

The Post-Coronavirus World of Business, Education and Digital Lives

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COVID-19 is the biggest shock to our lives in decades. Its effects will be felt long after the pandemic and crisis have passed. Clearly the economy will take a major hit with a long recovery looming ahead. Some industries like tourism, transportation, and hospitality will be particularly affected. In the long-term, consequences to businesses will reflect changes to society and to our lifestyles. Digital technologies, already widespread, will expand even further for both leisure and work. The services sector is the one that best responded to the pandemic thanks to the ability of many employees to work from home. Even once the pandemic is over, homeworking has come to stay for many organizations, thanks to remote access to information systems, video conferences and digital communications. For many, homeworking has been a welcome change. Why face a long commute at rush hour to go to an office with bad coffee when work can be done

from the comfort of the home accompanied by a flavourful espresso? Indeed, I expect workers in the post-coronavirus world to have higher expectations from employers in terms of homeworking and flexible working hours. Likewise, many organizations are discovering the benefits of homeworking. Why pay for offices and associated utilities when employees can work from home? As such, I predict that after the pandemic there will be fewer and smaller offices, with regular homeworking, online meetings and digital platforms becoming more mainstream in many organizations. Indeed, shifting from physical to virtual work has already been implemented by some companies, a trend that will be exacerbated by the coronavirus. Public and government services will also become more digital.

No doubt the mobility industry (airlines, transports, etc.) will be affected in the post-coronavirus world. Tourism will recover faster because a virtual visit to a sunny white-sand beach is not the same as actually going to a sunny white-sand beach. Business travel, however, I think will be affected forever. Travelling on business and face-to-face meetings will be replaced by video conferences and other online communications. Digital lives are already leading to a growth in online meetings, shopping and even personal relationships. Furthermore, organizations will increasingly employ automation, robots and artificial intelligence. We are already tech-dependent and a surge in digital platforms is inevitable in the years post-coronavirus. In other words, a digital transforma-

tion of businesses is already taking place and will be catalysed by COVID-19.

One major sector that will be hit by COVID-19 with lingering effects is education. Many students prefer face-to-face teaching, and traditional classrooms will not disappear. Some topics are also more easily taught online than others. Nonetheless, I believe online teaching will become more prevalent, in particular for older students like university students. Already in recent years we have seen a growth in online courses and e-learning. Due to COVID-19, even traditional universities and schools are now being forced to move teaching online, and many changes will be here to stay. As educators and students alike are forced to move online and dabble in the vast array of online tools and communications, I believe a hybrid model of education will emerge from the pandemic with online education as an integral part of many schools and universities. Online teaching allows students to learn at their own pace, which is particularly suited for more mature, older students. Of course, one downside of moving education online is that it risks increasing the gap between privileged and disadvantaged students, as the latter may lack the tools to join the online world. Therefore, we need to ensure that all students have access to the necessary digital technologies.

Overall, the world that emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic and global crisis will be more digital than ever. As we are forced to adapt to homeworking and digital lives,

many of the changes that were forced upon us by the pandemic will be here to stay. I predict this will mean a world with less travel, less mobility and a growing number of activities online, including in business, leisure and education. Digital lives forever.

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