

Transcript | Futures Thinking Fundamentals for Busy Public Servants

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00:00:12.650 --> 00:00:37.159

Ula Rutkowska: Hi, everyone. Welcome to this masterclass-style event. I'm going to give everyone a moment to make the digital commute before I actually get started. So, I'm watching how many folks are entering into the room, and as soon as I feel like we've reached a critical mass, I will get us started.

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00:00:37.160 --> 00:00:41.650

Ula Rutkowska: But thank you all so much for joining us here today.

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00:00:41.650 --> 00:00:52.350

Ula Rutkowska: Welcome. This event will be on Futures Thinking Fundamentals for Busy Public Servants. My name is Ulla, and I'm the head of user research here at Apolitical.

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00:00:52.350 --> 00:01:09.729

Ula Rutkowska: It would be great to hear from all of you, so please do post into the chat where you're joining us from and what organization you work for. A technical note that your messages might come through to only our backstage team due to your Zoom's default settings.

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00:01:09.730 --> 00:01:17.680

Ula Rutkowska: Please be sure to select everyone from the blue drop-down menu in the Zoom chat if you'd like to send a message to all of us here today.

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00:01:17.680 --> 00:01:42.350

Ula Rutkowska: But, as... before we get going, please do remember to say, where you're joining us from and what organization you work for. It'd just be wonderful to see who is in the room today. So I'm seeing that we've got folks from Quebec in Canada, from Delaware in the US, from Toronto, more from Ontario, from the UK government, from Austria.

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00:01:42.430 --> 00:01:47.700

Ula Rutkowska: more and more and more from Canada, from Moldova, Portugal.

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00:01:47.980 --> 00:02:02.840

Ula Rutkowska: All right, everyone, please keep them going. I'll see who else has introduced themselves in the chat after I do a couple of introductory remarks. So, today is all about understanding the concept of futures thinking so that you can implement it into your daily work.

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00:02:02.840 --> 00:02:11.000

Ula Rutkowska: You'll hear from experts on how futures thinking can help you, whatever your role, and why it's more important now than ever before.

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00:02:11.000 --> 00:02:22.609

Ula Rutkowska: For those of you who may be joining us for the first time, welcome. Apolitical is the world's largest online network for public servants, used by half a million public servants and policymakers

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00:02:22.610 --> 00:02:25.939

Ula Rutkowska: Across 170 countries.

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00:02:25.940 --> 00:02:49.429

Ula Rutkowska: AP Political is a strategic partner to governments, helping them prepare their workforces for the future. We achieve this by upskilling government workforces through short online courses focused on government priorities, enabling them to find and share best practice through peer communities, and by building innovative tools designed for and with governments. So, let's see where else folks are joining us from.

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00:02:49.430 --> 00:02:58.349

Ula Rutkowska: Actually, so many responses are coming in that I'm struggling to keep up, but I'm seeing that we have folks joining us from Argentina, Leeds.

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00:02:58.440 --> 00:03:01.099

Ula Rutkowska: More from Canada.

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00:03:01.810 --> 00:03:11.050

Ula Rutkowska: Jersey, Ontario, South Africa, Nigeria... London, Bolivia...

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00:03:11.520 --> 00:03:36.479

Ula Rutkowska: Scotland, Toronto, Wales... alright, well, wonderful. Thank you so much, everyone. Before we get started, I also want to introduce you to the long-term governance and Futures Thinking Community on Apolitical. It's a space to ask questions we don't always get time for at work, such as, how can futures thinking make me better at my job today? If you've ever wondered about questions like this, you're definitely not alone, and this can

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00:03:36.480 --> 00:03:44.730

Ula Rutkowska: community is a great place to connect with and learn from your peers in the public sector. My colleague will post the link to the community in the chat.

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00:03:44.760 --> 00:03:57.069

Ula Rutkowska: Now, I need to get a few technical notes out of the way before we get into today's conversation. This event is recorded for on-demand viewing on the Apolitical website. Please don't record it yourself.

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00:03:57.180 --> 00:04:02.139

Ula Rutkowska: Contact details for privacy concerns are in the apolitical homepage footer.

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00:04:02.520 --> 00:04:13.709

Ula Rutkowska: Closed captions are available in your own language and can be toggled on or off in your screen settings. My colleague will post the instructions to follow in the chat.

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00:04:14.280 --> 00:04:23.449

Ula Rutkowska: Alright, before we introduce our speakers, we're going to run a few quick polls, just to get a sense of where you're coming from today's conversation.

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00:04:23.450 --> 00:04:37.029

Ula Rutkowska: Now, let's have a look at our first poll, and that's just gonna pop up on the screen in a moment. Alright, the first poll question is, what most gets in the way of applying futures thinking in your role?

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00:04:37.030 --> 00:04:52.810

Ula Rutkowska: Option 1, it feels too abstract to connect to day-to-day decisions. Option 2, there is no shared language or framework in my organization. Option three, the immediate always crowds out the long term.

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00:04:53.190 --> 00:05:18.179

Ula Rutkowska: Option 4, I don't have enough fluency in the tools and methods, and options... option 5, leadership doesn't create space or appetite for it, so please keep answering this particular poll question. Again, the question is, what most gets in the way of applying futures thinking in your role? What I'm seeing right now is that the immediate always crowds out the long term is definitely

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00:05:18.180 --> 00:05:26.459

Ula Rutkowska: taking the lead, but I'll give it just a quick moment to see if we can get any more responses, and then we'll see how you all voted.

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00:05:28.280 --> 00:05:47.190

Ula Rutkowska: Alright, I think we've got an answer here. So, as predicted, the immediate always crowds out the long term, with over 50% of you selecting that as your answer, followed by, I don't have enough fluency in the tools and methods, and leadership doesn't create space or appetite for it. Alright.

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00:05:47.190 --> 00:06:06.299

Ula Rutkowska: Now it's time for our second poll. This one is more focused on work processes, but will help us determine a few questions about future content, and that is, how long does it typically take to pull together comparative national and international evidence for a new piece of work?

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00:06:08.650 --> 00:06:17.280

Ula Rutkowska: And the options here are less than a few hours, half a day to a full day, 2 to 5 days.

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00:06:17.780 --> 00:06:21.479

Ula Rutkowska: One to two weeks, and more than two...

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00:06:21.480 --> 00:06:44.019

Ula Rutkowska: weeks. So, as a reminder, if you wouldn't mind answering this question, it will help us think through how we develop various pieces of content going forward. How long does it typically take to pull together comparative national and international evidence for a new piece of work? Option 1, less than a few hours. 2, half a day to a full day. 3, 2 to 5 days.

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00:06:44.020 --> 00:07:00.399

Ula Rutkowska: for one to two weeks, and finally, more than two weeks. And, helpfully, I think we're almost there, but if you have a chance, please do provide an answer. What's definitely taking the lead here is more than two weeks.

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00:07:00.430 --> 00:07:03.850

Ula Rutkowska: And that means that it's clearly taking quite a lot of time.

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00:07:05.060 --> 00:07:20.120

Ula Rutkowska: Alright, let's see what one. Alright, so we've got more than 2 weeks and 2 to 5 days, as well as 1-2 weeks, so certainly something that takes quite a bit longer. Thank you all so much for answering that question, it's just incredibly helpful. Alright.

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00:07:20.640 --> 00:07:28.679

Ula Rutkowska: Now, it's time to introduce our speakers. We're fortunate to have two brilliant guests, Ben and Ina, joining us today.

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00:07:28.770 --> 00:07:52.229

Ula Rutkowska: Ben Holt is Director of Foresight and Strategic Change at the School of International Futures. He previously served as Global Lead for Strategic Foresight at the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, embedding foresight in the Ukraine crisis response and leading work on multinational food security programs. He also co-founded a social enterprise innovation lab for Cancer Research UK,

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00:07:52.230 --> 00:07:55.620

Ula Rutkowska: And is the author of The Strategic Foresight Book.

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00:07:55.800 --> 00:08:11.560

Ula Rutkowska: Ina Steenmans is Associate Professor in Futures, Analysis and Policy at UCL STEAPP. She works with governments on how public servants develop the analytical and strategic thinking capabilities that complex policy problems demand.

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00:08:11.560 --> 00:08:22.379

Ula Rutkowska: She teaches futures, data science, and policy analysis at UCL, and evaluates and designs government capability programs, most recently with the UK Cabinet Office.

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00:08:22.380 --> 00:08:34.579

Ula Rutkowska: You can read the full bios by visiting the Resources tab at the bottom of your Zoom screen and heading to the Speakers section. Welcome to you both, it's really lovely to have you here.

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00:08:34.659 --> 00:08:44.910

Ula Rutkowska: Now, I want to start with a bit of an icebreaker. Each of you, and by that I mean Ben and Ina, you'll have 30 seconds to share your response to the question that I'm about to pose you.

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00:08:44.910 --> 00:09:02.129

Ula Rutkowska: And we'd love to also hear the answers of everyone that's here today in the chat as well, so as soon as I pose the question, please do, this is for all attendees, please do start thinking about what your answer to this question is, post it in the chat. I want to read them all, but first I'm just going to direct it at Ben and Ina.

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00:09:02.420 --> 00:09:03.490

Ula Rutkowska: Alright.

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00:09:03.740 --> 00:09:10.319

Ula Rutkowska: Which word do you wish we'd stop using when we talk about the future, and why?

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00:09:10.680 --> 00:09:18.889

Ula Rutkowska: Ben, I'm gonna come to you first, and again, the question is, which word do you wish we'd stop using when we talk about the future, and why?

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00:09:19.580 --> 00:09:22.010

Ben Holt: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here.

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00:09:22.260 --> 00:09:38.949

Ben Holt: I think I'd cheat a little bit here, and stretch it, because it's a phrase that I think we should stop using, which is, that will never happen. Like, I've heard it from people all over the place. You know, fundraising directors said that online donations wouldn't replace collection tins.

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00:09:38.990 --> 00:09:55.730

Ben Holt: I've heard it from people running aid programs, saying that drone technology wouldn't be useful for that delivery of those services, CIOs saying that AI would not be market-ready by the middle of this decade, and all sorts of examples of it.

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00:09:56.290 --> 00:09:57.889

Ben Holt: It's not because...

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00:09:57.960 --> 00:10:17.730

Ben Holt: they're not smart people, I'm not criticizing them, they do amazing things, it's an instinctive response, right? But if you shut down the possibilities with that kind of phrase, then that's going to limit the scope that you are working with for your plans, your conversations, your changes, your strategies. So yeah, I would get rid of that, will never happen.

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00:10:18.530 --> 00:10:29.489

Ula Rutkowska: Oh, wonderful. Well, thank you, Ben. And a reminder to everyone who's here today, please do post which word you wish we'd stop using when we talk about the future in the chat. Ina, over to you.

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00:10:30.740 --> 00:10:44.040

Ine Steenmans: Ben, I feel like I'm sure I've said that even just in the past week, so... I picked a word that I know I used to use a lot in my teaching, but oh my gosh, no more, and that's future-proofing.

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00:10:44.270 --> 00:10:59.329

Ine Steenmans: I think this, kind of description of what good futures thinking looks like, and what it is in policy is this idea that you're gonna have this watertight plan, and then the future can't get in, or at least the bits of the future that you don't want can't get in and ruin your plans, and...

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00:10:59.330 --> 00:11:05.929

Ine Steenmans: It's really unhelpful, like, it's deceptive, it's impossible, you cannot future-proof anything.

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00:11:05.930 --> 00:11:24.330

Ine Steenmans: Right, Ben? Anything can happen. And I think also what I find quite uncomfortable about it is, like, it makes us adversarial. Like, we have this opponent in the future, and we kind of have to work really hard and put up all of our defenses so that we can feature-proof our policy. So that will be my word for the day, I think.

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00:11:24.330 --> 00:11:25.200

Ula Rutkowska: -

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00:11:25.440 --> 00:11:36.750

Ula Rutkowska: All right, well, thank you so much, both. Let me just take a quick look at what everyone posted in the chat. So we've got fear, transformation, the phrase, but we have always done it this way.

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00:11:36.750 --> 00:11:50.979

Ula Rutkowska: Sustainability, there is no way. Predict, transformational initiatives, impossible. We don't have the bandwidth for that. Robust, dystopian. It will be like dot dot dot dot.

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00:11:50.980 --> 00:12:05.969

Ula Rutkowska: Skills needed for the future. Alright, well, thank you so much, everyone, and thank you to you both for such thoughtful answers. Now it's time to get right into things. Ben and Ina have both prepared a masterclass drawing on their experiences with futures thinking.

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00:12:05.970 --> 00:12:15.479

Ula Rutkowska: As always, we'll leave plenty of time for you in the audience to ask questions after, so please start thinking about those and posting them in the chat as we go.

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00:12:15.480 --> 00:12:18.630

Ula Rutkowska: First, though, let's get started with Ben.

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00:12:24.960 --> 00:12:29.190

Ben Holt: Okay, slides, and volume, right then.

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00:12:30.000 --> 00:12:32.359

Ben Holt: Thank you so much, it's a real pleasure.

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00:12:32.460 --> 00:12:33.370

Ben Holt: So...

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00:12:33.800 --> 00:12:51.710

Ben Holt: As was mentioned, I am the Director of Foresight and Strategic Change at the School of International Futures, and we help organizations that know urgent action is needed today on the world's most complex challenges, but the decisions that we make will shape the future.

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00:12:52.750 --> 00:12:57.150

Ben Holt: And I spent years in the humanitarian system, in the third sector.

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00:12:57.290 --> 00:13:09.559

Ben Holt: Helping organizations change, and that led me into innovation, and then on into strategic foresight, which basically, to me, means exploring possible futures to make better decisions today.

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00:13:09.810 --> 00:13:19.769

Ben Holt: So I've worked deep in the guts of organizations, changing how they're set up, how they use technology. I've worked directly on crises and...

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00:13:20.340 --> 00:13:28.790

Ben Holt: humanitarian programming, and so I'm always trying to find practical ways to use futures thinking, turning visions into actual decisions.

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00:13:28.990 --> 00:13:40.570

Ben Holt: So, I'm gonna share some of the mindsets and the ways of thinking and looking at the world that I think makes futures useful. Whether or not you want to call yourself a foresight or a futures practitioner.

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00:13:40.840 --> 00:13:44.110

Ben Holt: Because we all think about the future all the time.

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00:13:44.210 --> 00:13:47.369

Ben Holt: Anyway, so let's start with that. Start with yourself.

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00:13:47.740 --> 00:13:50.309

Ben Holt: What's your emotional and gut reaction?

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00:13:51.060 --> 00:13:53.419

Ben Holt: When you hear the word future.

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00:13:53.610 --> 00:14:08.580

Ben Holt: put yourself onto this... this grid. If you feel optimistic when you hear the word future, you'll be towards the top. More pessimistic about the way the world's going towards the bottom. If you feel that you can make a difference to that future, you're over on this side.

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00:14:08.710 --> 00:14:10.939

Ben Holt: And if you can't, you're over there, so...

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00:14:11.420 --> 00:14:20.329

Ben Holt: I'll share some colors so you can see where we're at. You might feel optimistic and that you can make a difference. And please, you know, feel free to share in the chat where you are.

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00:14:21.540 --> 00:14:31.499

Ben Holt: You might feel pessimistic, the world's gonna get worse and more challenging, but you can still do something about it to help to deal with those and mitigate the challenges.

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00:14:32.460 --> 00:14:38.080

Ben Holt: Many people, particularly those caught up in crises, disasters, or who have been

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00:14:40.190 --> 00:14:43.960

Ben Holt: Who, you know, who are not thriving in the current state.

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00:14:44.380 --> 00:14:55.530

Ben Holt: will find themselves down here, pessimistic about their future, and that they can't make a difference. And apparently there are some people who feel optimistic about the future, but that they can't or don't want to make a difference.

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00:14:56.590 --> 00:15:01.079

Ben Holt: I suspect on a call like this, a lot of you will be over on the right-hand side.

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00:15:01.280 --> 00:15:18.560

Ben Holt: feeling that you have some agency, but you may feel optimistic or pessimistic, and that might change over time as well. Change is dependent on whether you're thinking about the timescale, or which timescale, whether you're thinking about yourself as an individual, or your organization, or your community.

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00:15:19.290 --> 00:15:28.089

Ben Holt: And that starts to illustrate that there's a huge variation in our assumptions about the future, and our expectations about how we might influence it.

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00:15:28.400 --> 00:15:36.679

Ben Holt: So why is there, you know, this big variety of emotions, feelings, attitudes towards the future, even within ourselves?

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00:15:37.080 --> 00:15:39.739

Ben Holt: I think it's because the future doesn't exist.

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00:15:40.190 --> 00:16:00.029

Ben Holt: So, Jim Data is one of the founders of Foresight as a Practice, and he has three rules for the future. And the first is that the future cannot be predicted because it doesn't exist. So there are multiple possible futures, and that is... and it's shaped by what we do now. It's not predetermined, definite, under control, or certain.

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00:16:00.200 --> 00:16:06.730

Ben Holt: So it's a place of uncertainty, of possibilities and change, and that can be really uncomfortable.

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00:16:06.760 --> 00:16:23.210

Ben Holt: Especially in big, complicated organizations, which might try to think of themselves as a machine which can be optimized. And it's that attitude that, in turn, changes how they then think about the future, because they also want that to be predictable and manageable.

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00:16:25.280 --> 00:16:29.030

Ben Holt: you can visualize it like this, so...

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00:16:29.760 --> 00:16:36.559

Ben Holt: We have that inherent, innate understanding of time passing, and that as time passes, things will change.

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00:16:37.800 --> 00:16:51.649

Ben Holt: Organizations then create strategies, they create growth projections to explain what they will do over time, but they're just stories about the future, and they often sit in quite a narrow set of assumptions.

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00:16:51.780 --> 00:16:54.029

Ben Holt: About what the future might be like.

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00:16:54.630 --> 00:17:07.250

Ben Holt: And that, in turn, can make it hard to spot or to use signals of change to identify emerging challenges and opportunities. I saw in the chat at the beginning, somebody said the word they would get rid of

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00:17:07.250 --> 00:17:15.400

Ben Holt: or challenges, everything being a risk, and that there are opportunities out there, and I absolutely agree. Spotting those early, considering them.

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00:17:15.480 --> 00:17:17.920

Ben Holt: Exploring them can be really powerful.

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00:17:18.980 --> 00:17:19.960

Ben Holt: So...

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00:17:20.310 --> 00:17:31.429

Ben Holt: Let's illustrate this kind of thinking with an issue that I think is important to a lot of people, one we might all be familiar with, and that's the future of sandwiches.

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00:17:31.680 --> 00:17:36.309

Ben Holt: Now, this might seem strange, pointless, not what you expected.

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00:17:36.970 --> 00:17:38.289

Ben Holt: But what do you think?

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00:17:39.160 --> 00:17:42.769

Ben Holt: That a sandwich might look like in 10 years. 20 years.

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00:17:42.990 --> 00:17:45.379

Ben Holt: What is a future sandwich gonna look like?

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00:17:45.560 --> 00:17:51.500

Ben Holt: It might seem like a daft question, how much have they actually changed, and why am I talking about sandwiches?

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00:17:51.710 --> 00:17:53.180

Ben Holt: But what about Mao?

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00:17:53.660 --> 00:18:00.560

Ben Holt: How does a sandwich change if generative biology allows us to create food that's also individualized medicine?

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00:18:00.670 --> 00:18:05.560

Ben Holt: Or that doesn't have the negative health impact of current processed foods.

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00:18:06.220 --> 00:18:12.120

Ben Holt: What happens if the rural economy collapses, thanks to synthetic manufacturing or urban farming?

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00:18:12.860 --> 00:18:18.079

Ben Holt: So by examining weak signals of change and emerging trends across different domains.

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00:18:18.430 --> 00:18:21.649

Ben Holt: From public attitudes to cutting-edge science.

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00:18:22.860 --> 00:18:29.450

Ben Holt: Considering the potential impacts of scientific breakthroughs, new technologies...

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00:18:29.960 --> 00:18:34.270

Ben Holt: Even the future of a sandwich can start to look quite dramatically different.

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00:18:35.320 --> 00:18:40.809

Ben Holt: And it's not sci-fi, right? These are all real emerging trends, issues.

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00:18:41.050 --> 00:18:43.210

Ben Holt: Science. Legislation.

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00:18:43.420 --> 00:18:45.610

Ben Holt: And it's this kind of evidence

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00:18:45.810 --> 00:18:48.979

Ben Holt: That can help us better understand how the world might change.

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00:18:49.100 --> 00:18:50.310

Ben Holt: Over time.

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00:18:51.090 --> 00:19:01.399

Ben Holt: And again, another question I saw in there was how do you, you know, how do you sift out, how do you start to consider what's a valuable versus a not valuable signal?

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00:19:01.790 --> 00:19:12.789

Ben Holt: And breaking it down to the component parts of the problem you're wrestling with can help. You know, when I did this, I started looking at all the different elements that made up the sandwich, and explored different aspects of them.

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00:19:15.300 --> 00:19:26.669

Ben Holt: So, the future can't be predicted, but it can be explored and examined, and you can find useful signals of change out there, and suddenly, even then, the future of a sandwich looks dramatically different.

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00:19:26.760 --> 00:19:43.819

Ben Holt: It might not even be a sandwich. There's plenty of other ways that we could snack, now that we have all these new technologies, this new knowledge. And so... so if you're a sandwich manufacturer, and you only ask, what is the future of the sandwich, rather than what are possible futures for convenience food.

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00:19:43.880 --> 00:19:47.399

Ben Holt: You miss a lot of challenges, opportunities, and potential.

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00:19:47.640 --> 00:19:58.139

Ben Holt: If you're a car manufacturer, and you only ask what's the future of the car, rather than what are possible futures for personal transport, you will miss challenges, and you will miss opportunities.

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00:19:58.570 --> 00:20:04.259

Ben Holt: So, that's a really critical element to this, thinking about the questions that you're asking.

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00:20:05.070 --> 00:20:11.210

Ben Holt: And... What that means for your strategies, and how you are planning for the future, because

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00:20:11.410 --> 00:20:16.150

Ben Holt: It's those kind of questions, it's broadening the questions that you ask that's going to

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00:20:16.370 --> 00:20:24.450

Ben Holt: Help you think beyond what you assume to be the probable future, and to consider a much wider range of possibilities.

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00:20:24.850 --> 00:20:30.469

Ben Holt: The wild cards are the things like the pandemic, the sudden arrival of AI to a lot of people.

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00:20:30.750 --> 00:20:35.640

Ben Holt: Those things that disrupt the current paradigm and are well-made plans.

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00:20:36.720 --> 00:20:45.809

Ben Holt: And the space between current reality and these emerging possibilities across the scenarios, that's where good strategy and change and innovation happens.

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00:20:46.860 --> 00:20:58.490

Ben Holt: It helps you identify that preferred vision for the future, and really be ambitious and directional about what you're trying to achieve, and how you'd like to shape the future for what you do now.

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00:20:58.740 --> 00:21:09.370

Ben Holt: It's also a very interesting space, because it asks you to combine evidence of emerging change with imagination and creative thinking, which is another critical element for foresight work.

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00:21:09.540 --> 00:21:19.860

Ben Holt: But imagination and creativity are not always respected or valued as much as they might be in large institutions or bureaucracies, because people are suspicious of them.

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00:21:20.030 --> 00:21:34.799

Ben Holt: They're worried that too much imagination might lead you to predictions about the future that appear ridiculous and get dismissed, ridiculed, or laughed at. So, there's an image here of how somebody in 1899 imagined the year 2000.

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00:21:36.520 --> 00:21:41.070

Ben Holt: But images like this... They're only ridiculous until they're not.

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00:21:41.130 --> 00:21:55.739

Ben Holt: Because sometimes things become real. Sometimes things emerge which really do surprise us, and which might be dismissed at first. And that leads us to Jim's second rule, which is that any useful idea about the future should appear to be ridiculous.

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00:21:55.740 --> 00:22:04.400

Ben Holt: That means that you often have to be willing to disagree with the accepted wisdom and embrace uncertainty, consider multiple possibilities at once, and ask what if.

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00:22:04.650 --> 00:22:10.509

Ben Holt: And that can be uncomfortable, because it's often people with the power in the current setup who struggle to accept

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00:22:11.400 --> 00:22:12.420

Ben Holt: The...

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00:22:13.760 --> 00:22:18.889

Ben Holt: Thing, you know, they struggle to accept things that they consider ridiculous, because they've helped to establish, you know.

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00:22:19.050 --> 00:22:24.849

Ben Holt: the situation of the world as it is now. And there's loads of examples of people dismissing radically different futures.

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00:22:25.360 --> 00:22:33.389

Ben Holt: Because they're so immersed in the current paradigm, which they help to create, and they often can't imagine or believe that it might fail.

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00:22:33.420 --> 00:22:46.120

Ben Holt: So people like Ken Olsen, who helped to really drive the computer revolution, but he made his money selling huge mainframe computers to businesses. Could not see a larger personal market.

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00:22:46.440 --> 00:22:48.089

Ben Holt: The head of Warner Brothers.

143

00:22:48.320 --> 00:22:52.489

Ben Holt: Couldn't see a shift in movies to where people wanted to hear them talk.

144

00:22:52.730 --> 00:23:00.499

Ben Holt: Or Time Magazine failing to connect the dots, emerging in disparate domains that would lead to the kind of home shopping that we have now.

145

00:23:02.740 --> 00:23:05.349

Ben Holt: So this leads me to a third rule from Jem.

146

00:23:05.560 --> 00:23:12.349

Ben Holt: Which is that we shape our tools, and thereafter, our tools shape us. So that means that the context

147

00:23:12.750 --> 00:23:18.410

Ben Holt: The mental models, the organizational structures we're surrounded by, they shape our thinking.

148

00:23:18.590 --> 00:23:22.709

Ben Holt: And they alter how we behave, and then they change the world around us.

149

00:23:22.920 --> 00:23:39.899

Ben Holt: So there's loads of examples of this. Smartphones are reshaping how we communicate, share information. They're even affecting our brains and how we retain information. Cars reshaped cities and suburbs, commuting patterns.

150

00:23:39.970 --> 00:23:52.909

Ben Holt: The printing press reshaped literacy, religion, education, politics. There's loads of examples. It has huge implications, but in practical terms, and on an organizational scale.

151

00:23:53.170 --> 00:23:58.100

Ben Holt: It suggests that making foresight useful means understanding what's

152

00:23:58.240 --> 00:24:03.779

Ben Holt: Currently shaping the way that your organization thinks, acts, and allocates resources.

153

00:24:03.940 --> 00:24:08.830

Ben Holt: It's not enough to just have big, interesting ideas if they don't lead to change.

154

00:24:08.940 --> 00:24:16.199

Ben Holt: And this is the bridge into good organizational change and innovation, because innovation just means new stuff that's useful.

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00:24:16.480 --> 00:24:23.930

Ben Holt: As in, it solves a real problem, or makes something work better, or allows people to do things that weren't possible before.

156

00:24:24.330 --> 00:24:27.930

Ben Holt: Foresight and futures thinking can really help with that.

157

00:24:28.130 --> 00:24:29.980

Ben Holt: So, when I have worked on

158

00:24:30.250 --> 00:24:33.349

Ben Holt: You know, with people on things like the Ukraine crisis.

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00:24:33.490 --> 00:24:41.850

Ben Holt: We took the kind of thinking I've just described, and those mindsets, and we applied it to real, urgent, complicated, high-stakes problems.

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00:24:41.970 --> 00:24:49.249

Ben Holt: And I was nervous, because I was supporting people in the Red Cross, Red Crescent, who were responding to a war.

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00:24:49.640 --> 00:24:56.280

Ben Holt: And here we were, offering a set of scenarios and implications, looking 5 years ahead into possible futures.

162

00:24:57.400 --> 00:25:15.719

Ben Holt: But it allowed us to analyze and extrapolate on the impacts of the war, and how they might interact with existing humanitarian vulnerabilities or create new ones, which in turn allowed us to flag some really real risks and challenges and critical issues for the operational teams to consider.

163

00:25:16.380 --> 00:25:26.289

Ben Holt: And after we did it, being told that we'd surfaced stuff that they weren't currently thinking about, but that they were... that was really relevant to the decisions that they were making was really powerful.

164

00:25:27.040 --> 00:25:33.970

Ben Holt: And we went on to integrate Foresight into their normal strategy and planning processes, so it became integrated rather than an add-on.

165

00:25:35.190 --> 00:25:42.329

Ben Holt: you know, we've done similar across food security programs in Zambia, democracy building.

166

00:25:42.440 --> 00:25:58.710

Ben Holt: in the Middle East, emerging science for governments, automation technology for NGOs. So, we have to make sure we're doing something useful, and that the outputs can be translated into the organization. So, to wrap up, I think that that means

167

00:25:58.890 --> 00:26:00.729

Ben Holt: Asking different questions.

168

00:26:01.210 --> 00:26:04.560

Ben Holt: Being aware of your own biases and blind spots.

169

00:26:05.880 --> 00:26:07.720

Ben Holt: Exploring evidence.

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00:26:07.980 --> 00:26:13.899

Ben Holt: I'm looking for unexpected evidence, not being scared to apply imagination to it as well.

171

00:26:14.660 --> 00:26:17.590

Ben Holt: Being willing to hold more than one future.

172

00:26:17.720 --> 00:26:21.970

Ben Holt: In your mind at once, and being comfortable with that uncertainty and ambiguity.

173

00:26:22.480 --> 00:26:25.550

Ben Holt: Being willing to question received wisdom.

174

00:26:26.100 --> 00:26:33.349

Ben Holt: And becoming confident in saying things that, you know, you're scared that they might invite ridicule, or a raised eyebrow.

175

00:26:34.200 --> 00:26:50.979

Ben Holt: And then being very pragmatic about how you feed these insights and ideas into the organizational pipework. And that's the ways in which money, information, power, decisions flow around your organization. You need to feed the insights into that, so they translate into real action.

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00:26:51.030 --> 00:26:57.809

Ben Holt: So, those are the kind of critical mindsets and approaches that I would recommend for making foresight useful.

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00:26:58.600 --> 00:27:00.089

Ben Holt: Thank you very much.

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00:27:00.770 --> 00:27:13.960

Ula Rutkowska: Thank you so much, Ben. That was just unbelievably interesting, and I must admit that I spent a good few minutes there thinking about just how pessimistic I am. So also, thank you for forcing me to confront that for a moment.

179

00:27:13.960 --> 00:27:28.879

Ula Rutkowska: Ina, I will hand over to you in a second. I just wanted to take a moment to encourage everyone to get their questions submitted in time for the Q&A. We've got two experts here with us, so please don't hold back. There's no such thing as a bad question, so keep them coming, please.

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00:27:28.880 --> 00:27:31.130

Ula Rutkowska: And in the meantime, Ina, over to you.

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00:27:32.120 --> 00:27:39.630

Ine Steenmans: Thanks so much, and Ben, how brilliant. I think what I'm gonna try and do my best here at is...

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00:27:39.960 --> 00:27:48.140

Ine Steenmans: Same with you, audio and visual, there we go. Is... okay, so Ben's giving us...

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00:27:48.870 --> 00:27:56.629

Ine Steenmans: Many things, but at least three kind of core principles for how we can spot patterns in our thinking about the future.

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00:27:56.630 --> 00:28:17.549

Ine Steenmans: And by day job, I do a lot of sort of designing of training and evaluating of training for complex analytical thinking, which includes futures thinking. And so really, I come from a place where I'm always driven by understanding, like, how can we nurture the kinds of thinking that are really desirable, or the ones that we want to foreground?

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00:28:17.550 --> 00:28:24.450

Ine Steenmans: And what works. So, I'm going to do 3 things in my next 10 minutes or so.

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00:28:24.740 --> 00:28:37.420

Ine Steenmans: I'm gonna share a little bit about what we know from science to date, about how you as individuals, and you as part of wider teams and your institutions collectively, can think

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00:28:37.420 --> 00:28:52.720

Ine Steenmans: well about the future, but also to really acknowledge, like, what can be hard to do that in a government or public policy context, and then once I've gone with the bad news, I'll come back with some good news about here are some things that we've also learned from science in terms of how to do that better.

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00:28:53.110 --> 00:28:58.899

Ine Steenmans: So, I... we didn't really get a chance yet to...

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00:28:59.010 --> 00:29:13.739

Ine Steenmans: ask you this question, but I imagine that some of the people on the call will have actually taken some futures training in the past, or at least you'll have received or seen, kind of, future scans, foresight reports, strategies, and...

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00:29:13.740 --> 00:29:38.699

Ine Steenmans: To date, much of what we do when we try to help each other out to sort of do better futures thinking and policy contexts, a lot of the ways by which we do that is that we're very kind of... we make this assumption that it's all about sharing knowledge and wisdom, so that we share tools with each other, we share artifacts, protocols, outlines, how-tos, and that's really great. It gives us a lot of sort of content to work with.

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00:29:38.700 --> 00:29:41.260

Ine Steenmans: And it fills our brain with lots of principles.

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00:29:41.260 --> 00:29:42.020

Ine Steenmans: But...

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00:29:42.540 --> 00:30:07.469

Ine Steenmans: what tends to get missed out a little bit is, like, linking all of that knowledge into really how each of you think, and how your brain operates. And so, it's not that I'm a neuroscientist or a brain scientist, but I have become quite passionate about sort of saying, like, we should really better understand how we actually do features thinking, because if we're going to sort of look to not just do that better individually, but scale that up to organizations and societies, then we should really understand the kind of

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00:30:07.470 --> 00:30:15.369

Ine Steenmans: fundamental nuts and bolts of what makes for features thinking capacity. So that's kind of the theme. If you're wondering why is she talking about brains.

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00:30:15.390 --> 00:30:23.080

Ine Steenmans: I'm doing it because I want all of the things that you receive to land and to stick, when you go on courses or training or receive reports.

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00:30:23.180 --> 00:30:24.340

Ine Steenmans: So this is, like...

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00:30:24.390 --> 00:30:40.330

Ine Steenmans: the shortest history of, prospective neuroforesight science that you'll ever have, 30 seconds, which is that, lots of studies have been done, especially in, like, developmental biology, psychology, neuroscience, about

198

00:30:40.330 --> 00:30:53.410

Ine Steenmans: What do we know about the human brain? And, like, what distinctively is it that, from an evolutionary perspective, human brains do that might be distinctive to humans, or at least are, like, fundamental to making sense of how we make decisions and how we behave?

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00:30:53.450 --> 00:30:58.510

Ine Steenmans: And fundamentally, there's sort of some famous studies signposted there on the side.

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00:30:58.510 --> 00:31:19.139

Ine Steenmans: What each of you do is you are already a phenomenally effective prediction machine. You are constantly simulating possible futures and evaluating and assessing them. You do that when you throw a ball, when you wake up in the morning and you open your cupboard and you don't have as much food as you thought, and you're trying to figure out, what will I do now, or you...

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00:31:19.140 --> 00:31:26.379

Ine Steenmans: Commute to work, and there's a traffic jam, and you then simulate different routes to work, but also kind of the consequence of what will happen.

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00:31:26.380 --> 00:31:33.909

Ine Steenmans: So, simulating futures, unknown things, and quickly appraising them are things that your brain do, really well.

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00:31:34.260 --> 00:31:49.300

Ine Steenmans: So much so that if you sort of were to take that away in terms of one frame, one of the more kind of most recent arguments has been that we should sort of shift from this term, *Homo sapiens*, which I don't speak Latin, but I take it to mean it's a knowing being.

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00:31:49.300 --> 00:31:55.850

Ine Steenmans: That we are a homeless prospectus, that most of our decision-making and our planning and behaving is entirely premised in this

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00:31:55.850 --> 00:32:17.389

Ine Steenmans: predicting constantly what we expect to happen in the next moment, the next day, the next week. And that we try to minimize the error, because we try to be as efficient as possible with our energy to avoid harm, but prediction is the fundamental way by which your

brain takes you through every moment, every day, and all of your time. So you are a homeless prospectus, whether you like it or not.

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00:32:17.850 --> 00:32:18.730

Ine Steenmans: Now.

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00:32:19.110 --> 00:32:26.730

Ine Steenmans: How this works, and this is going to help us when we try to make sense of how can we do it better in a policy context, is that the way the brain

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00:32:27.120 --> 00:32:33.420

Ine Steenmans: predicts the future, or simulates different futures, is it uses the exact same parts

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00:32:33.460 --> 00:32:48.350

Ine Steenmans: mechanisms of the brain that you use when you, engage in memory recall. So, the brain, you have experiences, the brain, a bit like Lego blocks, disassembles them and takes these little fragments and puts them in your own local library of different things you've experienced.

210

00:32:48.350 --> 00:33:04.459

Ine Steenmans: So you have a little memory block that's about knowing what the smell of wet grasses look like. You have a little memory block that gets saved, which is about, like, knowing what it feels like to be hungry when you haven't had food for a while. And you have, I'm sure, many memory blocks about what it's like to be in a meeting and to see if

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00:33:04.460 --> 00:33:16.929

Ine Steenmans: sort of a study and a fact that you took from that. You have many, many, many of these little memory blocks in your brain, and what the brain then does is it, when prompted by something, a situation, it's trying to predict, it quickly draws

212

00:33:17.210 --> 00:33:29.500

Ine Steenmans: And, like, curates from that huge library of experiences, and another part of the brain stitches them together, provides a kind of stage for it, so it makes these future simulations

213

00:33:29.500 --> 00:33:46.929

Ine Steenmans: place-based. It sort of tries to land them on particular people, particular places, particular emotions, and it immediately also is then sort of assessing, well, does this make sense? Would this be possible? Is this coherent? You don't know that you're doing it, but your brain is doing this full-time, and so it's making these

214

00:33:46.930 --> 00:33:56.130

Ine Steenmans: New future simulations, hugely dependent on your past memories. So in this, we already learned quite a few things. We know that the more

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00:33:56.290 --> 00:34:07.000

Ine Steenmans: The more, or the richer, or different kinds of experiences you've had, or the more you've kind of tried to be actively present, the more you equip your brain to help it with these different kinds of simulations.

216

00:34:07.000 --> 00:34:24.410

Ine Steenmans: And we can also become more attentive. So someone asked, in a question I saw early on, what makes for a really great time horizon for future activities? Well, that's the bit of the brain, I don't know if that will show, which is about staging. So, it just... there's not a right or a wrong, but helping

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00:34:24.409 --> 00:34:40.520

Ine Steenmans: you or someone say, actually, let's imagine the future in 5 years from now, or 10 years from now. You immediately give it some context, and the brain does much better when it just... it doesn't matter whether it's accurate, but giving someone a time frame, a location, a community, a person to hook a futures question onto.

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00:34:40.520 --> 00:34:46.260

Ine Steenmans: The brain does a much better job at bringing resolution and color and, like, sense to future simulation.

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00:34:46.760 --> 00:34:51.360

Ine Steenmans: So... that's amazing, right? We do feature syncing all the time.

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00:34:51.800 --> 00:34:55.009

Ine Steenmans: I'm trying to move my slide, but it's not going.

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00:34:55.449 --> 00:35:01.040

Ine Steenmans: There we go. So, so what? Like, if we're already doing this, then,

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00:35:02.540 --> 00:35:21.370

Ine Steenmans: we work, you work in policy context, why can't it be harder than we would expect it to be? Or maybe, I don't know where you were on Ben's, like, four quadrants, maybe your own historical experiences have drawn you all the way down to pessimistic, and not thinking that you have much ability to change the future. Like, why is that?

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00:35:21.370 --> 00:35:23.070

Ine Steenmans: Well,

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00:35:23.230 --> 00:35:41.870

Ine Steenmans: there are lots of reasons, but I think really important here is that the majority of the reasons for why futures thinking in a policy governmental context can be hard are structural. And now, I don't know how many colleagues on the call are sort of in managerial positions or, like, directors, but the kind of implications here have relevance to all of us.

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00:35:42.020 --> 00:35:56.740

Ine Steenmans: A lot of text, that's just there for reference. I'll sort of go with the icons. So the first thing that can switch off futures thinking in a policy context is that actually, by and large, we are rewarded for sounding certain.

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00:35:57.090 --> 00:36:15.190

Ine Steenmans: That's entirely legitimate. Of course, your industry partners want to have a sense of policy direction and some certainty about what the priority and investment levels are going to be like. Of course, the media isn't going to applaud every time someone stands on a stage and says, we have no idea what's gonna happen.

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00:36:15.190 --> 00:36:20.109

Ine Steenmans: You know, same in your personal, appraisals and in your, kind of, probation forms.

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00:36:20.740 --> 00:36:25.570

Ine Steenmans: If you just said all the time, I have no idea, then, you wouldn't come across that well. So...

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00:36:25.750 --> 00:36:41.059

Ine Steenmans: we reward certainty, and generally, you're kind of trading off, there's a kind of cost that you're calculating happens when you don't have certainty to perform. So, come back a little bit later about what can we do? That doesn't mean good or bad, but more something to be aware of.

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00:36:41.400 --> 00:36:43.090

Ine Steenmans: The other thing is...

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00:36:43.480 --> 00:36:55.820

Ine Steenmans: we talk a lot about time horizons and timeframes, and lots of you, I mean, that first survey question was about how do we deal with the long term when the short term is just all we have to think about and firefight? Well.

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00:36:56.470 --> 00:37:15.770

Ine Steenmans: That is one of the key switches. We currently, and this is very UK, relevant, I imagine too, across other policy contexts, we structurally are set up to really be completely about the short term. That's our electoral cycles, it's the

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00:37:15.770 --> 00:37:40.680

Ine Steenmans: timeframes around our key performance indicators, maybe we have, like... we might talk about climate change of a multi-decade time span, but our budgets are reviewed every 3 years, things like that. We may speak of the long term, but we are completely structurally set up to squeeze a long-term out and only focus short-term. So what then emerges, and you probably experienced this, that thinking about futures in the long term feels like this, like, indulgent thing.

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00:37:40.680 --> 00:37:43.689

Ine Steenmans: of luxury thing? What's the relevance?

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00:37:43.690 --> 00:37:45.470

Ine Steenmans: And,

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00:37:45.680 --> 00:37:51.599

Ine Steenmans: I guess what I should say there is, like, of course that's... that's not what... that's so unhelpful and inaccurate.

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00:37:51.870 --> 00:38:15.450

Ine Steenmans: If you find yourself in that situation, I would recommend any colleague that you're dealing with to say, like, actually, but surely what we're dealing with today is because upstream from us, someone didn't do long-term thinking. Now, think about the cost of what we're dealing with today. What would we wish we had talked about 5 or 10 years ago that could have made our day-to-day firefighting today easier? Anyway, we can come back to that in the Q&A.

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00:38:15.450 --> 00:38:22.210

Ine Steenmans: And lastly, Ben, I think you and I have to take some responsibility for this, on behalf of our many futures colleagues.

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00:38:22.210 --> 00:38:42.519

Ine Steenmans: But there's a little bit of a historical inheriting from various reasons where futures methods come from, that often the methods were kind of treated like that was futures thinking. Just do some scenarios, do some trends analysis, and you've done futures thinking. No. The methods are just the vehicles. The thinking happens in people's brains, so people inevitably have ended up quite disappointed.

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00:38:42.520 --> 00:38:45.619

Ine Steenmans: Because you had really credible-looking futures outputs.

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00:38:46.060 --> 00:38:59.110

Ine Steenmans: But very little good futures thinking that happened. So, three things that happen often in government contexts, and every time they happen, they switch off the space for good futures thinking. I won't dwell on this too much, but...

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00:38:59.110 --> 00:39:24.030

Ine Steenmans: I do want you to feel, you don't have to share what they were, but you can put a number 1, 2, or 3, if just in the past week you kind of look back on meetings you were in, or email chains you were in, if you spotted any of these three things happening. You know, sort of reward for certainty, sounding confident, squeezing out of the long term, or methods performance. And I'd be curious when I come back to the chat later to see how many numbers 1, 2, or 3 were there.

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00:39:24.030 --> 00:39:25.549

Ine Steenmans: And if there was any difference.

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00:39:27.770 --> 00:39:44.160

Ine Steenmans: So, I'm coming to that third part of the talk, because I said I'd sort of share the bad news, and then I'd come back with some good news. There's lots of things that you can do, and they're not expensive. They're not very controversial to do this better.

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00:39:44.160 --> 00:39:49.129

Ine Steenmans: So, better futures thinking for very, very busy public servants, I imagine.

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00:39:49.130 --> 00:40:05.540

Ine Steenmans: Individually, remember how your feature syncing happens. So try, when you experience something, to do that deliberately. That sounds a bit abstract, but what it means is, if your brain is trying to collect more of the building blocks, or the Lego bricks, or however you want to think about it, to help you do

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00:40:06.030 --> 00:40:09.420

Ine Steenmans: More interesting future simulations and thinking.

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00:40:09.520 --> 00:40:27.380

Ine Steenmans: then, you know, give yourself exposure to new experiences. In your professional context, read a little bit outside of the immediate brief, meet a colleague who doesn't immediately work in your policy domain or area, or go and, like, visit frontline service delivery. Any... whatever it is, but just...

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00:40:27.650 --> 00:40:38.450

Ine Steenmans: value, experience, and broader experience as something that long-term builds up your own little catalog that you can draw on. Now, the other is, really from neuroscience and cognitive sciences.

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00:40:38.460 --> 00:40:49.400

Ine Steenmans: The brain, turns out, does much better at perspective, speculative thinking when it doesn't have a specific task. So if you sit down and say, what is the future of the sandwich?

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00:40:49.450 --> 00:41:03.199

Ine Steenmans: If you just say, come up with the answer, the brain does not do well with that at all. It needs permission to think loosely and broadly, so go for a walk and think about it, or sit down with a notebook and don't immediately have to write down the answer.

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00:41:04.020 --> 00:41:15.589

Ine Steenmans: Cognitive science tells you that that is more effective at coming up with better building blocks and simulations about the future and better futures thinking than trying to just land on the answer. And the other is.

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00:41:15.700 --> 00:41:33.650

Ine Steenmans: the stuff that happens in our brain, much more to say, it can be a bit fuzzy, especially the longer we think, it constantly keeps flipping, so many of us, it really helps us when we kind of sketch something, or put a physical object in front of us, not for accuracy, but be like, I'm going to pretend this is the future I want to look at, because it kind of...

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00:41:33.730 --> 00:41:46.680

Ine Steenmans: takes away the cognitive load, the effort of, like, trying to remember all of the things I was thinking about. What does a sandwich look like in 2050? I'll just sketch something quickly, and then the brain does better at sort of reacting to that, and having friction with that.

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00:41:47.230 --> 00:42:03.049

Ine Steenmans: Now, if you're, that's all about you as an individual, but kind of the magic of government and policy is, sure, we'll just get, like, 50 really great futures thinkers, and then surely we'll get 50 times the futures thinking effect, but that doesn't happen that way.

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00:42:03.290 --> 00:42:22.710

Ine Steenmans: for various reasons, structural, but also some are social and cognitive. This is the kind of the puzzle we face. If we just get everyone to think better in terms of future thinking, won't we just then automatically have better institutions? No, you have to provide the enabling conditions. So...

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00:42:23.020 --> 00:42:28.070

Ine Steenmans: I'll try to be, not hurried, but short here.

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00:42:28.380 --> 00:42:37.570

Ine Steenmans: So what you need is, you need to allow people to do... give them permission to do, to struggle with things, to come up with wrong answers.

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00:42:37.660 --> 00:42:50.369

Ine Steenmans: Because it is in the struggle and the wrong answers that the brain learns to think more broadly. So in Ben's visual of the cone that gazes in the future, to go widely, you need to have yourself

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00:42:50.540 --> 00:42:55.310

Ine Steenmans: And your colleagues have permission to think about things that seem ridiculous.

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00:42:55.550 --> 00:42:56.990

Ine Steenmans: That means...

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00:42:57.430 --> 00:43:10.260

Ine Steenmans: If you're a manager or you're a colleague, you have to give that safety. You cannot ridicule, but you also have to be... sort of look back and say, when's the last time we were in a meeting, and someone said, honestly, I don't know, without caveats, without hedging.

263

00:43:10.260 --> 00:43:22.050

Ine Steenmans: If you don't often have that, it's a kind of sign that people don't feel safe to not have the right answer. They don't feel safe to not have certainty. And so something really to sort of be like, I'm gonna give you permission. In academia.

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00:43:22.050 --> 00:43:27.430

Ine Steenmans: I don't know if I'm allowed to... it's not really a swear word, but it's a famous essay called Shitty First Drafts.

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00:43:27.430 --> 00:43:46.369

Ine Steenmans: And it's basically an essay about the art of thinking and writing, and the shitty first draft is the permission we give as a community to just don't get it right. Just write a shitty first draft, and then other things will follow. So give your team permission for a shitty first policy brief. You heard it here first. I'm sure I'll never be invited back.

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00:43:46.370 --> 00:43:50.840

Ine Steenmans: And... and lastly, institutional memory. So,

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00:43:50.850 --> 00:44:02.710

Ine Steenmans: your organizations need their hippocampus. They need that little library of all the things, and not constantly reinvent the wheel, and you need to institutionalize it, so meeting notes, making them accessible,

268

00:44:02.920 --> 00:44:15.599

Ine Steenmans: keeping track of what happens in different meetings gonna help. Now, really shortly, as you can tell, I'm not anti-AI, because all of my other visuals were generated with AI, I use AI in lots of ways, but I am deeply concerned.

269

00:44:15.720 --> 00:44:27.539

Ine Steenmans: I get asked so often, gosh, what are the ways that we could use AI for better horizon scanning or futures thinking? And I can tell you from a brain, just brain science point of view.

270

00:44:27.600 --> 00:44:37.100

Ine Steenmans: you have to be so careful, because you're reducing the ability for yourself and your colleagues to get your LEGO bricks, to do the appraising and the assessing, and if you

271

00:44:37.800 --> 00:44:55.380

Ine Steenmans: under pressure, compromise at this point. What you are doing, you will in the long term compromise the ability to do anything well in terms of future thinking. My deep, deep concern there. So, again, bad news, final good news. I was thinking for very, very busy public servants, Ben and I wanted to sort of hand over

272

00:44:55.630 --> 00:45:06.519

Ine Steenmans: some of our kind of know-how, like, what can you do? Well, I'd say this is a really simple tool. Of all the things, I'd say, take a question away. Take it to yourself, sit by yourself, or take it to a team and say.

273

00:45:06.590 --> 00:45:21.980

Ine Steenmans: what would have to be true for this project to... for us to be completely wrong about this? Which is the same as what Ben was talking about before. That is a way to do futures thinking really quickly, really well, and I'm really looking forward to the discussion.

274

00:45:23.160 --> 00:45:48.120

Ula Rutkowska: Thank you so much for that brilliant presentation, Ina. Remember to keep adding any questions you have for our speakers in the Zoom Q&A. And just before we dive into your questions, I want to let you know that we've also created a great follow-on resource to today's topic that we think you'll find useful, a teaser lesson from one of Apolitical's courses, an introduction to Futures and

275

00:45:48.120 --> 00:45:48.980

Ula Rutkowska: foresight.

276

00:45:48.980 --> 00:46:01.949

Ula Rutkowska: If you've joined us for a previous Futures Thinking event, you may have seen this teaser before, but we wanted to make sure to share it again, since the free course is such a helpful resource for public servants looking to strengthen decision-making today.

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00:46:01.970 --> 00:46:19.780

Ula Rutkowska: So, to receive our link to the teaser lesson, go to the Long-Term Governance and Futures Thinking community after the event and leave a comment on the post pinned at the top of the page. We'll send you the resource by email after the event. My colleague has also posted a link to that thread in the chat.

278

00:46:19.780 --> 00:46:43.069

Ula Rutkowska: Now, what you'll also see appear in the chat is a quick survey that my team is running on AI and government. If you have 3 minutes, please fill it out. It makes our lives a lot easier when we're able to gather these kinds of insights. Now, on to the Q&A. We've had quite a few questions submitted, so I'm just gonna kick us off. Ben, I'm gonna ask you the first question.

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00:46:43.070 --> 00:46:50.789

Ula Rutkowska: And that is, what are some suggestions when we're talking with youth who feel that the future is lost?

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00:46:51.020 --> 00:46:57.250

Ula Rutkowska: Based on many of their experiences with the world to date. It's an understandable belief.

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00:46:59.370 --> 00:47:03.280

Ben Holt: is an understandable belief.

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00:47:05.440 --> 00:47:12.119

Ben Holt: I mean, a critical part of that is to listen, to actively be engaged and to listen. That in itself...

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00:47:13.040 --> 00:47:19.400

Ben Holt: It's a powerful way to start to help people and think, believe that change is possible.

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00:47:21.160 --> 00:47:27.810

Ben Holt: I think that... Because everybody has that human capacity to

285

00:47:28.490 --> 00:47:38.219

Ben Holt: think about the future. We can have quite easy conversations about it. There's an easy way into the conversation. You can talk to people about what they've experienced.

286

00:47:38.520 --> 00:47:55.160

Ben Holt: in their own lives? What have they heard that's changed? What can they not believe that their grandparents told them about that doesn't exist? What have they seen shift? What do they want to see shift? And what stories do they want told about them and the impact they had in the long term? That can be a really powerful way to surface people's...

287

00:47:55.310 --> 00:47:57.120

Ben Holt: Hopes and aspirations.

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00:47:57.470 --> 00:48:02.629

Ben Holt: I think... There are more and more programs and projects out there.

289

00:48:03.330 --> 00:48:12.139

Ben Holt: trying to give money, agency, and support to young people to generate new ideas and new solutions, because that's where they're going to come from. So...

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00:48:15.340 --> 00:48:19.190

Ben Holt: Yeah, I don't want to go on too long, I know we're a little bit on for time, but

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00:48:19.580 --> 00:48:27.549

Ben Holt: Yeah, active engagement, not just paying lip service to people, making them have a voice in the decisions and the discussions is critical.

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00:48:28.540 --> 00:48:38.380

Ula Rutkowska: Alright, thank you, Ben. Ina, I... my next question is for you, and it's gotten a few upvotes. Can you speak a bit more about anticipatory governance? What does that look like?

293

00:48:38.750 --> 00:48:48.510

Ine Steenmans: Hmm, great. I'm trying to think if I should give a formal definition. I might split it.

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00:48:48.540 --> 00:49:08.420

Ine Steenmans: Anticipation and governance. So, anticipation would be the act of looking forward and imagining different futures, and then tracing what connection that has for present-day decisions or possibilities. So, I... there are some technical distinctions between anticipation and futures, but

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00:49:08.780 --> 00:49:19.760

Ine Steenmans: That is what it is. It's looking forward and making that connection back to the present, very much motivated by having us take decisions. The governance part.

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00:49:21.200 --> 00:49:28.310

Ine Steenmans: one of the aspects, I think, that really helps foreground is that you are not... none of us are passive...

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00:49:30.210 --> 00:49:43.160

Ine Steenmans: actors, agents, in what is happening here. We... this relates to a few of the questions I've seen in the chat. No future exists yet. It is not there to just sort of unfold and we stumble upon it.

298

00:49:43.730 --> 00:49:57.649

Ine Steenmans: we shape them. You know, I think it was Law 3 that, Ben showed on the screen. So, the governance part has to be... there has to be somewhere, and in a policy context, I could either be at, like, very high level, kind of.

299

00:49:57.660 --> 00:50:08.240

Ine Steenmans: cabinet ministerial level, or within a policy team, sort of up front in the policy scoping and developing, or wherever it happens. But kind of real holding of the conversation of, like.

300

00:50:08.240 --> 00:50:24.850

Ine Steenmans: what are we doing this for? What's our purpose? Because we should be governing not just the now, but also towards what... whatever will be, and that requires us to take a position on what we care to make possible. Now, that's not about optimism or pessimism, that's just about recognizing that

301

00:50:24.850 --> 00:50:30.490

Ine Steenmans: You do have responsibility and agency, so anticipatory governance is the

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00:50:30.960 --> 00:50:42.319

Ine Steenmans: recognition that whatever lies in the future will be shaped by what thinking you do now and what actions you take now. And that we have to be,

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00:50:42.620 --> 00:50:51.370

Ine Steenmans: Proactive in holding the conversation about what we want to see differently, or better, or actually what we don't want to change at all.

304

00:50:52.650 --> 00:51:08.670

Ula Rutkowska: Thank you so much, Ina, and that was just incredibly helpful. Ben, my next question is quite practical, and it got quite a few upvotes. If a public servant only has 10 minutes a week to practice futures thinking.

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00:51:08.670 --> 00:51:14.750

Ula Rutkowska: What would actually make that time worthwhile, and what should they stop doing to make space for it?

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00:51:16.240 --> 00:51:28.969

Ben Holt: That's an interesting question. I mean, I would say you're always thinking about the future, you don't just think about the future 10 minutes a week. You've got a calendar full of invites and meetings, and you're in those meetings to discuss

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00:51:28.990 --> 00:51:45.310

Ben Holt: decisions which will change... yeah, they're intended to change something in the future. Very few of your meetings are probably looking back and dissecting what happened in the past, and even if you are having those meetings, they're there to change what you do next time, right? So futures thinking is pervasive, so I would...

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00:51:45.310 --> 00:51:49.749

Ben Holt: start with that, recognizing that you're immersed in it. It's the water you swim in.

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00:51:49.770 --> 00:51:55.949

Ben Holt: Then start to apply some of those mindsets. And in his question, absolutely perfect, right?

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00:51:56.010 --> 00:51:58.520

Ben Holt: Question what could go wrong within this.

311

00:51:58.790 --> 00:52:03.959

Ben Holt: And then, it's a question of keeping your eyes and ears open, and spotting those little...

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00:52:04.960 --> 00:52:11.199

Ben Holt: Signals have changed, there's a little interest in nuggets, and asking yourself what if, and following those trains of thought.

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00:52:11.580 --> 00:52:32.230

Ula Rutkowska: Okay, and if you don't mind, I'm just going to quickly come to you again with another question, and I think that this relates to judgment that you must be using when you're trying to detect what signals are worth actually looking out for. But someone's asked, what signals do you look for, and where do you look when doing futures thinking, and how do you determine what is likely to be more or less important?

314

00:52:34.200 --> 00:52:36.509

Ben Holt: Yeah, it's a tricky,

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00:52:36.730 --> 00:52:42.179

Ben Holt: It can be overwhelming, right, when you start to think about, where do I begin?

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00:52:42.890 --> 00:52:53.840

Ben Holt: A simple tool. I work quite visually, quite like to map things out, so I would usually start with my kind of founding question, that what is, you know, what are possible futures for?

317

00:52:53.970 --> 00:53:09.910

Ben Holt: And I would create a sort of superstructure around that, using a pestle framework, or similar. So that's breaking things down into politics, economics, environment, technology, society, law, etc, right? To give yourself some bones, because

318

00:53:10.710 --> 00:53:14.059

Ben Holt: Yes, the details change, but the world...

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00:53:14.240 --> 00:53:17.649

Ben Holt: The arc of history is shaped by those big, powerful drives.

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00:53:17.650 --> 00:53:18.280

Ula Rutkowska: privacy.

321

00:53:18.280 --> 00:53:32.879

Ben Holt: That gives you something to kind of hold onto. You can start in the kind of obvious existing evidence through your desk research, there are credible sources, there are reports, you start to dig into what the state of the conversation is now.

322

00:53:33.090 --> 00:53:52.270

Ben Holt: And then I would always head for the fringes. Look for the people really pushing to disrupt the conversation, who are doing stuff which is maybe at odds with or challenging, received wisdom. And then you'll always find, we like to call them super connectors. You'll always find somebody who's agitating for change in any given space, and they know loads of people.

323

00:53:52.270 --> 00:54:12.049

Ben Holt: they're always really interesting, because they will open your eyes to things that you weren't quite expecting. And the beauty of foresight is you're not looking for the answer, you are looking for multiple signals. So you can kind of follow your nose to a degree, as long as you're willing to process it, and consider how these things might interact and influence each other over time.

324

00:54:13.810 --> 00:54:31.330

Ula Rutkowska: Thanks, Ben, that's super helpful. And, Ina, you've spoken a little bit about your concerns on using AI and using AI in relation to futures thinking. Are there any strategies that dash good practices for using AI, or is it a blanket no from you?

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00:54:32.220 --> 00:54:34.150

Ine Steenmans: Oh, no, no, it's not a blanket, no.

326

00:54:34.710 --> 00:54:38.409

Ine Steenmans: I love air. So...

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00:54:38.880 --> 00:54:48.059

Ine Steenmans: I'm not normatively telling you all what to do, but I can share what I do, and I'm... I fail at it regularly, so I try to recognize that

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00:54:48.260 --> 00:55:00.949

Ine Steenmans: When I experience the various pressures to be productive and to be very timely with my responses and ideas for a meeting or a report or a study, that I cannot compromise

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00:55:01.160 --> 00:55:05.000

Ine Steenmans: The slow and the unproductive and the...

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00:55:05.160 --> 00:55:15.609

Ine Steenmans: beep, first drafts, so the not-that-great first drafts, the struggles. So, just a really basic thing that I have is that I...

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00:55:15.610 --> 00:55:27.819

Ine Steenmans: have to sketch something. You can see I'm holding a pen. I'm trying to get back into the habit of sketching, or writing something, or talking out loud before I'm allowed to give a prompt into a large language model.

332

00:55:28.460 --> 00:55:36.240

Ine Steenmans: that's about futures analytical thinking, but that also holds in all of my other work. And so that's just sort of a very basic

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00:55:36.420 --> 00:55:51.430

Ine Steenmans: When people talk about, like, human in the loop, I sort of make sure my human is the first thing, and then the loop continues to any AI use. That's a really simple, principle I take into any future's work, too. You can use it, just...

334

00:55:51.990 --> 00:55:55.899

Ine Steenmans: Don't get too quick, and focus too much on being productive.

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00:55:56.480 --> 00:55:57.440

Ine Steenmans: Quickly.

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00:55:57.440 --> 00:56:07.169

Ula Rutkowska: That's helpful. Thank you, Ina. And Ben, what about you? And this might ultimately end up being the final question, but any advice or tips or thoughts on using AI for futures thinking?

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00:56:07.170 --> 00:56:08.500

Ben Holt: Yeah, don't trust it.

338

00:56:08.560 --> 00:56:22.340

Ben Holt: It can be very useful, but it... we've experimented with it in various ways. I've tried it in different things, and I asked at one point to surface, you know, find me some small startups doing this, and it gave me this list.

339

00:56:22.340 --> 00:56:30.280

Ben Holt: And I was like, okay, where's the website? Oh, he said, oh, no, I made them up. They don't exist. They're the kind of organization that should exist. So don't use it for, you know.

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00:56:30.720 --> 00:56:49.250

Ben Holt: for the answer, use it to play stuff back. We used it recently in a workshop series in Lebanon and Tunisia. And actually, when it becomes kind of a part of the team, almost, where you can ask it to challenge stuff, where have we got blind spots, push back, look for holes in arguments, that's useful, because it's pushing your thinking.

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00:56:49.330 --> 00:56:52.539

Ben Holt: When you delegate thinking to it, you're in trouble.

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00:56:53.130 --> 00:57:09.179

Ula Rutkowska: That's super helpful. Thank you, Ben. Alright, everyone, I think that might be all the time that we have left today. We've had some really incredible wisdom from each of our speakers, and I'd just like to ask all of you here today to join me in giving Ben and Ina a virtual round of applause.

343

00:57:09.180 --> 00:57:16.370

Ula Rutkowska: And most importantly, thank you to all of you, an audience invested in learning and being so engaged on this topic.

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00:57:16.370 --> 00:57:26.580

Ula Rutkowska: The team is going to pull up a quick poll to find out how you felt about today, which will help us continue improving our content, and we really appreciate your responses.

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00:57:27.250 --> 00:57:44.050

Ula Rutkowska: Alright, before you go, and while you're responding to that poll, I want to share a few more events that you can register for to join us again soon. If you're not available to be there live, remember that you can always register for the event in order to get sent the recording to catch up on whenever suits you.

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00:57:44.050 --> 00:57:50.799

Ula Rutkowska: So, coming up next Tuesday, you can join us at AI for Meeting Management, part of our AI Skills Lab series.

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00:57:50.800 --> 00:58:02.920

Ula Rutkowska: In two weeks, we have Building Habits to Reduce Work Stress on how to manage high-demand periods without burning out. And if you're ready to take the next step with Futures Thinking, join our Signal Club on May 14th.

348

00:58:02.920 --> 00:58:27.070

Ula Rutkowska: A monthly event series for long-termists and speculators to get together to explore real-world examples of signals and how we use them in our work, with a focus on health and fertility in this particular edition. Okay, that is all that we have time for today. We hope you

found it helpful, and we want to say a huge thank you to our speakers, to everyone who's made today happen, and to you for taking time out of your busy days.

349

00:58:27.250 --> 00:58:37.379

Ula Rutkowska: Keep an eye out for the email coming your way with today's recording and resources, and we hope to see you at another apolitical event very soon. Have a great day. Bye, everyone!

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