

# Rethinking Home, Office, and School

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*COVID-19 has disrupted life for people around the world, and the fallout is still being measured. The IEEE Computer Society has a role to play in the recovery.*

**H**ow many people on New Year's Eve, with the fireworks, festivities, and celebration, would ever have imagined what 2020 would quickly become? We doubt that the number is more than a handful. There is no reason to speculate here as to who knew what and when, but it will certainly go down in history as a contested question. The end result is that the convergence of home, office, and school is having a huge impact on families, livelihoods, businesses, and nations. The computing infrastructure (worldwide) appears to

remain resilient enough to adapt to this major shift, but the final assessment is still to be determined. For example, the popular virtual meeting tool from Zoom ran into early security problems that impacted its widespread adoption once "online" meetings became the singular means of seeing each other face to face. Further, the shift to the need for more Internet access/bandwidth at home versus access in the office seems to have transitioned rather smoothly. We believe this says much about the malleability of the Internet.


COVID-19 has forced the permanent closure of many businesses, both small and large. Those businesses that managed to survive were forced to employ draconian virtual work rules. Those companies that were already using some form of virtual work were in a much better position than those that did not have virtual systems in place. Those employees who were autonomous and capable of working virtually had a significant advantage over those who were not independent. Those who were not autonomous were either able to learn to become self-sufficient or exposed as nonadaptable.

Companies that were able to convert largely to virtual work are now faced with a decision on what to do with

their physical facilities. Businesses that have plants that can't be virtualized are facing difficult choices concerning how to reopen in a safe, phased manner. Some will make it; some will not. Some workers will keep their jobs; others will not. And schools will not be the same—well, at least not in the near future. Online learning may be fine for college students—but for pupils in the third grade? Children learn from children; we all know that. That may not be an option for a long time.

Our last point here is that what the IEEE Computer Society has promoted for decades, in its many publications

and conferences, will hopefully have a beneficial impact on addressing this crisis. Whether that is in the area of supercomputers that help the medical community create a vaccine or study the unique characteristics of this virus and whether it helps with contact tracing or assists with creating a hybrid home, office, and school environment, we believe that the IEEE Computer Society has a role to play here and a story to tell. And you as our readers and authors also have a role to play. Please stay engaged in this conversation and let us know how things are playing out in your new normal; you can write to

letters@computer.org. We may contact some of you about publishing your responses. 

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