

# FUTURES THINKING



EGGS, ELEPHANTS AND HOW  
TO BE READY FOR ANYTHING

*We believe that Futures Thinking is  
a new powerful approach to unlock  
complex problems in an increasingly  
uncertain world. At Kantar we live and  
breathe it every day and with this book  
we want to introduce you to this new  
way of thinking too.*

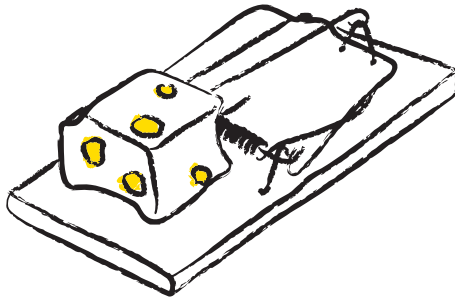
**PEOPLE ARE REALLY,  
REALLY, BAD AT THINKING  
ABOUT THE FUTURE**

"The automobile is just a fad," said an adviser in 1903. "The horse is here to stay."

"Guitar music" Decca Records told The Beatles, "is on the way out."

"The chance of house prices falling in 2008" a top economist (basically) said, "is the same as winning the lottery 20 times in a row."

**WHY?**



If you're a human, which you're likely to be, you can blame your brain.

Your brain traps you:

in your own perspective

in the short term

in the wrong focus

in one dimension

in a fantasy

That means you do things like stay 20 more years in a bad relationship... because you've already been together for 10.

It means you suddenly realise your business became outdated years ago—and so did your strategy for innovating it.

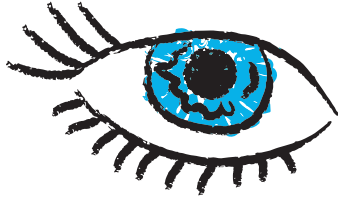
It means opportunities float past you. Problems ambush you.



The world's uncertain enough.  
Competition comes out of the blue,  
it's light on its feet and it grows fast.

How are you supposed to overcome  
backwards business structures, your own  
biases, your biology... to anticipate change,  
even in uncertainty? And to respond?

# YOU DO IT WITH FUTURES THINKING



FUTURES THINKING is a way of thinking about what's possible more deeply, honestly, and strategically.

It opens your eyes, sharpens your senses, expands your view, and prepares you to act.

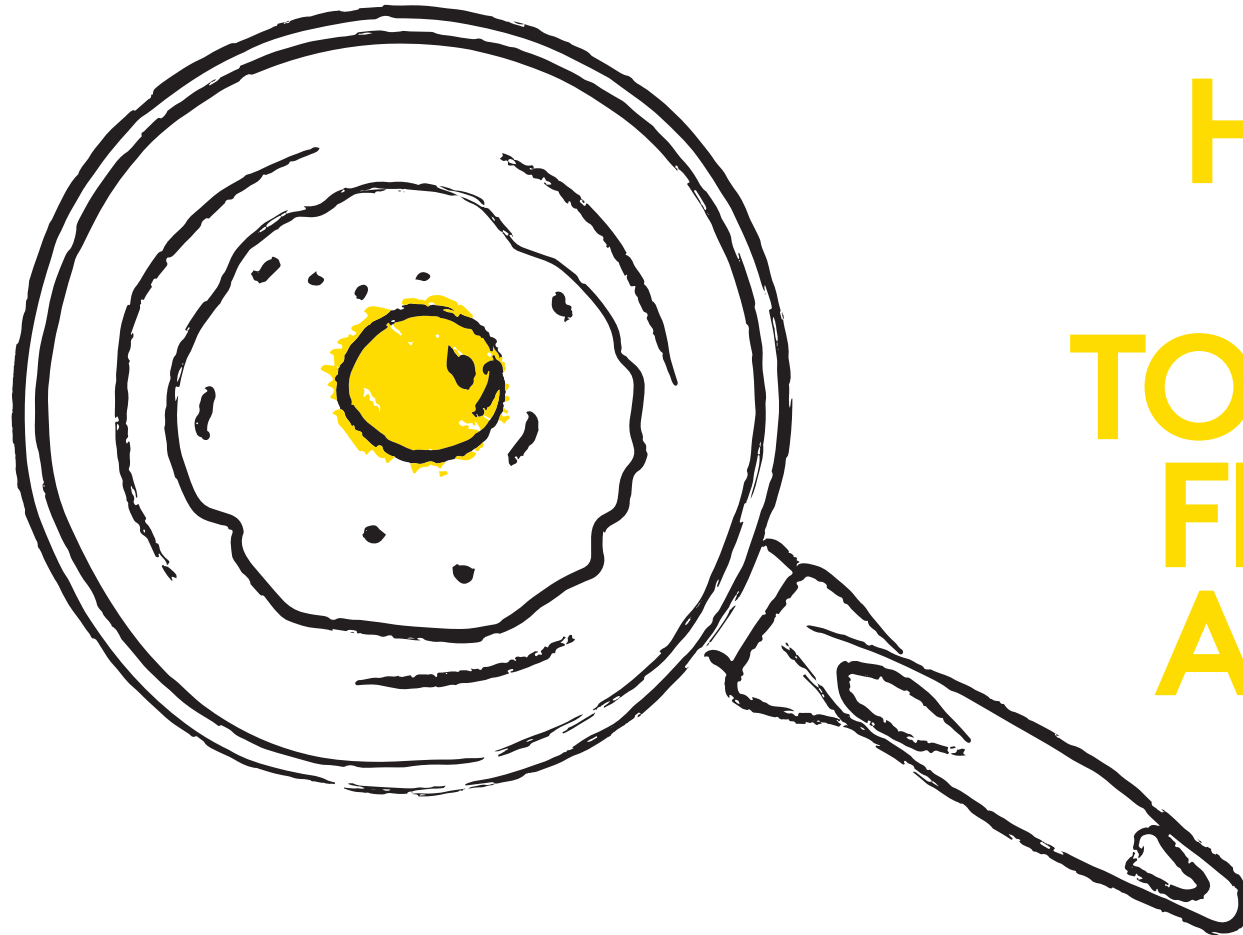
And you can start with this book.

Five simple principles. Five small shifts that, taken together, add up to a lot.

Learn how to not get fried alive, how to avoid being trampled by elephants, how to spot opportunities, and grow.

Learn how to look ahead—then really see.

PRINCIPLE 1  
SWITCH PERSPECTIVE



HOW  
NOT  
TO GET  
FRIED  
ALIVE

# IMAGINE YOU'RE A CEO

The pan is the world.

The white is your market.

The yolk is you.

All most people see is egg.

The pan starts to sizzle.

But like most people, you're too busy with the day-to-day to notice the pan's heating up. From the outside in.

By the time you feel the heat, it's already too late.

# YOU'RE COOKED



# FUTURES THINKING LESSON#1

LOOK FROM  
THE OUTSIDE  
IN TO SEE  
THE BIGGER  
PICTURE

# STORYTIME

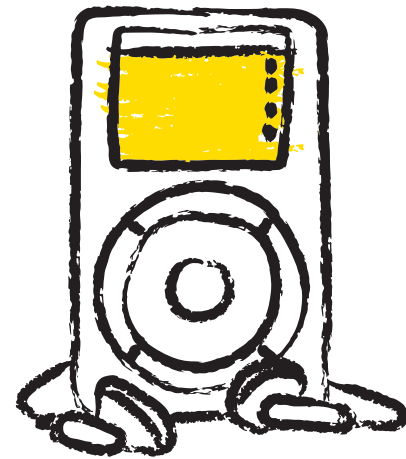
It's the '90s. The age of Pogs. Pop. Light-up trainers. And the launch of Sony's MiniDisc: the next big little thing in digital music.

Sony only sees the egg. They're not really innovating the music player, just making a smaller version of what already exists.

Meanwhile, Apple's biding its time. Watching the whole pan.

They see people moving to social media and virtual storage and looking for simple, simple, simple. As technology heats up everything, they spot the opportunity.

They don't just go smaller. They go different.



**WITH ITUNES. AND IPOD.**

YOU CAN'T  
HAVE AN  
EDGE IF  
YOU CAN'T  
SEE IT

# FUTURES THINKING LESSON#1



## TO DO TODAY

Read an article or website that takes a stance you don't usually agree with—read it with empathy, try to see the world from its perspective.

PRINCIPLE 2  
LOOK FURTHER

# DON'T CRASH THE BOAT



# OUR VIEW OF TIME IS TOO ZOOMED IN

We're focused on the present. We think the way things are now will last forever.

You see it in companies all the time—this short-termism. Weekly bonuses. Quarterly reports.

"Where do you see yourself in ten years?" executives ask eager interviewees. But they haven't thought about that for their own business.



You wouldn't navigate an ocean by focusing on a tiny square of map.

So how come we navigate the future from the tiny square called *now*?

# FUTURES THINKING LESSON#2

TAKE A  
LONGER  
VIEW OF  
TIME TO  
SEE DEEPER  
PATTERNS  
OF CHANGE

# STORYTIME

Target the growing middle classes with all their disposable income. Look for expanding markets and follow them to glory. That's business 101, right?

Not quite. Zoom out your view of time, and then look. You'll see that real economic growth is a

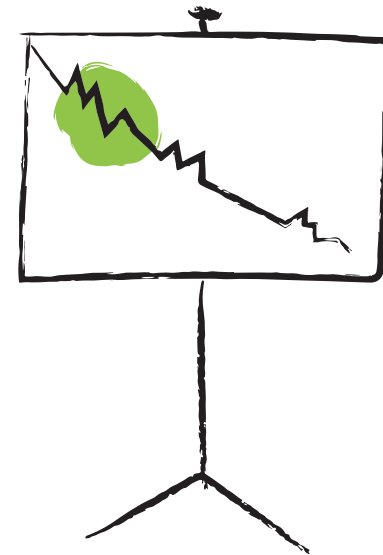
Long

Line

Down

Populations aren't growing fast, your market's growing slow, and people are actually spending less.

Lots of people still think we're in a boom and bust economy. Because they're operating on zoom 500%. And they're waiting for a boom.



They're waiting for markets that won't rally to rally. Relying on strategies built during a tiny historic growth peak—not for the future.

## WHAT SHOULD THEY DO INSTEAD?

Reinvent the way they work. Look to new places and strategies. Create demand and growth in brand new ways.



GO LONG

# FUTURES THINKING LESSON#2

## TO DO TODAY

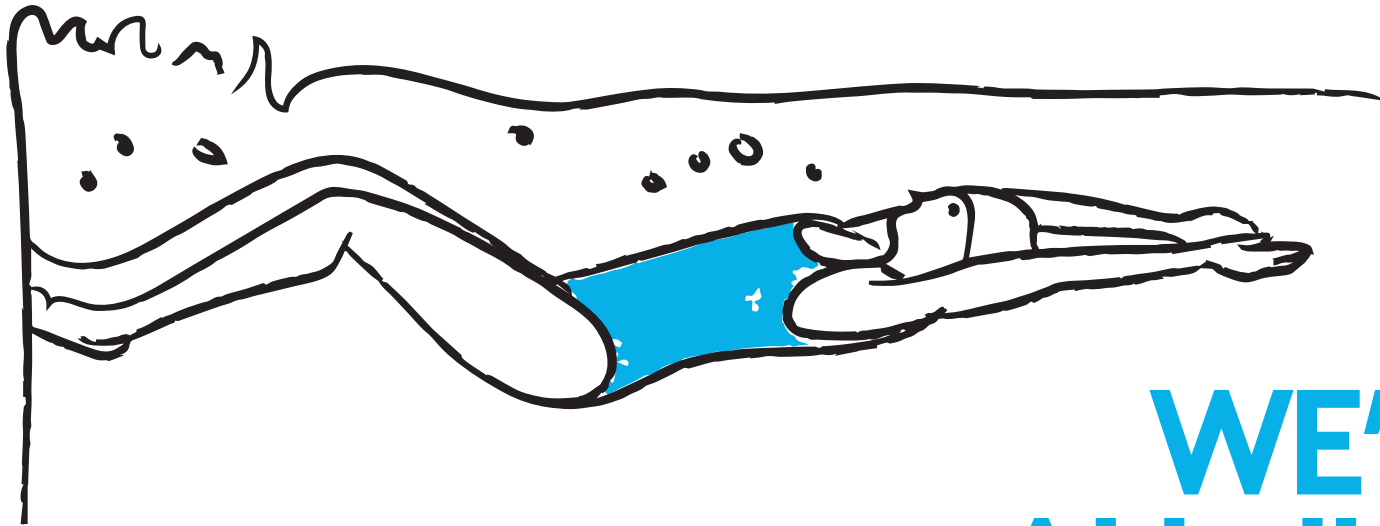
Think of a sector you really care about—be it cars, aeroplanes, sneakers, or music. Think back to how it was 20 years ago.

Back then, what did people predict would happen in that industry?

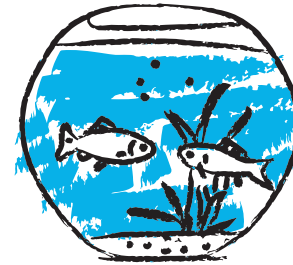
What's turned out differently?



PRINCIPLE 3  
ANTICIPATE VALUES



**WE'RE  
ALL JUST  
SWIMMING**



Two fish are swimming along together.

One of them says:

*"The water's nice today."*

The other says:

***"What the  
hell is water?"***

We all swim in our own values and assumptions.  
That makes it hard to step outside them,  
to see them critically.

So we don't notice them change. We don't  
prepare for them changing in the future.

Think about how different society was just 50 years  
ago—the picture for feminism, LGBTQ, civil rights.

We marvel at the speed of technological change.  
But we're slow to catch onto changing social values.

We just float around.

# FUTURES THINKING LESSON#3

UNDERSTAND  
PEOPLE'S  
SHIFTING  
VALUES TO  
ANTICIPATE  
SOCIAL  
CHANGE

# STORYTIME

Let's join a senior exec meeting in the 1950s.  
It's Scotch all round. Paunches (all round).

What does that meeting look like today?  
Everyone's wearing a Fitbit. Sam's off to  
yoga straight after.

Society used to see health as a chore.  
'Healthy foods' were laughably colourless.  
Drinking, drugs and other bad behaviour  
—that's what was aspirational.

But slowly, that started to change. Today we  
aspire to good health and wellbeing,  
and taking care of ourselves.

Smart businesses paid attention to that.

**LIKE NIKE.**



They started off as a sports brand.

But over the years, their emphasis shifted—  
towards fashion. Lifestyle. Luxury, even.

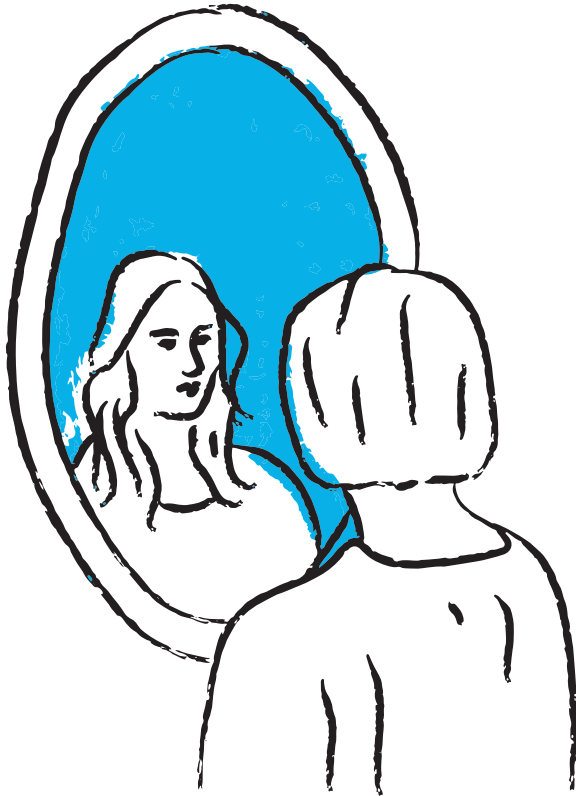
Riding that wave of wellbeing.

CARE ABOUT  
WHAT  
WE'LL CARE  
ABOUT

# FUTURES THINKING LESSON#3

## TO DO TODAY

Think back to the industry from your last exercise—and those changes you spotted over 20 years. Now, try to identify the shifts in social or cultural values that influenced those changes. (Hint: think about shifts in your own values)





PRINCIPLE 4  
SEE CONNECTIONS

**LINES  
ARE AS  
IMPORTANT  
AS DOTS**





Ask a technologist about the future,  
and they'll tell you about AI.

Ask an economist and they'll tell you about  
how interest rates could change.

Ask an environmentalist—they'll tell you  
about climate change.



Each one of those views is vital.

But look at one star at a time, and you'll miss  
the constellation.



# FUTURES THINKING LESSON#4

CO—NNE—CT  
MOR—E  
DOTS  
T—O  
S—E—E  
A  
R—IC—HER  
V—IE—W  
OF  
CHA—NGE

# STORYTIME

Not so long ago, if you lived in a city and needed to eat, you'd drive to a big box supermarket out of town.

Today, you'd just pop to your little local supermarket. One of hundreds across the city... or better yet get them to pop to you.

Food shopping has transformed.  
How did it happen?

If you were watching closely enough ten years ago, you'd have seen different kinds of change coming together:

**S**ocial change. More people start living in inner cities. Choice becomes a burden, they want less of it.

A useful acronym:

**S** IS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE  
**T** IS FOR TECHNOLOGICAL  
**E** IS FOR ECONOMIC  
**E** IS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL  
**P** IS FOR POLITICAL

**T**echnological change. Online shopping means that for buying in bulk, they don't have to travel.

**E**conomic change. People are willing to pay more for convenience.

And how will shopping change tomorrow? Keep connecting the dots, and you could anticipate it today.



# FUTURES THINKING LESSON#4

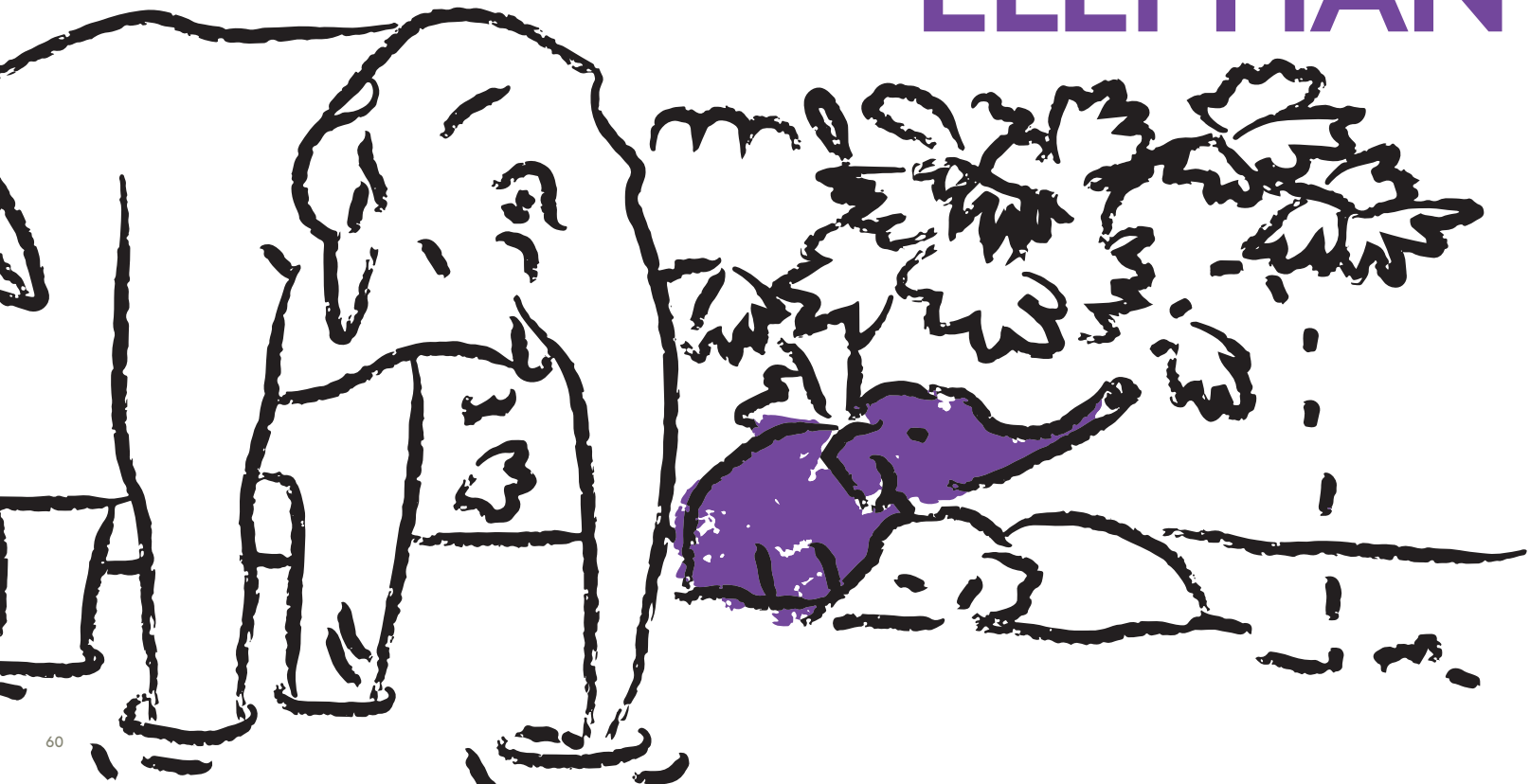


## TO DO TODAY

Practice thinking beyond just one dimension. Imagine five big changes you think will happen in the next 10 years: social, technological, economical, environmental, and political. Try colliding two of those together: what happens?

PRINCIPLE 5  
PREDICT SURPRISES

# SPOT THE ELEPHANT





Black swan:  
a big surprise that's hard to foresee.

Elephant in the room:  
you can see it, you're just avoiding it.

Black elephant?  
A big old surprise...  
that you *totally* could have seen coming.

In life, in business, some surprises  
shouldn't be surprises.

To see black elephants you need to do three  
things. Know to look for them to begin with.  
Know where to look. And finally,  
you have to want to see.

So you don't get squashed.



# FUTURES THINKING LESSON#5

TAKE  
OFF THE  
BLINKERS  
TO REVEAL  
PREDICTABLE  
SURPRISES

# STORYTIME

Over the last five years, the US coal industry has lost almost all its market value.

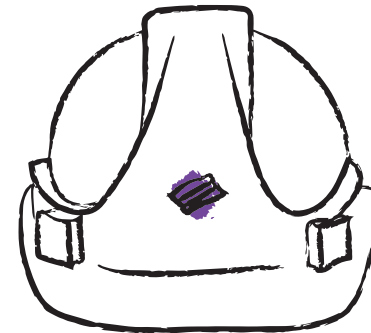
Suddenly. Ruthlessly. Without warning.

Or at least, it seemed that way.

It was actually a black elephant.

Look back over the last 20 years, and you can watch the rise of solar, natural gas and fracking. You can track the gradual, predictable curve of declining solar power prices.

But coal companies weren't looking in the right place.



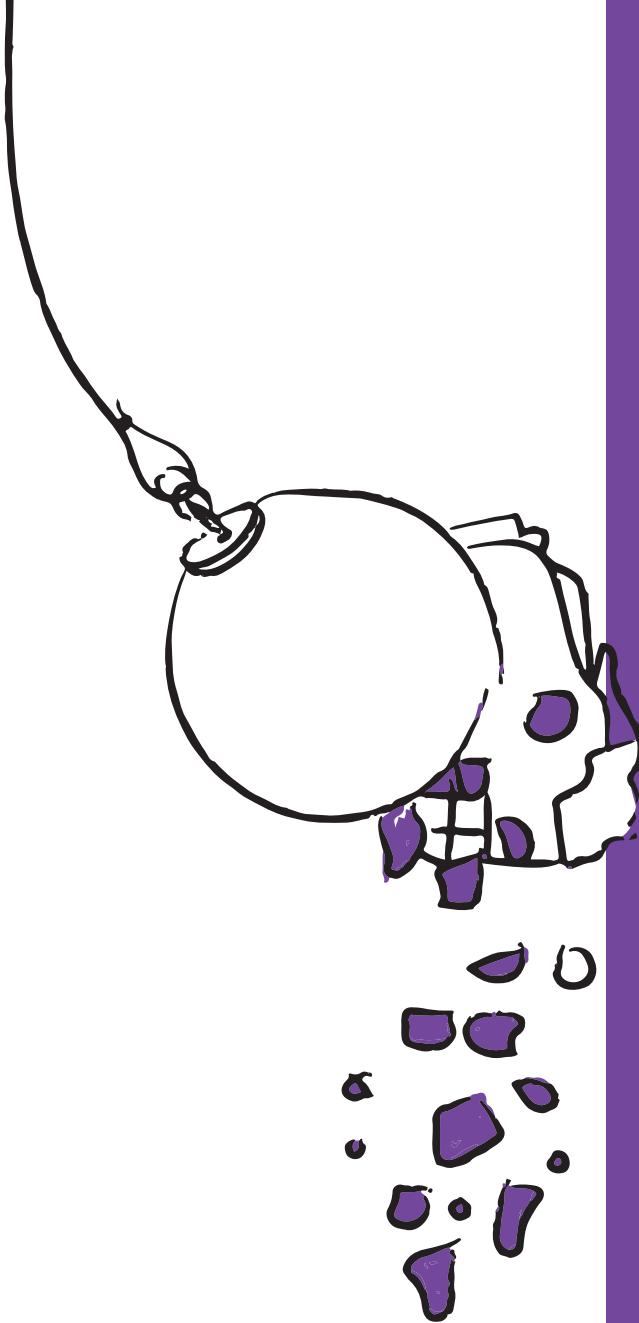
**OR IF THEY WERE,  
THEY DIDN'T WANT TO SEE.**

ADD  
SURPRISES  
TO YOUR  
SCHEDULE

# FUTURES THINKING LESSON#5

## TO DO TODAY

Spot some black elephants.  
Think about your chosen  
industry: what would its ideal  
future be in 10 years? Great—now  
what could happen that would  
overturn that completely?  
There could well be something big,  
scary and hard to acknowledge  
lurking on the horizon.



# IN SUMMARY

## **SWITCH PERSPECTIVE**

Look from the outside in to see the bigger picture

## **LOOK FURTHER**

Take a longer view of time to see deeper patterns of change

## **ANTICIPATE VALUES**

Understand people's shifting values to anticipate social change

## **SEE CONNECTIONS**

Connect more dots to see a richer view of change

## **PREDICT SURPRISES**

Take off the blinkers to reveal predictable surprises

**REIMAGINE  
WHAT'S  
POSSIBLE**

AND CHANGE  
THE WAY YOU  
DO THINGS  
TODAY

## SOME SUGGESTED FURTHER READS

Stewart Brand (2000), *The Clock of the Long Now: Time and Responsibility* (Basic Books)

Arie de Geus (1999), *The Living Company: Growth, Learning and Longevity in Business* (Nicholas Brealey Publishing)

Jennifer M. Gidley (2017), *The Future: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press)

Sohail Inayatullah (1999), *Six Pillars: Futures Thinking for Transforming* (Foresight: Vol. 10 Issue: 1)

Adam Kahane (2007), *Solving Tough Problems: An Open Way of Talking, Listening, and Creating New Realities* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers)

Richard Normann (2001), *Reframing Business: When the Map Changes the Landscape* (Wiley Publishing)

Paul Saffo (2007), *Six Rules for Effective Forecasting* (Harvard Business Review: July/August 2007)

John Urry (2016), *What is the Future?* (Polity Press)

In today's uncertain world where growth has slowed right down, it's getting harder and harder to see opportunities. Conventional approaches to growth are running out of road. We need a new way.

Kantar, is creating that new way.

We help clients – from Unilever to Ford, Lloyds Bank to L'Oréal – understand, anticipate and shape the future of their markets. So they can profit from change, not be blindsided by it.

We do it with FUTURES THINKING.

And now you can too.

Find out how at [www.kantar.com/consulting](http://www.kantar.com/consulting)

# KANTAR

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People are really, really, bad  
at thinking about the future.

We make bad predictions.  
We make decisions we live  
to regret. We get ambushed  
by things we should have  
seen coming.

Why does that happen?  
And how can you turn it  
around – starting right now?

Find out inside.

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