

Imagining 2030: Preparing for What Comes Next

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Guillén, Mauro F. (2020). 2030 : How today's biggest trends will collide and reshape the future of everything. St. Martin's Press.

978-1-250-26817-4, 280 pages

Uldrich, Jack. (2020). Business as Unusual: A Futurist's Unorthodox, Unconventional, and Uncomfortable Guide to Doing Business. River Grove Books.

978-1-63299-309-0, 130 pages

At one point in time, the year 2030 seemed so far away that any deliberation of what might be different from today appeared unfathomable. The march toward it, however, has continued, and it is now less than nine years away. To prepare students for a world that could be markedly different tomorrow, we need to start proposing and creating courses today. With that goal in mind, I turned to two books that complement each other well. While neither book steps out on a ledge and proclaims in bold text what to focus on, both take the approach of explaining where we are today with the belief that understanding what is possible in the future requires fully appreciating where we are now and building from it (a concept often referred to as the adjacent possible).

The Guillén book takes the traditional approach and resembles any other trade book you would find at a Barnes & Nobles. The Uldrich book is really stretching to be called a book; it is more of a think piece intended to spur thought and discussion about trends and topics. It is this dissimilar approach which makes the two titles work together so well, and I would have difficulty recommending one without the other.

Some ponderables/take-aways from the Uldrich book include the following. Within one month of COVID-19 being declared an emergency, 51 percent of the workforce began working remotely—demonstrating business can change quickly when needed—and Twitter told its employees they could work from home forever! During that same time period, eCommerce sales doubled. In eight weeks, internet sales increased as much as they had in the

past ten years combined. While all of this can be attributed to the pandemic, in reality, the world was changing prior to COVID. In early 2020, more consumers were having more meals delivered to them than dining out, Waymo's autonomous vehicles logged over 15 million miles of road experience, some chatbots have gotten so good that many humans can't tell they are speaking to a computer, and a student at MIT created a brain-computer interface device that allows access to the internet by thought alone.

One reason even smart people miss the future is because they fail to appreciate that our tools are becoming exponentially more powerful. Ignorance is growing faster than knowledge and—the author asserts—failure is the key to unlocking success. The example he offers is that before the U.S. put a man into space, NASA launched 12 monkeys. Many of those monkeys didn't return safely. But the lessons we learned from those failures ultimately made it safer to launch astronauts into space. Precise answers to the wrong question are worthless.

Some ponderables/take-aways from the Guillén book include the following. The United States and Europe house the majority of the world's middle class now, but by 2030, China, India, and the rest of Asia (excluding Japan) will be home to more than half of global consumer purchasing power: consider that Singles Day generated \$25 billion in sales in 2017, dwarfing Cyber Monday's \$7 billion that year.

In 2016, the number of patent applications filed in the United States was three times greater than in 1995. In India, though, it was seven times greater and in China, it

was seventy-two times greater. As China and India grow in prominence, so does their culture of patenting new products and inventions.

The average lifetime of a company on the S&P 500 stock index declined from 60 years to 10 years in the last half century. IoT and AI are areas of massive growth; by 2030, there will be 200 billion devices and sensors connected. At the end of the day, technologies spread and get adopted if they resonate with something already underway in society or the economy. To truly change the world, to be utterly transformational, technological innovation must ride a very big demographic or economic wave.

His takeaway on the NASA/monkeys narrative is that in 2014, India stunned the world by successfully placing a space probe in orbit around Mars with a budget of \$74 million. To put that in perspective, it costs \$165 million to produce the movie *Interstellar* and \$108 million for the movie *The Martian*.