



SCHOOL OF  
INTERNATIONAL  
FUTURES

**SOIF**

**Practitioners  
in planning,  
strategy and  
policy for future  
generations.**



[soif.org.uk](http://soif.org.uk)

# A better future starts with better decisions today

Taking a longer-term view of what could and should lie ahead isn't a distraction from the present. It sharpens your perceptions of the present. It improves your ability to act.

## Introducing SOIF

School of International Futures (SOIF) is a global non-profit collective of practitioners in strategy and policy for current and future generations. We were established in 2011 to help government and other sectors use strategic foresight and futures techniques to make better, long-term policy and decisions.

We are a leading specialist in the UK and beyond in the application of futures in policy, working with a wide range of UK government departments and agencies, multilateral organisations, policy advocacy organisations, and other sectors. We work across sectors and internationally, giving us the ability to help policy makers connect with and learn from emerging practice in other sectors and regions.

## Foresight with impact

Foresight and futures provide a different approach to the questions that public sector organisations wrestle with. By starting from the wider environment, to identify what's changing there, and how this might affect your working environment, they help you to take a big picture systemic view of what's happening. This leads in turn to clearer sight of implications and stronger alignment around actions. Using foresight improves clarity, resilience, agility, and management of risk. It creates narratives about direction that people can align themselves with, building greater purpose.

## Public sector foresight

Policy-making is often made in an environment which is uncertain, complex, and fast-moving. Public sector organisations are being encouraged to join the dots, look long-term, "scan the horizon" and collaborate across organisational and sector boundaries.

Foresight and futures provide a practical way to navigate these challenges. Of course, any intervention needs to be designed well, and to understand technological change, shifting values, and global interdependencies, if it is to have an impact.

You can use foresight effectively at any stage of the policy cycle:

- to give leaders agency to make strategic decisions that are ready for the future, not just today
- to set the strategic direction at a cross-government, executive or departmental level
- to manage risk and build resilience by developing policies that are tested against multiple scenarios
- to identify new opportunities for policy innovation
- to develop governance approaches that are future-focused
- to work participatively with stakeholders to achieve transformation.

# Our services

Whether you are looking for insights into the future of a particular issue, conducting a strategic review, or looking to improve your own capability and skills, SOIF can help you – from design through to policy creation.

## Projects & research

- Qualitative and data-driven research into future trends, uncertainties and emerging issues including horizon scans or deep dives
- Strategic review to navigate potential direction of uncertain trends or external shocks; exploring scenarios
- Stress-testing options for your policy/operational response
- Developing mitigation and response plans, putting in place robust risk management processes for the future
- Building internal alignment around factors of change influencing policy and strategy areas.

## Advisory

- Full- or half-day strategy sessions for senior management, departmental or project teams
- Driving new practice – innovating around methods, identifying emerging use cases, learning from different domains (e.g. actuary, intelligence, design thinking, ecology)
- Experts in the use of foresight in governments including the UK and internationally, with special expertise in global practice in strategic planning, open government, democracy and deliberation.

## Capability & Training

- Skills development, mentoring, coaching and training for individuals and teams at a strategic, operational or executive level
- Foresight retreats – unique combination of capability building, networking and conference. Custom event design.
- Programmatic support to integrate foresight into strategy, policy, or risk management, or to drive transformation
- Foresight audit to understand the ‘future-preparedness’ of your team or organisation
- Support to set up a new function – or develop an existing foresight unit

## Methods

**We are experts in futures methodologies applied to policy, strategy and planning including all methods in the GO-Science Futures Toolkit. More detail is in the ‘SOIF and systems approaches’ annex.**

7 Questions, Archetypes, Backcasting, Capability Matrix, Causal Layered Analysis, Citizen Journeys, Delphi, Driver mapping, Horizon Scanning, Issues Paper, Modelling, Personas, Policy stress-testing, Prototyping, Rapid world-building, Roadmapping, Scenarios, SCQ, Stakeholder analysis, Strategic navigation, SWOT, Systems mapping, Three Horizons, VERGE, Visioning, Wind-tunnelling.

## National strategy development

The World Health Organisation Western Pacific Regional Office was working with the Mongolian government to reimagine the health sector in Mongolia and develop a new strategy. They wanted to set a clear long-term vision using a foresight-based process.

**APPROACH:** SOIF designed a two-day futures-to innovation workshop and trained local facilitators to deliver five further workshops. We supported the Ministry of Health to run three deep dives, through scanning, webinars and sense-making processes. We then worked with government, civil society and industry to develop a Change Agenda that reimaged what health in Mongolia could look like in 2050 using scenarios, visioning and backcasting.

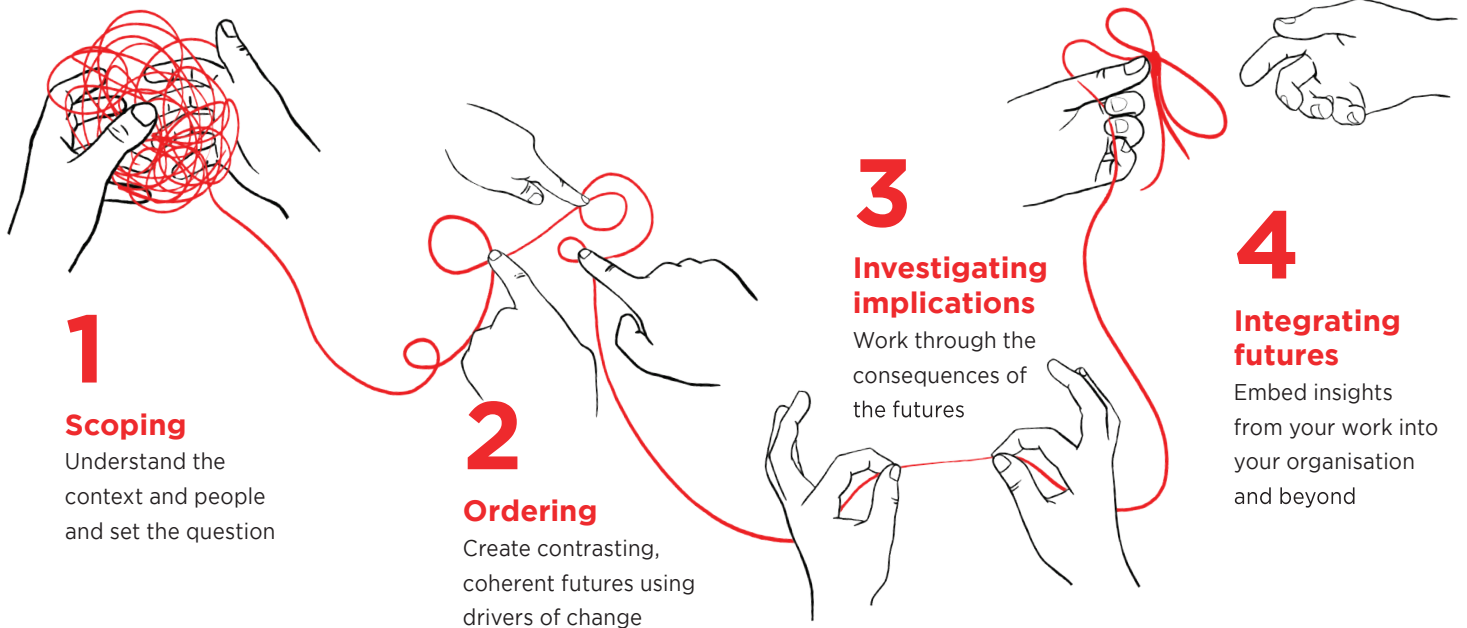
**OUTCOME:** This process brought together stakeholders that weren’t previously aligned, changed attitudes and built cross government support. The Regional Office and Country office have built their capability and the foresight approaches developed have been adopted by other policy teams in the Mongolian government.

**CLIENT** World Health Organisation Western Pacific Regional Office, 2022

# How we work

Our foresight work focuses on the transmission of insights about the future into decisions today. We design for impact, complexity and participation to ensure that the end of any foresight journey is rooted in impact and real-world change.

We focus on understanding your question and problem-space, and help you to integrate insights from foresight work into policy and strategy. We believe in building the capability of the teams and individuals, and our services can be tailored to your specific needs. Our work is always purpose-led and action-oriented. Tools and methods vary; what is consistent is our focus on equipping you and your organisation to build a long term vision, make better-informed, more robust long-term strategic choices, manage complex future risks and get future-ready.



## Futures for better governance

We work to make leaders in government more future-minded, improve strategic planning, and build up capabilities in foresight as a core competence for better, more future-proofed public policy.

## Supporting the next generation

We are growing a global network of next generation foresight practitioners. The programme, now in its sixth year, has reached 600 people from 80 countries, with 30 new fellows identified every year through our annual awards.

[nextgenforesight.org](http://nextgenforesight.org)

## Clients

SOIF works internationally with policy makers and governments, multilaterals, businesses and third sector organisations. We have worked with UK Government departments, agencies and statutory bodies including Cabinet Office, GO-Science, Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, Department for Transport, the MOD, the Social Mobility Commission, the Infrastructure and Projects Authority and the Information Commissioner's Office. Other clients include: British Council, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Chatham House, Health Foundation, IAEA, IATA, Oman Supreme Council of Planning, Open Society Foundation, Mott MacDonald, NATO, ODI, the Royal Society, STEPI Korea, Swedish Defence University, UN organisations, US State Department and US National Intelligence.

## Foresight retreats

Our annual foresight retreat teaches the science and art of strategic foresight. Become a better commissioner and user of foresight work in an uncertain and increasingly volatile world.

[soif.org.uk/retreat](http://soif.org.uk/retreat)

# Case studies

## Scenarios and new insights

The National Crime Agency wanted to develop a global perspective on the future of serious and organised crime to inform their strategy refresh. They wanted to avoid groupthink and blindspots, and to develop a product that could galvanise a deeper national conversation.

**Approach:** SOIF developed an innovative approach that took an ethnographic approach to develop scenarios and explore their implications. We combined deep engagement, through interviews, workshops and an online survey.

**Outcome:** The work produced new insights that informed NCA's strategy. It also connected external changes in the world of serious crime with internal capability needs, and helped to identify new requirements for the NCA.

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**CLIENT** National Crime Agency, 2022

## Social care and technology

The UK Government Office for Science, with EDS Projects in the Cabinet Office, were looking at the future of support for people in later life - and in particular the roles that housing and technology could play.

**Approach:** Following a rapid research exercise, this short project brought together external stakeholders, including experts in housing, technology and social care, together with cross-government stakeholders to explore future 'demand', technology and housing solutions, and to propose policy approaches.

**Outcome:** The work contributed to spending review decisions around social care including short-term decisions around the UK Spending Review, and the establishment of the UK Aging Society Grand Challenge.

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**CLIENT** GO-Science, 2018

## Training and guidance

The United Nations wanted to better equip country teams, agencies and Resident Coordinators (RCs), their senior representatives at the country level, to use foresight and futures in their roles.

**Approach:** We designed and delivered 2 cohorts of a blended learning course for 60+ learners from across the UN system, establishing a community of practice over 18 months. The approach supported participants to start their own foresight experiments and to capture evidence of impact and how foresight can be used.

**Outcome:** The training enabled learners to identify opportunities for using foresight in their everyday roles, practice using foresight tools and understand how to drive systems transformation.

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**CLIENT** UN Global Pulse 2022-2023

## Policy and public engagement

Impact on Urban Health wanted to identify policy approaches in the food sector to inform the work of their ten-year obesity programme.

**Approach:** We combined techniques from futures and public engagement to design a programme of work aimed at change. We did a full scan of drivers, identified domains of change and tested these with stakeholders and communities. We identified actions for policy-makers, the private sector and communities and published these in a visually rich public website and report.

**Outcome:** The work achieved impact by extending the reach of the work to the general public and making it accessible for a broader audience to engage in thinking, talking and acting on the future of food.

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**CLIENT** Impact on Urban Health, 2020-2021

# Our team

SOIF's team includes UK and international foresight experts, policymakers, strategists, network weavers, and problem solvers. Key members of the futures framework team include:



**Andrew Curry**  
Director of Futures

Andrew has worked as a futurist for twenty years, leading projects across the public, private, and civil sectors, joining SOIF from the Futures Practice of Kantar Consulting. He has published widely on futures methods, including the first academic paper on the Three Horizons method. Andrew was the lead author of the Cabinet Office report, "Understanding Best Practice in Strategic Futures" and served for five years as Vice Chair of the Association of Professional Futurists.



**Emma Bennett**  
Strategy specialist

Emma Bennett is a strategy and foresight practitioner with expertise across management consulting, international development, and corporate innovation. She has a strong interest in systems thinking, resilience and adaptation. At Accenture and 'The Futures Company', she advised multinationals on long-term growth. At Adam Smith International, she led DFID-funded programmes to improve justice and security infrastructure in fragile and conflict-affected countries.



**Lewis Lloyd**  
Researcher

Lewis is a researcher with a particular interest in government, science, data and new technologies. He previously worked at the Institute for Government, first on its Brexit team - analysing the UK's approach to negotiating and preparing for its exit from the EU - and subsequently on the Institute's digital government programme. Lewis's public-facing research has been featured on the BBC and in the FT, The Guardian, The Times and elsewhere.



**Cat Tully**  
Founder and Managing Director

Cat founded SOIF in 2011. She is a policy and strategy expert who has previously served as Strategy Project Director at the UK Foreign Office and as Policy Advisor in the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit. She is a non-resident fellow at the US Government Accountability Office's Center for Strategic Foresight and a member of the Advisory Committee of the Chilean Council of Foresight and Strategy. Cat's mission is to inspire individuals, communities, organisations, and governments to reinvigorate democracy by designing, scaling, and embedding a range of innovations.



**Johann Schutte**  
Foresight specialist

Johann Schutte is a specialist in applying foresight to policy, technology and strategy. He has experience facilitating foresight processes, integrating foresight into strategy, capability building and developing training materials. Johann developed his foresight policy expertise at UNICEF's Data, Research and Policy Unit in New York, where he advised national committees and country offices. He is a member of the Association of Professional Futurists.

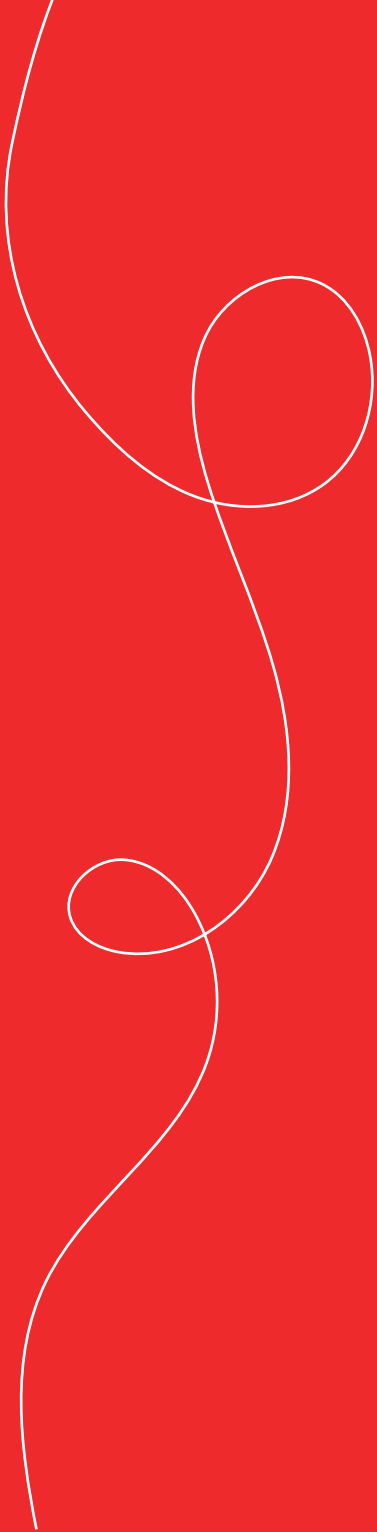


**Peter Glenday**  
Director, Programmes and Research

Peter has twelve years' experience delivering foresight and research projects across governments, non-profits, and academic research. His clients include Cancer Research, the Royal Society, UK government (Cabinet Office, GO-Science), and IATA. He was a lead researcher on the UK Government's 2010 Technology and Innovation Futures and 'Dimensions of Uncertainty' projects. Peter has a doctorate in Zoology (Genetics).

## Network and partners

SOIF works with partners and experts internationally to ensure our work is building on cutting edge design and innovation. We actively maintain an international network of over 2000+ expert practitioners, innovative thinkers and policy-makers. This allows us to connect clients with interesting thinkers, and to bring challenging and diverse voices into projects.



**SOIF**

49 Brick Lane  
London. SE1 1BH  
+44 300 302 0486  
info@soif.org.uk  
soif.org.uk

The School of International Futures (SOIF) is an approved provider of futures and foresight services to UK Government. Please contact us to discuss your requirements.



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## SOIF and systems approaches

SOIF exists to help policy makers and leaders to make better strategic choices about the future, to improve the quality of policy innovation, and to make your organisation more resilient by better understanding and managing risk.

We use systems thinking and systems approaches in a number of ways. It is an essential part of our foresight and futures work. By starting from the wider environment, to identify what's changing there, and how this might affect your working environment, they help you to take a big picture systemic view of what's happening. This leads in turn to clearer sight of implications and stronger alignment around actions. Systems approaches also help organisations to understand their system, the policy, strategy and operational levers they have at their disposal and how to act today to improve or reimagine the system that they are working in.

### Our systems offering includes:

- Design and delivery of projects that use systems approaches and tools (see below) that can help understand and unlock systems change
- The use of systems approaches and foresight to identify leverage points, stakeholders and map dynamics of change.
- Training in foresight and systems thinking. Including how to leverage systems thinking as part of long-term and anticipatory policy planning.
- Support with systems mapping, visualization and social network analysis using a range of tools including Kumu, Vensim and Insight Maker (while our core offer does not include quantitative systems modeling though we work with analysts who provide these services).

For an example of some of our systems work see the [Urban Food Futures report](#) produced for Impact on Urban Health.

**To discuss working with SOIF, please contact Peter Glenday, Programme and Research Director ([peter@soif.org.uk](mailto:peter@soif.org.uk)) or Andrew Curry, Director of Futures ([andrew@soif.org.uk](mailto:andrew@soif.org.uk)).**



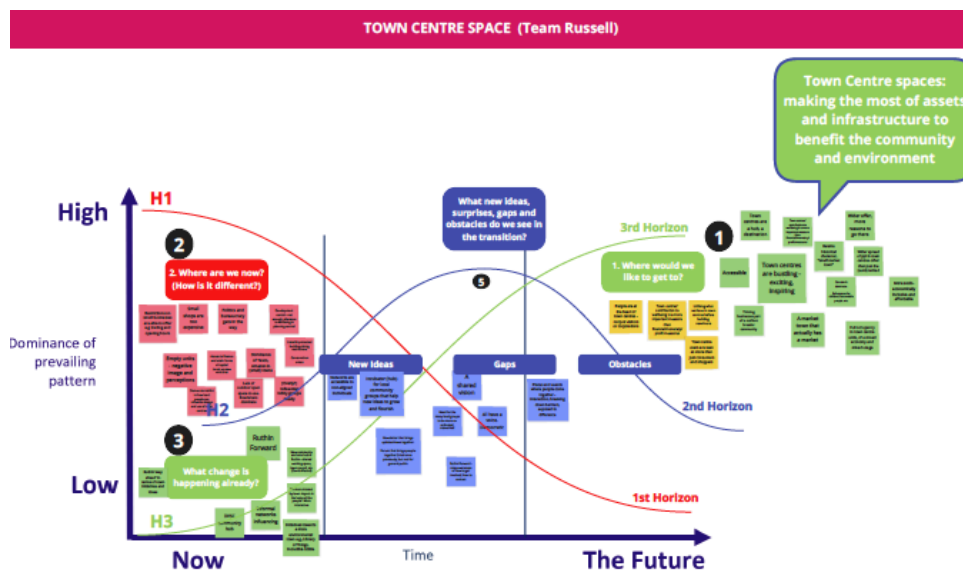
# Ten tools that use systems approaches

This is a short summary of some of the approaches that we use:

## 1. Three Horizons

Three Horizons is a widely used method that is designed to map system change visually from the current H1 (Horizon 1) system to a future possible or preferred future, H3 (Horizon 3). This is a core method that is used widely in SOIF's work. In addition, SOIF's Director of Futures, Andrew Curry, was a member of the group that developed Three Horizons and a co-author of the first academic paper.

Three Horizons analysis can be deepened by using Dilemma Resolution, a method developed by Tony Hodgson from the work of Charles Hampden Turner. It identifies many transition dilemmas as being conflicts between the 'hard edges' of current institutions (H1) and the 'soft flows' of desired change (H3), and has a methodology to identify transformational ways to resolve these, rather than just trading them off.



**Figure 1.** Example of three horizons output exploring town centers during one of the community workshops held with WCVA. See the [the WCVA 'better futures' toolkit](#).

**Recent applications include a 'future of intellectual property' project for the Intellectual Property Office, for the World Health Organisation, zero carbon in the built environment, with Chatham House, and a community futures project for WCVA (Wales Community and Voluntary Action).**

## 2. Futures wheels

Futures wheels are a straightforward way for people to map first-order and second-order changes from a given event or driver of change, and identify potential outcomes. When combined with the 'seeds of change' concept developed by The Good Anthropocene project, they also help people step into a possible future and thereby stretch their thinking.

This can combine well with Three Horizons as a way to test the routes to possible or preferred futures.

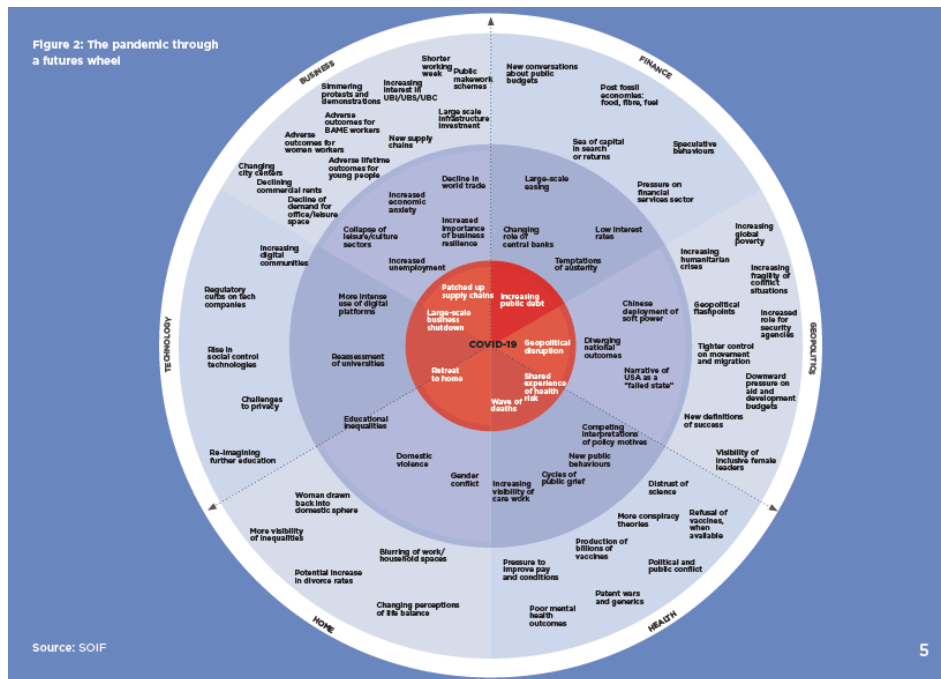


Figure 2. A futures wheel exploring the impacts of the [Covid-19 pandemic](#).

*Recent applications include projects for the World Health Organisation and a community futures project for WCVA (Wales Community and Voluntary Action), and Post Carbon Moves. For an example of how it combines with Three Horizons, see the [WCVA 'better futures' toolkit](#).*

## 3. Future landscapes and domains

SOIF prefers to use inductive models that develop futures landscapes 'bottom up' from groups of drivers of change. One approach, developed from the morphological scenarios method, develops a futures landscape as a set of 'domains' or sub-systems that together describe a model of the future landscape.

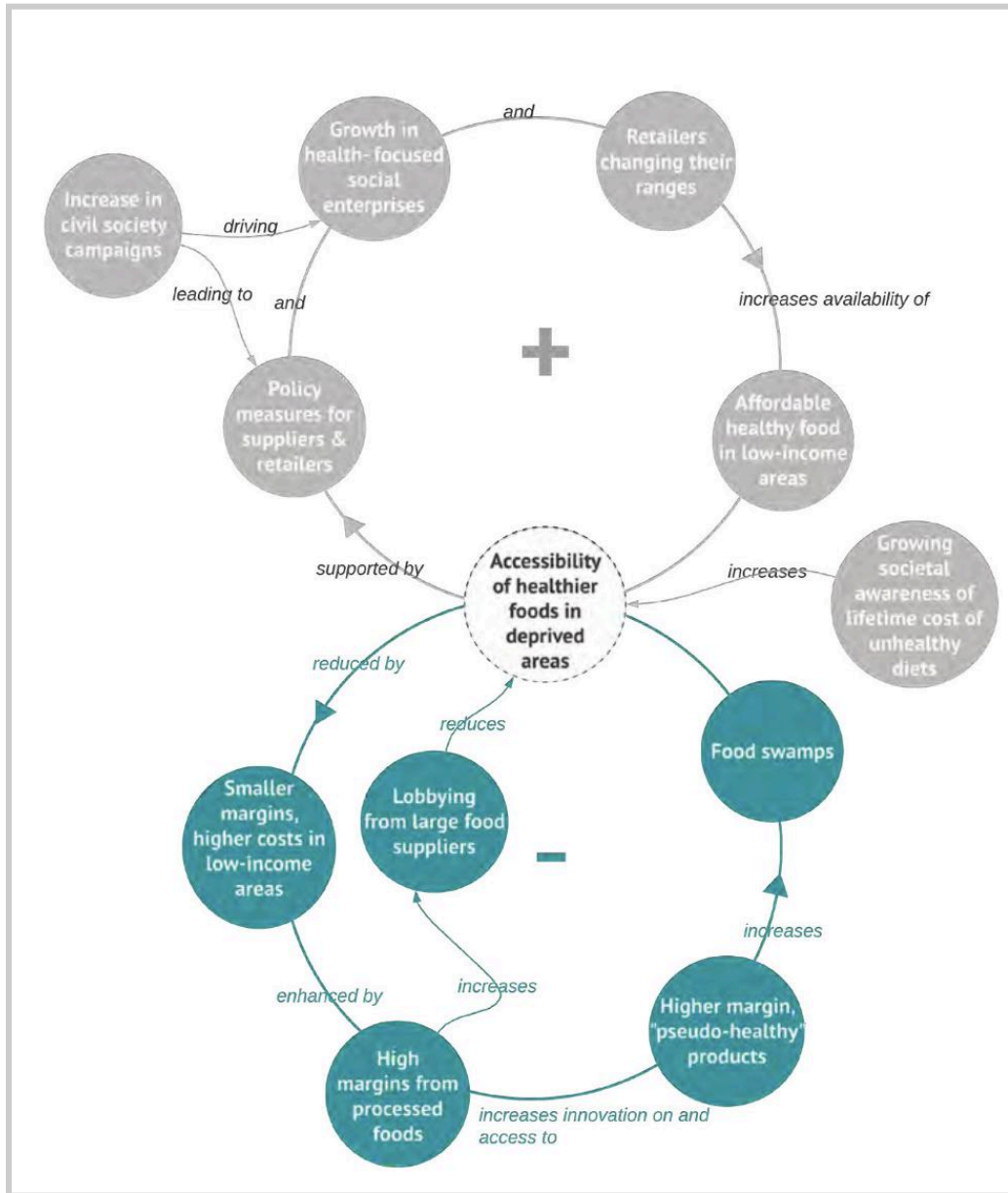
For example, domain analysis for a project on the future of food environments for the charity Impact on Urban Health identified six domains, shown here in a screenshot from [the published report](#).



**Figure 3:** Examples of domain, or sub-systems, in the future of food environments project.

#### 4. Causal loops analysis

To analyse these sub-systems (both to test them and to validate them) we use causal loops analysis, identifying both positive or reinforcing loops and negative or balancing loops. The sub-system here is about the external costs of the food system.

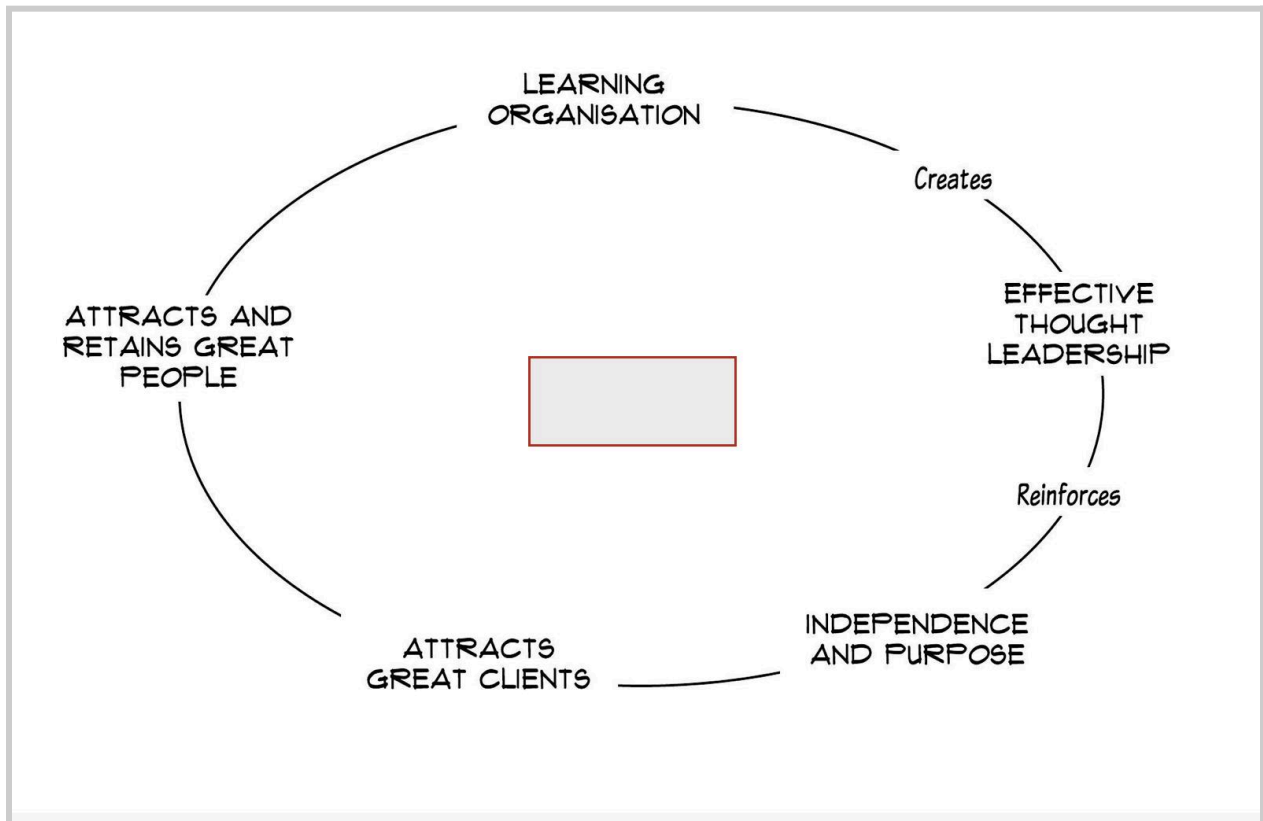


**Figure 4.** Causal loop mapping. Recent applications of causal loop mapping of domains include two projects for the charity Impact on Urban Health and one for the BBSRC.

*One of these projects was on the future of food environments (for which the above example was created), the other on the future of adolescent mental health. The full set of loops for the food project [is published as an appendix](#) to the project report.*

## 5. Flywheel as model of change

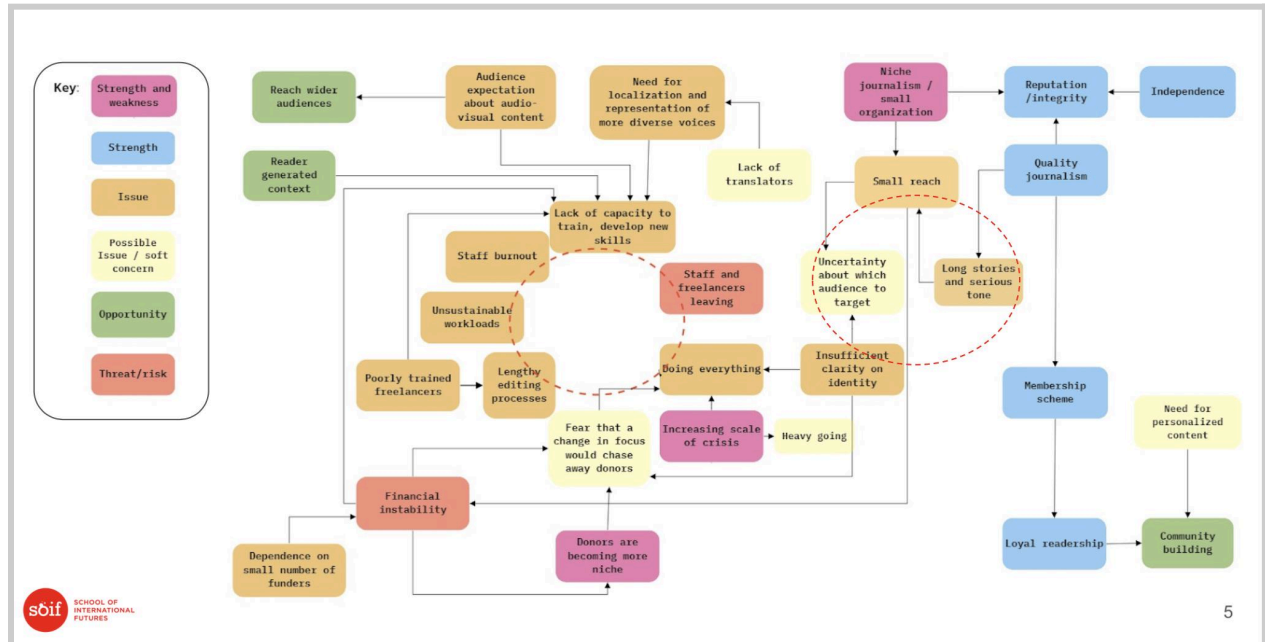
Jim Collins' 'flywheel' model is a virtuous circle that creates change that is beneficial for an organisation or sector. It is more generally associated with commercial or private sector businesses such as Amazon. However, it is also used with public sector and non-profit organisations. It can help to develop a straightforward theory of change that also helps to focus strategy.



**Figure 5.** Flywheel. Recent projects which have used this tool include the future of food environments, discussed earlier, and a project for an African think-tank focussing on digital and financial inclusion.

## 6. Diagnostic mapping

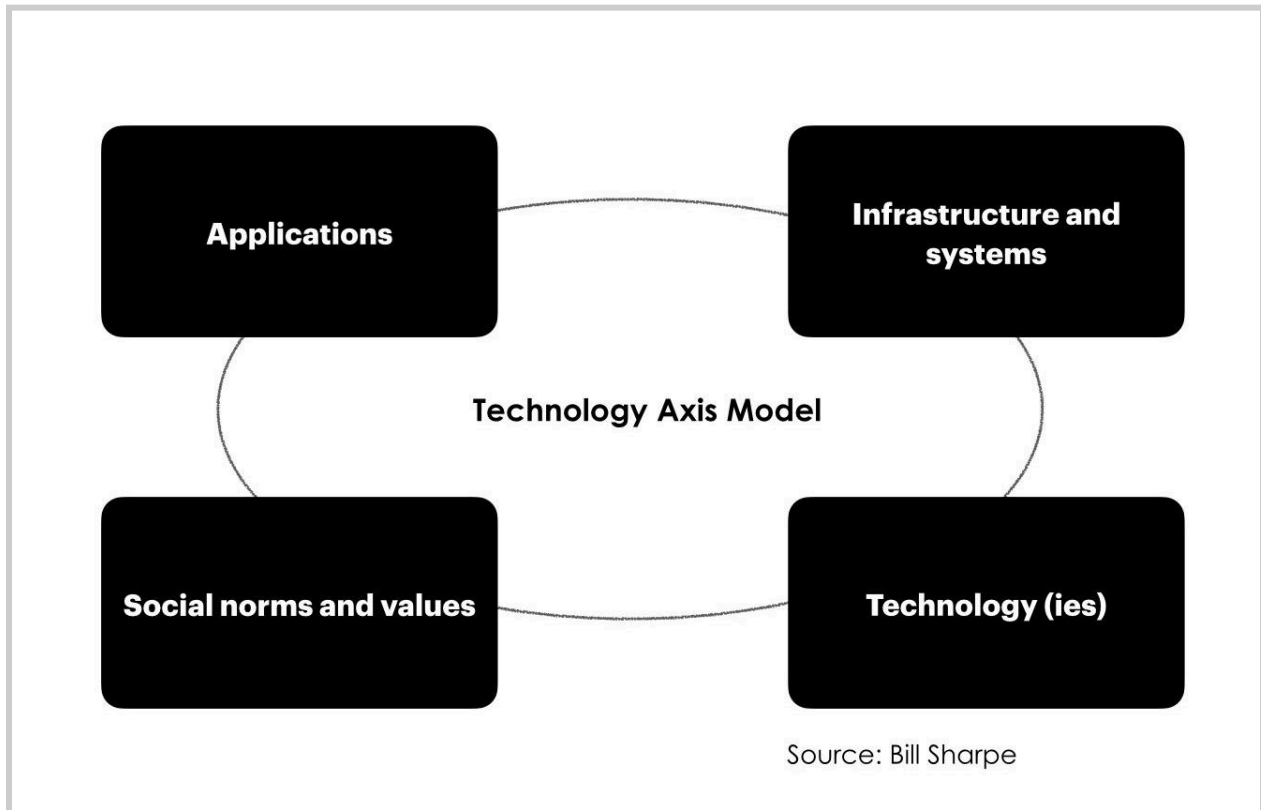
Diagnostic mapping is a method that helps to create a visual picture of organisational strengths and weaknesses at any given point. It is designed to provide a snapshot of an organisation (or a system, or a specific function) on a single page. It can be used in conjunction with Wardley Mapping.



**Figure 6.** Diagnostic map. The diagram above, slightly disguised, is a diagnostic map for a non-profit news organisation.

## 7. Technology axis model

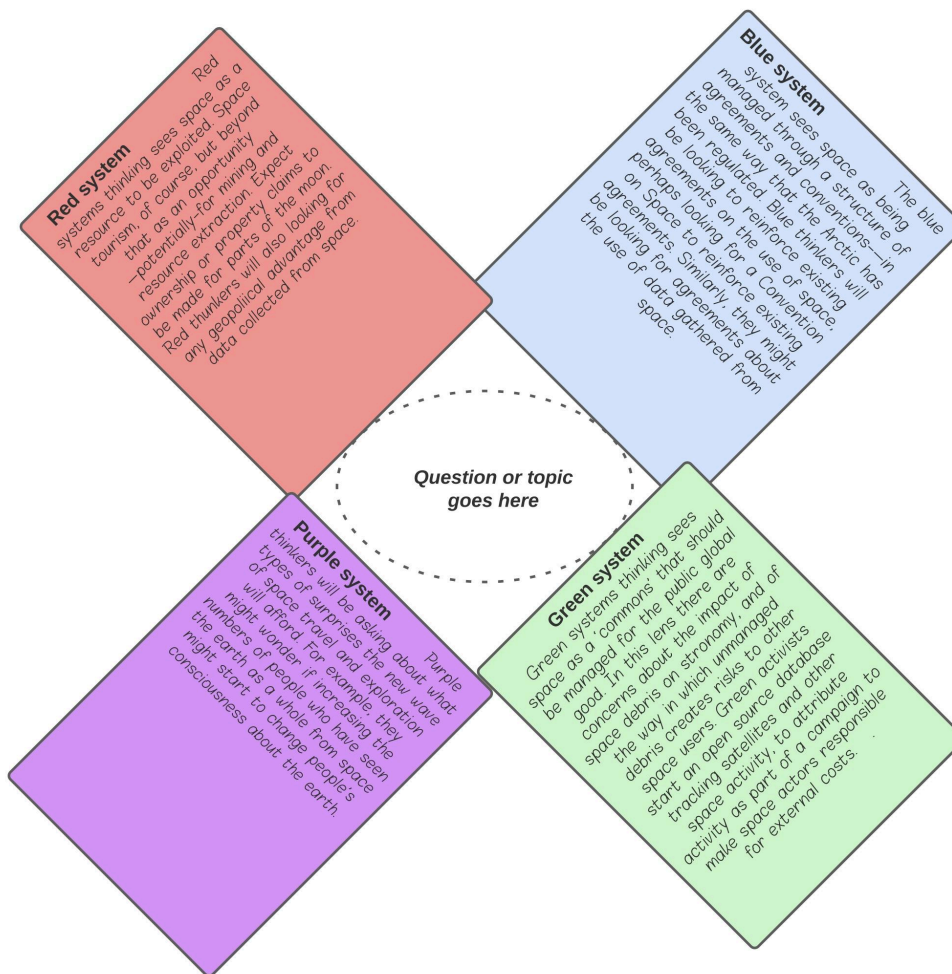
The technology axis model, developed by Bill Sharpe, enables non-specialists to build up a 'socio technical systems' picture of change around a specific technology. As well as looking at the underlying technologies, it assesses social norms and values, 'applications' (early use cases), and infrastructure and systems.



**Figure 7.** Technology Axis Model. This model has been used in projects for GO Science's Horizon Scanning Centre and more recently, in futures projects for the Department of Transport. It works well as a mapping framework in workshops.

## 8. Systems mythologies framework

The systems mythologies framework, developed originally by the Institute for the Future, allows groups to review an issue through different systems lenses. The four systems are: red, or 'winner takes all'; blue, or 'rules matter'; green, or everything is connected'; and purple, or 'rewriting the system.' We have developed for a UK public sector client a 'tetrad' approach to using this framework, in which these different lenses are used to identify Opportunities; Threats (some opportunities may also be threats); New questions that require more analysis or research; and Blindspots.



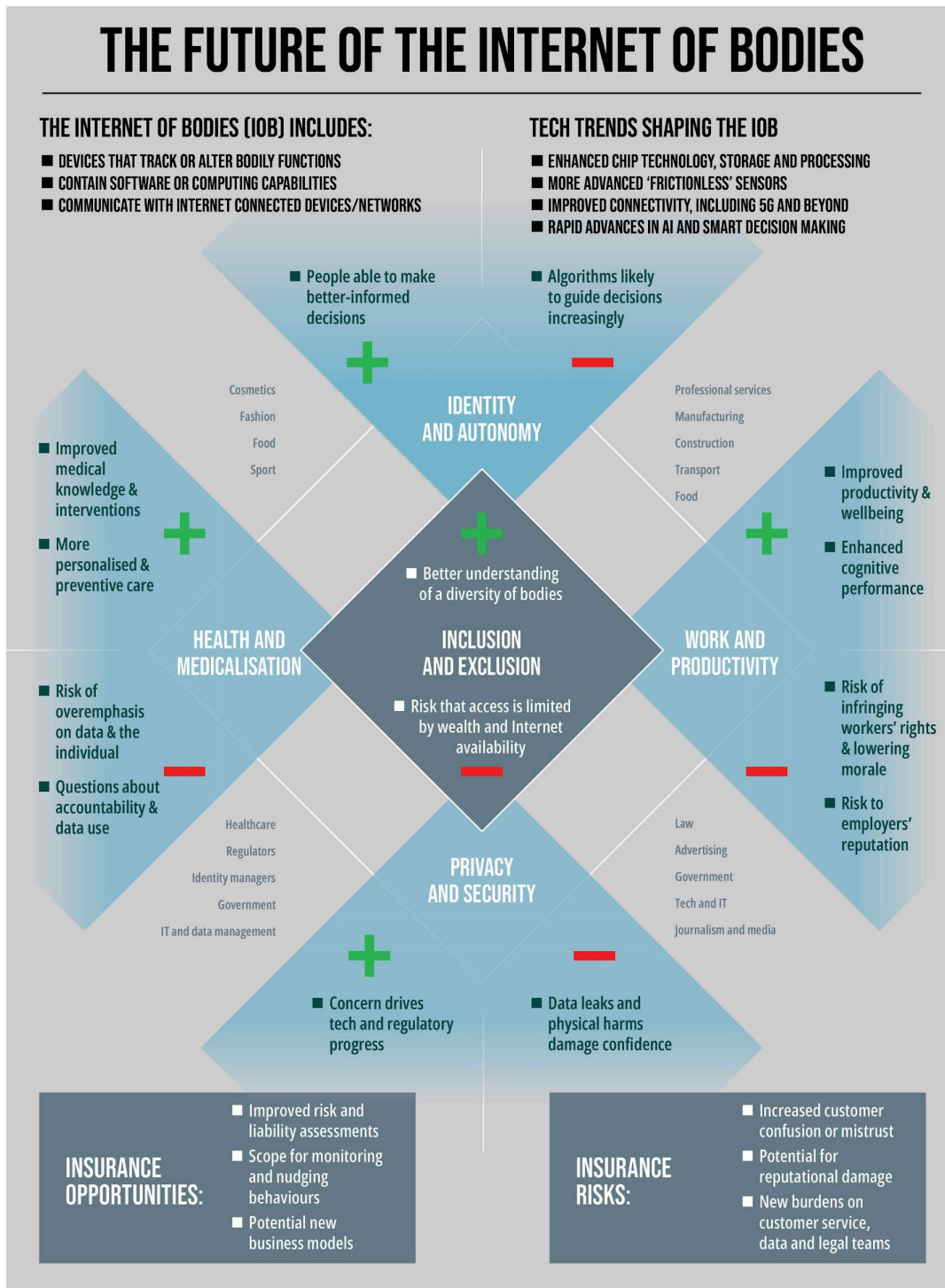
**Figure 8.** Systems mythologies tetrad for outer space. Developed from the work of the Institute for the Futures for a UK public sector client.

## 9. McLuhan's tetrads

The technology tetrads, developed by Marshall and Eric McLuhan in their book *The Laws of New Media*, proposes that all new technologies have four systemic effects. These can be explored through four questions: 'What does it enhance?'; 'What does it obsolete?'; 'What does it retrieve or recover from the past?'; 'What does it reverse into?'. Like the Technology Axis Model, which it can be used in conjunction with, this helps to build up a picture of the social and institutional effects of a technology. (Technologies here can also include social technologies: *The Laws of New Media* includes examples for 'drugs', 'high rise', 'Xerox' (photocopying) and 'perspective in painting'.)



The technology tetrads approach is one of the methods we used for a project on the future of the Internet of Bodies for the NTT Data in Japan, together with Systems Mythologies and the Technology Axis Model, above. The findings from that project are summarised in this infographic.



## 10. Backcasting

Backcasting allows people to translate insights from systems thinking into strategy and planning frameworks. Unlike conventional planning, it starts from the 'Ambition' statement or desired outcome;(expressed through values and associated goals) and then iterates between present capabilities and goals to identify a set of route maps to help you get to the future. In some contexts it can help to identify organisational functions (e.g. finance, skills/people etc) and then work out what the values mean for their evolution. The purpose is to identify policies and programmes that will connect the longer term ambition to a shorter term present.

The core question backcasting asks: "If we want to attain a certain goal, what actions must be taken in the short, medium and long term to get there?"

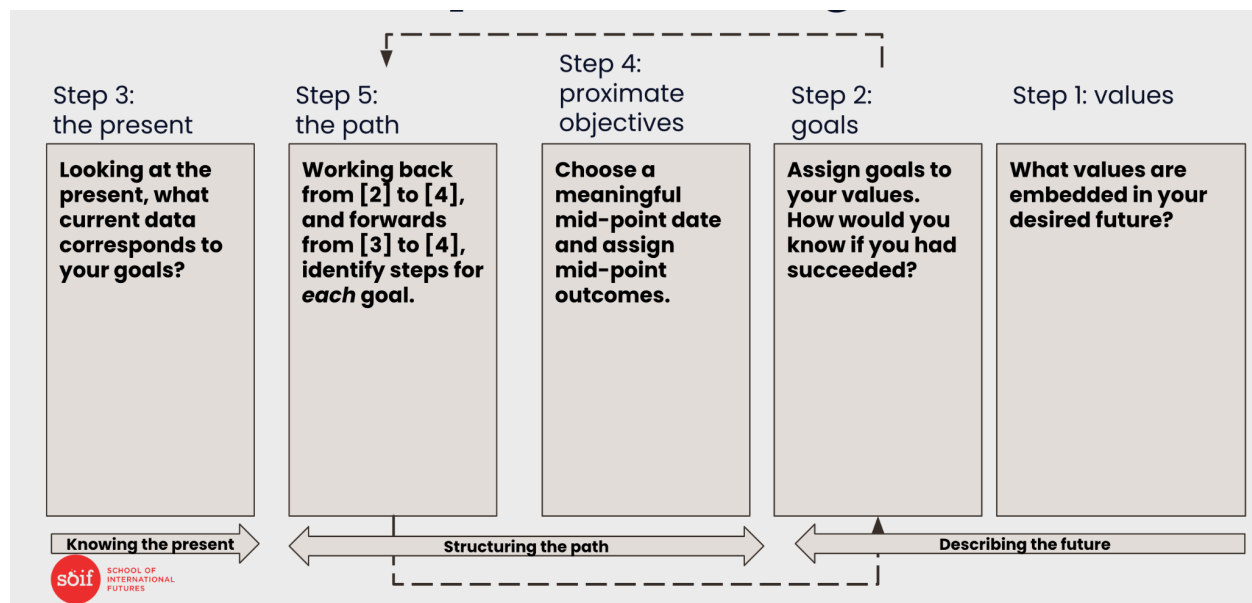


Figure 9. The five steps to build a backcasting model. (Source: SOIF, 2024).

### Contact:

Andrew Curry, Director of Futures, [andrew@soif.org.uk](mailto:andrew@soif.org.uk)

Peter Glenday, Director of Programmes and Research, [peter@soif.org.uk](mailto:peter@soif.org.uk).