

GRASPING THE FUTURE

Colophon

Author: Silke den Hartog - de Wilde, School of Foresight, Leiden

Guest contributions: Erica Bol, Djenny Brugmans, Patrick van der Duin, Freija van Duijne, Susan van 't Klooster, Ben Römgens en Nanon Soeters

Design, layout and image editing: Ellen Bouma, Alkmaar

ISBN 9789403609041

Keywords: Strategic Foresight, exploring the future, trend analysis, scenario planning, test tunnelling, three horizons, wild cards, science fiction prototyping, road mapping.

© 2020, School of Foresight, Silke de Wilde

Original Dutch version published in 2017



Grasping the future (2020) by School of Foresight is protected by copyright as recorded under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 International. Visit <http://www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/deed.nl/> for the full text of the license.

Silke den Hartog - de Wilde
silke@schoolofforesight.com
www.schoolofforesight.com

Grasping the future

Strategic Foresight to get your
organisation future ready

Silke den Hartog - de Wilde

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank everyone I have met for the past years while working on foresight studies. In particular I would like to thank (in alphabetical order): Marjolein van Asselt, Hans Peter Benschop, Djenny Brugmans, Erica Bol, Geert Boosten, Patrick van der Duin, Freija van Duijne, Hellie van Houten, Jan Lelie, Susan van 't Klooster, Ben Römgens and Nanon Soeters.

And above all I want to thank Robert and Krijn for their support and trust and a wonderful future!

Guest contributions

<i>No enlargement of the present</i> , Patrick van der Duin	21
<i>Trend watching</i> , Nanon Soeters en Djenny Brugmans	37
<i>The questions we should ask ourselves in dealing with change</i> , Susan van 't Klooster	60
<i>Thinking as a solution for a sustainable future</i> , Erica Bol	66
<i>A better future starts with thinking about the future</i> , Freija van Duijne	78
<i>Scenarios and Roadmaps</i> , Ben Römgens	86

Table of contents

5

1. Introduction	6
2. Eight steps to prepare and position your foresight study	8
3. Methods	22
4. Trend analysis	23
5. Scenario planning	38
6. Test tunnelling	61
7. Three Horizons	67
8. Wild Cards	74
9. Science Fiction Prototyping	79
10. Road mapping	82
11. How to choose your methods	88
Bibliography	91
About the author	

1. Introduction

We all know companies that were very successful once, but not anymore. Think of Nokia, Kodak and Blockbuster. What they have in common is that they failed to recognize large-scale, disruptive changes in time and thus lost control of the future. That has cost these organizations dearly. But also, as a society we have been overwhelmed by disruptive event. Take for example the disruptive impact of the current covid-19 crisis that has taken so many people and organisations by surprise.

People like thinking about the future. There are many examples from history of how people tried to find out what the future would bring. Such as prophets, astrologers, tarot readers, etc. Even today we are constantly given predictions: the weather forecast is a good example, but also economic projections of GDP growth or sports forecasts.

However, the future has not happened yet, so it cannot really be measured or calculated. What we can do is explore the future. By exploring the future, we can prepare for what's to come, even if we're not exactly sure what it is.

In 1902, HG Wells wrote the article 'The Discovery of the Future,' which was published in the scientific journal *Nature*. In that article, HG Wells argued for a more systematic approach to the future. Among other things, he described how important it is that visual representations of the future are made and what influence these representations have on our society. According to him, a systematic approach to the future is necessary to better prepare for the future and shape that future.

It was Herman Kahn who, in the study *The Year 2000 from the 1940s*, made a case for considering several alternative futures. To no longer rely on prognostics and manufacturability. He introduced the term 'thinking the unthinkable' and is considered by many to be the founder of scenario planning.

In the 20th century much has happened in terms of systematically exploring the future. Methods such as scenario planning and road mapping were widely

used and further developed. Now, in the second and third decades of the 21st century, not only have these methods matured, we also see new methods of strategic foresight emerging, such as Three Horizons framework and Science Fiction Prototyping.

However, exploring the future is not yet commonplace. This book is written to help people and organizations get started with strategic foresight. To learn to deal with uncertainty and to get a better grip on the future. The basis for this book is my experience as a consultant and trainer in strategic foresight over the past years. I try to avoid theoretical explanations about foresight and methods and to convey the information that is necessary to actually conduct a foresight study and put the methods in this book to practice. For more theory about different methods of foresight, I would like to refer to the bibliography at the end of this book.

Using strategic foresight has many advantages - I could write another book about it - but for now let me stick to five main advantages:

1. Strategic foresight helps you take a step back from the issues of the day, **gain a broader picture and not be hindered by today's obstacles** (which could be gone tomorrow).
2. It also provides **insight and understanding for other people's value systems** and opens up the floor to discuss those value systems. By exploring and discussing the future, different wishes or fears about the future can be identified and we can cultivate more understanding for each other.
3. Because it's always about possible, fictional visions of the future (no predictions!), foresight studies **offer a safe place to think things out and discuss things** with each other. Or to break taboos.
4. In addition, you are **challenged to use your imagination**. In strategic foresight you have to use your creativity, your empathy and your imagination.
5. It therefore also offers the opportunity to think of multiple options and to create a larger decision space: because you are considering multiple futures, you also get a much **broader range of possibilities and scope for action**. This allows you to take **advantage of opportunities and stay ahead of potential competitors**.

I hope this book makes strategic foresight methods understandable and helps you get started and grasp the future!

2.Eight steps to prepare and position your foresight study

8

1

Determine your goal

- Insight
- Commitment
- Communication
- Evaluate
- Inspiration or innovation
- Strategic ability (skills)
- Propaganda



2

Determine your client's 'type'

- Type of organization
- Access to decision makers
- Create support
- Enthuse people



3

Determine the research question and research scope

- Research question: strategy
- Scenario question: context
- Time horizon
- Geographical scope
- Taboos



4

Identify your target group(s)

- Users
- Creators
- Decision makers
- Stakeholders



Choosing methods and products

5

- Methods
 - > Trend analysis
 - > Scenario planning
 - > Road mapping
 - > Wild cards
 - > Science fiction prototyping
- Products
 - > A meeting like a brainstorm, workshop or symposium
 - > Booklet (s)
 - > Report
 - > Posters
- Techniques
 - > Infographic
 - > Mood board
 - > Film or animation (s)
 - > Website or social media page
- Workshops
 - > Interviews: on- and offline
 - > Surveys: on- and offline
 - > Brainstorming sessions



Communication

6

- Intermediate products
- Finished products
- At least 50% of time and money



Involve the right people

7

- Plausible, relevant and surprising
- Converge and diverge
- Involve 'outsiders'



Planning

8

- Meetings and invitations
- Budget
- To do list: responsibilities?
- Important choices



Preparing and positioning a foresight study is essential for the success of the project. Yet many take it too lightly. My advice is to give yourself time for a good preparation. This will save you a lot of time and effort later in the process, hard decisions will be made faster and ambiguities are prevented. These eight steps will help you prepare and position your strategic foresight project:

1. Determine your goal
2. Determine your client's 'type'
3. Determine the research question and research scope
4. Identify your target group(s)
5. Choosing methods, techniques and products
6. Communication
7. Involving the right people
8. Planning your foresight project



1. Determine your goal

A foresight study can serve several purposes. You may want to gain more insight into new developments, or into the specific consequences of current and future trends for your organization. A foresight study can also create commitment, for example by jointly formulating a future vision: where do we go together? Another purpose can be to evaluate or test current policy or strategy and discuss how future-proof or robust it is in the light of future changes. A goal can also be inspiration or innovation: generating concepts and ideas for, for example, new products, new policy or an application of a new technology. Increasing the strategic capability of an organization can also be a goal. Methods of strategic foresight are then used for a substantive issue, but also to develop new skills. Finally, there are examples of foresight projects that are used for propaganda purposes. This kind of studies often convey an alarming message about the future, for example: "If we do nothing, in twenty years' time this will be the world in which we or our children live."

Of course, a foresight project can be used to meet more than one (of these) objectives. Regardless of the purpose (or goals) of the outlook, it is important to realize that the foresight project can never be an end in itself. A foresight study is always a means, an instrument.