



Critical Times for SMEs

Hong Kong's smaller businesses need urgent support, but we must also boost our technology capacity to prepare for a digital future



中小企處於關鍵時刻

香港中小企急需支援，但同時我們亦要提升技術，為數碼未來籌謀

香港商界現正處於關鍵時期。總商會最近進行的一項調查顯示，許多企業若然缺乏政府進一步的支援，將在未來六個月內停止營運。

我們的調查於8月中進行，結果反映中小企在新冠病毒疫情和社交限制措施下首當其衝。當近四分之一大型企業表示恐怕會在六個月內結業，中小企的比率更高達42%。此外，中小企營業額下跌的幅度亦比大型企業為大，同時也較受到資金周轉困難和生意不足問題困擾。

我們歡迎政府迄今提供的各項支援。大大小小企業都向我們表示，「保就業」計劃對協助他們應對這個非常時期尤其有效。計劃第二期大受歡迎，無疑將可發揮穩就業、保生計的作用。

中小企業是香港的命脈；從歷史悠久的家族企業到充滿創意的初創公司，他們合共聘用全港近半的勞動人口，對商界的多元發展貢獻良多。假使這些企業被迫結業，將對失業率、整體經濟，以至香港獨一無二、活力充沛的商業環境，造成長遠的不良影響。

儘管調查結果顯示前景黯淡，卻有助我們了解企業的重要關注，好就10月公布的《施政報告》撰寫建議書，提呈行政長官參詳。

本會藉今年的建議書敦促政府繼續向企業施以援助，渡過這空前難關。不過，我們同時也放眼更長遠的未來。隨著我們邁向疫後世界，香港應把握這次機會建構更好未來，尤其是提升本地科技實力。

全球各地實施封鎖措施，凸顯出數碼應用對未來企業營運至關重要。疫情衍生的另一趨勢，是低收入人士及青年失業率上升，情況令人擔憂。要拆解這兩個問題，我們需要積極提升本港勞工的技能，確保他們具備數碼時代所需的技術。香港要維持環球商業中心的地位，就決不能步人後塵。

從本會調查可見，商界團結一心支持政府的抗疫工作，這讓我們甚為鼓舞。我們明瞭，同心協力、互助合作方是香港克服當前難關、重佔鰲頭的不二之道。

Hong Kong's business community right now is at a critical juncture. According to a recent Chamber survey, many companies will not survive the next six months without further government support.

Our survey, carried out in mid-August, also showed that SMEs have been hit hardest by the Covid-19 pandemic and social restrictions. While almost a quarter of big companies said they feared they would have to close within six months, the figure went up to 42% for SMEs. Smaller companies have also suffered a greater drop in turnover than larger firms, and are far more concerned about cash flow and insufficient business volume.

We appreciate the support that the Government has given so far. Companies of all sizes have told us that the Employment Support Scheme has been particularly useful in helping them survive these exceptional times. The second tranche of the scheme is very welcome and will no doubt save jobs and protect livelihoods.

Our SMEs are the lifeblood of Hong Kong: from long-running family businesses to innovative start-ups, they employ almost half of the workforce and contribute immeasurably to our diverse business community. If these businesses are forced to shut down, it will have a devastating long-term impact on unemployment levels, the wider economy, and Hong Kong's unique and vibrant business environment.

While our survey painted a gloomy picture, it has been useful in ensuring that we understand businesses' key concerns as we craft our submission to the Chief Executive ahead of her Policy Address in October.

In this year's submission, we call for continuing support to see businesses through this unprecedented period. But we are also looking at the longer term. As we prepare for a post-Covid world, Hong Kong should use the opportunity to "build back better," in particular by improving our capacity in the technology sphere.

Lockdowns around the world have highlighted that being digitally savvy will be crucial for companies in the future. Another Covid-driven trend, which is very worrying, has been higher unemployment among low-paid and younger people. To address both of these issues, we should look at actively upskilling Hong Kong's workforce to ensure we have the technology skills required for the digital age. If Hong Kong is to remain a global business hub, we cannot be left behind.

We are pleased to report that our survey also showed that the business community is united in its support for the Government's efforts to fight the coronavirus. We know that mutual support and cooperation will be essential to make sure Hong Kong is in the best position when we emerge from the current challenging conditions.

Peter Wong
王冬勝
chairman@chamber.org.hk