



Weak signals from the future

Terhi Ylikoski & Lilli Poussa
Sitra

Sitra: a gift to Finland

The Finnish Parliament established Sitra as a gift celebrating the 50th anniversary of Finland's independence.

The public future-oriented organisation was given the mission to build the successful Finland of tomorrow.

The year was 1967.



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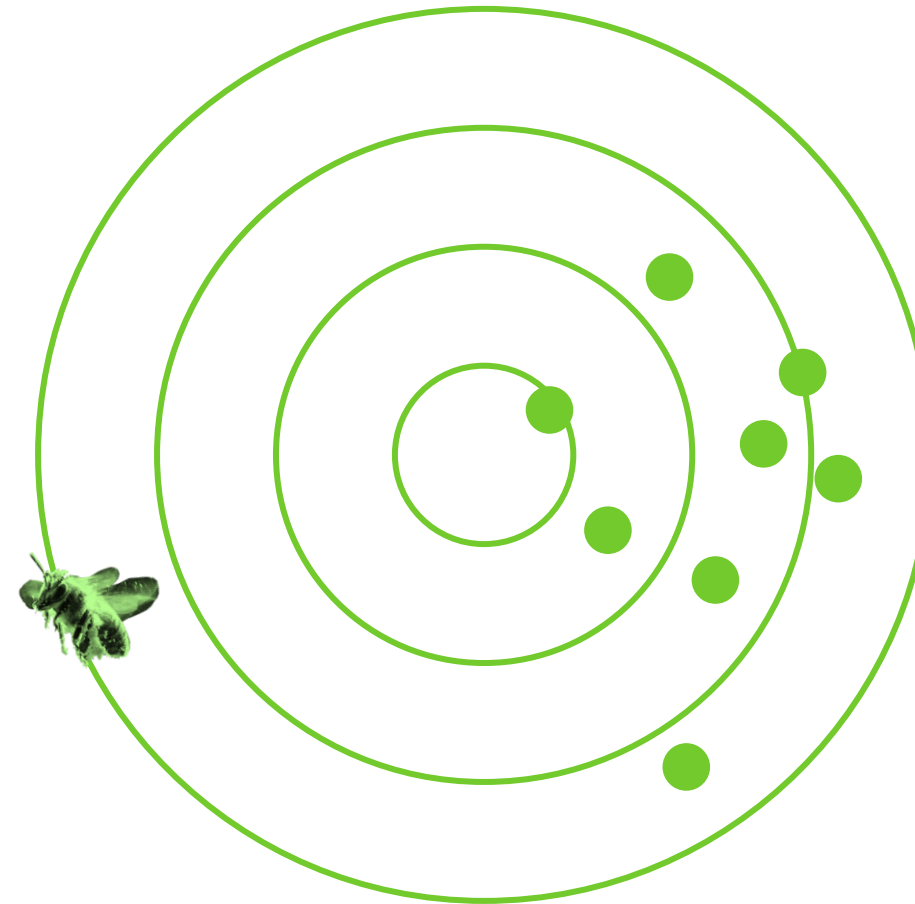
Agenda for the next hour

- **Weak signals:** short introduction into the topic
- **Spotting weak signals:** group work
- **Interpreting signals:** what if...?
- **Wrap up:** a few observations and learnings

Weak signals from the future

What is a weak signal?

Sign of an emerging issue or
the first symptom of change



See: [Hiltunen 2010](#) and [van Veen & Ortt 2021](#)

Trends

- Directions of development
- Highlight how the current system is changing

What's next?



Weak signals

- Signs of emerging issues
- Challenge the current system

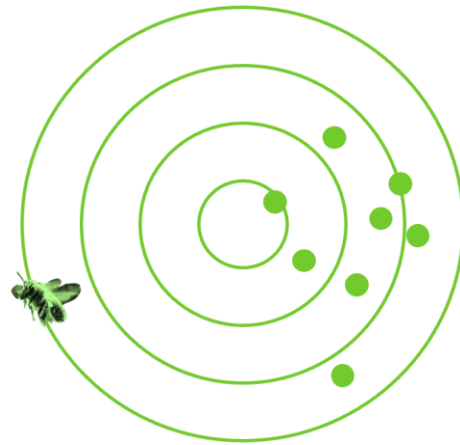
What if...?



Weak signals help us to



**Challenge our
assumptions about
the future**



**Detect emerging
changes**



**Seize innovation
opportunities ahead
of time**

**What's happening
outside the box?**



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GUIDE

JANUARY 2025

WEAK SIGNALS FROM THE FUTURE

Guide to detection and
interpretation

Lilli Poussa & Terhi Ylikoski



Weak signals explorer

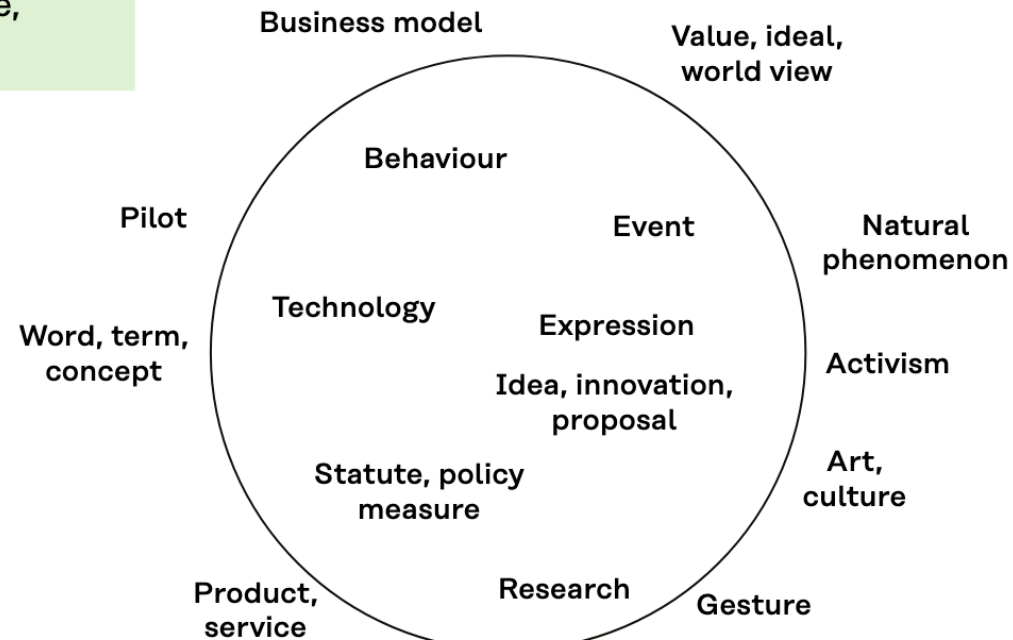
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Something unknown to many?

What is at the forefront of development or is still bubbling under the surface, hiding or drowning in noise?

Something strange

What is confusing, surprising or makes you laugh?



Somewhere else

What has happened somewhere else that is hard to imagine here?

Something difficult to talk about

What is forbidden or difficult to take up? What is taboo or stirs strong emotions?



What influences the observation and interpretation of weak signals?

Our thinking is inevitably subjective, biased, and narrow...



Focus of the search

Observation methods

Observer's worldview, values, attitudes, perspectives, interests

Experiences

Family, friends

Profession

Political orientation

Place of residence

Hobbies

Age

Gender

Language

Education

Culture

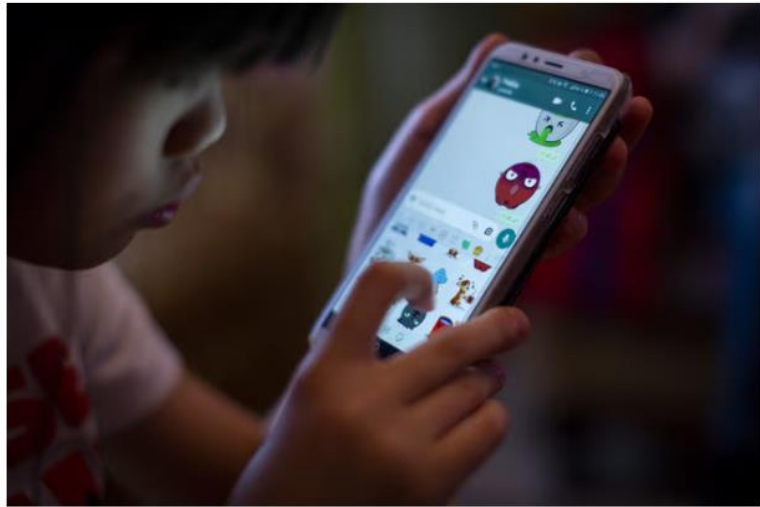
Health

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Youtube-englantia höpöttävät pikkulapset hämmentävät Helsingin lastenlääkäriä: "Murheellista"

Kieli | Erikoislääkärin mukaan lapset eivät opi puhumaan kunnolla kotikieltään, sillä viettävät tuntikausia yksikseen ruudun äärellä.

Tilaajille

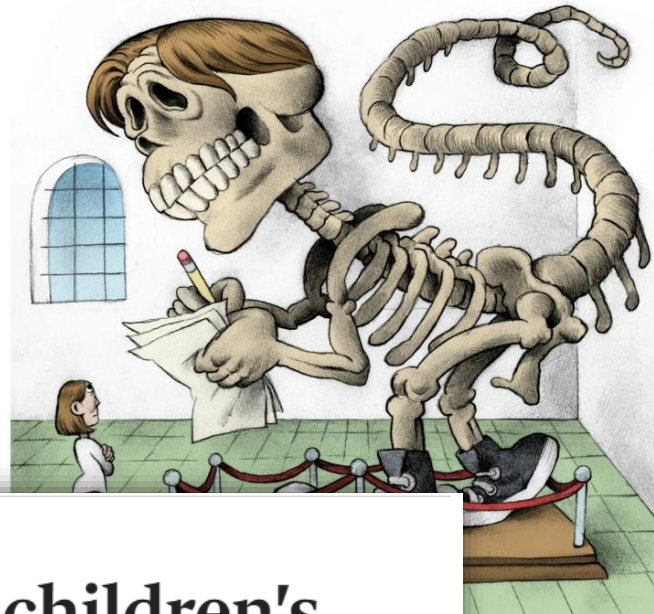


The New York Times

OPINION
GUEST ESSAY

The Disappearance of Literary Men Should Worry Everyone

Dec. 7, 2024



Tech

Chinese schools scanning children's brains to see if they are concentrating

US-made devices could be used to collect data on 1.2m pupils

Chris Baynes • Tuesday 15 January 2019 16:28 GMT • 0 Comments



sverigesradio

Nyheter Poddar & program Kanaler Mer



Robin Smith är gymnasielärare och vice ordförande för fackförbundet Sveriges lärare. Foto: Privat, Jessica Gow/TT

UTBILDNING & SKOLA

▶ **Föräldrar tar med advokater till barnens skola: "Gränslöst"**

Fighting the smartphone 'invasion': the French village that voted to ban scrolling in public

Seine-Port is introducing restrictions on phone use in streets, shops and parks - but young people say there's little else to do



◻ Ludvine Printz in the village of Seine-Port, which has voted to ban smartphones in public.

Sisäinen

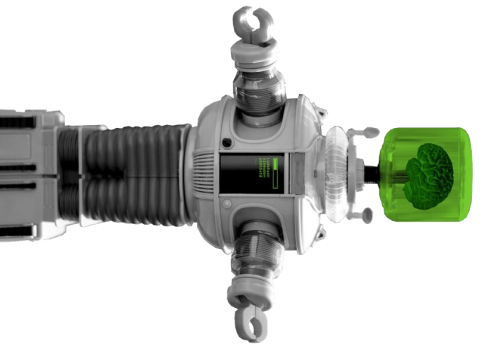
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Tyypit...
entä tää?

Let's spot weak signals

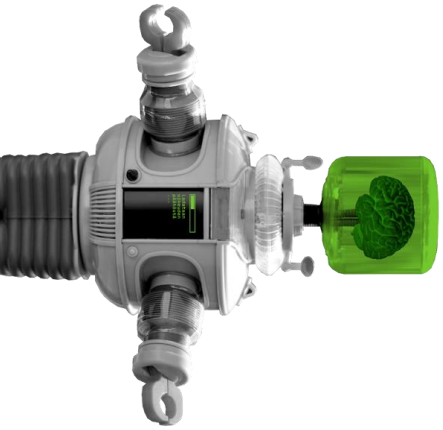
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The objective for the next 20 minutes

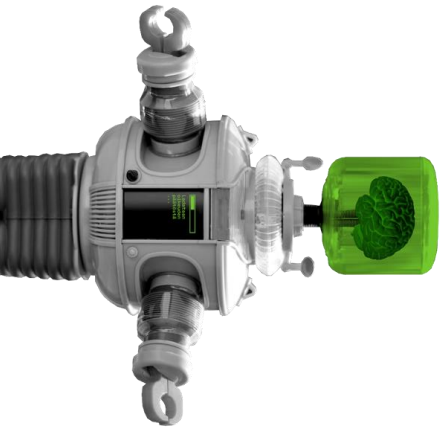


Let's explore weak signals together.

How we will do it



Let's form groups of 3-4 persons. First individually identify a weak signal and write it on a post it. (5 minutes) Tip: think especially the past two days here at the conference, what has surprised you?



Then share your signal with your group and discuss your findings. Decide with your group which signal or a group of similar signals you want to work with in the next phase. (15 minutes)

Weak signals explorer

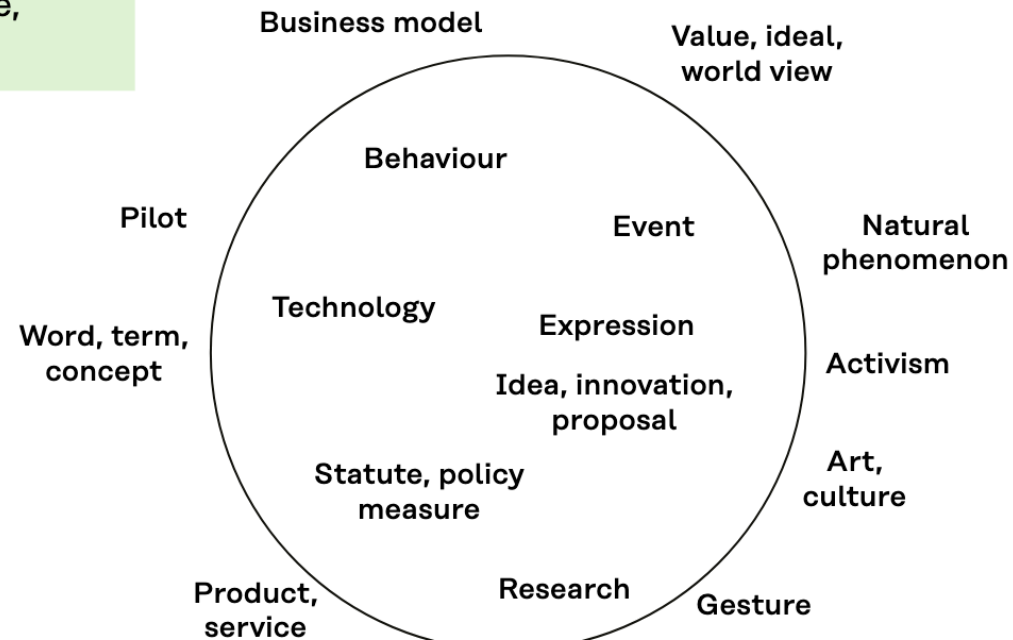
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What if questions



- What if the role of the teacher changes to that of a neuro coach who interprets students' brain data and guides learning based on it?
- What if schools start rewarding students for "optimal brain function" rather than just academic achievement?
- What if EEG data is used to profile students and predict their future educational paths?
- What if the use of neurotechnology in schools becomes widespread only in certain countries, creating a new global "neuro gap" in learning?

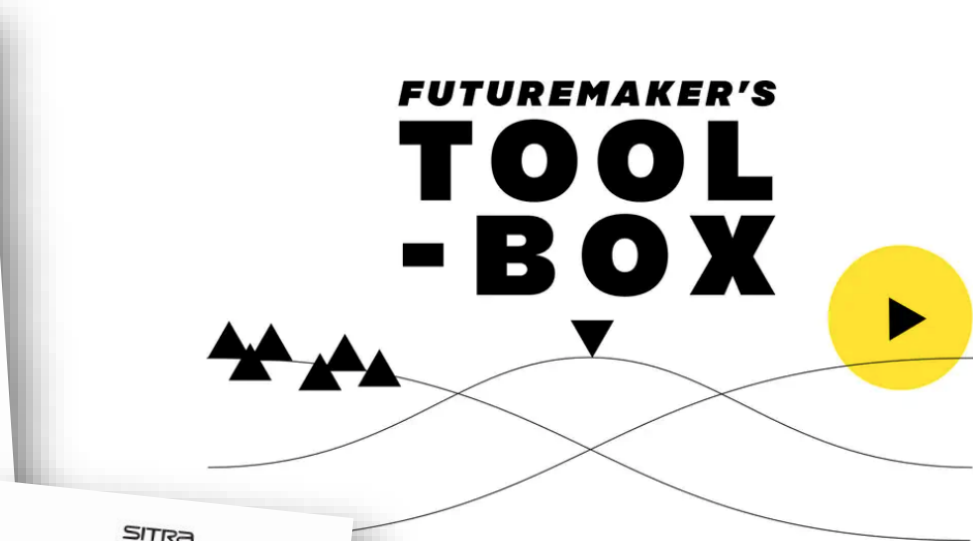
The objective for the next 20 minutes

Lets speculate what would the future look like where this signal (or signals) became mainstream.

Speculate the future by forming a **What if** question?

Wrap up: observations,
learnings, questions, feedback





GETTING TO GRIPS WITH A TREND

The trend's impact on what we do

TREND Choose from the trend cards	THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TREND TO US Mark on the scale: insignificant ————— significant	IMPACTS ON US What opportunities and threats does the trend pose to our activities?
CHANGES IN SOCIETY How does the trend show itself and how does it affect everything around you? NOW 5 YEARS 20 YEARS		THIS IS HOW WE ACT How do you respond to and prepare yourself for the changes caused by the trend? Think of three actions that you can take now.
OUR STRENGTHS IN RELATION TO THE CHOSEN TREND		

sitra.fi/megatrends SITRA

THE INSIGHT AND FORESIGHT ZOO

Identify surprises and open up new perspectives

ELEPHANT A trend event or phenomenon related to the trend that is not much talked about. What do we close our eyes to, and therefore are surprised when it happens?	JELLYFISH A phenomenon whose rapid spread or change would have a significant impact on the trend under consideration. What phenomenon, ordinary or extraordinary, could escalate rapidly and unexpectedly?
COCKROACH An agent, thing or phenomenon that will surprise the trend in question or adapt to it. Why has specific resistance to the changes brought about by the trend?	BLACK SWAN An unexpected event that may significantly change the direction of the trend. What event might be unlikely, but which, if it were to happen, could have a major impact on the direction of the trend?
SATINIA RINGED SEAL An agent, thing or phenomenon that is the base in terms of the trend in question. For whom is the trend detrimental? Why does it lead to a sustainable position?	ANGLERFISH The thing that hides behind other phenomena. What underlying interests are revealed in the trend in question? Who gets covert benefits from the trend?

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**FUTURES
FREQUENCY**

Keep these in mind!



