HOW TO RESEARCH TRENDS

/ Els Dragt

WORKSHEETS

Intro

Have you ever wondered how you can research the future? Trend research is a powerful method to detect signs of change at an early stage. It gives you a glimpse into various possible futures.

In my book 'How to Research Trends' I guide you through the trend research cycle. This document contains the practical worksheets from that book. The colours correspond with the chapters in the book for easy reference. You can use these hands-on sheets to challenge yourself or your team to learn-by-doing. So don't just read 'How to Research Trends', it's time for action!

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YOUR SKILL LEVEL

There are some competences anyone working with trends should try to train and cultivate. First, let's find out what your skill level is right now. Take a look at the list of characteristics that define a good trend researcher. Then complete the form in an honest and self-critical way. Provide evidence of the characteristics you rated yourself high on by giving examples from your daily life. Think of ways to train the skills you score medium or low on.

How will you try to develop these? Keep this worksheet for future reference. You'll find it interesting to take a look at it after some time has passed and reflect on how your skills have (hopefully) improved. If you're working in a team you can also have others fill out the form for you and compare your perception of your skills with that of others. Provide each other with tips and advice on how to train and develop certain skills, and track each other's progress once in a while.

SKILL LEVEL LIST
How do you rate yourself on ....?

CHARACTERISTICS		MARK YOUR ANSWERS		
Curious	You are eager to absorb knowledge and experiences, you have an inquisitive nature.	low	medium	high
Non–judgmental	You are open towards opinions and behaviours that differ from your own personal standards.	low	medium	high
Interdisciplinary	You can easily think across boundaries, combining knowledge from different fields.	low	medium	high
Holistic	You can look at the bigger picture and how this maps onto the details.	low	medium	high
Analytic	You like to arrange information in an organised way and use a system for this.	low	medium	high
Creative	You are able to see connections between snippets of information that seem unrelated at first.	low	medium	high
Persistent	You are not satisfied easily and want to research beyond the baseline.	low	medium	high
Recognisable	You research in a way that sets you apart from others and leave a personal fingerprint.	low	medium	high
Storyteller	You are able to get your trend story across in text and visuals and adapt it to different audiences.	low	medium	high

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THE TREND LANDSCAPE

Practitioners of trend research come from a wide variety of backgrounds. One result of this variety in backgrounds is the wide spectrum of job titles and different usages of terminologies and methodologies they use to explain their trend research processes.

Find various trend researchers worldwide and create a profile overview of them using the worksheet. To which type of profile do you feel drawn to most, and which the least?

TREND LANDSCAPE OVERVIEW

Name

Company

Job title

Education

Methods

Specialisation

Name

Company

Job title

Education

Methods

Specialisation

Name

Company

Job title

Education

Methods

Specialisation

Name

Company

Job title

Education

*Methods*

Specialisation

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CREATE YOUR TREND DEFINITION

The word "trend" evokes many different associations, and you might have heard this word being used in various ways and contexts. What are the first thoughts that pop into your head when you hear the word "trend"?

Create a mind map where you collect all associations regarding the word "trend". You can do this as an individual or team activity. Use it as input to create your own definition of a trend. The goal is to help you in explaining your view on trends to others.

TREND MIND MAPPING
Make a mind map and use it to create your own trend definition.
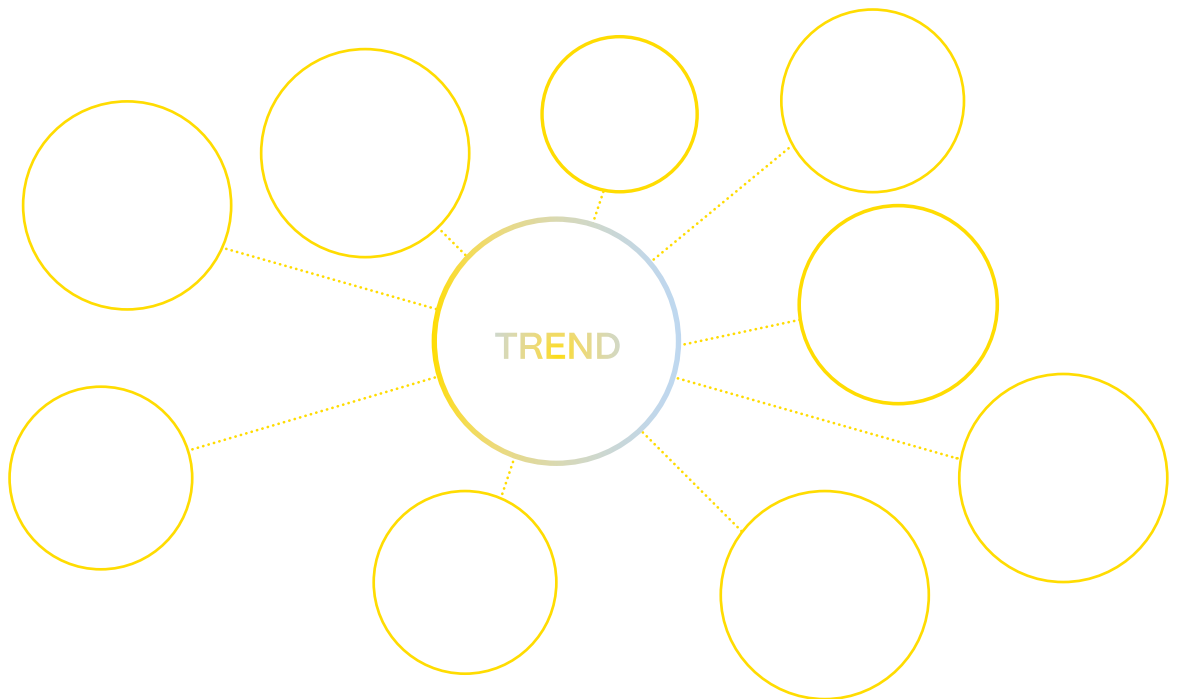
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THE TREND LEVELS

A trend is constructed of manifestations of change, underlying values and needs, and driving forces. Use the Trend Levels Canvas as a tool to help you understand the different layers of a trend. The easiest way to do this is to take a concrete manifestation of change as a starting point.

Place a visual of this manifestation or the name of it in the canvas, or place your phone on it with a picture of your manifestation on the screen. Then dissect the manifestation by looking at it from the different trend levels. You can use this tool in your team and discuss the trend levels together.

TREND LEVELS CANVAS
Fill in the Trend Levels Canvas to understand the different layers of a trend.

Place your manifestation here		
	Forces What are the drivers behind this manifestation? What has happened in past years that has made it possible for this manifestation to emerge at this moment in time? (STEEP)	
	Values Which values, needs, wants and desires are related to this manifestation? Why would people want to adopt it?	
	Manifestations Which similar manifestations have you spotted in other domains or regions? Think open and broad.	

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SCAN PLAN

Make a first attempt at creating a scan plan and decide on whether it needs to be a personal plan or a team plan and for which period of time you are making it. Then add relevant activities, divide them into field and desk research, and specify what you are going to do.

So, don't just add "visiting an exhibition", but also which one you are visiting and when you are going. Discuss your scan plan with others to get more input on activities to add. And last but not least, carry out your plan!

CREATE A SCAN PLAN

Create a concrete scan plan for a specific period of time by filling in the worksheet.

SCAN PLAN   PERIOD..   TOPIC..

Desk or field activity	Specific actions

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SIGNAL SELECTION

When you have gathered a lot of manifestations, it is time to get critical and select the most interesting and relevant ones. This is the step where you move from quantity to quality. Gather your signals and check every signal one by one for relevancy by using the Signal Selection Canvas.

To what extent does a trend spot meet the criteria? You can also add criteria based on the challenge or topic at hand. Fill in the canvas to help you decide which manifestations to keep in your filing system and which to discard. Mark the spot on the line where you feel the signal is positioned. You can add other elements that you feel are relevant for curating your collection of manifestations.

SIGNAL SELECTION CANVAS
Reflect critically on your signals using the criteria below.

place your signal here

To which extent is this signal.....

Innovative?   −   +

Inspiring?   −   +

Reliable?   −   +

Impactful?   −   +

_____?   −   +

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SIGNAL DESCRIPTION

When you have decided which manifestations to keep, you can start filing them away. One aspect of filing is making a description of each signal for quick future reference.

Take your selected signals and make short descriptions of every single one of them using the Signal Description Canvas as a starting point. You can do this in a group or individually. Also, do not forget to file key visuals of the signal. Fill in the canvas for each signal.

SIGNAL DESCRIPTION CANVAS

Fill in the canvas to make a complete description of each of your signals.

place your signal here	What is it?	How does it work?
	What is the launch date?	Who is the creator?
	Where has it been spotted?	Which domain is it linked to?
	How does it relate to quality of life?	What is the main source of reference?

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TREND VALIDATION

When you have found some first rough clusters, you can verify if they are emerging trends by digging deeper. Choose one of the clusters and use the Trend Validation Canvas to zoom into the cluster and try to explain why this specific change is happening right now, how it has emerged and how it might evolve.

Try to answer each question in the canvas by scanning some more and doing extra research to find relevant information. The goal is to build a trend foundation, while staying critical and allowing clusters to be adjusted or deleted because your first hunch might be too far off.

TREND VALIDATION CANVAS
Fill in the Trend Validation Canvas to help you validate your trend clusters.

Forces: why is this trend happening right now?

Place key signals and visuals of your trend cluster here.

Values: what is the specific shift in values and needs?

Manifestations: where is this trend happening already?

Innovators: who started this trend and who is spreading it?

Phase: which phase of adoption is the trend in?

Impact: how can this trend impact our future daily lives?

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TREND COMMUNICATION

Trend communication is a balancing act between being inspiring and bringing a fresh perspective versus making trends relevant and actionable. How to find the right balance? Consider the context in which you are sharing your trend, such as a company culture and level of trend sensitivity.

Then define the tone-of-voice you would like to use. As for deliverables, which formats fit best? Are combinations possible? Check if the available budget also matches the most suitable deliverables. You can use the Trend Communication Canvas to help you think about your communication approach.

TREND COMMUNICATION CANVAS
Fill in the Trend Communication Canvas to decide on your communication approach.

Context: what is the context the trends will be communicated in?	*Tone of voice:* Formal or informal? Visual or text? Intuitive or rational?	*Trend communication:* summarise the way you will communicate about your trends within your context.
Audience: Who will you communicate with?	*Form :* what is the desired output? ○ *Trend report* ○ *Trend workshop* ○ *Trend presentation* ○ *Trend video* ○ *Trend consultation* ○ *Trend exhibition* ○ *Trend tour* ○ ———————	
Level of interaction: one-way street or interactive?	*Preference:* Describe your style preference in text and imagery.	

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SCOPE

How do you apply your trend insights for a specific challenge? Understanding the scope will guide you from your broad overview of trends to a smaller selection of relevant trend insights for a challenge or project at hand.

Use the Scope Canvas during your briefing conversation. Add any additional questions that might be related to your specific project. Try to really uncover the why behind the challenge and do not forget to debrief after the conversation.

SCOPE CANVAS
Fill in the Scope Canvas to make sense of a trend briefing.

| What is the main question?	Who are the stakeholders?	How are trends going to be applied?
What is the trend sensitivity of the organisation?	What is the desired deliverable?	What type of collaboration is preferred?
How will the impact be defined?	What are the budget and timeline?	_____ ?

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TREND SELECTION

There are so many trends! Which trends should you select for a specific challenge and use as a starting block for your idea? One way of prioritising trends is to plot them on a grid or a radar chart and add aspects that are important to the challenge on the axes of the grid or rings of the radar chart.

For instance, criteria like the impact a trend can have on the challenge or the uncertainty of a trend going mainstream. This will help you to decide which trends to select for your specific challenge at hand. You can use the following example of a grid to practise selecting trends. Create your own made-to-measure grid. Experiment with using different criteria and see what happens with your selection process.

TREND SELECTION GRID
Choose aspects to put on the axes and plot your trends.

+

Write down an aspect

—
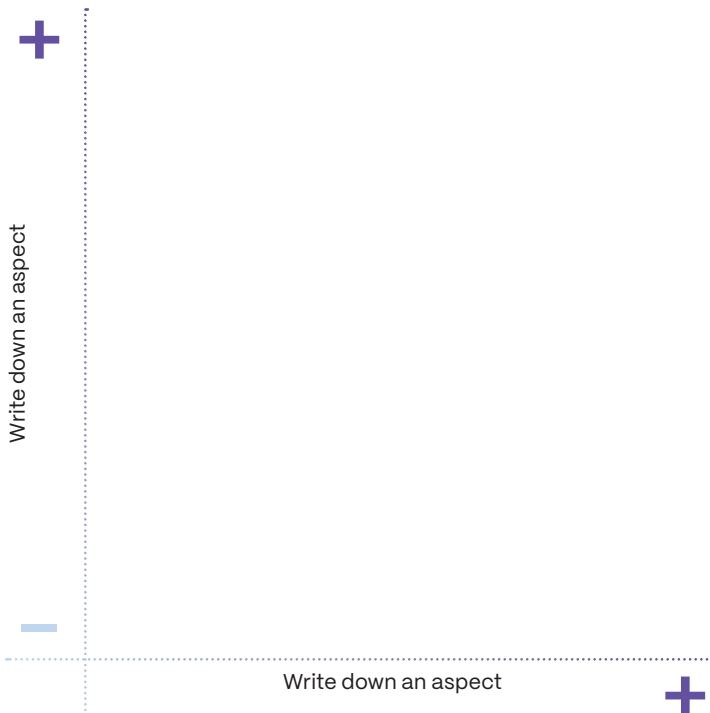
Write down the trends you select from the grid as most relevant and interesting for your challenge.

Write down an aspect   **+**

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TREND SCENARIO

Scenarios tell stories about potential futures and make these futures come to life. Creating scenarios is preferably a collaborative and collective activity. The starting point is a "what if" question related to your selected trend(s) and the challenge at hand. To make a scenario concrete and vivid use the "a day in the life of" approach where you describe and visualise one day of a person living in this trend scenario. Make sure the storyline contains positive as well as negative consequences of living in this trend scenario for your persona. Write down and visualise this day in the life as vividly as possible. The final step is to reflect on this scenario with your company, brand, challenge or topic in mind.

TREND SCENARIO CANVAS
Fill in the trend scenario canvas.

Trend Scenario	**Describe** a day in the life of a person living in this scenario. Make use of elements of your selected trends.	*Impact scenario*
		If this scenario becomes a reality, what could that mean for your organisation, challenge or topic? What to stop? What to continue? What to start?
	Visualise a day in the life of a person living in this scenario and the mood of the scenario. Draw or stick images below.	

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COCD BOX

The COCD box (Byttebier, 2002) is an example of a technique to categorise ideas by using a box with two axes: the originality of the idea versus its ease of implementation. Original but not (or not yet) feasible ideas are placed in the how? square, original and feasible ideas are placed in the wow! square, and the feasible and already known ideas should be placed in the now square. Discuss with others, such as your team, which ideas should be placed where in the box. Next, decide together which idea(s) you want to build on and describe this idea in more detail. Give it a catchy name and pitch it to get feedback and fine–tune it.

COCD BOX CANVAS
Plot your ideas in the "COCD box" and describe the chosen idea in more detail.

			Name of innovative idea
not or not yet feasible		**HOW?**	Description of innovative idea: Which needs does it fulfil? How does it work? What is the impact on our future life?
feasible	**NOW**	**WOW!**	Make your idea reality: Who do you need to make this idea happen? What kind of resources? What will be the first step to take?
	common ideas	*original ideas*	

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Outro

Hungry for more? I offer in-company training and coaching on-the-job to help you integrate the trend research cycle into your daily work. Drop me a line at els@studio-elsewhere.com to share your challenges and exchange thoughts.

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