

Economies of Trust

Business transformation in the post-pandemic world - online discussion series

A Future of Work Hub by Lewis Silkin and RSA collaboration

How will the current crisis shape the social contract and business landscape

"We're facing the twin-track challenges of creating a society with better 'good work' yet also facing the headwinds of an economic crisis. Few want to return to the world exactly as it used to be. In the world of work, we have a unique opportunity but also a unique once in a generation challenge, for both employers and the government, in re-thinking the who, how, what, and where of work." James Davies, Partner, Lewis Silkin LLP

In our final virtual discussion of the series, we looked at emerging drivers of change in the world of work and their impact on the evolving social contract. We also considered organisational challenges to change and the importance of responsible business in the current climate, and how that will impact the future business landscape. Below we have drawn together some of the key trends and perspectives shared in the discussion.



Leadership

"The current crisis is an incredibly challenging time for those in leadership in many ways. Leaders will face expectations that are higher and demands that are more

pressing. At a time when resources are constrained, they are facing increased pressure from workforces along with higher expectations for real change. The Black Lives Matter movement has been significant, and we've seen an impatience for change – employees don't want vision statements, but evidence of concrete change. Hierarchy has been subverted with organisations working in flatter ways during the crisis as the line between personal and work life have become more blurred. But leaders still need to lead and make the necessary tough decisions that can't be made collectively." Matthew Taylor, CBE, Chief Executive, RSA



"From a leadership point of view, we need a well-defined purpose. Assuming we have got that, that is a great way to make decisions. Listening, transparency, honesty, and being willing to be vulnerable is important." Amanda Mackenzie, OBE, Chief Executive, Business in the Community



Technology

"The third element of crisis is a time of innovation. Organisations have to radically rethink the business model. There have been significant changes for example in the events industry, and we have to think deeply about business which is an opportunity for innovation.... Challenges are how to innovate where you are constrained and under scrutiny" Matthew Taylor, CBE, Chief Executive, RSA

"There is a tendency to focus on what we are losing rather than what might emerge. Every time there is a burst of technology we get two tribes, those who say that change will lead to profound structural unemployment and social division and another group that say the technology will lead to a wonderful paradigm shift where we work 6 hours a week and spend the rest of the time playing the guitar and reading Plato. One consistent thing is that these are all wrong. Existing activities can be subject to change but that just means fewer jobs, but they don't say that technology facilitates growth and the desire of humans to generate new things." Matthew Taylor, CBE, Chief Executive, RSA

86% of attendees think long-term sustainable business change is most likely to come from shifting cultural and social norms.



Responsible business and good work

"I have an idealism about this moment, I do think that it could be that all work should be good work is something we can adhere to. We can get rid of the idea that has been around since the Industrial Revolution, that we do work against our wishes to simply pay bills. Instead we should think of work as being continuous with our lives. The notion of a 'work life balance' is an odd one because it implies that life is something we choose, and work is something we're compelled to do. Work should be an integral part to our lives. I believe we should uphold the ideal that work is a space of fulfilment, development and growth." Matthew Taylor, CBE, Chief Executive, RSA

Community as a word has been reborn. We are now more aware of the personal circumstances of individuals in our organisations and the challenges they are facing on an individual level but also now more than ever society as a whole. They way in which organisations are interacting with local communities during the pandemic has changed. Leaders won't go back from that, they'll want to really think who is their community – to do this is to think about that place between a healthy environment and a healthy community. You can't have one without the other and the role of business in helping that is profound." Amanda Mackenzie, OBE, Chief Executive, Business in the Community

79% of attendees think Brexit and the pandemic have changed attitudes within businesses towards adopting responsible business models.



Security of employment

"The economic crisis will bring challenges for organisations and the government not only to create new jobs but create a society with better 'good work' at the same time. We were already moving to a world of work where economic risk was shifting to the employee with the rise of zero hours contracts, an increase in self-employment and the rise of the gig economy. Any post-pandemic move to increased flexibility may well accelerate this. We need to look at what level of security for employees is optimal and the relative roles of the State and the employer in providing this. The merits of initiatives such as universal basic income will no doubt come under greater scrutiny."
James Davies, Partner, Lewis Silkin LLP

"I think people will say either we want labour laws, protections and restrictions on forms of work to guarantee security at work, or they will say we want a welfare system for greater security and dignity if work isn't continuous and secure. They will not want neither - a precarity at work with a welfare system that is mean, punitive and not supportive like we've seen in the past. But in an economic crisis, people's aspirations to move away from insecurity might not be matched by what will be possible." Matthew Taylor, CBE, Chief Executive, RSA

*In each of our discussions in the series, we asked attendees if Coronavirus was wiped out tomorrow, which would be the biggest Covid-19 adaptation they would retain for the business for the longer term? **Over half said they would retain support for agile working.***

74% of attendees think the government should introduce a modern safety net in the form of a universal basic income