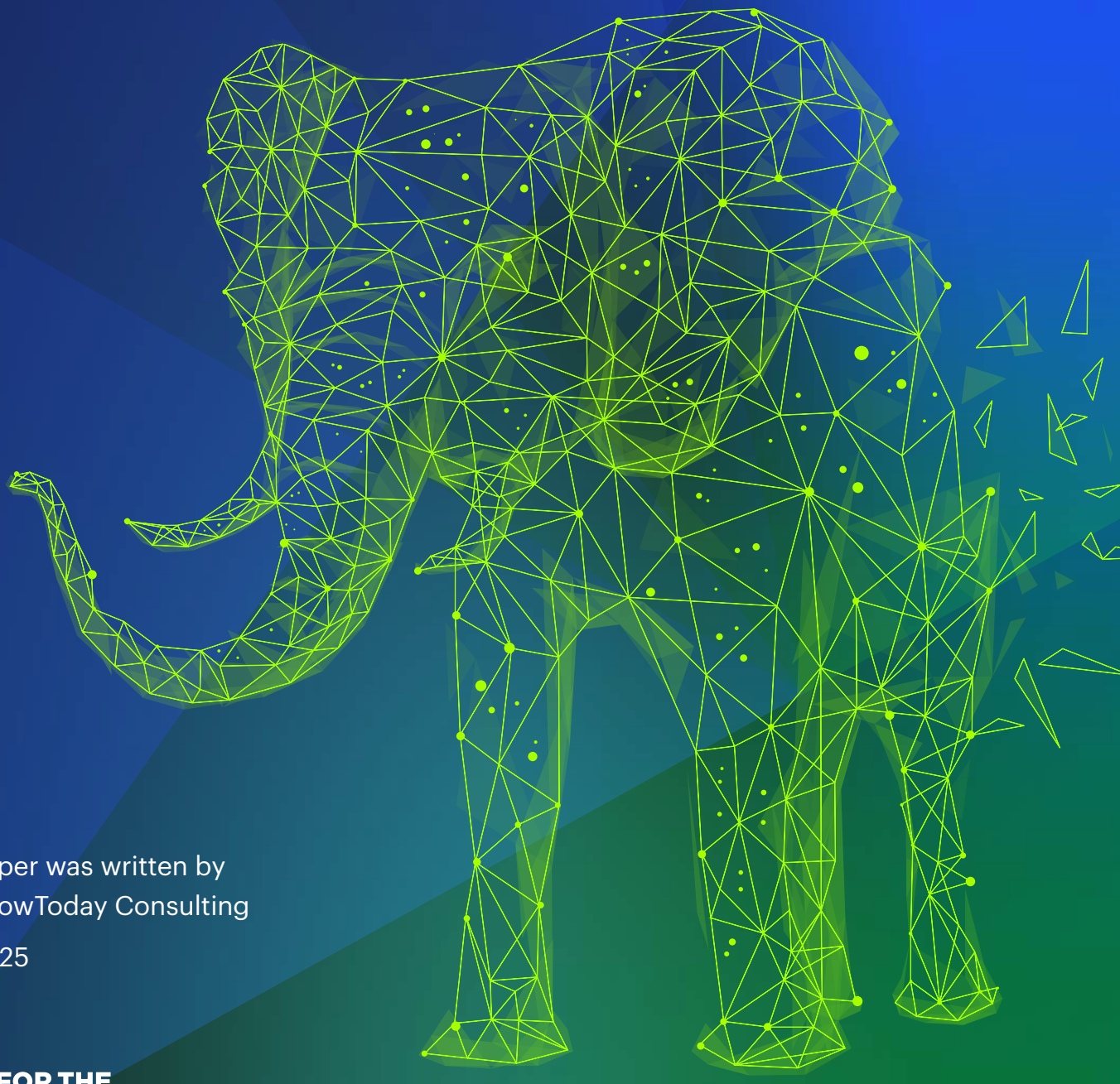
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Where Visionary Thinking
Meets Strategic Execution

Seven Great Grey Elephants and How They're Transforming the World



This paper was written by
TomorrowToday Consulting

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1% FOR THE PLANET
– ENVIRONMENTAL PARTNER –

Introduction

The future is created by leaders attuned to Grey Elephants—forces of progress colliding to drive sharp transformation in the world we live in.

Grey Elephants are significant yet often overlooked forces of change with far-reaching consequences. They represent major socio-economic, environmental, and technological shifts—clearly visible, but frequently ignored by business and society because they feel too vast, too uncomfortable, or too slow-moving to confront. But when Grey Elephants appear, it's too late to prepare.

At TomorrowToday, our research shows that Grey Elephants are not random—they are the inevitable consequence of progress colliding with itself. Take COVID-19: it wasn't a Black Swan, but a highly probable, high-impact event born from the convergence of mass urbanisation, ecological destruction, and the unchecked trade of wild animals in wet markets. It was visible, even predictable—but widely ignored. And when it struck, it found governments, businesses, and societies unprepared. Like all Grey Elephants, it didn't just disrupt the world—it reshaped it.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, TomorrowToday was focused on helping clients navigate the reality of living with the virus. While many consultants labelled the pandemic a "Black Swan"—an unpredictable shock—our team recognised it as something else entirely. We had been highlighting pandemics as foreseeable, disruptive forces for over a decade—alongside Bill Gates and other scientists who saw the warning signs.

As we dug deeper into the data, we began to identify other forces with the same profile: highly probable, high impact, and yet largely ignored. Seven in total. Each one large enough to reshape industries and societies—and all of them converging. This convergence was alarming, but also energising. Because when forces of progress collide, the world doesn't just break—it reinvents itself. And with that comes not just disruption, but extraordinary opportunity.

These Seven Grey Elephants are the defining forces of our time—powerful, interconnected, and reshaping everything from geopolitics to business models, social contracts to the natural world. They are not speculative or futuristic—they are here, now, and accelerating. Yet too often, leaders confront them as isolated challenges rather than part of a broader systemic shift.

This paper invites you to take a different view.

Across the following chapters, we unpack each Grey Elephant in detail—from ageing demographics to technological disruption, climate instability to economic inequality. Each section surfaces the critical questions leaders should be asking, the risks they cannot afford to ignore, and the opportunities that await those bold enough to act early.

We do not offer easy answers. But we do offer a framework: one that helps leaders reframe disruption as design challenge, pressure as fuel for progress, and chaos as a canvas for strategic reinvention.

Because in a world shaped by converging elephants, clarity is not found by predicting the future—it's found by creating it.

Grey Elephants and the questions we should be asking.

In this section, we summarise each Grey Elephant and surface the uncomfortable questions business leaders should be asking—but too often avoid. These forces are not distant or abstract; they are already reshaping the world around us.

We invite you to approach these challenges with curiosity and courage. Because within each Grey Elephant lies not just disruption, but the raw material for reinvention. The leaders bold enough to strike out and chart new ground will be the ones who uncover the breakthrough opportunities that define tomorrow's world.

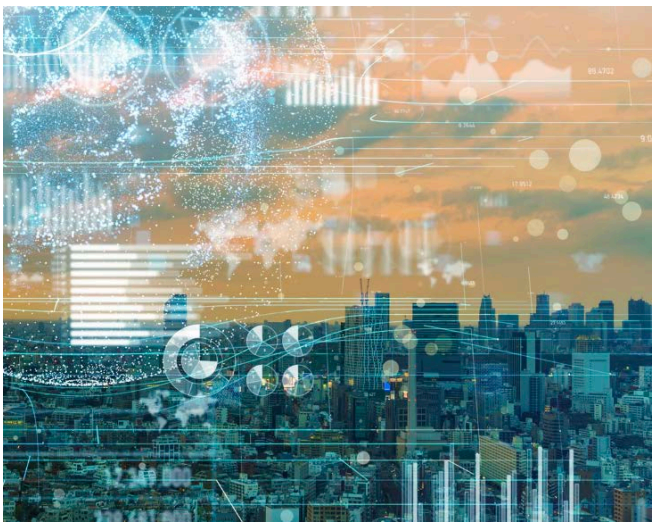
Ageing: *How do we redesign work, products, and services for a 100-year life?*



The most pressing strategic question for boards is not longevity itself, but the outdated assumption that older workers are less innovative and that retirement marks the end of productivity. By 2050, one in six people globally will be over 65—double today's share (UN DESA). In many markets, over-50s already control more than 60% of consumer spending and hold the majority of financial assets.

Despite this, most businesses continue to treat ageing as a cost centre or welfare issue, rather than a growth engine. Today's older populations are healthier, more capable, and more motivated to contribute than ever before. Companies that view longevity as a competitive advantage—not a demographic burden—will unlock new markets, harness multigenerational talent, and build for the future with every age in mind.

Societal Fractures: *What glue holds societies together when old systems crumble?*



The post-war social contract—built on liberal democracy, institutional trust, and shared prosperity—is fracturing. Only 7.8% of the global population resides in "full democracies," while digital tribalism splits realities: 4.5 billion social media users inhabit algorithmically curated echo chambers, undermining consensus on truth. Urbanisation accelerates this rupture: by 2050, 70% of humanity will live in cities, where generational and cultural clashes over climate policy, gender norms, and immigration intensify.

Capitalism faces existential scrutiny. While ESG frameworks proliferate, 42 million EU citizens cannot

afford daily meals despite 59 million tons of annual food waste. Meanwhile, middle powers like India and Saudi Arabia reject ideological blocs, leveraging multipolarity to extract concessions from East and West.

The path forward demands new models: Capitalism reimagined that prioritises planetary boundaries, decentralised governance powered by civic tech, and intercultural dialogue frameworks to bridge urban-rural divides.

Companies that build legitimacy through transparency —not just profit—will thrive in this reordered landscape.

Angry Planet: *What does it take to succeed in a 2°C world—and what if rising temperatures don't stop there?*



That's the burning question business leaders can no longer ignore. The Earth's average temperature is already breaching the 1.5°C threshold, with 2024 confirmed as the hottest year on record. On our current path—even if all national pledges are met—we're heading for 1.8°C to 2.2°C of warming by 2050 (UNEP, Climate Action Tracker). This will mean more intense heatwaves, water scarcity, supply chain failures, collapsing crop yields, and over a billion people displaced by mid-century.

But buried within this disruption is a transformative opportunity: to design products, systems, and cities built for a hotter, more volatile planet. From climate-adaptive infrastructure to resilient food, water, and energy systems, businesses that treat climate change as a strategic design brief—not just a risk— will shape the next era of growth.

Multipolarity: *How do we operate in a global economic system which no longer runs by Western rules?*



BRICS+ now represents 46% of the global population, 43% of oil production and 35% of global manufacturing —more than twice the US share. An example of this incredible shift; China, now makes more commercial ships than the rest of the world combined. In fact, one of Beijing's state-owned firms built more commercial ships just last year than all of America has produced since the end of World War II. The BRICS+ are actively building non-dollar financial systems and already dominates strategic supply chains: China alone controls 80% of processed battery minerals, 90% of active pharmaceutical ingredients, and 60% of global battery cell production.

At the same time, transactional middle powers like India, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia are pursuing pragmatic, interest-based relationships across multiple blocs. For western businesses these are troubling signs well past the horizon, accelerating the shift toward a fragmented, multipolar world where the old rules of globalisation no longer apply.

Intelligent Advances: *What will happen if AI takes away all the jobs?*

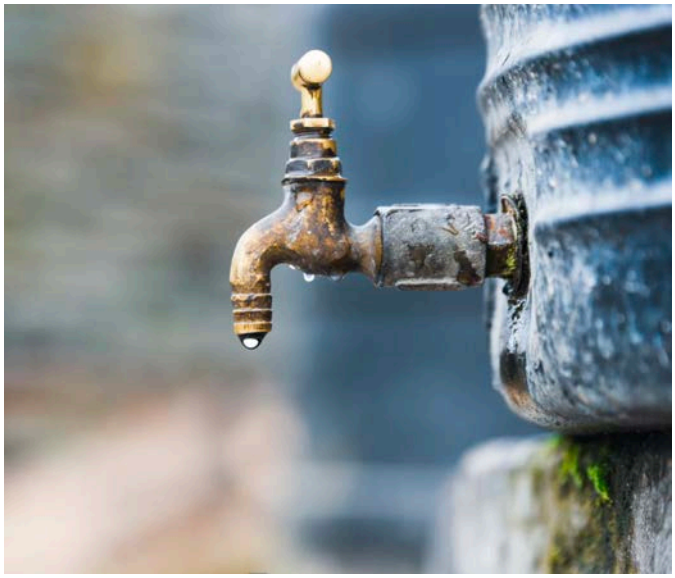


AI has the potential to elevate human intelligence—automating routine tasks, enhancing decision-making, and unlocking new forms of creativity. When deployed wisely, it can amplify higher-order skills like critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and innovation. Businesses embracing a "bionic" model—blending people and machines—are already seeing transformative gains.

But many leaders are using AI as a blunt instrument for cost-cutting. Jobs are being automated away without parallel investment in up-skilling or human development. The result? Eroded human agency, rising inequality, and a growing dependence on machines that risks making us collectively less capable—not more. Will AI, biotech, and exponential technologies advance humanity — or will they create a superhuman elite and leave entire populations behind?

AI influencers, with their enthusiasm for endless productivity gains, have become powerful enablers of corporate automation and cost-cutting agendas. These imperatives are not new—leaders have long sought to maximise profits through labour-reducing technologies. But generative AI has offered a uniquely persuasive narrative, one that legitimises the erosion, disempowerment, or outright elimination of vulnerable jobs under the banner of innovation. Replace too many people with machines, and leaders will find that their customer base has vanished—because robots don't buy products.

Big Squeeze: *How do we grow in an era of strategic scarcity?*



The age of abundance has given way to strategic scarcity, with cascading pressures on food, water, energy, critical minerals, and talent reshaping global economics.

By 2025, 1.8 billion people face absolute water scarcity, while 931 million tons of food are wasted annually—equivalent to 8–10% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Critical minerals like lithium, cobalt, and rare earths, essential for renewable energy technologies, are concentrated in geopolitically volatile regions, with China controlling 80% of processed battery minerals and 90% of active pharmaceutical ingredients.

Meanwhile, energy markets remain brittle. : UK gas prices surged to two-year highs in early 2025 amid supply disruptions and geopolitical tensions, while global demand for critical minerals must triple by 2030 to meet net-zero targets.

This scarcity is structural, not cyclical. Just-in-time supply chains, optimised for cost efficiency, are collapsing under climate volatility, trade fragmentation, and resource nationalism.

Leaders must now redesign systems for antifragility—prioritising regionalised sourcing, circular manufacturing, and strategic stockpiling. The squeeze is not merely a risk; it is a catalyst for reinventing value chains, accelerating green innovation, and redefining resource stewardship as a competitive edge.

Rising Rage: *Capitalism and liberal democracy are fracturing, what system comes next?*



Economic dislocation, automation-driven job loss, and institutional erosion are fuelling a global anger epidemic. The eight richest individuals now hold wealth equal to the poorest 3.6 billion, while 72% of the global population lives under autocratic regimes—the highest share since 1978.

Trust in democracies has cratered. Studies suggest that 50% of Generation Z has given up on democracy and would prefer to be ruled by a dictator. This discontent manifests in polarised politics: populist movements from Europe to Latin America exploit grievances, while social media algorithms amplify tribalism, with echo chambers radicalising 45% of users on platforms like Facebook and Twitter.

The rage is economic, cultural, and existential. Inflation persists, outpacing wage growth, while AI-driven job displacement threatens 30% of roles in sectors like logistics and administration. Yet within this volatility lies opportunity to address inequality through living wages, up-skilling, and stakeholder governance—that can build brand loyalty and stabilise workforces.

The challenge for leaders is to channel anger into systemic redesign: progressive taxation, participatory decision-making, and AI policies that augment human agency rather than erase it.

Kairos Moment—Learn to Dance with Elephants

Eventually these forces reach a tipping point, triggering a Kairos moment—a rare, opportune time to act. Most businesses won't see it. But leaders tuned to change—those who can dance with the Grey Elephants—will seize the opportunity to reshape industries, reimagine systems, and forge bold new paths that shape the future.

These are the moments when new models emerge, power reshuffles, and those attuned to change can harness fresh solutions, ride waves of new technology, and new thinking to shape a different reality.

We are no longer living in a world that is simply VUCA—Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous. Today's reality is BANI: Brittle, Anxious, Nonlinear, and Incomprehensible. In this new environment, systems can shatter without warning. Anxiety amplifies stress, anger and clouds decision-making. Cause and effect defy prediction. And traditional logic often fails to make what's unfolding comprehensible. The old playbooks no longer work. What leaders need now are not rigid strategies or risk-averse instincts—but the courage and curiosity of APEX leaders.

APEX leaders—Antifragile, Purpose-Driven, Explorers and Xenophiles—venture boldly into the unknown. They ask better questions. They read weak signals, spot emerging patterns, and anticipate resets before the crowd sees them coming. And they use the power of the Grey Elephant framework: as a compass to navigate the chaos and find meaning in the noise.

Our research shows that those leaders who see these elephants clearly—who embrace uncertainty, lean into discomfort, and engage with these forces early—will not only survive, but lead the transformation and help shape the new world.

As Neal Froneman, CEO of Sibanye-Stillwater—a leading global PGM mining company and one of TTC's long-term clients—told us on the Elephants in the Boardroom podcast:

> *"When we put the whole package together, it really made sense. It created logic. It created a framework, and it allowed us, with confidence, to continue down some of these paths and even accelerate and make them fundamental strategies. We would have been three years behind the game. I would say we're three years ahead of our competitors in thinking—and we've seen the value."*

"We now know how to dance with elephants."

Neal Froneman — CEO Sibanye-Stillwater



Grey Elephants are highly probable, high impact, yet largely ignored forces of progress.

But perhaps the most resonant insight Neal shared came after working closely with our team:

> *"It's not a stampede anymore—we now know how to dance with elephants."*

That phrase—dancing with elephants—captures the essence of what APEX leadership looks like in this BANI world.

It reframes disruption not as something to fear, but something to move with. For Neal and his leadership team, the framework gave shape and language to forces they were already sensing—but hadn't yet named. And once illuminated, these forces could be engaged with strategically, rhythmically, and with intent.

That's the invitation this paper extends to you: to step into the dance. To explore each Grey Elephant, ask the hard questions, and discover the opportunities hiding in plain sight. Because in a BANI – Brittle, Anxious, Non-Linear and Incomprehensible world, advantage doesn't belong to the biggest or the fastest—it belongs to those who learn the new steps before the music changes.

Chapter 1: Ageing Populations

Understanding the Ageing Phenomenon

The world is undergoing a profound demographic transformation. As life expectancy rises and birth rates fall, a historic milestone looms: by 2030, people over 65 will outnumber children under 9—1.4 billion versus 1.3 billion.

This shift is especially pronounced in developed economies. Europe is forecast to see a 25% increase in its over-65 population by 2050, while even in rapidly changing countries like China, the median age will reach 50. These trends are not confined to any one region—they are global, and accelerating.

The implications are immense. Sectors like healthcare, financial services, insurance, and even consumer goods must brace for—and benefit from—a new societal age structure. Ageing is not merely a social challenge; it is a strategic inflection point for economies, industries, and cultures.

The Economic and Social Challenges of Ageing

The economic implications are sobering. A shrinking working-age population will strain public finances, reduce tax bases, and amplify the cost of pensions, healthcare, and eldercare. In countries like Japan, dependency ratios already exceed 4:1—and the pressure is mounting elsewhere.

According to the World Bank, global GDP growth could decline by 1% per decade unless economies adapt. Healthcare systems will feel this most acutely, requiring fundamental redesigns to deliver both volume and value under mounting fiscal pressure.

In tandem, societies will need to address the mental, emotional, and social wellbeing of older citizens—not just their medical care. A reactive approach will not suffice; what's needed is a shift from burden to opportunity.

Questions for Leaders to Consider

- What structural changes might your organisation need to implement to better support and retain older workers in a world where 41% now expect to work beyond age 65?
- How effectively does your leadership team challenge outdated stereotypes about older people whilst developing inclusive strategies that understand and serve their evolving needs and aspirations?
- What cross-sector collaborations could your organisation initiate to address the complex challenges of an ageing population more effectively than siloed approaches?





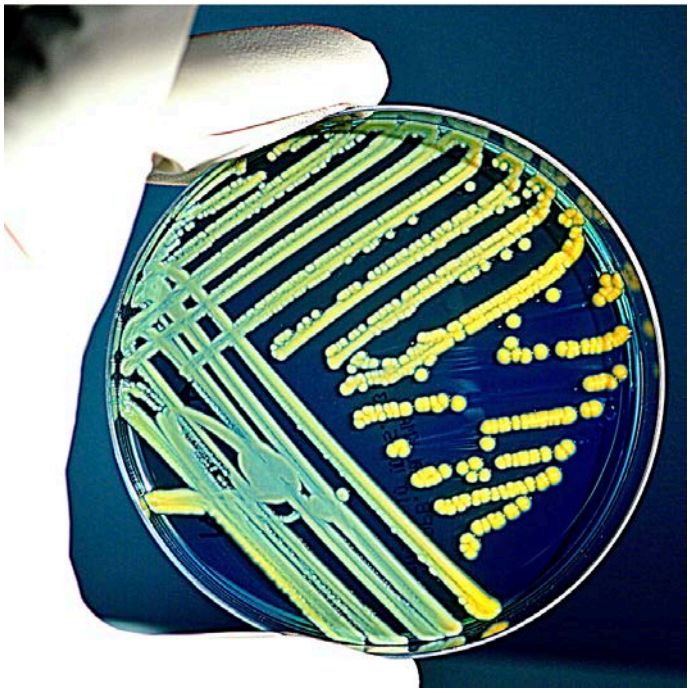
Conclusion: From Challenge to Catalyst

Countries like Germany may lose a third of their workforce within a decade. Yet within this disruption lies a strategic opportunity. Older workers bring invaluable institutional knowledge, mentorship, and perspective. By embracing flexible work arrangements, phased retirement, reverse mentoring, and re-skilling, organisations can tap into this expertise while preparing younger generations for leadership.

The path forward requires intergenerational collaboration, inclusive cultures, and long-range thinking. Leaders must advocate for progressive policies—from pension portability to age-friendly urban design—that reflect 21st-century realities.

Chapter 2: Angry Planet

Climate Change, Environmental Disruption, and the Kairos Moment for Business



Antibiotic resistant superbugs are a serious grey elephant flying under the radar

The Angry Planet is no longer a distant forecast—it is our lived reality. 2024 was the hottest year on record, and 2025 is already tracking to exceed it. For the first time, the world is expected to sustain an average temperature increase above 1.5°C—the critical threshold identified in the Paris Agreement. This milestone marks not only a scientific tipping point but a strategic one for business and society.

Extreme climate events are no longer outliers. In the past 12 months alone, we have witnessed wildfires in L.A. and Canada displace hundreds of thousands, unseasonal snowfall in the Arabian desert, and hurricanes so intense they have outpaced our instruments. Floods in South Asia, heatwaves in Europe and North America, and collapsing glacier systems from the Himalayas to the Alps all paint a unified picture: the Angry Planet is heating up—and with it, risk is rising.

But climate change is only part of the story. Mother Earth is fighting back on multiple fronts:

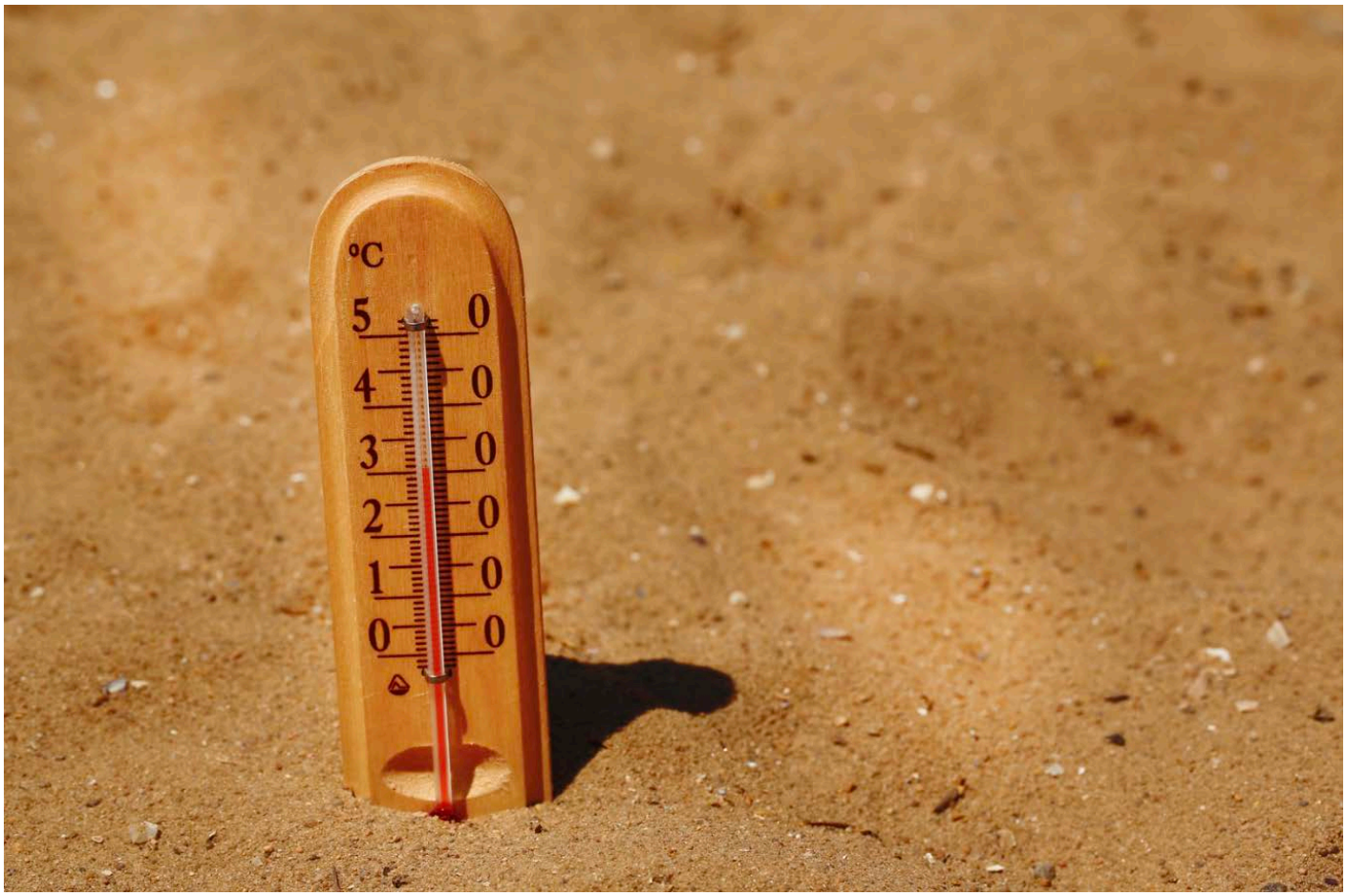
- The World Health Organisation now warns of a sharply rising risk of pandemics, with the probability of a COVID-scale event nearly doubling by 2050.
- The rise of superbugs and antibiotic resistance threatens to make common infections untreatable, potentially costing millions of lives annually.
- Wildfires are burning nearly twice the tree cover they did two decades ago, and rising seas are set to redraw coastlines and disrupt communities regardless of emissions cuts.

Economic Disruption Is Already Here

Climate and environmental disruption is now a business issue. Supply chains are buckling under extreme weather. Airlines face more frequent delays and cancellations due to heat and storm activity. Shipping routes are destabilised. Insurance and reinsurance are recalibrating, with rising premiums and outright refusal to cover high-risk areas—unthinkable just five years ago. Coastal property markets and infrastructure are under threat, and shrinking snowpacks destabilise water supply and hydropower.

A Global Policy Backslide—and a Business Imperative

Policy responses are mixed. In 2024, President-elect Trump's return to power reignited fossil fuel support in the US, while similar reversals have been seen elsewhere. Yet major economies such as China, India, and Australia are accelerating their green growth ambitions. The imperative for business is clear: act now to manage risks, support green growth, and prepare for a world



What does it take to succeed in a 2°C world—and what if temperatures do not stop there?

where climate volatility, health shocks, and environmental instability are the new normal.

Questions for Business Leaders

As the Angry Planet intensifies, business leaders should be asking themselves:

- What does it take to succeed in a 2°C world —and what if temperatures do not stop there?
- How resilient are our operations and supply chains to the increasing frequency of extreme weather events, wildfires, pandemics, and antibiotic-resistant superbugs?
- What sustainable innovations and climate-resilient practices can we adopt now to turn these risks into opportunities for growth, especially as competitors become more vulnerable?
- How can we build an organisation that is not just robust, but antifragile—capable of thriving amid disruption rather than merely surviving?

This is a rare kairos moment—a window where those who lean into disruption and rethink their approach can transform grey elephant risks into sources of strategic advantage. The question is not only how to weather the storm, but how to lead and grow through it.

Chapter 3: Societal Fractures

An 80-Year Playbook Is Being Ripped Up and a New System Is in the Making



The post-war consensus—liberal democracy, trusted institutions, and shared cultural values—has fractured. Across the globe, social glue is dissolving: megacities are hubs of migration-driven diversity, citizens turn to influencers over parliaments, and digital echo chambers deepen divides. Societal fractures are accelerating, redrawing the contours of culture, power, and identity.

Urbanisation and migration are reshaping societies at unprecedented speed. By 2050, over 70% of people will live in cities. Urbanisation acts as a cultural accelerant, bringing together diverse backgrounds and values, often sparking friction. Mass migration, especially from Africa, is set to transform global demographics. By 2030, half of all new entrants to the global labour force will come from sub-Saharan Africa, yet job creation lags far behind population growth. Most African migration is legal and professional, with countries like Kenya formalising labour export strategies. Ageing societies in the West and Asia increasingly rely on this demographic bulge, even as political rhetoric resists it.

Democracy, once the global norm, is now the minority experience. Only 7.8% of the world's population lives in "full democracies," while 72% live under autocratic rule. Even in established democracies, trust in institutions has eroded. People want more democracy but feel they are getting less, fuelling disengagement and a preference for strongman leadership.

Trust in government, media, and corporations is at historic lows, especially among younger generations. Many are building meaning in peer networks and digital tribes, leaving a vacuum that populists are quick to fill. Digital platforms have fragmented reality itself, creating echo chambers where consensus is impossible and misinformation thrives. When reality is subjective, institutions collapse and dialogue ends.

Yet, amidst the fractures, a new system is being crafted. The world is witnessing the emergence of hybrid models that blend the best of capitalism with the coordination strengths of other systems, such as China's state-guided market approach. The BRICS nations are building alternative financial and governance structures, while public-private partnerships and multi-stakeholder initiatives are setting new global standards. The architecture of global governance is being reimagined.

This is a kairos moment for business. Rather than simply adapting to change, business has a unique opportunity—and responsibility—to help shape the next generation of institutions. The best of capitalism—innovation, entrepreneurship, and value creation—should be balanced with broader societal goals and inclusive governance. Businesses should lobby for institutional reform, support the creation of new frameworks, and help rewire societal norms and values for the future. The system that emerges could be a hybrid, better suited to the complexities of the 21st century and the needs of all stakeholders.

Questions for leaders:

- Is your strategy designed for stability, or are you ready for an era of cultural flux and urban migration?
- How do you build trust when younger generations distrust nearly all formal institutions?
- How can your organisation help shape the new global system, rather than simply adapt to it?
- What role can you play in lobbying for institutional reform and the creation of new frameworks that benefit all stakeholders?
- Are you investing in workforce models and governance structures that can thrive in a world of mobile, diverse talent and shifting societal values?

The old playbook is obsolete. The winners will be those who help forge a new centre—designing for complexity, leading with empathy and agility, and building institutions that are fit for the future. This is a rare opportunity to co-create a system that serves business, society, and the planet alike.



Chapter 4: Multipolarity

The Rise of Multipolar World Order—A long game who's time has arrived

The global order is in the midst of a profound shift from Western-dominated unipolarity to a multipolar world, where power is distributed across competing blocs. This transformation, while not yet complete, has reached a stage where reversal is no longer possible. The implications for business strategy, supply chains, and economic governance are significant and demand urgent attention. Navigating this evolving landscape requires a clear understanding of the forces at play and a proactive approach to resilience.

The Architecture of Multipolarity

Russia's Strategic Blueprint

Russia's rejection of Western hegemony was formalised in 1999 with Yevgeny Primakov's doctrine of multipolarity. This strategy was designed to fracture Western dominance through energy diplomacy, cyber operations, and alliances with other authoritarian regimes. Under Vladimir Putin, Russia has built alternative governance structures that bypass Western institutions, directly challenging the liberal international order.

China's Systematic Encirclement

China has pursued a complementary long-term strategy, embedding itself as a critical partner for over 120 nations through the Belt and Road Initiative and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. This is a deliberate effort to create parallel systems for trade, finance, and governance. By 2024, China controlled 80% of processed battery-grade minerals, 90% of active pharmaceutical ingredients for antibiotics, and 60% of global battery cell manufacturing—establishing strategic chokepoints in future economic ecosystems.

Western Strategic Myopia

The Cost of Complacency

Western policymakers have long underestimated these developments, prioritising short-term gains from globalisation and offshore manufacturing. This complacency has eroded strategic autonomy and enabled the rise of new power blocs. The expanded BRICS+ group now represents 46% of the global population and 29% of GDP, a direct outcome of this shift.

Manufacturing's Eastward Migration

BRICS+ has overtaken both the United States and the European Union as the leading bloc in global manufacturing. China alone accounts for over 31% of global manufacturing, with BRICS+ collectively controlling about 35%. The United States and the EU, by contrast, are projected to see their shares decline further in the coming years.

The Rise of Transactional Middle Powers

A new category of "T25" transactional middle powers—including India, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey—has emerged. Representing 45% of the world's population and 18% of global GDP, these nations refuse binary alignment. Instead, they leverage multipolarity to secure concessions from all sides, prioritising pragmatic interests over ideological commitments and fundamentally altering traditional alliance structures.



The US Response: Reactive, Not Strategic

Recent US policy, characterised by aggressive tariffs and industrial reshoring, is a reactive attempt to counter China's dominance. While these measures aim to disrupt supply chain dependencies, they risk accelerating trade fragmentation and deepening global supply chain complexity. The focus on large-scale technology and manufacturing investments may spark a high-tech arms race, further bifurcating standards and regulatory regimes worldwide.

Taiwan: The Geopolitical Flashpoint

The Taiwan Strait remains the world's most dangerous flashpoint. China's military exercises have evolved into rehearsals for blockades and economic pressure, targeting Taiwan's shipping lanes and undersea cables. With Taiwan producing 90% of the world's most advanced semiconductors, any disruption would have global consequences. The uncertainty of US security guarantees and rising protectionism have prompted regional allies to hedge their bets, increasing the risk of miscalculation.

Strategic Imperatives for Business

Navigating Fragmented Systems

Businesses must now design supply chains for resilience, not just efficiency. Persistent volatility, currency competition, and diverging regulatory standards are the new normal.

Building Antifragile Operations

Success requires modular supply chains, regional compliance, and pragmatic partnerships with middle powers. Scenario planning for shocks—such as disruptions in Taiwan or tariff escalations—is essential.

Regulatory and Currency Complexity

As BRICS+ advances non-dollar financial systems and alternative standards, businesses face a world of competing regulations and currencies. Robust risk management and local market intelligence are critical.

Cultural Intelligence and Localisation

Winning in a multi-aligned world demands deep cultural understanding and the ability to tailor products, services, and partnerships to diverse markets.

Strategic Questions for a Multipolar World

1. How resilient are your supply chains to sudden tariff hikes, sanctions, or regional blockades?
2. What contingency plans exist for a major disruption in the Taiwan Strait or other strategic chokepoints?
3. How will you navigate regulatory divergence, currency volatility, and shifting alliances in the Asia-Pacific and beyond?
4. Are you actively building relationships with T25 middle powers and non-aligned markets to hedge against geopolitical risk?
5. How robust is your scenario planning for "grey-zone" disruptions-blockades, cyberattacks, or economic coercion?
6. Do you have the cultural intelligence and local partnerships needed to operate across divergent regulatory and political environments?

Conclusion

The world is not yet fully multipolar, but the transition is irreversible and accelerating. The West's delayed recognition of this shift has allowed Russia and China to rewire global systems and enabled the rise of powerful new blocs. Today's business leaders must build resilience, diversify partnerships, and adapt strategies for a world where Western centrality no longer guarantees success. Those who master these complexities will thrive in the new era; those who do not risk obsolescence as the global centre of gravity continues to shift.

Could a Multipolar World Lead to WW3?

The shift from American unipolarity to a multipolar world —where power is distributed across the US, China, Russia, and an expanded BRICS+—creates genuine potential for major global conflict. While some dismiss this as alarmist thinking, historical patterns and current tensions suggest this "grey elephant event" demands serious boardroom attention. .

Why the risk is real:

- **History's warning:** Previous multipolar eras (pre-WWI, pre-WWII) ended in global conflict as rival blocs miscalculated and alliances fractured.
- **Flashpoints abound:** Taiwan is the most dangerous, with China rehearsing blockades and the US threatening massive tariffs. Economic and military tensions are now deeply intertwined.
- **Economic decoupling:** The old logic that trade would prevent war is eroding. As the US and China disentangle, economic pain could drive desperate leaders to gamble on escalation.
- **Weakening safeguards:** International institutions are losing authority, and middle powers now hedge their bets, making the global system less predictable.
- **Resource competition:** From semiconductors to rare earths, critical technologies are now seen as national security assets, raising the stakes for confrontation.

Why War is not inevitable:

- **Nuclear deterrence:** The threat of mutual destruction still restrains major powers.
- **Grey-zone tactics:** Economic warfare, cyberattacks, and blockades are preferred over open battle.
- **Economic self-interest:** A US-China war would devastate the global economy—an outcome neither side truly wants.

The boardroom reality:
The stabilisers that kept the peace are weaker than at any point in recent memory. Multipolarity guarantees more frequent crises and dangerous brinkmanship.

Leaders must plan for a brittle and breaking world order, and accept that what we hope will never happen is now a scenario worth preparing for.



Chapter 5: The Big Squeezes

Navigating Strategic Scarcity, Systemic Risk, and the Collapse of Business-as-Usual

Strategic Scarcity and the End of Business-as-Usual

The global operating environment is undergoing a structural shift. Decades of globalisation, cheap capital, and abundant resources are giving way to a period defined by constraint—on materials, labour, energy, and resilience.

Pressure Points Are Converging

Global systems once optimised for efficiency are now brittle. Supply chains are fragmented. Labour markets are distorted. Inputs—energy, water, food, talent—are becoming more politicised, volatile, and expensive. Antifragility is the new premium.

Nearshoring and reshoring are gaining traction, but progress is slow and expensive. Semiconductor shortages delay production. AI forecasting tools are being adopted for stability, but only mitigate, not solve, the underlying fragility. Inflation is now structural, reflecting deeper systemic stress.

Sectoral Squeezes

Food: The global food system is wasteful and misaligned. While 1.6 billion tonnes are wasted annually, obesity rates are rising, and malnutrition persists. Industrialised diets are colliding with climate volatility and resource depletion.

Water: A two-degree rise in global temperatures could eliminate two-thirds of Himalayan glaciers, threatening water supplies for 3 billion people, in an economic region responsible for over 30% of global trade. Early-stage flooding will give way to chronic scarcity, with implications for agriculture, energy, and regional stability.

Energy: Markets remain unstable. The war in Ukraine, Red Sea disruptions, and shifting oil alliances have entrenched energy security as a boardroom priority. The green transition is underway, but remains uneven. Investment in renewables is outpacing grid capacity. Fossil incumbents are digging in.

Labour: The global labour market is bifurcated. Advanced economies face ageing populations and labour shortages; emerging markets grapple with youth unemployment and underemployment. Hybrid work has changed expectations, but productivity is stagnant. In many regions, real wages have declined.

Digital: The digitisation of supply chains introduces new vulnerabilities—cybersecurity, AI bias, and regulatory divergence. As dependencies increase, so do exposure and fragility.

Impacts Beyond Business

This is not a normal economic cycle—it is a paradigm shift. Business models optimised for



growth, efficiency and scale are now being tested on adaptability, ethics, and resilience.

Case Study:

Kellogg's – Strategic Adaptation in the Era of Big Squeezes

Navigating Scarcity with Focused Execution

Facing inflation, supply shocks, and rising resource pressures, Kellogg's has adopted a disciplined, strategic response aligned with the systemic constraints described in the "Big Squeezes" framework.

1. Minimising Waste, Maximising Core

Kellogg's reduced food waste by streamlining its portfolio—prioritising staples like Special K, Corn Flakes, and Nutri-Grain bars. This shift reduced inefficiencies tied to frequent changeovers while ensuring product availability. As one executive noted:

"Higher inventory was worth it to satisfy consumers who were glad to find a trusted brand on the shelf."

2. Reformulating for Health

With obesity rates soaring globally, Kellogg's reformulated key products to cut sugar and fat without sacrificing taste—pre-empting future regulation on HFSS foods and aligning with evolving consumer demand.

3. Regionalising Supply Chains

In response to packaging constraints, Kellogg's adopted nearshoring—sourcing paperboard from nearby markets. The move reduced emissions, lowered transport costs, and enhanced supply security. It reflects a broader industry pivot: 77% of European firms are now considering regionalisation.

4. Conserving Critical Inputs

Recognising water scarcity risks, Kellogg's has rolled out conservation technologies across its plants—anticipating future constraints in a sector highly dependent on reliable water access.

Results: Strategic Resilience Pays Off

By prioritising availability over efficiency, Kellogg's maintained brand trust and market share—even as 78% of European firms reported margin erosion due to inflation.

Five Takeaways for Leaders Facing the Squeeze

1. **Focus on the core** – Rationalise product portfolios to reduce waste and reinforce brand equity.
2. **Localise supply** – Nearshoring boosts resilience and mitigates geopolitical and logistical risks.
3. **Own reform** – Anticipate regulation by leading on regulation and improvement.
4. **Secure scarce resources** – Water and energy management must be strategic, not operational.
5. **Resilience over efficiency** – Long-term advantage lies in reliability, not just margin optimisation.

Kellogg's shows how a well-calibrated response to systemic pressure can turn constraint into a competitive edge.

Conclusion: Reinvention in the Squeeze

The Big Squeezes are not isolated shocks. They are structural signals of a system under strain. Yet constraints can sharpen focus. They clarify priorities, test assumptions, and compel innovation.

The question is no longer how to avoid the squeeze—but how to emerge from it with a model built not just to withstand pressure, but to thrive because of it.

Chapter 6 – Intelligent Advances

Reimagining Work in the Human+Machine Era

AI, robotics, and automation are no longer fringe experiments—they are scaling fast, reshaping industries and redefining work. Generative AI has moved from novelty to necessity in under a year. Yet many businesses still view these technologies through a narrow lens: cutting costs, increasing efficiency, replacing humans. This is a strategic blind spot.

The real opportunity is not automation—it is **augmentation**. We are at a **Kairos moment**: a rare inflection point where technology has become reliable enough to transform—not just improve—how we work, lead, and grow.

The Ford Paradox: Innovation Lies in Reimagination

In 1914, Henry Ford doubled wages to $5 a day. Critics were outraged. But Ford wasn't being generous—he was being strategic. He saw what others missed: that retention, morale, and productivity were eroding profitability. Better wages weren't a cost—they were a breakthrough.

Ford didn't invent the assembly line or the motor car. His genius was reimagining the **economic model**. He understood that true innovation isn't about doing things better—it's about doing them **differently**.

Today's leaders face the same challenge. With supply chains strained and labour costs rising, the reflex is to automate more, faster. But that's yesterday's playbook. The real move is to rearchitect systems, workflows, and roles around Human+Machine collaboration—creating entirely new ways of working.

Strategy Shift: From Machines that Replace to Machines that Amplify

Too many organisations still treat AI as a bolt-on to legacy processes. The result? Marginal gains. To lead, businesses must instead build *bionic* operating models—systems where technology enhances, not substitutes, human capability.

Old Leadership Logic	Re-imagination Imperative
Reduce headcount	Augment human potential
Save cost	Create value
Optimise legacy	Invent new models
Replace people	Rethink partnerships

Strategic Implications:

We are now entering a phase where the underlying technologies—AI, quantum computing, synthetic biology—are no longer experimental. They are reaching the reliability threshold. This is the moment when reimagination becomes possible.

Ford didn't just pay more. He saw further. He understood that technology wasn't the innovation—it was the enabler. The true breakthrough was in rethinking the relationship between people, productivity, and prosperity.

We stand at a similar crossroads today. With smart technologies becoming more capable, more accessible, and more reliable, the

temptation is to apply them simply to squeeze out more efficiency, to automate, to replace. But that would be to miss the moment entirely.

Many businesses see AI as a tool for replacing human roles or automating tasks. This narrow view ignores its greater potential to enhance human intelligence, creativity, and problem-solving.

The real frontier is not artificial intelligence. It is augmented human intelligence. It is the capacity to take what these technologies offer and use them to build something profoundly better—for business, for society, and for humanity.

The question for today's executives is no longer "How do we use machines to do what we already do, only faster and cheaper?"

The real question is: Who will advance the intelligence of our business models, our systems, and—most radically—advance the intelligence and progress of the human race itself? The real question is how do we build bionic organisations?

Humans have powers AI can not match—Empathy curiosity, creativity, antifragility, intuition, inspiration, collaboration—AI can however, turn these into superhuman powers. That's the opportunity. That's the elephant in the boardroom. And that's the moment we dare not ignore.

This is a once-in-a-century opportunity. It is not about the rise of machines. It is about the rise of organisations—and leaders—who can build a bionic superhuman future.



Building a bionic workforce means using advanced technology to turn human powers into superhuman powers

This is a once-in-a-century opportunity: Machine+Human augmentation that builds a bionic superhuman future.

The Challenge

Siemens GBS, with around 10,000 employees across 11 global delivery centres, manages over seven million customer service tickets annually, spanning finance, HR, logistics, and technical support. The sheer volume and complexity of enquiries made traditional, manual processing inefficient and prone to error, while full automation was neither feasible nor desirable for nuanced, high-value interactions.

The Bionic Solution

Starting in 2017 and accelerating through 2022, Siemens GBS developed and deployed its "bionic customer service agent"-an intelligent solution built in-house using Microsoft Azure Services and advanced natural language processing (NLP) This system now automates up to 70% of service ticket processing, classifying and routing requests, extracting key data, and handling routine queries with over 90% accuracy-surpassing manual performance.

Crucially, Siemens did not eliminate the human element. Instead, the bionic agent is designed for seamless human–machine collaboration:

- **AI handles the repetitive, high-volume tasks**-freeing human agents to focus on complex, judgement-intensive cases and direct customer engagement.
- **Humans oversee, validate, and continuously improve the system**-ensuring quality, compliance, and adaptability as business needs evolve.
- **Continuous learning**-feedback from human agents is used to train and refine the AI, expanding its capabilities over time.

Results

- **70% automation** of ticket handling, with higher accuracy and faster response times.
- **Employees redeployed to higher-value work**, such as complex problem-solving, customer relationship management, and service innovation.
- **Scalable, reusable solution**-the bionic agent's architecture allows it to be adapted for other business functions and future requirements.
- **Cultural transformation**-Siemens GBS has built new digital skills within its teams, fostering a mindset of "learning by doing" and continuous improvement.

Lessons for Leaders

Siemens GBS exemplifies the core intelligent advances thesis: the future is not about replacing people with machines, but about designing systems where humans and intelligent technologies work together to achieve outcomes neither could deliver alone. Their approach demonstrates:

- **Start with augmentation, not replacement**-focus on freeing humans for higher-value work.
- **Invest in skill-building and change management**-ensure teams can adapt and thrive alongside new technology.
- **Design for adaptability and reusability**-build solutions that can evolve as needs change.
- **Keep humans in the loop**-for oversight, improvement, and the delivery of empathy, judgement, and creativity.

Siemens GBS's bionic agent is not just a technology project-it is a blueprint for the next era of business. By reimagining work at the intersection of human and machine capability, Siemens is delivering on the promise of the bionic organisation: superhuman performance, greater resilience, and a more meaningful role for people in the intelligent enterprise.

Chapter 7: The Rising Rage

Inequality and Discontent Are Becoming the Most Disruptive Forces of Our Time



The world is angry.

From cost-of-living protests in European capitals to food riots in the Global South, from populist victories at the ballot box to digital spaces ablaze with fury—rage has shifted from the margins to the mainstream. It is organised, intensified, and no longer ignorable.

This chapter explores one of the most consequential Grey Elephants of our time: The Rising Rage. Fuelled by structural inequities, broken promises, and algorithmic amplification, it is no longer just a societal challenge—it is a strategic risk for leaders across sectors.

A Fractured Social Contract

We are living in the fallout of a grand disillusionment. After decades of rising expectations—access to education, upward mobility, equitable opportunity—the returns have diminished or disappeared entirely for many. The eight richest individuals now own more wealth than half of humanity. Meanwhile, wages stagnate, housing is unaffordable, and automation casts long shadows over job security.

People have noticed.

They see record profits and executive bonuses while essential workers face burnout. They hear the promises but experience none of the progress. This anger is not explosive—it is accumulative, coherent, and increasingly coordinated. And it is reshaping markets, institutions, and political orders.

The Economics of Anger

Inequality is no longer an ethical issue alone—it is a force of destabilisation. As the middle class contracts and opportunity gaps widen, exclusion becomes identity. People are not only angry about what they lack—they are angry about being invisible.

The pandemic was a force multiplier. Financial markets rebounded; the majority did not. Now, amid inflation and crumbling public services, we face the consequences: radical politics, institutional distrust, and deepening volatility.

For business, this is not abstract.

- Companies facing public discontent suffer an average 15% drop in brand loyalty and 20% decline in employee engagement.
- Conversely, those addressing inequality and sustainability report 12% higher brand trust and 8% better retention2024.

Anatomy of Rage

This Grey Elephant is dangerous not because it is loud—but because it is *everywhere*. Rage is the emotional convergence point of several systemic failures:

- Economic injustice locks people out.
- Political elitism breeds cynicism.
- Social media acts as the spark, accelerant, and echo chamber.

Martin Luther King warned that "a riot is the language of the unheard." Today's rage speaks in many tongues: protest votes, populist nationalism, social media campaigns, and, in some cases, violence. Movements are self-organising around heroes and villains. Where leadership falters, anger fills the void.

Harnessing Rage as a Strategic Input

Anger, when acknowledged and channelled, can become a catalyst for renewal. It exposes system failures and unlocks pathways for redesigning broken models—economically, socially, organisationally.

This is the leadership imperative: Don't suppress rage. Decode it. Behind every outrage lies:

- A need unmet.
- A truth denied.
- A voice ignored.

Leaders who lean into discomfort—who listen, co-create new compacts, and enable collective ownership of change—will not only mitigate risk. They will unlock latent value, trust, and innovation capacity.

Strategic Questions for Leaders

- What root causes of discontent exist within your workforce, supply chain, and customer base?
- How prepared is your leadership team to operate in a world where silence has consequences?
- Is your definition of value creation evolving to include equity, dignity, and inclusion?
- Can you convert public anger into a strategic input for transformation?

Conclusion:

The Rising Rage is not a passing moment—it is a systemic signal. A mirror. A warning. A mandate.

It reveals what no longer works. If ignored, it will disrupt. If harnessed, it can drive a transformation of extraordinary scale and relevance.

The true risk is not anger—it is apathy in the face of it.

The future will not favour those with the strongest defences, but those with the deepest understanding. Leaders who can interpret the rhythm of rage—its causes, its contours, and its potential—will not just survive this era.

They will shape the next one.

Conclusion—Turning Grey Elephants into Strategic Advantage

Grey Elephant forces are not distant possibilities but immediate realities, accelerating profound systemic change and sharply transforming the world today.

The seven Grey Elephants outlined in this paper are not forecasts to be managed in isolation, nor are they anomalies to be feared. They are converging realities—structural, systemic forces that are already reshaping the business landscape with profound implications for leaders and organisations worldwide. To ignore them is no longer an option. To react defensively is insufficient. The true imperative is to lead through them—with vision, resolve, and a new kind of capability.

These elephants—ageing populations, societal fractures, angry planet, multipolarity, intelligent advances, big squeezes, and rising rage—represent not just risks but the raw ingredients of reinvention. When faced squarely, they catalyse new thinking. When engaged early, they yield outsized returns. And when met with courage, they present an opportunity to build organisations that are not just resilient, but antifragile.

The world is shifting from the VUCA paradigm to something altogether more transformative—what we've described as BANI: Brittle (Breaking), Anxious, Nonlinear and Incomprehensible. In this environment, the qualities that defined 20th-century leadership—efficiency, control, predictability—are no longer fit for purpose.

What is needed now are APEX leaders: Antifragile, Purpose-driven Explorers and Xenophiles—those who are curious, courageous, and willing to reimagine everything from strategy and culture to governance and growth.

Strategic clarity will not be found in quarterly forecasts or annual plans alone. It will be found in the willingness to ask better questions, to test assumptions against emerging realities, and to adapt with intentionality.

As Neal Froneman, CEO of Sibanye-Stillwater reflected after adopting this very framework: "It's not a stampede anymore—we now know how to dance with elephants."

That is the invitation. To move beyond the reactive and toward the antifragile. To turn pressure into progress. To not merely respond to change, but to shape it.

In this kairos moment—where the urgent meets the important—those who learn to dance with Grey Elephants will not just endure the future. They will define it.

Tomorrow is shaped by those who see the elephants in the room today—and choose to lead the dance.

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About TomorrowToday Consulting

At TTC, we partner with clients to proactively create a better future.

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