

Dr. Mauro Guillen:

The future will look like the following: yes, there's going to be an increasing number of jobs, possibly 10, 15, 20% that will be performed from a place that is different. It could be home, it could be a bar, or it could be some kind of co-working space. But there's also going to be an even greater proportion of jobs, which will be arranged in a hybrid way. Workers will, or employees will, perform some of their duties a couple of weeks from the home and they will perform other kinds of duties, let's say three days a week, from the office.

Ellen Kelsay:

That's Dr. Mauro Guillen, author of *2030: How Today's Biggest Trends Will Collide and Reshape the Future of Everything*, from our July 2020 podcasts, *How the Pandemic is Accelerating the Future*. One year later, Mauro and I are coming together again to discuss some of the most transformative ways the world has changed, and will continue to change, because of COVID-19. Mauro is a Zandman Professor of International Management at the Wharton School, whose research deals with the future of global markets from a demographic perspective and the dynamics of innovation in the global digital economy.

I'm Ellen Kelsay and this is a Business Group on Health podcast, conversations with experts on the most relevant health and well-being issues facing employers today. In this episode, Mauro and I discuss trends reshaping the world, including global birth rates, women in the workforce, remote work, and remote learning, as well as global economic and talent impacts.

Mauro, we are so glad to have you back on the podcast. You were one of our very first guests and you are still one of our most downloaded episodes, now a year later. As I was saying, you are one of our greatest hits of all time, so thanks so much for coming back again.

Dr. Mauro Guillen:

Ellen, it's such a pleasure to converse with you about all of these important issues. Thank you for having me back.

Ellen Kelsay:

Yes, it's been a crazy year and when I was getting ready to have this conversation with you, I went back and I listened to our podcast conversation from last year, and it is just amazing how spot on you were with all of your predictions and the trends that you were tracking. I would love to, here we are a year later, to talk about that. Your crystal ball was spot on and you've got kind of a reflective window as you look at the past year, but also continue to look ahead. I would love to know your thoughts a year later on what some of those trends are and anything that really struck you as surprising over the course of this past year.

Dr. Mauro Guillen:

We now know that the pandemic has had some, I think, anticipated effects at least from the point of view of the conventional wisdom. For example, if you remember, the U.S. Bureau of the Census reported, maybe about three months ago, that the number of babies born during the year 2020, was smaller than expected by about 200,000-250,000. If you remember, people were speculating, well with the pandemic people stay more at home so therefore they're going to have more babies. What else can they do at home? Of course, demographers and people who have observed this dynamic before knew that with this economic crisis, this pandemic is both a public health emergency and economic crisis, young couples postpone making big decisions. And is there a bigger decision one can make than having a baby? The uncertainty essentially, and the possibility that you might lose your job or you've actually lost your job, this is going to make people postpone having babies. I wasn't surprised by that, but I think a lot of people were essentially caught by surprise, because they were assuming that if we spend more time at home and we're bored because of home confinement and all that, then we're just going to have more babies.

Ellen Kelsay:

Related to that, I know one of the other things we spoke about was the impact on women in the workforce. It's not just birth rates, but then we also saw some other demographic shifts and related impacts on the workforce. Anything there that you care to comment on?

Dr. Mauro Guillen:

Absolutely. This is something that is not good in terms of the effect of this pandemic. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported, if I remember correctly sometime in the month of February, that about 1.5 or 1.6 million American women had withdrawn from the labor market, because they couldn't cope with it all. Meaning having small children at home because the schools were closed and having to at the same time, essentially, if they were working remotely perform their duties for the job. That's a tragedy, I think. Of course, the only reason that happened to women and not to men, was that we continue to have an unequal division of tasks in the household. Women perform more of those tasks, and therefore this negative effect of the pandemic has affected women so much more than men. I think it's just tragic that so many women were forced to essentially withdraw from the labor market.

Ellen Kelsay"

Of course. It's just got rippling effects. There's so many aspects of professional life, personal life, etc. It is devastating. I'm curious too, and maybe I'm putting you on the spot with this, it only took a year to see drastic effects on women in the workforce and drastic effects on birth rates, how long does it take to course correct? It's not a year. It takes probably decades or more to start to kind of rebound from something like that. Is that correct?

Dr. Mauro Guillen:

No, absolutely. Look at what happens with unemployment. Unemployment went through the roof as a result of the shutdowns from a year and two months ago, but then it took months to go down to 5% and it's going to take maybe over a year to go back to where it was before the pandemic. Yes, the fall, from a physical point of view this tends to be the case always, tends to be much faster than the recovery, right. Tends to be, not always, but tends to be. Yes, it was unique. Let's not forget, Ellen, about this crisis was that it happened so swiftly and then the response by companies, by the government, and so on and so forth, is also very, very quick. This is actually the first time I think in the last, I would say, 200 to 300 years that we have shut down the economy on purpose. Right? We turned the switch off by saying, everybody stay at home. We shut down the restaurants, we shut down offices, all of that. It was a unique experience, unique experiment, in this respect, that we hadn't confronted before, as I said in the last couple of hundred years or so. It is a unique event from so many points of view. It's certainly one that none of us is going to forget ever.

Ellen Kelsay:

Let's not be all doom and gloom. We've talked about economic downturn, birth rate impact, women leaving the workforce. I'm curious, any positive trends that you've seen or any trends that have really gained momentum in a favorable direction?

Dr. Mauro Guillen:

I would say that perhaps from my perspective, there's two things that make me optimistic about the future based on what has happened. One is that I think the American economy and American society has demonstrated once again that it is very resilient and very flexible, right? If you compare right now the U.S. to Japan or to Europe or to so many other parts of the world, they're having trouble bouncing back. Whereas, as you know, the American economy is just roaring back right now. Growing this year in 2021, potentially, which I'll see at the end of the year, but potentially 6, 7, 8%, which is unheard of, right? The United States hasn't grown at those rates for a long time, annual rates for a long time. I think that's a monument that speaks volumes about the flexibility of the American economy and how we can react and adjust to new situations very, very swiftly. That's one thing.

The second thing I learned very quickly is our mindset. I think this pandemic has been a humbling experience, and I hope that we learn a lesson as human beings. I think before the pandemic, we were a little bit spoiled thinking that we had everything under control, that we could essentially mold the environment to our will. The pandemic has essentially, I think, reminded all of us that, no, we're not in control. There are things that can essentially ruin our lives. I think it's humbling. I think a reasonable dose of humble pie every now and then is a good thing, because that makes us come down to earth and see our limitations as human beings, and therefore, I think be a little bit more careful about how we organize our lives, how we organize the economy, how we organize society.

Ellen Kelsay:

I think that point you just made about the mindset is so true. This brought us to our knees in every way, literally and figuratively that you can imagine over the past year, and you hope that we don't lose sight of those lessons. The further we begin to see maybe another side of the pandemic that we at least do maintain that dose of humble pie, as you said, I think that's so important and we will leverage these lessons learned into the future, for sure. Well, I'm curious in your book, and we've talked about it a ton the last time, was all about the year 2030, and that these trends were really accelerated in the future. Is 2030 still the target or are we going to see 2024 be the target or has the timeline just massively accelerated in your mind with all of these trends and certainly the pandemic accelerating them?

Dr. Mauro Guillen:

No, absolutely. This pandemic is a great accelerator of trend. It has accelerated the adoption of technology, for sure. It has accelerated, unfortunately, inequality. It has accelerated the growth of the East Asian economies like China, Taiwan, Vietnam, South Korea, because they controlled the pandemic much earlier and therefore the economies have suffered less. Those were the things that were going on before: the rise of East Asia, technology adoption, inequality. The pandemic has put all of those things on steroids and my only regret about the book, although I did include material about the pandemic, but my only regret is that instead of using the title *2030*, I think right now I would have chosen the title *2028*, because the future that I described in the book now is arriving a little bit faster. I would say 2024, but 2028. In fact, I've recalculated some of the numbers about population transcend and it's about a 2-year difference now in terms of when that world that I described in the book is going to be arriving, but it is arriving let's not forget.

Ellen Kelsay,

That's just right around the corner. That's not that far away. That's for sure. You talk about the accelerant of COVID and that everything is now on steroids and just the pace of change, you also talked about mindset and humble pie. We hear so much and I think there's just a collective fatigue. There's an excitement about the pace of change. There's excitement about harnessing these lessons learned, but then also the resilience and adaptability of organizations, of individuals, to embrace what we've learned and to harness the optimism of the future. Anything there that you would say kind of as a watch out, as we think about navigating between now and 2028, things that we as individuals should be mindful of, things that organizations should be mindful of too, to not lose sight of that positive change, but also to be mindful that it's a lot and it's coming at us all a lot faster than we probably ever would have anticipated or planned for.

Dr. Mauro Guillen:

Yes, I think perhaps for me, the biggest thing to think about is how this pandemic may be having some really, bad long-term consequences, for example, for children. For children who don't have Wi-Fi at home, children who perhaps don't have the appropriate equipment, maybe they don't have the space at home to be able to learn from there, and therefore they've lost one year, potentially a year and a half of schooling. That's pretty bad when that happens to a 6-year-old or an 8-year-old or an 11-year-old. I think, somehow, we need to think about how to make up for that. I don't think we've had a debate yet. That's I think the one issue that I find worrisome or the most worrisome right now.

Ellen Kelsay:

I think that's going to take probably years and even decades to completely fully understand and appreciate. Like you said, that year loss of learning, let alone the year impact psychologically and mentally on children, is going to take probably a while for us to fully appreciate the extent of that damage that's been done. I agree that's something we all need to be sensitive to and keep a close eye on. I think these deficits, that's one of them, are related to kind of the long-term effects of the pandemic. Last we spoke, this was a good news, bad news scenario, or potentially a double-edged sword of remote work, remote learning. There are certainly some benefits to that and we saw so many organizations and schools pivot to support that, but we also said at the time, a year ago, we had this conversation that it was a massive experiment. We didn't know if it was going to be all positive or if there would be some potentially unintended negative effects of that. Here we are a year later. What are your thoughts on remote work, remote learning?

Dr. Mauro Guillen:

Well, let me begin with remote learning. I think this pandemic has shown us that remote learning, except for I would say very young children like we were discussing earlier, is not necessarily a second best. It's not an inferior way of learning. I think in-person learning is, or can be, made to be synergistic with remote learning. A hybrid blended models, I think are the future. In some cases, I believe that 100% remote learning may be the solution for some people. The demand for education, as you know, continues to grow, especially among not necessarily younger people, but people in their forties, fifties, or sixties who want to maybe learn something new or refresh their knowledge about the things that are relevant to their jobs. For those people, actually being able to learn remotely without having to leave their home is a Godsend, because otherwise they wouldn't perhaps have the time to do it. Also, remote learning can be more affordable. It can be cheaper, because it's more efficient. I think we've learned that from this pandemic, that remote learning is not necessarily the precursing of in classroom education, that's I think the single most important learning there. When it comes to remote work, nearly half of the American population has gone through this big experiment. After 18 months of remote work, I think we've learned about both the advantages and the disadvantages, or the limitations of remote work. I think in the future we're going to see blended models of work. I don't think large numbers of people are going to be working only from at the office or only from home. I think we need some interaction of the office, but obviously being able to work from home a couple of days a week or three days a week is, I think, something that a lot of people have realized is a very attractive proposition. I think we're going to see companies and employees, essentially, finding over the next few months a new balance in terms of the location of work. That, I think, is going to be to everyone's advantage. Perhaps not the developers or the owners of office space, but other than that, I think it's going to benefit both companies, because they're going to be able to cut costs and keep their employees happier. Employees want the social interaction of the office, but not every day of the week.

Ellen Kelsay:

I agree. Yes, I think it's going to be great to see the new models and the flexibility that we see and how people thrive in those. I think it's really encouraging. We've talked a lot so far, predominantly about the U.S., but not solely about the U.S. Obviously, these trends we see outside the U.S. as well, but as we are sitting here having this conversation, COVID is still ravaging. Many other countries around the world are in much dire straits than we are here in the U.S., and even here in the U.S. we are certainly not out of the woods and have some things to continue to be concerned about. You do a lot of looking around the world at trends, and you look at growth rates and future economies and where markets might be in 2030. I'm curious about your perspective on global workforce, global economic, global talent, just global trends, generally speaking. Anything that you would say concerned you or that is going to change kind of your forecasting based on how we've seen COVID take hold differently around the world?

Dr. Mauro Guillen:

From the point of view of talent, I think the biggest change that I think we're likely to see over the next few years, and it's a change induced by the pandemic and by this big experiment in remote work, is that we might be on the brink of seeing, for the first time, the emergence of a truly global market for talent. Let me explain

what that means. What that means is that maybe we have a company, somebody in the United States who wants to hire an additional marketing expert to its team, and they advertise a job and they get applicants from not just United States, but all over the world. They decide that the best candidate for the job is somebody who lives in Singapore. In the past you would need to actually ask that person to Singapore to move to the U.S., but now you could hire that person on a remote basis to work from Singapore, for your company, if you believe that that person is going to be really valuable. I think this opens up an entire array of new possibilities for companies. Of course, we need to be mindful about something, which is that whenever something like this happens that is a technology shock, like the one we've gone through with remote work, there will be winners and losers in the labor market. There will be workers that will benefit because they have the financial skills that are going to be high in demand, now on a global scale. But there are also going to be losers in the sense that people who don't have such skills, perhaps they will lose their jobs because companies may find somebody else somewhere else in the world who's willing to perform the same duties for less pay. This is yet another example of the classic pattern that we see that technological change can be good and at the same time, it can be bad. There are winners and losers, always.

Ellen Kelsay:

Yes, I think that's important. I think we like to kind of romanticize the upside, but are maybe giving short shrift to some of the potential downsides and unintended consequences. I think that's an important point to keep eyes wide open on both the opportunity, but also the pitfalls and certainly from a talent and workforce planning perspective, as you said, there are some flexibilities, but also again, some potential pitfalls. Then also from a global health and well-being perspective, when you think about employing a workforce that could reside literally anywhere in the world and how you support that workforce from a health and well-being perspective, can become unruly when you've got thousands of people in hundreds of countries, and you see what COVID can do in varying degrees around the world. That brings on a whole new level of complexity from a workforce management perspective, as well.

Dr. Mauro Guillen:

Absolutely. In fact, I've been talking over the last few months with HR managers at different kinds of companies, both large and small, and they're all telling me that there's so many things going on in terms of the effect of technology on jobs and job practices. For example, the entire process of selecting people has been changed now by artificial intelligence. I mean, companies are increasingly deploying artificial intelligence techniques to sift through large numbers of resumes and so on. Once again, I mean, the very way which we organize work and the location of work, I think it's going to be transformed by remote work. Again, I don't think remote work is going to make work at the office or on location obsolete. I think we're moving towards blended models of work. Again, let's hope that this will be to the benefit of the largest number of people. I think certainly companies are going to benefit for it.

Ellen Kelsay:

Absolutely. Well, I'm curious Mauro, what is the thing that you're working on right now that excites you the most, or the trend that you're watching on that you are really just jazzed about, that you're really wanting to see if by 2028, if it plays out the way that you're hoping it does.

Dr. Mauro Guillen:

Well, the one thing that, I don't know whether it excites me but it certainly fascinates me, is the possibility, which I think is a real one that we're going to start going back to school several times over our lifetime. Let me explain. We have three trends that are converging on one another. The first trend is we live longer. Every year life expectancy grows. Right now, the average American who turns 60, and today as we speak there's 12,000 Americans celebrating their 60th birthday, well, they have on average another 24 years of life ahead of them, which is of course another lifetime, right? 24 years is a very long period of time, if you've made it to age 60. That's the first change.

The second change is not only the lifespan has increased, but also the health span, so we are remaining in good physical and mental shape for a much longer period of time than before. In other words, a 60-year-old or a 70-year-old today is in so much better shape that somebody of the same age a couple of generations ago. That's the second big change.

The third is that technological change is making what we learned at school obsolete much faster than in the past. So what's my forecast? My forecast, what I see coming, is that when we turn 40, we're going to realize that what we learned at school is no longer giving us an advantage in the labor market. Then we're going to go back to school. I don't mean to say that people are going to move back into the dorm on campus. No, I think people may use a digital platform to learn or to update their knowledge. Then we're going to work again and then when we turn 60, we're going to realize that, again, whatever it is that we learned when we were 40, back at school, is no longer as useful in the labor market, and we're also going to realize at that point that we still have another 24 years on average to live. So we're going to go back to school again, at age 60, and then go back to work. I think what's going to happen is that the old sequence that we would play, study, work, retire, I think that linear sequence is going to be blurred in a gradual way. We're going to transition between school and work, back and forth, several times during our lifetime. That's what I think is going to happen. I find it fascinating, because it will be a break with the last 150 years in which we organized our lives in that way that I described.

Ellen Kelsay:

That is fascinating and I love it as somebody who is a lifelong learner, myself, and likes to be challenged and continue to grow. As somebody in an organization, you think about the HR people that you're speaking with, how important that is for talent and skill evolution within an organization, that you're bringing in both fresh ideas and fresh perspectives from people who are continuing to stay sharp on their skills. That's fascinating. I love it. Maybe I'll be back in your classroom online one of these days, Mauro.

Dr. Mauro Guillen:

Or feel free to move back into the dorm on campus.

Ellen Kelsay:

That would be fun. I'd love to relive those days, that's for sure.

Mauro, thank you again. As always, such a treat speaking with you. I look forward to having you back again in 2028 to hear what you have cooking then. As always, thanks so much for your time.

Dr. Mauro Guillen:

I hope we can have another chat earlier than 2028, but once again, thank you so, so very much for inviting me. It's a pleasure to have a conversation with you about all of these important topics.

Ellen Kelsay,

Anytime, it's my pleasure. Thanks again.

I've been speaking with Mauro Guillen, author of *2030: How Today's Biggest Trends Will Collide and Reshape the Future of Everything*, on some of the biggest impacts stemming from the pandemic and the resulting effect on the global workforce.

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