

Tech Leaders Surfing the Crisis to Enable Accelerated Innovation

As COVID-19 makes its way around the world, we see countries under solid or soft lockdowns with social distancing in practice. Consequently, digital ways of working, interacting, and leading become crucial.

Egon Zehnder's Istanbul office gathered senior Turkish technology leaders to share their experiences in these circumstances. Participants were from the top banks, telecom, logistics, food delivery, and retail companies of Turkey; total population of workforce this community serves is greater than 250.000. What follows is a summary of the discussion:

Turkish companies were successful moving to home offices in a few days and almost flawless, with “no need to convince anyone.” Infrastructure has proved itself to support this huge workforce.

- Most companies had remote working practices in place but on a smaller scale. This helped flawless transitioning to remote working for a majority of the organizations' Operations teams in headquarters. However, call center agents have been the most challenging. Mass laptop ordering and installation had to take place, and the transition in these teams is complete.
- End user support desks faced a tsunami of requests in the initial days yet it has now normalized
- Working from home increased the productivity of software development teams.
- Telecom companies have faced incremental demand from all corporate customers but particularly from education, health, and public sector customers. The focus has

been to ensure everyone can use the basic communication services at its best. In IT, the hardest work is now within the teams defining tariffs, campaigns and offers. Students were guaranteed some free data tariff. The digital operator application has seen high demand.

- One of the largest fast delivery companies of Turkey claimed it was able to handle instant 25 times more traffic just after the curfew was announced on short notice on April 10.
- In retail, a majority of stores are closed. In some countries, e-commerce had to be stopped, however, in other countries such as Russia and Kazakhstan, e-commerce boomed.
- Regulators are making changes to adapt to new conditions and IT teams are busy implementing urgent regulative changes.
- Each of the companies on our call stated that their infrastructures are operating with 5000-8000 VPN connections with very high availability.
- Main collaboration tools used by the companies came out as Cisco WebEx, Skype for Business, MS teams, Zoom, and Jabber.

The world will never be the same, there will be challenges and transformative actions will need to be taken.

- Fixed Asset Transformation needs to be considered in the upcoming days. When all the agents and teams get used to flexible working arrangements, will we need these buildings again?
- Cyber Security will be a bigger area of concern. Vulnerabilities to individual users through VPN connections need to be engineered and protected through new measures.
- Speed, availability, and effectiveness of the operations are no longer dependent on corporate infrastructure but on individuals. Some companies need to provide specific support for employees with weak internet/communication facilities.

On the people side safety first, business second. Motivation is key; trust is an important component.

- Leaders said there is a thin line between motivation, effectiveness, burn out, and depression at this point. Distance working was a concept tech organizations were familiar with, yet working in isolation is a whole new concept.
- Passion for touching lives has been a boosting factor in employee motivation.

“What keeps the teams motivated and working more effectively than before is emphasizing the main goal and how the result of our work touch millions of lives.”

- It is crucial to make employees feel that they are safe and the challenges of work-life balance are discussed.
- Cultural transition is more important than the technological transition.
- This whole process is helping senior technology executives grow as a leader. The power of teams, holding onto a common mission and commitment to each other stand out as the main motivational pillars of this period.

Last few weeks have been a huge opportunity for innovation.

- Pure play internet companies are producing frequent releases of their platforms in the past month to incorporate process changes such as contactless delivery systems and requirements in billing systems. The CTO of a cargo business mentioned the increased transactional load in their systems (5 million transactions a day). E-commerce load dropped in March, and the load converted from textile to groceries, requiring process innovation as food distribution has some nuances. As of April, textile started coming back. Creating touchless delivery process that includes ID scanning was launched in less than 10 days. Extension of working hours, training consumers to collect their cargo from self service areas, developing the B2C apps further to enable scheduled delivery are innovations in the pipeline.

“The customers need hygienic and timely delivery. In order to provide that, we need technology and seamless operation. This is possible by innovative practices. We are working on products that can be launched fast with less function.”

- The CIO of a leading beverage company said that in addition to closure of restaurants, the fact that alcoholic beverages are banned to be sold via e-commerce in Turkey negatively affected their business. However, even in these conditions, the social media engagement of consumers skyrocketed (increased followers 5 times) and they started to conduct outdoor branding and socialization events digitally.

“The digital transformation journey that was being planned prior to epidemic is now up and running, despite people other than field workers are working from home. The journey is planned to be complete in 15 months. The fact that our efforts are highly appreciated in the organization definitely helps keeping the motivation high.”

Putting in Extra Effort for the Greater Good—Supporting Healthcare Business with Manufacturing.

- The CIO of Tofaş, an automotive company with more than 9,000 employees stated that the manufacturing operations had to be stopped due to pandemic situation and supply chain hitches. Just before the closure, the company initiated a volunteer effort to support hospitals by manufacturing protective medical equipment and continue production of these equipment during the time of closure. Starting with sample and incubation cabinets, the design was quickly adapted by other Turkish automotive/ machinery manufacturers. The company produced 600 cabinets and 20.000 protective face shields to be distributed to pandemic hospitals. Engineering design and data of these equipment is being shared as open source for other volunteer producers. The R&D departments’ capacity has completely started to serve hospital needs, which can now be tracked online.

“We have worked with Turkish engineers and doctors together with our R&D teams. Hospitals in need of any of these supplies and producers volunteer for production of these equipment, can contact the e-mail address: covid19@tofas.com.tr or visit our website; www.tofas.com.tr”

- Automotive sales, on the other hand, continue in an online platform while the distributors and after-sales continue to serve mainly commercial vehicles and ambulances.
- LC Waikiki's CDO talked about efforts on manufacturing 40 million masks per week for Ministry of Health within a short period of time.

“It has clearly been a time that we learned a unique way of working to adapt to this agile game with new machinery, textile, supply chain and IT system to support manufacturing masks. We completed an algorithm in 2 days that would normally take approximately a month”

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Covid-19 Micro-Website

We have launched a micro-website where this and other informative pieces are posted. This site will be regularly updated: [click here](#) for further details.

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Egon Zehnder is the world's preeminent leadership consulting firm, sharing one goal: to help people and organizations transform through leadership. We know what great leaders can do and are passionate about delivering the best solutions for our clients. As One Firm, our more than 500 Consultants in 68 offices and 40 countries combine our individual strengths to form one powerful collaborative team. We partner closely with public and private corporations, family-owned enterprises, and non-profit and government agencies to provide a comprehensive range of integrated services: Board advisory, CEO search and succession, executive search, executive assessment, leadership development and organizational transformation.

Our leadership solutions cover individual, team and organizational effectiveness, development and cultural transformation. We work with world-class partners including Sinequanon (SQN), a firm we have invested in that uses AI and advanced analytics to improve workplace culture and performance, and Mobius Executive Leadership, a transformational leadership development firm. In addition, we have partnered with Paradox Strategies, co-founded by Harvard University Professor Linda Hill, to develop the Innovation Quotient (IQ), a proprietary culture diagnostic.

Our goal is that the work we do contributes to successful careers, stronger companies – and a better world.

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