

The Future is
No Place for Sissies!

*Eight “Super-Trends” You Must Master
to Succeed in Business*

By

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Eight “Super-Trends” You Must Master to Succeed in Business

Karl Albrecht International, as part of its ongoing service to clients, continuously scans the business environment to identify important trends that are shaping the opportunities and threats facing business enterprises. This discussion presents a snapshot of eight important strategic trends expected to prevail over the coming 5-10 years. KAI's database of trends, The TrendBank, compiled through a decade of in-house research and analysis, as well as aggregated findings from various client-sponsored studies, is the source for much of this discussion.

In this discourse, the term “business enterprise” is intended to refer to both commercial and non-commercial organizations of virtually all types. This includes corporations, government agencies at all levels, educational institutions, and associations, as well as philanthropic, fraternal, professional, charitable, and advocacy organizations of various kinds.

The “Strategic Conversation”

The cherished and time-honored process of “strategic planning” in business organizations has changed considerably during the most recent decade. Rapid and wrenching changes in the business environment have made the traditional planning rituals used by organizations less and less responsive to the changing demands of the business environment.

Some experts have even declared the annual strategic planning exercise officially dead. More and more organizations are approaching the question of strategy and execution as a continuous, evolutionary proposition. Many enterprise leaders are less inclined to invest energy and resources in a formal, structured process, preferring to encourage a philosophy of dialogue and adaptation which can answer new challenges more quickly – certainly faster than the traditional one-year planning cycle.

This new “continuous strategic evolution” model, however, is more easily advocated than implemented. If we're going to collapse the traditional annual planning cycle into a zero-time, continuous process, we must change the underlying proposition of strategic thinking and planning. We must change the defining proposition from a *periodic planning process* to an ongoing *strategic conversation*.

The strategic conversation must now involve more people, at more levels, and in more roles than were typically involved in the traditional planning rituals. The strategic conversation has several significant benefits:

- It makes the leaders of the enterprise more generally aware of threats and opportunities in the environment.
- It invites exploration, discussion, debate, and eventual consensus about the need to face the threats and capitalize on the opportunities.
- It sets the context for change; when the key people in the organization – and even the rank-and-file members – have been involved in the conversation about threats, opportunities, and responses, they are much more likely to understand and support the changes.

Two of the central elements of the strategic conversation are 1) the “environmental scan,” or “E-scan,” which is the continuous study of the business environment to identify trends, events, and contingencies which can pose threats or present opportunities; and 2) the “organizational scan,” or “org-scan,” which is the realistic and objective assessment of the organization’s capacity for achieving its mission and adapting to the changing demands of its environment.

The focus of this discourse is the *E-scan*. Here we explore a simple but comprehensive model for taking stock of environmental trends: the “strategic radar” model, and we briefly examine certain key “super-trends” which span across all categories. These super-trends are very likely to shape the overall business environment for at least the next five to ten years.

The Strategic Landscape

To place the following discussion into a useful business perspective, it is worthwhile to highlight a few key issues regarding the study of “the future.”

First, “the future” is a very grand concept, and probably too broad and all-encompassing for human beings to think about effectively. It is very difficult to study “the future” as a topic in and of itself. Futures writers, researchers, analysts, and consultants tend to get lost in a vast forest of possibilities. It is much more feasible, practical, and profitable to study the *future of something*. Dissertations about the future often seem to wander all over the landscape, with categories such as “education,” “demographics,” “business,” “health,” “government,” “society,” “politics,” “technology,” “family,” and countless others. Without a focus for the study of the future of something, futures fans tend to fatigue themselves trying to study the future of everything.

A second key handicap associated with the study of the “generic future” is the lack of a balanced perspective between threats and opportunities. Many futurists and futures fans love to engage in “gee-whiz” speculations about the wonderful things they believe – or hope – will happen. Typically, these kinds of predictions tend toward utopian themes rather than dystopian pessimism; cynical futurists are not much in demand. The inspiring images of the “shining city” – where we’ll all be gliding around in our flying cars and our George Jetson future suits – often selectively exclude mundane challenges such as poverty and homelessness, crime, urban decay, social inequities,

weather disasters, war, and terrorism. These nuisances will presumably be eliminated by the time we get to the new future the gee-whiz fans envision. The path from today to the magical future of tomorrow, however, typically seems rather vague.

A third key handicap inherent in the study of the “generic future” is the lack of a clear sense of time-span, and a fuzzy conception of the sequence of developments that will presumably get us there. What will happen thirty years from today is wide open to creative speculation; what will happen three to five years from now is much more closely connected to what’s happening today.

In business, “long range planning” was once a hallowed concept: one should think in terms of decades at least. Japanese companies were credited with thinking on a scale of 100 years or more. In recent times, businesses have been thinking much more tactically and immediately. While planning horizons of ten, twenty, and thirty years invite some inspired and creative strategic conceptualization, the simple fact is that most executives focus their attention and resources on time spans considerably shorter.

Case in point: in a recent online survey of strategic practices used by associations, fewer than 3 percent of the 459 respondents reported using planning horizons of ten years or longer. Nearly *two-thirds* reported horizons of two years at most. Many of the respondents confirmed that “strategic planning” is rapidly giving way to “strategic evolution.” It appears that the *pentade* (i.e. five years) is a more typical planning horizon than the decade.

While the “gee-whiz” trends or predictions can be interesting and fun to discuss – colonizing Mars, cloned body parts, consumer space travel, and undersea farming – the KAI interactive database of key business trends focuses on actual identified trends and their implications for the next *five to ten years*.

Your Eight Strategic Radar Screens

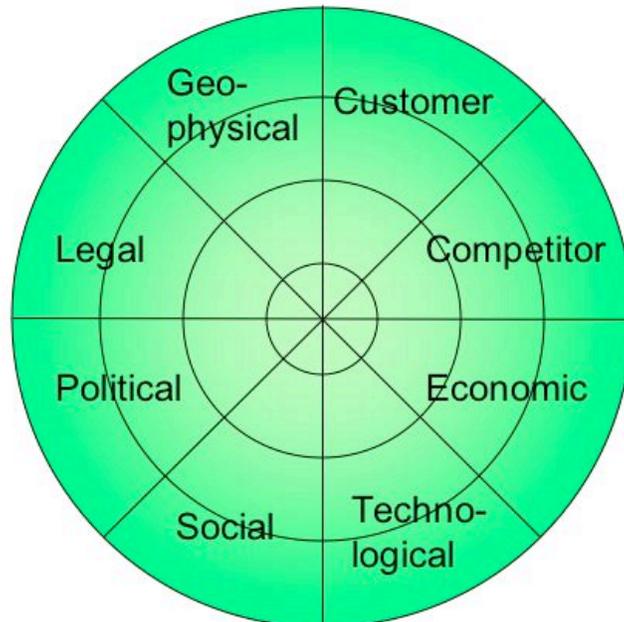
Strategic trend research involves a very wide-ranging investigation and produces a wealth of information. Managing and understanding the large inventory of identified trends calls for an effective system for organizing and classifying them – a practical taxonomy which can support and guide the thought processes of executives who will base their plans and decisions on the findings.

For many years, KAI has employed an explicit categorical structure – Karl Albrecht’s “strategic radar” model, which divides an enterprise’s business environment into eight interrelated sectors of influence: Customer Environment, Competitor Environment, Economic Environment, Technological Environment, Social Environment, Political Environment, Legal Environment and Geophysical Environment. The “Customer” label, as used in this context, has the broadest possible interpretation, referring to buyers of services, clients, constituents, members, sponsors, patrons, supporters, funders – virtually all “value receivers” affiliated with the enterprise. This practical taxonomy, explained in more detail later in this discussion, serves to organize the identified trends into convenient categories for management attention, and for monitoring over time.

This metaphor of a “radar” for the enterprise – a continuous process of scanning the business environment to identify the signals of change, provides a useful vehicle for the

strategic conversation. This model applies equally well for virtually all business enterprises, albeit with a different relative emphasis in each case.

Figure 1 shows a conceptual breakdown of the business environment into these eight key sub-environments. By studying the goings-on in each of them, and connecting the lessons of all of them into a unified picture, we can build a solid basis in fact and a reasonable basis for speculation about what's going to happen to the players in the competitive arena.



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Figure 1. The “Strategic Radar” Model

- **Customer Environment** - the identity, wants, needs, behaviors, habits, values, and life situations of those who do business with you. This category deals with both demographic and psychographic truths about customers. It also recognizes that the enterprise may deal with complex customer entities such as businesses, governments, and groups of people, as well as simply with individuals. What are demographic changes doing to your customer environment? What demographic factors, such as gender, age, marital patterns, birthrates, education, economic situation, buying habits, religious patterns, mobility, and the like, have the biggest influence on your access to your customers? What psychographic changes are happening in your customer environment? How do social values, such as styles and trends, ecological awareness, health consciousness, attitudes toward institutions such as government, police, and corporations, family values, and

gender relationships condition the life environment of your customers? How do rising crime and violence influence their thinking? How are changes in the customers' own personal or business environments forcing them to change? Get yourself mentally inside their worlds and learn what they're experiencing, and how they are reacting to the changes in their worlds. By studying closely what's happening to your customers you can better understand and even anticipate what's happening with them. Are there new issues facing them, and can you translate these issues into the value premise of your business? By the way, be sure to study the customers you hope to do business with, not just the ones you're currently serving; you may discover important differences.

- **Competitor Environment** - the identity, motives, strengths, weaknesses, current behavior, and potential behavior of the other enterprises who compete for your customers' resources. It's not necessary, and usually not advisable, to build your strategic approach around what your competitors are doing; you just need to be clear about how they are approaching the customers you want to do business with. How do the competitors array themselves in your particular industry? Are there just a few big players? Is your enterprise one of them? Or is it a "cats and dogs" industry, with no real dominant player? Are your competitors ganging up? Are they forming alliances or co-ventures? Are they searching for acquisitions that strengthen their customer access? Are they aggressively bringing new offerings to the market? Are they taking advantage of new technologies to do more for the customer or to drive down costs, or both? Are global competitors affecting you? Where are the other players weak or inadequate? What gaps exist? What blind spots might they have concerning customer value that you might be able to exploit? Don't forget that in some cases, your customers themselves may become your competitors, if they "in-source" things they have been buying from you. In fact, your competitors aren't limited to just the other enterprises offering to do exactly the same thing you do. They may be other operators in your business world that do things that could lead your customers to do less business with you.
- **Economic Environment** - the dynamics of markets, capital, critical resources, costs, prices, currency, state of the national economy, and the state of international trade, all of which may affect the buying patterns of the customers, the behavior of competitors, and the opportunities open to your own enterprise. What are the few critical economic factors that most affect demand for what you provide? How recession-sensitive is your industry? How does it behave in boom times? On the down slope? During the comeback phase? Do global markets affect your business directly? Are your prices or costs sensitive to foreign exchange, interest rates, or investment yields? Do you depend heavily on critical materials or processes that fluctuate in price or availability? Is demand for your products or services hostage to, or derived from, other more primary economic activity? How will changes in tax policy affect your customers or your business? What shockwaves can you see coming, and how might they affect you? If you depend on a few large customers for most of your revenue, could losing one jeopardize your survival? Are there economic changes in other industries that

can translate into advantage in your industry, i.e. can you "cannibalize" business from others who vie for the customer's resources? The economic environment is a very complex one, and it helps to sort the various changes into primary and secondary effects, so you can keep the analysis to manageable proportions.

- **Technological Environment** - the range of technological events, trends, and solutions available or on the way that can improve the capability of your enterprise for creating value. This includes the study of the developers of new technologies and their likely behavior, the technology itself, and the trends associated with the application of the technology. How are technological changes affecting your customers, and how do those changes lead to new threats or opportunities for your enterprise? Which technologies are coming fast, and which ones are dying? Are you riding the developing ones, or the dying ones? What are the long-wave changes, the ones certain to drive events for many years? What are the short-wave changes, open to debate about their long term consequences? How long will it take to build the most valuable of these technologies into your operation? Are there new products or processes that can jeopardize the very existence of your enterprise? What possible breakthrough, if achieved, could restructure your whole industry? What one technological capability could make the biggest difference in your ability to create value for your customers? Should you be investing your own resources in developing certain technologies for your needs?
- **Social Environment** - the cultural patterns, values, beliefs, trends, styles, preferences, heroes, villains, and conflicts that form the reference system of people's behavior. These may include the effects of national cultures, individual ethnic cultures within a country, and various social segments such as teenagers and people with various lifestyles. These parameters can strongly affect customer behavior as well as define the opportunities open for new market ventures. What broad social issues or changes in attitudes might make certain products less desirable, or others more in demand? What problems of public life, such as law and order, civil rights, questions of medical ethics, family values and relationships, moral issues, religious issues, the role of the media, and the rights of various special-interest groups, are changing your part of the business environment? What part does the issue of corporate social responsibility, i.e. good citizenship, play in your business? How do people feel about your kind of industry or your organization? What must you rethink, what must you re-evaluate, and what must you start doing differently to position your enterprise with the set of values you consider necessary?
- **Political Environment** - the processes of national, regional, and local governments, as well as various power groups that can affect the rules for doing business. This can include government intervention in particular industries, tax policies at all levels, government expenditures for certain causes, legislation aimed at implementing social policy, and regulation of various industries and trade practices. In some countries, it can even involve the basic stability or instability of the national government, effects of corruption, and the safety of the

enterprise itself. Differences in laws and policies from one regional government to another can mean that doing business can be easy in one part of a country and a nightmare in another. It may even be advisable to relocate all or part of a business operation to eliminate the negative effects of political hostility. The political environment can also include the influence of informally organized pressure groups, activist organizations, associations representing people or organizations committed to various goals, and media interest in certain issues.

- **Legal Environment** - the pattern of laws, lawmaking activity, and litigation that can affect the success of the enterprise. This can involve legal considerations of patents, copyrights, trademarks, and other intellectual property; anti-trust considerations; trade protectionism; product liability; environmental liability; and employment law and litigation, including equal employment issues, sexual harassment, and the rights of employers to hire and fire at will. Clearly, some societies are more litigious than others: the United States, for example, has over twenty times more lawyers per 100,000 population than Japan. Some firms use litigation as part of their competitive strategy. The prospect of expensive or even catastrophic litigation requires that the leaders of the enterprise have a conscious risk-management approach suitable to the realities of their business.

- **Geophysical Environment** - the physical surroundings of the organization's facilities and operations, including the ecosystems and natural resources, availability of raw materials, transportation options, proximity to major population centers and sources of skilled talent, susceptibility to environmental disasters like earthquakes and hurricanes, and the effects of crime in the near environment. Changes in any of these factors can affect the success of the business. The location of the corporate headquarters may not be very significant, but the location of geographic offices and distribution centers to maximize customer access can be critical. Operating in a severely congested urban environment may make it more difficult to attract certain kinds of highly talented employees, who value other aspects of quality of life. For businesses that depend on natural resources such as oil, minerals, wood, water, or land access, trends in the management of these assets by governments or other custodians can have a major effect on strategic options.

Connecting the Dots

In using this environmental model, a note of caution is in order: it is important not to fall into the habit of thinking of these eight hypothetical environments as if they really were separate components. Indeed, they are not. In many cases, the most valuable insights come from discovering phenomena that weave through all of them, or that transcend any imaginary intellectual dividing line between one and another. The only value in dividing them up is to make the process of analysis more manageable. The real value is ultimately in putting them back together.

Eight “Super-Trends” Shaping the Future of Business

After reviewing many trends associated with the eight key radar sectors, KAI has formulated a summary view of important trends in terms of eight over-arching developments – mega-trends, meta-trends, or “super-trends” – that may help business leaders digest the meaning of the various specific trends more readily.

Although subjective in nature, and possibly open to some discussion or even debate, these eight super-trends – one for each of the strategic radar categories – may serve as a context to organize thought and discussion about the relationships and implications of the individual trends.

KAI reviews, revises, and republishes these super-trends at least annually.

1. Customer Super-Trend: “*One Size Fits None.*”

Monolithic markets, customer segments, and product categories are continually breaking up into smaller clusters of demand and preference.

“Demassification,” first articulated by Alvin Toffler in his landmark book *Future Shock* (1980), is the disintegration of mass communication, mass values, mass behavior, and mass preference, which is making the cultures of the developed economies ever more heterogeneous. Diversity in lifestyles, values, and priorities is becoming more apparent with demographic changes, generational patterns and attitudinal segmentations.

Customers – more accurately characterized as *value receivers* – are becoming ever more differentiated in their lifestyles and interests, with smaller and more specialized “preference clusters” responding to more narrowly targeted value propositions.

Demassification and microsegmentation are making it more difficult and costly to reach value receivers and prospective value receivers with broadly-based appeals. Enterprises of all kinds are finding it necessary to develop more targeted and focused value packages to reach these smaller and more specialized clusters of preference.

2. Competitor Super-Trend: “Cherry Picking.”

Enterprises that have traditionally offered a broad range of products or services are now facing specialized competitors who provide more specific, targeted solutions, often in new ways and at lower prices.

The traditional “one size fits all” value packages are losing their appeal as customers increasingly “cherry pick” the offerings, selecting preferred options a la carte.

The reciprocal relationship between the One-Size-Fits-None trend and the Cherry-Picking trend is giving rise to a proliferation of “demand-value combinations,” in which competitors increasingly focus on a few selected areas in which they can hope to achieve competitive advantage.

Web-based sources in particular are threatening the “one-stop shopping” premise of enterprises that provide information and knowledge, such as educational institutions, publishers, associations, and advisory services. “Customer loyalty,” having always been a questionable proposition, has declined as a commercial priority as enterprises must now compete on an item-by-item basis.

3. Economic Super-Trend: “Chinafication.”

The relentless growth of the Chinese economy is creating far-reaching global impacts, which are becoming apparent even to enterprises that have never thought of themselves as operating globally or internationally.

China’s rapidly growing consumer class will compete ever more intensively with first-world consumers for needed resources such as oil, water, energy, grain, manufacturing raw materials, and luxury food items, including meat.

Western manufacturers and consumer product marketers will face ever more intense competitive pressures from the “China-Mart” axis, i.e. low-cost manufactured goods from China marketed by America’s retailing giant Wal-Mart. China’s vast pool of cheap labor may dominate world labor markets for decades, giving that country a near-permanent monopoly on cheaply manufactured goods.

Chinese industrial firms and cartels, in many cases operationally indistinguishable from the Chinese government and the Communist party, are using accumulated foreign exchange reserves to buy up foreign firms and capital assets, seeking to secure a grip on supplies of critical resources such as oil. Chinese trade practices, competitive barriers, labor exploitation, currency manipulation, and piracy of intellectual property are causing protectionist reactions in the developed countries, which will probably increase for some time.

4. Technological Super-Trend: “The Electronic Society.”

The continuing deconstruction and delocalization of human communities, and the emergence of electronically mediated “virtual relationships” are changing our definitions of community and fellowship.

The all-pervasive effects of movies, television, recorded video, music-video, electronic games, personal electronic devices, the Internet experience, email, cell phones, and many other features of the “information ecology” are turning citizens of all developed cultures into heavy consumers of synthetic experience.

The relentless build-out of the many electronic channels of distribution is creating a dense and noisy information environment for all citizens of the electronic culture. At one end of a spectrum, a vast tide of “hot” information, which is arousing, entertaining, amusing, and stimulating, creates and destroys “pop culture” icons at an ever-increasing pace. At the other end of the spectrum, “cold” or “cool” information, which requires careful attention, study, reflection, and active cognition, engages those few who seek it for its utilitarian value.

In the electronic world of business, information is rapidly becoming a profitless commodity and knowledge is becoming the new competitive advantage. We are finding it necessary to rethink Alvin Toffler’s “Third Wave” concept – the shift from industrial societies to information-based societies. To use an Internet metaphor, we’re now moving into “Wave 3.1” – *the focus is shifting from information to knowledge.*

Businesses increasingly use information as part of a two-way exchange with customers. Social networking arrangements, as well as user-generated content – or “co-generated” content – increasingly make customers co-creators of the commercial experience.

Peter Drucker's seminal concept of "knowledge work" also needs to be rethought, as information technology increasingly replaces human mental processes with computer-based processes. Many low-level employees previously thought of as knowledge workers are now being recognized as "data workers," who contribute very little added value to the processing of information.

Individual privacy is rapidly becoming an antiquated concept, as electronic surveillance and "data mining" permeate all aspects of life.

To the extent that digital citizenship correlates with income and educational level, the socioeconomic chasm between the haves and have-nots will be reinforced by a corresponding digital caste system, characterized by "knowledge haves" and "knowledge have-nots."

Politically, new forms of power, pressure, and influence become possible as advocates and organizers can reach very large numbers of constituents, and they can orchestrate mass movements at very low cost, and even, in some cases, at low risk to their own lives. "Blogs," "e-zines", and alternative news channels, together with concepts like "cyber-mobbing" and "swarm advocacy" are becoming part of the political armamentarium, particularly in the hands of out-groups seeking to counter the power of established governments. This figurative "peasants with pitchforks" phenomenon is increasingly prevalent, as caused-based political activists can more easily assemble temporary constituencies through online marketing and fund-raising.

Ironically, the developing state of all-pervasive "connectedness" imposed by Internet use, cell-phone technology, instant messages, and other wireless technologies may actually give rise to a greater appetite for meaningful personal contact. New psychopathologies, such as "Internet addiction," "digital depression," and "connected aloneness" are activating unfulfilled needs for social connections, particularly in the "geek" population and amongst immature young people.

Restoring, rediscovering, or reinventing this personal-virtual balance will be an important challenge for many enterprises.

5. Social Super-Trend: "Dumb and Dirty."

The rapidly saturating media environment is forcing marketers of the popular culture to resort to ever more provocative methods of capturing the attention of a jaded public, creating a pervasive "culture of amusement," which tends to devalue and displace thoughtful discourse.

Pervasive electronic media of all kinds, and particularly those devoted to entertainment, are superimposing a "virtual culture" upon the traditional culture, which has evolved through centuries of direct personal human interaction.

The ever more desperate use of sexualized, violent, antagonistic, emotionalized, and voyeuristic content as an attention-getting strategy in news, advertising, publishing, and entertainment is causing more and more people to perceive the social values projected by the popular commercial culture as narcissistic, hedonistic, anti-intellectual, and regressive.

This implies a kind of “Gresham’s Law of information”: “dumbed-down” content drives “wised-up” content out of circulation. Political discourse in the popular media is becoming ever more polarized, strident, antagonistic, and uncivil. Talk shows attract audiences with content that is increasingly aggressive, intolerant, and vulgar. As a result, the culture of ideas is progressively migrating to the Internet, and media-based societies may increasingly reveal a new division of classes – the gap between the “knows” and the “know-nots.”

This relentless dumbing-down of the popular channels of discourse is also accentuating the differences in world view between fully-conditioned media consumers and a smaller number of self-educating citizens who seek to counteract these influences in their own lives. Advocacy groups are forming around various aspects of the "restoration" agenda, such as the reaffirmation of "family values," opposition to the commercial exploitation of children, corporate social responsibility, ethics of elected officials, improvement in public education, and attention to environmental and ecological priorities.

6. Political Super-Trend: “The American Twilight.”

Lagging national commitment in the U.S., combined with rapid advances by other nations, are steadily reducing or eliminating America’s long-held pre-eminence in a number of important sectors of development.

As U.S. governments and leading industrial firms have devoted less attention and fewer resources to competitive “multipliers” such as scientific research, technology, the environment, energy, manufacturing, education, medicine, finance, and consumer products, a number of other countries have invested more.

As the US continues to lose its unique competitive advantages in science and technology; as intellectual capital continues to develop rapidly in competing countries such as China and India; and as competition for oil and other natural resources intensifies, an “American twilight” of influence is increasingly likely.

“Made in America” is no longer “cool.” Social and political counter-reactions to an increasingly unilateral and militarized US foreign policy, together with developing nationalistic and regionalistic coalitions are eroding the taken-for-granted dominance of American styles, values, products and business practices.

Americans and their political leaders are widely viewed by those of the other developed nations as indifferent, or even willfully ignorant, of the growing problems of environmental protection and sustainable development.

As more business enterprises seek to go international, localized business practices are resisting the global reach of the Americentric model. Enterprises seeking to develop globally will need to partner with local entities, develop an authentic local presence, and evolve more relevant business models.

7. Legal Super-Trend: “Mixed Signals From Government.”

National, regional, and local governments, facing an increasingly complex and uncertain economic and political landscape, are increasingly tempted to resort to idiosyncratic,

self-centered policies and law-making practices that serve their interests without considering the broader side effects.

The threat of terrorist activity, for example, has led to unprecedented restrictions on prospective visitors to the United States, with severe economic side effects for the domestic travel and hospitality industry. Demands for border controls and privacy data by U.S. immigration and customs organizations have alienated many foreign governments and raised significant issues of privacy and disclosure.

Differences in ecological policies and ideologies have also placed some national governments at odds with others, and have led to considerable consternation and backlash from some parts of the corporate sector. “Green” taxes, coercive regulations, and the use of government policy for social change are causing increasing dissent and friction between governments, between levels of government, and between governments and the private sector.

In some cases, regional or local governments have taken unilateral activist positions in order to influence national opinion and national policy.

Business enterprises, faced with this ever more complex and coercive environment of legislation and enforcement, must develop alternative scenarios and flexible strategy options for dealing with increasingly unpredictable and idiosyncratic behavior on the part of various government entities.

8. Geophysical Super-Trend: “Going Green.”

As the issue of global warming and climate change, or “GWCC,” becomes increasingly real in the public perception, governments, businesses, and institutions of all types will experience increasing pressure to be “seen as green.”

Continuing political controversy over the economics of sustainability will probably keep the public discourse about “the environment” in a state of confusion for some time to come. Responses to the challenge of sustainability will range from denial and determined opposition at one extreme, through passive acknowledgement, sloganism and token “PR” activities, modest commitment, and serious efforts to grapple with the consequences. Various forms of eco-fanaticism will further complicate the discourse.

Government policies and political leadership, as the principal drivers of the green conversation and the commitment of resources, will vary substantially from one country to another. Within national boundaries, regional and local leadership will also be significant to the pace of development, and will vary in degrees of commitment.

Within industry, the influence of a few major corporations, key trade associations, and industry councils will tend to set the pace for other players.

The commercial news media can be expected to keep the green issue high on the news agenda, largely because it is easily emotionalized and politicized.

Business enterprises will find it more and more necessary to devote attention and resources to developing green products and practices, and to tracking the direction of the political entities that are shaping the issues and options.

Reacting to the Trends

As one reads these eight super-trends and considers the many associated specific sector trends, several messages immediately emerge. One is that most of the trends one can identify can represent both threat and opportunity. A pessimistic first reading might perceive many of them as “bad news” – an inventory of challenges, a figurative “paradise lost.” A more careful reading, however, could well see them as strongly implying an action agenda. It seems fairly clear that enterprises that want to avoid the slow slide into irrelevance will need to respond proactively to these findings.

A quick glance at the eight super-trends also shows that at least half of them relate directly or indirectly to the “information age” – or more accurately, the emerging “knowledge age.” Information technology, the Internet, “webonomics,” “virtualization” and a variety of other new-age terms must become a standard part of the enterprise leader’s vocabulary. It’s time to stop marveling about the coming age of information and knowledge and get serious about coping with it and capitalizing on it.

If this discourse serves to stimulate, inform and enlighten the ongoing *strategic conversation* in the business community, then it will have achieved its intended purpose.



About the Author:

Dr. Karl Albrecht is an executive management consultant, futurist, lecturer, and author of more than 20 books on professional achievement, organizational performance, and business strategy. He is also a leading authority on cognitive styles and the development of advanced thinking skills. His books *Social Intelligence: the New Science of Success*, *Practical Intelligence: the Art and Science of Common Sense*, and his *Mindex Thinking Style Profile* are widely used in business and education. The Mensa society honored him with its lifetime achievement award, for significant contributions by a member to the understanding of intelligence. Originally a physicist, and having served as a military intelligence officer and business executive, he now consults, lectures, and writes about whatever he thinks would be fun.

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