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LEADING IN THE COTECH ERA

Why the Rules Have Changed

Yuly Grosman

Patricia Chin-Sweeney

What if the greatest risk to your company isn't a financial crisis, a cyberattack, or even a global pandemic—but the silent erosion of human resilience in the face of relentless technological change?

Introduction:

The COVID-19 pandemic didn't just disrupt supply chains and work models; it accelerated a deeper transformation. We now live in the CoTech era, where the collision of rapid technological advancement and post-pandemic societal shifts has redefined how people work, connect, and cope. This isn't just a cultural shift—it's a business risk.

Rising mental health challenges, shrinking attention spans, growing workplace aggression, and an overreliance on digital systems aren't isolated HR issues. They're board-level threats that impact decision-making, security, productivity, and long-term growth. The risks are more complex, the threats more invisible, and traditional playbooks no longer apply.

This report will help you identify these emerging threats and, more importantly, ask the right questions to safeguard your organization's future from the:

- Mental health and productivity impacts
- Business continuity risk of non-human leadership
- Tech-enabled borderless physical threats to CEOs, employees and beyond
- Micro-aggressions that escalate into mass corporate risk

Is your company prepared for risks that don't fit neatly into past categories—where technology isn't just a tool but a trigger, and where the greatest vulnerabilities may lie within what matters most – your people?

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The Co-Tech Pandemic & Its Emergent Challenges

CoTech describes the dual impact of COVID-19, snowballed together with those of evolving and further integrated technology into the day-to-day. Together, they've shifted the web of communication, mental health, and societal behavior…our cultural DNA. It has also blurred the line between facts, humanity, machine and trusted sources.

Today, children as young as seven are now required to have smartphones in schools, in some countries such as Israel. In the US, kids typically receive their first smartphone between 10 and 11 years old with this age dropping. Forty-two percent of children 8 or younger in the U.S. have their own tablet devices, according to Common Sense Media. While this ensures connectivity, it also creates dependency, disrupted focus, eroding critical thinking that requires focus, and lesser human interaction. This report focuses on a need to refocus on a human-centered approach to combat key emergent business challenges.

Challenges in a Tech-Driven World:

▶ Growing anxiety, uncertainty and aggression

▶ Growing distraction and inability to perform

▶ Fading resilience and connectivity

▶ Values influenced by broader external forces vs. family, culture and local community, as before

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A 2023 study by Cigna Group, and cited by SHRM, found that "Gen Z are the loneliest, least resilient demographic alive today." Beyond the evidence that excess tech usage affects mental health, the same study found that "no other generation feels less connected, less autonomy over their future, more unfocused when it comes to life, and reports worse quality of life and greater hinderance due to their mental health" than any other, with 55% of Gen Z employees experiencing stress related to finances and economic concerns, as their top issue.

Mental health issues have major setback threat for companies:

Higher Absenteeism

Less confidence at work

Lower work performance

Higher turnover

Less satisfaction at work

Approximately half of Gen Z respondents reported that their poor mental health keeps them from taking care of responsibilities and concentrating on completing important tasks. In contrast, people with "higher vitality are more present in their jobs, more productive, and have a higher confidence and ability to carry [out] their duties."

With the push of corporations and the Trump Administration return to work-in-office protocols, after nearly 5 years of hybrid or remote work, rising work-related violence incidents is a fear, cited by **SHRM** and others. Every year, 2 million people have reported being victimized by workplace violence, with an additional estimated one-fourth of incidents never reported; a 2019 SHRM survey reported one-fourth of American workers said their workplace had been the scene of at least one workplace violence incident. Now, workers will struggle with physical, mental and emotional stress stemming from CoTech, PLUS the rapid shift in work-personal norms as they return to the office.

They must reassess home care, childcare, office environment, time allocations, monthly budgets, personal partnership/relationship dynamics and more. In contrast, only one-fifth of American workers felt their employers had added mental health services since the start of the pandemic. This disconnect felt by employees, whether accurate or not, is a harbinger of growing frustration and declining well-being that poses risk of work-related microaggressions that can scale up into full-on workplace violence.

In the CoTech age, individuals have increasingly forgone human interpersonal relationships, confusing the deep connections from friendships, community engagement, and time spent together solving problems. This shift from real human connections to virtual and parasocial relationships—one-sided bonds with public figures where emotional investment isn't reciprocated is not inherently harmful, yet overreliance on these connections can exacerbate isolation and make individuals vulnerable to manipulative influences, such as extremist groups. Social media algorithms amplify this risk by prioritizing repetitive, persuasive content over balanced, fact-based information.

Wharton, the **Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC)**, and the International Centre for Counterterrorism (**ICCT**) have provide research findings that show heighted aggression during the last Trump Administration, citing his aggressive, divisive language—and its echo among followers—led to both psychological and physical harm to his targets. **UCLA** also found that increased use of "violent vocabulary" can motivate aggressive individuals to support greater violence. Scholars also noted a rise in hate crimes after rallies and tweets, suggesting that such rhetoric fuels fear and bolsters support in the form of physical actions. A Wharton **study** further observed that post-2016, men adopted more aggressive negotiation tactics against women, linking this to aggressive language spoken by a powerful public figure. While much of this research focuses on political contexts, the resultant atmosphere of fear and anxiety is noteworthy today.

Key Questions for Board Members

▶ Is your company instituting a phased-in return to work policy to ease the shock, and with human nature in mind?

▶ Are HR, managers and the C-suite trained to anticipate and identify red flags of a pending threat? Are they trained to de-escalate volatile situations before they get worse?

▶ Are adequate mental health and other resources being provided to those needed, and who's mental health could affect your organization?

▶ How can we create an environment that fosters mental health and resilience among our workforce?

▶ Are our policies and benefits aligned with the needs of younger employees?

▶ What measures can we implement to reduce workplace distractions and enhance performance that are not just traditional 'top down' restrictions?

For example, Gen Z is now the most racially and ethnically **diverse**, well-educated, and digitally native generation, with one in four U.S. Gen Zers being Hispanic and 22% being children of immigrants. With the retraction of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policies/initiatives, and anti-immigrant sentiment by the Trump Administration, further uncertainty around employment, minority assistance, and immigration status for loved ones, and physical safety can affect well-being and mental health.

ANI: A Call for Human-Centered Leadership in the CoTech Era

ANI isn't just a concept—it's a call to realign on humanity and its healthy interaction with technological advancements. As AI evolves, ANI emphasizes evolving or re-instated empathy, communication, and connection, offering a chance to address the imbalances amplified by the CoTech pandemic- and that we've only begun to see the impacts of, as younger generations merge with tech deeply integrated into their lives.

For leaders, ANI drives corporate resilience. A 2022 **Gartner** HR survey of 230+ HR leaders found a 37% increase in employee engagement under "human leaders," with engaged teams performing 27% better. Human leaders are defined as Authentic (purpose-driven, fostering self-expression), Empathetic (genuine care for well-being), and Adaptive (flexible, meeting unique team needs). Yet, only 29% of 3,400 surveyed employees felt their leader embodied these traits.

Gartner's report notes,

*"Organizations that develop more human leaders
will see lower turnover,
higher engagement, and better well-being."*

Key ANI Strategies:

- **Clarify Human-Tech Roles:** Define when to rely on tech vs. human judgment.

- **Human Skills Training:** Focus on conflict resolution, collaboration, emotional intelligence, and communication.

- **Critical Thinking in the AI Age:** Teach awareness of multitasking's impact, misinformation (e.g., deep fakes), and the distinction between parasocial and real interactions.

- **Policy & Well-being:** Go beyond blocking tech—educate on mental health, life quality, and balanced tech use.

- **Modern Team Building:** Explore activities like book clubs (41% growth from 2022–2023 per *The Guardian*), promoting conversation and critical thinking.

Even simple shifts make a difference. In a recent seminar, I showed how body language tweaks can enhance connection. By applying ANI principles, people navigate high-stress situations with empathy and resilience. Ultimately, organizations can foster uniquely human skills, reducing risk and unlocking exponential results alongside technology.
This evolution enables:

- Resilient, emotionally intelligent adaptation
- Constructive responses to conflict
- Heightened situational awareness
- Deeper connections in a digital world

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Key Questions for Board Members:

How can your organization integrate ANI principles into our organizational culture?

Are training programs equipping employees with the skills needed for resilience and adaptability?

What steps can be taken at the board, C-suite to manager levels to foster meaningful human connections within the organization, and to build Human Leaders, and human teams?

How should hiring norms adapt in the AI-driven workplace. Should one department remain fully disconnected from AI to provide unbiased human analysis of AI- generated reports?

Where will AI or chatbot customer care improve results, vs. where will it erode trust, quality control and human sales and customer loyalty potential?

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Situational Intelligence: Evolving Threats in a Tech-Enabled World

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Physical risks are rapidly evolving, fueled by technology and a generation grappling with anxiety, isolation, and disconnection. This environment increases the likelihood of "Lone Wolf" threats—individuals acting independently, driven by personal grievances or extremist ideologies. The targeted killing of United Healthcare CEO Brian Thompson by Luigi Mangione highlights how disconnected individuals, lacking healthy communication or conflict resolution skills, can become dangerous.

Isolated individuals are now more dangerous due to easy access to technology. 3D printers enable untraceable weapons, while drones allow for remote surveillance, targeting, and aiding attacks or escapes. This tech extends an attacker's reach, blurring the lines between safe and unsafe environments.

Technology has dissolved boundaries between work and home, public and private spaces, while open data sources expose personal information, and remote surveillance tools like drones make anyone a potential target, anywhere.

Many companies and organizations continue to rely on outdated strategies because they were acceptable norms from the past, or touted by trusted public sources; yet they should be reviewed with evolving scenarios in mind:

- **Run-Hide-Fight**, taught by the FBI and other leading law enforcement agencies as effective response in the face of an active shooter attack, does not account for modern distractions, reduced attention spans, or tech-driven threats.
- **Traditional security teams** may often lack insights or KPIs that ensure they are attuned to and prepared to address evolving risks.
- **Insurance products** focus on historical risks (e.g., parking lot shootings) yet may exclude emerging threats like drone-led attacks because they're statistically rare—for now.

Organizations must adopt proactive, human-centric approaches:

- **ANI Awareness:** Reconnect individuals through empathy, communication, and resilience to reduce radicalization risks.
- **Tech Safeguards:** Address vulnerabilities from drones, open data, and surveillance.
- **Comprehensive Training:** Focus on situational intelligence and adaptive strategies reflecting today's threats- even if they seem 'too extreme' to happen

What worked before is no longer enough. Security today requires both physical defenses and a cultural shift toward awareness, prevention, and resilience.

Tech-enabled or not, a workplace shooting can cost a business millions of dollars. For instance, the 2018 Las Vegas mass shooting resulted in an estimated **$600 million** in economic impact. The Trump Administration's **shutdown** of the Federal School Safety Clearinghouse External Advisory Board may create new vulnerabilities that could further expose children to new risk, not just their CEO parents.

Key Questions for Board Members:

How is executive and employee physical security protocol evolving with new risks of lone wolf and technology-assisted risks? Is hiring a former detective or police officer enough to ensure the organization is anticipating and de-escalating threats, or only ready to respond once they occur?

How can companies proactively safeguard their teams from a threat that is no longer bound by physical proximity, relying instead on the anonymity and distance afforded by advanced technology?

What is the Key Person risk the company is exposed to? And who related to key persons are also at heighted risk?

Conclusion: Navigating the CoTech Era—
A Call to Action for Board Members

The convergence of technological acceleration and post-pandemic societal shifts—the CoTech era—has redefined the landscape of risk, resilience, and leadership. As stewards of corporate governance, board members play a pivotal role in ensuring that organizations not only adapt but thrive amid these complex challenges. The questions are no longer just about operational efficiency or financial performance; They must now address the core of human and technological integration:

- **Are we fostering a culture** that balances technological advancement with authentic human connection?
- **Do our leaders possess the situational intelligence** to identify emerging threats—both digital and physical—before they escalate?
- **Are we investing in the mental well-being of our workforce** as a strategic imperative, not just an HR function?
- **How prepared are we for risks** that defy traditional boundaries—whether from lone actors, cyber-physical threats, or the unintended consequences of AI integration?
- **What are we doing to cultivate 'human leaders'** who can navigate complexity with authenticity, empathy, and adaptability?

In this era, resilience is not just about robust systems but resilient people. The organizations that will lead tomorrow are those that invest today in adaptive leadership, proactive security, and a renewed focus on human-centered values. Board members can challenge outdated assumptions, and champion strategies- and committees- that future-proof both the people and businesses.

About the Authors

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Yuly Grosman

www.yulygrosman.com

Email: yuly@thefrontierra.com

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Yuly Grosman is a corporate speaker, serial entrepreneur, global logistics executive, who is well known for helping executives and first responders think beyond business and focus on protecting what truly matters- which is their people.

With his signature talk "Reframe Response, Skills Needed For Our Future" Yuly sheds light around workplace micro aggression and empowers executives with frameworks needed to improve workplace culture ecosystems.

Formerly with the IDF (Israel Defense Forces), Yuly has an extended experience in security, healthcare and business sectors. Yuly has lived and worked in Israel, Eastern Europe, Africa and the United States. He is BSc Security Risk Management, 3rd Dan Black Belt Shadow-Jitsu, 3rd Dan Black Belt Shadow Krav Maga and body guard instructor.

His expertise includes Corporate Security Audits, Risk Assessment, Logistics & Security Planning, and Contact Combat Training. He also specializes in blending knowledge and business best practices with tactical, physical readiness and response through his training of law enforcement and frontline workers.

Yuly shares his expertise as a keynote speaker at seminars around the globe, sharing insights on security, business continuity, and effective communication. As an international business entrepreneur, Yuly has forged successful partnerships with multinational corporations to startups and local small businesses alike.

About the Authors

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Patricia Chin-Sweeney

Email: patricia@thefrontierra.com

Patricia is a business strategist and executive coach with over 18 years of experience advising corporations, startups, and non-profits through high-stakes transitions, including risk management, capital raises, and innovation initiatives. As Co-founder of I-DEV International, a global strategy and investment advisory firm, she supported clients such as Google, Green Mountain Coffee, Eileen Fisher, Grupo Bimbo, the World Bank, and USAID, navigating complex, high-risk environments across 45 countries.

Patricia has advised over 17 investors on corporate operations and investment risk, and has served in interim leadership roles at the request of boards to prepare organizations for growth or other big transitions. She began her career in investment banking and M&A at EFCG, supporting global engineering and infrastructure firms to get ahead. She holds an MBA from NYU Stern (Global Business, Social Innovation & Impact) and a BA from Barnard College.

Patricia serves on the Investment Committee of Beyond Capital Ventures, an emerging markets tech innovation fund. She has been a 2x Entrepreneur-in-Residence at Singularity University, the Silicon Valley think tank focused on exponential technology trends; and she frequently speaks on business growth, scaling innovation, and social innovation.