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Future thinking:
Professor Bi Puranen sees the younger generations playing an increasingly important role in the IT industry.

attempts that have been made in the past to predict the future based on technological development instead of on human values and behavior.

Showing a video-clip from the late 60s, she illustrates her point: “For example, scientists believed that by the year 2000, commercial aircraft would be able to vertically take-off and land, carrying around 20,000 passengers.”

Therefore, the focus for future studies should, according to Puranen, be mankind, since it doesn’t change as fast as technology.

“Using technology in our everyday life is making us go faster all the time. But the perception of time is subjective to humans, while to computers, it is precise. The human brain has its own ‘maximum speed.’ Therefore, if intellectual capital – the human being – is to be in charge and call the shots, things shouldn’t get any faster.”

Continues Puranen: “Walter Wriston, former CEO at Citibank, once said: ‘Intellectual capital goes where it is wanted and stays where it is well-treated. It cannot be driven, only attracted.’ And this is so true. The market is moving toward post-modern values such as maximized wellbeing, free market, technology development, continuous uncertainty and chaos/dynamic, which together symbolize a de-emphasis on authority.

Puranen maintains that businesses still haven’t adjusted to this, not even the youngest, entrepreneurial, IT companies. “For young people, it is imperative that love, relationships and family must happily co-exist with work. This is why I believe that companies that are currently trying to squeeze 10–12 hours a day out of their employees will not last in the long term. The younger generation simply won’t accept this.”

And at some point, Puranen believes there could even be a backlash: “It might even come to a point when people contra-react to the bit-society and demand guaranteed chip-free products, like clogs!”

But still, if we look ahead – and most of us have to do that – we can always imitate Bi Puranen and look at the next generation: “Young people of today are better than us at using technology in an effective way. They sort things out, communicate in a much faster way, so that once they actually meet in real life, they have all the time in the world. They see no conflict in combining human values with technology. And we will most probably get used to that too. It will take a while, but we will get there.” ●

Facts of the future

All the IT visionaries and technology gurus may well think they know what the future holds in store. In most cases, however, they are probably wrong. Professor Bi Puranen has seen the future – and it’s different!

Who would have thought that in a world where teenagers can become IT millionaires overnight that overwhelming numbers of today’s young people see a future for themselves in health care?

Who would have thought that in a society where the Internet, computers and mobile phones are speeding up the pace of life, family values get top billing (99%) on young people’s list of priorities?

And who would have thought, in these days of IT heroes, that the most common role model for most youngsters is – their parents?!

These are just a few of the astonishing findings of Professor Bi Puranen’s research, which has led her to become the Nordic region’s foremost expert on tomorrow’s society. Ms Puranen, a professor of future

studies and communications is based half the year in the French science village of Sophia Antipolis and half in her home town of Stockholm. She is a frequently hired consultant and lecturer to international organizations and corporations such as Volvo, Ericsson and Akzo Nobel.

Sharing her findings with major corporations, governments and the public is her way of contributing to increased understanding of young people and the society of the future.

“Only if we see things from the perspective of young people will we be good at future studies,” explains Dr Puranen. “I think it is very important that industry – and particularly IT companies – fully understand what young people think and want.”

The reason for drawing conclusions based on young people’s values, is the unsuccessful