

SAS Institute

Summary of talk by Magnus Lindkvist, trendspotter and futurologist

### Introduction: The Long View

We live as prisoners of the present, blinded by dramatic news headlines and preoccupied with pressing concerns. To see the future, we need to rise above the present and look at long-term shifts and changes. When we do, secrets reveal themselves.

### Part 1: Two dimensions of change

To simplify the concept of trends, we can think in terms of horizontal and vertical change. Horizontal change is when the same thing happens in more places geographically speaking. This is the essence of globalization. Shanghai looks a lot like New York. More people in more places have a mobile phone or a car.

Vertical change happens when something previously impossible becomes a reality.

Technology represents vertical change. Progress is vertical.

However, when firms think about growth, they are predominantly talking about horizontal change, i.e. selling the same product and service in more places. Vertical growth, however, is where the real opportunities lie but it's more difficult to focus on.

### Part 2: Future Mindsets

We tend to divide thoughts about the future into optimism – the future will be better – or pessimism – Armageddon is nigh. However, when we try to evaluate future outcomes, we tend to project these current opinions on an unwritten future. In other words, there are a lot of things that we do not and cannot know whether they will be good or bad for us. A much better way to look upon the future is through the lens of knowable and unknowable futures. Demography and gravity are knowable parameters. Inventions are unknowable (“You can never predict the invention of the wheel because if you could, you would already have invented it” – John Gray). How can a business navigate the path between the knowable and unknowable future?

### Part 3: Compete or Create?

A company needs to choose whether its primary objective is to compete OR create.

Competition is a game where you identify competitors and try to be better, faster or more efficient than they are. Creation is trying to bring a new way, a new idea to the market.

The challenge is that competition favours the status quo and tends to bring concrete rewards – profits, awards – whereas creation involves breaking rules, exploring abstraction, making enemies. Do you want to be competitive OR make enemies?

### Part 4: The keys of creation

There are thousands of management books on Amazon about how corporations can boost their competitiveness. There are not a lot of thoughts – yet – about how we can or should create. Based on studies over the past century of companies and individuals who have thrived in times of turbulence, four key ideas regarding creation will be presented:

- A) Experimentation – the mother of creation. Trial and error. Cheap failures.
- B) Recycling Failures – most new ideas fail. In fact, you might already have stumbled upon a world-changing idea but it was hiding inside a failure.
- C) Patience and Persistence – because changing behaviours and minds takes time.

Conclusion: Make Enemies!

To avoid going backwards to a medieval cyclical world – where we cannot make things, only take them from others – we need to push the boundaries of creation. By doing so, we will step on toes and disturb the status quo. The price we pay is that we make critics and enemies. It's a price we need to pay.