



International and interdisciplinary research cooperation  
*European Cultures in Business and Corporate Communication*  
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## **EUCO Conference 24. - 26. Oktober 2024 in Nuernberg**

### **Call for Papers**

# **Progress, Innovation, Vision – Scenarios, Images, Metaphors and Linguistic Concepts of the Future in Business Communication. An interdisciplinary reflection.**

Host & Contact: Prof. Volker M. Banholzer  
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#### **Summary, subject and aim of the conference:**

For companies as well as associations, think tanks, politicians or general players in economic discourse, the reference to future developments of their own organization, the future of industries or the economy, the socio-technical futures in social discourse as well as forecasts, scenarios and roadmaps is becoming increasingly important. Attracting junior staff, retaining the core workforce or approaching investors depend on a credible and attractive presentation of the company's own future. New products, technologies or services are advertised as forward-looking, future-proof and illustrate this with imaginations of the future present. Problem sketches or anticipated crisis situations are used to mobilize people so that they can then present their own proposals as suitable solutions. Roadmaps, Delphi studies and scenarios

contain expectations and representations of the future in order to prepare decisions. Against this background, actors in economic discourses must therefore represent and communicate their perspectives on the future visually, narratively and stylistically. Policy fields such as space travel, nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, bioeconomy or biointelligence as well as sustainability are constructed socially and discursively through imaginations of the future.

The communicative representation and use of futures is currently taking place in a wide variety of communication arenas in which, on the one hand, imaginations of the future are competing or, on the other hand, actors are forced to refer to culturally shaped or, for example, industry-standard common imaginations of the future, but have to shape them in their own way. At the same time, imagining the future is currently taking place against a backdrop of multiple crises. In view of the different facets of the current polycrises, a pure reference to an established narrative of progress seems outdated and rather counterproductive. On the other hand, dystopias and crisis-like depictions of the future are being used to mobilize people, particularly in the civil society and political context, which can also be observed in the discourse on the climate crisis.

The EUKO 2024 conference will focus on the interdisciplinary and intercultural consideration of these communicative representations of the future in business communication. However, reflective practical reports, case analyses, methodological and theoretical reflections are also welcome. The subject areas and disciplines listed are for illustrative purposes only and are not exhaustive:

- Communication Studies, Business Studies, Political Science, Literary Studies as well as Linguistics, Sociology, Science & Technology Studies, with contributions on:
- Internal and external corporate communication, public relations, public affairs, marketing and advertising as well as
- Political communication, policy field analysis of emerging technologies, research & innovation policy;
- technology assessment, futurology, scenario management, sociology of technology and business journalism
- Business journalism, science and technology journalism or general communication; media sociology and psychology

Analyses of text-based, visual and audio-supported imaginations of the future in corporate advertising, marketing, public relations or public affairs are obvious. However, actors in (economic) politics also specifically use images of the future in political communication, from "blossoming landscapes" (Nöling, Schröder & Marotz 2011) to the "human-empty factory" (Frey & Osborne 2013) to "humans as conductors of value creation" (Banholzer 2023) and show that the future is contested in social discourse (Zille, Drewing & Janik 2022; Mazé 2019). Policy fields such as nanotechnologies are socially constructed (Schaper-Rinkel 2010) and the presentation of visions of the future shape the political programs of space travel (Grunwald 2023) or the biointelligence-driven factory of the future (Miehe et al. 2019).

Concepts such as Industry 4.0 or, with a view to mission-oriented R&I policy, Industry 5.0 or Society 5.0 (Banholzer 2023; Kleinemaß & Seebacher 2023) cannot do without visions of the future. Societies can only debate path decisions on new technologies, their technology impact assessment and desired and undesired outcomes via imagined visions of the future, socio-technical futures, which are represented in their extreme forms as utopias or dystopias. A current example is the regulation of artificial intelligence and the underlying scientific, economic and political discourses on dangers and potentials, which differ on the one hand interdisciplinarily in the specialist disciplines of, for example, law, natural sciences and social sciences (Heinrichs et al. 2023), but also interculturally (Denford, Dawson & Desouza 2024). Think tanks, media and journalism reproduce and reinforce these imaginations of the

future or generate such ideas themselves. This also raises the question of the significance of the cultural framework of images of the future in the communication of internationally operating companies.

The interdisciplinary exchange on images of the future in business communication and the intercultural comparison offer an analytical dimension to the imagination of futures and the related discourses that help to reflect and concretize theoretical concepts. The conference is aimed equally at academics and practitioners. Contributions from economics, political and communication sciences are just as welcome as analyses from linguistics, media psychology or sociology as well as practical examples from scenario management, campaign planning and strategic communication.

## Submission formalities:

Please send contributions for the conference

- as an **extended abstract** of a maximum of 1200 words (excluding bibliography, illustrations, etc.)
- **until May 22th, 2024**
- as a Word document
- to: [euko2024@th-nuernberg.de](mailto:euko2024@th-nuernberg.de) .

## Do you have any questions?

Conference organization:

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[www.th-nuernberg.de/EUKO2024](http://www.th-nuernberg.de/EUKO2024)

for the English Version:

<https://www.th-nuernberg.de/en/faculties/amp/research/research-areas/euco-conference-2024/>

A more detailed description of the subject matter of the conference and the literature cited can be found later in this call:

Possible topics and issues:

## "Future" as a topic in business communication

In order to survive and succeed in an environment whose current form will not last long, companies, employees and consumers, politicians and citizens must constantly look to an uncertain future (Beckert 2016). The future is therefore not a distant time, but something that all people are constantly creating (Gaub 2023) and this future occurs in the present exclusively in the form of images (Neuhaus 2023), which actors consciously create and use in ideas, imaginations, representations, forecasts, scenarios and trend statements. These "images of the future" thus describe current ideas of possible, sometimes probable and desirable or avoidable futures (Rauch, Simon & Bösch 2023). On the one hand, the necessity of this approach, in its self-evident nature, also entails problems arising from the limitation of resources or economic requirements. On the other hand, every imagination of the future is inevitably subjected to a reality test, although this only becomes the subject of new discourses in selected cases.

Competition in general has developed into a pronounced communication competition in all sectors of the economy, but also in society and politics. In different communication arenas, institutional and individual players are called upon to position themselves, and the actions of companies are being observed more and more critically due to the growing demands of a wide variety of stakeholders (Ingenhoff, Borner & Zerfaß 2020). For recipients, stakeholders, society and politics, this positioning must contain signals of future viability, problem-solving ability, (technological) development and competence as well as conformity with the value contexts of the respective target group. Decisions for technological and political development paths, the acceptance of changes, the risk and opportunity assessment of technological consequences are influenced by the conflicting imaginations of the future and their communication. The present is dependent on the orientation function of discursively constructed knowledge of the future and strategically acting actors enter into a social competition for interpretive sovereignty in future discourses with their ideas of the future (Haupt 2021) in order to ultimately be able to shape their spaces of possibility (Buchholz & Knorre 2019; John 2020).

The **EUCO 2024** is dedicated to these framings and changes in the discourses of the economy, companies and actors, which are expressed in new or adapted visual languages, stylistics, forms of commentary, narratives or methods and channels. Against the background of the interdisciplinary and intercultural character of the EUCO, contributions from different academic disciplines and practice are welcome. We are looking for theory-oriented or empirical contributions from the fields of linguistics, marketing or public relations, communication science, innovation and futurology or social sciences. Contributions from the practice of companies, associations and politics are also welcome.

**As already mentioned in the summary, the topics and examples listed below are expressly intended as an impulse for submissions and are not to be understood as exclusive or exclusive.**

## **Public relations, marketing and advertising, external and internal corporate communications**

Companies are under an innovation imperative (Rammert et al. 2016). However, every product innovation or the introduction of a new technology is also an announcement of the replacement of the previous portfolio. This problem arises in marketing communication in particular and is described in the literature as a requirement for ambidexterity: Announcements of new products must not jeopardize the sales of the successful cash cows in the portfolio. One method to meet this requirement is the vision communication approach, as proposed by Banholzer and Siebert (2021). An approach that can bring the existing portfolio and innovation together under a narrative or a shared vision of the future. There is also a paradigm shift from transaction marketing to relationship marketing (cf. Backhaus and Schneider 2020), which always relates companies and different stakeholder groups to the jointly envisioned future. This shared future is shaped linguistically, visually and narratively. Siemens AG has defined "Pictures of the Future" (Eberl 2013) as the core of innovation communication and has developed a content marketing or content PR strategy with images of the future. Advertising also uses descriptions of the future. For example, the automotive industry stages e-mobility in animations and scenes that use science fiction motifs or explicitly address the locomotion of the future in terms of language. Another example based on the automotive industry is the sponsorship of Formula E by the technology group ABB. For example, ABB's claim in this context is: "Let's write the future of living in digitally enabled cities". Concepts of thought leadership are in demand in both external and internal corporate communication (Kirchenbauer 2022). Thought leadership must communicate ideas about the future in order to convey the future viability of an organization to stakeholders. Images of the future are also required for communication within organizations and companies in order to be able to adapt to the needs of new generations, but also to be able to communicate transformation processes. Helmold (2023) sees a "future-oriented mindset" as a goal for internal communication, both towards the entire workforce and with regard to CEO and management communication.

## **Linguistics, media psychology, journalism**

The interest of social actors in shaping future futures can be seen both in the establishment of institutions and in the use of frames or linguistic peculiarities. The visual and linguistic representation of futures activates so-called frames in recipients. In some cases, references are explicitly staged, while in others, hints that deliberately use omissions suffice (Schmidt 2023). This also refers to findings in neuroscience. "Our brains like to plan" (McHale 2022) and use imagination and language to create different models of both previously non-existent and hoped-for things. Concepts such as constructive journalism, which aims to move away from pure problem reporting towards reporting with possible solutions (Mast, Coesemans & Temmerman 2019; Urner 2019; McIntyre & Gyldensted 2018) and thus draws on images of possible futures, should also be seen against this backdrop. By reporting on plans, opportunities and risks, the media and journalism contribute significantly to the discursive shaping of future markets and to decisions on development paths. Reporting creates opportunities to represent the new (Müller 2021).

## Political Communication, Science & Technology Studies, Technology Assessment

The idea of the future influences the design of political systems. White (2024) emphasizes that "beliefs about the future shape expectations of who should hold power, how it should be exercised, and to what ends". At the same time, companies, organizations and individuals operate under conditions of radical uncertainty as a central feature of modern economies (Kay & King 2020; Beckert & Bronk 2022). This means that planning based on extrapolations or simple trends can no longer do justice to the changing framework conditions (cf. Esposito 2016). Therefore, in addition to extrapolations and trends, other tools are becoming increasingly important - so-called scenarios, in which several imaginable visions of the future are developed and described and their interdependencies are presented; simulations and models from science have also been incorporated into policy advice. Kaminski, Gramelsberger and Scheer (2023) even speak of a "prognostic turn" with regard to political consulting, because "modeling for politics has become an integral part (...) of technology assessment". Scenario management is an overarching framework concept in which scenario development and the strategic use of scenarios are directly linked, whereby scenario management combines future-oriented and networked thinking with strategic thinking and action (cf. Fink and Siebe 2016). Vision assessment has established itself as an advanced method in technology assessment. It is used to analyze the influence of visions of the future in the development of new technologies in socio-technical innovation and transformation processes or the handling of visions of the future in advising politics, business and society (Lösch 2022, 51).

A narrative battle of interpretation can be observed in the public sphere, particularly in the context of climate protection, economic interests and the common good (Freier & Schneider 2022), in which catastrophic narratives compete with established progress/future narratives, with politicians often asserting their own ideas of the future in the past by arguing that there is no alternative (Séville 2018). Current futures are also communicated in order to consolidate current power constellations (Knappe 2020), which in turn provides an opportunity to analyze their construction. Concepts such as Industry 4.0 or Industry 5.0 and Society 5.0 are not artifacts, but rather draw on imaginations of socio-technical and socio-economic futures (Banholzer 2023; Kleinemaß & Seebacher 2023) in order to create acceptance and also socially construct new markets. Political announcements on space programs, hydrogen or AI strategies as well as on industrial policies of biointelligence (Bareis & Katzenbach 2022; Miehe et al. 2019; Maletzko, Wurster & Pinkwart 2024) set narratives and activate frames to imagine ideas of the future.

### Intercultural aspects

The discourses on opportunities and risks are subject to culturally specific frameworks and reflect the respective value contexts (Joly 2017). According to Pfothner and Jasanoff (2017), every research and innovation system is an expression of the respective idea of socio-technical progress and the specific perception of the environment and thus an expression of the concrete idea of the future present. Regulations for the development and use of artificial intelligence are currently being debated intensively in regions of the world such as America, Asia and Europe, and with different cultural connotations (Denford, Dawson & Desouza 2024). However, this also happens differently within cultures, depending on which scientific discipline they belong to and how they engage with each



other (Heinrichs et al. 2023). This raises questions about the culturally specific ideas and, for example, visual concretizations of the future, which can be analysed in policies, communication and the design of innovation ecosystems. "The cultural relevance of the future" (Seefried 2023, 3) is also expressed in the institutionalization of concrete images of the future. So-called museums of the future have emerged internationally in recent decades, each representing an expression of the respective culturally shaped perspective on the future. These include the Futurium in Berlin, which is designed as a space for experiencing the future (Anzengruber, Zobl & Engelbrecht 2021), and the Museum of the Future in Nuremberg, which is a branch of the Deutsches Museum and presents future technologies in connection with ethical and social issues (Müller & Saverimuthu 2021). The Museum of the Future in Dubai offers the experience of "nearfuture technologies from the world's leading innovators" and the Seoul Robot and AI Museum also focuses on future technologies (Cornell 2023).

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