



COURSE 2

FORECASTING SKILLS



INSTITUTE FOR THE FUTURE

FUTURES THINKING

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

Skill refresher: **Collect and analyze signals of change**

In the “Ready, Set, Future” course, you learned that a **signal of change** is anything that is already happening today, that could be a clue to the future.

A signal might be a new invention, product, business or behavior. A signal could be the first successful demonstration of a new technology, or the first major breakdown of an old technology. A signal could be a new law, or a new kind of crime.

A signal demonstrates how something could be different. A signal of change makes you say, “A ha! That's new. That's weird. I haven't seen that before.” It makes you curious to find out more.



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Analyze signals by asking questions

One of the first questions a professional futurist asks about any signal of change is this: “What *kind* of change does this signal represent? **What direction is it taking us in?**” From what now to what next?

When you know the direction of change, you can look for **the driver**. “What future force is creating this change? What trend or bigger picture phenomenon is *driving* us in that direction?” **Drivers** are the forces of change that move us toward particular futures. Behind every signal, there is at least one driver. Looking at multiple related signals can help you spot the drivers.

Other key questions to ask include: What would the future be like if this signal becomes more commonplace, or widespread? And is this a future I want?



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At the Institute for the Future, professional futurists collect new signals and share them with each other every day.

It's the most important habit of futures thinking, and we practice it often.

Researchers form groups to share signals on a particular topic, like future of healthcare, future of learning, future of food, or future of climate change. After we've collected and analyzed a set of related signals, we send them out to the entire Institute to share our foresight.

In this reading, you'll have a chance to see firsthand exactly how professional futurists at IFTF share and analyze signals with each other. **What you'll read on the next few pages is a full and complete example of a "signals share", exactly as written and used internally at IFTF.** By sharing this with you, we hope to inspire YOU to share signals with your own group of friends, industry contacts, or colleagues!



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Bréf til framtíðarinnar

Ok er fyrsti nafnkunni jökullinn til að missa titil sinn.
Á næstu 200 árum er talið að allir jöklar landsins fari sömu leið.
Þetta minnismerki er til vitnis um að við vitum
hvað er að gerast og hvað þarf að gera.
Aðeins þú veist hvort við gerðum eitthvað.

A letter to the future

Ok is the first Icelandic glacier to lose its status as a glacier.
In the next 200 years all our glaciers are expected to follow the same path.
This monument is to acknowledge that we know
what is happening and what needs to be done.
Only you know if we did it.

Ágúst 2019
415ppm CO₂

Dear staff,

I wanted to pass along some cool climate-related signals of change that the "Climate Futures" group collected over the past couple weeks. You can find them below this message if you're interested.

As some of you may know, the Climate Futures group at IFTF formed when the team that worked on the Climate Investment Funds' [Future of Climate Action project](#) wanted to keep up the momentum within IFTF of tracking the climate field and applying it to IFTF's own futures work.

Our mantra is William Gibson's quote *"All imagined futures lacking recognition of anthropogenic climate-change will increasingly seem absurdly shortsighted. Virtually the entire genre will be seen to have utterly missed the single most important thing we were doing with technology."*

We hope you enjoy the signals below. We will continue sharing compelling climate-related signals with all staff. Please let me know if you have any thoughts to share about the long-term implications of these signals!

Best, Ayca



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Signals:

What: [Iceland holds a funeral for its first glacier lost to climate change](#). About 100 people, including the country's Prime Minister, commemorated the loss of the Okjokull glacier with a monumental plaque entitled "A Letter to the Future." The plaque addresses people 200 years in the future, when scientists expect Iceland's 400-plus glaciers to be gone.

So What: [Solastalgia](#) for rapidly changing landscapes will produce more rituals mourning environmental deaths - including monuments to occupy the transformed physical spaces where natural landmarks once stood. We'll come up with new and different ways of remembering what the environment once looked like. Future generations will have to go to a museum to learn what a glacier is.



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Signals:

What: As the temperature in Phoenix rises, people are changing their daily routines, shifting ordinary day-time activities to the very early morning or the middle of the night. They are hiking in the dark with flashlights (and it's still 94 degrees), going to the zoo at 6 a.m., and building roads in the middle of the night so the concrete can set correctly.

So what: We'll re-think what we do in the day and what we do at night. School hours may need to shift to accommodate intolerable midday heat. Businesses will need to redesign their service hours and staff will have to follow along. More jobs that used to take place in the daytime will shift to darker, cooler hours, affecting families, sleep, and health. And as more activities shift to evening hours, perhaps we'll sleep more in the day.



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Signals:

What: In Punjab [State in northern India](#), regulators require that applicants for gun licenses, in addition to normal background checks, must plant ten trees and submit photographic evidence of having done so. "I thought about how much Punjabi people love guns," says the deputy commissioner behind the idea. "We receive hundreds of applications for gun licenses from this district every year. Maybe I could get them to love caring for the environment too."

So What: There are many untapped leverage points for environmental regulation, including uncommon and unrelated (on the surface at least) areas like gun registration. In order to reach sustainability goals, authorities might start to tack on requirements for citizen climate action to all sorts of things - driving licenses, business permits, and much more.



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Signals:

What: Brazilian farmers, ranchers, and land-grabbers (Brazil's "[Beef, Bible and Bullets caucus](#)") coordinated a day of new fires in the already-burning Amazon rainforest to demonstrate their support for president Bolsonaro's lax environmental policies. Using WhatsApp groups, they labeled August 10 as "[Fire Day](#)", resulting in 124 new fire spots in Pará - a 300% rise in a single day. The Amazon contains 40 percent of the world's rainforest and 17 percent is already gone.

So What: Human-made environmental disasters used to happen by accident or negligence, and were caused by easily identifiable actors. Now, anti-environment, ideological extremists are using digital networks to coordinate acts of eco-terrorism - pointing to a future of environmental irregular warfare that holds the rest of the planet hostage.



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Signals:

What: New Zealand's central bank, the Reserve Bank of New Zealand (RBNZ) is [considering adding a climate change objective to its legislation](#). This would raise climate change risks to the level of other types of financial risk, and base growth and interest rates on climate disruption.

So what: Factoring in climate risk at the central bank would affect interest rates and markets. It would produce new disclosure requirements and spur demand for better tools to identify, manage and value climate risk - creating new incentives for climate-protecting behavior. Could it also reshape investment goals and priorities or currency values?



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Signals:

What: Did you know that scientists say the Bay Area should expect 6- to 10-inches of sea level rise by 2030? San Mateo County unveiled a "One Map, Many Futures" sea level rise [calculator and map](#), based on the state of California [Sea Level Rise Guidance](#). The map gives you a view of any location with multiple scenarios at 2030 and 2050, based on probabilistic combinations of sea-level rise, storm surges, and high tides.

So What: As tools like this become more available around the world, potential flood risks will become an everyday part of the calculation of big ticket, long term investments like buying a home or situating a new retail space, office building, or housing development. Shifting land values will affect the whole region - not just the areas immediately at risk. Some heavily populated areas may have to relocate.



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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.

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