

FUTURE NEWS

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BEYOND PREDICTIONS

HOW FORESIGHT CHANGES MENTAL MODELS AND MANAGERIAL COGNITION



by Jan Oliver Schwarz

One of the biggest misunderstandings about foresight is the belief that its main purpose is to deliver better knowledge about the future. Executives often expect foresight to supply insight: the trends they haven't seen, the signals they should be watching, the next disruptions on the horizon. Insight is certainly part of the job — but insight alone rarely shifts strategy.

What actually changes strategy is not knowledge about the future, but **how leaders think about the future**. The true power of foresight lies not in the information it produces, but in the transformation it triggers in the minds of the people who use it.

This article looks at what happens in the space *after* foresight creates conversations but *before* it shapes organizational capabilities. This is the cognitive zone — the place where leaders' mental models, biases, attention, and interpretive lenses begin to shift.

It is rarely visible.

It is almost always underestimated.

And it is the real reason foresight matters.



THE COGNITIVE SHIFT: A QUIET, OFTEN INVISIBLE PROCESS

In the 2019 study, we explored how foresight relates to dynamic managerial capabilities — the abilities leaders need to sense change, interpret uncertainty, challenge assumptions, and reconfigure resources. The results were striking: foresight practices, and especially foresight training, were strongly associated with measurable improvements in these capabilities.

This suggests that foresight does not simply give leaders *more information*. It gives them the ability to use information differently.

Leaders who regularly engage in foresight develop a broader field of vision. They start paying attention to early signals at the periphery rather than only the core of their business. They become more comfortable holding multiple futures in mind at once. They get better at making decisions with incomplete data. They develop a deeper sensitivity to assumptions — their own and the organization's.

In other words, foresight reshapes cognition.

What makes this particularly fascinating is that leaders often do not notice this shift while it's happening. It feels like they are simply “thinking a bit more broadly” or “asking different questions.” But beneath the surface, something far deeper is unfolding: the architecture of their mental model is being rewired.

WHY WORKING WITH FUTURES CHANGES HOW LEADERS THINK

There are two reasons foresight influences cognition so powerfully.

The first is that foresight exposes leaders to alternative logics. Executives spend most of their time in environments that reward clarity, efficiency, and decisive action. Scenario work, in contrast, pulls them into a space where uncertainty is not a problem but a condition, and where multiple plausible outcomes can coexist. This alone destabilizes rigid mental frames.

The second reason is that foresight externalizes uncertainty. It gives executives a shared vocabulary and a structured process for exploring what they cannot know. This reduces the psychological discomfort that often accompanies ambiguous decisions. When uncertainty becomes an object of inquiry rather than a threat, leaders gain cognitive flexibility.

That flexibility is what enables them to challenge the assumptions embedded in their current strategies. It's what allows them to take seriously a possibility

that, a year earlier, they might have dismissed.

This is not something a trend report can do. It is something the *practice* of foresight does.

THE ROLE OF PROSPECTING: WHY SCENARIOS MATTER SO MUCH

The 2024 study helps clarify which foresight practices influence cognition most strongly. While scanning broadens awareness, prospecting — the work of scenarios, sensemaking, and future-oriented dialogue — is what actually stretches and transforms mental models.

Scanning gives leaders new inputs.

PROSPECTING GIVES THEM NEW INTERPRETATIONS

A long list of trends rarely changes how a leader thinks. But spending time inside a scenario that challenges the underlying logic of the firm's business model can shift something fundamental. It forces leaders to consider worlds in which their current mental models don't hold.

The impact of this becomes visible slowly. A leader might start questioning a long-held assumption in a meeting. A product idea once dismissed as too speculative might suddenly seem worth exploring. A shift in a geopolitical dynamic might be taken more seriously because the mind has already rehearsed a comparable scenario.

These micro-changes accumulate. Eventually, the organization finds itself with leaders who navigate uncertainty with more confidence and more humility at the same time.

WHY EXECUTIVES OFTEN RESIST COGNITIVE SHIFTS

Of course, none of this is easy. Executives are under enormous pressure to project certainty, deliver quarterly results, and avoid costly missteps. Their environments reward optimization, not imagination. So when foresight demands that they suspend their current perspectives and consider alternatives, it can feel uncomfortable — or even threatening.

The challenge is that cognitive biases thrive under pressure. Confirmation bias, status quo bias, anchoring, and overconfidence all intensify in leadership settings. Foresight works as an antidote to these biases, but only if leaders engage deeply enough for the antidote to work.

Superficial engagement — reading a report or hearing a presentation — rarely has any effect. Deep engagement — grappling with scenarios, challenging assumptions, inhabiting alternative futures — is what shifts cognition.

This is why foresight without meaningful participation often fails. Leaders have to experience the cognitive tension themselves.



TRAINING: THE OFTEN OVERLOOKED CATALYST

One of the most important findings in the 2019 study is the impact of foresight training. Leaders who receive training in foresight approaches — such as scenario thinking, systems mapping, or decision-making under uncertainty — show significantly higher dynamic managerial capabilities. These capabilities, in turn, predict better strategic outcomes.

Training provides the tools and mental habits that enable leaders to integrate foresight into their daily thinking. It helps them recognize when they are slipping into narrow reasoning. It gives them ways to step back and reframe situations.

But training alone is not enough. The cognitive shift happens through a combination of exposure, participation, and repetition. It's a practice, not a program.

WHY COGNITIVE SHIFTS ARE THE TRUE CURRENCY OF FORESIGHT

If we judge foresight by the reports it produces, we miss its actual value.

If we judge foresight by the decisions it immediately changes, we'll often be disappointed.

But if we judge foresight by the cognitive shifts it makes possible, we begin to see its real contribution.

A strategy conversation becomes richer.

A leader notices a signal they once ignored.

A team considers a scenario that once felt implausible.

A resource gets shifted earlier than it otherwise would have.

A project gets launched or killed with clearer logic.

A portfolio gets rebalanced with greater confidence.

These are the early signs of a transformed mental model — and, ultimately, a transformed organization.

Both studies give empirical backing to what many practitioners observe intuitively: foresight is not merely an analytical exercise; it is a cognitive intervention.

FUTURISTS IN ACTION

THE FUTURIST RED FLAG WHEN LEADERSHIP OUTSOURCES THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE



by Nikola Danaylov



A CEO calls. The board wants a futurist on stage at the next strategy offsite. The brief is short. Tell us where the industry is going. Tell us what AI will do to our business. Tell us what to bet on next.

It sounds like preparation. It looks like rigor. It is, in fact, the first sign of trouble.

When a leadership team hires a futurist to think about the future *for* them, the hire itself is the failure. That is the case I want to make here. And as a futurist who gets booked to think about the future, I am the one who needs to make it.

THE QUIET ABDICATION

Executives have always hired thinkers. Consultants for strategy. Analysts for markets. Lawyers for risk. Now they hire futurists for the future, and increasingly, they hire AI to do the same. Each hire feels like diligence. Each hire is rewarded by the system. It signals to the board you took the question seriously, it generates a deck, it produces a defensible artifact.

But the deliverable is not the point. The thinking is. And thinking is exactly what you cannot outsource. This is **cognitive offloading** in its corporate form. We already know what it does to the individual mind. Use a GPS for a year, and your sense of direction quietly dies. Use AI to write your emails, and your prose decays. Use a futurist to imagine your future, and your strategic imagination atrophies in the exact place where you needed it most.

Frank Herbert saw this coming sixty years ago. *Dune* opens with the aftermath of the Butlerian Jihad, a war fought against thinking machines because, in Herbert's words, "Men turned their thinking over to machines in the hope that this would set them free. But that only permitted other men with machines to enslave them." The machines in that warning are incidental. The thinking is the point. The moment you outsource it, you have already lost something that the contract cannot give back.

The damage is not in the report. It is in what you stop being able to do without one.

WHY MOST FUTURISTS WILL NOT TELL YOU THIS

Because being treated as the oracle is profitable. The market rewards confidence, not humility. Clients want a number, a date, a single-arrow narrative. So a certain kind of futurist hands those over. Ten predictions for the next decade. Three trends that will reshape your sector. A roadmap to 2035 that fits neatly on a slide.

It is theater. And the merits are not on its side.

Nobody can tell you what is coming with the precision your strategy deck assumes. Not a futurist. Not a consultant. Not an AI system trained on every word ever written. **Technology is not a crystal ball, and neither is the person you hired to talk about it.** The future is a level-2 chaotic system. It reacts to predictions about it, so any sufficiently confident prediction defeats itself the moment it spreads. Pandemics, revolutions, market crashes, and breakthroughs are all predictably unpredictable, regardless of the fact that plenty of people sell certainty about the future. Nobody can actually deliver it. The transaction is real. The product is not.

The best a good futurist can do is think *alongside* you. Identify the signals. Stress-test the assumptions. Widen the field of what you consider possible. The prediction is the content. **The thinking alongside you is the context.** One is replaceable. The other is the work. The rest is theatre.

THE SOCRATIC REFRAME

My namesake had a method. He called himself a midwife. Socrates did not bring you knowledge. He helped you give birth to your own.

A futurist's actual job is identical. Bring you the questions you have been avoiding. Refuse to bring the answers, because the answers that will actually move your organization are yours to find. They have to be. They will be lived by your people, executed by your team, paid for out of your budget, and judged by your customers. No outside voice can carry that weight, no matter how well it presents.

The future is not a deliverable. It is a leadership function.

The futurist who understands this hands the thinking back. The futurist who does not understand this builds a career on letting you off the hook.

THREE SIGNS YOU ARE USING A FUTURIST WELL

You leave the conversation with more questions than you arrived with.

You leave the strategy in *your team's hands*, not the consultant's.

You can name what you would want to know a year from now that you do not know now.

THREE SIGNS YOU ARE USING A FUTURIST BADLY

You ask them to predict.

You accept the prediction.

You build slides from their slides.

If you recognize the second list, the hire was the warning sign. The damage is not the bad strategy that follows. It is what happens inside your team. They stop thinking about the future, because they were told someone smarter already did. A muscle goes unused. A muscle atrophies. By the time you need it back, it is gone.

PLANNING IS EVERYTHING. PLANS ARE WORTHLESS

Eisenhower said it, and he meant it the way generals mean things, with people's lives on the line.

Plans are worthless, but planning is everything.

The plan is the artifact. Planning is a discipline. You will never be ready for the future. The future is always surprising in at least some of the ways that matter. What you can develop is the mindset that handles surprise. And no consultant can hand that to you. It is built by leaders who keep doing the work themselves.

If you are considering booking a futurist for your next conference or internal event, ask one question first: Do you want someone who will tell you what comes next, or someone who will make sure you and your team are still the ones doing the thinking?

The first is a red flag. The second is the only kind worth the budget.

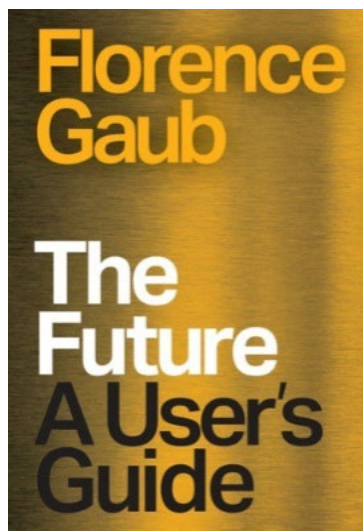
The future will arrive regardless. The only question is whether your leadership shows up to meet it.

Book Review

by Charles Brass – Chair, futures foundation

The Future A User's Guide

by Florence Gaub



In her introduction, Gaub suggests: “There are three reasons why parts of the future have been neglected so far, by individuals, but also by philosophers, politicians and scientists: the necessary skills are not being taught: the future has only recently been discovered by science, and right now, the future appears to be in crisis. That’s where a user’s guide comes in.” (p3)

Widespread pessimism and fear of the future are everywhere. With times to come often seeming threatening and uncertain, this book offers new perspectives and fresh ways of thinking. Futurologist Florence Gaub shows that everyone can influence what lies ahead in their personal or professional life, or in society. Her ideas are for those who refuse to be paralyzed by fear, instead seeing the future as a space full of possibilities.

Gaub explores how humanity’s visions of tomorrow have changed throughout history; she explains what the future is, how it works, what disruptions may arise and how to fix them. She draws on insights from neuroscience, psychology and philosophy to show how humans conceive and construct the future, as individuals and as a society.

A bestseller in Germany, this smart, snappy handbook of ideas is an antidote to passive fatalism. It challenges our lack of faith in

our own ability to shape what is to come, or how it will affect our lives. After all, we’re the only beings who can imagine the future in such detail that we can actually create it.

As Gaub reminds us: “The purpose of the future is to make the best possible choice under conditions of uncertainty....” (p28)

This book is not a listing of the tools and techniques that futurists might use, rather it highlights how to use the future (Chapter 3) – and equally importantly what not to do (Chapter 4). The final chapter (5) is entitled “Troubleshooting and includes such headings as: ‘When the future has expired’, ‘When we cannot see the future’, ‘When the future is bad’ and ‘When we do not know what to fill the future with’.

If you are paralysed by fear whenever you think of what lies ahead, Gaub points out: “...the more futures one can imagine, the freer one is” (p32). Her advice to everyone, whether or not they are policymakers, is to combine creativity with and knowledge to imagine the best, prepare for the worst and – perhaps hardest of all – to accommodate surprise: all while never forgetting that: “...the present is the only place where we can have an actual effect on the world around us. This is where we make decisions and implement them.” (p65)

Signals in the Noise

ECONOMIC SCENARIOS FOR TRANSFORMATIVE AI

by Anton Korinek, Charles I. Jones, Szymon Sacher, Tess Cotter and Peter McCrory

The Anthropic Institute



Below is a very brief summary of a 60-page report recently produced by researchers at the Anthropic Institute. The full report can be requested by emailing info@futuresfoundation.org.au

This paper presents a framework for assessing the economic consequences of AI between

2026 and 2030. In the model, AI automates a growing share of cognitive work, raising productivity and displacing workers who must search for jobs in other occupations. The model maps future paths of AI capabilities into implied paths for GDP, the labor share, wages, labor reallocation, and unemployment. We illustrate the framework by considering three scenarios:

Modest – AI adds less than half a point to GDP growth by 2030 and raises unemployment by a tenth of a point.

Substantial – AI is a pivotal technology, more significant than the internet. It has substantial macroeconomic effects, both on GDP as a whole and on the cognitive occupations. In this scenario in 2030, 12 percent of the tasks in the economy—roughly 20 percent of the tasks performed by cognitive workers.

Extreme – AI has transformative effects, with AI performing almost half of today's cognitive work by 2030. GDP growth then rises to 15 percent per year, the labour share of income falls from 60 to 45 percent, and nearly one in five cognitive workers is unemployed.

Under modest change, AI adds less than half a point to GDP growth by 2030 and raises unemployment by a tenth of a point. In the extreme change scenario, AI has transformative effects, with AI performing almost half of today's cognitive work by 2030. GDP growth then rises to 15 percent per year, the labor share of income falls from 60 to 45 percent, and nearly one in five cognitive workers is unemployed. We also surveyed US adults about their expectations for AI. Views vary widely, but the median respondent's answers are consistent with our substantial change scenario in which, by 2030, GDP rises by 8 percent and cognitive employment declines by 4 percent. The model offers a structured way to compare possibilities for our economic future under different expectations about AI. The following infographic offers a visual overview of the three scenarios and the principal economic outcomes modelled in the full report.

Translation created by Artificial Intelligence (LLM)

Signals in the Noise

ECONOMIC SCENARIOS FOR TRANSFORMATIVE AI



MODEST CHANGE

AI MAKES A SMALL BUT NOTICEABLE IMPACT



HOW AI AFFECTS THE ECONOMY



- ~20% capability (of tasks)
- ~20% diffusion (of tasks)
- 50% automated (of affected instances)
- 50% augmented (of affected instances)



SUBSTANTIAL CHANGE

AI TRANSFORMS WORK AND BOOSTS GROWTH



HOW AI AFFECTS THE ECONOMY



- ~20% of tasks performed by cognitive workers (in 2025)
- 75% automated (of affected instances)
- 25% augmented (of affected instances)



EXTREME CHANGE

AI DOMINATES THE ECONOMY



HOW AI AFFECTS THE ECONOMY



- ~50% of tasks performed by cognitive workers (in 2025)
- 90% automated (of affected instances)
- 10% augmented (of affected instances)
- No reinstatement of new tasks for cognitive labor

Source: Korinek et al., Economic Scenarios for Transformative AI (2026), Table 3; Sections 4.1–4.3.