

Reflective Practice and Practitioners

Peter Bishop
University of Houston
USA

Rowena Morrow
Swinburne University of Technology
Australia

About a year ago, Sohail Inayatullah, Editor of the *Journal of Futures Studies*, approached the Association of Professional Futurists (APF) with the idea that the Journal would like to affiliate with the Association. The APF was formed in 2003 to serve the foresight practitioner, those who make at least part of their living in the applied practice of futures studies and strategic foresight. So a journal of foresight practice could be a valuable addition to the literature of the field.

The Board of the APF was favorable to the idea since Inayatullah and Tamkang University, the publisher of the *Journal*, were well known leaders in the field. At the same time, they were skeptical that an academic journal belonged in a professional association. As university faculty members who also practice in the field, we did not see the conflict. Rather we saw opportunity and synergy in the relationship. We knew that the best practitioners reflect deeply on their practice, and the best intellectuals ultimately direct their work to the world of practice. Therefore, we took Inayatullah's offer as an opportunity to give the foresight practitioner a visible way to contribute to the intellectual heritage of the field and to give the practicing futurist a publication that contributed to their practice. Hence this special issue of the *Journal of Futures Studies* was sponsored, written and edited by members of the Association of Professional Futurists.

The two criteria we used to solicit and select articles for this issue were (1) an interesting and intellectually rigorous contribution to the field of futures studies and (2) a practical contribution to the practice of those who work in the field. So we strove, quite simply, to find articles that were interesting and novel because they made an important intellectual statement about the field, but also ones that reflective practitioners could use in their practice. In order to balance and achieve these twin goals, we had to avoid the extremes of interesting, but highly theoretical research and the relatively mundane step-by-step approach to practice without any spark of intellectual interest. In the end, we wanted the readers of the *Journal* to be intrigued by and interested enough by what they learned to use it to inform their practice.

Our goal frankly was really a vision, the vision of a publication that served the reflective practitioner, a concept that Schein conceived of many decades ago. It is a vision that avoids the false dichotomy of thought and practice, of theory and action, of the academy and the marketplace. While

there are numerous and extreme examples of both in the world of publication, we were greedy enough to want it all—to publish sound ideas that also had practical utility.

So with these articles, have we achieved our vision of interesting, rigorous and useful content in one edition? Despite the best efforts of the writers, reviewers and editors, no one achieves an ambitious vision in one try; else it would not be a vision at all. We can tell you, however, that looking over this material, we will be hard pressed to equal or surpass it if we do it again.

The lineup of articles covers the full range from theory to practice, from essay to empirical research, from forecasting about the world to creating change in it. A brief review merits your consideration before jumping into the actual material –

- Jennifer Jarratt and John Mahaffie, from Leading Futurists in Washington DC, open the volume with an essay on one of the key elements of foresight practice – reframing. They reflect on the difficulty of helping people see the world differently even when it means their very survival.
- Peter von Stackelberg, from Social Technologies in Alfred NY, follows with a review of a traditional tool for describing change—the timeline. He describes the most common shapes that appear on a timeline and uses examples from the history of oil production as illustrations of how those shapes can enlighten us about the future.
- Andrew Curry, from The Foresight Company in London UK, and Wendy Schultz, from Infinite Futures in Oxford UK, share their empirical research on the expected outcomes from different scenario techniques—the Scenario Cross (or Shell/GBN), Causal Layered Analysis, Manoa, and Incasting. The same participants used the same dataset to create scenarios using each method in turn. The scenarios were then compared on their overall characteristics, such as coherence, depth and creativity.
- Stephen Millett, formerly of Battelle Memorial Institute and now with Futuring Associates in Columbus OH, also focused on scenario development. He asked the perennial question about whether futurists should attach probabilities to their scenarios and developed a substantial list of reasons for and against doing so.
- Terry Grim, from Social Technologies in Houston TX, introduces a brand-new tool to the field, a means for assessing an organization's foresight capability called the Foresight Maturity Model. Based on the work of Carnegie Mellon's Software Engineering Institute in the 1980s, Terry has developed a detailed rubric that can be used to assess how well an enterprise is practicing foresight.
- Clem Bezold, from the Institute for Alternative Futures in Alexandria VA, moves the discussion from forecasting to aspirational futures. In this essay, he describes how the Institute approaches the whole task of helping clients articulate and move toward their preferred futures.
- Verne Wheelwright, from Personal Futures in Harlingen TX, recommends applying the whole futurist toolkit to a less well-known area of application, that of the individual's own strategic future. Verne describes the tools he has developed to help his clients forecast the futures they face and make decisions about how to maximize their values in those futures.

- And finally, Steve Gould, from the University of the Sunshine Coast in Brisbane QLD, shares an essay on community development. The question in this case-study/reflection is whether "local governments can empower their communities with the opportunity and capacity to create alternative futures."

We would like to acknowledge that this was a group effort. Firstly, our thanks go to those APF members who acted as reviewers for papers submitted. This was a commitment of time and intellectual effort, without which this issue would not have been possible.

- Devin Fidler, Corvinus University, Budapest, Hungary
- Elizabeth Rudd, Sensis, Melbourne VIC, Australia
- Dr. Jay Gary, Regent University, Virginia Beach VA, USA
- Jim Lee, Laurer Associates, Wilmington DE, USA
- Dr. Joseph Voros, Swinburne University of Technology, Hawthorn VIC, Australia
- Marcus Barber, Looking Up Feeling Good, Melbourne VIC, Australia
- Dr. Pero Micic, Future Management Group, Eltville HES, Germany
- Dr. Peter Hayward, Swinburne University of Technology, Hawthorn VIC, Australia
- Steven Douvas, FMGlobal, Johnston RI, USA

Thanks also to the twenty three APF members that submitted an abstract for this issue. We were overwhelmed with choices and very pleased that the APF could generate such a spread of ideas. For those not selected, we expect some of these will be revised and appear in future editions, or indeed, in other publications. Finally, thanks to Sohail Inayatullah, JFS, and Tamkang University for the opportunity to showcase the work of APF members.

In the end it is you the reader who must judge. Is this the kind of practitioner-focused academic offering you want? Would you look forward to a second edition were we to do this again? Could it become a *must read* in your professional life? If so, then we have started something that someday might be closer to our vision.

But we will not know that unless we hear from you. So we will open a comment space on the APF website (<http://profuturists.org>), open to APF members and non-members alike. There you can post comments about the articles; ask questions of the authors or editors, and provide your overall assessment of our inaugural volume. Frankly, your comments will be the most important element in whether the Journal and the Association choose to continue this experiment.

We look forward to your response, and enjoy what we have produced!

Correspondence

Rowena Morrow
Swinburne University of Technology
Prospective Services P/L
PO Box 702,
Brentford Square,
VIC 3131 Australia
E-mail: rowena@pspl.com.au

Peter Bishop
Associate Professor of Strategic Foresight
Department of Human Development and Consumer Science
College of Technology
University of Houston
Houston, TX 77204
USA
E-mail: pbishop@uh.edu
Phone: +1-281-433-4160