



The Competitive Edge: Spot Trends and Thrive in the Future of Work

Navigating AI, Talent, and Independence in an Era of Rapid Change



@criswashington



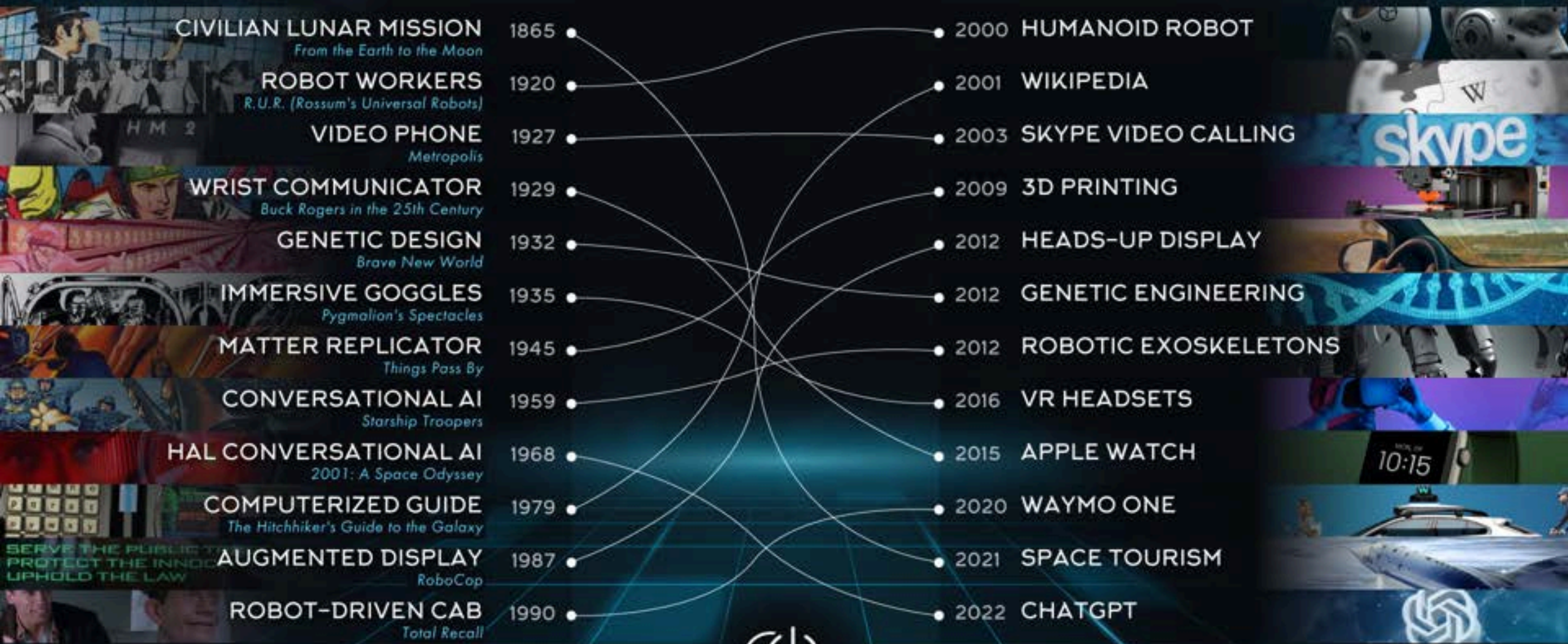
CRYSTAL WASHINGTON

Most of the technology we enjoy today was not created at a private sector startup or in a lab but in the minds of artists decades ago.



@cryswashington

FROM SCI-FI TO REALITY





A futurist analyzes trends, data, and emerging technologies to help organizations anticipate change and strategically prepare for the future.

Our Journey Today



Humans



Trends



Future Firm
Opportunities



Humans



**The rate of
change is
increasing...
but not as fast
as we think.**

Western Electric is crossing a telephone with a TV set.



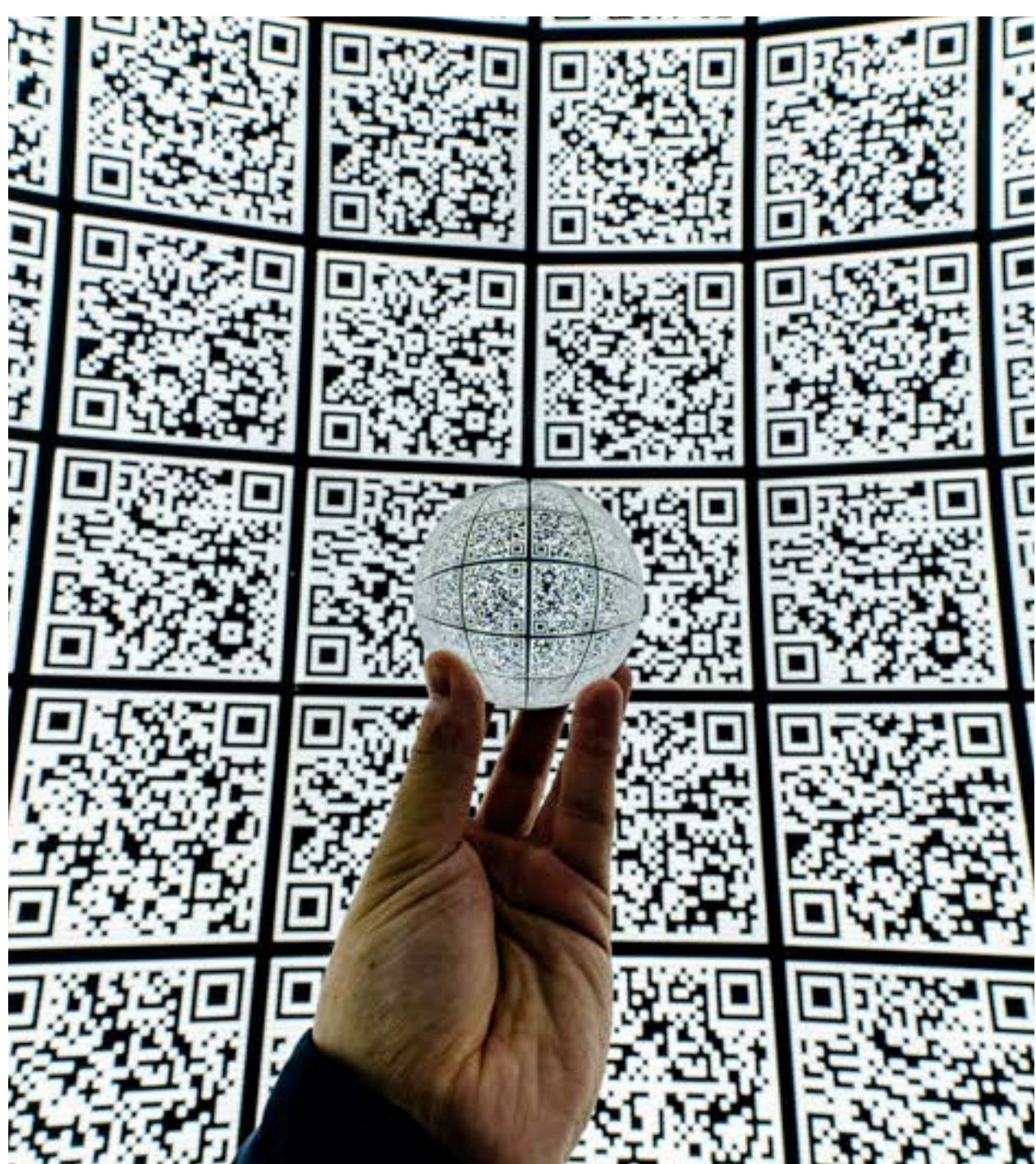
Someday you'll be
a star!

What you'll use is called, simply enough, a Picturephone® set. Someday it will let you see who you are talking to, and let them see you.

The Picturephone set is just one of the communications of the future Western Electric is working on with Bell Telephone Laboratories.

Western Electric builds regular phones and equipment for your Bell telephone company. But we also build for the future.

 **Western Electric**
MANUFACTURING DIVISION OF THE BELL SYSTEM



ARE YOU READY?

Let's play a
little game.



You're hungry. Which do you eat?



A



B

A



B



You're hungry. Which do you eat?



A

grapes



B

moonseed

You want a pet. Which one is Fluffy?



A



B

A



B



You want a pet. Which one is Fluffy?



A

scarlet kingsnake



B

coral snake

Which one are you bringing home?



A



B

A



B



Which one are you bringing home?



A

baby



B

axlotl

RESULTS:

How did you do?

Not great.



Let's be like Abe!



When information becomes abundant, trusted advisors become indispensable.



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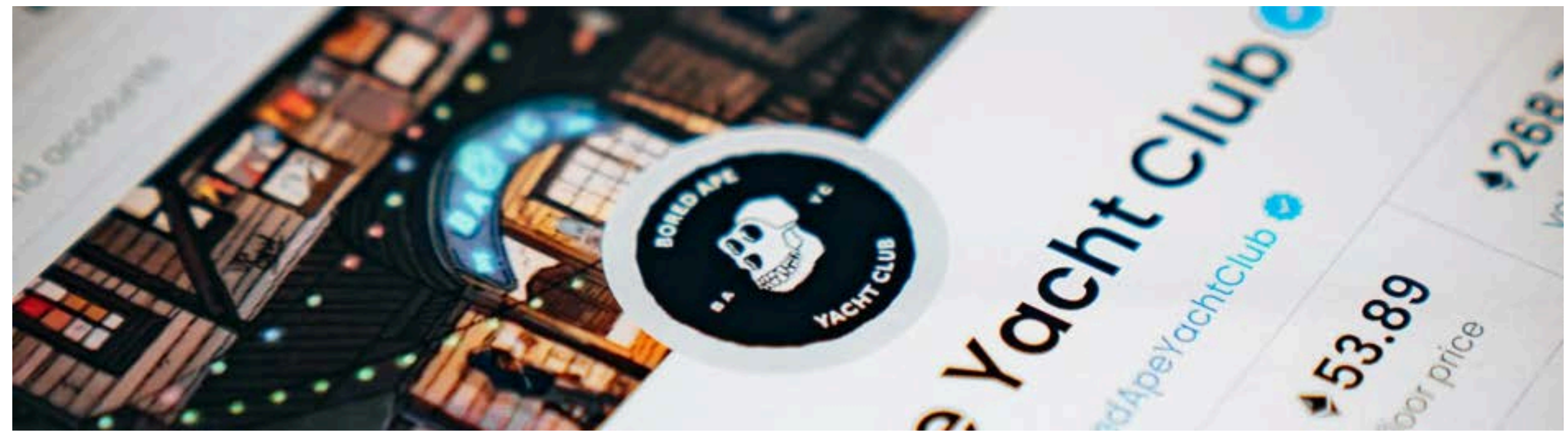
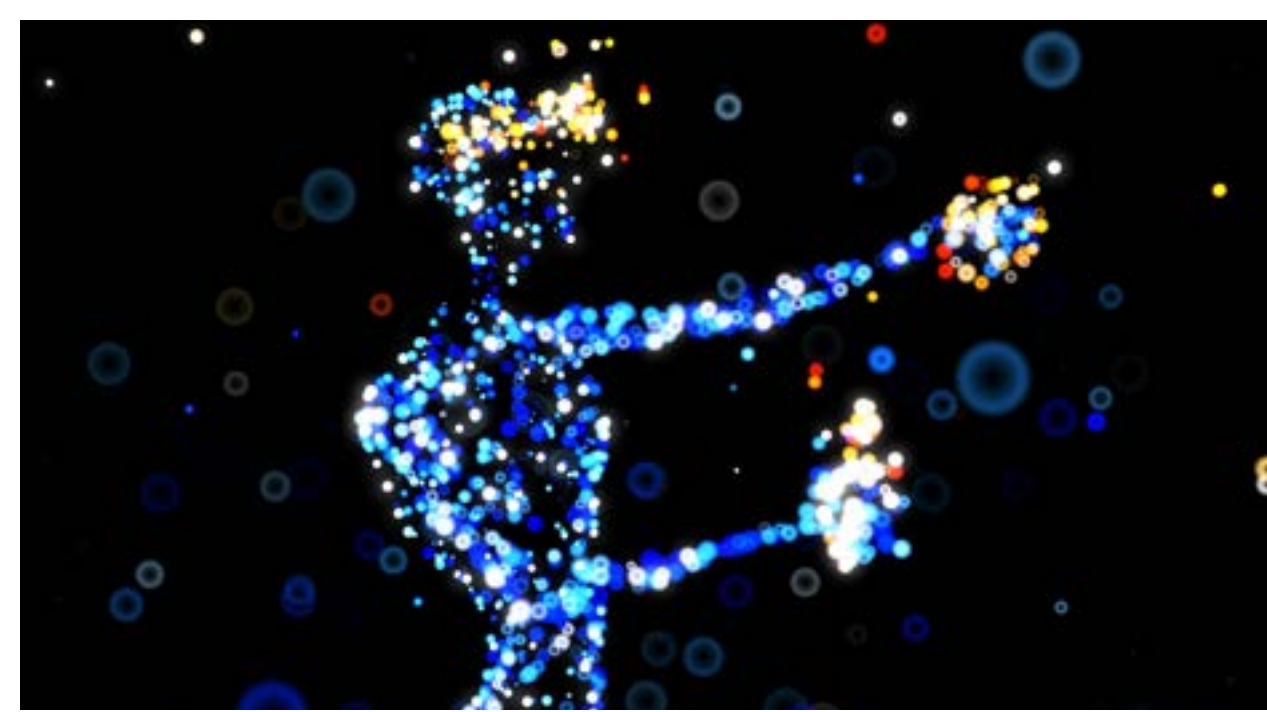
**Independent accounting firms quietly power
thousands of business decisions every
day.**



@cryswashington



Trends



“

**"In 2036, my
organization will..."**

The firms that thrive over the next decade won't necessarily be the biggest.
They'll be the ones that spot and act on signals earliest.



The End of the Apprenticeship Model



AI is increasingly performing the routine work that historically transformed junior staff into future managers and partners.

Concrete drivers:

- Agentic AI
- Knowledge automation

Early warning signals:

- AI-assisted tax and audit work
- Reduced entry-level tasks

Actions:

- Redesign professional development with client simulations
- Create new pathways that center on cross training (tax, audit, advisory, business development)

Ownership Decoupling From Leadership



Future leaders may increasingly seek influence and wealth creation without traditional partnership structures.

Concrete drivers:

- Workforce value shifts
- Flexible career models

Early warning signals:

- Delayed partnership interest
- New profit-sharing structures

Actions:

- Modernize leadership pathways
- Explore alternative ownership models

Digital Labor Reshapes Professional Services



Organizations will increasingly deploy AI agents alongside human professionals to deliver client work.

Concrete drivers:

- Autonomous AI agents
- Workflow automation

Early warning signals:

- AI handling multi-step workflows
- AI-powered client interactions

Actions:

- Redesign service delivery (focus on outcomes vs. hours)
- Focus humans on judgment and relationships



Trust Becomes Scarcer Than Expertise

As expertise becomes more accessible, trust becomes more valuable.

Concrete drivers:

- Information abundance
- Synthetic media

Early warning signals:

- Clients arrive with AI-generated answers

Actions:

- Position trust as a differentiator

Locate Easter Eggs of the Future





Collect trends and signals through feedback.

Your clients and team members have strategic insights that you may not have considered. Ask open-ended questions and ask as many people as you can! Create a path for front-line team members to submit observations and ideas.

One tool is [Raindrop.io](https://raindrop.io).

The BIFMA Article / IMCOB Email for November 17

File: BIFMA Article / IMCOB Email for November 17

Created: 11/17/2023 11:31 AM

Size: 1.0 MB

Location: /BIFMA/Articles/IMCOB Email for November 17

Tags: #BIFMA #IMCOB #Email #November 17



Americans are changing where they're moving. Here's how that could affect commercial real estate

#H1 #Social #demographics #migration #housing #policy #economics #urbanization #realestate #forecasts #future #insights #predictions #trends #outlook

cnbc.com · Jan 7

Bleisure 3.0: The Future of Conference Centers

Conference centers are installing On-Demand Office Pods for business travelers. This creates a massive market for BIFMA-rated acoustic privacy booths. Members should focus on modularity and sound—

#H2: Hospitality; Economic; Technological # Innovation #Trends #architecture # design #sustainability #future #strategy #outlook #value #travel #meeting # networking #amenities #wellness # retreat #multifunctional #mobility

meetings-conventions.com · Jan 4

Campus 2026: The Rise of the Phygital Learning Space

Universities are creating Fluid Classrooms where the distinction between lecture hall and office disappears. BIFMA members should develop omni-directional seating and mobile whiteboards that allow students an...

#H3: Higher Education; Technological; Social #Innovation #campus #trends # Hybridlearning #architecture #design # learningenvironment #networkingspace # mobility #analytics #accessibility #digital

highereddivs.com · Jan 4

Civic Spaces and the New Social Contract

Local government offices are becoming Community Front Porches, blending public service desks with open gathering spaces. This shift requires hardened but welcoming furniture. BIFMA members should focus on...

#H1: Government; Social; Political # community #design # environmentalimpact #resilience #retrofit #reuse #trends #networkingspace # multifunctional #retrofitting

icma.org · Jan 4

After Tariffs, Turmoil, and Hybrid Chaos, the Contract Furnishings Industry Finally Sees a Clear Runway into 2026

This article signals a mood shift in the contract furnishings and workplace ecosystem heading into 2026—from survival to cautious optimism. After years of disruption driven by tariffs, hybrid work, an...

#H1 #Economic #Technological #trends #future #forecast #prediction #tariffs # trade #industry #furnishings #resilience #sustainability #cybersecurity #global # manufacturing #supply #logistics # export #import #market

File · 11:31 AM

Educational Leadership 2040

Predicts a shift to adaptive leadership where school administration is community-led. BIFMA members must provide hybrid

Demographic Dividend and Education 2030-2045

Developing nations will peak in working-age population by 2045. BIFMA members should care because there is a window for leapfrog furniture solutions for billions of students.

#H3: Higher Education; Social; Economic

digitallibrary.unl.org · Jan 4, 2025

Colleges Close as Falling Us Birth Rate Pushes Them Off Enrollment Cliff

The U.S. is entering a sustained college enrollment decline as birth rates that dipped after the 2007-08 recession reduce the pool of 18-22-year-olds beginning in 2026. Fewer high school graduates means smaller...

#H2 #Social #Economic #demographics #economics #outlook #predictions # forecast #retention #accreditation # financialaid #admissions #diversity # forecasts

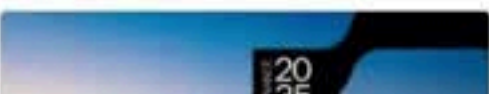
bloomberg.com · Jan 19

Deliberate Innovation: Lifetime Education 2040

Universities will transition to a lifetime platform model serving learners from age 5 to 95. BIFMA members should care because learning spaces must be intergenerational.

#H3: Higher Education; Social; Economic

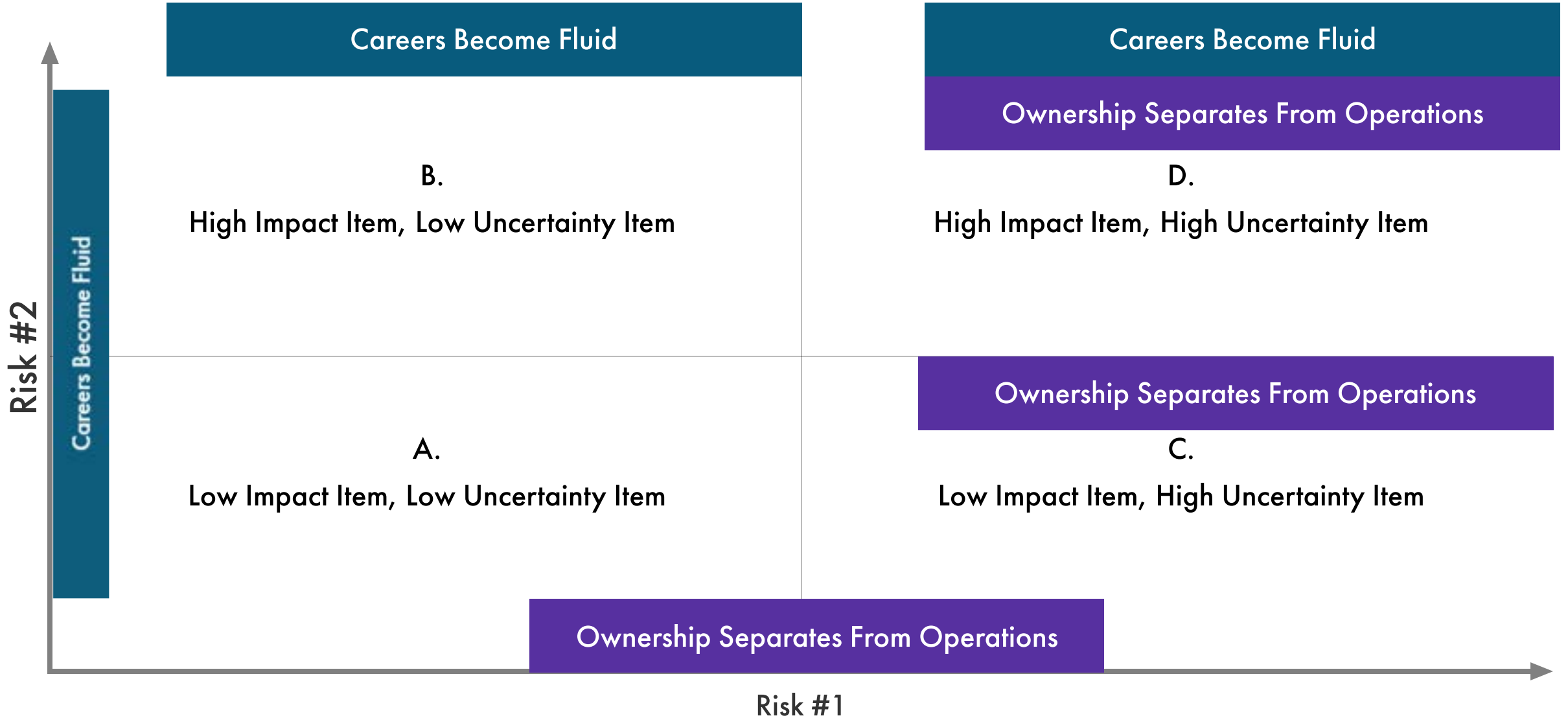
researchgate.net · Jan 4, 2025



STEEP Drivers

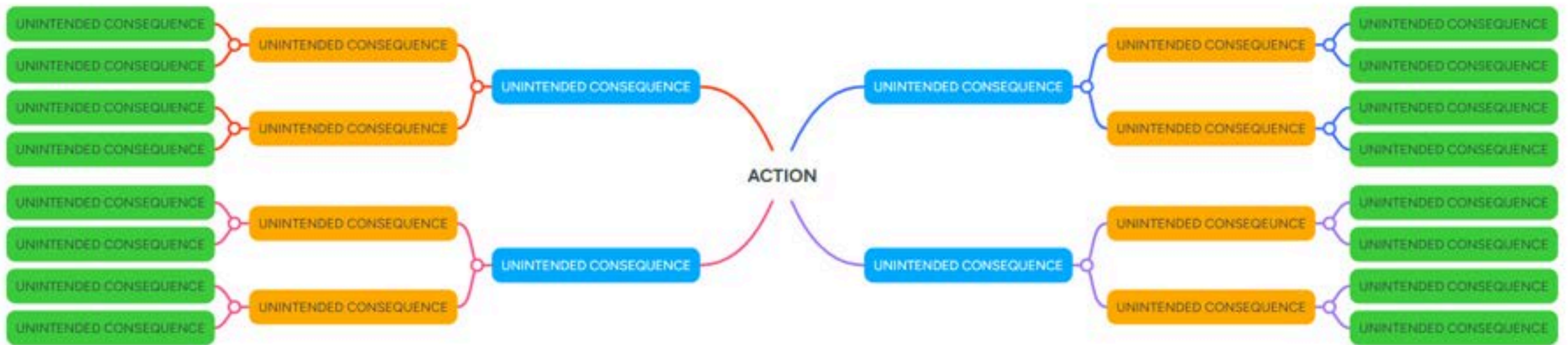
- 1 Careers Become Fluid, Not Linear
- 2 Expertise Becomes Embedded
- 3 Ownership Separates From Operations
- 4 Geography Loses Relevance
- 5 Human Oversight Becomes Regulated

Risk Matrix



Georgetown,
Kentucky per
ChatGPT





What happens when AI becomes the first referral source for professional services?

Get PDF Notes & Actionable Takeaways

If you run into any challenges, email manager@crystalwashington.com and put LEA Notes in the subject line.

Scan this QR code



Or go to

<https://talk.ac/crystalwashington>

and enter this code when prompted

LEA



Opportunities



Create a **culture of curiosity**
and collaboration.



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Last Trend...
Choose joy.



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Crystal Washington, CSP, CPAE
Forbes 50 Leading Female Futurist
| Keynote Speaker | Author | Founder, ...

