

Online Collaboration Forum Summary: Purposeful Leadership in a Time of Crisis

Examples of effective purposeful corporate leadership

The discussion started with participants providing examples of effective purposeful corporate leadership in addressing the COVID-19 crisis. Initiatives ranged from small grass-roots solutions to community problems to large businesses and organizations tackling resource shortages. Some notable examples from companies include the following:

- H&M has committed to paying suppliers for orders that were already placed but can no longer be used in stores
- BP is offering free fuel to emergency services
- L'Oréal is producing antibacterial gel
- LVMH is providing masks to help with shortages
- VISA's CEO has pledged not to have any COVID-19 related layoffs in 2020

- Unilever has donated \$100m worth of soap, hand sanitizer, bleach, and food to communities worldwide

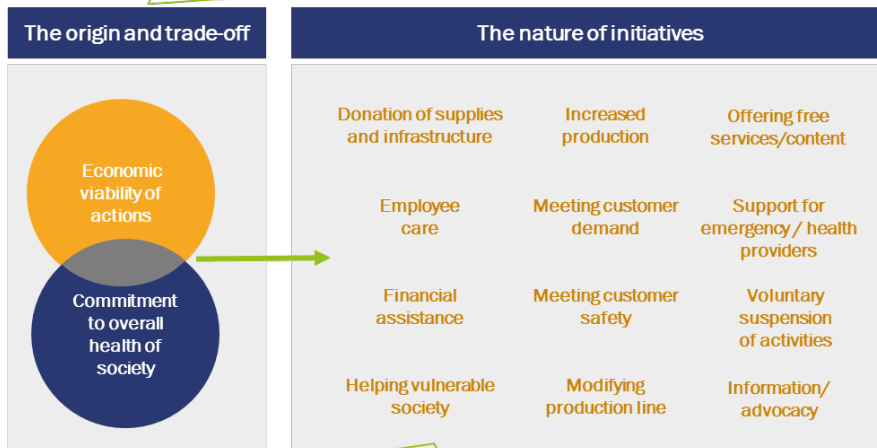
More general initiatives from organizations include:

- Companies shutting stores and outlets during the early stages of the pandemic
- Food delivery services offering deliveries with no delivery charge
- Pop-up test centers in retailers
- Airlines transporting COVID-19 supplies
- Grocery stores designating hours for vulnerable citizens

* For a more detailed overview of company initiatives and an overall assessment of how business is demonstrating purposeful leadership, please see our [global landscape review](#) of over 200 initiatives on corporate responses to COVID-19.

Corporate Response – The Trend

Actions of governments and corporates face the underlying challenge of trade-off between economic well-being and the overall health of society. Corporates have strived to strike the right balance while responding through their initiatives.



An analysis of the initiatives across the globe reveals a recurring trend of the nature of the response, which can be classified into 12 major focus areas.

The 12 categories of initiatives can be grouped under 4 categories of corporate response which reflect the agility, ethos, and purpose of the organizations.



Barriers to taking more impactful action

Despite the large number of inspiring examples shared during the online discussion, significant challenges remain. Five main types of barriers were identified by participants:

Lack of insightful leadership – Organizations need the guidance of leadership (at the organizational level and in global governance) to inform and inspire action.

Fragile finances – A decline in revenue and low financial resilience is a critical barrier for many organizations who may have the intention to act but do not have the necessary resources to do so at scale.

Balancing priorities – Many organizations are grappling with how they can effectively prioritize the care of their employees with the care of the greater community.

Future uncertainty – Inability to ascertain the duration of the crisis and outcomes is a key reason why many organizations have been reluctant to act, with many simply focusing on surviving the “now.”

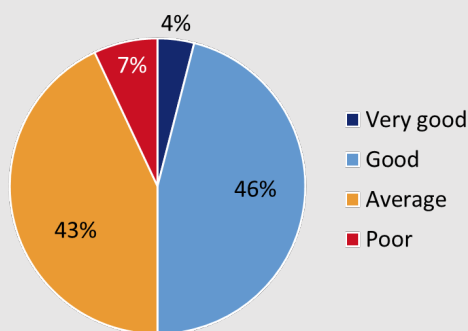
Lack of coordination – Reacting to the crisis has led many companies to focus on their own priorities, leading to limited coordination across organizations, and more widely, across governments.

Examples of unexpected and impactful collaborations

Arising from the barriers, many companies, organizations, and industries have worked together to provide new and innovative responses to the crisis. Some powerful examples shared during the discussion include:

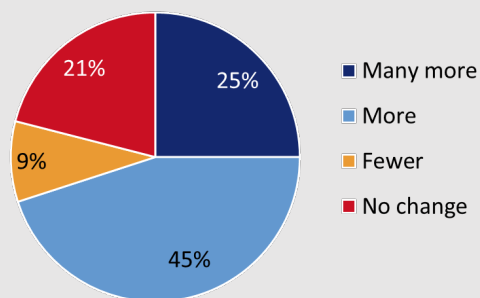
- Collaboration across sectors in order to provide resources to the industries in need such as Tesla, Dyson, and GM manufacturers retooling and building ventilators and personal protective equipment
- Collaborative action across regions to ensure that there are adequate medical resources – the Governor of New York State is encouraging collaboration across the State to balance the supply of doctors, equipment, and facilities with demand
- Collaboration across job roles, with a focus on partnerships arising between shops and supermarkets, in order to shift labor into food production and distribution centres
- Collaboration through skills sharing – global hackathons to suggest solutions that can support the economic growth post-crisis
- Expertise and resource sharing by large companies to help small businesses, NGOs, and citizens

Overall, how would you rate business' response to the COVID-19 crisis to date?



Forum participants were asked to rate business' response to the COVID-19 crisis so far, and 89 percent of respondents said that the response has been very good / good.

Do you think there will be more or fewer multi-stakeholder collaborations in the area of sustainability post-crisis?



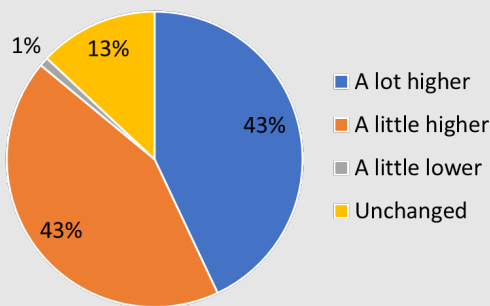
When asked about collaboration, 70 percent of forum participants said that there will be more multi-stakeholder collaborations in the area of sustainability post-COVID-19 crisis.

Changing expectations and implications for corporate leadership post-crisis

A theme that ran through the entire discussion was the need to shift from aspirational promises to action on the most pressing issues. Demonstrating impact will be at the core when it comes to rebuilding trust with consumers. Implications for businesses can be summarized across three areas:

- 1. Putting purpose at the core:** There will be a greater need to understand, articulate, and strategically plan around purpose, as it becomes even more core to business strategy. And there will be greater demand from consumers for more purposeful businesses.
- 2. Focus on sustainability:** Businesses will be under increased scrutiny by stakeholders to ensure that they are sustainable – environmentally, economically, and socially. This will be an opportunity for businesses to establish leadership in sustainability, particularly in countries where it has been low on the agenda.
- 3. More collaboration:** There will be a rise in the emergence and/or significance of pre-competitive collaboration within industries. The emphasis will be on collective impact to solve common challenges.

Do you think societal expectations for purposeful corporate leadership will be different in a post-pandemic world? Will expectations be...



Forum participants (86%) thought that societal expectations for purposeful corporate leadership will be higher after the COVID-19 crisis.

Lessons in resilient leadership from COVID-19

Many lessons in leadership – for both corporate and other types of organizations – will come out of the crisis. These lessons will form the basis of significant organizational change and inform corporate planning for generations to come. Notable lessons highlighted by participants are summarized below:

- **Risks have to be acted on and not just identified** – risk management going forward will need to have an action plan to respond to circumstances like this. There is a pressing need to listen to scientific warnings and develop resilience by planning and preparing.
- **Open and transparent communication about challenges** posed by crises is crucial and having the courage to admit your faults is even more critical.
- **The importance of compassion** in difficult times.
- **Focusing on your strengths as a company** and how you create value over time is necessary for building purpose.
- **The need for strong inter-dependent relationships with stakeholders** that goes beyond the norm of employees, shareholders, and customers.
- **The necessity of long-term thinking, planning, and strategies** – businesses will learn that they need to go beyond working toward quarter-to-quarter financial performance.
- **Sustainability and resilience cannot be looked at in silos** – they must be extended throughout the organization.
- **Being dynamic and flexible** are critical to survival.

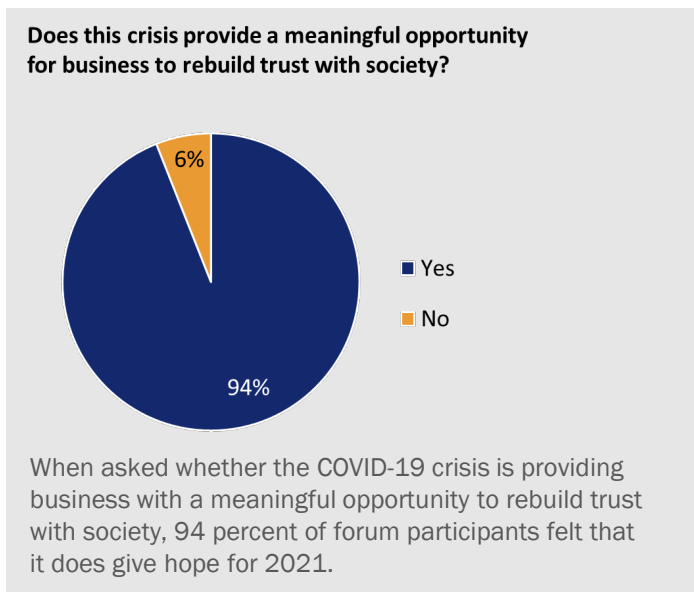
Our global landscape review report on Purposeful Leadership in a Time of Crisis also includes an assessment of collective corporate action to date, which shows that companies have performed strongly around responding via their products and services, engagement, and collaboration, but have been weaker in the areas of purpose and driving systemic change. See the full analysis in our [report](#).

Trusted Leadership: Purpose, Performance, and Participation



Hopes for 2021

Overall, there was a collective sense of optimism for the future in the discussion, with hopes spanning economic growth, behavior change, leadership, technological innovation, and addressing climate change.



A non-exhaustive list of some of the hopes that participants shared include the following:

- “Leaders should learn that we’ll have to partner together to ride out the impact of COVID-19 in the short and long term. Companies that remain committed to purpose and sustainability are more important than ever.”

- “A less-individualistic society.”
- “We put wellbeing and the environment at the heart of the emerging economies/societies.”
- “That collaboration goes center stage. No individual company, however influential, has sufficient leverage for collective problems, such as climate change. Collaboration!”
- “That COP26 is a raging success.”
- “That this will be our true reset button. I think we need to get our act together properly if we are to survive the other big topic – climate change. COVID-19 is just a dress rehearsal.”
- “That businesses and governments dive into addressing climate change with a new more active and positive lens and real urgency.”
- “At the latest, return to economic growth.”
- “Citizens everywhere actively and consistently make purchasing decisions aligned with their values.”
- “That we remember these lessons: We’re all connected and dependent on each other and that externalities related to nature need to be factored into the economics of doing business.”

- “That we will be more specific when we say we want change.”
- “It is bigger than hope – it is faith that enough of humanity will awaken to the systematic problems that are of our own creation and will substantially change the situation. This includes becoming more humane in our work, health, inclusivity, and care of each other and the planet. Thinking globally and creatively is the new order of the day.”
- “While respecting it as a test of humanity and the crisis it is, my hope is that we seize this as an opportunity to shape the new together.”
- “That the climate crisis is put at the center of all government policy and decision-making as we rebuild.”
- “Leaders understand the interdependency within systems and move their strategies toward shared outcomes (value across a range of stakeholders), rather than individual outcomes (profit for my own company and reward targets).”
- “My hope is that business leaders come together as a cross-industry community to challenge the status quo ... challenge the legacy design of the global financial system ... and demand that the system be redesigned away from ‘profit at any cost’ to ‘profit only if people and Mother Earth are not harmed.’”
- “That we reflect upon and learn from the imaginable human toll of this crisis – and build a more humane, just society. We are interconnected.”
- “That the ability of the government, private sector, and individuals to take fast and radical action will be applied to address the climate crisis and other pressing global issues.”
- “That citizens will become much more active stakeholders in the value chain. That they will adapt traditional buying behavior to bend the consumption curve. That they will demand (proof of) better business. That their active participation will support companies and legislators in making changes needed to safeguard the climate and redesigning business, value, and prosperity.”
- “And understand that we are fragile and that efforts on climate and across SDGs already are providing us with the early warning system that maybe this time we might listen to.”
- “That as many purpose-led, innovative companies that are/were proving out the viability of new sustainable business models survive as possible.”
- “I’d like to see CEOs adopt an ecosystem approach to their organization and stakeholders that is connected to the world. What do the decisions of our organization mean for biodiversity and ecosystem drivers in what regions of the world? How do our decisions influence individuals and communities, and where?”
- “Understanding that we must stand together.”
- “It is time to act on a new system change with SDGs as the focus.”

Contact Us

Caroline Holme

Senior Director, London
caroline.holme@globescan.com

James Morris

Director, San Francisco
james.morris@globescan.com

Eric Whan

Director, Toronto
eric.whan@globescan.com

Anneke Greyling

Director, Cape Town
anneke.greyling@globescan.com

Wander Meijer

Director, Hong Kong
wander.meijer@globescan.com

Perrine Bouhana

Director, Paris
perrine.bouhana@globescan.com

Alvaro Almeida

Director, São Paulo
alvaro.almeida@globescan.com

Anup Guruvugari

Director, Mumbai
anup.guruvugari@globescan.com



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