

A diver in a black wetsuit and fins is swimming through a dense, swirling school of small fish. The fish are silvery and create a tunnel-like effect around the diver. At the top of the frame, a bright light from the surface illuminates the scene, creating a strong lens flare and highlighting the water's texture. The overall color palette is deep blue and teal.

Navigating the new workplace reality

Trust and Authenticity

March 2025



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Trust and authenticity

Introductions

The Beautiful Truth recently hosted a thought-provoking conversation over breakfast at the Haymarket Hotel in London, in partnership with tml Partners, bringing together senior leaders to explore some of the most pressing challenges shaping the worlds of communications, marketing, people, and recruitment.

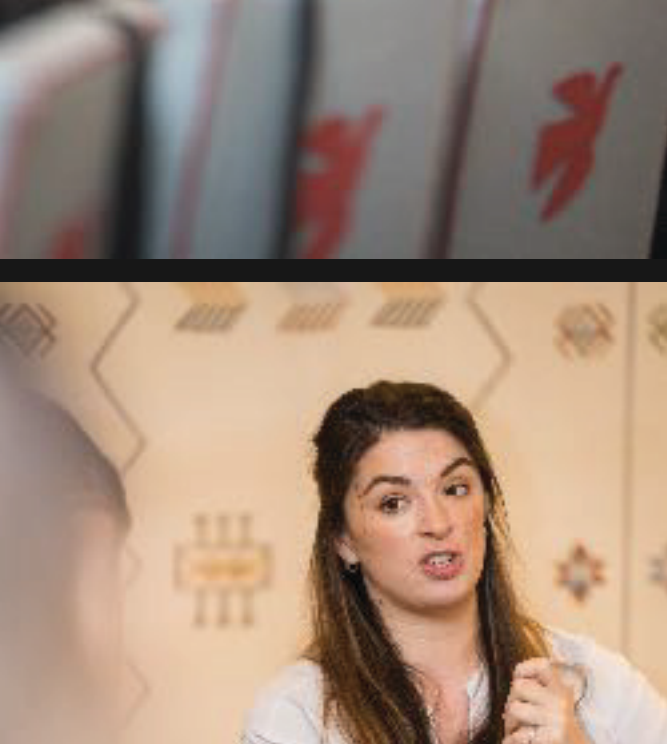
Over the course of 90 minutes, our discussion spanned a range of critical themes, including:

- The intersection of communications, marketing, people, and recruitment
- The urgent need for imagination in response to an innovation crisis
- Complex expectations across the generational divide
- Evolving perspectives on corporate purpose and its role
- The importance of resilience in leaders and the examples they set

These discussions culminated in a series of insights and recommendations - both from The Beautiful Truth, tml Partners and our guests - on fostering trust and meaning within organisations.



Photographs from the morning



The context

What's going on out there?

The pace of change in the business world has been unprecedented since the turn of the year. It's becoming increasingly difficult to keep up. Even since we put together this slide, major shifts have occurred.

Companies are retreating on sustainability and DEI, with business leaders making statements that leave no room for misinterpretation - like Mark Zuckerberg's conversation with Joe Rogan. AI discussions have shifted; last year, the focus was on ethics, but now it's an open race to implement as quickly as possible.

Additionally, the ideological gap between liberal and conservative men and women has never been wider. Looking back to early January, a *Financial Times* article on corporate purpose hinted at where we are now, reflecting the shifting priorities in business and society.



Has corporate purpose lost its purpose?

Ambitions beyond profit are laudable, but don't always help to inspire staff

STEFAN STERN + Add to myFT



Commuters walk over London Bridge. Drives to articulate company-wide purpose may boost employee engagement yet such efforts appear to do little for actual commitment © Andy Rain/EPA/Shutterstock

Accenture ditches diversity and inclusion goals

Chief executive Julie Sweet tells 799,000 staff decision was taken following 'evaluation' of US landscape



The context

The most pressing challenge for CEOs and leaders: is how their organisations engage and motivate an increasingly diverse and cosmopolitan workforce.

David Price
Partner, tml Partners



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Historical context

What's changed?

The workplace has always evolved alongside economic and social shifts, but today's rapid changes present unique challenges.

20th Century: Stability & Hierarchy. Rigid, hierarchical workplaces with authoritarian leadership and lifetime employment as the norm. Fewer older workers - most retired by their 50s or 60s. Psychological safety was rarely considered, as conformity was expected.

Late 20th - Early 21st Century: Rise of 'Knowledge Work' & flexibility. Growth in tech, finance, and consulting fostered collaboration and more open workplaces: HR and DEI initiatives improved workplace inclusion. Stronger pensions enabled earlier retirement, while more young people delayed work to pursue higher education.

Post-Pandemic: Remote work reshaped trust, engagement, and work-life balance. Burnout, economic uncertainty, and layoffs pushed well-being to the forefront. Five generations now co-exist in the workforce, creating the biggest age gap in modern history.



Current Realities

Changing expectations

Older workers are staying longer: In 1950, only 3% of workers were over 65; today, it's 19% and rising. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics)

Younger employees expect rapid progression: 52% of Gen Z expect a promotion every 12-18 months or they will seek new jobs. (Walters People)

Workplace trust is eroding: 59% of UK workers say their organisations lack ethics, transparency, and accountability. (Vault Platforms Trust Gap Report, 2021)

Psychological safety remains low: Only 26% of leaders create environments where employees feel safe to speak up. (McKinsey, 2021)

60% of Gen Z report that mental health resources are important in selecting an employer and 57% say they are important when deciding to stay (Whetston 2025)

The context

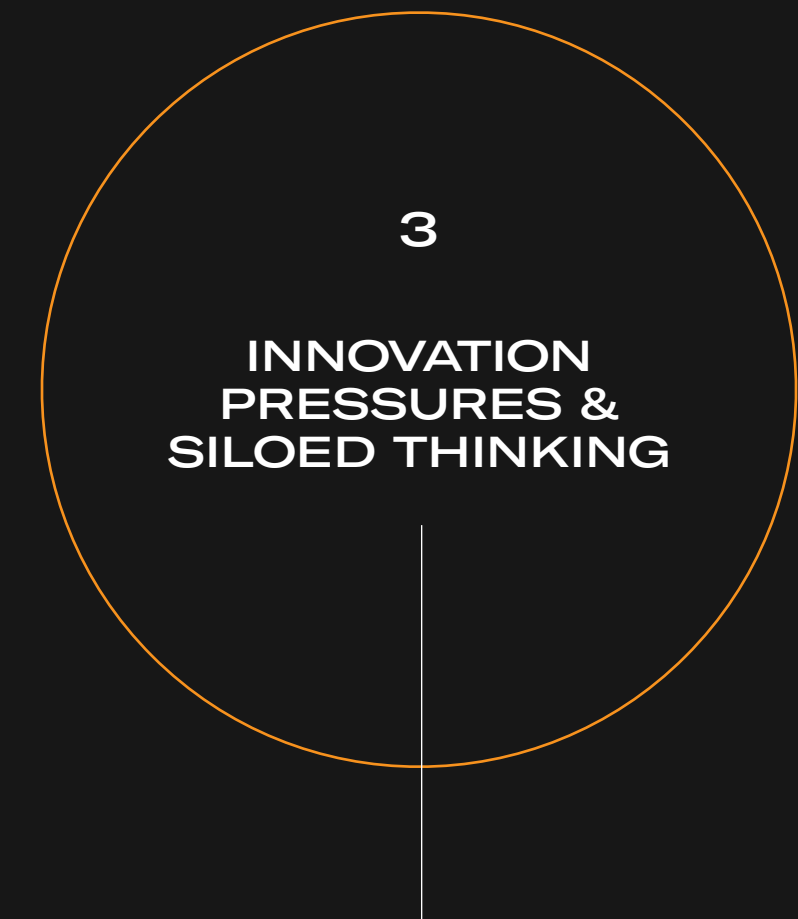
Many of the challenges business leaders face today aren't technological or strategic, they are *human*.



We are facing an
“unprecedented global decline”
in employer trust.
(Edelman Trust Barometer, 2025)



The majority of European
workers report feeling
disengaged and/or burnout.
(Gallup, 2024)



45% of CEOs are not confident their
companies will survive more than a
decade on their current path.
(PwC, 2024)

The context

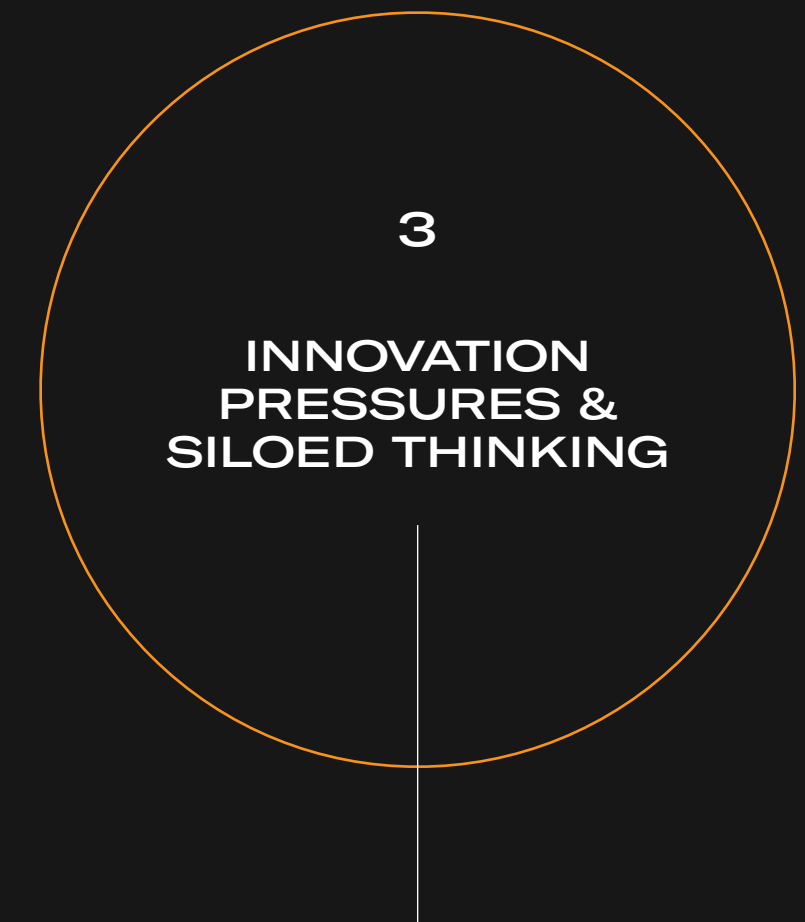
Human challenges don't just impact people — they impact *profits*.



Among all leadership behaviours, a lack of trust has the most significant negative impact on company profits.
(HBR, 2002)



Companies with high levels of disengagement show 23% less profitability than highly engaged ones.
(Gallup, 2023)



Companies lagging in innovation are 2.6 times less likely to grow at the industry average.
(Forrester, 2021)

Trust

Where trust breaks down

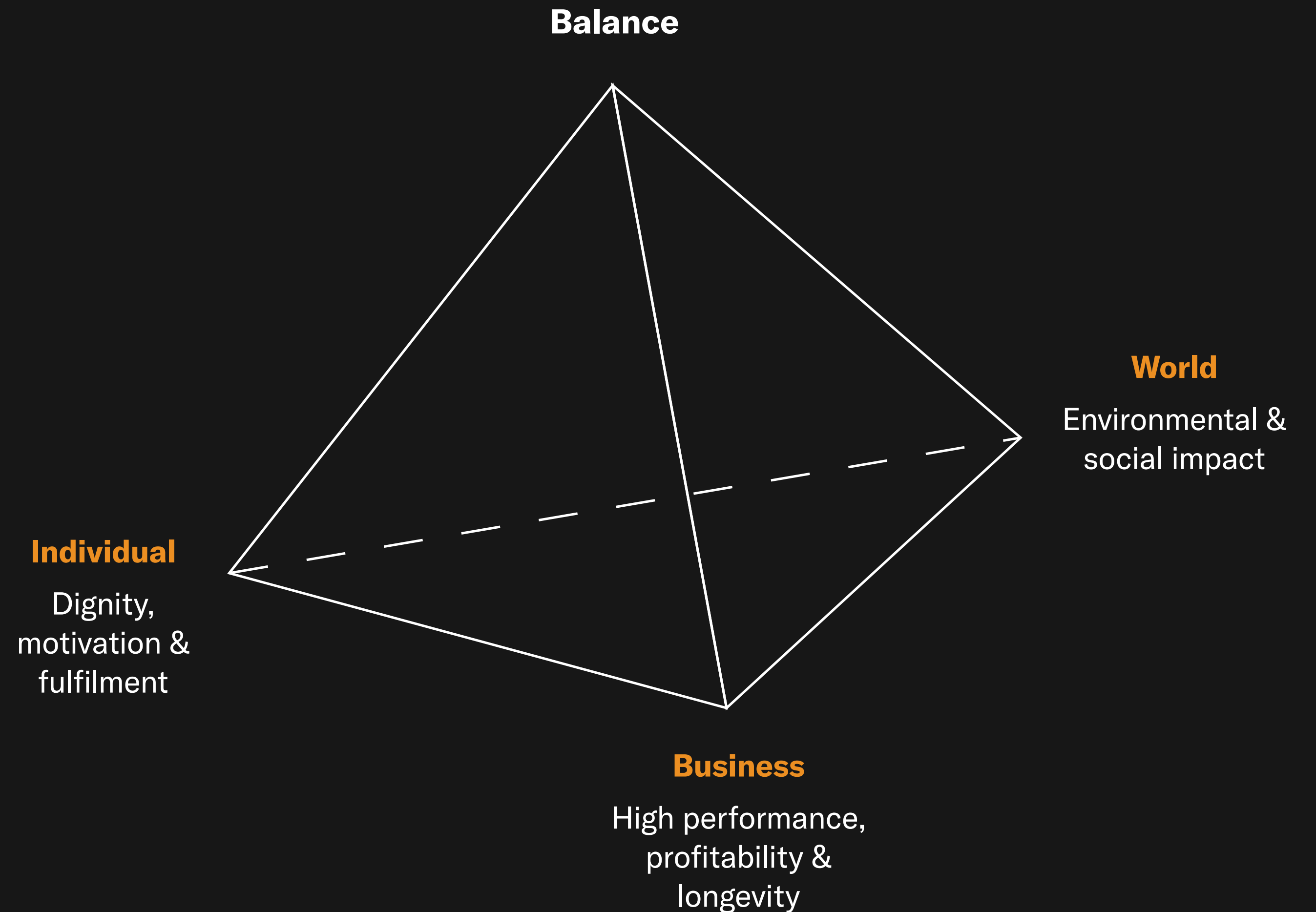
As senior leaders, we're driving a major shift in business. Success isn't just about the bottom line anymore - it's about trust, connection, and impact.

Your role is more than sharing information; it's about shaping a vision that balances:

- The well-being of employees and suppliers
- The world's environmental and social needs
- Strong business performance

The challenge?

Crafting stories and strategies that show how business can thrive while supporting people, tackling global issues, and delivering results.



The 3 Dimensions of Trust

A long history of research demonstrates that **trust** can be broken down into three components: competence, honesty, and benevolence.

COMPETENCE

To trust someone's competence is simply to believe that the person or entity you deal with has the ability to do the job.

HONESTY

Honesty—or integrity—refers to your sense that the company keeps its promises and is not telling lies or hiding things.

BENEVOLENCE

Benevolence is the belief that your company has your best interests at heart and cares about you as a stakeholder (employee, investor or community etc).

Summary of research: <https://insight.kellogg.northwestern.edu/article/cultivating-trust-is-critical-and-surprisingly-complex>

Meaning

The efficiency and convenience
of our semi-automated lives
removes friction but doesn't
replace it with *meaning*.

Margaret Heffernan

Professor at University of Bath, chief executive and author



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Meaning

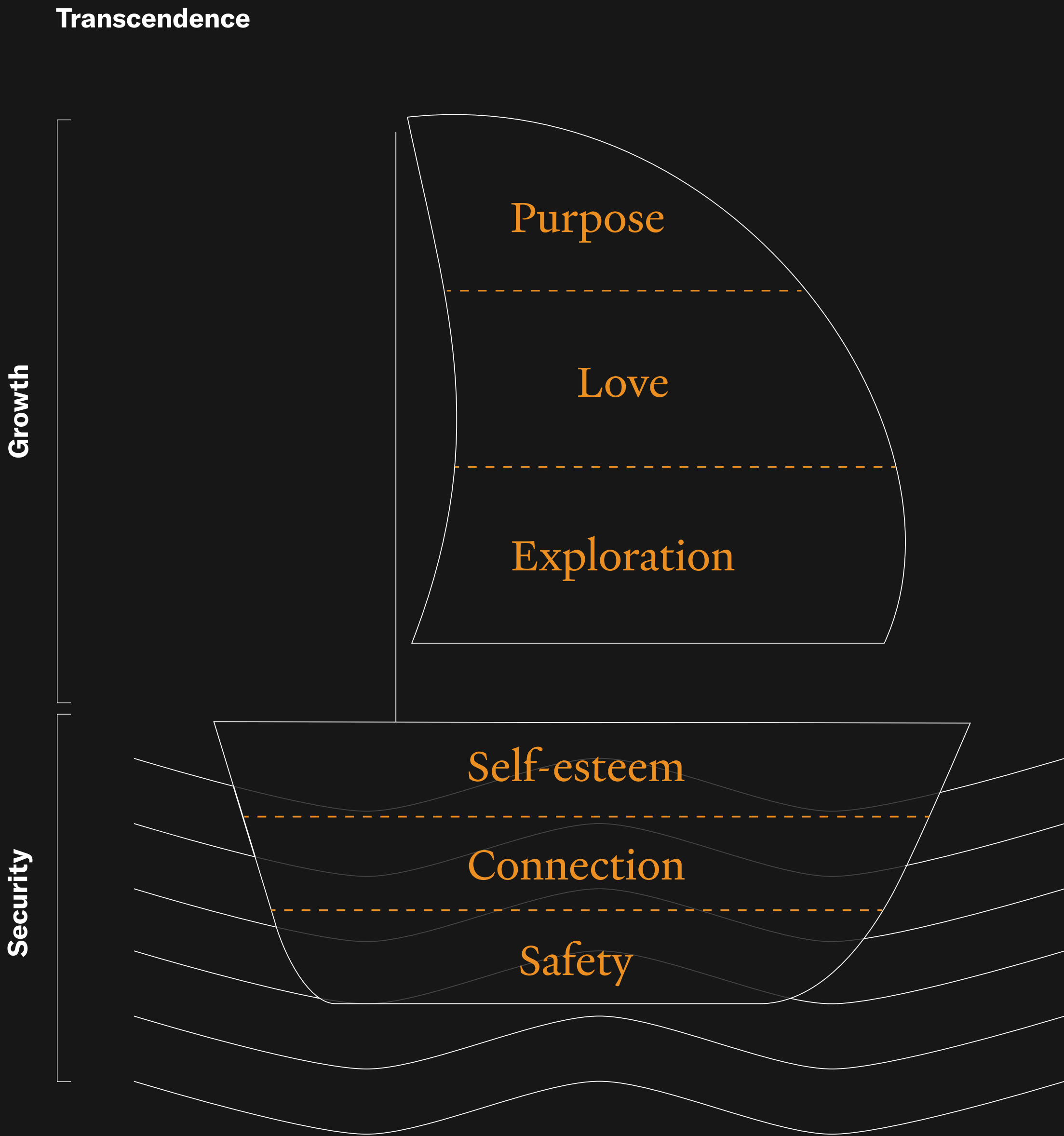
Setting the foundations

Businesses have long turned to “purpose” to create meaning - aligning employees around a mission beyond profit to foster fulfilment. But purpose can’t be superficial; it must come from within, not as a regulatory checkbox or marketing strategy. More importantly, purpose is meaningless if fundamental needs like psychological safety, trust, and self-esteem aren’t met.

Much of today’s global retrenchment stems from insecurity. When people don’t feel safe, lofty ideals like growth, exploration, and purpose feel hollow. The question is: How do we first create a foundation of security before asking employees to believe in something greater?

Cognitive scientist Scott Barry Kaufman, building on Maslow’s work, explains that the mind tells different stories depending on our state. If we feel threatened - whether physically depleted or psychologically unsafe - our minds reinforce that fear. But when we feel secure and supported, our brains shift toward positivity.

Source:
Scott Barry Kaufman
American Cognitive Scientist
<https://scottbarrykaufman.com/sailboat-metaphor/>



Meaning

If you haven't done the work
at the bottom of the boat...
you can't expect purpose.

Guest quote



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Meaning

What do I want from my life and work?

Daniel Pink's model, referenced in the *Financial Times* article "*Has Corporate Purpose Lost Its Purpose?*", highlights three key elements for fulfilment in life and work: autonomy, mastery, and purpose.

Autonomy - the freedom to self-direct - varies depending on life stage and external circumstances. In today's world of uncertainty, exhaustion, and distrust, many just want the space to do their work without interference. Mastery is equally vital - the drive to improve, grow, and be recognised. Organisations must provide tools for development. Lastly, purpose isn't assigned; it's personal. People seek meaning in their work, whether for a better future, their children, or providing for others.

Autonomy.

Mastery.

Purpose.

Daniel Pink - author on behavioural science

Meaning

I expected moving from a Plc environment to the public sector that purpose would be a given. But without autonomy and mastery it doesn't exist.

Guest quote



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Stories

The power of human stories

In challenging times, stories become essential tools for guidance and understanding. They help us find meaning in subtle, emotional ways, offering clarity when answers feel out of reach.

Stories also serve as reminders - of courage, resilience, and what it means to be human, beyond efficiency and profit. They reconnect us to deeper values, inspiring us to move forward with purpose.

As described by the concept of elevation, witnessing acts of remarkable moral goodness evokes warmth, appreciation, and admiration. Stories have the power to elevate us, fostering connection and reminding us of the best within ourselves and others.

“Facts are facts.
Stories are how we learn.”

Alan Webber - Entrepreneur, Author, Politician and Founder Fast Company



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Stories

We do look at stats... but it's
the stories from the coal face
that hold the key insights.

Guest quote



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Key takeaways

Don't underestimate **the power of storytelling** for connecting with a businesses values, its history and its future innovations.

We've been through plenty of **difficult periods** as humans - we're a **resilient** bunch - it's important we're reminded of this.

Corporate purpose is really under the microscope right now - you can't force it upon employees - **they have to discover it for themselves.**

Individuality is more important than it's ever been, and for all the change and volatility in the world, sometimes going **back to basics** is the most effective solution.

Hierarchy can stifle ideas, the imagination and thus innovation - we must **empower everyone** to feel they can contribute.

Leaders setting the right example, showing vulnerability and being 'positively human' is vital for **fostering trust.**

Further Reading

Books

Alex Edmans - *May Contain Lies / Grow the Pie*

Adam Grant - *Think Again: The Power of Knowing What You Don't Know*

Alison Taylor- *Higher Ground: How Business Can Do the Right Thing in a Turbulent World*

Emily Esfahani Smith - *The Power of Meaning: Crafting a Life that Matters*

Jonathan Haidt - *The Righteous Mind / The Anxious Generation*

Jean Gomes - *Leading in a Non-Linear World*

Kim Dabbs - *You Belong Here: The Power of Being Seen, Heard, and Valued on Your Own Terms*

Margaret Heffernan - *Uncharted: How To Map The Future*

Rebecca Robins/Patrick Dunne - *Five Generations at Work: How We Win Together, For Good*

Simon Sinek: *The Infinite Game*

Articles and Interviews

[The Beautiful Truth: The Business Case for Purpose](#)

[The Beautiful Truth: What is Meaningful Work?](#)

[The Beautiful Truth: Where is the line between the personal and the professional?](#)

[The Beautiful Truth: What is the Purpose Gap?](#)

[FT: Has corporate purpose lost its purpose?](#)

[Edelman 2025 Trust Barometer](#)

[Kellog Insight on Cultivating Trust](#)



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Introducing tml Partners



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tml Partners specialise in sourcing marketing, corporate affairs, and commercial leaders for some of the world's most ambitious organisations.
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Change starts with a conversation: wearetbt.com

What do we do?

Transformational storytelling

We are publishers, corporate strategists, expert filmmakers, visionary experience designers and transformational storytellers.

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What do we do?

We build trust.

Our work looks beyond impact to uncover **intention**.

We foster meaning.

Through seeking **wisdom** rather than information.

We spark imagination.

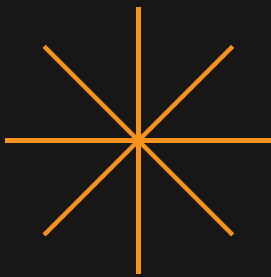
By prizing **experiences** over theories.

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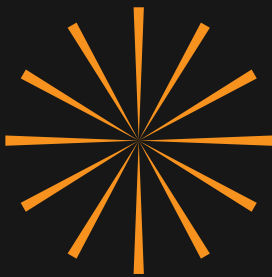
Our work covers



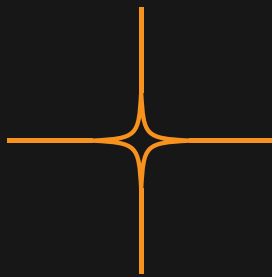
EMPLOYEE
ENGAGEMENT



SUSTAINABILITY
COMMUNICATIONS



LEADERSHIP
EXPERIENCES



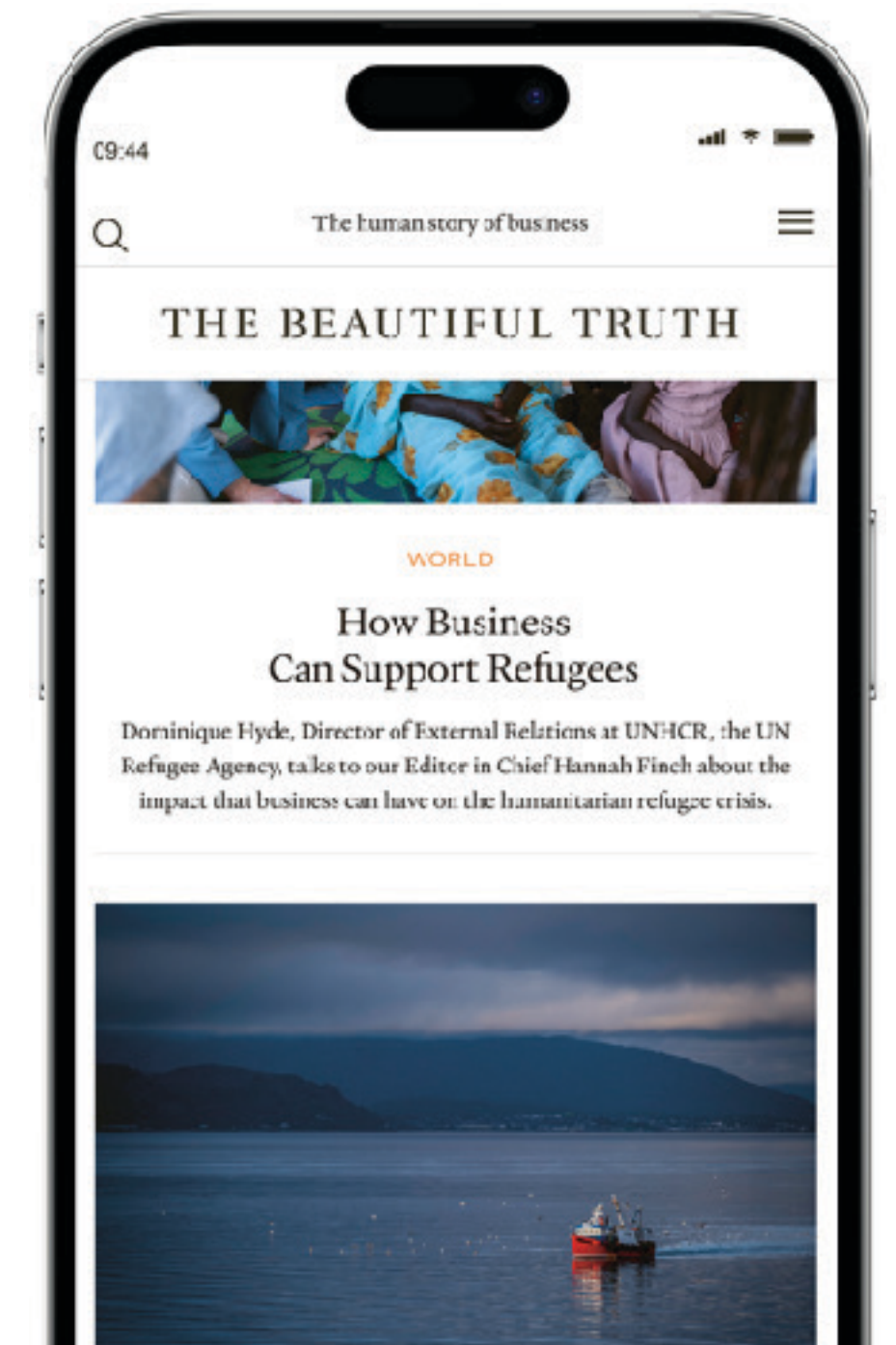
NARRATIVE
STORYTELLING



CONTENT
PARTNERSHIPS

Bringing the thinking to life

We cover a variety of subjects all deep-rooted in human insight, creativity, and the belief that business can be a force for good and profitable at the same time. We aim to be a source of inspiration for those who want their lives and work to have a lasting, positive impact on people around them and on the world.



Thank you



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