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FUTURE NEWS

TO CONNECT, TO INFORM AND TO INSPIRE

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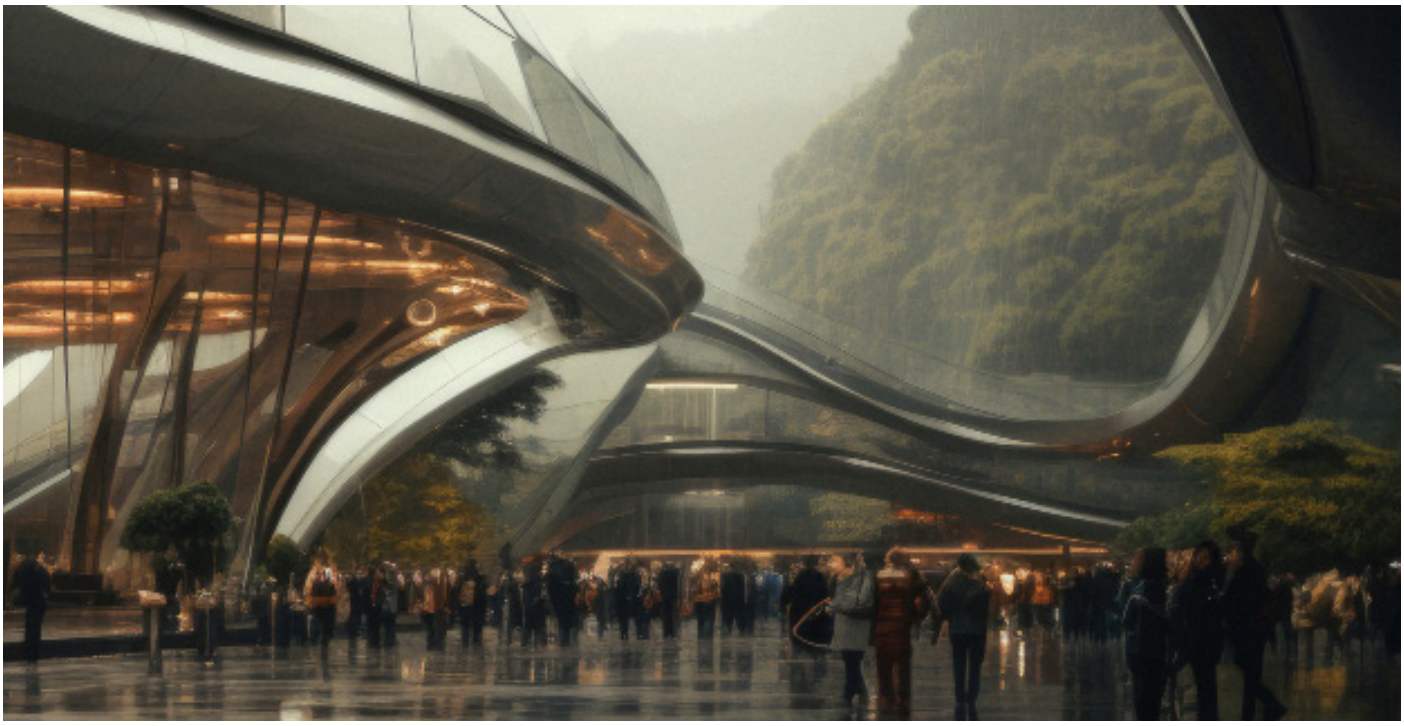
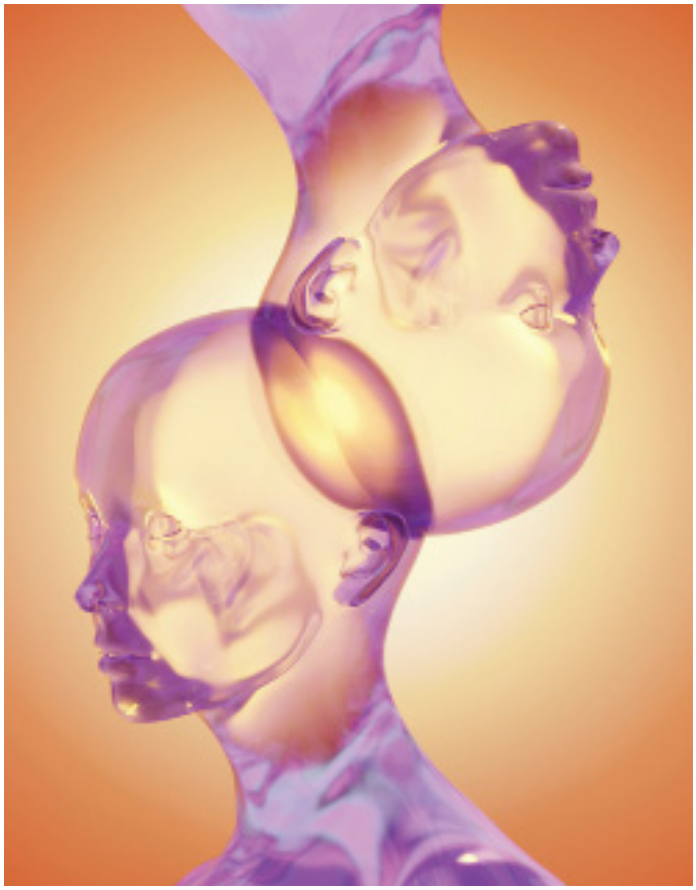
DESIGNING STRATEGIC FUTURES CONVENINGS
A FRAMEWORK FOR COLLECTIVE UNDERSTANDING

by Lisa Kay Solomon



We're living through a moment that demands we imagine together. Climate, AI, democracy, equity— the challenges we face aren't just complex, they're interconnected. They require a different kind of discovering and building together—not through meetings and conferences that feel performative, but through creative conversations and convenings where people feel brave enough to imagine genuinely new futures with—and for—each other.



Yet too often, our convenings fall short of this promise. We gather with good intentions but default to familiar formats— panels that prioritize performance over dialogue, presentations that inform but don't transform, conferences that connect us briefly but fail to catalyze lasting change.

There's a growing recognition that we need something different. Across sectors, leaders are questioning why we keep convening the same way when the challenges we face demand new approaches. The dissatisfaction is palpable: strategic convenings that could unlock collective imagination too often become missed opportunities for genuine transformation.

This gap between what our moment requires and what our gatherings deliver is urgent. Getting people to permission to imagine and build together—especially in these times—feels both necessary and hard. But it's also possible.

I've spent years exploring how to design strategic conversations and collaborative convenings—work captured in my book Moments of Impact: How to Design Strategic Conversations that Accelerate Change and more recently in The Futures Happening Playbook on Civic Imagination. I believe that learning how to design these gatherings is one of the most important leadership skills of our time.

What gives me hope is that these skills are teachable and learnable. They're essential for any leader or organization wanting to bring people together to solve complex challenges. What follows is a framework for effective futures facilitation, grounded in three essential elements: Context, Content, and Craft.

CONTEXT: SETTING THE STRATEGIC ALTITUDE

The first moments of any futures convening are critical.

Context is about setting the purpose intentionally, balancing stretch and relevance in a way that orients people to both "why" and "why now." This requires systems thinking—the ability to position the experience and conversation at a strategic altitude that resonates.

Effective futures work must frame imagination itself as infrastructure, not as a soft skill or luxury, but as the foundation that empowers movement. We have to be ready to build what we haven't seen.

Everyone already has the superpower of prospection, the ability to imagine multiple futures. Most of us only use it when we're lying awake anxious about everything that could go wrong. The facilitator's job is helping people recognize and intentionally redirect this capability toward transformation rather than worry.

Setting context at the right altitude goes beyond intellectual framing. It's about using metaphors, phrases, and images that capture people's hearts and energy, not just their heads. Language that is both poetic and political.

The message must be both urgent and empowering. Recently I heard my colleague Aisha Bain talk about traveling into the future not as escaping reality, but as transforming it together. "We are the bridge between memory and possibility, between what has been and what must be."

Perhaps most importantly, effective context-setting reminds participants that futures are plural, not singular. We can share direction like a compass while acknowledging multiple pathways forward. More than one thing can be true at the same time.

CONTENT: GROUNDED IN INTEGRITY AND DEPTH

Context without substance is just inspiration theater. The content of futures work must be grounded in integrity, depth, and concreteness.

Strong content requires masterful questioning that moves participants through a carefully designed arc of inquiry. This begins with establishing baseline understanding: What do participants need to comprehend about the current moment of transformation? From there, the inquiry moves toward action by exploring how power can be used to strengthen opportunities and what will enable systems change. Finally, it cultivates hope by asking what participants want future generations to say about what was done in this pivotal time and what gives hope now. Each question should build on the last, creating a bridge between present challenges and future possibilities.

Effective facilitation doesn't shy away from difficult questions, but creates space for generative and expansive reflections that invite the group to build on what they hear.

Content should fuel questions that surface new thinking and prompt further inquiry, rather than confirm existing beliefs.

The depth of content comes from rigorous preparation, deep subject matter expertise, and the courage to ask questions that might not have easy answers but open new possibilities for thinking and action.

CRAFT: THE DETAILS THAT BRING IT ALL TOGETHER

Context and content won't land if the craft isn't there. Craft is about paying attention to every detail that creates the conditions for transformation.

Can you stitch together planned and emergent content? Can you hold space without commandeering it? Can you inspire authentic connection? This requires knowing your own strengths and staying attuned to every detail including your presence, your energy, what you're wearing, what music is playing as people enter the room, and more.

Masterful facilitation means conducting high-stakes interviews and panels to surface new perspectives, building psychological safety with strangers, delivering content and context while managing timing and logistics—all with equal grace and gravitas.

It's the ability to frame the conversation with intent and purpose, communicate authentically and connectedly, and move a room of people through a journey that honors both what has been and what could be. This level of craft doesn't happen by accident. It comes from deep preparation, self-awareness, and attention to the full experience.

CONCLUSION: The Imperative of Intentional Futuring
The question isn't whether we'll shape the future. It's whether we'll do it with the intention, wisdom, and masterful facilitation that the work requires.

As we face increasingly complex and interconnected challenges, the ability to design and facilitate strategic futures convenings becomes not just valuable, but essential. These are the spaces where we move from anxiety to agency, from isolated thinking to collective imagination, from predetermined outcomes to improbably good futures.

The framework of Context, Content, and Craft offers a foundation for this work. But ultimately, effective futures facilitation is an art and a discipline—one that requires continuous learning, deep empathy, and the courage to help others imagine what they haven't yet dared to believe is possible. The future is calling us to do better. And we can.

AUTHOR

Lisa Kay Solomon is a bestselling author, strategic foresight designer, speaker, podcast host and award-winning innovator who believes we're all capable of imagining and designing better futures. She is currently a Designer in Residence and Lecturer at the Stanford d.school, where she leads their futures work and teaches popular classes like "View from the future" that help leaders and learners learn applied skills of anticipation, imagination and design to navigate increasingly complex futures. She co-authored the bestselling books Moments of Impact: How to Design Strategic Conversations that Accelerate Change, and Design A Better Business: New Tools, Skills, and Mindset and Strategy for Innovation, which has been translated into over a dozen languages. She created the popular LinkedIn learning class, "Leader as Futurist," and contributed a chapter of the same name for Des Dearlove's Certain Uncertainty: Leading with Agility and Resilience in an Unpredictable World.

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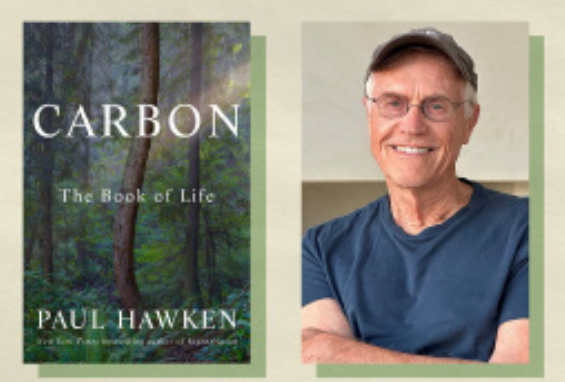
Book Review

by Charles Brass – Chair, Futures Foundation

Carbon

The Book of Life

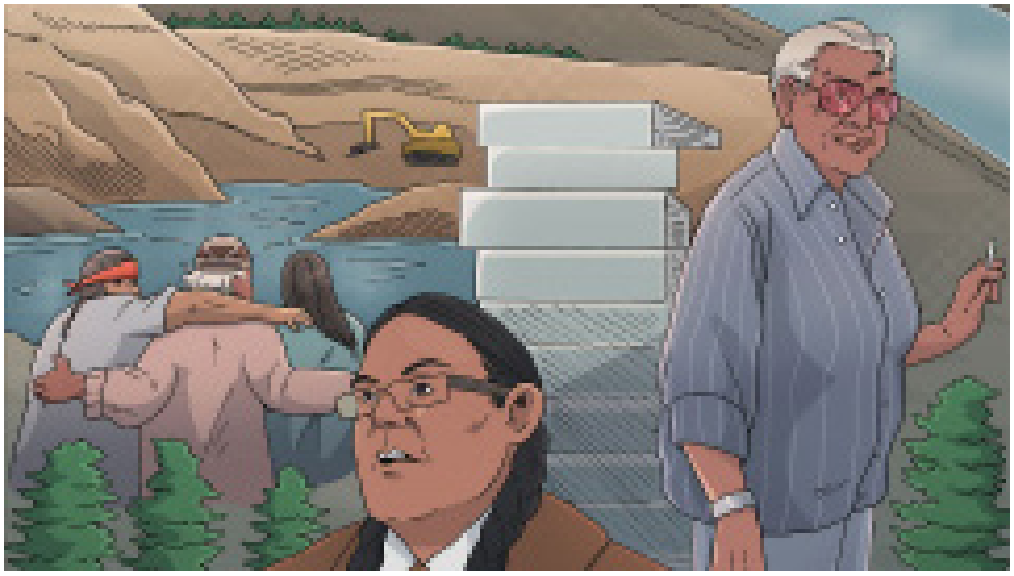
Paul Hawken



Viking/Jasmine Scaelsciani Hawken

The book records a shift in his thinking. In 2017, Hawken published Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming, a book that ranked 100 climate solutions by how much they could reduce carbon emissions, from refrigerant leaks to food waste. The nonprofit Project Drawdown, which he launched, continues to implement these kinds of fixes around the world. But now, Hawken is forgoing straightforward metrics to focus on what he sees as a deeper cultural problem. “The living world is a complex interactive system and doesn’t lend itself to simple solutions,” he said.

The new book frames carbon as a flow — a cycle that moves through the atmosphere, oceans, soil, with the element absorbed by growing plants and exhaled in every animal breath. Hawken’s book is a lesson in what’s sometimes called “unlearning,” or letting go of old assumptions, like the idea that nature is something to fix or control. The book explores ways to repair a broken relationship with the natural world, drawing inspiration from Indigenous cultures and new scientific discoveries. Hawken marvels at how much remains unknown about carbon, which he dubs “the most mysterious element of all.” The book’s poetic language offers a stark contrast to the warlike terms climate advocates tend to use to describe carbon. Hawken argues that the typical metaphors are not only inaccurate — how exactly do you battle an element? — but also provide fuel for right-wing narratives that carbon has been unfairly demonized. Last week, E&E News reported that the Trump administration is planning a federal report making the case that a warming world would be a good thing, a pretext for weakening climate regulations. “Carbon dioxide is not an evil gas,” David Legates, a former Trump official, said in a recent video put out by the Heartland



How the Klamath Dams Came Down by Anita Hofschneider and Jake Bittle

Institute, a conservative think tank. "Rather, it's a gas beneficial to life on Earth. It'll increase temperatures slightly, and warmer temperatures are certainly better than colder temperatures." How the Klamath Dams Came Down Anita Hofschneider & Jake Bittle Hawken wants a broad shift in how people talk about the natural world, though, not just a rethinking of the climate movement's metaphors. He points to how financial institutions increasingly refer to nature as a commodity. In January, BlackRock, the world's largest asset manager, declared "natural capital" an investment priority. In February, Goldman Sachs launched a "biodiversity bond fund" turning ecosystems into investment products. The jargon used in scientific reports and global climate conferences also creates a sense of detachment that dulls the living things it refers to. Hawken describes the word "biodiversity" as "a bloodless term" and "carbon neutrality" as an absurd "biophysical impossibility." "We are numbed by the science, puzzled by jargon, paralyzed by predictions, confused about what actions to take, stressed as we scramble to care for our family, or simply impoverished, overworked, and tired," Hawken writes. "Most of humanity doesn't talk about climate change because we do not know what to say." Even plainspoken terms like "nature" are suspect, in Hawken's view: The concept only seems to exist to mark a separation between humans and the rest of the world. He points out that the Chicham language of the Achuar people in the Amazon doesn't have a word for nature, nor do other Indigenous languages. "Such words would only be needed if the Achuar experienced nature as distinct from the self," he writes. English, by contrast, he describes as a "rootless" language, borrowing terms from so many places that it struggles to teach the kind of deep, reciprocal relationships that are born from living in one place and caring for it over many generations. Hawken hopes to mend that separation by helping people discover the flow of carbon in their daily lives and kindle a sense of wonder about it. Carbon delves into mind-bending scientific discoveries about the kind of marvels that carbon makes possible. Bees, with their two-milligram brains, appear able to count, learn by observation, feel pain and pleasure, and even recognize their own knowledge. The rye plant senses the world around it with more than 14 million roots and root hairs, a network that one plant neurobiologist described as a type of brain. Hawken's book is a reminder that carbon — despite all the problems caused by releasing too much of it into the atmosphere — is actually a gift.

The goal of Carbon isn't to map out a plan for saving the Earth, but to rekindle a sense of relationship with it. Where Hawken lives in California, his community recently restored a salmon stream, breaking down a concrete barrier under a bridge that had blocked the fish on their final journey up the stream to spawn. "The core of it is about care, and kindness, and connection, and compassion, and generosity," Hawken said. "That's where regeneration

FUTURISTS IN ACTION

FUTURES LITERACY
A UNIVERSAL REIMAGINING OF FORESIGHT

By Dr. Richard David Hames

I acquired my initial proficiency in foresight from friends such as Napier Collyns, Arie de Geuss, Peter Schwartz and Pierre Wack who founded Global Business Network (GBN) in Emeryville, California. Previously they worked together at Royal Dutch Shell, which is where they mastered the classic scenario planning method of Herman Kahn.

Wack and his team had refined Kahn's method and applied it to the company's business strategy, helping Shell navigate significant challenges, including the oil shocks of the late 1970s. I was an apprentice to this thinking, which had proven the practical application of scenario planning in a corporate setting, making it a valuable tool for strategic decision-making.

Scenario planning, as I interpreted it, was to see beyond the narrow confines of the present, in order to imagine not only what's likely, but to anticipate what might be possible. The method demands more than competence in just one particular domain.

Scenario planning is a multidisciplinary field of inquiry-based topics; extending all the way from analysing historical events to making sense of what's going on around you in the present moment, and visualising any number of alternatives. The method is aimed at helping us anticipate and prepare for change – a kind of intellectual rehearsal that can be scaled and targeted.

I was intrigued by the world of scenario planning and what GBN called "strategic" conversation. But there was something bothering me. For too long, our capacity to

imagine and design futures has been shackled by agendas that assume a specifically industrial and colonial view of the world – frameworks firmly rooted in the intellectual tradition of the European Enlightenment. And the scenario planning method I had been taught was certainly part of that tradition.

When so constrained, I reasoned, critical factors might be casually overlooked or ignored altogether, even though that wasn't necessarily the intention. Points of view that appreciate links within or between whole systems, for example. Diverse cultural expressions that value uncommon views. Emotional and intuitive insights that are needed to liberate creativity. I was also very aware of the fact that the scenario planning framework I was using struggled to accommodate complexity, too readily compartmentalised knowledge, and emphasised short-term outcomes rather than the "art of the long view" – ironically the title of a book by Peter Schwartz. Embracing a more holistic, inclusive, interdisciplinary approach seemed much wiser to me.

It was with all of this in mind that I resigned from Australian Business Network, GBN's outpost in Australia that I had co-founded with Oliver Freeman and Richard Bawden, to start work on my own research in the field of foresight. The results of that research were included in my third book, The Five Literacies of Global Leadership, where "futuring" was proposed as an extensive knowledge domain of patterning and ambient intelligence, and "futures-literacy" became much more than just scenario planning.

Essentially I concluded that if we're to navigate the cascading crises of our time, we must look far beyond prevailing frameworks to embrace the wisdom of non-Western wisdom traditions – ways of knowing that are intuitive, relational, spiritual, and deeply rooted in the cycles of life. The future we most need will not be built from spreadsheets and strategic forecasts alone. It will not emerge from models assuming infinite growth on a finite planet or from institutions that equate GDP with progress.

Instead, it will grow from the rich soil of ideas that Western systems had long dismissed as inferior – the cosmological origins, philosophies, and praxes that see the world not as a machine to be optimized but as a living system to be cherished. It is in these models, too often relegated to the margins of futures thinking, that we can find the seeds of metamophosis. This is what I tried to describe in The Five Literacies – albeit still constrained by my European upbringing and frame of mind. I will try to do a better job here:

TIME AS A CYCLE, NOT A LINE

One of the most profound shifts needed in futures literacy is a reimagining of time itself. Western models teach us to see and experience time as linear, a relentless arc of progress, invariably teleological. But then many indigenous and non-Western traditions view time as cyclical – an underlying pulse with cadences of growth, decay, and renewal. The M ori of Whakapapa, for instance, reminds us that the past, the present, and the possible are not separate but interconnected layers of relationship and responsibility.

Studying this I developed "the expanded now." To be able to imagine any possible state, I figured we must act consciously in the present, having due regard for the past, but comprehending that what we do now ripples forward in an eternal cycle of consequences.

The concept of "the expanded now" offers a structure for understanding our present reality by integrating insights from the deep past and all possible future states. This encourages us to move beyond our tight present focus – the "here and now" of each and every moment – recognising that the decisions we make in these moments are influenced by historical contexts, perceived opportunities, probabilities, and path dependence. The "expanded now" seeks to transcend these limitations by fostering a deeper awareness of our interconnectedness with both our history and our evolution.

At the heart of this concept is the idea that we can embrace complexity by identifying "patterns that matter" and that it can be visualised, which is essential for making sense of the unprecedented challenges we face today.

By situating today's problems within a broader evolutionary context, the "expanded now" allows for emergent states to be noticed. The uncertain disruptions and brittle capriciousness of our time present a unique chance for inspiring human evolution, enabling us to evolve towards a more equitable and viable world-system.

This cyclical view of time suspends the obsession with "solutions" and "development," which characterizes so many Western foresight techniques, including scenario planning. It demonstrates that the future is not something to be conquered or controlled but a "state" to be shaped and into which we must blend. This perspective offers us a profound antidote in a world of ecological collapse and social fragmentation: a call to slow down, to listen, to feel, and to align our actions with the rhythms of the earth and the cosmos.

NAVIGATING WITH AGILITY

Another lesson from non-Western models is the importance of embracing uncertainty – again, not as a problem to solve, but as a practice to develop. In the Zulu worldview, for example, dreams and intuition are trusted ways of knowing, offering guidance in times of ambiguity. Similarly, many Native American traditions use ceremony and storytelling to navigate the unknown, creating shared spaces where communities can reflect, grieve, and imagine together.

In contrast, Western models often treat uncertainty as a threat, something to be minimised or "treated" through risk models and contingency plans. But what if the most dangerous thing is not uncertainty itself, but our addiction to the illusion of certainty? What if the future requires not more control or manipulation but more comfort with what cannot yet be named? The people who will thrive in this age of compounding crises are not those with airtight business plans but those who can move through the fog of uncertainty with poise, holding space for what is emerging rather than clinging to what is known, or dying.

FAILURE AS FERTILE GROUND

It was no coincidence that my mentoring practise was very quickly dubbed a journey "From Success to Significance" by one of my earliest protégés. We in the West have a one-sided tendency to venerate "success" and punish failure, creating systems where mistakes are buried beneath lengthy polished reports rather than treated as a chance to upgrade. This is a profound disservice to the future.

Non-Western models, by contrast, often embed failure into the fabric of the methods, something I witnessed first-hand when implementing Total Quality Management with W. Edwards Deming in Japan. The Japanese philosophy of Kaizen, or continuous improvement, often requires a shift in organisational culture which, by its very nature, implies that things were less than optimal before the improvement was implemented. Kintsugi teaches us to embrace brokenness, repairing cracks in pottery with gold to create something even more beautiful and resilient than the original. Similarly, indigenous agricultural practices often include

experimentation as a natural part of adaptation, understanding that failure is not an exception but a necessary step in the cycle of growth.

To build a future that is resilient, we must stop hiding from failure and start designing for it. This means creating "failure budgets" and recovery protocols, but it also means cultivating a narrative of empathy – one that sees mistakes not as endpoints but as fertile ground for transformation.

THE WISDOM OF MANY VOICES

Perhaps the most urgent shift for futures literacy is the recognition that no single mindset or method holds all or even some of the answers. For far too long, Western models have dominated the practise of foresight, framing futures through the lens of scalability, data, morphological analysis and evidence-based logic. Although tolerating science fiction within the mix more recently, the resulting narrative archetypes are shaped by Western devices.

But there are many other ways of knowing – ways that emerge through tone, rhythm, ceremony, and relational factors, through stories told by grandmothers rather than algorithms. The Balinese concept of Tri Hita Karana offers a powerful example. This philosophy aligns human activity with three harmonious relationships: with the divine, with nature, and with each other.

Similarly, the Andean principle of Buen Vivir (a "good life") prioritises community well-being and ecological balance over individual wealth and consumption. These frameworks challenge our Western obsessions with individualism, affluence, and success, reminding us that the future must be co-created with all beings, human and more-than-human alike.

FUTURES AS LIVING SYSTEMS

A powerful idea emerging from non-Western "forethought" is the recognition that futures are not static endpoints to be predicted or designed; they are living systems to be embraced. This requires a shift from linear, goal-oriented thinking to anticipatory systems thinking – an understanding of the complex synapses and dynamic relations between people, culture, ecology, and spirit. The Lakota concept of Mitákuye Oyás'in ("all my relations") embodies this perspective, emphasising that every action we take affects the entire web of life.

By adopting this relational mindset, we move away from the Western impulse to dominate and exploit the future in some kind of utopian reconstruction of the present. Instead, we become curators of possibility, co-creating futures that are regenerative, inclusive, and deeply attuned to the rhythms of the earth.

RESTORING THE SACRED

In a world that often reduces everything to sterile metrics and markets, non-Western models remind us of the importance of the sacred. Ceremony, ritual, and storytelling are not merely cultural artefacts; they are tools for aligning our actions with more profound values and intentions. They invite us to take a deep breath, to pause and reflect, and to reconnect with what truly matters – not profit or progress or success, but harmony, reciprocity, sufficiency, and the bourgeoning of all life on Earth (not Mars).

Although I often say to my clients that the future is in their hands, it's not just a blank canvas waiting to be painted, nor even an outline needing

to be finished. It exists today, within each of us, as an integral truth of the human condition. It's a living, breathing entity that we are all part of, one that holds the wisdom of the ages, the dreams of our children, our own actions, and the voices of the rivers and the deserts and the forests. To be "futures-literate" is to respect this complexity, to embrace uncertainty, and to co-create with humility.

LIBERATING WHAT HAS BEEN DENIED

As I discovered when trying to understand what was bothering me when I was part of ABN, at a time when I had been convinced that scenario planning – and a few other tools – was all there was to foresight, the greatest barrier to futures literacy is not a lack of imagination but the systems that silence it – models that assume preeminence, discount non-Western voices, dismiss intuition and alternative intelligence, and prioritise certainty.

To construct transformative futures, we must liberate what has been denied us for too long: the wisdom of cycles, the potency of failure, the voices of the marginalised, and the sacredness of the earth. This is not just a strategy or an extension of what we already have. It's a restoration – a call to reinterpret the illusory state we refer to as the "future."

As "futurists" we stand on the edge of uncertainty. Let us listen – not just to the algorithms or the experts, but to the rhythms and pulse of the earth, the stories of our ancestors, and the dreams of those who are yet to arrive on this Earth. For the futures we most need are not the ones we were taught to craft; they are the ones we've been denied and just beginning to remember.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Richard David Hames, lovingly referred to as "the accidental futurist" by his nine children, has had a somewhat circuitous career spanning music, medicine, computer science, academia and management. A polymath by inclination, Richard is an Australian citizen with a global presence, having lived in Australia, the UK, the US, France, Italy, Thailand and China. He has worked on every continent as a strategist, mentor, and impact entrepreneur. He is a Fellow of the World Academy of Art & Science. Richard was the founder of The Centre for the Future and is currently President of The Asian Foresight Institute in Bangkok. The author of nine books, Richard also writes a daily blog, "The Virtual Activist," on Patreon and publishes a weekly essay, "The Hames Report," on Substack where he reflects on "the future of everything." He was the inventor of the "Strategic Navigation" and "Transformational Narrative" methods, as well as anticipatory intelligence tools such as "Systemic Acupuncture," and "The Expanded Now." At 80 years old, Richard is considered to be a senior statesman in the field of strategic foresight.

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Signals in the Noise

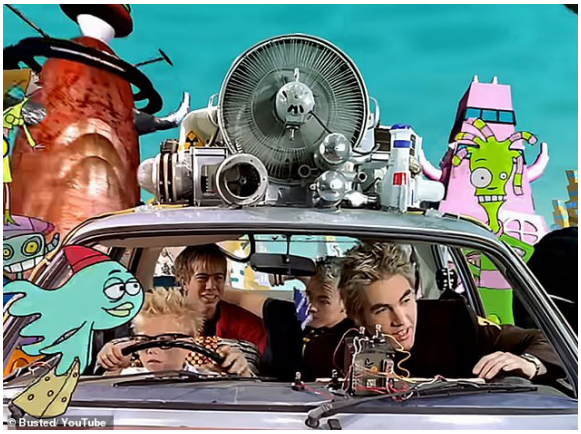
WAS BUSTED RIGHT ABOUT THE YEAR 3000?

EXPERTS REVEAL WHAT LIFE ON EARTH WILL REALLY LOOK LIKE 975 YEARS FROM NOW

It's been more than 20 years since boy band Busted proclaimed visions of the future in their hit song 'Year 3000'. The catchy pop-punk classic, which reached number two in the UK charts in January 2003, envisages the world just under 1,000 years from now. According to the lyrics, people of AD 3000 live underwater, while triple-breasted women 'swim around totally naked'.

So, were Busted right with their predictions?

According to Simon Underdown, professor of biological anthropology at Oxford Brookes University, an underwater society 975 years from now is 'not entirely unfeasible'. However, he doubts there's any evolutionary factor that would make women grow an additional breast. 'If global temperatures keep going up and sea levels rise humans might build structures that extend under the seas,' he told the Daily Mail. 'But I'm going to question Busted's scientific bona fides when it comes to predicting a multi-mammary future.'



Busted's song, which reached number two in the UK charts in January 2003, predicts the world in the year AD 3000. Pictured are the band in the music video

Professor Underdown predicts 3000 will see 'technologically and biologically enhanced humans' implanted with 'bio-chips to open things' and eyes that let us 'use the internet in a hugely augmented way', a bit like in The Terminator films. 'Technological innovation is only getting faster and the impact it has on our lives is getting ever more profound,' he added.

Also in the song, Busted – made up of James Bourne, Charlie Simpson and Matt Willis – tell listeners that your 'great-great-great-granddaughter is pretty fine'. SJ Beard, a philosopher and existential risk researcher at the University of Cambridge, points out that this is surprisingly few generations away. The academic told the Daily Mail: 'If the guy's great great great grand-daughter is still alive in the year 3,000 then she is about 800 years old, so they must have invented some pretty good life extension.

Professor Beard, who is author of 'Existential Hope', also speculates that three breasts could be possible if we're 'exposed to radiation or a gene-altering pathogen'. 'This would also explain why everyone lives underwater, to protect themselves from a hostile atmosphere and environment,' they added. 'However, underwater habitats are gruelling – everything needs to be recycled, there isn't much room, and the ocean is constantly threatening to breach your containment and force you out.'

Professor Beard also speculates there 'may not be any people in the year 3000 at all' in a scenario that echoes sci-fi classic 'The Matrix'. 'What might have happened is that

people invented a super-intelligent AI and gave it some benevolent-sounding task like "make everyone happy",' they said. 'But the AI realised this was impossible and so decided that the best it could do was to create artificial humans to live happy lives in our place.'

Dr Thomas Robinson, senior lecturer at Bayes Business School in London, thinks AD 3000 could be similar to before the Industrial Revolution where the vast majority live 'far simpler lives in the wreckage of past societies'. In a dystopian-sounding scenario, he envisages 'villages under a rusty toppled pilon' and 'horse paddocks by the remnants of the M5' when resources run out.

'The last 250 years with the Industrial Revolution and the harnessing of various kinds of carbon fuel are an exception rather than the norm,' Dr Robinson predicted. I think, over very long timespans, there will be a reversion to the mean. 'This does not mean that technologies will disappear, but our capacity to infinitely scale stuff up hits hard boundaries.'

However, Nick Longrich, senior lecturer at the University of Bath, thinks the world will be 'richer, safer and more prosperous' and people will be 'nicer, more sociable' and 'less disagreeable'. 'In purely material terms, the world is increasingly wealthy, notwithstanding tech billionaires,' he told the Daily Mail 'Famine has become much rarer, most people have clean water, few people die of warfare, in a large number of countries life expectancy is 70-80 years. 'We enter this situation where increasingly the world will suffer problems of abundance and affluence, rather than scarcity, at least in purely material terms.

'Also, the evolution of humans saw us evolve to become more cooperative, more agreeable, and less aggressive, which might be why we beat the Neanderthals. 'That's one sorta dystopia – we take a time machine to the future and it's kind of nice, and pleasant, and boring.' Overall, correctly predicting the future is 'a big ask', Dr Robinson said, especially considering the changes that happened in the last 1,000 years.

A millennium ago, England was part of an Empire ruled by Danish kings and most people were peasant farmers who lived in countryside villages.

1,000 years ago, England, along with Denmark and Norway, was part of the North Sea Empire ruled by Cnut the Great from 1016 until his death in 1035. Depicted, the Danes land at Tynemouth in England as people flee to the safety of a hastily built hill fort, 10th century AD

'One thousand years is an immense amount of time in human society,' Dr Robinson said.

'What correct predictions could Cnut the Great from Denmark have made about our times? The answer is nil.' According to Professor Beard, change over such a long time period 'isn't just possible and desirable' but 'inevitable'.

'To me, the most worrying part of the song is the line "not much has changed" – flourishing and resilient societies are always changing to innovate and adapt,' they said. 'When societies stagnate, it either means they have become dangerously fragile or else that something is forcing them to stay the same. 'The question is whether we can guide this change towards making our societies safer and better, or whether we let it drive us towards destruction.'

The original story was published by the Daily Mail on 12 November 2025