In a digital world of exponential, non-linear change where seemingly impossible stuff ─ 3D printing, [machines that learn](https://www.sap.com/solution/machine-learning.html), self-driving cars ─ is now happening with incredible speed, even the smartest people at leading edge companies can’t possibly predict what’s next. To find out how we can prepare for a winning future, I reached out to four futurists and authors who will share their perspectives in an upcoming openSAP MOOC entitled, [“Reimagining the Future:  A Journey through the Looking Glass.”](https://open.sap.com/courses/tcs1-tl) The online course is designed to give business and technology leaders a clearer understanding of the macro forces at play in this next market revolution, and the steps they need to consider for faster adaptability in an unpredictable world.

“The future is moving too fast to predict, but you can rehearse it,” said Frank Diana, Futurist at Tata Consultancy Services, who is leading the course. “This drives experimental cultures, not having a problem with failing, and being good at ambiguity and uncertainty. Especially traditional companies have to learn how to be adaptive and flexible enough to shift with the changes that are happening.”

**Short-term tactics won’t deliver lasting value**

Predicting more change in the next 20 years than the previous 300, Gerd Leonhard, CEO of The Futurist Agency, sees this era as a once in a lifetime opportunity to solve major problems like cancer and global warming – provided companies think bigger about possibilities and embrace collaboration with a wider ecosystem.

“It’s no longer going to be enough to just make money with what you’re selling,” said Leonhard. “For some companies, monetization is creating some ugly realities that may not have been the actual original purpose. Technology is forcing us to move to a future where what matters are three things: people, planet and profit.”

Leonhard cautioned business leaders against treating everything as just a technology issue targeted towards inefficiencies. “You should not use technology primarily as a tool to just get rid of people,” he said. “Thinking about the immediate bottom line is a very short term exercise. It doesn’t create enough value. In the new digitally-based ecosystem, your neighboring segments are important. If you launch an [IoT-based](https://www.sap.com/solution/internet-of-things.html) product, you’re also responsible for security, policies and ethics related to that rollout.”

**Think big, start small, learn fast**

As technology disrupts every part of the business, Chunka Mui, Managing Director at Devil’s Advocacy Group, places marketing and innovation at the forefront of the challenge. “Technology is fundamentally changing the products we build and how customers learn about and buy them. This is having a horizontal impact across the whole company,” he said. “Facing large disruptions from [AI](http://news.sap.com/video-brilliant-startup-customermatrix-co-innovating-sap-ai/), big data, mobile and IoT, many organizations tend to swing from complacency to panic.”

Instead of waiting until doom is upon the company, Mui advised leaders to have a systematic process for fast, ongoing innovation that “allows us to think big about the possibilities, and consider the upside and downside scenarios before we have to panic. Then you can think about what data is needed to make the critical decisions, and build a learning process that answers the most important questions.”

**Staying relevant when everyone is tech-enabled**

According to Gray Scott, Founder and CEO of SeriousWonder, business leaders have to understand our transformation into a technological species. “We are entering the age of science fiction, curing cancer through personalized medicine and tracking our metabolism through wristbands,” he said. “But the old narrative of terminator against human no longer works. What’s actually taking place is that technology is getting into the hands of more people, and they’re integrating it into their bodies. This is having a profound effect on our cultures, governments and economies.”

CEOs must figure out how to be relevant and deliver value in a world of decentralized knowledge and innovation. “When a farmer replaces 30 field workers with two work bots, they can over-farm, impacting local and global markets,” he said. “The individual becomes the tech-enabled business entity. Anyone can become the new corporation. If you have an internet connection and the will, you can create pretty much anything you want. Maybe companies become the scaffolding for innovation, providing a service through their architecture.”

**Time to face moment of truth**

Decision-makers at many businesses haven’t realized how quickly future innovations are becoming reality, along with how to manage the cascading impact. Diana used the insurance industry as an example.

“We have to think about the future in a whole new way beyond standard forecasting or planning,” said Diana. “If self-driving cars stop getting into accidents everything changes, and not just for the insurance industry. Car dealerships disappear, lawyers fighting legal battles around damages are no longer needed for that. Cities that have been built around the car for more than a century totally change.”

This blog was originally posted on [SAP Business Trends](https://blogs.sap.com/2017/05/08/ceos-have-to-stop-using-smart-machines-to-get-rid-of-workers/).