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suppliers, and payment methods means a load off your AP staff and increased intelligence tools and capabilities to run your back office remotely.

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By Lauren Ruef

We have more technology at our fingertips than we could dare to imagine. Our phones know us better than we do—they're capable of running shortcuts to help us respond to texts or check the weather. Capabilities like this dwarf the wildest dreams of someone living just half a century ago. But despite our powerful personal technology, a global pandemic has disrupted the world. For better or worse, this change has dispelled the notion that change must come at a gradual, steady rate. The pandemic's most poignant insight is that humans are resilient and capable of making rapid changes at a moment's notice.

Reliance on Automation is the Mainstream

The decade-old technologies that have shaped pandemic work life—remote

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on a larger scale. Threats are examined on the horizon, and we adjust accordingly. But how could something like a lack of automation not have tripped our radar for so long?

Threat Detection: Is it Enough to Just Survive?

Think back to the early school days. A time when basic concepts were beginning to build on one another with increasing complexity. You learned about the interlocking circles of a Venn-Diagram, but what you also learned was the hierarchy of needs introduced by Abraham Maslow.



[Click to enlarge.]

The pyramid's base houses the most basic survival needs: food, water, sleep, warmth. The next level introduces more psychological needs, including safety, trust, and stability. Moving up the diagram to the third level, we see that relationships are responsible for connection: family and friend relationships that foster belonging.

And the final two levels included some form of self-actualization related to mastery,

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Pre-pandemic, some businesses pegged digital innovation as a top-of-the-pyramid issue, which is to say, an issue of minimal importance. So what if we're still cutting paper checks, relying on manual data entry, or putting notifications in the mail instead of updating our customers in real-time? Beliefs like this have caused a delay in response to shifts that [more streamlined companies made long ago](#).

[In 2020](#), businesses of all sizes had to respond with an agility only known to startups. Teams restructured. Staff was reduced. Companies drove their network security engineers into the ground, ensuring safe VPN access and deploying cloud solutions for remote employees at scale. Automation needs, presumed to live in the third or fourth tier, dropped straight to the bottom of the company's pyramid overnight, making them far more important than originally perceived. Rainy-day upgrades weren't so leisurely after all as engineers pulled them into the hub and furiously engaged.

The lessons are cogent. Decentralized models of work and productivity aren't

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central role in many hospitals' fight for survival to ensure staff was adequately prepared with PPE equipment, from masks to gloves and gowns. Many institutions are still facing the grave effects of chronic shortages as they attempt to save lives.

Manufacturers are taking hits to their bottom line from a lack of raw materials necessary to create products. Supply chains, a formerly invisible actor in the great relay of goods and services, are now center stage. While some of the shortages were genuinely unpreventable for issues stemming further upstream from suppliers, ensuring suppliers are paid correctly and on time is no small thing.

Your business might be in survival mode with suppliers if you are only leveraging manual paper check payments. It's great if you have a form of payment you already know vendors will accept. You might think that paper payments, while not glamorous, aren't entirely broken. And yet, the collection of in-person signatures has been [increasingly taxing on your office staff](#) with social distancing requirements. Approvers can live in vastly different locations, making payment approvals a chore. There is limited visibility in your payment ecosystem. Still, things mainly get addressed, notwithstanding occasional backtracking to chase down remittance info for suppliers, manually log payment data changes, and other headaches. And let's not even begin to mention the security risk of housing supplier data!

Or maybe, as it stands now, you are only partially automated. Your front-end process, like invoice scanning, has received a digital upgrade, but the circle is incomplete. You're still printing stacks of paper checks, licking envelopes, and filing bank details for suppliers in cabinets—data that is subject to change at any moment. Maybe some suppliers have asked for ACH or complained about print check wait times. Still, you fear others will have trouble with receiving an electronic method of payment. This holds you back from making 100 percent of your supplier payments electronically.

Are you thriving to your best potential?

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