



What comes after the knowledge era?

We live in the information age, which according to Wikipedia is a period in human history characterised by the shift from industrial production to one based on information and computerisation. But what comes next? Just as the industrial age gradually gave way to the information age in the post-war period, we can safely assume that something else lies beyond the information age. Of course, firms will always need to harness information in effective ways, just as most of them still need industrial techniques to make their products cheaply and efficiently. But at some point information will become necessary but not sufficient for firms to be successful.

So here is a way of addressing this challenge: ask yourself, what would a world with too much information look like? And what problems would it create? Here are a couple of initial responses to get the conversation going. One problem created by too much information is “analysis paralysis” – we become so obsessed about collecting more information that we fail to act on it. Another is that easy access to data makes us intellectually lazy, with the result that we allow rapid processing power to substitute for thinking. In both cases, an excess of information puts a premium on our capacity to make smart and timely judgments. Maybe judgment and action are the scarce resources of the post-information age?

Julian Birkinshaw
Professor of Strategy and Entrepreneurship