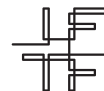




# IFTF FORESIGHT TOOLKIT

Practical tools  
for foresight, insight,  
and action



INSTITUTE FOR THE FUTURE



FORESIGHT TOOLKIT

# FORESIGHT

Foresight is the process of turning facts about the present into plausible, provocative, and logical views of the future. Foresight is a practice that encompasses creative thinking about future possibilities and systematic analysis of patterns that affect change. Foresight tools help us sense change and communicate vision.



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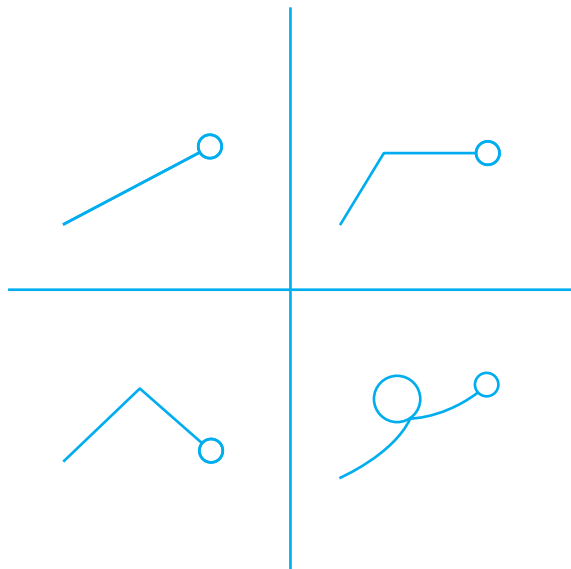
FORESIGHT

# ENVISION ALTERNATIVE FUTURES

While a single future cannot be predicted, alternative futures can be envisioned. Four archetypes—growth, collapse, constraint, and transformation—help us envision futures that are neither variations of a single future, nor simple mirrors of the present.



IFTF FORESIGHT TOOLKIT



## WHY THIS TOOL?

- ▶ **Expand** the stock of available futures for you or your organization to consider.
- ▶ **Uncover** hidden assumptions, biases, and blindspots.
- ▶ **Learn** to create a robust set of scenarios that can serve as a “wind tunnel” for testing strategies under different future conditions.

**Images of the future are critically important to how we respond to change and envision better worlds. Our images are often dominated by extrapolating trend lines forward. Sometimes, we make specific forecasts about events or directions of change. But when change is deep and hard to see, we need to take many alternative possibilities into account. We need stories that we can compare and contrast, and even choose among to make the future we want. That's when we turn to scenarios.**

There are many ways to develop scenarios. The most commonly used scenario planning method focuses on exploring two critical uncertainties. Some frameworks compare pragmatic, utopian, and speculative futures. But they all focus on distinguishing different possibilities. Using multiple scenarios offers a way to think outside “one true future” or even a “most likely” future.

The Alternative Futures framework in particular pushes our minds outward to the edges of our imaginations. If you're only thinking in terms of more or less “growth” or “progress,” you're missing the very real possibilities for collapse and radical transformation that we have seen throughout history.

When Jim Dator and his team at the University of Hawaii at Manoa created the Alternative Futures framework, they collected thousands of images of the future from

all over the world. After careful analysis, Dator identified the underlying story archetypes, or generic shapes of change. Dator found the same four archetypes repeated by indigenous myths and think tanks alike: **growth**, **constraint**, **collapse**, and **transformation**.

**Growth:** An extrapolation of trends continue into the future with minimal disruption

**Constraint:** A core guiding value or purpose organizes society and governs behavior

**Collapse:** A rapid, catastrophic systems and infrastructure break down

**Transformation:** Society or systems fundamentally change or reorganize around a new paradigm

# ENVISION ALTERNATIVE FUTURES

TOPIC: FUTURE OF \_\_\_\_\_

INPUTS:  
DRIVERS OF CHANGE

- ▶
- ▶
- ▶
- ▶
- ▶
- ▶

SCENARIO TITLE

This is a future in which ...

This is a future in which ...

GROWTH SCENARIO

CONSTRAINT SCENARIO

COLLAPSE SCENARIO

TRANSFORMATION SCENARIO

This is a future in which ...

This is a future in which ...

# HOW TO WRITE GOOD SCENARIOS



FORESIGHT

**Scenarios are a unique blend of researched facts and creative extrapolations. Scenario writing takes practice and while this template will help you learn how to write scenarios in a structured way, true virtuosity comes from repeated learning and improvement.**

Scenarios can take many forms, including documentary-style, a “day in the life,” a report or historical account, or critical analysis. But all good scenarios have the following characteristics:

- ▶ allow a reader to understand a different world in a way that draws out insights;
- ▶ are logically coherent and internally consistent, where the external events and human actions make sense in relation to each other. The world might be quite provocative, maybe even ridiculous at first glance, but deeper engagement generates deeper understanding and plausibility;
- ▶ are based on evidence from drivers, trends, signals, and other research, but make a leap from the foundations into new territory. A set of scenarios should explore a wide range of possibilities and be distinct from each other in fundamental ways;
- ▶ elucidate both the dynamics of the external world, and what it feels like to be a person in that world.

## SCENARIO NO-NOS

Often, we can see how to do something by understanding what NOT to do. Here's a list of “No-No's” when writing scenarios:

**NO magic**, no alien invasions

**NO technological silver bullets** that solve everything

**NO moralizing** (the world should be the way I want it to be)

**NO picking favorites** (all scenarios should be thoroughly developed and realized)

**NO naive copying** of science fiction tropes

**No “kumbaya”** (everyone just decides to get along)

In short, no cheating. All features of a scenario, while provocative and challenging, must be well-researched, logical, and flow from a common foundation (the reality of the present).



- ▶ Choose a rich and complex topic or forecast as the focus of your scenario work. Narrow topics don't benefit as much from alternative scenario development.
- ▶ If you have a large group, assign smaller groups to develop and explore each alternative scenario.
- ▶ If you work with small groups, invite groups to discuss all the scenarios, comparing assumptions and outcomes. Refine the scenarios to make them clearly distinct.
- ▶ Try an outside-in method: develop four alternative scenarios for the world at large, and see how that might impact your futures topic at hand, then try to create alternative scenarios for your topic, and see how they differ.

## SCENARIO ARCHETYPES

**Growth:** An extrapolation of trends continue into the future with minimal disruption

**Constraint:** A core guiding value or purpose organizes society and governs behavior

**Collapse:** A rapid, catastrophic systems and infrastructure break down

**Transformation:** Society or systems fundamentally change or reorganize around a new paradigm

**Alternative Futures is a forecasting technique developed by Jim Dator at the Center for Futures Studies at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.**

## Congratulations!

You've just mastered one of the **Institute for the Future's** Foresight tools. Here's a sneak preview of six more!

You can get advanced training in all of our tools, and be certified as a foresight practitioner, in IFTF's 3-day intensive foresight training.

**For more information**, visit [iftf.org/foresight-training](http://iftf.org/foresight-training) or contact:

**Lyn Jeffery** | [ljeffery@iftf.org](mailto:ljeffery@iftf.org)










FORESIGHT

### SEVEN TOOLS FOR FORECASTING THE FUTURE

This section will help you  
sense change and envision  
future possibilities.

"The past cannot be changed,  
the future is yet in  
your power."

MARY PICKFORD

TOOL	USE	OUTPUT
 <b>Draft a Forecast</b>	Develop proto-forecasts using signals and drivers	A proto-forecast with a clear title and description
 <b>Reveal Unexpected Possibilities</b>	Unstick yourself from familiar stories and assumptions	New possibilities found within patterns of unrelated signals
 <b>Draw Out Consequences</b>	Develop a clear sense of implications of particular scenarios	Wheels of cause-and-effect that reveal patterns and long-term futures
 <b>Envision Alternative Futures</b>	Ensure your foresight accounts for the wild variation that history demonstrates is feasible	Alternative futures scenarios describing a range of possibilities
 <b>Headline the Future</b>	Bring foresight to life with pithy and shareable statements	A collection of snappy blurbs about what the future may look like
 <b>Personalize the Future</b>	Align foresight with new audiences, existing consumer profiles, or everyday people	Personas of future stakeholders and stories about how the future affects them
 <b>Create Artifacts from the Future</b>	Move toward designing new products and experiences, or simply create a striking visual representation of a future	Images or prototypes of scenes, objects, and situations that may arise in the future



## ABOUT THE 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. For more, visit [www.iftf.org](http://www.iftf.org).

## OWNERSHIP & USAGE GUIDELINES

As a research and educational organization, IFTF's mission is to build more foresight capacity in the world by providing tools and resources to help people better anticipate the future to make decisions in the present. To this end the IFTF Foresight Studio Toolkit and Templates are held under an IFTF copyright and licensed under the Creative Commons 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). If you are a certified IFTF Foresight Practitioner, we encourage the reproduction and use of these tools within your organization(s) and in your own practice of foresight education for any non-commercial, attribution-only, non-derivative use.

**For more information** about using these tools or how to bring a Foresight Workshop to your organization with customized content, please contact:

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