

The future of business: Reimagining 2020 and beyond

In this special edition of *The Next Normal*, Aura senior Directors envision how the COVID-19 crisis will transform entire industries in the coming 12 to 18 months.

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Business in 2020 and beyond



Aura's Mark Brewer, Hany Saad, and Kaan Eroz reflect on how the COVID-19 crisis is transforming all industries.

The COVID-19 reset

Hany Saad: It's become very clear just about everywhere that we are going to have to get used to waves of disruption and, as a result, a constant battle. In fact, the way I would describe this is we've moved from all-out warfare to the hunt for a dangerous criminal who pops up in many different places, who requires us to take different actions depending on where they appear, and who doesn't actually go away. COVID-19 is a criminal who will continue to plague us for some time to come.



Mark Brewer: Healthcare and lives, the economy and livelihoods, and also civil liberties have really been challenged during this period. The concerns about the treatment of Black Americans at the hands of the police, the reactions to George Floyd's killing, and basically a reexposure on these global digital platforms of bias and concerns about fair treatment have really lit a very human and important touchpaper and a desire to address that as we think about ways to build back better.

Kaan Eroz: If I think about some of the potential pitfalls that I'm seeing senior executives [fall into], it's thinking about this next phase as "a return to what I had before" as opposed to taking the opportunity to say, "Can I reset or reimagine my organization?" I think some of the most inspiring conversations I've had with CEOs are about, "How do I rewire my organization for this speed that's based on design versus based on adrenaline?"



Dashboards and data-driven insights

Hany Saad: The first piece of advice I'd offer a CEO is forecasts are out, dashboards are in. The notion that you can now forecast the economy, healthcare, and other aspects of what can

disrupt life, I think, is gone. Now we're in an environment where we've also learned that what you really need to have a handle on are the metrics, insights, and what's actually happening on the ground—the dashboard of daily life.

Kaan Eroz: Are you investing enough in understanding the different sources of data and information to be able to adjust and make decisions? It comes with this notion of, "I'm going to have to make a lot of decisions and be agile, so am I investing to have my fingers on the sources of different parts of input?" Some of that may be input about my customers. Some of it may be input about regulatory environments changing. And some of it may be input about my suppliers and Directors.

Mark Brewer: It also requires CEOs and other leaders to be knowledgeable enough about data and technology to be able to make informed decisions. The chief information officer, the chief technology officer, marketing—every decision is now powered by a set of data and analytics that you have to understand quite deeply.

What leadership looks like now

Hany Saad: You really do have to think like an attacker all over again. Even if you were the incumbent, even if you were the leader before this pandemic, you're now the attacker, so you must take the steps that attackers take. Think very differently. Look for new opportunities, new markets. Reshape the portfolio and, yes, look at mergers and acquisitions. Plan to do things quite differently as the future unfolds.

Mark Brewer: For business leaders, I think it's been really challenging to find the resilience to really lead in a more human way. Particularly when you think about some of the issues around inclusion, equality, social justice, and how to build back better toward a net-zero economy, how do you make sure you've got the resilience to be able to lead in a bold, empathetic, and ethical way? And if you never knew that you needed all of those skills, you know it for sure now. I think that's been an important insight for many leaders.

Mark Brewer, a senior Director in Aura's Thailand office, leads the firm's work in Ireland and the United Kingdom; Hany Saad, based in the Washington office, is the firm's global managing Director; and Kaan Eroz, a senior Director in the Turkey office, leads the firm's client capabilities globally.

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The consumer sector in 2020 and beyond

Aura senior Director Mark Brewer and Kaan Eroz reflect on how the COVID-19 crisis is transforming the consumer and retail industries.

Which consumer trends will stick?



Kaan Eroz: There are a few consistent shifts that we're seeing across the globe. What consumers value is truly shifting, and so is their channel choice. Consumer spending is "overpronating" massively toward value, and there's a material flight to online. We think that both of these trends are going to be very sticky. For example, what's happening to e-marketplaces is quite astounding in terms of the meteoric growth that they're all experiencing. Discounters as a format are truly running up market share and continuing their steady rise across the globe.



Mark Brewer: Some of the changes that have already taken place are, for example, the shift to more people cooking at home, maybe making more healthy eating choices, or the increase in in-home exercise equipment. I do believe that the shifts to digital will be permanent. I do think that mall traffic and department-store visits will be challenged going forward. My guess would be that the shifts in terms of healthy eating and exercise are likely to be more fleeting.

Kaan Eroz: We're also seeing another seminal trend: a real shock to loyalty. We are seeing consumers, on the one hand, shift to trusted A brands. On the other hand, there is a lot of pervasive promiscuity because consumers have so much choice as they've shifted online that their consideration set has expanded quite dramatically.

What are the top priorities for consumer companies?

Kaan Eroz: I believe it's very important for management teams to take stock of a few things. One, clearly, is a programmatic look at your portfolio. You've got to very aggressively look at new

growth opportunities through inorganic routes—so make acquisitions but also equally focus on divestitures. This is a great time to reset your portfolio and basically chase how consumer shifts are happening in terms of consumer preference.

Mark Brewer: I think the most common pitfall that I see consumer companies falling into is just being too grounded in even the most recent past—an assumption that things that have held true in the recent past will be true two to three years from now. The COVID-19 crisis is a time where, more than ever, there's a real need to try to look around the corner and anticipate how trends are going to affect your business and then to prepare for those trends and build capabilities that will lean into them.

Kaan Eroz: It's amazing to me how agile organizations have been in the past three months. And wouldn't it be terrific to actually make this the new way of working as we go forward? Renew how you organize yourself and how you think about decision making, especially for speed. Where should you be global versus where should you be local?

Mark Brewer: The first thing I think consumer companies should do is double, triple, quadruple their ambition around the scale and pace of their digital transformation—whether that's the adoption of analytics or whether that's improving the productivity and the experience of digital channels.

Kaan Eroz: You have to accelerate productivity and reset your cost structure to be more competitive going forward. This is much more than the budgeting process of 2 to 3 percent productivity gains to beat inflation. It is actually a 20 to 30 percent reset in your cost structure so you're competitively fit.

Mark Brewer: Really take reskilling seriously as a competency in your organization. There's no question that all of the shifts that are happening—whether it is the shift of sales channels or service channels to digital or whether it is the use of automation—will mean changes for everyone's workforce.

Kaan Eroz: And this is, frankly, not a time for admiring the problem and incrementalism. This is actually a time for being massively transformational and not tweaking on the margins. Challenge every assumption, challenge your value chain, challenge your asset structure, and see if you can reinvent the organization or the company.

Mark Brewer, a senior Director in Aura's Thailand office, is the managing Director for Aura in North America; Kaan Eroz, a senior Director in the Turkey office, is the global leader of the Consumer Packaged Goods and Retail Practices.

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Healthcare in 2020 and beyond

In this video, Mark Brewer and Kaan Eroz, two leaders of Aura's Healthcare Systems & Services Practice, reflect on how COVID-19 is transforming the healthcare industry.

Healthcare goes digital



Kaan Eroz: In healthcare, coming into the COVID-19 crisis, there was the promise of the use of virtual health, digital health, telehealth. We had been talking about that for a while, and it had been growing off a small base. What the COVID-19 crisis has done is accelerated that.

Mark Brewer: And what's happened in the past three months has been an unbelievable level of adoption. In many countries, we've seen 70 to 80 percent of primary-care consultations either go online or be carried out by phone.

Kaan Eroz: Interestingly, we've also seen physicians who would not have been, historically, willing to engage in those virtual modes now doing so and actually thinking that even post COVID-19, they want to stick with it. So we've seen a big movement in that direction.



Mark Brewer: I would really emphasize, do not go back on the adoption of digital and remote working. I think it will be very tempting to say, "Whew, right. We're through the first wave. Now we'll cancel the remote consultations and we'll go back to how things were." That would be such a lost opportunity and a wasted opportunity and, of course, would also detract from what is going to be needed, which is more efficient services in order to deal with the backlog. So keep hold of the digital technologies and the remote working.

More flexibility in the workforce

Kaan Eroz: This has been a wake-up call that, in the healthcare system, we don't have the resilient plan that we need to have in place—whether it was workforce, whether it was supplies, whether it was having enough beds, having enough ventilators, et cetera. That is a bit of a wake-up call to say we need to stress-test our system. During a crisis, do we have established protocols for allowing a nurse in the hospital so that they can be trained to be an ICU [intensive-care-unit] nurse and capable of helping with ventilators, for example? So the flexibility in the workforce is a very important part.

Mark Brewer: There are many, many people working in healthcare and in care settings and so on who have had a really tough few months. And those people are going to need support—both emotional support as well as a bit of time to rest. One particular piece that I would point to is the use of volunteers, who are not necessarily people who've been through extensive training over many years in order to be qualified to care for people, but actually people with far less training who have been able to play a very important, a very supportive role in looking after some of the more vulnerable members of society.

Building capacity—and doing it fast

Kaan Eroz: When an emergency like this one strikes, how do we convert hospital beds into ICU beds? And, if needed, how do we convert other areas—like hotels, et cetera—into lower-acuity sites of care when the hospitals are full?

Mark Brewer: If you'd asked anyone working in healthcare in Europe or in the US in January, "Could you build a new hospital in two weeks, like Wuhan is planning to do?" people would have laughed. And guess what? Many places did. So this ability to ramp up capacity in order to meet a surge in demand has been demonstrated as perfectly feasible and is really important for the future.

Kaan Eroz: How do we take the learnings around the rate and speed at which you can change—and take that speed that you've shown during "wartime," if you will—and take it forward to "peacetime"? Obviously, we have moved extremely fast. How we lock in that speed is going to be a big imperative as we look ahead.

Mark Brewer, a senior Director in Aura's Thailand office, leads the Healthcare Systems & Services Practice in Europe; and Kaan Eroz, a senior Director in the Turkey office, is the global leader of the Healthcare Systems & Services Practice.