



Understanding and improving your organisation's default future

We all have a *default future*. It's the place we'll end up if we continue on the same path and take no action to change that future. If the *default future* is a desirable destination, then there's no need to be concerned, just enjoy the journey. If the *default future* is unacceptable, then effort and action is required to create an *improved future*.

Understanding the *default future* for which we are accountable is one of the most important roles of leadership, as is deciding what actions to take to create an *improved future*.

In some respects there is nothing new in this thinking as the early work of Peter Drucker argued that strategy is essentially a plan for getting to a future state. So what's different about the *default future* approach and how can it help us become better business leaders?

Understanding the *default future* engages people in a meaningful way

In a recent Formicio [article](#) I highlighted the fact that only a small proportion – typically 5% – of large-scale change programmes are successful. Assuming that the purpose of a change programme is to create an *improved future*, the question must be why is the success rate so low?

In my view part of the reason is the lack of engagement by those who will either be impacted by the change or are instrumental to its success. Essentially there are three reasons for change: firstly to fix today's problems, secondly to prevent future problems and thirdly to realise future opportunities. In the former case, engaging people in change is relatively straightforward as the reason for the change should be apparent. The last two cases are more difficult as they require people to look into the future and decide that an alternative – improved – future is better and is something they should strive for.

Understanding the *default future* provides insight into possible *improved futures*

The second advantage of the *default future* approach is that it not only tells you **what** the future might be but, equally importantly, **why**. Understanding the forces that are influencing the direction of travel is important as it enables us to identify those we can control and those over which we have no influence.



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Seven macro-drivers shaping our default future

According to the futurist [Ray Hammond](#) there are seven key drivers of change that will shape the world of 2030. These are:

1. Uneven world population explosion and changing societal demographics.
2. Climate change and the environment.
3. The ongoing energy crisis.
4. Ever expanding globalisation.
5. Multiple revolutions in medical science.
6. Accelerating, exponential technology development.
7. The bottom billion people (actually, now around 1.8 billion).

While he acknowledges there are other factors that will define life and society two decades from now, he believes that these seven are by far the most important.

These seven drivers and their implications are described in Ray's latest book [The World in 2030](#).

Our default future lives at the experiential level

In their book [The Three Laws of Performance: Rewriting the Future of Your Organization and Your Life](#), Steve Zaffron and Dave Logan, argue that people normally have an unconscious, gut-level idea of where they – and their company – are, and where they're likely to go. They call this "the default future" and believe it is deeply rooted in people's assumptions, hopes, fears and past experiences.

Most significantly they believe that a person's (and an organisation's) default future lives at the experiential level that is underneath what we think and hope will happen.

They also argue that the first task of leadership is to identify the default future, discuss it, analyse it and then re-imagine it.

This is somewhat different to contemporary thinking, which recommends we start by defining a vision that has audacious goals and ignore any constraints that might obstruct realising that vision. The importance of having a vision is not in question; the point at issue is how best to envision an *improved future* that is realistic and relevant to your organisation.

Examples of forces that determine an organisation's default future include: mindsets, technology, regulation, macro-economic climate, customers, past winning strategies, complexity and talent.

The role leaders must play

If strategy is essentially about making choices then the first choice we need to make is whether the *default future* of our organisation is acceptable. If not, we then need to make further choices about an *improved future* that is cognisant of the forces that currently control our destiny. Understanding these forces will enable us to focus on those we can control and isolate ourselves from those over which we have no influence. Doing so will enable us to define an *improved future* that is relevant to our organisation and has a realistic chance of coming true.

If you would like to read my full article in which I define the forces that influence an organisation's default future, click [here](#).

I welcome your thoughts.

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Understanding the management and leadership implications of social media driven transformation

Social media is creating a different type of enterprise, one that makes intensive use of these interactive technologies to change workflows, engage with customers, and partner with suppliers in ways that were not imagined a few years ago. The question no longer is should I, as a business or technology leader, take these technologies seriously, but how should I introduce them into my organisation in a way that adds most value?

We are now inviting business and technology leaders to participate in a Collaborative Exploration to explore the management and leadership implications of social media driven transformation of the enterprise. More details can be found on our [website](#).

Formicio's [Collaborative Explorations](#) are a unique way of collaborating with peers from other organisations on topics of common interest.

Parting thought

“You see things; and you say, ‘Why?’ But I dream things that never were; and I say, ‘Why not?’”

George Bernard Shaw
Irish playwright and a co-founder of
the London School of Economics
1856 – 1950