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FUTURE NEWS

TO CONNECT, TO INFORM AND TO INSPIRE

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WHAT IS STRATEGIC FORESIGHT, AND WHY DO YOU NEED IT?

from the Copenhagen Institute of Futures Studies

Pulitzer prize winner and New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman argues that we are in the middle of three giant accelerations – changes involving globalisation, the Earth's climate, and technology. These changes are reshaping social and economic life in powerful ways and putting a premium on 'learning faster and governing and operating smarter'. These transformative forces in markets, climate, and technology are 'melding into one giant change'.

The expansion of global commerce and global communication means that we are no longer just interconnected, but also increasingly interdependent. The pace, spread, and reach of the coronavirus and subsequent global lock-down illustrates this better than anything. Globalisation has rendered the world a small village, where people can interact with minimal barriers. This free movement of people, goods, and services, which has been the stimulus to social-economic development, has also been instrumental in spreading the virus. The super-spreaders of the goods of globalisation, such as airport hubs and harbours also facilitated the spread of COVID-19.

Looking further back, the 2008 global financial crisis is also an example of how crises are no longer contained to one region or nation; If a crisis is big enough, the ripple effects show up everywhere.

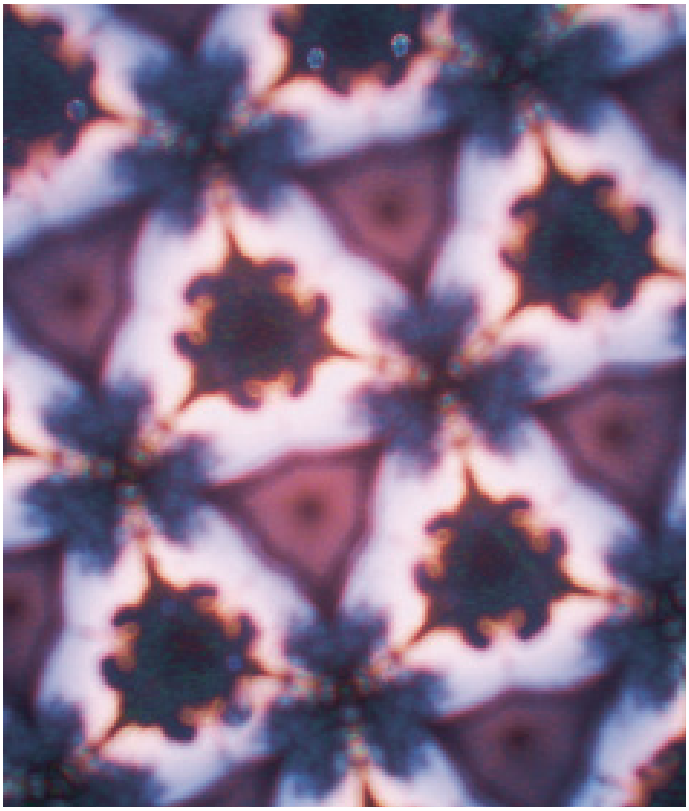
The volcanic eruption in Iceland in April 2010 not only disrupted air travel across Europe for about a week but had an effect that extended all the way to Africa and Japan. Kenyan flower farm employees were out of work because their crop could not reach Europe, and Nissan was forced to halt production of some models in Japan because certain parts were not available.

Change is accelerating and the world is more interconnected, which means that your next big opportunity and threat will probably not be one you see coming. If organisations and governments are not actively looking to the horizon for early warning signs and budding opportunities, they will probably be missed and grabbed by someone else.

This is where strategic foresight can be of use.

The goal of strategic foresight is not to predict the future, but to discover the perspectives of many different futures and use those perspectives to make decisions today. Strategic foresight is therefore based on two premises: that there is not one future but many possible futures; and that it is possible today to make choices that influence future developments. At the same time, the process and decision-making includes relevant actors who can lead developments in the desired direction.

By rejecting the notion of a predictable future, strategic foresight seeks to include many different plausible and possible outcomes, drawing attention to assumptions and potential blind spots. Though strategic foresight works with exploring the future, the goal is to expand the assumptions and alternative futures that form the basis of discussion and present day decision-making.



In the 1970s and 1980s, strategic foresight was often used in connection with preparing the enterprise for unforeseeable future developments,

whereas the discipline's use today is often more active, aiming to influence and shape future developments and internal strategy. A key strength of using foresight tools is that they improve organisations' and governments' long-term planning, early warning recognition, learning and innovation processes, and the general ability to react to changes in the strategic surroundings.

Strategic foresight processes are also used to involve broader actor groups (customers, suppliers, researchers, competitors, NGOs, etc.) in joint strategy development and innovation.

WHY IS STRATEGIC FORESIGHT IMPORTANT?

Strategic foresight prevents organisations from being blindsided. While organisations understand their sector and the short-term trends shaping their environment and industry, many organisations are caught unaware of the long-term trends and developments in other sectors and industries. Think – Kodak, Blockbuster, horse-drawn carriages.

For organisations to survive and thrive, and for governments to meet the needs of their present and future constituents, there are two key ingredients: resilience and propulsion. As Friedman puts it, to survive in the face of rapid change, '…you want resilience. You need to be able to take a blow, because you do not know when the disruption is going to come, but there will be disruptions. At the same time, you want propulsion. You want to be able to move ahead'.

Strategic foresight provides practical tools and the possibility to experiment, explore, and create preferred futures. This exploration and experimentation is essential to dealing successfully with volatility and unpredictability. Classical planning techniques and strategy place emphasis on predictability and efficiency. These techniques are inadequate to deal with the inevitable changes, disruptions, and shocks that are taking place currently and which will continue in the coming decade.

Traditional modelling techniques are vulnerable to small shifts in underlying assumptions and are not sufficient to deal with volatile and unpredictable environments. The field of strategic foresight on the other hand utilises qualitative, exploratory, and narrative tools to aid decision-makers in expanding their worldview and recognising a range of possible and plausible outcomes, which can be further tested and developed to suit a certain strategic environment.

Imagine a future with fleets of autonomous buses and cars that navigate through city streets. Ridesharing services utilise sophisticated data to dispatch autonomous vehicles to pick up multiple passengers who are travelling a similar route. In this future, the way we understand public and private transport and the definition of commuting is upended.

This future is, however, incomplete without simultaneously imagining the supporting infrastructure, physical and digital tools, as well as the skills required to make this future a reality. What role will the public sector play, and what will the private sector bring to the table? What behavioural changes will be required to share a vehicle with strangers? There are many factors to consider and even more unknown factors that will emerge as the transition to autonomous vehicles takes place.

When dealing with 'unpredictable problems of the future', there are two possible routes:

1. Pretend the problem does not exist and suppose the future will look like the past.
2. Acknowledge uncertainty as a fundamental premise of life and develop scenarios to inform decision-making, not to predict, but to learn what actions you might need to take to prepare for a future that is different than today.

Which will you choose?

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COPENHAGEN INSTITUTE FOR FUTURES STUDIES

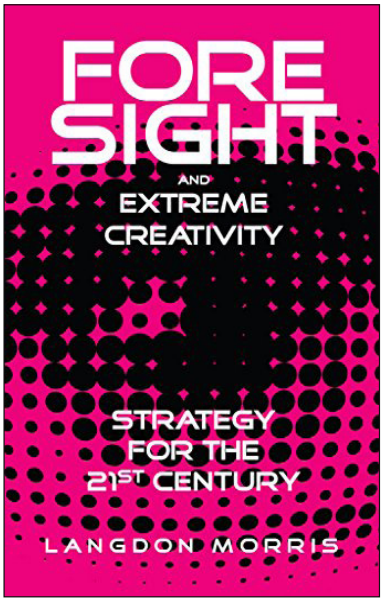
Book Review

by Charles Brass – Chair, Futures Foundation

Foresight and Extreme Creativity

Strategy for the 21st Century

by Langdon Morris



Our intention in producing these book reviews is to introduce our members to books that might not otherwise come across their desk, and provide them with enough information to decide if it might be worth buying the book (or borrowing it from our library).

This book certainly fist the description of something that is unlikely to come across one's desk. First it was written in 2016 and second it is over 600 pages long. However, we certainly found it a very worthwhile read, and are happy to encourage others to read it through this review.

Langdon Morris is co-founder of Innovation Labe, and President of Future Labs, both based in the USA. He has, however, lived and worked around the world which is clearly evident from the breadth and depth of his writing.

The book is borne out of recognition that the human race is now a "super predator" in that we hardly face any competition from other earthly species, and also have developed the capacity to profoundly shape (if not destroy) Planet Earth – whether for good or evil is still to be decided.

As Langdon puts it: "…our creativity could be the cause of our own fatal demise… Or will we find the wisdom to endure, or even to thrive?" (p2).

He describes his book this way: "(it) is about you, and all your neighbours, and all of humanity, and about the exceptional creativity that we may harness and the uniquely human qualities that may enable us to attain the society we aspire to. It explores who we are and who we are becoming, and the risks and opportunities that lie on the amazing journey before us"(p5).

Langdon is a practising futurist, which means he unambiguously eschews any attempts at predicting the future in favour of exploring the multiple alternatives that may exist and then choosing a preferred future, and steering towards it.

The first two hundred pages are devoted to exploring humans as a creative species and outlining the five significant revolutions – and one counter revolution – that we are facing. The five revolutions are:

Technological	The digital revolution
Environmental	Climate change
Economic	The energy revolution and globalisation
Demographic	The planet cannot sustain 9 billion of us

Cultural what do we really believe in and what he calls the counter revolution is the significant resistance being increasingly expressed against "all this change".

> *Science accumulates knowledge faster than society accumulates wisdom*

He concludes this section with a chapter entitled "The Futurist" (p229) which explores the evolution of thinking about change – and encouraging a theme explored by Nicholas Nassim Taleb in his book "Antifragile" (reviewed in our April 2016 newsletter) – that we all have a vested interest as a species in creating systems that are not merely robust but actually strengthen over time.

The next two hundred or so pages explore ways in which futurists and the principles of strategic foresight are used to help individuals, organisations and countries engage more effectively with an inherently uncertain future. The chapter headings are:

The Realist	Drowning in complexity
The Visionary	Understanding foresight
The Analyst	Evidence, and Interpretation
The Map Maker	Geostrategy
The Explorer	World Models
The Planner	What If? + What If?

and each explores various tools and techniques commonly used in each area.

Langdon is particularly encouraged by the use of alternative scenarios in helping navigate into the future and he carefully explores the creating of many scenarios within each of his previously described revolutions.

The validity of these scenarios is one major reason why this is still a very relevant book eight years after it was published. Despite current rhetoric about the ever increasing rate of change in every area of life, Langon's scenarios still feel very relevant and offer anyone with an interest in big picture futures thinking much food for thought.

In the final hundred or so pages Langdon focuses on "de-risking the future" and asking "how do we fix this?" (p497). He quotes Isaac Asimov: "science accumulates knowledge faster than society accumulates wisdom" (p497) as evidence that creating desirable futures will require humankind as a species to think and behave differently in the future. He suggests three routes to creating these differences – philosophy, innovation and leadership – and explores each in some detail.

Langdon begins his conclusion with a quote from T.S. Eliot: "Only those who risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go" (p579).

Ultimately, the value of this book is nicely summarised on its last page: "The importance of foresight and the inescapable need for more and better clarity about the future is perhaps paradoxical, for in a world of accelerating change how can we see more accurately into the future than we do now? The answer, of course, is that we have to look in a different way, not by trying to predict specific future states, but by understanding the driving forces of change" (p596).

FUTURISTS IN ACTION

NURTURING FUTURES THINKERS

THE CASE FOR DESIGNING NEW LEARNING SYSTEMS TO SCALE FUTURES LITERACY

by Zabrina Epps

Teach the Future (TTF) has developed a paradigm shifting curriculum by introducing futures thinking and practices to students and educators. Thirty years ago, Peter Bishop developed a curriculum to teach futures thinking to students before they entered higher education. Predicated on the belief that "the future can be influenced by individual choices and actions," the program has spread throughout schools around the globe.

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Much has changed within the last thirty years. Advancements in technology, finance, health care, transportation, and communications have expanded exponentially. However, the complexities of global crises in climate, epidemiology, democratic governance, cybersecurity, and diplomacy, have intensified historic hegemonies.

These crises have been classified by governments and global planetary organizations as volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) such that the United Nations has issued sustainable development goals through 2030.

MANY FACTORS, MANY CHALLENGES

The Anthropocene has given primacy to humans at the expense of the natural resources, and animals that sustain us. Political ideologies have divided nations that were previously described as democratic. Social and economic policies have created unprecedented barriers to basic needs among middle and low income families. These are but a few of the myriad, multifaceted, muti-leveled, and interconnected challenges today's students will inherit unless they define and design new and different futures. But with no systemic way of instituting the TTF curriculum throughout primary and secondary schooling, will enough students be prepared to live in sustainable (and generative) futures?

There is a case to be made for integrating futures thinking and strategic foresight into education leadership training and development. Programming that engages education system leaders and policymakers with futures consciousness would ensure holistic and systemic benefits of embracing futures thinking. Likewise, there needs to be a thorough diagnostic of how primary and secondary education systems not only fail to prepare students for future life, work, and planetary concerns, but also perpetuate the same social and political hegemonies that existed when these school systems were designed.

A WIDER-DEEPER-LONGER PERSPECTIVE

In their 2010 JFS article, (Bishop & Strong, 2010) stated, "To teach the future means helping students develop a wider-deeper-longer perspective." The TTF curriculum is designed to prepare students to consider alternative futures of the world. Students are acknowledged as global citizens and active contributors to society now instead of at some future time when they are gainfully employed or hold leadership positions. Young people are taught how to consider the VUCA issues of the present and invited to co-create preferred futures using their knowledge and diverse experiences, imaginations, and aspirations.

TTF helps students build confidence and self-efficacy and view themselves as decision makers and leaders. Students are encouraged to investigate systems at multiple levels and to envision the world differently than they have come to know it.

AFTER THE FUTURES LITERACY COURSE

However, what happens after students are introduced to futures thinking? How do they integrate this new perspective with other classes, particularly in traditional schools? Many schools are still perpetuating binary, right or wrong, grades-based approaches to assess student achievement. Unfortunately, because futures thinking isn't embedded throughout the education landscape, students' self-agency could be encumbered as they move on from classes where TTF is taught to classes or schools that have yet to be exposed to or embrace futures concepts.

Many schools continue to be concerned with "the right answer" and do not encourage the engagement of students' imaginations, aspirations, anticipations, or diverse experiences as an approach to problem solving and decision making. This lack of futures consciousness can be extremely frustrating to students who feel hindered by traditional curricula or teaching practices.

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What could school systems that promote creativity and imagination from pre-kindergarten through the secondary grades allow students to accomplish? Instead of maintaining traditional grade structures, schools could be redesigned to support the individual learning needs of students. Equipped with a deeper understanding of their own futures consciousness, district leaders and policymakers would be compelled to ensure that all educators and students learn more about futures and how to use foresight concepts and methods to co-create emancipated futures.

This shift in perspective would also strengthen the learning relationships between teachers and students as they explore alternative futures together. Moreover, schools could invite experts from different fields to demonstrate how students can use foresight tools to analyze complex problems and consider alternative futures.

To ensure that students are prepared to co-create the world they want to live in over the next thirty years, and not merely react to the effects of historical decisions, school districts and education policies must support the development of futures consciousness. Scaling the TTF curricula to school system leaders and policymakers would ensure a better chance for students to engage with alternative futures and promote planetary thriving.

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Signals in the Noise

BEYOND 2024: ENVISIONING A FUTURE SHAPED BY BREAKTHROUGH TECHNOLOGIES

from Medium.com

In a world where technological advancements unfold at an unprecedented pace, the landscape of our everyday lives is continuously reshaped. As we move beyond 2024, envisioning the future becomes not just an exercise in creativity but a glimpse into a rapidly approaching reality. This article explores how humanity might evolve through these advancements, and what technologies we might use in our everyday lives.

THE DAWN OF UBIQUITOUS AI

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has moved from the realms of science fiction to an ever-present reality. In the future, AI is poised to become as ubiquitous as electricity is today. We are looking at AI personal assistants not just executing commands but predicting needs. Imagine your AI assistant, attuned to your preferences, scheduling your day, optimizing your health routine based on real-time biometric data, and even managing your home energy consumption for efficiency.

QUANTUM COMPUTING: UNLOCKING NEW POSSIBILITIES

Quantum computing, still in its infancy, is set to revolutionize our problem-solving capacities. By 2030, quantum computers could be solving complex scientific problems, optimizing logistics, and revolutionizing cryptography. The implications for cybersecurity, a field continually battling the challenges of data protection and encryption, are immense. Quantum-resistant encryption methodologies will become standard, ensuring data security in a quantum computing world.

THE INTEGRATION OF AUGMENTED REALITY (AR) AND VIRTUAL REALITY (VR)

AR and VR technologies are blending digital and physical worlds in ways previously unimaginable. In the future, these technologies will be integrated into our daily lives. Education will be revolutionized with immersive learning experiences, enabling students to explore the universe or historical events as if they were there. In the workplace, AR glasses will provide real-time data overlay, enhancing productivity and decision-making processes.

SUSTAINABLE ENERGY AND THE GREEN REVOLUTION

The future is not just digital; it's green. Sustainable energy technologies, such as advanced solar panels and wind turbines, will become more efficient and cost-effective. The integration of smart grids in cities will optimize energy use, reducing waste and promoting energy conservation. Electric vehicles will be the norm, charged by renewable energy sources, contributing to a significant reduction in carbon emissions.

HEALTHCARE TRANSFORMATION THROUGH BIOTECHNOLOGY

Biotechnology is set to transform healthcare. With advancements in genetic engineering and personalized medicine, treatments will be more effective and tailored to individual genetic profiles. Wearable health monitoring devices will detect illnesses even before symptoms appear, enabling preventative healthcare approaches that extend life expectancy and improve quality of life.

THE EVOLUTION OF SMART CITIES

Smart cities, powered by IoT (Internet of Things) devices, will optimize urban living. Traffic will be managed more efficiently, reducing congestion and pollution. Waste management systems will become more effective, and public safety will be enhanced through smart surveillance systems. These technologies will not only make cities more livable but also more sustainable.

SPACE EXPLORATION AND COLONIZATION

As we look beyond our planet, space exploration and potentially colonization become tangible possibilities. Technologies enabling life in space, such as advanced life-support systems and sustainable space habitats, are under development. The future may well see humanity not just visiting but living in space, whether in orbit, on the Moon, or even Mars.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the future shaped by technological advancements holds incredible promise. From the rise of AI and quantum computing to the integration of AR/VR in education and work, the evolution of sustainable energy sources, breakthroughs in healthcare, the development of smart cities, and the exploration of space, these technologies will redefine what it means to live in the 21st century. As we stand on the brink of these transformative changes, it's essential to embrace these advancements while thoughtfully addressing the ethical and societal implications they bring. The future is not just happening; we are actively shaping it with every technological leap forward.

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