

Disruption in the workplace and the importance of corporate citizenship

By [Dr Graeme Codrington](#)

10 Sep 2018

We are only 16 months away from the 2020s. We are already in the future. 'Back to the Future' movies of our youth depicted time travel to the future in the year 2015. That is already history and the future is racing towards us at a rapidly increasing speed.



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History is a certainty, while the future is uncertain. The past 10 to 12 years have been a time of remarkable change. On reflecting the years between 2006 and 2017, there were no smart phones in 2006; the first were produced by Apple in 2007. Who would have thought we would be carrying a super-computer in our pockets in 2018? Apple is now worth more than the total GDP of Indonesia!

GPS devices in 2008 were bulky instruments attached to car windscreens, yet today they are free on our phones. There was no online shopping - Amazon was only selling books; Facebook began in September 2006. Billion dollar companies like Uber and AirBnB did not exist then. Tesla launched its first sports car in 2008 and first sedan a little later, but it is currently the most popular car in the USA.



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Today's grade 0s are the grade 12s of 2030. What sort of world do we want to create for them? As we consider the 2030s, we cannot begin to envisage the amount of change we will face. The past 12 years were dramatic, but were just the start of the technical revolution. The next 12 years promise artificial intelligence, real-time translation, 3D printing, healthcare revolutions, the possibility of having a super computer in the palm of your hand, or the promise of having everyone on the planet interconnected. We will see great good as well as great bad come from it.

Roy Amara, late president of the Institute for the Future said, "We tend to overestimate the effect of a technology in the short run and underestimate the effect in the long run." It is important to upgrade, to stay abreast of technology. The potential for the 2020s is vast. It is up to us to shape the next decade, but if we spend time trying to keep up, we will be battered and bruised by the end. Yet, if we make the effort to understand the potential coming our way, we can be a part of shaping it. The next decade could and should be one of the most remarkable in human history. Each of us can play a part. The following five keys or skills will help to unlock the greatness of the 2020s.

Switch on your radar

We must be more aware of the future. Technologies making a massive impact in the present time are driverless cars, medical innovations, personalised medicine, genetic engineering, robotics, real-time translation, 3D printing, automation, artificial intelligence, distributed clean energy, drones, DNA sequencing and virtual reality. The list is endless and none are so new that we haven't heard of them, yet few present today have actually experienced them.

They are becoming commonplace in our world. Normal, everyday things we will use at work and home. They will change your life fundamentally. They will change what clients require, who the competition is and how you live your life. It is your choice whether to wait for them to become commonplace and be the last to get them or put your radar on. Read a science magazine regularly, watch technology information clips on YouTube, watch a TED talk once a week. Get your family involved by suggesting they bring an item of new information to the table once a month. Challenge your company teams to each bring two-minute feedback on some future innovation to the next meeting. Encourage family, friends and staff to think to the future and be actively switched on to future innovations.

Build a culture of experimentation

Encourage a culture of experimentation, both in business and at home. Most companies say innovation is a key objective, but it cannot happen on command. It requires a climate conducive to growing innovative thought. A company must be willing to put time, resources and budget into trying something new and different. But don't fear failure. Most innovative companies have more failures than successes, but we learn from failures in order to achieve success.

Some executives fear allowing staff to experiment in case they burn the place down. Start with small things that will not cause a crisis if they don't work. There are processes to deal with big things; these should remain. However, small irritations which may be changed for the better will add up to a big business benefit when they work. Does your company do meetings brilliantly or is there room to improve? Are there problems with parking, the cafeteria, working hours?

Develop a willingness to experiment, but be prepared to fail. Try something a few times and if it doesn't work, then try something else. Don't get into a habit of failure, nor be afraid if you don't have all the right answers. Richard Feynman, Nobel prize-winner, philosopher and scientist said, "I would rather have questions that can't be answered than answers that can't be questioned."



Embrace disruption

Facing so many technical advances, many organisations merely digitise their current systems without disrupting or modernising them. Applying for a bank loan, one is told, is easy to do online. The first form that pops onto your screen will ask your name, address, bank details etc., yet you have probably banked with them for years! It is simple to have the form pre-populated when it is opened. Once the form is submitted you are informed you will be contacted within three days, yet the application took a couple of minutes and went directly to their system. Approval should have been almost instantaneous. We need new ways of working, not old ways digitised.

Make a meaningful contribution

To choose a career, you used to start by deciding what you were good at and what people would pay you to do. Consider the Japanese concept of *ikigai* which is centred around living a fulfilled and meaningful life. Today we must ask the questions: 'Does the world need it?', 'Can I be paid for doing it?', 'What am I good at?', and 'What do I love?'. Place these questions in four intersecting circles and where each pair intersects, label the spaces Passion, Mission, Profession and Vocation. The middle point where all four intersect gives *ikigai*

Up-skill for the new decade

The new decade will require a whole new set of skills from us. When robots do most of the work in the world, what will be left for us to do? The good news is they cannot do everything! Robots do not care about meaning; they work to processes, procedures and systems. They can handle complicated problems which are solved by means of a formula, but they cannot handle complex problems or meaningful work, for robots do not experience emotions. Work involving change, creativity, connecting with other human beings and emotions are beyond them.

For example the land issue; there is no simple solution as it involves people, emotions, history and many other factors. We must develop those skills that computers cannot solve, because those are what the world will need in the future.

These five keys to surviving the future are only of use if you act on them.

This speech was delivered by Dr Graeme Codrington, an author, researcher and international director of Tomorrow Today, and expert on the future of work, at the [In Good Company 2018 Conference](#) on 21 August 2018.

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