The megatrendsetters

Who are the thought leaders shaping current discourse on the future of business and society? Which thinkers are we guided by? What are the new global perspectives and theories helping to drive social change and innovation? The new "Thought Leader Map" recently created by GDI with the help of Peter Gloor shows the people with real influence, who are setting the trends in the market of ideas.

A LACK OF LISTS Every year, numerous lists are published about the world's largest companies, the most promising start-ups, the strongest consumer brands, the richest individuals, the most successful sports stars, the top chefs and the most important trends in technology. Unlike these lists of business or technology leaders and trends, the most important thought leaders and trends in (social) science have not so far been subjected to any truly systematic analysis and regular publication – nothing remotely comparable to the analysis behind Gartner's technology trends, for example.

And yet the market of ideas also yields both innovators and trends, which guide the decisions made within politics and business, which influence public opinion and which inspire further research or attract investors – and which are therefore well worth monitoring.

As a rule, the importance of individual thinkers is measured on the basis of frequency of citation (citation index), sales figures from non-fiction and reference works, and academic accolades

(e. g. the Nobel Prize). Magazines such as Foreign Policy and Time publish annual lists of leading personalities from business, politics, research, art and culture, based on the results of polling experts for their opinions. And the

TED.com website beautifully showcases the people currently in vogue in the market of ideas, showing which talks with ideas for the future have had the most views and recommendations.

While such rankings can give a rough idea of the popularity of individual thought leaders, they say little about the size of their actual influence, nor about the trendsetters in the market of ideas and how these ideas propagate. Nor do they show how the various thinkers and doctrines are interconnected – and who is being influenced by whom. New ideas are not created in a vacuum but in the act of engagement with a range of separate doctrines: accordingly, one must also consider these ideas in their juxtaposition to views held by other academics and researchers.

A thinker gains influence only if his or her ideas attract attention, are taken on board by others and are then discussed in depth. This not only means

discussions held within an inner circle or research group but also the wider, subsequent debate with a broader public, which also includes laypeople. Today, the most important marketplace for new ideas is the internet, where they

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are first presented, disseminated and most vigorously debated. If we want to gauge the actual influence thinkers possess, we therefore need to assess their status on the net and the intensity of debate in the virtual infosphere about these people and their ideas.

NETWORK ANALYSIS To analyse the status and the popularity of selected thought leaders in the infosphere/blogosphere, we have been working with network analysis software supplied by Galaxyadvisor (you can read more about our methodology and the mapping in the interview with Galaxyadvisor CEO Peter Gloor on p. 108).

Before we can assess which thought leaders have the greatest influence in the network, we must first establish who they are. To this end, we have selected around seventy thinkers by querying current "best-of" lists, Amazon bestseller lists and expert opinion. Our criteria

were as follows: individuals must be still alive and their research must take a broader view, tackling future developments in business and society; their approach must be multidisciplinary; they must be well-known and write in (or be translated into) English; they

longer focused on the next big idea or the next Einstein, but is now increasingly divided up among many small-scale ideas – the "long tail of ideas", if you will.

This picture – namely the absence of authoritative thinkers and key concepts

The era of the great authorities seems to be over. Major thought leaders are rare – the picture is composed of many specialists.
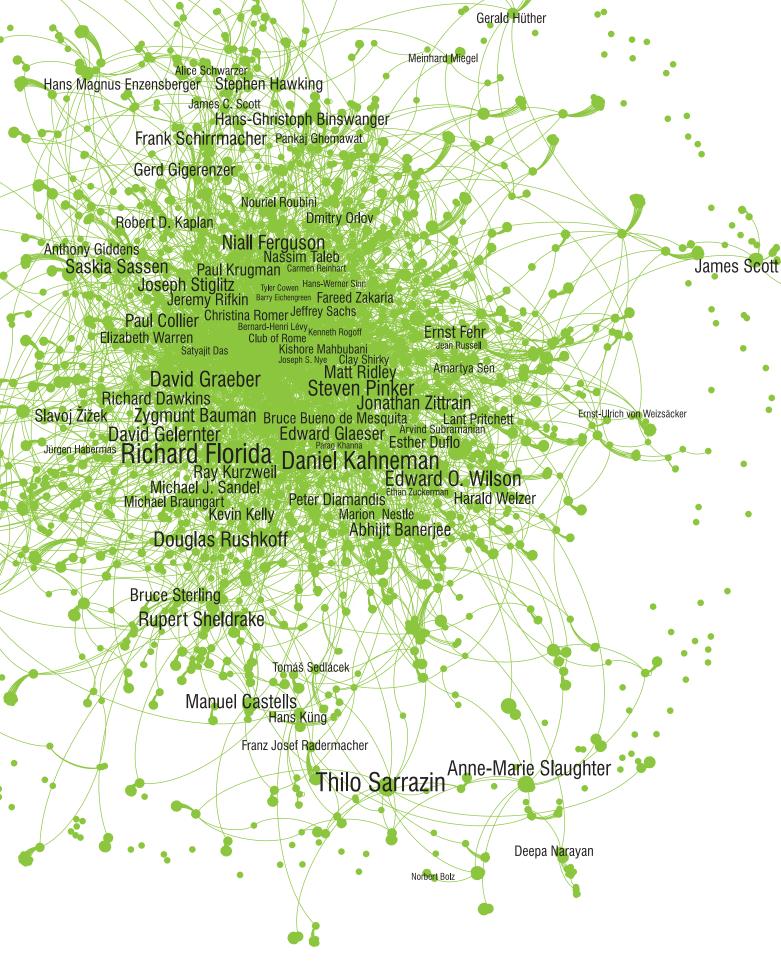
must conduct their own research and publish in academic journals.

IDEA FRAGMENTATION The results of this network analysis (see graphic to the right and table on p. 110) present a highly fragmented picture. There are no thinkers who really dominate the landscape: the distance between the «stars» and the less significant/well-known researchers is relatively small and presumably only temporary. Other analyses will reveal the degree to which the relative social network positions change over time.

The era of the great authorities seems to be over. Instead of a handful of key thinkers, we see a broad spectrum of specialists, who focus on niche topics, who remain generally unknown outside their specialist field and whose work is not discussed. As with the market for books and films, the market for ideas also seems increasingly a niche market, where major ideas and their creators are now losing ground to minor ideas and unknown researchers. Attention is no

that influence whole generations of intellectuals – seemed so extraordinary that we tested it by means of a different assessment technique: we surveyed contributory authors to this journal. We asked former authors for GDI Impuls (experts from both research and practice) to name the thinkers who have most strongly influenced their own work and also the persons who will be the thought leaders of the 21st century. Receiving no prior briefing, fifty experts from home and abroad (including such luminaries as were already ranked in our Thought Leader list) generated a list of around 300 different names. On this long list of the major thinkers of yesterday and tomorrow, multiple mentions are rare. Karl Marx (5), Niklas Luhmann (4) and Michel Foucault (3) are the most-cited thinkers from the past, whose ideas have most strongly influenced the work of our experts. Daniel Kahneman (5), Anthony Giddens (3), Malcolm Gladwell (3) and Paul Krugman (3) top the list of the most important thinkers for the 21st

Dirk Baecker

Gottfried Schatz

Ernst Pöppel

Bruno Latour

Ulrich Beck

Interview with Peter Gloor

Towards a global key thinker report

Richard Florida ruling the centre, Stephen Hawking out on the edge? How have you decided which thinkers are placed where in the Thought Leader map? And the size at which they are shown?

To simplify things a little: the more often two thinkers are named together in the infosphere, the closer together they are shown here in the graphic. The size itself is determined by the citation frequency and by the relevance of the pages on which they are featured. Our Coolhunting software then generates this image by aggregating the links between the individuals analysed.

And yet this is the first Thought Leader map your application has created?

Yes, that›s true – but the task itself is no different to that of analysing product brands, for example. We've been working with this system since 2005 to compare the positioning of brands, companies, concepts or individuals in the infosphere and to produce graphics of this kind. The software itself doesn't care whether the subject is Pepsi vs. Coke, Obama vs. Romney or Krugman vs. Kahneman.

The choice of websites or blogs that you investigate surely makes a difference, however? Coca-Cola isn't necessarily discussed on the same websites as economic theories, for example.

Peter Gloor, MIT
Chief Creative Officer Galaxyadvisors

Actually, even here we don't simply select the corresponding pages ourselves – we use a computerised methodology, involving the application of a subject-driven page rank system.

Like Google does?

Almost. Google's page rank is fixed: each website has a predetermined value. Our page rank is topic-based, however: for debates about ideas, the "Huffington Post" has very high relevance, for example – but very low relevance for conversations about dog food.

What importance is attached to the time window for your results? When this analysis was carried out, for example, Thilo Sarrazin had just published his most recent book – and this might have had a positive effect on his ranking.

Absolutely. If we take another look at the data in six months then his position will certainly be quite different – and thinkers who are then being hotly debated will have a higher relevance. Comparisons over longer periods of time should then let us distinguish between "one-hit thinkers" and long-term thought leaders.

What about geographical comparisons? Our thinker short-list seems to favour the West, doesn't it? Viewed from India, the Middle East or China, the Thought Leader map would look quite different.

If we're talking about the most influential thinkers in China, then, yes, absolutely. For this, we'd need to use a completely different set of sources. This would be an interesting step along the path to a global key thinker report. Which is what we're aiming for.

century. All in all, then, this survey gives us the same picture as that from the network analysis: it's not about altitude, but latitude.

ECONOMISTS RULE A thought leader's importance depends on the one hand on whom you ask and on the other, on how one measures. If we take the citation frequency in academic journals as our benchmark, we find the behavioural economist and Nobel Prize winner Daniel Kahneman also among the leaders, but the remaining positions in the Thought Leader map now look very different: Thilo Sarrazin, author and former Berlin Finance Senator, would no longer be ranked first, for example, but would be bringing up the rear. This seems to indicate that individuals who carry little weight in research circles may be ideas market trendsetters, however, and can – for a certain period of time – set the agenda of public debate.

If we take Google search hits as our benchmark then our rankings once again change completely. Of the thinkers we consider, the physicist Stephan Hawking now has the most Google hits – although he is a mid-fielder in terms of network status. Only Daniel Kahneman achieves consistently high rankings. It appears, therefore, that a strong online presence does not automatically lead to the actual discussion of an idea – and thus to a greater influence on the zeitgeist – than ideas whose creators have fewer Google hits.

The field of influential thinkers is broad and too large to present in its entirety on the Thought Leader map. If we consider our thought leaders' disciplines, however, and the universities at which they work, then the field contracts once

again. Discussions about the future are clearly dominated by economists (24), followed by political theorists (8), social theorists (7) and philosophers (5). Scientists, in contrast, are less represented in discussions about the future in purely quantitative terms. Yet these few individuals – biologists (5), computer scientists (4), physicists (3) and chemists (2) – are nonetheless all ranked in the upper half of the thought leader list, i.e. they enjoy above-average popularity in the blogosphere.

Individual thinkers are not the only constituent parts of the network. Their environment – friends, research partners, students, sponsors and institutions where they work – also plays a part. Here, we note that the traditional elite universities continue to exert a powerful influence: Harvard (12) leads New York (6), Princeton, London (4 each), Yale and Columbia (3 each). While knowledge creation continues to become more and more open, and operate much like a bazaar – where many thinkers develop and exchange a wide variety of new ideas – the universities, as "cathedrals of learning", have clearly not lost their central importance (cf. Eric S. Raymond, "The Cathedral and the Bazaar", 1996).

THE BOOK IS STILL A MUST Thinkers who generate a strong response from the

blogosphere and occupy a central position in the thought leader network are also successful authors in their own right and have produced one or more bestsellers in recent years. It seems, therefore, that the book continues to be the medium of choice for making one's ideas heard and achieving a central role in the knowledge market. Accordingly, it seems that anyone wishing to change the world must, even today, still write a book that gets one noticed and triggers the debate that is clearly necessary for disseminating one's ideas. A book makes the idea tangible and durable, ensuring that people's engagement with the idea can develop and grow, both online and offline.

The US social theorist Randall Collins has written what is probably the most comprehensive work on the formation of intellectual standpoints ("The Sociology of Philosophies. A Global Theory of Intellectual Change", 1998). One core aspect of his theory is that new ideas are always generated by the rivalry between contemporary thinkers, and that creativity is at its highest when there is an especially high level of friction between competing ideas. If one therefore assumes that new ideas are generated by engagement and debate, it is interesting to observe the standpoints between which these lines of conflict are drawn up today.

> **Whilst only a handful of scientists contribute to discussions about the future, their opinions are very much in vogue.**

THE LEADERBOARD FOR THE GDI THOUGHT LEADER INDEX

Name	Thought Leader Index	Google Citation H-Index	Google hits
Richard Florida	0.15532562	58	815 000
Thilo Sarrazin	0.034529135	7	3 160 000
Daniel Kahneman	0.032592207	131	3 990 000
David Graeber	0.025085267	36	1 450 000
Steven Pinker	0.024713721	64	1 880 000
Douglas Rushkoff	0.023806253	18	579 000
Niall Ferguson	0.023014171	41	2 380 000
David Gelernter	0.022511605	39	293 000
Frank Schirrmacher	0.02140022	19	499 000
Franz Josef Radermacher	0.021215923	15	44 100
Ray Kurzweil	0.020574821	14	1 650 000
Bruce Sterling	0.020151732	27	1 160 000
Matt Ridley	0.019829774	18	764 000
Gerd Gigerenzer	0.019788496	69	230 000
Michael J. Sandel	0.019454172	32	5 500 000
Peter Diamandis	0.017538087	12	462 000
Edward O. Wilson	0.017428175	78	786 000
Anne-Marie Slaughter	0.017274639	40	670 000
Rupert Sheldrake	0.016360085	26	747 000
Manuel Castells	0.015326205	79	1 260 000
Saskia Sassen	0.015142039	65	377 000
Zygmunt Bauman	0.015125725	79	1 490 000
Jonathan Zittrain	0.01476404	19	389 000
James C. Scott	0.013972453	91	1 570 000
Edward Glaeser	0.013923897	88	264 000
Joseph Stiglitz	0.013834712	undefined	4 490 000
Abhijit Banerjee	0.013574838	58	285 000
Paul Collier	0.013307666	78	1 070 000
Richard Dawkins	0.013153211	47	11 300 000
Slavoj Žižek	0.012257034	49	3 470 000
Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker	0.011952454	13	232 000
Ernst Fehr	0.011791188	74	125 000
Kevin Kelly	0.011517704	undefined	2 410 000
Stephen Hawking	0.011512456	74	13 900 000
Hans-Christoph Binswanger	0.011404731	14	102 000
Harald Welzer	0.011213235	19	247 000
Jeremy Rifkin	0.011129971	44	1 280 000
Paul Krugman	0.010957496	63	10 200 000
Esther Duflo	0.01090141	47	228 000
Robert D. Kaplan	0.010281591	26	397 000
Nassim Taleb	0.010244179	20	598 000

TO BE CONTINUED... The new ideas show great diversity: the question of whether the field will continue to differentiate or consolidate can be answered only in the long term. The diversity of ideas and thinkers also reflects the complexity of the world itself, which is "too big to know" (David Weinberger, 2012). Knowledge volume and rate of growth are now too great for the market to be dominated with just a few ideas. Never have there been so many researchers as today – nor has academic output ever been so diverse. We can no longer rely on the old measurement systems as a means of orienting ourselves and finding relevant, new ideas. Our Thought Leader map is an attempt to establish a new approach for classifying the most influential thinkers and trends in published research. We will continue to develop this ranking system and will conduct further network analyses at regular intervals. <

Background links
For other analyses and the opportunity to view comments and links to other thought leaders, please visit www.gdi.ch/de/Think-Tank/Trend-News/Detail-Page/A-global-thought-leaders-map