

FUTURE NEWS

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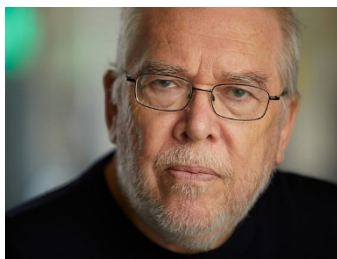
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THE NEW LEADERSHIP PARADOX IF FORESTS THINK, WHAT CHANGES?

by Richard David Hames



There is general agreement in the minds of most thinking people that the world needs leadership now more than ever before. We look to those currently wielding political or financial power, to get us out of the mess in which we find ourselves today - a predicament whose genesis stretches back centuries, but that is now precipitating a crisis for all of humanity.

One key assumption is that leaders have the obligation, authority, and knowledge to act in stewarding a safe path into the future. This is, after all, why we elect or appoint them in the first place. A familiar definition in that context is that leadership is *the art of motivating and directing a group to act towards achieving a common goal*. This description, taught in many business schools, captures the essence of inspiring others to act, while having the skills to do so.

Is that sufficient today? Is individual leadership the remedy we so anxiously await? Or are we clinging to a formula we chose decades ago, that solved a different set of problems, but that then caused the very issues we are now trying to understand and combat today? If serving and 'servant' leaders, their beliefs and behaviours, navigated us into this mess, are they likely to have either the expertise or the desire to repudiate everything they stand for (and everything they practice) in order to guide us out of trouble?

Based on common definitions of leadership and observable behaviours, we might be on a quest for something entirely different - a social phenomenon for which we are ill-prepared, and possibly have yet to experience in the modern era.

Thus, it is with increasing angst that I participate in conversations with intelligent people that give scant attention to framing the dialogue by challenging the basic proposition of leadership: what do we need 'leadership' to be? Are we being lazy or negligent sticking to old models - or are we simply unable to imagine anything different to the type of leadership that exists today?

I am reminded of the anecdote of a man who stops to help a drunk search for his lost keys in a well-lit street. Others join in the search one by one. After a few minutes one of the group asks the drunk if he is sure he lost the keys here. The drunk replies, no, and that he lost them in the park. Surprised, they ask the drunk why he is searching here, to which the drunk replies, *this is where the light is*.



This kind of observational bias occurs when people only search where it is easy to look. Is that the trap concerning leadership we have fallen into today? We suppose charisma is a virtue; that vision, resolve and courage are vital qualities; and that for every problem there is an individual eminently well-suited to solve that problem. We do not usually concede that these traits are socially-conditioned reflexes, grounded in Western cosmology and the *worldview* in which we are heavily invested. Nor do we admit that these characteristics are most often found in psychopaths. Nevertheless, that is where we continue to look. For it is where the light is.

The origins of this mindset is a *worldview* grounded in Western cosmology. This later embraced congruent ideas from the European Enlightenment, such as Cartesian logic, scientific rationalism, and social advancement. Often conveyed with evangelistic fervour, this interpretation of humanity became all-pervasive on the back of slavery, colonialism and genocide, along with other equally predatory practices, including those incited by neoliberal economic and political dogma today.

Various shades of *world-system* were plagiarized from this source meta-narrative. Propagated by mainstream media, most exhibited analogous traits incorporating (most tellingly in a leadership context) the cult of the individual, along with freedom of expression, for example.

The resilience of this *worldview* achieved by absorbing a few distinctive elements from other (and older) narratives, while trampling over more ancient wisdom traditions, was quite extraordinary. It explains why the resulting *world-system* was uniquely able to evolve a modern world-order built on a litany of black letter law.

The Western archetype also spawned three related concepts that are key to helping resolve the dystopian predicament in which we find ourselves today. Three toxic beliefs we must nullify if we are to have any hope of evolving an empathic civilization that recognizes all life as sacred.

- *Exceptionalism* - the concept that Homo sapiens are in a class of their own - different from, and superior to, all other species. This notion has also been exercised within the context of nation-states, with many assuming the possession, or acquisition, of economic and military power grants them authority over others less strong.
- *Separation* - of humans from the natural environment, and *detachment* from each other, has led to a commonly-held view that we exist 'apart' from (and above) nature.
- *Objectification* - the act of treating a person, or an animal, as an object that can be bought or sold, thereby disavowing the humanity of others and degrading other species.

It is probably valid to claim that these three modes of *being*, so intrinsic to the Western paradigm, have spread their own ideological contagion across the world. In countering them, appreciating the diverse range of connections between humans, animals and the environment, and the ways we typically interact with wildlife, will be vital in dealing with any future pandemics, in addition to keeping the planet safe for human habitation.

It is hardly surprising that the fatigue felt by ordinary citizens on so many levels, in such an era of disruption, has accompanied an erosion of any deeper meaning and the importance of a moral dimension in our lives. It is in this context that the anxiety felt by the younger generation, fearful that there is no future for them, is resulting in profound stress, illness, dissent, and frantic pleas to incumbent

leaders to restore hope. This is futile for they are incapable of acting outside of their learned helplessness and prevailing belief system.

We acknowledge that doing the same thing, expecting different results, is a sign of insanity. But repetitive doing arises from repetitive thinking - in much the same way that our world-systems (or practices) are not unprejudiced and discrete, but tethered to a repository of beliefs held captive by our worldviews (or narratives).

Repeating the same conversations over and over, using identical cognitive structures, is evidence that we are in a cognitive gridlock from which escape seems unlikely. But repeating the same old leadership practices over and over can only be attributed to a collective autism, the flat-lining of any ability to make sense of our ambient surroundings, or a refusal to step into new ontological spaces for reframing and reconceptualizing the role of 'leadership'.



Image from Sar Haribharku

It is entirely possible that we have reached a threshold in our ability to 'see' beyond the obvious and our ability to break through the many constraints that keep us locked in cognitive prisons of our own invention. If so, it is vital that we find paths of consciousness capable of propelling us beyond the gridlock of our current capacities and expectations. Evolution is demanding it. The uncertain future traces of human existence must transcend the vestiges and symbols of past ways of life and the 'untouchable' dogma represented by the hubris of conquerors and corporations.

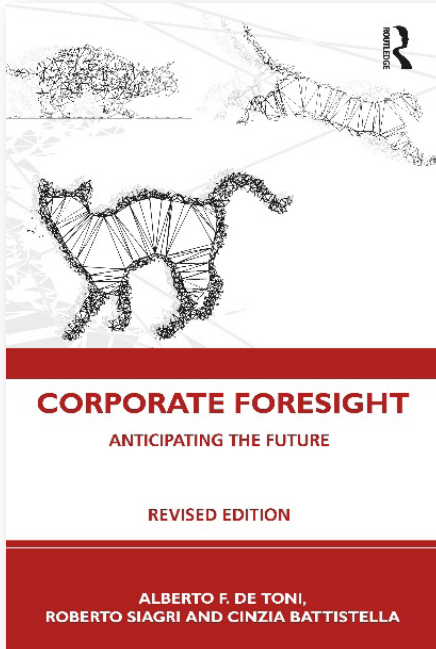
In so doing we must surrender the supremacy of a purely anthropocentric vision, letting go of all notions of human exceptionalism in the process, and igniting conversations we should be having about the relationship between humans and other species.

When the cult of the individual wanes - along with narcissism, myths of the hero's journey, alpha-male impulses, and unrelenting metaphors emphasizing the virtue of celebrity; when community engagement drives social transformation; when matriarchal law and indigenous wisdom achieve parity with patriarchy; and when humans accept being part of nature, and treat other species with reverence, we will be witness to a new consciousness creating a more viable human civilization. Perhaps we will discover that forests do indeed think.

To get to that level of understanding, leadership will need to mutate into a collaborative grassroots experience for impelling 2nd-order transformation, rather than a vanity requiring individual expression for its vicarious fulfilment.

Book Review

by Alireza Hejazi



Using more modern methods of anticipation, this book shows how to discover the future. Reasoning to develop possible scenarios based on emerging trends, coexisting presents, and potential paths of evolution, rather than conventional predictive models focused on the prediction of experiences is the major theme. The book aims to help organizations faced with the intertwined, rapid, and discontinuous transition. It provides readers with the resources they need to deal with transition and overcome uncertainty in organizations, making it a helpful guide for administrators and scholars.

Emphasizing its complementarity to decision-making, corporate foresight is commonly conceived as “strategic foresight”. While some experts use the terms “organizational foresight” and “managerial foresight” alternatively, others prefer the term “corporate foresight” to

Corporate Foresight: Anticipating the Future

by Alberto F. De Toni,
Roberto Siagri, and Cinzia Battistella.

refer to the usage of foresight at the organizational level.

This book commonly uses “corporate foresight” with its broadest significance. In this sense, weak signals, environmental and emerging-market discontinuities for strategy and growth policies are analyzed. It is about identifying weak signals and collecting intelligence so that it could help anticipate new economies and developments, facilitate the management of growth, and get ready for unpredictable futures. Foresight allows businesses to take a view of the dynamic underlying forces of transition, of supporting the decision-making process, and of managing research and development appropriately. The ability of a corporation to foresee the future has been of researchers’ study in recent decades.

Corporate foresight succeeds when the preliminary criterion for foresight is rational and reasoned. The individuals interested in the organization and their future-oriented efforts shape the operations of the organization in the long run. Corporate foresight has a competitive advantage in that it helps businesses to innovate, recognize prospects, and adapt to latent environmental weaknesses. It is a method of inquiry that allows businesses to brace themselves for evermore uncertain, near, and unique

futures. However, for this strategy to be successful, it must be embraced at all organizational levels, from the middle to top management ranges. Three writers gathered to represent their insight and expertise in a noteworthy book to remind readers of the value of corporate foresight. Alberto F. De Toni is an operation and dynamic systems professor. He is also chairman of the Italian University Rectors’ Conference. As the Chairman and CEO of Eurotech SpA, Roberto Siagri studies the interaction between humans and machines and envisions scenarios that could be likely applicable. Cinzia Battistella is an architect and engineering associate professor at Udine University. She discusses future-related topics in the areas of agrifood, telecommunications, and e-government.

De Toni et al. (2020) describe how corporate foresight in both cornerstones of organization and management is critical for the interpretation and leadership of transformation. They support the divisions of research and development (R&D), by facilitating the formation of foresight units and concentrating research activities primarily on the acquisition and recombination of external know-how.

Besides, they suggest the introduction of a methodology called “future coverage” following the up-to-date literature of

forecasting techniques, enabling organizations to evaluate and validate coherence between trends, policy vision, and provided products. Their book reflects their experience in managing corporate foresight activities by sharing the story of the Italian company Eurotech SpA, a leader in the field of ICT as a case study.

This book consists of four parts. The first part is about the future in a developing world. Chapter One introduces the reader to an ever more uncertain, close and distinctive future, formed by association, acceleration, and discontinuity. In its different ways and facets, Chapter Two introduces imagination. Chapter Three describes behaviours of flexibility, pace, and resilience, and forward-looking responses to change. It detects weak signals, trends analysis, and scenario planning. Chapter Four describes how to foresee the future by proactively reacting to change and promotes an understanding of change based on the logic of prediction and expectation.

The second part is dedicated to forward-looking enterprises. Chapter Five reflects on the organizational level, offering a foresight built on both the corporate and management foundations. Chapter Six deals with the organization by making a distinction between today's and tomorrow's markets.

The authors suggest a separation between the market oriented analysis and market creation. They recommend that a foresight unit be formed which will be internally linked to policy and analysis, and internally linked to scouting, and that research work must be coordinated specifically to link internal and external expertise.

Chapter Seven discusses administration. The authors define the foresight process. In Chapter Eight, the authors suggest a framework that measures the continuity of trends, strategic visions, and market-based products. Their proposed "future coverage" methodology tests how efficiently the strategic plan meets future expectations. It attempts to evaluate the coherence between the external environment (trends) and the internal environment (vision and products).

In this book, the authors attempt to illustrate approaches, mechanisms, and systems of change. The book's main contribution to the foresight field is the method of analyzing coherence between trends, vision, and products. The "future coverage" method measures the degree to which the vision corresponds to current trends, the products reflect the vision, and the products match the trends (p. 118). The authors' proposed method operates by an index containing the Cartesian planes of the coherence matrixes. Using the Delphi panel method, the coherence analysis is based on experts' judgment.

The third part presents the Eurotech case study, an Italian ICT business. This case study offers an example of how to embark on a voyage into the complexity of the future for the Eurotech SpA, an ambitious and forward-looking Italian ICT Business based in Amaro. Chapter Nine lays out the research sense and the pattern of symbiosis between man and machine, namely the ICT megatrend.

Chapters 10 and 11 explain how an enterprise can show itself to be outstandingly capable

of forecasting the future of an industry. The two chapters represent the operational and management tools outlined in the second part. The fourth part concludes with a note of the meaning of imagination.

The distinction between R&D and a broad overview of what innovation is one of the key points of this book. In addressing the issue of leading a business through the period of growth, the authors have taken a wide range of aspects outside of study into consideration such as organization, operations, economies, and disruptive events.

The authors of this book have reflected on discovering and managing the future professionally. They have enriched the book with a meaningful explanation of reform and inspired readers to look at the world as much as possible by dealing with the tradition which sometimes threatens imagination. The authors attempt to communicate this message: It is the world of alternatives, the location where dreams intertwine and spread, changing reality's horizon.

Studying the book, the readers learn that the future cannot be created only by staying in the systemic and methodical realm. It is important to envision new possibilities and creative ideas through the lens of imagination to transcend current paradigms. Imagination traces countless paths which are often inaccessible and offers many potential opportunities for individuals and groups. The book empowers this understanding pragmatically.

FUTURISTS IN ACTION

CLIMBING THE FORESIGHT LADDER

by Frank Spencer



Frank Spencer

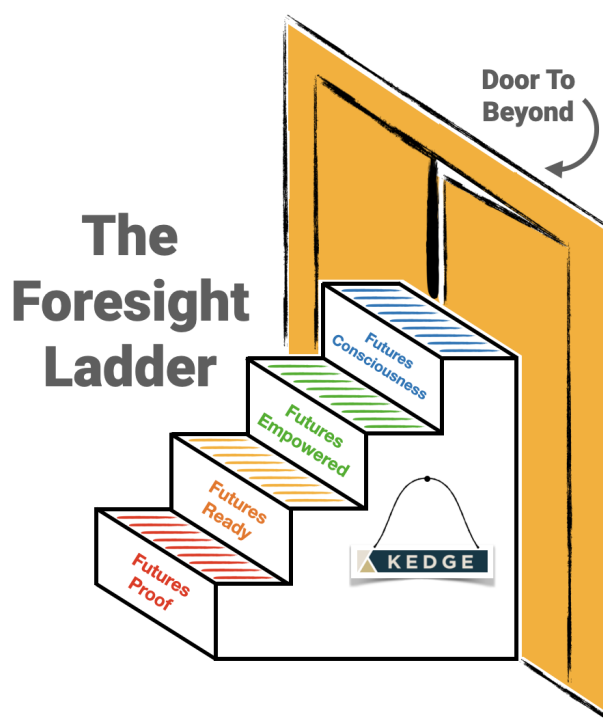
A quick tour of Linked, Facebook or Twitter in 2021 will reveal a flood of articles, webinars and conferences on how to think about the future in an intentional and actionable way. If the COVID-19 pandemic impacted nothing else — and it most certainly did — it definitely created a greater urgency around the uncertain future of, well, everything. The future of work? It will be completely virtual, OR an excited return to f2f interaction, OR a hybrid model, OR maybe we will throw off the shackles of uninspired labor and redefine work as a full-time actualization of our passions. What about the future of cities? Well they will be technologically smart, OR reconnected to nature, OR higher order expressions of a post-human emergence, OR even greater drains on planetary resources? The future of the web? It will be an extension of self, OR a criminal haven, OR a depersonalized data drain, OR an embodiment of abundance, OR a wasteland of non-fungible scarcity, or... or... or... You get the idea.

Though futures and foresight skills have actually always been important for governments, organizations, communities and individual lives, we have historically tended to relegate those skills to a once-a-year check-up, momentarily gauging the health of our more traditional planning methods through a bit of lite trend analysis while simultaneously applauding those long-standing metrics of linear value and success. Then along came a deadly global virus that utterly shook our economies, policies, businesses, and every one of those traditional metrics to the core. Now, talking about futures thinking as a normal human skill to help us navigate an unknown terrain is all the rage. Surely, foresight can help us navigate these new obstacles and restore our pre-pandemic operating system? Alas, the pandemic may have amplified humanity's need to normalize the exploration of uncertainty and complexity, but it also laid bare our inability to use futures thinking as a tool to mastery over those elements. A shifting world not only beckons us to alter our perspective; it also has the power to reframe our role in a naturally maturing cosmos.

Now don't get us wrong — we should all be grateful that more and more people are recognizing the need for futuring as a normal human activity. However, it's also important to note that futures thinking has been around for quite awhile, and both the theory and practice of the field are more extensive than many realize. In offering that statement, we're by no means saying that new voices aren't needed in the field. They absolutely are, and those diverse views enrich the scope, scale and even meaning of futures thinking, especially in terms of including those unrecognized visions of the future that have been hidden and silenced by dominant cultural narratives and practices. Further, we're not saying that new approaches aren't needed in the field. Any living practice should evolve and transform,

and many times this only happens when new perspectives are made to feel at-home in the laboratory of exploration. Besides, foresight works best when we democratize the future, decentralizing this way of thinking and acting across humanity.

Why then did we bring up the established nature of the field? As professionals who have 30+ years of combined practice in all aspects of foresight — and who work hard to remain open to continually learning and changing ourselves — we want to address the evolutionary development of futures thinking that's been underway for decades, long before its pandemic-activated role as a social media influencer that comfortably knows its way around Instagram. In doing so, we hope to offer a better understanding of the power of foresight to take us beyond the antiquated practices of strategic planning, SWOT analyses or developing long-range developmental goals. If our suggestion that foresight isn't simply a booster shot for those traditional models sounds unfamiliar to you or challenges your view of the practice, then I hope you will seriously consider what we might call the "Foresight Ladder." Each rung demonstrates the evolutionary application of futures thinking on our collective relationship with a world that seems more uncertain every day.



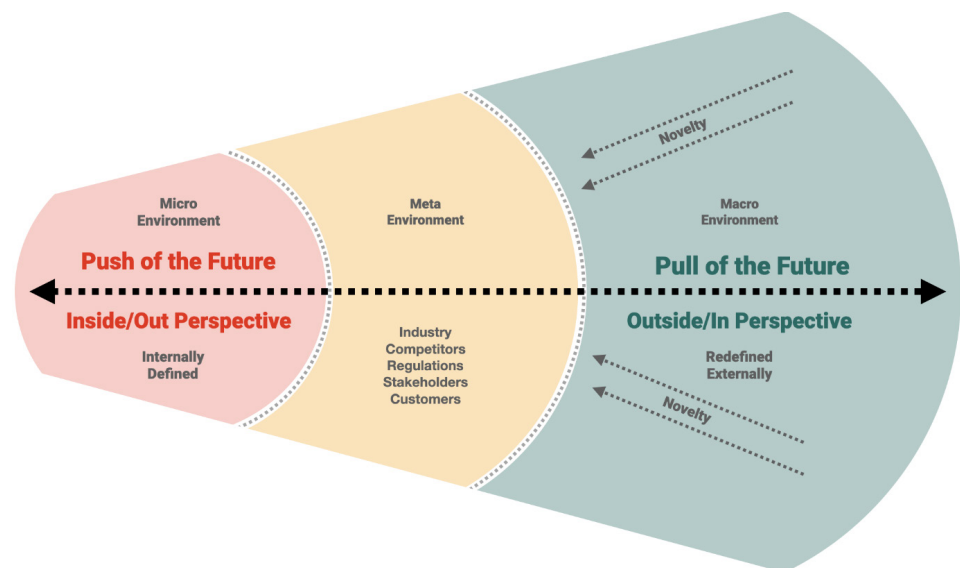
1. Futures Proof

The phrase "futures proof" was a staple in the field of foresight long before COVID-19 disrupted everyone's lives, but the pandemic has made it a pervasive battle-cry among organizations and governments. The idea is to utilize foresight as a risk management and environmental design tool, supporting our efforts to centralize, quantify, predict and mollify the future. "When will the next world-changing event occur? How can we stop prevent change from disrupting our way of life? How can we manage the uncertainty ahead so that we can stay the course?" This is strategy's attempt to domesticate foresight, employing it as a means to safeguard the status quo in the face of an unfamiliar world. The problem with this framing is that a new landscape requires a new way of measuring. Beyond

being a passive approach that sees the future as something happening to us that we should be frightened of, it suggests that we live in a universe of logical certainty. If our current experiences have taught us anything, it should be that certainty is not a characteristic of the future.

2. Futures Ready

“How can we make sure that we have what it takes to weather the approaching storm? Are we poised to take advantage of the mega trends in business and society? Are we best positioned to seize on the promising opportunities that align with our strengths while navigating past the threats that could prey on our weaknesses? Are we future fit?” These questions should sound very familiar as they are uttered repeatedly by every organizational and governmental foresight effort. However, this focus is one that looks at the world from the “inside-out” (IO) instead of the “outside-in.” (OI) An IO perspective sees foresight as a way to measure an institution’s well-worn area of focus (“What’s keeping the leadership awake at night?”), and secure the present operating system for the long-haul. This is what might known as the “push of the future” or defining foresight as an exercise in intentionally managing the trends and emerging issues that are pushing us into the future whether we like it or not. From this vantage point, the future is filtered through our dominant narratives, and only the strong, fit and ready among us will survive and thrive.

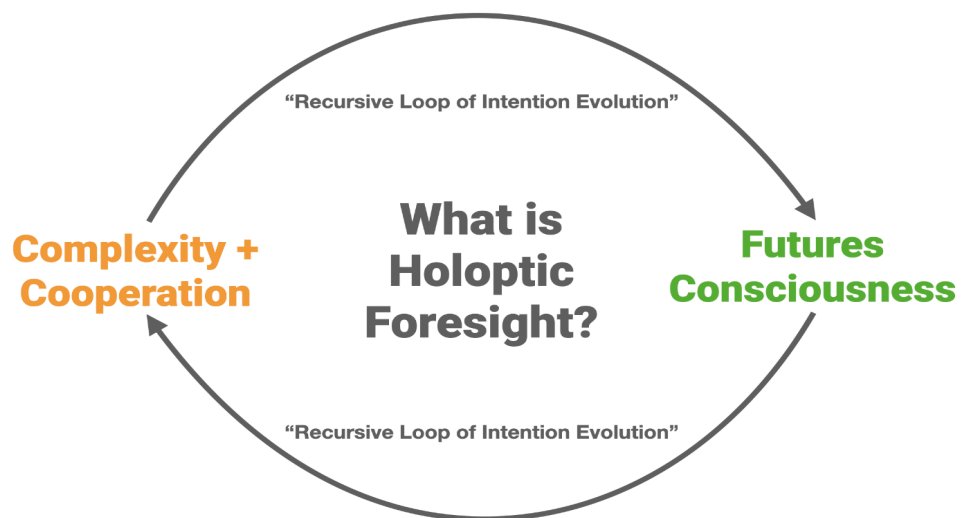


3. Futures Empowered

This rung of the Foresight Ladder envelops the entire spectrum of the future, from “push” to “pull,” but flips our attention from an IO to an OI perspective. This reoriented locus moves us away from a primary goal of attempting to ensure long-term entrenchment and success for the dominant narratives within our organizations, governments and societies, and reframes foresight as an organic mindset and practice. When we look at the world from a much broader, holistic, and integrated vista, we begin to expose the assumptions, biases, shortcomings, immaturities, gaps and flaws in our systems that must naturally transform in order to be relevant and generative. This empowerment — a manifestation of embodying the currently popular concept of futures literacy — shifts us from being framers to imaginers, innovators to inventors, commanders

to collaborators, sustainers to regenerators, separators to entanglers, colonizers to democratizers, and fearful cynics to awe-inspired visionaries. Many who are invested in “the way things have always been” may hope to stop at the Future Ready rung of the ladder, but that’s not how futures thinking works. Foresight isn’t an add-on that serves to supercharge our traditional methods of business, governance or civilizational development; by its very nature, it challenges the efficacy and existence of all that we think and do. The Futures Empowered have ventured beyond the reductive idea of employing trend analyses for making the best strategic decisions, realizing that a world of ever-increasing uncertainty and ambiguity redefines the “what, why and so what” of life as we’ve known it.

4. Futures Consciousness



If being Futures Empowered fosters new ways of thinking about the future (as well as the past and present) in order to overcome wicked problems and cultivate unique opportunities, Futures Consciousness fosters new ways of collective BEING that allow humanity to perceive and align with emerging realities so as to participate in the evolutionary co-creative process. This rung of the Foresight Ladder moves us past the idea that the future is a time to prepare for or a place to aspire to, but rather an experience that we can manifest. This is a state of revelatory sense-making, recognition of novelty and the unfolding of higher order purpose. When we begin observing the cosmos through the eyes of cooperative creative complexity rather than seeing it as chaos that we must order (or, as some might believe, peacefully surrender to), we shift from being ready for, fighting against, or gaining control over what’s to come, to giving birth to the unique and undiscovered nature of the future. Futures posits a change in our cosmological narrative from being ‘separate but connected’ to ‘the whole as a unique entity,’ allowing for a greater capability to display anticipatory behaviour. More than a collective skill, Futures Consciousness tracks along the evolutionary arrow from competition to cooperation, ultimately becoming a human trait and cosmo-centric force. Once we reach this step in our futures journey, we’ll understand that foresight is much more than an important skill to learn and leverage; it’s a critical element in continuing the human story.

Frank Spencer is the principal of the Kedge School for Future Studies.

Signals in the Noise

9 TRENDS THAT WILL SHAPE WORK IN 2021 AND BEYOND

by Brian Kropp



Image by Kevin Van Aelst

It's fair to say that 2020 rocked many organizations and business models, upending priorities and plans as business leaders scrambled to navigate a rapidly changing environment. For many organizations this included responding to the social justice movements, shifting to a full-time remote staff, determining how best to support employees' wellbeing, managing a hybrid workforce, and now addressing legal concerns around the Covid-19 vaccine.

It would be nice to believe that 2021 will be about stability and getting back to normal; however, this year is likely to be another full of major transitions. While there has been a lot of focus on the increase in the number of employees working remotely at least part of the time going forward, there are nine additional forces that I think will shape business in 2021:

1. Employers will shift from managing the employee experience to managing the life experience of their employees.

The pandemic has given business leaders increased visibility into the personal lives of their employees, who have faced unprecedented personal and professional struggles over the last year.

It's become clear that supporting employees in their personal lives more effectively enables employees to not only have better lives, but also to perform at a higher level. According to [Gartner's 2020 ReimagineHR Employee Survey](#), employers that support employees with their life experience see a 23% increase in the number of employees reporting better mental health and a 17% increase in the number of employees reporting better physical health. There is also a real benefit to employers, who see a 21% increase in the number of high performers compared to organizations that don't provide the same degree of support to their employees.

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That's why 2021 will be the year where employer support for mental health, financial health, and even things that were previously seen as out of bounds, like sleep, will become the table stakes benefits offered to employees.

2. More companies will adopt stances on current societal and political debates.

Employees' desire to work for organizations whose values align with their own has been growing for some time. In 2020, this desire accelerated: Gartner research shows that 74% of employees expect their employer to become more *actively involved* in the cultural debates of the day. I believe CEOs will have to respond in order to retain and attract the best talent.

However, making statements about the issues of the day is no longer enough: Employees expect more. And CEOs who have spent real resources on these issues have been rewarded with more highly engaged employees. A Gartner survey found that the number of employees who were considered highly engaged increased from 40% to 60% when their organization acted on today's social issues.

3. The gender-wage gap will continue to increase as employees return to the office.

Many organizations have already adopted a hybrid workforce — or are planning to this year — that enables employees to work from the corporate office, their home, or an alternate third space (coffee shop, co-working space, etc.). In this hybrid scenario, we are hearing from CHROs that the surveys of their own employees are showing that men are more likely to decide to return to their workplace, while women are more likely to continue to work from home.

According to a recent Gartner survey, 64% of managers believe that office workers are higher performers than remote workers, and in turn are likely to give in-office workers a higher raise than those who work from home. However, data that we have collected from both 2019 (pre-pandemic) and 2020 (during the pandemic) shows the opposite: Full-time remote workers are 5% more likely to be high performers than those who work full-time from the office.

So if men are more likely to work from the office, and managers retain a bias towards in-office workers, we should expect to see managers over-rewarding male employees at the expense of female employees, worsening the gender-wage gap at a time when the pandemic has already had a disproportionate impact on women.

4. New regulations will limit employee monitoring.

During the pandemic, more than 1 out of 4 companies has purchased new technology, for the first time, to passively track and monitor their employees. However, many of these same companies haven't determined how to balance employee privacy with the technology, and employees are frustrated. Gartner research found that less than 50% of employees trust their organization with their data, and 44% don't receive any information regarding the data collected about them. In 2021, we

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expect a variety of new regulations at the state and local level that will start to put limits on what employers can track about their employees. Given the variability that this will create, companies are likely to adopt the most restrictive standards across their workforce.

5. Flexibility will shift from location to time.

While enabling employees to work remotely became commonplace across 2020 (and will continue this year and beyond), the next wave of flexibility will be around *when* employees are expected to work.

Gartner's 2020 ReimagineHR Employee Survey revealed that only 36% of employees were high performers at organizations with a standard 40-hour work week. Organizations that offer employees flexibility over when, where and how much they work, see 55% of their work force as high performers. In 2021, I expect to see a rise of new jobs where employees will be measured by their output, as opposed to an agreed-upon set of hours.

6. Leading companies will make bulk purchases of the Covid vaccine for employees — and will be sued over Covid vaccine requirements.

Employers that provide the Covid vaccine to their workforce will leverage this action as a key differentiator to attract and retain talent. In tandem with employers providing the vaccine, several companies will be sued for requiring their employees to have proof of vaccination before allowing them to return to the workplace. The corresponding litigation will slow return-to-workplace efforts even as vaccine usage increases.

7. Mental health support is the new normal.



Across the last several years, employers have offered new benefits to support their employees, for instance, expanded parental leave. Even before the pandemic, Gartner research revealed that 45% of well-being budget increases were being allocated to mental and emotional well-being programs. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought well-being to the forefront as employers are more aware than ever how of the impact of mental health on employees and by association, the workplace.

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By late March, 68% of organizations had introduced at least one new wellness benefit to aid employees during the pandemic. In 2021, employers will go even further by working to de-stigmatize mental health by expanding mental health benefits, creating days where they shut the entire company down for a day to offer “a collective mental health day” to build awareness across the workforce about this critical issue.

8. Employers will look to “rent” talent to fill the skills gap.

The number of skills employers are looking for has risen dramatically — [our analysis](#) shows that companies listed about 33% more skills on job ads in 2020 than they did in 2017. Ultimately, organizations simply can’t reskill the capabilities of their existing workforce fast enough to meet their changing needs.

At the margin, some companies will shift from trying to build skills for an uncertain future and instead just hire, and pay a premium for those skills, when the need actually manifests. Other companies will instead expand their use of contingent and contract hiring or expand their partnerships with organizations to “rent” employees for a short period of time to meet the skill needs that they are facing.

9. States will compete to attract individual talent rather than trying to get companies to relocate.

States and cities have historically offered incentives to get companies to relocate to their jurisdictions. The belief being if you can incentivize companies to come, they will bring jobs with them. The new era of remote and hybrid work will evolve this strategy – where an employee lives will be less tied to where their employer is located than ever before.

Given this breaking of company location and employee location, states and cities will start to use their tax policies to create incentives for individuals to relocate to their jurisdictions rather than giving tax credits solely to large companies to relocate. We are already seeing fledging programs in cities like Topeka, KS and Tulsa, OK where they are offering remote employees up to \$15,000 to move there. These jurisdictions will compete for individual employees and their jobs, not just the employer.

While 2020 was the most volatile year in modern history, we would be mistaken to think that the disruption is over. Rather, as we move into 2021 and beyond, the rate of disruption will potentially accelerate as the implications from 2020 play out across the next several years.



Brian Kropp is chief of research for the Gartner HR practice, which delivers insights and solutions that address new and emerging executive challenges and enable HR leaders to take decisive actions. Brian’s expertise spans all aspects of HR, including talent acquisition and management, employee experience, change management, and leadership.