Introduction

Innovation, on which any organization is so reliant, is about to become more dynamic and challenging than ever.

I believe that hyper-relevance, ultra-personalization, collaboration, ethics and sustainability are the crucial foundations of success. Meanwhile, those tasked with creating that innovation are now faced by two key issues with implications that could not be more profound, nor more disruptive.

The first sees the challenge of the environmental crisis mean that society and business alike are confronted with an existential dilemma. It’s one that has, in the majority of cases, effectively been ignored. That crisis has in fact become a ‘climate and biodiversity emergency’ and major action is needed, with businesses in every industry having a role to play.

The second sees technology, and particularly artificial intelligence, having game-changing impacts across all sectors. From product development to service provision, from smart cities to connected homes, and from future jobs to next-generation education, the effects will be deeply felt at all levels, across society and business, around the world.
Throughout this book, therefore, I illustrate the effect of these issues across a wide variety of areas. The first being a global problem that has to be addressed with the utmost urgency, and where innovation has a crucial role to play; while the second is set to be the ultimate ‘innovation enabler’ as we also finally move into the second phase of the internet, where the Internet of Things enables ever more ubiquitous connectivity.

In each case, creative thinking and collaborative approaches show the way forward.

For companies that are seen, by their behaviour, to be meeting these challenges in an effective and inventive manner, then on purely consumer-engagement and brand-differentiation levels, this will enable them to achieve greater business success.

In the book, I take note of renowned innovative ‘thinkers and doers’ (from philosophers to entrepreneurs) and reference international agencies, consultants, think tanks, brands, movements and organizations that illuminate, in my opinion, best-case examples of ‘how to do it’.

In a consumer context, I portray a major overall shift from passive to active consumption. The implications are that businesses must reflect new lifestyles, behaviours and attitudes from people who are both more demanding in their desires from brands, and less satisfied with current branded offerings. Meanwhile, a key ongoing trend in innovation circles sees product development being recast as ‘service renovation’ or ‘experience creation’ and this move shows not the slightest sign of abating.

From a business strategy perspective, being customer centric via agile responses to attitudinal trends and behavioural change is a more vital approach than ever. This is why, for instance, the role of the designer is of such importance. And it’s also why the influence of the educational establishment is so significant, as

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their ongoing promotion of ‘design thinking’ benefits organizations around the world.

In addition, an absolutely vital point is that of ‘social innovation’, this being a core issue reflected everywhere from debates at the World Economic Forum to global activist group protests. What is fascinating is that both combine some similar demands. These include that organizations of all types now demonstrate a proactive social purpose, which requires ever more open-minded thinking in order to achieve the required results.

So, how do innovators answer the variety of demands with which businesses are confronted? I believe that relevance, personalization and sustainability are the key issues on which to base strategic and tactical approaches, and that a simple formula for enabling successful innovation, and then proving the results of it, is ‘Insight + Ideas + Impact’.

I’ve worked on innovation projects, on an international basis, for a very wide range of clients and agencies over the years. It still amazes me how much confusion there is about this subject. For me, the innovator quite simply ‘seeks problems to solve when confronted with a challenge’.

On a practical level, how do they do it? I believe that the sign of genuine innovators is that they look for inspiration, consider ideas, products or services that may already be relevant, and then either utilize these to solve the dilemma they face, or move from incremental innovation to genuine invention, and create a new answer to that problem.

Meanwhile, all too many organizations seem to remain in a wilful state of inertia when it comes to understanding the disruptive changes taking place across their sector or industry. To them, I would merely repeat the well-known advice of Henry Ford, who so memorably said ‘Whenever you get the idea that you are fixed or that anything is fixed for life, you’d better get ready for a sudden change’.
Chapter guide

To illustrate how I’ve approached the variety of innovation areas covered in this book, this is a brief guide to the chapters within it:

Chapter 1 Classic innovation theory and current leading-edge thinking

I begin the book by providing a brief overview of a selection of renowned innovative thinkers, highlighting an eclectic mix of philosophers and business visionaries including René Descartes, Joseph Schumpeter, John Locke, Karl Popper, Theodore Levitt, Rebecca Henderson, Peter Drucker, Rita McGrath, Philip Kotler, Mariana Mazzucato and Amy Webb.

In doing so, I identify what I believe are some crucial routes to innovative thinking, regarding the need to challenge established thinking, being aware of cultural signals, leveraging organizational assets, and conducting research into tension points, prior to concept evaluation.

Chapter 2 The disruptors disrupted. What next for adland?

In this chapter, I discuss innovative actions that are revitalizing communication strategies and the agency world that creates that brand communication. In setting the overall picture, I highlight a sector still reeling from a decade of unparalleled disruption, a situation to which there is absolutely no end in sight.

I also look into a key fault line running through much of the agency world, which impacts their output – a continuing lack of diversity. Hence suggesting that the make-up of their teams is well overdue regarding issues based around gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age, religion, lifestyle and background.

Chapter 3 The future of retail and the future home

In Chapter 3, I focus on the future of retail and the future home; subjects that are joined, like so many others in this book, within
the overall context of smart technology, environmental issues and changing consumer behaviour.

Yet, somehow, many businesses appear to be ignoring these new realities despite the implications of smart stores, smart homes and informed consumers being so important. From a retail perspective, the pace of change has never been faster, and the pressure on retail margins has never been greater. It is crucial that businesses reflect new lifestyles, behaviours and attitudes. Meanwhile, the overall impact of retailing is infiltrating our domestic environments as never before. I therefore focus on the implications of the connected home and, within it for example, the future kitchen, where technology ‘knows us and assists us’ as never before. The issue of the staggering amount of consumer data being gathered in our living environment is discussed in depth relating to both the positive implications, ie personalized services, and the negative, ie increased privacy intrusion.

Chapter 4 How the food and drink industries leverage catalytic trends

This chapter describes a series of catalytic trends being utilized by organizations ranging from multinational corporations to local start-ups, alongside the highlighting of a variety of category-changing products and packaging that have resulted from leveraging those issues.

Throughout the chapter I therefore outline a range of dynamic actions focusing on global consumer behaviour and sector trends that have issues such as ethics, sustainability, individual health benefits, and user experience as foundational considerations. Specific activity connected to these areas reference factors such as localism, provenance, mindfulness, transparency, traceability, bioengineering, premium convenience and hyper-personalization.
Chapter 5 The wellness economy meets the lifestyle industry

In Chapter 5 I examine the health and wellness market, where the amount of innovation taking place is staggering. Hence, I cover a wide spectrum of areas undergoing transformational change.

In doing so, I illustrate an increasingly holistic and multi-sector approach to mental and physical health. This has led to a ‘multiplier-effect’ where traditional notions of health products, services and organizations are being leveraged by individual and collaborative activity across sectors such as beauty, fashion, hospitality, sports, food, architecture and retail. In addition, this dynamic situation is being continuously impacted by catalytic start-ups, alongside progressive action from legacy brands, on a global basis.

Chapter 6 Smart cities, the IoT and connected living

This chapter looks into a range of dynamic issues and trends affecting ‘cities of today and tomorrow’ and highlights a variety of catalytic innovations impacting the people living and working in, and visiting, them. This is happening at a time when serious questions are being asked of those tasked with creating progressive answers to the problems facing citizens, businesses and governments alike.

The approach I’ve chosen to take focuses on the ‘chaotic realities’ of urban life, alongside some extraordinarily innovative ways in which these realities are being addressed, regarding plans being developed and actions being taken relating to the here and now, in addition to insights gained from leading-edge trend forecasters and scenario planners.

Chapter 7 Intelligent and sustainable: a new era of tourism and mobility

In Chapter 7, I cover a range of trends and innovative activity taking place across the tourism and mobility sectors. I’ve joined
these areas together from the perspective of similar cultural and social trends linking to product development and service provision, from both legacy brands and start-up operations.

The two issues that I focus on most in these sectors (in all their guises) are environmentalism, from the perspective of ‘conscious consumption’ where sustainability is a central concern, alongside ongoing digitization, particularly relating to artificial intelligence and the anticipated impacts of other forms of next-generation technology.

Chapter 8 The transformation of entertainment by technology, experiences and personalization

In this chapter, I look into the overall entertainment industry, and a range of specific areas within it, including the gaming, sports, television, radio, film, music and festival sectors. These areas all have key areas in common: relating to the effect of technological innovation and a demand for ever-greater levels of consumer experience.

I highlight issues such as the gaming sector being impacted by a new generation of consoles and streaming technology. Regarding sports, I look into how augmented and virtual reality will offer fans a ‘full-immersion’ experience. In the television sector, I note that, despite all rumours to the contrary, broadcast TV is alive and well. Meanwhile, customer online-viewing behaviour has transformed content consumption and, with it, the film industry. I also look into the music business where consumer experiences are becoming ever more rewarding, and then cover the festivals sector, where the number and variety of these catering to niche audiences has multiplied massively.

Chapter 9 The future of work: goodbye to certainty and stability. Hello to Industry 4.0

In Chapter 9 I outline how a range of trends are impacting the future of work from a range of perspectives including future
workforce desires, the catalytic impact of technology, the enablement of autonomy and the broadening remit of creativity. I illuminate why the future workplace will become a more emotional, diverse, inclusive and responsive ‘exchange space’ and why issues ranging from wellness to flexibility to virtuality are becoming ever more key considerations.

I therefore look into specific areas such as leadership, ‘conscious coworking’, multi-generational teams, lifelong learning, the search for meaning and value creation, and how we’re witnessing a move from ‘talent owning’ to ‘talent attraction’. I also explain how we need to fundamentally reappraise work by taking a fresh look at the impact of social and cultural trends regarding the ‘who, how, why and where’.

Chapter 10 Fintech and insurtech, and the battle of choice vs privacy

This chapter looks into the dynamic areas of the banking and insurance markets, where the level of disruptive innovation, particularly in Western markets, is at long last catching up with those in the East.

The supercharging of the financial services industry (in all its guises) by Big Tech provides them with a dynamic challenge, or a ‘perfect storm’ problem. The implications of ever-increasing technological progress, the impact of stricter regulations and the effect of increasingly demanding consumers, set against a broader backdrop of changing social expectations, mean that both these sectors are set for a turbulent ride over the next few years. Common denominators include innovation based around increased consumer choice while safeguarding consumer privacy.

The Influencers and Revolutionaries
Innovation Manifesto

I believe it’s virtually impossible to imagine any type of business that won’t be affected by the issues I describe as being set to
impact the sector, or sectors, within which they operate. (And yes, I’m well aware of that being a big claim.)

In a context set by the global crisis of climate change and the disruptive impact of technological developments, governments, businesses and society alike require levels of change that see innovation, in all its forms, being highlighted as ‘the answer’ as never before.

But while many view these issues with a sense of resignation, even fear, I believe the future is one to look forward to with a positive mindset and a progressive attitude.

In the final chapter, I therefore summarize my thinking around the way ahead for innovation, by providing an ‘Influencers and Revolutionaries Innovation Manifesto’ for readers to use as an easy reference guide to some of the key points discussed and examined throughout my book.

Set as a backdrop to my thinking is the belief that the catalytic times in which we live have profound implications for organizations of all varieties, meaning that it’s no longer ‘business as usual’. The levels of imagination and creativity required to successfully deal with the challenges that affect us were indicated in the starkest terms by, for instance, Greta Thunberg’s speech at the UN when she called for systematic change. They continue to be highlighted via the ongoing activities organized around the world by Extinction Rebellion and via the ethos of those such as the B Corp movement, who advocate for a radically different approach to capitalism.

A well-known industry saying has it that the most successful companies achieve their ongoing success by preparing for change, rather than simply attempting to adapt to that change when it appears.

I therefore hope that the wide range of innovative approaches and actions that I’ve illuminated in this book assist readers in their own preparations for the ever more disruptive changes that are appearing around us, and the unknown ones that must surely come.