

# Manifesting Upside Recovery Instead of Downside Fear: Five Ways Megacrisis Anticipation Can Proactively Improve Futures Research and Social Policy

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By focusing on the possibility that society may be headed for a "mega-crisis," Bill Halal and Michael Marien have opened up a very important line of inquiry. The purpose of this brief essay is to advance the further evolution of this debate, as well as the systemic improvement of futures research and social policy R&D in general. It is based on my recently published research on similar concerns (Markley, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c).<sup>1</sup>

For reasons made clear below, I avoid making the specific severity, probability and timing estimates that were expected—creating my own template instead, and responding to the questions the new template poses in ways I hope others might weigh in on as well. Thus, this response is primarily methodological, contributing five specific suggestions on how to proactively engage a positive recovery from whatever level of severity to which the current trends toward disruptive disintegration may lead.

## Contingent futures instead of gross scenarios

The focus of the Megacrisis inquiry would be more relevant for proactive policy development if the initial consideration of scenarios ranging on a pessimism to optimism axis were supplemented by detailing critical if-then contingent futures—much as is done in a tree of alternative future histories.<sup>2</sup> Using Figures 1 and 2 on which to base such set of contingent alternative futures, consider the following probability estimates reflecting these figures.

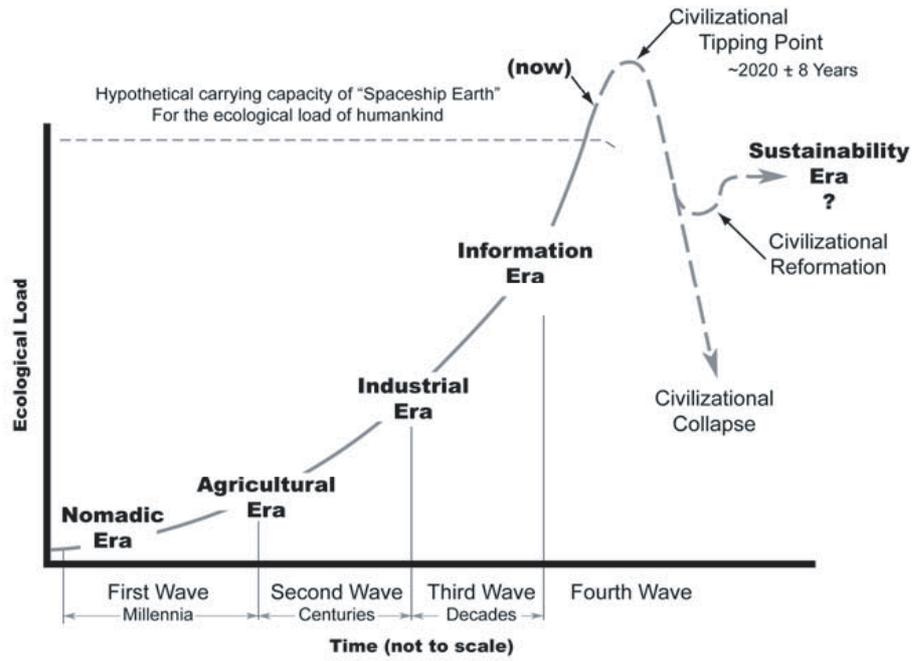
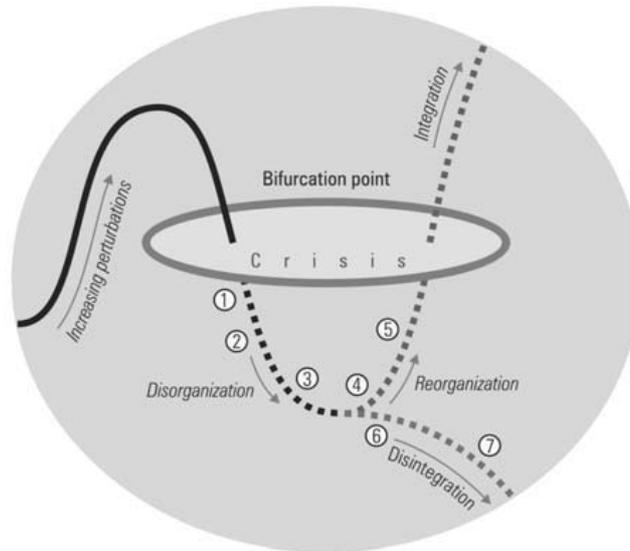


Figure 1. Two idealized alternative futures after a "Civilizational Tipping Point"  
Note: From Markley & Porter, 2010, Markley, 2011a & 2011b; after Markley, 1995.



The springboard effect helps systems reorganize

- ① People lose faith in the industrial system as crises worsen
- ② Human and economic resources are released from the system
- ③ Support increases for both inclusive (sustainable) and exclusive (ethnocentric) solutions
- ④ If sustainable solutions are supported, constructive reorganization begins
- ⑤ The reorganization of the global system accelerates  
or
- ⑥ If ethnocentric values and structures dominate, conflicts over scarce resources intensify
- ⑦ Global civilization disintegrates

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Figure 2. Articulation of post-collapse bifurcation paths

Note: From Diagram 7 of Taylor & Taylor (2007); Used with permission.

A. What is the probability that the continuation of current trends will lead inexorably to a cascading series of STEEP<sup>3</sup> disruptions, which together trigger a "tipping point" toward mega-systemic disruption and/or disintegration?

My probability estimates: 70% by 2015; 98% by 2030.

These estimates reflect factors such as the "4 I's"—Infoglut, Ignorance, Indecision, and Inadequacy—described by Michael Marien (Halal & Marien, 2011), and the particularly penetrating assessments of Bedoe, et al (2009) and Bailey (2011).

B. *If this tipping point cannot be prevented, what are the relative conditions and probabilities of occurrence in the shorter term (~1 to 3 years) after it occurs, under which:*

a. *Existing policies and leadership styles in the short term cannot prevent further disintegration, such as widespread rioting, looting, and governance failures.*

My probability estimate: 95%

b. *A sufficiently rapid and skillful transformation of existing policies and leadership styles in the short term can and does bring about systemic restoration to sustainable normalcy.*

My probability estimate: 5%

C. *What are the relative conditions and probabilities of occurrence in the longer term (beyond ~3 years) after such a tipping point, under which:*

a. *In order to prevent further collapse, existing policies morph into draconian policies of social control, leading to a worldwide "Garrison State" <sup>4</sup> with intensified ecological decline and massive loss of protesters' well-being and/or lives.*

My probability estimate: 60%, possibly much sooner than ~3 years  
(think "Homeland Security" writ large)

b. *In order to prevent further collapse, existing policies are eclipsed by citizen activist movements around the world who unite in manifesting an integrity-oriented reformation leading to long-term sustainability ("the upside of down").*

My probability estimate: 60% for the 5 to 30 year time horizon  
after the tipping point, assuming that draconian policies of  
attempted social control can successfully be turned aside

c. *Existing and revised policies are not sufficiently transformed to restore order and prevent further disintegration leading to further decline, even civilizational collapse.*

My probability estimate: 40% for the 5 to 30 year time horizon  
if option (b.) is not realized

D. *What is the probability of a truly wild card future, leading to a drastically different, and hopefully much improved type of human civilization, as expected by various "2012" visionaries whose views are "further out" those of more conventional futurists such as Petersen (2008): e.g., Laszlo (2009), Miller (2011), Rochele (2011) and Hubbard (2001/forthcoming).*

My personal probability estimate: indeterminate, but highly worth considering

### A new typology of wild-cards (aka STEEP Surprises)

As briefly summarized in Figure 3 and detailed in Markley (2011a, 2011b), for such wild card/STEEP Surprise forecasts as are noted above—of equal importance to probability is the estimation and monitoring of their credibility. In this typology, a TYPE II forecast is one having high probability as seen by relevant experts, but low credibility to most others. Because it is so well known and critically important, global warming is perhaps the "poster child" example. The tipping point toward systemic disintegration noted above is believed to be another critical Type II forecast, one that could happen before 2015 if emerging global financial woes aren't resolved.

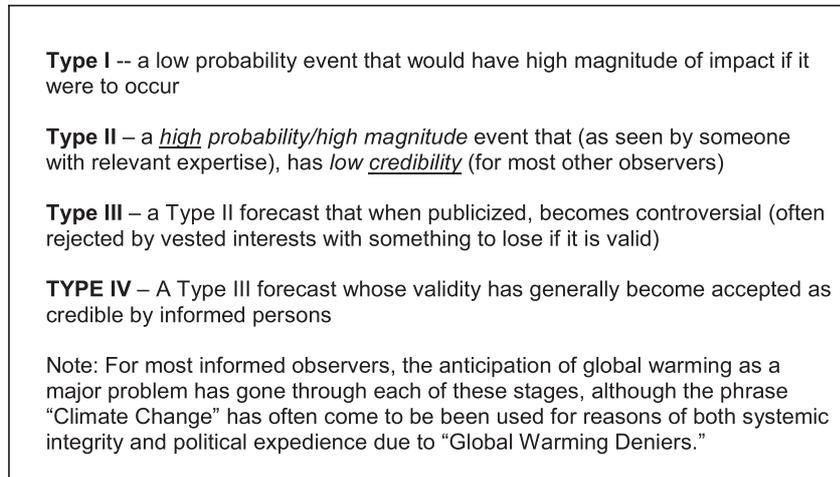


Figure 3. A typology of wild cards (aka STEEP Surprises)

An important benefit of this typology is the added intelligence it brings to monitoring and strategic planning, especially for ethical citizen activists proactively working toward "the upside of down." Figures 4 and 5 are illustrative of the types of thinking that can be aided through use of this typology, especially when dealing with something as politically and emotionally sensitive as the tipping points displayed in Figures 1 and 2 above.

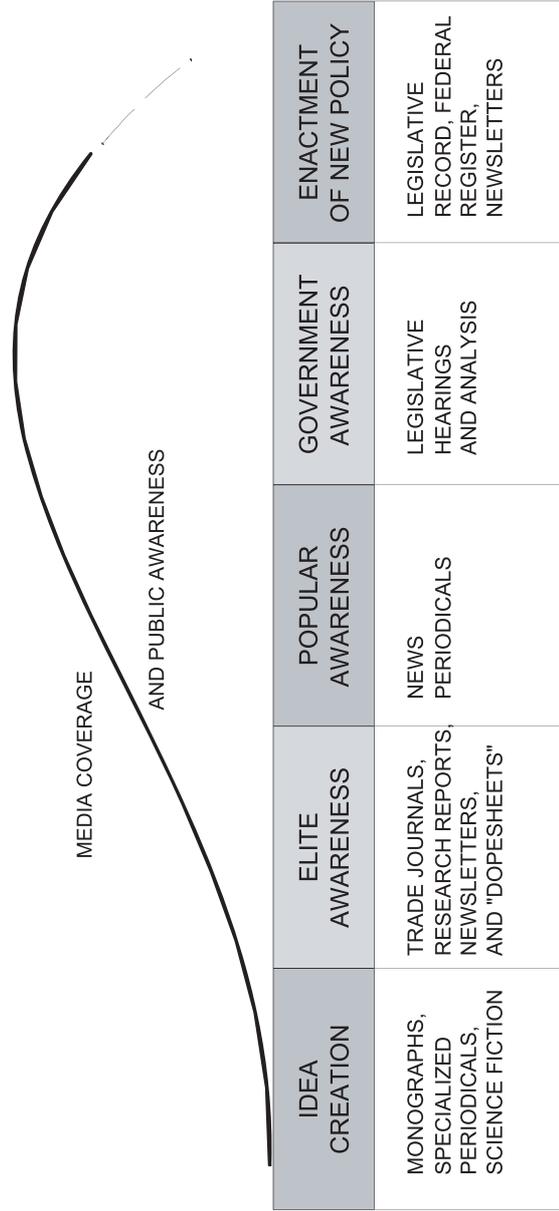


Figure 4. Precursor monitoring of emerging issues  
 Note: From *Information and the Future: A Handbook of Sources and Strategies*, (Wygant & Markley, 1988); based on Molitor (1977).

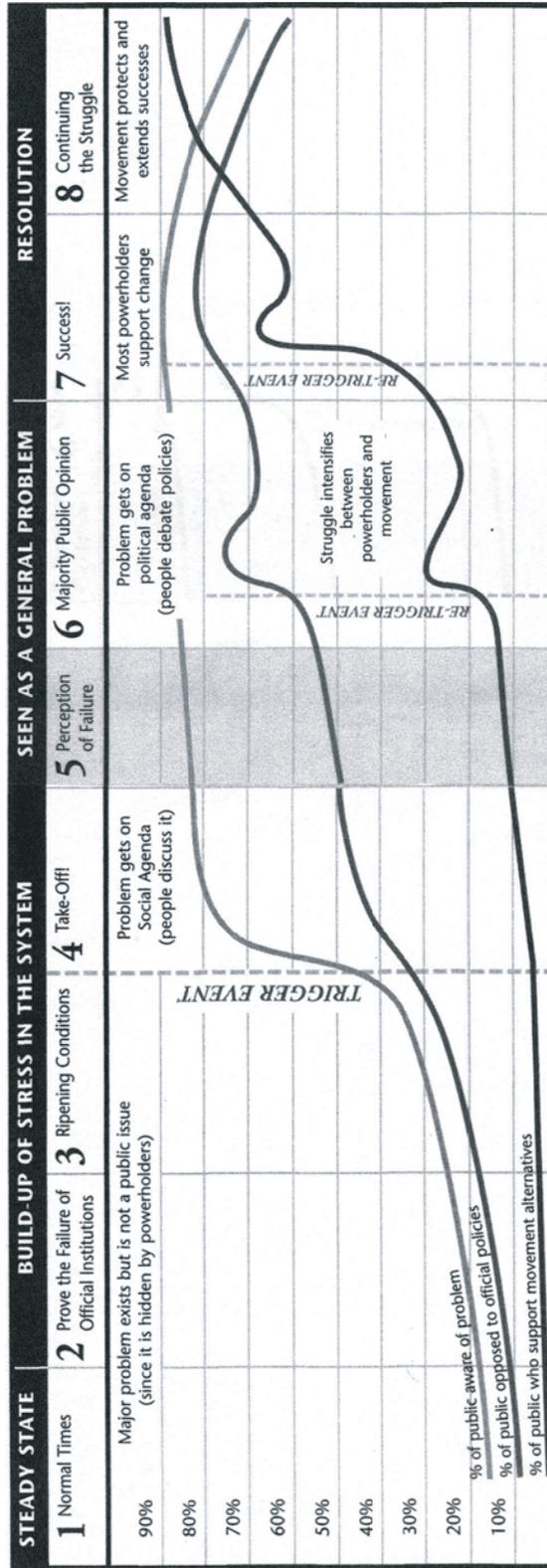


Figure 5. Winning the public three ways across eight stages of social change  
 Note: From Moyer (1987) & Moyer et al (2001). Created by Tom Atlee.

In this regard, three categories of thought leaders are particularly significant, both as sources and audiences of intelligence on probability, credibility and impact of specific TYPE II forecasts:

- *Professional Futurists* (particularly those who promulgate their views in ways that are highly visible and relatively credible to both establishment opinion leaders and leading citizen activists)
- *Forward-looking Citizen Activists* and their opinion leaders (leading activist authors, bloggers, etc.)
- *Establishment Opinion Leaders* (pundits, c-level media executives, etc.).

### Remote viewing of transformative futures

It seems obvious that the use of rational/analytic modes of thinking alone are inadequate for research on alternative futures involving deeply systemic transformation. Intuitive methods that draw on "hidden reserves" of the mind are also needed (Harman and Rheingold, 1984; Markley, 1998).

Of enormous potential usefulness in further inquiries about the potential Megacrisis is what could be called a "Type II Methodology" (high validity when done with expertise, but currently having low credibility for most stakeholders): the use of intuitive remote viewing (Lee, 2008)—a special case of which is "Mental Time Travel" (Markley, 2007)—as a meaningful complement (not replacement) for more conventional rational/analytic futures research methods. For example, a precursor to Figure 1 was envisioned by use of such methods in 1995 in a white paper for a NASA client on the long-range Future of Spaceship Earth (Markley, 1995).

### Creative resilience and optimistic outlook as important as accurate anticipation of future crises<sup>5</sup>

Resilience for coping with unexpected change is truly an "attribute for all seasons" and is in some ways supplanting (but not replacing) sustainability as a strategic priority (Markley, 2011b). There is a huge difference between "reactive" resilience (the aim of business continuity planning), and creatively "emergent" resilience (as in the old adage of turning a lemon into lemonade). Recent research reported by Seligman (2011) shows that an optimistic outlook and related factors are key ingredients for the type of "out of the box" creativity required for emergent resilience. Moreover, research evidence by Feinberg & Willer (2011), indicates that unless communication of bad news research results (in this case, about global warming) is accompanied by promising solutions, helping them to feel optimistic, people tend to either reject or forget the results. Thus, it is important that inquiry into a Global Megacrisis put much more emphasis on positive possibilities, much as Halal has done in this debate, even though Marien's view may well be the more accurate if current trends continue.

### Cooperative Clearinghouse on STEEP Surprises<sup>6</sup>

In light of the above assertions, a needed contribution from futurists in the run-up to a Global Megacrisis, is to develop a formal process to elicit, assess and publicize positive STEEP Surprises (wild cards)—especially those of TYPE II—for example,

what is envisioned by Paul Hawken (2006, 2007) in *How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One Saw it Coming*; Riane Eisler (2007) in *The Real Wealth of Nations and Caring Economics Campaign*<sup>7</sup>; or Barbara Marx Hubbard's (2001/forthcoming; 2011) vision, trainings and activist events for humanity ascending with conscious evolution.<sup>8</sup>

At a simple level this could involve a systematic collection, summarization and distribution of contributions from both futurists (including students), and other stakeholders, especially forward looking citizen activists. At a more complex level it could parallel the Risk Resilience Network (RRN) recently launched by the World Economic Foundation (2011). This possibility is explored in more detail in the PowerPoint white paper essay described in endnote 1.

## **Concluding Summary–Bottom Line Implications of this Whole Essay**

In light of the Megacrisis as a Type II STEEP Surprise:

1. *The entire practice of futures research needs to be rethought.*
2. *Futures research should generally reflect Type II STEEP Surprises (especially positive ones), as contingent future forecasts.*
3. *Forecasts about disruption and disintegration need to be paired with positive future possibilities if there is to be "buy in" by the public.*
4. *Promotion of proactive resilience can do much to increase realistic optimism (and thereby) proactive buy-in, leading ultimately to more positive future outcomes.*
5. *Visioning exercises giving participants the "feel" of specific Type II STEEP Surprises can do much to increase their credibility and buy-in.*
6. *A "Clearinghouse" on STEEP Surprises could help.*

Finally—and of over-arching importance—a new type of proactive activism is urgently needed to lobby for non-violent homeland security policy in times of megacitizen protest. To coin a phrase, we need to "*manifest upside recovery instead of downside fear.*"

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## **Notes**

1. In addition the research cited above, this response is based on a PowerPoint white paper, *Toward a Clearinghouse on STEEP Surprises* (Markley, 2011d) which covers a number of promising, positive developments—including radical technological advances such as "The Singularity" (Kurzweil, 2005/2009), that were beyond the scope of the present

- response, with its 1,000 word limit, to cover. *Please note that this present article cannot be fully appreciated with out at least scanning the executive summary of this white paper.*
2. Examples of this approach, based on Harman, Markley & Rhyne (1973) are Figures 3 and 4 of Markley (2011b).
  3. STEEP (Social/demographic, Technological, Economic, Ecological, Political policy) is a well-known acronym used by futurists to signify the types of variables needing to be considered in comprehensive forecasts, strategic plans, etc.
  4. Michael Marien suggests that the term "Garrison State" is a rather outdated image, and that the term, "Global Israel" (as proposed Nicole Schwartz-Morgan at Canada's Royal Military College), would be a more fitting way to characterize an empire-dominated civilization whose leadership is preoccupied by militaristic security concerns, both foreign and domestic.
  5. The content of this section and the next are greatly expanded in Markley (2011d).
  6. Michael Marien makes a similar call for a neutral clearinghouse of ideas, proposals and progress on global governance appearing in books, reports, and articles in his (2011) essay, *Taming Global Governance Idea Chaos: A Frontier Frame for Recent Books*.
  7. Eisler's "Caring Economics Campaign" (<http://www.partnershipway.org/get-connected>) sets forth a pathway to transforming what is arguably the key driver of Megacrisis.
  8. Hubbard's advanced course, "Agents of Conscious Evolution" (<http://theacetraining.com/>) sets forth a pathway to a peaceful, prosperous and just global civilization seen as evolving from times of crisis.

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