

What if we become good ancestors?

Imagining and enabling more sustainable futures

at the CCA 24-hour event “What’s Mine To Do”, 4 March 2021
session times: UTC 8.00am, 11.00am, 2.00pm, 5.00pm, 8.00pm

Session hosts (bios at end)

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Abstract

If you knew you can become a good ancestor then what will you do differently now? In these sessions, repeated five times during the 24-hour event, we found out some of what it means to be a good ancestor for the earth and all who live on it, starting with the root causes of today's climate crisis. With the help of “What if...?” visualisation exercises we considered the actions we can take today which could plant the seeds and develop the roots of the futures we want. Participants experienced the sensory realities of the futures they imagined, and learned a tool for helping others imagine the futures they desire.

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1. Good Ancestors

We are ancestors of billions of ways of being. We have an opportunity as coaches to facilitate thinking and actions that help us all become good ancestors. Our thought patterns and actions every moment are roots of the future: in this activity we explore how we can ourselves become better ancestors, and how we can facilitate these experiences in our practices. For more information on being a good ancestor, see the work of [Roman Krznaric](#).

2. Root causes of climate change

Using imagery from mainstream media and websearches, we asked participants what they believed the key causes of climate change to be. By using mainstream images, we hoped to expose participants to the world we live in today, serving as a basis and potential contrast for later exercises. We invited participants to enter the causes into a Menti poll, which were then collated into a word cloud. These are the word clouds from the five sessions:



short term thinking
species survival key
consider wider ecosystem
cradle to grave ownership
fossil fuels
individualism
globalisation
consumerism
population
behaviours
arrogance
chemicals
growth
human impact
selfishness
short term view
development
people
over-population
abuse
extreme weather
agriculture practises
disconnect
addiction
separation

carelessness
consumerism
disregard
ego
individualistic mindset
hierarchical systems
lack of connection
personal pollution
egocentric thinking
pollution at scale
feedback loops
disconnection
externalities
greed
apathy
recklessness
deforestation
burning of fossil fuels
excess consumption
meat and rice consumption
humanity
population growth
disempowerment
land use for roads houses
man's desire for growth
lack of awareness
ignorance
humans

3. What if...? exercise

The words in these word clouds are possibilities of one future, if we continue business as usual. However, we have the power to create different futures with our imaginations. The “What if...?” exercise encourages us to come up with the right questions to help us imagine the futures we want.

With the root causes of climate change in the word clouds above in mind, we asked participants what would need to change now in order to tackle those issues. For example, if one of the root causes of climate change and injustice is the fact that we are measuring our economies based on limitless GDP growth, then perhaps we could re-imagine the future by asking the question: What if we measured our economic success in terms of wellbeing?

Working in breakout rooms in groups of 3-4, we asked participants to make the link between the root causes of climate change in the word clouds, and the What if...? questions we would need to ask ourselves to address those causes by 2030 (i.e. in nine years’ time). We used 2030 because it serves as a major tipping point for climate change impacts and is also close enough for participants to view it as a realistic time period. We asked participants to enter their questions in the Menti poll and we received over 100 questions from the five sessions.

Caveat: it is important to frame the What If...? questions in the positive

When coming up with What if...? questions, it is important that they are framed to indicate what we *do* want, rather than what we don’t. The questions shouldn’t contain the root causes which came up in the first exercise, rather they should be reframed into the outcome we would like to see. The following questions, which were entered into the Menti poll, serve as good examples to reframe questions in the positive:

Negative questions (what we <i>don’t</i> want)	Alternative positive questions (what we <i>do</i> want)
What if meat eating was no more?	What if we all ate plant-based diets?
What if we were not rated by the number of our possessions?	What if we were rated by our levels of generosity?
What if we didn’t have money? / What if money wasn’t a thing? / What if money didn’t rule the world?	What if we appreciated the true value of everything?
What if reality TV was banned?	What if our media focused on spreading love and compassion?

There are three important reasons for doing this:

- a) Saying what we *don't* want is not the same as saying what we *do*. Neuroscientifically, the brain tends to ignore the word "don't" and focuses on what follows, thus, in this case, focusing on the unwanted.
- b) Using the “root cause” words, such as money, possessions, reality TV (or greed, consumption, or any of the other words in the word clouds above), has the effect of keeping us focused on the problem instead of looking towards solutions. Seeing and hearing these “negative” words also affects us psychologically.
- c) Once we’ve identified what we *do* want, we can start thinking about the steps needed to get there. Without a beacon, we don’t know the direction we need to go.

These are the 100+ collated questions, grouped into common themes:

Respect for nature	People and community
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What if we were more connected to ourselves and nature? 2. What if we could truly connect with ourselves, each other and with nature? 3. What if we respected biodiversity? 4. What if we planted a native tree? 5. What if we viewed ourselves as part of the whole? 6. What if we had respect for nature from when we’re young? 7. What if we left the planet better than we found it? 8. What if we put ecosystems first? 9. What if we noticed the abundance of nature? 10. What if we found true balance between self and earth? 11. What if the concept of ancestorhood was understood to include ‘inanimate’ objects (rocks, water, land, plants, etc.)? 12. What if we regenerated our soil? 13. What if we realise we enjoy regeneration? 14. What if we really saw that everything is connected? 15. What if we respected the gifts of nature? 16. What if we honoured and respected all living things, ourselves included? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What if we were more connected to ourselves and nature? 2. What if we could truly connect with ourselves, each other and with nature? 3. What if we were more connected with one another? 4. What if we had better connection with our neighbours and neighbourhood? 5. What if we respected global diversity among people? 6. What if local communities could determine their own needs (education, energy, etc.)? 7. What if each of us had clean air to breathe in our own communities? 8. What if we collaborated more? 9. What if we felt part of the collective? 10. What if we felt proud of the environment we leave for our children and grandchildren? 11. What if we respected past and future generations? 12. What if we always made space at the table for someone from the 7th generation? 13. What if collaboration was the norm? 14. What if all children had access to outdoor play and wild space?

17. What if it was easier to be kind to the planet? 18. What if we only used natural medicines? 19. What if we took a longer-term view of how we use the planet's resources? 20. What if our self-identity expanded to include the more-than-human web of life and earth we are part of? 21. What if we lived by the laws of nature?	15. What if we valued the wellbeing of future generations as much as (or more than) our own? 16. What if we lived 500 years?
Education	Behaviours
1. What if schools focused on empathy, nature and local? 2. What if education was holistic and celebrated diversity? 3. What if we educated children from nursery, for their actions to be appropriate? 4. What if we could be more radical in our thinking about education? 5. What if we all tapped into our local indigenous wisdom? 6. What if we cultivated wiser action? 7. What if we followed indigenous wisdom and respect for the planet? 8. What if we had courageous conversations about history? 9. What if we all faced our skin colour and its history? 10. What if adult learning opportunities related to sustainability? 11. What if Climate and Ecological Emergency knowledge spread like COVID?	1. What if coaches role modelled good behaviours at every opportunity? 2. What if organisations were more transparent? 3. What if we only had one place we spent most of our time? 4. What if people were eco-centric? 5. What if we were truly focused on social and climate justice? 6. What if we deliberately praised right actions? 7. What if we 'called in' instead of 'calling out'? 8. What if people were more open to changing lifestyle and habits? 9. What if we replaced fear with vision? 10. What if everyone influenced just one other person?
Mindfulness	Abundance and plenitude
1. What if we were more accepting and calmer? 2. What if we had calm and peaceful minds? 3. What if we stopped and reflected more? 4. What if we spent the majority of our time loving, caring and in gratitude? 5. What if we were to live the story of	1. What if we could let go of our craving for more? 2. What if we spent according to what we really need? 3. What if the media celebrated abundance and wellbeing? 4. What if we believed in abundance?

<p>interbeing?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What if we trusted our intuition more? What if we were to return to our true nature of love? What if our survival was the only important thing? What if we changed the word 'I' to 'we'? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> What if we believed we had enough? What if people realised that more does not make them happy? What if we consumed sparingly? What if we knew what enough was? What if we only consumed/took what we truly needed? What if we re-used and re-purposed more? What if we felt less pressure to consume?
Perspectives	Food and resources
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> What if we were more playful about new opportunities and solutions? What if we could really believe that creating a safe future is going to happen? What if we could leverage and apply all the lessons learned from the pandemic? What if we redefined what success and happiness look like? What if we measured growth or success on wellbeing and happiness? What if nine years were enough to bend the curve? What if 9 years was just enough to do what we need to do? What if all industry leaders said tomorrow "Let's do it!"? What if we dared to dream bigger? What if we believed we had unlimited power to bring about the change we hope for? What if vintage became truly cool? What if we used societies' survival as an indicator for decisions? What if we used triple bottom line indicators for measuring business success? What if we all knew that everything we do matters? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> What if we redistributed our resources? What if we bought more local food? What if we shared more (e.g. food)? What if we ate more locally produced food? What if we all ate more healthily, consciously and conscientiously? What if we all grew at least some of our food? What if we all went vegan?

Technology	Political systems
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What if we could create the technology to make carbon dioxide really useful and safe? 2. What if we could unleash the full potential of the technology we already have? 3. What if we understood the data and its impact on us personally? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What if we had a democracy, where all votes counted? 2. What if our borders dissolved? 3. What if individuals, councils, governments and countries cared for the planet?

4. Future visualisation

The next step is an important component of this exercise as it gives people the sensory reality of experiencing their vision. The guided visioning process we used is adapted from [the one provided by the Transition Network](#). This is the modified script we used in our sessions:

"We'd like to invite you all now to get comfortable, close your eyes, and take a breath. Choose one of the What if? questions from the previous exercise which appeals to you the most – yours or somebody else's.

Now imagine we are travelling in time to 2030. We're all getting into a vessel to carry us into the future. Imagine how you feel as you climb aboard this vessel and begin to travel. This is our journey...

The times we travel through from 2021 until 2030 were times of the most profound and remarkable transition in human history. The changes in the way we interact with the earth shifted in ways we could never have dreamed of. Institutions that felt so permanent in 2021 crumbled and fell, and new, infinitely better ones bloomed in their place.

Those 9 years were the most thrilling time to be alive. They are times that those that came afterwards told great stories about and sang great songs about.

Now that we've arrived in 2030, let's step out of our vessel together, emerging blinking into this New World. It's not a Utopia, but it is the result of everything that could possibly have been done by humans to positively shift our relationship with the earth and our people. Take a walk around it in your imagination using all your senses.

Look around you. What do you see as you walk around?

What sounds do you hear?

Take a deep breath in through your nose. What does it smell like?

Find the closest thing to you. What is it and what does it feel like?

What does the air taste and smell like?

What is the first thing you notice about what others are doing?

How are we interacting with each other and with nature?

What are people doing for work and leisure?

You can open your eyes now. We're still in 2030 and we're going to go back into breakout rooms to share what we feel, what we see, what we hear, smell and taste. You have 10 mins to share with each other what your lived realities of 2030 are like."

Participants then shared their experiences of their imagined futures with each other

5. What next?

Finally, we asked participants what they were taking away from the session and whether they can use what they've learned with their clients, friends, family, etc. The question we posed was "What most excited you that you are taking from this session and that you will share?"

Again, we asked participants to enter their key learnings in the Menti poll, and these are some of the collated results:



6. Lessons learned from the sessions (from the facilitators)

"The commonality of our desired futures is what struck me. Participants from across the globe articulated a near future - 2030 - of people in harmony with people, and with our world. The visceral power of the guided visualisation of living in this alternate future should be experienced by as many people as possible: a "felt" imagined future brings the possibilities of change to life more effectively than only a "thought" imagined future."

Julie Courtage

"The potential power of collective consciousness for the World as demonstrated in this sample group is incredible. It is also an, as yet, largely untapped resource for change. Experiencing this gave me inspiration to do more and a belief that we can create a safe and engaging container for many different people to re-imagine the planet's future, and engage actively in that re-imagined future. I was struck by the power of the What If question and how a seemingly simple tool like this can be both powerful and liberating for our curiosity and sense of what is possible."

John Frost

"The commonality of root causes was also similar across sessions, which occurred across the globe. Combined with the similarities of the What If exercise outcomes, this gives hope that we can collectively move towards a new future. Also noted that while the root causes brought out a number of political issues, the What If exercises did not focus on politics and instead on connection, both to nature and to community. Logistically I would suggest extending the session to two hours to give sufficient time for reflection and feedback."

Marcus Griswold

"The What If exercise is an amazing tool for unleashing the power of the collective imagination in reframing and addressing many of the problems facing humanity today. More than ever before, we need creativity and imagination to enable us to move to the next level in our evolution. Giving people the chance to experience the sensory realities of potential futures helps secure the place of these realities in our hearts and not only our heads."

Helen Strong

We would welcome feedback and your experiences in using this tool in your communities (contact details in bios below).

7. What if...? resources

<https://www.robhopkins.net/>

<https://transitionnetwork.org/>

The full What if...? guided visioning process is available to download from here:

<https://transitionnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/What-If-Visioning-Exercise.pdf>

8. Host bios:

- [Julie Courtnage](#) facilitates processes of imagining our shared futures, and pathfinding for how we might move meaningfully towards this, together, by reconnecting with self, other and nature. She lives in South Africa.
- [John Frost](#) is an executive coach and leadership development facilitator who works with people, teams and organisations to inspire their consciousness, curiosity and imagination about a shared future based on collaboration, connection and compassion.
- [Marcus Griswold](#) is based in San Francisco, California and focuses on empowering environmental justice organizations to develop, share and stand strong in their experiences. He is focused on climate justice through nature and social equity.
- [Laura Re Turner](#) is an executive coach who works with leaders and teams on developing an agile mindset, behaviours and skills for the future. Her company, [Future Focus Coaching](#), offers coaching, training and mentoring. She is an active volunteer in her local Wildlife Trust in Buckinghamshire, England, and has worked as an environmental activist in the United States before becoming a coach.
- [Helen Strong](#) lives in the Outer Hebrides off the northwest coast of Scotland, where she [runs a B&B](#) and blogs about environmental issues. She loves speaking to people who do the audacious and courageous work the world needs, and she publishes their stories on her [podcast](#).