

# **Sustainability during Covid-19: the primary role of businesses in solving timeless and novel wicked problems**

## **Abstract**

After the outburst of the Covid-19 crisis in 2020, the global society found itself tackling a wicked problem of an unprecedented size and might. It gave rise to a whole new set of societal challenges, characterized by their changing dynamics and multiple interconnected issues, including different prioritizations by each stakeholder group, and requiring a number of varied solutions. Within this emerging crisis, the world was already dealing with another long-unsolved category of grand problems, namely those concerning a sustainable development. The complexity of this current scenario requires organizations to intervene on a larger scale, and companies appear to be the actors with the utmost expertise and capability to engage in significant dialogues with the public sector, form meaningful partnerships across industries, spread awareness globally and foster innovations, standing out in their primary role as solvers of wicked problems. This paper aims at understanding how the efforts towards addressing the older wicked problem of sustainability are affected by the novel one concerning the Covid-19 recovery in the context of firms. To achieve this, an initial analysis is carried out to explore the connecting points of impact between the two, revealing that the social (leadership and culture), eco-innovation (through collaborative efforts and partnerships), and digital (strictly connected to business accountability) spheres have the highest potential for leverage. A description of characteristics and actionable variables are then provided for each of the aforementioned elements, demonstrating the potential retained by businesses for feeding those solutions back into the macro-societal level.