THE FUTURE

A Short Guide to Getting There in One Piece

John Caswell

The Present
2020 was the worst year ever. Especially if you were hoping to get back to normal.
Real-life was horrendous.., a realisation that all was not well with the world.

Alternate realities and virtual worlds as social media became parallel universes.
The chaos signaled change - it motivated some and became dangerous rabbit holes for millions.
Overall, 2020 will go down as a warning flare for civilisation.
> *"You can't go back and change the beginning, but if you change you can influence the ending. You have the power to put order into your version of the chaos. What you change will be the future you have."*

A Look Back At The Future
In 2021 we counted the damage. Millions of people forcibly separated from their traditional careers. Hundreds of thousands of graduates prevented from a 'normal' entry into the workforce. Our city centres ghost towns - main streets boarded up.., their re-use yet to materialise.

The roaring 2020s beyond the plague saw large swathes of independent workers. They were makers and creators, inventors and collaborators - they were all these things.

Something Important Happened
Work Changed. I used to say if only we could change the way we think then we would change the way things work. That was mostly wrong. I now realise we have to be forced to change the way things work - and only then will we change the way we think.

Many people have rejected the traditional work journey but silently. They've complained bitterly about the system but never did anything about it.
> *"Millions of humans were marooned in dispiriting Ad agencies, grey and soulless offices designed for battery hens or slaving for the man in an abusive factory. 2020 forced a shift at scale - giving birth to a world of new work and new workers."*

New Workers
The 'new worker' formed creative models of cooperation and ingenious ways to liberate their capability. Through a greater fear of the consequences, humans took the leap that decades of mediocrity hadn't quite tipped them into taking. Many had no other choice. But for others, a preferable conclusion of a hitherto meaningless life.

An unconventional pathway was built which unleashed new skills driven by circumstance and isolation. This struggle sparked ingenuity and enterprise and saw a return to raw human creativity.

People realised that their destiny was (quite literally) in their own hearts, minds and hands. Millions started to see how easy it was to create their own business. These passions were stirring long before 2020 but the pieces were not yet fully in focus. We listened to the rumblings we just couldn't quite hear what it meant.

> *"If we just talk, we are repeating what we know. To learn something new we have to listen, and to put lessons into practice we have to hear."*

A New Path - The Unconventional Is the New Convention
New digital platforms and tools (no code, creative platforms) have removed most if not all the barriers.

I know many more people today who feel liberated from outdated social expectations. And re-energised by exploring new models, technologies, and ideas. I've felt liberated for a long time -- always running my own life and my own business. Now there's endless choice and access to all information for everyone, whatever their age.

For the interested and curious, it has supercharged everyone's ability to construct their own life and career.

Necessary Discomfort
The necessity that forced millions to figure out how to be online is called 'forced adoption'.

- Forced adoption transformed the behaviours of a significant majority.
- Millions have been forced into the worlds of online shopping to survive - learning e-commerce, contactless payments, door drop deliveries, and through smarter devices and apps - experiencing content streaming.
- Underpinning almost all of this is the algorithm that is both friend and foe - the thorny puzzle faces humanity.
- We want labour-saving miracles that suggest precisely what we are looking for and when we want it - not wanting to be ruled by a faceless mathematical tyrant.
- We do and we don't want these hidden geniuses informing our purchasing decisions or overwhelming us with stupid ads or ever stealthier ways of emptying our wallets.

Inspiring Visions
For as long as I can remember we've been mainlining science fiction. Jet planes to exotic destinations. Jet packs on our backs. Miniature wristwatches that we can speak to. Genomics to give us remedies and longer lives. Cyborg augmentation to improve our capacities.

We are living it now. The technologies are incredible - every day we are mining and harvesting new variations of real-life. With the right mentality, we can see this as finding fresh and meaningful human experiences.

> *"In 2020 a live Travis Scott's concert was held inside the video game 'Fortnite' - 9 million players attended. The set was short - around 15 minutes - it was an experience that could only exist in a virtual space. In real life (IRL) a Travis Scott arena show is an elaborate affair, but you can't float through the air while a 400-foot rapper walks across an ocean."*

We've seen how virtual simulation and augmentation spawn extraordinary applications. They've given us new terms and opportunities - augmented, virtual and mixed realities. The application of this is the infinite, real-time and very real world. Global medical procedures, multimedia entertainment, collaborative learning, 3D manufacturing and augmentation, teleconferencing - we've only just scratched the surface.

> *"Half a billion people played 'Among Us' in November 2020, the most monthly players for a mobile game - ever. More than Pokémon GO and Candy Crush Saga. Astonishing because InnerSloth, the company that makes 'Among Us' has four employees. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) famously live-streamed herself playing it. She did it to encourage people to vote and achieved an audience on the Twitch platform that peaked at over 400 thousand."*

How Did We Get Here?

The future has always relied on dreams. Those who realise their dreams are rare. They have both imagination and the perseverance to make them happen. We need new dreamers. We need to harvest their imaginations and exploit these opportunities.

Why are so many of us afraid to use our imagination? Is it the failure of education to provide the tools to exploit it? We are afraid of our dreams because of the responsibility that begins in them. Without the tools to leverage our imagination, we will always undermine our dreams. We cannot afford that.

Futurists dream - they anticipate the big ideas. Science fiction writers develop stories that inspire us and bring concepts to real life. Technology accelerates unpredictable surprises.

> *"In 1945 Vannevar Bush described the 'Memex' - a single device to store all books, records and communications - accessible by fully automated association. It entered the consciousness and two decades later came 'hypertext' and then another couple of decades came the World Wide Web. Then enter the era of streaming. The first streaming video was more than 25 years ago but the wars are happening now. Literally an infinite supply of content, on-demand playback, interactivity, dynamic personalization - converging content with distribution."*

Although we can see the bits - the components of technology, infrastructure and communications we don't know where this goes next. The features the audiences want are impossible to guess. We can't foretell the business models, which experiences matter, we don't understand the societal or competitive dynamics that will trigger the shifts.

Everything Flows

IP TV happened at the turn of the century. Netflix launched its streaming service because it understood the future of television was online. The challenge boiled down to two things. Packaging and timing. This is what these challenges always boil down to.

Markets need educating after any launch. It's a slow process. Initially - and it's not guaranteed, but there will be some hype of early adoption - mostly it is the longness of the tail.

Even today many people still don't appreciate all the channels, genres and content, nor how available this already is through the common device of a TV.

Similar examples of the 'quick, quick slow' are to be found in every industry:

- VHS - Betamax. Microsoft dominated the PC era that began in the 1990s over the mainframe pioneer IBM.
- Microsoft foresaw mobile but misread the role of the operating system and the hardware.
- Apple iOS and Google Android profited globally.
- The importance of app stores and social networks was unexpected right up until late in the 2000s.
- Facebook was unintentional and happened in 2005.

What will succeed in the world of bits we are living through right now? A constantly different set of bits -- a new world where trial and error is inevitable to test and learn the strategy.

> *"Trying things is bittersweet because failure isn't fun - yet not trying leads to regret. Getting things wrong is how learning happens. Leadership used to be never let anyone think you didn't have the answer. Now it's about comfort with the uncomfortable and not knowing. It means forging a path to answers through the 'least worst' mistakes. Perseverance is a lonely place that's constantly under attack, but it is the path to glory."*

The Writing On The Digital Walls

There's a new term for where this constant reinvention may go. **The Metaverse.**
Over time, and we can't be certain how long - more decades - something like the 'Metaverse' will revolutionize the entire digital infrastructure of today. It will transform the physical experiences we expect and alter the services and transactional platforms that sit on top.

For those of us already thinking this way it already feels very real. And as we learn every time the arc is as long and unpredictable as its end state is lucrative.

The Metaverse is already both vision and goal for many of the world's tech giants. Billions are being invested. This isn't going away.

- Elon Musk's Neuralink (brain to machine)
- Facebook, Apple and Google as well as Epic Games are invested heavily through cloud-based gaming engines, AR glasses, Oculus VR and Horizon Spaces.

- During the Black Lives Matter protests, activists used Snap's 'Local Lenses' feature to cover their cities in AR protest art.
- Architecture firm GGLO created an AR app to make a permanent metaverse record of the real BLM street art painted across Seattle during the protests.
- Fashion label Marc Jacobs released a line of six outfits for avatars to wear in Animal Crossing: New Horizons.
- Facebook are beta-testing Horizon, a massive, social VR world that runs on the Oculus platform.

Right now, more than at any time in our lives we have the opportunity to change. We are creative and sentient human beings. The motivation for fresh ideas to reinvent, innovate, and be better has never been higher. We can choose to be more sustainable, more effective, more useful, and more human.

> *"Chaos is found in greatest abundance wherever order is sought. It always defeats order, because it is better organised." - Terry Pratchett*

Chaos accurately describes markets, trade, movement of goods, societies and global certainty. But it's an emotional word. Chaos is visible everywhere - observing it depends on your perspective. For example, watching waves crashing on the shore up close offers no rhyme or reason for the action of individual droplets of water - and yet observed from near-earth orbit the flow of the oceans has a regular and discernable pattern.

For the conscious business leader looking at their market with the right perspective - the chaos is the opportunity. The chance to create new products, better services, more appropriate businesses is vast.

The conscious leader realises a few things that the less conscious don't. The conscious leader though is defined by their ability to act as well as think. **They are building an intelligent operation.**

- In an intelligent operation, context is vital - the current and future consumer is fully implicated at every step of the journey.
- Consumers are involved in the design of the product or service, how and where they get sold (channels/platforms), what messaging strategy and campaign works and how to make and service the solution in the first place.
- The operation is open - completely open. Diversity, creativity, and sustainability are meaningful and not just words on the wall.
- Sharing everything is the norm - the methods, the code, the hacks, the processes, the recipes, future roadmaps, systems and platforms.
- All boundaries between what happens internally and externally are gone - the operation is effectively boundary-less.
- The vision for the future model is defined as 'operation as a community' - that's the proposition, offer and system that's being built now.
- Consumer trust emerges because they are involved. Everything is a feedback loop of mutual value. The operational model is a flywheel not a hierarchy - a self-perpetuating brand.

Allbirds - a stellar startup story throughout 2020 and built a billion-dollar brand. They developed an entirely new and sustainable shoe sole. They made the patents open-source and shared it with the world. And in May (2020), Allbirds announced a partnership with Adidas, to create a sneaker with the lowest ever carbon footprint carrying both the Allbirds and Adidas logo. **How?**

- Decide on the best channel/media platform and start sharing your story.
- Regularly explain the progress - the development process, then new services, as you go make the solutions possible to touch and feel - and eventually sign up to or buy.
- Invite conversation, engagement and eventually ownership.
- The audience will see the work happen and engage with it if the audience sees the value.
- They will help with the choices needed to be made and challenges that need solving along the way.

You will have effectively made a platform for your consumers to immerse themselves and help shape your future.

We are conditioned to expect ultra-convenience. Are they too established to retreat now? We are all human and no matter how conscious we struggle to see how to make ultra-convenience and positive impact converge -- techniques, tools, and services that will encourage more sustainable consumption at the same time as being easier and more convenient.

The Ipsos Global Trends 2020 survey found 80% of people worldwide believe we are heading for environmental disaster unless we change our habits quickly. McKinsey, at the same time, suggests that 66% feel it's important to limit the impact of the fashion industry on climate.

Leadership Consciousness
Consciousness will be the critical capability required to succeed in the new world - after 2020. One interesting thing about consciousness is defining it. It's mercurial, relative, and unfathomable. The more I tried to write my thoughts down about it - the less I could. The closer I came to define it - the further away it went. By writing, I can usually put order into my thoughts. In this case, I only arrived at the following starting point:

Consciousness - a state of openness to possibility - whilst knowing nothing.

We all know things because we are conscious beings. And we can use our experience to filter a host of other things. But there's very little of any certainty - projectable from our past - that's guaranteed to be of any value in the future. Consciousness, in this context, is an electric awareness of what's happening - unfettered by filters and unattached to predisposition.

I found myself writing about reinvention. Constant reinvention. Reinvention in a business context.

Setting Expectations
It's clear to me that 2021 will be better for all of us if our expectations remain low and hope silently high. I advise senior leaders - so my baseline for everything is built on what I expect

them to want and need. I've been lucky that many of them are indeed conscious, but I believe (post-2020) they must supercharge it.

Intelligent operations that can perpetually reinvent are going to mean everything in 2021. To survive and win a business has no alternative but to learn faster and execute better than its competition.

Strategically the operation must be prepared. It requires many skills and talents but inspirational leadership and vision sitting on a fully connected interdependent operation are mandatory.

Operationally the future business will need two super-powers - enterprise creativity and hyper-awareness. The table stakes will be rigorous market research, data analytical skills, rapid prototyping - testing and learning.

Real success will demand distinctly better insight into customers, a dynamic serving of services and delivery and mastery of the routes to them - blue water between them and the competitors…, to market and communicate more effectively than the competitors and have the patience to stay with all of the above until it works.

We Are Being Boiled Alive - The Boiling Frog Syndrome
I wish there was a better word to express that idea. Over a period of time (a long time), we've not noticed the uncomfortable and creeping heat. We've come to assume it was just the way things are. We've been unable to voice a feeling - then boom – we are overtaken by an apocalypse. This mess didn't just happen. Here we are, trapped by a catastrophic current reality.., an overnight shock that took decades and we did nothing about it. This at a time when we need to be unconstrained in order to grasp any future.

A Becoming
I think thoughtful people thrive on change or they stagnate. I believe all people are born more thoughtful and creative than they think. Sadly I also believe they were more thoughtful to begin with than they've become. It frustrates me hugely but only proved itself more and more during 2020.

2020 - a year of suffocating sameness and catastrophic upheaval for the majority. Everyone called on to dig deep, to summon superhuman effort and stay focused on the hope that it will end. It took creativity, patience and courage - it was a boot-camp for our mindsets.

2020 didn't just happen. As I've said - the culmination of generations of stuckness. When struggling with situations we are forced to be creative and think to survive.

Personal disadvantage often results in individual ingenuity. Profound writing, great art and music - individual acts of invention and collective business innovations emerge through crises.

Thoughtful individuals are not defined by status, gender, class or age. Neither are societies. But fixing systemic challenges at scale has been notoriously elusive. Typically, it takes a successful

movement going mainstream, war, or the occasional global plague to see a shift in human behaviour. And it doesn't always last.

It's definitely the case that we have difficulty overcoming the wickedness of many human challenges. And I complain bitterly when people suggest there's a 'we' in that sentence.

We Think?
The idea that 'we' have to fix a challenge or create change is why WE never do.
I would struggle to go and visit 'we'- - for instance, where the fuck does 'we' live?

Unfortunately, it's become a convenient lingo. It's foolish and dangerous. Even the more thoughtful of us lapse and say 'we' when we know there's no mechanism for 'we'.

This means 'we' are being busy solving the wrong problem really well — believing that there is 'we'.

We Hope
If 'we' can get momentum into a movement - a collective behind a systemic change - then there may be a 'we'. A movement can motivate us - the public at scale to gather impetus around a purpose. In this scenario, I'm imagining challenges of the sort that would deny one type of audience over another.

Therefore, I'm conceiving of solutions that bypass biased, corrupt, bullshit 'systems.' We must reinvent the deeply flawed pre-engineered systems built to rules designed to serve everyone but 'we'.

We Don't Think
Subjectivity imprisons us in a false world with deadly force. Subjectivity is a psychopath that almost always wins. When objectivity is allowed in, the psychopath easily tricks objectivity into thinking that it won. Change is oblivious to subjectivity and just does its thing.

Change isn't something to be fixed. It can only be exploited, which means reinvention - and this isn't negotiable. Only those capable of rethinking on a daily basis can hope to emerge for the better into whatever is the new norm.

And by extrapolation, the new norm will be 'nothing normal' - ever again. Retooling and reconstituting operations will signal success, improve performance and be ready to exploit opportunities.

Mission Impossible?
The biggest challenge for the future will be dealing with constant corrections to the operation.
It's a challenge for countless reasons. Not simply the enormous number of corrections.
Luckily for us, automation is helping intelligent operations deal with the exponential number of micro-decisions and alterations.

Technology will eventually win the day but in the short term, we're dealing with the human challenge. A mix of conditions exists in us that do not inhabit the machines: prejudice, bias, acceptance, fear, ignorance, capability attachment, embarrassment, capacity, denial and more. Add fixed mindsets, lack of emotional intelligence, vulnerability, and historic expectations.

This is an avalanche, hurricane and a wildfire while being holed below the waterline. The aim isn't trivial - perpetual reinvention can only happen through the absence of any attachment to what was.

A Systems Definition for A New World
Systems don't operate in their own unique world. They are connected to other systems.

- Systems are an 'ecology' of living and non-living organisms that co-operate and are interdependent.
- No system is a completely free agent. Even government systems are subject to powerful 'other' systemic forces not entirely under their control.
- Black markets thrive the more the governments believe they are dominating.
- Free agency is a central pillar for empowerment. It is what drives entrepreneurship. Without free agency, the system takes power away from any individual in the system.
- Individuals are exploited rather than unleashed to create greater value as is true with all efficient marketplaces.
- Trade has to work and for that, we need mutuality across the system - increasingly we can substitute the work platform.
- Free trade is being eroded in favour of the owners of the platforms - exploitation, therefore, rises to the top.
- Without the individuals able to trade with free agency and mutuality the system continues unchecked and the individuals suffer.
- Great systems thrive on fairness, open standards, free and mutual trade and reward systems - systems that return the respect invested.

The Art of Reinvention
Reinvention is non-negotiable - another word for it is life. We've always done it. It's at the root of our survival - the lack of it would signal the demise of humanity. But I struggle to get people to realise it's their job - increasing their vocation.

If you run a business it's the most critical thing to do. Unless you plan to run it over a cliff.

The Inconvenient Paradox of Simplicity
In our mad pressure cooker, we tend to boil things down. We have this urge for simplicity. Distilling everything to the minimum. It doesn't really help. Everything has become a race to take things down to their bare bones.

While it's understandable, given our decreased capacity it can be very dangerous. We now fight over the disappearance of meaning. Meaning is rendered impossible as a result of over-distilled artefacts - infographics and jargon. (Jargon - those 'special' words and expressions that are in regular use by professions and groups that are difficult for others to understand.)

An Example of Our Desire to Be Fooled By Convenient Simplicity
Maslov's Hierarchy of Needs - Utter bollocks from the moment (in 1943), when Abraham Maslow first published his 'theory of human motivation' in Psychological Review. Maslow built his model from qualitative research on the Native American inhabitants of the Blackfoot reservation, who later pointed out that his whole theory was entirely incorrect when applied to their culture and identity.

The hierarchy has subsequently been criticised on the basis of missing stages, putting stages in the wrong sequence, and the fact stages change according to circumstance, culture and geography. So basically everything. But the dreaded hierarchy proved a hit with marketers (for example), who had no formal training but wanted something scientific-looking and faintly European-sounding to beef up their empty marketing plans.

The Language of Reinvention
Humans and their differences in definitions of everything are responsible for many of the challenges we have in business. We're obsessed with packaging up big ideas within simple phrases - for sheer conversational convenience or to avoid the hidden complexity.

Unfortunately, that simple act removes the enquiry and importance needed for it to be meaningful. It becomes meaningless to everyone through its use. There are millions of cases in point and the idea behind the phrase (whatever phrase), is valuable and often critical.

The big issue here is the wild variability of the definition in people's heads - rendering the application of the idea impossible. This is death in a world where reinvention relies on the integrity needed for coherence and meaning across a highly interdependent meaning.

A Case in Point
Any leader can be forgiven for wanting to create a 'digital-ready' culture. (#3 on the top jargon chart.) For the consulting industry, it's like juicy red meat thrown into a pool of piranha. Needing to create a digital-ready culture is on par with the combustion engine coming on the scene.

There you are, breaking your back with a plough but thinking what an innovator you are to include a horse. At that moment you spot your neighbour, tearing up the next valley with smoking hot robot from space. No horses in sight.

Leaders have no alternative but to get their cultures in line with their transitions to stay in the game but how many dismiss it out of hand - being told they need to create a digital-ready culture? I've come across three who have said that's impossible to create.

Ready for A Digital Future
Operations are under real pressure to make their services digital - both quickly and at scale. They have to do this to meet customer expectations and take advantage of the revenue channels. Operations will succeed by understanding what matters - creating processes to get insight out of

the information/data. Once they have that insight, they can turn them into plans - through analytics and creativity. (Strategies)

The entire operation becomes involved at that point - cultures will change. Some will struggle and others thrive. Although this gets called innovation. In fact, it's really the fundamental rhythm and routine.

What was called agile will soon become 'composable' - an intelligent operation. Reinvention. Digital micro-capabilities composed as needed - made up of existing applications - using APIs, rather than building anything from scratch.

This is the battleground now. Perpetual Reinvention.

Cracking the Code Of Perpetual Reinvention

1. **Strategy** - Now there's a word that's been doing damage - and for decades. A whole lot of nonsense built up around it - much of it designed to defend innumerable charlatans. Their camouflage is a set of opaque methods and models built to over-complicate the aim of it. **Perpetual reinvention demands adaptive strategies and leadership mindsets that know how to bypass all this and every prior definition of strategy.**

2. **Interconnection** - One objective of the strategy is to optimize the achievement of objectives and minimize chances for competitors. In every respect strategy must define the best path between 'where we are' and 'where we want to be'. Too often the idea of strategy has been dislocated from the operation and therefore the system it is intended to guide. Now that degree of intelligently shifting connectivity has to be constant and continuous. **Perpetual reinvention demands wholesale interdependence across the system as it moves inexorability to an uncertain future. Everything talks to everything else.**

3. **Ownership** - I prefer to think of a strategy in terms of blueprints and an agenda built on principles developed by the team that needs to deliver it. I've witnessed what happens when a business outsources the task of 'making strategy'. It's like watching a highway traffic accident. Everyone backs away in horror and shock.
    Fixed plans with the impression that they aren't. Words like agile to propose that the system reconfigures itself in the way that we know it won't. The workforce bewildered and immune from successive and very familiar/similar attempts. **Perpetual reinvention is only possible through ownership - accountability, responsibility, and deep intimacy of what matters and how it works.**

4. **Creativity** - In its real form - the application of imagination and action - not a job title. Creativity applied to the situation as it appears - making the new connections as required - closing gaps between the flows required in the system - doing the constant correction.
    Dangerous though it is to believe that marketing is in some way disconnected from manufacturing, communication isn't distinct from the leadership of the business either. And so it goes for every function of every individual, so-called department, system and every business process. **Perpetual reinvention demands creativity from everyone - this is**

11

ingenuity at scale - the intersection of ideation, innovation and creativity - always on. Every connection and every interconnection shifting like sand - 24x7.
   Creative without strategy is called 'art.' Creative with strategy is called 'advertising.'" - Jef I. Richards

   To me creativity is the most important of all human capabilities - the capacity to solve. I believe it to be undeniable for any human - creativity is at the core of everything. We are all born with it, yet the majority of people I meet tell me they aren't creative. As a species, it is our salvation.

Part Two - The Blueprint and Agenda For Perpetual Reinvention
The Guide to Surviving the Voyage to The Near Future.
Tools, tips, and techniques that work.

ONE: Nirvana Through Realising
Seeing seems to be central to success in so many areas. Certainly, when thinking about the future the method has to be visual. Dreams are remembered visually. Visions are after all dreams.

But to see properly we have to cultivate the art of standing back and having clear objectiveness. It's really hard for us to do that because of our attachment to the bubbles we've created within which to feel safe.

Humans are time poor and information smothered. Visual conversations have become the primary route to understanding. Video, graphics - headlines (true or false)
   "A lot of [what it means to be smart] is the ability to zoom out like you're in a city and you could look at the whole thing from the 80th floor down. And while other people are trying to figure out how to get from point A to point B reading these stupid little maps, you could just see it in front of you. You can see the whole thing."   - Steve Jobs

TWO: Getting to Profound
Do you know when you have had a profound thought? It's that sublime moment of absolute clarity. An indescribable thrill courses through the body, whether a simple realisation or a deeply intellectual conclusion. A mess of inconclusive ideas with all their complications fall away and the obvious remains.

We remember the moment as time tends to stand still. Everything changes in the blink of an eye and new conditions present fresh opportunities.

Humans are engineered to make plans - it's our way of getting through everything.

THREE: Seeking Silver Linings
Hunting for food or making new business-critical decisions are the engine that drives the outcome we want. During the last six decades, we've had have relatively stable conditions -- mostly stable trade, no world wars, little civil unrest. Every business could develop 5-year business cases - plan for the long term - peacetime, abundance, normal economic and trading patterns, social norms and expected business systems and processes.

Enter technology and the increased pressure for shareholder return and hey, "Presto." It's a pretty severe environment. Technology is the poster child and every market category and system on Earth is now undergoing warp speed transformation.

But as creative beings, this turmoil should signal opportunity. In some cases it does - but we also feel the fear. The fear should drive our curiosity to seek the silver lining from these dynamics.

FOUR: Exploiting Extraordinary Times
In recent history, we happily invested our ingenuity and relative certainty to exploit opportunity - whenever it came along.

The majority of our time now is characterised by uncertainty, resulting in the complete inability to identify probability. Ever since we can remember, we've convinced ourselves to apply the knowledge we gained to make new plans. It worked before and it's likely it will work again. But we realise to our cost that such plans get defeated by fresh conditions.

We default to carrying on developing more fixed conditions - maybe new facilities and infrastructure - a new organisation design, all based on what worked and seriously limiting our future - simply creating a brand new set of challenges.

I've come to realise that knowledge is not our friend. What we know is valuable but increasingly often, not material. In these modern times, it's highly suspect that what you think you know is even true.

FIVE: The Problem With Knowing
This is tough for every single one of us. We should tackle every challenge by knowing nothing. This allows us to imagine better ideas that lay beyond our preconceptions. Preconceptions are killers and most often misconceptions. It has become life-threatening to use 'what we know' as the precursor to 'what we need to know' to be successful. Knowledge is a helpful tool but only valuable when there is a lack of attachment to it.

Leaders must favour the voyage of fresh experience to gain a critical grasp on what's actually going on now. This is likely a far better determinant of distinction and advantage in the context of a more intelligent outcome.
> *"You have to not have the same bag of experiences as everyone else does, or else you're gonna make the same connections and you won't be innovative. You might want to think about going to Paris and being a poet for a few years. Or you might want to go to a third-world country — I'd highly advise that. Falling in love with two people at once. Walt Disney took LSD, do you know that?" - Steve Jobs*

SIX: Destroying Conventions
I've spent my life challenging conventions - both when I was a client and then as an advisor and collaborator. Now, I believe that businesses have a critical responsibility to step up. Challenge everything, because of the absence of political or any other leadership.

Developing a friction-free mind - always rethinking and rethinking. It requires the ability to look at challenges from a number of dimensions and often all at the same time. We have to develop the opposable mind - not 'knowing' the right answer but iterating towards a better idea. Always learning something, challenging our own ideas and always open to fresh input from everywhere.

There's nothing wrong with experience. It's alright to have opinions - even really strong ones - provided we are persuadable when new information comes along. Experience gives us a solid foundation of historical fact and even well-reasoned ideas based on lessons.

But we need to be willing - open to letting go of held beliefs, to adopt other perspectives. Given dramatic changes, we must always question the validity of the underlying thinking.
This takes new levels of self-awareness, to confront our biases, blind spots and long-held conventions.

SEVEN: Living Amid Error
Believing we are unique in our struggle is commonplace and ridiculous. According to almost everyone I meet, we are struggling as no other generation has ever struggled - utter nonsense. There's just one area where I could be persuaded - the struggle to find time to think.

Imagine how much time you would get back if you weren't bringing others up to speed with what's going on in the world. There's a pandemic of startled people out there.

I'm more conscious than ever of conversations explaining stuff we've all lived with for decades. It's a simple Google search away. Whatever happened to curiosity? Why have we lost the ability to pay attention to the actual world we are inhabiting?

Why are so many people not giving a damn about anything other than how much of a struggle everything is? Take the leadership in your average business where this definitely isn't a new phenomenon. The struggle really isn't unique. Neither is the absence of creating the capacity to think.

Yes, we have fresh challenges - they're happening every second of every day.
We have to deal with them or sink.

EIGHT: Solving Challenges
Saying that we urgently need to think differently is a pathetic statement in the face of our challenges. I'm forever optimistic, but for the first time in my life haven't been able to put into words how I feel about why I am optimistic.

We must get back to creativity and leverage our aptitude for it. We think we think. But do we? We default to solving challenges with our canned experiences. Recently a network I belong to issued a challenge:
> **"If you had $20 million to spend on making a difference to climate change what would you spend it on?**

This answer makes my point. Creativity is out there, but are we groomed into mediocrity compared to this?

> *Orchestrate a decade-long conspiracy to enlist the world's most-read horoscope writers. Get them to nudge, cajole and threaten the necessary behavioural changes across all personality types. Run a global Gen Z-focused citizen science effort and spend the bulk of the money sending out components to build thermal cameras and drones. Put them in the hands of the world's TikTok generation and tell them the elders of the world are emitting their futures and they need to hold us accountable. Show them how to capture thermal energy of buildings, factories, and farmland and make whatever sort of media they want to make. Then if the swarm could find their way to integrate the images into the Ratatouille musical phenomenon, truly the second greatest human achievement this year after the vaccine, then we are on our way.*

A problem is not solved by one or even two solutions; there's always a third or fourth. If solutions don't work out straight away, we take the best and create a fresh version. And that's a perpetual strategy for reinvention.

NINE: Working Systems. Smooth Operations
The successful leader understands that the business he operates is a system - an ecology - Living and non-living organisms interoperating with one another within their physical environment.

Great leaders realise operation is everything - every facet and aspect - each bit and every piece working, operating as it should. The operation is the sum total - the culture, the systems and processes -- the way each dimension of it is organised.

An operation is its leadership; knowing what matters and how it needs to work, with everything altering all the time as the pressures on it shifts. At every level, this is an enormous challenge to get our heads around.

TEN: The Exquisite Ecology of The Intelligent Operation
Few operations are exquisite ecologies or intelligent operations right now. And to be fair this isn't a trivial objective, even for those with deep pockets. Traditional organisational and managerial language, mindset and practices must be dismantled for any intelligent operation to emerge.

The org charts, process maps and traditional people-incentive schemes struggle enormously with today's need for fluid knowledge flows. So much has changed by those of us looking and working on these challenges. Unfortunately for the average leaders - access to the skills that can make a difference is not mainstream.

ELEVEN: A Focus On Skills
There's no convenient language or label to describe the skills needed to build this kind of operation. The leadership skills needed are rare. They live at the intersection of technology, neuroscience, human/social and management science. It is alchemy and critical to steering the operation towards success.

Neuroscience (understanding the way markets and individuals think) and systems thinking (how operations need to think) must complement traditional solution design. It's not enough to focus on individual technologies, traditional organisational thinking - structures, people, and processes.

There will come a time (hopefully very soon) when we no longer have to describe an operation by way of an organisation chart.

Intelligent Operation - Perpetual Reinvention (IOPR)
This is the new definition of the operation - a blueprint that already heralds widespread adoption. Leaders and managers across the operation will reap the benefit - harvesting the full and collective cognitive power of their operational ecosystems. They will adapt, react and respond far more swiftly (effectively) to fast-changing conditions.

Operations will still have challenges - it is the nature of things. We know that the best ideas for any business are through diversity - the combinations of inputs, coming from many places, assembled by many hands who are often not in the same place.

Individual genius at the root of yesterday's scientific breakthrough has been overtaken by larger, more distributed multidisciplinary teams. They create, combine and access vast bodies of knowledge.

An Emerging Blueprint:

- A continuously optimising combination of internal and external systems, technologies and people - composability.
- Constantly identifying the key data within dynamical contexts - consequently surface what's insightful and valuable.
- Perpetually curating the intelligence - reporting continuously what happened, what is happening - and what is likely to happen
- Arrange actions and collaborations as automation (AI/ML) fulfils the computational heavy lifting needed.
- Operations, therefore, are intelligent networks - and ecology. And at scale made of large numbers of people and machines.
- The intelligent operation facilitates the emergence of collective intelligence.
- No matter how smart or expert a specific system or individual is there's a compound (accretive) intelligence effect.
- The cumulative impact is increased the more effective interplay between them and the scale achieved.
- In the near future, many of these challenges will self-heal.
- Problem-solving work mostly gets done outside of formal operational flows.
- They will generate and execute stronger and stronger ideas that learn.

TWELVE: Connective Thinking at The Core of Intelligence
A decade ago, intelligence was far less connected than it is today. Even though the obsession for smartness was comparable then to how we feel about it today. And in another few short years, it will have changed again - exponentially.

The collective response in the first days of COVID-19 tells the story of how much has changed -- thousands of scientific papers, the result of global scientific collaboration and largely impervious to political bickering.

The new operation is deeply interdependent - both internally and externally. This interdependence is increasingly smart and as a result, the operation becomes increasingly smart. Smart means greater fluidity, increased adaptability, and accelerated responsiveness. Many people still call this Agile.

More and more investment focus is applied to improving the flow of intelligence. We are calling these things 'platforms' but really this is just intelligent operation. This deeply intimate attention to the fine-tuning is a considerable effort. Each act of fine-tuning is at a granular level of detail. Small in some senses but added up - massively impactful at scale.

Take Google. Google's strength comes directly from the knowledge people create, and the choices they make when they browse. Google's business model wouldn't exist without leveraging the intelligence of knowledge producers, curators, and users. This is about the use of the cognitive power of billions of individuals becoming collective intelligence. It emerges from the interoperation of large networks composed according to the query.

Every business can think the same - it must engage with the ecosystems of intelligence that exist within and surrounds it. It means identifying the right people, the generators of knowledge - the systems and processes needed and the gaps that may exist.

THIRTEEN: The Tyranny of Key Words
We must work hard with people to appreciate their terminology. I personally ask as many questions as I can to be certain I've understood them - hopefully without irritating them. I do it from bitter experience.

People leave critical meetings with keywords whistling around their brains. They're as dissimilar in meaning as possible from their colleagues. Imagine the risk of that when they go away to do the work. It's feasible that everyone leaving a meeting has a wildly differing definition of each goal or action. In many cases, this is the norm.

The pandemic of zero bandwidth means we've little time to check in what others mean when such words are used. This is extremely dangerous because we use these words to define important constructs in plans being built to make progress. A single word can take on massive importance. It then becomes shorthand for important concepts -- Culture, Agile, Innovation, Mindset, Pervasive, Digital, Transformation.

Critical words with flexible meaning. This is a major challenge to newcomers or occasional visitors to complex programs. Individuals with a cursory glance of a document or presentation use the prior experience of those words and that's that.

And that's not all. The meaning of these words continues to change as circumstances dictate and without anyone involved realising it - chaos ensues. The meaning of words is reinvented by use and the creeping scope of their continued application.

FOURTEEN: Knowing What Works - Then Do That.
Because it didn't exist, we developed an approach to getting leaders to shift mindset towards the exquisite operation. It's not easy -- it takes patience and trust. Leaders tend to lack access to objectivity and critical thinking. As a result, they spend millions of dollars solving the wrong problems really well.

By bringing objectivity and visual techniques to critical and always complex conversations, strategies are considerably improved. Businesses have bigger challenges now - forecasting the future and creating plans while everything around them changes. Literally, everything is changing exponentially - (politics, technologies, systems). The effects and opportunities are cumulative and well outside the domains of the current business models.

Leaders are often ill-equipped to figure out and then leverage the mounting dynamics. What needs to change is the mindset above everything else - or the kind of change we desperately need will not stick. Solutions are only possible through trust - creating safe spaces and stimulating better conversations. Attention spans and capacities are short, so visualising complex concepts are essential to developing the path to better futures.

Simple — Not
After a few decades stumbling around the topic, some things became clear:

1. You have to change the way business thinks if you want to change how it works.
2. If businesses change how they work, they can change how their audiences think.
3. If audiences think differently, they can be shown more valuable and sustainable ways to consume and we can create more lasting change.

Businesses have the chance to change the world. That's bloody good news because it's obvious governments won't. And this is disgraceful because they could. They have no will. They are not paid to.

I've spent a lifetime challenging convention. First, when I was a client and now as an advisor and collaborator. I believe businesses have a critical responsibility to step up. It's going to take a step-change in leadership, which means it either won't happen or at least it won't happen quickly. Unless we become a 'we'.

FIFTEEN: Remedy the Devil Of Semantics
In my experience creativity has been undervalued for a long time. When compared to finance or management in general it's not good to be creative - that signals risk and perhaps a degree of frippery.

The word creativity has been kidnapped.., sadly carried out by so-called creative industries. Not to demean the countless highly creative people. As a job-title, creativity runs the risk that being

creative is best left to those labelled that way. Creative people are everywhere but creativity isn't valued anywhere enough.

Over generations, these conventions have resulted in a societal context - conditions within which we now exist. This is a layering of conditions that have crept up on us over decades and we now find impervious to any dismantling.

SIXTEEN: Exploit the Data Divide.
We customers are rapidly evolving our expectations and businesses are looking to keep up. Their challenge is to find quicker ways to figure us out. They are looking at all the data they have on us and find the insights. Turning the data into the insight is all it takes.

This is what will separate a business from its competitors. The quicker and sharper they are at analysing and then acting on it will be the accelerated and smart path to growth. The digital-ready business - on its way.

SEVENTEEN: Develop A 'Composable' Enterprise.
Jargon alert. But worth it.
Iven that we all like things that work perfectly for us (alone), because we are all individuals, then this one is a no brainer. What the technologists/consultants call 'hyper-specialization' has opened a pandora's box of applications - a menu of ingredients. This has allowed leading organizations to bring about the needed capabilities digitally. Now they can effectively be 'composed' (assembled) from pre-existing applications (using APIs), rather than being built from scratch every time.

It's the same with the services to customers - (now rebranded as 'Microservices'), where businesses can build new/specific customer experiences almost on the fly.

EIGHTEEN: The Democratization of Innovation
We are already in a world where everybody is able to come up with ideas. We inform the intelligent operation of our likes and dislikes in the data that we send back to it. Imagine if we trust the front line more - we would create more meaningful customer experiences - and quicker. The business has to invest in active training, supporting and motivating them. A digital-ready culture is more than this, but not something to be afraid of.

To be concluded..