

Do good, do well; the art of being a leader and a change-maker

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When we think of ‘leaders’ or ‘change-makers’ what comes to mind? All too often, we associate leaders with a grasping for celebrity or power, using divisive language, or preying on fear or insecurities, rather than encouraging our better selves or a better society.

At the same time, we cannot wait for leaders to save us. So is it time we admit that we ourselves are the leaders? That we ourselves are the change-makers we are waiting for? Stepping into our own potential to create positive change is an opportunity to learn, an opportunity to commit to increasing understanding and awareness, an opportunity to change the narrative, and an opportunity to participate in a collective effort to tackle interests of our shared humanity.

When we step into the belief that changing the way the world tackles challenging issues is a choice not based on charity, but underpinned by purpose and providing dignity and independence, then we are effectively propelling new models of positive change.

Opening up a world of opportunity

Endeavours that enable those less fortunate to see and feel themselves as vital participants in solving problems are critical to developing solutions. Indeed, when we listen and respect all stakeholders, collaboration can be an incubator for promising ideas, a bridge between generations and a mechanism for fully understanding corporate, community and individual needs.

Fundamentally, to embark on or refine philanthropic or social investment, a discovery phase is required. This can be viewed as a kind of Research & Development (R&D) phase, which is essential for learning, success and impact in any endeavour.

Currently, the way social and philanthropic investment is often practised leads to outcomes that are unfocused, diffused and fall short of demonstrating real and meaningful value.

Measuring the impact

In our connected world, there is much pressure to do good, and do well. Doing well can be measured in myriad ways, although measures need to extend to including all stakeholders, as well as tangible, intangible and unexpected outcomes.

Activity that is tied to well-thought-out social or business objectives and contributions that reflect the personal beliefs and values of individuals, organisations and their employees, demonstrate immense value on a multitude of levels and make a strong case for continued and expanded investment, leverage and consideration.

An example of greater social value

As a simple illustrative example, let’s explore a corporate programme of employee-matched giving, where the explicit choice of charity support is left with the employee. Although aimed at enhancing morale, the same effect may be gained from an equal increase in salary, with encouragement to donate.

If, on the other hand, business resources could be leveraged to deliver social value to local communities, in the location or locations where they operate, shared value could be derived from:

- Employees being engaged
- Alignment of skills-based professional development
- Quality improvement of the economic environment in operating locations
- Empowered stakeholders, new ideas or products, shared values and understanding
- Better performance in the marketplace as



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competitiveness is enhanced from bringing social and economic goals into alignment

- Improved long-term business prospects.

A programme of employee-matched giving is clearly a fast and easy corporate social responsibility (CSR) activity to introduce, although the superficial tie to business goals makes the attributes difficult to measure or leverage. When combined with an inability to show, feel or see direct and indirect impacts, the merit of this activity can lack meaning.

The point is, by not only giving money, and alternatively leveraging capabilities and relationships in support of charitable causes, the approach produces social and investment benefits, which far exceeds those that could be provided by an individual, foundation, or even government.

Fundamentally, to enhance the shared value to business, the community and stakeholders, activities that are driven by committed leadership and cemented in performance measures, offer the greatest benefits and impacts. In the same way as the best leaders learn they can't simply lead and succeed on their own, philanthropic and social investment provides immense opportunity to seek and engage with other aligned potential.

This approach may not be the quick and easy path, though undoubtedly the outcome will be meaningful and enduring. Additionally, the innumerable gains from participating in an aligned community – be it, of organisations, government or community – creates a powerful coalition focused and collectively engaged on enhancing the economy, the environment and each other as a result of the desire and willingness to change, grow and push.

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The scene is changing

Philanthropic and social investment approaches are changing, and changing rapidly. They need to, as our world is changing rapidly. Individuals and organisations do not function in isolation to the society around them, and in fact, a business' ability to compete, often depends heavily on the circumstances of the location(s) where it operates.

Economic and social objectives have long been seen as distinct and frequently competing. Today, this is



a contradictory view and represents an increasingly obsolete perspective in a more open world of knowledge-based competition.

The evidence is quickly stacking up that when social, environmental and economic objectives are considered as part of the whole, it does not come at the expense of economic results. In fact, the opposite is true. A purpose-driven business model is compelling as it demonstrates longer-term value and greater profit potential.

A new direction

Tapping into the unrealised potential of philanthropic and social investment requires a new direction, and fundamental changes to the way individuals and business think, plan and action their activities.

The thinking lies with where they focus their activities and how they go about their activities.

Strategic social and philanthropic investment is beneficial to social objectives when approached collaboratively. Specialist support – to guide, challenge, connect the dots and inspire thinking around design and systems – significantly enhances the benefits and increases positive impact.

An independent adviser will ensure opportunities can be leveraged for a shared value; a greater profit potential; a greater impact on the issue; and with

emotional intelligence (EQ) to enhance awareness and understanding of our shared humanity.

Akin to professional skills provided by a multitude of traditional services, we at Adessy operate on the premise that positive change, transformation and business outcomes are mutually reinforcing.

Our Catalyst programme offers tailored support to evolve the way philanthropic and social investment is made by world-class businesses and individuals. A way that is not only fit for the future, but also generates positive and sustainable outcomes that drive longer-term value, greater (profit/EQ/return) potential and facilitate positive change in society.

All around us, we are confronted by our beliefs on how to tackle need, facilitate opportunity and address the world's challenges. Whether directly 'touched' by experience, ultimately, many of these issues will eventually affect us all as we participate in life on planet Earth.

We (and many) believe a better world is possible and we want to help make that happen. In this spirit, Adessy provides a series of stepping stones to empower individuals and organisations to learn, connect and actively contribute to a movement of more people, doing the right things, for the right reasons:

1. What are the business/individual goals or interests?
2. What are the business/individual values?
3. Where is the business/individual giving and why?
4. How can the business/individual position itself to help meet business/individual need or opportunity?
5. How does the business/individual want the public/customers to perceive it?

The beginning of a new journey

We are really all just getting started. This global, inter-connected kind of social experiment is propelling new designs and new models. It's an exciting time with a suite of contemporary options including leveraging 'patient capital' through impact investing, venture philanthropy, social bonds to strategic partnerships, ethical investing, collaborative philanthropy, sharing skills ... to name a few. Wise navigation, R&D and guidance are an evident consequence of engaging an independent adviser.

As a self-confessed idealist, it could be argued that contributing to positive change is a moral responsibility for everyone. Using philanthropic and social investment as a strategy to connect with yourself, business and society – so you can incentivise stakeholders, benefit from wonderful collaborations and enjoy thinking and learning beyond expectations – transforms our narrative of what constitutes a leader and a change-maker.

And often, most strikingly, somewhere along the journey we realise our own virtuous circle of potential – a realisation of our capacity to have a greater impact, and engage and inspire others.

Leesa Muirhead is a collaborator, visionary, gentle disruptor and entrepreneur. Motivated by a deep belief of empowering people as a path to social and economic equity, Leesa founded B Corp-certified Adessy Associates in 2011.

Adessy inspires, equips and enables organisations and individuals to be a force for good and build a better world. Incorporating social, environmental, economic and human ethical principles, our mission is to help our clients make distinctive, enduring and significant positive change.

Adessy incubated Pioneers for Change, a UK-based social enterprise, which provides a Fellowship for those willing to harness their talents, energy and resources as a force for good. Pioneers for Change is a seed-bed for innovative thought, and a platform to harness collective energy, which is showcased on the Pioneers for Change Huffington Post blog. Published regularly, and inviting a variety of guest contributors, the blog is a celebration of champions and change-makers with themes including entrepreneurship, philanthropy, social impact investing and social enterprise.