

# Will COVID-19 Fuel the Next Wave of Innovation?

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During my Decision Making course that just concluded at The College of New Jersey, we discussed and applied various tools that can be utilized for making better decisions that lead to optimal outcomes. One of these (made popular by Chip and Dan Heath in their book “Decisive”) is called the Vanishing Options Test. This test is designed to help decision makers overcome the villain of the narrow frame – defined as: unduly limiting the options that we are considering as we evaluate an important decision.

The test challenges us by asking the question – what if you were not permitted to utilize any of the options that you have come up with after brainstorming your decision situation? In other words, what else might you try as a possible solution? The beauty of this approach is that it empowers us to become more creative and innovative in our thinking!

Like the Vanishing Options Test, COVID-19 has forced us to invent and implement new approaches for doing every day tasks that we took for granted a few months ago. In fact, it has required us to rethink how we shop, travel, work, communicate and interact with each other.

Fortunately, this adaptation process has enabled us to brainstorm ideas that few of us considered prior to the current pandemic.

## **Innovation examples in the “New Normal”**

Examples of our new-found innovation run the gamut from low-tech to high-tech and everything in between.

Here are just a few ways that people and organizations are tapping into their creative mindset to invent new approaches for adapting to our current environment:

- Creating new ways to entertain our children who are now home-schooled
- Establishing pop-up drive-in movies in empty parking lots to replace movie theaters
- Convening impromptu family tailgates in the park in lieu of eat-in restaurant dining
- Using Zoom technology to conduct lectures at high schools and colleges
- Mandating the use of Meeting in Teams (by Microsoft) to foster team collaboration
- Manufacturing and distributing vending machines that sell KN95 masks (by RapidMask2Go)

- Helping people grow green produce at home (via Microgreen kit producer Hamama)
- Developing “contact-tracing” technology for workplaces, retail stores and warehouses
- Formulating new drugs and medical devices to successfully diagnose and treat the coronavirus

### **What are the implications for this wave of Innovation?**

From my perspective, there are both short-term and long-term implications (and possible benefits) that result from the increase in innovation that we are currently experiencing.

#### Short-term

- Learning new skills and technology to improve performance and enhance career opportunities
- Strengthening interpersonal relationships and social networks to prepare for future societal disruptions / black swan events
- Improving customer buying experiences as technology makes purchase transactions more efficient
- Overcoming disrupted local and global supply chains as we formulate new ways to deliver products and services to customers

#### Long-term

- Creating new jobs, skill sets and new categories of businesses and industries
- Speeding up the generation of new products, services, and business models
- Greater use of robotics, artificial intelligence, and automation that may test the regulatory and legal systems of all countries
- The utilization of temperature screening and “contact-tracing” technology that may impact privacy and data protection concerns

Like it or not, our world is changing rapidly as a direct result of the innovation that is now required to meet the challenges brought about by COVID-19. I believe that this wave of innovation will evolve and ultimately become a permanent part of how we live, work and interact with one another.

In light of this reality, what breakthrough ideas will you devise to make a positive difference in the way we respond to our “new normal”?