

# **MODELLING THE LONG TERM FUTURE**

**Stephen Aguilar-Millan**

**Director of Research**

**The European Futures Observatory**

**[stephena@eufo.org](mailto:stephena@eufo.org)**



# Why do we use long term models?

Long Term models help us to link the past and the present to the future.

They provide a device to explain what has happened in our recent past, and how it shapes today.

They also provide a device by which we can anticipate what is likely to happen in the future.

They are not an accurate predictive device owing to discontinuities in trends and the impact of unforeseen circumstances.

We shall examine an example of a Political, Economic, Social, and Technological long term model to gain a glimpse of our near future in the coming decade.



# Long Term Political Change.

Political change can be characterised by the interaction of two key drivers of change – the beneficiary of public action and the mode of delivering public action.

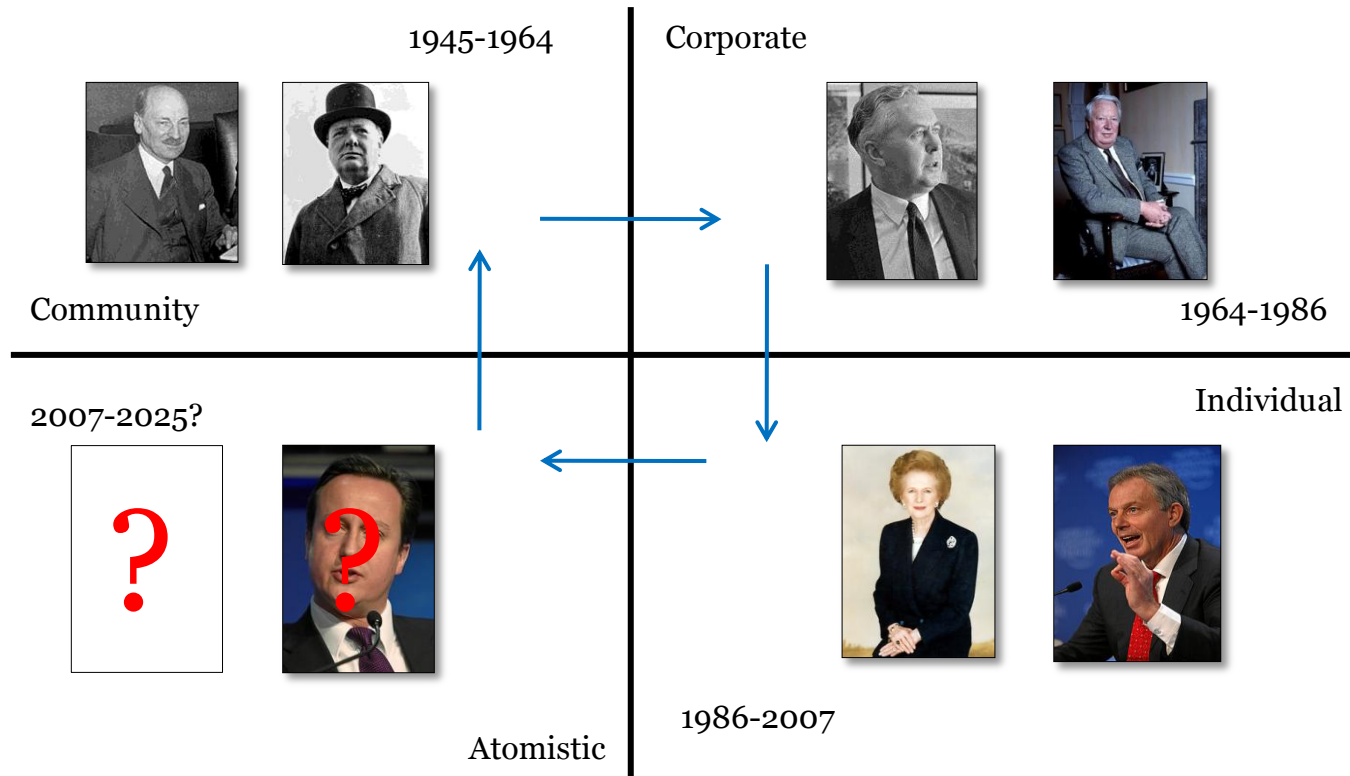
There are swings in the focus on who should be the beneficiaries of public action between the individual and the community.

There are swings in the emphasis on what should be the mode of delivering of public action between the atomistic and the corporate.

Each of the possible outcomes creates an unstable result that propels the system into a new phase.



# Long Term Political Change.



# Long Term Economic Change.

We often forget that the economy is subject to long term cycles, with periods of high economic activity and periods of low economic activity.

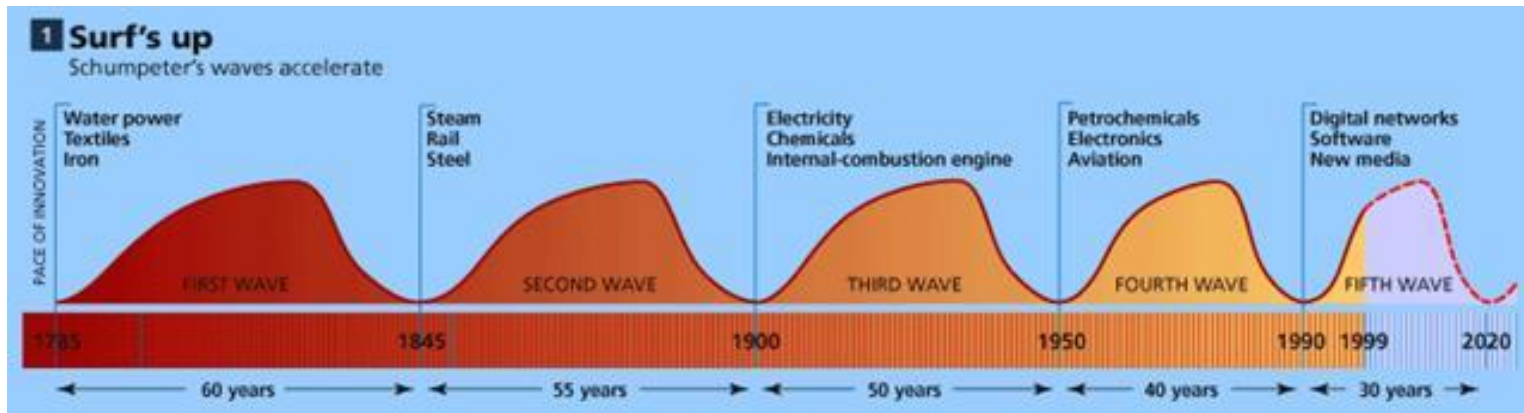
These periods of relative activity and inactivity can be characterised by the Kondratieff Cycle.

The cycle is characterised by four phases of the cycle – Spring (Expansionary Phase 1971-1998), Summer (Maturity Phase 1998-2001), Autumn (Consolidation Phase 2001-2007), and Winter (Crisis Phase 2007-2025?).

Each phase has its own distinct characteristics.



# Long Term Economic Change.



The next ten years could herald a long winter.



# Long Term Social Change.

Long term social futures tend to be characterised by three dimensions – generational archetypes, lifecycle stages, and generational cohorts.

The generational archetypes (Prophet, Nomad, Hero, and Artist) are determined by the shared experiences of the group.

The lifecycle stages (Youth, Adulthood, Mid-life, and Golden Years) determine the predominant roles played by each generational group.

The generational cohorts are defined by the lifecycle stage that each generational archetype passes through.

For example, the Boomers were in mid-life during the Thatcher Revolution (1983-2007), which enhanced their inclination towards being principled and moralistic opinion formers in society.



# Long Term Social Change.

|                     | 1945-1964                     | 1964-1983               | 1983-2007               | 2007-2025               | 2025-2045                     |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
|                     | <i>Post crisis adjustment</i> | <i>Awakening</i>        | <i>Unravelling</i>      | <i>Crisis</i>           | <i>Post crisis adjustment</i> |
| <b>Youth</b>        | Boomer<br>(Prophet)           | Generation X<br>(Nomad) | Millennial<br>(Hero)    | Homeland<br>(Artist)    | Scarcity<br>(Prophet)         |
| <b>Adulthood</b>    | Silent<br>(Artist)            | Boomer<br>(Prophet)     | Generation X<br>(Nomad) | Millennial<br>(Hero)    | Homeland<br>(Artist)          |
| <b>Mid-Life</b>     | GI<br>(Hero)                  | Silent<br>(Artist)      | Boomer<br>(Prophet)     | Generation X<br>(Nomad) | Millennial<br>(Hero)          |
| <b>Golden Years</b> | Lost<br>(Nomad)               | GI<br>(Hero)            | Silent<br>(Artist)      | Boomer<br>(Prophet)     | Generation X<br>(Nomad)       |





# Long Term Technological Change.

Long term technological change tends to occur in waves of self reinforcing advancements.

There are two parts to the wave – the Installation Phase and the Deployment Phase – between which a crisis of maturity occurs.

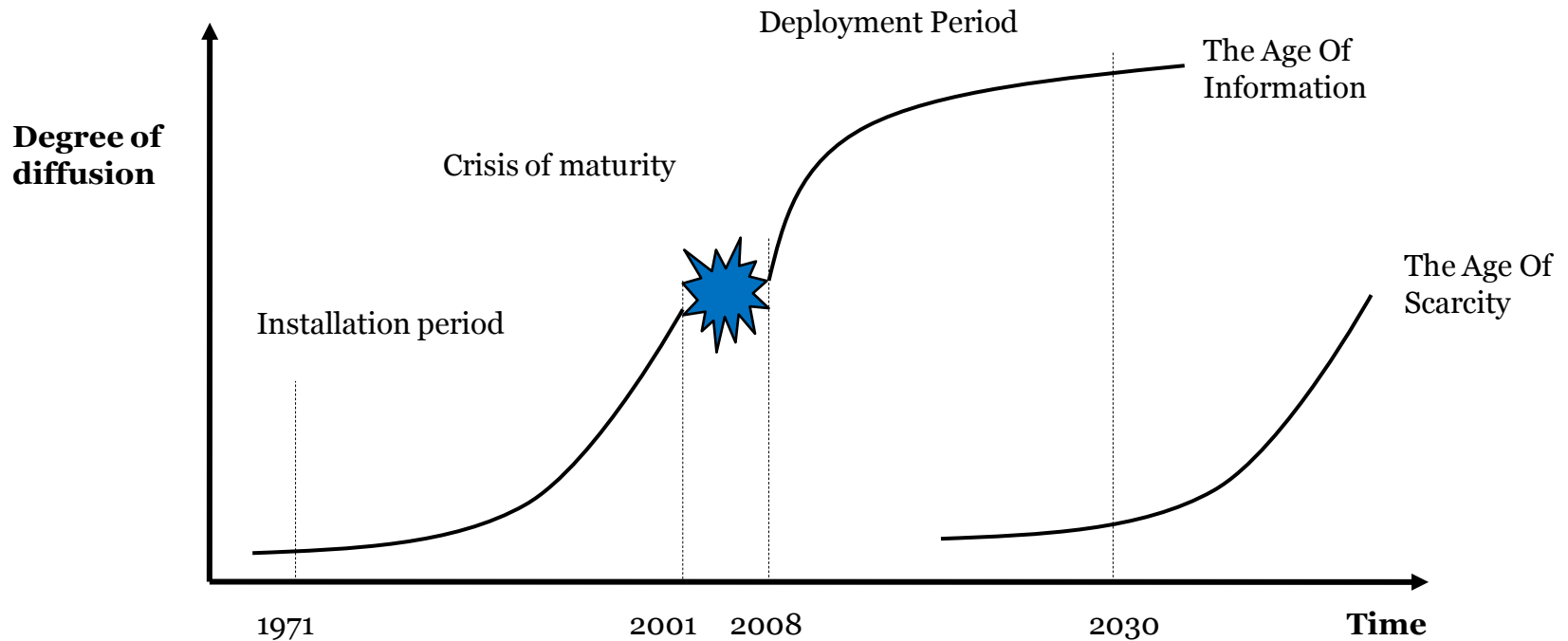
The Installation Phase is the process whereby the technological revolution gathers momentum and becomes established. During this time a financial bubble develops.

Eventually, the financial bubble bursts, causing a crisis of maturity in which a shake out occurs within the industry.

As the crisis of maturity subsides, the Deployment Phase takes hold, leading to the greater dissemination of the technology.



# Long Term Technological Change.



# Where are we now?

What do our models tell us about what we can expect over the next ten years?

In the political realm, we can expect a move towards a greater focus on community objectives delivered by more market based mechanisms.

In the economic realm, we can expect a prolonged downturn accompanied by a slow recovery.

In the social realm, the Homeland Generation will be in its Youth (over-protected), the Millennials will be in adulthood (good team workers), Generation X to be in Mid-life (very pragmatic), and the Boomers to be in their Golden Years (opinionated and over-bearing).

In the technological realm, we can expect the ICT revolution to reach maturity and saturation and the technology of scarcity to start to take off.

