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False assumptions that will thwart your COVID-19 course correction

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want to thank my colleague Tawfik Jarjour for his contribution to the research supporting this post.

While COVID-19 has wrought the worst growth decline on record, many business leaders have positioned their companies to emerge even stronger from the crisis.

Recent [research](#) that my team and I conducted tells us these firms have not only become more digital but also more data-driven and cloud-based, which has made their operations more agile and their cost structures more variable. The result: better experiences for both employees and customers.

This is encouraging, to be sure. But uncertainty abounds and will for some time.

That is why every leader must be prepared to course-correct — and not just now, but again and again, as a permanent proposition. But how? And to what degree? Our research suggests leaders will need to reassess three common beliefs before it's too late.

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Relevant and timely research and data have never been more important. Don't assume you know what customers want or how they feel, even if you think you knew the answer last month, last week, or even yesterday.

You might be ready to get back to the office, but don't assume everyone else is. Likewise, you might be ready to eat at a restaurant, but don't assume others are. Accept that opinions, feelings, and desires can change faster than you can predict.

That's why it's critical to use analytical tools to determine what your customers and employees want and need on a near-daily basis. To do that, data tools must be integrated into daily decision-making processes. What repeated data sources are you using and providing for your teams to make decisions off of? What tracking sources can you use for the future, post-COVID, to have real-time data about employee and customer attitudes? Measure and internalize that insight.


Our most successful clients have truly embraced and invested in the digital and analytics tools and related decision-making processes needed to operate in a time of uncertainty. One of our large retail clients has actively used customer trends, COVID-19 regulations, and online activity to determine how to stock brick-and-mortar stores versus warehouses for online orders for improved performance.

False assumption #2: I need to worry mostly about the places where I operate

One lesson the pandemic has taught us is how interconnected and interdependent everything really is. We can no longer assume far away things don't matter. This is true whether you're a multinational company or a regional business. If California shuts down, how does that impact buying patterns, supply chains, operations on the East Coast?

You must consider all the scenarios and continually look for the best strategy for each of them. Be prepared for all possibilities. Don't let geographic presumptions put your business at risk. Don't assume today's stable operations are immune to shocks tomorrow.

Supply chains continue to be affected in seemingly odd and unpredictable ways due to specific geographic impacts of COVID-19 affecting local operations. Global shipping has been interrupted as quarantined airports and seaports have caused goods to be rerouted. And shortages of simple things like masks and other PPE have caused health facilities to shut down despite having everything else needed to operate.

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Assumption #3: More support from the government is on the way

COVID-19 caught us all by surprise. Businesses, big and small, were put at risk in ways we couldn't have anticipated, and government support was essential.

But that support is fading fast. This is why leaders must chart a course of self-sustainability.

In the airline and travel industries we have seen major players prepare for the worst if additional government support does not come. This has led to rapid shifts to new technologies, processes, and policies to keep the industry afloat.

Part of this new shift is moving from a business predicated on charging additional fees to one that sells "experiences" to people on staycations. New offerings such as first- and business-class meals shipped to homes have begun to arise as companies attempt to open up new markets and opportunities.

False assumptions can blow your company completely off-course

We don't yet fully understand what people — employees and consumers alike — can cope with and for how long. Though we were all pleasantly surprised by people's fortitude and flexibility so far, we can't assume their psychological strength indefinitely.

While some companies have been quick to get rid of physical spaces, we should not assume the behaviors and productivity of the last four months will last forever. People sheltered in place once, but they may not again. People have made extraordinary sacrifices and it has taken incredible strength to make the past four to six months manageable.

So don't expect people will work all night while taking care of their kids all day. Don't assume the two hours of a commute that people are spared should be given back to work. Don't assume more free time in their day means more productivity. Constantly correcting course with people in mind must be a top priority to make this recovery sustainable.



Paul Nunes

GLOBAL MANAGING DIRECTOR – THOUGHT LEADERSHIP, ACCENTURE RESEARCH



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