

# Turning the Pandemic Into Opportunities for Innovation & Entrepreneurship

By Naoyuki Haraoka

Whenever human beings face challenges in life, they need to draw on their full capabilities to overcome them. This can work to enhance their creativity and in the world of business lead to innovation and start-ups. The current pandemic brings with it daily tragedies, but we also see innovation and new businesses emerging from the efforts of people who are suffering from the health crisis and the economic crisis. This issue highlights such developments and aims to show that the consequences of the pandemic are not necessarily all negative. The articles in our cover story of this issue show that i) innovation and entrepreneurship can be encouraged by such challenges; ii) many innovations are related to IT; and iii) female entrepreneurship has emerged as particularly noteworthy as women suffer more from the economic turmoil caused by the pandemic than men do.

In three initial theoretical articles on the connections between the crisis and innovation, we introduce the views of economics and business management experts. Dr. Jay Rao, professor at Babson College, specializing in raising entrepreneurship, and Larry Clark, managing director of global learning solutions at Harvard Business Publishing Corporate Learning, agree upon the positive aspects of the crisis on innovation and entrepreneurship in two leading articles based on interviews; while Dirk Pilat, a distinguished expert on the digital economy at the OECD, concludes in his article that digital technologies will continue to transform profoundly the economic nature of society and our working style in particular.

Real stories of practical experiences of innovation and entrepreneurship triggered or expanded by the pandemic follow these items. First, medical doctor Yo Iwami, CEO of Japanese medical venture MedPeer, talks about his efforts to expand the sharing of critical medical information among medical doctors as much as possible to raise the quality of medical services in Japan. This is another IT platform business and it is now applied to telemedicine, the remote use of medical services, which has been growing in popularity during the pandemic. Thanks to the UK Embassy in Japan, we were lucky to interview representatives from three rising British IT ventures – Tom Macallister of Caburn Solutions Ltd., Anthony Huszar & Eszter Gulacsy of Mott MacDonald, and Nick Johnson of NowSignage Ltd. All three are contributing to promoting smart offices and buildings in the United Kingdom that offer greater protection from the pandemic. They are interested in expanding their businesses overseas, including in Asia, as the pandemic has spread all over the world.

We then focus on innovations by Japanese working women to

be better prepared for the aging society. The creation of GIFMO by Masaru Morizane, which sells a cooking machine that softens food and helps retain its shape and taste, is already having a significant difference on long-term care food for elderly people who are unable to chew food well. It is fascinating to think about its possible large-scale impact on the economy as aging populations will drastically increase in many countries around the world.

We pick up on the prospect given by Dr. Jay Rao in his interview that the next 20-30 years will feature women-led entrepreneurship, and take our cue from APEC's program promoting female entrepreneurship. Whereas many women are handicapped in working places under the pandemic, as they are mostly non-permanent workers and could easily be laid off due to the economic decline, APEC has noted that women's creativity would be a key to restoring damaged economies. Following the introduction of APEC initiatives in encouraging female entrepreneurship and innovation in an interview with Renee Graham, chairwoman of the APEC forum Policy Partnership on Women and the Economy in New Zealand, we introduce two successful women entrepreneurs, Svetlana Shmakova from Russia and Norzilawaty Md Isa from Malaysia, who were both winners of the prestigious APEC BEST Awards 2000 for entrepreneurship.

## (Brief Introductions)

### COVER STORY 1

Interview with Dr. Jay Rao, Professor, Strategy & Innovation, Department of Operations and Information Management, Babson College

#### Crises & Innovation – a Perspective on Business Management

By Japan SPOTLIGHT

Assuming that innovation has been encouraged by the crisis, even after the pandemic is over new challenges will emerge in such environments as poverty, and so innovation itself will continue.

### COVER STORY 2

Interview with Larry Clark, Managing Director of Global Learning Solutions at Harvard Business Publishing Corporate Learning

#### A Crisis Could Provide Ideal Conditions for Deep Innovation

By Japan SPOTLIGHT

In addition to the pandemic crisis, we need constant learning to keep up with the rapidly changing economy and technology for maintaining innovation.

**COVER STORY 3****Digital Transformation & Innovation: the Impacts of Covid-19**

By Dirk Pilat

Assuming that the digital economy expands in the post-pandemic world, the role of data flows will become crucial in order to enhance the merits of digital technology. We will need increased international cooperation to strengthen international policies and regulatory frameworks to achieve free data flows based on fair rules.

**COVER STORY 4**

Interview with Dr. Yo Iwami, CEO of MedPeer

**Collective Intelligence from IT to Support Doctors & Help Patients – the Story of Japanese Healthcare Venture MedPeer**

By Japan SPOTLIGHT

Use of IT will be promoted in Japanese medicine as a result of the pandemic. Healthcare workers in Japan will be less exposed to a high risk of mortality from the pandemic thanks to more online tools for consultation and diagnosis.

**COVER STORY 5**

Interview with Tom Macallister, Co-Founder &amp; Director of Caburn Solutions Ltd.

**IoT Helping Smart Offices in Need of Protection from the Pandemic**

By Japan SPOTLIGHT

Caburn Solutions, an IoT solutions and communications provider, helps smart offices and buildings to maintain a good environment and energy efficiency as well as protection from the pandemic.

**COVER STORY 6**

Interview with Anthony Huszar, Account Leader for Global Health Security &amp; Eszter Gulacsy, Technical Director in Sustainability, Mott MacDonald

**Flexibility in Workplaces Enhances Office Amenity & Lowers Risk of Infection**

By Japan SPOTLIGHT

Mott MacDonald, a global engineering, management and development consultancy, in attempting to incorporate smart technologies into building designs, enhances office amenities, such as raising air quality or reducing infections and incidence of pathogens.

**COVER STORY 7**

Interview with Nick Johnson, CEO and Co-Founder of NowSignage Ltd.

**Digital Signage Advancing an Information Society in the Pandemic**

By Japan SPOTLIGHT

NowSignage is an award-winning digital signage contents management system enabling users to upload, schedule and manage content across screens at the click of a button. The pandemic added information on public health, such as keeping sufficient social distance at big markets, to the list of its signage content.

**COVER STORY 8**

Interview with Masaru Morizane, CEO of GIFMO Co., Ltd.

**Innovation for Happiness in an Aging Society**

By Japan SPOTLIGHT

GIFMO's cooking appliance "DeliSofter" can soften ordinary meals in a short time and make them easier to eat without damaging their appearance and taste. This is a wonderful innovation for elderly people and the handicapped who have trouble chewing food and for caregivers who badly want to see the happy faces of those being cared for.

**COVER STORY 9**

Interview with Renee Graham, Chairwoman of the APEC forum Policy Partnership on Women and the Economy

**APEC: Driving Innovation & Female Entrepreneurship**

By Japan SPOTLIGHT

One of the APEC forums, the Policy Partnership on Women and the Economy, aims to advance the economic integration of women in the APEC region, considering female empowerment high on APEC's agenda.

**COVER STORY 10**

Interview with Svetlana Shmakova, Winner of the Grand Prize of the APEC BEST Award 2020

**Russian Mother Promotes Healthy Food Business as Pandemic Prompts Public Health Concerns**

By Japan SPOTLIGHT

The APEC BEST Award, the first contest for female entrepreneurs in the APEC region, was given to a Russian mother promoting gluten-free products in response to growing concerns about public health during the pandemic.

**COVER STORY 11**

Interview with Norzilawaty Md Isa, Founder of The Good Prawn, Malaysia

**The Good Prawn Wins APEC BEST Award**

By Japan SPOTLIGHT

Another winner of the APEC BEST Award was a Malaysian lady who also started a food company delivering good prawns online to homes at a time of difficulty in her personal life, as well as the pandemic. She said that whatever happens to you, life must go on, and her success has proved her own strength and patience in facing challenges.

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