Reinventing CSR in the Digital Economy
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Emerging trends bring new expectations from consumers, governments, investors, and employees for the companies with whom they choose to align. The requirement that companies integrate purpose into their operating model, is taking hold. This begins with high ethical and environmental standards in business practice, and is furthered by expectations that companies make direct contributions for a positive impact on local communities. IBM’s Global Purpose Study, conducted by Morning Consult, found that 80% of global respondents agreed more strongly with the statement that corporations have a responsibility to prioritize their employees, the environment and their community as much as they prioritize delivering profits to their shareholders. Notably, it’s good for business too - companies that show a clear commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) increase share price by six percent. With 87 percent of consumers stating they would buy a product or service based on a company’s advocacy concerning a social matter and 83 percent of millennials stating they would be more loyal to a company that helps them contribute to social and environmental issues, it is now imperative that companies be socially responsible.

IBM is reinventing its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices to meet the emerging needs of communities around the world. Leveraging IBM’s latest technology, techniques, and talent, IBM CSR is empowering civil organizations and communities to equip themselves for the future. This paper outlines how IBM is reinventing CSR by using technology such as AI and cloud, techniques including agile and Design Thinking, and top talent to achieve scaled impact across the world.

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The role of Corporate Social Responsibility in today’s market

Successful companies are purpose-driven, and operate CSR programs that engage multiple stakeholders. It not only benefits the greater public good, but it’s good for business too. Studies confirm that purpose-driven companies enjoy better market valuations, employee retention, and revenue.

So, how can companies best design, create, implement, scale and sustain their CSR initiatives? In this paper, with anecdotes from practitioners such as IBM, we suggest how companies can offer thoughtful and impactful CSR programs by:

1) Aligning social impact initiatives with business imperatives and their employees’ skills. This addresses societal issues, while also giving visibility to companies’ products and services. In turn, this makes CSR efforts for sustainable and scalable, and helps retain and train top talent.

2) Putting the beneficiaries of CSR programs — the “users” — at the center of the programs’ design processes. CSR resources that are user friendly, designed thoughtfully, and truly address a given need will be the most durable and effective.

3) Partnering with internal and external stakeholders early and often during the CSR development process. This approach will help accelerate the design, deployment and usefulness of CSR programs.

Done right, these efforts can cement the loyalty of clients, employees, and suppliers — all while making the world a better place.

IBM’s approach to Corporate Social Responsibility

Strong values are the foundation of the IBM approach to CSR.

Embedded in IBM’s core values has always been an approach to making the world a better place that is inextricably tied to the company’s role in the world. These values also serve as the foundation that underpins all CSR activities:

— Innovation that matters for the company and for the world
— Trust and personal responsibility in all relationships
— Dedication to every client’s success

Through all community efforts, as through business pursuits, IBM seeks to provide meaningful leadership in creating solutions, bringing them to scale and making them sustainable. Corporate Social Responsibility programs are good for business too— strong communities coincide directly with strong business outcomes.

IBM leverages what it does best to provide the most impact.

IBM CSR practices are aligned with the IBM business model, which enables identification causes that the company is best suited to positively impact. This means choosing focus areas that are aligned to IBM’s business imperatives as well as utilizing IBM’s technology, tools, and IBMers’ talent to make a difference. IBM CSR focuses primarily on education and skills, where the technology, techniques, and talent of the company can make a true difference globally.

“Social impact is built into our business. We apply our technology and talent to make a positive impact — through our operations, in our practices and by taking a clear stance on issues that matter. That’s what #GoodTechIBM means in practice”

— Guillermo Miranda, Vice President & Global Head, IBM Corporate Social Responsibility

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Digital technologies have transformed the lives of billions, but in doing so have also changed the types of workforce skills demanded by various industries. The World Economic Forum states that required job skills will shift significantly by 2022. Currently, there are nearly 6 million unemployed workers in the U.S. and even though the technology industry alone has more than 700,000 open jobs, tech employers can’t fill these jobs, partly because people are not equipped with the skills that the digital economy demands. At the same time, the Labor Department projects that computer and I.T. occupations will be the fastest-growing type of work through 2026, adding 557,100 well-paying jobs in fields including AI, cybersecurity, digital design, and software development.\(^8\)

IBM CSR focuses on education and skills to prepare the current and future workforce to meet these demands; with special focus on underserved communities. As a leading technology company, there is not only a huge opportunity but also a duty to equip the workforce with the technological skills required to be successful in the evolving job market. As Ginni Rometty, CEO of IBM, stated “ultimately, our challenge as a society isn’t about AI replacing jobs—it’s about people and skills. If we introduce new technology into the world but don’t equip our workforce with the necessary skills, we’re not living up to our obligation as responsible innovators.”\(^9\)

With IBM’s expertise in AI, blockchain, cybersecurity, cloud, and a multitude of other rising technologies, the company is suited to leverage its combined resources to provide this education to communities in need.\(^10\)

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**IBM CSR utilizes the same technology, techniques and talent as the business**

IBM’s CSR portfolio reflects the priorities and direction of our company as well as IBM’s brand in the marketplace. This is built by direct study of and experience with the domain, by seeking input and guidance from experts across the business. We leverage the breadth of IBM’s technologies, techniques and talent to empower organizations as they work in communities to overcome society’s toughest challenges, from AI to blockchain to data analytics and more.

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**IBM Social Impact Paradigm**

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<td>Technology</td>
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<th>Innovation that matters - for our company and the world</th>
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<td>Dedication to every client’s success</td>
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Business Alignment: Using technology to solve the biggest challenges

IBM embodies the idea of putting smart to work and is currently at the forefront of some of the most cutting-edge technology, including blockchain, AI, machine learning, and analytics. IBM CSR leverages those same cutting-edge technologies to enact Smart for Good, bringing the best in talent and technology to help people succeed and communities thrive. These powerful tools have empowered government, non-profit, and community partners to succeed in a changing digital landscape. By ensuring that innovations coming from the IBM business are readily available and transferable to IBM’s CSR work, the company will continue to make the world a better place for years to come.

United Way Worldwide (UWW) provides 2-1-1, a free, confidential service that helps people across North America find the local resources they need 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. When Hurricane Irma hit Florida in 2017, the 2-1-1 service was inundated with public inquiries. UWW requested assistance from IBM in determining how they could alleviate the strain on their call centers during such times. IBM developed a virtual agent, or chatbot, for them, using CARLA (Cognitive Automated Response Learning Agent) technology. CARLA uses AI to connect incoming callers with the right resources or people, learning over time to improve its outcomes.

When Hurricane Michael devastated the Florida panhandle last year, CARLA was quickly deployed to provide Florida residents with vital information — both in English and Spanish — about evacuation, shelters, food, medications, and applying for government assistance. Hundreds of people used CARLA following Hurricane Michael, and the technology will be available during disasters and crises in the future on 211.org and local 211 websites. IBM has also worked with United Way on a chatbot for their Louisiana 2-1-1 service with a vision to expand nationwide.
In 2018, IBM launched a $25 million, four-year IBM Code and Response effort to put open source technologies developed as part of coding challenges in the communities where they are needed most. As open source development makes source code publicly available, users can see how the software was designed, enabling a wide exchange of ideas to foster technological innovation and choice.

Call for Code, a Code and Response initiative, challenges teams of up to five participants to write code and leverage one or more IBM offerings to create solutions that can be deployed as a sustainable business model. The inaugural winner in 2018, Project Owl, developed an Internet of Things (IoT) and software solution to quickly activate a communications network, including after a disaster. The second annual winner, Prometeo, developed an AI-based platform to monitor and act on firefighter health and safety in real-time and over the long-term.

Through Call for Code, IBM has the power to activate developer expertise and innovative ideas powered by IBM technology and furthered by open source communities. Additionally, dedicated campaigns are offered for university students and IBMers to participate. These competitions enable IBM to inspire, mobilize, and support target populations while developing skills and engaging employees to maximize impact.

Human Trafficking is the fastest growing criminal industry with $150 billion in annual profits\(^1\) and 40.3 million victims of modern slavery globally.\(^2\) Information about human trafficking comes from diverse sources, from local news, financial transactions, and the web to official government agency reports. IBM partnered with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, DeliverFund, and Stop the Traffik to turn this information into actionable intelligence.

After two years of design and development, IBM, along with a multi-sector consortium of organizations announced the launch of the Traffik Analysis Hub (TA Hub) – a first-of-its-kind international data sharing and analytics platform to disrupt human trafficking. Nonprofits, law enforcement, and financial institutions are using the TA Hub to share vital data on trafficking and applying IBM’s Watson AI and other tools to analyze blended data to uncover hotspots and routes that have not been evident before. With IBM i2 software, teams can visually analyze trends and hotspots and use this information to target awareness programs that ultimately help disrupt human trafficking.

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IBM has transformed many times throughout its 108 years of operation and digital transformation is now core to its business. Digital transformation is the process of using digital technologies to create new — or modify existing — business processes and customer experiences to meet changing industry and market requirements. IBM CSR regularly reviews its strategy and approach to corporate social responsibility and integrates the principles of IBM digital transformation to help identify, prioritize, and execute on the issues of relevance to the business and stakeholders.

IBM uses agile processes and methodology to drive digital transformation. This enables teams to work quickly and efficiently by creating clear goals and a standard way of working. Key aspects of an Agile team include:

- Strong communication between team members, management, and across teams to discuss rapid change
- Flexible, adaptive ways of working when projects require quick, unexpected changes and iteration
- Small, self-directed teams to quickly deliver on user outcomes
- Introspective opportunities to reflect on successes and opportunities for improvement

Through agile practices, IBM has been able to enhance customer performance significantly. Clients have reported a 50 percent improvement in code quality, 7.5x more releases per year, 25 percent faster speed to market, and overall fewer mistakes made in the transformation process.
IBM enables its employees to give back to the communities where they live and work through volunteerism and donations. The IBM Volunteers global program helps active and retired employees apply their professional skills to community needs with a wide range of resources to organize and deliver effective volunteer support. Since its inception in 2003, the program has recorded 22 million volunteer hours across 94 countries.

In 2018, IBM decided to build upon the flagship IBM Volunteers program by aligning the program with IBM’s smart technology and transforming the experience for both volunteers and beneficiaries. IBM.org, a new centralized social impact platform that launched in 2019, was designed for an engaging experience that connects IBMers to global CSR opportunities using data and insights. It simplifies and celebrates IBMer giving and volunteering, providing a single destination for IBMers to learn about and actively participate in IBM’s social impact programs. IBMers can easily view a comprehensive list of thousands of opportunities in their local community, filter based on personal interest and location, and sign up to volunteer directly through the platform. In the same platform IBMers can seamlessly track giving and volunteering milestones and connect with peers across the globe while also learning about powerful stories of IBMers and community partners putting #GoodTechIBM to work around the world.

IBM.org was deployed globally using a combination of DevOps capabilities for rapid sprints and agile engagement with users for testing, adoption and scalability. The most recent Net Promoter Scores (NPS) are in the high 70s.

Business Alignment: Using talent to solve big problems

Rather than following an approach in which only dedicated employees carry out values-driven work, IBMers across the company deliver social impact. This helps maximize the force of efforts and holds everyone accountable to shared goals. While IBM CSR coordinates the global corporate responsibility portfolio, local leaders across the company manage social impact initiatives optimized for their geographies and industries. IBM provides a spectrum of social impact opportunities – from long term engagements such as participating in IBM Service Corps or delivering IBM innovation grants to strategic not for profits, to smaller activities that are aligned with the business and IBMers individual interests. IBM CSR understands that in order to drive positive outcomes, employees must have personalized, relevant, and meaningful experiences.
User-centricity: Putting the user at the forefront in business and CSR

IBM begins both business and CSR efforts with a clear user centered approach to ensure delivery teams understand and achieve what is truly needed with an iterative mindset. Rather than leading with pre-packaged ideas or imposing perspectives, it is important to understand what targeted beneficiaries require.

At the heart of the IBM approach to human-centered experiences is IBM Design Thinking, a framework to solve users’ problems at the speed and scale of the modern digital enterprise. Whether re-envisioning the digital customer experience for a multinational bank or simply planning an upcoming product release, IBM Design Thinking keeps teams focused on what matters to users while guiding them from ideas to outcomes faster and more efficiently. The IBM Design Thinking Framework stems from three underlying principles:

1) Focusing on user outcomes, which drives business by helping users achieve their goals.

2) Restless reinvention, for which IBM designers counsel to “treat everything as a prototype.” By continually iterating through a loop of “observe, reflect, and make,” IBMers are always moving toward great outcomes for their users and clients.

3) Engaging diverse empowered teams, to enable faster progress. Design Thinking teams at IBM must have a diverse composition of expertise, backgrounds, experience levels, gender, race, ability, and age. These teams are equipped with the expertise and authority to deliver outcomes without relying on others for leadership or technical support.

Forrester found that IBM adoption of Design Thinking made solution time-to-market twice as fast, including reductions in design and development times by 75% and 33% respectively. Improved collaboration and business strategy drove increased customer experience and sales, streamlined processes, and reduced project labor.


Design Thinking case study: IBM Service Corps re-design

For more than 10 years, the IBM Service Corps program gave IBM's most talented employees the chance to help communities around the world tackle complex problems. Teams of 8 - 15 members from across IBM partner for four weeks with nonprofit, government, educational, and civic leaders to address high-priority issues such as education and skills, health and disaster preparedness. IBM Service Corps is seen as a model for leadership development and employee engagement.

In working to uphold the program’s relevance and sustain its impact into the future, IBM CSR used Design Thinking workshops to envision how IBM could make the program more accessible to a broader group of IBMers by scaling participation and simultaneously improving user experiences. The team brought together over 100 IBM Service Corps alumni, prospective participants, and program staff over several workshops across the world. Working with these diverse stakeholders, IBM was able to successfully identify user pain points and build out a roadmap for the future and identify the stepping stones needed to achieve this vision, ensuring maximum impact for beneficiaries and employees alike.

For example, by focusing on user needs, it became clear that providing both international and local volunteer opportunities would open the IBM Service Corps engagement model to thousands more IBMers. Further, the workshops demonstrated the power of alumni supporting participants, and they are now engaged for project scoping and providing local guidance when teams deployed close by. By using Design Thinking to regularly re-engaging participants, IBM will ensure that the program continues to get feedback from various stakeholders and iterate as needed.
Co-creation: Collaborating to build better outcomes

The IBM emphasis on user centricity, through which feedback is collected, buy-in is gained, and new opportunities to partner with stakeholders are defined, underlines the third element of IBM’s Social Impact paradigm – co-creation.

Co-creation is the process of gathering teams to design, prove, and launch innovative programs.\(^{15}\) Co-creation can be defined as an active, dynamic, and social process based on interactions and relationships between firms and external stakeholders, oriented toward the generation of new products.\(^{16}\)

The power and necessity of co-creation is especially critical given the opportunities and challenges presented by the digital era. “Given limited AI and analytic skills in the marketplace,” says Lori Victor Feller, IBM Garage global leader, “you can do three things: acquire the skills, acquire a partner, or purchase the skills.”\(^{17}\) IBM Corporate Social Responsibility’s co-creation model is a partner strategy, which is executed in collaboration with three stakeholder groups:

1. IBM business teams
2. IBM employees
3. External partners

IBM CSR continuously engages with these stakeholders to maintain and improve the relevancy of programs, understanding that no single entity or sector can accomplish alone what diverse, empowered groups can do together.

IBM employees

IBM Corporate Social Responsibility is designed to enable IBMers to have a positive impact on the world. As such, IBM CSR engaged in a co-creation exercise with employees to build opportunities to create social impact for the future. The objective of this exercise was to gain buy-in during a period of significant change, improve the employee experience through more personalized programs, and identify change agents to roll out the new strategic CSR vision. The exercise resulted in an overwhelmingly positive response from IBMers and covered a diverse population - over 60 countries and 50 business units. This wide-reaching participation equipped management with specific insights to leverage as they continue to implement the CSR strategy. For example, an insight discovered through the exercise revealed that remote workers want in person volunteer experience as this in person interaction with fellow IBMers is something they feel they are missing in their regular work schedule. Overall, the IBM co-creation exercise identified employee areas of interest and insights at scale allowing leadership to engage with employees and utilize these insights to redesign CSR programs to be more impactful.

Community partners

IBM CSR’s work is made possible by relationships. Partnerships within and outside the company provide the purpose, traction, raw materials, subject matter expertise, and visibility that is needed to succeed. Partner relationships exist at all levels and are bi-directional – so that wherever a relationship originates, the benefits and reach of that relationship can be leveraged by everyone. IBM CSR’s Partner Selection Framework prioritizes partner groups that:

1. Are recognized as leaders in social innovation and impact in one of our issue areas of focus.
2. Have strong connections and regional or national influence that can be used as a connector for communities and reach larger audiences.
3. Have potential to be catalysts to drive significant outcomes and scale, including building upon a basic digital infrastructure that is already in place.

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Community partnership case study: SkillsBuild

SkillsBuild is IBM CSR’s new digital experience platform that provides jobseekers, including the long-term unemployed, refugees, asylum seekers and veterans, with career fit assessments, training, personalized coaching and the experiential learning they need to re-enter the workforce.

SkillsBuild is available for users who register through local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). It provides personalized coaching and experiential learning as well as IBM Digital Badges, which strengthen digital resumes and connect skills to real job listings. The program goes the final mile to present users with employment opportunities.

The underlying architecture of SkillsBuild.org based in the latest microservices: kubernetes and dockers configuration technology allows plug’n play flexibility for partners’ integration and unprecedented personalization for users.

SkillsBuild is built on an open ecosystem through four different types of partnerships:

- Content providers in the microlearning, gaming, and coding spaces
- Technology partners including My Inner Genius for assessments, Credly’s Acclaim badging platform, and Crowdsift for projects and coaching interface
- Other companies that offer content, mentors, project opportunities, and employment opportunities
- NGOs that serve as both go-to-market enablers, bringing their beneficiaries to the platform, and as beneficiaries for their own development and transformation

The starting point for partner-driven engagements is to leverage existing relationships where a level of trust is already established. For SkillsBuild, IBM CSR drew on the relationship network of CSR managers in different countries (France, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Germany, Philippines, Turkey and India) to secure the first partners for SkillsBuild. After that, targeted engagement was helpful to get traction with new organizations who heard what IBM CSR was doing with existing partners and wanted to get engaged. “It was a contagious effect and happened very quickly” stated Lisa Neddam, IBM’s SkillsBuild lead.

Most importantly, co-creation with partners allowed SkillsBuild to increase its impact on beneficiaries. As every stakeholder knows something about end users, using a shared vision and success metrics will enable an optimized approach. Co-creation allowed SkillsBuild stakeholders to come together and share knowledge to create something better than any of the individual organizations could have created alone.
Scale: Maximizing impact through an integrated approach

The goal of scaling impact is to make a meaningful and sustainable impact by reaching greater numbers of people. The Social Impact Exchange\(^\text{18}\) identifies two types of strategies for scaling, Replication and Non-Replication. The key distinction between these strategies involves geographic replication. In a replication-based strategy, a potential method of scaling is opening a new branch or office location in order to implement a program model for new sets of beneficiaries. For a non-replication strategy, there are various options including collaborating with new partners, spreading ideas and information about change models, developing change policy, and other strategies to create thought change or promote a social movement.\(^\text{19}\)

IBM utilizes both strategies underpinned by the three CSR pillars (business alignment, user centricity, and partnerships) to scale key CSR programs. Currently, IBM’s P-TECH program is spreading to many locations (replication scaling) and also expanding through a growing partner base (non-replication scaling).

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Scale case study: P-TECH

Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools (P-TECH) are innovative public schools spanning grades 9 to 14 that bring together the best elements of high school, college and career. P-TECH started in 2011 in Brooklyn as a partnership between IBM, the NYC Department of Education, and NYC College of Technology. Since then, IBM has opened hundreds of other schools in 24 countries in collaboration with key education and industry partners.

Within six years, students graduate with a no-cost associate degree in applied science, engineering, computer science or other competitive STEM disciplines, along with the skills and knowledge needed to continue studies or step easily into high-growth, new collar jobs. Some of the P-TECH graduates will move on to new collar jobs, ranging from associate analyst to digital design developer. Others plan to pursue their bachelor’s degrees, and some will do both — maintaining jobs that use the skills they gained in the program while furthering their education. There are currently 25 P-TECH graduates working full-time at IBM in New York, Georgia, North Carolina and Virginia. Some of these graduates are participating in IBM’s industry-leading apprentice program, and more graduates are in the hiring pipeline. At Brooklyn P-TECH, the on-time graduation rate is four times the national average, and five times the national average for low-income students.

Critically, P-TECH is not a simple add-on program to enhance curriculum, but rather a structural transformation model that merges high-school with technical university offerings to offer free of cost dual graduation opportunities to students in underserved communities (high school diploma + associate degree in a highly demanded industry skill areas).
P-TECH uses IBM’s CSR values as guiding principles. By leading the upskilling of students in technology, IBM is helping the technology industry adapt and prepare for unprecedented demand for tech skills. Educators at P-TECH Schools believe deeply in the mission of putting users first, and therefore use Design Thinking activities to ensure that they are meeting the needs of their students. Notably, students from low-income communities that deal with a variety of issues outside the classroom. It is critical that, teachers understand their students at the individual level and pull in the right stakeholders and learning to cater teaching to those students.

P-TECH schools were built in collaboration with hundreds of partners, from educators to policymakers industry and nonprofits. By engaging diverse stakeholders, each with a different area of expertise, IBM was able to ensure the ongoing success of P-TECH schools around the globe. Co-creation amongst the many partners has allowed P-TECH schools to scale across the world, growing and changing to meet the needs of diverse student populations.

Today’s education system does not prepare many students for the workforce of the future. We can address this issue through the IBM CSR approach of business alignment, user centrality, and co-creation to change the paradigm, create jobs ready education, and make true social impact at scale.

“Corporations prosper only to the extent that they satisfy human needs. Profit is only the scoring system. The end is better living for us all”

— Thomas Watson Jr., IBM’s second chairman

Conclusion

Social impact at IBM is a global enterprise effort. IBM became a leader in corporate responsibility by understanding what is required to actualize its values, not only with clients, employees, and shareholders, but with the world at large. IBM’s social impact platforms, programs, and offerings are available globally to ensure that the organization can confront the most pressing challenges wherever they emerge and engage its employees wherever they live and work. By continuing to focus on users, and deliver for people in need, at the center, IBM will continue to drive innovation in the way that companies make the world a better place.

Check out IBM CSR team’s transformation as they put smart to work for the world:

IBM offers tailored education, skills development, professional opportunities, and other resources for students, recent graduates, mid-career job seekers, military veterans, and those supporting them. Learn more at IBM.org/impact/education

The IBM Principles for Trust and Transparency provide a baseline for organizations of all types to review, plan, and optimize their use of AI and other digital solutions. The Principles are available for consideration and use via: https://www.ibm.com/blogs/policy/trust-principles/

IBM’s social impact programs, including those focused on support for and collaboration with students, job seekers, community organizations, social enterprises, governments, corporations and more are accessible via www.ibm.org

Our Executive Sponsor is Guillermo Miranda, Vice President & Global Head, IBM Corporate Social Responsibility

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