

Leading in these uncertain times

Sharing by IBM Greater China Team (Mr Liming Chen, Chairman, IBM Greater China; Dr. Tong Chen, Chief Medical Officer, IBM Greater China; and Mr Jim Lin, Brand, Communications & Citizenship Lead, IBM Greater China) and discussion with Technology Business Leaders in India.

Participants

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Demands on leadership are higher than ever before, in this unprecedented situation. In addition to *continuing to provide leadership* to their people, the key ask from every leader today is to *ensure people safety and business continuity*. Leaders are being looked upon for *confidence* during this crisis and *need to take the front seat with their people* today. It is, therefore, the leaders imperative to *make sure their people and their families are safe and protected, equipped with tools so their safety is taken care of, and set their minds at peace*.

Some thoughts around what leaders can do to support their organisations and their people through this

- The situation is quite grave and it is unprecedented. As a leader, it is important to prepare for the worst case scenario in a situation like this. This also means that one needs to amplify the impact of COVID – 19 and to a certain degree over reaction is possibly the right reaction.
- Act immediately and not wait to mobilise all your Crisis Management Teams (CMT) for the execution of your recovery strategy. It is very important that the CMT be extended to include all business units and site leaders.
- The CMT response is at three levels: Corporate, Country and Site, and all three need to be integrated with each other. Each city and site has its own situation and its own regulatory environment so there needs to be localisation of the response. Country level CMT provides the framework for the response, and each of the sites will need to come up with their own response. Each site and business unit also need to come up with their own site pandemic plan and business continuity plan as every site and business unit has its own uniqueness.
- Create a small team that makes the emergent and critical decisions, else it is difficult to decide on matters with urgency with larger teams. This team needs to include representations from the medical team, HR, site management, security, communication, government and legal.
- Corporate Social Responsibility takes on a new meaning in times like this. It is also critical to remember that we are living in a society and are in this together. For example, IBM China has made donations to the Red Cross in China and at the Corporate level IBM has been marshalling resources and bringing together the right communities of experts to work together, and manage through the COVID-19 outbreak with what we do best — applying data, knowledge, computing power and insights to combat the pandemic.
- Make sure you have a medical team on hand that can educate and provide trainings, not just to the senior leaders but across all business and functional units, managers and employees alike in the organization.
- There is a lot of panic and anxiety in teams at this time. Communication and site management play a critical role to set their minds at peace.

- Send out a communication to all your employees so they know they have the support from the Group. The communication should have tailor made content for the target audience that covers your current and former employees, client base and the general public that you serve, and the investor community for listed entities. A good communication strategy should reflect
 1. Care for your employees and clients;
 2. Factual data - communicate with facts, and do not speculate or predict as we don't know how the situation will evolve;
 3. Transparency, about how you are handling it;
 4. Hope, to arrest the panic.
- Monitor the situation closely at 4 levels (health information, government policies, HR policies and local situation) and integrate all these into an easy-to-follow guideline.
- Ensure compliance with local regulatory requirements and guidelines
- Ensure disinfection of sites, entry control, availability of PPE (personal protection equipment) in an agile manner. Activate early, even in areas where there are no cases.
- Ensure social distancing and set up appropriate infrastructure for WFH, as physical isolation is very critical during this time.
- WFH doesn't come naturally to most of us so employee engagement is critical to keep employee morale high. Companies are being creative about employee engagement in the WFH scenario. This will be important as the world will be a different place when employees return to office.
- Make employee health a priority, respond as a family and make them know you care.

From a P&L and client perspective, one has to be prepared for the long term. The business outlook varies from industry to industry. While the pharmaceutical industry is playing a big role in supporting the world through this crisis, the travel industry, SMEs and start-ups are struggling through this situation. Every fund is focusing on how to save companies. As a result, fund raising will be very slow. What leaders need to do through this period, is be creative about how to engage with the client base, and help them adapt to the new environment. The world is a different place today and must come together as one. For example, one needs to convince and educate clients in the government on how to use modern technology for communication – it doesn't come naturally to them, preferring to conduct in-person meetings. Global MNCs and VCs can play a big role in supporting SMEs and start-ups through this phase by adapting their cash flow models to

respond to the situation and allow for longer payment terms. They can also help mentor founders to help them cope with the business uncertainties. Another example is the VC community putting some money together to contribute to several different causes, and give back to society. This situation also presents an opportunity for technology industry to partner with other industries to figure out how to we can get a multiplier effect on issues like healthcare capacity to help the situation.

Covid-19 Micro-Website

We have launched a micro website where this and other informative pieces are posted. This site will be regularly updated: [click here](#) for further details.

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Egon Zehnder is the world's preeminent leadership consulting firm, sharing one goal: to help people and organizations transform. We know what great leaders can do and are passionate about delivering the best solutions for our clients.

Our more than 500 Consultants in 68 offices and 40 countries form one powerful, collaborative team. Our services include: leadership development, individual, team and organizational effectiveness, CEO search and succession, executive search and assessment, Board advisory, and cultural transformation.

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