

# Engage with Purpose

How corporate-charity partnerships can  
help companies engage colleagues.

*Remarkable*  
**Partnerships**

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By Denise Cranston and Peter Chiswick

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# Executive summary

This report is the result of detailed qualitative interviews with nine business leaders.

It argues that companies can increase employee engagement by building purpose-driven partnerships with charities.

From these interviewees we have identified the following challenges and recommendations:

## Challenges

1. The battle for talent.
2. Hybrid working.
3. Partnerships not delivering value.
4. The Covid-19 pandemic.
5. Engaging employees.
6. Partnerships struggle to be virtual

## Recommendations

1. Have a clearly defined business purpose.
2. Take a strategic approach to partnerships.
3. Demonstrate purpose through charity partnerships.
4. Find charity partners that share your purpose.
5. Engage colleagues with purpose driven charity partnerships.
6. Take leadership on environmental and social issues.
7. Embrace the virtual space.
8. Partner with other companies to make a bigger impact.

Ultimately the report concludes that corporate-charity partnerships can significantly increase employee engagement, but only if companies take a more strategic and purpose-driven approach.

# Introduction

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“We live in uncertain times and our all may yet be taken from us.”

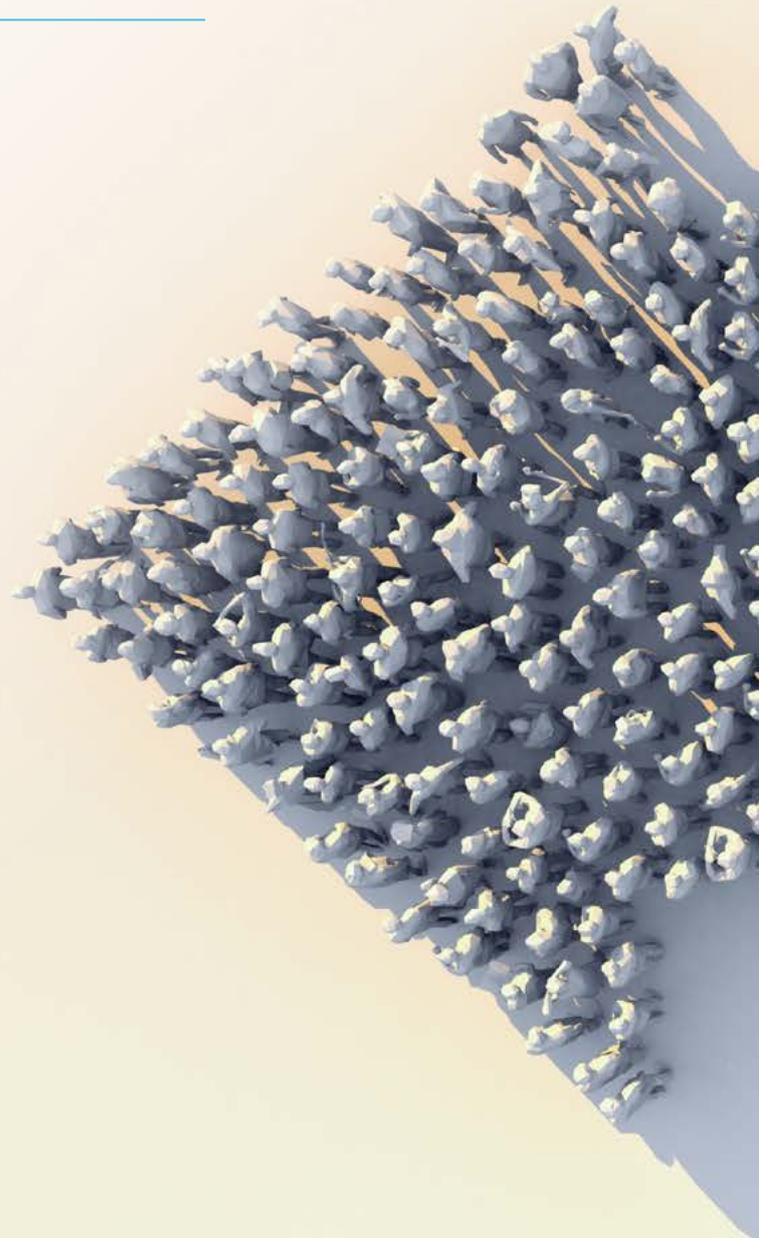
These words were written 84 years ago, by William Somerset Maugham, but they are an accurate description of the volatile world in which we live in today. The pandemic, climate change and discrimination are at the top of a long list of global problems.

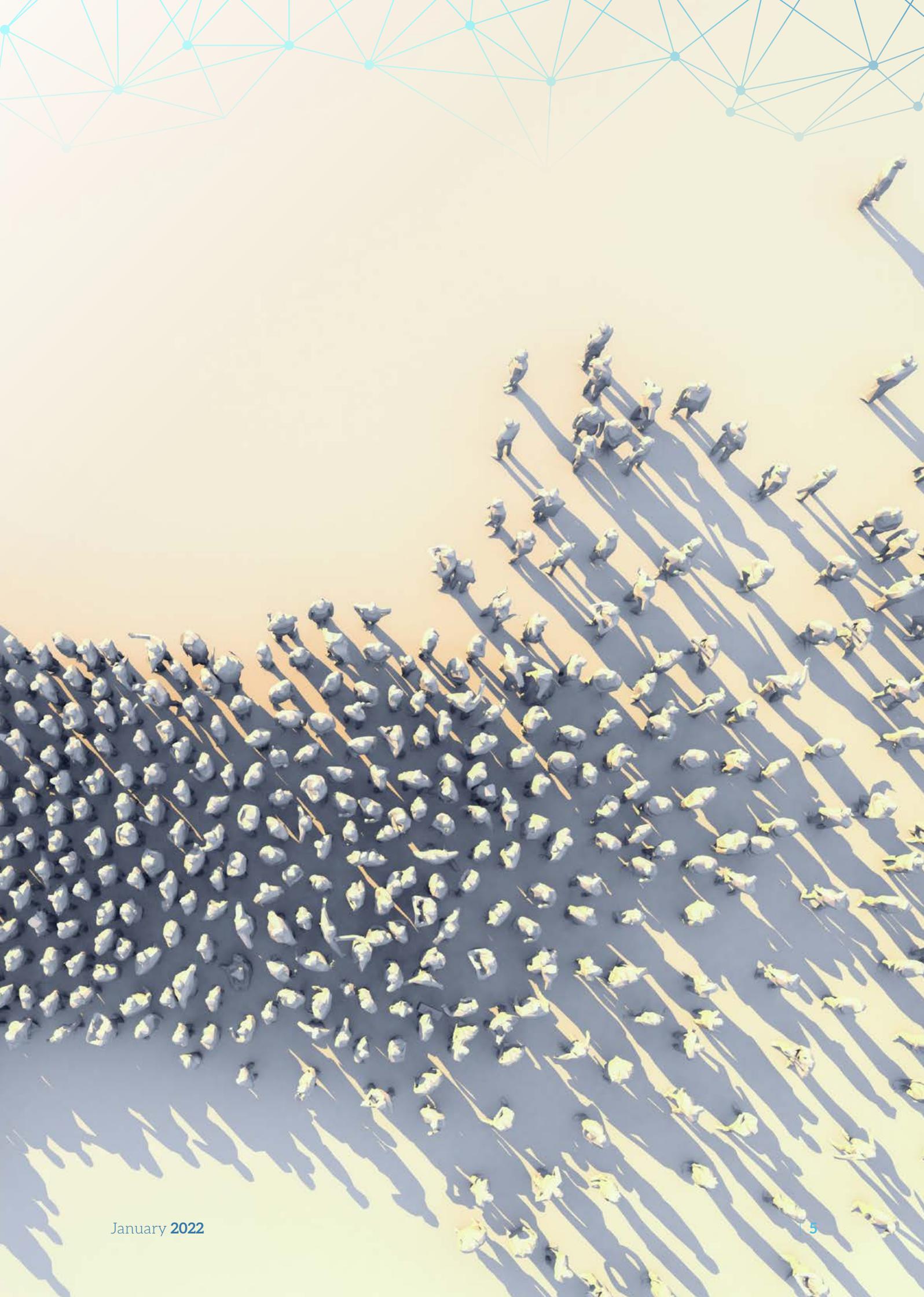
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This is a challenging context for companies. Described as ‘The Great Resignation’, a recent survey revealed that almost one in four UK workers are planning to change their jobs. (Randstad UK, 2021). Increasing employee engagement is the top priority for companies, or they risk losing their best talent. Employee engagement increases performance and loyalty, whilst reducing the risk of burnout.

This report explores the space where these global problems and workplace challenges meet, in the form of corporate-charity partnerships. We wanted to discover whether charity partnerships can help companies increase employee engagement. After all, helping employees connect what they do, to what they care about, is one of the most important ways that companies can increase employee engagement (Harvard Business Review, 2021).

We conducted in-depth interviews with nine business leaders. We combined those findings with our knowledge, to share the following challenges and recommendations on how corporate-charity partnerships can increase employee engagement.





# Challenges

## 3.1 The battle for talent

Our research shows that one of the greatest challenges for companies right now is the recruitment and retention of employees. This is demonstrated by the next graph which shares the results of a survey with hundreds of CEOs across the globe.

The battle for talent has never been so competitive. The pandemic has added a challenge, because the future of work and employee wants and needs have changed. Responses from our company interviewees highlighted the need to respond to these challenges.

***Our challenge is bringing people into the business. A part of that attraction, that employee value proposition, is around what are we doing that goes beyond the day job. What impact are we making in the community? And we know that that's an important dimension in terms of attracting talent into our business.***

Company interviewee

***"We have three people from a responsible business perspective out of eight on our interview panel, because we know that they're going to be asking so many questions in this area. And thankfully, we have something to say about it. And obviously, I will say this, but I do think it differentiates us from other similar firms in the amount of quality and types of opportunities we have."***

Company interviewee

***"It's tough right now. Employees know they have options ... it's a challenge to try and keep them."***

Company interviewee

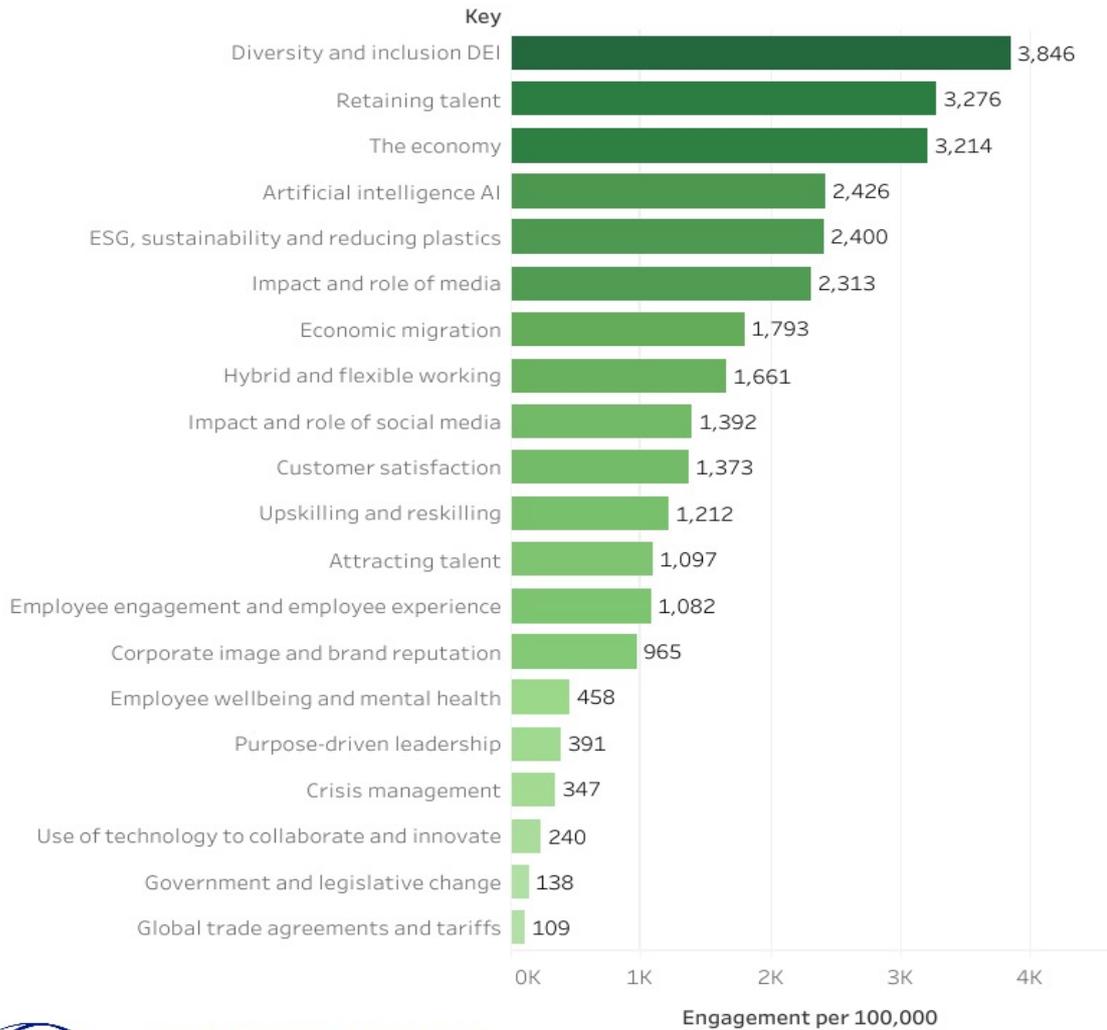
By 2025 it is expected that 75% of the global workforce will be millennials (forbes.com). Companies need to adapt their working practices, environments, and cultures to fit the demands of this generation. On the whole, millennials want to work for companies with a purpose that goes beyond just making money. They want to feel good about their work because it is making a positive impact on society.



## Worldcom Business Topics Engagement Monitor

The Relevance of Key Business Topic Areas to the Global CEOs and CMOs

Number of CEOs and CMOs Discussing Key Business Topic Areas  
(Global C-Suite Sample)



## 3.2 Hybrid working

Companies are facing a number of challenges with the new hybrid model of working. Employees are missing out on the spontaneous conversations they normally have in the office kitchen or by the watercooler. These moments provide valuable breaks, giving employees a place to gather, and engage in non-work-related conversations. This helps build trust between employees, increases collaboration, and leads to a stronger, more united company that produces better ideas and work. Companies are struggling to find a meaningful replacement for these interactions.

*“How do we make that virtual employee experience as good as an in person? If you have half the team on a zoom call and the other half actually in the room, how do you make everybody participate at the same level? It is the same for any external engagement, we have to be sure that they are just as accessible for people who are working from home 100% versus those who are in the office 100%. So, there is going to be a whole series of new challenges for employers as we think about engaging with the charity sector in a virtual, post COVID world.”*

Company interviewee

*“So I think we have a really big challenge at the moment around what hybrid working is going to look like for us going forward. From our perspective, we have quite a young team and people learn an awful lot from others, actually from observation. And people love the flexibility of being able to work from home, but it’s how we manage to bridge the gap between giving people that flexibility, which is really important, but also making sure that they are suitably skilled to do the jobs that they need to do.”*

Company interviewee

*“The world of the office has changed and changed forever, so we’re never going to get back to five days a week. We were already pretty flexible, but whenever we come back, we’re going to be uber flexible in terms of our approach to work. I expect that’s the way it’s going to settle is that people will come in two, maybe three days a week tops. And there may be some people who just don’t come into the office at all, which means you will have to be thinking about completely different ways of interacting.”*

Company interviewee

*“It’s all about people feeling connected to the business, to the brand. Social and volunteering opportunities just aren’t there for our employees and then that kind of breaks down some of the affiliation that people have with the brand. And I think that is what’s driving some of it, you know, you don’t feel as connected.”*

Company interviewee

Companies are finding it difficult to have remote-working policies and practices that strike the right balance between being fully remote and having a healthy level of in-person office interactions. They have also realized that time in the office is particularly valuable for younger employees because it provides them with much needed connections. In particular, they are missing out on planned and spontaneous mentoring opportunities that a Zoom call struggles to match.

In a hybrid model, business leaders worry that the culture becomes diluted, and employees become disillusioned and then leave.



### 3.3 The Covid-19 pandemic

Every company interviewed said that the pandemic has not changed the ‘why’ of partnering with charities, but it has significantly changed the ‘how.’ The pandemic has made it impossible to hold in-person team volunteering activities, and the number of traditional employee volunteering opportunities have been reduced.

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*“How we engage has definitely been impacted, our desire to be engaged, definitely not.”*

Company interviewee

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*“Covid-19 did change things significantly. And it would have been so easy to step back but what it did was make us focus on how can we maybe do things differently and still make our people feel like they are giving back.”*

Company interviewee

When lockdown began, companies were reluctant to put additional pressure on employees. For some, it meant that they were not able to meet with new partners, and that created a real disconnect, resulting in little being achieved by either partner.

Philanthropic relationships suffered most during the pandemic. But more strategic partnerships proved to be more flexible. In these cases, many companies provided money, equipment, and expertise, and often went above and beyond for charity partners when they needed it most.

### 3.4 Engaging employees

The importance of employee engagement cannot be understated. It is the greatest priority for most companies. Disengaged employees are less productive, the quality of their work suffers and they sometimes spread negative messages about the company.

When we consider that 85% of employees in the UK and western Europe are not engaged at work and 18% are actively disengaged (Gallup 2021), we begin to understand the scale of this challenge.

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*“That’s what’s it about, it’s how do we get our employees and colleagues across the business involved in the partnership? That’s absolutely what we’d be looking for.”*

Company interviewee

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*“Often in the day job, it’s hard sometimes to link what you do to purpose, and I think increasingly, we’re dealing with a generation of people for whom purpose is really important and they want to do things that are purposeful, and they want to feel that it links to what their own sense of purpose is.”*

Company interviewee

Companies found that when everybody was working from home, employee engagement levels were high. This was because they were making considerable effort to support people working from home.

Companies are always looking for ways to increase the percentage of their employees involved in their charity partnerships. Many companies have a volunteering policy which gives employees a number of paid workdays that they can use to volunteer for a charity. But the uptake can be low. Companies told us that, on average, 20% of employees are actively engaged in their charity partnership activities.

### 3.5 Partnerships not delivering value

In a recent survey 63% of respondents said that they, **“want CEOs to take a stand on key societal issues, with income inequality, racial equity and climate change the top issues identified”** (JUST Capital, 2021). However, charity partnerships are not always delivering opportunities to make this happen. Every company involved in the research wants to make a difference and can see that charity partners can help them achieve this. However, some companies have partnerships with charities that are transactional and short term. This means they deliver minimal long-term value for the business.

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*“Every month we choose a charity that will be donated to through employees and gift-matched through the company. So, we don’t really have specific charities that we work with repeatedly, we tend to move almost through a series of charities in particular areas, which we think are close to our corporate hearts.”*

Company interviewee

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*“Our work with charities tends to be short term almost entirely, in fact, but the themes may be consistent.”*

Company interviewee

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*“I think one of the challenges often is we have a charity partner and it’s like, and so what do we actually do with them? Because if it is down to raising money and painting fences it’s not actually making an impact.”*

Company interviewee

For some of the companies, their work with a charity partner often has a singular fundraising focus such as an annual corporate donation or employee fundraising. Often they choose their charity partners via an employee vote, or because someone in the company has been impacted by a particular issue. There is a

noticeable lack of strategy when it comes to many charity partnerships, so they fail to deliver the employee involvement and social impact the company was hoping for.

### 3.6 Partnerships struggle to be virtual

The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the use of digital technologies in business. Corporate-charity partnerships have never been more important and urgent, but they also have the challenge of adjusting to operate in a virtual world.

*"We found it quite challenging this year. And we're not quite sure why that was. Because last year was the year, we thought was going to be the least successful. But actually, it was a bumper year. And I think that's because everybody was in that lockdown and let's do something together. Whereas I think this year we weren't fully in lockdown, but we weren't fully back into society either. And I think people were a bit Zoom fatigued, and therefore we did very poor on fundraising this year. So, you know, sometimes the impact is great and then sometimes it's disappointing and it's about looking to see why that is and re engaging."*

Company interviewee

*"I think the challenges are probably the same for many businesses, about communicating and engaging with people in a broadly remote world where you don't get the benefit of identifying things that you can do when you're just in front of them."*

Company interviewee

*"Because we're all working from home, we haven't been able to have a deep engagement of our charity partnership down through the company. We haven't really had an opportunity to expose that and get more people involved from an employee perspective."*

Company interviewee

*"We've done two charity involvements now, the first one, everybody got involved. The second one, I would say there was a dropout in terms of number of people"*

Company interviewee

In person events are one of the most popular ways of companies and charities partnering together. When the pandemic hit, many of these events were cancelled or postponed. Some companies delayed the start of their charity partnerships for a year. For many corporate-charity partnerships this has resulted in a reduction in employee involvement and fundraising.

# Recommendations to engage with purpose

## 4.1 Have a clearly defined business purpose

To overcome these challenges, we recommend that companies have a clearly articulated purpose. This should be a short and inspiring statement sharing why your company exists, beyond just making money. To identify your purpose, you want to ask yourself, **“what problem is the company aiming to solve?”**

Unlocking your company ‘why’ is incredibly powerful. It helps colleagues understand why their work matters. It helps customers dream bigger. Ultimately, it unites all of your stakeholders around a single vision. As Simon Sinek says, **“People don’t buy what you do. They buy why you do it.”**

To the right there are four examples of purpose statements from companies.

Even just looking at these statements, you can see how powerful they are.

Once you have completed this vital and transformational first step, our following recommendations will show how to seize the opportunities it presents.

To add vitality to life. We meet everyday needs for nutrition, hygiene and personal care with brands that help people feel good, look good and get more out of life.



Our vision is of a communications-rich world – a world in which everyone, irrespective of nationality, culture, class or education, can benefit from the power of communication skills and technology.



At Whole Earth, we believe in helping people to live healthier, more wholesome lives. It’s the first step towards making the Earth Whole again.



Tesco was built with a simple mission – to be the champion for customers. Our core purpose is to serve Britain’s shoppers a little better every day.



## 4.2 Take a strategic approach to partnerships

Historically many corporate-charity partnerships have been driven by a desire to deliver short-term results for both parties. However, the problem is that short-term partnerships leave considerable value on the table. This is because it takes time to build strong relationships and activity that delivers meaningful employee engagement. That is why many companies, such as Lloyd's Banking Group and Tesco, have replaced their "charity of the year" approach with long-term, strategic partnerships instead.

*"I've made the switch to something that is longer than just the one-year engagement. We definitely are seeing the benefits of that, a much better interaction, better sense that actually we're making a difference. So, I definitely think it's a model that we would take forward for the next iteration, whenever we drop out of this one in two years' time."*

Company interviewee

The 'Collaboration Continuum', (see below), was created by two academics, Austin and Seitanidi, in 2012. It clearly shows the four different types of corporate-charity partnerships that are available.

*"The value is in terms of building longer term sustainable relationships, that then will help to achieve the outcomes, yes, of the charity itself, but also for us as a business where we want to develop our leaders"*

Company interviewee

### The Collaboration Continuum



Source: Adapted from Austin and Seitanidi, 2012

# GSK and Save the Children

The partnership between GSK and Save the Children demonstrates the significant value of a strategic approach. They began their partnership in 2013 with the eye-watering goal of saving one million children's lives.

*"We have gone beyond the traditional corporate-NGO partnership model and combined our skills, expertise and resources to find new ways to reduce child mortality."* Kevin Watkins, CEO Save the Children UK

For Save the Children, they developed knowledge in key areas relating to procurement and supply chain management, which brought cost savings and allowed funds to be redirected to other programmes around the world.

For GSK, the partnership is an important driver in increasing employee engagement. It has also enabled the company to deliver their sustainability goals, develop authentic corporate brand campaigns and win industry awards.

*"I'm really proud of this partnership and everything that we are doing for children by bringing together our unique skills and resources."* Rogerio Ribeiro, SVP Global Health, GSK

GSK and Save the Children produce powerful impact reports that demonstrate the value of their partnership (see the example below).

## The first five years at a glance



### 4.3 Demonstrate purpose through charity partnerships

The pandemic has shone a spotlight onto inequalities in our society. This means that purpose is even more important for companies, because they need to show that they are helping tackle those inequalities rather than make them worse. In a recent survey by Porter Novelli, respondents said that when a company leads with purpose they are:

**78% more likely to want to work for that company**

**76% more likely to trust that company**

**72% more likely to be loyal to that company**

**70% more likely to defend that company if someone spoke badly of it**

**72% more likely to forgive that company if it makes a misstep**

Companies cannot claim they are purpose-driven unless they are actually doing something about it. One of the most effective ways for companies to demonstrate their commitment to creating a better world is building a long-term partnership with a charity. By partnering with a charity, you can tap into the expert knowledge and skills of a cause that will support you to make a real difference. This partnership will give you the scope to engage colleagues, attract customers, and show your impact. Not only will this demonstrate you are committed to your purpose, it will also help you stand out in a crowded market.

*“For us it’s about being embedded with those (charitable) organizations, getting to really understand what the challenges are that they face, and working with them to see where we can support in ways that will actually make a real difference.”*

Company interviewee

## Fitbit and Diabetes UK

Working from home during the pandemic has created a surge of at-home workouts. Fitbit saw this as a significant opportunity to engage their customers and colleagues with their purpose. By working with Diabetes UK, they were able to deliver their purpose of making people healthier. Fitbit shared their marketing expertise with Diabetes UK, to create tailored email journeys for their millions of users about the steps they could take to reduce their risk of diabetes. This partnership generated positive publicity, made colleagues feel proud to work for Fitbit and most likely saved thousands of lives.



## 4.4 Find charity partners that share your purpose

Rather than choosing your charity partner via an employee vote, we recommend you look for a charity who has a similar purpose to your company. Our company interviewees explained why it is so important to find the right partner.

*“There are a number of charities that will reach out to us, we always ask ourselves why we would partner with them, and what is it that we can bring to them? Are they clear enough on what they might want from us? Because an organization needs to be able to work with us as well as the way we would want to work with them.”*

Company interviewee

*“I have seen charity partners that we’ve worked with that have been really successful, because we’re like minded, and then ones that have failed because there’s not the same value there.”*

Company interviewee

Once you have found a potential charity partner, we recommend you write down your mission next to theirs. When you see them alongside each other you should be able to see what you have in common. Then you can write down what you think is your shared purpose. This will provide the solid foundation on top of which you can build your partnership.

See the following example of the shared purpose partnership between Statkraft and SolarAid:

 **Statkraft**      Our shared purpose       **SolarAid**

**Statkraft envisions a world that runs entirely on renewable energy. We believe that renewable energy can power every industry, every business, every community and every home.**

**SolarAid's vision is a world where everyone has access to clean, renewable, energy.**

**We are both creating a better world by providing renewable energy for everyone**

## 4.5 Engage colleagues with purpose driven charity partnerships

As mentioned earlier in this report, engaging colleagues is probably the greatest priority for most companies. The Edelman Trust barometer shows us that 7 out of 10 employees expect opportunities to make a social impact. All the companies interviewed believe that charity partnerships can improve employee engagement. For some, it is their primary way of engaging their employees.

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*“So we’d often find if our charity relationships would be longer, funnily enough, employees would be really engaged.”*

Company interviewee

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*“Charity partnerships is an area that was specifically focused on, our executive committee are backing it, it has been identified by our Chief HR officer, as an area that we really need to show that we are invested in both, financially, but also in time and effort. Because it will have a positive impact on employee engagement, both the internal and external perception. Both for our existing employees and also how we can attract talent to the company as well.”*

Company interviewee

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*Employees want their work to be meaningful and to be engaged in the workplace, they must believe and be aligned with the company purpose, vision, and goals.*

Company interviewee

We recommend you build purpose-driven charity partnerships to help you engage colleagues who are working both remotely and in the office. We encourage you to think of what skills your employees have to offer and build your partnerships around that. Purpose driven charity partnerships enable your employees to see how their role directly connects to creating

a better society. This brings increased loyalty, better collaboration and enhanced performance.

## 4.6 Embrace the virtual space

The pandemic has caused an acceleration to more digital ways of communicating and working. This means that companies need to embrace the virtual space in order to keep employees engaged and motivated. Polls show that 67% of young people want brands to keep them informed on how they’re supporting employees and the broader team (DoSomething.org, 2020).

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*“We set up several WhatsApp groups, so the virtual engagement was really good.”*

Company interviewee

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*“So, when we get involved with the charity partner, there is a very upfront conversation around, we have a number of skills within our organization that we are keen to deploy with you, we are here for the long run, we’re not just here for you to raise money and paint fences.”*

Company interviewee

A strong example of a corporate-charity partnership embracing the virtual space is between Oxford University Press and SolarAid. Together they identified several projects that would benefit from the company employees’ expertise, that could be delivered virtually. One project was building and launching the charity’s website in Uganda. SolarAid’s Partnership Manager said,

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*“With such a small team, and limited resources at SolarAid, we rely on skilled corporate volunteers to help us achieve our goals through specific projects like this website.”*

Previously, most successful corporate-charity partnerships have relied heavily on in person volunteering and fundraising activities.



Therefore, it is understandable that the acceleration to digital is viewed initially as a huge challenge. However, both companies and charities have realised that it is possible to continue to deliver so much of what they do using digital technology. Indeed, by doing so they have the opportunity to reach and involve more colleagues than ever before.

The problems that charities are tackling are so large that they cannot be solved by a single organisation. This is why more companies are exploring how they can partner with other businesses to deliver a greater social impact.

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*“The work that we do is limited by the amount of money that we can provide to support organisations and to support individuals who are at the greatest point of need. And I think for us evolving, what we do is to actually bring other businesses in alongside us so we can make an even bigger impact.”*

Company interviewee

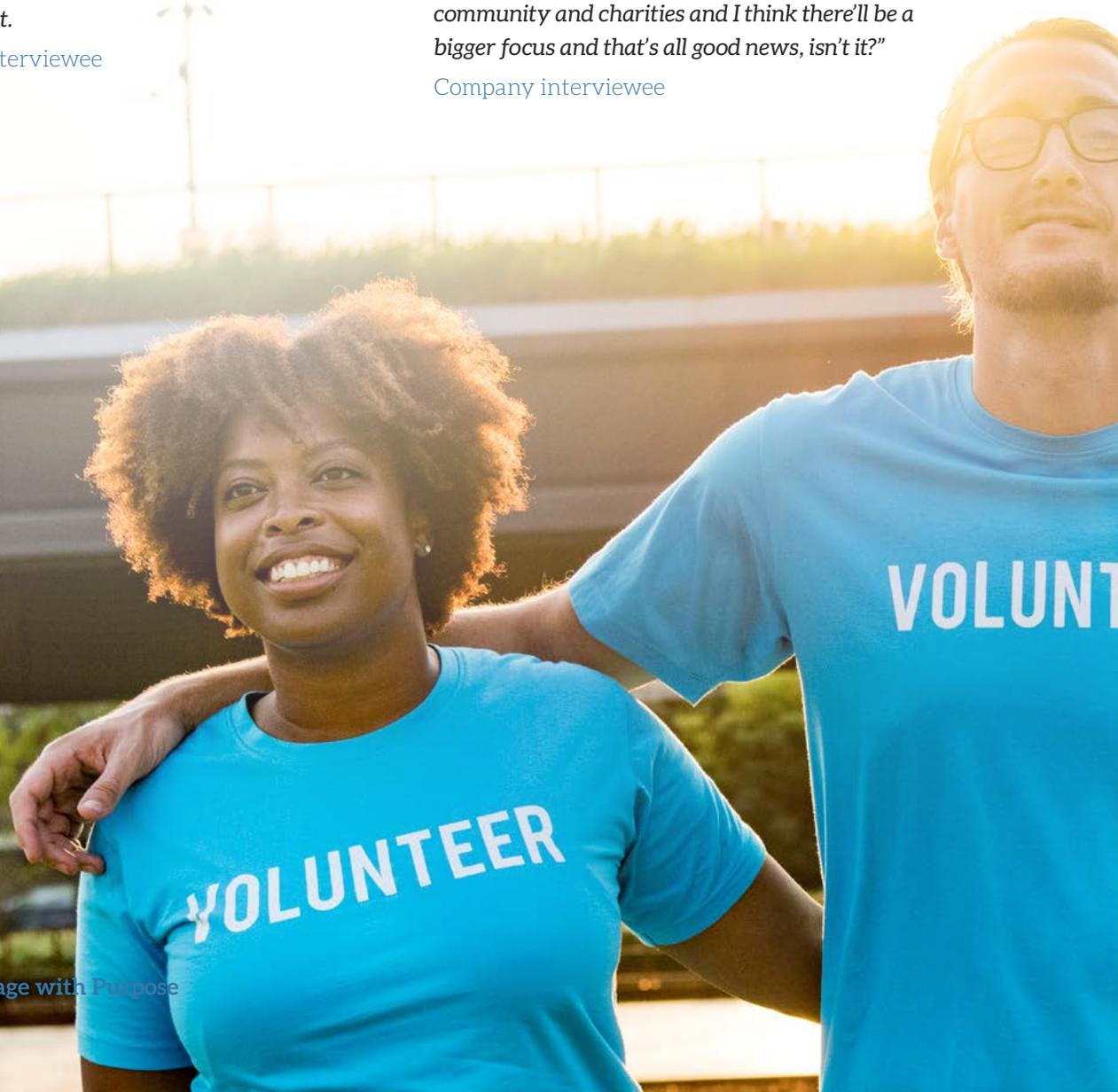
## 4.7 Take leadership on environmental and social issues

There is growing recognition that companies are fundamentally linked with environmental and social problems. In fact, reporting on environment, social and governance (ESG) is now mandatory for companies with over 500 employees and turnover greater than £500m.

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*“It’s been evolving - moving from CSR to CR to responsible business. Now we’re moving into the ESG space and I actually think, personally, that is a good space for us to be in because governments are talking about it, the private sector is talking about it, investors are talking about it, and our clients are talking about it. So finally, we’re hopefully all going to be speaking the same language. So I do think that will have an impact on the how we engage with the community and charities and I think there’ll be a bigger focus and that’s all good news, isn’t it?”*

Company interviewee



Workplace ESG is deeply connected with corporate purpose. By focusing on ESG in the workplace, organisations can make a difference for society and the planet and improve employee engagement, innovation and productivity at the same time. Giving employees a clear connection to a meaningful and greater purpose, is a vital factor for business success.

#### 4.8 Partner with other companies to make a bigger impact

In recent years charities have started building partnerships with several businesses at once. These 'corporate movements' are typically built around a single issue or urgent call to action, and they have proved to be an effective way of securing multiple strategic partnerships.

An excellent example of this is the Race Equality Network. After interviewing 70 senior business leaders, organizers realized that 55% could not name a good minority ethnic employer. This led to a movement of over 2,000 engaged companies, focused on a week of action in February 2021, to become better places to work for BAME people (Black, Asian and minority). The organization provided companies with a toolkit to take action, and they continue to engage them on their diversity and inclusion.



## Conclusion

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It is a shocking statistic that only 11% of employees in the UK and western Europe are engaged. (Gallup, 2021) Employees are the most important resource in a company and yet they are often neglected. This report shows that many charity partnerships are also taken for granted.

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If you open up corporate-charity partnerships, there is significant value inside. These partnerships have the potential to increase employee motivation, performance, loyalty and collaboration. They are employee engagement dynamite because they bring meaning into the workplace.

However, unlocking this employee value requires companies to take a more strategic approach to partnering with charities. If that happens, we will see a new era of purpose-driven, corporate-charity partnerships, creating a better world.



## Appendix A

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### Research interviewees

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Jim Chuck, Senior VP, Business Consultant

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Chantille (Sankaran) Ciais, Marketing & Sales, ActivePure UK

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Paul Denton, Chief Executive Officer, Scottish Building Society

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Paul Eastwood, Chief People Officer, Private Equity

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John Healy, Managing Director, Allstate NI

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Karen Lodge, Human Resource Director, Ipsos

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Ian Maynard, Marketing Consultant

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Lynne Rainey, Partner at PwC Forensic Services, NI Region Head of Place and Purpose

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Sinead Smyth, Head of Corporate Responsibility, A L Goodbody

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## Appendix B

### Qualitative research interview questions

#### 1 Business Challenges

What are the main challenges facing your business at the moment?

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#### 2 Approach to Charity Partnerships

Do you have charity partnerships and if so who are your current partners?

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What are your objectives for partnering with them?

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Has COVID-19 changed why you partner with them?

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#### 3 Purpose

Does your company have a clearly defined purpose? If so tell me what it is.

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Do you see a relationship between your purpose and your charity partnerships?

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If yes can you tell me more.

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If no why do you think that is.

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#### 4 Employee Engagement through Charity Partnerships

To what extent do you see your charity partnerships as a vehicle for increasing employee engagement?

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What percentage of employees are engaged in your charity partnerships?

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How do you involve your colleagues in your charity partnerships?

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Do you measure your impact? If so how?

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How do you see your charity partnerships evolving in the future?

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## Appendix C

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### Author biographies

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#### Denise Cranston

##### Partnership Manager, Remarkable Partnerships

Denise is an experienced Corporate Charity Partnership professional who cares passionately about people and communities, and believes in the power of business to be a force for good in the world. Denise has over 23 years' experience working with leading companies, to help them develop their strategy and approach to corporate responsibility. She is highly skilled at relationship management and helping to build purpose-driven partnerships.

#### Peter Chiswick

##### Partnership Manager, Remarkable Partnerships

Peter is a Partnership Manager with over 20 years of corporate sector experience. As an award-winning results-driven corporate and charity specialist with an MA in Corporate Social Responsibility he is passionate about developing remarkable partnerships. Working for companies such as Thomson Reuters, Reed Elsevier and Sony, he's experienced at developing high revenue, purpose-driven partnerships with major clients such as Google, BBC and KPMG. Peter has also delivered a number of internal innovative initiatives that focused on employee motivation and professional development.

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Forbes.com

JUST Capital

Porter Novelli

Edelman Trust Barometer

DoSomething.org

## Contact

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**Partnerships**