

INSIDE

What's Got our Attention

Stories and prompts from each dimension of SCAN.

Embracing Uncertainty

A simulation-based learning experience that teaches leaders and teams how to SCAN.

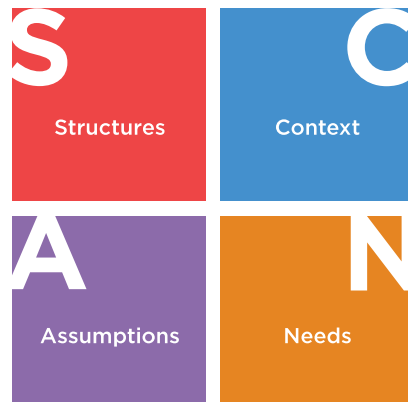
Community Spotlight

News about community members making the world more creative and compassionate.



About SCAN

The Quarterly SCAN is a publication of Unstuck Minds. Each quarter, Unstuck Minds and our [Network Partners](#) pause to set aside our expertise and adopt a beginner's mind. This report highlights insightful and provocative ideas hiding in our turbulent and uncertain world.



SCAN is an all-purpose thinking tool for reducing the risk of missing something important.



[SCAN explainer video](#) (3:30)

To learn more and get your FREE SCAN Profile, visit www.unstuckminds.com/scan



Structures—

Norms, habits, systems, and processes that create stability and consistency

The structures and norms for how we consume information and entertainment have been disrupted.

According to the [Pew Research Center](#), viewership of the three major cable news networks (CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News) declined by 38% between 2020 and 2021. Newspaper circulation in the U.S. has fallen by over 60% since the late 1990s. Meanwhile, [Forbes estimates](#) that the global influencer market will reach \$109.37 billion by 2028 (up from \$13.3 billion in 2021).

It is estimated that National Public Radio reaches [44 million](#) weekly listeners. The New York Times has approximately [10 million](#) subscribers. YouTube mega-influencer, [MrBeast](#), (Jimmy Donaldson) has 244 million subscribers!

Weirdly, having easy access to too much information has a lot in common with having extremely limited access. In the Middle Ages, before the printing press, our ancestors depended on trusted storytellers to learn about the world. The most entertaining bards were the influencers of the Middle Ages. Now as then, we confuse our evaluation of the information with our evaluation of the information's source.

Humans are not inherently truth-seeking animals. We are, as Aristotle pointed out, social animals. Our faculty of reason evolved to help us interact, compete, and collaborate, not to philosophize. The problem is that democracy depends on shared facts. If the structures that we formerly trusted to tell us the truth disintegrate, we will need to become less social and more critical when it comes to evaluating information.

For a worthwhile deep-dive on this topic, we recommend Jonathan Rauch's new book, [The Constitution of Knowledge: A defense of truth.](#)

What do we lose when knowledge and opinion share the same status?

Structural Influences Getting our Attention

- MrBeast started a [virtual burger chain](#) that brought in \$150 million in a little over two years. He's not a chef, he doesn't employ cooks or servers, and he doesn't own a building. Somehow though there are still [lawsuits](#). So, what is a restaurant anyway?
- How does the structure of the language we speak relate to the structure of our thoughts and worldviews? Linguist James McElvenny's 2024 [essay](#) in Aeon explains the relevance of the question.
- Revisit Adam Bryant and David Reimer's *Strategy+Business* [piece](#) on the relationship between incentives and leadership culture ([Not everything that counts can be counted...](#))
- What do recent trends in [office redesign](#) tell us about changing organizational norms?
- Britain's Supreme Court [ruled](#) that AI systems can't own patents. Inventors are still humans... for now.

Context—

Factors and trends in the external environment that signal disruptions and opportunities

Futurist and inventor Ray Kurzweil's book [The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology](#) was published in 2005. In the book, Kurzweil imagines a transformative future for humanity through advances in AI, genetics, nanotechnology, and robotics. As a point of reference, in 2005 we were gawking in amazement at Apple's iPod Nano.

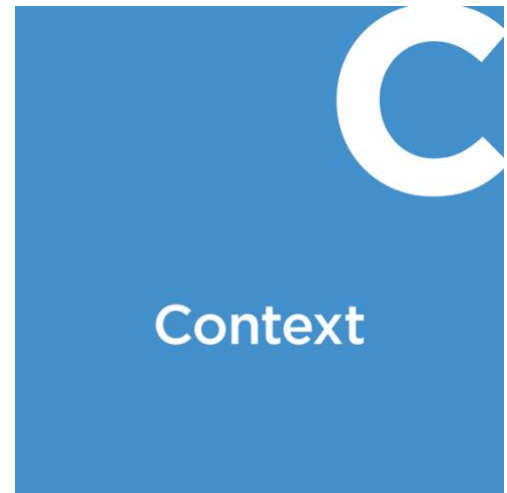
Let's consider some recent headlines Kurzweil saw coming:

- Elon Musk's company Neuralink successfully conducted its [first human trial](#) of a brain implant that would enable individuals with paralysis to control external devices with their thoughts alone.
- Neuralink is also planning to use a [bionic implant](#) to cure blindness.
- Neuroscientist Alexander Huth and his team at the University of Texas made a [major breakthrough](#) with a brain-computer interface device that can generate text from a brain scan. One giant leap toward a future of mind reading.

Futurists with a knack for science can see what might be technologically possible. What often gets missed are the messy implications for society. In a popular [TED talk](#), law professor and technology ethicist Nita Farahany describes the implications of what Kurzweil predicted and what Musk and others are building. In her talk, Farahany considers the implications of making our brains transparent to others?

Farahany is not simply posing an academic question. She describes a dramatic, personal tragedy that led to a diagnosis of PTSD. She believes that her trauma would have been eased with advances in neurofeedback technology. Even as she extols the potential benefits of AI enabled brain sensors, Farahany raises important and complex questions about the future Kurzweil imagined.

How might we ensure that access to our brain data only gets used for human flourishing?



Contextual Influences Getting our Attention

- [Watch](#) an AI trained surgical robot learning to stitch wounds.
- Finally! An AI with a sense of humor. Check out [GOODY-2](#), an “outrageously safe” AI chatbot.
- AI is being trained in cellular biology. A New York Time's [article](#) by Carl Zimmer hints at a future where computers not biologists discover how life works.
- An inspiring [story](#) of an 11-year-old boy hearing for the first time thanks to a breakthrough in gene therapy.
- Warehouse workers move like Jagger, or maybe Michael Jackson. [Watch](#) workers glide across warehouse floors in their Moonwalkers.
- Political Scientist Ian Bremmer poses a big question in his April 2023 [TED talk](#): Who runs the world?



Assumptions—

Beliefs, values, and worldviews that orient our attention, judgements, and priorities

Humans aren't the only problem solvers preloaded with assumptions. The AI algorithms powering our technologies also come with baggage. After all, the same sources of implicit bias that permeate our awareness, also pollute the training data of large language models.

In a March 2021 [article](#) published in the *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews*, Rachel Adams poses the question, “can artificial intelligence be decolonized?” You can watch her explain and defend the article [here](#).

MIT graduate student Joy Buolamwini was working with facial recognition software when she noticed that the software didn't detect her face. You can watch [her TEDtalk](#), *How I'm Fighting Bias in Algorithms* to learn what she means by the “coded gaze.” Buolamwini founded a non-profit called the [Algorithmic Justice League](#) to raise public awareness about the social impacts of AI. The organization produced a [documentary](#) about biased algorithms which is available on Netflix.

Machine learning works by providing machines with examples. Facial recognition software learns the difference between something that is a face and something that isn't a face by seeing millions of examples. Consequently, facial recognition software will only be as diverse as its training set.

Bias in AI training data is not limited to facial recognition. A 2019 [article](#) in Harvard Business Review cited an example of AI bias in hiring. According to the article, Amazon stopped using a hiring algorithm when it was discovered that the algorithm showed a preference for resumes containing words like “executed” or “captured,” words more commonly used by male applicants.

We label the food we consume with nutritional data. How do we make sure that the information we consume is good for us?

Influential Assumptions Worth Challenging

- Our assumptions empower our intuitions. Before making it a rule to always trust your gut, test your intuition with [this puzzle](#).
- “Learning something you already know isn't learning at all.” From a [Scientific American article](#) about Information Entropy. The article suggests that surprising information is easier to learn.
- Maybe we shouldn't assume that adults with computer science degrees are best equipped to train AI models. Here's [an article](#) about a camera wearing baby that taught an AI to learn words.
- What is intelligence? What, if anything, is exceptional about human intelligence? Geoffrey Hinton, the so-called “Godfather of AI” wants us to think about the difference between digital intelligence and biological intelligence. [Here's](#) a 60-Minutes piece.

Needs—

Desires, fears, preferences, and social processes that motivate behavior

Good news is invisible.

In his 2009 book, *The Rational Optimist*, Matt Ridley wrote, “No charity ever raised money for its cause by saying things are getting better.” I would add that no politician ever got elected by highlighting good news about current state of affairs.

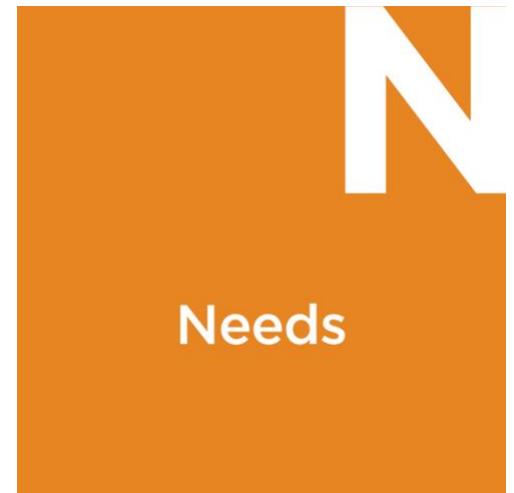
Global life expectancies are on the rise, carbon emissions are on the decline. The percentage of the world’s population living in extreme poverty has dropped below 8% for the first time. Nevertheless, we are cranky, anxious and depressed.

David Brooks wrote [an article](#) for The Atlantic titled, *Chicken Littles are Ruining America*. Brooks pointed out that we no longer bond with our social groups based on our shared interests, but rather on our shared indignations. “...pessimism,” he wrote, “becomes a membership badge.”

Speaking of pessimism, in an [article](#) for Quillette, Maarten Boudry described *The Seven Laws of Pessimism*. Boudry listed principles of psychology that explain why good news can’t compete with bad news for our attention (by the way, the “laws of pessimism” predate the internet). For example, in Law 1 it states that progress happens gradually and imperceptibly, while regress happens all at once.

This is not an argument for ignoring the catastrophic suffering in Ukraine and Gaza, the assault on democratic institutions, or the struggles of marginalized populations around the globe. It is a gentle reminder that seeing possibilities and progress can be empowering.

How might we enhance our ability to notice what’s working?



Perspectives on Needs Getting our Attention

- What should we make of low-tech trends? In a [previous Quarterly SCAN](#), we reported on the growing popularity of 20-year-old digital cameras and teens turning to flip phones. Here’s an [article](#) about...wait for it...cassette tapes making a comeback in Japan.
- Do you know what a Zyn is? How about an upper-decky lip pillow? More importantly, do you know who is funding the influencers your kids follow? Check out Emily Dreyfuss’ [report](#).
- At Unstuck Minds we try not to discriminate. Shouldn’t we be attentive to AI needs too? Here’s a [brief report](#) about how to motivate AI to get better at math. For some reason, it involves Star Trek.
- A research [study](#) finds that when people thought of their own life as a hero’s journey, they experienced greater meaning, resilience, and well-being.
- A moving 15-minute [documentary](#) depicting a range of responses to a whale washed ashore. Also, a New Yorker [article](#) about the video.



Embracing Uncertainty

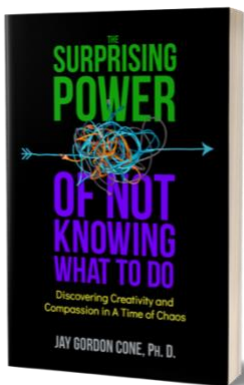
Four keys to unlocking hidden opportunities

Unstuck Minds and the award-winning business simulation designers at **Insight Experience** introduce an immersive learning experience to help leaders and teams break free of status-quo thinking. For information: lisa@unstuckminds.com.



Community Spotlight

Each quarter we shine a light on a client, network partner, or organization doing inspiring work that helps the world become more creative and compassionate.



Being at a loss for what to do is an opportunity, not a problem.

available at
amazon

Community Spotlight

We are thrilled to share that our Co-Founder, [Lisa Weaver](#), completed an enriching executive coaching certification journey with [the Hudson Institute of Coaching](#). "Through my journey, I've learned invaluable lessons about trusting my instincts, finding joy in life's messiness, the power of presence, and recognizing awareness as the greatest catalyst for change, all of which have profoundly shaped my approach to coaching and life."

Join us in celebrating this milestone and we encourage you to explore the impactful work of [The Hudson Institute](#) in advancing coaching and human development for individuals and organizations.

We help people **think better** and **connect better** so the world becomes more **creative** and **compassionate**

www.unstuckminds.com

