




# Emerging Disruptors in the Future of Libraries

URBAN LIBRARIES COUNCIL

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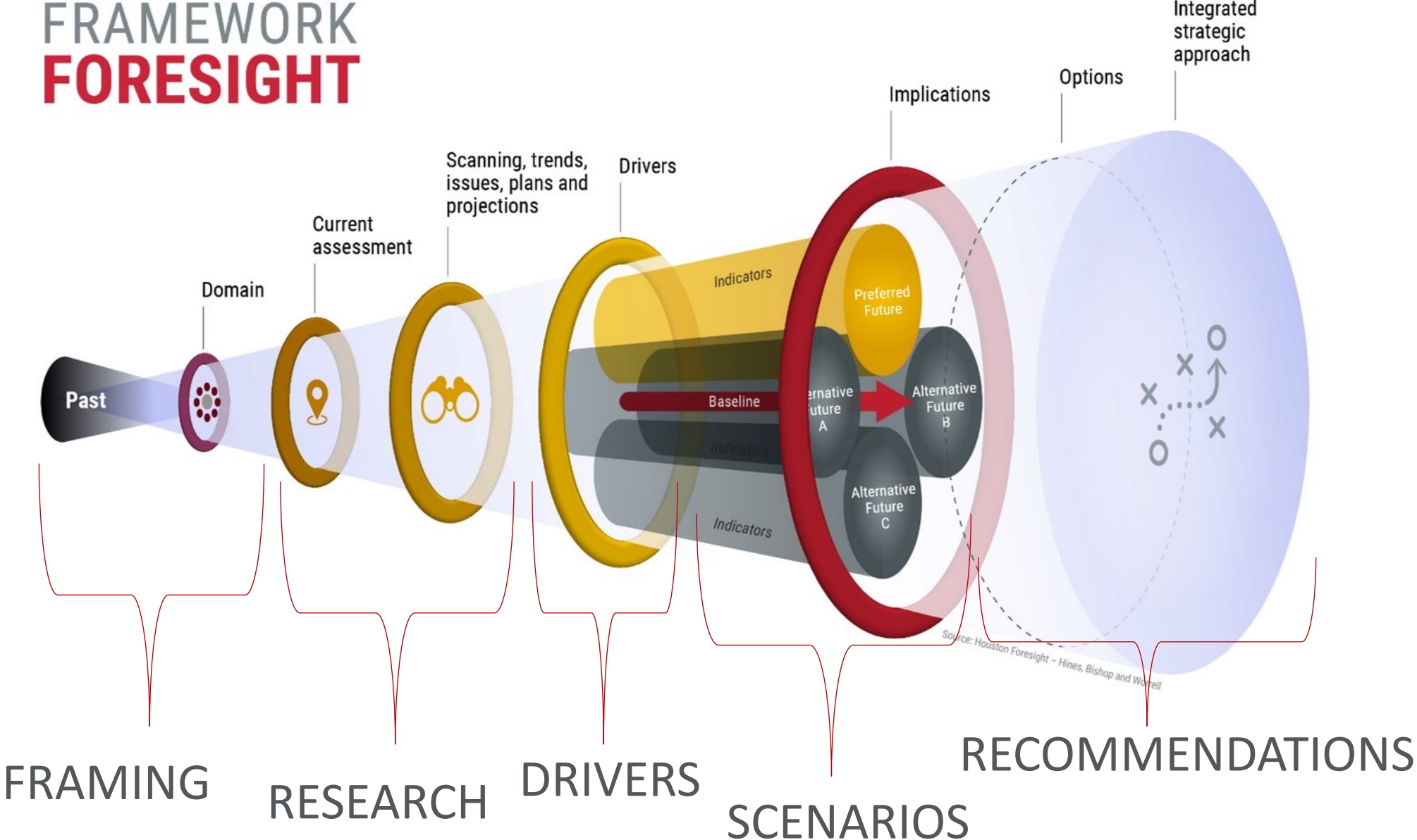




**“Strategic Foresight** is the study of change that uses a systematic methodology to explore the future in order to make better decisions today by helping us move toward the futures we want and avoid those we don’t, and to ultimately build confidence in the future by building our capacity to avoid surprise!” – Andy Hines

# Houston Foresight

## FRAMEWORK **FORESIGHT**



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# 14 Drivers of Change...Top Six

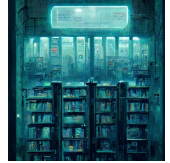
<b>Security Concerns</b>	Patrons expect libraries to provide security for various physical and cyber security threats, especially special collections.
<b>Staffing Issues</b>	Competition for talent and struggles with retention continue as education level and capabilities are reconsidered. A stellar workforce is key for a preferred future
<b>Social Services &amp; Opportunity Gap</b>	Libraries are community hubs to provide services for social welfare and other programs, yet communities are unwilling or unable to adequately fund these services leaving libraries filling the gap.
<b>Culture Wars</b>	Political and cultural battles are being waged against libraries. Library services are the epicenter. A position must be taken, and it can't be of "neutrality".
<b>Shades of Green</b>	How green do libraries want to go? From refurbishing buildings, training staff on low carbon footprint, and reducing carbon emissions by increasing remote working & programming, libraries have a myriad of green options to choose from.
<b>The Next Tech Wave</b>	A new wave of tools is emerging to deal with the exploding availability of (mostly digital) information e.g., AI-based avatars.

# Future of Libraries 2032 Scenarios



## Not Enough

Despite good intentions, increased expenses mean the library can't keep up with demands, which disappoint the community and the library.



## Libraries for Some

Library services move into the cloud with remaining branches more like shelters than traditional libraries.



## Pushing the Limits

The library dramatically expands its scope of services, and then scales back.



## Taking a Stand

Libraries take a strong stand for community values and intellectual freedom that earns it a key role in bringing the community together.



## Trusted Third Space


Building trust with community through seamless invisible tech, relationship building and equitable resources allocation.



## Ecosystem Anchor

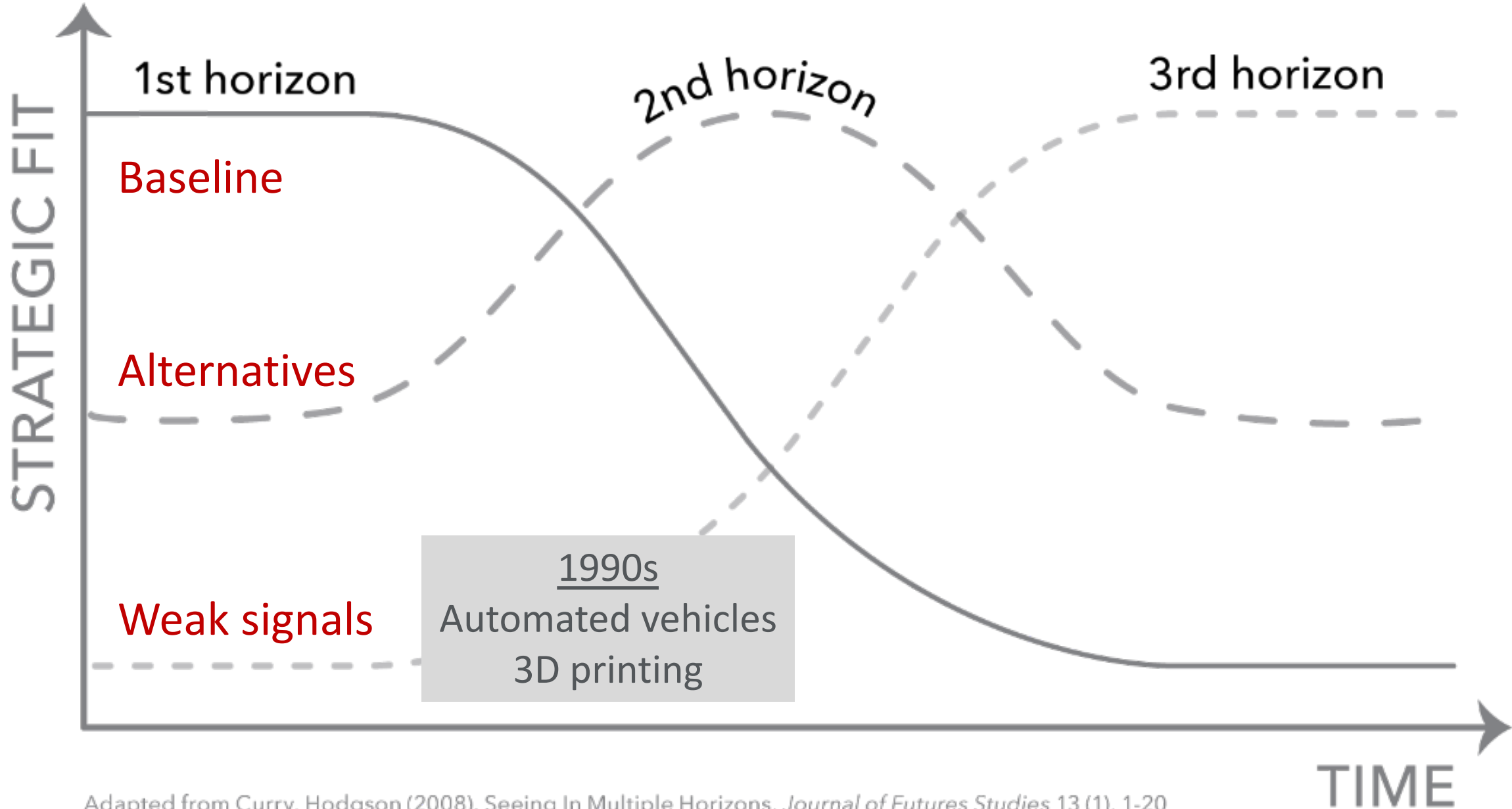
The library is able to return to its roots as the guides to the world of information as social services and other direct provider services are distributed to other organizations in the community ecosystem that are more qualified to handle them.





**Emerging disruptors** are young forces that are just now materializing. As a result, they are not well-known or well-understood. But in ten+ years these trends may become major forces impacting the future.

# Three Horizons



Adapted from Curry, Hodgson (2008). Seeing In Multiple Horizons, *Journal of Futures Studies* 13 (1), 1-20

# Market Dynamics: Library Edition

Libraries are undergoing a metamorphosis as new players enter the arena. An increase in private and niche libraries could create competition for relevance and expose the public to new avenues for library services. Often these new players bring new business models, technological innovations, and a keen focus on user experience.



**The Huntsville City Council voted 6-3 in favor of privatizing and outsourcing its public library operations.** The decision comes after concerns were raised about banned books and LGBTQ displays.

Based in Edinburgh, with branches in Switzerland and India, **the Library of Mistakes is a free public library designed to improve understanding of finance (and life in general), one mistake at a time.**

**Is Amazon “slowly” taking over public libraries?** Said to already be gatekeeping their digital-only, amazon-published content, in testimony to Congress, the American Library Association called digital sales bans like Amazon’s “the worst obstacle for libraries”.



# Grassroots Censorship Battles

Dissatisfaction with the ongoing battle on censorship resonates across both ends of the political spectrum. The traditional reliance on higher authorities to resolve this dispute has dwindled, giving rise to a shift. **Now, both sides are actively engaging in grassroots methods to address and, in some cases, redefine the contours of this issue.**



**Reporters Without Borders uses a censorship loophole in Minecraft.** One can visit the inner world's library to access "forbidden articles" from journalists who have been banned, jailed or even killed.

Residents of a small town in Michigan helped **raise nearly \$100,000 for their local library after it was defunded** over the inclusion of LGBTQ books.

The Right **takes to social media to get teachers and librarians fired** for not banning books. The effort is organized and widespread.

A district in Ohio **used AI (specifically ChatGPT) to figure out which books to ban.**

# Info Influx

What's the library's role in collecting and preserving the ever-growing onslaught of data? Libraries are evolving into data-driven centers of knowledge curation. This shift is driven by the imperative to stay relevant in an era where information is both a treasure trove and a potential overload.



As intellectual property becomes a hot topic, artists are looking at ways to ensure their property is distributed in accordance with their wishes upon death. Such as an **Intellectual Property Donor sticker to affix to a driver's license.**

In response to the alarming loss of music, the Global Music Vault worked with Microsoft to develop a silica glass device that can **store 150GB of music for thousands of years.**

A Data Garden is a plant-based storage aka "Grow Your Own Cloud". By using genetically-altered bacteria, **scientists could "infect" the DNA of plants with data.**

# Cultural Catalysts


**Libraries are increasingly being called upon to address and repair some of society's most pressing challenges.** Known as neutral ground, this evolving special third space is poised to play a transformative role in shaping the narrative of our collective future, addressing 'big problems' and fostering a more resilient, informed, and connected society.

President Obama stresses the importance of libraries to rebuild **"the unifying story of America,"** as well as providing **"citizens with a shared set of baseline narratives around which we can make our democracy work"**

After 30 years of war and disaster, trauma and grief are deeply ingrained in the Somali experience. In response, **this understanding is being incorporated in schools, libraries and political systems.**



**The Human Library is a learning platform that allows people to borrow people instead of books.** Every "human book" from this library represents a group that faces prejudice or stigmas because of their lifestyle, ethnicity, beliefs, or disability. A human book can be, for example, an alcoholic, or a Muslim, or a homeless person, or someone who was sexually abused.



The forces of today do not look the same in the future. They must be **forecasted** with an understanding patterns and movements of future forces.

**Scenarios** combine individual trends to reveal unanticipated sources of change. We use narratives to socialize insights and expand our understanding about the future.

# Scenario Archetypes

## **BASELINE > Same Rules**

The system moves forward along its current trajectory. This is the “official future” and usually considered most likely.

## **COLLAPSE > No Rules**

The system falls apart under the weight of “negative” forces.



## **TRANSFORMATION > New Rules**

The system is discarded in favor of a new one with a new set of rules.

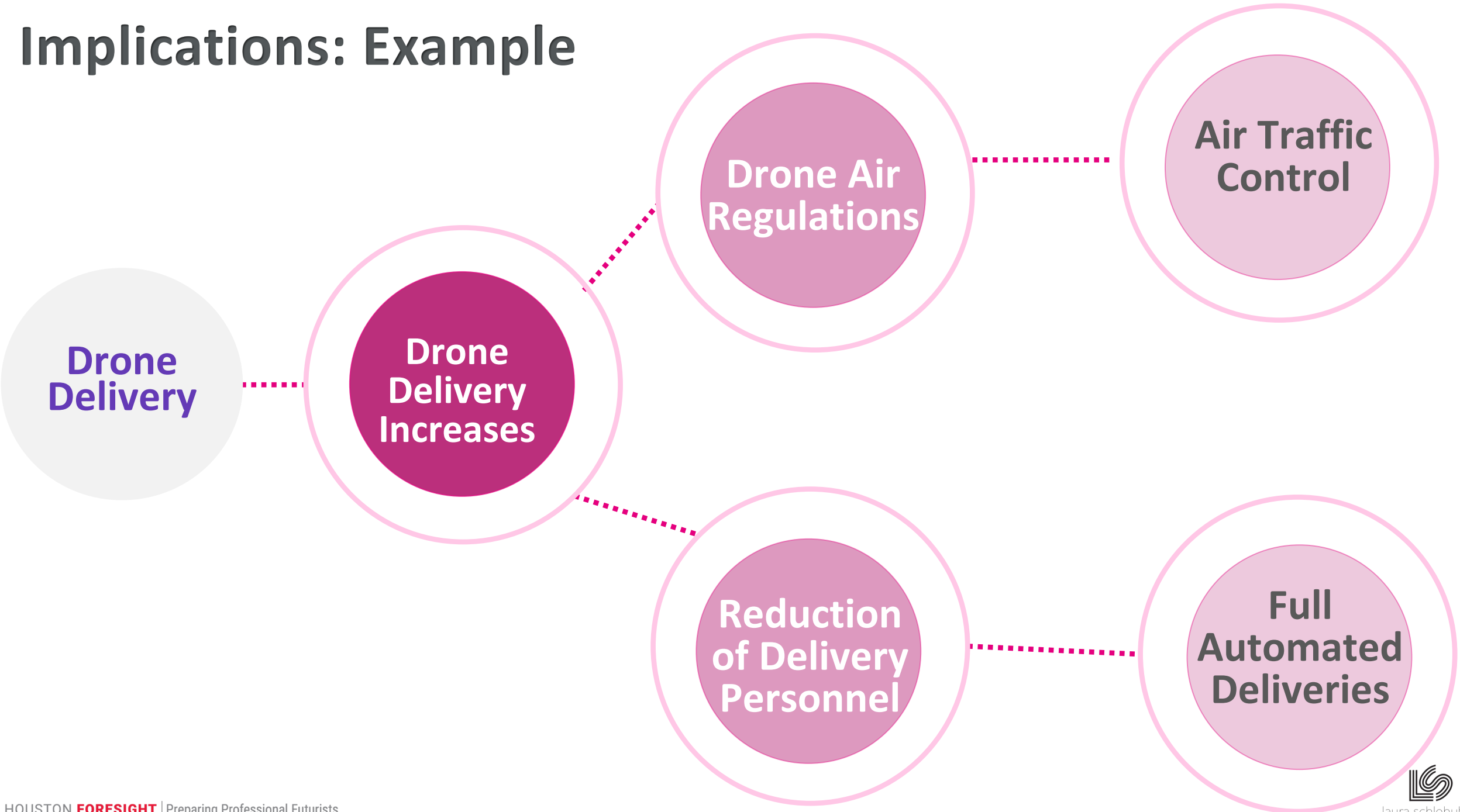


## **NEW EQUILIBRIUM > Changing Rules**

The system reaches a balance among competing forces that is significantly different from the current balance.

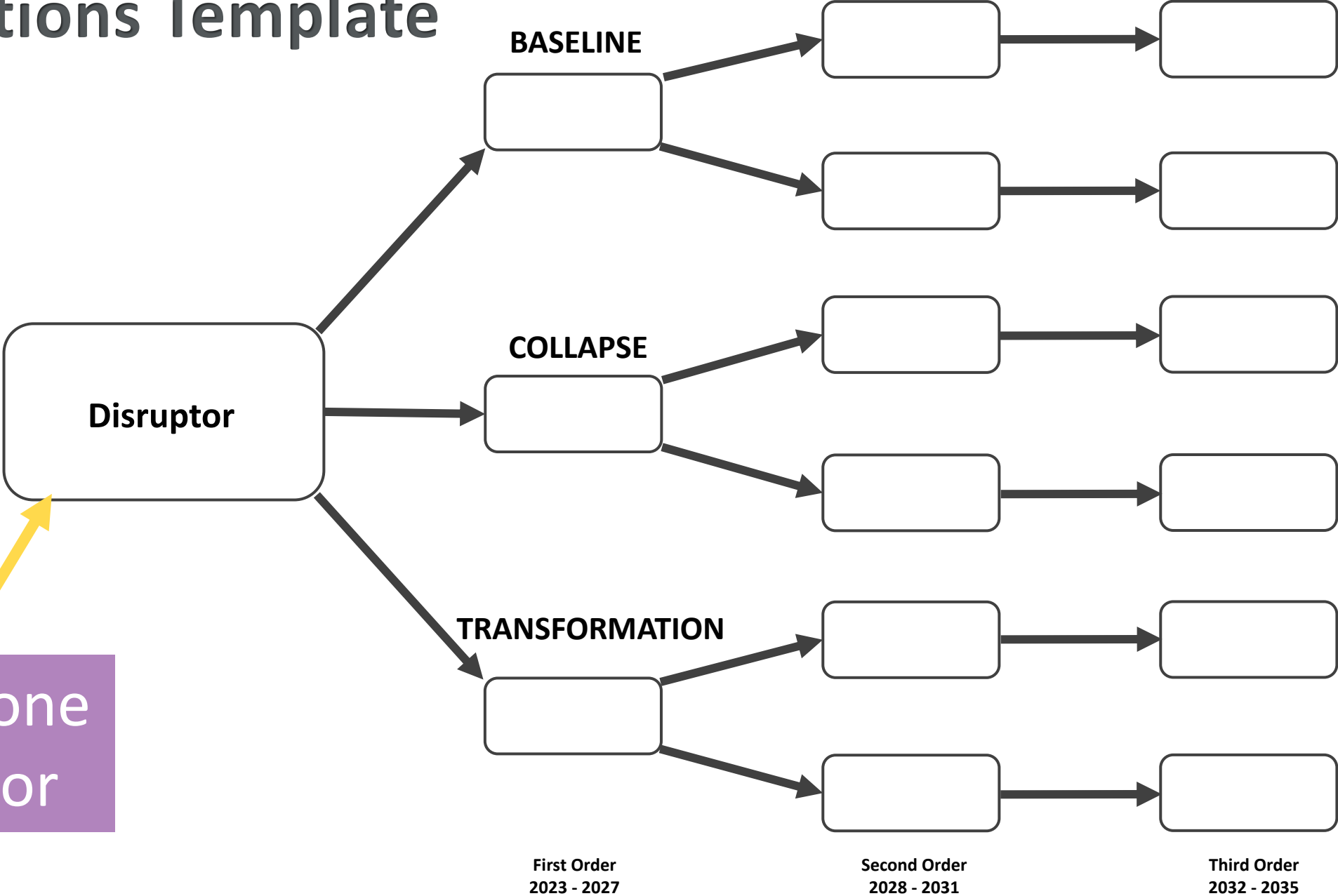


# Implications: Example



# Implications Template

Select one disruptor



[houstonfutures.org](http://houstonfutures.org)

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