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It's my great pleasure to be here today with two very good friends and colleagues, fellow futurists. Glen Hiemstra, a long-time friend and also a long-time futurist, a very long time, owning the URL Futurist.com. And Anton Musgrave from Cape Town, South Africa. And he's also a fellow team member of mine. So we have gathered here today to talk about the meaning of futurism and what does it mean to be a futurist based on what's happening today and how is our job changing? And in general, what does it mean to be a futurist and what does it entail? So welcome, everybody.

And I would suggest that we dive right into the first topic. I would like to hear from you, I'm going to do the same thing. I'd like to hear from you how do you define your job? And how has it changed, possibly, in the last decades or so, and how do you think it will change going forward?

Well, let me take a stab at that. And I'll just do part of it, and then we'll come back to the other parts of the question. I always define my job as trying to understand the relationship of the future, the present, and the past. How the future influences the present, how the past did that, and then how we're doing things in the present that influence the future. I do that by asking three questions about the future, that I try to work with organisations to wrestle with, or in some senses to play with. And those are not mysterious, they are what is probable in the future, what is possible in the future, and what is your preferred future? And then depending on what the assignment might be, we might spend more or less time on one of those questions. So that's in a nutshell, how I'd define being a futurist.

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And how has that changed since this crisis came about? Because everybody now wants to know what the future is. You're still using the same approach, or is it more short-fused?

It is temporarily more short-fused. I think we're in this crisis moment, and it's actually quite challenging, I think, to think about the long-term future because the uncertainties are so high around the virus. You can draw scenarios that, in one scenario, you get a vaccine and two years from now, the whole thing is behind us. And in another scenario you don't have that, and then you have very, very different futures.

And so actually, I've advised my ongoing clients to not make long-term decisions right now, to just try to preserve their assets and their employees, to keep looking at scenarios and to be thinking about their preferred future beyond this. But I'm not actually trying to advise them to make long-term, permanent decisions during this crisis.

Yes. Anton, how do you think about your job today and tomorrow?

It's certainly fascinating right now. And it has changed, Gerd, so we'll get back to that piece. But for me, it's always been about getting a team of leaders to think beyond the obvious and to think beyond their current, short-term business plan. If you look at the demands of the capital markets, leaders are short-term focused. It's quarterly results, it's interim interviews, it's one-year plans. And so that engrosses the attention span and the intellectual headspace of most executives.

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So I see the job, as a futurist, as getting them, helping them, provoking them to think just

beyond their horizon of comfort, if you like. And to ask the questions what happens after the two or three-step changes? What's coming over the horizon? And yes, I agree with Glen, as to try and understand the possible outcomes which may arise. It's absolutely not about predicting the future, that should be avoided at all cost. But it's to get their minds to open up to possibilities outside the short-term thinking, and outside the tramlines short-term, tactical business planning. And to get them excited about that, to awaken their memories of possible exciting futures and to evoke in them an ambition to at least think about. And then obviously, with our business advise role, to choose a different future that's aspirational, exciting, will require lots of different things to be done, things they wouldn't have done. So perhaps for me, the ultimate test is will they, in working with a futurist, take different business decisions?

Interesting. And my approach is very similar, and it has changed a lot in the last couple of years. But the concept of predicting the future is always being presented to me as desirable by the clients, because clients are saying, we want to know what's happening, which stock should we buy, and so on and so on, and what's going to happen, what will happen? And now the last couple of years, I've been able to morph that over into saying, you know what? The future is basically... Of course, it's unknown and it's unpredictable. But also, basically in ten years, we'll be pretty much capable of anything we want to do because technology is exponentially enabling us.

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So the key question is no longer what is possible, but what do we want? So I've shifted a lot in the last few years, exponential change and all that, by saying, basically, the future is not about saying what can we do and what will happen, but what do we want to do? So as you were saying, Glen, the preferred future.

And the other thing is that in my work, I really try to take more of a therapist role. I sometimes jokingly call myself the future therapist, because really what I do is I tell them what they already know. They already are aware of all of these things, but they haven't realised what it means. It's just like when you go to therapy with your wife or so and you know this issue exists but, it's always been uncomfortable. And now, you're head-on into it and you could lose or win.

So that brings me to my next question, and we should have a back-and-forth on this. The next question is, the enormous pressure you are getting, and that I'm getting, from clients to give them precise instructions for the future, and to tell them what's going to happen, and to give them recipe. Again, it's like when you go to a therapist, a therapist doesn't say, your wife is not happening. You should move on. He doesn't say that. He waits for you to discover that or not. But the clients come to me and say, now, what's going to happen and where should we put our money? So I'm sure you've seen that situation. What's your response?

I've seen that situation many times. But apropos to what you were just saying earlier, one of the ways I've thought of myself, and I've often said this to groups that I'm working with, I'm here as your excuse to talk about the things that you would like to talk about but don't really ever have permission to do so. Which is, Gerd, as you said, people know a lot more about the future than they give themselves credit for. And so I don't surprise them nearly as much as you might think. And you don't surprise them as much as... They think, oh, they're going to say something I've never heard before.

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And occasionally that happens, but mostly, they know. But they're trapped in systems in which

they're forced to look at the next year or the next two years or the next six months, and they don't get this chance to think longer-term. So I may not have presented myself as the therapist, but as the excuse to have the conversation that you've always wanted to have.

I think it's interesting when you talk about this position. I can't tell you how many times I've been hired by people who want to use me as a shield to get to the really important questions. So if they were to bring those important questions, they would be fired or disregarded or hated ubiquitously by everybody, so they bring me and they say, he's probably going to say the same thing. And this is what I mean with the therapist role. A therapist can say, your wife is really rejecting you or so. But it's hard for the wife to say that. So it's that feeling. I'm sure, Anton, you had the same experience.

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Absolutely. And it's one of the things I tell a client right up front, is that I promise never to tell you what to do. And that rocks them a little bit. And the next thing, similar to you, Glen, I say to them, if I tell you something you don't know, you should be, really, way more scared than you thought. But what I will help you do is think about those things that you know, differently.

One of my favourite questions is to ask a team of leaders to talk to each other about their own children. Tell me one thing that really scares or excites you about your own kids. And there's this amazing, animated conversation about their children. It's fantastic. And they talk about all sorts of things. And then when they're done, I say, now, what does that mean for your business? And there's this stony silence in the room because they realise, they've been looking at the future over every dinner table, but never understanding what it means in relation to their business. And there's this, wow, I never thought of it like that.

And to me, that's a test of a good futurist. If someone talks about something or thinks about something in a way they've never thought of before, mission accomplished. And so for me, Gerd, if clients want me to give them the paint-by-numbers answers, I'm the wrong guy. Go and hire a consultant that's got an army of 28-year-old MBAs and they'll tell you a whole bunch of stuff. The fact is, you're never going to execute the difficult stuff with passion anyway, so I don't know why you want that, but...

Yes. And I think the other difficult part that I encounter a lot, and that's also changed since the COVID crisis, is that the American view and the Anglo world view of futurism is one thing. And then there's a European view, or the German view which is mostly, this is suspect. This is like here's a saucer or something like that.

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The German Chancellor, I think, Helmut Schmidt, or was it Schröder before that, he said 20 years ago, if you have visions, you should go see a doctor. And this was the Chancellor of Germany. And you can't say that about Merkel, she has lots of visions. But this is really a difficult part. And this is why I think that's one of the real difficulties for doing this job. You're always somewhere between the sorcerer and the magic wand guy and then the other guy who's making a mess out of things.

Well, it's one of the issues between the whole concept of prediction and preferred futures. Well, on the prediction side, people do tend to think that the future can be predicted and that if we just study it enough, it will become very obvious what we should do. And that's a fallacy that I try to break the organisations that I work with of. Because, in fact, if you start looking at future trends and all the alternatives that are out there, all the things that could happen, it

actually becomes more confusing instead of more clear. And that's a challenge that people in the organisations have to get through.

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But on the preferred side, people get suspicious of that. Particularly I've had, when I've worked with European clients, they're suspicious of that because there are alternatives, of course, in terms of preferences. The President of the United States might have one preferred future, but somebody else might have a different preferred future. And just because it's somebody's preference doesn't mean that it's good. And so sorting through what actually is a truly preferable future for most of society is actually a big challenge.

But this is part of the intuition. To me, I always say this is really not a science. At least it's not for me, I'm not a scientist. But for me, futurism is a bit of an art, because we have to choose and we have to match and we have to use our intuition. We can't just measure. I think there were other futurists that are more measurable, but everybody's different. And this is one of the key things. In the end, you will not get a conclusive answer. No matter how much you study and how many focus groups you run, you're still going to have to sit down and say, I think it's this.

Gerd, I absolutely agree with you. I think the point, also, to understand is there's no one right answer. So for business A, you might choose to do something different, because for you and your team and your skills and your customers, that's preferred. And for the next business that does exactly the same thing, the future may hold an entirely different preferred future.

So it's really to distil the options out. There are many, many options, many, many choices. And how do you take a team on a journey, a process to distil out what that means for them? And then help them choose what will inspire them, what will unlock their full potential and their ambition, and frame that in a coherent plan and get them excited about that? But to do it from a future perspective. So imagine this outcome five years from now, seven years from now, whatever the timeline really is, and get excited about that. And then teams of people do amazing things when they're inspired by what the destination looks like. It's like taking your kids on a holiday. You don't bundle them into the car or the aeroplane and say, I'm not sure where we're going, but be excited.

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So let's talk about one key question that I have been looking at the last six months. It seems like the COVID crisis has destroyed any wider-scale future thinking, because everything you say now, people will say, well, what does it mean now? And what is changing now? And my entire catalogue of topics and questions is now being put in context with the COVID crisis. And it seems like all people want to know is, how does the COVID crisis impact this? So have you noticed this phenomena where people are saying, never mind the future, tell us about post-corona?

I think for me, what I'm trying to do right now is actually not talk about futurism or the future through a COVID lens. We're all in the middle of it and everyone's coping with it. And I agree with Glen, it's about cashflow and your people and your customers. But really, to get the team to think. COVID will end at some point. It might be 12 months, it might be 18 months. And the future that I certainly work with is longer-term than that.

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And the term differs. It differs per industry, almost. And the term, for me, is what is that timeframe in which you are uncertain of everything? And that's the context in which you need to have this future conversation. And that's clearly post-COVID. So if you want a COVID conversation, to me, that's tactical, it's survival, but it's not what futurism or being a futurist is all about.

Yes, I've seen the same thing. People, of course, are... And I've been here stuck in the United States, where the COVID crisis is quite extreme, and so it's really top-of-mind for everybody. Everybody's just trying to survive it and cope. And yet, there's lots of conversation about what does it mean for the very long-term?

There's lots of people making claims that it means that either various things have changed forever because of the COVID crisis. And I count myself something of a sceptic of almost any claim that something is never going to be the same because of this crisis. I went back and I read a journal of the Plague Year, the last time the plague came through London. Well, one of the times it came through in 1665, and it killed 20% of the population. And two, three years later, things had gotten back to normal. So people are amazingly resilient.

So if we get through this, that is, if there's vaccines and in fact that this particular virus issue is behind us, there would be a few things that have changed quite significantly because of this and will not go back to the way they were, that's for sure. But it's not so easy to say what those are. And so I agree with Anton that to get an organisation to look beyond this, to just say...

And in fact, I was just proposing this with an organisation a couple of weeks ago, that the project we should do would be to look at the future ten years from now in this particular organisation's case, and just assume that the whole virus thing is behind us, as though it almost didn't happen. Of course, it had some impacts on various things, but let's take a look at the future as though that that's not the most significant factor. In fact, not a factor at all. And I think that's quite powerful. My work, by the way, I've tended to push organisations to look much further ahead than they typically do. They resist that some, but ten years, 15 years, 20 years, occasionally even longer than that.

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I think also to get back to the COVID issue, Glen. It's not COVID on its own that's going to change things. It's the combinatorial effect of a growing inequality in the world, rampant capitalism, and all of the obvious ills that we've seen in recent years. Executive remuneration, some of the behaviours of some very large companies in the world, shifts in society, the generational stuff. And these things combine to create different futures out there. And that's the rich conversation. So it needs to go way beyond this two-year pandemic.

And of course, the other thing that I talk about is there will be COVID-20 and COVID-21, and then there'll be an environmental event of equal proportion. So talk about these things. Don't just talk about one thing that we happen to be living in right now.

Yes. To me, the whole discussion about COVID has been a really interesting learning journey. I've looked at this in different ways and I've published a bunch of things about the post-corona future, and now I'm changing it to the with-corona future.

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Yes, yes.

Because both are maybe the same thing. So basically, I've used my intuition by saying, okay, what's going to happen? And one thing I said in my 12 bullets is that, for example, the populists, and the people who are utterly useless in running countries, will be sunk as a part of this experience. And this is really what's happening in the US right now. This is the end of the administration no matter how we look at it, no matter whether you like Trump or not.

So I think there's a couple things that are really... When you talk to a 25-year-old person today or talk to my son who's 30. For him, this COVID crisis has as big of a cutting effect in his life, because it's a young life, as World War II in many ways. And for us, it's like, okay, that's one of the bumps. But this is not Fukushima, this is not September 11th, this is not the 2007 financial crisis. It's a fundamental reset, I think, for so many neighbouring facts that changes the narrative, the way that we look at the world. And this is why, I think, that whatever normal is, we don't really know what normal is. There is no such thing. Everybody lives in a different normal. It's the context that's changing.

And I think we're going to look back at this time, we're going to say, wow, we went through some really amazing changes, like the government is telling us what to do now. And in many countries, the government is paying us. We have a basic income. Well, of course, not in America or in South Africa. Well, yes, America's also paying a lot of people just to stick around.

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So this is why I think the COVID thing, my position has changed completely, because here in Europe, people are saying, well, don't tell us about digital ethics. Don't tell us about the future of artificial general intelligence. All of that stuff is off the table. We've got more important things to do. And that is European solidarity, the start-up package, the politics around this, the geopolitics, what's going to happen to China. And the entire questions have shifted for me. That's a challenge.

I think that's a really great moment for Europe. So what's Europe's preferred future? And the things that shape that are including new forms of manufacturing, artificial intelligence. And COVID, absolutely, is one of those inputs into shaping the context in which Europe chooses its preferred 2050 future. I wish more countries, mine included, would have that conversation. What is our ideal country ten, 20 years from now?

Well, what's interesting to see is that whatever was bad before has gotten worse, that's certainly true for South Africa. And whatever has been good before, in many cases, has gotten better.

Sure, absolutely. Absolutely. We've seen industries transform more digitally in the last four months, than in the last five years.

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Yes. Satya Nadella from Microsoft said the other day, he said, there's been more digital transformation in the last three months than the previous three years. And it's so true. I think that's a good thing even though, yes, it can be disconcerting for people. So this is one of the key challenges, I think. Putting all this together in a new context and re-evaluating.

And this is in fact what I've been thinking about, if the term futurist is still a good term, because it implies, you're not here, you're there. And it's also such a discovered view in different countries, how people look at futurism. It's normal in the US or in Anglo world, and here it's kind of weird. It's like, well, you know the future. So that's one of those constantly recurring

challenges, I think.

One of my least favourite ways of being introduced is as a futurologist, because really sounds very... That's real crystal ball stuff. But I agree with you, Gerd. I think what COVID has done for us, of course, is everyone with an opinion and a microphone and a modem is suddenly a futurist. So perhaps the word needs to become a future strategist or some such thing. But to me, it's all about understanding these waves of change, and then guiding a business to have a real business conversation about choices and outcomes.

Well, I think when you look at really successful people from the digital era, from the digital economy in the last 20 years, you can tell that all of those people are very heavily-steeped in technology. And they look at data, and they do all these things. But in the end, it's always about the art of creating. Like Steve Jobs said, Apple is about technology and art.

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Absolutely, absolutely.

And it's not about building a magic box. And then Jeff Bezos said the other day, you know what? I look at all this data and everybody has to show me data. In the end, I use my intuition and imagination and I go for that, right? And I think this is also a key message for organisations. You cannot sit down and take out a map and execute on the map and then you're safe in the future.

Absolutely, no.

Especially not now.

If you look at some of the businesses that I've experienced that have made an incredible digital transition in the last four months, every single one of them has designed the human experience, at every touchpoint, through a human lens. Sure, they've built the interfaces and the APIs and the payment platforms and all of that, as have many the big retailers. But the big retailers have done the logical, sequential thing, planning thing, and the others have actually sat down and designed the human experience. And they've done so with incredible impact.

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When someone's thought through the pre-order, the order, the delivery, and the post-order experience and created moments around that, all it's taken is actually, it's not about technology, it's about understanding human beings and emotions and feelings and experiences. And for me, that's been a real insight. Everyone's got the balance sheet and the IT department. That's not what it's about.

But it seems like that's a little bit connected with our age. It's that we have this background. Yes, when you talk to a 25-year-old futurist, and I know I've been talking to quite a few of them lately, I don't get that impression that it's entirely steeped in the same background. It's very technological-driven. It's very driven by what is possible, rather than what is desirable? And these approaches really bore me a lot, when you're saying this is possible rather than what is desirable.

Well, it's just one of a process. What's possible is just the first step. So what?, is the big debate.

Yes, let me ask this question to both of you. I think it's a key question. When you look at our icons, Alvin Toffler, Marshall McLuhan, Arthur C. Clarke, when you look at all those people,

how are we different and how is the future going to be different for people? Will we ever have people again like Toffler or was this just a... Marshall McLuhan was a very iconic figure and he didn't really use the term futurist very much, I don't think. But we look at him like this today, and is it going to be like that in five years? Are we going to have people like that? Or was it just the sign on the times?

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That's a really good question. There are a couple of people who are in the futurist field, academically, who compare to that. I think you know them. Sohail Inayatullah from Australia is the primary one that comes to mind, who's a philosopher of the future, as all three of the names that you mentioned.

One of my observations, and I don't know that this is really fair, but that the academic community and future studies, which has actually grown around the world in the last couple of decades, has made an effort to change the terminology to their term of art, which is strategic foresight rather than futurism. And made an effort to make the field a little bit more, and again, this may not be quite a fair term, more technocratic, more tool-driven. Here are some really good tools for analysing and assessing the future. And as the field academically goes that direction, then I think it loses some of the larger historical, philosophical perspective that a Toffler or a Marshall McLuhan would bring. And so we may not see those kind of people associated with futurism again anytime soon.

We're in this strange period of such major historical shifts that are coming closer together in time, that is, they happen faster and faster, that I think it would be wonderful if another Alvin Toffler would appear to help make sense of what it all means. Because just doing the technocratic, strategic foresight thing is useful. It's more useful than not looking at the future at all, but I don't think it necessarily develops that depth of understanding that those people brought to the field.

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The power of what Toffler and Arthur C. Clarke... And I really just remember one of my favourite expressions of his is, unless your view of the future is thoroughly unbelievable, you have no chance of being correct. Which is amazing. But he said that in an era where there's always been volatility and uncertainty and change, but it happened within a relatively narrow band of variability, if you like. And so to come out with these big, powerful, bold insights and statements was shocking, it was scary, and it served a purpose. And maybe that's where the term futurist was even valuable.

Today, of course, you don't need to shock execs all that much. They get the message that this future is going to be very different, very soon, in very many ways. And so the role, Gerd, is as you said, it's maybe as a psychologist almost. Just to get them have their conversations they should be having, but, because of the nature of business today, they're not having. But it's not new or shocking anymore.

Yes, I see people like Toffler or Buckminster Fuller or others more like polymath, going back to Leonardo Di Vinci. And I strive to go in that direction, even though that's not something you can probably get, it's something that you are, I suppose. But for example, I try in my work to create momentable moments. And I make a conscious effort, because I know that's really important for the audience. When I say, for example, you will not find happiness on the screen or in the cloud, I think it could be something that Marshall McLuhan would have said.



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For example, he said, we can always extend ourselves in media. But when we extend ourselves, we also amputate ourselves. And those very simple sentences are very powerful, because they bring down the moment into something precise. And I think this is something I've learnt from those people I've read and watched and looked at, as opposed to as you say, Glen, the technocritical, theoretical view of the world. I think it's all about the story. But then again, that's my approach to doing this job. Yes, so.

No, I hear you. Give yourself credit. You're quite good at that, at creating those moments and those phrases, similar to what McLuhan and others did. One other thing that's interesting to think about, those people from that era. I was a very young person when they became the spokespersons. I was a high school student or a college student. But it came from an era of infinite possibilities. Come out of World War II, great technological progress, a lot of economic progress in the world, at least the parts of the world that they were in. And when they looked at the future, I think they tended to see more a sense of unlimited possibilities than, say, a young person today might or even that we might.

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We see more limits. And we have to struggle with those limits, I think, and ask ourselves, can we get beyond those limits? Whether they're environmental or economic or class-based or whatever they might be. And that could be why we're not seeing a similar kind of literature come out right now. Because they just assumed that virtually anything was possible, that we could do whatever we wanted to do. At some base level, I still believe that. But there are a lot of people who don't. And I think we struggle with it on two poles between the future is more limited than we want it to be or the future is unlimited. Yes, I think that's a challenge.

Yes, the way I look at this is basically saying that those people that we mentioned, that we listed earlier, they pointed towards a future where it's basically, the sky's the limit, anything is possible. Now it turns out today, that's actually true. It was hard to imagine in the 60s or 70s or the 80s. I talked about music in the cloud in 1995 and people were saying, this is madness. It's going to destroy everything, and so on. And that's what we have now. So we're actually at the point where we don't have to worry about that anymore, if it's possible, because we can probably say pretty much anything is possible. Can you upload your brain to the internet? Well, not today, really but in ten years, 20 years, possible. So the real question for me is, what is good for us humans and what is the right thing to do?

And this tags onto my next question. Politics, ethics, social context. It seems like I'm in that position today where everything that I do somehow touches on politics or on policy, at least, or on social governance and social contracts. Because for example, when you talk about COVID and what is happening, you can see that the countries that have a large amount of inequality, again, South Africa, Chile, the US, the UK, and of course Brazil. They are the worst off. There's a direct relationship between inequality and the impact of COVID. And as soon as you talk about inequality, you're talking about politics. Everything is so intertwined with politics now, so I find that to be quite a challenge. When you're speaking to people about what is the right thing to do, you're essentially talking about politics. So have you had similar experiences?

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I think from our perspective, Gerd, you're right. We're at the forefront of COVID. We're, I think, the fifth most impacted country at the moment. And certainly socially, the consequences are

absolutely dramatic. So bad that I imagine that by middle of next year, we could have more than 50% unemployment. And there's only two ways that's going to be fixed. It's through really successful business and appropriate government policy. And so again, it's not one or the other, it's the interconnection between the two.

And I think that's a feature of this world that is more pronounced than, I think, in previous eras, is that it's the interconnection and the interdependency between all of these things. Societal attitudes, politics, technology, and business possibility coming together. The problem, of course, is as that disparity grows, the cynicism between and the distrust grows. And so parties, entities that should be collaborating and thinking together and redefining a new future, new outcome, are actually increasingly mistrustful of each other. And that's a very scary reality.

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Yes, that's really well-said, Anton. Yes, I wrestle with the political question always as it relates to being a futurist. The person who mentored me into doing this was a guy who was the Director of Program Planning for Apollo back in the day. And then he became a college president and a futurist, and that's how I got started. And he argued when I knew him in the late 1970s that to be a futurist, you should stay away from politics because you're going to antagonise one group of people that you otherwise could work with. So just stay away from it. The forces that a futurist would deal with or talk about to look at would be bigger than politics, it would be historical forces and technological forces and so on that are larger than politics.

But more recently, as Gerd just pointed out, everything is so influenced now by political decisions, that I think it behoves futurists to address politics in some way. It's a challenging thing to do, because you're going to alienate potentially a group of people who you don't want to alienate. But the decisions that are going to be made around environment and around future pandemics and around economy and around global balance of power are all wrapped up in politics.

And so I haven't written anything on this yet, but I'm trying to play around in my mind that this is the time for futurists to be more political than they've ever been. And by that, I actually mean, don't just talk about the political forces that are shaping the world, but actually take political positions to say, as a futurist or even just as myself, I just happen to be a futurist, we need to do X or Y in our country or in our political system.

Because I think that to ignore it, is to ignore probably the most important force in the world right now which is what direction, politically, are various countries going to go? Because if they go in a particular direction, we're not going to do anything about the environment. If they go in another direction, we will do something about the environment. And so, if you talk about the environment and say, but I'm not going to talk about politics, well, then nothing's going to happen. So I'm not quite sure how to do this, but I think it's time to be involved in politics as a futurist.

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Yes, I think that we're really in a very unique position today, because we're in the middle of this shift from what or how, to why. And the why question is always going to be political and cultural, because the why question has to do with values and goals. It's not tactical. It was Tim Cook the other day, or it was about a year ago. I went to this event in Brussels and Tim Cook was speaking there as well. And he said technology can do great things but it does not want to do great things. It doesn't want anything.

That's good. That's good.

And that's so true. It's so true. And I think for us, the problem is today, my view is we have all of the amazing tools available to solve pretty much any practical problem. Whether it's food or water or energy, we have the tools. But do we agree on what we want? And do we agree on distribution of benefits? Do we agree on the ethics and the values and the principles? And the Dalai Lama once said that ethics is more important than religion. So this is not about any of those things, it's about the bottom line, what do we want?

00:38:35

And I think this is the key question that also rubs a lot of people by saying, okay, if I say, for example, that there's no way around the carbon tax for airlines and for meat. I'm making a projection into the future that's something completely obvious, just like music moved to the cloud. Yes, a lot of people are not going to like it, but this is what it is. And those are political things. I think that's a real challenge to set that forth.

I think there's never a better time for a futurist to be involved in a political conversation without being political, and by embracing the party-agnostic position. Take yourselves back to the late 80s when the future of South Africa was being debated and negotiated between the then-minority government, the ANC who were banned, a communist party, and many others in between. When they were talking about the framework of a constitution, there was massive collision of philosophy, or ideology, etc. etc.

And they could make absolutely no progress until a very wise man who's I believe, today, our president, said, let's just press pause. We come from two diverse backgrounds to have a debate around what we should do. Let me ask you a different question. Describe the country you would love your children to grow up in. And everyone, whether they were the communist party, or the banned ANC, or the minority white government, we all had the same answer.

And so when everyone realised that the outcome was common and what everyone wanted, then the what and the how become much easier. And you addressed the political conflict, having established a common future outcome. And business strategy, of course, is exactly the same thing. Let's get excited about the destination. We'll close this department, stop selling that, stop making this. That becomes much easier to do. Whereas, if you start from that premise, as you would in the political conversation, it becomes much more difficult.

00:40:39

Yes, that's why I've started using the word humanist in my job title, because I want to shift the attention back from the possibilities of what technology does, to what we actually want. And when I talk about the future of capitalism, for example, I use the phrase People, Planet, Purpose, Prosperity to describe where we are going.

And I believe that what we have today, because of the COVID crisis, our society is forced to consider that there's something more than making money. Because we know the current way of capitalism is broken, it will not lead us to a good future. It will lead us to more emergency situations. First COVID, then AI, then geo-engineering, the, genomic engineering. And we can't solve any of those like this. So this is why...

And we're still not any happier people. It's not making us happy, whatever it is.

Yes. Yes, I think this is the other thing. I think it's very important to think of a positive future, a

Star Trek economy, you could say, is to think of that in a positive light of saying, we have all the possibilities. We can invent our way out of so many things. But we have to agree on what we want to achieve. And I think this is the primary mission for my work, is not to show the cool ways that we can invent our way out; the cool robots, the cool cars, or whatever, but to help invent the consensus.

00:42:07

It's about mindset. It's about calibrating mindset. Jack Ma of Alibaba said, on his singles day where he does \$39 billion of turnover in 24 hours. The tech behind that is unbelievable, but he said, it's not about that. It's about the attitude and mindset of humans that made that possible, that came up with the idea. That was the dream and then the funky stuff made it easy to execute.

Well, I was just thinking there's another guy that goes back a ways, Ron Lippitt, who came out of organisational development world who began doing futurist work in the 1980s. And he wrote a paper called Future Before You Plan. I was thinking of it when Anton was describing the political move to imagine the future country that you want your children to grow up in. And he was at one of the Michigan universities, I can't remember which one.

And he did this research project in which he had groups of people try to plan the future, first of all, by making plans, identifying problems, for example, and making plans to deal with them. And then other groups who imagine their preferred future, let's say the preferred future of South Africa, and then work backwards from that. And the paper that he wrote was Future Before You Plan, which I've always remembered.

And what he found was that the sense of enthusiasm was higher, the solutions were better, the commitment to follow through and actually do something was much higher, and the ability to sort of overcome differences that existed when they walked into the room was much higher when they started off with their preferred dream, their preferred vision for what they really want in the future. And that still is quite powerful. You're right, I've been thinking that it would be good to try to somehow do that one a global scale, or on a national scale, in these times if you could.

00:44:06

If you could figure out a way to enable people to sit down and say, what is the role that we really want, we'd find that there would be so much commonality that then the solutions would be easier to agree to.

Yes. And the corporate boardroom, you talk about the future. Everyone walks into the boardroom and they're thinking about their retirement date, their share option maturity, their business department and their empire. And how do you break that? So you've got to take the conversation away from all of that. And then those things, they're still difficult, but they're much easier to solve afterwards.

Well, okay, I've got two more topics and then I think we should wrap, okay?

00:44:41

First, I want your opinion on science-fiction and science-fiction movies. Useful, not useful? Does it relate to futurism at all? I get this question all the time. And my personal view is, just to preambule this, is that I like watching science-fiction movies but I want to keep that separate

from my job, because it does taint it to be in certain directions. You watch too many Hollywood movies, your view of the future is going to be very dim. And so what is your take on science-fiction as a tool?

I don't use it at all, only in hindsight. So it's useful to show clips of the movie *Back to the Future* when he says, roads? We won't need roads. So historical science-fiction, old science-fiction might be useful, but only for a light moment of entertainment. For the rest, it has no place in what we do.

Well, I take the opposite view. I've been a fan of and a friend of a lot of science-fiction writers over the years, and they've actually referred to me as a futurist who embraces them. What I have found is that science-fiction writers, the best ones and, of course, those are the ones I like. That's how I define the best ones, are the ones I like. They're better storytellers than the average futurist, by far. And so they're very good at taking technological socio-political trends of the day, extrapolating them into the future, and then telling very human stories about how it plays out.

And so a science-fiction writer like Kim Stanley Robinson, for example, and one of his more recent books, I think it was called *New York 2041*. I think that's the right year. And it's New York partially underwater, because of sea level rise because of global warming.

Yes, great book. I've read it too.

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And he's just very good at helping you imagine alternative futures and how people behave in those futures, in ways that the average futurist is just not as good at in terms of storytelling.

So I've used science-fiction. I've used science-fiction films on corporate retreats to watch, just to stimulate the imagination. And I tell audiences that everybody, even if you don't like science-fiction, you should read one science-fiction book a year just to stretch your mind in ways that regular literature won't do. So I embrace it. I try to use it.

Not all science-fiction, of course, is equal. But I am a fan and I've used it in my work in various ways. And so I think there's more of a connection, Anton, than you might think. Although, your view I've heard from... Most futurists I've ever been around say no, I've stayed away from science-fiction. It doesn't have much to do with my work. Gerd, what about you? And Anton?

It is my style. I have a great quote on this. I always say science-fiction is becoming science-fact. And when I watch *Black Mirror*, I have to say, well, this is already a fact. When I read Cory Doctorow, I'm saying, yes, he's describing the president. And when I look at other things like humans, I think it's inspiring.

00:48:13

The bad part of science-fiction is that many clients and many audiences are tainted by Hollywood science-fiction, which is basically death and mayhem, because that's what sells. And that makes them afraid. And I really think it's important that we don't go into the future with fear, but with caution and excitement. And a lot of fear is being installed in people. All of the latest Hollywood productions are about how AI will kill us, robots will kill us, we'll kill each other, we'll have another nuclear war. And it's all about that. So I think that is the science-fiction we don't really need. That's overkill. But yes, I think it's an important role of science-fiction in my work.

Glen, I love your point about storytelling, because to me, that's the hallmark of a great or a good futurist, is the ability to tell a story that your team or your audience, your client, can identify with, that moves them intellectually and emotionally. And if you can't, as a futurist, do those two things through storytelling, then you should be an academic researcher. Because being a futurist in the business context is about moving businesspeople, customers, clients, to do more exciting, more ambitious, better, different things. Storytelling is massive. That's a good point.

I think to our colleagues, fellow futurists, there's also, I think, everybody has different skills and different talents and different personality. I don't try to convince people with numbers. As somebody has said, if you torture data long enough, it'll confess to anything. So you take Ramez Naam, for example. I love his work and he's brilliant at taking these numbers and convincing people. And that's what he does. He does a great job at this and I admire his work.

Personally, for me, I do a narrative. I tell a story. And I use some numbers, but for me, it's all about the story. I think stories have more impact on people than numbers. Numbers are a foreplay to this. And this is how I do it. I think everybody does it differently, so it's not by any means a general rule.

00:50:32

Let's wrap up with a question about where you are. So what is the immediate future for South Africa, or for the US, for Europe? I have an opinion about the US and for Europe, but not so much for South Africa. But what is your vision, and what would you like to see happening there? That would be, I think, of interest to people.

From a South African perspective, the challenges are absolutely enormous. We have a huge diversity of wealth ownership in the country, it's made strides over the last couple of decades. Wealth disparity is absolutely massive. Unemployment is a huge thing. Unfortunately, our government seems stuck in policies that were framed in previous decades.

And the breakthrough for this country will be small business development, entrepreneurship development, harnessing new ways of doing things, enabled by the new technologies. And I think our most serious problem, post-COVID, is the education system ill-equipping young learners in the country to be relevant in the future. Followed up by a set of regulatory policies that enable easily small businesses to grow and flourish. That's the only way we're going to break through this. The big corporates, the big employers, yes, they have a role to play. But the mass impact is at grassroots level.

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And for me, I despair sometimes when I hear some of the government thinking. Some of it is good and has great potential, but then I despair on the execution track record. And for me, I wish there'd be greater collaboration between the policymakers and people that are very good at executing grand plans.

I think ,not only will South Africa, I suspect the world, will need a marshal plan post two years of COVID to reinvigorate the global economy, global trust in everything from airlines to restaurants to hotels to institutions. And so we need that new form of collaboration. And to me, that's one of the biggest risks, is the breakdown of trust when we need trust and collaboration more now than ever before across countries, politics, countries, regions, etc.

Let me add onto the USA debate, okay? Here's one theory and then, Glen, you can go.

Yes, I want to hear your theory and then I'll respond.

Yes. Here's my theory, okay?

Yes.

I call this is the New American Renaissance, okay? And I think what's happening right now, America's going close to civil war. It's utterly dysfunctional, it's a total mess, and everybody's saying, yes, it is. There's very few people left who don't say that anymore. And that's going to go on for the summer, and that's going to be very, very painful in so many ways.

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And my view is that because of this enormous hole that America has gotten itself into, a Democratic president backed up by a Democratic congress could mean the biggest change ever since Ronald Reagan, who had the same situation, I think, to actually completely reboot America. And I think this is what may be happening in 2021. And this is, of course, what Americans do. It's always the utter change. And this is what makes America.

That's true.

You pivot on a dime. We would never do that in Europe, it would take us 50 years. So in America, it's very likely that people are going to say, enough of that. Now we're going to do everything completely different. And that's my hope for America. I don't know. What's your take?

Well, that's a wonderful hope. And I think you're right. It's certainly when I put on my optimistic lens, I think you're right. Yes, it's going to be a miserable rest of the summer and fall, into the election here. The battle lines are very, very stark. The violence level goes up, and nobody has as many guns as we have. Not only economic inequality and political issues that we have, but we also are flooded with weapons in this country, which makes everything more scary.

00:54:45

When you use the term civil war, that actually becomes something involving a lot of weapons, if it was real. Number one, I think that the US, what the current government crisis with the current administration, now with COVID on top of it, has revealed is the degree of systemic rot within the American political and economic system, that has been covered up by basically good economic times and the continual support of entrepreneurial drive, which has always characterised the United States. Now all the holes in that system are being revealed by the crises that we're in.

And so if, as the polls would suggest, there's an election in the fall and we do end up with a Democratic president and a Democratic congress, then I think it is quite possible that we'll see as big a shift, even bigger than during the Ronald Reagan era, more comparable to Franklin Roosevelt, in terms of reinventing the American system. And that would be looking at economic inequality and healthcare inequality, and probably looking at the whole issue of weapons and looking at the environment in a serious way. In a way in which actions actually then occur. It isn't just a conversation, there are new policies put in place and things that will actually happen as a result.

What we don't know is the degree to which, as we approach this election... And I am serious about this. We don't know the degree to which the elections could be manipulated by both foreign and nefarious American forces, we really don't. It's kind of bizarre to be in the US, the

land of free elections, the country that has spent the last 50 years monitoring the world for free elections, and calling this election free and that one not, now approaches election in which nobody in the country is really quite sure whether it will be a free election.

00:56:55

But if we assume that it will be or that the numbers will be so large as to overwhelming any effort to manipulate the polls. And by manipulate the polls, I mean keep people... In the US, there are two primary things that are possible. Number one, prevent people from voting who want to vote. And there are various ways and means by which that is done. And the second is because more and more polling is done electronically, literally to manipulate the actual outcome of the election. And people are seriously concerned about that.

Of course, both sides would accuse the others of being the manipulators, and both have teams that are gearing up to try to stop that. Gerd, back to science-fiction for a sec. Kim Stanley Robinson wrote a three-book series about global warming, basically. And within that book series, there is one American election in which there's a massive effort to hack the election by one party, but then the other party has a massive counter-hack team. And so the election rides on who has the better hackers, basically. And now people are actually seriously talking about that.

It sounds like our reality.

Yes, it does.

All right. I'll give you a short take on Europe, and then I think we should wrap up.

00:58:17

So I think what's happening in Europe right now is that the COVID crisis has forced us to either stand together with pretty much unlimited solidarity, or crash. And basically, what has happened, in the beginning in March, it looked like it was going to crash. But now we're in a world where the European government, the commission, and of course the parliament, has just approved this bail-out package, which is basically a completely unlimited solidarity with Italy, Spain, Portugal. €100 billion for Italy, without conditions; a flat-out grant.

So the lesson has arrived, if we want to be something together of a world power, we have to have unlimited solidarity. And even the Danish and the Dutch have finally agreed. So that's very, very hopeful. I think this crisis is forcing Europe to come together as what I call the United States of Europe, which has been debated many times. I think this is really where we're going.

Here is Switzerland, we are part of that, whether we want to or not, already. There's many illusions that we have in Switzerland about our complete independence, but we are in Europe. In fact, you could say the Swiss political system is probably going to be the system that will be used to create the United States of Europe, with the cantons having independence and so on.

So I see a great future for Europe. I'm very hopeful for this, especially after the crisis because when we move together, we can be a powerful player in the world like the US "was", China. And so that's my positive view on the future.

Gerd, can I just make a quick comment?

01:00:00

Yes.



I totally agree with you. I think it's great. I think Angela Merkel has played a huge role in achieving this breakthrough moment. And two of my most admired global leaders are both woman Prime Ministers, there's Angela Merkel and Jacinda Ardern.

Of course, of course, yes.

It's era of women leadership, gentleman.

Well, this is just the final comment, but we can also see the rise of women around the world in this crisis, and that's going to continue. So it's going to be women, minorities, and younger people going into politics. And on top of that, you have really wise people like Socrates kind of people who will be drawn into this as well. That's my hope. But if we had more Jacinda Arderns and more, what's her name from Taiwan...And Denmark and Iceland and what-have-you, we'd be much better off.

Absolutely.

01:00:55

So I think that's what's coming. I often say women are the future for so many reasons, but this is one of the reasons, that you have this combination of compassion and sharp intellect that Jacinda has, for example. But then again, of course, New Zealand...

Military language in politics and business is over.

Yes, yes.

It's not really a question of killing the competition anymore.

And that gives me hope that we can actually achieve this. My hunch is, and I said that a few times already, in 20 years when we do have a world government, the global leader will be a young woman.

Yes, yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes. And we'll probably see older or very old people in that inner circle, like we did in ancient Greece, Socrates and people like. So that sort of thing. But to pull this off, I think that's...

That's a brilliant vision. Yes, yes, love it.

01:01:49

So I want to thank you very much for your time. And I hope I was able to share some important feedback with you. And I look forward to seeing you at our virtual discussion. Thanks very much, and see you down the road.

01:02:16