

For Mark Zuckerberg (and maybe a few others)

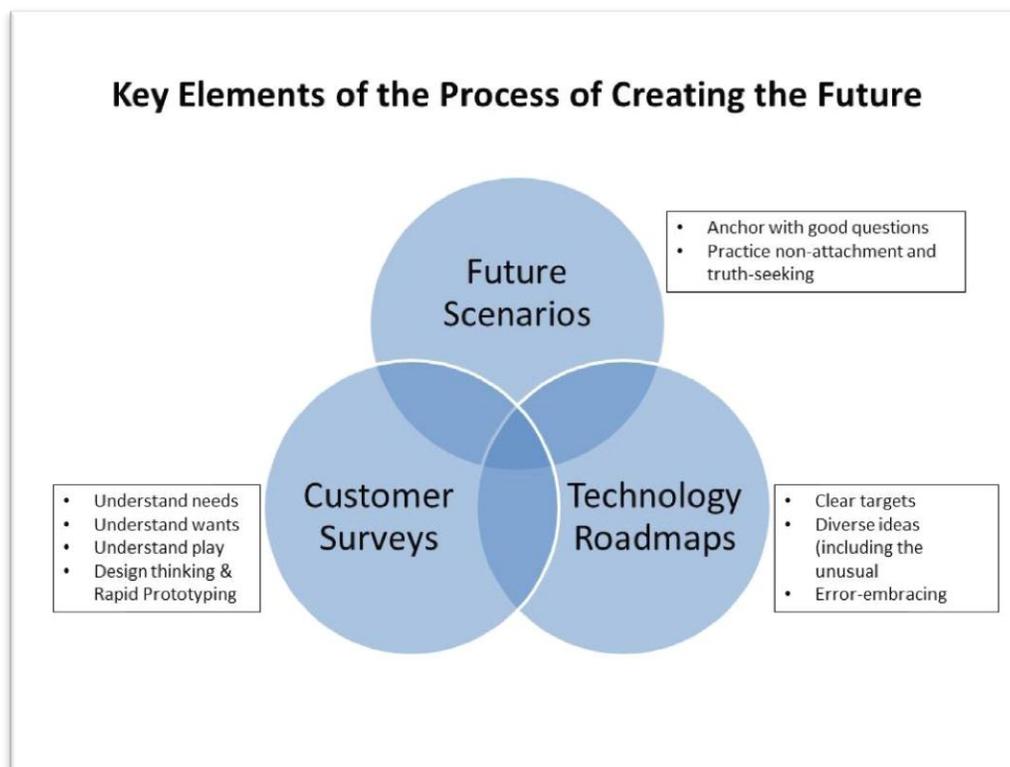
How to create the future (the short answer)

By Gerald Harris, President, Quantum Planning Group*

The August 1, 2016 issue of Bloomberg Businessweek has a lead article about Facebook and its work in the virtual reality headgear space. In that article Mr. Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook, is interviewed and quoted as follows:

"...I don't know who said it first, but it's not hard to predict what the world is going to be like in 20 years. The hard thing is actually predicting or figuring out how to get there."

The purpose of this article is not to debate the first part of that statement (I will leave that to all the economists who missed predicting the recession of 2008-2009). However, there is some good news on the latter part of that statement: figuring out how to get there. The answer (which has been shown in many real world examples — a good one being a study of the evolution of the automobile industry) is to manage a three-pronged process of future scenarios, technology road-mapping and customer surveying/communication. Here it is in a nutshell below.



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In short, creating the future is about three things working well together over time: imagining the future with a continuous series of good scenarios which are anchored in good questions and curiosity about the future; using technology road-maps to manage the process of creating real world capabilities that are focused and have clear purposes like improving a particular feature or lowering costs; and maintaining a deep understanding of what customers (also known as real people) actually want and need (or just want to play with). Within an organization these elements are tied together in a system of mutual learning and sharing.

Smart integration of these three steps is the key and a lot can go wrong, so I am not completely dismissing the challenge Mr. Zuckerberg sees. But in working this process with several companies, I have found the following guides in each phase to be useful.

Scenarios	Technology Roadmaps	Customer Surveys
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve diverse teams • Encourage multiple perspectives • Be “truth-seeking” • Encourage openness in thinking about what matters • Be rigorous in research • Cycle through several times with good questions • Share/vet ideas with outsiders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have clear targets and criteria for success • Embrace learning from mistakes • Encourage a sharing culture among participants • Be smart and flexible about categorizing • Occasionally invite review by outsiders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen deeply • Don’t impose personal or pet ideas • Support human dignity • Be flexible in interpreting results • Survey a diverse group of customers • Incorporate feedback • Design thinking and rapid prototyping

Using the steps above with discipline over time and with teams of good people can generate good results. As in all human endeavors, good quality communication among team members will be important.

One last suggestion deserves emphasis: be somewhat unattached to future you want to create as the real future unfolds in using these steps. Enjoy and work with the real future as it unfolds since this process does not guarantee a way to **control** the future. Going back the automobile example, look at today’s cars versus the Model T. The industry went from basic cheap automobiles to the latest Mercedes E Class which parks itself among many other wonderful things! Of the many car companies that existed in the beginning only a few remain—the most innovative. The same is likely to be true for virtual reality in the many ways it may emerge.

So, since this is an impossible task, “Your mission, Mr. Zuckerberg (if you choose to accept it) is to lead a team of people learning their way forward and creating the future!” Your job is to ensure shared learning within the organization and let the future emerge.

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