

Why We Need Government to Evolve as Fast as Technology

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From deep learning to gene editing, the world of technology is moving fast. But at Singularity University, we believe amazing tech is only half the equation. Equally important is how we use technology. The most pressing question: How can technology address and perhaps solve the biggest challenges facing humanity?

We call these the Global Grand Challenges, and they include energy, environment, food, water, disaster resilience, space, security, health, learning, and prosperity.

And we recently launched a new Global Grand Challenge: governance.

We believe it's not only possible to solve governance, but that doing so is essential to solving all other GGCs. Like other Grand Challenges, with the right social and political will we could already solve for governance with existing tools and capacities—even if technology stood still. However, in a world of exponentially changing technology, we are presented with both new opportunities to overcome human limitations and entirely new and unpredictable challenges.

But first, what does the end-state objective for governance look like to us?

To create a world with equitable participation of all people in formal and societal governance in accordance with principles of justice and individual rights; free from discrimination and identity-based prejudices; and able to meet the needs of an exponentially changing world.

Whether it's lack of trust, corruption, or not being fit for purpose, evidence of poor governance can be found around the world. A recent Pew survey shows that only 19 percent of Americans say they can trust government “always” or “most of the time”—which is close to the lowest level in the past 60 years.

The World Economic Forum estimates the cost of corruption is \$2.6 trillion—more than 5 percent of global GDP—with over \$1 trillion paid in bribes each year.

Beyond the numbers, the real “face” of corruption is the girl who is denied schooling because funds for building schools, paying teachers, and other needs are diverted elsewhere. Or the mother who cannot access basic health care for her children because governmental funds are diverted.

An illustrative example of the challenge to being fit-for-purpose is the United Nations Climate Change Conference 2015 currently underway in Paris.

The stakes are high—as Newsweek magazine put it, “leaders and high-level officials from 196 parties have 12 days to reach an accord that could save the planet.” And yet, although 97 percent of climate scientists insist climate change is real and caused by human actions, significant

percentages of people around the world are still in denial, with government policies not reflecting the severity and magnitude of the global consequences.

As we increasingly shift into a globally connected world—environmentally, economically, socially, technologically—legacy governance structures based on nation states may no longer be able to meet emerging challenges. Both formal and nonformal governance structures will struggle to keep up with the exponential and accelerating pace of change.

Examples abound of new technologies that are already straining governance structures: drones for civilian use, self-driving cars, genetic engineering, crowdfunding, artificial intelligence, cybercrime, and others.

We don't need policies that lag behind but policies that rapidly adapt and enable innovation, equity, and safe regulation. This applies equally to all organizational governance structures—from large corporations to small startups.

While technology is posing new challenges to governance, it is also rapidly evolving new approaches to governance.

Blockchain (the technology underpinning digital currencies such as Bitcoin) can be applied to most any contract, increasing transparency, accountability, and efficiency. Virtual reality can be used to increase empathy and “feel the future” that is likely to result from policy options. New forms of direct democracy and consensus decision-making are emerging such as liquid democracy, adhocracy, Loomio, and holacracy.

Current governance structures were developed over thousands of years, and while they may have been suitable for a slow-changing and parochial world, they are ripe for disruption. While technology changes at exponential rates, governance tends to change at linear rates. This discrepancy must be rectified to ensure that humanity not only avoids a range of catastrophic consequences, but also enables innovation and creates an equitable world where all Global Grand Challenges are solved.