

FUTURE NEWS

TO CONNECT, TO INFORM AND TO INSPIRE

IN THIS EDITION

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PROTOPIA FUTURES

by Monika Bielskyte

PREFACE: THE “WE” OF PROTOPIA FUTURES

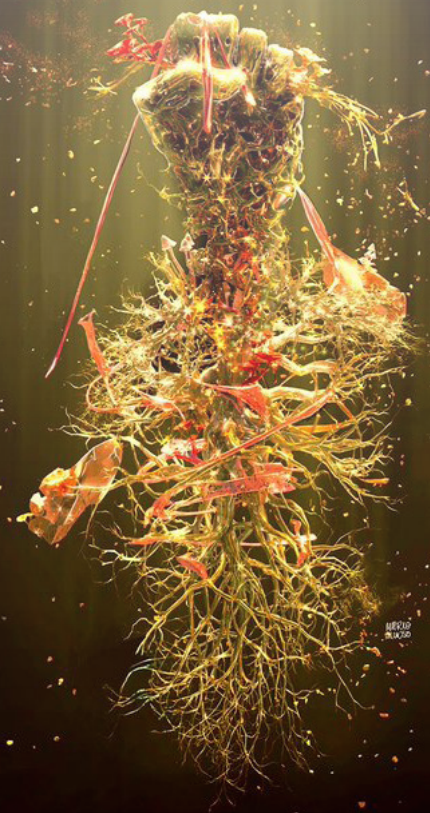
Throughout this document, a conscious choice was made to use the pronoun “we”. The “we” of Protopia is everyone involved in putting this together, yes, but also the collaborators past and future, joining this gradually expanding community of ours. Together, we learn to foster radically hopeful and inclusive future ways of seeing and being in this world.

Collaborative cultural frameworks of gathering and nurturing are at the very origin of our species, despite the historical prevalence of patriarchal and individualist accounts associated with hunter mythology (contrast the patriarchal curriculum retellings of the paleolithic age as “brutal” withvs Barbara Mor & Monica Sjoo’s perspectives in *The Great Cosmic Mother*). Through Protopia explorations, we express deep gratitude to all those who nourish the soil in which Protopian imagination seeds can germinate and grow. We were inspired by thoughts developed not just over the last few years, decades, or even centuries, but millennia. Specifically, this document has been influenced by the revolutionary work led by authors, activists, and innovators at the forefront of Black feminism and Indigenous, Queer and Disability activism. Some of these brilliant minds include Aime Cesaire, Angela Y. Davis, Ruha Benjamin, Tyson Yunkaporta, Bruce Pascoe, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Alice Wong, Imani Barbarin, Arundhati Roy, and Adrienne Maree Brown.

FUTURES – IN PLURAL

Mainstream futurist discourse tends to extrapolate from the status quo and proposes singular, predetermined future visions. The problem with a lot of such foresight is that it is bound by the constraints and suppositions of dominant perceptions of reality (*Radha Mistry).

Within the Protopia Framework, however, we position that there is no singular “future” trajectory but rather a vast perimeter of many alternative futures. It is continuously shaped not just by our actions but also by our inactions and our apathy. Hence, we consciously choose to use the plural “futures” throughout this text. Our work is always meant to engage the plurality of future possibilities — not a singular thread but rather the scope of the probable, possible, plausible, and, most importantly, desirable.



Both Science Fiction and corporate foresight visions directly influence reality, and their predominantly dystopian/utopian stereotypes limit our understanding of the possibility space of tomorrow's choices. Protopia research is intended to open such imagination doors so that many others can "walk through them" and take our ideas further than what we could ever do by ourselves. We are here to journey together — with you — in crafting Speculative Fiction world design and foresight practices that challenge, not further entrench, the status quo.

TODAY'S CRISIS OF IMAGINATION

Before we move into what specifically we want to create with Protopia, it is important to understand why our work is even necessary.

The dominant historical narratives within both entertainment media and education have brought on a crisis of our collective futures imagination. Industrial markers of "progress" lead us to dead ends. The speed and quantitative aspects of our mechanical technologies have advanced to 21st century paradigms. Culturally, socially, and politically, however, so much of our lives remain informed by a multiplicity of biases and injustices of centuries prior.

These flawed narratives of progress predicated on colonialism have privileged treacherously incorrect scientific theories, such as Cartesian dualism, that distort any true understanding of our communities and our very presence on the planet. They have blocked us from more expansive scientific inquiries and innovative discoveries (*Mary Katherine Heinrich).

DYSTOPIA VS UTOPIA: A FALSE BINARY

Currently, the two most commonly familiar frameworks to discuss the future are the seemingly polar opposites of Dystopia and Utopia. But has Dystopia vs. Utopia ever been a binary, or are these concepts just two sides of the same coin? Is this argument just another manifestation of self versus "other" entrenched into Western thought by colonization as "thingification" (Aimee Cesaire, *Le Discours Sur Colonialisme* 1954)? Haven't most utopias been someone else's dystopias, and vice versa? Instead of being productive frames of inquiry, are dystopias and utopias mere neo-religious content outlets for dualistic ideas of Heaven, Hell, and the fetish for the apocalyptic Rapture?

What are the tangible consequences of such constrained, monocultural ways of defining our futures? What could be the possibilities of multicultural, open definitions (*Sydette Harry)?

DYSTOPIA: DESPAIR ESCAPISM & PRODUCT ROADMAP

Dystopian Futures are generally depicted as desolate beyond repair, and consequently mostly futile to be engaged with or salvaged. Whatever action happens in such a setting looks pretty much like cyberpunk dancing on the deck of the Titanic.

By now, Dystopias have become so obvious and banal that they are memes rather than cautionary tales, despair escapism, and excuses for inaction and further consumption. But also, and possibly even worse: they serve as product roadmaps for entities such as Peter Thiel's Palantir, the deeply racialized predictive surveillance tech inspired by Minority Report.

This is not to say that, historically, dystopian warnings, especially by authors of marginalized backgrounds, have not been extraordinarily prescient and valuable. For example, if our policy makers would have heeded the lessons of Octavia Butler's *The Parable Of The Sower* (1993), we could have diminished or at least



been better prepared for some of the most disheartening aspects of the last decade: the disinformation warfare-driven resurgence of inequality, alienation, xenophobia, racism, fascism, and biosphere collapse. Butler's dystopia rings true in 2021 PRECISELY because the systems of oppression she critiques remain. Further, her embodied experiences as a Black woman, impoverished and disenfranchised early in her writing career, positioned her to see the broader societal implications of these injustices because she and those in her community were already living in these dystopias (*Ash Baccus-Clark).

UTOPIA: A COLONIAL PROJECT

Even today, the majority of “mainstream” figures in the foresight field position Utopias as antidotes to Dystopias. Yet this approach tends to be deeply exclusionary, perpetuating the gaze and the experience of privilege, even if with a “green” twist. It must be said here that “environmental utopias” that do not address racial, Indigenous, gender, and disability justice are at best greenwashing, and at worst eco-fascism.

Utopian Futures are generally envisaged as so “perfect” that they can only exist by prodigiously leapfrogging all of the most urgent inequities of the present. Consequently, they are mostly closed to critical inquiry. Utopian imaginings pertain to communicating a peaceful and magically post-austerity world, yet somehow the peace of such a future is always peace without justice.

A non-whitewashed history tells us a horror story of 20th century top-down dreams of the “perfect society” morphing into eugenic, genocidal nightmares. We must remember that the Third Reich's extermination of Jewish, Roma, Queer, and Disabled people was seen as a means to achieve an Aryan Utopia. As recently as 1994, apartheid was the Utopia for Afrikaaners, with the price paid by everyone “one shade darker” than white. The most recent chapter of these “Utopian” nightmares features Silicon Valley evangelists peddling technology to “connect all humanity” which has quickly shifted to extreme surveillance capitalism — commodifying every interaction, radicalizing us for clicks, exploiting us as products, and tearing at the very fiber of our social fabric.

And yet, even with all of this becoming public record, the best that many Futurist “thought leaders” seem to propose for the 22nd century is the absurdity of endless economic growth based on exponential technology.

The ideologues of exponentialism are dragging the mindset of the “Enlightenment” into their projected futures without any real analysis of colonial extraction consequences extending from past to present day and into the future. Such a techno-utopian mindset is dependent on limitless extractive economic growth, and it glosses over all genuine consideration for the cultural and biosphere extinctions that inevitably happen in the wake of that growth. The principal offerings of these deceitful ideas of infinite material expansion on a finite planet are always magical techno-fixes and, of course, space colonialism as its *deus ex machina*.

The myth of technology as savior points to an underlying Christian mythos which marginalizes other narratives and faiths (*Phoenix Perry). As we can see, both historical and contemporary iterations of Utopian envisioning are all very mired in ivory-tower delusions of colonizing grandeur: an utter insult to the planetary life AND our shared humanity.

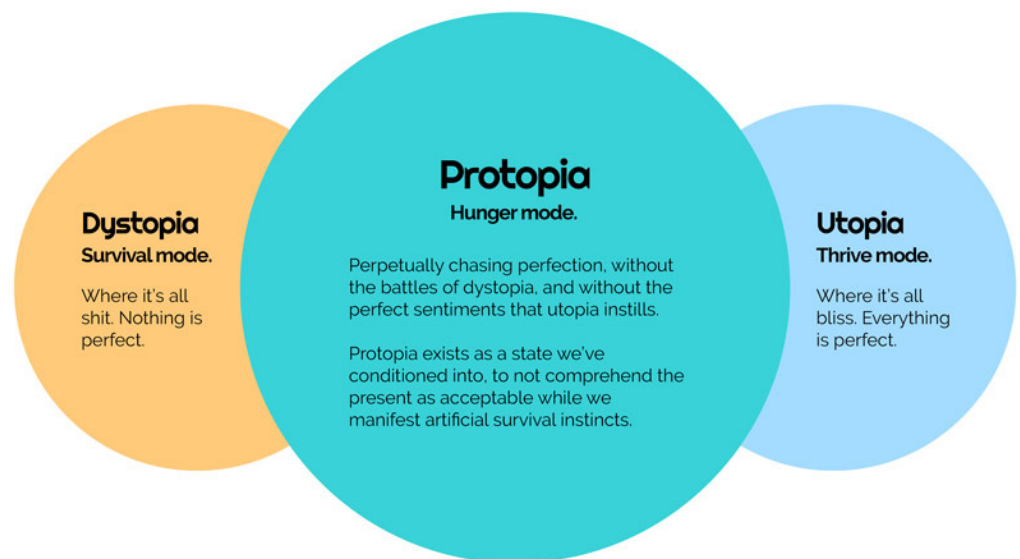
So we ask here: Can either of these binary concepts truly represent the complex fabric of our lived realities or do they reduce them?



WHY PROTOPIA?

The critical setting of context is vital so we can at least attempt not to fall back into common future stereotypes. BUT! Just saying NO is not enough. Protopia is our framework for shared YES VISIONS of the future, intended to inspire and support us in making the hardest choices of the decades to come.

The word “Protopia” was coined in a 2011 blog post by *Wired*’s founding editor Kevin Kelly. Kelly’s initial idea of the concept came from “pronoia,” (the opposite of “paranoia”): an exuberant feeling that the entire world is rooting for you. At the time, however, it captured only a niche audience, being so early in the futures conversation, but possibly also for being very much an extension of Kevin Kelly and Stewart Brand’s techno-utopian thought.



At @protopiafutures, we have taken a significant departure from the original framing of “better futures” via the route of incremental technological innovation to proactive prototyping of radically inclusive futures that shifts the gaze from technological panaceas to focus on future cultural values and ethics. We believe that technological innovation without humanitarian evolution always leads to Dystopian Futures. We consider humanity rather than the abstract notions of “technology/science” (as featured in Kelly’s 2010 book *What Technology Wants*) to be the drivers for said evolution. To boldly address past and present injustice and exploitative frameworks IS to strive to replace them with regenerative and equitable alternatives, rather than merely patching things up with inevitably temporary, disposable, technological solutions.

PROACTIVE PROTOTYPING OF HOPEFUL FUTURES

Superficially, one could perceive Protopian Futures as situated “between” Dystopia and Utopia, yet they are not particularly indebted to either. Dystopias/Utopias are monologues moored in the gaze of privilege, inevitably tied to boundaries of thought established via patriarchal settler colonialism. Protopia is a continuous dialogue, more a verb than a noun, a process rather than a destination, never finite, always iterative, meant to be questioned, adjusted, and expanded. Our goal is always to center the previously marginalized perspectives, especially those at the intersection of Indigeneity, Queerness, and Disability. Above all, Protopia explores visions of embodied HOPE, futures wherein we have come together, as imperfect as our condition is.

Protopian futuring is NOT to be solely bound to the realm of theoretical imagination. It is also very much about the methodology of creating (and recovering) blueprints for action. Our goal is to challenge the inevitability of imposed futures. We hope to create spaces of active imagining, resourcing in the present and moving towards collaborative visions of liberation (*Tiana Garoogian).

Unlike most SciFi which features distant time periods and fantastical locations (i.e. space colonialism, alien invasions, singularity/simulation projections, etc.), we want our speculative futures to explore time horizons no more than 30 years into the future and to take place primarily on Earth. We deem the narratives of life on our home planet the most urgent and compelling, and we critique the neocolonial approaches to space expansion.

Protopian visions are anchored in principles of:

*plurality,
community,
celebration of physical presence,
regenerative action,
symbiotic spirituality,
creativity,
and evolution of cultural values.*

THE PRINCIPLES OF PROTOPIA

1. **PLURALITY — BEYOND BINARIES:** We consider mere “tolerance” a failure and actively resist the violence of sexism, misogyny, racism, colorism, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, ageism, classism, and any other forms of discrimination and exclusion. Nothing embodies our approach as accurately as these words by Alok Vaid-Menon: “Creativity reveals all categories to be artificial and unambitious.”
2. **COMMUNITY — BEYOND BORDERS:** Our narratives are narratives of communities coming together rather than glorifications of individual “hero journeys” of magical saviors. COMMUNITY is the hero of our futures.
3. **CELEBRATION OF PRESENCE:** Our futures are embodied and interdependent. We revel in expanded sensory experiences and consciously make vital space for neurodiverse expressions of intimacy, care, and radical tenderness.
4. **REGENERATIVE ACTION & LIFE AS TECHNOLOGY:** With recognition of destructive feedback loops already in motion, we consider sustainability solutions entirely insufficient and aim for regenerative practices in every aspect of our civilizational construct. We prioritize biological over mechanical technologies as the only truly viable long-term strategy. We grow, not just build.
5. **SYMBIOTIC SPIRITUALITY:** We appreciate the importance of spiritual practices from the dawn of humanity and their role in human culture-making. We therefore quest for spiritual practices that acknowledge ancestral wisdom, whilst also expanding rather than stifling scientific inquiry.
6. **CREATIVITY & EMERGENT SUBCULTURES:** From the interwoven journeys of our Ancestors to the future living fabrics of our cities, we celebrate the role of creativity beyond the elitism of disciplines previously labeled as “artistic.”



7. **EVOLUTION OF VALUES — CULTURE OF CONTRIBUTION:** We must depart from colonial/neocolonial individualist cultures of exploitation and greed, and endeavor to nurture cultures of equity, contribution, and planetary mutuality. We envision the values of a material degrowth society.

PATHS TOWARDS CHANGE

It is hard to believe we can eradicate the seeds of prejudice, bigotry, and discrimination entirely. We can strive, however, to make the cultural environment significantly more inhospitable for the further rise of fascism and other genocidal ideologies. We must, at the very least, imagine a world that gives as little oxygen as possible to such violence. None of this is feasible if we only look forward. We embrace the lessons of history from the perspectives of the oppressed rather than of the oppressors.

There can be no healing unless there is CHANGE. Protopia encourages the uncomfortable yet vital conversations about the harm we have experienced AND the harm in which we have participated. Rather than celebrating being “right,” we must vitalize the processes of learning and unlearning. Even as we evolve, we will experience failures, misunderstandings, and misalignments. But none of these instances are signs to give up. If we allow ourselves to be honest and vulnerable, they become opportunities through which we can deepen our engagement.

THE SCOPE OF OUR FUTURES IS THE SCOPE OF OUR DREAMS

To begin to free ourselves, the first thing we need to do is to see ourselves again as historical actors, as people who can make a difference in the course of world events. This is exactly what the militarization of history is trying to take away. The ultimate hidden truth of the world is that it is something we make. And could just as easily make differently. — David Graeber (1961–2020)

With the awareness of exponential global warming, climate-pattern disruption, biosphere collapse, pandemic realities, disinformation warfare, fascist consolidation, and increasing inequality, time is of the absolute essence.

We MUST dream more expansive, hopeful futures, for their very purpose is to help us act in accordance with Protopian values in every step of our personal and professional lives. As Walidah Imarisha and Adrienne Maree-Brown write: “*All organizing IS science fiction.*” By supporting forward-looking and regenerative-action-focused grassroots activism, participating in local and international policymaking, and equally engaging with large-scale corporate entities, we shape the realm in which our future hopes breathe — or suffocate. Fundamental lasting change must come from and through all these complementing strategies, AND more.

The scope of our futures is the scope of our dreams.

We very much hope you come dream with us.

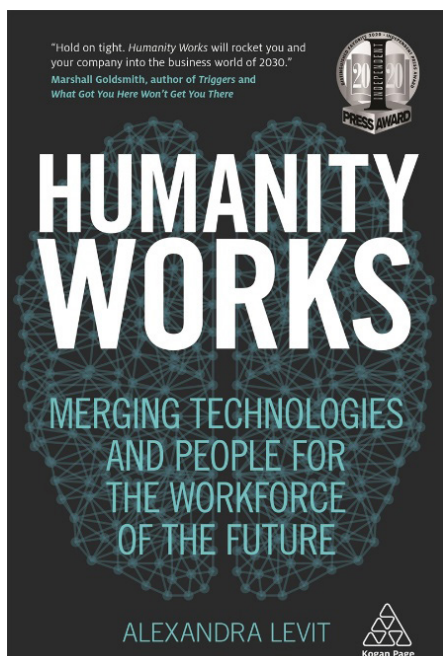


@PROTOPIAFUTURES was founded in 2019 as a research project by Monika Bielskyte but has quickly grown into a borderless collective across disciplines and cultures.

This is an abbreviated version of PROTOPIAFUTURES (reproduced with permission). A longer version is available – simply contact the Futures Foundation office.

Book Review

by Alireza Hejazi



Core Message

This book offers a reflective and optimistic view of the workforce in 2030. It investigates various technological and social transition patterns and weaves them together to paint an image of what work will be like in a decade. It is a road map for the massive improvements leaders make to their workplaces and careers. It illuminates the requisite next steps for corporate leaders that are committed to choosing value and cooperation. The book paints a hopeful picture, with human imagination at the center and technologies used to inspire rather than replacing humans. People, according to the book, cannot be replaced by robots. The book's target audience includes corporate executives, administrators, contractors, as well as technologists, and futurists.

Humanity Works: Merging Technologies and People for the Workforce of the Future by Alexandra Levit

Content Analysis

Alexandra Levit is a world-renowned thought maker, futurist, and strategist. She is a member of the Association of Professional Futurists. She carries out key workplace studies with Fortune 500 firms such as American Express, Deloitte, PepsiCo, and Whirlpool. As a leadership expert, she has been writing for the New York Times and Forbes.

Levit aims to look at how people could engage in their work by publishing this book. In *Humanity Works*, she envisions a world in which many leaders will shift to a more contracting paradigm in which job teams will be assembled 'on the go' using accelerated recruiting processes. This book examines the intriguing idea of robot takeover and how people can collaborate with robots because some talents and characteristics are uniquely owned by humans and cannot be reproduced by robots, such as creativity and innovation.

Levit wrote this book for existing leaders who need to set the pieces in motion to protect their legacies and the potential health and success of their organizations, as well as for new leaders who need to take specific measures to improve themselves and their workforces to succeed successfully in the prime of their careers. According to Levit, by assisting their employees in learning what it takes to be

competitive in a gig economy, leaders can secure a larger pool of contract labor open to them as their industry progresses.

Her book serves as a warning against short-term thinking. As this short-termism spreads, it will have serious consequences for companies and their executives, and Levit provides plenty of tips about how to thrive in this modern economy. Each chapter focuses on two case studies or topics that are intended to provide readers with specific examples of how some of the more abstract principles can be applied in a real-world business setting. Each chapter also has an Action Plan to get readers dreaming and moving on deliverables that will solidify their readiness for a 21st-century ready team and company.

Levit divides her book into nine parts to help the reader truly understand how workforce paradigms are changing. The first chapter delves into population trends, baby boomer labor engagement, projected capacity shortages, and the growth of the international workforce and global talent pools. The second chapter examines the importance of automation and smart machines in the design and management of successful 21st-century organizations. The third chapter looks at how human careers will evolve over the next 15 years, as well as the competencies that can ensure human teams will

“ A thought-provoking read that brings together a kaleidoscope of thoughts and arranges them into one cohesive view of the future workplace.

compete with computer partners and how leaders can promote innovative and more flexible ways of learning.

The fourth chapter reflects on co-working, flextime, autonomous teaming, and swarms, as well as the incorporation of remote access technology such as augmented reality, virtual reality, and telepresence. In Chapter 5, readers learn about the trends that are behind the growth of the gig economy and why contract employment is attractive to both employers and workers. Chapter 6 delves into career customization, intending to assist leaders in promoting sideways or lattice movements, the advancement of cross-functionality, work-life alignment, and wearables in their teams' career journeys.

Chapter 7 delves into the cultural factors that can fuel long-term workplace growth, identifying the elements of the optimal 21st-century employee experience, such as how to promote positive experiences at each stage of the employee life cycle and use those interactions to drive motivation and efficiency. Chapter 8 follows the transformation of the command-and-control leadership model to a more open, adaptable, and flatter approach best adapted to the mid-twentieth-century workplace. Finally, Chapter 9 reflects on the key elements of the corporate puzzle—from branding and ethics to disruption and expansion—that leaders must put together by the time 2030 workforce realities converge on our collective doorstep.

Levit's book is a research-driven glimpse into the emerging agile workplace and how the “three Cs”—collaboration, customization, and creativity—

will be critical for employees at all levels of the career hierarchy who want to excel now and throughout the future. It's a thought-provoking read that brings together a kaleidoscope of thoughts and arranges them into one cohesive view of the future workplace. The fifth chapter, which explains the workings of tomorrow's gig economy, appears to be Levit's strongest point of discussion. She would likely want to expand on the seventh chapter, in which she imagines the future of organizational culture and experience, by creating alternate possibilities rather than sticking to Cameron and Quinn's four cultural designations. Overall, the book is meant to jolt the reader into thinking about how inventions and humans can combine to form the workforce of the future, and it succeeds in its goal.

Conclusion

The book teaches executives how to modify their workforce planning programs to accommodate generational desires. Although this is not a new topic, the book provides several examples of how ignoring millennial development needs will affect a company's image, processes, and strategy. It serves as a manual for maximizing human qualities such as imagination, judgment, problem-solving, and interpersonal connection and awareness. This book helps educate leaders to guide companies of the future by revealing what the ‘robot invasion’ will actually look like, how talent and machines will work together, and how leaders will make corporate processes more flexible and creativity-driven.

FUTURISTS IN ACTION

WILD CARDS

WHAT THEY ARE AND HOW TO USE THEM IN FUTURES & FORESIGHT

by Alireza Hejazi



Alireza Hejazi

Wild cards are one of the most controversial topics in futures and foresight, as there is neither consensus on what wild cards are, nor on how to identify them and incorporate them in scenarios. Additionally, wild cards are also a topic of great interest given what we've been

experiencing in the past year due to the COVID19 pandemic, which reminded us of the importance of taking into account wild cards in futures and foresight practice.

Therefore, this article will attempt to make some clarity on wild cards. It will lay out the points of agreement and disagreement regarding what is a wild card in order to land on a parsimonious definition of it. It will then provide guidance on how to identify wild cards and incorporate them in futures and foresight practice. Finally, it will explain why wild cards should be used in futures and foresight.

WHAT IS A WILD CARD?

As there is no consensus on the answer to this question in futures and foresight, it would be helpful to look at what is less disputed. These are the attributes that most of futures and foresight practitioners and scholars agree on regarding what is a wild card:

1. A wild card is an event, not a driving force. In other words, it occurs at one point in time, rather than over time.
2. A wild card is not reversible. Once it has occurred, it cannot be undone. It's like eggs: once we scramble them, we cannot unscramble them. However, the irreversibility attribute of wild cards holds for the wild card event in and of itself, not for its effects. By contrast, the changes brought about by a wild card may be reversible in the short-term future and, by principle, are always reversible in the long term future, unless it is an extinction-level event, in which case we are not going to care about it because we are not going to exist.
3. A wild card is very impactful on human society in all of its aspects. Specifically, its impact is broad in geographical range *within the spatial boundaries that delimit the scope of the futures and foresight project at hand*, and it affects different industrial sectors and different groups/classes of individuals alike.
4. A wild card is low in objective probability. That is, no matter how likely different individuals may believe that event is (a subjective perception of probability), it is objectively not highly probable *in the time span explored in the futures and foresight exercise/project at hand*. This last qualification is important because, given that the chances (P) of an event (E) to occur sum up over time, any event has a less than certain probability of occurrence, i.e. lower than 1, in a limited time span — $P(E)_1 + P(E)_2 + \dots P(E)_n$ —, but the probability of an event in an indefinite time span is always certain, i.e. equal to 1 — $P(E)_1 + P(E)_2 + \dots P(E)_\infty$.
5. Although unlikely, a wild card is still imaginable. It is not completely beyond human ken. Therefore, even if it cannot be predicted, that is, even if it is impossible to assign a reliable future date to it, it can be anticipated.
6. Although wild cards are often primarily portrayed as negative, they can be both positive and negative. However, the negative/positive valence of wild cards should always been seen in relative rather than absolute terms, i.e. wild cards can be *predominantly* or *relatively more* negative/positive, as there are no completely negative/positive events, only a varied set of repercussions of such events.

Some examples of wild cards that subscribe to all the six attributes above are a tsunami, a pandemic, and the discovery of a new energy source. And this is because: 1) they're all events, 2) they're all irreversible, 3) they all have a very high impact on human society as a whole, 4) they are all very low in objective probability *in the time span explored in futures and foresight, e.g. 10 to 20 year* 5) they're all imaginable, and lastly 6) although a tsunami and a pandemic are (relatively) negative wild cards, the discovery of a new energy source is a (relatively) positive wild card, which corroborates the idea that wild cards can be both positive and negative.



Additionally, the concept of wild card should be differentiated from the concept indicated by the terms “black swan” or “black swan event”. Indeed, these terms are not indicative of a low probability, high impact event. Instead, they indicate an impossible to predict, high impact, mostly negative event which is rationalized after it has happened as predictable. However, the concept of black swan is not used in futures and foresight, so this article will focus on the concept of wild card.

Although what written so far are generally agreed-on attributes and distinctions, there are also three major points of disagreement regarding what wild cards are:

1. The first point of disagreement is about the difference between wild cards and so called “discontinuities”. Some futures and foresight practitioners believe that true wild cards are not imaginable, only what is called “discontinuities” are imaginable. However, this distinction can be proven to be pointless. If we cannot imagine the so-called “wild cards”, then we shouldn't worry about them. We should only worry about what we can imagine: discontinuities. But since that is only one class of events, not two, then we don't need two names. We can just pick one. In which case we
2. The second point of disagreement is about the difference in degree of probability between wild cards and “discontinuities”. Some treat wild cards and discontinuities as synonyms or equate the two concepts because the two both indicate a high impact, low probability event. However, others believe that while wild cards are low probability, high impact events, discontinuities are a high probability, high impact events. For illustrative purposes, according to this point of view a wild card would be a tsunami while a discontinuity would be a typhoon. This distinction can also be proven pointless because insofar as scenarios are a chain of events, and insofar as the practice of creating scenarios already includes the idea of taking into account high impact, high probability events, then discontinuities are already embedded in the creation of scenarios. Thus, we shouldn't treat “discontinuities” separately from them, which brings us back to the importance of imagining wild cards as an integration to common futures and foresight practice, rather than “discontinuities”.
3. The third and perhaps most contentious disagreement is on whether wild cards are only sudden events, or not only sudden events but also turning point events of more gradual phenomena. According to the second point of view, we should not only consider massive natural disasters or pandemics as wild cards (sudden events), but also, for example, a point of no-return in climate change (a turning point of a gradual phenomenon). However, the latter point of view can be proven to be a non-sequitur. If we assume that wild cards are imaginable — a fair assumption without which we wouldn't be able to discuss about them — then there must be signs in the past pointing towards future wild card events, even if small and difficult to identify. In other words, there must be signs in the past that can help us imagining wild cards. Two observations then follow. The first observation is that if we can identify those signs and the wild card is sudden, those signs must be events in the past similar to the future wild card, and since those events are separated by long lapses, we tend to forget about the next similar event (the wild card), so we get surprised when it happens, like financial crises. This

justifies sudden events to be wild cards, at least in the time span explored in futures and foresight, because they are high impact and low probability. The second observation is that if we can identify those signs and the wild card is a turning point of a gradual phenomenon, then those signs must be a crescendo of phenomena rather than past events separated by long lapses of time. However, the non sequitur of this observation lies in the fact that a crescendo of phenomena would make the point of no-return wild card eventually highly probable, which would in turn violate the assumption that wild cards should be high impact, low probability.

In short, the analysis of the three points of disagreements above shows that:

1. It is pointless to distinguish between imaginable “discontinuities” and not imaginable “wild cards”,
2. If discontinuities (high impact, high probability events) are already embedded in scenarios, wild cards (high impact, low probability events) are not, and should be given extra attention, and
3. Only sudden events should be considered as wild cards, because if we also considered turning points of gradual phenomena as wild cards, that would involve a non-sequitur. From this discussion, it is then possible to land on a definition of wild card: a wild card is a sudden, irreversible and imaginable event which has a high impact on human society, a low (objective) probability of occurrence, and that can be either (relatively) negative or (relatively) positive.

To be fair, this definition does not take into account the arguments about the importance of identifying high probability, high impact events that are not known by most people, including futures and foresight practitioners and planners, or not credible by most people, or difficult to discuss about because they are elephants in the room, such as a turning point in climate change. These events have been called “type II wild cards”. However, while these concerns are justified in that we have to identify those events in futures and foresight practice, it should be noted that these events are high probability, and any high probability event should already be included in scenario work, if it is done well. In other words, it appears that we should consider wild cards only those events that are very low in

objective probability, high in impact, and sudden, and pay extra attention to them in futures and foresight practice because, if we don’t, we won’t account for them in our scenarios, whereas other classes of events should have already been accounted in our scenarios by default.



HOW TO IDENTIFY WILD CARDS?

Although wild cards are difficult to identify, there must be signs in the past that can be precursors of wild cards. These signs are nothing else than weak signals, that is, single examples of change limited in geographical scope and of which few people might have heard of that may point towards future wild cards. For example, teleporting a muffin from point A to point B would be a very strong weak-signal-precursor of human being teleportation, a future wild card event. As a consequence, *horizon scanning*, the activity by which we look for weak signals, is an ideal practice to help us imagining wild cards.



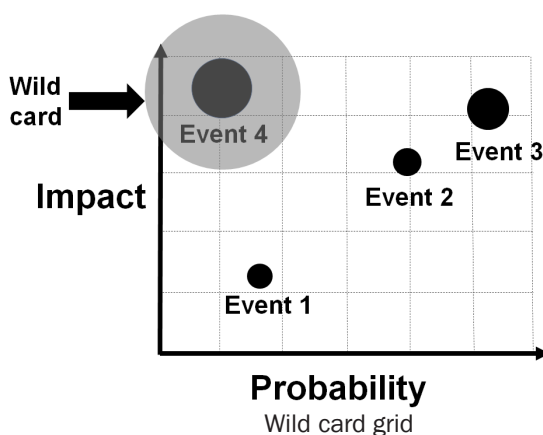
However, horizon scanning does not guarantee that we identify several wild cards, as wild cards arguably sit at the fringes of our knowledge. They are our “blind spots”. Therefore, to make sure to identify a fair amount of them in our futures and foresight practice, there are extra steps we can take:

Conducting extra rounds of brainstorming or interviews with individuals who were not originally involved in the futures and foresight project to elicit information about potential wild cards.

S	T	E	E	P
Event 1			Event 3	
	Event 2			Event 4

Wild card grid

2. Filling up a wild card grid with several high impact, low probability events for every category of the grid where wild cards with relevance to the focal issue under examination could originate. The grid can be based, for instance, on conceptual frameworks such as STEEP: each letter of the acronym would be a column of the grid.



To make sure that the identified events are wild cards, we can also assign each of them a score on impact and a score on probability (e.g. from 1 to 5), plot the two scores on an impact-probability matrix, and make sure they are located on the top left corner of the matrix, i.e. high impact, low probability. In this manner, many low impact, low probability events (weak signals) and high impact, high probability events (“discontinuities” that should have already been included in the scenarios) will be winnowed out.

HOW TO INCORPORATE WILD CARDS IN FUTURES AND FORESIGHT PRACTICE?

Once we have identified a fair amount of wild cards, we should incorporate some of them in the scenarios generated in our futures and foresight practice. This can be done by choosing the two/three most critical wild cards for the topic (focal issue) we’re looking at, and by creating two or three scenarios based on

them in addition to the scenarios that have already been generated. In other words, wild cards are incorporated in futures and foresight not in existing scenarios, but by designing two or three additional *wild card scenarios*. A wild card scenario is a scenario where the wild card is at the beginning of it and then it develops further, or a scenario where the wild card is dominant in it at some point of the scenario narrative. To create plausible and comprehensive wild card scenarios, we have to think of how far the impact of the wild card goes in the scenario and include this in the narrative, and we have to describe both positive as well as negative repercussions of the wild card. Indeed, although wild cards are often described as negative, due to their systematic nature, they must also have positive repercussions. When some people lose, other gain.

WHY DO WE NEED WILD CARDS IN FUTURES & FORESIGHT?

The practices of selecting two or three wild card events and of creating two or three wild card scenarios — and not more than that — underscore the reason why we use wild cards in futures and foresight. Wild cards are not used to predict low probability, high impact events so that we can prepare to them — in which case we would need more than two/three wild card scenarios to be prepared to all possible eventualities. Instead, wild cards are used to train our minds to be more prepared and less surprised by such kind of events in general. Wild cards are used to enhance our unqualified capacity of preparedness, rather than to build narrow preparedness of response to some contingencies. This is the reason why although a pandemic is often used as a wild card in futures and foresight projects, the value of anticipating it does not lay in using it to prepare specifically to it, but in using it to make our mindset more flexible when thinking of the extreme conditions brought about by a class of varied events which includes but is not limited to it. At the organizational level, this will in turn facilitate the emergence of resilience capabilities to support constructive improvisation, such as the encouragement of a safe environment of trial and errors, cross functional collaborations, the leverage of urgency, and a sense of non-conformity. These capabilities will allow the organizations, at the very least, to prevent the cascade of negative repercussions of wild cards and at best, to be antifragile and become stronger thanks to them.

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Signals in the Noise

10 MENTAL HEALTH TIPS TO HELP YOU SURVIVE THE PANDEMIC

by Jaime Lee

It wasn't too long ago social distancing was introduced to the language. Yet ever since, our lives have arguably changed forever. In addition to a global pandemic that has killed hundreds of thousands of people worldwide, COVID-19 has brought profound changes to our daily lives, such as remote work, unemployment, and virtual school. In turn, many are facing newfound economic and social stresses, as well as panic over the uncertainty of the future. Here are the best mental health tips we've found from experts on how to cope.

CREATE A NEW ROUTINE

For starters, keep up with some kind of routine. If your typical routine isn't feasible anymore, create a new one. The WHO recommends you get up and go to bed at similar times, eat at regular hours, and schedule slots for personal hygiene and exercise.

The predictability of a routine may help you feel more in control, which is important for mental health, according to the Mayo Clinic. Plus, regular exercise may reduce anxiety and improve your mood.

MAKE TIME FOR THINGS YOU ENJOY

It's important to schedule time each day for something that makes you happy. That advice is backed by most medical researchers. Even just a few minutes of an activity you enjoy, such as reading, yoga, or meditation, can help you relax and ease stress.



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FIND A PROJECT

This is the perfect time to tackle a project you never had time for previously. The possibilities are endless: Clean out the garage. Paint the guest room. Plant a vegetable garden, or at least some indoor herbs. Build a backyard treehouse. Learn a new language. Write a book. This, according to the Mayo Clinic, helps distance us from the cycle of negative thoughts that contribute to anxiety and depression. Plus, you'll have something positive to show for the pandemic once it's over.

But don't beat yourself up if you're not fluent in Mandarin yet. Instead, set reasonable daily goals and go easy on yourself. Celebrate the victories you can — even small ones.

PRACTICE MINDFULNESS



source: Mindful.org

When you feel the anxiety build and your mind begin to race, stop what you're doing and practice mindfulness. There are many online resources to help master this exercise, including Calm and Headspace. (Headspace offers free access to those who are unemployed now.)

Sit and breathe deeply for 10–15 minutes (or more, if you need it) to help your mind return to the present moment, according to experts at Vanderbilt University. The CDC suggests adding some stretches too. Whatever helps you feel more grounded is on the table.

SEEK VIRTUAL SOCIAL CONTACT

While social distancing remains vital, we can — and should — connect with loved ones virtually (or from six feet apart). The WHO, CDC, and Mayo Clinic recommend staying in contact as a way to share thoughts and feelings with friends and family. Consider this a small but meaningful coping mechanism to use during the pandemic (and beyond). Emails, texts, phone calls, and video chats are more important now than ever.

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STAY INFORMED WITH SAFE PARAMETERS

Another tip most health organizations agree on: Limit your daily news intake. Constant exposure to negative news can contribute to anxiety and stress. Instead, check the news at a set time each day, possibly once or twice daily. You can schedule this into your routine. It will help you balance staying informed with avoiding a nonstop stream of negative headlines. The same is true of social media, so watch your intake there too.

THINK POSITIVE

It's a rewarding exercise to spend time acknowledging the positive aspects of your life each day. This can also include connecting with organizations in your community, including faith-based groups, which can not only bring comfort but also help members recognize there is still good in the world. Just be sure to maintain distancing or seek connections virtually.

LIMIT SCREEN TIME FOR YOURSELF, TOO

We hear this a lot about kids, but it's relevant to adults too: Be cognizant of how much time you spend in front of your computer, phone, tablet, and television each day. And make sure to schedule screen-free breaks. Everything in moderation, right?

LEND A HELPING HAND



A great way to manage stress is by doing something for someone else. Show gratitude to healthcare workers and first responders, check on neighbours, or help vulnerable people in your community by grocery shopping or running errands.

Remember: lending help can help reduce stress, but don't forget to practice self-care too.

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TAKE CARE OF YOUR BODY

You can't help anyone else if you don't take care of yourself, which includes your physical self. Eat balanced meals, get plenty of sleep, and avoid alcohol and drugs.

You'll also want to limit (or avoid) junk food, refined sugars, and caffeine, as they can contribute to stress and anxiety. Balance cravings with healthy foods. Good nutrition keeps you healthy and supports your overall immune system, which is a must during a pandemic.

THE TAKEAWAY

We're living through a global health crisis that the world has not seen for more than a century. We don't know what the new normal will look like yet. Until that becomes clear, it's important to take heed of these mental health tips and focus on taking care of ourselves, our loved ones, and our communities.



Jaime is Head of Content Strategy at AdRoll, a division of NextRoll, Inc. She has 12 years' experience in content, social, and partner marketing, spanning from scrappy startups to the global enterprise. Jaime loves crafting content that actually gets used by customers and goes to bed dreaming about how content can change the world. An avid tennis player and Champagne Martini enthusiast, Jaime spends most of her spare time being the #1 dog mom to her chiweenie.
