

# Facilitating Futures

Workshop Tools  
for Uncertain Times



# Welcome

The future is always present in the choices we make today, but all too often, we move through our work without taking the time to notice it.

**This guide is an invitation to pause, to ask better questions, and to make space for imagination.** It's a collection of methods designed to help groups get a clearer sense of what might be coming, and what they want to do about it.

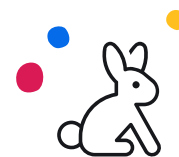
These methods come from the world of futures and foresight. They've been adapted, shaped, and shared in workshops, classrooms, boardrooms, and community halls around the world. What they have in common is a belief that **the future is not fixed, and many possible futures exist—each of them open to exploration, critique, and co-creation.**

And although many of these tools were developed by academics, policymakers, and foresight consultants, they aren't the only ones using them, or inventing new ones. All over the world, thinkers, dreamers, and doers are finding creative ways to engage with the future: to anticipate, to explore, and often, to shape something better.

**The idea of playing with futures is having a moment.**

That's hardly surprising. We're living through times when the pace and scale of change can feel disorienting, and yet these same times also offer glimpses of possibility.

Futures thinking can help us step back from urgency, look wider and deeper, and ask not just what might happen, but what matters most.



**This booklet is for facilitators, conveners, and anyone responsible for bringing people together and guiding meaningful conversations.** Whether you're running strategy sessions, creative workshops, community gatherings, or innovation sprints, there's something here for you. You don't need to be a futurist or foresight expert. You just need a willingness to hold space for uncertainty and a belief that people can think differently together.

In my own work as a futurist, facilitator, researcher, and foresight practitioner, I've seen how **engaging with the future can stir up both hope and collapse.**



That's part of the work. It's why we need to keep asking not only what could happen, but **who is this future good for?** These methods won't give you simple answers. But they will help you and your participants find new perspectives, and maybe even new responsibilities.



## WHAT IS “FUTURES AND FORESIGHT”?

**Futures:** refers to systematic approaches to thinking about the future and exploring factors that could give rise to possible and probable future characteristics, events, and behaviours.

**Foresight:** refers to the application of specific tools/methods for conducting futures work, for example, horizon scanning (gathering intelligence about the future) and scenarios (describing what the future might be like).

### **Futures work helps us, among other things:**

- » Spot patterns of change, emerging trends, surprises, and disruptors earlier, giving us more time to respond.
- » Build resilience in a community or organization by preparing for different possibilities.
- » Create a collective narrative of possible futures, based on structured frameworks and evidence, and start moving towards the plausible future we hope to inhabit.

However you use this guide, I hope it supports more thoughtful, creative, and courageous conversations. Because **imagining better futures is where making them begins.**



**Suzanne Whitby**

Futurer, Facilitator & Founder of Futures Fit

“The times are urgent, let's slow down”  
— Bayo Akomolafe

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# A toolkit for facilitating futures

In practical terms, what does it take to bring futures thinking to a group?

**In the pages ahead, you'll find 15 methods to support facilitating futures.** This selection is designed to help you guide a group through a meaningful futures conversation, whether you're working in strategy, innovation, education, or community development.

These aren't the only tools out there, but they're a good starting point: we picked them for variety and accessibility. They are all tools that facilitators can put to use in practice, even if they might not have their wished-for 4-days retreat to fully go through every step.

We've organized the methods to follow **a flow that mirrors how many futures-focused workshops unfold in practice.**

- You'll start by helping the group **open up**, shifting into a more creative, expansive mindset.
- Then you'll move into **mapping the present**, to ground the conversation in what's actually happening now.
- From there, you'll explore the **future**, working with scenarios, signals, and trends.
- As the conversation deepens, it's time for **envisioning and embodying**: trying on new perspectives, stepping into the possibilities, imagining what different futures might feel like.
- Finally, we bring it back to the here and now with **action planning**: because the real power of futures work lies not in prediction, but in preparation.

Of course, tools alone won't make you a skilled facilitator of futures conversations. Futures thinking is a well-established discipline with roots in academia, and we strongly recommend getting to know its core concepts and ethics before jumping in. Sharing just a little of that background with your participants can go a long way too; it helps avoid the common traps of drifting into fantasy, fear, or vagueness that lead nowhere.

Each method here comes with clear instructions and, just as importantly, insights from facilitators who've used these tools in real settings. **You'll find their reflections and stories woven throughout the booklet, offering glimpses into how this work plays out in different cultures and contexts.**

In SessionLab's template collection you can [find an example](#) of how these methods come together in a real-world workshop. You'll also find a short bibliography and set of resources at the end to keep exploring.

Ready to step into the future, one method at a time?

“Any useful statement about the future should appear to be ridiculous.”

— Jim Dator

American futurologist and a former professor and Director of the Hawaii Research Center for Futures Studies at the University of Hawaii at Manoa

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## CASE STUDY

### **LIGHTING THE WAY: IMMERSIVE FUTURES FOR STRATEGIC CHANGE**



**Suzanne Whitby** - Foresight Facilitator, Futures Researcher & Founder of **Futures Fit**. Helps groups imagine, explore and co-create hopeful, sustainable futures.

In late 2023, I was hired by a leading European lighting company. Their challenge: they were tired of being reactive. Their new generation of leaders were keen to embrace sustainability as a real strategic lever. They wanted to start shaping the future of their industry.

My role was to design an immersive experience of what might lie ahead. My team and I began with interviews across the company, combined with external horizon scanning to surface trends and weak signals. We developed four possible future scenarios, loosely based on Jim Dator's archetypes: growth, collapse, discipline, and transformation.

Every employee, from engineers to designers to the C-suite, took part in a half-day participatory future workshop. Using the scenarios as provocations, teams explored how they might respond. Conversations were open, critical, and hopeful. We harvested reflections and surfaced insights from across the business.

The findings were turned into large posters and displayed at all sites. Then, through informal feedback channels (comment boxes, emails, hallway chats), we gathered additional reactions. These were used to run a prioritization session with the leadership team.

The outcome was three strategic pathways. These were shared during a leadership tour of all offices, alongside a visual story of the process and sincere thanks to all contributors. Strategic planning followed, alongside a commitment to keep the conversation going.

Something I knew at the outset and learned anew: real futures thinking isn't just top-down. It lives in the everyday imagination of the whole organization.



# Opening

A workshop needs the right atmosphere before diving into future trends or scenario building.

The opening moments set the tone: they help participants shift gears, connect, and start thinking beyond the immediate and obvious.

**The methods in this section are designed to energise the group and lay the groundwork for meaningful participation.**

Some invite light-hearted creativity; others introduce core ideas of future thinking gently. They all help create a shared space where people feel ready to explore, imagine, and collaborate.

You don't need to overdo it. One or two short activities are often enough. **The aim here isn't to impress, but to invite:** to get people moving, noticing, laughing, and beginning to stretch their thinking.

Whether your group knows each other well or is meeting for the first time, these openings can help you start strong.

- **Postcards from the future**  
A creative warm-up and visioning exercise.
- **Polak Exercise**  
Uncover and share participants' existing mental models.
- **Signal Scavenger Hunt**  
Actively build awareness of emerging trends.



## Postcards from the future

A creative warm-up and visioning exercise that **invites participants to imagine a future world or situation and describe what it feels like to be there**. This approach helps surface early assumptions, hopes, and curiosities, while gently introducing the idea that the future can be imagined and shaped.



### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Invite participants to imagine they are living in a future. This might be 5, 10, or even 20 years from now. The exact time horizon can be adjusted to fit your workshop.
2. Ask them to write a postcard to someone in the present day, describing a moment from their day in this future. Encourage sensory details: what they see, hear, do, or feel. If time allows, offer time to design the postcards - adding an image, a collage, colours etc.
3. If helpful, you can prompt with a few questions:
  - >> Where are you?
  - >> What's different?
  - >> What's surprising?
4. After writing, invite participants to share their postcards in pairs or small groups.
5. Optionally, gather a few examples with the whole group to notice themes, surprises, or patterns. Use these to segue into your workshop.

### Goal

Spark imagination and open up a futures mindset in an engaging way.

🕒 15-30 min

👥 Any group size; best in small groups or pairs for sharing.

### Materials

Blank postcards or index cards

Pens/markers

Optional:

Printed images for inspiration

For online use:

Create "blank" postcards in your favourite whiteboard tool, or invite people to draw at their desks

## BACKGROUND

This method is widely used in futures and design workshops as a light, narrative entry point into thinking about change over time.

## SIMILAR METHODS IN THE LIBRARY

You might also like to explore similar methods in the [SessionLab Library](#):

- >> [Headlines from the Future](#) >> [Cover Story](#)
- >> [Future Cover Page](#)

### FACILITATION TIPS

- >> Providing a focal point for the exercise to help guide participants in their thinking. Is your purpose to envision a business future, innovate by getting ideas from possible futures, explore risks and opportunities, imagine sustainable futures? As with most facilitation, the initial positioning is key.
- >> Communicate that there's no "right" future to imagine. Allow participants to be optimistic, critical, playful, or reflective. This ensures a diversity of perspectives.
- >> Consider assigning personas to prompt insights for a specific group of people.
- >> Some may focus on big shifts; others on personal experiences. Both are valid and valuable.
- >> You can vary the tone by adjusting the prompt: "Imagine a desirable future..." or "a future where one big challenge has been solved..."

## Planning a workshop?

Grab a free template in SessionLab's library.

[sessionlab.com/library](https://sessionlab.com/library)

### Looking around

### Team Canvas Session

### Doodling together

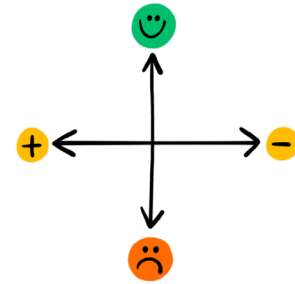
COLLABORATION CREATIVITY TEAMWORK FUN TEAM  
VISUAL METHODS ENERGISER ICE BREAKER REMOTE FRIENDLY



Create wild, weird and often funny postcards together & establish a group's creative confidence.

## Polak Exercise

Named after futurist Fred Polak, this reflective exercise asks participants to consider how they see the future, whether it's bright or bleak, and how those images shape the present. It **helps surface underlying assumptions and emotional responses to change**.



### INSTRUCTIONS

#### Version 1: Reflective (classic)

1. Invite participants to reflect silently on two questions:
  - >> What is your image of the future?
  - >> How does that image affect how you feel and act today?
2. Allow 5–10 minutes for writing or sketching.
3. Ask participants to share their reflections in pairs or small groups.
4. Bring the group together and discuss:
  - >> What patterns emerged?
  - >> Were the images hopeful, fearful, conflicted?
  - >> How might these affect your work?

#### Goal

Uncover participants' existing mental models of the future.

🕒 15-30 min

Longer for full group reflection.

👥 Works with small to medium-sized groups (6–20).

Can be adapted for larger groups with visual variation.

#### Materials

Reflective version:

Paper

Pens

Matrix version:

A printed or drawn 2×2 grid (on a flip chart, wall, or digital board)

Sticky dots or markers

**Version 2: Matrix (visual)**

1. Draw or display a 2x2 grid.  
One axis is optimism → pessimism about the future.  
The other is high agency → low agency (how much influence you feel you have).
2. Ask participants to place a sticky dot or mark where they currently feel they sit.
3. Step back and observe the distribution.  
Prompt a discussion:
  - » What do you notice?
  - » How do different views affect collaboration?
  - » What might shift these positions?
4. Optionally, invite participants to share what brought them to that point, and what might move them closer to a different quadrant.

**BACKGROUND**

Based on the work of Dutch futurist Fred Polak, who argued that “the image of the future is the strongest force shaping a culture”: **This method turns that insight into a group reflection, adapted for futures workshops across sectors.**

**FACILITATION TIPS**

- » Make space for a range of emotions and perspectives. It's fine if not everyone feels optimistic.
- » Emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers. This exercise is about awareness, not judgment.
- » Avoid moving too quickly into “fixing” mode. This is about noticing, not solving.
- » Consider doing this early in the session to help build awareness and openness before introducing tools and frameworks.
- » If using the matrix, be mindful of how visible placement might affect responses. Offer a digital or anonymous version if needed.
- » Use this exercise to build empathy: different people bring different images of the future, shaped by their experience, context, and role.



## Signal Scavenger Hunt

This activity invites participants to look for weak signals, which are early signs of change that may shape the future. It helps **build awareness of emerging trends, stimulates curiosity and encourages participants to notice what’s happening at the edges of the present.**



### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Briefly introduce the idea of a “signal of change”. A “signal of change” is a small, specific example of something new or unusual that might be a sign of a broader shift. Signals are often surprising, marginal, or contradictory.
2. Assign participants a time window (e.g., 10–15 minutes) to go on a “scavenger hunt” to collect one or more signals.  
These can be drawn from:
  - » Things they’ve read, seen, or heard recently
  - » A quick online search (e.g., niche blogs, forums, news stories)
  - » Personal or local observations from daily life
3. Ask them to note each signal with:
  - » A short description (What is it?)
  - » A source (Where did you find it?)
  - » A hunch (Why might it matter?)
4. Bring the group back together and ask participants to briefly share their signals. You can collect them on a wall, flipchart, or digital board for the group to explore together.

### Goal

Practise **horizon scanning** in an accessible, active way.

🕒 30–45 min

Can be shorter with tight facilitation.



Works well with individuals, pairs or small groups; scalable for larger groups with breakout spaces or digital tools.

### Materials

Paper or cards

Pens

Optional:

Internet access (e.g. phones/laptops)

Printed media (magazines, newspapers)

Digital board (if remote)

## BACKGROUND

Horizon scanning is a key practice in futures and foresight. The Signal Scavenger Hunt adapts it into an interactive, participatory format that lowers the barrier to entry and builds pattern-recognition skills, ideal for workshop openings.

Versions of this method are used by foresight teams in business, government and NGOs.

*“Any fool can tell a crisis when it arrives.  
The real service to the state is to detect it in embryo.”*  
— Isaac Asimov (Foundation)



### FACILITATION TIPS

- » Encourage participants to avoid “big trends” and look instead for the unusual or emerging.
- » If working with a specific domain (e.g., education, urban life), you can offer a focus, but be mindful of over-directing - it’s not needed.
- » Highlight the diversity of sources and interpretations. What seems niche now might become mainstream later.





## CASE STUDY

### INTEGRATING SYSTEMS MAPPING INTO TRANSFORMATIVE SCENARIO PROCESSES



**Christel Scholten** - Managing Director of the Brazilian office of **Reos Partners**, designer and facilitator of multistakeholder systems change and social transformation processes including several transformative scenarios processes, trainer and nature retreat guide.

I had been designing and facilitating transformative scenarios processes since 2013 and over the last five years began integrating systems mapping as a core element of the process. During this period, I also ensured that each scenarios process I facilitated involved indigenous and black people in the scenario team to integrate the diverse voices of the Brazilian population.

The recent scenarios processes we facilitated using this approach included the state of Rio de Janeiro scenarios in 2030, education for sustainable development scenarios in 2030, just energy transition scenarios in 2040, and scenarios for the black population in Brazil in 2050. Each of these involved multisectoral groups between 30 and 45 participants and 2 to 3 in-person workshops of 2-3 days each.

We often facilitated a collective systems mapping exercise of the current state of the system we were working with on the first afternoon of the first workshop. Scenario team members worked in groups of 7-8 and identified structures and mental models that contribute to maintaining the system and others that contribute to transforming the system. They would write these on hexagon sticky notes which we clustered on the wall. The next day these would be used as input to define the key uncertainties upon which the scenarios would be based. After defining the certainties for the scenarios and mini-scenarios for each of the key uncertainties, we organized these into 3-4 possible futures visually represented in a large comparative table on the wall. These formed the basis for the scenario narratives.

Something I learnt through these processes is the importance of engaging scenario team members in mapping and understanding the system collectively before determining the set of possible future scenarios.

Another thing I learnt was how useful it was for participants to have the core scenario inputs represented visually on the wall which they could consult as they engaged in the next step of the process.

A final learning is about the importance of involving indigenous and black people in these processes which bring in perspectives, ways of knowing, understanding and being in the world that wouldn't otherwise be represented.



## Mapping

Once the group is warmed up, it's time to begin grounding the conversation. Mapping methods help participants make sense of the present by identifying forces of change, patterns, and dynamics already at play.

**These tools offer a structured way to explore complexity,** clarifying what's shaping the world today and where momentum might be building.

The methods in this section don't require perfect data or expert analysis. Instead, they help groups work with what they already know and observe, **spotting drivers, tensions, and possibilities that may inform how futures unfold.**

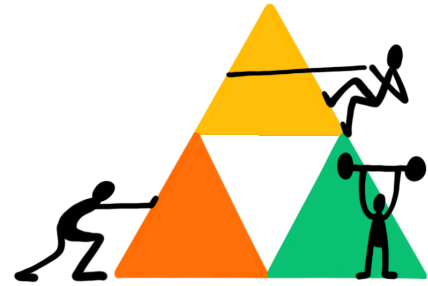
- **Futures Triangle**  
Map and discuss what is driving or blocking change.
- **Future Trends**  
Identify key transformative trends over the next few years.

## Futures Triangle

The Futures Triangle is a mapping tool that helps participants explore the forces shaping the future.

**It looks at three key elements: the pull of the future, the push of the present, and the weight of the past.**

Together, these form a dynamic picture of the landscape of change.



### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Draw or display a large triangle. Label each side as follows:
  - » Pull of the future: What visions, hopes or expectations are drawing us forward?
  - » Push of the present: What trends, drivers, or innovations are pushing change now?
  - » Weight of the past: What legacies, habits, or structures are holding things in place?
2. Invite participants to brainstorm ideas for each corner of the triangle, either as a whole group or in smaller teams. Use sticky notes for easy movement and clustering.
3. Once the triangle is filled in, discuss the dynamics:
  - » Where is the tension?
  - » What seems to have the most influence?
  - » Are there contradictions between past, present, and future forces?

### Goal

Discuss the drivers, constraints, and aspirations influencing possible futures.

🕒 30–60 min  
(flexible depending on depth).

👥 Works well with groups of 4–20; ideal for small teams or breakout groups that can compare outputs.

### Materials

- Pen
  - Flipchart paper or large worksheets
  - Markers
  - Sticky notes
- Optional:
- Digital collaboration boards

4. Groups can compare triangles or move into identifying leverage points or scenario starting points.

## BACKGROUND

Developed by Sohail Inayatullah, the Futures Triangle is part of his broader work in futures thinking and causal layered analysis (CLA).

*“We are prisoners of our own metaphors,  
metaphorically speaking...”  
— R. Buckminster Fuller*



### FACILITATION TIPS

- » Clarify that this is not about right or wrong answers. Instead, it's a way of surfacing shared (and divergent) understandings.
- » If participants get stuck, use prompts like: “What’s one thing everyone assumes will happen?” or “What’s holding us back from change?”
- » This method pairs well with **Horizon Scanning** or **Futures Wheel** as a follow-up.

## Future Trends

This tool helps small and large groups to **identify key transformative trends** over the next few years, **explore their consequences**, and **begin to look at how they can be met to create business opportunities**.

By the end of the workshop, participants create a list of most relevant trends; and an elaboration on three most-important trends, including ideas around how their organization/s could act to meet those trends.

Can be run both online and face-to-face.



### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Explain that we are going to discuss transformative trends in the near future, and explore how our organization/s might act to meet those trends.
2. The group will collaboratively map the most relevant trends changing their industry over the next 3 years. Explain to the participants that by “trend” we’re not simply talking about transient fashion fads, but about driving forces in society that have strong and lasting consequences.

This step has four rounds of 5 minutes.

Each round focuses on a different category:

**Business**  
**User Behaviour**  
**Talent**

**Demands**  
**Technology**

The task is to brainstorm as many relevant trends in each category as possible.

### Goal

Identify key transformative trends over the next three years.

🕒 2 hrs  
 (flexible depending on depth).

👥 2-40

### Materials

- Flipchart
- Markers
- Tape
- Sticky notes

**Face-to-Face:** Give participants sticky notes and markers. Instruct them to write one trend per sticky note, speaking them aloud before sticking them on a wall in four clearly labeled category sections.

**Online:** Use a digital whiteboard like Miro to create boards and sticky notes to work with.

Give them 5 minutes per category. 20 minutes in total.

3. After the four rounds, the next step is to quickly prioritize the trends in terms of which will have the biggest impact. It should take around 5 minutes.

Use the **Dotmocracy** tool. It's perfect for helping large groups to make rapid prioritizations. Using markers, give each participant 8 dots (or digital votes on a whiteboard) to distribute across the trends they have posted up.

They should base their voting on which trends they feel “will have the biggest impact on their business over the coming 3 years.”

To help avoid group bias, ask them to select their votes in their heads first, then place their dots. Once the votes have been placed, select the three most-voted trends to explore in the next step.

4. The aim of this step is for the groups to collaboratively explore the most important trends, and generate ideas around the business opportunities that they might open up.

Split the group into smaller groups of 2-4 people. Each new group will work with one trend, exploring its opportunities, consequences, potential risks, and imagining:

» What does our company look like in three years if we fully take advantage of the opportunities of this trend?

» What steps would we need to take today to begin moving that way?

Give each group a **trend template**, and 15-20 minutes to complete it. Before they begin working, remind the participants that this is an exploratory exercise.

They should work from what they know, sense and feel, and complete the template fairly quickly. After they have completed the templates, have groups quickly present back to each other.

5. Explain the next steps to the group. What are you going to do with the trends and insights? How are you going to work with them as individuals and companies?

**BACKGROUND** (Source: [Hyper Island toolbox](#))

Hyper Island designs learning experiences that challenge companies and individuals to grow and stay competitive in an increasingly digitized world. With clients such as Google, adidas and IKEA, Hyper Island has been listed by CNN as one of the most innovative schools in the world.



# Anticipating

Once the group is grounded in what's happening now, it's time to begin looking ahead. This section focuses on anticipation: surfacing early signals, exploring drivers of change, and considering what might happen next.

**The methods here help participants build familiarity with uncertainty.** Some support wide scanning and structured analysis; others open up space for speculation and provocation. Together, they build a more expansive sense of what could be possible, probable, or surprising.

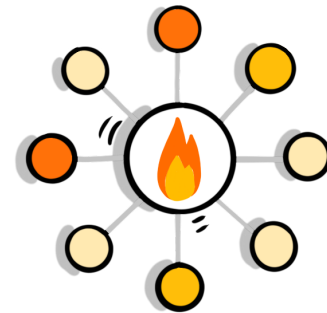
These tools don't aim to predict the future. Instead, they **help groups explore a range of possibilities by making change feel more visible, and more discussable.**

- **Futures Wheel**  
Visualize the potential consequences of making a change.
- **What if...?**  
Provoke creative, divergent thinking.
- **Horizon Scanning**  
Identifying emerging issues and trends that could shape the future.

## Futures Wheel

The Futures Wheel is a structured tool that helps groups explore the ripple effects of change. Starting from one event or trend, participants map out first-order consequences, and then expand outward into second- and third-order impacts.

It **encourages systems thinking and helps uncover both obvious and unexpected outcomes.**




### INSTRUCTIONS


1. Start with a clear central change or event. This could be a trend, innovation, decision, or shift identified earlier in the workshop. Write it in the centre of the paper.
2. Ask participants to generate first-order consequences. Direct and immediate effects of that change. Place these in a ring around the centre.
3. Then, for each first-order consequence, ask:
  - » » “What happens as a result of this?”

This becomes the second order. Repeat to a third order if time allows.
4. Encourage discussion around each ring.
  - » » What’s desirable?
  - » » What’s unexpected?
  - » » What links are forming?
5. If needed, prioritise which consequences feel most relevant, risky, or actionable.

### Goal

Explore the potential consequences of a change in a structured, visual way.

 30–60 min  
(depending on depth).

 Works well in small groups (3–6) or full group with facilitator-led mapping.

### Materials

- Flipchart or large paper
- Markers
- Sticky notes

Optional:

- Pre-printed Futures Wheel templates

For online use:

- Collaborative white-board tools (e.g. Miro, Mural)



## BACKGROUND

Created by Jerome C. Glenn in the early 1970s, the Futures Wheel has become a staple of futures and strategic foresight practice. It supports systems thinking by mapping not just what might happen, but what happens because it happens.

“The future influences the present just as much as the past.”  
— Friedrich Nietzsche



### FACILITATION TIPS

- » This method works especially well when paired with a prior **scanning exercise**, such as **STEEPL** (Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, Political, Legal). Use STEEPL to identify key external changes, then select one or more for deeper exploration using the Futures Wheel.
- » Use a timer to keep the exercise moving.
- » It's like that many groups will get stuck on the first ring so be ready with examples and support.
- » Remind participants that not all consequences are certain. This exercise is about plausible possibilities, not predictions.
- » You can do this as one shared map, or several small group wheels with different starting points.



## CASE STUDY

### WHAT FUTURES FOR “AUGMENTED” FACILITATION?



**Sara Tremi Proietti** - Public officer and facilitator.

Explorer of complexity theory, strategic foresight, and conflict mediation.

In March 2025, the annual Facilita conference (the Italian gathering of facilitators) took place in Milan. As co-chair of IAF Italy, nearing the end of my two-year term, I wanted to contribute a workshop. This year’s theme, “Facilitation and Artificial Intelligence,” was close to my heart. I had grown increasingly passionate about AI and was eager to try an in-person futures exercise. The opportunity was too good to miss. I teamed up with [Barbara Bellucci](#), a fellow facilitator and futurist, and we booked our session.

But what could we offer a curious, open-minded group of facilitators in just two hours? A futures wheel exploring the medium- and long-term impact of AI on facilitation felt like the right fit.

Our goal was to guide participants into the future through small-group discussions and hands-on experimentation with AI. In particular, we wanted to see how AI might help uncover hidden assumptions and biases, identify second-order effects, and reveal interconnections across the futures wheels.

Participants worked in groups of five, with written instructions that guided them through a series of individual, group, and AI-supported reflections. We also set up a WhatsApp group to deliver step-by-step AI prompts in real time, written to encourage participants to explore potential blind spots in their thinking.

Two hours later, the walls were lined with completed futures wheels. Each group photographed their wheel, then asked AI to summarize their work.

Here are some of our learnings from that day:

- » Clear written instructions are essential, especially for transmitting complicated instructions in a decentralized space.
- » Our time constraints were quite tight, and people found that frustrating: striking a good balance between time pressure and spaciousness is quite the challenge.
- » If you're using AI to transcribe handwritten notes, legibility matters.
- » And, most importantly of all: when doing futures work, stop to give careful thought to crafting specific questions with clear contexts, to keep the conversation grounded.

## What if...?

A speculative prompt-based activity that encourages participants to explore alternative futures by asking bold or unexpected "what if" questions.

This method **invites imaginative thinking and helps loosen assumptions about how the future has to unfold.**





### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Introduce the method by explaining that small shifts can lead to very different futures. Sometimes, asking "what if?" can unlock powerful new insights.
2. Share or invite the group to generate a set of speculative "what if" questions. These can be provocative, hopeful, or strange. Examples:
  - >> What if owning data was a basic human right?
  - >> What if fossil fuels became illegal overnight?
  - >> What if learning replaced earning as the measure of success?
3. Give each small group or pair one question to explore. Ask them to imagine a future where that "what if" is true.
  - >> What would change?
  - >> Who benefits?
  - >> What new challenges appear?
4. Have groups sketch or list key features of that future. Optionally, ask them to present back to the whole group.

### Goal

Provoke creative, divergent thinking and expand the range of possibilities.

 20–40 min  
(depending on number of prompts and depth of discussion).

 Flexible for group size. Works well with 4–20 people in small teams or whole-group discussion.

### Materials

- Pens
- Sticky notes or index cards

Optional:

- A prepared list of "what if" prompts

For online use:

- Shared documents or whiteboards

5. Close with reflection:

- >> What felt surprising?
- >> What assumptions were disrupted?
- >> How might these provocations connect to today's decisions?

## BACKGROUND

Speculative questioning is a foundational practice in futures thinking, design fiction, and foresight education.

The "What if...?" format is especially useful for groups new to futures work because it's **simple, engaging, and reveals how deeply we are guided by our assumptions.**

“People don't need new facts – they need a new story...  
change their story and change their behaviour.”

— Rob Hopkins,  
From What Is to What If



### FACILITATION TIPS

- >> The goal isn't realism. The goal is to stretch thinking. Encourage boldness and play.
- >> If participants struggle, offer “preposterous” examples to warm them up.
- >> You can guide tone depending on context: light and imaginative, or serious and values-driven.



## Horizon Scanning

Horizon scanning is a structured method for identifying early signs of change, like emerging issues, trends, and weak signals that could shape the future.

It **helps participants look beyond the immediate and obvious**, scanning across multiple domains to detect what might be coming next.



### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Introduce the purpose of horizon scanning: to look beyond the organisation, issue, or sector, and identify emerging changes in the wider world.
2. Provide a scanning framework (e.g. STEEPL or custom categories) to give structure.
3. Ask participants to look for signals of change. These could come from:
  - >> Media, blogs, niche news sources
  - >> Research reports
  - >> Everyday observations
  - >> Examples from their own context or sector
4. For each signal, participants should record:
  - >> What is it?
  - >> Where did it come from?
  - >> Why might it matter?

### Goal

Collecting and discussing emerging signals and drivers of change.

45-120 min

Works with individuals or groups; ideal in teams of 3–6 for collaborative sense-making.

### Materials

- Sticky notes
- Markers
- Printed materials (e.g. news articles, trend reports)
- Laptops for digital research

Optional:

- Scanning template
- Domains (e.g. STEEPL).

For online use:

- Digital whiteboard

5. Collect and group signals. Discuss:

- >> Which signals are surprising?
- >> Are there early patterns or contradictions?
- >> What questions do these raise about the future?

## BACKGROUND

Horizon scanning is a core practice in futures and foresight, used in both government and industry to anticipate emerging change.

While it can be formal and data-driven, this workshop version **prioritises participation and learning, helping groups develop their collective radar for what's next.**



### FACILITATION TIPS

- >> Encourage scanning beyond mainstream sources to avoid reinforcing current narratives.
- >> Emphasise that weak signals are valuable, even if they seem niche or unclear.
- >> Use scanning as a recurring practice. It's not just a one-off activity, it's about developing habits of awareness.



## Envisioning

With a sense of the forces shaping change, participants are ready to explore what different futures might actually look and feel like. This section is about moving from analysis to imagination. We want to bring possible futures into focus through narrative, worldview, and reflection.

The methods here support groups in exploring a range of futures, from plausible to provocative. Some build structured stories of what might unfold; others surface the deeper beliefs and metaphors that influence how we imagine change.

Envisioning isn't just about imagining better outcomes. It's about **expanding the space of what's thinkable, so groups can engage more consciously and creatively with uncertainty.**

- **Scenario Planning**  
Create and explore diverse future scenarios.
- **Myths and Metaphors (Causal Layered Analysis)**  
Surface underlying assumptions and cultural narratives.

## Scenario Planning

Scenario Planning is a structured approach to imagining multiple, plausible futures. Rather than predicting one outcome, it helps groups explore a range of possibilities shaped by uncertainty and change.

It's a powerful tool for **preparing strategy, stimulating creative thinking, and stress-testing assumptions.**



### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Introduce the purpose: Explain that scenarios are not predictions, but plausible stories about how the future might unfold under different conditions.
2. Define key uncertainties: As a group or in advance, identify two major uncertainties that will shape the future of your topic (e.g. ,“Regulation: strict vs. light” and “Technology adoption: slow vs. fast”). These will form the axes of a 2×2 matrix.
3. Map the 2×2: Place each uncertainty on one axis of a grid, creating four quadrants, each representing a distinct future.
4. Develop scenarios: Divide into small groups. Assign each group a quadrant and ask them to develop a scenario where both conditions are true.  
Encourage storytelling:
  - »» What’s happening in this future?
  - »» Who is affected?
  - »» What challenges or opportunities arise?

### Goal

Create and explore diverse future scenarios to inform planning.

🕒 90 min to half-day  
(can be extended across multiple sessions).

👥 Best with 6–30 participants; can be done in small groups or plenary, depending on scope.

### Materials

- Flipcharts or large paper
- Markers
- Scenario templates or axes
- Sticky notes

For online use (optional)

- Digital whiteboard and slides



**5. Share and reflect:**

- » Each group presents their scenario.
- » Discuss what's surprising.
- » What feels plausible.
- » What this might mean for action today.

**BACKGROUND**

Originally developed by the RAND Corporation and later popularised by Royal Dutch Shell in the 1970s, Scenario Planning is one of the most widely used tools in strategic foresight.

It encourages resilience by helping groups prepare for a range of possible futures rather than just one forecast.

**FACILITATION TIPS**

- » Keep the framing grounded but open. Encourage imagination without drifting into science fiction.
- » If the group struggles with uncertainty, begin with trends or drivers from previous exercises (e.g. STEEPL or Horizon Scanning).
- » Scenarios work best when the uncertainties are truly uncertain, rather than when they are just opposites of what's already known.



## CASE STUDY

### **A VISION FOR THE TYNE DERWENT WAY**



**Megan Evans** - Facilitator, trainer and consultant.  
ICA:UK Technology of Participation Lead Trainer, member of IAF and  
of **Consultants for Good**.

The Tyne Derwent Way (TDW) is a nine-mile riverside route along the Tyne and Derwent rivers, Gateshead, Northumberland, UK, celebrating its heritage, culture, people and wildlife. The route connects urban communities to countryside, heritage sites, events and to the areas past, the present and hopefully the future. How could we build a common understanding and vision for the its development?

I was called in as an independent facilitator to encourage conversation and move the group towards identifying realistic actions. The TDW was a new initiative started during COVID and the group wanted some time to take a breath after a frenetic few years and to help them identify the best way forward. The 3-hour workshop was delivered to stakeholders - environmental activists, local authority and NGOs.

Firstly the group reviewed the influences and actions taken to date before considering their vision for the future of the riverside route.

Firstly I asked participants to quietly sit and imagine that they were visiting the TDW in 30 years' time asking:

- >> What would you hope to see?
- >> What activities would people be doing?
- >> What would people be saying about the space?
- >> What would be putting smiles on the faces of visitors?

Then I asked participants to imagine the TDW 100 years in the future, where lots would be different especially in terms of technology and asked:

- >> How would it be different from now?
- >> What would you see?
- >> What would you hear?
- >> What would people be talking about the space?

We then drilled down to a shorter time period asking the focused question - What collective aspirations do we have for our work over the next five years?

Firstly I asked people individually to either write or draw their thoughts and ideas, then they moved into small groups of four to five people to explore and prioritise their thinking. In their groups they then agreed the best 6 – 7 ideas which were shared and grouped into themes by via whole group discussion.

The outcome was a set of 9 themes with easily identifiable actions to take forward and a feeling that the groups voices had been heard.

Something I learnt is that it's essential to give yourself enough time to plan the session but it is important that the physical space is well-ventilated, spacious enough to allow comfortable movement for all participants and allows for people to be easily heard while working in groups.

“We shape the future not by predicting it—  
but by imagining better stories  
and choosing to live into them.”  
— Suzanne Whitby

## Myths and Metaphors (Causal Layered Analysis)

Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) is a deep futures tool that helps groups move beyond surface-level problems to explore the deeper stories, systems, and worldviews that shape the present.

This version **focuses on the myths and metaphors layer, in order to uncover the narratives that underpin how people see the future.**



### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Introduce the four levels of CLA:
  - » **Litany:** headlines and visible problems
  - » **Systemic** causes: structural drivers (economic, political, etc.)
  - » **Worldview:** assumptions, ideologies, beliefs
  - » **Myths/metaphors:** deep stories and symbolic narratives
2. Start by choosing a focal issue or topic (e.g. “the future of work”, “climate action”).
3. Work layer by layer (or jump directly to the myth/metaphor level):
  - » Ask: What’s the common narrative around this issue?
  - » What assumptions underpin that view?
  - » What metaphors or stories do we tell about this? (e.g. “the race against time”, “man vs nature”, “data as oil”)

### Goal

Surface underlying assumptions and cultural narratives.

🕒 45–90 min  
(can be expanded with multiple rounds or layers).

👥 Works best with small to medium-sized groups (6–20), ideally with some trust or facilitation experience.

### Materials

- Flipchart or whiteboard
  - Sticky notes
  - Pens
- Optional:
- Pre-prepared prompts or examples of metaphors in use

4. Capture ideas as you go, either moving down the levels or mapping horizontally.
5. Close by discussing:
  - » What's revealed when we reach the metaphor layer?
  - » How might reframing the story change what we see as possible?

## BACKGROUND

Developed by futurist Sohail Inayatullah, CLA is a cornerstone of critical futures thinking. It's designed to support more inclusive, layered conversations by opening up not just what might happen, but why we imagine it that way.



### FACILITATION TIPS

- » This method requires space for reflection. Don't rush.
- » Offer examples of metaphors if the group gets stuck. They're often hidden in plain sight.
- » Be mindful that worldviews and narratives can carry emotional or cultural weight.

# Embodying

Imagining the future is one thing: experiencing it is another.

**This section invites participants to step more fully into future worlds through storytelling, creativity, and physical or emotional engagement.** The goal isn't just to think differently, but to feel and see from within a different context.

These methods help make futures tangible. By dreaming boldly or designing objects from imagined worlds, groups can test assumptions, reveal values, and generate more grounded insights. They're also energising, and can help to shift the mood of a session and opening up new kinds of participation.

Immersive methods can be playful, poetic, or serious. What they share is a belief that **futures work is intellectual AND sensory, embodied, and human.**

- **Radical Dreaming**  
Centre the imagination as a critical part of futures thinking.
- **Artefacts from the Future**  
Embody a possible future through a physical or visual object.

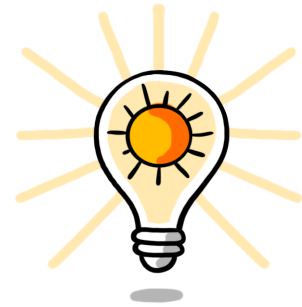


## Radical Dreaming

Radical Dreaming invites participants to imagine bold, transformative futures without the usual constraints of feasibility or current limitations.

It's a space to envision what's truly possible, before practicalities narrow the field.

This method **centres imagination as a critical part of futures thinking.**





### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Set the tone: explain that this is an exercise in possibility, not probability. Ask participants to suspend concerns about realism or implementation.
2. Invite participants to imagine a future 10, 20 or even 50 years ahead where something important has changed for the better.  
Use prompts such as:
  - >> What does a just, joyful, or regenerative future look like?
  - >> What if we succeeded in creating a thriving, equitable system, what would your life be like?
3. Encourage participants to express their visions in writing, sketching, or spoken word.
4. After individual reflection, invite sharing in pairs or small groups.
5. Close with group discussion:
  - >> What common hopes appeared?
  - >> What values were expressed?
  - >> What surprised you?

### Goal

To expand creative capacity and surface values and desires.

 30–60 min

 Best with small to medium-sized groups (6–20); works well in pairs or reflective journaling.

### Materials

Paper

Pens

Optional:

Art supplies (colouremarkers, collage materials)

For online use:

Shared documents or creative digital boards

## BACKGROUND

Radical Dreaming draws on practices from social justice movements, Indigenous futurisms, and critical design. It's rooted in the idea that imagination is political and that envisioning new worlds is the first step toward creating them.

“All that you touch, You Change.  
All that you Change, Changes you.  
The only lasting truth, is Change.”

— Octavia E. Butler,  
The Parable of the Sower



### FACILITATION TIPS

- » Some participants may find this exercise confronting or difficult. Offer reassurance that there are no wrong answers.
- » Be intentional about the mood. Use music, quiet, and gentle pacing to help create space for honest visioning.
- » This method works well as a midpoint or prelude to more strategic exercises (e.g. Backcasting).





## CASE STUDY

### **BUILDING CLIMATE RESILIENCE THROUGH GROUP-DREAMING**



**Sophia Cheng** - Facilitator & founder of **With Many Roots**.

She has a habit of making 'the hard stuff' more accessible and focuses her work on the comms, training and engagement to address the climate and ecological crisis.

Following the heatwave in the summer of 2022, some Woodland Trust staff felt that things were out of their control; they were stuck at their desks, burned out and hopeless in the face of the climate crisis. I teamed up with the Woodland Trust to run a unique and innovative pilot study that combines peer grief counselling, imagination and creative writing to combat burnout among those working in the environmental NGO sector.

I designed a 3-month-long programme that aimed to build long-term resilience and active hope. We did that in three ways. Firstly, 'composting sessions' to give space for the hard feelings that emerge. Second, 'group-dreaming sessions' to cast an eye to the future, taking one ecological solution or emerging technology each month and imagining what the world would be like if it were already so. These sessions were for imagination stretching, collective dreaming and building active hope based on tangible possibilities. Third, 'myth-making sessions' taught the participants creative writing skills, to allow them to write short stories about their imagined futures, to share with and help to inspire others within the organisation.

Questionnaires at the end of the project revealed that those who had taken part felt better able to communicate their emotions constructively, more resilient, more confident as storytellers and better able to imagine a positive future.

Something I learnt is that imagination is like a muscle, it needs to be used. While participants found it strange to imagine positive futures by the third month we were reaching over 100 years into the future and found lots to celebrate.

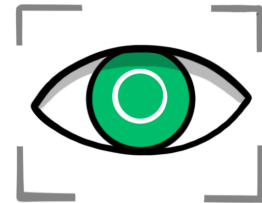


**With Many Roots**



## Artefacts from the Future: 2D or 3D Version

This creative method invites participants to bring a possible future to life by designing or imagining a tangible object from that world. In the same way that we have historical artefacts from the past, this exercise is all about **creating a tangible “artefact from the future”**. It’s a way to make abstract scenarios feel real, prompting empathy, engagement, and grounded conversation.




When adopting the 3D approach, this method shifts participants into a making mindset. This engages their analytical thinking as well as intuition, improvisation, and embodied creativity. This helps surface insights that might not emerge through discussion or writing alone.


### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Begin by setting a time horizon and context. Link to an existing scenario or simply ask: “Imagine a future 10–20 years from now where something significant has changed.”
2. Ask each group to imagine and create an artefact from that future. This might be a product, policy, tool, app, document, object, or system element.
3. Give teams a choice:
  - » Option A (2D): Draw, write, or digitally sketch the artefact.
  - » Option B (3D): Build the artefact using craft materials, found objects, or Lego. Encourage improvisation.

### Goal

To embody a possible future through a physical or visual object.

 30–60 min

 Flexible for different group sizes. Works well in small teams of 2–4 for creation, with whole-group sharing.

### Materials

- Paper
- Pens
- Markers
- Recycled materials, magazines
- Scissors
- Glue
- Lego or small construction toys
- Collage materials
- Labels



4. Ask each group to consider:

- » What is this object for?
- » Who uses it, and how?
- » What problem does it solve or create?
- » What does it suggest about the values of this future?

For online use:

- Shared slides or whiteboards with access to image libraries or design templates

5. Each group shares their artefact. Presentations can include naming, advertising, or role-play as if speaking from that future world.

6. Reflect as a group:

- » What themes appeared?
- » What felt compelling or strange?
- » What shifts in today's world would make these artefacts possible?

## BACKGROUND

This method is rooted in design fiction and speculative design, popularised by the Near Future Laboratory and others.

It is used in futures, innovation, and education settings to bring the abstract into focus through story and form.



### FACILITATION TIPS

- » Encourage rough ideas and playfulness. Clarity of concept matters more than polish.
- » Use physical materials to engage different learning styles and creative approaches.
- » Provide gentle time prompts or consider using strict time-boxing. Building can be immersive and groups may lose track.

# Acting

**Futures thinking isn't complete until it reconnects with the present.** This final section focuses on translating insights into action, and introduces methods that encourage exploration into how **today's choices can shape tomorrow's outcomes**, and how to stay adaptable in the face of change.

**The methods here support groups in planning, prioritising, and stress-testing ideas.** Some focus on backcasting from a preferred future, while others help map risks, opportunities, and points of resilience within current systems.

**This is where futures work becomes practical: not about certainty, but about preparation.** The aim is to leave the room inspired and equipped with next steps, shared clarity, and a sense of agency.

- **Backcasting**  
Begin with the future the group wants and work backward towards next steps.
- **Risks, Opportunities and Resilience**  
Identify key risks and opportunities and prepare to face them.
- **Triz**  
Clear the path for change (and add some humor too!).



## Backcasting

Backcasting helps a group move from a visionary future toward clear next steps in the present. Instead of asking what might happen based on current trends, backcasting begins with the future the group wants and works backward to identify what needs to be in place along the way.



It's a method rooted in what's called normative futures thinking. That means you're asking, "**What should we do to create this future?**" rather than "What might happen to us?" This approach can generate a sense of agency and urgency, especially when people see how much must change to reach their goals.

### INSTRUCTIONS


1. Start by helping the group clearly define a desirable future state. For example: "What is our ideal outcome in 2045?"
2. Once that vision is set, move backward in time step by step. Ask:
  - >> What needs to have happened by 2035 to make 2045 possible?
  - >> What needs to have happened by 2030?
  - >> What needs to happen in the next year?


Have small groups discuss each milestone and note their responses on the canvas.

3. Invite each group to share their backward roadmap and propose next steps they can take now. These can feed into a formal action plan.

### Goal

Planning the actions necessary to reach desired goals.

 60-120 min

 Any number, working in groups of 5-8 people.

### Materials

One canvas for each group

Markers

For online use:

Prepare sections for each group on a whiteboard

### BACKGROUND:

John Robinson coined the term "backcasting" in the early 1980s.



## CASE STUDY

### THRIVING FOREST FUTURES



**Deborah Rim Moiso** - SessionLab content writer, trainer in facilitation skills & IAF Endorsed Facilitator, with a slant toward environmental, regeneration, sustainability topics

In early 2025, I was hired by a EU agency to facilitate an 80-person networking event among experts in the field of forest management. What methods could best support their conversations and lead to concrete action planning? And (here is the catch), could I do it in 3 hours?

Backcasting might be one of the most well-known futures methodologies amongst facilitators, probably because it lends itself to quick execution. By dividing participants in groups of about 7 people and getting them around a table with a backcasting canvas, it was a simple task to lead them into ambitious visions of what a positive future for the (human and other-than-human) forest communities would be like, then back along the timeline, step-by-step, into practical actions they could take.

After a break, participants returned to find all their canvases hung on the walls and had time to discuss and share what action points they felt were most important to execute in the coming year.

Something I learnt that day is the value of well-prepared canvases. These were designed specifically for the event, with lots of space for participants to write on with markers (rather than a flurry of sticky notes that might get unstuck and fly around everywhere). The design looked sleek and professional, clear written instructions helped the conversation stay on track, and the end results were easy to read and understand.



#### FACILITATION TIPS

- » Lead the group in envisioning and discussing the ideal future state before starting backcasting, to avoid excessively unrealistic and vague futures.
- » The number and spacing of milestones can be adapted to suit your context. But don't skip the middle steps. They help people grasp the scale of change needed.
- » The more interdisciplinary the groups, the more creative and grounded the outcomes tend to be.
- » Remind participants to write clearly if you're digitizing outputs later.



## Risks, Opportunities and Resilience

This method helps groups assess the potential impacts of future changes, both positive and negative, and reflect on how resilient they are to different types of disruption.

**It supports balanced, practical conversations that go beyond excitement or fear,** focusing instead on preparation and adaptability.



### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Introduce the purpose: this is a chance to explore what a particular change (or future scenario) might mean. Position this not just in terms of potential and opportunity, but also risk and readiness.
2. Choose a focal trend, signal, or future development. This can come from earlier exercises like Horizon Scanning or Scenario Planning.
3. In small groups, ask participants to discuss and record:
  - » **Risks:** What could go wrong? What might be disrupted, lost, or destabilised?
  - » **Opportunities:** What new possibilities might open up? Who could benefit?
  - » **Resilience:** How well prepared are we? What capabilities, resources, or relationships would help us respond or adapt?
4. Encourage participants to be specific. Ask them to think about systems, people, tools, and behaviours.

### Goal

To identify key risks and opportunities linked to emerging changes and build resilience.

🕒 45–60 minutes (can be expanded for deeper planning).

👥 Works well with 6–20 participants; ideal in small breakout groups with plenary sharing.

### Materials

Flipcharts or worksheets

Markers

Sticky notes

Optional:

Pre-defined trends or scenarios to work from

5. Groups present highlights from their discussion to the full group. Optionally, capture key insights on a shared wall or board for later reference.

## BACKGROUND

While not attributed to a single source, this kind of three-part framing is widely used in strategy, design, and foresight processes. It helps groups balance aspiration with awareness. Recognising that futures work is as much about readiness as it is about vision.

“Foresight is not about predicting the future,  
it’s about minimizing surprise.”  
— Karl Schroeder

### FACILITATION TIPS

- » This method can be framed positively or cautiously depending on the energy in the room.
- » Use follow-up questions to go deeper: What makes us vulnerable? Where are we most adaptable?
- » Works well at the end of a futures process, as a bridge into strategic planning.



## Triz

TRIZ helps a group move from reflection to action by uncovering the habits, assumptions, or systems that might be undermining their ability to respond to uncertainty or to move closer to a desired future.



After exploring possible futures, this activity flips the usual approach.

Instead of asking “What should we do next?”, it begins by asking “**How could we make sure we fail?**”


This reverse perspective often leads to surprising insights and clears the path for meaningful change.


### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Ask the group to restate the future they have been working toward. For example:
  - »» What would success look like in 2040?
2. Then pose the question:
  - »» What could we do (intentionally or unintentionally) to make sure we don’t reach that future, or stay unprepared for what’s ahead?
3. In small groups, brainstorm all the actions, behaviors, and patterns that would lead to failure or fragility.
4. Next, go through the list and ask:
  - »» Which of these things are we currently doing, even just a little?

### Goal

especially useful for building resilience and commitment at the close of a futures workshop.

 45–60 min

 Any number, working in groups of 4 to 8 people. Can also be used as an individual reflection.

### Materials

- Flipchart or shared whiteboard
- Markers or sticky notes

5. Finally, discuss:
  - » What can we stop, reduce, or redesign to become more resilient and more aligned with our desired future?
6. Have each group share one or two actionable insights to take forward.

#### BACKGROUND:

TRIZ was adapted for group facilitation by [Liberating Structures](#), inspired by a problem-solving methodology developed in the Soviet Union to drive innovation by identifying contradictions.



#### FACILITATION TIPS

- » Keep the tone light during the failure brainstorm. It helps people surface tough truths without judgment. Humor is very welcome in Triz!
- » Be ready to guide step 4 with care. It can bring up uncomfortable realizations, but that is where the breakthroughs often lie.
- » This activity pairs well with backcasting or scenario work, helping to bridge insight and implementation.
- » Use the final reflections to seed action planning or feed into next steps.





## Facilitation tips

If you've come this far, we hope that you feel ready, equipped, and inspired to face a future in which you are facilitating groups to explore theirs.

This work can be deep and serious as well as playful and creative. Like any facilitation task, it will change radically based on the group and context. Here are 5 things we invite you to keep in mind as you approach your next futures workshop:



### **Pick methods, tools and questions that suit the group.**

Doing some research about the group you are going to be working with is due diligence and common sense. Don't push a timid group of new staffers to embody a utopian future, theatricals and all, in front of their boss. Conversely, quiet focussed writing on sticky notes might not be the thing for energetic NGO volunteers. Interviews with your clients and, ideally, a few participants, will inform your thinking and enable you to create the right program for that specific group.



### **Stress that this is not about predicting the future, but about preparing for change, today.**

The idea that futures thinking is akin to having a magic ball or doing some sort of astrology is where most of the resistance to this work stems from. Clarify that we work with the future to build capacity in the present, and keep it practical.



### **Encourage diversity of views.**

Challenge the group if their views are too hopeful or too bleak. Futures work is at its most valuable when it skirts speculative fiction yet stays close to possibilities and realities. Full-fledged utopias and dystopias might be useful thought experiments, but for influencing our groups and organizations, it's more useful to remember that all plausible futures will always be a mix of good and bad. Encourage the group to look at different possible angles.



### **Give it space.**

Some people readily jump into using their imagination but that is not all people. Rushing into these activities is likely to make your futures flat, unimaginative and yield little that is of use. Ease the group into these activities. The opening activities will help with this, as will some good examples: think of those ahead of time.



### **Always include some points for action planning and next steps.**

Don't leave the group hanging and wondering: "so what was that for?" If you don't have time for a longer closing activity, at least host a round of "what is one thing you'll do/change as a consequence of this exercise?"



## Keep exploring

The International Association of Facilitators has a Special Interest Group on Facilitating Futures & Foresight, hosted by Suzanne.

We're here to explore methods, ideas, and practices for facilitating workshops and meetings where future thinking and strategic foresight is key.

### Our goals:

- ☞ As practitioners, build future literacy skills to support personal and professional growth.
- ☞ As facilitators, learn new methods and tools that we can bring into our client-facing work to help others USE the future to make better decisions in the present and plan strategically for possible futures.
- ☞ As a community, learn from each other through practical workshops, open discussions, and the sharing of experiences.

### Our mission

To become Futures Literate facilitators, and facilitators of hopeful, sustainable resilience futures – while having a bit of fun, too!

[Learn more about the Special Interest Group.](#)



promoting the power  
of facilitation worldwide

In [SessionLab's Library](#) you can find these and more methods on Facilitating Futures, as well as the right tool for your session whatever your focus is, among more than 1400 methods.

# To continue your journey into futures

## WEBSITES

### Institute for the Future

- » **Why?** Their blog and resource areas are things of wonder, and they offer workshops and training, too.

### The UK government's "Futures, Foresight and Emerging Technologies" area

- » **Why?** Plain language explanations about what Futures & Foresight work is all about, as well as useful guides and toolkits, all free.

### Foresight Guide

- » **Why?** The Foresight Guide is an online book, and the website positions it as the most comprehensive intro to general futures thinking and professional foresight practice available on the web.



## COURSES AND TRAINING

### Futures Thinking Specialization

Offered by game designer and futurist **Jane McGonigal** from the IFTF, this is a great **free introduction to Futures and Foresight work**.

### Metafuture School

Renowned futurist **Sohail Inayatullah** (creator of the Futures Triangle and Causal Layer Analysis, which looks at the underlying "stories" behind possible futures) offers **two accessible and affordable courses, one for Personal Futures and other for those interested in Futures at work**.

Both are excellent self-paced courses with the opportunity to publish some of your learnings at the end.

### TFSX

In-person and on-demand training, as well as an enjoyable **podcast**. TFSX offers **a perspective on futures and foresight** that has a strong business and practitioner focus rather than an academic perspective.

## A GOOD READ:

» Starting with the basics?

### **"Futuring: The Exploration of the Future" by Edward Cornish**

Edward Cornish, a leading futurist and founder of the World Future Society, offers an insightful and comprehensive guide to the field of "futurology" (as it's known in some European circles). The book is both an introduction to futurology for newcomers and a valuable resource for seasoned practitioners.

» Want to dive into a classic?

### **"Future Shock" by Alvin Toffler**

This book was published in 1984, and it's arguably one of the most influential books ever written on the future. Its premise? That the pace of change was outstripping the human capacity to deal with it.

» Want to apply methods in business?

### **"The Art of the Long View: Planning for the Future in an Uncertain World" by Peter Schwartz**

This book has a business focus and is packed with stories about how scenarios impact businesses and organisations.

» Looking for a "how to" guide?

### **"Thinking about the Future: Guidelines for Strategic Foresight" by Andy Hines & Peter Bishop**

The ultimate set of guidelines from leading practitioners on how to do strategic foresight.

» Curious about how hindsight links to foresight?

### **"Try A Short History of Progress" by Ronald Wright**

A book that explores the patterns of triumph and disaster which humanity has repeated since the Stone Age and how understanding these, along with luck and wisdom, might help us to shape better outcomes.

» **Want more, including some speculative fiction?**

Pop over to [www.futures.fit/reading](http://www.futures.fit/reading).



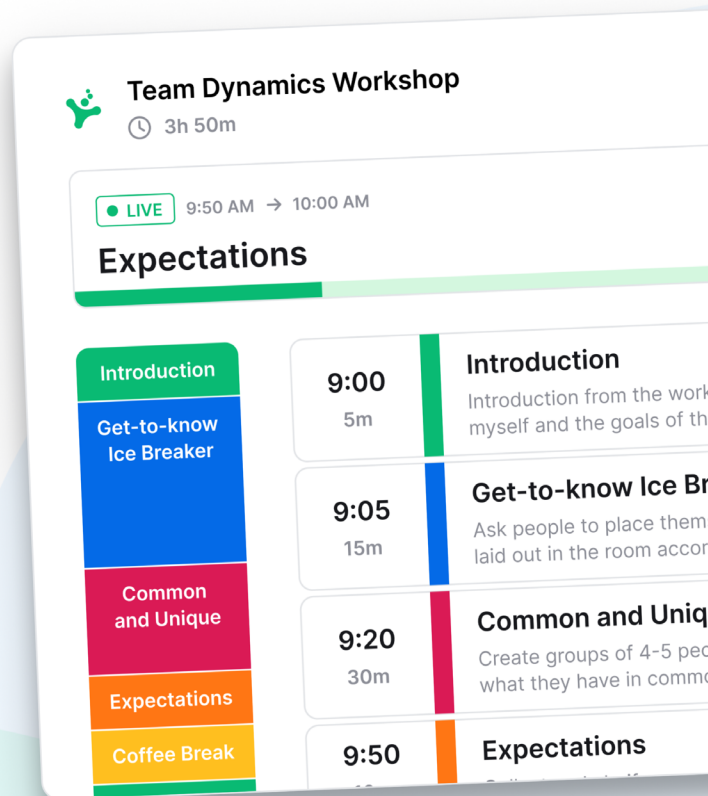


SessionLab is **the go-to platform for facilitators, trainers and team leaders who want to design effective, engaging sessions.**

Leave spreadsheets behind with an intuitive drag-and-drop agenda planner that automatically calculates timing.

Collaborate, share knowledge, and build a company-wide culture of facilitation.

[www.sessionlab.com](http://www.sessionlab.com)



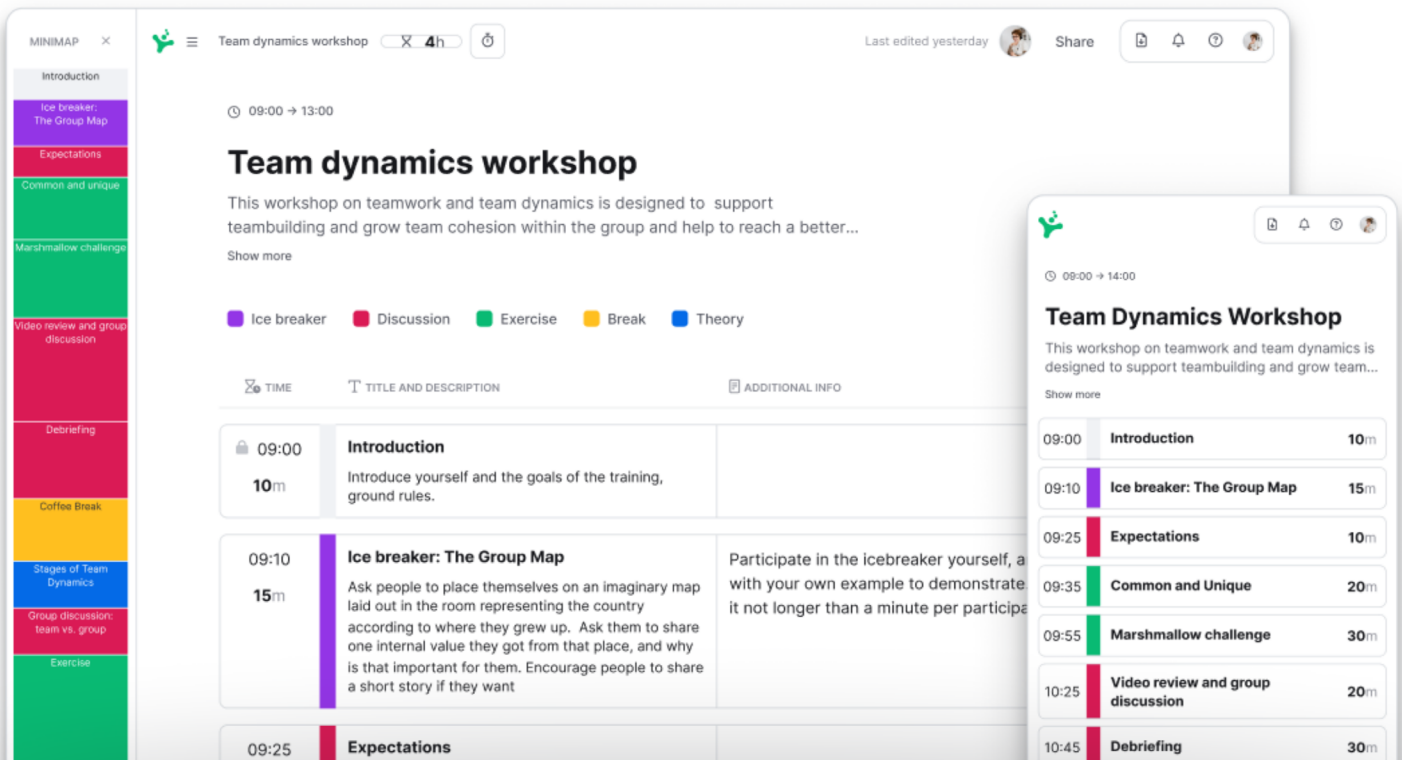
**Futures Fit** is a strategic futures & foresight agency helping science-led businesses and research spin-offs across Europe **use the future to make shift happen today.**

Through workshops, facilitated processes, and learning programmes, we support teams to navigate uncertainty, build resilience, and co-create thriving, sustainable futures.



# Ready to plan your next workshop?

Sign up for free



The screenshot displays the SessionLab interface for a workshop titled "Team dynamics workshop". The main view shows a table with columns for TIME, TITLE AND DESCRIPTION, and ADDITIONAL INFO. The workshop is scheduled from 09:00 to 13:00. The table lists activities such as Introduction (10m), Ice breaker: The Group Map (15m), Expectations (10m), Common and unique (20m), Marshmallow challenge (30m), Video review and group discussion (20m), and Debriefing (30m). A legend indicates activity types: Ice breaker (purple), Discussion (red), Exercise (green), Break (yellow), and Theory (blue). A sidebar on the left shows a vertical timeline of the workshop activities. A smaller inset window on the right shows a mobile view of the same workshop plan.

TIME	TITLE AND DESCRIPTION	ADDITIONAL INFO
09:00 10m	<b>Introduction</b> Introduce yourself and the goals of the training, ground rules.	
09:10 15m	<b>Ice breaker: The Group Map</b> Ask people to place themselves on an imaginary map laid out in the room representing the country according to where they grew up. Ask them to share one internal value they got from that place, and why is that important for them. Encourage people to share a short story if they want	Participate in the icebreaker yourself, a with your own example to demonstrate it not longer than a minute per partici...
09:25	<b>Expectations</b>	

An amazing tool that has completely transformed the way I can both prepare and keep records of my workshops.



**Erica Marx**

Online Events Producer & Facilitator