



Bob de Wit

Professor of Strategie Leadership,
Nyenrode Business University, The Netherlands

Founding director, Strategy Works and Strategy
Academy, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Inspirational speaker on Society 4.0 and the
Digital Revolution

Author of *Strategy: An International Perspective*,
7th global edition, Cengage, 2020

FOREWORD

In 2017, I delivered an inaugural lecture at Nyenrode Business University entitled "On the Eve of a Societal Revolution". It was based on years of research, lectures and keynote presentations on the future consequences of a large number of technologies, such as artificial intelligence and biotechnology. The main message was that I expected a societal revolution within a number of years. In 2018, I started to write the manuscript for this book, *Society 4.0*, to share my expectations on what our future society might look like.

Halfway through writing the manuscript, in spring 2020, my home country, the Netherlands, went into an 'intelligent lockdown' because of coronavirus. Upon hearing the explanation for the lockdown given by the Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte on national television, I immediately realised that this day, March 23, 2020, marked the beginning of the future, I had been anticipating.

With my understanding of the fundamental societal changes ahead, I redirected my research time to better comprehend the coronavirus 'pandemic'. I started investigating the fatality rate of the virus, together with my Nyenrode colleague Professor Bo van der Rhee, by analysing the number of weekly deaths in the Netherlands compared with the years 2015-2019. Bo and I published the results on LinkedIn. One important conclusion of our research was that coronavirus was more infectious than influenza but no more lethal.

Why, then, was the world economy being forced into a lockdown? Why would we need a vaccine for this corona flu before going back to normal?

My posts and articles on LinkedIn made me something of a public figure for the Dutch 'Corona Realists'. Then my LinkedIn profile was removed temporarily. I also received invitations to share my thoughts on the virus and possible future consequences. One interview, with Café Weltschmerz, received many YouTube views and appreciative comments. In the interview, which was dubbed 'New World Order', I revealed some of the thoughts contained in this book and the feedback I received helped to sharpen my views.

The corona 'pandemic' also speeded up the societal changes I was expecting and so I decided to accelerate finishing the manuscript. As soon as the Dutch government allowed me to fly again, I took off to my favourite writing location: the Caribbean island (and 'extraordinary Dutch city') of Bonaire, where I finished the manuscript. Approximately half of my book "*Society 4.0*" was written in the two years BC (Before Corona) and the remainder in the six months AD (After Disruption).

The main challenge in writing this book was to make an extremely complex and multi-disciplinary topic accessible for large audiences, while also keeping the number of pages as low as possible. Armed with the famous quote by Blaise Pascal [*Blaise Pascal was a French mathematician, logician, physicist and theologian (19 June 1623 - 19 August) 1662*]: *Je n'ai fait celle-ci plus longue que parce que je n'ai pas eu le loisir de la faire plus courte*' (I write you a long letter because I do not have the time to write a short one'), I took the time needed to compress a vast amount of information from many different publications into an easily digestible book. It will be up to the reader to decide whether I have succeeded in my endeavours.

INTRODUCTION

This book aims to provide both hope and a set of guidelines for a better future society. The society I envision for the future, dubbed the 'Glocal Citizens Society', will be described in chapter 7. The name combines two characteristics of a hopeful future: a Citizens Society and Glocal Citizens.

A Citizens Society: Over the past few decades, many global companies (particularly digital, financial and pharmaceutical companies) have grown larger and richer than most nations, while some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have become more powerful than national public organisations. On a worldwide scale, global organisations and NGOs have strengthened their collaborations with wealthy individuals and 'charitable organisations' to form a new world order of the elite. Yet none of these 'global elite stakeholders' is democratic and their aim is to establish an undemocratic 'Elite Reset Society', which is described in Chapter 6. This is the society that my book aims to prevent, with the ultimate aim being citizens to develop an alternative society with citizens at the centre.

Glocal Citizens: Strategic issues and communities are becoming global, while citizens continue to work and live locally. When citizens combine their local social domain with contributing to resolving global issues they become glocal citizens.

In my book it will be argued that whether the Elite Reset Society (chapter 6) or the Glocal Citizens Society (chapter 7) comes into being, depends on how eight key societal issues will be resolved. The eight societal issues that need rethinking are (chapter 5): the nation-state concept, the governance of societies, world governance, industrial capitalism, income distribution, labour, human life and natural living.

My book is meant to inspire everyone to build a better future for our children and grandchildren: CEO's, politicians, public servants, doctors, teachers, engineers, marketers, designers - indeed all citizens who wish to commit themselves to creating a better future for more than only him- or herself. This book aims to go beyond telling an 'inconvenient truth' and to provide guidelines for organising and realising the Glocal Citizens Society.

The aim of chapter 2, A (Very) Brief History of Societies, is to provide a historical context for the current societal revolution. I apologise to historians in advance for my very brief summary, but I like to use history to understand the future - not the past or the present - in a concise form. The previous societal revolutions - from the feudal society to the trade society and then to the industrial society - are briefly described in order to understand the revolutionary change from an industrial society to a digital society that will dominate the years ahead.

In chapter 3, Society 4.0 - the Digital Wave, the impact of digital technologies is described using a taxonomy of digital technologies. The taxonomy consists of two societal waves: the digital technologies wave (4.1) and the artificial intelligence wave (4.2). When combined, these technologies can have a fundamental impact on society.

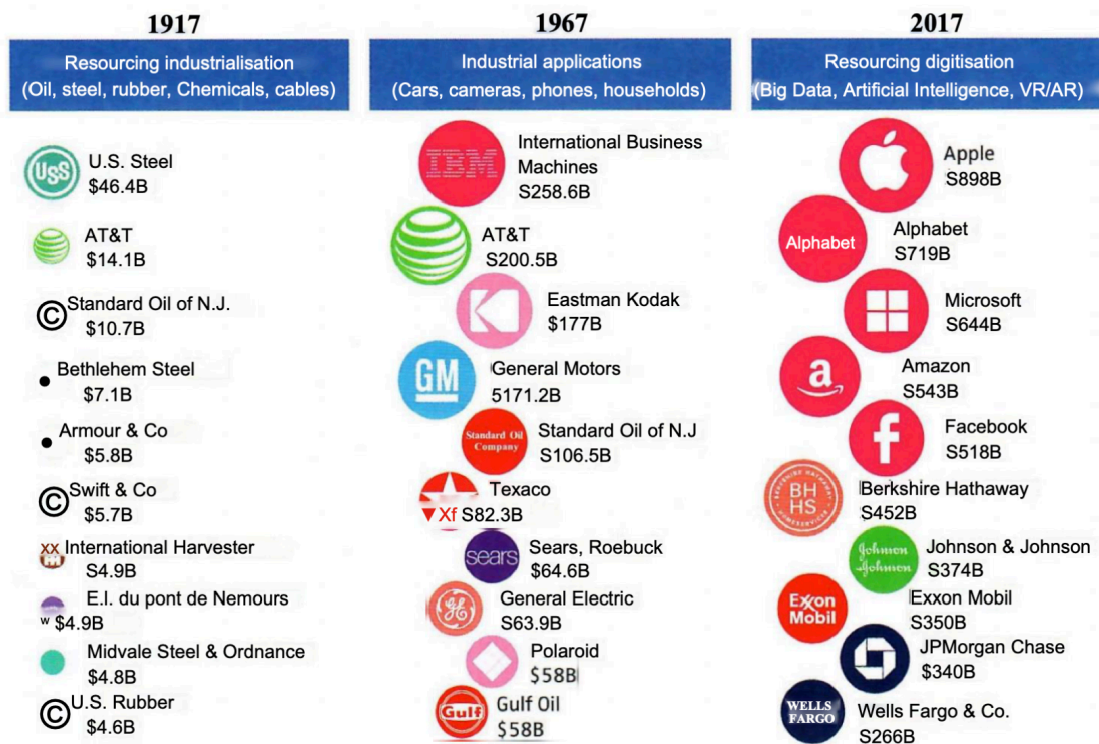
Chapter 4, The Fourth Societal Revolution or 'just' a Fourth Industrial Revolution?, contradicts the statement of the World Economic Forum that digital technologies are just a fourth industrial wave and not a societal revolution. A number of fundamental developments are discussed to substantiate the main assertion in this book that digital technologies are changing society.

The current period of uncertainty and change is addressed in chapter 5, Eight Key Issues for the Societal Revolution. The societal revolution that comes with fundamental change is discussed in relation to eight key issues. The future outcomes on these issues will form the basis of the future society.

Chapter 6, The Elite Reset Society, describes one possible future society. This scenario is based on the extrapolation of current developments regarding the eight issues outlined in chapter 5. In this scenario, society will return to a feudal elite state.

Chapter 7, The Glocal Citizens Society, sketches a more optimistic scenario. The aim of this chapter is to describe an alternative and optimistic future society, one based on societal debates that will mobilise societal groups to develop a better future.

Finally, chapter 8, Invitation to all readers for suggestions, aims to inspire readers to join and build a 'Citizens Society'. Readers can join the venture by visiting the webpage www.society4th.org. The idea behind the webpage is to form a community of citizens who wish to contribute to the creation of a citizens society for the future.



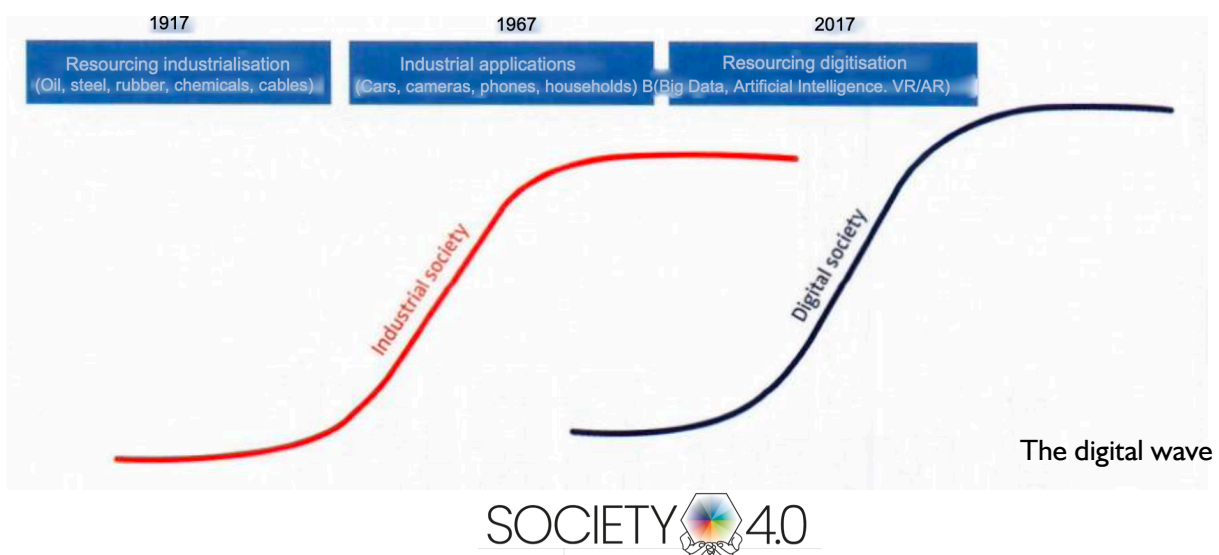
Top 10 US companies in 1917, 1967 en 2017

THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION

Our human society is in transition. We have left the industrial society that has brought democracy, welfare and peace to most citizens over the past seventy-five years behind us. What started as 'just another industry: computing' in the 1970s gradually changed the economy and then our whole society. Over the past few decades, digital companies like Apple, Microsoft, Google, Facebook, Alibaba and Amazon have been growing at an astonishing speed, with Apple becoming the first company to be valued at \$1 trillion in 2018 and \$2 trillion in 2020. Up until the turn of the last century, the top 10 list of largest companies in the United States was dominated by industrial giants such as IBM, General Motors, General Electric and Kodak. In this century they have been swiftly overtaken by digital firms. In 2017, the top 10 was dominated by digital companies and financial institutions, with one pharmaceutical company also on the list (Figure 1.1). These are the companies that will dominate our society in the years ahead. The big question facing us now is: what will our society look like in 2030 and beyond? A second factor that has gradually been changing our society is that large companies have been globalising to become multinationals. The wealth of multinational companies and their shareholders has exploded beyond the wealth of many nations and, consequently, their influence in the global public and political arena has become significant. Many of them use their increasingly powerful position to maximise their (predominantly) financial interests and behave like 'corporate-states': States that do not consist of citizens but of community members. Under the motto 'Our Company First' almost anything is allowed, including tax evasion, censorship, manipulating national politics and influencing non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

These corporate-states align themselves strategically with extremely wealthy private shareholders who act as 'global citizens' with a comparable motto ('My Wallet First') or as 'charities' ('My Values First'). Yet these actors on the global stage - corporate states, NGOs, global citizens and global charities - are not democracies. Nation states and public values are mainly represented by the intergovernmental organisation the United Nations (UN), which currently has 193 member states or act as 'global citizens' with a comparable motto ('My Wallet First') or as 'charities' ('My Values First'). Yet these actors on the global stage - corporate states, NGOs, global citizens and global charities - are not democracies. Nation states and public values are mainly represented by the intergovernmental organisation the United Nations (UN), which currently has 193 member states - almost all of the world's sovereign states and the European Union with its 27 member states (in 2020).

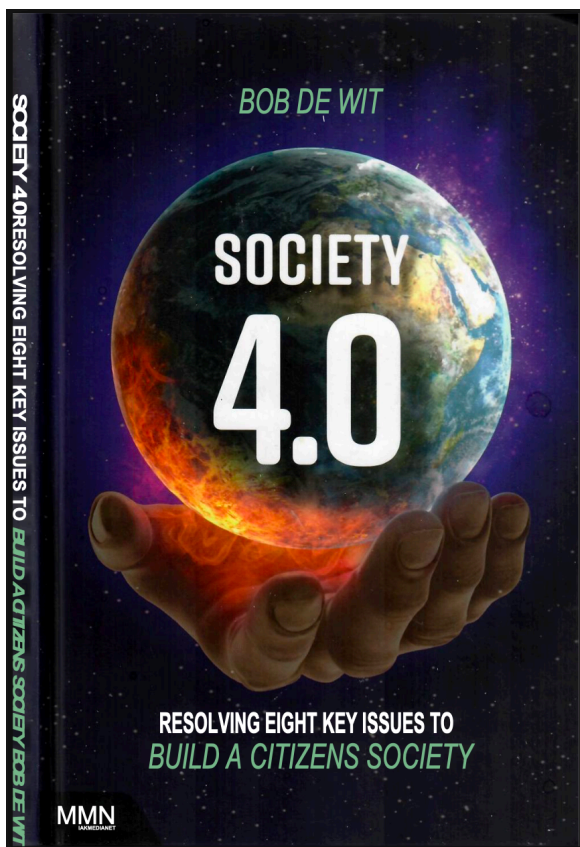
Not only will societies change, but humanity will too. The future development of Homo *Sapiens* is departing from the Darwinian evolutionary path. Some humans believe they can and should assume control over nature. Advances in biotechnology, such as CRISPR-Cas9, are enabling genetic upgrades by cutting and pasting human DNA (Sapiens 2.X), while technologies like Artificial Intelligence may soon be connected with human brains to produce



cyborgs (Sapiens 3.X). Combining Artificial Intelligence with robots may even lead to artificial beings (Sapiens 4.X).

History seems to be repeating itself in the current transition period from an industrial society to the next society. In the past, increased income inequality and economic crises have been fertile ground for social unrest and sometimes even for revolutions, such as the famous 'Storming of the Bastille' in France in July 1789 and two World Wars in the twentieth century. I consider the 'corona crisis' to be the catalyst for a social revolution that will uncover fundamental societal malfunctions.

For references, see www.society4th.org, where you can also order my book "Society 4.0" of more than 100 pages, as well as the Regio Gids in Dutch, where you are guided for the various domains.



SOCIETY 4.0

RESOLVING EIGHT KEY ISSUES TO BUILD A CITIZENS SOCIETY

SOCIETY 4.0: Resolving eight key issues to build a citizens society is meant to provide inspiration for those who wish to build a vital and hopeful future for the next generations. In envisioning a different and better society, Bob de Wit explores the emerging possibilities of new technologies, collects and examines 'weak signals' and evaluates numerous new societal initiatives and future visions.

Bob de Wit aims to inspire readers to join his venture and build a 'Citizens Society'. Bob has opened the webpage www.society4th.org to build a citizens community and create a citizens society for the future.

'This book is a timely warning of the major societal risks posed by technological developments in the long run. Corporate leaders should pay heed to the analyses and observations in this book and take on the responsibility for building a better society.'

Prof. Jan Peter Balkenende
Former Prime Minister of the Netherlands (2002 - 2010); Professor of Governance, Institutions and Internationalization, Erasmus University Rotterdam; External Senior Advisor to EY; chairman of the Dutch Sustainable Growth Coalition

'The world of tomorrow requires us to Took differently' at ourselves today. This book invites you to consider the issues facing us as a society from a new perspective.'

Trudy Huisman
Chairman of the Economic Board Zwolle Region; non-executive board member of several organisations; former Executive Director of Rabobank