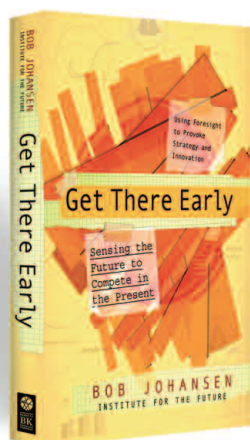


SOUNDVIEW Executive Book Summaries®



by Bob Johansen

Sensing the Future to Compete in the Present

GET THERE EARLY

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

A forecast is a plausible, internally consistent view of what might happen. It is designed to be provocative. At the Institute for the Future (IFTF), the word prediction isn't used because it is a statement that something *will* happen, and a *prediction* is almost always wrong. Fortunetellers predict the future; forecasters don't. A forecast doesn't need to "come true" to be worthwhile. It should provoke new thought: new insights, new possible actions or new ways of thinking about the present. You don't need to agree with a forecast to find it useful.

The ultimate paradox for business leaders today is the inability to forecast the future, yet the necessity to make sense of it in order to thrive. To be successful, leaders must devise strategies rooted in their own point of view and then get there ahead of the crowd. However, many leaders are content with getting there in time, and some are even willing to settle for getting there fashionably late. Those behind the curve focus on quick-fix problems, avoiding the kind of long-term dilemmas that will characterize the future. But as the IFTF's 10-Year Forecast delineates, today's corporate chieftains face more and more dilemmas; recurring, complex, messy and puzzling situations.

In this summary, Bob Johansen — former president and CEO of the IFTF — shares techniques refined by the Institute to help you navigate your organization's road to the future. Employing fascinating case studies like that of the Apple iPod, he shows how getting there early means finding new markets, new customers and new products ahead of your competitors. Through these stories, Johansen shows how getting there early helps you see beyond today's problems and recognize possible futures before others do.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Seven directions of change in the next decade.
- Core dilemmas of the five driving forces in IFTF's 10-Year Forecast.
- The difference between a problem and a dilemma.
- Why smart networking is critical to marketing.
- How to conduct an effective After Action Review.

CONTENTS

Thinking 10 Years Ahead to Benefit Today

Page 2

Institute for the Future's 10-Year Forecast

Pages 2, 3 4

The VUCA World

Page 4

What's Different About Dilemmas?

Pages 4, 5

It Takes a Story to Understand a Dilemma

Page 5

Immersion

Pages 5, 6

Sensing and Sensemaking

Page 6

From Insight to Action

Page 6, 7

Flexing and Flexibility

Pages 7, 8

Foresight From Hindsight

Page 8

THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: GET THERE EARLY

by Bob Johansen

Thinking 10 Years Ahead to Benefit Today

Forecasting is a kind of mental fitness practice, comparable to physical fitness. Here are the core methodologies used at IFTF to develop forecasts:

- **Expert Opinion Aggregation** — defines who is most proficient in understanding a possible future.
- **Expert Workshops** — are usually composed of groups of about 12 to 25 diverse experts.
- **Content Synthesis** — draws together the forecasts of others.
- **Historical Analog** — draws lessons from the past.
- **Scenarios** — bring forecasts to life through stories to bring people into the daily life of future worlds.
- **Survey Research** — uses questionnaires or interviews to elicit attitudes about the future.
- **Ethnography** — is derived from anthropology to explore underlying culture and values.
- **Visualization** — brings a forecast to life through pictures, human and digital art, and other means.
- **Artifacts from the Future** — are hybrids of archaeology and design that use imagined objects to bring a forecast to life.

Although forecasting methodology is important and useful, it is wise not to take any methodology too seriously. Each leader needs to decide what approach he or she will take toward the future. ■

Institute for the Future's 10-Year Forecast

Before discussing the 10-Year Forecast, it is important to highlight the underlying directions of change behind it. Think of these as historical contexts for the future that is to follow. The following statements indicate direction, not destination; we are moving in the direction indicated, but may never actually get to the end point toward which we are moving. We are moving toward:

- **Everyday awareness of vulnerability and risk** — both in the developed and undeveloped worlds.

- **An hourglass population distribution** where old age is the new frontier, but kids will be heard.
- **Deep diversity** that is “beyond ethnicity,” in the workplace and society.
- **Bottom-up everything** in which people interact with the products and services they consume.
- **Continuous connectivity** in which network connections are always on.
- **A booming health economy** in which health is an important filter for many purchasing decisions — and health risks are on everyone’s mind.
- **Mainstream business strategy** that includes environmental stewardship combined with profitability — doing good while doing well.

Within the 10-Year Forecast, there are five driving forces, or “storylines”: personal empowerment, grassroots economics, smart networking, polarizing extremes and health insecurity. These storylines help to expand on the external forces that will shape the next 10 years.

Storyline 1: Personal Empowerment

The word *consumer* is obsolete, but there is no better word to replace it yet. The word *consume* means to destroy. But consumers are not just destroyers or passive recipients of mass messages, and increasingly, people resent being treated as such. Consumers are empowered people whose powers are amplified by the interactive media they are rapidly learning how to use.

For very large organizations, this personal empowerment
(continued on page 3)

The author: Bob Johansen, who received his Ph.D. from Northwestern University, was president and CEO of the Institute for the Future (ITF) from 1996 to 2004 and is now an IFTF Distinguished Fellow.

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For additional information on the author, go to: <http://my.summary.com>

Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries (ISSN 0747-2196), P.O. Box 1053, Concordville, PA 19331 USA, a division of Concentrated Knowledge Corp. Published monthly. Subscriptions: \$209 per year in the United States, Canada and Mexico, and \$295 to all other countries. Periodicals postage paid at Concordville, Pa., and additional offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Soundview, P.O. Box 1053, Concordville, PA 19331. Copyright © 2007 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries.

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NAN BAUROTH — CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
ATHENA NICOLAIDES — GRAPHIC DESIGNER
MELISSA WARD — MANAGING EDITOR
SARAH T. DAYTON — EDITOR IN CHIEF
REBECCA S. CLEMENT — PUBLISHER

Summary: GET THERE EARLY

Institute for the Future's 10-Year Forecast

(continued from page 2)

ment creates a dilemma: How can they engage constructively with the increasingly powerful individual and networks of people who buy their products and services?

IFTF's research suggests that engaged consumers are characterized by three bellwether behaviors:

1. **Self-agency:** acting with independence, on one's own behalf, but with closely networked links to others, so that individual decisions are magnified but influenced by others.
2. **Self-customization:** adapting and applying core products or services to their own individual needs, with expectation that products will be customizable to their needs.
3. **Self-organization:** organizing responses and initiatives in ways that are difficult to anticipate.

Engaged consumers are a force to be reckoned with. They can inject a brand with incredible buzz, as did early iPod users. Apple got there early with a well-designed and compelling product promoted mostly by word of mouth, although Apple fueled the fire. Engaged employees have the same kinds of power, but it is applied to work. Many work practices (e.g., time and task management) are being brought home, but influence goes back and forth as the line between home and work become blurred.

People are shifting their identities from consumption to creation — including customization and do-it-yourself (DIY). The shift implies a move toward more open economic exchange, with an emphasis on external innovation.

Personal empowerment will be shaped by the aging baby boomers. The word *retirement* will probably be replaced by a boomer-type term like *redirection*, *regeneration* or *refinement*. Boomers will rethink and re-form the notion of careers for the 50-plus in several ways:

- **Working older:** Don't expect them to stop working, unless they get bored.
- **More health expenses and investments in health:** Chronic disease meets longer life.
- **Lower levels of government support:** Social Security will not be enough.
- **Expanding, not narrowing horizons:** Empowered boomers have a big-picture view, so they will continue to reach out and grow.

The next generation of workers is *really* different, with skills and perspectives their elders do not share — or in some cases even understand. They will likely be more comfortable improvising their way out of dilemmas. Many have learned their skills in video gaming worlds that are not as different from business as some may think.

Storyline 2: Grassroots Economics

Economies of scale — where bigger is almost always better — are giving way to economies of organization, where you are what you can organize. Think of it as eBay on steroids. Everyone can be a seller and everyone can be a buyer. All organizations have the potential to take on a grassroots character. Think personal media, personalized products and services, and mass customization.

The grassroots economics dilemma facing very large corporations is how to grow financial performance in an economic environment in which scale is a mixed blessing, and you must give the feeling of being both large and small simultaneously.

Storyline 3: Smart Networking

We are moving toward a global fishnet of connectivity, where smart networkers live at the leading edge of market trends, making distinctive and influential choices about entertainment, health, home, policy issues and elections. Increasingly, brands are selling not just to an individual, but to a social network.

The smart networking dilemma to be considered is how to engage in positive ways with smart networks and networkers that cannot be controlled and only rarely can be influenced in straightforward ways.

IFTF has identified these six factors as being most important to networking IQ:

1. **Group participation:** how you use networks to engage with others in effective ways.
2. **Referral behavior:** how you use networks to link to other resources available through the network.
3. **Online lifestyle:** how the network fits the context of the rest of your life.
4. **Personal mobile commuting:** how you use the network as you move about.
5. **Locative activity:** how you use the network to draw links to specific geographic locations.
6. **Computer connectivity:** how you use your skills to link to computer-based resources.

If leaders are not skilled or at least conversant with blogs, wikis and other networked media, it will be hard for them to lead. Younger workers are learning to create and share knowledge in a mixed physical and virtual landscape. The explosion of social software will challenge traditional notions of focus, workflow and productivity.

Storyline 4: Polarizing Extremes

Everything, and especially the proliferation of extreme views, is amplified on the Internet. Extreme

(continued on page 4)

Summary: GET THERE EARLY

Institute for the Future's 10-Year Forecast

(continued from page 3)

groups seem more sophisticated at networking than do more moderate ones. A dilemma of polarizing extremes is figuring out how to engage extreme groups when you cannot please all of them.

Worldwide, it appears that fundamentalist perspectives (religious, political and social) are increasing in popularity. Strong opinions will become more mobile. For the first time in history, during the course of this decade more than half the world's population will live in cities. The shift will be greatest in developing countries. Megacities (over 10 million people) will constitute a new kind of wilderness, resembling the most extreme ecologies in nature and eliciting adaptive survival strategies. At the same time, small cities with populations of 50,000 or less will be among the fastest growing in both developing and developed worlds.

Storyline 5: Health Insecurity

Boomers will fund and fuel what health researchers at IFTF call the "health economy." The health insecurity dilemma is how to grow a culture-of-health marketplace in the shadow of looming global health crises. How many will be able to afford to be healthy?

Essentially, the next 10 years will see new approaches to extending what the body can do in ways that were difficult to imagine before. IFTF has identified these styles of creating an extended self:

- **Identity switchers:** those who strive to change their identity through mental and social disciplines.
- **Medical modifiers:** those who use medical or surgical methods to change their bodies in ways they find positive.
- **Body builders:** those who use exercise and other disciplines to alter their physique.
- **Death defiers:** those who stretch the limits of what is possible and what is safe.
- **Super connectors:** those who use networks to amplify their sense of self and essentially develop a more connective definition of "self." ■

The VUCA World

There are both nasty challenges and intriguing opportunities in the VUCA World. These dangers are characterized by *volatility, uncertainty, complexity* and *ambiguity*. But these same dangers create leadership opportunities in terms of *vision, understanding, clarity* and *agility*.

The VUCA world is sparking new ways of thinking and acting. The most successful leadership strategy is to

flip the danger, like an aikido move in martial arts where you absorb the attack but redirect the energy of the attack in a positive direction. The negative VUCA world can be turned around with a combination of vision, understanding, clarity and agility. The challenge is finding a way to engage honestly and create a winning strategy within the chaos that you encounter. Here are some emerging principles:

- **Volatility Yields to Vision** — Vision means having a clear intent, a clear direction for your actions. Vision is much more important than foresight since it seeks to create a future, not just study the future. With clear vision, creative space opens for innovation within the parameters you specify. A bold vision sees beyond volatility, with a calm perspective not trapped by assumptions of the present.

- **Uncertainty Yields to Understanding** — Listening leads to understanding, which is the basis for trust. You must learn to listen carefully without judging too soon. The VUCA world creates an urgency to act quickly, but sometimes it is a false sense of urgency. The best leaders have the presence and calm to listen before talking.

- **Complexity Yields to Clarity** — Leaders must help others make sense of complexity. The VUCA world rewards clarity because people are so confused they grasp at anything that helps them make sense out of the chaos. The thoughtful leader's quest is to be both clear and accurate, simple but not simplistic.

- **Ambiguity Yields to Agility** — Leaders can't surrender to ambiguity; that would lead to paralysis and confusion. Rather, they must learn how to be agile and respond to attack. The VUCA world rewards networks because they are agile, while it punishes the rigidity and brittleness of hierarchies. ■

What's Different About Dilemmas?

The biggest challenge for leaders is learning to live with — even embrace — the tensions inherent in dilemmas. How can you prepare your mind to win when faced with dilemmas, to win what appear to be no-win games? Dilemmas disguised as problems are particularly dangerous. If you engage a dilemma as if it were a problem, you may get there early, but you are not likely to win.

Most of today's leaders were taught to solve problems, and problem solvers have specifically been taught to move fast. Winning when faced with dilemmas, however, requires an ability to hold complexity in your mind

(continued on page 5)

What's Different About Dilemmas?

(continued from page 4)

without knowing too soon and without taking words or data too seriously. If you get there early, you've got time to sort out a situation. Some leaders shoot from the hip because they get there late and don't have time to do anything else.

Can You Tell a Dilemma From a Problem?

Modern dilemmas have evolved beyond the traditional definition of *dilemma*, which focused on an either/or choice between two bad options. In today's complex world, choices are many (we face *trilemmas* and *multi-lemmas*) — even as the context within which dilemmas are arising is becoming more intractable. Consider the following characteristics of modern strategic dilemmas:

- Unsolvable
- Recurrent
- Complex and often messy
- Threatening
- Enigmatic and confusing
- Puzzling, with two or more choices — and decisions are still required
- Possibly positive (dilemmas with attractive but competing options are possible).

A problem is “a question or puzzle that needs to be solved.” Typically, in current thinking, a problem has a binary (either/or) solution or at least a clear solution. In a world of dilemmas, we still have many options for response, but usually the options aren't simple and usually they don't come in pairs. Yes/no will not be enough. What might be a third way, or fourth or fifth? Expecting a binary solution can get you in big trouble in the world of dilemmas.

Dilemmas as a Source of Inspiration

The first discipline is to resist jumping to premature conclusions. Unless you're in an extreme situation where you absolutely have to respond immediately, reflection is usually more useful than reaction.

There are still many problems with binary solutions and it is very important that someone solve them. Looking ahead, however, it can be seen that most problems with binary solutions will tend to be tactical, important for successful execution but more appropriate for the operational people within a firm. Strategic thinking will be dominated by dilemmas. ■

For additional information on dilemmas,
go to: <http://my.summary.com>

It Takes a Story to Understand a Dilemma

Storytelling is only part of the leader's challenge. Listening for stories is just as important, to untangle dilemmas, reach some kind of “Aha!” and develop winning strategies. Sometimes the best stories about a dilemma will arise where you least expect them.

A Story About Silicon Valley

Silicon Valley works as a hotbed of innovation based on the dilemma between the “culture of ideas” and “culture of money” in the valley. The “culture-of-ideas” people love ideas and love to exchange them to see ideas mix and grow. They are willing to give away ideas, trusting they will get back even better ideas in return. Subgroups of the culture-of-ideas people are intent on changing the world, and convinced their ideas can have an impact.

Meanwhile, the culture-of-money people in Silicon Valley are focused on making as much money as possible, through commercialization of technology and ideas. Subsets of this group are driven by greed.

However, these social networks need each other. The culture-of-ideas people need money to bring their ideas to life. The culture-of-money people need ideas and innovation to inspire new businesses and attract investors. Neither of these two dominant cultures likes the other — even though they recognize that they need each other. The tension between the poles of this dilemma — ideas and money — provides energy for Silicon Valley innovation. If this dilemma were “solved” the creative energy of the Valley would dwindle. ■

Immersion

Immersion is the best way to learn in a VUCA world. Immersion experiences allow leaders to learn rapidly and viscerally, and help at every stage of the Foresight to Insight to Action Cycle (see diagram on page 6) by providing a way to get there early before committing to go there at all. Immersion can help leaders experience a possible world of the future to get a feeling for what it might be like, to see things from different points of view to provoke insight. Immersion helps you try out different ways of being so you can develop your own agility.

Consider a spectrum of immersion experiences, in order from most to least involvement for the learners:

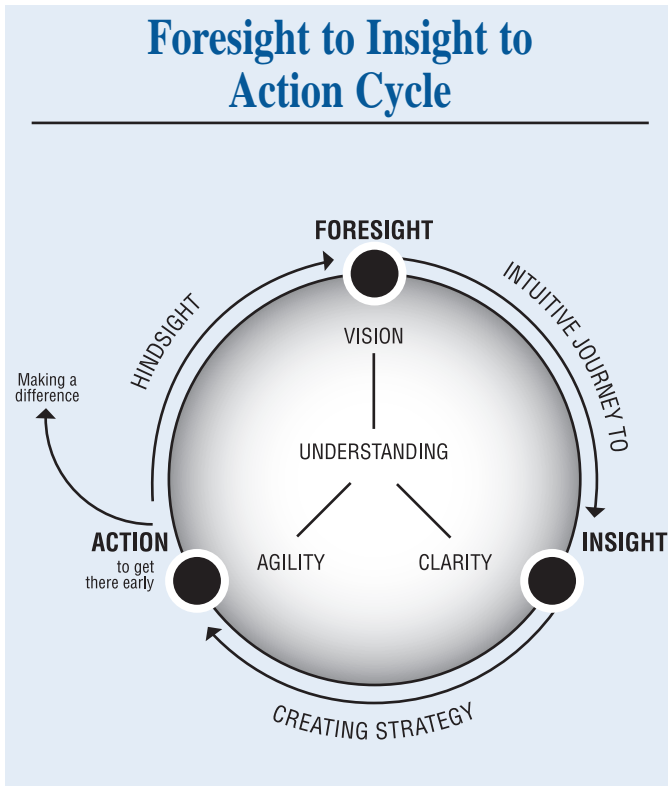
- **Simulations of reality:** where some aspect of the real world is being modeled so it can be experienced.
- **Alternate-reality games:** where individuals, small

(continued on page 6)

Summary: GET THERE EARLY

Immersion

(continued from page 5)



groups or huge numbers of players engage in hypothetical worlds, either digital or real.

- **3-D immersive environments:** where people role-play an alternative identity in an online setting. There is no story or “game” other than what the players create.
- **Role-play simulation games:** where learners play a role in an interactive simulation that draws from real-world experience.
- **Scenarios:** where a story is brought to life, through text or physically via artifacts.
- **Mentoring, reverse mentoring or shadowing:** where learners are immersed for a period of time in the life of another person from whom they want to learn.
- **Ad hoc immersive experiences:** where the goal is helping someone see the world from another point of view.
- **Theatrical improvisation:** where actors bring a future possibility to life in a vivid way while learners watch.
- **Case studies:** where a real-world situation is described in a third-person but engaging way so that learners can become involved with the case. ■

Sensing and Sensemaking

To get there early and compete, both sense and sense-making skills are needed. First, you sense what’s going

on around you and what might be possible in the future. Being able to identify what’s most important or influential requires an ability to sense and make sense of both concrete information and qualitative experience. Think of sensing as listening: to the world around you, to the signals you think are important for your organization and to your inner voice of innovation. Sensing is listening for the future, hearing something that others don’t yet hear.

Foresight to Insight to Action Workshops

Moving from foresight to insight is an intuitive search for “Aha!” It is a nonlinear creative process best done in a small-workshop setting. Small groups are good at listening for the future in creative ways to generate insights and seed innovation. In an interactive workshop setting, seven to 25 people can be amazingly productive — if they can learn to engage constructively with each other. In planning one of these workshops you need to assess where you’d like to focus. A typical workshop will have the following emphasis:

- 40 percent on foresight that is provocative for the organization
- 40 percent on insight provoked by the foresight
- 20 percent on possible actions. ■

From Insight to Action

The transition from insight to action is more straightforward than the transition from foresight to insight. Action is aimed at results, at making a difference. But action doesn’t necessarily mean final action. Action unfolds. The ultimate basis for evaluation of a forecast is not what you got right in the forecast but whether the forecast helped leaders make better decisions that led to action that made a difference.

Beware of the Operational Problem Solver

Action is great, unless it is the wrong action. Those who are problem solvers also want to get there early, but are more likely to get there early with an answer that is wrong — even if it is right in the short run. Action is the home court of the problem solver.

Modern strategic dilemmas require new kinds of leadership and new kinds of leadership development. Even solvable problems can be embedded in dilemmas, and dilemmas can be nonlinear — like global warming — with real potential for large-scale sudden or long-term impacts that can rearrange entire systems.

The key here — in the midst of action — is to recognize the difference between a problem and a dilemma as

(continued on page 7)

From Insight to Action

(continued from page 6)

Components for a Foresight to Insight to Action Workshop

Foresight to Insight to Action workshops work best when they have the following ingredients:

1. **A meeting owner.** This person may need to make real-time decisions during the workshop regarding next steps.
2. **A target outcome.** Having a clear outcome, a mantra for the meeting, gives everyone focus.
3. **A diverse group.** You need diverse people who will play well together. Generational mixes and mixes of thought styles are particularly helpful.
4. **A content facilitator.** He or she must possess both content and group process skills to assist participants in drawing links between foresights, insights and possible actions.
5. **A chunk of provocative foresight.** A big picture forecast can be a wonderful stimulant, but it's also important to think through the message track you want to use to stimulate the discussion.

early in the process as possible. If in doubt, assume you are dealing with a dilemma. If, as the situation unfolds, it turns out that you are dealing with a solvable problem, all you need to do is solve it and move on. On the other hand, if you mistake a dilemma for a problem, you can dig yourself in deeply before you realize what's going on — and before you figure out that no solution is possible. By this time, there may be no way out, or at least no face-saving way out.

Wal-Mart's Sustainability Strategy

Foresight: Long-term financial performance won't be possible without changes in environmental practices.

Insight: Wal-Mart needed a new approach.

Action: Create the Wal-Mart Sustainability Strategy.

Wal-Mart has always been about growth and “everyday low prices.” But in 2005, CEO Lee Scott entered into new territory with his focus on “business sustainability,” which he defined as including the goals of environmental sustainability and robust business performance. This strategy has three core elements, each of which involve dilemmas that Wal-Mart will try to overcome:

1. Climate and renewable energy
2. Zero waste
3. Sustainable products.

Wal-Mart is aiming to do good while doing well, that is,

without compromising its financial goals. Perhaps Wal-Mart's years of bad press — a dilemma — influenced its decision to deal with the environmental dilemma. ■

For information on the Foresight to Insight to Action Cycles of Wikipedia and the Omidyar Network, go to: <http://my.summary.com>

Flexing and Flexibility

The organizational form of the future will be more like a network than a hierarchy, although hierarchies won't disappear. There is no single center in network organizations; there are as many possible centers as there are network nodes. The action is at the intersections and edges. Such a structure is just right for dealing with dilemmas. Nobody controls organizations that function like networks, but the organizations can be woven into varied patterns and flexed without losing strength.

Leaders must have the ability to flex, the wherewithal to maintain a clear direction and the vision to decide where, when and how to work. Fortunately, the next generation of workers wants even more flexibility and more choice — and they are ready to navigate the work/private life dilemmas implied by this increasingly networked world.

Developing Your Ability to Flex

Flexing is like the freedom that a musician has to improvise within the rhythmic structure of a song. However, in most organizations, there are distinct values and legal requirements that must be met. Organizational structures and responsibilities are both explicit and implicit. The outside world, however, is not necessarily governed by the same principles. Organizations cannot assume that their ways of working will be followed by others. Flexing skills need to be tempered by an organization's sense of direction.

The IFTF has identified seven “tuning levers” to design and evaluate organizational structures:

1. **Structure** — Like the cord on a fishnet, network structures are strong but flexible. The number and pattern of the nodes on the net are critical to its strength and flexibility.
2. **Rules** — Flexible firms work best with only a few rules, but those must be followed religiously; principles, rather than rules, work best in the context of network organizations.
3. **Resources** — The key resource need in network organizational structures is to make communication possible across the network.

(continued on page 8)

Flexing and Flexibility

(continued from page 7)

4. **Thresholds** — Scale thresholds are critical in the life of network organizations, since small groups are typically more cohesive than large ones.

5. **Feedback** — This often comes informally by word of mouth.

6. **Memory** — Memory in network organizations is often decentralized and formal methods of organizational memory (like databases) often do not capture the vitality of the knowledge being stored.

7. **Identity** — Network members may or may not have shared collective identities; some are formal while others are informal with dispersed identities. ■

Flexible Firms

Firms that have incorporated flexibility have begun to emerge, but there is still room for more flexible firms to come to the forefront.

An Open Source Flexing Story

While IBM still supports hardware and software businesses, it makes money off of services. Open source for IBM includes:

- Co-production of value between competitors and users
- Celebration and incorporation of user-generated innovation
- Discovery of communities of interest and efficiencies among users, producers, distributors, partners and employees.

IBM has been able to create or participate in open source or free zones where it gives away software in order to create a higher-value competitive zone where it can offer services. It is cooperative and open in hardware and software, but competitive in services.

A Geoweb Flexibility Story

The geoweb is the mixing of virtual and physical media to extend both our experience of the physical world and our access to online resources. Walt Disney is already mixing the physical experience of the park with virtual links and is focusing attention on both the technology and human efforts to work with technology to provide great experiences for guests. Consider Pal Mickey — a small Mickey Mouse stuffed animal with a radio frequency reader in its nose and an ability to “talk” to the person holding him. As a guest goes around Walt Disney World, Pal Mickey gives updates on where lines

are shortest and points out interesting attractions. ■

Foresight From Hindsight

On the Foresight to Insight to Action Cycle, the activities between action and foresight are observation, measurement, induction and learning from experience. What can we learn from our actions to identify new approaches for the future? Thoughtful foresight should include hindsight: At IFTF it is said that you should look at least twice as far back as you are looking forward. For example, the Institute’s 10-year forecasts usually include a 20-year look back.

After Action Reviews

One of the most effective disciplines for learning from experience is the After Action Review (AAR). The army and other military services and the fire and police agencies use AARs as a regular discipline for debriefing and documenting lessons from every significant event. The army keeps a database of AAR lessons, but the primary value is not in the database but in the personal discipline of learning that is ingrained in daily life. Lessons from AARs are fleeting and best understood in real-life context.

A big challenge for business is to distinguish performance evaluation from learning. At many companies, managers talk boldly about “learning from failure,” but common wisdom among employees is that there is a strong, usually unspoken, pressure to produce and not admit failure.

After Action Reviews are an example of content synthesis, which is a tool for foresight. The key to AAR, as well as any other form of experience synthesis, is to learn from what has happened and apply that learning to one’s understanding of future possibilities.

Often, the best foresight happens in real time, in the midst of the action. The best leaders develop an instinct for response, a discipline of readiness, not just a plan. The best strategy emerges from the flow of experience and events. The deepest insights arise in the field, and often an initial insight suggests a first action; but as the action unfolds, the insight gets deeper. That’s what prototyping is all about, a kind of learn-as-you-go style for strategic action. ■



If you liked *Get There Early*, you’ll also like:

1. *The Starfish and the Spider* by Ori Brafman and Rod A. Beckstrom. The authors provide a look at the decentralized companies that are taking the business world by storm.
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