

Model

Four generic alternative futures

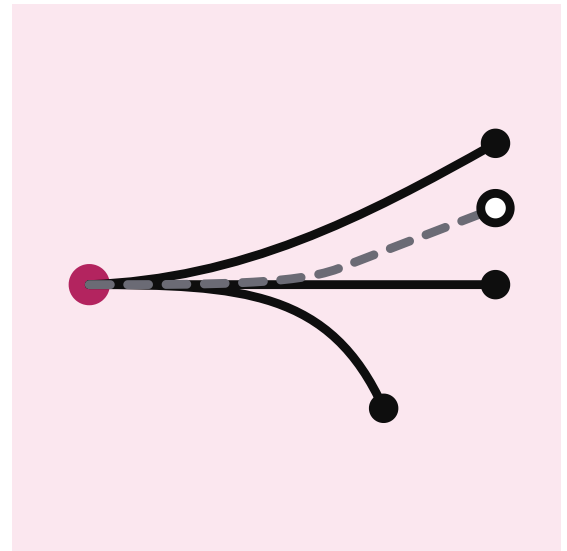
Four types of future from which almost all images of the future derive: continued growth, collapse, discipline and transformation.

In Spanish

Cuatro futuros arquetípicos

Origin

Dator, Manoa School (University of Hawai'i)



What problem it addresses

Avoids thinking about a single future, almost always the one of continued growth, and forces you to explore the others too.

Components

Continued growth

The future as more of the same: the economy and technology keep growing.

Collapse

Something fails on a large scale and the current system breaks down.

Discipline

Society organizes around shared values and puts limits on growth.

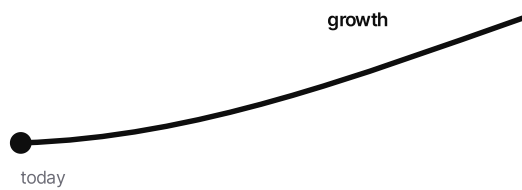
Transformation

A deep change, often technological, creates a very different society.

An example

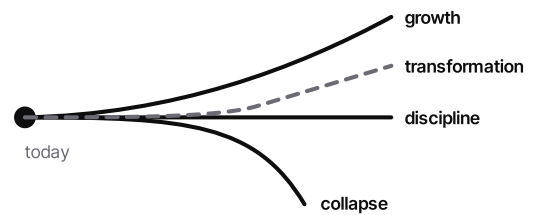
Think about how people will eat in your city thirty years from now.

A single future



It is taken for granted that everything keeps growing: more choice, more delivery, faster.
The official story.

Four futures



Growth, collapse, living within limits or changing the way of life: four different cities.
More questions.

Thinking through all four helps design something that works even if the expected future doesn't arrive.

How it works

1



Images of the future repeat in the news, films and plans.

2



Dator grouped them into four basic stories.

3



Exploring all four brings out the assumptions behind each plan.

Applications in design

✓ Use it like this

Write a short scenario for each of the four and test your idea in all of them.

✗ Avoid

Telling the collapse story only to scare, or the transformation story only to sell.

👁 Don't fall for it

If you only imagine growth, ask what would happen to your design in the other three.

Connections

Used in

■ Scenario planning

■ The Thing From The Future

Authors and works

2009

Jim Dator

Described the four futures that the Manoa School works with.

Sources

Original sources

- Dator, J. (2009). Alternative futures at the Manoa School. Journal of Futures Studies, 14(2), 1–18. [View source \(https://jfsdigital.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/142-A01.pdf\)](https://jfsdigital.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/142-A01.pdf)

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