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Ensuring Culture Does Not Eat Strategy for Breakfast: What Works in Futures Studies

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Abstract

For foresight to be useful to organizations, it must have seven dimensions. The first is that the journey is learning focused and not about particular forecasts or strategic targets. The journey is continuous, adaptive, and narrative-based. Second, for organizations to transform, they must challenge their used future: practices they continue that do not match their desired vision. Third, as the rate of technological change is dramatic, often exponential, it is necessary for organizations to search for emerging issues—novel disruptors that can challenge standard operating procedures. Fourth, they need alternative futures or scenarios, as they best capture uncertainty and allow for novel possibilities. The fifth is inclusion, or the question of "who is not in the room?" Sixth, for a new future to successfully emerge, it must have a supportive worldview and underlying narrative or metaphor. And, seventh, they need a vision, neither too far nor too near, one that enables and ennobles.

Keywords

futures studies, organizational foresight, causal layered analysis, scenarios, rate of change, narrative foresight

Technical Fixes to Adaptive Responses to Transformative Journeys

The challenge for a change agent in organizations and institutions is straddling the boundaries between (1) a technical list of things to do, often immediately relevant; (2) emergent adaptive strategies; and (3) the longer term transformative journey. Technical solutions are often based on a plan, a list of things that need to be done: the plan-budget-delegate approach. Adaptive strategies, while also requiring the capacity to foresee alternatives, are often shorter term solutions, with the need to return to business-as-usual once the adaptation has been made. Although most organizations prefer a clear, articulated, actionable strategy based on the new opportunity or threat, the strategy can easily fail as individuals in the organization are not prepared to confront what they do not know. More often than not, anxiety overwhelms, and as Peter Drucker is purported to have said, "culture eats strategy for breakfast."[1] Thus, transformative journeys are required where a double-loop learning approach is used. Technical and adaptive solutions are thereby located in a deeper learning journey where stakeholders learn about what they know, what they do not know, and how they can continuously learn about self, other, and the

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changing external environment. Transformative journeys require a champion, institutional support, a willingness to engage with emerging issues and use scenarios wisely, and the capacity to move beyond a simple fix-it solution. They require not just the long run to be embraced but depth of understanding of self and other.

As a futurist having worked with hundreds of organizations over a thirty-year time span, I have found that every intervention—workshop, program, course, or a series of action learning experiments—is a learning journey. Often in these journeys, the data become overwhelming, especially data about the future. The journey is contingent on multiple factors—including multiple unknowns—so much so that individuals can find learning challenging. They give up or, having seen previous failed interventions, become cynical.

As a way to assuage this group, and to get some "runs on the board," I move to "single loop learning,"—the plan-budget-delegate-review cycle—or specific technical fixes they can engage with on Monday morning and over the next six months. Possibility is restored since action has been purchased. However, the technical fix only works until there is an unexpected shock. These are varied. It could be internal, such as when a champion resigns or a board member challenges the overall strategy process. Or it could be an external event such as currency devaluation, a new disruptive technology, or a troubling geopolitical event. At this stage, what seemed so easy before—the simple "to do" list—now seems like a waste of time, albeit with a serious dose of anxiety. "We had the perfect strategy for yesterday's future," commented one chief executive officer (CEO).

Double-loop learning and narrative foresight are required, wherein there is learning about learning, the development of futures literacy. It is not just that the product, process, or strategy is questioned—but that the official future itself is challenged. It is not just that emerging issues and weak signals must be identified and alternative futures explored but that the core narrative of the business needs to be reimagined. The narrative part is critical in that a new story of the future needs to emerge. Using causal layered analysis (CLA), the new story recasts, reframes, what is counted, what systemic interventions are required, and how stakeholders see the organization.[2] CLA is useful in that it structures reality into four aspects: the litany or day-to-day construction of events and data; the systemic, or the deeper social, technological, economic, environmental, political, causes of the litany; the worldview, or the perspective of reality from the positions of the various stakeholders; and, finally, the myth-metaphor level, the often unconscious stories individuals and organizations tell themselves about the way things are or are not. Using CLA, deeper causation can be better understood and a more robust strategy can emerge. All four levels are transformed, thus leading to deeper, longer lasting, and, thus, more effective change.

In one instance, a steelmaker had to reflect on whether they were still the "men of steel" as external currency shocks and lower-cost overseas providers had challenged their market. After the foresight workshop, they realized they were, in fact, a "leaky oil tanker" and needed to change their core story and become "Optimus Prime."[3] This new organizational metaphor allowed for new insights into the changing world economy and their story in it. They had to fund and explore new technologies and markets, instead of remaining stuck in the old product and business.

It is this deeper level of foresight that moves organizations to make the transition from technical fixes to adaptive responses and even to transformative journeys, where they change as they create new futures. Based on a new story, they are able to see possibilities that were invisible before. Foresight at its best does that.

However, it is easy to remain at the level of the "the technical" fix. One state level education ministry keen to engage in futures thinking asked for a three-day workshop. As education leaders articulated their scenarios and visions for transformation, it became clear to ministry functionaries that the alternatives suggested were outside their zones of comfort. Instead of a change process, they wished for a checklist to provide evidence that they were innovative. Once this did not occur, the foresight process did not go further. Their core narrative, which was risk averse, was threatened by the options that emerged. One could conclude that this process was a failure. However, this forgets that the process is a learning journey. Many participants at the meeting, seeing the benefits, initiated foresight processes in their own schools, districts, and educational systems. Indeed, the director of the ministry, seeing the potential uses of futures thinking, has championed the process elsewhere even though he was unable to while leading his own ministry (he understood that the timing was not right for educational reform).

Navigating what works and what does not can, thus, be a challenge for the futurist. To understand the winds of change, it is important for the futurist to understand the theoretical basis for the journey.

Intellectual Context

Traditional foresight models focused on forecasting[4] the future.[5] They assumed that the accurate forecasting was the end-all of being a good futurist. He needed to follow, as much as possible, the scientific method, basing forecasts on solid quantitative models. He needed to control for worldview bias by ensuring that the data were not tainted by culture. However, the interpretive turn in the social sciences brought in questions of meaning: what does the future mean to the person making and using the forecast? The policy context was not a black box but imbued with perspective. Along with data, the meaning frameworks of all parties became important. Worldview bias was not a factor to be controlled for but a variable that could better texture foresight, and, moreover, ensured that the policies and strategies that ensued could be implemented, as there was now ownership. The empirical-interpretive debate was further challenged in the ’80s and ’90s by the poststructural turn, the rise of critical futures studies.[6] The future was not just a dish on an ordered menu, but rather was constructed by persons, institutions, and worldview, the future was a practice. It was man-made, and thus, as feminists have argued, could be women-remade.[7] The future thus moved from being simple, a closed system, to an open system where the forecast was situated in multiple perspectives, which were in turn nested in multiple worldviews. These worldviews were not just objectively describing the world but actively creating, constituting it.[8] In this evolution, language ceased to be a neutral and transparent tool. It became opaque, bound to create not just distortion, but novelty. As Tony Stevenson[9] has argued, the misunderstanding creates the alternative future.

However, for critical theorists, language could also be used as a weapon, a way to silence certain alternative futures. Language, thus, moved from the dungeon to the living room, part of the debate. Metaphors and meanings as well moved from being the problem to being possible solutions, ways to create more robust policies and strategies. In this move toward the critical, the problem of doing, of action, however, remained. What emerged then was the fourth wave of research, focused on action learning.[10] This approach uses data, listens to alternative perspectives, deconstructs the assumptions and worldviews behind these nominations of reality, and then, remembering Marx, actually changes the world. The role of the futurist was not just to write trends reports, embrace the worldviews of others, and critically[11] challenge power, but through courses, programs, workshops, protests, organizing, and other interventions to make a difference in the world out there.[12] And this is crucial: to be aware of his or her own narrative.[13] The futurist was not the modernist, holding the lever of change, standing outside the machine, but instead part of the problem and part of the possible solution. The futurist was part of the ecology of change: inside and outside of the machine. For this, the notion of double-loop reflection and narrative foresight has been doubly important. First, the futurist explores his or her own narrative in the field, becomes epistemologically clean, as it were, and second, understands that these stories are based on meanings, worldviews, and practices. That is, the objective and subjective interpenetrate learn from each other.

My context has thus been to be aware through an understanding of empirical, interpretive, critical, and action learning approaches of how I use the future, and likewise, how the future uses me. This is the theoretical context of the following principles of foresight. What this means is that I look for data about today and emerging issues. I then use the data in workshop settings, understanding how different stakeholders construct their life stories and their futures. Using critical theory—in the CLA framework—I work to challenge assumptions and assist—governments, citizen groups, nongovernmental organizations, friends, small business, corporations, associations—in the creation of alternative and preferred futures. I search for a new strategy and metaphor that can help create, all the while mindful of my own strategy and metaphor in the process: it is thus a narrative journey—a learning journey. And in this journey, over the decades, I have found a few simple principles of futures thinking that help along this process.

The Learning Journey

The first, as mentioned earlier, is to frame the journey as learning-based. Short-term financial and political output pressures are thus reduced, and with calm minds, experiments can be conducted that optimize productivity and enhance innovation. If this is not done, then the first failed forecast, or at the first sign of difficulty—politics at the board level, or from the ministry, or change fatigue from stakeholders—the foresight process is abandoned. We are back to square one. Worse, since the process was derailed by the incorrect forecast—the often "what happened to paperless offices quip" to avoid engaging in the future—the entire foresight process is abandoned, and the organization reverts to being reactive, until there is another external shock. As Jim Dator has argued, futures studies need to be seen as a hypothesis, not as an ideology.[14]

And it is possible to create such a learning journey. One national ministry for numerous years—understanding that change takes time and a critical mass is required, a crucial number of champions—has funded over the past years a five-day course for deans, senior professors, and deputy vice-chancellors. The deans and professors work the first three days to articulate scenarios and recommendations for the deputy vice-chancellors. Having a senior audience helps to focus their thinking and scenarios. They thus think outside the box for the first few days and then on the morning of the fourth, present recommendations as to what the nation should do next. The deputy vice-chancellors comment on the recommendations and then, until the close of the program on the fifth day, undergo their own foresight process. They develop recommendations for the committee of vice-chancellors and the Ministry of Education. The benefits are first that the futures process is spread widely throughout education leaders. Second, a core group of change agents emerges—a network of innovators who can share ideas with each other even after the course. Third, recommendations filter up to the ministry, who may act on them or avoid them, but they do now have a sense of the changes being asked for. And, the most important outcome is that the process creates an ecology of foresight. For example, in the fourth year of the program, because of severe currency fluctuations, they did not go ahead, and another ministry picked up the program, taking more than thirty-five of their senior scientists through the foresight process. Thus, capacity has increased at the broader national level.

At the multi-lateral international level, the international Pearls in Policing[15] action learning program is exemplary. Knowing how busy police commissioners are, they focus instead on deputy commissions and other senior leaders. Foresight methods and tools are foundational in their training program. Senior executives meet annually to create and explore alternative policing futures. A focal research question is presented to them by police commissioners. Executives then explore this question. In previous years, research questions have included diversity in policing, the role of social media in policing, leadership succession, policing in tough times, and global scenarios. The question for 2016 is focused on counterterrorism futures. After working with the tools and methods of Futures Studies, executives then present back to commissioners, creating an action learning feedback loop. The intent is not just to discern more relevant information about the futures of policing but to create senior global police executives who can adapt to a dramatically changing world. It is thus designed not just to create a particular learning organization but a deeper global learning culture. In times of crisis, leaders have each other to support, to question, to draw for new ideas, and ideally work together for a safer world.

Challenge the Used Future

The second principle is to challenge the "used future." Every organization has particular practices that they engage in that do not reflect their preferred future. Indeed, they often engage in strategies that move counter to their vision. In the foresight process, I ask participants what might be these routinized practices, their used futures? Police, throughout the world, state that one of their most significant used futures is the "drive around" (police presence) as it wastes labor, energy, and has little or no impact on reducing crime or increasing safety.[16] Once the used future is named, then alternatives can be created. With policing, this means moving toward big data-oriented approaches to policing, that is, putting analysis, efforts, and forces where problems are, instead of promulgating the belief that driving around leads to reduced crime. However, futures are used because they are held as true—not by reality—but by earlier worldviews. In policing, this has been the worldview of command and control, a visual show of strength. This may have worked more than a hundred years ago, but with new types of crime, cyber, for example, quick action and prevention in particular, are far more important. But what often prevents a shift to this new future are the weights of the past. Police often still act as if they live in small towns instead of in complex, adaptive, highly advanced and global technological systems

In education, the used future that emerges over and over, whether at the primary, secondary, or tertiary level, is the disconnect between the new technologies and the design of classrooms in strict rows. At issue has been the deep worldview of the factory. The factory model may have been useful more than a hundred years ago—primarily to create obedient laborers—it is far less important in a knowledge economy where person-based critical learning is far more important. With education, many principals, ministry leaders, and teachers suggest that this means redesigning classrooms so they are student-centered and technology enabled.

However, in education, the weights are twofold and heavy: first, the memories of education ministries and the principals of how they learned; second, the fear among leaders that they will no longer be in charge. They fear that the new digital technologies will make them irrelevant. Thus, it is critical while transforming the factory model to also support leaders—or boards and CEOs—to find new spaces where they can contribute. In interventions in education ministries in Australia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Malaysia, what consistently emerged was the tension between the current story of "I am in charge" to the emergent story of "we are all learners." To help create this shift, a key enabler has been to skill leaders in the new disruptive technologies and suggest to them that their lives can be easier if they shift stories. This approach also seeks to demonstrate that the shift from the factory as the underlying worldview to the "playground" better positions the nation in a globalized knowledge economy. Moreover, even for those parents seeking high marks, their students will do better as they are engaged, participating in the futures they want to create.

Search for Emerging Issues

The third principle is to search for emerging issues or disruptors. This is especially important during periods of rapid change—technological, demographic, and geopolitical, for example. These emerging issues can be forthcoming problems or possible opportunities. The challenge is to identify them before they become easy-to-spot trends, through the methodology of the s-curve, as developed by Graham Molitor.[17] A decade or more ago, one health insurer noted the move toward prevention and wellness. They understood that, as the 4-p model of health[18] (prediction via big data; prevention[19] via behavioral changes such as meditation, better diet, and exercise; patient participation via peer to peer networks; and personalization via genomics and biomonitoring devices) grew in importance, they needed to make a strategic shift from downstream to upstream. This meant proactive measures to keep their customers healthy—providing dietary advice, for example, and developing apps that customers could use to monitor their health.

In another example, a trucking insurance company, seeing the advent of new competition and the development of new technologies to monitor drivers, began to make a shift from only providing insurance to bioinformatics. Using a biosensing device—wearable computers they could monitor the truck driver's fatigue levels, his attention level—they hoped they could develop an early warning system to enhance driver safety. This shift, they believed, would help them to develop new products—higher up in the value chain—and make the roads and country safer. Their costs would also go down. As they already had expertise in information and communication technologies, the shift to bioinformatics could be seamless.

In a final example, a soft drink company noting the shift to more empowered consumers with more information and more real time monitoring devices on their health, decided to diversify. They also accepted the argument my colleagues and I gave them that they were in an industry selling products counter to personal and environmental health. Without changes, they would eventually be seen like big tobacco today: as evil. This company is now moving toward becoming a wellness leader instead of a sugar seller. Of course, the transition may take decades, and there are several strategic scenarios. Two are noteworthy. First, while they could switch overnight, the risks to the current business would be high, and markets would punish them. Second, they could stay in the current business and slowly grow the new wellness business. The cultural challenge, however, would be great, as staff and customers would not be clear on who they were, their identity.

Create Scenarios

Thus, even if one is able to accurately or usefully discern new innovations, not only is the trajectory of the emerging issue not easy to forecast but organizational culture is challenging to change. Using alternative futures is a crucial principle in practicing foresight to negotiate such uncertainty. Alternative futures or scenarios can help an organization become more flexible and adaptable. They also help develop a range of alternative visions and strategies. These scenarios can be developed through many techniques, but I have found the most useful to be based on challenging one's core assumptions about the way the world is, and the way the world is developing. While the futurist may offer examples and guiding questions, it is crucial that the workshop participants develop the actual scenarios. Scenarios need to be lived alternatives, embedded in the culture and embodied in the person. As much as possible, I try to use a number of games, for example, the CLA game[20] and "the Sarkar game"[21] to ensure that participants actually feel their way into alternative futures. They experience social change.

Although there are hundreds of examples to draw on, most relevant is work with a number of libraries, a global care organization, and a number of ministries.

With libraries, the current trajectory is the "Digital dinosaur." The underlying story behind this future where libraries and librarians fail to keep up with rapid new technologies is "libraries—very quiet places." A second scenario articulated by librarians is one where libraries become "holo-decks" of the future. By scanning the environment and investing in new virtual and holographic technologies, they become "amazing new spaces" where children and adults have remarkable conversations with virtual authors, for example. A third scenario articulated rethinks the library as a "multi-door community hub." It could be a collaborative third space, neither the office nor the home. It could be a place for workshops for the elderly on financial management, for example. It could be a place where children and adults play with 3D printing technology, both consuming and producing. The library in this future becomes the "heart of the community." In a fourth future, the library works with authors to co-publish, to help them move from consumers of knowledge to "co-publishers" for a digital era. And, of course, all these scenarios are possible for different libraries and librarians.

However, while the scenarios help map possible futures, as important is the narrative of the librarian. The librarian's story would certainly have to shift. In the work I have been part of, this shift is often from the "keeper of the collection" to the "innovator in the new—digital, virtual, 3d printing, production—gardens." This is not an easy or seamless shift, as librarians for centuries have been the holders of the collection. While they are certainly able to shift their narratives, it is not without pain and anguish.

Turning to education, in one project for an Asian national educational system, the first scenario developed by deans and professors was a continuation of the current trajectory. In this future, assessment would remain exam-based, courses taught in traditional lecture rooms, and the curriculum was based on jobs from the past. The worldview was industrial, and the inner story was "force-feed." A second scenario took the view of the student seriously. In this future, the inner story was, "all you can eat." Courses and to some extent curriculum would be student designed, and assessment would be self-regulated. The organizing worldview was the shift from the industrial to the digital era. A third scenario attempted to integrate the two visions of the future with the story of the "healthy buffet." Assessment would be done through partnerships. The worldview would be that of coordinated cooperation with students, the ministry, and professors co-designing change. A fourth was less about who designed what but more about moving toward the story of the "omnivore" or blended learning, wherein some courses would be taught in traditional classrooms—albeit redesigned for digital technologies—and others in virtual holographic settings. Assessment would move from exams to creating innovative difference. The scenarios were important in that they opened up space to think not just about the future of education but about alternative futures of education. Moreover, the scenarios used the perspectives of different stakeholders to interrogate what could be.

In a fifth process that entailed numerous face to face workshops and virtual presentations, a global care organization was confronted with a number of challenges: first, the demographic shift from an aging North to an expanding Africa; second, funding limitations from Northern governments toward nongovernmental caring organizations, suggesting that government funding would decrease annually and they needed to find new sources of revenue; third, a shift in donation type from individuals, particularly digital natives who did not wish to merely give money or "sponsor a child," but play an active role in changing the conditions of poverty; and fourth, "competition" from new web-based social change organizations such as getup.org, change.org, kiva.org, and avaaz.org. Avaaz.org, for example, has a membership list of more than forty-two million in just five years. It is focused on organizing "citizens to close the gap between the world we have and the world most people everywhere want."[22]

In this context, they articulated four alternative futures for their organization. The first was to "Move South" and relocate where the most vulnerable children would be: Africa. This would mean a physical location, and a dramatic change in the makeup of senior leadership. The second was to become a "facilitator of believers" of the various religions: to mobilize religious leaders and communities to work together for the vulnerable. This would mean focusing less on their own religious roots, and more on the ability to leverage relationships among workers on the ground to make a difference globally. The third future was "the great streamline"—to become like many other high impact, virtual, nongovernmental organizations and reduce their staff and costs—doing more with less. The last scenario was "the full streamline" organization where along with working directly with the most vulnerable, they leveraged their expertise to influence global policymaking. They understood, they argued, that if they did nothing, then a collapsed future for their organization was on the cards. Their current process is to articulate decision points in terms of next steps and to create the capacity to change.

Who Is Not in the Room?

The fifth principle asserts essentially "the more, the merrier." As the future is uncertain, bringing in alternative voices from varied fields can help reduce uncertainty and find new solutions. In foresight projects, bringing in the full range of stakeholders, while messy, enhances the robustness of the scenarios and the strategies developed. One group, a professional organization, noted that their executive was not representative of their emerging membership, based on the categories of ethnicity, gender, and age. They represented the past, not the future. Thus, the ideas emerging were from like-minded people. For them to be relevant, the executive had to become the future they wished to see. "Be the stakeholders" became the mantra.

In a large conference on the futures of disability, the ministry ensured that providers, persons with disability, carers, funders, and policymakers were all the room. This did lead to confrontational debates about who should lead the future. But the conference design created safe places for these conversations, ensuring that the differences added to the robustness of the scenarios and strategies. Indeed, the future became a safe place for discussion, since blame was not being assigned. Possibilities were explored and truths told. Persons with disability could speak their truth, asking for a redesign of buildings and cities, and not a focus on heroic science to "correct" them. Government carers could speak of their fatigue, of endless demands on them. It was a step first to hear each other and then move from trauma to healing.

Find the Worldview and Narrative

With such inclusion, a change of conversation and strategy remains possible. This is especially critical in futures thinking, where uncertainty is higher the further into the future one projects. Without understanding deeper perspectives, strategies often fail, as they reinforce the worldview of the dominant. They are often unable to account for the new "bedouins"[23]—those who are challenging the system, who see reality differently. The sixth principle is finding the worldview and the metaphor underneath the used future, and finding a new cognitive pattern that supports the new story. In international policing, it is shifting the story from the "thin blue line" in which only police officers have the solution to policing (and the "blue brotherhood," where they must protect each other when they are challenged) to the metaphor of an orchestra, where everyone contributes toward safety, even as the police commissioner directs. Citizens, for example, can contribute through wiki-crime portals and community policing.

In the health insurance company example mentioned above, they shifted from "the insurer" to the "health navigator." They refocused on the worldview of the customer—the "healthier you." As their overall strategy shifted, they began to see themselves as now co-creating health with their customers, instead of waiting for disease and paying for illness. But the consumer was not the only relevant stakeholder. Government was equally important. This involved lobbying government to make supportive legislative changes. Along with external changes, they needed to hire different types of people: those who understood prevention and knowledge navigation.

Narratives are not right or wrong. The critical question is do they serve or hinder where the organization wishes to go. In one ministry, the core metaphor of the executive was that of leaders sitting around a round table in a protected castle. However, outside the castle were hungry wolves: teachers, parents, students, and the media. While one may agree or disagree with the metaphor, the issue for the ministry was that they imagined themselves as innovators, creating new global learning spaces for the children and young adults in their constituency. This narrative was risk averse; in opposition to their strategy. The conclusion is that their strategy would fail, as their fear of risk would override strategy.

In another instance, the national bank of an Asian nation decided that they would become "a centre of excellence in the region in banking and finance." While this is certainly laudable, when they used CLA to see if the culture supported this vision—they realized that "their culture did not give a premium to knowledge."[24] There was a mismatch between the vision and the culture.

The challenge then is to create a new story that more accurately approximates the desired vision and from there, articulate strategies. One organization, a national department of statistics, changed their story from the "scorekeeper" to the "trusted expert." The scorekeeper was reactive and an impartial observer. They could see that the trends toward big data—artificial intelligence—could make them obsolete. Their new story was proactive, not just counting, but being part of the national conversation on what should be counted. The new narrative created possibilities where they would interpret big data, moving upstream in national debates.

Create the Vision

In turbulent times, it is critical to have a clear vision of where one wishes to go. This cannot be too near nor too far. Too near leads to being trapped by the present. Too far becomes science fiction. The vision must also enable—enhance the capacity to deliver—and ennoble—bring out the best in people so that they can create systemic structures to deliver the best. In many city councils I have worked with, vision has been the first challenge. The domination of the "roads, rates, rubbish" worldview blinds them to changes in the global economy in terms of the ability of cities to create change.[25] Because they are often focused on the immediate and narrow—always busy solving political problems—they are unable to take advantage of new technologies, for example, the maker-movement today. They are also unable to notice emerging issues around biosecurity, cybercrime, or climate change. More proactive cities, however, can fund innovation, for example, to help the transition to a global renewable solar economy. In these cities, clarity around the vision was always first. "Where do we wish to be in thirty years?" "What do we wish to keep?" "How will we use new technologies to enhance governance?" "How do we create partnerships to deliver the vision?" Certainly linking the long term vision to the electoral cycle is crucial, but it is equally important to move from the worldview of "the way things are is forever" to "we can redesign our city toward the future we want." Visioning involves citizens, experts (collecting the data, testing the data, searching for disruptors), and leaders (who can champion particular projects or resist change). And it is personal. Each person must ask themselves where they want to be in twenty or thirty years. Who is with them? What does nature look like? What technologies do they wish to use? What is the built environment like? One mayor was uncertain of the foresight process until he engaged in imagining what he would be doing in twenty years. Once the link between the external and the inner was made, the value of foresight became obvious. Legacy became critical.

Visioning also moves from the desired future back to the present—it is transformational. This is not the same as devising a list of endless things that must be done. In one city, after the visioning exercise, the participants became depressed. This was not because of their dream of what they wished for but because they had made a list of fifty actions that they did not believe were politically feasible to do. Once we narrowed down the list to three major strategic pathways, then the impossible became the possible. The vision suddenly enabled. It became doable.

Effective Foresight

So to conduct effective foresight, it is first important to frame the experience as a learning journey. There are four levels to this journey:

- Zero loop where participants often give up.
- Single loop where they seek to immediately eliminate uncertainty by having a list of actionable strategies.
- Double-loop learning where—when confronted with the unknown—they

venture toward creating a learning organization that has the capacity to adapt. This is more than planting seeds but nurturing the foresight process through river rapids, ensuring that the process of learning continues, that it is built into the culture of the organization.

- Narrative foresight, the search for new stories that better enable and support emergent realities.

Second, it is important to challenge the used future. This is the future that no longer works but because of a previously held worldview-mindset, we continue its practice. Once the used future is challenged, new futures can emerge.

Third, it is crucial to search for emerging issues, disruptive events, patterns that could provide early indicators of dramatic shifts. These issues can help us prepare for the emergent future. They can help us avoid future problems by taking early action. They can also help us take advantage of opportunities for change before fluidity disappears and bureaucracy takes over.

Fourth, it is important to move from thinking about one future to alternative futures. This is most commonly cast as scenario planning. Scenarios help us rethink the present, imagine alternatives, and when properly done, see the future from the perspective of different stakeholders, including Nature and future generations.

Fifth, it is always important to ask, who is not in the room? Who is missing who can provide everyone in the room with new ways of knowing and thinking. Often in foresight workshops, the exact people who can provide the new ideas are not there. Thus, experts speak to each other, creating self-referential conversations.

Sixth, a new future can successfully emerge, if and when there is a supporting worldview and a guiding narrative or metaphor. Otherwise, it is too easy to return to what no longer works, as it is comfortable and our thinking supports old patterns (not to mention our habits and the financial systems that support them).

Finally, seventh, it is crucial to have a vision, or rather, visions of the future. What made the Renaissance unique in human history was not the emergent vision of the future, but the opening up of the future, the creation of multiple visions and possibilities.

Foresight, done well, creates these possibilities, allowing for culture to work with strategy, but in alignment not opposition.

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Notes

1. http://thoughtmanagement.org/tag/peter-drucker/ (accessed May 16, 2015).
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