

# When innovation is the path of greatest resilience

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Many businesses are still operating in that emergency 'first response' mode - reacting to every challenge every day, just to survive. But the time is coming to rethink and redesign a new economic order and we can either prop up our old systems or build new ones that are as innovative as they are resilient. It's time to choose before it chooses us.



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What do you do when your computer crashes? You reboot. And it works, the first few times. But somewhere in the back of your mind you know it's pointing to a bigger problem that will one day crash the whole system, maybe the whole network and a simple reboot won't fix it. The coronavirus has crashed our systems. Economic. Social. Political. They are so interlinked; it was bound to happen. And it caught us off guard, forcing us to scramble just to keep our businesses alive, let alone thriving.

## 'First response' is an instinct, not a plan

They don't call it 'first response' for nothing. It's what you do in an emergency. You focus on what you can save, what to let go and how quickly you can do both. And it's a good instinct to have. But right now we need to recognise that it's just that – a *survival instinct* that responds to an *emergency situation*. And yes, it's hard to think beyond today let alone think about how your business operates next month. For some, it might even feel like competing interests – short-term survival versus long term resilience. It's not. If you don't have resilient systems in place, you will always be putting out fires. And you better believe, there are many more fires to come. It doesn't really matter what or how big the crisis is, **staying in 'first response' mode is not sustainable. Building a resilient business is.**

*"For some organisations, near-term survival is the only agenda item. Others are peering through the fog of uncertainty, thinking about how to position themselves once the crisis has passed and things return to normal. The question is: 'What will normal look like?'"* These words from [Sir Ian Davis](#), former managing director of McKinsey & Company, could have been said yesterday. In fact, he said them 11 years ago, back when businesses were still reeling from the global

financial crisis. And if we didn't know it back in 2008, we sure do now – crisis and flux are part of any future scenario. Best case scenario.

We're all affected. All we know is that our old systems don't work, disruption is constant and 'tried and tested' no longer applies to any future planning.

## From panic to pivoting

How quickly we forget. A vaccine is only created when a group of people come together and trial new ideas until they get it right. In business terms, that's called **innovation**.

Back in 2003, [Alibaba](#) launched its first consumer market, just as the SARS epidemic forced its Chinese market into self-quarantine. But, instead of panic, they pivoted and turned to online shopping, putting the company on the path to becoming a \$500bn e-commerce giant.

That's a big story. But there are many small ones happening right now.

Like [OhmniLabs](#)' high-tech mobile stick fitted with a high-resolution camera. A simple device that enables people to have virtual visits with their frail and elderly loved ones. These mobile devices are already doing rounds in hospitals and care organisations across the USA.

And this is just one idea that is currently being executed. There are many innovative examples of products delivering symptom-tracking solutions, chatbots for diagnoses and more. And that's not to mention the many startups addressing an array of quarantine problems like digital teleworking tools, home-schooling, safe food delivery, therapy and stress coping mechanisms.

The microgreen kit producer, [Hamama](#), is already helping people grow the fresh green produce they can't get at their local stores. While [Outschool](#) is a startup producing online video chat classes that are taught by a network of approved, independent teachers.

**Business is not dead. In many ways, it's never been more pro-life.** New customers and communities are constantly forming around new and varied needs. But it's not only about creating innovative new products and services it's also about building this kind of quick, innovative thinking and action into our businesses.

## Innovation is the path of most resilience

We often think of innovation as the products we make or the services we create. But **innovation is something that is built, not made**. It's built into our systems, processes and cultures. It's in the way we communicate as much as respond. Innovation, and its ally creativity, is what makes us resilient to disruption and adaptable to change.

And the best time to build innovation into our business is when the old systems are down and the new ones haven't been created just yet.

## How to bring innovation and creativity into your business:

### Reimagine your culture

Remote working has changed the game. Technology has the power to enable or disable it. But there's a huge gap between idea creation and information exchange. Who does it? How will it take place? You need to build it into your culture and create platforms to enable it to grow organically, remotely and authentically. Some ideas:

- Creative-thinking workshops to **enable idea exchange** as a way of working.

- Redesigning a **leader-led culture** that drives employee innovation.
- Building responsive **idea/ innovation exchange platforms**.
- This may require a **culture (re)design**.
- You might want to consider a **business strategy (re)design**.

## Rethink your relationships

The way we work and interact as consumers, employees and citizens has changed. That means the way you engage with your market, customers and even your supply chain will not be the same. You need tools and strategies to help your teams understand and adapt to these constantly evolving relationships. Some tools might include:

- **Employee programmes** designed to put the new customer at the heart of your business
- Innovations around **customer service and sales**.
- **Equipping sales team** with tools to enable and engage new audiences through new technology.
- You could consider a **sales strategy (re)design**.
- You might need to think about **rebranding and repositioning your brand**.

## Expand platforms from work to a net of work

The concept of 'work' has expanded to be a net of working. How people engage, learn and communicate has changed and will continue to do so as we find new and better ways of being creative and staying productive. Some starting points:

- **Online learning platforms** that build in resilience and encourage a growth mindset.
- **Employee engagement platforms** that enable communication and collaboration, no matter the job level, employee location or technology constraints.

## Now it's time to look ahead

The time for 'first response' as the only response is coming to an end. Quick fixes and ad hoc solutions have done their job – they've kept business alive for now. We certainly can't go back to the old systems. It's like asking Windows 95 to imagine the world of work in 2020! We need to step back, breathe and **start imagining a more creative way of seeing, a more innovative way of doing and a more resilient way of being**. And we need to do it now before we're simply responding to new world order.

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