



# Practical Foresight Guide

## Chapter 1 - Foresight

Author: Dr. Michael Jackson, Founder, Shaping Tomorrow

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# 1. Foresight

## The world today

Most significant changes affecting organizations know no borders or markets and affect every part of society today. Countries, governments, businesses, and institutions continue to witness ever increasing surprise as complexity increases. New surprises impact us far faster, and more profoundly, than we might think, e.g., pandemics, changing weather conditions, terrorist events, health crises, altered social values, economic and political uncertainties, and technological advances.

Organizations, too, face additional new challenges including

- ❑ severe competition
- ❑ market convergence
- ❑ new entrants
- ❑ high volatility in all aspects of their activities
- ❑ growing dispersive expertise
- ❑ rapid information sharing across increasingly porous boundaries
- ❑ emergence of new business models
- ❑ investors demand for repeatable, successful growth

## The world tomorrow?

Today's, global trends, uncertainties, and surprises have the potential to significantly change the way the world works tomorrow.

- ❑ Greater prospects for global, national, and local disruption and shock are increasingly in evidence.
- ❑ Forecasting models projecting past patterns can therefore no longer be relied upon to predict the future.

An increasing number of drivers are reshaping companies' business contexts. Drivers include climate change, globalization, new technology, regulatory change, demographics, and new consumer values.

- ❑ Shaping the world we want to live in means being more aware of the future and seeking better approaches.

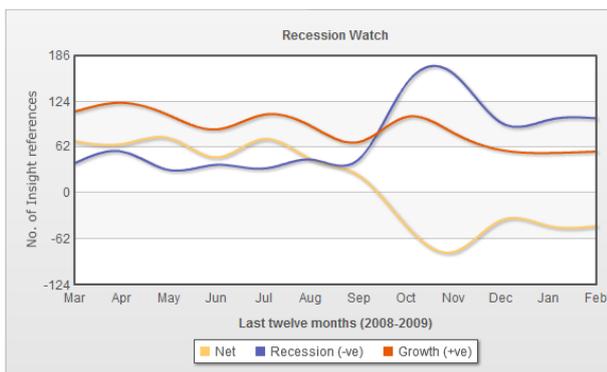
Those who spot new trends through strategic foresight and exploit them early have competitive advantage over their less prepared rivals. Studies show that those that create, join quickly and then leave an emerging market just before it peaks are those achieving the best performance. How do they do that?

The answer lies in their drive for a more agile and resilience-focused approach to being smart and forward-thinking. They have learned that continually searching for emerging trends, tipping points and weak signals is a vital intelligence tool to help them survive and thrive in an ever more competitive future.

Periodic and episodic analysis is no longer enough to cope with rapid change; real-time recognition, interpretation, and action on issues are required to reduce roadblocks to on-going competitiveness. Consider those who were prepared for the financial crisis and could see it coming and those who were not and blindly pursued existing strategies. Most financial organizations and governments ignored the normal boom and bust cycle and just held their course. Even the British Prime minister jumped on board declaring the cycle a thing of the past. How wrong he and the financial organizations were.

But, the promise of a coming recession had been widely touted as growth deteriorated and warnings of looming recession were regularly given in the media as the chart shows (Figure 1). Tracking these media articles about potential future recession and growth over time showed growth deteriorating steadily from 2004 while talk of recession

#### Recession watch



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Figure 1. Recession watch. Scan hit meta-tag analysis - Courtesy of Shaping Tomorrow

grew more incessant from 2006. The chart indicated the coming tipping point fully one year before world stock markets responded giving ample time for forward-thinking organizations to take avoiding action.

The prepared and thoughtful sail on, with hardly a mention in the media, while the high profile failures and troubled short-sighted organizations get maximum coverage and brand damage, or are forced to merge or close. They didn't see the crash coming in time because their antennae were just not tuned to emerging change or the potential for sudden tipping points.

On the other hand agile organizations recruit, train, and expect their managers to develop fresh insights about new opportunities and threats. This is done by systematically finding weak signals and amplifying their effect on the future. For example, recognizing that mobile phones and/or cameras will allow society to increasingly communicate with inanimate objects through artificial intelligence means that organizations can use this knowledge to create new products and services and refresh or displace existing offers.

Forward-thinking organizations do not attempt to predict the future but are putting in place holistic systems and repeatable processes that anticipate possible futures and determine their response to them. That's because deep understanding of changes across the political, economic, social, and technological

fields are required to derive deep understanding and interpretation about future consumer and societal expectations and desires. By better preparing their organizations for change they continuously enhance their agility, capability, and robustness to withstand emerging change and future shocks and make better and earlier decisions than their rivals.

Foresight projects should be considered successful, not because they correctly predict the future, but if people make better decisions from them. It is not a failure if a foresight project's conclusions turn out to be wrong and in any case continuous future watching means decisions can be changed and course corrections made as new learning is received.

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Source: Emery 1980

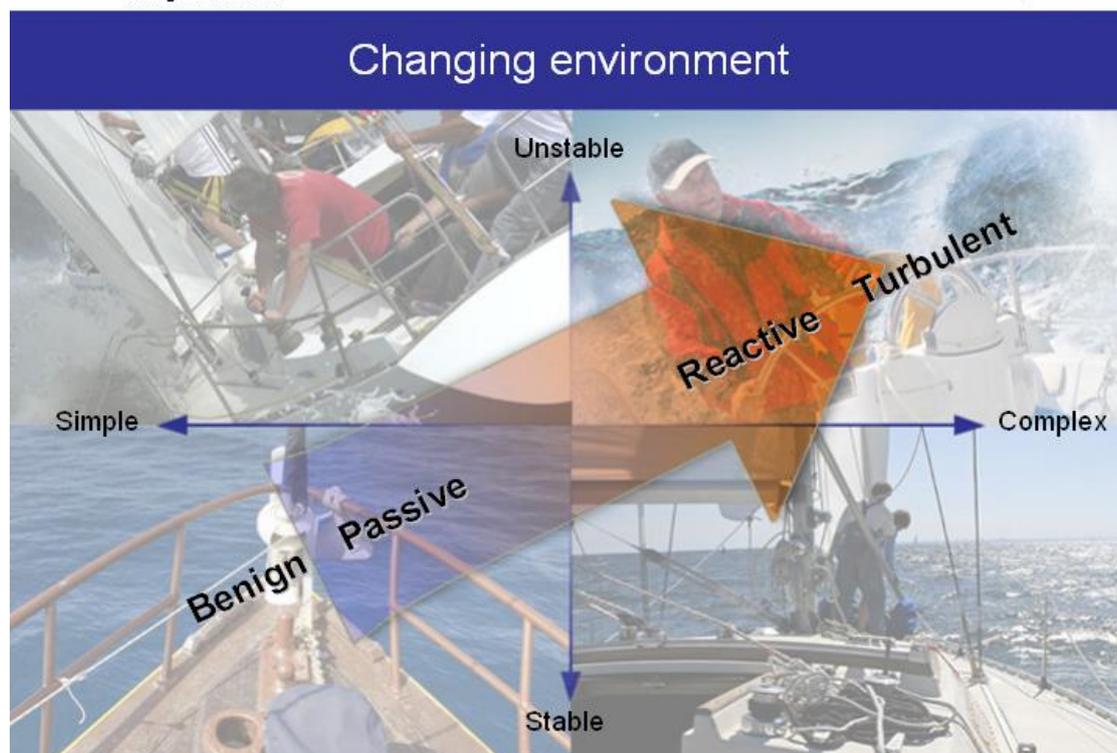


Figure 2. Changing environment. Courtesy of Shaping Tomorrow

Driving this shift is

- ❑ Increasing capabilities to monitor, sense, and interpret weak signals through structured analytic techniques.
- ❑ Recognition that more intelligence is less as computing power makes it possible to aggregate and drill down into change observations made by the many.
- ❑ Knowing that the same change observations are collected by organizations and analyzed in almost identical ways even if the emphasis and outcomes of the analysis are entirely different.

- ❑ The desire to overcome the silo effect of different teams in different parts of the organization not contributing to overall organizational intelligence.
- ❑ Benefits to be had from Web 2.0 technologies in creating collaborative, dynamic, analysis and subsequent innovation.
- ❑ A need to rapidly respond at the right time to a far wider array of threats and risks.

Cost-effective tools now provide continuous anticipatory intelligence but do not replace sound analysis. Instinct and sound thinking is still required but with a much improved lens and less drudgery than traditional methods.

Agile organizations use what they can see on, and over, the horizon to determine their way forward, avoiding risks, or using them to advantage, and seizing opportunities ahead of less far-sighted rivals. They continually ask themselves strategic questions to stay ahead of the game because the market economy knows no uniform progression. Instead, it regularly fluctuates between upswing and downturn, boom and bust, just like the changing weather.

Strategic questions for any organization include

- ❑ How are customer and societal values changing?
- ❑ Where are the new opportunities for, and risks to, growth?
- ❑ Who might be the new competition?
- ❑ What competencies will be needed tomorrow?
- ❑ Which capabilities need modifying/strengthening or divesting for the future?

Determining right challenges to address at the right time is therefore vital. At a societal level the key challenges haven't changed.

- ❑ How might homes & families change?
- ❑ How might work change?
- ❑ How might hobbies & leisure differ?
- ❑ How might people travel & communicate?
- ❑ How might childhood & education differ?
- ❑ How might the environment change?
- ❑ How might government & economies differ?
- ❑ How might military responses change?

- What should be done to maximize opportunities for growth and minimize risks, time, and cost effectively?
- But the environment has!

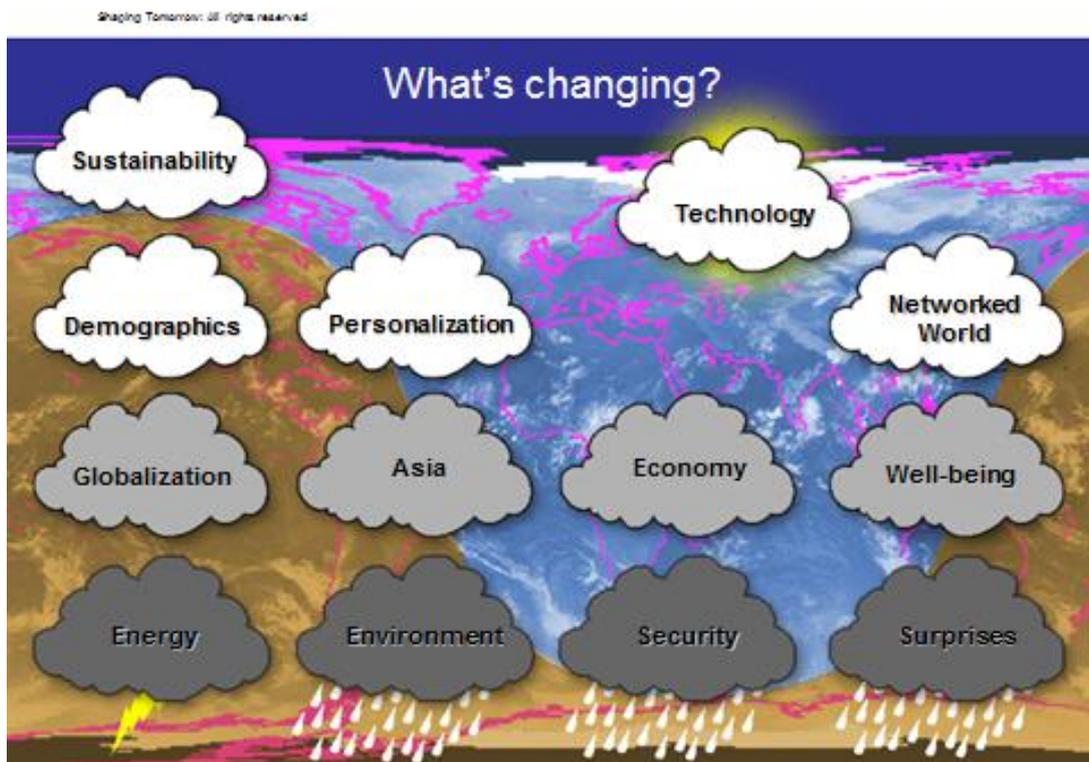


Figure 3. What's changing? Courtesy of Shaping Tomorrow

In fact, these clouds have already changed since the slide was made in August 2006. From being grey with the possibility of rain, the economy morphed rapidly into a violent storm that threatened us all and still lingers.

It's the latest example of increasingly uncertain tomorrows bringing

- Increasing turbulence
- New risks
- Accelerating innovation

- Increasing surprise

A better response by organizations is required

To cope organizations are increasing their resilience to surprises through

- On-going [questioning](#) of potential futures
- Intelligent [horizon scanning](#)
- Continuous [strategic thinking](#)
- Dynamic [action planning](#)
- Engaging in social [networking](#)

They know that by looking further ahead and reconnoitering what's next they can change a vicious reactive cycle to a responsive virtuous circle making their work more satisfying and less wasteful of time and resources. For them anticipating the future and preparing for it early means greater chances of success and less of failure.

Common traits across future thinking, innovative, risk aware organizations include

- Strategically and simultaneously focusing on innovation and risk.
- Systematically gathering precursory insight of changes happening in the world around them.
- Sensing and adjusting to emerging change.
- Collaborating and partnering far beyond traditional commercial boundaries.
- Using simple, quick processes to reduce cycle times.
- Measuring and rewarding on a few vital organizational-level metrics.

They have learned, over many years, that systematically searching for and analyzing emerging trends, tipping points and weak signals is a vital intelligence tool to help them survive and thrive in an ever more competitive future. And, looking further afield for experts in academia, NGO's, commerce, government and futurists for that intelligence gives them greater insight and earlier warning than their less prepared rivals. Sharing what they know now, in a co-opetitive manner brings another level of resilience and agility to their organizations tomorrow.

### Fit for the Future

	Ad-hoc	Aware	Capable	Mature	World Class
Leadership	<input type="radio"/>				
Framing	<input type="radio"/>				
Scanning	<input type="radio"/>				
Forecasting	<input type="radio"/>				
Visioning	<input type="radio"/>				
Planning	<input type="radio"/>				

→ Goal

03 August 2013

Figure 4. Are You Fit for the Future? Jointly developed by Shaping Tomorrow with Terry Grim (Foresight Alliance) and with the kind permission of Social Technologies - [www.shapingtomorrow.com/fitforthefuture.cfm](http://www.shapingtomorrow.com/fitforthefuture.cfm)

### Are you fit for the future?

Knowing how capable your own organization is in developing effective strategic foresight compared to others is an essential health check; part of your kitbag of tools to keep on improving competitive advantage.

Take the simple test [here](#) or visit the Shaping Tomorrow link in *Figure 4* to see how you compare to others.

‘Consider your current and desired capability in the following disciplines

- ❑ *Leadership*. Helping organizations to translate foresight into action...on an on-going basis.
- ❑ *Framing*. Helping the organization identify and solve the right problems.
- ❑ *Scanning*. Helping organizations to understand what's going on in its immediate environment and in the world at large.
- ❑ *Forecasting*. Helping organizations consider a range of future possibilities.
- ❑ *Visioning*. Helping organizations decide what they want in the future.
- ❑ *Planning*. Helping people develop plans, people, skills, and processes that support the organization's vision.

Then rank your existing and desired capability at a particular future point in time based on these maturity levels

- ❑ *Ad hoc*. The organization is not or only marginally aware of strategic foresight processes and most work is done without plans or expertise.
- ❑ *Aware*. The organization is aware that there are strategic foresight best practices and is learning from external input and past experiences.
- ❑ *Capable*). The organization has reached a level where it has a consistent approach to strategic foresight, used across the organization, which delivers an acceptable level of performance and return on investment.
- ❑ *Mature*. The organization has invested additional resources to develop strategic foresight expertise and advanced processes for a practice.
- ❑ *World-class*. The organization is considered a leader in strategic foresight, often creating and disseminating new methods.’

Source: With the kind permission of Terry Grim, William Croasmun ([www.foresightmaturitymodel.com](http://www.foresightmaturitymodel.com)) and Social Technologies.

These types of tests will not only help you benchmark yourself and your organization against others, but identify key gaps in your foresight and show associates where you fall short. They can be used both for increasing understanding and objection handling.

This handbook aims to make it possible for any organization to be able to rapidly move itself to best and possibly next practice in each of these disciplines.

Further reference

- ❑ [1998: Globalization ... 2008: Continuous Change](#)
- ❑ [Foresight and Business Futures](#), Ian Miles, Manchester Institute of Innovation Research 2008 (Slideshare: registration required)
- ❑ [Outside In](#), Mark Madsen, TWI 2007
- ❑ [In a Recession Consultants will have to Deliver Almost Instant Results](#), Mick James, Top Consultant 2008
- ❑ [The Crash Course](#), Chris Martensen
- ❑ [The New Age Of Innovation](#), Driving Co-created Value Through Global Networks; Prahalad & Krishnan 2008, McGraw Hill
- ❑ [A Vision for 2012, Planning for Extraordinary Change](#); John L. Petersen, 2008, Speaker's Corner
- ❑ [What's Next](#), Rowan Gibson,
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## 1.1 Strategic leadership

Increased agility and resilience

In the face of:

- ❑ Increasing speed of innovation and product lifecycles
- ❑ Globalization of markets, knowledge, and technologies
- ❑ Growing risk of misdirected R&D expenditures
- ❑ Explosion of transferred knowledge and technologies from one industry to another

organizations need more accurate and early anticipatory warnings of change. Changes can be perceived, before becoming effective, by examining "weak signals." An early perception of these signals prolongs the time organizations have to consider, prepare, and act instead of reacting too late.

'Managers and leaders today therefore cannot rely on past experience and the hope that life will be predictable. Instead they face disruptive change and must learn to cope with far greater unpredictability and disruption. That means identifying and focusing on the vital few future opportunities and threats, maintaining a long-term view and recognizing the patterns of change that are likely to create the next waves of transformation.

But, most organizations today suffer from weak strategic analytics:

- ❑ Limited data collection
- ❑ Siloed information
- ❑ No systematic dissemination
- ❑ Limited analytical talent
- ❑ Low fact-based decision-making'

Source: Weak Analytics Capabilities Hindering Companies' and Governments' Decision-Making Abilities, Accenture Research Reveals <http://www.webwire.com/ViewPressRel.asp?ald=112125>

Strategic foresight is often held in the heads of executives, discussed at the water-cooler and often not documented in even formal meetings. Consequently, strategic decision making is based more on gut-feel and personal experiences than sound analysis. Even when sound analysis and thoughtful decision-making is undertaken it is often carried out in isolation as a project rather than part of a designed and continuous foresight program.

Yet, with a little forethought and perhaps one or two talented and trained people to set-up and manage a program the disparate information silos can be brought together for the benefit of the whole organization. The result is that corporate memory is retained, decision-making is more robust and quicker, silo strategies are better co-ordinated, risks better managed, opportunities full exploited and the organizations information turned into real-time knowledge about the external environment.

Even in an organization of just a few hundred people a single person devoted to managing a properly constituted foresight system can prove extra-ordinarily effective in implementing the ideas that will be described here. Cost effectiveness and value for money is therefore very high while just one great market innovation or threat identified early more than pays for the annual investment.

Possible outcomes

By introducing better foresight capabilities to an organization leaders can

- ❑ Feed organizational-wide consensus.

- ❑ Change thinking and create a sense of a shared future direction.
- ❑ Buy time.
- ❑ Encourage commitment and decision making.
- ❑ Avoid tunnel vision.
- ❑ Assist participants to develop and adjust their own team strategies.
- ❑ Improve networking in pursuit of solving common problems.
- ❑ Develop an organizational foresight culture.
- ❑ Help better prepare people to address future challenges.
- ❑ Increase chances of survival, performance, strategy, and decisions.
- ❑ Test robustness of policies.
- ❑ Improve the credibility of business cases.
- ❑ Help optimize use of resources over time.
- ❑ Generate many innovative ideas.
- ❑ Allow understanding of which technologies and concepts have more practical application.
- ❑ Reduce down silo effects.

and potentially create disruption for their rivals rather than be storm-tossed by the market or events.

Foresight work is both a strategic and tactical tool

An all-embracing, organization-wide approach to foresight helps to determine a better vision and strengthens cultural values, metrics and processes. Foresight thinking can be used as a:

- ❑ Strategic tool
  - ❑ It won't tell you what will happen in the future, but, it will reveal a vision of a world that could plausibly happen and challenge you to think about what that could mean and whether it should be welcomed or avoided.
- ❑ Tactical tool
  - ❑ It can be used for creating short-term strategies lasting just a few months, or years. Risk assessment, problem solving, solutions testing, crisis, reputation, and change management can all benefit from taking a futures thinking approach.

## Further reference

- [Why Study the Future?](#), Shaping Tomorrow
- [Case Studies](#), Shaping Tomorrow
- [The Benefits Of Strategic Analysis](#), Third Sector Foresight
- [Using Futures Approaches: A Guide to Getting Started](#), Maree Conway
- [What do we mean by futures thinking? The Tomorrow Project](#)
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- [Forces and Trends in Business](#), Steven Brown, Trends 2010
- [Strategic Leadership Amidst Disruptive Change](#), Articles Base 2010

## 1.2 Opportunity and risk management

Uncertainty and turmoil rule; and will do for quite some time. But despite the crises, there will still be opportunities out there. Companies will now need to work smarter and with a keener eye on the future than ever if they are to win through. Examining the options, thinking through the implications, looking for win: wins, and being fast and flexible are even more important in the bad times as well as in the good times.

For example, the recent U.S bailout package by Congress is not the end of the global crisis. It is getting the U.S money markets moving again, but observers suggest a coming deeper recession is likely despite the actions of many countries around the world to stabilize confidence. Many companies and consumers are feeling the pressure; surviving today feels like the only game in town. And it is unclear as to whether the actions which governments and national banks have taken will work in the medium-term. Anticipating alternative futures and being prepared for each is critical to ensure the best possible course ahead can be plotted and adjusted as circumstances change.

### Parallels and precedents

Economies of the world are likely to come out of the other side of the crisis very different than when they entered: new regulations, new rules, new priorities - and new opportunities will emerge. The bursting of the Dot.com bubble in the late nineties provides a parallel and precedent to the current crisis that we can learn from:

- The companies that went to the wall during the bubble were those whose short-term business models were fundamentally flawed: a race for egotistical growth, profligate spending and low concentration on inherent risk, inappropriate capitalization, and shareholder returns.

- Many companies, affected by, but not critically wounded, waited out the storm by cutting vital investment and jobs, intending to begin again after the storm passed. Most never did!
- The smart companies, many that we know as household names, protected and even enhanced their investments, ensured they kept their team together, and swept up great people and assets displaced from less forward-thinking and weaker organizations. They used the crisis to develop new futures for themselves and their stakeholders often re-inventing themselves or changing existing industry paradigms through knowing more about what was possible.

## Innovation

Pressure on resources is creating opportunities for innovation and new products, such as processes to reduce water consumption, technologies to scavenge energy, reducing energy consumption in data centers, collaborating with customers to find new solutions, using waste as a feedstock for biofuels. But to make these happen, a sense of direction and vision from management are essential. So, too, are looking beyond the immediate crisis to see what opportunities and risks may be out there; being able to prioritize them, and developing the flexibility to take advantage of them while staying in touch with stakeholders' needs all the while.

Profitable innovation begins early in the cycle of change as the number of people with desires for change grows. Organizations that can spot stickiness and turning points early are at a considerable advantage to those who come later.

## Management response

The question for management is whether they want to be like an ostrich and ignore the options; a rabbit transfixed in the headlights of the approaching crisis or a bird ever watchful and making the most of the few updrafts that are around, and grasping the opportunities as they arise.

Smart organizations look to learn from the past and simultaneously learn from the future by creating a forward-thinking culture whether the times are good, bad, or awful.

In times of great uncertainty management has to better prepare for dealing with surprises at all times. If seemingly robust strategies and decisions have a higher propensity for failure, then risk assessment becomes a key execution tool to manage surprise.

Best practice organizations endeavor to

- ❑ Make risk assessment a key organization-wide tool and insure their business through investment in threat assessment and control.
- ❑ Determine potential disruptive and potential "wild card" scenarios and plan for their arrival, thus breaking their mental models and challenging industry paradigms.
- ❑ Look for upcoming tipping points.
- ❑ Develop scenarios and choose their strategy from a range of risk-assessed options.

- ❑ Choose strategies that are exciting, challenging, and achieving, but which do not bet the business on a whim.
- ❑ Encourage diversity of thought and creative problem solving.
- ❑ Recognize that their strategy is only valid if it is grounded in tomorrow and not cast in stone.
- ❑ Develop corporate foresight disciplines and systematized processes.

### Further Reference

- ❑ [It's No Time To Forget About Innovation](#), Janet Rae-Dupree, New York Times 2008

### 1.3 Imagining the future

Managers have traditionally relied on periodic and episodic information to make decisions. Most decisions have been based on "gut feel" about what worked in the past. But, in the ever quickening cycles of change that we are experiencing now, foresight not hindsight is a more valuable managerial attribute.

Foresight comes through discovering and understanding changing competitive landscapes through the use of real-time structured and unstructured data. By analyzing far more information, using computers, we can actually see the underlying trend patterns in complex data that signal far-reaching change far quicker than before.

We can imagine the future by thinking about change in four dimensions

- ❑ Examining and projecting current trends and issues.
- ❑ Considering potential events or tipping points.
- ❑ Developing positive futures.
- ❑ Choosing among the options.

#### Projecting current trends

Trends are changes occurring over time in (p)olitical, (e)conomic, (s)ocial and (t)echnological spectrums. These spectrums are often stated as an acronym such as STEP, STEEP, STEEPV or PESTLE where the additional V is for Values, the E for the Environment and the L for legal.

Trends occur gradually but at varying degrees of speed and impact and can be exploited to take advantage of the opportunity or to avoid the damage they may threaten. But, beware! "A trend is only a trend until it bends."

Spotting the turning or inflection point before it happens is where the greatest opportunity to exploit the change often occurs. Crowds blindly pursuing a trend can often lead to the creation of a bubble (the 2008 financial crisis for example) with the result that, like lemmings, most go over the cliff together while the more foresightful live to tell the tale.

## Considering potential events

Trends are relatively easy to spot but predicting the impact and likelihood of a future event or bend in the trend is not. Unforeseen or uncertain events are hard to anticipate but we can learn from history and envision the type of surprise (a wild card in the extreme) that might come along. So asking challenging questions is as much a part of determining future success as finding the answers.

Considering possible events and setting future-based challenges helps to strengthen an organization at times of high potential change. For instance, Matsushita told his managers after the Second World War that he was artificially going to peg the yen against the dollar several multiples higher than it then was. He told his managers this new exchange rate would now be used to calculate his company's performance. His managers thought this was crazy and impossible to contemplate. When asked why he would do such a thing he pronounced "because one day it will be at this level!" Several years later his alternative scenario came true and Panasonic was able to flood the U.S market with cheap electronics and hence build an empire. Matsushita had prepared his company for the unthinkable and was ready when the tipping point came.

Today, several drinks companies worldwide are preparing for a new unthinkable: the removal of all subsidies, and potentially the introduction of taxes, on the use of natural resources like water. They are preparing for the day when they will pay the true cost of using natural resources in their organizations, creating future competitive advantage and a more sustainable long-term strategy for their companies.

Considering potential events like tipping and inflection points and surprises helps us to see how we might cope in a crisis or exploit the opportunity. It helps organizations become more resilient to change under more circumstances than just maintaining the status quo and hence increases the chances for survival, innovation, performance improvement, and long-term success.

## Choosing among the options

Like Matsushita's decision, choices have to be made from the considered trends and events and action plans put in place to maximize the outcomes.

Determination at the outset to take action as a result of conducting foresight projects and programs will bring great rewards but, without it, all that results are increased costs, wasted resources and time, and considerable disappointment from all concerned. But, with upfront determination and continued focus on achieving future success foresight initiatives will succeed.

Quality and customer service programs exhibit the same long-haul effort that strategic foresight requires. Twenty years ago these programs were only practiced by pioneering companies but now having a customer service oriented culture is a pre-requisite for doing most business.

## Further reference

- [The New Age of Innovation](#), Driving Co-created Value through Global Networks, Prahalad & Krishnan 2008, McGraw Hill

## 1.4 Learning organization

Making future thinking a key part of day-to-day problem solving and decision-making is an ideal way to create a learning organization. Holding occasional executive sessions on the future of the organization is less than ideal and can be dangerous if management is not alive to ever-changing opportunities and threats.

On the strategic front the executive need to be alive to the possibilities of they, or their rivals, choosing a different time and place to play from everyone else. Future thinking helps identify these new playing fields and those likely to play on them.

Futures exercises need not be time-consuming or resource intensive and can take a variety of forms engaging the whole organization rather than just the leadership team.

### Exercises

- ❑ Collecting reports, plans, and program descriptions.
- ❑ Focus groups.
- ❑ Participant action approaches.
- ❑ Ethnographic study.
- ❑ Anecdotes.
- ❑ Case study analysis.
- ❑ Oral histories.
- ❑ Futuring exercises.
- ❑ Visualization maps.
- ❑ Organizational health checks.
- ❑ Accessing networks (yours and others).
- ❑ Job rotation of researchers and line people.
- ❑ Systematically analyzing customer complaints and idea schemes.
- ❑ Monitoring the venture capital market and start-up firms.
- ❑ Executive programs for constantly discovering stakeholder ideas.
- ❑ Experiential virtual world programs; Second Life, YouTube.
- ❑ Foresight/Google mash-ups.

- Scanning futurist Tweeters

Participatory futures exercises help stimulate high-level strategic thinking by everyone involved at whatever level they are in the organization.

### Meetings

Leadership agendas to consider the conclusions of these exercises might ask these open-ended questions:

- What conclusions can we draw from the exercise(s)?
- How might the future be different?
- What certainties/uncertainties are implied in the conclusions?
- How does A affect B?
- What is likely to remain the same or change significantly?
- What are the likely outcomes?
- What and who will likely shape our future?
- Where could we be most affected by change?
- What might we do about it?
- What don't we know that we need to know?
- What should we do now, today?
- Why do we care?
- When should we aim to meet again on this?

### Shell's seven questions

Or they might be more open-ended questions such as:

- If I could answer any question for you, what would it be?
- If you looked back from 10 years hence, and told the triumph in the \_\_\_\_ space, what would it be?
- If you looked back from 10 years hence, and told the failure in the \_\_\_\_\_ space, what would it be?
- What does the \_\_\_\_\_ space need to forget?

- ❑ What are the one or two critical strategic decisions regarding the \_\_\_\_\_ space on the horizon?
- ❑ What are the top 2 or 3 trends driving the future of the \_\_\_\_\_ space?
- ❑ What are the obstacles to progress in the \_\_\_\_\_ space?
- ❑ What should I have asked that I didn't? (At the end).

### Asking powerful questions

Raising challenging, strategic future questions rather than searching for quick tactical answers can inspire, engage and enable people and teams to solve their own and your issues in novel ways.

Try creating questions that:

- ❑ Encourage curiosity
- ❑ Enable dialogue
- ❑ Draw-out pre-conceived ideas and assumptions
- ❑ Inspire innovation and/or images of the future
- ❑ Focus attention and inquiry
- ❑ Are memorable
- ❑ Offer deep meaning and responses
- ❑ Suggest more questions

### Further reference

- ❑ [How Often?](#), The Tomorrow Project
- ❑ [The Art of Powerful Questions](#), Catalyzing, Insight, Innovation and Action, Eric E. Vogt, Juanita Brown and David Isaacs, The World Café 2003

## 1.5 Learning from the past

What can we learn from our history to help us understand the future?

Examining history can teach us much about the future.

- History often repeats itself or shows how the future evolved in similar circumstances to today's world.
- History is often re-invented through giving new facelifts to old concepts.

- History, too, is littered with tipping points, surprises, shocks, and human advances that we can learn from.
- History is as much unknowable as what we perceive is the reality of today or what the future holds. It is constantly being re-written and discovered.

Historic surprise has manifested itself in many situations including

- The thought that everything that could be invented had been invented at the end of the 19th century.
- IBM's prediction that the world would need only 7 computers to run its affairs.
- Western Union predicting in 1876 that "the telephone has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication."

We now know these predictions and ideas were extraordinarily fanciful. The 20th century, far from being benign, saw man fly both terrestrially and in space, discover nuclear energy, design personal vehicles for mass human transportation, link almost everyone through global telecommunication systems, and significantly improve both health and longevity. These discoveries completely changed the world. And, of course, "the war to end all wars" was followed by the Second World War and hundreds more since.

**NOTHING IS FOREVER AND THE ONLY CONSTANT IN LIFE IS CHANGE!**

The same human opportunity to change the world again, for better or worse, in this century, presents itself through advances in robotics, remote sensing, artificial intelligence, anti-aging, sustainable practices, and energy transformation, etc. Yet new threats present clear and present danger such as financial chaos, climate change, pandemics, natural resource shortages, new wars, and as yet unforeseen wildcards.

Examining history shows us that the pace and nature of change is accelerating more rapidly than ever before. The outcome of this acceleration has been to make the world increasingly more complex and uncertain. We can expect even greater complexity and uncertainty as ever more sophisticated responses to improving the human condition and solving today's issues create new surprises tomorrow.

### **Driving forces**

Two driving forces have been instrumental in accelerating change:

- **Globalization:** since the Industrial Revolution markets have progressively moved from local to national, to international, to multi-national, to truly global, and soon to be virtualized systems. This expansion has led to increasing sophistication, rapid product and service diffusion, and innovation and learning on a global scale.
- **Technological advancement:** The technological revolution (Internet, PC's, Mobile phones, E-mail, Office software) has been a key driver of this diffusion, and in making the world a far smaller place through dramatic improvements such as in transportation and the arrival of near-instant communication.

These driving forces have created further negative forces for change in the form of increasing terrorism, crime, conflict, financial crises, and health threats, among others.

Knowing the future is impossible - yet determining a way forward is essential, not least in business. The right decisions offer huge opportunities, the wrong ones huge risks. Watching the unfolding effect of these and other key driving forces is therefore an essential element of spotting emerging opportunities and threats. Historical analysis of how an issue has developed, and considering this in the context of parallels and precedents, is an essential part of strategic foresight.

### Counterpoints

Two counterpoint maxims for you to consider:

- ❑ "Those who drive their car through the rear-view mirror will never see the future."
- ❑ "Those who don't read history are doomed to relive it!"

An excellent future thinker is therefore most likely a good historian, too, through acquainting themselves with the broadest reading of history. By going back in history twice as far as looking forward, knowing the potential outcomes of the past, applying these to emerging issues, and considering potential futures in equal measure future thinking people develop considerable foresight and hence, advantage.

### Further reference:

- ❑ [A Brief History of the Future, How Visionary Thinkers Changed the World and Tomorrow's Trends Are 'Made' and Marketed, Oona Strathern](#) Robinson Publishing
- ❑ [World Transformed: What Are the Top 30 Innovations of the Last 30 Years?](#), Wharton 2009

## 1.6 Overcoming roadblocks

Adopting a strategic foresight approach to opportunity scanning and risk management represents a major challenge for organizations just starting out on the journey. Fortunately, others have trod these paths before and found ways to overcome roadblocks in their path. Implementing a foresight program is very akin to introducing and maintaining any change management program. Here are some of the lessons learned from leading corporate practitioners in Europe.

### 'Barriers to strategic foresight

- ❑ Top management not serious about using foresight as a strategic tool.
- ❑ No motivation to think about the future; fat and happy culture.
- ❑ Organizational silos and policies restrict dialogue.
- ❑ Incentives to manage the future are missing.
- ❑ Reward systems hostile to future thinking.

- ❑ Limited attention of internal stakeholders.
- ❑ Current decision-making processes are dis-organized.
- ❑ Frequent career moves mean loss of corporate memory.
- ❑ Lack of resources reduces effectiveness
- ❑ Lack of a designed foresight system creates disparate and disconnected information sharing.

#### Enablers of strategic foresight

- ❑ Create collaborative vision and culture.
- ❑ Establish strategic foresight performance indicators.
- ❑ Change reward systems.
- ❑ Change budgetary, decision-making systems.
- ❑ Introduce foresight tools to the process of decision making.
- ❑ Train people in the use of the tools and expect them to use their new knowledge constantly.
- ❑ Challenge poor thinking lacking in strategic foresight.
- ❑ Use media formats and content that communicates the future.
- ❑ Engage only with external partners focused on the future.
- ❑ Be seen out and about where the future is.
- ❑ Spend less time on the past and delegate more.
- ❑ Take a future-focused leadership position in the industry.
- ❑ Evaluate competitors' strategic foresight positioning versus the organization.
- ❑ Involve all stakeholders.

Source: The Road Ahead for Research on Strategic Foresight Insights from the 1st European Conference on Strategic Foresight.' 2007

Like any organizational change program the key ingredients for success are management desire and will to create a future-focused culture and to have the leadership skills to carry it out. The leadership skills can be learned but the desire and will come from within. Have you got what it takes to be a forward-thinking leader?