

Scenarios for a post-pandemic world

With such an uncertain outlook, how can individuals and businesses prepare for the range of possible outcomes that could play out as we navigate through the crisis and enter into a post-pandemic era? Rohit Talwar, Futurist, Strategist and CEO of Fast Future shares his four scenarios.

As a Futurist, I advise governments and global businesses on forces shaping the future. Right now there is a massive demand for future insights and scenarios from leaders waking up to the importance of planning for a range of possible futures. People are craving insights into what the future might hold, how to survive the economic and societal damage of COVID-19, and how to prepare for the bleaker scenario.

At the start of the pandemic, we initiated a new book, inviting fellow futurists and future-thinkers globally to submit perspectives and scenarios on life after the pandemic. We were inundated with submissions, and in just ten weeks the book went from conception to launch on Amazon – something conventional publishing company would consider impossible. The book opens with four scenarios for 2022-23 that I am summarising here for you. The challenge for business owners is to make sure we are prepared for all the scenarios, rather than focusing on the one we like best.

To develop the scenarios, we started with what we considered the most important and uncertain driving forces: *The Evolution of the Pandemic* (ranging

from poorly contained to total eradication), and *The Shape of Economic Recovery* (ranging from a deep and prolonged downturn to a vibrant economic rebound). We then layered in the possible impacts in each scenario of health, political, business, consumer sentiment, socio-demographic, science and technology, and environmental factors. The four resulting scenarios are:

The Long Goodbye (poorly contained pandemic, deep and prolonged downturn)

This scenario sees a slow and painful end to the systems, structure, and hierarchies that are no longer fit for purpose in a highly interdependent world. The worst affected developing and developed nations yoyo in and out of lockdown. Meanwhile, major nations like the US fail to control the situation, with high death rates through 2020, and periodic new infection waves. This hampers domestic recovery and global trade—with nations fearful of opening their borders to visitors from the infected countries.

An inwardly focused world is slow to acknowledge that this global problem requires a global solution. However, by mid-2021 a coalition of major nations, country groupings, institutions, global businesses, philanthropists, and visionary social change agents reach agreement on a new recovery plan. Ultimately a five-year program of economic, social, environmental, and governmental developments are agreed with richer nations acting as a coach, mentor, and sponsor to those in the most need of help and reform. A vaccine emerges in 2022, with global rollout by the end of 2023.

The VIP Economy (poorly contained pandemic, vibrant economic rebound)

This scenario sees an exacerbation of the divides within and between countries. Those with reasonable incomes and wealth can ensure they are first in line for testing and vaccinations. Strong physical distancing measures are put in place within many countries to protect the middle class and wealthy from those with greater infection risk in poorer, more densely populated areas. This allows parts of the economy to relaunch quickly, with investment hunters picking up failed businesses at bargain prices.

Governments in developed economies emphasize the need to prioritize the protection and healthcare of those individuals most likely to drive economic recovery. In the developing world, many governments effectively write off

segments of the population as irrecoverable, cordon them off from the rest of society, and leave nature to take its course.

Safe but Hungry (eradication of the pandemic, deep and prolonged downturn)

In this scenario, a large number of economies respond to public pressure and prioritize public health over economic recovery. Government resources are directed at accelerating testing, treatment, and vaccination programs. Lockdown orders are lifted slowly and protective measures are imposed on businesses and public transport. Bars, restaurants, cinemas, and hotels choose not to reopen or repurpose themselves.

The resulting economic recovery is much slower to materialise but ultimately feels more sustainable and inclusive because of the increased confidence that the virus is under greater control.

Inclusive Abundance (eradication of the pandemic, vibrant economic rebound)

This scenario depicts a world where those in power accept that this is an opportunity to innovate and transform in response to the pandemic. Alongside an accelerated pursuit of mass testing, treatment, and vaccination, a globally inclusive regeneration around the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) becomes the chosen way forward. Alongside the regenerative investment, governments also look to work in partnership to address the challenges of the weakest nations.

Science and technology are central to the new agenda with a focus on ensuring that every nation has local capabilities in fields as diverse as vertical farming, synthetic biology, and AI as a means of increasing future resilience.

Guaranteed basic incomes and services are used as temporary measures to support those in need while they transition and learn skills to enable them to create new employment opportunities. This is by no means a perfect world and many longstanding challenges persist. The SDGs have not been fully delivered, but a more inclusive future-focused agenda has been embraced by many and the benefits are beginning to show through.

Conclusion

Scenarios, by their nature, are meant to present extreme possibilities that force us to think differently about possible paths to the future. The four scenarios here are designed to challenge, stimulate, inspire, and provoke in equal measure. What strategies would and your business adopt under each of the scenarios – which are you least well prepared for?

For more visions of what our post-pandemic society might look like and the future of business, technology, education, the home, and healthcare read [Aftershocks and Opportunities – Scenarios for a Post Pandemic Future](#), co-written and edited by Rohit Talwar, available from [fastfuture.com](#) and [Amazon](#).

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Article by ROHIT TALWAR