

The Next Ten Years — Key Insights from Gerd Leonhard's Masterclass

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In a recent Masterclass at the IMI, Gerd Leonhard shared a captivating vision of the future, challenging traditional notions and prompting a reconsideration of our current trajectories. Throughout the thought-provoking session, Leonhard urged leaders to rethink their perspectives while exploring the dichotomy of purpose and profit, the importance of building a sustainable future and addressing critical challenges such as climate change, AI, biotechnology, and other key areas.

Shifting Industries and Paradigms

Leonhard began by emphasising that the future is not a simple extension of the present. Drawing parallels with the music industry, he highlighted the drastic shift from selling records to the current era of streaming, where platforms like Spotify offer access to over 100 million songs. This evolution, he suggested, is a microcosm of broader transformations occurring in banking, tourism, and the automotive sector.

The dynamics of attention have become paramount, with businesses no longer merely selling products but vying for clicks in a super-connected world. Leonhard noted that traditional car engines are on the decline, and soon, no one may buy a gas-powered car. Car companies, he argued, are no longer selling vehicles; they are selling access to mobility. Similarly, the insurance industry is adapting to measure risk using AI and analytics, while the financial sector is undergoing significant digital transformation and disruption — to the extent that the rise of digital money may lead to the disappearance of traditional banking services.

Such transformative shifts have become the norm, and Leonhard's insights resonate strongly with changes IMI has seen as industries, organisations and leaders adapt and evolve to a changing world. As Leonhard notes, it is imperative organisations can not only capture attention and clicks but also engage their customers and employees in a super-connected world — this requires leaders who can communicate effectively, motivating and inspiring organisations through their vision, and being empathetic to the needs of those around them in a digital world. To learn more about leading in a digital world, check out our [Professional Diploma in Digital Leadership](#).

Geopolitical and Cultural Shifts

Leonhard highlighted the evolving nature of geopolitics, moving beyond the historical binary model to a more complex and multi-polar world. Noting a departure from the historic US vs. Soviet paradigm to a world with at least five major powers, Leonhard likened the present to the cultural upheaval of 1968–73, emphasising that current conflicts are not entirely new but are reaching a critical juncture. Despite these challenges, Leonhard remained optimistic about the future, citing humanity's track record of innovation and adaptability, although he noted collaboration has not entirely kept pace with the challenges.

As leaders, understanding the evolving nature of geopolitics and cultural shifts can be crucial for effective decision-making. Leonhard's observations about the multi-polar world align with the complexities to be navigated in global business. The cultural shifts he highlights should prompt leaders to consider how diverse perspectives within teams influence strategic approaches and decision-making.

Environmental Concerns and Sustainable Solutions

Leonhard tackled the climate crisis, acknowledging the urgency of addressing climate change, and the role played by AI and biotechnology. While concerns exist, he highlighted positive trends, such as the rise of renewable energy and advancements in fusion power. Fusion, Leonhard asserted, holds the promise of unlimited energy, potentially resolving one of humanity's most pressing issues. However, he stressed the need for collaborative efforts to decouple GDP from emissions and create sustainable practices, a vitally important theme we deal with in more detail at our Senior Leaders Breakfast Briefing on Cleantech on the 29th November (events@imi.ie for tickets) and also our [Transformational Leadership in Sustainability](#) customised programme

The Imperatives of Preparation and Collaboration

The purpose of examining the future, according to Leonhard, is not mere prediction but to be better prepared. However, different cultural perspectives shape how people view the future. A live Menti poll during the session revealed that roughly 50% of the audience felt cautiously optimistic about the future, which according to Leonhard reflected the dichotomy and variance of cultural perspectives. While the Anglo world sees it as an opportunity, Germany tends to view the future with caution and as a risk or threat.

Leonhard again stressed the importance of preparing for the future rather than predicting it, and emphasised the rapid changes already occurring, such as advancements in genomics, trials for cancer prevention within 15 years, and the transformation of traditional industries like automobiles into mobility services. On the other hand, Leonhard urged companies and individuals to contemplate their job outlook in 5–7 years, emphasising that the future might arrive sooner than expected if one does not prepare, citing the recent failure of Credit Suisse as an example.

Challenges and Opportunities in Healthcare

Leonhard discussed the profound impact of technology on healthcare, with a shift from 'sick care' to proactive healthcare using data and technology and the use of mRNA vaccines to potentially cure cancer within the next two decades. Customised food and healthcare are on the horizon, with pharmaceutical companies transforming into tech entities. Leonhard coined the term "perchange" to describe such constant evolution in a world facing multiple crises, highlighting the need to move beyond efficiency and towards resilience, agility and creativity. The shift from 'sick care' to proactive healthcare aligns with the sector-agnostic emphasis on well-being and preventive measures in contemporary leadership and organisational culture, along with the need for leaders to move their organisations from being reactive to proactive — which aligns with one of IMI's 2024 [membership](#) themes, Gaining From Disruption.

Navigating Challenges and Embracing Change

Leonhard encouraged embracing the impossible, or the seemingly impossible, citing instances like the transition from cable boxes to streaming within a decade. He underlined the shift towards resilience, agility, and creativity, emphasising that natural capital is shrinking despite increases in produced and human capital. Leonhard also touched on the transformative power of pain and love as motivators for change, advocating for falling in love with new ideas. He presented three revolutions — digital, sustainable, and purpose — with younger generations spearheading the purpose revolution.

Leonhard's call to embrace the impossible and transition towards resilience, agility, and creativity resonates with the need for adaptive leadership in today's dynamic environment. The transformative power of pain and love underscores the importance of empathetic and compassionate leadership, especially during times of change and uncertainty.

AI, Technology, and Workforce Dynamics

Leonhard delved into the impact of AI on the workforce, discussing the potential for increased productivity (especially for knowledge workers) and job creation. He distinguished between augmentation and automation, stating that AI should amplify human capabilities rather than replace them. The distinction between augmentation and automation aligns with the ongoing discourse about the future of work and the urgent need for upskilling and reskilling. Leonhard envisioned a future with reduced routine work, allowing humans to focus on tasks that require creativity and intuition, explored biases in AI and the need for character-driven skills rather than just technical expertise. The emphasis on character-driven skills complements the evolving expectations of leadership in the digital era.

Leonhard also touched on the changing nature of work in the face of unprecedented technological advancement, suggesting a move towards a four-day workweek and universal basic income. He noted the accelerating pace of change, with AI potentially eliminating routine jobs but creating new opportunities, a topic discussed in depth by IBM Ireland General Manager [Deborah Threadgold during her keynote presentation](#) at the National Leadership Conference.

Future Optimism and Continuous Learning

Despite the challenges, Leonhard remained optimistic, echoing Kevin Kelly's sentiment that humanity's capacity to solve problems is growing exponentially. He urged a shift from the pessimism of intellect to the optimism of the heart. In a rapidly changing world, he emphasised the importance of a future-ready mindset, encouraging questions, creativity, imagination, resilience, optimism, courage, and foresight. Leonhard's optimism about humanity's capacity to solve problems resonates with the ethos of lifelong learning. The call for a future-ready mindset aligns with IMI's commitment to cultivating adaptive leaders who can navigate uncertainty with creativity, resilience, and foresight.

The session concluded with a call to embrace technology without becoming it and to leverage the 4Ps — Planet, People, Purpose, and Prosperity — as the core of all future endeavours. The audience was urged to invest in both technology and humanity, and to think positively about possibilities, ask questions and cultivate the mindset needed to navigate the complex but exciting future ahead. As the world faces exponential opportunities and risks, Leonhard concluded by advocating a positive and imaginative approach to shaping the future. As Leonhard aptly put it, the future is not just about existing; it's about how we use the tools at our disposal to shape a better tomorrow.



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