A Framework for Leading in Today's World

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Introduction

We live in challenging times.

Geopolitical turmoil, local and national social unrest, cycles of deadly natural disasters, cyber hacks, rising distrust of media and tech companies—many recent disruptive events have taken us by surprise.

Nearly two decades ago, military planners coined an acronym to capture the nature of an increasingly unpredictable and dynamic world.

They called it VUCA: an environment of nonstop volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. The world today embodies VUCA more so than any era we've recently experienced.

Why do so many of us—individually and collectively—fail to imagine, let alone anticipate, the massive and disruptive changes that are unfolding? Driven by fast-moving technologies and globalization, the pace of change is accelerating, our brains are struggling to keep up, and the results are surprise, discomfort, and unrest.

This is not an anomaly. VUCA isn't going away. Change will only speed up from now on, and it won't slow down. To thrive in a world where "change is the only constant," leaders need to replace old thinking with a new framework.

Exponential change calls for **exponential leaders**. What exactly does that mean, and how can leaders learn to become *exponential* leaders?

The Exponential Leadership Framework

In this ebook, we'll explore the **four pillars of exponential leadership** and discuss the critical skills leaders must learn to successfully navigate a rapidly changing world—not just to create strategic advantage for their organizations, but also to help build the kind of inclusive, equitable, positive, and abundant future we all want to live in.

Some leaders already excel at some of these skills. An exponential leader strives to master them all, clearly understands how they influence each other, and, in practice, models them as an integrated whole much more powerful than its parts.

You'll discover the skillset, toolset, and mindset required to inspire and empower both the individual and the organization to adapt and evolve. We'll also look at real-world examples of exponential leaders in action, examine how they're impacting change at their organizations and for the betterment of our world, and provide actions you can take today to start leading exponentially.

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LEADER AS FUTURIST

How Leaders Dream Boldly to Bring New Futures to Life

Science fiction writer William Gibson famously once said, "The future is already here, it's just unevenly distributed." As leaders, how do we embrace the elements of the future that are here, and the ones that are just around the corner?

By thinking like a futurist.

In times of increasing change and complexity, it can be difficult to envision bold new futures with

any certainty. Our go-to strategies for thinking about the future typically start with the elements that are known, such as projecting out historic results to future performance, analyzing existing competitors, or focusing on executing near-term results.

The problem, however, is that when we see future events as a continuation of past events, we presume the pace of change will move in a straight and linear line. In reality, the exponential line curves upward, and new variables—unforeseen technologies, for example—always enter the equation. What's missing are systematic approaches to understanding and taking advantage of the unknown.

The result? Forecasts fall short. At best, we're shocked, at worst disrupted. This is why leaders need to embrace skills, practices, and behaviors of futurists.

As futurists, leaders need to get comfortable asking open-ended questions about unspoken assumptions to see new possibilities. They need to be curious about the future and blend imaginative practices of strategic foresight, futures backcasting, science fiction design, and scenario planning into traditional business planning. In other words, exponential leaders must learn to transform surprise into mindful anticipation.

Futurists don't have secret powers to predict the future. Rather, futurists discipline themselves to question the status quo. They regularly scan external trends, adjacent industries, and underlying forces. They consider diverse perspectives. And they boldly tell stories about the future before all of the data is available to back it up.

Limitations of Linear Thinking

We've been trained to think of the future as a linear extension of what we know, typically imagining change as a 10 percent improvement (or decline) from what we see around us.

Our implicit views about the future are so ingrained in business plans, financial models, and strategy conversations that leaders often don't take the time to articulate underlying assumptions. When they do, they may discover their plans rely on variables that are far from given and perhaps not the only options.

The future lives in a very broad set of possibilities, and these can unfold surprisingly quickly.

Technological, environmental, and political changes will likely disrupt your business. How can you prepare for a different and even unimaginable world that will arrive faster than projected?

This is where methods commonly employed by futurists can help you strengthen your plans. Disciplined methods of strategic foresight systematically scan, analyze, probe, and project the future beyond what we intuitively think might be possible.

How to See Ahead Like a Futurist

Start by identifying the most important and uncertain macro forces shaping your business. These can usually be divided into five broad categories: social, technological, economic, environmental, and political.

TIP: Recall these 5 broad categories with the acronym STEEP.

Under each of these categories, there are a number of driving forces and external variables that might lead to very different futures.

An insurance company, for example, might track variables related to the extension of human life (social), technologies disrupting treatment of chronic health conditions (technology), the rate of change from traditional employer-driven work arrangements to more independent "gig" jobs (economic), the frequency and impact of natural disasters (environmental), and the government's stance toward regulation and potential new laws (political).

Once these high-impact variables are identified and prioritized, futurists gather diverse inputs to establish a range of how the variables are likely to play out over time. The further ahead they go, the wider the range of possibilities.

Futurists call this the cone of possibilities and carefully organize their forecasts into four buckets.

- WHAT ARE POSSIBLE FUTURES?
  This is the full range of events that could unfold.
- WHAT ARE PLAUSIBLE FUTURES?
  This is what we believe is possible but unlikely.
- WHAT ARE PROBABLE FUTURES?
  This is what's most likely to happen.
- WHAT ARE PREFERRED FUTURES?
  This is what we want to happen.

Although these futures stem from a common set of identified variables, the derived outcomes are significantly different.

This can be an enlightening strategic exercise for leaders: Is your organization overemphasizing its preferred future and neglecting the full range of possible futures? If so, perhaps there isn't enough hedging of investments. Does your organization default to the plausible future? Consider broadening the view by investigating new technologies, adjacent industries and early startups to inform alternative strategic options.

Paul Saffo, Singularity University's Chair of Futures Studies and Foresight, repeatedly warns us that "sacred cows make the best burgers." A quick way to make your organization more future-focused is to ask team members to dive into their networks and scout for evidence related to the key variables you've outlined and post them on an analog or digital wall.
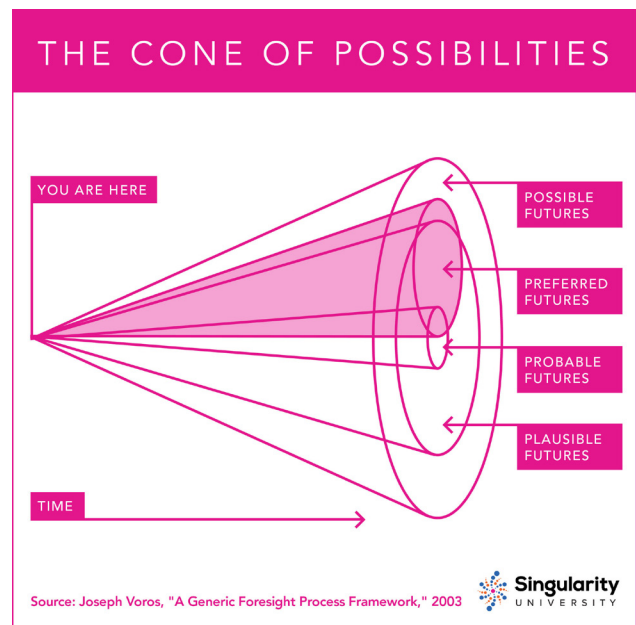
How to Create Preferred Futures

Once you've identified your preferred future, you can start to identify key activities and milestones that would help create that future.

Backcasting is the act of imagining a preferred future and then stepping backward toward the present, repeatedly probing what has to happen to enable each step.

Backcasting is anchored in an aspirational future state rather than being constrained by limitations of the current state. This method allows people to create their own richly detailed stories of the future and leads naturally to the discussion: "How can our product/service do that?"

To dream up bold, new possibilities, try imagining an outcome 10 times better, cheaper, or more impactful than what exists today. What

THE CONE OF POSSIBILITIES

YOU ARE HERE

POSSIBLE FUTURES

PREFERRED FUTURES

PROBABLE FUTURES

PLAUSIBLE FUTURES

TIME

Source: Joseph Voros, "A Generic Foresight Process Framework," 2003

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if, for example, we all had access to personalized artificial intelligence wellness care providers through emotional robots? Or, what if the majority of our transportation services were provided by autonomous vehicles?

Now step backward from each vision to discover what's needed to turn it into reality.

Like forecasting, backcasting can be improved by seeking diverse input. For example, consider carving out a few hours in a company-wide meeting to craft "headlines from the future." Just a few hours of collaboration can spark new thinking and ignite fresh ideas. Such exercises can also fuel interdisciplinary engagement and encourage a sense of collective responsibility.

Don't be afraid to get creative and even ditch the PowerPoint slides. Lowe's Innovation Labs' director Kyle Nel uses narrative-driven innovation to imagine new futures. To jumpstart his efforts, Nel brought in science fiction writers and illustrators to create comic books that showcased possible alternatives stretching far

beyond smaller, incremental changes, helping the company's leadership concretely imagine and visualize the Lowe's store of the future.

Getting Comfortable With Ambiguity

One of the most challenging aspects of practicing the skills of a futurist is getting comfortable with the reality that we simply cannot predict the future. For many senior leaders, this is deeply unsettling. How can we possibly make big bets on the future without all the facts and data?

Most of us are uncomfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty. Boldly looking ahead elicits doubt, fear, and anxiety—emotions we'd rather hold in check. We can learn to overcome our discomfort with the unknown, and even begin to revel in it, by continuously pushing ourselves to learn new things and seek out new experiences and people.

We are all capable of becoming better futurists. In doing so, we not only architect hope of new possibilities, but we also build more flexible, adaptive, and resilient organizations in the process.

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LEADER AS INNOVATOR

How Leaders Can Make Innovation Everyone's Day Job

In addition to imagining a range of new futures, leaders must also act as innovators, discovering new ideas through creative ideation and rigorous experimentation. These days, great product ideas can come from a single tweet or a surprising customer interaction and be tested with a working prototype in a matter of hours.

Yet, many businesses still focus primarily on getting existing products to market faster while reducing costs and increasing margins. The underlying strategic bet is placed on certainty by minimizing variability. If these approaches are successful, the focus is on defending and expanding what exists rather than exploring new opportunities through ongoing discovery. All too often, this results in missing a deep understanding of the person on the other side of the transaction.

When leaders embrace their role as innovators, they realize they must always be thinking about the customer. They use human-centered processes, such as observation and questioning, to collect insights; they use visual thinking and storytelling skills to share hypotheses and ideas quickly and effectively; and they embrace a growth mindset to test and gather evidence on what they've learned.

Rigorous innovators do this continually, iterating over and over to uncover opportunities obscured by the fog of uncertainty.

Innovation at Amazon

Jeff Bezos is arguably one of our most innovative leaders. He is a great example of a leader who imagines possible new futures and has created an organization that puts as much discipline into innovating as it does into bringing those new ideas to life.

In the 20-plus years Amazon has been in business, Bezos has entered and disrupted multiple industries—retail and technology infrastructure, for example—pioneering new business models that make competition irrelevant.

How does Amazon do it?

In a recently released shareholder letter, Bezos outlined Amazon's operating principles which he calls "Day 1." To Bezos, Day 1 represents being a customer-obsessed company that focuses on experimentation, utilizing external trends, being skeptical of information, and making quick decisions. Bezos is obsessed with creating an innovative company and culture: "Day 2 is stasis. Followed by irrelevance. Followed by excruciating, painful decline. Followed by death. And that is why it is always Day 1."

Being innovative like Amazon isn't just valuable in tech—it's a key skill for all leaders. We live in a fast-paced world, where even the biggest companies can be disrupted.

But making a company innovative from the roots up is no easy task. To lead like an innovator means investing in the right mindset, culture, incentives, and support throughout your organization. It means looking beyond a single brilliant idea and instead creating an iterative system focused on value creation and scalable growth.

"The success that comes with executing what we know and what we've historically done is exactly what prevents us from seeing what's next." —Lisa Kay Solomon

Innovation Starts with the Right Mindset

Successful innovators know that bringing something new to life—something of value that creates positive impact for customers, partners, or communities—requires a mindset focused on discovery of the unknown, not on execution of the existing.
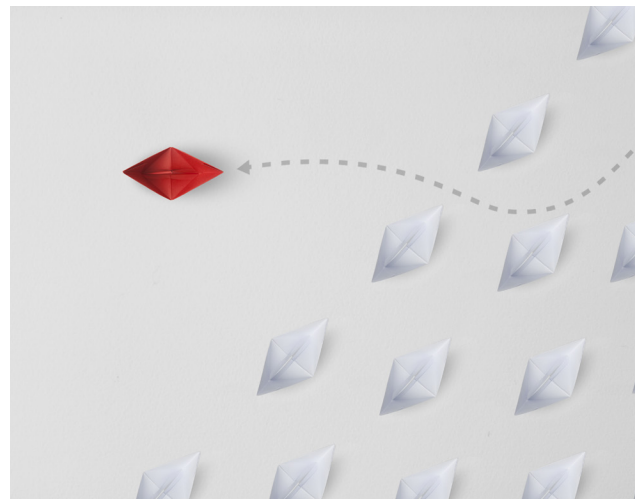
This may sound simple, but embracing a discovery mindset is almost antithetical to how we've been taught and trained. Nearly all of our formal education focuses on performance rewarding "right" answers and defendable arguments. Our organizations tend to promote individuals who ace their performance reviews, rewarding execution and risk management over divergent thinking and questioning.

And yet, the success that comes with executing what we know and what we've historically done is exactly what prevents us from seeing what's next.

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella believes instilling a culture of discovery is critical to the company's future success. After taking the reins at Microsoft, he endorsed the importance of a "growth mindset," emphasizing learning from others and from our own mistakes to move quickly and find the right path forward.

At the heart of a discovery mindset is the willingness to ask different questions. In his research for his book, *A More Beautiful Question*, author Warren Berger studied hundreds of innovative companies and found the original

idea often came from asking divergent questions that "are ambitious and yet actionable, capable of shifting the way we think about something and to serve as a catalyst for change."

Mindset is important. But you don't magically shift a whole organization's mindset overnight. Thinking like an innovator has to become part of the culture.

Innovation Requires Investing in Culture

In his book *The Geography of Genius*, Eric Weiner explores why some cities were more creative and productive in certain moments of history than others.

After deep investigations of cities like ancient Athens during its Golden Age, Florence during the Renaissance, and present day Silicon Valley, Weiner finds their success comes back to a simple philosophical principle first coined by the great philosopher Plato: "What is honored in a country will be cultivated there."

In other words, what each city valued is what received investment, attention, talent, and rewards, and by honoring and valuing the right things, we achieve greatness.

At Pixar, one of the world's most creative and innovative companies, the culture honors creative and technical talent working together to tell great stories. The company highly values peer support and honest feedback across all levels of the organization.

Edwin Earl Catmull, President of Pixar and Walt Disney Animation Studios and author of the business classic, *Creativity, Inc,* says,

"Management's job is not to prevent risk but to build the capability to recover when failures occur. It must be safe to tell the truth. We must constantly challenge all of our assumptions and search for the flaws that could destroy our culture."

As Catmull notes, a culture of innovation starts at the top. Leaders have to embrace it first and then work tirelessly to protect, nurture, and reward innovative behavior.

Once innovation is baked into your culture, you can get down to work. But you still won't get wildly creative and useful ideas without setting a few ground rules.

Innovation Is a Teachable and Learnable Discipline

Innovation is not driven by a single great idea or the result of magical serendipity; innovation is a process of disciplined exploration and experimentation.

There are many "playbooks" for innovation— lean, agile, and design-thinking, among others. Regardless of which you use, practicing innovation requires we learn six essential skills that aren't often taught in traditional education or training.

1. IT ALL STARTS WITH THE CUSTOMER: Learn how to observe and see things objectively from a customer's perspective. This allows you to identify what they really need, and not what we believe our current capabilities and features do for them.

2. DON'T FLY SOLO: Learn how to engage and collaborate with colleagues and partners who bring diverse experience and perspectives. To nurture this activity, consider creating a war room, an unstructured space to allow new ideas to grow.

3. TELL STORIES. THINK AND WORK VISUALLY: Practice presenting ideas in a compelling way—through story, metaphor, and visualization—to help overcome the need for endless research data to ensure your ideas are the right ones.

4. KEEP IT SIMPLE: Practice finding the simple idea hidden in the complexity. This entails an ability to step back and see the big picture as well as break the big picture down to find the most critical thing that will lead to success.

5. SET UP SMALL EXPERIMENTS: By experimenting, you'll learn if the value you've identified and how you deliver it are truly valued by your customers.

6. EMBRACE UNCERTAINTY: When you expect change and cultivate a mindset of continuous learning and growth, you can become an architect of hope for others.

Innovation is not driven by a single great idea or the result of magical serendipity; innovation is a process of disciplined exploration and experimentation."
—Lisa Kay Solomon

Working at innovation provides a chance to practice and learn these skills in rapid cycles. This effort has a flywheel effect—not only are

ideas advanced in appropriate and measured ways, but also capability is also catalyzed and scaled within the organization.

We Are All Capable of Being Innovators

Innovation is more than an idea-generating brainstorming session. True innovation requires deep persistence and fierce resolve, a willingness to move forward when you're not sure you will be successful, rapid adaptive cycles of learning, and the ability to connect and galvanize networks of diverse and committed talent to work together towards a larger goal.

When you take the role of spokesperson or evangelist for innovation in your organization, you have the opportunity to bring about the improvement you want to see in the world and to inspire your colleagues to build the skills to do the same. In doing so, you can ignite and scale positive impact and architect a better future for all of us.

"Exponential leaders will also have to grapple with the ethical, moral and social implications of the technologies they build their organizations around."
—Lisa Kay Solomon

LEADER AS TECHNOLOGIST

Why Every Leader Needs a Healthy Obsession With Technology

As technology innovation accelerates, leaders have to understand which technologies will directly impact their industry and which will affect adjacent industries. Technology can digitize, manipulate, and replace physical products and services, challenging the status quo of many existing industries.

The best way to understand technological change is not to read about it, but to experience it first-hand by learning to code, building or manipulating a simple robot, trying new products and services that go beyond what's familiar or comfortable, and seeking the resources of innovation and experimentation.

However, understanding technology solely from an engineering or R&D perspective is not enough. Exponential leaders will also have to grapple with the ethical, moral, and social implications of the technologies they build their organizations around. Technology disruption is quickly outpacing existing regulations, laws, and societal norms. For example, there are already ongoing tax and labor feuds between industry disruptors like Airbnb and Uber and the communities they serve.

But those legal battles pale in comparison to the ethical battles we may soon face when workers in large industries, such as food or transportation, are replaced by autonomous systems. We've hardly begun to explore the implications of a future in which genetic modifications have become significantly more accessible and widespread.

Policy and ethics are not independent of technology, and technology does not operate in a protected silo apart from either. If leaders bet on the massive new revenue potential or cost-saving opportunities that technology offers, they must also embrace the societal and moral implications that will inevitably follow.

To do so will require a whole new set of discussions and decisions in the boardrooms of every corporation, new behaviors and norms in every product development lab, and new ways of educating and rewarding (and even penalizing) tomorrow's leaders.

The Tragedy of Tower Records

In the 1990s, Tower Records was the place to get new music. Successful and popular, the California chain spread far and wide, and in 1998 took on $110 million in debt to fund aggressive further expansion. This wasn't, as it turns out, the best of timing.

The first portable digital music player went on sale the same year. The following year brought Napster, the first global file-sharing service allowing users to freely share music online. By 2000, Napster hosted 20 million users swapping songs. Then in 2001, Apple's iPod and iTunes arrived, and when the iTunes Music Store opened in 2003, Apple sold over a million songs in the first week.

As music was digitized, hard copies began to go out of style, and sales and revenue declined.

Tower first filed for bankruptcy in 2004 and again (for the last time) in 2006. The internet wasn't the only reason for Tower's demise. Mismanagement and price competition from electronics retailers like Best Buy also played a part. Still, today, the

vast majority of music is purchased or streamed entirely online, and record stores are for the most part a niche market.

The writing was on the wall, but those impacted most had trouble reading it.

Why is it difficult for leaders to see technological change coming and right the ship before it's too late? Why did Tower go all out on expansion just as the next big thing took the stage?

This is one story of many. Digitization has moved beyond music and entertainment, and now many big retailers operating physical stores are struggling to stay relevant. Meanwhile, the pace of change is accelerating, and new potentially disruptive technologies are on the horizon.

More than ever, leaders need to develop a strong understanding of and perspective on technology. They need to survey new innovations, forecast their pace, gauge the implications, and adopt new tools and strategies to change course as an industry shifts, not after it's shifted.

Simply put, leaders need to adopt the mindset of a technologist.

Survey the Landscape

Nurturing curiosity is the first step to understanding technological change. To know how technology might disrupt your industry, you have to know what's in the pipeline and identify which new inventions are directly or indirectly related to your industry.

Becoming more technologically minded takes discipline and focus as well as unstructured time to explore the non-obvious connections between what is right in front of us and what might be. It requires a commitment to ongoing learning and discovery.

Read outside your industry and comfort zone, not just Fast Company and Wired, but Science and Nature to expand your horizons. Identify experts with the ability to demystify specific technology areas. Singularity Hub is a smart, accessible resource.

But it isn't all about reading. Consider going where the change is happening, too.

Visit one of the technology hubs around the world or a local university research lab in your own backyard. Or bring the innovation to you by building an exploration lab stocked with the latest technologies, creating a technology advisory board, hosting an internal innovation challenge, or holding a local pitch night where aspiring entrepreneurs can share their newest ideas.

You might even ask the crowd by inviting anyone to suggest what innovation is most likely to disrupt your product, service, or sector. Don't hesitate to engage younger folks—the digital natives all around you—by asking questions

about what technologies they are using or excited about. Consider going on a field trip with them to see how they use technology in different aspects of their lives. Invite the seasoned executives on your team to explore long-term "reverse mentoring" with someone who can expose them to the latest technology and teach them to use it.

Whatever your strategy, the goal should be to develop a healthy obsession with technology.

By exploring fresh perspectives outside traditional work environments and then giving ourselves permission to see how these new ideas might influence existing products and strategies, we have a chance to be ready for what we're not ready for, which is likely to be right around the corner.

Estimate the Pace of Progress

The next step is forecasting when a technology will mature.

One of the most challenging aspects of the changes underway is that in many technology arenas, we are quickly moving from a linear to an exponential pace. It is hard enough to envision what is needed in an industry buffeted by progress that is changing 10% per year, but what happens when technological progress doubles annually? That is another world altogether.

This kind of change can be deceiving. For example, machine learning and big data are finally reaching critical momentum after more than twenty years of being right around the corner. The advances in applications like speech and image recognition that we've seen in recent years dwarf what came before, and many

believe we've only just begun to understand the implications.

Even as we begin to embrace disruptive change in one technology arena, far more exciting possibilities unfold when we explore how multiple arenas are converging.

Artificial intelligence and big data are great examples. As Hod Lipson, professor of Mechanical Engineering and Data Science at Columbia University and co-author of *Driverless: Intelligent Cars and The Road Ahead*, says, "AI is the engine, but big data is the fuel. They need each other."

This convergence paired with an accelerating pace makes for surprising applications.

To keep his research lab agile and open to new uses of advancing technologies, Lipson routinely asks his PhD students, "How might AI disrupt this industry?" to prompt development of applications across a wide spectrum of sectors from healthcare to agriculture to food delivery.

Explore the Consequences

New technology inevitably gives rise to new ethical, social, and moral questions that we have never faced before. Rather than bury our heads in the sand, as leaders we must explore the full range of potential consequences of whatever is underway or still to come.

We can add AI to kids' toys, like Mattel's *Hello Barbie* or use cutting-edge gene editing technology like CRISPR-Cas9 to select for preferred gene sequences beyond basic health. But just because we *can* do something doesn't mean we *should*.

Take time to listen to skeptics and understand the risks posed by technology.

Elon Musk, Stephen Hawking, Steve Wozniak, Bill Gates, and other well-known names in science and technology have expressed concern in the media and via open letters about the risks posed by AI. Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella has even argued tech companies shouldn't build artificial intelligence systems that will replace people rather than making them more productive.

Exploring unintended consequences goes beyond having a Plan B for when something goes wrong. It requires broadening our view of what we're responsible for. Beyond customers, shareholders, and the bottom line, we should understand how our decisions may impact employees, communities, the environment, our broader industry, and even our competitors.

The inconvenience of mitigating these risks now is far better than the alternative. Create forums to listen to and value voices outside of the boardroom and C-Suite. Seek out naysayers, ethicists, community leaders, wise elders, and even neophytes—those who may not share your preconceived notions of right and wrong or your view of your role in the larger world.

The question isn't: If we build it, will they come? It's now: If we can build it, should we?

Adopt New Technologies and Shift Course

The last step is hardest. Once you've identified a technology (or technologies) as a potential disruptor and understand the implications, you need to figure out how to evolve your

organization to make the most of the opportunity. Simply recognizing disruption isn't enough.

Take today's struggling brick-and-mortar retail business. Online shopping isn't new. Amazon isn't a plucky startup. Both have been changing how we buy stuff for years. And yet many who still own and operate physical stores are now on the brink of bankruptcy.

There's hope though. Netflix began as a DVD delivery service in the 1990s but quickly realized its core business didn't have staying power. It would have been laughable to stream movies when Netflix was founded. Still, computers and bandwidth were advancing fast. In 2007, the company added streaming to its subscription. Even then it wasn't a totally compelling product.

But Netflix clearly saw a streaming future would likely end their DVD business.

In recent years, faster connection speeds, a growing content library, and the company's entrance into original programming have given Netflix streaming the upper hand over DVDs. Since 2011, DVD subscriptions have steadily declined. Yet the company itself is doing fine. Why? It anticipated the shift to streaming and acted on it.

Never Stop Looking for the Next Big Thing

Technology is and will increasingly be a driver of disruption, destabilizing entrenched businesses and entire industries while also creating new markets and value not yet imagined.

When faced with the rapidly accelerating pace of change, many companies still default to old

models and established practices. Leading like a technologist requires vigilant understanding of potential sources of disruption and constantly exploring what might make your company's offering obsolete. The answers may not always be perfectly clear. What's most important is relentlessly seeking them.

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LEADER AS IMPACT-DRIVER

How All Leaders Can Make the World a Better Place

Exponential leaders use the skills and behaviors of futurists, innovators, and technologists to improve the lives of the people they touch, and society as a whole. They aim to do well by doing good—not as a separate set of "corporate social responsibility" activities, but as part of the integrated company mission.

Leading as an impact-driver can mean explicitly building a business using technology to create positive impact. B corporations, like Singularity University for example, are for-profit companies certified to meet rigorous standards of social and environmental performance, accountability, and transparency. It can also mean investing in humane policies and practices that create a positive culture and a meaningful work environment.

Increasingly, technology can also generate fundamentally new business models and growth opportunities enabling and empowering more new parts of the world to become sustainable and autonomous economic centers of growth.

When Google's high-altitude balloons connect the most rural and underdeveloped areas to universal high-speed internet, or when drones deliver medical supplies after natural disasters, we can start to imagine a world where the ultimate resource technology amplifies is our ability to enhance all of mankind.

Think Beyond Your Organization

In February 2017, Facebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg posted a public manifesto of nearly 6,000 words to Facebook's community of almost 1.9 billion people called "Building a Global Community." In the opening lines, it becomes readily apparent that the post isn't about a product update or policy change, but rather an exploration of a larger philosophical question that Zuckerberg courageously poses: "Are we building the world we all want?"

The manifesto was not without controversy, but regardless of your interpretation of the manifesto's intent, what's remarkable is that a private sector CEO—someone who is typically laser-focused on growth projections and shareholder return—has declared a very ambitious aspiration to use the technology platform to promote and strengthen a global community.

As we enter an era of increasing globalization and connectivity, what is the responsibility of leaders, not just ones elected to public office, to support the betterment of the lives they touch? How might leaders support the foundational needs of their employees, customers, investors, and strategic partners—to lead like a impact-driver?

What It Means to Lead Like an Impact-Driver

To lead like an impact-driver requires making choices to transform scarce resources into abundant opportunities to positively and responsibly impact communities far beyond our own.

This might mean making big investments in solving our world's biggest challenges. Or it might mean adopting a business model that intentionally serves a specific population in need or promotes sustainability, community service, or employee engagement outside the office.

At its foundation, leading like an impact-driver means taking responsibility for how we connect our work—regardless of the job—to a meaningful purpose beyond growth and profitability.

Unlock Possibilities by Liberating Scarce Resources

Technology is at the core of some of today's biggest businesses, and organizations can have more impact now than in the past. While tech can be used to produce great products, it can also be aimed at solving big problems in the world by liberating resources that were once scarce and making them more abundant for more people.

What does this look like in practice? Mobile technologies offer significant opportunities to create positive impact. Apps that use the sensors and software on your phone for entertainment, everyday productivity, and socializing can use those same sensors to make your phone an intelligent aid for the blind, a diagnostic tool for doctors in remote areas, or an off-the-shelf

radiation detector. With a dose of creativity and a different focus, the same skills used to produce games can make tools to help those in need.

Consider breakthroughs in areas such as digital fabrication, biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and robotics. As these technologies become more advanced and accessible, exponential leaders have a responsibility to consider how they can be used for a purpose greater than simply profit at all costs.

Perhaps one of the most valuable resources technology can help liberate is human potential.

Leaders need to motivate and enable team members as much as possible.

A 2017 Deloitte report on global human capital trends found that the digitization of human capital processes is radically changing how employees engage with work, from the recruitment process through leadership development and career advancement.

Technology is enabling learning to move from episodic, generic training to continuous, blended social exchanges. Platforms such as Degreed, EdCast, and Axonify move beyond bounded online classes by offering microlearning and on-demand learning opportunities.

Leaders need to assess if they are supporting a culture conducive to continuous learning and if they are empowering all employees to learn from and with each other. As we widen our view of what's possible, the ability of people and technology to solve big problems has never been greater.

Developing New Business Models

As technology enables teams, big and small, to make an impact as never before, leaders and organizations need to reimagine who they are serving, what they are serving, and how they are serving them in viable, sustainable, and profitable ways. Businesses no longer need to choose between maximizing profit and helping society. They can choose to do both.

Leaders need to build proficiency in both critically examining current models and creatively exploring fundamentally new ways of thinking about value creation and capture. In an increasingly dynamic world, re-evaluating old business models is a key new strategy.

Last year *Fortune Magazine's* "Change the World" cover story featured 50 successful global companies that are doing well by doing good. Its top profiled company, GlaxoSmithKline, is making choices to ensure growth and help people by reversing the traditional business model of maximizing revenue through protected drug patents. The company is no longer filing patents in poor countries to enable lower prices and improved access to medicine in those countries. It's also partnering with NGOs to retrain workers on the proper administration of drugs and collaborating with governments to make its drugs part of national treatment programs for HIV and other widespread diseases.

Nearly five billion new people are expected to come online through high-speed internet in the next ten years. Now is the time to imagine what new opportunities are on the horizon—not just for tapping new markets and customers but for how to empower them, too.

Live a Higher Purpose Within Your Organization

One of the most powerful ways a leader can motivate and enable these changes is to actively and continuously clarify the organization's higher purpose—the "why" that drives the work—and to make choices that are consistent with what the company stands for.

There has been a lot of social science suggesting all workers—especially those in "Generation Z"—are motivated by work that matters to them. In her book, *The Progress Principle*, Harvard Business School professor Theresa Amabile argues that the most important motivator of great work is the feeling of meaning and progress—that the work matters.

Leading as an impact-driver requires modeling meaning throughout the organization and behaving in ways congruent with core values, both internally and externally.

In 2016, Marc Benioff, the CEO of Salesforce, pushed for LGBT rights in Indiana, North Carolina, and Georgia. In 2015, a company-wide survey revealed Salesforce had a gender discrepancy in pay, which Benioff remedied in what has been called the "$3 million dollar raise." In January, Salesforce said it would adjust pay again to level out the salaries of employees who joined through acquisitions and didn't share in the gender equality salary policies. Moreover, the company said it will monitor the gap as an ongoing initiative and commitment to employees.

In a Time article last year, Benioff stated his rationale for taking an active stance: "If I were to write a book today, I would call it *CEO 2.0:*

How the Next Generation CEO Has to Be an Advocate for Stakeholders, Not Just Shareholders. That is, today CEOs need to stand up not just for their shareholders, but their employees, their customers, their partners, the community, the environment, schools, everybody. Anything that's a key part of their ecosystem."

There's More Than One Way to Lead Like an Impact-Driver

Leading like an impact-driver is a mindset and set of practices, not a single, defined position. Try asking a simple question as you make decisions about the direction of your organization: How does our work positively impact the world, and can we do better?

This shift in view looks beyond only productivity and profit toward empowerment and shared possibility. Equipped with ever-more-powerful technologies, capable of both greater harm and good, leaders need to consider how their decisions will make the world a better place.

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Ready to Dive In?

Enter Singularity University

A core part of our mission at Singularity is teaching current and aspiring leaders how to embrace new competencies required to navigate exponential change.

As a complement to traditional programs that teach skills like communication, goal-setting, and managing teams, Singularity University empowers leaders with an understanding of exponential technologies, trends, and emerging methodologies for leading in a VUCA world.

In particular, our Executive Program can help groom your next generation of leaders so they're ready to help lead your organization into the future. We guide leaders from all sectors and industries to develop exponential leadership, business models, and innovation practices to propel their organizations forward. Through content, community, and a growing number of programs—many of which can be tailored to specific needs—we help leaders navigate a rapidly changing landscape.

Whether we're monitoring the latest technology trends, training an organization's next generation of leaders, or taking innovation teams through tailored prototyping sprints or disruption workshops, we can help you see the future of your industry and empower you to take decisive, bold action.

"Equipped with ever-more powerful technologies, capable of both greater harm and good, leaders need to consider how their decisions will make the world a better place." —Lisa Kay Solomon

Our Future Needs Exponential Leaders

These roles—futurist, innovator, technologist, and impact-driver—are interconnected and enhanced when knowledge and insights flow between them. The four pillars are a holistic system of learning to imagine, create, capture, and scale hidden value in an increasingly complex and dynamic world.

This is the essence of **exponential leadership**.

By practicing these new skills, all leaders can improve their capacity to not only anticipate change, but also make proactive choices leading to more positive, productive futures for their organizations, communities, and the world.

Singularity University serves as your guide to the future by helping leaders make sense of and evolve their strategic road map to persevere in an unpredictable world. With a world-class curriculum rooted in futures thinking and exponential technology, you'll learn more than how to avoid disruption. You'll become the disrupter.

Exponential Leadership Builds Exponential Enterprises

Singularity University's enterprise program offerings can help you advance your exponential leadership capabilities from any starting point. Our Executive Program can help prepare your next generation of leaders to drive 10x results. To disseminate this knowledge to a group of key leaders and customize the insights for your industry and company strategy,

consider a customized Enterprise or Individual Premium Membership. As a premium member, unlock access to an exclusive, private community of like-minded leaders and change-makers who are committed to personal and professional growth. Attend premium webinars, roundtables and professional networking events, all alongside peers and subject matter experts that help leaders like yourself better understand and apply exponential technologies.

We hope you found this ebook helpful and hope to hear from you soon!

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