The Imperative of Strategic Foresight to Strategic Thinking

Luke van der Laan
University of Southern Queensland
Australia

Abstract

An apparent gap in mainstream strategy literature points to questions relating to the role and competencies of leaders in strategy making. An initial investigation reveals that turbulent change and growing environmental uncertainty demands leadership intuition and skills that are able to anticipate aspects of the future, provide enabling environments significantly different to the recent past and to provide direction for a dynamic 'living organisational strategy'. The paper explores the relation between neuroses of thinking about the future, the roles of leaders, strategic foresight and their connectedness to expanding bottom line measures of organisational performance. These are seen as indicators of leadership skills required to embrace the future and the possible foundations of an imperative for strategic foresight education in leadership development.

Keywords: strategic foresight, strategic leadership, strategic thinking, futures studies

Introduction

A great deal of contemporary work on leadership and strategy (Beer & Eisenstat, 2000; Burke, 2006; Fulmer, Gibbs & Goldsmith 2000; Kanter, 2006; Montgomery, 2008; Mintzberg, 1994a, 1994b, 1998, 2004; O'Regan & Ghobadian, 2002) indicates that there is an increasing need, at the practising end of strategy, to enhance the role and capacity of leadership in strategic thinking. Whittington (2004) indicates that there is a large gap in strategy literature defining strategic thinking. Kanter (1995) confirms the need for new ideas, experimentation and innovation in strategy practice in the 2000s. Handy (1995) argues that today's organizations are in an environment of rapid flux and uncertainty in a discontinuous form and are required to meaningfully address these chal-

lenges or face an unsustainable future. Therefore, organizations need to continually *renew*, *reinvent* and *reinvigorate* themselves. While acknowledging the important role, at all levels of the organisation in strategy, this paper will focus on the role of leaders' at the most senior level.

In response to the 'gap' in the literature referred to above the question has been raised as to whether the corpus of knowledge underpinning strategic leadership is relevant to the new information economy and the dynamic role of leadership in organisations specifically in terms of strategic thinking (Hamel & Prahalad, 1996, p.242). While gaining depth by increasingly formalised systems and framework in terms of planning, strategy has reportedly lost breadth (Montgomery, 2008, p.56) and is increasingly in the domain of planners rather than leaders (Mintzberg, 1994, p.321). Can the emerging field of Strategic Foresight (SF) as derived from Futures Studies (FS) provide some of the breadth needed in terms of strategic thinking in strategic leadership? This question is not posed in a strict bounded disciplinary sense but rather in terms of the epistemological and ontological foundations of FS and its possible value in terms of strategic thinking. This conceptual paper seeks to investigate a basis for further research as to the synergy between SF and strategic leadership, in addressing this apparent 'gap'. The paper will:
  a) Briefly examine the context of the nature of the future, human endeavour within this context and common obstacles of engaging the future.
  b) Seek conceptual clarification of the terminology used in the paper.
  c) Seek to illustrate the relationship between Future Studies (FS) and Strategic Foresight (SF).
  d) Link organisational needs and contemporary views on strategy with the potential benefits of SF.
  e) Explore shifts toward expanded bottom line measures of organisational performance and its link with SF and leadership.

It must be noted that the paper acknowledges the multi dimensional nature of what constitutes better strategic leadership in all its complexity. The importance of experience and learning, and those aspects such as values, intuition and cognition are recognised. The paper rather seeks to explore a basis for the proposition that SF education may enhance strategic thinking, and by extension, strategic leadership within the context of shifts in the way organisations view strategy and the attendant environmental shifts related to change and organisational performance.

Nature of the future

"The future doesn't exist, never did, and never will. By definition, the future hasn't happened. And when it does happen it becomes the present, and then quickly becomes the past" (Gelatt, 1993, pp.9-13).

Much has been written of the future and seemingly human endeavour has always sought to know it. Other than the possibility of spiritual enlightenment, the future cannot be known. It does however arise out of the present and the past no matter how discontinuous and as such, there are strands of information that can allow a dedicated enquiry to 'narrow the cone of uncertainty' (Spies, 1997, p.15; Ratcliffe, 2006, p.40). It is critical to acknowledge that FS does not seek to predict the future but rather seeks,

at an epistemological and ontological level; to create different images of what the future may become, what is most likely given the current reality, and how an entity's idealised design can fit into images of a preferred future. It is encapsulated in terms of *prospective thinking or prospection* (Voros, 2005, p.89). FS seeks to know what can or could be (the possible), what is likely to be (the probable) and what ought to be (the preferable) (Bell, 1997, p.42).

FS recognises that images of the future are among the causes of present behaviour. Organisations and decision makers either adapt to what they perceive as likely outcomes of their present action or act in a fashion to create the future they want. This can be seen as an inherent feature of all constructive action whether long or short-term. It could be seen as the root cause for all planning as it is pro-active and future bound.

Abundant usage of the term 'future' can be seen in business, media, social and technological discourses. It pervades formal and informal educational endeavours most notably in terms of sustainability, whether in terms of the pure sciences or social sciences and business. Most, if not all, disciplines seemingly include work on the future but lack collaboration and common dialogue across disciplinary boundaries. The question is raised as to whether certain salient knowledge foundations exist that can invigorate this discourse and can avoid the duplication of work in these areas.

Ego, creator of the future

De Jouvenal (1967) provides a sound theoretical platform for the literary basis for studying the future. Images of the future exist in the minds of all people. Images of the future exist in the collective minds of all organisations and entity's. These may be long or short term, complex or simple extrapolations of the present and past perceived realities. All images are representations of these perceived realities or *facta*. These representations may also not represent any reality of the past or present and are commonly subjective fabrications of the mind. De Jouvenal notes (1967, p.25) that these interpretations of current and past reality or *facta*, are of critical importance in understanding action, and while many are discarded, perhaps as fantasies, those that are retained are the cause of future realities or *futura*. A study of the images, *futura and facta*, their causes and content provides a valuable framework for understanding present action but can also inform decisions to create intended actions based on images of a preferable future, a chosen image of the future among possible *futura*. This is summed up by de Jouvenal (1967, p.25) in the statement that "There is no volition without object, and the object of a volition is that a fiction of the mind becomes a fact". In essence, de Jouvenal concludes that there would be no actions if there were no representations of the future, only reactions to the present as it unfolds.

De Jouvenal (1967, p.26) states that an entity that acts with sustained intention to achieve an image of the future is the creator of the future in that its actions seek to validate representations of the future. It is important for an entity to know that he / she / it is a cause of the future. The resources it has available and the parameters of action within which it can mobilise form the basis of its intention. An assumption of strategy is that one can be the creator of one's future, the question is how this can be optimised and within which framework this could fall. FS seeks to build a valid and reliable

basis for contributing to this knowledge and in so doing provide a disciplinary framework for action, based on preferable representations of the future, or *futura*.

It is important to provide epistemological grounds for the philosophical basis of FS. A purpose of FS is, concurrently, also to verify the knowledge it produces as well as formulating the research and other intellectual procedures that give rise to it (Bell, 1997, p.43). Given a sound knowledge foundation for the *facta*, the reality it may produce, the *futura*, and the strength of its intention, FS represents the possibility to inform and influence decision making in shaping the future. An entity's action is based on the fact that they perceive aspects of the future as known, its *futura*. Without a level of certainty in regard to the future it could be construed that there would be no sustained intention and that action would be limited to reaction. It is clear that human endeavour and action is not limited to reaction. This indicates that human endeavour is based on an entity treating elements of the future as known whether accurately or not. Knowledge creation that can illuminate aspects of the future, reduces uncertainty and thereby informs actions based on that which is treated known, has obvious value in terms of strategy and leadership. This assists in i) achieving the object of one's intentions and ii) reduces the impact of disruptive future events by developing anticipatory capacity. The greater the certainty, the greater the sustained intent, the more effective the action and the greater the chance of achieving future ideals.

A problem that arises out of a study of the future is the gap between a representation of the future and the current reality of an entity. The longer term the representation is, the larger the gap between the perceived current reality (*facta*) and future realities (*futura*). This often evokes a feeling of detachment, futility of thinking long-term and may be disempowering due to the possibility of a 'wild cards' or key uncertainties. Leaders that have education and training in FS beyond this perceived gap may be more likely to adapt to / mitigate change, be innovative / pro-active and have more confidence in challenging the complexity of the future. This directly relates to the propositions of the anticipated study.

Images of the future

Heisenberg warns that it is possible in human discourse to make statements that are not based on empirical fact, but nevertheless produce a picture in our imagination (1930, p.11). While it is prudent to guard against action based on a lack of truth and understanding, it does not equate to action which is the result of purposefully decreasing uncertainty based on epistemological methods. Importantly, the extrapolations which inspire future action must be the result of rigorous analysis in a multi-layered fashion so as to unravel deeper understanding and stimulate agreement. Further, due to the power of such images, it requires responsible practice in illustrating alternatives rather than a one dimensional vision which may lack agreement and therefore truth. Some may argue that traditional strategic management practice of a linear, uni-visionary nature is by its very nature untruthful in terms of this definition and therefore flawed.

Mental models serve to illustrate alternatives which are dependent on perceived past / current realities, sustained intent, driving forces and even system breaks. As Senge sets out; "human beings cannot navigate through the complex environments of

our world without cognitive 'mental maps' and all these mental maps, by definition, are flawed in some way" (1994, p.235). The fact that they may be flawed is acknowledged but they are nevertheless recognized to be the main cause of positive action. Based on interpretations of the perceived present and past, mental models offer a valuable source for shaping the future despite that future being unknown and possibly based on flawed assumptions. FS seeks to reduce the uncertainty and mitigate flawed assumptions. Based on sound analysis, mental models inject creative stress into the organisational environment in order to promote positive change and innovation.

Inayatullah (2006, p.4) confirms the uncertainty of engaging the future. The universe, he states, is however not static and not disconnected from humanity who fills it with images and desires which shape the future. The future is not linear but is the result of possible trajectories that are formed in the past and the present. By embracing uncertainty, ambiguity and change, FS extrapolates what might become and how those futures may impact upon us now and inform actions that seek the most preferable possible outcome.

Obstacles to thinking about the future

A Maslow stated that "people have a need to know and a fear of knowing" and J Balbraith stated that "given a choice between changing and proving that it is not necessary, most people get busy on the proof." (Gelatt, 1993, p.9). Thinking about the future infers embracing change and being creative and flexible in decision making. The future however, unlocks various fears that may paralyse the decision maker into inaction or reaction. Gelatt (1993, pp.9-13) proposes that four neuroses exist which inhibit creative and flexible decision making.

- Future phobia. This implies a fear of the future and attempts to avoid thinking or making decisions in relation to it. Often the decision maker invents ways in which to avoid thinking about the future either by asserting that the environment is in flux, out of control, unmanageable and beyond control (and are therefore justified not to take positive action) or by asserting that the future is already known. This fear of the future leads to avoidance and is best counteracted by inspiring decision makers to get excited about the future or as Gelatt puts it, by engendering future euphoria.
- Paradigm paralysis. This neurosis implies an inability to change one's point of view within an environment that has change as its most salient characteristic. Also known as paradigm fixation, paradigm paralysis relies on recipes of success in the past and ascribes failure as fate. Much has been said about the unprecedented change facing the world. However, amidst the change and extensive empirical evidence of it, decision makers seek stability amid the rapidly changing environment in which they function. Gelatt suggests that this leads to 'blind spots' where, due to existing paradigms the decision maker is unable to 'see' new truths and therefore becomes increasingly inflexible as the change continues to evolve. The suggested remedy is to achieve 'metanoia', the ability of open mindedness, being comfortable with uncertainty and able to change beliefs, attitudes and knowledge.

- Info mania. Idolising information and craving more when the current supply of information is already at overload, leads to info-mania. Most commonly rooted in a fear of not knowing or being perceived as ignorant by observers, info-mania stifles creativity at the expense of seeking facts to explain difficult decisions. It is suggested that strategy is immersed in and inhibited by the need for more information, planning and conventional strategic surveys (Kotter, 2007, p.99; Montgomery, 2008, p.56; Zaleznik, 2001, p.87) and that even the qualitative dimensions of SF are becoming suppressed by the quantitative and empirical (Ratcliffe, 2006, p.40). It is proposed that 'enlightened ignorance' should be sought in order to escape info-mania thereby opening up an opportunity for understanding rather than disguising ignorance.
- Reverse paranoia. In an intimidating environment of change and especially in view of changing, those with reverse paranoia give up their responsibility by preferring to follow a leader who will not only lead but imagine the future for them. This is clearly illustrated on the back of the 'change' buzzword employed by political candidates which seeks to attract the voting attentions of those who are paralysed by change. Reverse paranoia, states Gelatt, leads one to give up personal responsibility and become immersed in reactive behaviour.

Directional thinking; Consequential thinking; Influencing strategies; and Communication skills are mentioned by Portnoy (1999, pp.73-198) as key competencies for the success of leaders. It is premised that key competencies, when viewed separately, can effectively be undermined by all four neuroses, whether individually or in combination. The neuroses prevent thinking about the future and undermine leadership success if viewed in terms of Portnoy's competencies. Leadership development, in this context, should include i) the recognition of these obstacles ii) the development of the skills to overcome them and iii) to be *futures-wise* in embracing and understanding change. Wisdom results from knowledge, understanding and insight. If a leader is futures-wise it stands to reason that they have overcome the neuroses (Gelatt op cit) and understand the benefits of thinking beyond existing paradigms. Anything that prevents this development not only hinders progress but stifles true leadership.

The Need for Conceptual Clarification

Terminology

As society and economic conditions have evolved especially since the industrial revolution, so have organisation's approach to thinking about the future (Spies, 1998, p.5). Not unlike the rapid population growth, urbanisation, technological innovation, globalisation and communication explosion that typifies the last century, organisational approaches to planning have also evolved as rapidly and probably in response to these changes. This has brought about an inundation of terminology, often originating from disciplinary confines that are inevitably used beyond the extent of such disciplines and are often couched in lay terms. In many instances the terminology is used out of context and thereby creates grey areas which confuse understanding and learning. For the purposes of this paper it is critical to clarify the concepts of what is meant by contemporary leadership, strategy and strategic foresight.

Spies (1998, p.5) lists the shifts in the emphasis of business planning (see Table 1). The table illustrates significant changes in approaches to organisational planning and accompanying terminology that occur roughly every decade in relation to changes in the business environment. The table raises the question as to what the planning emphasis of the recent 1990s until early 2000 was and what the next decade will be especially in view of rapid change, sustainability, social responsibility, environmental degradation and existing paradigms relating to performance, strategy and leadership. It could be argued that the latter part of the 20th century was dominated by increasing shareholder value and the rapid accumulation of wealth at all costs as underpinned by such developments of globalisation, expanding markets, explosion of information technology and the development of such theories underpinning aspects of these such as the agency theory. Clearly, recognition of the need to address the challenges arising out of these possible paradigms may be reflective of the growing popularity of trans-formational, upper echelon and servant leadership theories. The dramatic scandals sur-rounding incidents such as the ENRON collapse could be seen as symptomatic of a complex interaction of the planning paradigms of the late 20th century but also as a catalyst indicative of the conflict between economic bottom line measures and broader performance measures relating to sustainability, the environment and social responsi-bility.

Table 1
Shifts in the Global Emphasis of Business of Planning

Period	Characteristics	Planning emphasis
1910s	Engineering emphasis e.g. Henry Ford's assembly line.	Engineering design
1920s	'Indian summer', the 'Go-Go' years.	Financial planning
1930s	Depression.	Accounting-based planning
1940s	War production and post-war shortages.	Production planning, operations research
1950s	Market expansio.	Sales strategy
1960s	Market ceiling.	Market strategy
1970s	Cash cows and conglomerates	Corporate planning
1980s	Information society	Strategic planning
(1990s)	(Shareholder wealth maximisation)	(Resource-based strategic planning)

Note. From *the Role of Scenario Planning in Strategy Formulation* (p.5), by Phillip H. Spies, 1997, Agrifutura Project Stellenbosch, University of Stellenbosch Press.

Foresight

"Foresight is the process of developing a range of views of possible ways in which the future could develop, and understanding these sufficiently well to be able to decide what decisions can be taken today to create the best possible tomorrow" (Horton, 1999, p. 5).

It is generally recognised that foresight is part of FS. It is the 'measuring part' of FS that develops a range of views of possible ways in which the future can develop with the intention that it gives rise to commitment and action. It therefore correlates with the strategic thinking aspect of the strategy process. Horton (1999, pp.5-9) illustrates the foresight process as a key business skill that has found particular value in large studies in the UK, Germany, USA, Netherlands and Japan. She indicates that the principle aim of introducing foresight to organisations is to derive real value rather than simply conducting an interesting exercise. She indicates that foresight seeks to combine the development of an understanding of possible futures and strategic actions based on that understanding. It is noted that foresight is not about guessing the future or making predictions but draws on the theoretical foundations of FS and knowledge management in order to derive meaningful strategic value for organisations that have recognised the critical value of thinking into the future. In many respects the foresight process seemingly represents a departure from the *deterministic* dimension of traditional scientific method to an *intentionistic* systemic method (Dostal, 2005, p.14).

Foresight is carried out in the organisational entity system and is dependent on an analysis of the organisation's internal and external environment in all its dimensions. It therefore represents a multi-layered analysis encompassed in systematic processes which seeks to increase organisational knowledge of its possible futures with the specific intent to derive tangible actions. The process is illustrated in Table 2 below and can be summarized as a sum of three phases:

1) Collection, collation, summarisation of available information from various sources such as surveys, literature, customers, government, experts, institutions, etc. by way of a number of methodologies such as environmental scanning, qualitative/quantitative research, data mining, literary reviews, trend analysis and others. This culminates in the production of foresight knowledge after it is collated and summarised in order to give it structure and present it in a manageable form.

2) Translation, interpretation of the knowledge in order to produce an understanding of an organisation's possible futures and the implications thereof. Interpretation is the "KEY step and heart of the foresight process" (Horton, 1999, p.7). The translated knowledge (into the organisational language) is converted into understanding and is directly linked to the "so what?" factor. The interpretation seeks to identify the implications of possible futures of the organisation and is mostly not discernable by the managers themselves. Phase two is therefore of critical importance and where the value add is in terms of the foresight process in generating an understanding of what can (and cannot) become.

3) Assimilation, commitment in order to transform the foresight outputs into meaningful action that will yield positive results as related to the preferable future of the organisation. Actions defined by sustained intent within the framework of an assimilated understanding by the organisation, is the overall intent of the foresight process. Communication is the most critical of enabling factors in generating commitment and the Actions are the only place in the process where the process's value can be realised.

Table 2
The Foresight Process

Phase 1 Inputs	Phase 2 Foresight	Phase 3 Action
Information $\Longrightarrow$	Knowledge $\Longrightarrow$	Understanding $\Longrightarrow$ Action (Wisdom)
Collection Collation Summarisation	Translation Interpretation	Assimilation Commitment

Note. From "A Simple Guide to Successful Foresight (Fig. 1)," by Averil Horton, 1999, *Foresight, 1*(1), p. 5-9.

Horton (1999, p.9) indicates that the foresight process is concerned with the hierarchy of knowledge whereby data is collected, translated and interpreted leading to insight and understanding, culminating in decisions as a result of the wisdom achieved through the process. If phase two is compromised, the understanding and action it generates will possibly be misdirected and lead to wasted resources and time.

Strategy

A literary study by O'Shannasy (2006) related to strategy indicates an evolution of the discipline. The focus has shifted from strategic planning in the 1950's to strategic management and presently to strategic thinking (Hamel, 2000; Liedtka, 1998). O'Shannasy (2006, p.16) indicates that traditional strategic management activities are now embedded in the current interaction of the activities of strategic thinking and strategic planning in strategy. This is significant in that while strategic planning and strategic thinking are differentiated, strategic management is embedded in both. The traditional "strategic management activities of planning, leading, directing and controlling are now embedded and intertwined in the process" (O'Shannasy, 2006, p.16).

The work of Mintzberg (1994a & 2004), Montgomery (2008), Kotter (2007), Fulmer et al. (2000) and Beer and Eisenstat (2000) has pointed to the importance of the generative perspective of strategic thinking (O'Shannasy, 2006, p.5). The generative perspective is typified by strategic thinking that is a divergent, creative and intuitive activity. The rational perspective of strategic thinking on the other hand is most notably defined by the work of Ansoff, Porter and Andrews (O'Shannasy, 2006, p.5). The rational perspective is typified by analytical approaches and defined by systematic sequential processes (O'Shannasy, 2006, p.5).

Historically, the primary analytical process in strategic analysis has been the SWOT analysis. Hussey (2002, p.43) notes that "modern textbooks on strategy... (have) a few paragraphs on SWOT but not much else under the heading of analysing strengths and weaknesses". He continues by illustrating the flaws of SWOT and concludes that "I do not think SWOT can ever become really useful unless it is related to a more careful analytical underpinning" (2002, p.43). It is clear that the analytical methods of strategic analysis have been expanded significantly to include PESTEL analysis, environmental scanning, data mining, scenario development and others. From a generative perspective this seems to have addressed the shortcomings of the

analytical basis, but further entrenched the rational perspective. Liedtka (1998), O'Shannasy (2006) and Raimond (1996) however argue that the strategy process should include both perspectives, the emphasis depending on the organisation's environmental and sectoral context.

It can be argued that if the organisation gets the balancing of rationally based planning and analysis and generative based creativity and intuition wrong in the strategic thinking practise, then there is a significant threat that the very objective of strategic leadership is undermined by inaccurate assumptions and may lead to unachievable visions and action plans, not to mention missed opportunities. This may have led to strategy processes being i) compromised by an inherently inadequate scope of strategic thinking worsened by growing complexity and the increasing rate of change ii) undermined by poor work by practitioners and leaders due to inadequate education, training and experience iii) based on unsustainable visions of the future due to a lack of creativity and intuition in decision making. It is one thing to develop a vision (or image) based on exhaustive analytical processes, it is quite another if that vision is not possible, fails to identify new spaces or has an insufficient entity support system (its environment) to achieve it. It is increasingly acknowledged that "strategy is not what it used to be – or what it could be ... Most notably, strategy has been narrowed to a competitive game plan ...we need to think about strategy in a new way – one that recognises the inherently fluid nature of competition and the attendant need for continuous, not periodic, leadership" (Montgomery, 2008, pp.54-60). Contemporary writings (Fulmer et al., 2000; Kotter, 2007; Liedtka, 1998; Raimond, 1996) on strategy have acknowledged this.

Usage of terminology in this paper

The author acknowledges the need for clear and consistent usage of terminology for the purposes of this paper. As such the following guidelines are proposed:

- *Strategic Foresight (SF)* is a sub-field of *Futures Studies (FS)* and represents a convergence between FS and strategy (Slaughter, 1996) and the attendant process of *foresight*.
- *Strategy* (Hamel, 2000) is understood to encompass *strategic thinking* (in terms of the formulation of strategy and reviews thereof), *strategic planning* (in terms of the allocation of resources, actions and timeframes according to objectives) and *strategy implementation* (in terms of actioning the strategic plan).
- *Strategic management* is understood as being the control processes embedded in strategy as related to management functions as opposed to *leadership* functions (Montgomery, 2008, pp.54-60).
- *Management* is understood as related to those tasked with controlling the functions of an organisation in order to cope with complexity. *Leadership* in contrast, is understood to be the function associated with direction-setting and anticipating change. It is acknowledged that both can function together in the form of *leader-managers* but that their functions are distint and differentiated (Kotter, 2001; Mintzberg, 2004; Montgomery, 2008; Zaleznik, 2004)

Futures Studies and Strategic Foresight

"Strategic foresight is the ability to create and maintain a high quality, coherent and functional forward view, and to use the insights arising in useful organisational ways...It represents a fusion of futures studies (FS) methods with those of strategic management" (Slaughter, 1999, p. 218).

Futures Studies (FS) seeks to create discernable images of the future. It is about understanding change and seeks to challenge complexity within the broader context of an entity's system at levels not usually discernable by the entity itself. A number of FS methodologies (quantitative and qualitative) are applied to describe a plurality of possible, probable and preferable futures. A 'measuring of the future' is primarily achieved by way of the foresight process in which a problem is discerned and alternative futures are formulated. This process often includes methods that are unique to FS and others that are shared with other disciplines. Thereafter FS seeks to 'make the future' by including an ontological dimension in influencing decisions, attitudes and actions related to a preferable future.

FS does not seek to predict the future but rather seeks to identify causes of the future, raise questions that are often different to mainstream analysis and build upon knowledge foundations by applying sound intellectual processes. The value of FS is in its usefulness in opening minds to consider new, often deeper causal possibilities and in changing the policy agenda (Fletcher, 1981). FS and more specifically SF, finds expression in multiple levels of analysis and non-linear methodologies. The purpose of futures methodology is to systematically explore, create, and test both possible and preferable futures to improve decisions by leadership (Glenn & Gordon, 2007). Positive visions, untested by futures analysis within any discipline, can be destructive by leading people toward misaligned goals or impossible schedules. It is in this dimension that the potential exists of undermining mainstream strategic leadership methods and has often led to criticism. Often due to a quest to communicate a single vision, leaders may have failed to analyse sufficiently the possibility of such a vision of the future as opposed to its alternatives. FS emphasises the importance of asking questions which illustrate deeper causal relationships within an organisation's complex system that often reveals solutions / alternatives / meanings below an organisation's most visible litany level.

FS work is practised at different levels of analysis. As illustrated by Slaughter (2001, p.414), education of the methodologies of FS has historically been seen as enough and has led to a great number of practitioners functioning at a superficial level without the very necessary grounding in futures literacy. This, he concludes, risks bringing the profession into disrepute or most certainly may have led to retarding the legitimate growth of the field. Slaughter (2002, pp.493-507) further illustrates different levels at which FS is practised namely popular futures, problem-solving and at an epistemological level. It is noted that "pop futurism" is largely practiced under the guise of FS but that it is "mostly trite and superficial ... eminently marketable, but largely bereft of theory and insight" (2002). This relates somewhat to the challenges facing strategic management but is, however, fertile ground for exploring new paradigms for strategic thinking. Inayatullah (2002, pp.479-491) who developed Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) notes that layered analysis does not propose to exclude other

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levels, such as the most visible litany level of analysis, but rather that "all levels are required and needed for fulfilling valid and informative research" (2002, p.480). FS analysis could therefore arguably compliment strategic thinking whether in the form of *strategic foresight* or otherwise.

Effective FS practise is dependent on the quality of its proponent's work and depth of analysis. It is argued that this is a skill which if learnt and developed will enhance the implicit knowledge and develop leadership intuition. The possible duplication of knowledge creation efforts resulting due to strict disciplinary boundaries and paradigms seem wasteful and contrary to the scientific norms of universalism and communalism (Neuman, 2003, p.10). The development of *strategic foresight* has sought to address this concern in providing a framework for a richer and more effective field of strategic thinking by "fusing FS methods with that of strategic management" (Slaughter op cit.). It is imperative to re-affirm the overarching nature, and reciprocal benefits of both fields and to challenge existing disciplinary confines and possible disciplinary chauvinism. *Strategic foresight*, in itself, challenges the disciplinary boundaries of FS and by extension encourages collaboration and the exploration of new knowledge.

The increasing complexity and acceleration of change decreases the lead-time for decisions and makes previous expectations less reliable. Strategic thinking by way of *strategic foresight* increases the lead-time between potential events and current planning. As a result, a meaningful opportunity exists to manage the faster pace and complexity of change today, facilitate long term thinking and increase its value of early warning, because it increases the time-space for analysis (Glenn & Gordon, 2007, p.5). In combining the powerful literary foundations, hermeneutics and worldview of FS with the extensive depth of strategic management, *strategic foresight* is a realistically practical alternative to mainstream strategic practise in organisations and may provide a practical opportunity in dealing more effectively with the future.

Organizational needs and strategic foresight

"Global changes are probably more profound than commonly understood, demanding a new mindset ... this cultural transformation engenders a fresh set of challenges ... in tackling the inherent complexity, uncertainty and ambiguity which need a futures-orientated approach to comprehend and capitalise upon societal change ... this organisational metamorphosis will best be understood, planned and managed through a process of foresight or prospective" (Ratcliffe, 2006, p.39).

As has already been eluded to there are significant overlaps between strategic management and FS, between organisational needs and FS, between leadership-management and FS. Much of the confluences have been incorporated into SF whose literary foundations are rooted in FS and are constructed with the intention to understand the complexity, uncertainty and ambiguity of contemporary societal transformation and anticipate the likely impact of that change.

It has also been illustrated above that;
  i) change is unprecedented, volatile and demands greater organisational innovation, flexibility, creativity and a need to be *'future-wise'*,
  ii) organisations need both management (to cope with complexity) and leadership

(to challenge change) but due to environmental turbulence there is a growing need to enhance strategic thinking capacity,

iii) SF is about embracing change, challenging complexity and provides the tools to meaningfully raise deeper laying questions that underlie the more visible litany level of an organisation,

iv) there is a gap in the literature relating to strategic thinking especially in terms of leadership's ability to think creatively, embrace the ambiguity of change and have the necessary competencies to effectively contribute to organisational strategy.

v) the potential benefits of adding SF education to an organisation's leadership development imperatives and the resultant competencies of which may provide significant advantages in terms of strategic thinking.

Hines (2002, pp.337-347) notes that there is an inevitable convergence of organisational needs and FS. He refers to the fact that corporates are increasingly very sensitive to shareholder (societal) concerns and that these concerns now not only refer to bottom line returns but increasingly demand better social responsibility, innovation, environmental conservation and generally a greater focus on ethical concerns and values. Organisations, in a response to remain competitive and appealing to the market and shareholders are seeking new "principles, approaches and tools for delivering the goods" (2002, p.338). The dramatic growth of scenario and contingency use in organisations suggests that organisations are finding value as never before in planning for an uncertain future and the alternative images of the futures (Rigby & Bilodeau, 2007). This growth reflects the changing needs of organisations toward futures thinking and are defined in term of four key needs that are emerging in organisations "that dovetail with the strengths of FS" (Hines, 2002, p.338):

● To be more future-orientated
● To think more deeply and systematically
● To be more creative
● To better deal with change

Hines (2002, p.339) submits that "being competent in innovation and foresight will come to be seen as perhaps the most important source of competitive advantage for organisations in tomorrow's knowledge economy. This entails decision making with the future in mind." The key assumption that Hines makes is that futures thinking will improve the quality of decision making. SF, as a fusion of FS and strategic management, therefore not only makes sense but, subject to verifiable research should arguably be part of the education and development of leaders.

Contemporary challenges to traditional ideas of strategy

Competition has been the central concern of strategic thinking since the 1980s as stemming from the work of M Porter (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005). Aspects of cost and differentiation as related to competitive advantage have dominated strategy practise (Auerbach, 1988; Day & Reibstein, 1997) in determining organisational vision but may not have sufficiently addressed the growing flux of change and its emerging problems. Alternatives to this approach have largely been ignored mostly due to the rigidity of economic performance measures and stakeholder short-termism. The idea

that alternative images of the future exist, dependent on the decisions that are made now is increasingly being accepted and have become more prolific in strategic thinking. The growing acknowledgement of alternative futures is illustrated by the "boom period of scenario planning" (van der Heijden, 2004, p.145) as inspired by FS in the 1960s.

Kotter (2001) has studied more than 100 companies implement transformation strategies in order to make themselves more competitive. He builds on earlier work at Harvard that distinguishes between management and leadership. He proposes that leadership and management differ but are complementary especially in a world of rapid change and concludes that "managers promote stability while leaders press for change, and only organisations that embrace both sides of that contradiction can thrive in turbulent times" (2001, p.85). In keeping with Gellat's remedies for future neuroses especially that of paradigm paralysis (1993, p.11), decision makers are increasingly required to be comfortable with uncertainty, embrace change and develop the ability to be creative and flexible. There is therefore a convergence of mainstream management and the ability to drive change in a visionary fashion. Both are required for the welfare of an organisation. This convergence is most likely the basis for the original rapid evolution of mainstream strategic management theory. Contemporary organisations therefore seek to balance leadership and management because "both are necessary for success in an increasingly complex and volatile ... environment" (Kotter, 2001, p.85) and are increasingly successful in developing leader-managers.

Overwhelming evidence signifies that the environment is changing more rapidly than 10 years ago. Kotter indicates that more change demands more leadership and that leadership is commonly associated with setting a direction and crucially – it is not about producing plans but rather about creating visions and strategies (2001, p.87). He distinguishes between the importance of the two functions of coping with change (leadership) and coping with complexity (planning). Both are necessary for the success of an organisation (2001, p.87). Kotter (2001) differentiates between management and leadership. Management is typified as *managing complexity* by planning and budgeting in order to achieve short term goals by allocating sufficient resources. This is accomplished by organising and staffing. Progress is regularly monitored and necessary steps are devised to achieve the plans by controlling and problem solving. Leadership seeks *constructive change* by setting a direction in terms of a vision "often the distant future" (Kotter, 2001, p.86). This is achieved by aligning people to that vision by way of effective and efficient communication. The vision should consistently be re-evaluated and can only be achieved by motivating and inspiring the whole organisation on an ongoing basis. He notes the pitfalls of organisations that have placed greater emphasis on either planning or direction at the expense of the other. Importantly, the observation is made that the most successful corporations limit the time frame of their planning activities. Long term planning, as a derivative of management, is seen as burdensome, unable to adapt to the unexpected and ultimately is a contradiction in terms. Further, that in the absence of leadership direction, even short-term planning is inefficient and a drain on human capital. This leads to an increase in cynism among managers and often degenerates into a political gamesmanship. It is recognised that planning needs to complement direction setting and serve as a valu-

able reality check on its development over time. Similarly, competent direction setting provides a framework for the realistic development and implementation of planning. Strategy after all, should not be about imitation, but about responding to weak signals (Ratcliffe, 2006, p. 44).

The New Triple Bottom Line: Quadruple Bottom Line?

The spiritual dimension of leadership in the future

Burke (2006, p.14) notes that current leadership practise is seemingly unable to address the most pressing issues within the turbulence and uncertainty of contemporary change. The impact of increasing issues related to diversity, conflict, information, automation and consumption within the context of media domination of western ideals has re-enforced *futures neuroses* (Gelatt, 1993) and thereby created an urgency to mitigate and adapt to their effects. Burke's observations relating to effective leadership challenge the underlying philosophies of contemporary leadership paradigms (2006, p.14). He notes that in order to enhance effective leadership, different worldviews are necessary. The emphasis in leadership is therefore shifting towards being able to create enabling environments that represent values in organisations which may mostly arise out of reflecting the spirituality of its stakeholders. This is seen to be both critical in terms of the organisation's inner and external environmental sustainability. Organisations that fail to recognise this shift, says Inayatullah (2006, p.12), will be unable to attract the best human capital and thus miss out on the opportunity to innovate and match the changing needs of all stakeholders.

Burke proposes that 20th century worldviews are centred on the Cartesian-Newtonian linear worldview (described by Burke, 2006, p.17) and based on the mastery of the environment. This has given rise to conventional management practise that in many aspects pervade the disciplinary confines of education related to effective organisational development, management and leadership. He states that spirituality in organisations has been defined by being immersed in the spirit of capitalism. This has lead to limiting important universal human values but ironically has also limited an organisation's ideals, most notably the accumulation of wealth. The human spirit has, as a result, long been suppressed only to start re-emerging in organisations as of critical importance in terms of strategy (2006, p.17).

Inayatullah (2006, p.4) notes that the present is "murky", marked by greater complexity, convergence, discontinuous change and macro environmental volatility. Similarly, the mid- and long-term future outlook is that this will continue and perhaps even get 'murkier' as the exponential global effects of change in the second, third and higher orders roll out. He envisages a world moving toward an environment where; i) self- actualisation is unable to succeed, ii) messages conflict and cause greater confusion, culminating in iii) no space for understanding alternative futures. Due to the uncertainty of the future and the increased importance of values and spirituality, the question is raised as to how leadership can realise its purpose of guiding organisations through the impending greater turbulence and how this can be measured. Inayatullah (2006, p.8) reflects on these questions and concludes that there are ways to mitigate and adapt to these tendencies. In terms of measurement, Inayatullah points to the

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importance of not increasing the burden that may be associated with a spiritual '4th bottom line', but rather that it goes "deeper than that" (2003, p.2). How can one measure the immeasurable he asks and suggests that the most appropriate way, if called upon to measure, may be to take a layered view seeking deeper levels of measurement until measurement is impossible - remembering of course, the possible impact of measurement on the outcome. Measurement is best reflected by the organisation itself. The 'spiritual' precedes the level of financial, social and environmental impact. The latter three 'bottom lines' reflecting the relative success of the former. It points to the capacity of leadership itself rather than systems and measurables that can appear in a balance sheet and annual report.

So how does one evaluate spiritual leadership capacity? It is acknowledges that this is problematic and at best is achieved by cumulative self-reflection. Due to the added dimension of non-fiscal performance required of leadership, much of leadership development must be cathartic, possibly facilitated, either as part of the organisation's cumulative leadership, group leadership development or by individual coaching. The conclusion by Kets de Vries (in Burke, 2006, p.21) that more durable changes in leadership behaviour are achieved by leadership development in a group setting lends itself to support this. The group should actively be aware of the possibility of 'group think' in addition to the 'quadruple bottom line' ideals of the organisation(s). Self-reflection is honest, attempts to avoid such honesty will inevitably lead to disillusionment and detachment.

In conclusion, it can be deduced that sufficient evidence exists in both theory and practise, indeed the everyday experiences of organisations, that there is an apparent shift toward worldviews that challenge western paradigms of organisational theory and leadership. With a reported 25% of people in OECD nations subscribing to a spiritual alternative to capitalism (Ray & Anderson in Inayatullah, 2003) the shift represents significant changing values in a quarter of the most influential nations in the world. This is significant because the 25% of populations most likely work in or interact with organisations be they government, civil or private. It points to increasing needs by a working humanity that the organisations that they work in and interact with in society should reflect their spiritual ideals whether defined by religion or echoed in their understanding of the universe but not by current socio-political paradigms. Leadership is bound by these ideals otherwise it faces detachment, disempowerment and ultimately failure in its purpose. Further, it is acknowledged that the future is uncertain but not exclusive enough to reject extrapolations that seek to limit uncertainty and thus inform the actions of leaders. This, ultimately, will serve mankind, societies, organisations and individuals in self-actualisation and a better world in which to work and live.

The triple bottom line. Quadruple bottom line?

"It was this disruption of the natural world that Toffler accurately forecast. Changes in the nature of nature...in reality...in society...in truth...and sovereignty have deeply challenged our world. And we are (now) living through this rupture" (Inayatullah, 2006, p.3)

Much has been said about Alvin Toffler's book "Future Shock". To the seasoned FS practitioner the book resembled much of what Slaughter terms *pop-futurism* (2002, p.494) which is limited by the litany level of analysis yet nevertheless is a valuable source of work. Despite this, the turbulence and volatility of change that we are currently living in was indeed forecast in 1974 with its attendant 'rupturing' of much of our understanding and systems. Inayatullah, however identifies the flaw of Toffler's assertions in that his analysis is based on a linear history. History and indeed the future, rather follows "a complex adaptive pattern" (2006, p.4) fraught with system breaks and periods of extreme disruption which inevitably sets the foundation for a new era.

Humanity is instinctively afraid of the unknown, and rather seeks to maintain a status quo or even things as they were. "Leaders and citizens (still) imagine a nostalgic past" (Inayatullah, 2006, p.4). Recipes of success are the order of the day but the ignorance of what the future may hold, an ignorance of the future, has dire consequences. Stemming from Kotter's assertions (2001) and mainstream contemporary management theory, the role of the leader is becoming more differentiated in order to deal with the turbulence referred to above. Inayatullah (2006, p.7) recognises this as giving rise to the great leader hypothesis: "the leader creates the future, brings about change and sets the vision". This description echoes the calling for new leadership paradigms in contemporary organisational leadership research (Montgomery, 2008). It is critical that organisations not only heed the call but look beyond this description of leadership as many are still steeped in the more traditional management paradigms. Due to the rapid change at all levels, in all aspects of the environment (not only technological!) it is important to recognise the growing phenomenon of a "loss of agency" which is anticipated to become the new 'future shock' (Inayatullah, 2006, p.5). This may be described as an individual's perception of their capacity to influence their environment. Increasingly, with the massive shifts in workforce needs and increased automation, amongst others, there is an overwhelming sense of futility. This is often reflected in increased levels of fear within society resulting in escapism such as dependence on virtual reality, substance abuse and suicide. Inayatullah describes this as: "without a sense of being able to influence the world, we will curl up and die", the removal of "the possibility of individual efficacy" will lead to self destruction (2006, p.6). Evidence of this is well documented as increasing the levels of deviant and pathological behaviour, substance abuse and organised crime.

Why this observation? Leadership paradigms are directly related to this prospective change. Organisations will increasingly be confronted by a workforce that not only seeks the opportunity to work but places enormous value on their purpose and dignity while working. Inayatullah (2003, p.1) indicates that the triple bottom line movement has taken off. With this he states that 45% of the world's top companies publish triple bottom line reports (profit, the environment, social responsibility). This is primarily due to shareholder / stakeholder / employee values and concerns upon which the very sustainability of the organisation depends and does not necessarily reflect some philanthropic ideal. "Along with profit, organizations are expected to consider human rights, evaluate their impact on the environment, and on future generations" (2003, p.1).

He quotes (2003, p.1) Jennifer Johnston of Bristol-Myers Squibb who stated that "Work is such a large part of life that employees increasingly want to work for organizations which reflect their values, and for us, it's also an issue of attracting and retaining talent." This is increasingly reflected in investment patterns and stock exchange indexes.

Burke (2006, p.14) notes that current leadership practise is seemingly unable to address the most pressing issues within the turbulence of contemporary change. The impact of increasing issues related to diversity, conflict, information, automation and consumption within the context of media domination of western ideals has consolidated the *futures neuroses* (Gelatt op cit) and thereby created an urgency to mitigate and adapt to the effects. Burke's observations relating to effective leadership challenge the underlying theories of contemporary leadership paradigms (2006, p.14). He notes that in order to enhance effective leadership, different worldviews are necessary. The emphasis in leadership is therefore shifting towards being able to create enabling environments that represent deeper values in organisations which may mostly arise out of spirituality. This is seen to be both critical in terms of inner and external environmental sustainability. Organisations that fail to recognise this shift, says Inayatullah (2006, p.12), will be unable to attract the best human capital and thus miss out on the opportunity to innovate and match the changing needs of all stakeholders.

Burke (2006) refers to recent acknowledgments of the work by winner of the Templeton prize 2006, J Barrow and Nobel Peace Prize nominee E Laszlo, who explain that physical and spiritual reality "are indeed two faces of one coherent whole" (2006, p.14). This, states Barrow (in Burke, 2006, p.14), illustrates how "our scientific picture of the universe has revealed time and again how blinkered and conservative our outlook has often been, how self-serving our interim picture of the universe, how mundane our expectations, and how parochial our attempts to find or deny the links between scientific and religious approaches to the nature of the universe". It is noted that Barrow and Laszlo have provided scientific proof of the convergence of science and spirituality and that they are integral in developing understanding.

Conclusion

Increasing academic commentary, practitioner criticisms and the rapid increase in scenario planning practise are all indicators that the traditional strategy paradigms are increasingly being challenged and that alternative futures provide valuable organisational learning opportunities. The shift in focus is primarily the result of an inability to understand and embrace change which in greater or smaller measure depending on the context has been the most prevalent environmental characteristic in modern times. Many organisational leaders acknowledge the need to think in terms of the future but change has increasingly become more turbulent and prominent, and insufficient frameworks exist to confidently meet the resulting challenges.

This paper briefly seeks to explore a basis for the question as to whether FS education, and SF in particular, may compliment leadership competencies in terms of strategic thinking. Theoretical shifts and environmental turbulence increasingly point to the question as to whether thinking more eclectically about the future and overcom-

ing barriers to this may improve strategic thinking as a core competence of leaders. If evidence exists that FS education does indeed enhance leadership competencies, the question arises as to whether this raises an imperative in terms of leadership development.

Management and leadership are increasingly differentiated with leadership being acknowledged as central to anticipating, adapting to and mitigating change. This differentiation does not exclude the development of leader-mangers who balance both roles. An organisation's ability to embrace change, ambiguity and turbulence by being creative and innovative is of critical importance. SF may sufficiently compliment the competencies of leaders and thus their organisation's capacity to cause the creative stress that is essential to organisational sustainability in a volatile environment of convergence and hyper competition.

D Elgin (in Voros, 2006, p.16) indicates that humanity is currently pivotally challenged which requires turning to the long view forwards in order to propose a sufficient response. This implies that 'sustainability' is only the first 'necessary step' in the context of any envisioned long-term future and the measures of performance that are anticipated. "Our civilisation should thereby have the appropriate degrees of perspective, wisdom, creativity and compassion necessary to sustain ourselves into the distant future" (Voros, 2006, p.16). *Ego, creator of the future* would respond by intensifying the search for all meaningful opportunities to indeed transcend paradigmatic boundaries in developing the 'wisdom, creativity and compassion' required.

Correspondence

Luke van der Laan
School of Marketing and Management, Faculty of Business
University of Southern Queensland
Toowoomba, 4350
Queensland, Australia
Phone: +61 450091598
Email: luke.vanderlaan@usq.edu.au

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