Leading Through Futures Thinking:
An introduction to using futures thinking questioning and methods and guideline on how to facilitate a basic ‘Strategic Foresight’ session

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About this resource

The disability sector context

There are many possible benefits that can come from applied futures thinking, but the most important one is that it creates opportunities for choice. The Australian Government is implementing new reforms for disability sector across Australia and here in Queensland disability service providers and others are getting ready for the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

As the full consequences of the NDIS policy reform takes shape and become realised, disability service providers may be experiencing very different futures (both our own and for others) than we could have imagined today. Historically, service providers have offered their services with a great deal of professionalism, expertise and relative certainty however the NDIS requires adaptation in how service provision will be offered into the future.

The NDIS policy reform asks and invites the sector to consider alternatives to the ‘business as usual’ future through engaging in challenging current thinking and innovation to create available and sustained alternatives to how service provision is currently provided. For future service delivery directions this will mean creating a new change story, a new way of viewing the future landscape for service provision. The imperative is simple, if the service providers of today are to remain viable and responsive to changing marketplace conditions and expectations then service providers must consider that the future is an open space and that there are many possible futures available rather than a singular or dominant future. Futures thinking helps us to adapt our thinking and provides a framework to get ahead of the change game!

This strategic foresight guideline provides a foundational introduction to futures studies, futures thinking and strategic foresight approaches, concepts and methods and is designed as a tool to support people to undertake facilitation of strategic foresight sessions. This guideline is based on the seminal works by futurist Professor Sohail Inayatullah.

This guideline provides an introduction to futures thinking approaches, concepts and methods through the “Six Pillar Approach to Strategic Foresight” and the ‘Seven Foundational Futures Questions’. In addition it provides useful introductory Facilitator Notes to guide your planning and facilitation of the Seven Foundational Futures Questions as an introduction to your strategic foresight practice. This guideline does not have the scope or intention to fully expand on the use of the six pillars approach; however references and links to additional strategic foresight resources are provided.
Strategic foresight film resource

This facilitation guideline has been developed to complement the strategic foresight film resource, *Creating Preferred Futures with Strategic Foresight*. The film resource includes an interview with leading futurist Professor Sohail Inayatullah on the six pillars approach to futures thinking, concepts and methods. Viewing this film resource is highly recommended as an orientation to strategic foresight and it can be utilised as a learning tool to support your facilitation work.

The film resource includes seven sessions and provides ‘play all’ or ‘select session’ options. The resource can be made available on DVD by contacting National Disability Services, Queensland or accessed the Sector Readiness and Workforce Capacity Initiative Clearinghouse.

Strategic Foresight Film Resource
*Creating Preferred Futures with Strategic Foresight*

Some clarity on futures terminology and concepts

There are many diverse methods and approaches to strategic foresight facilitation. In developing your own unique approach to facilitating a strategic foresight experience, it is imperative that you familiarise yourself with futures thinking concepts, foresight methods and techniques and relevant terminology. By understanding some foundational knowledge in this area you will be more confident in facilitating a foresight session and it will greatly help you and others situate themselves in the context of what it means to do strategic foresight praxis – or practicing and realising the ideas of the theory through application.

Without a doubt, you will be challenged as a facilitator for both your clarity in knowing and explaining of futures thinking concepts and meaning by the participants. Further you will need to hold an ‘in-between’ space of both participant and facilitator. What this ‘in-between’ space means is there will be times you will need to declare your opinions, perspectives and critique similarly as if you were a participant. This is okay as you will also have a view on the future if you are an organisational employee. However, you also need to hold the space of ‘process facilitator’, a role which ensures effective use of futures thinking theory/methods and the ethical and equal engagement of the participants’ inputs. You can develop your competence and skills in this area by investing in your planning, facilitation and researching/learning futures thinking theory. Prior to attempting to facilitate a foresight session it will be helpful for you to engage in the following activities:

- **Watching** the strategic foresight film resource;
- **Reading** the appendices to this guideline;
- **Researching** the links in the section titled ‘other helpful resources and links’.
Once you have completed these three steps you ought to have a sound capability and desire to design and facilitate a strategic foresight session. Your confidence, learning and skill in strategic foresight facilitation will come from doing, by actioning strategic foresight facilitation experiences. In addition, it is beneficial to connect with a trusted colleague who can ‘debrief’ your reflections on the experience for the purpose of action learning adaptations.

Some of the benefits of facilitating a strategic foresight session within your organisation include being equipped to question known assumptions about the future and seeking to evoke alternative ways of knowing the same phenomena; having the capacity and preparedness to disrupt dominant ways of thinking and knowing the future; and being able to use powerful foresight questions and methods.

The foresight questions and methods will help you and others map and challenge how not to collude in creating an undesirable future for you and/or your organisation. Foresight helps individuals, organisations and communities move through change with ethics, dignity and compassion. You will learn how to make sense of the past, the present and the future and create opportunities to emancipate. In your sessions, you will be able to facilitate the development and recognition of other perspectives to emerge and alternative choices to be made.

The six pillars approach to strategic foresight

Professor Sohail Inayatullah’s ‘Six Pillars Approach of Futures Studies’ provides a sound framework to facilitate strategic foresight sessions. What makes the six pillars approach an effective and powerful approach is the logical sequencing of foresight concepts, questioning and application of strategic foresight methods. The six pillars include the following:

1. The pillar of mapping futures
2. The pillar of anticipating futures
3. The pillar of timing futures
4. The pillar of deepening futures
5. The pillar of creating alternative futures
6. The pillar of transforming futures

Keeping it simple: Doing strategic foresight doesn’t have to be overwhelming

This guideline does not expand in depth and on each of the six pillars approaches and methods and it is not recommended as first-time facilitators to start your facilitation praxis with a complex strategic foresight approach. This guideline focuses on the application of ‘Seven Foundational Futures Questions’ as a basic introduction to facilitating strategic foresight practice.

One of the many benefits of the six pillars approach is that you can still do meaningful strategic foresight questions and analysis without needing to facilitate all of the six pillars

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approaches. You can stage build your confidence and competency in foresight facilitation by slowly expanding on the use of the six pillars, strategic foresight concepts and methods. Each foresight session you do will build on the learning from the previous and provide a rich context for discussion with other practitioners or even build your organisational profile and functionality as a trusted voice and authority in foresight competency.

It is highly recommend that as part of your pre-planning work you read the journal paper:

The seven foundational futures thinking questions

The Seven Foundational Futures Questions designed by Professor Sohail Inayatullah have been developed over 40 years of foresight practitioner work and research. These questions are:

1. What is the history of the issue?
2. What do you think the future will be like?
3. Which future are you afraid of?
4. What are the hidden assumptions of your predicted future?
5. What are some alternatives to your predicted or feared future?
6. What is your preferred future?
7. How might you get to your preferred future?

The Seven Foundational Futures Questions forms the basic framework for this guideline and your strategic foresight facilitation. The questions are designed to explore and map current futures thinking and create opportunities for alternative futures perspectives. Each of the main seven foundational futures questions are supported by a range of sub questions to be asked by you the facilitator. It is important prior to asking the foundational futures questions to determine the topic (or research area) that will be under a foresight investigation. As the facilitator you may leave this as an open unanswered matter and then ask your participants to determine this as part of building a participatory and collaborative futures facilitation session culture.

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Where to start in foresight work

There are numerous places you can start to apply strategic foresight in your organisation:

1. **Scan for emerging issues which may affect your organisational operations:** By scanning the environments for drivers of change you will start to find indicators of change. Further, this will assist in developing organisational foresight.

2. **Challenge the default future (The default future is the official, normalised and often considered the right future):** facilitate a strategic foresight session;

3. **Question the used or borrowed future (a future purchased or borrowed from others):** use futures thinking methods and concepts in the next strategic planning event;

4. **Create alternatives to the future (creating flexibility, adaptations to the future):** facilitate a strategic foresight session; and

5. **Build a foresight capability/capacity (skill and opportunity in applied foresight concepts and methods):** Establishing a capability for scanning is a fundamental building block towards the development of organisational foresight facilitation capacity and capability.

Determining a foresight purpose for your session

It is encouraged for you as the facilitator to be clear on **why** you are facilitating a strategic foresight session. Some suggestions for purpose are:

1. **Education/Learning:** Education in futures thinking and strategic foresight methods;

2. **Planning/Strategy formulation:** Updating strategic plans or documentation;

3. **Projects/Capacity:** Using foresight projects to build capacity in foresight methods application;

4. **Policy/Incentivisation:** Developing new policy and using new policy to incentivise behavioural change;

5. **Language & Culture:** Introducing alternative languages that build personal and collective agency to create preferred and desired futures;

6. **Worldviews & Culture:** Exploring alternative assumptions, beliefs and paradigms that may challenge dominant and inhibiting cultures; and

7. **Narrative/Story:** Creating and crafting a new story for the future.

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Critical success factors in strategic foresight

There are many ways to evaluate a foresight experience. Too often strategic foresight success factors tend to get caught up in performance metrics that simply measure only data or systemic changes rather than culture and stories. Effective performance measurement in strategic foresight evaluates both the rational and irrational measures. This allows for metrics which can monitor many layers of organisational and cultural realities. Such realities are then not necessarily embedded purely only in financial terms but rather the social, the environmental and ecological. To assist in developing a layered performance metric framework, there is one simple effective question:

*Does our vision of the future story match our current story?*

Community of practitioners

There are a number of futurist practitioners in Queensland and across Australia. Developing mentoring or support networks with these practitioners can be a great way to develop your own futures facilitation competency.

Futures facilitation: The theoretical basics

What is Futures Thinking?

To assist you as a facilitator in preparing your knowledge about futures thinking and strategic foresight there is a comprehensive discussion on futures thinking and key terms in the appendices. In addition, you are encouraged to watch session 1 of the strategic foresight film resource as this discusses the question, 'what is futures thinking?'

Foundational futures thinking concepts

When people use the word ‘future’, they are generally speaking about the extrapolation of ideas and images to make sense of what is assumed about tomorrow or what may or will become the future for a given context. These ideas and images can be grouped under a range of foundational futures thinking concepts. These are:

1. **Default futures:** The official, normalized and often considered the right future; “*futures thinking assumptions are left unexamined*”. The default future can often be found as the strategic vision statement within a strategic planning document. A default future is often communicated to us as an opinion and does necessarily seek input or feedback.

2. **Used/borrowed futures:** A future purchased or borrowed from others are usually ideas and images that have been either consciously or unconsciously adopted but have been constructed by others (used or borrowed).

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3. **Disowned futures:** why things may fall apart. The disowned futures are usually those futures ignored both within ourselves or can represent the views of others, cultures and perspectives outside that which is a dominant and generally accepted version of the future.

“[O]ur excellence in one future can also be our greatest weakness/flaw in another future....” For example we become overly busy on implementing our strategic plan but fail to see the emerging issues that disrupt who we are and catch us unaware

4. **Alternative futures:** Alternative futures are traditionally about creating flexibility through scenarios to provide a range of choices and potentialities of different futures.

“Often we (society) believe that there is only ONE future. (We cannot see alternatives) There is more than a singular future rather many probable, possible, plausible or preferred futures...thus by looking for alternatives, we may see something new. We are not caught in the straightjacket of one future”

**Inner/External Alignment futures:** inviting organisational and societal transformations by ensuring we check for **internal alignment** – ‘Does our story of the future match our actions in the present?’ and checking for **external alignment** – ‘Do our actions in the present match our plan for the future?’

5. **Models of social change:** Situating our understanding where we see ourselves in a pattern of change. The aim is to determine where we can best influence change within the structures of social change.

Models of social change refer to a futures concept which looks at the concepts of agency (influence) and structures (patterns) and our subjective outlook/imagination about the future. By discussing the range of foundational futures concepts we come to realise that the future is an open space and can be influenced and not a singular prediction or forecast. However, there are diverse politics around who gets to decide the official version of the future. Indeed most futures thinking work is about disrupting dominant ways of thinking and knowing the future. Often a future privileges or serves to benefit those who get to define and the future. As a facilitator in futures thinking and strategic foresight your primary role is to disrupt dominant ways of thinking and knowing the future through elegant futures questioning so that alternative options and choices may emerge for consideration.
So futures thinking aims to:

1. Disturb dominant structures (historical and present patterns), narratives (stories) through **futures thinking questions and questioning**, to invite agency for change;
2. Investigate futures ideas and images and their consequences;
3. Seeks to create new possibilities and alternatives through challenging dominant ways of knowing the future.

**Core futures thinking by Inayatullah**

1. Not one future but futureS plural;
2. Humans have agency; meaning they can influence the future;
3. The image of the future can pull us towards a future desired;
4. Images of the future can be based on historical narratives that have travelled through time and cultures;
5. The intention of a strategic foresight session is to use foresight questioning as a means to question assumptions about the future forecasted or predicted so that we can create alternative perspectives on the future as an active agent in the present.

**Transformative Futures Thinking**

The goal of any strategic foresight investigation is to transform how we have come to think and know our ideas and images used to define ‘the future’. We can use our images and ideas to forecast, compete and/or create alternatives. However it is more important to think about how we can change how we get to know the future rather than what we do with our dominant ideas and images of the future. If we can critique and develop a new understanding of how we have come to know the future we can transform our futures thinking. Transformed futures thinking can then be used to explore other creative imaginings and ideas for the future. Bringing our transformative futures thinking results into our present re-shapes our understanding of the concept called ‘the future’. Interestingly, most of us think the future is something outside of ourselves, something out there in the distance. Rather, as Professor Ivana Milojević, articulates:

“The future is not an empty space but like the past an active aspect of the present”

Similarly, how we have come to know and fill our understanding of the past as history, we are similarly compelled to fill the empty space called *the future* with our forecasts and predictions, our ideas and images. This filling the space, we call the future, means we are endeavouring to create certainty, clarity on our destinations and meaning or purpose for destinations as visions.

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What becomes crucial in futures thinking analysis is to understand how we come to fill the future with particular images and ideas as it will help us situate ourselves in whether we think we can make a difference to the official version of the future. This understanding enables us to explore how we can make a difference in changing the future by challenging our levels of agency and structure to create the future.

(Fred Polak 1973)

Image source: Polak, F (ed.) 1961, The image of the future,

By undertaking strategic foresight investigation we are really investing in our ability to regain influence and capacity (our agency) over what happens to us tomorrow. A strategic foresight investigation through the use of powerful foresight questions helps challenge dominant structures of knowledge in how we’ve come to know the future. By exploring alternative futures and envisioning the desired I am no longer in a position where I simply have to accept a default future. I can actively engage in implementing today the different desired future by changing the way I think and feel about the future.

Image source: Inayatullah, S 2014, Futures Thinking PowerPoint NDS, slide No 35 <www.metafuture.org>
The future is a not a given, rather an open and creative space which can be influenced by changing our ideas, images and actions in the present.

Four archetypal categories of futures thinking

When facilitating a strategic foresight session you will evoke a range of diverse perspectives expressed as ideas and images of the future. As a facilitator you can invite participants to group these ideas and images under four archetypal categories of futures thinking. These archetypal categories of futures thinking are commonly known as:

1. **Possible futures**: are futures which *might* happen: irrespective of the laws of the universe;
2. **Plausible futures**: are futures which *could* happen: more realistic, structural considerations;
3. **Probable futures**: are futures which *are likely to happen*: given historical trends and quantitative data; and
4. **Preferred futures**: are futures which we *want* to happen, what participants desire, the vision of the community/organisation.

**Source**: Adapted from Hancock and Bezold (1994)

Futures thinking traditions

There are also a range of futures thinking traditions which have varied contexts, outcomes, timing and purposes. These are pop futures, social cause, critical and action learning frameworks.

**Futures Traditions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pop Futures</td>
<td>Sensationalist</td>
<td>Short Term</td>
<td>Shock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Cause Problem oriented</td>
<td>Strategic</td>
<td>Issue Driven</td>
<td>Medium Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Future Probes for deeper meanings</td>
<td>Analytic</td>
<td>Relative</td>
<td>Long Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Normal/Epistemic Action Learning</td>
<td>Synthetic</td>
<td>Evolutionary</td>
<td>Epochal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Four types of futures studies research frameworks\(^6\)

Similar to the futures traditions there are four types of futures studies research frameworks. These are:

1. **Empirical** – the objective world exists and we can know or seek to control the future – knowledge is constructed;
2. **Interpretive** – subjective images of the future, the objective world exists but there are different accounts – the future can be negotiated;
3. **Critical** - the objective world is problematic, the aim is to disturb power relations that framed the future; we have come to know the future through the politics of language and structure; and
4. **Anticipatory Action Learning** - the goal is to create alternatives by questioning the future, reality is process based and the future is not fixed but continuously being revisited to active learning experiments.

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Planning and pre-session preparations

There are several matters which need to be considered by you the facilitator as part of your planning and pre-session preparations. These topics include the following:

1. Selecting the topic, question or problem to be investigated;
2. Designing your foresight sessional plan;
3. Ensuring you have the necessary resources and logistics;
4. Considering how you will be engaging and communicating with your stakeholders;
5. Futures facilitation fundamentals; and
6. Evaluating and reporting on your session

Selecting the topics, questions or problem to be investigated

There are several ways you can select the topic to be investigated. Key questions, problems or issues that have been deemed important by your organisation and in need of further investigation may form the basis of the agenda. Additionally, you may leave the session agenda as an open, unanswered matter and the decision regarding the agenda to those in the workshop to determine. Further, you may consider using the results from an environmental scan or the reporting from strategic documents as clues or cues as to which may be a more relevant topic for investigation. Selecting the foresight topic can be determined by identifying a key focus or emerging priority. A tip here is to consider foresight topics that you and the participants have the same opportunity to evoke influence or agency over together.

Designing your session plan

All sound facilitation is often supported by a sessional plan structure. A sessional plan is essentially a way to prepare and deliver training sessions. This guideline provides detailed support for designing your session plan in Appendix 2 including an example of a highly effective framework for adult learning; sessional resources; and considerations and recommendations for engaging stakeholders or participants including pre session, session and post session work.
Facilitating a Strategic Foresight Session

Using the foundational futures questions

The foundational futures questions provide a solid foundation to conduct a strategic foresight session. The questions are ordered in a logical sequence to move the conversation and futures investigation from a known perspective to the unknown and then back to a reframed alternative perspective through your facilitated synthesis of results. So in essence what you need to do is to take the conversation into a divergent perspective and then convergence through each of these foresight methods. Each step needs to be facilitated through three parts being theory, activity and summary. As a facilitator you need to:

- Provide some theory for each of the strategic foresight pillars;
- Provide a sample of the method being applied;
- Engage participants in an activity through a combination of both questioning and/or application of a foresight method to a selected context;
- Engage participants in a synthesis of results for meaning making; and
- Link the learning back to the overall session outcome through a discussion on implications from the learning.

Introduction & context: the why, what & how of futures thinking?

As the facilitator you need to situate your participants or audience into the rationale for doing futures thinking and a strategic foresight investigation. It is important to follow a structure as a means to logically introduce your participants to the theory, activity and learning from your foresight session. Here are several points of discussion that can guide your opening introduction as means of situating your audience into a futures thinking and strategic foresight context. These are:

- Ask the audience for their definitions and meaning on the main futures and foresight key terms. Discuss and provide some clarity on the working definitions as per the glossary in this guideline;
- Establish clarity on the purpose for the strategic foresight session - in other words why are we questioning a particular context?;
- Consider discussing current strategic foresight approaches by your organisation;
- Discuss how you and others are currently making sense of the future;
- Consider discussing your current strategic intention or commitment to the future - in other words what is the current official version of the future for your organisation?;
- Consider discussing the implications of old perspectives or versions of the future and what this means to the official version of the future;
- Consider discussing what are the drivers of change that may dramatically influence or effect who we are is an organisation;
Show several images which are representative of the problems with the current ideas and images of the future;

Consider highlighting the phenomena of growing rates of change in XYZ, the increasing influence from diversity, or a globally connected world;

Stimulate and motivate your audience by incentivising why we need to critically examine the future;

Furthermore discuss the idea of the future being futureS plural and that we have a range of alternatives based on changing our ideas and images and assumptions about the future. These discussions create a setting to introduce and discuss what might be the topics/issues that are desired to be investigated.

Consider the slide below and introduce the idea that there may be a range of different responses to the future of XYZ depending on the degrees of structure (patterns) and perceived levels of agency to influence the future.

(Fred Polak 1973)

I imagine a positive future

I can't make a difference

I imagine a negative future


Continue to engage your audience by considering exploring a topic through the four archetypal futures categories as seen below.

- **Possible**: futures which *might* happen: irrespective of the laws of the universe;
- **Plausible**: futures which *could* happen: more realistic, structural considerations;
- **Probable**: futures which are *likely* to happen: given historical trends and quantitative data; and
- **Preferred**: futures which we *want* to happen: what participants desire, the vision of the community/organisation.
From your introduction, as the facilitator you ought to have provided a contextual rationale (Why) there is a need to investigate the future of XYZ, agreed on (What) will be investigated and (How) this foresight investigation will take place.

The next step is to get your participants actively involved in their own strategic foresight through the use of futures questioning and foresight analysis. To do this you need to consider the use of the Seven Foundational Futures Questions. These questions are:

1. What is the history of the issue?
2. What do you think the future will be like?
3. Which future are you afraid of?
4. What are the hidden assumptions of your predicted future?
5. What are some alternatives to your predicted or feared future?
6. What is your preferred future?
7. How might you get to your preferred future?

It is recommended to allow at least 30 minutes for the participants and you the facilitator the opportunity to discuss, answer and synthesise the results for key learning and insights.

After you have completed your introduction topics, you may still need to re-affirm or propose the idea of participant choice on the topic. Futures facilitation works best if the participants decide on the topics as this increases levels of agency to make changes in the future. Seek and confirm agreement on the topic/s which are to be investigated in your foresight session. Instruct your participants to organise themselves into groups of topical interest and then progress through each of the seven foundational futures questions.

**Note:** Participants do not need to answer the same topic for each of the seven questions but there may be a range of topics which are desired to be investigated. Considering there may be a wide range or diverse variety in topics being investigated, for the benefit of creating depth and breadth in analysis, participants ought to be actively encouraged to move around, visit, and comment on other topics and answers throughout the proceeding foresight questions. However, equally, some participants ought to be encouraged to stay with ONE topic throughout the remaining foresight questions for the purpose of developing a consistent foresight analysis or story synthesis. Although you are provided with a series of sub questions for each of the seven foundational futures questions, as the facilitator you or the participants can discerningly decide how many questions you would like to answer or may even invent some questions similar to the foundational question intention.

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Foundational futures question 1: History of the issue

The purpose of the first futures question is to map and identify the historical narratives, events and decisions of the topic.

History questions which can be explored:

Foundational Futures Question 1: What is the history of XYZ or 123?

- What are the historical events, major decisions or timelines for this topic over the last XYZ years?
- Why do you think this topic has remained continuous (a continuity) through history? Or as a dominant narrative or story?
- Does this topic history privilege a few? If so, why? Or why not?
- How has this topic history being legitimised still today?
- What elements in this topic have dis-continued? (dis-continuities)
- What do you think would cause this topic to cease in existence?

Synthesis questions which can be explored:

- Why do you think this topic has remained continuous (a continuity) through history as a dominant narrative or story?
- Who is missing from this topic historically speaking?
- How would their lost historical perspective change our present?
- What does this topic history tell us about how our past is shaping our present perspectives (and possibly our future)?
- How is this history shaping our approaches futures thinking analysis?

Foundational futures question 2: Futures forecasted

The purpose of the second futures question is to map and identify the current thinking about the future of the topic under investigation by the participants in the room. It is essential to communicate the working definition between forecast and prediction at this time. It is also important that you (the facilitator) stick to one term rather than oscillate between the two terms in your facilitation language.

- **Prediction**\(^8\): A specific statement that something will happen in the future. "It will rain tomorrow" is a prediction, and so is "If the wind is westerly and I sleep till after 8am, it will rain tomorrow" - but "it may rain tomorrow" is not a prediction.
- **Forecasting**\(^9\): Forecasts are usually applied to short-term futures - no more than a few years ahead. A forecast is considered to be less certain than prediction, but more certain than conjecture or anticipation.

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\(^8\) List, D 2014, Audience dialogue, Audience and business research, analysis and development, [http://www.audiencedialogue.net/gloss-fut.html#prediction](http://www.audiencedialogue.net/gloss-fut.html#prediction)
Prediction/forecasting questions which can be explored:

Foundational Futures Question 2: What do you think the future will be like for XYZ or 123? What is your prediction?

- Is your prediction about more evolution and progress? Why?
- Do you think your prediction has travelled through history as a narrative or story?
- If so, why has this story remained so continuous or privileged?
- Does your prediction benefit or privilege only a few individuals? If so, why?
- What does the diversity in our predictions tell us about who we are in our futures thinking?

Synthesis questions which can be explored:

- Why do you think this prediction is valid?
- Who is missing from the room? And how would their perspective on the future of XYZ change our forecast or prediction?
- What can we learn from these predictions?

**Note:** It is actively encouraged that participants are creative in their ability to report back on their answers for each of the seven foundational questions. It is not necessary to report back to the group the comprehensive discussions, rather ask participants to report their top three or four points or feedback can take the shape of skits, drama, drawings, narrative or simply group reporting.

Foundational futures question 3: Futures feared / transformed

The purpose of the third futures question is to map and identify the current fears about the future predicted/forecasted and to determine the level of agency or capacity to influence the future across the participant’s perception. Again, participants are encouraged to examine the answers to the first two questions by other groups or individuals.

The future feared/agency questions which can be explored:

Foundational Futures Question 3: Which future predicted are you afraid of?

- Does the future you or others predict evoke fear in you the participant? Why or why not?
- Do you or your group think that you can transform the predicted future feared to a desired future? Why or why not?

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Synthesis questions which can be explored:

- Why do you think this prediction is valid as being feared? Why or why not?
- Why do we lack agency to influence this feared future predicted?
- How do structures (patterns in thinking, acting, and feeling) protect us from this future feared predicted?
- How could we increase our potentiality to increase our levels of agency/influence over the future feared predicted?
- What can we learn from these fears about the future of XYZ?

Foundational futures question 4: Hidden assumptions

The purpose of the fourth futures question is to map and identify the current assumptions used to answer previous questions. By understanding the core assumptions used to frame future predicted/forecasted will assist in understanding a level of agency over the future. Further, by making explicit the assumptions used we may be able to draw some insights and learning into the correlation between current level of agency or capacity to influence or change the future. Participants are encouraged to examine and make explicit theirs and others assumptions used to answer the previous foundational questions.

Hidden assumptions questions which can be explored:

Foundational Futures Question 4: What are the hidden assumptions of your predicted future?

- What are the taken for granted assumptions that frame your answer?
- What comparisons or insights can we make between the different assumptions in the room about the future?
- Why do we think these comparisons or insights are significant?

Synthesis questions which can be explored:

- Where do these taken for granted assumptions come from?
- Why are these taken for granted assumptions so dominant? How does culture shape these assumptions?
- What other assumptions are ignored by overly focusing on these taken for granted assumptions?
- What might be some of the ongoing consequences or effects from these assumptions of the future of XYZ?
- What ought we do to change these taken for granted assumptions about the future?
Foundational futures question 5: Creating Alternatives

The purpose of the fifth futures question is to generate some alternatives to the predicted future. By changing or challenging our assumptions, we can reframe our understanding of the future predicted. One way to explore the creating alternatives question is to consider a range of scenarios. Scenarios can be developed by archetype categories as discussed by Professor Jim Dator\(^{10}\) such as:

1. **Continuation**: meaning continued economic growth
2. **Collapse**: meaning from a variety of different reasons such as exhaustion conflict instability degeneration or overloading
3. **Disciplined society**: meaning a future society organises around overarching values, usually considered to be ancient and traditional, natural, ideological and correct
4. **Transformational society**: meaning usually a high-tech or high-spirited variety of the future which sees the end of current forms of society and the emergence of new forms of beliefs, behaviour, organisations and perhaps intelligences

Alternatively, organisational based scenarios as discussed by Professor Sohail Inayatullah\(^{11}\) can be used and tend to be described under the following scenario categories:

1. **Business as usual**: meaning more of the same
2. **Worst case**: meaning a collapse situation/future
3. **Outlier**: meaning should it occur it would significantly disrupt who we are and what we do today and tomorrow but the likelihood of it occurring is low, considered to be an emerging issue
4. **Best case**: meaning the preferred future desired

The value of scenarios is it contours risk and uncertainty that may be evoked from answering the first three questions. It is also important as a facilitator in preparing your participants how to develop scenarios, there is a simple and easy way to design the internal elements that constitute the structure of a scenario.

All archetypal and organisational scenario types can be constructed using a standard scenario structure as designed by Professor Sohail Inayatullah\(^{12}\). The following scenario structure can be used to populate the elements of the participant scenarios.

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\(^{11}\) Inayatullah, S 2013, Futures Studies Six Pillars Approach Workbook, www.metafuture.org, p.25

\(^{12}\) Inayatullah, S 2013, Futures Studies Six pillars Approach Workbook, www.metafuture.org, p.20
These elements are:

- the title and year of the scenario
- the predicted image; or alternative image desired
- the main headline or visible characteristics
- the systemic dimensions (social, technology, economic, environmental, political, ethics, values) which underpinned the scenario
- the assumptions or belief supporting for the scenario
- the dominant story or narrative supporting the scenario
- a metaphor for the scenario

Creating alternatives questions which can be explored:

Foundational Futures Question 5: What are some alternatives to your predicted or feared future?

- If you change some of your assumptions what alternative futures emerge?
- How would these alternative futures for XYZ look like as scenarios?

Synthesis questions which can be explored:

- How would your scenarios help contour risk and uncertainty into the future?
- Why ought we monitor, measure and report on the scenarios?

**Foundational futures question 6: Preferred futures**

The purpose of the sixth futures question is to imagine the preferred future. The idea is to leverage off the results from the answers in question five. In considering the best case or preferred scenario the next step is to envision what these scenarios may look like as an imagined future. “The task for visioning the future is about creating a vision that pulls us forward and does not draw people into a glue of greed and fear” Inayatullah (2007). There are two visioning methods to consider in facilitating question five, you may consider using logical questioning as per of two questions below or you may prefer creative visualisation, therefore use the creative visualisation script.

Preferred futures questions which can be explored:

Foundational Futures Question 6: What is your preferred future?

- Which future do you wish to become reality for yourself or your organisation?

As an alternative to answering the question, use a visioning script where the facilitator reads out a creative visualisation script. Take time to set the scene in the workshop setting and ask people to get comfortable, turn down the lights, close their eyes and take several deep breaths before commencing the script.
Creative visualisation script

Step 1. Relax and close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths, focus on your breathing.
Step 2. Imagine you are walking up to a hedge.
Step 3. Looking over the hedge.
Step 4. Walking to the site of the vision.
Step 5. In detail describing what is seen (visual, auditory, smells ...what are people doing, how are they communicating...).
Step 6. Moving to a higher ground, getting a bird's eye view of what is going on.
Step 7. Back to the ground.
Step 8. Back to the hedge and over.
Step 9. Waking up and open your eyes when you are ready.

Write down your vision.

Synthesis questions which can be explored:

- How does your vision change from your initial prediction of the future of XYZ?
- Why do you think the future has changed?
- What do we notice about the visions from each of us in the room?
- What are the deeper learnings from the visions?

Foundational futures question 7: Getting agency & direction

The purpose of the seventh futures question is to identify the next steps to creating a vision. The idea is to remember the present from the future envisioned. A simple method is to backcast the major events and decisions which occurred from the vision and back to our present. Backcasting creates a simple timeline from the future back to the present and helps us identify key events, actions and decisions which contribute to the creation of a preferred future.

Agency and direction questions which can be explored:

Foundational Futures Question 7: How might you get to your preferred future?

- What are the strategic pathways?
- What steps are needed to realise the preferred vision?

Synthesis questions which can be explored:

- What steps ought we to take to implement the backcasting events/decisions into our strategic documents?
- Why would these backcasted events or decisions on the timeline to the preferred future be significant?
- What could dramatically challenge these backcasted events or decisions?

Agency evoking questions by Burke\(^{13}\):

- What today is impossible to do, but if it was possible would lead to change for the better?
- Why is it impossible?
- What could make it possible?
- What can you do to make it possible?
- What support do you need?

Post session actions

There are many potential options, considerations and documenting they can take place after completing your strategic foresight session. As a minimum there are some basic steps to complete as the facilitator.

- Seek to ensure that you could link the result to existing strategic planning documentation. This may need to wait until there is a review undertaken on the results from your foresight session and then be considered as part of new data to update the plan.
- You could consider writing up the results and findings as a discussion paper for circulation to others who may be interested in strategic foresight and futures thinking.
- You may have been successful in encouraging others to take specific actions. Further reading and research on the concept of anticipatory action learning can be pursued and two relevant journal articles are titled below authored by two leading futurists, namely:

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\(^{13}\) Burke, R Mt Eliza Business School, cited in Inayatullah 2014, The Future Workshop NDS PowerPoint slide No 335, 5th, 6th, 7th February 2014, National Disability Services Queensland, Lutwyche, Brisbane.

- You may also mentor and support the Anticipatory Action Learning teams and write this experience as a case study.
- You may consider developing performance measures for foresight action learning projects as a means to demonstrate how foresight can influence transformational change.
- You may decide to investigate increasing your competency in strategic foresight facilitation.
- At this stage you may even like to try to additional futures studies methods from the pillar of mapping.

Two sample methods from the Six Pillars approach

The purpose of ‘Mapping Our Futures’ pillar

The main intention with the pillar of mapping is to catalogue current thinking on the ideas and images about the future of XYZ in the present. The strategic foresight film resource provides an outline of the purpose of mapping and ideas to support knowledge building in this area.

Mapping Method No 1: Shared Histories

Purpose of the method

The shared histories foresight method seeks to bring to awareness what has shaped our present. By understanding what has made our present we can then move into choices about our future. Shared history helps us understand what has become victorious and influential as themes in decision making. Further, shared history provides a means to recognising our historical and cultural narratives that have travelled through time to help us make sense of why our agency, identity and structures are in the present.

Facilitating instructions for the method

The facilitator instructs individuals to either come to a whiteboard, or use a sequence of butchers paper connected together, or simple cards that can be laid out on the floor. The idea here is to create a timeline so that participants can visually see and understand how pluralistic histories and our collective pasts have shaped our presents.
Participant questions to be answered:

- What were the key events, trends and decisions that have created our present? (last 20 years);
- What has changed over this time in terms of levels of change? Consider answers from societal, organisational & individual perspectives;
- What are the continuities and dis-continuities? (What has remained sustained or survived? What has stopped or ceased?).

Synthesis questions you the facilitator ought to ask:

Discuss how our collective cultural, individual and collective perspectives shaped our present

- Why do you think these continuities prevailed while other contexts became extinct?
- What can we learn from these events, decisions made in the past?
- How do these results relate to us now and into the future?
- What assumptions do you think underpinned both the continuities and discontinuities? Why were these assumptions so prevalent?
- What are the implications if we do nothing?

Mapping Method No 2: The Futures Triangle

Purpose of the method

The futures triangle maps our current perspectives about the future of XYZ, or the context under investigation. A futures triangle method can also be used to make further sense of another foresight method called ‘environmental scanning’. Environmental scanning\(^{14}\) is simply a systematic method of looking for drivers of change that can influence the future. The process can be passive or active, continuous or occasional. “Environmental” here is not restricted to the natural environment, but covers all types of environment - often abbreviated to just scanning. In a Futures Triangle scanning results can be compared with creatively imagined images and ideas of the future.

\(^{14}\) [http://www.audencedialogue.net/gloss-fut.html#driver](http://www.audencedialogue.net/gloss-fut.html#driver)
Futures Triangle

The Futures Triangle Method maps three interrelated dimensions which are shaping the plausible future for the topic under investigation. These dimensions are:

- **Pushes of the present** - are quantitative drivers of change in our present. “Pushes are key drivers of change from past events or trends that led to our present e.g. …politics, technologies, demographics changes, economic growth, cultural shifts…”\(^{15}\);
- **Pulls of the future** - are visual images & ideas about the future. “Pulls are the dominant & contending images/ideas of the future – personal and collective and often unconscious”\(^{16}\);
- **Weights of the past** - are barriers or patterns that limit or prevent the attainment of change. Weights can affect the pulls, usually these barriers come from our past. “Weights are deep patterns, those patterns are resistant to change. e.g. …structures, history, silos, cultures, hierarchies…”\(^{17}\).

**Facilitator instructions for the method**

Explain the theory behind the futures triangle (as above) and the purpose of mapping the future. Discuss the concept of plausible futures. Ask your participants to break into groups or teams. Provide participants with butchers paper, a whiteboard or workbook sheet. Ask participants to select their topic and to complete a futures triangle and allow for or around 30 minutes. Ask participants to start with the image of the future as this becomes the forecast or prediction for the topic/context under investigation. Identify the drivers of change shaping this future. Then finally, consider the weights of the past or the barriers that may prevent or slow down this future from occurring?

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\(^{16}\) Ibid.p.8

\(^{17}\) Ibid.p.8
Ensure that the image of the future is more than a list of words but an authentic image. If there is more than one image emerging, consider doing a future triangle for each image.

**Note:** In your instructions determine whether you want the participants to identify pulls of the future (images/ideas) as either desired or forecasted futures. Participants will give you both if you are not clear in your instructions.

![Futures Triangle on ____________](image)

The three main questions to be answered by participants are:

- What are the **Pulls** (images/ideas) of the future (forecasted or desired) for your futures topic/context?
- What are the **Pushes** (drivers of change) shaping the plausible future or your futures topic/context?
- What are the **Weights** (barriers to achieving the pulls) influencing the pull or pushes for futures topic/context?

Synthesis questions to be asked by the facilitator are:

- Q: How balanced is our internal/external dimensions of our futures triangle?
- Q: Where should we strategically intervene? (images, pushes, weights)
- Q: Which are easiest to change? Why?
- Q: Which are most difficult? Why?
- Q. Can weights be a good thing to slow down the pull of the future?
- Q: Is the pull of the future a wise choice or simply an image that privileges at the expense of another alternative?
- Q: What happens when you did a futures triangle on each of the competing or contesting images? Was there greater or less tension between the image polarities?
- Q: Is there a lag time in the images?
- Q: How could we integrate the competing images into an integrated pull?

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Linking to other futures methods

The results from each of the futures triangle analysis can used to develop scenarios. Depending on participants context and perspectives each of the three dimensions from the futures title can help populate a range of different scenario archetypes. For example:

- the pull of the future could be either the preferred scenario (desired images and ideas) or a collapse scenario (depending if the images forecasted are a feared future);
- the weights of the past could also become a business as usual scenario or collapse scenario;
- the pushes of the present could become a business as usual scenario or preferred.

Further details on the six pillars approach to futures thinking are provided in Appendix 1 and Appendix 3 of this guideline. Appendix 4 of this guideline provides a range of helpful strategic foresight resources and links.

Some additional and concluding thoughts

Futures thinking and strategic foresight is in essence is about knowing your preferred learning styles and what this means when you engage in both facilitating and participating in strategic foresight sessions. The four preferred learning styles about futures thinking according to Professor Sohail Inayatullah\(^\text{19}\) are:

1. **Zero Loop – overwhelmed – PRETENDING**
   Zero loop occurs when there is information overload or no purpose to learning.

2. **Single Loop – take aways – DOING**
   Single loop learning focuses on actionable items – linking the long term with items to do on Monday morning.

3. **Double Loop – outside of paradigm learning – KNOWING**
   Double loop is learning about learning, gleaning insight by going out of the box in our thinking.

4. **Narrative learning, finding and creating your story – BEING**
   Narrative learning is focused intuitively, insights into the internal and external stories of persons and organisations. Narrative learning seeks to create a new story about the future.

Understanding these four preferred learning styles enables us to patiently and graciously support our learning from zero loop to narrative learning. Actually this is what will happen over the many facilitation sessions that you do. Some sessions will be zero or single, others may be double and narrative learning. So it is recommended to be patient in the development of your facilitation praxis. But most of all, find the timing, intentionality and ethic to have a go!

\(^{19}\) Inayatullah, S 2014, *Futures Thinking PowerPoint for NDS futures workshop slide No 2*, <www.metafuture.org>, workshop dated 5, 6, 7 February 2014, NDS Innovation Hub, Lutwyche, Brisbane.

After reading this guideline, the idea of facilitating a strategic foresight session may seem too overwhelming or complex! This is perfectly understandable. So it is recommended that you don’t rush into a foresight experience until you are ready and when you do start small. There are several points or ideas for you to consider that may alleviate the sense of being overwhelmed or knowing when to start.

It is recommended that you definitely familiarise yourself with the theory, concepts and definitions of futures thinking and strategic foresight. There are many texts available both online and through various futurists’ websites. Some of these futurists similar to Inayatullah have bookstores which you may purchase these resources directly. Another idea is to start thinking about integrating futures thinking and foresight language into your own. This will help with your ability to articulate and explain the range of futures thinking terminology while assisting in your own thinking, analysis and effective communication.

Or you might like to observe a practitioner in action so that you may vicariously learn how futures thinking and strategic foresight is facilitated. There may be a timing which is suitable to introduce futures thinking as a methodology such as a revising strategic plans or policies. Your role may be to design such reviews and this provides a wonderful opportunity to integrate futures thinking methodology into traditional planning and policy methodologies.

You may wish to contact practitioners so they may work with you to support your facilitation planning and preparation and learning. Or simply you may contact a futurist and have a lengthy discussion about possibilities. There are a myriad of ways to build your strategic foresight competence and confidence.

Thank you for taking the time to read this guideline and it is hoped that even if you do not end up facilitating a strategic foresight session for quite some time, that this guideline as a minimum enabled you to think differently about your own future and the future of those who are significantly important to yourself.

“If we dare to question the future other futures are possible!”

Steven Gould
Appendix 1: Futures Thinking/Futures Studies

Futures Thinking

The term ‘futures thinking’ is also closely related to the term ‘futures studies’. Futures studies are according to Professor Sohail Inayatullah the: “…systematic study of preferred, probable and possible futures including the worldviews and myths that underlie each future”. Futures studies has moved from historical assumptions that external forces are only influencing the future – astrology and prophecy – to structure (historical patterns of change, of the rise and fall of nations and systems, many ways of knowing) and agency (the study and creation of preferred images of the future) 21.

So when we talk about doing futures studies, what we are doing is engaging in a systematic study of the future. However, a study of the future also means a study into the many ways we have come to know the future and how such knowing has shaped our present and future thinking. To know the future involves understanding the type of thinking that has shaped our present. Thinking is a very individual and personalised experience, because it involves communicating my own individual interpretations, and what becomes obvious very quickly in a study of the future is that you and I most likely will have different interpretations and answers about the same subject/object in the future. Consequently, a study of the future involves brings multiple perspectives.

The difference between a study of the future and planning is that planning assumes only one future is available to us, futures thinking implies that we have more than one future, multiple scenarios, more choices are available and as a result futures studies sets up the ability for us to question the future, to ponder how is our world changing? 22 Do I have the appropriate paradigm/worldview to handle these changes? Thus, we can assume that there is not a singular future out there waiting to be discovered; rather that there are many futures. The question equally to how many individuals involved in the study.

One of the main key points in facilitating a strategic foresight session is that you are investigating and doing analysis on the future from multiple perspectives. Thus, as the facilitator and organisational futurist you will need to highlight that the future is not a singular construct or predetermined, rather that the future can be considered as being negative or positive depending on our ability to be ‘open or closed’.

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21 Inayatullah, S 2007, Questioning the Future: Methods and Tools for Organisational and Societal Transformation, Third edn, Tamkang University Press, pp.1
22 Inayatullah, S 2014, Creating Preferred Futures with Strategic Foresight, Interview with Professor Sohail Inayatullah by Steve Gould Session No 1, Sector Readiness and Workforce Capacity Initiative Film, National Disability Services Queensland, Lutwyche, Brisbane
According to Dr Marcus Bussey futurist we can consider the future as either ‘open or closed’ in terms of our:

- Closed and Open systems
- Closed and Open cultures
- Closed and Open institutions
- Closed and Open Minds

Closed futures privilege pattern over patterning; open futures do the reverse. Our concept of the future (closed or open) effects how we feel/identify, therefore:

1. When identity is threatened we retreat into closed “secure” futures and the pattern that sustain these.
2. When identity is expansive we reach out to others and understand the relational patterning nature of being that is an expression of a deeper humanity.
3. Closed futures decrease personal and social resilience.
4. Open futures increase personal and social resilience.
5. Open futures promote hope.

Considering a foresight investigation is about engaging multiple stakeholder perspectives and assumptions, you will face both open and closed futures perspectives. Therefore, your challenge as a facilitator will be to get your participants to think about the future in ‘Open and Pluralistic’ terms, meaning ‘futureS plural & open’…rather than ‘the future singular & closed’.

As Professor Ivana Milojević argues in her PhD chapter on Future, time and education: contexts and connections:

“Strictly speaking, Futures thinking is a study of the images and ideas. It is an investigation about the ways in which current predictions, images and ideas about the future influence decision and policy making today. An investigation into various possibilities (plausible in terms of present-day knowledge and theory). An investigation into the cause and effect dynamics, extrapolation of current trajectories towards their logical consequences.”

We use our images and ideas to forecast, compete and/or create alternatives through our creative imaginations…our imaginings bring the future into our present and thus shape our understandings of the concept called ‘the future’. The goal of any strategic foresight investigation is to transform how we have come to think and know our ideas and images used to define ‘the future’. We can use our images and ideas to forecast, compete and/or create alternatives, however it is more important to think about how we can change how we get to know the future rather than what we do with our dominant ideas and images of the future.

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24 ibid
25 Milojevic, I 2005, Educational Futures: Dominant and contesting visions, Routledge, New York, p.17
If we critique and understand how we have come to know the future differently, then we can transform our futures thinking by ‘questioning the ways we know and what we don’t know’ in the case of foresight, the ways we know and don’t know knowledge, imagination, ideas etc relating to the past, present and future. This questioning of knowledge and ignorance assists with our exploration into other creative imaginations, imaginings and ideas for the future. We can then bring these transformative futures thinking results about the future into our alternative present and thus re-shaping our present by default and in real time. Interestingly, most of us think the future is something outside of ourselves, something we have to chase or wait for, something way out there in the distance. Rather, in considering Professor Ivana Milojević’s synthesis about time and space as cited in Al Gore’s book on ‘The Future’ Milojević suggests that we already have a history of the future, that:

“The future is not an empty space but like the past an active aspect of the present”

This powerful statement challenges our thinking about the future. The future can be understood as a linear construct; as cyclic pattern, or an evolutionary spiral. The future has a past, from imagination, to the present, to possibilities…

So it is important to understand how we have come to know and fill our understanding of the past as history; why we are similarly compelled to fill the empty space called the future with our forecasts and predictions. Further why we need to continue to explore alternatives to these dominant ideas and images from the past and present.

Some may argue that this filling the space called ‘the future’ means we are endeavouring to create certainty through the use of sound research and science, for reasons of truth, objectivity, clarity on our certainty, destinations and/or purpose. Others may argue that it is our destiny as visions. So as an active aspect of our present, future thinking shapes our creative imaginations of alternative futures. If we want to change our forecasts or imaginations about the future, then we need to understand how to change and transform our way of knowing the future from today’s present way of knowings.

Thus, the purpose of strategic foresight processes is to create opportunities and options to move away from potentially limiting knowings that are used to make forecasts, singular or default futures to alternative knowing for creating alternative futures. Alternative futures which can be considered aligned, indeed more relevant or deeply more meaningful. So here are some important insights into why you ought to do futures thinking and strategic foresight facilitation and what can be some of the effects if you do:

- futures thinking challenges our dominant way of knowing and learning about the future;
- futures thinking helps us see the world differently;
- futures thinking is designed to help us rethink the present;
- futures thinking is not intended to help us predict anything;

- futures thinking helps us understand relationships between other ways of knowing the future AND why certain dominant or default perspectives about the past, present and future prevail;
- futures thinking helps us understand the history of the future;
- futures thinking challenges structures that inhibit or contain and seeks to evoke influence through agency;
- futures thinking helps us aligned our personal narrative to strategy desired futures;

Assumptions on the future and in futures thinking

As a facilitator in futures thinking you need to be mindful of several key philosophical assumptions provided by Professor Ivana Milojevic\(^{28}\) underpinning a study of the future. These are:

- The future is not predetermined and cannot be ‘known’ or ‘predicted’ as it does not exist;
- The future is determined partly by history, social structures and reality, and partly by chance, innovation and human choice;
- There is a range of alternative futures which can be ‘forecast’;
- Future outcomes can be influenced by human choices;
- Early intervention enables planning and design, while in ‘crises response’ people can only try to adapt and/or react;
- Ideas and images of the future shape our actions and decisions in the present;
- Our visions of preferred futures are shaped by our values;
- Humanity does not make choices as a whole, nor are we motivated by the same values, aspirations and project;

Prediction

Prediction according Dr Dennis List\(^{29}\) implies that an event will happen to a defined extent and sometimes with a defined probability. As a seminal futurist Professor Sohail Inayatullah states “If I want to predict the future invent it”. Predictions are made as specific statement that something will happen in the future. "It will rain tomorrow" is a prediction, and so is “If the wind is westerly and I sleep till after 8am, it will rain tomorrow" - but "it may rain tomorrow" is not a prediction.

Forecasting

Forecasting\(^{30}\) assumes that ‘all things considered’ the data (those who are inventing the future) suggests a high probability for continuity of the trajectory for the context under investigation. For example “there’s a 50-50 chance that at least 1 millimetre of rain will fall in this area tomorrow” is a forecast. Forecasts are usually applied to short-term futures - no more than a few years ahead. A forecast is considered to be less certain than prediction, but more certain than conjecture or anticipation.

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\(^{29}\) List, D, *glossary of futures terms*, [http://www.audencedialogue.net/gloss-fut.html](http://www.audencedialogue.net/gloss-fut.html), n.d

\(^{30}\) ibid
Foresight

Is generally used as a broad term covering all methods of envisaging the future, but with an emphasis on the alternative futures concept. ‘Foresight is the strategic application of futures thinking to the world around us’31.

Strategic foresight

“Strategic foresight is the understanding of alternative – possible, probable and preferred - futures and the worldviews and myths that underlie them”32. Strategic foresight is praxis that:

- Creates flexibility in decision-making by moving from a focus on one future to an analysis of alternative futures
- Moves from the management of reality to the creation of possibilities. Strategic foresight moves from the day to day operational considerations of management to the longer term transformative dimensions of leadership
- Moves from narrow problem-solving approaches to broader and deeper systemic perspectives and solutions
- Anticipates emerging issues and weak signals that may derail strategic plans and policies. Strategic foresight intends to solve tomorrow’s problems today, and discover opportunities early on.
- Through logic and creative thinking, articulates the first and second order – the longer term - consequences of current issues
- Changes the temporal horizon of planning from the short term to the medium and long term, indeed, strategic foresight provides methods and tools to navigate the three horizons (short, medium and the long term)
- Seeks to ensure that the inner stories of organization and nations are linked to systemic strategies. Often strategies fail not because an inaccurate assessment of alternative futures but because of a lack of understanding of deep culture.
- Reduces risk by understanding the worldviews of multiple stakeholders. Blind spots, which are always built into the knowledge framework of each person and organization, are addressed by including difference. This makes implementation far easier.
- Moves from risk avoidance to risk reduction to risk management to opportunity and innovation creation
- Uses the future to change the present

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31 Bussey, M, 2012 Graduate Certificate in Futures Studies, Lecture on Strategic Foresight, Sunshine Coast University, August 15
32 Inayatullah, S 2011, Forty years of foresight thinking to define my definition of strategic foresight, Mooloolaba, 2011.
Appendix 2: Framework for Session Planning

Designing your session plan

A highly effective framework for session planning is based on three simple steps. These steps are Introduction, Body and Conclusion. When the steps are correlated to the competencies of workplace training as found in the Certificate 4 Workplace Training & Assessment\textsuperscript{33}, there is a simple yet powerful way to facilitate adult learning, and in this case strategic foresight. These three simple steps are:

1. Introduction - GLOSS
2. Body - TAS
3. Conclusion – OFF

The following table below provides an explanation of this sessional design pneumonic correlated to the development of a strategic foresight session plan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Design pneumonic</th>
<th>Explanation and the design pneumonic applied to a strategic foresight session plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G - Get their attention</td>
<td>To get the audience or participants attention in a strategic foresight session, start with an evocative image, question or statement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L - Linkages to purpose/previous context</td>
<td>Provide clarity as to why (purpose) the session is being facilitated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O - Overview of learning outcomes</td>
<td>Identify what you hope will come from facilitating the foresight session. Note: Outcomes can be open-ended in a foresight session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S - Sequence of sessional events</td>
<td>Explain the sequence of the foundational foresight questions that will be asked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S - Stimulate for learning</td>
<td>Discuss why an investigation into the ideas and images of the future is significantly important. How such consequences if left unexamined may impact or leave undesired effects.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Body**               |                                                                                   |
| T - Theory             | Provide a general and a brief overview of futures thinking concepts and theory. Introduce the purpose of each foundational question in sequence. |
| A - Activity           | Get participants to answer the foundational futures question to a chosen context. As the facilitator you ought to provide a sample of |

\textsuperscript{33} Trebilcock, C 1995 National Staff Development Community for Vocational Education and Training, Commonwealth of Australia, Melbourne Victoria, pp 8-53.
Design pneumonic | Explanation and the design pneumonic applied to a strategic foresight session plan
--- | ---
answers based on possible, plausible, probable and preferred contexts to guide participants.

S - Summary | Through reflective questioning synthesis facilitate meaning or sense making of the participants answers and link insights/ learning to session outcomes.

Conclusion

O - Overall review and summary of key learning | Summaries of the key learnings and implications from the foresight analysis.

F - Feedback | Discuss how the results will be recorded, evaluated and communicated with others.

F= future events & learning activities | Discuss the development and implementation action learning projects/teams.

Sessional Resources

A main resource that is recommended that you develop as a facilitator in strategic foresight is a futures thinking PowerPoint session. You may consider designing your foresight PowerPoint session based on your sessional plan. The use of images is an effective way of supporting understanding of some of the theory for each of the pillars and methods. It is also recommended that you include examples of the method being applied to a relevant context. A good range of butchers paper, whiteboards and open space designs where people can engage and mingle is highly recommended as part of your layout design.

Engaging and communicating stakeholders/participants

There are a range of activities that you the facilitator need to consider both before, during and after your strategic foresight session. These activities aim to ensure there is clarity in purpose and rationale as to why participants and stakeholders should support or participate in your strategic foresight session.

Pre-Session

1. consider developing and communicating a foresight brief;
2. communicate the rationale and purpose for the foresight session to all participants prior attending;
3. consider inviting participants who may not agree with the current default future or political position on the topic;
4. seek clarity on desired outcomes from key decision makers and/or sponsors; and
5. invite stakeholders who bring a difference; think about if someone is missing from your session how this would make a difference to the results.
During the strategic foresight session

1. ensure each person has the opportunity to be listened to;
2. ensure your instructions are understood;
3. make your session as interactive as possible;
4. create an environment conducive to open and uninhibited thinking;
5. avoid the trap of debating points of view with your participants from a dualism perspective, e.g. right and wrong, my way versus your way rather seek for how both views can become a dualist or integrated perspective;
6. see differences as scenarios;
7. use as many ways to be creative with reporting back method results e.g. role-play, skits, drama, one-minute reporting, top three responses, etc.
8. avoid the necessity to be the expert, rather simply declare your perspective;
9. affirm that all views are considered legitimate; and
10. seek to get commitment and agency to implement actions for creating a preferred future

Dealing with conflicts or problems

If during your facilitation the dialogue and discourse becomes heated or hostile there are many techniques and responses which can mitigate the likelihood of this conflict escalating. Some of these are:

1. let the group work on self-regulating the conflict or persons;
2. recognise the point of view as a scenario;
3. don’t overly focus on the resisters by continually the conversation and engaging in a one-on-one debate, rather use the conflict as an opportunity to discuss a futures triangle. (Conflict may be representative of barriers to change hence be considered a weight in the futures triangle method)
4. use conflict as an opportunity for a break and reflection;
5. acknowledge and post the topic/issue to a discussion board (should time permit later) for further discussion;
6. consider whether the conflict represents a disowned future;
7. consider that conflict may also be indicative that there are limited acceptable choices to the future; and
8. consider whether the group or the individual do not see themselves represented in the future forecasted or predicted.
The nuances of synthesis and legitimising participant results

One of the real challenges in facilitating a strategic foresight workshop is how to process and synthesise the meaning making of results from the foresight methods. As the facilitator this requires you to use elegant questioning as a way of trying to find alternative perspectives and meaning in the results. You will need to engage the participants in this meaning making exercise by:

1. ensuring participants communicate and present their findings in a timely, creative and succinct manner;
2. highlighting the main premises and conclusions used to frame the participant results;
3. identification of participant learnings and insights from the analysis;
4. asking the participants how their results link to the overall sessional outcomes;
5. discussing the implications of the results in terms of the official default/used future;
6. facilitating a discussion with the participants in determining the consequences and implications from their foresight analysis.

Post-Session

1. write up your results and highlight implications and recommendations;
2. link results into strategic documentation;
3. consider a recommendation for action learning foresight teams to implement results;
4. plan for your next strategic foresight session.
Appendix 3: Further details on the six pillars approach

Concepts, Methods and Tools in Futures Studies (by www.metafuture.org)

Pillar No 1: Mapping futures
- Shared History
- Environmental Scanning
- Making sense of the scanning - Futures Triangle
- Push, pull, weight
- Strategic mapping Futures Landscape

Pillar No 2: Anticipating futures
- Emerging issues Analysis (disturbing the map)
- Futures Wheel - the consequences of issues
- Sorting by Impact, Actionable

Pillar No 3: Understanding time and spaces in futures
- Macro History and Macro Futures (patterns and the long term, lengthening the map)
- Linear, cyclical, bifurcation, pendulum, spiral
- Implications of grand thinkers on long term trends

Pillar No 4: Deepening our understanding of futures
- Causal Layered Analysis
- Ways of Knowing
- Inner and outer mapping, Four quadrants

Pillar No 5: Creating Alternatives to the present
- Scenarios
- Single diver
- Double driver
- Content archetype
- Structure archetype
- Probable, preferable, possible, plausible
- Contradictions
- Social Innovation
- Nuts and Bolts

Pillar No 6: Transforming the present and creating futures

- Uses of the Future
- Visioning
- Analytic
- Questioning
- Unconscious
- Back casting (planning in reverse)
- Anticipatory Action Learning
- Transcend Conflict resolution method
Appendix 4: Helpful resources and links

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Futures_studies
A general introductory site for knowledge on the basic concepts and ideas associated with futures studies.

http://www.audiencedialogue.net/sitemap.html
Audience Dialogue is a useful foresight website that can assist with exploration on key terms, definitions and futures studies terminology. These definitions are the works of Dr Dennis List.

http://www.shapingtomorrow.com/
This is an anticipatory foresight intelligence site to help with your understanding on a range of forecasts, predictions and topical themes in society. This site discusses emerging opportunities & risks, including strategic thinking, innovation, risk assessment, collaboration & education approaches to strategic foresight.

http://www.meta-future.org/index.html
An educational think tank hosted by Professor Sohail Inayatullah and Professor Ivana Milojevic that explores alternative and preferred futures and the worldviews and myths that underlie them. Their approach to futures thinking and practice (theories, methods, tools and processes) is based on the "Six Pillars" model.

http://www.meta-future.org/articles-by-sohail-inayatullah.html
This section of the Metafuture.org site provides a range of futures thinking and strategic foresight articles written by Prof Sohail Inayatullah and Prof Ivana Milojevic and other futurists.

http://www.wfsf.org/
This site is the home of the World Futures Studies Federation.

The above link is the home of seminal futurist’s Dr Richard A Slaughter an internationally recognised futurist/foresight practitioner, author, editor, teacher and innovator who has worked with a wide range of organisations in many countries and at all educational levels.

http://www.futures.hawaii.edu/
The Hawaii Research Centre for Futures Studies (Hawaii Futures) was established by the Hawaii State Legislature in 1971. It is one of the world’s most renowned institutions for futures research, consulting, and education. The activities of Hawaii Futures are overseen by pioneer futurist and Professor Jim Dator, who for nearly a half century has sculpted the very discipline of futures studies.

Environmental Scanning/ Social curation sites
There are many social/media curation sites for researching foresight scanning.

https://www.pinterest.com/
http://pearltrees.com
http://www.scoop.it/t/strategic-foresight
http://www.youtube.com/user/strategicforesighttv
http://www.futureswatch.org/Timeline.htm
http://www.worldtrendsresearch.com/
http://www.worldwatch.org/
http://www.un.org/popin/wdtrends.htm
http://www.ciesin.org/IC/wbank/wtables.html
http://www.wfs.org/trendmj05.htm

Futures Studies Journal Articles
http://www.jfs.tku.edu.tw/

Journal of Futures Studies: Epistemology, Methods, Applied and Alternative Futures
The Journal of Futures Studies is a globally-oriented, trans-disciplinary referred journal. Its mission is to develop high-quality; futures-oriented research and thinking based on the evolving knowledge base of Futures Studies. Articles accepted for publication are expected to show an in-depth understanding of the field's dimensions, content, research perspectives and methods.
References


Inayatullah, S 2011, *Forty years of foresight thinking to define my definition of strategic foresight*, <www.metafuture.org>, Mooloolaba, Sunshine Coast, Personal communication 22nd February 2011 to Steven Gould Futures.


For more information and resources, visit the Sector Readiness and Workforce Capacity Initiative Clearinghouse: http://Communitydoor.org.au/SectorReadiness

The Sector Readiness and Workforce Capacity Initiative is a collaboration between the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, Health and Community Services Workforce Council, National Disability Services Queensland and the Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE.

This guideline has been developed by Steve Gould Futures in consultation with National Disability Services Queensland.