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Futures Thinking and Design Thinking Simply Explained

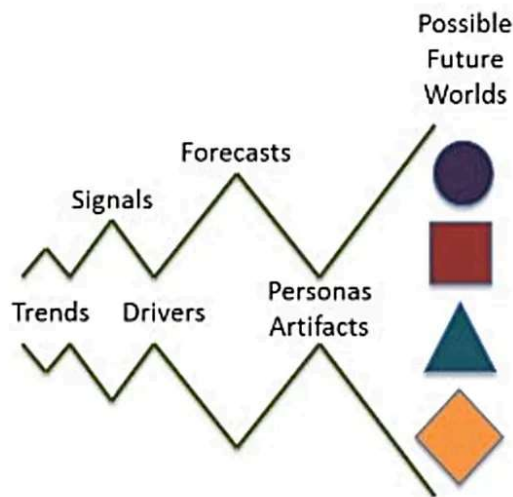**Santhosh Gandhi** 🔷 · Follow

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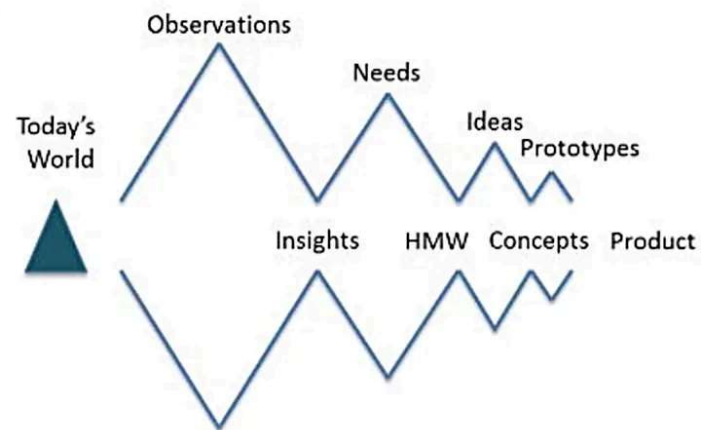👏 435   💬 2   🔖 ▶️ 📤

In this article, I have tried to share my knowledge related to Design Thinking and Future Thinking in a simplified way for Students, Researchers, Strategists and Designers who want to implement these approaches in their work process.

What is Future Thinking and Design Thinking?

Future thinking is a future-centred approach to Long-term strategy — anchored in understanding the driving factors and context of different possible scenarios that could happen in future, creating future artefacts and generating creative ideas — that will enhance the way you do strategy for products, services, processes, and organizations. By using Futures thinking, you will have a forward view to avoid future shocks and to create disruptive innovations.
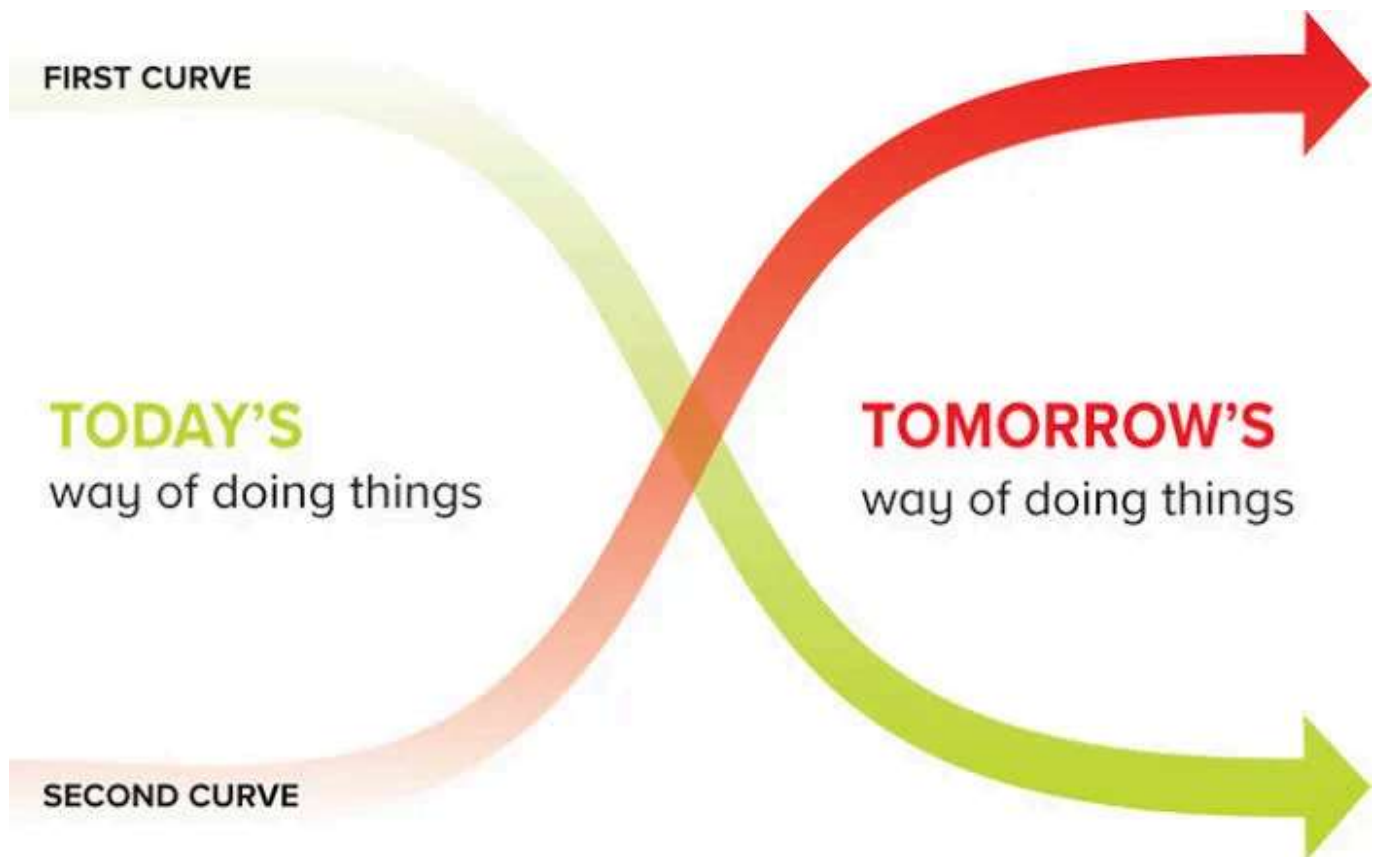
Principles of Futures Thinking

The future is not predictable.

The future is not predetermined.

The future can be influenced by individual choices.

FIRST CURVE

TODAY'S
way of doing things

TOMORROW'S
way of doing things

SECOND CURVE

Examples of situations where Future Thinking will be highly useful:

1. *A CEO looking to lead their company into the future and to avoid being disrupted by new technologies or competitors. What should the company start doing differently, to survive shifts and disruptions in the marketplace?*

2. *An entrepreneur inventing a new service for a changing world. What kinds of help will people need in the future, that no one else has created a way to provide yet?*
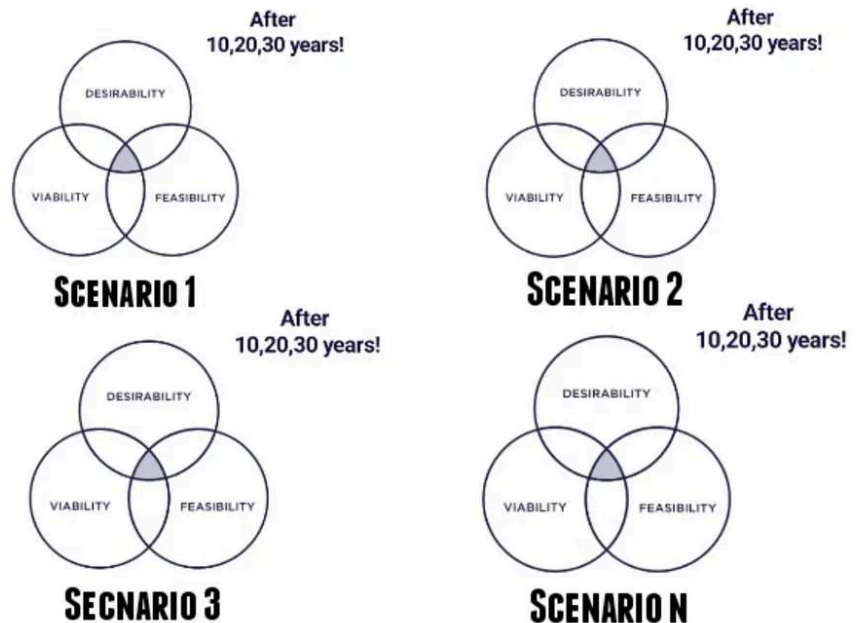
Future thinking foresight multiple scenarios in which, what is desirable from a human point of view with what is technologically feasible and economically viable in the future.

- **Desirability in Future**: What makes sense to people and for people in future?

- **Technological Feasibility in Future**: What could be technically possible in the future?

- **Economic Viability in Future**: What is could be likely become part of a sustainable business model in future?

Based on analyzing these foresight, a long-term strategy will be created for growth and innovation.

FUTURES THINKING

LONG TERM STRATEGY WILL CREATED BASED ON UNDERSTANDING THESE SCENARIOS AND ITS DRIVING FACTORS!

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Design thinking is a human-centred approach to design— anchored in understanding customer's needs, rapid prototyping, and generating creative ideas — that will transform the way you develop products, services, processes, and organizations. By using design thinking, you make decisions based on what customers really want instead of relying only on historical data or making risky bets based on instinct instead of evidence.

Design thinking brings together what is desirable from a human point of view with what is technologically feasible and economically viable.

- **Desirability**: What makes sense to people and for people?

- **Feasibility**: What is technically possible within the foreseeable future?

- **Viability:** What is likely to become part of a sustainable business model?
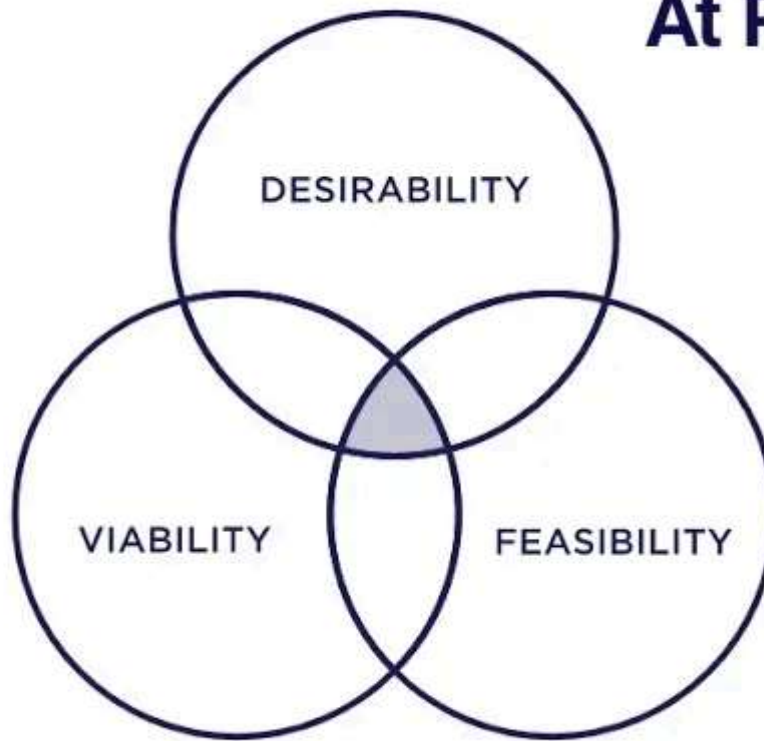
Examples from movies that are loosely based on these concepts

Movie Example for Futures Thinking:

In the Marvel movie series, Ironman understood the context of one of the possible scenarios where he dies, so he wanted to safeguard his teenage mentee spiderman.

So he created E.D.I.T.H (AR glasses that has access to arsenals & drones) that will help spiderman in very adverse situations. E.D.I.T.H is the result of futures

thinking done by ironman.

Did you put a tracker in my suit?

I put everything in your suit. Including this heater.

Movie Example for Design Thinking:

In the same Marvel movie series, Ironman's close superhero friend Warmachine was paralyzed by falling from the sky. And once Ironman had to make a fire to make him warm after he falling into the deep sea.

Understanding these pain points from past & present experiences, Ironman designed a comfortable superhero suit for spiderman with a parachute to avoid falling from the sky and with a heater to get warmer after falling into the sea.

Steps Involved in these processes!
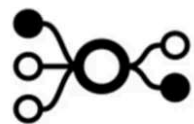
Futures Thinking

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1.Choose a specific Future

2.Gather Future Signals

3.Look Back History

4. Find Drivers

5.Create Future Scenarios

6.Generate Ideas

7.Share the Story

1. **Choose a specific Future:** Inspire your team to choose a specific future that is directly related to your product, service, process and organization.

2. **Gather Future Signals:** Identify the events (*Inventions, Discovery, Policies, Startup etc*) in the recent past that has a greater probability to affect your chosen future.

3. **LookBack History:** Identify the events in history that directly affected the field of your chosen future and signal.

4. **Find Drivers:** Identify the drivers of your signals that belong to you. *Eg: If the "2021 Western North America heatwave" is a signal, then climate change is a driver. If "Neurograins" is a signal, then Brain-Computer Interface and "Cyborgs" are drivers.*

5. **Create Future Scenarios:** Based on the drivers & signals, Simulate multiple possible scenarios that could happen in the future which explores Insights like advancements, changes, supports & constraints in your chosen field.

6. **Generate Ideas:** Use the scenarios which you simulated to help to come up with a fresh long-term strategy, vision, and future artefacts.

7. **Share the Story:** Once you've arrived at the right strategy, vision, future artefact then share the story to introduce it to your colleagues, clients, and customers.

Future thinking is subject to iteration. So If necessary Iterate Scenarios according to new gathered signals.

Design Thinking

FRAME A QUESTION   GATHER INSPIRATION   GENERATE IDEAS   MAKE IDEAS TANGIBLE   TEST TO LEARN   SHARE THE STORY

1. **Frame a Question:** Inspire your team to think about your customers (who you're designing a solution for) and what they actually need.

2. **Gather Inspiration:** Go out into the world and seek inspiration by observing and discovering what people really need.

3. **Generate Ideas:** Use the inspiration you gather to help push past the obvious to come up with fresh solutions to your problem.

4. **Make Ideas Tangible:** Build rough prototypes and find what's working and what's not.

5. **Test to Learn:** Test your prototypes, gather feedback, and iterate.

6. **Share the Story:** Once you've arrived at the right solution, craft and share the story to introduce it to your colleagues, clients, and customers.

Future Thinking Vs Design Thinking

Along with this information in the given below table, Future thinking focuses more on macro forces, Design Thinking focus less on macro forces.

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	Futures Thinking	Design Thinking
Approach	Future Centric	Human-Centric
Focus	More Strategy oriented	More Design Oriented
Major Qualitative Methods	• Horizon Scanning • Backcasting • Scenarios etc	• User Interviews • Ethnography • Diary Studies • Card Sorting etc
Major Quantitative Methods	**Predictive Analytics** • Multiple Linear Regression • Simple Linear Regression • Random Forests • Moving average etc	• Click Stream Analysis • Experimental design • Multivariate Statistical Analysis • Log Data Analysis • Surveys etc
Related Job Roles	**Foresight Strategist:** Devise strategies and action plans for increasing the probability of the most desired futures. **Foresight Researcher:** Explore multiple alternative futures in long term. Analyze the comparative risks and benefits of each that will help to provocate competitive strategy and Innovation.	**UX Designer:** Focused more on Outcomes of the product, Design the product in a way that ensures the User Experience is efficient and pleasurable. **UX Researcher** Focused more on understanding the users, systematically study target users to collect and analyze data that will help inform the product design process
Related Specializations	**Design Futures:** Future Thinking is used for imagining, prototyping, designing future artefacts.	**Design Strategy:** Design Thinking is used in strategic planning for business development.

Why do we need Futures Thinking?

The future is becoming more important to the present than it has ever been. We have now entered an era in which the pace of change is accelerating rapidly. At the same time, the scale of impending change is increasing. Therefore, the risks and opportunities that confront us justify expanded efforts to lead, rather than be led by, the course of events.

Conventional strategies may not be able to prevent this disparity or to contain its consequences, without first acquiring a better understanding of its complex causes.

So there is a need for a systematic effort

1. **To explore important future alternatives for your organization, product, services and process.**

2. To ascertain which among these possible futures appear to be more desirable than others, and why.

3. To seek means by which the probability of their occurrence could be enhanced through appropriate decisions and actions.

Conclusion

In my perspective, Design Thinking and Futures Thinking are complementary to each other. Futures Thinking paves the way for quality long-term strategy. Design Thinking paves the way for user-centric products and services. Insights from Future thinking can be employed in Design Thinking. Same way Insights from Design Thinking can be employed in Futures Thinking. As an Industry researcher, I see both these approaches will be helpful for strategists and designers to create successful valuable products & services.

Feel Free to connect with me on Linkedin!
https://www.linkedin.com/in/isanthoshgandhi

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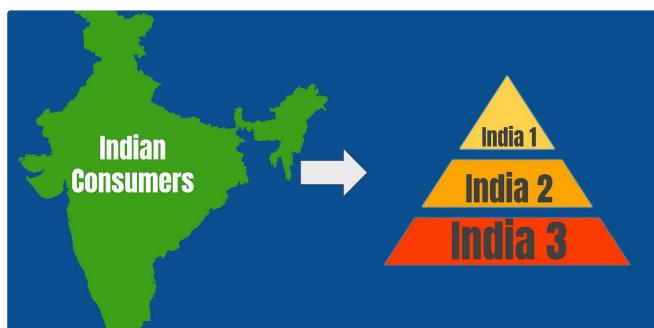
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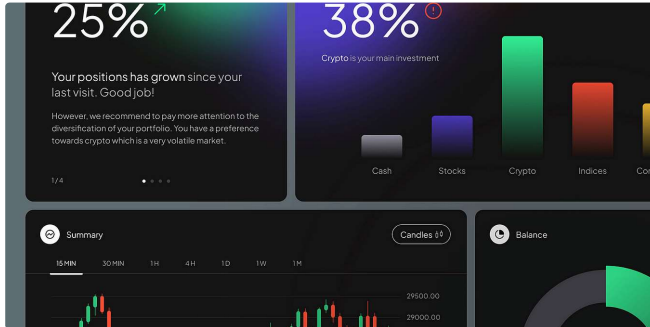
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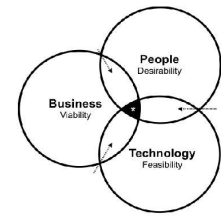
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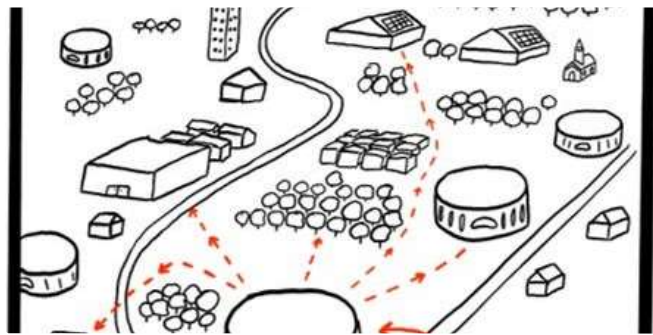
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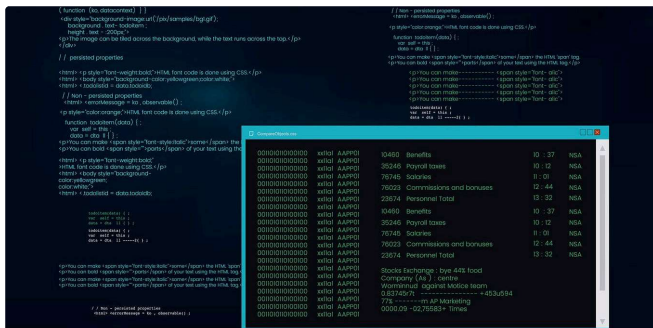
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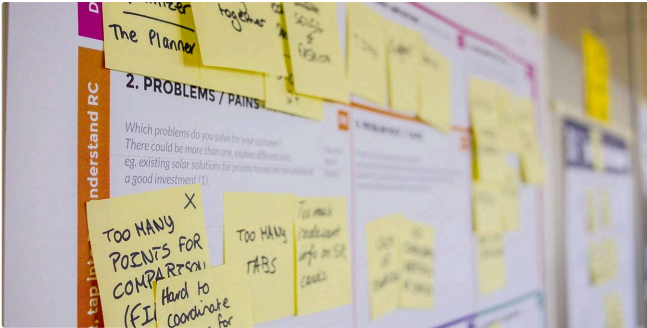
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