Across Fjord Trends 2020, the over-arching theme is a major realignment of the fundamentals. We know more and care more about our world and our impact upon it, and our changing priorities are filtering through to all areas of business and design.

In 2019, questions about capitalism’s trajectory of endless growth with profit as the sole measurable moved from shouting on the streets to conversations in boardroom. Businesses are under pressure to reassess their goals, while a growing number of people embrace conscious consumption.

Concerns about plastic expanded into a major climate-crisis movement, which is now voters’ top priority in many countries. Meanwhile, the clash between the technology industry, governments and their citizens is causing widely felt tremors in society.

In Fjord Trends 2020, we explore seven trends that have emerged as a result—trends that we believe will be most important for organizations, employees, customers and stakeholders over the next 12 months and beyond.
People are putting organizations under pressure to define their success in more ways than the long-established standard: financial growth. It’s time to define and pursue a wider set of business objectives, while balancing them with the fact that profit is ultimately essential for longevity. If we can resolve the tension, the redefinition of growth offers an epoch-changing opportunity to imagine new ways to create and celebrate value.

This trend is about re-examining long-held beliefs. Organizations are under pressure from investors, customers and employers, and must respond to changing societal values, concerns about climate change and finite natural resources, and economic and political instability.

New definitions of growth will lead naturally to new thinking in meaning and metrics. Economic models will evolve. Shareholders will increasingly demand environmental, social and corporate governance, and organizations will need to upskill staff at all levels. This is a positive call to redefine growth in new ways that enhance our lives.
Our experience of money is changing—what it is and what it can do. The very notion and shape of money is morphing, along with our perception of it, relationship with it, and thus how we think about paying for things. These shifts will enable us to do more than just buy things, and create opportunities for a new stream of product and services.

This trend is about how our relationship with money is developing, the evolution of new ecosystems pioneered by non-traditional financial companies, and how our seamless—or almost invisible—payment systems are making our relationship with money more ambiguous. As these changes gather pace in the coming months and years, they will have knock-on effects for every organization or individual in any financial transaction. The door will be open for new payment products and services that augment the capabilities of payment systems. Those that thrive will meet customers’ particular needs and offer great experiences, while robustly addressing concerns about privacy, transparency and integrity.
Facial and body recognition now make us as trackable in the real world as we’ve been for years online. 5G will create opportunities for new products and services—but we must all learn lessons from digital world mistakes and prioritize privacy and security above all else.

This trend is about how, as machines get better at reading our physical features, our bodies are becoming our signature, effectively merging our digital and physical selves. It’s also about how living services—sophisticated, contextually-aware, digital services—will move from the digital world into the real world. As they do so, targeted advertising and experiences will become the norm in physical environments.

Organizations will need to design for dissolving interfaces. Designers will need to redirect their energy toward facilitating meaningful human interactions instead of transactional stopgaps, and ensuring that the invisible data-transaction is an exchange that offers people tangible value.
People still want to buy and work, but they no longer want to define themselves by their possessions or their jobs. Organizations must support consumers’ and employees’ increasingly changeable desires and their pursuit of greater meaning in their lives.

This trend is the human side of Many faces of growth. In short, consumption is changing.

Driven by a range of factors including growing understanding of mental health and wellbeing, and climate change and sustainability, people’s priorities are becoming more fluid.

Organizations can cater for people’s thirst for conscious consumption by providing guilt-free experiences, and by creating new ways to help people feel good about being who they are.
Artificial Intelligence (AI) is moving on. While, at first, it was largely used to improve efficiency through smart automation, its next iteration will be more about adding new value and supporting human ingenuity. If we can design systems that effectively blend people’s skills with AI, we’ll be able to devise disruptive business strategies, empower people to cope with increasing complexity in the workplace and enhance the human experience.

This trend is about how AI is maturing as a technology and how, as organizations start to look to it for more than automation, they’ll need better tools and more careful consideration of its economic and social effects. Key to success is a commitment to designing for human intelligence and optimizing the relationship between people and machines.

Through our work with The Dock, (Accenture’s flagship R&D and global innovation center in Dublin, Ireland), where an evolved approach to AI will have dramatic impact in the next few years, we’ve identified three key areas: enhancing the human experience, empowering people in complex systems, and envisioning new products and services.
Digital twins like 3D and data models are established tools in manufacturing and industry. Now, they’re getting personal—the race is on to create virtual manifestations of ourselves.

This trend is about the evolution of our digital doubles. At first, they’ll offer personalized entertainment opportunities—soon after, they’ll combine with other agentive services. Eventually, they’ll become a virtual home for all our data, over which we’ll have control (at least in theory).

Brands and public services must at least learn how to design for our new digital doubles and, for a few winners, how to create them. People will soon use digital doubles to control their own personal data in a way that looks after their own interests rather than those of any third-party that gathers and uses it. At this point, a digital double will become the gatekeeper to someone’s personal life, and organizations will need to respond appropriately. We’ll see this in financial services, healthcare and the workplace.
The focus of design is moving from “me” toward “we”. We’re starting to question the self-centered nature of a user focus above any other value, prompting a need for design to switch from user-centered design to design for all life.

This trend is about how the values in the traditional Venn diagram of desirability, feasibility and viability are fundamentally changing, along with organizations’ design responses to them. The logical solution is a shift to life-centered design.

For years, user-centered and human-centered design has often separated people from ecosystems. Now, designers must consider people as nodes in an ecosystem rather than the center of everything. To do this, they’ll need a systems mindset and to design for two sets of values: personal and collective.
Economics and politics, capitalism and resources, technology and society have long been entwined, but recently the consequences of that entanglement have burst into public consciousness – ironically, driven by the very technologies that made such interconnectivity possible.

The omnipresence of digital and the internet have been big (possibly decisive) factors in the prominence of President Trump and Greta Thunberg, of Amazon.com and the gig economy, smartphones and techlash and, indeed, the re-evaluation of Silicon Valley start-ups triggered by the failure of WeWork’s IPO.

This realignment also potentially leads to iconic innovation moving beyond start-ups in favor of more traditional businesses who will need to work together to make change happen at an industry-wide level.

We might also see a two-speed model emerging as the shift takes place at different paces in different markets. Emerging markets might just leap-frog western attitudes toward endless consumption and go straight for a more balanced view. Meanwhile, people continue to be ever more fluid in their behaviors, constantly shifting between traditional demographic segments in often contradictory ways.

However it plays out from here, one thing is likely: Fjord Trends 2020 reveal that tomorrow’s winners will be those organizations willing and able to embrace the long-term view – starting with their impact on the planet and society, and embracing the complexity of the real world.

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