HIGH VALUE EMPLOYMENT

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HIGH VALUE WORK FOR EMPLOYEES

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The business case for high value work is straightforward: it creates value for everyone. Businesses, employees and society all benefit from high value work because it creates a culture of investment, in people, customers and equipment that increases productivity and performance.

This is the fourth report from the Association for Finnish Work and The Futures Company on the nature of high value work. The others, published during 2014 and 2015, explored the core idea, and then looked at what high value work meant for businesses and how society could support the creation and development of high value work. These reports are published as The High Value Work Agenda, Making High Value Work: The Business Briefing, and the Manifesto for High Value Work.

This report now focuses on how employees can engage with high value work, and the ways they can influence their work environment to increase the value of the work they do.

High value work was defined at the outset of the project as work that is:

× *Productive* because it creates new value.

× *Durable* because it creates value over time.

× *Inclusive* because it creates shared value across businesses, employees and society.

× For these reasons, it is also *meaningful*.

The desire for "meaningful work," in particular, for work with purpose, is an increasing feature of research into attitudes to work. According to the Deloitte Millennial Survey in 2014, 92% of Millennials reject the idea that profit is the only measure of business success. Interestingly, 71% of business leaders agree with them.[1]

As Barry Salzberg, the CEO of Deloitte Global, commented, "Millennials want more from business than might have been the case 50, 20, or even 10 years ago. They are sending a very strong signal to the world's leaders that when doing business, they should do so with purpose. The pursuit of this different and better way of operating in the 21st century begins by redefining leadership."
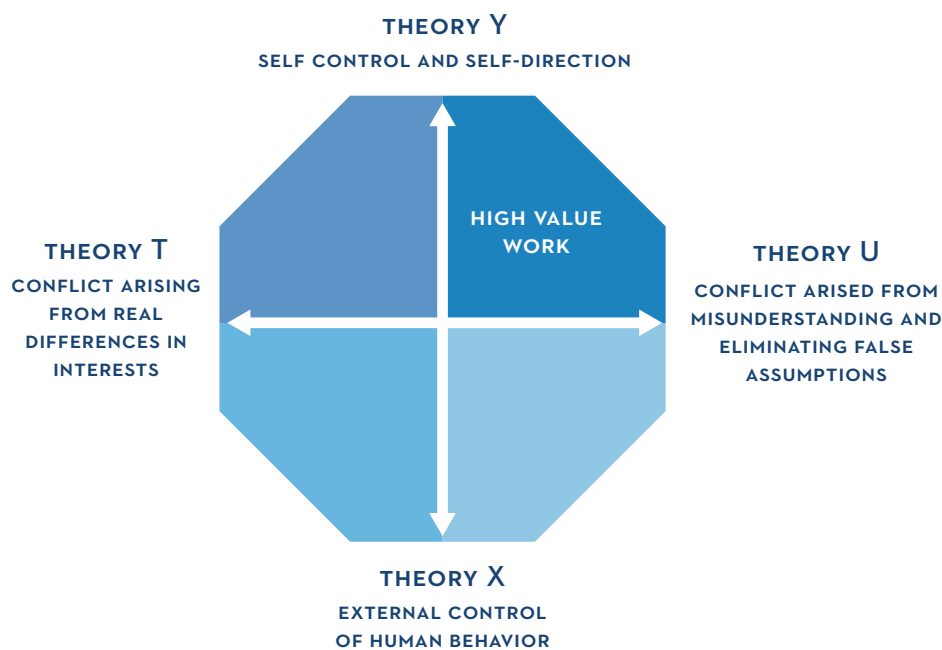
"Different and better." In a world in which technology is often used as a surveillance tool within the workforce, and to micro-manage or micro-monitor employees, the choice of high value work is a moral choice as well as a business decision. But the evidence suggests that, beyond this, a sound moral choice produces better business outcomes by increasing employee commitment and engagement.

In this, in one of the long-running arguments about people and their attitudes to work, it finds itself on the side of Theory Y and not Theory X. The two labels were created by Douglas McGregor in the 1950s, as ways of thinking about work and the workplace. As McGregor wrote,[2] "Theory X places exclusive reliance upon external control of human behavior, whereas Theory Y relies heavily on self-control and and self-direction". Theory Y holds that:

× physical and mental effort are natural and that most people (depending on the work environment) find work to be a source of satisfaction;

× generally, on their own motivation, people exercise self-control, self-direction, creativity, and ingenuity in pursuit of individual and collective (company) goals;

× they either seek responsibility or learn to accept it willingly, and that

× their full potential is not tapped in most organisations.

More recently Matthew Stewart has added an organisational layer, about human relations:[3] "Theory T" (for Tragic), and "Theory U" (for Utopian). While Theory T sees conflict as arising from real differences in interests, under Theory U conflict arises from misunderstanding and eliminating false assumptions can return the world to a natural state of peace.

When Theory Y combines with Theory U it creates a model of "freedom lovers", in which people are self-starting and self-organised, and will get the job done if only bosses would let go of the detail.

THEORY Y
SELF CONTROL AND SELF-DIRECTION

HIGH VALUE WORK

THEORY T
CONFLICT ARISING FROM REAL DIFFERENCES IN INTERESTS

THEORY U
CONFLICT ARISED FROM MISUNDERSTANDING AND ELIMINATING FALSE ASSUMPTIONS

THEORY X
EXTERNAL CONTROL OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR

Source: Build on Matthew Stewart's The Human Relations Theory Matrix

The characteristics of high value employment identified in the analysis for this report suggests that the world of high value work is one which values freedom and some degree of self-organisation, albeit freedom within a framework of purpose and direction.

Specifically, the four characteristics of high value employment, explored below in this report, are that it is:

1. Internally Open: it fosters a culture of curiosity and experimentation
2. Externally Open: it prioritises sharing and co-operation
3. Technology Enabled: it uses technology to increase the value of its people
4. People Facing: it focuses on points of personal engagement, especially with customers.

In this report, we expand on each of these in turn, looking at them through the lens of the employee's experience of the business. Each section ends with a set of questions for employees about their business and how they engage with it.

INTERNALLY OPEN

INTERNALLY OPEN

For employees, internal openness defines the way that employees interact with their organisation. Looking inwards at the structure of the business can be as beneficial as looking for inspiration from outside.

Internal openness implies that employees are trusted and empowered to have more access to the way the business works, and more influence over it. High value businesses listen to their employees and act upon what they hear. Employees become barometers by which a business can assess how it should be changing. Internally this might be in dealing with cultural or procedural problems before they grow. Or it might involve allowing staff to act as R&D or market research by bringing new ideas into the business. For example Snellman, a Finnish meat producer, uses its staff to develop all of its new products. "We trust our employees a great deal in terms of knowing about the market and where there might be a gap," says Tommi Fors from Snellman.[4] As the saying goes, in a high value business it is better to ask forgiveness than it is to ask permission.

Listening and acting is facilitated by feedback loops that allow everyone's voice to be heard and allow ideas to be processed, analysed and, wherever possible, acted upon. However it also relies on a cultural openness to questioning and criticism from employees – a high value business welcomes the kind of feedback that challenges the business to improve.

As companies strive to create a strong internal culture, there is a danger and a tension that the ideology of the company begins to create an environment of 'groupthink'. Instilling a culture where challenge and criticism is welcome is key to avoiding this, but building diverse teams is also integral. Decades of research shows that groups that are socially diverse, as well as diverse in their skill set, are more creative, more innovative, and more successful than their monocultural counterparts.[5] People with different backgrounds bring new

knowledge to a business, but also create team dynamics that challenge assumptions and 'groupthink'. Take Barbara Beskind, a designer for San Francisco-based design firm IDEO. She is 90 years old, and those working with her say that simply having her present in a room makes the group think differently and design better products.[6]

Most internally open and high value businesses have 'Theory Y' management structures that empower employees and enable them to engage with the workplace, with some degree of control over work routines. This might be facilitated by new technologies such as internal networks that allow employees to share and collaborate more easily. It might be facilitated by new types of contracts for employees, and new kinds of responsibilities for employers. People thrive in environments where they are allowed the structured freedom to define the way they work, and reporting structures that make people accountable to peers in their teams, rather than a line manager in a hierarchical structure, can be very successful in a range of different types of businesses. W.L. Gore has its employees self-organise into working groups, and then make commitments to that group as to their delivery of work and value.[7] Tata Consultancy Services creates a structure of goals, roles and vision for a project, before allowing the team freedom to achieve these goals in the way that works best for them. In many cases this includes less tethering of employees, whether that be physically (to an office) or in terms of responsibilities and position.

IRIS

CHERRY BLOSSO

ORANGE

AUBERGINE

CASE STUDY: OPEN INNOVATION

Fiblon is a family-owned Finnish company producing paper products whose working culture is based on openness, challenge and commitment to staff development: "Sharing ideas openly enables us to find the best solutions for the customer. Apply to work for Fiblon if you have an active desire to develop yourself and your work environment. You should be positive and able to spot opportunities. If you think there is nothing more to improve, you are in the wrong place."

FACT BOX

Company name: Fiblon

Description: Finnish company producing paper-based tabletop and wiping products.
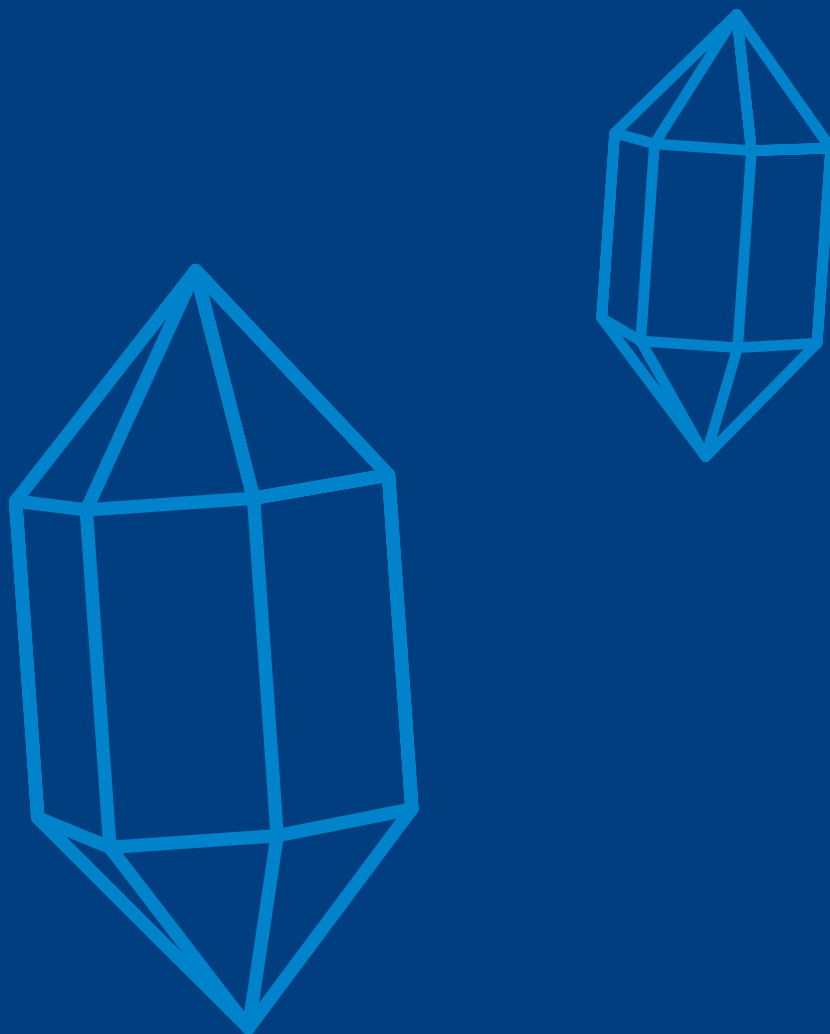
Number of employees: 30

Revenue in 2014: € 6.2 million

Source: http://www.fiblon.com/11/Fiblonstory.pdf
& LargestCompanies.com

Questions about the Internally Open business:

× Am I encouraged and willing to take an interest
in the business performance and future goals?

× Do I question and challenge the business in a constructive
way, and are my ideas accepted, encouraged and acted upon?

× Can I get involved in the process of hiring new employees
who will become my peers in the business?

EXTERNALLY OPEN

EXTERNALLY OPEN

The high value workplace prioritises sharing and co-operation between businesses and the outside world rather than building walls around its business units. The reason it does this is because it sees value in the flows of knowledge that go through the business as a result. A defining feature of this workplace, therefore, is its openness to its wider environment. It encourages employee interactions with a wider business and social community.

External openness can and should be manifested in the physical working environment. As Johns and Gratton point out in a *Harvard Business Review* article on virtual work, people first organised businesses in a single location in order to house technology and tools, support efficient and productive processes, and reinforce the hierarchy of management. They discovered that there were unintended benefits as a result: "[C]ultural alignment, idea generation, and fellowship that led to greater trust, teamwork, and quality." [9] The high value workplace seeks to foster all of these qualities directly to create a rich knowledge environment in which ideas and working processes can be easily shared.

One way in which these open business environments have been cultivated successfully is through the creation of 'hubs' of particular types of businesses and support services. When implemented well, these hubs create both a fertile business environment, and a social community in which employees are interested and motivated to work. A large-scale example in the UK of a 'civic space' growing in this way is 'Silicon Roundabout' tech hub in London's Old Street. The area received £50 million of government investment to become a ground for the sharing of ideas and rich knowledge in order to fuel high value business growth. [10] As a result it is also now a dynamic and desirable environment in which to work. Groups like *3Beards* have created regular social events that reinforce the community dynamics and sense of fun of working in the area, and as opportunities to share ideas and build networks. [11]

Much of the working, socialising and day-to-day collaboration in places such as these is facilitated by co-working spaces; work environments shared between small companies or units of larger companies that encourage 'cross-pollination' of ideas between employees from different organisations. Other types of shared workplace include 'open house' arrangements where larger companies open their doors to inspirational smaller startups, and 'working commons' – state- or business-backed spaces that allows the incubation of socially useful businesses such as social enterprises. In all of these kinds of spaces, collaborative working can come hand-in-hand with shared resources and services. Companies sharing work space at GRid70 in Grand Rapids, Michigan, also share processes, research findings and even rotate college interns.[12] Johns and Gratton note that this culture harks back to the medieval guilds, where, amongst such levels of productivity, fellowship and mentorship, we see talent clusters begin to emerge.

These kinds of clusters (both local and national) have been shown to promote higher levels of innovation, more resilient and high value jobs, and over a longer period of time, cluster identities that add value through the networks they create and the reputation that follows (think Swiss watches or Italian textiles).[13] Good high-profile jobs are attractive to employees, and make good business sense – in late 2013 the EU recognised co-working as a driver of economic growth. Governments have responded with significant investment in hubs, accelerators and co-working spaces across Europe.

Organisations that bring together smaller companies within an industry, in spirit and in communication if not physically, are a powerful facilitator of external openness. Finnish non-profit Neogames describes its mission as being "to accelerate, coordinate, and support the development of the Finnish game cluster... connect the industry players and serve their shared interests." Smaller companies can share ideas and resources by being members of Neogames, and therefore punch above their weight globally – something that would be far more difficult without acting as a networked community.[14]

External openness is also broadening to include customers and consumers, who increasingly expect to collaborate in the development of products and services, or at least have a voice in their development. In addition, consumers are becoming more demanding about company transparency about internal conditions and processes. Businesses that elect to share more than they need to by law or regulation successfully build consumer trust and brand image. Finnish energy company Fortum have openly reported their tax footprint (along with their environmental and societal impact) since 2012, and in doing so have forced competitors to follow suit.[15] Everlane, a US clothing manufacturer with transparency at the core of its business (see our previous report, Making High Value Work [LINK]), shows the working conditions of their factory employees around the world in some detail and with photographs, with a factory linked to each of the products on the Everlane website.[16] Similarly, KFC in China introduced paper place mats detailing the journey their chicken takes from farm to restaurant, promoting trust through transparency. In a world where people are increasingly aware of their own personal image, in particular their online profile, the company you work for makes up an increasing part of your identity. Employees want to work for businesses that are perceived to be 'good', and so the consumer benefits associated with external transparency also create valuable social currency for employees.

CASE STUDY: INTUITIVE OPENNESS

The open source database software MariaDB – formerly known as SkySQL – is developed by open community through the MariaDB Corporation. Independent developers submit code which is checked by 'Captains' of the community before being integrated into stable versions of the software. Unlike other similar databases, community code makes up a significant proportion of each version update. A Foundation has also been set up to oversee the development of the software; the Foundation is a member-supported not-for-profit business based on a similar model first developed in Canada. The lead developer, Michael Widenius, previously sold MySQL to Oracle. Customers who are reported to use MariaDB include Google.

FACT BOX

Company name: MariaDB Corporation (formerly SkySQL)

Description: A free, community-developed fork of leading open source software system MySQL; a relational database for database administrators and application developers. Founded in 2013

Investment in 2013: $20 million investment was led by Intel Capital and included Finnish Industry Investment, Open Ocean Capital and Spintop Private Partners in the round

Source: http://www.arcticstartup.com/2013/10/23/skysql-raises-20-million-to-work-on-mariadb;
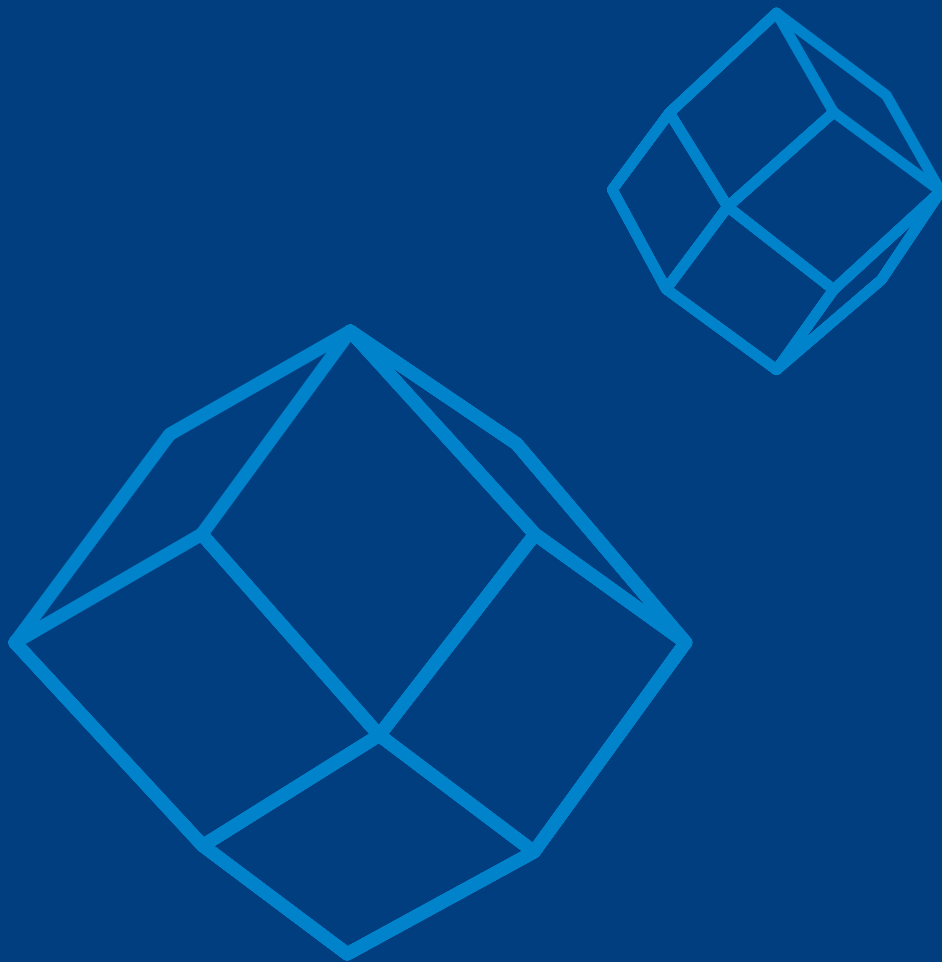Mariadb.com (https://mariadb.com/kb/en/mariadb/community-contributing-to-the-mariadb-project/);
Bartholomew, D. 'MariaDB vs. MySQL', Admin Magazine
(http://www.admin-magazine.com/Articles/MariaDB-vs.-MySQL)

Questions about the Externally Open business:

× Am I able and willing to interact with people from outside the business? Does a network exist to enable this?

× Do I expect my business to share more than it needs to of what it does and what it knows?

× How can I make sure I learn from our customers? What processes can we build to help this happen, and make sure that knowledge gained from this is acted upon in the business?

TECHNOLOGY ENABLED

TECHNOLOGY ENABLED

A high value business takes an inclusive stance on technology, seeing it as a enabler or facilitator of new ways of working that emancipate employees to perform more 'human' tasks.

Although the idea that automation will cannibalise the majority of jobs is widespread at present, it seems unlikely, certainly in the short-to-medium term future. As Peter Thiel says, "Humans and computers are just good at very different things. They are therefore mostly complementary." [17] The other mistake that people make when thinking about jobs and technology is conflating jobs and tasks. David Autor makes the distinction between them, and concludes that while many tasks are open to automation, the bundle of tasks that make up a job are difficult to unpick, and often require complementary skills including human flexibility and judgement.[18]

Peter Thiel has enlarged on this point: "Doctors need to marry clinical understanding with an ability to communicate it to non-expert patients. And good teachers aren't just experts in their disciplines: they must also understand how to tailor their instruction different individuals' interests and learning styles. Computers might be able to do some of these tasks, but they can't combine them effectively." [19]

If businesses take a 'technology enabled' approach to new innovation, the effect on employees is that jobs are *changed*, but generally not *lost*. A previous publication in this series, 'Making High Value Work: The Business Briefing', recommended that businesses become 'lean in the right places'. This meant that where tasks can be improved by implementing technology, such as in the storage facilities of supermarkets, businesses should do so in order to design jobs for employees that are customer-facing, knowledge-based, or value-adding. A famous example of this is in Apple retail stores: mobile technology allows staff to roam the floor of the shop, talking to customers and demonstrating the products, taking payments as they go, rather than sitting behind a cashier's desk. Customers get better service, sales are more easily closed, and employees have the opportunity to be trained in a number of different disciplines.

Technology also *creates* jobs. When spreadsheets were invented in the 1980s, they revolutionised the accounting industry. 400,000 bookkeeping jobs in the USA were made redundant as a result, but 600,000 accounting jobs were created to work the software, perform more complex calculations, and facilitate the greater number of queries that companies now requested as a result of spreadsheet software.[20] It's also possible that new technology will encourage companies to 'reshore' or 'nearshore' their manufacturing and administration facilities closer to home because of the reduction in costs that new technology is fostering in many European industries, or because of new more fluid customer demand.

Enabled technology requires training people in new job roles, and this works better when employees are involved with the planning processes that implement new technology in a business. Openness is key: if jobs are to be lost or reconfigured, employees should be made aware early, retrained early, and be part of the transition process. In many ways, this retraining is the employee response to a company being 'lean in the right places'. Employees need to be willing to adapt job roles, supported by their employers. There is a role here as well for better and more collaborative job design. As a technological transition begins, employees can play an important role in defining the way in which new jobs are configured. High value companies use this reconfiguration to become 'lean in the right places', not as an excuse to dramatically cut employment and reduce value creation.

There is a fear among some employers, a hangover from 20th century management, that training employees throws value away or, worse, passes it to competitors when people move jobs. The evidence runs the other way: training and development increases commitment, while a new generation of employees who are concerned about personal development as well as more tangible job benefits are leaving companies because of a lack of training. It's a vicious circle: "Companies won't train workers because they might leave, and workers leave because they don't get training." [21] Wrong management of the implementation of technology and a change in job roles and training can create huge problems across a spectrum of different types of jobs. High value businesses bring employees with them on this journey.

Questions about the Technology Enabled business:

× What formal training can I request from my employer, or what informal training can I engage in, to keep me up to speed with changing technology in my industry?

× Can I use information/data generated by my employer to help make my job easier?

× Does the company look for ways to develop staff to work with technology, rather than just replacing staff with technology?

CASE STUDY: TECHNOLOGY ENABLED

Elder care is an area in which technology has a huge opportunity to save time, improve care and reach those in the most need. There is a growing industry of sensors, apps and digital innovation in this area, but simple changes in job spec to include technology can be very powerful in allowing carers to spend more time actually giving care. In Nottinghamshire, UK, the National Health Service (NHS) has piloted a scheme to provide tablets to social carers so that they can do case work virtually, and therefore spend more time with their patients.

Nottinghamshire NHS also runs Twitter discussions to talk about key health issues. Online communication, they have found, breaks down barriers that can get in the way of providing the best care - without the offices and the hierarchy, people share more. Online systems, including one-on-one consultations, are also over 23 times cheaper for the NHS to supply. Training staff beyond key medical and social skills is, in this case, allowing social carers to spend more time doing the thing that is most valuable both to them and their employer – caring for the elderly.

PEOPLE FACING

PEOPLE FACING

Employees want to work for companies that make a positive contribution to the world, and doing so creates significant social currency. Conversely, working for a company that seems to make less of a contribution is increasingly a source of social disapproval. The rise in popularity of social enterprises and 'B Corps' as employers is evidence of this change. Employees, especially younger people and those in high demand, are increasingly voting with their feet when it comes to good working culture.

Equally, consumers are increasingly interested in the companies behind the products they buy: their values, their processes, the way they run their business. Employee culture, along with environmental credentials and social mission, plays an important role. Many businesses are beginning to be defined by their working culture: think about Google or Facebook and you are as likely to think of their offices and employee perks as you are their digital services. In the UK, the success of Innocent smoothies was as much about the image of the company 'doing good' to the world and to their employees as it was about their fruit drinks.[22]

One of the key sources of value for a high value business is that it is able to put these two things together in a way that makes a difference to both groups. Customers get better service; employees get greater job satisfaction. In a world where customer experience is increasingly a driver of business value, and company performance is increasingly a function of employee commitment, this creates a virtuous circle. This is not just the case in professional or white collar service businesses. In fact, the evidence - reviewed in earlier reports from research such as that of Zeynep Ton - suggests that the impact can be greater in routine service environments such as retail.[23]

And the most recent research suggests that the business effect of doing this can be dramatic. Christof Binder and Dominique Hanssens argue from a detailed analysis of company valuations that over the last decade the value of customers as a share of overall enterprise value has doubled, while brand value has halved. As they note, "Customers still value strong brands, but what constitutes a strong brand is now more dependent on

customers' direct experience with an offering, and with their relationship with the firm that produces it." [24]

Similarly, Alexander Jutkowitz has argued that loyalty is becoming more important than marketing: "Consumers today have many options, and more than ever they choose particular brands to communicate something personal about their own beliefs and priorities. ... Building loyalty is much harder work, and it requires not only valuing customers, but liking them enough to have a conversation every day. Bringing passion and excitement to that conversation requires genuine enthusiasm for your own products and mission." [25]

Of course, what this requires is having staff who choose to bring that passion, excitement and enthusiasm to work every day. In this world, customer value is being created directly by the 'personality' of the company and their employees and the way they work. This can be a double-edged sword. It is one thing to want your employees to 'bring themselves to work' – something that, when done in good faith, creates a more honest and comfortable working world. But it is another when an employer expects a particular type of "emotional labour" from its staff. The international café chain Pret a Manger has come under fire after it was found that the behaviours expected of its staff were both formalised and evaluated weekly by secret shoppers.[26] There is a tension between being able to be yourself in your job, and being exploited by your work.

People Facing businesses don't just put people at the centre of their company. They align the interests of the business, the staff and their customers around their working culture. They ask their staff to be the face and the heart of their businesses, and help them to share in its success.

Questions about the People Facing business:

× Am I myself when I'm at work?

× How can I contribute to a working culture where human facing values are central to company success?
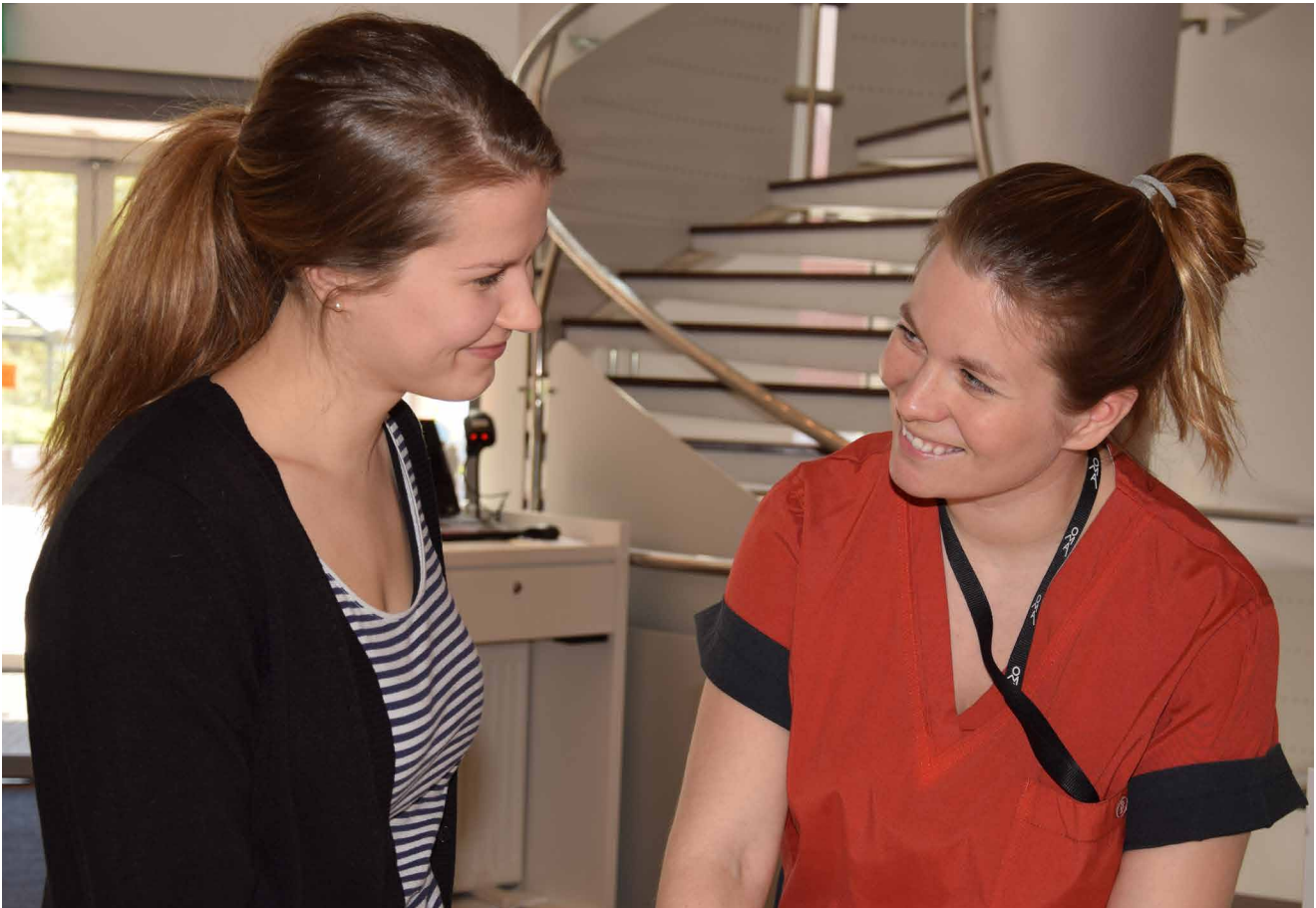
× Do I gain more than just wages from going to work?

Image: Omasairaala

CASE STUDY: PEOPLE FACING

Omasairaala is a network of Finnish private healthcare facilities that measure performance not on number of patients seen over a certain timescale, but on customer satisfaction and speed of patient recovery. Omasairaala's revenue comes from businesses who take out staff medical insurance with their parent company, so their imperative is to deliver quality service that gets each patient back to work in the quickest time possible, and with the best long-term results. On Omasairaala's website is a real-time monitor customer satisfaction (at time of writing, very high) and it is this metric that is used to evaluate staff performance. Healthcare is fundamentally a people-centred industry, and Omasairaala employees are liberated to spend more time caring and less time watching the clock.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

MAKING IT HAPPEN FOR YOU AND THE BUSINESS YOU WORK IN

We don't all work in high value businesses, but the culture of any business is partly shaped by the way that people decide to behave when they're at work. You can nudge your business in the right direction. This list of seven personal behaviours, and seven team behaviours, is designed to help you make a contribution towards working in a higher value business.

Personally

1. *Be human* – Everyone is human, but we don't always act it. High value businesses value 'soft skills' like relationship building and seeing the bigger picture. Bring your humanity to work.

2. *Stretch yourself* – Your future – inside and outside of work - is about creating value for yourself that goes beyond money. Take every opportunity to develop your skills and abilities.

3. *Look after yourself* – Your physical and mental wellbeing shapes fundamentally your ability to contribute. Look after yourself and better performance, happiness and resilience at work will follow.

4. *Ask questions* – All businesses should want to challenge themselves. High value businesses relish it. Asking constructive questions helps your organisation be more internally open, and helps you and your colleagues work better within it.

5. *Make it better* – If you see a way to make something work better - a process, a place, a way of doing things - try to do it. Don't be weighed down by the status quo; improve the way your organisation works wherever you can.

6. *Follow your passion* – People can often turn their hobbies into jobs. Many more find ways to bring their personal expertise and enthusiasms into their current job.

7. *Stand in other peoples' shoes* – Empathy - for colleagues, for customers, for partners, for communities, is essential to the success of - and in - a high value organisation

The Team

1. **Commit:** Make a commitment to your colleagues in your team on the outputs that you are going to deliver, but be flexible and understanding in the way they are delivered.

2. **Don't cut corners:** It creates more work for someone else on your team, now or later.

3. **Be honest:** Build a safe working environment where people can ask straight questions and expect to get straight answers.

4. **Understand your impact:** Understand how the tasks and flows involved with your job and your team impact others, to make participation and processes simpler.

5. **Make tech your friend:** Use technology – but only when it makes everyone's job easier.

6. **Dissent:** Challenge each other, encourage constructive disagreement, celebrate diversity and reward yourselves for making things better.

7. **Create work space:** Develop the right physical and digital spaces for the team to work in. Encourage the company to let you make decisions about improving your working environment.

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