2020: a year that changed everything

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As 2021 goes off to a start, will the world return to normal or to near normal? In case it does not, what will be the route to the "next normal?"

The COVID-19 burst is only one of several occasions that made 2020 a year like no other. The year has brought more change than many might have envisioned. The pandemic is not only a health crisis, but also a forthcoming restructuring of the global economic order.

During an unusual year, over a million lives were lost in the pandemic, oil prices went negative, protests occupied the streets and technological developments emerged at a record speed. The year 2020 witnessed both huge changes and sorrows due to the pandemic as well as the intensified worries over the dreadful economic situation.

While exploring what's next, for some people "survival" is the only mode, as others are gazing through a "haze of uncertainty" regarding how to situate themselves when the crisis passes.

Since nobody can assure how long the crisis will keep going, the real crucial question is "what will this new normal look like?"

As we entered the Fourth Industrial Revolution, plainly both business and industry have moved profoundly to more virtual and distant operations. Moreover, working from home has brought about a lot higher dependence on technology for many people.

Key megatrends have changed the job market where job quality, job quantity and inclusiveness are three key measurements as per the OECD's "Jobs Strategy Framework." There are expanding worries about the nature of some of the latest jobs which may carry the risk of increasing inequalities, social divisions, discontent, adversely impacting efficiency, development, prosperity and social cohesion.

The "Employment Outlook 2020" report published by OECD states that the pandemic has set off one of the worst job crises since the Great Depression. There is an actual threat that the crisis will increase inequalities, which will later affect societies for quite a long time to come. Countries currently need to prepare with all that they can in order to prevent this crisis from transforming into a social one. Rebuilding a more resilient labor market is indispensable for ensuring a better future for the generations.

The impact of the pandemic and social distancing measures negatively affected the economies of OECD countries. The report highlights that the working hours decreased by 10 in certain countries, in contrast to the first months of the 2008 financial crisis.

The job crisis is striking the workforce in varying intensities. Young people are challenged with a tough job market that could easily defy their expectations; women and underpaid employees are probably going to confront more prominent joblessness; whereas part time, temporary and self-employed workers, making up around 50 percent of the labor force, are struggling.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has been causing deep societal and organizational changes, there is a need for reshaping the work outlook based on practices and lessons learned through the crisis.

An article published by Delliot titled Returning to Work in the Future of work: embracing purpose, potential, perspective, and possibility during COVID-19 states that, "COVID-19 has challenged business leaders to do three things at once: stage the return to work, understand and leverage the advancements they enacted during the crisis and chart a new path forward."

This requires a new path to education reform that involves a novel set of skills. In the present quickly evolving world, students need to build up a range of skills that go beyond numeracy and literacy. The limited emphasis on content rather than critical thinking in considering a problem is insufficient. This raises a critical question: how can schools benefit from the educational community consensus around how and what they learn as a pathway to achieve transformational reform?

Digitalization is the main road toward this transformation. One of the EdTech trends that could transform education in 2021 is artificial intelligence that can undoubtedly be incorporated into the area of education to advance most of its aspects. Automated algorithms save time by checking the assignments faster than a teacher would. Likewise, AI solutions can be utilized to distinguish the main difficulties students face while learning.

Principals and educators are keen on using big data and data analytics in order to gain insights on how their organizations truly function. According to a study conducted by the Center for Digital Education among higher education professors, the main benefit of Big Data Analysis in education would be the ability to predict student's learning outcomes, increase graduation rate and enhance institutional performance.

Unmistakably, 2020 will be beacon for change by influencing what comes next. Be that as it may, can a balance of the "old" norm with the "new" norm be sustained?

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