

# In a digital world, how can being more human be key to unlocking more growth?

Leaders of increasingly connected organizations are looking for the business case to become more human.

Where is your organization on this journey?

**Join the debate #HumanAtWork.**



# A discussion paper from Unilever, EY and The B Team

We are delighted to be collaborating with Unilever, The B Team's 100% Human at Work initiative and EY Beacon Institute to bring together the multitude of discussions related to harnessing the value of human in the workplace.

These organizations are already inspiring real consideration of how to deliver a long-term sustainable future, how to be 100% human and the value of purpose in business. Get involved in changing the conversation about people and work – let's better understand what inspires people and helps organizations unlock more growth.

**Join the global conversation  
#HumanAtWork.**



# Why organizations must be more human if they are to deliver sustained growth in a connected world

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The intention of this paper is to help leaders stand back and look at some of the new challenges facing the workplace today and to explore how we can tackle them together.

The reality is that we are living in an increasingly fragmented world with a crisis of slowing growth in many areas and a whole generation feels worse off than the one that came before it. At the same time, social media makes almost every individual on earth vocal and visible, ready to campaign against unacceptable business and political practices.

Meanwhile, brands and employers are becoming more meaningful: those with clear purpose are prospering (outperforming the S&P 500 by 14 times between 1998 and 2013),<sup>1</sup> while many corporate “dinosaurs” that refuse (or are unable) to adapt are dying off as the rate of change increases.

This paper will seek your views on the argument that organizations of the future need to embrace fully the concepts of empowerment, learning and balance if they are to succeed, by using the power of technology and automation to rehumanize – rather than dehumanize – the workplace.



**Paul Polman,**  
CEO, Unilever

*Technology may be changing the nature of work in ways – and at a speed – never previously imagined, but businesses and society still fundamentally depend on the resilience and creativity of human beings for their success. Reassessing this relationship between people and work, and understanding in particular what drives a true sense of purpose will be key to building stronger businesses, more stable societies and – ultimately – supporting more fulfilled and productive lives.*

# There are several significant trends that are driving change in the new working world

## 1. The range of workforce generations is growing:

More generations are working together than ever before, with different expectations and attitudes. It is estimated that by 2025 millennials will make up 75% of the workforce – and life expectancy is still rising, so up to two thirds of babies born in the last year could live to be 100.<sup>2</sup> People are retiring later, or not at all. We now have an environment in which older workers already report facing prejudice at work<sup>3</sup> and millennial executives struggle to gain acceptance from older colleagues.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Work is less permanent and more flexible:

By 2020, almost 20% of US workers will be “contingent” – i.e., not permanent. That’s 31 million people. If that sounds like bad news, consider that 80% of today’s contingent workers appreciate the flexibility.<sup>5</sup> Most of Uber’s growth has come from drivers who use their own cars,<sup>6</sup> and 75% of them have other jobs.<sup>7</sup>

## 3. Successful business models look radically different:

New business models are springing up all over the world, many of them rooted in the “sharing economy.” Nearly half of UK business leaders think that their current business models will cease to exist within the next five years.<sup>8</sup>

## 4. Increasing economic inequality and slowing growth:

The richest 1% of the global population is now estimated

to own over 50% of all global household assets.<sup>9</sup> This is especially bad news for economic growth: inequality at the bottom of the income scale hurts overall growth, and countries where income inequality is decreasing grow faster than those with rising inequality.<sup>10</sup>

## 5. The rise of robots in the workplace:

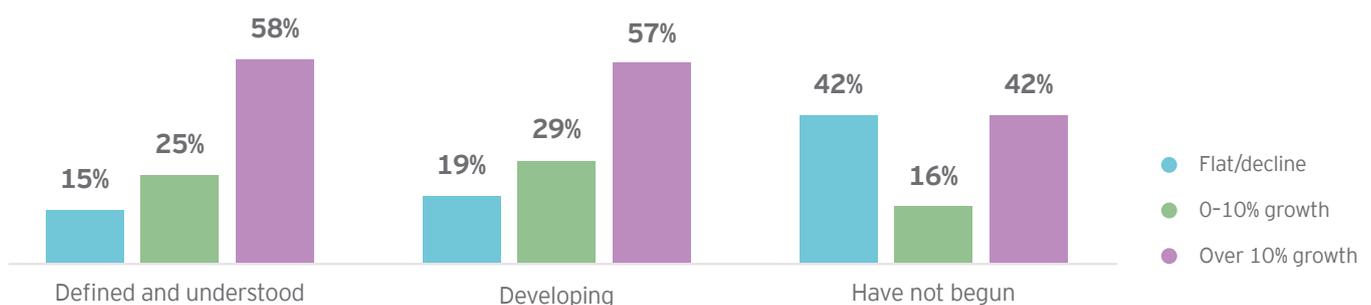
Smart machines could replace 33% of jobs by 2025, and the Governor of the Bank of England stated earlier this year that almost 15m UK jobs could be “hollowed out” with the workforce being replaced by robots: “Alongside its great benefits, every technological revolution mercilessly destroys jobs and livelihoods ... well before the new ones emerge.”<sup>11</sup>

## 6. Political and social instability:

From mass human migration as a result of war, conflict and the search for employment, to Brexit and the messages that Geert Wilders in The Netherlands and Marine Le Pen in France gained surprisingly strong support for throughout their respective election campaigns – these socio-political shockwaves are driven by people who feel frustrated and ignored. They threaten to undermine an intertwined, global trading economy that was already in crisis.<sup>12</sup>

These trends will affect everyone – and for those of us who run organizations, they should be a wake-up call.

## In the past three years, organizations which had a defined and understood purpose had an edge on revenue



Source: The business case for purpose, EY Beacon Institute, 2017

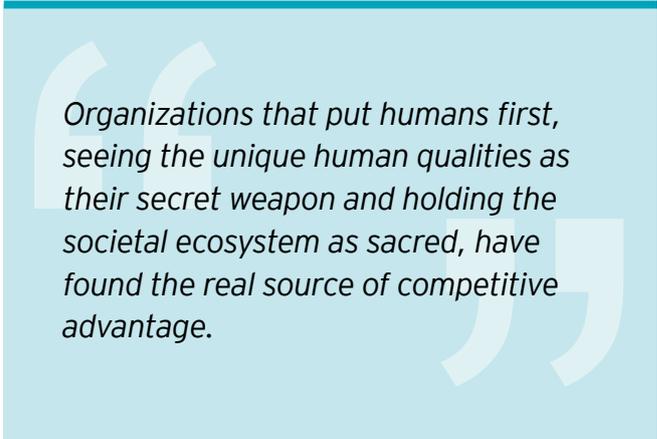
# To thrive in the new era, we need to rethink the role that organizations and their workforce play in driving competitive advantage

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Change is inevitable – but it is accelerating at such a pace that we are simply not equipped to process or adapt to it quickly enough. We are not machines – yet some predict that may be our downfall. For example, social historian Yuval Noah Harari predicts a grim future in which, “with roles taken on by machines, our political and economic systems will simply stop attaching much value to humans.”<sup>13</sup> Already, 67% of CEOs believe technology, not people, is the key to survival.<sup>14</sup>

Of course, profit remains the strongest driver for most businesses, and companies will continue to invest in new technologies to cut costs and increase efficiency. But this approach on its own will not create a sustained competitive advantage in the long term. As the data and examples in this article will show, organizations that put humans first, seeing the unique human qualities as their secret weapon and holding the societal ecosystem as sacred, have found the real source of competitive advantage. These organizations create new work practices that enable their workforce to innovate and deliver more than ever before, creating entirely new business models and better ways to serve their consumer base both now and in the future.

This is especially true right now. In the context of rising inequality and slowing growth, people are the critical assets that truly and uniquely differentiate the organization, its products and services. We need to understand how we can harness technology to increase our uniquely human capabilities – creativity, empathy, innovation, communication, connection – and the freedom to use them at work. Only by being more human can we deliver the growth and sustained economic value we, as a global economy, all seek.



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Artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, digitalization, 24/7 social media and global connectivity are here to stay; but, so is this truth: organizations are ultimately a collective of people, working and making decisions together. “The effective organizational system isn’t just a mechanistic one of capital investment. It’s a human system that relies heavily on unique human capabilities. So *collectively*, human talent is ... extremely valuable.”<sup>15</sup>

Thriving will mean adapting to the changes, facilitating the interconnections between humans and investing in their uniquely human attributes.

# What is the risk if organizations don't act now?

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Today, we are at a crossroads. One road promises an “age of abundance ... where products, services, energy and education become so inexpensive ... that people are freed from work.”<sup>16</sup> The other hints at a more apocalyptic vision of a post-work world where humans are unskilled and become increasingly obsolete.

These are polar extremes, but the responsibility is on us to navigate a third way – if we don't, the following consequences will be borne by everyone.

- ▶ **An automation apocalypse:** Software robots will remove humans from repetitive process-based jobs, creating mass unemployment, which in turn will erode purchasing potential. As Martin Ford, one of the most vocal contributors to the debate on automation, writes, “Workers are also consumers, and they rely on their wages to purchase the products and services produced by the economy.”<sup>17</sup> Or in other words: if robots take all the jobs, who will buy our products and services?
- ▶ **The growth of a “useless class”:** Yuval Noah Harari asks, “What will happen ... when computers push humans out of the job market and create a massive new ‘useless class?’”<sup>18</sup> Millions of people will be left without any employable skills. And because no one will be sure what skills will still be relevant in the future of work, no one will know what to study in college: “The world is changing so quickly that by the time new college students graduate, much of what they have learned is ... in many cases obsolete.”<sup>19</sup> Will we as businesses have a significantly smaller talent pool to choose from? Where will diverse ideas come from and why would we want growth without equality?
- ▶ **Turbo-charging the war for talent:** If education is not equipping people with the right skills, how will organizations find the talent they need? This could lead to fewer skilled people being available. What will incentivise them? How will your organization compete with other potential employers, especially among freelance and contingent workers, who may become highly selective around their choice of employer? When talented individuals no longer want a job for life and can earn more outside of traditional full-time employment, how will we attract them?
- ▶ **Increased nationalism, isolationism and trade wars:** With growing unemployment, “globalization will accentuate class divisions between those who have the skills and resources to take advantage of global markets and those who don't.”<sup>20</sup> And, even though many economists believe that a political backlash could push the global economy deeper into a rut,<sup>21</sup> we are starting to see politicians regulate against globalization. They will take actions that will reverse the current trade flows that have taken decades if not centuries to establish. This, despite evidence that “direct trade-restricting measures have the most negative impacts on growth and employment.”<sup>22</sup> There could also be increasing charges or immigration barriers, which may prove prohibitively costly because securing the right human skills in the right place will come at a premium. All eyes are on the UK to see how they navigate the Brexit detangling of freedom of movement and free trade.





► **Tax and welfare overhaul:** Some commentators have suggested a human solution to rising unemployment and economic inequality could be to give citizens a universal basic income. This is being trialed by Finland and the Netherlands among others, and early reports in Finland are already indicating improvements to people's mental health.<sup>23</sup> And while in 2016 Switzerland voted to reject it, "young people seem to overwhelmingly support [it] – making it a political likelihood in the decades to come"<sup>24</sup> – perhaps even more so if younger people are the ones hit hardest by the new world of work. The obvious question is, how would we pay for this? And the obvious answer is: higher taxes. "America could afford to pay citizens about US\$10,000 a year if it increased taxes from 26% to 35%."<sup>25</sup> Another option is "taxing ... things we need less of, such as pollution, financial transactions and extreme wealth."<sup>26</sup>

Can we afford to wait for governments to solve these issues for us? Or will we lag behind our competitors who solve them ahead of us? In order to make headway, organizations, governments and wider society will need to work together: we must at the very least go in search of a third way. "We can, and will and must ... harness innovation to not just provide better products and services, but create more inclusive economic growth," says Mark A. Weinberger, Global Chairman and CEO of EY.<sup>27</sup>

Mark Carney, Governor of the Bank of England, agrees: "For free trade to benefit all it requires some redistribution. We need to move towards more inclusive growth where everyone has a stake in globalization."<sup>28</sup>

This demands that we take proactive and responsible decisions and actions that transform the future of work, so that not just a few people prosper in a growth economy.



**Mark A. Weinberger,**  
Global Chairman and CEO, EY

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# Let's think again – and put people in the center of business with more human ways of working

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We can balance the age of abundance with the age of automation in a way that benefits humans as a whole. We just have to think more broadly.

## 1. Make our organizations reflect a more connected world.

Most businesses are still organized in silos, which are often disconnected and dampen collaboration and cooperative learning. These silos are still propped up by traditional hierarchies. They're no longer fit for purpose. Digital connectivity and collaboration on a local and global scale have made these traditional forms irrelevant.

## 2. We need to harness our entire human ecosystem, not just our own workforce.

The relationship between a person and their organization is changing. They may be full-time, part-time, contractor, freelancer ... This is what we mean by our human ecosystem. Around 18% of the workforce is currently contingent – and firms expect to increase their usage to 25% to 30% or even more within less than 10 years.<sup>29</sup> This begs the question of what organizations will really be offering employees beyond just the basic contract of employment, and where a group purpose becomes particularly important. Matthew Taylor, head of the UK Government review into the gig economy, links the UK's poor productivity growth to a feeling of dissatisfaction among workers. He cautions that too few positions offer a feeling of "genuine flexibility, being valued and respected, learning and growing ... feeling work has a meaning and purpose,"<sup>30</sup> and this view is supported by the Bank of England's Chief Economist, Andy Haldane.

## 3. We are suffering from digital sicknesses – we need to adapt to it.

The culture of "always on" technology over-usage is causing a rise in mental health issues such as "digital dementia" and "digital stress" from 24/7 work availability. We need to protect our people and help them thrive and survive in the connected world. France has already reacted to this risk, enacting on 1 January 2017 legislation giving workers in organizations with more than 50 employees "the right to disconnect" from the "always-on" work culture enabled by technology.<sup>31</sup>

## 4. We have to anticipate and develop the skills we will need in the future of the Internet of Things, robotics and AI.

If we don't know what tomorrow's valuable skills will be, it will be a challenge to train and develop our people today. The B Team's Arianna Huffington predicts that the "two most essential skills in the new world order [are] creativity and empathy." Organizations must help to hone them, as there will likely be a premium for these uniquely human attributes that cannot be easily automated or synthesized.

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# How can we fully activate our full human potential to thrive in the future?

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There is conclusive evidence that well-being generally is higher for those who are employed than those who are unemployed. Employment itself may not increase subjective well-being, but work facilitates activities that do (such as supporting a family, philanthropy and education). We as organizations need to maintain employment levels to help ensure a happy and healthy workforce, talent pool and consumer base.

We now understand that for people to thrive, they need to be able to achieve a sense of balance, foster a mastery of their subject, continually learn and develop, to feel they belong, and have a meaning or purpose that extends beyond their basic functional needs.

Technology, instead of making these values obsolete, can help us to embed them further.

Using technology to enhance, rather than negate, that which is essentially human is not just the right thing to do, it's one of the most important ways that we can safeguard the long-term health and well-being of organizations, of the people who work for them and for society as a whole.

We suggest that to build competitive advantage with your human "assets," organizations should:

## 1. Inspire

Explore new ways of working to inspire individuals.

### ► **Replace old hierarchies with new mindsets and real purpose.**

The B Team suggests that organization structures should be flat, not vertical. "Flatter structures not only make sure everybody's voice is heard, they allow companies to make decisions quicker and innovate faster."<sup>33</sup> Organizations are no longer just about hierarchies, but lattices<sup>34</sup> – "the network is where big change happens. It allows a company to more easily spot big opportunities and then change itself to grab them."<sup>35</sup>

One key principle is uniting people through a common purpose: research from EY Beacon Institute demonstrates that a well articulated and integrated organizational purpose helps individuals and teams to work across silos in order to pursue a single, compelling aim.<sup>36</sup> In fact, 87% of business leaders believe that companies perform best over time if their purpose goes beyond profit.<sup>37</sup>

### ► **Review working hours to increase human productivity, creativity and wellness.**

The OECD found that when looking at the GDP created per hour worked, productivity is highest when people spend fewer hours working.<sup>38</sup> With more jobs being able to be automated, and an increase in productivity, countries are starting to experiment with new working schedules. Sweden, for example, has proven that less work leads to more productivity and happiness<sup>39</sup> and this trend is universal. There is no need for us to stick to a working schedule that has existed for the last 100 years, based mostly on factory work.



► **“Democratize” your workforce.**

Enable greater flexibility and self-determination among your people. For millennials, who are projected to make up 75% of the workforce by 2025, this is key.<sup>40</sup> Zappos, the online shoe and clothing retailer acquired by Amazon.com for more than US\$1b, has implemented a “holacracy”: people have “roles,” not jobs – with experience and expertise de-emphasized, less “typical” and more junior types have been able to succeed.<sup>41</sup> Video game company Valve uses a modular work model whereby employees are free to work on any of the company’s projects that they may find interesting.<sup>42</sup> As Laszlo Bock, Former Senior Vice President of People Operations at Google, says: “If you’re comfortable with the amount of freedom you’ve given your employees, you haven’t gone far enough.”<sup>43</sup> The B Team has been considering the “New Engagement Paradigm” for some years.

## 2. Learn

Embed continual learning and evolving education strategies.

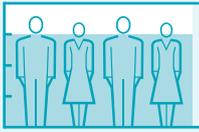
► **Use digital to enable constant skills development.**

This is critical for the evolving needs of your business, as well as those of the individual: within the next five years, 35% of skills considered important in today’s workforce will have changed.<sup>44</sup> In our digitally enabled and hyperconnected world, graduates will also need cultural empathy, cross-cultural communication skills and global contacts. Today, 65% of millennials say the opportunity for personal development is the main factor in their current job.<sup>45</sup> Both Alphabet and AT&T have each invested more than US\$2m in the Khan Academy, a non-profit organization that produces short lectures for YouTube and mobile devices, mostly on mathematics, with the goal of creating an accessible place for people to be educated.<sup>46</sup> Such an investment will not only help many access education they otherwise couldn’t, it will also help to widen the potential talent pool for organizations requiring numeracy skills.

► **Work with government on education programs to provide the right skills for tomorrow.**

Given the rate of change in skills and knowledge required in the workplace, life in the future is unlikely to happen in two discrete stages: education then career. “The mantra of political leaders should be ‘guidance, guidance, guidance’ for employees throughout their careers.”<sup>47</sup> Denmark allocates funding for two weeks’ certified skills training per year for adults, and the strong emphasis the country places on in-work training helps explain its very high degree of employment mobility, with 70% of workers considering mid-career transitions a “good thing,” compared to 30% or less in most other European countries.<sup>48</sup> To reach the same ends, businesses are working closer with universities; for example, Ericsson has created a learning platform that uses mobile phones to download the Indira Gandhi National Open University’s (IGNOU) course content.<sup>49</sup>

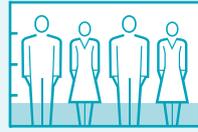
## From the worker ...



By 2025 millennials will make up **75%** of the workforce – and life expectancy is still rising, so up to two thirds of babies born in the last year could live to be 100.

**75%**

*Two thirds of today's babies could live to 100, The Telegraph, 12 December 2013*

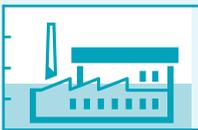


Around **18%** of the workforce is currently contingent – and firms expect to increase their usage to 25% to 30% or even more within less than 10 years.

**18%**

*Staffing industry analysts, 2015 Europe Contingent Buyers Survey in Is the gig economy a fleeting fad, or an enduring legacy?, EY, 2016*

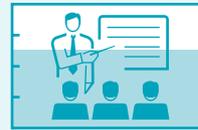
## ... to the workplace ...



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*The 10 skills you need to thrive in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, World Economic Forum, 19 January 2016*



**65%** of millennials say the opportunity for personal development is the main factor in their current job.

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*OECD Data, OECD, 2016*



**77%** believe that advanced technologies in the workplace are important.

**77%**

*Future Workforce Study, Dell and Intel, 2016*

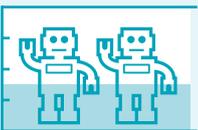


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**70%**

*The Future of Jobs, World Economic Forum, January 2016*

## ... to the organization.



Smart machines could replace **33%** of jobs by 2025.

**33%**

*Mark Carney, Liverpool John Moores University Roscoe Lecture, 5 December 2016*



**87%** of business leaders believe that companies perform best over time if their purpose goes beyond profit.

**87%**

*What are the trends disrupting our clients' People Agenda? Research and insights on major shifts across the globe, EY, September 2016.*



### 3. Balance

Actively balance the technology and the person to humanize, not dehumanize, the work experience.

► **Automate to make work more fulfilling.**

The vast majority of millennials feel AI could make work easier for them.<sup>50</sup> For the generations that follow them, so-called digital natives who are just entering the workplace, 77% believe that advanced technologies in the workplace are important.<sup>51</sup> “The future won’t be about people competing with machines, it will be about people using machines and doing work that is more interesting and fulfilling,”<sup>52</sup> claims Australia’s Minister for Employment, Michaelia Cash. Therefore, the message from the emerging and future workforce is not to stop automation, but to ensure that automation helps humans to have more fulfilling work.

► **Invest in developing our uniquely human characteristics.**

Helping individuals see the direct impact of their work, whether in terms of products or services, is vital to a culture of innovation.<sup>53</sup> Autodesk has built a strong culture of reinvention by bringing its employees through a series of innovation workshops. Employees are given both the training and resources to create business pitches that highlight the value of their ideas.<sup>54</sup> Microsoft’s innovation team now actively encourages employees to get involved with three forms of innovation: product, business model and policy, taking the company “in directions that were previously unthinkable.”<sup>55</sup> In fact, innovation can even come from looking after the hygiene factors, as in the UK, supermarket chain Lidl has found that increasing the basic rate of pay can also achieve great things: “The Living Wage can give workers the security they need to innovate. Half of the people that receive the Living Wage explain it’s made them more likely to implement changes in their organization.”<sup>56</sup>

*The message from the emerging and future workforce is not to stop automation, but to ensure that automation helps humans to have more fulfilling work.*

# Where should we go from here?

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The one thing that we can be sure of is that technology is here to stay: it's become an indispensable part of our lives, at work, at home and in our social relationships of every kind. As digital has evolved, it has unlocked more utility and meaning than we ever imagined.

It has made the human experience richer.

This is what we need to remember as we take further steps in this era of the fourth industrial revolution. In the end, business fundamentally depends on people's ingenuity, interrelations and human decisions. We hope this will ignite debate about the right choices to make for our future – and inspire it. As organizations we need to be conscientious, and simultaneously embrace opportunities to balance technology, continuing individual development and an inclusive economic agenda. All this while bearing in mind that people are influencing the organizations they interact with and work for in a way that has never been seen before.

We are at a crossroads now, and as business leaders we all need to think hard about the direction of travel – and the human implications of our decisions. So what does it mean to be human at work? How can being more human add even more value for the organizations that serve their many stakeholders? Momentum for changing the narrative about people and work is already under way.

- ▶ Is the Armageddon scenario a real possibility – or do you think the world will self correct?
- ▶ Is talking about organizations' purpose a fad? What role does leadership play?
- ▶ What are the steps organizations need to start taking in order to make the more human organization a reality?
- ▶ What is it about the paper that hasn't been talked about before? Is anything missing?

Join the global conversation at #HumanAtWork and share your views and experiences so we can learn from each other, co-create a brighter future and thrive in the connected world.



**Leena Nair,**  
CHRO, Unilever

*In the connected world, as technologies transform our lives, there is a huge opportunity to explore what it means to be human at work, and how being more human can create even more value for our business. I am committed to driving this agenda forward so we never lose sight of the essential contribution that being more human can bring to our collective and individual sense of wellbeing and, importantly, superior business performance.*





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### About EY's People Advisory Services

As the world continues to be impacted by globalization, demographics, technology, innovation and regulation, organizations are under pressure to adapt quickly and build agile people cultures that respond to these disruptive forces. EY People Advisory Services believes a better working world is helping our clients harness their people agenda – the right people, with the right capabilities, in the right place, for the right cost, doing the right things.

We work globally and collaborate to bring you professional teams to address complex issues relating to organization transformation, end-to-end employee lifecycles, effective talent deployment and mobility, gaining value from evolving and virtual workforces, and the changing role of HR in support of business strategy. Our EY professionals ask better questions and work with clients to create holistic, innovative answers that deliver quality results.

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### About The B Team

The B Team is a not-for-profit initiative formed by a global group of business leaders to catalyse a better way of doing business, for the wellbeing of people and the planet.

Founded in the belief that the private sector can, and must, redefine both its responsibilities and its own terms of success, we are developing a 'Plan B' – for concerted, positive action that will ensure business becomes a driving force for social, environmental and economic benefit.

Plan A – where business has been motivated primarily by profit – is no longer an option.

We are focused on starting 'at home' in our own companies, taking collective action to scale systemic solutions and using our voice where we can make a difference.

[bteam.org](http://bteam.org)

### The team includes:

Sir Richard Branson // Oliver Bäte // Marc Benioff // Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland  
// Sharan Burrow // Kathy Calvin // Bob Collymore // David Crane  
// Arianna Huffington // Dr. Mo Ibrahim // Yolanda Kakabadse // Guilherme Leal  
// Andrew Liveris // Strive Masiyiwa // Arif Naqvi // Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala  
// François-Henri Pinault // Paul Polman // Mary Robinson // Ratan Tata  
// Zhang Yue // Professor Muhammad Yunus // Jochen Zeitz

### About Unilever

Unilever is one of the world's leading suppliers of Food, Home Care, Personal Care and Refreshment products with sales in over 190 countries and reaching 2.5 billion consumers a day. It has 169,000 employees and generated sales of €52.7 billion in 2016. Over half (57%) of the company's footprint is in developing and emerging markets. Unilever has more than 400 brands found in homes all over the world, including Persil, Dove, Knorr, Domestos, Hellmann's, Lipton, Wall's, PG Tips, Ben & Jerry's, Magnum and Lynx.

Unilever's Sustainable Living Plan (USLP) underpins the company's strategy and commits to:

- ▶ Helping more than a billion people take action to improve their health and well-being by 2020.
- ▶ Having the environmental impact of our products by 2030.
- ▶ Enhancing the livelihoods of millions of people by 2020.

The USLP creates value by driving growth and trust, eliminating costs and reducing risks. The company's sustainable living brands are growing 50% faster than the rest of the business and delivered more than 60% of the company's growth in 2016.

Unilever was ranked number one in its sector in the 2016 Dow Jones Sustainability Index. In the FTSE4Good Index, it achieved the highest environmental score of 5. It led the list of Global Corporate Sustainability Leaders in the 2017 GlobeScan/SustainAbility annual survey for the seventh year running. Unilever has pledged to become carbon positive in its operations by 2030.

[unilever.com](http://unilever.com)

For more information on the USLP: [www.unilever.com/sustainable-living/](http://www.unilever.com/sustainable-living/)