

Maximising well-being post COVID-19

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KEY INSIGHTS

Much has changed in New Zealand since the New Zealand Government imposed a nation-wide lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic on 26 March 2020. Research³ undertaken by social researchers from Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research and the Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment provides insights into how people navigated their COVID-19 response and what that means for their, and New Zealand's, continued well-being.

Social Licence to Operate

New Zealand's well-being post COVID-19 will largely depend on the actions of Government. The level of confidence communities of interest have in those actions represents the Government's Social Licence to Operate (SLO). This confidence (or SLO) is determined by how well those actions reflect the expectations and aspirations of those communities of interest. Trust and relationships are central to SLO, and these are built through engagement activities that genuinely consider societal issues and concerns. As highlighted by the key insights on the government response and COVID-19 communications, trust in the Government is high following its response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

I think the election really showed that people respected and valued the response of the government; and going back in again was a real endorsement of their management of the pandemic. They did a good job of managing it and New Zealand really said thanks by voting them back in again, really. So, there's a real vote of confidence there (MWB89).

So, through their very clear and effective messaging around COVID, it's boosted trust and confidence in government (MWB51).

I think what was done has set us up [for] having a strong foundation to recover (MWB37).

...everything seems to be being managed quite well. I can't think of anywhere else I would rather be (MWB8).

However, building and maintaining SLO is a long-term, continuous process. This means that if the Government and its agencies want to retain public support for, and trust in, their practices post COVID-19 they need to proactively manage for SLO on a continuous basis. This requires the Government to genuinely listen and act on issues of concern to people. Manaaki Whenua's social

³ A background and methodology report is available from StrongeD@landcareresearch.co.nz

researchers have developed a framework (Fig. 1) that helps guide organisations in gaining and maintaining a social licence.



Figure 1. SLO engagement framework.⁴

There are four key phases:

- Socialising the concept of SLO with the organisation.
- Hearing the views of stakeholders and understanding their expectations are essential in building and maintaining SLO.
- Integrating or co-developing the views and expectations of stakeholders into an organisation's processes and procedures so it fosters SLO and promotes participative and learning opportunities.
- Reflecting occurs throughout because obtaining SLO is a dynamic and evolving process – learning opportunities are important and need to be fed back into the process in a continuous reflecting step.

Our research on maximising well-being post COVID-19 contributes to the hearing phase (Fig. 1) of the SLO framework. The findings provide a look into New Zealanders' views and expectations regarding important issues facing the country. Participants in our research spoke on a wide range of topics they deemed important contributors to improving societal well-being in New Zealand (see the key insights on inequality, tourism, rethinking the economy, the environment, and mental health, for example). If and how those views and expectations are integrated (Fig. 1) into the Government's post COVID-19 processes and practices will be an important component for retaining the support and trust of the public. Approaches that promote public participation and learning opportunities will contribute to the Government's SLO. As outlined in the key insight on building a better society, participants saw New Zealand's post COVID-19 response as an opportunity to initiate significant societal change. They wanted boldness, not a return to how things were; but most importantly, they wanted to see a collaborative approach to achieving this:

So yeah, maybe there's some collective thought around the kind of society that we want to create moving forward and how we can do that together (MWB41).

I think we have an opportunity here – you know, you've got a Government that can rule alone if they want to, and that's great. But it will be most effective if there is as much collaboration and listening as possible with other parts of Parliament but also with the different layers. And if people are really empowered to be able to contribute and be useful in their local community, their local sphere, whatever it is, then hopefully we'll end up with a good result. ...So, yeah. I want boldness, but I also want lots of opportunity for innovation and creative thinking across a really broad range of people (MWB2).

⁴ Stronge D, Kannemeyer R, Edwards P 2020. Methodological and analytical approaches to gauge social licence to operate. Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research Report LC3750. 25 p.