the future of JOURNALISM

building futures literacy within Schibsted Media Group

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Diploma Report, Spring 2018
The Oslo School of Architecture and Design
THE FUTURE OF
JOURNALISM

Building Futures Literacy
Within Schibsted Media Group

A multi-disciplinary design diploma
(interaction + systemic design)
at
The Oslo School of Architecture & Design

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For me, the most exciting problems design can grapple with are large, muddy, and important. This might sound strange from someone who spent 7 years in a dusty workshop, getting lost in the details of designing and building furniture.

Over my time at AHO I have tried to explore how bridging disciplines and collapsing scales can help us to address wicked problems; how strategic, and yet small-scale and aesthetic, interventions can fuel change.

Journalism is at the heart of several wicked problems. It is a critical part of a democratic society, and yet all of our interactions with it are personal and mediated through objects of one kind or another. It is at the same time both systemic and personal, macro and micro.

At a public lecture at AHO this spring, Cameron Tonkinwise said “There are ways that objects enable transitions.” (Tonkinwise, 2018) I hope that the results of this project, in some small way, have done just that, and have illustrated the value of working with an unabashedly multidisciplinary approach.

a note on language

Throughout the course of this project I have struggled with how to describe the people who will ultimately be using future products and services.

Users is a commonly-used word in both UX and service design processes, but doesn’t adequately reflect the relationship people have to news media and journalism.

At the same time, reader, listener, and viewer are commonly used in media environments, but are tied to specific types of media, and, like user and consumer, fail to address an emerging two way relationship between the producers and consumers of content (content: another problematic term).

The word prosumer has emerged as an attempt to represent a dual-natured user, but has not been widely adopted outside of DIY and maker spaces.

While it might not seem so important, our language shapes how we as designers imagine and engage with people. This is all just to say that we will need to explore new terms to represent new and complex relationships between actors, across different types of media.

For now, though, I’ll try to stick with user and reader, even if they fall short, and people aren’t actually reading anything.

This document has been formatted for printing on newsprint, meaning that some colours may appear duller than intended.

All photographs, illustrations and graphics by the author, unless otherwise noted.
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When we imagine the future of journalism, what images do we see?
Prix de l'abonnement: un an, 5 fr.; six mois, 10 fr.; trois mois, 20 fr.; un mois, 30 fr.

Le nombre des abonnés à l'année étant complet, on n'en reçoit plus qu'au mois.
My earlier experience studying and working with International Studies and Political Science has given me a high-level, somewhat naive view of the role journalism plays in society, and a somewhat dim view of its future.

That naive view is also passionate - I believe in the vital role journalism plays in democratic life, and that to move forward together as a society we need to guide it carefully through the challenging state of flux we find it in.

In the spring of 2017, as part of the Interaction Design 2: Screens course here at AHO, I had the opportunity to work on a project with Schibsted Media Group’s NextGen Publishing Products as a partner. NextGen is a team working to imagine and build new kinds of news publishing platforms.

That four week project was focused on how to engage younger audiences with the news and journalism in meaningful, useful way. This was real design building the future of journalism. The project was an opportunity to work across scales, addressing systemic issues through small-scale interventions.

The concept I put forward was called NextGen Issues; a modular, atomised news platform designed to help younger audiences get up to speed with complex, evolving stories. I worked with the French election happening at that time, breaking down content into understandable bits.

Working with this team as a project partner was a challenging and rewarding experience, and issues like reader engagement and editorial responsibility were satisfying problems to grapple with. When it came time to plan a diploma project, NextGen was top of my list as a potential project partner.

From January of 2018 I have been working as an embedded design student within Schibsted’s NextGen team. This means that I have had incredible access to NextGen’s diverse staff. For most of the semester I have had my own desk space in NextGen’s space at Akersgata 55 in Oslo.

I have had the opportunity to participate in regular team meetings, conduct formal interviews with a diverse range of developers, journalists, designers, product specialists and managers. I have eaten lunch with them, drank beer with them, and gotten to know this team and how they work in a very embodied, intuitive way.

At the same time, I have benefited from having my own work space in the diploma studio at AHO, which allowed me to keep some distance and perspective during critical points of the design process.
After my initial experience with NextGen, I was curious about how this team worked with the future. As an outsider, what I saw was a team that was founded with a strong mandate to explore the future, but that was now entirely absorbed by the important work of building and improving new products. Could this project help NextGen to look forward once again?

Over the past few years I have taken an interest in exploring ways of thinking about the future. Futures Studies is a broad term for the systematic, study of probable, possible and preferable futures. That study, Marien argues, should be a broad, interdisciplinary study that connects other fields. (Marien, 2002)

At its foundation are three assumptions, as outlined by Wendell Bell in the book Advancing Futures:

“(1) Humans by their behavior constantly shape their natural and social environments and, in so doing, shape their own future, although not in ways that they intend or understand; (2) disciplined and valid prospective thinking can help people shape their environments and their future effectively and responsibly; and (3) explicit and objective moral analysis can help people responsibly create desirable futures.” (Bell, 2002)

Futures Studies is distinct from the practice of forecasting. In using Futures Studies, we are not trying to predict what will happen, but rather to explore a range of possible alternatives, and to use them to inform our actions today.

Recently there has been growing interest exploring how Futures Studies can be used outside of academic contexts. Researchers, like Stuart Candy, and organisations like SitLab, are experimenting with how we can explore futures collaboratively, emotionally and in felt, embodied ways. They have been playing - often literally - with how we can show each other our visions of the future, and rather than simply talking about them. (Candy, 2010)

There are different models we can use to imagine time, change and possible futures. If you are interested, check out my 3 favourite:

- the Futures Cone (Voros, 2003), which helps us map possible, plausible, probable and preferable futures, with increasing uncertainty the farther out we look.
- the Three Horizons Model (Curry & Hodgson, 2008), which suggests futures can be perceived in three parts: our current system, an ideal future, and a transitional system.
- the Pace Layers Model (Brand & Saffo, 2015), which divides change into layers of different speeds, from fashion and commerce changing quickly at the top, and culture and nature changing slowly at the bottom.
How can we critically engage with a concept like the future, something so inherently uncertain and fluid? In his 2010 dissertation, *The Futures of Everyday Life*, Stuart Candy describes a new futures practice that he calls Experiential Futures:

This practice can be located at a three-way intersection where futures studies, design, and politics (both theory and activism) meet. It can be approached, and usefully deployed, from any of those angles. Why these three fields? As a human institution, politics is the mechanism by which we collectively make decisions, set rules for ourselves, and deliberately reshape the world... Futures is the discursive community and toolset concerned with enabling visions and possible paths of action to be elaborated, articulated and pursued. Design is remaking the world piece by piece, just on a different (smaller) scale than futures, and frequently with an immediate interface to materiality. (Candy, 2010)

This project is also situated at the intersection of these three fields. But, rather than being an aesthetic experience of conceptual design (an Experiential Future), it hopes to enable others to imagine and work with these futures themselves.

While the design intervention outlined in this report is not a piece of conceptual or speculative design in and of itself, there are parallels between Futures Studies, Experiential Futures, and what Dunne and Raby describe as a process to create “socially engaged design for raising awareness; satire and critique; inspiration, reflection, highbrow entertainment; aesthetic explorations; speculation about possible futures; and as a catalyst for change.” (Dunne & Raby, 2013)

This project aligns itself philosophically with their idea of Critical Design. I believe, as they do, that “to achieve change, it is necessary to unlock people’s imaginations and apply it to all areas of life at a microscale. Critical design, by generating alternatives, can help people construct compasses rather than maps for navigating new sets of values.” (Dunne & Raby, 2013, emphasis added)

Critical Design is a normative practice. At the same time as it is grappling with design’s capacity to shape our futures, it is seeks to challenge the ideological constraints that limit our vision and progress as designers and as society as a whole. (Jakobsone, 2017)

One of the goals of this project is to enable the inclusion of critical design within existing design practices at Schibsted Media Group. It seeks to help teams break out of their normal mind sets, imagine critical alternative futures, and build new understandings - new compasses - together.
How can futures studies methods be used to imagine alternative futures for journalism?
**Future of Journalism**

**methods & approach**

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**Persepolis Rising** | **Ancillary Justice** | **Ancillary Sword** | **Ancillary Mercy**
---|---|---|---
**Travellers** | **Dr. Who** | **Gattica** | **Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency** | **Black Mirror**

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**Trend & Scenario building**

- 1st iteration futures workshop
- 1st workshop test
- 2nd iteration futures workshop
- 2nd workshop test

Speculative Illustrations, Fictions & Concepts

- system mapping
- uncertainty mapping
- actors mapping 1.0
- internal interviews (19)
- external expert interviews (8)
- embedded observations
- desktop research
- signal scanning

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**first mid-term**
From the outset, this project has been deeply explorative and experimental in its approach. Starting with a question about methods (how can future studies be used to imagine alternative futures for journalism?), I decided to dive in and explore different methods in parallel. The project has been a continuous process of inspiration, insight gathering, and creation.

Sci-Fi
The true foundation of this project, if you are really curious, has been a nearly life-long love of science fiction. In the late 90s I hit the peak of my social relevance as a founding member of the Star Trek club at school (pictured back row, centre).

Exploring images of the future from science fiction has helped keep my mind stimulated with possibilities, and, importantly, has provided a cultural and linguistic touchstone for talking about time and the future.

Insights
Building on this foundation is a parallel series of investigations: interviews, desktop research, signal scanning, embedded observations and mapping. Before starting my embedded process at Schibsted I wanted to build a strong knowledge base from external sources.

This was important to me for two reasons: first, I wanted a foundational understanding of media, journalism and the news before working alongside professionals in those fields; and second, I wanted to build a critical perspective on the industry before diving head-first into an embedded process.

To this end I conducted 7 expert interviews on topics related to media, journalism and the news, before moving on to my internal observations.

I also interviewed a professional designer with experience using Futures Studies methods in corporate contexts.

Building on this foundation, I turned my focus to Schibsted. Throughout the course of the project I conducted 19 interviews with a diverse range of people within Schibsted - including young journalists right out of school, product managers with decades of experience at Schibsted, Strategy Directors, data scientists, developers and designers.

As an embedded designer I also had access to meetings, workshops, and the casual conversations that happen over coffee or lunch (and sometimes beer).

I processed the insights gathered by sketching and mapping. This allowed me to build a clear understanding of the critical uncertainties facing the industry, as well as how Schibsted works as an organisation.

Creation
Parallel to this insight gathering process I explored three futures studies methods: scenario building, speculation (illustrations, concepts and fictions), and co-creative futures workshops.

I pursued an iterative approach to creation throughout the semester, rather than moving sequentially through stages.

Sketching throughout the project also allowed me to reflect on my own process as it unfolded, and helped to build visual metaphors to communicate with.

Finally, in building my delivery itself, I practiced an even tighter cyclical process of iteration and evaluation. The whole process has been a lot of fun.
I came into this project with many assumptions about journalism and the role it plays in society. Over the course of two weeks these assumptions were challenged, prodded and in some cases validated through a series of semi-structured interviews with a group of external experts. Collectively, the panel’s expertise included academic media and journalism studies, design and organisational change within major media companies, audio engineering and production, alternative journalism practices in restrictive contexts, organised labour administration and implementing futures studies methods in corporate contexts.

Throughout the course of these interviews, many common themes and issues arose including: failing business models; the challenges presented by social media and fake news; the evolving competencies and practices of journalists; emerging technologies; editorial responsibility and public trust; issues of privacy and data use; and changing user behaviour and needs. I present these six core issues as critical uncertainties facing the future of news, journalism and the media. These uncertainties have formed the analytical framework used to guide my further inquiries and explorations.

What struck me throughout the course of these interviews was the level of agreement about what uncertainties face the industry. Journalism is, in many ways, a very self-aware industry, perhaps because the challenges facing it are so universal and so strong. While the experts largely agreed on the major issues facing journalism today, many differed on what they felt should be done about them. There were considerable differences in how these experts view journalism as a practice and as a social institution.

Finally, there were differences in how journalism and media companies are perceived and critiqued in different contexts around the world. Of the 8 interview subjects, 4 were Norwegian, 1 was Canadian working the US, 1 was Brazilian studying in Norway, and 1 was an Iranian research fellow in Norway.

Many of the issues facing the journalism around the globe are only just beginning to be noticed in Norway, a country with one the highest news subscription rates in the world. (Reuters, 2017). Things are not necessarily going to stay that way, however.

“Going back to this whole need for more media literacy and education and so forth, hopefully the public will be quite literate about media bias and media sources. So if you are not transparent about your sources and the perspectives that you view the world from, then people will see through it. They will not trust you.”

“Collectively, the panel’s expertise included academic media and journalism studies, design and organisational change within major media companies, audio engineering and production, alternative journalism practices in restrictive contexts, organised labour administration and implementing futures studies methods in corporate contexts.”

“Throughout the course of these interviews, many common themes and issues arose including: failing business models; the challenges presented by social media and fake news; the evolving competencies and practices of journalists; emerging technologies; editorial responsibility and public trust; issues of privacy and data use; and changing user behaviour and needs.”

“I also think that institutional media is -- this is not not news to anybody -- institutional media has obviously been weakened, and there’s all these other outlets to get information now.”

“Future of Journalism

“With social media, what we have done, is to sort of outsource a core journalistic activity, namely evaluating sources, that’s now outsourced to the public, and to companies like facebook.”

“It’s hard because once you are at the whim of the audience, unless you are really good at predicting what they are going to want, you are kind of stuck. Like you have to do what they expect you to do.”

“What Schibsted makes money from, if you look at the online reports, the quarterly reports, is online classified ads, not journalism.”
Throughout the semester I built on the foundational knowledge gained through the expert interviews by doing daily signal scanning: reading and listening to articles, blog posts and podcasts focused on industry news and trends.

During the first month of the project I collected these signals in a spreadsheet, summarising the content and what the signal meant. This was the basis on which I translated these signals into trends.

Throughout this process I found it difficult to separate signals and trends about 'media' from signals and trends about journalist; these fields are highly interrelated, but through my research I realised they are not the same thing.

To try and make sense of things, I started mapping these trends, grouping them together around similar themes and effects. Through this process, these groupings started to mirror the 6 uncertainties identified through my expert interviews.

What emerged was a web of interconnected trends and changes with broad reach throughout the news, media and journalism industries.

Technology trends were being driven by technological developments and behavioural changes, and vice versa. An intervention in one part of the system would have some kind of effects in almost every other part.

Richard Buchanan might call this a ‘wicked problem’. Citing a 1964 report on Horst Rittel’s wicked problems concept, he raises this definition of a wicked problem as:

“a class of social system problems which are ill-formulated, where the information is confusing, where there are many clients and decision makers with conflicting values, and where the ramifications of the whole system are thoroughly confusing.”

(Buchanan, 1992)

To me, this definition easily applies to many of the specific challenges facing journalism, and to the question of futures more broadly.

Without an actual time machine, we can never know what a signal means, or how a trend will play out over time. Both signals and trends can be misinterpreted, change over time or contradict one another.

Mapping the issues facing journalism in this way allowed me to start asking questions about why certain signals or trends mattered; it allowed me to work back and forth from the micro-scale of individuals up to the macro scale of the systems.
signals → trends → uncertainties
six critical

The levels & objects of our trust.

The role & definition of journalism in society.

Our changing data & privacy culture.
uncertainties

User needs, behaviour & context.

The formats, media & technology we use.

Power structures, systems & business models.
embedded research
To build this project I did not want to pursue a traditional designer-client relationship; I wanted to work as an embedded designer: working and learning alongside my focus group and my end users.

There is significant potential in working so closely with your focus group: you can build tacit and embodied understandings of what life is like for your users. Cameron Tonkinwise, referencing Indi Young, talks calls this practical empathy: a way of “capturing mental models people are using in their daily lives.” (Tonkinwise, 2018)

What better way to learn about people’s daily lives than to be there when they live them?

Ethnographers and anthropologists practice this kind of research all the time. SJ Lewis and AJ Russell write about embeddedness in anthropological field work as a kind of “being there” (Lewis & Russel, 2011).

They go on to describe the core of ethnographic practice as

“...an attitude toward ‘being there’ sufficient to experience the mundane and sacred, brash and nuanced aspects of socio-cultural life and, through observations, encounters and conversations, to come to an understanding of it.” (Lewis & Russel, 2011)

They argue that to be effective, embedded researchers need to become ‘some kind of team member’; in doing so they need to act reflexively, returning honest insights and findings back to their research group as quickly as possible. (Lewis & Russel, 2011)

There is risk and responsibility in building this kind of relationship, however. Whose interests are you working towards? In this case, this question was complicated by a third factor: being a student.

I had to wear three hats in this embedded process: some kind of NextGen team member, a designer demonstrating professional practice, and a self-interested student.

What I found when I started this process was that this balancing act was not as complicated as I at first thought.

The NextGen team were quick to include me in meetings and were generous with their time, and they weren’t demanding with their own interests and agendas towards the outcome of my project.

I also had access to Slack, a workplace messaging service. This allowed me to follow conversations happening throughout the organisation - in other product teams, as well as groups focused on privacy and technology foresight.

At times it was hard to separate my interests, and the interests of the project, from those of the NextGen team. Sometimes, part of building empathy is losing part yourself in someone else.

At times I had to remind myself (or be reminded by my supervisors) that my first priority was to my own project’s integrity. At these times I benefitted greatly from being able to set my own schedule, splitting my time between the Schibsted offices and AHO when I needed to regain my external perspective.

The insights I gained working this way were rich and varied and greatly informed my process and the outcome of the project. Being both an insider and an outsider made it easy to build trust, and to ask naive and critical questions. It enabled me to tighten feedback loops, gaining valuable feedback and constantly testing my assumptions.

Again echoing Tonkinwise, working as an embedded designer allowed me to be of service to my users, not be servile to them - in other words, to give them what they need, not necessarily what they want. (Tonkinwise, 2018)
In 2016 Schibsted started the NextGen as an in-house experiment in building new products, with reader engagement as a core goal. NextGen currently has product teams prototyping, testing and developing publishing platforms focused on: semi-automated sports news; daily news updates for younger readers; and tailored business-to-business newsletters.

The VGNext product team

“The vision for all our Next Generation Publishing Products is to deliver and tell news in a way that makes users feel like they have their own personal, intelligent editor.” (Sundve, 2016)
If I was going to be thinking about the future of journalism, it was important that I understand exactly what it is. Throughout the course of the project I asked the 27 people I interviewed inside and outside of Schibsted how they defined journalism. I got 27 different answers.

Three common themes emerged, arranged as I see it on a spectrum, balanced on the idea of editorial or journalistic responsibility. These are, journalism as documentation (unbiased capturing of reality), journalism as information (to inform), and journalism as criticism, (holding power to account).

Given all the changes facing the industry, and the seeming fluidity of how we define journalism, and what it is that those "committing journalistic acts" actually do, it became clear to me that the industry needs effective tools for grappling with dynamic change over time.

Building on this understanding, I started thinking about how journalism, and my project is related to the news and media. The way I see things, our traditional image of journalism is rooted in a time when people who practiced journalism also controlled the distribution of news and information because they had ownership, or at least exclusive access to, the instruments of mass media.

Rapid technological changes, however, have meant that the three concepts of media, news, and journalism are drifting farther apart.

Most people now have direct access to mass media via the internet and smart phones; news is now both publicly relevant information, and what we see on our social media feeds; and journalism is no longer the exclusive arbiter of either media or the news. Now more than ever people in this industry need the tools to grapple with uncertainty and change.
This map is the result of several interviews and mapping sessions with the NextGen team. It is presented not as a design object, but rather as a useful tool for capturing insights and situating learnings within the Schibsted System.
Drawing characters that represent real team members was a way to build engagement with the mapping process. When the first iteration of the map was posted publicly, people quickly gathered to find themselves - many then made comments or corrections using post-its. This discussion even moved to Slack, with people sharing parts of the map with team members working in other offices.
Schibsted Media Group publishes an annual Future Report. Published by Schibsted Communication and edited by the Executive Vice President of Communication and Brand, this is primarily intended as an external facing document used to build Schibsted’s image as a forward thinking company.

Well written and nicely designed, it is essentially a compilation of emerging and established trends affecting media business. Divided into three sections (tech, people, and biz), the report presents articles on mainstream trends such as automation, artificial intelligence, home assistants, algorithmic content creation and millennials.

“It’s just mostly ‘up there’ somewhere. How does it trickle down?”

- NextGen team member

What this report shows is that Schibsted has the internal expertise to think and write about the future, but that this capacity isn’t necessarily directed inwards towards their own teams.

In fact, when I visited the Stockholm office, there was a 3 metre high banner proclaiming “The Future is Now”.

Schibsted clearly recognises the value of thinking about the future as a sales or promotional tool - in fact, “Shape a Future Oriented Organisation” is one of Schibsted Media’s Key Objectives for 2018. But how is the company working towards that goal in practical terms?

In 2015 VG released a concept video and report, called VG2020. It outlines a product strategy, putting forward a future concept of VGs core news services as an AI enabled, personal editor.

The report and its accompanying concept video acted as a sort of concept-car for VG, showing the potential of what the future could be, and describing what the organisation would need to do to get there.

The biggest result of VG2020 was the creation of NextGen Publishing Products. Much of the writing team and advisory group for VG2020 went on to work for NextGen, and now for the Technology Trends Team.
I have tried to approach my creative process with the same approach I took to working as an embedded designer: by diving in and ‘being there’ – by living in that space.

In practical terms, this means that I have been working through creative iterations throughout the course of the project.

By working with these tight iterative loops I was able to translate the insights I gained through the interviews, embedded observations and desktop research into visual metaphors, concepts and scenarios.

These creative outputs would then fuel a new series of questions and possible avenues of exploration.

This constant mixing of methods is something Birger Sevaldson advocates for in his Systems Oriented Design class at AHO, as a way of unsticking thought processes and developing what Tonkinwise has called “a felt approach to systems thinking.” (Tonkinwise, 2018)

What follows on the next few pages are scenarios, illustrations, future concepts and speculative fictions. These outputs fueled further inquiries and discussions, and ultimately led to a series of speculative fiction workshops.

By sharing these concepts back to the NextGen team, I was also able to start normalising the practice of engaging in ‘weird’ speculations, of exploring outside of expected comfort zones. I think that this normalisation of strangeness paved the way for the adoption of my design intervention.
future journalist

half AI

half human
“In the year 2046 there are editors, but there are no longer any staff writers, which is super popular when I tell journalists this. Generative language bots and personalization algorithms will craft stories for each individual reader, so you will have your own, personalised newsfeed. And because there are so many different opportunities to get content, the value that news brands will continue to provide 30 years from now is that it’s vetted, it’s content that has accurate data that can be trusted.”

(Webb, 2015)

In the aftermath of the HumanFirst movement’s worldwide protests in 2046, the world’s leading techcorps and governing cybercratic institutions passed the AICA - the Artificial Intelligence Circumscription Agreement.

The AICA set some limited restrictions on Artificial Intelligence research to prevent the development of self-aware machines, while ensuring that new technological developments would still be leveraged for maximum corporate profit.

Most journalists have been laid off and now live on basic assistance. Some still write and pursue stories, although their abilities to earn additional income this way are limited.

Journalists still working for media houses are now divided into two groups: data miners, who program and maintain the algorithms that drive modern news rooms; and story farmers, who look after the algorithms that are busy crafting the stories individual readers will eventually see.

For those companies that successfully managed the 4th industrial revolution, profits have never been higher. Legacy industries that failed to adapt are all but forgotten.

In Birmingham, a hipster subculture reviving the printed paper emerges, facilitated, of course, by Alphazon’s AI cloud services. Successful startups have managed to disrupt some businesses, but they are quickly absorbed by the major media and tech companies.

Dramatic investments in new technologies and radical reorganisation efforts made by the major media and techcorps over the last 25 years have entirely reshaped the media landscape.

The public can now access and distribute any content, on nearly any platform, in nearly any format. The big brands have segmented themselves into targeted niches, even if profits are centralised.

The public now expect seamless, affordable and hyper-personalised services across all platforms, with as few subscriptions to manage as possible. The iPhone 19, the last model ever produced, is entered into the MoMA’s permanent collection.
What will VG look like in 2030?

Will mobile still be growing, or will it be in decline?
Will interactive voice and AR be revitalizing journalism?
What will our jobs look and feel like?
Who will be our new colleagues - will they be robots?
Who will be reading, listening and watching, and what will they want?

#futureschibsted
WHERE YOUR ISSUE IS READY, IT IS PRINTED ON A HIGH-QUALITY PRESS

That high-quality press is actually a digital, on-demand printer...

Read your curated, personalised newspaper, complete with saved and recommended articles, and social media highlights.

Save articles, posts and podcasts from across your platforms.

...located at a local Newspaper Cafe. Get your caffeine fix with your custom paper, or choose one edited by a guest editor.

Trade and share with your friends, or follow editors you respect.

SANDERSEN’S PRINT HOUSE & Coffee Emporium

Experience the richness of the printed page with all the convenience, curation and connection of digital life. At Sandersen’s you can get your personalised printed newspaper - on real paper - complete with recommended, trending or hard-to-find articles, along with highlights from your social platforms.

Stop in for a coffee, stay for the news.
"Source criticism - this is a concept which is really important, and that is going to be much more important in the future. This has to do with everything associated with fake news, and sort of having the capacity to evaluate whether or not something is fake, or real. That's going to be more important, especially because there are now technologies being developed that make it much more easy to manipulate things." Steen Steensen, in interview.

The multicoloured glow from the screens dances on the water as Michel's foot lands in the puddle. The water is cold, but he is too focused to care. Though none of them see him, the streets are filled with people, making navigating the streets a challenge. He's already late, but he knows the package he is carrying will be worth the wait.

Rushing down the main pedestrian street of this residential unit, Michel weaves between bystanders, some transfixed by the glowing rectangles of colour suspended from the buildings, anachronistic holdovers from a time when displays were fixed physical installations.

Without glasses or implants, he sometimes wonders what they see. Updates from their social networks? Advertisements for their latest identified need? Updates from what passes as the news these days?

What must it be like, he asks himself, to not trust anything your eyes show you? He, at least, could trust The News.

A child, still young enough to be curious, spots him and says to her mother "Look! One of those weirdos in the facepaint!" but she doesn't seem to hear her. His makeup might be fooling the cameras, but he can still be seen by people not lost in in the Augment.

It's a strange mixture of relief and anxiety to really be seen by another person.

Looking at the little girl, he remembers a time when this street was empty at this time of night, everyone home in bed, resting for the next day's work. Since what passes for school went on-demand and Basic was rolled out, the streets have been filled whatever the hour.

The noise of the street softens when Michel turns the corner into near darkness - a forgotten passage between two old walkups. Ducking into a low doorway, out of sight from any cameras, he immediately takes off his robes. They do a good job of shielding his infra-red and body patterns, but the trapped heat is sweltering.

Picking his way through the rolls and stacks of newsprint in the darkened room, he pulls an envelop from the discrete bag he keeps strapped around his hips. It's worn surface and taped edges show a level of care for what once would have been disposable. Paper is hard to come by these days, unless you make it or recycle it yourself. It still has it's uses.

Pushing open a heavy door, a new world of light and sound opens up before him, his eyes adjusting to the cool glow of the LEDs. Somehow the brightness doesn't quite match the mechanical clunks and hisses coming from the ancient, manually operated printing press.

When she sees him enter, Editor Sofia rushes over, welcoming him with an ink-smeared handshake. "Correspondant Michel, did you manage to get it?" she asks.

"It's here."

He carefully tips the contents onto a nearby desk. Real photographs of a protest, developed on silver gelatin sheets, and bundles of hand-written notes in various scripts slide out of the envelope.

"I managed to get sworn and verified statements from 7 witnesses to the police action against the Association of Chartered Accountants' sit-in at the old financial block," he proclaims proudly. "Will it make tonight's pressing?"

"Just in time." she replies, smiling. She carries this Trusted News over to the Typesetters, a row workers arranging tiny metal letters in wooden frames, chanting in unison: "All the news that's fit to print... All the news..."
... we have talked about how we can use emotions in our product. It would be really cool to have a workshop on it.

I think you are starting them now. We have not discussed AI on a serious level yet, but I think it's time!

Yeah I'd be very interested to hear about those discussions ... especially as more and more of the publishing process is automated.

I think you are starting them now. We have not discussed AI on a serious level yet, but I think it's time!

This experiment also reinforced the central role Slack could play as not only a platform to coordinate with people on practical issues, but also as a place where discursive discussions could start.

Working with creative teams, it was easy to start conversations this way, but the problem remained: how to keep them going, and what to do with the results?

With this question in mind I designed a series of futures workshops to explore how visions could be made actionable.
speculative futures workshops

FINN

A major lesson from working as an embedded designer: some of the most productive conversations happen after work over beers.

While talking with a UX designer from Finn (a Schibsted Marketplaces company) at one of these events, we hatched a plan to run a half-day futures workshop with a UX team. Run as part of a monthly team-building program, the team came expecting something explorative.

Divided into two groups, the workshop progressed through 5 stages intended to bridge futures thinking with the design process.

1. Scenario Building
The team drew 3 random trends from a trend deck, and talked together to create a scenario based on the interaction of these trends.

2. Individual Ideation
Next, the teams spent 10 minutes ideating individually, sketching and describing service or product concepts inspired by their scenario.

3. Negotiation & Synthesis
Here, each team member presented their favourite concepts, and the team worked together to choose one concept, or a combination of similar ones, to work with further.

4. Concept Development
On large format paper, the teams sketched and prototyped their concepts.

One team stuck to sketching and working with post-its, while the other added to their sketches by building simple paper mockups of their concept: an automated cart that transports second-hand materials around mega-cities.

5. Sharing and conversation
Finally, the teams shared their concepts with eachother, and we discussed what they might mean for Finn today. Interestingly, the automated cart concept sparked a discussion about how Finn does not facilitate the buyer-seller relationship very well in their service today.

The speculative futures quickly sparked new ideas. Building concepts on these ideas, and analysing them together in conversation, led to new insights and perspectives on Finn’s current service offerings.

People used their phones to explore and document, sharing links and taking photos. They also got lost in SnapChat from time to time.

The size of the group (7) was too big for one group, but too small for two. I had to act as both participant in one group (after someone left for a meeting), and an overall facilitator. This meant we lost track of time, and the group without me had a harder time following the process.

The workshop materials faded into the background, and participants used other materials. This worked well, but may also have been a lost opportunity to communicate the process and build a more creative atmosphere.

Working with such a creative group, used to UX and agile methodologies, meant it was easy to work through such a rapid ideation process. The group felt this would be a bigger challenge with end-users or non-designers.

While the conversation was stimulating and engaging, there was no follow-up, and way to track the output and effects of the workshop.

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key findings

- Working with such a creative group, used to UX and agile methodologies, meant it was easy to work through such a rapid ideation process. The group felt this would be a bigger challenge with end-users or non-designers.

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NextGen

After processing the findings from the first workshop, I developed a second iteration for further testing. Designed with more structure, and an entire stage dedicated to windtunneling and backcasting concepts, I hoped this workshop would make the results of a futures conversation more actionable.

Working with a smaller group from NextGen (two Product Managers and a UX Lead), I tried to guide the group through a more systematic 5 stage process. The goal was to work from trends and pre-defined scenarios, and then through individual ideation.

At this point, we would map our concepts on the futures cone, talking together to identify our preferred future, before working collaboratively on a new design concept situated in that preferred future.

The final round would see us create a roadmap to our future concept, and run an evaluation of the concept’s potential costs and benefits.

While the group understood the process intellectually, in practice, the workshop went quite differently.

After a lengthy process of getting on the same page, the conversation took a number of diverting and speculative paths.

The group skipped from the first stage to the 4th, focusing the discussion on a future weather service. Using AI and automated processes, this weather service would know who you are, where you are likely to go and what you would likely do there. By aggregating data from all users, the automated processes could build more nuanced profiles of expected user behaviour.

This concept and the conversation were engaging, but was only loosely related to the mandates of the teams represented at the table.

At the end of the session we spent 30 minutes debriefing the process. Even though it resulted in a fun conversation, this process did not address some of the core issues facing NextGen’s use of the future.

The results of the conversation were not captured or translated into action. The trends themselves were interpreted in predictable way; variability and uncertainty were not addressed.

The workshop was successful at sparking a conversation, but as we discussed at the end, starting these conversations is not the core problem NextGen has. It was back to the drawing board.

The first stage of five – discussing trends, and how they might interact in a fictional scenario. Getting everyone on the same page took some time, but resulted in a very interesting conversation.

... still the first stage. This workshop resulted in an interesting conversation about machine learning and weather forecasting services, but didn’t progress through the stages as I had hoped.

key findings

This group was also used to working creatively quickly, and was even more comfortable with future trends. This made getting into speculative conversation easy.

The process and materials for this workshop demanded a lot of time, and yet were not engaging enough to keep participants moving through the stages.

Relying on plotted material is a critical bottleneck. If the materials are inaccessible or difficult to print, the whole process is at risk. After plotting problems at AHO, we had to improvise with smaller copies of the materials.

Working with pre-defined scenarios was intended to help focus teams on possible outcomes. This actually put the narrative ‘on-rails’. We spent a lot of time getting on the same page about what these scenarios meant.

Even if the process failed, the results of running a test were more than worth the frustration. The critical conversation about the process this failure sparked fueled the reflection and re-evaluation that lead to what would become Futures Compass.

By building up a relationship with my participants as an embedded designer before the workshop, I had built enough good will to make the risk and failure worth it, and enough trust for solid critical feedback.
“”
We discuss possible futures all the time, but the bad thing is that it's not done in a structured way, or in a way that we can use it.

UX Lead, VGNext
It wasn’t until I imagined removing myself from the equation that I realised what NextGen needs – the ability to continually go through this process on their own. What I could best offer was not a unique or novel view of the future of journalism; their own expertise makes them better suited for this.

Rather, I could provide a tailored, exploratory approach to futures methods, rooted in a deep understanding of place, of context, and NextGen’s needs. To do this, I needed some kind of framework for dealing with the future in a structured way.

Futures Literacy is a concept put forward by Riel Miller, an economist and Head of Futures Literacy at UNESCO. To Miller, Futures Literacy is “the capacity to explore the potential of the present to give rise to the future.” (Miller, 2006)

He views it as a cumulative capacity: just as children learn to read simple books before moving on to more complex stories, we can learn and develop our capacity to think about the future.

Divided into three levels, Miller’s framework for Futures Literacy provides the structural backbone for the output of this project.

**Levels of Futures Literacy:**

1. **Awareness:** change happens over time, and we are situated in moments in time.
2. **Rigorous Imagining:** what is possible, what is probable, and what is desirable
3. **Choice:** build on our awareness and insights to act strategically today, in line with the values we prefer.

Summarised from (Miller, 2006)
Futures Compass is a collaborative conversation tool and futures game specifically designed to build Futures Literacy within Schibsted Media Group’s NextGen team. It enables product teams to make sense of trends by exploring a range of possible futures.

More than that, it helps teams to integrate their learnings into today’s world by imagining what role the team could play in creating future change, and by identifying new goals and actions.

Built on research into existing Futures Studies methods, as well as existing futures and storytelling games, Futures Compass is a playful and engaging alternative for workshops, meetings, and product reviews.

It comes out of a four month embedded design project with Schibsted’s NextGen Publishing Products team, and is informed by a deep understanding of the NextGen way of working.

Futures Compass is designed to be used by product teams at monthly roadmap and assessment meetings, quarterly off-site meetings and OKR sessions, and at annual goal-setting workshops.

A flexible and adaptable tool, Futures Compass is also designed to be used in different ways by teams whenever they face challenging decisions, encounter new trends, or have questions about the future of their team, their product, or their industry. Happy exploring!
“...a game format or framing can be helpful in and of itself for the futurist facilitator seeking to trigger a hypothetical, exploratory mindset, affording players not only permission to think along heterodox lines, but offering the specific materials of imagination with which to do so”

(Candy, 2018)
Futures games aren’t a new concept: there are a range of examples, some available for purchase, others openly available for download and printing. In researching precedents I identified 3 alternative futures games to explore, representing a range of play styles.

Strange Telemetry, a London-based research company and consultancy created Futures Poker in 2016. It is essentially a deck of trends, grouped into suits that correspond to STEEP (social, technological, economic, ecological, & political) categories commonly used in trend analysis. The game is played as a storytelling competition, with players receiving 3 random trends, along with a future date and location. (Strange Telemetry, 2016)

The Thing from the Future, released in 2015 by Situation Lab, adds a level of rigour to the trend deck model. It is a speculative design and storytelling game based on four suits of cards: Arc, which defines timelines and trajectories; Terrain, which describes the context; Object, which describes the form of the thing from the future; and Mood, which describes the emotions around the object. Prompted by 4 random cards, players take turns describing hypothetical future objects. (SitLab, 2015)

Situation Lab redesigned The Thing from The Future in 2018 for the International Federation of the Red Cross, streamlining the game to three suits, tailoring content for the IFRC, and representing the suits as grammatical elements of probing questions asked to the players. (IFRC Innovation, 2018, & Candy, 2018)

The two card games drive our imagination, while Impact shows us how new events and developments can have impacts throughout society. But all three fall short of tying these future speculations to how we can act today, something NextGen identified as critical to their engagement with the future.

Analysing these games through the lens of Futures Literacy, we can see that Impact clearly builds awareness of change over time, and so is limited to level 1. The card games also build awareness, but they also apply a level of rigorous imagining, and as such are working towards building level 2. What these games don’t explicitly or directly enable is the progression to level 3; they don’t build strategic scenarios to question our values, assumptions or actions today. This is what I hope Futures Compass will do for NextGen.
In exploring the range of precedents available, I also looked at games designed to facilitate storytelling. Hub Games is a UK based company known for their range of creative storytelling games.

Perhaps best known are *Rory’s Story Cubes*, a series of dice with icons and images on them used to inspire the narratives of imagined stories. The original set (pictured) features generic images, although co-branded sets are now available featuring cartoon characters and superheroes. The random pairings of images are reminiscent of the trend-deck approach to futures games - random stimuli provoke us to make speculative connections and imagine alternative stories.

Building on this platform Hub Games released *Untold*, a highly-structured narrative tool that uses Story Cubes and common plot structures and tropes from TV to set the stage. Working collaboratively, groups of players invent new characters and put them into established contexts, using the Story Cubes and random Outcome and Reaction cards to trigger unexpected conflicts and final resolutions.

*The Extraordinaires* presents a different approach to creativity by simplifying the design process into three stages. Drawing Extraordinaire (character) cards and Project cards (objects), players create simplified design briefs (i.e. a chair for a pirate), and then draw Think cards for probing questions (i.e. what if it changed shape?).

All three of these games offer robust platforms for generating new ideas. Rory’s Story Cubes, with their countless combinations have almost unlimited creative potential, but are almost entirely lacking in structure - the example stories on their website border on the surreal. Untold builds that missing structure by adding a layer of narrative sequences and reactions, driving forward a collaborative conversation. The Extraordinaires, by simplifying the design process, adds a level of rigour and process to simple ideative sketching.

One final precedent that I have a long personal history with is *Dungeons & Dragons*, a game I have been playing for nearly 20 years. Beyond the complex rule sets and strangely shaped dice, D&D offers interesting parallels to co-design workshop processes. It is a heavily facilitated experience, requiring trust and collaboration between team members and demands creative approaches to both context and established constraints.

Importantly a balanced team, aware of their collective capabilities, is critical to successful problem solving and conflict resolution.
Games give us the opportunity to play with systems. They give us a safe space to embrace ambiguity and to take risks. They offer a playful way to experience an event, discover solutions, create empathy or learn skills.”

(JoLT, 2017)
Structure and flow are critical to the success of any interaction. For Futures Compass, I explored existing game flows, and looked for parallels to futures studies methods and design practices.

The precedents I examined were doing a good job of enabling imaginative thought, but what I really wanted to do was create a system for "making basic assumptions problematic." (Inayatullah, 2013)

With this goal in mind, I used the three levels of Futures Literacy (Miller, 2006), as guideposts and assessment tools for the user flows I sketched.

**Basic Futures Compass Flow**

- **Scan for signals** (indications of change we see today), and identify trends (broader patterns of change) these signals point to. ← build awareness, Futures Literacy level 1
- **Pick a trend**: bring in uncertainty by adding a random change. ← leverage uncertainty
- **Create a stories together about possible futures this change could enable.** ← imagine rigorously, Futures Literacy level 2
- **Explore different possible outcomes, and how we might react.** ← make basic assumptions problematic
- **Identify what we should do today based on what our explorations have taught us.** ← choose, build strategic scenarios, Futures Literacy level 2

The first sketch of what would become Futures Compass. This concept had a diverse range of components covering most aspects of futures thinking methods. It was complex and highly systematized. I used something similar as the framework for the second workshop.

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"The design question becomes: how to make a structure more reliably generative of useful outcomes?" (Candy, 2018)
To test the preliminary Futures Compass structure, I headed to Stockholm. One of NextGen’s teams, Schibsted Daily, is based in Sweden, and so they had less exposure to my methods and approach than teams in Oslo. I hoped that this lack of exposure would help raise critical questions about the process.

In this first test I took a fairly active role as a facilitator. While each member of the team was engaged in the process, I again found myself taking most of the notes.

Throughout the session I also noticed that the team seemed to be moving into established social and behavioural patterns: certain people were playing different roles automatically. While this wasn’t a barrier to continuing the conversation, I was left wondering what would happen if I were able to shake participants out of their normal habits.

This could be a natural side effect of having an external facilitator and an unfamiliar process, but it highlighted two problems: first, a lack of clear roles (aside from me as the facilitator), and second, a need for more clarity around how the participants should engage with the Futures Compass tools.

It begged the questions: what is worth recording, and how? In writing? With drawings? Why would we record the outcomes of this process, and how can these outcomes be used as the team moves on with their work?

These issues and questions aside, the results of this conversation proved insightful for the team. We imagined a future in which AI assistants are replacing journalists, and asked how the team could adapt in that situation.

The group decided that if their workplace was affected by these technological changes, so would their customers’ workplace. The team then discussed what they could do about this possibility today. One possibility is to hire editorial staff with expertise in organisational development and change management, and position Schibsted Daily not just as a daily business newsletter, but as a trusted advisor on future trends and changes.

The key findings and reflections from this test proved invaluable in developing further iterations of Futures Compass.
The Schisbted Daily team imagines the future of their business model.

“I like the gamification of things, it’s much more fun. I really like that it’s physical – I want to take it home and play it.”

participant

**key findings**

- established social and group patterns went unchallenged
- flow and language from boardgames enables engagement
- more than one coffee break is needed!
- people have lots of meetings, and try to keep up with slack on phones and laptops during workshops
- digital documentation needs to be designed into the process
- it was fairly easy for the team to imagine alternative futures, and to connect them to today’s needs
- the group often relied on the facilitator for documentation
- the bright colour was engaging, but the contrast made some parts of the sheets hard to read
- clear expectations about timeframes are great - someone still needs to be watching the time
- worksheets or documentation tools are necessary, but there could be more engaging, tangible elements
- new ideas and possible actions emerged as a result of the future scenario exploration
the prototype

WORKSHEETS

HANDY BOX
(WITH USB + TREND DECK)

Futures Compass
**2. explore**

*conversion from RGB to CMYK for newsprint means the colours on this page appear duller*

**futurescompass**

**pick a trend**  Roll the Number Cube to choose a random trend, or pick one together as a team to keep working with.

**pick a change**  Roll the Change Cube to find out how your trend will change.

**tell a story**  Using the Scenario Worksheet, work together to tell a story of what this future might look like. We call these stories Scenarios. Try to answer the 6 uncertainties:

**repeat**  You can keep working with trends, changes and scenarios until you have one or two that the team wants to keep working with, or your timekeeper says you are out of time!

**futures compass**

**navigator**

@picardian2000

Knows which way the wind is blowing. Keeping the #squad on track and on plan. But it’s the journey, not the destination, right?

one step ahead

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**Outcome Card**

futurecompass

... how could we amplify? #getloud
Ways to Play

Futures Compass is carefully designed to guide your team in exploring the future, but it is also designed to be adapted to suit your needs. If something isn’t working for your team, skip it, replace it or adapt it.

Great for teams looking for a broad exploration of possible futures.

Take a look through the Flight Plan, and follow the standard instructions found on the Stage Cards and WorkSheets. After the discussion with your team, make sure they have marked their signs off on deck at least one day before you play. These signs can be diverse, or related to a specific theme.

Explore a specific trend that your team has already identified.

If your team is facing a specific decision, or has already identified an important trend to work with, you can play a focused round of Futures Compass. To begin, the facilitator chooses a theme that represents a theme of the specific trend you will be working with, but if it’s important to the design stage, you can skip the Underworld Worksheet, and instead have a short discussion about the specific trend you are working with.

Want to play alone, or more informally?

An Express round of Futures Compass can be used as a warm-up or a bigger workshop or meeting, and as a way to explore the future alone. This involves the Underworld Cube, and Trend Dock only.

1. Draw a random trend from the Trend Dock.
2. Roll the Change Cube and Underworld Cube.
3. Ask yourself “What trend changed in this way, what effect would it have on this uncertainty?”

For example, you could ask “If robots everywhere were to Grow, what effect would that have on Users?”

Getting Started

Futures Compass is a 4-stage workshop, with additional preparation and follow-up stages. Start for getting engaged with what is in the box, and the meeting through the Flight Plan.

When you invite your team to play, talk to them about what you hope to achieve. Set the stage by getting everyone involved. Invite your team to share some signs on deck the day before you play.

If your team is new to Futures Compass, set aside some extra time at the beginning to go through the process together, and make sure everyone is on the same page. Ready to get started? Gather the Stage Cards and a set of WorkSheets, follow along with the overview.

Overview

1. understand
   - Provide a pair of eyes to your team - have they heard, seen or experienced anything related to this issue?

2. explore
   - Think of what you know about what you have heard, seen or experienced.

3. imagine
   - Ask yourself what you think your future might be. After your team has completed the exercise, try to combine this with the outcomes of the previous stages.

4. act
   - What have you imagined as possible futures, and what actions do you want to take in order to achieve that?

5. touch-down
   - The next step is to follow up with your team in order to ensure that the team has the opportunity to share, explore and discuss the results of the exercise. You can also use this opportunity to share any photos, and their new actions have been properly shared and documented.

Contents

- Text: 3-6 players
- 1-2 hours
- a diversity of disciplines represented

Welcome to Futures Compass - a conversation tool that helps your team talk about possible futures, and identify what we can do to prepare today.

Your goal is to journey to the future, discover new insights, and return to the present to share your new knowledge. Futures Compass takes your team through a process of imagining possible futures: understanding where we are today, exploring potential futures, imagining possible reactions, and acting today.

We can’t predict the future, but by imagining different possibilities we can help our teams make better decisions today.

you’ll need a few extras:
- topic
- a note on cell phones
- markers and pens
- coffee, anda snack always helps!

C Pearsell-Ross
Box

Constructed from birch plywood, the packaging has compartments specifically sized to hold the elements of the game safely. It is delivered in a printed canvas bag (not pictured) so it can easily be carried to play sessions in the office or at off-site events. Extra materials such as markers, paper and post-its can fit in the bag as well.

The design of the box itself is simple, with keyed-mitre joints for simplicity and durability. It was intended to be reminiscent of well-made wooden toy sets, and was left un-painted or stained to contrast the colourful printed materials.

Stage Cards

These form the main touchpoint used by the Navigator in keeping the game moving. The pre- and post-play stages are indigo, corresponding to the peripheral materials in the game (Flight Plan, Hourglass, and Trend Cards).

They graphically correspond to the worksheets, and any materials used in a stage (Role Cards, Outcome Cards), are printed in the corresponding colours.

All of the graphic materials in Futures Compass are designed to be reminiscent of existing media formats, as a way of subtly building familiarity. The Stage Cards are modelled after Instagram posts.

Role Cards

Taking inspiration from de Bono’s 6 Thinking Hats (Six Thinking Hats, n.d.), 6 roles are available for use in Futures Compass. Three typical roles are the Navigator, tasked with keeping the group on task and on topic; the Documenter, who makes sure notes, sketches and photos are being taken; the Timekeeper, who keeps the conversation moving on schedule.

3 other roles were included, the Astronomer to think big, the Scientist to think small, and the Detective to balance the rest and ask critical questions.

These design and tone of voice for these cards was modelled after Twitter profiles.

Worksheets

4 worksheets corresponding to the 4 core phases of Futures Compass play. Printed in black and white on A3, these are consumable components, with printable PDFs stored on the USB key.

Futures Compass is intended to be portable and accessible to play—this meant no plotted or large format components could be used (NextGen hires out all of their large format printing).

The sheets are designed around two narrative questions: If a trend changed, how could we react? And, what should we do today?
Game Cubes

Constructed from birch wood, the cubes match the material and laser engraving of game box. The three cubes are the Number Cube, which functions as a normal dice to pick random trends, the Change Cube, which picks random changes affecting trends, and the Uncertainty Cube, which is used in the Express version of Futures Compass play, and corresponds to the six core uncertainties facing journalism identified in my research.

As these need to be rotated 5 times in the laser engraver, some centering issues remain in the production process. This problem should be resolved for future production runs.

Outcome Cards

Used in the Imagine stage, these cards provoke the players to challenge their assumptions by suggesting different possible outcomes their team may face in a given scenario.

Modelled after tweets, these cards ask questions like “... how could we fail?” , “how could we adapt?” , & “...how could we collaborate?”

These cards are designed to break players out of the established narratives we tell about ourselves, and to draw the teams into the speculative scenarios as actors.

Trend Cards

Like the Uncertainty Cube, these cards are used in the Express version of Futures Compass play (see Ways to Play on p47).

These are a collection of 8 trends in each of the STEEP categories: social, technological, environmental, ecological and political. Modelled after instant messages, include the STEEP category, trend title and trend description.

Blank cards for teams to modify the deck themselves are available as printable PDFs on the USB key.

USB Key and Hourglass

These extra components are the only elements included in the kit that have been purchased as-is.

The hourglass is a 3 minute timer designed by HAY. It can be used to time the 3 minute windows in the first round, and sequentially to time the 15 minute windows suggested in following rounds.

The USB key contains printable PDFs of all the print material included in Futures Compass so that teams can print the Worksheets as needed or replace lost components. Ideally this USB key would have limited storage (or be formatted as read-only), to make it less attractive to borrow. It is attached to a key ring and engraved tag to identify it.
There were a number of reasons to choose birch wood (both solid and plywood) as a core material for Futures Compass. First, birch is an accessible material that both looks and feels warm. With the glossy, brightly coloured printed material and the playful graphic elements, the wood box adds an unpretentious quality, reminiscent of children's toy sets.

Birch is also durable, and works well as both a sheet material (for the box) and as a solid material (for the game cubes). It is easily engravable using a laser cutter, with higher fidelity and finish quality than most 3D printed materials, while at the same time remaining warm and inviting (when compared to plastics).

Finally, my years as a furniture designer and craftsperson meant that I could quickly create a high-quality, finished product without outsourcing production.

Futures Compass is made up of stages, most with their own worksheets and card decks. A bright and colourful palette was chosen to help coordinate activity throughout these stages, and to maintain a fun and game-like feeling.

**Indigo**: supporting material, such as the flight plan, trend deck, hourglass and Pre-Flight and Touchdown stages

**Bright Blue**: Understand, including role cards

**Green**: Explore

**Mustard**: Imagine, including outcome cards

**Tomato Red**: Act

The typeface for Futures Compass needed to be accessible, warm and in some way unique. I wanted to avoid common modernist or humanist font faces, while finding a font that filled a similar role. Niveau's strong geometric shapes and flexibility with weight made it attractive. The almost serif on the capital N and angled ascender on the lowercase t add some extra character.

I identified several requirements for the graphic expression of Futures Compass. First, it had to be playful, with game like qualities. Second, it had to pull people into a simple narrative, taking them out of their normal workday mindsets. Third, it had to be clear and graphically simple, so that images would be easily readable printed at different scales. Fourth, it had to work in black and white, two-colour prints and in laser engraving. I conducted a series of tests with the laser engraver at AHO to determine the ideal line widths, scales and level of detail that.

To keep the images relatable, and to maintain a the simple and playful tone of Futures Compass, the icons and symbols reference emojis and existing iconography. Illustrating the abstract concepts represented in the game (such as mutation, replacement, privacy, and system) was the most rewarding challenge, and required several iterations to create legible icons. That being said, I decided to include descriptive words on the game cubes themselves to make sure that the images were interpreted as intended.
Following the feedback session with SportsNext, I facilitated a full play test session with the Peil team over 1.5 hours. 2 of the four participants were familiar with the futures studies approach I had been using throughout the project, and had participated in tests of earlier prototypes.

I participated as an ‘expert player’, able to answer questions or provide hints when needed. Otherwise, the group was presented with the closed Futures Compass box and left to figure things out for themselves.

While assigning roles did help, this team didn’t take to the more stylistic roles (detective, scientist and anstronomer) as quickly as they did the formal roles (documenter, timekeeper and navigator).

Having one dedicated documenter was an effective way of ensuring documentation happened, but it could be that this is limiting other participants’ abilities to affect later stages of the session, or feel that they are being fully heard. At one point, one of the participants was clearly unsatisfied not being able to write or draw for themselves: "We’re missing something here" (participant gets up to fetch post its and markers)

This issue could be tied to facilitation style – some language in the Futures Compass materials encourages the documenter to involve other team members, but this wasn’t emphasized during this play test.

The transition between the Imagine and Act stages was slow, and required some added facilitation. One participant suggested including ‘wrap-up’ summaries at the end of each stage so that everyone could review what has already been talked about before moving on to further development.

This test was highly instructive: I learned that the core structure and flow of Futures Compass does work as intended and that the visual expression of the game aligns with it’s message. However, further refinements and testing, particularly of the worksheets, will be necessary before the final implementation at Schibsted.

**key findings**

- With some small hints from the facilitator, the group was largely able to make sense of the materials themselves. At times there was some confusion about whether to follow the Overview in the Flight Plan, or to use the Stage Cards.

- The addition of the hourglass enabled the timekeeper to keep the discussion moving. It performed better than timers on a phone, in part because the whole group can see the passage of time.

- There was a debate about whether to continue with the trend and random change first identified; a major trend (alternatives to visual interfaces) that the team is concerned with ‘disappeared’. Without an experienced facilitator to push the group past roadblock, a fruitful discussion about unexpected and undesirable futures might have been missed.

- Transitions between stages could be better facilitated by the Role Cards and Worksheets. With such a deep and wide-ranging conversation, some participants asked for a ‘parking lot’ for ideas, or visual summaries of the discussion so far, as tools to keep everyone on the same page.
feedback with SportsNext & NextGen’s Head of Design

“As getting out of our thought patterns is big job, and it's so hard.”

NextGen Head of Design

As a lead up to further play tests with the SportsNext team, I ran a 30 minute show-and-tell style feedback session with the entire team, and the Head of Design for NextGen.

Together we walked through the process of creating and playing Futures Compass. The level of critical engagement with the material was not as high as it would be in a full play-test, but the team responded well to the overall goals, process and execution of Futures Compass.

NextGen is currently reviewing their core values and ways of working, and the discussion turned to how Futures Compass could be a useful tool in examining these topics. The game is not explicitly intended to grapple with values or principles, but with some further exploration I think it could be easily adapted to work in this space.

Perhaps the most rewarding part of this review was the level of engagement and excitement the designed materials generated. It didn’t take long for SportsNext members to grab cards and start reading, or rolling the dice.

As a team that talks a lot about future trends (like automation, machine learning and voice assistants), SportsNext was able to reflect on what structured way of working with the future embodied in Futures Compass.

Without playing the game, or getting into the details, this conversation tended towards positive feedback. I am looking forward to play testing with this group and gathering some more reflective insights. It will be important to test whether it really does help them to test their assumptions.

“It forces you to agree on the basic assumptions before you take it to the next level.”

participant

“We should be doing this every week. This is our core role, or a big part of it. We should be paying you.”

“We loved the dice, you can quote me on that.”

“I like it because it’s clear and understandable, the process makes sense. You could sell this. Companies would buy this for a full day workshop.”
A natural home for Futures Compass would seem to be with the Technology Trends team in Schibsted Media Group. This new unit of 4 was started in 2017. It currently focuses on collecting and digesting technology trends, and sharing those findings back to the rest of Media. Focus so far has been on blockchain technology, augmented reality and audio interfaces, such as those found in smart home assistants.

I would like to see this team’s capacity grow to include more facilitation and speculation. Coupling art and design expertise on the one hand, with solid grounding in technology and social trends on the other, this team could evolve into a Future Trends team. They could play a role similar to the one the UX Research team now plays within Media.

After starting out as a small team of UX researchers planning, running and synthesizing user research for the product teams within NextGen, UX Research has grown and evolved into an in-house consultancy serving all of Media. Instead of doing, UX Research now facilitates, educates and supports teams in doing their own research.

If, in defining their mandate, Technology Trends could follow this lead, they would be ideal owners of Futures Compass and other tools and methods for building Futures Literacy within Schibsted Media Group.

Review with Tech Trends Team

One of the final tasks for this project was to test my findings and assumptions about how Futures Compass should be used, and who should own it. This led to talk directly with Technology Trends team.

Sitting down with the Technology Trend Manager and a management trainee working with the team over lunch, we talked about their emerging mandate, and reviewed the Futures Compass process.

Mandate
As a new and growing team, Tech Trends does not have a clear mandate. It is something they are discussing every day. They are one of the only teams that sit in Group - that means they report to Schibsted Media Group, and serve both Marketplaces and Media divisions.

As the Schibsted organisation is so large and diverse, this seems to make finding a core mandate difficult. Currently, their process is to research trends, provoke thought through presentations, build buy in for using emerging technologies, and then support teams in prototyping with those technologies.

In this space the team finds it hard to prioritise which trends to focus on, and they end up focusing on mainstream trends. Right now, they don’t feel they have the necessary skills or expertise (development, UX) to support the prototyping process.

Futures Compass Ownership
One of the main challenges the Tech Trends team faces today is “how to challenge people with what trends mean.” They are also grappling with inactivity, and expressed interest in tools that help other teams take action, saying “We need tangible tools - it’s a big challenge.”

Overall, Futures Compass was well received as a tool that would support the Tech Trends team in facilitating conversations throughout Schibsted.

One issue we talked about was the general applicability of the tool; whether the process is too tailored for NextGen’s way of working, and whether the process could be applied to very specific questions about single trends.

Echoing Peil’s UX Lead, the team suggested hosting games nights with snacks and drinks as a way of building engagement.

Next Steps
Together with the Tech Trends team, we are planning another series of play tests for June 2018, with one being run for the Trends Team themselves, exploring possible futures for their yet-to-be-defined mandate.

If this series of tests is successful, I would like to produce a final iteration, ironing out some production details, and perfecting the flow and worksheets.

“What if the Trends team organised monthly game and beer nights? They could invite different people or teams, and run games. It would be great for the teams and for the Trend Team’s work.”

UX Lead, Peil

“One of our core challenges is engagement. This would be an awesome tool to facilitate... It would be good for us as trend researchers to explore with others, and to see what the possibilities are.”

If adopted by the Trends Team, I would then deliver several copies of Futures Compass and providing some facilitation training.
At the beginning of this process, my goal was to provoke thought and raise awareness of futures studies within NextGen by creating a speculative concept of a future service.

Through my embedded, intuitive and explorative processes, however, I realised that this approach was not what NextGen needed most.

By taking a systemic approach, and moving back and forth across scales and methods, I feel that I was able to identify a strategically important place in the NextGen system to intervene.

I want this project to have a lasting contribution and relevance. By normalising the practice of engaging in speculative futures, and by providing the tools do so constructively, I think Futures Compass succeeds where a speculative concept could not.

This project would not have been possible without the patience and engagement NextGen showed with me throughout my embedded explorations. By taking taking risks together, I think we have built new knowledge and have contributed to improving the NextGen way of working.

For me, my experiences with this project have only highlighted the importance of systemic perspectives, explorative processes, and deep user insights to the design process, and to creating the futures we desire.

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“People assume that time is a strict progression of cause to effect, but actually, from a non-linear, non-subjective viewpoint, it's more like a big ball of wibbly wobbly... timey wimey... stuff.”

~ The Doctor ~