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[Home](#) > [Mapping the Future: Stairways to Heaven or Highways to Hell?](#) > Mapping the Future: Stairways to Heaven or Highways to Hell?

Mapping the Future: Stairways to Heaven or Highways to Hell?

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Date:

07/11/2013

Speaker:

Session Reporter: Gregory Blanc and Greta Ciganaite

The objective of this session was to understand how innovation drives society and economy, and how to make the best of it. People need to accept the change and embrace it, because innovation has been shown to drives GDP growth from the industrial revolutions onwards.

Mr. Curley first introduced the session by quoting Niels Bohr and Alan Kay about how difficult it is to predict the future. He then focused his talk on how important innovation is, and how it has shifted from universities and companies to the user community. In a few words, “moving forward is about community”.

Then Mrs. Kroes offered an inspiring talk about creating the future. She highlighted the fact that innovation is not possible without a human behind it.

At the basis, one needs to think what will the future look like. And it is actually a good thing to read a little science fiction to get a grasp, as demonstrated in an example where Neil Damon visits a sci-fi convention in China. He was told that because Chinese officials thought their youth wasnot innovative enough, they asked big innovative companies how they were inspired. They answered that they were actually reading sci-fi books as kids.

She finally invited young Amy, 13 years-old, on the stage that told the audience about the type of education she would love to have: inspiring teachers to whom young people will look up to; opportunities to go out and branch to what they want to do, to specialize at a young age. Amy finally asked the adults to consult children on how to change the educational system.

The second talk was given by Dr. Wendy Schultz, who is a trained futurist. In her talk about inventing the future, she gave us several tips about changes for us to think about, explore and exchange through discussions.

Beware of the straight lines: change is not linear and it often relies on people. She showed that changes occur in overlapping ways.

Beware of the lone wolf future: there is no single future but a myriad.

Beware of intentions: the use we envisioned for a product is not the only use people we will make of it. Unintended consequences abound.

Beware of your lenses: people other than you perceive the world differently.

In another talk, Mr. Burghin first defined “disruptive technology” using 4 factors: the technology should have a fast rate of change, impact the market, quickly influence users and be sufficiently transformative. Among 100 of the recent top technologies, he identified only 12 that he thinks will be impacting us in the next 10 years. He grouped these technologies into 4 clusters: “the way we use IT”, “machines working for us”, “rethinking energy for coming ages”, “changing the building blocks of everything”.

To conclude, he predicted that these technologies, if they materialize, would produce half of the technology enabled productivity growth alone, by 2025.

Final talk was given by Mr. Cochrane, and was about the inability of our past culture to cope with changes, called “The Curse of Efficiency”.

He began by criticizing the educational system where kids are taught to read, write, count and locate names on a map, instead advocating an innovation-teaching education.

He then demonstrated how efficiency is counterproductive: optimizing by money alone leads to brittleness and instability.

He pointed out that sustainability is important and cannot be done by optimizing old processes. By including technologies, machines, the man is able to pass beyond his own limitations: machines are now the biggest communicators, moving into design and even general knowledge.

Therefore, Mr. Cochrane advocates ICT as a vital part of our symbiosis.

For ICT students/young researchers, the most interesting takeaway from the session would be that they need to stand up for a new innovative way to educate, for them and the coming generations, as innovation is vital, correlated to our evolution.

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