



2021

2021 AS AN URGENT CASE FOR ACTION

A GUIDE TO CREATING A BREAKTHROUGH YEAR



“Never let a good crisis go to waste.”

– Winston Churchill

This year is coming off the back of an unprecedented time in human history. People, organizations, and entire nations have been disrupted like never before. Over a million small businesses closed temporarily and thousands in the U.S. have closed permanently. But it's not just small businesses. In May, the 100-year-old rental car giant Hertz filed for bankruptcy. That same month, Latam Airlines, the largest airline in South America, filed for bankruptcy. Those two were joined by J.C. Penney, the Neiman Marcus Group, Frontier Communications, and many others.

Many companies are faced with the challenges of shifting to remote-based work, having to discover new ways of maintaining productivity and their culture in this new normal. Business travel has come to a near halt, interrupting plans for new partnerships and international expansion. All of this happening inside of an unstable and polarized political environment.

Meanwhile, some companies have thrived. Tesla joined the S&P 500 and saw its market cap soar above \$600 billion. Netflix is about to break 200 million subscribers. DoorDash saw its shares jump 86% during its stock market debut in December. But that's nothing compared to video conferencing company Zoom, whose shares rose more than 400% last year.

But what does all this mean for 2021?

It means that now, more than ever, it's time to reinvent your organization. It's time to capitalize on the uncertainty in the marketplace, launch new strategic projects, and secure long-term competitive advantages.

THE CREATED FUTURE

“The best way to predict the future is to create it.”

– Peter Drucker

The long-term impact of the pandemic is still unknown, but what is clear is that uncertainty and accelerated change is here to stay.

It's not a matter of changing that fact, it's a matter of discovering how best to operate within it.

Over the last 25 years, Vanto Group has worked with some of the most successful executives and organizations around the world. We've found that **the key to having your organization thrive amid uncertainty is to create a powerful future.** A clearly articulated and compelling future serves as a guiding light to lead you and your employees in the right direction in the face of unprecedented circumstances. It is a catalyst for new thinking, new coordinated actions, and new ways of being. It calls forth breakthrough results and a culture of accountability and ownership.

A *created future* like this includes an overall vision, a purpose-driven mission, and clear strategic outcomes that paint the picture of the future. It is not predictable or probable by virtue of the past. This new kind of future—one created "from the future"—is improbable, but possible.

You might be skeptical that a created future has the power to transform your organization. That's understandable. Most of what passes for a "future" in organizations these days are merely empty words on the website or in marketing materials or it's a 5-year budget plan to manage costs and appease investors. It's not something real in the hearts and minds of their people.

Understanding why a created future is so powerful is the access to having it be real in your organization.

First, it's important to understand that the future lives in language. Most of us relate to the future as a concrete, tangible thing, but it's not. **It's a conversation.**

When you extend this to your entire organization, you can see the power of a created future. That's because—and this is Vanto Group's unique perspective—your organization is a *linguistic system*, it is a *Network of Conversations*.

From this vantage point, conversation becomes the primary organizing principle of corporate leadership, strategy, implementation, and results. **To transform your organization is to transform the conversations that are happening within it.**

To learn more about this unique approach and to see examples of it in practice, we invite you to read [this MIT Sloan Business Review article](#) co-authored by Vanto Group's Founder, Steve Zaffron.

That's the power of the created future—to shift the entire dynamic of your organization. It alters how your people think, act, coordinate their activities, and produce results. Approaching an organization in this way is also the access to having the created future be real in the hearts and minds of your people. It allows you to leverage the power of language to reinvent your organization.

How do you go about creating a future like this?

The first step is simple: getting clear on the conditions of the game.



THE CONDITIONS OF THE GAME

“There are no obstacles, only conditions of the game.”

– Steve Zaffron

When we talk to executives about transforming their company, one of the first things that comes up is the obstacles to making it happen.

“Where will the money come from?”

“We don’t have the time. My people are swamped as it is. Let’s revisit this next year.”

“Our competitors are already breathing down our neck, we can’t risk a reinvention of our company.”

“We’ve done things a certain way for a long time here. Our people don’t do well with change.”

All of those are understandable. The marketplace has never been so competitive and organizations have never been stretched so thin. So, we don’t argue with the reasons themselves, we re-contextualize them.

Financial limitations, time constraints, tough competitors, and a legacy culture aren’t obstacles, they are *conditions of the game*. Just like in a football game—there are fixed rules, a certain length field, and a specific number of players on the field. That’s it. That’s the game.

The first step in creating a future is **getting clear on the conditions of your game**.

You can do this yourself. Look at your employees, your industry, and the broader market. What seems to be in the way of reinventing your organization? What do people complain about? What are the barriers and obstacles to a breakthrough in results?

Then get clear on the facts of the situation. Contextualize any obstacles as conditions of the game.

After you’ve done this yourself, it’s helpful to do the exercise with your team. Look at your overall situation and clear out any interpretations or “stories” that aren’t the facts of the situation. At Vanto Group, we support executives in getting clear on “what’s so”—what is absolutely factual of the situation and dropping everything else.

This exercise has you and your team grounded in where you are, which becomes the launching pad for a new created future. From there, it’s time to discover your *urgent case for action*.

THE URGENT CASE FOR ACTION

"If we don't change our direction soon, we're liable to wind up where we are headed."

– ancient Chinese proverb

Your urgent case for action answers the question that is always in the background:

“

Why should we do anything new now?

”

“

Why invest our time, money, and people in taking action now?

”

The inquiry into your urgent case for action both creates and confronts a compelling picture of "what's so" and what's currently predictable. The urgent case for action points at the undesirability of ending up where you're going, what the risks are, and what opportunities you'll miss if you keep going in this direction. It also points at what is at stake for you and your team if you don't alter this probable course of action with regard to your overall corporate initiatives and even specific projects.

This urgent case for action is a creation, not a description. It is something you declare, instead of something you report about.

To reveal your urgent case for action, inquire into these questions as a team:

- What is the predictable future of our department or organization?
- If we don't take action now, where will we end up?
- If we don't act now, what risks will we be exposed to?
- If we don't act now, what opportunities will we miss?

Now that you've discovered your urgent case for action, you're ready to articulate a created future and the new breakthrough projects that fulfill it.

NEXT STEPS

"This is it."

– Alan Watts

To recap, there are only a few crucial steps to creating a breakthrough future for your organization:

1

Get clear on the conditions of the game. Do this step yourself then with your team. Ground yourselves in the facts of your situation and let go of any interpretations or stories.

2

Create alignment with your team around a specific urgent case for action. Each of you should be able to powerfully answer, "Why should we do anything new now?"

3

Begin to articulate the elements that will enable this year to be a breakthrough year and the new projects that fulfill it.

That's it. These steps may sound simple, but the art is in applying them to your unique circumstances to accomplish breakthrough results.

As pioneers in the field of organizational transformation with a successful track record of more than 25 years, we can apply our unique and proven methodology to the most critical issues and opportunities your organization or team is facing.

We would love the opportunity to support you in achieving your breakthrough future. Call us. Don't wait. The time is now.

READY TO TALK?

CONTACT US TODAY

