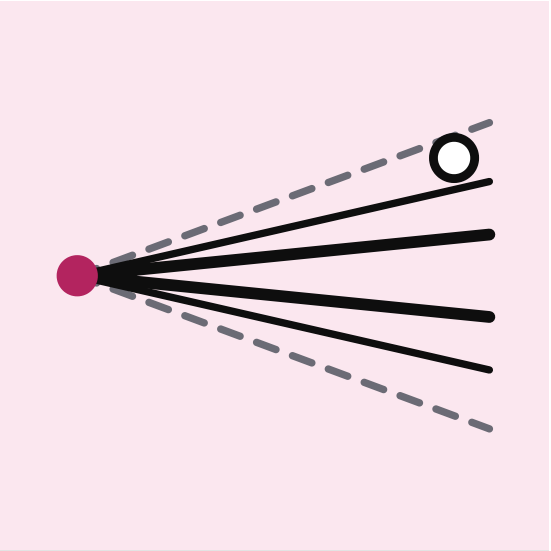
Model

Futures cone

A cone-shaped diagram that, starting from the present, distinguishes possible, plausible, probable and preferable futures.

In Spanish
Cono de futuros

Origin
Henchey (1978); Hancock and Bezold's cone (1994)



What problem it addresses

It helps you not to confuse what will probably happen with the only thing that can happen, or with what we want to happen.

Components

Possible
Everything that could happen.

Plausible
What could happen given what we know today.

Probable
What is most likely to happen if nothing changes.

Preferable
What we want to happen: it depends on values.

An example

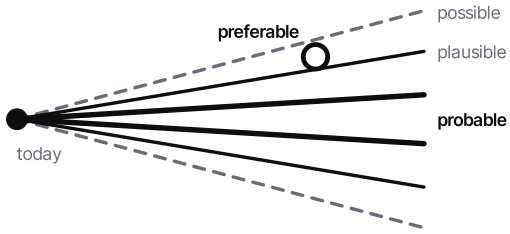
Imagine you are designing how we will get around a city twenty years from now.

Only the probable



More cars and more traffic, because that is where the trend points. **A single future.**

The whole cone



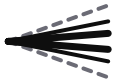
The probable, other plausible options and one we choose as preferable. **Several futures and a direction.**

The probable need not be the preferable: the cone shows the space between the two.

How it works

1 

From today a range opens up of futures that widens over time.

2 

Each layer is narrower: the possible contains the plausible, and the plausible, the probable.

3 

The preferable is a choice of values, and it may lie outside the probable.

Applications in design

Use it like this

In a workshop, place each idea on the cone: is it possible, plausible or probable? Which does the team prefer?

Avoid

Calling probable what you simply wish for.

Don't fall for it

Revisit the cone from time to time: the plausible shifts as the present changes.

Connections

Used in

- Backcasting
- Design futures
- Speculative design
- Horizon scanning
- Scenario planning
- Futures wheel

Authors and works

1978	**Norman Henchey**	Proposed distinguishing possible, plausible, probable and preferable futures.
1994	**Trevor Hancock and Clement Bezold**	Drew those classes as a cone opening out from the present.
2003	**Joseph Voros**	Expanded it with more categories and spread it in foresight.
2013	**Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby**	Brought it into speculative design, based on a version by Stuart Candy.

Sources

Original sources

- Henchey, N. (1978). Making sense of futures studies. Alternatives, 7(2), 24–28.
- Hancock, T., & Bezold, C. (1994). Possible futures, preferable futures. Healthcare Forum Journal, 37(2), 23–29.
- Voros, J. (2003). A generic foresight process framework. Foresight, 5(3), 10–21. View source (https://doi.org/10.1108/14636680310698379)
- Dunne, A., & Raby, F. (2013). Speculative everything: Design, fiction, and social dreaming. MIT Press.

Secondary sources

- Voros, J. (2017). The futures cone, use and history. The Voroscope. View source (https://thevoroscope.com/2017/02/24/the-futures-cone-use-and-history/)

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