**Journal of Information Technology**
**Call for Papers for a Special Issue on**

# Futuring: 'Digital' Futures as a Novel Site of Inquiry and Imagination

**Special Issue Editors:**
**Dirk S. Hovorka**, The University of Sydney, Australia (corresponding editor, dirk.hovorka@sydney.edu.au)
**Benjamin Mueller**, University of Bremen, Germany
**Elizabeth Davidson**, University of Hawaii-Manoa, USA
**Mike Chiasson,** University of British Columbia, Canada

*"The futures world may be a murky world, but it is one we have to enter, interrogate and hopefully reshape."* (Urry, 2016)

What attention do we owe the future(s)? The Information Systems (IS) and adjacent research fields engage with the design, implementation, and evaluation of increasingly powerful digital technologies and with studies of their impact on work, knowledge, sustainability, and organizing. Given the rich and growing body of theories and findings from research on these wide and long-term impacts, the potential for researchers to help envision, inform, critique, and shape how these technologically-infused futures – "digital futures" as a recent editorial of the Journal of Information Technology calls them (Schlagwein et al., 2024) – develop are immense.

Despite this rich potential, most discussions of the future implications of digitalization in IS research (and by this we mean the IS field and adjacent research fields) are abstract and nominal, typically assuming a singular "future" will arise from the technological advances studied. Discourses on the future with digital technologies rarely bring the *worlds* and *practices* that emerge from, shape, and transform futures to the foreground for a close and critical examination (Mueller et al., 2021; Parmiggiani et al., 2020). Similarly, whether or to what extend such worlds and practices will discernibly be *digital* to any meaningful degree is often just assumed which focuses our attention on specific aspects that may no longer be salient in futures. As a result, researchers tend to cede these important discussions and considerations to visionaries, technology firms, and "evangelists" in business and consultancy.

To the degree that IS research does consider the future, the implications of digital technologies in the discourse are often contradictory. On the one hand, an optimistic, instrumental view depicts the broad range of technologies as "tools" under social control, which can (and will) produce an economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable future. On the other hand, a substantive view of technology casts technology as dark, uncontrollable forces that (inevitably) result in personal, societal, and environmental distress. For instance, the dominating discussions of AI in research (and in popular media) illustrate these contradictory "hopes and fears". Neither view of technology sufficiently challenges researchers to engage actively with *futuring* – that is, the envisioning, informing, critiquing, and helping to shape possible futures systematically through research practices.

Hence, the purpose and focus of this special issue is on *futuring* work – active, imaginary, forward-looking research work in IS or related fields that is informing or shaping our 'digital' futures.

Research approaches that address the worlds and practices that shape digital possibilities and the multiplicity of futures that could result are possible (Mager & Katzenbach, 2021; Mol & Law, 2002). These strategies can overcome nominal approaches to considering the future and build on the rich socio-technical positions already present in IS research. To do so, researchers need to consider new ways of futuring that go beyond simple extrapolations of current trends into the future or tacit acceptance of technology's inevitable path (be that instrumental or substantive).

One way to do so is to loosen the grip of empiricism in IS research and broaden our relationship to futures (Hovorka & Peter, 2021), for instance, by engaging with *speculation* and *imagination* in research (Brown, 2003; Hovorka & Mueller, 2024a; Hovorka et al., 2025; Schön, 1993; Schultze & Orlikowski, 2001), creating speculative engagements with future possibilities (Hovorka & Mueller, 2024b), and deconstructing the narratives and expectations of the present (Dourish & Bell, 2014; Selin, 2008; Vaast, 2022). These and other approaches to futuring can be highly significant to what emerging phenomena can be (and are) observed, where present-day research interests and practices are directed, and ultimately, what future worlds are realized through the technologies we study. There is enormous potential for present-day research to consider the futures of lived social life, environmental conditions, and economies with digitalization and technological enactments.

To foray into, conceptualize, and perform the variety of futuring approaches, we must take the theoretical, methodological, and philosophical implications of futures seriously in our research. Our goal in this special issue is to encourage researchers in the IS and adjacent managerial fields to do so. The intended types of contributions to this special issue follow the "digital futures" editorial referenced above (Schlagwein et al., 2024) and encourage submissions with novel contributions within (or across) three main categories:

**(1) Engaging in Futuring**

Futures studies methods are regularly used in managerial practices and public policy to address substantive problems that have not fully emerged (Gray & Hovav, 2008; Schwarz, 2008; Slaughter, 2021). The futures studies literature has developed a body of research designs and methods to *think about* futures including, but not limited to: computational modelling/simulation, trend analyses, scenarios, predictions, and horizon scanning, which are under-utilized in IS research (Markus & Mentzer, 2014; Slaughter, 2021). Submissions addressing the limitations of current theorizing by applying futures-studies approaches to IS and related topics are welcomed (Cuhls et al., 2024; Dries et al., 2024). Submissions using these approaches are expected to provide exemplary applications of futures studies approaches in IS research and should contribute forward-looking insights regarding substantive IT/IS issues.

**2) Envisioning Futures**

As a research field and a discipline, IS addresses the design and impact of systems that will change the world – in the future – yet leaves unaddressed what those futures might entail.

By envisioning what inhabiting those futures might be like, digital futures become *a site of inquiry* to critique and inform present action. Novel epistemological approaches that envision futures critically and closely include utopias, dystopias, science fictions, speculative foresight and design ethnography develop new ways to create and "think with" futures (Peter et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2016; Wilkie et al., 2017). We encourage submissions that expand the IS fields' toolset beyond well-known futures studies approaches, such as analytical techniques and instruments, design approaches and speculative ethnography/anthropology.

**3) Conceptualizing Futures**

We seek submissions that *conceptualize futures* – how our relationship to them can be characterized and the underlying philosophy with which they are understood (Appadurai, 2021; Chiasson et al., 2018). If we embrace the statement that "We do not describe the world we see; we see the world we can describe" (Descartes), we acknowledge that the language, metaphors, and expectations with which researchers and society discuss technologies have an impact on making the world. These, in turn, shape what we can observe, where our attention is directed, how research is done, and what projects are funded. Examples of this research orientation include envisioning novel conceptualizations (Frank, 2009), tracing how present discourse becomes a future achievement (Selin, 2008) (Dourish & Bell, 2011) and articulating the immanence of current groundings for futures and how they could be otherwise (Bell, 2021; Ingold, 2021). Submissions of this type should highlight new relationships and concepts from possible futures, increasing our comprehension of the role futures can play in our present theorizing.

Within and across these envisioned submission types, topics of interest to the special issue include – but are not limited to – the following:

- Researching futures to inform present theory and action.
- Anthropologic, ethnographic, or speculative design approaches.
- Ethical futures: what do we owe the future?
- Beyond trajectories of the digital: Anticipating and modelling future *worlds.*
- Precautionary principles: guardrails for dual-use technologies?
- Socio-technical construction of the future.
- Utopias, dystopias, and science fiction as forms of speculative science.
- Non-empirical approaches to knowledge.
- Bridging epistemic distance.
- Digital transformation in a digital world.
- Reconceptualizing the organization.

We invite research papers and research essays that take futures seriously by engaging with futures thinking (Urry, 2016) that can inform present action. Submissions may examine our relationships with short-term events and technologies or with the long, slow shifts in social norms; moral reasoning; and the power, weight, and significance of institutions, practices, and technologies. We encourage consideration of the philosophical bases for connecting past-present-futures, new methods of futuring, and conceptions of the future as a site of inquiry. Traditional futures-studies approaches are welcome insofar as they contribute to the special issue's goals. The special issue seeks to be inclusive in terms of diverse approaches to futuring and studying digital futures—please contact the special issue editors if in doubt about whether a submission would be of interest.

**Submission Timetable**

- AOM workshop: July 2025 (introducing special issue)
- Submit extended abstract: 15 Aug 2025
  *(for feedback and workshop admission, max 1500 words, via submission system)*
- Abstracts invited for workshop: 15 Sep 2025
- Special Issue Workshop: Dec 2025, Hybrid at ICIS 2025 and online (recommended)
- First round submission deadline: 15 Feb 2026
- First round decision to authors: 15 May 2026
- Second round submission deadline: 15 Oct 2026
- Second round decision to authors: 15 Dec 2026|
  *Papers will be accepted or rejected after the second round of peer review. In exceptional cases, the special issue editors will advise on minor changes directly with the editors.*
- Final revision due: (if applicable) 31 Jan 2027
- Final decision to authors: 28 Feb 2027
- Target publication date: in 2027

**Submission Timetable**

JIT submission guidelines: https://journals.sagepub.com/author-instructions/JIN.

JIT submission site: https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jin.

Special issue authors must indicate in the submission comments and the cover letter that this is a "submission to the special issue on Digital Futures".

**References**


Appadurai, A. (2021). The Scarcity of Social Futures in the Digital Era.

Bell, G. (2021). Talking to AI: An Anthropological Encounter With Artificial Intelligence. In The SAGE Handbook of Cultural Anthropology (Vol. 1, pp. 442–458). SAGE Publications Ltd.

Brown, T. L. (2003). Making Truth: Metaphor in Science. University of Chicago Press.

Chiasson, M., Davidson, E., & Winter, J. (2018). Philosophical Foundations for Informing the Future(s) Through IS Research. European Journal of Information Systems, 27(3), 367–379.

Cuhls, K., Dönitz, E., Erdmann, L., Gransche, B., Kimpeler, S., Schirrmeister, E., & Warnke, P. (2024). Foresight: Fifty Years to Think Your Futures. In J. Edler & R. Walz (Eds.), Systems and Innovation Research in Transition: Research Questions and Trends in Historical Perspective (pp. 73–106). Springer Nature Switzerland.

Dourish, P., & Bell, G. (2011). Divining a Digital Future: Mess and Mythology in Ubiquitous Computing. MIT Press.

Dourish, P., & Bell, G. (2014). "Resistance Is Futile": Reading Science Fiction Alongside Ubiquitous Computing. Personal and Ubiquitous Computing, 18(4), 769–778.

Dries, N., Luyckx, J., & Rogiers, P. (2024). Imagining the (Distant) Future of Work. Academy of Management Discoveries, 10(3), 319–350.

Gray, P., & Hovav, A. (2008). From Hindsight to Foresight: Applying Futures Research Techniques in Information Systems. Communications of the Association for Information Systems, 22(1), 12.
Hovorka, D. S., & Mueller, B. (2024a, January 03–06). Speculation: Form and Function. 57th Hawaii International Conference on Information Systems, Honolulu, HI, USA.
Hovorka, D. S., & Mueller, B. (2024b). Speculative Foresight: A Foray Beyond Digital Transformation. Information Systems Journal.
Hovorka, D. S., & Peter, S. (2021). Speculatively Engaging Future(s): Four Theses. Management Information Systems Quarterly, 45(1), 461–466.
Hovorka, D. S., Thoring, K., & Mueller, B. (2025, January 07–10). Pushing the Boundaries of Reality: Imagination and Design in Science. 58th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS 2025), Big Island, HI, USA.
Ingold, T. (2021). Imagining for Real: Essays on Creation, Attention and Correspondence. Routledge.
Mager, A., & Katzenbach, C. (2021). Future Imaginaries in the Making and Governing of Digital Technology: Multiple, Contested, Commodified. Media, Culture & Society, 23, 223–236. SAGE Publications.
Mol, A., & Law, J. (2002). Complexities: An Introduction. In Complexities (pp. 1–23). Duke University Press.
Mueller, B., Diefenbach, S., Dobusch, L., & Baer, K. (2021). From Becoming to Being Digital: The Emergence and Nature of the Post-Digital. i-com, 20(3), 319–328.
Parmiggiani, E., Teracino, E. A., Huysman, M., Jones, M., Mueller, B., & Mikalsen, M. (2020). OASIS 2019 Panel Report: A Glimpse at the 'Post-Digital'. Communications of the Association for Information Systems, 47, 583–596.
Peter, S., Riemer, K., & Hovorka, D. S. (2020). Artefacts From the Future – Engaging Audiences in Possible Futures With Emerging Technologies for Better Outcomes. Twenty-Eighth European Conference on Information Systems, Marrakesh, Morocco.
Schlagwein, D., Currie, W., Leimeister, J. M., & Willcocks, L. (2024). Digital Futures: Definition (What), Importance (Why) and Methods (How). SAGE Publications.
Schön, D. A. (1993). Generative Metaphor: A Perspective on Problem-Setting in Social Policy.
Schultze, U., & Orlikowski, W. J. (2001). Metaphors of Virtuality: Shaping an Emergent Reality. Information and Organization, 11(1), 45–77.
Schwarz, J. O. (2008). Assessing the Future of Futures Studies in Management. Futures, 40(3), 237–246.
Selin, C. (2008). The Sociology of the Future: Tracing Stories of Technology and Time. Sociology Compass, 2(6), 1878–1895.
Slaughter, R. A. (2021). Stumbling Towards the Light: Four Decades of a Life in Futures. Futures, 132, 102794.
Smith, R. C., Vangkilde, K. T., Kjærsgaard, M. G., Otto, T., Halse, J., & Binder, T. (2016). Design Anthropological Futures. Bloomsbury Publishing.
Urry, J. (2016). What Is the Future? John Wiley & Sons.
Vaast, E. (2022). Future Imperfect: How AI Developers Imagine the Future. ICIS, Copenhagen.
Wilkie, A., Savransky, M., & Rosengarten, M. (2017). Speculative Research: The Lure of Possible Futures. Routledge.