



Beyond Governance

Creating clarity, improving business

DECISION
MAGAZINE



The Responsible Business

A meeting with:

Mike Wilson

Managing Partner

Blake Morgan

Extract from a DECISION magazine report co-commissioned by Beyond Governance

Introduction

What we are experiencing could be described as the business equivalent of the perfect storm.

The convergence of a new generation with a distinctive mindset, the sudden realisation and acceptance that the environment clock really is now counting down, coupled with the dramatic increase in the pace of technological advances, and the impact of Covid-19 which has been to fast-forward change.

As a consequence, are we having to re-evaluate the purpose of a company its priorities, indeed the role of governance?

So how would we now define what constitutes a responsible company – and who should it be responsible to?

Arguably, being a responsible business provides the foundation for sustainability, innovation, productivity, because it establishes a culture which has the required mind-set. But what are key characteristics, and how might they change over time?

For a digital book co-commissioned by Beyond Governance, to be published by DECISION magazine, directors from across generations and market sectors share their thoughts.

This is one of the interviews to be included.

Mike Wilson

Managing Partner

Blake Morgan

“Having a sense of purpose is very much about the heart beat of an organisation – and if you get it right, everything is more likely to fall into place.

“But while that sense of purpose could be the subject of change when new leadership comes in, the impact of external macro issues has intensified massively in the last decade with the much stronger focus on what is now ESG as a priority post pandemic.

“If an organisation gets ESG right, then it helps to align engaged motivated people to meeting its P&L requirements. There have always been tensions between business and concerns such as the environment but now there are more of them and a company has to constantly juggle financial requirements and aspirations with external issues which are now much more of a concern to its workforce.

“If people believe in an organisation’s values they engage with them, but it’s a constant process for that to continue to happen. Ask your receptionist what your company’s values are and while

they won't necessarily express them word for word, they should be able to articulate their meaning.

“So an organisation needs to be very clear about its sense of purpose and its values if they are to be communicated effectively. And a responsible business puts those words into action.

“That engagement is particularly important in a professional practice because, for example, lawyers can tend to be far more vested in their clients because it's a trust relationship between them. The issues being addressed aren't just black and white so there is a need for a firm to ensure that its fee earners have an inner knowledge of the whole governance piece as well as having an empathic ability to read people.

“So, you need put that to the test to make sure that your purpose and values are clear to your colleagues.

“What I have found is that surveys can be revealing if they are undertaken independently and the questions aren't designed to deliver the answers the organisation wants to hear.

“It doesn't matter if you think a response is unfair because that's someone's perception, what they believe. It's essential people aren't concerned about being career nobbled if they speak out. Why wouldn't you encourage people to express a view, because if they don't say something it doesn't mean they're not thinking it and making their feelings known to colleagues.



Mike Wilson

“Who we are as an organisation, what we believe, shouldn’t be complex messages but they have got to be ‘lived’ by each of our partners, then the next level manager, all the way to support staff.

“An organisation then finds it gets more interest and commitment because regardless of their particular role, people want to feel they are part of something which has meaning, a sense of purpose.

“And delivering a sense of purpose isn’t just about leading from the top within your own organisation. I meet with a number of managing partners of other law firms to have ‘Chatham House’

conversations which are cathartic and helpful to improve best practice.

“If I think about our approach to ESG, the ‘G’, governance, can be hard to pin down.

“My definition of governance, which I’ve thought through, is that it’s a framework which enables effective, transparent and responsible management ensuring that an organisation operates in the best interests of all its stakeholders.

“Governance is a platform for inclusion, bringing individuals together with a common purpose and defined expectations. It should enable an organisation to be able to constantly review and flex without compromising culture; otherwise you can only assume that your values continue to have resonance.

“What I would say is that governance isn’t risk management and accountability per se but how you address risk management and accountability. A strategic rather than a cookie-cutter approach pays you back in spades because insurers want to see you’re a well run organisation and larger companies expect to see the evidence in the tender documents you submit.

“And it can’t be a tick box, one-off exercise. I used to roll my eyes when we had to schedule simulated disasters to test our governance but it’s exactly what an organisation should be doing because governance has to work not just on paper but in practice.

“Hybrid working is one of the reasons why it is important values and governance are more formalised to ensure buy-in, because otherwise, when people are not coming into the office each day as a matter of course, where’s the glue to keep everyone together?”

“It is fair to say that even before we spoke of pandemic, there was always some traction for flexible working. Now it is about managing expectations.

“With flexible working, I think productivity has gone up, having thrown off the shackles of requiring people to be in the office all of the time, but it can be hard for an organisation to get away from time-honoured ways of thinking, such as putting stock in ‘presenteeism’.

“I have worked under that kind of regime where nobody left the office before the managing partner. People should be able to live their lives how they want when they are working with us, as long as we can deliver on our KPIs.

“But a disadvantage of hybrid working is that you can’t deal with an issue in the same way as you could if you could talk to someone in person.

“The risk is that we diminish the cohesion of humanity if our interactions are predominantly screen based.

“An organisation has a responsibility to ensure there is a balance, and that the new ways of working don’t lead to overload, because

the signs of burn-out aren't always so apparent when people aren't working together in the same place all the time.

“The engagement piece, people wanting to belong to an organisation, also has to be intrinsic to the governance process.

“You can have every accreditation necessary but the cultural piece is that people will want to deliver if they are engaged sufficiently rather than seeing accreditations simply as something they have to comply with.

“There is a generational aspect to this. I think the generations coming through care passionately about the behaviours and purpose of a business because they have more on their plates to consider than previous generations.

“They have more energy and aren't going to be drawn to an organisation's values and governance if they are thought of as passive.

“It's important to know what drives this. What has been one of the biggest changes is that a business now needs to know the thinking of its people, which can include a requirement for the company to be doing the right thing for the community and the role it plays in addressing huge macro issues. I think we're a better firm because of it.

“You ask about the role of government. It plays a significant role in setting framework but legislation in isolation can be

restrictive, so business has to be involved in influencing what is being drawn up and then driving it.

“I believe that sustainability isn’t only about ESG and financial efficiency, and that we must invest in enabling a new generation to take leadership roles, ensuring that promotion processes provide as much opportunity as possible, because otherwise we might not have the businesses we want in five years time.”

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Mike Wilson is managing partner at Blake Morgan, a UK law firm with offices in Cardiff, London, Oxford, Reading, and Southampton, and around 400 lawyers and paralegals plus support staff.

Beyond Governance is a multi award-winning full service consultancy that collaborates with the c-suite, chair, board and investors to unlock value, resulting in increased shareholder and stakeholder confidence, increased share prices and achievement of business objectives.

Our three distinct service offerings, are dedicated to addressing the most critical issues and opportunities facing our clients. Our strength lies in creating value that transcends traditional boundaries and connects the silo'd elements within organisations.

Our Boardroom Advisory team specialises in strategy, organisational design, operational efficiency, technology integration, transformation initiatives, digital strategies and analytics, corporate finance and mergers & acquisitions as well as sustainability.

Our CoSec-on-demand group works with governance and secretariat teams to support them on a project basis, working with them on governance frameworks, subsidiary management, software audits, entity rationalisation as well as joining their risk registers to provide emergency cover, all done outside of IR35.

Our Training teams works with institutions big and small to help narrow the gap between theory and day-to-day practice. Industry experts had expressed concerns regarding the future outlook of the governance profession, and we felt we could help address these needs by sharing our experiences. Our training clients include members of the Big 4 and FTSE.

In 2020, Beyond Governance became the UK's first certified B-Corp consultancy in its sector.



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*The interview with Mike Wilson was
undertaken with Erika Eliasson-Norris,
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About DECISION magazine

First published in 1988, DECISION magazine reflects the business lifestyle, the trials and tribulations, the hopes and aspirations of business owners and directors responsible for businesses with a turnover of £5million and above across the south of England and London.

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