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# Forget 2020. Here's What Not To Do In 2021.



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Start the new year strong by preparing for the risks to come. GETTY

2020 is going down in the history books as the year that we would all like to forget. Here's a shortlist of top 'don'ts' to future-proof our organizations and get this decade back on track in 2021.

## **Don't neglect Covid-19 recovery**

Resilience must drive Covid-19 recovery in 2021. Leaders across business and government are evaluating lessons learned and re-evaluating the status

quo. They must focus on strengthening and future-proofing their organizations by retooling strategies via improved business continuity practices and other operational measures. This will help ensure they're prepared to tackle future risks while safeguarding core competencies.

Outside of healthcare and government, the biggest focus for most organizations is on the economic impact of the pandemic. It is likely that numerous, diverse teams will be called upon to work together across departments in order to manage the challenges that lie ahead. For example, resilience planning has traditionally focused more on technological risk issues, but both social and political risk factors are now becoming equally crucial. For organizations that survive this extended pandemic emergency, many will make major changes to their business models and adapt how they approach resilience planning internally.

That the Covid-19 pandemic would have cascading impacts was [predictable](#). In 2021, leaders need to plan for what is likely to unfold next and understand that their actions and attitude toward recovery will shape the next decade, not just the next year. Stay the course and there's a chance to save 2021 from going down the tubes.

### **Don't ignore other top risks**

The pandemic undoubtedly will continue to be the top risk facing organizations in 2021, but it's not the only issue of concern. Organizations can put themselves at great risk if they focus myopically on the issue of the day. DRI International's annual [Global Risk and Resilience Trends Report](#) surveys resilience professionals from major global organizations to learn what worries them. Based on likelihood and impact, the top 10 resilience issues facing organizations in 2021 are pandemics, long-term IT outages, operational incidents, economic failure, a state-sponsored attack on critical national infrastructure, the theft of proprietary data, severe weather events like hurricanes, a serious supply chain disruption (toilet paper shortage!), the misuse of data, and wildfires. Should any one of these occur,

organizations could be devastated and they need to be prepared. Of note since last year, five issues have risen by four or more places in the resilience index: pandemics, supply chain disruptions, protests or civil unrest, state-sponsored cyberattacks, and the business impact of an economic downturn. This is new territory for many organizations and priorities may have to be completely rewritten.

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In general, the majority of survey respondents were surprisingly optimistic that their organization would survive the current pandemic and recover well. 46.7% of resilience professionals felt that their organizations performed very well despite the fact that only 6.4% reported having a comprehensive pandemic plan. This disparity indicates that many organizations maintain a high degree of embedded resilience, which allows them to respond quickly and effectively using an effects-based planning model. This approach appears to have worked well in a situation so complex that a detailed plan would have been impractical and insufficient. The challenge will be for leaders to remember in better times that these measures are more than a cost center—they are an essential part of doing business and a safeguard against myriad risks.

### **Don't unlearn valuable leadership lessons**

Leadership in crisis is different from leadership in normal times. Leaders need to present a bold and optimistic yet pragmatic vision of the future as well as a plan of action to help people see their way forward. They must

chart a pragmatic course of action now that it is clear that Covid-19 and the resulting response measures will continue for the foreseeable future.

**Studies** show that people trust their own employer above any other institution. In times of crisis, it is especially important to live up to that trust. Modeling resilience is a way to demonstrate that trust is earned. All organizations must rethink their approach to designing their operating strategy in this new normal in which secondary effects including fear and economic pain will linger.

Last year, DRI's survey identified leadership's lack of crisis management expertise as a top concern, and **it wasn't wrong**. However, just about every leader was tested this year and while mistakes were made and the results were not uniform, reactions have been positive overall. Many stakeholders have seen their leaders rise to the occasion and demonstrate new flexibility, openness, sensitivity, and compassion. This more humble and human-centered approach to leadership is a welcome, and hopefully lasting, change.

### **Don't undo innovation**

Not everything that happened in 2020 was bad. Organizations implemented changes at lightning speed in order to safeguard their businesses, employees, and customers from the pandemic. In the last year, we've seen the healthcare industry adopt new practices and technologies. We partook in a stunning global experiment in work-from-home and the widespread adoption of remote work tools like videoconferencing. We witnessed swift changes to business models and online offerings across diverse industries from retail to hospitality. These changes were made at organizations of every size and in every sector and country.

What did we learn from this remarkable if painful feat? Big crises can serve as a catalyst for long-delayed and much-needed changes to be implemented. Some of the changes brought on by the pandemic are worth keeping, others

not so much, however, the decision making process should be approached with thoughtfulness and intention. Not every strategy is right for every organization.

Leaders should take a good look at what has worked, what hasn't, and perhaps most importantly, how they can expand on this stunning wave of global innovation rather than reverting to caution and inertia. In the 2020s, the future is here to stay.

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