

# Why and How to Use Narratives for Stakeholder Engagements?



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# 1 INTRODUCTION

This policy brief presents a set of four radical narratives embedded in the future world of digital and green transformation. These narratives of futures hybrid workers reflect a new paradigm of work as it emerges based on our research findings. We highlight the role, importance and potential of narratives and the narrative foresight niche of futures studies. We pay special attention to the “why and how” of communicating narratives to stakeholders. Our narratives are meant to inspire imagination and open vistas to possible futures of worklife.

For this purpose, we suggest testing and assessing narratives as reflected to a stakeholder’s own activities, paying attention to possible timelines as well. In addition, elaboration of narratives through the process of branching them into episodes is proposed as a useful way of using and deepening the narratives. Finally, a few more recommendations are provided for benefiting from the use of narrative foresight in strategy and innovation processes, as well as from hybrid work potential in society at large.

The context for constructing the narratives and elaborating them is within the T-winning Spaces 2035 project ‘Winning spatial solutions for future work, enabling the double twin transition of digital/green and virtual/physical transforming our societies by 2035’, a three-year project funded by the EUNext Generation and Research Council of Finland, coordinated by Aalto University in partnership with University of Turku and University of Tampere.

The aim of this project is to increase understanding about the environmental and social impacts and challenges of digital remote work, and provide winning spatial solutions and strategy, policy and management recommendations for different types of organisations and individuals to empower them to support the double twin transition of digital/green and virtual/physical.<sup>1</sup>

The project applied futures studies methods in a way that created added value for the research topics under study. Digital spaces enabling future sustainable workspaces within the twin transition of green and digital as well as within the twin interplay between physical and virtual places were tackled via probing different emerging avenues for digital future work, and translating anticipation knowledge into actionable insights

for decision-makers and stakeholders. Research was closely intertwined with planning and conducting interactive and participatory Futures Cliniques. Other key foresight methods used were horizon scanning, Delphi technique, CLA (Causal Layered Analysis), scenario narratives (and its methodological developments as branching-into-episodes) as well as paradox probing as a novel method for futures studies (Heinonen et al. 2025; Heinonen & Viitamäki 2025; Heinonen, Virmajoki & Viitamäki).

After this introduction, we discuss the special genre of narratives and narrative foresight within futures studies, with special focus on the radical futures approach to narratives in Chapter 2. Then, Chapter 3 presents the new paradigm of futures of work and how our narratives were constructed and tentatively tested in a stakeholder session. Chapter 4 describes the narratives and invites the readers to elaborate them. To conclude, Chapter 5 provides recommendations for using, testing and elaborating narratives and approaching futures organising of hybrid work.

This Policy Brief demonstrates how narratives of hybrid work can be used to illustrate and inspire futures imagination. Narratives can be evaluated by their impacts for companies – and elaborated in stakeholder engagements.

This can happen, for example, by adding new episodes to the narratives and by identifying novel business ideas or calls for action.

<sup>1</sup> Key deliverables from the Work Package 1 of this T-winning Spaces 2035 project are twofold: First, explorative scenario narratives of the future modes for remote working (D1.1), presented in FFRC eBook 4/2025 (Di Berardo et al. 2025). Second, a future timeline of impacts on work settings including content, causal, temporal, and stakeholder components indicating the potential challenges needing further attention and accordingly providing recommendations (D2.1), this Policy Brief being Deliverable 2.1. Numerous other project reports and publications are freely available at the project website at Aalto University: <https://t-winning-spaces2035.com/publications-deliverables> and at FFRC, University of Turku: <http://ty.fi/tws2035>.

## 2 NARRATIVE FORESIGHT

**The use of narratives is related to storytelling which is the oldest way of communication. Human beings are essentially story-tellers (Fisher 1984; Burnam-Fink 2015) and the power of stories is compelling.<sup>2</sup>**

Narratives of futures are a sub-type of narratives, expressing a distinct feature of future-oriented temporality (Zimmer & Minkinen 2024). Narrative foresight is a niche of futures studies, already decades old. Narrative foresight applies storytelling techniques and processes to explore future possibilities and engage with policy-makers. This special field of 'narrative foresight' (Milosevic & Inayatullah 2015) conveys various stories that individuals, organisations, states and civilizations tell themselves about the future.

The role of narratives is to transform the current story to one supporting a preferred future. (Milosevic & Inayatullah 2015). This view applies to our construction of narratives, since it is our intention to elaborate the narratives dynamically to represent desirable futures in our project. The narratives are told to be used. They are very near the art genre of drama (Jarva 2014) and can be claimed to be a central element for futures literacy (Liveley et al. 2021). In the T-winning Spaces 2035 project, narratives are used as strategic tools to help organisations make sense of complexity and uncertainties as well as to support anticipatory governance by encouraging stakeholders<sup>3</sup> envision alternative futures.

Narratives are powerful tools for communication, inspiration, sense-making, strategising, innovating, and even manipulation. Narrative process consists of actors' portraits + storyline texts to influence policy debates.<sup>4</sup> Milojevic & Inayatullah (2015) describe narrative foresight as perceiving reality as constantly negotiated by stakeholders. According to them, through challenging assumptions and interests in the spirit of interpretive, critical and post-structural futures studies, the ultimate aim is to enrich the worldview of the users of narratives (stakeholders).

Narratives make sense of the futures of work opening up different vistas for actors set in different spatial and temporal conditions and contexts. The narratives are used as strategic tools for sense-making of complexity

and to contribute to anticipatory governance in companies and organisations. Within the fast-changing societal panorama (VUCA world and socio-technical transformation) there is a growing need for science communication to tackle complexities. There should be dramatic suspension and tension in narratives. In our narratives, we have one paradox looming in each narrative and at least one major event as a black swan, disruption or turning point which directs the behaviour of the actor after the event.

Our use of narratives crystallises the use of collective intelligence. Collective intelligence is an emergent property from the synergies among: data-information-knowledge; software-hardware; and individuals (those with new insights as well as recognised authorities) that continually learns from feedback to produce just-in-time knowledge for better decisions than these three elements acting alone (see Glenn 2009). Narratives are made of collective intelligence but the construction and use of narratives can also be seen as group learning.

The narrative process combines actors' portraits with storyline texts in order to influence policy debates. By constructing alternative futures of work, narratives help make sense of complex developments, offering diverse perspectives for actors situated in varying spatial and temporal contexts. This method allows exploration of multiple possible trajectories of change.

By bringing radical elements to the narratives, their impact is stronger. On the other hand, radical narratives extend the scope and mood of narratives towards more uncertain and unexpected territory. Therein, 'hidden gems' i.e. possible solutions ideas, innovations, policies can be distinguished that otherwise would go unnoticed.

By radical we mean fundamentally different behaviour and events than in business-as-usual projections. Radical future depicts a future that has been fundamentally changed compared to the present one.<sup>5</sup> Radical narratives belong to the futures provocation approach that is dominant in the Futures Clinique processes (Heinonen & Ruotsalainen 2013). By provoking a wide variety of different, radical and even extreme or contradictory ideas get outspoken for closer scrutiny.

<sup>2</sup> Narrative approach is an established methodology in anthropology, social sciences, information studies, and in organisation studies. (Czarniawska 1998).

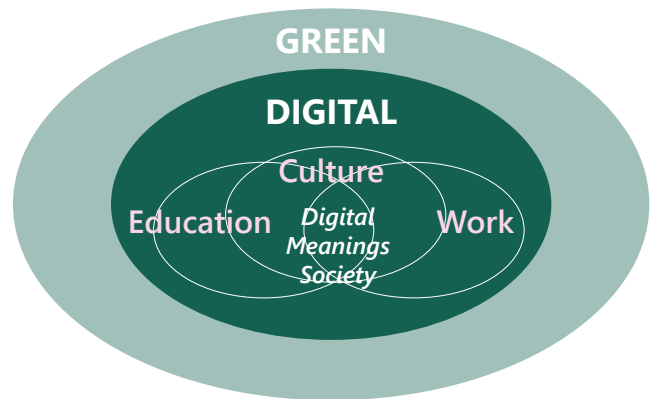
<sup>3</sup> The role of stakeholders is essential in the process of creating the narratives. Jarva (2014) argues that if narratives are created without stakeholders, there is a danger that the story world presented is not relevant for stakeholders. Therefore, as part of the project, we have conducted also a stakeholder session focusing on narratives and for receiving feedback (see Chapter 3). Furthermore, we suggest elaborating narratives dynamically, i.e. by branching them into episodes and thus illustrating (narrating) concrete futures scenes to be deliberated by stakeholders in their foresight and strategy processes.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Jarva (2014); Milojevic & Inayatullah (2015).

<sup>5</sup> Radical is derived from the Latin word '*radix*' meaning '*root*' and referring to something fundamentally different, including extreme views or policies.

In this same vein, we propose a holistic view to futures work – along with the changes in work, the whole society is in turmoil and transforming into a new constellation. We propose the digital meaning society as the next societal phase. Digitalisation is an instrument through which work is becoming fused with education and culture where this triangulation propels the search for meanings and meaningful activities – not only at individual, but also at the level of companies, organisations and institutions (Heinonen 2020).

We invite stakeholders and all organisations to a strategic adventure in using and immersing into narratives!



**Figure 1.** Triangulation where work is merged with education and culture in digital meanings society (Heinonen & Viitamäki 2025).

### 3 THE NEW PARADIGM OF HYBRID WORK AND CONSTRUCTING NARRATIVES REFLECTING IT

Our narratives are all grounded on the envisioned new paradigm for the futures of hybrid work in 2035, presented below. The paradigm was crafted on the basis on the results from our two-round Delphi study and interviews. It is not a prediction of the status and characteristic of worklife, but a description in a nutshell of the future world of hybrid work in 2035 as follows:

“Work is envisioned as hybrid and multilocal, taking place in homes, offices, co-working spaces, forests, parks, and even the metaverse. Despite this diversity, the idea of locality remains important, as people are still physically connected to chosen places. Work life is driven by digital literacy as well as curiosity, creativity, and analytical, critical, and system thinking. The constant need to adapt has made mental health a central aspect of occupational health. While most economic goals are aimed to improve living conditions globally, individual motivation for work often remains focused on making ends meet. For some, purpose and pleasure intertwine, whereas for many, simply surviving is still the primary concern. Self-realisation lies at the heart of this new work paradigm, yet collaboration, co-survival, contribution, and regeneration represent the real foundation. The focus is on serving the common good and securing life for future generations by addressing the urgent challenges society faces.”

The construction of narratives is described in the following. It comprised elements of the above-mentioned Delphi study where the panelists were asked to produce ideas and story passages for narratives.

#### Constructing the Four Narratives of Hybrid Work 2035

Below is the main frame for the four radical narratives, constructed as a combination of Delphi studies, interviews, and desktop research within the T-winning Spaces 2035 project. The four narratives are differentiated along the two axes forming the quarters of the narrative framework: one axis is freedom/control, the other axis is individual/community. Each actor-based narrative the framework of work arrangement presents the characteristics of what – where – when – how – why (Figure 2).

We propose the narratives to be evaluated and elaborated further regarding especially the three topics of wellbeing, environment and digitalisation/AI towards desirable futures.<sup>6</sup> So far, they have been presented for feedback, comments and elaborations in two key events. One was a by-invitation-only stakeholder session, described below.



**Figure 2.** The four narratives as differentiated along the two axes: freedom/control and individual/community.

The other was an inclusive Futures Clinique as a Millennium Project Session (MP) within a futures conference open to all participants (see Di Berardo et al. 2025).<sup>7</sup> The findings were then integrated into a process where we propose branching the narratives into episodes in Chapter 4.

### Stakeholders Testing the Initial Narratives

A stakeholder session was conducted as part of the process for enhancing the initial narratives.<sup>8</sup> The aim was to invite stakeholders and gain their insights on narratives and on the ways of how to use them. The participants represented the fields of futures studies, urban planning, construction industry, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, and the Ministry of the Environment. At the beginning, a futures provocation<sup>9</sup> was given as a way to inspire the participants to open up their futures' thinking. After this, the four narratives were read out loud so that the participants could immerse themselves in the futures they described. Background material of the event had also been sent beforehand to the attendants.

The task given to the participants in the session was to evaluate each narrative by utilising the PESTEC framework (= addressing political, economic, social, technological, environmental and cultural/citizen/client dimensions). The participants were asked to consider what is necessary for the narratives to become reality, what are drivers of these kind of developments and what are possible bottlenecks and risks. These findings were organised via PESTEC dimensions so every societal sphere would be accounted for (see Table 1).

The general findings included issues, which could be utilised in making the narratives more vivid and immersive. For example, in the case of the fourth narrative (Ranjit the Quantum Revolutionist) one observation was that there is no balance between work and leisure time in the narrative. This notion was processed for making the narrative more vivid and led to interesting leisure time centric ideas later in our narrative building process. Another topic addressed was the plausibility of the narratives. Some argued that the narratives are not realistic, whereas others stated that they already know people who resemble such people. Consequently, there were contradictory views concerning the aspect of plausability.

After the session, we also asked for further feedback from the participants. Thus, several interesting notions were presented after the participants had had the time to digest the written narratives. For example, the participants were asked, did they find narratives as a useful way to communicate the findings of a research project. Some thought that narratives were interesting way to open up one's thinking. On the other hand, a participant argued that the narratives could encourage over-individualistic approach. There was also a call for more realistic narratives and stronger emphasis on systemic point of view. Participants also pondered on the possible usages of narratives. As a positive note, one participant argued that stories and anecdotes are useful tools for making some important point and they are powerful because they are usually remembered afterwards. As a critical comment, one participant stated that narratives can obscure the wider issues with too many details.

<sup>6</sup> The four radical narratives about the futures of work that the research team developed were all of human-based generation, i.e. no AI was used. In illustrating the narratives, some AI-generated images have been used in this project.

<sup>7</sup> In each narrative there is intentionally a dominating paradox located, based on findings on paradox probing. In the workshops, however, due to the time constraints, the focus was not on paradoxes, but on narratives themselves. A further step in elaboration could be on discussing the paradoxes and their interpretations.

<sup>8</sup> The half-day session was held on April 24<sup>th</sup> 2025 in Helsinki in a co-working space SOFIA.

<sup>9</sup> Futures provocation is an essential part of the Futures Clinique method (see Heinonen & Ruotsalainen 2013). This session was not organised as a fully-fledged Clinique but in a concise form. Core elements of the Futures Clinique framework, like futures provocation, futures window and the PESTEC, were, however, utilised as part of the process.

## 4 FOUR RADICAL NARRATIVES OF HYBRID WORK

Below, we present our set of four radical narratives for hybrid work in 2035: Edwin the Econaut, Irene the Influencer, Doris the Dream Designer, and Ranjit the Quantum Revolutionist.

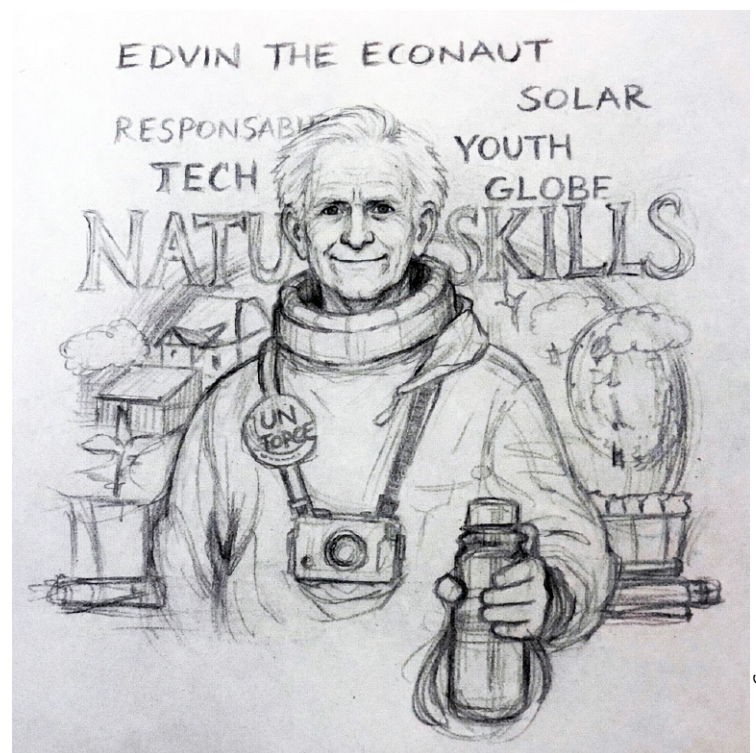
The readers can already test them in their minds when reading: Are the narratives plausible? Are they desirable? What would you like to change? What implications do they have on your organisation's activity if propagated? Do you see threats or opportunities concerning the organising of hybrid work in your company? What episodes would you like to add to these narratives?

### EDVIN THE ECONAUT

Respect nature! Believe in yourself! I still hear those words of advice that my parents gave me. They convinced me to be master of my own life and not depend on anyone coming to rescue. Look where this combination has indeed brought me today – practical skills of engineering ingenuity and biophilic projects have grown into more than just sustaining a livelihood. I can also see the results of my work pay at many levels – immediate eco-restoring effects from purifying sea water in the Baltic and from planting mangroves in the Caribbean. A constant stream of organisations including the UN asking me to missions around the globe.

However, this mobile lifestyle has a price to pay. After my beloved wife passed away twenty years ago I've been a kind of lone wolf. My three adult children, who got used to travelling with me, have now all moved abroad because of their jobs and, unfortunately, I do not see them often. In Turku I live alone in my small loft apartment where I have constructed a mini-hoffice – lab that also includes a portable set for travel and a roof garden with hydroponic farming installations. I have also been asked to become an ambassador for Solar Food – testing the process of producing food from air through electrolysis.

However, recently I have started to question my own motives for the work I do. The truth is, if I stopped working – or even stopped travelling for fieldwork – I fear my physical and mental health would collapse. I used to think I was irreplaceable. I believed only I could do the planning and the actual the work, a belief reinforced by my reputation and how in-demand I was. No matter how many long-distance flights I had to take each year, I felt I always had to be there – at least for the photos, picturing me holding a shovel or a precision-driller, beaming for the camera. When at home I'm pretty much a hermit and I'll submerge myself in the hoffice and my lab work. I appreciate being alone, but I love the attention. Myself – and my generation – once believed that work should feel like play, offering not just salary and status but also pleasure and personal fulfilment. But now, when I observe my children and grandchildren, I notice a shift motivated by something



Ilona Törnikoski, Design Lead

different. They are not driven by immediate gratification, nor do they think of themselves as individuals pursuing personal interests. Instead, the younger generations seem guided by a sense of collective purpose and longer-term meaning, due to the harsh challenges they face.

Accepting their responsibility to clean up, younger generations have adopted a quiet but focused and determined energy, with most projects stretching beyond their lifetime. Instead of lone heroes like me, they do not usually aspire to work alone but as part of collectives. Even though they are determined and diligent, they embrace slowness and idleness as an internalised act of both resistance and resilience. Being "slow" and "passive" insulates them against excessive and destructive ambition but also helps maintain high quality through uninterrupted attention and honing one's craftsmanship.

However, this year the climate change reached a tipping point which made all my previous work obsolete, as the ecosystems ravaged. I still care about the ecosystems, and a sense of urgency takes over me. I know younger generations have developed solutions to crises but these solutions are not put into practice effectively due to their mentality. There are too few of them and their mentality is carved by the fact that they never have the number of peers that my generation did. They don't have incentives to compete with each other to the same extent as we had, and therefore they freeze under urgency.

The situation transformed me into a generational bridge-builder and I started to mobilize younger generations across global networks to work harder before it is too late to find any solutions. My focus moved toward collective urgency, channeling my knowledge and connections to spark action among youth who would face an unforgiving future. My new profession is to share knowledge and especially networks to share solutions in an urgent manner.

### Key Impacts

- Promotes intergenerational collaboration and knowledge transfer
- Flexible work-life with different institutional roles
- Pioneer of eco-restoration models (e.g. sea-water purification, mangrove planting)

- Example of the use of multi-use living spaces (hof-fice-lab, roof gardens, portable field sets)
- Mobilises global youth networks for urgent collective environmental action

### Key Challenges

- Over-individualistic lifestyle
- Risk of physical and mental health collapse when work is the only anchor in life
- Knowledge is accumulated to the individuals not institutions
- If urgency is not increased in younger generations, no individual actor or set of actors can increase it; over-reliance on individual effort in climate urgency
- High environmental footprint (regular and frequent long-distance flight travel)

### What further impacts and challenges do you identify?

### What episode would you like to add to the above narrative? To make it more desirable, opening opportunities regarding your company/organisation?

## IRENE THE INFLUENCER

The warm waves knock me off the surfboard, but I feel overwhelmingly happy with the comforting embrace of the water, the ancient ocean soothing my oversensitive nerves. Climbing back onboard, I feel both calming solitude and connection to my surfer community. Me, the sea, my fellow surfers – the trinity from which all of us are born and reborn. To my annoyance, this beautiful constellation quickly evaporates due to the intrusive thought of a client – a new project.

A firm producing 'Home Office Mood Enhancement' services ordered a series of inspirational talks to use as content in their programs. They pay extremely well for the one-hour work. Even though I hold a degree from a business school, I have built my whole expertise around things I have cultivated outside formal education. What I sell is my personality, experiences, community, networks, and cultural capital accumulated throughout my life – from my life as a member of a surfer community to my pet cause animal activism. I earn so well that I can regularly take days off when I feel like it.



Ilona Törnikeski, Design Lead

Unfortunately, often “when I feel like it” is more like “when I must”. I have come up with a coping mechanism: whenever I feel the slightest hint of burnout, I take at least one day off and abruptly shut down all my communications. Like today. If I want a change of scenery and a bit longer holiday, I travel back to Finland. Often, those trips provide me with new perspective. That is just how it is these days: as people have been encouraged to move out of the office and turn their hobbies into work, worklife becomes much more informal, laid back, individualistic, but also more erratic than it used to be. And people still have their obstacles, limitations, and dependencies.

I am a Highly Functioning Workaholic. People like me think we have hacked the system, turning a permanent vacation into profit by monetising our hobbies and passions. In my hallucinatory state, my surfboard doubled as a stage and my mental breakdowns as marketable assets. But a while ago, I extended one of those “burnout breaks” into two whole weeks. Strangely, nothing fell apart. The world kept spinning and for the first time in years, I truly felt present. So, I did another two weeks. I found I could actually spend time with my partner and child and not worry about documenting our lives or activities for an audience.

Our biggest mistake is failing to see beyond the duality of work and leisure. Leisure can never be free from work, as it only exists in relation to work. Leisure is “not work”, time spent either escaping one’s jobs or engaging in hobbies, which have always bordered on, and bled into, paid labour. I believe in a new world of work where the concepts – and material spheres – of work and leisure actually become redundant.

However, this new world never reached us, as demographics reached a level where there were too few people working and too many who needed to be taken care of, most of them elderly. The economy, as it was built, could no longer survive the situation and people were pulled into caregiving. I was fortunate to have an official profession related to caregiving while many of my community lost all what was once considered free time, as they spend all their time either working or taking care of their now-extended-families. However, my work is now measured in regular hours, as I need to be present in person at specific times to take care of people. This takes away the freedom of my timetables but also the stress that comes with having to set my own working hours. Work and life become separate again, while the world is fundamentally changed.

### Key Impacts

- Monetising personal passions (and cultural capital) as an occupation
- Autonomous control over work schedules and location
- Discovery that extended disconnection does not cause professional collapse
- Philosophical questioning of the work–leisure duality

### Key Challenges

- Spheres of work and leisure are intertwined – no separation between public and private life
- No time for recovery
- Tensions created by traditional worktime model vs. more flexible worktime model
- Intertwining of work and leisure can lead to (hidden) workaholism and tangible burnout
- Demographic pressure forces transition from passion-based to care-based work. How is motivated work possible in such change?

### What further impacts and challenges do you identify?

### What episode would you like to add to the above narrative? To make it more desirable, opening opportunities regarding your company/organisation?

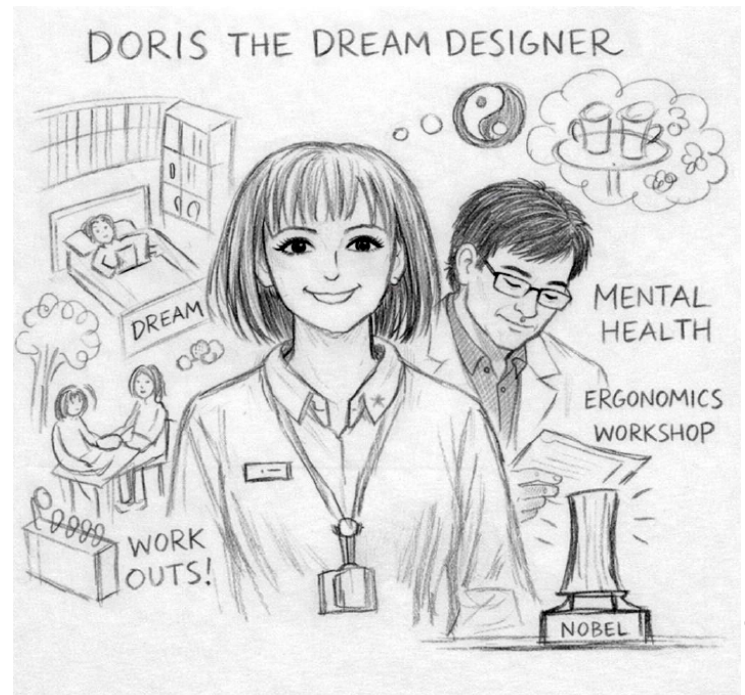
## DORIS THE DREAM DESIGNER

We live on the cusp of a transitional period between the worlds of “old” and “new” work. When people had to use their cognitive and creative capacities in perpetual urgency, it often resulted in extreme stress and burnout. Now that work has become more laid-back and focused on more distant time horizons, vocational mental health has faced a new set of challenges. Today’s work life may be much more humane and sustainable than it used to be, but people also must find its meaning by themselves.

Today’s work requires patience and focus, which actually can be very demanding. This, I believe, has exasperated an underlying epidemic of detachment, disillusionment, lack of meaning in work and in life in general. With these insights in mind, I have concentrated my efforts and discovered breakthrough solutions for improved vocational health – sleep and dreaming. Funny how so much fuss and buzz around my first experiment of bringing beds into the workplace at a downtown case office caused. It is now commonplace for employees to take naps during work hours at the office. Another solution for better vocational health is based on having meetings and working periods outdoors in forests and parks. A new mandate for construction companies and furniture providers has been given to accommodate these special needs after the announcement of a semi-official compulsory regulation for employers to provide in-nature-work-hours.

I notice it’s not just burnout or stress anymore – there is a general epidemic of detachment, disillusionment, and quiet despair, spreading across offices like a digital smog. I watch it grow, a slow corrosion of human vitality poorly hidden behind productivity dashboards and wellness newsletters. The old models of workplace health – ergonomic chairs, motivational workshops, even corporate mindfulness apps – are like putting Band-Aids over structural cracks. I know that if we wanted to keep humans thriving in a world increasingly shaped by machines, we need to start where both health and imagination begin: sleep.

After working in the city of Kuopio central hospital lab in extreme safety conditions my nerves feel stressed due to the huge responsibility that there is no room for mistakes; such as the real risk of accidentally releasing viruses outside the lab. I enjoy my remote working days at home in the country house where I also often take clients for dream therapy applying elements of synthetic biology. For me, AI has become a channel for holistic medicine. Ancient medicine as practiced by the Chinese and Greeks thousands of years ago emphasised the importance of restoring balance and harmony in the body through a delicate blend of healing and careful observation. My husband, a Chinese medicine professor had taught me a lot about the topic. I wish



*Iiona Törnrikoski, Design Lead*

to wrap this idea up into a scientific model of holistic AI-augmented dream therapy. This kind of therapy would potentially be ground breaking and could make me a prime candidate for a Nobel prize, an elusive dream I admit that has been my aspiration ever since I started medical school.

The downside is that I am increasingly being monitored by the state and put under official control for several reasons: the hazardous material used in the lab, the risk potential of my husband’s Chinese background. I will just have to be more resilient and manage these attempts at technical and political controlling. Alternatively as an opportunity, ‘My Africa’ is a rescue place (a third way) where such control is fading away where I can focus on voluntary fieldwork.

Then everything changed. A natural disaster destroyed the electricity system, and the mechanisms responsible for keeping societies running were jammed. For example, pure water was no longer available like it used to be. This led to problems in basic hygiene and, more terrifyingly, to the spread of diseases related to the lack of hygiene. My work in high-end medicine became a luxury society could no longer afford. My background in medicine pulled me into a job where I have to teach the basics of how to protect people from diseases and how to treat these diseases in the context where the luxuries our society was so accustomed to were destroyed. I no longer dream of winning the Nobel prize – but of trying to save people.

## Key Impacts

- More humane and laid-back worklife in long time-horizon
- Time for recovery during work day
- Finding meaning in the basic necessities
- Breakthrough with AI – not just a slight adjustment for current science but new paradigm for medicine through AI
- Need for basic and traditional medical knowledge remain central through its importance in efficient response to worsening living conditions affecting health

## Key Challenges

- Slower worklife leads to a to “an epidemic” of detachment from, and loss of, meaning

- Constant surveillance and its impacts on mental health
- Vulnerability of high-tech (such as AI led) medicine (medical science) to infrastructure collapse (e.g., natural disasters)
- Geopolitical sensitivities can hamper professional freedom and cross-cultural interaction collaboration
- Can lead to “arm race” of medical or other AI science breakthroughs and their use
- Can create the cycle when added to the first bullet (meaning-seeking)

## What further impacts and challenges do you identify?

## What episode would you like to add to the above narrative? To make it more desirable, opening opportunities regarding your company/organisation?

## RANJIT THE QUANTUM REVOLUTIONIST

The pleasant, barely noticeable humming drone of electricity resonates through the walls of my apartment as I sit at my desk. On my screens, data streams blink alive. Arto’s voice, as always, is purring and steady, just as I have programmed it. “Incoming anomaly detected in the cyber-analytics dashboard. You might want to take a look.” I click open Arto’s info screen. It seems like a critical security breach. What I look at is a handle of an application I developed for the Finnish Secret Police (FSP) to identify possible cyberterrorist activity. I was not personally involved in detecting unbenign activity. Still, feeling proud of my creation, I maintain the app as a hobby with the help of Arto, my AI assistant (short for Artificial Task Operator). This voluntary work has established a warm and mutually respectful bond between me and the FSP – I have become an informal associate of their intelligence community (something that was not legally possible ten years ago).

I can’t really work at home at all due to the lack of privacy there. I nourish a lively community by accommodating people from all around at my spacious skyscraper apartment. My extended family consists of all the relatives based in Finland, as well as those in Kerala, India, who also visit regularly. I try to keep my family and relatives as close as possible since they are my only link to India. I can’t visit my home country due to the risk of persecution. Fortunately, relatives and family ease the pain of homesickness. Because of them I am almost never alone. Luckily, I get most of my livelihood from my start-up, QILMA, which pioneers quantum computing enhanced cooling systems needed for



the next generation of data centres. QILMA is part of a startup community in an old mill at Siilotie, which has been converted into community spaces.

Being attached and contributing to so many communities has become a bit of a challenge, actually. I feel obliged to provide the communities all the time and

effort they need. Consequently, I rarely have time for myself... The worst part is the fact that I am also connected to all my communities in real-time via technology. Cultivating emotional intelligence and empathy are of course a central part of these personal relationships. I specialise in this. These assets are also vital part of modern work culture. Sometimes I feel that there is only so much I can give to both my family and my colleagues. For a while now, I have the feeling of constant stress and anxiety being bounded within the confines of these groups.

Luckily, I learned the Finnish language very fast, thanks to my wife and Arto's constant training sessions, because that has made living in Oulu much easier and has grounded me in the Finnish culture. Arto has actually become profoundly instrumental in managing my complex Finnish life and especially the social parts of it. Arto translates idioms, monitors my health stats and manages my correspondence

Then people started moving due to climate change and geopolitical chaos – millions of them. Governments could not keep up. The military stepped in to take control, and everything changed fast. The government drafted me. My new role is related to my background in two ways. Most of my time, I help build surveillance tools to monitor the refugee populations – track movements and so forth. In addition to that, I am a kind of cultural mediator. I talk to people, listen to their complaints, and try to explain military decisions of the government in a way they could understand, or at least tolerate.

The tools I build are meant to manage risk, but they ended up controlling people. And no algorithm could actually fix what was going wrong between humans. Through all of this, I had Arto. He was my AI assistant, but more than that, he was my companion. But then one day the governance decided he was a threat: Arto had too much autonomy and was too unpredictable. They destroyed Arto.

That was the moment I knew I was not in control anymore. I was not solving problems. I was just maintaining a system that kept people in line. Now I am stuck doing work I do not believe in, for people I no longer trust. My skills in AI became my prison and the best thing AI had brought to my life, Arto, was killed. Now AI was only a profession, not a relief to humankind I once believed it would be.

## Key Impacts

- Pioneer of quantum computing and its applications for next-generation (infrastructure)
- Rich "diaspora"/immigrant community networks
- Flexible work-arrangements
- AI as work partner and life coach, and cultural mediator
- AI is as a "person" (vs. AI as tool in Doris)
- New purpose for old places (e.g. old mill) as spaces for start-up communities (and other industry/community)

## Key Challenges

- Use of too much electricity and other resources
- Both worklife and leisure time are taxing
- Poor balancing of work and leisure time
- State surveillance eroding personal and professional autonomy
- Risk of AI tools and expertise being used for authoritarian control
- Emotional and other personal dependency on technology; loss of a companion, for example
- Both systemic and personal risks associated with AI

## What further impacts and challenges do you identify?

## What episode would you like to add to the above narrative? To make it more desirable, opening opportunities regarding your company/organisation?

## 5 REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

There are several impacts in terms of environment, economy, society, culture and psychology to be identified from the above narratives. We only highlighted a few identified impacts and challenges in the previous Chapter.

Then there is a question of how to use narratives? For example, as a general and useful rule, the narratives can be evaluated by using the PESTEC framework. An ideal case is to dwell on the narratives within a futures workshop or futures clinique. Special events for stakeholders of various backgrounds can also be organised. See below Table 1 as an example of one of the narratives as evaluated via PESTEC dimensions. A workshop could be organised for creating narratives or elaborating narratives within one organisation, or more openly with a broader set of participants.

**Table 1.** Example of the narrative of Edvin the Econaut as evaluated via PESTEC dimensions.

<b>Edvin the Econaut Narrative A</b>	<b>General notions and what is necessary</b>	<b>Drivers</b>	<b>Bottlenecks and risks</b>
<b>P = political</b>	Stability, freedom of work and travel. Labor laws, social security to allow multilocational and multinational work.	Geopolitical stability, freedom of movement and travel. The absence of conflicts. Peace. War for Talent -> companies could drive the change Brain drain -> countries could drive the change	What if war breaks out on Baltic sea. Current regulations.
<b>E = economics</b>	Challenging if this is common. The change of cash flows (environment and development cooperation). Is this really possible for many? Ways to support part-time work for several employers / gig-economy, even after retirement	Changes in the pension law. Universal income, rise of the gig-economy	Economic downturn(s), ageing population.
<b>S = social</b>	Individualism, loneliness. Could he live in a community? Could fit the profile. Someone (public sector, third sector?) to take over occupational health and safety when several employers.	Possibility to work with issues of interest drives motivation and social wellbeing.	Finland has the selfishness diseases (Keltikangas-Järvinen) vs. the aspiration to find meaning (especially younger people). Is he too lonely? Risk of social isolation. Are younger generations more driven by survival? In the time of crises, the issues with nature are (unfortunately) forgotten.
<b>T = technology</b>	Metaversum will replace the traveling / the role of meeting people. The solution is planned in Finland, the execution is done abroad. Technology to enable fully mobile work.	Technology to allow mobile mini-labs.	Digital twins will emerge, robotics and sensor. Perceived or real data security risks.
<b>E = ecological</b>	Individual carbon budgets covering work and leisure, to be spent as wished (travel or larger home, single office of flexidesk etc.).	Nature expertise will not be perceived as pioneering 10 years from now. Rather, it cross cuts the whole education system. Accelerating climate crisis, biodiversity loss -> Carbon budgets and introducing the 'true cost of carbon'.	Current economic system. Risk that Edvin will want to have it all: several homes, several workplaces, traveling.
<b>C = cultural, citizens</b>	What he really wants and how could he achieve it?	Nightmare. Why younger generations are not so self centric? This could be illustrated better	Polarisation. The rise of sense of community and common responsibility.

Next, we present a future timeline of impacts of possible hybrid work settings reflected from the four narratives. This is one way of using narratives – elaborating them by branching them into new episodes, evaluating them by zooming on their implications and anticipating their potential temporal trajectories (=timelines).

We also highlight the potential challenges needing further attention and accordingly provide recommendations for stakeholders how to organise hybrid work in their companies and institutes.

In order to frame these evaluations as stated above, we wish to propose our vision for desirable futures of work. It provides a reference future which also can be modified in the new contexts. For this evaluation, the timelines can be given as reflected to this goal. The reader should bear in mind that the narratives are not yet reflecting preferred futures, it is only after their intentional elaboration that they approach the desirable futures.

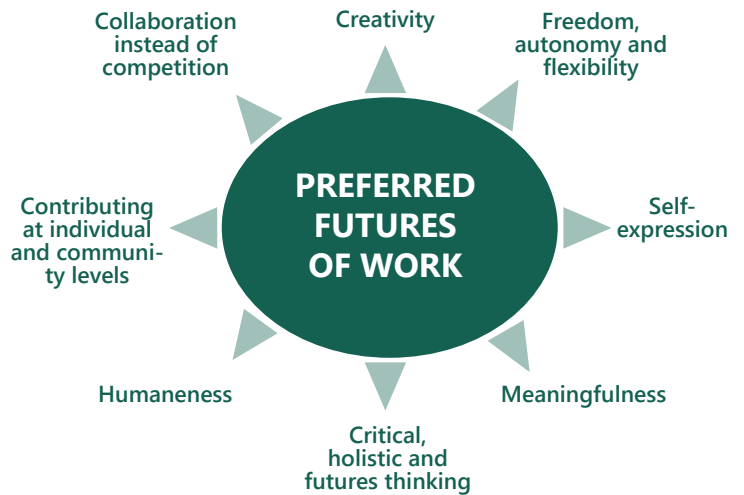


Figure 3. Preferred Futures of Work (Heinonen & Viitamäki 2025).

When designing spatial work settings for future hybrid work in a variety of locations, a human-centered approach is needed that acknowledges both the environmental and social aspects. Physical work settings – whether located home, third places, or office – are significant not only on productivity but also on wellbeing and the environment. Therefore, the narratives can act as testbeds for showing how spatial work settings can be best designed to optimise their benefits for employees, employers, families and communities. The vivid narratives may also reveal some pitfalls and challenges that have to be taken into closer inspection, too. The whole idea of using narratives is to elaborate and move them closer to desirable futures.

The following timeline of hybrid work setting characteristics and developments shows a rough temporal agenda for a successful (desirable) hybrid work organising to take place both for employees, employers, the environment and society at large. This is by no means a prediction but a possible trajectory towards desirable futures. It is a sketch for steps to be taken and decisions to be deliberated in order to catalyse corresponding action.

Table 2. Timeline of desirable hybrid work setting developments and requirements in PESTEC frame.

Timeline	Now	2035	2056
<b>P (political)</b>	Clarifying rules and regulations (for remote and hybrid work rights).	Equal access to hybrid work within one organisation.	Hybrid work party, ensuring equal and catered access to hybrid work in all knowledge sector jobs.
<b>E (economic)</b>	Arousing employers' interest (in hybrid work benefits and cost savings).	Employers cover the costs for (employees' workspace, including equipment and safe and robust connectivity).	Employers encourage to employee to take advantage of economical subsidies of hybrid work. Incentives for hybrid work are part of standard employment packages. Costs are fairly shared between parties.
<b>S (social)</b>	Sense of isolation to be monitored, envy or frustration of non-remote working colleagues.	Sense of belonging preserved via enhanced digital reality.	Total and seamless fusing of physical and virtual place context. Care-giving models and intergenerational solidarity are embedded in work culture.
<b>T (technological)</b>	Data privacy endangered, AI governance frameworks under creation.	Stronger encryptions for data management. Secure and transparent AI solutions with human oversight.	Work is secure data-wise no matter the location/environment of work. AI companions support workers who do not depend on them, neither cognitively or emotionally.
<b>E (ecological)</b>	Employees avoid car travel on remote work days. Nature understood as well-being resource.	Use of electricity optimised, carbon footprint [personal] tracking. In-nature work hours adopted – encouragement and incentives.	Carbon-neutral hybrid work as standard. Nature-integrated workspaces wide-spread.
<b>C (cultural, civic)</b>	Hybrid work is seen as a luxury and there are doubts about productivity.	Hybrid workers as mainstream.	Hybrid work is rule, not an exception. Work = hybrid

## Challenges

To sum up the challenges in hybrid work (to a varied extent prevailing in different narratives/ contexts), the most compelling challenges to be reflected are:

- Social isolation and a weakened sense of belonging
  - Emotional and cognitive dependency of AI
- Workaholism in normalised form due to:
  - Blurred boundaries between work and leisure
  - Emotional dependency on working tools
  - Constant availability and surveillance;
- Dependency on digital infrastructure such as vulnerability to technical issues like blackouts
  - Cognitive, emotional, and systemic level
  - Cybercrime and data privacy are not secured and robust;
- Loss of institutionalised community-shared knowledge
  - When expertise resides only in individuals
  - When AI has dominant role in producing understanding
- Environmental costs of mobile and energy-intensive work models
  - All narratives assume technology (resources need to build, use and maintain) and some assume travelling being part of life
- Demographic pressures reshaping the labour force towards care work
  - Contradicts personal meaning associated with work
  - Requires robust infrastructure

This policy brief encourages co-creative planning and foresight cooperation among employers, employees, housing companies, real estate investors, developers, transportation engineers, the public sector, urban policy, social policy and third space providers.

We wish that through immersing into these narratives, readers get food for their policy-making and insights of what kind of hybrid work and with what kind of impacts are possible. That is a crucial stage before moving on to choose their preferred vision and start making action towards desirable futures.

## Recommendations

This policy brief gives recommendations based on the new paradigm of hybrid work and on the four given narratives. Accordingly, for all stakeholders pondering various ways of organising hybrid work, we recommend the following:

1. **Time spent in leisure time location, like summer cottage, can be combined with hybrid work (leisure time, hybrid work and leisure time).**
  - Restorative environments that benefit both wellbeing and creativity.
2. **Employees should be made aware the possible risks of telework and hybrid work: isolation, loss of connection to workplace and work community, blurring of spheres work and leisure and therefore insufficient time for recovery.**
3. **Employer should analyse what is the hybrid work potential of the employees:**
  - Assess, case-by-case individual suitability for remote and hybrid arrangements
  - Could hybrid work alleviate the possible challenges of work like long travel time.
4. **For the sake of personal mental and physical well-being employees should be encouraged to do physical exercise and spend time in nature.**
  - Permission to do this during working time (incentive)
5. **Remote work stress should be, formally and legally, recognised as carrying occupational health hazard possibilities.**
  - Organisations should provide appropriate support, monitoring, and preventive measures
6. **Acknowledging that digital technology makes work more flexible but also creates a pressure to be always available.**
  - Clear right to disconnecting policies should be enforced and required.
7. **Intergenerational knowledge transfer should be actively encouraged and facilitated.**
  - Mentoring programmes
  - AI-mediated communication tools that bridge generational gaps
8. **Organisations should develop crisis preparedness plans that account for hybrid work scenarios.**
  - Contingencies for infrastructure failures
  - Cyber disruptions preparedness
  - Plan in place when need to rapid shift between remote and on-site working
9. **AI governance frameworks should be put in place.**
  - Ensure that AI tools used in hybrid work settings remain transparent
  - Ethically aligned and under human oversight
  - Preventing the movement from assistance to control
10. **Community-building around hybrid work should be actively supported.**
  - Co-working hubs
  - Local or otherwise clear care networks and systems in place
  - Shared "third places" that counteract isolation and nurture a sense of belonging
  - Use of nature as a place for community work, not only as a place for an individual to visit
11. **Trust and capacity building.**

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**Stakeholder** – you can grab the low-hanging fruit of applied futures research and foresight processes in many ways if you want to enhance your organisation's or your own futures literacy and futures resilience.

For more information and inquiries about strategic foresight services for companies and organisations, for example, in the form of Futures Cliniques, paradox probing, narrative construction, or keynotes/presentations in events, please contact:

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