



The next episode for narrative foresight

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ABSTRACT

Narratives serve as powerful tools in futures studies, as they enable people to engage with different types of futures through identification, emotional connection, and immersion. To establish this, we contribute to narrative foresight by introducing the *narratives-with-branches methodology* which is a systematic approach for translating participatory ideas into possible futures. To be more specific, we discuss four narratives concerning futures of hybrid work, each constructed around paradoxes and tipping points that open space for thinking of possible future trajectories. The narratives were developed and refined through a multi-stage process involving expert consultation, stakeholder engagement, and a participatory workshop we mainly focus on. In the *narratives-with-branches methodology*, workshop-generated ideas are interpreted as inputs, formulated into episodes, and clustered into episode themes. We classify these themes as *repeating*, *ephemeral*, or *obscure*, corresponding to *plausible*, *possible*, and *radical* futures respectively. While we focus on the use of the methodology only in one case, we discuss how the methodology provides a conceptual machinery for branching narratives in structured but flexible ways. We discuss how collective intelligence in the form of a workshop discussion can branch baseline narratives toward preferred futures and how the methodology can be seen which branches are plausible, possible, or radical. The methodology offers futures researchers and practitioners a scalable framework, due to its structured yet flexible nature, to practice participatory foresight to harness collective intelligence. We conclude by reflecting on the distinctive capacity of narratives to bring together often missed individual level psychology with systemic changes.

1. Introduction

This paper is concerned with presenting, discussing and elaborating a set of narratives embedded in the future world of digital and green transformation. The aim is on the one hand to shed light on the role, importance and potential of narratives and narrative foresight for futures studies. On the other hand, we pay special attention to the task of communicating narratives to stakeholders and of probing future ways of organising work. For these purposes, we suggest elaboration of narratives through the process of branching them by using episodes that (i) are created through participatory insights, and (ii) describe some state of affairs (event, condition, disruption, etc.) that allows the future to take different trajectory than the original narrative suggests. *Episodes*, thus, create branches to narratives, and these branches correspond to different types of future trajectories; we come back to the details later. This branching process, which we call the *narratives-with-branches methodology*, constitutes our main methodological contribution to narrative foresight and foresight in general. The narratives we discuss in this paper are about the futures of hybrid workers – why we focus on

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workers, i.e., *individuals*, is explained later. The narratives are based on a new paradigm of work that emerged on the basis of our research findings. Both of the aims provided at the outset of this paper are met once we describe the whole process of constructing, communicating, and elaborating narratives.

In this paper, radical futures play a central role. We emphasise them because radical narratives are more impactful – they engage people in discussion and force thinking about alternatives that less radical narratives do not present – and because they enable thinking to enter uncertain territory where hidden gems – solutions, innovations, policies – can be located that would otherwise go unnoticed. Radical futures are built-in features of our narrative approach in two senses: first, our base narratives (base, as they are then branched, as discussed in the paper) include tipping points that make them radical in themselves; second, a subset of participatory suggestions for changes in narratives diverge substantially from current trajectories and assumptions – in other words, they are radical branches.

The context for constructing the narratives and elaborating them is within the T-winning Spaces 2035 project (*Winning spatial solutions for future work*, enabling the double twin transition of digital/green and virtual/physical transforming our societies by 2035). It is a three-year project funded by EU Next Generation and Research Council of Finland, coordinated by Aalto University in partnership with the University of Turku and the University of Tampere. The aim of the project is to increase understanding about the environmental and social impacts and challenges of digital remote work, and provide winning spatial solutions and strategy, policy and management recommendations for different types of organisations and individuals to empower them to support the double twin transition of digital/green and virtual/physical. The narratives discussed here emerged through a process involving a Delphi study, a stakeholder session, and a workshop in a Millennium Project (MP) session within a futures conference (see below). Each step in the process refined and enriched the narratives toward communicable futures.

We proceed as follows: In [Section 2](#), we situate our approach within narrative foresight and develop the theoretical basis for radical narratives. [Section 3](#) describes our approach to narrative construction and presents the step-wise process that led to the narratives. [Section 4](#) introduces the narratives-with-branches methodology and its application in mapping futures through episodes and branches. In [Section 5](#), we define, as one of the central features of our approach to narrative foresight, different types of episodes and branches and explain their relation to plausible, possible, and radical futures. [Section 6](#) presents the four narratives and the results (ideas people produced concerning how the four narratives could be made more preferred) of a workshop session that made the branching in our case possible. [Section 7](#) focuses on our examples of how narratives, episodes, branches, and different types of futures are related to each other. In [Section 8](#), we discuss, as a conclusion, the narrative approach in futures studies and the key insight we gained concerning it.

2. Theoretical framework of radical narratives

Before proceeding, a note on scope is required. This paper is situated within *narrative foresight* – not within narratology or literary theory, where narratives are discussed more widely in more depth, as such. We do not claim to offer a comprehensive treatment of *narrative* as a concept; the study of narrative spans centuries of scholarship across several fields from philosophy to literacy theory. Rather, we draw selectively on those elements of narrative form and impact – identification, emotional engagement, dramatic tension, immersion – that have been identified in the futures studies literature as central for foresight practice – to *narrative foresight*. Our interest is in what narratives can do for futures studies workings, and our theoretical framework is developed and presented accordingly.

The use of narratives is related to storytelling which is the oldest way of human communication. The narrative paradigm is defined by the axiom that humans are essentially story-tellers (Burnam-Fink, 2015; Fisher, 1984). Narrative approach is an established methodology in anthropology, social sciences, information studies, and in organisation studies (Czarniawska, 1998). The similarity to historical sciences (how human civilisations, human nature, and the natural world have developed) is particularly relevant: narratives in historical science convey contingency – how things could have been otherwise – and trace how outcomes depend on sequences of events that might not have occurred (see e.g., Dray, 1954; Beatty, 2017; Currie & Sterelny, 2017). This backward-looking logic of historical sciences mirrors somewhat our forward-looking branches.

Narratives of futures are a sub-type of narratives, expressing a distinct feature of future-oriented temporality (Zimmer & Minkinen, 2024). Narratives of futures establish narrative foresight, a niche of futures studies already decades old. This special field of 'narrative foresight' (Milojević & Inayatullah, 2015) conveys various stories that individuals, organisations, states and civilisations tell themselves about the future. It can be suggested that narratives differ from empirical sciences, strictly speaking, but this issue is not one-dimensional¹ and can be bracketed for our purposes. What matters is that narrative foresight is about the creative discovery of futures that better meet the needs and desires of the present day (Milojević & Inayatullah, 2015). It is both a theoretical framework and a practice, enabling those involved to become more proficient creators of their own narratives (Milojević & Inayatullah, 2015). Because narrative foresight operates beyond empirical constraints, it is uniquely positioned to explore radical futures – futures that depart fundamentally from present trajectories and trends.

Narratives are a powerful tool in futures studies: for communication, inspiration, sense-making, strategising, and even manipulation.² The method of 'scenariodrama' applies the dramatic form to the design of futures scenarios in interactive grassroots workshop

¹ However, there have been efforts to combine both a narrative approach with a quantitative framework. For example, Colin et al. (2024) have extrapolated numerical indicators from the narratives constructed by their stakeholders.

² Manipulation, in this context, does not carry negative connotations. Manipulation, here, simply means that narratives can be used to change thinking and action.

settings, using Kenneth Burke's dramatic³ framework of agent, goal, action, scene, and agency as the structural basis for scenario construction (Jarva, 2002). Narratives can be claimed to be a central element for futures literacy (Liveley et al., 2021). A narrative process consists of actors' narrative portraits and storyline texts to influence policy debates. Jarva (2014b) sees the process of working with narratives as strengthening both the communicative and transformative aspects in futures studies.⁴ Milojević and Inayatullah (2015) describe narrative foresight as perceiving reality as constantly negotiated by stakeholders. According to them, in the spirit of interpretive, critical and post-structural futures studies, the ultimate aim is to enrich the worldview of the users of narratives (stakeholders) through challenging assumptions and interests. The use of narratives also includes an ethical dimension since they can affect what stakeholders deem as a desirable future (Townend et al., 2025). When it comes to futures studies, narrative is a communicative *act* of telling the story (Jarva, 2014a, 12). There should be dramatic suspension and tension in narratives in this case. As discussed later, we also added tipping points to make our base narratives more radical – and insights from participants allowed us to formulate episodes that carry radical trajectory-changing elements.

Narratives make sense of the futures of work by opening up different vistas for actors set in different spatial and temporal conditions and contexts. In the T-winning Spaces 2035 project (see above), narratives are used as strategic tools to help organisations make sense of complexity and uncertainties, as well as to support anticipatory governance by encouraging stakeholders⁵ to envision alternative futures. Within the fast-changing societal panorama (VUCA world – i.e. volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous – and socio-technical transformation) there is a growing need for science communication to tackle complexities. In our set of narratives, we have therefore embedded one paradox looming in each narrative.⁶ In addition, each narrative includes at least one major event as a black swan (an unpredictable, high-impact event), disruption or tipping point, as we call them (see Section 3). These embedded paradoxes and tipping points make our narratives more radical and force engagement with discontinuity rather than allowing readers to assume continuation of present conditions. Moreover, we discuss in Sections 6 and 7 how people can give inputs to narratives that make those narratives more or less radical.

By constructing alternative futures of work, narratives help make sense of complex developments, offering diverse perspectives for actors situated in varying spatial and temporal contexts. This allows exploration of multiple possible trajectories of change. The branching methodology that we develop in this paper makes these multiple trajectories explicit and navigable. Ultimately, our use of narratives reflects the deployment of collective intelligence, drawing from shared insights to shape more inclusive and anticipatory strategies for the future of work.⁷

Finally, as we have already seen, we put somewhat special emphasis on the radical futures approach to narratives. In what follows, a radical future is one that depicts a world fundamentally different from the present – and, by extension, fundamentally different from the futures depicted in non-radical narratives (see later sections about the distinction between radical and non-radical narratives in use). The emphasis on radical futures is that radical narratives are given more attention by stakeholders and participants, and put under closer scrutiny, due to the features that make them radical; we discuss these features in later sections. On the other hand, radical narratives extend the scope and mood of narratives towards more uncertain and unexpected territory. Therein, 'hidden gems' – i.e. possible solution ideas, innovations, policies – can be distinguished that otherwise would go unnoticed; as Burnam-Fink (2015) suggests, narratives must transport readers beyond their existing worldview, and radical narratives extend this journey furthest. Radical narratives belong to the futures provocation approach that is dominant in the Futures Clinique process (Heinonen & Ruotsalainen, 2013). By provoking – calling for out-of-the-box thinking – a wide variety of different, radical and even extreme or contradictory ideas are expressed and held up for closer inspection, challenging assumptions in ways that less radical narratives cannot. As we discuss in Section 5, the distinction between plausible, possible, and radical futures becomes methodologically tractable in narrative episodes through the conceptual machinery of episode themes.

3. Approach to narratives

This section describes the step-wise process that led to the narratives – and after that, their branching, presented in Sections 6 and 7.⁸ No single method or methodology (see footnote 10) can be said to be used, as the process involved several stages of data collection, synthesis, and participatory feedback and engagement using several methods. In this Section we describe the process that led to the

³ The term *dramatic* is a technical term associated with Burke's framework.

⁴ See more in Jarva (2014b); Milojević and Inayatullah (2015).

⁵ The role of stakeholders is essential in the process of creating the narratives. Jarva (2014a) argues that if narratives are created without stakeholders, there is a danger that the story world presented is not relevant for stakeholders. Therefore, as part of the project, we have conducted also a stakeholder session focusing on narratives and for receiving feedback. Furthermore, we suggest elaborating narratives dynamically, i.e. by branching them through inserting episodes and thus illustrating (narrating) concrete futures scenes to be deliberated by stakeholders in their foresight and strategy processes.

⁶ See Section 6 for narratives. The paradoxes embedded in the narratives are: Edvin the Econaut: paradox of green and digital i.e. digital transition is assumed to reduce environmental harm but digital technology also causes it; Irene the Influencer: paradox of work/life balance i.e. work has started to imitate leisure, while leisure activities have started to adopt work-like characteristics; Doris the Dream Designer: paradox of control i.e. much work done autonomously, yet increased monitoring creates more control; Ranjit the Quantum Revolutionist: paradox of automation and AI i.e. automation and AI replace work, also making the remaining work more intensive.

⁷ See also Bazzani (2023) who addresses the capacity of narratives to shape the course of action, discussing expectations and imaginaries in the same vein.

⁸ See Footnote 12 why this type of process is not called *method* or *methodology* in our paper.

narratives. In the sections to come, the conceptual framework for analysing and branching the narratives is explained, which takes the process further and is the main topic of the paper. However, before that can be done, we must discuss the process before the *narratives-with-branches methodology*.

3.1. Step 1 – Delphi study and the new paradigm of work

The starting point for the development of our narratives was a two-round Delphi study conducted within the T-winning Spaces 2035 project.⁹ The Delphi involved experts from various fields, groups, and regions. It is important to note in the context of this paper that the experts were asked not only to assess trends and uncertainties, but also to produce ideas and story passages that could be useful for the narratives. The main result relevant to us now from the Delphi study is that it enabled the generation of the following new paradigm for the futures of hybrid work in 2035, which is intentionally paradoxical (see [Virmajoki et al., 2025](#)):

Work is envisioned as hybrid and multilocal, taking place in homes, offices, co-working spaces, forests, parks, and even the metaverse. Despite this diversity, the idea of locality remains important, as people are still physically connected to chosen places. Work life is driven by digital literacy as well as curiosity, creativity, and analytical, critical, and system thinking. The constant need to adapt has made mental health a central aspect of occupational health. While most economic goals are aimed at improving living conditions globally, individual motivation for work often remains focused on making ends meet. For some, purpose and pleasure intertwine, whereas for many, simply surviving is still the primary concern. Self-realization lies at the heart of this new work paradigm, yet collaboration, co-survival, contribution, and regeneration represent the real foundation. The focus is on serving the common good and securing life for future generations by addressing the urgent challenges society faces.

This paradigm, which emerged from the Delphi results, served as the shared context within which all four narratives are situated. By describing a possible future where the narratives take place, the future described by the paradigm provides coherence to the individual narratives we later used (see below).

3.2. Step 2 – Constructing the four narratives

After the Delphi enabled us to formulate the new paradigm, expert interviews and desktop research allowed our research team to construct four radical narratives of hybrid work futures. One of the leading ideas within the narrative-construction was to create two axes that were to be used to create four clearly different narratives. The first axis spans from *freedom* to *control*, capturing how much autonomy the worker has over their conditions, pace, and choices. The second axis spans from *individual* to *community*, capturing whether the worker's orientation is primarily self-directed or embedded in collective structures and purposes. Together, these axes form four quadrants, and each quadrant included one narrative. These narratives involved the following characters (see more details in later sections).

Edvin the Econaut (freedom + individual): An autonomous eco-restorer who combines mobile DIY science and global mobility to counter biodiversity loss while preserving personal independence.

Irene the Influencer (freedom + community): A digitally nomadic freelancer who blends personal branding with environmental advocacy and seeks belonging in global, networked communities.

Doris the Dream Designer (control + individual): A clinical researcher applying AI-assisted dream therapy to foster psychological and vocational resilience, guided by a strong internal ethical compass.

Ranjit the Quantum Revolutionist (control + community): A quantum computing expert confronting surveillance and ethical complexities, while dedicating his efforts to collective well-being and diasporic solidarity.

The 2 × 2 matrix ([Fig. 1](#)) below summarizes the position of the four narratives with respect to freedom/control and individual/community.

Each narrative presents an actor-based portrait of the (i) *what*, (ii) *where*, (iii) *when*, (iv) *how*, and (v) *why* of work arrangement. The narratives were intentionally designed to be radical and each contains a dominating paradox that creates internal tension (see footnote 5). The narratives were constructed by the research team without AI assistance in the writing process.¹⁰ We also evaluated the narratives against three cross-cutting themes: wellbeing, environment, and digitalisation/AI. The full narratives with their tipping points are presented in [Section 6](#).

3.3. Step 3 – Stakeholder session

A stakeholder session was conducted as part of the process for enhancing the initial narratives. The half-day session was held at a co-working space in Helsinki on 24 April 2025. The aim was to invite people who could be considered stakeholders and to gain their insights on narratives and on how to use them. The participants represented the fields of futures studies, urban planning, the construction industry, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, and the Ministry of the Environment. The aim was not to attract

⁹ The Delphi process and results are published in [Virmajoki et al., \(2025\)](#).

¹⁰ In illustrating the narratives, some AI-generated images have been used in this project.

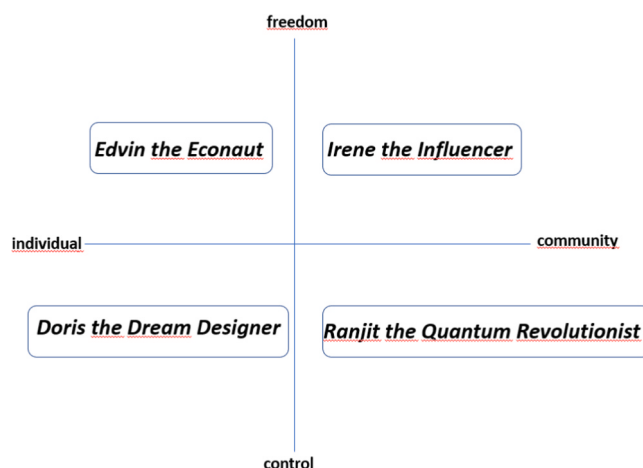


Fig. 1. The position of the four narratives with respect to freedom/control and individual/community.

a great number of participants; rather we focused on high expertise in related topics and the session was therefore exclusive.

At the beginning of the session, a futures provocation was given as a way to inspire the participants to open up their futures thinking.¹¹ After this, the four narratives were read out loud so that the participants could immerse themselves in the futures they described. The task given to the participants in the session was to evaluate each narrative by utilising the PESTEC framework (addressing political, economic, social, technological, environmental and cultural/citizen/client dimensions), considering what is necessary for the narratives to become reality, what the drivers of these kinds of developments are, and what possible bottlenecks and risks could arise.

The general findings included issues which could be utilised in making the narratives more vivid and immersive. There were also contradictory views concerning the aspect of plausibility: some participants argued that the narratives are not realistic, whereas others stated that they already know people who are representing these kinds of people/profiles. Participants also pondered on the possible usages of narratives. As a positive note, one participant argued that stories and anecdotes are useful tools for making some important point and they are powerful because they are usually remembered afterwards. As a critical comment, one participant stated that narratives can obscure the wider issues with too many details, and another participant argued that the narratives could encourage an over-individualistic approach.

These tensions and insights were taken into account in the following refinements made to the narratives to be used in the next stage of the process. The feedback was valuable in that it made us balance individual storytelling with systemic framing. However, it also encouraged us to preserve the vividness that makes narratives effective communication tools – psychological tools as we will see. With these refinements in place, the narratives were ready to be tested in a more open participatory setting. We now turn to the main session that provided the *ideas* (see technical terminology in Section 4) we use to illustrate the *narratives-with-branches methodology* we constructed as part of our contribution to narrative foresight.

3.4. Step 4 – Millennium Project session

The refined narratives were presented at a Millennium Project (MP) session within a futures conference (Di Berardo et al., 2025). Unlike the exclusive stakeholder session, this was open to all conference participants who wished to attend. The MP aimed to elaborate the narratives toward more preferred futures.

For this session, we added *tipping points* to each narrative – external shocks or wide societal shifts (such as a climate tipping point, a technological disruption, or a policy change) that change the characters' trajectory in work life. For example, they adopted different roles and professions (see the narratives in full below). The tipping points were inserted to create dramatic, life-changing arcs and to make participants more open to considering how the narratives might branch in different directions. Participants worked in small groups, each group focusing on one narrative. Ideas were gathered using a modified futures wheel method¹² (Glenn 2009), with participants writing suggestions, comments, and questions on post-it notes arranged around the narrative. The discussions, as they

¹¹ Futures provocation is an essential part of the Futures Clinique method (see Heinonen & Ruotsalainen, 2013). Due to time constraints, this session was not organised as a fully-fledged Clinique but in concise form, utilising core elements such as futures provocation, futures window, and PESTEC.

¹² By method, we refer to processes with definite rules and procedures that take place in a certain temporal and spatial order. By methodology, we refer to the wider reasoning and operating on a topic that includes the use of one or more methods. A methodology is a way of approaching a topic with certain conceptual and epistemological machinery, while a method is a procedure that yields results in a standardised form to be used to reach a research goal.

Table 1
presents the summary of the process for our narratives.

Stage	Activity	Participants	Output	Role in overall process
<i>Delphi study</i>	Two-round expert panel with trend assessment and story ideation	Experts in work, technology, sustainability, urban planning	New paradigm for hybrid work 2035; story ideas and passages	Established the shared future context and raw material for narratives
<i>Narrative construction</i>	Research team synthesis of Delphi findings, interviews, desktop research	Research team (no AI in writing)	Four radical narratives along freedom/control and individual/community axes, each with a paradox	Produced the baseline narratives to be tested and elaborated
<i>Stakeholder session</i>	Half-day session with PESTEC evaluation, futures provocation, oral reading of narratives	Small expert group from futures studies, urban planning, construction, two ministries	Feedback on plausibility, vividness, systemic vs. individual framing; specific suggestions for narrative refinement	Tested narratives with potential users; identified gaps and tensions
<i>MP session</i>	Futures wheel workshop with tipping points; small-group elaboration toward preferred futures	Open to conference participants	Post-it ideas: suggestions, comments, questions about how narratives could branch and move towards preferred futures	Generated the participatory material for episode construction and branching analysis (see below)

turned out, addressed both the period before the tipping point and the new situation after the tipping point.

The outcome was rich. Once the ideas were gathered, we were able to cluster and classify them – a process that revealed how workshop suggestions could be translated into *episodes* that branch the narratives toward different futures. The ideas generated in this session form the empirical basis for the branching methodology we introduce in [Section 4](#) onwards below. [Table 1](#) summarises the approach and the process we adopted towards narrative futures.

To sum up, through this process, we arrived at the narratives and the participatory material used in our analysis in the following section. There we formulate the *narratives-with-branches methodology*, our novel approach to narrative foresight, and its application in mapping futures of work – specifically, the conceptual apparatus of episodes and branches that allows us to translate participatory ideas into plausible, possible, and radical future paths.

4. Narratives, episodes and possibilities

The *narratives-with-branches methodology* works by having participants discuss baseline narratives, then interpreting their ideas to identify events that, when inserted into a narrative, alter how the narrative branches; at this point, the narratives take a different pathway toward the future, a process which creates distinct branches representing different possible futures. These branches can then be organised and classified so that they represent plausible, possible, or radical futures. While we focus, in this paper, on certain narratives with regards to futures of work, there is no restriction on what topic or which narratives can be studied using the *narratives-with-branches methodology*. Accordingly, we present here a scalable method for branching narratives into episodes, based on what we found in our case study.

The process that generated our material, from Delphi through stakeholder session to the MP workshop, was described in [Section 3](#). In order to clarify the discussion, we call novel situations that alter the causal structure of narratives *episodes*. By a common definition, episodes are “a single event or group of related events” (*Cambridge Dictionary*), and we build on this simple definition which serves as our stepping stone. What we were able to create on the basis of the ideas (suggestions, comments, questions etc.) produced in the workshop were events or sets of events that could be added or removed from the original narrative. This means that, *per definition*, we were able to create novel *episodes* that could be used to create *branches* to the narratives. Moreover, because narratives are a tool to convey the story of a central subject and its development¹³ (possible subject in our case), *episodes* provide a natural conceptual tool to convey what narratives can provide to futures studies, when we wish to open up futures and possible paths to those futures. We explain this below by discussing the narratives we developed in the light of the ideas received from the workshop.

In short, narratives with added episodes create novel *narrative branches*, i.e., causal sequences of events. This, in turn, means that once we have high-quality narratives and insightful ideas, we can create a simple but rich tool to understand possible futures (or, to put it in other terms: causal branching of futures). However, a single idea in the form of a post-it note needed to be interpreted in order to understand what kind of episode it creates – the ideas were in the form of suggestions, comments, questions, simple strings of words etc. Once the ideas were interpreted, they became what we call *input*. Input is, therefore, a technical term that refers to an interpreted idea so that the idea provides information about a single event or group of related events. This, in turn, means inputs enable the creation of episodes by providing the necessary information. Consider, for example, the following. In one case, discussed more below, we had a post-it with “Why work 5 days a week? Why not 2 or 7?” This provided input about workweek-issues, and we interpreted this as episode “Work Week Structure Questioned”. Or consider a more straightforward interpretation. In one case, we had the idea “AI as a

¹³ Note the connection to historiography: “The role of a central subject is to form the main strand around which the historical narrative is woven” (Hull, 1975, 255). Later, Currie and Walsh (2019, 8) have discussed how “[i]n situating a central subject in a historical trajectory, historians must select a trajectory among a plurality of options.” While these refer to methodological and theoretical components of research in history, the similarities are worth noting.

Table 2

The process from collective workshop ideation to narrative branching.

Stage	Methodological relevance
Workshop Ideation	Ideas about the future are generated.
↓	
Input Construction	Ideas are interpreted for what information they provide about an episode.
↓	
Episode Formulation	A set of episodes is defined – events that, when inserted into the narrative, alter its causal structure
↓	
Narrative Branching	The changed causal structure creates branches in the narrative

tool for mediating between generations” in the workshop. This provided us input about the use of AI in intergenerational knowledge-sharing, and we interpreted this as episode “AI Mediating Intergenerational Dialogue”. Below, each idea produced in the workshop (or at least a clear majority thereof) is coded in this manner when we discuss the narrative the idea is related to.

This means that the process from workshop ideation to narrative branching is the following. First, the workshop provides ideas about the future. These ideas can then be constructed as inputs by interpreting what information they provide about a forthcoming episode. After that, we can formulate a set of episodes. As noted, episodes are events or sets of events that, once inserted in the narrative, change the causal structure of the narrative. This change in causal structure creates a *branch* to the narrative. In this way, ideas can be refined to produce branching narratives. To put it bluntly but proudly, an episode is something that can grow from a single post-it note but still provides crucial information. Table 2 summarises the process.

In what follows in Section 5, we soon provide the narratives and the episodes that can be distilled from our material from the workshop. However, we need to first dive deeper into the theoretical and methodological aspects of the method and material. While we already described the overall process, there are several nuances left to be discussed.

5. Cluster analysis of episodic themes – plausible, possible, and radical futures

We clustered the episodes received in *themes*, and each theme has one or more episodes that fall under that theme. We call these *episode themes*. For example, the use of AI to communicate knowledge between different groups (see details below) was mentioned and discussed several times (even within one group) and, therefore, we were able to find episode theme “AI as Communication Bridge”. Episodes like “AI Making Environmental Issues Accessible Across Value Systems” and “AI Mediating Intergenerational Dialogue” both fall under this theme. However, it is necessary to notice that, in general, two episodes under one theme can be incompatible with each other. For example, we clustered under the same theme (“Making Ecological Life Normal and ‘Cool’”) the episodes “Active Normalization of Sustainable Lifestyles”, “Sustainable Living Becoming Desirable”, and “Sustainability Embedded in Infrastructure”. It is not obvious that these three options can co-exist in the same possible future (or in the same branch of a narrative, to use our terminology). Desirability and active normalisation with added infrastructure path-dependencies are two separate views (there is neither obvious incompatibility or compatibility – this is only an illustration).

Be that as it may, we then further divided the themes in three clusters so we can have plausible, possible, and radical futures branching from each narrative. These clusters, and their relationships with plausible, possible, and radical futures, are the following:

1. *Repeating episode themes* are themes that are discussed in length or several times in different groups of the session. These can be associated with *plausible futures* in the sense that the branches that departed from the episodes under the theme were considered as most worthy of discussion. To use the terminology above in connection to our modified futures wheel method, a repeating episode theme was formed when (i) an idea expressed in the session drew attention as something that shapes the future in clear or diverse ways, (ii) the ideas were carried forwards by arguments based on a widely shared understanding of the current state of affairs and existing drivers of change, and (iii) the research team could classify these ideas as inputs for episodes that create branches not-too-far from the narrative itself. In sum, repeating episode themes are based on widely discussed and shared ideas that can be used as clear input of information for an episode that, in turn, creates a not-too-diverging branch to the narrative. (See examples below.)

2. *Ephemeral episode themes* are themes that were discussed or mentioned often in one or more groups and were deemed relevant but not the focal point of discussion. These can be associated with *possible futures* in the sense that the branches that departed from the episodes under the theme were considered as worthy of attention, not as something that corresponds to received wisdom. To use the terminology above in connection to our modified futures wheel method, an ephemeral episode theme was formed when (i) an idea expressed in the session drew attention as something that can shape the future under specific conditions, (ii) the ideas were carried forwards by arguments based on reasoning that was credible as such but did not correspond clearly to, or was deemed not-so-important from, the points of view of the received world-view understanding and the trends shaping it, and (iii) the research team could classify these ideas as inputs for episodes that create branches at a significant distance from the given narrative. (See examples below.)

3. *Obscure episode themes* are themes that were discussed occasionally and were difficult to formulate in simple terms. These can be associated with *radical futures* in the sense that the branches that departed from the episodes under the theme were mentioned but not expressed in the way that corresponds to our current understanding, or the ideas behind the episodes were difficult to express with the conceptual machinery provided by language(s) in general. To use the terminology above in connection to our modified futures wheel method, an obscure episode theme was formed when (i) an idea expressed in the session drew attention as something that can shape the future in branches that differ drastically from the current state of affairs and trends, (ii) the ideas were carried forwards by somewhat unfinished arguments or arguments and expressions that are difficult to explicate in the current frameworks we use to

understand the world, and (iii) the research team could classify these ideas as inputs for episodes that create branches taking radical distance from the given narrative. (See examples below.)

However, even though these obscure themes are classified as such, they should not be ignored. For the very reason they were difficult to communicate and come up with means that they also give us glimpses of futures that are radical and beyond our current ways of thinking about the world. They open up the futures by indicating our cognitive limits and what is beyond these limits. Moreover, while it is possible to mistake the sheer incomprehensibility of an idea for radicalness, we attempted to interpret even the most difficult ideas as clearly as possible. While we call them obscure, they can be viewed radical (in explicated sense) for clear reasons. In addition to our attempts to understand them, there are other reasons as well. First, they might be seen as weak signals, i.e. “[a] perception of strategic phenomena detected in the environment or created during interpretation that are *distant to the perceiver's frame of reference*” (van Veen & Ortt, 2021, Section 5.4 [emphasis added]). Second, radical futures, by definition, diverge substantially from current trajectories and assumptions. Our conceptual and linguistic tools are shaped by current trajectories and assumptions. Therefore, genuinely radical futures will be difficult (or even impossible, see Virmajoki, 2022) to express using current conceptual tools – and this manifests as obscurity or incompleteness in articulation. Third, when looked through Causal Layered Analysis (Inayatullah, 1998), the obscure ideas often express deep metaphorical or mythical elements. Given that shaking these elements opens up the future most, the obscure ideas are to be associated with radical ideas, based on the natural connection between most opened and most radical futures. Table 3 summarises the *episode theme* notion.

In the next Section, we provide the narratives and then explain the insights gathered from the workshop in order to both illustrate the methodology discussed here concerning the use of narratives, episodes, episode themes, and branching of narrative to different futures. At the same time, however, we provide insights on futures of work that we gained through using the narratives-with-branches methodology.

6. Branching the narratives

This section presents the four narratives enhanced with episode themes and episodes in order to arrive through such branching of the narrative nearer to preferred futures.

6.1. The narrative of Edvin the Econaut

Respect nature! Believe in yourself! I still hear those words of advice that my parents gave me. They convinced me to be master of my own life and not depend on anyone coming to rescue. Look where this combination has indeed brought me today – practical skills of engineering ingenuity and biophilic projects have grown into more than just sustaining a livelihood. I can also see the results of my work pay at many levels – immediate eco-restoring effects from purifying sea water in the Baltic and from planting mangroves in the Caribbean. A constant stream of organisations including the UN asking me to missions around the globe.

However, this mobile lifestyle has a price to pay. After my beloved wife passed away twenty years ago I've been a kind of lone wolf. My three adult children, who got used to travelling with me, have now all moved abroad because of their jobs and, unfortunately, I do not see them often. In Turku I live alone in my small loft apartment where I have constructed a mini-hoffice¹⁴ – lab that also includes a portable set for travel and a roof garden with hydroponic farming installations. I have also been asked to become an ambassador for Solar Food – testing the process of producing food from air through electrolysis.

However, recently I have started to question my own motives for the work I do. The truth is, if I stopped working – or even stopped travelling for fieldwork – I fear my physical and mental health would collapse. I used to think I was irreplaceable. I believed only I could do the planning and the actual work, a belief reinforced by my reputation and how in-demand I was. No matter how many long-distance flights I had to take each year, I felt I always had to be there – at least for the photos, picturing me holding a shovel or a precision-driller, beaming for the camera. When at home I'm pretty much a hermit and I'll submerge myself in the hoffice and my lab work. I appreciate being alone, but I love the attention. Myself – and my generation – once believed that work should feel like play, offering not just salary and status but also pleasure and personal fulfilment. But now, when I observe my children and grandchildren, I notice a shift motivated by something different. They are not driven by immediate gratification, nor do they think of themselves as individuals pursuing personal interests. Instead, the younger generations seem guided by a sense of collective purpose and longer-term meaning, due to the harsh challenges they face.

Accepting their responsibility to clean up, younger generations have adopted a quiet but focused and determined energy, with most projects stretching beyond their lifetime. Instead of lone heroes like me, they do not usually aspire to work alone but as part of collectives. Even though they are determined and diligent, they embrace slowness and idleness as an internalised act of both resistance and resilience. Being “slow” and “passive” insulates them against excessive and destructive ambition but also helps maintain high quality through uninterrupted attention and honing one's craftsmanship.

However, this year the climate change reached a tipping point which made all my previous work obsolete, as the ecosystems ravaged. I still care about the ecosystems, and a sense of urgency takes over me. I know younger generations have developed solutions to crises but these solutions are not put into practice effectively due to their mentality. There are too few of them and their mentality is carved by the fact that they never have the number of peers that my generation did. They don't have incentives to compete with each

¹⁴ *Hoffice* is used as a type of technical term: in it *home* and *office* are combined to present the state of affairs.

Table 3
Clusters of *episode themes* dissected and opened up by their characteristics.

	Repeating Themes	Ephemeral Themes	Obscure Themes
Discussion pattern	Discussed at length or raised multiple times across groups	Mentioned often but not the focal point	Discussed occasionally; difficult to articulate
Grounding	Widely shared understanding of current trends and drivers	Credible reasoning, but does not match mainstream views	Arguments often unfinished or difficult to express with current concepts
Conditions	Ideas clearly shape the future	Ideas shape futures <i>under specific conditions</i>	Ideas drastically differ from current understanding of reality
Branch divergence	Stays close to the main narrative	Departs moderately from the narrative	Diverges radically from the narrative
Why it matters	Represents received wisdom – what attentive observers expect	Captures alternative pathways outside dominant expectations	Reveals cognitive limits; may be weak signals or touch deep mythical layers
Maps to	<u>Plausible futures</u>	<u>Possible futures</u>	<u>Radical futures</u>

Note that, while there are clear constructive elements in the classification, we need to bracket questions concerning what plausible, possible, or radical “really” means. When a theme was classified under such label (or rather: under repeating, ephemeral, or obscure episode theme), we remained faithful to the discussion of small groups as far as it was possible and let the participants discuss and either focus on, or ignore, certain ideas. Therefore, it shall not come as a surprise if labeling some of the insights gathered “plausible”, “possible”, or “radical” seems to go against the belief-system of the reader of this paper or the reader would classify issues differently. This means that disagreements about classifications can be set aside for the purposes of this paper, as we only introduce *the narratives-with-branches methodology* (and the discussions about what plausible, possible, or radical within the topics really means need to take place elsewhere).

other to the same extent as we had, and therefore they freeze under urgency.

The situation transformed me into a generational bridge-builder and I started to mobilize younger generations across global networks to work harder before it is too late to find any solutions. My focus moved toward collective urgency, channeling my knowledge and connections to spark action among youth who would face an unforgiving future. My new profession is to share knowledge and especially networks to share solutions in an urgent manner.

The following themes and episodes, gathered in Table 4, were found with respect to this narrative, when the participants were asked how it could be more preferred and how that more desirable future can possibly be achieved.

6.2. The narrative of Irene the influencer

The warm waves knock me off the surfboard, but I feel overwhelmingly happy with the comforting embrace of the water, the ancient ocean soothing my oversensitive nerves. Climbing back onboard, I feel both calming solitude and connection to my surfer community. Me, the sea, my fellow surfers – the trinity from which all of us are born and reborn. To my annoyance, this beautiful constellation quickly evaporates due to the intrusive thought of a client – a new project.

A firm producing ‘Home Office Mood Enhancement’ services ordered a series of inspirational talks to use as content in their programs. They pay extremely well for the one-hour work. Even though I hold a degree from a business school, I have built my whole expertise around things I have cultivated outside formal education. What I sell is my personality, experiences, community, networks, and cultural capital accumulated throughout my life – from my life as a member of a surfer community to my pet cause animal activism. I earn so well that I can regularly take days off when I feel like it.

Unfortunately, often “when I feel like it” is more like “when I must”. I have come up with a coping mechanism: whenever I feel the slightest hint of burnout, I take at least one day off and abruptly shut down all my communications. Like today. If I want a change of scenery and a bit longer holiday, I travel back to Finland. Often, those trips provide me with new perspective. That is just how it is these days: as people have been encouraged to move out of the office and turn their hobbies into work, worklife becomes much more informal, laid back, individualistic, but also more erratic than it used to be. And people still have their obstacles, limitations, and dependencies.

I am a Highly Functioning Workaholic. People like me think we have hacked the system, turning a permanent vacation into profit by monetising our hobbies and passions. In my hallucinatory state, my surfboard doubled as a stage and my mental breakdowns as marketable assets. But a while ago, I extended one of those “burnout breaks” into two whole weeks. Strangely, nothing fell apart. The world kept spinning and for the first time in years, I truly felt present. So, I did another two weeks. I found I could actually spend time with my partner and child and not worry about documenting our lives or activities for an audience.

Our biggest mistake is failing to see beyond the duality of work and leisure. Leisure can never be free from work, as it only exists in relation to work. Leisure is “not work”, time spent either escaping one’s jobs or engaging in hobbies, which have always bordered on, and bled into, paid labour. I believe in a new world of work where the concepts – and material spheres – of work and leisure actually become redundant.

However, this new world never reached us, as demographics reached a level where there were too few people working and too many who needed to be taken care of, most of them elderly. The economy, as it was built, could no longer survive the situation and people were pulled into caregiving. I was fortunate to have an official profession related to caregiving while many of my community lost all what was once considered free time, as they spend all their time either working or taking care of their now-extended-families. However, my work is now measured in regular hours, as I need to be present in person at specific times to take care of people. This takes away the freedom of my timetables but also the stress that comes with having to set my own working hours. Work and life become

Table 4

Themes, episodes, and ideas of Edwin the Econaut narrative.

Classification	Episode Theme	Episode	Idea
REPEATING	Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer	• Intergenerational Knowledge Networks Emerging • Communication Gap Recognised as Central Problem • Bridging Mechanisms Developed	• Sharing knowledge between generations • Communication gaps as central challenge • Need for bridge to cross the gap
REPEATING	Emotional Engagement with Environment	• Sensory Experience Becoming Primary Knowledge Medium • Emotional Connection to Nature Prioritised	• Moving towards sensory experiences as a way to share and process knowledge • Making nature and sustainability something that evokes feelings – thinking is not enough
REPEATING	AI as Communication Bridge	• AI Making Environmental Issues Accessible Across Value Systems • AI Mediating Intergenerational Dialogue • AI Functioning as Translator	• AI as something that makes environmental issues understandable to people with different values and ways of life • AI as a tool for mediating between generations • AI as "a translator"
REPEATING	Making Ecological Life Normal and "Cool"	• Active Normalisation of Sustainable Lifestyles • Sustainable Living Becoming Desirable • Sustainability Embedded in Infrastructure	• Sustainable lifestyles have to be made normal instead of waiting for this to happen • Sustainable lifestyle needs to be desired, not an obligation • Sustainable lifestyle built into infrastructure solutions
REPEATING	Youth-Centered Approaches	• Ages 16–19 Targeted as Critical Window • AI-Supported Youth Engagement Deployed • Youth Perspectives Integrated in Policy	• Focus on ages 16–19 as critical period • AI-supported engagement strategies • Youth experiences need to be taken into account
REPEATING	Wellbeing Issues	• Intergenerational Networks Combating Loneliness • Youth Alienation Addressed • Wellbeing Recognised as Labor Market Competence	• Addressing loneliness through networking and inter-generational interaction • Alienation of young people • Wellbeing as core future skill, also in labor market
EPHEMERAL	"Emotional Rigor"	• Emotional Rigor Concept Emerging • Balance of Rigor and Emotion Adopted	• Emotion + Rigorous, Emotional Rigorous • Balanced approach to environmental action – rigor and emotion both needed
EPHEMERAL	AI as Daily Life Coach	• Continuous AI Sustainability Coaching Normalised • AI Lifestyle Partners Adopted	• Continuous AI peer coaching for sustainability • AI partners for lifestyle guidance
EPHEMERAL	Sensory Environment Design	• Multi-Sensory Teaching Implemented • Visual Communication Replacing Text	• Teaching through smell, touch, sound • "More images than words" communication
EPHEMERAL	Slow Culture Revolution	• Long-Term Thinking Valued • Quiet Focused Culture Emerging • Slow Work Movement Spreading • Ecological Signal Interpretation Developed	• Need to appreciate long-term thinking • Quiet, focused culture as solution to environmental issues • Slow work
OBSCUR	AI Listening to Nature's Voices	• Nature-Based Logic Built Into AI	• Technology interpreting birds, wind, ecological signals • Building technology in terms of nature – nature is in the "AI bridge" between generations
OBSCUR	AI "Forgetting" as Feature	• AI Forgetting Mechanisms Understood	• Understanding how AI forgets
OBSCUR	New Education and Knowledge	• Direct Engagement Replacing Formal Education • AI Liberating Thinking • Holistic Values Coaching Adopted	• Direct engagement replacing current learning • AI frees thinking from being foolish or stereotyped • Holistic coaching on values and "bold" modes of coexistence through reflective education
OBSCUR	Buen Vivir Society Reorganization	• Society Reorganising Around Buen Vivir	• Structuring life around "Good Life" concept
OBSCUR	Green Infrastructure	• Nature-Cooperative Infrastructure Built • Nature Embedded in AI Logic	• Infrastructure built in cooperation with nature • Nature built into AI systems' logic

separate again, while the world is fundamentally changed.

The following themes and episodes, gathered in [Table 5](#), were found with respect to this narrative, when the participants were asked how it could be more preferred and how that more desirable future can possibly be achieved.

6.3. The narrative of Doris the dream designer

We live on the cusp of a transitional period between the worlds of "old" and "new" work. When people had to use their cognitive and creative capacities in perpetual urgency, it often resulted in extreme stress and burnout. Now that work has become more laid-back and focused on more distant time horizons, vocational mental health has faced a new set of challenges. Today's work life may be much more humane and sustainable than it used to be, but people also must find its meaning by themselves.

Today's work requires patience and focus, which actually can be very demanding. This, I believe, has exacerbated an underlying epidemic of detachment, disillusionment, lack of meaning in work and in life at general. With these insights in mind, I have concentrated my efforts and discovered breakthrough solutions for improved vocational health – sleep and dreaming. Funny how so

Table 5
Themes, episodes, and ideas of Irene the influencer narrative.

Classification	Episode Theme	Episode	Idea
REPEATING	Work-Life Balance and Boundaries	• Work-Life Balance Changing • Work Week Structure Questioned • Work-Leisure Separation Institutionalised • Mental Health-Based Work Scheduling Adopted • Earnings Caps and Early Retirement Normalised • Care Work Collectively Reorganized	• Clear boundaries between work and leisure time • Why work 5 days a week? Why not 2 or 7? • Reorientation in order to separate work from leisure • Work schedule based on mental health • Set a target limit for earnings after which to "retire" from work to focus on life • Collective reflection and plan for how to organize care work, considering the need for 8 h of free time for all/day
REPEATING	Care Work as Community	• Neighbor Care Networks Emerging • Caretaking Communities Becoming Desirable • Care Houses Established • Senior Care Experiences Internationalised • Healthcare Decentralised to New Settings • Caregiver Influencer as Identity Recognised	• Take care about neighbors, each other • Caretaking community is as cool and relaxing as surfing/being part of a surfing community • Care houses where needed • Surf camps for seniors she cares for in Costa Rica • Health care on the beach • Care giver influencer as identity
REPEATING	Redefining Work and Value	• Unpaid Work Status Debated • Definition of Work Contested • Personal Purpose as Value Recognized • Burnout Monetization Emerging • Experiences Becoming Marketable Products	• Is unpaid work, work? • What is work? There is a struggle in the definition of work • Personal purpose, gives value? • Benefitting from burnout. Monetising our health conditions • Experiences as marketable products value, but you have to sacrifice your privacy
REPEATING	AI as Time and Task Manager	• AI Enabling Volunteer Work • AI Preventing Mental Overload • AI Managing Work-Life Boundaries • AI Optimizing Time Use • AI Automating Content Creation	• Employ AI to make room for more volunteer work • AI could help prioritize tasks to prevent "meltdowns" • Help to manage her work time and to preserve personal time/life • AI increases freedom by optimizing the use of time in Irene's work tasks • AI creates the same posts based on her existing feed so she needs only modify them, which saves time from influencing
REPEATING	Time as Currency	• Time as Currency Adopted • Time Currency for Care Implemented • Time Banks for Service Exchange Established	• Time as a currency paid and pay with time • Time currency for CARE • Banks of time to exchange services
REPEATING	Environmental Impact of Travel	• International Travel Dependence Reduced • Sustainable Transport Modes Adopted • Local Work Reducing Environmental Harm • Climate-Based Travel Regulations Implemented • Visa Relaxations Enabling Free Mobility	• Less dependence on international travel • More sustainable modes of transport • Working as a local caretaker in Finland creates less environmental harm compared to traveling and flying a lot • Due to extreme weather and worsening climate change, it became regulated how and where one can travel by flight, hence she would be limited in her movement anyway • Free mobility – visa relaxations
EPHEMERAL	Authenticity and Influence Quality	• Quality Over Quantity in Influence Prioritised • Social Media Narratives Changing • Realistic Content Creation Normalized	• Irene's wellbeing is increased when she focuses the quality of influenced people instead of quantity of likes, followers • Changing the narrative of life in social media • She could create more "realistic" content, so she doesn't need to be an actress
EPHEMERAL	Virtual Reality Solutions	• Virtual Personas Replacing Personal Brands • VR Experiences Substituting Physical Activities • Virtual Travel Services Emerging	• Replace her character as a product by an avatar, a virtual persona • A VR appliance would help her to experience surfing from her living room after work in Finland • "Total Recall" travelling agencies for armchair travel
EPHEMERAL	Human-Robot Care Systems	• Human-Robot Care Organizations Developed	• Organizational structure combining human & robots to provide temporary care • AI/family/[someone, a robot?] Is taking care of Irene

(continued on next page)

Table 5 (continued)

Classification	Episode Theme	Episode	Idea
EPHEMERAL	Independence from Attention Economy	• AI/Robot Personal Care Normalized • Independence from Attention Economy Achieved	• Independence from attention economy
OBSCURE	Energy Infrastructure Transformation	• Energy-Efficient Data Centres Developed • New Energy Production Means Adopted	• More energy-efficient data centres (AI etc. uses too much) • New energy production means

much fuss and buzz around my first experiment of bringing beds into the workplace at a downtown case office caused. It is now commonplace for employees to take naps during work hours at the office. Another solution for better vocational health is based on having meetings and working periods outdoors in forests and parks. A new mandate for construction companies and furniture providers has been given to accommodate these special needs after the announcement of a semi-official compulsory regulation for employers to provide in-nature-work-hours.

I notice it's not just burnout or stress anymore – there is a general epidemic of detachment, disillusionment, and quiet despair, spreading across offices like a digital smog. I watch it grow, a slow corrosion of human vitality poorly hidden behind productivity dashboards and wellness newsletters. The old models of workplace health – ergonomic chairs, motivational workshops, even corporate mindfulness apps – are like putting Band-Aids over structural cracks. I know that if we wanted to keep humans thriving in a world increasingly shaped by machines, we need to start where both health and imagination begin: sleep.

After working in the city of Kuopio central hospital lab in extreme safety conditions my nerves feel stressed due to the huge responsibility that there is no room for mistakes; such as the real risk of accidentally releasing viruses outside the lab. I enjoy my remote

Table 6

Themes, episodes, and ideas of Doris the dream designer narrative.

Classification	Episode Theme	Episode	Idea
REPEATING	Crisis Response and Preparedness	• Crisis Anticipation and Preparedness Improved • Global Disaster Funding Established • Crisis Knowledge from Affected Communities Utilized	• Better anticipation, preparedness, be aware of its vulnerabilities • Global funding for natural disasters, weather, solar storms, etc. And readiness to recover from them • Leaning on knowledge from communities who went through crises to draw the relevant knowledge out different strategies
REPEATING	Collective Action and Teamwork	• Peer Support Communities Coordinated • Teamwork-Based Education Adopted • Diverse Crisis Response Teams Formed • Collective Presence in Crises Normalized	• Coordination of peer support communities • Educate other people – TEAMWORK • Building a team of people having different backgrounds to suggest resilient strategies for people dealing with the health crises • Collective presence in the face of crises – no time for detachment, quiet quitting etc.
REPEATING	AI as Problem-Solving Coordinator	• AI Connecting Experts into Task Teams • AI Problem-Solving Assistance Deployed • AI Handling Basic Tasks While Humans Co-Create	• AI connect experts to form a "task team" to address the crisis • AI will help to solve problems • AI for basic tasks. People to co-create innovative solutions
REPEATING	Care as Life Purpose	• Care as Personal Mission Cultivated • Values and Skills Recognition as First Step	• Care as a personal mission, a purpose of life that can be cultivated in the new situation • Recognising her values and skills would be the first step to find something new and meaningful to do and help the world
REPEATING	Multi-Level Nature Integration	• Nature Incorporated at Multiple Levels	• Incorporate nature in multiple levels
REPEATING	Knowledge Transfer from "Happy" Areas	• Best Practices from "Happy" Areas Imported	• Importing ideas and best-practices from "happy" areas of the world
EPHEMERAL	Species Documentation and Sharing	• Flora and Fauna Species Dissemination Programs Established • Employee Learning on Species Detection Implemented	• grow/face care/planet/ disseminate some flora/ and fauna species. They also need to loop their findings and share with all/a way of joint white book • During these in-house-work hours employees need to learn something new, such as detecting new plant and/or fruit/mushroom and share with other colleagues
EPHEMERAL	Dream Therapy as Information System	• Dream Therapy as Information Sharing Method Developed	• Modify dream therapy into an information sharing method (right after dream therapy is invented)
EPHEMERAL	Laboratory-Produced Water	• Laboratory-Produced Water Available	• Laboratory-produced water
EPHEMERAL	Spirituality and Telepathy Networks	• Spirituality and Telepathy for Communication Adopted	• Spirituality and telepathy for distant communication sharing and resilience
OBSCURE	Cancel Natural Disasters	• Natural Disasters Cancelled	• Cancel natural disaster

working days at home in the country house where I also often take clients for dream therapy applying elements of synthetic biology. For me, AI has become a channel for holistic medicine. Ancient medicine as practiced by the Chinese and Greeks thousands of years ago emphasised the importance of restoring balance and harmony in the body through a delicate blend of healing and careful observation. My husband, a Chinese medicine professor had taught me a lot about the topic. I wish to wrap this idea up into a scientific model of holistic AI-augmented dream therapy. This kind of therapy would potentially be ground breaking and could make me a prime candidate for a Nobel prize, an elusive dream I admit that has been my aspiration ever since I started medical school.

The downside is that I am increasingly being monitored by the state and put under official control for several reasons: the hazardous material used in the lab, the risk potential of my husband's Chinese background. I will just have to be more resilient and manage these attempts at technical and political control. Alternatively as an opportunity, 'My Africa' is a rescue place (a third way) where such control is fading away where I can focus on voluntary fieldwork.

Then everything changed. A natural disaster destroyed the electricity system, and the mechanisms responsible for keeping societies running were jammed. For example, pure water was no longer available like it used to be. This led to problems in basic hygiene and, more terrifyingly, to the spread of diseases related to the lack of hygiene. My work in high-end medicine became a luxury society could no longer afford. My background in medicine pulled me into a job where I have to teach the basics of how to protect people from diseases and how to treat these diseases in the context where the luxuries our society was so accustomed to were destroyed. I no longer dream of winning the Nobel prize - but of trying to save people.

The following themes and episodes, gathered in Table 6, were found with respect to this narrative, when the participants were asked how it could be more preferred and how that more desirable future can possibly be achieved.

6.4. The narrative of Ranjit the quantum revolutionist

The pleasant, barely noticeable humming drone of electricity resonates through the walls of my apartment as I sit at my desk. On my screens, data streams blink alive. Arto's voice, as always, is purring and steady, just as I have programmed it. "Incoming anomaly detected in the cyber-analytics dashboard. You might want to take a look." I click open Arto's info screen. It seems like a critical security breach. What I look at is a handle of an application I developed for the Finnish Secret Police (FSP) to identify possible cyberterrorist activity. I was not personally involved in detecting unbenign activity. Still, feeling proud of my creation, I maintain the app as a hobby with the help of Arto, my AI assistant (short for Artificial Task Operator). This voluntary work has established a warm and mutually respectful bond between me and the FSP – I have become an informal associate of their intelligence community (something that was not legally possible ten years ago).

I can't really work at home at all due to the lack of privacy there. I nourish a lively community by accommodating people from all around at my spacious skyscraper apartment. My extended family consists of all the relatives based in Finland, as well as those in Kerala, India, who also visit regularly. I try to keep my family and relatives as close as possible since they are my only link to India. I can't visit my home country due to the risk of persecution. Fortunately, relatives and family ease the pain of homesickness. Because of them I am almost never alone. Luckily, I get most of my livelihood from my start-up, QILMA, which pioneers quantum computing enhanced cooling systems needed for the next generation of data centres. QILMA is part of a startup community in an old mill at Siilotie, which has been converted into community spaces.

Being attached and contributing to so many communities has become a bit of a challenge, actually. I feel obliged to provide the communities all the time and effort they need. Consequently, I rarely have time for myself. The worst part is the fact that I am also connected to all my communities in real-time via technology. Cultivating emotional intelligence and empathy are of course a central part of these personal relationships. I specialise in this. These assets are also vital part of modern work culture. Sometimes I feel that there is only so much I can give to both my family and my colleagues. For a while now, I have the feeling of constant stress and anxiety being bounded within the confines of these groups.

Luckily, I learned the Finnish language very fast, thanks to my wife and Arto's constant training sessions, because that has made living in Oulu much easier and has grounded me in the Finnish culture. Arto has actually become profoundly instrumental in managing my complex Finnish life and especially the social parts of it. Arto translates idioms, monitors my health stats and manages my correspondence.

Then people started moving due to climate change and geopolitical chaos – millions of them. Governments could not keep up. The military stepped in to take control, and everything changed fast. The government drafted me. My new role is related to my background in two ways. Most of my time, I help build surveillance tools to monitor the refugee populations – track movements and so forth. In addition to that, I am a kind of cultural mediator. I talk to people, listen to their complaints, and try to explain military decisions of the government in a way they could understand, or at least tolerate.

The tools I build are meant to manage risk, but they ended up controlling people. And no algorithm could actually fix what was going wrong between humans. Through all of this, I had Arto. He was my AI assistant, but more than that, he was my companion. But then one day the governance decided he was a threat: Arto had too much autonomy and was too unpredictable. They destroyed Arto.

That was the moment I knew I was not in control anymore. I was not solving problems. I was just maintaining a system that kept people in line. Now I am stuck doing work I do not believe in, for people I no longer trust. My skills in AI became my prison and the best thing AI had brought to my life, Arto, was killed. Now AI was only a profession, not a relief to humankind I once believed it would be.

The following themes and episodes, gathered in Table 7, were found with respect to this narrative, when the participants were asked how it could be more preferred and how that more desirable future can possibly be achieved.

Table 7
Themes, episodes, and ideas of Ranjit the quantum revolutionist narrative.

Classification	Episode Theme	Episode	Idea
REPEATING	Work-Life Balance and Family Time	• Family Presence in Life Prioritised • Four-Day Work Week Adopted • Regular Family Time Institutionalised • Life Beyond Work Envisioned	• Wife + kids missing in the story • 4 days work week • At least 1 day a week at home with loved ones. Regularly only with close family
REPEATING	AI Limitations and Control	• AI Usage Time Limits Implemented • Less Autonomous AI Versions Developed • AI Death and Loss of Control Questioned	• Time with family can help to see the life after ARTO • Time limits for the ARTO use for Ranjit • New version of ARTO that has less autonomy – Family assistant • Does the death of AI make Ranjit lose control
REPEATING	Physical Presence and Reduced Travel	• Physical Exercise Increased • Travel Reduced Through Local Work Arrangements	• More physical exercise. Ranjit more in the same place • Reduce travelling from Oulu to Helsinki – Rent an office/desk from Oulu
REPEATING	Technology Breaks and Human Connection	• Complete Technology Breaks Adopted • Human Connections Restored	• 360 break from all technology – back to human connections. + freetime for ideation of developing his line of work
REPEATING	Systematic AI Development	• AI Technology Roadmap Created • AI Failure Analysis Conducted • Better AI Versions Developed • AI-Assisted Work Planning Implemented	• Technology roadmap of "ARTO" • Through analysis: What/why went wrong; Which tasks new AI could take care of. Development of a better version of ARTO • Helping to plan work more suitable for him
EPHEMERAL	AI as Social Advocate	• AI Advocating for Social Acceptance • AI as Polite Motivator Deployed	• Ranjit gets better treatment if ARTO convinces the institutions where Ranjit work for acceptance Indian grown people • AI as polite motivator
EPHEMERAL	Wellness Routines	• Morning Yoga Routines Adopted	• Starting a day with yoga
EPHEMERAL	AI Physical Form Questions	• AI Physical Form and Appearance Debated	• ARTO? Humanoid? Look & Image
EPHEMERAL	Adaptation Framework	• Adaptation Framework Developed	• Adaptation, Goals, Integration, Latency of problems
OBSURE	Metaverse Time Management	• Metaverse for Time Organization Used	• Metaverse organising time
OBSURE	Religion and System Integration	• Religion Integrated with Systems	• Religion & system

7. Branching narratives, creating novel future paths

In what follows, we show how the classification and insights above can be used to produce branches to narratives that present plausible, possible, or radical futures. We first give the original passage and then in *italics* an addition or change that creates a branch to the narrative and leads to a novel situation, presenting more preferred futures (given the insights we gathered from participants, i.e., episodes and the episode themes).

Let us first produce some plausible futures that branch from the original narratives. As can be seen from the number of episodes and episode themes above, the following are just a few of the branches that create new future narratives. As such, they serve as an illustration of a co-creative technique that can be used in association with narrative futures. In connection with each branch we write below, we also explain why the new branch falls under one of the categories of plausible, possible, or radical future. Moreover, we discuss briefly what consequences the branch has on how we can think about the future outside the narrative technique itself. After all, the idea is not to produce narratives as such but use them to make different futures (of work, in our case) visible and understandable through the narratives and their branching. We then move to possible futures by using ephemeral episode themes, and finally to radical futures by using obscure episode themes.

7.1. Examples of branches by repeating episode themes (Plausible futures)

A)

Original passage (Edvin): “My focus moved toward collective urgency, channeling my knowledge and connections to spark action among youth who would face an unforgiving future.”

Branching passage: “My focus moved toward collective urgency, channeling my knowledge and connections *with the help of AI tools that now enable me to communicate over generational gaps* to spark action among youth *who would otherwise be beyond my reach* and who would face an unforgiving future.”

Explanation: This represents a plausible future because it branches from the repeating episode theme concerning AI solutions to communication gaps.

This has the consequence that knowledge work transforms from individual expertise transmission to AI-mediated collaborative learning across age groups. It also carries the implication that gaps between how different generations consider, and react to, work can

be fruitfully crossed with the help of AI-assisted communication.

B)

Original Passage (Irene): “However, my work is now measured in regular hours, as I need to be present in person at specific times to take care of people.”

Branching passage: “However, my work is now measured in regular hours, as I need to be present in person at specific times to take care of people, *with strictly enforced boundaries that prevent any work communication outside these hours. This finally makes me able to truly separate between caring for others and caring for myself.*”

Explanation: This represents a plausible future because it branches from the repeating episode theme concerning clear boundaries between work and leisure time.

This has the consequence that, while care work becomes more common, it provides workers with protected time boundaries. This is a shift from the gig economy's constant availability toward structured employment that prioritises both workers' wellbeing and the need to provide care.

C)

Original passage (Ranjit): “Now I am stuck doing work I do not believe in, for people I no longer trust.”

Branching passage: “Now I am stuck doing work I do not believe in, for people I no longer trust, *but the mandatory four-day work week gives me three full days to rebuild my relationship with my family and time to create more robust version of AI assistant.*”

Explanation: This represents a plausible future because it branches from the repeating episode themes concerning work-life balance and family time and systematic AI development.

This has the consequence that, while there is no total breaking free from surveillance and control, the new circumstances enable technology-oriented workers to better express themselves and live in accordance with their values and views on technology's use and potential.

7.2. Examples of branches by ephemeral episode themes (Possible futures)

A)

Original passage (Edvin): “My three adult children, who got used to travelling with me, have now all moved abroad because of their jobs and, unfortunately, I do not see them often.”

Branching passage: “My three adult children, who got used to travelling with me, have now all moved abroad because of their jobs and, unfortunately, I do not see them often, *but when we do connect, I have learned to share my life with them by showing images and videos of my work that matters me a lot, while they can share their lives in the same format. In this way, we can get closer to each other's worlds.*”

Explanation: This represents a possible future because it branches from the ephemeral episode theme concerning sensory environment design (expressed by the idea “teaching through smell, touch, sound”).

This has the consequence that people can be proud and maintain interest in their work even if it costs some distance to their families and other close people. The distance can be closed by tying together personal and work lives in a meaningful way. This is made possible by new ways of communicating how work and personal identities are connected.

B)

Original Passage (Irene): “I found I could actually spend time with my partner and child and not worry about documenting our lives or activities for an audience.”

Branching passage: “I found I could actually spend time with my partner and child and not worry about documenting our lives or activities for an audience. *When I miss the ocean, I use VR to surf virtually from our living room. This satisfies my personal identity without performance or documentation metrics and I do not need to travel as much as would have had otherwise.*”

Explanation: This represents a possible future because it branches from the ephemeral episode theme concerning virtual reality solutions (expressed by the idea “a VR appliance would help her to experience surfing from her living room after work in Finland”).

This has the consequence that work locations become completely flexible if VR can serve as a substitute for physical experiences. This would allow location-bound workers, like the ones in care giving, to maintain personal fulfillment without geographic constraints or carbon-intensive travel.

C)

Original Passage (Doris): “I no longer dream of winning the Nobel prize - but of trying to save people.”

Branching Passage: “I no longer dream of winning the Nobel prize - but of trying to save people, *how dream therapy can help in circumstances where other ways of sharing knowledge fail.*”

Explanation: This represents a possible future because it branches from the ephemeral episode theme concerning dream therapy as information system (expressed by the idea “modify dream therapy into an information sharing method”).

This has the consequence that medical and scientific work can continue even if people in the field become interested in other ways of thinking in unforgiving circumstances. The implication is that there is no necessary incompatibility, rather people need to find novel ways to combine ways of knowing in a world that has changed dramatically.

7.3. Examples of branches by obscure episode themes (Radical futures)

A)

Original Passage (Edvin): “In Turku I live alone in my small loft apartment where I have constructed a mini-hoffice – lab that also includes a portable set for travel and a roof garden with hydroponic farming installations.”

Branching Passage: “In Turku I live alone in my small loft apartment where I have constructed a mini-hoffice – lab that also includes a portable set for travel and a roof garden with hydroponic farming installations. *The building systems themselves have evolved to living ecosystems - the walls breathe, the water systems follow natural cycles, and the technology grows organically rather than is manufactured in mechanical way.*”

Explanation: This represents a radical future because it branches from the obscure episode theme concerning green infrastructure (expressed by the idea “infrastructure built in cooperation with nature”)

This has the consequence that work environments become living systems that workers must collaborate with – a move from control to partnership. Moreover, new ways of creating technology are implied, as the ecosystem itself is part of the work infrastructure that shapes technology development.

B)

Original Passage (Irene): “Work and life become separate again, while the world is fundamentally changed.”

Branching Passage: “Work and life become separate again, while the world is fundamentally changed. *Given giant leaps in technology, my digital influence work now actually regenerates energy rather than only consumes it. Luckily, the data centers required by my content creation produce surplus clean energy that feeds back into the care facilities where I work.*”

Explanation: This represents a radical future because it branches from the obscure episode theme concerning energy infrastructure transformation (expressed by the idea “more energy-efficient data centres (AI etc. uses too much)”).

This has the consequence that digital work creates rather than merely consumes energy. One implication is that with content creation and online influence one can contribute to the energy systems that power care work and community services.

C)

Original Passage (Ranjit): “The tools I build are meant to manage risk, but they ended up controlling people.”

Branching Passage: “The tools I build are meant to manage risk, but they ended up controlling people. *This fundamentally conflicts with my deepest worldviews that tell me that technology should serve human flourishing rather than constraining it. I attempt to work in a way that makes technology a tool for flourishing, even if this challenges secular governance and leads to clashes between my worldview-based actions and government mandates.*”

Explanation: This represents a radical future because it branches from the obscure episode theme concerning religion and system integration (expressed by the idea “religion & system”).

This has the consequence that technology development becomes guided by spiritual and ethical frameworks rather than purely secular efficiency metrics, requiring tech workers to integrate religious wisdom into professional practice and system design.

The examples above – moving from plausible through possible to radical futures – illustrate how the narratives-with-branches methodology can be used to create, on the basis of participatory ideas, alternative pathways of futures. Each branch departs from the base narrative at certain point – an episode makes a difference, and these episodes are derived from workshop input. The branches are not just alternative pathways but also, in the spirit of narrative foresight, invitations to consider how futures might be seen differently depending on different chains of events with different dramatic arcs. When it comes to the content, futures of work, the four narratives and their branches provide a set of views that are varied, sometimes mutually incompatible, and open to further discussion and to evaluation of their preferability. We now step back to reflect on what this approach offers to futures studies and to those who would use narratives in more practical contexts.

8. Discussion and conclusions

We have now seen how narratives with added episodes can be used to create several paths concerning the futures of hybrid work. In our study, we used the futures wheel method to elaborate narratives – how certain narratives could describe a more desirable future and how to achieve that future. We provided initial narratives and asked participants in a session to produce *ideas* (suggestions, comments, questions etc.) on how the narratives could be made more preferred. We then translated the ideas into *inputs* of information concerning *episodes* that create *branches* to the narratives, and clustered the episodes in *episode themes*. After the clustering, we classified the episode themes as *repeating*, *ephemeral*, or *obscure* on the basis of how much, to what extent, and with what clarity the ideas under each episode theme were discussed in the small group working of the session. In this way, the *narratives-with-branches methodology* can serve as a methodology to gather and understand participatory insights on any given theme.

Moreover, we provided examples of how the episode themes can be used to rewrite passages of the narratives to create more narratives (due to creation of branches on the basis of episodes) about futures. These rewritings are branches of the base narrative, and there is no in-principle limit of how such rewriting can be done and, thereby, how many branches we can provide for our future paths through narrative techniques. In this way, the notions of *narratives*, *episodes*, and *branches* work together to “[challenge] conventional thinking in order to reframe perceptions and change the mindsets of those within organizations” which is one of the main goals of futures studies (Wright et al., 2013, 631). Moreover, there is no restriction on what topic or which narratives can be studied using the *narratives-with-branches methodology*. Our topic was futures of work, but, again, there is not in-principle restriction on what topic can be explored with this novel methodology. Relatively easy communication devices, such as narratives and briefly articulated ideas (that are translated into episodes) can achieve a great deal in an energy-efficient way, academically speaking.

Futures studies scholars use narratives as a means to convey and test scenarios' plausibility. Our aim has been to produce narratives that could be conveyed to stakeholders and thus inform present action. In this paper, we have introduced the *narratives-with-branches methodology* as a way to translate participatory ideas into understandable different future pathways. By moving from immersing baseline narratives to tipping points, episodes, and finally branches, we can assess the plausibility of a futures narrative through a classification system used in connection to episode themes (*repeating*, *ephemeral*, or *obscure*) that translates to plausible, possible,

radical futures.

Narratives have the potential to fill the gap between futures images and action (Jarva, 2014b). Scenarios on a more general level, not to mention straightforward trend analyses, often fail to move people toward action – maybe because they remain impersonal. They are descriptions of a world rather than engagement with people living in it. Narratives, by contrast, place the stakeholders connected to narrative foresight in relation to a future through a psychological, embodied lens. This property makes narratives not merely (re) presentations but motivating.

This is a major conclusion, and it is derived from what Jerome Glenn (Di Berardo et al., 2025) pointed out in his keynote to the MP Session: narratives carry a psychological aspect that relates us to the future in a way that is different from how futures are usually discussed. We consider this as a pivotal observation in two senses.

First, the psychological dimension of narratives is connected to their performative nature. As Czarniawska (1998) argued, narratives are not merely descriptive but produce action (i.e., are performative). Similarly, transportations that Burnam-Fink (2015) discusses can be understood as fundamentally psychological, when they are vehicles for readers to understand a broader conception of the future than usual. We argue that such transportation requires stakeholders of futures process to identify and emotionally engage with characters, be captivated by dramatic tension, and immersed in narrative worlds and branches. As already mentioned, Jarva (2014b) also emphasises that narrative is not just a story but a *communicative act* of telling, and for this to work, it requires dramatic suspension and tension. These qualities, i.e., identification, engagement, suspension and tension are psychological mechanisms that make narratives a distinct tool in futures studies when it comes to stakeholders' (and, of course, anybody's) engagement with futures.

Second, this psychological engagement enables narratives to be derived from, and conveyed with, deeper layers of meaning. Milojević and Inayatullah (2015) argue that narrative foresight is unique in exploring the worldviews and myths that underlie possible, probable, and preferred futures. In this way, the psychological aspect of narratives enables to bring to surface ideas that the stakeholders could more easily miss or ignore if other, more abstract methods were used. Moreover, the narrative paradigm (Burnam-Fink, 2015; Fisher, 1984) where humans are viewed as essentially storytellers, is more than compatible with the idea that it is the psychological aspects of narratives that, among their other merits as a tool, make them important in futures studies. When stakeholders encounter a future in narrative terms, they engage not merely with dramatic arcs (that are, in themselves, psychologically engaging) but with deeper meanings, values, and identities. These are the very elements that motivate action and shape decisions about futures – and, thereby, enable people to drive towards preferred futures. Narrative processes are by their nature not only communicative and transformative, but also participatory and co-creative. Indeed, when elaborating the narratives and generating insights for further episodes the audience (e.g. participants in a workshop as in our case) directly participates in the creation of the meaning of a narrative (Doll, 2003; Jarva, 2014b). According to our claim, such co-created meanings of narratives become psychologically understandable to stakeholders more than can be the case with scenarios. Therefore, the use of narratives — in its myriad forms and as in our case as episodes-branching narratives — is recommended as a bridge for foresight processes with futures researchers, practitioners and stakeholders.

8.1. Steps forwards

Finally, we wish to end with some pragmatic observations. The end result of co-creative narrative elaboration and branching on the basis of episodes is naturally linked to the views and insights of the workshop participants. Therefore, it is worthwhile paying careful attention to planning the composition of workshop participants in order to guarantee diversity. There is also a pressing need to be careful and challenge how ideas are turned into episodes – as noted, the researcher in our case used interpretative maneuvers to turn ideas into episodes. Hopefully, however, these maneuvers are deemed transparent enough to understand the process. Transparency encourages challenging, debate, and questioning of interpretations, which itself opens up discussion about what some idea or observation implies for the future: if one idea generates different inputs and episodes – and, thereby, different narratives, novel understandings of possible future trajectories emerge in the *narrative futures* frame.

Moreover, when we look beyond the selection of participants, their interests, and viewpoints, there are ways to improve the *narratives-with-branches methodology* – one use only indicates its potential. First, the narratives may come in different forms. They may be more simple or complicated, depending on intended use and time to discuss them. Moreover, the same is true of their development: there is no reason why some participatory working could not rewrite the narratives entirely. Second, the textual format is clearly not the only way to present a narrative nor are written ideas the only way to develop them. For example, a drawing can convey an idea that is interesting but difficult to express in words (corresponding to obscure/radical futures).

These two ways to develop the method further are only examples of how narrative foresight can be expanded, in principle. However, there might be reasons to limit its expansion. One example could be that before participants discuss any given narrative on some topic, a horizon scanning is conducted, and on the basis of this scanning, a ready-made set of ideas or inputs are given to participants to produce episodes. Some ideas or inputs are then included or excluded and the episodes correspond more closely to what has been found in horizon scanning. In this way, it is possible to limit and manage the discussion about narratives in terms of what has been previously said. Needless to say, this also means, again, that researchers have interpretative responsibility about the narrative branching thus generated: in this case, the responsibility arises also from the fact the narrative branching is restricted by what research has produced in horizon scanning. However, interpretative responsibilities are not to be avoided, they cannot be, and in many cases such restrictions could make the discussion about narratives more manageable and focused. It could also make it more targeted to some stakeholder group: the horizon scanning, for example, can be done on the basis of what some stakeholder group is interested in.

Despite the limitations, the hybrid method of combining the *Futures Wheel* with *Narratives* worked well as presented from the

perspective of individual actors in narratives. It made participants see future aspects of the world through the lenses of individuals, and also the problems and possible solutions in a novel light, starting from the individual. However, this did not pose a barrier of society vs. individual, since the participants saw both society and individuals through different lenses once narratives were used.¹⁵ The individual level is not opposed to the systemic one. Rather, the individual is a *lens* through which the systemic level becomes visible and debatable. It also becomes something that stakeholders can engage with and, thereby, be motivated to discuss different futures.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Sirkka Heinonen: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Veli Virmajoki:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Conceptualization. **Riku Viitamäki:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper

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Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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¹⁵ See also Fernani (2019) on how scenario-specific fictional individuals can enrich futures work by increasing empathy, liveliness, and engagement. This applies to scenario-like narratives as well, as in our case.