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Using Futures Approaches A Guide to Getting Started

Maree Conway



2007



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February 2007

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Contact Maree Conway for further information.

Phone+61 3 9016 9506

Email: maree.conwa@thinkingfutures.net

Web: www.thinkingfutures.net

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Preface

This guide is designed to provide you with enough information to understand the critical steps you need to follow to set up an effective organisational futures program. Most of my career has been in universities, and I use them as my reference point, but the processes and methods detailed in this guide can be used in any organisation.

I have worked in the futures field since 1999. I set up the [University Futures](#) website in 2006 to provide a resource for planners and strategists working in universities who wanted to find out more about how to integrate futures approaches into their existing strategy processes. In 2007, I established [Thinking Futures](#) as an innovative futures practice working with organisations to create futures inspired strategy.

There is not much formal futures work going on in universities. While futures approaches are used well in some organisations, I saw a gap in the knowledge base for people who want to find out more about how to use futures approaches in their organisation. I have put this guide together to assist people who want to move to the next level of strategy development – beyond strategic planning. It is based on what I wished I had known when I was asked to integrate futures work into the planning framework at an Australian university in 1999. I had to look up ‘foresight’ on google to find out what I was dealing with, and I’m hoping this guide will save you that step in your futures journey!

The guide is deliberately not written in a formal or scholarly style, although it does include information about both relevant theory and practice. As a practitioner, it is important that the steps in this guide do help you to set up a futures program in your organisation. Please let me know if I achieved that aim, and if you have any suggestions for improvement.

Maree Conway

February 2007

Email: maree.conway@thinkingfutures.net

Terminology

Like any field, futures has its own jargon. There are levels of [depth](#) in futures work, and the jargon increases in complexity and abstractness as you increase the depth.

There is also some confusion about the terms ['futures'](#) and ['foresight'](#); they are often used interchangeably.

In this guide, **foresight** is defined as the capacity to think systematically about the future to inform decision making today. It is a capacity that we need to develop as individuals, as organisations, and as a society.

Futures is a term that can be used to refer to the research, methods and tools that are available to us to use to develop a futures capacity. It is also used to describe the field in which futurists work.

The following terms are ones used most often in this Guide.

- **Foresight:** an often unconscious, individual capacity to think about the future.
- **Strategic Foresight:** an organisational futures capacity.
- **Futures:** the broad academic field now developing globally, interdisciplinary and inclusive in its approach.
- **Futurists:** those who work in futures, as academics, consultants (outside organisations) and as practitioners within organisations.
- **Futures Approaches:** the tools, methods and thinking styles used to build an organisational foresight capacity.

Using this Guide

The guide is designed to be read sequentially so that you build up your understanding of futures work which will, in turn, increase your chances of success in your organisation.

You can, of course, dip in and out as you wish, but I would recommend working through the Guide from beginning to end the first time you read it.

Chapter One provides an introductory overview about strategy development and implementation in organisations today. It suggests a re-conceptualisation of the way we view 'strategic planning' as the starting point to understanding how futures approaches can be used in strategy development.

Chapter Two provides a conceptual framework for futures work in your organisation, using the work of Richard Slaughter and Ken Wilber to provide the intellectual foundation for your futures program.

Chapter Three takes you through some steps you need to do before you go 'live' with any futures program. These steps involve both understanding your motivations and positioning in the organisation, as well as steps to build into your program any existing organisational knowledge and capacity.

Chapter Four deals with some challenges and obstacles you might encounter as you work to set up your futures program. Some responses to those challenges and obstacles are suggested.

Chapter Five is about how to do futures work in organisations in terms of the types of methods you might use, and the staged approach you need to follow to implement those methods.

Chapter Six provides good practice statements against which you can measure the outcomes and success of your futures program.

Chapter Seven is short, and provides some final words of encouragement.

Links to the University Futures and Thinking Futures websites and other relevant sites are hyperlinked throughout the guide.

Introduction

Integrating futures approaches into strategy development needs to start with a re-conceptualisation of strategic planning ...

Using futures approaches in your strategy development will be one of the most challenging and intellectually stimulating things you will do in your career in your organisation. Because you are reading this guide, you are probably interested in finding out more about how to:

- enhance the strategic thinking capability of staff within your organisation,
- strengthen your organisational strategy development by building in futures approaches to your processes, and
- prepare your organisation to be able to respond more effectively for its future.

Why Futures?

It is a sign of the degree of acceptance of futures approaches in organisational strategic thinking and planning processes in the first decade of the 21st century that most futurists begin discussions about the future with a 'why futures?' section. The better questions to ask though are: 'why not?' and 'what have you got to lose?'

INTRODUCTION

It is a truism that organisations today exist in environments that are changing rapidly and increasing in complexity. Traditional methods of interpreting and understanding those environments work well when the world is relatively stable. In such environments, an organisation does not necessarily need a strong strategic thinking and planning capacity, since potential futures can be extrapolated with relative certainty, and outcomes are relatively assured.

But, we have not had those sorts of environments since the middle of the 20th century. The environments in which organisations now exist are moving so rapidly and the future is so uncertain that a different approach to strategy development is required. Using futures approaches to enhance your strategy development processes will allow you to enhance the strategic thinking that ultimately informs your strategic plan and ensuing action to create your future.

It will not be easy. Because there are no facts about the future, you will need to convince people who are used to quantitative data that overt processes to think about the future are a valuable addition to strategy development. You will come up against deeply held assumptions about the way strategy **should** be developed, and how your organisation **should** view the world.

Traditional strategy models tend to focus on processes run by planners to develop and implement plans of the here and now, for action to be taken today. Such processes often include words about the future that are written following some mainstream trend analysis, and which are generally included in the Context section of a strategic plan. For example, it can probably be guaranteed that every Australian university strategic plan will have a context section that comments in some way on globalisation, funding, technology, learning and competitiveness.

The existence of this Context section is then seen to provide evidence that the future has been considered. But, while there is much information about the past and the present to be found in trend analysis, there is little tangible information about the future, and there are certainly no future facts that can be quantified as trends. What usually happens in current strategy processes then, is that consideration of the future is based on extrapolations of the past and the present, without any systematic exploration by the whole organisation of what *might* happen. The result is a single future, upon which the organisation 'bets the farm'.

Such a plan built around a single preferred outcome without systematically considering the future is called a default scenario. When the default scenario fails because of an unforeseen changes in the external environment, an organisation tends to enter crisis mode and becomes reactive. One way of avoiding crisis management is to **think** more systematically about the future, and plan to deal with those possible shifts in the external environment. By doing this, an organisation will be better prepared to adapt to this change as it occurs, because it will have already have considered and agreed on alternative strategies in its ongoing planning processes.

How to think systematically about the future is the least understood or analysed element of strategy development, even though that strategy is being developed to allow the organisation to survive and grow into the future.

It is important to remember here that a strategic plan is simply a documented record of agreed actions to achieve a set of goals. It is the end product of the strategy development process, but it is not the whole game. The whole game is about improving the quality of the thinking that goes into the development of strategy that is then implemented through a plan. If we consider strategic planning to be the whole game, we tend to focus on running big planning retreats and workshops and producing glossy plans, without spending a commensurate amount of time on improving the quality of the **thinking** that goes into the development of those plans.

Futures approaches naturally 'belong' to the thinking stage of strategy development and implementation, but this only becomes apparent when strategic thinking, strategic decision making and strategic planning are defined as separate, but interrelated and overlapping domains. Integrating a futures approach into traditional strategic planning models therefore requires not only a understanding of what futures approaches are, but also a fundamental re-conceptualisation of the current strategic planning model itself.

Re-Thinking Strategic Planning

The development of strategy involves three stages: strategic thinking, decision making and planning - that is, *thinking* about future strategy options, *deciding* on options, and *implementing* those options. But, current definitions generally regard 'strategic planning' as subsuming all three stages.

INTRODUCTION

There are basic differences among strategic thinking, decision making and planning. Mintzberg (1994) indicates that *strategic planning* is about taking an articulated goal and turning it into formal, documented action steps to be implemented to achieve agreed outcomes. This sort of activity requires thinking which is analytical, logical, pragmatic and deductive to make sure that actions are implemented, monitored and reported.

By contrast, strategic thinking is about synthesis. Liedtka (1998) suggests that such thinking is intuitive, experimental and necessarily disruptive, and attempts to explore areas beyond logical thinking, in order to develop a vision of an organisation's future. Because information about potential futures is always incomplete, the thinking required for success in this activity needs to be 'synthetical' and inductive, rather than analytical and deductive:

Foresight in an organisational context is best conceived and positioned as an aspect of strategic thinking, which is meant to open up an expanded range of perceptions of the strategic options available, so that strategy making is potential wiser. Strategic thinking is concerned with exploration, often based on limited and patchy information and options, not the steps needed for implementation of actions, which is the realm of strategic planning (Conway and Voros, 2002).

Strategic decision making is the interface between strategic thinking and planning, where directions are set. At this stage, options are assessed, choices examined, decisions made and a destination selected.

Strategic thinking then is about exploring possibilities and options, *strategic decision making* is about setting directions, and *strategic planning* is about implementing actions. Successful strategy needs all three stages. As Wilson (2004) writes, 'there is little to be gained from developing a plan per se. There is everything to be gained from the thinking that lies behind the plan--and the action that follows it'.

Figure 1 show this three level model of strategy development and implementation. It indicates that futures approaches add value to strategy development by strengthening strategic thinking and broadening the generation of future options.

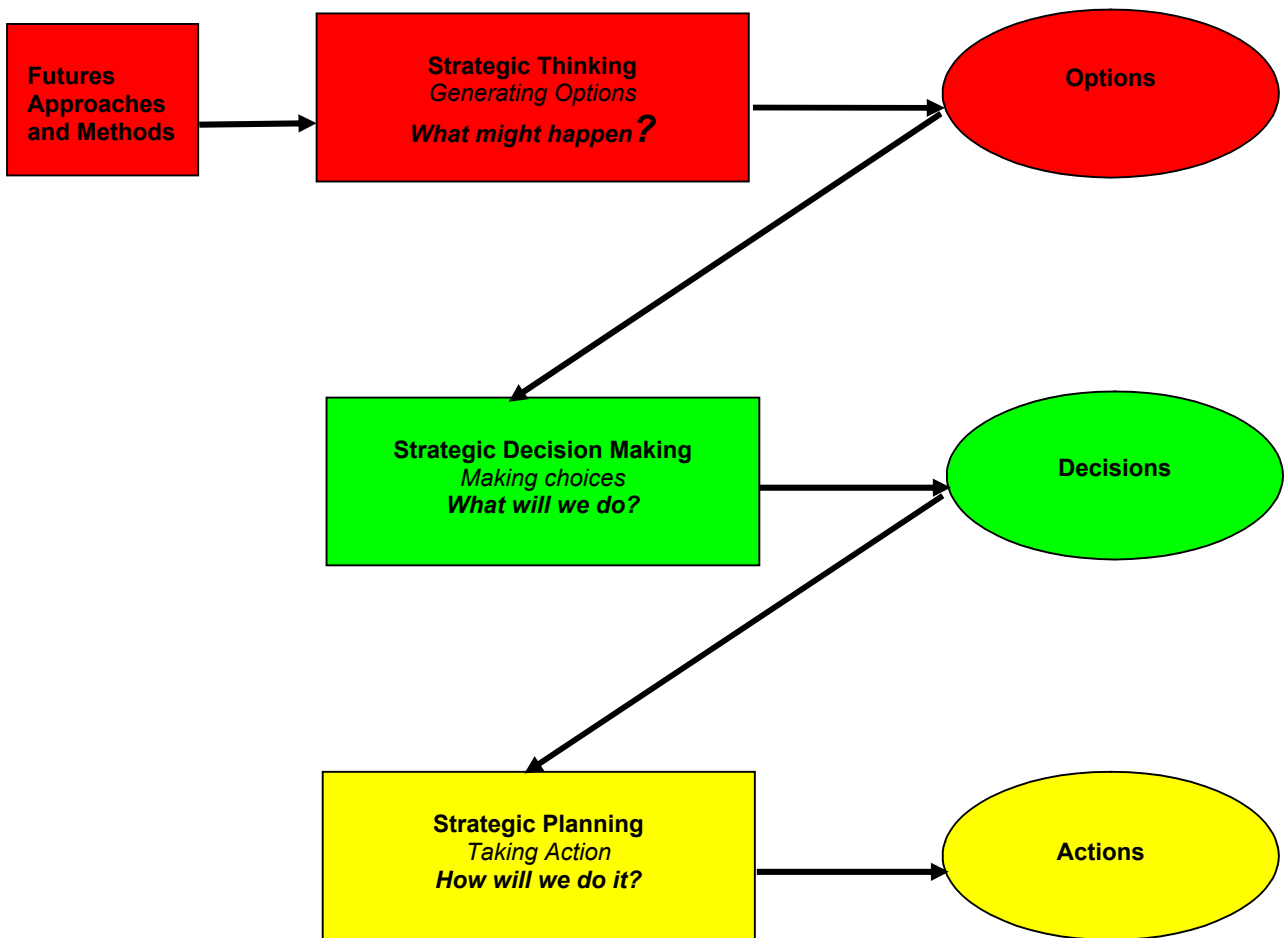


Figure 1: Three Level Strategy Development and Implementation Framework

This framework makes it clear that strategic planning as we generally define it today is a critical element in a broader strategy process that includes consideration of the future as an integral element. Time needs to be spent at each of the three stages to ensure an effective outcome for the organisation.

Building in futures approaches to the strategic thinking stage is the first step to building an organisational foresight capacity. Strategic foresight can be positioned in an organisation as ‘an element of strategic thinking which informs strategy making, which directs strategic planning and action. Care [should be] taken to stress that it does not replace strategic planning but rather enriches the context within which strategy is developed, planned and executed’ (Conway and Voros, 2002).

A Conceptual Framework

Futures work needs to be grounded in a strong conceptual framework ...

The biggest mistake in the implementation of futures work made at my organisation was to jump right in and begin futures work without any clear operational or intellectual framework to guide that work. That, combined with the negative impact of organisational politics, meant that successful implementation was always going to be difficult – but this was only apparent in hindsight! This Chapter provides a conceptual framework upon which you can base the development of your plan to use futures approaches in your organisation.

Futures Concepts

Before we move to the conceptual framework, however, there is a bit of homework to be done. You will need to understand a number of futures concepts that underpin that framework. You need to have a good grasp of what futures work is all about. The [Futures Primer](#) is available on the University Futures website, and if you haven't read it yet, you should before you continue reading this guide.

Treat the Futures Primer as a first step in building your futures knowledge. A little knowledge is indeed dangerous when it comes to futures work. While the University Futures website and this guide provide resources to help you get started in futures work, the best starting point is increasing your own knowledge about the field. This can be done by exploring on your own, or by undertaking a formal course of study. I have done both, and recommend the formal course of study approach.

Once you begin a course of study, you become part of the 'futures community' and have access to a range of people and support that you might not otherwise have. Short courses introduce you to particular tools, but you need to immerse yourself in the futures discourse to build your understanding of its concepts, value and imperatives to run effective futures programs. You can read books about futures work and methods like scenario planning, but it is unwise to then decide you can run a futures process successfully. It looks easy enough, but there is an emerging, strong intellectual basis for futures in which you need to immerse yourself first.

The [Knowledge Base of Futures Studies](#) is a good starting point. It will introduce you to both the futures field and futures concepts and the work of some of the major futurists.

A Conceptual Framework

[Richard Slaughter](#) (2004) and [Ken Wilber](#) (2000) have provided different frameworks that, when combined, create a strong conceptual framework for thinking about how to introduce futures work into an organisation.

Slaughter's Five Levels

Richard Slaughter is an internationally known futurist, whose work focuses on the development of a social foresight capacity. He has been instrumental in establishing the concept of integral futures, which uses the work of Ken Wilber as a base. Slaughter has developed a framework to understand how social foresight develops so that society can move from a past-driven to a futures responsive culture. This five stage framework recognises that the development of a social foresight capacity will not occur in the near future, but that it can be built up over a period of time.

Table 1 shows these five stages in the development of a social foresight capacity.

Levels		Indicators
Level 5		<i>Social capacity for futures</i> as an emergent property Long term thinking becomes a social norm
Level 4		Futures processes, projects and structures embodied in a variety of <i>applications</i> Futures routinely applied in most organisations
Level 3		<i>Futures tools and methodologies</i> increase analytical power Widespread use of standard futures tools and methods
Level 2		<i>Futures concepts</i> and ideas enable a futures discourse to develop Futures concepts and ideas become influential via discourse
Level 1	<i>Raw capacities and perceptions</i> of the human brain-mind system	Unreflective use of forward thinking in daily life of individuals

© Richard Slaughter

Table 1: Stages in the Development of Social Foresight

Level 1 is where foresight is often sub-conscious, and occurs with little reflection or consideration of the processes being used to make decisions about the future. Recognising the capacity is the first step in the development of social foresight. This is the level of the individual, where futures is a solitary activity.

Level 2 is reached when futures approaches begin to be discussed by individuals who recognise their own foresight capacity. As more and more people become familiar with the concepts, the validity of futures work grows and a futures discourse develops.

Level 3 occurs when organisations are using futures tools and methodologies in a range of ways.

Level 4 is reached when an organisation routinely uses futures approaches to underpin its strategy development.

Level 5 is reached when an organisational foresight capacity has developed, and long-term thinking to underpin strategy development is the norm. Futures is now overt, collective and supported by systemic processes in all organisations, government, business and education.

Wilber's Four Quadrants

Ken Wilber is often described as perhaps the most comprehensive philosophical thinker of our times. His work in field of human consciousness is based on his integral theory, a bringing together of the world's great historical, psychological, philosophical and spiritual traditions.

Wilber's (2000) four quadrant framework provides a model for developing a more holistic approach to strategy development that includes consideration of individuals' thoughts, values, beliefs and motivations as a valid and necessary element. Wilber contends that his model, within the context of his integral theory of consciousness, provides a comprehensive way of viewing reality that integrates both internal and external perspectives on both an individual and collective level.

Wilber's framework consists of a two-by-two matrix - interior and exterior and individual and collective - which creates four quadrants to explore: interior/individual, exterior/individual, interior/collective and exterior/collective as shown in Figure 2.

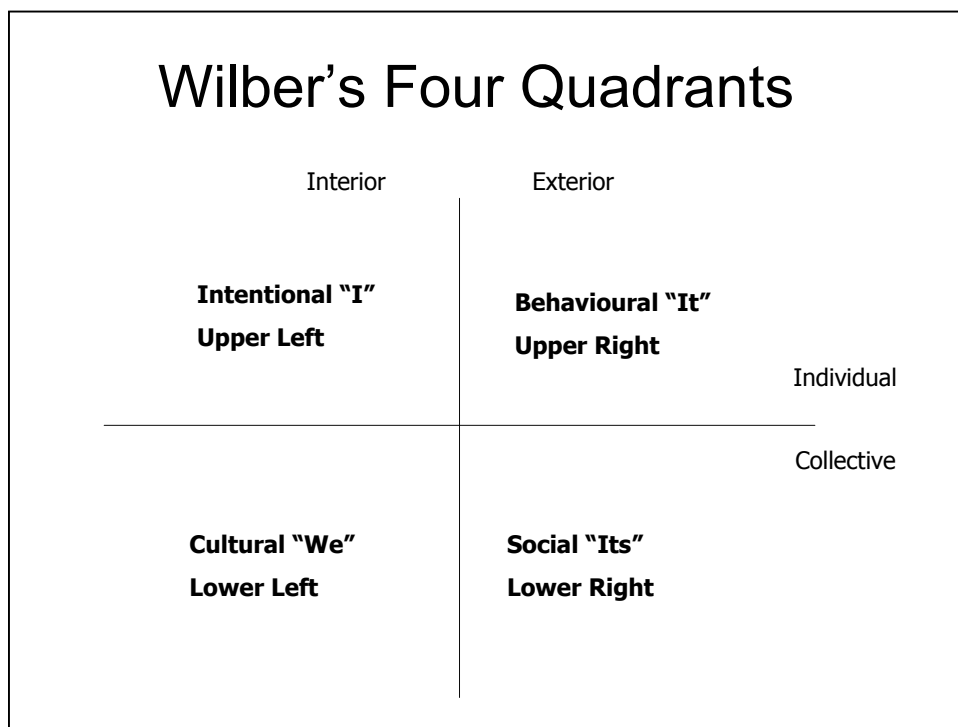


Figure 2: Wilber's Four Quadrant Model

Wilber's integral theory is significantly more complex than just the four quadrants, and consists of a range of concepts such as holons, lines or streams, states, waves and types found in each quadrant (see Slaughter, 2004 or <http://www.kenwilber.com>). Each quadrant also has a different type of 'truth' or validity claim that relates to different types of knowledge held in each quadrant. Accessing left hand quadrant knowledge always involves interpretation, while right hand quadrant knowledge is empirical.

The **Upper Left** quadrant is the subjective realm, the region of individual consciousness, thoughts, values, motivations, ideas and images. The only person who can 'know' this realm is the individual. For others to begin to understand the upper left quadrant of an individual, a process of 'engaging' with that individual needs to occur. The validity claim in this quadrant is *truthfulness* to the individual.

The **Lower Left** quadrant is the cultural, inter-subjective realm, where only the group can provide interpretation of meaning. This is the space where the 'rules of the game' by which individuals come together and co-exist are shared. The validity claim in this quadrant is *justness*.

The **Upper Right** quadrant is the objective realm of individual and organisational behaviour, with a validity claim of *truth*, while the **Lower Right** quadrant is the inter-objective social realm, the world external to the individual or the organisation. The validity claim here is *functional fit*. The quadrants are interdependent, and tensions exist between them, such as tensions between individual and organisational or cultural values.

Bringing Slaughter and Wilber Together

While Slaughter's model deals with social futures, it can be adapted to describe the stages of development of organisational futures. His five levels indicate clearly that developing a futures capacity will not occur without some effort, and without the involvement of many people. Indeed, Slaughter's model makes the critical observation that an ability to think about the future – that is, to develop a foresight capacity – is innate and held by everyone. In an organisational sense, this means that all staff have the ability to think strategically about the future, but it needs structured processes to build this strategic thinking capacity.

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

And, while not developed to analyse organisational strategy processes, the value of Wilber’s framework lies in its basic premise that to understand how the future might affect organisational strategy, all four quadrants need to be considered. The framework validates the value of data sourced from the interior/individual quadrant (that is, what goes on in our heads and our consciousness) as an equally valid source of input into strategy processes as data located in the right hand quadrants. Indeed, Wilber suggests that without exploring all four quadrants, understanding – and in this case, resulting strategy, is always flawed.

Bringing Slaughter’s levels and Wilber’s quadrants together into a single conceptual model is shown in Table 2.


		Slaughter	Wilber	Organisational Indicators
Emergence of organisational futures capacity 	Level 5: organisational futures is the norm		Lower Left Quadrant: organisational culture	A defining characteristic of organisational culture is long term thinking underpinned by futures approaches
	Level 4: the use of futures approaches is routine		Lower Right Quadrant: organisational strategy	Strategic decisions about how the organisation ‘fits’ into its environment are routinely developed using futures approaches
	Level 3: futures methods begin to be used		Upper Right Quadrant: organisational behaviour	Staff who have recognised their innate futures capacity begin to develop a futures discourse, and then to seek ways to use futures methods in their organisation
	Level 2: a futures discourse emerges			
	Level 1: recognition that futures is an innate human capacity		Upper Left Quadrant: individual behaviour	Individual staff recognise their own futures capacity

Table 2: Organisational Futures Conceptual Framework View 1

Figure 3 shows how the conceptual framework can also interpreted using Wilber's quadrants.

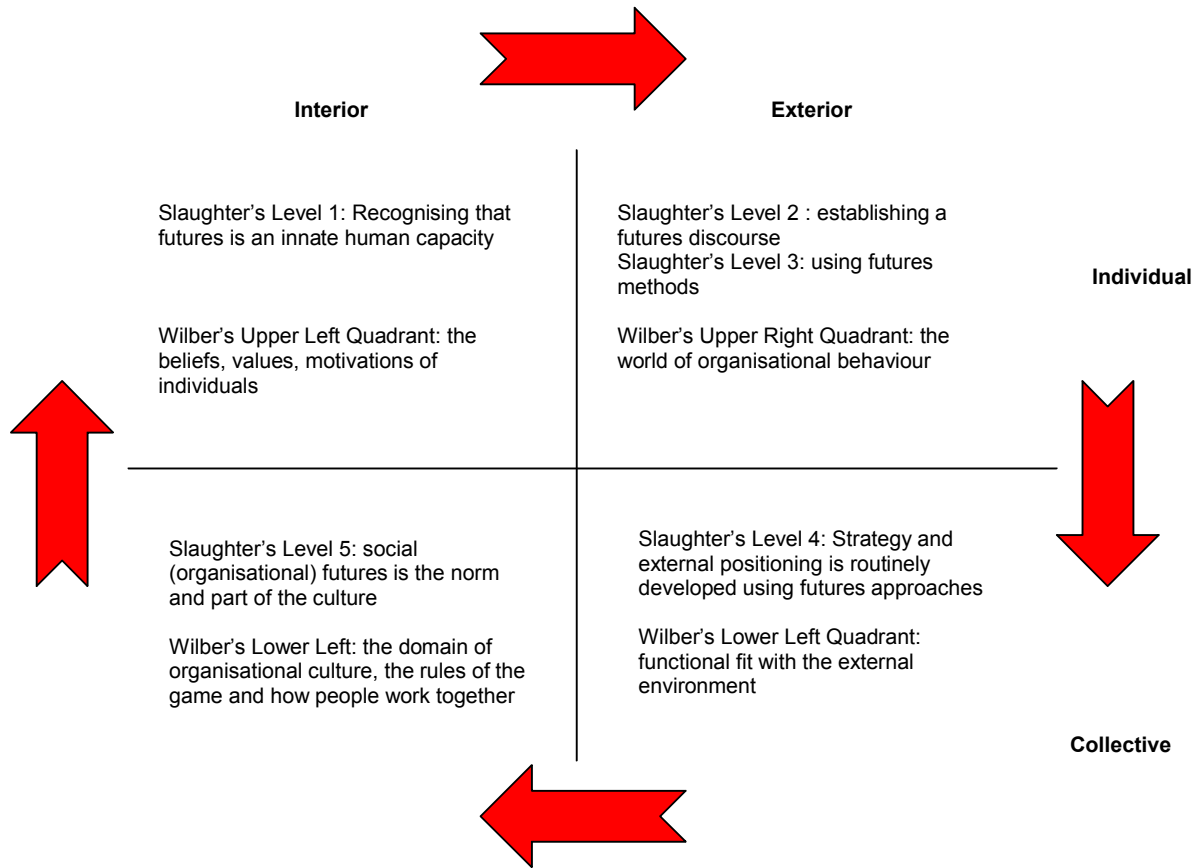


Figure 3: Organisational Futures Conceptual Framework View 2

The development of a strategic foresight capacity is not linear, and stages overlap and are interdependent, as indicated by the cyclical nature of the arrows. From my experience, the general flow of development, however, is:

- individuals first overtly recognise their own futures capacities and are supported to develop those capacities and build this understanding over time,
- then, processes are put in place to enable an organisational discourse or conversation about futures work to develop, which enables the use of futures methods and tools in projects, so that
- over time, the use of futures work becomes routine, and
- finally, organisational culture is underpinned by the long-term thinking generated from using futures approaches which, in turn, reinforces the need for individuals participating in that culture to reflect on their own foresight capacities.

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

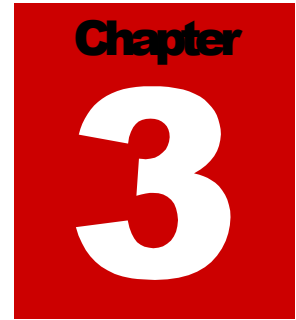
Using this framework, strategy development needs to take into account the following four 'types' of data:

- **Upper Left:** Individual/Interior: the inner motivations, beliefs and values of individual staff, where images of the future are generated and held – that is, the staff of an organisation,
- **Upper Right:** Individual/Exterior: how people in universities behave, and organisational processes where images of the future are contested in strategy processes, and where preferred futures are implemented –that is, organisational processes and behaviour,
- **Lower Left:** Collective/Interior: the culture of an organisation, the 'rules' that determine whose image of the future is adopted by the university – that is, the cultural realm that will determine the likely success of a strategy; only individuals who come together as a group can define culture, and
- **Lower Right:** Collective/Exterior: the university's positioning in the external environment as demonstrated by its 'official future' – that is, its work to scan the environment and its plan to 'fit' into that environment.

Models and frameworks such as the ones discussed in this Chapter should not be reified, and are intended only to help you understand the scope of the issues that need to be considered when using futures approaches. The stages and quadrants are not independent, and overlap and influence each other, and so must be considered as a whole when you are designing processes.

The value of bringing Wilber and Slaughter together, however, is that it highlights the need to ensure that:

- the development of an organisational foresight capacity occurs in a staged way, starting with the individual, and
- each level and quadrant is addressed so that no critical information is 'missed' or ignored in the design of processes.



Getting Started

Before going ‘live’ with futures processes, there are some preliminary steps to complete ...

Before going ‘live’ into the organisation with futures processes, there are a series of preliminary steps that you should take to ensure you have a firm foundation for your work. You need to be aware of your own positioning in the organisation, you need to understand organisational culture and politics, and you need to know what you outcomes you want to achieve.

In Wilber’s four quadrant model (see Chapter 2), you need to understand:

- what you hope to get out of your work to use futures approaches in your organisation, and understand how you see the world (that is, how you interpret what goes on in your organisation): **Upper Left Quadrant**,
- how to design and adapt organisational processes to integrate futures approaches, and how to design effective projects to include relevant stakeholders: **Upper Right Quadrant**,
- what information will need to be obtained and analyse to inform strategic thinking in your organisation: **Lower Right Quadrant**, and
- how organisational culture might affect your implementation plan; you will need to identify who will need to be involved if you are to be successful, and understand clearly what will work in your organisation, and what won’t: **Lower Left Quadrant**.

The key here is to remember that you will develop ‘deeper’ and more effective processes if you develop depth in your own thinking and self-reflection about futures approaches.

Your Positioning: 10 Questions

Andy Hines, a US futurist, has written an article which poses 10 questions every organisational futurist needs to be able to answer. The article is available from [Hine's](#) website, and I would recommend it as compulsory reading for anyone wanting to ‘do’ futures work in organisations. I’ve summarised the 10 questions below.

1 How are you going to spend your time?

Are you going to focus on process, content, or transformation (changing minds)? My view is that you should focus on 90% process and 10% content to begin with, and bring in transformation only when you have established a base in the organisation. You might never reach the transformation stage. Ultimately, futures work is about changing the way we think about the future, but transformation at both an individual and organisational level is difficult and takes time.

2 What is your positioning?

This question is about understanding your position in the organisation. Hines describes a spectrum ranging from an inside focus – you work within the organisation, to planners, to ‘insider-outsiders’ and finally at the outside focus, you have a public voice for your organisation. Somewhere down towards the insider end of the spectrum is the option of working in ‘stealth mode’ which is something that needs to be considered at times when there are significant obstacles to developing a futures program.

3 What is your leadership style?

Hines writes that every futurist has to be a leader of some kind, and provides another spectrum from leader-oriented to participant-oriented and from coercive to democratic styles. I think that futures leadership builds over time – until you are confident in your understanding of futures work, I would not try and lead from the front – but that’s where you should aim to be eventually!

4 What is your framework?

There are three broad areas in which futurists work in organisations: (i) the strategic; (ii) the creative; and (iii) the educational. The first has to do with informing organisational strategy and decision making, the second with generating new ideas, and the third with a general information role about the future. Your futures program will need to be clear about which of these areas it addresses.

5 Who is your audience?

Hines describes four organisational types: (i) true believers who will follow you anywhere; (ii) bridge builders, who understand the organisation and its politics; (iii) fence-sitters, who are prepared to support you as long as there is something in it for them; and (iv) laggards, who will never support you. Aim your futures message at the bridge builders, who can help you get futures implemented in the organisation.

6 Who is in your network?

As with most organisational work, it is important to build both internal and external networks. This is particularly true with futures work, and connecting with the futures community is worth the effort. The major futures associations are the World Futures Society, the World Future Studies Federation, and the Association of Professional Futurists.

7 What is in your toolkit?

This is the methods section. Hines recommends you have a relatively broad toolkit of methods, so that you are apply to work in different contexts with different groups of people. Start with one or two methods and build your expertise in these first, and then work to introduce a broader range of approaches.

8 What is your guiding orientation?

At what level of depth do you want to work? In futures work, you can work at the 'pop' level, which is a mostly superficial, techno wow type approach, but which does gets people thinking about the future. Deeper is the problem-oriented approach, which is where most organisational work takes place, and focuses on decision making and options in the near term future. Yet deeper is critical futures (the realm of meaning and paradigms) and epistemological futures work (where the foundations of social order are explored), which need to be used with caution in organisations and delayed until the organisation is ready for them.

9 What are your purposes?

Are you going to focus on being more creative, being able to deal with change better, being more futures focused, or thinking more deeply and systematically. You need to decide what you are trying to do before you do it.

10 What are your intended uses?

Are your desired outcomes to do with improving the quality of information to inform strategic decision making, looking for issues that need to be addressed, focusing on problem solving or simply increasing the level of knowledge about futures work in your organisation?

Start-Up

Once you have done your own personal audit using Hines' 10 questions, you are ready to consider how best to set up your organisational futures program (this section is based on work by Richard Slaughter, Foresight International).

Step 1 Consider what sort of organisational futures capacity is most appropriate for your organisation.

Before any sort of structure is set up to 'house' your futures work, some initial thinking needs to occur about what sort of organisational futures capacity is most appropriate for the organisation. There are no set models here - structures and processes will be organisation specific to take account of differences in cultures, markets, and existing structures and processes. But, you need to be clear about why you are trying to introduce futures approaches into your strategy development and planning processes, and what outcomes you are trying to achieve.

Step 2 Determine what sort of futures information already exists in the organisation.

It is likely that there are already overt and tacit processes in the organisation that collect information about the external environment, so an audit of this information and ways in which it is used is often useful to identify both strengths and gaps in that information. You also need to consider which staff may have knowledge that will be useful in your futures work, and work out ways to involve those staff in your processes.

Step 3 Consider whether they are already staff in the organisation who are suited to futures work.

Using internal capacity is one way to establish a futures function, but with this approach, care needs to be taken to assess the capabilities and expertise of existing staff, since people working in futures need to enjoy working with people, and know how to work across an organisation. And, not everyone is suited to this sort of work, since it does challenge long held ways of organisational operating and thinking, on both an individual and organisational level.

Step 4 Establish clear ground rules and expectations.

This was something we did not do well in the university futures program in which I was involved. There were mixed understandings about what we were trying to do and confusion about how the futures work linked with our existing strategic planning processes. If you are doing this as part of your job, or if a specific futures unit is being established, you need to be very clear about:

- the role of futures work and unit, and who will be involved and why,
- what resources are being expended to fund the set-up costs of the program,
- how futures work will be communicated to the organisation and beyond,
- what methodologies will be used and why,
- how the output will be used and how it will link to existing processes, and
- how performance and results will be assessed.

Not every organisation will have the resources to set up an in-house futures unit, even if a commitment to develop a strategic foresight capacity has been made.

Slaughter (1999:290-91) suggests that there are four ways to establish a futures program in organisations:

- (i) upgrade an existing capacity,
- (ii) create a new capacity, and
- (iii) buy in external expertise, or
- (iv) a combination of the above.

Upgrading an existing capacity was how my futures work began, where my role in planning was expanded to include futures work. If you choose this option, you need to ensure that the existing staff are well trained in futures approaches as a first step.

Creating a new capacity is probably the most expensive option, but allows you to tailor the structure and processes to your needs. It also allows you to ensure that the staff brought in have the right levels of knowledge and expertise.

Buying in external expertise can be useful, and there are many futures consultants who would be able to work with you to establish the function. But, in this case, you need to ensure that knowledge transfer is part of the agreement. Likewise, there are many scanning services that would be able to provide data and information which you could introduce to your strategy development processes without having to establish a formal function. But, if you take this road, you will need to ensure that you have the scanning function included in your position description or role statement, and you will need to have some funding to enable you to subscribe to scanning services. You will be able to find limited information from many sites, but the detailed and tailored services cost money.

Combining all three to create a fourth approach is probably the best way to go, but that decision will depend on your funding and your rationale for wanting to establish a futures program.

Once you have completed your personal and organisational audits, you are ready to begin designing the processes you will use in your futures work.

Doing Futures Work

Having a methodological framework to guide the design of your futures work is critical.

When you have completed your personal and organisation audits, your next stage is to design the processes you will use to 'do' futures work. But, how do you start doing futures work?

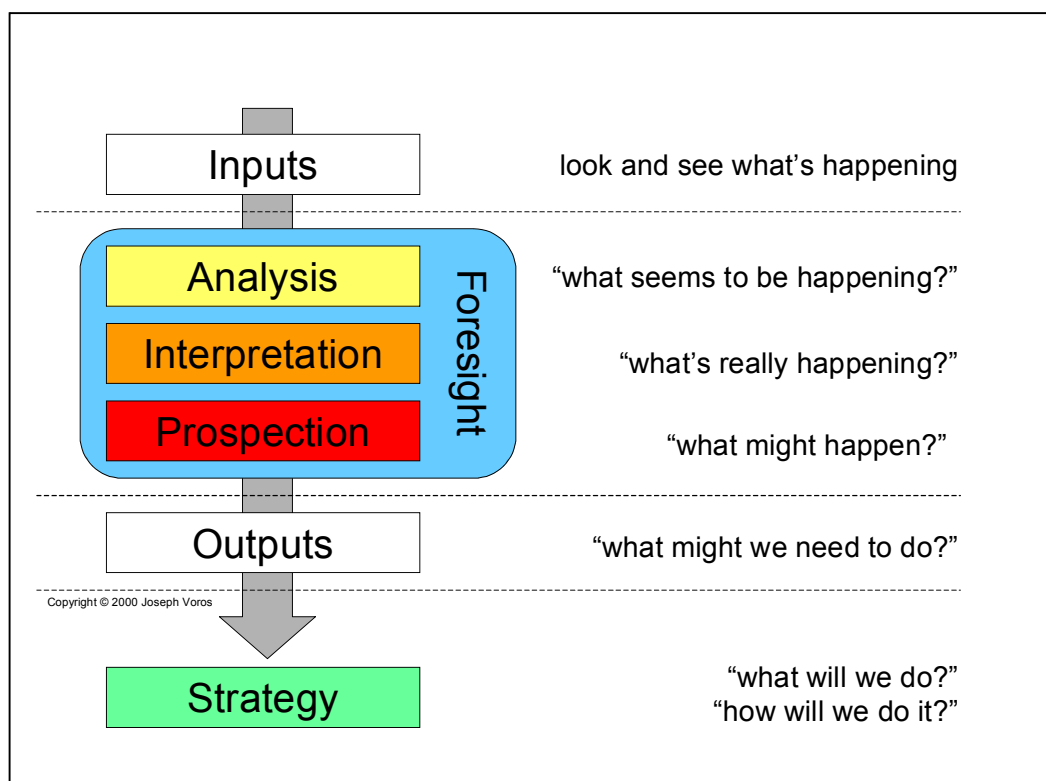
Designing the futures processes you want to use, and linking them to existing strategic planning practices can be one of the most exciting stages in futures work. Here you are putting into action all the planning and thinking you have been doing. By now, you have worked out:

- what sort of information you need to gather from both staff and from scanning the external environment,
- who needs to be involved in the processes to increase their chances of success,
- what you want to achieve, and
- how you are going to communicate the futures program to the organisation.

Generic Foresight Process

The Generic Foresight Process, developed by Joseph Voros (2003), is a good place to start when you are designing futures processes. Figure 4 shows the model which consists of five stages leading to the development of strategy:

- **Inputs:** information about the external environment, scanned and recorded by the organisation,
- **Analysis:** work undertaken within the organisation to tailor the information for the organisation's purpose,
- **Interpretation:** interpreting the information in terms of the organisation's context by asking the question "what does this mean for us?",
- **Prospection:** the step in the strategy process most often neglected, where the information is used to explore potential futures for the organisation, and
- **Outputs:** the product of a futures exercise.



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Figure 4: Generic Foresight Process

Figure 5 shows what happens when you combine the Generic Foresight Model with the three level strategy development framework described in the Introduction to this guide. Foresight activities form the basis of strategic thinking, with the output informing strategic decision making and action.

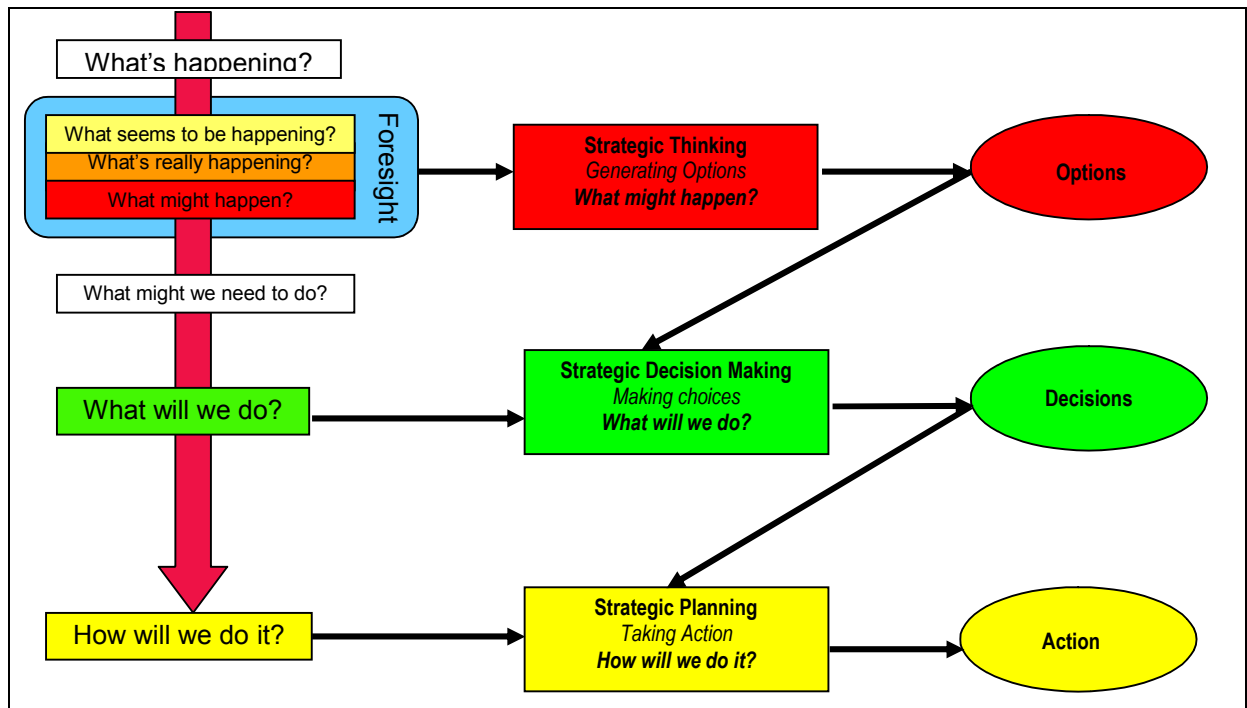


Figure 5: Integrating Generic Foresight Model and Three Level Strategy Framework

It is very important to recognise that while futures work informs strategic thinking, it does not replace strategic planning. Very different questions are asked at each stage, and you will still need to develop a strategic plan to define and document action. After using futures approaches, however, that plan will be underpinned by stronger thinking and the consideration of potential futures, which should make it a more robust plan when it is implemented in the organisation and the external environment.

So, what does that mean in reality? If you take the five stages of futures work in turn, examples of what you can do follow.

Input: set up an environmental scanning system and database. This might be an in-house operation, or you may pay for a scanning organisation to provide a tailored service. Seek information from staff as well as scanning the external environment to identify trends and drivers of change – their views form an equally valid input into strategic thinking.

Analysis: trend analysis is a well known method here, but emerging issues analysis is probably more useful because it identifies the new developments that may end up having a significant impact on the organisation. Traditional trend analysis does not capture these sorts of issues.

Interpretation: at this stage, the focus is on interpretation of information for your organisation's context. You can collect a lot of information, some of which will be critical, while some will be less so. What is important at this stage, however, is to not dismiss information without careful exploration – what seems unimportant today may be very important in the future. You should also involve people at this stage who are sceptics and who can help surface the 'undiscussable' assumptions that underpin organisational action. For the best result, these people should be from outside universities and the world of higher education.

Prospection: scenario planning is a well tested method, but make sure you do lots of research about how to implement it **before** doing this yourself. My advice here is: please don't just read a book and then run a scenario planning exercise – it will be fun, but it will be ad hoc and superficial. It would be better to get some formal training in the method, or employ a good consultant, or both. It looks deceptively simple to do, but the potential enhancement of thinking that can emerge from scenario planning is often wasted by inexperienced practitioners.

Output: the form of your output will depend on at what stage you are working. Environmental scanning reports can be in the form of one page briefs or detailed reports. You can produce workshop reports, videos and glossy publications. But, the key criteria is that people who did not work through the futures process must be able to understand the nature of the **thinking** that went on during that process. So, it's not just about the output, but also the quality of the input into the thinking and the analysis that occurred that needs to be recorded. You may need to produce several outputs to suit different groups.

Using Wilber to Design Inclusive Futures Processes

Another way of viewing the process of doing futures work is to use Ken Wilber's four quadrant model as shown in Figure 6. Some indicative methods are also provided.

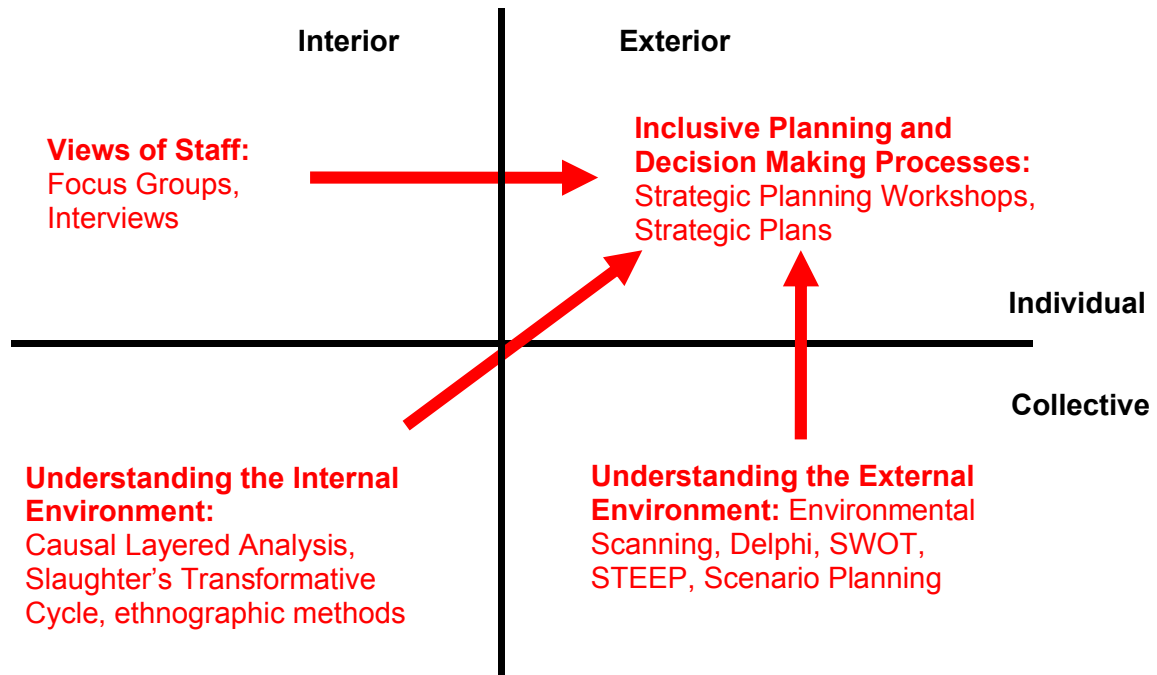


Figure 6 : Doing Futures Work Using Wilber's Four Quadrants

Traditional strategic planning processes do a good job of understanding the past and present external environment and translating that into planning and decision making activities. These traditional processes focus on the right hand, empirical quadrants. But, understanding the nature of organisational culture and the views and motivations of individual staff (beyond asking for feedback on draft plans) are not generally included as separate steps in traditional processes. If you don't understand how staff are thinking about the future, and you don't overtly take into account organisational culture – as described by the staff – you risk problems of alignment during your implementation phase. If you tap into the left hand quadrants, you will have expanded your knowledge about your organisation and to how to effectively and successfully introduce strategy that works.

Each quadrant lends itself to particular methods or processes. The **Upper Left** quadrant needs engagement with staff directly to obtain their views about the future of an organisation. While staff are usually given an opportunity to comment on draft plans, it makes more sense if their views about the future can be tapped at the beginning of the process as a major input. It is staff who will implement plans and unless they can see their future in the organisational plan, their engagement and ownership of that plan will be compromised.

While the Wilber view of the world suggests that staff views should be sought in one-on-one interviews, that is unlikely to be practical in the real world of organisational planning. But, focus groups and surveys are neither difficult nor costly to organise and can provide rich data. Staff input can be used in two ways:

- (i) as an input into the planning process itself; and/or
- (ii) as a benchmark with which to assess the likelihood of success of a particular strategy.

If you have some idea of what staff think about the future, then you will have some idea about how to successfully implement a strategy, and what issues you might need to address during implementation to take into account staff views. It seems logical to want to ensure you don't spend a lot of time developing a plan only to see it fail because it is implemented poorly. Taking the left hand quadrant into account during the design of your strategy process will help avoid poor implementation.

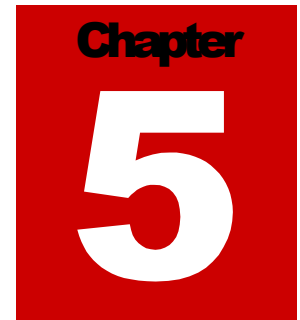
The **Lower Left** quadrant focuses on ensuring that organisational culture is taken into account when you do futures. This seems straight forward enough, but unless you ensure that you have processes that allow those organisational 'undiscussables' to be discussed, you may again face implementation issues. [Causal Layered Analysis](#), for example, allows an 'issue' to be explored in depth, and then to be re-created in a more positive and shared way.

The **Lower Right** quadrant is the world of environmental scanning, SWOT and STEEP, trend analysis and many, many consultancies. When this is done well, it provides extraordinary input into futures work. When it is done poorly – particularly in areas where expert knowledge is involved – the futures project risks failure. The need for high quality scanning and information about the external environment is critical.

The **Upper Right** quadrant is where the actual planning process occurs – the workshops, discussions, and documentation. It is a well understood realm, again with too many consultancies to count. The same caveats apply. It needs to be done well to succeed.

As already indicated, all four quadrants overlap and depend on each other, but you need to address all four when you use futures approaches in your organisation.

The key here is to remember that you will develop ‘deeper’ more effective processes if you develop depth in your own thinking and self-reflection.



Some Possible Challenges

You will always encounter challenges on your journey to use futures approaches in organisations that are focused on the present...

Futures work would be easy if, when you started talking about what it involves, people instantly 'got it'. They won't. You will face a number of challenges and obstacles on your journey to strengthen your strategy processes. The exact nature of these challenges will depend on your organisation and where it is 'at' in terms of its leadership, management and strategic planning processes. If you have a leader who is open to staff input, then you have a better chance than if you have a leader who always knows best, or worse still, is always right! If your strategic planning processes are fixed and run in the same way every year, then your chances of integrating futures approaches will be lower than if you already have in place a process that acknowledges the need to have flexible plans to respond to rapidly changing external environments.

But, no matter what your starting point is, it is worth persevering to start using futures approaches. All organisations can benefit from thinking more overtly and systematically about their possible futures. You will, however, run up against organisational politics, closed minds, egos and you will hit the wall of deeply held assumptions about the world and the future of your organisation. So you must take care to not only plan your futures program carefully, but to be ready to deal with objections and criticisms before they are voiced.

This Chapter provides you with an overview of a number of areas in which you might face some challenges and suggests how you might overcome them. Suggestions are marked like this:



so you can identify them easily.

Organisational Positioning

Who brings futures to your organisation will most likely determine where your futures work will be positioned. Ideally, you need to be working in the planning area to be able to have the most influence, and so that an environmental scanning function can be established that will provide input in organisational strategy processes.

But, remember that you can begin 'doing' futures work at any level in the organisation. Futures is not a niche activity – it is something anyone can start to do at any level of the organisation. For futures work to be effective in terms of strategy development, however, means that activity is best positioned in a corporate department.

As an individual, the best step to start with is environmental scanning – gathering information about the external environment that is relevant to your internal unit and job. While you could start doing futures work 'on the side', it is obviously preferable to get the work agreed to and supported by your manager, particularly so that it is clear how your output will be used in your unit. This, of course, is easy to write in a guide such as this. But you have nothing to lose by asking permission to voluntarily undertake a task which will improve the information base of your unit. In these days of data-driven decision making, what more could you ask for?



Use the Viable Systems Model to help you consider where to position your futures program in your organisation. See Peter Hayward's article "Facilitating Foresight: Where the Foresight Function is Placed in Organisations" (*Foresight*, 6 (1): 19-30) as a starting point. It's a little complex but worth persevering with, as it highlights the need for futures functions to be both independent to avoid the influence of organisational politics, but also well connected with the organisation's planning processes.

Language

The language of futures is quite alien to the language of organisations that have not used these approaches before, and seems to trigger not only questions about crystal balls, as well as some bad taste jokes as well. When I worked in one university which was using the term 'foresight', I must have heard every joke that included a word beginning with 'fore', most of which were told to me by Deans and senior academic managers.

SOME POSSIBLE CHALLENGES

Given that at the time, I was new to the job, and foresight was new to the university, knowing when to stop laughing at the jokes was a critical decision. If the senior managers weren't taking futures seriously at the beginning, then I had a hard job ahead of me to convince them of its value.

Language is critical. Make sure your language is clear and unequivocal so that your message is equally clear and unequivocal.



Launch your futures work only when you have your communication strategy in place that explains clearly what futures work is, and how it will be of value to the institution.

Maintaining Support at the Top

You need a vocal and strong champion who won't let your futures work be ignored, and who will follow-through on implementation – that is, the Vice-Chancellor or the CEO is a critical player. If it was the Vice-Chancellor who brought futures work to your institution, this will be an easier task than if you have to convince him or her that futures is a good idea.

So...ensuring the Vice-Chancellor or CEO has a clear understanding of futures and what its value is the first step.

Next, you will need to spend time with senior executive staff first – convince them first – by taking them through a futures process to demonstrate its value.

You will need to continue to provide services and training for senior staff over time to maintain their support. Note here though, that 'training' may not be the best word to use, as one reaction I got was that "I think about the future everyday, and I don't need you to teach me how to do that". People in senior positions have got there because they are able to demonstrate certainty and decisiveness in decision making. Accepting that they can't be decisive about the future can be quite threatening.

Building and maintaining support at the top, therefore, is both a critical start-up step, as well as a continuing task.



Factor in sufficient time in your plan to introduce futures approaches to ensure that you have people in key positions in the organisation supporting you.

Organisational Context

This one is no surprise. You will need to use futures approaches in ways that suit your organisation and its culture. The processes you decide to run will need to be tailored to the needs of the unit you are working with, and their needs. You will need to work out how to add value for different people in different organisational contexts.

Only you understand the true nature of your organisation. If you have only been there a short time, then talk to people who have been there a long time. How do things get done? Who really makes the decisions? Who do you have to have on side for a new idea to get accepted? You will need to do your homework here, if you aren't able to answer these sorts of questions yourself.



The power of futures work has to compete with the power of people's egos and personal positionings, ambitions and animosities. Ensure that you take organisational politics and relationships into account in designing your futures program.

People

Choose the people who will lead and be involved in your futures program with care. You need to have people who have established goodwill across the institution in their previous roles. Credibility is critical because the concept of futures work will probably new, and at the opposite end of the planning spectrum to the traditional strategic planning approach used in many institutions.

You may find that staff at the 'grass-roots' are more open to exploring futures, and how it can be used to enhance their planning. Seek out "friends of futures" who are in key positions across the organisation, and work with them to build support to run some processes to build credibility and demonstrate value.

Look for evidence of 'glazed eye syndrome'. If, when you start talking to someone about futures work for the first time, you see their eyes glaze over and/or a slight smile or smirk appears on their face, and/or they try to shift the conversation to a new topic, or end the meeting abruptly, then you know that this person is not going to be a futures champion. Depending on where this person sits in the organisation, however, you will need to decide whether or not you need to convince them, or whether they can be left alone.



Organisations are made up of people. You will need to work with people and convince them of the value of using futures approaches. You will need to understand not only the organisational roles of the people you are working with, but you will also need to assess how they might view futures work, so that you can tailor your message for them.

Implementation

Accept at the outset that implementation of a futures program is going to take time. The [UK Government Foresight Project](#) has been running since the mid-1990s, and has been through a number of changes in its format and focus as its value becomes apparent.

You will need to develop a strong project plan that defines how your futures work will be implemented, and what methods will be used. The generic foresight model is one way to structure implementation – start with an environmental scanning function, supported by some ‘what is futures’ workshops as a way of raising awareness. Then, move on to running futures processes as a second stage. You will need to be very clear about expected outcomes at each stage, so there is no confusion about what you are doing. One senior manager told me that they didn’t do any strategic planning one year, because I was going to ‘do’ foresight for them – I learned a very clear lesson then about ensuring expectations are in alignment across the organisation.

A good communication strategy is critical. You need clarity about purpose, aims and terminology from the beginning, and you need to be able to answer the questions:

- What is wrong with what we do now?
- How will this help with my day-to-day work?
- Why should we spend our time and energy on this, when it’s just another fad?

You will need to clear about differentiating between content and process. While futurists can provide content in the form of trends and environmental scanning output, the beliefs and ideas of staff need to drive content and how it is interpreted. If you run a process that uses ‘ready made’ content, you run the risk of alienating staff, who will not be able to ‘see’ themselves in the futures being explored. As a rule of thumb, it will be your job to provide the process; let the content come from the staff participants.



Implementing futures work will be difficult. Ultimately, you are endeavouring to change the way people think about the future, which involves shifting mindsets and changing worldviews. It will take time and persistence.

Thinking is Work Too

Finally, because futures work involves people coming together to surface and share their ideas about the future in order to develop a shared preferred future for the organisation, you will need to convince people to take time out from their desks. Remember that futures work belongs to the strategic thinking stage of strategy development, so perhaps your biggest challenge is to convince people that **thinking is work too**.



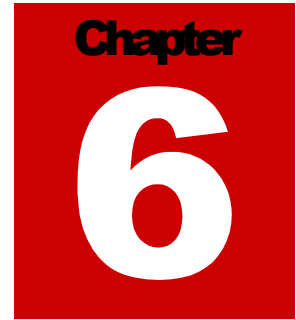
It will be easier to convince people to take time out to think strategically if they can see how the outcomes will benefit them in their day-to-day work. Make sure you have defined the value of futures work at every stage of your implementation.

Worldviews

You will encounter what I call the worldview wall, when you run up against deeply held assumptions that can be very difficult to shift. The 'glazed eye syndrome' referred to earlier is a sign that you are bumping up against a worldview wall. But, you also need to be continuously and consciously aware of your worldview, and how that is influencing action you are taking. While you will need to be designing processes that work for your organisation, you need to understand how those processes are being influenced by your own beliefs, ideas and motivations about the future.



Make sure you build in time for self-reflection about how the implementation of your futures work is going, both in terms of processes and changes to how you are thinking.



Measuring Outcomes

In these days of data driven decision making, we need a strong case to support organisational investment in futures work ...

The need to be able to justify the continued existence of any organisational program is now a given – if the program is not seen to be ‘adding value’ to the organisation and its core business, its existence will be challenged.

Generally, each time you run a futures exercise, you should run an evaluation process as well. You need to be able to measure both responses to the specific activity and the growth in understanding about futures work over time.

A set of Futures Program Benchmarks is provided in this Chapter. Assessment against these benchmarks should be undertaken both during the implementation of futures work, and after it has been operational for some time, and would be best used in the context of a self-assessment process. The benchmarks are in the form of good practice statements and provide targets which can be used to develop an improvement plan for your futures program. It is possible to create a more quantitative approach to these benchmarks, by allocating a score against each benchmark on a 10 point scale, as shown in Figure 7:

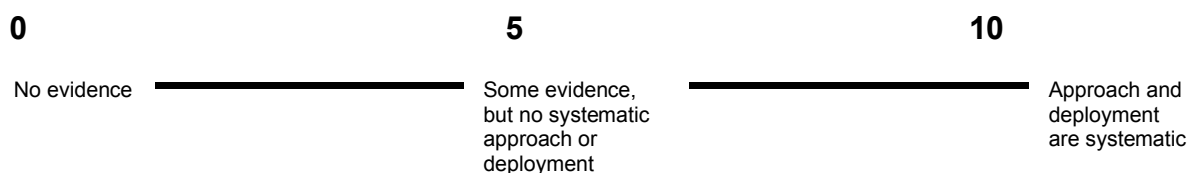


Figure 7: A Scoring System for Futures Program Benchmarks

Futures Program Benchmarks

The benchmarks are categorised using Ken Wilber’s four quadrant model. Using the four quadrant approach ensures that a holistic view is taken to the evaluation of organisational futures work and allows both tangible and intangible outcomes to be assessed, as shown in Figure 8 .

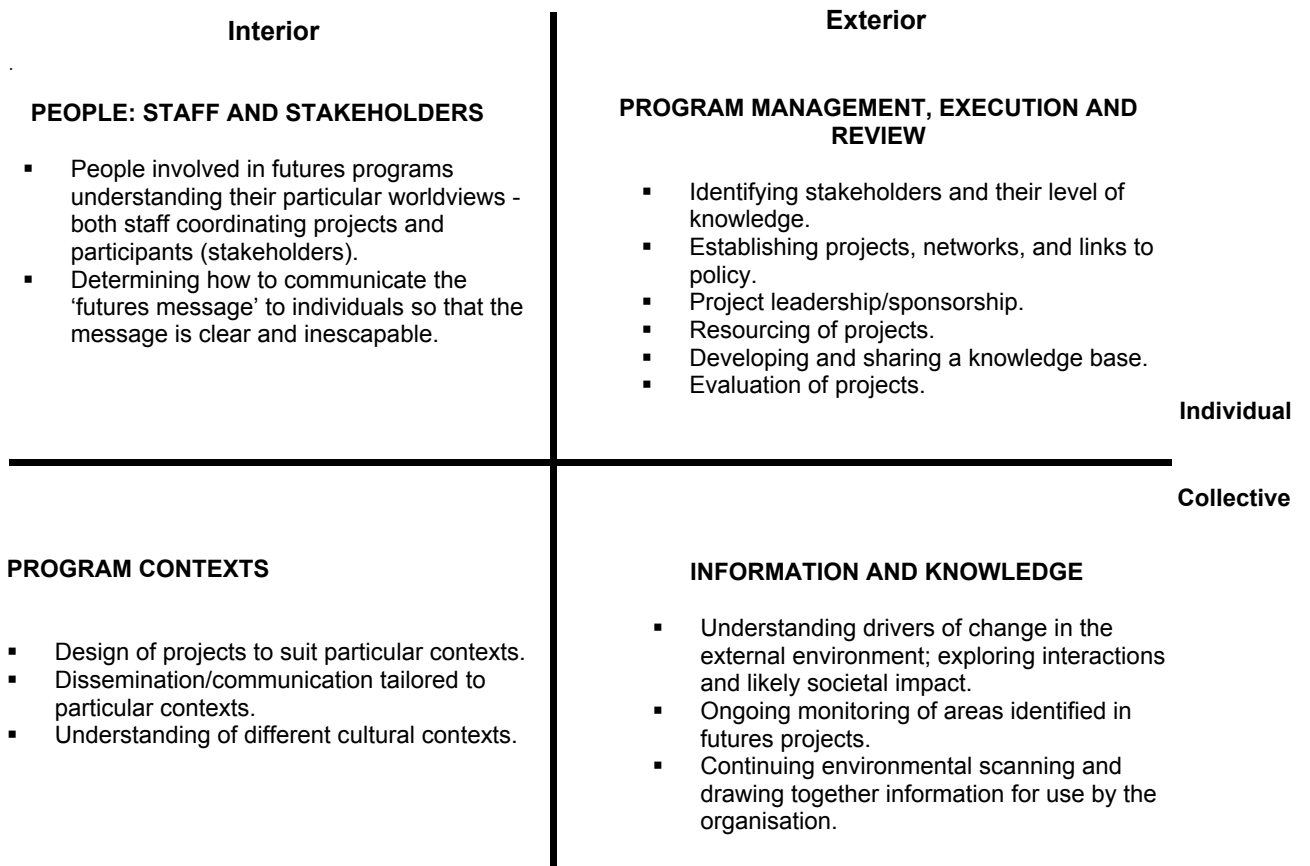


Figure 8: A Four Quadrant Approach to Evaluating Outcomes

The four quadrant approach ensures that not only the overt, measurable elements of futures work is measured. A lot of effort is put into the design of projects and their management, but less time and effort is spent on working on how to engage people in projects, how practitioners understand their role and influence on the project, and how their thinking changes over time. Processes need to be put in place to address each quadrant if an organisational futures program is to be successful.

The four quadrant approach therefore focuses on:

- **People** - both the futures practitioners designing the program and the people who will be involved in the program,
- **Project Context** – how the program needs to be designed to ‘work’ in a particular organisational culture; understanding the organisational ‘rules of the game”,
- **Project Management** – how the futures program itself needs to be designed, run, managed and evaluated (processes and tasks), and
- **Information and Knowledge** – how information relevant to the organisation will be gathered and analyse to inform the work of the program over time.

Each of these four areas is further sub-divided in the benchmark statements into major activities that need to be completed.

The benchmarks that follow were developed following a 2005 survey of major futures projects around the world (Conway and Stewart, 2005). They represent a consolidation of the best thinking at that time about what makes futures projects successful, and draw on almost 20 years of experience in government and other organisations. They define the most effective characteristics of futures programs over that time.

There are a lot of benchmarks included in this Chapter. The best way to use these benchmarks is to undertake periodic self-reviews of your futures work and projects to identify areas of improvement over time. Unless you had a lot of time and money, it would probably be unlikely that you could set up a futures project that displayed all of these characteristics at the beginning. So, it is more useful to consider these benchmarks as a desired end state towards which you can move over time, and as your organisational foresight capacity develops.

1	People: Staff and Stakeholders
1.1	Worldviews
1.1.1	It is recognised that the ability to think about the future is present at all levels of government, and that futures practitioners come in many ‘guises’. The latent knowledge of existing staff, who may be working across a range of functional areas, has been identified as a first step to ensure that people chosen to do futures work have demonstrated an aptitude for engaging with the future, and understand the value of multiple paradigms and worldviews.
1.1.2	Staff to be involved in futures work have been formally trained in futures approaches and thinking to ensure they have sufficient knowledge and understanding to run a futures process, and for their roles to have sufficient credibility with external stakeholders.
1.1.3	It is recognised that, for futures to be successful, staff need to be have permission to be different, and to provide a ‘dissenting voice’. Staff must have permission to challenge existing assumptions underpinning management thinking. Ways to manage any resulting ‘organisational discomfort’ are integrated into the process to be used.
1.2	Staff Skills, Knowledge and Roles
1.2.2	Staff working in futures have been trained in the methods to be used and have an understanding of futures concepts and approaches. Formal qualifications in futures studies are pursued for appropriate staff.
1.2.3	Staff working in futures are supported to build effective external networks, to both avoid ‘reinventing the wheel’ and to be exposed to sources of new thinking.
1.3	Leaders and Sponsors
1.3.1	Leaders and ‘champions’ are identified and understand what futures is, and recognise the organisation’s responsibility for future generations in their decision making. They are willing to provide leadership to instil this understanding in others.
1.3.2	There is top-level support for futures work, an interest in the process, and a commitment to use outcomes in policy development.
1.3.3	There is a clear understanding of the scope and nature of roles to be undertaken at different stages in the futures program.
1.3.4	People who will be responsible for ensuring the use of outcomes in the policy process have been identified at the outset, and have accepted that responsibility.
1.4	Securing Buy-In
1.4.1	It is recognised that the support of managers at all levels will be required for the successful implementation of futures work in terms of linking outcomes with policy development. Managers are therefore ‘exposed’ to the concepts of, and need for, futures work and are seen to support the process. Thinking systematically about the future is recognised as a desired managerial attribute.

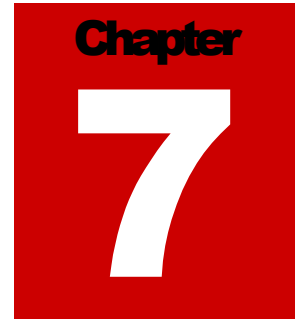
1.5 Stakeholder Participation
<p>1.5.1 A wide range of internal and external stakeholders is involved in futures work. Stakeholder groups can include experts in relevant areas, as well as participants from within government, business, non-profits and non-government organisations.</p> <p>1.5.2 The nature of input required for particular futures work determines which stakeholder groups are consulted. A wide range of expertise is sought.</p> <p>1.5.3 Stakeholder expectations about participation, goals, objectives, resources and outcomes are managed effectively.</p> <p>1.5.4 Effective use is made of electronic communication methods to improve the quality of networking among stakeholders.</p> <p>1.5.5 Opportunities are made available for individuals to engage with futures in a variety of ways that acknowledge different degrees of understanding about futures and how it can be used.</p> <p>1.5.6 A stated aim is to establish a network among participants which can continue once a particular project has been completed.</p>
2 Project Management and Execution
2.1 Purpose and Rationale
<p>2.1.1 It is understood that futures is based on the premise that it is impossible to predict the future, that futures work is about better understanding uncertainty, and that futures is best used to undertake a broad evaluation of potential future developments. People involved in futures work at all levels understand and accept this premise.</p> <p>2.1.2 The purpose of futures work is clear, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ to identify issues likely to have an impact into the future and use insights gained as a general input into policy processes, ▪ to identify priorities to inform funding decisions, ▪ to build networks, and/or ▪ to build a continuing futures capacity in government and in participants. <p>2.1.3 It is understood that the benefits of futures work may take time to realise and that project outcomes may have an impact on policy years after the project has ended. Therefore, it is also recognised that futures work is best conducted as a continuous process of learning, rather than a quick one-off exercise.</p>
2.2 Funding
<p>2.2.1 Funding for the futures program is agreed. Sponsors are identified, costs are agreed, and the unpaid work in terms of time and effort of participants is recognised.</p>

<p>2.3 Objectives</p>
<p>2.3.1 Objectives are clear and agreed with participants.</p> <p>2.3.2 The needs any given futures program will address are clear, that is, there is an identified customer for the futures work.</p> <p>2.3.3 Objectives are realistic and not overly ambitious to ensure that expectations about outcomes are achievable.</p> <p>2.3.4 It is clear at the outset that the aim is to make better informed policy decisions not create better descriptions of the future.</p> <p>2.3.5 Objectives are documented and signed off by the Chief Executive Officer and senior executive group prior to being communicated to the organisation.</p> <p>2.3.6 There is a communication strategy to communicate the objectives and purpose of the futures program to the organisation.</p> <p>2.3.7 Staff are aware of the objectives of the program.</p>
<p>2.4 Structure of Futures Units</p>
<p>2.4.1 There is a discrete futures unit which is structurally located “on the edge” of the organisation, with the exact model dependent on the context. This unit can undertake a number of roles depending on its remit, including undertaking futures work, and providing a coordinating function for staff involved in futures work. The unit reports to a board, committee, advisory council or group that is close to the executive of the organisation, and which has overall responsibility for futures, direction setting and identifying long term priorities.</p> <p>2.4.2 The reporting lines for the futures unit are clearly documented and understood in the organisation.</p> <p>2.4.3 The work of the futures unit has direct links to the organisation’s strategy development and strategic planning processes.</p> <p>2.4.4 The futures unit works to embed a futures capacity in different units and departments across the organisation and to establish networks, to both increase the number of people with futures expertise, and to allow projects to be tailored to meet the needs of those units and departments.</p> <p>2.4.5 It is recognised that a futures group has to be able to do some work which is independent of the needs of immediate sponsors or projects.</p> <p>2.4.6 There is a small core of staff appointed to coordinate futures work. Outside expertise is sought when appropriate.</p> <p>2.4.7 Clear links with relevant external departments and agencies have been established to ensure effective communication and collaboration.</p>

2.5	Scope
2.5.1	The scope of the futures program is clear and agreed. Scope can include the focus of the program, coverage of particular areas to be investigated, degree of participation by, and consultation with, stakeholders, the timeframe and the timeline for the project.
2.6	Processes
2.6.1	The overall process to be followed is determined after objectives have been set, and desired outcomes have been identified.
2.6.2	Staff identified to work on projects bring particular skills and knowledge required at different process stages.
2.6.3	There is a realistic assessment of the time it will take for a project to be completed.
2.6.4	There is a quality assurance system in place which ensures that best practice informs procedures and practices used in processes.
2.6.5	There is a step in the process that includes time to be spent on raising awareness about futures, its benefits and how individuals can contribute.
2.6.6	It is recognised that the process itself is as valuable as the outcomes of the project and that, accordingly, management of the process is undertaken by qualified staff who are skilled in the methods being used.
2.6.7	Stakeholders are involved at every stage of the process.
2.6.8	There is agreement about the analytical timeframe. A timeframe of between five and 30 years can be chosen, depending on the objectives of the work.
2.6.9	Links to ensure outcomes are used in the policy development process are agreed, documented and understood.
2.6.8	Regular progress reports on the project are provided to key stakeholders.
2.7	Methodologies
2.7.1	Methods and tools are chosen depending on the nature of the particular project, and are aligned with the purpose of the work and suitable to the culture of the organisation.
2.7.2	Methods are integrated with current futures theory, and are not chosen in isolation from that theory.
2.7.3	There is adequate support and training in methods provided to participants, and the methodology has the confidence of, and is understood by, participants.
2.7.4	Methods focus on achieving high levels of authentic staff participation and generation of content.
2.7.5	Pilot and/or feasibility studies are used as a way to convince others of value of work to be undertaken. Senior manager see it as their role to be involved in these pilot studies to 'road test' proposed methodologies.

2.8	Outcomes
2.8.1	Methods for disseminating outcomes and results are agreed at the beginning, with particular attention paid to the design and content of electronic publications.
2.8.2	Outcomes from futures work is communicated in ways that the mainstream organisation and decision makers with shorter term horizons can understand. Outcomes are integrated into mainstream activities, such as training, where that is appropriate.
2.8.3	The timing of the release of project outcomes is aligned with decision making cycles in order to be able to inform policy and budget decisions.
2.8.4	The long term focus of futures work around improving the quality of thinking about the future and as generating discussion as inputs into continuing policy development is clear in external communications.
2.8.5	There is a clear idea about how, in specific terms, outcomes will be used to make better policy decisions. Those outcomes have legitimacy in the policy development process.
2.8.6	There is both management and political accountability for short- and long-term outcomes.
2.8.7	Outcomes are given a 'reality check' with key stakeholders to ensure a high degree of credibility and technical feasibility.
2.8.8	Networks developed during projects are supported to remain in existence as part of the development of a national futures community.
2.9	Assessment, Evaluation and Renewal
2.9.1	There is an evaluation stage built into the program which allows it to be renewed over time so that it remains relevant to the organisation.
2.9.2	Evaluation processes are designed to take into account both short-term and long-term benefits of futures work.
2.9.3	Feedback is sought from participants and stakeholders about the usefulness of the work, particularly in terms of insight and guidance provided, the degree to which multiple perspectives were integrated, and improvements to the process.
2.9.4	Evaluation processes focus around learning as well as accountability, and include assessment of both intended and unintended outcomes.
2.9.5	Evaluation processes assess different factors depending upon the context and nature of the project, but could include short term and long term use made of formal outputs such as environmental scanning, scenarios etc, links with decision making processes, and value of networks established. Evaluation also assesses the degree to which individuals believe their own futures capacities have been enhanced.

3	Project Context
3.1	Understanding Cultural Influences
3.1.1	The dominant culture is understood, particularly the influence of organisational politics and psychology on the policy making process, as is as the historical factors shaping the nature and structure of the organisation.
3.1.2	Futures work has been designed to achieve a balance between the organisational culture and desired outcomes.
3.1.3	It is recognised that each futures project or activity will need to be tailored for the context, and involve a range of different people.
3.2	Acceptance in the Organisation
3.2.1	Futures work is accepted as a valuable function in the organisation, as evidenced by ongoing, strong and visible support by the Chief Executive Officer and senior executive managers.
3.2.2	Responsibility for futures work is included in position descriptions and performance targets of senior managers.
3.2.3	Feedback from participants indicates that the value of futures work is recognised.
3.2.4	If appropriate, the existence of the futures program and its contribution is recognized externally.
4	Information and Knowledge
4.1	Information used in futures work includes both quantitative data such as trend analysis and projections, and qualitative data such as the rich descriptions of alternative futures generated by scenario processes.
4.2	Workshops to improve the knowledge of the complexities of issues to be explored are included in the design of futures work, particularly for relevant decision makers.
4.3	Information gathered during futures work is stored in a 'knowledge base' which is regularly updated through environmental scanning and provides a knowledge sharing platform. The futures unit is responsible for monitoring issues and trends, assessing cross-sectoral impacts and interrelationships and possible implications for future policy development.
4.5	Regular reports are produced from the knowledge base, both on issues of direct relevance to the organisation, but also on general futures trends.



Final Words

Using futures approaches in organisational strategy processes is both challenging and very hard work, but it will also be some of the most rewarding work you have ever done

...

Strategic planning is now a routine part of business, with an accompanying set of beliefs and protocols that underpin day-to-day practice. While the need to plan is accepted, the resulting plans are often not successful in driving implementation of organisational strategy through alignment of action. Indeed, 'while the need for planning has never been greater, the relevance of most of today's planning systems and tools is increasingly marginal' (Fuller, 2004:2).

Traditional models for developing strategy do not deal well with complexity, uncertainty and rapid change in the external environment. The apparent failure of corporate strategy even after extensive planning, and the inability of many organisations to read signals of change in the external environment, suggests that there is something missing from existing planning models. 'It may well be that the typical strategic planning exercise now conducted on a regular and formal basis and infused with quantitative data misses the essence of the concept of strategy and what is involved in thinking strategically' (Sidorowicz, 2000).

FINAL WORDS

There is now some recognition that this missing element is the capacity of an organisation to systematically develop and maintain a shared view of the future – a strategic foresight capacity. Scenario planning is often promoted as the way to incorporate a futures view into planning, and has been used by organisations and governments with varying degrees of success since the 1960s. While using a methodology such as scenario planning introduces organisations to the value of exploring the future, it does little to embed a more comprehensive futures approach into strategy development, decision making and implementation – that is, to develop and sustain an organisational capacity for foresight, which is what using futures approaches is all about.

This guide provides practical steps to help you start to develop an organisational foresight capacity through the use of effective futures approaches.

Developing wiser and stronger organisational strategy, will not happen overnight. You will need to take a long term view, since developing an organisational ability to systematically use the future in its strategy development (an organisational foresight capacity) involves changing the way people think. But, it will be some of the most challenging, exciting and rewarding work you have ever done.

Good luck!

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About Thinking Futures

Following the successful launch of my [University Futures](#) website in 2006, [Thinking Futures](#) was established in 2007 to work with organisations to develop futures inspired strategy.

There are relatively few organisations whose strategy development processes include systematic use of futures approaches. There are some folks who have read a book on scenario planning, developed some ideas about the future, run a process, and tell everyone they have done futures work and there is nothing to it. Worse still are the folks who tell you they know how the future is going to turn out and don't need any more information, which is a sign of both their ignorance and arrogance – because the future simply cannot be predicted.

The resources available on the University Futures website and in this guide are provided so that you can begin to use futures approaches in your organisation that is based on a strong and sound grounding in futures work. My aim in providing the resources on the University Futures website is to help you develop programs which have depth, and which provide useful and meaningful outputs for your continuing strategy development. If you work through this guide and develop depth in your own understanding of futures work, as well as depth in your processes, you will have a good basis from which to launch futures approaches in your organisation.

If you would like professional help with your efforts to use futures approaches, my Thinking Futures practice can assist. Contact me at maree.conway@thinkingfutures.net or telephone +61 3 9016 9506.

Finally, if you have any questions or would like to offer suggestions for improvement to the guide, please [contact](#) me. I'd be very glad to hear from you.

Maree Conway

February 2007