

ALUMNI PERSPECTIVES

Winners and losers...

the advent of the coronavirus

The advent of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, has sent shockwaves across the global social and economic system. Whereas 18 months ago we were talking about the fourth industrial revolution as the next big thing that would change the manner in which business is done globally, our business continuity plans never saw this pandemic coming.

As with other crises that the world has faced, we must have the courage to reinvent ourselves and keep moving forward. Some businesses will close down forever, and new ones will emerge. It becomes the duty of every business leader to think of ways to protect their businesses and much-needed jobs. Therefore, my advice is that we seriously look at the macro issues affecting our businesses and plan how we will respond. Will your customers still be needing your service? Will they still put your service amongst their 'top priority' expenditure line items? How do you bolster your competitive position in the marketplace post COVID-19?

A few entrepreneurs have sprung up as manufacturers and distributors of sanitisers, face masks and other PPE. We must now imagine the many other changes that will make doing business different from what used to be. In these changes lie opportunities for us to reposition or start up new



lines of business. For instance, the centralisation of global manufacturing in China will be reviewed particularly in areas like medical supplies, food security and other essential goods. We must therefore say, "What opportunities will this present for our types of business?"

My good professor at Harvard Business School, Professor Ranjay Gulati, asked us a simple question: "When is the best time for businesses to get ahead? During uptimes or downtimes?" After much debate, Professor Gulati said that it was during downtimes that innovators and new business ideas got a better platform to take off than during uptimes. He was basically saying that we should never let a good crisis go to waste; it presents learning and growth opportunities as well. As technical students, trained at MUT in problem-solving, this is the time we should think deeply about how we will get tailwinds from the changes that this pandemic will bring in our economy. In conclusion, we need to take advantage of the business support platforms that have been created by both Government and the private sector. Let us resist the temptation to sit back and weep in our corners under lockdown. Yes, it is a frustrating period, but let's craft well thought-out proposals to preserve our businesses beyond this period.

By Mlamuli Buthelezi, MUT Alumnus, Class of '86



Resilient leadership in the time of COVID-19

I'm often asked what we mean by resilient leadership in the context of the current health crisis. I think everyone will agree that returning to a world that existed before COVID-19 would mark failure. We all should expect more. We have a chance to use what we've learned during this pandemic to usher in a new and better normal. The key to doing so would be exercising resilient leadership; having the ability to energise our teams by looking outward; imagining a successful future and embracing trust to get us there.

The biggest challenge organisations will likely face next is the tension between getting back to work and embracing a new reality. How leaders and organisations handle the recovery may define their brands for years to come and ultimately define whether they are truly operating as a social enterprise. Rebuilding working structures and relationships and factoring in priorities like mental health and well-being in a post-COVID-19 world will require a new kind of leadership – one that is authentically more human, is rooted in connections, and focuses on uplifting, inspiring, and enabling workers to deliver their best.

By Sthembiso Phakathi, MUT Alumnus, Class of '90