

Looking back, I predict a riot

Published on December 21, 2017



Image ©2017 Neil Gaught

December is traditionally a time for reflection on the year just passed and for predictions on the new one ahead. Here are mine.

In the second half of 2017 I went round the world promoting my book [Core](#), and at the same time trying to understand what stands in the way of businesses identifying, defining and implementing a core strategy that would make them a force for good. I wanted to find out why doing good some of the time (read 'when it suits them'), can't progress to doing good all of the time. Although some [videos](#) show me in evangelical mode, actually the whole tour was less about provoking, pushing and nudging, and more about probing, listening

and learning. And boiled down, these are the two things I learned:

1. Business leaders don't know how to make change for good
2. Evidence alone doesn't make business leaders want to change for good

They don't know how Prompted by the UN's 2015 [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) and 2017's buzzword 'purpose', there's lots of thinking and some searching going on. But the fact is: there's no "approved" approach to changing the purpose of a business at its core so that it can become a force for good. By "approved" I mean no business school course for business leaders (as far as I know) has that objective. How you change a business for good at its core simply isn't out there.

There are plenty of established CSR courses, of course, and recently new ideas and approaches have come from the likes of Harvard's Shared Value Initiative and its 'win-win' ethos. But these big ideas coming out of big institutions and their bedfellows (big consultancies) have a cautious eye on the reaction of their corporate masters. Resultantly they don't move beyond the "when it suits you" status quo.

"Resultantly they don't move beyond the "when it suits you" status quo."

But here's the thing. I do know how organizations can make change for good, and I humbly point you in the direction of the Single Organizing Idea (SOI). As 2017 draws to a close, a small part of the ecosystem that supports businesses in the 11 cities* I've visited has been shown that a practical business tool exists that goes beyond the rhetoric and theory of purpose, and that can change business for good.

But they have to want to change, and I also learned in 2017 that business leaders aren't moved by evidence. DE

Evidence doesn't influence business leaders

The social and economic value of any path that would lead a business to become a force for good and at the same time increase its profitability has been touted by sustainability pioneers and business gurus for decades. Unfortunately the impact has been, well, "underwhelming" as one such pioneer put it to me.

We have a lot of people with "CSR", "sustainability" or "community" in their job title and there's a thriving industry of earnest sustainability organizations annually handing out gongs to corporates. CSR communication agencies are continually banging the drum. But the fact is all this noise is not turning the dial sufficiently to shift doing good from the sidelines to the core of business thinking, and more evidence at this stage won't help.

But funnily enough, fear does.

Fear of being left behind looms in the minds of business leaders, and passive curiosity is turning into a growing need to know more among those at the leading edge of a mainstream who have pulled their heads out of the sand.

"All this noise is not turning the dial sufficiently to shift doing good from the sidelines to the core of business thinking."

In essence, the prospective annihilation of our planet isn't a sufficient spur to action, but the prospective annihilation of a business leader's company is.

Why now? Evidence of burning forests, rising seas, agitated millennial's and technological advances may not cause a corporate machine to misfire and change, but threats to its life-blood and very survival do. Revenue is the ultimate disruptor.

While it may be an overstatement to say that the monster we've created that serves the few at the expense of the many is about to be violently challenged by a riot of stampeding mainstreamers there is definitely a growing tide of disquiet. According to the motivational speaker Simon Sinek it will take 15% to 18% of companies to create a tipping point. Bring on 2018.

*London, Oslo, Boston, Toronto, Montreal, New York, Washington DC, Copenhagen, Beirut, Sydney and Auckland.

[CORE: How a Single Organizing Idea can Change Business for Good](#) published by Routledge is available at Amazon and other stores in [paperback](#) and [Kindle](#). In the USA you can find it here - [paperback](#) and [Kindle](#).