

If progress is this way, where is your business - in the vanguard, main-guard or rearguard?

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This way



Earlier this month Unilever announced that 70% of its turnover growth now comes from an increasing stable of brands that have successfully defined or redefined their purpose and aligned themselves with the core [Sustainable Living Plan](#) (USLP). That's up 10% on the previous year and comes hand-in-hand with what FT commentator Matthew Vincent described as a positive quarterly result. 'Positive' may not excite the parts of the short-term brigade other businesses can reach, but if your core purpose is to be a force for good that benefits

all stakeholders (human and non-human), it's a great result.

Holding up Unilever as *the* pioneer of a new way to do business not only irks the one-eyed profitters. It also rubs-up those on the other side of the fence, the social activists. There are plenty of others in the vanguard they say. But actually there aren't. Very few businesses of any scale have completely redefined their core purpose in the way Unilever has done; most in the vanguard were conceived to do good in the first instance. But it's a mute point anyway.

Talk to enough people with an interest in the future of humanity and the role of business like I do and you will quickly come to the conclusion that a tipping-point is fast approaching. At long last it seems the vanguard is being joined by the forward elements of the main-guard (or mainstream if you like).

Leading the way are businesses that have concluded that the pioneers are on the right track. Spurred on by clear warnings from financiers about how investment decisions will be reached in the future (see Larry Fink's [annual letter to CEO's](#)), these forward thinking businesses have determined that doing good is not only good for business but may be the only way of being in business in the future. These businesses also have a clear understanding that doing a bit more CSR or Shared Value stuff on the side while delivering trendy purpose statements won't

wash.

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These businesses have gone beyond the 'why' and are getting on with the 'how'. They are determined to drive change and they are determined to do it in a way that sticks. That means collaboration; that means employing practical proven approaches and tools that engage people. It means putting '[more meaningful growth](#)' at the core of their businesses.

Those that carry on denying, delaying or attempting to disrupt the march of progress run the risk the of being left in the rearguard. So where is your business?

Judge for yourself. Here are six quick questions to help you make that assessment:

1. Do your business leaders support the idea that business should be a force for good?
2. To what degree are your products and services adapting and changing to meet fast changing social expectations?
3. Is your business admired by society for what it does?
4. Is there a gap between what your business is saying and what it's actually doing?
5. Do you think fast changing customer, employee and investor expectations are putting your business at

risk?

6. Is your business organised around a single, compelling, relevant and sustainable idea that will help ensure its future success?

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

CORE was a finalist at the 2018 Business Book Awards