

Dubai needs to adopt a 'humanistic' view of technology, says futurist



World renowned futurist Dr Gerd Leonhard says that while Dubai's embrace of technology is impressive, the city needs to adopt a humanistic worldview in its pursuit of progress so it can create a viable and sustainable future.

Among Europe's most influential thinkers, Leonhard is the CEO of the Futures Agency, a collective of global academics that speak at global summits and advise governments and businesses on the ramifications of a rapidly evolving digital world.

On the sidelines of the Emirates Airlines Festival of Literature, he was speaking with Arabian Business about the underlining thought behind his book 'Technology vs Humanity' and how he is lobbying governments to

consider technology as a tool to chase more than a bottom line.

“This world will soon be run by those that understand data and technology for the purpose of collective human benefit. Civil rights will be connected to cyber rights and digital rights, and you can’t have the latter when you don’t have the other. So there is a significant pressure on this entire region to reinvent itself to become a more inclusive economy,” he said.

According to Leonhard, the current line of thinking about the future risks “becoming technology while embracing it... we risk tapping into only the industrial benefits of what is simply a tool to achieve a goal and become just a commodity,” he said.

Dubai has “enormous potential, according to Leonhard, but would be wise to consider “What do we with all this cool stuff we are inventing? What does it solve?” he said. “That is when it would be able to become a global player.”

In recent years, Leonhard has made headlines for saying that within the decade, hard currency will vanish and nearly 60 percent of human jobs will vanish.

He has also been a pioneering voice in calling for governments to establish “Digital Ethics Councils” when deliberating the future of their jurisdictions.

The idea has seen visible interest from global leaders including German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who mentioned it at the World Economic Forum in Davos this year.

“A Digital Ethics Council is basically a collection of wise people who look beyond the money toward what is best for humanity. Because if you only look at the bottom line then you will always do things that are not necessarily going to be good for everyone,” he said.

“The geopolitics of the world are changing dramatically in no small part due to technology. Let’s be brutally honest. We’re on the verge of solving the global energy problem with renewable energy. It’s a certainty that we’ll

see the end of oil in 20 years. In the meantime we're also seeing tremendous advancements in genetics and artificial intelligence. These will all be significant scientific advancements, but they have to be governed," he said.

Leonhard has spoken at a number of events in Dubai including the World Government Summit and he has been lobbying ministers and companies to create their own their ethics councils.

"Right now they're very interested but are still looking for an economic positioning. The immediate thought is that for instance, 'Everyone is competing in AI so we want to be there as well.' This is not enough. This is region is not going to be like Silicon Valley or Singapore. It has to plant its own flag. And that will mean being more proactive," said Leonhard.

"Currently, there is always a short-term idea of promoting the location. But imagine if Dubai did incorporate an ethics council. That would be a truly big message because it would be looking at things a bit further. Ethics does not involve just being digital but human rights, the environment etc. This is a much bigger story," he said.

"This word will be run by companies that understand data and technology but for the purpose of collective human benefit. Civil rights will be connected to cyber-rights and digital rights, and you can't have the latter when you don't have the other. So there is a significant pressure on this entire region to reinvent itself to become a more inclusive economy."

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