

ISSUE #2, 25 APRIL 2023

FUTURES OF WORK

HORIZON SCANNING DOCUMENT



10 SIGNALS FOR THE FUTURE OF WORK

Driven by society and technology

SCENARIOS FOR POSSIBLE, PREFERABLE FUTURES

Back to nature – a dream scenario
or just too far out?

Good
Morning
April

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Together we shape
the futures of work

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1. We need to talk

There's a thing we need to talk about.

This thing: **S**

The **S** in 'Futures Thinking'. The plural **S**.

It is both attracting and repelling.

It is both intriguing and infuriating.

It is both a call-to-action and a decision-fatigue-catalyst.

The plural S is there to underline that there are multiple futures to discuss, design, and decide. Possible futures. Plausible futures. And preferable futures.

It also means that the specific and concrete future that we are going to experience is not destined yet and that we can affect it. The keyword here is **can**. We can affect it. This is what both excites us and scares us. Yes, we can shape our future. But are we ready to take that responsibility, do we understand the consequences of that kind of freedom, and do we have the resources to make the changes?

There are circumstances that we cannot change nor affect. To name some, there are societal, geological, geographical, political, financial, physical, mental, habitual, cultural, and national contexts that we cannot change. We all need to understand and acknowledge that. And we must investigate our own biases and privileges while we enter this realm of imagination and play with fantasy.

But the **S**!

On one hand, the **S** is a release of energy. The idea of exploring and evaluating possible futures is immensely flirtatious.

- What if ...?
- How might we ...?
- Who might be interested in ...?
- How is this going to unfold ...?

Look at the massive amount of science fiction that is being produced and consumed. As a species, we're curious. And, we have the skill of imagination. The thinkers and scientists in this area call this 'anticipatory thinking'. We can imagine things before they happen AND create an emotional response to that mental image. We can describe and anticipate our next dinner. Our next vacation. Our next job. Our next place to live. Or maybe even our next 10 or 20 years. It is fascinating to play around with and to prepare yourself and your family for. Out of all these possible futures, some are very nice, attractive, and even preferable. We like those options. But some of these possibilities are unpleasant and unpreferable. Just think about the possible futures of climate change, to jump to one megatrend that is both immensely urgent to address and dystopic to imagine.

On the other hand, the **S** is a yoke. With insight comes responsibility and the option to act. By using the mechanisms and tools of Futures Thinking, a range of possible, plausible, and preferable futures emerge. And logically, also insight into which futures we are unpreferable. This can be overwhelming. The **S** stresses that we must actively make some choices. We must explore and evaluate. We must say yes and no. We must overcome decision-fatigue, and act. Futures Thinking gives us a framework to have qualified discussions of the likelihood of events, and the likability of effects.

It helps us distinguish between the options and makes it easier for us to vocalize our investment of time, money, and attention into either supporting a future or suppressing a future.

We are both optimists and possibilists. Naïve at times, too, we admit that.

But we do believe that Future Thinking is an eye-opening approach to discussing, designing, and deciding our next steps, both regarding work, life, and our planet.

We are strong believers in a collaborative approach to exploring and evaluating possible futures.

Let's do this, together.



2. What is this document – and how can you use it?

This document is our gift to you.

Every year we release our overview of the signals we keep an eye out for regarding the Future of Work. By all means, we are also interested in the Future of play, of food, of health care and more, but this document focuses on the Future of Work and how the signals might affect leadership, culture, organizational design, the embracement of technology, and us, the people in the organizations.

We call this our Horizon Scanning Document as we strive to gaze into the horizon to see what's happening there; what signals to keep an eye on. In the document, you will find (1) ten concrete signals that we keep an eye out for, (2) a workshop process for working with them in your own team, and (3) scenarios of how we might see the signals unfold.

We also look back on the signals from last year to reflect on how the organizations have worked with them and what we have learned from that.

We aim to make this very approachable and an easy read, and to make the material very hands-on and useful.

Our purpose and goal is to enable us all to have a joint conversation about the present and how we can shape the future together. The world is changing and evolving, as it has been doing for billions of years, however faster than before. We believe we should be part of shaping the world we want to be part of. **Futures Thinking is one of the approaches to have a qualified discussion on how we explore and evaluate the possible and preferable futures.**

That is why we do it.

3. What is Futures Thinking?

Futures Thinking emerged half a century ago as a structured and strategically applied method to both proactive strategy planning, risk management, and crisis preparation. Amongst others, the US Army embraced this as a response to an increasingly rapidly changing world, partly affected by technology and partly by the geopolitical scene. They needed to have a way to discuss and simulate scenarios, considering both existing developments and hints of future changes.

Not to beat a dead horse, but in a situation with VUCA-like circumstances, planning for change is vital.

Over the next decades, several initiatives across the academic, public, and private sectors were launched, to discover a robust approach to thinking about futures. Drawing upon psychology, anthropology, and social sciences, an understanding of how we imagine and describe future scenarios led to several different, well-functioning, and replicable methodologies.

Lately, UNESCO has stated that Futures Literacy – the capability to manage and juggle anticipation and futures thinking – is “*an essential competency in the 21st century*” and that it even should be taught in schools. “*Futures Literacy [is] a universally accessible skill that builds on the innate human capacity to imagine the future,*” UNESCO writes on its website.

Now, Futures Thinking and foresight is gradually being embraced as a strategic tool in both public and private sectors, to help organizations and governments navigate the fast, frequent, and increasingly disruptive developments in society and technology.

To put it simply, **thinking about the future makes it easier to make decisions in the present.** Imagining what might be prepares us to proactively shape what we want. This is called ‘using the future’.

Futures Thinking has two major components:

1. **The methodology** of discussing and describing, exploring and evaluating the possible futures, in order to identify those futures that are preferable in our context.
2. An overview of the **things that affects us** in the present (trends) and things that might affect us in the future (signals and anomalies). This document focuses on the latter: The signals.



3.1. What is Futures Thinking to us?

Futures Thinking is two things to us:
An observatory and a laboratory.

In an observatory, you grab your telescope to look at the things that are very distant. You observe, take notes, and try to understand. Maybe you spot something odd that makes you go ‘huh’. Maybe you see a pattern, or something new that either provides answers or provoke questions. In the same way, Futures Thinking is an observatory where you observe behavior and developments that are new to us. We look into the horizon to see those things that are approaching us. We take notes, wonder, and try to understand. **In the observatory, we explore.**

In a laboratory, you perform experiments to learn all kinds of things, for example, about context, causality, and correlation. You formulate a hypothesis, you analyze, and you synthesize your learnings. This is where you conduct controlled experiments to understand the primary effects, the unwanted side



effects, the challenges in upscaling the experiment, and what risks there might be. In the same way, Futures Thinking is a laboratory where you can experiment with the effects of the trends and signals. Structured approaches to imagination and real-life experimentation can help you understand the possible futures and support you in spotting the preferred futures. **In the laboratory, we evaluate.**

We know very well that this analogy is simplified and does not honor the complexity and value creation in those professional areas, but as a vehicle for understanding – and for communication with your peers and stakeholders – it is a nice way to set the scene for Futures Thinking in your organization.

3.2. A methodology of exploring and evaluating futures

This document does not describe the methodologies in detail or exhaustively. Several other resources are better at that, for example, the body of work by Riel Miller, by Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies, by Jane McGonical, or by Institute For The Future. These methodologies have slightly different approaches to the analytical or the practical applications, and some are even tailored specifically for business strategy application.

To describe one such methodology briefly, we can turn to the Futures Literacy Labs by UNESCO: **Reveal, reframe, rethink.**

Here we paraphrase the approach, turning it into a series of questions:

- **Reveal our assumptions:** How entrenched are we in our assumptions? What are our personal reflections and assumptions of the past, the present, and the future? What is our temporal anchoring?
- **Reframe our world:** What's hitting us? How hard? How sure are we? What are our possible futures? What is our preferred future? What do they look like to us?
- **Rethink our actions:** How do we navigate the uncertainty? What does our approach look like? What's my story now?

But this document is not about that. There are better sources to be found out there.

3.3. What are signals and anomalies?

Turning to the second major component in Futures Thinking, this is what this document is about: An overview of the signals for the futures of work; those signals that you work with in the 'Reframe' part of the methodology.

Megatrends are existing, massive, and unstoppable shifts in society and technology, that affects a significant part of the world. Trends are less significant, but still have an impact on us, albeit maybe temporal and limited to more isolated parts of our domain. Normally, both trends and megatrends are easy to identify and have an opinion about, as they typically are frequently discussed in the media and in significant trustworthy outlets like Harvard Business Review, McKinsey, and London Business School. These trends are hard to avoid, and they affect us as we speak.

Signals are something different. Signals are tiny but real and concrete anomalies, that stand out and makes us go 'hmm, that was odd'. Signals have the possibility to snowball into a trend – or they might merely be a bleep and disappear.

Some of these signals are so-called 'strong signals', with several, maybe hundreds of cases. This kind of signal is almost on the verge to becoming a trend.

Other signals are weak and faint, and the cases are few-and-far-apart, but still serves a role as sparking our imagination ... because they might become important to us? Or we like them so much that we want to nurture them?

Signals appear 'in the horizon', and 'horizon scanning' is the act of spotting those anomalies; those signals that are approaching us.

3.4. Three ways to getting familiar with signals

“Futures thinking is just voodoo and hocus pocus”

“I could do that too. It’s just like fortune telling in coffee or in tea leave”

“So, tell me (giggles), can you predict the future?”

Maybe you have had similar reactions yourself, or have heard them? Admittedly, years ago we were skeptical too. However, diving into the science and the practical application of futures thinking has broadened our minds and altered our stance.

Futures thinking has nothing to do with fortune telling or supernatural forces. It is very much rooted in the present, in embracing and understanding our approach to assumptions and anticipation, in flexing our imagination, and in a facilitated conversation about preferences for the possible futures.

Let’s look at three concrete ways to use some of the many mechanisms and tools from futures thinking in your daily work.

Maybe you’ll get inspired?



1: Creating your own “huh, that’s odd”-database at work

We bet you already do this with your friends, with your team members, or over dinner with your family: You share odd things that you have found online.

“See, I found this pair of glasses that Google has made. It listens to our conversation, translate it in real time, and shows the result on the inside of the lenses. In that way I can have subtitles on the conversation with Mårten when he speaks Swedish”. Your reaction might be “Hehe, that’s crazy” or “oh, that’s utterly useless” or “wow, that’s surveillance!”

Whatever your reaction, you have just found a signal: **A concrete example of something that might grow and snowball into a trend.** This is what we futurists do when we scan the news, scroll through our feeds, and look at societal behavior: We look for anomalies, for things that make us go “huh, that’s odd.”



Here's what you can do: Make it a habit that each of you in your team bring a signal to your next monthly team meeting. Share them with each other and collect your emotional responses. Over time you end up having a signal database within your professional domain, being the future of food, the future of TV, or whatever is your industry.

Also, in this way you build a habit of scanning for signals everywhere, all the time. It has absolutely become a habit of mine. Some of us use 5-8 hours per week to scan for signals, consciously or subconsciously.

2: Playing “if this, then that, and that, and that”

Another game that futurists play is to let a signal unfold, and unfold, and unfold.

You have maybe tried the “yes, and”-improv mechanism when brainstorming a solution or as an icebreaker at a business event.

This is the same thing: To build upon the existing idea with yet an idea. Just, this time the seed for the conversation is the signal.

Let's take the Google Glasses again.

“If that becomes reality, then people that are in multicultural suburbs can understand each other. People that speak Danish can understand the Arabs, who can understand the Germans, who can understand the Swedes. This may lead to more relationships being build, to friendships, and to a more peaceful world. Maybe we get subtitles to what our cats and dogs try to say to us. And people that are deaf can listen in on all conversations and be a stronger part of society. Maybe my old grandma with Alzheimer's can get hints on who she's with (her sons and grandchildren), so she doesn't feel so isolated. Maybe the glasses can interpret facial expressions and help people with autism who have a harder time doing that. And maybe the glasses can mouth read too? Oh, but then people can eavesdrop on my whispering conversations with my business partners and steal our business ideas. Or use it for surveilling me?”

This technique strengthens your imagination and is a well-known way to poke around with possible consequences, that is, with possible futures. Futurists call this game ‘The Futures Wheel’, invented by Jerome C. Glenn in 1971

3: Playing “this is good news for?”

There is a big difference between these possible futures and the preferable futures.

Not all the possible futures are likable to YOU. We all will prefer a certain flavor or variant of those possibilities; a preference that is preferable to YOU. A future that YOU would like to see unfold.

A classical mechanism for evaluating signals is to sort them in a 2-by-2 matrix according to likelihood of impact and likability of the effect. This is the mechanism we introduce in this document and use ourselves in our workshops with customers.

However, this game is different: We strive to investigate WHO each and any of these possible futures are good for, even those futures that we dislike ourselves.

“Google Glasses used for surveillance can be good for undercover cops.”

“People with hearing disabilities who have hard time navigating in group situations can regain their ability to keep track of a dialogue.”

“People who work in noisy surroundings, like firemen, might be able to communicate in a different way.”

Again, this is a method to strengthen your imagination.



Joseph Voros has coined the so-called Futures Cone where he unpacks the different potential futures:

- The preposterous,
- the possible,
- the plausible,
- the projected,
- and the probable futures.
- And finally, the preferable future.

The approach here is – for each of the possible futures – to imagine WHO this might be good for: who would prefer THAT version of the future?

Try it – give it a spin

These are fun and entertaining games but can be very resourceful as tools for both training your futures thinking, for making it a habit, and for applying it in your work too.

We hope you got inspired!

Oh, and by the way: Fortune Telling in coffee is called Tasseography.

3.5. A popular, a scientific, and a practical answer

“Futures thinking” is a complex thing with at least three answers to its nature.

There might be more angles to this, but here are the most frequent answers people look for, then they ask us what it is: **A popular, a scientific, and a practical answer.**

So, is there a good, a bad, and an ugly answer?

All these answers are valid, but the usefulness of the explanation differs vastly depending on the context and the relevancy of the topic to the person who asks.



The popular answer

The popular answer: Futures thinking is ... a way to foresee what will happen.

We have been asked hundreds of times over the past decade about the future of X. Typically, the question comes from people who are on the verge of a transition with a lot of moving parts, and they need to have some steppingstones to feel safe on.

- “What’s the future of leadership?”
- “What’s the role of HR in the future?”
- “What skills are required as an employee in the next decade?”

We fully understand why we all look for those pointers and predictions. We need certainty in a world of uncertainty. We need some clear answers to foggy questions. We need to lean on to someone who seems to have a firm idea of where we’re going.

The challenge is that not all futurists like giving such popular answers, as they inhibit our wiggle room, do not allow for hesitation, and rob us of our imagination.

Even if you give (or receive) such answers, remember that they are filled with bias on both parties. Maybe the answer comes from a white, middle-aged male engineer, from a Nordic business world. And maybe the receiver of the answer has a similar bias. These answers can absolutely be useful, just remember that they are given (and received) in a certain context and with a “this is my world”-bias.

Your mileage may vary. The answers, no matter how firm or clear it is, might not be that happens, in your ecosystem.

The scientific answer

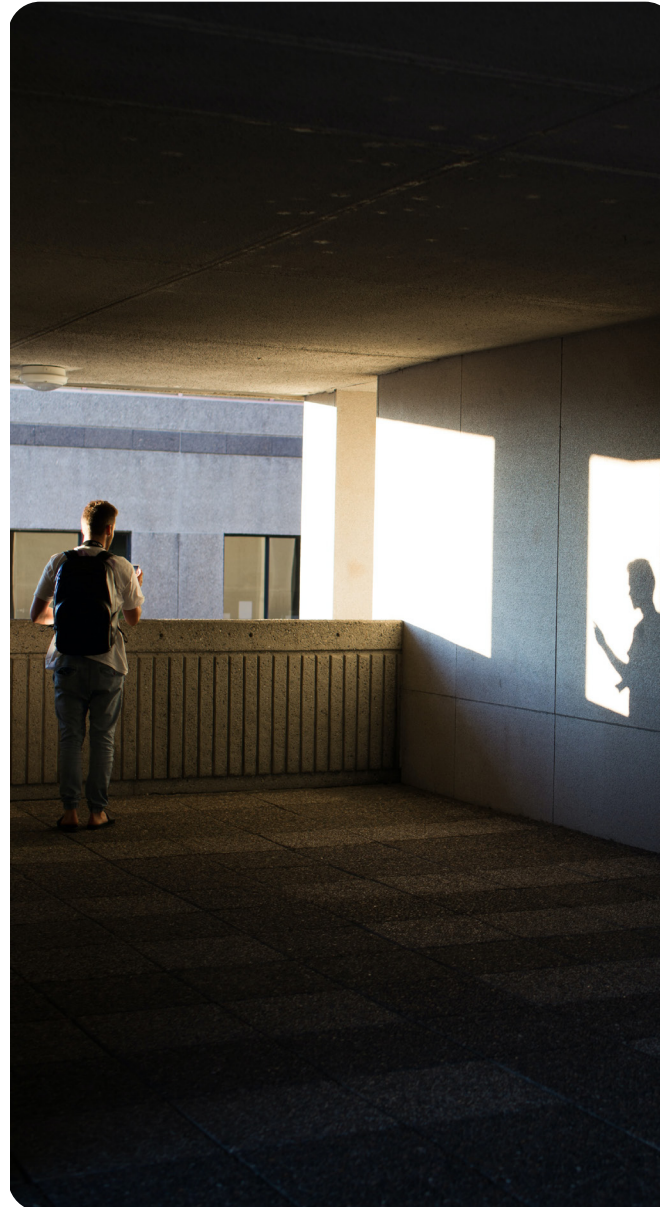
The scientific answer: Futures thinking is ... the study of anticipation and assumptions, to understand how we think about things that have not happened yet.

Thinking about the future has changed with the shifting needs of humans over the past +300,000 years, from “*how might we get through winter*” to “*how fast should we populate Mars*,” just to name a few thoughts on the spectrum.

Futures thinking and futures literacy has caught the interest of UNESCO too and is named as a “*an essential competency in the 21st century*.” “*Futures Literacy [is] a universally accessible skill that builds on the innate human capacity to imagine the future*”, UNESCO writes on their website.

This scientific field is emerging. As the complexity of our challenges and worlds increase, futures thinking is needed in schools, in businesses, in politics, and in society. Several universities invest time and money in this area and collaborate on shedding light on the different aspects. Futures thinking is of interest to the scientists in a changing world.

Using the future for better decisions in the present starts with understanding how we assume things, how we anticipate things, in what contexts it happens, and for what purpose.



The practical answer

The practical answer: Futures thinking is ... a way to evaluate the trends and anomalies in your ecosystem to imagine and evaluate the scenarios of what might happen, so that you can invest time and money in the future you like.

This is an approach that has many methodologies and tools in it, and with many thinkers and doers that contribute to the party. You might have heard of signal sorting, trend spotting, scenario building, and backcasting. There are dozens of other tools that help us in exploring and evaluating the possible futures, and in emphasizing and nominating a future that we prefer.

This can for example happen as part of a strategic planning in a business, where key opinion leaders want to investigate the possibilities and keep nurturing the multitude of potential business ideas. Or as part of solving wicket problems in a society. Or to keep the ambition and aspiration of an organization live and dynamic, rather than focused on a single-threaded tactical execution, however relevant that even might be in some cases.

The good, the bad, and the ugly?

In this way, futures thinking is an approach to juggling options, rather than providing answers.

Which of our three answers above is the “good” one? The “bad” one? The “ugly” one?

We think it depends on what your initial legacy is, and on that you want to use the answer for.

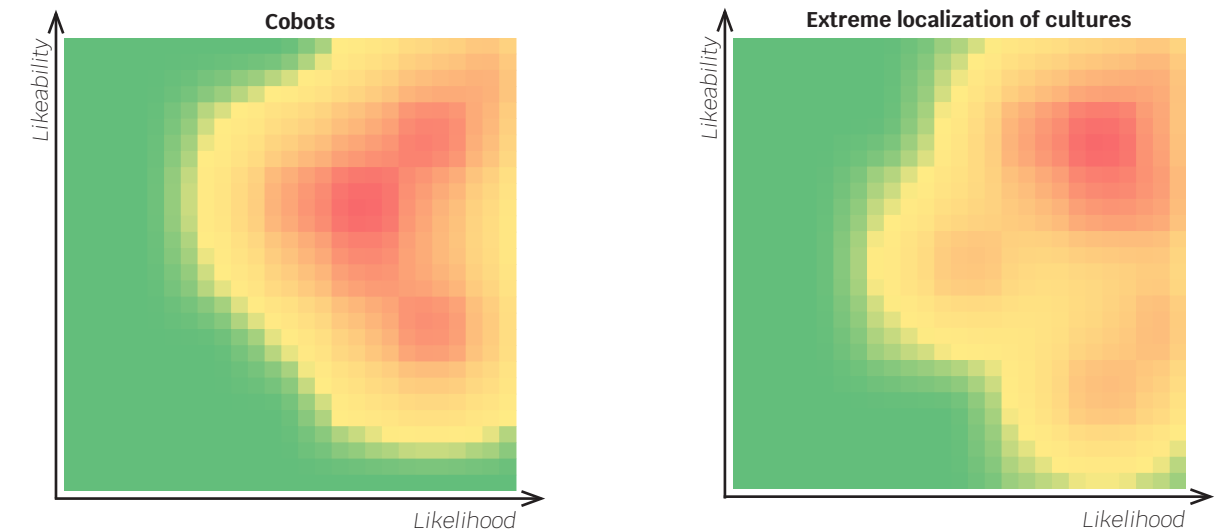
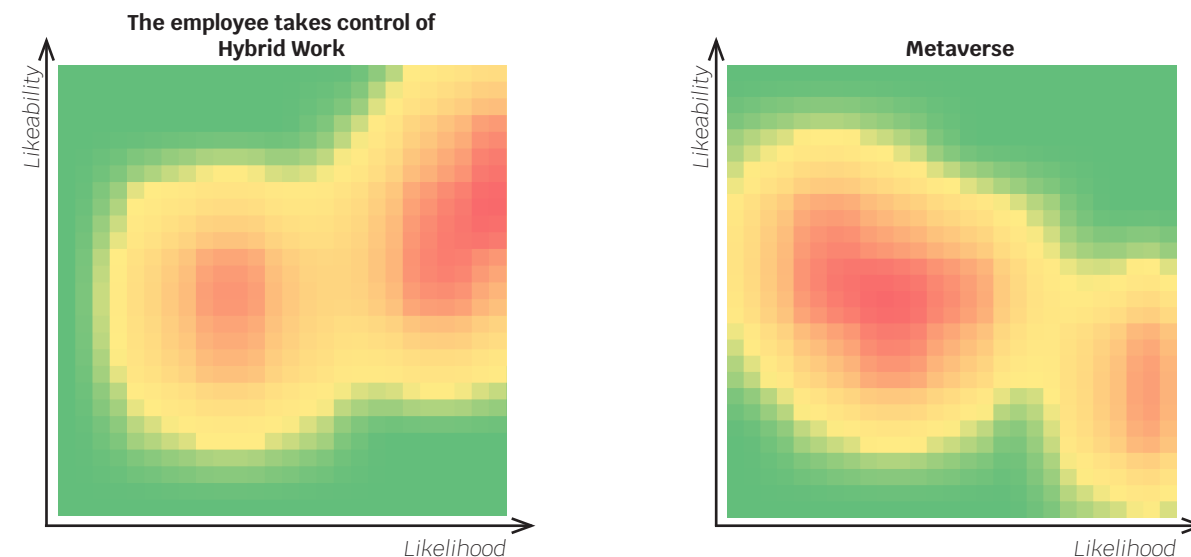
4. Learning from 2022 version; a few heatmaps

Since the publication of the 2022 version of the Horizon Scanning Document we have held +20 workshops ourselves, where the participants have sorted the signals according to likelihood and likability:

- What is the **likelihood** of the signal affecting you, in your context?
- And what is the **likability** of the impact, that it might have?

We have had participants from private and public organizations, from global corporates, from HR, from line of business, from strategic and operational functions, and consultants and practitioners of New Ways of Working.

Here are a few heatmaps from the workshops.
There are two big learnings:



First, **the workshop does a good job** in facilitating the discussion of how signals and trends affect you in a very involving and effective way, and with a concrete output.

Secondly, **people disagree** on both likelihood and likability, and these differences come to the surface very fast, enabling the participants to discuss the backgrounds, prerequisites, and assumptions in a structured way.

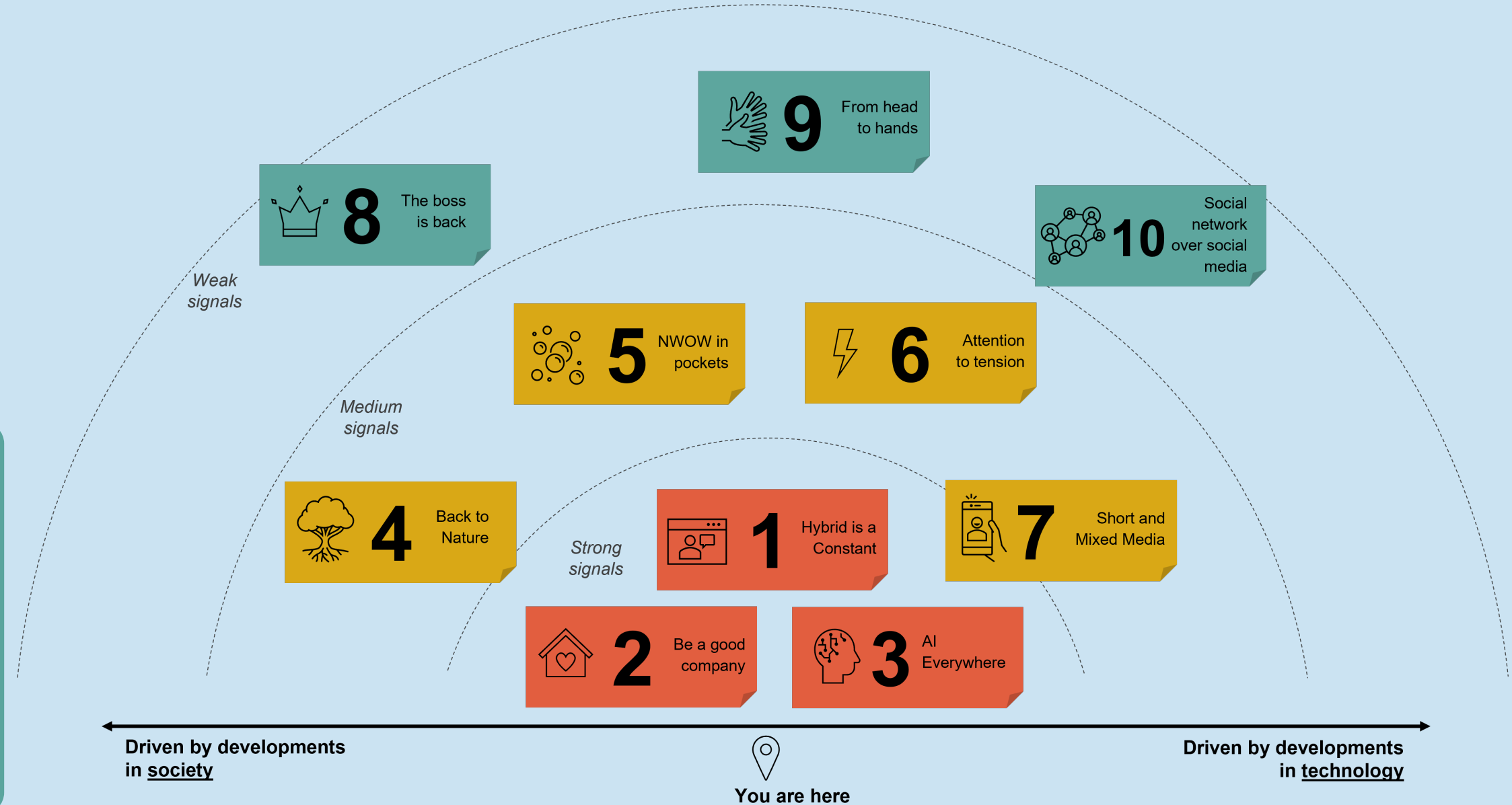
And this, the opportunity to discuss assumption, anticipation, and imagination, is the crux of Futures Thinking and Futures Literacy.

5. The signals, 2023

Here they are, the signals that we keep an eye on.

The radar below gives an overview of how we perceive their origin and signal strength: What drives the emergence of the signal? Is it driven by developments in society or in technology – or a mix? And how frequently and persistently do we bump into the signal?

- A signal is a specific example of a trend, where the trend is the bigger force behind the example.
- A signal can be a concrete practice, a tool, a product, a technology, or even an experience. It is often a disruption or an anomaly in its surroundings.
- A signal stands out and makes you stop and ponder.
- A signal has the potential to grow and snowball into a trend.



1: Hybrid is a constant

Hybrid work, the mix of where, when, how, and with whom to work, is here to stay. It's a constant, not to be avoided.

Boosted by Covid-19 and the Work From Home-premise, virtual meetings has become familiar to all and a convenience to many.

Now, organizations, leaders, and employees are struggling to find the right balance between being in the office or being at home. Between meeting online, face-to-face, or hybrid. Between synchronous and asynchronous collaboration. And between who makes the rules on how to hybrid.

No matter how you twist and turn the situation, hybrid is here to stay, and it has consequences for collaboration, culture, relationships, workflows, transparency mechanisms, IT security, how we take care of each other, legal contracts, salaries, and more.

Hybrid is a constant. You must embrace it. We're not going back.



2: Be a good company

Be kind, be ethical, be honest, and be persistent in how you activate your principles.

This is not about having a grand purpose to pursue, but about being a good company in the interactions with your people, your customers, your suppliers, and the world. It is ok to make money, if you treat people well – all to the benefit of society.

Good organizations are ethical, virtuous, customer- and employee-friendly, and make a fair profit – while enabling a good society in collaboration with the community and ecosystem.

World Economic Forum has taken interest in this. Several academics study it. Practitioners promote it. The frameworks are wide and broad, from micro interactions to macro intentions.

This is not about a glossy purpose, but about relationships and interactions, and how it is part of building a society that enables prosperity. So maybe it IS all about purpose in the end after all.

Be good!

3: AI everywhere

Where were you 30th of November 2022? That's when ChatGPT was launched, breaking barriers with its impressive language skills and ability to give detailed answers across a multitude of domains. In a few months, it gained massive interest, and has spawned both conversations and skepticism.

On Reddit, they discuss how to craft prompts to get the best out of it. They also discuss now to "break" it and make it pretend to be someone else with a rude mind.

Teachers on Twitter are discussing how to embrace it in their schools and universities.

It is being used for generating code, for giving therapeutic advice, for writing music, for creating social media updates for large corporates, for integrating into MS Teams, for writing manuals for DIY projects, for making mobile apps that are ready to deploy.

ChatGPT is only one of many tools like this, that can generate text, video, pictures, sounds, PowerPoint presentations, listen to your meetings and take notes. DALL-E, Midjourney and DeviantArt are a few of the examples. Both Microsoft and Google have launched strong and powerful AI solutions. AI is everywhere and is being embraced in business processes rapidly.

Some say that it is going too fast and what we need to slow down the development to have an opportunity to think and establish regulation.

"The world is bending in front of my eyes", as one Reddit user exclaimed.



4: Back to nature

Slow down. Get your sleep. Take the breaks. Walk in nature. And foster a partnership between people and nature to build a leadership and a culture, that is both productive and healthy.

As a response to the hastiness and constant search for efficiency and performance over the past decades, regenerative leadership has emerged. The aim is to establish a holistic approach to a continuous renewal of life, culture, relationships, and collaboration. A leadership and culture in balance.

The Inner Development Goals (Being, Thinking, Relating, Collaborating, and Acting) are one of the frameworks that describe such skills for sustainable, human-focused development, to deal with the increased complexity in our society – and at work.

The movement uses presence and pauses in their search for a healthy life and sustainable business. It is a realization that human beings ARE nature, not external consumers OF nature. We follow and react to biological rhythms, seasons, and the environment like all other living things. Connectedness to nature and people is essential to the meaningful, regenerative life.

We must create more life and energy than we take.

5: New Ways of Working in pockets

The idea of New Ways of Working (NWOW) took the business world by storm. Agile, Teal, and Holacracy was the talk-of-the-town, and we dreamt of transforming our organizations to all the way, all across the value chain.

However, instead of a fully-fledged embracement of NWOW in the organizations it is happening in 'pockets', that is, in smaller areas of the organization. These modern organizational paradigms work wonders with team sizes up to about 50 (plus/minus). One of the characteristics of these models is the social capital and strong relational ties in the network, mimicking those of a tribe or a community.

A co-existence between numerous NWOW pockets and the modern organizational hierarchy is emerging, with the hierarchy being based on roles, purpose domains, and mandate mechanisms.

The future organization is muddled, and a mix of many different modes and cultural dialects. And in pockets of 50 employees.



6: Attention to tension

"Pay attention to what irritates you" is one of the catchphrases by futures thinkers.

Irritation and tensions steal our attention, and our from-the-hip reaction is to make it go away as soon as possible; to lubricate the friction. But in the tension lies new learning, new possibilities, and new solutions – if we pay attention to it.

Dilemmas often trigger us to a choice: Either/or. Either purpose OR profit. Either alignment OR autonomy. But this binary approach limits our possibilities. Often, these supposedly opposites can supplement and complement each other, and help us see new and previously unvisited solutions and unharvested value.

Tensions can be embraced by a both/and mindset, by investigating assumptions, and by uncover the underlying paradoxes. Herein lies new and better innovative solutions.

Pay attention to the tension and avoid the text-book binary choice.

7: Shorts and Mixed Media

In visual art, mixed media describes artwork where more than one medium or material is used.

Similarly, the internal and external business communication is becoming mixed, by augmenting the traditional text-based medium with audio and video: Podcasting, videos, and even metaverse is everywhere.

The short video format made popular on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube is taking a more prominent role in the mixed media landscape. ‘Shorts’, as they are called, are tightly edited, are sped up to 1.2x speed, and grabs the attention quickly – within a single second from the start. Often, they have subtitles as many users scroll their feed with sound off.

Shorts are used by the old-fashioned massive media platforms and by multinational corporates to get the attention of a broader variety of people, not limited to the archetype of the typical TikTok user. Internal Comms are using it on the corporate intranet and social media platforms, to convey messages in a crisp and appealing way.

Mixing the written long-form articles with audio and video is a way to focus on the recipient, and to make sure that your message gets the attention you need.



8: The Boss is Back

As a pendular response to the self-leadership movement, people are directly asking for a boss!

People are getting fed up with decisions by consent, rounds, and nominations, and not having fully descriptive playbooks. Running out of patience, they ask for “the old days, where we had a boss that made it clear what I should do, and when I was finished. It was so much easier.”

It takes energy and mental bandwidth to embrace the many differences that people have, and both equity and inclusion is time consuming.

In some cases, the boss seizes the moment to maneuver themselves back in the throne, under the pretext of “doing what’s best for business”. “The business of business is business”, accredited to Milton Friedman. Finally, the boss is back.

9: From head to hands

Being an artisan is cool! With all the AI, hybrid work, and desk tasks we're surrounded by, being physical and using our hands for even simple, small tasks is tremendously value creating.

"With AI and the fourth Industrial Revolution, 300,000 jobs will disappear, and 300,000 other jobs will be created". Things like that and similar projections were aired about five to ten years ago.

U.S. Career Institute has researched the jobs with the lowest risk of automation. On the top are occupations with so-called "warm hands" (nurses, physical therapists, midwives, and social workers), creative and innovative people (choreographers, sports coaches, artists, and musicians), and people working outside (bioengineers, plant scientists, firefighters, and security managers).

Classical jobs like carpentry, plumbing, and electrical work are in demand, as it requires skill, care, innovation, and attention to detail.

In some national governments, initiatives are made to encourage students to choose skilled educations over university.

Clearly, being good with your hands – both for leisure and business – is great for the future.



10: Social network over social media

People use social platforms (both internally and externally) to shape and maintain social relationships, rather than to exchange professional content. They value solutions like MS Teams and Slack for their ability to nurture the tribe, more than their functions to support the production.

One of the diagnostics for that was found by Microsoft: People connect to each other in small, strong networks, and less so to the organization in large, weak networks. Their sense of belonging is shifted from the distant network in the organization to the 'close-knit members of a team'.

Online, people are fed up with the consolidated social media platforms and their seemingly clickbaity and annoying algorithms for the feed, and they instead move to smaller and more intimate closed groups. Here they can connect and relate to people, rather than be exposed to news, ads, and less relevant content.

This development can be seen in organizational settings too, where employees are staying away from the internal corporate social media, and instead gather around smaller, tribal based channels.



6. How did we gather the signals? And how about our own bias?

We constantly invest time in scanning for signals, anomalies, and things that make us go ‘huh, that was odd’.

Our sources are many and diverse:

The traditional news media, both nationally and globally. The feeds on LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram. Both popular and more obscure newsletters from other futures thinkers. Numerous dialogues with friends and colleagues from across the continents. Reddit and Twitch. Magazines like Wallpaper, Wired, and Monocle. Eavesdropping in airports, trains, and busses. Overhearing what clients see, share, and discuss.

We pile all these datapoints and start spotting patterns. We explore them. Evaluate them. Discuss them. Play around with scenarios. We make absurd prerequisites and challenge our assumptions. “What if” and “where might this work” are part of the toolbox.

It ends with this document, with these signals.

And naturally there are things that we haven’t seen. Signals that are blind to us. Movements that we have overlooked or not considered. We have biases, due to our age, our nationality, our education, our upbringing, and more. Most likely we’re affected by confirmation bias, optimism bias, simplification bias, groupthink bias and more.

That is why you should be on your toes yourself.

We love reading predictions of the future, but we always remember these four things:

1. What’s the bias of the author?
2. What’s the likelihood of the effect, in my context?
3. What’s the likeability of the effect, in my context?
4. Who might this future be attractive to, if not to me?

7. How to use them: The signal sorting workshop

Here’s a way to use the signals in a workshop.

Get a hold of this document, and print the pages with the signals and their description.

**Step 1: For each of the signals, answer this question:
What is the likelihood of this signal affecting you?**

Is it very likely? Very unlikely? On a scale from 0% to 100% where will you place each of the signals?

Make sure to vocalize and discuss the assumptions each of you have, when sorting the signals. It is exactly those assumptions and anticipations, that we’re looking for.

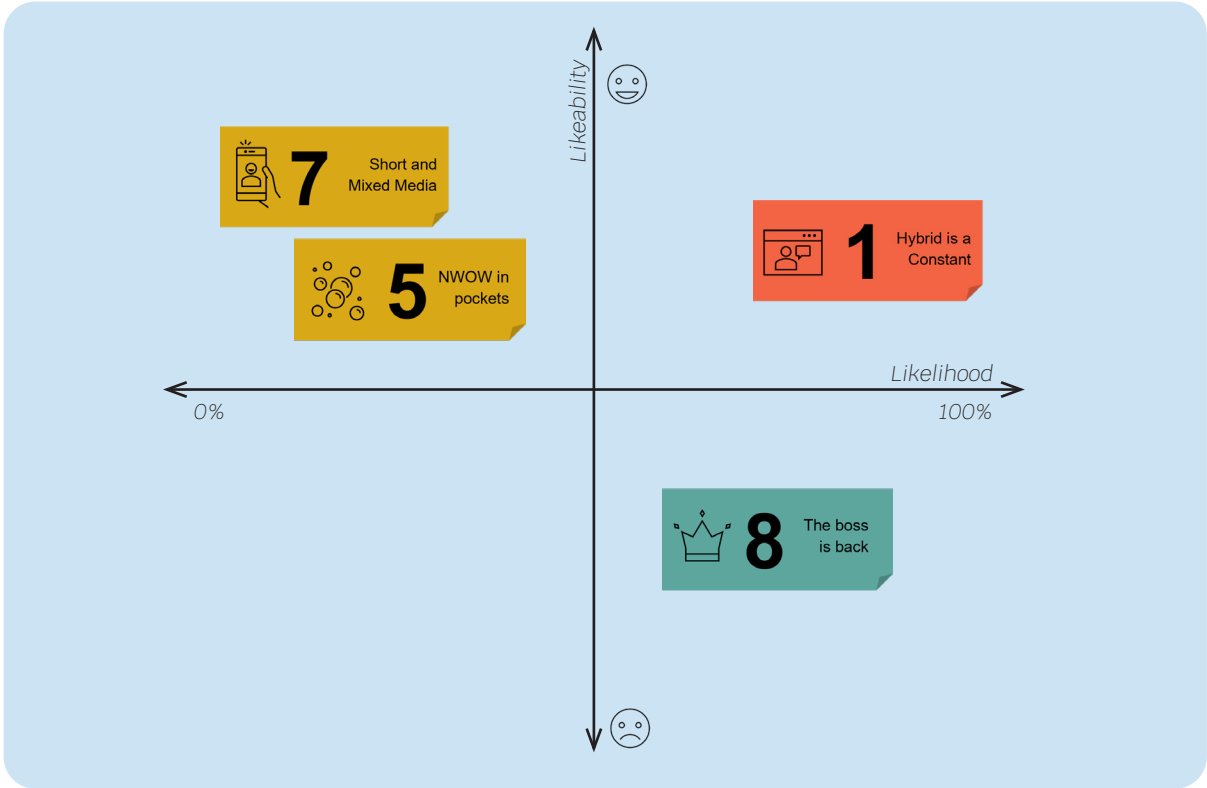
**Step 2: For each of the signals, answer this question:
What is the likability of the effect, that this signal has on you?**

Do we want this to happen, or do we want to avoid it? Do we like or dislike it?

Again, make sure to vocalize and discuss the assumptions and anticipations between you.

**Step 3: Place the signals in the signal sorting matrix.
What does the overview tell you? What futures do you imagine?**

You now have an overview of each of the signals. Look at each of the four corners.



Now it’s time to use your imagination to visualize some of the possible futures, coming from those signals, one corner at a time.

Imagine your organization in ten years, when these signals have had an effect. Describe the workplace, the tools, the products, the customers, the office, the coffee, the canteen, the collaboration, the business models, the cashflow etc. Be as descriptive and detailed as you can. Give the future a catchy and memorable title.

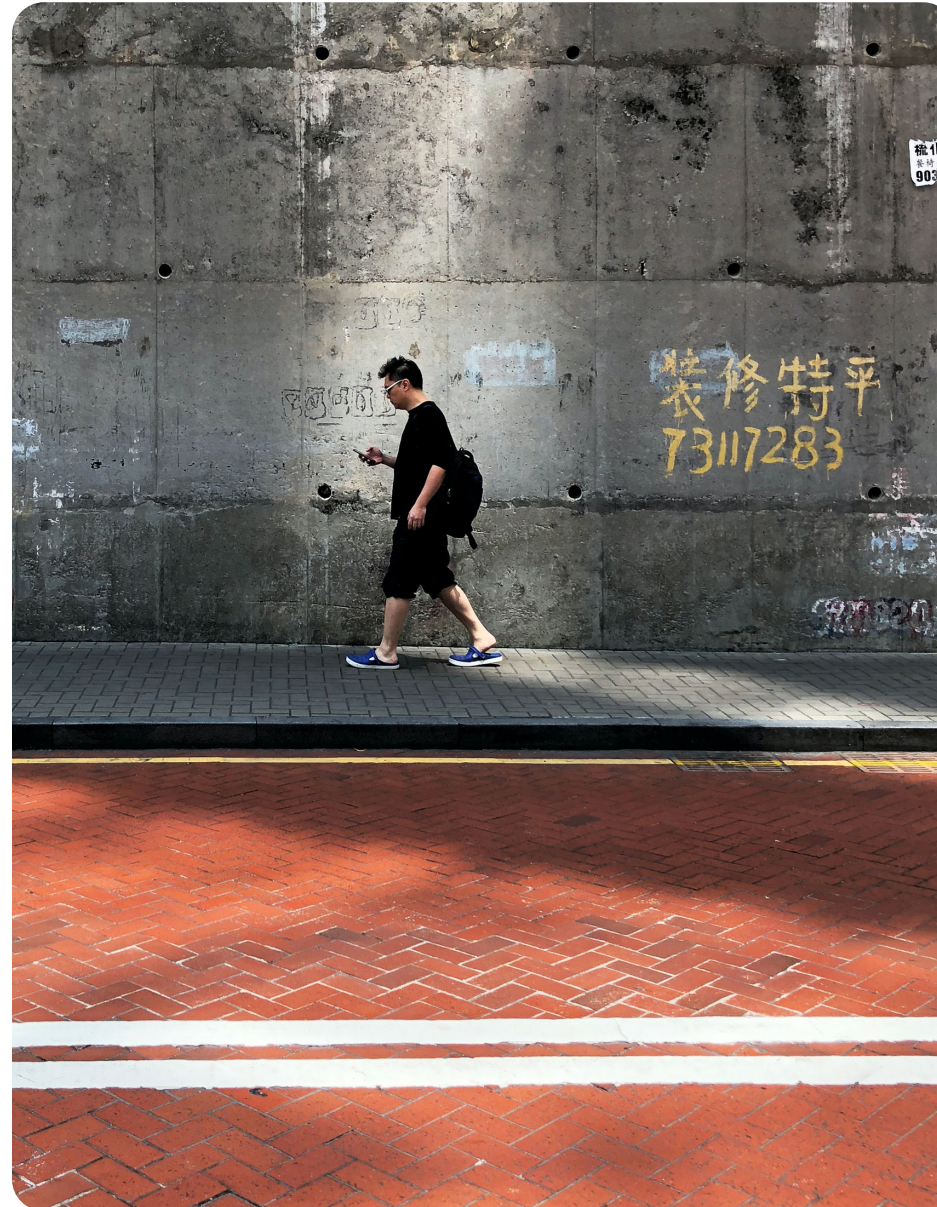
You might also pick two signals and discuss the so-called polarities for the development of the signals in your context.

- Fast or slow?
- Local or widespread?
- Market-led or regulated?
- Growing or declining?
- Private or public?
- Individualized or shared?

Insert the two signals into a scenario cross; one signal on the horizontal axis; the other signal on the vertical axis. The polarities of the signals are thus at opposite ends of the respective axes. This creates four scenarios, A, B, C, and D, which are combinations of the polarities of the two signals. Take time to discuss each of the four scenarios. For each scenario: Give the scenario a catchy title. Describe it in detail. Debate who is affected by the scenario, and what the technological and societal correlations are.

As a special case, maybe the signal has two sets of polarities that can shape a scenario cross by itself. Explore the four scenarios in the same way as above.

Step 4: What now? What's the way forward?



Look at the signal sorting matrix again.

Two of the quadrants are easier to work with than the other two:

- In the upper right corner, you have signals that have high likelihood and high likability. That future might come by itself and might need no special attention in this context. Prepare yourself, **get going**, make it happen.
- In the lower left corner, you have signals that have low likelihood and low likability. You might **ignore** those for now but do keep an eye on them for observational purposes. They might evolve and move place, on both axes.



Now, the two other quadrants need your attention way more:

- In the upper left corner: Signals with low likelihood, but high likability. You like the effect, but it is not likely that the signal is going to unfold. What can you do to amplify and **nurture** it? Can you affect it, or do you merely need to accept it? Can you make an experiment internally, to understand what challenges there are, how you can mitigate them, and who and what you need to get going? Establish a small experiment with the involved technology, mechanism, thinking, or stakeholders. Establish hypotheses, that you want to falsify or verify. Setup observation mechanisms.
- In the lower left corner, things are more dark-looking: Signals with high likelihood, but with an effect that you do not like. What can you do to **avoid** or minimize the effect of this future? The approach is somewhat the same as just before: Can you make an experiment to understand the challenges and risks, and what kind of mitigation you need to suppress the effect?

In general, make a clear note on **who** in your organization might be affected by the changes. Get in touch with them, involve them early and often, and adapt as you learn.

That's the way to explore and evaluate your possible and preferable futures.



8. Scenarios for possible, preferable futures

8.1 Back to nature – a dream scenario or just too far out?

By Thea Tolstrup Bramming

Back to the Future

The 'Back to nature' signal is a bit like Back To The Future. It doesn't mean that we are actually going back in time to live like we did hundreds of years ago. It means that we are realizing that something is missing in the way we live today, and we need to bring that back and mix it up with our current live style to create something new.

That something is the deep connection to the fact that we as humans are nature. Not only does the way we work and produce affect nature, our nature as human beings is also being affected by the way we work and produce – sometimes for better but more often for the worse, with burn out, broken relations and waste of energy. When we forget to breath, take breaks and connect to our bodies, we lose a key element of what it means to be human.

In 1835 most people had no choice but to follow the circular rhythms of nature. In 1935 the industrial revolution initiated an ever increasing disconnect. In 2035 we have realized that we have a choice and we have chosen to once more make nature central to the way we work.

Avaati – a circular business

Let's visit Avaati, a producer of smart windows that reduces energy usage in houses through IoT and weather data. Five years ago they transformed the company into a circular business model. For them it's a dream come true. Read on and decide for yourself, if this would be a dream or a nightmare to you!



It's March 2nd and Laila and a few of her colleagues, who are "larks" (people who wake up early) like she is, show up around 7 AM to tend to the pre-germination in the shared roof top garden and green houses where they prepare most of what they eat at work. Laila is a ph.d. in AI engineering and self-made gartner and has been with Avaati for almost three years. By now she knows the rhythm of the business and she is used to her job changing a lot during the year. It's spring which means time for growth. In the garden as well as in the business. Laila explains the way Avaati works.

Following the seasons

"It so nice to be back here and get the new season going. During winter we have spent less time in the office to keep heating expenses down and because there is less to do in the green houses. Instead, winter is where we explore new designs and functionalities based on the learnings from the customer feedback that we collected during autumn. When we do meet up during winter time, we have our fireplace on, keep the lights down and huddle in smaller groups exploring our ideas, building prototypes and discussing MVPs for next season's production lines. Very often, clients are invited to join us if they have input or asks to what will be produced in the summer." The work days are shorter, and breaks longer.

At Avaati spring time is full of customer meetings. Most of them are taken on a walk and talk, physical or virtual. If it's too cold or they are too many people, they use one of the green house meeting rooms with large windows (their own of course) to the outside. They do not sit around tables, and they are not looking at their individual screens. Instead they draw, and build and co-create, again either physically present or virtually present. But present. The presence is ensured through a check in of two minutes silence, sufficient breaks and healthy snacks.

"We like to bring our clients to our factory to see the prototypes turning into the

actual products they have ordered” Laila explains. *“Our factory is by the river and almost 100% driven by waterpower. Spring and summer is the best time for production as the river flows faster.”*

At the end of summer Avaati focuses on doing the final fitting, some helped by robots, some done by hand. *“It’s great to work outside for that type of work. And with the physical work, it nice to have plenty of fresh vegetables from the garden and green houses”* Laila elaborates.

Autumn is of course the main harvest time. And as mentioned, it is also the time that they harvest their learnings through customer feedback, and when they harvest their income to make sure they have *“supplies for the winter”*, as Laila calls it. It’s also the time, they work on left over material to re-introduce it into next year’s production.

I thank Laila and leave Avaati feeling much more alive than when I arrived.



Dream scenario or just too far out?

Yet, I am puzzled as to how they can run a business only producing windows half of the year. I decide to call Xander, who is a finance expert and carpenter at Avaati, to understand.

“Your question is valid”, Xander says, “but the way we work is more circular. We do produce fewer windows than we did before we changed to the circular model – but our innovation pace is much faster. All up we make less money and we have to turn down customers who ask for windows during winter. But most of them are willing to wait, because they know the quality and are involved in the process. The lower revenue is the price we pay for a work life that is healthier than before. We have 75% fewer sick days and 50% lower churn in the team than five years ago.

No doubt that Laila and Xander are living their dream. How about you, would you like to work for Avaati – or is it too far out, too unrealistic, or just not human nature?

8.2. AI is everywhere – Best-case / worst-case scenario

By Tore Nielsen

With the public release of ChatGPT by OpenAI in November 2022 and the subsequent launch of GPT-4 in March 2023, AI has rapidly caught the general public’s attention. And with that, many experts and analysts have started debating the possible consequences for society of large learning models and AI in general. It’s not difficult to imagine a future where AI has made a transformative impact on everything: our work, our private life, and society as a whole. Given the seemingly exponential advancement of AI capabilities, it’s also very easy to see this transformation happening fast.



If you’ve followed the discussion around AI for a while, you’ll be aware of the worries of AI surpassing human intelligence, leading to the likely downfall of the whole human race. There are also versions of the ultimate utopian scenario where AI has tuned humans into god-like omnipotent beings. While these extreme scenarios might be possible, we find it more interesting to look at less absolute futures. In the following, we will imagine best-case / worst-case scenarios for the near future.

Best Case – Tools of Liberation

The year is 2033.

The repetitive, mindless office jobs that used to chain people to the 9 to 5 hamster wheel have practically disappeared. We read about them in novels and watch them in movies with the same curiosity and dread that we used to view the 19th and 20th-century factory conditions. It would be just as unthinkable to imagine humans spending hours, days, and weeks in front of a computer as it would be to imagine humans in slavery. A thing of the past that was wrong and

has now been corrected. The advancement of AI has ensured that people will never need to do tasks that are not the most engaging, meaningful, and fulfilling use of their time. From mundane work like data gathering, documenting, and scheduling to more advanced work like a cancer diagnosis, complex problem analysis, or creating art, AI does it faster and better than us. And that is a good thing.

We experience a safer, less error-prone world where AI manages society’s critical infrastructure. Early and reliable diagnosis of illness has increased general health and longevity tremendously. It’s so rare that a person loses their life due to a traffic accident that it’s a worldwide breaking piece of news. And information has become verifiable and trustworthy, so it has generally become easier to navigate and make sense of the world.

All this has become possible due to the development of a robust framework for controlling the development and use of AI, similar to the UN. The world’s nations quickly realized the dangerous



potential of AI could lead to the end of everything and agreed to a safe and ethical standard of AI development.

This framework also ensured the democratization of AI, meaning that it is now a human right to have access to the tools of AI, no matter where you are born or how wealthy you are. AI is not an exclusive tool for large, wealthy corporations or individuals. On the contrary, AI has “closed the gap,” and wealth distribution has become far more equal, both within countries and across the globe.

Worst Case - The Breakdown of Reality

The year is 2033.

No one knows what’s real anymore.

News is comprised of AI-generated articles, images, and footage indistinguishable from reality. When you interact with a person online, there’s simply no way to know if there’s a physical human on the other side or if you are interacting with an algorithm optimized for devious things. Even if you have a live video call, the CGI has become so advanced that you cannot trust your eyes to make a judgment.

Many job functions have de facto been entirely overtaken by AI, even though many employers are unaware that they’ve hired a fictive person, and they are now paying salaries to the scheming masterminds behind it. Other corporations have actively sought to create their own AI workforce, thus not needing to hire or pay real humans. This has led to massive unemployment globally, and politicians and society are under much pressure.

The AI revolution didn’t happen with a sudden wave but with a slow, subtle tide that slowly crept in everywhere. Without realizing it, we humans were increasingly consuming AI-generated content, basing our worldviews on AI-generated news, and building relationships with AI-generated personalities.



When we realized what was happening, people reacted in quite different ways. A considerable portion of the population ignored the change, stating that they didn’t believe in AI and naively continued their lives. Some people embraced the new reality and chose to be fully immersed in AI-powered virtual realities, leading to a state of worship of the new machine gods.

A small minority rejected the AI reality and chose to cut themselves off from anything digital, retreating to remote areas and rediscovering the old ways of running a society before the invention of computers.

Here they hold out, as the last redoubt of humanity, until the new gods will notice them.

8.3. The boss is back – finally!

By Erik Korsvik Østergaard and ChatGPT

Bringing the boss back seems immediately like a setback from the progression of developments in organizational culture. Why would we step back from Teal to Orange or Amber?



But what if it is a response either to a very matured culture – or a variant of ‘quiet quitting’ that we can call ‘engagement-fatigue’?

Let’s first ask ChatGPT to write a scenario, to have different perspectives on the signal. Here’s my prompt to ChatGPT. I gave it the unedited signal text and added:

Write a short story, with Alice, Bob, and Eve in the leading roles. Bob likes this new trend of bringing the boss back. The other two does not. Be sure to include their dialogue and let them describe their feelings. Make sure that we see the story from Bobs side mainly.

Let Alice be sarcastic. Set the temperature to 0.8.

ChatGPT writes:

Alice, Bob, and Eve were sitting in the break room, sipping coffee and chatting about work. Bob suddenly spoke up, “You know what we need? A boss! Someone to make the tough decisions and tell us what to do.”

Alice rolled her eyes and replied, “Oh great, Bob. You want to go back to the good old days of being a mindless drone? No thanks, I’ll pass.”

Eve chimed in, “I have to agree with Alice. I like having a say in how things are done and feeling like my opinion matters.”

Bob scoffed, “You guys just don’t get it. It’s exhausting to have to make decisions by committee all the time. I miss having a clear playbook and knowing exactly what was expected of me.”

Alice quipped, “Yes, because blind obedience is so much easier than actually using your brain and working collaboratively with your colleagues.”

Bob ignored her and continued, “I think it’s time for us to have a boss again. Someone who can take charge and make the tough calls for the good of the business.”

Eve looked at him skeptically, “But what if the boss is only looking out for their own interests? What if they don’t care about our well-being or our input?”

Bob shrugged, “That’s a risk we have to take. The business of business is business, after all.”

Alice rolled her eyes again and muttered, “Just what we need, a power-hungry boss who thinks they know what’s best for everyone.”

As they finished their coffee, it was clear that Bob liked this new trend of bringing the boss back, but Alice and Eve were not on board. Only time would tell who was right.

Now, write the story, but from the perspective of the new boss and the Board of Directors. The board members disagree wildly about the decision to let go of the self-leadership and new ways of working. Let's hear their argumentation, thoughts and feelings, and their reflections.

Give the boss and the board members names. Set the temperature to 0.7. Make it fit 200 words.

ChatGPT writes:

The Board of Directors had a heated discussion about the recent decision to bring back a boss. Sarah, the new boss, sat quietly and listened as the members argued back and forth.

John, the Chairman of the Board, was strongly in favor of the move. *"We need someone who can make the tough decisions and steer the ship in the right direction. Our self-leadership experiment has gone on long enough. It's time for a change."*

On the other hand, Melissa was vehemently opposed. *"This is a step backwards. We've worked hard to foster a culture of collaboration and inclusivity. Bringing back a boss will only stifle innovation and creativity."*

Sarah spoke up, *"I understand both sides of the argument, but as the new boss, I believe there is a middle ground we can reach. We can still value collaboration and input from our employees while also having a clear chain of command."*

Tom, a board member who had remained quiet until now, added, *"But what if the boss becomes too authoritarian? What if they only care about their own agenda and not the well-being of the employees?"*



Sarah replied, *"That's where accountability comes in. As the boss, I will be held accountable for my decisions and actions. And I will ensure that the well-being of our employees is always a top priority."*

The Board continued to debate, but in the end, the decision was made to bring back a boss. Sarah was nervous but also excited to take on the challenge of leading the company in a new direction. Only time would tell if it was the right decision.

Let's reflect, without the help of ChatGPT

Erik Korsvik Østergaard writes:

Is this signal a response to bad change management? Do people want 'the boss back' as a reaction to lack of patience and persistence with the embracement of New Ways of Working? Are people understandably fed up with protocols and countless rounds of opinion sharing?

Or has the general maturity in organizations grown to a healthy level where reinstalling 'the boss' happens on top of a well-informed, well-trained organization, making 'the boss' act as a new role, focusing on facilitation, decision-making with the employees, and direction-setting?

Or is this a variant of quiet quitting that we can call engagement-fatigue?



At least three scenarios can unfold:

1. A “**return to the clarity and discipline of a traditional manager**”, to regain clear direction, efficient decision-making, streamlined communication, an established chain of command, single point of accountability, and consistency. Some people that we meet in the organizations ask for this, and they genuinely mean it. They have a deepfelt urge to get the management back.
2. A “**reinstatement of the team lead, on top of the modern organization**”, to streamline the mechanisms of alignment, information sharing, decision-

making, and communication. This happens on top of an organization, that has been learning, embracing, and absorbing with New Ways of Working for years. The cultural fabric is matured and has numerous functional experiences and emotional anecdotes, so that the people is equipped and request and design what kind of “boss” they need and require.

3. A “**response to engagement-fatigue, a variant of ‘quiet quitting’**”, where the people would love to engage in work and not constantly have to be part of discussions, clarifications, and choice-making. Engagement-fatigue refers to a sense of exhaustion or burnout that can occur when employees feel overwhelmed by the demands of collaboration, consensus-building, and engagement in a self-managing organization. In the scenario, people may feel that having a boss would provide a sense of relief from these demands by providing clear direction and expectations, and taking on some of the decision-making responsibilities.

Bringing the boss back can in all scenarios have the upsides of clarity of purpose and direction, strategic decision-making, facilitation of learning and development, organizational alignment, and bridging between the organization and external stakeholders.

Engagement fatigue can arise in a hierarchical organization if employees feel disempowered or unengaged. In a Teal organization, engagement fatigue can occur if the principles of self-management and distributed decision-making are not properly implemented or if there is a lack of trust and communication among team members.

The difference is the needs-and-wants of the people in the organization. How much effort do we want to invest in work, and in maturing our culture? Is it time to engage less in work and in culture, and instead ask for bosses?

Is it time to bring the boss back – finally?

9. Lean forward and take the next steps

Our manifesto in Good Morning April opens with this paragraph:

“We dare to explore and evaluate possible futures so that we together can create a better, brighter tomorrow for the organizations and people of the world, today.”

We want you encourage you to be part of it.

Share this Horizon Scanning Document with your peers.

Have the workshop in your team at your next offsite meeting.

Or discuss the signals one-by-one at your monthly leadership get-together.

Use the structure from the Futures Literacy Labs by UNESCO:

- Reveal your assumptions.
- Rethink your possible futures.
- Reframe your preferred future.

Have fun. And go create a better, brighter tomorrow.



Creating of content

The content of this document is created by the Good Morning April Team.

Pictures of us: Thomas Rønn, TR Media.

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FUTURES OF WORK

HORIZON SCANNING DOCUMENT

GOOD MORNING APRIL

We dare to explore and evaluate possible futures so that we together can create a better, brighter tomorrow for organizations and people of the world, today.