

Exploring the Futures Thinking mindset



FUTURES THINKING

Business and society are continuously changing. The pandemic has shown again how a relatively unthinkable future can change every aspect of our lives. In particular due to these changes, the future is often related to uncertainty. So, how can we turn uncertainty and change into opportunities? How can we encourage people to positively approach the future and embrace uncertainty? For us, this meant sharing different Futures Thinking mindsets with you.



What does the Futures means?

Everyone has their perspective on the future. This perspective is mainly influenced by your environment, your current situation and your mindset. For you, Futures means the following:

Futures Thinking is a mindset, not a method?

Futures Thinking is a balancing act between the mindset and the method. Whereas, the mindset allows you to think further and adapt to different situations. The methods provide you with certain parameters to go through the process. Important here is to choose the right tools and methods for you as an individual, your team or organisation.

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Yes it is a mindset, moreover it is our duty to think about the future.”

-Raphael Gielgen, Trendscout «Future of work» Vitra

Is Futures Thinking different from foresight studies?

When you compare both, it comes down to the language. From the perspective of the IFRC, Futures Thinking might connote with the luxury position of the Western world. Furthermore, using the word Foresight might imply the following:

1. Foresight is perceived as more informed,
2. Foresight supports strategy development, and
3. Foresight enhances the operational context.

Following this, we can conclude that Foresight is a more widely accepted term.

To think about the Future is an obligation and mission-critical. The urgency to act and the application of Foresight or Futures Thinking are closer related than one might think.

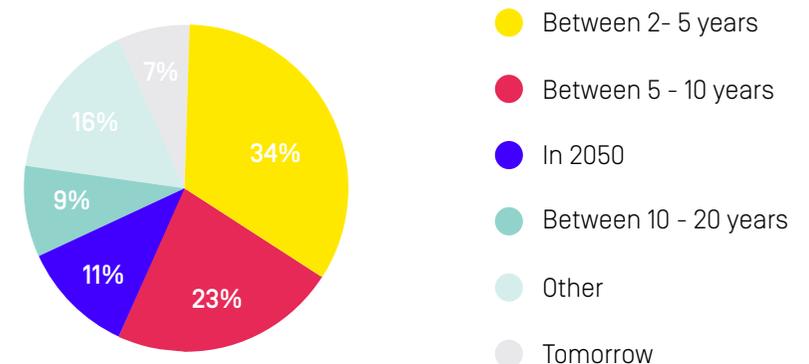
How far is the future?

Thinking about the future is personal and can therefore spark a different answer from anyone you ask. The official response is however 10 years, which is not too far to be considered science fiction and not too close to be confused with your 2 to 3-year plan.

Nonetheless, if we look back into the history of the planet, certain events have repeatedly found place. Considering this, we can't be looking far enough. There is no limitation, so there shouldn't be an end to think. In addition to the earlier mentioned, we could add another dimension, the three horizons. With this dimension, ask yourself; If I look beyond my product, company, or industry, what are the opportunities and what are the challenges that I can identify?

When you think about the future, how far out are you thinking?

Poll - interaction with participants



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The main point to consider, is to question yourself; What is the best way to engage your organisation to prepare yourself for the multiple futures that are available.”

-Joseph Press, Future advisor at IFTF and visiting Professor at Politecnico di Milano

How do you apply Futures Thinking in your daily life / work?

Futures Thinking is and can be applied every day. How can you start applying this mindset both in your professional and personal life? See below;

1. Make it a daily routine to interact with your environment, clients, partners, colleagues, and stimulate cross-pollination.
2. Look for and act on signals.
3. Put yourself in a room/ state of mind, or use methods to become familiar with certain habits.
4. Surround yourself with people that inspire you and have an open mind as well.
5. Start asking 'What if..?' questions.

In short, engaging daily with Futures Thinking or Foresight means looking for and picking up signals, from your environment and beyond. Signals are for instance new technologies and laws that aren't picked up by the masses yet. Balance these signals by asking yourself questions. Either in the 'What if..?' format or by questioning 'How would [signal] influence [a product/ service/ industry/ part of society]?'.

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In organisational context, it is often important to demystify the Futures Thinking process, so the entire organisation can apply this mindset in their daily work and life..”

- George Panopoulos, Head of Strategic Foresight at the Solfreno Academy - IFRC

Do you think you apply Futures Thinking in your daily live?

Poll - interaction with participants [43 votes]



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The good news is, we often practise foresight without even realising it. You're doing it, for example, every time you leave the house and decide whether or not to grab an umbrella.”

- Kristel van der Elst, CEO of the Global Foresight Group

How do you get people to share the same mindset?

Sharing the same mindset might not always be necessary, nonetheless, it provides an opportunity to stay curious, keep learning, look for challenges to solve, and identify opportunities.

1. Build a community space where you feel comfortable to share your mindset and grow together. Build trust and start sharing ideas.
2. Convey that they are 'using' the mindset daily, for instance when they plan their travels.
3. Use a different term to describe Futures Thinking, like provisioning or Foresight.
4. Make knowledge accessible and don't be afraid to share your perspective in the office or online.
5. Start actively designing. Here it is not necessarily about the artefact and end-product, it is about the process and the team that co-created and resulted in a shared language. Designing is about creating, understanding and sense-making before you make something concrete.

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I compare it with a wire; If you span enough with each other you all of a sudden have a trampoline that can bring you together to higher spaces.

- Harald Neidhardt, CEO and curator at Future i/o institute

How is technology changing our definition of the future?

On the one hand, you can see technology merely as a tool, on the other hand when we relate to the future there is always technology involved.

More often than not we have a dystopian view of the future, instead of utopian. In particular with popular programs like Black Mirror.

However, there are multiple ways to think about the future. For instance, describe the Future with the four archetypal ways of thinking about the future: growth, constraint, collapse and transformation. Maybe we use a model, like STEEP? Or depart from the SDGs? The most valuable approach might start with determining how we unpack the future in general.

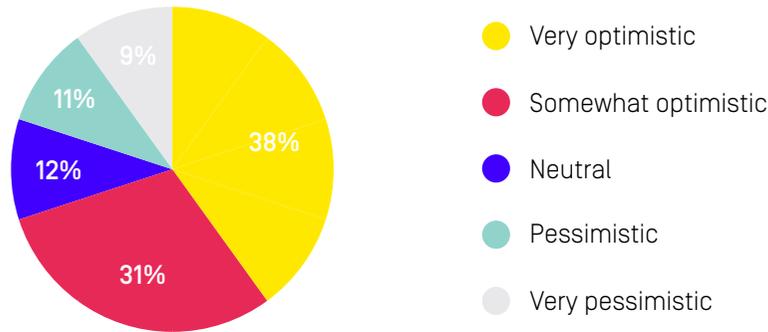
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I look back in order to look forward. Here it is in particular interesting to do this with a clear direction and objective.”

- Erika Marthins, Interaction Designer and founder & CEO of Augmented Food Studio

How optimistic are you about the future?

Poll - interaction with participants



In the end, it is our responsibility to think about the future, to inspire others to be curious and share the mindset to grow. Moreover, to ensure that we don't only hold a dystopian view of the future, which is strongly related to the uncertain feeling most of us shared. We should also allow ourselves to take a positive approach and search for opportunities beyond our product, service, company, or industry. The different methods and models that belong to both Foresight and Futures Thinking can support you in doing so.

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The decisions we make today will have some kind of implications on the future, so it's our choice, to choose if wanna be part of the problem or solution.”

- Sissel Hansen, CEO & founder of Startup Guide and founder of Impact the Future

We would like to thank the panellists, George Panoupolos, Harald Neidhardt, Raphael Gielgen and Joseph Press, Guest Erika Marthins for another perspective, and Kristel van der Elst and Sissel Hansen for their quotes.



George Panoupolos

Global Head of Strategic Foresight at The Solferino Academy - IFRC



Harald Neidhardt

CEO and curator at Future ilo institute



Raphael Gielgen

Trendscout «Future of work» Vitra



Joseph Press

Future advisor at IFTF and visiting Professor at Politecnico di Milano



Erika Marthins

Interaction Designer and founder & CEO of Augmented Food Studio

This document is the result of the digital roundtable hosted on November 26th by Spark Works and moderated by Laura Gonzalez Osorio and Jiske van Straaten. If you are interested in the full content, the roundtable broadcast is available [via this link](#).



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