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insights

What Matters Next

A Leader's Guide to Making
Human-Friendly Tech Decisions
in a World That's Moving Too Fast
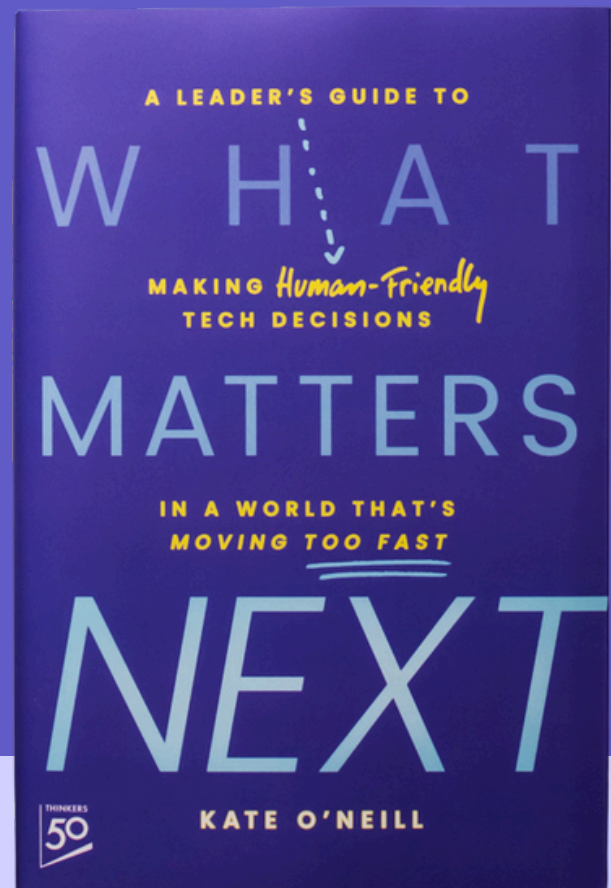
by Kate O'Neill

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About the book

In a world accelerating at breakneck speed, leaders face an unprecedented challenge: making decisions that address immediate needs while preparing for an uncertain future. *What Matters Next* provides a framework for navigating this balance, helping leaders make tech decisions that are both future-ready and human-friendly.

Kate O'Neill, known as "the Tech Humanist," offers a roadmap for making tech decisions that serve both business objectives and human well-being. The book introduces powerful concepts like the now-next continuum, through-line thinking, and ethical acceleration that help leaders confidently pursue innovation while avoiding both the harms of reckless action and the costs of harmful inaction.

Building on O'Neill's previous works, including "Tech Humanist" and *A Future So Bright*, this book completes a trilogy of thought leadership on the intersection of technology, business, and humanity. "What Matters Next" doesn't just identify problems—it provides a comprehensive framework for addressing the most critical challenges of our time.
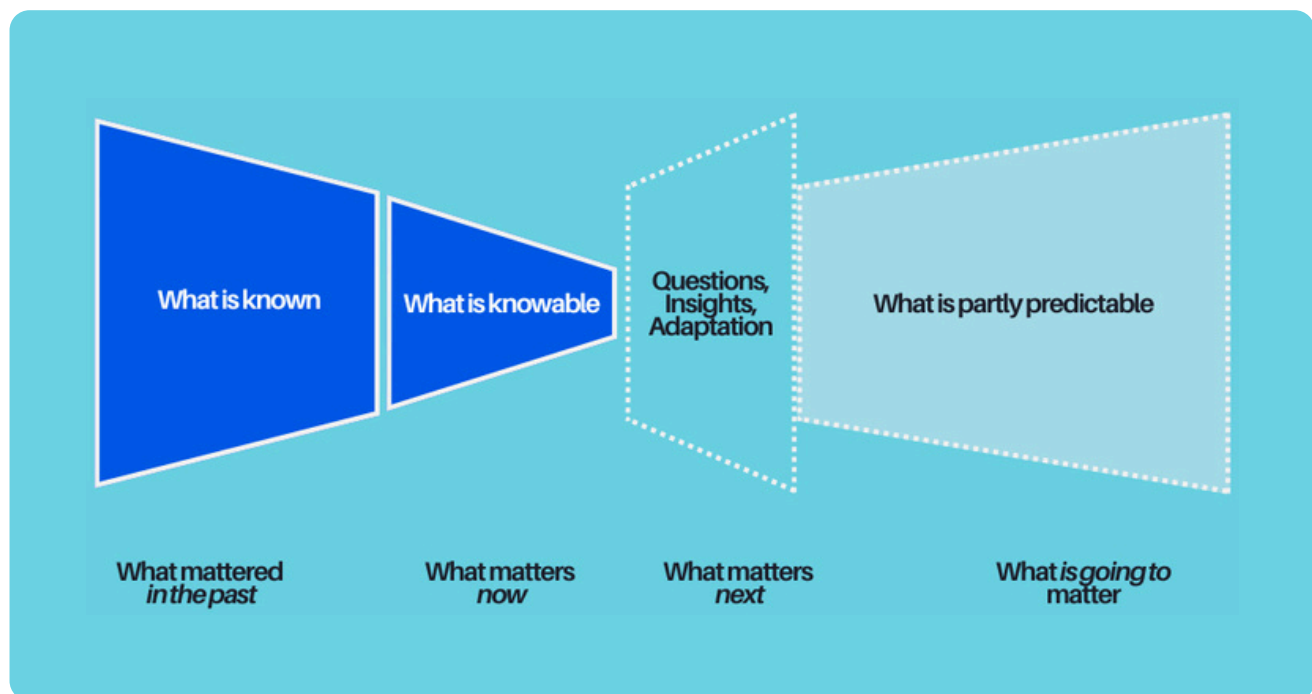
Key discussion topics

1. The Now-Next Continuum

Core Concept   A mental model that helps leaders visualize decisions as part of a continuum rather than binary choices between present and future

Discussion Points

- How past, present, and future are connected through our decisions and actions
- Why both shortsightedness and extreme longtermism are flawed approaches
- The art of taking meaningful steps toward the future without abandoning present responsibilities
- How the model applies to practical business decisions around AI implementation and digital transformation

What is known | What is knowable | Questions, Insights, Adaptation | What is partly predictable

What mattered *in the past* | What matters *now* | What matters *next* | What *is going to* matter

Key discussion topics

2. Harms of Action vs. Harms of Inaction

Core Concept   A framework for weighing potential harms that might come from acting too quickly versus waiting too long

Discussion Points
- Examples of companies that moved too quickly with technology (causing harms of action)
- Examples of companies that moved too slowly (causing harms of inaction)
- How to find the balanced approach of "ethical acceleration"
- The institutional and psychological biases that lead to either extreme

3. The Insights-Foresights Model

Core Concept   A decision-making approach that transforms good questions into insights and foresights

Discussion Points
- Why asking better questions is more valuable than seeking quick answers
- How to derive timeless insights from partial answers
- Developing "bankable foresights" that guide future actions
- Using this model to build organizational knowledge that transcends individual decision points

Key discussion topics

4. Through-Line Thinking

Core Concept   Understanding how decisions connect across time and
                          their ripple effects through complex systems

Discussion Points   - The ecosystem effects of tech decisions
                          - The ethical implications of AI and data systems
                          - Approaches to seeing beyond immediate applications
                            to long-term impacts
                          - Case studies demonstrating both successful and failed
                            examples of through-line thinking

5. Ethical Acceleration

Core Concept   Moving at the speed of technology without abandoning
                          human values

Discussion Points   - The false dichotomy between innovation and ethics
                          - Creating technology that preserves meaning and
                            human connection
                          - Designing experiences that scale across millions but
                            preserve individual humanity
                          - How leaders can institutionalize ethical considerations
                            without compromising agility

Key discussion topics

6. Tech Humanist Leadership

Core Concept   Leading at the intersection of business objectives, human outcomes, and technological capabilities

Discussion Points
- Finding the overlap between business goals and human needs, then using technology to amplify that intersection
- Creating purpose-driven strategies that align organizational values with meaningful human experiences
- Building trust in hybrid and remote work environments without resorting to surveillance
- Fostering the skills of curiosity, creativity, and collaboration that cannot be automated
- Balancing optimization and integration in creating future-ready organizations

Quotable insights

"What matters next isn't disregarding the present for the future or being stuck in the now without a vision for tomorrow. It's understanding that the present and the future are a continuum."

"The future is simply the time ahead of us, and it is at least somewhat knowable and predictable because it is at least somewhat shaped and influenced by the actions and decisions we've already taken and those we are about to take today."

"Technology, by nature, has an incredibly amplifying effect. It has an uncanny ability to take any input and scale it exponentially."

"Technology is a means to an end, not an end in itself."

"Meaning is what language does. All human beings are equipped with the hardware for meaning making."

"We cannot leave meaning up to machines to determine."

"The longer we delay acting on something that we know is causing harm, the more we invoke the harms of inaction"

Quotable insights

"Our strategic purpose should influence our starting point on critical decisions."

"Insights don't operate in isolation. They often come accompanied by foresights, those glimpses into the future that enable us to weather uncertainty with greater confidence."

"The harms of action are not so easy to discern from the harms of inaction. Both come with risks."

"Not all innovation is meaningful. In our too-fast world, the best innovation is both meaningful and human-friendly."

"Move fast, but don't break humanity."

"The best, most meaningful step forward into the future—which you determine to shape through your actions and decisions—is an exercise in integrating both 'what matters now' and 'what is likely to matter' into what matters next."

Testimonials

*"Kate O'Neill has the unique ability to take the speed out of a world that is moving fast, sometimes too fast, and allow our brains to absorb things in digestible bites. Decision-making is difficult with so many variables affecting the outcomes. What Matters Next is a **must read** for that reason."*

— Faisal Hoque, #1 Wall Street Journal best-selling author of *REINVENT* and founder of Shadoka

*"In the ongoing and often exhausting debates about AI and the future, **Kate O'Neill is a voice you can trust**. What Matters Next is not just a masterful playbook for better decision-making. It's a catalyst for how to show up, lead, and champion humanity—today, tomorrow, and in the years to come."*

— April Rinne, Global Futurist and Author of *Flux: 8 Superpowers for Thriving in Constant Change*

*"In What Matters Next, Kate O'Neill doesn't just provide answers—she provokes the right questions. It's a guide for leaders who understand that in the race to innovate, we must preserve our purpose and the integrity of our decisions. A **timely and necessary reflection on leadership ethics** in a tech-driven world."*

— Dan Pontefract, Leadership strategist and author of *Work-Life Bloom*

*"Kate is focused on helping leaders navigate the "Now-Next Continuum," making **decisions that are not only tech-ready but also human-ready**. This kind of forward-thinking, grounded in empathy and strategic foresight, is exactly what we need more of in today's fast-paced world."*

— Dr. Diane Hamilton, Author of *Curiosity Unleashed*

Testimonials

*"If you've ever thought that tech, especially AI, would swallow up humanity, Kate O'Neill just wrote the treatise on how leaders can avoid exactly that. What Matters Next will help you identify what's most important to you, to those you lead, and in the future you want to create. This is the book that will **lead you to sharper decisions and, better yet, meaningful outcomes**."*

— Carla Johnson, Innovation Architect, RE:Think Labs

*"Kate O'Neill has given us **practical solutions to the fast-paced decision making challenges** that leaders face when wanting to move quickly while still making ethical decisions. With the tools in What Matters Next, uncertainty doesn't have to cause anxiety."*

— Caleb Gardner, Founding Partner at 18 Coffees, and former Digital Director for BarackObama.com

*"This book is nothing short of transformative—it's a beacon for those seeking to lead with purpose, empathy, and foresight in an increasingly unpredictable world. What Matters Next is a roadmap for creating meaningful change and lasting impact. For any leader committed to making a difference, this is **your essential guide to navigating the complexities of tomorrow, today**."*

— Jeanette Bronée, Culture Strategist and Author of *The Self-Care Mindset*

*"In an era of disruption and polarization blessed are the bridge builders. Kate O'Neill is one of the best in the business. She bridges the divide between technology and humanity, between the past and the future, with clarity and ease. Above all else, she offers **practical wisdom on how to encode human-centric values into technologies**."*

— Stuart Crainer & Des Dearlove, founders Thinkers50

Relevant Links

Book listing at KO Insights
https://www.koinsights.com/books/what-matters-next-book/

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https://www.amazon.com/What-Matters-Next-Human-Friendly-Decisions/dp/1394296428/

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Kate O'Neill

info@koinsights.com

in X 📷 **kateoneill**

koinsights.com