

January 2024

As part of the *Café Insights* series of interviews with insightful speakers, The Insight Bureau recently caught up with Dr. Mark van Rijmenam, to hear his views about emerging technologies and how they will change organisations, and society in general.

[\[Link to audio recording\]](#)



ANDREW VINE:

Well, hello, and welcome to another in the series of *Café Insights*. I'm Andrew Vine, the founder and CEO of the Insight Bureau. And today, it's my pleasure to be in conversation with Dr. Mark van Rijmenam. How are you?

MARK VAN RIJMENAM:

I'm very good. Thanks for having me.

AV: And here we are in Paddington. I used to live here 35 years ago.

MVR: It's a long time ago. Yes, Paddington is beautiful. Sydney, Australia, yes, is a great place to live. It's called the lucky country... for good reason ...

AV: Well, it's great to catch up with you. I mean, you are a strategic futurist speaker around all of the fast-changing, evolving technologies that are impacting our world. So, somebody we really need to be talking to right now. Tell us a little bit about what you do and your background, about what keeps you busy.

MVR: Sure. So yes, as you said, I'm a strategic futurist, also known as The Digital Speaker, which sort of means that I think about the emerging technologies and how they change organisations and society. So, I consider myself an optimistic dystopian, which is a bit of an oxymoron, but it's, for me, important to sort of take two opposing viewpoints in my head to be able to understand how this technology is going to affect society, both the good, the bad, as well as the ugly. Because I think it's important to look at all the different aspects.

AV: Great. Well, we'll talk about that. I'm really interested to hear it. You've written a number of books; I remember the *Step into the Metaverse*. We worked together on some speeches around that as well. *The Organisation of Tomorrow*, *Blockchain*, and others. But your latest book was interesting; *Future Visions*. Tell us a bit about that.

MVR: Yes. So *Future Visions* came out in December 2022, so exactly a year ago, and literally two weeks after ChatGPT was launched. And that was because I had written it entirely with ChatGPT. It took me about five days to write it. It took me a few more days to get it published, and the entire book was done by AI. So it's not that I said, "Okay, ChatGPT, write me a book." No, I had this full conversation with ChatGPT, basically asked it, "I'm going to write a book about technology and how technology will change society. Which technology should I cover?" And then I asked it, "Which question should I ask?" And then we use those questions to have a full conversation with ChatGPT about the future of technologies for the next 50 years. It's amazing. But for me, that was a pivotal moment, because I quickly noticed that the world had changed when ChatGPT was launched because this was such a powerful technology, the fact that I couldn't write a book in five days, which was quite readable, I would say. Not as good as my other books, obviously, I have to say, but still quite readable. And this was ChatGPT 3, so not even ChatGPT 4. For me, that was absolutely mind-blowing. And it also sort of shows what I like to do is I always like to walk-the-talk, to practice what I preach. And doing these kind of things really helped me

understand what the impact is of technologies and how they affect organisations, which then I can pass on to companies to help them.

AV: Yes. And I was going to say that as well. You do take quite an innovative approach to things. I was quite impressed when I saw the recent TED talk you did. That was a lot of fun because you started off as a digital twin avatar saying that you couldn't be there at the conference and then showed up on stage. It was remarkable.

MVR: Well, yes. That was a really, cool thing. I would say like a groundbreaking approach for a Ted talk, and that's where I am. I live at the cutting edge. But I think the funny thing about--well, the interesting thing about the TED Talk was that the story I wanted to tell is that we live in a post-truth world. And what does that mean? And what a better way to show that we are living in a post-truth world is by recreating myself digitally with all off-the-shelf technology, which didn't cost me a fortune. It cost me a couple of hundred dollars altogether to build that with the help of others. But the fact that I can do that with a couple of hundred dollars, which I thought was quite a remarkable result. Now, compared to a bad actor with near-infinite budgets, you sort of start to see what is possible. And that was the message that I tried to show. If I can do this, then anyone can do this, and we see this happening. 2024 is going to be the year of deepfakes. We'll have deepfakes influence the US election and probably many other elections around the world. And this is really problematic. We need to think about how this works, and that's the message I tried to share in my TED Talk. So yes, I'm glad you liked it.

AV: Yes, I did. And I've always thought, even before AI had come along, that we were in this environment where technology seems all very fast and exciting and opening up wonderful opportunities. And a lot of people talk about technology as this is going to be something wonderful thing that's going to happen to all of us. Now, all of a sudden, there have been a lot of voices being raised with concerns, legitimate concerns about how this is going to impact us. And I think that's what makes you quite different. You're not this tech evangelist. You can see the potential of this to assist humans, do a lot of the heavy lifting and to do some very, very clever stuff, but it comes at a price, maybe.

MVR: Yes. Well, I think that's really important to see both sides of the coin because we live in such a transformative era. We were going through digital renaissance, but not a renaissance that will take 100 years, but a renaissance will take 3 to 5 years. And I think it's crucial for any organisation to be aware not only what the upsides are of these technologies but also the downsides are of these technologies. Because if you don't know both, how can you prepare your organisation and your employees and your customers for the future? And I think that's really, really important. And so my perspective has always been to look at the optimistic side, to look at the dystopian side, and to see what do we need to do as a society and as an organisation to end up in a thriving digital future instead of a dystopia.

AV: Yes. Well, we were talking a little bit earlier about that there are various different events that take place, and there is a time where you want to make people feel good about the future. More responsible ways to say, "Look, don't go in with your eyes closed. You've got to go with your eyes open."

MVR: Well, I think I gave two talks for one of the world's biggest hedge funds in the world. After my talk where I did share both optimistic and the dystopic side, so many people came to me and said, "Well, you really opened our eyes. We never knew." And I think that is so important. We need to know what is going on. Because if you don't know what's going on, how can you prepare as an organisation, as a society, as an individual, to these very disruptive changes? And I think that is really, really crucial.

- AV:** Yes, it is exciting in terms of the possibilities. Ordinary people, including ourselves, sometimes we question, is what we're doing today going to become redundant? It's a natural question to ask, but just the sheer pace that things are moving-- you were talking about when you wrote that book using GPT 3. That was a year ago. That's a lifetime in terms of AI, isn't it?
- MVR:** My goodness, 2023 has been so disruptive. So many things have happened in the past 12 months. It's absolutely insane. New technologies have been announced on a daily basis. And 2023 was like the most crazy year I have experienced ever. From an organisational technology leadership perspective, everything has changed. And we have crossed into the second half of the chessboard. And it took a long time to reach this. But from now on, things change will be exponential, and that is very difficult for people to understand.
- AV:** I used to work at The Economist as you know, and we ran innovation conferences. And one of the things I always remember was how innovation upon innovation just starts to explode possibilities. And we were talking earlier about, well, which AI did you use to be able to create yourself as a speaker in different languages? And it's actually combining a cluster of these things together.
- MVR:** We can use these technologies now that are all off-the-shelf. So what you're referring to is I've created myself as a digital twin. You can talk to me via text, audio or video in 28 different languages. And the technologies that I use are all off the shelf. All I did was connect the dots, but I'm not a machine learning specialist -- I have no idea how to technically create this! -- and still, I was able to do that, and that is the era that we live in now.

Dr Mark van Rijmenam, the Digital Speaker, is the founder of Datafloq and Futurewise, and is considered to be a global thought leader on AI, big data, blockchain and other emerging technologies, and is a strategist, influencer and author of three best-selling management books. His keynotes are inspirational and provide the audience with a deep understanding of the accelerated change that we are currently experiencing and focus on the future of work and on how to build the organisation of tomorrow, using emerging technologies.

To learn more about Dr Mark van Rijmenam's experience and insights, please visit:

<http://insightbureau.com/MarkVanRijmenam.html>

To listen to other conversations in the series of *Café Insights* please visit:

http://www.insightbureau.com/cafe_insights.html

To hire Mark van Rijmenam for a briefing or a conference, please email:

andrewvine@insightbureau.com