

# **Future Shock Study Guide**

## **Future Shock by Alvin Toffler**

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# Contents

<a href="#">Future Shock Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 1-2.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 3-4.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 5.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 6.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 7-8.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 9.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 10-11.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 12-13.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 14.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 15.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 16.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 17.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 18.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 19.....</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 20.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">26</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">28</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">30</a>



# Plot Summary

Future Shock by Alvin Toffler discusses change and what happens to people; how they do and don't adapt. Even though the book was first published in 1970, it is certainly appropriate for the changes of the age of technology. The book was written about the future and that future is now. Massive changes result in stress and disorientation, especially when these changes take place in a short period of time. Man must cope with these changes and Toffler's point is that there isn't much known about the mechanisms for coping and adaptability. Toffler attempts to study these mechanisms in the book.

Toffler's point is that the tactics of the past will not be successful in the future. If future shock is to be avoided, society must control the accelerating thrust and must make plans for the future and the changes it will bring. There should be studies of the different scenarios that might exist in the future and the effects these scenarios will have on values and lifestyles. Different models and simulations allow people to study future scenarios and to try out different lifestyles. Without some kind of preparation and control, society will not be able to deal with the future and will suffer from future shock. It is not necessary for future shock to take place if the proper measures are taken.

Much of the book consists of the results of various research studies with a paragraph of two devoted to each. Many of these studies deal with man's ability to change and reaction to change. The various changes experienced in life produce stress and this leads to a strain on the body's defense mechanisms and results in illness. There is a certain amount of change that men can handle and this is called the adaptive range. If the amount of change is below this level, the result is boredom and people seeking more excitement in life. If the level of change is above the adaptive range, man's coping mechanism breaks down and the result is destruction and irrationality. This is what Toffler says future shock will consist of if society does not develop methods to deal with the changes.

Toffler does a good job in explaining how and why people select the lifestyles that they select. Adherence to a particular lifestyle makes the individual a member of a subcult and cuts down on the number of choices and decisions the individual has to make.- It avoids the problems of over-selection and over-stimulation. Major life decisions occur when the individual changes his lifestyle. This involves having to confront all of the choices involved in the selection of a new lifestyle with a new set of values to adopt.

A large portion of the book is devoted to the study of relationships, with the five major kinds of relationships being defined and discussed. The result of change is a shortening of the different relationship with a shift from permanence to impermanence. Relationships are now characterized by transience. This causes a change in values and places a greater strain on man to adopt.

Even though future Shock was first published in 1970, it is interesting reading and very relevant to today's world of rapid technological changes. Readers will find the time spent reading the book to be worthwhile.



# Chapters 1-2

## Chapters 1-2 Summary and Analysis

Toffler discusses the rapid changes that will take place in study and states his purpose as studying how people will adjust to these changes. Some people seek change, others run from it. Change means that there has to be new rules and new roles for people. Toffler calls this a disease that he names future shock. He distinguishes this from cultural shock, a situation in which the familiar cues are replaced by unfamiliar cues. This is a situation encountered in foreign travel.

Millions of people will be affected by the disorientation of future shock. The changes of the future will result in not knowing what behavior is and isn't rationale given the changes in society. Toffler discusses some of the innovations and changes that have taken place in history such as in agriculture and the effects they have had on economic development. Changes in agriculture mean it takes fewer people to produce the food supply. There has also been a shift in numbers from blue-collar to white collar workers. This is what he calls the shift to super-industrialism.

Toffler distinguishes what he calls the eight hundredth lifetime. This is the time that denotes a break with the past. This marks the shifts from agriculture to industrialism to super-industrialism. There have been massive changes during this lifetime. The economic and political regimes of all countries are interrelated so what happens in one place affects people and events in other places. The events of the past, like wars, effect people today, like they never did in the past. In adapting to the changes, society has broken with the past.

Chapter Two discusses the rate of change and how professionals cannot keep up with the changes within their field since they change so fast. Millions of people ignore change. Some find it threatening and in this period of accelerating change, many do not take change into account when planning their lives. This is also true for nations. The changes in technology are responsible for the accelerative thrust. There are three stages in technological innovation : the idea, the application of the idea and the spread through society. The accelerative thrust is characterized by a shortening in the time between each of these stages.

The accelerative thrust brought about a change in the familiar and the unfamiliar and strained man's ability to adapt. Out changes cause internal changes within the individual. The individual must adapt.



# Chapter 3-4

## Chapter 3-4 Summary and Analysis

People are aware of their own pace of life. Some lived at a more accelerated pace than other do and prefer it that way, and this is a characteristic of the super industrial society. Others try to break out of this fast pace, or rat race, and slowdown. The people in the fast lane are the people of the future. The fast pace of life attracted many immigrants to North America. Different cultures move at different paces and this can bring them into conflict with one another. Some are time-conscious while others are more or less indifferent to time.

People learn about what Toffler calls durational expectancies, such as the length of the work day or the time spent at a movie. There are what are affected when the pace of life is changed and what must adapt to acceleration. There are five relationships that comprise social experience and these are: things, places, people organizations and ideas. These are the relationships that are affected by acceleration since they become shorter and this results in feelings of impermanence and transience. High transience denotes the condition of the person who lives in the fast lane.

Transience is evident in what Toffler calls the throw-away society. Examples of this are Barbie dolls that can be traded in for newer models and disposable bottles and other items. Items are used once and then thrown away. This phenomena has spread from America to other countries creating the problem of litter. There is even disposable clothing made of paper. These throw-away products resulted in a throw-away mentality among the population. In terms of buildings, the old are torn down and replaced by new ones as the average life of buildings steadily decreases. This adds to the aura of transience.

A new economics accompanies the era of transience and this is what Toffler calls the economics of transience. Things that were built for durability now aren't and the economics of permanence became the economics of transience. New technologies mean that it is cheaper to replace an item than it is to repair it and items are produced with this idea in mind. Psychologically, this results in the avoidance of commitment. Why commit to something that won't be there in the near future? This is the result of shortening the man-thing relationship.

Another manifestation in this change of relationships is the rental revolution. This also decreases permanence, whether it is apartments, cars or other items. This causes a distinct shortening of time in the man-thing relationship. Part of the reason for renting is the fear of obsolescence. Many manufacturers shorten the life of their product to increase sales. All of this adds to transience.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary and Analysis

Super-industrialism has also resulted in a new kind of commuter. Executives live in one city where they work during the workweek, then fly home to their families in a different state for the weekend. People now commute greater distances and maintain long distance relationships. Distance and place are now less important factors. People move around much more today than they did in the past. The automobile has resulted in increased travel, a characteristic of the super-industrial society.

Relocation of one's home is also a characteristic of the modern society. People move around from place to place with few attachments to any one place. The United States probably has the highest rate of geographic mobility of any country in the world. Europeans are also highly mobile and the resulting labor shortages attracted workers from the Mediterranean and Middle East areas.

In Europe, much of the migration was the result of the transition from agriculture to industrial society. In the United States, the migration represented the shift from industrialism to super-industrialization. Technical workers and professionals are the most moved group. People are basically migrating to where the jobs are. Frequent moves are a part of corporate life and this kind of lifestyle appeals to many.

Automobiles are considered important in American society. The last thing people will let go of is their cars. Many people who don't have cars hitchhike. Travel is big part of life and it seems to give people status. In terms of changing addresses, a person who has moved once is more likely to move again. Once the initial break is made, it becomes easier for people to move. However, there are many people in the world who never move far from their place of birth. Many people relocate for job opportunities and for some, this causes grief, in addition to physical and mental ailments.

Frequent moves result in non-involvement with the community, since the individual knows he will be moving shortly. There is no commitment to long-term improvements of projects since the individual knows that he won't be there for the long-term. This can result in a decrease in the quality of the community.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary and Analysis

This chapter begins with the fact that millions of college students spend their spring break in the Fort Lauderdale, Florida area. The amount of their spending makes it worthwhile for the community and it is an escape for the college students. The temporary relationships they form during the week are exemplary of the relationships formed in super-industrialization.

People who live in cities don't know their neighbors as well as people who live in small communities. Many relationships are partial based on the nature of the contact. These are limited relationships based on what Toffler calls the modular man. This means that an individual's relationship with the shoe salesman is based on shoe sales and no other aspects on the shoe salesman's life. This is the module that the relationship exists in and each individual has thousands of these modules. There is no total involvement.

Deeper relationships involve expectations and the interaction of many different modules within each personality. There is more freedom involved in relationship when they are superficial. The result is a shorter duration in the length of relationships. Some relationships last longer than others which may only consist of one or two meetings. Toffler distinguished between short-term, medium-term and long-term relationships. Long-term relationships are like those with family and involve higher expectations than short-term relationships. These relationships can last a lifetime. There are also medium-duration relationships that consist of four kinds: friends, neighbors, co-workers and members of organizations. Short-term relationships are viewed as service relationships and consist of relationships with clerks, barbers and the like.

Urbanization is the reason for the shortening of the duration of relationships. Greater mobility leads to shorter duration of relationships. Travel also results in temporary relationships that fall into the service relationship category. Relocation also results in a shortening because relocation results in the termination of all relationships in a community. Short-term relationships have replaced long-term relationships.

The result of technology and specialization results in shorter life expectancy of occupations. New occupations come into being as old ones die out. Super-industrialism results in serial careers and high rates of job turnover. This is true in the United States and Western Europe and temporary employment agencies add to the transience. The training for turnover begins in school where there is already a high rate of turnover in the classroom.



# Chapters 7-8

## Chapters 7-8 Summary and Analysis

The organization is a big part of the future and many portray it as something that destroys the individuality in man and turns him into a faceless cog. Organizations are one of the five relationships describing the social fabric. Since the bureaucracy is breaking down, new forms of organizations are coming into being. This is what Toffler calls the Ad-Hocracy.

There are three characteristics of bureaucracy. People occupy a clearly defined place in the division of labor, as well as in the vertical hierarchy. The organizational relationships tend to be permanent. The individual fulfills his specified obligations and receives his rewards. There is a fixed set of relationships that continues until he leaves the organization. Organizations are characterized by a high rate of change. In addition, there are mergers and acquisitions that contribute to the change. This is also true of government as departments and ministries are restructured.

All of the change within organizations results in a shortening in the duration of relationships of the individual to the obligations and rewards. Thus means that the individual must continually reorient himself to the changes in the structure. Many teams or departments are formed for short-term projects and then disbanded. This is one of the common practices in organizations and this is the result of the acceleration of change. The traditional organizational structures cannot deal with the rapid changes in society. The faster the rate of change, the shorter the life of organizational structures. This is a characteristic of the Ad-Hocracy.

The conformity required by the organization changes with the shift to Ad-Hocracy. The Ad-Hocracy is based on transience not permanence. Instead of loyalty to the organization, the new loyalty is to the profession. Their colleagues are those in the profession not those in the organization. This is the new Associative Man.

Chapter Eight deals with the effects of acceleration on information. There are many celebrities and personalities that come and go in the age of transience. They function as behavioral or mental models for people. In order to be functional as a model, there must be some relationship to reality.

The fast pace of society and changes makes it difficult to keep up with changes in knowledge. This forces individuals to be constantly learning and the vast gains in the amount of knowledge result in increasingly narrow fields of specialization. Individuals receive both coded and decoded messages from the media and other sources. The average adult is inundated by advertising messages and words are changing at a more rapid pace. Toffler points out that Shakespeare would be able to understand only half the words in use today. Transience is also evident in art in the various countries. Reality must constantly be relearned to keep up with the changes.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary and Analysis

A new society is being created. As a result of high technology, a revolution is underway. This is the super-industrial revolution and much of it is led by advances in scientific technology. Scientific advancement may have man exploring and exploiting the sea. Since more than two thirds of the earth's surface is water, there is a lot of room for exploration and very little of it is mapped. There is a wealth of minerals and resources on the sea floor and there will be greater reliance on the ocean for food. There will also be underwater cities. Advancing into the ocean can lead to weather manipulation.

Dolphins have been trained to help with the underwater effort and to perform other tasks. There is also research being performed on communications with dolphins and good production using microbiology. Japan is one of the leaders in this area using bacteria in the process of food production. Man is learning how green plants function and soon will be able to imitate the processes that occur in nature. There have been advances in genetics and molecular biology that will result in gene manipulation. Cloning is possible where the nucleus of an adult cell can be used to make carbon copies of the organism. There may be some moral dilemmas with this issue, and, at some point in the future, it may be possible for a woman to purchase a frozen human embryo guaranteed to be free from any genetic defects, have it implanted, and vary it to term. The purchases would have the full genetic information on the embryo. Eventually babies will be nurtured outside the uterus.

Advances in science lead to moral and ethical issues, such as the issues surrounding genetic engineering. This is why various countermeasures are required. Most people refuse to acknowledge the speed of change. Organ transplants are becoming more common as the field of medicine advances. There are also moral issues involved here. Robots are also a reality and some are very lifelike. Human brains can be kept alive after the death of the body. The real danger from all of this is man's inability to acknowledge the speed of change and his inability to envision the future and make plans for it. There is no return to the past.

# Chapters 10-11

## Chapters 10-11 Summary and Analysis

Super-industrialism will change the economics of society. There will be changes in the means and ends of economic activity. The current economic models will not be effective in the age of super-industrialism. There are new human needs in the form of psychic gratification. There is more emphasis on the production of services and products now result in the inclusion of psychological extras for the purchases. These can occur in every kind of product. The psychological differences between products are emphasized by the manufacturers.

Toffler talks of the growth of what he calls the experience industries. Experiences are sold with services. An example of this are the Club Mediterranee vacation resorts or the Esalen Institute weekend seminars. Cerebrum's electronic music studio is another example. Many of the experience industries blur the line between reality and illusions. The technology of the future will be used to manufacture experiences.

Chapter Eleven discusses the fractured family. The advances in novelty and technology will place strains upon the family. Others claim that the increase in leisure time will result in families spending more time together and will absorb the shock of change. There may be radical changes in the concept of motherhood and parenthood due to embryonic transplants and genetic engineering. These advances in science may result in parenthood being a legal and not biological matter. This raises the question of who will be able to purchase embryos. What about corporations or research labs? Is this family or slavery?

It is possible for professional parents to raise children. These would be family units that are paid to raise children. The results of transience and alienation will lead to different experiments with marriage. There are various communes that have come into existence and men now frequently adopt children as do homosexuals.

Most of the mindset in society is that marriage is a lifelong commitment that is supposed to be based on love. The stability of the marital relationship is affected by transience and the rate of change. Both partners do not grow and develop at the same rate and this leads to divorce and separation. Marriage becomes a short-term phenomena or what is referred to as serial marriages. This is all the result of transience and the rate of change.

# Chapters 12-13

## Chapters 12-13 Summary and Analysis

Super-industrialism will change most of what society believes about democracy and choice. Individual choice is a part of democracy but this may change in the future as society becomes more standardized. As a result of increased science and technology, there is less choice and more standardization. This, according to Toffler, is not true. The future may result in an over abundance of choices for the individual as society moves towards the negation of standardization. The United States is ahead of Europe in this respected. Technology lowers costs and allows for more individual choices. All of this fosters diversity.

Technology in the auto industry resulted in increased choice for the American consumer as foreign made cars become available. There is greater diversity in terms of colors and options. Another example of diversity, this time cultural diversity, is in the number of different published book titles. Some countries, however, moved in the other direction. Education was also marked by rigid standardization until students and educators began to complain. Then that movement for decentralization spread across the country. Many alternative schools were formed to combat the standardization of education. Technology will result in more alternatives to traditional schools as more of it will take place in computerized environments.

Publishing in terms of magazine titles, also offers more diversity. Short-term publishing is also cheaper and more readily available due to advances in technology.

Chapter Thirteen discusses the various subcults that have come into existence. These are small special interest groups dedicated to an activity like rodeo riding. These kind of subcults give the individual an identity, like in surfing or skydiving. These kinds of groups will become more important with the shift to increased leisure time. The adult population is becoming more segmented into age groups, with many more groups identified today than in the past. The faster the rate of change, the more pronounced are the differences between age groups. At the same time the new technology will result in differences between people due to diversity.



# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary and Analysis

There is a diversity of lifestyles and sexual values. The change in values and the confusion over the changing values is a result of the change in acceleration. Public value systems now change during the course of a lifetime which introduces a great deal of temporariness into values, whether they are public or personal. Look for more rapid changes in the future and more diversity. The different subcults and groups have different values. There is really no overall agreement on conduct, manners and language. This is what Toffler refers to as a cracked consensus.

Lifestyle is now a matter of identification with a subgroup. The greater the number of subcults, the greater the number of lifestyles. Everyone selects a lifestyle and that lifestyle is based on tastes and preferences. Articles of clothing, accessories and manner of speech are part of lifestyle. They conform to the model of the lifestyle. Each subcult has its own heroes which help solidify the psychological identity. Once the lifestyle model is set, it is marketed to the members of the subcult. This was true of the hippie subculture with its heroes Allen Ginsberg and Timothy Leary.

Subcults compete for members and adherence to a subcult basically shapes the individual's identity. The member of a subcult is less lonely and is not overcome by the myriad of choices because the choices are narrowed to those that conform to the group. The individual selects the characteristics he wants from the lifestyle and tailor's them to his own tastes. Lifestyle also accompanies things like the selection of furniture and the decision to smoke cigarettes or a pipe. These are the external factors of lifestyle. It is the lifestyle that is important, not style and people tend to reject the items and concepts that are not consistent with their lifestyle. Once the individual commits to a lifestyle, he does not have to be concerned with items that are outside that lifestyle and this helps him deal with the choices he must make.

Super decisions concern the changing of the lifestyle. The individual is then faced with the issue of overchoice until he decides on another lifestyle. For many, this is a crisis. There is an increase in the transience Index as people rid themselves of the items of the old subcult and acquire the items of the new one. This process results in changes in the self-image and will become increasingly more important in the society of the future.



# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary and Analysis

Man has survived many changes over the years but Toffler's premise is that there is a limit to the amount of change that humans can tolerate and the rate of change may exceed the limit that man can tolerate. This is future shock and it is the result of overstimulation. Different people will exhibit different symptoms ranging from anxiety to physical illness and violence and withdrawal. There is no list of the diseases of adaptation.

The amount of change in an individual's life affects his physical and mental well being. There has been some research performed by Holmes and Rahe to try to quantify the amount of change in an individual's life and how the individual responds to that change. This study was performed in the United States and Japan. People basically agreed on which items required major and minor adjustments. This allowed the researchers to assign weights to each change and to quantify the amount of change in people's lives and to determine life change scores. They found a close relationship between the rate of change and the health of the individuals. The greater the changes, the more severe the health problems. Rahe then went on to the Navy and used the scale to predict illness about crew members on a six month cruise. Again, there was a direct correlation between change and illness. A great deal of change overtaxes the coping mechanism and results in illness. The body's defenses are lowered by the stress of the changing situation. The stress can also lead to death, as is indicated in a study of widows and widowers. There is higher death rate among survivors in the first year.

The experience of novelty results in certain physical responses in the individual. This is called the orientation response and it occurs hundreds of times a day. Familiar items put the individual at ease. Too much novelty overtaxes the body and requires the use of energy. The individual experiences relief when the stress passes.

Continual stress results in what Toffler calls the adaptive reaction which involves the endocrine system and changes in body functions like blood pressure. There is more energy expended than in the orientation response. These biologic changes are the cause of the relationship between change and illness. Toffler feels that man's capacity to handle change is limited by these biological factors.



# Chapter 16

## Chapter 16 Summary and Analysis

Future shock involves psychological as well as physical factors. Change overloads the individual psychologically and effects the decision making process and the ability to act rationally. The result of these confusing breakdowns is a user of drugs, participant in mysticism, vandalism, apathy, etc. These are all the results of the deterioration in the individual decision making process. The individual can only successfully adapt to change when there is the right amount of change. Too little or too much results in social irrationality. This right amount is called the adaptive range. Future shock occurs when the amount of stimulation is above this adaptive range.

Soldiers in battle conditions are the example used for over-stimulation. The result is lethargy and apathy. This was a result of psychological collapse and it was especially evident in those who penetrated behind enemy lines. Eventually it resulted in withdrawal and the loss of the desire to live. They engage in behavior that is not in their own best interests and this is also evident in people's responses to disasters.

This kind of response is drawn by over-stimulation on the sensory, the cognitive and the decision making levels. The result of over-stimulation is distortion of the perception of reality. The individual cannot think clearly and the result can be schizophrenic like behavior. There is a problem in coping with and processing information.

The accelerative thrust calls for faster decision making and more rapid responses. Some decisions are programmed decisions, such as which commuter train to ride. If too many decisions are programmed, then life is boring for the person, even though it decreases the amount of time spent on trivia. The accelerative thrust explains why so many people had a problem with coping and decision making in their lives.

Victims of future shock deal with the situation by blocking the inflow of information or by only accepting certain information within his specialty. Other stick to post modern mode of behavior and refuse to accept change. Some people drop out of the rat race and live in caves on the beaches of Crete. These are the victims of future shock.



# Chapter 17

## Chapter 17 Summary and Analysis

Groups within culture have to change even if there is a limit to the amount of change they can accept within a given amount of change. Going above the adaptive range results in problems of distortion and disorientation. Not all people adapt to a new culture as did the group found on Manus who were living in the stone age. The coming future will push people to the upper limits of the adaptive range. This does not mean that the future should be greeted with despair or a halt to change. People must be prepared to deal with the changes when they come and need to develop mechanisms for dealing with change. New technologies and organizations may be required to increase adaptability.

The process of preparing for the future begins with the individual examining his own reactions to stimulation. People need a stability zone in their lives. This is a pattern of habits that stays the same no matter where he goes or what changes he faces. This is a way of managing change and people must find the level that results in optimum performance for them. However, this will become harder to do as time goes on because most of the problem lies outside the individual. People need to change their way of thinking in order to develop future shock absorbers. Situational groups might be one form of shock absorber. The person would attend long enough to deal with the transition. Halfway houses are another way of dealing with the future shock of change.

Another way of dealing with change will be to have enclaves of the past where the old ways are maintained. These will allow people to briefly escape over-stimulation. There should also be enclaves of the future so people can experience the effects of future changes on a temporary basis. This will help them prepare for future problems. At the same time continuity must be maintained.

All of these are ways of making change easier to cope with and will be needed to deal with the accelerative thrust.

# Chapter 18

## Chapter 18 Summary and Analysis

Education is also a crucial factor for the future. Education is supposed to prepare children for the future. A super industrial education system will be required for a super industrial society. Giving children the skills of the past will not be sufficient in preparing them for the future. The purpose of the education system has always been to produce the kind of person that society needed. Industrialism emphasized a need to understand the present and the focus of education shifted to reflect this need.

The goal of education is to create an individual with the ability to adapt to continual change and the ability to understand the pattern of future change. Understanding the past and present will not be that important as learning to predict the direction of change. In order to create this kind of education system, people must have a vision of the future and the kind of jobs it will require, the kinds of relationships that will exist and the kinds of moral and ethical problems it will present. There are already certain organizations that are concerned with these issues.

There must be three goals: the transformation of the organizational structure to revolutionize the curriculum and to develop an orientation focused on the future. The basic orientation of the school to the factory must be changed. Many highly educated parents are better equipped to teach their children than is the school system. Technology will enhance this capability. There should also be a greater emphasis on community activities and education must be a life long process. The new education system must contain more elements of the Ad-Hocracy since the industry based system will not be able to deal with the rates of change of the future. It does not train students in versatility. The curriculum must be changed to eliminate obsolescence. A series of temporary curricula that can adapt to change are needed that stress for the proper balance between standardization and variety. Children should be allowed to select from a large variety of short term courses in preparation for the future.





# Chapter 19

## Chapter 19 Summary and Analysis

It is possible to prevent future shock but it won't be easy. The way to prevent future shock is to exert control over the accelerative thrust. Technological advances are a part of the accelerative thrust and is a part of it that can be controlled. This doesn't mean to try to stop it. The fast pace of technology has resulted in environmental pollution. It also results in overchoice. The roles for decision making are no longer adequate and choices must be made at a faster rate.

Technological innovations should be investigated and examined and many questions should be asked. This is the only way to control the accelerative thrust. The physical effects must be examined and the potential damage to the ecological environment. The effects must be anticipated and if they are expected to be dangerous, society must be prepared to block the new technology. Questions should also be raised about the effect of the new technology on values in addition to the effects on acceleration.

If these kinds of questions aren't asked and answered, there will be no way to control acceleration and prevent future shock. The technology must not be allowed to ruin the culture and some political involvement may be necessary to prevent this. Controlling technology is not the same thing as limiting or controlling research. Since the viability of new technology in the West is based on profit, there is really nothing in the system to control it. Toffler suggests the formation of a new public agency to review the new technology and its affects. There should be a mechanism in place that will review the effects of a new technology before it affects the public. Private corporations could be required to test the new technology and make the results public before being able to spread the technology.

It may be possible to alter or block some innovations if the social consequences are serious enough. This will require the use of a social cost benefit analysis. The only way to prevent future shock is to control the accelerative thrust.



# Chapter 20

## Chapter 20 Summary and Analysis

Will it be possible to live in a society suffering from the accelerative thrust and future shock. Many social policies have erratic undesirable effects. Economic planning takes place in most societies but the goal here is economic change not the control of acceleration. The fact that society is out of control is evidenced by the rise of crime, mysticism and cults and other pre-scientific ideas and interest on nostalgia. Planning has fallen out of favor since many people feel it restricts the future by imposing values on the future. Yet, non-planning is just as bad.

Super-industrial gives rise to changes in the financial system. Mutual funds are given as an example of new investment vehicles. In spite of all the statistics and indices, there is no measure of the live-ability of a country and this basically perpetuates the technocracy. Some kind of social index are needed to measure the danger of future shock and especially when it comes to changing relationships and the degree of choice. These kind of indicators will be necessary for a move into the future and this need must be reflected in the political system. Planning at the different levels of government that uses social indicators would help eliminate future problems.

The problem with Technocrats is that they are extremely myopic and don't think out all of the long-term effects of projects. There are organizations and think tanks that look for into the future. Toffler names and discusses the work of some of the organizations. They develop models and games and perform simulations of various scenarios. They develop programs for forecasting. The idea is to study different future scenarios and to help develop the skills to deal with it. This kind of information must be organized. The Utopian organization of the past used to deal with these kind of issues. These kinds of actions will lead to the development of alternative lifestyles. Models help people examine these different alternatives and the values that exist in each.

There are many things that society can do to prepare for the future and to facilitate the adaptation to the accelerative thrust. Instead of following the changes as man has done in the past, society must anticipate the changes and prepare for them. This is the point that Toffler is making in the book.



# Characters

## Harvey Cox

Harvey Cox is a theologian who writes about the new urban man and how his relationships are characterized by fragmentation and modularization. Each relationship is defined in terms of limited contact. The relationship with the shoe salesman is based on the contact involved in the sale of shoes not on the total personality or lives of each. There is no total involvement or involvement that reaches further than the purchase of a pair of shoes. This is the kind of relationship that characterizes urban society. Cox feels that any attempts of urbanites to become further involved would lead to emotional emptiness and self-destruction. The urbanite has many superficial and impersonal relationships with only a few that involved deeper involvement.

## Warren Bennis

Warren Bennis is a social psychologist and professor of industrial management who studied the changes that occur in organizations and bureaucracy. He predicted the end of bureaucracy since bureaucracy needs a stable environment in order to survive and the stability that it requires is vanishing. The result will be temporary changing structures within the organization. A new group will come into being to handle communications between the different temporary groups. The relationships will be very short-term due to the temporary nature of the group. This is a characteristic of the Ad-Hocracy and all of this transience creates social and psychological tensions in people.

## Dr. Thomas H. Holmes

Dr. Thomas H. Holmes is a researcher, first at Cornell and then at the University of Washington School of Medicine. He and Richard Rahe developed a method to quantify the amount of change that occurs in peoples lives. They developed an index that assigned weights to different life changes with weighted scores attached to each change. By applying this index to actual changes that occur in a person's life, they could quantify the amount of change and to correlate it with the medical histories of the subjects. They found that the greater the changes in the individual's life, the more severe the health problems.

## Robert Gutman

Robert Gutman is an academic at Rutgers University who has studied the phenomena of relocation and how people become a part of a new community. Most communities, he says, have a person who takes on the role of an informal integrator. She greets the newcomers and introduces them to others and to community events. This individual is



usually an outsider and the newcomer soon breaks off with her. Then the integrator moves on to other newcomers.

## **Lawrence Suhm**

Lawrence Suhm is a sociologist at the University of Wisconsin. He talks of man's need to adapt and calls the rapidity of change today as traumatic as the evolutionary process involving the transition from sea creatures to land creatures. Individuals who can survive will, those who can't adapt will exist at a lower level of development or will not survive.

## **John Lofland**

John Lofland is a sociologist at the University of Michigan who coined the term youth ghetto. These are areas populated mainly by college students. There is a great deal of mobility in these areas and price and rent gouging along with poor housing. These age groups ghettos may eventually affect voting patterns in cities as they become more prevalent.

## **Arne Tiselius**

Arne Tiselius teaches at Uppsala University in Sweden. He has won the Nobel Prize in biochemistry and is president of the Nobel Foundation. He believes that biology is the future of industry. There are many processes in nature, like the functioning of green plants, that man is just beginning to understand and can't imitate.

## **Richard Rahe**

Richard Rahe is a psychiatrist and associate of Dr. Thomas R. Holmes. Together they performed the study that allowed them to develop the Life Change Units Scale and to study the correlation between change and health problems. Rahe went on to serve as a Captain in the Navy and use the survey to predict illness among sailors.

## **D.R. Daniel**

D.R. Daniel works as a consultant for McKinsey and Company. This is a management consulting firm that performs organizational studies for corporations both in and out of the United States. He comments on how reorganizations and restructurings are a part of corporations.



## **Dr. F. N. Speiss**

Dr. F.N. Speiss is the head of the Marine Physical Laboratory at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography. He believes that man will begin exploring and occupying the sea.

## **Margaret Mead**

Margaret Mead is a noted and famous anthropologist. She has researched human cultures response to change.

## **Twiggy**

Twiggy was a modeling sensation in the 1970s.



# Objects/Places

## United States

The United States is in North America and is one of the countries with a fast pace of life. Citizens of the United States are considered to have the most hectic pace of life in the world.

## Canada

Canada, a country in North America, is also known for its fast pace of life although the pace is not considered to be as fast as that of the United States.

## Germany

Germany is a European nation whose people are known for their punctuality. Germany is also a member of the super-industrial economy.

## France

France is a European country that is mentioned on and off in the book as a member of super-industrialism. They have a fast-paced life style but not as fast as the United States.

## England

England is a European country that is mentioned on and off in the book as a member of super-industrialism.

## Japan

Japan is an Asian country that is a member of super-industrialism. The pace of life in Japan is a little slower than that in the United States.

## Sweden

Sweden is a European country that also exhibits the characteristics of super-industrialism.



## **Mexico**

Mexico is a North American country with a slower pace of life than that of the United States.

## **Iran**

Iran is a Middle Eastern country with a slower pace of life that does not emphasize punctuality. This brought them into conflict with the Germans at times when the Germans had projects in Iran.

## **The Netherlands**

The Netherlands is a European nation that exhibits a great deal of cultural diversity. The pace of life is a little slower than that in the United States.

## **Matala, Crete**

Matala is a beach area on the island of Crete where many people escaped the rat-race and complexities of life by living in caves.

## **Manus**

Manus is an island near New Guinea where a group of people were found who were still living in a stone age culture.



# Themes

## Change

The most prevalent theme of the book is the role of change in society and the fact that change will occur at a much faster rate in the future. Technology will result in such a rapid rate of change, that people will be overwhelmed and unable to cope. Toffler defines an acceptable level of change which is defined as the adaptable range. If the level of change is below this level, the result is boredom and the individual looking for more excitement and challenge. Man needs a certain level of change in order to perform efficiently. This is what is defined as the acceptable range.

Future Shock occurs when the level of change is above the adaptive range. The result is stress and the inability to function rationally due to distortions in thinking and decision making. The result then is physical and mental illnesses as people require some sort of escape from the rat race. People turn to cults, mysticism, nostalgia and other forms of escapism since they can't cope with the rapid changes. They become dropouts from society in various ways because of their inability to adapt to and deal with the rapid changes.

These changes will not only be technological, although technology is a big part of it. Change results in a shorter duration of relationships and result in changes in values and lifestyles. If the accelerative thrust of change is not managed, the result will be over choice and over-stimulation, which will tax the coping mechanism of people. There will be so many decisions and choices, that the result will be future shock.

## Adaptability

Another underlying theme of the book is man's adaptability and his capacity to cope with change. Man has a limited ability to do this. Rapid rates of change, as given by the accelerative thrust, push humans beyond the limit of the adaptive range. They have problems coping and adapting and this is manifest by physical and psychological problems resulting in distorted and irrational thinking and decision making. Toffler uses the example of soldiers who penetrate behind enemy lines and serve in combat situations. They withdraw and engage in behavior that is not in their own best interests. Many people avoided the over-stimulation of the rat race by withdrawing to live in caves in the island of Crete or becoming hippies.

The need for the ability to adjust is not just a requirement of the future. Change has resulted in a shorter duration in the various relationships. People change jobs and residences more regularly than they did in the past. They must be able to adjust to the new circumstances and the shorter term relationships. Organizations are also undergoing these changes with a greater emphasis on task forces and short term groups and a movement away from permanence. The focus and loyalties of the workers





change as a result of this. The loyalty is now to the profession and not to the organization.

The rates of change must be kept within the acceptable range in order for humans to perform efficiently. Because of man's physical limitations to cope there is only so much that the individual can do before he becomes overwhelmed by the accelerative thrust.

## Preparation for the Future

Avoidance of future shock and preparation for the future are underlying themes of the book. The tactics and mechanisms of the past will not work in the future. A new education system with a new focus is required to prepare people for the future. It must prepare them to anticipate the future and different scenarios and to devise alternative lifestyles and values to go with the future. The current educational system is based on industrialism, not super industrialism. Its emphasis is on the past and the present and not the future. It does not produce forward thinking people who can envision what might be and how to live with it.

Society must also develop ways to control the accelerative thrust as a way of preventing future shock and Toffler discusses various ways of doing this. The human can learn his own reactions and limitations, but there is only so much that he can do to control his own reactions. There are steps that society can take to control the accelerative thrust. Technological advances can't be stopped but they can be studied and regulated. The effects of values and the environment can also be evaluated. They may require the technology to be limited to a test area to study the effects, and if they are undesirable, legal steps can be taken to prevent the technology from spreading through society.

Organizations that study the different scenarios that can exist in the future, use computer models, games and simulations that allow people to try different lifestyles and adapting mechanisms. Toffler's point is that if steps aren't taken to prepare for the future, the result will be the kind of future shock that he is discussing. Prevention will require a change in orientation and thinking.



# Style

## Perspective

The book is written from the third person point of view. The views are those of the author, Alvin Toffler, who does a very good job supporting his points of view. His views are supported by a great deal of research. There are a myriad of research studies presented in the book. In many cases there is only one or two paragraphs dedicated to each, but it is enough to present the gist of the research and to support Toffler's point. Toffler's book is well researched with a broad reference base.

The author has worked at a variety of occupations including Visiting Professor at Cornell University, a Visiting Scholar at the Russell Sage Foundation and a Washington correspondent. He has also held various jobs in heavy industry and brings his many experiences to his writing. His writing has won numerous awards in the United States and other countries.

Toffler's book is intended for anyone with a concern for the future. He builds a good case of the lack of preparation on the part of society and describes what future shock will mean for a society. It can be prevented but prevention depends on the ability to control the accelerative thrust and this, Toffler feels, is within man's grasp. Even though Toffler cites plenty of research studies to support his point of view, the views presented are still his. It is his view of what will happen in the future and his view of what steps should be taken to prepare for the future.

## Tone

The tone of the book is objective and factual. There is a great deal of research presented that Toffler uses to support his opinions. Many of these studies are briefly mentioned and cited with only a few described in more detail but they are all offered in support of whatever point it is that Toffler is making. The views regarding the seriousness of the situation and what steps need to be taken for the future are Toffler's opinions.

Toffler presents his views in an academic style fashion with plenty of research to support his positions. He does not overtly try to scare the reader into being concerned about the future but his style of writing does make the reader stop and think. Toffler makes it clear that humans will not be able to deal with the rapidity of changes unless society takes some steps to help individuals cope. Man has a limited capacity to deal with change and the rapidity of the changes in the future will push humans beyond the limits of the adaptive range.

Even though the book was first published in 1970, it does generate some concern in the reader. The book explains many of the counter cultures that existed during that time and what it was that people were reacting to. He makes many points that are well taken and



well supported. The tone of the book and the style of writing result in the reader taking a serious approach to the subject matter. A less serious and less intense tone might not have the same effect on the reader.

## Structure

The structure of the book is to divide the content into six parts with a total of twenty chapters. The book is well structured and well written. Each part has a topic that is covered in the chapter that are in that part. There are chapter titles and sub headings within each chapter.

The book contains an Introduction which explains Toffler's reasons for writing the book and the concepts that he hopes to impart to the reader. There is also a detailed Table of Contents showing all of the chapter subheadings. There is a very detailed section of Notes and Bibliography showing all of the citations and references used in the book. This makes it easy for the interested reader to look up information. The Notes section contains more information on the various cited studies than is given in the body of the text. There is also a detailed Index that also makes it easy for the reader to look up various information.

The structure works well for this kind of book. The divisions give the overall topic of discussion with the chapters further dividing the topic into different areas. The book is well researched and written in a matter of fact style. It is easy to read and written in a style that makes the reader think about the subject matter. This is the best structure for presenting this kind of material. It is a structure that is easy for the reader to work with. The reader who wants more information about a particular study or citation has the information available at their fingertips. Any other structure would result in a book that would be more difficult to work with.

## Quotes

In the three short decades between now and the twenty-first century, millions of ordinary, psychologically normal people will face an abrupt collision with the future. Citizens of the world's richest and most technologically advanced nations, many of them will find it increasingly painful to keep up with the incessant demand for change that characterizes our time. For them, the future will have arrived too soon. (Chapter 1, pg. 9)

It is these durational expectancies, different in each society but learned early and deeply ingrained, that are shaken up when the pace of life is altered. (Chapter 3, pg. 43)

Never in history has distance meant less. Never have man's relationships with place been more numerous, fragile and temporary. Throughout the advanced technological societies, and particularly among those I have characterized as "the people of the future," commuting, traveling, and regularly relocating one's family have become second nature. Figuratively, we "use-up" places and dispose of them in much the same way as we witness a historic decline in the significance of place to human life. We are breeding in a new race of nomads, and few suspect quite how massive, widespread and significant their migrations are. (Chapter 5, pg. 75)

What this means is that we form limited involvement relationships with most of the people around us. Consciously or not, we define our relationships with most people in functional terms. So long as we do not become involved with the shoe salesman's problems at home, or his more general hopes, dreams and frustrations, he is, for us, fully interchangeable with any other salesman of equal competence. In effect, we have applied the modular principle to human relationships. We have created the disposable person: Modular Man. (Chapter 6, pg. 97)

One of the most persistent myths about the future envisions man as a helpless cog in some vast organizational machine. In this nightmarish projection, each man is frozen into a narrow, unchanging niche in a rabbit-warren bureaucracy. The walls of this niche squeeze the individuality out of him, smash his personality, and compel him, in effect, to conform or die. Since organizations appear to be growing larger and more powerful all the time, the future, according to this view, threatens to turn us all into that most contemptible of creatures, spineless and faceless, the organization man. (Chapter 7, pg. 124)

We are creating a new society. Not a changed society. Not an extended, larger-than life version of our present society. But a new society. (Chapter 9, pg. 185)

One reason for their lack of imagination is that when they think about technological advance, they concentrate solely on the means of economic activity. Yet the super-industrial revolution challenges the ends as well. It threatens to alter not merely the "how" of production but the "why." It will, in short, transform the very purposes of economic activity. (Chapter 10, pgs. 219-220)



The Super-Industrial Revolution will consign to the archives of ignorance most of what we now believe about democracy and the future of human choice. (Chapter 12, pg. 263)

Most previous societies have operated with a broad central core of commonly shared values. This core is now contracting, and there is a little reason to anticipate the formation of a new broad consensus within the decades ahead. The pressures are outward toward diversity, not inward toward unity. (Chapter 14, pg. 304)

It is the thesis of this book that there are discoverable limits to the amount of change that the human organism can absorb, and that by endlessly accelerating change without first determining these limits, we may submit masses of men to demands they simply cannot tolerate. We run the high risk of throwing them into that peculiar state that I have called future shock. (Chapter 15, pg. 326)

Social rationality presupposes individual rationality, and this, in turn, depends not only on certain biological equipment, but on continuity, order and regularity in the environment. It is premised on some correlation between the pace and complexity of change and man's decisional capacities. By blindly stepping up the rate of change, the level of novelty and the extent of choice, we are thoughtlessly tampering with these environmental preconditions of rationality. We are condemning countless millions to future shock. (Chapter 16, pgs. 366-367)

More important, the transience level has risen so high, the pace is now so forced, that a historically unprecedented situation has been thrust upon us. We are not asked, as the Manus were, to adapt to a new culture, but to a blinding succession of new temporary cultures. This is why we may be approaching the upper limits of the adaptive range. No previous generation has ever faced this test. (Chapter 17, pg. 372)

To help avert future shock, we must create a super-industrial education system. And to do this, we must search for our objectives and methods in the future, rather than the past. (chapter 18, pg. 399)

Future shock, the disease of change - can be prevented. But it will take drastic social, even political action. No matter how individuals try to pace their lives, no matter how we alter education, the society as a whole will still be caught on a runaway treadmill until we capture control of the accelerative thrust itself. (Chapter 19, pg. 428)

These pages will have served their purpose if, in some measure, they help create the consciousness needed for man to undertake the control of change, the guidance of his evolution. For, by making imaginative use of change to channel change, we cannot only spare ourselves the trauma of future shock, we can reach out and humanize distant tomorrows. (Chapter 20, pg. 287)



# Topics for Discussion

Explain the difference between future shock and cultural shock.

What are the five relationships of social experience? How are they affected by acceleration of the pace of life?

Explain what is meant by the Ad-Hocracy and what changes in relationships it requires.

What are some of the moral issues involved in scientific advancement?

How does an individual select a lifestyle? What effect does the rate of change have on lifestyles and values?

Discuss the effects of over-stimulation and under-stimulation on an individual. What are programmed decisions and how do they help the individual deal with trivia?

Is it possible to prevent future shock? What methods does Toffler recommend?