Field

Futures studies

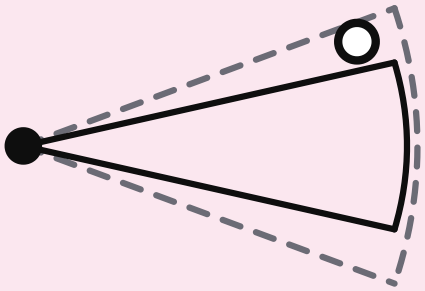
Systematically studies possible, probable and desirable futures to guide today's decisions, without claiming to predict.

In Spanish

Estudios de futuros

Origin

Took shape between the 1940s and 60s; its key works include Polak (1955) and Kahn and Wiener (1967)



What it studies

How to think about what doesn't exist yet without falling into fortune-telling or science fiction. For design, it provides tools to imagine alternatives, spot changes in time and choose which future to design toward.

Principles

Futures, plural

There is no single future to guess, but several to explore.

The preferable is chosen

Beyond the probable, it matters to decide which future we want.

Look early

Big changes usually give early warning through small signals.

Applications in design

✓ Use it like this

Before designing "for the future," ask which one: explore several and choose one with care.

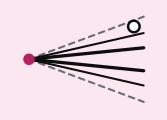
✗ Avoid

Presenting a single forecast as if it were what will happen.

👁 Don't fall for it

Review your assumptions often: futures change as the present changes.

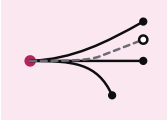
Theories and concepts



Model

Futures cone

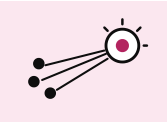
From today, possible, plausible, probable and preferable futures open up.



Model

Four generic alternative futures

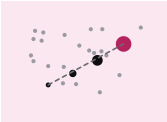
Growth, collapse, setting limits or transformation: four stories of the future.



Theory

Image of the future

Societies steer toward the image of the future they share.

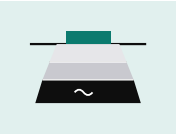


Concept

Weak signals

Small hints of a change that is still uncertain but may grow.

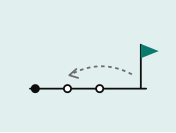
Methods and tools



Method

Causal layered analysis (CLA)

Looking at a problem in four layers, from what the news says to the myths that sustain it.



Method

Backcasting

Imagining the future you want and walking back to today to see which steps lead there.



Method

Horizon scanning

Continuously looking for signals of change outside your field to anticipate what may come.



Method

Delphi method

Consulting experts over several rounds of questionnaires, showing them the group's answers each time.

Connections

Used in

- Design futures

Authors and works

	Fred Polak	Showed that shared images of the future guide a society.
	Herman Kahn and Anthony J. Wiener	Used scenarios to explore alternative futures in The Year 2000 (1967).
	Jim Dator	Set out, at the Manoa School, the four archetypal futures.

Sources

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Last reviewed: October 26, 2026

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