

www.samiconsulting.co.uk

F&S February 2021

The very recent announcement of a roadmap out of lockdown in the UK comes as a relief. The astonishing speed of the invention, development and deployment of a wide range of vaccines, with impressive [efficacy](#) rates, is a testament to what properly funded and incentivised science can do. We have been struck by the awful and increasing number of deaths worldwide; but also of the differential rates of rollout, and the difference in preparedness to take the vaccine in the first place. These are, in a line we use in explaining our Three Horizons process, “pockets of the future in the present”: as William Gibson said in 1999 “[The future is already here – it’s just not very evenly distributed.](#)”

Recognition of the need for **scenario planning** is extending ever-wider as people anticipate the speed and scale of disruption in the coming decade. The American Alliance of Museums’ produced a report to help museums “to forge on without knowing what lies ahead, dodging and weaving as new obstacles arise, constantly recalibrating their course towards a preferable future.” It goes on to describe the “Cone of Plausibility” and describe four future scenarios that can be used “as the seeds for longer narratives, building out these futures and envisioning how your museum might respond”.

The **GameStop bubble** caused lots of people to scratch their heads. One way of thinking about it is as a conjunction of weak signals of the kind that can be explored using [Wendy Schultz’s Manoa method](#), creating unanticipated outcomes.

Patricia Lustig’s interview on the chapter she and Gill Ringland wrote for “**50 Years after Future Shock**” is now available on YouTube <https://youtu.be/tR2htj76ZLU>

SAMI Associate **Keith Leslie’s** new book “[A Question of Leadership](#)” launched on the 18th February. He provides a wide range of illustrative case studies derived from both research and his first-hand experience in the public and private sectors as a

former partner at both Deloitte and McKinsey. See also our blogpost. Keith was also on Radio 4 'You and yours' (streamed on BBC Sounds) talking about leadership and mental health.

After the success of the **SAMI Cohort** , we are now recruiting for a second cohort. In a small group of other professionals you can explore the issues surrounding your foresight work, from improving your horizon scanning to winning over internal customers. Please contact Jane.Dowsett@samiconsulting.co.uk if you are interested.

SAMI has a long history of academic engagement – Gill Ringland's book [Scenario Planning](#) has been used on the Harvard Business School course for a while, for instance, so we were pleased this month to hear that our resources on horizon scanning have been taken into use for a major university's business transformation courses.

Executive Education

Our online course "Understanding the Future" will be run again on 22nd to 26th March 2021. The course fee is £490 + VAT, and discounts may be available for self-funded individuals. For more information, please email us at training@samiconsulting.co.uk.

A range of information on various [futures techniques](#) is available on our website.

Futures Issues

A number of battery developments this month:

- [Australian researchers](#) have developed a battery the size of a large fridge, which can be hooked up to an existing array of solar panels, and use that power to convert water into hydrogen and oxygen. The hydrogen is stored in a fibrous metal alloy. The unit can store three times as much power other wall-mounted batteries, allowing it to power the average household for two to three days on a single charge.
- A new approach to hydropower (using excess renewable power to pump water uphill for later release) could mean many more sites would be suitable

for use as “hill batteries”. [“High-intensity” hydro projects](#) use a mineral-rich fluid, more than two and a half times the density of water, to create the same amount of electricity from slopes which are less than half as high.

- Batteries capable of fully [charging in five minutes](#) have been produced. Instead of the graphite used in existing Li-ion batteries which can get congested when charged rapidly, the StoreDot battery uses semiconductor nanoparticles into which ions can pass more quickly and easily. The cost would be the same as existing Li-ion batteries.

There were also several brain/computer integration stories:

- [Neurotechnology company Neuralink](#) could be launching trials, implanting an artificial intelligence chip in humans’ brains to control technology just by thinking. “later this year.”
- Conversely, work started on a project that uses [human brain stem cells](#) to power artificial intelligence (AI) devices. The project will show how neurons can be harnessed to supercharge computers’ ability to learn while dramatically cutting energy use.
- An [intelligent material](#) that is able to learn by changing itself physically, in the same way our brain does. The material is able to store and process information in similar ways to a brain – and, like a brain, it is able to adapt itself.

Cutting-edge light design help plants to grow more sustainably – while being an artwork in itself. Photobiology light science technologies have shown that certain recipes of blue, red, and ultraviolet light can enhance plant growth and reduce the use of pesticides by up to 50%. You experience this as a poetic artwork of ‘dancing lights’ across a huge agricultural field.

Apartments on [floating cities](#) are going on sale.

And for further amusement:

- [Spinach](#) is now capable of sending emails. When the spinach roots detect the presence of nitroaromatics in groundwater the carbon nanotubes within the

plant leaves emit a signal. This signal is then read by an infrared camera, sending an email alert to the scientists. The technology is known as “plant nanobionics”.

- [Smart toilets](#) fitted with technology that can detect a range of disease markers in stool and urine, have been discussed for a while. But the records need to relate to the individual using it. So the latest development adds added a small scanner that images a rather camera-shy part of the body. Your anal print is unique – this is the polar opposite of facial recognition.

Our Blogs

Since the start of 2021 our blogs have covered topics from vaccine nationalism to leadership. Firstly, though, we completed our short series on the future of cities by looking at [city financing and economics](#), followed by an exploration of [some of the political impacts](#). We then looked at the [recent announcement of the EU Strategic Foresight Network](#) at the ESPAS 2020 Conference. Issues relating to the current [pandemic and vaccine rollout](#) were explored in our next post; this was followed by a look at the [recently published WEF Global Risks Report](#) and, lastly, we were pleased to have a blog on the subject of [leadership based on a new book written by SAMI Associate, Keith Leslie](#).