

Megatrends & futures thinking

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SITRA



***What would you like to
know about the future?***

Today

1. In brief: What is Sitra?

2. What is foresight?

3. Megatrends, tensions & weak signals

4. Discussing together



Theme: How to talk about foresight & futures to your colleagues (and others)

1. What is Sitra?



Five important things

- 1. A gift from Parliament to the 50-year-old Finland. Still under the direct control of the Finnish Parliament.**
- 2. Funded by returns on endowment capital and capital investments.**
- 3. An independent future house.**
- 4. The aim is the successful Finland of tomorrow, the vision is the next era of well-being – a fair and sustainable future.**
- 5. The vision is implemented by three themes and hundreds of projects.**

Read more about our new strategy here:
<https://www.sitra.fi/en/news/sitras-new-strategy-out-now/>

+ the most important of all

Building our future *together*.



2. What is foresight?



**Foresight is the systematic
thinking of futures**

**You don't need to be an expert to
engage in futures thinking**

What could be? What is desirable? What if...?

What is changing right now?

What is now?

What has been?



In foresight we ask:

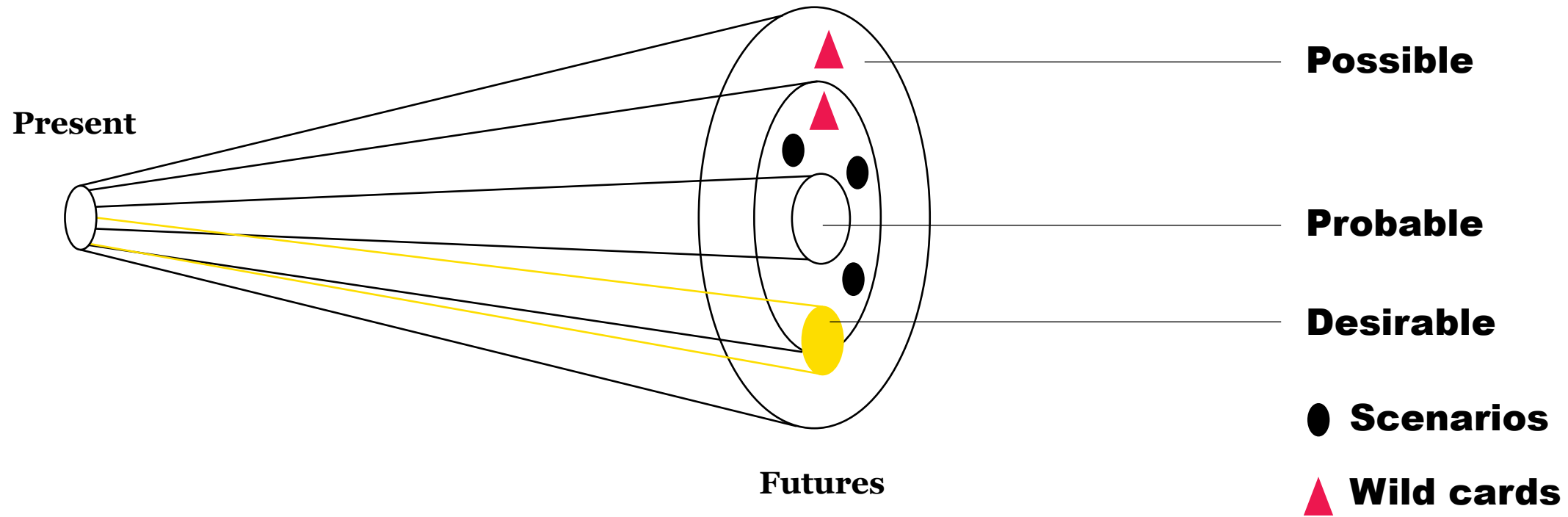
What futures are...

Possible?

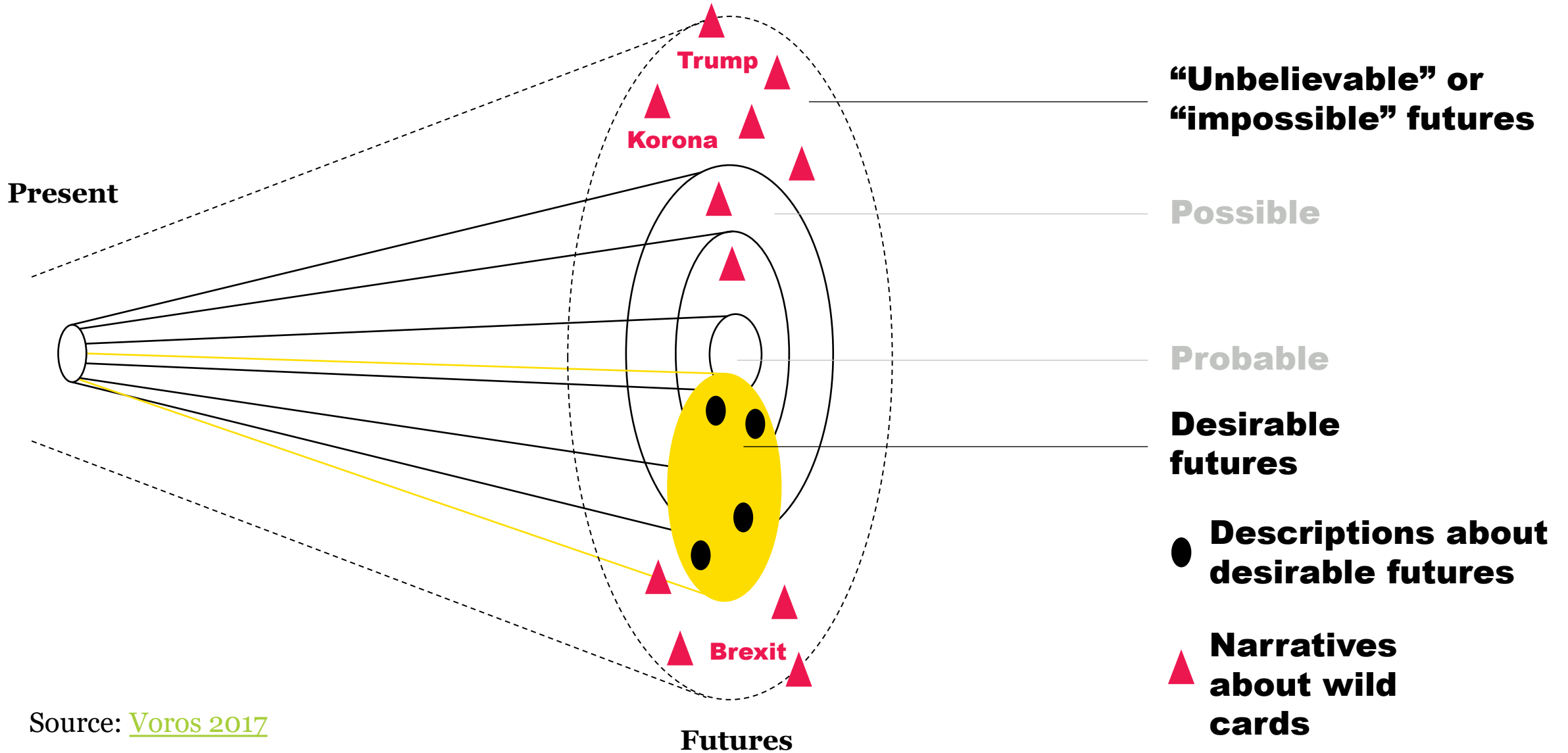
Probable?

Desirable?

The futures cone



The futures cone ...is often too narrow



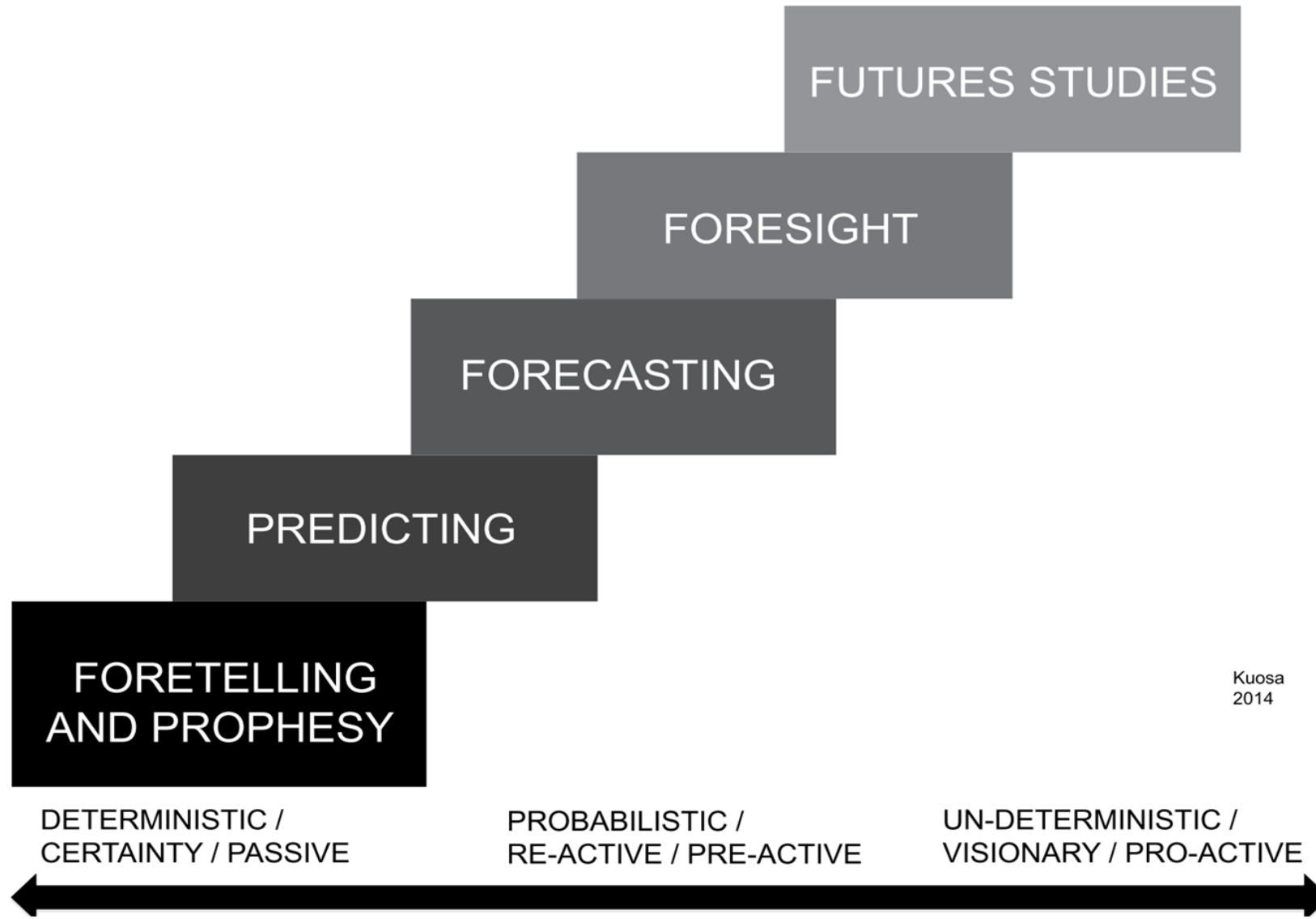


Figure 2: The scale of five classes in futures domain

Three approaches to futures

Preparation

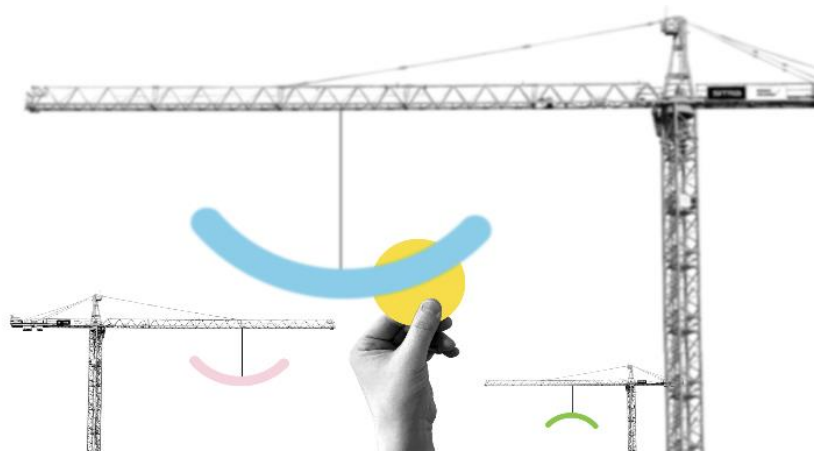


What is changing?

What is uncertain?

(cf. [Miller 2018](#))

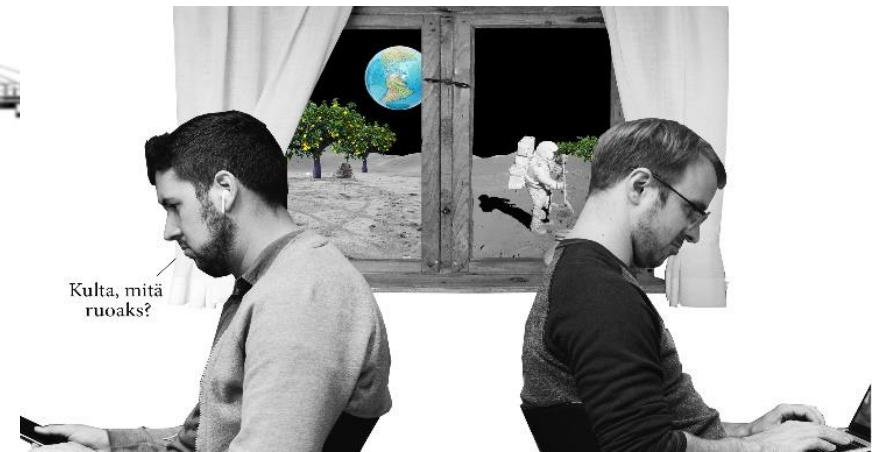
Planning



What can we do?

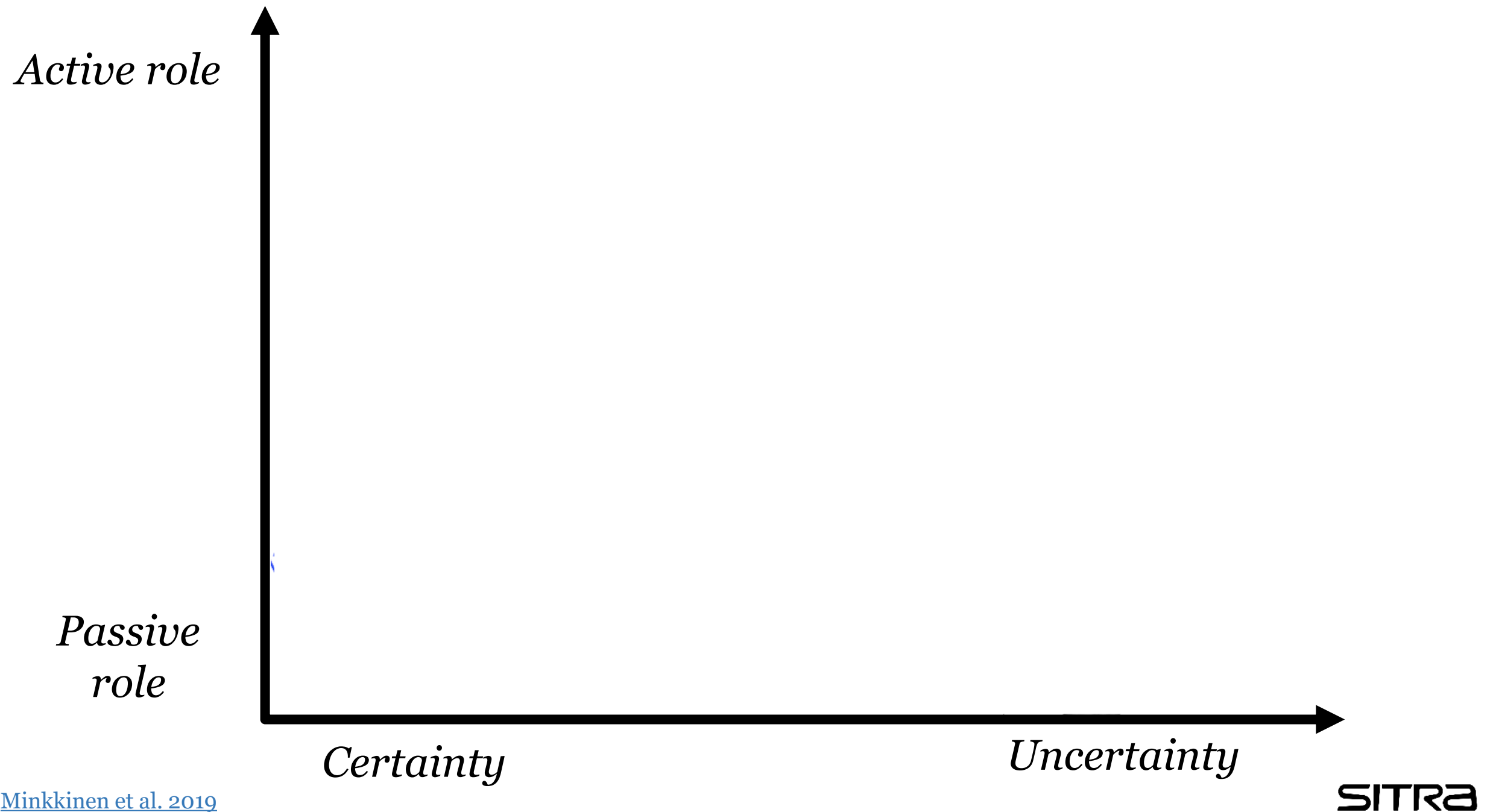
What is desirable and for whom?

Novelty



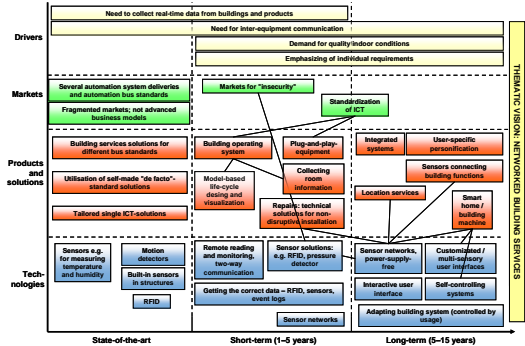
What do we assume?

What is not questioned?



Active role

Planning frame



Forecasting frame



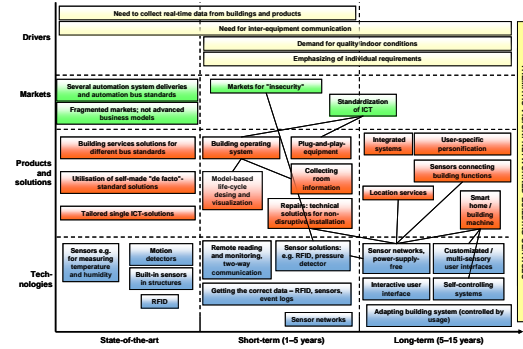
Passive role

Certainty

Uncertainty

Active role

Planning frame



Vision frame



Forecasting frame



Scenario frame



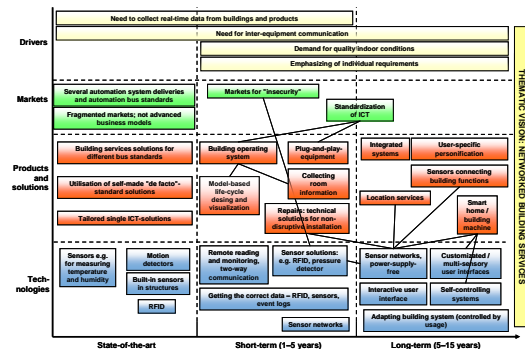
Passive role

Certainty

Uncertainty

Active role

Planning frame



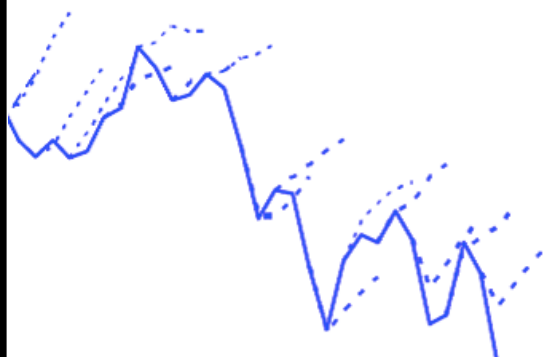
Vision frame



Transformation frame



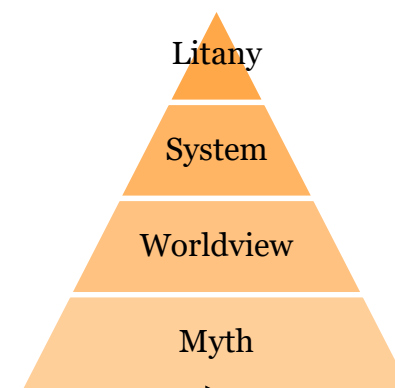
Forecasting frame



Scenario frame



Critical frame



Passive role

Certainty

Uncertainty

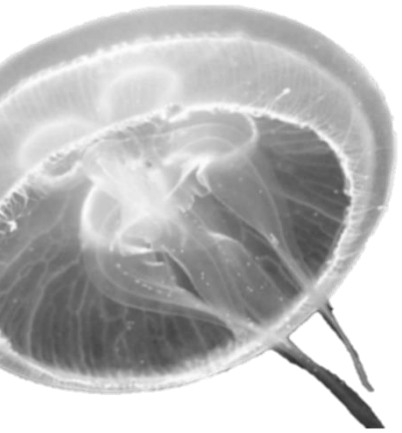
VUCA, BANI and postnormal times

*“We are entering an era where
complexity, chaos and contradictions
will become the dominant themes; and
uncertainty and ignorance
will increase drastically”*

Sardar 2015, 2010

**Volatile
Uncertain
Complex
Ambiguous**

**Brittle
Anxious
Non-linear
Incomprehensible**



**Futures are
surprising in
surprising ways**



Driving in Sao Paulo: In the World Streets 2013 Traffic Olympics they are serious title contenders.

That is why we need
imagination



Ways to imagine futures

Horizon scanning: Changes in the operational landscape - trends, megatrends

Scenarios and future images: Narratives about possible futures

Visions: What kinds of futures are desirable?

Weak signals: What is happening in the world that is especially surprising or difficult to observe?

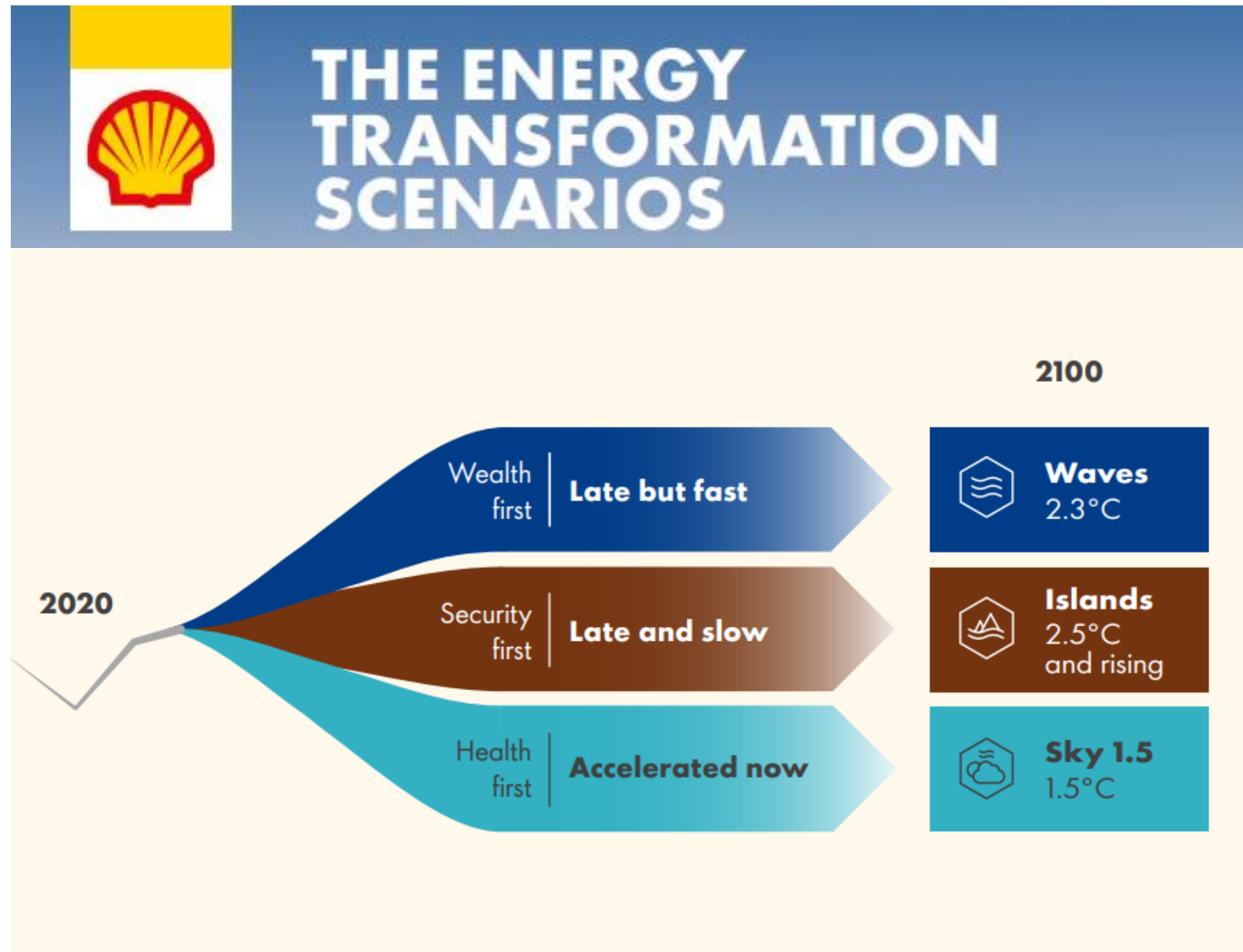
Stories, literature, arts: imagination without borders

Example:

Shell

scenarios

(2021)



What helps us to imagine?

Tuning in to the mindset of imagining

Time and space for imagining

Feeling of safety & permission to imagine.

Having a frame, model or structure

Ask more: [Liisa Poussa](#), Sitra

“We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was never normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return, My friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature.”

[Sonya Renee Taylor](#)

Founder, The Body is Not An Apology



Who are seen in the future?

A collage of various people and scenes, including a woman with a tablet, a man in a suit, a robot, a woman taking a photo, a group of children, a man in a raincoat, a man in a wheelchair, a man with a laptop, a woman with a backpack, and a group of children sitting on the ground.

Futures thinking & foresight: a summary

There are many futures,
and we can affect those futures.

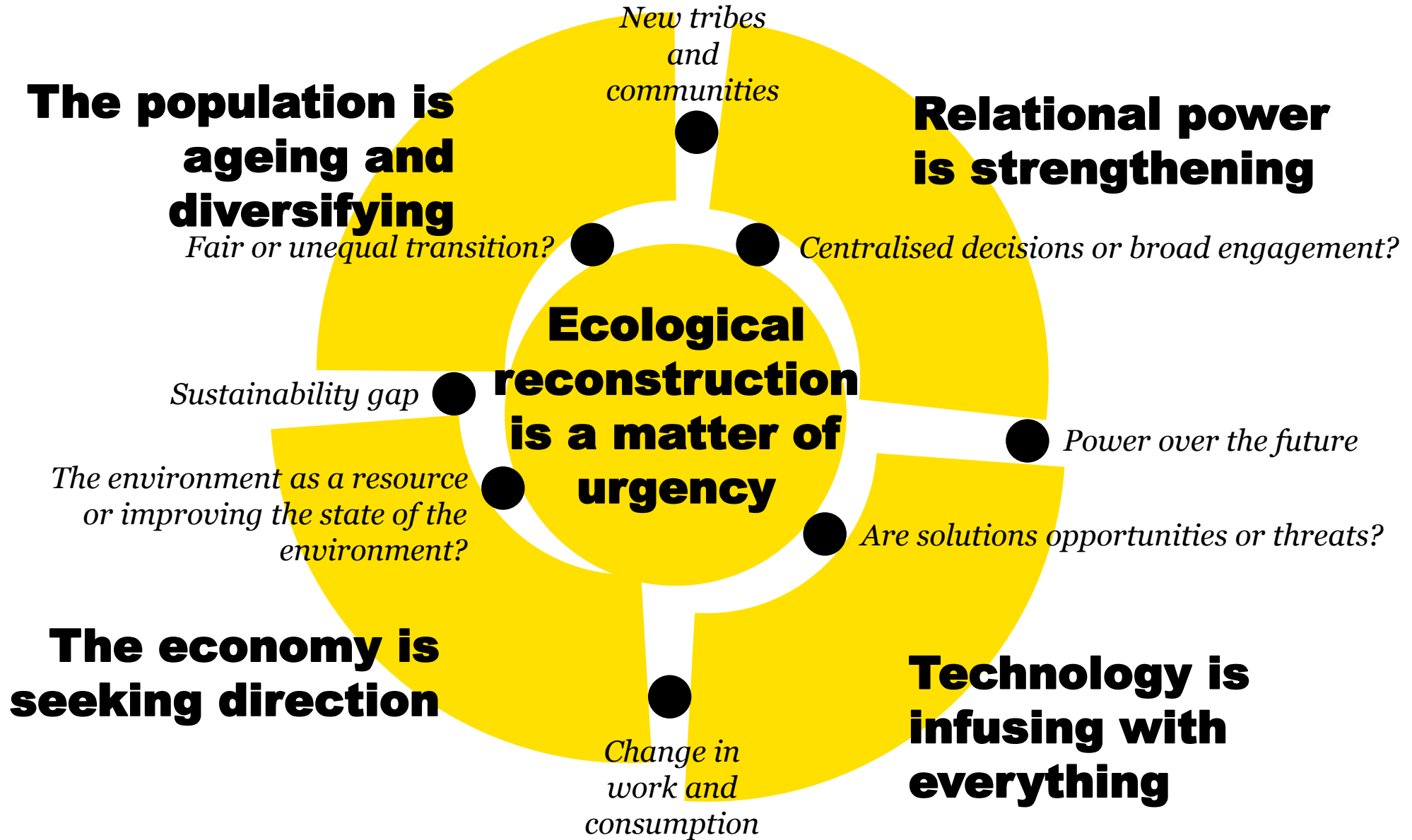
Therefore, it is our responsibility to think
about futures in the long term.

3. Megatrends, tensions & weak signals

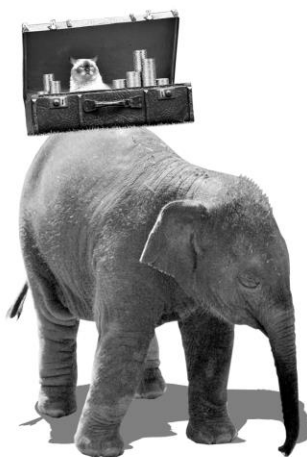


MEGA TRENDS





Ecological reconstruction is a matter of urgency



TRENDS

Climate warming

**Extreme weather
phenomena**

Loss of biodiversity

**Overconsumption of
resources**

Soil degradation

More waste

TENSIONS

**ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS
VS ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION**

**BELITTling
VS ACTIVISM**

**FAIR *VS* UNEQUAL
TRANSITION TO
A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY**



***How successful will we be
in achieving quick and fair
ecological
reconstruction?***

***What is
Finland's role in
the global
change?***

***What could
sustainable
lifestyles look
like in practice?***

***Do we see
nature as a
resource or as
having intrinsic
value?***

Relational power is strengthening



SITRa

TRENDS

**From a multipolar world
to a poly-nodal world**

**Admiration of strong
leaders**

Rise of populism

Rise of new movements

Confusion is power

TENSIONS

**CENTRALISED DECISIONS
VS BROAD ENGAGEMENT**

**FREEDOM OF SPEECH
VS INFLUENCE THROUGH
INFORMATION**

**GLOBAL INSTITUTIONS *VS*
POLY-NODAL WORLD**



***How can we achieve the
renewal of democracy and
make big changes?***

***How do we ensure
broader engagement
and quick decisions?***

***How can we reduce
polarisation and
confusion?***

***How do we strengthen
global decision-making
in a poly-nodal world?***

The population is ageing and diversifying



TRENDS

**Longer life expectancy
and an ageing population**

Declining birth rate

**Concentration of the
population**

Tribalisation

TENSIONS

**DEPENDENCY RATIO
VS MAINTAINING THE
WELFARE STATE**

**CITIES
VS RURAL AREAS
VS MULTI-LOCALITY**

**NETWORKS
VS BUBBLES**



***How can we prevent
inequality while building
an ecologically
sustainable society?***

***How will the tensions
created by polarisation
develop, and can we let
go of them?***

***Will we find a
new story for
what it means to
be Finnish?***

***How will we ensure the
quality and adequacy of
society's services?***

The economy is seeking direction



TRENDS

**Concentration of
wealth**

Circular economy

**Changing structures
of work**

**Continuous
development of
competence**

TENSIONS

**PLATFORM MONOPOLIES
VS HUMAN-DRIVEN DATA
ECONOMY**

**CONSUMPTION CULTURE
VS ENOUGH IS ENOUGH**

**SUSTAINABLE
VS RESTORATIVE ECONOMY**



***How do we want to
reshape our
economic system?***

***How will people's
consumption habits
change?***

***What will be the future
shape of working life?***

***How do we ensure the
fair distribution of
wealth and income for
all?***

**Technology is
becoming
embedded in
everything**



TRENDS

**Technology transforms
operating methods**

**AI applications permeate
society**

**Programmed organisms in
production**

**Falling cost of renewable
energy**

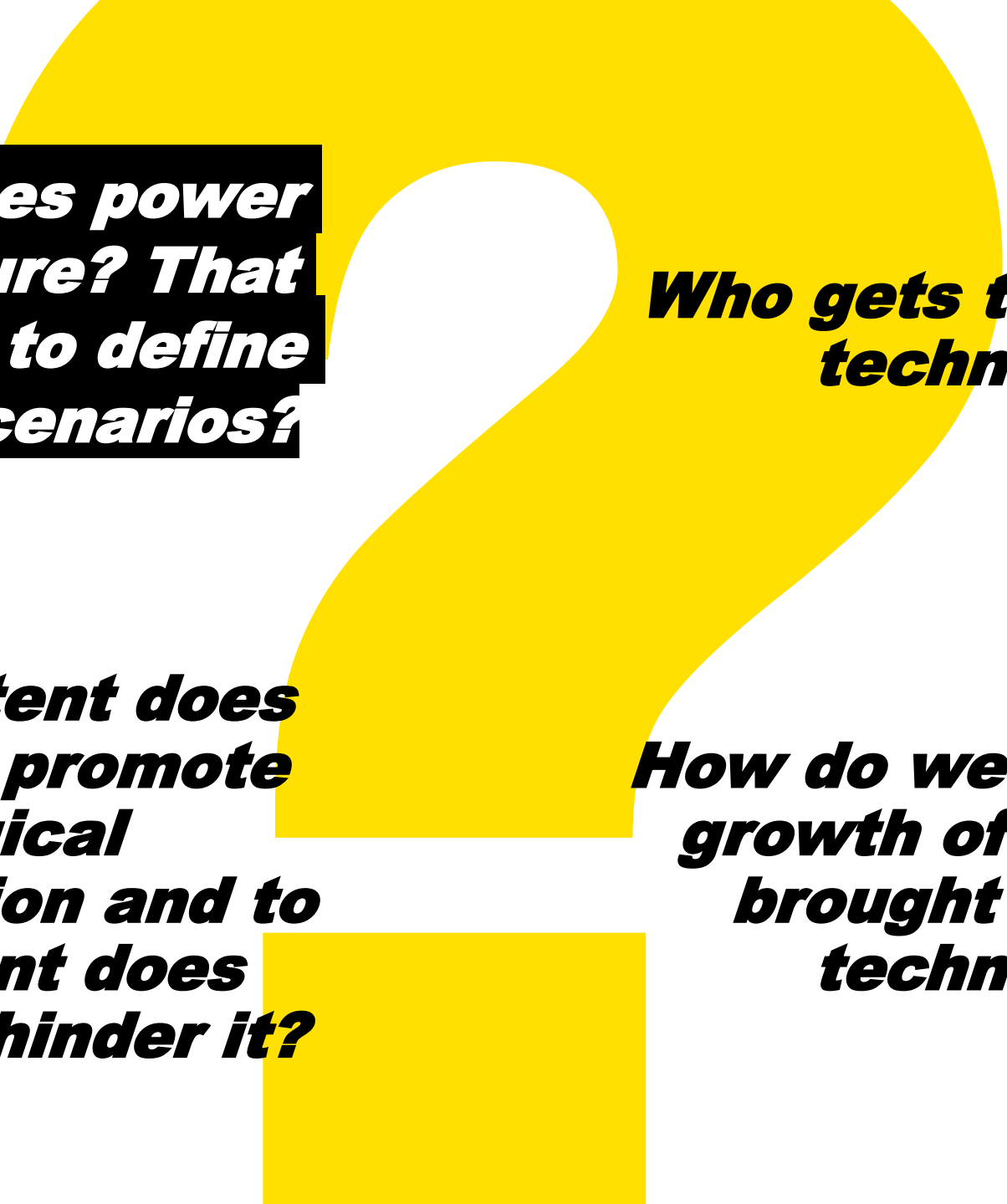
**Emphasis on understanding
technology**

TENSIONS

**CO-OPERATION
VS BATTLE FOR AI**

**WIDESPREAD USE OF
TECHNOLOGY
VS INEQUALITY**

**TECHNOLOGY AS AN
OPPORTUNITY
VS THREAT**



Who exercises power over the future? That is, who gets to define the future scenarios?

Who gets to decide on technology?

To what extent does technology promote ecological reconstruction and to what extent does technology hinder it?

How do we prevent the growth of inequality brought about by technology?

meta- **trends**



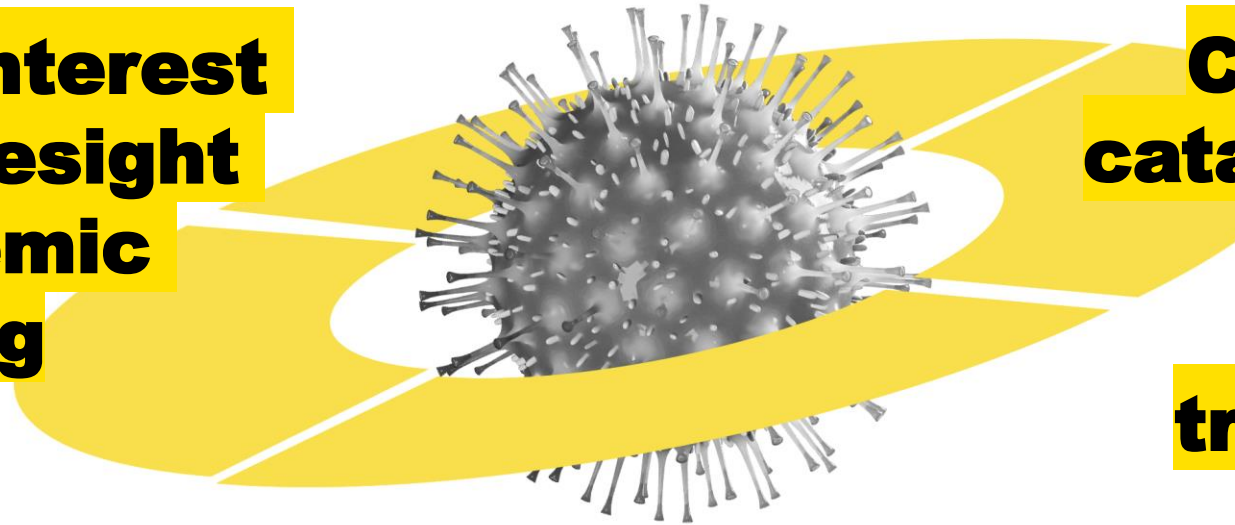
***Postnormal
times***

***Emotions
at play***

***Together
apart***

HOPE

**Increasing interest
towards foresight
and systemic
thinking**



**COVID-19 as a
catalyst for change
for fair and
sustainable
transformation**

**Emergence of solidarity, empathy, caring
and action in communities**

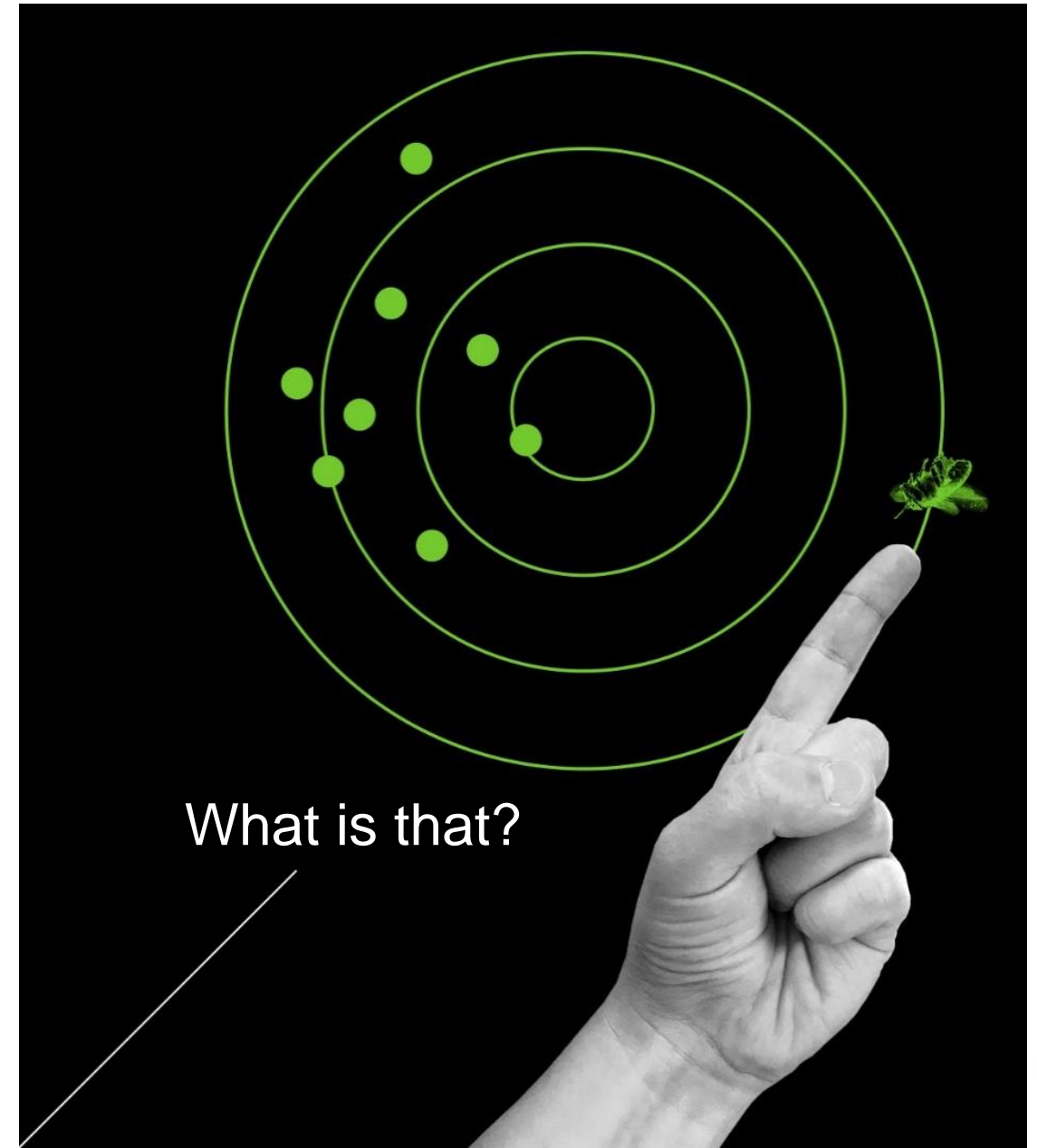
**Not just
megatrends:
Looking at weak
signals**

***Any useful idea about the
futures should at first
appear to be ridiculous***

Jim Dator

Weak signal:
Sign of an emerging issue
or the first symptom of
change

Hiltunen 2010: Weak signals in organizational futures learning



What is that?

**What is a human /
humanity?**

**Who has/have the power to
decide in the future?
Does anyone?**

**What is our relationship
with other living beings?**

**What will relationships and
families look like in the
future?**

**What will future generations
think of us?**

**How will we manufacture things in
the future?**



Weak signals can be about...



**New or
emerging things**

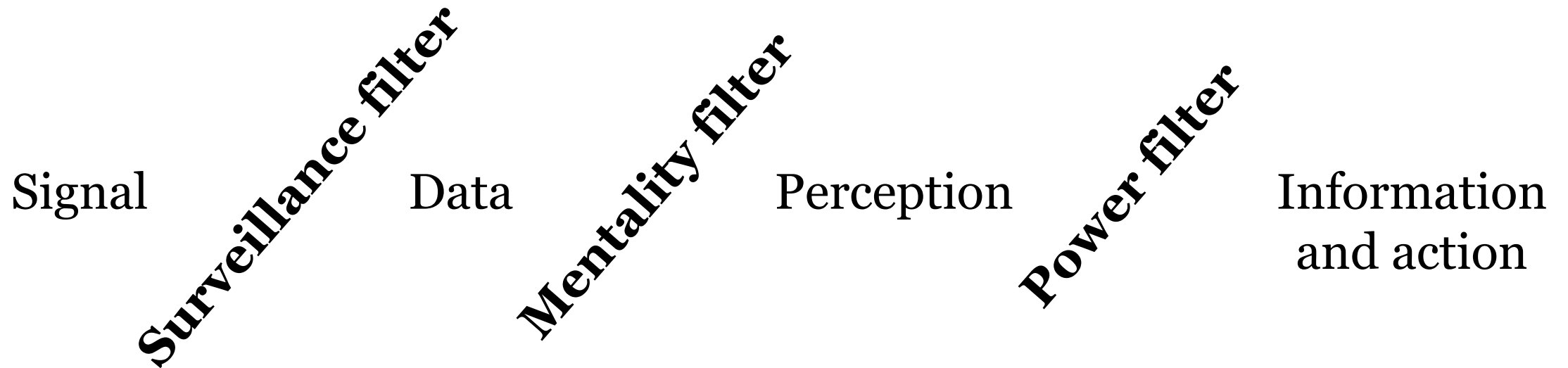


**Re-emerging /
re-ordering
things**



**Discontinuing
things**

Signal and its interpretation



Modified from

Ilmola 2014: Increasing Flexibility by Environment Scanning of the Early Signs of Change in the Complex Environment

Ansoff 1984: Implanting strategic management

[illegible]

Find out more at
<https://www.sitra.fi/en/topics/weak-signals/>

What's this now?



Five tips to futures thinking

1

Don't try to be right or correct

2

Listen to differences and make space for diversity

3

Question and challenge assumptions about the future

4

Think about futures from the point of view of an individual

5

Remember hope!

A surreal collage featuring an orange tree in the top left, a large full moon in the top center, three birds flying in the top right, a mountain lake with a wooden dock in the middle, two rabbits in the bottom left, and a cluster of red flowers in the bottom right. The text "The future is made together" is centered over the lake and moon.

**The future is made
together**

**Thank
you !**



Discussing together



**What would you like to
know about the future?**



**~~What would you like to
know about the future?~~**

**What sparks your
imagination?**