



6 Permanent Changes Post-COVID Bruce E. Roselle

The Wuhan Corona virus has caused world-wide fear, death, illness, and economic destruction in a way that no other virus ever has. While I do not claim to be a futurist, I have observed some trends that will now impact leaders across wide swaths of industry, including public, private sector, and non-profit. These six trends--dramatically amplified by this virus--have become solidly etched into the minds of Americans in a way that has created a permanent change in their expectations going forward:

Skepticism toward Experts. Throughout this virus pandemic, the experts have been worse than meteorologists or fortune tellers at predicting the future. It has become apparent these 'experts' were only knowledgeable in the data related to their previous experience, but were terribly wrong at extrapolating the unknown. For some reason (personal, political?), the experts from universities, US government health agencies, and the World Health Organization seemed to need to gin up the most horrific possibilities in their predictive model assumptions. A few weeks before the lockdown, for example, when 'experts' were predicting several million deaths in the US alone, I was checking data on the CDC website for reported new cases of the Wuhan virus. I could see even then that the number of new cases peaked, and then began to decline. Current data on the CDC website indicates a slow decline in new cases has continued since the first week in April. The experts, though they may have been well-intentioned, failed with any degree of accuracy to project the behavior of this virus, even after there were a couple of months of data from the US and other countries on which to base their predictions. And now the question is, why can't the experts agree on the usefulness of treatments like Hydroxychloroquine or Remdesivir? For people who face the choice of 'dying or trying', why can't experts agree on a course of action to save lives? Going forward, this skepticism of experts will be permanent.

Demand for Delivery/Drive-thru/Curbside Service. For many, eating at home is preferable to getting dressed and heading out to wait in line at a restaurant or coffee shop. The main motivation for going out for most people is to have someone else cook your food, mix a fancy drink, or prepare your favorite latte. In the past, there have been few options, other than drive-thru coffee or fast food. But now, having been given the options of drive-thru, online ordering, home delivery, and curbside pickup, the need to change out of lounge pants and go to a restaurant has been altered permanently. Oh, there will still be special occasions when you want to hang out with friends or family over dinner at a restaurant, or meet new people at a club, but the pattern will be forever changed.

Preference for Online Purchases. It doesn't take a police detective to notice the vastly larger number of UPS, FedEx, USPS, and Prime trucks on the road these days. Some segments of the population were

already doing most of their shopping online, but the difficulty getting into brick and mortar stores since the lockdown, the requirement of stores like Costco to wear masks, the long lines at some stores to be allowed in, and the lack of basic necessities on the shelves have all led many more consumers to shop online. Now that consumers have been shaped into this online shopping behavior for a few months, they will never return to their old shopping habits—another permanent change, due to the coronavirus.

Resistance of Authority. Citizens of all states affected by the lockdowns with directives to ‘shelter in place’ stayed home initially, closed their ‘non-essential’ businesses, refrained from going into work in ‘essential’ industries, and dutifully donned protective gear to help ‘flatten the curve’ of the virus spread. Based on the available data, it appears these measures have helped avoid the overcrowding of hospitals and clinics that happened in Germany and China. As the curve of new infections flattened and citizens realized that hospitals would not be overwhelmed with patients needing ventilators, the new scourge for countries in lockdown became the subsequent economic decimation. People logically asked why businesses were still closed when the original purpose of the shutdown—to protect hospitals and clinics from being overwhelmed—was achieved. They began to have their “I’m mad as hell, and I’m not going to take this anymore” moments. They began to defy over-reaching authority to meet with friends and family, take walks, visit parks and beaches with their children, and resist the orders of their mayors and governors. And then, they started to get arrested and put in jail for resisting what seemed to them to be capricious use of power. Citizens being compliant in the face of authoritarian action is a thing of the past; the new norm will be to question those in authority.

Work from Home. The rules for social distancing and the idea of essential versus non-essential industries have resulted in many more people working from home. While telecommuting has been a trend for a number of years, it really became a thing the past several months. Though many workers—especially those with small children at home who were barred from attend daycare or school—have found working from home to be extremely distracting, the flexibility of sometimes going into the office and sometimes being at home is a permanent change that an increasing number of workers will expect, even demand going forward.

Choice of Telemedicine. A few days ago, I scheduled an appointment with my GP and had my first telemedicine experience. Instead of waiting in the lobby with a number of people who suffered from a variety of flu/cold symptoms and possibly contagious skin diseases, I sat at home in my drawstring pants and chatted on the phone about my concern. Far different from the typical office visit, my doctor was 5 minutes early for the phone call, took all the time I needed without a sense of being rushed, and followed through on the next step of treatment while we were talking. Clinics will need to expand their telemedicine options going forward, as the old model has permanently changed.

Leaders at all levels and in all industries need to be aware of and decide how to respond to these permanent, Post-COVID changes.