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## Chapter 4. Models – Foundations for Organizational Foresight

### 1. Dator's Four Futures

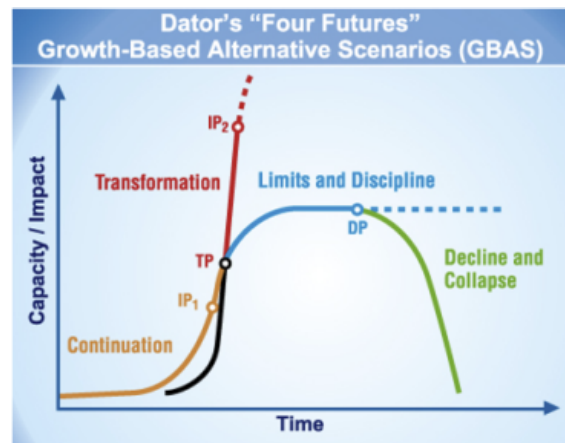
In 1979, [Jim Dator](#), director of the newly-established U. Hawaii foresight Ph.D. program, published a brilliant model of social change stories in an obscure journal, *Perspectives on Cross-Cultural Psychology*. He revisited this model in *Advancing Futures* (2002). Dator's model observes that all our narratives (stories, scenarios) on social change issues can be classified into four recurring groups of images, stories, or policies regarding effects of that change, as follows:

1. **Continuation** (business as usual, more of the status quo growth)
2. **Limits and Discipline** (behaviors to adapt to growing internal or environmental limits)
3. **Decline and Collapse** (system degradation or failure modes as crisis emerges)
4. **Transformation** (new technology, business, or social factors that change the game)

As we will see, these four future perspectives can be represented by phases on four classic growth curves:

1. **Continuation** (the **initial phase** of slow or fast **exponential growth**)
2. **Limits and Discipline** (the **saturation phase** of **S-curve growth**)
3. **Decline and Collapse** (the **decline and recycling phase** of **life cycle growth**)
4. **Transformation** (**superexponential growth**)

The graphic at right displays these four growth-based alternative scenarios in terms of these classic growth curves. In the curves above, IP stands for **inflection point**, DP for **decline point**, and TP for **transformation point**, points after which careful observers can notice and forecast changes in future growth.



One major insight for leaders is to recognize that all four change stories are often being told by different parties at the same time. Each can be a valid perspective for the interest groups telling each change story. Another insight is to realize that each of us, and our clients, tell all four of these stories at different times..

For foresight professionals, discovering which stakeholders represent each point of view, and describing any other hybrid views that may exist, is thus a great first **learning goal (Skill 1 of the Eight Skills)** in foresight research.

Let's look with a bit more depth at each of these curves now, along with a few lesser-known curves, to get a deeper understanding of **probable**, **possible**, and **preferable** change.

← IV. Change Curves and Other Cycle Models

↑ 1. Dator's Four Futures

→ 2. Logistic Growth (S-curves)