



## Pre-workshop questionnaire for participants: Gathering weak signals

Below is an example of a homework questionnaire that could be sent to participants prior to a foresight workshop exploring sources of change with potential impacts on the Canadian economy.

### **What are some weak signals of potentially disruptive changes that could have significant implications for the Canadian economy?**

A weak signal is a sign that a significant change is starting or that it could be underway. Some examples include:

- Artificial intelligence is learning to be social and ethical, suggesting that artificially intelligent robotics could fill a surprisingly wide range of roles in the economy. ([Watson, IBM's Jeopardy-winning robot, meets Softbank's Pepper the social robot](#); [Watson is learning to debate ethical issues](#).)
- Several countries (China, Argentina, Philippines) are adopting India's softer stance on intellectual property for pharmaceuticals, suggesting a potential shift in international IP trade norms. ([http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2012-06-22/news/32368898\\_1\\_compulsory-licence-intellectual-property-shamnad-basheer](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2012-06-22/news/32368898_1_compulsory-licence-intellectual-property-shamnad-basheer))
- Online service platforms such as Uber and Airbnb use crowd-based reputation systems to create trust between consumers and unregulated service providers, competing with traditional regulatory approaches to consumer protection.

Weak signals challenge our mental models. We have an a-ha moment because they do not fit into our understanding of the expected future. There is a sense that they could have a profound impact on the issue or system under study. Weak signals are found through experience, reading, interviews and dialogue.

The ideal weak signal for this exercise has the following qualities:

**Significance:** If the change occurs (and grows), it could have a significant disruptive impact on the system or issue you are interested in.

**Plausibility:** There is some evidence that the change is occurring or could occur.

**Novelty:** Awareness is low among affected actors (e.g. policymakers, mainstream media).

**Timeliness:** The consequences could emerge in 10–15 years (Horizons' period of interest).

To answer this question, think about the last year and some of the changes you learned about in the world that seemed important and that you think could reshape the context for Canadian economy over the next 10-15 years. These changes may originate within the economy, or they could come from another domain—e.g. changes in society or the environment, a new technology, or a political or governance change. Most organizations are good at spotting changes in their own domains, and most of us are good at finding information that confirms our existing views. However, often disruptive changes originate outside your domain—the places you are not looking, and in the areas your own biases may naturally steer you away from.

Make a list of as many weak signals of change that you can identify. Select two and send them to [the workshop organizer]. Bring your list with you to the workshop to draw on for discussion.

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