



Pinsent Masons

Business Values: Learning from Lockdown

Speakers

Sean Haley,
Region Chair, Sodexo UK&I,
and CEO Service Operations
Worldwide (keynote)

Sean Elson,
Regulatory Partner,
Pinsent Masons LLP
(speaker and facilitator)

Henry Richards,
Future of the Corporation,
British Academy

Jacqueline Oughton,
Chief Operating Officer,
Shaw Trust Group

Caroline Hopkins,
then Development Director
(Place), ENGIE UK & Ireland

John Faulkner,
Group Strategy &
Development Director, Amey

The BSA, in collaboration with Pinsent Masons LLP, were joined in July 2020 by some 40 participants from across the BSA membership to discuss lessons from the lockdown period - on the responsibility of organisations as employers; service and infrastructure providers; and community and global citizens.

Sean Haley opened the discussion with a keynote speech.

Sean stressed the need for company leadership. There had already been a need for change, and for businesses to have a purpose beyond the pursuit of short-term gain. During and after the lockdown, this had become an even greater imperative.

The time we had just lived through - and the associated government response - had been extraordinary. This had been matched by a rise in public expectations. People *expected* companies to step up, to do the right thing, to speak up on societal issues and play a leadership role.

Companies in turn, on the whole, wanted to change.

Sean was proud for example to hear his colleagues in America speak out in support of Black Lives Matter. Sodexo had also been one of the first companies in the world to put social value at the core of its mission. But while one company could push ahead with its own initiatives - on climate change; apprenticeships or recruiting ex-offenders; focusing spending on local suppliers; promoting women into leadership roles; and doing more to tackle racism - none could achieve as much on its own. Furthermore governments needed to create the right ecosystem to support such business behaviour.

This was already happening in some areas. The UK Government's updated procurement framework had a clear emphasis on social value. Meanwhile the

world's central banks were creating the conditions in which commercial banks could take the threat of climate change seriously and use this as lending criteria.

Sean also stressed the need for public and private sector clients to pay at least the living wage. Sodexo's employees were key workers. They worked through the crisis, side by side with the public sector and deserved more than applause.

The world as we once knew it had changed for good. In the drive to recover, it was vital that we built on the progress made to get social value, responsible capitalism and purposeful business on to the agenda. Being a purposeful company had never been harder - but it had also never been more necessary.

Further details of the speech can be found [here](#)

Henry Richards then set out the work of the Future of the Corporation project at the British Academy. It had started by asking 'why' purpose was important, then 'what' it meant, and 'how' a business could become purposeful. Many businesses were already on this journey.

The Academy had defined purpose in this context as "to profitably solve the problems of people and planet, and not profit from creating problems for either". There were eight principles that provided a framework to put such a commitment into practice, across law, regulation, ownership, governance, measurement, performance, finance and investment. Henry presented a list of questions for businesses to ask in seeking to apply these principles.

Further information on the Future of the Corporation project, including details on the reports published, is [here](#).

Jacqueline Oughton from the Shaw Trust Group set out a VCSE perspective, and asked how businesses and the VCSE sector could learn from each other.

The COVID-19 period had widened inequalities but had also provided lessons in how to respond in a collaborative way. The key now was to focus on 'value add', rather than 'value extraction', both in terms of social value metrics and corporate responsibility programmes but also throughout an organisation's entire activities. There were ways in which all organisations could combine a business-like approach and a values-led approach, and Jacqueline looked at specific examples from the lockdown period showing how Shaw Trust had been able to do so.

Sean Elson summarised the changing behaviour of clients, going beyond regulation and considering wider expectations from stakeholders including employees, clients and wider society in terms of business behaviour.

Pinsent Masons itself had become a purpose-led business, with a values programme and a mental health strategy. It had made a commitment to the [Mindful Business Charter](#). Through all these programmes Internal communication was key.

Caroline Hopkins from ENGIE talked about responsibility in general and sustainability in particular, both from the perspective of lockdown and the lessons being taken into the recovery phase. She outlined what ENGIE had done during the lockdown period under the headings of people, customers, communities and business.

ENGIE's purpose was specifically to "make zero carbon happen". It was held to account on a month-by-month basis on progress being made.

There had been substantial activity at speed to deliver essential services during lockdown, with much flexibility and collaboration, which had often been appreciated by clients and communities. This needed to be built on to meet new challenges - including limited client resources - in the recovery phase.

The final speaker was John Faulkner, Group Strategy & Development Director, Amey. John concentrated on the practical application of purpose in business. COVID had focused minds on doing the right thing and responding quickly to changing circumstances - in terms of people (and in particular recognising the key contribution of front-line workers); suppliers (and treatment of SMEs and supply chain, including prompt payment and sharing resources); and communities (using company assets to help communities and vulnerable groups).

Leadership had been vital, as was joint working with SMEs along with internal communication within large organisations. COVID should now be used as a catalyst for change in all these areas. All stakeholders now recognised just what could be done if minds were concentrated on shared goals. The dynamic on issues like collaboration had fundamentally changed.

Sean Elson facilitated discussion, which covered a wide range of issues, including what collaborative working meant in practice, including the importance of transparency and openness; the absolute need to focus on climate change going forward, despite the range of competing client priorities in the recovery phase; the particular challenges being faced by the VCSE sector and how businesses could help; how client expectations had changed, and how this differed between organisations and markets; the importance of resilience in relation to purpose; and the theme of People which had been central to the discussion.

Positive lessons from recent months were the speed of public/private sector collaboration; the degree of flexibility; the good relationships built as a result; and the way front-line staff were now seen differently and their contribution genuinely appreciated. The industry had never been better understood in terms of the value it delivered.

There was now great opportunity - and responsibility - for business leaders to respond to, and leverage, all these changes, so all stakeholders could move together with shared purpose in future. That had been a consistent theme from all the presentations and from the panel discussion.

The BSA outlined how these themes would be taken forward, and Sean Elson thanked all the speakers and participants.