

Post-Covid-19 Themes

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Identifying the themes

I reviewed editorials and opinions published in April 2020 in leading English language newspapers and magazines (*Economist*, *Financial Times*, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and *Washington Post*) and extracted and lightly edited 24 statements¹ about the nature of the post-Covid-19 business environment. Many of these conjectured outcomes have implications for IS education, practice, and research.

To gain a deeper understanding of these post-Covid-19 views and to identify different themes, I conducted a Q method analysis.² Q method does not depend on large samples of respondents, because it aims to identify different perspectives. It needs sufficient respondents to identify viewpoints or themes. Most Q-sort studies result in less than seven themes, and often not more than two or three. The 23 respondents produced five themes that satisfy appropriate criteria and explain 61% of the variance in responses.

Themes

Theme 1 has 6 respondents

They agree most with:

- *Companies will accelerate automation.*
- *Fragmentation of the global economy will accelerate.*

They disagree most with:

- *A broader knowledge of productive business practices will accelerate their adoption*
- *There will be a downturn in sectors that rely on an increased personal wealth perception, such as from a housing boom and a vibrant gig economy.*

These respondents see **macro-economic** effects as most important.

Theme 2 has 4 respondents

They agree most with:

- *Workers will have great flexibility to mix in-office and distance interaction.*
- *Organizations will experiment to find an effective balance between face-to-face creativity and remote working.*

They disagree most with:

¹ See the appendix.

²<http://code-lab.django.group/AIScovid/us/>

- *The nature of globalization and the structure of international capitalism will be significantly different.*
- *Fragmentation of the global economy will accelerate.*

This viewpoint focuses on **organizational rebalancing**

Theme 3 has 3 respondents

They agree most with:

- *Companies will accelerate automation.*
- *Face masks and temperature checks will be common for spaces where people interact, such as offices, factories, restaurants, and bars.*

They disagree most with:

- *Companies will aim to go beyond resilience and robustness so that they can adapt to, and even thrive on, disorder.*
- *Expanded high-speed internet connectivity will be available everywhere for everyone.*

This perspective is hard to label.

Theme 4 has 3 respondents

They agree most with:

- *Fragmentation of the global economy will accelerate.*
- *Organizations will experiment to find an effective balance between face-to-face creativity and remote working.³*
- *Companies will accelerate automation.*

They disagree most with:

- *Workers will have great flexibility to mix in-office and distance interaction.*
- *Governments will require companies to localize the production of drugs and medical goods.*

The group is mainly concerned with **macro organizational actions**

Theme 5 has 3 respondents

They agree most with:

- *Governments will require companies to localize the production of drugs and medical goods.*
- *People will demand improvements in the quality and coverage of social services and medical care.*

They disagree most with:

- *Expanded high-speed internet connectivity will be available everywhere for everyone.*
- *Face masks and temperature checks will be common for spaces where people interact, such as offices, factories, restaurants, and bars.*

This theme is concerned with **government actions** related to medical care.

There is one statements that **statistically distinguishes** among the five themes.

- *Face masks and temperature checks will be common for spaces where people interact, such as offices, factories, restaurants, and bars.*

³ Equal scores for the second and third statements.

There are no statements on which there is **consensus** agreement.

Overall scores

Highest

- *Companies will accelerate automation.*
- *Fragmentation of the global economy will accelerate.*

Lowest

- *Expanded high-speed internet connectivity will be available everywhere for everyone.*
- *Redistribution policies, such as a basic income, will become more common because of an economic shock's impact on those least able to survive a crisis.*

Agreement with the opinion writers

Of the 12 sources for the 24 statements, respondents most agreed with the views of

Portas, M. (2020, Apr 20). The cull of retail businesses spells the end for mediocre malls. Financial Times. Retrieved from <https://www.ft.com/content/1d14b976-7ff6-11ea-b0fb-13524ae1056b>

- *An organization's digital presence will be the central element of its customer engagement strategy.*

Frey, C. B. (2020, Apr 24). Covid-19 will only increase automation anxiety. Financial Times. Retrieved from <https://www.ft.com/content/1d14b976-7ff6-11ea-b0fb-13524ae1056b>

- *Companies will accelerate automation.*
- *Consumers will prefer automated to face-to-face services.*

Respondents least agreed with the views of

Friedman, T. (2020, Apr 20). Post-pandemic, here's how America rises again. New York Times. Retrieved from <https://www.google.com/url?www.nytimes.com%2F2020%2F04%2F14%2Fopinion%2Fstimulus-infrastructure-covid.html&usg=AOvVaw1JIHOdh-e0v5PcwwTpri2Y>

- *More investment in renewable energy sources will reduce vulnerability to oil price manipulations and address climate change.*
- *Expanded high-speed internet connectivity will be available everywhere for everyone.*
- *There will be broader distribution of affordable tools of invention, design, and manufacturing.*

Ladapo, J. A. (2020, Apr 30). The Looming Civil-Liberties Battle. Wall Street Journal. Retrieved from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-looming-civil-liberties-battle-11588198523>

- *Repercussions from civil liberty intrusions to reduce contagion might limit the effectiveness of future efforts to contain a pandemic.*

Conclusions

The variety of perspectives revealed is not surprising as in any field there is a variation in opinions. Themes 1 and 3 might reflect the thoughts of those in the Economics of IS area, theme 2 might be identified with those who pursue IS behavioral issues, and the fifth theme around government actions on public health is less directly associated with IS. I could not see a pattern to label theme 4.

The lack of influence on IS scholars of the *New York Times'* Thomas Friedman's opinions is perhaps because he is social commentator with a broader perspective, as also is Ladapo's opinion in the *Wall Street Journal*. The *Financial Times* writers are more attuned to business issues.

Educational implications

Accelerated automation requires we should give more attention to robotics. Maybe we should give even more attention to the data analytics possibilities created by the digital data streams generated by an increasingly automated society, which at the same time is replacing global with localized supply. Managers will need decision support to navigate these two complex transformations.

We will need to equip our students with a set of tools to work remotely and with frequent non-FTF interaction. Out with Excel and Powerpoint and in with Zoom, Whiteboards, Slack, and so on to support effective social electronic interaction.

Research implications

The ecosystem is considered to be one of the most important managerial innovations of the last few decades, and now it is going to be deconstructed to some extent. Understanding the impact of global fragmentation on organizational performance and decision making will offer opportunities for research as the arrow of IS integration is reversed.

Human computer interaction could broaden its horizons as it studies the effects of shifting the workplace from the office to the home. The new mode is more intrusive on personal life and at the same time less social as collegial connections are reduced. A new era of HCI research could be guided by Ellie Saari's advice, "Always design a thing by considering it in its next larger context -- a chair in a room, a room in a house, a house in an environment, an environment in a city plan."

Appendix

Predicted effects

1. Companies will aim to go beyond resilience and robustness so that they can adapt to, and even thrive on, disorder.
2. Companies will transform their supply chains from "just in time" to "just in case" models.
3. Businesses will maintain a safety net of loyal and adaptable full-time workers who are well-prepared to handle future disruptions.
4. A broader knowledge of productive business practices will accelerate their adoption.
5. Workers will have great flexibility to mix in-office and distance interaction.
6. Organizations will experiment to find an effective balance between face-to-face creativity and remote working.
7. Companies will accelerate automation.
8. Consumers will prefer automated to face-to-face services.
9. Governments will require companies to localize the production of drugs and medical goods.
10. An organization's digital presence will be the central element of its customer engagement strategy.
11. The nature of globalization and the structure of international capitalism will be significantly different.
12. Fragmentation of the global economy will accelerate.
13. The simultaneous health and economic crises will change how companies balance risk and resilience.
14. There will be a downturn in sectors that rely on an increased personal wealth perception, such as from a housing boom and a vibrant gig economy.
15. People will demand improvements in the quality and coverage of social services and medical care.
16. The balance between residency and efficiency will shift to resiliency by localizing supply chains and pro-national industrial policies.
17. There will be investment in and rationalization of government agencies and systems that were overwhelmed by Covid-19.
18. More investment in renewable energy sources will reduce vulnerability to oil price manipulations and address climate change.
19. Expanded high-speed internet connectivity will be available everywhere for everyone.
20. There will be broader distribution of affordable tools of invention, design, and manufacturing.
21. There will be an increase in taxes to pay off the massive national debts incurred in addressing the economic impact of Covid-19.
22. Face masks and temperature checks will be common for spaces where people interact, such as offices, factories, restaurants, and bars.

23. Repercussions from civil liberty intrusions to reduce contagion might limit the effectiveness of future efforts to contain a pandemic.
24. Redistribution policies, such as a basic income, will become more common because of the economic shock's impact on those least able to survive a crisis.