



Daniel Burrus: Anticipatory Leaders Leverage Future Facts™

Daniel Burrus 3/3/2021



The coronavirus pandemic has proven to be one of the most disruptive occurrences to happen in modern history. Starting in mid-March of 2020, something happened that would have been considered unheard of on January 1: Everyone was forced to change in some way — and with so many business closing their doors, and large numbers of employees globally sheltering in place and working from home, we turned to digital solutions like never before.



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From a business perspective, you were either shut down, like bars and restaurants, or you were booming, like grocery stores and pharmacies. And with no clear end to the pandemic in sight, there were, and still

are, extremely high levels of uncertainty to deal with, on both a personal and a business level. Unlike the Great Recession of over a decade ago, the coronavirus pandemic was not the result of a rapid industry decline like housing prices dropping to foreclosure levels, or a dramatic stock market crash due to bad loans. This was quite a different disaster, creating unique problems we had no experience in solving, as well as new types of opportunities. The solutions — from a vaccine level, a business level, and a government level — would need to be quite different as well.

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We cannot turn back the clocks and undo the damage the pandemic has done, but we can move forward with an anticipatory mindset and a firm plan of action. For many decades now, and in all industries, digital disruption has been on an exponential curve upward. Because the pandemic forced us to turn to technology for help on both a personal and business

level, the pace of technology-driven change increased dramatically, far beyond merely exponential levels. Now that this change has been set in motion, the question remains: What do we do now?

Having a plan is always a key to success. There is an old saying: “Failing to plan is planning to fail.” I would add that it is equally important to build the likelihood of change into the plan by making the plan a dynamic plan (as opposed to a static plan that is unchangeable). But both during and after the pandemic, successful planning requires more than a simple business forecast (of events that may or may not happen) or scenario planning (in which a planning team creates a number of possibilities and develops a reactive strategy for each).

Hundreds of organizations worldwide have embraced my Anticipatory Organization Model® to elevate their planning, accelerate innovation and transform results, because it allows them to find certainty in an uncertain world and the confidence to make bold moves forward. A

foundational portion of the methodology teaches you that all trends are either Hard Trends based on *future facts* (relating to events that will happen) or Soft Trends based on *future assumptions* (about events that might happen). By separating *future facts* from *future assumptions*, you have a powerful way to uncover game-changing opportunities — even in a pandemic!

In scenario planning, all scenarios represent Soft Trends, or assumptions about the future that might happen. None of these scenarios represents a *future fact*, which is why you need so many scenarios. Soft Trends, and the scenarios you can derive from them, are very useful because they identify opportunities to influence an assumption. But assumptive scenarios neglect the most important part of strategic planning, *future facts* — or, in other words, certainty.

Presently, the vast majority of organizations in a multitude of industries are reactionary — or, at best, agile fast reactors. While agility is very important, the pandemic has showed us that when disruptive change occurs, it doesn't matter how agile you are — you can't react quickly enough to get ahead of the change curve and truly take advantage of disruptive change. Therefore, as you create your plans for the years ahead, you will find it very beneficial to move beyond basing your plans only on assumptions about what the future will bring and to learn instead to anticipate and use *future facts* to take better advantage of what is to come.

2020 Accelerated Digital Trends

Digital disruption was already increasing at an exponential rate even before the big elephant known as COVID-19 entered the room in 2020. When the pandemic hit, many focused on the obstacle and put innovation and growth out of mind, replacing them with a reactive strategy only.

Of course, we did have to react to massive changes quickly, which is why I always say that it is important to be agile. Many things come out of the blue to which we need to be able to react quickly. However, as an Anticipatory Leader, you are not limited to mere reaction. You learn how to create a list of things you are certain about, and a list of things that you can do, thereby arming yourself with a way to grow no matter

what the situation is.

For example, here is a Hard Trend *future fact*. The pandemic will end. Post-pandemic success will be determined by what you do now, not what you do then! Therefore, becoming anticipatory — that is, spending less time putting out fires set by the pandemic and more time discovering the amazing opportunities that are right there for you to see — will serve you well into the future.

As I said earlier, the pandemic has dramatically *accelerated* many of the digital trends that were already growing exponentially long before the pandemic. For example, *Digital Hard Trends like eCommerce accelerated ten years' worth in five months!* During the lockdown, many had to stay home, prompting them to shop online for just about everything, including ordering food for curbside pickup. Even grocery stores that were packed with customers saw an increase in demand for online ordering. And as you might guess, contactless payment systems also grew rapidly.

When technology advances accelerate, the number of new opportunities accelerate as well. Are you and your organization taking the time to identify the new opportunities for accelerating growth that this massive acceleration in ecommerce enables?

Digital Trends in Accounting and Finance

The same challenges and opportunities applied to the accounting and finance industry. When the pandemic hit, midsize and small banks, as well as accounting firms that were not already using VPNs for security and the cloud, quickly turned to cloud solutions to maximize the productivity of both their remote staff and remote customers. The distancing forced by safety concerns represented a major opportunity for those Anticipatory Accounting™ firms and banks that had anticipated these Hard Trends and were already using cloud computing services and secure VPNs for remote work before the pandemic hit. These well-prepared organizations very quickly adjusted and benefited from having their employees and customers work remotely. And as you might guess, the distancing forced by the pandemic *accelerated remote working by 10 years in just five months — and cloud computing, which was already being used by*

many organizations, by four years in just five months.

Are you and your organization taking the time to identify the new opportunities for accelerating growth that this massive acceleration of distributed cloud computing services enables? Do you have a plan to leverage what you've learned from remote working after the pandemic ends?

Banks and the financial industry have had to contend with another major challenge: With so many employees going remote and customers going digital, there has been a sharp acceleration in digital cash management, remote banking, and applications for loans, not to mention PPP loan management. As a consequence, digital fraud has become an even bigger problem — one that drove the *accelerated use of adaptive and predictive cybersecurity applications by five years in five months.*

Are you and your organization taking the time to identify ways you can take cybersecurity to the next level? Instead of simply reacting as quickly as you can threats, are you developing a predict-and-prevent strategy?

Going Forward, Not Back

It is important to understand that things will not fully go back to the way they were pre-pandemic, but that should not worry you. In your personal life, you'll still want — and be able — to do most of the things you did pre-pandemic, like taking a walk on a beach and going to a restaurant with friends. But the way you do those everyday things will involve a much higher level of digital integration, even if you don't actually see it. And when it comes to business, both p transformation and digital disruption have been accelerated, and will continue to accelerate post-pandemic.

That's why it is so important to become an Anticipatory Leader who identifies problems *before* they occur (so that you can pre-solve them) and disruptions *before* they disrupt (so that you can turn change and disruption into a business and personal advantage).

Playing Offense Versus Defense

Consider almost any team sport, which requires players to focus on

both offense and defense. Offense is focused on moving the ball forward and gaining points. Defense tries to prevent the opponent from scoring points.

Defense is reactive: The faster you react (the more agile you are), the better you're able to protect and defend your team's interests. Offense, on the other hand, is anticipatory: It requires players to scan the entire playing field continuously for opportunities to move the ball forward and score points.

To succeed on the field, a team must be effective both at reacting and anticipating. But most businesses, and the people who lead and manage them, spend the vast majority of their days only reacting — to a problem, a customer complaint, an email, or a situation. In other words, these businesses and their managers are only playing defense.

But how many championships have been won with defense alone? The last 20 years of Superbowl winners didn't triumph simply because they had the best offense — they were the best at being anticipatory!

The pandemic has illustrated for us that when things change fast and that change accelerates, you can't react quickly enough to get ahead, no matter how agile you are. Becoming an Anticipatory Leader allows you to take control of change and disruption, and to become what I call a *positive* disruptor, creating the transformations that need to happen to elevate your organization's relevancy and accelerate innovation and growth. In business, offense wins!

Actively Shape Your Future!

Technology trends have been dramatically accelerated by between four and ten years in just a few months. It's important to understand that this dramatic acceleration, which has pushed beyond merely exponential levels, has created many new and game-changing opportunities for you and your organization. Have you noticed? Are you building accelerated technology Hard Trends and *future facts* into your plans now? Are you positioning your organization to be a positive disruptor in the years ahead?

It's time to play offense, to be anticipatory! It's time to actively shape your future — because if you don't, someone else will!

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