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Notes: The Future of . . .

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*This is the first of a new feature in our monthly newsletter. It's a compilation of short notes on the several themes we track on a regular basis: **Technology, Place and Space, People and Organizations, and Work Design.** Periodically we also include a short book or article review.*

The Future of Technology

Right now we're tracking two technologies that haven't really penetrated the corporate world yet—but we're convinced they will: **3D video** and **augmented reality** (or AR, as it's known among the digerati). Ignore them at your peril.

If you haven't yet seen the blockbuster movie [Avatar](#), go see it in 3D, and we think you'll understand why we're so fascinated by this emerging technology. The storyline is fun, even if it's not all that original or profound (imagine if you can a mashup of *Dances with Wolves*, *Star Wars*, and *Apocalypse Now*)—but the 3D technology creates a completely new experience. It's truly stunning.

We're now thinking seriously about how 3D might—or, rather, *will*—change the business world. What if we all had 3D video on our laptops? Or in our videoconferencing facilities? What could you do differently? How would interacting with remote colleagues change?

Now, combine those thoughts with a look at augmented reality—the imposition of digital images into real-world video displays like those yellow first-down lines that stretch across TV images of the football field during NFL games.

There is now an iPhone app that will show you what the Roman Forum (in Rome, of course) looked like several thousand years ago. The reconstruction is literally superimposed on the iPhone screen when you point the camera at a particular structure. [Click on this link](#) for a short [YouTube](#) video demonstrating how you can see both the current and the reconstructed realities simultaneously.

And for another example of how just useful AR can be, check out [this short video](#) produced by our friend Richard Leyland, the founder of [WorkSnug](#). It shows how you can find a good coffee shop with free wifi in London, just by pointing your 3GS iPhone down the street.

Finally, look at [this visionary video](#) produced by ad agency [Zugara](#) showing how AR can be combined with video conferencing to create truly revolutionary interactive collaboration among people in totally different parts of the planet.

The Future of Place and Space

The recent “snowcalypse” on the east coast reminds us once again of the importance of planning for business continuity in the face of natural (or man-made) disasters. We have a very simple question: why isn’t everyone telecommuting? As far as we know the roads may be closed, but unless your power is out, the Internet is still alive and well.

John Edwards of the [Telework Network](http://www.teleworknetwork.com) (not *that* John Edwards!) has posted a wonderful series of “good, bad, and ugly” stories at <http://www.teleworknetwork.com/16.html> about how the federal government is coping (not!) with this latest disaster. He reports that the Washington Post has estimated it costs the government about \$100 million in lost productivity every day it is shut down. That would sure buy a whole lot of flexible work!

The Future of People and Organizations

We’re in the midst of preparing a *Future of Work Executive Briefing* for our Private Client Network members on the changing workforce and its implications for recruiting, for managing, for employee engagement, and in particular for dealing with distributed and temporary teams. For more information about the Private Client Network, please [contact us directly](#).

In the meantime there are two very current articles in the public press that we consider must-reads:

[“The Disposable Worker”](#) (*Business Week*, print edition of January 18)

A comprehensive look at the structural changes in the workforce and its employment opportunities; focuses on the explosion in temporary and part-time workers and the social and economic consequences of this fundamental shift in the way organizations get their work done.

[“Lay Off the Layoffs”](#) (by Professor Jeffrey Pfeffer, *Newsweek*, print edition February 5)

The subtitle says it all: “Our overreliance on downsizing is killing workers, the economy—and even the bottom line.” Again, an incredibly important perspective you need to consider.

The Future of Work design

We recently held our first quarterly *Leadership Forum* teleconference for members of our Private Client Network. The Forum featured a conversation with **Rex Miller**, the founder of the [Mindshift Project](#), which received CoreNet's Global Innovation Award last October. Rex is also the lead author of the highly acclaimed book [The Commercial Real Estate Revolution](#).

The conversation focused on just how broken and inefficient our current management models are, especially when it comes to project management and working with subcontractors. Just one example of how things have gotten overly complex: in the 1950's most large construction projects included about a half dozen subcontractors. Today, the average building project draws on over 200 subs! What does that level of complexity do for efficiency and performance?

Rex's primary message is simple: **build trust among all the participants** on any team, and you can cut waste, reduce the budget, beat the project deadline, reduce materials usage, and improve quality—almost effortlessly. Of course, the message is simple, but it's almost impossible to implement if you don't design trust and teamwork in from the very beginning of every project.

For more information, follow these links:

<http://www.rexmiller.net> (Rex's personal website, with many links to related resources)

[The Commercial Real Estate Revolution](#) (link is to Amazon.com; and the book isn't just about real estate—it's about project management broadly defined)

[The Mindshift Wiki](#)

The Bookshelf: Stuff We're Reading (and you should too)

[The Next 100 Years](#) (by George Friedman)

Let's start with this quote:

“Old institutions have shattered, but new ones have not yet emerged. The twenty-first century will be a period in which a range of new institutions, moral systems and practices will begin their first tentative emergence.”

Okay. We've been saying that for years ourselves. But now ask yourself, “What do Mexico and Turkey have in common?” George Friedman offers some intriguing answers to that and other unusual questions ([see the book's website](#) for more information).

Not that we agree with everything Friedman has to say, but he does offer a lot to think about. If, as he suggests, the conflicts and alliances of old do in fact have a habit of repeating themselves we are in for some verry interesting times. And not surprisingly,

Friedman also sees a global shortage of talent as *the* major driver of geopolitical maneuvering in the coming decades.

This is a strongly recommended read for anyone who appreciates the larger context of the seemingly unrelated events we contend with on a day-to-day basis. You can also look for some of this thinking to emerge in upcoming “weak signal” reports we’re preparing for members of our Private Client Network.

http://www.thefutureofwork.net/news_newsletter_archive.html

About the Work Design Collaborative and *Future of Work Agenda*

Future of Work is a global network of resources – practitioners, thought leaders, researchers, and senior consultants – who are committed to building and implementing physical, social, and technology-based work environments that are cost-effective, socially and environmentally responsible, and personally satisfying.

We are focused on defining the future of work and helping our members and clients achieve new levels of workforce and workplace productivity. *Future of Work* produces and distributes management tools, surveys, benchmark databases, white papers and technical reports, conferences and workshops, newsletters, books and articles, and public presentations on the changing nature of work. The Work Design Collaborative, LLC, provides leadership and infrastructure services for the *Future of Work* community.

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