These 4 skills can make the world better after COVID-19

05 Aug 2020

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[Source World economic Forum](#)

- To handle the aftermath of COVID-19 and tackle the world's biggest issues, we need to change the way we make decisions and become more knowledgeable about the future;

- A systemic analysis of the impact of COVID-19 in Italy highlights four skills required to face our complex world;

- Futures literacy, anticipation, systems thinking and strategic foresight are increasingly essential skills.

The pandemic is first and foremost a human tragedy, but it is also shaking the pillars on which our society is based.

This shock to the planet has built an expectation of big changes that will lead us to a different and hopefully better world. But how should we get ready for these changes? Where should we intervene and with which priorities? What are the opportunities that we must seize and the risks to mitigate? What needs improving and what instead needs transformation?

Have you read?

- [Reimagining the future of skills: what do young people think?](#)

- [COVID-19 forced a billion children out of school - here's how we can save their education](#)

- [Reading during COVID-19 can trigger anxiety - but it helps us build resilience too](#)

In order for the hope of a better world to move beyond rhetorical optimism, we must be able to answer these questions. We must change the way we make decisions and become more knowledgeable about the future. Conventional approaches are no longer sufficient; new skills are needed.

But what are these new skills? Myself and seven friends, all alumni of the Università di Trento's Strategic Foresight MA degree, decided to use our expertise and the power of our collective intelligence to build a systemic analysis of the impact of COVID-19 in Italy. It was a challenging team exercise conducted remotely as we were all confined at home. The results of this analysis allowed us to picture the outlines of this phenomena and explain which new skills are needed to face this complexity and how to practice them.
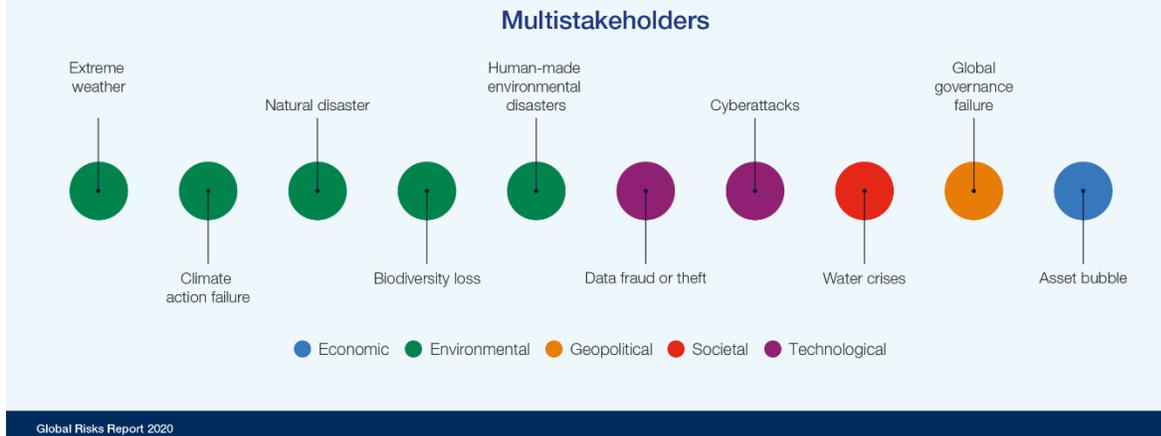
The Global Risks Report 2020

Image: World Economic Forum

Skill 1: futures literacy

In general terms, literacy is simply the ability to read and write, although it may be intended with a broader and more insightful meaning. The significant increase of literacy across many countries in the last two centuries together with the push of industrial revolutions has enabled a dramatic leap forward for civilization.

Now, however, we are living in a new era where the world is changing faster than ever and any change may have huge global consequences because we are increasingly connected to each other.

Perhaps it is time our society takes another step forward to cope with this new challenge, becoming a more "futures literate" society. This is the skill that allows people to better imagine and make sense of the future. It's important because it is images of the future that drive our expectations, disappointments and willingness to invest or change.

UNESCO is building futures literacy globally with local actors in more than 20 countries who organize Future Labs in schools and communities. The goal is to demonstrate that imagining the future is something that's accessible to everybody and that this capacity to imagine can be improved.

In December 2019 in Paris, UNESCO held the first Global Futures Literacy Design Forum with 28 different laboratories and people from all over the world. In Brazil, the recently launched [#freethefuture movement](#) is also pushing futures literacy.

The question here is not to think of the future as an add-on; it should be integrated, like reading and writing, with what we do and what we think.

Skill 2: systems thinking

Almost all the challenges presented by the effects of COVID-19 relate to "systems". Essentially a system consists of three things: a scope or function, parts and relationships. In a system the effect of interventions may appear distant in space and time.

Systems thinking is a mindset to think, communicate and learn about systems to make the full patterns clearer, improve and share the understanding of problems and see how to face them effectively.

In our exercise, through a method named "Futures Wheel", we built a systemic picture of the COVID-19 pandemic in Italy, exploring its impact on different areas: social, technological, economic, environmental and political. This was the magnifying glass which allowed us to spot the strategic themes that need to be faced.

Skill 3: anticipation

To explain this concept, we should reflect on a couple of things: in the present, there are signals of the future; and these signals are of something that is not yet evident but which has the potential to become empirical evidence if circumstances permit. Therefore, today there are futures in progress even if they are not clearly visible for most of us.

The anticipation skill requires us to learn how to recognize these possible futures and to use this augmented consciousness to shape our decisions and actions in the present.

This in practice means modifying our habits and behaviours to be better prepared for a continuously changing world.

Skill 4: strategic foresight

The disruptive changes in front of us will require choices and decisions and these will influence how the future world will evolve.

But how do we set our helm to first survive and then, hopefully, take advantage of the opportunities in this rough sea of change? This is a big challenge that requires a new strategic thinking attitude for governments, businesses, organizations and people to better understand change and the future, as we will all be living and working in a future world that's different from today in significant ways.

Strategic foresight and more generally "Futures Studies" are the disciplines that have broadened to an exploration of alternative futures and deepened to investigate the worldviews that underlie possible, plausible, probable and preferred futures.

2022 Skills Outlook

Growing

1. Analytical thinking and innovation
2. Active learning and learning strategies
3. Creativity, originality and initiative
4. Technology design and programming
5. Critical thinking and analysis
6. Complex problem-solving
7. Leadership and social influence
8. Emotional intelligence
9. Reasoning, problem-solving and ideation
10. Systems analysis and evaluation

Declining

1. Manual dexterity, endurance and precision
2. Memory, verbal, auditory and spatial abilities
3. Management of financial, material resources
4. Technology installation and maintenance
5. Reading, writing, math and active listening
6. Management of personnel
7. Quality control and safety awareness
8. Coordination and time management
9. Visual, auditory and speech abilities
10. Technology use, monitoring and control

Source: Future of Jobs Report 2018, World Economic Forum

What skills will be in demand in 2022?

Image: Future of Jobs Report 2018, World Economic Forum

Moving from the assumption that the future will be a continuity of the present toward a better understanding of changes and multiplicity of the future will allow us to develop future-proof strategies that anticipate the consequences of alternative futures.

Ultimately, what we need is a cultural leap from a reactive approach to an anticipatory one. But we believe that this will only be possible if we manage to

embed the competencies mentioned above into the skill sets of leaders, policy-makers, teachers and every individual.

Today, we may grab the great chance for a breakthrough which could bring us to a better world, a more inclusive one with a sustainable economic system, an increased maturity of our society and more conscious electors. A world where countries cooperate to make people safer, happier and healthier and to treat them as equals.

If you want to dive deeper into this topic, please download our report from the [Italian Institute for the Future](#).

Meet the team:

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