The Future of Futures Research

Jay Forrest, Cindy Frewen Wuellner & Jay Gary

Abstract:
Futures Studies occupies a unique niche in social sciences research and knowledge creation today. Futurists share common methods, including environmental scanning, trend analysis, the Delphi method, scenario planning, extrapolation of time-series, and computer-modeling. But where did its research methods come from? What disciplines and research models shaped the modern futures movement? This session will 1) explore the mental models behind futures thinking from social, political, organizational, and systems theory, 2) discuss how mid-career futurists might improve our practice, and 3) consider how futures research might enhance the specificity and relevance of futures research to organizations.

How do we strengthen Futures as...
Discipline? Profession?

Basic Research Applied Research

Profession

Association of Professional Futurists
profuturists.org

World Future Society
wfs.org

World Futures Studies Federation
wfsf.org

Discipline

- Futures: The journal
  http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/journaldescription.cws_home/30422/description#

- Technological Forecasting and Social Change
  http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/journaldescription.cws_home/505740/description

- Foresight: The journal
  http://www.emeraldinsight.com/info/journals/fs/fs.jsp

- Futures Research Quarterly
  http://www.wfs.org/frq.htm

- Journal of Futures Studies
  http://www2.tku.edu.tw/~tddx/jfs/

- International Journal of Forecasting
  http://www.forecasters.org/ijf/
PhD Research

The Future of Futures Research

- Jay Forrest, PhD soon!
  Improving Futures Methods Through Systems Thinking
- Cindy Frewen, PhD soon!
  The Art of Urban Futures Research
- Jay Gary, PhD candidate!
  Why Futures Studies Needs a Theory Base


My Thoughts…

Jay Forrest

Futures Methods

Putting Rigor in Futures?

- Quantitative Processes?
- Qualitative Processes
- Both?
  - Better Facta
  - Better Conjecture
    - Better Thinking
    - Better Logic
- Better Communication
- Better Demonstration of Value

Systems Thinking Seems to Hold Much Potential
Where Is Systems Thinking?

- Causal loop and influence diagrams consistently show benefits of improved understanding, better communication.
- Less than 2 percent of articles in Futures use causality or systems concepts or diagrams to explain or discuss the issue at hand.

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The Art of Urban Futures Research

Cindy Frewen Wuellner, FAIA

Why we need futures research

PRACTITIONERS

- Profit Motivated
- Privately Held Results
- Project Scope by Client
  - Time = $$$
- Production Oriented
- Must successfully produce plan
  - Quality = peer recognition, media attention

RESEARCHERS

- Knowledge Development
- Publicly Shared Results
- Create Inquiry Focus
  - Pay = Theory, Ideas, Pubs
- Theory/Method Oriented,
  - Can experiment & fail
  - Quality = peer reviewed publications, useful ideas

Shared Methodologies - Qualitative & Quantitative

interdisciplinary paths

FUTURISTS

- Research
  - scan, monitor
- Implement
  - change, management

ARCHITECTS

- Research
  - assess, existing conditions, program
- Create
  - design, documents
- Administer
  - bidding & construction
- Implement
  - occupancy, facilities management

Choose Direction

Interdisciplinary practice + research

FUTURES RESEARCH BUILDS KNOWLEDGE

Supply credible foundation and knowledge for the field
Explore topics that otherwise are unfunded or marginalized
Create links between various projects and issues
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How Existing “Methods” Fit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Techniques</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Framing</td>
<td>Stakeholder analysis, integral metasystem analysis, critical futures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scanning</td>
<td>Environmental scanning, content analysis, leading/tailing indicators, text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forecasting</td>
<td>Event detection, cross impact analysis, Delphi, emerging issue analysis,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>framework forecasting, gaming/simulation, historical analog/pathform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visioning</td>
<td>Causal layered analysis, futures wheel, implications analysis, appreciative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Decision modeling, risk analysis, strategic planning, technology assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting</td>
<td>Action research, change management, coaching, consulting, issues management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why Futures Studies Needs a Theory Base

Jay Gary
Assistant Professor
M.A. in Strategic Foresight

http://www.regent.edu/global/msf

The Stepladder of Futures

1. Methods
2. Theory
3. Frameworks
4. Philosophy

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Philosophy

1. Futures studies recognizes that:
   (a) "time is continuous, linear, unidirectional and irreversible," (b) "there is an independent and objective external world," (c) "the future is open—there are opportunities and freedom in directing the future," and (d) "there are better and worse futures."

2. Futures studies is concerned with:
   (a) organizing "the most useful knowledge" for "decision making and social action," (b) "increasing democratic participation in imagining and designing the future," and (c) empowering "conscious or decisional human action."

Frameworks

Dr. Richard Slaughter has proposed a new framework of foresight to reorganize the field from the inside out: "Integral Futures" (http://www.foresightinternational.com.au)

Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Quantitative</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
<th>Scenario-based</th>
<th>Strategic</th>
<th>Foresight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Future scanning</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trend impact analysis</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Competitive analysis</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Systems perspectives</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decision modeling</td>
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<td>Technology assessment analysis</td>
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<td>Scenario analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scenario generation methods</td>
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<tr>
<td>Computer modeling, simulation</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cost-benefit analysis</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intuition and decision making</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Action planning</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social and environmental context</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Global trends analysis</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example: Anticipatory Leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Does anticipatory thinking enhance long-range innovation of groups?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Construct</td>
<td>Futurist: A relentless fascination with the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strategist: An ability to think systemically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mensch: Interpersonal skills that motivates great groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variables</td>
<td>Leader: foresight, complex thinking, inspirational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Followers: creative performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measurement</td>
<td>Instrumental, Environmental Scanning behavior, ENTRE scale, MLC, Scale: Technology executives, with time span of 12 years or more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Why Futures Needs a Theory Base

1. Methods
2. Theory
3. Frameworks
4. Philosophy

Borrow, Adapt & Create Foresight Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Strategic</td>
<td>Fiskelove, &amp; Hambrik, (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Transformational leadership</td>
<td>Bass &amp; Steidlmeier, (1985)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forecasting</td>
<td>Probability theory</td>
<td>Krueger, (1983)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forecasting</td>
<td>Environmental Scanning</td>
<td>Hambrik, D. C., (1987)</td>
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<td>Scanning</td>
<td>General System Theory</td>
<td>Bertalanffy, (1968)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scanning</td>
<td>Organizational Adaptation</td>
<td>Mce &amp; Snow (1976)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scanning</td>
<td>Environmental Scanning</td>
<td>Hambrik, D. C., (1987)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Environmental Scanning</td>
<td>Hambrik, D. C., (1987)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foresight</td>
<td>Learning behavior theory</td>
<td>Fiskelove, &amp; Hambrik, (1996)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I am concerned that we futurists sometimes fail to test adequately our beliefs and ideas. If our beliefs—even our most cherished beliefs—are wrong, we ought to want to find out that they are indeed wrong. But designing research so as to put ideas at risk, rather than merely seeming to confirm them, is challenging (Bell, 1996, Futures, 28, p. 529).

Wendell Bell, PhD