

stars insights: 15 August 2019

Leading from the Future instead of Reacting to the Past



*How do today's leaders deal with the uncertainty of the corporate environment? Companies that know the dynamics of their business environment will have a clear advantage to stay ahead of their competition. In this stars insights, stars alumna Diana WOLF-DOLGNER, Managing Director of management consultancy **MARKET & BEYOND**, talks about future management and how the steadily increasing discipline is used to improve management decisions with research-based insights to minimize risk and capitalize on opportunities – but also to keep up with the latest leadership methods that stand for a transformative and future-oriented culture.*

Do you know what the future looks like?

Diana Wolf-Dolgner: No one knows exactly what the future will look like – with the various methods and knowledge about future developments, however, a future manager helps decision-makers to think ahead – and to derive challenges and opportunities (early enough) to create the future proactively rather than being delivered to the future. I always say: Future has, who makes it!

What does a Future Manager do concretely?

A Future Manager creates a link between the often very abstract scenarios of futurology and the practical needs of company executives and policy makers. How will tomorrow's world look like and what role can we play in it? What opportunities will it open up for us and where will risks arise? These are questions that this discipline tackles.

Why is it so important today to deal with the future systematically – and what role does connectivity play?

The interaction of fundamental forces – or megatrends – is causing dramatic change. Similar to waves reinforcing each other, these trends gain strength, size and influence when they interact with each other. Through computerization and internetization, for

example, we are experiencing how rapidly the requirements for the digitalization of all areas of life are being formed. This rapid change can be fatal for companies who rely on conventional, outdated patterns of thought and decision-making. Hardly anything has such a catalytic effect on other megatrends as connectivity. Information and networks are the main drivers of digital transformation, manifesting themselves in the developments of countless megatrends, including artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, the sharing economy, robotics and augmented reality. There's no escaping it.

What does this mean for companies? How can they survive?

First of all, companies need an integrated understanding of the fundamental changes in their environment. A well-founded, fact-based analysis looks at many of the megatrends behind the upheavals in business and society. The megatrend mapping method provides participants with a kind of future gallery. Analytical and scientific aspects are combined with a creative approach. Methods like these form the basis for companies to deal with new developments creatively and develop scenarios. Ideally, this takes place in interdisciplinary teams involving strategy, human resources and the communications department. After all, it is not just a question of developing a common vision of the future and finding new playing fields, but also of providing employees with security and orientation.

Which megatrends are not quite as well-known as digitization and globalization, which you believe will be very important for the (business) future?

Many do not estimate the number of megatrends to which we can already adjust today to be so high. There are more than 60 significant developments – and a large number of less pronounced ones. That's why the gallery concept mentioned above is so well received. In working with my customers, the megatrends health and wellbeing and neo-ecology are increasingly rated as more important. The megatrend neo-ecology – that reflects itself in organic markets, plastics regulation, energy turnaround – extends into every area of our everyday lives. Whether personal purchasing decisions, social values or corporate strategy – even if not always recognizable at first glance, it is developing more and more into one of the most powerful drivers of our time, not least due to technological innovations, and it gives new momentum to the concept of sustainability.

Back to connectivity and digitalization: nearly every business is dealing with it in one way or another. Do you have any advice?

For one, I often see companies focus on digitalizing their existing business processes without questioning whether their product or business model itself is future-proof. I also constantly notice that, despite all the emphasis on process digitalization, companies give comparatively little attention to their most important asset – people. What will these changes mean for employees? Are managers prepared for the future? This is where future management comes in and helps us from becoming a passive plaything to master the transformation proactively and successfully, because future has, who makes it.



Diana WOLF-DOLGNER (diana.wolf@marketandbeyond.com) is Founder and Managing Director of **MARKET & BEYOND**, a management consultancy focusing on market intelligence, foresight and business innovation. Prior to that, she worked for over 20 years as a senior executive with international groups e.g. as Director Market & Economic Research, Future Management for Rolls-Royce Land & Sea. In this function she was responsible for market analyses for all markets worldwide and established a global team. At Rolls-Royce, she introduced Future Management and gained extensive experience in megatrends and scenario building. In addition to the classic fields of application of foresight for top management guidance, risk management and sustainability, Diana Wolf-Dolgner is today also in demand for leadership trainings to improve future-oriented thinking in leadership and management.

This interview is an adapted version of an earlier interview for Schott, available [here](#). The views expressed here are solely those of the interviewee and they do not necessarily represent or reflect the views of the stars Foundation.

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