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After Corona: Back to Normal?



*We are in the middle of a deep crisis. How do we get out of it, and how do we shape the future? Many people wish to return back to normal as quickly as possible. But is that right? No: The only way forward is into a new future, that must be the motto, writes stars Vice Chairman Dr. **Markus NEUHAUS**, Vice Chairman of Barry Callebaut, Board Member of Galenica, Baloise, Orior and Jacobs Holding and former Chairman of PwC Switzerland.*

For 30 years we have been talking about the paperless office, but paper consumption is constantly increasing. For more than 10 years we have been talking about the home office. The statistical figures on flexible working models in Switzerland have just been published, and that includes the home office. A certain percentage work flexibly and also from home, but: everyone, both private and public organizations, must now consider what alternative models worked well in the Corona era and should be maintained or even expanded in the future. This is a far-reaching opportunity.

Our infrastructure, especially that for private and public transport, is heavily strained in normal times. Surveys have given a negative assessment of this infrastructure burden, as has the land consumption associated with the expansion of transport infrastructure. Politically, this aspect is misused as an argument against immigration and the percentage of foreigners in Switzerland. But right now we can see that it is mainly the Swiss who put a strain on the transport infrastructure in normal times. We have it in our hands to maintain and promote digital working methods, A and B teams, flexible working hours, etc. on a large scale, even after the Corona home office.

In this way, we can make an active contribution against the overburdening of the transport infrastructure and traffic jams with their economically damaging consequences can be reduced. This would then require less investment in expanding such infrastructure, which

saves money and land. In addition, companies need fewer office workplaces because they can greatly increase the ratio in desk sharing.

This is nothing new, actually, but it has to be done. What does it take? The task of private and public managers is to develop and implement these concepts now, it needs active steering into this future. Investments in new working models must now be released, communication platforms and document management must be strictly aligned with these new working models. Likewise, individually adapted concepts must be developed to support home office workplaces that are suitable in the long term, for example by financing a screen at home, a financial contribution to an ergonomic home workplace, etc.

But politics is also called upon: Digital communication capacities must be expanded rapidly, for example with a nationwide 5G network. Labour law must be made more flexible, with annual working time models instead of petty work and break time reporting. There must be confidence in the economy (private and public), consisting of employers and employees, that together the right way and the right balance can be found in the individual sectors and companies. Those who now fear exploitation and abuse will prevent any forward-looking solution – at the expense of the population.

We have a unique opportunity ahead of us: in many areas we are already forcibly in a test phase from which we can glide directly into the new world. “Never waste a good crisis”, as Winston Churchill said. We should seize this opportunity now – we will all benefit from it.



Dr. **Markus NEUHAUS** spent his entire career at PwC, ultimately serving as Chairman of the Board of PwC Switzerland and member of the Supervisory Board of PwC Europe until 2019. Since 2019, he has been Vice Chairman of Barry Callebaut, the world’s leading manufacturer of high-quality chocolate and cocoa. Markus is also a Member of the Boards of Galenica, Baloise, Orior and Jacobs Holding. Furthermore, he serves as Vice Chairman of the Foundation Board of Avenir Suisse, Chairman of the Finance and Tax Committee of *economiesuisse*, Member of the Foundation Board of ETH, Vice Chairman of the Zurich Chamber of Commerce, Chairman of Zuercher Volkswirtschaftliche Gesellschaft as well as Vice Chairman of the Foundation Board of stars. Markus studied law at the University of Zurich and received a doctorate degree in law in 1988.

The views expressed here are solely those of the author and they do not necessarily represent or reflect the views of the stars Foundation. This article was first published as an op ed in [Neue Zuercher Zeitung](#) on 27 April 2020 and translated for stars insights by David ERNE.

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