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# POSTCARDS FROM THE FUTURE: THE QUEST FOR AUTHENTIC WELL-BEING

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**Summary:** Based on a keynote delivered in July 2017, as part of the EHFG Health Futures Project, this article explores ways in which we could assess and measure true progress in a 21st-century context to deliver a cohesive society for the future. It proposes the inclusive 4P prosperity model, which balances profit with purpose, placing the well-being of people and our planet at the centre of everything we do. Visionary leadership is needed to achieve sustainable goals for both society and business – a vision in which we create value by cultivating values.

**Keywords:** *Social Cohesion, Lifelong Learning, Creative Leadership, No-Age Society, Public Policy*

## Past and present hold keys to the future

Philosopher Marshall McLuhan said: “We march backwards into the future”, and this resonates with anyone involved in planning ahead, since we can only get a glimpse of what tomorrow’s world might look like by considering the landscape and tools we know. Try for a moment to imagine Europe in twenty years’ time in a context of greater well-being for everyone? What would that vision look like and how might we make it happen?

To take the long view, we have reflected on past development, while considering the relevance and potential impact of current events. The result is a Trend Management Toolkit<sup>1</sup> to anticipate the future, and a global Trend Atlas to monitor and filter the interconnected layers of society. These include the socio-economics drivers of PESTEL – politics, economics,

societal, technology, environment and legislation – alongside more values-based and emotional dimensions.

As a society, we are currently facing a spectrum of global and local challenges, from climate change and terrorism to migration and social exclusion. To reduce the potential impact of such volatile forces, together we must cultivate a culture of positive change. New digital tools give us access to more information than ever – allowing individuals to make informed choices from work and play to health and well-being – but dissonance is fuelled by the quantity and quality of information.

We are still in the early days of the Networked Society, but already it is offering new awareness of where we might target energy and resources in the future to improve outcomes for our children and grandchildren. In effect, the ability to

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shape better lives for many more people will be enabled by our increasingly all-seeing networks, and by the realisation that everything is interconnected. Technological progress offers a step change and the tools to better understand weak signals in order to develop relevant and timely approaches. Big data already means we can access information on a vast scale so that we can, for instance, target resources better.

## “how do we measure prosperity and well-being?”

The Trend Atlas is an indicator of what's happening in a current context, the outcome of these drivers is never set in stone. People, organisations and societies don't just land in the future; they create it through their choices and actions. This means that today we have the freedom to explore our options by considering multiple future scenarios.

A bold forecast by economist John Maynard Keynes in 1929 envisaged that, by 2030, growth in the developed world would have slowed down and that a 15-hour week would be the norm because, as he saw it: “people will have enough to lead the good life.” A 15-hour working week is very unlikely within the next two decades, although Sweden's recent test of a 30-hour week found that people's happiness and health improved along with their productivity.<sup>2</sup> With the full potential of artificial intelligence (AI) and robotic welfare technology yet to be understood, Keynes's prediction might not be as far-fetched as it sounds today. However, it is the other part of his prediction that is worthy of closer examination: the belief that by 2030 we would reach a point where we would have “enough”. This is a pressing issue for policymakers to explore; who decides what's ‘enough’, and how do we measure prosperity and well-being to set realistic goals for the ‘good life’ in tomorrow's Europe?

### Fostering creativity in a complex society

Keeping pace is one of our biggest challenges in today's society. In 2012, IBM interviewed 1,500 CEOs across the globe. There was a broad consensus that complexity is escalating and that most organisations are not equipped to cope. The leaders interviewed agreed that creativity is the single most important leadership quality for the 21st-century. If creative thinking is the essential skill then how do we foster a society in which it is activated to solve real-world problems and achieve sustainable progress?

There is certainly evidence to suggest that it is time businesses put their creative hats on in order to reassess their role in society, since today only one-in-five brands is considered to have a positive impact on people's well-being. If 80% of companies are judged to make no meaningful difference to our lives, it would suggest that the leaders of all organisations need to re-examine their purpose beyond making a profit. One potential solution for navigating this minefield of complexity is a 4P prosperity approach – of *people, planet, purpose and performance*. When organisations have a positive impact on both people and the planet, and a deeper purpose underpinning all their activities, then they enrich their environment rather than merely feeding off it – creating sustainable value in a much wider context.

### People and the quest for authentic well-being

Increasingly, people want to get more out of their lives. Forward-thinking organisations are already tapping into the potential for growing people, not just gross domestic product (GDP). According to WEF's Future of Jobs Study,<sup>3</sup> emotional intelligence is now one of the most desirable skills and will be critical in an era of automation. In Sweden, the creative business academy, Hyper Island, assists people in building the skills and confidence needed to lead the future. In the US, Stanford University's Design Your Future programme – created by Silicon Valley design innovators, Bill Burnett and Dave Evans, and now open to all – teaches skills such as cross-cultural working, problem solving, entrepreneurship,

creativity and design. In London, The School of Life, founded by philosopher Alain de Botton and a group of writers, artists and educators, are devoted to lifelong learning and run courses on emotional intelligence. The pursuit of happiness, fulfilment and human flourishing is the future of business, says de Botton.

Organisations of every type, and not just policymakers, are crucial players in assisting people to flourish as individuals and become engaged, happy citizens – because when people thrive so do businesses and society. In this context, we need to rethink the term ‘going to work’ by looking at the best models of lifelong learning and co-creation. Already, learning through play, scenario creation and ideation are useful approaches for inspiring people and to build the ‘out of the box thinking’ tools required to solve 21st-century issues. This rings true on many levels in a greying society, where self-diagnostic tools and eHealth solutions will redefine the role of health care – taking us from a prescriptive model to a more collaborative preventive one of self-monitoring and actively building our own health capital.

### Planet and collaborative communities in an age of no retirement

While people look to improve their own future, they also want to participate in making the world a better place by being part of something bigger than themselves. There are already several collaborative communities and innovation labs around the world cultivating the thinking needed to tackle pressing challenges. For instance, IKEA's Space 10 in Copenhagen gives total creative freedom to a global network of contributors, enabling them to explore 21st-century themes such as food security, urbanisation and well-being.

In an ageing society, we could potentially face a future of no retirement. To prepare for much longer working lives, we must adopt a ‘no-age’ mindset, so we can harness the skills of every generation. The Age of No Retirement is a movement for inter-generational action to create a future where our age doesn't define us. Also, in the UK, Age of Creativity is a

collaborative network of professionals spanning health and social care, academia and the arts using creative activities to help older people maintain quality of life. A cornerstone of its work is inspiring people – whatever their age – to play an active role in shaping their own quality of life.

Even though age discrimination undeniably exists, it's also inspiring a new generation of successful 'olderpreneurs' driven a movement of start-ups by older people. The *Financial Times* commented recently that, while older workers are in short supply in the City of London, the over-64 workforce has doubled in the UK in the past decade alone.<sup>[4]</sup> What might the no-age generation of policymakers and entrepreneurs do to develop propositions and platforms that help us remain productive and fulfilled citizens throughout our lives?

### Building purpose through 'betterness'

Redefining our goals for prosperity is the key to developing a sense of purpose. The Austrian-American management guru Peter Drucker noted that: "management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things". While this quote is often cited in a business context, it has equal relevance to policymakers – expressing the urgent need to have a clear 'betterness' goal in both legislation and public health guidance.

There are some striking examples from the Nordic countries of how the 4P prosperity model can be used in public policy to shift society in a positive-values direction. In Denmark, paternity leave has become compulsory – a clear message that parenthood (not only motherhood) is critical to family futures. The Norwegian Public Roads Administration – tasked with keeping Norway's roads and transport infrastructure running smoothly – offered employees who biked or walked to work an extra week's holiday as a reward for not only relieving the strain on the nation's roads, but also improving their own health and well-being. Both examples show that simple initiatives can have a far-reaching impact in changing behaviours for both individual and the common good.

Inspiring people to take control of their lives puts the human perspective back into economics. A good example is UBS' Why Health Matters campaign. In a sector notorious for its long working hours, this campaign invited workers to think about their work/life balance to put themselves and family first. A further UBS initiative, known as 'take two', has offered investment bankers at least two hours a week of personal time.<sup>[5]</sup>

### Fostering better performance in a smart society

In our data-led economy, valuable new tools are evolving, enabling policymakers to collaborate with citizens and businesses to drive a culture of positive change. While automation and urbanisation are often perceived as a threat to society, the World Bank has noted that the growth of cities may actually be a positive force in building a sustainable society.<sup>[6]</sup> Since 80% of GDP is generated by cities, good management of urban areas through networked information and automation can build prosperity, improve public health outcomes and foster innovation and strategic alliances.

Smart cities require a collaborative, open-source system, rather than a top-down approach. New York City has successfully capitalised on using real-time big data in to solve complex urban problems – pooling diverse information to identify trouble spots and target everything from landlord-tenant issues to breaches in food-safety regulations. E-government – already successful in Scandinavia – makes it much easier for citizens to feel part of civic life by breaking down traditional barriers between the electorate and legislators/local government. For instance, Denmark's MindLab is a cross-ministry innovation lab using design thinking to facilitate new public-sector solutions. Notably, it encourages the active involvement of individuals and businesses in finding these solutions.

In public health, big data can deliver real-time information, in even the most rural areas. Canada's OSCAR (open source clinical application and resource) is a McMaster University-developed programme for primary care clinics that

has expanded into a multi-disciplinary resource for health professionals. It enables everything from accurate patient record keeping to electronic referrals. The potential for eHealth to revolutionise the way we deliver care by 'joining the dots', is enormous and offers a route to manage resources more efficiently while delivering targeted care and better health outcomes.

### 'The Good Life' in tomorrow's society

To return to John Maynard Keynes' prediction of life in 2030 and beyond, we may never achieve a 15-hour working week in our lifetime but policymakers and businesses can address the question of how more of us will achieve a better work/life balance and come closer to 'the good life'. A 4P approach – *people, planet and purpose for better performance* – offers a route to a more cohesive and positive leadership style focused around a society that works for all of us. One could envision a future scenario where leaders say: "I don't want to be the best in the world – I want to be the best for the world". This is surely the society we all aspire to for our children and grandchildren.

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