

The world is flat – the
globalization world in
the twenty first
century



'The World Is Flat- the Globalization World in the Twenty First Century' is a well written book by Thomas L. Friedman based on his personal experience, case studies, and etc.

He explores the political and technological changes that have made the world a smaller place. From the explosion of the internet to the dot com bubble bust and outsourcing of jobs to India and China, globalization has evened the playing field for many emerging economies.

Prominent in Friedman's thesis are the effect of relocating outsourcing jobs from the West to the East, the rising knowledge globally and wealth in developing countries. This leads to the theme of the entire book which teaches us to stay curious and innovative, if we were to excel in a global economy. Furthermore, Friedman also discusses the setback for a negative 'flat' world, through terrorism in particular, there would be mutual disadvantage for all.

Main Theme From Friedman's journey around the eastern world, he realized globalization has changed in core economic concepts. He named this present era as Globalization 3.0, separating it from the previous Globalization 1.0 and 2.0, which countries and governments were the main characters and the multinational companies in 2.0. What created the flat world? He explains his theory with ten major forces that caused the flattening of the world, and three points of convergence.

First, being the Collapse of the Berlin Wall in 11/9/89, the "fall" of communism, and the start of Windows powered Personal Computers which had the ability for individuals to create their own content and connect to one

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another. As Friedman puts it, “ When the walls came down, and the windows came up.” Secondly, the beginning of Netscape in 8/9/95: which broadened the audience for the Internet, as previously primary users were “ early adopters and geeks” which turned into something was “ accessible to everyone from five-year-olds to ninety-five-year olds.” He then explains the importance of the third flattener, the Workflow software, which altered the standards and technologies of work to flow; quoted “ the ability of machines to talk to other machines with no humans involved.”

He believes these first three forces were the “ crude foundation of a whole new global platform for collaboration” as the next six flatteners sprung from this. Following came Uploading, what Friedman considers “ the most disruptive force of all” as Communities uploaded and collaborate on online projects, which was truly a world changing technological venture. Which encouraged the fifth ‘ flatter’, Outsourcing; this allowed companies to split service and manufacturing activities into areas which performs most cost-effective way.

Following that, came Offshoring; relocating selected internal part of a company to foreign land to take advantage of lower cost there. This led to structure called Supply-chaining: here Friedman compares the modern retail supply chain to a river, and uses Wal-Mart as an example of a company using this technology to modernize item sales, distribution, and shipping.

Friedman uses amusing stories about UPS, Dell and JetBlue, among others, to relate to his next flatter, Insourcing; using UPS as a prime example, where a company may perform services beyond their usual for another company in

quite mind blowing. Without a doubt, this following event had to be a part of this trend, In-forming: the ability to Google or use any other search engines and find any information. As he writes it, “ Never before in the history of the planet have so many people – on their own – had the ability to find so much information about so many things and about so many other people.”

And lastly, what he calls “ The Steroids”: Wireless, Voice over Internet, and file sharing, all Digital, Virtual, Mobile and Personal. Explaining how almost all content nowadays can be digitized and therefore shaped, manipulated and transmitted; which is done at high speed, at any place, and certainly can be done by anyone.

Friedman then goes on to the “ the triple convergence,” or the way the ten flatteners converged to formed an even flatter global playing field. The first convergence include how the ten flatteners came together in a way that allowed many of the them to work together, to form multiple types of collaborations. The second convergence is the set of business practices and skills that make the most of the flatteners, thus enhancing every potential. The third convergence is the entrance of three billion plus people (India, China, Russia- mainly) onto the playing field which added new brain power and enhanced ‘ horizontal’ collaboration across the globe.

Analysis Friedman goes on to his second part of the book, “ America and the Flat World,” he states that America isn’t and shouldn’t be afraid of this flattening. Free trade is still in their best interest, as long as there are demands, people are required to produce them. He points out that China and

India are only racing Americans to the top, thus only promoting higher standards for everyone.

From the book, we learn as services and goods become more tradable, more jobs are likely to become outsourced/digitized/automated. He predicts that untouchable jobs in the new flat world will be firstly, the people who are “special or specialized” as in, Celebrities, Doctors ; Judges etc. Secondly, the people who are “localized and anchored” as in waitresses, plumbers, nurse; and lastly, “the old middle jobs” being the people in the middle class who are under pressure because their jobs are becoming tradable.

Friedman spends a good chunk of the book outlining ways that will allow a person to be successful in the flat world. Firstly, the “ability to learn and how to learn”; secondly “CQ + PQ ; IQ” or rather curiosity and passion combined are more important than intelligence and finally, to “Play Well with Others.”

He also focuses on the negative side of globalization and the ties countries have with one another. The technology allows a country to excel also enables terrorist organizations, such as al-Qaeda or suicide bombers in Iraq. He takes the 9/11 as his example and reminds readers that “Osama bin Laden did not use nuclear weapons on 9/11 because he did not have the capability, not because he did not have the desire”.

According to Friedman, countries such as Japan, South Korea, China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia could work well together, despite the political or cultural differences, they are economically invested in a supply chain. On the other hand, nations such as Iraq, Syria, North Korea, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran are not part of any major global

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supply chains and, therefore, will not suffer similar economic setback due to war.

As we have seen over the last three years, pride, honor and rage play a large part in global politics. He titles his last chapter “ Imagination”, to his conclusion Friedman emphasizes on the array of imagination, which were seen in the difference between the 11/9 – the Fall of the Berlin Wall to 9/11- proving how negative (evil) imagination can cause this world to be less ‘ flat’ or slow down the flattening process.

“ Imagination is more important than knowledge.” He uses this quote by Albert Einstein at the beginning of his chapter on the importance of affecting the right kind of imagination in the flat world.

Conclusion After having read the book, I have realized there are several reasons why he managed to sell over 2 million copies and be on New York Times Bestseller. However, having a broad exposure to countries in Asia, and being born in India does give me doubts about how fast and how far the world would truthfully be ‘ flattened’ into.

The book is perceived to be written from an American perspective. The author’s work history has been mostly with The New York Times which may have influenced the way in the book was written – some would have preferred a book written in a more “ inclusive voice” addressing more aspects of the developing nations, which are yet to be cover.

Nevertheless, he covers a broad range of industries, cultures and schools of thought, with the real-life examples as evidence which are somewhat

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undeniable, but looking at the actual situations in some parts of the world, i. e India, it is questionable how fast this phenomena is going to take place in reality. The book has gotten many positive and negative feedbacks but one of them- Aronica and Ramdoo's, have pointed out that there isn't a single table or data footnote in the entire book – which would have made the book more reliable.

No doubt the 'barriers to entry' are being destroyed; today an individual or company anywhere can collaborate or compete globally but a country like India, the inequality is still far too wide for it to reach at its peak any time soon. There are over a billion people residing there, which of many had to be left out in this development fold of globalization. India, unfortunately, is still a poor third-world country, but from the book you would assume it is on the verge of becoming a global megastar.

Similarly, many new reports have pointed out how workers in China (and many other countries) work in appalling conditions, which churns out the low cost products, with poor pay and no benefits.

Over all, we see the changes he described will have a net effect to the world economy. Though his book covers a wide range in the future of globalization, I feel he has failed to take many aspects in consideration to make this book an internationally acclaimed best seller.

References

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