



Beyond Governance

Creating clarity, improving business

DECISION
MAGAZINE



The Responsible Business

The Role of Governance

A meeting with William O’Hickey

Senior Partner

Ridge and Partners

Extract from a DECISION magazine report 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.

Adrian O'Hickey

Senior Partner

Ridge and Partners

“At the outset, a business will focus on ‘product’ as its main objective, and as it grows it becomes more aware of its culture, being responsive to all of its stakeholders.

“I would say generally a sense of purpose will continue to evolve over time; it must, to stay relevant.

“As a built environment consultancy we don’t make widgets – all we have is our people and their talent, and we can only deliver our objectives through them.

“That is one of the reasons why I believe we should never be afraid to say the business must be focused on profitability; otherwise it can’t be financially stable, and it won’t be able to invest in its people and their communities.

“The bottom line from a sustainability perspective is that a business should be able to continue to make a profit if it is to deliver its sense of purpose.

“Looking after one facilitates the other. If a business doesn’t have a happy workforce aligned to what it wants to deliver, then it might be able to make a fast buck but it won’t be sustainable.

“A responsible business is a combination of a number of different moving parts, but there isn’t an A, B or C set of definitions. The important bit is that a responsible business isn’t insular, that it will want to influence its suppliers, for example to work with them to align its supply chain with its values.

“Sustainability in this context is recognising the importance of where something is sourced, observing payment terms, rather than just linear, environmental issues in isolation.

“If you’re not careful, having a number of initiatives to perpetuate behaviours can become noise, so an overall strategy needs to be implemented, based on purpose, vision, values, and opportunities. From that, the spokes in the wheel can be identified, such as well-being, learning, and behind each of them, we have three objectives and define who is responsible for them.

“A business needs to be able to recognise a reflection of itself, otherwise it’s just an image.

“When we say Ridge and Partners are ‘enabled by great people who are inspired and proud of what they do and respected for who they are’, it’s not enough just to articulate what it means; this has to be embedded. And a business has to give people the opportunity to live and breathe its ethos.



Adrian O'Hickey

“The overlay of governance is about accountability, but I would add that it should be open to change and innovation and indeed help facilitate both.

“We need to have a broader breadth of thinking about governance. I would suggest it has to be rooted in sustainability and will include succession planning, financial stability, consistency. Governance should protect all of the company’s stakeholders.

“Governance and the visionary piece are intertwined. Governance is about the organisation, the process around the delivery, to support and facilitate the vision. If governance doesn’t deliver that, then it’s going to be a limiting factor. We’ve all been up against organisations which aren’t agile or responsive enough because their governance piece is a lead weight.

“With accreditation, I think there are companies which want the badges for commercial reasons without aligning them with sustaining their culture. It’s not enough for a company to have commercial objectives for an accreditation. People will only be able to feel empowered to really deliver the benefit if they understand how they are an intrinsic part of the whole process.

“So they need to understand purpose, because that translates to a desire to do their bit. For process to really work, there has to be a tool kit for people to manage their role if they are to give their best.

“If people believe in what they’re doing, understand the ‘why’, and they have the right tool kit, they will take it further than the accreditation requires.

“People are clear in their own minds what they want from life now, and don’t simply follow the career path their parents did.

“When I look at Gen Z, I see people who are more knowledgeable about the way of the world because of technology and the internet. We have a young professionals group, all under the age of twenty-five, which meets twice a year to discuss what they believe is important with our ESG strategy, because we value their diverse thinking.

“While the P&L is the financial driver, ESG, if you get it right, will improve financial performance and provide future proofing. The two are inextricably linked. Your thinking has to combine

the two, but then what needs to be included is both strategy and governance. For me, it's all about alignment or they won't effectively facilitate each other.

“If business at a macro level is to have a clear horizon, it needs consistency from government. Simply relying on some investment support or discretionary effort from individual companies isn't going to get us there quickly enough when it comes to addressing the environmental crisis the world is facing.

“But the way we have set up the body politic in this country means there is no value for a government insisting on measures which could result in short-term pain when it is part way through a five-year term in office and is looking to be re-elected.”

Ridge and Partners are a built environment consultancy with a multi-discipline team of more than 1000 across eleven offices.

ridge.co.uk

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.



**Training by
Beyond Governance**



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*The interview with Adrian O'Hickey 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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