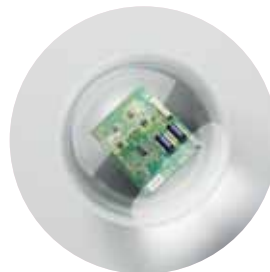

Joining the Conversations

A quiet revolution is taking place in the way that corporates engage with the world. Companies are beginning to see that communications is not about bombarding people with messages but about going out and engaging in a conversation

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Imagine the traditional corporate as a citadel: a huge fortress, built for defense and designed to keep the world out. From inside, issues that concern the world are seen as threats. Occasionally an issue gets in, over the ramparts, and the response is to minimize it and manage it down.

But the world has changed. We live in the Age of Conversation, and a new model is emerging. Gradually, corporates are shifting their outlook: they're opening up the citadels and stepping out into the world. They're re-framing what they do in terms of their relevance to wider society, and the role they can play in helping to tackle some of society's challenges.

This is happening at a time when the world is demanding more and more of business: consumers are more empowered, communities around the world are finding their voice, and employees expect to find more meaning in their employment. Governments are expecting business to play a more active role. Campaigning groups have become more effective. Once, companies' biggest priority and purpose was to create and maintain shareholder value. Now, there are increasing demands to show how they are in the business of creating value more broadly. Society is shining a light on business, and asking a clear question: are you adding value to the world, or destroying it?

Into the breach

We believe that the biggest contribution a business can make to society is by being a business. It's not by giving grants or patronizing the arts that businesses can really make an impact. It's by doing what business does best: delivering products and services, creating jobs and livelihoods, finding enterprising new solutions to old problems.

The challenges we face today are unprecedented in scale and complexity. Neither governments nor NGOs can tackle them alone. Business must step into the breach. As we have seen in the previous pages, one of today's big health issues is the spread of diabetes. Which government knows more about this disease than Novo Nordisk, the world's leading producer of diabetes drugs? Another major global issue is food security and water purity. Few NGOs have the scale and resources to address this in the way that Unilever can, as one of the world's leading food companies.

By the very nature of what they do, the activities of every major corporate inevitably makes them relevant to one or more of the world's big conversations. The most forward-

looking of today's business leaders get that. They are proactive in joining the conversations – because they know that the knowledge and expertise embedded within their business puts them in a position to make a contribution.

The 11 Conversations isn't a how-to model, or a grand strategic framework – it's simply a new way of thinking about how companies can engage with the world. In the preceding pages, we've met some of the leaders and thinkers who are brokering a new relationship between business and society. We can see that a radical shift is under way in how the more progressive corporates see their place in society. Whether it's Population or Security, Health or Human Rights, these companies aren't hiding from the big issues: they're rolling up their sleeves and getting involved.

Who is doing what?

Different companies are doing this in different ways. For some, like ARM, it's about *what they do*: they are the world's leading designer of energy-efficient smartphone chips, and so it's not surprising that Warren East, CEO, is deeply involved in the conversation about Energy & Climate Change.

Others focus on *how they do it*: Anglo American, one of the world's largest mining companies, understands that a small group of local people can stop a big project in its tracks, and so Cynthia Carroll, CEO, is passionate about the Communities conversation.

Some companies are contributing to the big conversations through *smart corporate philanthropy*: Cisco Networking Academy, for example, is promoting ICT skills around the world – and so Amy Christen, Cisco's Head of Corporate Affairs, talks about Education & Skills.

Let's talk

Unsurprisingly, not all corporates are moving in this direction at the same speed. It is easy to underestimate how big a change it is in the entrenched habits of traditional corporate behavior. The heat in the public debate around the banking sector, for example, illustrates how, for many people, the gleaming towers of Wall Street and Canary Wharf represent the citadels of today. Some companies struggle to engage successfully, others thrive on the opportunity. Those who want to join the wider conversation recognize that it is less about controlling the story and more about making a contribution to the debate. It is a significant shift in attitude: from corporate-centric to socially relevant. 🌐



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