

Of resilience and hope: business priorities in a post-crisis world

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“Hope is the thing with feathers”, Emily Dickinson, the 19th century American poet, observed. Hope, in the famous poem, is a strong-willed bird that gives us strength in times of difficulty, and warmth in the strongest of storms.

The search for hope has fostered our collective resilience in 2020, a year of uncertainty, adversity and human loss. And a determination, despite setbacks, to change, reset and improve what we can control.

This year has seen us lurching from optimism at the start of year to despair as COVID-19 spread inexorably, then to increasing confidence as businesses and people found ways to cope with the challenges of the pandemic. Now, hope is ready to take wing as the initial successes of vaccines promise an end to this devastating pandemic.

We have learnt a great deal about ourselves this year. Our experiences have not only revealed our global interdependence, but also exposed humanity’s collective vulnerabilities and strengths in this age of seamless interconnectivity. At the same time, the ‘global versus local’ debate has also intensified. Should we draw inwards, be more protective, or are we better off having global safety nets and redundancies? India, in particular, is presented with a unique opportunity to boost exports by connecting into global value chains as countries look to reduce their risk of over-dependence on any single location.

The pandemic has induced significant shifts in our social behaviours, spending patterns, travel habits, supply-chains and country-interdependence. The impressions it leaves on lifestyles, domestic markets and the global economy will be enduring. It has served as an eye-opener on critical matters such as climate change and sustainability. Business and commerce, we have learnt, cannot be divorced from nature or the physical environment. COVID-19 has underlined the need to collectively prepare for future (and perhaps even more severe) crises.

The exigencies of infrastructure development, specifically, are explored in this special global issue of Mantra. It is imperative that collaborative multilateral responses and initiatives should be embraced and institutions upgraded or created to facilitate our collective action.

It is remarkable how rapidly our perspectives have evolved this year. I [recently discussed](#) the key findings from [KPMG in India’s 2020 CEO outlook: COVID-19 special edition](#), which identifies three immediate to long-term priorities for business leaders today. One, the emergence of purpose driven leadership. Two, realignment of strategies that includes rebalancing supply chains, enhancing environmental, social and corporate (ESG) programmes and aligning with new work realities. Three, heightened emphasis on digital acceleration to be future ready.

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The crisis has triggered transformative digital adoption, which is expected to help e-commerce companies flourish. Entire physical set-ups may move to the cloud, opening up opportunities for related sectors like transport, warehousing and logistics.

In 2021, we are bound to face various difficulties, readjustments — and opportunities. Foremost among them will be the enormous supply-chain challenge of rolling out the new COVID-19 vaccines to the world's 7.8 billion people, especially those in the developing countries.

Our battle with the virus has veritably united humanity, reminding us starkly that we are all in this, together. The learning and message – of hope – from 2020 is that our individual, community and country security and welfare are fundamentally and indissolubly dependent on our collective welfare and security globally.

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