

Headline	Getting the most from technology		
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## KPMG Perspectives

# Getting the most from technology

**V**ALUABLE technologies are emerging at an amazing rate. We should be making better use of them.

New technology is everywhere. It is in the hands of consumers and in the labs of massive corporations. It is in the air and under the ground. It is not a single idea or innovation but, rather, a universal theme that impacts everyone, everywhere.

As this publication illustrates clearly, technology can mean very different things to different people. For some, it elicits images of futuristic moonshots—entirely new modes of transportation, and disruptive business models—that often feel more like science fiction than achievable realities. For others, technology is all about the here and now—real and tangible innovations that, in unexpected ways, change the way we view the world around us.

While it is certainly tempting to focus on the big disruptive ideas, we believe that significant value could be achieved by thinking more practically about the smaller ones that could be applied today to create real and sustainable value for people around the world.

How, for example, could we be leveraging the Internet and artificial intelligence (AI) to improve the way we deliver quality education to students around the world? Could we be using solar-powered drones to bring water to remote villages in Africa and Asia? Could we be using mobility data to improve the way we plan and develop new transit assets?

We believe that we can. Yet, in many cases, we seem to be stuck in our old ways of thinking and old models of delivery. In part, this is because of the economic models we have created to support and sustain our current infrastructure. Investors, be they public or private, expect a certain rate of return from the assets they have already developed.

However, it is also due to a failure of imagination and innovation. Why else would we continue to develop infrastructure that assumes the technology set will remain static for the next 50 years when we already know that it won't?

We also believe firmly that decision-

makers need to start putting much more focus on seeking ways to use existing technologies to solve current challenges. Rather than focusing on the "next big thing," we should be spending more time expanding our use of what exists today. We should be finding ways to improve efficiency, expand access and remove waste. We should be using the technological advances we have already made to prepare for the future rather than trying to anticipate what technology will bring us tomorrow.

That is not to say that decision-makers should be ignoring the fundamental changes now under way. Quite the opposite; they should be learning from what has already happened over the past decade to build more flexibility and adaptability into their current plans and models.

However, we should also not be staring up into the sky waiting for the next big disruptor. We should be doing more with the technology we already have.

Is technology bridging or widening the gap?

If we're not careful, technology could expand the gap between the rich and the poor.

It's easy to paint a rosy picture of the future. As robotics and AI start to take on manual, repetitive and mundane tasks, people will be free to enjoy more leisure time without sacrificing productivity or quality of life. Smarter cities will lead to happier, healthier and safer populations. Automated and electric vehicles will eliminate congestion and pollution. Access to better information will remove cultural divides and create more cohesive societies.

However, there is an equally good chance that technology will actually increase the gap between the rich and the poor, remove jobs and create disparity between nations and more congestion in our networks. Indeed, left unchecked, this is the more likely scenario.

Yes, the automation of labor could conceivably allow every human being to work fewer hours and enjoy more leisure time. However, that assumes that the impacts of automation are evenly distributed and the benefits of automation are shared equally among all stakeholders. The more likely

outcome is that laborers will be made redundant, while knowledge workers continue to toil at their desks; shareholders will profit while workers lose out.

Automated cars could certainly reduce congestion, but only if automation leads to a reduction in the number of cars on the roads, and the number of vehicle miles traveled, not just the effort of driving. Smarter cities, if placed in the hands of authoritarian governments, could lead to less personal security and privacy, not more. And we are already seeing how increased access to information can build walls between groups rather than remove them.

In much the same way, the adoption and availability of technology could also increase the gap between the developing world and mature markets. However, it could also allow developing markets to leap ahead of the mature markets.

Consider, for example, the rapid adoption of solar generation in Africa, Asia and Latin America versus that in Europe and North America. Or the fact that the vast majority of smart cities are being built in the developing world, while cities in the mature markets struggle to smarten up. Lacking legacy infrastructure and onerous or misfocused regulation, developing markets could reap significant dividends from the advance of technology.

Unfortunately, there are no easy answers. There are no institutions dedicated to ensuring that the benefits of technology are shared equally. In fact, as governments and private companies vie for every competitive advantage and technological edge, the potential for the gap to widen is only growing.

We believe that governments at all levels must start to grapple with the question of equality now. When investing in new technologies, decision-makers will need to consider not only whether their investments make financial and operational sense, but also whether they make sense socially. Governments will need to return to their roots of securing the greatest benefits for the greatest numbers of people and to the modes of the less fortunate.

The alternative is that we allow technol-

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ogy to advance unchecked. And, in doing so, sow the seeds of our own discontent.

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