FUTURES OF WORK

Horizon Scanning 2025

16 signals for the future of work, leadership, culture, collaboration, and organizational design

ISSUE #3, April 2025

Erik Korsvik Østergaard, Good Morning April

Good Morning April

What is this document – and how can you use it?

Good Morning April

A Horizon Scanning

This document contains the result of a horizon scanning, looking for trends and signals within the future of work, leadership, culture, collaboration, and organizational design.

In the past year I have had dozens of workshops and dialogues with leaders and doers related to how the trends and signals might affect them – and how they feel about it.

Here are 16 signals that are emerging in the complex industries in Europe

Signals are real and concrete anomalies, that stand out and makes us go 'hmm, that was odd'. Signals have the possibility to snowball into a trend – or they might merely be a bleep and disappear.

Some of these signals are 'strong signals', that are already trending. Other signals are week and faint, and the cases are few-and-far-apart, but still serve a role to our imagination and provoke an emotional response.

How to use the document

Get familiar with the trends and signals, but do not take them for granted without skepticism and contextualization. **Put the signals into your context**, in your organization, your business unit, your team.

Will the signals impact you? Do you like the impact?

How do they make you feel?

What scenarios emerge from them? Are they good or bad? Are they plausible or speculative?

Which of the signals do you want to experiment with to learn more?

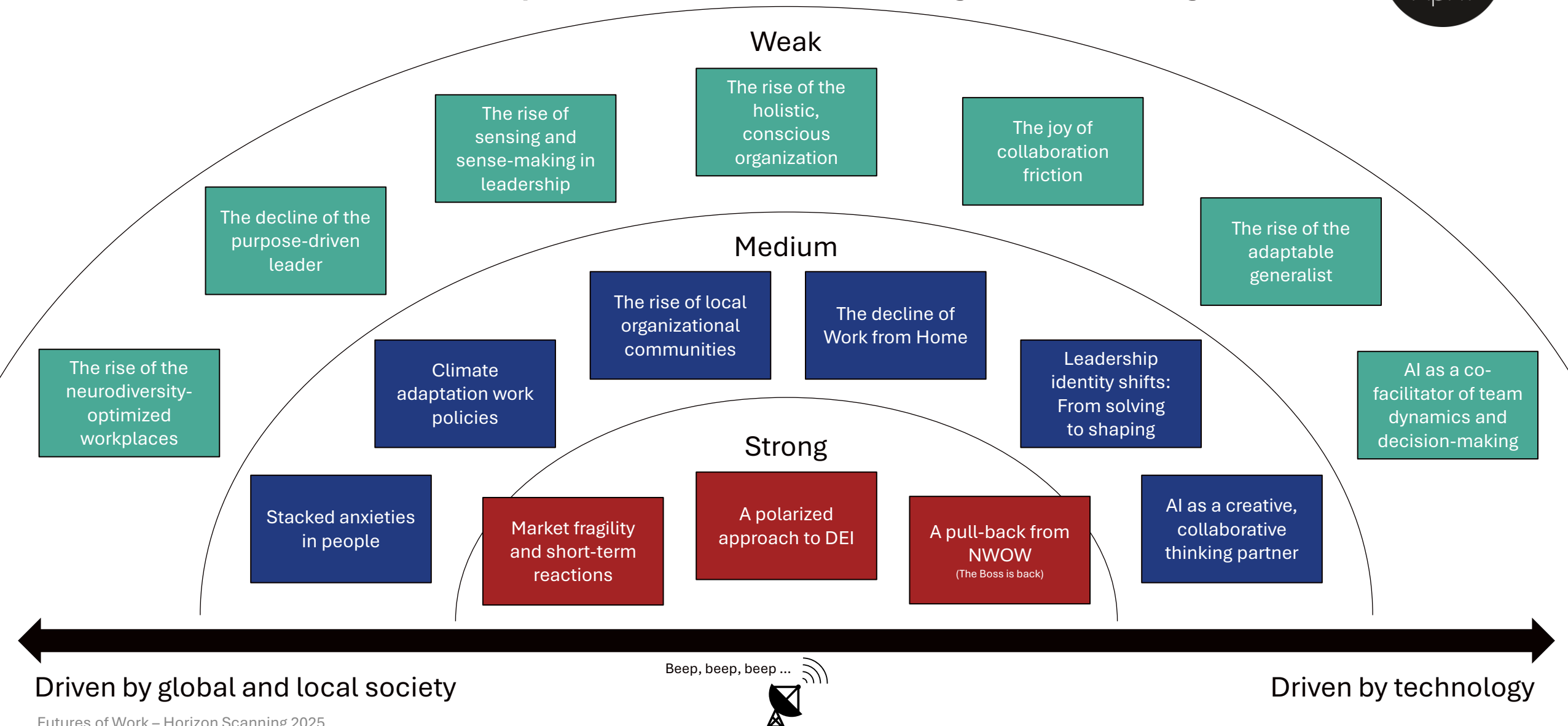Which of the signals do you want to suppress? Or nurture?

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Futures Thinking can create hope, ownership, confidence, and agency, but only if you engage in it.

The grass is greener where you water it.

Signal Radar 2025
The Future of work, leadership, culture, collaboration, and organizational design

Good Morning April

Weak

The rise of sensing and sense-making in leadership

The rise of the holistic, conscious organization

The joy of collaboration friction

The decline of the purpose-driven leader

The rise of the adaptable generalist

Medium

The rise of local organizational communities

The decline of Work from Home

The rise of the neurodiversity-optimized workplaces

Climate adaptation work policies

Leadership identity shifts: From solving to shaping

AI as a co-facilitator of team dynamics and decision-making

Strong

Stacked anxieties in people

Market fragility and short-term reactions

A polarized approach to DEI

A pull-back from NWOW
(The Boss is back)

AI as a creative, collaborative thinking partner

Driven by global and local society

Driven by technology

Beep, beep, beep ...

Futures of Work – Horizon Scanning 2025

Strong signals

Market fragility and short-term reactions: Due to (a) the increased uncertainties in the global market and (b) the rapid development in technology over the past two years, some organizations are more reactive than proactive. They make decisions based on short-term pressures and the organizational 'bandwidth' is occupied with adaption. This stifles some areas of innovation and creativity.

A polarized approach to DEI: There is a deepening divide in opinions and policies regarding DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) initiatives. This polarization has led to significant controversies, with some organizations doubling down on DEI efforts while others face governmental pushback or legal challenges.

A pull-back from NWOW (The Boss is back): We first sensed this signal in 2023, naming it 'The Boss is back'. At that time, it was a weak signal witch now has grown in intensity. Some companies are pulling back from New Ways of Working (NWOW) like self-management, flatter hierarchies, and Teal-inspired initiatives, in favor of reinstating more traditional, top-down leadership structures. This is both a reaction to the market fragility, as well as a disappointment related to the perceived impact of NWOW initiatives.

Medium signals

Stacked anxieties in people: Employees are experiencing layered stress from economic uncertainty, societal instability, climate worries, and rapid workplace changes, leading to emotional fatigue, disengagement, and loss of wellbeing.

Climate adaptation work policies: Some organizations are creating policies to accommodate climate impacts, such as responsible travel and commuting guidelines, continued focus on CO_2 emissions in supply chain and factory building, and purchase guidelines.

The rise of local organizational communities: Companies are nurturing stronger, localized teams and in-person micro-communities to boost trust, collaboration, and a sense of belonging and identity.

The decline of Work from Home: Some companies scale back remote work in favor of hybrid or stronger on-site models. Key drivers are a need for identity, belonging, culture, creativity and productivity. This is both promoted by leaders and doers.

Leadership identity shifts: From solving to shaping: Leaders are redefining their role from being the expert with answers to being facilitators of direction, sensemaking, and collective ownership.

AI as a creative, collaborative thinking partner: Teams and individuals are increasingly integrating AI into creative and strategic processes, treating it as a thinking partner for ideation, problem-solving, and creativity.

Weak signals

The rise of the neurodiversity-optimized workplaces: In line with their DEI principles, organizations are designing work environments, methods, and practices to support neurodiverse individuals, acknowledging cognitive diversity in a team as a strength rather than a challenge.

The decline of the purpose-driven leader: There's growing skepticism toward leaders who focus too unilaterally on purpose-narratives, as (a) employees seek direction, responsibility, and impact over inspirational rhetoric, and (b) stakeholders and shareholders seek tangible results in a VUCA world.

The rise of sensing and sense-making in leadership: Modern leaders are leaning into intuition, active listening, and organizational consciousness, helping both leaders and doers embrace more than purely quantitative and rational approaches.

The rise of the holistic, conscious organization: Companies are embracing a more integrated view of life and business that includes emotional, ecological, and societal awareness in how they operate and grow. The regenerative movements are examples of this.

The joy of collaboration friction: Teams are valuing productive tensions and diverse viewpoints as a source of innovation and energy, shifting from avoiding conflict to embracing it as a creative force.

The rise of the adaptable generalist: Leaders and doers who can flex across roles, learn quickly, and connect dots across disciplines are increasingly valued over narrow specialists – especially as AI enters the scene.

AI as a co-facilitator of team dynamics and decision-making: AI is increasingly embedded in team processes, supporting real-time feedback, surfacing patterns, mediating conflicts, and enabling more inclusive, nuanced, and insight-driven decisions.

Are the signals relevant to you in your context?

For each of the signals, answer two questions:

1 What is the **likelihood** that this signal will affect your organization in 3-5 years, from 'Very unlikely' to 'Very likely'?

2 What is the **likeability** of the effect the signal will have in your organization, from '☹' to '☺'?

Place the signal in the signal cross.
Ask your colleagues for their input too.
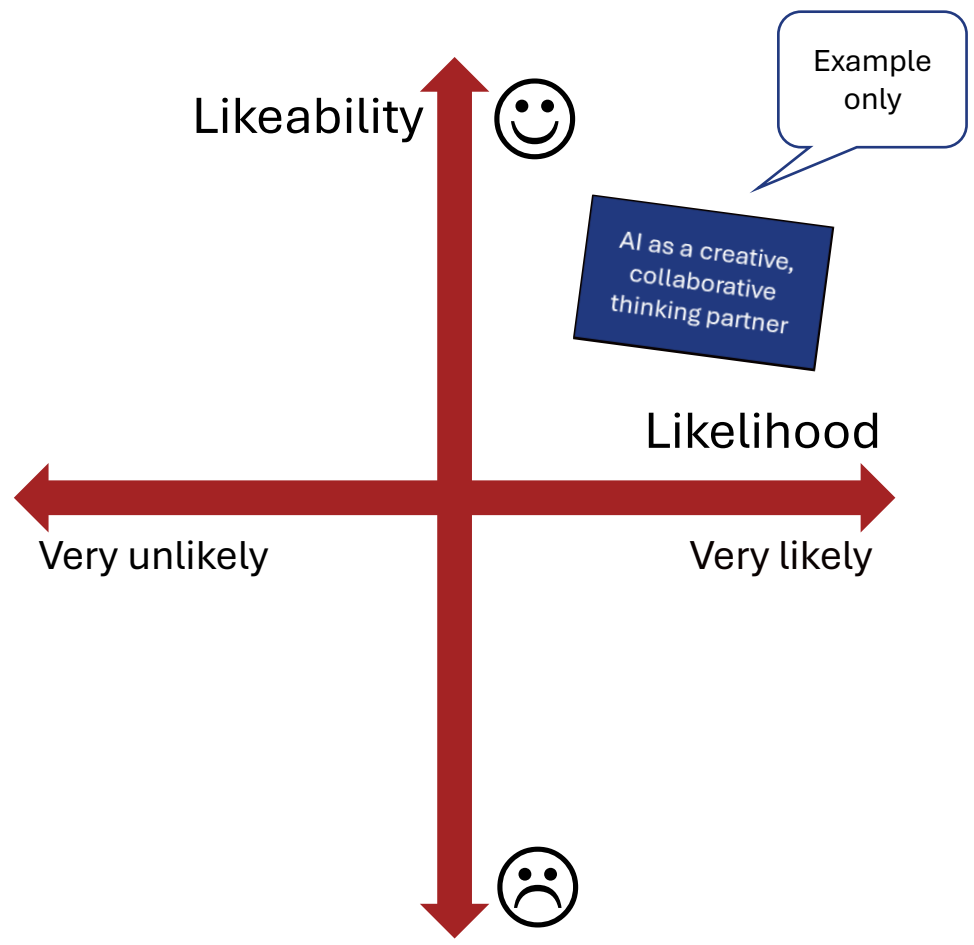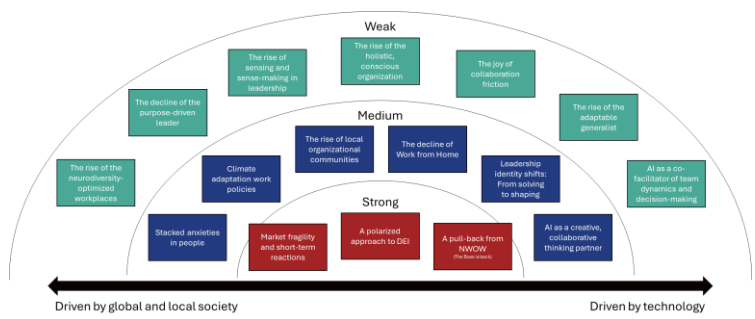
Scenarios

Next step would be to create scenarios of how the signals might unfold in your context.

A central element of Futures Thinking is establishing scenarios for alternative futures. These scenarios support us in exploring and evaluating possible, plausible and preferable futures, by triggering emotional responses to them.

- What scenarios emerge from your signal sorting?

- Are the scenarios good or bad?

- Are they plausible or speculative?

- How do they make you feel?

What actions emerge from creating the scenarios?
Are there things you want to avoid?
Movements you want to nurture and promote?

Possible futures

Future casting

Plausible futures

Preferable futures
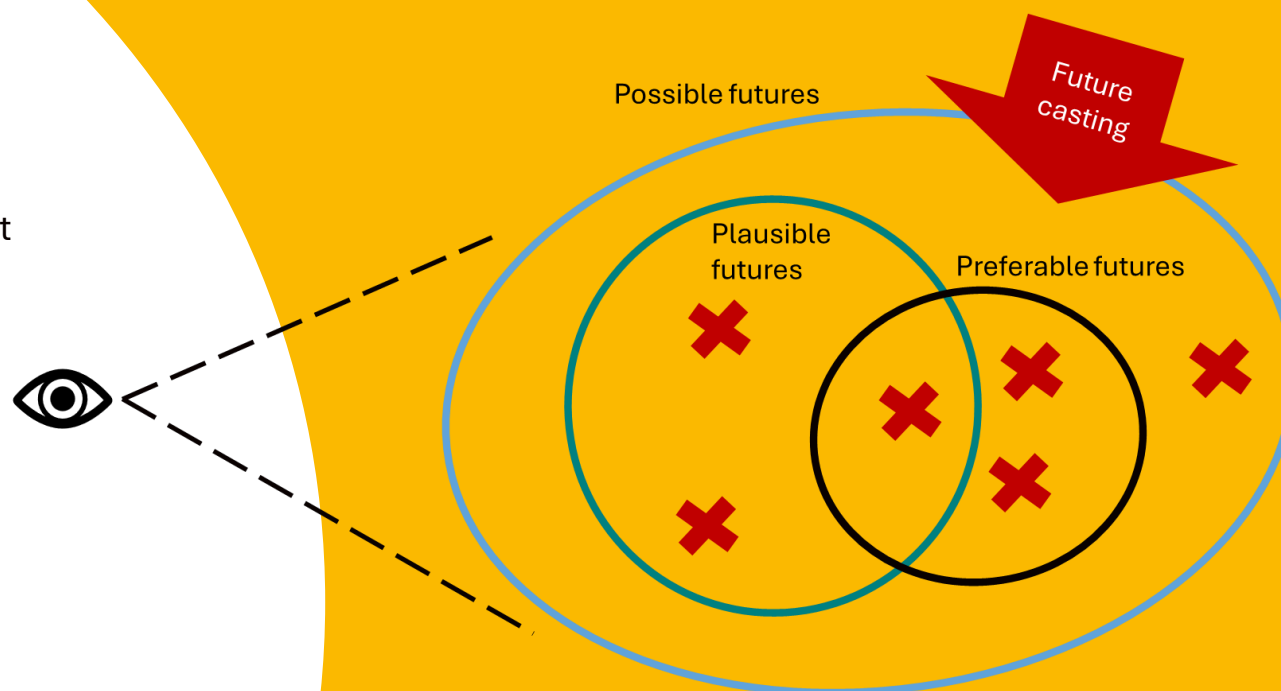
A simplified Futures Cone, based on the work of Joseph Voros

Voros, J 2017, 'Big History and anticipation: Using Big History as a framework for global foresight', in R Poli (ed.) Handbook of anticipation: Theoretical and applied aspects of the use of future in decision making, Springer International, Cham. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-31737-3_95-1,

What can you do?

In this challenging period, I personally find comfort in focusing on possibilism and agency.

Seek areas where you can have an impact and situations where you – in your context – can nurture the work, leadership, culture, collaboration, and organizational design, that you prefer and need.

Dive into the signals.

You can increase the strength and momentum of signals that attract and inspire you, just by engaging in them.

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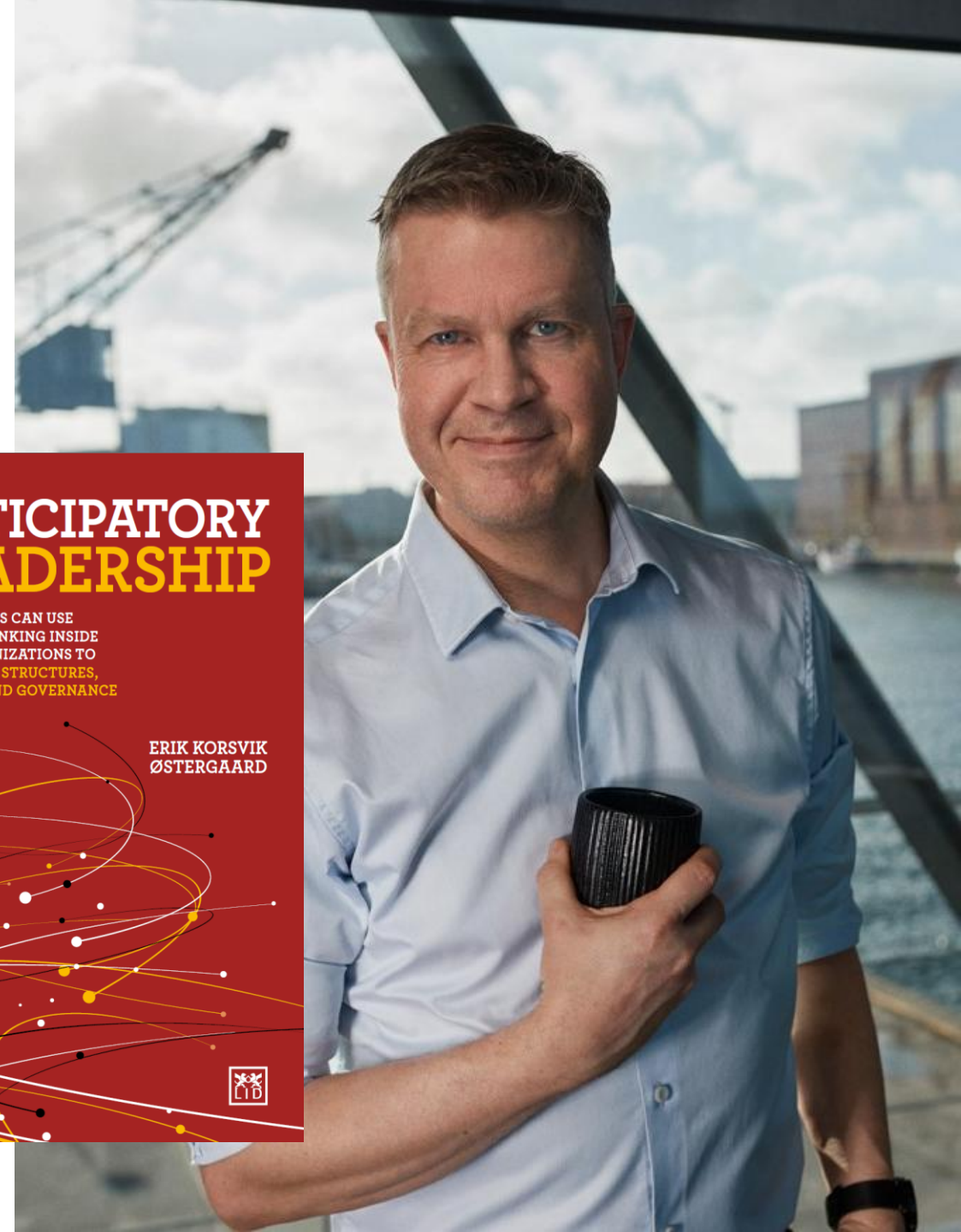
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Erik Korsvik Østergaard

Erik is a futures thinker, leadership advisor, speaker and author. Some people call him a 'CEO Whisperer,' alluding to his role as an organizational advisor at the C-suite level.

With a background in engineering (MSc in Applied Mathematics), Erik has held numerous leadership roles as project manager, program manager and people manager in large, complex, regulated industries. For the past decade, he has been self-employed, helping leaders in scale-ups, SMBs and corporate enterprises understand the Future of Work and embrace their own New Ways of Working. He is a popular speaker and advisor, helping organizations in many countries and with numerous cultural backgrounds, but with a preference for large, complex, regulated industries.

He has previously written two books on progressive leadership and organizational design. The first, The Responsive Leader, was published in 2018 and described the roles and behaviours of progressive, modern leaders. The follow-up, Teal Dots in an Orange World, came out in 2020 and focused on the organizational design of pockets of progressiveness inside classic, hierarchical organizations.

In 2024 he published his third book, Anticipatory Leadership, on how to use Futures Thinking inside the organization to shape the structures, cultures, and governance.

ANTICIPATORY LEADERSHIP

HOW LEADERS CAN USE FUTURES THINKING INSIDE THEIR ORGANIZATIONS TO SHAPE THEIR STRUCTURES, CULTURES AND GOVERNANCE

ERIK KORSVIK ØSTERGAARD

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