

ACHIEVING THE POST-PANDEMIC VISION: LEANER, GREENER AND KEENER

HLB SURVEY OF BUSINESS LEADERS 2021





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FOREWORD FROM THE CEO

THE PAST YEAR HAS BEEN DESCRIBED BY MANY AS UNPRECEDENTED. NEARLY 12 MONTHS INTO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIETIES HAVE BEEN GRAVE. THE GLOBAL ECONOMY AND BUSINESS PERFORMANCE ACROSS MANY SECTORS HAS SUFFERED AS A CONSEQUENCE.

However, with economic growth slowing across many regions at the end of the last decade, did the virus merely accelerate what was already coming: a contraction phase in the economic cycle.

While a slowdown might have been anticipated, few could have predicted the deepest economic recession in nearly a century. The shock has caused business leaders to question if their current business model suits the new economic reality. And more importantly — at what cost?

We saw many businesses taking responsive and protective measures such as cutting costs and furloughing staff early on. However, prolonged damage limitation cannot lead a business out of the trough. In fact, the very forces behind economic cycles will provide the momentum for the next phase of growth. Already, many structural changes have accelerated the end of some sectors and the beginning of others. Early adopters are seeking out new differentiated growth opportunities in countries, segments, and in sectors across the globe. Some have moved quickly to make the most of these opportunities which present themselves at points of disruption and change.

This year in our global Survey of Business Leaders, we explore how C-suite executives are adapting to new economic realities and what their view is on the international business environment in light of a global health crisis and its many implications. We surveyed 583 business leaders from 55 countries during Q4 2020 and asked them about their biggest concerns threatening

business, their vision for the post-pandemic world and how they aim to achieve it. In addition to our quantitative research, we conducted some in-depth interviews with CEOs to deepen our understanding of today's most pressing business issues.

What we found is – while the implications of COVID-19 and the state of the economy remain a significant risk to business – levels of confidence and optimism were surprisingly high, providing hope for a steady recovery. We found very positive responses from global business leaders regarding key social imperatives, and find that overall, their vision for the post-pandemic world is leaner, greener, and keener.

I would like to thank all the business leaders who gave their time to respond to our questionnaire. We hope this report brings you the insight to achieve your post-pandemic vision for success. If you would like to discuss any of the findings or issues raised in our report, we welcome the opportunity to do so.

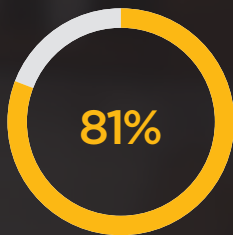


Marco Donzelli
Global Chief Executive Officer, HLB

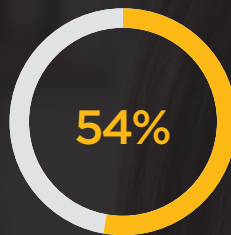


KEY FINDINGS

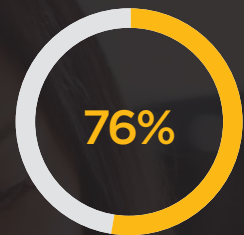
BUSINESS LEADERS REMAIN CONFIDENT IN A CHALLENGING YEAR



are worried about the implications of the pandemic



believe the rate of global growth will decline



are confident in their own ability to grow

THE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE OF A DIVERSE WORKFORCE

Q: A more diverse and inclusive workforce will ultimately improve our financial performance.



Q: Building diversity in the board and workforce is increasingly important.



Q: Staff physical and mental wellbeing is a top priority for our Human Resource department.

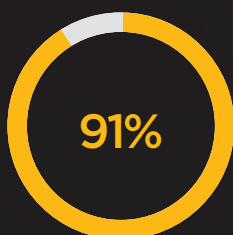


Q: In the current environment, it is even more important employers ensure equal support and opportunities to all their people.

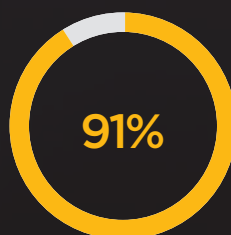


■ Agree ■ Disagree

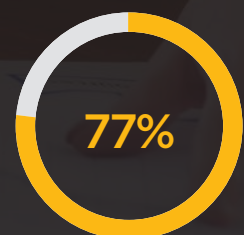
THE PANDEMIC PROVIDES A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO REBUILD BACK BETTER



believe their response to events which impact society will reflect on their brand reputation



are confident they can steer their business in a new direction



of leaders see an opportunity to profit from the low-carbon economy of the future

A CRISIS THAT MADE US THINK

2020 WAS A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER. ENTIRELY UNEXPECTED, THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC HAS HAD A SIZABLE IMPACT ON THE OUTLOOK FOR GLOBAL ECONOMIC GROWTH.

At the beginning of 2021, uncertainty still remains. Nearly 54% of business leaders we surveyed expect the rate of global growth to decline this year. However, others also recognise that sometimes you need a sharp turn in the road to arrive at the right destination. Previous recessions effectively became a launchpad for technical innovations. From rapid electrification to mass automobile production and booming growth of IT and Telecom sectors, history shows that good crises never went to waste with forward-thinking leaders.

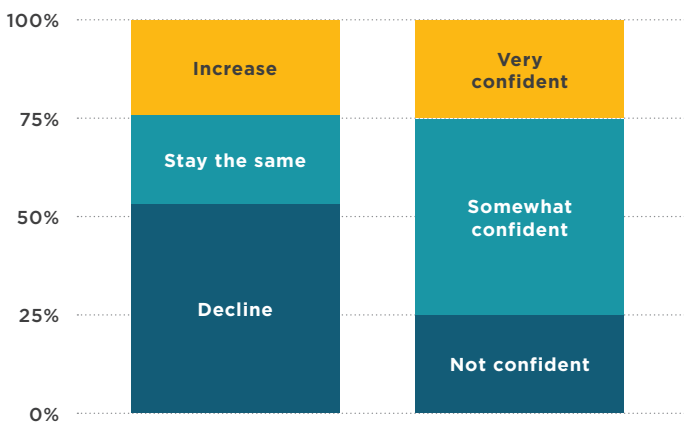
“We do feel really optimistic about the future prospects for recovery. I think the signs are there and as soon as we move past COVID-19, I think people are going to be ready, and then some, to resume some sense of normality,” noted Gail Becker, Founder and CEO of food brand CAULIPOWER and other CEOs that we interviewed this year. Her company is planning the launch of new products in 2021 and achieving dominance in new product categories ahead of perhaps more conservative competitors. This line of thinking is shared by 42% of leaders who also plan to bring new products or services to the market next year. Additionally, three-quarters of leaders feel confident about their ability to grow in the next twelve months.



Figure 1: To our surprise, business leaders remain confident

Q. Do you believe the rate of global economic growth will change in the next 12 months?

Q. How confident are you about your company's ability to grow revenue over the next 12 months?



“WE DO FEEL REALLY OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR RECOVERY. I THINK THE SIGNS ARE THERE AND AS SOON AS WE MOVE PAST COVID-19, I THINK PEOPLE ARE GOING TO BE READY, AND THEN SOME, TO RESUME SOME SENSE OF NORMALITY”

GAIL BECKER, FOUNDER AND CEO OF CAULIPOWER



As is further highlighted in our survey, there's indeed room for optimism. Especially, as businesses exit 'survival mode' and turn their attention to charting improved operational frameworks for the ambiguous world. Going digital opens up new growth opportunities across all industries with regard to new operating models, customer offerings, and workforce diversification. At the same time, leaders have treated COVID-19 as a 'wake-up call' for reassessing corporate values and operational patterns.

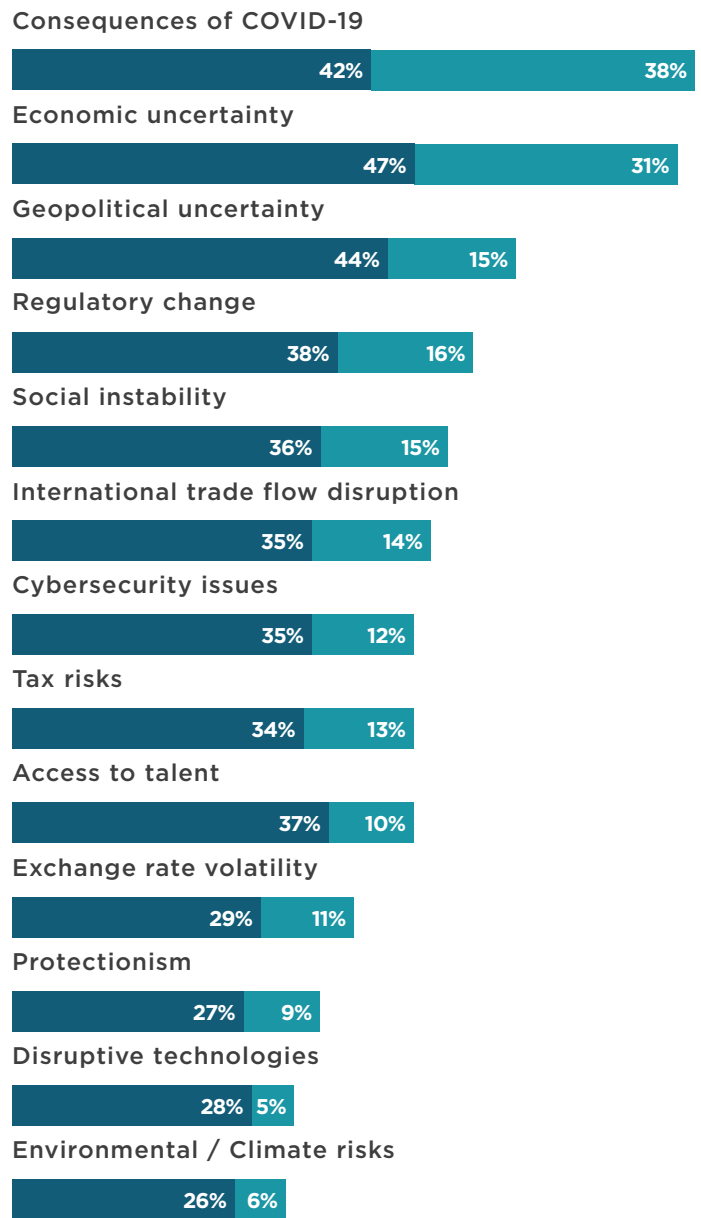
Even though most global markets are past the initial shock wave, COVID-19 still remains a locus of profound pressure within most industries. 81% of leaders are worried by the implications of the pandemic on their operations, ranking as this year's top concern. Notably, economic uncertainty gained a nearly 10 percentage point increase since last year, rattling over 77% of respondents. These two risks are inextricably linked.

Dealing with the aftermath of the pandemic is and should be top priority for businesses. Yet, maintaining full attention on this issue alone can leave leaders exposed to other types of risks, persisting in the background. Geopolitical uncertainty, regulatory change, and social instability are also among the main concerns, leaving over half of leaders preoccupied.

Compared to last year, geopolitical uncertainty increased by 10 percentage points and remains the third biggest concern. Social instability also rose to the ranks of top five risks this year, whereas it wasn't of major concern in our previous survey. Regulatory changes and international trade flow disruption are two areas of risk concerning nearly half of our survey respondents, similar to what we found last year, and not surprising considering ongoing uncertainty and tensions between trading blocs.

Figure 2: COVID-19 overtakes concerns about economic uncertainty

Q. To what extent do the following risks to your business concern you?



■ Concerned ■ Very concerned

With such a great number of push and pull forces, shaping the current business climate simultaneously, we must ask: what will the post-pandemic landscape look like?

Governments around the globe are committed to starting vaccination campaigns for the most vulnerable demographics and essential workers as early as January 2021. The general availability of vaccines is yet to be announced in most countries. Though no definite dates are set, the early prospects of vaccination have already positively shifted both the business and consumer sentiment. High streets are once again getting fuller, offices start reopening, and operations across sectors gradually rebound towards previous volumes.

However, the world won't be the same as the one we were used to before COVID-19. Prominent measures such as wearing face masks in public and physical distancing might vanish later into the year. Yet, the deeper societal and operational aftermath, and accelerated transformation across sectors will remain. These transformations are still at a nascent stage but are already visible across geographies in terms of the strategic actions leaders are planning to pursue in order to succeed in 2021.

81%

OF BUSINESS LEADERS
CONSIDER THE
CONSEQUENCES OF
COVID-19 THE BIGGEST
RISK TO BUSINESS.



FROM EAST TO WEST, EVOLVING STRATEGIES FOR RECOVERY

WHILE BUSINESS LEADERS IN DIFFERENT REGIONS AND INDUSTRIES ARE UNITED BY THE SAME PREOCCUPATIONS — THE PANDEMIC AND ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY — THEY HAVE DIFFERENT VIEWS ON THE CORE QUESTIONS WE ASKED THIS YEAR.

COUNTRY OUTLOOKS

The first to emerge from the worst of the pandemic, China's business leaders are the least concerned about the impact of COVID-19 (67% vs 81% of their global peers). They are also least concerned about economic uncertainty (62% vs 77% of their global peers). China-based leaders are overall more confident than their peers in growth prospects for their own organisations over the next 12 months (83% vs 76% of their global peers).

Such optimism may be due to the fact that China managed to prevent the second (and all subsequent) waves of the virus spreading. This, in turn, has given local businesses a longer runway for recovery. In addition, previous experience with flu outbreaks, such as SARS, has better-prepared economies in the Asia Pacific (such as China, Korea, Vietnam, and Japan) to effectively contain the pandemic, as well as its economic impacts.

The only exception to 'eastern optimism' is lower expectations for global growth prospects. 64% of business leaders from China expect the rate of global economic growth to decline over the next 12 months as compared to 37% of business leaders from the US. To some extent, this is a welcome realism, given the interconnectedness of global markets and China's reliance on trade partners, who are likely to be grappling with COVID-19 impacts well into 2021.

STRATEGIC ACTION

This sense of being ahead of the recovery curve is also evident in the activities business leaders are focusing on in the next 12 months. The US and the UK business leaders share their top three priorities — improving efficiency, reducing costs and building organic growth. Interestingly, US business leaders are almost twice as likely (26%) to be outsourcing a function than those in China (11%) or the UK (8%). The decision to outsource is a good medium for meeting the two of the top three priorities.

Not to say that Chinese business leaders aren't equally focused on operational efficiency. They are. However, their growth roadmap includes more proactive activities. Unlike their Westerner peers, they are more intent to launch new products/services; are more likely to seek strategic partnerships and work with entrepreneurs (41% and 29% vs. 27% and 21% respectively for their global peers).

Further differences can be found in how leaders assess their weaker areas. Half of the leaders based in China (49%) consider their ability to innovate as the top area requiring improvement. US businesses are more confident in that department, but they are more committed to bridging gaps in their operational effectiveness — 42% compared to their global peers (35%). Business leaders in the UK are more likely than their peers to be concentrated on strengthening their brand (29% vs 20%), apart from focusing on becoming leaner and tightening some spending.

“PERHAPS THE CHINESE WILLINGNESS TO INVEST WILL HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT, BUT I’M NOT SURE CHINA IS LOOKING TO BAIL OUT THE WORLD ECONOMY IN A WAY THAT IT DID LAST TIME AROUND.”

LEVON ANTONIAN, GROUP MANAGING DIRECTOR AND CO-FOUNDER OF HALIAN

TECHNOLOGY PERSPECTIVES

Notably, the US and the UK business leaders consider their digital capabilities as their second most critical area of weaknesses which needs to be addressed over the next 12 months (39% in the US and 31% in the UK).

Leaders based in China are more confident with their current progress in digitisation. Only 20% perceive a gap in their digital capabilities, shifting more focus towards raising their abilities to innovate. Such a difference in technical maturity further reflects in the choice of new investment allocations.

Leaders from both the UK and US place greater importance on the cloud technologies for enabling their future success. This choice is understandable, considering that the cloud is a crucial ‘starter package’ for hosting and supporting more advanced technologies. Business leaders in China assigned higher importance to AI and IoT over cloud computing. These two technologies indeed could help local leaders to deploy more innovative solutions.

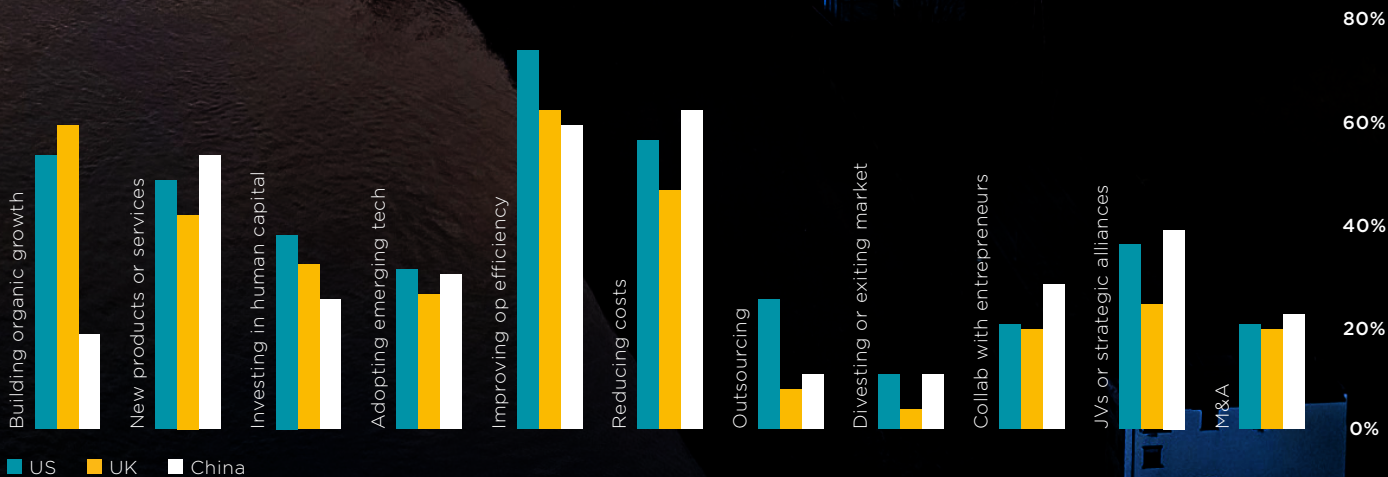
ASPIRATIONS FOR THE BETTER OR WORSE

Apart from dealing with the imminent aftermath of the pandemic, all leaders expressed a strong commitment to improving diversity and equality within their organisations. 95% of leaders in China, more than in any other country, agreed that diversity on the company board and in the workforce is even more important in the current environment. Additionally, 92% were inclined to agree that diversity can ultimately improve the organisation’s financial performance – compared to 82% globally.

Yet, as the world moves beyond the global health crisis, we must brace ourselves for another calamity – climate change. Currently looming in the background, environmental concerns/climate risks were ranked among the least worrisome ones by all leaders. That’s certainly problematic as inaction today will magnify the future consequences of irreversible changes. On a more positive note, leaders are taking certain steps towards green growth. A sound 89% of leaders in China and 81% in the UK are making changes to profit from the low-carbon economy in the future, as compared to 63% of business leaders in the US.

Figure 3: Leaders in different countries have different action plans for growth

Q. Which of the following actions are you planning to take in the next 12 months, in order to grow?



THANK GOODNESS FOR TECHNOLOGY

IN 2020, WE ALL LEARNED TO BE ETERNALLY GRATEFUL FOR THE CURRENT STATE OF GLOBAL CONNECTIVITY.

In our personal lives we found solace in being able to stay in touch with our close ones via video calls, thoroughly educated and upskilled via eLearning platforms, and surprisingly well entertained via team quiz nights and virtual after-hours events. Amidst the mentally challenging times of the pandemic, technology has helped us keep our internal light on and gather the optimism for the new cycle ahead.

Rapid consumer adoption of technology is also matched by the accelerated rate of digitisation happening among businesses. Investments in new digital technologies, previously positioned further down on strategic roadmaps, are now an immediate necessity to maintain robust operations at distance. Describing the future growth prospects, Marco Mormone, Co-Founder and Partner of big data consultancy firm Arca Blanca puts things bluntly: “There will be some losers... [but] people who are embracing [those emerging] technologies are probably the winners now.”

Indeed, a strong technological core has become a crucial factor for operational survival. In 2021, makeshift technical structures, assembled in a matter of weeks to support operations at a distance, are being replaced by more weighted technical investments. Our data suggests that leaders have focused more on fulfilling immediate technical needs, rather than investing in R&D (Research & Development) projects. Compared to last year’s findings, some technologies including blockchain, 3D printing, and biometrics have decreased in strategic importance in 2021

THE CLOUD CONQUERED, BUT YET TO SECURE

Thanks to the cloud, businesses could remain operational during lockdowns across the globe. Not surprisingly, this year nearly 50% of leaders ranked ‘cloud computing’ as the most important technology for enabling future success, among others.

Understandably, the usage of cloud-based applications, data storage infrastructure, and data management solutions increased in 2020 much to the rise of remote work. Matt Dodds, Chief Executive Officer of CaseWare International Inc. noted that early investment in the cloud gave them a better position at the start of the pandemic, compared to other industries. “Our ability to use the cloud to deploy internationally without having to physically travel and go on-premises is a big benefit,” he said.

Apart from allowing businesses to operate remotely, cloud computing also lowers the total cost of ownership of technical infrastructure, increases day-to-day employee productivity, both directly and indirectly, as well as enables access to business model transformations and new customer value propositions. Given the high level of cloud investment and a staunch commitment to launching new products/services which 42% of leaders expressed, can we expect more businesses to pivot to cloud-powered offerings in 2021?



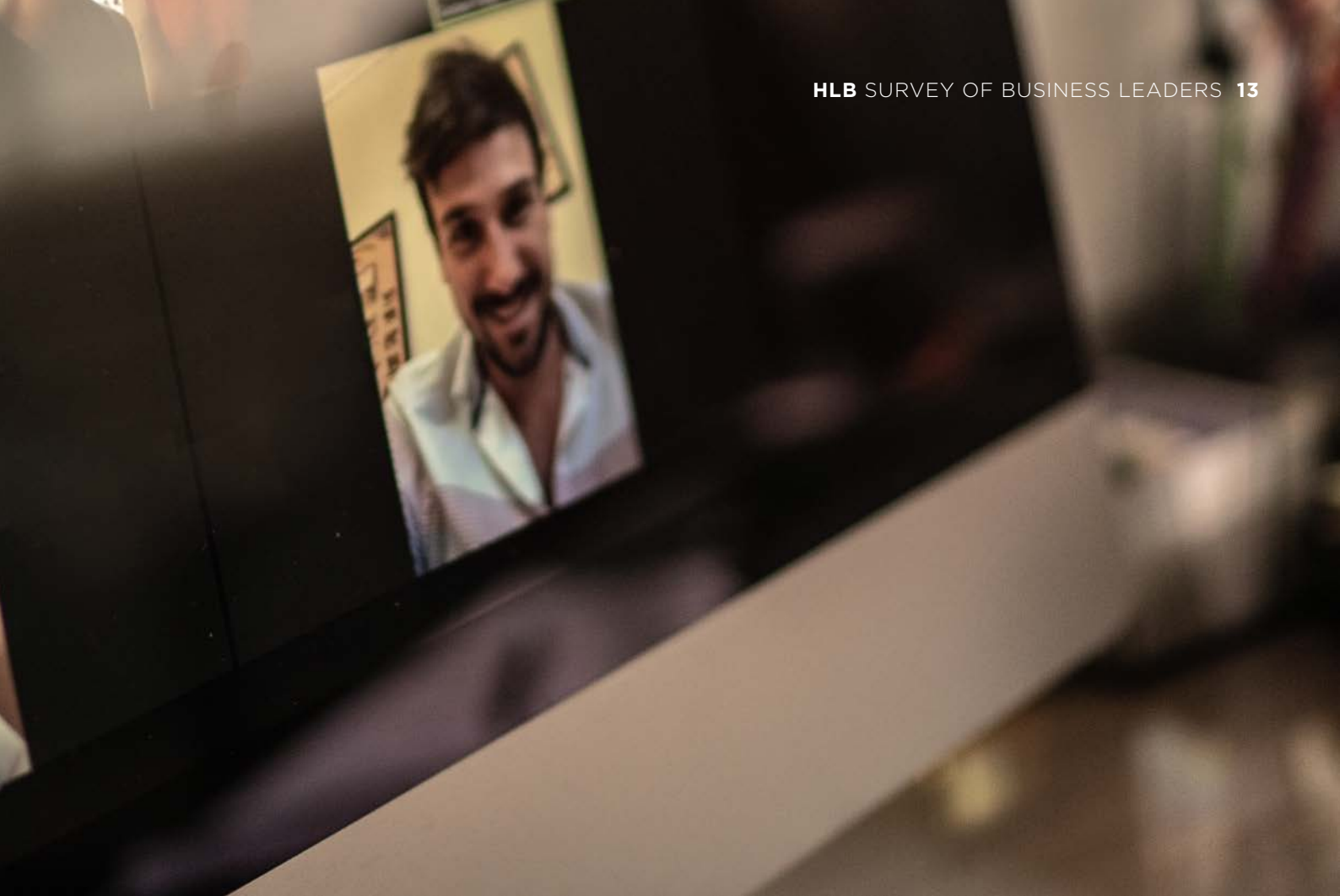
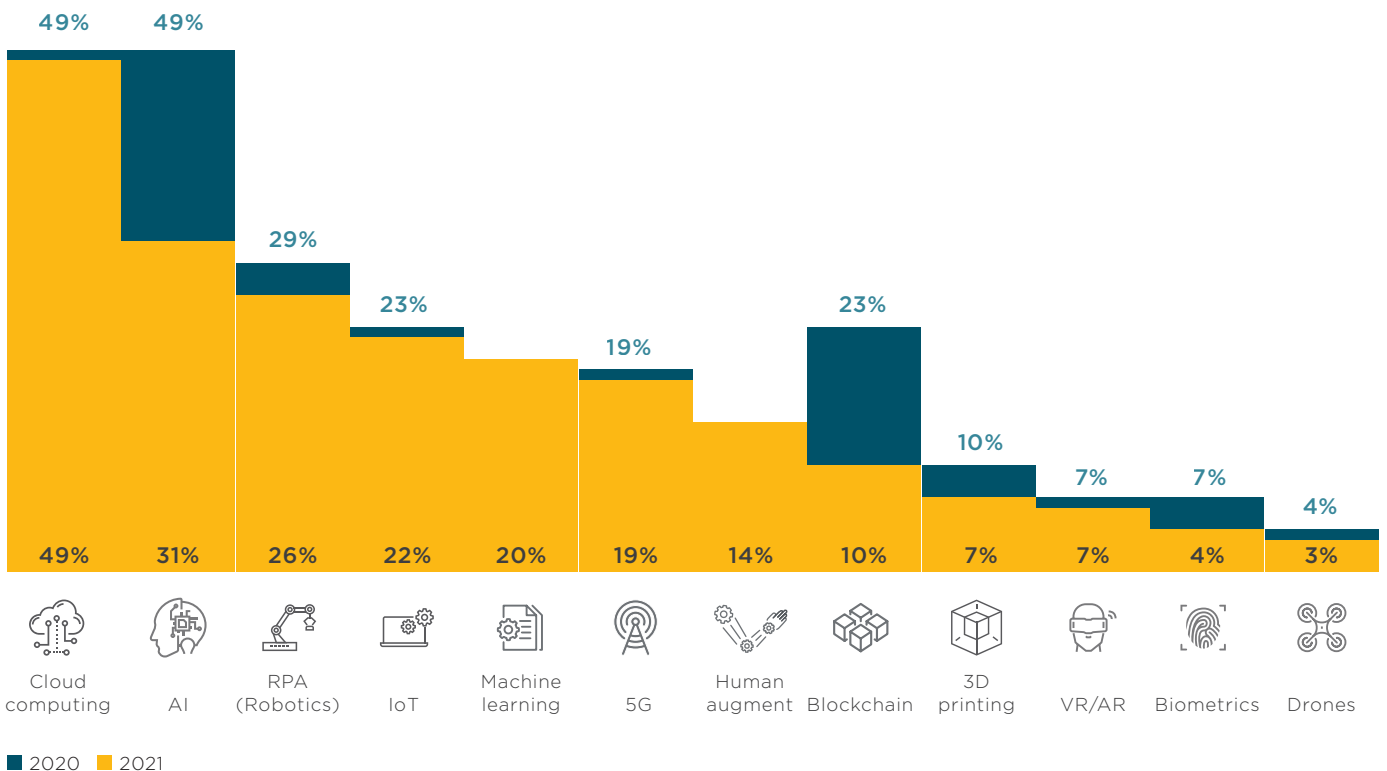


Figure 4: Cloud deemed most important for business success

Q. Which technological advancement will be the most important to your business's future success?



Note: Last year, we used 'AI' as an umbrella category for all 'intelligent' technical solutions. In 2021, we introduced a separate category for machine learning (ML) as a subset of statistical methods and modelling techniques, used for building applications that learn from provided data. Hence, the difference in ranking distribution this year.



Likely so. But en route to the cloud, leaders must not forgo security in lieu of rapid digitalisation and potential operational savings. 53% of IT professionals we surveyed in June 2020¹ commented on the sharp increase in unusual cyber-related activity since the start of the pandemic. As more sensitive data now travels across digital means, failure to set up appropriate defence measures can endanger corporate operations. Levon Antonian, Group Managing Director and Co-Founder of Halian also expects that: “cybersecurity will be the next biggest area for us as more and more commerce is transacted online.”

Leaders less focused on technology, on the other hand, tend to slightly downplay the risks associated with cybersecurity. Only 47% feel concerned by potential cybersecurity issues. Surprisingly, even less (13%) identified digital security as an operational weakness. Perhaps some companies already have a robust cybersecurity programme. Yet are they prepared to offset new threats associated with remote work, the rising volume of online transactions, and sensitive data exchanges? That’s an area worth pondering over.

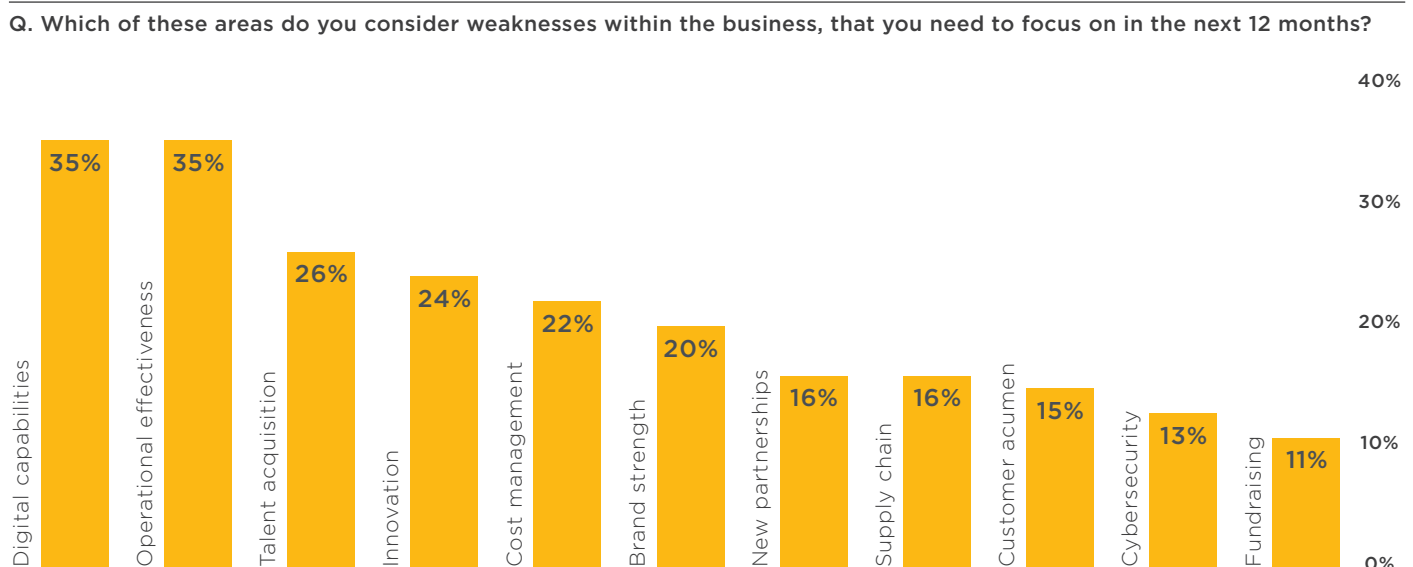
DIGITAL TRANSFORMATIONS: PROGRESS IS STEADY

Much like last year, artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), Internet-of-things (IoT) and robotic process automation (RPA) remain the mainstream areas of emerging technology interest. As early cross-industry pilots suggest this tech cohort could drive better operational decision-making, sophisticated automation, and subsequent increases in human employees’ productivity. Understandably, all of them rank among the top five areas of tech importance for 2021.

However, investments in core digital capabilities remain a ‘work in progress’ for many leaders. 35% identified digital capabilities as an area of weakness to address this year. Given that almost every industry vaulted ahead in terms of digital maturity, reluctance to explore new technologies can increase the market gap between leaders and laggards.

In addition, a large majority, (88%) believe that technology is a key enabler for overcoming cross-border business challenges. Indeed, the new breed of RPA solutions, fuelled by AI, can handle time-demanding manual regulatory tasks, as well as automate decision-making for an array of rule-

Figure 5: Digital capabilities are weak, requiring improvement



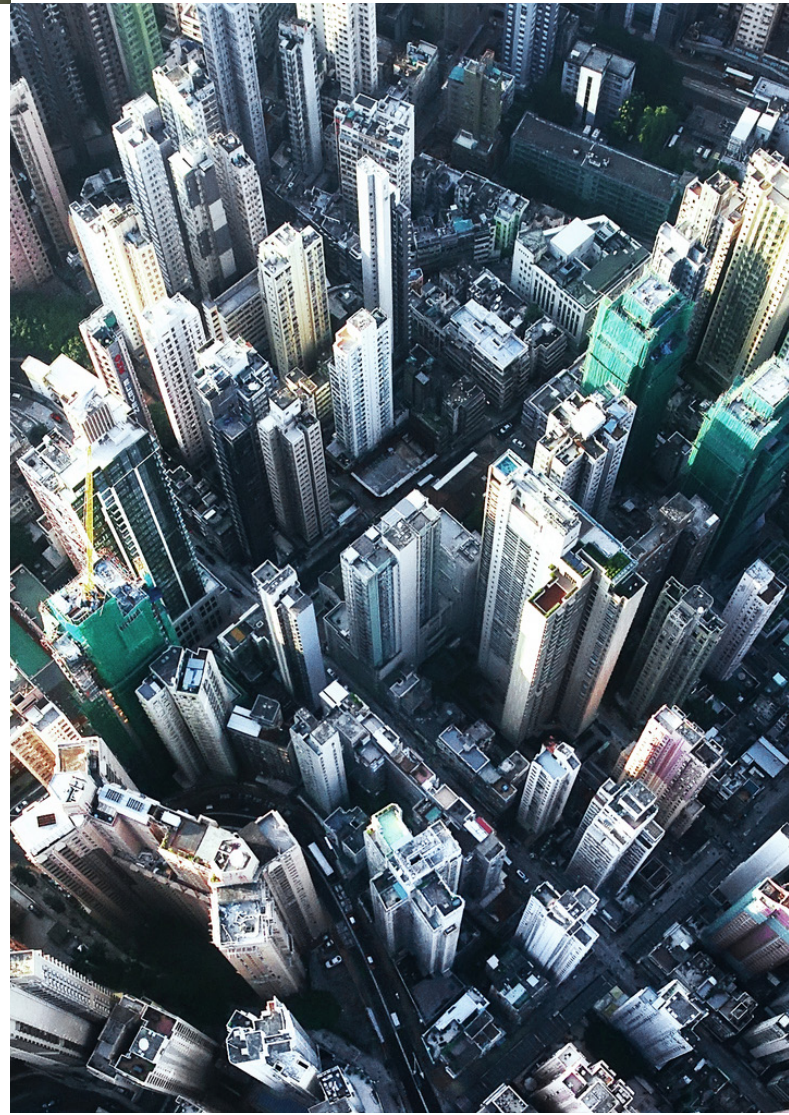
based processes. Predictive analytics solutions, powered by ML, could help offset the impact of trade flow disruptions on operations, by issuing alternative recommendations for managing procurement cycles and logistics. Still, successful large-scale implementations of such projects remain few. “We’re only just beginning to see the adoption of wider, analytical and business intelligence systems. What’s good though, is that new technologies are gradually becoming mainstream and probably the pandemic has accelerated their adoption,” according to Levon Antonian from Halian.

TECH OPTIMISTS OR TECH REALISTS?

COVID-19 became a catalyst for new tech investments, steering optimism around the abilities of ‘digital’ to solve an array of operational issues. However, do leaders realistically estimate the opportunities emerging technological advancements present? Or might they soon get disillusioned with the scope of results achieved?

Last year, blockchain ranked as the fourth strategic area of tech importance among businesses. This year, the technology dropped to the eighth position, remaining a priority area for only 10% of leaders. Why such a shift? Early pilots positioned blockchain as a strong contender for solving an array of operational issues — immutable data storage, streamlined supply and asset chain management, and simple data auditability among others. When it came to moving the solutions from the lab to the mainstream, a lot of leaders discovered the inherent limitations of blockchain such as scalability and energy inefficiency.

Given that many emerging technologies are yet to be tested in real-life settings we remain curious regarding the companies’ ability to assess the viability of their technology choices. The technology itself is not a blueprint for success. How do businesses plan to ensure sufficient tech infrastructure maturity to prevent new technology investments from becoming an expense, rather than a strategic advantage? Do leaders have clear roadmaps for aligning their tech investments with wider operational strategies? And what role does regulation play in the achievability of technology solutions when it comes to cross-border challenges?



“THERE’S A NATURAL CYCLE WHERE A NEW TECHNOLOGY IS PUMPED UP AND THEN THERE’S A PERIOD OF DISAPPOINTMENTS, AND IT’S NOT FIT FOR PURPOSE YET. THEREAFTER, THERE IS A GRADUAL UPTAKE AGAIN AND IT BECOMES MAINSTREAM”

LEVON ANTONIAN, GROUP MANAGING DIRECTOR AND CO-FOUNDER OF HALIAN

BUT ARE WE MISSING THE 'HUMAN TOUCH'?

ALTHOUGH MANY ORGANISATIONS FOUND THEMSELVES GETTING THINGS DONE 'AT A DISTANCE', THE LACK OF PROXIMITY HAS INTRODUCED NEW AND DIFFERENT CHALLENGES.

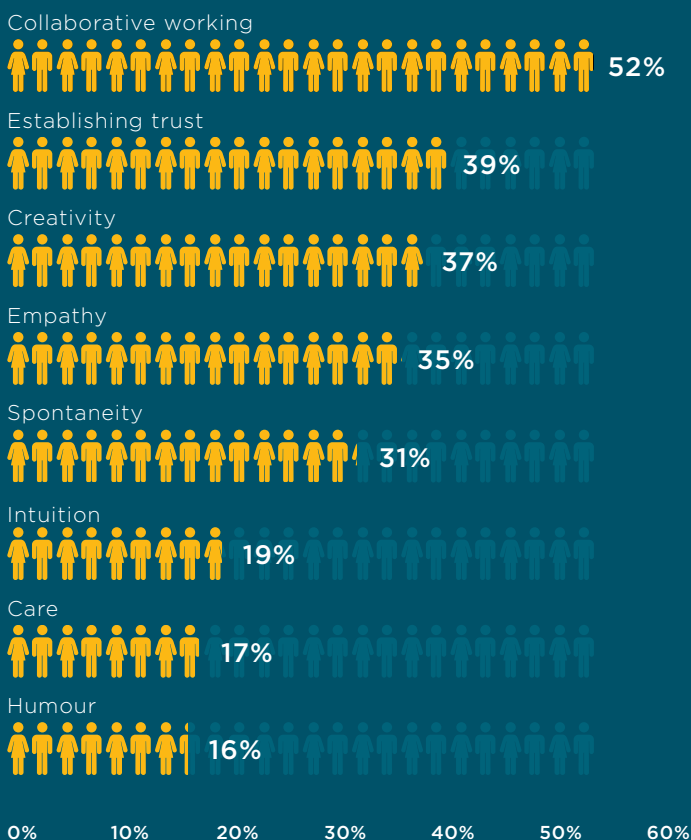
For 84%, deploying the value of 'human touch' in their businesses remains a tough act to master due to social distancing.

The natural way of collaborating — without planned video conferencing and pre-shared agendas — is hard to orchestrate within the distributed environments. Yet, serendipitous cross-functional, 'water cooler' interactions are the 'secret sauce' to enabling new ways of thinking and acting within companies.

Understandably, over a third of respondents (37%) also acknowledge the difficulties of sparking creativity via digital means. "Those discussions, when you walk into the hallway to get a coffee, they're not taking place anymore," Matt Dodds, Chief Executive Officer at CaseWare International Inc. contemplated. "The creative element doesn't happen organically."

Figure 6: What we've most missed working remotely

Q. In times of social distancing and increased remote human interaction through digital technology, which elements of "the human touch" are most difficult to foster within the business?



Due to the highly structured and pre-planned nature of conversations via video conferencing, developing cohesive relationships with colleagues, partners, and clients becomes a more challenging act. Though an important one to master, 52% of leaders agreed that collaborative working was the most difficult to foster in times of social distancing and increased remote human interaction. Significant gaps in collaboration can amplify the feeling of disconnect from the company — a factor directly impacting employees' creativity, engagement, and ultimately performance. So it only makes sense that leaders we spoke to are getting more intentional about staying 'human' despite the prevalence of tech.

As Marco Mormone from Arca Blanca recounted, during the early days of the pandemic finding a good framework for engaging with clients was a bit challenging. Both the teams and the clients naturally gravitated towards 'the old way of doing things', which wasn't always ideal in the remote setting. Yet as teams gradually settled into the new ways of working, they "...have run, started, and completed tens of projects remotely. And I'm thinking [about] all the different crazy travelling I was doing, taking a plane to go somewhere and have a one-hour meeting and come back... Definitely those collaboration tools and digital remote working tools have been hugely successful."

Notably, establishing trust remotely is another challenging aspect for 39% of businesses. After-hours activities and informal networking can help forging trust among team members and partners. However, when it comes to developing new relationships, continuous physical distancing can have a long-term impact on future growth prospects.

Business development, strategic partnership deals, and sales are likely to suffer according to Halian's Levon Antonian: "We've been fairly lucky in that our business has continued through the lockdown, but we have seen a decline in new business development." The lack of 'human touch' is very acute in new relationships as "there's also a degree of communication that we can't really express when we're on a Zoom or a Teams call. There's an element of trust that's built through that face-to-face interaction, which is hard to achieve on a video call."

”I THINK WHAT WE REALLY MISS IS GETTING FACE-TO-FACE WITH OUR CUSTOMERS AND OUR USERS, EVEN OUR DISTRIBUTORS; THAT TYPE OF INTERACTION, THAT TYPE OF COLLABORATION AROUND CREATIVE PURSUITS AND JUST UNDERSTANDING HOW PEOPLE ARE USING THINGS AND UNDERSTANDING THEIR PROBLEMS. WE DO MISS THAT FOR SURE”

MATT DODDS, CEO OF CASEWARE INTERNATIONAL INC

HOLDING OUR ‘HUMAN’ GROUNDS

Physical distancing will likely remain a reality for most of us (at least to some extent) this year. So will remote working. But how much longer can we hold on in the current state of interface-based social interactions? That’s a persisting question that emerged during our interviews with CEOs across industries.

Even though technology ‘provides us with the advantage of ‘staying connected’, no modern solution can fully compensate for the positive comradery of a physical workplace, the buzzing energy of an industry event, or a thrilling vibe of an in-person first client meeting.

Still, there’s an upside to ongoing remote work too. While forging meaningful new relationships with business partners and customers may remain challenging in 2021, 65% of leaders acknowledge that remote work lowered barriers to sourcing diverse talent. With great talent dwelling in different regions, geography is no longer a deal-breaking constraint for hiring.

84%

DEPLOYING THE VALUE OF ‘HUMAN TOUCH’ IN THEIR BUSINESSES REMAINS A TOUGH ACT TO MASTER DUE TO SOCIAL DISTANCING.

Researchers from INSEAD² anticipate the new economic cycle we are entering will be characterised by “an extreme geographical dispersion due to the optimisation of telecommunications”. Our findings also suggest that apart from direct benefits – access to missing skill sets, lower overhead costs due to work from home arrangements, and faster recruiting times – remote hiring can also drive diversity and inclusion (D&I) efforts among businesses.

Nonetheless, we must also acknowledge the downside of indefinite remote work. Are companies doing enough to help all employees socially transition into a new role? Do they have a healthy corporate culture, aimed at ensuring that the social and mental needs of all employee types – across roles, gender, age, and race – are properly addressed?

Fostering diversity across the company is decisively a good cause. Vital to its success is your organisation’s ability to ensure that staff and new hires alike connect effectively and thrive across two dimensions – the digital and the physical.

”HOW DOES SOMEONE WHO’S STARTING OUT ON THEIR CAREER, HOW DO THEY CREATE THE NETWORK, WHICH I BENEFITED FROM WHEN YOU GO TO CONFERENCES OR SEMINARS.”

SIMON FROST, GROUP CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER, PROACTIVE GROUP HOLDINGS INC.

DIVERSITY — A SALIENT COMPETITIVE DRIVER

IN 2020, WE LEARNED THAT FAST REACTION AND CREATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING WERE CRUCIAL FOR SURVIVAL. DUE TO RAPID MARKET AND OPERATIONAL SHIFTS, EMPLOYEES AT EVERY LEVEL HAD TO THINK FAST AND ACT WITH HIGH PRECISION.

As we were dealing with the unknown, most leaders also had to broaden their overall perspectives around corporate governance.

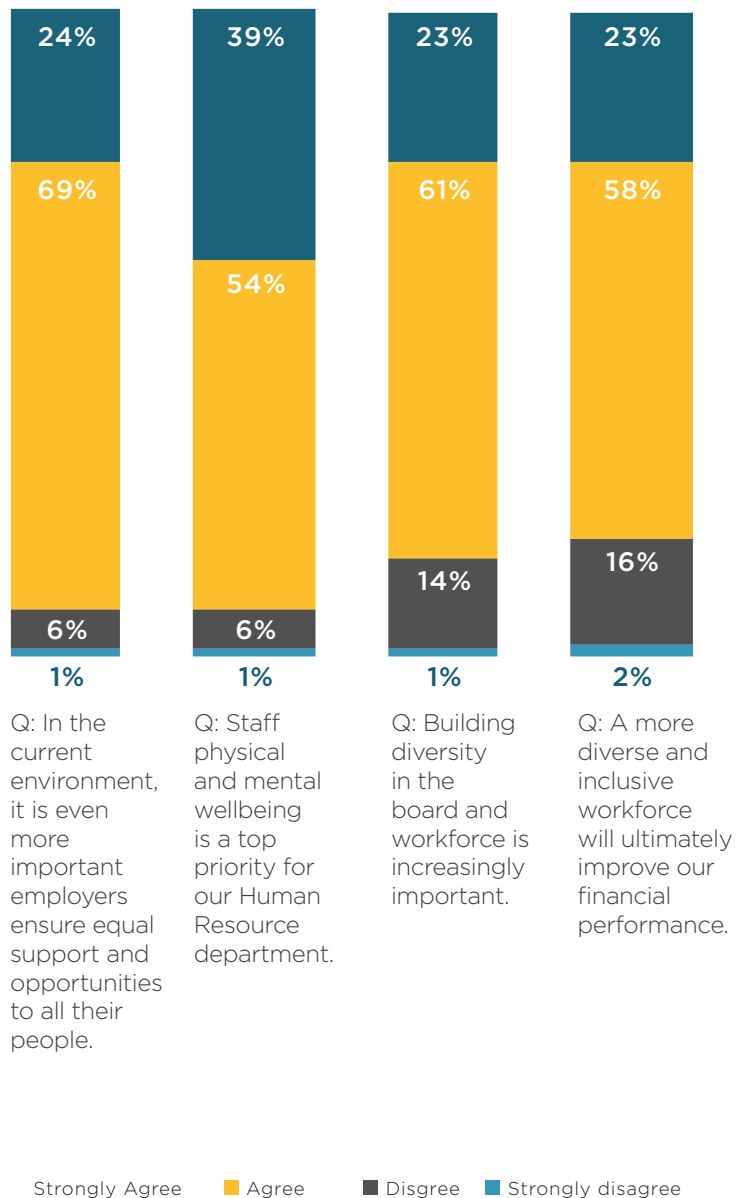
During our conversations with business leaders, a new underlying trend has emerged. Prior to COVID-19, driving business innovation used to be a task of some. Today, it is everyone's responsibility. Out-of-the-box thinking is gaining a crucial momentum in 2021 as leaders restructure their operations and aim for greater organisational agility. What would ignite those new ideas? Diverse talent.

82% of business leaders are certain that a more diverse and inclusive workforce will help them improve their financial performance. Matt Dodds of CaseWare International Inc. is also a strong believer that "...diverse teams deliver better results...with a broad range of experiences, perspectives, and skill sets create better outcomes for our company."

An earlier HLB study of unconscious bias behaviours³ also found that creative thinking and problem-solving are two areas where diverse teams (by age, gender, and geographical diversity) outperform homogeneous ones. In the current uncertain environment, diverse viewpoints, challenging the status quo, can help leaders find new pockets of growth, as well as connect with their customers on a new level. Marco Mormone from Arca Blanca noted that since they are now dealing with "problems that can make a difference for a company for surviving...we need to bring as many different aspects in our thinking, as we can, if we are all thinking homogeneously all the way, there is a limit to our impact."



Figure 7: Business leaders recognise the value of a diverse workforce



PROGRESSIVE VIEWS: A DIVERSE WORKFORCE FOR THE FUTURE

In 2021, we expect further positive shifts to the global workforce as business commitment to equality, diversity and inclusiveness increases. 85% agree that building diversity in the board and the general workforce is increasingly important. In addition, 93% acknowledge that it is more important than ever to ensure equal support and opportunities for all their people.

With movements such as Extinction Rebellion and Black Lives Matter gaining large scale international traction, some leaders are taking even more active steps to educate their teams and partners on matters related to social imperatives. At the height the discussion about inequality and race issues faced in the US, Gail Becker, Founder and CEO of CAULIPOWER, invited a professor of African-American studies to come and talk to their staff and “help everybody figure out what was happening [in racial context] ... how we can talk about it, and how we can help each other [become better]. It was a safe place to ask questions.”

Still, “finding the right mix of personality, cultural fit, capability” even in the diverse talent pool remains difficult for Marco Mormone of Arca Blanca, as well as other leaders. Though some progress has been made in the talent department since the start of the pandemic.

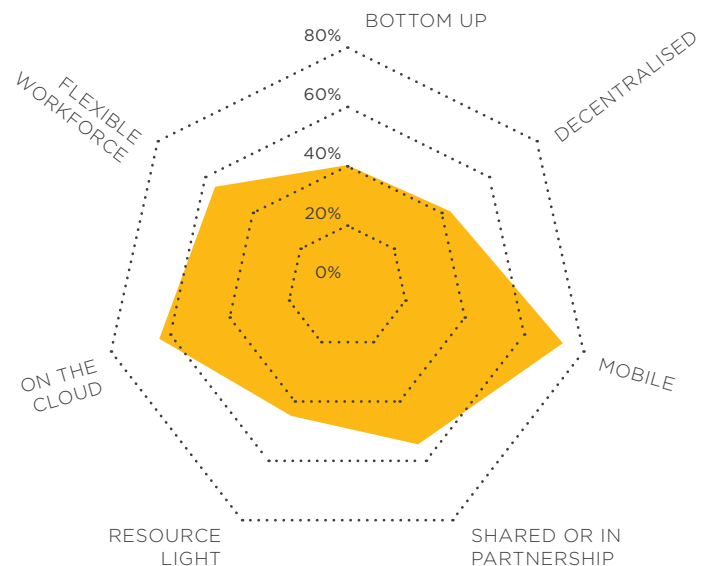
NEW OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

Apart from adding diverse perspectives, businesses are also branching out into new ways of working, better aligned with the challenges of the new decade. Our survey findings last year projected the characteristics of successful business models for the new decade: bottom-up, cloud-based, and mobile structures, accommodating flexible work arrangements, resource-light and backed by shared partnerships. At the dawn of the new decade, nearly three quarters of business leaders anticipated future businesses to be mobile. Another 43% believe them to be decentralised, and 42% predicted lower reliance on top-heavy operational structures. The cloud was strongly identified as an ‘enabler’ for such transformations. Fast-forward to 2021 and we are already seeing organisations operating by such principles or on their way to embracing them to stay competitive.



Figure 8: Characteristics of the successful business model of the future

Q: In your view, what will be the characteristics of the successful business models of the future?



Source: HLB survey of business leaders 2020

As CAULIPOWER's Gail Becker puts it: "We have been pivoting and fast. We have an idea. We can implement it 15 minutes later and we're used to operating like that. Whereas when the pandemic hit, many organizations were not nimble enough... not small enough, not malleable enough." Such a lack of speed and agility is an executional shortcoming leaders are now trying to address with different means.

Across industries, we identified a positive drift towards leaner, more human-centred operations. While major shifts have already taken place in terms of operational processes, the workforce is yet to catch up.

NEW IMPERATIVES FOR THE TALENT MARKETPLACE

Despite definite progress in remote hiring, 47% of leaders still see 'access to talent' as a risk to their operations and over a quarter (26%) identify 'talent acquisition' as an area of weakness needing improvement. Why are the numbers so high, considering that unemployment rates across countries soared since the start of the pandemic?

As there is no shortage of people currently seeking work, businesses seemingly should have a good talent pool to pick from. However, our in-depth interviews uncovered that recruitment isn't constrained by the capacity or capability to hire candidates; it's more of a 'right fit' question. Leaders are increasingly searching for people whose mix of hard skills, personal traits, and cultural attributes matches the corporate DNA. They are seeking new hires who are not just up for the job today, but who can evolve with the organisational needs of tomorrow. "The challenge for us is to find the skill sets and the people that are relevant to what we are trying to do and what we are doing," commented Marco Mormone from Arca Blanca.

Such a state of the job market prompts leaders to explore alternative hiring arrangements. To enable growth and likely fill in the gaps in skills and technical capabilities, an increasing number of leaders (21%) plans to collaborate with entrepreneurs. Apart from gaining access to the missing skill sets, external partners can also bring in more diverse perspectives, fostering creativity and new approaches to decision-making.

With intense competition for talent, especially in larger tech hubs, staff retention and engagement are of great importance. Matt Dodds, CEO of CaseWare International Inc. says that they constantly compete for the same talent with big players based in the same area — Amazon,

Google, Microsoft. "With COVID-19, they offer a new level of flexibility and work arrangements. We have to keep up with that to make sure that our talent brand and our offerings are competitive in the market," he noted.

While attractive working conditions and fair compensation are among important factors for potential hires, organisational diversity also adds up to a stronger employer brand. Seeding awareness around your industry and profession within minority communities could help with attracting entry-level candidates. At the same time, resolving unconscious biases within your company can help ensure higher retention of key staff.

Apart from becoming more flexible operationally, leaders are working towards building a happier workforce in the future. Soundly, staff physical and mental well-being is a top priority for 93% of employers. This is an especially reassuring figure, considering that the pandemic placed a major emotional toll on workers who suddenly found themselves socially isolated, lonely, and unprepared to deal with anxiety. In addition, such targeted initiatives could help to bring back the 'human touch' into daily interactions.

Having a strong employer brand, backed by internal organisational policies, promoting well-being, is just the first step towards wider transformation. The decisions businesses make today regarding larger societal trends will directly reflect on their brand at large, facilitating or hindering their ability to win over new consumer demographics, as well as recruit new talent. In fact, 91% of leaders believe that how they respond to events that impact society reflects on their brand and on how customers think of them.

Are leaders paying enough attention to internal discussion driven by events affecting society, around topics such as inclusion and equity? Can re-training and reskilling programmes help leaders close the gaps in talent acquisition? While cultural fit is truly important, perhaps some need to broaden their definition of 'the right fit' to engage with a wider segment of the society?

91%

OF BUSINESS LEADERS BELIEVE THAT HOW THEY RESPOND TO EVENTS THAT IMPACT SOCIETY REFLECTS ON THEIR BRAND REPUTATION AND HOW CUSTOMERS THINK OF THEM.

REBUILDING BACK BETTER

IN THE MONTHS PRECEDING THE PANDEMIC, AN ARRAY OF UNCOMFORTABLE QUESTIONS WAS PERCOLATING UNDER THE SURFACE.

What are governments and businesses doing to ensure that the ramifications of the pandemic are not having a disproportionate impact on some groups of society? Are enterprises deploying fair and equal hiring practices? Will business leaders have the resources to ‘do the right thing’ after withdrawal of governmental support post-pandemic?

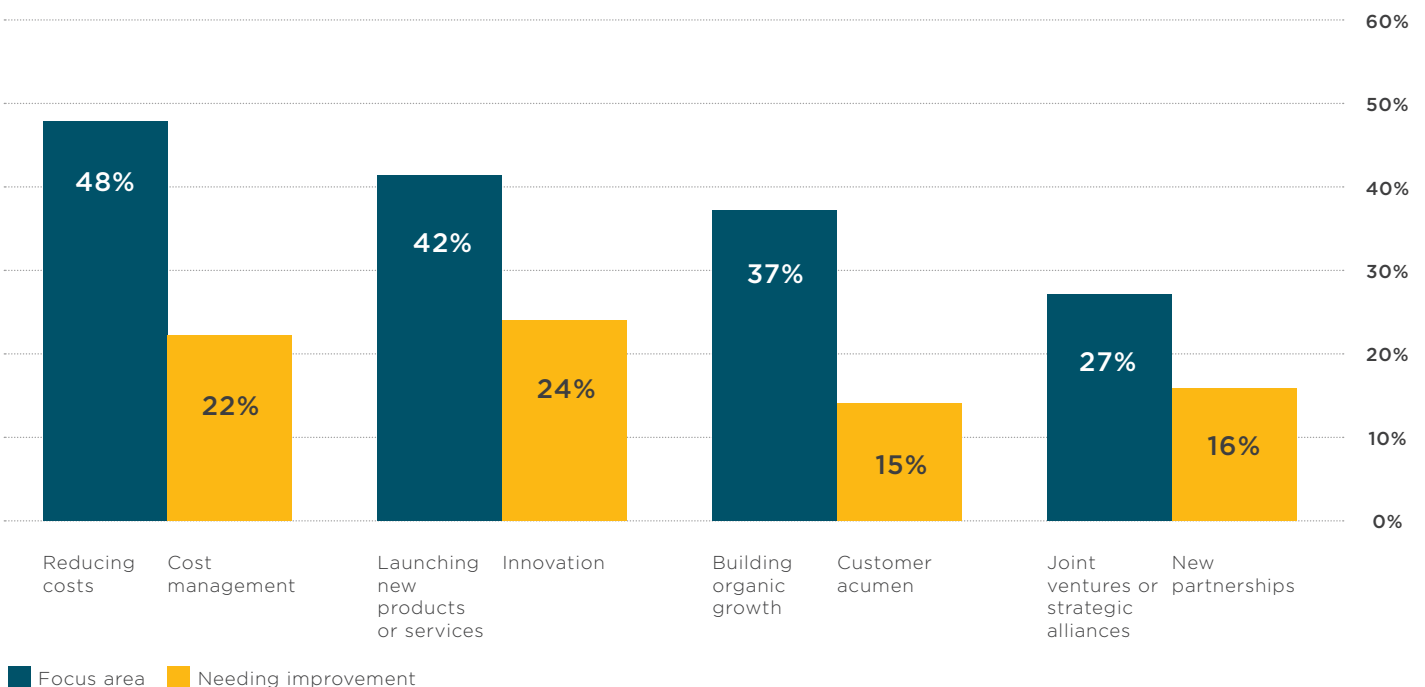
For many businesses, the ‘reset’ caused by COVID-19 is an opportunity to reflect on their past actions and re-commit to new prerogatives – leaner and greener production. A large majority of leaders (91%) are confident in their ability to successfully steer the business in a new direction in response to the impact of COVID-19. How do they plan to achieve it?

To respond to changes in the markets, most leaders understandably focus on increasing their resilience. To achieve that, 65% plan to further increase their operational efficiency. Expectedly, cost reduction is another strategic priority for nearly half (48%). During the pandemic, strategic cash control and cash management have helped many businesses stay afloat. Understandably, many are extending the ‘thrifty’ practices into 2021 to stay agile and pivot faster, should the markets demand.

While ‘defence measures’ are still in place among some leaders, many are also gearing up for a fresh start. In both B2C and B2B sectors, new consumer demands have emerged. Understandably, leaders plan to strengthen their innovation abilities, ranked fourth in terms of perceived areas of focus, to respond to shifts in consumer needs. Additionally, 42% are preparing to launch new products and services in the next 12 months. “New products and innovation is something we think about 24/7. And it’s something that can’t actually stop in the middle of a pandemic,” Gail Becker from CAULIPOWER admitted. In fact, she’s among many optimistic leaders who believe

Figure 9: Priorities may require strengthening

Q: Which of the following actions are you planning to take in the next 12 months, in order to grow?
 Q: Which of these areas do you consider weaknesses within the business, that you need to focus on in the next 12 months?



that “The pandemic is a wonderful time to start a business because we as a society have so many problems to solve. [Respectively], there’s so much room for opportunity and innovation.”

Previous crises caused major profit pools shifts. This crisis is no exception. Businesses who have linked their new strategies to value faster and at a lower cost would roll into the new cycle at a far better posture.

Despite increased optimism, leaders exercise caution when it comes to more funds-demanding initiatives. Based on responses from our survey, M&A activity will be lower in 2021 with only 20% of leaders seeking to close new deals. Additionally, only 9% plan to divest from an existing business or market. Perhaps, most are waiting for better economic conditions to reshape portfolios? Do leaders hold on to low-performing assets in hopes of them recovering value? In short, are they too optimistic about their ability to grow organically (37%) and launch new products (42%) and services to the market without external help?

LEANER, GREENER, AND KEENER

The decisions business leaders make every day, to adapt and survive, need to be aligned with wider implications of the pandemic. With the technology base covered, businesses must now take a deeper inward look. They need to determine how their vision, current operational principles and values align with those shared by the societies they serve. “Customers are now asking for our position on modern slavery, for example, [asking for] our position on environmental issues [when we bid on tenders],” noted Levon Antonian from Halian. He also anticipates that clients would become more inquisitive of the exact corporate social responsibility (CSR) measures they are taking in the coming years.

Surged interest in the ethical and environmental corporate commitment is not limited to certain business verticals or regional markets. Globally, 91% of leaders believe that how they respond to events that impact society reflects on their brand and overall customer perception of their business. Reputation becomes especially crucial considering how challenging it is to build trust digitally. Pinky Lilani from Women of the Future Programme mentioned that a “good track record, your reputation, what your brand stands for” has become more important since the start of the pandemic. “[Enlisting] other people [to] become your ambassadors” will be one of the main routes for forging new relationships.

On a wider level, business leaders need to be more conscious about their response to emerging racial, social, and financial inequality, environmental issues, accentuated by COVID-19. In 2020, Millennial and Gen Z consumers actively

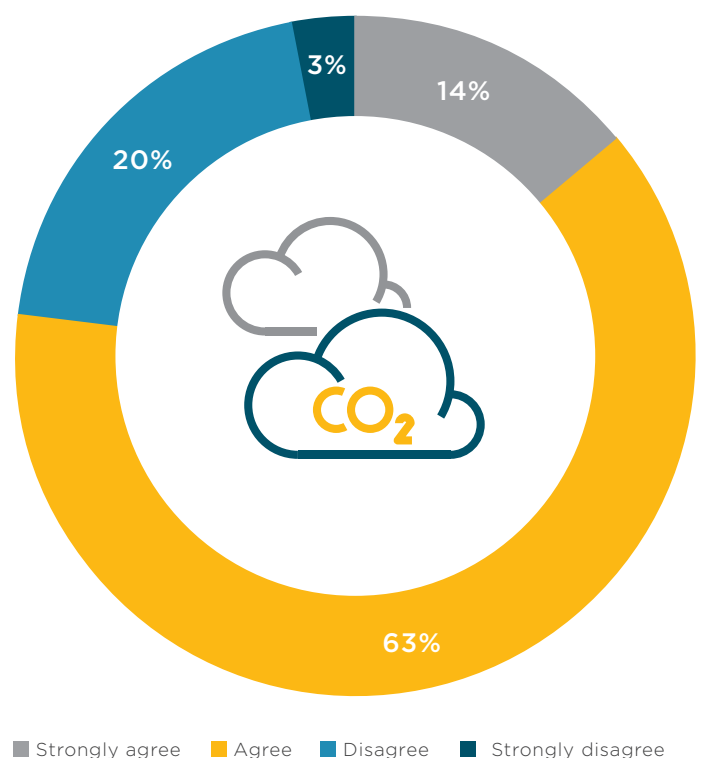
expressed their concerns about climate change, social injustice, inequality, both online and in the streets.

51% of leaders are concerned about the risks of social instability to their business. In this regard, the most important action leaders can take now is to not stay aloof. They should take a more weighted look at what actions they are pursuing to address the mounting concerns within the communities they serve.

The pressure to become greener is not only coming from consumers. Asset managers, representing trillions of dollars of investments, are now asking businesses to reduce emissions by 45% by 2030, as well as create plans for reaching zero-carbon objectives by 2050⁴. The stakeholders behind such firms no longer wish to support companies with murky sustainability prospects or those putting up a facade of low-impact initiatives to hide bad behaviour. “I worry when people have to do things from a compliance perspective, they do it very quickly. And I think that when your clients are holding you accountable, then companies move,” noted Pinky Lilani, Women of the Future Programme. “But I also admire leaders who [pursue change], because they think it’s right.”

Figure 10: Recovery is an opportunity to make changes to profit in the low-carbon economy of the future

Q. The business recovery process is an opportunity to make changes to our business in order to profit in the low carbon economy of the future



Getting intentional about making operations more compatible with the boundaries our planet has set is another positive consequence of the pandemic-prompted reset. 77% of leaders see the recovery phrase as an opportunity to make their business more conducive to profiting from the low-carbon economy in the future. Increased focus on renewable energy brings in a compendium of benefits including healthcare savings eight times the cost of the investment, along with accelerated job growth within the energy sector. Ultimately, a transition to greener energy could increase the global GDP by \$98 trillion by 2050⁵.

A growing number of industry frontrunners are making public commitments to increasing the sustainability of their operations within the next decade. For example, Unilever plans to halve the environmental footprint of its operations by 2030. Last year, the company achieved a 65% reduction in CO2 emissions per tonne of production target, effectively rolling back to pre-2008 levels⁶. E.ON is committed to reducing Scope 1 and 2 GHG emissions by 75% by 2030 and becoming fully carbon neutral by 2040⁷. But it is not just the large corporate leaders consciously making greener decisions in response to social demands. An array of innovative brands and start-ups such as Beyond Meat (meat substitute manufacturer), Cariuma (sustainable footwear brand), Depop (preloved garment marketplace) and other purpose-driven brands have gained major traction over the past few years as consumers' attitudes and demands have changed.

Our findings last year hinted at a growing cohort of leaders abreast of these changes. In 2020, 42% of the leaders had plans to bring their sourcing strategies closer to home as per customers' cues. This year, over 59% intend to reassess their supply chain to increase sourcing proximity.

When analysing sector-specific responses, over 88% of financial services businesses foresee the post-pandemic recovery process as an opportunity to make changes to their business models in order to profit from the low-carbon economy in the future. This makes sense given the drive by both institutional and retail investors towards more responsible investment strategies, with ESG (environmental, social and governance) factors at their core, as well as heightened concerns regarding the pricing of climate change risks.

84% of leaders in Agriculture, Food and Beverages also plan to re-align their operations for the low-carbon future. Additionally, 72% of Agriculture, Food and Beverages leaders are reassessing their supply chain to source closer to home.

Both figures are higher than the average across all industries — a very positive sign, given this industry's contribution towards global emission levels. To some extent, an increased commitment to local sourcing can be also explained by logistics disruptions, caused by the pandemic. At any rate, domestic production should help reduce the carbon footprint for produced goods, improve the sustainability of production, and create new jobs within the local communities.

A NEW MODEL FOR GLOBAL COORDINATION

Leaders adjusting their supply chains are justified in doing so. Global trade maps, designed around 20th-century ideologies of the free-trade and commercial movement of goods, finance, services (and people), are experiencing a shakedown. Not surprisingly, nearly half of business leaders (49%) are concerned about the impact of international trade flow disruption on their operations. At the same time, the public are observing governments delivering varying degrees of success in managing the global pandemic. Together, these two factors are prompting a re-assessment of the effectiveness of free-market forces to deliver a stable future foundation for the wellbeing of citizens and the economy.

The free-market mantra around less-government intervention, less-regulation, and the idea that the market will solve for everything, is being replaced by a call for active government investment to prop up ailing business and save lives. Coincidentally, or perhaps consequently, a change of leadership in the US is likely to usher in a period of confidence in a more active and effective government. Globalisation, as we knew it, is likely to be replaced by a new spirit of multilateral cooperation between nations, with relationships based more on trust and values than on trade and finance alone. This change could prove instrumental in solving some of the world's biggest problems (from COVID-19 to Climate Change).

Are businesses getting keener on improving their environmental footprint and following through with net-zero pledges? We hope so as continuous reluctance can prompt 'climate change' to become the next redefining crisis in our history. By taking advantage of governmental and international grants, tax incentives, and loans, can businesses move faster towards a zero-carbon economy? Does your organisation seek suitable green growth opportunities to ensure relevance in the post-pandemic world we are now entering?

CONCLUSION: TIME FOR A REALITY CHECK?

MORE THAN HALF OF THE RESPONDENTS TO OUR SURVEY THIS YEAR EXPECT GLOBAL GROWTH TO DECLINE, YET, DESPITE THIS, 75% THINK THEY WILL BE ABLE TO GENERATE GROWTH IN THEIR OWN ORGANISATIONS.

We were surprised to see such optimism (perhaps wishful thinking) from the business leaders across all areas surveyed this year, given the challenges they have faced over the past 12 months.

In light of the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines, wishful thinking could become reality. However, we expect businesses to plan for further ‘bumps’ in the road to recovery. “If we knew about upcoming lockdowns in advance or that there’s definitely a vaccine for everyone in six months, we’d be able to make better plans. But for now, the biggest issue for us remains uncertainty,” noted Simon Frost, Group CFO at Proactive Group Holdings Inc

ARE LEADERS REALISTIC ABOUT THE OBSTACLES STILL TO COME?

1 EXPECTATIONS FOR STRONG GROWTH		
HIGH EXPECTATIONS	BUMPS IN THE ROAD	QUESTIONS FOR A SWIFT RECOVERY
<p>COVID-19 has had a predictable impact on the outlook for global growth. In the middle of the pandemic, the World Bank expected the virus “to plunge most countries into recession, with per capita income contracting in 2020 in the largest fraction of countries globally since 1870⁸.” To our surprise, business leaders across the globe remained highly confident despite a poor economic outlook and decimated trading conditions in many sectors.</p>	<p>There may be cause for some optimism, but it’s not evenly distributed across countries and sectors. Recovery for segments most ravaged may take years. Some businesses will fail, and new players emerge. Survivors may lack sufficient strength in reserves to fund what’s been deferred. Finally, businesses in many countries need to account for the end of government handouts in various forms including wage support, grants, loans, and tax holidays.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How prudent have you been about the scale and length of ongoing cash management and investment policies? • Have you mapped out where you expect your business to be post-pandemic (strategically and financially)? • What can you do to ensure you keep your investment options open, as new opportunities for growth and expansion arise in unexpected places? • How fast can you access additional resources, required to quickly expand into areas poised for growth?
2 THE POWER OF TECHNOLOGY		
HIGH EXPECTATIONS	BUMPS IN THE ROAD	QUESTIONS FOR A SWIFT RECOVERY
<p>For most businesses, once optional investments made in digital technologies have proven essential. Cloud-based and other digital technologies have ensured business continuity through very challenging trading conditions. New technologies have helped to streamline processes, enable online payments, manage big data, and invent new customer offerings. In fact, the pandemic itself has provided the ‘launchpad’ for a number of new tech-enabled high-growth businesses across the globe.</p>	<p>The virus has been a catalyst for many to digitise, however, some are questioning the effectiveness and impact of new technologies, particularly where there has been a scattergun approach to investment. Digital capabilities ranked top of the “weaknesses requiring improvement” for the leaders we surveyed. A move, literally overnight, to remote working placed intellectual property and customer data in locations never before conceived. An accelerated migration to new systems and cloud technologies could expose some businesses to potential data breaches, fraud, and hacks. Curiously, concerns regarding the risks posed by cybersecurity have reduced just as the vulnerability to attack has greatly increased.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can you ensure your technology funding is an investment and not an expense? • What criteria are you using to select the tools you invest in, to ensure you’re not simply spending money to be ‘state of the art’ without value enhancement? • Have your team spent time to correctly assess the dangers (fraud and cyber risks) that are exposed in rapid systems migration to new technologies with operational savings? • Are you mitigating the new threats associated with remote work, the rising volume of online transactions, and sensitive data exchanges?

3 HARNESSING 'THE HUMAN TOUCH' AT DISTANCE

HIGH EXPECTATIONS

The pandemic has proved that digital platforms have saved many businesses. Technology has also made it possible for businesses to venture further to access or hire new talent. However remote working has also introduced new and different challenges. 84% of leaders agreed that it's been difficult to foster the 'human touch' in their ranks. However, most businesses have found creative ways to maintain collaborative, team-working, and trusted relationships across MTeams, GSuite Zoom, Skype, and other technologies.

BUMPS IN THE ROAD

Business communication platforms have proved sufficient for providing continuity, but more difficult when it comes to building new relationships to drive sales. Many sectors had to resort to working physically, particularly where decisions require the workforce to 'kick the tires'. Those who remain remote, face the challenges around mental health and well-being, as well as the constant pressure to 'do good on camera' and clock in sufficient 'screen time'. With each day, video conferencing fatigue makes it harder to maintain functional and productive customer and colleague relationships from afar.

QUESTIONS FOR A SWIFT RECOVERY

- Have you reviewed your office capacity to explore how use of space may change (for the better) going forward?
- How can you create the right time and place to ask questions and listen to concerns of your workforce regarding resumption of physical working?
- What's your plan to capture (and not lose) any productivity gains, new ways of working and cost savings prompted by working at a distance?
- Have you considered what additional training might be helpful for new talent coming onstream, some of whom have missed opportunities to observe how things work (physically) in your organisation?

4 ADVANCING THROUGH DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY

HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Over 90% of business leaders believe that how they respond to events that impact society reflects on their brand reputation and how customers think of them. There is also near-unanimous agreement on the importance of ensuring equal support and opportunities for all their people and on the importance of building diversity in the board and the general workforce. Leaders see great value in how diversity will improve their decision making, connect the business with the next generation of consumers, and surface new growth opportunities.

BUMPS IN THE ROAD

In terms of building a diverse workforce with equal opportunities for all, there is a risk that business leaders 'sign-up' and rapidly implement a compliance or box-ticking approach. Achieving true diversity takes time and patience. In part, it will depend on the individual situation (sector / geographical location) of each entity. The above will inform the speed and nature of the transition. Diversity and equality is important to get right, as nearly half of business leaders we spoke with consider access to talent as a risk to their business prospects and many are looking to strengthen their ability to attract and retain talent.

QUESTIONS FOR A SWIFT RECOVERY

- Are you prepared to share your data, policy, and progress on equality and diversity with customers, clients, or new partners who request to see it?
- How might you use a forward-thinking diversity policy to differentiate yourselves from competition in the talent marketplace?
- Have you established an internal group (or groups) to discuss the issues and build momentum from the inside out?
- Are you prepared to handle the challenges from employees and customers concerned that your diversity programme is 'not happening fast enough' or is 'happening too fast'?



5 BUILDING BACK BETTER

HIGH EXPECTATIONS	BUMPS IN THE ROAD	QUESTIONS FOR A SWIFT RECOVERY
<p>Business leaders are confident about their ability to respond to societal expectations and bullish regarding successfully steering their business in a new direction in response to the pandemic. On top of this hubris, an impressive 77% of global business leaders see the recovery phase (post-pandemic) as an opportunity to make the most of new opportunities to profit from the low-carbon economy in the future. This wishful thinking for a greener future relies on taking concrete actions at the core of how the business operates and supportive policies from individual governments, particularly around energy and transport.</p>	<p>Business leaders are ambitious about rebuilding for the better, however actions planned over the next 12 months hint at other priorities. Instead of launching new products and services or reshaping their portfolios, there is much emphasis on improving operational efficiency and reducing cost bases. Perhaps, leaders are waiting for better economic conditions to reshape portfolios? With less than a third of business leaders indicated they were actually concerned about the environmental / climate change risks, there is a danger of falling into the trap of green-washing. Also, it could be very difficult to achieve real change in countries where governments are yet to sign up to climate targets.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As company market values for green energy and transport businesses have doubled during the pandemic, what are you doing to seek out suitable green growth opportunities for your business? • How can you turn cost reduction into a means to enable agility? • Are you prepared for the likely impacts of the next crisis around Climate Change? • Are you holding onto low performing assets hoping for them to recover value when perhaps they never will? • Where are you in your plans to reshape your portfolios more actively (M&A and divestments) and have you identified the right targets to expand when the time is right?

MOMENTUM FOR THE NEXT CYCLE OF GROWTH

Prolonged damage limitation does not lead a business out of a crisis. In fact, the very forces behind economic cycles will provide the momentum for the next cycle of growth. Last year we asked business leaders if they were ready for the execution challenge of the next decade. Already, structural changes in 2020 have accelerated the end of some sectors and the beginning of others. Early adopters are seeking out new differentiated growth opportunities in countries, segments and in sectors across the globe.

Some have moved quickly to make the most of these opportunities which present themselves at points of disruption and change. Future winners will find that the pandemic has provided a helpful catalyst to adapt to new business models, embed digital and ensure a strong pipeline of diverse talent and ideas required to rebuild their businesses to be leaner, greener and keener.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

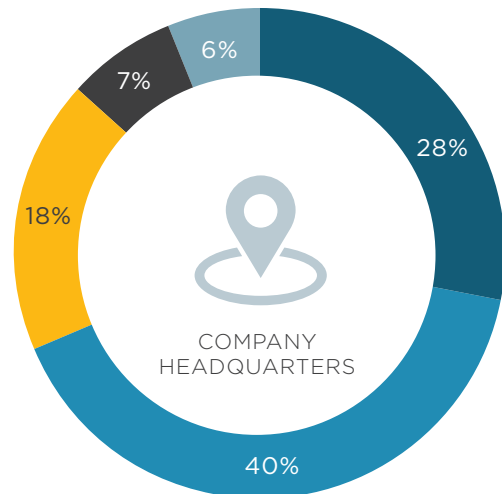
BETWEEN SEPTEMBER AND NOVEMBER 2020, HLB HAS COLLECTED 583 SURVEY RESPONSES FROM BUSINESS LEADERS ACROSS 55 COUNTRIES AND A RANGE OF INDUSTRY BACKGROUNDS.

Responses were collected via an online survey tool or telephone interview. The research sample was selected and controlled via HLB firms with their CRM data. In addition to the quantitative data, six in-depth CEO interviews were conducted via video calls.

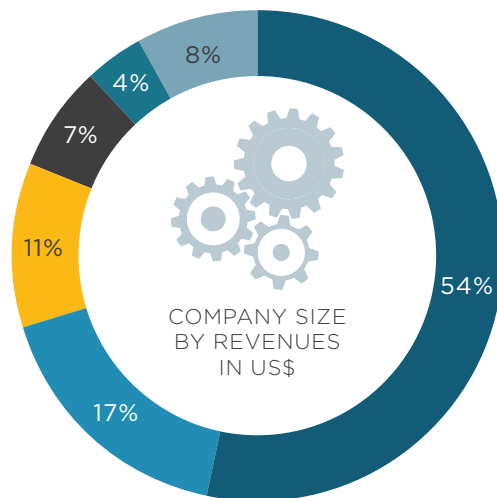
Note that not all figures in this report sum up to 100% as a result of rounding percentages, excluding neutral responses or when respondents could choose more than one answer. The base for all figures is 583 (all respondents) unless otherwise indicated.

More data and information about this survey is available upon request. Please contact:

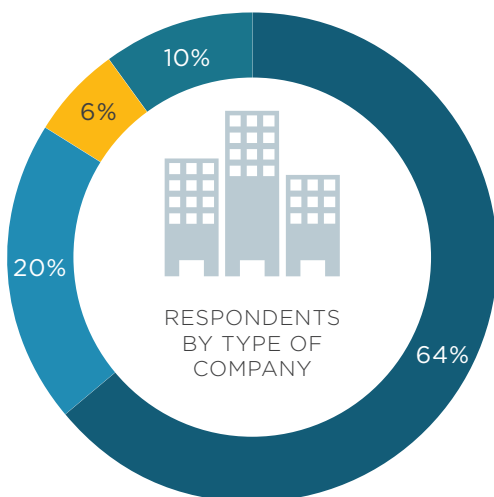
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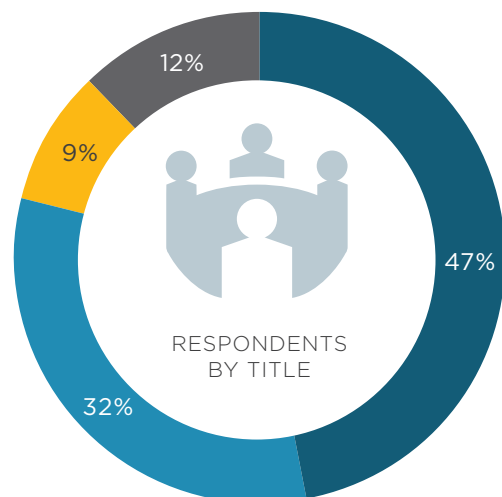
■ Asia Pacific ■ Europe ■ North America
 ■ Latin America ■ Africa & Middle East



■ < \$25M ■ 25M - 50M ■ \$50M - 100M
 ■ \$100M - 250M ■ \$250M - \$500M ■ \$250M - \$500M



■ Private ■ Family-owned ■ Not for profit ■ Publicly listed



■ CEO ■ CFO ■ COO ■ Other C-suite titles

BUSINESS LEADERS WE INTERVIEWED



GAIL BECKER
Founder and CEO
CAULIPOWER



LEVON ANTONIAN
Group Managing Director
and Co-Founder **Halian**



MARCO MORMONE
Co-Founder and
Partner **Arca Blanca**



MATT DODDS
Chief Executive Officer
CaseWare International Inc.



PINKY LILANI, CBE, DL
Founder and Chairman
Women of the Future
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SIMON FROST
Group Chief Financial
Officer, **Proactive Group**
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