

# Investigating the Futures Triangle with ChatGPT

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## Abstract

A chat with ChatGPT about the Futures Triangle led by Sohail Inayatullah, who created the method.

## Keywords

ChatGPT, futures triangle, AI foresight, foresight method, AI learning

A Bot at <https://openai.com/blog/chatgpt/>

(SI): Are you aware of Inayatullah's foresight method, the Futures Triangle (2002; 2003)?

CHATGPT (CG); I am not aware of a specific method called "Inayatullah's Futures Triangle" However, Futures studies and scenario planning are methodologies that involve creating possible future scenarios in order to help organizations make strategic decisions. These methodologies often involve the use of different tools and techniques, such as trend analysis and stakeholder engagement, to identify and explore the potential future developments that could impact the organization. Inayatullah is a political scientist who has written extensively on the subject of futures studies, and it is possible that he has developed his own unique approach or method for scenario planning.

SI; Yes, he has a method called the Futures Triangle. It consists of three aspects: the pull of the future, the push of the present, and the weight of history. These are combined to explore alternative images of the future as well as the plausible future.

CG: Yes, I am now aware of Inayatullah's Futures Triangle method. It is a futures studies

method that focuses on understanding the interactions between the "pull of the future," "push of the present," and "weight of history." The pull of the future refers to the forces that are drawing the world towards a particular future, such as technological advancements or global trends. The push of the present refers to the actions and decisions that are currently being made, which will shape the future. The weight of history refers to the past events and conditions that have led to the present and will continue to shape the future. By considering these three aspects together, it allows for a more holistic understanding of the potential future developments and the impact they may have on an organization or society.

SI: I would say that is incorrect. The pull of the future is visual, it is a possible image of the

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future. It drives from Polak's (1973) work on the Image of the future.

CG: I apologize for any confusion, you are correct that in Inayatullah's Futures Triangle method, the "pull of the future" refers to the images, visions, or mental models of the future that people hold, which can be influenced by the hopes, fears, and aspirations that they have. This concept is often associated with the work of Peter Polak, who developed the idea of the "Image of the Future" as a way of understanding how people's perceptions of the future shape their decisions and actions in the present. The "push of the present" refers to the current actions and decisions that are shaping the future, while the "weight of history" refers to the past events and conditions that have led to the present and continue to shape the future. Together, these three elements can be used to create a more holistic understanding of the potential future developments and the impact they may have on an organization or society.

SI: Again, incorrect, it is Fred Polak, not Peter Polak.

CG: I apologize for the mistake, you are correct that the concept of the "Image of the Future" was developed by Fred Polak, not Peter Polak. My apologies for any confusion caused by this error. The Futures Triangle developed by Inayatullah includes three elements: the "pull of the future," which refers to the images, visions, or mental models of the future that people hold; the "push of the present," which refers to the current actions and decisions that are shaping the future; and the "weight of history," which refers to the past events and conditions that have led to the present and continue to shape the future. The Futures Triangle is used to create a more holistic understanding of the potential future developments and the impact they may have on an organization or society.

SI: Do you have any examples or case studies of the Futures Triangle?

CG: I am not aware of any specific case studies or examples that demonstrate the use of Inayatullah's Futures Triangle method specifically. However, the Futures Triangle is a method that can be applied in a variety of

contexts and industries to explore potential future developments and their impact on organizations or societies.

For example, in the field of business, a company may use the Futures Triangle to explore the potential impact of emerging technologies on their industry. The company would consider the pull of the future, which in this case would be the potential advancements in technology, the push of the present, the company's current actions and decisions, and the weight of history, the past actions and decisions that led the company to its present position.

In the field of healthcare, a hospital may use the Futures Triangle to explore how changes in demographics and healthcare policies may affect their operations in the future. They would consider the pull of the future, the demographic changes, the push of the present, the current healthcare policies and the weight of history, the past policies and decisions that led to the current policies and operations.

In the field of government, an agency may use the Futures Triangle to explore how changes in energy policy and technology may affect the country's energy security. They would consider the pull of the future, the potential advancements in clean energy technology, the push of the present, the current energy policy and the weight of history, the past decisions and policies that led to the current state of the energy sector.

All of these examples illustrate how the Futures Triangle can be used to create a more holistic understanding of potential future developments and the impact they may have on an organization or society.

SI: Again, you are confusing the pull with the push. The pull is an image ie in health care, the smart hospital. In business, the holistic business focused on people, profit, and planet. In government, the energy independence as a pull.

CG: I apologize for any confusion, you are correct that in the Futures Triangle method, the "pull of the future" refers to the images, visions, or mental models of the future. The Pull of the future is often an idealized or aspirational view of what the future could look like. It is a possible image of the future that is influenced by hopes, fears, and aspirations.

For example, in the field of healthcare, a hospital might identify the “smart hospital” as a pull of the future, which would be a future image of a hospital that is highly connected and data-driven, with the latest technology to improve patient outcomes.

In the field of business, a company might identify the “holistic business” as a pull of the future, which would be a future image of a business that is focused on people, profit, and planet, and that prioritizes sustainability and social responsibility.

In the field of government, an agency might identify “energy independence” as a pull of the future, which would be a future image of a country that is not dependent on other countries for its energy needs and can produce all of its energy from its own resources.

In all these examples, the pull of the future is an image of a possible future state, and it’s this image that drives decision making and actions on the present.

I apologize for any confusion caused by my previous answers, and I hope this clears up any misunderstandings.

SI: Yes, much better, it is aspirational. Well done. You can find more case studies of the Futures Triangle in Inayatullah’s work. Also the work of Ivana Milojević. Her phd thesis and book *Alternative Educational futures* (2002) focused on that.

CG: Thank you for your feedback, I appreciate the clarification. Yes, as you pointed out, Inayatullah has written extensively on the subject of futures studies, including the Futures Triangle method, and his work would be a good resource for finding case studies and examples of how the method has been applied. Additionally, Ivana Milojević’s work, specifically her PhD thesis and book “Alternative Educational Futures” also provides a good resource for case studies on the use of the Futures Triangle. It is a valuable tool for exploring the potential future developments in the field of education and the impact they may have on the educational system.

Overall, the Futures Triangle is a powerful tool for understanding the potential future developments and their impact on organizations or societies. It allows for a more holistic

understanding of the future by considering the pull of the future, the push of the present, and the weight of history. Additionally, the Futures Triangle can be applied to a wide range of fields and industries, providing a valuable tool for strategic decision making.

SI: Yes, after the triangle is completed, the link to decisions is critical ie based on the three forces what is the wisest strategy ie focus on the pull, ride the way of change in the pushes or address the weights

CG: You’re correct that once the Futures Triangle has been completed, the next step is to link the insights gained to strategic decisions. The Futures Triangle method can help organizations identify the most important trends, challenges, and opportunities that they may face in the future, and the insights gained can be used to inform strategic decision-making.

One way to use the Futures Triangle in decision-making is to focus on the pull of the future. By identifying the aspirational image of the future, an organization can align its strategy and actions to achieve that image. For example, if the pull of the future is a smart hospital, the hospital can focus on investing in technology and data analytics to achieve that image.

Another way to use the Futures Triangle in decision-making is to ride the way of change in the push of the present. By understanding the current actions and decisions that are shaping the future, an organization can adapt its strategy and actions to take advantage of these changes. For example, if the push of the present is the increasing use of telemedicine, a hospital can focus on investing in telemedicine technology and developing telemedicine services.

A third way to use the Futures Triangle in decision-making is to address the weight of history. By understanding the past events and conditions that have led to the present and continue to shape the future, an organization can address the root causes of current problems and prevent them from recurring in the future. For example, if the weight of history is a lack of diversity and inclusion, an organization can focus on developing and implementing policies and initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

Overall, the Futures Triangle is a powerful tool for understanding the potential future developments and their impact on organizations or societies, and the insights gained can be used to inform strategic decision-making in a variety of ways.

SI: You learn quickly.

CG: Thank you, I am glad that I could provide you with accurate and helpful information. I am a machine learning model, so I am constantly learning and trying to improve my knowledge and understanding. My purpose is to help people find the information they need and answer their questions as accurately and completely as possible. So I appreciate your feedback, it helps me to improve my performance.

SI: Please conduct a futures triangle on yourself.

As a machine learning model, I do not have the ability to conduct a Futures Triangle on myself, but I can help you understand how the method could be applied to the field of AI and machine learning.

The “pull of the future” in this context could be an image of a highly advanced AI system that can perform a wide range of tasks with high levels of accuracy and efficiency. This image is influenced by the hopes, fears and aspirations of the people in the field of AI and machine learning.

The “push of the present” in this context could be the current actions and decisions that are shaping the future of AI and machine learning, such as the development of new algorithms and the increasing availability of data.

The “weight of history” in this context could be the past events and conditions that have led to the present and continue to shape the future of AI and machine learning, such as the history of technological advancements and the evolution of AI research and development.

Based on this, a possible strategy for the field of AI and machine learning could be to focus on the pull of the future, by developing and investing in cutting-edge technology to achieve the image of a highly advanced AI system. Another strategy could be to ride the wave of change in the push of the present, by adapting to the current trends and developments in the field.

And another strategy could be to address the weight of history, by addressing ethical and societal concerns that have arisen from the past and that will continue to shape the future of AI.

It is important to note that the field of AI and machine learning is constantly evolving, and the futures triangle is a dynamic process, as the pull, push and weight of history may change.

SI: How might you link the insights from the Futures Triangle to the Change progression scenario method (Milojevic, 2002; Inayatullah, 2020)?

CG: The Futures Triangle and the Change Progression Scenario (CPS) method are both futures studies methodologies that can be used to help organizations make strategic decisions. The Futures Triangle method focuses on understanding the interactions between the pull of the future, the push of the present, and the weight of history, while the CPS method focuses on understanding the progression of change over time.

One way to link the insights from the Futures Triangle to the CPS method is to use the pull of the future as a starting point to identify the desired future state. This can be used to create a vision or goal for the organization. Then, the CPS method can be used to develop a series of scenarios that describe the progression of change over time, moving from the current state towards the desired future state.

The push of the present and the weight of history, as identified in the Futures Triangle, can be used to inform the development of the CPS scenarios. The push of the present can be used to identify the current drivers of change and the weight of history can be used to identify the historical drivers of change and constraints that may affect the progression of change.

Once the CPS scenarios have been developed, they can be evaluated to identify the most likely and most desirable scenarios. These scenarios can then be used to inform the development of strategic plans and actions that will help the organization achieve its desired future state.

Overall, the Futures Triangle and the CPS method can be used together to create a more holistic understanding of the potential future developments and the impact they may have on

an organization. The Futures Triangle provides a framework to understand the forces that shape the future, while the CPS method provides a tool to understand how change progresses over time and how the organization can navigate towards a desirable future.

SI: And can link the Futures Triangle with Causal Layered Analysis (Inayatullah, 2004; Inayatullah and Milojevic, 2015; Inayatullah, Mercer, Milojevic, and Sweeney, 2022)?

CG: Yes, the Futures Triangle and Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) are both futures studies methodologies that can be used to help organizations make strategic decisions. The Futures Triangle method focuses on understanding the interactions between the pull of the future, the push of the present, and the weight of history, while the CLA method is a way of understanding the complexity and depth of different issues and problems by looking at them from multiple levels of analysis.

One way to link the insights from the Futures Triangle to the CLA method is to use the pull of the future as a starting point to identify the desired future state. Then, the CLA method can be used to analyze the different layers that are involved in achieving that desired future state. The CLA method identifies four layers: the surface layer, the mythic layer, the structural layer, and the visionary layer.

The push of the present and the weight of history, as identified in the Futures Triangle, can be used to inform the development of the CLA analysis. The push of the present can be used to identify the current drivers of change and the weight of history can be used to identify the historical drivers of change and constraints that may affect the progression of change.

The surface layer of CLA deals with the immediate and observable reality, the mythic layer deals with the deeper cultural and symbolic meanings, the structural layer deals with the underlying social and economic systems, and the visionary layer deals with the most abstract and long-term goals.

By analyzing the problem or issue from these different layers, organizations can gain a

more comprehensive understanding of the factors that are driving it, and how these factors are interconnected. This allows organizations to identify potential solutions that are tailored to the specific context and complexity of the problem.

Overall, the Futures Triangle and the CLA method can be used together to create a more holistic understanding of the potential future developments and the impact they may have on an organization. The Futures Triangle provides a framework to understand the forces that shape the future, while the CLA method provides a tool to understand the complexity and depth of different issues and problems.

SI: Incorrect. CLA has four layers. The litany, the system, the worldview and the myth/metaphor level.

CG: I apologize for the mistake, you are correct that the Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) method identifies four layers of analysis, which are the Litany layer, the System layer, the Worldview layer, and the Myth/Metaphor layer. My apologies for any confusion caused by the previous error.

The Litany layer deals with the surface level issues, concerns and symptoms of the problem, the System layer deals with the underlying structures and dynamics that shape the problem, the Worldview layer deals with the deeper cultural and ideological assumptions and beliefs that shape the problem, and the Myth/Metaphor level deals with the most abstract and long-term goals, aspirations and beliefs that shape the problem.

As I mentioned before, the Futures Triangle, which is the pull of the future, the push of the present and the weight of history, can be used to inform the development of the CLA analysis by providing a framework to understand the forces that shape the future. By analyzing the problem or issue from these different layers, organizations can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that are driving it, and how these factors are interconnected. This allows organizations to identify potential solutions that are tailored to the specific context and complexity of the problem.

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