

# 2050 NOW

## LEARNING EXPERIENCE SERIES

designed by HEC Paris Impact Company Lab

A report on the first edition delivered on April 26th 2024

**2050  
IS WAITING  
FOR US**



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# 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE 2050NOW LEARNING EXPERIENCES SERIES

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2050NOW learning experience series was designed by HEC's Impact Company Lab to bring to life the importance of future-focused business decisioning and actions. It enables participants to travel back and forth in time together, experience meaningful paradigm shifts that enable them to become more future fluent and thus empowers them to better lead a just transition.

Its main objectives are:



1. Drive future-focused business decision-making through scenario-planning that considers the likely evolution of sustainability challenges.



2. Encourage cultural fluency, empathy, and pro-sociality, thus igniting mindset changes & global sensitivity to cultural vastness



3. Harness collective intelligence, research, and collaboration to identify new tangible solutions to our common future

The first edition of the 2050NOW learning experience was held on the afternoon of April 26th in the Salle du Vieux-Marché, (a high-tech Theater in Jouy-en-Josas, near the HEC Paris campus). It used interactive theatre and role playing to enable participants to project themselves, navigate a rapidly evolving future, and experience the challenges and the potential solutions that lie ahead.

Throughout the play which included different sensory experiences, participants travelled back and forth between today and 2050. They were invited to change the course of a play and to influence desired outcomes by taking the stage or by side coaching the actors. In a very immersive and interactive way, the audience experienced the longitudinal impact of decisions linked to critical topics like diversity and inclusion, leadership development, go to market strategies, natural resource scarcity and value creation.

The very diverse and dynamic audience which represented 38 nationalities, included 220 HEC Master 1 students, approximately 50 MBA HEC students, plus HEC academics and staff, scholars, business leaders, policy makers and journalists. As a result, throughout the event, over 4500 years of collective intelligence and experience were harnessed to think about new systemic ways of driving a just transition for all.

## RATIONALE FOR 2050NOW

Driving a just transition is widely perceived as a desirable goal. However, the pathways towards achieving this goal are complex, multiple, and marred by uncertainties, limited perspectives, and siloed actions. Existing investments are not performing as well as they could and unfortunately the gap between sustainability intentions and results is growing. The current situation is creating negative emotions, including apathy, pessimism, radicalization, and deterministic thinking, swaying growing number of people to disengage, be it actively or passively so.

Therefore, new initiatives that ignite multidimensional, systemic thinking, drive alignment, and promote trust are urgently needed. The 2050NOW learning experience is one such initiative. It is designed to explore how foresight and connectedness at large (social capital, trust, relationships), are enablers to a more holistic understanding of 21st century global challenges and thus to more effective solutioning. The most urgent of these challenges being a just transition for all.

## **PEDAGOGIC CONCEPT IMBEDDED IN THE 2050NOW LEARNING EXPERIENCE SERIES**

The 2050NOW learning experience is a **series of cross-generational, cross-cultural, and cross-functional half-day immersive and interactive learning experiences** that offer a forward-looking vision of sustainability. They leverage different art forms, expert interventions and participant interactions to travel back and forth in time and experience in an embodied, physical (personal) manner how our decisions today shape tomorrow. They foster greater awareness about oneself and the other, about (organizational) culture and contextual differences, the shortcuts, and biases we are exposed to that hamper our ability to break persistent patterns of inequalities, injustices, and exclusion.

2050NOW seeks to shift attention from the here and the now to what we do know about the future including the likely impact of **global megatrends**, and the **growing megacities** (mostly in the global south) where challenges are concentrated, and that will thus shape sustainability realities by 2050. It does so by embarking participants on a **personal journey across time and geographies**, where the ability to navigate different realities and perspectives is of utmost importance. Each 2050NOW experience is anchored in a specific so-called '**sustainability hotspot**': a place that embodies global megatrends, is disproportionately affected by them, and yet whose voices are too often ignored as leaders strive to build multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary solutions for a just transition.

2050NOW is designed to help participants effectively learn about, and integrate critical issues linked to impact and our common future. Throughout each experience participants reflect, test & learn, and physically experience the longitudinal ripple effects of different business decisions on our common future. They do so in innovative and paradigm shifting ways, anchored in 'real life', far from regular classrooms settings.

## **2. PRESENTATION OF THE FIRST EDITION OF 2050NOW**

### **ZOOM INTO KINSHASA**

In our first edition of **2050NOW**, we took participants on a journey to the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kinshasa. Kinshasa is a megacity that will increasingly be part of our common future; of our 2050NOW.

Experts say that the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a city teeming with challenges and opportunities, will be the biggest megacity in the world by 2075 (projected City Population 58 million). Already by 2050, it will be the second youngest country in the world (after Niger) with its youth population bulging, a vital resource that aging societies will have lost (New York Times, 2023). The DRC is the world's fourth most vulnerable country to the impacts of climate change due to its low adaptation capacity, low investment in climate-resilient infrastructure and programs (Woodwell Climate Research Center, 2023). Kinshasa today is bursting with energy, therefore business as usual is no longer an option (World Bank, 2021). Truly understanding its realities and including its voices is therefore a must as we strive to be proactive about our common future.

The first edition of 2050NOW was designed to immerse the audience in Kinshasa as it speeds towards 2050, so that they could experience different trajectories and realize new paradigm shifting possibilities.

### **ZOOM INTO THE INTERACTIVE PLAY USED TO ENGAGE THE AUDIENCE**

The audience follows the personal journey of Adama, a talented woman from Kinshasa who is trying to build an impactful career in a European company operating in her country, the DRC. Each of the three acts focus on key moments in Adama's professional journey when she is confronted with prejudices and biases that her leaders at European headquarters hold.

The bespoke scenario was designed to exaggeratedly illustrate the longitudinal impact of key business decisions and to mobilize the audience to intervene and identify solutions.



## ACT ONE

The theme of this Act is: Ask or Tell?

- We are introduced to **Adama** in 2024. The audience has the chance to ask her questions about herself. We get a rounded impression of her as a character, her family and an insight into her life in a developing megacity. This furnishes the audience with the perspectives they need to intervene later.
- We learn that she has a new job at **TER**, a technology firm, working to recruit staff to sell tech goods and services to the Kinshasa populace.
- The company is expanding into **DRC** because it is known to be one of the biggest markets in the world, rich with minerals and raw materials for manufacturing, and with a large prospective workforce.
- The European team at **TER** speak in corporate jargon, assuming Adama understands and relates to the objectives that they are cookie-cuttering into **DRC**, making an effort to check. This is a behavioural metaphor to allow us to look into the differing behaviours of briefing vs connecting to co-develop.
- Adama is tasked with finding talented people who have relevant experience. She infers the audience of the different employment landscapes and criteria in her area in Europe.
- Adama is given **KPIs**, diversity requirements and the method for their application, which requires uploading **CVs** to a portal and the submission of a video cover letter.
- Adama challenges some of those policies given the shortage of electricity, lack of infrastructure and cultural differences.
- She solves the challenges in her ingenious & effective ways. Is able to hire and train strong talent. **TER** witness her initiatives first hand and she is promoted.

## ACT TWO

The theme of this act is: Manage or Solve...  
Quick fix or Foundations for the future?

- We travel through time to 2035. As we travel we share some of the things that have changed in that ten year window. Crucially, **TER** have diversified into mineral transformation with a stake in a mining company and Adama has been repeatedly promoted and is now **Head of Organic Resources**.
- She is struggling with surging levels of sickness and absenteeism in the workforce, having a significant effect on productivity.
- In a virtual **AI** tech meeting with her boss (**Luke**), Adama urges him to consider being part of the solution. **Luke** is up for a promotion, he needs a strong **P&L** and does not want to rock the boat. Shareholder pressure is at an all time high.
- Adama discovers that employees are getting sick because of a contaminated water supply. It's affecting employees and their families because they all live in the same area.
- Luke** tells her to get the water company to fix it: it's an infrastructure issue therefore not their problem. Adama says that they will need to invest in rallying stakeholder support and to lobby officials.
- Luke** is concerned about brooches of bribery and corruption policy, but Adama tries to explain the differences between lobbying, paying for a service and bribery. **Luke** balks and rejects any stakeholder lobbying for infrastructure solutions. **TER** are not an infrastructure company and the costs are too high for a short term return.
- Adama explores the business interests for the company but she is kept in a holding pattern with no decisions being made. By default she has to manage the problem not solve it.
- Luke** is finally promoted. Adama has to explain the whole context again to new interim leader. There is no strategic vision, cultural fluency or empathy.
- Frustrated by a lack of control and more integrated decision-making Adama strives to solve challenges at her level. She applies for further promotions hoping for broader scope & influence.

## ACT THREE

The theme of this act is: Profit vs Purpose

- Again, we travel through time - this time to 2050. Audiences have the chance to contribute their own vision of how the future will look. **TER** has again diversified into infrastructure development.
- We make three key assumptions to enable us to tell this part of the story:
  - Climate change has meant that the world's most valuable natural resource is now fresh water.
  - The United Corporation Congress exists which is a kind of **UN** for big business.
  - Humans are still making decisions.
- Adama, dressed in elegant local attire, is applying for a **Global Executive** position at **TER** as it grows its presence in global south.
- We see the selection meeting as **Execs** assess the three candidates for the global leader position to which Adama has applied. The other 2 candidates are highly educated and eloquent but have little understanding of emerging markets.
- Adama fails to secure the position as they believe shareholders won't view her with sufficient respect despite her track record, unique acumen and much needed local understanding/ability to bridge.
- Adama is instead offered the chance to head up a new **TER** strategic initiative: managing fresh water resources of the Congo river. She initially sees this as a great opportunity to develop many of the ideas she has had over her career.
- As she works on the strategy and business plans, she discovers that the initiative may have seriously adverse impacts (human, environmental & economic) on the people of Kinshasa and others who depend on the river.
- When Adama challenges the Board they tell her that they are simply responding to market forces: 'managing' this resource and that she needs to think global instead of local. She realizes that this is an extractive initiative focused on material/influence gains.
- At a leadership summit, Adama announces her strategic vision for the initiative that is holistic, multi dimensional and integrates longitudinal value for the people of **DRC**...

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW OF THE FIRST EDITION OF 2050NOW

STEP	DETAILS	OBJECTIVES
<b>ARRIVAL &amp; ONBOARDING</b>	Participants are registered, receive a welcoming boarder bracelet, are invited to walk down a <b>2050NOW</b> red carpet take part in a photo shoot and to take a seat in one of the 4 blocks surrounding the illuminated central stage in the high tech theatre. Select participants are interviewed.	Ignite curiosity and bring audience different stakeholders together. Create a somewhat disruptive futuristic environment.
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	Participants listen to a welcoming speech, understand that they will be active participants in the learning experience, are invited to express the words that come to mind when they think about 2050. They are then plunged in pitch black and watch an immersive sensory audio-visual about megacities and megacities on the screens surrounding them (10 minutes).	Inspire and set the stage for the why behind the event, the why behind the chosen focus (i.e. megacities & Kinshasa). Deliver key facts and figures and set the stage for paradigm shifts to come.
<b>COLLECTIVE EXERCISES</b>	Participants are being asked to take a few minutes to think about how questions on how they envision the future. They then and take part in short physical exercises that connect them to their direct neighbors and to the broader audience.	Break the ice and ignite collective intelligence. Encourage participants to go to work with going outside of their comfort zone.
<b>THEATRE PLAY</b>	Participants watch a 21 minute three act play delivered by professional actors with scenes in 2024 (today), 2035 and 2050. They follow the personal journey of Adama, a young woman from Kinshasa who is trying to build an impactful career in a European company operating in her country.	Provide the audience with an immersive setting and an insider view of the human implications of various business decisions by fostering empathy for the main character.
<b>BREAK</b>	Participants take a break outside the room with food and drinks. Select participants are interviewed.	Give the audience some time and space to digest, react and think about the play. Encourage discussions.
<b>INTERACTIVE PLAY</b>	Actors replay the 3 acts but this time, participants are given the opportunity to react to what was played on stage and intervene to change the course of events.	Simulate diverse situations including some related to our common future and understand the consequences of our choices if we only focus on here & now. Drive realization that we can change outcomes starting now. Learn from subject matter experts who explain the rationale behind their intervention.
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	Participants listen to a concluding speech and are invited to express the words that come to mind when they think about 2050 from now on. Call to action. Select participants are interviewed. Cocktail	Summarize key learnings and wrap-up the event. Encourage participants to continue conversations and mobilize them to design sustainability strategies more holistically.

## AUDIO-VISUAL AND INTERACTIVE ASSETS PRODUCED

- Bespoke interactive play.
- Sensory audio-visual file designed to help audience understand the growing importance of global megatrends and the megacities of the global south.
- Role-playing scenarios which participants can influence and witness different long-term impacts.
- Collective intelligence exercises to find solutions to sustainability challenges.
- Menti app questions to capture ideas and feedback in real time, with live display on the screens.
- 2050NOW branding including AI generated visuals and motion designs.
- Bespoke music and jingles.
- Dynamic photograph montages.

## 2050NOW PROJECT BLUEPRINT

The first edition of 2050NOW took several months of preparation since everything had to be designed and thought through from scratch, including strategic objectives, integration of the learning from recent learning expedition to Kinshasa, and the writing of the interactive play.

However, now that the concept is clear and unique assets have been produced, the organization of future editions should be relatively straightforward if anticipated and coordinated by an expert team.

Below are the different workstreams that need to be considered for future editions.



### 3. PARTICIPANTS' FEEDBACK

#### LEARNINGS, TESTIMONIALS & RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE EDITIONS

All the people who participated in the first edition of 2050NOW were emailed a detailed survey (adapted by stakeholder segment) a couple of days after the event. In addition, several participants were interviewed on camera during the event, and others provided spontaneous verbal feedback. Below is a summary of the learnings (please refer to the Appendix for the list of participants whose feedback we quoted).

#### 1. OVERALL PROGRAM STRUCTURE & FLOW

#### WOW FACTORS

- The combination of audiovisual technology, special effects and interactive theater, coupled with the deep dives into critical topics (megatrends and megacities) created a highly engaging and fun learning experience.
- The overall setting was unusual and thought-provoking, it was conducive to mindset changes and paradigm shifts.

RECOMMENDATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The event is disruptive by design, therefore paying particular attention to the quality of both the seating and audiovisual infrastructure is critical to ensuring audience engagement &amp; physical comfort.</li><li>• Need to foresee enough time and space for discussions to unfold. In this context, the moderator is the guarantor for managing overall tempo while catalyzing dialogues within the predefined scope.</li></ul>



“

*The more I talk about the 2050NOW experience, the more I feel it has influenced me. In fact, I love the concept!*

**Business leader**

*The event felt like the future of TEDx. Thought provoking but also varied and interactive;*

**Business leader**

*It was great. I hope this can be repeated next year.*

**Professor**



## 2. PROGRAM CONTENT & PEDAGOGY

### WOW FACTORS

- Bringing together a diverse group of students, professors, and leaders facilitated rich discussions and the exchange of varied perspectives, which participants highlighted as something rare and very valuable.
- The cross-generational, cross-cultural and cross-functional mix of participants created a modern and approachable tone to the event and new unlikely social bridges were formed.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Since the content is prospective and somewhat unsettling (especially for younger audiences) it would be helpful to send pre-readings including questionnaires upfront. This would enable participants to get better prepared for the event and understand the desired outcomes and the unique rules of engagement.
- Audience discussions and interactions on diverse sustainability dimensions are likely to extend beyond the expertise of the theatre actors' expertise. Therefore, the event moderator needs to be especially strong and able to draw from the knowledge of the pre-designated experts as needed. Furthermore, the moderator should strive to summarize the key takeaways of each section of the learning experience.
- While creativity and spontaneity are a central element to this learning experience, predefining the scope of the discussions and integrating elements of research and expertise are also important. Therefore, inserting short expert interventions within the interactive play (e.g. expert deep dives into mega-trends, latest data & trends on sustainability dimensions, academic frameworks, etc.) enable debates to be better centred and concluded.
- Depending on audience the use of Menti or other such tools needs to be managed to ensure their depth and relevance. One way of doing so is to favor closed questions over open ones.
- In order to encourage discussions and effectively harness collective intelligence, it is important to integrate discussions in smaller groups (facilitated by seating area 'leads') and dynamic momentum exercises throughout the event. (participants moving around - changing seats? -, standing up, etc.)
- It is important to make sure that this learning experience is anchored in reality while also igniting enough optimism and inspiration for participants to feel empowered to act upon the critical issues being raised, be it during the event or in their future endeavors.

“

*It was an amazing event. I have never experienced anything like it. Performers delivered not only the message of 2050 and enthusiasm but also successfully achieved the participation of audience with their passion. The artistic performance was very effective in drawing audience's attention and empathy.*

**MBA student**

*The intro was fantastic leading up to the choice of Kinshasa. Really quite eye opening.*

**Business leader**

*I gained new perspectives on where the worlds' real growth will be; on the realities of the megacities; on how fast change will be happening and where it will happen. I became very much aware of how France-focused current perspectives are. We are off the mark! Too often, we even encounter issues going beyond Europe within businesses and policy making.. the event made it clear that we need to think much broader. It made it clear that there are substantive problems that are not on our radars. These topics, which are key to driving sustainability, need to be brought to life more frequently, more urgently, more broadly and so, all the time. But they are not. We need to do it. HEC needs to continue on this path. We need to push the media too. That's what thought leadership is..*

**Business leader**

*This program has changed the way I approach the view of a company's mission.*

**M1 student**

*It made us think broadly about the future and how we want to shape it, things that we do not talk about in class.*

**M1 student**

*The 2050NOW conference was a transformative experience that has significantly influenced my perspective on sustainability and public policy. It provided me with valuable insights and actionable ideas that I will carry forward in my professional journey.*

**MBA student**

### 3. AUDIENCE DIVERSITY

# WOW FACTORS

- Bringing together a diverse group of students, professors, and leaders facilitated rich discussions and the exchange of varied perspectives, which participants highlighted as something rare and very valuable.
- The cross-generational, cross-cultural and cross-functional mix of participants created a modern and approachable tone to the event and new unlikely social bridges were formed.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The specific diversity of the audience needs to be considered during the design phase of the event, so that the angles chosen to address the topics of focus (within the interactive play or other art form chosen) are appealing and engaging for all. In our first edition, more experienced participants (MBAs & business leaders) showed stronger engagement and enthusiasm than the younger Master 1 students since the chosen scenarios strongly resonated with the former's professional experiences.
- In order to set the stage, for the potential heated debates, it is important to acknowledge the heterogeneity of perspectives present from the start of the event and to make them visible and alive throughout the event (e.g. through dynamic introductions, Menti short polls or "moving" debates).
- For younger audiences (e.g. Master 1 students), we recommend holding the event at a time when their attention level is likely to be high, perhaps earlier in the week (rather than on a Friday) and the day (start in the morning?).

“

*I liked the cross-generational, cross-functional, cross-cultural aspect. The diversity.*

**Business leader**

*One added value of this program is about understanding the power of collective intelligence and its relation to diversity.*

**M1 student**

*I can easily see 2050NOW in businesses, associations, universities, and public administrations to change mindsets, instill across a variety of participants a new way of seeing things, and prepare for the future.”*

**Business leader**

## 4. CONCLUSION

The first edition of 2050NOW proved to be an exciting milestone for HEC Paris as the school continues to innovate how it empowers the business leaders of today and tomorrow to reinvent a more sustainable future.

Participants were engaged throughout the four-hour experiment and came away inspired by the very prospective insights that were discerned. There was a newfound understanding of just how important it is to mitigate blind spots, biases, and tensions to drive a just transition.

The power of interactive theatre and scenario planning was recognized as a uniquely effective way to experience what lies ahead, and to build a shared, broader more tangible vision of our common future. The overall learning experience enabled multi-dimensional and multidisciplinary perspectives that could be key to accelerate progress on sustainability agendas.

The HEC Impact Company Lab is proud of having led the first edition of this breakthrough initiative. It plans to lead at least one edition of 2050NOW per year moving forward, leveraging the experiences, experiments, and learnings it leads with its global community of business and academic partners to further enrich it.



## 5. APPENDICES

- **CONTRIBUTORS**

We would like to warmly thank,

All the event participants who took the time to share their detailed feedback and impressions with us:

- **Rodolphe DURAND** – Co-founder of S&O Institute and Academic Director of the Joly Family Chair for Purposeful leadership (HEC Paris).
- **Finia KUHLMANN** – Assistant Professor in Accounting and Management Control at HEC Paris.
- **Guillaume CAPELLE** – Associate at Impact Partners.
- **Yves-Marie LEGRAND** – Deputy General Director at Association Française des Sociétés Financières.
- **Eric & Thibault BERSIER** – BASF group / Lubrizol.
- **Noor SHALGEN** – Marketing and Communications Director at UFI.
- **Patricia GAUTHIER** – Compliance Officer at Avanade.
- **Frédéric PINGLOT** – Vice President Human Rights at Schneider Electric.
- **Romarc NGAMBO** – MBA student at HEC Paris.
- **Kovo MASOLA** - Entrepreneur
- **James MYONG RI** – MBA student at HEC Paris.
- **Nayla IBRAHIM & Elisabeth PUIGRENIER** – Partnerships team at HEC Paris.
- **Marieke HUYSENTRUYT, Maureen SIGLIANO, Maily BERSIER & Daria MIESZKIELO** – HEC Impact Company Lab.
- **HEC Paris M1 students** (via an anonymous feedback poll).

As well as all our internal and external partners who we partnered with to develop the first edition of the 2050NOW learning experience series:

- **HEC Grande Ecole Program** – project management.
- **HEC audiovisual team** – logistic support.
- **S&O Institute** – com and admin support.
- **Yes indeed consultancy** – interactive play, actors & moderator
- **Mairie de Jouy-en-Josas** – logistic support.
- **Calliopé** - audiovisuels production.
- **We think elastic** – branding & visuals creation.
- **Done by Friday** – communication supports.
- **Antoine Geray** – photographer.



- **PHOTO GALLERY**

*The set-up: a central stage surrounded with 4 blocks of benches with seats for 300 people and a total of 7 screens*



*Professional actors and moderator (from Yes indeed consultancy) performing and interacting with the audience on stage*



*Participants taking part in polls, voicing their opinions from their seats or intervening directly on stage*





Leading with Purpose for an Inclusive and Sustainable World

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