

Editorial

Which Matrix Do You Want to Live In?

Em qual Matrix Você Quer Viver?



Paula Chimenti^{*1} 

I still vividly remember the astonishment I felt when I first saw Neo awakening from his slumber in a world ruled by superintelligent machines, where the only human function was... to serve as batteries.

Art teaches us a lot. Through extraordinary creations, utopian worlds, and frightening futures, time has passed, and here we are in 2025. We have now surpassed, chronologically, the 'futures' imagined in *Blade Runner* and *Back to the Future II*, among many others.

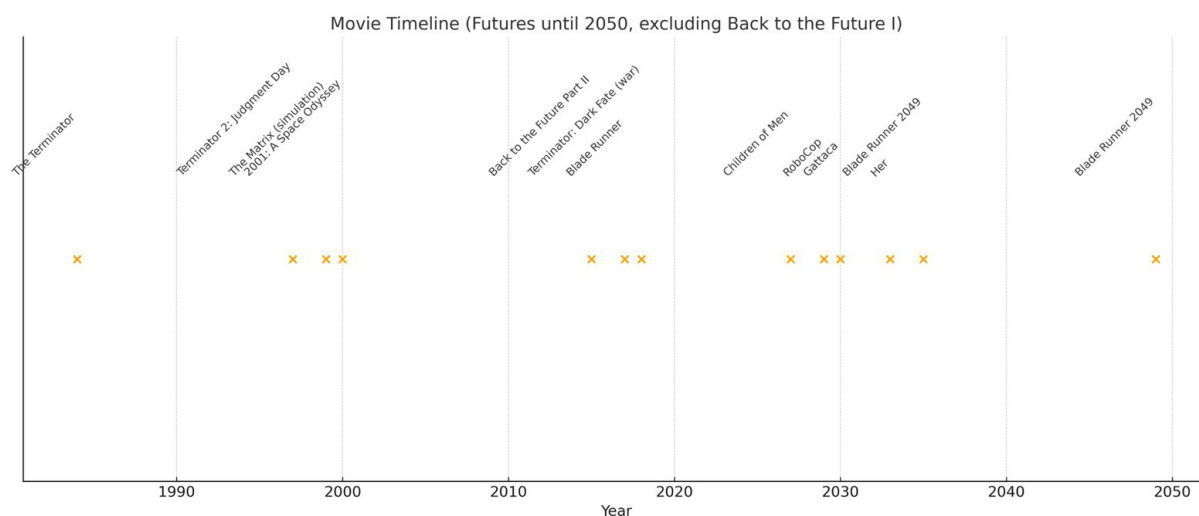


Figure 1. Timeline of films about 'possible futures'.

Even more fascinating is realizing that technological evolution has already made many utopias — and dystopias — possible. Biotechnology, nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, and robotics

now enable us to predict human behavior, interact with robots that look and act like humans, be whoever we want in virtual worlds, outsource information searches and decision-making...

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Table 1 summarizes some of this connection between art and the future, presenting some emblematic films that deal with futures that we have already surpassed (or are about to surpass) chronologically.

Table 1. Plots about “Possible Futures” and What They Imagined.

Film	Story Year	What They Imagined for the Future
The Terminator I	1984	Machines send cyborg assassins from the future
Terminator 2: Judgment Day	1997	Skynet triggers a nuclear attack to wipe out humanity
The Matrix (simulation)	1999	Simulated reality created by machines to imprison the human mind
2001: A Space Odyssey	2001	Regular space travel and autonomous artificial intelligence (HAL 9000)
Back to the Future II	2015	Flying cars, smart clothing, hoverboards, food rehydration
Blade Runner	2019	Nearly human androids (replicants) and overpolluted megacities
Children of Men	2027	Global infertility, social collapse, authoritarian states, and mass migration
RoboCop	2028	Privatized public security, police cyborgs, megacorporations controlling cities
Terminator (war)	2029	Apocalyptic war between humans and conscious machines
Gattaca	2030	Genetic engineering and discrimination in access to jobs and rights
Her	2035	Emotional relationships between humans and highly evolved artificial intelligences
Blade Runner 2049	2049	Continuation of the dystopian future: more evolved replicants, even greater environmental collapse

Note. Elaborated by the Authors.

Despite breathtaking technologies and visual effects, what captivates us in these stories are the relationships, dilemmas, and human emotions: the bond between Marty and Doc, Sarah and John Connor, Neo, Trinity, and Morpheus...

I chose to start with the idea of surpassed futures because we live in a time when technology advances at an accelerated pace — sometimes even faster than art itself was able to predict. Yet, amid so many innovations, it is crucial to remember that technology only makes sense if it helps humanity become better. Neither art nor science desires futures in which humans are rendered obsolete, reduced to mere cogs or batteries of a system.

Lindebaum (2025), in his recent editorial for the *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, asks whether there is still hope for a better future for our planet (and for ourselves), given the magnitude and multitude of challenges we face. I resonate with his view that teaching hope is fundamental. But to build real, non-dystopian futures, the discussion we must engage in today is not merely technological — it is primarily ethical. It concerns what future we want to inhabit and what humanity we want to preserve and strengthen.

This is directly related to objective decisions about what we want to research and how we conduct our research. Recent work helps us understand the impact of researchers’ choices on important conceptual advances in emerging fields of management.

For instance, Lee et al. (2021) showed that scientific production related to sustainability has grown dramatically over the past two decades. Bibliometric studies and databases indicate an exponential rise in the number of articles addressing sustainability, following increasing environmental awareness and global efforts such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Van Bommel et al. (2024) explored the evolution of research on diversity and inclusion. It is interesting to note that academic work on both topics highlights the growth in interest and scholarship but also reveals unexplored areas that constitute challenges and opportunities for future research. Indeed, it does not take much reflection to realize that we still have significant ground to cover — both in theorization and in practice — to tackle the immense problems posed by these themes. Ignoring them would be mere denial.

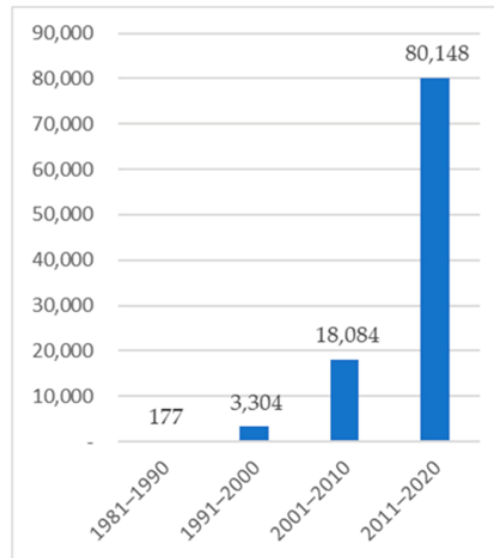


Figure 2. Evolution of publications on sustainability.

Source: Lee, J. H., Wood, J., & Kim, J. (2021). Tracing the trends in sustainability and social media research using topic modeling. *Sustainability*, 13, 1269. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13031269>

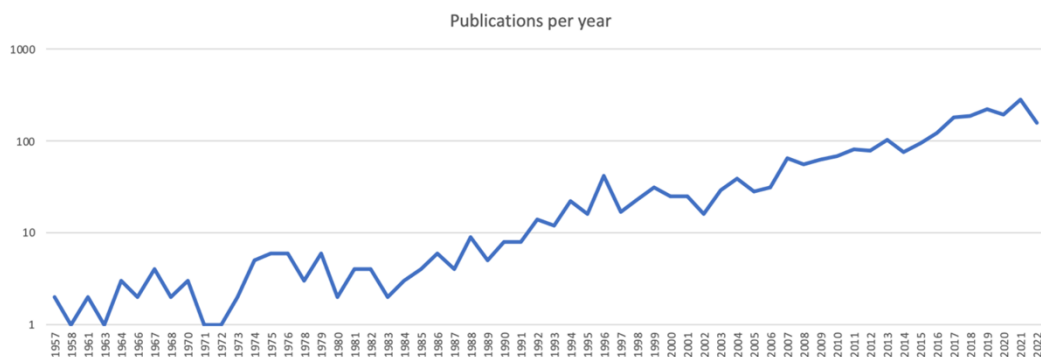


Figure 3. Publications on diversity and inclusion in management and business literature, log(10) scale.

Source: Van Bommel, H. M., Hubers, F. & Maas, K. E. H. (2024). Prominent themes and blind spots in diversity and inclusion literature: A bibliometric analysis. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 192, 487-499. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-023-05522-w>

Although there has been positive progress on both fronts, if we lose our ability to decide what we research and teach, the world will undoubtedly become poorer, less diverse — and we will become more like robots ourselves.

Here in Brazil, we continue to view academia as the home of open and frank debate. We believe that science is built by challenging prevailing paradigms with rigor and sound argumentation. That scientific investigation grows stronger

through constructive peer criticism. That engaged scholarship holds a commitment to helping solve real-world problems.

The role of RAC in this context is clear. Our mission is to contribute to the discussion of contemporary dilemmas, fostering scientific advancement toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. This scope adjustment was initiated by my predecessor, Professor Marcelo Bispo (Bispo, 2024), of which we are very proud. We publish a substantive

and relevant journal that applies the principles of engaged research to promote a better world.

At RAC, we believe that a truly innovative, sustainable, diverse, and inclusive future is born from academic freedom. It is born from respect for differences, from serious debate, and from rigorous and engaged research. It is the encounter — and sometimes the clash — between distinct worldviews that expands our capacity to see beyond the borders of what we already know.

As George Bernard Shaw once said: “The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man.” In other words, progress is not born from conformity, but from the courage to question, to imagine, and to transform.

Art, history, and science have long taught us: totalitarianism and authoritarianism are not solutions to human dilemmas — they are traps. That is why it would be wise to leave behind the tensions of the 20th century, which we hoped were already overcome, and focus our energy on the research debates that truly matter for humanity. There are too many new, too important issues for us to waste time on setbacks that prevent meaningful progress. The list below is far from exhaustive but offers some examples of reflections I would like to see explored in our journal:

- If the best ideas arise from conflict between different perspectives, how can we make this tension more productive?
- How can we teach our students to deal with ambiguity and conflict? To collaborate in diverse teams? To ‘coopete’ in a world that increasingly demands it?
- How do we manage the tensions between short- and long-term results, knowing that if we fail today, the organization may not survive to see the future we aspire to?
- Similarly, how do we navigate the narrow scopes of decision-making (investors, customers) alongside broader

societal responsibilities, recognizing that prioritization and trade-offs are the essence of strategy?

- How can we balance the tension between merit and inclusion? How can we help individuals become the best versions of themselves, while being conscious of their capabilities and their willingness to contribute?
- How do we move beyond the myth of the superhero leader, allowing those in authority to exercise their humanity and vulnerability, while still recognizing society’s need for inspiring heroes?

I do not have definitive answers to these questions, but it will be immensely rewarding to see our researchers, teachers, and students delve into them — immersing themselves in hundreds of articles and formulating thousands of research questions until they find the one that makes their eyes shine.

It is within tensions that answers reside. The adaptive challenges we face are complex, often difficult to discern — and certainly difficult to resolve. They have no absolute right answers, no one-size-fits-all solutions, and they will not eliminate human tensions.

So, what is the path forward? Is there hope?

I believe there is. But, just like in *The Matrix*, the red pill does not offer an easy escape. It offers freedom.

Freedom to debate openly and respectfully. Freedom to build bridges between different perspectives — not so that the loudest voice wins, but so that together, we can see further.

This is the freedom we wish to cultivate.

This is the future we wish to build.

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