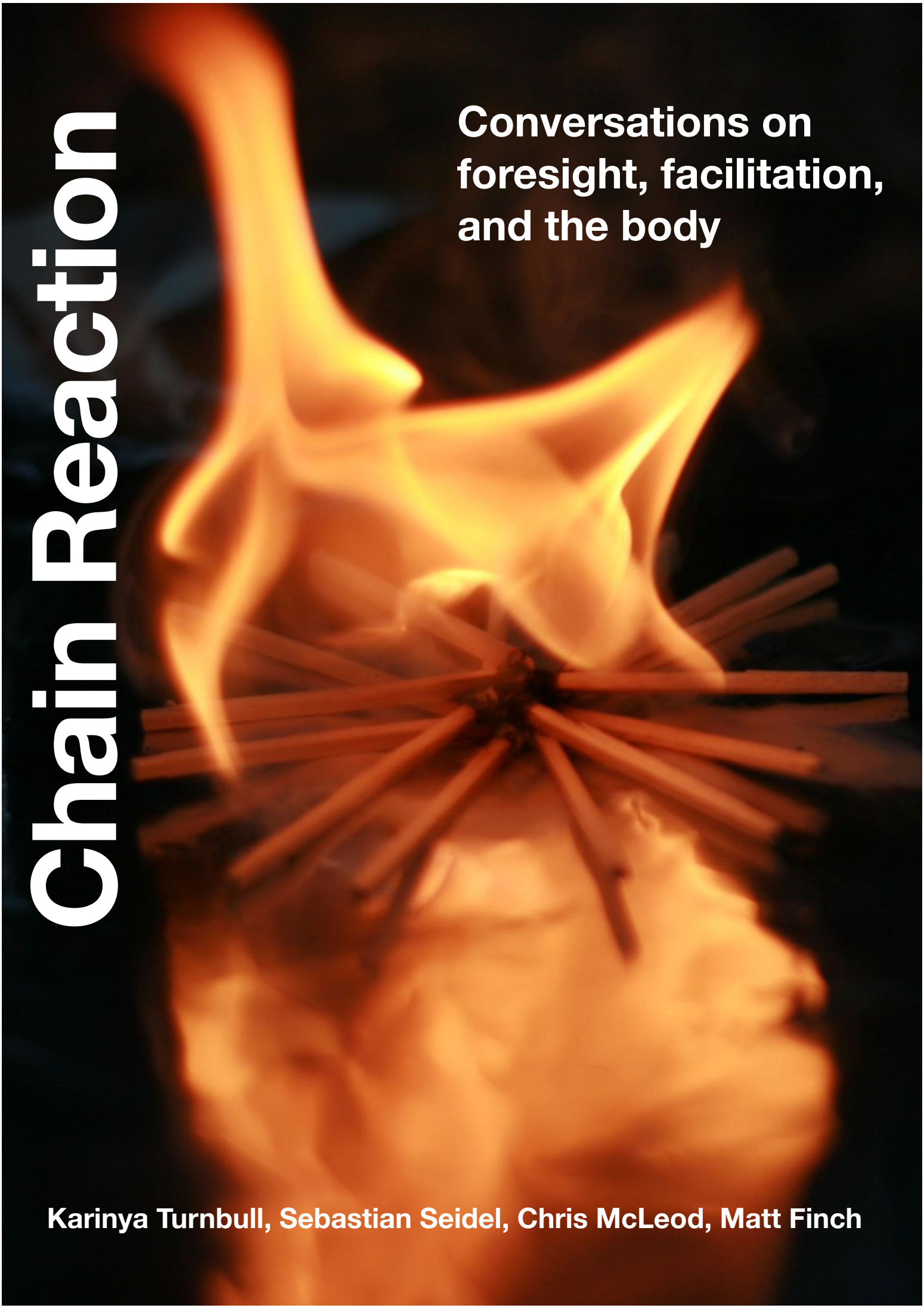
Chain Reaction
Conversations on foresight, facilitation, and the body
Karinya Turnbull, Sebastian Seidel, Chris McLeod, Matt Finch

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Foreword



Betty Sue Flowers

Foreword

Betty Sue Flowers

There's a spirit of play in *Chain Reaction*, a book structured as a chain of interlinking dialogues in which each author facilitates an interaction with the next. I could see the facilitation dexterity at work in that everyone was aware of the themes surfaced by the others, but each was given permission to speak in turn.

Most readers like me will want to join this dialogue. And I was lucky enough to be asked to write a foreword, so I took the opportunity to leap right in!

As in play itself, as well as in the best facilitated foresight workshops, the unexpected arises in this chain of dialogues. For me, the surprises emerged from the emphasis on the role of the body in facilitation, especially analogies between facilitation and the body in sports. In our coming world of disembodied prediction machines—AI—this book highlights the importance of embodied sensing and an openness to the unexpected. In facilitation, the body is a leadership tool.

Karinya, who represented Australia as a freestyle skier, talks about the fear in engaging in a dangerous sport as similar to a certain kind of anxiety in thinking about the future. Sebastian describes the mutual caring he experienced in a mosh pit and Matt responds to that image by saying that "The facilitation question here, I think, is the peril of the bureaucratization of psychological safety versus sincere mutual care and recognition." Chris talks about research showing that "71% of executives privately said they prefer to

make a decision quickly that they knew was wrong than sit with the uncertainty and say they didn't know."

Yes, thinking about the future goes against our natural inclinations to project the past into the future as a way of controlling the future. We have to think about the future, and it's comforting if it's familiar. So, meeting in a group with a facilitator to explore different possible future scenarios can be a very uncomfortable experience. People don't like appearing to be incompetent, especially if they're leaders, and especially if they think they might look incompetent in front of other leaders.

I was one of four authors of a book based on conversations with the original title of *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future.* We had all served as facilitators in futures dialogues—but it never occurred to us to facilitate our own conversation except to prepare the container of the conversation by a brief silent meditation before each recorded meeting. This, too, was a physical preparation, although I'd never thought of it that way until I read *Chain Reaction.* "Presence" is a difficult concept to explain although I believe almost everyone has experienced it. The four of us tried to find language for it by talking about a process. *Chain Reaction* suggests that music might be the nearest analogue to the indescribable aspects of facilitation. As Matt put it, "If you could tune out the verbal content and just read the vibe, I think that's the thing that may be eternally elusive, but which I find totally fascinating about this line of work."

Chain Reaction is the only book I've read that describes what I've experienced in every scenario workshop of which I've been a part—that moment when participants lose hope that anything will come out of the

process. It's a moment of low energy and loss of engagement, a time when facilitation seems to lose traction and people drift away to the coffee machine. That is the dark night right before a breakthrough happens. At that point, I look around, and I can spot immediately those people who have been through a scenario process before. They recognize the moment and have confidence in the birth that will come next in the process, with the facilitator acting as midwife. In a way, the group itself is like a body, trying to get to grips with emerging possible futures.

And that body can have emotions facilitators must recognize. Grief, for example, when we see that an unwanted future and not the future we'd planned for, is actually a plausible future scenario. *Chain Reaction* reminded me again that the best leaders are also facilitators. So leaders, too, would benefit from this book because it addresses those unspoken aspects of creating an effective project or organization—aspects which, like music or the intuitions arising from the body, or presence, that form the soul from which the future emerges, always in surprising ways.

Introduction



Introduction

Uncertainty is entwined with our existence, to an extent that sometimes seems as if it is ever-increasing. How do we feel, facing up to this ever-shifting reality and trying to understand its implications? As the decisions we take and the choices we make will play out in times to come, how do we make sense of a context that is yet to fully unfold?

This book brings together four practitioners of strategic foresight – the discipline through which organizations, institutions, groups, and communities can reckon with today's uncertainties by exploring multiple futures, testing our expectations of what may happen.

Scenario planning is one of the key tools of strategic foresight. Manufacturing scenarios – contrasting visions of what may come to pass, plausible yet challenging to current assumptions – is one way of establishing a basis for rigorous analysis and good decision-making in turbulent times. Those who engage in a scenario process enhance their ability to understand what is going on around them, what it means for them, and what they might do about it – individually or collectively – by entertaining different possibilities beyond their current hopes, fears, expectations, models and projections.

There are many approaches to such work; the practitioners in this volume all, to greater or less extent, operate within the Oxford tradition of scenario planning established in Rafael Ramírez and Angela Wilkinson's book *Strategic Reframing*. Scenarios in this approach are not predictions or forecasts; they do not offer probabilistic assessments of what is likely to transpire; nor do they set out normative or desired futures. Instead, they complement their

users' existing understanding and analysis by developing alternative perspectives.

This can be challenging and uncomfortable work, though it is also intensely stimulating, provocative, creative, and even fun, as participants enter an exploratory mode of abundant curiosity and humility about what they think the future holds. Importantly, the process is as valuable as the product – participants have the opportunity to learn throughout the journey as they test assumptions and go beyond received wisdom, even before the scenarios are completed.

In this book, we complement the extensive professional and academic literature on scenario work and strategic foresight to focus on what it means to facilitate the group processes by which scenarios are developed – and specifically, to think about the role that our bodies have to play in facilitation.

From interpreting gut feelings to physically arranging the room within which a scenario workshop takes place, from a sense of musicality in foresight work to the things that facilitators can learn from disciplines such as the martial arts and family therapy, we invite you to a wide-ranging discussion with a unique structure.

The late Kees van der Heijden described scenarios as "the art of strategic conversation"; this book exemplifies that in format as well as content. It consists of four interviews, each co-author interviewing another in turn. The authors bring to bear not just expertise in facilitation and foresight, but also diverse experiences of sports and other physical disciplines which inform their sense of what part the body has to play in this work – from martial arts and mogul skiing to glassblowing, horse riding, and playing on a rugby team.

First, Chris Mcleod interviews Karinya Turnbull. Chris is a consultant with Liminal Space Consulting, where he helps individuals, leaders and teams

embrace ambiguity and innovation in pursuit of their ambitions. He has spent over 20 years in high-performance sport and has facilitated scenario planning at Oxford's Saïd Business School. Karinya is a strategic foresight consultant and non-executive director who previously spent 17 years in commercial, innovation and strategy roles globally in Shell. She has facilitated scenario planning both at Oxford's Saïd Business School and in developing thematic long term energy security scenarios for Shell.

Then, Karinya interviews Sebastian Seidel. Sebastian is currently a strategy consultant for the German Armed Forces. He has facilitated the scenarios programme at Saïd Business School and teaches scenario planning at the Hertie School.

Sebastian, in turn, interviews Matt Finch, a researcher and practitioner in the fields of foresight, strategy, and negotiation, whose roles include Associate Fellow at Saïd Business School, member of the Futures Council at Australia's National Security College, and adviser to the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group for Future Generations.

Finally, Matt closes the loop by interviewing Chris.

Each interview builds on what has gone before, so that thoughts, patterns, reflections, and insights can accumulate, even as each co-author brings a different perspective and moves between roles as interviewer and interviewee. This captures some of the dynamic, dialogic aspect of foresight work, including disagreements and divergences as well the discovery of common ground.

The aim is to provide food for thought that nourishes anyone engaged with matters of leadership, strategy, foresight, planning or decision-making – but especially those who find themselves in the position of facilitating strategic conversations of consequence.

It is not an introductory volume, nor a “how to” handbook, but rather a chance to join a professional conversation, accompanying people on the search for something new, reaching for ideas on the cusp of formation, testing the waters, sharing stories, collaborating and challenging one another in a spirit of adventure.

As a reader, you are not a passive participant. You will have your own responses to the co-authors’ comments and dynamics; what you read will connect to your own opinions and experiences, and ideas will arise from within which were never captured on the page. The text is a springboard, not a cage, and its greatest success will come if these conversations form the basis for your own new ventures and explorations.

Key issues from the authors’ perspective

Because of the nature of this book, the key topics became evident to us only in hindsight – we set out on a voyage of discovery when we convened these four conversations. As you join that voyage, you’ll find your own points of learning, agreement, and contention, but here are some of the issues which struck us when we finally returned to shore.

Somatic experience: Throughout this work, interviewers and interviewees turn to the question of where we identify sensations which may be giving us signals as to what is happening during a facilitated process. Translating internal bodily cues into data about the emotional direction and dynamics of a group is a nuanced process which requires ongoing self-examination and reflection; we note also how the body has its particular ways of knowing which are distinctively honed through activities like the rapid descent of the mogul skier; the horse-rider’s rapport with their steed; or the relationship to music of the concert-goer, the dancer, and the player of instruments.

Within this, developing our ability to feel things before we think them and then attend to those feelings in a timely manner, the body itself becomes a leadership tool – we pause upon receiving an input to which we have become sensitised and take the time to process it cognitively and emotionally. A physiological reaction becomes an indicator of what is going on in the group, and we make an informed choice about what we then do with that. This can lead, as several interviews note, to "a facilitator's fight within", where we must deal with our own inclinations and biases – including resisting the urge to steer a conversation to ground that we find safer or more comfortable.

We consider also the role of confidence built by experience – on one hand, a martial artist may be relatively relaxed in a situation of physical threat, because they are accustomed to the contest, and a facilitator may need some of this ease borne of experience; but on the other, we must not allow the complacency of routine to limit us, given that our business is helping people to venture usefully into the unknown. This also means reckoning with failure: when we learn from things going wrong, the sense of disappointment may be visceral – yet also will contain learning within it.

This is both complicated and enriched when we co-facilitate with others, dealing with issues of authority, responsibility, and role – and feeding into the open question of exactly where a facilitator stands literally and metaphorically with regard to the other people in the room, who are "the facilitated".

Care for participants: Of course, while facilitators' own personalities and physical presence are perhaps their greatest tool in the heat of the moment, we must also attend empathetically to how the work is experienced by others. Engaging with futures explicitly intended to challenge hopes, fears, and expectations can be highly discomforting; the work is demanding in terms of energy and mental load; and workshops may take place in novel

environments, with many strangers potentially in the room, and the sense of vulnerability and visibility which comes with being asked to voice one's opinions and accept a situation of constructive challenge.

We consider practical questions of housekeeping and hospitality, too, and ponder the extent to which the lion's share of effort may lie in thoughtful, empathetic preparation and session design which centres the learner – even when we plan and rehearse only in order to feel free when we improvise in the unfolding moment!

There is also the matter of setting boundaries and establishing degrees of comfort and safety sufficient to allow the group to make the most of its individual and collective capacities, thriving and succeeding in the work of foresight. A particular challenge is considering what harms and discomforts might arise, how they may be borne by the group when it is necessary to the work, and how to ensure there is equity in this emotional burden.

The role of language: how do we name, label, and describe emotions and sensations? Even when we try to focus on the body, on wordless sensations, or on intuitive feelings and experiences which seem to precede language, we find ourselves searching for ways to share and communicate them.

Time and again in these interviews, we return to the need for descriptive language that allows for shared understanding. Common feelings like longing, love, music, competitiveness, or the bundle of emotions that come from raising children can connect us with the otherwise outlandish worlds that can be described in future contexts. Experiences that people are familiar with today can be helpful bridges for challenging visions of the future and help us identify with the inhabitants of scenarios that seem initially outlandish.

Conversely, miscommunication can create challenges to the process of engaging with the future, and the success of foresight projects. Knowing how

to name and interrogate behaviours that may look like disagreement or denial in a foresight process may help us as facilitators: sometimes it is unacknowledged grief for belief in one's preferred future, and the stark need to face other possibilities, which is the impediment to seeing a world anew.

We also find ourselves wondering, in an age of Large Language Models (LLMs), a form of artificial intelligence which resides exclusively in the domain of language and does not have bodily experiences to draw on, about the role of AI tools in scenario facilitation. Does AI help or hinder attention to gut decisions and inchoate emotions? Does the speed of an LLM remove time or reflection space which we would otherwise use to marinate our ideas – or is it a helpful provocateur and thinking partner?

Diversity and inclusion: We also consider how individuals, through their distinct standpoints, roles, life experiences, neurology and biology, propensities, identities, and attitudes, perceive and contribute differently to foresight processes.

From visual thinkers to storytellers or those who think more systemically, to creative types or those who work best with numbers, we consider both seen and unseen differences which factor into the composition, dynamics, and effectiveness of the group work which underpins successful scenario planning.

We invite facilitators to reckon with their responsibility, agency, and values when recruiting for group work and taking part in design, delivery, and evaluation of foresight activities.

Staying open-minded: The distinctive nature of this book presents a challenge and an opportunity, as we invite you to join a conversation in flow. If, as Ellen Ramvi suggests, "to learn is to get involved with what one doesn't know", here you enter a process of learning in action, in the belief that you will

not only find value in accompanying the authors, but that you will see new and greater opportunities to get involved with the unknown beyond the final page.

The book is inert until the group acquires its fifth member – you, the reader, who brings the words to life. We welcome you warmly, and look forward to continuing the conversation.

Chris interviews Karinya



Chris Interviews Karinya

Chris

I'm looking forward to this. So the theme of foresight, facilitation and the body is a huge one. Before we start, are there any specific topics that you definitely want to talk about?

Karinya

A couple of things really stood out that I thought were interesting. Firstly, talking about language. What words do we have in English to speak about the future? And I started thinking about it, and realised, I didn't have much - I kept reverting to descriptive sensation.

I don't think we have a lot, and I figured given we have been actively involved in foresight the last few years, we should be better than average. So that was an initial reflection.

To compare a niche topic such as futures, with say snow, there's an example I've heard that the Inuit have many dozens of words for snow because that's all around them, and integral to their life. As a practitioner talking about the future, perhaps I need to come up with some language to talk about the future. So that was my first insight that may lead to action.

The second one, when we're talking about the body I think about the location of feelings in the body, and I sent through the heat map of that image I saw (showing research that locates generalised feelings and where they are most prominently located in human physiology e.g. anger, happiness, anxiety and so on).

I take a slight digression to explain why the location of sensation comes to

mind for me: my youngest, who's seven, has started springboard diving this term. And I was with the Institute of Sport for springboard diving 25 years ago, so I was very excited walking into that steamy chlorine pool; all sorts of nostalgia washing over me. I haven't yet dug into the roots of whether it's entirely positive, negative, or purely sentimental — but the familiar sensation of familiarity is there, present in my body; activated by the sounds, smells and sights of activity in an indoor pool.

I can’t recall exactly where in the body I felt this, but it is different now, to when I was an athlete. This type of interoceptive experience is a very similar for many years when I used to go to a ski resort (after retiring from elite freestyle competition representing Australia), because I spent so many years competing, arriving at a new resort held anxiety, fear and stress; whereas now it’s purely social and recreational but the physical sensation and psychological reaction is still present and transitioning from my competitive era.

Back to watching my son, I was thinking about where one feels feelings connected to certain themes.

When I used to compete I felt the sensation of nerves more abdominally based, literally being nervous was in the gut. That was competition stress. Occasionally I could feel it in the groin, like the nodes there were releasing a chemical to turn my legs jelly or stone, equally ineffective when you’re about to ski a mogul course!

But if I think about other stress states and highly emotional events, like a grandparent passing, or some other kind of high trauma event. Recently, I had this experience and it felt like I was suffocating. I kept thinking of thick massive maritime ropes in knots, and how I felt they were at the slides of my neck. I would catch myself holding my breath. That's where I held the stress which was an emotional state. Whereas the physical fear of doing a backflip

on snow sat very deeply in my gut. So from a physical perspective, it feels really different depending on the trigger. This may be driven externally versus internally driven, or whether I choose to be in the position of stress, or it came to me?

And then another point I was thinking about is the term paralysis. The reason we talk about scenarios and futures is often to help make decisions. What happens if you don't make a decision? That comes with an opportunity cost. That's like a paralysis. But within the body, does paralysis have a benefit? At the most core level, humans have the fight or flight response — and then with the freeze response, which could be a version of flight. You know, I'm not going to get involved and I'm going to remove myself. It sparked this question around to what extent does paralysis have value? Because when we're talking about the future, a lot of people just refuse to engage, a version of paralysis that they don't want to deal with. So, this freezing of action/inaction, can it be helpful or does it hinder us?

And from a sensory perspective, sometimes stopping can be helpful. If you think about that visceral sensation or a hormone release being positive or negative in fight or flight, the adrenal glands release the hormone and that helps ascertain whether you face the fear or remove yourself from it.

Chris

So on that last one — there's a sense of paralysis, and I guess linked to where you started on where you feel things. My sense, even just from comments you've made around diving or the sports you've done, is that they're sports where there's a sense of unknown and uncertainty and inherent anxiety within them. And even hearing you speak, it seems like when people deal with the future, there's probably some similar feelings around unknown anxiety. Is there stuff from your time in sport where you noticed

where you felt things within your body that you think are relevant to futures?

Karinya

Well, this is why I started going down this rabbit hole. I did three sports at a competitive level — one at World Cup level and the other two at national level. Gymnastics, diving, and then freestyle skiing.

Chris

Strong mix. That's a strong mix.

Karinya

I always was jealous of swimmers and runners who did their sport without fear of significant injury just by jumping into the pool or running on the track. I could land on my head during most skills in gymnastics. Indeed I ended up in an ambulance and hospital for a couple of days because I landed on my head, because I got disorientated - just like Simone Biles described a few years ago. All my sports were inherently dangerous without the right execution, in particular skiing is an open environment where conditions can make it particularly uncertain so even more challenging.

Actually, the paralysis line of thought also made me think of Simone Biles again, how at the Tokyo Olympics she got the ‘twistiess’ as she called it. And this is where I was thinking: did that help make her stronger for the next Olympics, or is that something that held her back? Are there conditions where paralysis in exploring the future is helpful?

And then, coming back to your question within sport and scenario planning - do we have to build more courage to talk about the future, or are we conditioned to talk about the future only with a sense of foreboding, like it's something we have to wrangle and manage? There's almost a negative connotation from my experience, we warm up to scenario planning, we take

to frame it and create conditions to explore it because it does not come naturally for most.

This makes me think about technology, artificial intelligence, and human connection. In the Western context, we have a tendency to view the world of technology, with a negative connotation where the machines will overtake humans like in Terminator. Yet if you look at the Eastern perspective, I'm thinking in particular to Japanese culture, they look at robotics and humanoids as being really compatible, friendly and supplementary to human society. They really embrace technology because they feel it helps them, whereas in the West we're afraid it will hurt us or take our power.

I think about corporate executives making strategy decisions when we're talking about foresight. That's been my playground mostly for futures work. And I wonder if we just haven't framed the future positively enough for people to avoid being in that fight or flight stage. If as scenario facilitators we can minimise visceral stress, it will help our participants become more open and exploratory to future orientation?

And then in sport there is the Yerkes-Dodson Law, a performance curve that shows the relationships between emotional state, called arousal, and performance level, as an inverted "U". If you're really strong at something and you're put under pressure or stress, you tend to perform better. Which is why elite athletes often break world records at big events. But if you're low in the skill area, doing something you're very unfamiliar with, like exploring what the context looks like in 30 years, the pressure causes you to perform worse. Think of a learner driver in non perfect conditions, they are much more likely to have an accident (why they have various limitations on when they can drive e.g. no drinking, not at night, limited passengers).

And I wonder, coming back to scenario planning, does the fact that most

people aren't familiar in talking about futures, their resistance is in fact a display of performance and the arousal curve, and the combination of lacking familiarity, causes some participants peg the experience of participants in scenarios toward this anchoring effect of not wanting to perform, or engage in this space.

Chris

Can you talk to me about what you mean by anchoring effect? I think I know what you mean.

Karinya

Individuals who are unfamiliar with scenario planning, are learning a new skill and may find it initially a difficult concept. A common reaction to skill development that is challenging, is resistance. Added the burden that most executives are high performers in their usual skills, it’s significantly different to their normal operating conditions. It's a paradox and may reduce their engagement like a physical anchor. Particularly because not everyone enjoys the novelty of the unknown. New offices, new businesses, new people. That can be quite a stressful environment for some people. Also for executives, they've gotten to where they are because they're good at what they do. And all of a sudden talking about the future is quite the opposite. They don't know what the future is, may have limited experience working with it and the feedback loops are very different. So it brings people into that more stressed state, cortisol rises, and you end up in that fight or flight state, or paralysis potentially.

Chris

I'll jump around, but we had a session last week with a client by someone called the Uncertainty Experts. They've done research with thousands of executives and found that 71% of executives privately said they prefer to

make a decision quickly that they knew was wrong than sit with the uncertainty and say they didn't know.

It's interesting piecing those together. You've got the bit around where you feel something. You started with this sense that language to explain or talk about the future isn't great. And then the sense of how often people are in this paralysis/fear state. Hearing you describe that — it's almost like the triad of doom, isn't it? I'm stressed about something and anxious. I haven't got the language to talk about it. And I can't even acknowledge how I'm feeling within my own body.

Chris

You painted this really interesting picture. I can see it in facilitation — how often scenarios put people into that threat state, they haven't got the language to even articulate it, they might not be conscious of where they're feeling it in their body, and then they've been asked to move forwards.

Karinya

And yes, they can appear like they're weighted down, like being anchored by the unknown experience they are encountering. Whether it's a form of paralysis or they're in fight mode like they don't want to be there.

Karinya

From a facilitator's perspective, it's hard to know what to do with participants in the stressed state.

One thing I do when I facilitate, I always acknowledge emotional states early on. I always do the grounding and state you will feel uncomfortable, and that discomfort may come from not knowing, being in the learner’s seat again. And this is where I think there's an opportunity for more language about the future. An opportunity for a piece around the feelings that come up even

when you and I talk about the future, it's just a summary of stress words. Anxious, anxiety, uncomfortable, discomfort. There's almost a pick-a word exercise that would be helpful for facilitators to articulate what their participants will likely feel.

And there's probably an exercise one can do. You put up 20 words and people have to choose the top three and then discuss how that feels.

I had someone talk to me recently, a facilitator who facilitated at Oxford recently and he asked me: do you ask people what their stress state solution is? When people go into that stress state, whether it's because of conflict or they're overwhelmed, what's the key to help them out of it? And I said, I've never done that proactively. If I see conflict, as a facilitator, I may intervene and address it if needed, but I wouldn't preemptively get the whole room involved. But from a facilitatory perspective, that was actually a really good prompt to have in the back pocket — to ask people openly, especially if it's a high conflict group, what tools do they have to help them get out of that state and contribute back to the group.

I'm sure experienced mediators would have good tips on this!

Chris

That's really interesting. I really like the example of the 20 words. It's almost easy and potentially lazy to say 'you're going to feel anxious or uncomfortable.' Whereas what you're describing is helping them understand why they might be feeling anxious and uncomfortable. I might see a scenario and feel it in one place because it makes me think of a family member. Whereas someone else might feel it in a really different place because even exploring the future is instigating a different threat response within them. So the thought of having different words or activities to explore why you are feeling uncertain — because everyone won't be driven by the same thing, will

they?

Karinya

I agree. I don't think they would. In a corporate or learning environment it could be very challenging to facilitate, but it could be a personal reflection exercise where people have to articulate to themselves, write it down, and maybe share one out of five answers.

The whole point is for an individual to learn themselves and take that away. It's quite a deep reflection. And I'm sure this bridges on some kind of coaching tool around what are the anchors holding you back.

I remember having one executive coaching session where for me it was fear of not being amazing. And I thought: well, that's a terrible reason not to try. Or fear of looking silly in front of other people. Saying it out loud was very confronting.

But to facilitate that within the scenarios context — there's an interesting way to provide the space for people to reflect on what is holding them back.

Chris

Yeah. And to your point, it seems like there are trade-offs — risk versus benefits to that. Do you ever feel as a facilitator — because you're obviously really attuned to where you might feel certain things in your body — do you notice that when you are facilitating other groups through anxious or uncertain exercises?

Karinya

As a facilitator of scenarios, I am in a well known space for me, which is a process and a structure. I hold it, I design it, I guide it, and I've been there, done that. There's not a huge amount of variability in the process. The variability is usually the tech, is the AI tool working, can someone dial in

which is a different kind of unknown. It's a known unknown versus the unknown unknown, which is truly novel. So you have to get your head around how the content is going to land. This type of feeling is a low level stress which is the kind I know helps me perform like an athlete readying for competition.

I do reflect that facilitation could actually go really astray. With groups of high friction, perhaps they didn't buy into the process, there are lots of ways the stress of facilitating could create similar sensations to elite sport. I'm thankful it hasn't! Probably a combination of the fact scenario groups are highly curated to get diversity of thought, contribution and output; and in no way can I reasonably imagine myself at risk of physical harm! So fortunately the stress is not present like the self induced athletic conditions.

As a facilitator you don't own the content. You want it to be of good quality and valuable to the client, but it's not about you. You're there to deliver the baby as the midwife analogy is often used to demonstrate the role of facilitation in scenario creation. You don't get to keep the baby. So if you don't like the look of it, it's not yours. So it's a lower level of involvement which reduces the stress level ultimately - even if you do care a lot about the output. I feel it as stress, not anxiety, if that makes sense. I get stressed in my shoulders and then it goes to my neck and I'll get a tension headache. That's not fear of the unknown. That's just winding myself into a state because I've probably procrastinated and I'm doing slides for the process the night before.

It's a known unknown. You know you've got to do it, but you're doing something slightly different. Whereas it's when you're a participant and you're trying to come up with something that no one has spoken about — that's where the insight comes from. Where are we going to get something truly novel, truly interesting, truly insightful that allows the organisation to go, aha?

Very different.

Chris

Yeah. I think more in the last 12 months, partly because I've been working with someone who asks me about it a lot. She'll ask me a question and then ask me where I feel it — because it takes my brain a bit of time to catch up, and I'll try and out-logic it first. So she's started asking me what's just happened and where I actually feel it.

There are some similarities. If it's a more anxious, traumatic thing, it will be right inside my stomach-ish area. Groin area, if I'm properly nervous and anxious. And what I've got to now
is — I know I'm about to do something, I'm not sure how it's going to go — it's usually more like chest, upper gut. So I've tried to become more conscious of where I feel it. And look at it in a respectful way.

With groups — when you might be feeling something that the group is also feeling. If the group is anxious, do you feel some of that as a facilitator? I've just been able to notice that in myself a bit more. I definitely do. And even just through sport — I used to play a match every weekend and you'd start feeling it on about Thursday, then a little higher on Friday. So yeah, I'm definitely used to that. But I don't think it's the norm from a facilitation perspective. And I think sport does help because you have to be grounded in your own body and your experiences. And I think you're taught to notice more — especially the sports you've done, which are so feeling-based. Like you lose your sight to the bar when you're in gymnastics, flying through the air. You can't lose sense of your surroundings. So my sense is your sports are sensing sports.

Karinya

Is that called a freedom-based sport — where you lose kind of visual cues?

Chris

Yeah, probably. Really like that term. And so that's why I'm really interested in your take on it, because all the sports you described are sports where you've lost some kind of grounding or the normal cues that people have. So I'd imagine at certain stages all you've got is: what does this feel like to me?

Karinya

How does it feel? I was usually too nervous, with feelings of lead in the legs keeping me physically grounded so I was always trying to relax. I'd listen to Elton John at the start gate before I competed, it was always a calm Elton sony

But it makes me think about it from a facilitator's perspective. I have seen in leadership meetings where we have had leadership intervention. A facilitator was appointed, and when we met, I walked into the room and immediately noticed the degree of curation was impressive. The posters were up on the wall. The seats were already in the horseshoe shape so we all faced each other. He had a particular type of pen. The post-it notes arranged at everyone's feet. And he had music going, happy pop, really unoffensive, kind of easygoing. And I walked in and I was I like: oh, this is not like serious corporate leadership, HR-mandated event. This is a bit of woo-woo. We are supposed to feel comfortable.

So from a facilitator's perspective, I have not actually brought that degree of focus to calming the physical aspect and alleviating the physical stress that people usually find associated with talking about the future. I guess it goes back to my belief that sometimes stress can help propel us forwards, not just keep us in a state of paralysis.

Chris

Yeah. I was just thinking exactly the same thing. It seems like we're both saying we almost know what state people are going to get to. And what are the small things that make the biggest difference from a facilitation perspective to help people get to a state where they can even start to use some different words or to explore the future?

Going back to your original point — if there's an assumption that people haven't got the words to talk about the future, it's a horrible state to put people in. We're going to show you a future or futures that might bring some anxiety. We know you haven't got the vocab to really talk about it. And we're going to do that collectively within a group of your peers and your boss. Which is a normal scenario. But what do people specifically do as facilitators to truly help people do that?

Karinya

This makes me think of really young children who haven't yet learned to speak, and when they've got tummy aches and pain; they just don't have the physical language to say where it hurts and how it hurts.

And so again it comes back to language. If you can't communicate the sensation... how can you communicate to share the experience?

And I've been doing a lot of work around the role of the chair on a board. And the amount of value and necessity that comes from that role to manage dynamics of the group. The Chair has to get the best out of people, sometimes by popping a thought bubble and asking them what they're thinking, but not creating polarising discussion just inviting the sense to explore an unheard perspective.

It’s such an underrated skill. In corporate, you get promoted on your subject matter expertise. Leadership is valued, it's really important, it becomes

more important as you get more senior. And yet there's no test per se. And a lot of people stop training at a certain point. Half my cohort on one of my leadership teams refused to do any leadership training, refused to have executive coaches, and they were the ones who needed it the most.

So it just feels like the role of the facilitator is undervalued, given we're having to deal with these unnamed, uncharted characteristics of human physiology and dynamics, and yet manage that to get the best out of people and create insights about the future.

Chris

Yeah — with hugely high expectations of the session or the facilitator. And I wonder — often when people get frustrated with the scenarios, how much of it is linked to all of that. If you're frustrated and you feel under threat and you haven't got words for it and you're a senior leader feeling a certain way in your body — I'd imagine your natural action is to push back against some element of the process, or whether something's plausible or not. Because it's an easier response than saying, I don't know what I'm feeling here and I haven't got the words for it.

Karinya

Yes, self diagnosis is very difficult, and from experience usually requires guidance to resolve. To think about your thinking in the moment, which is metacognition, is difficult, and guidance here is extremely useful. I believe this falls into a leadership characteristic around mastering one's self, which people with high leadership capabilities seem to accommodate discomfort better.

I think self mastery is the absolute number one core characteristic of leadership, because you can't lead other people until you can lead yourself, or at least with any level of effectiveness and in an enduring capacity without

hierarchical power. And so with self-mastery, one of the first elements is self-awareness and self-reflection. Through this process the role of language comes in quite early, requiring being able to name and label how you feel. Without that language you end up in a place where you're pushing back on the scenario process, the facilitator or the output.

This can be seen as a participant saying no, or saying they don’t see it being plausible, and they disengage completely.

Chris

Yeah. Which is sort of — in sport it's a role of the coach, isn't it — especially in sports like gymnastics and diving. The anxiety can be fairly high and people haven't got words for it, and it's the role of the coach to coach someone through that so they can recognise it in themselves in high pressure situations.

Karinya

The military, I imagine, has similar characteristics to sport, in the sense of coaches providing feedback as they require high performance, lots of training, discipline and a lot of unknown outcomes.

Chris

Yeah. And going back to the comment you mentioned earlier — it's similar to a child when they can't articulate how they might be feeling. How would you deal with a child?

Karinya

I think there's probably a name for this type of reaction.

There's the grief cycle capturing denial, anger, resentment, acceptance, moving on. This can be felt by participants in scenario generation that is unexpected and potentially unpleasant. Sometimes seen when the ghost

scenario, or their expected future becomes not visible in the scenario set.

A child can be consoled when they are agitated with language by coaching them through with questions identifying the issue, like where does it hurt, what do you want? If that doesn't prove effective then a physical response often comes, and if I can diagnose them perhaps ice/heat as a simple mechanism to treat physical discomfort, or ultimately the parent's choice, a cuddle. Psychological discomfort which is what we are talking about I suspect is a less explored or area given for reflection for adults, especially in this type of strategic setting.

From a facilitation perspective, when someone's in that agitated state there are similar responses to coach out feedback. If there is one person in particular who's agitating the process or the content, it becomes an interventionary moment. Because of the sensitivity to psychological comfort I would tend to engage on this one to one, before bringing more visibly to the group.

And what if this person is effectively creating paralysis for the whole group; this is where I come back to: does it help or hinder? From a group dynamics perspective, sometimes you need to have that storming (in Tuckman's model of forming, storming, norming) play out. If you don't have something to trip over then it's all too easy and proper team functioning doesn't evolve.

As a facilitator I would encourage the agitator out of the room on the excuse of something for me, suggest we get some fresh air or I need a cup of tea and do they want to join. If I can identify there's something, I might ask their reflections? If not, try teasing out what they are focused on? And if there's not the words to explain the sentiment or behaviour, I would probably give them options, like that 20 words exercise. Because maybe it's something else. Maybe they just don't think it's going to be useful. Maybe it's not even

the people in the room or the process. Maybe it's some assumption sitting deep that they haven't voiced, or no one's listened to them previously.

Chris

Yeah. I love the way you talk about the grief cycle. It's interesting — in some scenarios you do feel something like grief, because people have to give up a future that they've invested in. They are losing something. I always think people's biggest reactions are when they actually feel the scenario is plausible, and yet it's very different from the future they hoped for. So I actually think there is an element of grief in there — they've had to give up something they've personally or organisationally invested in.

The description of the grief cycle is a really interesting one. Some people might get excited. But for those groups or those people — the time element of it. How long do you have to give them? Especially given your original point that really struck me — when people haven't got a language to talk about the future.

Karinya

I think Western culture doesn't have a sufficient range of words for death. There aren't enough words for grief. So lacking language for grief and lacking language for a feeling about the future, the missing middle of the Venn diagram is language.

So there are few areas we seem to feel we could have more expressive language for. Grief, as in giving up a preferred scenario. The Future, and how we live for or engage with it, and physical somatic senses when we speak of a certain topic; in this case engaging with the future.

I recently spent time with a woman who studies languages. She speaks many and is interested in how they interact culturally. Someone who has the

etymology or the origins of some words would be interesting to engage, because even Spanish or Latin or other common languages could open up a broader index of expressions to talk about grief and the future which could help us as facilitators better express or diagnose potential sentiment in scenario facilitation.

Interestingly, in the opposite direction when I was facilitating a couple of years ago, there was a participant from a country in Africa where it's generally Christian-orientated. And they don't talk about the future, because that's God's will. So it was highlighted to me that in some cultures, to talk about the future in the way that we do at Oxford, and we would commonly do it is against their religion. This is because if one speaks of an assumption to influence the future, it is representing oneself to be God, and to take this assumption is not acceptable. Therefore how this community requires engagement in scenario planning looks very different to what I've been used to from a western, academic centric approach. So that was a big learning for me. The groundwork for individuals from this region had to be set around: we're not there to change the future, we're here to understand what may or may not happen, and whoever holds the ability to change that. It required a very culturally knowledgeable preamble and recognition of the cultural priorities.

Chris

Yeah. Is there anything else that's coming to your mind, or anything we haven't spoken about that you'd like to address around this area?

Karinya

I'm still processing all of this!

Chris

I'm quite impressed because we've covered grief, we've covered sport, we've covered a fair amount.

Karinya

All these tangents have interesting rabbit holes to explore. And the paralysis concept, I would love to hear more if anyone has thought about paralysis in the sense of: can it be helpful or does it only ever hinder?

So again I come back to Simone Biles. Greatest of all time. She is an incredible athlete. And then she had this period where she literally couldn't compete.

And in the same vein, a senior executive who is in a scenario workshop who finally says (verbally or through actions), this is not what I want, can't explain it, not making any progress, it's not going to help us, and effectively ‘down tools’. What are the conditions where that paralysis actually expedites the participants' learning journey? As a facilitator, how do we get people there versus just the paralysis state, which either prevents people from moving on or slows down the process?

Chris

Biles is a really interesting example. If I remember the press conference she gave — she shared this disconnect between how her body felt and what her body was doing that she'd never felt before. And then I wonder how she worked through it. Because I really like your challenge of how do you almost create the conditions for that?

I guess what Biles did, which at the time was shared as really brave, was she named it — stopped and told everyone what happened. Whereas I

wonder how often in groups people feel paralysis but don't want to say that's what they feel. And so actually by naming it, six other people in the group would go, I feel exactly the same.

She could have said she was injured. There were lots of things she could have said. She didn't. She just said, this is how I'm feeling. And she described it as the twisties, a word but without the language to fully describe it.

Karinya

She had a version of proprioception loss — the ability to understand where your body is in space in relation to other things. Gymnastics is really high on that. You're always losing sight, doing so many spins. And when you get the twisties in sport — as Simone did, as I've had moments of — the whole world can slow down and you literally don't know up from down. It's terrifying. And it's not like a physiological reaction you can read, like heart rate. Most athletes will know: my heart's going too fast, I'll put on a slow song to calm down. When it's mental, you may have been given tools — but I suspect you only get those tools after you need them. And so when something trips you up and you get that mental paralysis, you have to work through it after the fact, versus in the moment.

So as a facilitator working in a space where people might trip up — maybe we need to have, besides language, a couple of tools to help people cognitively work through being disorientated.

Chris

All the words you've used — twisties, disorientated, a different feeling — is how I view some people describe scenarios. It's disorientating. I thought this was going to happen and it's not. I can't make sense of it. There's so much going on. There are 10 people in my group. So while it's not the same, it's

really interesting hearing your point around elite athletes making sense of it in time. It's got me thinking around facilitation and how much the constraints of a workshop — we've got two days to do this — constrain how you try and deal with some of that. Whereas if you worked differently with a group, or over longer periods of time, I wonder what you might leave in the moment and deal with it later. Because people can't make sense of it at the speed that we think they might.

Karinya

And a threat response is still consistent, isn't it? The brain doesn't really care if it is a professional threat (versus a physical one), the threat response is the same whether it's professional credibility or your own safety. So some people might have a high threat response to their professional credibility, like not knowing the answer, or what the future is; versus they can go and BMX all weekend and not feel it at all.

There's probably a link there from a character perspective where some people have a more concrete sense of self that is less influenced by others. And if you believe your professional credibility will be threatened by not knowing, that's probably lower on that spectrum. But the threat response is still valid whether it's professional or physical.

Chris

And I guess we have to balance this with the fact that some people get excited about scenarios. It doesn't send everyone into a threat response. A smaller percentage of people see opportunities in them. But broadly I find groups going to threat state relatively quickly.

Karinya

Again, is that outcome of threat response conditioning from a cultural

perspective? Is it just a complete lack of exposure? My experience across innovation and investment, the East versus West divide is quite profound. The Japanese are just so willing and interested in technology, accepting with a belief that technology is an enabler to society, resulting in a high acceptance of technology adoption. And yet you look at the US and what Hollywood has made of technology, it is inevitably a threat; think Terminator! So there's an East versus West element. There's a religious element. And maybe other non-English languages have more words for death, grief, or the future which may allow a different level of willingness to engage with the future.

Topics we've been speaking about, connect to a sense of agency. The ability of some people to influence their future. If you believe you have agency, my hypothesis would be you'd be more willing to engage. I think there might be research to back me here, there was a study of prisoners of war, and the characteristics of a POW who was in the best shape when released had certain characteristics linked to agency. Not blindly optimistic that you were going to be saved, but grounded in realism. I wonder if that agency has a link to one’s ability to engage with the future? And whether it's positive or fatalistic; because if it's fatalistic, language doesn't matter. And also some countries have a different sense of democracy, of your ability to influence an outcome. If you have less agency, I guess you would feel powerless and less willing to talk about an inevitable, perhaps less favourable outcome.

Chris

Which does strangely all come back to how you feel it, where you feel it and what kind of response that you get. We have covered a fair amount of ground. It's been wide-ranging.

Karinya

Yes it has! Was there anything in your list that we should cover?

Chris

No — the thing that struck me from what you said last time was the research on where you would feel something. And just hearing you talk — there are lots of things that stand out. Some of that: the triad of three areas that scenarios might evoke that the Western world doesn't have much language for. So grief, futures, and sensation within yourself — I think is a really interesting one.

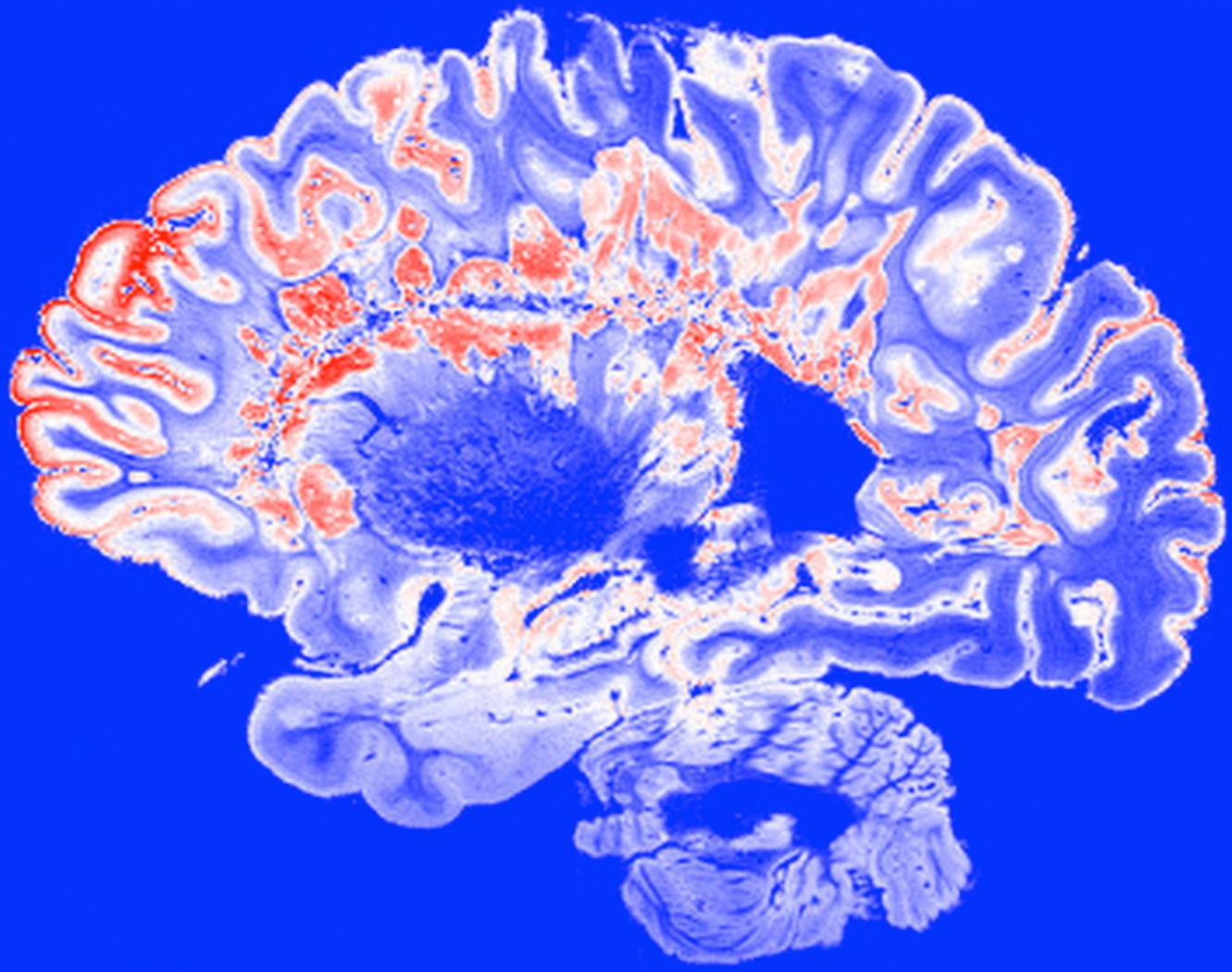
The Biles example really struck me. From a facilitation perspective, how do you really help people acknowledge that this doesn't match what I thought? I haven't got words for it yet. Especially when you're asking people to think innovatively.

And this person I saw speak last week who specialises in uncertainty — she said there's a paradox in uncertainty: your brain is at its most plastic but at the same time it's at the biggest risk of shutting down. It sends you into one of two states — the biggest opportunity for learning but the highest risk of not wanting to think innovatively. And even in this future scenario context: at the very time I'm asking them to think more innovatively, there is the biggest chance of threat, not having words for it, uncertainty. So how do I marry those two things? So yeah — thank you.

Karinya

Thank you very much. What a fantastic discussion.

Karinya interviews Sebastian



Karinya Interviews Sebastian

Sebastian

I think maybe to start us off: When reading through the transcript of you and Chris discussing, to me it's always interesting what gets picked up in these conversations, and what doesn't. And two of the things I thought were most interesting were also things you only lightly touched on, though they connect to what you just said in our warm-up.

In the beginning of our kickoff discussion with the four of us, I think one of the interesting things was this discussion around where in the body does the decision making happen, and what - if any - influence do we have as facilitators or scenario planners or participants on this decision making? I think in the very beginning, one of you had this quote on how executives like to make decisions fast and quickly, rather than sitting with them; and they would rather make a wrong decision quickly than sit with the agony of uncertainty for a while.

To me, that's interesting in many different ways. One is coming back to the original question: Where does the decision making happen? And especially, even though it's not my background, I find this neuroscience approach fascinating: How does our brain decide things? Coming from the 1980s, where there was this strand on how we don't actually make decisions, the brain makes decisions before we can think of what decision gets made; and now, 40 plus years later, that's being questioned quite a bit, and the direction seems to be that the brain does take a lot of evidence and then works on it and makes quick decisions, partly from the gut, partly from the brain, and that this is connected to how much experience we have.

And that then brings me back to this idea that you need a lot of experience to maybe get to that point where you can make a decision quickly, where it feels like you can go where you want to go next, and for whatever reason your gut or your brain decides, based on your experience, your personality, your intake and reflections. And I think that's then where we as scenario planners can potentially come in, right at this stage, over a certain period of time, where you can equip people with the ability to feel that uncertainty, to not have to make a decision quickly; but if they want to make a decision quickly, you have all this potentiality in there as well that gets factored into the ad hoc decision making.

Karinya

There's a lot in there. And the quote that was referenced, and I think it must have been Chris, who suggested that some executives would much rather make a fast decision, risking it might be wrong than sitting with the pain of uncertainty. In my experience, I've seen so many executives almost the opposite, so that they push back in decision making. Why make a decision?

My observation was, why would I make a decision today when I can make it later with the chance of more certainty? And yet, in the context we were in, we were in high value capital projects over many years. And yet, an indecision had a consequence. It had a time cost. It had an optionality cost of resources, schedule or quality. And so I observed, time and time again, instead of making a decision, where possible, to delay decision making in the hope of more certainty. So to me, that was maybe a very contextual observation that was the opposite.

I can definitely see how you've connected the psychology of gut driven

decision making and experiences that allows an executive to make faster decisions, because in their experience, they have generated knowledge. They have trained their experience to contribute to decisions.

The term “pattern recognition” is onel’ve experienced consistently in investment committees, which makes me baulk a little. My previous team did many investments annually. They were lower value multi million dollar investments not multi billion dollar ones. We might do 20 of these a year. And so the term pattern recognition became, I would say, a crutch for justifying some decision making rationale when I believed it wasn’t duly analytical.

If we were to use heuristics, that is to say mental short cuts: in Daniel Kahneman’s book *Thinking Fast, Thinking Slow*, his system relies on one’s individual's ability to pull in multiple inputs without being able to articulate them distinctively, to then say yes or no (when voting for an investment), it was not a judgement or evaluation answer, just binary, yes support investment, or not. This means I feel we could be relying on our lazy system 1 decision making brain using short cuts and heuristics which are notoriously susceptible to biases.

So whilst executives may go back to their original kind of landscaping, where that quote came out, it is interesting because does that serve executives? I see a lot of executives in a corporate environment are rewarded for not doing the wrong thing, not doing the right thing. Quite a different decision. And that's, again, my observation, if you don't rock the boat, you can happily go on. And I've seen many people drop out of corporate when they look at the system and go, that is a terrible decision. You know, you can foresee value erosion, however it’s a polite response. You can see the decision will not

meet the longevity that was desired, but it felt safe at the time. And then some people leave these teams because they can’t make sense of the decision making then they anyway, so sorry, I'm going down a different pathway to the original question!

Sebastian

No, absolutely not. I think they connect wonderfully. So first off, I totally agree with you. I work mostly in the public sector, so there's this idealised version of the private sector, where decisions are being made regardless of whether they're necessarily right or wrong. But they are getting made. Someone is raising their hand: I'm making this decision, and we're moving forward. That's very different to what I'm observing in the public sector, and I think it's interesting to see you saying that in the larger corporate sector you also see this tendency towards “let's put off making a decision, for whatever reason”; either because a future decision might feel safer, or, what I often see, because we have an environment which is very harmony oriented, and we want to all make the decision together, where there's safety in numbers and all that.

And I think the problem connects in my mind to this pattern recognition thing, because, as you said, you get promoted for not rocking the boat, for not making wrong decisions. That means that your, let's say, internal algorithm of which patterns you look for is also trained on this “avoid making mistakes” type of thinking. So you prime yourself to learn those patterns that help you stay away from making this mistake, stay away from certain "courageous" decisions, and stay away from creativity and complexity and divergence.

And that then, I think, is an interesting connection to the whole technology and AI dimension. If we consider this algorithmic decision making, this pattern recognition decision making - that's what AI does, right? You have past data. You get trained on the past data. You don't get trained on what ifs. You don't

get trained on what could be. You get trained on what happened. You also don't get trained on why other things did not happen.

And so, in a way, all of this safety-trained decision making of “I know my industry, I've been here for 20 years” - that's exactly the counterpoint to scenario planning. That's the counterpoint to... what is it? It's not about the patterns you see, it's about the patterns you don't see, or the patterns you don't want to see, because they go against your safety feelings. Connecting back to your conversation with Chris: It goes against what feels right.

It pushes you towards this uncomfortable feeling of, maybe my pattern recognition from the last 20 years does not, in fact, help me for the next 20 years. What does that do to me? What does it say about my self-image? And compounding that with the threat of being challenged on these patterns by tools such as AI, and the discussion around that, for better or worse, justified or not: As an executive today, sitting there thinking, all my 20 years of experience of pattern recognition - could it be modelled by this chatbot? What's my value then? And the value then comes in thinking creatively, taking all this experience and going against the pattern that has worked, and going into that uncomfortability.

Karinya

You mentioned that artificial intelligence bases its decision making and recommendations on historical data, and some work our investment team did was look at gender and our investments. So in venture capital, only about two 2-3% of capital is allocated to female founders, which is not representative of business, customers and ideas. And when we review a range of mental short cuts (or pattern recognition) being used to judge entrepreneurs as investible, the people making the decisions are a very small subset of society with less diversity of perspective and experiences so there

are biases.

Even I, attuned and motivated to avoid biases was one of those. I realised this when we did this easy online heuristics test, I think from MIT, on unconscious bias. And I, as an advocate in the team for gender diversity, still came out as highly biased in favour of male influences (in a professional setting for decision making), like that is how inherently ingrained some of our decision making judgements are in ‘pattern recognition’. I can only imagine how invisible this hurdle is for those not attuned to the decision making biases.

And so we can only assume AI is replicating the problems of the past and amplifying them to the future given how they take in reference data and structure output. And so from a facilitation and futures perspective, if we can't include different ideas, and so we're specifically talking about the role of AI and facilitation here, if we can't extract the diverse views of society, then we're not incorporating what the future could look like, which is, frankly, just a projection of the past, which is not useful… some of us didn’t like it enough the first time!

You mentioned another point around the what ifs and the patterns that you either want to see or not to see, and when you see these patterns that you don't want to see, perhaps there's this element of disappointment. So if these are being created, then the role of facilitator, and you see these projections of the future or these scenarios, and people don't want to see them, they may recoil or physically not be involved. And so as a facilitator, you've got to maintain engagement, but the disengagement could be because of a whole range of reasons around personal agency if they see a certain outcome and

they don't have the ability to influence their role in that future.

So take democracy, some might say there's demise of democracy and there's increasing authoritarian rule, and some may respond they don't want to live in that world. So therefore, as a participant in a workshop, they don't want to engage with this future, and might check out mentally. Therefore as a facilitator, we may need to find ways to overcome questions of agency to allow participants to continue contributing.

But also, if there are elements of artificial intelligence, included in scenario development, which many of us do use, particularly if it's for quick examples, we have to be the assurance governors to test that that scenario is not just a replication of the past as that is the data the LLM is pulling from.

Sebastian

So how do you deal with that? Because we're all biased by our history, and there's value in that; this whole thinking of "those who don't learn from the past are doomed to repeat it" and all that. So there is value in looking at what some of the past developments are, how certain tendencies have been overcome or not. There is value in learning from past data.

But especially this question of people checking out, either mentally or, at some point, physically. What are your clues at the early onset? Do you see when a person starts checking out, starts distancing themselves from the process or from the scenarios? And what's your way of re-engaging them?

Karinya

There could be different reasons why a participant in scenario development disengages. The easy ones are probably where as a facilitator, I would start

with what I consider the more the hygiene factors. So, is there enough fresh air? Have they had a break? Have they had enough water, food? Is it too hot in the room; like these are really basic elements that drive productivity and engagement. I start with physiology first then psychology. You know, we're talking about the role of the body, and if the body is fatigued and doesn't have enough water or food you are not going far, right? The body is the structural architecture of mental Additionally, in my experience as an athlete the body focus is the first principle of performance so as a facilitator I'm attuned to this.

Additional reasons for disengagement can be the social dynamics, who's leading, who's being heard etc and is their procedural justice in how the group is working, as well as the justice of what becomes the output. Not all output is agreed and resentment can arise. These are in my next mental check list to why participants may not be engaged constructively, on top of the role of personal agency in the futures being explored we just discussed. Finally it could be questions about the workshop process or other aspect of the content.

Generally I try to avoid interventionary tactics as a facilitator, however if there's not enough course correction I'll take up space near the dominant speaker, or make my body language known I'm about to speak. Then to re-engage a group I have asked open questions about how they are finding the process, or focus on the topic. The classic trifecta questions of 'what have I learned, what do I love and what do I long for?' can also be used to sort through what the group needs.

It could be because the critical uncertainties that they have designed for their

scenarios are not working. If it disengages one person or more than one, we have to consider that for the user, and re-test why are we doing this again? It goes back to the Oxford approach, they're very good to drill into us, who is the user? I always ask, who's the client of the user? Because, just because you've got a user, they always have a boss and they might need something different. I find it can be almost a version of the ‘the five whys’.

Because the critical uncertainties are lending themselves to create these worlds that there's a level of spiciness or palatability that results. Josh Polchar has written about this analogy where if it is just too spicy - people don't want to taste it, so the scenario becomes not engagable and thus not useful. I suspect this connects to language where participants won’t know how to articulate this. Offering a suggestion of using spice as an analogy might be useful.

Coming back to the role of the facilitator and what we can do when people might be disengaging, we can play the role of auditor of how it’s going, or the doctor doing a health check, and testing, does this scenario (or set) serve us? And by us, I mean the group that is developing the scenario, which ultimately needs to keep the client in mind, and their purpose.

Sebastian

What do you mean by “serve us”?

Karinya

So we would never do a scenario just for the sake of creating a scenario. We only ever do scenarios to support decision making,

Sebastian

Yes?

Karinya

I am testing whether it delivers the outcome why we are developing them, does it serve our needs? And our need was driven by, you know, decision, or project. Like in my world, often it was an investment decision.
So if our scenario does not influence anything, it is, expensive futures theatre I believe I've heard it called. So when I ask, ‘does it serve us?’,

Sebastian

Yeah, interesting. If I do scenarios with people in my professional setting, it's usually people I've worked with for a while on the client side, so I'm conscious of their physical routines and needs. I know which of them will definitely need a break at, say, three, and that for some of them I will need to have this type of snack or this type of drink there. Going to the very basics. And I think there's a lot in there, even subconsciously: Having people at ease in the room when their needs are met, fresh food, fresh air, stocking up the physical basics.

I think the more challenging thing is when you reach a setting or a scenario which challenges people's self-image, either who they are as a person, or who they are professionally. And I think especially with people who've had longer times of being in a certain role. If you've been in the same company for 20, 25, 30 years, that is part of your identity, right? And imagining a future where this role or this company would not exist, or would be completely different, that must be really challenging. It goes against all the patterns you've seen, but it goes much further.

And I think the starkest thing I've seen was in an online setting, so it was more difficult to engage with individual people. Certain participants' identities were almost nullified in some of the scenarios, far beyond their professional setting: Who they felt they deeply were on the inside, their cultures, their values, yes, their professions as well, but much more. And bringing those people back into the group, especially online, when there isn't this physical way of taking up space, standing next to them, but you have to moderate digitally, and then potentially longer intervals between sessions - it's really difficult. And I have lost one or two people who just couldn't come back to the process, because it was too much, too spicy, to stay with Josh, for them to want to eat it.

Karinya

When you facilitate online, and you are not getting the feedback from your participants, or you see them disengaging, do you ever step out of the group call and have a side call with those people?

Sebastian

Luckily I haven't done the online things in a while, because I think there's a lot to the physical side of it, and to group dynamics, locking yourself in for an extended amount of time. When I don't know the person well, I think it's a much bigger barrier to step over and reach out to that person, because it can come off as intrusive, somewhat strange: You feel you're being invalidated on some level by this process, and then the person representing that process, in a way, speaks to you directly, outside of the almost safe space of the group, where you can disappear. One on one, that is not possible.

So sometimes I haven't done that, even though probably, in the long term, it's better to directly engage with that person. But usually, as I said, in many

cases I know the people, and it's not that difficult to just reach out, because we already have a foundation with each other.

Karinya

This reminds me of a similar experience having to engage with a subset of people to a core meeting. I was in a board meeting, and we wanted to establish in-camera sessions without management. At first it felt a bit imposing to say, we're having a session without half of the participants, so please dial out. And what we found was, by making it structurally built in, and expected, mostly without an agenda so not a targeted assessment of management, it wasn't an imposition if it was needed and management weren't concerned when it was used. If we had monthly meetings, we would schedule an in-camera session once a quarter. We didn't have an agenda, but it's there if we need it, that helped reduce that pressure, particularly on people that we didn't know so well.

In this particular board we didn't know each other very well. And then, and I'm thinking from a facilitatory perspective here in the futures space we often end up with new contributors I can imagine facilitating futures if we needed to have the space to have separate discussions, particularly in an online setting, that having the expectation there that the facilitator might pull you into a 'side bar' call is normal to manage feelings of being targeted or missing out.
In the Oxford Scenarios Programme, I actually made a point to offer each individual a chat with every single person in my group to give them feedback, one positive and one constructive, however they had to opt in. And so the positive, you know, it could be either about the content or about the process.

I tend to focus on the process, and then the constructive again, it was very

diplomatically shared and carefully wrapped as a consideration to help the process in future. Fortunately this was face to face so it’s easier to establish the opportunity whereas online I think as facilitators we may need to plan to build out opportunities such as side calls beyond the primary call to have the opportunity for more personal communication.

I think you point, you bring up a point around when you don't know people. And this can be quite a revealing experience, because again, most people who are involved in futures, I think we spoke about this prior, they are there because they are an expert in their area, and no one's an expert in the future per se, unless you consider us who are familiar facilitating an exploration of the future, so it’s often uncomfortable.

So there's two questions here. One is the role of imagination and creativity, and the second is as facilitators providing early guidance.

As facilitators who influence the workshop design, do we need to design an inclusion for participants who have creativity, imagination and have innovative capabilities?

And secondly, is it beneficial to forewarn the group about the emotional curve often experienced, for example they might themselves be grieving a future that is no longer visible and you hope it would, or you're grieving an outcome that could happen that you don't want to happen. Does it help or hinder by giving the participants that heads up that?

So two topics here. So one's about, as a facilitator, do we give them a heads up around the emotional roller coaster or not?

Sebastian

Yeah, I tend to do it now, especially in my teaching at university, where we have a very specific setting. It's a weekend, and I know more or less at which point during the weekend most of the students will hit the low, and I have had good experience with telling them that, telling them: We go through this whole process, and around this spot is where you will feel most uncertain. You will feel most insecure. You will feel, where is this going at all? And I do stress the "trust the process" thing, and there's a clear separation between day one and day two, because on day one they build a lot of things, and on day two they bring all of that together. So day one is the hard working part, and day two is the fun, creative part, and I tend to frame it that way with them.

However, I'm aware I might trigger these framings in them by giving them those expectations. But my experience is, they feel more secure in the insecurity when they can prepare for feeling uncertain and frustrated; it's easier for them to embrace that frustration if they have been told to expect it.

Karinya

Yes, I like that. They feel secure in the insecurity knowing it's coming.

Sebastian

That has at least been my experience. How about you?

Karinya

I do the same at Oxford. I am very aware actually, I give them the heads up. And at Oxford given the structure of the week you can pinpoint the session where the participants will be low, confused, frustrated or anxious and then they have to trust the process. So I do find that helpful, allowing them to prepare. Also it helps to lean on what I think's the strongest trait in humanity, and that's hope. So if you give them hope that the process will

manifest an outcome that they desire - they'll hang in there. Whereas, if you don't give them enough hope of a positive outcome of a positive learning journey, then I think that you know it can be pretty hard.

Sebastian

You also somehow take pressure off them, right? Because if they feel frustrated at some point, and you've announced it, it's easier to see this as part of the process rather than as individual shortcomings, so you can externalise it much more easily.

Karinya

Yes, I like that, yes. And that's part of the language around futures that Chris and I spoke about. How did we describe this as a facilitator? We own the weight of the outcome, not the content, but the process. So you own the stress of supporting a group to birth their child like the midwife metaphor. So whereas the midwife doesn't take the baby home, the facilitator doesn't keep the content but it is our role to hold the space, provide guidance and make the process as effective and efficient as possible.

Coming back to design as a facilitator, I've often been involved in the design, as well as the delivery, I mean the facilitation of getting to those important insights is important to be part of the design so being part of those early stages are incredibly useful.

And I was thinking about how when we're talking about the body, we need a degree of self awareness, which helps to create a new perspective. And it's the different perspectives that we really value in exploring futures. So who might we consider to include in these creations that are self aware and have different perspectives that relate to physicality.

And I went down a bit of a rabbit hole of exploring imagination versus creativity because, you know, we are in the business of imagining the future. And if I were to say imagination is about the blue ocean creation of new concepts, what if you're dreaming and you're visualizing and you're really creating these images and thoughts, and then the creativity is designing how can these be designed into a scenario?

You know, you're creating the concept, these new ideas, and then, usually not so much in the workshop, but later on is where the innovation lands. How does imagination, creativity become valuable in this future? And it got me thinking about the selection of people who attend these workshops, because this is such a critical element, how it ties into the physical sense, a little bit less so. But I guess it's because these creative, imaginative types may have a more innately somatic experience, and it’s this connection with how the world is or could be viewed is what we could tap into further.

And that led me to just, if you'll allow me share one example of neurodiversity, called hyper fantasia. So from my very brief studies today, it’s a higher than average intensity of an experience, so where reality can be expressed in really vivid imagery internally, and it's often lends people to go down more creative pathways, and the opposite is people who just, they have no mental imagery, they just, they can’t see any images in their minds.

It made me think about the role of neurodiversity in how facilitators design the inclusion of different perspectives and creating futures, because you want these really amazingly special people who can convert imagination into reality, and this is why sci-fi has an interesting role in the future. So I guess I

put to you what are your thoughts on as a facilitator, the participant selection to create really interesting scenarios?

Sebastian

Yeah, first of all, I think this dimension of neurodiversity is incredibly valuable here, because it makes the connection to creativity, to disruptive thinking, and to the physicality on the neurological level. So I am very glad you introduced this here.

The selection, I think, is so crucial. Because in practical terms, how much agency do we as facilitators have in creating a wish list of the type of people we want to have in there? Ideally, depending on the type of setting you're in and the purpose, you want to have a wide selection of people, right? If scenarios are about the context of the context, everyone has a stake in it. So ideally, even, or maybe especially, in corporate settings, you would want to have some people from NGOs, from maybe rival businesses. I know that's practically difficult, but ideally you would want to have people who disagree.

You will want to have as many divergent opinions in the room as possible. You would want to have the cleaning lady from across the street, maybe the homeless man you walk past on your way to work, maybe a few kindergarten children, and what their perspectives are. I'm very much in favour of this, of what sometimes feels like a hyper-pluralistic approach, ideally. Because I think if we are in this context of the context setting, then the more voices, and the more divergent voices, the better.

And my experience is that breaking out of your individual perspective is especially difficult in corporate settings, with the "I've worked here for 30 years, I know everything" type of people, who extrapolate, and who might not be as capable of breaking out of that as others. And I think it's incredibly

valuable to have people with a neurodiverse mindset, and to have that broader in there, as well as people who feel counterintuitive at points.

However, how does that turn out practically? I've never had a session where I could really live that. We tend to invite people the client thinks are important. We tend to invite people who will have to be part of the process later on, to counter the whole “not developed here” thing. So many practical considerations, plus size, resources, that at least what I'm seeing is, unfortunately, that scenario workshops are almost always far less plural in mind and perspective than they should be. What do you think?

Karinya

I agree with you entirely. I've had to advocate in technical futures workshops to have attendance of non technical representation and had to really advocate for it, because I suspected it was important to the reason they were diving in futures to start with.

And one of the insights that came out was, this is not a technical problem, this is a geopolitical problem, which I didn't know the answer to, but I knew it had a material component, and so the client realized at the end, they don't need a technical button to push to enable their technical outcome but an understanding of geopolitical signals.

But with that overlapping topic, what I haven't considered is that neuro divergency contribution, and I think that's because, as an attribution or as a we don't attribute person is like, even amongst my peers or my team, I wouldn't necessarily know who's who's a visual learner versus who prefers audio to input to learn. So even that amongst people I know I probably wouldn't get the value, whereas reading about this, this type of visual

representation of the world, the hyper fantasia, which is a really creative engagement with reality that could have an incredibly high value in scenario making, because we're trying to come up with those creative, long term futures, but based on the signals today, again, it's not science fiction, and maybe that sits more In the communication element of it, maybe no the development of the scenarios. How do we cascade this? How do we make it known to the organization or the people that have to decide it?

Sebastian

I don't know. Yes, I can see the practical aspects of it, but to my mind, what we're getting at here from different angles is this question of immersion, right? How do we make the scenarios immersive, be it via the audio or the visual or whatever? How do we get people to inhabit that potential future? How do we get participants to envisage themselves in that setting, in that future setting, and what helps them, and who can help us create this? But also, how do we then use that to help everyone, not just the hyperphantasia people, but everyone, to engage with that future in a challenging way?

And I think there we have a lot of overlaps with the design aspect. There are future designers who say: Okay, let's design tools from the future. Let's design things that help us have these futures, these scenarios, come alive, so we can have something haptic, something around the physicality of things. It's a different thing to discuss that there will be a device which will allow you to call everyone on the planet and engage with them, than to have a smartphone in your hand and see: What does this do with me?

So I think there's a lot of value in this. And to go a little bit more back to the neurodiversity aspect: There's this discussion coming up, especially in the context of AI, where organisational scholars are now thinking, okay, the mainstream thinking, AI can do; but this breakout thinking, that's something

AI can't do. Maybe not yet, maybe not ever, who knows. But there's a lot of talk, at least I'm seeing this, around creative and divergent thinking, which has to come primarily from people who are more attuned to this.

I don't know how you would define neurodiversity in this framing, but there's certainly this argument, and I think it holds true for scenarios as well, that you need to think outside of the scope of the extrapolation in order to deliver the most value for immersion, or for assumption challenging.

Karinya

I agree that the role of AI may or may not be effective for the communicative elements of scenario engagement, and I haven't seen it done yet with real heart.

I originally was thinking from a facilitator perspective, however the role of AI does extend into other domains of expertise. So if I take a step back and go, “What type of skills, not subject matter expertise, are required for scenario development?” - it's about the mix of skills required to build scenarios.
One hypothesis a colleague described to me was there are three types of core skills required in a scenarios team. The designers of the workshop who identify and blend the expert participants, where and how the workshop will unfold and be facilitated, the deep thinkers who can bring the common connections and systems thinking to life and often are subject matter experts highlighting critical uncertainties and their connections, and finally the impactful group who are skilled at communicating and bringing the future stories to life.

In my corporate experience I so often see a version of PowerPoint, but I love seeing other methods to, you know, display, communicate and express the

future. So if I think, if I use those three archetypes, that's what I have as a facilitator. Often, when I, when I'm seeing participants, I'm like trying to categorize them into one of these three characters. And often I don't tend to have a good representation of the storyteller in the workshop, because it's the content that is the focus but the storyteller, which, in my mind, is where, perhaps that's more of the communicator of this neuro divergency of imagination, of what that future could hold would sit? Maybe that's where originally I thought, but I see your point. It's really critical to have that type of perspective in the creation as well, because it allows everyone else who has that subject matter expertise, whether they're the philosopher or, you know, maybe more of an architect, because that's that's the value of brainstorming, of having everyone bounce ideas off each other, but that's from my experience, the storyteller and that communicator invovlement tends to be back loaded in the process.

Sebastian

Yeah, I see that that is often happening, but I think that's too easy thinking. The thinking is: The scenario building is the hard part, and then getting people to engage with that is just sharing the good gospel of what we have developed here, in our braininess. And I don't think that holds. I think that's along the same lines as this idea of who's the user. Because if you know who the user is, the same dynamic applies: How do we tell the user? How do we engage the user? I think that's intricately connected with the question of how they want to use it.

And in the courses I teach, at least, I push them very heavily towards storytelling in the end, because I think that's one of the most underutilised ways. As you said, we do end up at either a PowerPoint or a 20 page document, sometimes both, so I push them towards exploring some of the

other things: writing an epic poem, creating a video collage, doing all of these things to engage people.

And they work. We had people there who presented poems, who wrote songs about the situation, and they engaged people, sometimes too much, because people started crying in class, because they were so emotionally engaged with these futures, they could so see themselves in those futures, got really immersed in them, and got challenged by that on a very fundamental level.

And I'm not saying the target is to make people cry, but the target is to make people engage with the scenarios, and to, let's say, think them through intellectually and emotionally, with your brain and your gut. And regardless of where your decision gets made, both of these things need to be engaged for the assumption challenging to take place. And I think storytelling is a very powerful way of doing this, especially for addressing the gut decision making part.

Karinya

In this example my attention is caught by your reference to the receiver, of someone in class who has cried because they had an emotional response to a song about the future. I wonder where in our physiology whether it's meant the brain or the rest of the body, where we receive that type of narrative or experience, and do certain parts of the body respond better to, I guess, that future? So does fiction based narrative, or song or visual prompts tap into, where in the brain we more likely will be receptive to think about the future? And is there a shortcut, or a stronger neural pathway between the receptors that take in that input to where we process and do that from a physiological perspective, is there something there to help us communicate those scenarios better?

Sebastian

Yeah, I think there are probably neuroscience answers better equipped than mine here, but my framing would be that what helps us is basically empathy, right? It's us empathising with the people we generate in that future, the people we see living in that future. And can we see ourselves in them? Seeing us in the other, or in this setting maybe more, seeing us in the potential other, in the potential future, in the potential person; either us in those futures, or people like us in any future. And I think that's something that resonates with people on a deeper level than just, oh, our revenue streams will be different.

Karinya

That's really interesting. I like that, being able to highlight the similarities of the receiver or the audience and making sure they're reflected. I think that's a really crucial ingredient of just futures communication.

Sebastian

Yes, I think so. I think it ultimately comes down to, and this might sound a bit cheesy, appealing to their humanity, to the human universal things. Because on so many things we're all pretty similar, across cultural boundaries, across all of these “differentiators”. Yes, there are a lot of differences, some physical, some mental, some cultural, but in so many more ways we are very similar - if not the same.

And appealing to that, and seeing that and bringing that out in scenarios: Wow we are similar to each other, and how we have been similar to each other in the past, how common we are in so many fundamental ways to people 100 or 1000 years ago, might make it easier to see how we are similar

to people in 100 years, or in 20 years, with the bodies that we inherit, the children that we have or don't, and the parents that we have or don't, and all of these things.

Karinya

So mentioning the commonalities across cultures, a topic Chris and I explored was language.

Sebastian

Yeah.

Karinya

So this was a big one for us, in essence, talking about, do we have enough language and we're conversing in English, and you're our key contributor for alternate languages here! As a facilitator I don’t feel I have enough language to talk about futures, and when I talk about facilitating futures, I use a lot of sensory descriptions. I talk about anxiety, and I feel it in my stomach and fatigue and the level of physical elements are often in my introduction in my first initial engagement, so I lend to the physicality of it.

But from a language and articulation perspective, Chris and I explored how we didn't feel we necessarily had enough language. And maybe that's what it's hypothesized that, because we don't talk about it, in a sense, we haven't developed the language. Just as Eskimos have 30 or 50 words for snow and the different types of snow, because that's their entire world, we have yet to engage with futures enough to create the language around it, and as a facilitator, this might be helpful, I am curious around your experience with language and futures?

Sebastian

I mean, being the only non-native English speaker here, obviously I have to now use my role and bring in a non-English quote from Wittgenstein, almost a commonplace: "Die Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt." Which is what I was thinking about when I read this, and which roughly translates as, the limits of my language mean the limits of my world. Meaning, we can only conceptualise what we have words for. I think he may have gone a bit far there, but it's a good starting point, because we can conceptualise things, or feel things, that we don't necessarily have words for. A child that is born can feel hunger without necessarily having the ability to speak the word hunger, or to express the concept logically.

So I do think we do have things that we don't have words for, and we can trigger those things. And I would go back to what I said earlier about speaking about the future from today. Because at the end of the day, if you develop a vocabulary for talking about the future: The purpose of language is to communicate as broadly as you can, right? And if you then have a specific language around futures that you first basically need to teach your participants in order for them to make sense of it, that's the opposite of bringing people in. That's creating a specialist language that only the indoctrinated can use. I would go in exactly the opposite direction.

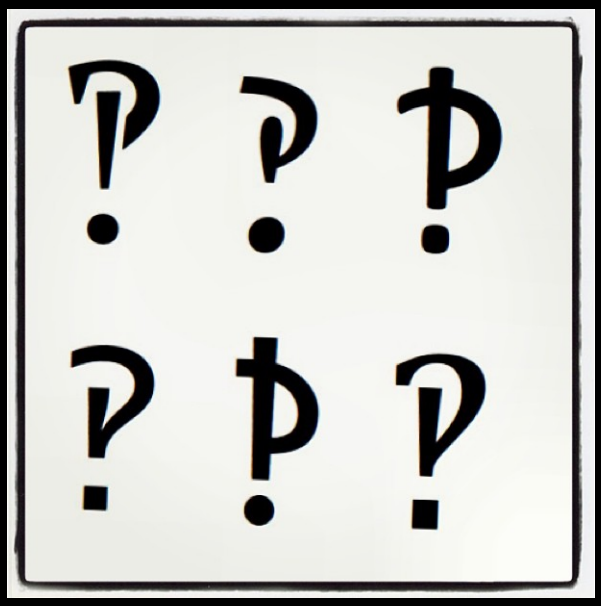
I mean, yes, new concepts are valuable, but I would think that what's really important is pushing the future to today, for the people today, building on the commonalities. And something like hunger for an individual was probably very similar 1000 years ago, and will probably be very similar as a feeling in 200 years. And I would start by building on those things that are universal, also because it helps both on language and on immersiveness, for people to see themselves, to understand what it would feel like to be in that future.

And I think with a new language, or with more explorative language around this, it would help us as facilitators, probably, but we would definitely then have to translate: What does that mean for the participants? How does that feel to the participants? It's not their role to then dive into that language. It's their role to collectively imagine alternative futures, plausible futures. Does that make sense?

Karinya

Absolutely, and I think you're very right to democratize the contribution to futures, to not make it exclusive with new language. And I think perhaps where we're circling around, how can we communicate that future better? And I think you've highlighted, if you were to use a Venn diagram of what's the same today versus the future. So what are the universal principles that we hope to expect to be the same, hunger, pain, grief, love, what have you then that might help be the bridge. But then there might be, you know, the use of metaphors and other comparative techniques that enable us to compare and contrast that we need, that we need to help create real world distance between today and the future, and maybe there's an example from the past that we can use to provide that but no, it does make sense.

Sebastian interviews Matt



Sebastian Interviews Matt

Sebastian

Vince Lombardi might be a good starting point to bridge into the physicality of things: "Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing." What I wanted to talk about, because so far it's the thread that connects the previous conversations, is obviously very much the sports thing.

I think the biggest shift in the last conversation was this discussion on language. The first conversation started from the point that we need new vocabulary for describing the future, language around people, facilitation, bringing people in, creating new pockets of meaning; and the second was more on how decisions get made, when they do get made, where in the body: basically at this dualism between the brain and the gut, with often one catching up to the other. At least that was my take on it. I think those are the things that stood out to me most from last time. But what's more interesting to me is: How did you read these things, what did you take away from them?

Matt

For me, what was interesting is that we explicitly set out to think about foresight, facilitation, the body — and the elastic pull is so strong that it drags us back towards language!

It's so hard to stay in the body, as opposed to being in this kind of skin of terminology which sits on top of the more immediate, the sensory, the thing that can't easily be named. We set out to talk about the body and end up having a conversation about naming things!

It left me thinking about my experiences as a horse rider particularly, and riding as a non-linguistic form of communication which does involve the body.

Also, just before this recording began, you were telling me that you were reading Vince Lombardi's biography... The only reason I know him is because as a teenager I was super into punk for a while, and in *Rock 'n' Roll High School* — which is like the Ramones' punk version of *Grease* — they go to Vince Lombardi High, and the motto over the door is "winning isn't everything, it's the only thing." So, how did you get to Vince Lombardi, and what do you get out of him?

Sebastian

Well, so, the embarrassing answer is, I was on a train recently, thinking about sports and preparing for our exchanges, and for some reason this late 90s movie *Any Given Sunday* pops into my head, and I start watching the trailer again on the train, and it also starts with a Lombardi quote on winning:

"I firmly believe that any man's finest hour, the greatest fulfillment of all that he holds dear, is that moment when he has worked his heart out in a good cause and lies exhausted on the field of battle - victorious."

I knew nothing about him besides that, basically.

I thought it would be interesting to get out of my comfort zone, look at sports in a sense, and the physicality of things, plus an interesting span of US history through him, and the immigrant experience, and, at least the way it's described in the book - David Maraniss' *When Pride Still Mattered* - how important it was for him to be Italian and Catholic in this setting, striving for autonomy and playing the game how he thought it should be played. And that's how I ended up looking into this. And I think there is something interesting there.

Matt

Right.

Sebastian

Coming from a martial arts-centred experience in sports, the team dynamic sports perspective is quite alien to me. I'm trying to capture it for myself, or to start thinking about some comparison: A team somehow needs to function as a version of a body, right? It needs to be sensing others, executing; whereas, for example, in judo, in randori, you can't necessarily see something, you have to feel, you have to trust mostly your other senses and your experience and "feeling".

Matt

Good.

Sebastian

This seems to be an almost Hobbesian idea of a multitude of bodies and how they may connect.

Matt

I think of the psychodynamic tradition of studying group relations — which feeds into the Oxford scenario planning approach via the work of Eric Trist and his influence. One of the things I noticed training in that tradition — studying alongside people who were working as therapists, and being trained on this stuff by a health service — was this notion that you could treat a group as a single entity, and then the members are effectively organs of that single entity, or aspects of it. And the way you're then recruited to kind of play a part in that.

So that's what comes to mind for me when you're talking about the team element of American football. But the thing I was thinking about throughout — when I realized that you and I were going to have a conversation like this — is: is your sport, or your sports, being martial arts, it is not just about competition but combat. And somebody saying "winning isn't everything, it's the only thing" — it's kind of an either/or in those kinds of arenas.

My day job is like being a midwife of ideas, and my sporting activities tend to be quite exploratory rather than competitive — I'm quite happy galloping a horse up the side of a mountain and thinking "this is a bit of a challenge", but that combat element actually really fascinates me, because it’s not a big part of anything I do. Like all well-rounded human beings every now and then, even gentle old me has those moments where you feel like, I'm spoiling for a fight, I feel I'd like to fight and win. But I wondered what part combat plays in your relationship to the body.

Sebastian

Yeah, I think that relationship evolved over time, probably mostly with my ageing. Because, especially when I was younger, I think the combat element was much more predominant in setting very demanding levels in my mind: sometimes not giving up for the sake of not giving up, and sometimes the costs that come with that.

But this idea of martial arts, depending on the martial art you go to, what aspects come up: I find there's a fascinating spectrum to be unpacked. I was definitely more on the sport side, and less on the side of going to walk around at night looking for some punks to beat up. But then again, I remember that some trainers or trainees in some of the training settings I explored were those kinds of people, who would be going outside and deliberately looking

for trouble. You tend to find more of these in some martial arts than others, it has been my experience; but almost always there is someone like that. I was very lucky to be training mainly somewhere where there was nothing or next to nothing of that. So there's a spectrum of people, some going more for the physical side, or the sporty side, versus going more for the martial violence side.

There's an interesting book, *Meditations on Violence* by Rory Miller, where the author unpacks that tension between martial arts training and actual violence in the real world outside the dojo. And I think it's a very interesting read, to get into this idea between, okay, are we practising in order to defend ourselves, or are we practising in order that we think we can defend ourselves: the confidence that comes from training, without ever actually having to fight, and then literally going out into any sorts of settings without actually testing whether you can really do what you think you can. And there are sports within the martial arts spectrum which are more towards one side of this than the other.

But for me, I think especially now, I'm more interested in the mindset that comes with these things, the art in martial arts, and the relationship there, what kind of physical education does what to your mentality. And in psychology, to the best of my knowledge, the catharsis hypothesis has largely been debunked (think, for example, of Brad Bushman’s work), but still there is a lingering idea that if you can live out certain aspects of yourself in one way, that will preclude you from acting them out elsewhere. In that sense, fighting randori would make you less violent in real life. I think there is something there.

And I wrote to you earlier about this idea of martial arts, and there is this judo idea of this type of physical education being actually proposed as a way of

making societies healthier, Jita Kyōei: a clear normative aspect there. I'm wondering whether this might bridge to the question of doing normative scenarios. Or is it that we start with sports, thinking this is what people should do, do it in this particular way because then the whole of society is going to be healthier? Or should we just look at what is the actual function we can see here, what are we using it for? Is the normative aspect here valuable, or not?

Matt

When I think about the normative aspect of scenarios, there's two things.

One is the way the term is actually used to mean the expression of a kind of desired future. The other aspect is the idea of, you know, what norms and rules are in place.

There's a bit of a vogue at the moment — like Cynthia Selin's work in *MIT Sloan Management Review* (rest in peace, that journal) —saying, “You know, actually we don't think enough about the certainties and the constraints, as well as the uncertainties.” But I don’t have that feeling in my client work, or the classroom, or when I’m doing research!

I remember being allowed only one slide to describe strategic foresight to a gathering, and I had a chessboard on one side of the slide and an interrobang on the other — which is the punctuation mark which combines a question mark and an exclamation mark.

I said, the problem with chess is we know the rules, we know the end state we're looking for, we know what the pieces can do, we know their roles and identity. And that's why computers are good at it. They can play out all the permutations.

What we need to do is get further over to where the interrobang is. It's this rarely used punctuation mark meaning "what — even — are you serious?" It's

like an expression of incredulity. And I think that’s the place where foresight has to forage.

At the same time, thinking about norms and rules, it really made me laugh when you said about, you know, well, there's a certain kind of martial artist who wants to go and beat up punks at night — because in my 20s I had a big dyed mohawk, spent plenty of time in the mosh pit, and would have made perfect fodder for this punk-bashing fantasies!

I wouldn’t have considered a contact sport, yet I have very vivid memories of the camaraderie of being in the mosh pit, and being hit very, very hard — like my eyes swelling over the next day and not being able to open them and everything — but by someone who would punch me in the face and then immediately help me up. And genuinely picking up some injuries that in one's youth and one's exuberance you enjoy perversely, and which your body recovers from, thankfully quickly.

We should acknowledge also a gendered aspect to that, a racialised aspect to that sometimes, young white men playfully beating up young white men in kind of safety, so to speak, and with social license that is not accorded to all.

But I also remember that there was already an awareness of this emerging, around permissions and bodies, because within the hardcore punk scene, there were these all-ages shows, where you could go from 14 and up, and there's no drinking.

And I remember very vividly that whereas my peer group would be happily walloping each other and beating the heck out of one another, we were also working really hard to avoid either injuring or having inappropriate contact with these kids who had decided to make their way into the front of the gig. And so even then in my kind of merry dumbness of youth, already having this emerging awareness of who gets to do what to whom and in what context,

and how one needs to be sensitive to that. I've always been a little bit drawn towards that wayward non-normative side anyway, I felt so at home in the mosh pit. That always sat weirdly with the fact that I also have this capacity for care — that I was a kindergarten teacher, which is as big a part of my professional development as anything else I've ever done. I think that tension is useful.

But then, when I think about it, being a kindergarten teacher, one encounters an awful lot of violence and physicality, because kids bring their whole emotions to the learning process. They can't really regulate, even to sit on a carpet for 10 minutes at a time necessarily. And I worked in really challenging schools. So, I did have, for example, a little boy in my class who had been kicked out of a previous school age four or five, and he knew he could hurt an adult by kicking you under the kneecap or bending your fingers back as hard as he could. And if you hadn't had what was called positive handling training, you couldn't physically restrain him. So, all you could do is say "stop it." Or "I don't like it."

Well, this kid was doing a very good job of injuring you. And so then you need to actually learn how to work with that. For me, it was one of the reasons I was drawn to this job: every part of yourself was involved, and you had this immense responsibility to tiny human beings who were also bringing their whole selves to the party, because they didn't know what else to do.

Years later, I read a very good book called *Scaling Force*, which is actually intended for law enforcement officials, and prison guards, and people in such worlds. It’s basically a book on techniques to use in these situations of physical confrontation. The entire first half of the book doesn't involve physical contact with anyone. It's about avoiding having to do anything to anyone. Only in the back half does it remotely get into anything that involves

using force against anyone.

But the thing that really stuck with me is: there's a moment where a very athletic prison guard says, "I train super hard, partly so that the people who it's my job to keep order with are in awe of me." And he gives this example: in prisons, you have these internal metal staircases often, in these very large halls that are two or three stories tall.

He said, "One time I was talking to a guy on the ground floor, and then I just went and climbed the metal railings to go up to the third floor, instead of taking the stairs. And I could see it freaked this guy out, that I could climb like Spider-Man. And I just knew I'd never have any trouble from this guy, because he'd never quite be sure what I was physically capable of. And that's much more entertaining for me and him both than actually getting into a confrontation."

So, I think that use of surprise and expectation, that sense of play, and various different hats we wear, sort of all combined in one. I mean, you are also somebody who wears multiple hats and roles at once. I wonder where you see these points of overlap.

Sebastian

What I think is interesting is the connection to the care aspect. I've probably seen more care of people towards each other in mosh pits than on some martial arts mats. Not my primary dojo, where care of the other was a core concept, but schools which focused more on competition. I remember at one of the concerts I went to in my youth, very much enjoying it, very physical mosh pit, always a little bit of looking around, taking care of each other, which is amazing. And I can't say the same automatically for every training environment I have been in, where people are much more focused on themselves, and probably more hurting takes place.

In many martial arts, care for your training partner is ingrained in the theory of that sport: actual sportsmanship. But it is not explicitly mentioned or written down somewhere when you go into a mosh pit. It just works.

Matt

The facilitation question here, I think, is the peril of the bureaucratisation of psychological safety versus sincere mutual care and recognition. This is something I'm always trying to work with as a facilitator: trying to tell the attendees, we're all taking responsibility here for one another, especially because we are going to go to provocative territory. We have to think about the impacts of what we're going to say.

I almost think it's on a case-by-case basis, that each gathering of people who decide to talk about an uncertain situation have to figure out what it means for them to treat one another respectfully, and yet accept challenges. It really bothers me though to hear that the martial arts community is less gracious to one another than the mosh pit.

Sebastian

It depends on the training ground, but on average I would say it's often less of a given than one would think or like. But again, it depends on the sport and the school. What I was thinking of is this idea of the book being only half about actual physical confrontation. I think that's something that's often, at least in more thoughtful martial arts conversation, very much on brand.

So there are two angles to it, I think. One is this angle of learning to fight in order not to have to fight. The other one is more mystic. There's a story, which I think is from Iaidō, the art of drawing your sword, of two sword masters standing in front of each other for hours, both refusing to draw their

swords, not because drawing your sword means you're being unethical, but because whatever you do, the first mover will make a mistake that the second mover can then capitalise on. No one wants to be the first person, the one who's making the mistake.

Matt

Right.

Sebastian

So, in order to exploit, one has to draw. But there is a second mover advantage. So no one draws, which is the preferred result: no fight. But in some ways, this is counterintuitive. And that also fits with the facilitation, right? Something that you don't expect, something similar to when you go into a scenario setting and try to explain to people that scenarios are not about the future.

Matt

Yeah, there's so much to get into there: the notion of being useful and acting in the world, but also the idea of not drawing the sword because you're going to come off worse, because you'll make a mistake and the other will exploit it.

It comes back to this concern with conflict and competition and combat, which has already arisen, which always sits really ugly with me, because I genuinely think I'm an explorer first, and a kind of midwife when I'm in a facilitation role.

Yet I think one of the times when the body just kicks in for me, where it is really preverbal, is exactly when it's almost like the worst of me, or the weaker aspects, or the more negative aspects come up. I remember working with two other practitioners in training, and we were taking turns as to who was the client, and then the other two would kind of practice various

techniques with that client.

We rotated to a certain moment where one person was the client, and I just felt really sure of myself at the end of this course, where I'd really gotten on top of everything, and I gave what I thought was a really good intervention. And then I could just see that the client preferred what the other person did. And the other person was an MD. And the client said to that guy, "Thank you for being a good doctor." And there was just this moment of this little green beast of envy in me, of wanting to be the best and wanting to come before the other guy and get the gold medal and everything.

I genuinely hadn't seen it coming. It sounds obvious when I tell the story, but in the moment, I was totally focused on using the technique with the client, and as the little intervention ended, I thought, "Yeah, not bad." And then just this pouting inner child lets themselves be known, as a gut feeling. I think maybe one of the hardest things for facilitation is recognising that one's own distasteful or counterproductive aspects are in play in the room. Even the things that can make you feel good, that can make you feel like a really slick professional, can actually be these demons that you have to find a way to be mindful of, without that awareness paralysing you.

Do you have moments where you freeze and you have to unstick yourself?

Sebastian

I rarely have it that I freeze. It's more that I fight against myself when problematic situations arise: deciding whether this is something I allow "for myself" and/or for the group. Whether, if something is there, something needs to be done by or for the group. But at the same time, the question then is: Am I potentially projecting onto other members of the group that they must be uncomfortable with something because it sits so wrongly with me? Is that challenging my assumptions so strongly that it is making me uncomfortable,

but not my students, who have totally different associations towards this?

I facilitate in different settings, so my approach will depend on the specific setting. Say, in an academic setting, scenarios bring out things, topics, aspects, potential futures, plausible futures that make us uncomfortable. And am I then using my role as an excuse to stop certain things because they are challenging me, or am I genuinely doing it to protect my students from something? This also always sits at the edge of academic freedom for me. And so, I rely more on gut in letting things emerge, up to a point. I think that's more where I have to fight with myself.

Matt

I like this idea of fighting with oneself, and I think we might come back to that. One of the things that strikes me when you talk about academic settings is that in some ways there are almost two kinds of scholars. The ones who are genuinely exploring, and ones who are equally valuable but are more like polemicists. They have the message and they're broadcasting it in a particular way. And those have been incredibly useful sometimes. I think they open my thinking in all kinds of ways, including ways they didn't intend.

I really, as a teenager, reading Germaine Greer, got so much out of that — where I wouldn't hold some of Greer's positions that she has today, but I got to positions different from the ones she currently holds thanks to her writing. She opened a doorway, I stepped through but went a different direction, yet still it was her polemic that opened the door.

So to me, while I see the value of the polemicist-preacher-broadcasters, I think this question of exploring is the real good stuff. Just to put great thinkers alongside one another, I have to quote William Shatner, who is an

avid horse rider, and, in one of his reflections on horse riding he says, "Anytime you get on a horse and you think you know what you're doing, very shortly the horse is going to tell you that you don't know what you're doing."

For me that relational quality to riding is really useful, and challenging, and rewarding. It’s empathy which will take you a lot of the way with a horse. I have a good relationship with this really bad tempered mare that kicks everyone but not me. She doesn't like me, but she doesn't kick me, and that's as good as it gets with her. I'm really just communicating through my weight and the reins and the stirrups, and yet we have this relationship.

But every time I'm driving to the stables to ride a horse, I'm mentally trying to put my bad mood elsewhere, or — or do something with my personality, to recalibrate it, so that I'm not asking for trouble with the horse. I'm not bringing something in that's going to bother the horse, because they're so sensitive.

Sometimes while riding, I've had a stray passing thought about something that's annoyed me at work while I'm on the horse's back, even after an hour in the saddle, and the horse has immediately done something in response and I go, "Oh my god, this is communicating some way through my body, and I thought that was entirely internal dialogue. I thought that was a line of dialogue in my head, and the horse felt it." So, I think this idea of the fight with oneself — which again doesn't have to necessarily be like a brawl in a western, it can be some other kind of conflict — I think that's really interesting.

Sebastian

Yeah, in some ways it brings us back to language, because we have

incorporated many of the internal battles, or verbal battles, with martial arts. There is the term "mental judo" or "mental jiu-jitsu"; there seems to be a language-level connection of martial artistry and communications.

But also this element of internality, for example in Chinese martial arts, between the outer styles (waijia), which tend to be more physically oriented, and the inner styles (neijia), which tend to be geared more towards inner strength. Both have value on their own, but there is also an overlap, of course. And the internal struggle manifesting itself outwardly, or being dealt with inwardly but with some outside physical manifestations, and body language, not in the traditional sense but in the sense of speaking out with our bodies, and through the action working through it: certainly connected to what you were saying about the internal dialogue ending up being a conversation with the horse.

Matt

We come to these questions of domination and power, including the idea that somehow, internally, there is one bit of you which is meant to kind of dominate the other bit of you and keep it in check. And of course, in both our consciousness and how we behave in groups, often it's a little more complicated than that.

I once saw another, equally good, facilitator running an online session and saying, "Everyone, put your thought in the chat but don't hit return until I say so — every comment appears simultaneously, so there's no first mover advantage." Talk about drawing your sword first!

But I prefer to just hold a bit of silence, find out what the group wants to say, and who might choose to speak, on behalf of themselves or even on behalf of the group - that could be consciously or unconsciously. This brings out

dynamics such as whether a particular figure tends to be the one who goes first, or overtalks the other…A part of me would rather surface the disharmonious relationships, or the disharmonious aspects or dynamics, and bring the power and the rough edges into the conversation a little bit, so we can work with it.

I think there's great benefit in working with the things that one might perceive as distasteful - which might also only be *culturally* perceived as being distasteful; for example, that some cultures are more tolerant of vociferous argument than others. As long as you're attuned to what's going on, and attentive - so that you don't have the male voices drowning out the female or non-binary voices, or one ethnic group speaks over another - then you can pick up a lot if you allow the dynamics to emerge instead of trying to short circuit them or work around them.

Sebastian

I think that's a very interesting point, and I would agree; that is probably closer to my thinking, that it's good not to pretend that imbalances aren't there. Since you brought up the online facilitation experience, and we also talked about that in the previous conversation: What's your experience with online versus offline facilitation? Online brings certain advantages but many challenges. What is your perspective on this physical side of facilitation: of being physically in a room, of using physical post-its, seeing each other not as squares but as fully fleshed out human beings?

Matt

I don't have a single answer. My observation would be that, especially during the lockdown phase of the pandemic, when suddenly everything went to screen, I discovered that one could experience something like jetlag just from having to be on Zoom all the time and work weird hours.

There was a season where I was working 7 days a week, across multiple time zones, at the height of the pandemic on an important project. And I was like, "Wow, I've got jet lag and I've not basically left the house."

I also discovered that one can feel something like stage fright as one walks towards one's own laptop in one's own familiar study, because one's about to give a presentation. I remember once getting a step ladder and using it as a prop in front of the camera, and walking up and down the step ladder, and feeling this wonderful feeling of bringing physicality into the screen.

So, I think it's a bit weird, because we are embodied creatures even when we only see a two-dimensional, slightly time-lagged video representation of the figure. It was a weird learning for me to realize, as someone who always was quite a physical facilitator.

That physicality can be to my detriment sometimes…I remember being in New Zealand, being told, very helpfully by a colleague, that it was culturally disrespectful to sit on a table in New Zealand, because tables are for food. So, one doesn't sit on tables. And this applies through most of New Zealand culture as a kind of polite way to behave. It made sense to me and I respected it.

And then during a very exuberant workshop, which involved people shooting me with Nerf gun bullets as a way of voting, without thinking I sort of vaulted over a table to retrieve something and my shoe touched a table. And the colleague, sort of very politely said: "Matt, if your backside is not allowed to touch the table, guess what? The sole of your shoe is also not allowed to touch the table." And these things stick with you. Again, turning to the embarrassing moment, or the shameful moment, or the darker parts.

I think sometimes the reason these things stay with us is they become little sort of marker buoys to teach us where we're going to steer and where we're

not going to steer. The benefit of learning from experience!

And so, yeah, physicality has sometimes betrayed me, and the two-dimensional screen has sometimes yielded all kinds of unexpected corporeal elements as well. What about you?

Sebastian

Nice! While I haven't brought as much physicality to the screen, my experience is that there is a lot of value in the physical/haptic side of things. Even in classrooms, using digital tools versus handwritten and so on: the more physical it gets, the better, in a way. In the sense that just the act of putting physical sticky notes somewhere is better than digital ones, even though I do not always live up to that.

The physical piece of paper helps people to engage with what is written on it. And standing in a circle, physically, and seeing each other, and being aware of the humans not as a screen but as an actual body: the screen separates the humans from other people, from the ideas. So, in that sense the ideas stay with us much better, I think, when we write them by hand, when we discuss in person, when there is a physical experience of the workshop together.

Matt

There's something to that for sure. The other thing that struck me as you were talking about this, is what you learn from bodies being in a room. I remember facilitating a session which I had done many times, and it involved a lot of people moving around, and it had always worked very well, and I thought, "yeah, I'm pretty slick." And then there was one woman who had seemed well disposed to the session, but she was sitting with her arms folded and not getting up and not getting involved. I went over at some point very discreetly, and I said, "oh, is something the matter, is there anything I can

do?"

She started to explain with a slightly weary expression: "I have Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, which is hypermobility of the joints. Every time you unsettle one's joints and move, one of the things that may happen is you experience a lot of pain. So, it's better not to move unless you have to."

By chance, through just social media, I knew what was, and the look of pure relief that came on her face — where she just had to name it and I understood — I could see she was gearing up for having to explain, "No, I'm not just sitting here with my arms folded not engaging."

It changed the way that when I start the preamble to a workshop and talk about what's needed, and making allowances — again, my preference is not to bureaucratise it, but to say, "here we are, a community of people, gathered to explore an issue, and if we suggest an activity and you say 'that doesn't feel right to me' or 'I can't do it', feel free to make your own adaptation, or to let a member of the facilitation team know."

Partly it comes from the fact that I had this experience and then subsequently had another experience with someone with the same syndrome. Just this ability to remove the sense that one is creating an unnecessary exclusion and making assumptions of able-bodiedness — “Go on, step up to the board and put a post-it on it when you're ready!”

Sebastian

Very interesting.

Matt

I was going to ask you about your pre-game routine for facilitation. I wondered if physically there is something that you do. Some people go for a run that morning. I usually do about 10,000 steps of nervous walking. Is there anything you do to manage the body and emotions before you go and facilitate two days of a scenario workshop, or whatever it is.

Sebastian

If we stick with the teaching environment, which is probably the most repeatable, other than me going through my materials and so on: What I like to do, first of all, is walk to Uni. I get up earlier just so I can walk, because then I can clear my head. I can breathe the fresh air, and I can start getting into the mindset of transferring, almost always on a weekend, from regular work and regular family life into this microcosm of a very temporary community for these two days.

And then I like to be there early, so I can arrange the room in a way that works for me. So, I make sure that not only the equipment works, but that the tables aren't set up in any way that would be detrimental. I check the breakout rooms, all of these things.

But just for me, I usually listen to music while I walk there. One of the few times where I mostly don't listen to audiobooks. Sometimes, when I think the topic of the book might be helpful to the sessions, I might listen to that a little. But mostly the music is more neutral and does not topically take me in any kind of direction or prime me towards certain issues. It just helps me to get into a more open mindset.

Matt

Really nice example. It's funny you say room layout, because I spent about 3

hours this morning — just in case anyone thinks I have some kind of glamorous scenario planning life — I spent about 3 hours this morning doing quick-fire emails about room layouts and room bookings for an event which is in a month.

The secret answer which lay behind all this back-and-forth was, there is a policy that the tables and chairs cannot be moved in this room, but it is only a policy, not a practical constraint. And one suddenly realises — talk about the conversation you're not having — that an extensive back and forth conversation which is necessary to have in writing, is really around the fact that the institution is turning a blind eye to something, a facilities management protocol.

You mentioning music also sparks something in me - I'm mindful of time and the length of this conversation, I have these impulses to talk about glassblowing, skiing, horses, and music…so let's do music!

We've already had there something about the strange position of music — a non-formal language thing — that somehow connects to something biological that humans do as creatures, and respond to. You know, babies respond to music before they've been inducted into a kind of cultured appreciation of it. Anyone can tap their toe in response to a tune; we can even sing along phonetically with lyrics we don't understand.

There's something about musicality which gets close to the thing that I was always looking for in these conversations we're having. I was dismayed thinking, like, "Oh my god, we are here to talk about the body and yet of course we are going to talk about language — because language comes on top of everything and weighs it down."

But I think there is something about instrumental music, along with things like the martial arts practice you describe, that comes close to what I'm getting

at. It also makes me imagine if you could have a workshop that you facilitated as if it was a silent movie, if you could tune out the verbal content and just read the vibe, I think that's the thing that may be eternally elusive, but which I find totally fascinating about this line of work.

Sebastian

I think that gets to something I find quite interesting. In your workshops, not just looking at the individual workshops but in general, is there usually a point where you think, this is now flowing: Not in the sense of "this is moving somewhere, we're gonna get to some result", but where you can see students getting in the flow of things? In the previous conversation, we also touched on this, where there is an uncomfortability curve, a point where some of the participants get irritated or aggravated around a topic or a step in the process. Is there a point or step where people get into the flow, usually, where it starts working for them?

Matt

It's a really good question. Often these sessions at the start are like pushing a boulder up a mountain, in order that it has the potential energy that one can let it roll down.

I think most of us who facilitate, at some point have had that experience where one sits back with a cup of tea, and the room is just a-buzz, and one feels that the potential energy is now being unleashed, and it's a good feeling. I don't know if there's a specific moment, but as I say, I see the group is one entity. I happen to be a member of it with particular expertise or particular responsibilities, but that's it. I'm one fraction of this group. And the sooner I get out of the way of that, and let the boulder roll down the mountain, the better. And I wish I could see exactly when that happens.

I think it is when people reach that moment of recognising, "oh, my mental

model might not be absolutely impervious and perfect and resilient to all possible uncertainties." The “a-ha” moment identified by Pierre Wack.

The moment where someone thinks, "I might have to release the current model", it's a recognition of one's own need to go beyond. Which I think also speaks to the facilitator's need to go beyond the tried and trusted as we interact with the group. And I think that's what I'm trying to look for, as I practice my profession.

It's this job of being a kind of midwife, but also someone who knows when to make things harder rather than easier. And also, when to ditch the familiar tools. There's this great literature on forest fire fighters, which includes things like forest fire fighters have to be trained to drop their heavy and valuable tools in an emergency, because they're so used to thinking that this tool is useful that actually, when they flee for their lives, often they continue carrying the tools, and it's actually hard to recognise the moment to say, "I no longer need this."

Patrick Mandikate, a British group relations practitioner who worked a lot in the prison service, once helped me immensely when I was in a group that was grappling with the question of whether it was willing to delegate authority to someone. Someone was going to go off and have absolute authority to make deals on our behalf, and some of us were very unhappy with how quickly this decision had been taken. And he basically went, "Leadership is like a tool. You pick it up, you put it down, you hand it over to someone else." And he did turn it round, in terms of our fear of handing over this tool to someone else temporarily. And I think this fondness for tools, the fear of releasing them, the dangers of familiarity, the willingness to reach for something new, is also something important to the facilitation journey.

Sebastian

I wanted to come back to something you said in the very beginning of this last point. If we stay in this image of the group as a body, do you consider yourself as a facilitator part of that body, or not? Are you part of that group? What is your thinking on this?

Matt

In some ways, I want to say one is separate and one has this other role. You know, like the midwife is not in a group with the parents. They're temporarily part of a process. But, honestly — and I only just did this the other day actually — I often say to people, "if there are 50 people in the room, one person can be talking at you and 49 of you can be in receiver mode, or we can admit that 50 of us are trying to get to grips with this issue."

I think, with regard to your question, the painful thing is that the answer is always "it depends." Sometimes one needs the authority of being a facilitator, and one needs to acknowledge that one is not part of the client organisation. There is this phrase of Rafael Ramírez "empathy without capture", and knowing how to come alongside, particularly as a consultant, without just being absorbed, is really important. But other times, you need the common cause of recognising, "we're all just a bunch of human beings in this room here." Each one of us has different expertise and experiences and inclinations, but there’s no hierarchy..

I think it depends a lot on what you're there to do, who you're doing it with, and what techniques you've chosen to use. Again, it comes back to this question of what's the right tool for the job. Or this notion of bricolage in the social scientific sense — the imaginative use of tools for unintended purposes — which I particularly like as a license to get creative.

Sebastian

I've been thinking about this. I think in my teaching, I'm much closer to the intellectual ideal type, partly because I emphasise the learning and push it all onto the students. If I stepped in, I'd feel I'm taking away from their learning. I'd rather have one of the groups "failing" in a step but learning a lot from it. Also in that setting, we don't have to come up with anything valuable to the organisation: It's about learning, or getting a sense of the methodology, understanding the process, learning the process. But the result matters only very superficially. Or, rather, the result that matters is the learning, not whatever gets produced at the end.

Whereas in a professional setting, in my case military/armed forces/public sector, facilitating workshops, it's more difficult for me to distance myself from the topics, because I care about the outcome. It is also because I'm usually much more deeply involved with the content, because they connect to the projects I lead. It's difficult not to put a thumb on the scale, to push in certain directions. Plus, this is not a learning environment, mostly, but the final results need to be practically used and aim to inform decisions.

Matt

I guess one of my tools that I worry I should drop sometimes is having these endless quotes of aphorisms!

But I've always liked this Norwegian psychologist, Ellen Ramvi, who says, "to learn is to get involved with what one doesn't know." It's such a nice way of framing learning.

Often with the kind of projects I'm on, we need at the outset to benchmark the client’s current hopes, fears, and expectations, precisely so we know we will go beyond them— because otherwise why are you investing money in

foresight? You know, if you can just come up with it in a thought experiment over coffee in 10 minutes, you already have it in your frame.

And that leads you to check, "am I getting them to somewhere that they don't already know, and get involved with the unknown?" It becomes quite a good criterion; it's not about what I want or what I know, it's about, for this client, ensuring they are going somewhere which for them is unknown but useful. It's as much an art as a science.

I think this idea of the facilitator's thumb on the scales is so delicate, because this is a reflective practice that is not reducible to simple rules and criteria. I've had a bit of a debate recently, actually, with some other consultants who are very keen on not letting the client look at certain things that they think would be adverse or improper or negative. My take was, "I think the client needs to see that for themselves."

It's not my job to constrain the possible futures to the ones that I find desirable. Even though I think an ethics of scenario planning is very important, and having an approach that has certain guardrails and values built into it is very important, I also thought, it's not my job to shepherd the client only towards the futures that don't make me uneasy.

This journey into the unknown, the voyage of discovery — the older I get, the more I see that, that for me at least, the way I depict my own identity, it is a question of exploration. What I thrive on is the idea of going somewhere that is new and seeing things afresh. When that is combined with a capacity for care, you can accompany someone on a journey which is their journey, not yours. But you can help them into their unknown.

I remember having to let go of a client once. I told them, "this is like learning to scuba dive. You actually can scuba dive now. You don't need me with you. And at some point, the real challenge is for you to scuba dive alone." And this

very senior person said, "But Matt, maybe we still want you just to hold our hand." And I responded by saying, "I think, by saying that, you've revealed the fact that this is the time for me to go."

I feel something similar as a horse rider - the moment when you no longer feel the need for someone to check the tack, to ensure that you've put the reins and saddle and so on correctly and have adjusted everything so it is safe and comfortable for you and for the horse.

I think something we haven't quite touched on here — from having been a kindergarten teacher where, you know, I had responsibility for 30 kids, 5 days a week. An amazing privilege and responsibility — I wonder what effect being a parent has on some of these questions and issues for you?

Sebastian

I think what I learned from having a child is, I'm getting better at explaining complex things in easy words. It's so useful. There is a tendency of specialists to hide behind their language, to hide uncertainties there. Making it simple and accessible helps, in my mind, to get to a more shared understanding of things.

Plus, I'm not afraid to use my child as an example or ice breaker. It can be very disarming, if you say, "you know, my five-year-old daughter thinks", then depending on the setting, especially in a room of parents, that carries a special kind of weight. It also relates to their own experiences and thoughts, it can help in taking us out of the expert mode that we're in, and highlight some of the more universal human things that actually unite us.

And this can either be helpful, or it can also, for some issues, be problematic. For scenarios with longer time horizons, people have the safety of being able to speak about things that won't necessarily affect them in their jobs. Once

you bring this parent dimension into it, it becomes less about "this is the world in which I will not have to work any more, because I will be in retirement" and more about "this is the world in which my child will have to live and work"; which brings back the emotional connection that we kind of want to reduce with the longer time horizon, but also kind of want for immersiveness. So, in some sense, it can be helpful. But it can also function in the sense of "I don't want my child to live in this world", making people step away from that future, which is obviously the danger. And I don't know whether it's a tool that's a good one to reach for.

Matt

No, I completely agree. Actually, very recently I had someone quite strongly push back on something, regarding a conversation that involved talking about conflict in Europe. And essentially, they said, "Well, I don't want my son to be conscripted into a war." They were completely resistant to looking at certain potential situations.

The other thing that I was thinking as you were talking was this balance of the familiar and the unfamiliar. Like, when not to use esoteric or specialist language, when to make things as simple and accessible as possible, and conversely, when to make things strange.

We've talked before about being counter-intuitive in this conversation. For me, it's not about using obscure language unnecessarily, or as an intellectual power game. But what it makes me think of is, there are certain kinds of specialist practice where you find that things behave counter-intuitively to what you think in everyday life.

So, for example, I learned to ski as an adult, and was like, "oh, you put your weight on the outside leg in a turn." Whereas, as a teenager, I'd been a dancer, and when you turn you put your weight on the inside supporting leg

of the turn. And then with horse riding again, it's different about where you put the weight on the legs — these things are as wordless and fundamental as "where do I put my weight?" Which again as a martial artist, you'll be very aware of. That kind of counter-intuitive thing that is not inaccessible because of some technical qualification one is obliged to have, but it's just a different way of using your body in the world. I think also glass-blowing — that really, these activities I've mentioned, I perceive them as a kind of professional development.

With glass-blowing, I was quite a long way into the journey when an instructor really had to hammer home to me that the reason the tools affect the glass is not the amount of pressure you put on the material. It is the fact that the tools cool down the glass. So, you are not pressing hard to shape the glass. The metal leaches heat away, causes the glass to become firm. And suddenly it changes the way you shape this material in a way that, you know, initially you think, "oh, it's a squishy thing, I have to press on it." But no, you just need a light and strategic touch.

That's what I find incredibly valuable. I couldn't really give a toss about the formalities and the hierarchies of a lot of disciplinary stuff. But I really value strange knowledge because you have more agility moving back and forth between the familiar and unfamiliar.

Sebastian

Yeah. And the obvious connection: For young children, things are all unfamiliar. Everything is strange, which means nothing is strange, right? Because everything is new, everything can be exciting. And I think that is such a wonderful position to be in, and certainly something that I try to emulate, not just in scenarios, but in any aspect where there's a learning opportunity, which can be anything if you look at it especially strangely.

Matt

I think this conversation is going to have to touch on something which I know you care a lot about, which is fantasy literature. Because what it makes me think is: as a kid, one hasn't yet ingested your society's explanations for how the world works. So, if people tell you it's Santa who brings the Christmas presents, you believe it up to a certain point. Whatever explanations are in place, including ones that might be scientific or pseudo-scientific — you know, in this age, even vernacular, folk explanations for things can be scientific or pseudo-scientific. So as a kid you come into the world, you don't know if there's magic or not. Your sense of what's possible gradually forms around you.

I remember there was a television show that was initially broadcast on the BBC when I was like one year old, called *Will o' the Wisp*. It's a cartoon about very weird characters living in these woods. The villain is a witch who is a television set, called Evil Edna. It's very vivid in my mind. And my mother convinced me when I was very young that this tiny park near where we grew up was Doyley Woods, the setting of this cartoon, and I 100% believed it. I actually visited it in January with a friend, and it is a tiny patch of just a few trees and a little green square. But for me, it was everything. There was this moment of sensing this barrier between stories and everyday life, and the ability to cross it. And it was the time of my life when I wasn't reading yet. I understood the difference between a TV show and my everyday life, more or less, and yet I had the feeling that, "yes, now I am walking in Doyley Woods from this thing that I watch on TV and enjoy." There's something fundamental to that for my practice, and a lot of the things I do — this interest in that space where one can step into the world of stories and back out again.

I know you've got this interest in fantasy literature and the place where it

meets some of the more conventional forms of thinking that you work with. I mean, what's your take on the part that fantasy plays in — in what you do?

Sebastian

So let me give you an example of my daughter. She's at an age where she enjoys a lot of fantasy, any kind of interesting stories really, as long as it's exciting. And she has a high bar for what's exciting. And she really enjoys dragons and magic and fairies and elves and all of these things, because they're exciting to her, because they're not everyday life. But she also fully intellectually understands they don't really exist in the sense that a table exists. And we talk about that.

And one day she comes home from daycare, explaining to me: "By the way, there is a planet somewhere in the universe, where all of these creatures live. They have their own planet. They do not exist here, but they do there, and magic also works there."

So, there's an intellectual mechanism at play trying to bring two things together. There is an understanding of what is "real", but also of wanting things to still be magical, and for that, building something that can maintain the balance between, yes, I know these things are not real, but here is a setting in which these things can exist. And this idea of having settings in which to explore and let imagination run free, and the "what if?" and the potential and the plausible, sometimes also the implausible, but rooted in something deeper within us. I think there is a strong necessity for having such mental playgrounds, and there is value in engaging in such settings.

Matt

I'm thinking about the use of that capacity in an institutional setting. I remember doing an energy project where a bunch of engineers pushed

against a scenario and said, "we'll never have the technology to do that. The laws of physics won't allow it." And we had to push them to say, "just for the sake of argument, let's look." And actually a couple of years later, a project was under way to do this thing that they said was probably impossible. And so it was a version in this setting, this implausible thing can happen.

But the converse of that, I was thinking of a little bit later in childhood, where one is coming to the cusp of adolescence. I remember being 11 years old and watching horror movies on VHS video, things that were way too old for me. George Romero zombie films. And my cousin, bless him, who was a bit like a big brother, like 10, 11 years older, the way he justified it to himself was putting a couple of things in place to protect me. He was in his early 20s and he was letting his 11-year-old cousin watch these horror films!

Very early on he paused *Day of the Dead*, which is the third George Romero zombie film. It begins and the planet has been overrun, and a few survivors are in a rundown military base underground. It was the first time as a kid I'd seen a movie where, from the opening shots, you know, there's no happy ending here. The cities are overrun with the living dead. There's no restoring of the order. Only bad things are going to happen, and maybe some people will get out, but not to a happily-ever-after. And that alone haunted me, but was kind of useful for my growth.

I had terrible nightmares all summer after watching this film. But my cousin paused this scene toward the end of the movie where a man is pulled in half by the zombies. This villainous army captain is pulled by the zombies, and he gets his come-uppance at the hands of the living dead. And my cousin paused it and he said, "can you see, that actor's legs — if you pause it, they're actually in a concealed compartment under the floor. They've put a false floor on top, and then they've put some cow guts under his shirt, so it

looks like it's only the top half of his body." And I said, "right." And he said, "when they were filming this, the refrigeration actually failed. So the cow gut smelt really bad." So all the actors were being sick between takes. And he told me this funny story and gave me new context for it.

So, the other side of saying, "there's this place where the implausible is plausible, there is this fairy planet or magic planet" — the other side is this demystification, which sometimes takes the fear out of it. And it's like the equivalent of bringing the uncomfortable issue to the door and saying, "Oh, actually, if I look at this realistically, it's not a nightmare."

That was one of the great gifts of my growing up, was actually the other side of the coin. Someone showing me this nightmare, and saying, "if you look at it, it's not really a nightmare. It's just people playing pretend."

Sebastian

Yeah, hopefully though, for most of the scenarios we do, the comment won't be "people playing make-believe".

Matt

It's what's useful, right? It reminds me of something our colleague Jutta Doberstein said in a recent conversation I had with her for the University of Huddersfield, about culture, media, and climate change: “Storytelling still has the same role: comfort, learning, looking at the monster together - just the monster has changed.”

Sebastian

Yes, yes.

Matt

We've already talked about the value of failure, or in a learning setting, the value of something that doesn't kind of come to fruition, but you learn from

it. You know, I notice so often that the discarded scenarios that don't make it to the finished report remain alive in the minds of attendees. I actually think one of my greatest successes was a project where people really didn't want to look at this one scenario, and it was so politically sensitive. We had to really change it. And then like two years later, someone was still complaining. “We had even looked at this scenario that I didn't like, that I thought was ridiculous." And I was like, "it stuck in your mind though, didn't it?" And that I felt was a job well done, that even if it was out of irritation, the issue had lived with him for 24 months after we had last been in the room together. And so I think there is also something about the material which is left on the cutting room floor, which is valuable.

Sebastian

Absolutely. And I mean, especially in organisational internal political settings, the value of what doesn't make it into the report, and what maybe does not even make it into the formal discussion rounds, but just gets talked about in the coffee breaks.

Matt

In the spirit of closing a loop after a good long conversation, I want to circle around and ask: what's your relationship to martial arts now, now that you're in dad mode in a different season of life? What does that practice mean for you?

Sebastian

So, unfortunately it often means I don't get to practise myself much, obviously, for time reasons, among other things. It also means I want to pass on the practice and experience, and I do have my daughter doing martial arts basically from the moment she was born. I train her a little and we go to training sessions together and play around with it and have father-daughter

bonding time without treating it competitively at that age, where I want her to have fun with it.

And I keep going back to the beginning of our conversation in a sense. Martial arts, on the one hand, seeing physical exercise as fun, and maybe some normative teaching in there about taking care of your training partner, all these things which I find valuable to teach to anyone. And the other side for me is, she's a girl now, will be a young woman in a few years: obviously I want her to feel safe regardless of whether or not she can fight, or has just the confidence of that. And training her not to have to fight, but maybe being able to, at least to some degree, if it came to that, is important to me as one aspect of how she can feel safe in her life.

Matt

Yeah. I find that the limits of this kind of midwifery, gentle aspect that I keep playing up, is recognising that the world is full of people who intend harm. There's all kinds of tensions and dynamics. Even sometimes among the people one is allied with, or working alongside, there is — there is all kinds of combat and conflict which arises. And making sure that the tools and skills are in place, that we can sort of treat each other well but also survive and thrive, and not just assume there is this kind of equitable environment is something on my mind more and more actually.

Sebastian

And that's something we talked about, sort of. It emerges when we set up facilitation settings in which we try to create a harmonious setting where everyone is included. It often feels like it goes against these sort of tendencies, because on the one side we are creating this feel-good environment, but also excluding, then, "the night is dark and full of terrors",

and we don't want any of that in here, while we're all being inclusive and caring with each other.

And I am not advocating we should "give the participants weapons to hammer things out with each other", or have environments where people do not feel safe to be there as themselves. However, I sometimes wonder how these can go together. Do these settings give us the confidence, do we feel safe enough to bring in the darkness, in some ways, because as a community we can work on it? Or does it preclude us from bringing it in, because we don't want these things that are dark here? Is there a danger here in potentially creating blind spots through this?

Matt

I think I see three layers to the cake. One of them is, as the community forms, to say that our differences and our disagreements are a resource, as important if not more so than the common ground we might have. And on a case-by-case basis, encouraging people to figure out how they can productively and non-traumatically use difference and disagreement as a resource.

The next level down, which I think is the real threat these days, is bad faith acting, both within the gathering and outside of the gathering, and how we manage that. You know, I also teach negotiations at Oxford now. I sat in on the week-long flagship negotiations program, and when I participated in a simulation, the one that really threw me, and we barely got a negotiation, was the one where one player's job is simply to spoil the negotiation. Everyone else has a scorecard of outcomes they can live with. His only job is to make sure no agreement is reached. And the guy who had that role was very good. Like, you did not realise he was the spoiler for the longest time. And in the final minutes, we suddenly realised, "oh, we can just get a deal without this

guy." And it was my own tendency to see the good in people, or to want to see opportunity, that actually hampered me in that group setting. So I think there's that aspect.

And then the last thing is to say, the last layer of the cake, is that I've also run a two-day session where some issues came up that were difficult for people from one background more than another. And despite all the preparatory work, some people in the room chose to say things that would be really upsetting to members of another group. Somebody stepped out and said, "I just can't handle this anymore." So, I sat and talked with them for a bit, and listened, we closed the two-day event with quite a forceful restatement of "not everyone has borne the same emotional burdens in this room, because of the way this group chose for the conversation to go."

I avoided blaming individuals for what they said, even though certain people had spoken in a way that was perhaps at least careless, if not worse. But I think knowing, as professionals, recognising the need, and having some ability to make a good-faith repair at the end is also part of that journey. I was particularly blessed on that occasion because one of the organisation's senior diversity and inclusion officials was in the room for both days.

So I sort of had a bit of a reference point for whether we had managed this process well, given that some people in the room had taken it somewhere that could cause offense and hurt. And again, this is serious work on serious issues. You and I have joked and talked about fantasy and play, and we've had a lovely conversation. But the reality of talking about uncomfortable things under conditions of uncertainty means stuff will get said that can really cause pain and distress, and understanding that, and finding ways to work with it, is also part of the calling.

Sebastian

Absolutely. And it's a balance, right? There are things that need to be considered, that will be very challenging to some people, in order to work through their implications. And I don't always know how best to balance that.

Matt

I agree, it's constantly ongoing and dynamic. I think the other thing I think about is that all of us have a particular identity, background, position, and journey, and we present to others in certain ways.

I remember the scenario planner Adam Kahane talking about working in Canada with indigenous groups. And at the outset of a gathering where he was the senior scenario facilitator, a senior First Nations representative just said at the end of his opening, "I don't trust you." And to his credit, Kahane spent the rest of the engagement at the back of the room, making cups of coffee for other people. And his team took up the role and took up the authority. But, though Kahane has worked in South Africa, worked in conflict areas in Central and South America — he is Canadian. Sometimes having the white Anglo Canadian be the one facilitating the engagement with Canadian First Nations people, one is simply not the person who can hold that role.

And understanding the part that identity plays in this — again, I'm not big on once-and-for-all pronouncements about who can do what under what circumstances, but — just acknowledging that it's part of an evolving sense of, for any given gathering of people, what is possible for the members of this group to do? And including, who can be the right consultant for the job? Yeah, this stuff is very alive in my thinking.

Sebastian

Yeah, in my professional setting in the military, I tend to have more

homogeneous groups.

Matt

Right. And I think, what is needed for one group and not others is also an interesting issue. I felt very lucky to facilitate work for Untold Stories, which was a non-profit looking at diversifying museum conservation as a profession. It was a very diverse group indeed of people convened internationally online. But also I reflect on some of the work done in Australia, quite recently working with a university where we had a parallel scenario stream with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the staff, both participating in the main scenario stream but also with a separate stream, so that other things could be said if they needed to be said. And seeing that that did interweave productively.

Members of that group were happy. Interestingly, recently a white Anglo academic said, "yeah, but you know, there are different notions of temporality — circular time — are you imposing a Western linear construct by using scenarios in this context?"

And there is stuff to get into there, intellectually, but what struck me was, I could see the process was *useful* for the participants that we had. The responses were positive. And whatever temporalities are in play, whatever understandings of time, if you are making a consequential decision under conditions of uncertainty, I think there's potentially value in saying, "how could this uncertainty play out beyond my assumptions?" And I thought it was interesting to see this interplay of what practically happened — the intellectual perspective, but also being open to a kind of critique of "are you just imposing the same tools and processes in a way that isn't actually helpful, or that reinscribes a kind of dominance?"


Matt interviews Chris
PRESERVATION HALL
JAZZ
BAND
of New Orleans, La.
NEW
ORLEANS

Matt Interviews Chris

Matt

Chris, what part does music play in your life?

Chris

It depends, let me say why. At the moment I listen to a lot of one particular type of music. I've had a religious upbringing, so when I am trying to grasp something, or go back to trying to make sense of it, I listen a lot to a certain type of music. I've not thought about this till now, but it's mostly live or spontaneous music. And the other time I listen to that, related to this slightly, is before an event or a workshop that I'm uncertain about. I didn't know this until I took note of myself doing it maybe three or six months ago. What I'm aware of is that during certain periods in my life, or certain periods within my work, I choose to listen to a specific type of music. So, it plays more of a part than I thought it would, because I'm not musical, I don't play anything, but there's a rhythm to what I listen to and when, for sure.

Matt

Yeah. Really interesting. I was thinking about Karinya saying she listened to Elton John before competing as a mogul skier, just to take it down a few notches. And I know you run before facilitating , that's basically how we met, the first time we met in person. I was having a stress walk before facilitating an event in Silverstone and you arrived from having had a pre-workshop run. Is there more to say about what music does to the emotions and to the body?

Chris

If I had to explain it, which I've never had to, I think the music I choose to listen to in these circumstances, the live and spontaneous nature of it,

invokes a certain reaction or emotion. Analysing myself in this instance, I think I'm probably doing it to try and get myself into a particular state; and so I think there is something around what particular music makes you feel, and where particular music makes you feel it. To use your example, in periods of most uncertainty for me, I'll run and listen to that type of music because it's one of the few times you feel stuff instead of thinking things.

And it's why the music is live. It's usually spontaneous, because I think it forces you into a different part of your being, and then that links to physical exercise. There's a rhythm to run in. There's a reason I run and don't cycle; there's a reason I like to run in those instances and not lift weights, because there's a rhythm to it, and a spontaneous nature to what I choose to listen to. Interestingly, the easy way to explain it for me is, to use Karinya's example, that it's trying to take you down a notch. I probably wouldn't explain it like that, because her example is different: it's pre-competition, and the easy scientific reason for it is that you're trying to lower your level of arousal.

I'm not sure it's that. I think it's something else to do with your state. Even sportspeople I've heard talk around the idea "I'm trying to lower my level of arousal", I might challenge that now in hindsight. Most of the time what they're trying to do is grapple, in my interpretation, with uncertainty. You're trying to do something you've never done before and so I think how that sits in your body and your state of mind isn't a direct up or down on arousal. I think that might be an easy explanation. I think to thrive in that level of uncertainty, or to ask your body to do something it's never done before, is more about state than about arousal.

Matt

I like this notion of rhythm because I've quite recently discovered I'm a tolerable horse rider. And, as you say, comparing running to cycling or lifting

weights, when you're sitting on a horse, you are aware of every hoof beat. And particularly when you're jumping, you have to really count the hoof beats and understand the rhythm and when you are going to lift off the back of the horse, because the horse is about to jump. I just had this experience yesterday where the instructor couldn't see it, but I could feel before a jump that the jump wasn't going to be clean, because in that half second the relationship between my body and the saddle and the hoof and the ground just felt off. It was so subtle and visceral. The instructor couldn't see it, she said it looked fine, but I knew it wasn't going to be a perfect jump before we jumped.

One thing that really interests me is that you've talked around the genre of music a bit, but the idea of it being spontaneous, I think that's interesting for a facilitator as well. Spontaneous almost in the sense of improvised music, where the musicians themselves don't know where it's going...

Chris

In my context, it's a specific video that best represents this. It's spontaneous worship in a church, and so the band don't know what's coming next. The choir or the singers behind don't, and you can see it in their eyes because you can see it in the video. And actually, the person on the stage leading doesn't know, the person singing, the sense you get is they've no idea what's coming next either. But they're still willing to sing what's coming next, which I think gives a certain amount of bravery and trust in whatever you are singing about, or to. And then you can see in everyone else that they're trying to make sense of where it might go, but even with all of this, it still has a coherence to it; not a beat is missed.

Actually, at the weekend I saw a live band on Saturday night, an improv band. The drummer and the guitarist were new as they had to fill in at the last

minute and so they had genuinely never heard the songs before, only the person leading it had. It was unbelievable to watch. The lead singer did a brilliant job: he got the drummer on a beat and he was just talking to the drummer and then he walked over and did the same to the guitarist. You watched him live build up this song, similar to what I described earlier. Two people with no idea what was coming next but still this coherence for the listener. So that kind of stuff, again, would give me a similar type of feeling. And going back to your example of the horse, I think one of the differences between what music, and potentially a horse does versus running or other sports, is that you have to be in sync with something else. And so, you can't logic your way out of it, I don't think. Especially when neither of you really know what's coming next.

Matt

What happens when you have to sync up with another facilitator? I'm minded of how we first met: we got thrown together to co-facilitate something. Either one of us could have thought, "Oh dear heavens, what is this person going to be like? Are they even going to be happy that they've been landed with this co-pilot?" Because it was a bit random. And almost immediately you showed your curiosity. You were talking about having interviewed retired elite sport coaches and your passion for that work was really evident. And you yourself said, "Matt, this probably feels a bit weird to you — why have I been landed with this internal facilitator?!" More broadly, in your experience of co-facilitating people, what is it like to sync up and find a way to improvise collectively?

Chris

It's interesting because I don't often co-facilitate, which probably says a lot.

There's something about how facilitators relate to each other before and

during a session that I think says a lot. There's the first bit when you start to work with someone, which you just explained brilliantly. But however I skin it, even though I think I'm fair with people, there's a first couple of minutes of "Am I having this person or not?" And I do think that's about energy, presence, and how that person makes you feel immediately. I can remember the first time we met: the client asked you a question and we were virtual, and I still don't know how you achieved it, but you almost took a step back in the room and made him ask the question to me, without saying anything. And so that sense of unofficial power dynamics and how that might play out felt a specific way and that was within the first three to four minutes. Straight away I could describe how my body felt different when you did that. Then more broadly, when I think about facilitating with others, there is something about people or other facilitators articulating how they're feeling and what they might be observing in the group, and the circular notion of that, of bouncing constantly between "I feel like this, this is what I'm sensing." That, for me, is when co-facilitation works really well because I do think that if a facilitator feels something, groups feel it earlier than we give them credit for. So, facilitating with someone and working through that, almost as a pair, has so many opportunities in it. I guess you've also got the question of whether you're trying to dodge the issue or stay away from it as a pair — but what's good is the co-regulation of each other. I think it allows you to be a part of the group.

Matt

That's really interesting. I always feel that we are like a soap bubble on the side of another soap bubble. As facilitators, are you in the group or not in the group? It is really ambivalent sometimes, isn't it, when you're in those rooms?

Chris

I think it fits with the previous three conversations in this series. It is the balance, especially in futures work when people are anxious and the facilitator might be anxious too, between trying to get rid of a feeling and engaging with it. So, I do think as a facilitator, or facilitator pair you have to be more in the group than out. But an effective facilitation pairing, done really well, does allow you to co-regulate one another.

Matt

It's a great word. I think it's a really fascinating way of looking at it. And again, we talked about bringing the emotions down a bit, this idea of regulating. I find facilitating shattering, because you've felt so much in the room and hopefully you've held it together and looked very professional. I remember running one scenario workshop and at the end of it, I didn't realise, but I'd been chewing a Biro on and off the whole time. Another guy in the room looked at this Biro that I had destroyed and went, "Yeah, I wondered where all the nervous energy was going, because you seemed very calm during that!"

And I felt like I'd been rumbled, and I hadn't even noticed I was doing it. It's not particularly my habit, but the energy had to go somewhere. You also seem like someone who feels things deeply, who brings their emotions into play when they facilitate.

Chris

Yes, I think I do. I keep underestimating how long I need in a dark room post-facilitation. I assume it's like this for everyone who facilitates. But my biggest wrestle is this: what are you feeling on behalf of the group, and what are you feeling that's just yours, that might not help the group move forwards? This perspective has challenged me on the slight difference, as a facilitator, between trying to absorb what the group are throwing at you and

coming out of it completely spent, seeing yourself as an external container for the group versus the slightly more nuanced situation of being closer to it, and it being a reciprocal relationship. That shift, from being the group's container to being a participant within it, is the distinction I keep working at. Which goes back to the original Wilfred Bion work, I think. It connects to his idea of containment: that a group can only hand you what it trusts you to hold, so you must care enough to be in it. So, as a facilitator, when you are feeling certain things, what do you choose to hold? What do you choose to share with the group? Because I think part of them feeling safe might be that they know you are feeling similar things to them as well. Whereas historically I think I've had a view that you almost want to shy away from sharing that, because the group needs to feel like you think it's all right. Whereas I'm not sure anymore.

Matt

I'm with you. And it always strikes me, it's like that conversation that's been happening within therapy over about 40 years: how much should therapists disclose? Should you never reveal anything about your home life, or should you sometimes admit to things? And judicious disclosure has become more of a thing in therapy. It makes me wonder also, thinking about internal versus external and getting close to the client, Rafael Ramírez has this phrase, "empathy without capture." I remember you saying at one point that you would almost like to be a Ronin, a wandering samurai. You were in-house for a long time and now consult in your own right. In some ways the Ronin have more liberty, but of course there are trade-offs. What has it been like, being someone who facilitates in-house and then someone who now consults? Do you feel differences? Do you see trade-offs?

Chris

Yeah, definitely. I was chatting to someone about this last week. Being an external consultant these last 12 months, I feel more when I'm in the room than when I was "on the inside." There are different explanations for that. I could argue I've got fewer assumptions, and there are fewer blockers, maybe. I think one way to limit what I feel as a facilitator is to label something really early, "Matt looks angry" so then I don't have to deal with the uncertainty of it. Whereas as an external consultant you feel you know less and so might not label situations or people as quickly. I feel more in the room than I did as an internal, which has been really interesting. That might be balanced with my slightly different stance around uncertainty, either within the process or in what I think I can tolerate.

So I've definitely found it different, and that's balanced with some frustration around endings. Endings are different. There's always the ending of a workshop or a session, but when you are internal the relationship ends differently, it's a soft ending of the workshop, but your relationship continues and the work continues, and your place in it continues. Whereas, as you well know, even for work I've done for the same organisation since I left, the endings are really different, in terms of both the relationship and my energy. The anxious or uncertain energy that I would develop in a workshop, in hindsight, I used to channel into going and doing the "What next?", whether anyone asked me to or not. Some of it was helpful, some of it wasn't. This meant that when I leave now, I often don't have that obvious avenue to go and do more around the subject with some of that anxious energy I probably had as an internal facilitator. So yes, it has been different.

Matt

Super interesting, thinking about that alongside that spontaneous genre of

music you were talking about. How does the music know when it's going to come to an end? How long does it run for? Is there a sense of feeling it coming towards a conclusion?

Chris

I think you can feel it, but I don't think they or we know, in the classic sense of the word, which makes it really interesting. Most songs are what, between three and six minutes? Most of these spontaneous songs I was referring to earlier are 15 to 20 minutes. The song runs out, and there's a rhythm to it. The song runs out and then everyone thinks they'll finish, then someone will start to sing. It's like, "What's going on there?" And then it extends. I think it's a different type of ending. With a normal song you can tell it's finished, whereas I've found, either being in the context of these things happening or listening to it, there's an awkwardness to the ending, because it's not quite finished, but the song is. It's done. I think there's a different type of ending too, the song's done, or it either transitions to the next one, or there's some things left unsaid.

Matt

And then there's the question of what we do with what's left over. In some ways, I love that. I remember listening to this interview with Ray Davies, the songwriter from the Kinks, and he said, "I prefer demo versions to finished songs, because as a songwriter I can still hear all the options in a demo." In the final cut, they've locked down the creative choices. So, he would rather listen to a demo but those loose, straggly ends are both really stimulating and can give you this awful feeling of, "Oh, I'm never going to get a decisive ending," I suppose.

Chris

To use your phrase, "the awful feeling of not knowing," actually I think the

spontaneous songs have done that really well, changed that in my mind, changed the feeling of "the awful not knowing" to "I don't know." And so there's a realisation to it, and because I think they invoke a certain state, there's then a couple of ways this plays out. When I've heard some songs, I get put in a certain state, and then it's done, you almost have a hangover from a concert, or you realise the state's gone. Whereas part of me quite likes the way these spontaneous songs end, because the state isn't cut off either. So the straggly ends, for me there's some hope in them, that the state doesn't have to be related to this moment or this song; you can go and find it somewhere else.

Matt

That sounds almost too perfectly healthy for a foresight facilitator!

Chris

It depends. There are times it feels healthy, and other times you're like "I didn't want that to end," or "That's not finished yet," or "That wasn't the time to end." Because the reality of those spontaneous songs is that someone on the stage chooses when it ends, and that's not everyone's choice, some people could sing the same spontaneous song for 20 minutes. The uncomfortable reality is that someone still has to call it, and therefore everyone leaves with a slightly different feeling. Which is related to one of my biggest challenges with futures and foresight work, because some of it is structurally contained by a workshop, two days, or a day. And then you've got the other side of you that's like, "This can't be contained to a couple of days." And when I talk about the body as a facilitator, when I feel that something isn't finished yet, or there's a conversation that might need to be had, or this doesn't feel finished and yet the session finishes at four, I find that odd.

Matt

Yeah, I agree. And one thing I know is, if you look beyond the workshops, I might have a relationship with a client that runs for years, maybe we're even emailing once a week, or texting, saying, "Look at this thing in the newspapers, that came up in our scenarios." Sometimes that feels really healthy, because it's keeping everything alive. And then sometimes it's like a Sunday morning, you've read something in the paper and you're emailing your client going, "Is this just me? Am I just bugging them with stuff from the project? Am I flogging a dead horse?" And are they like, "I would be very happy if Matt stopped emailing me stories relating to this scenario!" This feeling of what's after... I was wondering, when you were saying someone has to call it , does that also tie into your dislike of co-facilitation? Do you prefer the clarity of being the person who is running the room?

Chris

Broadly, probably yes. If I'm being honest and more accurate, I think I'd find it hard to facilitate with certain types of facilitators, or certain types of people; and others strangely make it easier. If I had to list the people I could work with, and I'm being honest, and ask myself, "What is it about them?", the answer is they make you feel more like yourself. This is not about whether someone is a 'good' facilitator or person, but more about fit and balance.

And so, going back to some of the conversations around anxiety and uncertainty, and where you feel it, there's something about those people's presence that allows you to be more comfortable in your own skin, which I think the group feel. And then there are others who make you feel less like yourself, because you're trying to second-guess them. So there's no middle ground for me; but I think the group feel it.

Matt

Yeah. Even you using that phrase "in your own skin" — it is so much a sense of being in your own body. It brings us back to the body. I had an experience — and we always learn from the bad experiences as much as the good ones. I was co-facilitating with someone, and there was already a strange power dynamic. They were academically senior to me, and older, and weren't happy that I wasn't deferential and that I saw us as equals, which we were, in how we'd been contracted. During a workshop they massively overran a section they were facilitating solo. And then when I took up the reins for the next bit, they continued to interrupt and do stuff that was really undermining my authority as the person facilitating. I ended up getting them to hand out pens to the tables — something I learned to do as a primary school teacher, when you need to occupy someone in the classroom! The two things that blew my mind were, number one, that this hand-out-the-pens gambit worked; but also, secondly, having genuinely not seen it coming as an already experienced facilitator: "Oh, you are going to literally walk back up on stage and try and run the room after handing over to me." It's like when the gears don't mesh in a manual car, you feel it more than you intellectualise it. So I really respond to what you're saying there about how, when you don't mesh with the other person, it can be really hard.

Chris

And do you think the group felt that?

Matt

They knew something was going on. Afterwards, in the debrief, we hypothesised about whether the group had projected something onto us, because it was a very tense situation. But it was one of those issues where everyone involved in the project was bringing stuff into the room, not

excluding myself. It was a perfect storm, a hornet's nest of emotions. The project delivered in the end, but the facilitation was incredibly fraught. Again, it comes back to having one person who's going to call it. That question of who holds the authority to say, "Okay, that's it for now," and takes that responsibility, can sometimes be a bit challenging. I talked about this a bit in the previous chat with Sebastian about Patrick Mandikate teaching us that authority was a tool that can be picked up, laid aside, passed around.

Chris

Yeah. And I guess the real and interesting challenge is that the easiest bit to facilitate, for me, is to go, "Well, it's easy because I can control it." It's on me, I make the call, it's on my terms. The more interesting question, which comes from co-facilitating, but also for the group, is one I don't know how you'd even answer: who's best placed to call it? If I go back to spontaneous music, I'm going to re-watch it after this, because actually I don't know who called it. I've watched it hundreds and hundreds of times and I couldn't tell you who called it. The interesting challenge as a facilitator is what it means for me to be a facilitator, either with the co-facilitator or for the group. There's a sort of sense that the facilitator might know best, but usually in futures work there'll be the uncertain ending, however you spin it. Who calls it, and how is it called? The facilitator has to take the, I'm going to use the word, burden.

Matt

No, that's really interesting. It sparks a memory of having attended a group relations conference, these very open-ended, exploratory conferences in the Tavistock tradition, as you know. They are incredibly strict on time. Every session is time-kept to the second, and the person in charge of running the room says, "And that's time!", and cuts you off at the end. There was a particular group in this very large gathering who were really being maligned,

all kinds of things were being projected onto them about being bad and misbehaving. And I built a rapport with one of the people in this group of so-called bad people. At the end of the three days, this unfair projection was still going on. I tried to avoid doing this, because I didn't want to be in the rescuer role, but in the end people around me nudged me to speak, because I was so strongly feeling an objection to where this was going.

I interrupted someone who was maligning this group but it was like a lay-up in basketball. I said something to stymie the person maligning, pointed out what was happening, then handed over to this young woman from the group that was being maligned. She said her piece. And then she went, "And that's time!" and closed the entire conference!

For me, I learned something about allyship and what could happen if you were willing to go out on a limb. But the young woman also said, "I never thought a complete stranger at a conference would just choose to take my side because it was the right thing. I've never expected in life that a stranger would take my side." We both came away with different things. The last thing I want to say about it, though, was that there was a point earlier in those three days where I'd done something similar in the large group, she'd said something and everyone had ignored her.

I literally just repeated what she said, because the conference had moved on. I said, no, no, no — she said this. And she said, "I want to thank you for doing this, but I want to warn you: some of my mates said, 'That bloke just mansplained you.'" She goes, "I know that's not what you did, you verbatim repeated me and then backed off — but you might get stick from some people." I think there's something about the way the rod of authority gets passed around a group, which is also incredibly fraught. (In fact, I'm musing now about the "relay-race" format of this group discussion, too!) I don't know

if you've experienced these moments of jeopardy, where you haven't felt like you've had a grip on the process, and how that's gone. It might have gone well, it might have gone badly but have you had these moments where your grip on the room felt slippery?

Chris

I had one recently, a two-day workshop. Day one was very difficult. Then on day two, there's a particular task to open with, where the group describe their own behaviour: in a really clear, compelling way, they talk about how they thought they'd behaved on day one. At the same time that was going on, a senior person in the room decided to tell me, in no uncertain terms, everything that was wrong with day one. I saw there were lots of things going on. But, to your point about losing grip on a process or a way of going, that was definitely a point where it was an overt power move, amongst other things.

They had some allies within the room, and I'm trying to make a call as a facilitator within the moment: how much of this is just someone being awkward? How much is someone speaking on behalf of the group in an explicit, conscious way? How much is someone speaking on behalf of the group in an unconscious way? And how much of this is true, but true in that I could do something about it within the next hour? So that kind of stuff's going around my head, and what state it's putting me in, and how it's making me feel at the moment, and what that might be telling me about the group.

Matt

How did you handle that challenge of being told everything that was wrong with day one, and what was going to be reported?

Chris

I flicked into, "I'm just going to ask questions here." I did that partly to buy the group time, and partly because questions kept the authority in the room rather than in the confrontation. I asked questions either for clarification "What do you mean by that?" or to clarify, "Where did that position come from?" I just kept asking him questions around the key things he was talking to me about. But partly, if I'm honest, when someone's telling me some of my worst fears about how I might have got things wrong, it's difficult, because many of them are thoughts I've had about myself on a bad day. I did notice in this moment that they had no alternatives, which was interesting. I noticed I felt surprisingly calm, which wouldn't be normal for me in that context and then I offered them the opportunity to share it with the group, or not, and influence how the day went. I didn't use that wording, but it was obviously an important reflection if they wanted to share, which they didn't want to. So that's how I dealt with it in that specific situation, and then carried on. The thing I did tweak was to give opportunities, if they did want to share it with the group in a certain context, then they could. I probably didn't do this as well as I could have at the time, but I do think there were some useful things in his reaction, in terms of what was going on, on behalf of the group. And then, when the session finished, it hit me: there was definitely a bigger sense of anger.

Matt

That's a great answer. And I'm really glad you've brought in that aspect as well, of being hacked off. I've also dealt with people sometimes who've just taken against me for various reasons. Some of it may be legitimate, some maybe not. And there are some evenings where it's like 11:00pm, the session ended hours ago, it might be a multiple-day session, so I'm going to see them again the next day and at 11:00pm I'm gnashing my teeth going, I'm not paid

enough. There's not a paycheck big enough in the world to tolerate this level of antagonism, or whatever.

Chris

There's definitely that thing where you find yourself talking about it and you're like, okay, this is obviously still bothering me. In this instance it went on for a couple of weeks, because it invokes a reaction in me, or a feeling that partly is stuff you might deep down feel about yourself, so I go, yeah, that might actually be true. And then there's also the side of me that goes, "What was really going on there that might be useful to understand?" So there's both sides and I wouldn't like to say I'm Zen-like and it left me immediately but what did massively help me is the Bion perspective of working in groups to go, "What part of this might be expected, given the context of the workshop?" The risk of that is you give yourself an out, saying, "Oh, they're just projecting, it wasn't the fault of my session." The balance is interesting.

Matt

And to the extent that projections only work if they hook you, even a projection tells you something about your own susceptibility. But I was actually going to ask you: you are so emotionally aware, so committed to checking in with yourself emotionally, and you've mentioned Wilfred Bion, you've talked about the unconscious. What part does that kind of tradition play in what you are doing and how you are going about things now? There's this whole way of talking about the unconscious, you can go to Freud, you can go to the group relations tradition, and people can take it or leave it. It's just one way of interpreting the world; I can see you use it. I'm just interested in your relationship to that tool. Is it one tool in the toolbox? Has it become something that is constantly running in the background, like a piece of software? What's your relationship to this idea of seeing things in terms of

unconscious group processes?

Chris

Oh, it's become something that runs in the background all the time. Because I have a firm belief, one I've probably always had, that your ability to recognise and take note of how your body is feeling and responding to things is, I think, the right language to use. In my view of the world, your body responds first. I don't think emotions or consciousness are as confined to "me versus you" as we think they are. So for all of those reasons, I put a huge value on being present, and on people being present with me.

I try to put a lot into being honest with myself and others, which I don't always manage. And so, yeah, what your body feels and how it feels fascinates me. I think one of the challenges, and one of the risks, is what happens when you try to make sense of that with any logical type of language. You can see it weaving through this conversation, and through the questions I've asked the others to date. So the questions running in the background around group relations and all of it leave me asking, "Is this okay? Can I stay still enough that I can feel how I'm responding to stuff, and how do I deal with that in a way where you can't really give it language yet?"

Matt

The other thing in my mind is that I think we are both the eldest siblings of our families. It was a running joke when I was a primary school teacher that every primary school teacher is a big sibling — it's been baked into you from birth to be a deputy parent. And I just wondered, is there part of you that brings that side of yourself to this work of being the person who cares for the room and gets — or seeks, or judges the right level of harmony? Do you feel that alive in you, or is that just a separate bit of life?

Chris

I'd be like that in most aspects of facilitation or work, which brings about some pros and cons — because, to your point earlier, if you're a rebel, or the other way, you usually say what's on your mind and you say what you think, so you get it out. I think one of the challenges is the default, to your comment earlier: you create an ideal level of harmony. Maybe as a facilitator it's a strength, but for me there's almost a risk around the level of harmony you can tolerate. If you're used to trying to create harmony, that can definitely cross over to facilitation, in terms of what I can and can't tolerate. So the balance is something like, Chris might run a session which feels harmonious and nice, but the other challenge is that if Chris is involved in facilitation, or in rooms where I think there's room for the light and the dark, you could finish a session without harmony. And that takes us back to our conversation about how things might end. If I'm in control of that ending, then I could definitely make an argument for an ending that's easier for me to tolerate personally, no matter what happened, one that is more harmonious than not.

Matt

With consulting work, one tends to want one's clients to feel good about the fact they brought you in — even if the best thing to do would be for them to go out the door feeling unhappy, because there's a problem which needs to be addressed, a burning platform whose heat they need to feel. It's very hard to sell unhappiness as an output of one's consultancy!

Chris

We're back to that same session I described earlier. I designed high amounts of uncertainty into the process over the two days. So what do I expect? That people react and push back against the facilitator? It's almost laughable. Or rather, it's the tension of someone who broadly likes harmony, entering into

something like futures work, where uncertainty is high and there's lots going on beneath the surface. I have a preference, a belief, that you can't give words to everything, at least not all at once. Part of the craft is knowing what to name now, and what to leave unnamed until the group can bear it. So working in organisations that like clarity, language and certainty, and then trying to enact some of this might not quite add up.

Matt

Yeah. That commercial imperative is really hard, where sometimes the best thing I could do is leave you with a stone in your shoe. That will make you change, but it's really hard to then leave your client saying, "Yeah, it was so much fun working with Matt, working with Chris, who put a stone in my shoe."

You kicked this whole cycle of conversations off with Karinya, when you were questioning her. It's now been your turn to be questioned, even though there's been a bit of back and forth. Is there anything else you want to say about this topic of foresight, facilitation, and the body? Anything you didn't get a chance to say? Anything else that comes to mind as we come to the end of the whole process, with all four of us?

Chris

The bit I was thinking about, as we worked through, was mirroring. I'd love to look at all four conversations and see how many of the challenges we've described in facilitating we've also mirrored within the conversations themselves. For example, I think we have gravitated towards language, which makes sense; but what are some of the challenges this brings, and what were we dodging by taking that route in the conversation, because that was the obvious place to go? So I've definitely been thinking about that. And then, going back to sport, the one thing I had written down is just story after story

of how, in times of deep uncertainty, people actively choose people to just sit with them.

The stories in all the sports I've worked with are either just before, or just after, something's happened. They're really selective about the type of people they want around them in that space. And then you ask them, what did that person do? And they say, "They didn't say anything, they just sat there." I've got example after example of people who did that. And that's what struck me, listening to and reading some of our conversations, in terms of facilitation around futures and what you feel. If I make the assumption that if you are anxious, I can feel your anxiety, I can feel that in sports too, where I was talking about the characteristics of the people that others choose to just sit with, in their times of professional uncertainty. That fascinated me, because it's so easy to go, "Well, a facilitator held silence, or held the space," but it's not just that. There's a certain feeling they give off as well, which makes the "holding space" statement almost irrelevant.

Matt

Yeah.

Chris

That's one of the things I was thinking about that we haven't talked about.

Matt

It comes back to what you were saying earlier as well, about the people who just make us feel okay in our own skin to be ourselves. That might be that we're okay and we're anxious, or we're okay and we're angry, we're okay but we don't feel we have to put something on. I can more or less feel like I'm coherently me, inside and out. I can imagine the sports people sitting beside each other and just feeling accepted.

Chris

Yes. And I think at times, when you try to speed that process up, it shuts a load of stuff down. So this fascinates me. And going back to music: when a song ends, even if you believe it can end at the right time, that doesn't mean everyone's in the same spot. But what it might mean is that it's left people with the opportunity to process, or work through whatever's just happened, in their own time. I think that's an interesting ending.

A Note on Use of AI

Automated transcription tools were used for these interviews. There was no other AI use.

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Sebastian: Thank you so much to Matt, Chris, and Karinya for being such a great group of people to talk with and for how much I was able to learn for each conversation and person. And of course thank you to Betty Sue for your warm and thoughtful words.

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Chris: Matt Parker, thank you for thinking it would be a good idea for me to facilitate alongside Matt Finch a few years ago. It's one of your many good ideas I'm hugely grateful for. Matt F, thank you for your encouragement, conversations and continued friendship.

Sebastian and Karinya, who would have thought there was so much to talk about, and there's still so much more to say! It has been, and I'm sure will continue to be, a pleasure getting to know you both.

To my Mum and Dad, you have given me what I believe is the greatest gift a parent could give a child: a belief that this world is not always as it seems, and that there is hope and wonder to be found in the unseen.

Finally, to Sarah, Noah, Jacob and Elijah, thank you for allowing me, each in your own unique and precious way, to be me.

Karinya: The richness of our discussions has origins in many conversations.

Firstly, **Matt**. You invited this diverse group of scenario practitioners together bound by our discipline and varied experiences of physicality. I feel privileged to have been invited into such a wonderfully thoughtful and experienced company. I’m continuously learning from you and this has been such an enjoyable experience so with gratitude, thank you again.

The process of exploring how physicality influenced my facilitation practice was initially prompted during an Oxford Scenarios Facilitation Programme, with the facilitation team led by **Trudi** Lang. Physical presence is by definition something to be felt and that first programme was such a learning of being present, and presence. Thank you for prompting initial reflections on this theme that continues to seek my consideration across many contexts.

The idea of grief in foregoing a planned future, explored through **Chris'** questioning, has already given me inspiration for another project already in process as I write this. I'm so fortunate for our discussion which sparked this idea that now continues to burn on its own flame and give me a valuable purpose to explore. Thank you for being part of this ignition.

To the concept of communication, language and origins of words I thank **Karina** Litvack. From a bistro dinner in Paris earlier this year the idea of how words convey different meanings across different languages never left me, and I continue to experience wonder in etymology and how original use of language can be interpreted through new contexts. Merci beaucoup.

I've found the opportunity to change my position during a single, friendly conversation was completely unexpected and a valuable experience. I thank **Sebastian** for his contribution to how I view communicating futures instead of requiring new language, to using the most basic human experiences as a bridge. I am humbled, and your approach makes so much more sense. Vielen Dank.

Betty Sue Flowers: I graciously thank you for the kind reflective words I've seen written in the foreword. You embodied our book in several short paragraphs, comparing the relevance of our capability alongside technology, highlighting use of language, and capturing the role of presence in facilitating futures. I hope the idea of the chain reaction interview, if not specifics, alight

new flames for you too, thank you.

Without a moment of hesitation, to my husband **Todd**, who manages seamlessly to run the needs of the family during my many European hours working on this project, and who unequivocally supports, what he probably, and rightly considers, an endless number of passion projects. I am always appreciative of your support.

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Matt: Thanks to Betty Sue, Karinya, Chris, and Sebastian for being up for this; Janice for some guidance; and also: David for the jack burns, Kees for the eardrum, Marek for the downhills, Jacob for showing me the ropes, los Bolufer for the good stuff, Shila for the inscription, Laura for going upside-down, my family.