

Chapter 8

#SocialIT

ABSTRACT

Chapter 8 examines the #SocialIT layer of the model and concludes that we are in a period of seismic transformations where technology underpins the future. We must tap into the shifting technological landscape to actively use its tools and platforms in the development of future programs, projects, and activities. We must realize that all targets are shifting, and the future will overtake anything we plan based on the present.

We are clearly living in a period of huge transformation – technological, social and economic, and while we can't know exactly what the future holds – that is we can't predict the future, neither can we assume that today's choices and assumptions will be relevant tomorrow. – Marina Gorbis, Institute for the Future

The current transformational circumstances are summarized by Horton and Dowling (2018): “the pace of technological change is accelerating. In less than 12 months since we published the last Digital Disruption Index, we have witnessed significant shifts in investment in new technologies, with the likes of artificial intelligence, augmented and virtual reality, and blockchain gathering momentum.” An example of that rapid pace from the report is that from 2017 to 2018, the percentage of organizations that had invested in artificial intelligence rose from 22% to 41%.

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Castells' (1996, 1997, 1998) *Information Age* trilogy was an early herald of the shift toward a world built on technology and interconnections. He argues that technology can “unleash the power of the mind” and hence dramatically increase individuals' productivity. He examines the social dynamics of production, power and experience, how they inter-relate, and the dynamic of the self and networks in a continually changing culture. This leads to the argument that “The Information Age, The Age of Consumption, and The Network Society are all perspectives attempting to describing modern life as known in the present and to depict the future of society. As Castells suggests, contemporary society may be described as ‘replacing the antiquated metaphor of the machine with that of the network’” (Aragon, 2013).

That conclusion may be overstated: the network and the other technologies we depend upon are built on machines and rely on their power and precision. But we cannot doubt the transformative power of those technologies.

The imminence and impact of this global social transformation is summarized in this statement by one of us (Dr Jane Thomason): “For the first time in human history, we have the technological tools that will enable us to connect the bottom billion unbanked to the global economy, to provide digital identity to stateless people, to make micro grid solar power ubiquitous and through smart contracts, to direct benefits to women and girls” (Decade of Women, 2018).

THE WINDS OF CHANGE

The Institute for the Future (www.iftf.org) identifies six drivers most likely to shape the future workforce (Tandon, Pritchard, Savelieva, Smith & Vogt, 2012):

- Longer life spans
- A rise in smart devices and systems
- Advances in computational systems such as sensors and processing power
- New multimedia technology
- The continuing evolution of social media
- A globally connected world.

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