

Post Pandemic Industrial Revolution: Towards A Digital Humanism

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Let us imagine a world where toilet paper is always available, travel does not require tonsil and nostril swab, and face to face gatherings are back without digital clearances. Something will still be not normal. The pandemic triggered new attitudes and habits that will persist and are likely going to affect operations, companies, and industries. An unstoppable digital explosion is underway. We need to decide how to position our life and work away from a slide towards de-humanistic technologies, and towards a digital humanism.

Our freedoms are rewired to become digital experiences during lockdowns or self-isolation. Healthcare takes centre-stage at the expense of privacy. Our physical identity is replaced with a digital identity in a parallel reality – and it could be more dangerous than you think. We are now teleworkers, app users and digital content consumers.

We accelerated the development of cognitive technologies and smart machines to replace routine tasks. We pushed out human workers, embraced the freelance economy at the expense of connecting workers to clients and the organisation.

And big IT companies are consolidating their algorithmic governance. Algorithms, data analytics and AIs are invading households and workplaces at an alarming rate, harvesting cosmic amounts of behavioural data. Teleworking and social networking are leaving an accurate digital footprint on everything we need, feel and think, which can only speed up machine learning. A technological God is being modelled full of open, non resting eyes, watching and recording everything like the Greek God – Argus Panoptes.

Are we facing a new future towards technological dehumanisation, or can we do better and humanise the trend? Organisations must adapt to meet their customers and employees' expectations, or risk being left behind.

Things need to change taking into account new consequential values such as the following:

- The future can't be trusted
- I feel safe working and doing things online

- My top priority is Health
- I feel safest at Home
- My expectation is that everyone will do the right thing

The future can't be trusted

One way of doing this is for companies to focus on providing consumers with reassurances to restore consumer confidence. The need for **Trust Multiples** with detailed never published before information to customers and clients. For example, accurate information on when and how rooms will be sanitised.

I feel safe doing things online

Gartner estimates more than 41% of people plan to do more work from home. Operations in many industries are increasing their development and use of virtual models and tools, for example, 3D home tours, and 5G powered systems for remote consultation and diagnoses. However, this is coming at the expense of limiting other real experiences. Work in the future will be based on hybrid connected experiences. Virtual experiences and existing real ones need to co-exist and complement each other.

My top priority is Health

Voice control technologies and AI enabled appliances, for example, will be highly valued with their diminished need for contact. This will create new opportunities for businesses to be part of **the health ecosystem** (including mental health). Businesses who treat this as a cash cow without having a legitimate product or benefit, or trust and credibility will be exposed.

I feel safest at Home

The epicentre of experience and life is moving inwards to our homes. Average consumers are shaping innovation while working remotely, educating their children, preparing their own meals, and caring for their loved ones. Companies need to observe these new needs and develop their products for domestic mixed use. Where and how products are produced and handled is now paramount to provide greater assurances about delivery and supply chain networks and manufacturing facilities' cleanliness. The more products and services feel part of the local fabric, and closer to home made, the safer they might feel. So, businesses need to be careful about emphasising their globalisation efforts and zoom in on a new kind of local buying behaviour to speed up consumer recovery.

My expectation is that everyone will do the right thing

Companies are expected to solve societal problems as well as selling products and services. Companies need to be seen that they are deploying their people, resources, processes and technologies for the greater good more than ever. Those who tried to **humanize their brands** and alleviate their consumer pain in these difficult times will be shown gratitude while others will be punished in the marketplace.

This clearly indicates a critical need to reshape the new digital revolution around human concerns. **PWC Customer Intelligence research**, for example, revealed that 75% of consumers surveyed prefer to interact with a human than an automated platform. The report also indicated that 59% of consumers feel organisations have lost their human touch in favour of automation and digitisation.

Some organisations are attempting to humanise their client's digital experience. **NTT Research** on digital touchpoints indicates that the quality of automated systems significantly improved during the pandemic. Several businesses are attempting to augment customer personal experience with a more humanised involvement from their skilled and knowledgeable personnel. These companies have a better chance to develop adaptive, intelligent and personalised automated systems, build relationships, and consolidate brand loyalty.

The post pandemic industrial revolution will not be like science fiction movies where human involvement in operations is almost rendered obsolete. On the contrary, collaboration between humans and machine – **collaborative robots** comes to mind. The new industrial revolution is expected to offer customers a personalised and customised product to meet individual requirements. It is not a one-size fits all approach but a **tailor-made customised** product or service – A continuous glucose monitoring (CGM) device could be one such product. Or clothes designed to fit unique body shapes based on body scans and data analytics.

Industry 4.0 companies were obsessed with digitising business processes to relieve human workers from rule-based repetitive tasks. **Industry 5.0** is about integrating human touch to bridge this gap we created between digital systems and highly skilled workers.

I implore you to keep an eye on this so that technology do not replace but enable human decision making. So the service to humanity is not eclipsed by the momentum of technology.

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More than 15 years of lecturing experience (University of Newcastle / Edith Cowan University and several International Universities). Extensive industry analysis and management consultancy experience helping SMEs commercialise their ideas, enhance their operations/processes/supply networks, improve project governance and management, and continuity planning and execution. My areas of research interest lie in Entrepreneurial best practices, Operational improvement and Logistics/Supply Chain Management.