Mindsets of the future: recommendations to face whatever's next

Tomorrow depends upon what you do today. Professor Javier Díaz Giménez offers a series of recommendations to face the future's next radical change.

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FROM MY DESK

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The future is at play

Changes that profoundly transform society are happening with accelerating speed. It took over 100,000 years for humanity to go from being hunters and gatherers to farmers and shepherds, and about 12,000 years more before we became industrial innovators. But just 200 years after the Industrial Revolution, we're now slaves to our smartphones. And whatever comes next will happen sooner than we think.

Futurology is a notoriously imprecise science. At the end of 2019, I was asked to make some predictions for 2020, and I will admit I did not envisage a pandemic shutting down the world. However, that doesn't mean we should not at least attempt to imagine tomorrow; your business may depend on it. And while you may have blind spots, some of your predictions will be spot on: In that same 2020 prediction, I felt that GDP as the sole metric for measuring growth would become obsolete among business leaders, and this is bearing out today, with governments and citizens increasingly eager to embrace a vision of growth that prioritizes social cohesion and the planet. As I also noted at the time, companies will need to learn to do a lot more with a lot less. Sometimes the substance of your predictions will stick, even if they don't look exactly as imagined.

Issues of scarcity, population growth, the three D's (digitalization, demonetization and dematerialization) and, of course, climate change: These are the megatrends that will transcend outlier events and local movements to bring sweeping transformation to every aspect of human life, and with it the inevitable conflicts of change — between countries and world powers, between global and local, between generations and even between types of intelligence, with human beings no longer being the smartest guys in the room.

But there are ways to stay one step ahead and not only read the future, but actively create and shape it:

- Read widely. Don't just limit yourself to business news and the latest nonfiction bestsellers. Speculative science fiction can also offer deep wells of inspiration.

- Look at startups in your sector. See where the wind is blowing and whether you can jump aboard.

- Work *and play*. Cut down on emails and social media and dedicate 20% of your time to off-beat projects. Often, it is in the state of play that we can have the best ideas and create the most value.

- Don't limit yourself to a single scenario. Think about the many possible futures for your company and assign them probabilities. Don't be overly optimistic either: The pandemic may still have a few surprises left.

- Most of all, **enjoy**! The future may not look bright, but that's because you haven't turned the light on yet.

> *If the pandemic has taught us anything, it's that the future is not as predictable as we once thought. Will globalization swing toward more localization? Can we come together in time to save the planet or will we fall into partisan divides? What will the future of work look like now that working from home has accelerated our virtual connectedness? Whether the glass is half empty or half full depends largely on how we envisage it, and the future we write depends on our current actions. These top picks highlight the mindsets we will need to adopt to inform our thinking at the start of 2022.*
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> ***The abundance mindset***
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> *Andrew McAfee's Insight article "Harnessing the crowd in the age of the machine" focused on how "machine, platform and crowd" would change the world. The MIT scientist's latest book, More from less, is a timely challenge to use fewer resources and, as we do so, those resources will become cheaper and, counterintuitively, more abundant over time. Add the right mix of capitalism, tech progress, public awareness and responsive government and we can create the conditions for sustainable life on our planet.*
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> ***The exponential mindset***
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> *Linear thinking — that one thing follows another in an orderly fashion — won't serve us in an age where the pace of innovation doubles every 18 months. In the aptly named podcast Exponential Wisdom, entrepreneur Peter Diamandis and co-host Dan Sullivan explore what this means for industries and individuals, and how we can wrap our heads around the reinvention of everything, from transportation and retail to education, health and finance.*
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> ***The longevity mindset***
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> *Leaps in science and healthcare mean living to 100 with a good quality of life won't be the exception. As such, Lynda Gratton and Andrew J. Scott, authors of The 100-year life, recommend disconnecting "age from stage." With the concept of the three-stage career no longer relevant, going to university in your 60s may not be so unusual. IESE's Pedro Nueno also considers managing beyond 80 in his latest book, Mayores dirigiendo bien. Time to prepare for a long and fulfilling future.*

The collaboration mindset

AI is not the enemy, says James Lovelock, whose Gaia theory of an intelligent Earth famously inspired Isaac Asimov. His book, Novacene, imagines a world where humans are superseded by cyborgs, but far from this leading to our demise, they make better decisions, unmotivated by material wealth, and guide us toward a more sustainable future.

Accenture's Paul Daugherty echoes this theme in his own book Human + Machine. The plus sign is key: Machines are not coming for our jobs but rather are there to help humans navigate the changes.

The paranoid-optimist mindset

Former Nokia Chairman Risto Siilasmaa learned the hard way The power of paranoid optimism to lead through colossal change, the title of his book charting Nokia's fall and reinvention. He shares survival strategies and change-management tips to help leaders see through the sparkle of a hugely successful global corporation to spot the signs of trouble that could bring it down. Read more in our report on "Global uncertainty."

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