


Strategic Foresight Tools for Planning and Policy

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INTRODUCTION

Many people in organizations believe they can foresee developments in their industry or sector. Yet, the most critical threats or greatest opportunities often emerge in other industries or sectors. Brand new trends, developments, or phenomena can emerge in adjacent fields or in society at large. Although in the beginning they may seem disconnected, they are often the drivers of change that will eventually affect one's own future, in dramatic ways.

Organizations from both the private and public sectors must improve strategic decision making to succeed in the challenging environment of today to overcome emerging complex problems, for success in an increasingly uncertain future. Strategic Foresight enables organizations to envision a range of possible future environments. Scenario-based planning then enables organizations to develop an adaptive strategy for success as the actual future unfolds.

Major corporate companies have been leveraging the power of Foresight for years. During the oil crisis of the late 1960s, Shell altered its strategy and successfully propelled itself to the top of the industry, a move credited to the use of scenario planning. Today, organizations like Intel, Ford, and Disney have joined Shell in employing futurists to leverage foresight tools for organization-wide strategy development and innovation.

Most recently, Foresight has emerged as a key instrument for the development and implementation of forward-looking research and innovation policies. Some activities show an interesting mix of approaches combining three types of elements: prospective studies of long-term opportunities and alternatives, participatory networking, and policy orientation

Strategic Foresight is well-established in many advanced economies, including the European Union, Japan, and Singapore. Among the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), Foresight programs at the government level are increasingly common.

Moreover, Strategic Foresight is about improving a leader's decision making and their ability to implement change. The practice of Strategic Foresight affects the behaviors of planning goal setting and decision-making.

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This paper will examine the Strategic Foresight and Scenario Planning.

Background

Strategic Foresight is a branch of strategic thinking, which have long been practiced in military, politics and business management for as long as the disciplines existed (Kuosa T. 2016).

The beginnings of strategic foresight military planning, strategic study and planning can be considered one of the central branches of politics and political theory. Niccolo Machiavelli can be considered as one of the first modern political strategists.

Strategic foresight was held in high esteem in Sun Tzu's book "Art of War" when he wrote, "Fore-knowledge enables a wise general to achieve things beyond the reach of ordinary men".

The use of Strategic Foresight and Scenarios, in particular, to explore the future goes back to the work of Herman Kahn at the RAND Corporation in the 1950s. Kahn used scenarios to investigate different military strategies for engaging the Soviet Union during the Cold War. He became known for communicating about the future through stories told in the future.

Scenarios have been famously used to guide government policy and plans. In 1991-1992, the Republic of South Africa engaged a team from RDS to help them envision the future of RSA post-apartheid. Named after the resort where the exercise took place, four Mont Fleur scenarios were developed. The team then reverse engineered (or backcasted in futurists' terms) the decisions required along the way to achieve the future state most preferred by all stakeholders.

Strategic Planning vs. Strategic Foresight

Strategic Planning looks at what you've historically offered to members and asks, "How can we do this a little better, faster or more efficiently? How can we improve or expand upon what we're currently doing?"

Strategic Foresight looks 10 or 20 years into the future and asks, "What will our future pool members value? What kind of products and services will our members need, and how can we best serve them?"

Many Foresight professionals agree with the statement "the future does not exist" and "it is impossible to predict the future". What may fill some people with optimism, maybe a deeply depressing prospect to others? While some may focus on technological developments others may look at demographic shifts (Van der Duin P 2016).

Strategic Foresight contains a set of tools and processes for gathering systemic, participatory intelligence by pulling together a set of emerging trends underlying recent developments in a range of different sectors, together with their interactions and begin to collectively make sense of them.

Strategic Foresight and Scenario Planning

Strategic Foresight and its most common tool, scenario-based strategic planning, have been used successfully for decades in corporate planning. The most famous example is provided by the energy and petrochemical giant Royal Dutch Shell (Cardoso and Emes 2014). During the oil crisis of the late 1960s, Shell altered its strategy and successfully propelled itself to the top of the industry, a move accredited to the use of scenario planning. Today, organizations like Intel, Ford, and Disney have joined Shell in employing futurists to leverage Foresight tools for organization-wide strategy development and innovation.

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