

## **Doctoral contract: fiction, a new playground for initiating collective learning in marketing innovation**

### **Abstract**

Science fiction, whether expressed in film, literature or video games, never fails to arouse the enthusiasm of fans and amateurs alike.

Memorable works such as Steven Spielberg's *E.T. the Extraterrestrial*, Robert Zemeckis' *Back to the Future*, and the *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* sagas have left an indelible mark on our society.

Beyond their impact on the book, film and merchandising markets, works of science fiction have shaped the imaginations of several generations, affecting engineers and others involved in research and development.

Steve Jobs was inspired by the vision of the personal computer presented in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Similarly, Martin Cooper, the inventor of the cell phone, drew his inspiration from the communicator in the *Star Trek* series, and Jeff Bezos acknowledged that the touch-screen tablets in the same series influenced the development of Amazon's Kindle.

Science fiction transcends its simple role of entertainment to become a vector that stimulates the imagination, liberating us from current societal and technological ties, and opening the way to alternative, anticipatory practices.

This stimulation of the imagination affects not only those involved in research and development, but also consumers, who are fascinated by these visions and await their realization as if they were predictions. Imagination therefore helps to create desire and shape innovations, playing an active part in shaping expectations.

Science fiction is hence a driver of innovation, a manufacturer of imaginary worlds and a sculptor of minds. But it doesn't stop there. Other players, companies and public services alike, use narrative storytelling, but this time to feed their strategic, operational and organizational thinking, by anticipating the technological, economical, societal and environmental aspects of the future, with the aim of preparing for all possible scenarios.

For this purpose, the French Armed Forces General Staff and the Defense Innovation Agency have launched the Red Team project (Adam-Ledunois, 2022). Led by science fiction writers and scriptwriters, as well as scientific and military experts, the project aims to imagine threats that could directly endanger France and its interests. The army is not the only one who uses Design Fiction to explore the future: Ikea, Danone, Bouygues, Orange and many others are also using it.

Finally, among the many possible uses of fiction, narrative narratives can be used to modify our knowledge and representations of management science. Numerous authors have taken the bet of using works of fiction to convey knowledge in a more entertaining and meaningful way. These include works such as *All about marketing with the Mad Men series* (Tellier & Martin, 2022), *Understanding management with La casa de papel* (Szpirglas, 2023) and *From Mac Gyver to Game of Thrones: when TV series teach us about management* (Aubert, 2020). Sonia Adam-Ledunois and Sébastien Damart (2021) have used the works *Divergents* and *Silo* to illustrate the concept of bureaucracy and show its possible flaws. Cyrille Sardais and Marine Agogué (2022) used the *Games Of Thrones* series and one of its characters, Daenerys, to represent charismatic management and its potential pitfalls...

This narrative art, which initially intended to be nothing more than simple entertainment, has managed to go beyond this initial purpose to become a support for deciphering and understanding what awaits and surrounds us. This thesis aims to highlight the contributions of these works and fictional stories for innovation. Following on from our master research thesis, a first objective will be to identify how and why the use of narrative stories can lead to ideas for innovation (technological, social, linked to distribution, etc.) in organizations, and to familiarize consumers in order to generate a positive attitude towards them. A second objective, based on these initial results, will be to detect the ways in which the organization – or public authorities if it concerns major causes – can use narrative stories (beyond science fiction this time since we are no longer in a projection into the future) to create interest, even desire, towards an innovation; either by creating works of fiction from scratch (like the army with the “Read Team” project), or by integrating it into a narrative currently being created.

## **Project’s Presentation**

This research originally took place in a context of the strong comeback of fiction and science fiction among the public, particularly with the box office success of Marvel films as well as the return of sagas like Star Wars or Star Trek.

This enthusiasm for these works and this narrative art finds expression among consumers, but also among researchers with a growing community in France over the last 15 years. We thus find research on science fiction as a tool for prospecting and putting theories into perspective in all fields of management sciences (marketing, innovation, human resources, etc.). These subjects are of interest and spark discussions, the meeting of the AFM (French Marketing Association) which was held in February 2024 entitled “Marketing and Innovations” does not ignore them with an “Inception” workshop on the new modalities teaching, a workshop on design fiction and another called “Blade Runner” on the promotion of research and knowledge.

We are therefore faced with a theme appreciated by a large part of the population and which has an impact on our imaginations, our thoughts and our perceptions of what surrounds us.

This research aims to understand how the use of science fiction, and more broadly narrative stories, makes it possible to discern the multiple possibilities that present themselves to us and to anticipate solutions to these possible futures; Furthermore, it also aims to reveal ways in which organizations and/or public authorities can use a story to promote the adoption of an innovation. It

seeks to understand and explain the contributions of works of fiction and narrative stories in management science to promote innovations (whether technological, social, linked to distribution, etc.). We could summarize it with the following question:

### **To what extent can fiction be used as part of learning and shaping perceptions of innovations?**

The objectives of this research are multiple, both managerial and theoretical. From a theoretical point of view, the objective is to support the legitimacy of science fiction – but more broadly that of narrative – as empirical material in management science but also to highlight new methodologies combining fiction and reality. This research also aims to highlight new potential monitoring and strategy practices for organizations and their managers. Let us add to this, even if it is not our primary objective since we are not in educational sciences, the objective of democratizing the use of fiction as an academic support, for learning and for popularizing management sciences.

This approach is based on a deductive approach. The idea is first of all to take a state of the art on the way in which fiction can be used to generate collective learning. Case studies will then be analyzed in resonance with this state of the art, supplemented by semi-structured interviews and role-playing via virtual reality.

**Estimated Research Agenda:**

- State of the art: September 2024 – May 2025;
- Case study: June 2025 – January 2026;
- Virtual interviews and role-playing: February 2026 – September 2026;
- Theoretical discussion of the results and managerial implications: October 2026 – February 2027;
- Finalization of the writing: February 2027 - September 2027;
- Defense: January 2028.

**Information about the host laboratory:**

Name of the Host Laboratory (name, acronym, UR/UMR number): Normandie Innovation  
Marché Entreprises Consommation – NIMEC- UR 969

**Doctoral school of the thesis director:** ED Économie-Gestion Normandie (ED EGN, n°242).