Playbook: Collaborative Foresight for Teams

A workshop to bridge the imagination-action gap

Colophon

Contents

Introduction

Collaborative Foresight is an inclusive, community-based, open-source and evolving way to work with the future developed at Media Evolution. It draws on and contributes to the fields of strategic foresight, futures thinking, futures studies, speculative design and participatory design.

Given Media Evolution's ability to tap into our 180 member organisations—representing a wide variety of industries, scale and sectors—our approach relies on organisational knowledge-sharing to power collective futures-making. In Collaborative Foresight, we create space and time to move through knowledge-sharing into collective imagination, and then translation of emergent futures into strategies for action.

Collaborative Foresight for Teams is a workshop in which teams gain futures-oriented insights about their work, and ways to bring them into action. The half-day workshop has four steps in which the team uncovers possible, desirable and unknown futures relevant to their topic at focus, key impacts and actions for the team to take.

The process helps the team to reveal new perspectives and opportunities and to align on how to work with the future going forward. It also helps the team to create a shared language around the future and builds their competencies in foresight and futures thinking.

The workshop results in a roadmap of actions for the team to take on key insights that emerge in the workshop.

This playbook offers a step-by-step guide and a structure for a facilitator to use. As with any such structure, we invite you to tap your experience and adapt the method to meet the needs of the team.

The method and the playbook were developed with support from Swedbanks Ägarstiftelse Skåne. Before its release, it was tested with teams from five companies of various sizes and from different industries. The method builds on Media Evolution's work on and approach of Collaborative Foresight and makes use of the wide range of future scenarios imagined by industry experts and practitioners in our past Collaborative Foresight cycles.

Workshop overview

The guidelines that follow is a 3,5-hour in-person workshop for groups of 3-5 persons with suggestions for adjustments for facilitating groups of 6 and above. With additional adjustments, the method can be used in online and/or in shorter or longer settings.

In the Collaborative Foresight for Teams workshop, the team (or group) focuses on a pre-chosen topic and explore the impacts of different kinds of futures on this focus. They capture the impacts and insights uncovered into the Imagination-Action Canvas. Towards the end, the team chooses the most important and novel insights and impacts and decides on actions to take going forward.

The workshop consists of the following parts:
- Introduction (15 min)
- Team focus (10 min)
- Possible futures (75 min)
- Break (10 min)
- Desirable futures (30 min)
- Unknown futures (30 min)
- Roadmap – From imagination to action (30 min)
- Closing (10 min)

How to credit this work

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To honour the co-creators when using the method, please use the following language:
"Collaborative Foresight for Teams - a workshop to bridge the imagination-action gap is based on a co-creative approach to foresight called Collaborative Foresight developed by Media Evolution, www.mediaevolution.se/Collaborative-Foresight/"

One-pager

In the Collaborative Foresight for Teams workshop, the team will apply foresight and futures thinking on a particular focus. The focus could be a product, strategy, service or similar. We recommend the focus to be as close to the work of the team as possible and one which the team has power to act upon.

The purpose of the one-pager is to offer a concise yet comprehensive way to present and align on the focus of the workshop.

Questions for the team to answer:
- Title of the focus
- Description
- Context and background
- Purpose – Why is the team focusing on this particular topic?
- Current status – How is the team currently working on the focus?
- Potential action – In what way might the team be able to take action on the focus?
- Questions – Are there any particular questions or areas that the team wishes to focus on in the workshop?)

You can download one-pager template at www.mediaevolution. se/foresight-cycles/collaborative-foresight-for-teams.

Imagination-Action Canvas

The Imagination-Action Canvas (see next page) guides the team's work in the workshop as they move through different types of futures, identify insights and impacts, and draft out a roadmap.

We recommend using the Canvas either as a large printout or by drawing a similar shape on a whiteboard/large paper.

You can download the Canvas at www.mediaevolution.se/foresight-cycles/collaborative-foresight-for-teams.

The imagination-action gap

We have witnessed how individuals, teams and organisations struggle to translate their future visions and foresight insights into action. There's a gap between how we anticipate and imagine our near-, mid- and long-term futures and how we respond, prepare for and shape the changes underway. At the same time, many lack the time and/or resources needed to look beyond the next dead-line and reflect on what is changing and where they are headed.

Possible Futures

Desirable Futures

Impact area

Impact area

Focus

Impact area
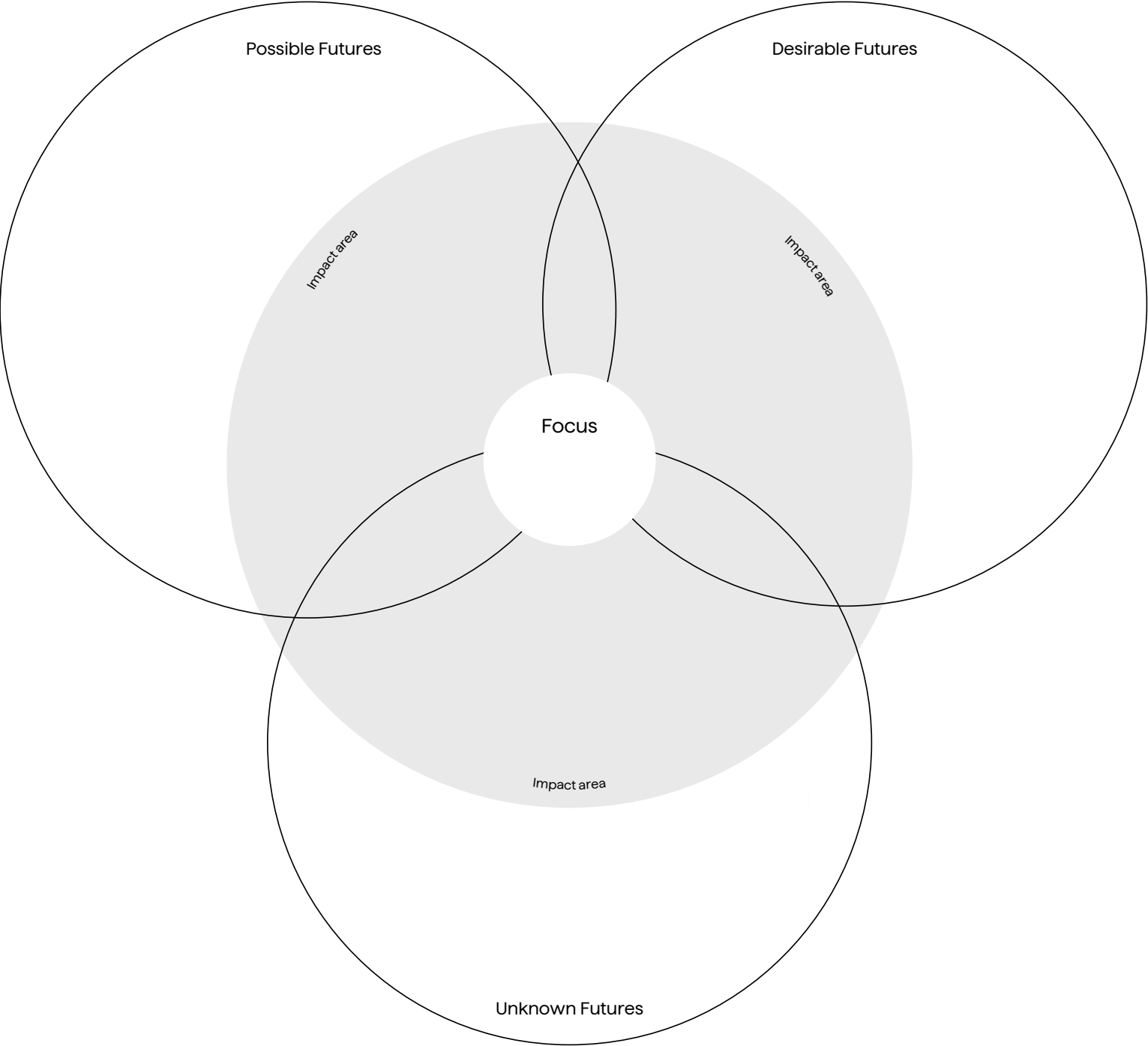
Unknown Futures

Shared Roadmap

Parking lot

Collaborative Foresight futures

In part 4 (Unkown futures) of the workshop, the team members will read a future scenario, reflect on questions, and discuss uncertainty and the unknown in general.

For this, we tap into futures scenarios imagined by groups of experts and practitioners in Media Evolution's Collaborative Foresight cycles exploring a diverse range of topics, such as futures of digital work, wise cities and creating, to mention a few.

For the purpose of the exercise on unknown futures, we recommend you to pre-select a scenario that you believe is furthest away from the group's own imaginations and reflections around their focus: what could challenge them the most?

The futures scenarios include:

Fractured Future

By 2045, the world has become increasingly divided into two completely discrete spheres of existence, the digital and the analogue. Recently, however, it became clear that this dichotomy is not sustainable for the planet nor its inhabitants and many are trying to bridge the divide. (From Collaborative Foresight cycle on Futures of Digital Work)

Nowhere to Hide

By 2050, the application of AI has led to total transparency of sustainability impacts and the end of greenwashing. (From Collaborative Foresight cycle on Futures of AI for Sustainability)

Earth-Centred Design

In 2050 life and cities in Southern Sweden are integrated with nature. Humans are working in tandem with other organisms to balance degraded ecosystems. (From Collaborative Foresight cycle on Futures of Wise Cities)

In Nature, No Greed

It's 2050 in Skåne, and being present in the physical world is highly valued. The best jobs are those that maximise outdoor time and time spent physically together with other people. There's a social stigma around overt or obvious uses of technology. (From Collaborative Foresight cycle on Futures of Digital Work)

Painting the Town Green

It is 2050, and the region-city of Copenhalmö has become a self-sufficient, regenerative city-state where urban agriculture and local food production employ and feed the population. (From Collaborative Foresight cycle on Futures of Behaviour Design for Well-being)

Download the futures and accompanying questions for printout at www.mediaevolution.se/foresight-cycles/collaborative-foresight-for-teams.

You can find more future scenarios in Media Evolution's Collaborative Foresight books available on www.mediaevolution.se/archive.

Time travel

In part 2 (Possible futures) of the workshop we conduct at time travel excersie to help the team expand and visualise their work and life in time – both backwards and foreward.

When reading out this exercise, take it slow, and give people time to envision. If possible, do this with your eyes closed and envision yourself as well. This will help you get the right pace. Make sure to update the highlighted years and months.

You can download an A4 version of the Time Travel manuscript at www.mediaevolution.se/foresight-cycles/collaborative-foresight-for-teams.

The Time travel manuscript

● Sit comfortably, put your feet on the ground.
● Close your eyes, or if you're not comfortable with it, just relax your gaze on the ground.
● Feel the weight of your body against the chair, your feet on the ground, gravity holding you in place.
(Pause)
● Relax your shoulders. Your neck. Your jaw and face. Relax the space between your eyebrows.

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(Pause)

● How does it sound (Pause), how does it smell (Pause), how does it feel (pause), what's the temperature of the room like on our skin (Pause)?

● Then inward: how does your body feel, where is your mind right now? How is your breath?
(Pause)

● I invite you to travel in time. We'll start way back and travel 30 years into the past to the year *1994*: How old were you then, were you born? What comes to mind when you think of that time? (Pause) Send a wish to your younger self.

● We continue, to 10 years ago, *2014*? How old were you then? What was your life like then?
(Pause)

● And how about this time one year ago, *2023*? What were you focused on? What comes to mind?
(Pause)

● And we move into yesterday, how was your day?
(Pause)

● Say hi to your present self and we'll move on into tomorrow: what are your plans? How do you wish the day would go?
(Pause)

● Then let's think a year from now: to *2025*. Imagine that thing we are focused on here today has really taken off, in a way that even you are positively surprised by. What has happened?
(Pause)

● Then let's move on to *2034*, ten years from now. How old will you be then? Imagine that all that you had hoped for this thing to achieve has been realised. What do you see?
(Pause)

● And then let's move 30 years into the future, to *2054* - things look different here. How old will you be? Imagine that the thing you worked on in *2024* in this workshop has had unforeseen ripple effects. What are they? How is the world different because of them? (Pause)

● Just sit with this for a little while, just let your mind wonder.
(Long pause)

● And I ask you to return back to today. Back to, *2024*. Land back.
(Pause)

● Return to the room. Listen to the sounds of the room. Feel the air in the room.
(Pause)

● And then start to wiggle your fingers and your toes. Stretch.
(Pause)

● And at your own time, open your eyes.
(Pause)

● You'll find a postcard/a piece of paper and markers.

● In silence, draw, write or do a desirable future else to represent an image or a vision of something you experienced during this exercise, or something you came here with.

● Once you are ready, join me by our canvas and tape your vision on the canvas.

Checklist

1. Invite
Decide who should be present and invite them to the workshop. This could be a team working together on a particular product, service, strategy or other or a group of people from the same organisation looking for alignment and ways to work together.

2. Define focus and create a one-pager
Before the workshop, the team or group lead defines what the team will focus and apply futures on. Make sure the team/group lead answers the questions in the one-pager and shares it with the participants well in advance. The focus can be a product, strategy, service or similar.

We recommend this focus to be as close to the work of the team as possible and preferably a product, project or a service rather than a theme or a topic. Make sure to share the one-pager with workshop participants ahead of time.

3. Materials
Prepare materials (see next page) and update the presentation and Time Travel.

4. Room
Book a suitable room with possibility for group work, showing a slide presentation and hanging up the Canvas.

Workshop materials

All materials can be downloaded at www.mediaevolution.se/
foresight-cycles/collaborative-foresight-for-teams.

1. One large Collaborative Foresight for Teams Canvas
You can either draw this on a large whiteboard or if you have
access to a large printer, you can print it out (recommended size
916 x 1424 mm).

2. One-pager
Print the filled in one-pager the team has prepared.

3. Keynote or Powerpoint slides with speaker notes
Download slides to your computer and use as a guiding tool
throughout the workshop.

4. Collaborative Foresight Futures from Media Evolution community
Print one copy per workshop participant.

5. Time travel exercise
Print the manuscript.

You will also need:
● Post-its and markers
● A computer and projector for slides
● Postcards or paper of similar size (one per workshop participant)
● One roll of tape
● A2 paper or larger (if 5 people or less: one; if 6 people or more:
enough for two pieces/3 people).

Team focus

Possible futures

Desirable futures

Unknown futures

Roadmap

Time:
15 minutes

Set-up:
Half-circle by the projector

Materials:
Printouts of the completed one-pager

In this first part, you welcome the participants to the workshop, set the scene, present the program of the day and help the participants tune in on working with the future.

- Welcome everyone to the workshop, introduce yourself.
- In this 3,5-hour workshop, the team will travel through different types of futures: possible, desirable and unknown to uncover impacts on their focus and gain novel insights to take action on.
- This workshop builds on Media Evolution's approach called Collaborative Foresight that is defined by three main principles:

  1. Futures are plural
  We are not trying to stipulate that *one* most probable future,

but acknowledge the complexity in the world and how our attempts to predict the future often fail. We work with multiple possible futures and find ways to anticipate, be prepared for and work with various different ways the future might unravel, including those that we cannot even imagine with today's knowledge.

2. Futures are imagined
We work with our imaginations and examine our assumptions about the future critically to broaden the range of possibility and be better prepared for what might come.

3. Futures are created
Although no one is all powerful, we all shape the future through our actions in the present. We take this responsibility seriously and find ways to work towards more preferable futures.

We will be applying these principle in practice when imagining multiple possible futures, practicing envisioning of desirable futures and exploring unknown futures, and finally, moving from our insights into actions we can start taking today.

● Tuning in exercise to get the group to start to think about longer-term futures (we'll start with a 10-years horizon which is often a sweet spot that keeps us close to now but allows for significant changes):
    ● In the next 10 years, related to your work and the focus of this workshop, what one thing do you believe will remain the same and what one thing will change?
    ● 1-2 minutes of reflection and then a quick round of sharing.

Adjustments if the group does not know one another well: Add brief introductions here.

If 6 participants or more:
Do the exercise in pairs (5 minutes) and let a few share reflections.

● Program of the workshop and presenting the Canvas that the team will be filling in as they progress through the workshop.

Team focus

The team briefly revisit the focus as outlined in the one-pager and make edits or additions to the focus.

● Distribute copies of the one-pager to all or present it on slides.
● The facilitator or the team lead briefly presents the focus and why it has been chosen.
● Participants can ask questions, add or make small edits to the focus.
● Once done, you can place the one-pager to cover the Roadmap part of the canvas for now.

Team focus
Possible futures
Desirable futures
Unknown futures
Roadmap

Time:
75 minutes

Set-up:
Table for group work

Materials:
A2 poster (one per group) & Post-its and markers

In this part, we identify key trends and signals that open up for possible futures and explore how important uncertainties might impact the team's focus. This is often the most intense, work-heavy part of the workshop that needs vigorous time-keeping and facilitation to keep the group focus and help them move forward.

Adjustments:
If 6 participants or more: Split the team into groups of 3-4 persons for this exercise. Each group will only select one impactful uncertainty to focus on per group. Make sure that the groups focus on different uncertainties and save time for sharing between the groups at the end.

● Introduction (5 minutes)
Presentation of this part: now it's time to reflect on and share what you observe and believe will impact the future of the focus. We are particularly interested in signals and trends (see definitions in slides) that are shaping the focus today.

● Trends and signals shaping the future (8 minutes)
The group members individually brainstorm trends and signals potentially impacting the focus. One signal or trend per Post-it.

● Sharing trends and signals (15 minutes)
In group, everyone shares what they've written. (You can add that this is not the place to start to debate if one believes that the signal or trend shared is relevant or not. One can of course ask the person presenting to clarify).

● Voting for most impactful uncertainties (5 minutes)
The participants vote individually for the most impactful uncertainties, that is, trends and signals with most impact AND most uncertainty around how they will develop or impact the focus. 3 votes/person.

● Selecting most important uncertainties (10 min)
Based on the votes, but in dialogue, the group selects two of the most important uncertainties they have identified. Move these two on the outer layer of Possible futures in the main canvas. The rest, especially the ones with the most votes, can be parked for the group to take back home and work on later.

Adjustment if 6 or more participant:
Let each group select only one impactful uncertainty and work with the separate poster.

● Discussion: if this, then what? (15-20 min)
In what different ways might these uncertainties unravel? The group discusses both the impactful uncertainties and identify different ways that these uncertainties might unravel or develop going forward. The group is to capture these developments in the outer layer of Possible futures in the main canvas.

● Impacts on the team focus (15-20 min)
What impact might these developments have on your topic at focus? The group discusses and writes down Post-its on the inner layer, the impact area, of the canvas.

Adjustment if 6 or more participant:
Let each group pick the most important impacts and related developments, hang them on the main canvas and present them briefly to the whole team.

● Congratulate the group for a job well done!

10-minute break

Time to refresh and strech legs.

Team focus
Possible futures
Desirable futures
Unknown futures
Roadmap

Time:
30 minutes

Set-up:
Sitting in a circle/half-circle, as comfortably as possible, no tables

Materials:
Time travel, postcards or similar, markers, and tape

In this part, the team moves into active envisioning of the futures they wish to see and be part of creating.

● Introduction (5 min)
Presentation by facilitator about how we are now changing mode and why it's important that we envision desirable futures: "what's the point of foresight if we don't use it to realise the futures we want?"

● Time travel (8-10 min)
Read out the Time travel while participants close their eyes and envision. Make sure to do this in a calm way, don't rush. If possible, try to travel with the participants, that is, envision the things you ask

them to picture in their minds - this way, you'll be able to get the right pace.

● Creating a vision (5 min)
In silence, everyone draws and/or writes a vision they've had from before or something they saw during the travel. Once done, tape up the postcards on the outer level of the desirable futures canvas.

● Displaying visions and reflecting on their impact (5 min)
In silence, the participants look and read through each others' visions and write down impacts on their focus in the impact area in the poster.

● Reflect and discuss (10 min)
Discussion in plenum: what stands out?

Adjustment if 6 or more participants:
In step 3, the participants can discuss in pairs for 5 minutes and then few to share reflections in plenum.

Team focus
Possible futures
Desirable futures
Unknown futures
Roadmap

Time:
30 minutes

Set-up:
Moving inside or outside the room, then gathering by the Canvas.

Materials:
Future scenario print-outs and post-its

This part takes us into unknown futures to explore on the things we cannot anticipate, ask "what if?" and reflect on working with the unknown.

● Introduction (5 min)
It is important for us to work with the understanding that there will always be things we are not able to anticipate, and this can be done by paying close attention to our assumptions about the future and exposing us to different views and imaginaries about the future. The purpose of this exercise is to expose the team to a scenario that might feel ridiculous or impossible but might open up for new reflections, questions and perspectives regarding their focus and working with the unknown.

● Visiting another future world (10 min)

Individually, each participants reads through the selected scenario
and reflects on the questions:

- How might your focus impact this future world?
- How would your focus need to change in this future?
- How might you prepare your focus for any unknown future?

● Discussion in pairs (10 min)

In pairs, the participants discuss the questions and the scenario
and capture reflections on a couple of post-its.

● Sharing reflections and impacts (5 min)

Sharing in plenum with: The participants share key reflections
among the whole team and attach them to the 'impact area' of the
Unknown futures part of the poster.

Team focus
Possible futures
Desirable futures
Unknown futures
Roadmap

Time:
30 minutes

Set-up:
Standing or sitting down by the Canvas

Materials:
Markers and post-its

This is where the bridge between Imagination-Action takes shape. The team picks most important and novel insights to address going forward and decides on actions and responsibilities.

- Time to choose (10 min)
  - (3 min) Each participants circles three things in the red impact area that they feel are the most important, novel insights or impacts to address going forward.
  - (7 min): Based on the votes, the team decides which three things they want to take action on going forward. Emphasise unexpected or most surprising insights that provoke exploring novel relationships, processes or tools. If the team struggles to pick three, you can advise them to park 1-2 insights/impacts in

the general part of the roadmap to be addressed and remembered later.
- Once selected, you can help the team to move the selected insights/impacts onto the roadmap part of the Canvas.

Adjustment if 6 or more participant or if the group does not work together on a daily basis:
You can skip the part in which the team agrees on most important insights and impacts and have the participants work on individual roadmaps on the three insights/impacts they have chosen. Use the extra time to let everyone share at least one action to help inspire or ask help from others and hold the one sharing accountable.

- Roadmap (20 min)
  - Brief introduction: it's now time to bridge imagination and action.
  - The team defines actions they wish to take on each of the three insights identified and selected. They write the actions on the roadmap part of the canvas.
  - At this point, it's good to point out that the team knows best what type of actions they tend to take and what gets done and how. But you can support them with the following cues:
    - How could they learn more about this?
    - Who should they talk to? Who could be a potential collaborator?
    - Who from the team should be the owner of this action point (who makes sure to hold the team accountable that it gets done)?
  - Congratulate the team for work well-done and ask them how they will make sure that they'll hold each other accountable for taking the planned action.

Closing the workshop

Time: 10 minutes
Set-up: half-circle by projector

This is where we close the workshop and reflect on key takeaways.

- Give a brief recap of where you have been today: exploring possible, desirable and unknown futures, insights and impacts identified and a roadmap of concrete actions to bring home.
- What's next: time to act, and possibly apply the methods in the team's work as they come in contact with new signals and trends or gain other insights. You can ask the team to bring the Canvas with them or take pictures of it.
- Final round: What do you bring with you from this workshop? Sharing one thing each.
- A big thank you.

After the workshop

Check in with the team a few weeks later for feedback and whether they have taken action on their roadmap.

Share this playbook with the team in case they wish to revisit or employ any of the methods in their work.

Feedback

We'd love to hear from you! Please share your learnings from the workshop and your feedback on the playbook and method by emailing us at info@mediaevolution.se.

About Media Evolution

Media Evolution is a community-owned, non-profit platform for co-creation, knowledge sharing, and futures-thinking. We are situated in Malmö, Sweden, where we run a place for work and meetings.

Convergence is our holy grail – meaning we believe development happens when various disciplines, industries and people get together. Since 2009, we've engaged the public sector, academic institutions and more than 170 companies in cross-disciplinary collaborations and knowledge-sharing. In our second decade exploring and creating together, our goal is to equip humans and organisations with tools and inspiration to thrive in uncertainty. We aim to help closing intent-to-action gaps in transitions to stay sustainable and resilient and for fostering completely new beginnings.

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