

Reinvent, redirect, discard and restore

 By [Ann-Mari Höfinger](#)

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The answer is in the 're': resilience... 2020 was the year never to be repeated. Or was it? As we survey the future and look to 2021, the unfortunate refrain that keeps repeating is that in 2021 we can expect more of the same: change. Fortunately, as humans, our defining quality is our adaptability, and our response to 2020 was evidence of that.



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The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic saw a major acceleration of digital transformation in 2020. As I write this in December 2020, the second wave of the pandemic is in full force globally. Around the world, multinationals continue to

support millions of employees working remotely. The return to the office is now less about when (not right now) and more about how (and for some, if). Tech organisations are leading the conversation about the possibility of remote work being more enduring and even permanent for those who choose so.

Pivoting to the future

Whilst the shift away from the workplace has had the greatest impact on day-to-day mobility, the initial lockdowns gave rise to what was ANA's Marketing Word of the Year for 2020: pivot.

Digital transformation, once a slow and steady journey that forward-thinking organisations were undertaking, became an absolute necessity. The numbers showed this. In the US 10 years of e-commerce penetration was gained in just three months, with similar growth rates being achieved in South Africa. This massive shift in consumer behaviour required organisations to pivot quickly, driving massive change for their employees. With one swoop, we pivoted to the future in 2020, with a large impact in the workplace.

In a recent study of the Future of Work completed by GetSmarter, over 70% of respondents stated that their work had changed either significantly or had a complete overhaul in the past 18 months. Technology was highlighted to be the major driver of past and future change expected.

As much as organisations that were able to pivot successfully have been those that have survived the demand and business model disruption, so too is this the reality for employees today.

Life-long learning

Individuals that will succeed in 2021 - and years going forward - are those that keep their skills and capabilities aligned with the demands of the market. With skills replacement as much as 60% every four years within the marketing profession, adopting a life-long approach to learning is absolutely critical.

GetSmarter's Future of Work study highlighted that evidence of life-long learning is now the number one element that hiring managers look for on a CV. Whether formal or on the job, learning is critical in order to remain relevant and competitive. Skills-based certificates are increasingly seen as signals of value that the employers of today are looking for.

Resilience

The enduring nature of the pandemic means that in 2021 continuing to pivot will be critical for organisations and individuals, however, the orientation will be different. With the advent of a number of different vaccines as well as the natural course of a pandemic, we can expect to start to exit this crisis some time during 2021.

Resilience will be critical to survive this next phase. At an organisational level, large-scale bankruptcies - particularly amongst small businesses - will create opportunity for the survivors, as well as new startups. Regaining customers and

turnover that was lost in 2020 will require innovative thinking that must begin early in 2021.

At an individual level, leaders now have two jobs: keep both your business and your team alive, engaged, energised. Ensure they understand the challenges ahead of them, and, are personally ready to pivot by ensuring their skills remain relevant.

This is not an easy feat. The overwhelming emotion presently surrounding individuals regarding their careers is distress. Whilst this varies by generation, navigating teams through this stage of the crisis will require compassionate, calm, but action-orientated leadership.

Delivering this requires strong interpersonal and leadership skills, not only critical in 2021, but in the future, as we increasingly see larger parts of our jobs done by machines (both through automation and artificial intelligence).

Our research has shown that these human skills will be even more important. Other skills such as creativity, analytical and critical thinking and emotional intelligence are important attributes modern leaders will need to further enhance. Learning these skills online is now increasingly accepted, as the world's universities leverage digital platforms to reach a broader audience.

Thus, going into 2021, keep reinventing, upskilling and learning to be able to operate in a new economy. Discard the idea that at 12am on 31 December the challenges (and opportunities) that 2020 brought will be gone. Redirect your energy in pivoting for the eventual recovery, and ensure you use the early parts of the year to restore your resilience for the coming year. As said by Winston Churchill, "Never let a good crisis go to waste."

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