

Janka Krings-Klebe ■ Joachim Heinz ■ Jörg Schreiner

# **FUTURE LEGENDS**

Business in  
Hyper-Dynamic  
Markets

## Praise for FUTURE LEGENDS

*“This great book offers a bold vision for leaders how to transform their corporates into platforms, ready for innovation at scale in the digital age.”*

Gisbert Rühl  
CEO Klöckner & Co SE

*“Inspiring – and true in many ways! Future Legends invites you to change the way you think about your own environment and take a look at the social consequences of rapid change through new technologies. And most important: Each company’s corporate culture plays a widely underestimated yet decisive role in the transformation of institutions.”*

Uta-Micaela Dürig  
CEO Robert Bosch Stiftung

*“Explains in a highly readable form how to resolve the contradictions arising from simultaneous management of substantial established business and innovations.”*

Dr. Ingo Luge  
CEO E.ON Germany

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Introduction

# Become the Change

What this book is about and why we think  
it matters to business leaders.

In January 2016 the three of us, colleagues at a multinational enterprise, were brainstorming ideas for an ongoing corporate initiative to prepare the company for the digital age. We were convinced that this would mean a big change for the company – and we were determined to guide the change towards a broader entrepreneurial set-up of the enterprise with our ideas and know-how. Little did we know at this point how fast the change would find us and turn our safe corporate world upside down. The more we thought about entrepreneurship, the more we realized that it would need to start with ourselves. Only eight months later we decided to quit our contracts and start our own venture. In January 2017 we found ourselves again brainstorming, yet this time it was for our own company.

Change happens very fast in the digital age. In our private lives we are still amazed by the possibilities offered by the digital world and we are enjoying the richness of the experiences it provides to us: Google delivers the world's knowledge to us, Twitter inspires us with new ideas, Facebook, Instant messaging, and Google Hangouts keep us connected to friends and co-workers around the globe, Amazon delivers just about every kind of good to our doorstep within days, TripAdvisor shows us great places to be, AirBnB makes our stays affordable, and Uber provides us with rides instantly. Novel services are constantly jumping onto the scene, offering us new and cleverly individualized choices at a dizzying pace.

Curiously enough, we mostly lacked this experience in our professional lives. Planning travels and paying for goods

and services was somehow not so easy, not so fast. We did not have the richness of individualized choices and lacked possibilities to instantly connect with others and to spontaneously collaborate on ideas. Policies designed to protect corporate property greatly limited our ability to connect with others and to share our ideas and knowledge. Things in general moved slowly and in a highly controlled fashion. In our attempts to move faster or to do things differently we felt like trying to sprint through quicksand, often unable to make any meaningful progress.

And we were not the only ones who experienced this huge gap in opportunity. During our research we talked to countless leaders from various businesses. Whether seasoned project managers, corporate leaders, or members of supervisory boards, everybody had the same set of questions:

- How can we transfer the positive digital experience of our private lives into our business?
- What keeps us from running and managing our businesses in a different way?
- Why is it that we keep losing our focus on the customer in daily operations?
- Why does it often feel like our choices and ideas do not make a difference?
- How can our business become as fast and flexible as start-ups?

- How much time is left until the digital world affects our business?
- How will I earn my money in 10 years?
- How can I effectively lead necessary changes and make a real difference for my business?

Digging deeper into the issue, we also felt the need to expand our scope beyond established businesses. Looking at the starting point of innovation, we found people who worked in new and young businesses. While their perspective might have been different, their questions revealed the same sense of unease. They were worried about how they could secure timely support to turn their ideas into business operations. They were concerned that scaling their innovative business would reduce their flexibility and speed. And they wondered how best to protect their autonomy in collaborations with larger enterprises and investors.

It was at this point that we realized that we also had to include questions concerning larger socio-economic challenges of the digital age because they turned out to be connected to it all:

- What responsibility do digital entrepreneurs and innovators have for the development of society?
- How could digitalization contribute to solve income and opportunity disparities?

Researching these challenges led us to some surprising insights and to the development of useful and novel approaches to those issues. What if the digital age also offered new ways to combine the particular strengths of large corporations and the strengths of start-ups? What if this could be done at scale? What would be needed to guide this change into a favorable direction? What would this mean to businesses of any size?

We have collected our insights and answers in this book in the hope that it will provide inspiration and hands-on guidance to business leaders and policy makers. We challenge business leaders to read this book with an open mind because it will most certainly put into question some if not many processes within their own companies. We challenge them to critically reflect on our ideas and consider applying some of them in their own business. Throughout the book we deliberately stay clear of technical jargon because, more often than not, we have found that technical terms are burdened with theory and in fact distract from key concepts and novel ideas.

In our first chapter, we lay some foundation that helps us to fully understand the impact and inner-workings of digitalization. The main question we ask is:

**What exactly makes digitalization such a powerful force in the markets?**

In our second chapter we analyze why some companies thrive while others struggle to adapt to the waves of changes that are brought along by digitalization. Our guiding question is:

**What are the principles that make companies highly adaptive and innovative in the digital age?**

The third chapter discusses how only a connected business is prepared for the digital age. This outline will help to answer the crucial question of:

**How to combine the innovativeness of start-ups with the scale of large organizations?**

In the fourth chapter we show in detail how becoming a connected business plays out practically and ask:

**How would the practices of management need to change in a connected business?**

In the fifth chapter we finally look at the overall impact that this kind of shift in business could have on society and ask:

**What could connected businesses contribute to solve income and opportunity disparities?**

Coming from the practitioners' side, we are very much aware that our insights run counter to conventional theories and practices of business management. Yet, our discoveries are not random. They are based on thorough explorative work in

a large number of businesses; on extensive reading and researching of this field; and on in-depth analyses of approaches that we have seen to work in practice and barriers that we have found to stand in the way of change. We have shared many ideas and insights with business leaders all around the world. And time and again we saw that our ideas and suggestions filled a gap that many felt was left empty. We have received an enormous amount of positive feedback from leaders who felt that we have provided them with much-needed orientation, clear direction, and fresh ideas to try. We want to thank these entrepreneurs because they kept coming back to us, asked for more guidance, posed more questions, and challenged us with their own insights. Their feedback not only helped us further learn and develop our theory, but also encouraged us to make our practical insights available to a wider audience by writing this book. Starting our own company provided us with a much better first-hand understanding of the challenges and opportunities that business leaders face. We hope our insights can inspire them to turn their business into a future legend.

April 2017

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Contact the authors

The logo for CO-shift features the word "CO" in a bold, black, sans-serif font above a horizontal line, with the word "shift" in a black, cursive script font below the line.

BUILDING CONNECTED BUSINESS

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