

Back ↔ to the Future

How mental time travel can alter our density ...

I mean, our destiny

Brain-friendly talk





We are in a fight against toxic short-term thinking
...and we don't have much time



The Anthropocene requires both long-term thinking and urgent action

The worst impacts of short-term thinking are often felt on long-term time scales



AI 'godfather' Geoffrey Hinton warns of dangers as he quits Google

🕒 2 May · 💬 Comments



Watch: AI 'godfather' Geoffrey Hinton tells the BBC of AI dangers as he quits Google

Futures Thinking: A Connected Trilogy

A silver DMC DeLorean sports car is the central focus, parked on a city street at night. The car is illuminated by streetlights, and its distinctive gull-wing doors are visible. The background shows a busy urban environment with other vehicles and buildings. A semi-transparent text box is overlaid on the image, containing the title and a list of three parts.

- Part 1: Personal
- Part 2: Organizational
- Part 3: Civilizational



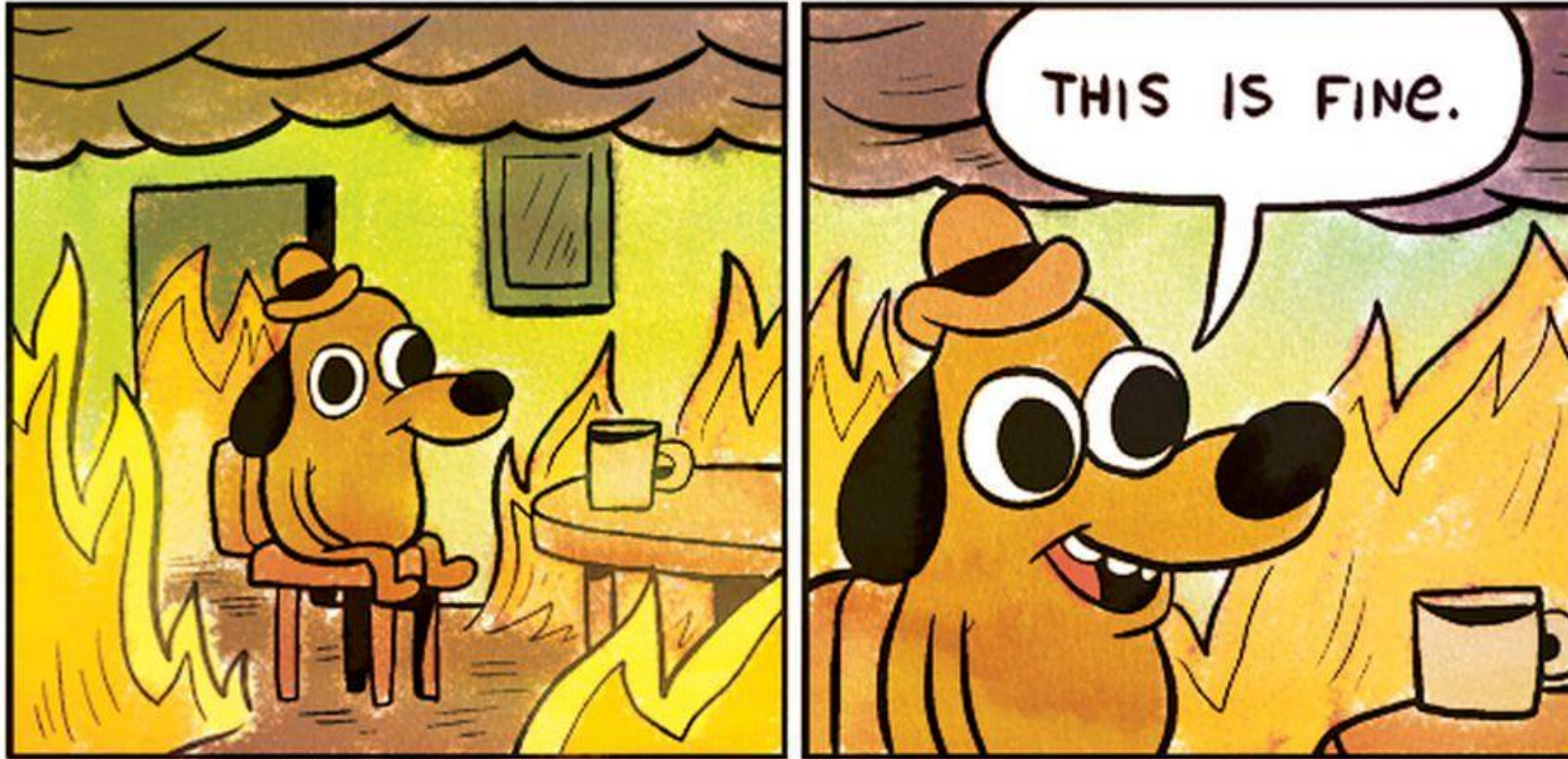
Part 1: Personal foresight

We all think about the future....

...we just don't do it very well.

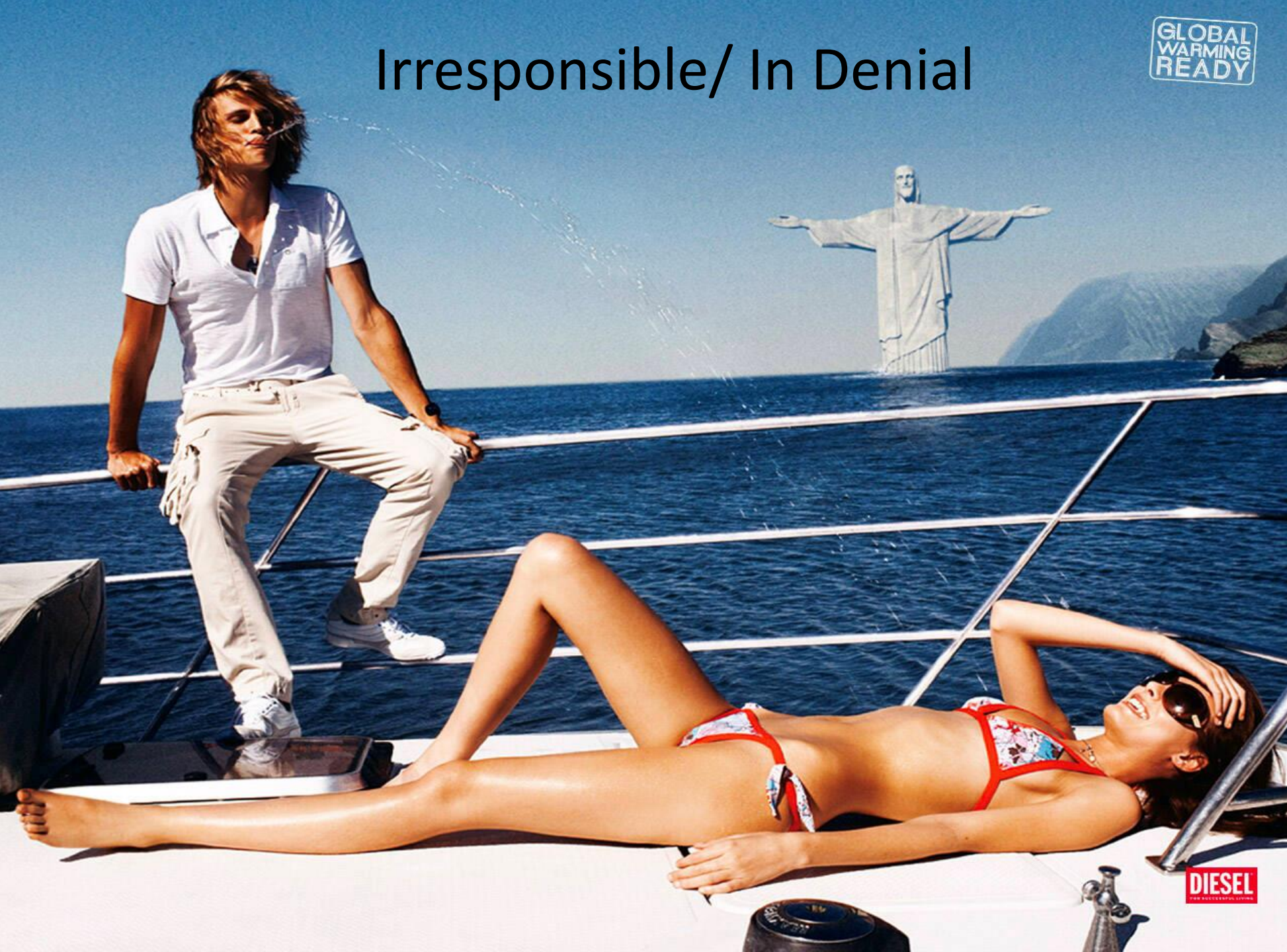


Overconfidence / In Denial



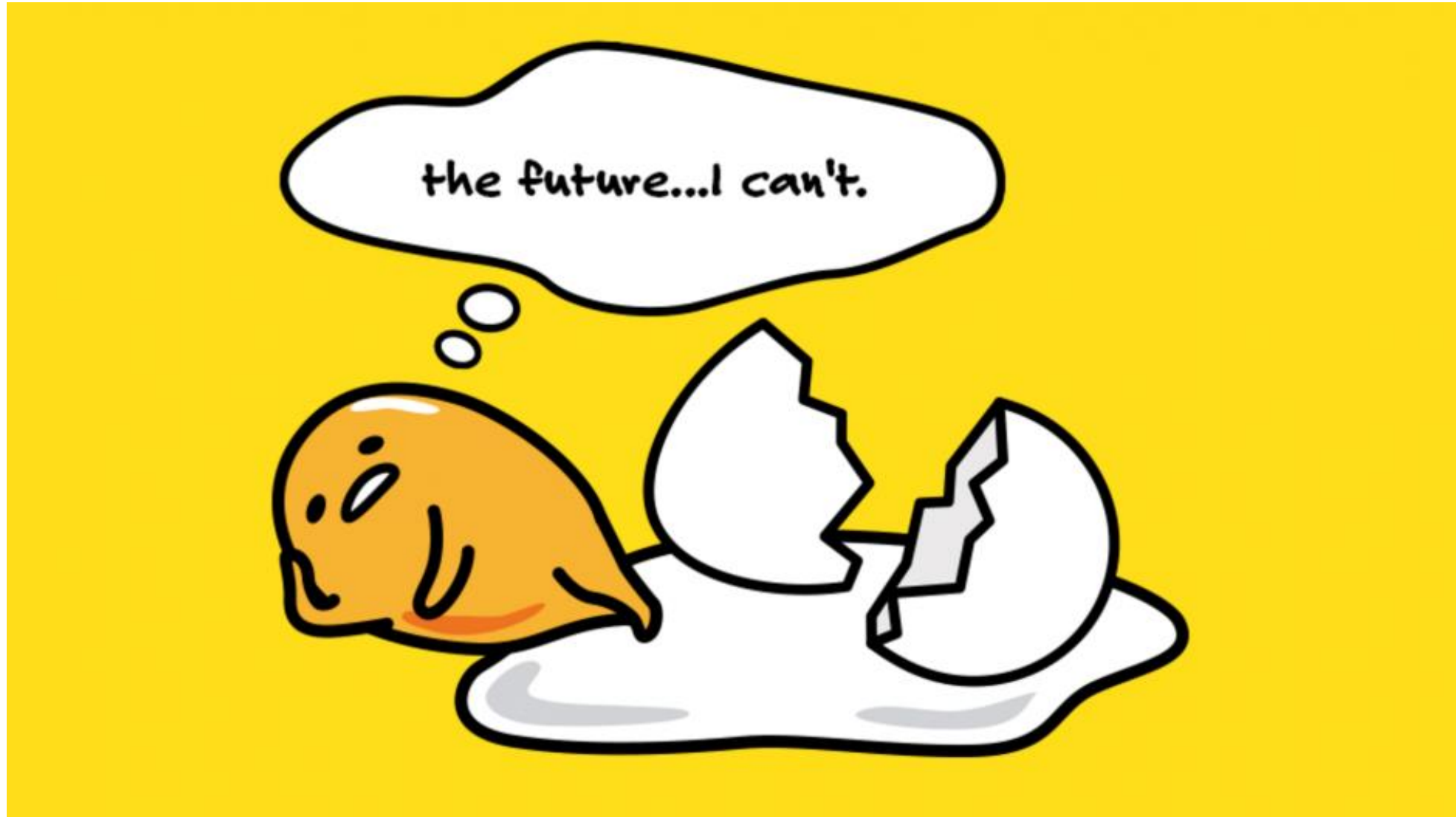
Irresponsible/ In Denial

GLOBAL WARMING READY



DIESEL

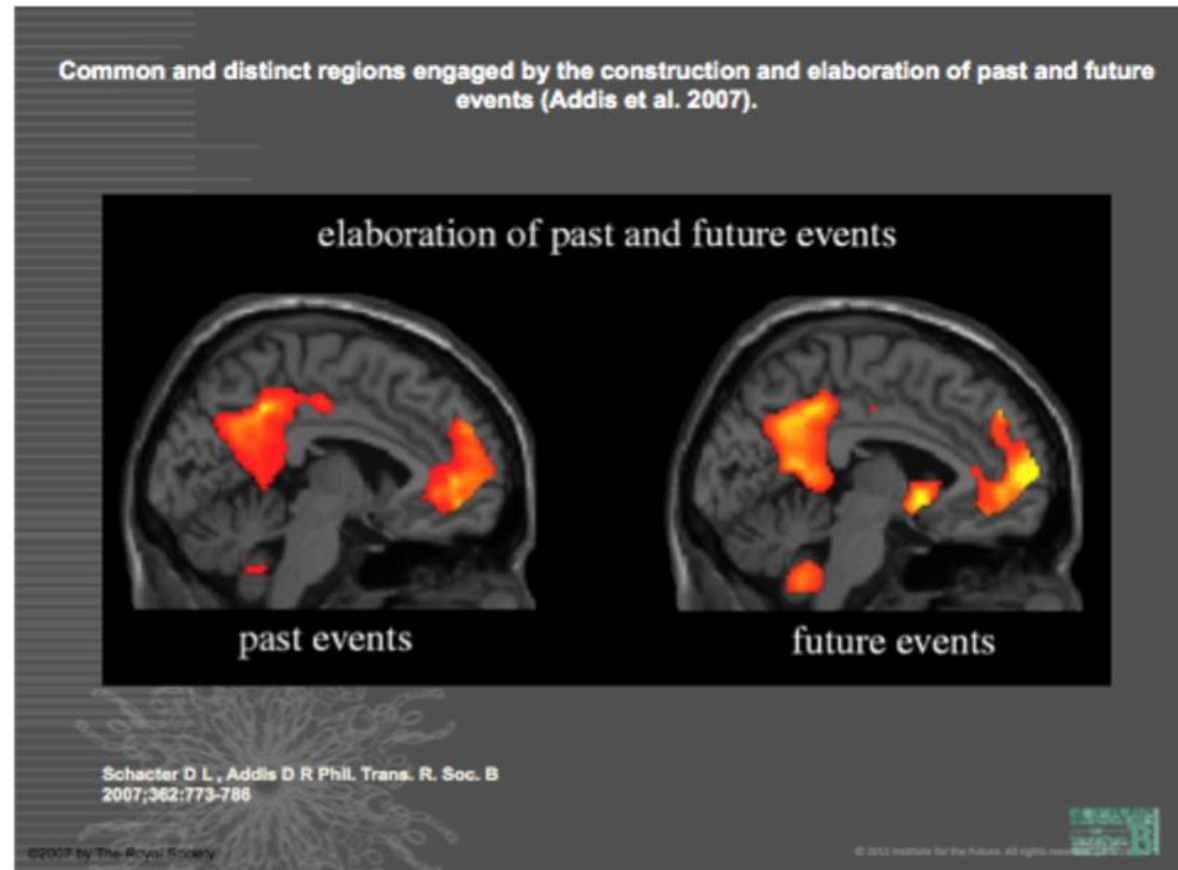
Paralyzed by anxiety and fear



We are bad at foresight

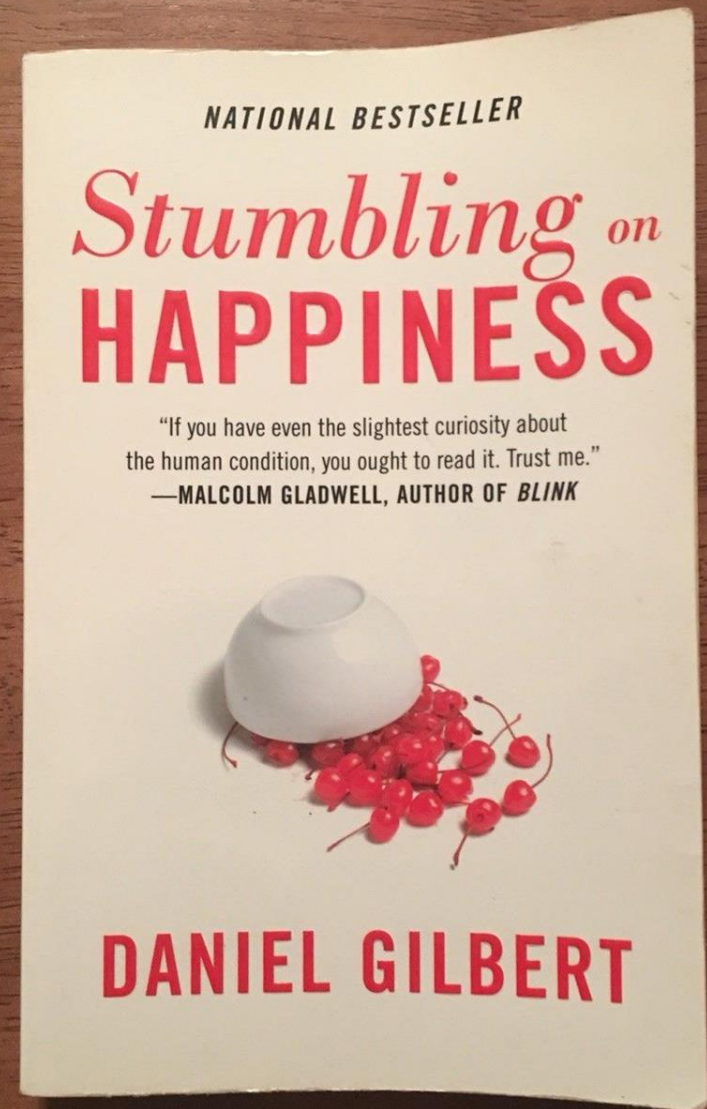
But it's [mostly] not our fault

We are neurologically biased toward the past and present (also linearity, consistency, and proximity)

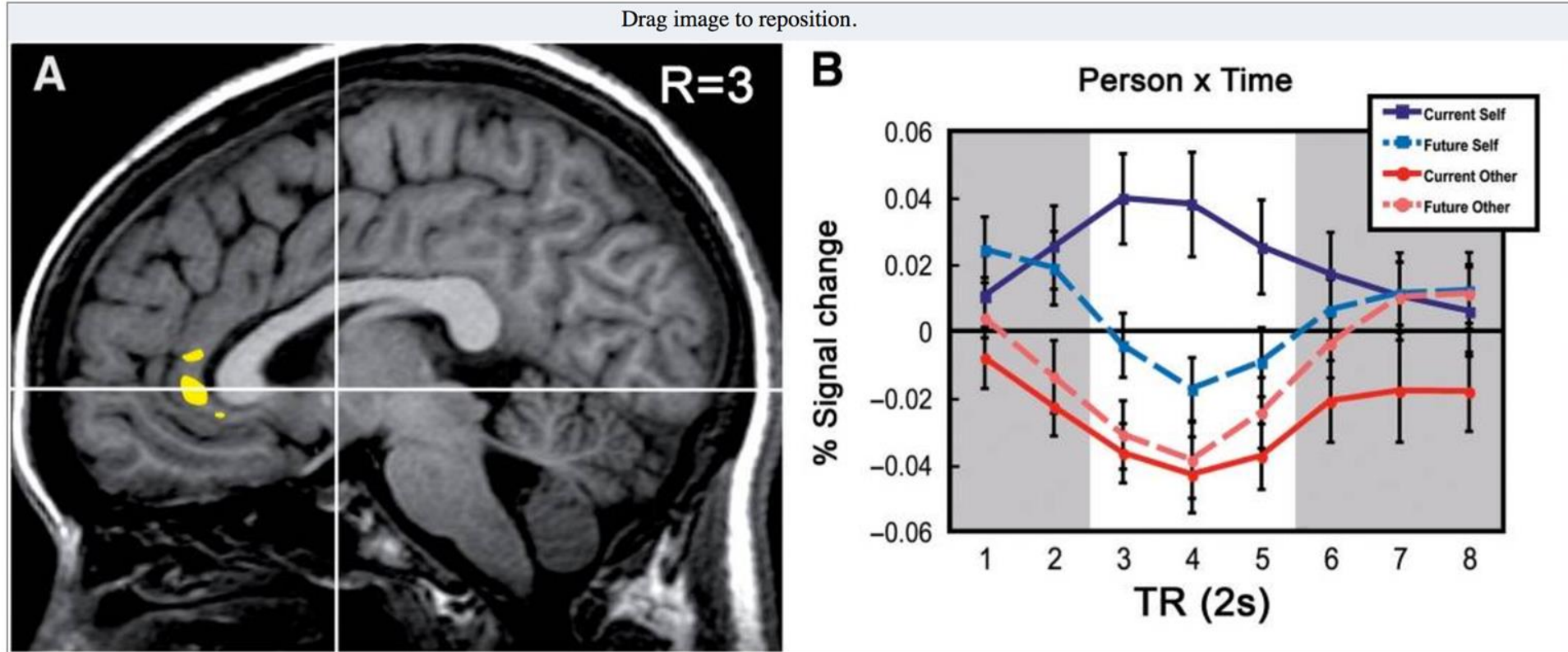


“The reality of the moment is so palpable and powerful that it holds imagination in a tight orbit from which it never fully escapes.”

— *Daniel M. Gilbert, Stumbling on Happiness*



Our future self feels like a stranger



Ventromedial prefrontal cortex supports affective future simulation by integrating distributed knowledge

Roland G. Benoit^{a,b,1}, Karl K. Szpunar^{a,b}, and Daniel L. Schacter^{a,b,1}

^aDepartment of Psychology and ^bCenter for Brain Science, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 02138

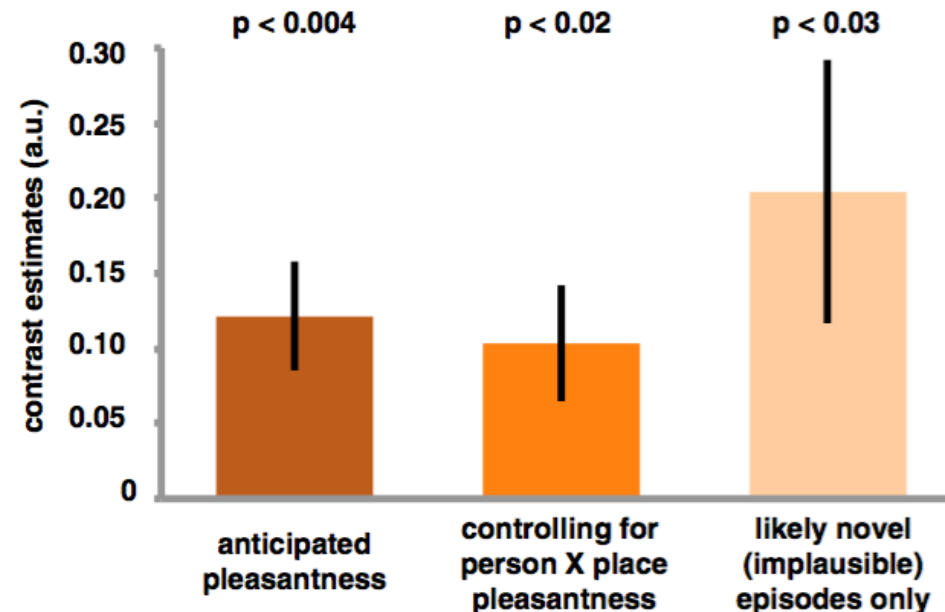
Contributed by Daniel L. Schacter, October 7, 2014 (sent for review August 22, 2014; reviewed by Arnaud D'Argembeau and Jonathan Smallwood)

vmPFC and the emergent affective quality of simulated episodes

parametric modulation: anticipated pleasantness



x = -10



“by encoding imagined scenarios into long-term memory, we can use our prior simulations at later time points so that they can substitute for real experiences.”

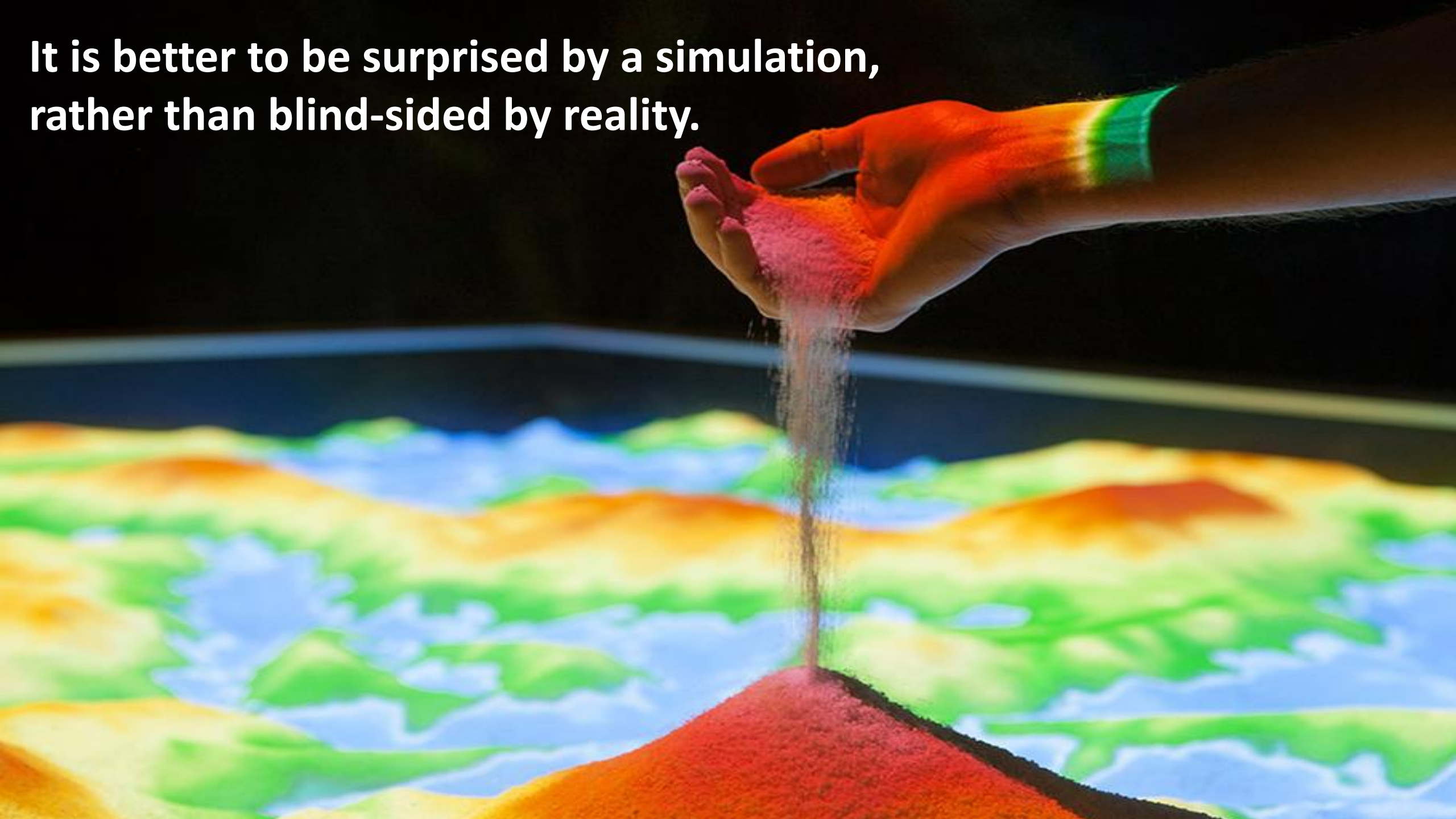
--Benoit, Szpunar, and Schacter



Foresight is a cognitive prosthetic

A mind-altering technology

**It is better to be surprised by a simulation,
rather than blind-sided by reality.**



A composite image featuring a hand holding sand on the left and an ancient Egyptian statue on the right. A white horizontal bar with black text is overlaid in the center.

Mental Time Travel Exercise

Specificity is the spice of imagination

Take one minute....close your eyes

The year is 2033, you are at your “office” or “workstation.”

1. Where is it located?
2. How are you positioned? What are you wearing? What are you looking at?
3. What sensations or emotions are you feeling?
4. What is in the room?
5. What is something IN your office today, that is NOT there in 2033?
6. What is something that is NOT in your office today, that IS there in 2033?



Share with your neighbor (1 min each)

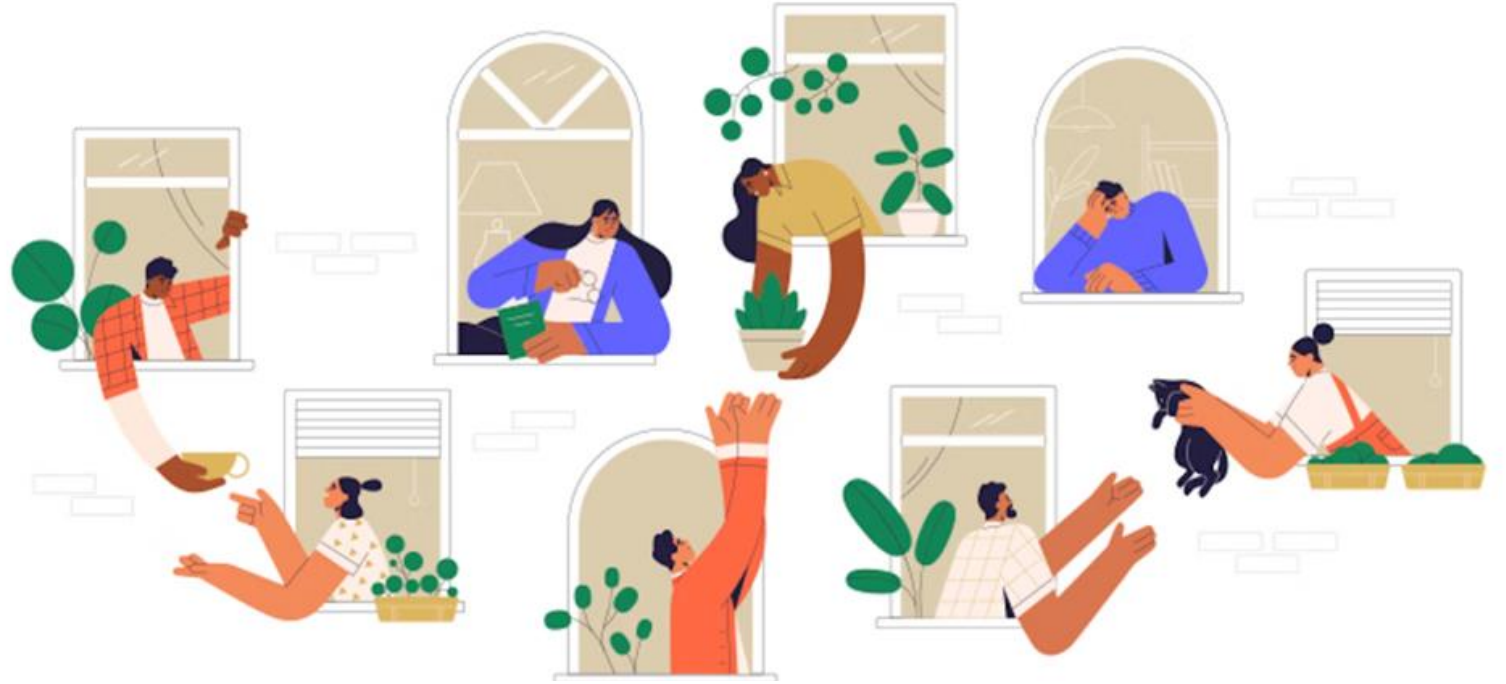
What is in your office of 2033 that is not there today?

PSYCHOLOGY

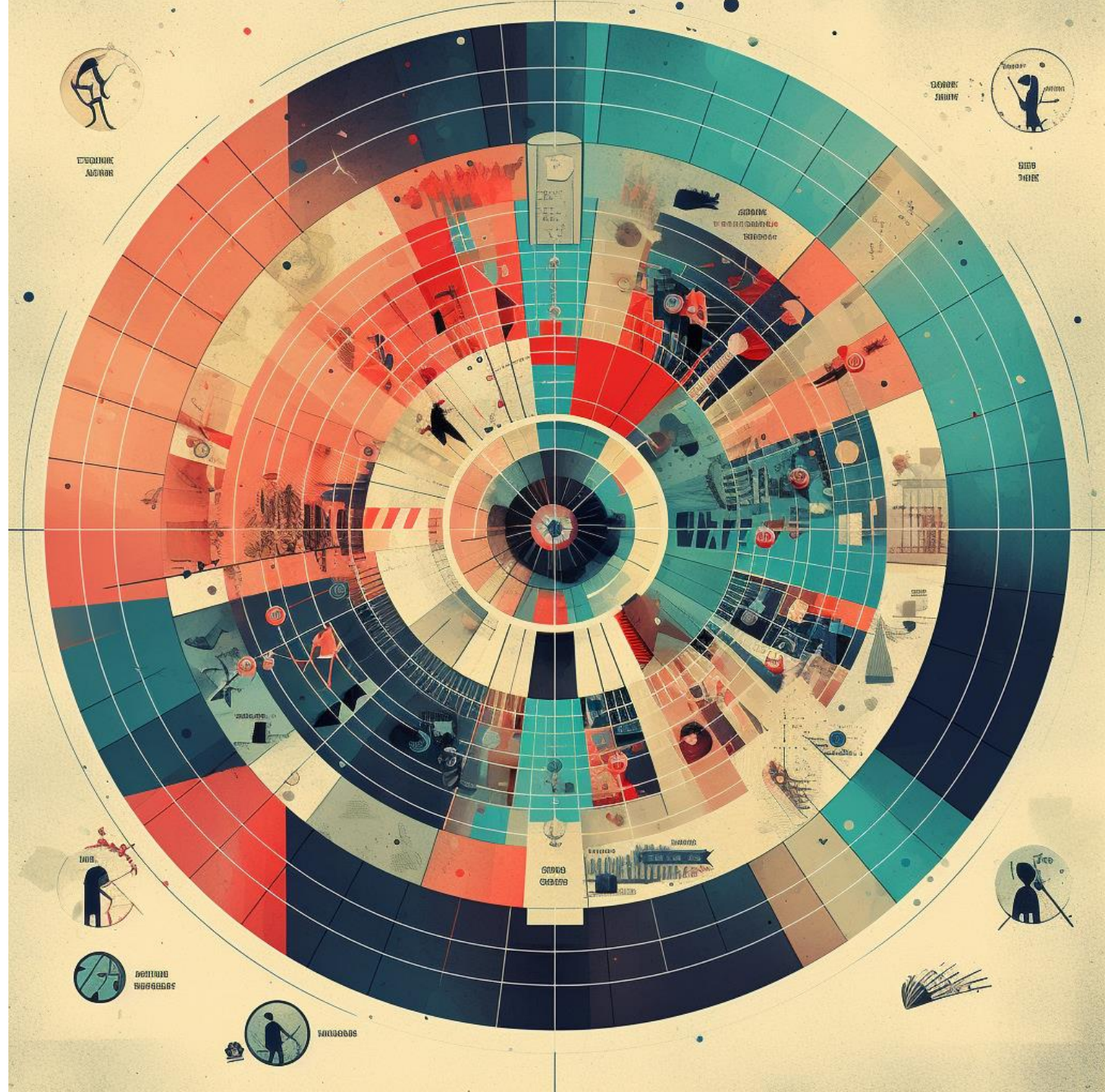
How Mental Time Travel Can Make Us Better People

Kindness lives in the future-present.

BY KATHERINE HARMON COURAGE December 23, 2022



Part 2: Organizational foresight





Any useful statement
about the **future**
should at first seem
ridiculous.

JIM DATOR

Corporate foresight and its impact on firm performance: A longitudinal analysis

[René Rohrbeck](#)^{a b c}  , [Menes Etingue Kum](#)^d 


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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2017.12.013> ↗

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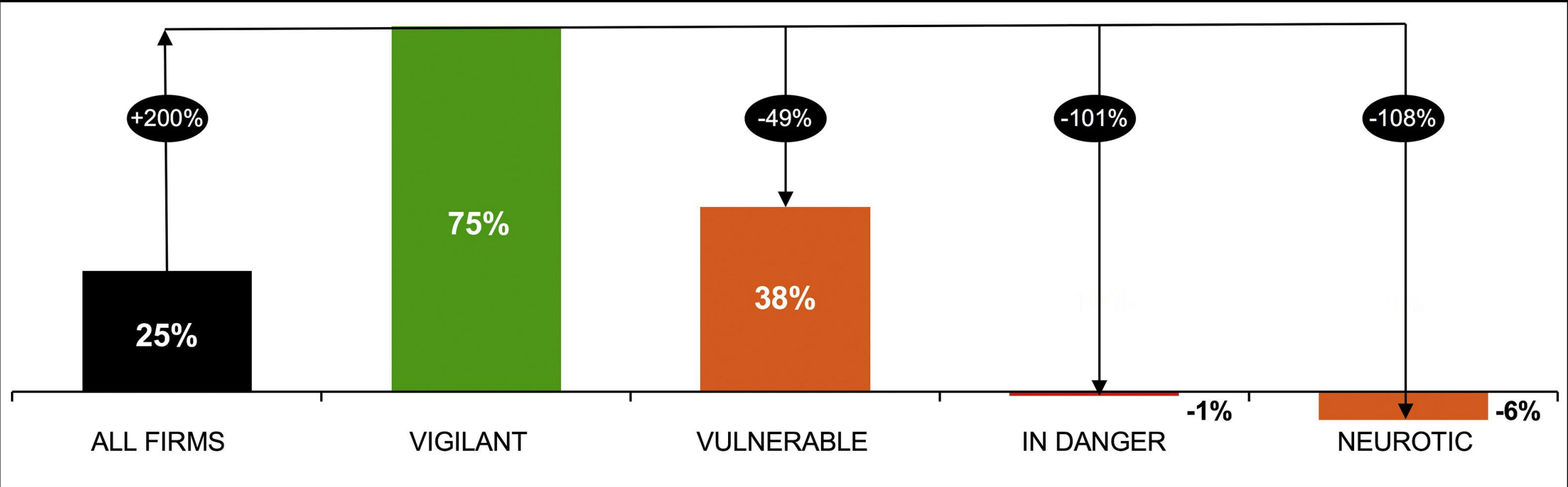
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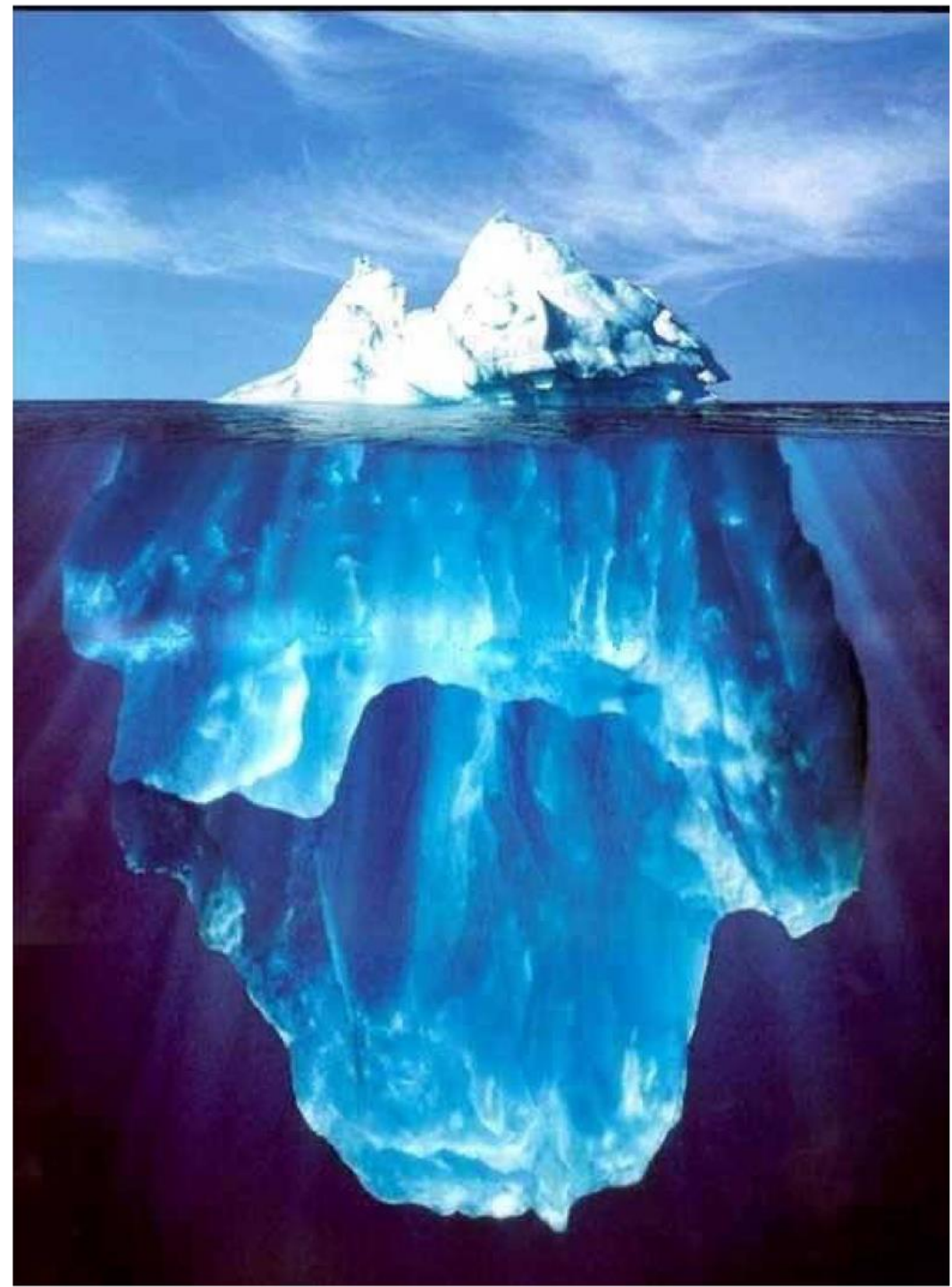
Highlights

- We developed a model for assessing the future preparedness (FP) of a firm
- We match FP data from 2008 and performance in 2015
- Future-prepared firms outperformed the average by a 33% higher profitability
- Future-prepared firms outperform the average by a 200% higher growth
- Firms with deficiencies face with a performance discount of 37% to 108%.

Next, we calculated the impact of future preparedness on market capitalization growth. [Fig. 11](#) shows that the average growth in our sample over the seven years (from 2008 to 2015) was 25%. The vigilant firms achieved over the same period on average a 75% growth in market capitalization, or 200% additional growth.



Looking Under the Surface: Causal Layered Analysis



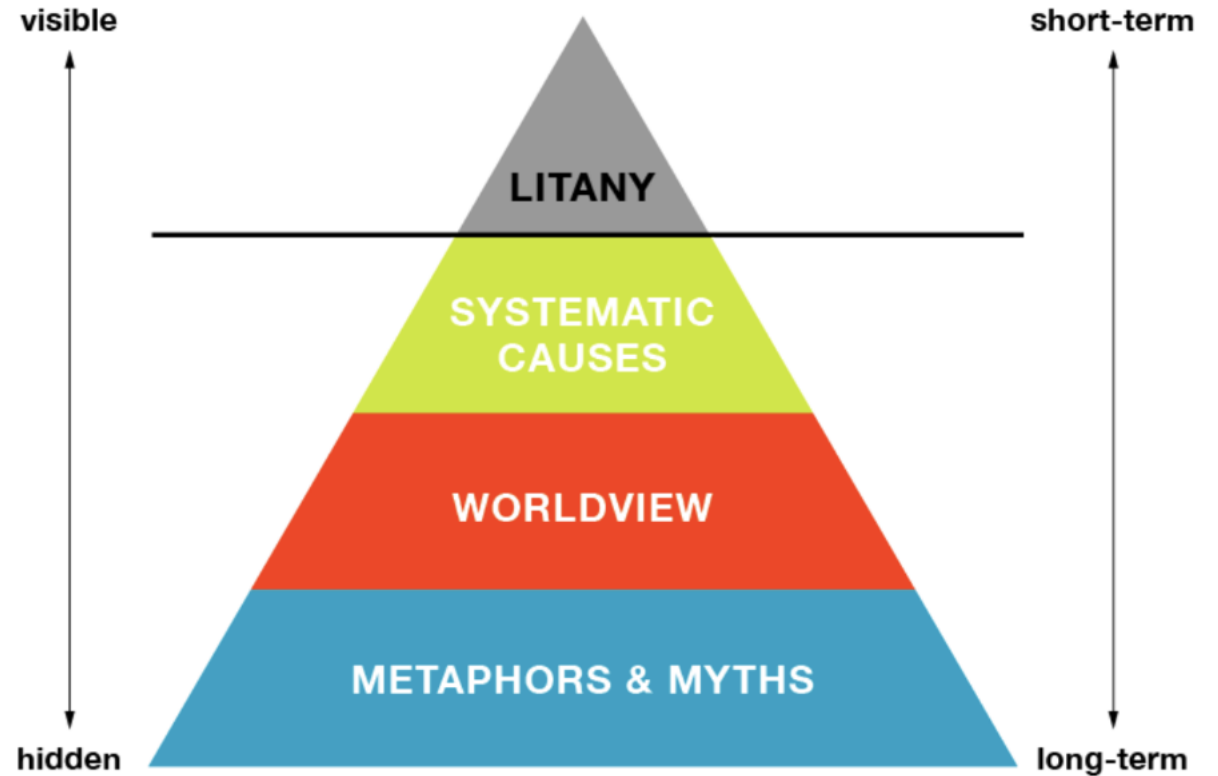
This method, pioneered by **Sohail Inayatullah**, breaks issues down into four layers:

Litany: the surface understanding of an issue, backed by data

Systemic Causes: social, economic, political structures and policies underlying the issue

Worldview: Deeper cultural assumptions and perspectives that enable structures and behaviors

Metaphors & Myths: The social narratives and imagery, acting at the level of collective consciousness, usually expressed through art and stories





CLA of Higher Education in the U.S.

Litany

- 19.4 million students
- \$1.76 trillion in debt (current & former students)
- 53.7% of adults have college degree

Systemic Causes:

- College degrees increase wealth potential and social mobility
- College is poorly funded by the government
- College is very expensive

Worldview

- Education is an individual and social good
- Better educated populations are more stable and more innovative.
- Education should be available to all
- Meritocracy

Myths/Metaphors/Stories

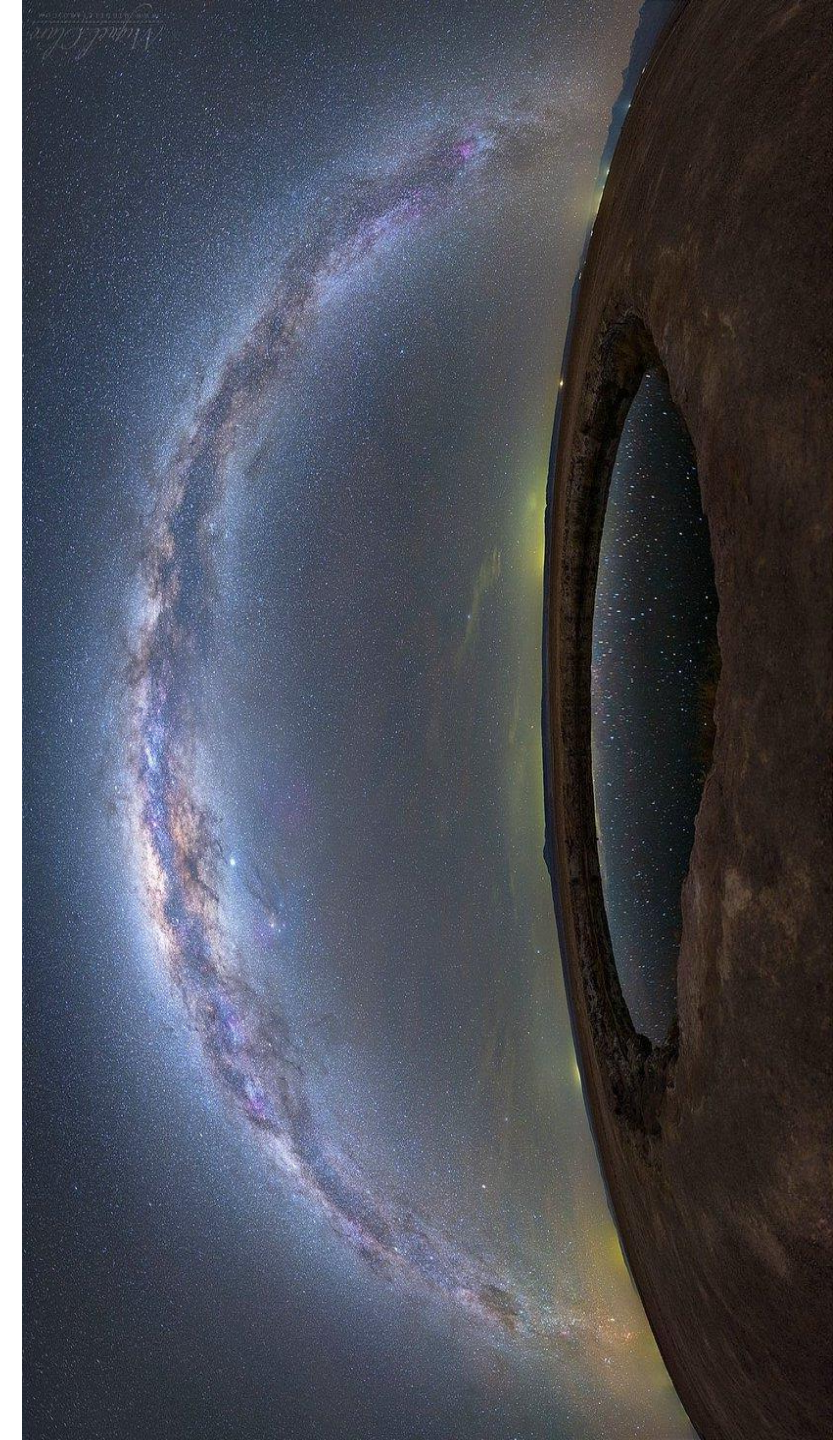
- Ivory Tower
- Animal House
- Climbing the Social Ladder
- Scientia potentia est
- The Titanic!

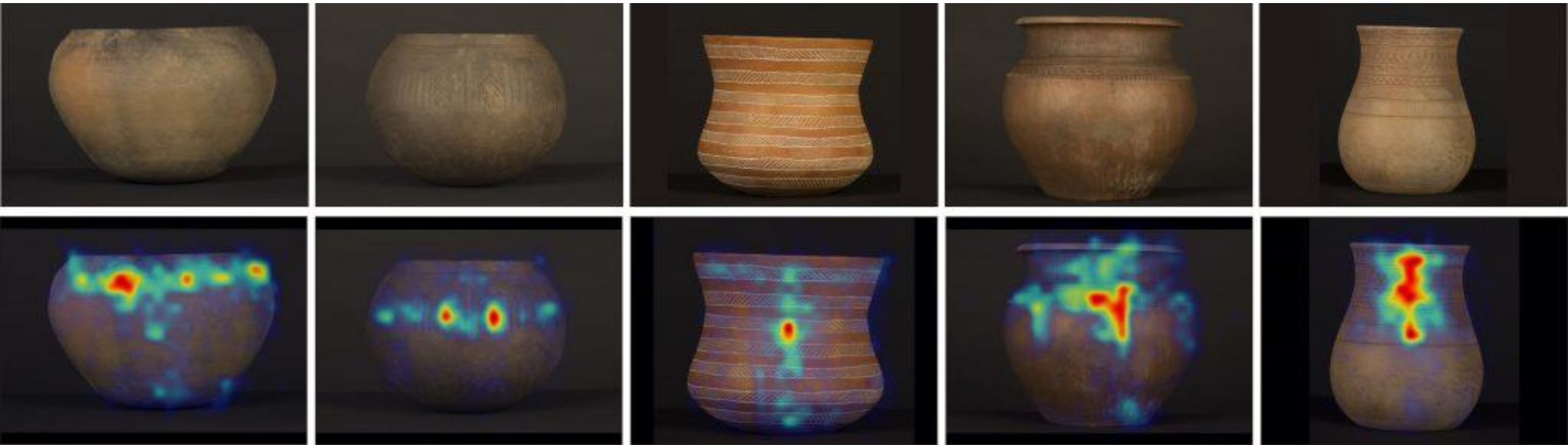
Your Turn (3 minutes)

- Think about your organization or industry
- What are some factual truths about your org?
- Why? What explains those facts?
- What is the dominant ideology or way of seeing the world of your org?
- **What are some images, metaphors, stories that symbolize, represent, or evoke your org?**



Part 3:
Civilizational Foresight:
Looking back at the present
from future worlds

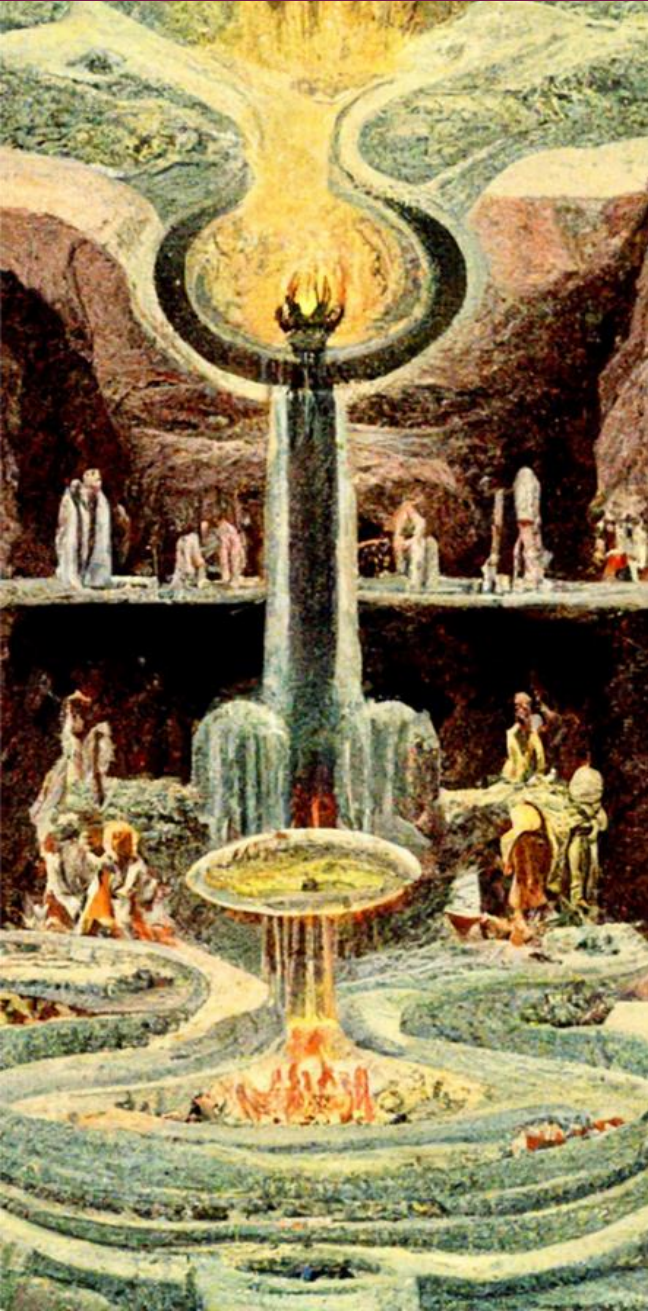




“there is a very close interaction between cultural changes and brain plasticity,”

Felipe Criado-Boado et al. Coevolution of visual behaviour, the material world and social complexity, depicted by the eye-tracking of archaeological objects in humans, *Scientific Reports* (2019).

Oracle



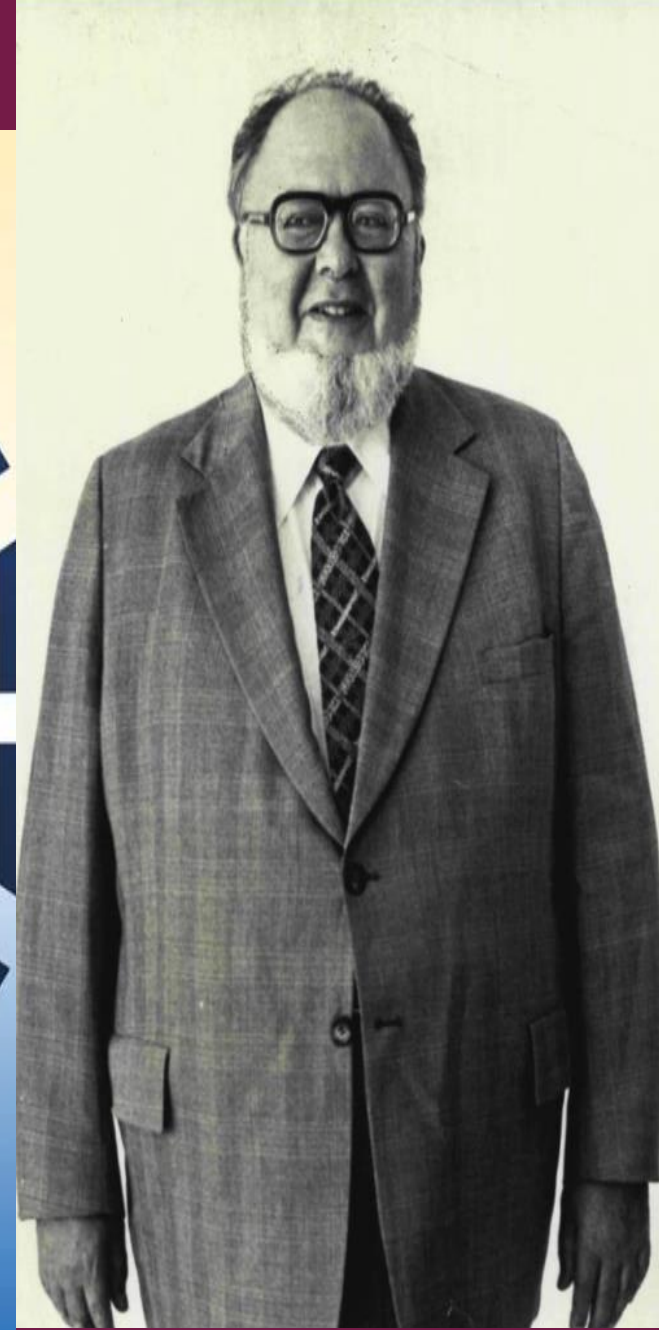
Changes



Wyrd



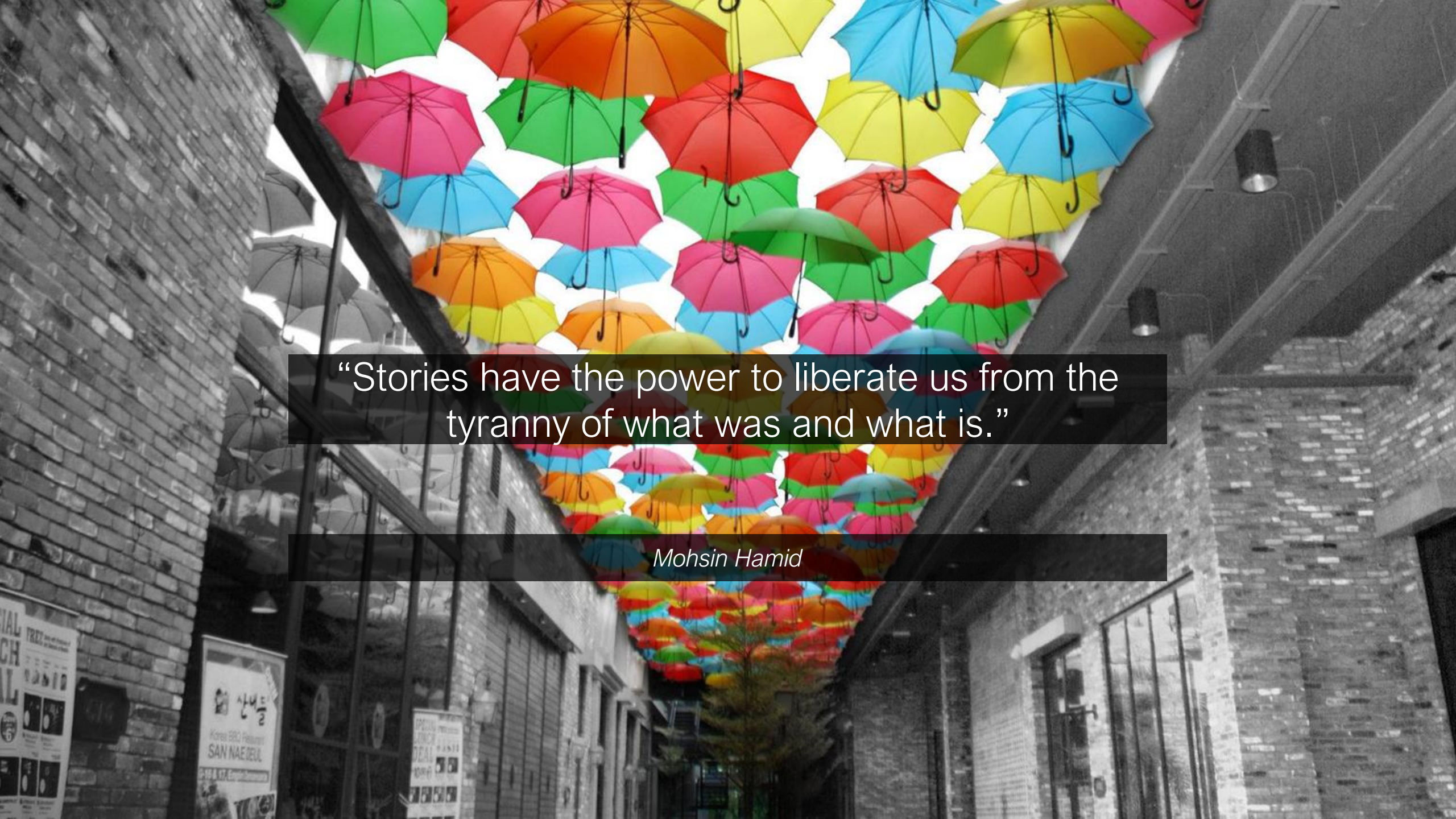
Khan!!!



Social foresight requires
better understanding of the
looping influence of
mind, culture, & the world

How can we intervene in these loops?

- New technological innovations
- New political or social movements
- Persuasive new philosophies
- New businesses and new business models
- New cultural practices and behaviors
- New **stories** about who WE are, and where WE are going... (however you want to define WE)
- ALL INFORMED BY ETHICAL FORESIGHT



“Stories have the power to liberate us from the tyranny of what was and what is.”

Mohsin Hamid

Can we create designer cognitive environments for better futures?
Can we build a human civilizational capacity for foresight?



A new story or mythology to build a future world on?

- Think about the most powerful myths, metaphors, stories, or images about human existence (from any source—religion, politics, books, poetry, movies, music, etc).
- If you were building a future society you want to live in, what image would you hold as a possible foundation to build it on?

Mine: The Pale Blue Dot

YOU ARE HERE → 

What is your image or story?

Write it down or draw it

Thank you | Gracias

A night sky photograph featuring the Milky Way galaxy stretching across the upper half of the frame. The foreground is dominated by the dark silhouette of a rocky coastline or cliffside. A bright star with a four-pointed diffraction pattern is visible in the lower right quadrant of the sky. The overall color palette is dark, with blues and greys in the sky and blacks in the foreground.