



## Positive thinking

Amid all the doom and gloom of early 2022 we looked to find some more positive views of the world – here are some optimistic thoughts.

### Why We Are Optimists



*Image by Geralt@pixabay.com*

With all the events occurring in the world at the moment we can see how fast everything changes. Nonetheless there are always some things we can be optimistic about – here's some ideas from just a few weeks ago to give us pause for thought and hope for the future.

The following blog, written by Patricia Lustig and Gill Ringland, was first published by [Pamphleteers, the Long Finance blog](#), on 13 December 2021.

We were recently asked to write a chapter for a [volume celebrating 50 years after the publication of 'Future Shock'](#). This 1970's book envisioned a post-industrial society where the pace of change accelerates at such a rate that it feels threatening. Indeed, the term "future shock" describes the shattering stress and disorientation induced in individuals subjected to "too much change in too short a time".



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We wondered how prescient the book had been. Since the 1970's, the pace of change has accelerated, with technology having a reach imaginable only in science fiction then. And it is not unreasonable that existing governing structures would feel threatened: on the whole, the older you are, the more likely it is that you'll feel threatened by change. We do see people who did not grow up with technology and find it hard to adapt. Some parts of society today do show signs of the shattering stress and disorientation of which 'Future Shock' spoke.

However, people develop their worldviews through the lenses of their generation and experience. Millennials and Generation Z — those born after 1980 — have grown up with technology, and also with the idea of continuous change. In contrast to their Boomer (and Generation X) parents, they're comfortable with change, and have exhibited remarkable adaptation. Rather than feel threatened, many of them actually feel empowered by it. They effortlessly exploit the myriad technologies at their disposal to connect with their worlds.

Technology isn't the only thing that has changed — the economics of the world have advanced too. In contrast to 50 years ago, far more people today are part of the middle class, and far more under the age of forty are above the poverty line. The combination of powerful technologies and prosperous economies engenders choice. Thus empowered, the luxury of choice includes the way we build our networks to energise communities to get things done. And the reach of Generation Z and Millennials is global.

Here are examples of how these four factors — continual change, improved economic conditions, greater freedom of choice, and global reach — are leading to the empowerment of people who are leading positive, proactive change.

Greta Thunberg is of course a role model for worldwide student activism on climate. She said before COP26: *"If we felt like there wasn't any hope, we wouldn't be activists. We need to reach a critical mass with people who are demanding change and right now it's more efficient to do that from the streets than from the inside."* (The question was whether she would be more effective in conventional politics).

Recent winners of the Earthshot Prize included Vaitea Cowan who believes that green hydrogen is the future of energy. After being named "Women Leader" in the World Bank Intern Program she moved to Thailand. She met her cofounders of Enaptor in Chiang Mai and helped set up the Phi Suea House, a communication and collaboration platform for hydrogen in Southeast Asia. They set up Enapter in Germany, to scale up the production of hydrogen generators. The team has grown from eleven to over 130 in 3 years.



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Another Earthshot shortlist project was Bangladesh based SolBazaar. Homes with a rooftop solar panel can sell any excess electricity into a microgrid network where others can buy it. This helps the environment, but also gives poor communities a new source of income: the sun. The microgrids also reduce emissions by 30% and make money for their providers in real-time – energy trading has boosted some household incomes by 25%. The management team has an eclectic international mix of mostly Millennials, led by Sebastian Groh.

Nigerian student engineer Olugbenga Olubanjo found that when he tried to call home from Toronto, calls would often be disrupted by power outages in Nigeria. He knew that the cost of solar power had plummeted in recent years, and he wanted to make electricity more accessible to rural Nigerians. The solution he hit upon was a solar-powered “electricity bank” where portable power packs could be rented on a short-term basis. He has set up Reeddi to tackle this. Currently, a Reeddi bank contains twenty capsules, each of which holds about 250 Watt-hours of energy, enough to charge three mobile phones or power a laptop for four hours. Capsule rentals are for 24 hours, after which they can be returned to the bank to recharge in the sun. The service is used by up to six hundred businesses and households every month.

Millennial Dr Edda Sif Pind Aradóttir is the CEO of Carbfix, a newly established Icelandic company which captures CO<sub>2</sub> from emissions and turns it into stone underground in less than two years. The method can be used for carbon emissions where the bedrock contains sufficient amounts of calcium, magnesium and iron. These metals are necessary because they react with the CO<sub>2</sub> to form carbonate minerals needed to permanently store the CO<sub>2</sub>.

In Nepal, tech-savvy Millennials stepped up after the 2005 earthquake. The Yellow House — Nayantara Gurung Kakshapati’s bed and breakfast in Sanepa, Kathmandu — emerged as the hub of ‘vibrant guerrilla aid’. The Yellow House “team” had little more than Facebook, mapping technology, local knowledge, and the will to get things done. Hundreds of people answered a call for help on Facebook. People in Europe and the USA — volunteer mappers — helped create precise maps of Nepal’s rugged terrain. In Belgium and the USA, people raised funds. Local volunteers used the information and donations to deliver aid to some of the quake’s hardest-hit areas. The UN, observing this, joined the effort, offering rice, tarpaulins and equipment — following the lead of these young people.

In each of these examples, we see Generation Z and Millennials responding to the need for change — exercising their economic and technology-enabled power of choice to create multiplier effects. They don’t find change threatening. They would not relate to “shattering stress and disorientation” from a too-rapid rate of change. They are not victims of change; they are citizens of the world and part of making the changes they want to see.



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One swallow does not a summer make, yet we hope these six examples will serve to illustrate the reasons we agree with Barack Obama and are more optimistic about the capacity of people to cope with change than *Future Shock* anticipated 50 years ago.

Backup data and the examples are in the Pearltrees associated with '*New Shoots – people making fresh choices in a changing world*'. '*New Shoots*' is available here.

*Written by Patricia Lustig, SAMI Principal and Gill Ringland, SAMI Emeritus Fellow, published 18 Mar 2022*



## Always Look on the Bright Side



Image by Geralt@pixabay.com

With all the daily news of problems and issues, it's easy to lose sight of the longer, more progressive trends that continue to drive change. How have things changed over the past 30 or 50 years? There are setbacks and reversals that seem dreadful at the time, and potentially changes in direction, but if one looks overall, there are many optimistic things to note. Taking a STEEP approach, we can see some of the many good things.

***Some things in life are bad  
They can really make you mad  
Other things just make you swear and curse  
When you're chewing on life's gristle  
Don't grumble, give a whistle  
And this'll help things turn out for the best  
And  
Always look on the bright side of life***

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## Social

Women's rights continue to improve:

- Abortion: Some pushback in US Supreme Court, but 50% of voters say *Roe v. Wade* should not be overturned — more than the 28% who say it should be overturned. 22% are undecided, according to a recent poll.
- #MeToo leading to less tolerance of abuse and greater levels of reporting

Racism remains an issue, but #BLM is a marker and English footballers are still “taking the knee”. Openly racist remarks are now few and far between.

LGBTQ+ becoming normalised:

- gays and lesbians are to be found in all parts of society – even now an openly gay professional footballer
- trans issues as yet remain contentious but the fact that it is the subject of discussion is progress in itself

Americans' attitudes and behaviours have become more liberal overall in the past 50 years and have taken a decidedly liberal tilt since the 1990s, according to an analysis of public opinion data. Americans are substantially more liberal on gender, sexuality, race, and personal liberty than in the 1970s.

## Technology

Advances in technology are too numerous to list – absolutely immense improvements to our lives have been enabled by remarkable developments, from the day-to-day effectiveness of smartphones to AI-supported surgical operations. Renewable energy, improved batteries and better grid storage support the Net Zero challenge. Personalised treatments, health wearables and managed release drug systems are transforming our health care. Biotech will take this to another level. AI is popping up everywhere.

## Economy

- The share of the world's population living in extreme poverty declined from 15.7 per cent in 2010 to 10.0 per cent in 2015. However, the pace of global poverty reduction has been decelerating. Nowcast estimates put the global poverty rate in 2019 at 8.2 per cent.
- The Office for National Statistics is responding to pleas for more relevant measures than just GDP. The concept of “inclusive wealth”, described in the Dasgupta Review of the Economics of Biodiversity, is beginning to be taken seriously. Inflation effects on different groups are also being presented.
- New Zealand is measuring “Gross National Happiness.”





## Environment

- Climate change denial has almost wholly disappeared. Governments across the world are making net Zero commitments.
- Australian PM Scott Morrison has been voted out by an electorate fed up with inaction on emissions and eager for change.
- Re-wilding projects are emerging.

## Politics

Sadly, this vital area is showing the least positive development, with Russia and China becoming ever more ominous. The Economist Intelligence Unit's "Global Democracy Index" continues to show a decline in the number of democratic countries. The US has been a "flawed democracy" since 2016; the UK still makes it into the "full democracy" category, though its score has been steadily falling (at 8.1, only just above the 8.0 threshold).

Taking the really long-term perspective, we can look to Stephen Pinker's book The Better Angels of our Nature which suggests we may be living in the most peaceful moment in our species' existence.

These positive thoughts are not to detract from the need to address the very real challenges we face today, but to provide some underlying optimism that with enough effort they can be overcome.

*Written by Huw Williams, SAMI Principal , published 9 June 2022*