

Foresight analysts have warned about pandemics for years, why were some surprised and not prepared?

Futurists have spoken of global pandemics for quite some time. In a recent tweet, futurist Andy Hines addressed the issue of anticipating a pandemic. Hines wrote “One might say ‘we took the horses to water, but they didn’t drink.’ Personally, I’ve included that possibility in works throughout my career. I went back and checked our 1995 book on [2025](#) and indeed the possibility of pandemics is in there.” Hines [suggests](#) that perhaps futurists have talked about this possibility so much, that in fact we have become desensitized by it.

Could we have predicted this pandemic? How did COVID-19 get started? What are the scenarios by which COVID-19 might play out?

Sohail Inayatullah and Peter Black wrote “[Neither A Black Swan Nor A Zombie Apocalypse: The Futures Of A World With The Covid-19 Coronavirus.](#)” in *Journal of Future Studies*. It discusses the predictability that COVID-19 was coming, how it got started, and four possible scenarios by which COVID-19 might track in the future: Zombie Apocalypse, The Needed Pause, Global Awakening, and the Great Despair. One conclusion the authors draw is that “culture eats strategy for breakfast.” The point they are making is that as we all try to develop a strategy for controlling the start or spread of the virus, our cultural patterns of behavior are stronger than our ability to exercise strategy. While they focus on eating habits and food preparation in China, we might think of it in the case of spring breakers in Florida.

What will be the long term impact of COVID-19?

Futurist Thomas Frey has outlined 19 COVID-19 trend lines that he is following, “[19 Startling Covid Trends and 19 Golden Covid Opportunities Emerging from the Chaos.](#)” *Futurist Speaker*, March 20, 2020. These include rewriting the rulebook for dealing with future crises, shaking hands has suddenly become a symbol for “you’re an idiot,” the biggest job transition in history, the coming reinvention of healthcare, sweeping new powers for elected officials, our increasing awareness of the world means we may have to play by someone else’s rules, education undergoing radical changes, the transformation of retail, the cocoon of isolation and the loneliness epidemic, and the coming baby boom (the increase in births next December and January creating the “Corona Generation”). This is worth a quick read to get your creative juices flowing.

My personal take is that one of the greatest impacts of the COVID-19 event will be its role as an **accelerator**. It will put into high gear some of the current trends that have been moving, but at a slower pace. For example, online learning at all institutions of higher education, employees working remotely, the decline of bricks and mortar retail, healthcare tele-visits, and expansion of takeout food from restaurants. The COVID-19 event may also lead us to reevaluate our global supply chain to ensure that we have the necessary items for key segments of our society to function properly in times like this.

How does the work of BACC contribute in times like these?

BACC’s vision is to be “...the leading organization in engaging community leaders in understanding and shaping the future of the greater Green Bay area.” We are seeking to fulfill our vision by partnering with

futurist Garry Golden of FutureThink to train community leaders to use foresight analysis tools as part of their strategic planning processes. To date we have trained 26 community leaders as well as the BACC Board of Directors. The BACC has also established “signal teams” that scan for information that will impact our community in the future. If the greater Green Bay area is to continue to thrive in the future, we must be prepared for the rapid changes that are headed our way. Foresight analysis is one powerful tool that will help us meet the challenges of the future.

In conclusion, Sohail Inayatullah and Peter Black provide us with a compelling summary statement, “...this crisis is a health crisis but, of course, it is much more. It is about leadership and governance, about what type of world we wish to live in. It is a test of the creation of a planetary civilization, working together to solve problems.”