



COURSE 1

READY SET FUTURE

READING MATERIAL

Who owns your future?

By Tessa Finlev, 2016



INSTITUTE FOR THE FUTURE

FUTURES THINKING

taught by Institute for the Future with **Jane McGonigal**



COURSE 1

READY SET FUTURE

Do you want to think about the future with more creativity and optimism? Do you want to see what's coming, faster, so you can be better prepared for disruptions and more in control of your future? Do you want to get better at changing what's possible—in your company, your industry, your community, and in your own life?

This course will introduce you to the practice of futures thinking, as developed and applied for the past 50 years by the [Institute from the Future](#), a Silicon-Valley-based research and learning group founded in 1968. In this course, you'll build your baseline understanding of what futures thinking is and what you can do with it. You'll master introductory techniques for growing your foresight. You'll meet a range of professional futurists and learn more about how they think and research what's coming. And you'll choose one or more future topics or personal interest to investigate with your new foresight skills.

This course is for anyone who wants to spot opportunities for innovation and invention faster, and gain the skills and confidence to help lead the course of events that are changing the world, instead of being led by them.

About this Specialization

The Institute for the Future is declaring 2020 “The Year of the Future,” because we believe that foresight is a human right. Every human should have the chance to develop the creative skills needed to imagine how the future can be different, and to participate in deciding what the future will be. We believe futures thinking shouldn't be something that only happens in Silicon Valley. With our specialization in Futures Thinking on Coursera, we are the first organization ever to offer massively open, free training in futures thinking. We aim to upskill the entire planet in future thinking and future making, by teaching one million online learners via the Coursera platform. This text is one of 100 free readings distributed as part of our “Year of the Future” training.

Institute for the Future

Institute for the Future is the world's leading futures thinking organization. For over 50 years, businesses, governments, and social impact organizations have depended upon IFTF global forecasts, custom research, and foresight training to navigate complex change and develop world-ready strategies. IFTF methodologies and toolsets yield coherent views of transformative possibilities across all sectors that together support a more sustainable future. Institute for the Future is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Palo Alto, California.
www.iftf.org



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Who owns your future?

By Tessa Finlev, Institute for the Future



In 2014, the United Nations Development Programme - Sudan partnered with the Institute for the Future to begin a local process for envisioning Sudan in 2030. Sudan 2030 is a long-term project to develop local visions of possible futures for Sudan to help facilitate dialogue between fragmented groups, build agency over the future, and influence sustainable human development.

Below is a transcript from a speech by the Institute for the Future's Tessa Finlev, during a one-week Peace Symposium in Khartoum, Sudan in 2015. The audience included 70 local Sudanese peace builders, in addition to representatives from business, foundations, and multilateral organizations. After this introduction to futures thinking, participants developed scenarios on the future of their region - some of continued conflicts and some of transformations - as a way to reinvigorate peacebuilding efforts.

What is the future?

Who owns your future?

The future is not something that just happens to us, **the future is something we create.**

Man created the walls around us. Man created war. But who will create peace? Who owns your future?

When we work to build peace out of conflict, we are building a future that is radically different from our present and our past. We are building something that we haven't yet seen. What does peace look like? What does real sustainable peace look like?

Do you know?

Can you imagine peace, in your homes, in your country in 2030?

How old will you be in 2030?

How old will your children be?

Where will you live?

While there are far too many variables in our lives to be able to predict the future, we can begin imagining all possible futures today—

from the good to the bad,

from peace to conflict.

By imagining possible futures, we can begin planning for the future we want – today.

We can ask ourselves what new technology will we have access to in 2030?

How will the rain patterns be different from today? Will the rivers be dry? Will the economic embargo be lifted? If the economic embargo is lifted, what impact will it have on our lives? What impact will new technology have? What impact will changing rain patterns have on our lives?

Perhaps we won't be able to agree. But that's ok. In fact, it would be impossible for us to agree because the future does not yet exist. There are no facts about the future after all. And because of this, we can't predict what the future will be like, and we won't agree on what the future will be like.

So we need to change the way we think about the future, it's not about figuring out who is right about what will happen. It's about using a place that does not yet exist as a tool to find common ground. The future is the only thing we all have in common after all.

Because the future does not yet exist **we can feel safe there**. We can use the future to imagine what is possible without claiming ownership or responsibility for it. We can use the future to ask the hard questions, to explore the things we don't want to happen so that we can learn how to prevent them. We can use the future to test new approaches to building peace before we implement them.

Conflict arises when different groups have opposing desires for the future. Let's take the example of a conflict based on land rights where two different groups are fighting for the same land. They are demonstrating two different wishes for the future.

Yet we talk about conflict in the past and the present. We focus on today's issues, even though the problem lies in the future. And the solution, the solution lies in the future.

If we are able to step out of today's conflict and into an open and yet undiscovered landscape of alternative futures—one which could be war, the other future which could be peace—we can begin to understand what is possible.

What is possible?

Instead of focusing on what we want, or what we don't want, or what the other group wants – it will be better to simply know what is possible, to begin at the beginning and understand what is possible.

We will gain a new perspective.

As we begin to imagine alternative futures—one of war, the other of peace—we will listen to our collaborators as they share their diverse perspectives about what is possible. **We will begin to uncover points of collaboration, points of agreements.**

And when we come across a possible future we don't agree with, we won't start a debate about who is correct, we will ask our collaborators to explain why they think what they think. **Our only concern is to understand if this is a possible future. Perhaps it's not what we want to happen, but is it possible?**

And if indeed, what our colleague said is a possible future outcome, we must explore it together. **We must explore how it could come to be, and what impact it will have on our lives.**

If we do this enough. If we put enough rigor into how we think about these alternative futures, we will eventually find common ground, and build a common vision for a shared future, a future that will work for us all.

And then, perhaps then, we can find sustainable pathways to peace.

But it won't be an easy path. How do you even begin to image 2030?

How can you describe a world you have not yet seen?

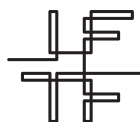
My colleague Ben is going to join us, to describe four conflict dimensions that we will need to explore as we develop a complete view of two alternative futures, one of peace in 2030, the other of continued conflict in 2030. And as Ben is sharing the four conflict dimensions with us, he will share stories from Kenya, his home country.

We have something called scenarios – these are stories we create today that take place in the future. They are not stories about the future, but they take place in the future. You see the difference? We can put ourselves directly into that world, we can walk around in 2030, interacting with the world around us.

As you work in your groups to craft scenarios – remember to use the four dimensions Ben talked about to build a complete image of what that world looks like. What is the relational dimension? What is the personal dimension? What is the cultural dimension? What is the structural dimension?

And this is exactly what we are going to ask you to do today. We are going to divide you into small groups, and ask you to imagine two alternative futures. What will life be like in 2030 in your communities if conflict continues. And what will life be like in 2030 if we are able to build peace?

For more information on the Institute for the Future's work in conflict regions, check out IFTF's [Peace and Development Lab](#)



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