



**Share a metaphor representing
your organization today
and a metaphor representing
the future you want it to
become.**

AFI | Strategic Foresight

Anticipatory Leadership

Shaping the Future with Strategic Foresight

WCMA - Crossroads & Catalysts: Leading through Uncertainty

August 14th, 2025

Today we'll be talking about how we lead into the future.

The world is changing and navigating its complexities calls for tools to not just minimize uncertainty but to embrace it.

1. Welcome & Kick-Off
2. Anticipatory Leadership
3. Thinking About Change
4. Break -----
5. Transforming Obstacles w/ Metaphor
6. Group Debrief

Alliance for Innovation

A long tradition of innovation
in local government.

3 Quick Things About Me

- > **Strategic Foresight Manager at AFI**

Helping local governments anticipate change and adapt proactively

- > **Consulting Futurist for AFI**

Facilitating capacity development and strategic processes that embrace uncertainty

- > **Background in Data Analytics and Leadership Development**

Experienced in critical analysis, workshop design, and facilitation

1

be open

2

be present

3

be curious

three agreements for the day



1

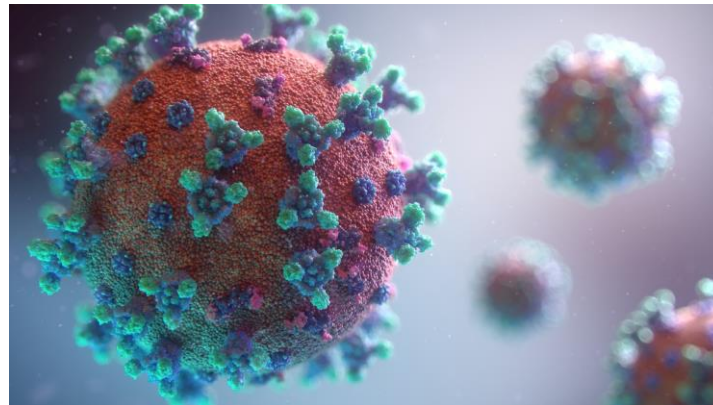
anticipatory leadership

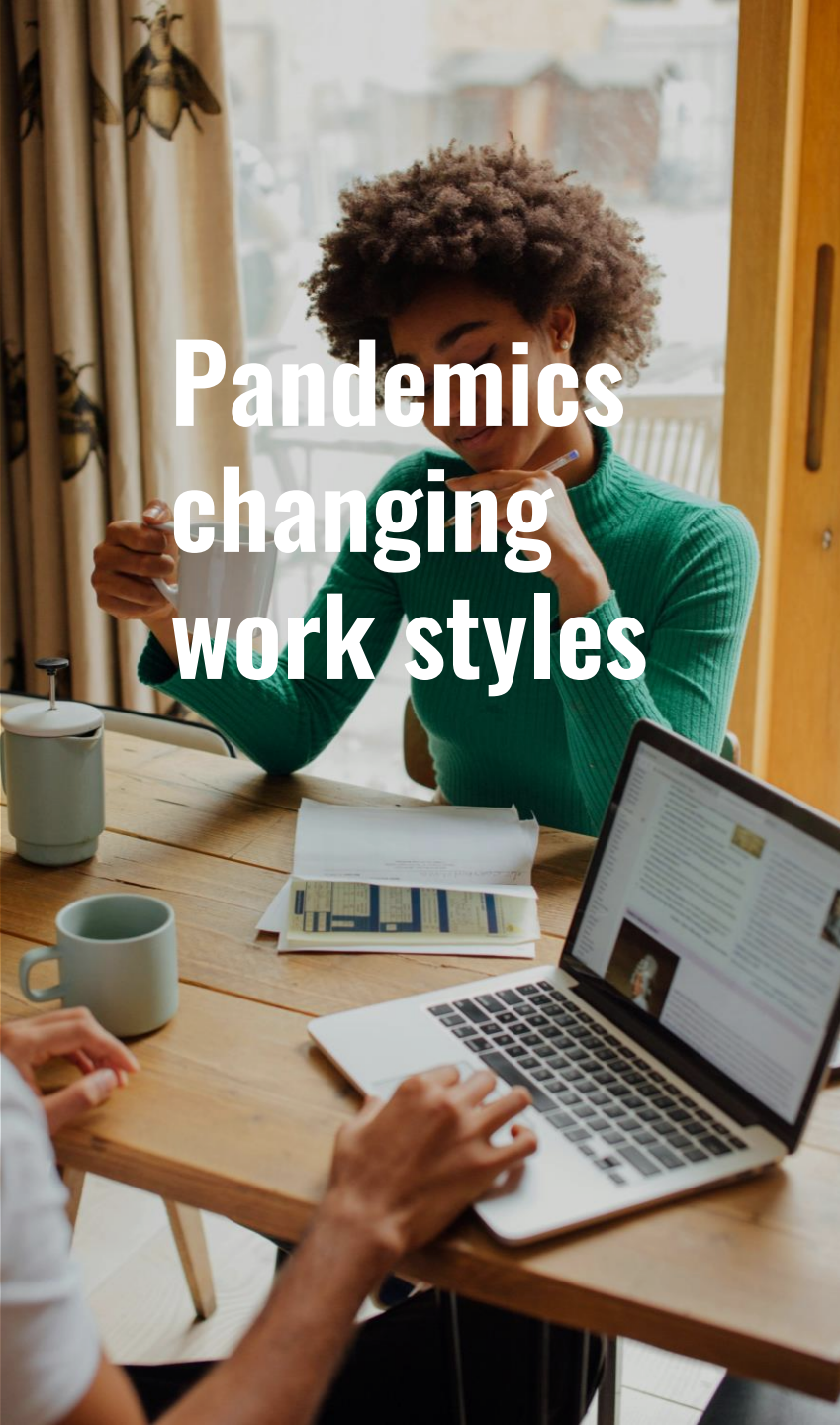
redefining our relationship with uncertainty



**We live in a time of
immense change.**

In just the last few years...





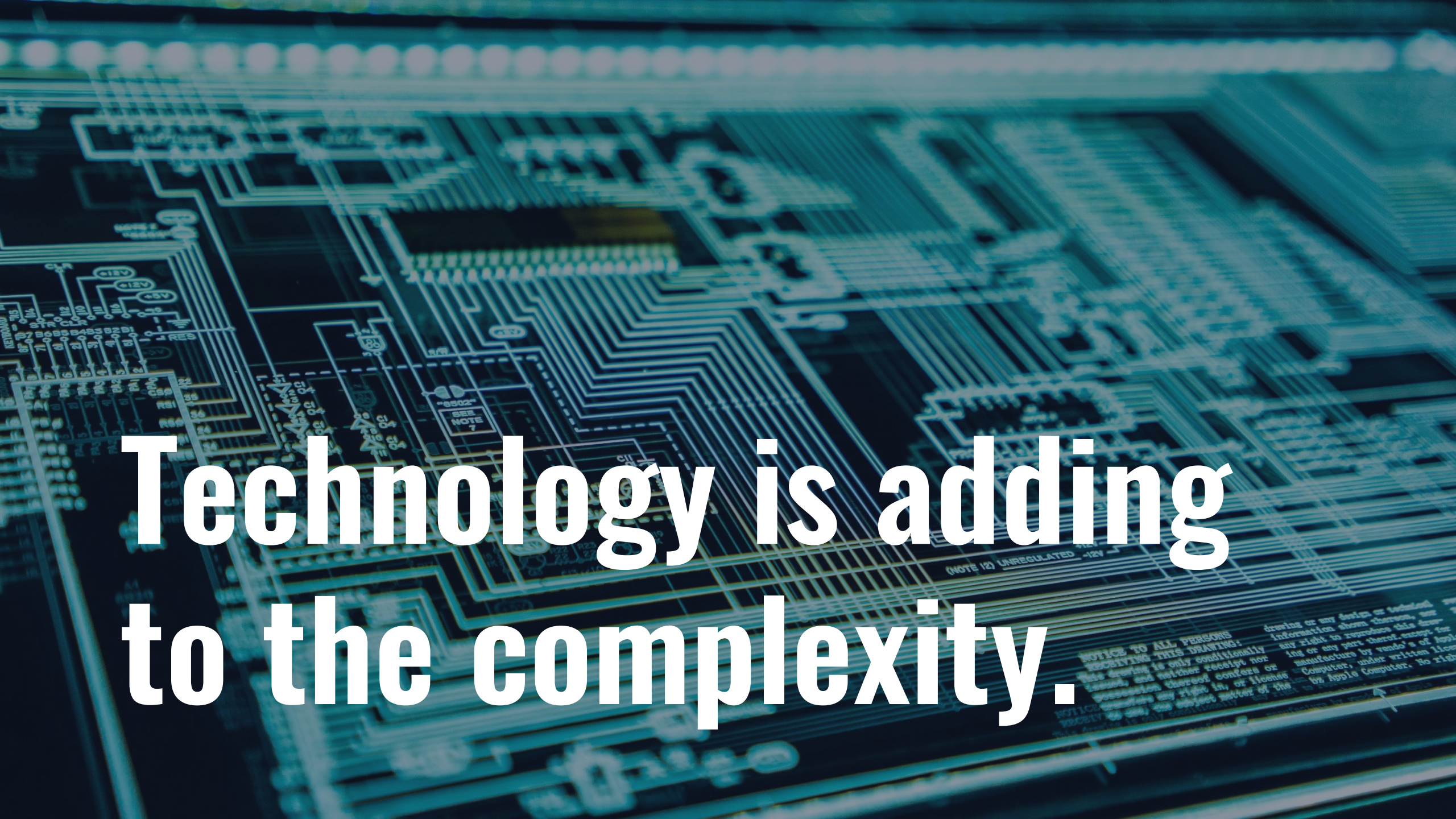
**Pandemics
changing
work styles**



**Climate
disasters
changing
services**



**Polarization
changing
community
cohesion**



**Technology is adding
to the complexity.**

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Apple Computer, Inc. 1977

Technology builds upon previous technologies, unlocking new possibilities but creating greater complexity...



Technological change is
accelerating...

**GENE
EDITING**

**REMOTE
WORK**

**PUBLIC
SPACE FLIGHT**

**3D PRINTED
FOOD**

**E-
SPO**

**OWNERLESS
COMPANIES**

**LANDING
ON MARS**

**DIGITAL
NOMADS**

**GIG
WORKERS**

**PEAK
OIL**



**If we aren't thinking
about change today,
we're falling behind.**



We call this the VUCA world.

volatile – **u**ncertain – **c**omplex – **a**mbiguous

A more dynamic world...

volatile

Leaders must operate in a chaotic and turbulent external context.

uncertain

Leaders are mired in constant uncertainty and change.

complex

Leaders are confronted with increasingly interconnected and complex systems.

ambiguous

Leaders are overloaded with new information but lack clarity on what is important.

A more dynamic world...

volatile

Leaders must operate in a chaotic and turbulent external context.

uncertain

Leaders are mired in constant uncertainty and change.

complex

Leaders are confronted with increasingly interconnected and complex systems.

ambiguous

Leaders are overloaded with new information but lack clarity on what is important.

pressurized

Leaders are under constant pressure to address immediate issues with limited resources.



**We need new tools to
navigate through this
VUCA-P world.**

violent

understanding

complex

ambiguous

potentialized





**We can anticipate to
embrace uncertainty
and volatility.**

**How can we
anticipate uncertain
situations that have
no precedent?**

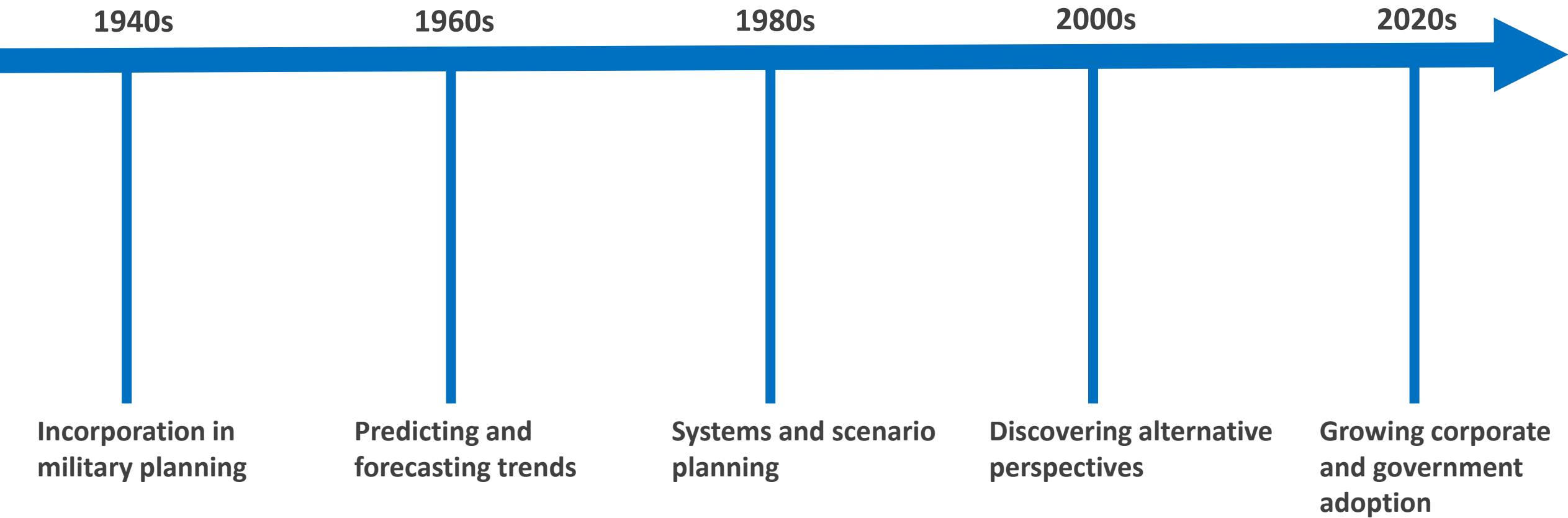
A vintage compass rose is visible in the background, partially obscured by the text. It features a circular design with various directional indicators and numbers, set against a dark, textured wooden surface. The compass is positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the image, with its needle pointing towards the top-left.

A photograph of a person with dark skin raising their right hand in a classroom or meeting setting. The person is wearing a white shirt. In the background, another person is visible but out of focus. The text "Have you heard of foresight?" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font on the left side of the image.

**Have you heard of
foresight?**

**Strategic Foresight:
Decision-making informed by
the systematic exploration of
long-term, functional
alternatives.**





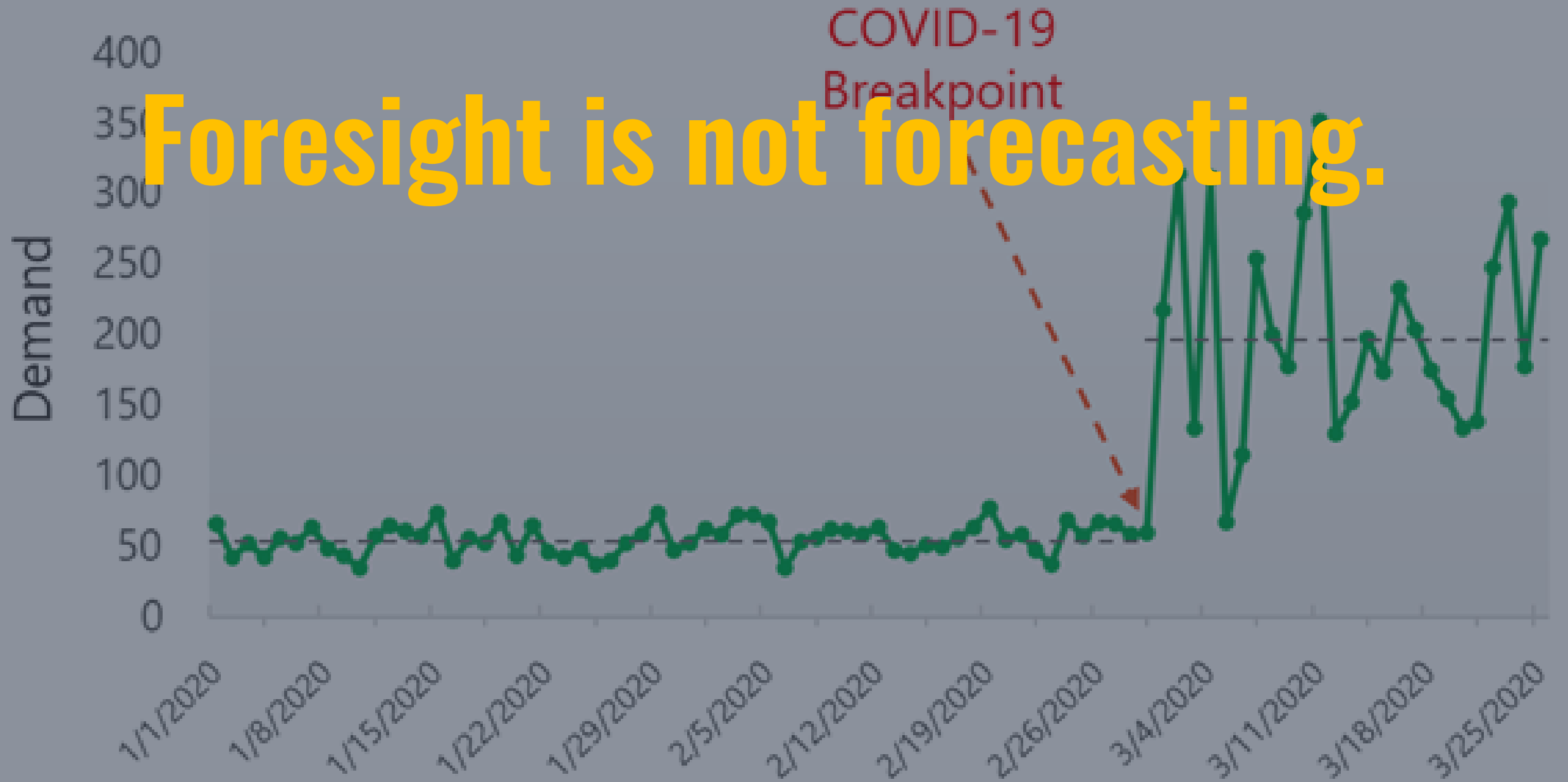
**Foresight is not predicting
the future.**



The background of the image is a textured, light brown surface. Overlaid on this are numerous dark blue, three-dimensional geometric shapes. These shapes are primarily L-shaped and T-shaped, resembling interlocking blocks or architectural elements. They are arranged in a non-uniform, scattered pattern across the entire frame, creating a complex, abstract visual texture. The lighting appears to come from the upper left, casting soft shadows that emphasize the three-dimensional nature of the blocks.

**Foresight helps us discover
functional alternatives.**

Foresight is not forecasting.



* Graph used for illustrative purposes only

**Foresight connects the
impact of critical
uncertainties to your
community.**



**Foresight is not only planning
for the distant future.**



A photograph of a park path. In the foreground, a wooden bench with a grey metal frame sits on the left. A paved path leads from the bench into the distance, flanked by trees and foliage. The text "Foresight uses the future as an asset to inform action today." is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font across the upper half of the image.

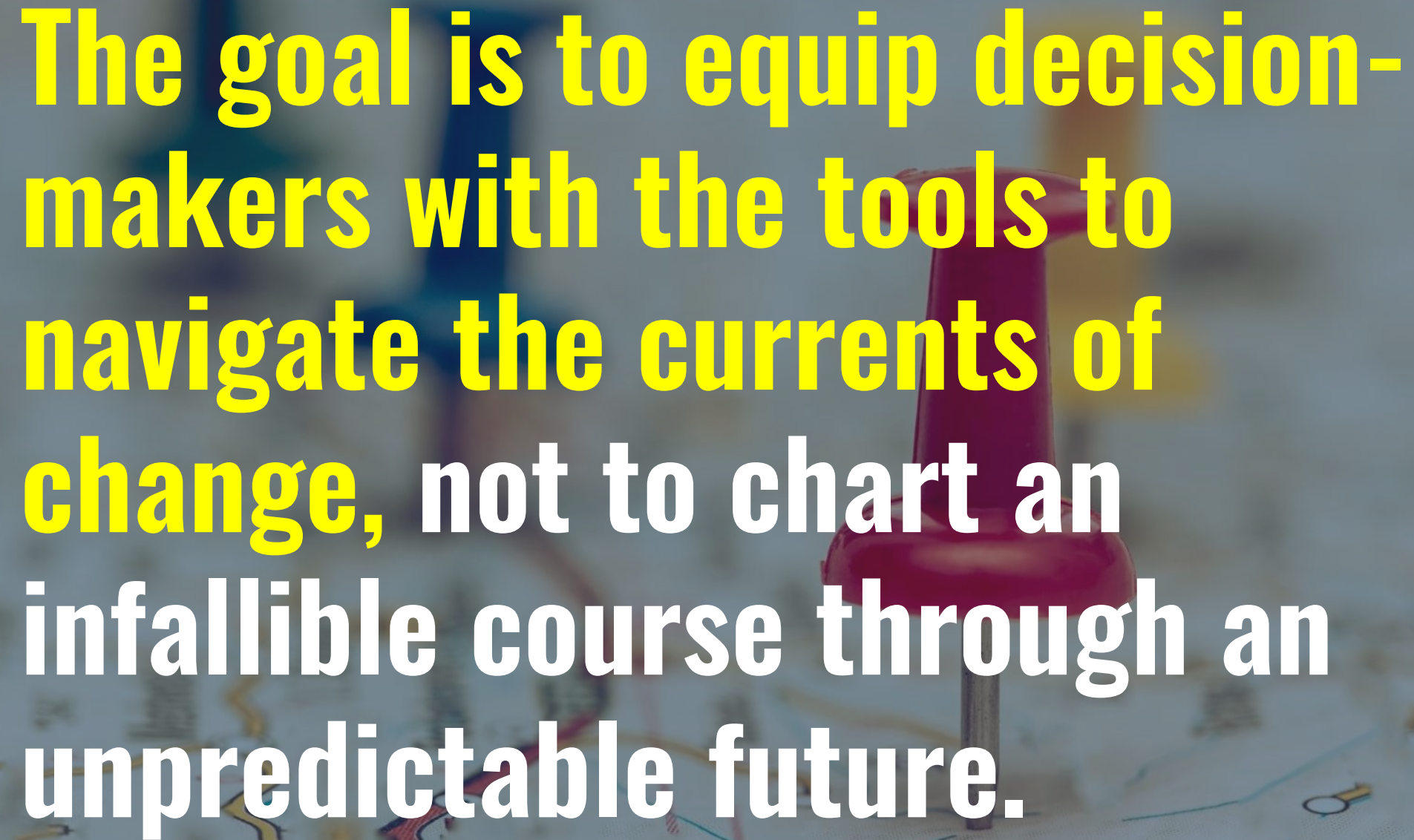
**Foresight uses the future as
an asset to inform action
today.**

Foresight is not a one-off project.



A close-up photograph of a person's hands being washed in a sink. The hands are covered in white soap suds. Water is running from a faucet on the left. The background shows a tiled wall and a white sink. The image has a blue tint.

**Foresight is a practice to
shift culture.**

A red pushpin is stuck into a map, which is visible in the background. The map shows various geographical features and lines. The text is overlaid on the map and the pushpin.

The goal is to equip decision-makers with the tools to navigate the currents of change, not to chart an infallible course through an unpredictable future.

3

thinking about change

strategic conversation to shape futures

perspective





Bill Sharpe's

three horizons

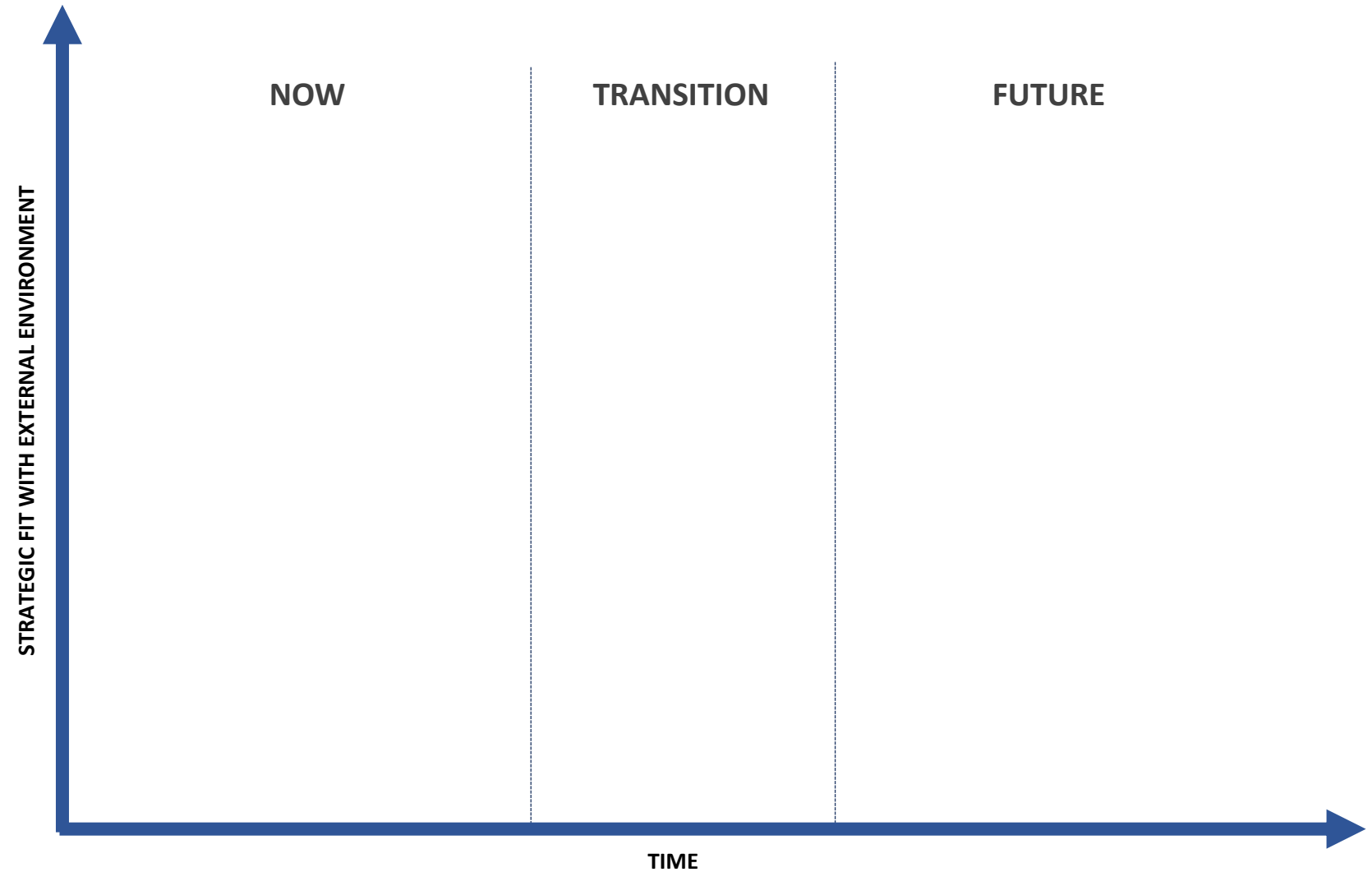
perspectives and strategies for the future

We want to shape the
future in the presence
of uncertainty about how,
or other people's
future with collective
(sometimes competing)
coordinated action
VISIONS

Framework

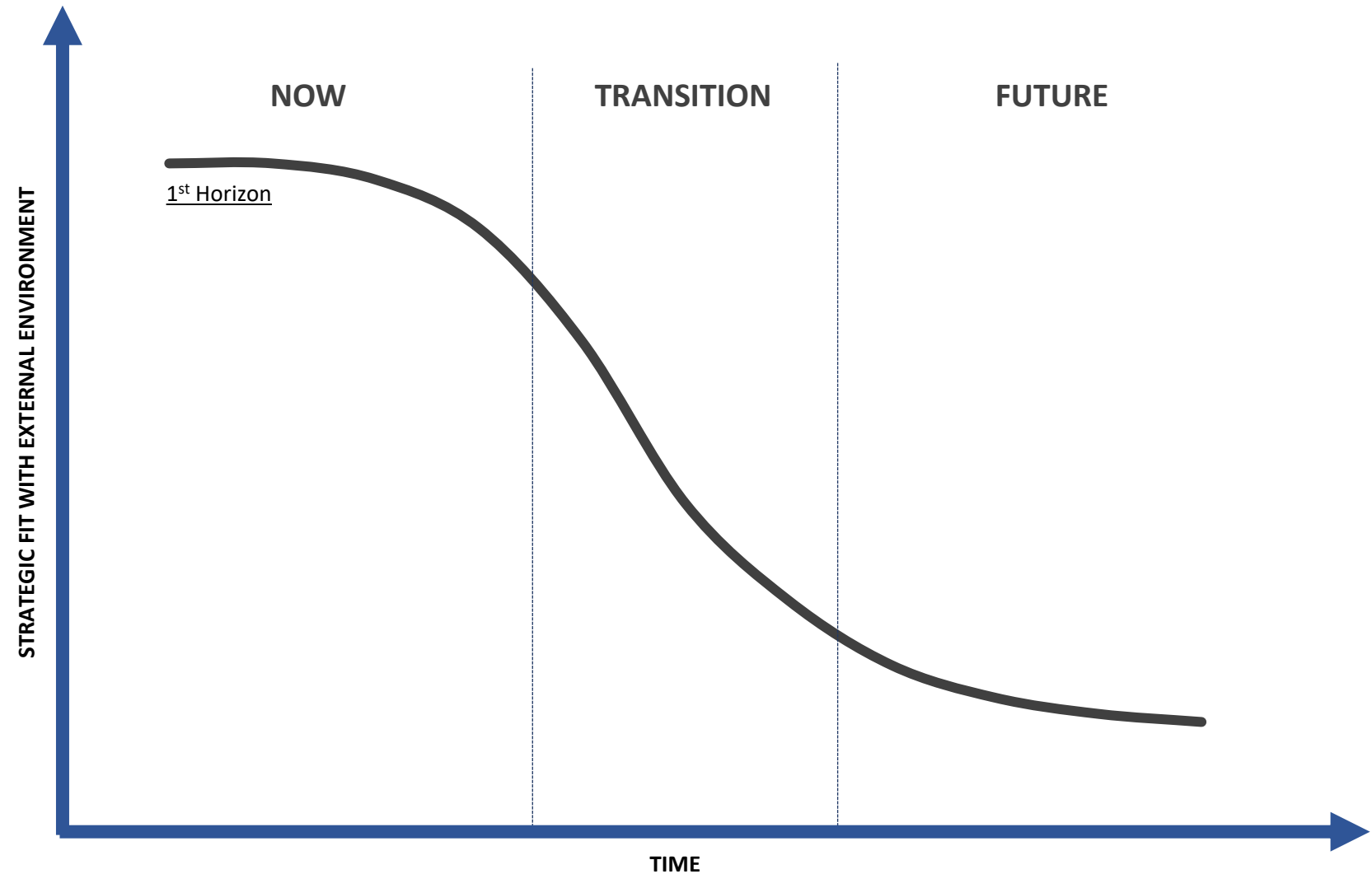
How well something fits the world.
How present it is in the world.

Fit vs. Time



1st Horizon

Current prevailing system.
Assumes “business as usual” will
sustain, but actually loses
relevance with the changing world
over time.

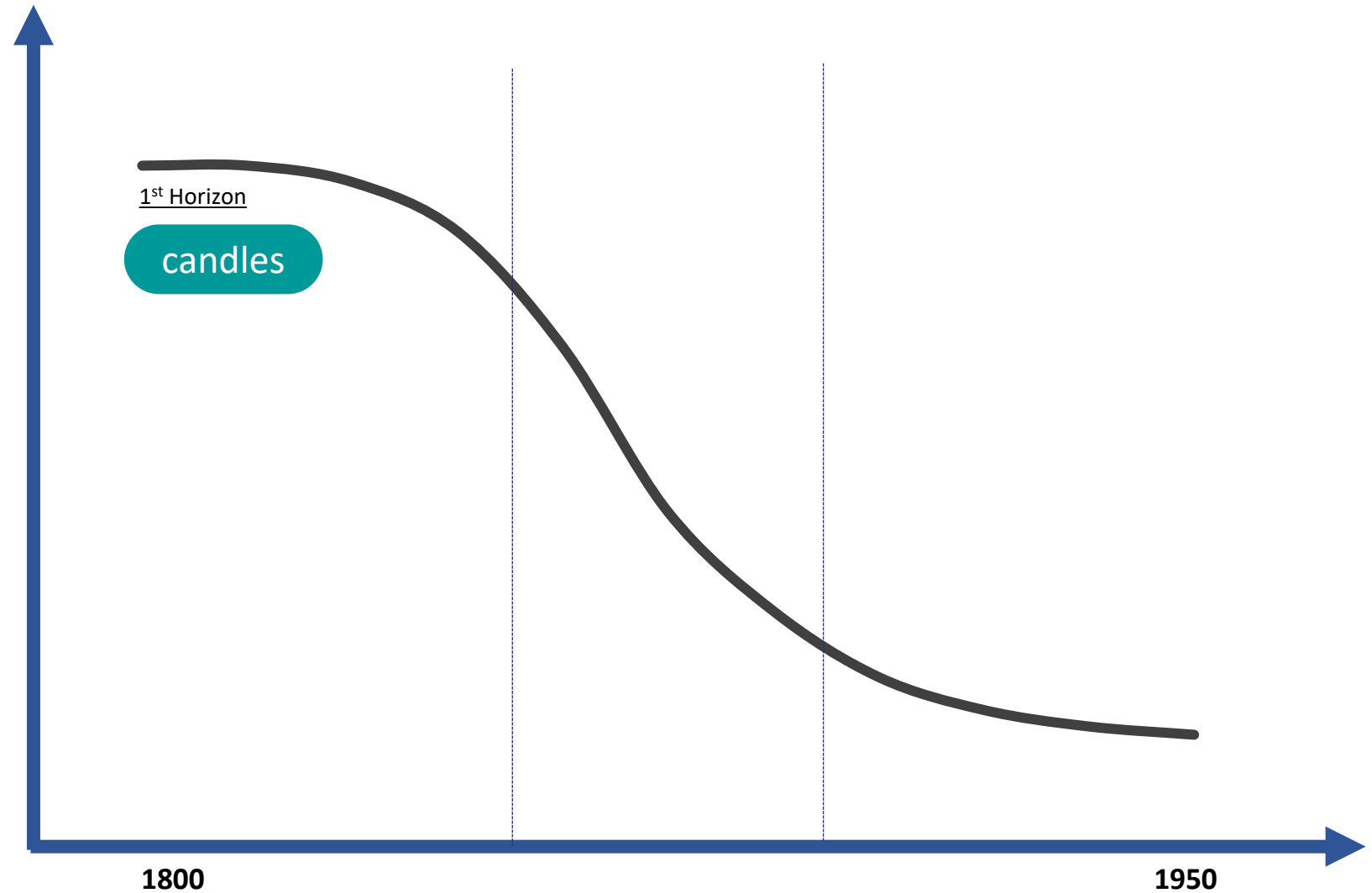


1st Horizon

The dominant system

Have been around for over 5000 years. Used for function. Relatively expensive per lumen-hour, limited lighting.

Industrial revolution shaped a new world in which candles were less fit for purpose – factories, large cities, skyscrapers, automobiles.



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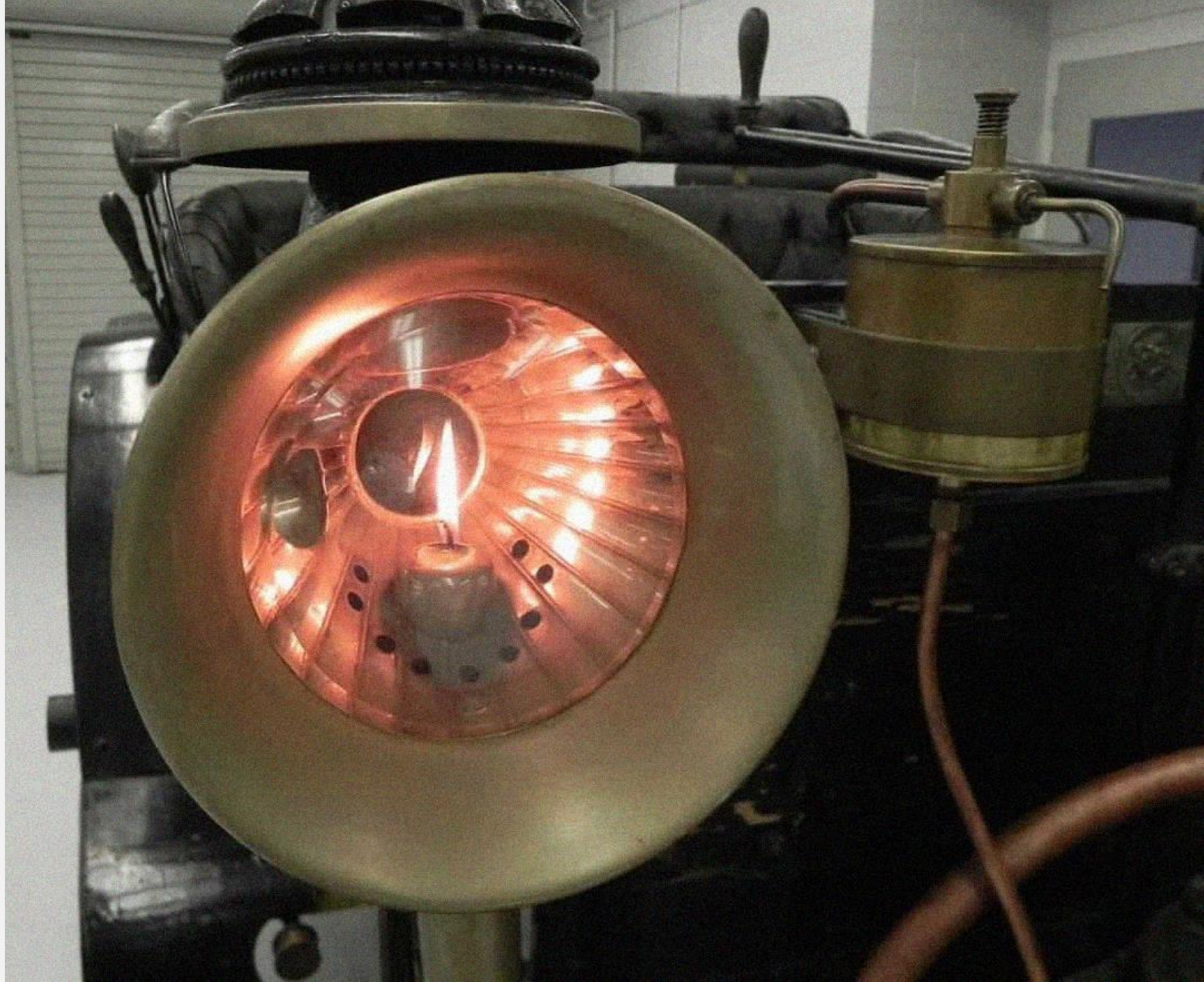


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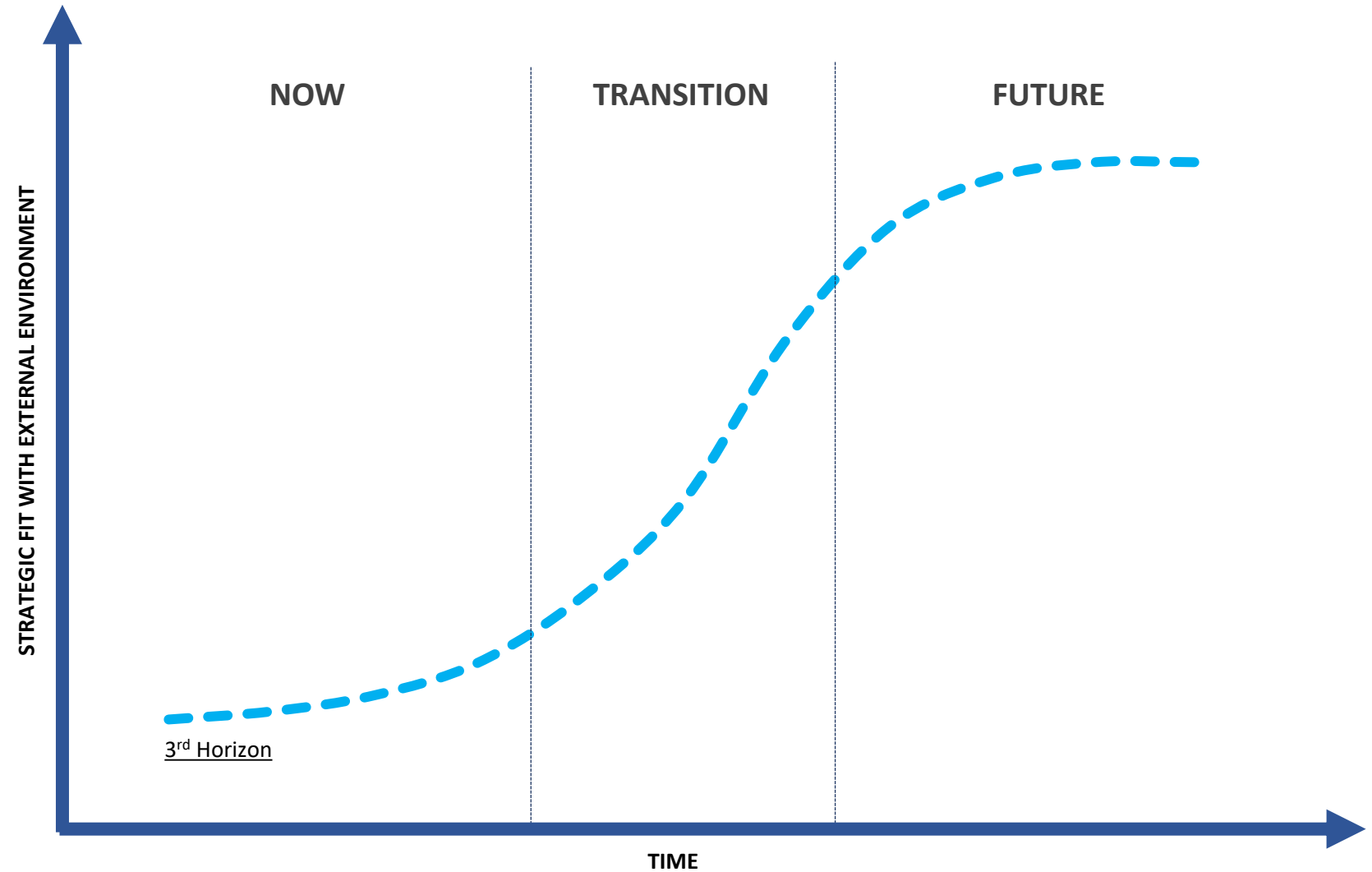
ALTERNATIVE FUTURE



BASELINE FUTURE

3rd Horizon

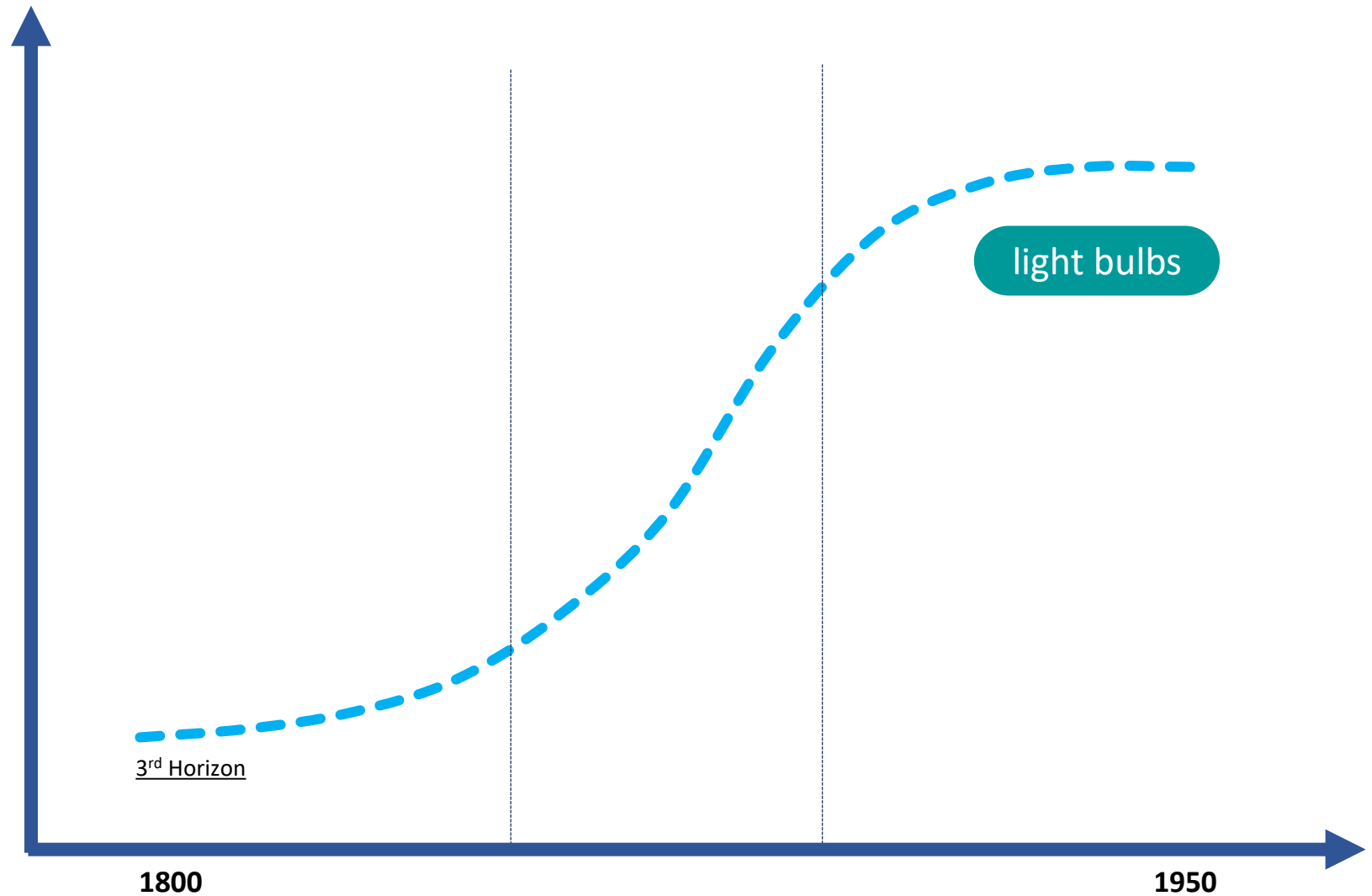
Marginal ideas in response to dynamic environment that exist in the world today. Eventually overtakes the old system and becomes the new normal.



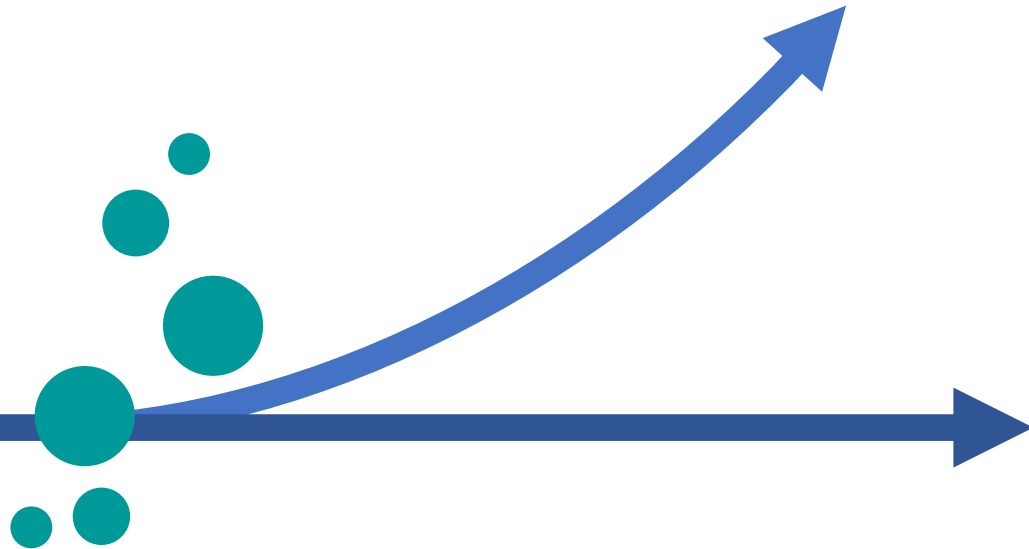
3rd Horizon

A vision for electric light

Transformative. Changed the design of buildings, the length of workday, lifestyles, and human behavior.

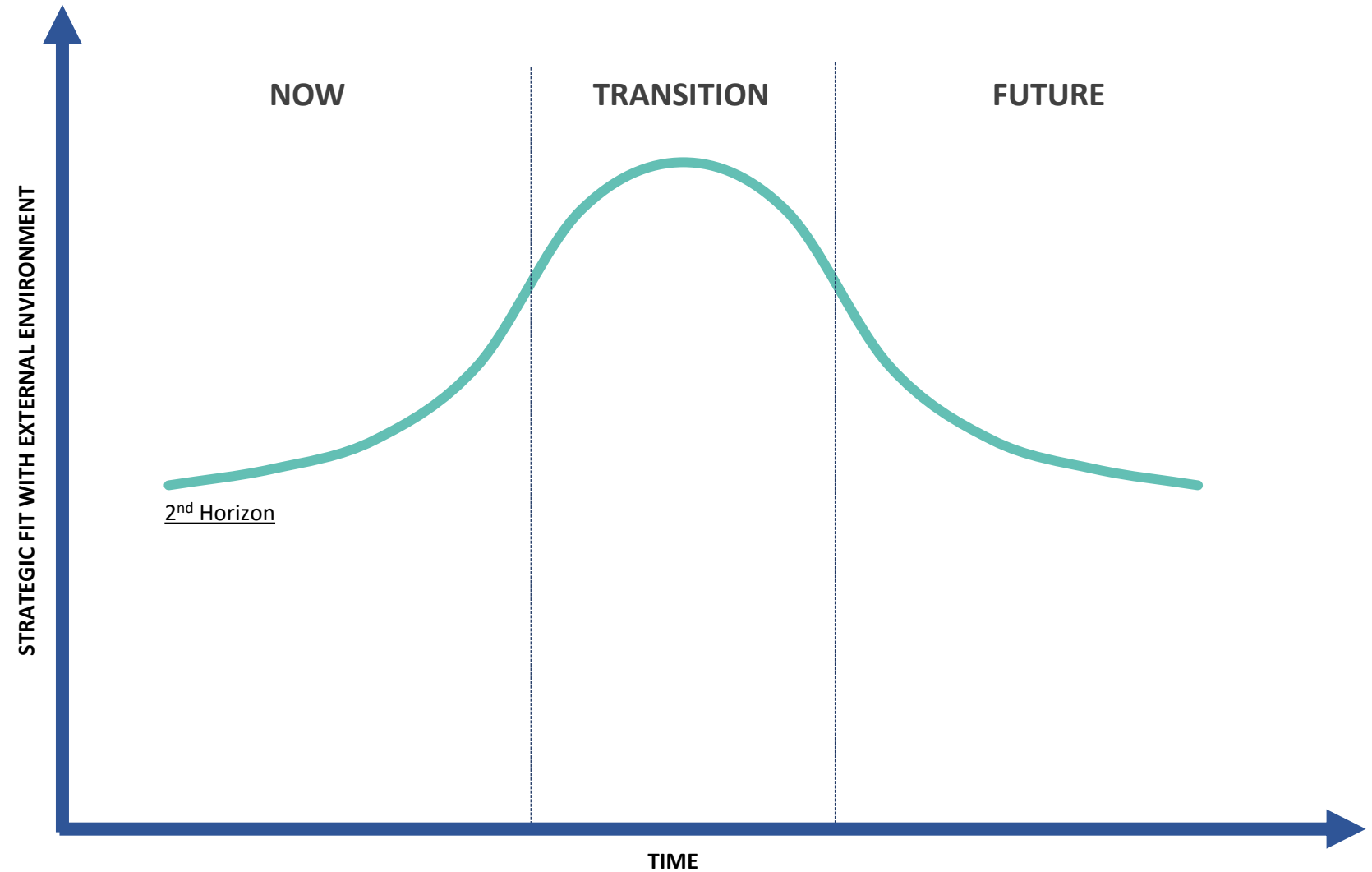


WEAK SIGNALS



2nd Horizon

Unstable transition and competing alternative paths. A temporary period between two dominant systems.



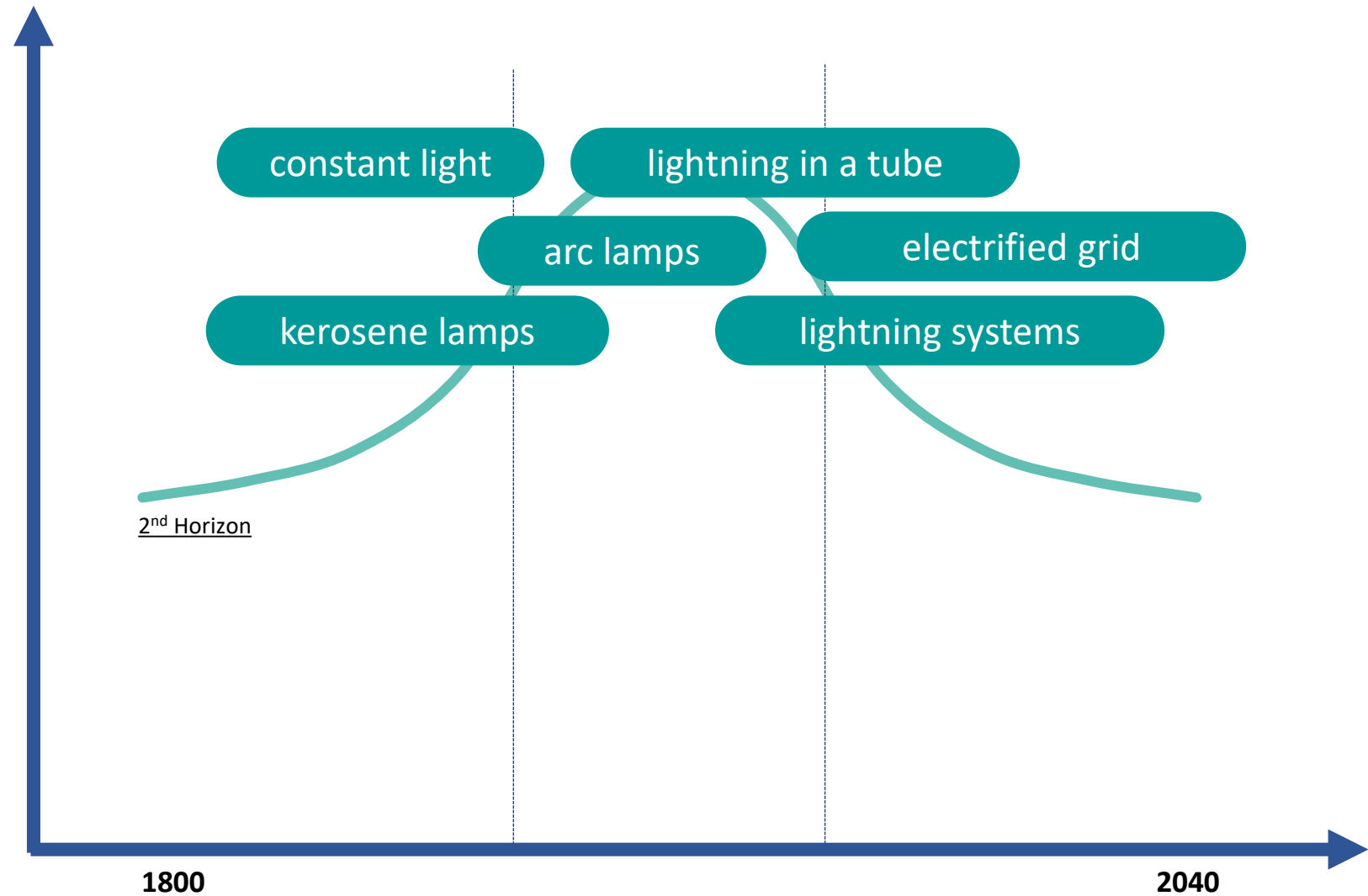
2nd Horizon

No single inventor

Series of prototypes and experiments, incremental innovation.

Arc lamps, kerosene lamps, filament experiments.

Commercialization and mass adoption beginning in 1920s.

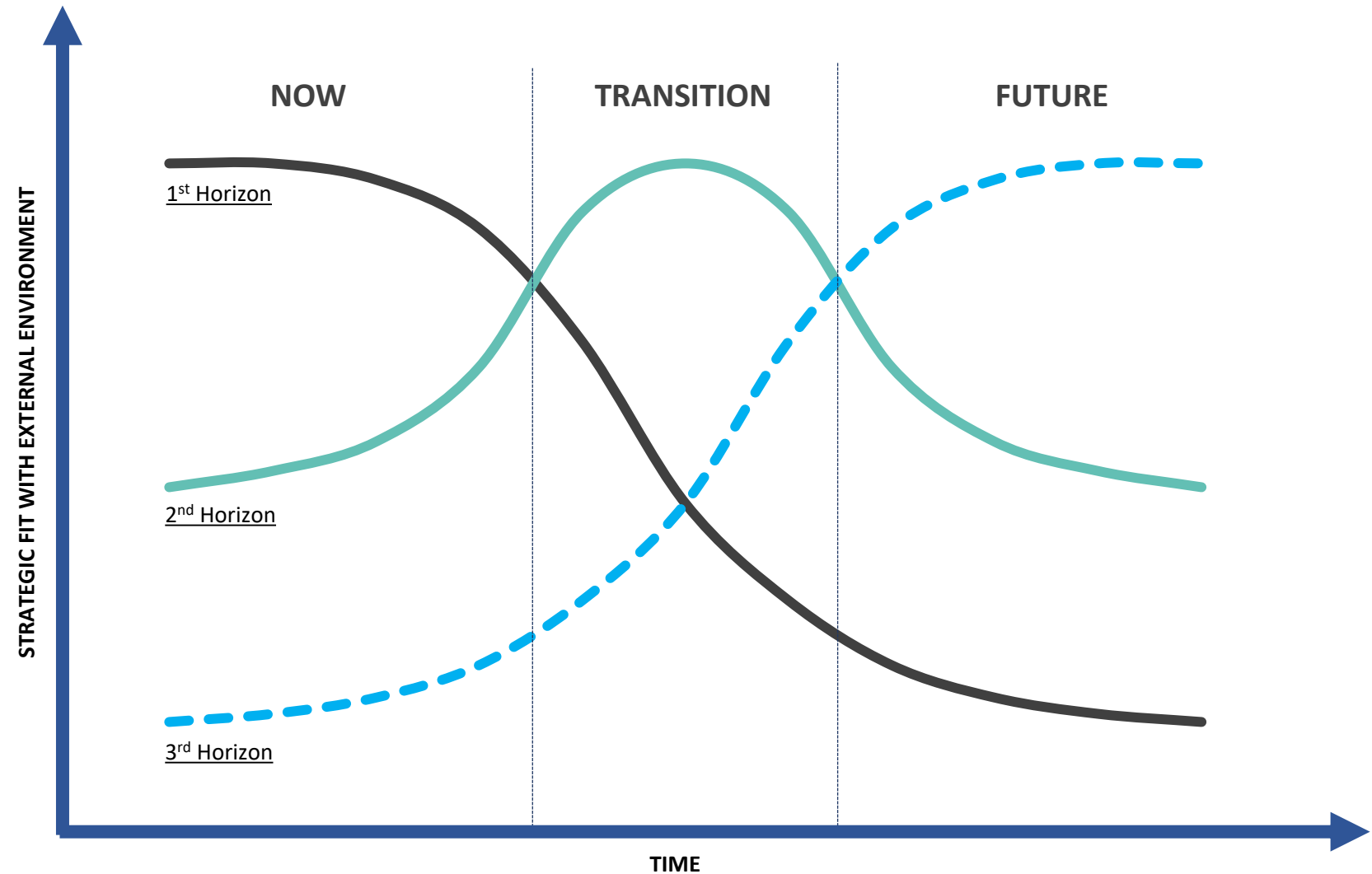


3 Horizons

Three conditions of the same system over time against level of prevalence

Recognize that multiple timeframes exist simultaneously

Recognize that no solution is forever

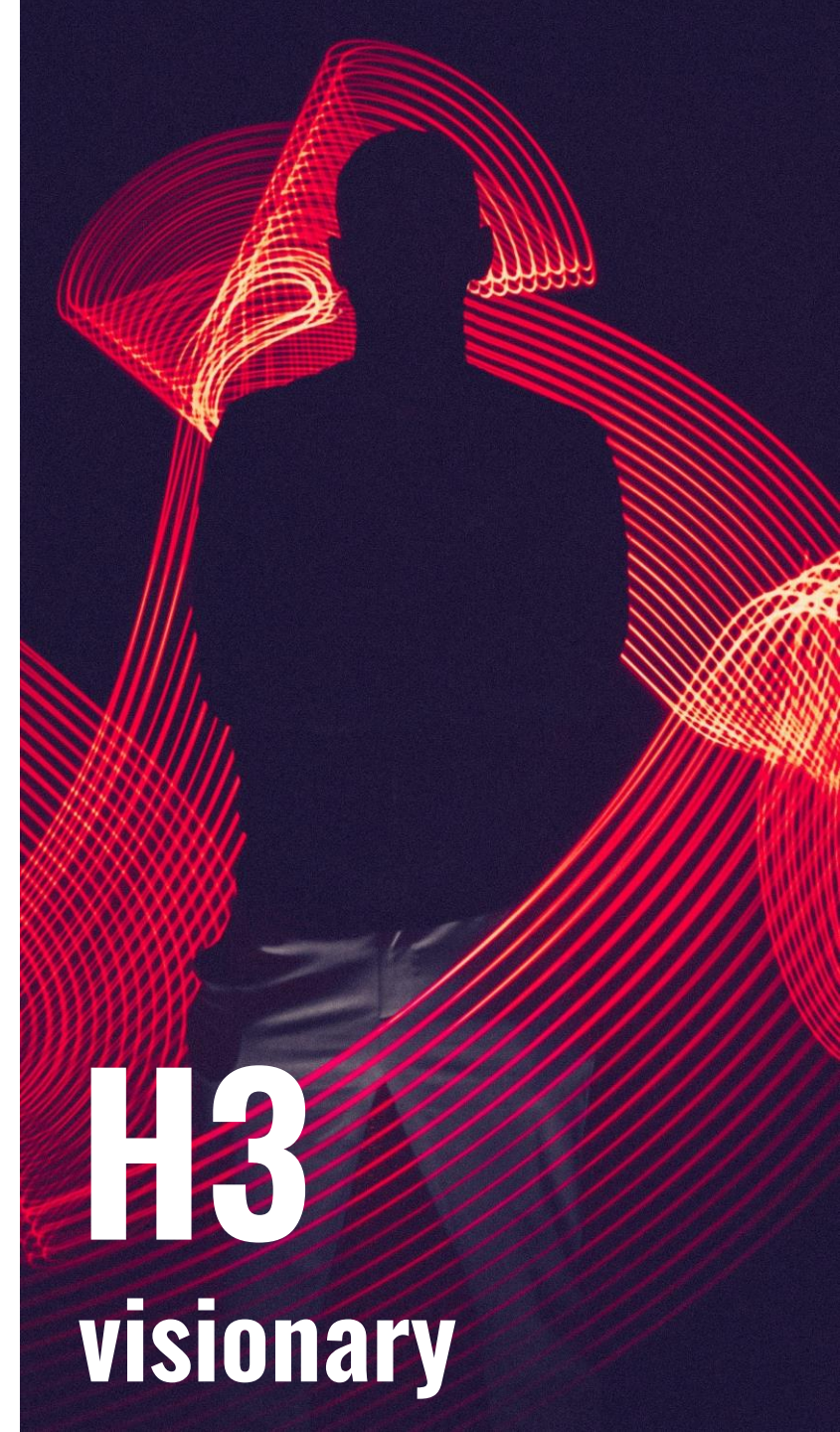




H1
manager



H2
entrepreneur



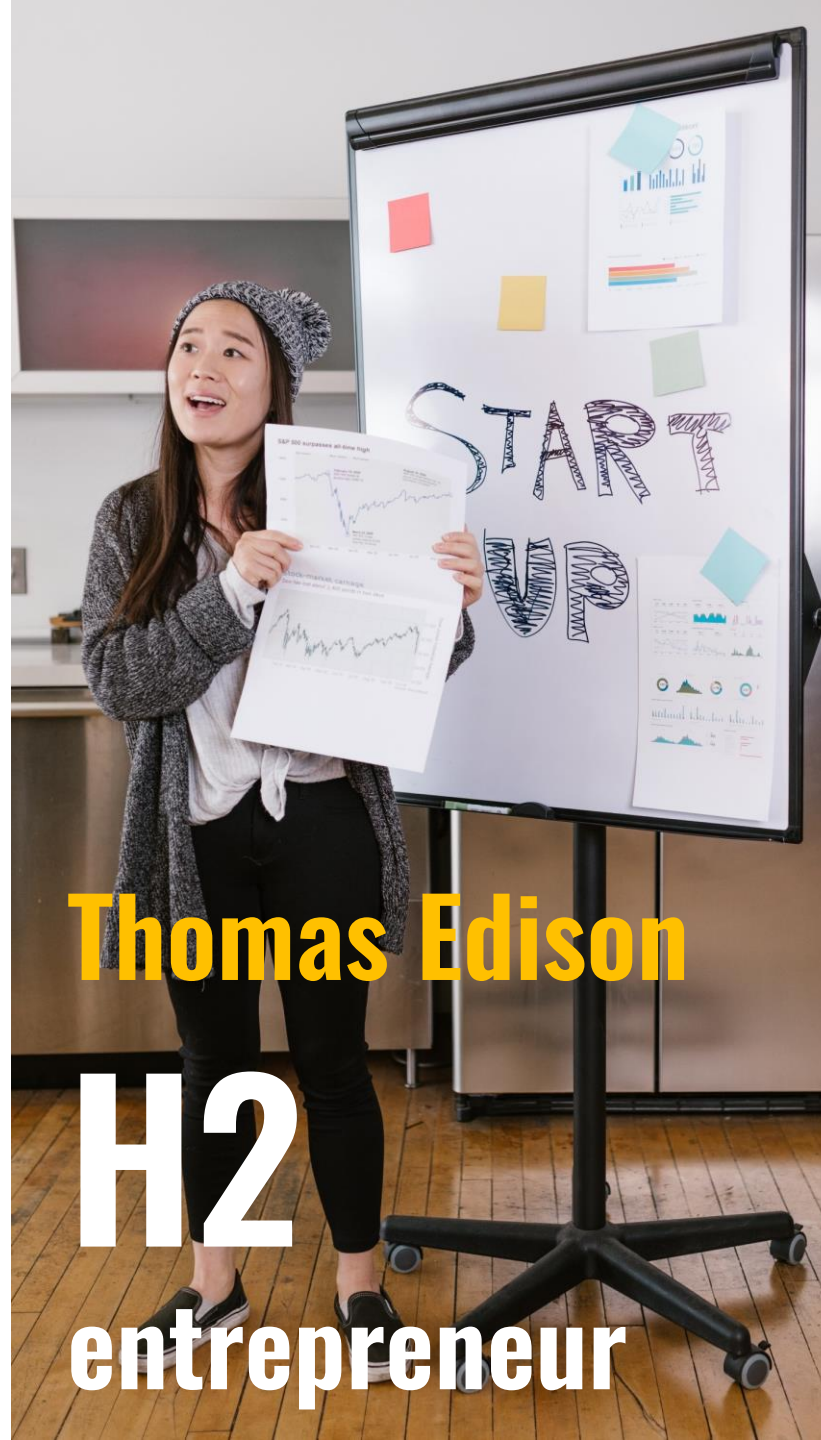
H3
visionary



Candlemakers

H1

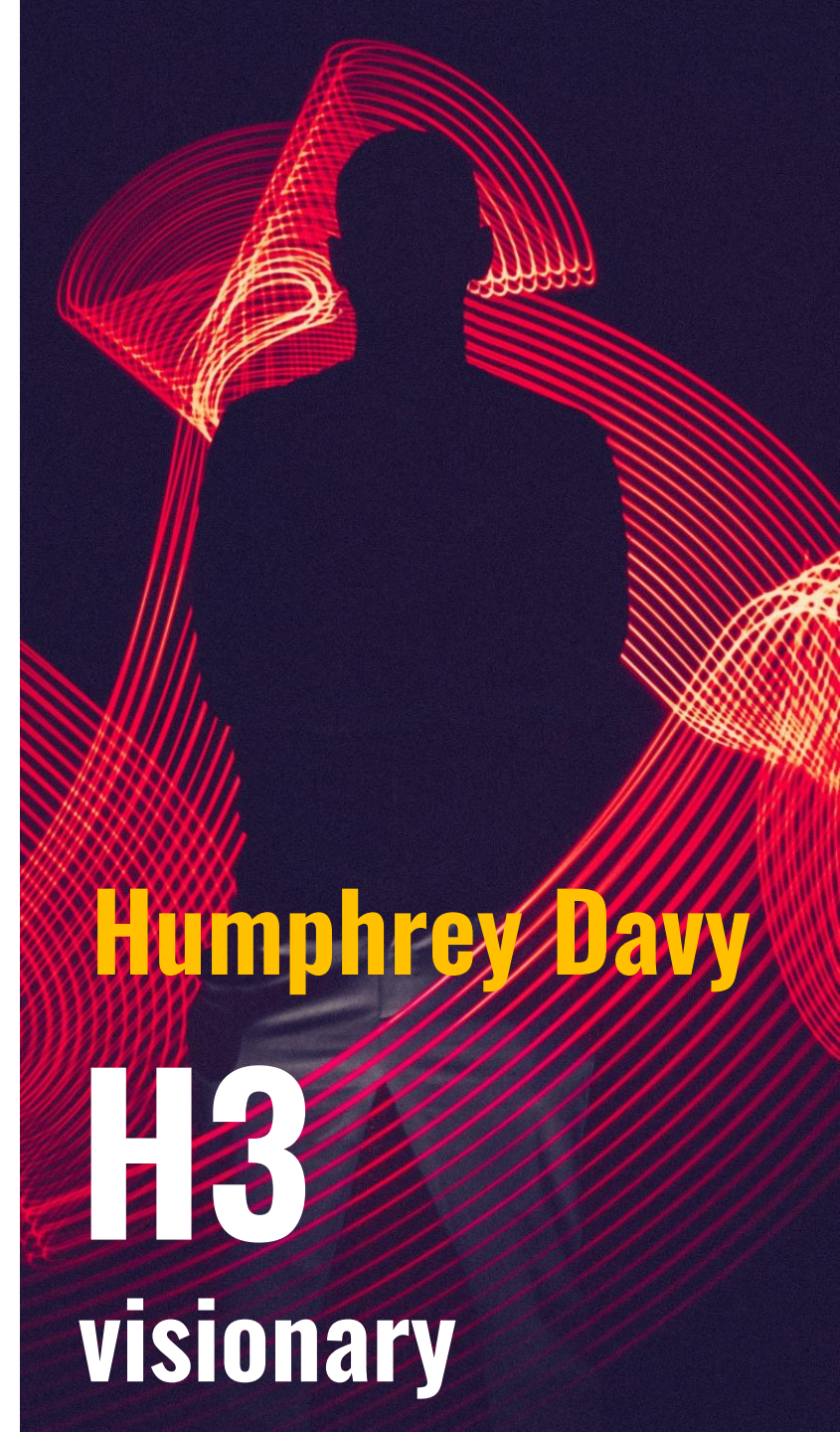
manager



Thomas Edison

H2

entrepreneur



Humphrey Davy

H3

visionary



dinosaur,
obstructive,
not with it

H1
manager



risky,
compromise,
sell out

H2
entrepreneur



irrelevant,
impractical,
unrealistic

H3
visionary



Flex your perspective.



**support,
heritage,
legacy**

H1
manager



**ideas,
innovation,
allyship**

H2
entrepreneur



**hope,
inspiration,
aspiration**

H3
visionary

A single lit candle is positioned in the center-left of the frame. The candle is a warm, orange-brown color and has a bright, yellow-orange flame that rises vertically. The background is a solid, deep black, which makes the candle and its flame stand out prominently. The lighting is soft, coming from the flame itself, casting a gentle glow on the candle's surface.

No more candles, right?

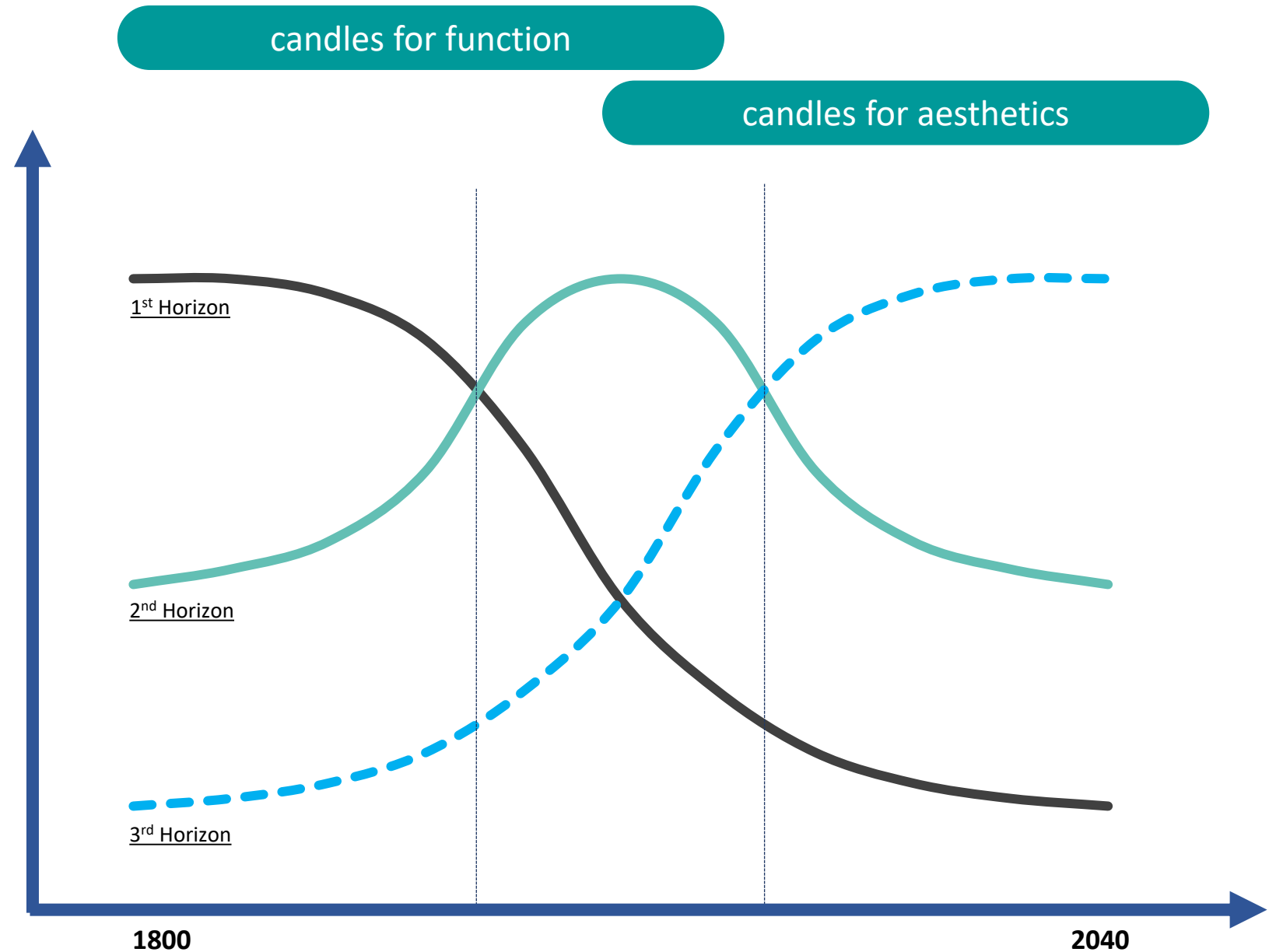
Transforming

Many industries experience a collapse followed by a transformation.

Candles transformed their purpose from function to aesthetics.

Renaissance of candle development, new waxes and manufacturing techniques.

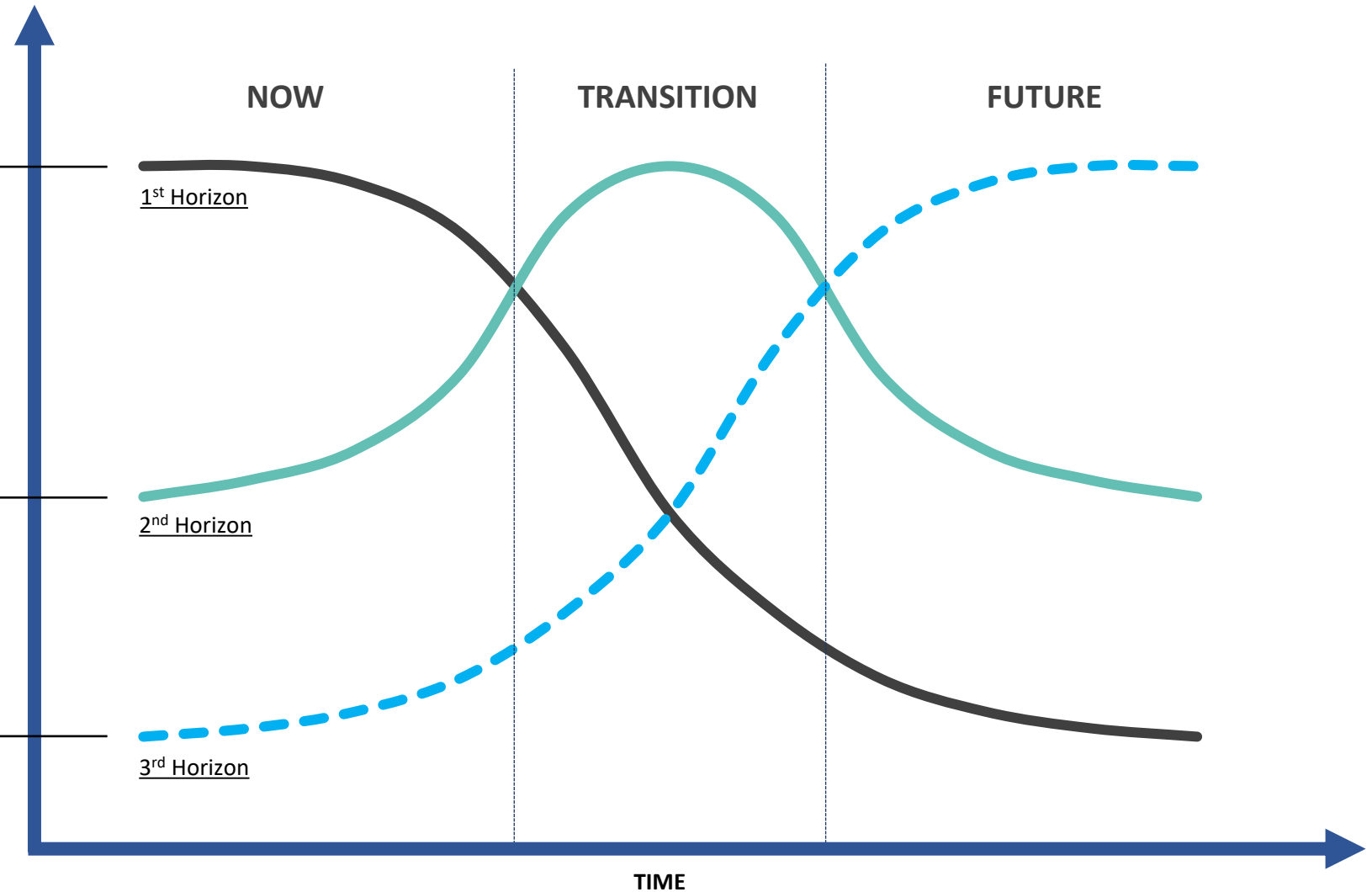
Projected global market cap of \$13.5 billion in 2028.



H1 – “is” Critique and understand the present.

H2 – “how” Form strategy to achieve goals.

H3 – “why” Develop preferred futures. Desire for change.



Strategic Questions

What is business as usual and how did we get here?

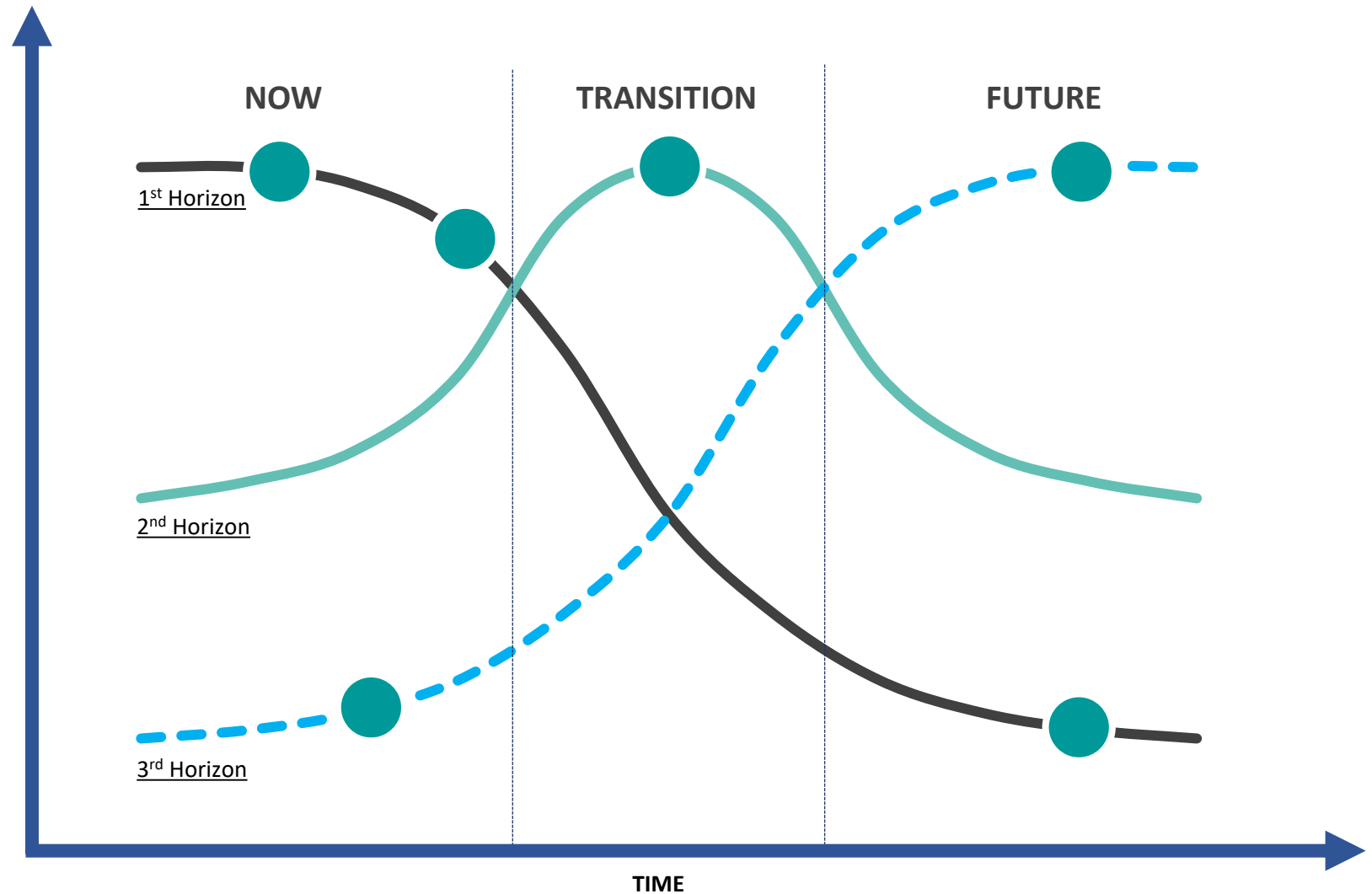
Why is it not fit for purpose anymore?

What's worth keeping?

What is the future we want?

What signals are present today?

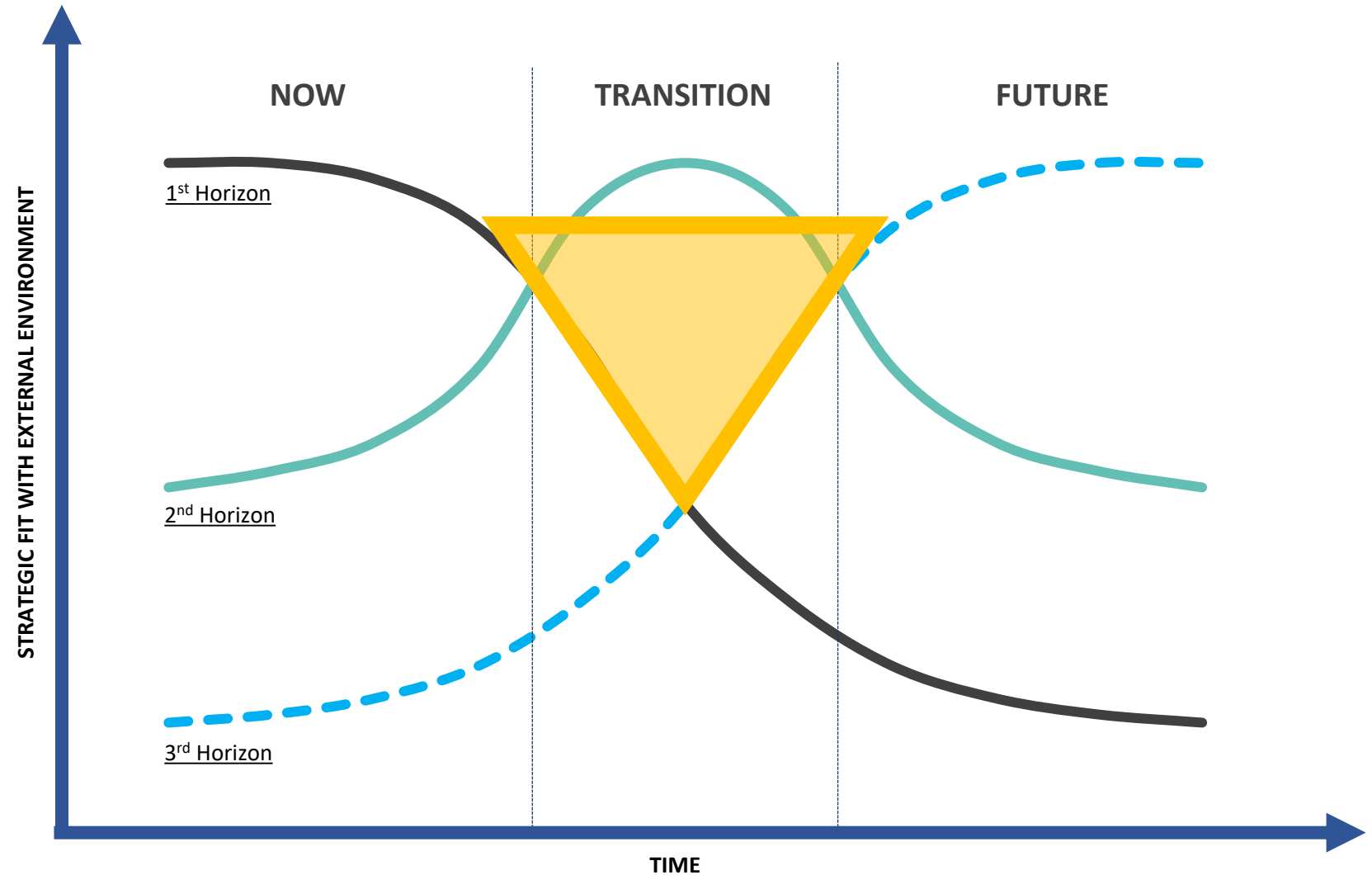
Who can solve these problems?



Triangle of Choice

The area of greatest uncertainty is also the area of greatest freedom and value.

Requires understanding values and assumptions of H1 and H3 (some work to maintain H1, others work to accelerate change) to define what the solution space is.



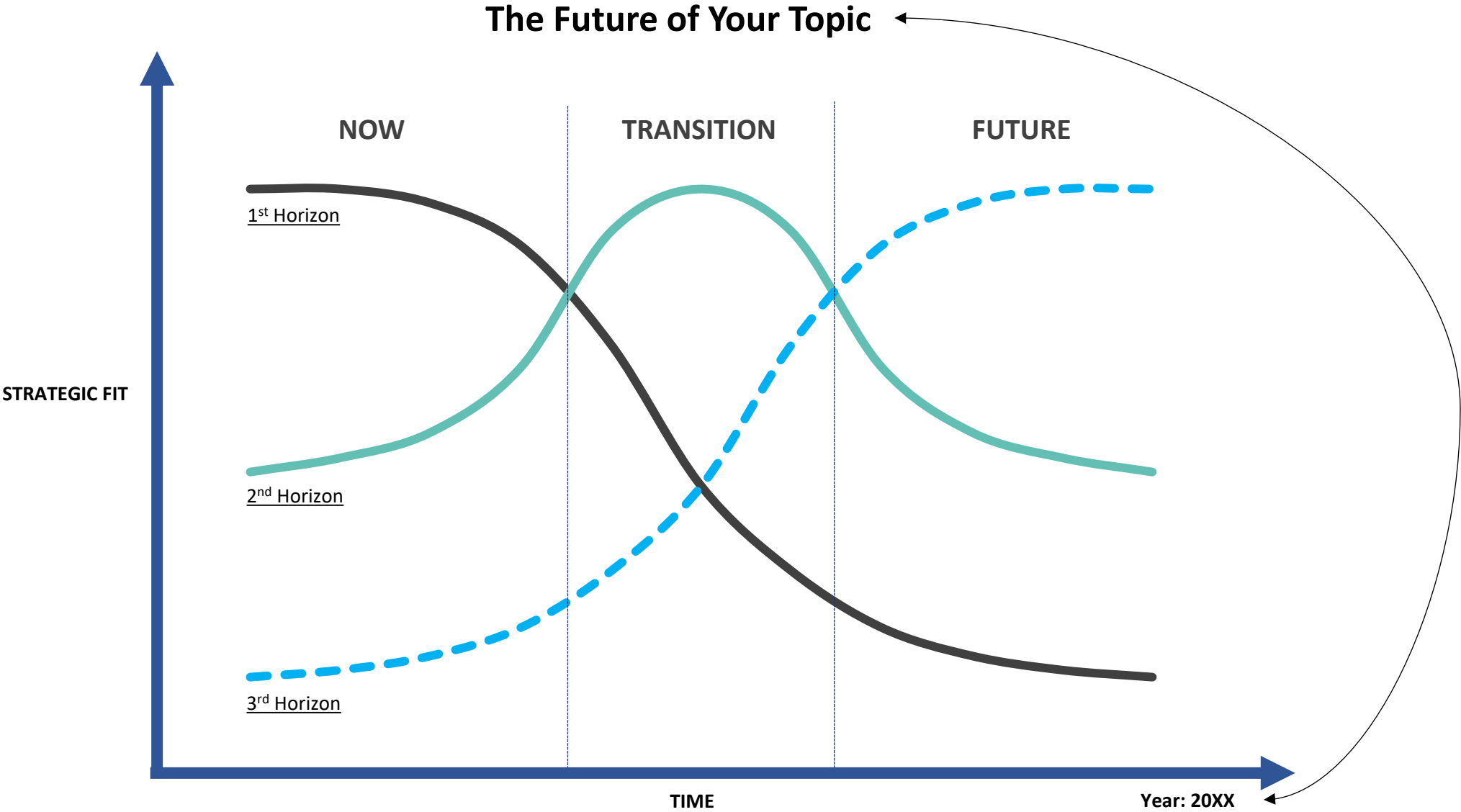
3.1

application

Handout



Starting with: Topic and Year



Choose Your Topic:

- Future of the Workforce 2050
- Future of Artificial Intelligence 2040
- Future of Public Services 2050
- Future of Revenue 2050
- A topic of interest i.e transportation, infrastructure, downtown revitalization

Horizon 1 (H1)

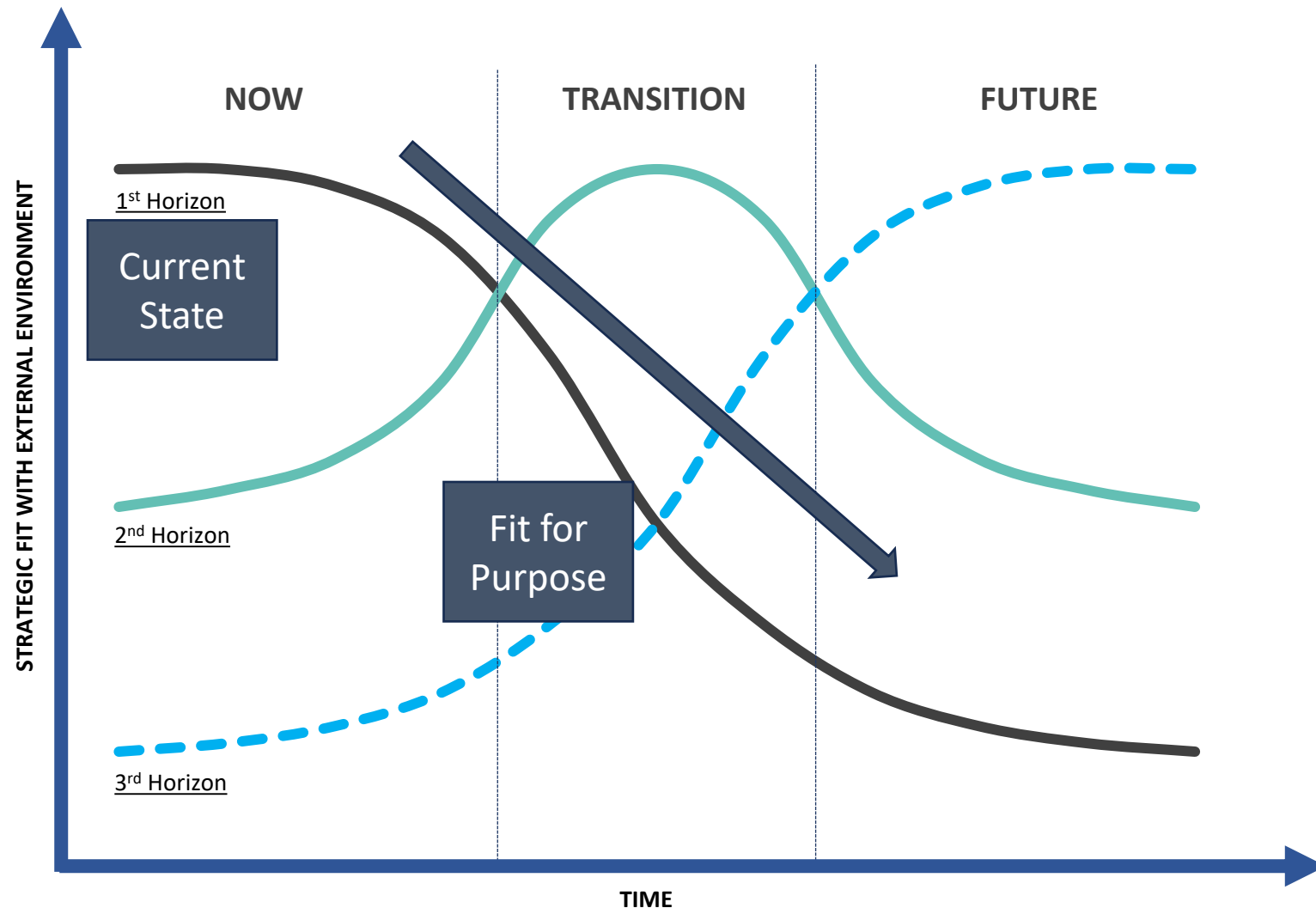
Current State

- What is business as usual for your topic?
- What are the core assumptions underpinning business as usual?

Fit for Purpose

- What areas are losing fit for purpose?
 - Why?
- Consider where the current system is...
 - under strain
 - failing to meet needs
 - losing fit with the changing world

The Future of Your Topic in 2050



Horizon 3 (H3)

Critical Changes

- What critical, long-term changes are impacting fit for purpose?

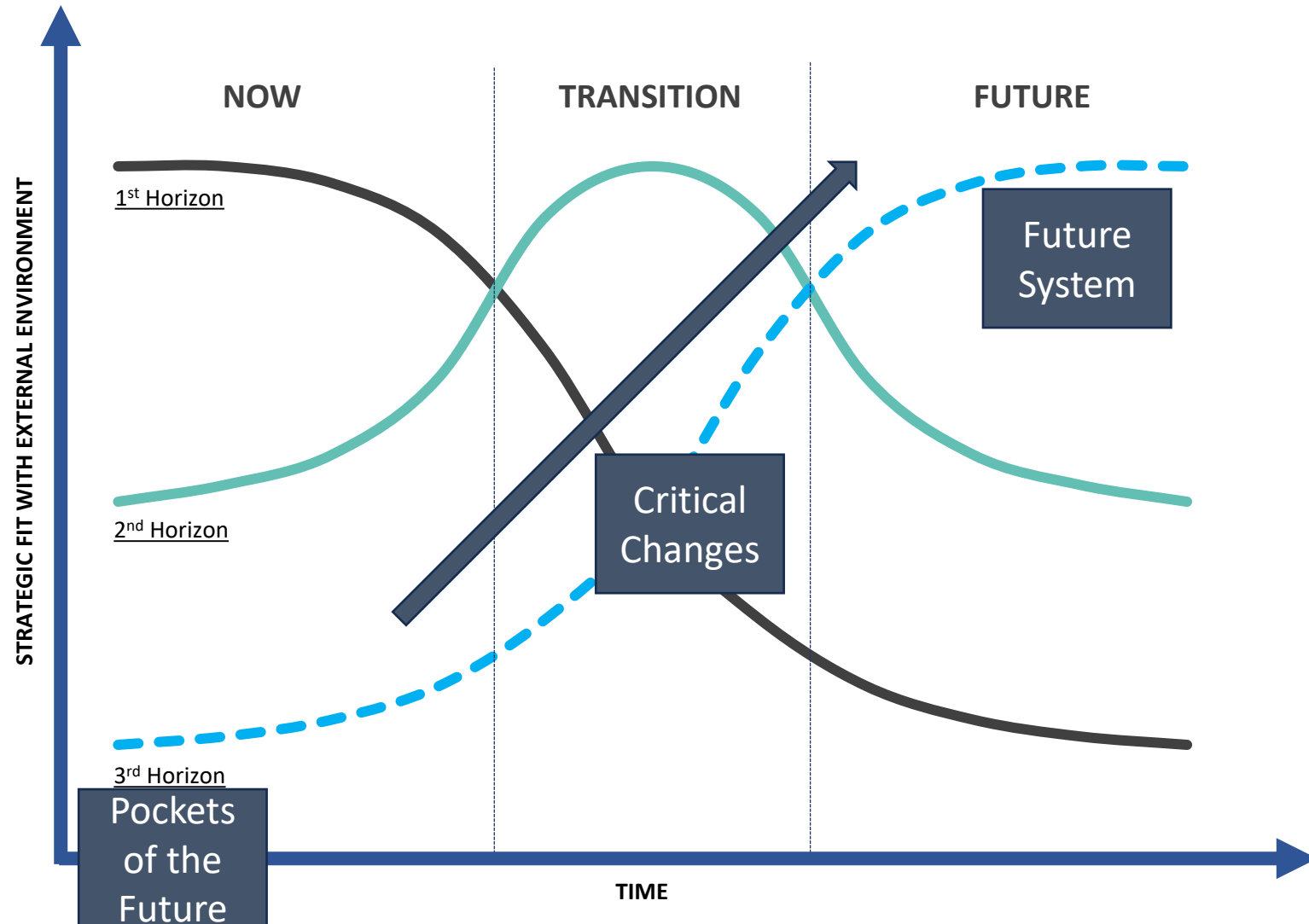
The Future We Want

- What is the future we want?
- What about this future is growing in fit for purpose?

Pockets of the Future

- Find one signal that provides evidence that the future you want is viable.

The Future of Your Topic in 2050



Horizon 2 (H2)

Emerging Future

- Name the greatest distinction between H3 and H1.

Transition

- What innovations, partners, or practices do you know about that are:
 - addressing H1 challenges
 - leading the H3 transition

Hospice

- What about H1 needs support
 - leaving well
 - renewing purpose

The Future of Your Topic in 2050

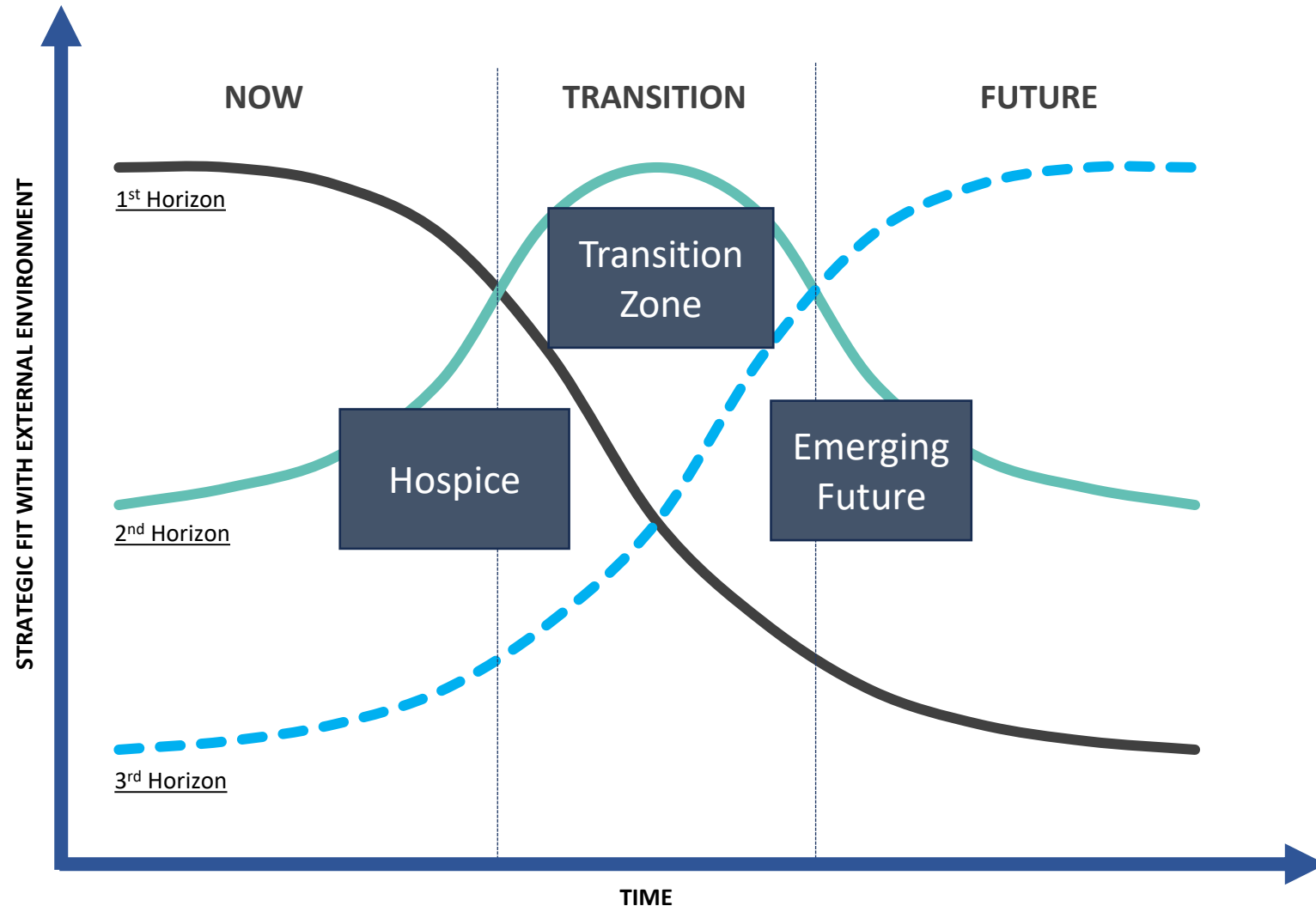


Table Reflection:

What about the Three Horizons did you find useful in terms of:

- Thinking**
- Dialogue**
- Decision-making**



**What were your “light-
bulb” moments?**



“Transformation happens as the emergent result of everything going on in the world — there is **always** an emerging third horizon...

Some things will be the result of conscious intent, others will surprise us...

The way we live now was once the third horizon, partly imagined and intended, largely unknown.

Future consciousness will not bring the future under control, but allows us to **develop our capacity** for transformational response to its possibilities.”

– Bill Sharpe



*Anticipatory
leadership*

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4

break

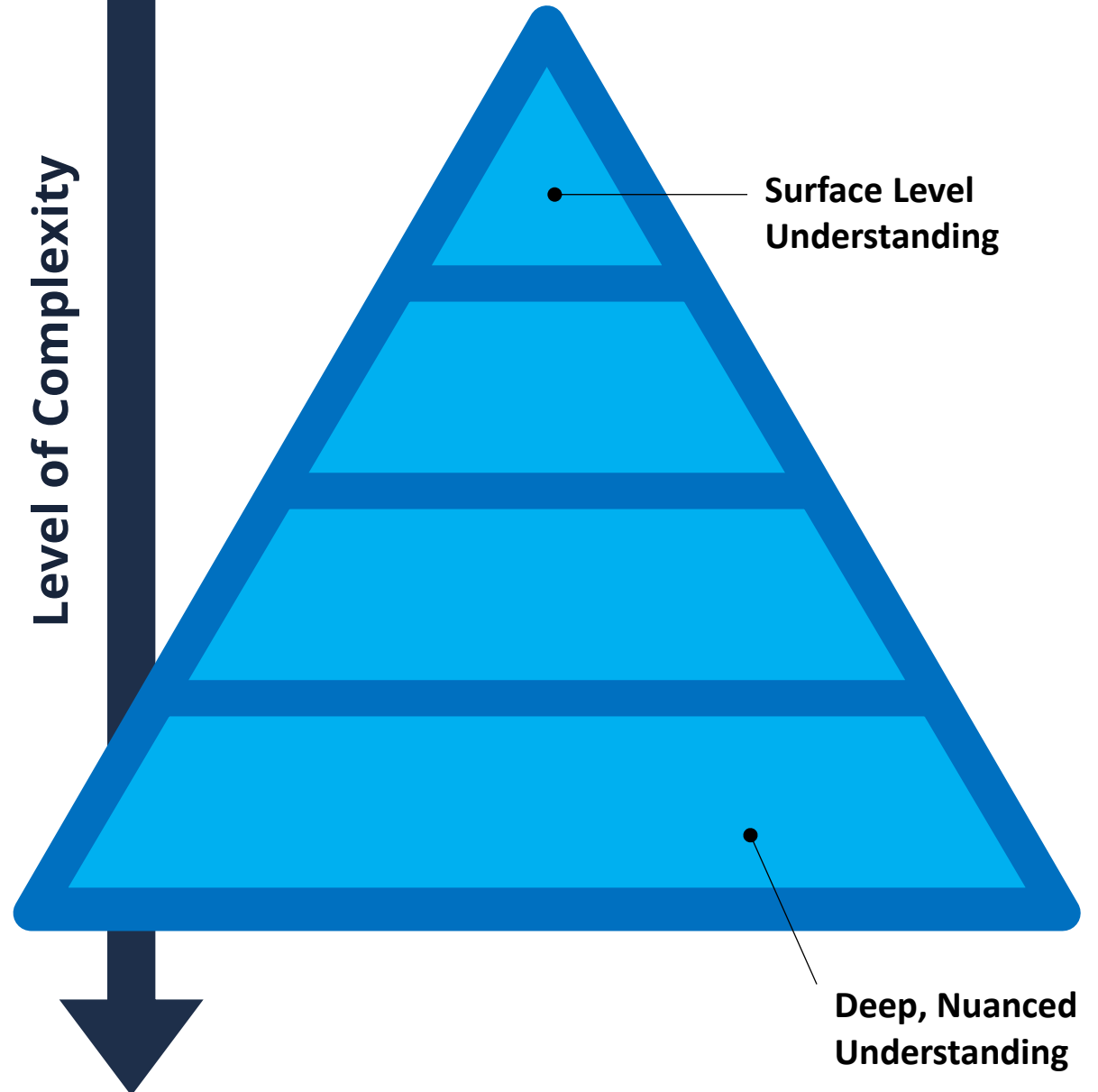
5

Causal Layered Analysis

deconstructing obstacles to change

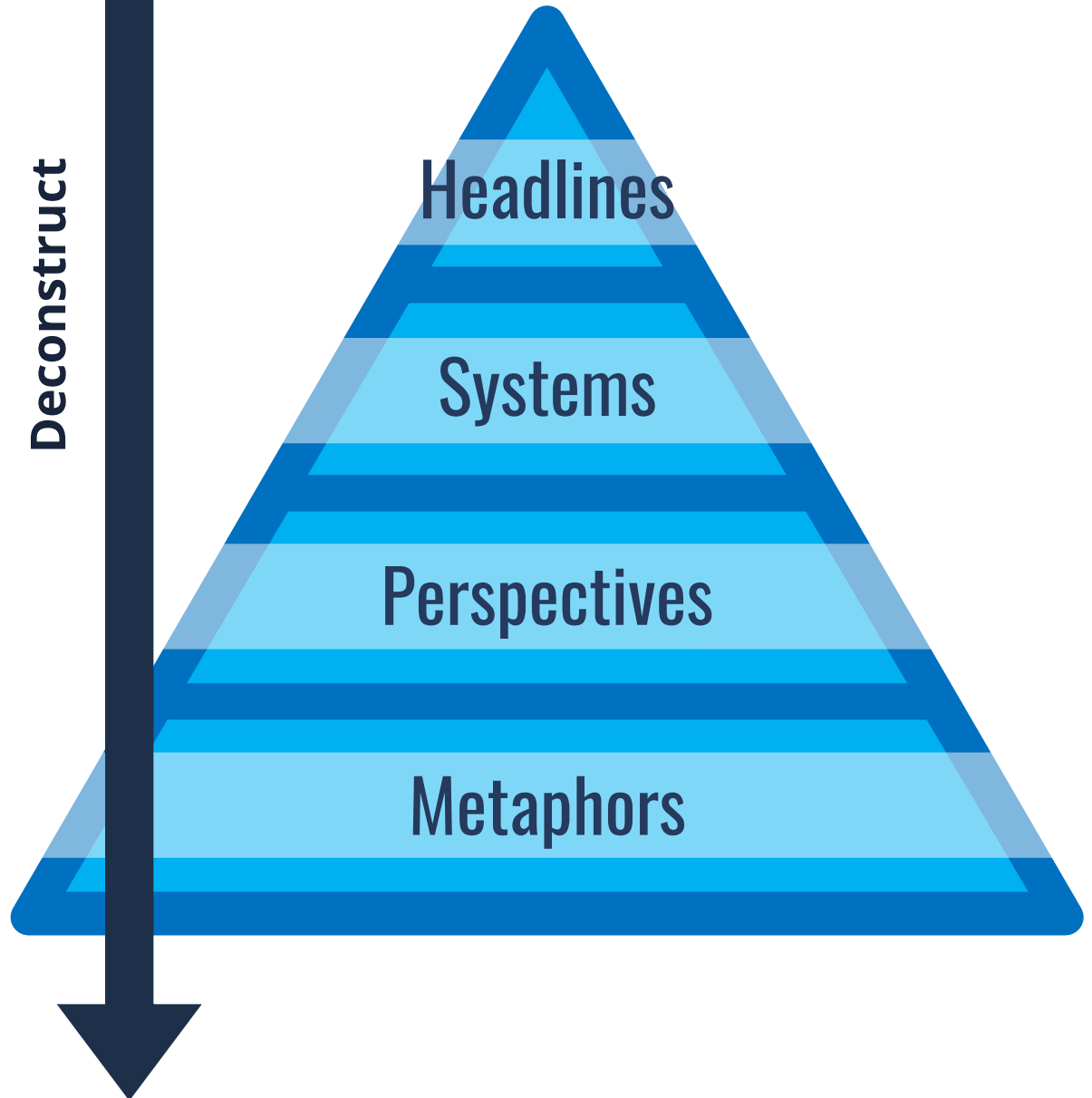
Causal Layered Analysis (CLA)

- A method for analyzing perspectives and underlying causes to a complex issue.
- Generates deeper understanding of what shapes our thinking and responses to issues.
- Used in government policy and strategy to shape a preferred future.



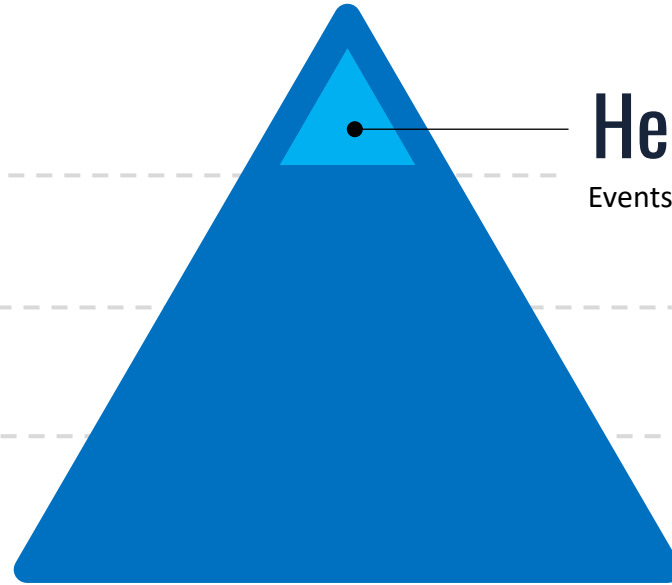
Basic Structure

- Four layers of change.
- Each contribute to the situation.
- Understand underlying causes to our behavior.
- Create new metaphors that drive new behaviors.



Headlines

- “The Problem”
- Official description of the issue
- Observable and quantifiable
- Examples:
 - Data
 - Events
 - Trends
 - Media spin

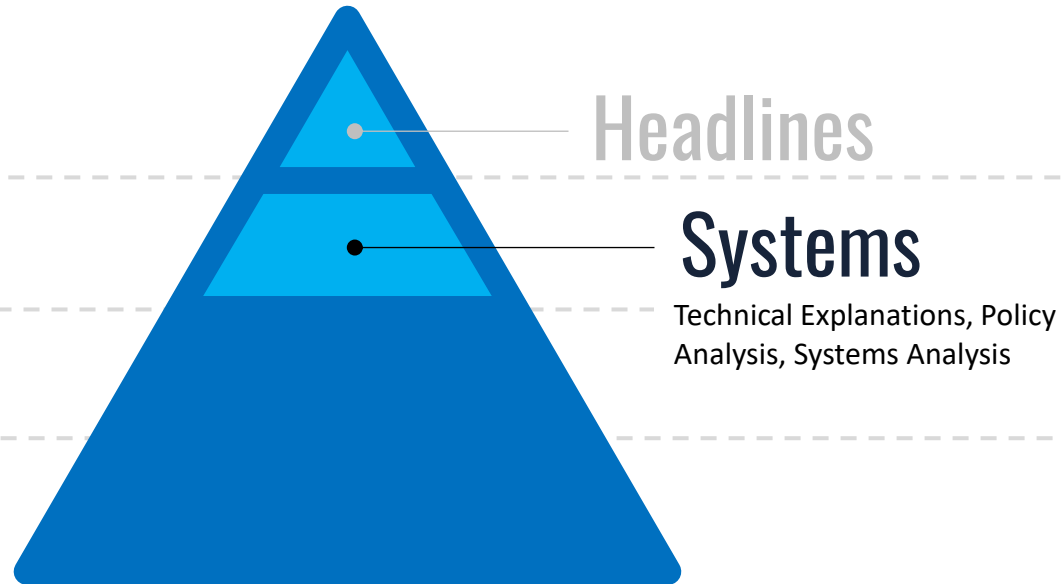


Headlines

Events, trends, policies, news

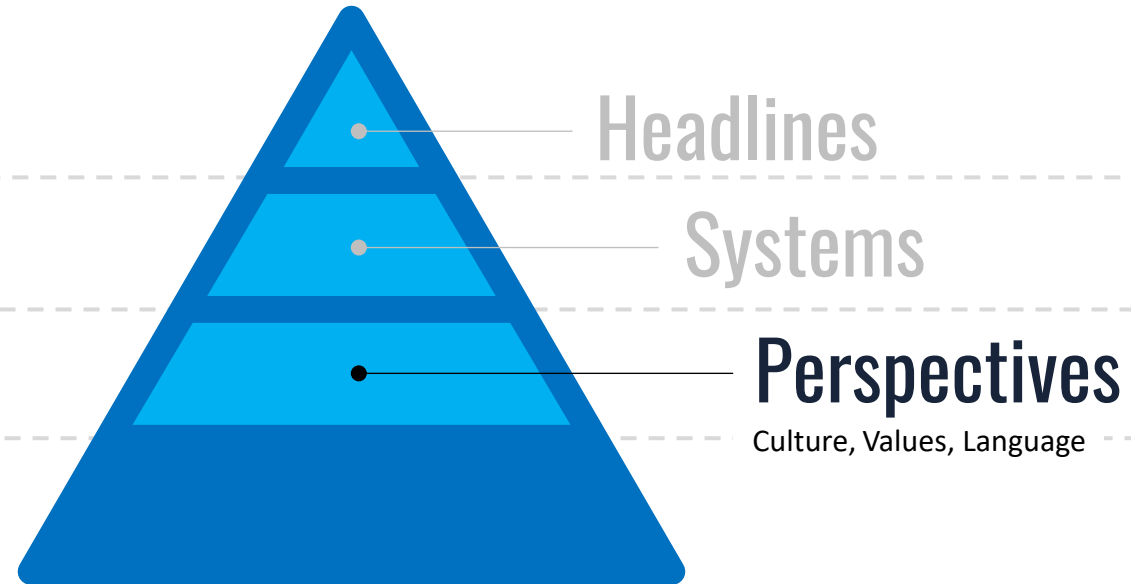
Systems

- “The Causes”
- The reasons why the “problem” is happening
- Systems Analysis
- Examples:
 - Policymakers and Engineers
 - Social Systems
 - Rules and Regulations
 - Technical Explanations
 - Problematic Actors



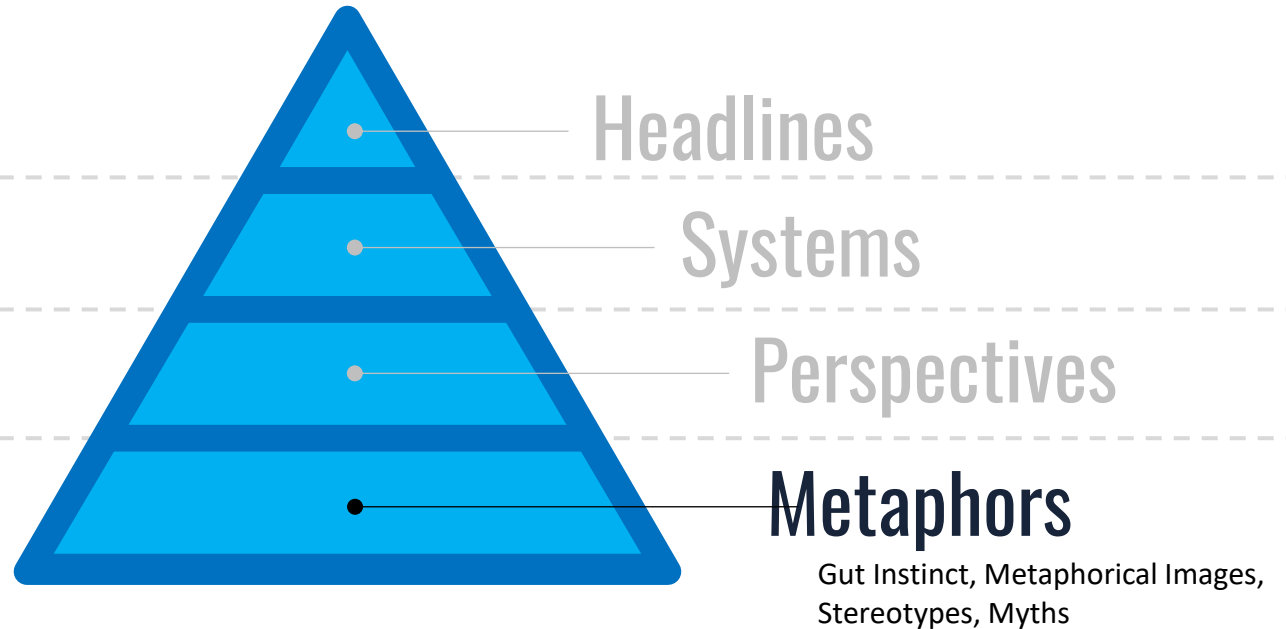
Perspectives

- “The Worldview”
- The values and cultures that underpin the systems and shape them.
- Can be named and debated
- Examples:
 - Philosophy
 - Organizational Culture
 - Cultural Values
 - Personal Beliefs
 - Leadership



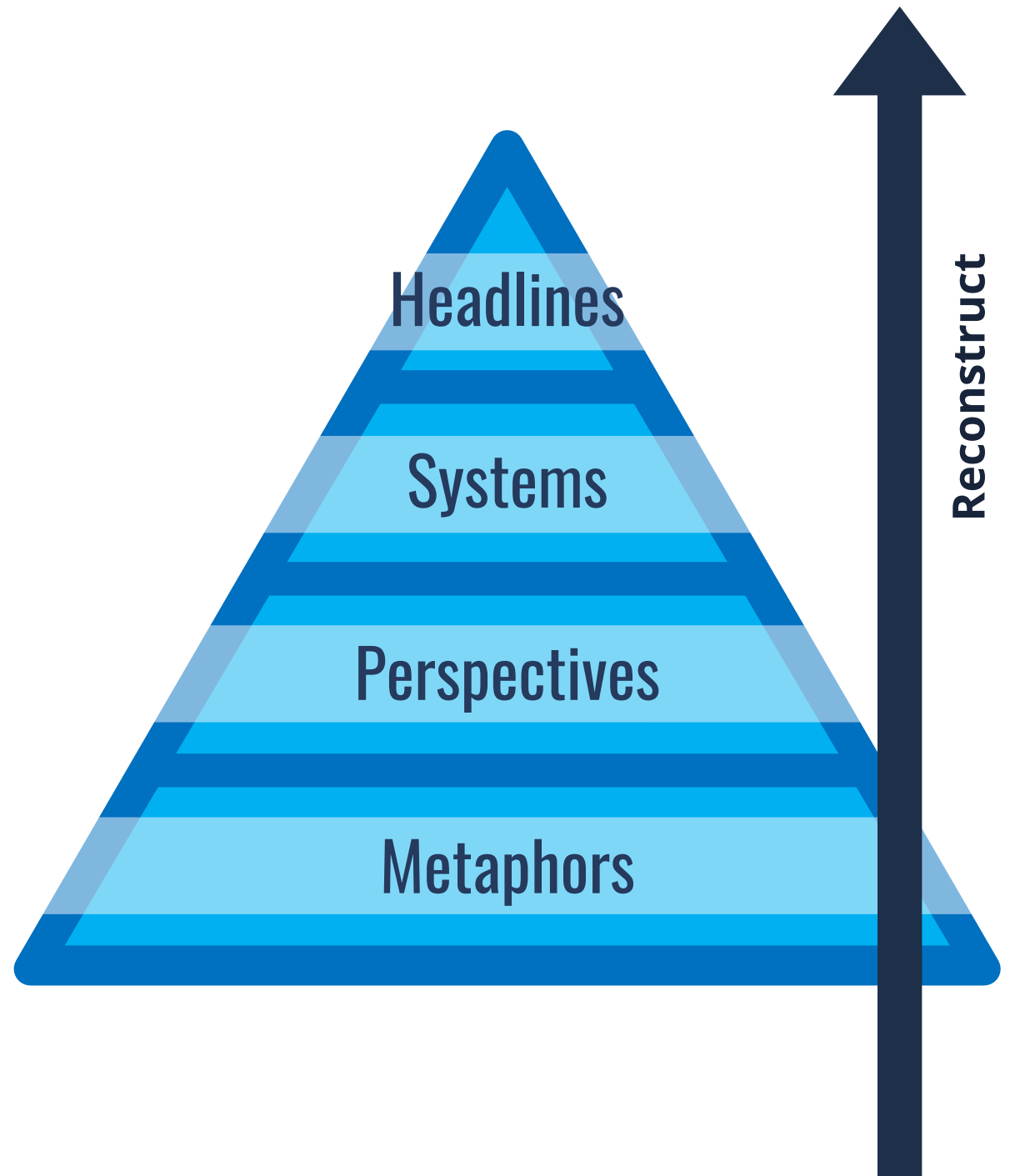
Metaphors

- “The Myths & Stories”
- Societal stories about how the world works.
- Subconscious and collectively shared
- Examples:
 - Storytellers and Artists
 - Ancient Wisdom
 - Emotional Responses
 - Visual Images
 - Archetypes



What Can We Do With It?

- Co-create longer lasting policy and strategy.
- Addresses gaps in traditional strategy.
- Connect short, medium, and long-term change.

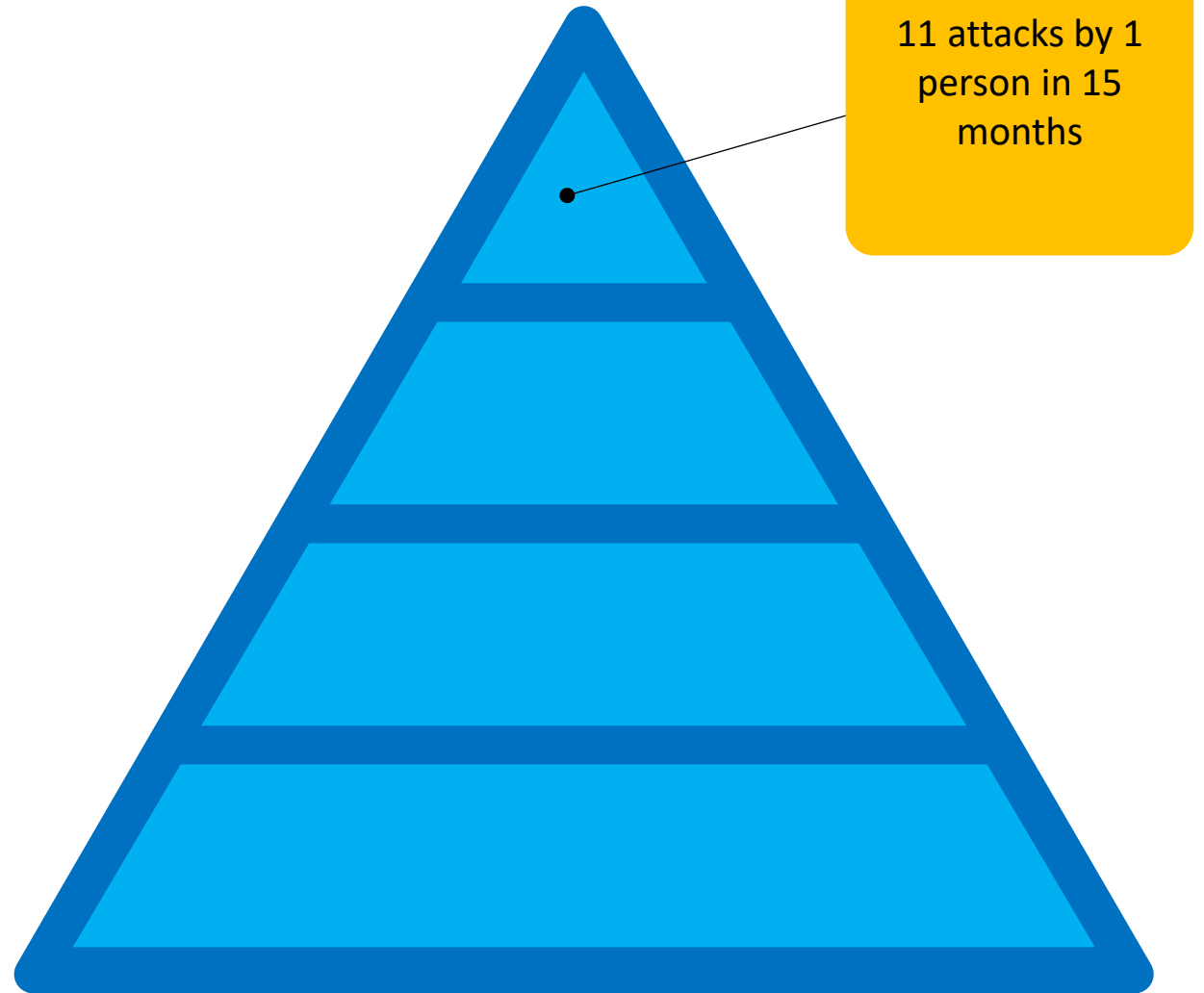


5.2

**power of
metaphor**

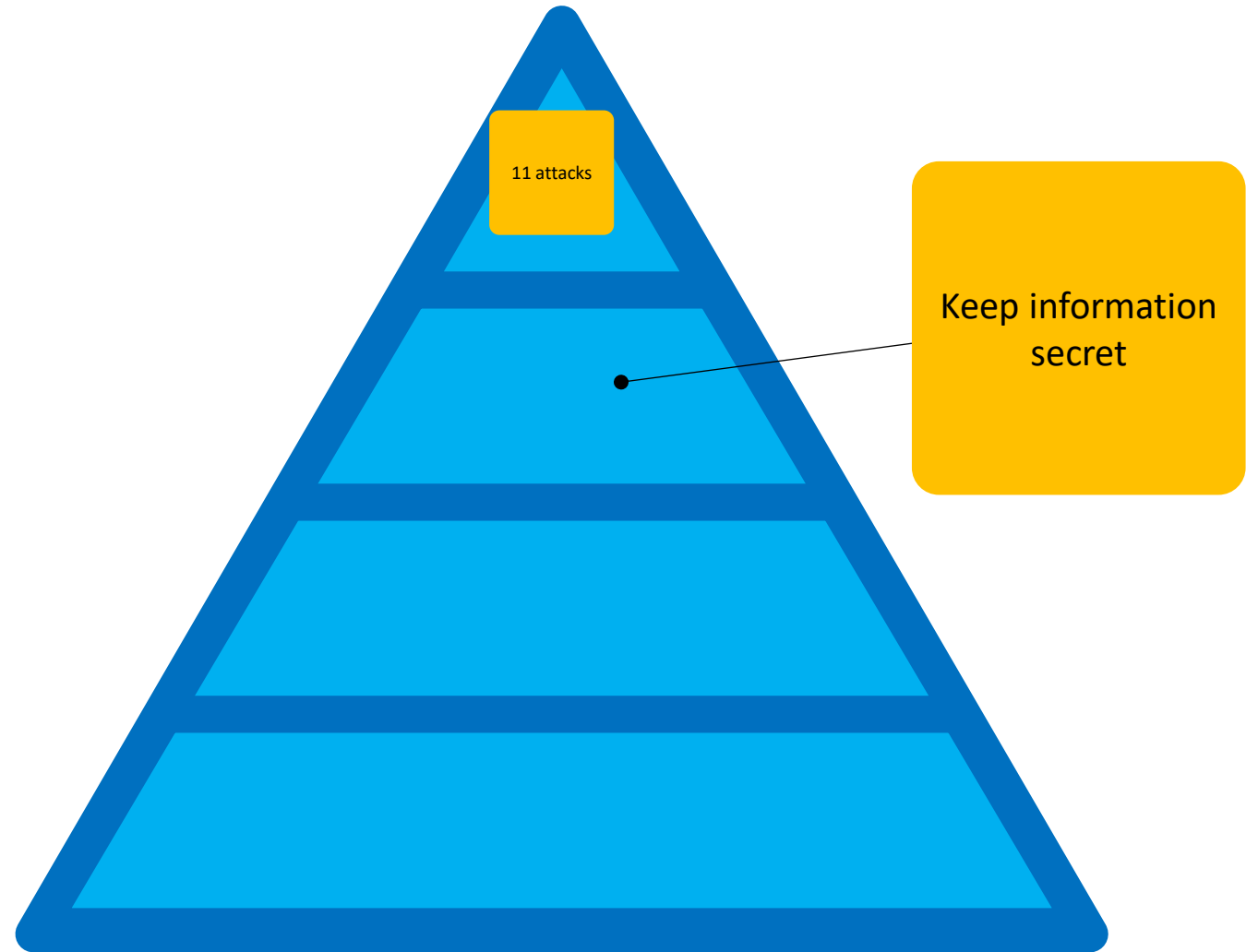
Reframing Crime

- Public discourse is saturated with metaphor.
- Crime waves, criminals prey on unsuspecting victims...
- *“victims... not only of the attacker, but of a metaphor.”*



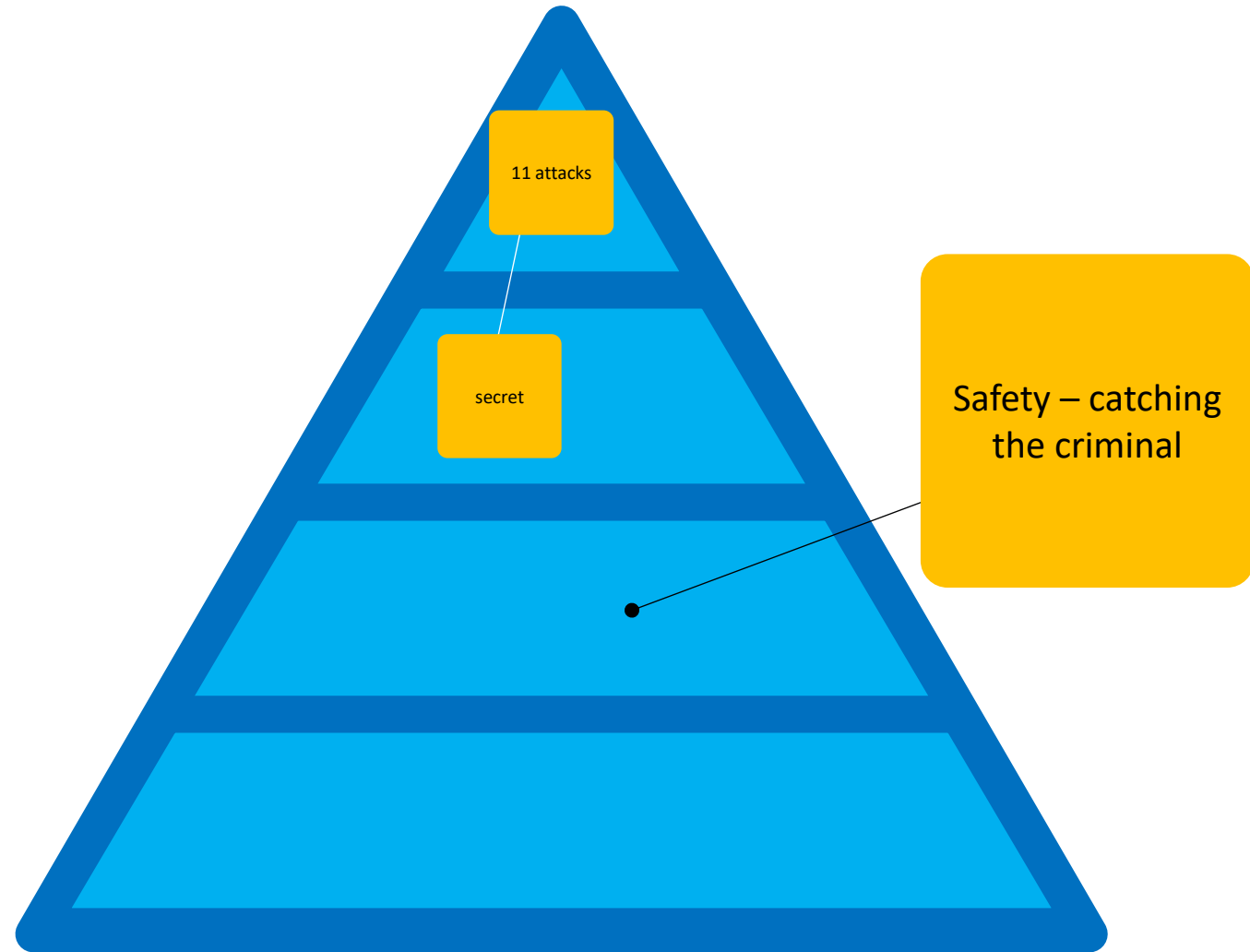
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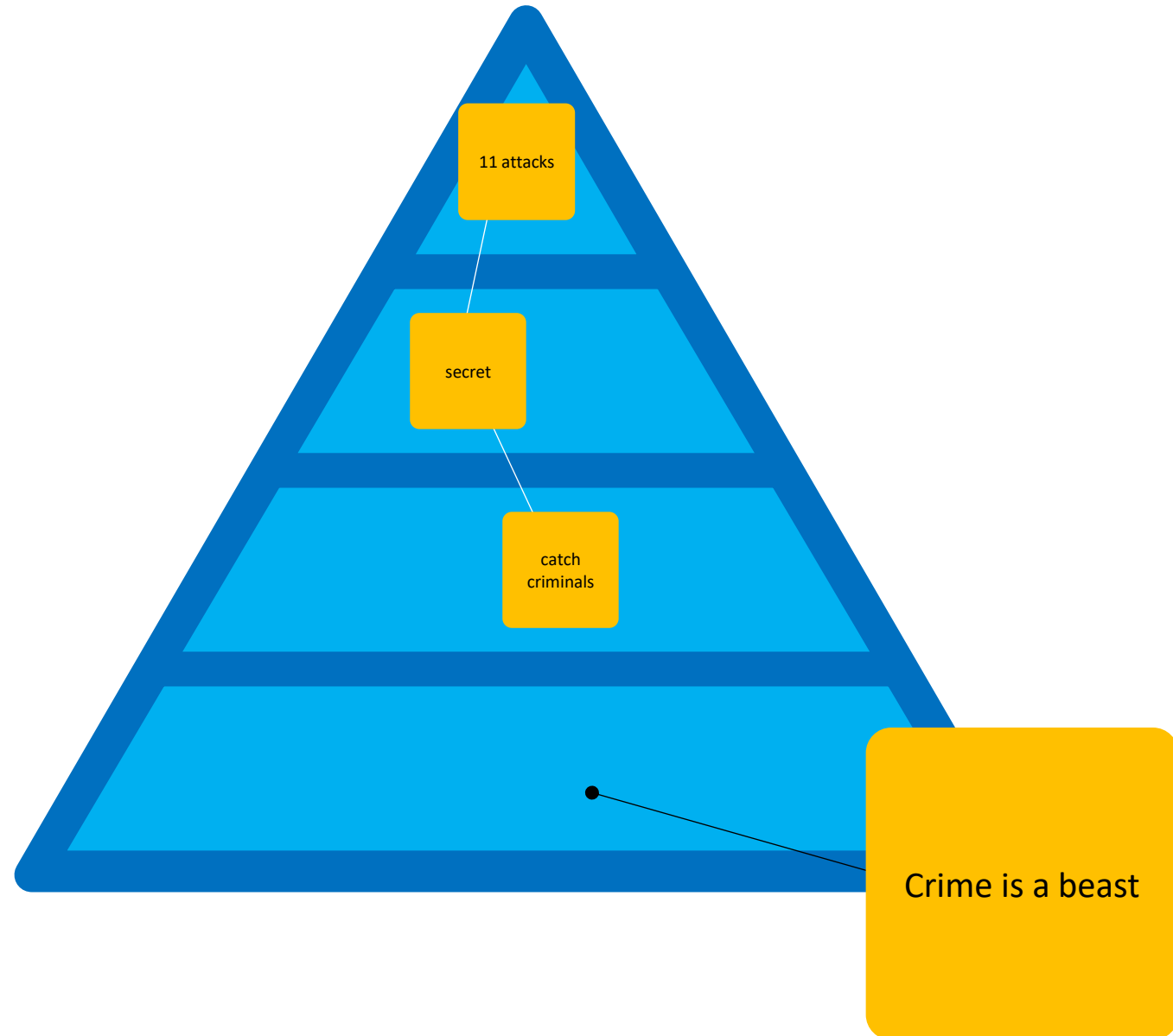
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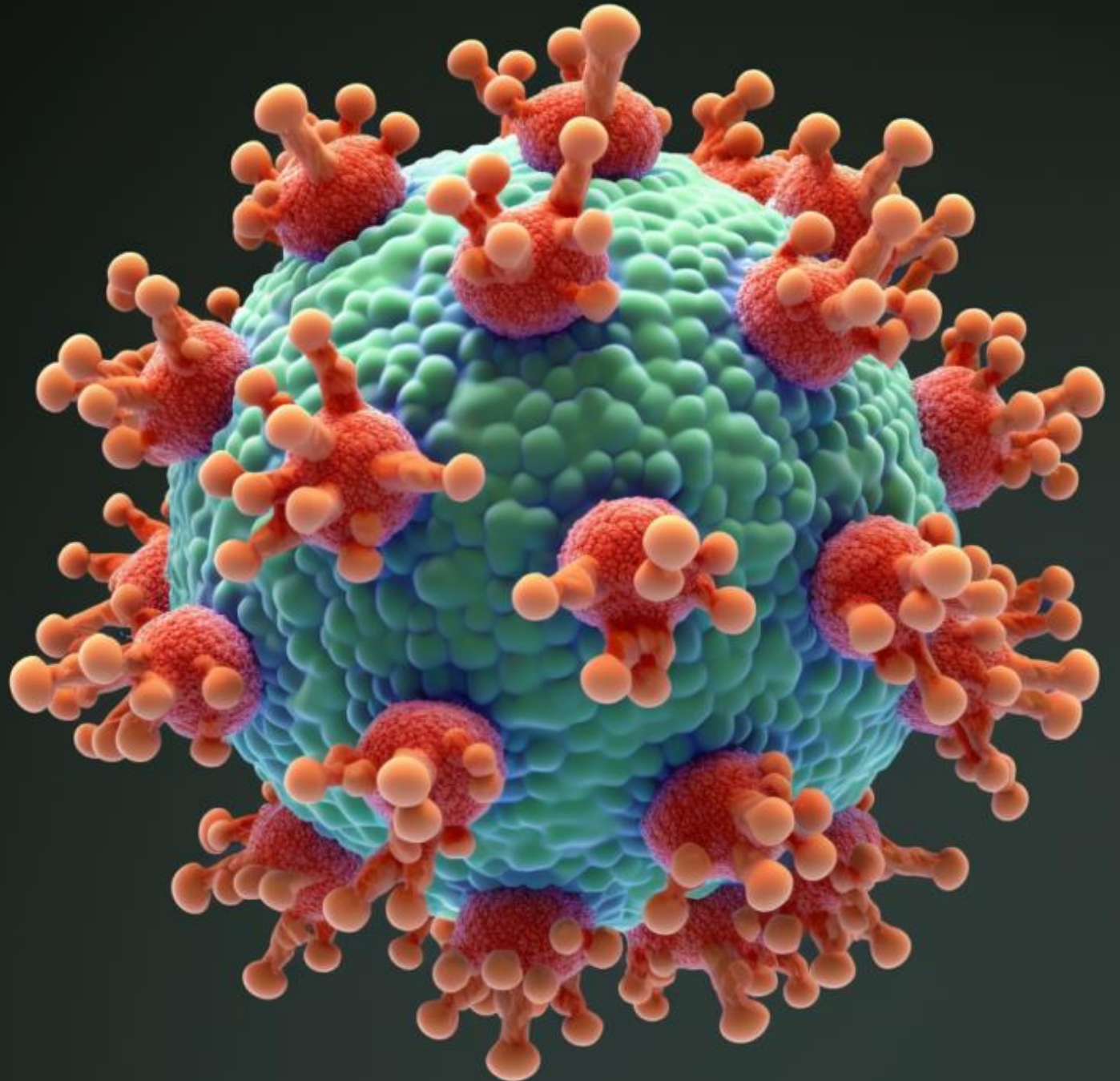
Crime is a Beast

- How do metaphors shape our choices?
- **Crime is a beast:**
 - catching criminals
 - harsher enforcement laws
 - criminals are monsters



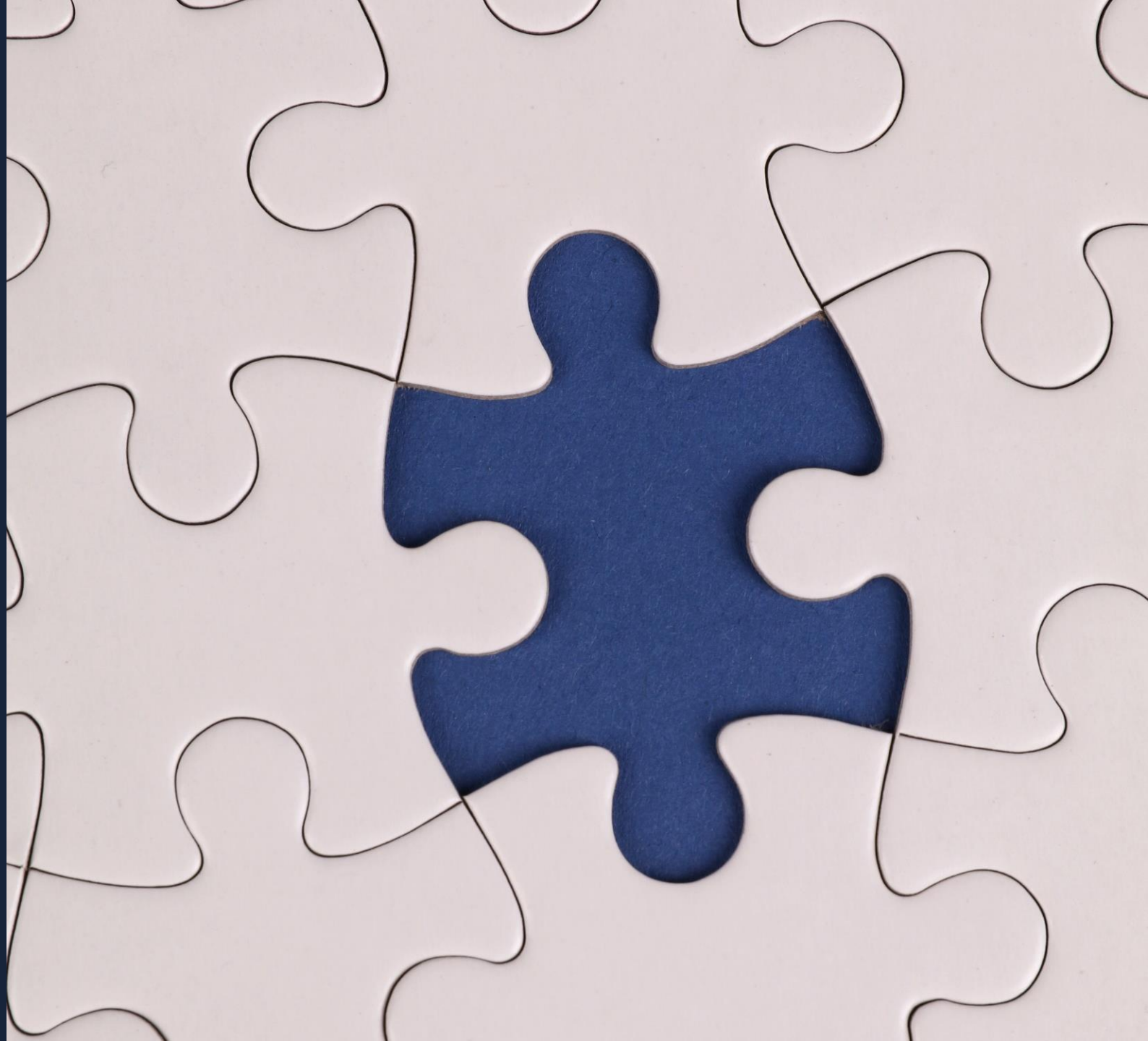
Crime is a Virus

- How do metaphors shape our choices?
- **Crime is a virus:**
 - investigating root causes
 - treating the problem by enacting social reform
 - criminals are patients



Reframing Crime

- Crime statistics were identified as the most influential aspect of the crime report.
- “Unbeknownst to us, metaphors powerfully shape how we reason about social issues.”



Reframing Crime

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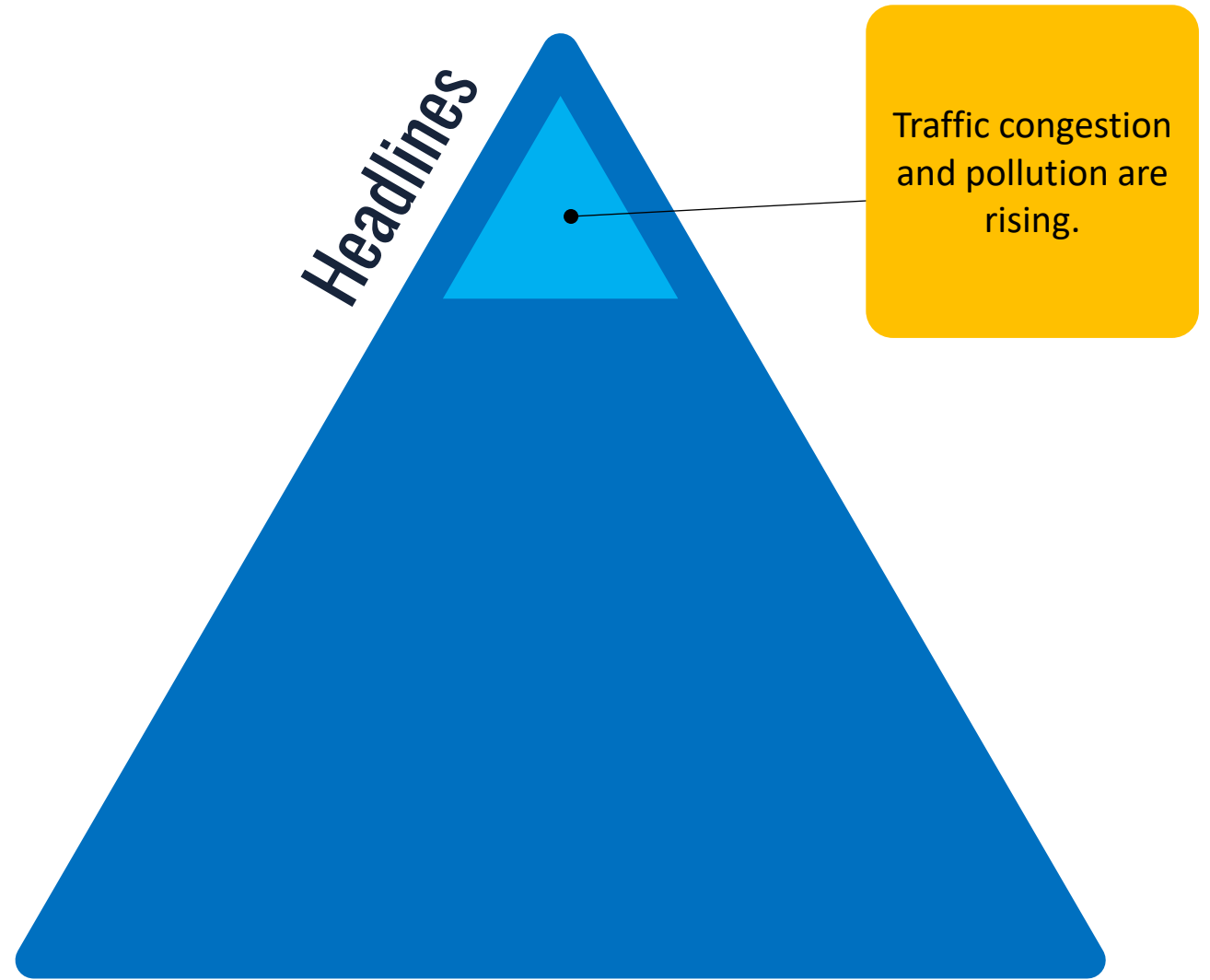
We can choose
our metaphor
rather than
letting
metaphor
choose for us.

5.3

example

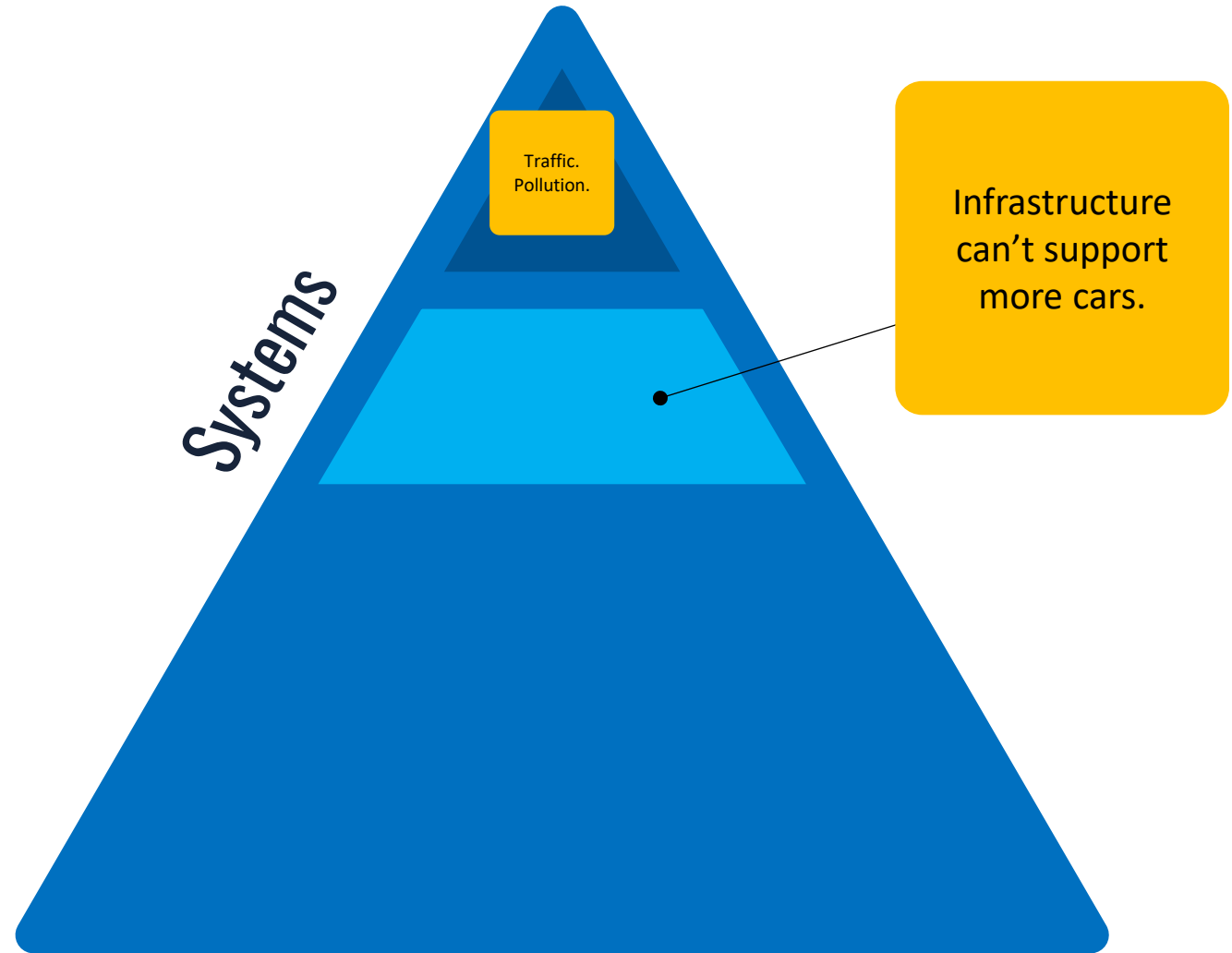
Headlines

- The problem statement.
- The official, public description of the issue.
- Includes events, trends, “water-cooler talk”, or media coverage.



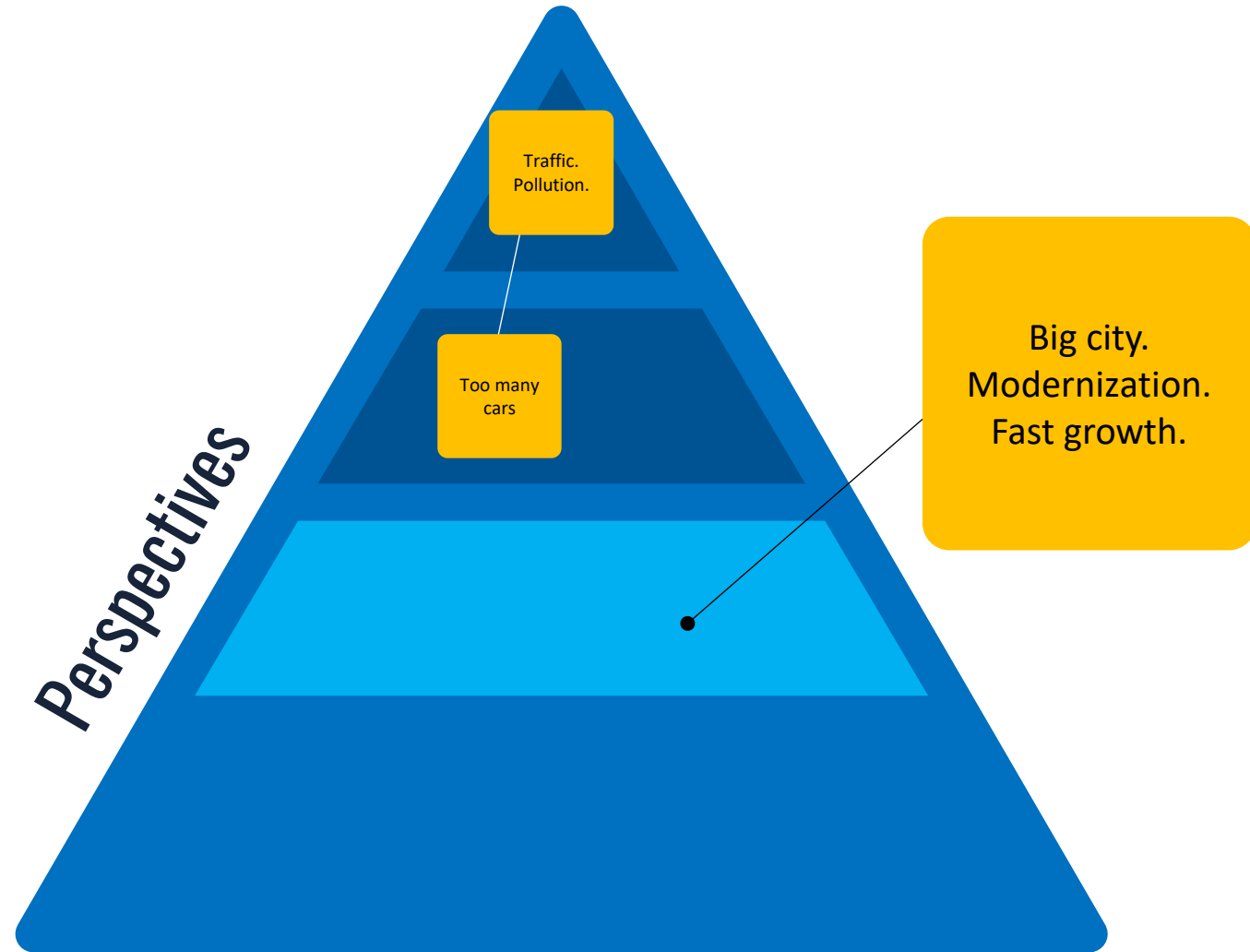
Systems

- The systemic causes to the issue.
- Includes institutions, stakeholders, policies, or other processes.



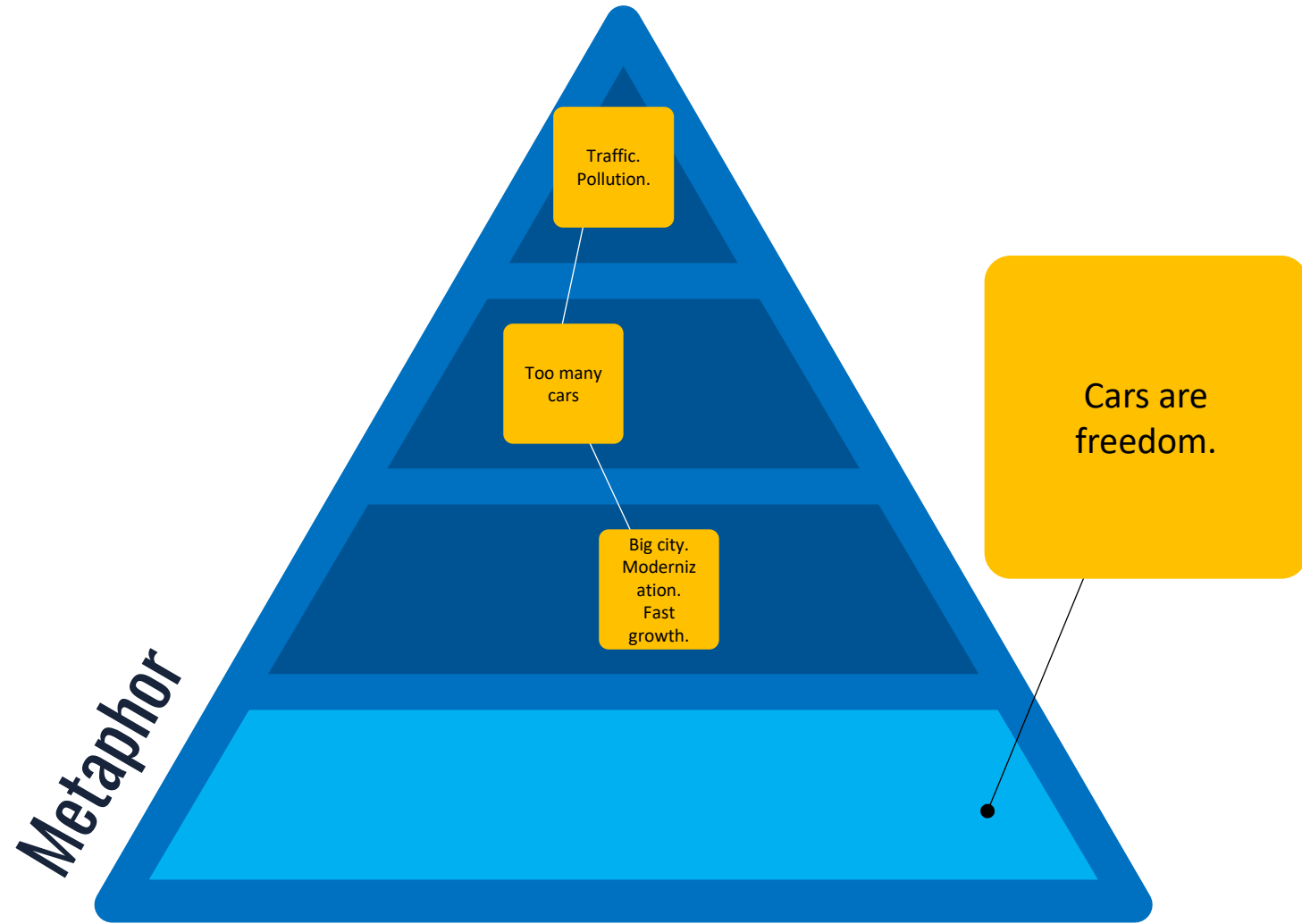
Perspectives

- Interpretations of the issue that reinforce the systems.
- Includes culture, values, beliefs, language, or other mental models.

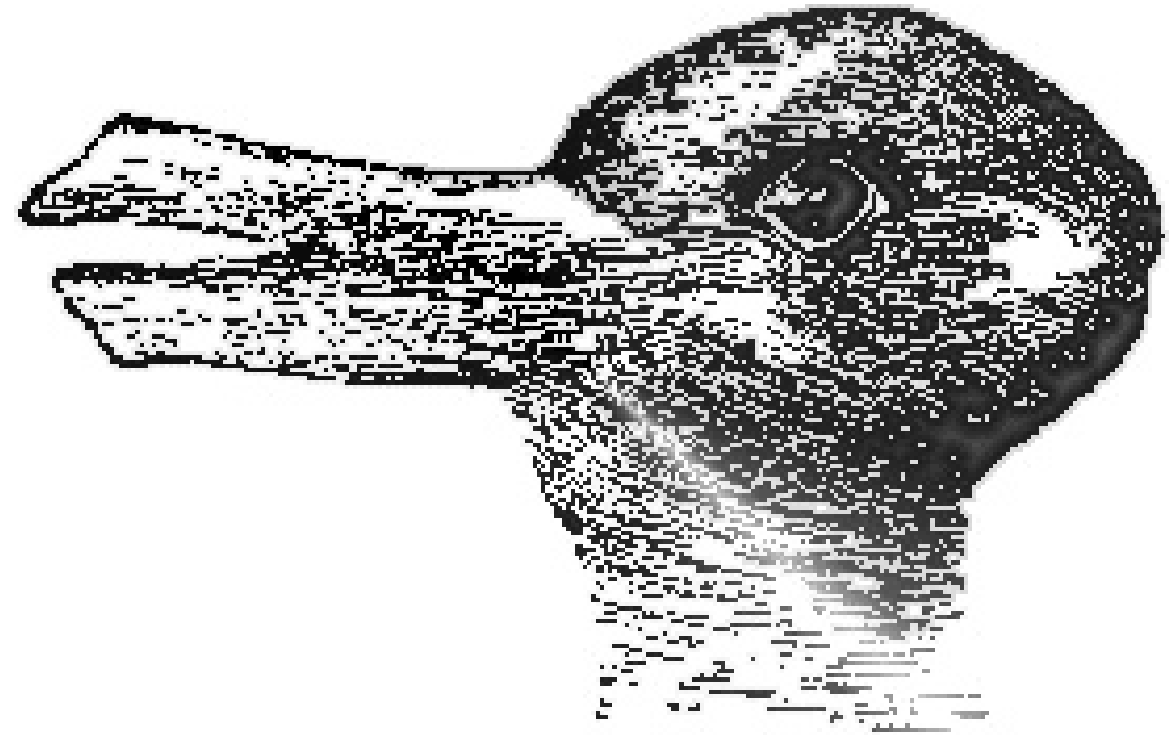


Metaphor

- The unconscious story that drives perspective.
- Includes metaphors, images, objects, animals, sayings, or other representations.

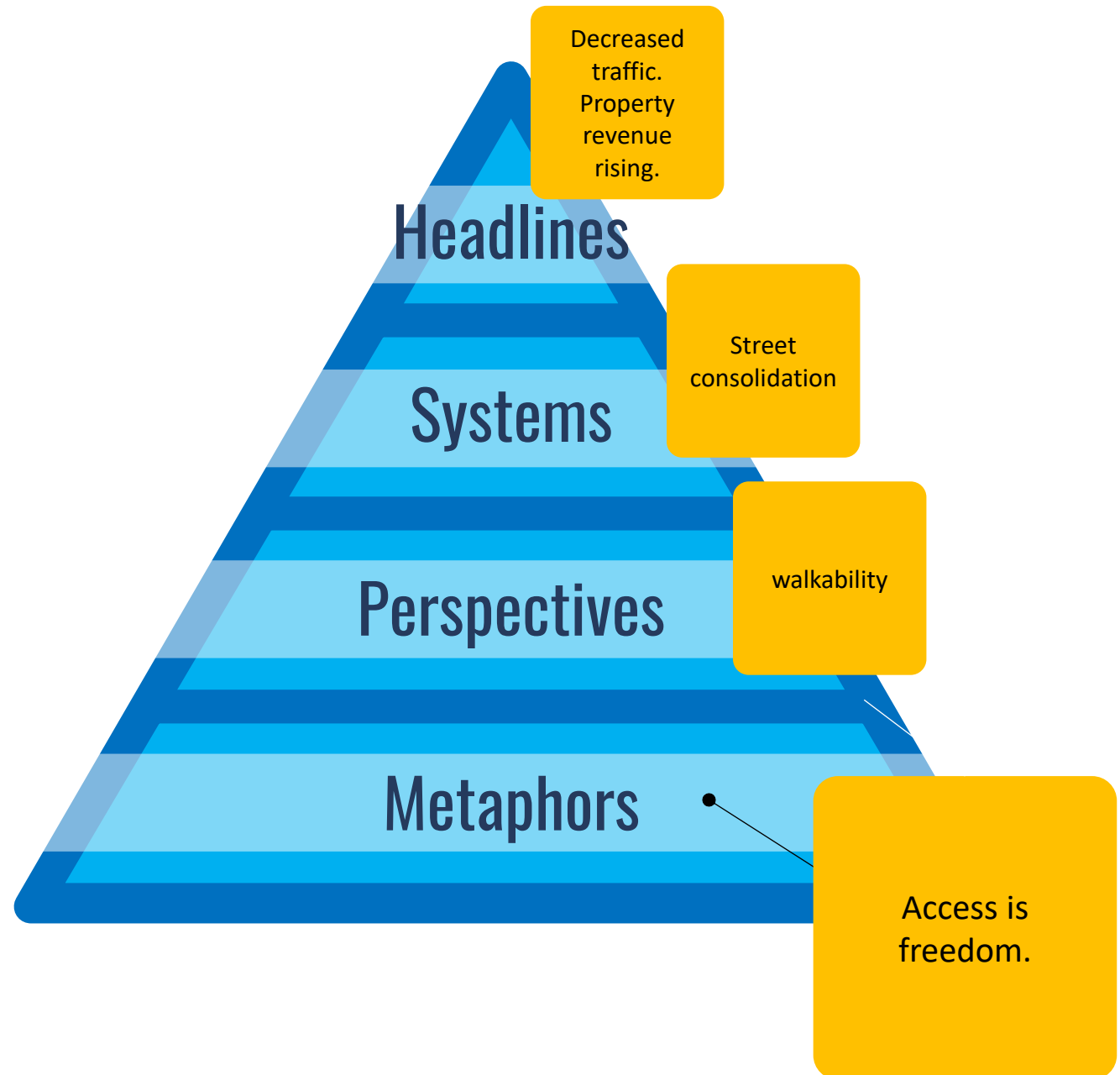


**The way we frame
problems shapes
the solutions we
bring to the table.**



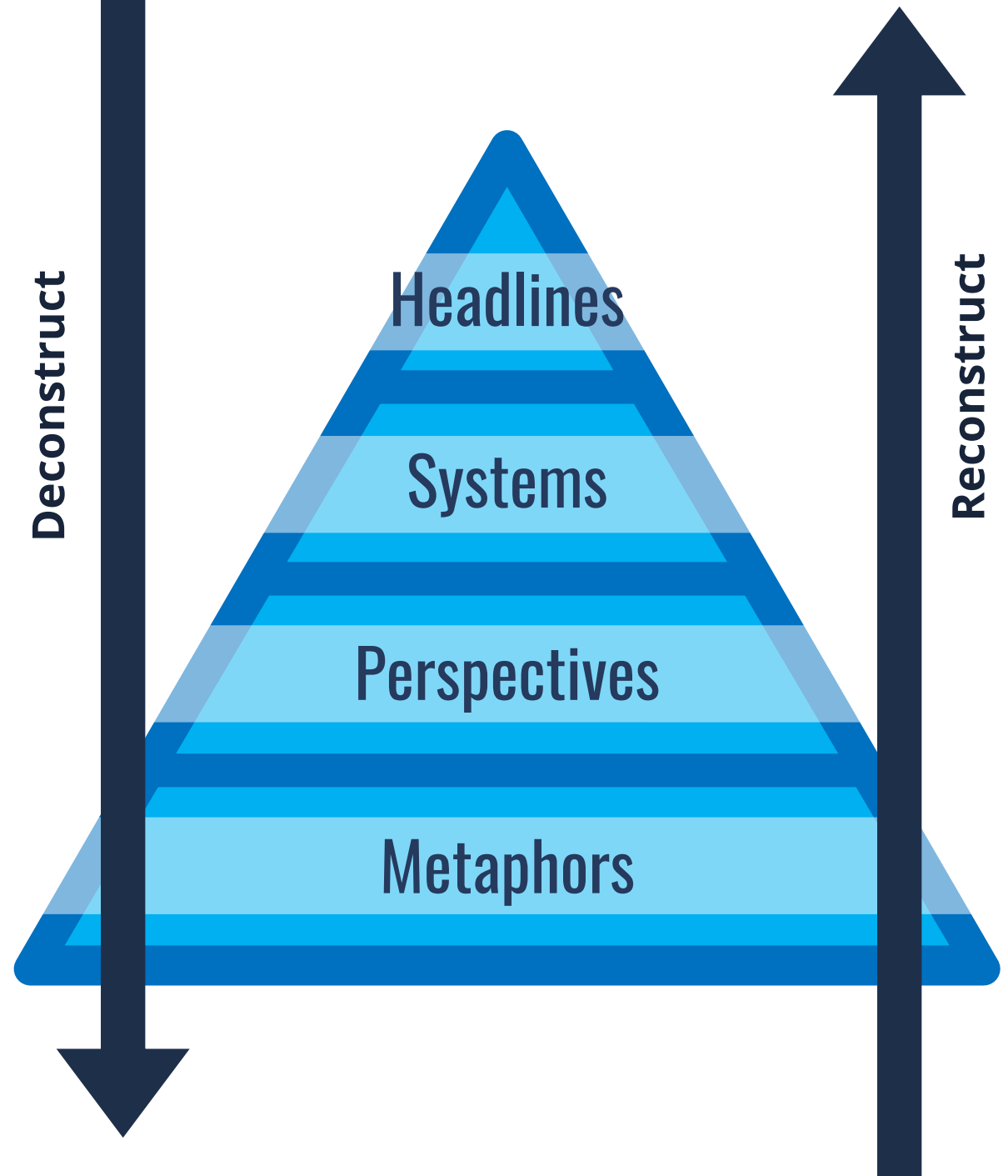
Creating New Futures

- Choose a new metaphor that represents your preferred future.
- Connect your metaphor with new perspectives and systems.
- What will the headlines look like in this future?



CLA Summary

- Headline – description and symptoms of the issue
- Systems – underlying causes to the issue
- Perspectives – values that shape systems
- Metaphors – the unconscious stories that reinforce the perspective



5.4

application

Handout

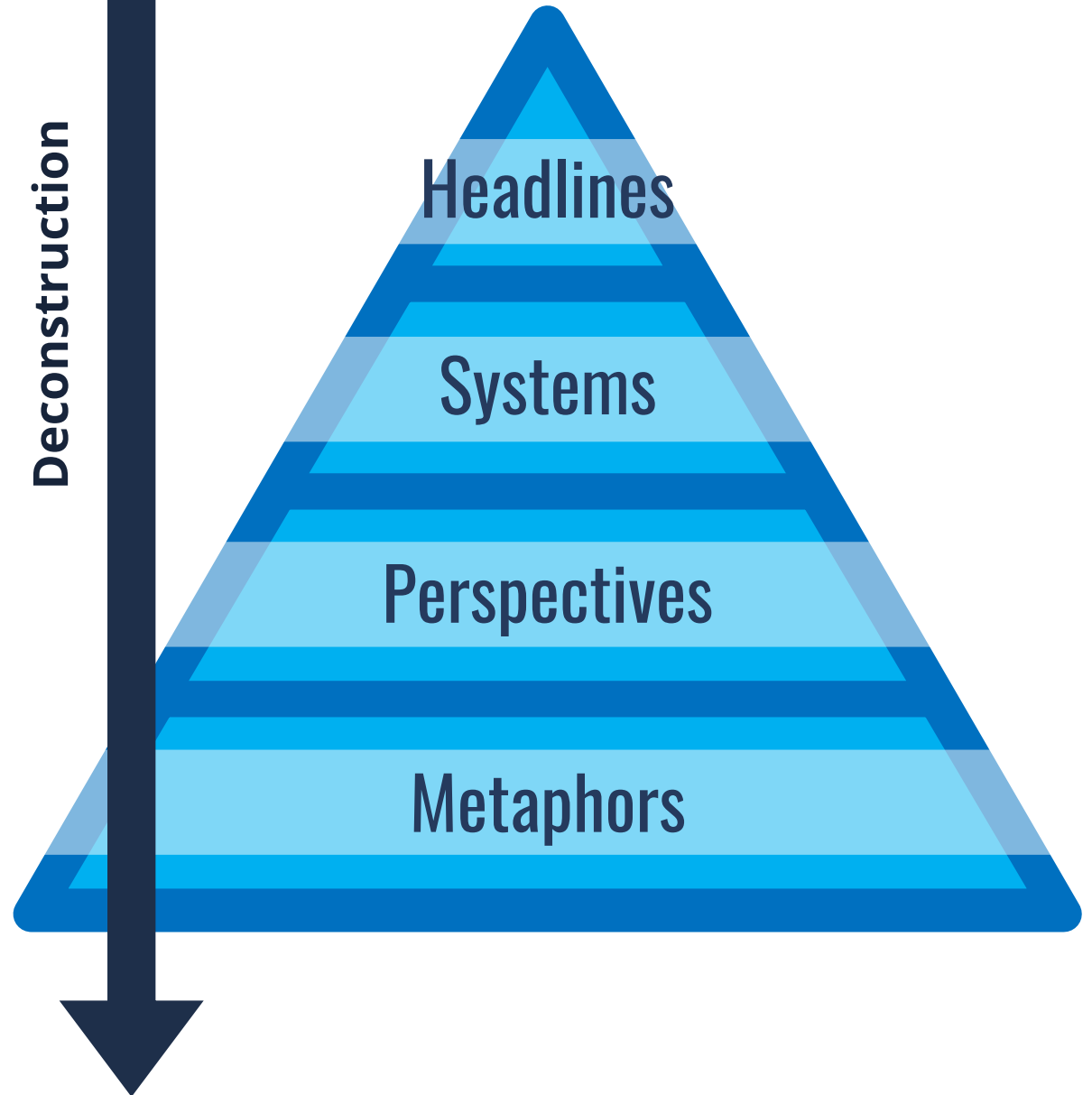


Choose Your Topic:

- Future of the Workforce 2050
- Future of Artificial Intelligence 2040
- Future of Public Services 2050
- Future of Revenue 2050
- A topic of interest i.e transportation, infrastructure, public discourse, org culture

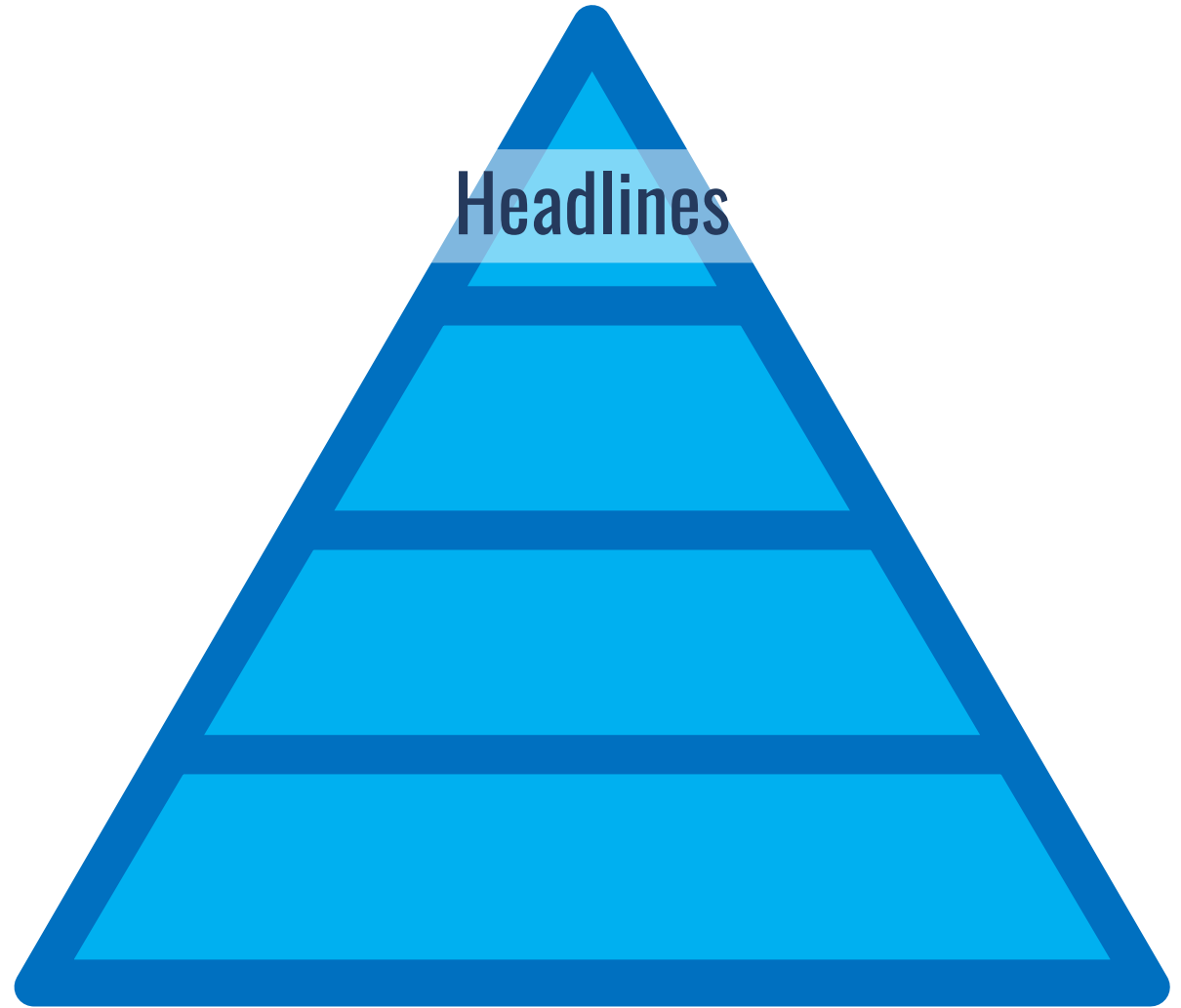
Flow

- Discuss 2-3 distinct “Headlines” for your topic.
- Surface 2-3 “Systems” driving the headlines.
- Name the 2-3 “Perspectives” that shaped the systems.
- Create 1 “Metaphor” encompassing the other three layers.



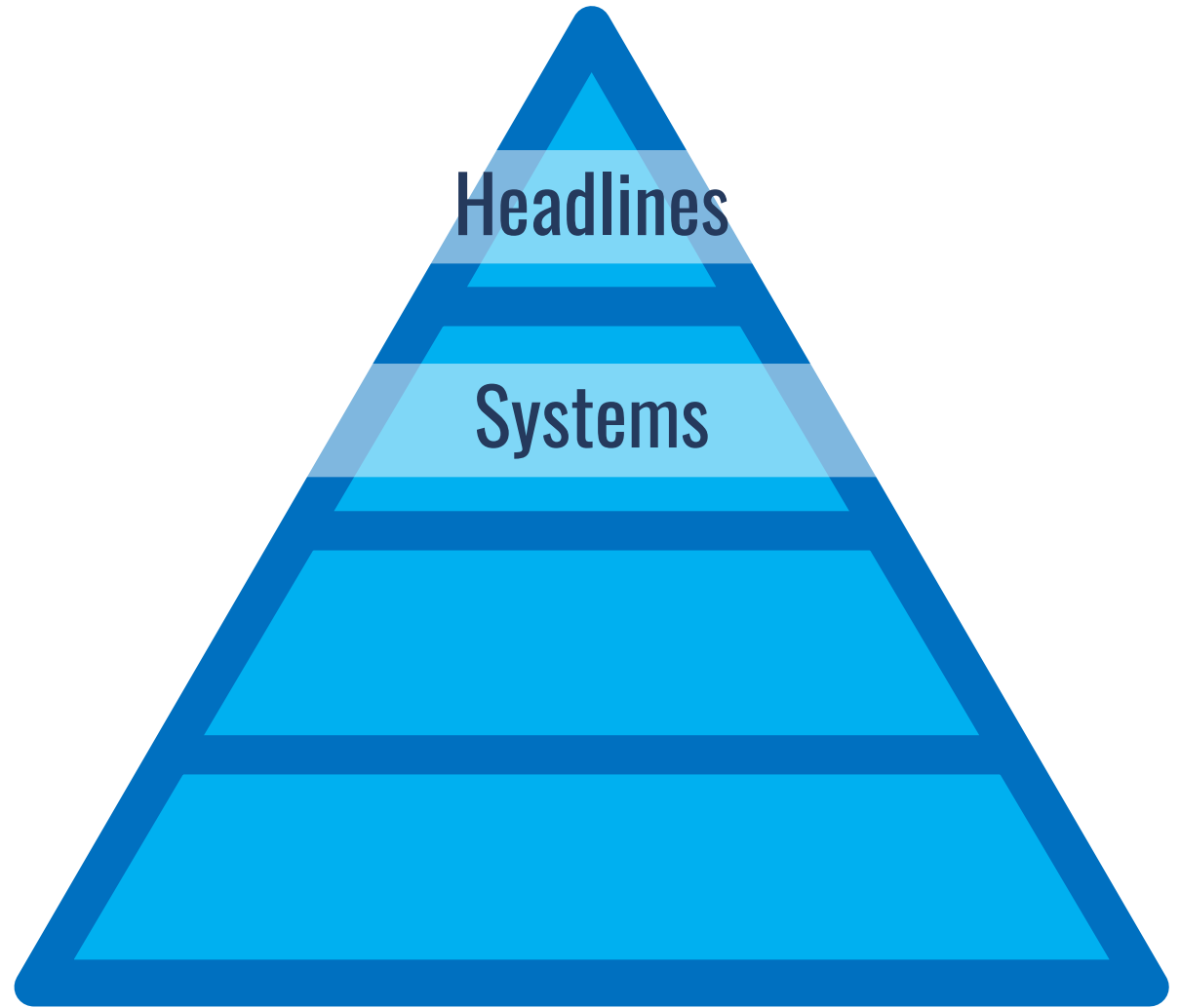
Headlines

- How would you describe the state of your topic?
- Visible challenges and quantifiable outcomes.
- Consider how your topic is perceived internally and externally.



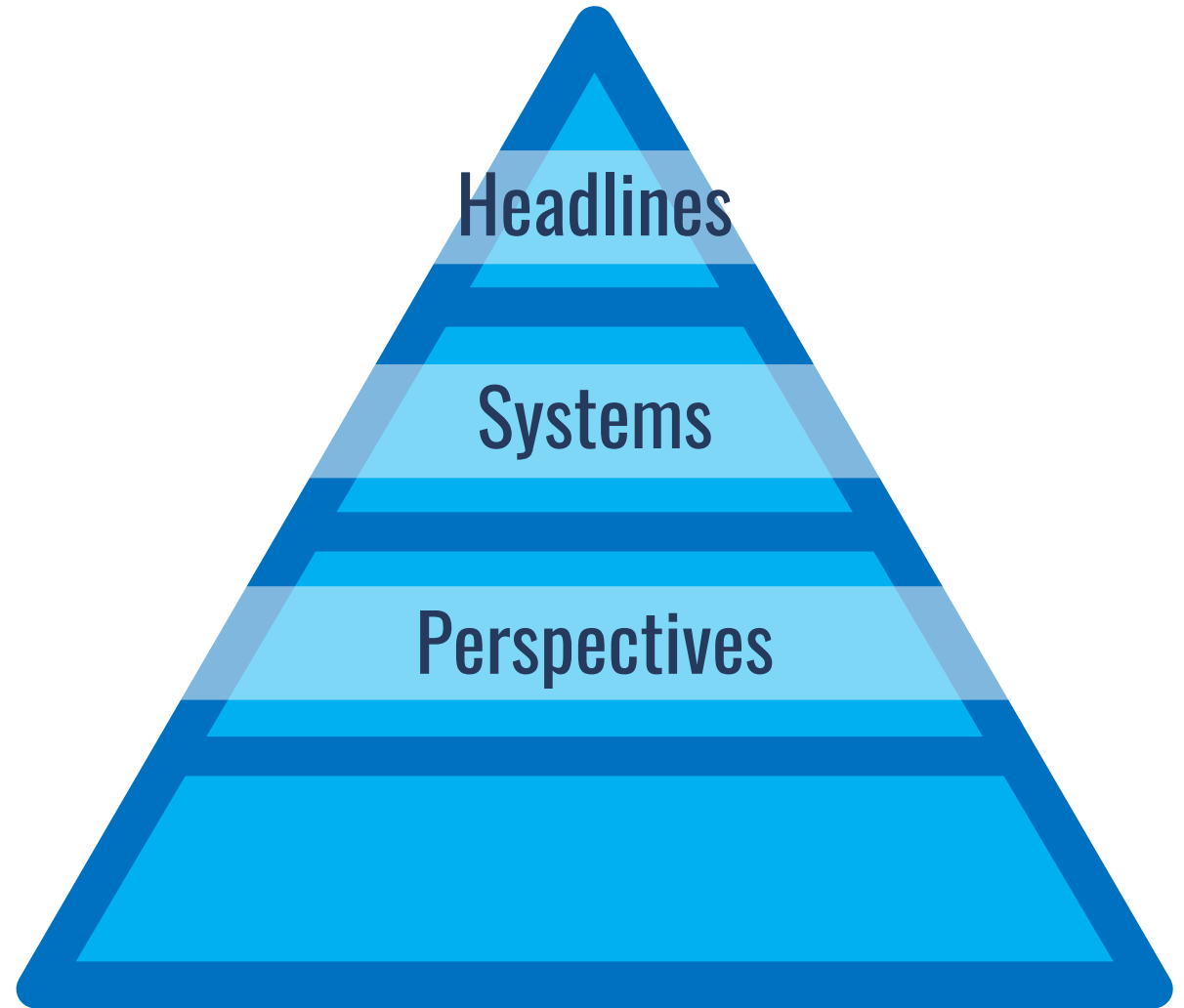
Systems

- The underlying causes to the surface problem.
- How and why did this issue arise?
- What is the source of the issue?



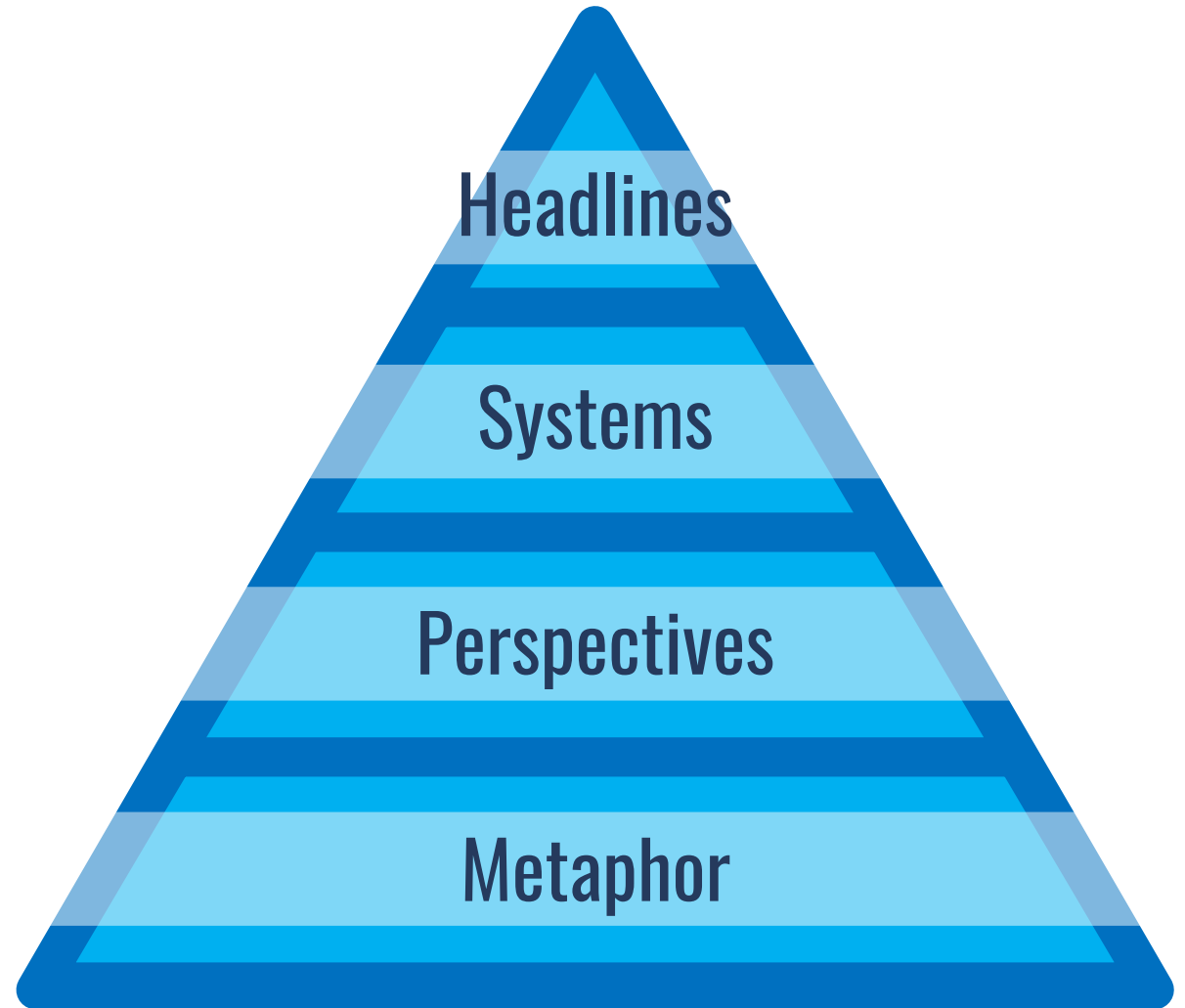
Perspectives

- Values the systems reinforce.
- What values/culture are the systems prioritizing, both intended and unintended?
- Are there any competing priorities in the system? Which is winning out today?
- Examples:
 - Efficiency
 - Stability
 - Risk-aversion



Metaphor

- The metaphor that fuels perspective.
- What is a metaphor or saying that encapsulates what has been uncovered?
- Examples:
 - Time is money
 - Titanic / Terminator
 - Pandora's Box
 - Boiling Frog
 - House of Cards

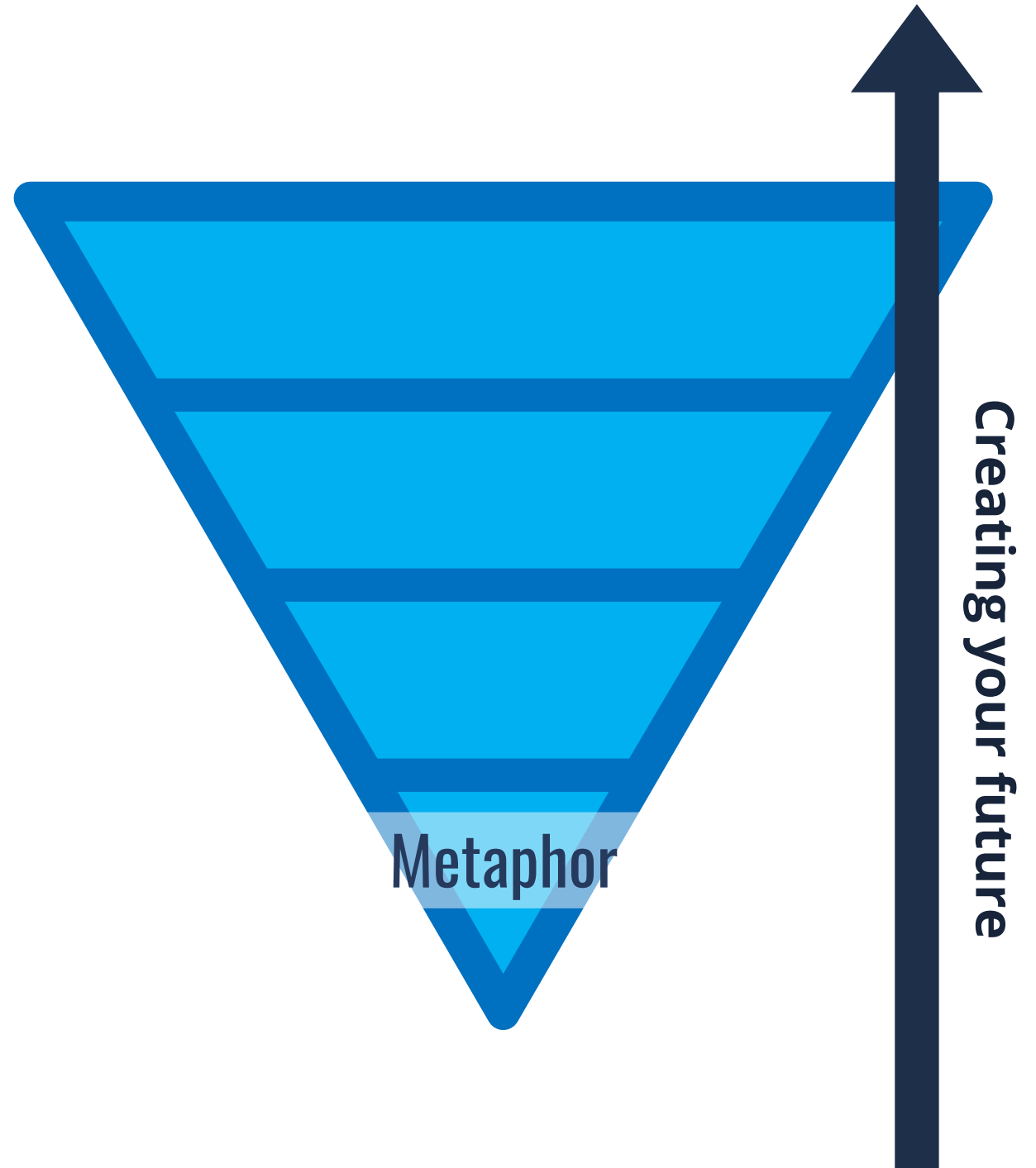


5.5

reconstruction

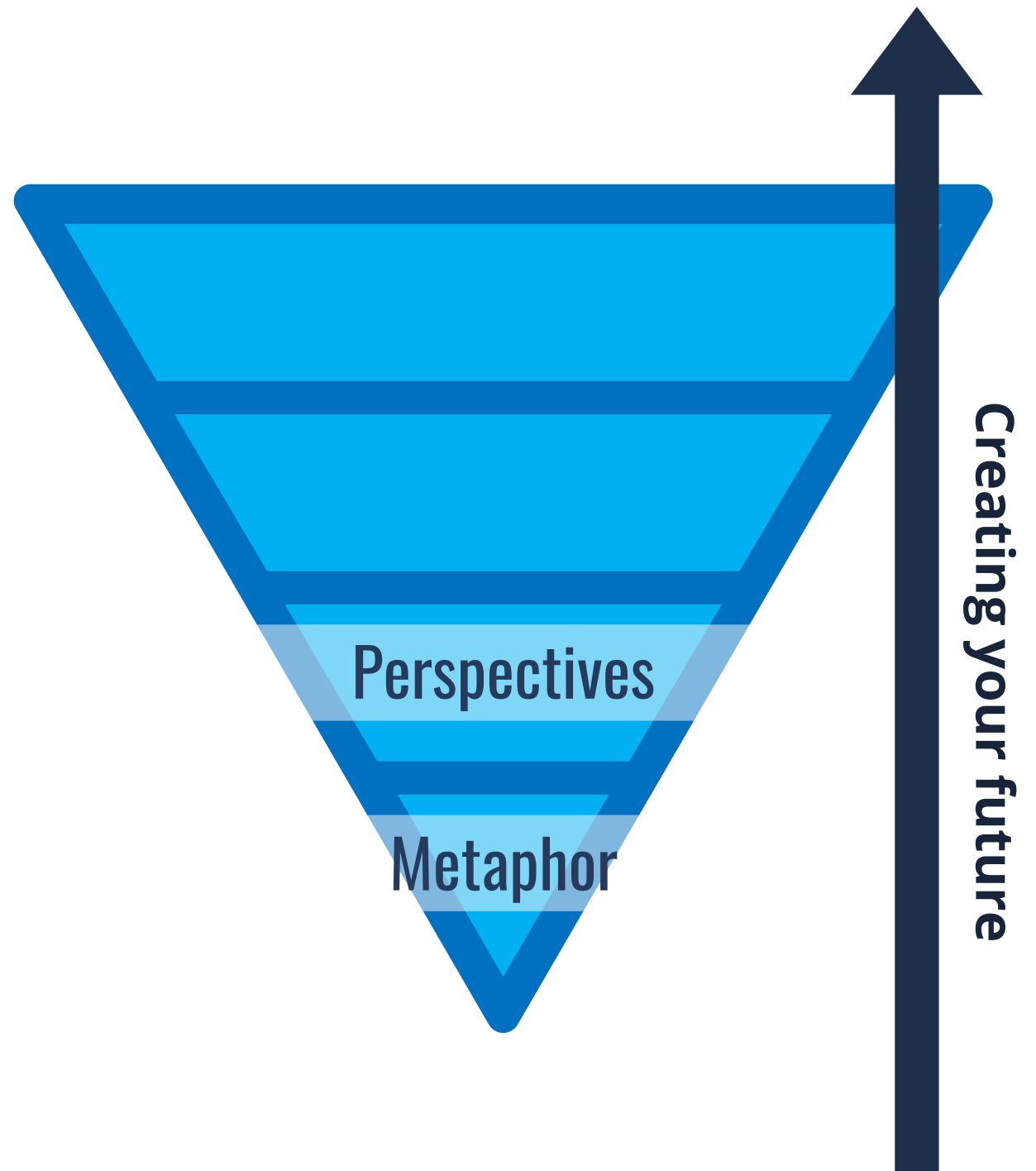
Metaphor

- The new story that fuels your vision.
- What is the new, empowering metaphor for your topic?
- Keep it simple. If you need to explain the metaphor, then it is not likely to communicate and persuade.
- From Titanic to Sailboat



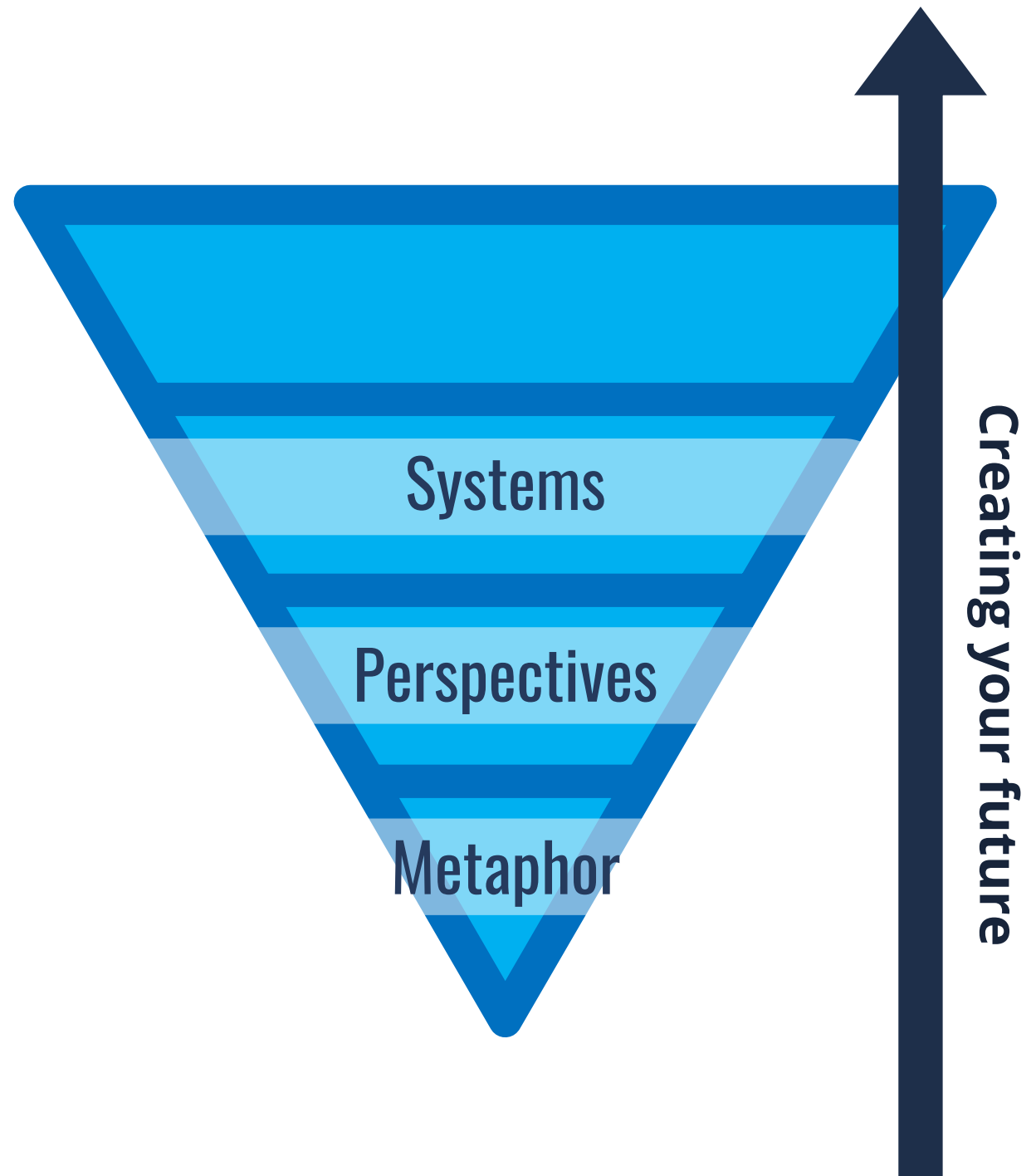
Perspectives

- The new approaches that reflect your metaphor.
- What values and approaches would need to be in place to support the new metaphor?
- What kind of approaches to your topic have been absent or underutilized?
- From Unsinkable to Agile



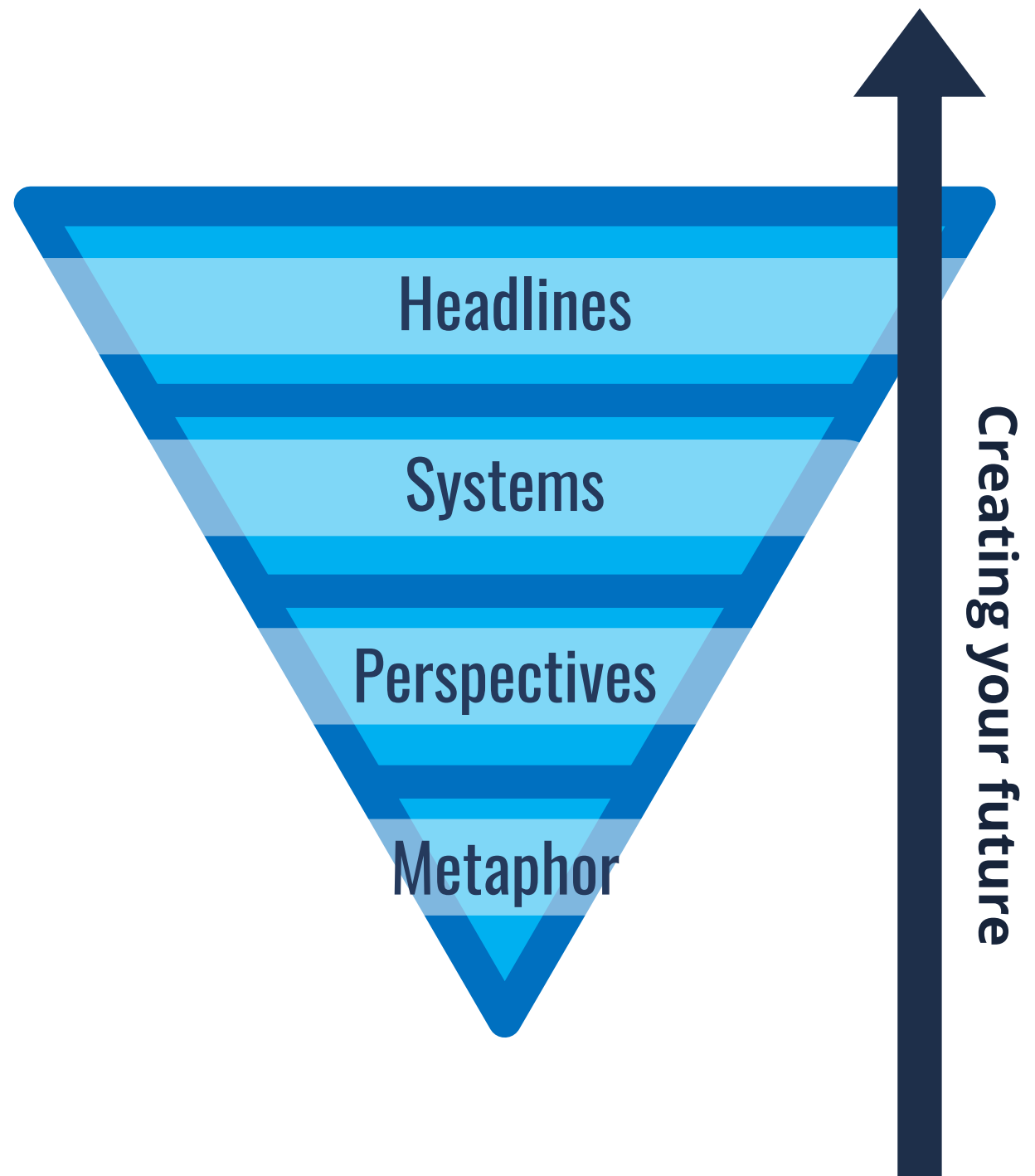
Systems

- What enables the new perspectives to grow.
- What systems are needed for the new metaphor and perspective to prosper?
- Consider new relationships and cooperation.
- Consider any differences in priority that emerge.
- From Technology to Changing with the Wind



Headlines

- The official, public description of the issue.
- What are we hearing and seeing now?
- What short term actions link back to the lower levels?
- What are the new measures?
- From Reactive to Proactive



Group Reflection:

- Your Topic
- From “Old Metaphor”
- To “New Metaphor”



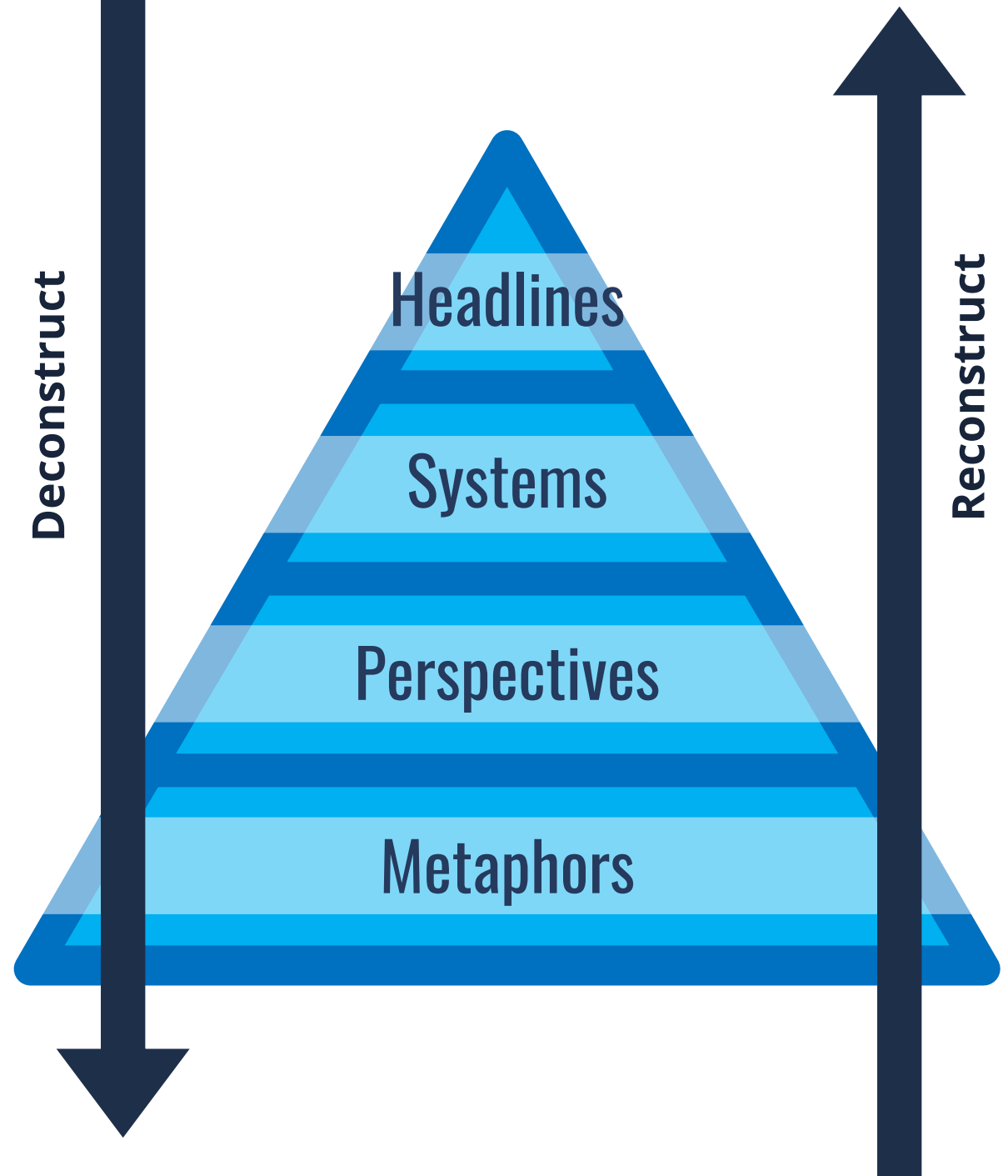
6

group debrief

insights and ah-ha moments

Summary

- Alignment between vision/strategy and underlying metaphor is decisive for successful implementation.
- CLA allows leaders to systematically surface and transform metaphor to create change.
- What is your metaphor today and what is the metaphor you want?



The background is a solid dark blue color. Overlaid on this are several layers of wavy, horizontal lines. Some lines are solid and light blue, while others are composed of small, light blue dots. These lines flow across the frame, creating a sense of movement and depth.

session recap

Foresight tools that....

- **Shift dialogue to fit for purpose**
- **Embrace uncertainty to create positive, viable alternatives**
- **Create support across stakeholders**
- **Transform obstacles to change**

To cultivate...

- **Proactive, long-term leadership**
- **Robust policy development**
- **Distinct strategic alternatives**
- **Organizational learning**
- **Shared agreement on change**

Staying Connected

afi

Handout



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Newsletter



7

lunch

