

Project Visions and Visioning



This article is developed within the scope of the **Project Visions and Visioning**, an effort to enhance Foresight learning through collaborative work.

The Nature of Visions is the second lecture from a module on Visions and Visioning, first taught to graduate students from the National School for Political and Governance Studies (Romania).

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Conventional wisdom

In the context of future-oriented activities, a vision is an imagined representation or a shared picture of the (usually desired) future.

Visioning is the process of creating a series of images or visions of the future that are real and compelling enough to motivate and guide people toward focusing their efforts on achieving certain goals.

... about visioning

- the elaboration of shared strategic visions bringing together the viewpoints of the various actors is the most important (intangible) output of a Foresight exercise

- developing these visions jointly can contribute to a shared sense of commitment and to the normative processes

Foresight Knowledge

Argumentation forms

- analogies - making future possible threats and opportunities plausible by analogy of known threats
 - ◆ the threats and opportunities of biotech have often been explored on the basis of the experience with nuclear technology
 - ◆ nanotechnology is increasingly being compared on the basis of experience with biotechnology
- counterfactual arguments are also often deployed when we address 'what if?' questions
- analogies or counterfactuals, do not allow for predictions but produce prospective plausibility claims, which do have sufficient power to allow us to explore the future

Plausibility

- equally plausible claims - based on alternative sources of knowledge and lacking any falsificationary power 'may conflict'
 - ◆ these plausibility claims either loose substance or become more persuasive, once empirical research seem to support particular paradigms based on those plausibility claims
- the argument (an analogy!) of a 'greenhouse effect' stated the plausibility of the occurrence of global warming; an analogy which has been strengthened by actual observed temperature rises over the last decade, although this empirical basis in itself will not be sufficient to proof the thesis of the greenhouse effect
 - ◆ as for those temperature rises exists alternative explanations

Characteristics of Foresight Knowledge

- non-verifiable in nature since it does not give a representation of an empirical reality
- the quality of foresight knowledge is discussed in terms of its plausibility rather than in terms how accurate it is
- Foresight exercises are therefore often characterized as 'explorative' in nature and not meant to produce predictions
- has a high degree of uncertainty und complexity - uncertainties exists concerning particular causal relationships and their relevance for the issue of concern
- thematises usually a coherent vision whereby relevant knowledge includes an anticipation of 'the unknown'
- has an action-oriented perspective - identification of 'threats/challenges/opportunities and the relevance of knowledge for a particular issue whereby normal scientific knowledge lacks orientation, foresight exercise mobilise orientation knowledge, making it possible to a diagnosis of the situation
- shares a typical hermeneutic dimension of the social sciences - knowledge is subject to continuous re-interpretation
- is more than future-oriented research: it combines normative (i.e. transformable) targets with socio-economic feasibility and scientific plausibility
- is per definition multi-disciplinary in nature and often combines the insights of social and natural sciences

Strategic Intelligence

Main article: [Strategic Intelligence](#)

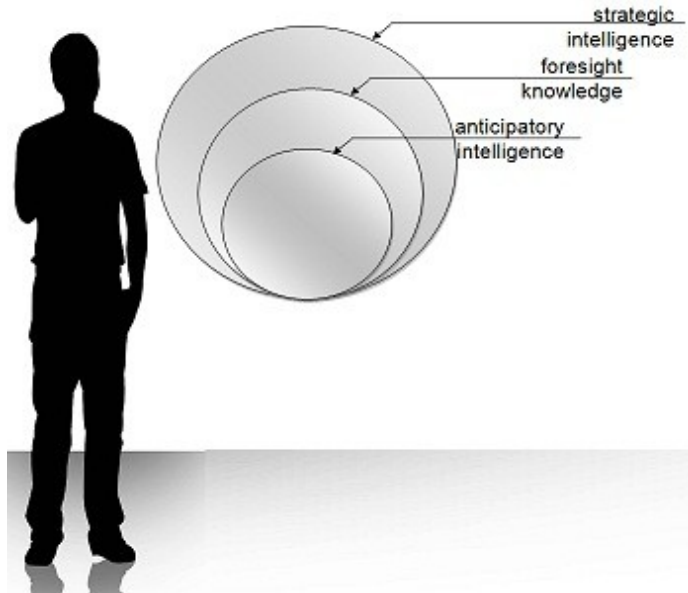


Figure 1: The relation between Strategic Intelligence, Foresight Knowledge, and Anticipatory Intelligence

- consists of targeted and context-sensitive combinations of explanatory knowledge about phenomena observed, of orientation knowledge, evaluative judgements, and of action-guiding knowledge with regard to strategic decisions
- necessarily provisional and incomplete in its descriptive aspects
- dependent on changing societal normative concepts in its evaluative aspects
- dealing with it leads to a great need for reflection on the premises and uncertainties of knowledge itself, as well as learning

Visioning

Innovators envision!

- visioning as a way of defining and a promise of achieving desirable futures has become a popular topic in recent years
- the assumption is that it is more likely to discover innovative pathways towards an objective if you can see it or imagine it
- visioning becomes associated with developing a sense of purpose, with driving the creative energy, with providing groups of innovators with goals to focus and direction, with inspiration and momentum
- visioning seems to be about favoring an image of the future to guide decision making, over thorough analysis of what has been done in the past

Assumptions

- focusing on the end-goal, even as the pathway is blurred, will offer long-term directions for action
- it's about drawing a clear image, with emotive touches, but also about being in touch with what people want
- encouraging openness breaks out of boundary thinking to offer unique and creative solutions
- provides continuity and avoids the stuttering effect of strategic fragmentation

Visioning vs. Focusing

- there is tension and interplay in the relation between 'visioning' and 'focusing'?
- visioning is about being able to visualize in a much focused way, but there is a limit to focusing, and upon trespassing this limit one would only diminish the overall harmony of the 'big picture'?
- how are we to create coherent visions, visions that inspire and make sense to large groups of potential innovators, without becoming too focused, without shredding the very thread that gives cohesion to the visioning effort?

The Dangers of Visioning

- visions are underlined by collections of structured concepts, values and norms, guiding behavior and answer to stimuli
 - ◆ their role becomes highly normative and even disciplinary when the limit of focusing is being crossed
- the episteme of a so-called Knowledge Society calls for a reorganization of knowledge to accommodate post-natural and post-scientific forms of prospective knowledge, but one should not overlook the fact that new knowledge is often intertwined with new forms of exercising power
 - ◆ according to Michel Foucault, an episteme is the structure of thought that epitomizes the thinking of a particular age - it is the underground network of assumptions and thought processes, the mind-set that limits the scientific, philosophical, and cultural thinking of an age

Change

Main article: [Risk management](#)

- visioning is about the relation between narratives of present and the picture of an idealized future
- it is about change, and change can be controlled, enhanced or inhibited
- without the possibility of change, a vision depicting the distant future becomes void of meaning
- visioning is expected to cause specific and sporadic forms of change

Mechanics of change

Main article: [Visioning](#)

- one metaphor describing the functioning of visions is the magnet that through its attractive force pulls the present towards an envisioned future
- another metaphor is the compass, with the ship navigating the complicated waters of transformative change

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- a vision can be seen as a crowbar, converging energies to break open a cryptic future
- finally, the vision was described as a platform that opens the space of dialogue for all actors
- these metaphors may be helpful in different contexts, but they seem rather contingent
 - ◆ *The use of metaphors may give us false suggestions that we have understood their functioning. [?] a vision simply is not a magnet, compass, or crowbar. (Helm)*

Social Representations

- visions carry a core set of invariable elements, common to diverse representations
- the nature of such elements is essentially qualitative, offering meaning to peripheral elements when anchored in one specific environment, and thus fulfilling a generative function that places them at the root of the visioning effort
- they also have an organizing function, determining relations that link together all the other elements of a vision

Corporate Visions

Senior Managers about Visions

Main article: Corporate Foresight

- framework for strategy, guiding the way in which strategy is being developed
- guide for individual behavior through complicated environments
- source of inspiration for people
- bases for the culture of our organization
- compass that guides the organization
- the glue that holds the organization together
- source of identity ? what makes us unique?

Structure

- Core values are the handful of guiding principles by which a company navigates.
 - ◆ they require no external justification
 - ◆ instead of changing its core values, a great company will change its markets?seek out different customers?in order to remain true to its core values
- Big, Hairy, Audacious Goals (BHAGs)
 - ◆ ambitious plans for the entire organization
 - ◆ they typically require 10 to 30 years? work to complete
- Vivid descriptions paint a picture of what it will be like to achieve the BHAGs
 - ◆ they make the goals vibrant, engaging?and tangible

Microsoft Future Vision

*To be led by a **globally diverse workforce** that consistently delivers **outstanding business results**, understands the **various cultural demands** of a global marketplace, is passionate about*

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*technology and the promise it holds to tap **human potential**, and thrives in a corporate culture where **inclusive behaviors** are valued.*

- Banking Future Vision
- Manufacturing Future Vision
- Health Future Vision
- Office Labs Vision
- Productivity Future Vision

Pedagogical features

[Media:Curs 2 - the nature of visions en.pdf](#) - original slides from the first presentation of this lecture

References