

Green Swans zoom into Japan

Tokyo's Shizenkan University hosts Asia's Green Swans event

Volans, June 2020



Introduction

World Environment Day 2020 on 5 June saw the launch of the Green Swans Observatory, hosted by London-based Volans Ventures. The aim: to scan for, identify, analyse and support exponential solutions to the world's most pressing economic, social and environmental challenges.

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Since the launch of the book *Green Swans*, subtitled 'The Coming Boom in Regenerative Capitalism', Volans has taken this exponentially positive change agenda to 29 countries on a virtual world tour. But Asia was always a priority. So, to signal the growing centrality of Asia to tomorrow's economy, Volans' Founder John Elkington launched the Green Swans Observatory whilst keynoting a 2-hour Green Swans webinar via Zoom on World Environment Day, hosted by the Shizenkan University Graduate School of Leadership & Innovation. Intriguingly, the School is positioned as "a business school for the 22nd century."

This paper captures some of the key results from the event, which suggested huge support for our positively exponential change agenda — and prefigured a potential longer-term strategic partnership between Volans and Shizenkan University.

A **Green Swan** is a profound market shift, generally catalysed by some combination of Black or Gray Swan challenges and changing paradigms, values, mindsets, politics, policies, technologies, business models, and other key factors. **A Green Swan delivers exponential progress** in the form of economic, social, and environmental wealth creation. At worst, it achieves this outcome in two dimensions while holding the third steady. There may be a period of adjustment where one or more dimensions underperform, but the aim is an integrated breakthrough in all three dimensions.

An **Ugly Duckling** is an early-stage concept, mindset, technology, or venture with the potential to become either a Black Swan (often driven by "bad" exponentials) or a Green Swan (driven by "good" exponentials). Its potential future evolution is very hard to detect early on, unless you know what you are looking for. Tomorrow's breakthrough solution often looks seriously weird today. The net result is that we give Ugly Ducklings significantly less attention and resources than they need — or than the future of the 2030s and beyond would want us to in hindsight.

Our webinar audience

As shown in the diagrams below (see 'Annex: Poll Results'), our audience was strikingly weighted towards business people, which was our attention. 67% of participants were from business, with 43% working in corporate social responsibility or sustainability roles, and 24% working in roles that were considered to be more mainstream.

This underscores the frequent separation of change agendas from the corporate core — a divide that Shizenkan University and Volans are committed to closing through the 2020s. Other participants self-identified in significantly smaller numbers as coming from the not-for-profit, social enterprise, university, student and/or “other” sectors.

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Results from online surveys

For those unable to make the webinar, or wanting to see the highlights again, the filmed session can be accessed [here](#). During the event, the Shizenkan team carried out two polls, one to assess the nature of the audience and its thinking on the future, the other to get a sense of what the 500 participants thought of regenerative capitalism — and the book’s core concepts of Green Swans and Ugly Ducklings.

Summary of findings

Q. How do you feel about the world beyond 2030?

Participants were fairly optimistic with 39% arguing that — if we can get the right leadership in politics and business — humanity will thrive. 18% felt that the future would be fine if the relevant technologies could be developed and deployed in time. However, just over 42% were fearful, either because they think we have entered a “serious time of crisis” (21%) or because, while current generations may make it through, future generations will have a much tougher time (also 21%).

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Q. Can capitalism be reformed?

40% of respondents felt that capitalism could be reformed, although an equal number (39%) concluded that capitalism would fade out and be replaced by a better economic system. 11% stressed that we need a policy revolution to transform capitalism, while just 5% believed that capitalism will crash and burn.

40% of respondents felt that **capitalism could be reformed**.



53% of participants believe **strong executive leadership** is most needed for sustainability.

The spread of results is probably **an indication of uncertainty** — and of very mixed levels of preparedness across the Japanese economy.

Q. What is needed in a company or organisation to promote sustainability?

Here 'strong executive leadership' topped the list (53%), alongside better collaboration with external partners (40%).

Q. How well prepared is your organisation for the Exponential Decade?

It was hard to detect a clear answer here. The largest percentage (17%) of participants chose 6, denoting better than average preparedness (with 10 being high and exponential). The spread of results is probably an indication of uncertainty — and of very mixed levels of preparedness across the Japanese economy.

Participant comments

At the end of the session, participants were given 3 minutes to come up with **questions, comments** and **suggestions** for future action. We received an astonishing 332 entries. What follows is a sampling of some of the more interesting responses:

1. Questions

How does regeneration at the personal level link to societal, environmental and economic regeneration?

How can the financial markets become not just responsible and resilient, but truly regenerative?

If war is the driver of much systemic change, can COVID-19 take the place of war this time around?

What KPIs can we use to track the coming transformations?

What can the Green Swans Observatory learn from long-lived companies in Japan, with more than 20,000 over 100 years old?

How can Green Swan trajectories take root in conservative societies like Japan?

Will climate change unite humanity — or fuel further divisions?

Given that technology is evolving at an exponential rate how long will it be before we establish civilization in space?

What career paths would you recommend to future generations?

2. Comments

Money and value surfaced many times. In the form of support for: basic income, a global currency, a no-money economy, incorporating multiple capitals in valuation, a “market in good deeds”, and — perhaps the most imaginative — a proposal that governments should abandon GDP and instead measure the levels of oxytocin (the “love hormone”) in people’s blood.

Technology, too. Among other areas of interest: telework as the standard, a cyber platform to identify and promote Green Swan solutions, artificial photosynthesis, negative emission manufacturing, a “universal vaccine”, AI robots that could store people’s memories on retirement, technology where people can feel each other online, and — something of a Star Trek idea — “a tool that can communicate with all things”.

Finally **Communication**, had comments ranging from the need for effective, global communication of the Green Swans agenda, to initiatives that better listen to and understand what children and young people think and want.

3. Suggestions

Build on COVID-19 behavioral adaptations to tackle other systemic challenges, including climate change

Achieve equality, diversity and peaceful progress

Solve loneliness, particularly in an ageing society

Eliminate poverty, inequality and racism

A future where everyone can live to 100 and remain healthy and socially active

Create a Japan — and world — full of social and environmental entrepreneurs

Universal education

Build societies where future generations are key stakeholders

“Pay-it-forward” mindsets

A society that no longer produces substances that it cannot control

Lean, mindful consumption, including radical cuts in food waste

Meatless diets

Adopt hydroponics and other forms of sustainable agriculture

Money and value,
Technology and
Communication were some
of the most repeated themes.

More local production

Abolish wildlife trade — and commuting

Co-existence with nature

Aim for a decarbonized society by 2050

CO2 as a raw material and fuel

Zero-waste, zero-fossil-fuels, zero-emission future

Go for 100% circular and 100% renewable everything

Ocean power generation (with one recommendation for “moonlight power generation”, which may — or may not — hold the seeds of future wisdom)

Conclusions

As we have rolled out the Green Swans agenda globally, we have tried different event formats with different partners, including UN agencies, companies, sustainable business and innovation networks, and universities.

To date, the Shizenkan University event generated the best data and most creative suggestions — so we intend to evolve and replicate the approach. The outcomes and insights will be reported out via the **Green Swans Observatory**. To sign up for updates, please click on the links on page 8.

Annex: Poll Results

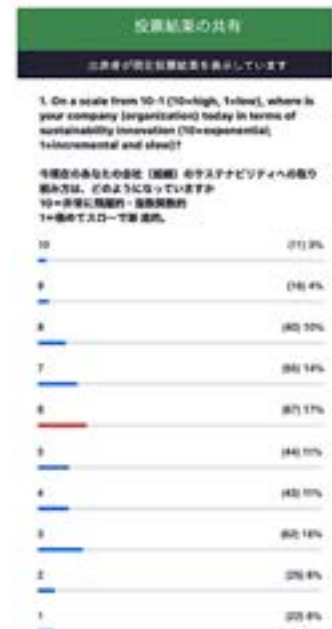
Results of online survey n=380



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Results of online survey n=380



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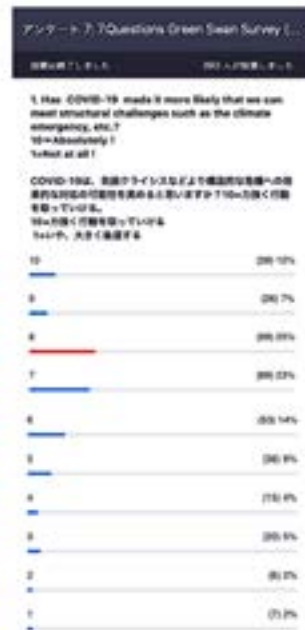
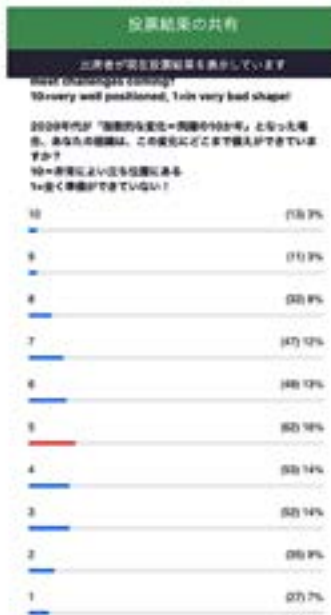
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Q6 If the 2020s become the "exponential decade" (with rapid change), how well is your company prepared to meet challenges coming?

10=very well positioned

1=in very bad shape!



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Further Information

For more information on the [Green Swans Observatory](#).

For more information on [Shizenkan University's Center for Sustainability & Innovation](#).