MEGATRENDS

Welcome to a journey to the future! Sitra’s megatrend cards contain various trends which we believe are already affecting our lives, society and thus also our future.

Predicting the future is not possible. Nevertheless, these cards enable us to make our own thoughts nimbler and to stretch them further; they allow us to create new ideas and visions about the possible future.

FUTURE TRENDS BY SITRA HTTPS://WWW.SITRA.FI/EN/
RADICAL OPENNESS VS SURVEILLANCE

Fuelled by the internet, radical openness keeps on increasing. The decisions and acts of governments, companies and individuals are more openly revealed to us all. Ideally, this will lead to better and more sustainable methods. On the other hand, the extent of network surveillance and individual rights will be one of the great political issues of the near future.
The global operating environment is unpredictable, and various surprising events, or black swans, can change political activities quite rapidly. Economic interests and power politics become interwoven in the global arena, giving rise to a frozen atmosphere. New actors, free trade areas and alliances emerge.
GLOBALISATION VS NATIONALISM

Globalisation is gathering strength and the world is more and more interdependent as the human species increases its presence on an ecologically and spatially diminishing globe. Regardless of the constantly increasing need for global solutions, growing nationalism and introversion have emerged as counter-trends to this development.
Along with globalisation, local presence will become stronger with the help of new technological applications. Internet applications also enable the fortification of a physical sense of community. For example, 3D printing and improvements in food and farming technology could in the future completely revitalise rural areas.
SKILLS CHALLENGE

KNOWLEDGE

Skills challenge knowledge, since the internet enables easy access to enormous amounts of information. At the same time, being able to think critically and analytically will become increasingly important. From the point of view of education, the need for time, creativity, interaction and immersion offered by the web and data will increase.
People are increasingly better able to look after and improve their health with the help of various applications and data, and the development of gene technology. The scope of well-being also covers our experience of inclusion, meaningfulness and understanding our own possibilities. On the other hand, health and well-being may be the factor that is increasingly separating and dividing different parts of the population.
Our understanding of the globe’s bearing capacity is increasing the earth is morphing into a small planet for the great human species, both ecologically and spatially.
There is an emphasis on social capital, both from the viewpoint of well-being and from the perspective of working life. Social capital means social networks, and the trust and reciprocity created by them. Social capital is formed, among other things, from civic engagement, voluntary work, networks and the support and trust received from them.
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POWER OF THE PUBLIC IN THE NETWORK

The sense of community created by technology and the ability of humans to directly collaborate with others enables unprecedented participation in society. On the other hand, Western societies have been based on institutional principles and the principles of rule of law. Ignoring the institutions and delivering “justice” in a network via collective power will cause fear and instability.
EXTENDING LIFE SPANS

Lifespans are extending and the demographic structure is changing, which poses many kinds of challenges to societies. Young people in Western societies will become a minority. They cannot be held solely responsible for the assimilation of new methods, technologies and sustainable ways of life. On the other hand, a person’s capacities are not dependent on age.
URBANISATION

Urbanisation is a global megatrend. In 2050 almost 70 per cent of the world’s people will live in cities. The character and features of the megacities emerging currently in Asia and Africa will also determine our global future. An important question to address is: will these cities be gigantic slums of millions of people or will they have a sustainable infrastructure, administration and operation?
New forms of family and living are becoming increasingly common. Families are adopting completely new ways of arranging their life. For example, communal way of building is a growing trend. Rainbow families, families established with friends or cross-generational families are becoming more common.
STRENGTHENING THE POSITION OF GIRLS AND WOMEN

The empowerment of girls and women is a growing global trend. We even hear about the “she-economy”, where female oriented consumption and trends are being strengthened further. Simultaneously, along with social media, new kinds of hate speech related to both women and girls has surfaced in more equal societies.
CREATIVITY BEGETS WORK AND WELL-BEING

As work becomes digitised, more jobs emerge in the creative areas where machines cannot be used as substitutes. Arts and experiences are areas in which most people look for meaningfulness.
GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

Global citizens move smoothly from one country to another following work and opportunities. Often they are attracted by the world’s largest metropolitan areas where global crossboundary urban culture is in the making. The counter-trends are growing refugee flows and mass movement of people due to conflicts and climate change. The conditions of people who come from regions of conflict and drought are difficult, and the international asylum system is fraying.
DIVERSIFICATION OF TECHNOLOGY

With the rapid development of technology and the extension of human lifespans, there are more mutually exclusive technological realities in society. Different age groups use technology in ways that differ a lot from each other. There is no single solution for all.
GOOD ENOUGH
IS SUFFICIENT

In prosperous populations, achieving the high water mark in material well-being is creating the “good enough” trend in thinking. Well-being is not increased by accumulating more material but by limiting it. The emphasis is on the value of a good life.
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CULTURE OF EXPERIMENTATION

More and more products, services and methods are developed in an agile manner and by experimentation. The direction can be quickly changed, and incompleteness is no longer regarded as a vice.
EMPHASIS ON MEANINGFULNESS IN BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT

As both consumers and employees, people want to commit themselves to a bigger purpose than just the mere seeking of profits.
INEQUALITY IS A BURNING QUESTION

Many countries are wealthier than they’ve ever been, and in Western countries there is an ongoing struggle caused by growing differences in income and well-being. The fundamental change in work and globalisation may divide people into winners and losers. If the differences become intolerable, social harmony may weaken. For this reason basic income is an interesting topic for many countries.
HEALTH IS A HUGE TREND AND BUSINESS

Super technology accelerators are finding solutions to the secret of extending human lifespan with the help of gene technology and instrumentation. The trend is also associated with the increase in wealth and its distribution. Those who can afford it invest in health, and more and more people have the opportunity to live longer than before.
HYPERCONNECTED
SOCIETY ON DISPLAY

It is not just people but also goods and services that will be interconnected, first by means of the Internet of Things and then via ubiquitous networks. It will be interesting to see whether a strong counter-trend to development, where people give up the network, will materialise or whether this kind of disengagement will even be possible.
Collaborative production and consumption, as well as, sharing economy play important roles in society. Technology enables easy production, consumption and distribution of things like food, transport, tools, housing, hobbies and sports equipment.
SMART GOODS AND SERVICES

When combined with technology, an ecological approach produces smarter consumer goods with competitive quality and attractiveness. The emphasis is on the ease of use and on the user’s perspective.
SUSTAINABILITY CRISIS NOW!

The sustainability crisis is acute and related both to the increasing scarcity of natural resources and to climate change. The biggest challenge of our time is to find a solution for the overconsumption of natural resources and for de-linking emissions from economic growth. Technology offers many possibilities for this, but the most challenging thing is to change human behaviour and mindsets towards finding a solution to the sustainability crisis.
The fundamental change in work is changing Western societies in a very radical way. Robotisation, digitisation and globalisation are changing the production structures in such a way that the link between production and human labour is becoming more challenging. One major challenge for the West is reintegrating people into society if traditional paid employment is significantly reduced.
Super-intelligence can refer for example to things such as artificial intelligence, the instrumentation of human intelligence or the global wisdom of crowds. The exponential growth of intelligence, for example in the form of artificial intelligence, can offer great opportunities for solving the biggest challenges to humankind. On the other hand, we don’t know what kinds of ethical and existential challenges could be associated with the development of super-intelligence in one form or another.
Digitisation is the form of technological development that has the strongest defining impact on the current radical change. This has to do with the fact that an increasing number of processes are being transformed into a digital form. This will enable rapid analysis of huge amounts of data, which has not been possible before. Whereas the industrial revolution brought muscle power to the economy, digitisation is creating a kind of nervous system and through that changing the way we function in a huge number of sectors.
Because technology affects many areas of business and creates new ones, we do not yet know how work and means of subsistence will be distributed in the future. It is possible that only a few will be employed and even fewer will benefit from work, but it is just as possible that technology and digitisation will bring about a remarkable number of new forms of work, which will be available in abundance.
Blockchain technology stirs up debate about its ability to act as a radical transformer of many industries in the future. Blockchain refers to a distributed technology which keeps records on payments and other transactions. Transfers are transparent and leave a permanent trace. This means that there is no need for a third party to verify the transaction. Bitcoin virtual currency is based on this technology.
FUTURE DIVISION OF WEALTH

The division of wealth and means of subsistence in the future should be at the core of political considerations about the future. If it seems that work-related inequality is increasing in societies at a rapid pace, what will be done? If the amount of available work increases as new technology is adapted, what kind of employment world would we like to build in the future? We should already start considering the answers to these questions.
LIFELONG LEARNING WILL BE A NECESSITY

Lifelong learning should become a new basic feature of life, since life spans will continue to increase in the future. If an increasing number of people live to around 100, it is quite likely that the education acquired in the early stages of life will not support people throughout their working lives. Micro degrees or study accounts could help to achieve this.
DEMOCRACY WILL BE CHALLENGED

Examining the state of democracy always includes examining the well-being of society as a whole. The state of democracy is influenced by, for example, the level of trust in society, equality, the functionality of institutions, the economic situation and employment rates. Increasing social inequality has been a growing trend in OECD countries over the past few years. Trust barometers have suggested there are alarming signs of citizens losing their trust in institutions, business and governments.
LOST DRIVE OF DEMOCRACY

Voter turnouts and the numbers of political party members have steadily decreased for several decades and the worldwide spread of democracy has slowed down. In order for democracy to work, it must be reinforced, and new operating methods must be found. We might witness power being concentrated in even fewer hands, as well as increased disorder and social tension. On the other hand, it is possible that any signs of a crisis will trigger a golden age of democratic development and inclusion.
UNDERSTANDING TECHNOLOGY WILL BECOME A CIVIC SKILL

Learning and applying new technological skills will become essential, because an increasing number of affairs will be managed online on digital platforms. These skills may include, for example, the use of personal data, an understanding of the effects of algorithms on our media use or being prepared to encounter cybercrime.
There are several serious global problems which cannot be solved within the borders of nation states. The benefits and adverse effects of globalisation and sharing natural resources, clean air, water and agricultural land are examples of issues which concern all people living on our planet. At the same time, the globally interdependent world needs functional grassroots democracy to maintain equilibrium. Developing both of these dimensions will become important in the future.
STRICTER CONDITIONS FOR THE ECONOMY

The long period of slow economic growth is about to end, but future growth will be marked by uncertainty. The framework conditions for the economy will become much stricter because of the ageing population and the limits of Earth’s ecological carrying capacity.
DECISION MAKING WILL BECOME PROBLEM SOLVING

In a world filled with information, it is increasingly difficult to find straight answers. In the future, decision-makers, information providers and solution providers should learn from each other. Instead of making one-off decisions on matters, we should be committed to taking a joint journey of learning and development.
THE ECONOMY IS AT A CROSSROADS

We might not be able to let go of our outdated operating models or that we will strive for economic growth regardless of the cost. In that case, the preconditions for well-being are likely to slowly degrade or utterly disappear as we damage the planet. Yet, if we could find ways to improve well-being without economic growth, we could partially solve the problem caused by our dependency on economic growth. Alternatively, if we could increase both economic growth and well-being while lowering emissions, humanity could enter a completely new era of progression.
NEW MEASURES OF ECONOMIC SUCCESS

In the future, the economy may be evaluated on the basis of success rather than volume or rate of growth. If both well-being and carrying capacity are to be regarded as attributes of a successful society, economic analysis will require new means of measurement that can take these objectives into account. Such means would be able to measure data on, for example, the prerequisites for well-being, democracy, health, climate change, sufficiency of water supplies and natural resources or the preservation of animal species.
VIRTUALISATION

Virtualisation enables us to simulate reality using machines. Virtual reality allows us to experience our presence in locations observed through a device. For example, various kinds of entertainment, travel and cultural experiences can become possible in an entirely new way without need to move from one place to another.
THE INCREASING SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

A circular economy is an economic model in which the production and use of goods or services minimise waste; materials remain in circulation and their value is maintained. A circular economy not only includes recycling, but also sharing, leasing, repairing and reusing, themselves practices that require new technologies.
Computers are now better at identifying things, objects and forms, assessing situations and making decisions based on them. Already computers can learn various skills through different algorithms. The ability to process and analyse great amounts of data gives the machine a huge advantage in comparison with human beings and also makes it possible to better automate demanding work tasks.
FAST ANALYTICS

Modern laboratory techniques, such as taking blood samples, testing bacteria and viruses and even techniques used to investigate crime can be made less expensive, which also makes it possible to sell them also to consumer markets. Soon it will be feasible to buy products offering various analytical functions, which when integrated to mobile devices will indicate the owner’s state of health, the quality of the surrounding air, the freshness of fruit or the composition of any item.
BIOTECHNOLOGY AND PHARMACOLOGY

Biological products can be utilised in food production, chemical processes, textiles, pharmaceutical industry and construction. Genetic manipulation is becoming easier and more precise than ever before. Also, the simulation of DNA in different environments has been the first step in producing synthetic life. It may be possible to develop viruses into programmable tools for various needs as the technology keeps on improving. Personalised medicine and nutrition as well as the conquest of many illnesses can mean significantly longer life expectancies.
ROBOTISATION

Robotisation enables services which are either wholly or partially automated or makes wholly automated production possible. The synergies present in robotisation and artificial intelligence allow robots to better carry out various tasks. Technology companies, for example, are developing personal robot assistants. Self-driving cars, seamless smart transport and drones are based also on robotisation.
The price of solar and wind energy has rapidly decreased. Similarly, battery storage technology has advanced with a great speed. It has been estimated that the price of solar energy will have decreased by 40 per cent by 2020. The interest in hydrogen energy has increased, and more and more people are generating their own energy while selling their excess.
DIGITAL CROWD PLATFORMS

The unprecedented democratisation of knowledge and an increase in transparency have given rise to social media, Wikipedia, open data, open source coding, translation technology, search engines and applications. These functions and their platforms are radically changing the methods used in many areas of human activity. The sharing economy, crowdsourcing and crowdfunding are expanding the space for new forms of organisation and innovation.
GLOBAL IOT AND HYPERCONNECTIVITY

The Internet of Things, robot modularisation, various kinds of crowd platforms, open data, self-organising platforms and so on promote the globalisation of ICT structures. We can also talk about hyperconnectivity when various services, industry, personal property, data and services are connected to a network and interact with each other in different applications. At the same time, this poses threats to the protection vulnerable societies and to privacy.