

WHITEPAPER

DEVELOPING LEADERS WITH "FUTURES CONSCIOUSNESS"

ENABLING BIG-PICTURE THINKERS WHO
ENVISAGE, LEAD & CONNECT WITH
ALTERNATIVE TOMORROWS



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A white paper from the Personal and Applied Learning centre at GIBS in in collaboration with Abundance at Work

At the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS), we take a personal, holistic and integrative approach to learning. The Personal and Applied Learning department is an area established within the business school to be the custodian of expertise, best practice, and thought leadership in the domains of personal change, transformation, and applied leadership practice. This department guides teams throughout the school on designing and delivering applied learning and leadership development in their programmes. The unit also delivers programmes on facilitation and coaching direct to market.

This white paper presents a useful perspective on the personal (internal and mindset component) and applied leadership development (intentional application) of an increasingly important “futures consciousness” mindset. It represents GIBS’s position that futures consciousness development requires an active personal leadership development focus as well as more widespread awareness of the subject itself.

Abstract

The tools of the futurist – foresight and forecasting, scenario planning, and systems thinking – help leaders across all spheres of society to scan the horizon for glimpses into the future and then to create possible scenarios that can inform long-term decision-making. As the challenges of creating a more just, sustainable, and mindful world accelerate, so too does the need for more creative, all-embracing, and relevant visions of the future. Today’s leaders can no longer afford to take a linear view of tomorrow; they must adopt a more human-orientated, futures-conscious approach.

With future-focused decision-making featuring strongly in the strategic intent of organisations and countries, leaders across all spheres of society are being asked to stretch themselves not only professionally, but personally. To address future complexity, leaders must orientate themselves into the unknown, while envisaging how the world might look for subsequent generations based on the decisions taken today.

Leader Development approaches such as executive coaching have important roles to play in developing the people-orientated self-awareness required of leaders. By engaging the mind’s capacity to imagine and create, and by challenging the personal bias and preconceived notions that derail the neuroplasticity leaders require to adapt quickly and skilfully, adept futures-conscious coaches and facilitators can help unlock the awareness and action that leaders need to steer organisations through a raft of alternative futures.

Key terminology:

- Forecasting – Using facts or experience to make a prediction.
- Foresight – Creating scenarios using data and trend analysis.
- Futures consciousness/futures intelligence – An ability to apply human creativity and perspicacity to the process of determining possible futures.

Keywords:



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consciousness

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development

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foresight

Executive
coaching

Alternative
futures

Introduction

If we accept that the world is becoming increasingly complex to navigate – not only because of future uncertainty, but due to the multiplicity of moving parts that comprise today’s tech-enabled, modern society – then it is also clear that knowing how to “manage, control and navigate the complexity” (Van der Merwe & Broadbent, 2022) of the system we’ve created requires a unique way of thinking, being, and interacting. This demands more than just the ability to predict the future (or at least attempt to). It necessitates building a mindful approach to decision-making and strategy, which recognises that the choices we make today have a direct impact on society in the future. This makes a futures orientation essential for leaders across the spectrum, from civil society and government to business. Paula Ylisassi (2023) – a Finland-based changemaker, coach, and entrepreneur – explained:

We need futures consciousness everywhere and every day in businesses: whenever we make choices or decisions, when we paint visions or create strategies, or when we set goals and targets for the future. Futures consciousness is needed to build truly sustainable businesses as you simply cannot operate in a sustainable way without being futures conscious. Businesses need to think what kind of legacy they leave for generations to come and what kind of businesses are overall possible in the future.

In the world of futures studies, an academic and scientific field that undertakes the systematic study of alternative as well as “possible, probably and preferable” (Chugh, 2021) scenarios for the future – these two abilities are known as *forecasting* and *foresight*. Although both concepts are subject to various definitions, broadly speaking *forecasting* can be explained as “a prediction based on objective facts or experience”, while *foresight*



is “the process of making predictions about the future, based on past and present data and the analysis of trends” (Dan-Şuteu & Giorgi, 2019, p. 131). Whereas forecasting ends once future scenarios have been identified, foresight “is a vision projected in a horizon of expectations, based essentially on analysts’ internal far sightedness, prudence or general mental preparedness, in order to anticipate uncertainties and prepare wisely for the future” (Dan-Şuteu & Giorgi, 2019, p. 131).

In short, foresight concerns the creation of a range of possible, alternative long-term futures, while forecasting drills into data to determine the direction of the future as a linear path based on past results or behaviour (Insight & Foresight, 2023). However, as executive educator and foresight researcher Alex Fergnani explained, it is naïve to assume that a trend extrapolated into the future through forecasting will actually continue into the long term. Forecasting might be useful to create a baseline around which to build other scenarios, but forecasting alone is insufficient. “What we need, above and beyond forecasts, is foresight” (Foresight Wisdom by Alex Fergnani, 2022).

“the process of making predictions about the future, based on past and present data and the analysis of trends”

Dan-Şuteu & Giorgi

Forgotten foresight?

The challenge facing businesses today is that the art of foresight is often overshadowed when times are good and profits are rolling in. As a result, many organisations are found wanting during crisis periods because they have neglected the development of this leadership muscle. In fact, most organisations start to think about the long-term future only when they have been disrupted (Phillips, 2023). However, in a world where disruption is becoming exceedingly commonplace, and where rare and unpredictable “black swan” (Taleb, 2007) events are now the norm, the ability to “anticipate disruption and thrive in a business unusual future” (Phillips, 2023) by applying foresight is increasingly becoming part of the leadership lexicon.

This is where an emerging field of study, known as futures consciousness – or futures intelligence – steps in. In a world in which trends analysis, scenario planning, and market forecasting have become central to any business’s drive to stay ahead of the competition and in sync with market-moving forces, it has become easy to focus on futures models, rather than developing the human, leadership capital required for effective foresight – abilities such as awareness, passion, capacity for deep change, and resilience. Futures consciousness draws human creativity and human perspicacity back into the process of envisaging a range of possible futures.

Future prepared or not?

According to a 2018 study by Rohrbeck and Kum, “vigilant” or adequately futures-prepared organisations were “33% more profitable than the average” and, from a growth perspective, outshone what the researchers dubbed “neurotic” (overprepared), “vulnerable” (underprepared), and “in-danger” (notably underprepared) firms by recording 75% growth in

market capitalisation over a seven-year period (2008–2015), “or 200% additional growth” (p. 113). The three categories of futures-unprepared companies also had “37% lower profitability when compared to the profitability of the vigilant firms and the in-danger firms realized a 44% lower profitability” (Rohrbeck & Kum, 2018, p. 113). These findings are illustrated in Figures 1 and 2.

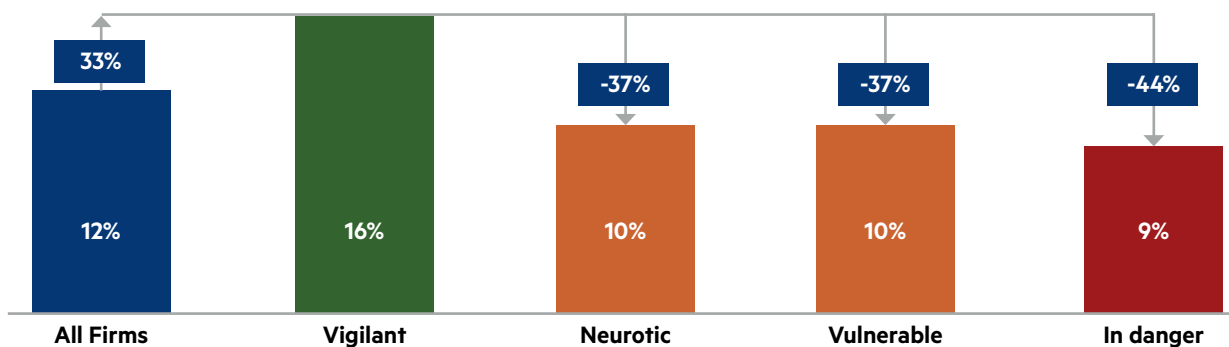


Figure 1: Future preparedness and average organisational profitability (Source: Rohrbeck & Kum, 2018, p. 113)

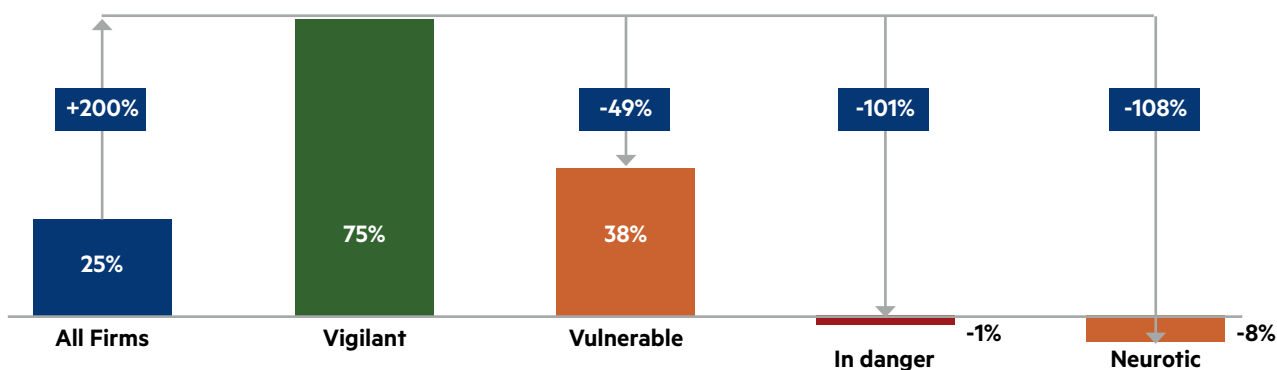


Figure 2: Future prepared firms outside average market cap growth (Source: Rohrbeck & Kum, 2018, p. 114)

While the Rohrbeck and Kum (2018) longitudinal study presents data that supports the need for corporate foresight and future preparedness, there are also a number of well-known examples of organisations that floundered due to a lack of foresight. These include Finnish telecommunications group Nokia, South Africa's state-owned power producer Eskom (BusinessTech, 2021), and well-used business school examples of how not to apply corporate foresight, such as Kodak, Blockbuster, and Toys R Us.

In the case of Nokia, the company banked on the accuracy of a trends analysis in the late 1990s, which foretold that GPS and MP3 functions were going to be the mobile phone differentiators in the future. By following this baseline

future, Nokia created a new series of phones and a new operating system, with built-in GPS and MP3. A decade later, this move proved short-sighted, as Apple and Samsung shook up the market by including a range of functions, over and above GPS and MP3, that gave birth to today's app market. Nokia was found left wanting. Between 2008 and 2010, Nokia's market share for mobile phones dropped from 52% to 32% (Foresight Wisdom by Alex Fergnani, 2022). Futurist Alex Fergnani explained: "This situation would have been avoided if Nokia [had] used some foresight ... they should have spread their resources across the different scenarios, not just the one they had forecasted as the baseline scenario" (Foresight Wisdom by Alex Fergnani, 2022).

Why do alternative futures matter?

For organisations and individuals looking to make sense of the range of possible future scenarios, using the futures cone (Conway, 2022) helps to unlock a range of possibilities. These include the seemingly impossible "preposterous", the "possible", the "plausible", the "projected future", the "probable" scenario, and the "preferable" outcome (Conway, 2022).

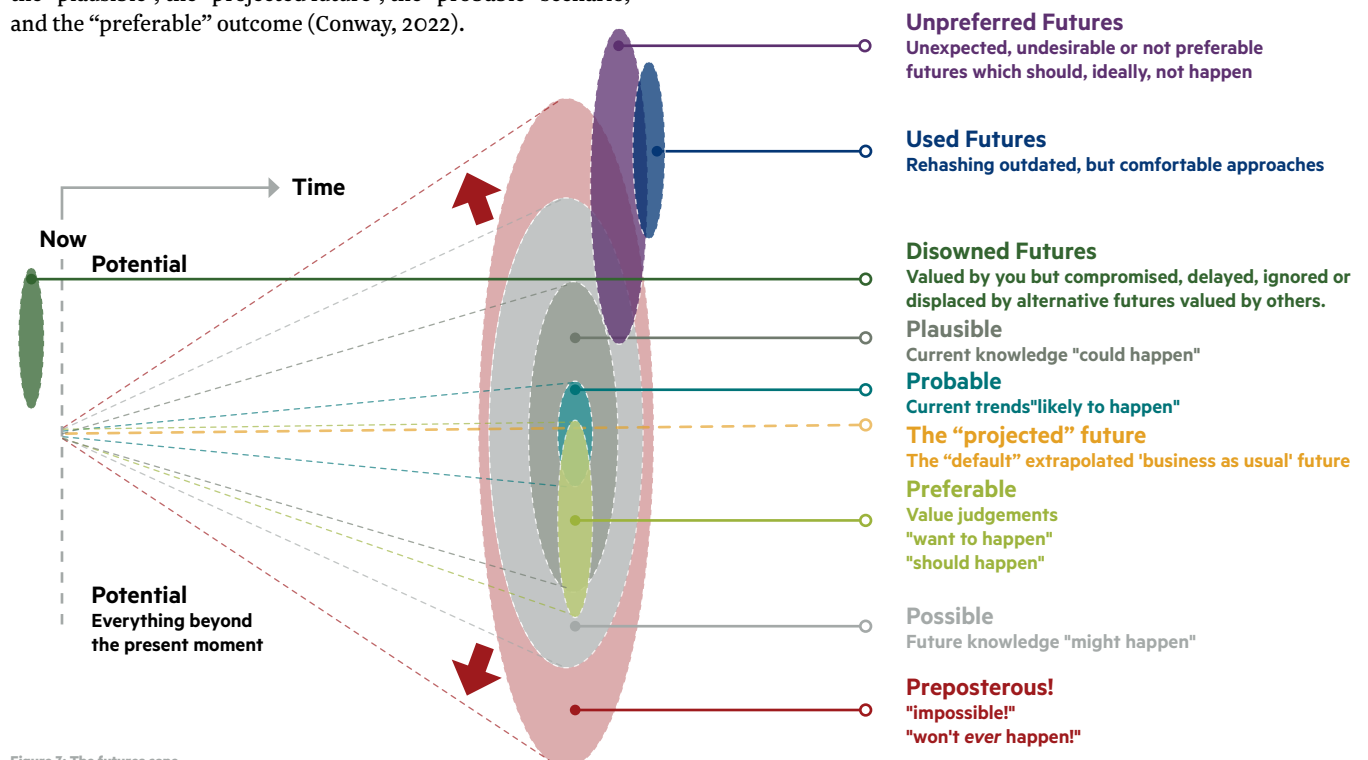


Figure 3: The futures cone (Source: Adapted from Conway, 2022; Voros, 2017)

The world of futures thinking also makes room for the possibility of “disowned futures”, which ignores the needs of future generations or diverse views and pushes on in the pursuit of present needs and wants (Phillips, 2023). A disowned future is a future that is valued by you, but has been compromised, delayed, ignored or displaced by alternative futures which are valued by others. Another option is the “used” future, a tomorrow that continues to doggedly apply “old age thinking for new age problems”, even in the face of rapid and widespread change and simply because these ways are already embedded in the system and our default way of responding (Phillips, 2023). As futures studies researcher Prof. Sohail Inayatullah points out, “used” future thinking is not aligned to the practices and methods we should be following to achieve a desired outcome (Phillips, 2023), yet many continue to apply old thinking to complex, new problems.

While defaulting to outdated “used” and “disowned futures” thinking models is a danger when it comes to advancing possible futures built around sustainability thinking, inclusion, and diversity, going the more radical route of the “preposterous” future (Conway, 2022) can also be challenging to some, given the scope of change that such transformational ideas might require. That said, some researchers believe alternative scenarios should be used to consider more radical future visions, using data analysis and scientific output, combined with creative storytelling. This was the subject of a recent journal article on ocean sustainability, which questioned whether

Basing future visions solely on current developments and underlying meanings prevents a necessary discussion of values and possibilities, inhibits novel ideas, creativity, and a diversity of alternatives, thus reinforcing the status quo. These tendencies can create an “imagination gap”, which limits the futures we are able to attain. (Lübker et al., 2023, p. 2)

Using an approach that was still grounded in scientific knowledge, but incorporated creative approaches as well, Lübker

et al. (2023) probed the value of creating “future visions that are both relevant and inspiring, emphasizing the plurality of possible futures and opening up transformative spaces” (p. 2). As the focus on achieving the targets set out in the United Nations’ (UN’s) Sustainable Development Goals intensifies, along with keener attention being paid to the ongoing global efforts around personal empowerment, gender equity, diversity, and inclusion (UN Women, 2019), leaders in business and society must also enhance how they envisage more radical scenarios using transformational futures thinking (TFSX, 2023). According to Dr Isabel Rimanoczy (2020), conceptualising creative solutions that consider the health of the environment and society is an important step towards envisaging a better, more connected tomorrow. “Our unsustainable planet requires innovation in all areas, which calls for unleashing creative thinking. Intuitive knowing, creativity, and alternate ways of knowing need to be accepted and promoted for a better balance of our human capacities” (Rimanoczy & Klingenberg, 2021, p. 62).

Even in an established industry, such as car manufacturing, adopting this sort of transformational futures outlook could be the difference between thinking in terms of personalising vehicles to manufacturing electric, self-driving pods to a more fundamental shift towards selling mobility through subscriptions, and not transportation alone (TFSX, 2023). With this sort of paradigm shift, the possibilities expand and the opportunity space opens up.

To get to the point where creative and transformational scenarios that consider the long-term sustainable impact on society have a place at the table, and a legitimate chance of being actioned, it is clear that a mindset shift is required. There are already indications of this evolution in thinking taking place in the world of business education, as the likes of the UN’s Principles for Responsible Management Education embrace sustainable and responsible practices that adopt a long-term and sustainable view of the future (Librizzi, 2019; Trompenaars & Woolliams, 2010).

Prof. Inayatullah shared:

**We put out the new image and eventually it becomes reality. Or it can become reality, it doesn't have to...
Our role as futurists is, of course, to go too far ahead.
To push them and so then maybe they accept the adaptive change. (TFSX, 2023)**

What is futures consciousness?



While the data and trends that inform forecasting and strategic thinking typically have a time frame of about five years, foresight and futures intelligence is an altogether longer-term exploration, which can reach up to 50 years into the future. While “forecasting becomes less accurate the more unpredictable our modern world becomes” (Phillips, 2023), futures intelligence is less concerned with unveiling a single, accurate predication and is more about anticipating the flavour of the future.

Futurists and futures-conscious leaders take comfort in the fact that the future cannot be predicted with certainty; but it is possible to prepare the way by exploring several alternative tomorrows. Therefore, futures consciousness is premised on “challenging assumptions and asking better questions. It is about seeing the world differently, beyond our own worldviews” (Phillips, 2023) and it is clearly focused on the human and technological experience of future generations, future consumers, and future leaders. Keeping a chair open at the boardroom table to represent current and future stakeholders who are not physically present, is just one impactful way to keep the needs and wants of future generations front of mind (Phillips, 2023). This approach underscores the guardianship role current leaders have in envisaging and creating a better future.

The five components of futures consciousness

True futures consciousness is about more than grand token gestures and paying lip service to listening. To truly embed this level of human awareness of the future, Ahvenharju et al. (2018) set out to determine the “cognitive, emotional and motivational processes” (p. 2) that help to build futures consciousness in individuals and organisations. The five dimensions they determined were:



Time perspective

The simultaneous understanding an entity has regarding the past, present, and future, and the extent to which possible futures can be envisaged;



Agency beliefs

The trust individuals or entities have in their ability to influence future events and achieve the future they envisage;



Openness to alternatives

The degree to which the view of the future is one of openness and alternative realities;



Systems perception

The understanding of how systems operate and interact within themselves and with others; and



Concern for others

The ability to think beyond the self or the entity and care “about the future of other people beyond themselves” (Ahvenharju et al., 2021, p. 3; Lalot et al., 2021).

The characteristics and behaviours associated with the five dimensions are highlighted in Figure 4.



Figure 4: The abilities and aptitudes behind the five dimensions of futures consciousness (Source: Ahvenharju et al., 2018, 2021; Phillips & Cross, 2023)

If individuals were to practise these five dimensions, it would support more sustainable and future-orientated decision-making in both their personal and professional lives (Ylisassi, 2023). Therefore, it is unsurprising that the five dimensions have been used as the basis for a psychometric futures consciousness scale to better understand how the five dimensions operate in relation to one another and how they manifest in individuals' behaviour

(Ahvenharju et al., 2021). Embedding futures intelligence in leaders across the social, business, and political spectrum through the application of “tools, techniques, methodologies, skillsets, mindsets and heartsets” helps those in a position of influence and leadership to “anticipate different alternative futures, imagine our preferred future and create the actions that turn our preferred future into reality” (Phillips, 2023).

Measuring (and developing) your futures credentials

Hard as it is to believe, about 75% of global organisations are unprepared for the degree of change impacting them and their industries (Woeffray & Carvalho, 2023). In fact, almost 40% of chief executive officers have little faith that their own companies will be economically robust going into the next decade (Woeffray & Carvalho, 2023). As a result, the likes of the World Economic Forum believe that foresight, futures thinking, analysing the bigger picture, and seeing the future potential of ideas and technologies are essential for organisations, management teams and, of course, individuals in general (Woeffray & Carvalho, 2023). Applying the level of forward-thinking required to navigate the future demands, necessitates both a broad understanding of the way the world works and the trends and indicators of which to take note, alongside the development of personal traits that attune individuals to their role in advancing an adaptive and inclusive tomorrow.

For organisations and industries, the Emerging Issues Analysis method developed by futurist Graham Molitor is an effective way of identifying new trends or potential issues at an early stage, and then plotting their potential development and maturation over time (Dator, 2018).

Some of these early signals may develop into full-fledged trends and some might surprise in the trajectory they take, but by scanning the environment and the industry universe, organisations can help to plot possible opportunities – no matter how weak or obscure – and factor in responses ahead of the curve (Dator, 2018).

Individuals can also assess their level of futures intelligence and apply the futures consciousness scale (Ahvenharju et al., 2021) by using the FC test tool, a psychometric instrument first published in 2019 and updated as recently as 2021 (Futures Consciousness Profile Database, n.d.). The tool has been shown to be a useful predictor of a respondent's "propensity to engage in future-orientated behaviour", as well as an indicator of "strengths and weaknesses across the five dimensions of time perspective, agency beliefs, openness to alternatives, systems perception, and concern for others", and as a means of measuring progress made over time and when participants have taken part in a workshop or received futures coaching or education (Lalot et al., 2021, p. 108). Other tools include the 20-item futures conscious test, the personal survey available on the University of Turku's website, and the suite of tools developed by e-learning platform Articulate 360.

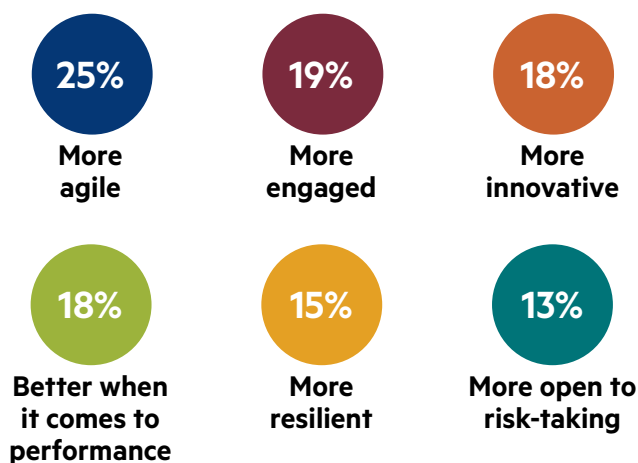
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Why do we need future-orientated leaders?

Being in sync with the world and its changing needs has long been an aspect of impactful leadership executives, organisations, and coaching professionals have emphasised. A conscious outlook can be fostered via the 15 commitments of conscious leadership – from taking responsibility to fostering curiosity and communicating directly and with candour (Conscious Leadership Group, 2023). However, today’s leaders require more than awareness, sustainable intentions, and intuition. Specifically, they must become comfortable making decisions that will have ripple effects through time; and they must be flexible enough to adapt their strategy when needed, while always keeping their preferred future clearly in their sights.

A futures orientation, supported by the development of futures consciousness has a measurable effect on the impact of leaders, but it is a skill that can enhance the experience of every organisation and individual. According to a 2022 report by human research firm BetterUp, teams led by futures-conscious leaders are:



In addition, “when individuals effectively tap into their future-minded leadership, there are positive shifts in anxiety and depression symptoms. Future-minded leaders report 34% less anxiety and 35% less depression [emphasis added]” (BetterUp, 2022, p. 16). Furthermore, leaders with futures consciousness skills were reported to be 21% more productive (BetterUp, 2022, p. 19). While all human beings have an innate ability to think and plan for the future, developing the muscle to translate this into effective decision-making and strategic intent requires time, attention, and learning.

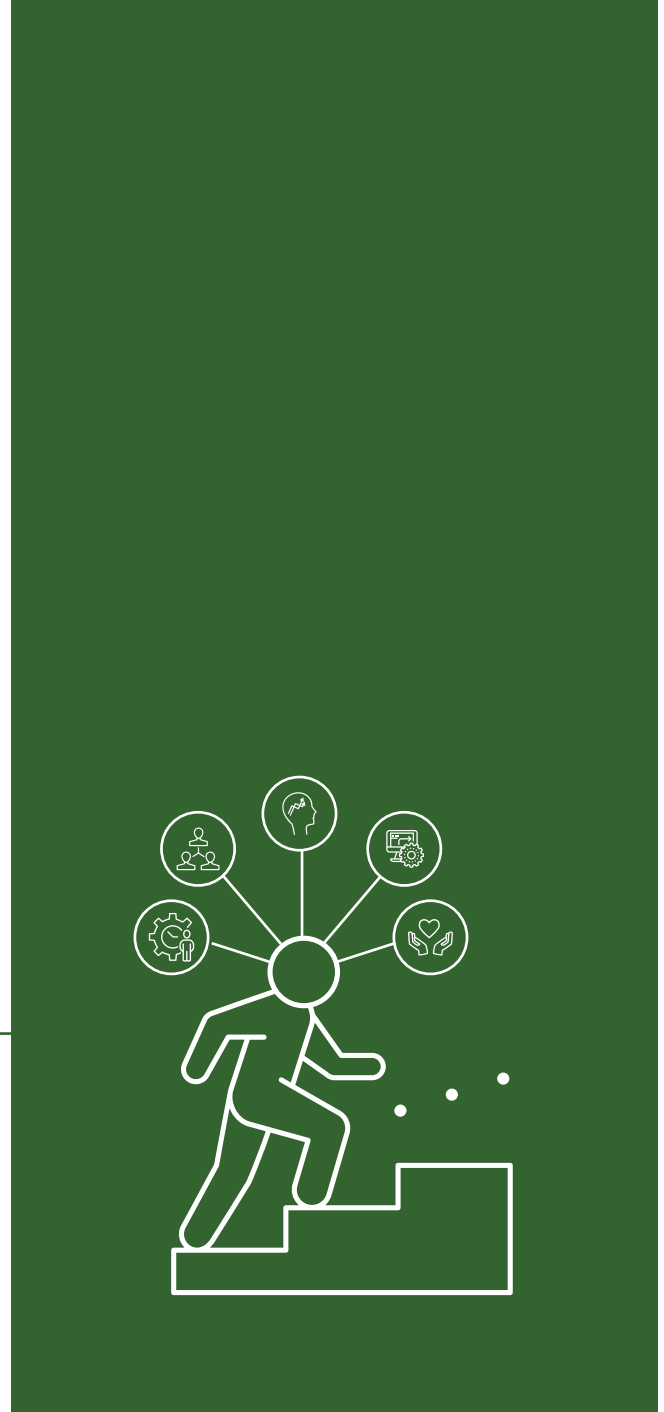
A survey of more than 1 500 workers in the United States showed that 82% showed “significant room for improvement in at least one area of future-minded leadership skills” (BetterUp, 2022, p. 26). The research found that while futures thinking was more developed in industries, such as professional services, manufacturing, and healthcare, the need for this skill spanned sectors and business of all sizes (BetterUp, 2022).

Fortunately, fostering a futures-conscious outlook and becoming comfortable with and hopeful about a fast-changing tomorrow can be developed. This is where executive coaching and leadership development play a crucial role.

Developing leaders with futures intelligence

Corporate foresight and ensuring a pipeline of leaders capable of preparing and anticipating future events have become an increasingly hot topic since the worldwide disruptions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the supply chain challenges of 2021, and the consumer crunch that followed and continues to be associated with high inflation and rising interest rates (Vindex International, 2023). Of course, corporate foresight is not a new notion, with the likes of Shell using futures scenario planning since the 1970s and Disney applying a futures-focused growth strategy since 2021 (Fergnani et al., 2020). However, as disruption becomes more widespread and with seismic changes disrupting carefully laid out strategies, the people guiding organisations through an uncertain landscape have become crucial to organisational success.

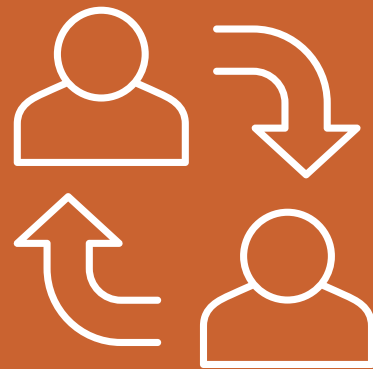
Many organisations today are using foresight methods, such as scanning the environment, outlining various future scenarios, and stress-testing or reconfiguring existing plans in line with new trends and developments (Fergnani et al., 2020). Although valuable, these actions fall squarely into the realm of forecasting, rather than foresight. The missing ingredient needed to move into full-fledged foresight is the futures consciousness guidance and futures intelligence of individuals and leaders with the tools



to understand the many alternative tomorrows on offer and to shape these futures in spite of headwinds and roadblocks (BetterUp, 2022).

As Prof. Inayatullah wrote: “In times of dramatic change, we don’t simply need better maps of the changing world, we need special powers or super powers to avoid the futures we don’t want and create the futures we do” (Inayatullah, 2019). Future-orientated leadership is one of these superpowers, but what does this brand of leading look like and how can leadership development processes like coaching help to develop these capabilities?

Coaching and futures consciousness



There are several well developed processes to work with transforming mindset, such as coaching, which is inherently about shifting perspective in order to question assumptions and expand possibilities. Coaching is a thinking relationship in which qualified coaches partner with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that enables coachees to maximise their personal and professional potential and generate new perspectives (Kahn, 2011, Rock & Page, 2009). An effective and proven means of leveraging leadership capabilities, coaching has an important role to play in optimising potential and driving performance aligned to an organisation's talent processes. Consequently, it is hardly surprising that coaching has been used very effectively in leadership and management development, either alone or in combination with classroom teaching and experiential processes (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Baron & Morin, 2009).

Coaches are fellow thinking and personal change partners. These professionals are qualified and experienced in facilitating applied personal change and transformation relevant to coachees. Coaches support personal insight, change, and application in context, with the aim of unlocking tangible results that matter to individuals and their organisations. Systems coaches are experts at facilitating this process within organisational systems or larger social systems (Boyatzis et al., 2006; Dyllick, 2015; Kahn, 2011).

The process is based on deeply developed skills of listening, questioning, supporting and challenging outdated habits, and limiting beliefs in the holistic context of an individual's life and context. The GROW model (Whitmore, 1992) describes that orientation coaching comprises Goals, Reality, Options, and a Way forward. GIBS has expanded this acronym to V-GROWTH, with the addition of V for Vision and TH to include Try and Hone,

with the latter bringing in the incremental experimentation approach necessary to develop one's behaviour and mindset.

Coaching is designed to foster the curiosity and agency for change, while unlocking the drive and agency that makes change happen. In leadership development, a coach is able to help leaders develop new ways of thinking, so they can better analyse and understand their current style and thinking patterns. This enables individuals to develop deeper insights into the process of navigating change and shifting paradigms by starting with the internal change process of changing one's own mind (Kets de Vries et al., 2010; Rock & Page, 2009). This is a powerful approach that supports leaders in their quest to better leverage their capabilities in support of outcomes that matter. Coaching has the potential to close the gap between futures thinking at a corporate level and individual futures intelligence capacity in the leadership sphere, holding out that change begins with the self (and therefore the leaders themselves).

Therefore, the link to the development of futures consciousness seems intuitive, as this too requires leveraging awareness, exposure to new perspectives and alternatives, concern for others and systems, and the ability to drive agency in influencing change. Futures consciousness uses tools like curiosity and powerful questioning to shift time perspective, thereby exploiting the mind's incredible capacity for imagination and creativity. Coaching uses deep listening and supportive challenges to tap into the purpose, values, meaning, and emotional drivers that generate the expansion of awareness and intentional change both externally and at the level of internal consciousness.

Using coaching to develop futures capabilities



In programmes like GIBS's The Future-Ready Executive, skilled facilitators take executives through a collaborative and experiential workshop in which practical insights into skills and futures world views are discussed and practised. Working with a professional coach or facilitator helps leaders to develop their abilities in a safe and secure place. These collaborative processes facilitates awareness, thinking and reflection around decision-making, actions taken, and life-long learning, with the ultimate goal of helping the individual to achieve both personal and organisational goals (Bouwer et al...). They do this do this using skills of questioning, feedback, listening and challenging. In the context of developing mindsets of sustainability and futures-orientation, these processes help leaders to align their existing leadership skills with a futures-conscious ability. Through a participant-led process, coaching allows individuals to share different perspectives, to be vulnerable and honest, and to step back from the day-to-day challenges that absorb their thinking. A professional coach can also provide tailored support and guidance by acting as "a reliable sounding board to explore ideas

and uncover blind spots and biases in our thinking" (BetterUp, 2022, p. 50). Moreover, coaching might challenge leaders to consider a "what if" outcome to their range of possibilities as a way of holding the space for additional and unexpected developments; to actively seek new ideas and diverse thinking in their teams to guard against personal bias; to actively find time to reflect rather than seeking comfort in busy-ness; and to build future-focused discussions into the corporate culture through ongoing discussions and collaboration (BetterUp, 2022).

Underpinning these broad approaches are tangible psychological concepts, which the coach and leader work on together to create comfort in the unknown and to align thinking with the five dimensions of futures consciousness (refer to Table 1). By breaking down behaviours that can be construed as futures-resistant, coach and coachee can break down the essentials of leadership and rebuild them to support a new context. While the tenets of coaching remain the same, this requires coaches to be as – if not more – adaptable than their clients and open to refocusing coaching efforts that support a future-orientated mindset.

Futures-conscious skills development in line with the five dimensions and considering the role of coaching support at each level



Time perspective



Psychological concepts

- Future orientation
- Awareness of future consequences



Skills development focus

- Long-term thinking
- Planning
- Social development



Coaching orientation

- Awareness of outdated current models and new future possibilities
- Breaking vision and goals into options, plans, experiments, and application to realise change



Coaching questions

- If you were to picture yourself in this imagined future, how would you change your decisions?
- How would you feel that is different from how you feel now?
- When you think about your orientation to the future scenario and your current reality, why do you think there are significant differences in how you would act?



Agency beliefs



Psychological concepts

- Self-efficacy
- Locus of control
- Optimism



Skills development focus

- Confidence in one's ability to act and take action
- Ability to identify action areas
- Self-belief in capacity to affect change and influence outcomes



Coaching orientation

- Expanding agency and potential, discovering new capacities and new identities that better suit the imagined future



Coaching questions

- Can you think of a time in the past when you were facing a situation over which you felt you had little or no control, but you acted anyway and the end result was positive?
- How might you use that insight to influence how you feel about your own agency in this future scenario?



Openness to alternatives



Psychological concepts

- Openness to experiences
- Critical thinking



Skills development focus

- Developing comfort in a plurality of possible outcomes and futures
- Critical thinking and evaluation based on questioning



Coaching orientation

- Gently challenging the status quo, taken-for-granted thinking, and limiting beliefs
- Generating new, sometimes unimagined possibilities



Coaching questions

- We've discussed your perspective in this scenario. Let's roleplay another alternative. Picture yourself as another of the key stakeholders. What would their perspective be? What might she say?



Systems perception



Psychological concepts

- Systems thinking
- Appreciation of the self as part of nature and the environment



Skills development focus

- Understanding linkages and interconnectedness, and how they impact complexity and causality



Coaching orientation

- Works with personal awareness of paradoxical and coexisting parts of the self
- Similarly works with the multiplicity of interconnecting parts in a larger system, develops empathy and perspective for parts of the system without a voice



Coaching questions

- How many people can you think of who probably played a role in you ultimately getting to enjoy your cup of coffee this morning? And who else? And who else? Then map the connections between those players and their part in the system.



Concern for others



Psychological concepts

- Social focus
- Human and nature orientation



Skills development focus

- Openness to compromise in the interests of others and society
- Recognition of the importance and interconnectedness of all people



Coaching orientation

- Encourages feedback and the appreciation of different perspectives for understanding and for one's learning
- Develops empathy and awareness of the diversity of people and therefore greater compassion and respect for others



Coaching questions

- Write a letter to one of your descendants three generations from now. Tell them what you wish for them and what you're concerned about for their future.

Table 1: Futures-conscious skills development in line with the five dimensions and considering the role of coaching support at each level

Source: Adapted from Ahvenharju et al. (2021, p. 2)



The Sustainability Mindset Indicator as a mechanism for shifting human consciousness

Given what we understand futures consciousness to be and the realisation that the complex challenges facing the world today require a greater ability to shift the mental models and thinking approaches, it is clear that the five dimensions of futures consciousness - time perspective; agency beliefs; openness to alternatives; systems perspective and concern for others - cannot be achieved without supporting the evolution of human consciousness. Developing mindset and consciousness can often benefit from a measure or indicator that raises insight about

an individual current capability and therefore illustrates a development pathway that can be used in self-development or coaching. Using the Sustainability Mindset Indicator (SMI) as an example of a guide to the mindset shifts required for humans to expand their consciousness (Rimanoczy, 2019; Rimanoczy & Klingenberg, 2021), it is evident that the 12 SMI principles have a strong future orientation (see Table 2) that incorporates systems thinking and require a deep knowledge of the neuroscience behind human development.

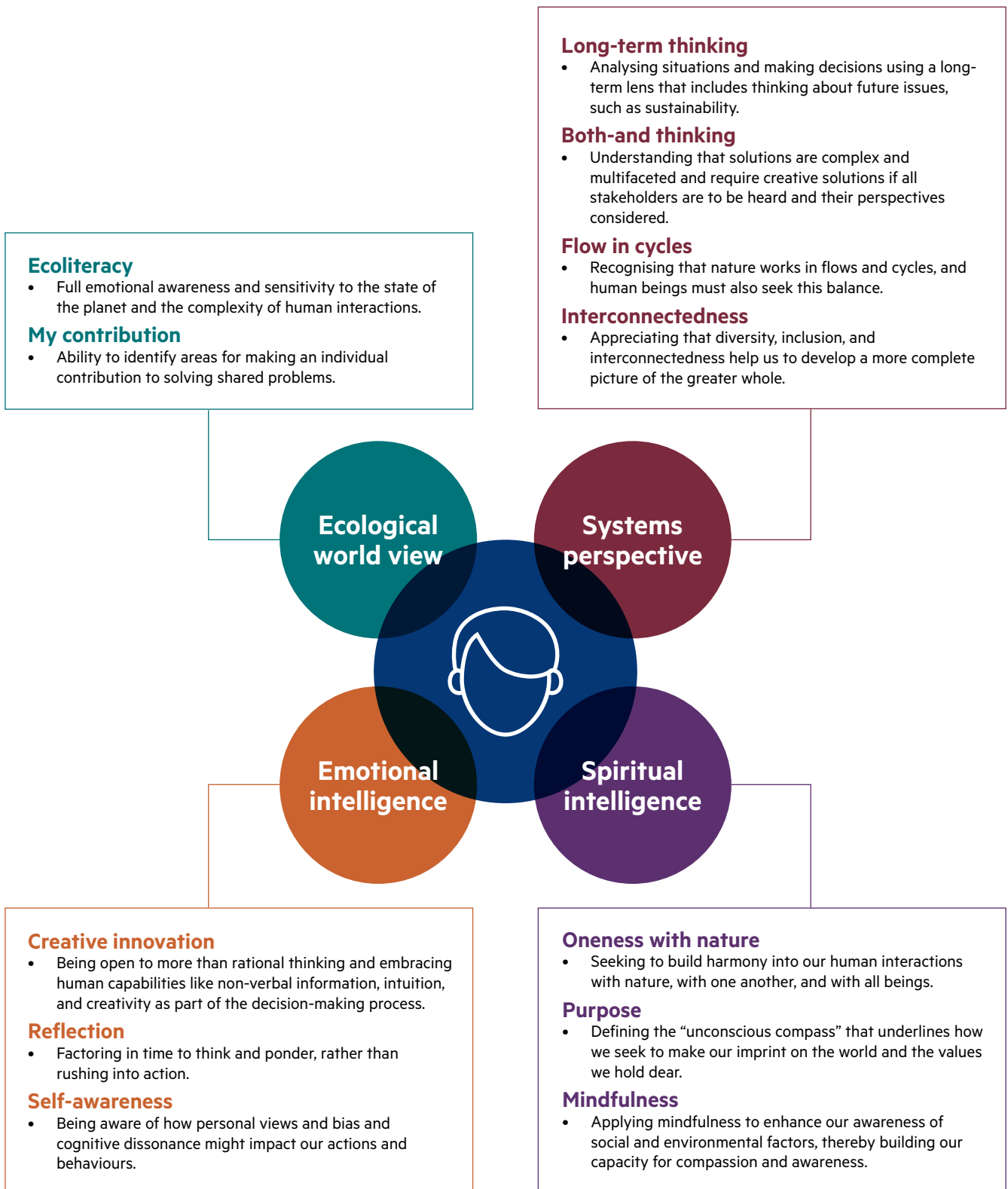


Table 2: The Sustainability Mindset Indicator principles
 Source: Rimanoczy (2019); Rimanoczy and Klingenberg (2021, pp. 47-48)

The SMI principles highlight specific areas for human growth and personal development. These include being aware and responsive to one's surroundings (mindfulness and reflection) and achieving a state characterised by sensation, emotion, and thought, where the mind of the conscious individual is aligned to personal, social, environmental, and spiritual aspects (self-awareness, interconnectedness, and ecoliteracy) (Rimanoczy & Klingenberg, 2021). Without this level of self-insight and awareness, individuals and specifically leaders cannot hope to successfully navigate current challenges; let alone envisage solutions capable of reshaping the future.

However, the neuroplasticity required to, as author Yuval Noah Harari put it, “create entirely new entities in the universe” (Wirjawan, 2022) requires learning and experience to develop the brain's ability to adapt, rather than just repeating past activities and behaviours based on the brain's comfort with less demanding and automated responses (Bellen, 2020). This is a key reminder that while modern human beings live in a complex social system and interconnected world, the human brain has yet to shake off its instinctive, primitive beginnings. As psychoanalyst and neuropsychologist Mark Solms noted:

The adaptation in the brain, the evolutionary, anatomical, physiological difference between our brains and chimpanzees' brains, brains of other primates, is really not that big. It's a small adjustment in the connectivity of what's called prefrontal cortex, which seems to have given rise to this ability to think abstractly.... Of course, we rightly are very preoccupied by what makes us unique, and we do have every reason to be very proud as a species of these remarkable capacities ... but we mustn't forget that with the evolution of this extra little bit of prefrontal cortical connectivity, that didn't remove everything that's under the cortex. So, the subcortical and, in particular, the limbic and brainstem arousal systems which underpin our emotional life, which underpin both our best and our worst emotional tendencies, those are not that different from our primate cousins. So, while we celebrate our uniquely human intellectual capacities, we have to remember they float on top of this sort of ocean of animalistic tendencies. (Wirjawan, 2022)

Fortunately, it is possible to better understand emotional triggers and in-built default responses by building self-awareness, experimenting with new ideas and new knowledge, and focusing on develop “ecoliteracy” through reflection and empathy. Professional coaching is one avenue that has proved successful in challenging thinking habits and habits of action (O'Connor & Lages, 2019) through goal-setting, understanding the brain's defaults, and tempering our default emotional brain with logic and reflection. By helping to focus the mind on an individual's personal strengths and habits of thinking, it becomes easier for an individual to identify possible derailers and learn from others how to handle complex challenges that are firmly outside of the usual comfort zone.



Conclusion

The voyage into the unknown does not begin with trend analysis and forecasting future scenarios, but rather with developing the individual – often the most demanding journey of all. As a profession that straddles the science of neuropsychology, reflective practice, self-insight, learning and human development, as well as self-actualisation and the process of envisaging the future, executive coaching remains an important tool in driving positive behavioural changes in individuals and teams (Passmore & Evans-Krimme, 2021).

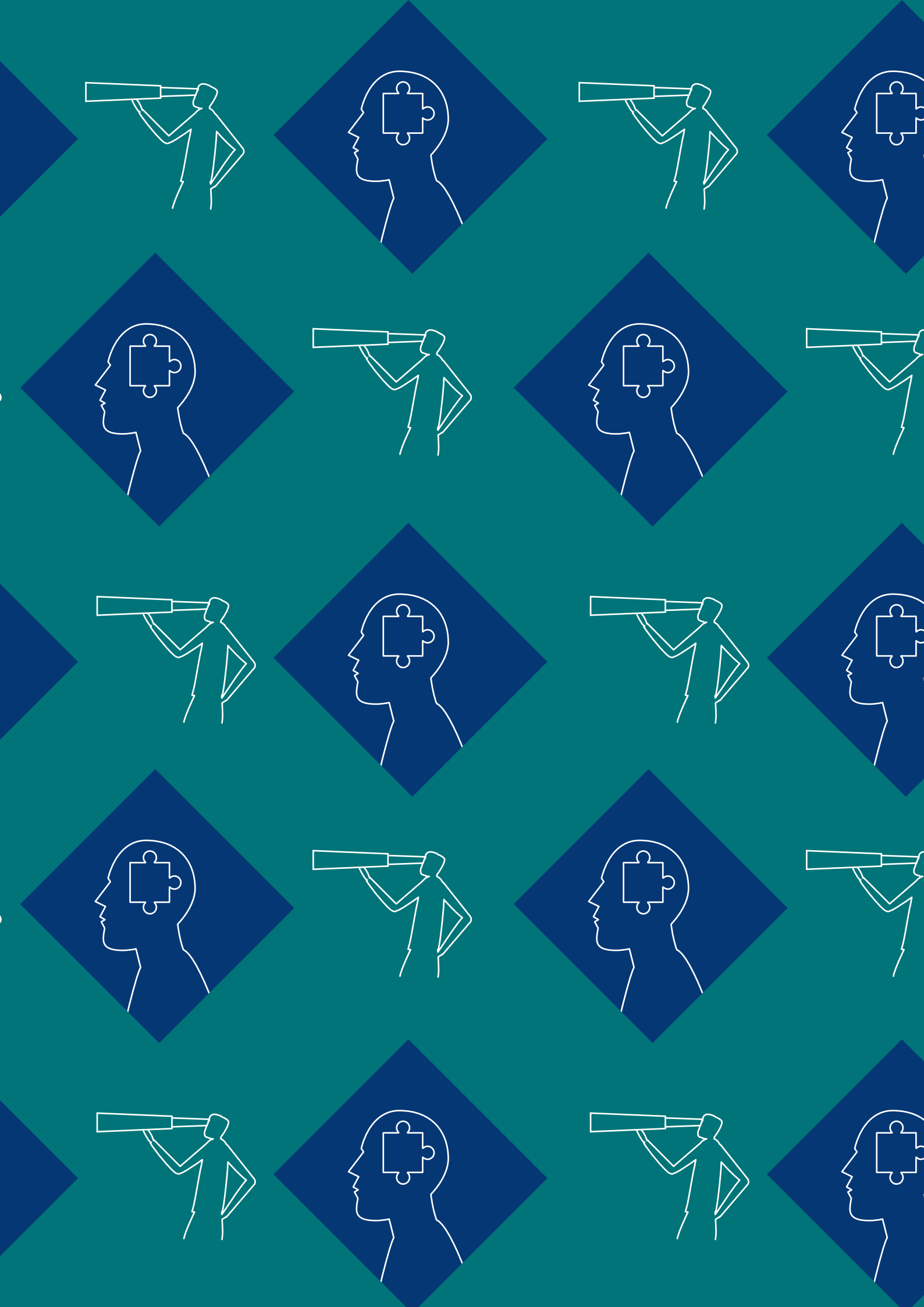
Whether its through self-reflection, a leadership development programme or a coaching process, self-knowledge is the critical leadership starting point when it comes to being able to ebb and flow with the many changes currently impacting the world and societies (Van der Merwe & Broadbent, 2022), in large part because it is the bedrock on which true futures consciousness is built. Without a sustainable mindset – such as that highlighted in Dr Rimanoczy's SMI framework – that considers the interplay of humans with each other, with all beings, and with nature, and the complex social systems in which we live, being able to envisage possible futures will remain trapped in an outdated thinking model. Reaching out into the realms of creativity required to see radical futures scenarios would be equally impossible.

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