



Why Rethinking the Future requires Presence in the Here and Now



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One thing the human brain is good at for sure is to think one-dimensionally. We are constantly searching for linear, repetitive patterns to reassure ourselves that we are safe and to avoid an (unnecessary) loss of energy.

Western society in particular has mastered to reduce uncertainty to a minimum, both in our private and professional lives: be it with sophisticated captive insurances, hedging, or more analogously, with security procedures, safety plans, quality inspections, control measures, audit examinations, verifications, accreditations, and certifications [...] the list seems endless. In short, we humans dislike uncertainty in general and put a lot of effort into avoiding it. Sure, that is part of our nature and luckily, it helps us survive.

But the irony behind human activities aimed at 'avoiding uncertainty' is that we tend to forget that we cannot fully eliminate it – no matter how hard we try. Now might be the right time to seriously question whether we have been overzealous in our quest to satisfy our biological need to be safe in the past years.

Events like the Covid-19 pandemic hold up a mirror to our society, and what we are seeing is painful: a global health crisis that is leading towards a severe, socially constructed economic crisis. Economic theories long believed (or rather, people had hopes for) are undeniably becoming 'a thing of the past'. Nowadays, even decent business leaders are proclaiming to burn their university books as those are becoming less precise (yes, we try to be politically correct here). This comes as no surprise given that the irrational is slowly but surely getting the upper hand.

Just two short reminders of the contemporary craziness:

- The issue of profit warnings that miraculously lead to a major rise in stock prices (never heard of that theory before);

- National banks worldwide are printing money like there is no tomorrow and with that, are trampling all joint efforts to maintain independence and stability (while writing these lines mid-June 2020, the total national debt of the USA rose to an incredibly high level of 26'573'844'713'898 US dollars while the total national debt of the Eurozone increased to 10'681'892'786'976 euros/disclaimer, cet. par.; as long as we all believe in the system, we will most probably remain part of the system. The question remains: Who will be the first to start tearing down Potemkin's village?).

In addition, and besides the urgent health situation in the past months, people quickly needed to adapt to several new institutionalized settings. This includes the sudden elimination of formal rites (like the Westerners' 'proper hand shake' that we were taught since childhood), or also the fact that during lock-down, lots of business were able to keep up organizational efficiency despite the prejudice against the 'fear of unproductive home office'. Now more than ever, the world is rapidly and undeniably changing in manifold ways – whether it is for the good or the better is no longer up for discussion.

And here is what we might learn from it:

While many of us are absorbed with thinking about all possible future outcomes for our businesses, industries, families, etc. on a daily basis, we tend to invest too little time to clearly observe the Now. As Eckhart Tolle already described in 1997, only the present moment is real and truly matters. An individual's past and future are created by their thoughts; the power and creative potential accordingly lie concealed in the Now. To reach a state where a non-judgmental analysis of the present is possible is certainly a hard task to master, but a necessary precondition for any future action.

When the winds of change are blowing, we will not be able to build appropriate windmills unless we start to feel the wind. Constantly rethinking the future thus becomes less important. It is more about listening and learning from the lessons of the Now to successfully decide on future endeavours.

Speaking for the Board of Directors, a constant reflection on the present doing might illuminate the path for strategic directions. Three fundamental questions need to be asked and – if possible – answered again and again:

- Are we, as people of our company, doing the things the way we want them to be done?
- How do we align our internal doings with our external environments by finding a common denominator?
- Are we open-minded, curious, reflective, and diverse thinkers, able to adapt fast, also when unexpected circumstances arise?

It is about living consciously in the Here and Now when thinking of the future. Focus, stay open-minded, curious, think diverse thoughts, and adapt fast. These are the high expectations we have also set for our Network for Innovative Corporate Governance (NICG).

The NICG was founded only 18 months ago, and since then, we have seen incredible commitment for and interest in our free, independent, and non-profit spirit. Sincere thanks to all contributions – be it in our conferences, debates, or publications. We are thrilled to continue with positive energy and to contribute to innovative thinking.