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2020 was a year of massive digital change in response to COVID-19. The pandemic has accelerated our understanding that technology can and must be a force for good.

From developing and distributing life-saving vaccines, to throwing businesses a lifeline by helping them pivot to online operations, to tackling climate change, to bringing about greater social equality through the power of online learning, technology's critical role in our world now and in the future has never been clearer.

One thing is certain as we move into 2021: Technology will continue to transform the way we live and work, and the pace will only quicken.

Here are the top 10 tech trends that we believe have the power to shape the year ahead:

#1: The Digital Workplace is here to stay

The rapid roll-out of online collaboration tools in response to lockdowns and stay-at-home orders has allowed organisations to serve their clients remotely and build virtual spaces that help their people stay connected. At KPMG, we fast-tracked the deployment of Microsoft Teams to more than 260,000 users across the global organisation, clocking almost 300 million virtual meetings since March of last year. Changing employee preferences and a shrinking office footprint will make hybrid teams a norm. With new functionalities being added every day, organisations need to be prepared to evolve the digital workplace at a pace never known before and to deliver the state-of-the-art user experience their people expect.

#2: Cloud transformation accelerates

Much of our lives has moved online. The surge in remote work, exploding e-commerce and endless streaming of content from the comfort of our couches have spurred greater cloud adoption and consumption, leading to double-digit growth rates. While many organisations are still in the early stages of their journey, increasing digitalisation will accelerate the move to the cloud and help businesses unlock productivity gains, drive efficiencies and innovate at scale and speed.



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#3: Cyber security remains a top priority

Fraudulent emails and text messages commonly spike after world events. Sadly, COVID-19 is no different: The [2020 Harvey Nash/KPMG CIO Survey](#) finds that 41 percent of organisations have experienced increased incidents, mainly from spear phishing and malware attacks that target remote-working employees. At KPMG in Malta, we continued to invest heavily in our own cyber teams and capabilities to protect our organisation and safeguard data that clients entrust to KPMG.

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#4: Organizations grow their ecosystems

In a global pandemic, unilateral actions only get you so far. The same goes for other pressing challenges that – simply put – are solved better together. KPMG has built a strong network of alliances with some of the world's leading technology, data and services companies. Like KPMG, organisations are looking to grow their ecosystems as a defining success factor.

#5: Democratization of technology will give rise to citizen developers

Demand for digital transformation is out-pacing central IT resources and the shortage of developers is only getting worse. New, intuitive low code/no code development platforms allow professionals in all areas of an organisation to build applications that can improve business processes and drive customer engagement with speed and at a fraction of the cost, effectively democratising technology and closing the transformation gap. The KPMG Digital Solutions team in Malta was an early adopter of these development platforms. As early as 4 years ago, a team of professionals was deeply immersed in these technologies, and since then a robust and highly skilled team has been journeying with clients throughout their Automation journeys resulting in over 100,000 hours per annum gained through processes improvements and process automation.

#6: Intelligent automation and artificial intelligence happen at scale

All around us we're seeing rapid automation and digitisation, enabled by advanced machines that are underpinned by artificial intelligence. Chatbots, for example, are integrated into business processes and execute tasks based on data and learning, allowing humans to focus on value-creating work. With the enabling technologies becoming more accessible through the cloud, intelligent automation and artificial intelligence are moving from the experimental phase to deployment at scale. This is reflected in the maturing conversations regarding ethics, regulation, control and other related emerging issues.

#7: Technology drives sustainability

The [KPMG 2020 CEO Outlook](#) confirms that leaders recognise ESG themes not just as a global challenge or regulatory issue, but as an opportunity to rebuild their organisation in a way that supports a sustainable economy, creates a competitive edge, influences buyer decisions and attracts talent. 71 percent of respondents say they want to lock-in climate change gains that have been realised during the pandemic. Technology is the catalyst: It enables data flows and allows us to analyse and predict our impact on the environment. It creates transparency and

drives efficiencies in our value chains. It optimises our processes and systems to reduce waste, conserve energy and guide our daily behaviour to change for the better.

#8: Healthcare is connected

COVID-19 has become a catalyst for long overdue changes in healthcare. Health systems worldwide have leveraged digital technologies to deliver care through new channels, support disease monitoring and contact tracing. In the new reality, further digital transformation will be required to build more resilient and connected health systems that enable the delivery of patient-centred integrated care, support insight-driven decision making and foster innovation, including advancements in operational and support functions.

#9: Learning is continuous

Online learning is here to stay, and not just for kids but for adults too. The delivery will change, however, moving from the (virtual) classroom session to a model of continuous, self-paced learning with knowledge nuggets integrated in processes and offered in-context.

#10: Trust takes center stage

When COVID-19 hit, organisations rushed to implement new technologies on accelerated timelines. In many cases, these deployments led to successful innovation and helped overcome the pandemic's challenges. But at the same time, they often increased existing concerns around trust and intensified questions around cybersecurity and risk practices. To achieve long-term success, organisations should integrate trust, technology and governance into organisational structures and overall enterprise strategies.

It doesn't take a crystal ball to see that digital transformation and adoption are no longer optional – they've become a business imperative and can make all the difference between the future and the failure of an organisation.

Through COVID-19, technology has a renewed sense of purpose. It has the potential to change key social, environmental and economic issues for the better and to make our lives safer, healthier, greener and happier. It's upon all of us now to make sure everyone equally benefits from these technological advancements and that we successfully close the gap between the digital haves and have-nots.