

IN THE NEWS: Sydney Morning Herald

US report foretells of brave new world

By Nathan Cochrane
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A draft government report says we will alter human evolution within 20 years by combining what we know of nanotechnology, biotechnology, IT and cognitive sciences. The 405-page report sponsored by the US National Science Foundation and Commerce Department, *Converging Technologies for Improving Human Performance*, calls for a broad-based research program to improve human performance leading to telepathy, machine-to-human communication, amplified personal sensory devices and enhanced intellectual capacity.

People may download their consciousnesses into computers or other bodies even on the other side of the solar system, or participate in a giant "hive mind", a network of intelligences connected through ultra-fast communications networks. "With knowledge no longer encapsulated in individuals, the distinction between individuals and the entirety of humanity would blur," the report says. "Think Vulcan mind-meld. We would perhaps become more of a hive mind - an enormous, single, intelligent entity." Armies may one day be fielded by machines that think for themselves while devices will respond to soldiers' commands before their thoughts are fully formed, it says. The report says the abilities are within our grasp but will require an intense public-relations effort to "prepare key organisations and societal activities for the changes made possible by converging technologies", and to counter concern over "ethical, legal and moral" issues. Education should be overhauled down to the primary-school level to bridge curriculum gaps between disparate subject areas.

Professional societies should be open to practitioners from other fields, it says. "The success of this convergent-technologies priority area is crucial to the future of humanity," the report says.

wtec.org/ConvergingTechnologies/Report/NBIC-pre-publication.pdf