

# Using Ethnofutures to Build Resilience

Thu, Oct 6, 4–8pm Pacific | Fri, Oct 7, 10am–2pm AEDT



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# LEARNING OBJECTIVES

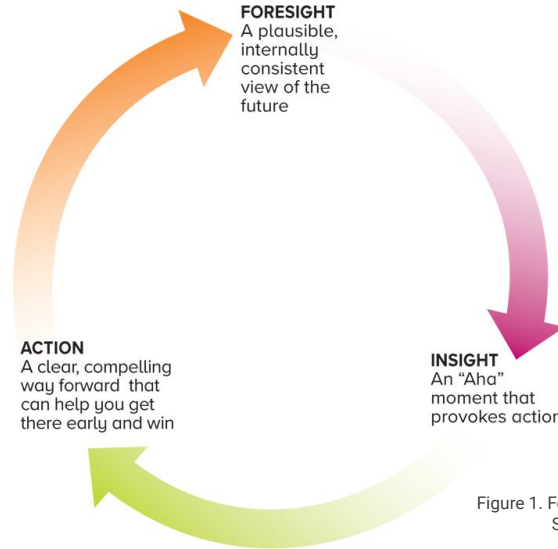


Figure 1. Foresight to Insight to Action Framework  
Source: Institute for the Future

**Phase 1**  
**Insight**  
Ethnographic research

**Phase 2**  
**Foresight**  
Signals,  
Drivers,  
Scenarios

**Phase 3**  
**Action**  
Appreciative  
(Asset-based)  
Inquiry

Oct 6 Pacific	Oct 7 AEDT	Activity
4:00-4:30 PM	10:00-10:30 AM	<b>Part 1</b> Introductions, intersections of asset-based ethnographic and futures experience (in breakout groups)
4:30-5:15 PM	10:30-11:15 AM	<b>Part 2</b> Concepts, Ethnofutures, Asset Spotting and Flipping, and Case Studies
5:15-5:30 PM	11:15-11:30 AM	<b>Break</b>
5:30-6:00 PM	11:30-12:00 PM	<b>Part 3</b> Set up for Workshop, Workshops in Breakout Rooms
6:00-6:15 PM	12:00-12:15 PM	<b>Break</b>

Oct 6 Pacific	Oct 7 AEDT	Activity
6:15-7:00 PM	12:15-1:00 PM	Report outs, Question and Answer
7:00-7:30 PM	1:00-1:30 PM	Part 4 Assessment challenges, Introduction and Discussion
7:30-8:00 PM	1:30-2:00 PM	
8:00 PM	2:00 PM	Adjourn

START

Part 1

Part 2

\*

Part 3

HALFWAY

\*

Report out

Part 4

How to

ADJOURN

4 PT / 10 AEDT

5 PT / 11 AEDT

6 PT / 12 AEDT

7 PT / 1 AEDT

8 PT / 2 AEDT

Our Objectives	Your Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Integrate</b> basic forecasting methods with ethnographic data collection and interpretation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Outline</b> the basic skills of ethnographic forecasting, aka ethnofutures</li> <li>• <b>Review</b> at least one of the module 1 readings</li> <li>• <b>Note</b> case study examples</li> <li>• <b>Practice</b> skills in Exercise 1</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Integrate</b> both data collection and analysis approaches from appreciative inquiry and ethnographic evaluation to build resilience.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Review</b> at least one of the module 2 readings</li> <li>• <b>Note</b> existing ethnographic applications</li> <li>• <b>Practice</b> skills in Exercise 2 of using ethnofutures for resilience</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Discover</b> use cases for ethnofutures for resilience approaches within their organizations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Identify</b> array of different applications in module 1 reading, Future Readiness Playbook</li> <li>• <b>Customize</b> to your own situation</li> <li>• <b>Introduce</b> takeaway assessment steps to create organization-specific action plan</li> </ul>

# Part 1: Introductions and Pre-Work Review

## Virtual Workshop Ground rules

1. Keep muted while others speak
2. Use the chat to ask questions and share resources
3. Keep breakout room discussions confidential



## Review Pre-read

### **Video and Reading Review**

Voices of Workable Futures report, Future Readiness Playbook

Ethnographic examples of Asset Spotting, Asset Flipping, and Appreciative Inquiry

### **Introductory Exercise 1**

Signal, Driver, your Ethnographic Forecast for your Professional Future

# From Homework Video

## What are the foundational ethnofutures forecasting tools?



- Drivers
- Signals
- Context
- Inferences

“**Drivers of change**” are broad, long term forces that will shape the next decade or more.

- Measured with **quantitative indicators**
- Include both historical and emerging trends, at different scales and rates of change
- **Convergence of multiple drivers** creates unexpected outcomes



Use the **STEEP** framework to remind yourself to explore beyond the obvious

- Social
- Technological
- Economic
- Environmental
- Political

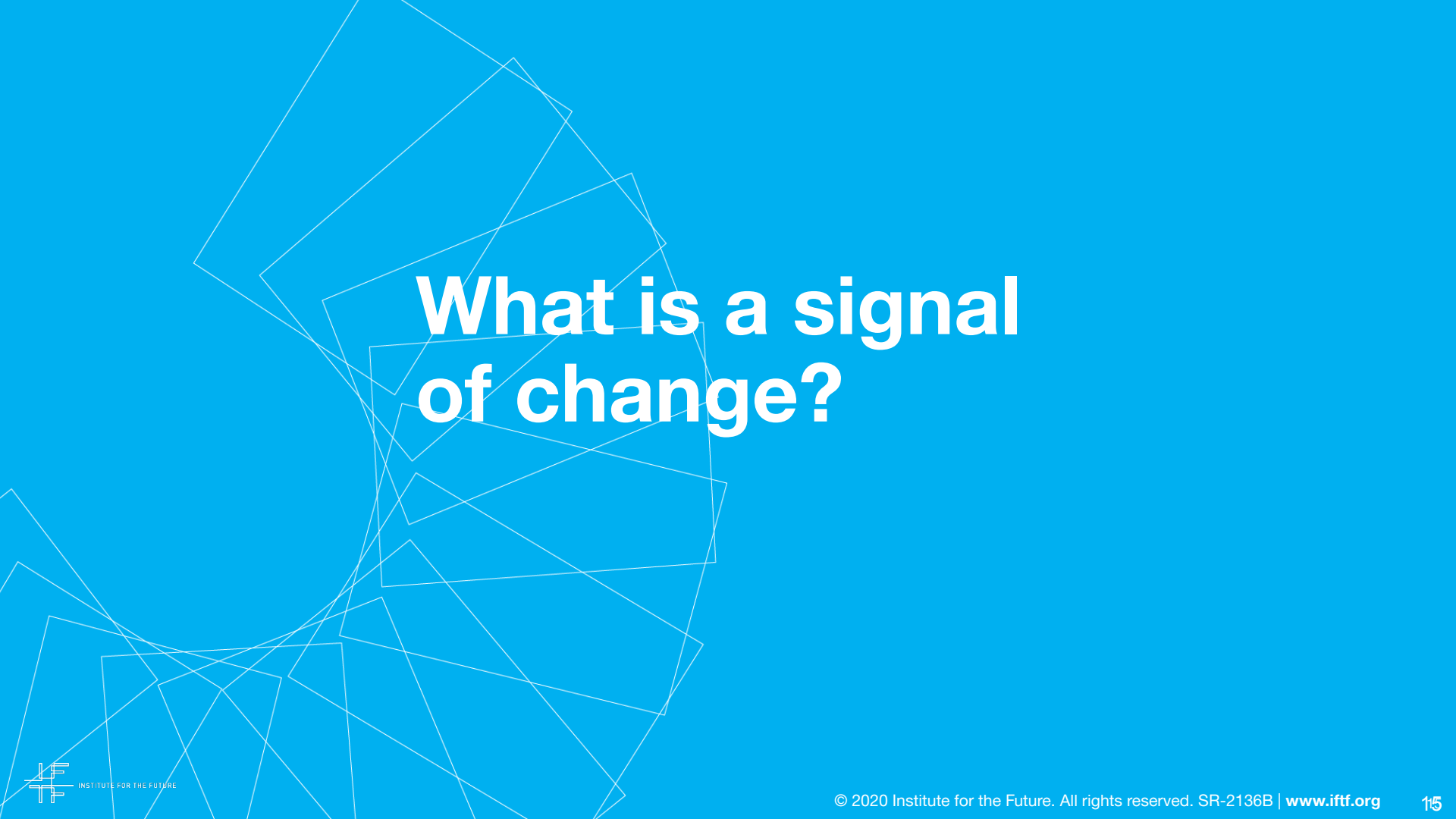


# Drivers of change take many forms, such as:

- a quickly advancing area of scientific research
- a shift in consumer behavior
- a new technology entering the mainstream
- a social movement
- an increasingly popular policy idea
- a growing threat documented by experts and researchers
- a major demographic shift
- a long-term regulatory effort
- a widespread cultural change

# Choose your “drivers of change”...

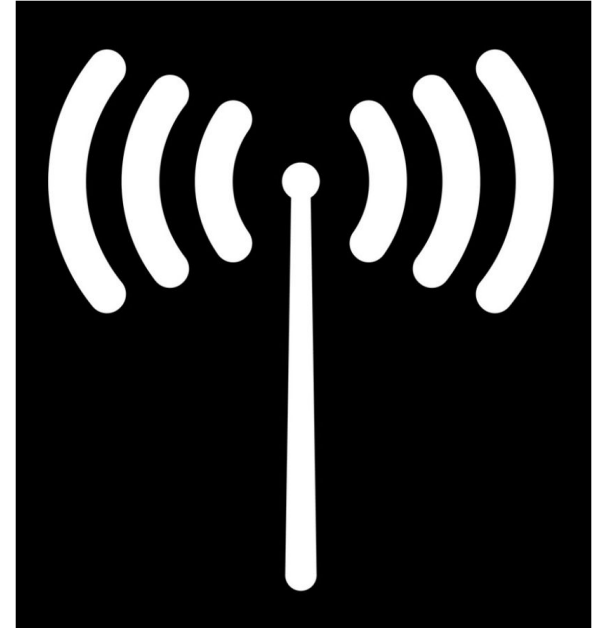
- The pandemic
- Climate change
- Extreme heat and weather events
- Shift to clean energy
- Increasing economic inequality
- New ideas for wealth redistribution (maximum wage, billionaire ban)
- Aging population and decreasing birth rates in richer countries
- The youth boom in Africa
- Growing migrant and refugee crises
- Automation of work
- Increase in facial recognition
- The Internet of Things
- Anti-racist activism
- Cryptocurrencies, NFTs, and centrally backed digital currency
- Virtual reality
- CRISPR/genetic editing
- Universal basic income
- Lifelong learning + reskilling
- The ethical tech/responsible innovation movement
- The rise of plant-based eating
- Gender equality efforts
- mRNA vaccines
- Social-media fueled conspiracy theories
- Anti-democratic voting laws
- Deepfakes video and audio
- Satellites, space Internet
- What would YOU add to this list?



# What is a signal of change?

**“Signals of change”** are vivid, eye-opening, real examples about how the world is changing, today

- **Small, local innovations** with the potential to disrupt the status quo
- Provide vivid detail about **new and unexpected** experiences, uses of technology, social interactions, shifting values, business models, etc.
- **Along with drivers, act as evidence and data points** for plausible, provocative forecasts and visions of the future.





# Signal: Eco-distress emerges as a new formative cohort experience

**What:** In the UK, almost 60% of psychiatrists had seen patients “distressed about environmental and ecological issues” within the last year. Young people are suffering from “**eco-distress** – a low mood, helplessness, anger, insomnia, panic and guilt” at a higher rate than the general population.

**So what:** Research shows that young people are deeply impacted by their political experiences before age 24. Living in an unpredictable eco-environment can spill over into the rest of their lives and be as formative as political affiliation.



## Half of child psychiatrists surveyed say patients have environment anxiety

**Research finds young people in England feel growing distress about the future of the planet**

Source:

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/nov/20/half-of-child-psychiatrists-surveyed-say-patients-have-environment-anxiety>

# Signal: Coworking spaces focus on the suburbs

**What:** Daybase, a new coworking company, is opening spaces in the suburbs where residents had long commutes to central business districts pre-pandemic.

**So what:** As the world is still adjusting to what post-pandemic working patterns will look like, companies such as Daybase are offering new alternatives to workers that could cement shifts in where people choose - and are able - to work from.



## What ISN'T a signal

- **...a driver of change** (like smart cities, or AI, or aging)—broad, underlying force that is well established and will shape the nature of the future
- **...a forecast**—something that *may* happen in the future



**“The future is already  
here, it’s just not evenly  
distributed.”**

–William Gibson,  
science fiction author

## Interpreting Signals of Change

If the signal is a leading edge indicator, what does that imply?

If the signal disrupts an existing convention, what does that imply?

If the signal is limited to a particular context or community, what does that imply?



# Applying drivers and signals to yourself

Become aware of what you hope, fear, and expect from your future and consider what might be if the arc of your work unfolds from drivers and signals you detect.

What are the drivers that shape your career choices?

What are the signals of change you see around you and in the wider world of work?

Create a forecast for yourself, that you will share during your self-introduction.

# Homework Reflections and Introductions

[in breakout  
rooms]

The signal I identified relating to my professional career is...	
A shaping driver, or force, acting on my professional career I identified is...	
Based on this signal and this driver I can imagine that in 10 years I might optimally be doing this...	

# Part 2: Concepts and Case Studies

Jan English-Lueck and Rod Falcon



# Creating Scenarios

Ethnographically Designed Fictions

# what is a scenario

- Scenarios are rational, evidence-based stories about the future – not science fiction, not fantasy.
- Scenarios are tools to test different assumptions about potential directions of change – and so they typically come in a set.
- Scenarios are snapshots of life in the future. They help us think about the kinds of lives ordinary people will live in ordinary places, the dilemmas they'll face, and the kinds of choices they might make.

# what is a scenario

- *Scenarios don't predict the future - they reveal the various ways in which changes may combine to produce unexpected outcomes.*
- A scenario may describe the future through the eyes of a single person. But most often, scenarios describe an entire community, a local city, a nation, or even the world.
- Like any futures story, scenarios are brought to life through creative use of narratives, images, and data.

# GROWTH   CONSTRAINT   COLLAPSE   TRANSFORMATION

(aka continuation)   (aka discipline)

“... four alternative futures [are] based upon different ideas about how the world works.

There is no single future "out there" to be predicted. There are many alternative futures to be anticipated and pre-experienced to some degree.”

*Alternative Futures at the Manoa School, (2009) Journal of Futures Studies*



# Alternative Futures: the 4 Archetypes

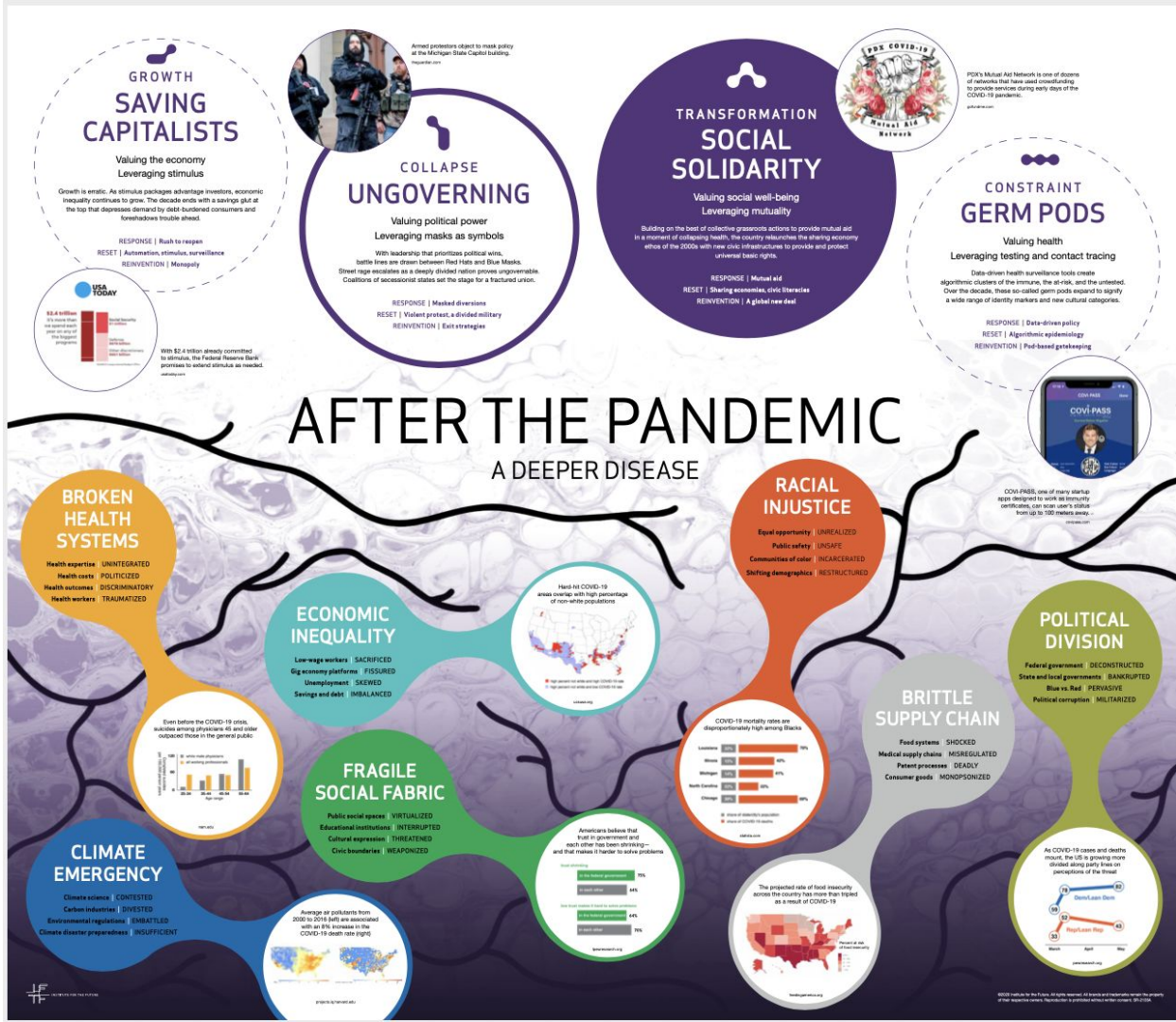
- GROWTH is a story about **accelerating the present**: better, faster, smarter. **“A winner’s journey.”**
- CONSTRAINT is a story about **balancing the system**: the whole vs. the parts. **“A common threat.”**
- COLLAPSE is a story about **struggling** with a broken system. **“A tragic failure.”**
- TRANSFORMATION is a story about **imagining** a different world: new guiding visions. **“A world-changing insight.”**

# IFTF *After the Pandemic: Alternative Futures Scenarios*



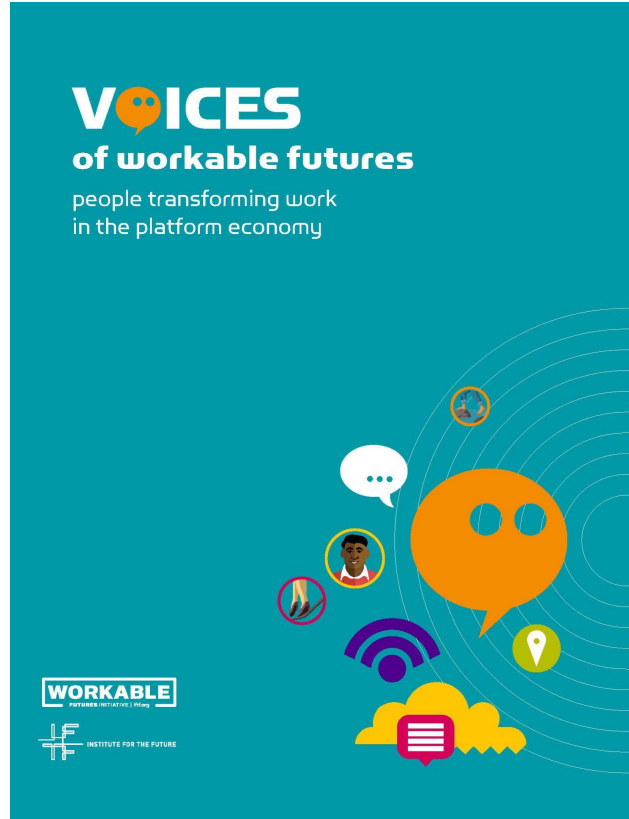
7 “deeper symptoms of the disease” – **the underlying drivers of change** shaping the four scenarios

- broken health systems
- economic inequality
- fragile social fabric
- climate emergency
  - racial injustice
- brittle supply chain
  - political division



# Context: The future of Work, the Future of the Office

Right: Image of title page of Workable Futures Initiative from the Institute for the Future



## From offices to officing



**No one can predict the future.**

**What we can do is learn how to think about the future systematically, turning uncertainty into inspiration for action and increased resilience.**

## Three steps to translating signals to scenarios

1. **Consider the types of shifts this signal represents:** *What are we moving from and what are we moving towards?*
2. **Imagine this signal has become the norm in the future,** creating new ways of doing things and challenging our basic assumptions: *What does that look like? What happens? To whom?*
3. **Now think about the “so whats”:** *What are the larger implications? What happens as a result of these changes?*

# Core elements of an Ethnofutures practice

- **Sense change** in multiple domains
- **Communicate vision** to drive toward insight
- **Facilitate insight** and build organizational capacity for stakeholders

# Linking Signals to Ethnography



# Linking Drivers to Scenario Development

Apply your anthropological and social scientific frameworks you used (invisibly) to shape your research agenda.

- Who is vulnerable? Who are the changemakers (with agency)?
  - What is risk? Success? Failure?
  - Where does the power reside?
  - When do consequences appear? When do the unintended consequences appear?
- How do these drivers play out in a particular community or sector? For the individual persona? The organizational context? The vision of the wider society?

Use your imagination, but base your conclusions on concrete signals and well developed drivers.

# Identifying Assets

To create climate positive futures, practice collecting signals of hope, like the signal above of a rickshaw driver growing flowers and vegetables on his rickshaw's roof as a natural AC during India's extremely hot temperatures.

(Image by Sanjana Shenoy)

From  
<https://www.iftf.org/future-now/article-detail/three-basic-steps-to-creating-climate-positive-futures/>



## Appreciative Inquiry/ Asset-based Approaches

### What is this approach? What are its limitations?

- Research tool—elicits stories of success, discern sources of social and cultural capital
- Analytical tool—problematizes assumptions about “success” and “assets”
- Development tool—fosters change in organizations, communities, applications
- Alternative to problem-solution traps, but it hard to communicate to those who see nothing but problem-solution fixes
- It is tricky to capture effectiveness data

# Asset Flipping for Resilience

## Asset Judo

- Identify urgent and optimistic future
- Problematize optimism, success, assets, which are based on values and power positioning
- Must insert “what if” pessimistic futures contain hidden assets?

## Techniques for flipping

- Identify unexpected edge cases
- Rethink “challenges” and imagine how they can be assets
- Ask, “Under what conditions could this challenge be an asset?”



# Reflections

- Questions so far?
  - Type into the chat
  - Consider questions for breakout group facilitator
- Transition into case study and applications
- Breakout room exercise

# Part 3: Practicing Ethnofutures for Resilience with the future of work.

Jan English-Lueck, Rod Falcon, Armando Ayala, Jasmine Low,  
and Melanie Bailey

## Exercise 2

Finding Resilience in the Future of Office Work:  
Civic, HR, and Application teams

## Breakout Exercise: Setup

We will work on a common domain—The future of the office.

Each team will be given a different perspective to approach this question.

Public sector. You are part of an research-strategy team that is responsible for civic planning.

HR sector. You are part of an HR research-strategy team that is responsible for workforce planning in your organization.

Application. You are part of a team doing user experience research and design. You are responsible for developing services and applications that will be used in offices.

## Step 1

**Elect** a notetaker.  
**Flesh out** your use case (5 minutes)

## Step 2

**Select an alternative scenario** framework (Collapse, growth, discipline, transformation) and develop it using a signal from your reading or an original signal from of your team (5 minutes)

## Step 3

Clearly **identify** one or more assets. Try to identify a challenge and try to flip it to become an asset (10 minutes)

## Step 4

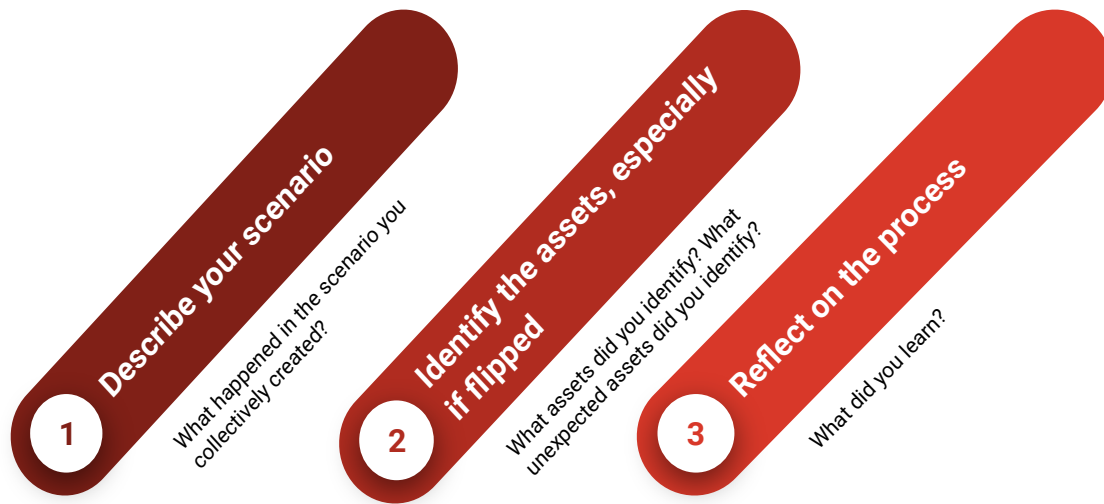
**Discuss** how the assets could be nurtured in your hypothetical domain (Civic, HR, Application) (5 minutes)

## Step 5

**Review** your talking points (5 minutes)

# Breakout Deliverables to all

- Notetaker: Write descriptive paragraph in the chat
- Spokesperson: Create 3 minute report out



# Part 4: Driving impact with ethnofutures in organizations

Rod Falcon and Armando Ayala

# Where would your practice fit into your organization?

## MAJOR TRADE-OFFS

### Why are you practicing foresight?

organizational ←————→ environmental

pragmatic ←————→ provocative

proprietary ←————→ public

### Where will your practice fit into the organization?

centralized ←————→ distributed

dedicated ←————→ dynamic

operational ←————→ strategic

### How will you create and disseminate foresight?

internal ←————→ external

quantitative ←————→ qualitative

informational ←————→ experiential

## YOUR PRACTICE

What will your practice look like? Who will be part of it?

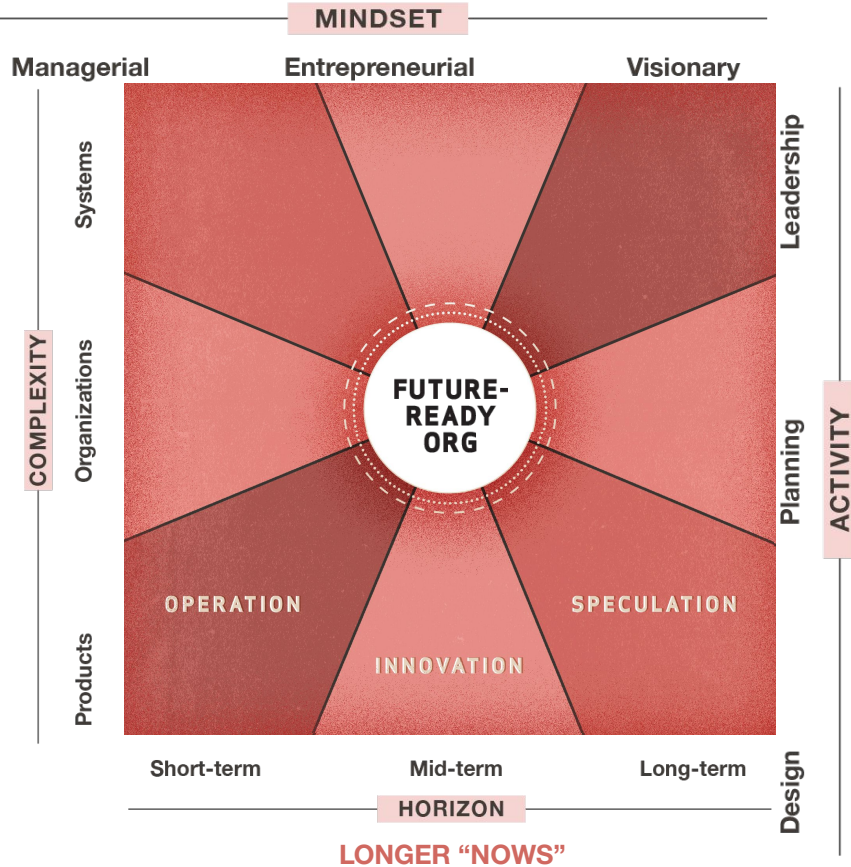
How will it be integrated with the rest of the organization? What are your plans for scaling?

From: Toward Future Readiness: A Playbook for Building Foresight Capacity, Institute for the Future 2020.



# Products | Design

LARGER “WHOLES”



- **OPERATION**  
Day-to-day; existing products, services, and programs
- **INNOVATION**  
New products and services; design thinking
- **SPECULATION**  
Customer foresight and design futures

From: Toward Future Readiness: A Playbook for Building Foresight Capacity, Institute for the Future 2020.

# Translating Ethnographic Stories

Personas

Scenarios

Personas+Scenarios

Immersive Environments

Artifacts from the Future

# Stakeholders use foresight to...

- **Develop** new offerings
- **Stimulate** new ideas
- **Evaluate** plans and test assumptions
- **Identify** strategic opportunities
- **Build** internal readiness
- **Tie** desirable futures to organizational values

# Use cases for ethnofutures integrating professional foresight practices

## Framing alternative scenarios and ethnographic user research to guide technology R&D

"I...designed some bespoke user research to do two things.

One, demonstrate to that team how far they were away from productization of the thing that they were trying to build.

And two, try to illuminate that path of, how could they possibly be successful with their chosen course?

What would need to be true? How would we need to approach it? What kinds of partners would we need to have to be successful?"

Rachel, Ethnographer and Research strategist

# Innovation and design

## Applying ethnographic futures design thinking

"So we executed a project where we did ethnographic futures with three families. I know that it's not a huge methodological innovation, but for us it was. We did a project where we explored futures with families from disadvantaged backgrounds in Mexico. And something else that I liked and that I had not had the chance to do it properly before, was that we took the futures imagination all the way up to futures artifacts. So we exhibited an experiential futures installation in a design festival in a big museum in Mexico city last year."--

Jaime, Design Strategist

# Policy-oriented service design

Using bottom-up forecasting to make sure efforts match needs

"...figur[ing] out how to do ethnographic research with people who are living on the streets, people experiencing homelessness, to really also get the same kind of voice of the people that are affected out and begin to understand what is the future of care in the public realm for low income people who are homeless look like. What should we be developing? What should we be refining? Where should we be doing it? What are the assets in that community and what are the systems of care that compliment those assets?"

Kathleen, Foresight Consultant and Coach

# Using ethnofutures for roadmapping and visioning in tech orgs

## Being the ambassador of ethnofutures scenario building with teams for large orgs and product roadmaps

- Large tech organizations have “planning” and “roadmapping” seasons where strategic foresight is most effective
- Being “in the room” with the knowledge of ethnofutures can be a great opportunity to showcase and present forecasted scenarios
- Adequate level-setting with stakeholders (e.g., “this is a provocative exercise to help us think through potential risks and opportunities) is important for keeping cross-functional teammates (XFN) interested and invested in exercises that can at first glance be taken as abstract
- It’s important for the ambassador to keep in mind the core goals of the time and scope the work to match these goals for high impact

# How do we establish and show the value of Ethnofutures for Resilience?

From problem to action plan



# Action Plan

After you leave this session....  
How would you do a pre and post  
Optimal ways to disseminate that within your team

As many slides as you want

# Questions and Answers

- Report out
- Please use the chat function to ask questions

## Acknowledgements and contact information

Thanks to the Anthropology Department at San José State University. Additional thanks to the staff and researchers at the Institute for the Future. We would additionally want to thank the foresight professionals who shared their stories with the Vantage Project and the Irvine Foundation. Further thanks go to Waymo, Sage Intaact, and Meta, for supporting our team's participation in EPIC. For further conversations contact:

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