

Partnerships

Tim Oldman, Annie Leeson, Divyang Mistry

The founders of the Leesman Index, the workplace satisfaction and effectiveness benchmark, had a solid foundation on which to build their company – having done business with each other as clients

Words **Marina Gask** Portrait **Gary Moyes**

Divyang Mistry I'm a chartered accountant by training, and had worked in accounting before joining media business Corporate Communications in 2002. I was Tim's client there – he helped us move offices.

Tim Oldman I started my career as an interior designer, originally in transport design. From there I drifted into retail, event and then workplace design. When I took on Divyang's project I was a partner in a business called Area One. I then retrained as a management strategy consultant.

Annie Leeson I was a biochemist by training and after working for Unilever to learn business and marketing, I became a strategy consultant, going freelance six years ago. Tim was my client in 2006, carrying out workplace-related research.

Tim Oldman A conversation in a bar seeded the idea for Leesman. Annie and I had been working on the concept that if you could profile and map out an organisation's personality, you could better design and conceive an environment to support its business course. I shared the idea with Divyang, as there was a realisation that it would amass huge amounts of data quickly, an area he knew about.

Divyang Mistry Because I wasn't in the industry I could look at it and say 'yes, this is possible'. I could ask lots of questions and have a fresh eye on it. And ask who was going to provide the science...

Tim Oldman And that's when I introduced him to Annie. Divyang was a convert to my ideas as what I'd delivered for him years before was an environment that changed how his business worked and performed.

Divyang Mistry When your business has to perform, you need to see how it's working, measure it, compare it to other things, find best practice and then improve it.

Annie Leeson If they're about to spend millions on office refurbishment, it costs just a few thousand more to make sure you're doing the right things.

Tim Oldman Honesty is the foundation of our partnership, and a trust in each other. The trust comes from having been through the pain of having had business relationships before. Because those had successful outcomes we've got a trust in each other's abilities to deliver.

"We've all worked in ways that have given us freedom to choose who we work with – we gravitate towards people we click with"

Annie Leeson All three of us have worked in ways that have given us the freedom to choose who we work with and how we work, which means we've gravitated towards people we know we're going to click with.

Tim Oldman While I'm the brand voice, as managing director, the creativity that Annie brings as director of research and Divyang as finance director is equal, regardless of what the roles or equity stakes are.

Annie Leeson We've always been clear about what we all want to get out of it. Tim is full-time, Divyang and I are part-time, so there's rarely a conflict of interests.

Tim Oldman We tripled revenues last year. And we have nearly 16,000 separate individual data records. The exciting thing now is where the company may go in global terms. We've seen a huge growth in the US and the Nordic markets.

Annie Leeson We value each other's skills and traits. Tim's the driving force. I've learnt from him that start-ups need someone of that kind. With Divyang, I value his way of being laid-back and measured.

Tim Oldman I admire Annie's clarity, her compartmenting of the concept. I admire Divyang's consistency, and he teaches me bravery. He's measured in his analysis, but there's that push to be a bit braver, too.

Divyang Mistry I've learnt from Tim what a brand means for a business. And I admire the way Annie uses words in the employee survey questions. She can see the logic of how a question is asked.

Tim Oldman Many clients have come to us when they're moving or fitting out, but increasingly we're having conversations with clients who are trying to understand how their environment is affecting their business performance.

Divyang Mistry We want to make our tool as internationally deployable as it can be. We hope to launch a parallel product that will further assist higher education institutes to measure the effectiveness of their estates.

Tim Oldman Organisations have their own distinct DNA. A key indicator is a sense of community. Higher productivity seems to mirror a higher sense of community.

www.leesmanindex.com



Design of the times: Divyang Mistry, Annie Leeson and Tim Oldman at London's St Pancras International station