

Ellen Kelsay ([00:01](#)):

What if we could predict the future? Right now, many of us would like to know what the future holds, especially over the next several months and the year to come. Imagine you had a crystal ball and could glimpse ahead to see what the next decade holds? Well- our guest today has done just that. Joining me today is Dr. Mauro Guillén, Zandman, Professor of International Management at the Wharton School. His research deals with the future of global markets from associate demographic perspective and the dynamics of innovation in the global digital economy. He's the author of several books and is a frequent commentator on Bloomberg, NPR and many other media outlets. He has a new book scheduled for release this August. Its title is "2030: How Today's Biggest Trends Will Collide and Reshape the Future of Everything". I'm Ellen Kelsay, and this is the Business Group on Health podcast, conversations with experts on the most relevant health and wellbeing issues facing employers today. In this episode, I asked Mauro about the current trends, pandemic dynamics, and other factors that are unveiling themselves to us and are shaping what the world will look like by the year 2030. Mauro, welcome. We are thrilled to have you with us today.

Mauro Guillén ([01:24](#)):

Thank you so much, Ellen, for having me on your podcast.

Ellen Kelsay ([01:27](#)):

Of course, and, and full disclosure. I need to share with our listeners that Mauro was one of my professors at Wharton, and we've invited him to speak at a number of Business Group events over the past year or so. He's incredibly knowledgeable and engaging, and we couldn't be more thrilled to have him back with us as one of our podcast's guests and Mauro let's, let's get right into it. And let's first talk about the pandemic since it is still very much top of mind, for just about all of us. You've studied epidemics and pandemics, previously along with the macro effects that emanate from them, big picture, let's take a step back. What are some of the effects of this pandemic?

Mauro Guillén ([02:07](#)):

Well, I believe that these pandemic COVID-19 primarily accelerates preexisting trends as opposed to previous big pandemics that we've had in the world, going all the way back to the seventh century. When we had the plague of Justinian, forgive me the sixth century, or later on with the Black Death in the 1300s, and more recently with the influence of pandemic in 1918, 1919. I think what's different about the situation confronting us now is that I don't think we're going to witness a turning point in history or a reversal of preexisting trends about quite on the contrary, we're going to see an acceleration and intensification of demographic, economic and of course, technological trends.

Ellen Kelsay ([02:54](#)):

You talked about demographics, and I know when you and I spoke previously, there are a number of aspects of the demographic trends that are really brought to light even more so relative to this pandemic. You had mentioned previously to me about childbirth rates perhaps been declining or, or deferred also impacts on millennials as well as the older generation. Could you expand upon those?

Mauro Guillén ([03:20](#)):

Yes, absolutely. So one of the trends that is going to be accelerated by COVID-19 is the decline in fertility. So this is not a new trend. It has been going on for several decades in the United States, in Europe, in Asia, even in Africa and in Latin America. But what happens here is that when unemployment

goes up, when there is so much uncertainty, then couples or women, to be more specific decide to postpone having the children that they would like to have. Maybe they postponed them by one year or two years or three years. And the mere postponement, even if they end up having that child, that they decided to have causes the fertility rate to go down. And it also accelerates another very important trend, which is population aging. So the results of these are that the lives of generations then change. And I would be happy to expand into how millennials might be affected by this, and also how the group of people above the age of 60 will be affected by the demographic consequences of these pandemic.

Ellen Kelsay ([04:27](#)):

I think that'd be helpful. I remember, you had used the phrase that this for millennials is something that you've called the second big crisis in their lifetime. So we'd love to hear more about that. And as you look at this crisis through the eyes of millennials, what that means to them both now, as well as, you know, as they think about and contemplate their futures.

Mauro Guillén ([04:49](#)):

Yeah. So this is the second big crisis in their lives. The first one being 12 years ago, 2008, 2009, the global financial crisis that cut them. That was the beginning of their working life. And for most millennials, COVID-19 comes when they are in their thirties or even early forties in some cases. And this represents yet another blow from an economic point of view. Many of them are losing their jobs. Some of them are not being able to perhaps get promoted or to find the job of their dreams. So from an economic point of view, it's a devastating blow for that generation. And it is still a crisis that because of the acceleration of technological trends, what might think that millennials could be, or would be very well positioned to take advantage of it. And that's true, but let's not forget that the millennial generation is not a one piece. There Are highly educated millennials here in the United States and elsewhere in the world. There are also other millennials who dropped out from high school. So the effects of this crisis are further going to bifurcate the experiences of millennials with, you know, more educational credentials and those who for whatever reason, didn't attend college.

Ellen Kelsay ([06:12](#)):

And let's talk about the other end of the demographic spectrum and perhaps the older population, those that are age 60 and above. You had said that this pandemic also places some unique strains on that population. Could you share more about what you're referencing there?

Mauro Guillén ([06:30](#)):

Well, the immediate impact as we know is higher mortality, unlike the 1918, 1919 influenza pandemic, which mostly affected men of middle age, right in their twenties, in their thirties, in their forties, COVID-19 is affecting people above a certain age. You know, generally we hear the numbers 60 or 65, more so than younger people. Now it is also the case, of course, that people of a certain age tend to have less effective immune systems. And they are more likely to have certain preexisting medical conditions that seem to be correlated with more severe symptoms during COVID-19 and hospitalizations of course, and deaths. So the immediate effect will be negative, but I would argue that longer run, I believe the population above age 60 is going to find new opportunities out there. And let me illustrate in two ways. One is because proportionally there are going to be a greater percentage of the population and that trend is accelerating as a result of the pandemic for the reason that we were discussing earlier that fertility, the number of babies being born is going to drop these year, next year, possibly for the next three years. The second factor is the trend towards remote work. So remote work offers workers more

flexibility, from many different points of view. And I believe that that's what many people about the age of 60 or 65 are looking for. Maybe they would like to retire from a full time job, but they would like to continue to work in, you know, in a more flexible arrangement. And especially if it's an arrangement that doesn't imply having to commute to the office. So I actually believe that, you know, five years down the road, 10 years down the road, 15 years down the road, probably the kinds of trends that are being accelerated by these pandemic, including specifically remote work are going to offer a wider array of opportunities for people above the age of 60 or 65.

Ellen Kelsay ([08:46](#)):

I'm going to pick up on the thread about remote work in just a minute, but before I do so I wanted to ask you about another demographic and that is females. And know in your research, you've also commented that women in particular have been disproportionately impacted or at least nuanced impacts on women as relates to the pandemic for a number of reasons. Could you shed a little bit more light on that as well?

Mauro Guillén ([09:12](#)):

Yeah, so it's a mixed bag when it comes to the effects of COVID-19 on women, for example, here in the United States. But I think what I'm about to say applies to other countries as well. So on the positive side, what we see is that women are, have been less affected by COVID-19 in terms of a percentage of infections, in terms of severe symptoms, in terms of hospitalizations and also deaths. And there are two reasons for this: one has to do with biology. So women are better equipped in terms of their immune system to cope with the potential adverse consequences of the virus. And secondly, there's a behavioral aspect, which is that women in general tend to be more risk averse than men. And as a result of that, they take directions from the health authorities such as social distancing or staying at home more seriously. They are more cautious in general about their health, and that they're more likely to follow all of those recommendations as to what is it that we need to do, you know, they're not to fall sick. So that's on the positive side. However, on the negative side, the lockdowns, the stay at home orders have also created problems for women. First of all, women now work in great numbers outside of the household. Barely they remain at home, then they have to perform even more tasks than before in the household, because they take on more of them compared to men. The other negative effect that we've seen in many countries around the world is a spike in domestic violence, perhaps driven by the fact that now in this pandemic men and women have been spending more time in this household. So once again, there are ways in which women seem to be doing better than men during these pandemic, but there are also other ways in which women are being hurt by some of the dynamics through, by the pandemic.

Ellen Kelsay ([11:08](#)):

With each of those groups. You, you just referenced the millennials, the older population aged 60 and above and women. And it sounds with, with each of those, that there are certainly some positive attributes that have come out of this pandemic and the impacts on them, but also perhaps counterbalanced by some unfortunate circumstances and impacts on them. So it will be interesting to watch how those continue to unfold through the duration of this pandemic and what that means for the future ahead for, for each of those segments of the population. I do want to pick up on the thread that you've now mentioned a few times related to remote work. And you also mentioning in your opening comments regarding one of the trends being a move towards technology. So I'd like to ask you to speak a little bit more about remote work, and possibly the future of work and are the changes that we've seen in recent months permanent about working from home or, you know, less people in a workplace

environment. And are there benefits associated with that or perhaps some negative consequences of prolonged remote work situations?

Mauro Guillén ([12:19](#)):

Yeah. So this is one of the topics that I think has been more widely debated. And there is, I think a lot of evidence to indicate that some of the changes in terms of the numbers of people working remotely, maybe permanent, but it'd be back, uh, you know, take one step back and take a longer view perspective here on the problem. So before the pandemic hit here in the United States, maybe about according to one study, 37% of all jobs could be performed from the home 100%. Okay. But of all those only 3% prior to the pandemic were being performed on a remote basis most of the time. Now we have the stay at home orders and we have problems with public transportation companies shutting down. We see more and more employees during the months of February, March, April working from the home. So we've come to a situation in which at least half of the labor force is doing as much as they can in terms of performing the duties from their home. This is a huge experiment. And the question of course, is will both workers and employers see that it is to their benefit to continue with this kind of arrangement, at least in part. And I think the answer to this question is yes, there will be some workers, some categories of workers and some categories of employers that will prefer to continue with this kind of an arrangement that even of itself also raises some challenges who's going to pay for the equipment, afforded the wifi connection at home. How are you going to coordinate with other workers? Is such an arrangement sustainable over time because there's a burnout because there is, you know, there are distractions in the home in the same way that there are at the office. I think the future will look like something like the following, which is 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 from the location of the company. So it could be home, it could be a bar, or it could be some kind of coworking space, but there's also going to be an even greater proportion of jobs, maybe 30, 40% or more, which will be arranged in a hybrid way. So workers will, or employees will perform some of their duties during a couple of weeks out from the home. And they will perform other kinds of duties. Let's say three days a week from the, or from the company's premises. So in other words, I think there's going to be both kinds of changes, jobs that will become 100% remote, and jobs that, are going to be performed on a hybrid, blended, fashion. So, the other issue by the way, Ellen, that I would like to bring to your listeners attention is that there's a danger in terms of moving certain jobs a hundred percent, to the remote mode we see is that once you make, or you redesign a job so that it is 100% remote, there are no limits as to who can be hired to perform that job. There are no limitations, no boundaries in can be a company that is based in Illinois that has workers living in Illinois, performing those jobs from their homes, or it could be workers based in California, or it could be workers based in Mexico or in Taiwan or in Argentina performing those jobs. So I think we also need to be careful about what are the longterm consequences. If we redesign a lot of jobs in such a way that they can be a hundred percent performed remotely, because then all of these global dynamics about, you know, where is the best talent in the world, what is the best, you know, cost benefit, in terms of, you know, productivity and wages and, companies could start making decisions that essentially offshore many of those jobs that can be performed remotely on a 100% basis.

Ellen Kelsay ([16:41](#)):

You raised so many points there that I want to pick up on, and I want to be sure that I pick up on them all. You know, I think this first one is just kind of the crystal ball and what does the future of the work site look like and how many people actually come back to a work site versus how many people stay full time working remote versus something in the middle of, you know, a hybrid or, you know, maybe commuting to a satellite location, but not necessarily to the old location in a big city center that they

used to. So it'll be interesting just to see where different industries and different employers maybe fall along those spectrum of options. And to your point, it does create some workforce considerations, hiring and talent management considerations that are new and will be interesting to see how, you know, collectively employers navigate that, but then also how workers and the employment and job market responds to that.

Ellen Kelsay ([17:36](#)):

You know, I know when, when you and I spoke recently, you were also talking about, you know, that there could be some longterm effects on productivity, as well as longterm effects on a psychological response from individuals, both in terms of isolation, and what we used to often look to as commute time as a time to decompress. And it was a transition in life from your work mode back into a family mode. And that for many people who may be working remote currently, and certainly in a prolonged environment, that that could be a challenge to no longer have that decompression or buffering time. So I'm curious. I know I kind of threw a lot in there, but I'm curious in, in your mind, if you, you know, have a sense from having studied these things in the past, at what point in time would we be able to look back and have a better handle on the true effects, uh, both from a productivity as well as the psychological impact perspective on these changes in how and where we work. Would that be a, let's say a six month point in time, a 12 month point in time, 18 month point in time or longer that we could with fairly good confidence, look back and say, we have a good sense of, of what this means in terms of productivity and psychological effects.

Mauro Guillén ([18:56](#)):

Yeah. So I think you've put your finger on precisely what the issue is, which is that we're going through, at least in the United States through a huge experiment, both companies and the employees in terms of remote work practices. And we still don't know because we've only been doing this for the last three months in such big numbers. We still don't know where the longterm consequences are. Long term consequences on job satisfaction on employee wellbeing and on productivity and creativity at work. So we definitely need more research. I don't think that three months, not even six months is going to be enough. This is probably going to be a matter of years, but in the meantime, before all of that research is available, I think companies and employees will continue to experiment, but some of the issues, some of the challenges that you mentioned are very real. So, yes, we all hate commuting, but commuting does help us separate what happens in the home and what happens at work. And it helps us adjust to, you know, in the morning to a working life. And then when we return back home helps us adjust that back to a family life. And there are all of those other, you know, secondary effects that you were mentioning sat as a burnout. There is burnout in the office. There's also burnout at home, when you work from home. But those kinds of psychological states in which people may find themselves, which could lead to lower productivity, for instance, are very different. So burnout in the office burn out at home. It's completely different. There's two other issues by the way that we haven't talked about, which are essential, what's going to happen to children? Are they also going to be learning from home or are they going to go back to school? As, you know, as we speak in France, they opened or reopened some primary schools and they had to shut them down again, because they haven't thought through all of the reverberations, all of the consequences of bringing students back into the classroom and at the same time having to make them follow social distancing guidelines. So there's all of these unknown. So all of these question marks. So I think you really put your finger on the key issue here, which is that we need a little bit more time to better understand exactly what might be some of the long-term consequences of all of this. And that's why, you know, I also believe that we're probably going to see more jobs that are going to be hybrid jobs than jobs in the near future, let's say in the next couple of years or so, that are going to be performed

exclusively from the home. That's why I made that forecast, right? Cause I think we need more experimentation and I think we need to give people more flexibility.

Ellen Kelsay ([21:40](#)):

I agree. It's going to be really interesting to keep an eye on and see how this all shakes out in the year or two to come. One other point that you briefly touched on in a couple different places in our conversation thus far is about this hybrid model or perhaps where people may work. And if it's not solely in the home or solely at work, it could be in an alternative location. And it could be a satellite location, not necessarily in a big city center. So it raises the question about the future of our cities, and even larger than that, you know, population density, if people no longer have to commute into Manhattan or Washington DC, or pick any other major city to do their job, they can perhaps do it from home or perhaps do it from a satellite location, then that might change where they choose to live. And so as you kind of extrapolate that and forecast that into the future, what do you think that means for our cities generally speaking?

Mauro Guillén ([22:47](#)):

Yeah, certainly. I think you're absolutely right. I think we're going to go through a process of rethinking many of the decisions that we make in life. And one of them of course, is where do we choose to live? What kind of a, how is that a, is it in the downtown area of a big city? Is it in a suburb? Is it in a rural area and obviously remote work, if it continues to increase as a trend is going to open up new possibilities and new opportunities, for people, by the way, not just in terms of which, place they choose to live in, but also which jobs they would take. Cause right now we are constrained, right? If you have to actually go to an office or to a factory, or to some other kind of facility, then you can only accept jobs that are reasonably nearby. So I think these again creates a whole new universe of opportunities for many people. And I think is going to have important repercussions in the real estate industry. And we haven't talked about retail. We haven't talked about commercial space, but it's certainly going to have a big impact as well on residential commerce. Real estate, residential real estate. And it's going to have an impact also in terms of the types of, apartments, the types of homes that people would like to have. Maybe you would like a home, with a quiet area, where you can work without any interruptions, and so on and so forth. But let me also add into the mix here. Another very important thing that we haven't touched on so far, which is unequal access to remote work. So most college graduates can work at least in part from home, right. They have the kinds of jobs that lend themselves to remote work, however, people without a college education, most of them, they need to actually show up for work. So that's one dimension of inequality and other, they mentioned yes, along racial and ethnic lines, in part correlated with education. So we see that whites in the United States when compared to minority groups tend to have more opportunities given their current jobs for working remotely. So I think this is also very important from a public policy point of view, but also from a another point of view, which is, you know, justice in the sense of offering everyone opportunities in this, you know, time when we have to both have social distancing and we also have to cope with the impact of technology. So I think all of these are very important considerations. And once again, that's why I was saying earlier that I don't think we're going to figure this out in six months. It's going to take much longer than that.

Ellen Kelsay ([25:37](#)):

These are all significant and important issues. It's an, I agree. We already have preexisting disparities in so many areas, whether it be ability to work remotely or access to technology or financial, well-being, physical well-being, and certainly the social and racial issues in our society. And we certainly don't want those disparities to worsen. So something we all need to be mindful of and keep an eye on and work

actively to try and protect and improve upon instead of seeing them go in the other direction. So I appreciate you raising all of those important points. I do want to take a minute to switch gears and talk about one of the other trends that you've mentioned, and that's the trend towards automation, which again, may disproportionately impact certain industries more than others. And, and obviously this pandemic has brought to light issues related to our supply chain and our reliance on other countries and our ability to procure and distribute resource to swiftly when and where we need them. So can you speak to automation and how it may evolve to better address issues that have come to light during the pandemic?

Mauro Guillén ([26:50](#)):

Yeah. So automation is yet another trend that will be accelerated or intensified by COVID-19. It is not a new trend by any means, especially in the manufacturing sector. And I think the pandemic will have broadly speaking, three kinds of effects here in this respect. So the first is on supply chains. So supply chains, yes, they're gonna be more automated, especially when it comes through the movement of goods and warehousing. If you remember, there's been problems precisely in those areas during this pandemic at companies, such as Amazon, for instance, and there are also going to be shorter and more diversified because one of the learning points from this pandemic is that a disruption, a global disruption, such as this can break your supply chain can interrupt it. And, no company wants to be in that situation. So I think the complexity and the geographical length of supply chains are both going to be coming down as companies make decisions to make their supply chains more resilient, more resistant to big disruptions, such as this. But I think automation is going to increase throughout the entire, you know, spectrum of activities that companies undertake. And it's especially, I think going to be the case in the service sector, where if you remember automation, hasn't made as many inroads as in manufacturing. So let me give you two very quick examples. So one is the need to limit contact between the competent employees and customers. So the other day I was talking to a CEO of a major Asian hotel chain, a woman, and she was telling me that they're investing a lot of money right now, trying to automate everything in each of their hotels, so that this has a little contact between employees in the hotel and the guests, right, in order to be able to persuade guests that it's safe to stay at the hotel. So they're gonna introduce all sorts of automated things from not contactless payments and contact lists, checking procedures, to food delivery, to cleaning rooms, all sorts of things, right. That represent acts or instances of automation. And the other example is, you know, all of those service occupations that imply having human beings are not necessarily in interaction with customers, but doing something of the company's facilities, maybe it's cleaning, maybe it's rearranging things, maybe it's restocking things. Well, a lot of that is also going to be automated, I think, as a result of the spend then, because companies aren't going to see the opportunity and the incentive to automate, whereas maybe five years ago, they thought more, well, why change something that it seems to be working just fine? So once again, I strongly believe that we're going to see a great deal of automation, much capital spending a year towards automation, especially in the service sector.

Ellen Kelsay ([29:54](#)):

And overall from a consumer perspective, how do you think about, or are you able to predict what consumers may do and how they may adapt to some of these macro level trends that you've, you've mentioned, whether it be automation or technology?

Mauro Guillén ([30:12](#)):

Well, I think the obvious area in which we already we've already seen quite a bit of change is e-commerce, so just imagining if 12 years ago, instead of having a financial crisis, we have had epidemic

such as this one without, you know, all of the online platforms that we have at our disposal today. We wouldn't be able to be having this conversation for instance, right. In the way that we're having it today. A lot of people wouldn't be able to work from home remotely and more importantly, very few consumers will be able to secure essentially during the pandemic because 12 years ago, e-commerce was not what it is today. We have such a diversified, you know, array of offerings. We have different kinds of platforms. We have payment systems. We have the logistics for fulfilling the orders and so on and so forth. So I think that's, what's going to change. What's going to change is that, you know, the acceleration of the changes that, um, consumers who were reluctant to use eCommerce now, over the last three months they've taken a crash course was on that. And now they feel so much more comfortable, but also most importantly, smaller firms that didn't really take e-commerce seriously because they were catering to a customer base that was located, you know, within 15 miles of their shop or their facilities. But now they're in lock down. They've been forced to engage in eCommerce. I don't think that's going away. Those small businesses are going to reopen to the public eventually, but they will continue to fulfill some orders through online platforms. So I think, at long last, we're going to see a blended hybrid model in which, you know, there's going to be all of these synergies that companies are going to look for in terms of the online channel and the brick and mortar channel with also a fee, you know, blended model, that is the click and collect model, right. Curbside delivery of the goods. That's sort of the thing. So I think, you know, naturally companies and consumers, both of them are innovating. They're, you know, looking for ways to overcome the limitations that come with, social distancing. And we're going to see quite a bit of, you know, entrepreneurial activity.

Ellen Kelsay ([32:33](#)):

I like the example that you gave about the e-commerce, but also, the proximity to locality and brick and mortars and supporting businesses within local communities. We've certainly seen, at least I know in my community and many people I speak to in other communities, this re-commitment almost to local businesses and the mom and pop stores, so to speak or the independent, you know, businesses within communities and a lot of people really rallying to support them, whether it be, you know, ordering takeout from that business or doing online business with them. So I appreciate your comments about the blending of the two and, and, um, what that may look like in the future as well. Let's talk about the year 2030 upon which your book is quite heavily focused. I know you've spoken often about the year 2030 and past lectures, and as well as in sessions that you've done for the Business Group. And of course, we're very excited about your new book, which is coming out this coming August, what are some of those long-term and big picture issues that are moving us towards the year 2030, specifically as a tipping point?

Mauro Guillén ([33:48](#)):

Yeah. So we've already talked about the demographic changes in trends, population on aging, the interplay among different generational groups from millennials to senior citizens and so on and so forth. I think there's two or three other things that I would like to emphasize here in terms of ways in which the year 2030 is going to look very different. One is the growth of emerging markets and of the middle class in those emerging markets. I'm specifically talking about East Asia, South Asia, parts of the Middle East, Latin America, parts of South Africa. So some people may be under the impression that this crisis will slow down the growth of the middle class in those parts of the world. But quite the contrary, actually, those economies are likely to grow faster than Europe or the United States will be growing over the next two or three years. And as a result I think, these process of re-balancing of consumption in the world of these emerging markets becoming so much more important from the point of view, the purchasing power of their middle classes, that process is going to get accelerated by this crisis. And you

see, when it comes to my book, my only regret is that instead of titling it 2030, maybe now I should change the title to 2029 or 2028, right? Because many of these things that I was projecting with, become a reality by the year 2030 now, because of this acceleration that COVID-19, represents, some of the realities that are gonna, you know, be there for all of us to witness a little bit earlier. And then there's two other things that I wanted to bring to your attention. So one, I think is very important. One is the role of women in society and in the economy as know, I always make a big point about the fact that, you know, 20 or 30 years ago, we had, in most countries in the world, relatively few women with a college education, relatively few women who would work outside of the household now in the U S of course, you know, this process has started maybe 30 or 40 years ago, but not everywhere in the world. And we've also seen over the last 10, 15 years, so much more accumulation of wealth on the part of, of women, so much so that in a couple of years from now more than half of their net worth in the world will be owned by women for the first time in a long time. Right. And, you know, focusing here in the United States, these changes, are now about to tip the balance in terms of who is the main bread winner, in American households, towards women, because as we speak right now about 39, 40% of households in United States, where there is a man and a woman, you know, in 39 or 40% of them, the woman makes more money than the man. And the trend is unmistakable. We're going to reach 50% within the next few years. So I think, the world in 2030 will also be different. And this is the second way that I want to emphasize because women will have come of age in terms of their role and their importance in the economy, as workers, as income earners and as wealth holders. And I can give you a third one, which is on technology. If you'd like a, I don't know, I'm not sure whether you would like to probe me a little bit deeper into this, too. Of course. Yeah, no, please go for it. So I mean, in terms of technology, it has become, you know, part of the conventional wisdom to say that, you know, we're going to be using more and more technology across the board. And what I want to bring to the attention is that, uh, you know, the meaning and availability of technology, that's a mean that it will be used, number one, but you also need people to have a motivation to use it then.

Mauro Guillén ([37:38](#)):

And that's why I think COVID-19 is such an important event, which is that it is encouraging people who weren't, that, you know, interested in technology to use it, in areas that they never thought that we use it. Right. And then the second thing that I would like to mention is that on a global scale, what we're going to see is that parts of the world that we thought were behind us in sort of progress in terms of wellbeing of the population suddenly have become role models, for us to imitate. And let me just very briefly 30 seconds to tell you about Sub-Saharan Africa for the last 10 years, they've become the global leaders when it comes to mobile money, when it comes to telemedicine, and also when it comes to remote learning and now, you know, COVID-19 happens, it's hitting Europe and North America, particularly hard. And now we realize, you know what, maybe we should do telemedicine. Maybe we should do, or take remote learning more seriously. And perhaps we should scratch our credit cards. We should get rid of cash, which is been right now discussed as you know, in the United States and only use digital forums of exchanging money. Well, Sub-Saharan Africa happens to be at least a few years ahead of us in each of those three areas. That's great. I'm glad you mentioned that.

Ellen Kelsay ([39:11](#)):

Thank you Mauro. I have one last question for you, and there's a saying that a good crisis should never go to waste and that out of any crisis can come some good and perhaps even a silver lining. So what in your view are the benefits or the silver linings coming out of this pandemic?

Mauro Guillén ([39:31](#)):

So let me give you the abstract, the general principle first, and then illustrated with them, the topic that we've already covered, but I want to, you know, put a twist on it that I think is really important. So the general abstract principle is that, you know, we figured out a certain points in time, what is the best way of doing something? And then we keep on doing that because she's reaching to another way is costly. And of course you gain experience, right? And you feel comfortable with the way in which you're doing things. When a crisis comes, it can be a pandemic, or it can be a bigger economic event. It can be a war then, you know, that forces you to rethink, to re-examining the assumptions that you made about what is the best way of doing things individually in groups, in organizations and in society as a whole, right? That's the general abstract, it's simple. That crisis provide you with an opportunity to see, okay, am I on the right path? Is this the best way of getting things done or not?

Mauro Guillén ([40:29](#)):

Let me get back to the issue of remote work, because I think that is a fundamental misunderstanding out there as to what is it that we should be attempting to accomplish here? I don't think we should think about remote work as a substitute for work at the office or work at the company's facilities. Okay. I think we should be thinking about smart work. How can we make work? What we do, right. In order to produce goods and services with the participation of human beings, what can we do to improve creativity at work and productivity at work? How can we use technological tools such as the one that we're using right now to tape this podcast so that we can make work more efficient, more productive, more rewarding. Okay. And also more creative. I think that is the important point. Let me offer you a second example. People are thinking about remote ways of learning as a substitute for learning in the classroom. And I think that's the wrong approach. The right mindset to adopt during a crisis is how can we improve learning, not how can we move to a specific form of learning. And I strongly believe that along the same lines as smart work, I think when it comes to learning, what we should do is try to come up with a blended model, one that combines in classroom learning and remote learning. I think that is the future. So our goal should not be to try to have more remote work or to have more remote learning. It should be, how can we improve work, right, as an experience for companies and for employees, of course, how can we improve learning as an experience for students and for the teachers? I think that should be the goal. And that's why I think thinking about each of these paths as substitutes for one another may not be the best way of thinking about the problem. Maybe what we need to do is think that the goal is to make us happier, richer, if possible, um, better citizens, better people, and both, you know, using my example, learning and work, play a very important role in that process. But again, it's not that remote work is better or remote learning is better than what we're doing or we were doing before this pandemic. I think there are pluses and minuses of each and probably a blended model is the ideal solution in the end.

Ellen Kelsay ([43:13](#)):

I think that's such a great example. And I, and I love, you know, how you talked about the mindset and that it's not a substitute. And I think a lot of people have thought about whether it be this remote work or remote schooling as temporary setbacks and contingency planning of how we're dealing with a near term situation versus a long term change towards perhaps a better, um, and more productive, more effective, a more enriching experience across the board for everybody. So I do think what's fundamental to that is the mindset shift and, and taking a longterm view and not viewing it as a temporary substitute to use your words. So I really appreciate you sharing that example, and, and I'm also glad to see, and to hear that you speak about a lot of the promise you see in the future of what perhaps might stay with us and a post-pandemic environment that are the silver linings that have come out of this situation. So with that Mauro, I want to thank you yet again for sharing your insights with us today on our podcast.

Mauro Guillén ([44:20](#)):

Thank you Ellen.

Ellen Kelsay ([44:22](#)):

For our listeners, I've been speaking with Dr. Mauro Guillén, author of the new book, "2030: How Today's Biggest Trends Will Collide and Reshape the Future of Everything", about the global changes that will reshape our world and are being accelerated by the current pandemic. I'm Ellen Kelsay. And this is the Business Group on Health Podcast: conversations with experts on the most relevant health and well-being issues facing employers today. Thank you.