

Leadership



INTERVIEWS • INSIGHTS • INTELLIGENCE

Tyrants will fall

Says Ronnie Kasrils

Ready for the unexpected

An eye on the future

Stranger than fiction

The Brett Kebble murder

Saki Macozoma


Getting ahead and staying ahead

SAMUEL SEEFF • ROSS FARAGHER-THOMAS • JOLANDÉ DUVENHAGE • ROY PADAYACHIE • PEPE MARAIS • DR GRAEME CODRINGTON

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A man with short dark hair, wearing a dark blue and black vertically striped button-down shirt, is shown from the waist up. He is looking slightly to the left of the camera with an open mouth as if speaking. His hands are held out in front of him, palms up, in a gesture of explanation or emphasis. The background is a plain, light grey wall.

“I believe it is critical for people to understand what is driving that change so that they can not only manage it, but shape it; so that we can set our sails and not be tossed about by these winds of change”

Are you ready for the unexpected?

Dr Graeme Codrington keeps an eye on the future

In the aftershock of the recession, leaders are grappling with the present, never mind the future. Many are waiting for things to “get back to normal”. But Dr Graeme Codrington warns that the future will never be the same again. “I am convinced that the next decade will be extremely turbulent on a corporate, social, political and a personal level. We will look back on this era as a time when things shifted. It will become a significant turning point in history.”

Dr Codrington is described as a futurist, researcher, author and expert in the future world of work.

He travels the globe speaking to about 100 000 people a year, and did this interview while commuting between London and Hong Kong.

He has shared the platform with the likes of Edward de Bono, Dr Jonas Ridderstråle, Sir Ken Robinson and Neil Armstrong; and was recently voted Speaker of the Year by The Academy for Chief Executives.

Dr Codrington lives in London, the United Kingdom base of his consulting agency, Tomorrow/Today, which he co-founded with two partners in South Africa in 2002.

He is a visiting professor at four top business schools, including the London School, Duke and the Gordon Institute of Business Science.

Dr Codrington has a doctorate in Business Administration, a master's in Sociology, honours in Youth Work, and degrees in Theology/philosophy and Commerce.

While studying, he did his chartered accountancy articles at KPMG and then joined an information technology start-up company at the start of the e-commerce era.

He is the author of *Mind over Money*, *Mind the Gap* and *Future-Proof Your Child*, and has three new books in the pipeline.

The fact that he is a member of Mensa partially explains his prolific talents: Mensa requires one to have an IQ within the top 2%

“In Standard 2, aged 10, I wrote a little software program that allowed someone to create a multiple choice question-and-answer program. I told my teachers about it, suggesting that if they were to use it for school subjects, it would be great to put on the library computers. They looked at me as if I were an idiot. Nobody knew how to do it,” relates Dr Codrington.

“So I asked for all the textbooks for standards three, four and five, and spent my whole holiday

“I have a very competitive nature. I do not want to beat someone; I am driven to be the very best at what I do”

of the global population. It recognises that IQ is not only about maths, and so runs two tests – for left- and right brain skills.

While in the army, Dr Codrington did the tests for fun. “I was feeling as sick as a dog on the day, but I passed both tests. I realised that I needed to find a career that would pay me to think and be creative.”

A story about his childhood foretells something about his own future: The PC was big news when he was a boy, but his family could not afford one. So he would go to a local store and play around with its computers.

writing up questions and answers for every subject. The school was quite impressed.

“The upside was that I didn't have to study anything for the next couple of years. I was incredibly bored for the rest of primary school, so I spent my time as an entrepreneur, writing and selling games to my mates,” he says.

“I have a very competitive nature. I do not want to beat someone; I am driven to be the very best at what I do.”

At Parktown Boys' High School in Johannesburg, Dr Codrington gained eight distinctions in his Matric preliminary exams.

Then he fell in love. Jane, his school sweetheart, later became his wife and they have three daughters. He 'blames' her for his achieving only four distinctions in the finals, but adds: "I thank her for teaching me there are other things in life."

"If the system won't provide, we have to provide for ourselves. That's why a lot of entrepreneurs have come out of our generation," he says.

Liking new challenges, Dr Codrington relocated with his family to London in 2008.

X'ers are individualistic, pragmatic, they like change, taking risks and are sceptical of the system

Dr Codrington entered the limelight with his work on Generational Theory. His book *Mind the Gap* explained what and why there were differences in values, expectations and attitudes between different generations.

Soon corporates wanted him to explain the difference between the GI, Silent, Boomer, X'er and Millennial generations. His insights help business better understand how to retain talent and customers.

A self-confessed Generation X'er, Dr Codrington shares many characteristics: X'ers are individualistic, pragmatic, they like change, taking risks and are sceptical of the system.

When he was conscripted, he wanted to serve in the air force because it had a military band. "I have played the trumpet since I was nine, so I did an audition and was told by the major in charge that I was guaranteed a place in the band. But I was called up to be in the Quarter Master's store."

Dr Codrington went back to the major, who said there was nothing he could do, but rather cryptically added that if Codrington reported for duty for the band, he could stay.

"So I hid in the roof of the toilet for 36 hours while everyone shipped out and spent the next 18 months serving as a professional musician, even though it was never official."

Dr Codrington does not do things the normal way. "Gen X'ers don't feel that authority should be feared or obeyed. If they don't make sense, we don't follow. My reaction was that this did not make sense. I wanted to be in the band and I did what I had to do to achieve that.

Unfortunately, his move coincided with the global financial crash. However, with hard work and luck he survived and his business is now growing exponentially. Perhaps this experience fuelled his current passion, his research into what he describes as the "Tides of Change".

Dr Codrington believes we can anticipate some of the change ahead by examining five disruptive forces that will reshape our lives forever: Technology, Institutional Change, Demographics, the Environment, and Social Values.

"We need to be preparing for change, the unexpected. I believe it is critical for people to understand what is driving that change so that they can not only manage it, but shape it;

forward to an innovation where language translation is linked to voice recognition: "As I travel and work with people all over the world, it's going to be wonderful to have access to an application that allows me to speak a sentence and have it instantly translated and played back in any language.

"We are only seeing the start of what the information revolution is bringing."

He says almost every industry is experiencing dramatic institutional changes that will shake them to their very foundations. "The rules for success and failure are changing," he says.

"Look at the music industry: they don't know whether they are coming or going: One makes more money out of a live act than being a recording artist. They do not know how to cope with the technology that allows people to share music.

"One company did see change coming. It was not part of the music industry, but in just three years has become the largest music retailer in the world. That company is Apple. Through their iTunes store and a clever technology licensing solution, they've taken the music industry by storm," Dr Codrington adds.

Any industry that has consumers who are shifting toward Internet use as their primary means of connection, will face change. "Many of them have their heads in the sand," he says.

"When the generation who reads newspapers dies – that will be it. Newspapers must eventually die. The media is struggling to deal with this, and the paper industry is still in denial about it."

"Gen X'ers don't feel that authority should be feared or obeyed"

so that we can set our sails and not be tossed about by these winds of change," he says.

"We are going to see remarkable technological innovations in biomedicine, genetics, robotics, energy and even space travel. However, the most powerful revolution we face will be in how we communicate and process information."

People will increasingly use technology to seek and contribute information and to interact with each other. Dr Codrington is looking

The pharmaceutical industry faces huge upheaval. "Eighty percent of its profits are about to disappear because its blockbuster drugs have patents that expire in three to five years and they will go generic. This is actually good news for South Africa; we have a great generics industry."

Demographic trends to watch include an ageing population, rising life expectancy, plummeting fertility rates, the potential for generational conflict, migration and diversity.

“If an investor were to ask where the next big news is going to be, I believe it will be sub-Saharan Africa”

Boomers will make the concept of retirement null and void. Many will not be able to retire, nor will they want to.

There will be less young people, but because of the laws of supply and demand, they will feel more powerful and be more influential.

Dr Codrington believes the human condition is improving dramatically in our lifetime, even in poorer countries, and will continue.

“Due to the efforts of people like Bill Gates, we are getting rid of malaria in Africa. Think of what we could do in Africa with no malaria – that will happen in the next 10 years,” he says.

There will be increasing focus on the environment, and Dr Codrington foresees enormous social change: “People’s expectations and values have shifted over the past few decades. There is a whole drive toward work/life integration.

“What we define as ‘normal’ is no longer certain. There is not going to be business as usual as we come out of this downturn.

“We are living through an era of radical change, which will end up with us on a new trajectory in human history. This has happened many times in the past during the Renaissance, the Reformation and the early Industrial eras,” he adds.

“Part of my job is to help people prepare for the unexpected and the unpredictable. I want to spend at least the next 20 years of my life helping people navigate in uncertain times. If people look back on my career, I would want them to say: ‘Graeme helped me make sense of the chaos and plot my path in turbulent times.’

“If I can do that, I will die a happy man!”

Where will Dr Codrington be during these turbulent times?

He and his family have made a firm decision to move back to South Africa in 2012. His reasons are, of course, unexpected: “I am absolutely convinced that what has happened to China in the last 20 years will happen in sub-Saharan Africa in the next two decades. There will be a resource boom with a massive growth in industrialisation. Sub-Saharan Africa has the same population as China, and more resources than China and India combined,” he says.

“If an investor were to ask where the next big news is going to be, I believe it will be sub-Saharan Africa.

“We want to be part of building South Africa’s future and firmly based where we think the future is going to be,” Dr Codrington adds. ▲

Michele Alexander

