

## Putting people above profits – Intermediate Worksheet

### 1 Warmer

- a. Look at the pictures. In pairs, discuss which occupations these people might have. What kinds of challenges do you think they face if they are working while we fight the virus? How could their employers help them to face these challenges and succeed?



### 2 Key words and expressions

- a. Write the words from the box next to the definitions below. The section numbers are there to help you find the words in the article.

appreciation      boosted      collective      genuine      highlight  
insight      investors      solely      strict      sufficiently

- when someone has definite rules that they expect people to obey completely  
(5) \_\_\_\_\_
- involving all the members of a group (6) \_\_\_\_\_
- helped to increase, improve, or become more successful (6) \_\_\_\_\_
- real, rather than pretend or false (7) \_\_\_\_\_
- the feeling you have when you are grateful to someone (7) \_\_\_\_\_
- to describe something in a way that makes people notice it and think about it  
(10) \_\_\_\_\_
- a chance to understand something or learn more about it (12) \_\_\_\_\_
- involving nothing except the person or thing mentioned (13) \_\_\_\_\_
- people or organisations that invest money (15) \_\_\_\_\_
- to the degree that is needed for a particular purpose (15) \_\_\_\_\_

## How should we assess value?

NOW IS A GOOD MOMENT TO RETHINK BUSINESS PRINCIPLES AND PUT HUMANS BEFORE PROFITS

BY RAVI MATTU

- 1 Mark Carney, the former central banker, asks why we esteem financial value over human values in this year's BBC Reith Lectures.
- 2 One theme is our slow response to climate change. Mr Carney says we favour short-term thinking over long-term strategy partly because we do not properly recognise the value of preserving the planet. We fail to assess the Amazon rainforest with the same rigour that we approach Amazon the company because we place more focus on the present than the future.
- 3 Many companies, driven by a singular focus on maximising efficiency and profits, fall into this trap but the pandemic has presented a moment for leaders to rethink first principles. Mr Carney's argument is a useful lens that managers can use to better understand value in their organisations.
- 4 Two very different stories from the coronavirus crisis illustrate how.
- 5 The first is from China, where much of the country was under lockdown after the virus was discovered. For millions of Chinese stuck at home, food delivery drivers became heroes for maintaining supplies through quarantine. When couriers complained about the stress of being penalised for missing strict time limits imposed by services such as Meituan and Ele.me, a consumer backlash forced the companies to tweak their algorithms and extend the deadlines.
- 6 The second example is from the UK, where Britons took to the streets and applauded healthcare workers during the first stages of the pandemic. The collective experience boosted the nation's spirits and felt like recognition for a buckling NHS.
- 7 Both of these stories display a genuine appreciation but did they lead to meaningful change for the lauded?
- 8 Chinese delivery drivers are still in demand but remain under intense pressure, as is typical for gig economy workers who are often poorly paid and live precarious lives governed by an algorithm. "The rewards are light but the punishments are always heavy," one Chinese courier told NPR last month. Some drivers have gone on strike or protested against working conditions.
- 9 In the UK, some healthcare workers suggested the applause was nice but did nothing to deal with the underlying pressures they face. Stop clapping, they said, start managing the NHS and staff better, and take the pandemic seriously. Hospitalisations in England last week surpassed their peak in April, during the first wave of the pandemic.
- 10 These stories highlight how understanding value matters. There has been lots of public appreciation for work done under extreme circumstances but not enough done to address fundamental problems that have been amplified by the crisis.
- 11 Some managers, however, have gone deeper.
- 12 One executive at a mid-sized global company said that not being able to travel or work in the office forced her to put more trust in lieutenants. But it also highlighted who she was less able to trust or rely upon, revealing which staff added the most value to the organisation. Such insight has been critical as she thinks about how to retool the business beyond the pandemic.
- 13 Roger Martin, the management thinker, believes organisations need to become more human. For too long, he says, companies have been driven solely by profits and efficiency, and have turned their staff into automatons by stripping them of decision-making authority.
- 14 He points to the example of Costco, the retailer, which pays its staff higher wages than its peers and gives them more autonomy. "They have a business system set up to give these people important jobs and decision making. If you do that, it's no problem to let them make more. But you can't if you turn them into a drone."

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- 15 Rita Gunther McGrath, a professor at Columbia Business School, argues for more regulatory pressure, such as forcing boards to include worker representatives as in Germany. But she adds that investors need to challenge CEOs more effectively. “Unlike the postwar situation, in which the job of company leaders was seen to create good jobs and a thriving middle class, they have not been questioned sufficiently, in my view, of the impact of their decisions on regular people,” she says.
- 16 This argument reflects a view advocated by Mr Carney, who calls for a company’s approach to global warming to be as much a determinant of its value as credit worthiness. The climate crisis is unprecedented, however, so the past is not a good predictor of the future and different solutions are needed.
- 17 The same could be said of Covid. The crisis offers a chance to radically reassess value. Asking the right questions is a start.

**FT**

Ravi Mattu, 4 January 2021

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## 3 Understanding the article

- a. In pairs, read the statements below and identify which are supported by information from the text. Tick the supported statements.
1. Businesses value profits more than their workers because humans are more focused on the present than the future.
  2. Chinese delivery drivers have been forced to work to strict time limits and have been punished when they have failed.
  3. Chinese companies have been protesting against unfair working hours imposed on them by the government due to the virus.
  4. People in Britain are angry with health workers because they haven't been receiving good care in hospital.
  5. People working in hospitals feel that they are not being given much support to fight the virus and that the public could be helping more to prevent its spread.
  6. An executive at a global company stated that working from home has caused the performance of her employees to drop greatly.
  7. Most businesses are planning to close once the virus is brought under control and many premises will be left empty.
  8. Staff should be given more freedom to make decisions at work instead of being told what to do all the time.
  9. Costco pays its staff high wages and this has led to a high number of applications for even the most junior of roles.
  10. We can use the challenges we have faced through fighting this virus to encourage us to put more value on people than profits.

## 4 Business Language – Collocations

- a. Complete the collocations below with words from the box.

appreciation

demand

drivers

1. delivery \_\_\_\_\_
2. genuine \_\_\_\_\_
3. in \_\_\_\_\_

b. Complete the sentences with the collocations from activity a.

1. Science graduates are \_\_\_\_\_, and successful candidates can receive high salaries in roles across a range of industries, including engineering and medicine.
2. She had a \_\_\_\_\_ of modern art and frequently attended exhibitions at the gallery in the city centre.
3. They had recruited hundreds of new \_\_\_\_\_ to help them get shopping, medicine and cleaning products to senior citizens unable to leave their homes.

## 5 Business Language – Vocabulary for industries

a. Put the words and expressions from the wordpool in the right column in the table below.

banking                      climate                      credit                      drivers  
 maintaining supplies                      preserving the planet

Financial	Environmental	Delivery
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

## 6 Discussion questions

a. Read and discuss the questions with your group.

- Do you think it is better to give employees freedom to make their own decisions or a lot of guidance and support? Why?
- The article says that businesses should put people before profits, but do you think there is ever a time when profits should come first?
- Delivery drivers and medical workers are just two examples of groups that have been badly impacted by the virus. Can you think of any others? How have they been affected?

Intermediate

## 7 Wider business theme – Negotiating independence

- a. In pairs, take turns and do the role play. Choose role **A** or **B** and read the role description.

**A:** You are the manager of a large restaurant and one of your employees, B, recently started working for you as a chef in the busy kitchen. You feel that because B is new to the job, they should be managed carefully and should follow your recipes exactly. However, you know that B is keen to impress you and to do well in their role, so you are open to listening to their suggestions when they approach you.

**B:** You are a new chef in a large restaurant and you have been working in the industry for five years. Your manager appears to be very strict and wants you to follow recipes exactly, but you want to experiment and bring your own flavour to the job. You need to try to convince your manager that you can be trusted to follow your instincts and create new recipes. But remember to be polite, persuasive and professional!