

POINT

COUNTERPOINT

Future Making as Emancipatory Inquiry: A Value-Based Exploration of Desirable Futures

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ABSTRACT In their *Point*, Wenzel, Cabantous, and Koch set out how future making encompasses a broad range of future-oriented practices, including but not limited to planning, foresight, agile, and design-driven approaches. In this *Counterpoint*, we contest that viewing future making as any future-oriented practice may also encompass unsuitable and detrimental practices, and may blur the concept to the point of hindering, rather than sustaining efforts at theorizing future making. Adopting a Pragmatist perspective, we suggest viewing future making as an emancipatory inquiry aimed at imagining and reifying desirable futures, that is, collective, value-based judgements of what the future might and should be. This entails a reflective conversation with the social and material world, whereby concerned actors collectively deliberate, based on values, what futures are desirable – for themselves, for future generations, and the natural environment. In advancing this view, we also reject Wright's *Counterpoint* on future making as a management fad that ignores long-standing research on scenario planning, and instead, we argue that future making should depart from the managerialism of scenario planning. The main contribution of our *Counterpoint* is to suggest a theoretical perspective for advancing our understanding of how desirable futures can be crafted in practice.

Keywords: emancipatory, experiential knowledge, future, inquiry, Pragmatism, reflection

INTRODUCTION

In this *Counterpoint*, we contest the *Point* (Wenzel et al., 2025) on future making as a heterogeneous set of practices and instead propose to conceptualize future making as an emancipatory inquiry based on the Pragmatist tradition. Future making is generally understood as the work of enacting the yet-to-come by making sense of and

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giving form to imaginings of the future (Wenzel et al., 2025). While sharing this understanding, we disagree with Wenzel et al.'s (2025) suggestion to view future making as an umbrella concept that encompasses a broad range of practices for dealing with an uncertain future. This, we argue, hinders rather than sustains efforts to theorize future making by blurring the concept and equating it to *any* future-oriented practices – including also detrimental practices that give rise to uncertain or even dystopian futures. We further take distance from Wright's (2025) *Counterpoint* on future making as a management fad that ignores long-standing research on corporate foresight, especially scenario planning. Future making, in our view, does not ignore corporate foresight but rather seeks to depart from it to develop more pluralistic futures based on societal rather than corporate interests.

Future making, we contend, should be regarded neither as an umbrella concept (Wenzel et al., 2025) nor as a management fad (Wright, 2025) but rather as an emancipatory inquiry, based on values. Through future making, we propose, participants seek to improve present conditions by collectively imagining, negotiating, and giving form to (more) desirable futures. Here, we use the term *desirable* in a normative sense to denote collectively negotiated, value-laden judgements of what the future might and should be (see also Gergen, 2015, p. 287; Gümüşay and Reinecke, 2024, p. 4). The term *emancipatory* indicates a concern with widening access to future making by empowering actors who otherwise might be voiceless, such as future generations, the natural environment, or marginalized communities. Hence, future making as emancipatory inquiry, differently from future making as any future-oriented practices (Wenzel et al., 2025) and scenario planning (Wright, 2025) adopts a *value-based* rather than *value-free* approach. It involves a democratic process where all concerned voices are included in a collective exploration of what futures are desirable and how they can be realized. Such an exploration requires participants to include ethical and moral considerations by explicitly reflecting on values in deliberating what futures are desirable on a societal level. This approach, we argue, is crucial to address the grand challenges of our times – for example, interconnected crises, systemic inequalities, and ungovernable technologies (cf. Wenzel et al., 2025). It also offers a vantage point for exploring the intersection between futures and crises, and for conducting more impactful organization and management research that can inspire change forward (Gümüşay and Reinecke, 2024, p. 2).

In this *Counterpoint*, we establish future making as a distinct approach that, unlike other perspectives on the future (Wenzel et al., 2025; Wright, 2025), focuses on the practices by which participants realize desirable futures. Drawing on the Pragmatist tradition (Dewey, 1938; Schön, 1983), we conceptualize future making as the practicing of an inquiry whereby actors (i) seek emancipation, empowerment, and betterment; (ii) engage sensorially with people, places, and materials; and (iii) reflect-in-action while the present unfolds into the future. In future making as emancipatory inquiry, we suggest, imaginings of the future are continuously adjusted and progressively reified in a reflective conversation with the situation (Schön, 1983): here, actors reflect as they act, in conversation with the people, places, and materials at hand. Hence, a central aspect of future making as emancipatory inquiry is the involvement of human as well as non-human agents (e.g., artefacts, materials, and places) in giving form to desirable futures. Importantly, future making as emancipatory inquiry is an

open-ended process that involves negotiations about who should be included, whose values are to be considered, what futures are desirable, and how such futures could be realized.

By arguing for future making as an emancipatory inquiry, the main contribution of this *Counterpoint* is to consolidate our understanding of how actors can make (more) desirable futures for themselves, for future generations, and the natural environment. This, we hope, will lay the foundations for further theorizing on future making, for example, with respect to the role of future making in addressing grand challenges (Gümüşay and Reinecke, 2022; Sterne et al., 2022), power imbalances between actors in future making (Wenzel et al., 2025), and the fallibility of the emancipatory inquiry (Whyte et al., 2022). We structure our contribution as follows: we first provide an overview of current research on future making, focusing on the limitations of the *Point* and the other *Counterpoint*. We then develop our view by framing future making as an emancipatory inquiry from within a Pragmatist perspective. Next, we sharpen our conceptualization by contrasting future making as emancipatory inquiry with future making as any future-oriented practices (Wenzel et al., 2025) and future making as scenario planning (Wright, 2025). We finally discuss the implications of future making as emancipatory inquiry and suggest directions for further research on making futures that are (more) desirable.

AN OVERVIEW OF FUTURE MAKING AND A CRITIQUE TO THE POINT AND THE OTHER COUNTERPOINT

Future Making: A Brief Overview of Current Research

Future making has recently gained traction in organization and management research, as scholars have acknowledged the increasingly problematic nature of the future. This challenges the foresight capabilities of organizations (Wenzel et al., 2020) and accordingly calls for non-rationalistic explanations of how practitioners imagine and reify what is not yet (Whyte et al., 2022). Such non-rationalistic explanations reject attempts at controlling the future through prediction, calculation, and planning, and instead, favour attempts at taking actions in the present to shape courses of action in the future. They further emphasize the lived experience of actors dealing with the future by drawing on a phenomenological view that underscores the interpenetration of temporal experiences of past, present, and future. As an example of future making, consider a building project. Here, actors draw on resources from the present and past to imagine and materialize a not-yet-existing state of things – for example, a residential building (Comi and Whyte, 2018). Throughout the project, they engage with the people, places, and materials at hand to make decisions about the future state of the building. These decisions have consequences on the near as well as distant future: for instance, unsustainable and/or unsafe materials might affect human life and the natural environment for a long time.

As the field of future making is growing, scholars (including ourselves) are developing theoretical frameworks of future making, exploring the situated practices whereby actors engage with their present and past to give form to imagined futures

(Comi and Whyte, 2018; Pettit et al., 2023; Thompson and Byrne, 2022; Wenzel et al., 2025). Comi and Whyte (2018) found that future making involves recursive practices of imagining, testing, stabilizing and reifying, whereby actors make the shift from abstract imaginings of the future to a realizable course of action for the future. Thompson and Byrne (2022, p. 263) explained that imagined futures are formed in the here-and-now of the situated interaction, through “a moment-to-moment texture of practical knowledge.” Assemblages of utterances, gestures and gazes bind actors “in a web of mutual expectations” and shape “subsequent modes of thinking and acting on imagined futures” (Thompson and Byrne, 2022, p. 264). Relatedly, Pettit et al. (2023) showed how imaginings of the future transform into ways of working, in contexts of strategic change where actors strive to align their organization’s everyday activities to a strategic vision for the future.

Further research observed how future making is becoming increasingly entwined with grand challenges, such as interconnected crises, social inequalities, and intractable technologies (Gümüşay and Reinecke, 2022; Stjerne et al., 2022; Wenzel et al., 2025). For example, the future of the Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games is threatened by climate change, which is causing limited natural snowfalls and reducing the pool of potential host countries (de Hoog, 2022). According to a study of the International Olympic Committee, by 2040 only ten countries across the globe will be able to host the Games, and by 2080 only one country (Japan) might be considered a climate-reliable host (Cunningham, 2024). This is prompting practices of imagining, testing, stabilizing, and reifying alternative futures for the Games: an example is the implementation of a decentralized hosting model (Cunningham, 2024) to reduce negative environmental impact.

Despite attracting increasing interest,^[1] research on future making is in its early stages. We still lack a comprehensive understanding of future making, the types of futures at stake, and their connections with the crises that organizations and societies are facing (Wenzel et al., 2025). While future making is generally understood as a non-rationalistic perspective that shifts the focus from predicting to crafting the future, several problems and questions remain unaddressed: for instance, what futures should we make, and for whom are they desirable? How can we imagine and realize futures that address (or at least mitigate) grand challenges? Which actors have a say and which actors, on the contrary, are silenced in future making? Whose imaginings of the future become realized, and whose imaginings of the future, on the other hand, become discarded?

Critique of the Future-Making Approaches in the Point and the Other Counterpoint

It might be tempting, as Wenzel et al. (2025) suggest doing, to address the above questions by conceiving of future making as what actors do and say to engage with the future. This means equating future making to *all* practices whereby actors give rise to various types of futures (Wenzel et al., 2025). However, this *Point* (Wenzel et al., 2025) is problematic. If future making amounts to any practices for coping with the future, then it encompasses – from the vantage point of societal equity – also the unsuitable

and even detrimental practices whereby dystopian futures are created or reproduced. Needless to say, this is of little or no value if we are to tackle the many uncertainties stemming from grand challenges, systemic inequalities, and interrelated crises. Although scholars might focus on what they intuitively deem as best practices of future making, Wenzel et al.'s (2025) approach offers little or no theoretical traction in this respect. It does not encompass any normative concern to guide the exploration and theorization of what desirable futures are and how they can be made: it focuses on what is, rather than what ought to be.

Furthermore, by equating future making to any future-oriented practices, the *Point* by Wenzel et al. (2025) compounds rather than addresses the problem of conceptual 'dilution' that it sets out to address. In fact, in Wenzel et al. (2025) the concept of future making becomes diluted to the point of encompassing even traditional practices such as planning and prediction; yet, this is at odds with the premise that research on future making arises from scholars recognizing the increasing uncertainty of the future and the limitations of traditional approaches to the future (Wenzel et al., 2025).

We also reject Wright's (2025) critique of future making as being old wine in new bottles. According to Wright (2025), future-making scholars reiterate many claims that had previously been expressed by scenario planning scholars – notably, the claim to conduct research that is innovative in its rejection of cognitivist and rationalistic perspectives on the future. Scenario planning, Wright (2025) continues, was developed in the mid-1980s as a reaction to a diffuse tendency – among managers and scholars alike – to view the future as similar to the present and, hence, predictable. Like future makers, scenario planners would acknowledge the problematic nature of the future and be accustomed to working in conditions of uncertainty (Wright, 2025).

While accepting that scenario planning might view the future as inherently unknowable (Wright, 2025), we argue that future making as emancipatory inquiry is distinct in its aim to craft desirable futures through practical engagement with people, places, and materials. Although future makers *might* mobilize scenarios as part of their emancipatory inquiry, they are not preeminently concerned with anticipating what might probably happen, but rather with creating desirable futures and what should ideally happen. Importantly, the democratic character of future making as emancipatory inquiry – that is, its concern with listening to critical voices, widening access to future making, and including under-represented actors, materials, and places (Whyte et al., 2022) – is largely absent from scenario planning, a perspective that originated in the corporate world, notably in the oil and defence industries (see, e.g., Amer et al., 2013; Cornelius et al., 2005). Our focus is thus on future making, not as managerial anticipation but as the collective crafting of futures.

We further criticize the *Point* and the other *Counterpoint* for their value-free approach to future making. Differently from Wenzel et al. (2025) and Wright (2025), we argue that future making and its entwinement with grand challenges are best explored by adopting a value-based rather than value-free approach. Future-making scholars, we believe, should “engage with values explicitly in order to contribute to discussions about socio-ecological justice, equality and human well-being” (Gümüşay and Reinecke, 2024, p. 8). In this respect, we take distance from Wright's (2025) *Counterpoint*, which adopts a corporate stance in its attempt to ‘revive’ corporate foresight and

scenario planning. By advocating for a resurgence of these paradigms, rooted in mainstream management theories, Wright's (2025) *Counterpoint* aligns with the status quo – that is, the assumption that desirable futures are driven by, or coincide with managerial interests. We also take distance from the *Point* (Wenzel et al., 2025), which explicitly rejects a value-based approach in its attempt to understand how futures of various types are made, regardless of whether they are underpinned by ethical considerations. In so doing, the *Point* (Wenzel et al., 2025) might end up re-producing many of the unsustainable, undemocratic, and uncritical approaches that are currently employed to make the future.

Hence, we find that the *Point* and the other *Counterpoint* are unsuitable for exploring future making in the face of grand challenges. In what follows, we elaborate our view, future making as emancipatory inquiry, by grounding this concept within the Pragmatist tradition.

FUTURE MAKING AS EMANCIPATORY INQUIRY: A PRAGMATIST PERSPECTIVE

We contend that Pragmatism, as a philosophy of practice (Simpson, 2018), offers theoretical traction to study future making vis-à-vis the crises, challenges, and problems of our times. The Pragmatist tradition, in fact, is concerned with improving present conditions and is underpinned by an optimistic outlook whereby change is both possible and realizable (Simpson and den Hond, 2022). From this perspective, we view future making as the practicing of an inquiry (Dewey, 1938; Schön, 1983) driven by an emancipatory concern and directed at crafting (more) desirable futures. Theorizing future making as an emancipatory inquiry (distinct from other future-oriented practices, as well as corporate foresight and scenario planning) gives further impetus to future-making research by directing efforts towards a value-based exploration of desirable futures.

As a philosophical tradition, classical American Pragmatism (Pragmatism) originated in the United States in the late 19th century. Pragmatist thinkers such as Dewey, Mead and Follett have been especially influential in organization and management studies (Simpson and den Hond, 2022). They reject metaphysics and the search for absolute truths, and instead are committed to empiricism and the exploration of “the everyday practicalities of living in an uncertain and ever-changing world” (Simpson and den Hond, 2022, p. 128). They view knowledge and knowing as provisional and fallible, focusing on the role of emergence in experiencing and learning in the world. This translates into a concern with understanding the many possibilities that emerge in the ‘here and now’ of situated practices of organizing and managing. As Simpson and den Hond (2022, p. 129) explained, “Pragmatism offers a perspective that is emancipatory and affirmative, one that helps us ‘to find out what may be, the possibilities now open to us’ (Follett, 1924, p. xii).” Its philosophy amounts to a: “disposition to engage with change, uncertainty and emergence, and to accept the possibility that knowing is fallible, but also emphatically oriented towards mobilizing creativity and imagination in order to ameliorate the present situation” (Simpson and den Hond, 2022, p. 129).

Previous research hinted at the resonance between Pragmatism and future making (Whyte et al., 2022; see also Mische, 2022; Simpson and den Hond, 2022). Drawing on Pragmatism (e.g., Dewey, 1938; Schön, 1983), Whyte et al. (2022, p. 1) suggested that future making involves a distributed process that unfolds through representations of the future – for example, visual artefacts, narratives, and stories. As they are engaged in situated practices, these representations enable actors to experiment with imagined futures, make judgements about possible futures, and develop desirable futures. We extend this previous work (Whyte et al., 2022), by arguing that the engagement with representations is underpinned by values, based on which actors negotiate a shared understanding of what they deem to be desirable futures. Hence, desirable futures take the form of imaginings: they are alternative, yet attainable realities that actors seek to imagine and realize in response to present as well as future challenges. They are iteratively tested, stabilized and reified (Comi and Whyte, 2018) throughout the inquiry. This leads to discussion, questioning and deliberation, which Schön (1983, p. 76) described as a “reflective conversation with the situation.”

Compared to the approaches articulated by Wenzel et al. (2025) and Wright (2025), our approach to future making is aimed at empowering participants through a collective inquiry into (more) desirable futures. Future making as emancipatory inquiry, in fact, is geared towards improving the present conditions, by mobilizing creativity, imagination, and matter. While sharing Wenzel et al.'s (2025) concern with exploring the practices of future making, we are interested not so much in understanding what actors do and say as they seek to cope with the future, as in theorizing how (more) desirable futures can be imagined and realized in practice, through a reflective conversation with the social and material world. What desirable futures are is not defined *ex ante*, but is agreed upon on a situated basis – as actors explicitly discuss their values and imagine ways of improving the present conditions. Hence, future-making scholars should critically examine the situated practices by which actors explore desirable futures, with a view to developing value-based, grounded theories of future making that address (or mitigate) grand challenges. A “conscious consideration of values” (Gümüşay and Reinecke, 2024, p. 13), in fact, enables actors (be they future-making practitioners or scholars) to challenge problematic assumptions (e.g., unlimited economic growth) and in turn imagine alternative futures – for themselves, the natural environment, and future generations. While it might sometimes be difficult to imagine what will be desirable for others in the future, desirability generally involves preserving “*initial* conditions and a range of *options* that allow future generations to realize their own goals and preferences” (Gümüşay and Reinecke, 2024, p. 18, emphasis in original).

Because of this emancipatory angle, our approach is suitable to explore how desirable futures are imagined and materialized, and hence to theorize how organizations, communities, or societies can take concerted action to deal with grand challenges. An example of a project concerned with making desirable futures is NICE 2035, that is, Neighbourhood of Innovation, Creativity and Entrepreneurship towards 2035. This project, initiated by Tongji University in Shanghai, consists of multiple initiatives for social innovation and sustainability in the neighbourhood of Siping, Yangpu District, where residential areas built in the 1970s for factory workers coexist with modern buildings of higher education institutions, giving way to a diversified population of retired workers,

young professionals, entrepreneurs, and students (DESI Network, 2018). NICE 2035 is geared towards improving the living conditions of the community by addressing the threats of unsustainable consumption, urban degradation, social inequality, and generation divides. In this project, community members organize through a network of labs spread across the neighbourhood, each with a specific focus (e.g., sustainable food, business incubation, the future of mobility, urban renovation and regeneration). They serve as urban innovators that co-create, negotiate, and experiment with ideas for future living (DESI Network, 2018).

Another important aspect of future making as emancipatory inquiry (compared to future making as any future-oriented practices and future making as scenario planning) is the role of sensorial knowledge and material artefacts in the craft of desirable futures. Future making as emancipatory inquiry, we suggest, is akin to craft work: as crafts are committed to realizing quality work (Sennett, 2008; see also Mintzberg, 1987), future makers are committed to making desirable futures, by mobilizing their sensorial knowledge (i.e., knowledge coming from practitioners understanding the “look, feel, smell, taste and sound of things in organizational life,” Ewenstein and Whyte, 2007, p. 689). Like craft work, future making as emancipatory inquiry is an engaged practice (Bell et al., 2019; Kroezen et al., 2021; Sennett, 2008) in which actors debate, negotiate and give form to desirable futures. In so doing, they do not merely *make sense* of the future; they actually *make* the future by engaging with each other and with the materials at hand (Comi and Whyte, 2018). Here, *making* does not amount to creating *ex nihilo*: rather, a desirable future is crafted by framing present and past constraints, imagining possible and probable outcomes, and putting frames up for discussion. This points to the generative role of artefacts: while the future is inherently immaterial, the artefacts enable actors to materialize their imaginings. Hence, artefacts are not just tangible representations of the future; rather, they are the machineries (Kaplan, 2011) through which abstract imaginings are turned into a realizable course of action (Comi and Whyte, 2018).

We further suggest that future making as emancipatory inquiry is characterized by reflection-in-action, whereby desirable futures are tested and made realizable. By reflecting-in-action, actors probe imagined futures, juxtapose alternative futures, and reify desirable futures. As Schön (1983, p. viii) explained, actors show “a capacity for reflection on their intuitive knowing in the midst of action.” For example, the urban innovators in NICE 2035 reflect-in-action when they get a feel for the social initiatives they are designing, and adjust their actions based on this intuitive understanding. Here, thinking and doing entwine, as reflection “tends to focus interactively on the outcomes of action, the action itself, and the intuitive knowing implicit in the action” (Schön, 1983, p. 56). As they reflect-in-action, the urban innovators in NICE 2035 create “virtual worlds” (Schön, 1983, p. 157) – for example, through sketches, physical prototypes, and online chats – in which they can perform thought experiments about their imagined futures. By so doing, they come to appreciate the implications of their past actions (expected as well as unexpected) and to develop novel appreciations that guide further actions, in a spiral of “appreciation, action, and reappreciation” (Schön, 1983, p. 132). This reflection-in-action is generative, yet challenging: the situation at hand might resist practitioners’ moves, and even bite back – with unexpected effects. As Schön (1983, p. 151) noted, actors “[shape] the situation, but

in conversation with it, so that [their] own models and appreciations are also shaped by the situation.” Hence, actors must put their frames up for discussion, in response to the situation’s back-talks, frictions, and resistances (Schön, 1983, p. 164). While this is more difficult as the work advances and choices become more committing, maintaining a reflective stance increases the chances of “arriving at a deeper and broader coherence of artifact and idea” (Schön, 1983, p. 164).

In summary, future making as emancipatory inquiry (i) is underpinned by a concern with empowering actors to improve their present conditions, by collectively imagining and reifying desirable futures, (ii) leverages sensorial and experiential knowledge, developed through engagement with others as well as with artefacts, and (iii) mobilizes reflection-in-action to ensure the realizability of imagined futures. These aspects, grounded in the Pragmatist tradition, characterize future making as a distinct, normatively infused perspective on how actors deal with uncertain futures. We argue that this perspective, future making as emancipatory inquiry, offers a value-based vantage point for future research to address the grand challenges of our times. It further reduces the problem of the conceptual dilution (Wenzel et al., 2025) of future-making research, by directing efforts towards explaining how actors can craft desirable futures; as opposed to dispersing efforts (as in Wenzel et al., 2025) in describing a broad set of practices that actors mobilize to make futures – be they utopian or dystopian, realizable or unrealizable, sustainable or unsustainable. Most importantly, it lays the foundations for understanding the practices by which organizations and societies alike can imagine, negotiate, and realize desirable futures – for instance in terms of equality, inclusion, and sustainability.

Table I summarizes key differences between future making as emancipatory inquiry and the other perspectives outlined in this *Point-Counterpoint* debate.

CONCLUSION: WHY FUTURE MAKING AS EMANCIPATORY INQUIRY – AND WHERE NEXT

In this *Counterpoint*, we refuted some of the points made by Wenzel et al. (2025) and Wright (2025). Rather than viewing future making as a set of heterogeneous practices (Wenzel et al., 2025) or a fancy term for scenario planning (Wright, 2025), we suggested adopting an emancipatory perspective from the Pragmatist tradition, viewing future making as an inquiry that aims to improve the present conditions through a reflective as well as sensorial conversation with the situation (Dewey, 1938; Schön, 1983). We proposed that imaginings of the future shape and are shaped by reflection-in-action: they trigger action in the present and are reflectively evolved over time. We contributed to expand the emerging field of future making by articulating a value-based perspective where desirable futures are crafted through an emancipatory inquiry with the people, places, and materials at hand.

We conceptualized future making as a distinct mode of organizing for the future. The contrast with future making as any future-oriented practices (Wenzel et al., 2025) and future making as scenario planning (Wright, 2025) is remarkable, if we consider how future making as emancipatory inquiry is value-based rather than value-free. Unlike Wenzel et al.’s (2025)

Table I. Future making as emancipatory inquiry and alternative perspectives

	<i>Future making as any future-oriented practices</i>	<i>Future making as scenario planning</i>	<i>Future making as emancipatory inquiry</i>
Description	Exploring the diverse set of practices that actors employ to deal with an uncertain future	Assisting strategic decision making and developing capability to deal with unanticipated events	Making a desirable or better future by turning abstract imaginings into a realizable course of action
Theoretical foundations	Practice theories, for example, Reckwitz (2002), Schatzki et al. (2001)	Diverse, for example, Whitehead (1967) on foresight, Weick (1995) on prospective sensemaking, but also academics and practitioners in the corporate world (e.g., Royal Dutch/Shell)	Pragmatism, for example, Dewey (1938), Schön (1983)
Keywords	Performativity, situationality, heterogeneity, relationality	Strategic decision making, strategic communication, reperceiving	Empowerment, betterment, inclusiveness, sensorial knowledge, reflection-in-action, collective deliberation
Practices	All the practices whereby actors make the future (e.g., strategic planning, scenario planning, forecasting and foreseeing, rational decision making, and design thinking)	Detecting environmental changes and constructing plausible yet alternative narratives of the future, engaging in strategic communication around developed scenarios, engaging in scenario-based organizational learning to sharpen organizational foresight (often in combination with other discursive and/or learning practices)	Seeking empowerment, engaging sensorially (with the people, places and materials at hand), reflecting-in-action

(Continues)

Table I. (Continued)

	<i>Future making as any future-oriented practices</i>	<i>Future making as scenario planning</i>	<i>Future making as emancipatory inquiry</i>
Approach	Value-free approach (with a focus on any practices that are constitutive of the future)	Value-free approach (with a focus on selected practices and their workings, i.e., scenario planning)	Value-based approach (with a focus on shared practices for exploring and realizing desirable futures)
Imaginings	Imaginings of the future are viewed as performative acts that make a difference to the present and future	Imaginings of the future (scenarios) are viewed as alternative possibilities, existing simultaneously in objective time	Imaginings of the future are viewed as alternative courses of action to be tested, stabilized, and reified through reflection-in-action
Exemplars	Wenzel (2022), Wenzel et al. (2020), Beckert (2021), Cabantous et al. (2023)	Wack (1985a, 1985b), see also Van der Heijden (1996), Wright (2005), Tsoukas and Shepherd (2004)	Comi and Whyte (2018), Whyte et al. (2022), Gümüşay and Reinecke (2022, 2024)

and Wright's (2025), our perspective has the potential to challenge the status quo – that is, the assumption that desirable futures coincide with, or at least are compatible with, corporate interests. This assumption, which contributed to create many of the grand challenges of our time, is reinforced by Wright's (2025) re-appraisal of corporate foresight and scenario planning, and is left unquestioned by Wenzel et al.'s (2025) neutral stance. Furthermore, future making as emancipatory inquiry has a democratic, inclusive, and pluralist character, which is absent from (or at least not paramount to) Wenzel et al.'s (2025) and Wright's (2025) perspectives. This is needed if we are to address major crises such as global warming, pandemics, wars, and the many issues they are posing for communities and their future generations.

The main contribution of this *Counterpoint*, hence, is to offer a normative framework for advancing our understanding of future making as a mode of organizing for (more) desirable futures, intended as futures that are imagined through a participatory process, and with societal rather than corporate interests. We contend that further research on future making should be concerned not with describing a broad range of future-making practices (Wenzel et al., 2025) or imagining alternative scenarios for the future (Wright, 2025), but with theorizing how the practicing of an emancipatory inquiry (i.e., seeking empowerment, engaging sensorially, and reflecting-in-action) can bring about the conditions for a better life. This, in turn, has the potential to advance our understanding of “desirable futures, and how they might become reality,” by opening up “radically new prospects for human agency to shape the world” (Gümüşay and Reinecke, 2022, p. 237, emphasis in original).

Our perspective on future making, we believe, has important implications for further research on organizing and managing for the future. Drawing on our perspective, scholars

might advance a novel understanding of how actors can create desirable futures. First, further research might take a closer look at the specific advantages and challenges of future making as emancipatory inquiry (compared to other future-oriented practices). For example, we propose that future making as emancipatory inquiry, given its explicit engagement in reflection-in-action, should be especially robust against the risk of realizing ‘fantasy’ plans (Clarke, 1999) that, albeit internally coherent or even persuasive, are doomed to failure – because they are not validated against the constraints posed by the situation. On the other hand, the engagement in reflection-in-action might also hinder momentum in the emancipatory inquiry and trigger an escalating indecision (Denis et al., 2011) that constrains the realization of desired futures. Hence, future scholars might explore how reflection and decision can be skilfully balanced in future making as emancipatory inquiry. Related research might explore challenges ensuing from power imbalances, clashing values, and hidden agendas among the participating actors (e.g., Comi, 2025; Hungnes et al., 2024). These challenges are especially critical vis-à-vis the democratic character of future making, and as such, they might derail the emancipatory inquiry.

Second, our perspective on future making can shed further light on the relationship between probable, possible, and desirable futures, and on related concepts such as near and distant futures (see also Augustine et al., 2019; Feuls et al., 2024). In future making as emancipatory inquiry, the realization of desirable futures is of paramount importance. This requires agents to make sense of probable futures, to deliberate on what desirable futures might be, and to ascertain whether such futures are also possible. At the same time, future making as emancipatory inquiry challenges dichotomies such as near and distant futures, and instead requires actors to justify their understanding of time on a situated basis. This, in turn, invites scholarly exploration of the role of anticipations, expectations, imaginaries, fantasies, and visions in making (more) desirable futures.

Third, our perspective on future making might deepen understanding of the relationship between human and non-human agents in the making of desirable futures. Future making as emancipatory inquiry suggests that non-human actors (e.g., artefacts) are mobilized in creating virtual worlds, and validating imaginings through thought experiments. Interested scholars might explore the sociomaterial practices of future making as emancipatory inquiry, analyse settings in which artefacts hinder rather than support emancipation, and map the conditions under which they become instruments of force rather than reflectivity. In fact, (visual) artefacts might be used not just to advance the inquiry, but also to persuade or even seduce stakeholders, by creating a big picture that “represents one perspective as an absolute and all-encompassing point of view,” which leaves little or no space for alternative futures (Kornberger and Clegg, 2011, p. 155; see also Comi and Vaara, 2022).

Finally, our perspective on future making offers novel prospects for research on social change by laying the foundations for impactful research on making desirable futures and addressing grand challenges (see also Feuls et al., 2024; Gümüşay and Reinecke, 2022, 2024; Rauch, 2025). Acknowledging the societal consequences of organizational futures, future making as emancipatory inquiry mobilizes Pragmatist thought to argue for a democratic, participatory, and inclusive approach. Further researchers might examine how future making as emancipatory inquiry relates to and differs from ideology and utopia, which are both central to research on the role of future in social change efforts (Mische, 2022, p. 408). They might also deepen understanding of the relationship

between future making and agency (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998), with a view to theorizing how desired futures shape social change.

We believe future making as emancipatory inquiry can create the conditions for tackling grand challenges and realizing the common good by emphasizing betterment, inclusiveness, and reflectivity. Hence, we invite future scholars to take forward the concept of future making as emancipatory inquiry, with a view to conducting engaged research that contributes to addressing societal problems. We welcome future studies on the situated practices by which actors tackle major crises such as climate change, pollution, pandemics, fires, and wars. Through the observation of various cases of future making as emancipatory inquiry (including cases in which actors attempted, but failed to make desirable futures), these future studies can develop novel theoretical, managerial, and policy implications for dealing with the crises that are threatening the future of life on our planet.

We wish to close our *Counterpoint* with a few remarks and a call to action. We can anticipate the criticism of some readers, who might dismiss our *Counterpoint* as wishful thinking, or ‘do-goodism’ (see Wright, 2025). We acknowledge that our concept of future making as emancipatory inquiry is underpinned by a Pragmatist sensitivity, whereby we believe in ethics, democracy, and the optimistic assumption that actors can and should take action to improve present conditions (cf. Simpson and den Hond, 2022). Yet, future making as emancipatory inquiry is not wishful thinking; rather, we argue that future making requires *reflective thinking*, whereby actors can iteratively test their imaginings against present and future constraints. We further anticipate that our emphasis on democratic participation in future making – that is, including human and non-human actors who are otherwise marginalized, silenced, or voiceless – might be dismissed as ‘do-goodism.’ Yet, we believe that democratic participation is indispensable for the construction of futures that are truly desirable – on a societal, environmental, and planetary level. Future making, we argue, is a challenging (and fallible) endeavour; but it cannot be delegated or left to a privileged few: rather, we call for scholars and practitioners alike to promote emancipation and take an active stance in realizing more equitable, diverse, and sustainable futures. This, we believe, can be realized primarily by adopting an optimistic attitude and actively engaging in inquiry – that is, in a reflective, collective, value-based exploration of desirable futures.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

NOTE

- [1] As witnessed, for example, by the growing number of contributions in organization and management journals, as well as the many symposia offered at the recent Annual Meetings of the Academy of Management (AOM) and Colloquia of the European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS).

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