



CIONET

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

**WORKPLACE
AND PEOPLE
COLLABORATION IN
THE DIGITAL WORLD**

Marta Cagnola of radio24.it introduces Roger Camrass as a Keynote speaker for CIONET Italia's Community Event on 15th April 2021

Roger Camrass is the Research Director of CIONET International and a visiting professor at the University of Surrey. He is a well-known author, speaker and consultant to Fortune 1000 companies. In the seventies he was a pioneer of today's Internet whilst working as a research fellow at MIT. He has spent his 50-year career helping small and large organisations harness the power of new technologies for competitive advantage. See www.rogercamrass.com

Marta: was covid just an accelerator of a digital future that you already foresaw?

According to Andy Haldane, Chief Economist of the Bank of England, COVID has been the biggest disruptor to work in modern times. Others have described COVID as compressing twenty years of digital development into just twelve months. This has accelerated digital start-ups and digital leaders who are now eclipsing many 'old Economy' companies. The FAANG companies alone are now worth more than the entire European stock markets.

What I have been forecasting since the early nineties is hyper connectivity and hyper personalisation. Both are occurring more rapidly through our sudden dependence on digital channels for all our lifestyle needs such as work, shopping, banking, education and healthcare.

Most of us in Europe and the USA have not ventured out of our homes over the last twelve months. This is having a transformational effect on all aspects of commerce, industry and government.

Marta: Covid has affected every aspect of our working lives, from Workflow to Workplace and Workforce. How did covid affect Workflows?

The universal move to home working and online commerce has transformed the way we communicate amongst ourselves and with our customers. Through the universal adoption of digital channels, it has enabled organisations to collect much more data about their customers and to extend their influence across the entire product or service life cycle.

Where we once sold 'products' within a transactional economy we are now selling solutions to lifestyle needs that extend over many years.

This changes fundamentally the way we organise our processes, especially where the customer is concerned.

Marta: after this period of COVID we face a lot of changes. But the changes are here to stay. Will we return to our offices (Workplace)?

There is a strong human need to meet, especially in activities such as sales, project management and research. This merits physical spaces over remote working. I have often spoken about the three categories of work that take place in an office – heads up (meeting external clients), heads down (emails, reports) and heads together (project and team meetings). Heads down can be undertaken at home. The rest merit physical space.

The latest predictions are that we will need 30% less office space in the future and that employment contracts will include a clause requiring some level of home working.

Marta: how will these offices be arranged in a post COVID world?

The We-Works model looks increasingly attractive with hot desking and flexible assignment of space depending on the nature of the work – heads up or heads together. This leads to the concept of 'soft' buildings that can be reconfigured in near real-time.

More emphasis will need to be placed on social space where people can gather. This is already apparent in many London developments where whole floors are social spaces with pool tables, canteens and lounge style seating.

Further into the future I predict that large office buildings will be converted into combined accommodation, retail and dining spaces, as well as offering shared workspace. The Collective in the UK is pioneering this concept with up to 1,000 people in one unit.

These will become self-contained modern villages that are able to cope with the impact of future pandemics. We can just close the front door and throw away the key!

Marta: such changes affect the Workforce. How will the characteristics and the knowledge of workers change?

The most interesting aspect of the post COVID era is that organisations will be able to source their employees globally. Few of us will expect to live within commuting

distance of our offices.

It will encourage far greater diversity in the workforce as we employ more staff from regions such as Africa and Asia as well as Europe and the Americas.

There will be many more virtual companies. Hopin is just two years old and now employs 500 staff. Its 28-year-old CEO lives in London, but his staff is distributed across 23 countries.

Robotics will change the type of jobs humans undertake by removing repetitive work and focusing on value adding tasks. This will require greater digital literacy amongst the workforce.

Marta: 2046 should have been a turning point. do you think that after this acceleration things will change before 2046?

2046 has been heralded as the point of singularity when computer intelligence across the globe is predicted to exceed all human intelligence.

This is based on projections relating to the increasing power of computers and all other intelligent devices that will be incorporated into our homes, offices, cars, cities

There will be technical constraints that might block any acceleration here such as just how fast quantum computing can enter the mainstream. However, this date is fast approaching and will impact everything we know about life on Earth.

In his seminal book, Homo Deus, Professor Yuval Harari predicts that just as we farm livestock to feed ourselves today, computers will farm human beings for our data beyond 2046.

Marta: what can keep us relating to the world as we knew it pre-COVID? do we have to "keep the dinosaur alive"?

We are amid a major transition from the old industrial economy to the new digital economy worldwide. We all talk about 'digital transformation' but most of our largest organisations will only ever become partly digital.

We are seeing the digital giants and start-ups dominate our equity markets. They represent 25% of S&P 500 today. By 2030 they could well exceed 50% of its value. The biggest challenge for many of us will be to help 'old Economy' businesses and institutions re-invent themselves by building new digital models that can replace the existing ones.

What we are seeing today is Darwin's laws of evolution applying to our dated industrial structures. The natural path will be for most of our large corporations to gradually disappear.

The challenge is how we can replace them in Europe rather than submit to the growing dominance of US and Chinese players. EU regulators may be able to hold back the tide for a while, but this will be merely a temporary reprieve.

As IT professionals we have a central role to play in this evolutionary game. Most of our CIONET community is employed within medium to large 'heritage' organisations. We will need to convince our peers that radical approaches are needed now to fend off the digital giants.

In such a period of dynamic change, doing nothing is no longer an option.



About CIONET

CIONET is the leading community of more than 10,000 digital leaders in 20+ countries across Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Through this global presence CIONET orchestrates peer-to-peer interactions focused on the most important business and technology issues of the day. CIONET members join over a thousand international and regional live and virtual events annually, ranging from roundtables, programs for peer-to-peer exchange of expertise, community networking events, to large international gatherings. Its members testify that CIONET is an impartial and value adding platform that helps them use the wisdom of the (IT) crowd, to acquire expertise, advance their professional development, analyse and solve IT issues, and accelerate beneficial outcomes within their organisation.

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