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Call for Papers – Thematic Issue

Creativity and innovation through Science Fiction: Inspiring the Impossible to Redefine the Possible

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Science fiction has been a central element of innovation for decades. Many of the technologies proposed in these stories have been realized in the form of sometimes revolutionary innovations and sources of undeniable social progress. – fascinating but limited to the imagination of scientists and engineers –. In recent years, designers and management science specialists have systematized its use to make it a relevant tool in the quest for innovation. It now clearly shapes the visions of entrepreneurs, designers, managers, and policy-makers around the world. Prominent examples include Elon Musk's repeated references to concepts inspired by classic and contemporary science fiction (e.g., colonizing Mars, humanoid robots akin to *I, Robot*, neural lace technology from Iain M. Banks's *Culture* series, and even the proposal for a transatlantic tunnel first imagined in Jules Verne's *In the Year 2889*). Similarly, Mark Zuckerberg's quest to build the "metaverse" traces directly back to Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash*. Yet Musk and Zuckerberg are hardly alone in citing science-fictional influences. Palmer Luckey, the founder of Oculus VR and Anduril

Industries, emphasized in a 2023 interview with Joseph Noel Walker how early exposure to sci-fi narratives fueled both his fascination with virtual reality and his drive to modernize defense infrastructures—an ambition often reminiscent of near-future techno-thrillers. In the same vein, Jeff Bezos has famously credited authors such as Isaac Asimov and Robert Heinlein with inspiring his pursuit of space exploration through Blue Origin. Another compelling example, Anousheh Ansari, highlights how science fiction can guide a more ethically conscious form of entrepreneurship. During a 2019 Web Summit panel on "How Science Fiction is Shaping Real-World Moonshots," Ansari spoke about how *Star Trek* fueled her desire for an inclusive, cooperative future in space—leading her not only to co-found Telecom Technologies, Inc. but also to sponsor the Ansari XPRIZE in an effort to democratize space travel. In all these cases, science-fictional visions serve as powerful catalysts for ambition—though they raise questions about how such visions may intersect with ethical, social, and political concerns.

At the same time, empirical research has begun to map out how exposure to science fiction can affect creativity and moral imagination. For instance, a pre-registered experimental study found that reading or watching sci-fi is associated with both a heightened sense that the impossible might become possible and a broader willingness to consider morally taboo actions permissible under certain conditions (Black & Barnes, 2021). Interestingly, this effect was linked to the level of « narrative engagement » that is, emotional, cognitive and sensory involvement in a story of participating readers and viewers : those who reported feeling more "transported" into the sci-fi story later demonstrated a greater ability to generate scenarios in which taboo acts might be justified, as well as more creative responses in a task measuring unique uses for everyday objects. These findings underscore the cognitive demands and imaginative potential of engaging deeply with science fiction narratives.

Taken together, such visionary endeavors and findings point to a new type of "hyperreal entrepreneur" (Michaud, 2025)—individuals who strive to make science fiction real, sometimes without regard for broader ethical, social, or political implications. This phenomenon has advanced far beyond individual entrepreneurs, permeating organizational practices of all sizes and sectors: think tanks, small companies, large corporations, universities, military institutions, and NGOs are increasingly using science fiction to spark creativity, imagine future scenarios, or frame strategic directions. A number of *concrete cases* illustrate this shift. Examples include Microsoft's *Future Visions* (2015), the French Red Team (2020–2024), ESA's *Amazonies Spatiales* (2024), and Singularity University's Science Fiction Design Intelligence, which published the graphic novel *SCIFI DI Design Intelligence for the Future* (2019). The Institute for the Future also released an anthology in 2013 titled *An Aura of Familiarity: Visions from the Coming Age of Networked Matter*, and ANA (All Nippon Airways) organized the *Avatars Inc.* short story contest in 2018 to explore the future of telepresence. Such initiatives show how science fiction is being used to drive innovation and shape entrepreneurial strategy, and they can serve as valuable subjects for studying how these narratives influence the organizations that create or adopt them—whether positively or negatively.

Since 2009, designers and futurists have developed methods that rely explicitly on science fiction to create "diegetic prototypes.", that is, a fictional object or technology integrated into a story with the aim of considering its impact on the future. Design fiction (Bleecker,

2009, 2022) and science fiction prototyping (Johnson, 2011) now feature prominently in the literature on creativity management, offering novel techniques that blend imagination with practical innovation. Yet, these methods raise critical questions. Are they instrumentalizing popular imagination for privative appropriation goals, or can they also foster more ethical, inclusive, and sustainable forms of innovation? A number of journals have taken an interest in this topic in recent years, offering stimulating reflections on how to interpret a phenomenon that affects a wide range of organizations. For instance, the journal *Technovation* devoted a special issue to science fiction and the quest for innovation in 2025 (Appio et al., 2025), and in 2024, the *International Journal of Technology Management* addressed a similar theme (Bucher & Hüsig, 2024). Think tanks, companies of varying sizes, universities, militaries, associations, and others have begun using fiction to stimulate creativity. This trend partly reflects the need to develop a forward-looking discourse, anchoring organizational action in a strategic narrative built around widely shared imaginary archetypes. At the same time, the use of science fiction both for optimization purposes and as a critique of capitalism raises questions about how best to interpret this growing movement within companies. Some see it as cause for concern, suggesting that the system struggles to think about its own ethics without resorting to fictional frameworks. Others, however, regard it as a powerful source of hope, envisioning a future where the utopias of science fiction are directly integrated into processes of capitalist innovation.

Parallel to these trends, educators and researchers report a growing presence of science fiction in university curricula (Michaud & Appio, 2022). From engineering and political science to management, instructors are integrating sci-fi narratives to stimulate imagination, teach ethics, and encourage critical thinking about technologies' impact on society (Chouteau & Nguyen, 2023). As these efforts gain traction, there is an urgent need for thorough inquiry into how science fiction–based pedagogy and practice can best foster both creativity and responsible innovation.

Thus, this issue of *Journal of Innovation Economics & Management* invites authors to submit contributions examining the role of science fiction in creativity and innovation processes. Papers may originate from diverse disciplines, exploring science fiction's impact on project management, the formation of entrepreneurs' visions, or the development of R&D programs. We are especially interested in research that investigates the relationship between creativity and science fiction, including case studies of design fiction or speculative design. Indeed, a growing number of companies are adopting forward-looking methods—derived from design thinking and science fiction studies—to prototype technologies early in the innovation cycle and to imagine practical applications for emerging inventions still in the laboratory phase. Potential topics include (but are not limited to):

The Institutionalization of Science Fiction Since the End of the Twentieth Century

- Future Visions in Business: The Origin of This Movement
- Design Fiction and Speculative Design: A Practice in Art and Business
- Science Fiction Prototyping and Foresight Thinking
- An Approach to Fostering Creativity and Innovation for Entrepreneurs and Businesses

Science Fiction as a Catalyst for Creative Thinking

- Imagining New Possibilities: How do sci-fi narratives spark original ideas and help individuals or teams envision alternative futures?

- Collective Inspiration: Exploring the interplay between popular sci-fi culture and group creativity in organizations or communities.
- Overcoming Cognitive Biases: Can science-fictional “What if?” scenarios challenge entrenched assumptions and broaden creative horizons?

Science Fiction and Creative Management

- Leadership Through Imagination: How do managers use sci-fi narratives to inspire teams, define strategic visions, or promote a culture of creativity?
- Storytelling as Strategy: Integrating science-fictional storylines into organizational processes, from marketing campaigns to innovation roadmaps.
- Ethical Dimensions: Balancing the creative energy unleashed by sci-fi scenarios with concerns about inclusivity, sustainability, and responsible leadership.

Science Fiction–Driven Creativity in R&D

- Conceptual Bridges: How speculative fiction seeds new directions in research and development—from idea generation to prototype validation.
- Methodological Innovations: Case studies of labs or consortia that employ science-fiction-based exercises (e.g., design fiction, scenario building) to stimulate inventive thinking.
- Collaborative Creativity: Investigating cross-disciplinary R&D efforts that merge technical expertise with imaginative storytelling to push the boundaries of what is scientifically or technologically feasible (Cohendet et al., 2021).

Entrepreneurship, Innovation, and Creative Vision

- Hyperreal Entrepreneurs: How do science fiction–inspired entrepreneurs harness their creative visions for business ventures, and with what social or ethical implications?
- Utopian vs. Dystopian Inspiration: Are positive or cautionary tales more effective in driving creative innovation and public acceptance of new technologies?
- Investor & Stakeholder Engagement: The role of science-fictional narratives in pitching ideas, securing funding, or galvanizing collaboration among diverse stakeholders.
- SF as a lever for the emergence of innovative entrepreneurship.

Design Fiction, Speculative Design, and Science Fiction Prototyping as Creative Tools

- Practical Methods: Comparing and contrasting the effectiveness of design fiction, speculative design, and sci-fi prototyping in stimulating breakthrough ideas.
- Turning Vision into Reality: Examining how these approaches move beyond conceptual exercises to inform real product or service innovation.
- Social and Ethical Reflection: Can these creative methods foster deeper ethical reasoning and more inclusive design processes, or do they risk being co-opted by narrow interests? (Bissonnette et al., 2022)

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Submission terms and important dates:

May 30, 2025: Submission of a one-page summary of the article proposal.

October 30, 2025: Deadline for submission of full articles (on the *Innovations* journal platform: https://jiem.manuscriptmanager.net/

Recommendations to authors: http://innovations.cairn.info/en/instructions-forauthors/

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