

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY


Setting A New Benchmark

When was the last time in global economic history that every single company in the world, big, medium and small, stood up and addressed a single risk at the same time in a way they never had before? The short answer: never.

In this highly volatile world, risk is ever present and – because we are more interconnected than ever before – it is also more severe. The global COVID-19 pandemic has underscored how we are living and working in extraordinary and unprecedented times. The decisions made during this crisis in both the public and private sectors – no matter their size, location or industry – carry immense weight.

Every organization in the world is reacting to this unprecedented challenge. There was no roadmap to guide a response and no past data to inform analytics or predictive models to help prepare for the future. As a company keenly focused on risk and closely connected to our clients, we felt compelled to embark on a collaborative effort to help move society and the economy forward.

This year, rather than simply accept the constraints imposed by the pandemic, Aon made an active decision to define the “new better” in collaboration with clients.

These **Work Travel and Convene Coalitions** have been created to help set a benchmark – to understand what is happening and, through the use of surveys and data and analytics, begin to develop new predictive models and solutions to tackle a challenge the world has never seen. The insights gleaned from the first phase of these coalition meetings – together with exclusive Aon research and case study interviews with leading multinational organizations – form the foundation of this [special report](#). 

As a result of these initial efforts, and research we have conducted, one phenomenon we have found more and more is that clients are asking questions about long-tail risks such as climate change, cyber threats, and the wealth and health gap. I cannot begin to tell you how many CEOs I have been connecting with who are asking similar questions.



That is why Aon brought together over 100 leading companies and organizations across 10 global cities from a broad range of sectors to examine the issues rising from the COVID-19 pandemic, learn from each other’s experiences and begin to discuss ways to navigate three fundamental aspects of society and the economy: **working, traveling and convening**.

Work Travel Convene Coalitions



But what the pandemic has also highlighted is how organizations are clearly unprepared for most – if not all – of these risks. And how the risk industry was not prepared to help them.

As the various regional coalitions met to discuss the crisis, the topic of **Work** quickly became by far the highest priority for participants. And as the meetings progressed, one core understanding emerged: returning to the way things were was not an option. Businesses that wanted to go back to the way they operated before the pandemic would clearly not be prepared to tackle the next big threat.

Emerging from these conversations was the clear understanding by organizations that they would need to prepare themselves for the risks posed by a volatile world and to not settle for a new normal but to instead strive to achieve **the new better**.

Not surprisingly, through our research we have found that less than half the leaders we surveyed said they were “very well prepared” for the pandemic. Those who say they were more prepared reported a broader awareness of and preparation for risks across the board, from health care costs to cyber threats to workforce disruption.

As companies make their way through an uncertain environment, leaders are bringing with them new perspectives on risk,

the future of work, how to manage and care for a remote workforce and what it takes to prepare for an uncertain future.

Organizations will continue to find ways to adapt to the shifts in the current global dynamic. Rather than confidently claiming to have found a sure-fire strategy of successfully managing a way through the pandemic, leaders have identified a number of **key changes in organizational behavior** that have helped them lead their organizations more effectively:



Change the way they assess risk

In a recent Aon survey, nearly 70% of company leaders said the pandemic exposed new risks and vulnerabilities that would require a significant change in how businesses should think about the future. This will not be the last challenge, but as various forces converge in this moment, we are witnessing a fundamental reordering of priorities on a global scale.



Look at their organization charts in a new way

The pandemic forced businesses to swiftly establish a remote way of working. Throughout this process, it became increasingly important to find the colleagues with the right skills and expertise to facilitate this new way of operating. Organizations therefore needed to identify, develop and redeploy team members who could best help find a path to a new better. This meant leaders had to rapidly reprioritize their training and development strategies.



Establish new lines of communication

COVID-19 has meant that companies have had to find new ways of decision-making. This, in turn, has led to them changing the way they communicate and forge new ties across industries, within their own organizational structure and across the public-private sector divide. By breaking down these silos, organizations are also realizing that a greater degree of transparency is vital in fostering a new way of working.



Re-examine their compensation and staff wellness programs

The shift to remote working and the new strains of setting up an office at home have meant that businesses have quickly come to realize the importance of a resilient workforce. This has led businesses to prioritize measures that can help motivate employees and, more importantly, ensure that their mental wellbeing is cared for.

Many of the changes that companies are making today were forced on them – creating a virtual office overnight, rethinking talent management and taking a new perspective on risk. But the underlying principles that were identified as helping business leaders get through the crisis – innovation, speed, risk strategy, collaboration – will be critical for the future.

I want to thank all of the organizations – from both the public and private sectors - that have participated in this effort, and offer a special thanks to those who contributed specifically to this report.

As we complete this report, there are two developments that will have a significant impact on our path forward in 2021. More countries around the world are seeing a spike in COVID-19 cases resulting in new restrictions and lockdowns. And in parallel, there have been promising developments on the treatment front with an expectation that vaccines will soon be available. Those realities make the ongoing work of our global coalition increasingly important and reinforce that, while there may be a long road ahead, there is in fact a path to a new better for countries, companies and communities around the world.



Greg Case
Chief Executive Officer

