BUSINESS vs.

LONELINESS

How Your Company Can Tackle the Loneliness
Problem Through Profitable Business Solutions

PATHWAYS TO ACTION REPORT

ECONOMICS
OF MUTUALITY
ALLIANCE

MANCHESTER
1824
The University of Manchester

Loneliness is not an individual's problem. It's society's problem.

So business has a critical role to play in tackling it.

ECONOMICS OF MUTUALITY ALLIANCE

✉ hello@eom.org   ⌖ eom.org/loneliness

According to our research,

44%

of people globally show medium or high levels of loneliness[1].

" *Tackling loneliness is not just a moral imperative, but a strategic opportunity for business. This report offers a clear, innovative framework that empowers companies to make a real impact, both within their organizations and across society. The solutions presented are practical and forward-thinking, demonstrating how companies can support the creation of meaningful connections between people, while also achieving sustainable growth."*

Professor Pamela Qualter

Business vs. Loneliness Senior Advisor

Professor of Psychology for Education, Manchester Institute of Education, The University of Manchester

Co-chair of the World Health Organization Technical Advisory Group on Social Connection

Loneliness leads to[2]:

UP TO
50%
HIGHER RISK OF
DEMENTIA

UP TO
30%
HIGHER RISK OF
CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE

UP TO
25%
HIGHER RISK OF
EARLY DEATH

The health challenges associated with loneliness translate into significant economic costs, amounting to $6.7 billion in the US alone.[3]

1. Mutual Value Labs Research across 5 markets (US, China, Mexico, Germany, UK): "Intimate loneliness" levels, simplified for understanding, n = 6.144; Three factor UCLA-LS-9 loneliness scale (Hawkley et al., 2005) was used to measure the levels of loneliness.

2. World Health Organization Commission on Social Connection. Link.

3. Flowers L, Houser A, Noel-Miller C, et al. Medicare Spends More on Socially Isolated Older Americans. Washington, D.C.: AARP Public Policy Institute; 2017. Link.

Key Findings That Highlight the Business Opportunity for Tackling Loneliness

*Part 1 of this report presents the results of an **extensive global study on loneliness**, based on over **50,000 individual responses, the largest dataset of its kind,** from participants in five countries around the world[1].*

- Contrary to common belief, and consistent with other recent large-scale studies, we found loneliness decreases with age. **29% of Gen Z feel lonely compared to 14% of Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation.** Yet, most interventions still focus on the elderly — highlighting a gap for products, services, and workplace cultures that prioritize belonging amongst young people. *See p.17 to learn more.*

- Perhaps surprisingly, **more than 50% of people find positive alone time a helpful way of overcoming loneliness** — revealing a powerful opportunity for businesses to design environments, products, and experiences that support solitude, not just social interaction. *See p.11 to learn more.*

- **14% of people who completed the survey say they have nowhere to go when they feel lonely, but want to connect with others** — a clear opportunity for businesses to create connection-friendly spaces in places such as cafés, retail stores, and offices. *See p.18 to learn more.*

- **60% report experiencing 'relational' or 'collective' loneliness**, not just 'intimate' loneliness — opening the door for brands to design experiences that foster everyday social connection. *See p.12 to learn more.*

- **People not belonging to a group are 1.6x more likely to feel lonely** — giving businesses a chance to build community through memberships, loyalty programs, and shared identity experiences. *See p.14 to learn more.*

- **Dissatisfaction with income doubles the likelihood of loneliness, regardless of actual earnings** — suggesting companies can drive loyalty and retention among their workforce by improving perceived financial well-being, not just financial status. *See p.15 to learn more.*

1. Mutual Value Labs Research across 5 markets (US, China, Mexico, Germany, UK): "Intimate loneliness" levels, simplified for understanding, n = 6.144; Three factor UCLA-LS-9 loneliness scale (Hawkley et al., 2005) was used to measure the levels of loneliness. The dataset was collected by asking people to respond to survey questions and to share their experiences based on open-ended prompts.

Our Research

Mutual Value Labs, an insight-to-impact partner that is part of the Economics of Mutuality Alliance, conducted extensive original research in partnership with The University of Manchester and leading companies to understand and address the complex issue of loneliness at both systemic and individual levels.

The findings, which inform this report, reveal key drivers of loneliness, offering actionable insights and tailored recommendations to guide private-sector interventions.

About Mutual Value Labs

Mutual Value Labs equips companies to drive superior value creation through the Economics of Mutuality operating model. Its digitally enabled consulting capabilities, proprietary tools, and leadership development programs empower businesses to enhance performance by profitably addressing societal and environmental challenges.

Visit mutualvaluelabs.com to learn more

MUTUAL VALUE LABS

Global Loneliness Study

Funded by **Mars, Incorporated** and conducted with **The University of Manchester**

Carried out in the United States, Mexico, the United Kingdom, Germany, and China in 2023, this study collected over **50,000 quantitative and qualitative** responses to identify core loneliness drivers and patterns across diverse demographic groups.

MANCHESTER 1824
The University of Manchester

Country Loneliness Study

In-depth research carried out across the Czech Republic in 2023 including a structured literature review, **42 cross-sector stakeholder interviews**, and a **5-week ethnographic study** including home visits with **25 participants** from a broad demographic range.

Asahi GROUP

ASAHI EUROPE & INTERNATIONAL

In partnership with Asahi Europe & International, part of Asahi Group Holdings.

# Join the Fight Against Loneliness: How Your Business Can Make a Difference

In today's hyper-connected world, it may seem counter-intuitive that loneliness is one of the most urgent challenges of our time. Yet, loneliness is described as a "pressing health threat" by the World Health Organization[1] – impacting individuals, communities, and businesses alike. In the workplace, it contributes to increased sick days, reduced commitment, and weaker performance.

Dysfunctional business practices in the context of our increasingly globalized and individualized societies have contributed to the problem. Yet, we believe the private sector can be part of the solution. As a fundamental force in society, business has a critical role to play in tackling the multifaceted challenge of loneliness in partnership with cross-sector stakeholders.

Addressing loneliness begins with rethinking our understanding of it. Rather than focusing on 'fixing' individuals, companies have the potential to reshape the spaces and environments in which people interact, fostering social cohesion that drives both social impact and sustainable business growth.

This report, drawing on original research, leading academic insights, and compelling case studies, provides fresh perspectives and practical strategies. It shows how companies can profitably tackle the loneliness challenge through mutual value creation – leveraging their unique positions, capabilities, and sector expertise.

Whichever sector your organization belongs to, the opportunities are substantial. With an innovative framework and multiple growth pathways, this report empowers leaders to start turning insights into transformative actions.
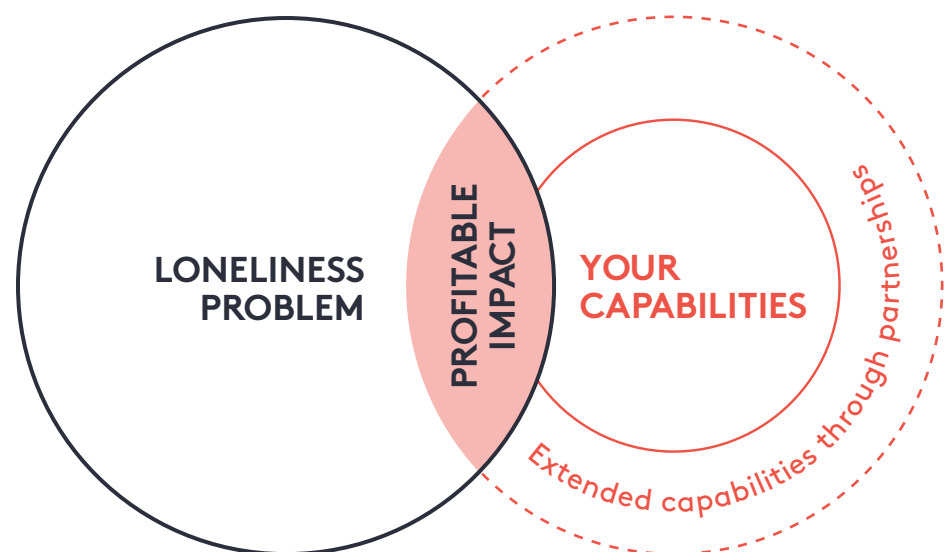
"*Applying the Economics of Mutuality operating model has helped our brands to drive positive societal impact and meaningful commercial growth at the same time.*

I encourage more companies to join the Business vs. Loneliness change platform and take action toward lasting change."

Mandikova Drahomira

Group Chief Sustainability Officer,
Asahi Group Holdings

Contents

THE LANDSCAPE OF LONELINESS

Understanding the Problem

Part 1 of this Business vs. Loneliness report shares key findings from the original research conducted by Mutual Value Labs with commercial partners.

We dive into the complexities of loneliness, exploring its prevalence across cultures, the types of loneliness individuals experience, and the systemic dynamics that drive loneliness. We also seek to dispel common myths—such as the misconception that loneliness is primarily an issue of being alone.

By challenging traditional views and understanding loneliness through a multifaceted lens, Part 1 lays the groundwork for designing effective, evidence-based interventions to address the problem.

Three Types of Loneliness

There are three core types of loneliness: Intimate, Relational, and Collective, each of which present unique characteristics. By examining these types, it's possible to better understand the barriers that individuals face when trying to overcome their loneliness, from societal stigmas around solitude to spaces that fail to encourage connection.

Our research collected data on each of the types to reveal a nuanced perspective on how to understand the issue of loneliness:

INTIMATE LONELINESS

Refers to a perceived lack of close, meaningful relationships, such as those with partners, close friends and/or family members.
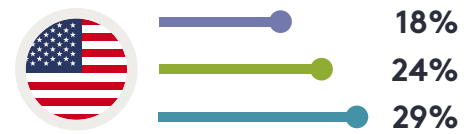
RELATIONAL LONELINESS

Describes the absence of regular and meaningful social connection, including with friends, colleagues, and family with whom one can feel comfortable.

COLLECTIVE LONELINESS

Involves a perceived lack of connection or belonging to a larger community and/or place, such as through group affiliations or trust in one's community.

The visualizations display the levels of each type of loneliness[1] within each country in our Global Loneliness Study. For example, levels of intimate loneliness in China are 10%.

United States

18%
24%
29%

Mexico

12%
23%
24%

United Kingdom

18%
28%
29%

Germany

9%
23%
28%

China

10%
24%
21%
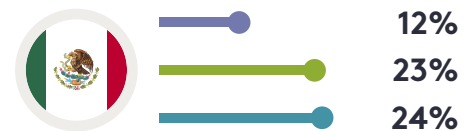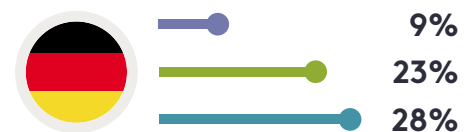
1. We gathered the country specific scores by averaging the answers to three questions associated with loneliness type as per the definition of the UCLA-LS-9 scale (Hawkley et al., 2005)

Common Misconceptions About Loneliness

A crucial first step for any business leader aiming to tackle loneliness is to examine their own assumptions about it. Many commonly held beliefs about loneliness lack support from research and may lead to ineffective solutions.

Myth #1
### *Loneliness = Being Alone*

Despite being associated with isolation, the narrative that "lonely people are lonely because they are alone" is misleading. Researchers define loneliness as the result of *perceived* deficiencies—either in quantity or quality—in social interactions.[1] In other words, you can feel lonely in the most crowded setting and you can feel a sense of belonging in moments of alone time.

SOLITUDE　　　　**LONELINESS**
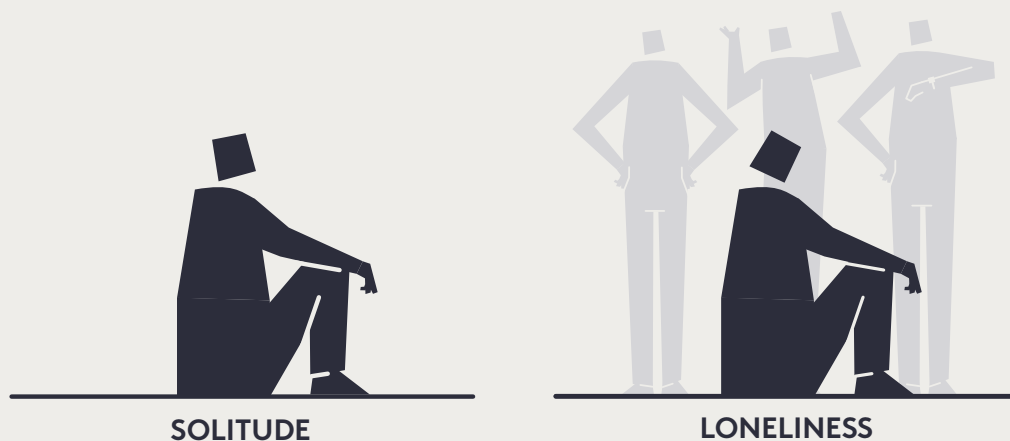
> **"** *If you look at the literature, loneliness actually hasn't increased over time.*
> *What we now have is much better awareness of what loneliness is and the impact that it has. For the first time, the media is really interested in it."*

Professor Pamela Qualter
Business vs. Loneliness Senior Advisor

Myth #2
There is a Loneliness Epidemic

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, global media attention on loneliness has surged. However, research findings remain inconsistent, challenging broad claims of a global loneliness epidemic[2]. There is little evidence to suggest the problem of loneliness has been getting worse, at least for as long as academics have been measuring it. Instead, loneliness appears to be a more enduring societal issue, developing over time and influenced by various social factors.

1. Luhmann, M., Buecker, S. & Rüsberg, M. Loneliness across time and space. Nat Rev Psychol 2, 9–23 (2023). Link.

Myth #3
# *Loneliness Stems From a Lack of Close Relationships*

As outlined on page 9, loneliness manifests in various forms. Intimate loneliness refers to the absence of close, meaningful relationships, such as those with romantic partners or close friends. While intimate loneliness is a contributing factor, our research identifies Relational Loneliness—a lack of quality connections with friends, neighbors, or colleagues—and Collective Loneliness—a sense of disconnection from one's community and environment—as the primary drivers.

Interestingly, the gap between single people and those in a romantic relationship reporting feeling lonely is less wide than many would expect. According to our Global Loneliness Study, 28% of single people report feeling lonely compared to 21% of those in a relationship.[1]

Although loneliness is felt on an individual level, it often stems from broader systemic factors. This was evidenced in our Global Loneliness Study, which found that:

45%
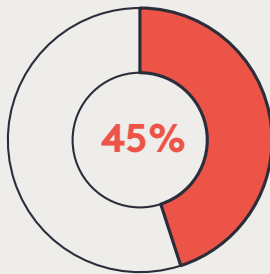
45% of respondents reported medium or high levels of Intimate Loneliness[2]

60%
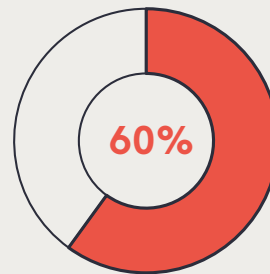
60% of respondents reported medium or high levels of Relational or Collective Loneliness[2]

Myth #4
Loneliness Varies by Gender

Research shows that, contrary to common belief, loneliness is not dependent on gender[3]. However, it should be noted that the research also shows that non-binary individuals report higher levels of loneliness, which is associated with their experience of being in a minority group and feeling discriminated against[4] (see p.16).

1. Having applied the Factor analysis, we have built a single indicator that uses all 9 questions and can be considered as a unique metric for loneliness which is enough to describe the dimensions of the 3 types: Intimate, Relational and Collective

2. 3 types of loneliness: intimate, relational and collective. Three factor UCLA-LS-9 loneliness scale (Hawkley et al., 2005) was used to measure the levels of loneliness. Each type of loneliness consists of three questions about "How often do you feel …" on a scale Never - Rarely - Sometimes - Often. The % correspond to Often for intimate loneliness and Never or Rarely for relational and collective loneliness;

3. Is Maes, M., Qualter, P., Vanhalst, J., Van den Noortgate, W., & Goossens, L. (2019). Gender differences in loneliness across the lifespan: A meta–analysis. European Journal of Personality, 33(6), 642-654.;

4. Is Barreto, M., Doyle, D. M., & Qualter, P. (2024). Changing the narrative: Loneliness as a social justice issue. Political Psychology, 45, 157-181.
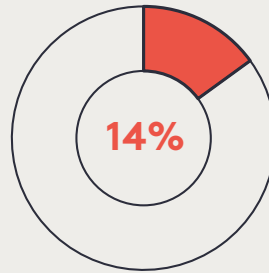
Myth #5

Loneliness is Most Common Among Older People

Contrary to popular belief, loneliness is most common among younger generations, who may experience isolation as they explore their identity. Such journeys of self-discovery often align with feelings of social disconnection. According to our Global Loneliness Study:

29%

14%
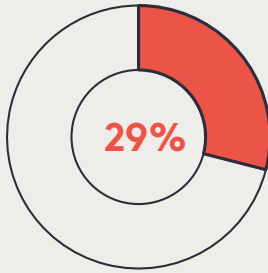
29% of Gen Z feel lonely[1]

14% of the Silent Generation and Baby Boomers feel lonely[1]

For more information, see p. 17. Despite this reality, most interventions still primarily target the elderly. The chart below shows the "supply" and "demand" gap when it comes to interventions designed to tackle loneliness among young people compared to older people.

18-50 years
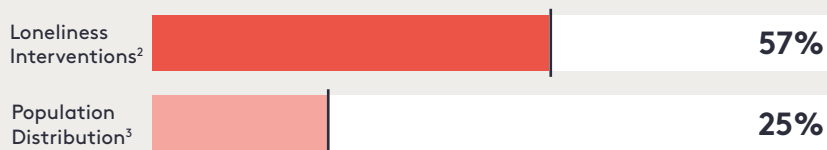
Loneliness Interventions[2]	**33%**
Population Distribution[3]	**45%**

50+ years

Loneliness Interventions[2]	**57%**
Population Distribution[3]	**25%**

1. Having applied the Factor analysis, we have built a single indicator that uses all 9 questions and can be considered as a unique metric for loneliness which is enough to describe the dimensions of the 3 types: Intimate, Relational and Collective

2. Musella, M., Blodgett, J., Harkness, F. Loneliness interventions across the life-course: A rapid systematic review. Link

3. Link

Key Factors Affecting Loneliness

Our research highlighted several complex dimensions that contribute to loneliness, including the factors included in the section below.

Belonging to a Group

Belonging to a group, association, or club reduces the likelihood of being lonely. Individuals who are not part of a group are 1.6x more likely to feel lonely than those who are group members.[1] This finding aligns with existing research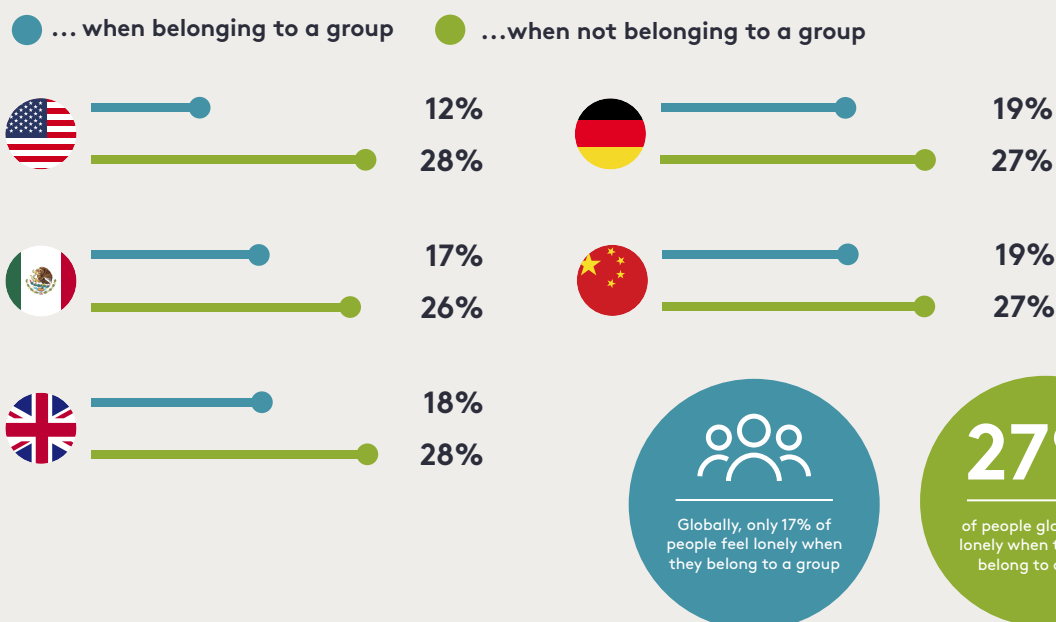[2] showing that group membership can help counteract loneliness; however, our study is the first to confirm this across multiple countries. To join groups, individuals often need to address anxieties about trust, and strategies for building trust have proven essential in encouraging group participation[3].

Likelihood of being lonely…

● … when belonging to a group   ● …when not belonging to a group

🇺🇸	12%	
	28%	
🇩🇪	19%	
	27%	
🇲🇽	17%	
	26%	
🇨🇳	19%	
	27%	
🇬🇧	18%	
	28%	

Globally, only 17% of people feel lonely when they belong to a group

27% of people globally feel lonely when they don't belong to a group

1. Having applied the Factor analysis, we have built a single indicator that uses all 9 questions and can be considered as a unique metric for loneliness which is enough to describe the dimensions of the 3 types: Intimate, Relational and Collective

2. Lim et al., 2016;

3. Tarrant et al., 2016; Survey question Q31: "Are you a member of any groups, clubs or associations?"
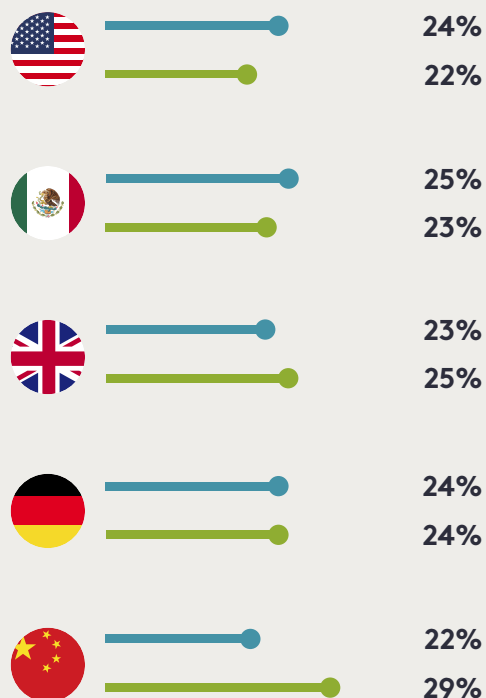
Income Level

Although income level in and of itself is not a predictor of loneliness, how people feel about their level of income is a predictor. In other words, a rich person is no more likely to be lonely than a poor person and vice versa. But people within the same income bracket can feel more lonely or less lonely depending on their subjective perception of how much disposable income they have.

Indeed, people who feel dissatisfied with their income are twice as likely to experience loneliness compared to those who are satisfied with their earnings[1].

Likelihood of being lonely based on income level

● High income ● Low income

	High income	Low income
🇺🇸	24%	22%
🇲🇽	25%	23%
🇬🇧	23%	25%
🇩🇪	24%	24%
🇨🇳	22%	29%

Likelihood of being lonely based on satisfaction with income level

● Satisfied with income ● Dissatisfied with income
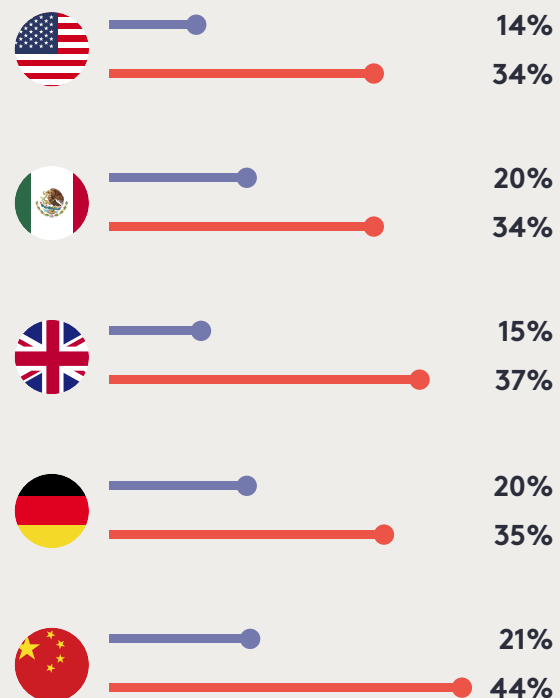
	Satisfied with income	Dissatisfied with income
🇺🇸	14%	34%
🇲🇽	20%	34%
🇬🇧	15%	37%
🇩🇪	20%	35%
🇨🇳	21%	44%

1. Having applied the Factor analysis, we have built a single indicator that uses all 9 questions and can be considered as a unique metric for loneliness which is enough to describe the dimensions of the 3 types: Intimate, Relational and Collective

Discrimination

Those who report experiencing discrimination face a higher risk of loneliness. Our research[1] across countries revealed significant links between loneliness and discrimination, with specific dynamics varying by region. For example, loneliness based on discrimination related to sexual orientation in Germany is significantly higher than other countries, as is loneliness based on discrimination related to gender in China.

Likelihood of being lonely because of discrimination based on...

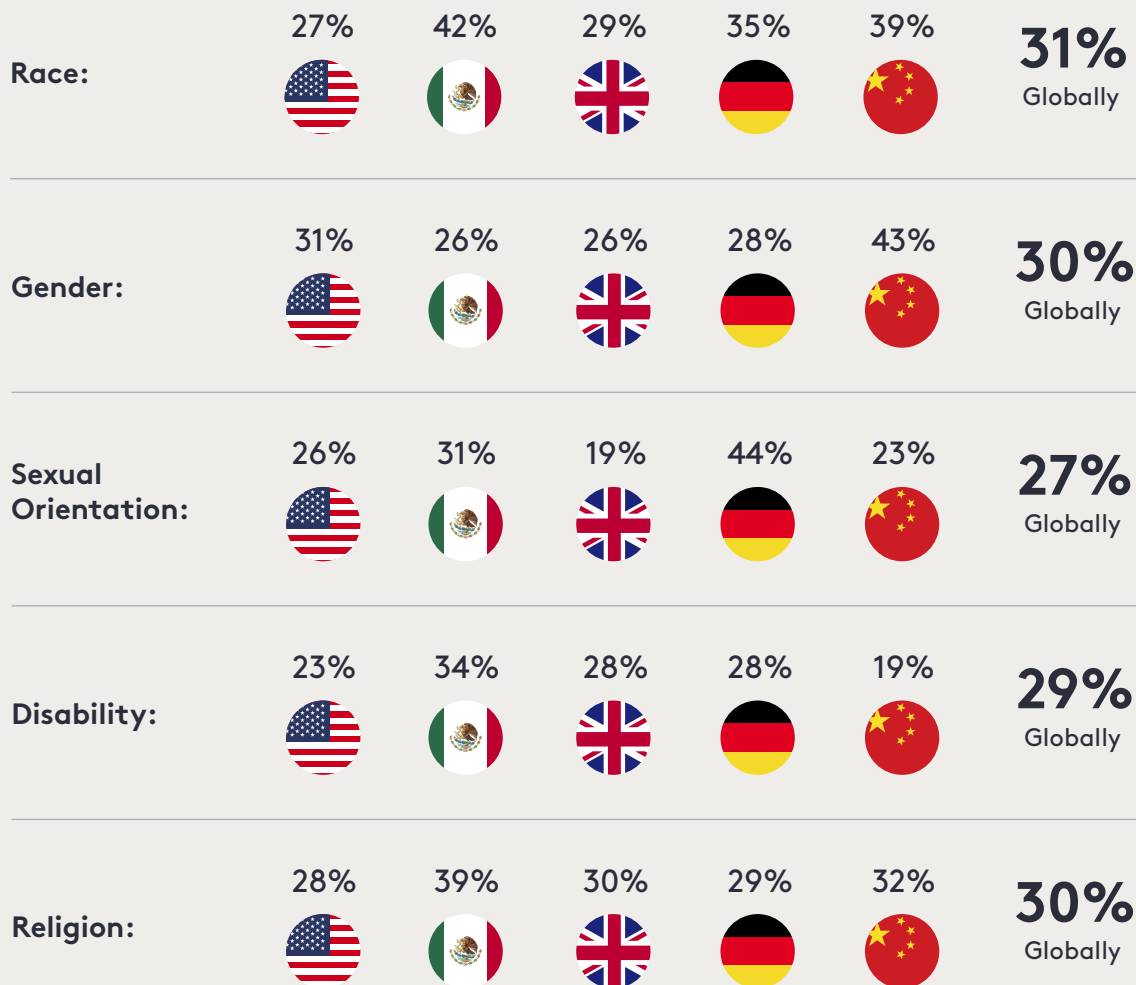|	USA	Mexico	UK	Germany	China	Globally
Race:	27%	42%	29%	35%	39%	**31%** Globally
Gender:	31%	26%	26%	28%	43%	**30%** Globally
Sexual Orientation:	26%	31%	19%	44%	23%	**27%** Globally
Disability:	23%	34%	28%	28%	19%	**29%** Globally
Religion:	28%	39%	30%	29%	32%	**30%** Globally

1. Having applied the Factor analysis, we have built a single indicator that uses all 9 questions and can be considered as a unique metric for loneliness which is enough to describe the dimensions of the 3 types: Intimate, Relational and Collective

Age

Our research indicates that loneliness generally decreases with age, a finding consistent with previous studies[1]. However, most academic evaluations of loneliness interventions focus on Generation X or those over 50[2], revealing a gap between the existing 'supply' of interventions and the 'demand' among younger populations (see p.13).

Likelihood of being lonely based on age

	USA	Mexico	UK	Germany	China	Globally
Silent & Baby Boomers 1928–1968	11%	12%	23%	12%	20%	**14%**
Gen X 1965–1980	20%	16%	18%	25%	26%	**20%**
Millennials 1981–1996	26%	28%	24%	28%	23%	**25%**
Gen Z 1997–2020	30%	28%	33%	23%	27%	**29%**

More Lonely

1. Barreto, M., Victor, C., Hammond, C., Eccles, A., Richins, M. T., & Qualter, P. (2021). Loneliness around the world: Age, gender, and cultural differences in loneliness. Personality and Individual Differences, 169, 110066. Link.

2. Musella, M., Blodgett, J., Harkness, F. Loneliness interventions across the life-course: A rapid systematic review. Link.
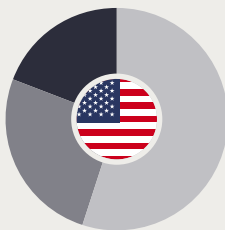
Places to Connect

14% of respondents indicated they have nowhere to go when they feel lonely, highlighting an unmet need and potential commercial opportunity to address loneliness on a larger scale by creating environments that offer spaces for connection.[1]
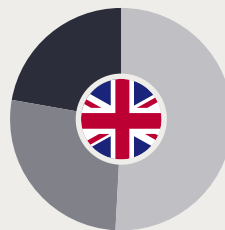
We asked survey respondents:
"Is there a place you can go where you don't feel lonely?"

- **55%** Yes
- **26%** To some extent
- **19%** No
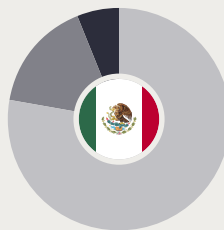
- **78%** Yes
- **16%** To some extent
- **6%** No

- **51%** Yes
- **27%** To some extent
- **22%** No
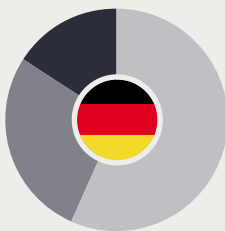
- **58%** Yes
- **26%** To some extent
- **16%** No
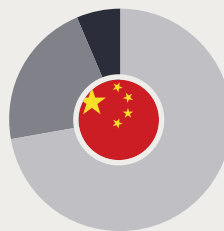
- **71%** Yes
- **23%** To some extent
- **6%** No

Globally

- **63%** Yes
- **23%** To some extent
- **14%** No

1. 3 types of loneliness: intimate, relational and collective. Three factor UCLA-LS-9 loneliness scale (Hawkley et al., 2005) was used to measure the levels of loneliness. Each type of loneliness consists of three questions about "How often do you feel …" on a scale Never - Rarely - Sometimes - Often. The % correspond to Often for intimate loneliness and Never or Rarely for relational and collective loneliness.

THE LONELINESS CHANGE COMPASS

Identifying Effective Intervention Strategies

In Part 2, we introduce the Loneliness Change Compass, an innovative framework we have developed to help companies tackle the problem of loneliness.

Based on our original research outlined in Part 1 plus additional academic input, the Compass helps business leaders to move beyond simply understanding the problem of loneliness by offering clear and practical intervention strategies.

We also outline how the Compass goes further than traditional intervention strategies by taking into account the need for systemic change. Typically, interventions place the burden solely on individuals to fix their loneliness, which limits the role businesses can play in tackling the problem.

Barriers to Overcoming Loneliness

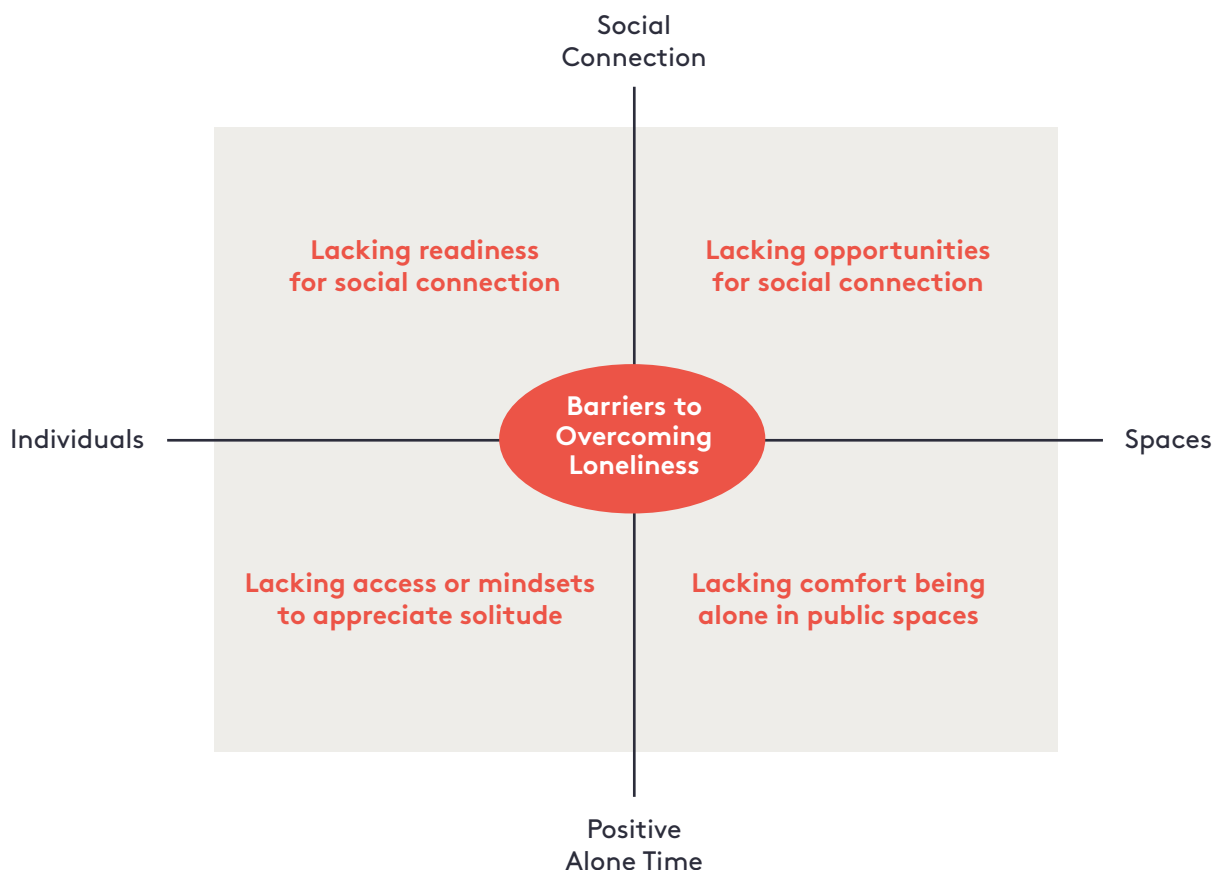## The Role of Business in Removing Barriers

Loneliness dissipates when individuals overcome it on their own terms – using their own coping strategies to do so in a manner uniquely suited to their personal psychology and circumstances. Therefore, although companies cannot directly eliminate loneliness for someone, they can play a crucial role in removing certain barriers that hinder individuals from addressing it themselves.

As a result, effective strategies for companies to combat loneliness should focus on identifying and dismantling these barriers – thereby empowering individuals to resolve their loneliness in ways that are relevant to them.

Identifying the Barriers

Through the research outlined in Part 1, we discovered that two dimensions must be considered when identifying the barriers that contribute to loneliness: from 'Individuals' to 'Spaces' and from 'Social Connection' to 'Positive Alone Time' – see the matrix below.

Based on these dimensions, we have identified four key obstacles that get in the way of people overcoming their loneliness. We have noted these barriers in each quadrant.

Social Connection

Lacking readiness for social connection

Lacking opportunities for social connection

Individuals

Barriers to Overcoming Loneliness

Spaces

Lacking access or mindsets to appreciate solitude

Lacking comfort being alone in public spaces

Positive Alone Time

Understanding the Barriers

Lacking readiness for social connection
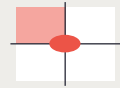
The ability to build **social connections** varies widely among **individuals**. Some find themselves trapped in negative feedback loops – struggling to engage in relationships and feeling unable to trust others. Barriers such as underdeveloped social skills and unhelpful cognitive patterns make it harder for people to overcome their loneliness.
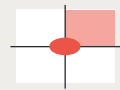
Survey respondent[1]:

"Every time I open up, I get rejected. People are just so self-focused and don't see me. People don't want to be my friend."

## Lacking opportunities for social connection

People are not accessing the physical or digital **spaces** that could help them build **social connections**. In many countries, the decline of social groups and associations, along with the erosion of social infrastructure, has reduced opportunities for meaningful interactions. For example, the closure of public libraries eliminates free, accessible spaces where people can meet and engage with others. Similarly, the rise of remote work has limited casual workplace interactions, making it harder for colleagues to connect organically.

Survey respondent[1]:

"I don't feel comfortable going to our local bar anymore. The way the room was redesigned makes you feel that everyone can see you while you can't see the others in the dark."

## Lacking access or mindsets to appreciate solitude
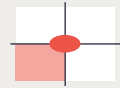
Many **individuals** struggle to experience **positive alone time**, either due to structural barriers that limit their access to fulfilling solo activities or patterns of distraction, whether digital or otherwise, that push quality time in solitude from reach. For these people, solitude can feel like a void rather than an opportunity for personal growth.

Survey respondent[1]:

"I would like to go to the forest, but I think going there is a bit dangerous for a woman."

Lacking comfort being alone in public spaces
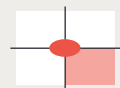
Many people struggle to experience **positive alone time** in public **spaces**, often due to environments that prioritize group interactions over solo experiences. Both physical and digital spaces frequently reinforce stigmas associated with being alone, perpetuating narratives that frame solitude as a sign of failure or inadequacy rather than a valuable and fulfilling experience.

Survey respondent[1]:

"In a restaurant I would feel strange that everyone is accompanied, and I am alone. I don't know if I would dare."

1. An illustrative quotation from an individual who shared their personal experiences of loneliness in a Mutual Value Labs qualitative research survey.

Using the Loneliness Change Compass

We have developed an innovative framework called the Loneliness Change Compass that can guide companies in their efforts to remove the barriers outlined in the previous section.

The Compass' four intervention strategies provide pathways to action for business leaders looking to help tackle the problem of loneliness – whether through external initiatives aimed at broader societal impact or internal strategies focused on reducing loneliness among employees.

In Part 3, we will explore how your company can begin designing targeted interventions to tackle loneliness using these intervention strategies.

Empower Individuals for Social Connection

Offer Spaces for Social Connection

Social Connection

Individuals

LONELINESS CHANGE COMPASS

Spaces

Empower Individuals for Positive Alone Time

Positive Alone Time

Offer Spaces for Positive Alone Time

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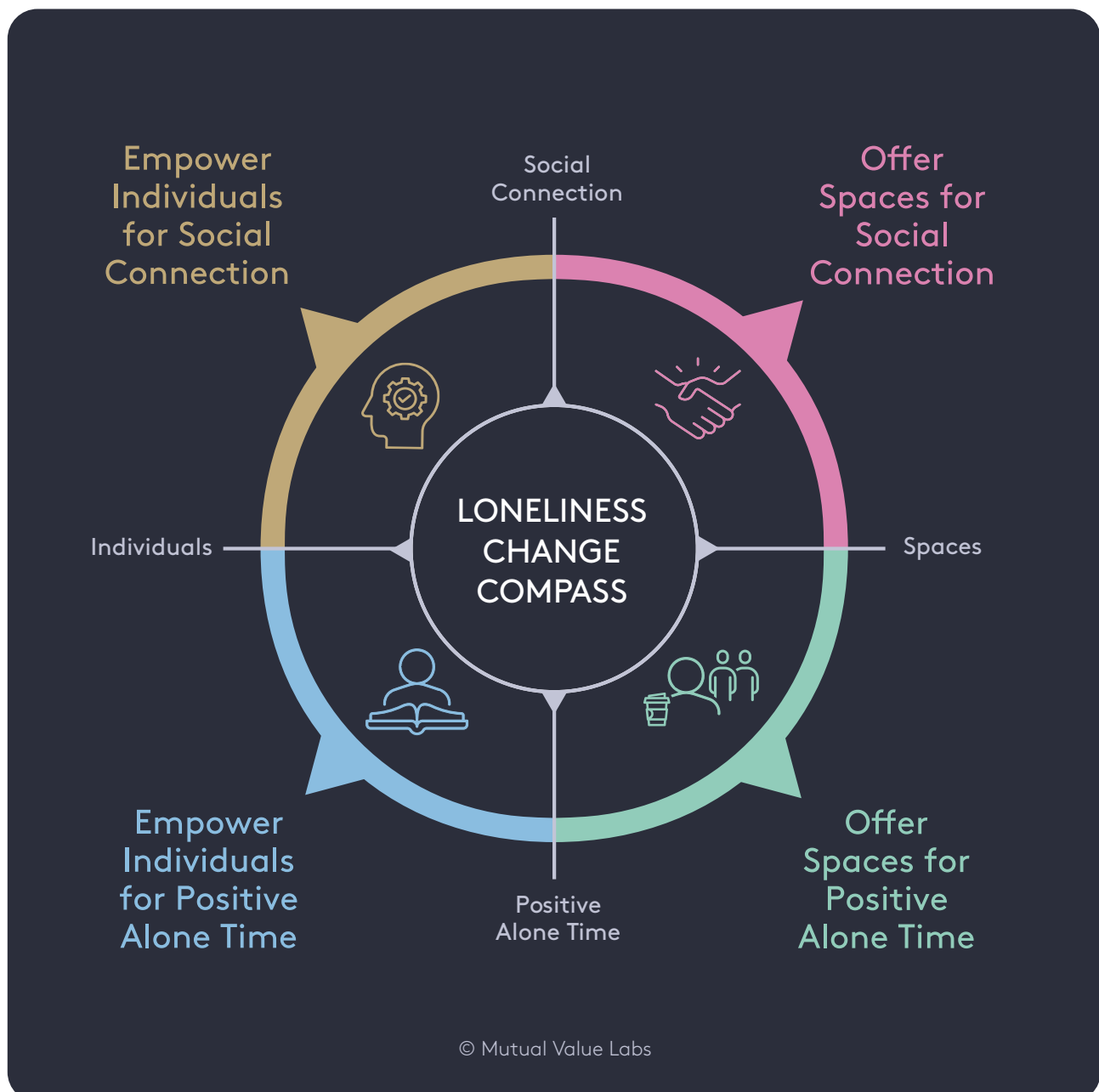
Unpacking the Intervention Strategies

How can you support employees, suppliers, partners, clients, or community groups by removing barriers that are preventing them from overcoming their loneliness?

Empower Individuals for Social Connection

How can you support people that are lacking readiness for social connection due to underdeveloped social skills or cognitive patterns?

External intervention example: A mental wellness app partners with psychologists to create a 30-day guided program that helps users develop communication skills, reframe negative thought patterns, and build confidence in social interactions.

Internal intervention example: A healthcare company offers training workshops on communication and relationship-building skills, helping employees improve their interpersonal skills and foster positive workplace relationships.

Offer Spaces for Social Connection

How can you shape physical or digital environments and experiences to support people that are lacking opportunities for social connection?

External intervention example: A gaming company intentionally incorporates community building opportunities into the design of its video games and associated platforms.

Internal intervention example: A consulting firm introduces a "Lunch Buddies" program, pairing employees from different teams for monthly lunches, encouraging cross-departmental connections and new friendships.

Empower Individuals for Positive Alone Time

How can you support people that are lacking access or mindsets to appreciate solitude due to structural obstacles or unhelpful practices?

External intervention example: A chain of bookshops launches a campaign that encourages people to read a book before going to bed rather than spending too much time on screens.

Internal intervention example: An insurance company offers a guide for staff members who have just joined the office from abroad about how to enjoy time alone in the city.

Offer Spaces for Positive Alone Time

How can you shape physical or digital environments and experiences to support people that lack comfort being alone in public spaces?

External intervention example: A travel company introduces a feature on their website for solo travellers, which allows them to book hotels and experiences tailored to enjoying time alone.

Internal intervention example: A financial services firm redesigns its office layout to offer passive participation in the office community, including open lounge areas and quiet zones with small round tables that don't appear empty when occupied by one person.

Moving Beyond Traditional Intervention Strategies

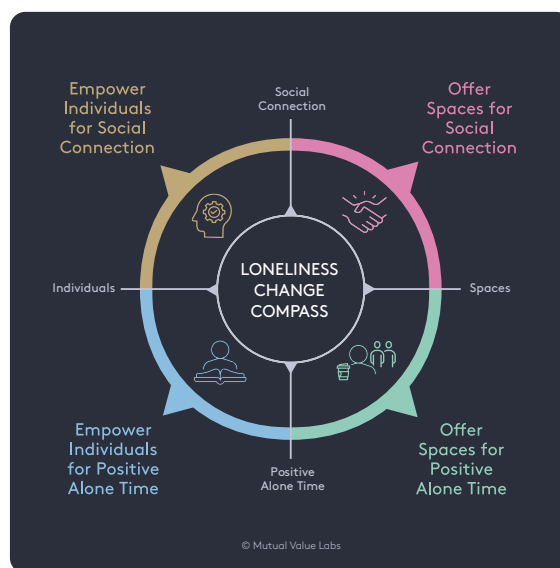**The multidimensional and systemic approach of the Loneliness Change Compass challenges the established paradigm on loneliness intervention design, which typically focusses only on changing individuals and fostering social connection.**
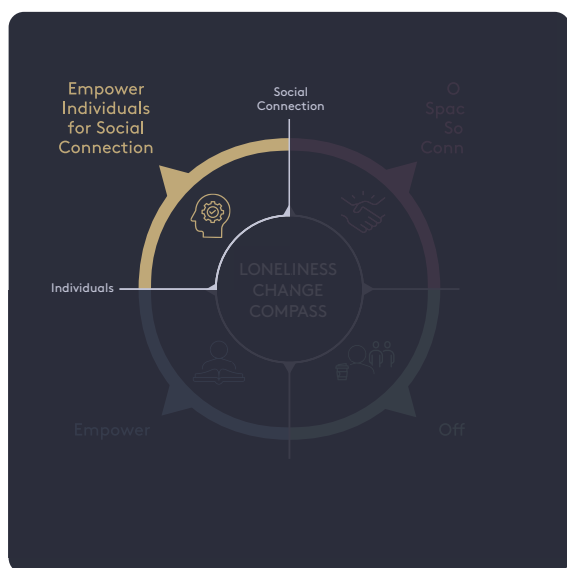
Traditional
Intervention Strategies

Loneliness Change Compass
Intervention Strategies

From Only Seeking to Change the Individual to Offering Spaces

Conventional understanding regards "not being lonely" and "not feeling lonely" as the individual's responsibility. Although individuals do bear some responsibility, we want to emphasise the importance of place and environment in driving loneliness.

Our research shows that people's preferred coping strategies to "not feel alone" involve enabling environments. Whether that's being around others in a coffee shop, talking to a staff member at the check-out counter of a grocery store, or connecting with others in a knitting club, environment has a significant impact on people's feelings of loneliness and broader belonging.

From Only Focussing on Fostering Social Connections to Enabling Positive Alone Time

Instinctively, we want to help "lonely" people by creating opportunities to meet others or teaching them the right skills and mindsets to connect properly. However, our research found that these approaches miss other important strategies.

"Being alone in solitude" emerged as a preferred emotional self-management strategy in our data. Yet people feel stigmatized for "being alone" and there are many other barriers to managing alone time positively.

Comparing the Approaches

	Traditional Intervention Strategies	Loneliness Change Compass Intervention Strategies
Understanding of Loneliness	Primarily seen as an individual psychological or emotional problem.	Viewed as a systemic issue influenced by both personal and environmental factors.
Responsibility	The individual is responsible for overcoming loneliness through self-improvement or social activities.	Shared responsibility between the individual and societies' stakeholders at large, with companies playing an active role.
Interventions	Focus on therapy, counselling, or encouraging social participation (e.g., joining clubs).	Holistic approach complementing the traditional approach with design of spaces and systems, and leadership.
View of Social Networks	Deficiency in one's social networks is seen as the root cause of loneliness. Solutions focus on helping a person "learn" to connect.	Loneliness is a "perceived deficiency" in one's social connections, not an actual deficiency. Appreciation of the relevance of "weak social ties" in the community.
Workplace Design	Often overlooked, with a focus on traditional office set-ups or remote work as a default.	Workplace design to encourage both positive alone time and collaboration, creating spaces that foster engagement and reduce isolation.
Alone Time	Viewed negatively and "not desirable." Often associated with isolation and loneliness.	Belief that many people seek time in solitude and that this is not necessarily a bad thing. People need to be empowered to spend quality alone time.
Role of Leadership	Loneliness is an individual's problem. Leadership plays a minimal role.	Leadership is pivotal, fostering a culture of belonging, inclusion, and open communication to combat loneliness within the workforce.
Measuring Success	Success is often measured by the number of social interactions or participation in activities.	Success is measured by the actual societal impact: a sense of belonging and social well-being.[1]

1. E.g., three factor UCLA-LS-9 loneliness scale (Hawkley et al., 2005)

Part 3

THE ECONOMICS OF MUTUALITY

How to Design and Deliver Interventions

As detailed in Part 1, loneliness is a complex societal challenge. But, as we've seen in Part 2, tackling the problem presents companies with a strategic opportunity to create both positive social impact and commercial growth.

The Loneliness Change Compass introduced on p. 22 provides a clear framework for identifying effective intervention strategies, but translating those strategies into actions that have lasting impact requires a complementary implementation approach.

This is where the Economics of Mutuality operating model comes into play. As briefly outlined in this third and final part of the report, it equips companies to combat loneliness by designing and delivering interventions, such as new products, services, spaces, workplace cultures, or leadership practices.

The model starts by identifying how loneliness manifests within and around your organization. It then moves through designing, testing, and embedding solutions that create mutual value.

Tackling Loneliness by Creating Mutual Value

The Economics of Mutuality is a proven operating model that drives superior value creation through impact-led management practices. Powered by digital tools, it equips companies to generate enduring mutual value for the benefit of multiple stakeholders by addressing societal and environmental challenges. Practical and scalable, the model enhances business performance by embedding purpose-driven strategies and metrics into day-to-day operations.

In the following pages, we explore how companies can leverage the operating model to address the societal challenge of loneliness through mutual value creation. By embedding social impact within their core strategies, companies can develop solutions that not only reduce loneliness but also unlock new opportunities for growth, market expansion, and brand differentiation.

This approach emphasizes creating long-term, sustainable value for both society and the business. Addressing a societal issue like loneliness thus becomes more than a responsibility – it becomes a strategic advantage that fosters innovation and enhances business performance.

Economics of Mutuality Operating Model:
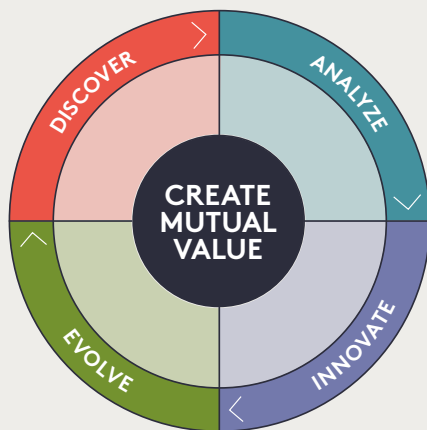
DISCOVER: Purpose Opportunity Identification

Uncover new strategic opportunities by pinpointing how to tackle the problem of loneliness in a way that is relevant to your capabilities and industry.

ANALYZE: Growth Strategy Development

Understand the ecosystem of stakeholders relevant to the area of loneliness you are tackling. Expand your visibility of value creation opportunities and surface value erosion risks to be mitigated.

INNOVATE: Impact-Led Solution Design

Design intervention(s) that empower your company to profitably address the problem of loneliness. Collaborate where necessary with external cross-sector stakeholders.

EVOLVE: Capability Building

Embed the intervention(s) in the day-to-day operations of your company by evolving mindsets, skillsets, and practices at every level of your organization.
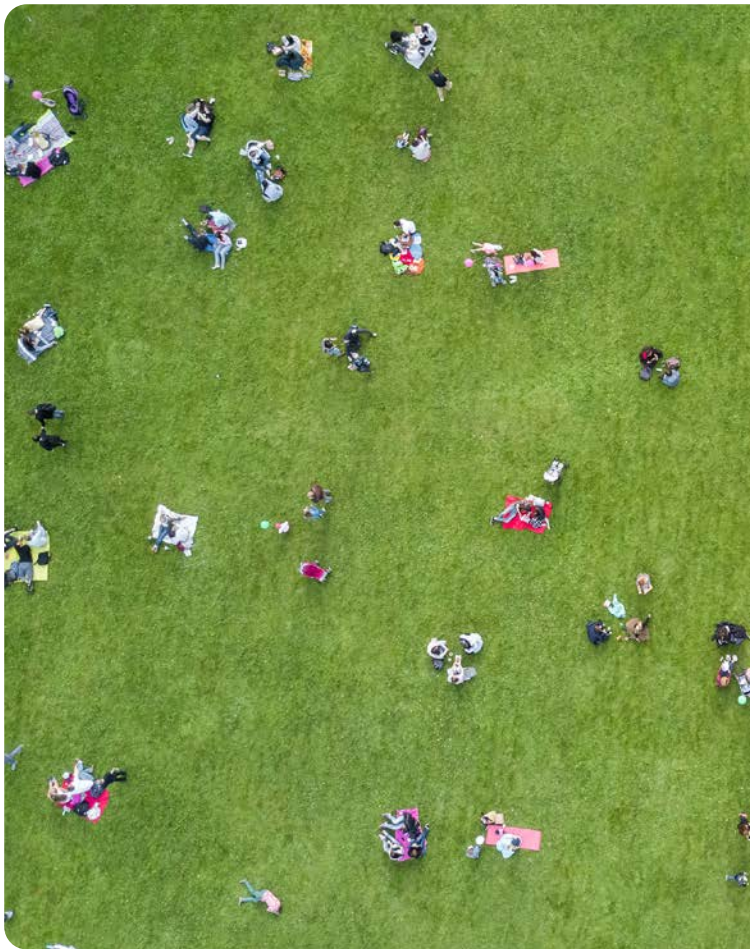
"The Economics of Mutuality challenges us to develop robust and virtuous business models. We acquire wisdom as we better understand the interdependence of things and nurture sustained ecosystems."

Gim Huay Neo
World Economic Forum Managing Board; Former Managing Director, Temasek

Development of the Model:
Fifteen Years of Research and Practice

The Economics of Mutuality operating model emerged from a multi-year business innovation program developed by Mars that engaged a range of cross-sector partners including Oxford University's Saïd Business School. The program delivered proof of concept practical application across business units, sectors, and markets along with teaching curricula and case studies.

The team behind the program spun out of Mars in 2020 to advance and implement the operating model more widely. Under the independent brand of the Economics of Mutuality Alliance, a partnership of two non-profits and two for-profits, they now collaborate with companies, investors, universities, and NGOs around the world to serve the common good.

"The Economics of Mutuality shows us that we can do well and we can do good at the same time. The myth that 'for us to win, someone else needs to lose' must be busted."

Nuno Gonçalves
Global HR and Learning Expert; Former VP of Talent Management & Executive Development, Nike.

DISCOVER
Purpose Opportunity Identification

Uncover new strategic opportunities by pinpointing how to tackle the problem of loneliness in a way that is relevant to your capabilities and industry.
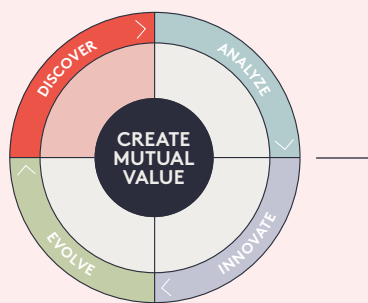
The Discover domain lays the foundation for the entire intervention process. Without a clear understanding of where your organization can make an impact, interventions risk being misaligned with business goals or societal needs.

By exploring the landscape of loneliness and identifying areas of opportunity leveraging the intervention strategies set out in the Loneliness Change Compass, your company can ensure its efforts are targeted, effective, and sustainable.

Suggested Actions

1. Use the Loneliness Change Compass as a Diagnostic Tool

Empower Individuals for Social Connection	*How can you support people that are lacking readiness for social connection due to underdeveloped social skills or cognitive patterns?*
Offer Spaces for Social Connection	*How can you shape physical or digital environments and experiences to support people that are lacking opportunities for social connection?*
Empower Individuals for Positive Alone Time	*How can you support people that are lacking access or mindsets to appreciate solitude due to structural obstacles or unhelpful practices?*
Offer Spaces for Positive Alone Time	*How can you shape physical or digital environments and experiences to support people that lack comfort being alone in public spaces?*

## 2. Assess Internal and External Needs

- Internally, survey employees to understand where loneliness might be impacting engagement, collaboration, or retention.
- Externally, analyze customer and community pain points to identify unmet needs or gaps in existing support structures.

3. Evaluate How to Leverage Organizational Strengths

- Reflect on your business's unique capabilities—whether it's your expertise, technology, infrastructure, or network—and determine how these can be harnessed to tackle loneliness.

- Match your company's core capabilities with the Compass dimensions to identify areas where your resources can have the most impact.

4. Define the "Sweet Spot" for Mutual Value Creation

- Locate the intersection of loneliness-related needs and your organization's ability to address them profitably.

- *This might, for instance, mean designing a service that facilitates social interaction while enhancing customer engagement, or rethinking workplace policies to foster inclusivity and belonging.*
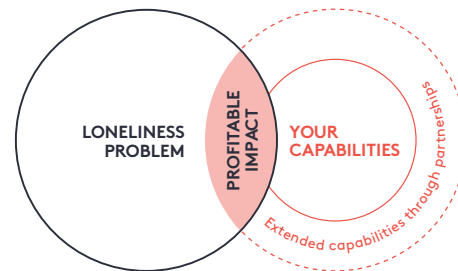
Illustrative Example

A social media platform discovers an area of loneliness to tackle using the *Offer Spaces for Positive Alone Time* intervention strategy: Many individuals seek engaging online spaces where they can unwind and explore content without the pressure to interact or seek validation from others. The company could offer a "solo mode" feature where users can engage with content anonymously without social metrics and engagement prompts.
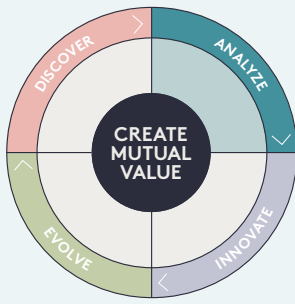
Go Deeper with the Business vs. Loneliness Practitioner Companion

This workbook is a practical guide to applying the Economics of Mutuality model in your organization. It offers starter questions, activities, canvases, and tools to help you address loneliness and shows how different business functions can contribute.

Request Your Free Copy

ANALYZE
Growth Strategy Development

Understand the ecosystem of stakeholders relevant to the area of loneliness you are tackling. Expand your visibility of value creation opportunities and surface value erosion risks to be mitigated.

After identifying strategic opportunities in the Discover domain, the next step in the Economics of Mutuality operating model is to deepen your understanding of the ecosystem surrounding the particular loneliness challenge that you are tackling.

This involves analyzing the interconnected relationships, stakeholders, and systemic factors that influence loneliness within your organization or externally. By mapping these dynamics, you can identify barriers to connection, opportunities for value creation, and key leverage points for impactful interventions.

Suggested Actions

1. Map the Ecosystem

- Identify key stakeholders, such as employees, suppliers, partners, clients, or community groups, and their roles in the ecosystem.
- Map the connections, pain points, and interdependencies between these stakeholders.
- *For instance, is a lack of community spaces inhibiting connection among your target audience? Are workplace structures limiting employee engagement?*

## 2. Understand Stakeholders & Identify Pain Points

- Conduct interviews, surveys, or workshops with stakeholders to uncover challenges they face related to loneliness.

3. Cluster Pain Points to Find Leverage Areas

- Group similar challenges into clusters that reveal patterns or trends.
- *For example, multiple stakeholders might highlight the need for more trust-building initiatives, pointing to trust as a critical leverage point.*
- Use human-centered design tools such as 5 Whys, Journey Mapping and the Iceberg Model to distinguish between surface-level symptoms (e.g., discomfort being alone at work) and deeper systemic issues (e.g., organizational cultures that discourage open dialogue about mental health).

4. Surface Opportunities for Mutual Value Creation

- Look for areas where addressing pain points can create mutual benefits.

- *For example, supporting employees in overcoming loneliness could enhance team collaboration while reducing turnover rates.*
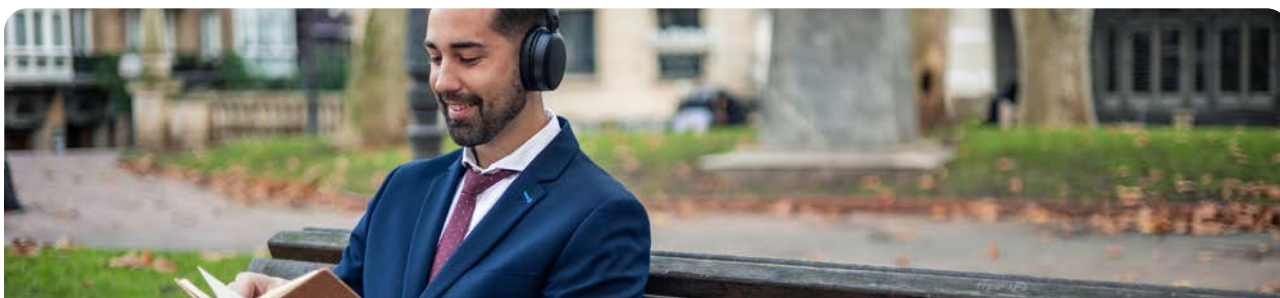
Illustrative Example

In the Discover domain, an insurance company identifies an area of loneliness to tackle using the ***Empower Individuals for Positive Alone Time*** intervention strategy: Many employees struggle to disconnect from work and spend meaningful time alone, leading to burnout and reduced well-being.

Through the Analyze domain, the company conducts employee surveys and focus groups, revealing that many team members feel pressured to be "always on". They report that they rarely take breaks for personal reflection or relaxation, fearing it may be perceived as unproductive.

The research also uncovers a disconnect between leadership expectations and employee behavior – while senior management encourages well-being, employees feel there is an unspoken culture of constant availability that prevents them from taking time for themselves.

Further analysis highlights that employees who do carve out solo time during the day – whether for reading, meditation, or short walks – report greater focus and lower stress levels. However, many feel they lack permission or structured opportunities to do so.

The company realizes that by normalizing and supporting positive alone time, it could improve employee well-being while enhancing productivity and job satisfaction.

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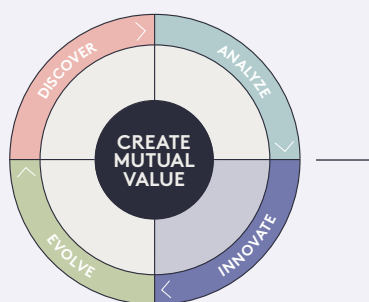
INNOVATE
Impact-Led Solution Design

Design intervention(s) that empower your company to profitably address the problem of loneliness. Collaborate where necessary with external cross-sector stakeholders.

Building on the insights gathered in the Discover and Analyze domains, the Innovate domain focuses on designing and piloting effective intervention(s) that address the root causes of loneliness.

It bridges the gap between strategy and action, empowering your company to develop scalable solutions that deliver both societal impact and business value. By piloting intervention(s), you can explore creative ways to address loneliness, refine solutions based on real-world feedback, and build scalable models for long-term impact.

Suggested Actions

1. Prioritize Leverage Areas to Address

- Review the leverage areas identified in the Analyze phase and assess where your organization has the highest capacity for impact.
- Use a prioritization grid, evaluating each leverage area by potential impact and your company's ability to address it effectively (e.g., resources, expertise, or partnerships).

2. Design Intervention Concepts

- Develop systemic solutions aligned with the Loneliness Change Compass intervention strategies for the prioritized leverage areas.
- Ensure interventions are inclusive, addressing the unique needs of diverse stakeholders such as employees, customers, or community members.

3. Collaborate with Stakeholders

- Engage external partners like NGOs, local governments, or other businesses to co-design interventions, leveraging complementary capabilities.
- *For example, a food retailer might collaborate with a local charity to create "community cooking nights" that bring people together.*

4. Pilot Minimum Viable Products

- Test your intervention concepts in a controlled setting to evaluate feasibility, impact, and scalability.

- Collect qualitative and quantitative feedback from participants to refine the solution.

5. Implement Solutions and Measure Impact

- Establish clear metrics to evaluate the success of the intervention during the pilot stage.

- Focus on both social and business outcomes, such as improved well-being, increased customer loyalty, or enhanced employee engagement.

Illustrative Example

In the Discover domain, a consumer electronics company identifies an area of loneliness to tackle using the **Empower Individuals for Social Connection** strategy: Many elderly individuals in urban areas feel disconnected from their communities due to limited confidence in using modern technology, preventing them from engaging with family, accessing essential services, or participating in online communities.

Through ecosystem research carried out in the Analyze domain, the company realizes that a lack of digital literacy – not just access to technology – is a primary barrier to connection. Many older adults own smartphones but feel intimidated by apps and online interactions, leading to isolation. To extend its capabilities, the company partners with NGOs specializing in senior engagement and local governments to better understand the needs of this demographic and co-design an effective solution.

In the Innovate domain, the company pilots a 'Connected Living' initiative, offering free, hands-on training sessions at local community centers. Designed to be both educational and social, these sessions teach older adults how to use smartphones, video calling apps, and social media platforms safely and effectively.

To ensure ongoing engagement, the company sets up a dedicated helpline and an online resource center with step-by-step tutorials, created in collaboration with its NGO partners. The initiative's success is measured using the UCLA Loneliness Scale[1], tracking changes in participants' self-reported loneliness levels before and after the program. This steers the program based on actual impact rather than on limited output metrics such a "number of people reached".

In its pilot phase, the program not only bridges the digital gap but also strengthens intergenerational connections, helping seniors maintain meaningful relationships with family and friends. The company gains positive media coverage, attracts new customers among both seniors and their families, and reinforces its brand identity as a leader in fostering inclusivity and digital empowerment.

1. Three factor UCLA-LS-9 loneliness scale (Hawkley et al., 2005)

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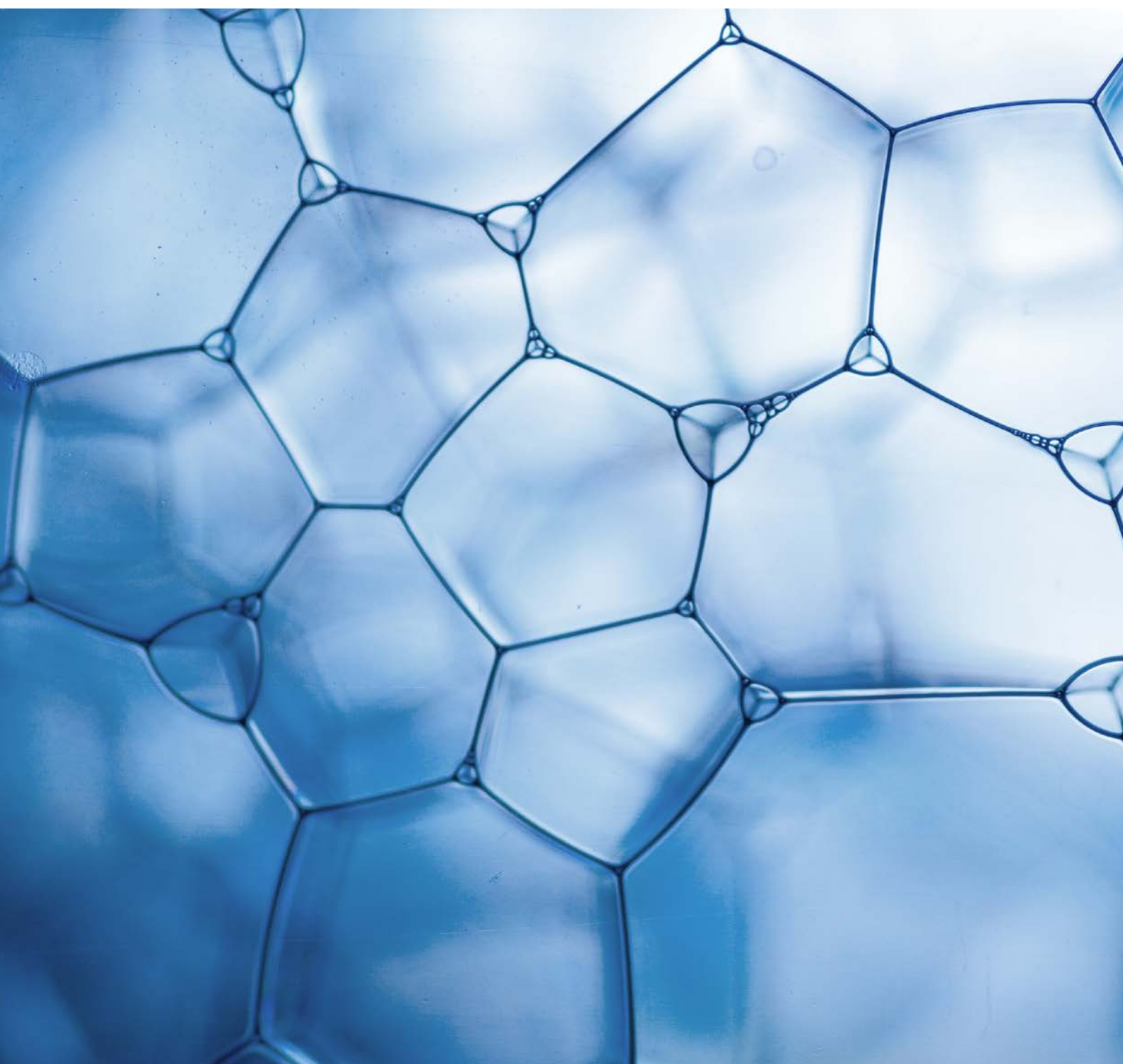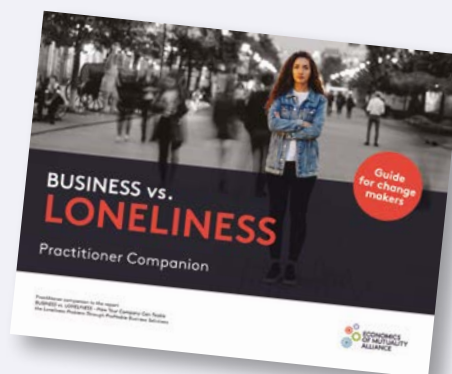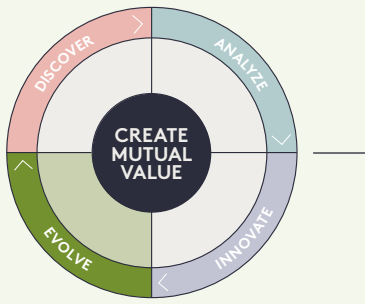
EVOLVE
Capability Building

Embed the intervention(s) in the day-to-day operations of your company by evolving mindsets, skillsets, and practices at every level of your organization.

Longevity and scalability are critical to systemic change. Interventions must go beyond one-off initiatives and be integrated into the company's strategy, leadership practices, performance metrics, and culture. Embedding and evolving interventions ensures that their impact is both lasting and scalable.

Suggested Actions

1. Integrate Solutions into Operations

- Build interventions into everyday processes and workflows.
- Ensure that interventions align with the company's strategic priorities, making them an integral part of operational decision-making.

2. Adopt Mutual Value Metrics

- Incorporate new metrics that track both social and financial outcomes, such as "employee sense of belonging," "community trust," or "customer engagement."
- Develop dashboards or frameworks to monitor these metrics alongside traditional business KPIs like revenue or productivity

3. Encourage Cross-Department Collaboration

- Align efforts across HR, sustainability, marketing, and strategy teams to ensure consistency and amplify the impact of interventions.

4. Scale and Replicate Success

- Evaluate successful interventions and identify opportunities to replicate them across different departments, markets, or stakeholder groups.

5. Foster a Mutual Value Mindset

- Train leaders and employees to adopt practices that prioritize mutual value creation.

Illustrative Example

In the Discover domain, a real estate development company identifies an area of loneliness to tackle using the *Offer Spaces for Social Connection* strategy: Residents in urban apartment complexes often feel disconnected from their neighbors, leading to a sense of isolation and lack of community.

Based on ecosystem research carried out in the Analyze domain, the company recognizes that fostering social connection requires expertise beyond real estate design. To extend its capabilities, it forms strategic partnerships with local organizations, community groups, and behavioral scientists specializing in social well-being. Together, they co-design an intervention aimed at transforming communal areas into hubs for meaningful interaction.

Using the steps set out in the Innovate domain, the intervention begins with the redesign of multi-purpose spaces in select properties, including lounges, rooftop gardens, and activity rooms. Each space is designed with insights from sociologists and urban planners to encourage interaction through shared seating arrangements, open layouts, and modular furniture. The company also collaborates with cultural organizations and wellness experts to curate weekly events, such as yoga classes, game nights, and communal dining experiences, ensuring a diverse range of engagement opportunities.

Through the Evolve domain, the company scales the initiative by integrating the intervention into its standard property development model, embedding social connection as a core design principle. To enhance accessibility and engagement, it launches a mobile app – developed in partnership with a tech startup specializing in community engagement – which allows residents to book spaces, propose events, and connect with neighbors.

To further institutionalize its commitment, the company partners with an academic institution to provide leadership training on designing for social well-being, equipping executives with the skills to embed mutual value creation into future projects. Over time, the intervention transforms the company's properties into thriving community hubs, strengthening resident well-being while driving higher occupancy rates and long-term brand value.

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Case Study: How a Beer Brand is Tackling Loneliness

Asahi Europe & International partnered with Mutual Value Labs to tackle the problem of loneliness by creating new opportunities to socialize and connect with Kozel, their legacy beer brand that originated in the Czech Republic. Working through all four domains of the Economics of Mutuality operating model, the Kozel International team discovered, designed and piloted innovative interventions, guided by the Loneliness Change Compass.

DISCOVER: Purpose Opportunity Identification

The project team discovered an area of loneliness to tackle using the *Offer Spaces for Social Connection* intervention strategy: Many young adults in Europe are feeling lonely because they're lacking opportunities to socialize with friends and meet new people.

Through a workshop that explored how the brand's distinctive capabilities, including its heritage, intersect with societal needs, the project team realized they could enable young people to connect with others through their unique brand presence, quality products, and network of hospitality venues.

ANALYZE: Growth Strategy Development

To deepen their understanding of the problem, the project team conducted focused research in the Czech Republic, a sample market where loneliness among young adults is notably high.

They carried out a comprehensive ecosystem analysis, conducting 42 interviews with cross-sector stakeholders from government, NGOs, healthcare, and education. In addition, they deployed a 5-week ethnography study including home visits with 25 participants across a broad demographic and health spectrum.

Through this research, the project team uncovered key root causes of loneliness among young adults, ranging from generational divides to weakened family ties and gaps in mental health support.

The project team realized that by creating spaces in which young adults could mix and have fun, the business could help tackle the problem by enabling people to form meaningful social connections, while also boosting sales through increased footfall in their network of hospitality venues and strengthening their reputation as an inclusive, customer-focused brand.

INNOVATE: Impact-Led Solution Design

Building on the insights from the Czech Republic research, the Kozel International team launched a pilot intervention named Kozel Meeet in Romania. Using the tagline "Join us, there is always room for one more", the initiative encourages people to connect through shared interests, games, and regular social events.

Based on their clear understanding of the root causes of loneliness among young adults, the team prioritized intervention areas where they could make a meaningful impact. Initial activities included:

- **Kick off through influencer-driven team challenges**
- **In-person activation at the Untold music festival with group activities**
- **Social engagements in pubs sustained by an online platform**

With plans for expansion to additional markets in Europe, the team aims to strengthen the brand's image as a connector through Kozel Meeet, providing opportunities for social interaction in accessible, fun environments.
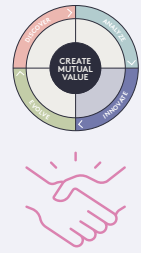
EVOLVE: Capability Building

To support the business in sustaining their efforts in tackling loneliness among young adults in Europe, Mutual Value Labs conducted a series of workshops focused on building mutual value mindsets, skills, and practices within the Kozel International team.

Furthermore, they supported the team with setting up a KPI framework that incorporates human and social capital metrics alongside traditional financial metrics. This framework empowers the company to manage and assess its interventions effectively, ensuring that its purpose-led actions continue to create both social impact and commercial value.

" *The insights from our research in the Czech Republic offered me a fresh perspective on purpose: When we understand a problem more deeply, we're better equipped to identify where we can make a meaningful impact.*"

Irina Laevskaya

Head of Global Brand Kozel
Asahi Europe & International

Join the
Business vs. Loneliness
Change Plaform

Loneliness is no longer an issue confined to the personal sphere – it is a global public health concern and an economic challenge that affects us all. As this report has shown, loneliness impacts individual well-being, community cohesion, and business performance in profound ways. Yet, it also presents an opportunity for businesses to take the lead in driving meaningful, systemic change.

By leveraging their unique capabilities, resources, and influence, companies can create solutions that address the root causes of loneliness while unlocking new pathways for growth and innovation. From reimagining workplaces to designing inclusive products and services, the private sector has a critical role to play in fostering connections and building environments that promote a sense of belonging.

But this is not a challenge businesses can tackle alone. Collaboration across industries, sectors, and communities is essential to create scalable and sustainable solutions.

We urge business leaders to step forward and embrace their role as changemakers – to join the Business vs. Loneliness change platform, collaborate with other stakeholders, and implement strategies that align social impact with business success. Together, we can transform loneliness from a global challenge into an opportunity for mutual value creation.

It's time to act with purpose, innovation, and determination to make a real difference for individuals, communities, and the world.
Let's begin today.

To learn more about the change platform, which includes events, research insights, and action initiatives, click the button below.
*To enquire about joining the change platform, email **hello@eom.org***

ECONOMICS OF MUTUALITY ALLIANCE

Business vs. Loneliness Pathways to Action Report
Published April 2025

✉ hello@eom.org   ▶ eom.org/loneliness