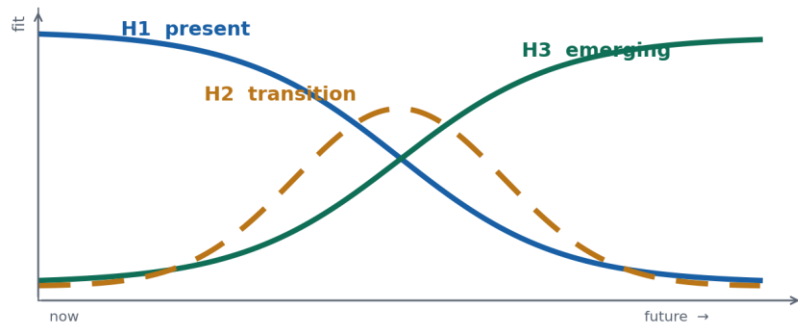


The Three Horizons

A short introduction — the framework behind the Mission Paradigms HopeLabs

How do we think clearly about a moment of deep change — when much of what we have known is fading, and something new is only beginning to appear? The Three Horizons framework, developed by Bill Sharpe with the International Futures Forum, offers a simple and generative way to do exactly that. It is less a forecasting tool than a structured conversation: a way for a group to hold decline and emergence together, honestly, without collapsing into either nostalgia or naïve optimism.



The framework sees three patterns — three “horizons” — coexisting in the present moment.

Horizon 1 (H1) is the world as it is: today’s dominant pattern, the structures and assumptions we have inherited. It is not the enemy — it brought us here and still holds much we value — but as the context shifts around it, parts of it steadily lose their fit. Its curve bends downward. That is not failure; it is what happens to every pattern in time.

Horizon 3 (H3) is the pattern that could become dominant: a genuinely transformed way of doing things. Crucially, it does not begin at zero. It is already present now, in pockets — small, easily missed, often at the margins. Much of the work is learning to see it.

Horizon 2 (H2) is the turbulent middle: the zone of disruption, experiment and innovation. It is the most contested, because what emerges here is ambiguous. Some of it genuinely carries us toward H3; some is really the old system borrowing new language to extend its own life. Telling the two apart — call them H2+ and H2– — is much of the strategic craft.

Two things make the framework valuable. First, it treats change as a *handover* rather than a switch: one pattern giving way to another, with a contested middle in between — and all three live in the present, in the same room. Second, it explains why people so often talk past one another. Someone who says “we are losing everything” is describing the falling H1 curve; someone who says “something new is being born” is describing the rising H3 curve. They are describing the same moment from different horizons — and both are right. Naming that tends to defuse anxiety and disagreement rather than deepen it.

Held well, the Three Horizons is not a prediction but an invitation to agency: to name honestly what is passing, to discern and nurture what is emerging, and to weigh the innovations of the middle with clear eyes. In the Mission Paradigms HopeLabs we use each horizon to look at mission in and from Europe — one paradigm giving way to another — holding hope and honesty together.