

WHOSE FLAG ARE YOU GOING TO SALUTE?

The rise of the corporation as nation-state



MindemicLab

Welcome to 2019. Welcome to 2039.

This scenario report describes two possible future states for recruiting and talent. One of them may happen, or neither of them may happen. We believe that considering and planning for many possible futures makes our profession more agile, and stimulates creative thinking. Please take a look and let us know what you think. Better yet, join the conversation!

Why are we doing this?

We see significant changes coming in the talent and recruiting world. While no one can be certain about what exactly that future will bring, we believe that participating in scenario planning will help our industry be better prepared to embrace whatever happens. We have created an organization known as MindemicLab to sponsor an ongoing series of scenario planning events.

How can I follow this work?

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On the Cover

Our vision of the future was created , just for this report,
by artist Filip Čekić.

Filip is a freelance illustrator from Belgrade, Serbia. A self-taught artist working with a wide variety of genres and themes, both traditionally and digitally, he has worked on numerous projects ranging from game concept art, album cover artwork, book and board game cover artwork as well as numerous private commissions. He has a degree in Art History and also occasionally dabbles in photography, filmmaking and other media as well.

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THE WORLD OF WORK IN 2039:

Military-Industrial Complexes in the digital age

What will the world look like in 2039? Will it be a future of jetpacks and food pills? Or will it be a world left scorched and uninhabitable by the effects of man-made climate change? The truth is, of course, that no one really knows what the world will look like in 2039. But for as long as there has been a written record of human thought, people have tried to figure out what tomorrow will bring.

Thinking about the future can be useful. In this series of reports we will develop glimpses of possible futures informed by trends that influence our profession today. By identifying a particular talent-related trend and extrapolating it out twenty years or so, we can craft a surprisingly detailed picture. The benefit of this is not in its reliability as a kind of crystal ball, but rather to prepare our profession for change and to stimulate dialogue.

In 2018, the United States economy experienced a series of firsts. For one thing, there were more open jobs than unemployed workers, something that had never happened before. Income inequality was more pronounced than ever in nearly all countries (rivaling 1920s-era figures in the United States).



As monthly employment indicators continued to twist and contort their way across graphs into previously unknown territory, those either employed or under-employed found that their wages didn't go quite as far as they did before; the purchasing power of the US dollar is down almost 20% in just the last ten years alone.

People are disoriented; all the institutions that used to provide certainty and safety are riddled with rot and corruption. College costs have risen, while the ratio of college costs vs. college debt payback is making higher education less of a sound investment. The underemployment rate for college grads has still not returned to pre-recession levels. Significant underinvestment in public infrastructure dating back to the 1960s has resulted in roads and bridges that are literally crumbling beneath our feet. The world obesity rate is the highest ever measured, and the rate of greenhouse gas emissions in 2018 reached the highest level yet recorded. We seem utterly and completely incapable of taking care of ourselves, and there seems to be no end in sight. Who is going to ride in and save us now?



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On January 17, 1961, outgoing President Dwight Eisenhower delivered a curious farewell address in his last public speech in office. Other presidents often use their final comments as an opportunity to provide a replay of their administration's major accomplishments, or to endorse their successor. That evening, Ike was more concerned with issuing a warning to an American people that appeared to him a little too "giddy with prosperity." At 8:30 p.m. he began. First, he thanked the radio and television networks. Then he thanked the incoming president. And finally he thanked congress. He then began to reflect on the "four major wars" that had defined a century still barely half over. It didn't surprise anyone when the career soldier then advocated for a strong military, ever ready to repel a "potential aggressor." He pointed out that the modern military of the day was vastly different than the citizen patriots who rushed from working family farms to join up with General Washington. And that seemed to trouble this particular president. The military of 1960 was no longer a ragtag gathering of patriots with muskets - it was now a permanent community of soldiers, defense contractors, policy makers, and scientists. . .all of whom just happened to make their full-time livelihood by preparing for, and engaging in, war.

"In the councils of government," Ike warned, "we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted."

He continued. “As we peer into society's future, we – you and I, and our government – must avoid the impulse to live only for today, plundering for, for our own ease and convenience, the precious resources of tomorrow. We cannot mortgage the material assets of our grandchildren without asking the loss also of their political and spiritual heritage. We want democracy to survive for all generations to come, not to become the insolvent phantom of tomorrow.”

It's difficult to know if Ike feared the “military” part of “military-industrial” most. But in hindsight, the “industrial” side of the coin was the one to watch. Fortune 500 Companies now represent two-thirds of the US GDP. Large, powerful companies who do well employ a lot of people and do things to make their employees' lives better: tuition reimbursement, egg freezing and storage, free food, free housing, free private transportation, and more. Unusual and head-turning perks become expectations to employees lucky enough to work for these large corporations. But as Milton said...

“

**The mind is its own place, and in
itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.”**

Paradise Lost

The Hall of Fame of horrible things companies have done (or still do today) is just as long: knowingly getting people addicted to opioids, monopolizing supplies of public drinking water, selling computers to help Nazis locate Jewish people destined for concentration camps, and unfortunately much more.

(Aspiring Bond villains take note.)

In civics class years ago, students used to learn about the legitimate roles of government. They included functions like coining money, building and maintaining roads, preparing armies, declaring war, and overseeing trade. Modern history has expanded the list to include providing healthcare, educating children, and identifying and tracking people (as it relates to visas and immigration).

It would be a pointless effort to make a list of the areas where companies now take on these responsibilities (up to and including maintaining military forces and using them). The list not only grows, but the flames are continually fanned by a population who has long ago accepted the fact that their legitimately elected government seems no longer able to handle even the most fundamental aspects of its role. (The irony associated with even trusting that free elections actually took place in a world of “missing” or “uncounted” votes and hacked voting machines is a form of irony President Eisenhower could thankfully never have known.)

In fact, while not addressed in this report, it’s worth noting that the private and the public sectors have never been quite so cozy, particularly as it relates to technology companies and their pesky habit of sharing personal customer information with government entities as freely as they do. The sword cuts both ways as municipalities, already saddled with debt, increasingly offer tax incentives to those same tech companies to encourage them to set up shop in town.

The fundamental question explored in this report is the extent to which private citizens will find their elected government sufficiently capable of carrying out its prescribed tasks and providing for the general welfare. Will some data breach, or an outrageous tax evasion scheme, or the discovery of a slave labor empire, or perhaps the widespread use of genetic propensity for disease as a reason to throw employees off the company insurance plan, cause citizens to reject the promise of the corporation as an ersatz government? Or will some major tunnel collapse, congressional scandal, illegal military action, or social security grab push people over the edge and finally close the book on elected representation?

This fundamental choice of what role private corporations will play in our personal lives is the theme of this scenario report. A future in which people embrace an even larger role for private corporations plays out in a scenario we



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A future in which people embrace an even larger role for private corporations plays out in a scenario we **[Click here to Accept Terms.](#)**

call **Click here to Accept Terms**. The alternative, a future in which people wrestle back what's already been perverted into the worst version of surveillance capitalism and hand it back to government is called **dot.com Originalism**. Let's visit both worlds twenty years from today.



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is a world of pragmatism.

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Click here to Accept Terms is a world of pragmatism. A super-charged, nitro-burning version of Capitalism in which no societal need could ever be delivered by government as well as it could be delivered through private enterprise. It's Adam Smith . . . with the brakes off. In this world the disorientation of the political landscape that started with the election results of the late 2000-teens has resulted in an intractable pile of gridlock. Political appointments as favors, inexperienced congressional candidates running on single issues, and the decimation of the diplomatic community have left government wholly unable to decide even *what* to do.

In 2029, citing security concerns, the United Nations voted to relocate the general assembly meeting space to Europe. Despite the fact that the land upon which the UN buildings sit was still technically owned by the United Nations, immediately following the announcement a three-way power grab ensued between the State of New York, New York City, and the Federal government for the valuable space along the East river, which had hosted the organization since 1952.



**The issue remains unresolved,
and the site is fenced off pending
resolution of multiple court injunctions.**



When President Nixon gave his farewell address in 1972 he made reference to how the Watergate Scandal almost certainly dissuaded many young people from pursuing a “career in public service.” The very idea that private citizens would run for office all but disappeared in the early 2020s. A book released around that time entitled “The Monetization of Public Service” compiled several big-data studies in which the monetary value of holding public office was accurately quantified. It demonstrated that public service was a “low risk” investment scheme for financiers and CEOs: compared to their ability to favorably manipulate laws and tariffs to their own advantage, the risk of punishment was virtually nonexistent. As a result, corporate leaders (encouraged by their boards of directors) either purchased or influenced their way into public service in a movement called “Wall Street to DC.” Their initial enthusiasm was short-lived. Once sworn in, most business leaders found public life so dissimilar to the environment in which they thrived that they quickly lost interest in the archaic Rules of Order and outdated traditions. They stopped attending congressional sessions, and when they were appointed to committees typically reserved for junior members, they simply didn’t show up. Instead they modernized and updated things, and have since become a new breed of bureaucrat/oligarch. Freshman senators from districts where tech hubs are located race through red signals in Washington DC in a wail of sirens and flashing lights, escorted by phalanxes of private security details. People who have never resigned from their corporate positions now hold the majority of political offices.



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So what do they do? They redistrict. A LOT. Gerrymandering is a very straightforward process designed to optimize voting outcomes, and as such was a perfect application for AI. Redistricting has been automated, and occurs in real time, all but guaranteeing lifetime appointments for representatives.

Lifetime being the operative word. This new breed of modern-day oligarch is obsessed with life extension and minor skirmishes have broken out between strong districts as a result. In 2025 a bay area representative moved to annex a choice piece of property up the coastline because of a study that suggested its position relative to the San Andreas fault line made it an ideal location for building a doomsday shelter. That congresswoman engaged with a private prison provider (who had access to armaments) and declared herself in charge of the region. Conversations with the Secretary of Defense around the implications of sending in National Guard troops proved to be challenging. The recently installed Defense Secretary had previously been a mega-fundraiser for the current



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administration, and was unfamiliar with past uses of military forces domestically.

By the time he was updated, the two factions had worked out an agreement and had in fact already completed a targeted social media campaign to minimize political damage. That congresswoman is now hugely popular as a result of a “Keep the Streets Safe for Tech” initiative in which vagrants and homeless people are arrested on sight and transferred to prisons owned by the company who provided the military support for her *coup d'état*.

Numbed by a long history of corporate leaders who behave selfishly as they enjoy the trappings of unimaginable wealth, most people don't pay much attention to the excesses of DC politics. Constituents are in general pleased with the changes that have taken place. Things get done now, and the trains in New York *literally* run on time for the first time in decades. Even the BART is running efficiently.

Employees are much more concerned with keeping their employers among the top-ranked companies. More profit means more amenities, and associates now work hard to ensure their organizations stay competitive. Corporate talent is identified early on now due to the proliferation of testing administered in public schools. Schools had discovered in the early 2000s that the first attempts at standardized testing were a bust. Why were they still giving kids paper and pencil tests anyway when most companies were now using AI-based testing for pre-employment screening? Those paper and pencil tests started disappearing when a series of DOE appointees partnered with the growing digital testing industry to see if their assessments could be used successfully on children. As companies set about to create a set of tools designed specifically for students, they tested the student results against the only database they had -- that of corporate roles. It turned out that the predictive validity was very high -- so much so that companies simply “cut out the middleman” and started testing first graders against the training sets they already had in place to assess skill in sales and leadership. Early access to this kind of data was a dream come true for private corporations. Companies began using test scores to identify suitable candidates for key roles a decade in advance. In one popular news release, a large company bragged that they now have specific replacements (currently enrolled as elementary school students) identified for all key roles twenty years in advance. Everyone benefits – families with high-potential preschoolers are relocated to luxury housing located near the corporate headquarters. Enhanced healthcare is provided to them, and all family members



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for two generations are guaranteed access to targeted genetic-based wellness and healthcare programs for life.

Far from feeling like helpless drones in a George Orwell novel, people love this new form of capitalism. Power and wealth were always reserved for a minuscule minority of people. In former times they weren't accountable to anyone – not even their own conscience. Today's ultra-wealthy are accountable to an extended family of shareholders and associates. They are judged quarter-to-quarter, not embedded and protected by dynastic succession. They are smart, and they use their intelligence to make the world better. For example, a financial crisis in 2031 resulted in the widespread proliferation of multiple alternative corporate currencies. As was the case in early America where each colony minted its own paper money, so it was that the top 100 corporations were granted the right to do the same. This prevented a significant recession that would surely have occurred after the disruption of China's mineral and rare earth metal supply chain due to financial instability in the region. In 2033 a major corporation consolidated 85% of the world's known supply of neodymium (a rare element used to make solid state devices and fuel cells) thus stabilizing the market. The corporation then made even more money by minting a new currency based on its physical holdings. The CEO was famously featured on the cover of a major publication in which he posed atop a huge pile of the shiny metal bars over the caption "This is no fiat currency." US currency is still sold and traded, of course, but some banks now charge an inconvenience fee to handle it.

While formal diplomacy has pretty much disappeared, "Team Based Action Agreements" (TBAAAs) between private companies accomplish much of what was previously handled by foreign services personnel. In a world where you can have almost anything delivered in a matter of hours, the very idea that trade negotiations or weapons treaties should take months or years is regarded as absurd. Companies monitor each other for vulnerabilities, and create agreements that maximize shareholder value that others are likely to sign.

Companies do take some heat now and then when it became apparent that not everyone is cut out for the corporate coliseum. In the way that business schools became more deeply associated with private companies in the early 2000s in an effort to influence curricula, it seemed like companies were growing less tolerant of enterprises that serve no clear financial purpose. Many art and music schools have changed their coursework in the last ten years as donors threaten to withhold gifts and scholarships unless the school shows more interest in preparing students for "the real world." Some people point out a disturbing trend in which prisons are now filled as quickly as they are built – mostly with people who just aren't cut out for corporate roles.

But people live longer, are more prosperous, have job security (though somewhat more limited



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career mobility), enjoy the benefits of reliable currency, access top-notch healthcare, and have more transparency from their leaders. Innovations that seemed impossible only years ago (commercial trips to space, genetically-based medical treatments, massive infrastructure updates, etc.) are part of everyday life now. Today's kids are better educated now than at any other time in history. It seems that the old adage was true—what is good for the corporations is good for the nation.

Dot.com Originalism

Dot.Com Originalism represents the calm that sets in after a violent storm passes. It's a moment of sincere reflection. The exhilarating experience one has when they almost slide into a busy intersection but manage to stop their car just in time, and now realize how much they almost lost and appreciate how much it means. This is a world of patriotism in a form that very few have historically experienced. It's an immigrant experience of the most basic and primitive kind.

In this scenario, something has happened to stop a movement that seemed virtually unstoppable – the growth of the corporate nation state. This growth was well funded to be sure. But it was also stacked with supporters in government and key influence roles. And when certain individuals started getting a little too bold in their criticism, the corporations responded quickly and swiftly to silence them.



Media was configured to make people think this was the best thing for everyone.



But it was stopped in its tracks. And slowly, deliberately, the massive train was shifted into reverse and carefully, laboriously began backing up. Civilization backed away from charter schools and worthless strip mall colleges. They backed away from for-profit healthcare and installed a real healthcare safety net instead. Shareholders with 401k's who risked losing their entire retirement savings said "no" to private prisons and to tobacco subsidies. Said "no" to eminent domain rulings favoring private corporations, and to wealthy executives who harass women for their entire careers with impunity. Like a stern parent coming home early and shutting down a teenage party, people poured the liquor down the drain and called the other kids' parents. They took back all the privileges and returned them to the local, state, and federal government where they originated. In this scenario, the wealthiest people in the world are no longer deified. No longer regarded as the natural product of free market selection and appropriately rewarded by the invisible hand of capitalism. They were somehow made shameful in the mind of the public. Unlike a previous era's wealthy who at least built a public library every now and then or founded schools to train the less fortunate, this generation of corporate leaders were ousted for a level of excess that would have embarrassed a roman emperor.



Companies partnered with local governments to utilize civil forfeiture laws to enrich themselves.

Like many revolutions, this one started in an unlikely way. For years, people watched their elected officials – the very group that was supposed to protect them from corporate evil – as they overrode local zoning laws for friends and robbed the state pension fund. Companies partnered with local governments to utilize civil forfeiture laws to enrich themselves. Public schools were crawling with highly paid "administrators" who had never taught a single class in their lives and who were appointed by elected school board officials. The scale of this variety of corruption increased logarithmically as one went higher up into the more elite levels of government. And one day, people decided they'd had enough.



In the run-up to the 2028 presidential election, it looked as though the traditional two-party system was going to continue its long-standing hold on American politics. Over the years, numerous third-party candidates had tried to get a foothold in the political system – progressives, libertarians, greens, and independents have in turn made impressive showings. But they were never really a threat to the democrats or republicans. However, in this particular election, a targeted digital campaign somehow convinced a sufficient number of Electoral College members to become "Faithless Electors" and cast their votes in a way that did not reflect the results of their respective states. They instead convinced them to

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elect an independent named Amiya R. This resulted in a constitutional crisis of unprecedented magnitude.

Amiya was born in the United States in 1992 to immigrant parents who struggled with establishing legal citizenship status. Politically active all her life, she was selected as the presidential candidate representing a new political party founded on a single platform: pulling back from corporations what should belong to local, state, and federal government. Several congressional campaigns in the prior decades had placed the odd socialist or soccer mom into office . . . who then inevitably either succumbed to pressure to comply with tradition and status quo, or were rendered politically impotent by the other members of the house or senate.

But because of the crisis caused by this aberration in the constitutional process, Amiya had unprecedented access to news and other media outlets. She spoke eloquently and passionately about the damage done to the environment and families by corporations. She was supported by a savvy campaign staff that was able to illustrate a direct connection between the rolling back of regulations and the deregulation of the banks, and the suffering experienced personally by the average voter. A highlight of her campaign was the day she delivered a press conference from a section of the Clearwater Beach Boardwalk just west of Tampa. She did it while standing waist-deep the Gulf of Mexico, as much of the shoreline was by then permanently submerged as a result of rising sea levels. The water lapped at her thighs as she looked into the camera and asked if people felt like their families were better off than they were ten years ago.

It was determined that the election should be held again, despite the fact that she was well above the 270 electoral votes required to win. Three days before the election a microscopic drone recorded the CEO of a major manufacturing concern and a US senator discussing how to have Amiya murdered before the election could be held. Both men claimed the footage was manufactured.

She withdrew from the race, and stepped down as a candidate citing safety concerns. The election was held a month later, and the democratic candidate was declared the winner. But in the meantime, a new wave of activism began to arise. The corporations and career politicians had started to clean up their acts – the close call had genuinely scared them. But more and more people began to get interested in running for office at all levels.



By 2032, statistics were on the side of the 99%. More and more people who had absolutely no previous political experience were elected into office. It was a numbers game by then.

Key elections could still be manipulated or influenced, but after a while there simply weren't enough candidates who played by the old rules to enter into each and every race. With no history of political contact, and with no personal/political agendas to serve, the generation that made instant purchasing decisions by what they saw on Instagram had collectively decided to run for office and elect themselves. And there wasn't a thing anyone could do about it.

As a population who spent their formative years being phished, ghosted, and manipulated by algorithms, this generation had learned when they were being played, and they were tired of it. Freshmen in congress used to have the senior representatives tell them...



**Just vote the way I vote
until you figure things out.**



That was not how this generation worked. Instead they went straight to the technology they grew up with - they researched laws and policies, crowd sourced information, and made themselves more available to their constituents than any politicians in history. This was a generation that had all personally experienced institutionalized racism and discrimination due to the diverse and penetrating social networks they maintained. They were furious, informed, and didn't know they were supposed to do what they were told. Off-the-record cloakroom conversations were broadcasted live. Ed Koch, the mayor of New York, used to famously ask people "How am I doin'?" Now there was no longer any need to ask - in a neo-Greek version of pure democracy, every constituent was happy to let their elected representatives know how they were doing in real time.



Within a few years the old system was unsustainable. How do you bribe a population that knows what it's like to have their job or their healthcare taken away in a moment? The old system collapsed under its own weight, and a new brand of civic responsibility replaced it. Corporate oligarchs had gone to the well too many times. All that remained of their previous lives were lonesome mansions that were understaffed and filled with high-end wristwatches and rare single-malt whiskies. They watched as decades of carefully choreographed corruption and sweetheart deals were revealed for all to see. The peasants were revolting, and by taking away everything they had, the corporations had paradoxically empowered them to revolt by giving them nothing to lose.

Roads were improved, public transportation and infrastructure were repaired, and the financial system was reinstated.

A new generation of patriots is back in charge . . . for good this time.





Who wrote this document and what is its purpose?

Scenario planning is a well-established process used to create detailed descriptions of possible versions of the future. Scenario planning is not intended to predict the future, nor is it designed to even describe likely or probably futures. The purpose of the activity is to simply prepare people for change, and to stimulate dialogue. This report is part of a series of reports, and was conducted by the following participants:



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