
Alfonso Vargas-Sánchez

Full Professor, Management and Marketing Department, Faculty of Business Studies
Huelva University (Spain)

A Book Review:
The Future of Business*

Like any work devoted to anticipating the future, this one raises high expectations. In a more and more volatile, uncertain world of business, which is complex and ambiguous, those expectations are necessarily very high just by reading the title of this book: all the strategists are eager to receive and interpret even weak signals about the new directions reshaping the future of their own businesses. To be able to respond and capably adapt, managers usually build possible scenarios, with a higher or lower likelihood of occurrence and level of impact, and this book provides many valuable indications about how the current hyper-connected business world is moving. Some of them can affect it in the long run, but others are already clearly acting, such as demographic trends in motion.

Although its title alludes to business, I would recommend this book not only to business people. Any individual willing to understand what is coming, in order to avoid as much as possible the risk of unemployment and guide his/her training and competences properly, is invited to read this book. The active and committed members of any higher education institution, wanting to play a relevant role in the years to come, are also invited to read this book; if companies, like employers, shift, the education system has to evolve accordingly. If new competencies are demanded, those institutions and their faculties have to adapt their syllabi and methods to be able to provide those competences; otherwise, they risk becoming irrelevant and disappearing. Any politician, who is a decision maker, should have interest in this book, because of its usefulness in catching up with the transformations that are reshaping our society. Any strategist, at any level, is called to read this book; this is excellent material, by the way, for a course of strategic analysis. To sum up, I would say that any person concerned about his/her life in the short and long run should read a book like this: his/her eyes will be opened to many unexplored phenomena that have gone unnoticed until now.

Several aspects can catch the readers' attention. One of them is the set of contributors: as it says in its subtitle, 60 future thinkers, critical insight providers into a rapidly changing

world, are involved in this extensive book. Concerning this point, in my view, which is more relevant in that group of selected authors is their diverse backgrounds, not only because of their geographical origins and disciplines in which they work, which is something expected for a collective book with such an ample and ambitious scope, but the mix of professionals, academics and even PhD students (researchers ultimately), in a combination of veterans and youth.

Nevertheless, its structure does not follow an apparent criterion, which always facilitates the readers' understanding and avoid them getting lost. As free thinkers, a large number of topics came up as global drivers of change, and its classification is hard. A classical option could have been the broad factors encapsulated in acronyms extensively used in business literature, like PESTEL. Thus, PESTEL stands for macro-environmental factors of the following nature: Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental and Legal. All of them are suffering changes, but following the spirit of the book, I imagine that editors have preferred to break moulds like this, with some inconveniences. For instance, the same factor (3D printing technology) is discussed in various sections (1 -Visions of the Future- 2 -Tomorrow Global Order- and in some other parts disseminated in other sections). Therefore, if the reader wants to gather a comprehensive view about the future impact of this new technology (even the most recent 4D printing), he/she is forced to go over the whole book.

Section 7 -Industry Futures- has, on the contrary, a particular character, because it is devoted to particular industries: aviation, journalism... The reason why these industries, in the transition between old and new ones, where selected remains unknown. They are good examples, of course, but also others could have been chosen.

In addition, the heterogeneity among chapter lengths is noticeable. This fact affects the content of each chapter. I am not saying that the longer the chapter is the more relevant and interesting it is necessarily, but a few of them are so short that they become almost irrelevant in the context of the whole work. Others are really fascinating.

A book with almost 600 pages is long to read; and not because of the number of pages, but the density of its content: a plethora of factors are included and discussed, and usually not all of them will be of the readers' interest, or catch the readers' attention with the same intensity. I would suggest going to the introduction and the conclusion first, and then to the first chapter in each section, denominated "Global Factor of Change" (in sections 1 to 7). In this way the overall landscape is drawn. Afterwards, you can go to particular chapters depending on your specific interests or what you are looking for.

Technological references are abundant in this book: it is unavoidable nowadays when presenting a foresight of the future. Nevertheless, its content goes beyond technological changes, in two senses: on the one hand paying attention to the consequences of new technologies in other areas such as economy, employment, social life, education, etc.; on the other hand because not all the changes are coming as a result of technological evolutions or disruptions: political systems (democracy particularly) are evolving because new generations have new aspirations, with effects also in the working conditions expected by them; in an accelerating world, the slow movement is raising as a reaction for a better life (slow tourism, slow food...); migrations are changing the face of the world, with a growing diversity and the need of tolerance and much deeper ability to operate in an intercultural climate; social structure and values are changing; just to present a few examples.

In a nutshell, this is highly recommended reading for those looking forward, instead of looking backward and trying to explain the past. Some answers can be found, but also new questions are open for guiding our search for a better position when dealing with the new challenges ahead: this is another virtue. This is not a time for melancholic thoughts, but for working hard on building a new and better future. This is the intrinsic fascination conveyed by this book.

*Rohit Talwar (Series Curator and Editor); Steve Wells, April Koury and Alberto Rizzoli (Co-Editors) (2015). Fast Future Publishing Ltd. ISBN (Ebook): 978 0 9932958 1 2