



# COVID-19

## REORGANIZATION SCENARIOS

BY: LEAH ZAIDI



The Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic is a global crisis that has destabilized the everyday fabric of our lives. As it alters the present, it will change what is possible for our future. It is important that we understand how our systems are being challenged as uncertainty continues to grow. The reality that emerges in the next few weeks will seal our fate for years to come.

This document will outline a framework to understand the overall current state and scenarios for what may emerge next.

## The Current State

Covid-19 is a fast moving event that has disrupted our systems. The model that best explains what our societal systems are experiencing is the Panarchy (also known as the Adaptive Cycle or the Ecocycle). This framework by Gunderson and Holling describes the evolution of complex systems and suggests that, like nature, our systems go through the following cycles:

**Exploitation:** Rapid expansion and growth.

**Conservation:** Slow accumulation and stability as the system reaches carrying-capacity.

**Release:** Rapid entry of competition or changed conditions. **Covid-19 has triggered a Release of stable, established systems.**

**Reorganization:** Rapid process of adaptation, selection, and reconfiguration of the system.<sup>1</sup>

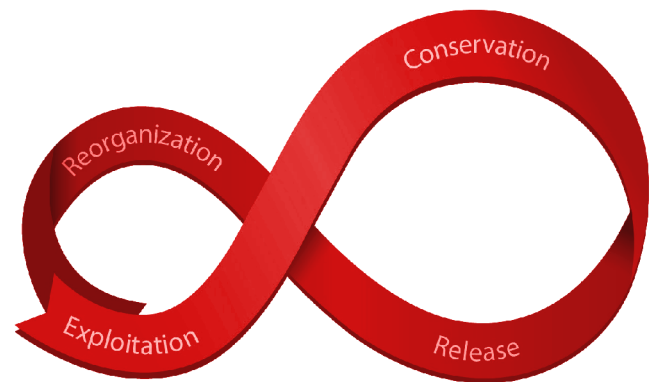


Figure 1: The Panarchy

---

<sup>1</sup> The provided definitions are reworded summaries from The Sustainable Scale Project. Retrieved from <http://www.sustainablescale.org/ConceptualFramework/UnderstandingScale/MeasuringScale/Panarchy.aspx>

Our systems contain subsystems that move at different speeds and impact each other. This is illustrated by the Nested Panarchy (figure 2).

Covid-19 is a '**Revolt**': when a small and fast moving event disrupts a stable system and forces it into a Release period.<sup>2</sup>

Whether or not our systems go through the Release period and Reorganize effectively depends on how much we '**Remember**': the extent to which we maintain the 'business as usual' paradigm (e.g. through our policies, knowledge, resistance to change, etc.).<sup>3</sup>

**Our socio-economic and political systems were overdue for a Release and Reorganization.** It is only through

maintaining inequalities and failing to address wicked problems that we have remained in a prolonged Conservation state.

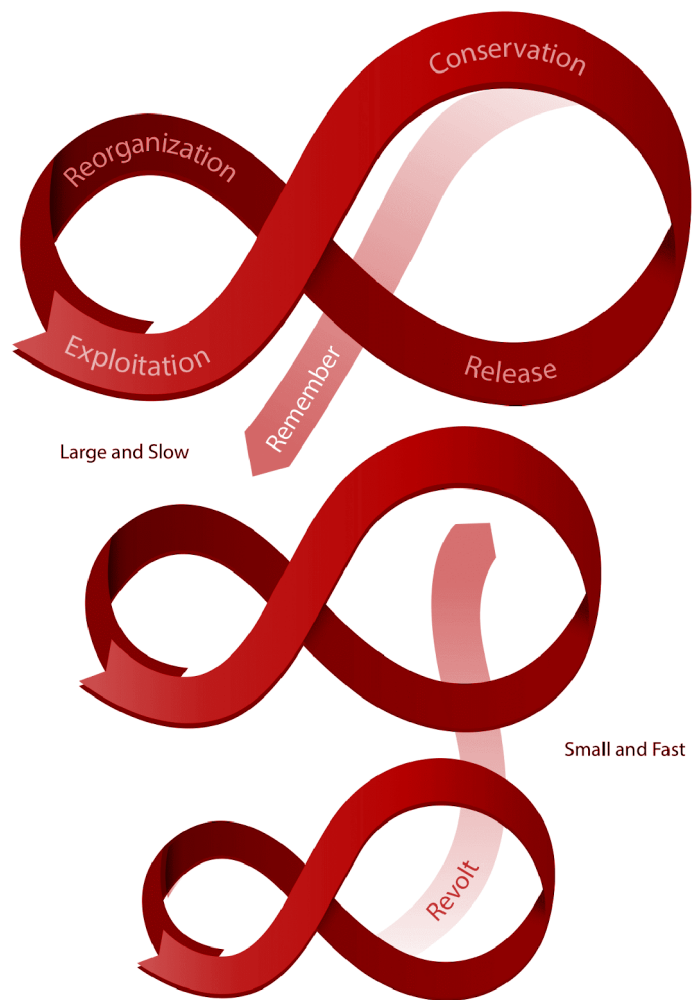


Figure 2: The Nested Panarchy

<sup>2</sup> The provided definitions are reworded summaries provided by The Sustainable Scale Project. Retrieved from <http://www.sustainablescale.org/ConceptualFramework/UnderstandingScale/MeasuringScale/Panarchy.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> The provided definitions are reworded summaries provided by The Sustainable Scale Project. Retrieved from <http://www.sustainablescale.org/ConceptualFramework/UnderstandingScale/MeasuringScale/Panarchy.aspx>

## Important Considerations for Covid-19

- Consider the Panarchy as a flexible spectrum rather than neatly separated containers. There is no single outcome, rather a range of possibilities within each state.
- Our actions, behaviours, and decisions can prolong or shorten the time spent in certain states. The world is currently in a Release state. Though a longer Release period will be more disruptive in the short-run, it may also create more Reorganization capacity in the long-run. The total run-time of a Release period is dependent on the time it takes to develop, test, and disseminate a vaccine.
- Artificial interventions and strategies can keep the system in a Conservation or Exploitation state, despite the need for Release and Reorganization. For instance, bailouts maintain Conservation states and prevent the Release of capital that allows for Reorganization.
- What will emerge during Reorganization and the extent to which we reorganize will depend on how much we 'Remember'. A comprehensive set of pre-Covid factors must be taken into account, ranging from the state of our healthcare systems, the decline of democracy, wealth inequality, stance on climate change, etc. We can not underestimate our resistance to change.
- Reorganization means something new will emerge. It does not mean that 'new' is better or devoid of negative unintended consequences. Akin to how it was naive to ignore dystopic scenarios pre-Covid-19, it is naive to assume what emerges next will lack dystopic elements or unintended consequences. A mixture of improvements and failures followed the Spanish Flu (e.g. universal healthcare and the U.S. privatized healthcare system both emerged after that pandemic). It is reasonable to expect both positive and negative outcomes.
- Different organizations, industries, and subsystems will react and feel impacts at different speeds.

## Scenarios

The following are modular scenarios for the Covid-19 pandemic, illustrating how the system might reorganize. These modular elements may be combined and used to create a wide spectrum of sub-system scenarios. The future will contain elements of all four scenarios presented — which elements will come into play, in which configurations, and for whom remains to be seen. These scenarios may need to evolve as the crisis does.

**The purpose of these scenarios is not to predict the future, but to use complex prototypes to better understand how to manage the situation today and in the near-future. Using these constructs, we can design and test more comprehensive strategies.**

To create the scenarios, two strategic foresight methods have been used as follows:

First, **Jim Dator's Generic Images of the Future** provided archetypal templates to lay out four possible futures:

- Continuation: Business as usual/growth
- Discipline: Order and control
- Collapse: Systemic breakdown
- Transformation: High-tech and/or high-spirit <sup>4</sup>

Though the modular pieces are sorted into the above categories, they can be combined with each other across scenarios to construct new images and possibilities.

---

<sup>4</sup> These definitions are summaries provided by Jim Dator in Alternative Futures at the Manoa School. Retrieved from: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bc578bdfb22a52798f8a038/t/5d1844ec3a01db000100f67b/1561871599474/3.+Dator-Alt+Futs+Manoa.pdf>

Second, the **Seven Foundations**<sup>5</sup> model by Leah Zaidi was used to assemble the fundamental aspects of any given system for each scenario. Each ‘foundation’ is present in every system, though we tend to privilege some over others (e.g. Western systems favour economic outcomes). Though this model is typically presented as a wheel (figure 3), it is laid out as a grid in this document. It is then crossed with Generic Images to facilitate a holistic view of all possibilities at once and to allow for comparisons of each foundation across all four scenarios.

**We are currently experiencing elements of both Continuation and Discipline scenarios. Shifts will occur as more time passes.**

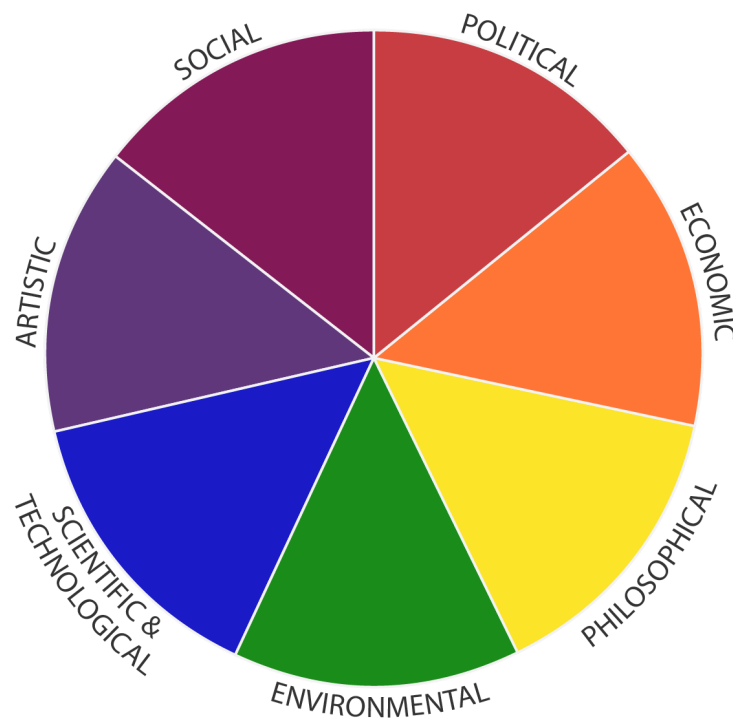


Figure 3: Seven Foundations Model

Sohail Inayatullah and Peter Black also examined the ‘Black Swan’ metaphor and Covid-19 scenarios in their article, [Neither A Black Swan Nor A Zombie Apocalypse: The Futures Of A World With The Covid-19 Coronavirus](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321886159_Building_Brave_New_Worlds_Science_Fiction_and_Transition_Design). Please consider their work along with the scenarios presented in this document.

---

<sup>5</sup> Created by Leah Zaidi, introduced in *Brave New Worlds: Science Fiction and Transition Design*. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321886159\\_Building\\_Brave\\_New\\_Worlds\\_Science\\_Fiction\\_and\\_Transition\\_Design](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321886159_Building_Brave_New_Worlds_Science_Fiction_and_Transition_Design)

# COVID-19: FORESIGHT SCENARIOS

By: Leah Zaidi, Multiverse Design

These scenarios have been constructed by combining Jim Dator's Generic Images of the Future with Leah Zaidi's Seven Foundations model. The scenario types are as follows:

- Continuation (business as usual/growth): **Detour Back** in which we attempt to return to an artificially maintained Conservation state as quickly as possible, creating the circumstances for another Release moment.
- Discipline (order and control): **Keep Calm, Carry On** in which prolonged Release period creates the need for top-down and bottom-up control.
- Collapse (systemic breakdown): **Vicious Circles** in which problems compound and feed each other with multiple infectious diseases that are fueled by natural disasters, rising tensions, and crippling systems.
- Transformation (high-spirit): **We, Not Me** in which the Release period is used to Reorganize as a more equitable and empathetic society.

	Political	Economic	Philosophical	Environmental	Scientific and Technological	Artistic	Social
Continuation: Detour Back	Policies that continue to benefit the wealthy WEF/Davos styled solutions to healthcare challenges Temporary relief measures with deadlines Decreased regulation and oversight of corporations Coordinated efforts amongst existing allies Global power shifts away from G7 Increase in lobbying efforts from incumbents Increased donations to political campaigns Self-serving agendas and policies hidden in emergency bills Resiliency measures with an eye on economy-first solutions Tense elections with high voter suppression efforts Early or delayed elections	Businesses open, double-down on bottom-lines Bailouts for corporations, dying industries clinging to life Further increase in wealth disparity Post-crisis billionaire donations, foundations champion billionaires Postponed retirements with trickle down effects Telecoms, internet providers gain power and gauge Capsule purchasing (e.g. capsule wardrobe, pandemic kits, etc.) Offshore assets, hidden gold and money increase Behavioural data analyses sold in droves Prolonged global recession, more support for unions 12 months of Christmas: marketing and sales overdrive Sickly unicorns that may not recover Corporate real estate sell off with smmlar, distributed offices	Commoditized panic Growing mistrust of governments and institutions More unethical corporate behaviour without changes to policy Increase in paranoia, 'other' versus 'unified' mentality Quick loss of distancing habits, sustainable behaviours Probability bias: belief that a future pandemic is less likely Renewed appreciation for 'normal' Denial versus reality-check camps More 'gurus', lifestyle coaches, financial coaches Growing mistrust in institutionalized religion Growing disillusionment, more ostracized fringe groups Increased desires to volunteer and give back Spiritual retreats, meaning of life classes increase	Temporary, short-lived environmental relief Uptick in nature retreats Gradual return to travel that ushers in pilgrimage style tours Growing demand for urban greenspace Reduction in CO2 without other improvements (e.g. plastic in ocean) False calm on climate change that ignores ecosystem health Redesign of transit systems around new work norms Climate change disaster brews after double-down Weakened response to next natural disaster Escalated resource extraction Bought time to address environmental sustainability	Pandemic apps (e.g. tracking disease, social connectivity) Surge in IoT: ambient, touch-less technology Fast tracking AI and automation, telemedicine, virtual assistants More private healthcare providers with concierge services Blockchain encryption with faster servers Boom in remote-work, communications tech Isolation strains health systems (e.g. mental health, pregnancies) Foreign-trained medical services providers certified faster Changes to what is 'credible' and 'citable' Effective measures dismissed as overreactions Covid consequences strain healthcare more (e.g. lung damage) Scrambling scientists, high volume of pandemic research Some mistrust of science remains	Dystopic films and music with environmental/nature themes Increase in digital arts organizations Virtual reality, projection communication and connection Uptick in art as therapy More desire for comedy, light heart-felt drama High demand for anything new Creative economy struggles (more demand, less funds) Death of the 'American Dream' myth High investment in entertainment Backyard office sheds Indie artists rise Return to collective activities (e.g. going to the theatre) Return of drive-in theatres	Set back for feminism; women stay home to care for kids Millennials move to Northern communities Multi-player games adapted for work and socializing Mass protests: state of anger and desire for change Education catch-up (e.g. extended grades, cancelled summers) Growing demand for alternative lifestyles e.g. prepper, off-grid Social rituals inspired by other cultures (e.g. bows) Ongoing trauma management, social workers still on frontlines Surge in going out, dating, socializing Anti-loneliness movement and services Change to religious services (more contactless, less people) Skills-based after school activities New co-living arrangements (different families under one roof)
Discipline: Keep Calm, Carry On	Precarious/sovereign democracy, leaning authoritarian Single, impoverished class, with some elites Stricter state of emergency laws, with wartime policies Constant border controls with no immigration Political shifts with migration away from dense zones Redrawing of national borders for already volatile states Crackdown on non-complicit persons Military coups, with declarations of war Conscription for frontline relief and civic duties Strict consequences and fines for disobedience Refugee, marginalized population concentration camps Expanded power and role of law enforcement Streamlined governments that focus on essentials	Depression: bartering, informal, dark web, and vice economies Nationalized essential services No more brands, state owned-companies only Home spun businesses operating quietly Community tax, seizure of offshore assets Rise of Do-it-Yourself and Fix-it-Yourself economy Suspension of all patents, supervision of all supply chains Home delivery for necessities: restrained consumption Aftershock management with staggered relief funds Modern takes on pre-industrial work, roles, and services No individual ownership, possessions seized as needed Echoes of French Revolution for the elite Government and quasi-government are the only white-collar jobs	Diminishing choices and freedoms, state of paranoia Surveillance state under guise of public health End of privacy: freedom traded for safety and security Me and mine-first values Power grab by religious extremists Revived patriotism against the 'invisible enemy' General state of distrust, high mistrust of 'foreigners' Loss of trust, sense of self, elder wisdom, etc. Tyranny of self-sufficiency; rebuilding survival skills Significant change in views on life and death Wealth = selfishness, Luxury = greed Fragmented public versus private personas Distancing and dying as moral obligations	Controlled economic shutdowns for environmental benefits Staggered energy supply (leading to staggered work hours) No interference or connection to unsanctioned nature/animals Less light, noise, and air pollution Crumbling infrastructure, lots of retro-fitting and repurposing Toxic disinfectants released with spray-downs Systematic animal culling of potentially infectious animals Always-on emergency management precautions/teams High anticipation for environmental disasters, little preparedness Sustainable strategies e.g. repair, repurposing, reusing Improvements to wildlife populations Tension: resurgence in coal versus off-grid options Live off land: more organic, grown, harvested materials	Touchless and augmented reality tech Unregulated blockchain communities: global medical connectivity Vaccines come with state-owned biometric trackers Always on monitoring, tracking, and control AI and algorithms Clean Eating': push for lab grown foods, high-tech home gardens Security, protection, biometric surveillance, policing tech Wartime-style medical tech innovation, R&D Proof of isolation required to receive care, non-isolators denied High status scientists that are known names Heavy investments in R&D Mandatory health checks and swabs Dark web flourishes with underground medical supplies, services High strain on healthcare systems, emphasis on saving the young	Digital collaboration and delivery Homemade entertainment, everyday dystopias, role-playing State-owned celebrities hired to distract the public Nationalized streaming service Increase in government propaganda More animated shows and films (distanced work) Increased interest in role playing games At-home projection mapped immersive environments New metaphors: invisible enemies, 'we're the virus' Practical arts': cooking, making, building, growing Depression propaganda Waste/trash art	Hypo-chondriac connections and cleaning rituals Changes lasting changes to celebrations and funerals Delayed family planning and/or choosing not to have children Quarantine driven disorders, mental health epidemic Humanitarian aid through labour only Pragmatic marriages (more resources, less love) High social shaming, with neighbours reporting on each other Repressed youth/generation Mandated curfews, registered small gatherings Permission-based, strategic global travel; restrained local travel Prescribed virtual connection Less pollution related deaths Prolonged homeschooling
Collapse: Vicious Circles	Full breakdown of governments who lose all power Anarchy, laws are discarded, reinvented Self-proclaimed leaders/strongmen; return of feudal lords Sealed compounds, underground, northern island communities Breakdown triggers civil wars, creates a vicious cricle No more global connections, focus on local only Non-existent global organizations who wither away Some functioning communes with utopic ideals Every style of leadership and rule of law emerges in pockets Tribal mentality abound End of democracy	Money is meaningless Rich hideout in undisclosed bunkers Outsiders and others feared Extreme nostalgia and longing for our lost world High spirituality versus dangerous cults Seeds, cigarettes, and batteries are new currencies No more corporations Agriculture and sanitation become important Spoils to the survivors Dispersion of belongings Master and apprentice relationships Hardened life perspectives; meaning in surviving	End of days rhetoric Fear rules all Destructive versus benevolent misogyny Virus as a modern 'flood' Rapture versus cleansing versus salvation Hope of new utopia, chance to rebuild End of social trust Return to indigenous knowledge Distrust of dirt; cleanliness as an act of worship Burials as offerings back to the Earth Distortion of truth: trying to understand what really happened Return of paganism	Unexpected natural disasters further decimates society Nature as punishment Nature flourishes, the Earth begins to recover World without oil emerges Most life is off-grid Sustainable living is the only kind of living Solar and wind technology is precious Heightened understanding of natural cycles Migration amongst survivors Fertile land is coveted and protected Cities abandoned, with as much converted for food as possible	Equally or more harmful mutations: Covid-20-21-22 Internet goes down Doctors, nurses become 'prized possessions' of the strong Pseudoscience and alternative medicine Relentless environmental disasters devastate cities Other diseases flourish as Covids clear the way Humanity escapes from nature in underground compounds Artificial everything: filtered air, sunlight Survival of the fitness is the ruling natural law Healthcare breakdown makes all diseases untreatable Battery run tech rebounds	Great art hoarded or stolen Pratical applications: making and using Art becomes a connection to the lost world Music and oral stories survive New religions mix with old (wrathful God versus Earth mother) Books are prized possessions Singers are coveted Historical fiction flourishes Natural materials used more (e.g. clay) Return of old world films and filmmaking processes	Mass death decimates all fabric of society End of equal rights, with movement towards hyper-hierarchy Increase in violence and devastation Return to hunting and gathering People move in small packs, settle in protected communities Death sentencing for the sick End of international travel Small communities on islands, underground Intentional social relationships, with strategic outside disconnect Libraries are raided Sick and mentally-ill are abandoned Stock-piling of weapons
Transformation: We Not Me	Democratic socialism Policies for lower and middle class (e.g. debt forgiveness) People, planet before political parties (issue-based voting) Enshrined essential services (e.g. farming, frontline workers) Essentials are socialized public services (e.g. meals) Acting local, thinking global (e.g. changed role of UN) Affordability measures implemented (e.g. new housing laws) Socialized education systems Internet as a human right (with ban on telecom gauging) Global scientific accountability enforceable by law Privacy laws that protect individuals health records New anti-establishment candidates	Universal basic income introduced Wealth dispersion mechanisms e.g. anti-hoarding laws Mandated for-benefit corporations, community participation funds Local supply chains, supported by global cooperation Shift away from manufactured consumerism Redefined shareholder benefits: pro-social mechanisms Shift from GDP to Affordability and Resiliency metrics Wealth and wage caps (e.g. CEO salaries, inheritance) Increase funding social services, mental health Unicorn extinction Restrained support for high profit companies, tax dodgers Decentivized, diminishing billionaires	Community-first mindset and values New symbols of social status (e.g. tax paid versus income) Science = status: renewed respect for academia Diminishing power of corporate America Renewed activism for climate change to mitigate disease Realignment of values around collective good Truth triaging, rise of journalistic integrity Demilitarization of patriotism Growing voices of indigenous populations Dissipating 'hero entrepreneur' myths Eco-reverence and respect Thought leadership diminishes as real experts rise	Protective measures around natural resources Climate change mitigation with understanding that Covid-19 dress Sustainable consumption habits, with less waste Push towards a post-carbon society Rise in community garden and local farms Relinquish dependance on oil Organic, disaster-proof infrastructure Clean-up of tourists sites, with controlled visitations Significant benefits reaped from economic shutdown Reimagine structures and infrastructure (e.g. hive homes) Greater push towards vegetarianism, lab grown meats At or in-home farms and gardens	Increase funding for infectious disease, health institutions Boom in medical knowledge and innovation Open-sourced science, Wikipedia models for journals Global cross-collaboration on Internet 2.0 Rise of care-tech Multi-player role playing games to study scenarios Climate change taken much more seriously Renewed interest in STEM with influx of university applications Rapid digitization of public services New blockchain innovations that distribute real-time information Fully resourced support systems for healthcare providers 3D, 4D, organic printing boom to support real-time response	Ongoing narratives of community and oneness Collective creating and storytelling More everyday utopias (e.g. Schitt's Creek) Increased interest in speculative/science fiction Diminished celebrity culture Highly diverse art and expression forms Global digital collaboration Celebration of new heroes (e.g. care and service providers) New metaphors and myths (e.g. techno-Gaia narratives) Creative economy as a revitalization strategy Flourishing arts community, supported by UBI Different languages and cultures provide inspiration	Augmented social services, with focus on wellbeing Tight-knit neighbourhoods share resources e.g. community banks New literacies, social capacities (e.g. financial, futures, etc.) Education reform: essential/creative skills, new hours/structures Equality and diversity (different ideas and experience valued) Libraries become the heart of communities Conscientious travelling with an eye on carbon footprint Rise of Eastern and Indigenous spiritual practices Dispersion of urban centres, reorganized suburbs Open, transparent global communication Mass adoption of habits, rituals, norms from other cultures Multi-generational learning (especially from wars)

## Important Considerations for Scenarios

- Complexity requires variety: What we will see unfold is not simply elements of the future as outlined, but complex relationships between those elements. We need to consider a variety of factors and how they relate to each other when designing strategies.
- Not mutually exclusive: Elements of each of the four futures will occur at once. For instance, though we are seeing Discipline elements emerge, we are also seeing some aspects of Continuation play out. It is a question of which elements are dominant in which cultural context.
- Uneven distribution: Even if a dominant scenario emerges, the future will not be equal for everyone. It is possible for some to experience Transformation while others experience Collapse within the same geographic boundaries.
- We might cycle through them: It is possible that we shift through the different possible futures as the infection and death rates change. Given that we are in the Release phase of the ecocycle, we will experience both resistance and catalysts for change.
- Signposts: The more elements you see emerge across a particular scenario, the more likely that scenario's archetypal cultural narrative is emerging.
- No timeline: some incidents, events, and signposts will occur sooner than others. The system is shifting too quickly to predict what will happen and when.
- Context matters: This document is written from a Canadian perspective, with a set of strategies best suited for Canada. It will require adaptation in other contexts (For instance, it is unlikely for China to display the Political-Transformation elements. They will likely deepen their already Discipline-Collapse tendencies, with some elements of Science and Technology-Transformation).
- Be mindful of stakeholder agendas: There are plenty who benefit from broken systems, including the world we are now leaving behind. Examine motive and intention carefully.
- Not all these points are equal: For instance, an environmental disaster will have a significant detrimental impact and must be accounted for in contingency plans. A single environmental disaster during or after the height of Covid-19 may tip a system towards Collapse.




## Next Steps

The next steps include the design of comprehensive sub-system scenarios, creation of short-term, mid-term, and long-term strategies, and testing these strategies for both organization and systems-level fit.



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW TO NAVIGATE A  
POST-COVID-19 WORLD, PLEASE CONTACT LEAH ZAIDI AT  
MULTIVERSE DESIGN.

[MULTIVERSEDESIGN.COM](https://multiverse.design)



© 2020