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# The Master Strategist

Ketan J. Patel

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# THE MASTER STRATEGIST

Power, Purpose and  
Principle

KETAN J PATEL



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# About the Book

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Since the turn of the century, we have seen hopes of a new era of peace shattered by the attacks of 9/11. We have witnessed the US become embroiled in a divisive and seemingly unwinnable war in Iraq. We have looked on as new nuclear rivalries have sprung up with Iran and North Korea. We have seen Europe struggle to define its place in the New World Order. And we have observed the balance of world focus shift towards China and India as they have continued their unprecedented economic rise.

What is the significance of all of this? Are these random events or is there an underlying pattern? What is required of leaders and individuals to propel the world in a more positive direction? *The Master Strategist* provides the means to decipher these changes, offering unique insights into the issues and patterns that are defining the future, and pointing the way to strategies for a freer and more peaceful and prosperous world.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Ketan Patel is the founder and chief executive of an investing institution, Greater Pacific Capital, which applies global financial and intellectual capital to the rapidly rising markets of China and India. Ketan is also establishing think tanks in both countries to foster deeper exchange and understanding. He was formerly a managing director at Goldman Sachs, where he built and headed their global think tank, The Strategic Group, to influence the agendas of selected global CEOs, investors and governments. He pursues interests in a broad range of areas including geo-politics and esoteric thought. He has practised and continues to learn from the disciplines of Tai Chi, Wing Chun, Pranayam Yoga and meditation.

The use of might has often been the defining character of today's and yesterday's leaders. Such strategies lead to war, violence, racism, oppression, repression and the impoverishment of entire peoples. Military and media capability is so great today that we can so abuse the whole world.

With all the scientific developments we have made, we still need to sit and speak of the challenge of the dichotomies of war and peace, violence and non-violence, racism and human dignity, oppression and repression, liberty and human rights and poverty and freedom from want.

The world stands today on the road that can lead to a common freedom but to walk this road we will need to walk together. This book is an important book; for those of us who strive to create a more peaceful and unified world, it explains the ways in which we may hold hands along this journey, the types of leaders we will need and the type of people we will need to become.

Nelson Mandela, April 2005  
On *The Master Strategist* by Ketan J  
Patel

IN 2001, OECD countries allocated approximately \$645 billion<sup>1</sup> to research and development.<sup>2</sup> Three of the largest areas of investment were the fields of medicine, computing and weapons. The success of this investment is clear to all of us in the huge advances that have been made in creating cures for diseases that previously were considered to be incurable, in creating the computational capability to understand things that appeared to be mysteries and in creating bombs that could, if their owners wished, reach across boundaries to destroy whole cities. Whether we translate the fruits of these investments to cure the world, apply computing power to solve the problems that threaten the world or create peace depends on strategy. Strategy, in this context, is simply the name we give to the plans and actions by which we enforce our ways on others – peoples, institutions and environments.

In the field of strategy, we have invested an insignificant fraction of these vast sums. In medical research it is clear that errors can result in death. If we create computing technology that miscalculates we put in jeopardy the systems that this technology runs – everything from aircraft to stock exchanges to heart monitors – and we also risk killing people. If we create inaccurate weapons technology we destroy hospitals instead of arms depots. Yet, we fail to take our research and development of strategic methods with the same seriousness. The strategies we employ have not given us the results we could expect from the breakthroughs we have made. At the end of the 20th century over 800 million people lived in hunger, 1.1 billion lacked access to safe water and 17 million people died each year from curable diseases. Computing and internet technology was available to only 0.5 to 7 per cent of the populations of Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Africa compared to between 50 and 60 per cent of North Americans. Over 170 million people are estimated to have been killed through war and genocide in the 20th century alone.<sup>3</sup>

Another threat is the pace of the rate of change and the way this is reshaping the world. This more dynamic landscape is the one that strategists need to be able to deal with, yet they are currently not well equipped and trained to deal with far narrower, more static environments. The best strategic thinking takes a broad view of life and the world, but most of it comes from sources much earlier than our own century, such as Sun Tzu, whose thoughts date from the 5th century BC, Machiavelli, whose book, *The Prince*, was published in the 16th century, Miyamoto Musashi, who wrote in the 17th century and Karl von Clausewitz, who wrote in the 19th century. All of this thinking, however, has its roots in military conflict and so has an in-built bias in that direction.

The breakthroughs in strategic thinking since then have taken a more ‘scientific’ approach in that they have picked a narrower domain and produced models which address only that particular domain. In addition, because of the lack of investment in developing strategic thought, there have been too few breakthroughs in comparison to other fields, and so we are not well equipped to formulate strategy to deal with the complex series of growing and interconnected factors facing us today. The progress that has been made in the field of science, for example, has not been matched by that made in the field of strategy, and so we risk squandering the gains made by scientists.

Since the Renaissance, researchers and academic authorities in the fields of science have examined a broad set of narrow domains and established frameworks and formulae that abstract from the world's complexity to define solutions to very precise problems. The number and diversity of these models in the world provide a rich body of theory and knowledge. In the field of strategy, there has been no such renaissance of thought, and so we do not have the richness or diversity of models to explain the world.

However, the models we do have are taken literally and have resulted in narrow and dangerous strategies. These strategies can, and do, lead us to wage unnecessary wars, destroy the environment and over-compete.

To summarise, this work is based on five themes, namely:

1. We are experiencing a level of change that is transforming the context within which strategy needs to be formulated in an exponential and stepped manner.
2. The current methods of developing strategies will not deliver changes to our strategic methods that are significant or fast enough to deal with the changes in the context.
3. The strategies of today are based on assumptions that are no longer relevant and are based on models that are too simplistic and often erroneous.
4. The level of progress in the fields of science and technology is far ahead of the field of strategy and this is dangerous because strategy is required to determine how we utilise the results of science and technology.
5. The strategists we require cannot be developed quickly enough through the methods we employ today and development is the responsibility of leaders and individuals and will, in general, require more extreme measures if they wish to succeed.

As a result, in this work, the attempt is to keep the canvas broad. The aim is to consider strategy in the context of a broad and changing world landscape, through the following seven objectives.

- The first objective is to try to make sense of the growing complexity of the world by identifying the most important underlying themes. This is the aim of Chapter one. Given the huge amount of data available to us today, one of the factors to bear in mind is that the value of this data is already in decline and that the value of insight will increase. One set of patterns is drawn out from the mass of change in the world and portrayed as a set of themes or 'shaping phenomena'. It is important to note that whilst these themes may have some value they are by no means complete or lasting.
- The second objective is to identify and explore the problems associated with simplification. This is the aim of Chapter two. It is a critical argument of this work that the current simplification of the world through models is dangerous because it results in simplistic answers to life-threatening problems. And that this simplistic thinking pervades all walks of life from military to personal. Given this argument, this work does not abstract from the data, information and insights used to provide models and frameworks.
- The third objective is to present insights into the nature of strategy and its exercise. This is the aim of Chapter three. To rebalance the bias towards the analytic method, this chapter relies wholly on personal intuition and experience. Its presentation format, but not its content, therefore borrows from the ancient instruction-based tradition.
- The fourth objective is to provide an examination of the exercise of power, purpose and principle. This is the aim of Chapter four. This chapter provides a critique on the existing methods of strategy and provides an alternative based on the insights and arguments of Chapter three.
- The fifth objective is to identify the areas where breakthroughs are required in the field of strategy. This is the aim of Chapter five. To be able to add value to the masters of other fields, masters of the field of strategy will need to make leaps that place them ahead of the breakthroughs of other fields. In this chapter we explore the nature of some of the



breakthroughs that we need to make in our strategic methods.

- ~~The sixth objective is to lay out an agenda for strategists to address the most fundamental issues and themes of our times. This is the aim of Chapter six. Supercomputers cannot substitute calculation for imagination yet. So they cannot find, imagine or form from obscure bits of data the patterns of possible future scenarios, opportunities or threats. In this chapter we will form such patterns of possibilities as well as lay out a wide-ranging agenda to explore how we can develop greater strategic mastery.~~
- Finally, we draw together all the strands of thought of this work to summarise the case and agenda for change. This is the aim of the concluding chapter of this work.

This work is aimed at those in all walks of life who have responsibility for developing strategy. Such strategists go by many names. In the White House, they are the policy makers focused on the interests of America – which today know no boundaries and therefore hold the greatest chance to do good as well as the greatest risk of causing disruption and disorder. In the think tanks, they are the political, social and economic analysts who seek to influence the policy makers of the world. On Wall Street, they are the traders, corporate deal advisors and asset managers. In business, they are the executives of major corporations and their advisors. In strategy consulting organisations all around the world, they are analysts aspiring to become what they are already called, strategists. Conventionally we refer to these people as the strategists and we ignore those that develop strategies in the communities, families and their lives. The scope of this work encompasses the challenges of life and so this conventional definition is challenged. One of the core beliefs underlying this work is that we can only be masters of strategy if we first become masters of ourselves. This is, however, as much a challenge for leaders as it is for individuals.

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## BEYOND THE CURRENT REALM OF STRATEGY

‘Sometimes chaos appears to have order. So, we think we understand what we observe.’

*The Book of Power, Purpose and Principle*

EVENTS HAVE CREPT up on us while we have been immersed in everyday life. They leave us with problems we cannot solve. These problems lead us to question every part of our lives. Regarding politics, how much trust can we put in our leaders? Can we even be sure they act in our interests? Regarding society, is our way of life sustainable? Regarding security, are we safe going about our day-to-day activities? Regarding economics, do we understand how to sustain our prosperity let alone expand it to others? Regarding commerce, do we know how to make money in a world of ever-changing rules? Regarding the environment, what are the consequences of our decisions on our world and are we worthy stewards of the resources of the planet? Regarding technology, is it delivering benefits or simply disrupting the existing order? On an individual basis, how well can we look after our loved ones and can we balance our ambitions, our relationships and our responsibilities?

Choices seem to lead to more confusion and actions to more problems. The sheer number of such events that have arisen all at once leave us unable to rely on the approaches, methods and formulae of the past. We face the need to rethink our approach. What is the nature of these events and why are they so confusing at this point in history?

Our confusion is due to the many possibilities open to us, which are the result of mankind passing a number of milestones. These milestones have a pattern that we will refer to as The Seven Shaping Phenomena. However, let us not get over-constrained by seven phenomena. This is simply one picture made from the pieces that make up our world.

### SEVEN SHAPING PHENOMENA

#### **Phenomenon One: The Breaking of Barriers to Performance**

The first phenomenon is the continual and inexorable breaking of barriers, which means performance – particularly human, machine and computing performance – is no longer limited.

#### **THE BREAKING OF HUMAN LIMITATIONS**

Men and women are breaking what were previously assumed to be unbreakable barriers both physical and mental performance. Man has increased his stamina and speed to levels unimaginable a century before. In 2003, the record breaker ran the 26-mile marathon almost 30 per cent faster than his equivalent in the 1897 24.7-mile marathon. Over approximately the same period, Man has jumped nearly 15 per cent further, almost 25 per cent higher and swum the 400 metres freestyle more than 20 per cent faster. During the last 50 years of the 20th century, man even ran the intense 100 metres race almost 10 per cent faster.<sup>1</sup>

Our ability to stretch the human body and mind and challenge the forces of nature has never been so great – and continues to improve. However, this potential has been matched by the abuse of our bodies

and minds through means such as drugs, tobacco and food. In 2000, there were 200 million users of illicit drugs. During the 20th century, an estimated 100 million people worldwide died from tobacco-associated diseases. In just over five years up to the year 2000, the number of obese people increased from 200 million to 300 million. The sophistication in production of entertainment drugs continues to grow, with innovations that use new chemicals, including acids. We continue to move towards a world of excessive consumption of anything we desire.<sup>2</sup>

So, at two extremes, we stand on the brink of the Age of Performance *or* the Age of New Decadence.

## **THE BREAKING OF MACHINE LIMITATIONS**

Our inventive creation of machines for almost everything we do has created an era of prosperity never before seen in the history of Man. The pace of machine breakthroughs has grown at an exponential speed. The agricultural era was set to be transformed almost 5,000 years ago with the invention of the basic calculating machine, the abacus. However, breakthroughs in automation and accuracy did not arrive until c.200 BC, when the Chinese developed an accurate water clock and an entire automated mechanical orchestra. Even with this platform, it took nearly a thousand years to build the first truly mechanical clock in 726 AD. And it was not until 1642, that Pascal invented the first automated calculating machine for adding and subtracting.

The pace of mechanisation picked up dramatically following the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century, and the world was set to create all manner of production machinery. When he died in 1871 Charles Babbage left behind over 400 square feet of drawings for a computer, his 'Analytic Engine'. The next hundred years saw rapidly accelerating innovations in machine technology being applied to almost every aspect of life. These machines enabled us to further break the barriers of nature, allowing the weakest of men to go faster, further and higher than the previous generation of the highest performing men.

This ability to make almost anything now places us on the edge of truly liberating us from many of the limitations of the human body and many of the barriers of the environment. However, the increasing substitution of machines for men in not only the 'drudgery' of labour but also service, entertainment and other creative endeavours threatens the very role and value of the individual in society.

So, at two extremes, we stand on the brink of the Age of the Rise of Machines *or* the Age of the Fall of Men.

## **THE BREAKING OF COMPUTING LIMITATIONS**

Computing speed doubled every three years in the 40 years to 1950. In the next 20 years it doubled every two years. By 2000, it was doubling every year. In 1997, IBM's Deep Blue Supercomputer defeated the reigning chess champion. In the first few years of the 21st century, a supercomputer being built for the US Department of Energy was expected to have a power of 100 trillion calculations per second – the same processing power, according to the Robotics Institute at Carnegie Mellon University, as the human brain. This is not to suggest that the matching of the human brain by computers is imminent. Based on the number of neurons and connections between neurons, it is estimated that for tasks such as vision, language and motor control, the brain is more powerful than 1,000 supercomputers, but for tasks such as multiplying and searching it is less powerful than a 4-bit microprocessor found in calculators.

The ability to compute the underlying equations of everything – our genetic code, the structure

matter, the nature of time and space – holds out the promise of enabling us to enter a new era of miracles. As early as 1980, American nuclear physicists turned several thousand atoms of lead into gold. In 2000, Chinese scientists cloned six calves from skin cells taken from a bull's ear. In this new era, we will be able to make the crippled walk, the blind see, turn water into wine, feed the multitudes and turn base metals into precious ones.<sup>4</sup>

Our capability has never been so great. However, given our emotional failings, particularly our fear of each other and our lust for power, we are prone to turning technological victories into weapons. In the past, this weakness has merely resulted in men destroying men, but in this new era of miracles we have the potential to destroy the genetic essence of man, the fundamental molecular structure of oxygen, air, water, rock and life-forms and, once our competence increases, the time-space relationship.

So, at two extremes, we stand on the brink of the Age of Miracles or the Age of the End of Times.

## **Phenomenon Two: The Unprecedented Mass of Information, Media and Communication**

The second phenomenon is the unprecedented mass of information, media and communication available to us across all countries, creeds, socio-economic classes and disciplines.

## **THE CUMULATIVE HISTORY, KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM OF MAN AT OUR FINGERTIPS**

We now have, through the World Wide Web, unique access to the cumulative information, knowledge and wisdom of Mankind at our fingertips. This body of information is not, of course, complete, but it is available in enormous quantity and is growing at an exponential rate. It is already accessible to the critical mass of the population of the world and is set to spread all over the world regardless of race, creed, wealth, age or formal education. The estimated time taken for a person to search a random piece of information has been calculated as: nearly 2 months in 1800 working around the clock; just over 5 days by 1900; under a day by 1990; 70 seconds by 2000; and, by 2004, around a second. In 2004, the search engine of Google had an estimated 4 billion Web pages, which, if printed, would have formed a stack of paper more than 220 miles high.<sup>5</sup> The ability to free people from the views of the 'master' – parent, teacher, community leader, priest, politician or ruler – has never been so great. Neither has the potential to be confused by the overload, the 'noise'.

So, at two extremes, we stand on the brink of the Age of Freedoms or the Age of Confusion.

## **THE MASS DISSEMINATION OF MEDIA INTO EVERY HOME ON THE PLANET**

In the last 25 years of the 20th century, mass-produced media were distributed throughout the world from film from hubs such as Hollywood and Bollywood. The mass media pushed ideas, values and dreams and pulled demand for the products of its homeland from all over the world. Media are always trying to convince us, the viewer, listener or reader, of something. Their embedded vantage point enable them to do this in many ways. The direct messages we know well – television, radio, newspapers and billboards – because they shout at us from places we expect. The semi-direct messages speak to us from the back of soap packets, on clothing labels, the warning notes in the box of our prescription drug, shop fronts and the many notices and signs that look like information. The indirect messages whisper to us – the newscaster telling us who is a terrorist and who a freedom fighter, the teacher in the classroom telling us the history of the world, the product placed in our favourite show, the voice we associate with truth and integrity selling us a holiday or insurance. We may not realise we were being sold to, because these messages were embedded in something else, but our subconscious hears them.

message.

Never before has it been possible to spread propaganda so efficiently. Nor has the potential to be confused by the enormous range of choices ever been so great.

So, at two extremes, we stand on the brink of the Age of Ideas *or* the Age of Propaganda.

## **MASS PERSON-TO-PERSON-TO-MACHINE COMMUNICATION**

The mass availability of communication devices and networks has reached unprecedented levels enabling the interconnecting of people to each other, to information and to entertainment. This communication is now possible from home, from work and on the move. In the first few years of the 21st century, 40 per cent of the world had a television, 20 per cent had a personal computer and 17 per cent had a mobile phone. The ability to access people anywhere, any time through any medium was almost a reality. The possibilities for commerce, education and entertainment were enormous. The power of the individual to choose continued to rise.

The disruptive next step had already begun: the breaking of the locks that kept intellectual property in the hands of the patent-holder; music and film in the hands of the 'rights' owners, and telecommunications in the hands of the telephone line owners. Open access to intellectual property, entertainment and communications for no rent or a rent that is increasingly affordable by a major global population was nearly a reality. By some estimates, during the early years of the 21st century 350 million people had used one of the pirate networks to listen to music and more than 2.6 billion copyrighted files had exchanged every month. At the beginning of the 21st century, over 50 per cent of online Americans (38 per cent of all US adults) used their own sources on the internet and considered these to be an important way of finding out what was going on in the world. About 20 per cent of Americans considered the internet a top source for election news and used it to supplement and supercede broadcasting or paper-based news media, newspapers and magazines.<sup>6</sup>

People's ability to create their own networks, build their own content libraries and educate themselves has never been so substantial. Nor has the ability of the official channels and suppliers to lose the 'loyalty' of customers ever been so pronounced.

So, at two extremes, we stand on the brink of the Age of the Networked Society *or* the Age of Individualism.

## **Phenomenon Three: The Compression of Time, Distance and Access**

The third phenomenon is the compression or collapse of time, price, distance and access. This has resulted in a greater ability to reach wider audiences, and a new ability to participate at unprecedented speed.

## **THE DESTRUCTION OF TIME LIFE CYCLES, COLLAPSE OF PRICE AND THE RISE IN AFFORDABILITY**

We are seeing the collapse of time. This is evident in the collapse in the life cycles of our products and services. By the end of the 20th century, the time it took to launch a product, the time before returns could be harvested, the time before the product became irrelevant and the time necessary to launch the replacement had collapsed across a wide range of industries from shoes to electronics to entertainment media. The service industries, such as management consulting, IT services and business process outsourcing, remained as 'higher value' realms. However, within the first few years of the 21st century, the time value of these had also collapsed due to over-supply, destructive price

competition and the participation of lower cost countries such as India and China. The reduction in prices of products and services led to an increase in the affordability of all things consumer. From almost zero usage at the end of the Second World War, television, telephone, mobile phones and household appliances were, by the turn of the 20th century, within the grasp of the mass population of the world.

Our ability to move faster through the process of invention-destruction-replacement has never been so accentuated. However, we are also entering an era of ever-increasing quality coupled with ever-decreasing prices. As a result, our uncertainty as to how to create a sustainable system of enterprise has never been so much under strain.

So, at two extremes, we stand on the brink of the Age of Compression of Time and Space *or* the Age of Compression of Value.

## **THE COLLAPSE OF DISTANCE**

Geographical barriers have been destroyed by the rise of international travel. The Superpowers in history have always attracted merchants, artists and migrant workers. America, like Alexandria, Rome and London before her, has been a magnet for adventurers, pioneers and power, fame and wealth seekers. The time it takes to travel from England to New York has shrunk from 18 days in the 1830s using steam power, to 6½ hours by aeroplane. In the first few years of the 21st century, about 54 million people per year travelled to places that in previous eras were considered to be the privilege of the wealthy. They stayed on average only a week.<sup>7</sup>

Our ability to reach every part of the globe quickly and easily for trade and leisure has never been so great. Nor has our ability to move around the world swiftly and with secrecy in order to engage in war, terrorism and environmental disruption ever been so great.

So, we stand on the brink of the Age of Global Reach *or* the Age of Global Disruption.

## **THE DENSITY OF POPULATION**

Population densities have risen dramatically throughout history. The largest city in 3100 BC was believed to be Memphis, Egypt, with a population of 30,000. In 612 BC, Babylon was the first to pass 200,000. In 637 AD, Baghdad, Iraq, was the first city to have over 1 million inhabitants. In 1825, the record was held by London, which had a population of 5 million. By 1925, the record had passed to New York, which had a population of 10 million and by 1965, this record was broken by Tokyo, which had 20 million inhabitants.<sup>8</sup>

In 1800, only 3 per cent of the world's population lived in urban areas. By 1900, this had risen to 10 per cent. By 1950, this had risen to 30 per cent and by 2000, 47 per cent of the world's population lived in urban centres. Wealth density had also risen sharply, to the extent that by the end of the 20th century, the top 20 countries had over 50 times the wealth of the bottom 20.<sup>9</sup>

In the early 21st century, this population pattern was set to continue. The appetite of the dense and wealthy cities to consume labour could not be matched by their own indigenous populations. The expectation for the first wave of modernised countries of the 20th century, countries such as Japan, Germany, France, the UK and America, was that they would need millions of migrants in order for their cities to function. In the meantime, at the dawn of the 21st century, the high potential economies, particularly China and India, began to feel the wealth of the first wave countries pass into their hands. With it, millions thronged to their major cities. China declared the creation of 50 silicon valleys, of which a dozen appeared to be the most promising, and government funding of between \$50 to \$75 billion for innovation. This, coupled with the \$60 billion or so of annual foreign direct investment

its lands, meant that these valleys became magnets for talented people.<sup>10</sup>

~~Our ability to create wealth continues to be concentrated in more and more centres and has never been so pronounced. Nor has our ability to threaten the wealth creation of existing centres ever been so great. With the emergence of the new valleys, the threat to the American Silicon Valley, the Japanese consumer electronics hubs, the South Korean broadband economic centres, the Singaporean Financial hub and the technology and bio-technology European hubs in the UK, Germany, France and Ireland has also never been so great.~~

So, at two extremes, we stand on the brink of the Age of Silicon Valleys *or* the Age of the Destructive Competition of Valleys.

#### **Phenomenon Four: The Unlocking of Creativity from Every Corner of the World**

The fourth phenomenon is the unlocking of creativity from every corner of the world based on more invention, more knowledge workers and more participation.

#### **THE EXPONENTIAL RISE IN INVENTION**

In 1843, the head of the US patent organisation was famously quoted as saying that we were nearing the point at which human advancement must end. Although it is unclear whether he actually believed this point to be imminent, no one could have predicted the unlocking of the inventive potential of Man that began in the 20th century.

The combination of war and ideology, Capitalism vs. Communism, drove Man to break new barriers. A series of races began. The race to process political intelligence drove the building of supercomputers. The race to possess the biggest threat drove the creation of atomic weapons. The race to power the factories drove the building of nuclear power plants. The race to declare the superiority of one way over another, drove the landing of men on the moon. At the end of this period, we had super-computing, super-weapons, superenergy and super-terrestrial space vehicles. America, as the leading culture of technology and enterprise, drove the revolutions in internet access and media distribution. This culminated in the internet boom in the year 2000. And so, we entered the 21st century with the core technologies that would enable us to make the next breakthroughs. These core technologies enabled us to begin to break the quantum code of atoms, the nano code of matter and the gene code of man.

Never before have we ridden the momentum of so much inventive potential. Nor have the ethical and moral-spiritual codes by which we live ever felt so inadequate to deal with the potential dangers that face us as a result of our inventions.

So, at two extremes, we stand on the brink of the Age of Super-Science *or* the Age of the Science of Mass Destruction.

#### **THE ‘MACHINE-LIKE’ PRODUCTION OF TECHNOLOGY, DESIGN AND ENGINEERING RESOURCES**

To fuel this creativity, we needed to be able to manufacture machines and skilled resources. The new era was to be led by people labelled ‘Knowledge Workers’. Their role was the transformation of raw materials through expert or specialist knowledge. This use of knowledge promised to lead us to new prosperity.

During the 20th century, the rise of America, and its trade with its allies, had resulted in the biggest bank of knowledge assets – people and intellectual property rights – being held on its shores. The

example led the Japanese to participate more effectively in the global business world during the 1980s. In the last two decades of the 20th century, the Chinese, and then the Indians, also began to participate more effectively. Although it is difficult to be precise, it is estimated that, in 2000, approximately 200,000 engineers graduated from Chinese universities and technical colleges. A similar number also passed through India's colleges. Within a few years this had risen to between 300,000 and 400,000 for both China and India, with each country producing nearly three times the number of engineers produced in America. By various estimates, the wage cost of their engineers was between a quarter and a tenth of the equivalent American engineer. Many European countries closed their science departments and fell a long way behind in the race to produce engineering talent. In the early 21st century, the Americans began to lose confidence that they could compete against the volume and cost of these Asian engineers. The participation of China and India began to be seen as a threat to American prosperity. Some Americans seemed to forget that not only did they have a huge lead, but also the most talented and advanced bank of intellectual property in the world.<sup>11</sup>

We have never been able to produce such large volumes of knowledgeable human talent. We have also never had such a powerful ability to deploy this talent in trade and commercial battles.

So, at two extremes, we stand on the brink of the Age of Knowledge Workers *or* the Age of the Battle of Knowledge Economies.

## **THE RISE IN KNOWLEDGE AND PARTICIPATION OF POORER NATIONS**

After the Second World War, the emphasis shifted from military warfare to propaganda and corporate warfare. Soviet Russia and America built up corporations, universities, armies and intelligence agencies, and competed to win minds, create power and build wealth. By the end of the 20th century, America had won a victory that seemed so complete and undisputed that the American Way stood poised to sweep the world. Popular media coverage defined this system as the ideology of capitalism, democracy, free trade and globalisation. The world, particularly the Chinese and Indians, seemed to accept the core aspects of the system and the ideology. Slowly, almost imperceptibly at first, the Chinese and Indians built their resources. By 2004, the notion of the rise of the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China), especially the rise and rise of China and India, had gained popular recognition. Unfortunately, it was a time of global uncertainty and insecurity, and the reaction of the ideological victors of the 20th century to the successful participation of the Chinese and Indians was to protect their status. This was despite the fact that, in that period, the combined revenue of the top six corporations, all from the existing wealthy nations, exceeded the national budgets of 30 nations representing 50 per cent of the world's population.

Our ability to break new scientific barriers, to invent and to produce has never been so great. In the early 21st century, the growing appetite of the consuming billions of China and India even offered the potential to involve Africa in a prosperity revolution. Unfortunately, our inclination to deploy our knowledge workers in international and intra-national commercial battles seems greater. The message to the poorer nations is that the ideology is hollow: self-interest will, as often happens in history, drive policy.

So, at two extremes, we stand on the brink of the Age of Global Prosperity *or* the Age of Self-Interest and Protectionism.

## **Phenomenon Five: The Connectivity of People through Multiple Global Systems**

The fifth phenomenon is the connectivity of the world's people through multiple global systems.



information and communication systems, personal payment systems and capital market systems.

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## **INTERCONNECTION THROUGH THE WORLD WIDE WEB, GLOBAL MEDIA AND GLOBAL TELECOMS CHANNELS**

The Persians gave Alexander the Great a communication system that linked his entire empire. The Roman Empire used a system that linked every soldier to his beloved in Rome. The British Empire used the railway network to connect the cities within every nation they conquered, thus allowing the free flow of trade and communication, and the control of the indigenous people. It would take the information technology revolution to make the most fundamental changes in how we connect with each other. During the technology boom of the final years of the 20th century, a number of technologies arose that connected Man to machines and people to each other. These technologies were computing, land telecommunications, land and satellite media networks, mobile communications and all manner of sensors. At the beginning of the 21st century, the networks and devices of each of these largely separate technologies began to converge and become interoperable. They were ready to be unified by a World Wide Web.

Never before have we had the ability to connect everyone and everything to everyone and everything else. Not only are the rich, privileged and free connected, but the most poor, most underprivileged and most abused people are on the verge of having access to the ideas and people that could be their saviours. The early 21st century use of the internet, however, shows that the overwhelming propensity is to use this grand capability for pornography, gambling and gossip. Hence the possibility of using this technology primarily for propaganda and trivia is great.

So, at two extremes, we stand on the brink of the Age of Communication *or* the Age of Trivial Pursuits.

## **CONNECTION TO FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND FREEDOM TO SPEND THROUGH GLOBAL PAYMENT SYSTEMS**

In almost all our history one could say that people have been divided into those that have the cash to pay and those that do not. This separation will remain at some level. However, for a huge number of people, and for the majority of their purchases, whether for a bar of chocolate or a car, this divide has been broken.

At the start of the 21st century, the global payment card was one of the symbols of consumer capitalism, freeing people from being constrained by their immediate ability to afford what they desired. It also allowed them to access their money all over the world and to pay without carrying cash. This was achieved from villages in Myanmar to the streets of Manhattan. The global payment system of Visa International enabled people to spend beyond their means. Around a trillion dollars worth of American and British credit card transactions went through the payment systems of the world. In the first few years of the 21st century, it was already clear that the Asians would follow the pattern of behaviour.

The ability of people all over the world to pay for their aspirations and dreams has never been so great. Nor has the ability for payment system providers to exploit our desire to live fantasies that we cannot afford ever been so exaggerated.

So, at two extremes, we stand on the brink of the Age of Personal Financial Freedom *or* the Age of Personal Financial Greed.

## **CONNECTIVITY OF CAPITAL MARKETS AND THEIR ABILITY TO SHIFT MONEY**

## THROUGH GLOBAL FINANCIAL TRADING SYSTEMS

Through the ages, the trade of the world has flowed through physical centres where traders met place their bets and reap the rewards. The ancient historic centres included Athens, Alexandria, Rome and Constantinople. At the end of the influence of these great centres, there was a period of relative stagnation in Europe. Between the 11th century and the 18th century, the growth in material wealth across Europe and North America was negligible. By the 19th century, the growth leaped to almost 200 per cent and in the 20th century almost 2000 per cent. By the end of the 20th century, Man has experienced the greatest wealth creation in history, and New York and London had become the dominant centres.<sup>12</sup>

In the late 20th century, technology, knowledge and access enabled capital to flow more freely than ever before to markets all over the world. In the last 25 years of the century, the stock markets of Asia (although still comparatively small) outstripped the American and British markets in growing the value. Asian markets grew 80 per cent in the technology sector compared to the American and British markets' 14 per cent, in retail 23 per cent to their 14 per cent and in financial services 20 per cent to their 16 per cent. In fact, in all industries other than pharmaceuticals the Asian markets outperformed the American and British capital markets and, in all but telecoms, outperformed the Japanese. This is not to say that the Asians were the greatest beneficiaries.<sup>13</sup>

The free flow of capital and access to international trading centres enabled the smartest capitalists to make money. These pioneers were mostly American and took the form of large scale institutional investors, specialist trading entities labelled 'hedge funds', private equity and venture capitalists and private individuals. This money differed enormously in how far ahead it looked and how long it held its investments. The money that made the greatest returns was often the fastest in and out of investments and the most speculative. Its largest impact was during the Asian crisis, when nearly 70 per cent was knocked off the capital market value of Indonesia and South Korea. Thailand and the Philippines dropped by between 30 and 40 per cent. A new type of raider was born. Perversely, these were the most 'open' of Asian markets in terms of their accessibility to foreign investors. This openness was considered to be a key factor in the development of these countries. On the other hand, China and India, who had not participated in the liberalisation of their capital markets, saw their value fall only 1 per cent and 10 per cent respectively.<sup>14</sup>

The ability of the smartest capitalists to invest all over the world has never been greater. This means that, more than ever before, innovators worldwide have a unique ability to access funding for their ideas. However, given the short-term nature of the flow of money, particularly some of the most profitable money, the ability to shake the financial stability of nations has also never been greater.

So, at two extremes, we stand on the brink of the Age of Capitalism or the Age of Capitalists.

### Phenomenon Six: The Rise of Fixed Positions and Asymmetry

The sixth phenomenon is the rise of fixed positions and asymmetry fuelled by the rise of ideological unequal war and the structural differences between nations.

## THE TRANSFORMATION OF RELIGION AND THE RISE OF IDEOLOGY

Looking through the long sweep of history, we see the rise and fall of religions. Through the rise of Greece and Rome, their gods remained a national construct, but both Superpowers were often inclined to be inclusive of the gods of others. Indeed, it is said that, on his journeys, Alexander the Great embraced the ways of the Persians and took with him the spiritualists of India. With the rise of

Christianity, we saw the rise of the largest and most global religion. Christianity, in its many different forms, was spread with zeal by the European empires to Africa, the Middle East and Asia through ideological and mercantile crusades. Judaism's followers also became a global force in every major capital, although its people spread without any ideological aspirations to convert the local population. Hinduism spread throughout the Indian subcontinent. Buddhism spread to China, South East Asia and Japan. The newer religion of Islam became a regional force in the Middle East and in South East Asia.

As Man questioned the teachings of the Church during the 15th-century Renaissance of the arts and sciences, Christianity gradually became less of an ideological force and more of a cultural norm. Slowly, church-goers declined and, in many parts of the world, this cultural norm evaporated too. At the end of the Second World War, people in many parts of the world felt a renewed liberation. Although religions had become global, the ideological force that had spread them and instilled them into people's lives in the main no longer existed. By the end of the 20th century, the internet provided the possibility for almost all the world, regardless of creed, to examine the word of Christ and embrace the instruction to love their neighbour as well as the word of the Buddha and seek enlightenment. Christianity in the West had become more of a social affair and Hinduism and Buddhism more of a community and personal spiritual affair. Judaism remained a personal and community matter for a very successful global diaspora of Israelites. Only Islam remained a strong ideological force. In reaction to what was often referred to as a 'fundamentalist' Islam, new and more strident strains of Christianity, Judaism and Hinduism emerged. The leaders of peoples from countries where these more strident strains were taking root were able to present arguments through the global media networks that advocated war, assassination, segregation and brutal retaliation in ways that convinced mass populations whilst claiming to follow the teachings of their religions.

The ability of the world to reach and embrace the spiritual instruction of the great religious leaders of history has never been so great. However, in the face of their enemy, the ability to re-invigorate ideology remains just as strong.

So, at two extremes, we stand on the brink of the Age of Higher Consciousness or the Age of the Battle of Ideologies.

## **ASYMMETRIC WARS AND BATTLES, AND THE RISE OF SMALL FORCES**

Large forces fighting small ones is not a new concept to the world. Every major superpower has forced itself on smaller nations to seize land, people and other resources. At their peak, empires have taken huge amounts of land. The Byzantine Empire covered just over 2 million square miles in 550 AD, the Arab Empire around 11 million square miles in 700, the Mongol Empire around 25 million square miles in 1300, the Ming Empire around 7.5 million square miles in 1450, the Ottoman Empire around 5 million square miles from 1600 to 1900 and, in the 20th century, the British Empire covered nearly 35 million square miles.<sup>15</sup>

At the start of the 21st century, America had one of the biggest homelands of any Superpower in history and an unprecedented level of influence through trade, foreign direct investment, media distribution, global corporations, capital markets participation and the sale of American products and services. After one of the great unpredicted events of history, the attack on the Twin Towers in New York on 11 September 2001, America decided it was time to assert its enormous military might on the small but determined forces of its enemies. The American military and defence budget for 2003 was over \$400 billion. This made America the first potential Hyperpower in history. However, America also possessed 2,450 landmark buildings, 2,800 power stations and 55,000 community water systems. It had 12 million cargo containers entering the country, 500 million foreign visitors and 95,000 miles

of border, plus financial transactions worth \$11 trillion were processed through the New York Stock Exchange to support its economic power. Can such a large country protect itself from a small, determined and covert force?<sup>16</sup>

The ability of a Superpower to wage war has never been so great. Nor has the potential for a Superpower to lose as much against a small force been so great.

So, at two extremes, we stand on the brink of the Age of Hyperpower *or* the Age of the End of Superpower.

## **STRUCTURAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN NATIONS**

The 20th century produced new labels for the prosperous and the poor. The former were called the Developed World and the latter the Developing or Third World. This language was also used in an absolute sense by members of the 'Developed World', who thereby implicitly assumed that history had come to an end and that the score could now be taken. They reached the conclusion that the Developed World had won. Only to find, a few years later, in the first few years of the 21st century, that this language was clearly inadequate and the conclusion premature. The labels needed to be far more sophisticated if they were to recognise the progress of China, India and other countries in South East Asia, as well as some of the countries of Latin America, Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Even amongst the largely lagging African countries there were differences worthy of note, such as Botswana. In addition, smaller regions and cities such as Hong Kong and Singapore and especially the countries of Scandinavia led a healthier, more prosperous, more caring and less corrupt way of life than the rest of the Developed World. The need for a new analysis and new language was evident but did not yet exist.

The most disadvantaged countries consisted of those with the worst structural conditions: harsh weather plagued them with drought, despotic rulers, communal violence, harsh living conditions and a lack of effective institutions of education and employment. In 2003, this structural poverty led to 1 billion people, roughly one-sixth of the world's population, not having access to safe water. In addition 2.6 billion people, roughly two-fifths of the world's population, lacked access to adequate sanitation. By contrast, 80 per cent of global resources were used by the world's richest countries, which represent only 20 per cent of the global population. This inequality was reinforced by the fact that the wealth of the world's 11 richest people was equivalent to that of the 49 least developed countries standing at £136.5bn.<sup>17</sup>

Our ability to address structural poverty has never been so pronounced given the financial, intellectual and commercial resources we possess. Nor has our ability to continue to ignore the world just around the corner been so heightened.

So, at two extremes, we stand on the brink of the Age of Plenty *or* the Age of Structural (In)Differences.

## **Phenomenon Seven: The Presence of Overwhelming Latent Power**

The seventh phenomenon is the existence of overwhelming power to destroy, win wars and justify our means and our ends.

## **THE ABILITY TO DESTROY THE WORLD MANY TIMES OVER**

Great invention has led to great weaponry, and the quest for great weaponry has led to great invention. The early waves of invention – the wheel, gunpowder, steel – all provided weapons for personal

combat or battlefield combat. Subsequent inventions – aircraft, computing, atomic reactions – armed us with weapons of mass destruction. In the Superpower race of the 20th century between the Soviet Union and America, the weapons of mass destruction were stock-piled. After the collapse and dissolution of the USSR, these weapons, and the experts that understood the underlying technology, spread to a wider set of countries.

The Iraq War of 2003 was a critical milestone for a number of reasons. It had the potential to reshape relationships in the Middle East, to regulate one of the biggest oil reserves in the world, to dismantle a regime widely accepted as pernicious, to send a warning to enemy states of the US on the consequences of their enmity and to enhance the Iraqi people's ability to embrace democracy. However, the outcome showed failings in political assessment, strategy and tactics, and was, initially, far from realising the positive outcome some had hoped for. The lessons learnt by the enemies of America were: possess and be prepared to use nuclear weapons; in the absence of nuclear weapons, lose the battle quickly and then wage a long and patient guerrilla war; sabotage the political aims of America, for example, by dividing them from their allies; link with neighbouring countries to influence the politics of the conquered land; and, most of all, be patient. The gap between intention and outcome can lead to onerous unintended consequences. With the increased destructive potential of our weapons the negative consequences are set to be more severe.

Our ability to destroy has never been so extreme. Our ability to restrict our destructive capacity seems to be slipping from our hands.

So, at two extremes, we stand on the brink of the Age of Strategic Military Intervention or the Age of Political Misadventure.

## **THE ABILITY TO WIN WARS FASTER THAN EVER BEFORE**

The empires of history have been built on the might and effectiveness of their military. Speed and flexibility was primarily applied to battle tactics and personal combat and not to whole wars. By the early 21st century, the potential to change the nature of war itself was in our grasp. The ability to annihilate the enemy from afar had continued to grow. The musket against the sword became the aerial bombing campaign against the entrenched enemy. We could now flatten the enemy's position, a part of the enemy's land or, if we wished, all of the enemy's land and then proceed to negotiate with the ruined.

The First and Second World Wars in the first half of the 20th century lasted 4 and 7 years respectively, and resulted in an estimated total of 37 million casualties in the First World War and an estimated total of 61 million casualties in the Second. In the last decade of the 20th century, the first Iraq War took approximately 6 weeks to conclude. The second Iraq War of 2003 lasted approximately half that time. Superpowers could conclude the 'formal' armed struggle part of their wars faster than ever before.

However, the American soldier, who was briefed to believe that he was a liberator of the Iraqi people, was instead more often stoned, spat on, cursed and shot at. Fast wars did not exhaust and defeat the mind of the enemy, who was willing to fight on after the aggressors had declared victory. Unlike the aftermath of the long wars of previous periods in history when the victors could enforce their rule, in later wars conquered lands could not easily be transformed and reconstructed.

Similarly, we were better able to win wars between corporations faster than ever before. The rise of the large-scale merger and acquisition had created enterprises with enormous scale at a global level. In the year 2000 alone, 39,499 deals, valued at \$3.4 trillion, were done between companies buying or merging with other companies.<sup>18</sup>

Our ability to win wars has never been so clear. However, our ability to win peace is a substantial challenge.

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So, at two extremes, we stand on the brink of the Age of Fast Wars *or* the Age of Continuous Wars because we are unable to win peace.

## **THE ABILITY TO PROPAGATE IDEOLOGY AS A CONSTANT STREAM TO MASS POPULATIONS**

There are forces within the seven phenomena described above which underscore the ability to influence mass populations. These forces are: the history, knowledge and wisdom of Man at our fingertips; the mass push of media into every home on the planet; mass person-to-person-to-machine communication; interconnection through the World Wide Web, global media channels and global telecoms; and the collapse of religion allied to the rise of ideology.

These forces present each individual with the greatest potential for becoming materially and spiritually free. These forces also present each power-wielder with enormous potential for indoctrinating people. The potential exists for someone to create a message that combines political and religious ideology, entertainment and the promise of material success.

So, never before have individuals had the ability to have access to so much information, develop their own information networks and learn so much. Equally, never before has the power of ideology been so well backed by media impact and reach. As a result, never before have we had the power to reshape assumptions, beliefs and aspirations so effectively.

So, at two extremes, we stand on the brink of the Age of Individual Freedom *or* the Age of Ideological Enslavement.

## **PHENOMENAL COMPLEXITY AND THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS**

The world situation, described through the Seven Shaping Phenomena above, is both ripe with opportunity and fraught with danger. The resulting challenges are beyond the scope of current leaders and current strategic methods. What we are experiencing is profound because it represents the biggest challenge yet to our thinking. The challenges to leaders of companies, societies and governments are overwhelming because these challenges threaten our ability to create peace, prosperity and freedom. These are the Great Challenges of our times.

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### **The Great Challenges**

1. How to deal with the inexorable rise in expectations as barriers are broken.
2. How to find meaning from the confusing and overwhelming volume of information and disinformation.
3. How to survive in a world of ever-rising volume and ever-decreasing prices and an ever-increasing reliance on machines for satisfaction.
4. How to maintain the value of our assets as others instantly copy and exceed us.
5. How to make sense of a world in which people, information and money move freely around the globe.
6. How to avoid ignoring those who live with poverty, brutality and oppression as victims and perpetrators.

7. How to fight those who appear undeterrable in their opposition to our way of life.
  8. How to deal with an unlimited capacity to destroy.
  9. How to unlock the potential of people.
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One way of understanding the events that challenge us is to examine the Seven Phenomena. However, we must not see each phenomenon as a stand-alone force or become attached ourselves to these seven. Each phenomenon multiplies as it interacts with other phenomena to create events that are beyond our current approaches. This is the greatest challenge facing Man. The nature of this challenge is common to governments, organisations and individuals.

## Fundamental Causes

There are five fundamental causes of the problems we face.

**1 *Inappropriate Physical Strategies:*** We try to impose outcomes on situations. As the variables (like the variables in a mathematical equation) defining a situation have moved beyond our experience, our ability to create coherent strategies has become compromised. Our views of situations have become inadequate. For example, previously we could depend on an understanding of what a large force could do to a small one but a number of factors, in particular technology and information, have altered this.

The breaking of physical norms is happening at a pace that outstrips the old strategic formulae.

**2 *Inappropriate Emotional Strategies:*** Our ability to predict behaviour has been shaken by a number of key forces. Firstly, the world has become 'smaller' in terms of our ability to reach it. Secondly, we have become used to quick results, partly because of the increasing power of money to deliver results. Thirdly, we cannot act in a way that is invisible to our public. The result is that as the strong have imposed themselves on an increasing number of the weak more quickly than ever before they have created potential responses that are unpredictable. The consequence of previous strategies are populations infused with fear, anger and hatred. Given the growing ability of these populations to access technology and capital, and to travel, the ability to predict their response is waning.

The old formula for predicting the behaviour of populations is inadequate.

**3 *Inappropriate Competitive Strategies:*** We adopt a win-lose approach. The legacy of simplistic conquest-based strategy has permeated all walks of life. Governments, businesses and individuals all compete to accrue power and wealth. Information has enabled us to draw up league tables for almost all activities and to publish the results, from education to business. The biggest are judged to be the winners and, as a result, we sacrifice many other values. However, the sustainability of success judged in this way has been shaken by fundamental changes in technology; shortening of the time needed to deliver products; our global access to markets; the ability to allow capital to flow freely to the best ideas; and the free flow of information. Some have moved against this more competitive mode and sought to forge a middle path through 'soft alliances', so called because they are not based on the 'hard' exchange of ownership stakes. The inadequacy of such soft strategies in delivering successful results has also been exposed.

The dissolving of barriers to competition has resulted in old strategic formulae becoming

inadequate.

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**4 *Inappropriate Monetary Strategies:*** We focus on money, in particular, over other objectives. In addition, the desired results of ambitious people often split into power and fame. A number of critical factors enable their pursuit. The first is the ability to specialise in all walks of life, which creates opportunities for more and more diversity so that more of us can succeed without fighting each other. The second is the growth of capital, which enables us to fund almost any venture in any part of the world. The third is the rise in the capacity to invent new products, which gives us the ability to translate our dreams into realities faster than ever before. This results in an unprecedented number of choices. However, choice is primarily controlled by one factor: the control mechanism for all of these things is the return on investment. Since the capital markets allocate capital based on the return on investment and it increasingly wants these returns faster, many agendas will remain unsatisfied. So the way these capital markets are run has the most significant impact on what is achieved. With the purpose of making money at the heart of our strategies, we increasingly address a smaller proportion of the issues and the things that add value to people's lives.

The over-focus of resources on the acquisition of wealth leads to a loss of emphasis on other issues and to the exclusion of those who cannot play by the rules of capital. These factors have revealed the inadequacy of today's strategic formulae.

**5 *Inappropriate Spiritual Strategies:*** We fail to build awareness, control and purpose. For the sake of simplicity, let us take spiritual to mean something beyond the 'surface' of everyday life, such as physical possessions and sensory entertainments, something that touches an innate sense of fulfilment in people.

Three forces in particular are counteracting the pursuit of a more virtuous path. Firstly, the increasing volume and effectiveness of mass media desensitises us and threatens to overwhelm our judgement. Secondly, the number of events outside of our control that have the potential to significantly change our lives continues to rise. Thirdly, the global rise of a capital culture leads to the mass desire and pursuit of personal wealth. So we act with the hope that the acquisition of this wealth provides us with the huge potential to change things for the better. However, the desire for personal wealth overwhelms us and, since we cannot all succeed, the majority are dissatisfied.

The old formulae of religions for increasing awareness, providing people with more control over their lives and enabling them to pursue a higher purpose are inadequate in helping us to overcome these counteracting forces.

An increasing number of variables are present in every situation facing leaders. These variables appear to be increasing in potency due to the recent advances in the performance of people and machines. As a result, things that we thought were simple, and therefore predictable, seem to be far more complex. Our understanding of these complex factors only increases our uncertainty. The fundamental truths that we relied on previously seem less fundamental. However, the sources of this uncertainty are fundamental; they are physical, emotional, monetary, competitive and spiritual changes.

In the next chapter, we will examine the adequacy of our existing strategic methods, and the impact these methods have on the strategy of a number of entities, in particular governments, investors and corporations, as well as on individuals.



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