A POSITIVE HUMAN FUTURE

The new leadership agenda

Bringing Ingenuity to Life
paconsulting.com
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In a world characterised by sweeping change – from rapid technological advances to shifting trade patterns and increased pressure on natural resources – leaders of organisations large and small find themselves at a crossroads. We can continue to pursue policies, strategies and approaches based on historical precedent where, in the quest for economic growth, we’ve overlooked the wellbeing of people and the planet. Or we can choose to build organisations that contribute to more engaged workforces, meaningful and impactful outcomes for customers and a healthier planet. In fact, there’s no better example of a major external shock forcing a fundamental re-think of how leaders operate than the coronavirus pandemic.

Despite the challenges, at PA, we believe a positive human future is perfectly achievable, and the steps required to attain it more important than ever. We see four forces of opportunity that create an unprecedented chance to adapt and transform more effectively than at any time in human history. Success in this new environment requires us to pursue business growth while respecting social impact; inspire consumers through purpose, transparency and trust; embrace difference in all its forms to power innovation; and harness technologies without leaving anyone behind. The quickening cycles of change and compounding effect of the four forces offer ever more chances for us as individuals, in our teams and leading our organisations to achieve more in ever shorter periods of time.
So, what’s it going to take?

The answer lies in a new and better way to lead. All too often, the workplace exerts a constraining force on our natural creativity, our purpose and our ingenuity. Unlocking the ingenuity stifled in our organisations isn’t going to be easy. Yet it’ll be worth it. We have the necessary ingredients for long-term prosperity: brilliant people; empowering technologies; and, increasingly, a renewed and aligned sense of purpose. With bold, focused leadership, we can pursue business for good, prove our organisations’ worth to consumers, inspire our teams and find creative solutions at a pace that’s never been seen before.

**We recommend the following essential actions for every leader:**

**Nurture human optimism**

Help people to have a positive outlook and act on it. Humans are biologically wired for innovation and change. Leaders can encourage optimism through their behaviours. It’s optimism that has proved a key ingredient in fostering innovation and creativity.

**Empower teams to innovate**

Inspire teams to find ways to better understand their customers’ desires and give them the permission and space to dream up creative responses, rapidly bringing to life ideas that are desirable for customers, technically feasible and commercially viable.

**Build evolving organisations**

Make a success out of rapid change. Build an organisation where humans work in aware, alert, inclusive and responsive teams. Where we tune into and bounce off each other, attentively and rapidly responding to our customers and competition. And where we adapt and transform in ever more ingenious ways.

**Seek inspiration in surprising places**

Take a different perspective. The wider world offers incredible inspiration: start-ups and disruptors offer a fresh take on the world; old technologies provide the building blocks for new; and even the natural world, with its ability to continuously adapt to change, offers powerful stimulus for growth.

**We offer these thoughts and ideas to encourage debate and positive momentum.**

We don’t have all the answers, yet conviction that there’s a new way to lead. We’ve seen what’s possible – to help create opportunities from challenges and make the world a safer, healthier, more prosperous, more sustainable place for us all.
01. We can reimagine business

The era of mass production and mass consumption, which started in the late 1800s and was powered by Fordism and Taylorism, ushered in a brand-new way of working that saw significant gains in productivity and growth.

The system created organisations as machines. Power was concentrated in the hands of the few. Strategies and ideas came top-down. Workers existed in silos, focused on a single repetitive task, unable to see the purpose and result of their labour.

Successive generations worked on the assumption that mechanisation and automation, as well as the exploitation of resources, was the only route to economic success, leading to questionable terms of employment for many workers and creating an economic model based on vacuous consumerism and the destruction of the environment. As a result, business stands accused of having left a toxic legacy for people and the planet.

The issues at hand today demand a different solution. We still require continuous economic progress to maintain and improve standards of living. We also need to tackle challenges accumulated over decades, such as the results of climate change, the lack of preparedness of major health events like pandemics, overcrowding and population changes, and inequality. And we need to do it in the context of rising political, economic and trade uncertainty.

Past generations have failed to fully tackle the problem. Yet it doesn’t have to be this way. With the ingenuity of people and the power of technology, and by working together, we can, and must, do better.

Today, we find ourselves at a crossroads. Either we hold tight to the beliefs and strategies from the past, or we take the opportunity to forge a new path towards a more positive future. How we respond will determine the extent to which the people and planet thrive in a sustainable way.

**Our vision is for a new kind of organisation that supports our personal growth, business growth and success, and the contribution we make to society and the natural world.**

As leaders, we can build businesses that are more relevant for our customers and more willing to work across ecosystems of the like-minded. We can better manage the responsibilities our organisations have to an ever-widening set of stakeholders. And we can demand more of ourselves and each other in society – all while growing sustainably.
In truth, making these changes won’t be easy. Yet, when we accept uncertainty as an inevitable part of doing business, we turn it to our advantage. We no longer rely on 10-year strategies, top-down directive leadership or highly specific tasks. We recognise that the best ideas and many small, impactful positive actions are hiding in plain sight in our teams. We take a different perspective, freeing and empowering our people to be their best.

As leaders – and particularly as we nurture the next generation of leaders – we’re at a tipping point. In business, as in life, we’ve never been afforded a better opportunity. By harnessing human creativity, technologies and a drive to do things differently, we can reimagine our businesses. By pursuing purposeful action and sustainable growth, we can nurture and grow trust in our organisations. Not just in isolation by focusing on our own success, but in considering our teams, our organisations, our societies and our planet.

At PA, we believe in the power of ingenuity to build a positive human future. We trust in the playful, creative, ambitious and skilful way that people look at the world.

**Ingenuity is a mindset, a way of thinking that creates the environment for innovation, from start-ups to incumbent businesses through to governments and societies.**

We’re confident that unlocking ingenuity will make the future better for us all whatever changes come our way as a society and as a species.
02.
Four forces of opportunity

We see disruption every day, whether we’re working with innovative start-ups, reinventing old-world businesses for the digital age or revolutionising industries with large-scale transformation projects.

There are four major forces that – when considered in combination – offer an unprecedented opportunity to effect positive change. Specifically, the forces provide a way of building a positive human future in a technology-driven world. By seizing these opportunities, organisations can turn disruption to their advantage. This isn’t only good for business, it’s business for good.
Society – how to pursue business growth and respect social impact

The business agenda of the past isn’t fit for the future. New attitudes towards issues such as sustainability, security, privacy and wellbeing require organisations to hold themselves to greater account and answer to their employees and customers, as well as their shareholders.

A purpose-led business views its role as generating value for shareholders and stakeholders, not just the former. In its broadest definition, stakeholders include a business’s employees, local community, ecosystem and wider industry, and, by extension, the planet and its people as a whole.

Why should businesses pursue such a global and holistic vision of their operations? First, because it’s the right thing to do. Second, because it drives business performance – our research on organisational performance shows a strong positive correlation between financial metrics and purposeful characteristics, with leading organisations making a conscious effort to focus on their people and create a dynamic, collaborative and empowering work environment. Third, because every business operates in an ecosystem – if businesses can prove value to their stakeholders as well as their shareholders, then everyone is vested in its success.

As attitudes shift, new economic models, business ecosystems and types of organisation are emerging, oriented towards business for social good. We’re witnessing a proliferation of start-ups looking to do more for society, from supporting women in technology careers at AnitaB.org to helping the homeless find work at the coffee company Change Please. And businesses are waking up to their social conscience, from start-ups championing the sharing economy like Airbnb, OLIO, Mutterfly and LENA to international corporations such as Coca-Cola, Mars and Unilever joining the New Plastics Economy Global Commitment.

We’re helping the United Nations (UN) advise senior business leaders on the breakthrough technologies that can drive progress towards the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals. The UN estimates creating new business models and technologies to meet the goals will be worth at least US$12 trillion by 2030. Disruptive technologies will be at the heart of many breakthrough innovations and will enable organisations to operate in new and far more sustainable ways while seizing huge commercial opportunities.

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation is helping businesses seize an estimated €1 trillion of value from circular economy initiatives. Rather than extracting capital such as natural resources or human labour to fuel the ‘take, make, use, dispose’ economy, the circular economy intercepts items that are about to be thrown away, reusing, repurposing or recycling them. For example, we’re working with ENSO Tyres to create a tyre-as-a-service model that sees drivers lease tyres, made from bio-based materials, and pay for miles driven. ENSO can then recover and recycle the tyres at the end of their life cycle.

Employees entering the workplace now want to join organisations that resonate with their own personal values. They want jobs they believe will make a positive impact on the world. People want to bring the energy, passion and commitment of a start-up into their working lives. Finding a way to do that will help attract scarce skills, engage employees, retain talent and, ultimately, power performance.

Clarity of purpose, consideration for all stakeholders and active internal and external engagement will drive business growth.
Consumers – how to inspire consumers with transparency and trust

Modern consumers are increasingly well informed and empowered to demand more. They’re looking for inspiring and purposeful brands, brilliant and innovative products and experiences, and transparency in a business’s operations. And they’re taking action, voting with their feet (and fingertips) much more readily than ever before for companies with integrity and a clear, authentic purpose. If organisations can prove they can meet these needs, and engage their customers, they can create substantial growth. Businesses that do good – and can show it – are resonating with a growing consumer conscience.

Successful organisations are tapping into modern consumer behaviours and desires with new ways of delivering products and experiences that drive top-line growth. A proliferation of fast-moving, innovative small companies are springing up in direct response to dynamic consumer needs. While start-ups can be seen as a flea in the ear of established organisations, they offer a genuine source of inspiration. Unconstrained by business legacies or hierarchical structures, start-ups can take bold, fast action and quickly gain large consumer followings.

Incumbent organisations need to rethink the business–consumer relationship, positioning themselves in the customer’s ecosystem rather than the other way around. Organisations have never been able to collect more information on their customers, or better tailor products and services. Trends like personalisation and subscription models reflect the shift in power from businesses – that used to dictate wants – to consumers. Your next growth idea is likely to feature a platform or service model where you play a broader role in the lives of customers, offering a variety of fully personalised products and services that change in line with their wants and needs.

Consumers have power to build, but also destroy, brands faster than ever before. Businesses need to demonstrate that they’re trustworthy and transparent to gain any kind of competitive advantage. Transparency and trust in business is best framed in terms of authenticity. Does an organisation hold authentic values? Are these values shown in all the work that it does, the way it treats people and the messages it promotes?

Transparency and trust are not just built (or destroyed) by your internal organisation but by your whole supply chain. Enabling secure, trusted and traceable transactions, technologies like blockchain can facilitate the tracking of products end to end. For example, we’re helping the UK’s Department for International Development use a blockchain to ensure aid reaches those who need it quickly and efficiently in emergencies. Meanwhile, companies such as Provenance use the technology to gather and trace key product information and the journeys made by goods, from component materials all the way to the shop floor. Having a record of how a product came about lets manufacturers, suppliers and sellers demonstrate their sustainable and ethical credentials, as well as immerse consumers in the narratives behind products.

There are substantial advantages to this consumer-centric world.

As our customers react quickly to innovative products and services, invest time to give feedback and share their views ever more widely, successful businesses will respond and gain competitive advantage.

Being transparent and building trust comes from positive engagement with all stakeholders and the clear communication of authentic values. Companies that can build on this approach have the benefit of deeper, committed relationships. Creating transparency and building trust is a business imperative.
Difference – how to embrace difference to power innovation

Our economies have been built on the assumption that conformity drives growth. The conformist economic model is typified by the production lines of the 20th century, which sought to standardise and replicate tasks and processes in pursuit of efficiency and higher productivity. In the face of standardised, repetitive problems, this solution can work well. Yet, when it’s applied to the complex and diverse problems we face now, the benefits of conformity are no longer sufficient.

In fact, history has repeatedly proven that ingenuity sparks when people with diverse views, different experiences and unique perspectives combine and collaborate. Today, difference is increasingly recognised as a key ingredient for growth.

Seizing opportunities in business requires a wide variety of skills and a wide variety of thought. Organisations must think differently if they are to find innovative solutions to their problems.

**Crucial to the innovation process is fostering an environment of creative dissonance – a proactive approach to bringing together a wide variety of thoughts, ideas and perspectives, and the right skills and experience, into one place to focus on a common purpose.**

Working alongside people from different positions of knowledge and experience, we’re more likely to objectively analyse facts, apply unconventional insights and make better, more rigorous decisions.

The best way to harness difference is through diversity of people. True diversity means recognising differences in gender, sexual orientation, race, education, faith, age, upbringing, skill sets, experience and background – all characteristics that make us unique.

Forward-thinking organisations understand the need to champion deeper-level diversity in their people, including attributes that are both inherent and acquired.

The good news is we’re seeing an increasing number of organisations creating supportive and inclusive environments. They’re encouraging new thinking and bringing new people into their workforces.

At PA, we’re focused on empowering the next generation of innovators. Our annual Raspberry Pi competition encourages young people to come up with ingenious ideas to solve big social issues. The latest competition – our seventh annual gathering – asked pupils from schools and colleges to use their ingenuity to invent ways to transform travel and transport.

With our Springboard programme, we bring students from difficult school environments into PA to learn about consulting and gain valuable business skills, working closely with consultant mentors on projects that seek to address big social issues. And through our Code First: Girls programme, our female digital experts host eight-week courses to teach other women the digital skills they need for richer careers.

Applying the insights and perspectives of the broadest set of people we can will help us all create the best possible outcomes for our businesses. Encouraging the next generation of innovators will create value for all.
Technology – how to harness technologies without leaving anyone behind

There’s a world of technologies that are mature or maturing and, if brought together in ingenious ways, can create entirely new businesses and opportunities.

Take the rise of data and collaboration technologies as an example. Lower barriers to access means more people than ever are connected, giving us the ability to collaborate instantly with people in every corner of the planet. Connectivity is the keystone of much of our progress in both business and society.

Data is also powering the disruptive technologies shaping our world. Artificial intelligence (AI), biometrics, autonomous vehicles – the list goes on. Such technologies are revolutionising the way we live and work, opening new avenues for exciting start-ups, letting incumbent businesses reinvent themselves and paving the way for the transformation of entire industry sectors. Moreover, emerging technologies are opening exciting opportunities in areas like AI, genomics, synthetic biology, neuroscience, materials science and data science.

If we pick just one industry – the critical field of healthcare – we’re seeing a host of impressive breakthroughs in the kinds of treatment available and methods of delivery. Working in partnership with the UK’s Moorfields Eye Hospital, Google’s AI group DeepMind has developed the ability to analyse optical coherence tomography scans better than the top radiologists in the world. The field of genomics has taken a giant leap with the CRISPR gene-editing technique.

Digital twins, such as virtual hearts, will enable doctors to visualise treatment realistically. And AI is revolutionising drug discovery and clinical trials. In our own labs, we’re exploring how robots and power-assisted exoskeletons can help patient care. Importantly, sometimes it’s not about new or breakthrough technologies. Rather, it’s about ingeniously applying old tech to new opportunities, like our work trialling simple sensors in socks and slippers to identify and prevent accidents in the home.

Advances in technologies are fundamentally changing the relationship we have with machines and raise the question of our place in this technology-driven future.

Yet we don’t buy into the doom-filled view that the inevitable rise of the robots will result in poor-quality jobs and mass unemployment. And our research shows that AI and automation, for example, are more likely to create jobs than eliminate them. Forty-three per cent of employers who introduced AI and automation in the last five years saw more jobs as a result, compared to 40 per cent who saw fewer. And we’ve proved that these technologies have an important role to play in providing people with higher-skilled and more interesting roles, flexible ways of working and more innovative environments.

Contrary to the common rhetoric that robots are taking over, our evidence shows that the picture is multifaceted – and clearly more positive than negative.

Imagine a future where machines take over the most pedestrian and tedious aspects of your job. Where you can deliver individually tailored, high-value services to your customers. And where your work-life balance improves alongside your productivity and efficiency. All this – and more – is possible.

We can shape the relationship we want between human and machine. Organisations will need to refocus their efforts on reskilling employees and carefully consider the implications of the devices they create. Regulators will need to actively consult with their industries to keep up. And government officials will need to participate in well-informed debate. Supporting people in the technological revolution means making sure no one is left behind.
SHAPE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMAN AND MACHINE
03.
Cycle times and compounding

The prevailing corporate narrative is all too often ‘change or die’. To a certain extent, this is accurate. No sooner have organisations got to grips and worked out what their next steps should be, then the landscape shifts again. The process is relentless. It can easily leave leaders emotionally exhausted, lurching from idea to idea to response, or immobilised by inertia.
Yet too much emphasis on the challenges and not enough on the opportunities distracts from the real debate, disempowering innovators and destroying value for clients and the economies and citizens they support.

Cycles of change should be seen as a positive, enabling organisations to achieve more in a shorter space of time. Each cycle enables leaders and their teams to experiment, to try new things and to adapt and learn, faster than the last time.

And the truly exciting development is what happens when the forces combine – and build on one another – to compound the pace of progress. Take the global focus on eliminating single-use plastics. We see the forces compounding for good: socially conscious consumers who find common cause and voice their opinion and pressure organisations to change their approach, and organisations that then respond by exploring breakthrough technologies to create innovative new products. This leads to new revenue streams that organisations reinvest in order to double down on their quest to find eco-friendly solutions to more products. Progress begets further progress in ever faster cycles.

The pace of change might feel overwhelming at times, but it’s fundamentally positive. With our world changing so rapidly, we have a host of new opportunities at our fingertips. Faster cycle times and the compounding effect of the four forces offer more chances for us as individuals, in our teams and leading our organisations to achieve more in ever shorter periods of time.
04.
A new way to lead

Organisational models based on Fordism are ripe for disruption. As leaders, we must change our approach to management if we’re to realise a positive human future.

The good news is that the opportunity to effect positive change has never been greater. We can change the top-down, command-and-control culture. We can give our people a voice, helping them find purpose in their work and potential in their roles. In short, we can radically rethink how we lead. It comes from believing in the ingenuity of our people.

Do you remember the sense of wonder you had as a child? The constant desire to question, create and explore the things around you? The sense of optimism and confidence that anything was possible? So many of us had ingenious dreams and a confidence that we could move the world in a positive direction. What was yours? A child’s dream of becoming an astronaut? A school project to save the local environment? A dissertation on social responsibility? Volunteering to teach people to paint?

Many of us feel we have sacrificed some of our imagination and childlike curiosity to the demands of the boardroom and the balance sheet. As we enter the world of work, we begin to lose confidence, to fear change, to defend our position and to become blind to the opportunities in front of us. Too many large organisations and processes focus on targets and tasks, and lead based on fear. We’re steered to conformity. We lose our difference. So, we compromise, we celebrate small achievements closer to home – leading a team, a great year’s performance – and miss the bigger purpose in what we do.
Strangely, as we get to the latter years of our careers, we start to see the world with a different perspective. We start to think about our legacy: The success that’s sustained us doesn’t feel so good. Suddenly, the desire to change we had in our youth seems so much more relevant. We see the bigger picture again, often at the peak of our influence, yet time is running out to make it count.

The workplace doesn’t need to exert such a constraining influence on our dreams, our sense of purpose and our ingenuity.

As leaders, we can close the gap that successive generations have failed to fill – by unlocking and nurturing ingenuity.

We have the necessary ingredients for long-term prosperity: brilliant people; empowering technologies; and, increasingly, a renewed and aligned sense of purpose. By focusing on what matters, we can pursue business for good, prove our organisations’ worth to consumers, inspire our teams and find creative solutions at a pace that’s never been seen before.
Unlocking ingenuity

As leaders – in business as in life – we’ve never been afforded a better opportunity to make change happen. By unlocking human ingenuity we can reimagine our businesses, pursuing purposeful action and sustainable growth.

Imagine throwing a pebble into a pond and the ripples it creates. Unlocking ingenuity is a bit like that. It starts with how we nurture optimism in ourselves and those closest to us, at home and in the workplace; how we empower innovation in our teams; and how we lead our organisations. At its widest, unlocking ingenuity is how we influence, and are influenced by, the wider world.

Nurture human optimism

Humans are inspiring. We don’t just accept things as they are. Take human flight. We’re not supposed to fly. But we’ve found a way to do so.

Humans are biologically wired for innovation and change. We’ve evolved to be like that because, over time, fortune favours those who seek, explore and adapt.

We don’t have to wait for evolutionary forces to play out. We can choose to actively encourage optimism in our own behaviours and those around us. It’s optimism that finds opportunities, not threats. Optimism releases serotonin, the potent neurotransmitter that unlocks neural pathways and inspires creative thinking. Time and again, in our experience, nurturing optimism has proved a key ingredient in fostering innovation and creativity.

Optimism can be a fragile thing. The counterforce to optimism is fear. From an evolutionary standpoint, it was fear that helped our ancestors survive by propelling them to attack or hide. Today, fear in the workplace can still impact mindset and behaviour in drastic ways.

As leaders, we need to carefully consider the balance of the signals we’re sending people around us.

We should be mindful of how often we communicate messages of fear and blame. Instead, we can choose to help people have a positive outlook through our focus on purposeful activity, experimentation and self-expression.
WE’RE NOT SUPPOSED TO FLY. BUT WE’VE FOUND A WAY TO DO SO
ALIGN AMBITIONS AND ITERATE RAPIDLY
Empower teams to innovate

Innovation is about taking ideas and turning them into something valuable. Lone inventors are splendid, but for most of us, the innovations that take our organisations forward will be the result of teamwork. As leaders, we have the potential to empower and enthuse teams, creating the environment for ingenuity to thrive.

For more than 75 years, we’ve been inventing in our labs and helping organisations around the world deliver faster, more valuable innovation. And over that time, we’ve distilled some key ingredients to success. Our experience shows it’s crucial to align ambitions, focus on user-centric design and iterate rapidly in multidisciplinary teams.

Many businesses organise resources vertically on a department-by-department level, a time-honoured way to manage. Yet, when it comes to innovation teams, our experience suggests that many great ideas will fall by the wayside as departmental priorities are reassessed and individuals are drawn from one project to another. Instead, we recommend optimising resources horizontally, creating small teams focused entirely on delivering the innovation required. Teams can bring in or discard additional resources as necessary, but the core team’s sole purpose and shared ambition is how to deliver the innovation required.

Once you’ve aligned your team, consider how you’ll learn what the end user wants. User-centric design is a way of viewing any situation through the eyes of the end user, and it keeps the focus on the user through the beginning, middle and end of any innovation. Teams are able to uncover the unmet needs and expectations of their target audience and use them as the basis against which to measure decisions. The teams then avoid the common pitfall of innovations failing at the first real-world hurdle caused by focusing much more on the technical or commercial issues instead of real customer need.

While you may know what the end user wants, how to achieve the desired outcome is another question. That’s where iteration can be helpful. You’re unlikely to get it right the first time, so rapid iteration is essential for innovation teams to get to market successfully. To get to value faster, borrow heavily from Agile and Lean methodologies, prioritise the hardest challenges, create short sprint-cycle times, learn from successes and failures and test progress with the end user throughout the process.

Your approach may be correct, but to unearth new ideas, you need the right people around the table.

**Bringing multidisciplinary teams to bear on a challenge empowers the creative dissonance from which inspirational leaps can be made.**

Then you can unearth radical approaches to solving problems or even removing the problem in the first place. Creating teams with diversity of skills, experience and viewpoint has great potential to uncover breakthrough innovations. In our own experience, cross-functional teams ensure the customer desirability, technical feasibility and financial viability of our work.
Build evolving organisations

The issues at hand today demand a different kind of organisation from the past. We still require continual economic progress to maintain and improve standards of living. We also need to tackle challenges accumulated over decades, and we need to do it in the context of rising political, economic and trade uncertainty.

When we accept uncertainty as inevitable – and as an increasingly important positive factor in modern business – we can turn it to our advantage. Indeed, we believe uncertainty can be the catalyst for a new kind of organisation, one where humans work in aware, alert, inclusive and responsive teams. Where we tune into and bounce off each other, attentively and rapidly responding to our customers and competition. And where we innovate and transform in ever more ingenious ways.

This isn’t utopia. Our research has found that leaders are creating organisations purpose-built to deal with constant change that see better financial results than others. These organisations are faster in responding to customer needs. And faster making decisions and acting, delivering value from new products and services more quickly. Simpler systems, processes and governance support them, and, crucially, so does an experimental learning culture.

We’re finding that these organisations are role-modelling a new way to lead. They’re much better placed to unlock ingenuity. And they’re maximising the potential to exploit cycles of change and seize opportunities through five characteristics.

These organisations centre on customers, really paying attention to what customers are saying, bringing them into the innovation process and using data to prioritise according to their needs. This is key to anticipating customer trends and quickly responding to changing demands.

And then these organisations speed up time to value by making decisions and mobilising quickly in response to competition, rolling out improvements faster than competitors and investing in moving from idea to launch at pace. A great idea is most valuable when it’s launched before a competitor’s.

These organisations are designed for simplicity, building teams around products and services rather than skills while empowering people to make decisions and creating a flat organisational structure. Such a business design removes barriers to doing great work.

And then these organisations evolve continuously by seeking out and accepting changes at any point in the development cycle, having modular digital systems and insightful data, and building teams that can flex easily to respond to changing requirements and cope well with change.

Perhaps, most importantly, they liberate their people by creating a dynamic company culture, empowering all people to contribute ideas and setting up technology, infrastructure and workspaces for collaboration. It’s impossible to have an organisation that evolves without giving people the freedom to work in dynamic ways.

The issues at hand today demand that organisations evolve rapidly.

The good news is it’s entirely possible to build healthy and adaptive organisations that also operate at the highest levels of performance.
INNOVATE AND TRANSFORM IN EVER MORE INGENIOUS WAYS
INGENUITY DEMANDS A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE
Seek inspiration in surprising places

The new way to lead we’re talking about applies to more than your current team or organisation. The challenges we face are complex, global and inter-related. Maximising the potential from ingenuity demands that we seek inspiration from the wider world.

So often in life the answer is already out there if only we knew where to look. We find that start-ups, wider business ecosystems and the wider world provide inspiration, often in fascinating ways.

Start-ups and disruptors have always been around. Yet, all too often, they’ve been seen as a flea in the ear of an industry giant. Today, the changes in our societies, funding and technology are creating new and exciting businesses faster than ever. We’re seeing exponential benefits when a vibrant new start-up interacts with the power and global reach of industry giants.

From our experience, the key is to work with start-ups in a spirit of mutual support, taking time to understand how things look from their viewpoint. Don’t fight too much about intellectual property, it’s the lifeblood of the venture, so find a win-win. Value potential over current financial performance – and do it loudly and visibly. Think and work in days and weeks, not corporate months and quarters – delaying a management decision can be catastrophic to a small business. And, if you can, kick the scale can down the road – get to pilot and first sales, take customer feedback and only then discuss scale. Give your venture time to breathe.

Exploring ecosystem-thinking and platform-thinking is another way to find inspiration. Both approaches are well documented but have so far been undersupported by large organisations. There’s good news. In our most recent research on innovation, we found that a far greater proportion of respondents are turning from thought to action – building networks of partnership, collaboration and trust through formal and informal programmes of work.

It’s become more of an imperative. And, as purpose prevails in business-thinking, it’s getting easier to identify, connect, collaborate and share assets with others who share goals.

The wider world can always provide important lessons about innovation. Some of the most impactful breakthroughs come not from brand-new technologies but from past inventions applied in ingenious ways. So too can inspiration be found from looking at the natural world, such as a butterfly wing as a blueprint for more efficient solar panels, an octopus as a model for advanced robotics and ant co-operation as a guide to adaptable organisations. Nature provides an incredibly rich source of inspiration for designing new products and ways of working.

We seek inspiration from nature in our labs. We developed microstructure technology based on the non-reflective properties of nocturnal moth eyes, which became crucial to our development of the world’s first three-minute home pregnancy test. More recently, we took inspiration from seashells to create a natural bottle for a global beverage company, developing a patented process to manufacture bottles made of bamboo fibres, plant proteins and waxes based on how marine molluscs generate their shells.

Now, more than ever, ingenuity demands a different perspective, discovering inspiration in surprising places.
06.
A positive human future is in our hands

As we consider the changing nature of our world, and the new technologies, attitudes and issues that affect us all, we consistently come back to one concept: opportunity. We have an opportunity to redress our negative impact on the planet. We have an opportunity, through new technologies and changing consumer behaviour, to rethink the way we create value in business. And the key to the opportunity is in unlocking human ingenuity in the workplace.

All too often, leaders view the powerful forces in our world as threats to be mitigated and controlled. And while there are genuine reasons for concern, there’s never been a better time to find opportunity in the challenges.

Neither new technology nor the disruption that comes with it are exogenous forces over which humans have no control. All of us are responsible for guiding their evolution, in the decisions we make daily as citizens, consumers and investors. We should use our agency to usher in a future that reflects our common objectives and values.

A technology-driven world, as a complement to the best parts of human nature – creativity, empathy and stewardship – can lift humanity into a new collective and moral consciousness based on a shared sense of purpose. We have all the tools we need to pursue business for social and environmental good, prove our worth to consumers, inspire our teams and find creative solutions at a pace that’s never been seen before.
We can do better – for ourselves, our organisations and the generations to come.
At PA, we have a clear sense of purpose. We’re different in what we do, and even more in how we do it. There’s a sense of optimism behind our purpose. It’s a feeling that inspires our people as well as our clients.

At PA, we believe in the power of ingenuity to build a positive human future in a technology-driven world. As strategies, technologies and innovation collide, we create opportunity from complexity. Our diverse teams of experts combine innovative thinking and breakthrough technologies to progress further, faster. Our clients adapt and transform, and together we achieve enduring results.

For us, that purpose centres on ingenuity – the cleverness, inventiveness and originality it takes to formulate and put into practice innovative ideas to seize opportunities, big and small. We call it Bringing Ingenuity to Life.

We thank our clients for choosing to work with us, and our people for their ideas, expertise and commitment. We hope you have enjoyed reading about what we think and who we are. And that it’s given you food for thought.

We’d love to continue the conversation.
BRINGING INGENUITY TO LIFE
About PA

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An innovation and transformation consultancy, we are over 3,200 specialists in consumer, defence and security, energy and utilities, financial services, government, health and life sciences, manufacturing, and transport. Our people are strategists, innovators, designers, consultants, digital experts, scientists, engineers and technologists. We operate globally from offices across the UK, US, Europe, and the Nordics.

PA. Bringing Ingenuity to Life.