Futures Techniques workshop @PAF – 28.02-03.03.2019

Notes Delphine Hesters

Overview
1. Divination using archetypes
2. Two futuring card games
3. How do you ask powerful questions
4. Non-predictive strategy: KPU
5. Horizon scanning – macrotrends and weak signals – change drivers into STEEP – CLA causal layered analysis
6. Dot voting (important in collaborative situation: quick and visual)
7. Ranking critical uncertainties
8. Sociometry (body-based special exploration)
9. U-process
10. Silent reflection – presencing
11. Scenario building – (2x2 double uncertainty or GBN shell model)
12. Developing scenario logics or skeleton or narrative
13. Incasting (developing things *within* the scenarios)
14. Answer core-questions from the vantage points of the different scenarios. (+ Visualizing scenario answers)
15. First-person scenarios: closed eye scenario/mental-time travel + personal scenarios (1-5-15 years)
16. Postcards from the future in *tableau vivants*
17. Appreciative enquiry (we only do fase 1: discovery)
18. Backcasting (from theory of change outcast framework)
19. Prehearsal (quick and dirty) – pre-enactment (full-version re-enactment for the future)
20. Open Space
21. Adaptive action cycle
22. Improvised collective invocation

(What we didn't do: alternative techniques for all that we have done. / Expanding techniques into methods (each technique can have the cycle from present-future-present) / Ambient foresight (Embodied futuring. Practice practice practice. Helps with visionary adaptation: ability to have a strong vision over the future, but also to adapt it.)
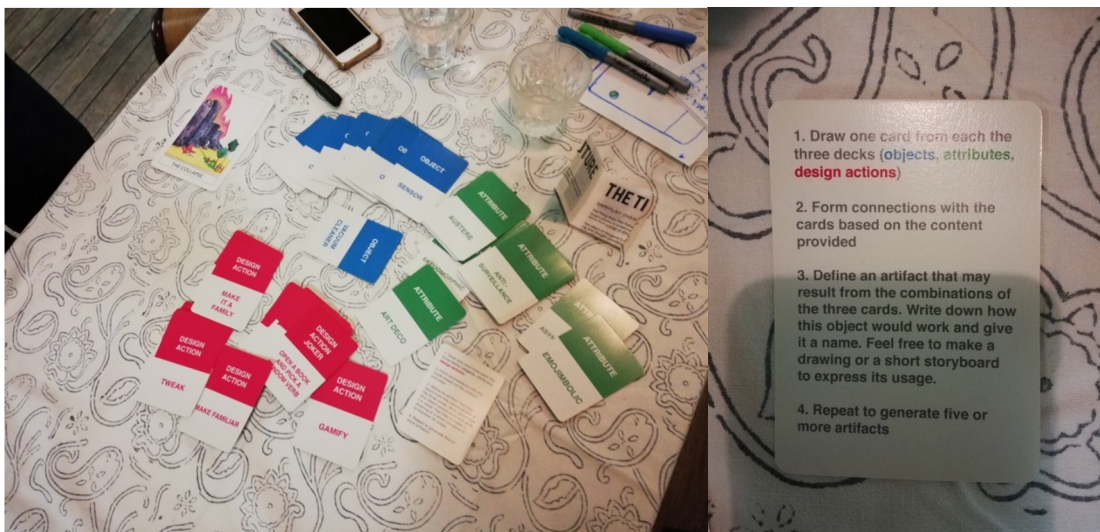
1. 'Instant Archetypes. A new tarot for the new normal' (Superflux)

- good for introducing chance and synchronicity
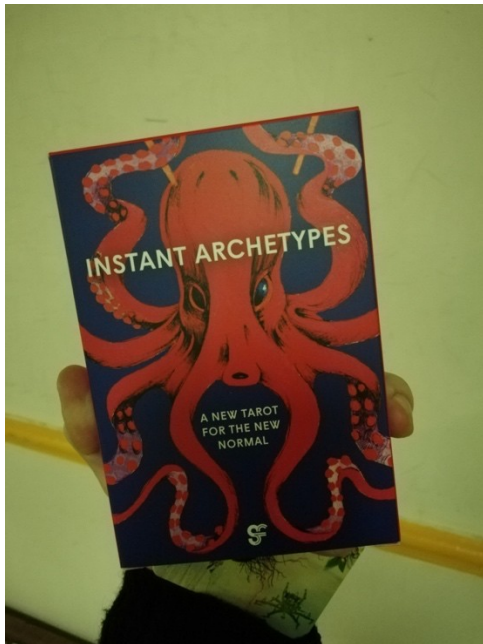
2. Design game: objects – attributes – design actions

(often used to stimulate design students)

3. Design fiction (imagine 2017)

- Spheres: environmental, political, social, economic, technological
- Aspects: mission, organization, constraint, target user

4. The Thing from the Future

See: techniques of working within constraints, having wild-cards, 4 generic scenarios (growth, collapse…) and an element of speculative

THE THING FROM THE FUTURE

GAMEPLAY OVERVIEW

The Thing From The Future is an imagination game that challenges players to collaboratively and competitively describe artifacts from a range of alternative futures.

The object of the game is to come up with the most entertaining and thought-provoking descriptions of hypothetical items from different near-, medium-, and long-term futures. Each round, players collectively generate a creative prompt. This prompt outlines the kind of future that the thing-to-be-imagined comes from, specifies what part of society or culture it belongs to, describes the type of object that it is, and suggests an emotional reaction that it might spark in an observer from the present. Players must then each write a short description of an object that fits the constraints of the prompt. These descriptions are then read aloud (without attribution), and players vote on which description they find the most interesting, provocative, or funny. The winner of each round keeps the cards put into play for that round, and whoever has the most cards when the game ends is declared the overall winner.

MATERIALS

In addition to the deck of 108 game cards, a supply of blank index cards and a pen for each player is required.

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

A single deck of The Thing From The Future cards may be used for play by individuals or by groups of two to six members. For larger gatherings (such as in a classroom or workshop), the game may be played by parallel groups with one deck per group and a central facilitator to orchestrate the timing of each round. Four players is an ideal group size.

THE CARDS

There are four types of cards in The Thing From The Future: Arc, Terrain, Object, and Mood. Each round, players will generate a four-card creative prompt containing one of each kind of card. Based on this prompt, players will imagine a thing from the future.

ARC CARDS

ARC cards broadly describe different kinds of possible futures. These cards contain two kinds of information. The main (top) text of each Arc card specifies one of four generic images of alternative futures for players to imagine: Grow, Collapse, Discipline, or Transform.*

Arc cards do not denote a specific future scenario; rather, they indicate a broad trajectory or category of scenario – a "plot type" rather than a particular narrative. Countless scenarios might be imagined as playing out under each of these generic umbrellas.

* This aspect of the game design owes a debt to the work of Professor Jim Dator on "generic images of the future" at the Hawaii Research Center for Futures Studies.
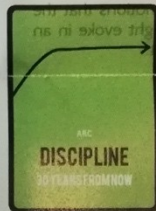
ARC CARDS (CONTINUED)
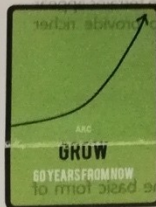
Grow is a kind of future in which everything and everyone keeps climbing: population, production, consumption...
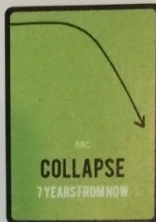
Collapse is a kind of future in which life as we know it has fallen – or is falling – apart.

Discipline is a kind of future in which things are carefully managed by concerted co-ordination, perhaps top-down or perhaps collaboratively.

Transform is a kind of future in which a profound historical transition has occurred, whether spiritual or technological in nature.

The deck also includes several ARC WILDCARDS. A player laying down an Arc Wildcard must choose the arc of the future in question (grow, collapse, discipline or transform) and the time horizon. This may be noted on an index card and placed in play with the rest of the prompt.

The bottom text on each Arc card describes the "time horizon" – the distance into the future that players must project their imaginations. In the standard The Thing From The Future deck, time horizons can be anywhere from seven to 1000 years out.

4

ALTERNATIVE FUTURES

5. Asking strong questions - finding the core question

Ask strong questions! (no 'yes/no'-Q). *How, what, what if, why* (but careful with why)
Important to take the time to ask the right question(s) = basis for the rest of the work
Good questions – think of the following 3 dimensions:
- Construction: how is it crafted? (make it short! Be able to remember it)
- Scope: people in the room have to have the capacity to act on it
- Assumptions

Note: Important to make sure that people are really invested in the topic. Otherwise the whole process of futuring stays at a distance and is hard.
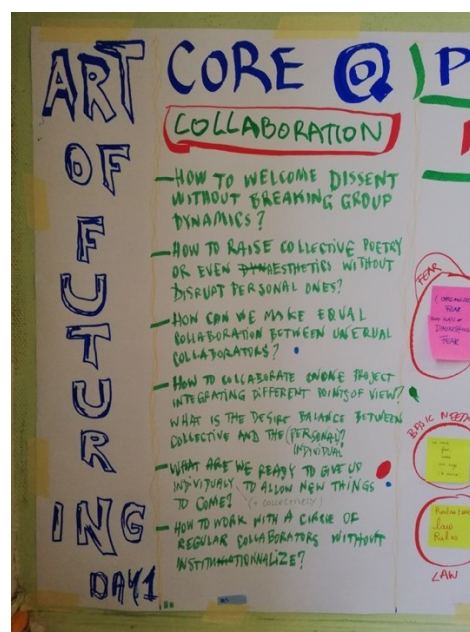
6. Sketching the 'present situation'

'Non-predictive strategy': unpick the presence: KPU
Map (on post-its) aspects to the 'present situation', related to the core question, on a board with K-P-U
KPU: what is Known / Presumed / Unknown (Unknowable)?
- good to make you aware of what you really know or don't know yet
- good to lay open what is present in the group, as knowledge, unequally distributed knowledge, worldview etc. Discussion about where to put a post-it (K – P – U) is revealing

Possible next step = to work with what's on the board and **how to bring the unknown and presumed elements into the known?**
- From unknown ☐ known: what experiments should we do? How to find out?
- From presumed to known: what to do to make it all known?
- Unknowable: not possible!

7. Horizon scanning

Scanning the horizon of past and presence to notice what is changing. What might effect the future, but you don't know how yet. See: 'trend watching'
1. <u>Trends</u> that are big changes in the world that can effect the world on a massive scale
2. <u>Weak signals</u>: micro-changes that you notice once, someone tells you… signals

Often (if futurists hired for policy e.g.): months of research what the trends really are – facts, … : make sure that it's a 'known' thing.
We will equally work with presumptions, what we consider true, our believes. That's ok, because the future will be full with people acting upon presumptions. It's part of life.

We combine 2 techniques in 1 (matrix):

- **CLA: Causal Layered Analysis**: from 'critical futures' or 'decolonial futures'. We need to look much deeper into the layers of these larger trends. And build scenarios from the bottom up. Layers:
  o <u>Litany</u>: complaining about problems. See what is portrayed in media
    ▪ *what you observe, first – comes up most easily in the process*
  o <u>Causes & systems</u>: causes– in systemic analysis
  o <u>Worldviews</u>: embedded in the systems and taken for granted
  o <u>Myths & emotions</u>: culture building, bottom-layer (e.g. fear underlying fundamentalist world views)

- **STEEP**: classify different types of trends or drivers of change (common method) – typology (can be anything – these are common ones:)
  o <u>S</u>ocial / <u>T</u>echnological / <u>E</u>conomical / <u>E</u>nvironmental / <u>P</u>olitical
  o Mostly macro-stuff, trends

Task: what are the trends or signals of change that have an important influence on our core question?

- Interesting to see where a group tends to cluster many post-its

Can be used as scenario-building technique: "If I want x to be different" (e.g. ban fear ⬜ trust): build-up a new line from bottom to top layer: Myth ⬜ Worldview ⬜ Systems ⬜ Litany (write a media report: what kind of news do you want to hear in the media)

8. U-theory
= A technique in workshops, moderation – good you follow this shape to craft the energy

In every process: 3 parts:
- Part 1: go down the U: diverge, sense, explore
- Part 2: bottom of the U: need to digest. Make it your own. See what happens to you, watch what it does to you. (rest, walk,… do something that is not talking and thinking)
- Part 3: techniques that are activating, showing how to change – building, answering

Task: between 14 and 14:30: stop talking or working – digest, be silent, be non-productive

9. Dot voting

Everyone gets 3 dot stickers and votes for the most important elements on the post-its.
Go back to the core question and intuitively: which ones of the things on the horizon board are *key* to that question.

10. Critical uncertainties (scenario building)

To get from a forest of possibilities and signals to a smaller amount of drivers to work with to create scenario's.
Reduction in 2 steps:
- Dot voting (see 9.)
- Work with 'critical uncertainties' (From Global Business Network/GBU and Shell - book 'The art of the long view')

 Which of our drivers and signals are <u>most important</u> for our question + also <u>most uncertain in how they will develop</u>? = critical uncertainties'

10. Sociometry

Critical uncertainties could be picked based on strong analyses of data etc.
We use sociometry, with our bodies in space, to make decision. (rather than staying seated and vote or use numbers).

Start exercise: from smallest to tallest person (to show the principle, get active).
Then stand on a scale for the chosen elements:
- How important – very important – essential ?
- How certain – how uncertain is its development/place in the future?

We want to come out with 2 critical uncertainties to design 4 scenarios –
 Map them on quadrant importance & uncertainty
 Choose the two that are most important+uncertain as basis for scenario building
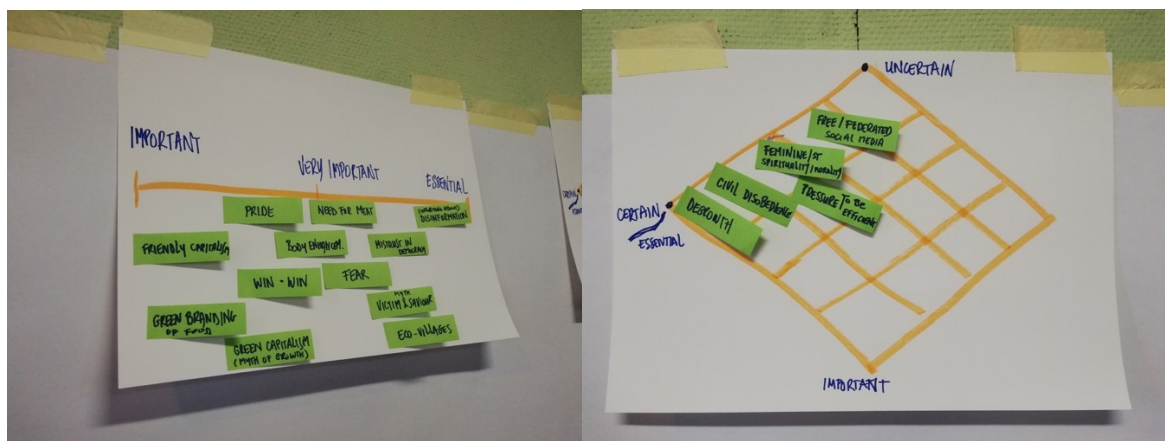
11. Scenario building

Draw 4 quadrants by defining the two axes based on the two critical uncertainties.

Now create <u>scenario skeletons</u> (or if time: whole <u>narratives</u>)
We create four 'extremes scenario's' (but know that we are in the four in certain ways, have certain aspects of the four already today)

Add separate elements which will be parts of those futures, things you associate, you would expect to develop in this kind of context.

Give each scenario a catchy name.
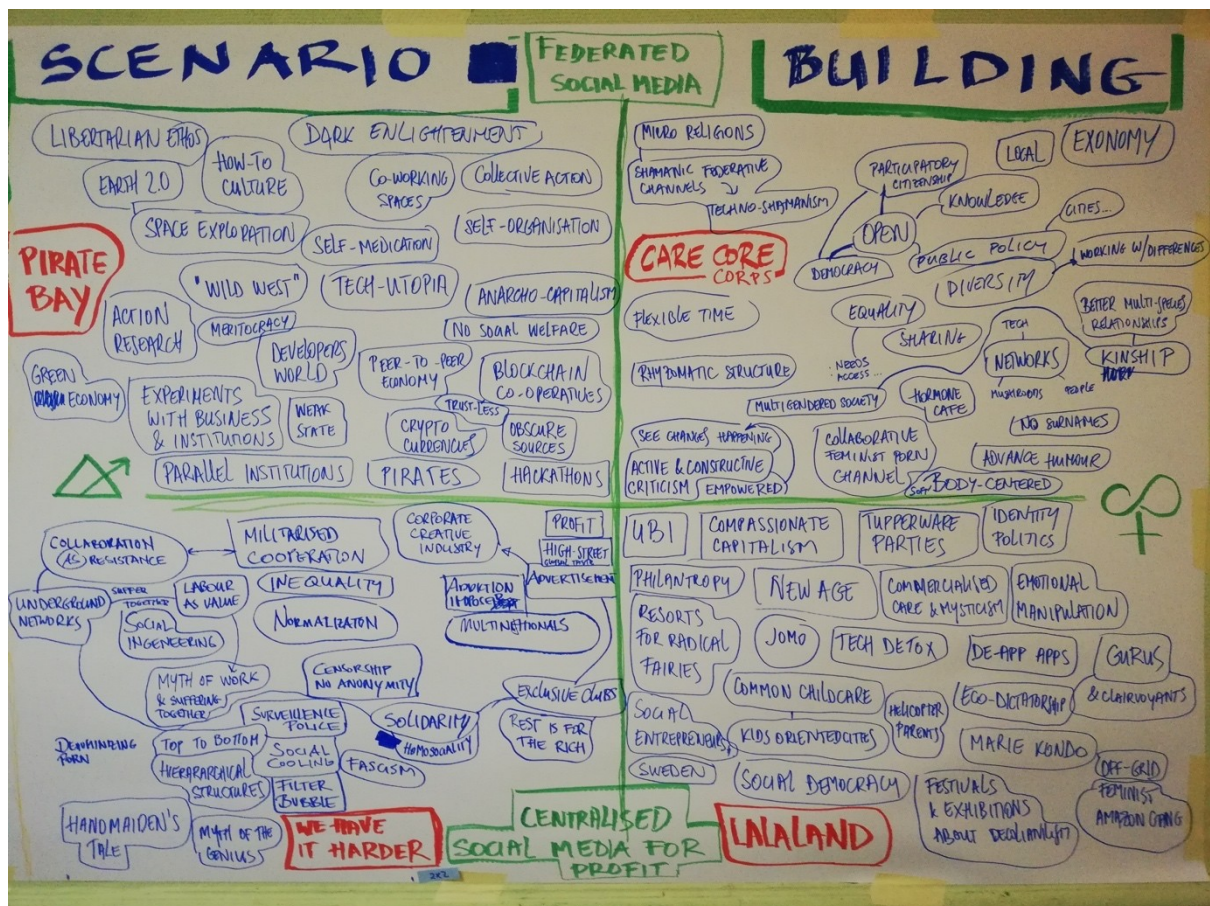
12. Speculate about the answer to your core question from each of the scenarios + visualize

How would you answer the core question if you would be living in the land of A/B/C/D quadrant?
Based on that answer, make a poster with your pictures. Illustrating your answer.

Observation Maja:
- *Tendency to make strategies of resistance within/against a scenario*
  vs.
- *Building strategies based on the dominant logics of/within the scenario*

13. Closed eye visioning – mental time travel

On yoga mats, closed eyes – Maja guides us through the four scenarios – she built beautiful narratives evoking the 4 different worlds, moving from one world to the other + asking us questions:

- How do you get up, what is your morning ritual?
- Who is with you?
- Where and how do you work?
- Where do you live?
- …

14. Imagine your individual life in the scenario's

Write individually what happens with you in scenario A/B/C/D
- In 1 year
- In 5 years
- In 15 years

Real-life scenarios for the *real* you. Go to what it actually would mean for you
= individual introspection.

15. Build collective *tableaus vivants*

Share the individual stories with the other people from your scenario & make *tableau vivants* for your group – what will you be doing/what situation will you be in in 1 year, 5 years, 15 years?

10

End of part 1: 'alternative futures' = from the present imagine a multiplicity of futures
Now move to 'preferred futures': start from a preferred future and work your way back to today.

PREFERRED FUTURES

16. Backcasting/retrocasting from a preferred future

Useful when working with a concrete project / mission / outcome.
(Comes from environmental sector – "we don't need playful scenarios, we need principles")
-    Agree on what the outcome looks like / define it well / define its principles
-    Work back – path in time to the present, in different layers/steps

Task: You want post-capitalist collaboration? Define what it is and what its principles are. And then work back.
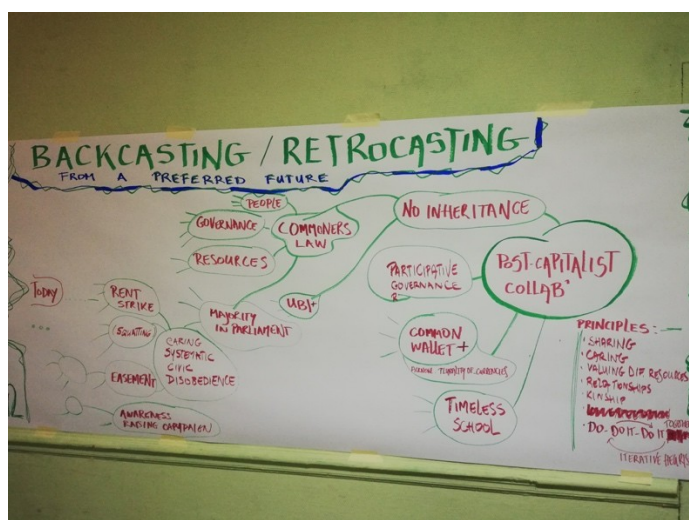
During the process, each outcome has to be well defined: opens a lot of (necessary and fruitful) discussions about their meaning, importance etc.
Observe how difficult it is to define an outcome, and not a negation-of-what-we-have-today.

17. Appreciative Inquiry
"From the best of what is to a desired future that could be"

Not really from future studies, but from organizational change. But used in futures as well. Method came from frustration with always working on 'problem solving', focus on problems and negativity – the need to shift to appreciating what you already have.

Preferred futures already exist from things in the past. Take those things into the future.

Very good warm-up technique. If you want to get people quickly engaged in things.

Task: in duos interview each other.
 Think about a situation in which capitalist habits were successfully broken
- What did you do in the situation? (actions)
- How did you feel? (moods emotions)
- What made this situation possible? (resources)

Collect the actions / moods / resources of all the stories
Cluster-synthesize Key elements and work with those to (a) create a scenario in the future / (b) create a project
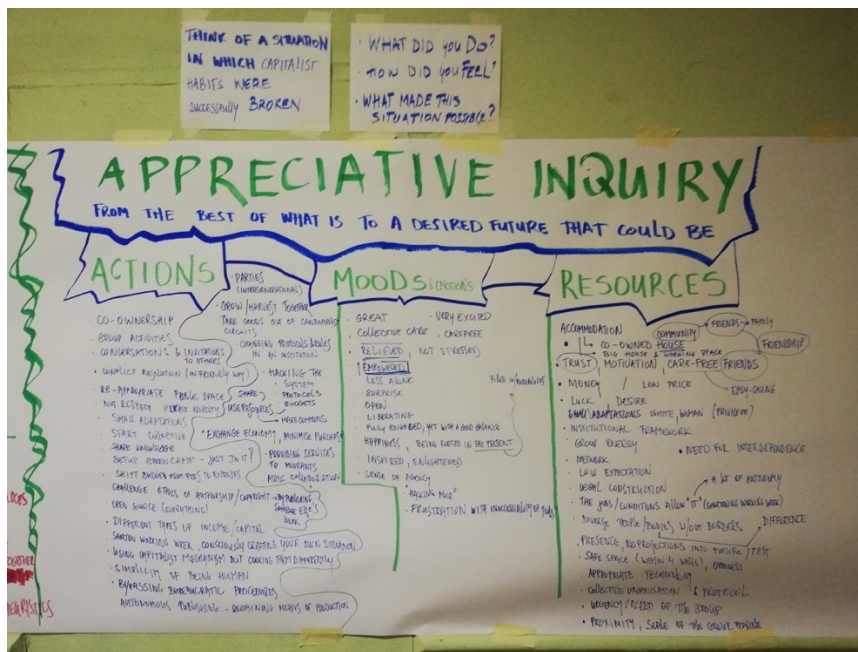
18. Prehearsal – prototype

Making the stories of the scenario actable for us now, today / experience

- Build a backstory (choose a scenario/'world', think about the reasons why we ended up here, history, context…)
- Design a situation (incl. mock-ups / alternative text and images)
  o What is the look & feel?

- o   What can you find there? (objects, food, materials, tools...)
- o   What is happening? (events, activities, rituals)

- LARPing (life action role-play): everyone has to agree on the world, the rules and then play it out fully = asks for a lot of preparation, investment

- Task: design a dinner party at Care Core!

19. Adaptive Action Cycle

Way to debrief or evaluate after something is finished. But mostly meant for projects that are ongoing or iterative development. Finishing one fase, evaluation and move on.
- What? So what? Now what?

What? What did you experience at this workshop?
So what? What worked for you? What didn't work for you? (what are the implication for your work?)
Now what? What happens next? What will you do?

20. Invocation

Task: each of us think of 3 wishes/prayers/invocation
- One for self
- One for group
- One for all beings

When ready, stand up and turn with your back to the circle. Start whispering those words over and over. All together – louder and louder to max and then back down. End with 2 minutes of silence.

Note for each end

Important to not stay in the realm of fiction!
 Go back to the scenarios. What are the indicators in the present that you might use as warning sign or opportunities to act today?