

Businesses are trying to survive through an unprecedented economic shock and wondering what the world will look like after. All are looking to the governments for leadership, for certainty and for the way forward.

Irreconcilable Choices

The balance between protecting healthcare systems so that they can cope with the pandemic and minimise deaths from it, and protecting the economy to minimise the damage to lives and livelihoods, is obviously acutely difficult.

Lurking behind this delicate balance is the knowledge that decisions and actions taken in the heat of the crisis will be subject to scrutiny after it.

Did they react fast enough? Were the early steps sound or did they exacerbate the crisis? How many people died because of a lack of medical care, or lack of containment measures, at the critical time for them? Were the huge amounts of money thrown at the economy enough, or have we overburdened future generations with debt? Was enough done to ensure that financial aid only went to those who strictly needed it?

The one certainty for those facing these incredibly difficult and finely balanced decisions is that those who scrutinise them later will have the benefit of knowing what happened next.

How Can Businesses Best Deal With the Government Through the Crisis?

Businesses small and large have a crucial role in helping their country through the crisis. Some provide crucial supplies, by boosting or adapting their production. Some can help public health measures by getting everyone who can to work from home, and helping those who must be in the workplace to follow social distancing guidelines as far as possible.

All will have a major role in getting the economy going again when the pandemic is under control.

However, how can you factor the government into your own decision-taking and dialogue?

- **Understand what the government is trying to achieve** – (measures rushed through are rarely perfect at first go, and can be hard to work through as a result) and test your decisions against that – expect announced measures to be adjusted quickly as the government sees how they work.
- **If you need something clarified or corrected** – think about using industry associations to spread the contact load on the government.
- **Document your decisions carefully** – ready for them to be audited at some point in the future – keep copies of relevant government regulations and guidance as they were on the day you took your decision – think about how you could use legal privilege to protect in case of future challenge.
- **Think about reputation and public reaction** – is the decision consistent with “we are all in it together”? Coming out of the crisis, governments will respond to how the public perceives business to have played its part.

Political leaders and officials are under huge stress too – a little humanity will help them as well.

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