

Here's how business can be a platform for social change

weforum.org/agenda/2020/11/business-post-covid-change-makers-social-enterprise



Vaccination is one area where collaboration between corporations and social enterprises can have a big impact.

Image: Reuters/Edgard Garrido

17 Nov 2020

1. [Samira Khan](#) Senior Manager, Global Impact Engagement, Salesforce.org
2. [Sumitra Pasupathy](#) Managing Director Global Partnerships, Ashoka Innovators for the Public

This article is part of the [Pioneers of Change Summit](#)

- Corporate change-makers drive social innovation within organizations; social entrepreneurs innovate in partnership with communities. They can inspire one another.
- A new engagement model is required where corporations and social entrepreneurs think like change-makers.
- By creating systems together, they can attract more capital to the most pressing challenges in society.

A change-maker is someone who takes creative action to solve social problems for the good of all.

Change-makers can operate within communities or corporations. In the light of the pandemic, it is increasingly clear that corporate longevity is intrinsically tied to how a business addresses environmental and social challenges for all of its stakeholders. A central piece of this is how a corporation empowers its people and communities.

Creating a culture of change-makers is at the heart of human empowerment - and business success.

Business can be the greatest platform for change.

— *Marc Benioff, CEO Salesforce*

When this platform joins hands with a movement, human potential is unleashed in a way that empowers both employees and community members.

Social enterprises, in particular, have intimate knowledge of communities and are at the forefront of cutting-edge solutions to environmental and social challenges. The pandemic was a precipitating event that focused attention on partnerships between

corporations and social enterprises, with communities at the centre.

Imagine the power of even greater collaboration between leading corporations who are committed to social impact and front-line entrepreneurs; business acumen and resources meeting community intimacy and passion.

Corporations, in general, need to get a clearer picture of what social entrepreneurs and their organizations need, based on their location or market, area of impact, and health of their business as a result of the pandemic. Some may be ready to partner, co-innovate and develop new solutions to thrive, while others can barely meet resource needs to survive. This work requires that corporations open up a more searching dialogue to reach communities and the entrepreneurs within them. If there is one point this pandemic has made clear, it is that all our futures are intertwined globally.

What is the COVID Response Alliance for Social Entrepreneurship?

The COVID Response Alliance for Social Entrepreneurship is a coalition of 82 global leaders, hosted by the World Economic Forum and supported by GHR Foundation and Porticus. Its mission: Join hands in support of social entrepreneurs everywhere as vital first responders to the pandemic and as pioneers of a green, inclusive economic reality.

Its COVID Social Enterprise Action Agenda, outlines 25 concrete recommendations for key stakeholder groups, including funders and philanthropists, investors, government institutions, support organizations, and corporations. These corporations are called on to stand with social entrepreneurs within their supply chains and the broader ecosystem, fulfil their agreements and extend their support to build a more inclusive & resilient economy and to:

- Honour existing relationships by standing by existing supplier commitments and extending credit lines to social entrepreneur suppliers/partners
- Forge new partnerships by using a mix of different types of financial and non-financial support to both social entrepreneurs and their constituents
- Facilitate capital connections so that social entrepreneurs can re-emerge and rebuild after the pandemic
- Invest in capacity building through individual or multi-company pro-bono/low-bono programmes
- Deepen and widen corporate's footprint by committing to sustainable sourcing practices and by building local "shock resilient" ecosystems

For more information see the full action agenda [here](#).

As an example of swift mobilization to tackle a critical societal need, once COVID-19 hit, Salesforce launched [Work.com](#) to help businesses, governments and non-profits or social sector organizations reopen safely.

It also joined the [COVID-19 Alliance for Social Entrepreneurs](#), with [salesforce.org](#) seeing a surge in [Power of Us Hub](#) applications and [pro bono requests](#).

“COVID-19 presented this dual challenge to nonprofits. The public health aspect made it imperative for nonprofits to move their operations online while the economic aspect made it more difficult to raise the funds needed to maximize use of technology. At Salesforce we’re proud of how our employees swarmed opportunities to volunteer their digital expertise when our customers needed it the most.”

— Cheryl Timoney, Senior Director of Tech for Social Impact, Salesforce

Specifically, achieving this common ground or a space to be empathetic and learn together, necessitates more touch points between communities and corporations, such as [Salesforce.org - Impact Labs](#) - which provides a way to co-design tech solutions with non-profits, or the community.

There is even scope to help governments and healthcare organizations more safely and efficiently manage vaccine programmes at scale - illustrated by the recently announced [Work.com for Vaccines](#) initiative.

Creating a culture of change-makers is at the heart of human empowerment - and business success.

Ashoka launched [Changemakers United](#), a global effort to support the social-entrepreneur community of Ashoka Fellows, which is a group on the front lines solving some of the greatest challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ashoka Fellows, David Cuartielles and César García, both open-source innovators, curated the Coronavirus Makers Forum as the pandemic was getting worse. More than 20,000 makers coordinated efforts to build masks, and produce respirators and cabins for hospitals.

Anshu Gupta, of the [NGO Goonj](#), was at the forefront of dealing with [one of the largest humanitarian crises in India](#) emerging from the shutdown procedures. Ashoka Fellows are often the first responders to the pressing needs of the citizen sector in complex global health crises such as the virus.

Ashoka’s work over 10 years with pharmaceutical company [Boehringer Ingelheim](#) in the Making More Health initiative highlights the value of their Corporate Changemakers programme. This is now extending to other pioneers in the private sector - but there is more of this kind of work to be done.

The [COVID Social Enterprise Action Agenda](#) provides five recommendations for corporations to take action to support social entrepreneurs:

1. Honour existing relationships
2. Forge new partnerships
3. Facilitate capital connections

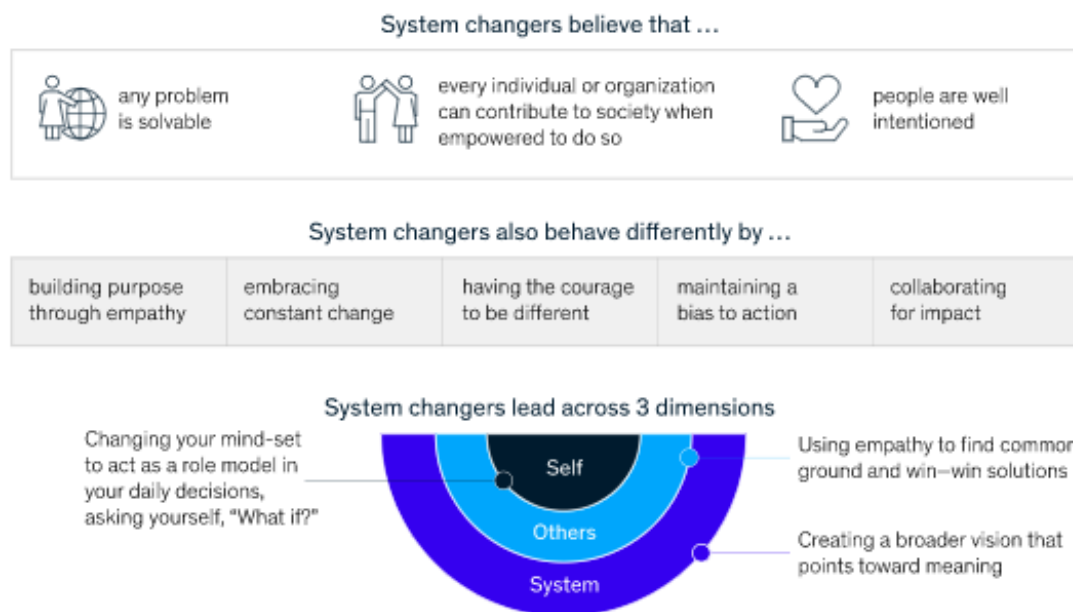
4. Invest in capacity-building

5. Deepen and widen your impact

This all begins with building a change-maker culture that is focused on innovation for the good of all parts of society. It is about more clearly defining a common social-good agenda, and corporations engaging as active stakeholders in society.

Exhibit 2

Pioneers in system-changing organizations share certain beliefs and behaviors.



Source: McKinsey and Ashoka research on system-change capabilities



Image: McKinsey

This involves investing in, engaging and supporting social entrepreneurs who are actively innovating for the good of society; and together identifying new ways to make change-making culture a norm across the private and public sectors.

Social entrepreneurs are often tackling unique problems and have game-changing solutions to serving communities. They see the patterns in the field and often innovate to create solutions that empower society to solve issues. This brings a new perspective into corporations, and unleashes new innovation pathways and thinking.

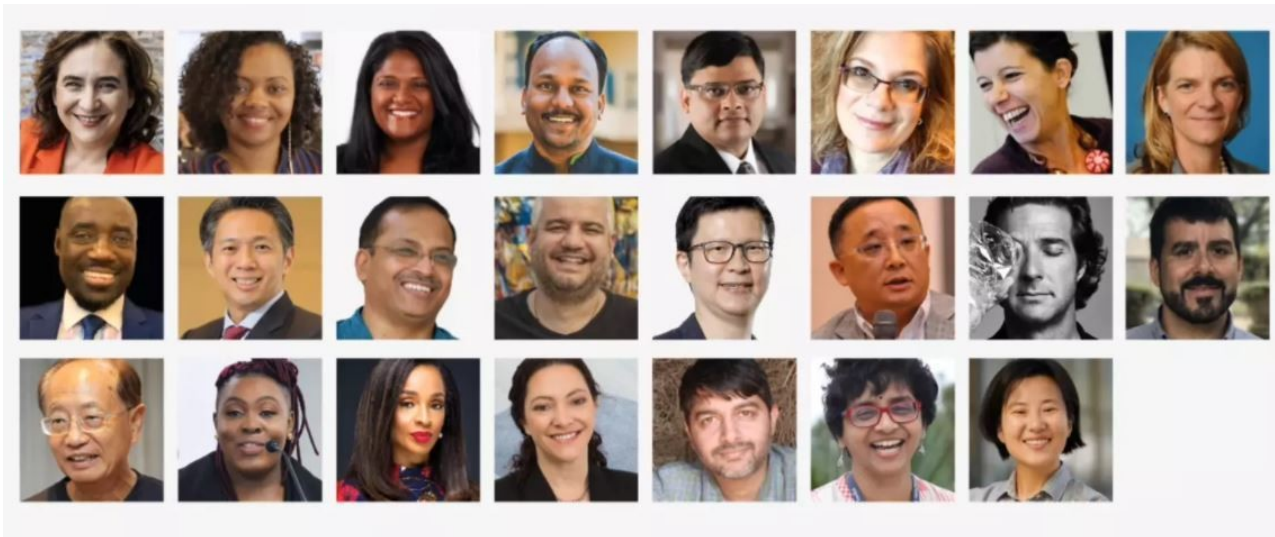
Change-making culture is rooted in mastering four abilities or skills: cognitive empathy, new leadership skills, sophisticated team working and creative problem-solving. In a world of rapid change, complexity and uncertainty as the pandemic has shown us – change-making truly becomes a new literacy and dexterity for all stakeholders in the world: citizens, young people, employees, companies and organizations.

| Social entrepreneurs help see differently, think differently and do differently.

What is the World Economic Forum doing to champion social innovation?

Social innovators address the world's most serious challenges ranging from inequality to girls' education and disaster relief that affect all of us, but in particular vulnerable and excluded groups. To achieve maximum impact and start to address root causes, they need greater visibility, credibility, access to finance, favourable policy decisions, and in some cases a better understanding of global affairs and access to decision makers.

The [Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship](#) is supporting more than 400 late-stage social innovators. By providing an unparalleled global platform, the Foundation's goal is to highlight and expand proven and impactful models of social innovation. It helps strengthen and grow the field by showcasing best-in-class examples, models for replication and cutting-edge research on social innovation.



[Meet the World-changers: Social Innovators of the Year 2020](#). Our global network of experts, partner institutions, and World Economic Forum constituents and business members are invited to nominate outstanding social innovators. [Get in touch](#) to become a member or partner of the World Economic Forum.

It is increasingly clear that business performance depends on how well various stakeholders are served, including communities.

This shared journey in turn, unleashes skills of the future and empowers humans across the board. A new engagement model and these relationships are vital to reach a "New Normal" – creating a more equitable, sustainable and just world for all.

This model requires a mindset shift where corporations and social entrepreneurs alike are thinking like change-makers and creating systems together, while attracting more capital to the most pressing challenges in society.

License and Republishing

World Economic Forum articles may be republished in accordance with the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International Public License](#), and in accordance with our [Terms of Use](#).

Written by

[Samira Khan](#), Senior Manager, Global Impact Engagement, Salesforce.org

[Sumitra Pasupathy](#), Managing Director Global Partnerships, Ashoka Innovators for the Public

The views expressed in this article are those of the author alone and not the World Economic Forum.

Subscribe for updates

A weekly update of what's on the Global Agenda