

## Anticipating Emerging Issues: Reflections from a Futurist

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### *Introduction*

I describe myself as a futures activist; my role is to anticipate potential developments, bring them to public attention and seek to take some action to address or redress this potential. As my observations later in this article indicate, the locus of my attention has tended to be around social justice, personal and economic futures, learning futures and life futures. During the mid-90s, I issued some fifteen 'Wildman Warnings' about trends I had observed, especially financial trends. At the same time, I started to notice that some trends I had identified up to a decade or so earlier were transpiring. This became the spur for the present paper. To gain better insight and develop a more effective proactive response, I decided to track the trends I had identified, and their eventual public emergence and acceptance.

### *Methodology*

This professional reflection relied upon four primary futures research tools. Scanning - seeking patterns and anomalies between information from many sources - distinguished the emerging issues. Emerging Issue Analysis then enabled the organisation of information and the identification of key trends. Causal Layered Analysis was used to establish a more multi-faceted understanding of causation. Finally, Futures Implementation and Management processes enabled the linking of future intent to strategic planning and thence to actions. Of these processes, Emerging Issues Analysis and Implementation and Management are the chief foci for this report.

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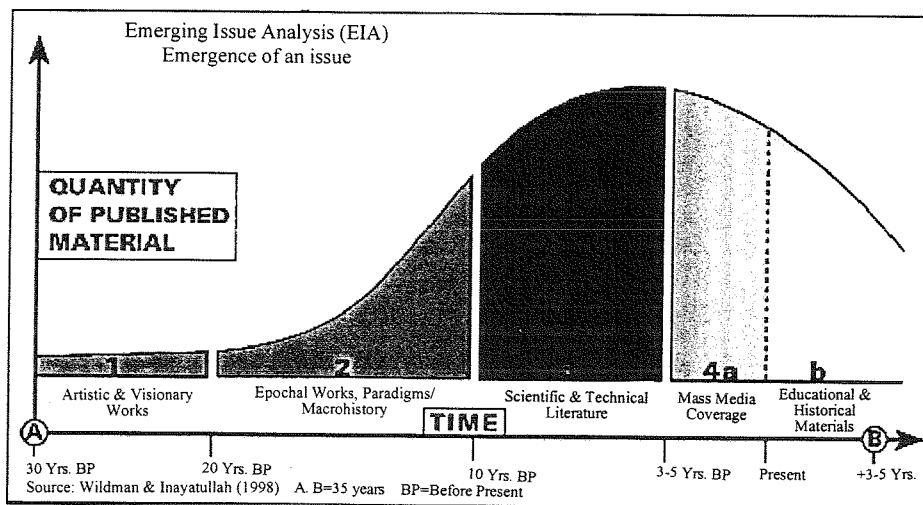
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*Emerging Issues Analysis*

Key trends within the scanned material were identified using Emerging Issues Analysis (EIA). EIA essentially has four categories for identifying trends (illustrated in Figure 1) spanning various time frames. The first category, occurring 20 to 30 or more years before the present - and sometimes significantly longer - and typified perhaps by science fiction writers like George Orwell and Arthur C. Clarke, is referred to as the artistic and visionary. In this step, stories emerge as ways of codifying intellectual, emotional and imagining knowledge. These are imagined futures, often with little apparent link to present knowledge. The second step involves longer-term issues, noted 10 to 20 years out, and may generate very long term strategic planning. In the third step, futures are envisioned - perhaps 5 to 10 years out - by scientists and technologists and reported in professional journals. It is in this step that metaphors imagined in earlier steps begin to generate the textual scaffolding for our ways of thinking. Most recent, the fourth step deals with the present and the immediate future. By this stage, issues have emerged into the public and political arena (4a) and begin to enter the mainstream educational and legislative systems (4b). Generally speaking, a hunch in step 1 moves to an emerging issue in step 2, becomes a trend in step 3, a problem (and media event) in step 4a, and generates legislation and education in step 4b. All this tends to occur over a thirty-year period (although, as Molitor has shown, there are examples of issues - including global warming and the impact of greenhouse gases - that have played out over much greater time spans).

Finally, there is a fifth step - the wild card or windfall - an event that impacts in an unpredictable manner. One wild card might be increased cyclone activity, or a threshold in air pollution levels being breached in the next 20 years. The Chernobyl accident is such an event. Another wild card receiving some attention is cosmic events such as asteroid impact. Windfalls may well take the form of a good harvest, futures market boom or unexpected technological breakthroughs. The probability of such wild cards emerging without accurate prediction is increasing.

Figure 1: Emerging Issue Analysis



#### *Methodological steps used in this project*

Emerging Issues Analysis enable me to identify:

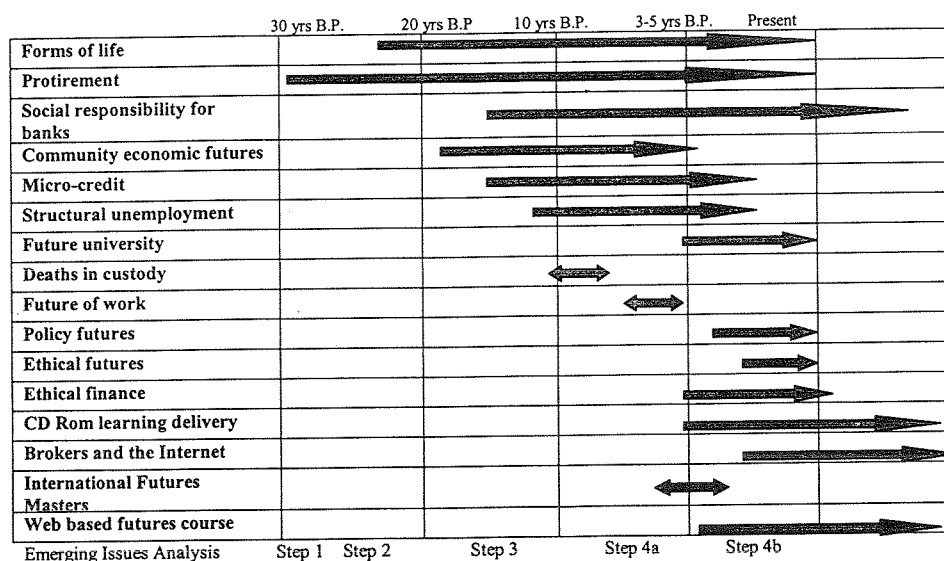
1. The issue.
2. How and when I first identified the issue.
3. My actions in response to the identified issue.
4. The gap to its re-emergence.
5. How the issue re-emerged into the public arena.
6. My involvement with the re-emerged issue.

Results for each of these categories are presented in Table 1, and issues are charted in terms of Emerging Issues Analysis in Figure 2.

#### *Observations*

The table reveals that my focus has been on issues relating social justice futures; personal and local economic futures; learning futures and life futures. Further, the average gap between my identification of the issue and its re-emergence into the mainstream is 10 years. Finally, the table indicates a preponderance of issue identification at EIA stages 2 and 3. This is illustrated graphically in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Emergence of Issues Identified by the Author



B.P. = before present; single headed arrows indicate movement of issue, double headed arrows indicates no change in issue's stage since identification.

Given the average time lag between identification and public attention, one strategy might be to refrain from taking action on the issue when it first emerges, instead monitoring and 'reactivating' it once it starts to enter the public arena some ten years hence. This strategy, however, does not equate with financial security for the Futures activist.

Further, in some instances I may have inaccurately diagnosed the current EIA step for a particular issue. For example, in the case of 'Aboriginal deaths in custody' and 'International Futures Masters', I initially placed these issues in EIA step (3)->(4); it now appears more likely that they were in step (2), with at least another five years before coming to public attention and action. This underlines what the table showed - that I appear best able to pick issues when they are at step 3. I have found that I am less efficacious at forecasting when issues will move to step (4).

Having become aware of a number of emerging issues, and with the knowledge that my own practice tends to lead to identification at Stage 2/3 (approximately ten years before wide public awareness), the key next question becomes: Who is capable of taking the appropriate action to ameliorate issues before they become mainstream?

Australia's political climate is increasingly designed around three year time frames (elections both federally and in most states are held every three years). As a consequence, the focus of political parties has tended to appear more and more media-driven. In this climate, issues that are identified more than three years out (as is the case for the majority of those I report on in this paper) are unlikely to experience either attention or amelioration through strategic political action.

Further, universities and academia - which one might imagine functioning with longer lead times - have experienced significant restructuring which has resulted in less time for the pursuit of ideas. For example, Australian academics (even at senior lecturer level) may mark up to six hundred assignments each year, undertake student administration, face-to-face lectures and email student contact, and spend vacation time developing new course material. Put simply, academics often have negative time available for such futures oriented 'action' research.

The only other group operating at this depth is the private or politically linked 'think tanks'. Australia has a number of these institutions (which proliferated from the mid-1980s), including The Evatt Foundation, The Sydney Institute, The Institute of Public Affairs and The Brisbane Institute. However, since almost all such institutions are financially supported by lobby groups of one sort or another, their output is effectively partisan and generally limited to words, not action.

Perhaps there is a need for 'action *and* think tanks'. Futures Activists are essentially without support from any such body. One possible response may well be an Association of Independent Futurists (perhaps a chapter of WFSF). Such an organisation could be modelled on other organisations of independent thinkers, such as the Australian Association of Independent Scholars (AAIS) of which I am a member. Continuing reliance, by the author and others, on the political and even academic systems to advance the message is unlikely to bear fruit.

The foregoing discussion, of course, ignores the contribution of the generational or even millennial horizon (EIA step 1) of the grand maestros of futures. This group is even more poorly served by existing structures.

## *Conclusion*

For futurists, spotting potential issues before they become mainstream is our core business. Understanding what we have seen, and taking effec-

tive action needs to follow. This article has sought to outline one futures activist's practice: forecasting and anticipating; using emerging issues analysis to identify trends and issues up to 10 years before they become socially obvious; providing warnings; offering new futures; and recording outcomes in order to learn. Emerging Issues Analysis has provided a valuable tool for the exploration and explanation of this practice. In identifying and understanding better my own futures activism, I have been able to see patterns and opportunities for change, both in my own work, and in the wider application of futures research.

*The all-pervading power of Time  
Drives each of us without mercy  
Into the Future,  
While at the same time  
Hurling us into the motionless past,  
And in our illusion of the present  
Time Deceives Eternity*  
----- Hidayat Inayat Khan

## Notes

1. This article in a sense is a celebration and acknowledgment of the great work done in EIA by its founder Graham Molitor. Consequently some background, supplied by Graham Molitor, about the origin of these charts of the dimensions of change may be interesting to the reader. Graham writes:

*'After working in Congress, for Presidential candidates, and lobbying major issues of the times a profusion of intuitive impressions evolved. I found it most difficult to lobby 535 Members of Congress, thousands of media contacts, influence peddlers and all the other trappings and institutions of democratic policy making. I wanted to get back to the "fountainhead" or the "wellspring." If I could identify a few basic persons or institutions giving rise to problems abroad in society, I could exert a much more powerful influence over the trend and direction of change. Immersion in thousands of issues, led to a clearer and clearer identification of specific patterns. One of those involved communications that provided a sustained and permanent part of the ongoing dialogue. As I applied those observations (beginning in the 1960s) to issues, it became evident that there was a sequence of engagement by the issue through various media.'*

The most interesting and important part of the series is, of course, its practical application. Bibliometrics is an artform used to describe the classic S-curve pattern of growth in literature. The literature plots follow a definite pattern. I would like to add that literature searches typically span 20-35 years, 50-100 years for those who look more closely, and even longer for those who care to probe in a scholarly mode. I've never researched an issue that I couldn't find media plots of 100 years or much, much more' (personal communication, May, 2001).

2. Over the past decade there have been fundamental shifts in the Australian labour market including the advent of jobless growth, industry restructuring, decline in middle management and blue-collar jobs (particularly but not exclusively for males). This has led to a rapid increase in the number of Australians, especially mature ones, being retrenched, made redundant, and accepting Voluntary Early Retirement. These people, their families and communities are the human casualties of this restructuring. Further, many of these people find it extremely difficult to regain suitable employment.

In this overall process the expectations of many would-be labour market re-entrants regarding employment changes significantly. No longer is the 9-5 by 5 the ideal job. Many people at this stage in their working-life (and young people who are alert to these changes in their work futures) prefer to work less than 5 days per week. Further they often wish to volunteer time to various community projects even mentoring emerging small businesses or young peoples projects, or work for themselves (often from home). Further these folks can also work as an employee and be self-employed, undertake formal and informal training and learning, provide leadership development, while ensuring adequate quality time for family and friends.

This is in short a New way of Working, hence NeWork.

It is this NeWork lifestyle we seek to respect and enhance through self-help projects, public education, provision of corporate opportunities and awareness, Government policy advocacy, integrity and leadership development, training and development, mentoring, NeWork experience, and publication. We believe that over the next decade this workstyle will be of great importance in the overall welfare of the Australian labour force.

3. SEV - Self Employment Scheme - providing small amounts of venture finance (up to \$10,000ea) to unemployed people with no security.
4. Mainstreet is a revitalisation program for the main streets of small towns - Services to Regional Business - Project Mainstreet: Commerce & Trade. A community development program designed to assist regional communities revitalise and promote their town centres. <<http://www.commerce.wa.gov.au/industries/rbs/mainstreet.htm>>
5. CED materials resulting from this process include Wildman 1993a, 1993b, 1993c, 1993d, 1993e; Wildman and Banks 1993; Wildman and Hubley 1993.

6. Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the United States has recently made 'MIT course materials that are used in the teaching of almost all undergraduate and graduate subjects available on the web, free of charge, to any user anywhere in the world. MIT OCW will radically alter technology-enhanced education at MIT, and will serve as a model for university dissemination of knowledge in the Internet age.' <<http://web.mit.edu/newsoffice/nr/2001/ocw.html>>

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Table 1: Futures at Work

1. Issue *	2. How and when I first identified the issue	3. My actions in response to the identified issue	Gap <- Yrs->	How the issue re-emerged into public arena	My involvement in re-emergence	Emerging issues Analysis Stage at identification/ present stage
Forms of Life	In the late 1970's my attention was drawn to the issue of bio-ethics by heart transplants.	1981: I organised a workshop 'Bioengineering and Eugenics: is there a link? Potentials for Church Leadership' with Sr. Regis Mary from Brisbane's Mater Hospital. Late 1990s: research on forms of life (Wildman, 2000).	20+  4	2001: Press articles predicting cloned humans by 2003.	Published article (Wildman, 2000) and started Robot Rights Australia in 1999.	1-2 / 4a
Proirement	1970: Noted that some 84% of Australians retire on a pension or part pension. This means that fewer than 1 in 5 actually plan/anticipate a future in which Government assistance will not be sought (or available). Of the remaining 16% a substantial proportion will be what is called 'self-funded retirees'.	I have been anticipating becoming a self funded protiree at 55 since I was 22 i.e. for 30 years. Protirement, a NeWork <sup>2</sup> concept, is a form of proactive retirement and does not necessarily mean leaving the work world.	30	The issue has re-emerged as changing demographics reduce the number of people available for the workforce. Costs exacerbated by structural unemployment - governments are finding it harder and harder to fund the increasing number of retirees. The Australian Government has increased superannuation contributions and tightened pension requirements.	My involvement includes managing my financial assets and endeavoring to monitor policy changes that may undermine my financial security long-term. I alert my local politicians when news reports presume that everyone over 50 is a pensioner (rather than including the self-funded retiree option).	1 / 4a

Social Responsibility for Banks	<p>1972: Noted that social responsibility for the financial aspects of life seemed to evade governance (and still does). I consider that banks have such a responsibility. Ralph Nader's well-publicised consumer protection work alerted me to this issue</p>	<p>In 1986 I sought to bring banks into a social responsibility scenario through the Self Employment Venture (SEV) scheme, including a recommendation that SEV'ers contact their bank manager for further assistance and advice. I requested banks feedback regarding the SEV application form content. The Australian Bankers Association declined to give an opinion and asked that any reference to Bank Managers or their organisation be eliminated – I obliged.</p>	15	<p>2001: Bank social responsibility has received significant attention in the media over the past few years, and the Australian Labour Party has proposed enforceable Codes of Conduct for the banks in relation to service.</p> <p>Banks now have small business assistance programs online – a reversal from their position of even five years ago.</p>	<p>I plan to re-launch a small business establishment program, and have prepared a product description.</p>	2 / 4b
Community Economic Futures	<p>1975: Noted the need to make economic development understandable for, and ownable by, those it impacted upon. In my Honours year (1975) I studied Regional Economics and became aware of a need for this form of empowerment, and of the possibilities presented by localised economic development.</p>	<p>1973-5: Pursued studies in economics and Community Economic Futures (CEF). This led to a continuing interest in 'bottom up' regional development strategies.</p>	18	<p>1990 – 2001: There has been increasing research interest in community economic development and futures. The Mainstreet<sup>4</sup> project is an example of one outcome. Otherwise, however, there have been few genuine attempts other than by individual communities</p>	<p>I have had direct and indirect input into this development. However, increasing government focus on economic rationalism has resulted in the loss of at least one such experiment – The National Advisory Group on Local Employment Initiatives. In April 2001, a colleague and I obtained funding to develop CED</p>	1 / 3

			In 1993, I launched Prosperity Press in order to publish the 'Community Economic Development series' (see list of CED materials below). I also completed my doctorate in this field.	12		materials using the Adult Learning technique of Learning Circles. <sup>5</sup>	
Micro-credit	1986: Noted that mainstream financial institutions are inept at facilitating the provision of micro credit to those with 'adverse' profiles – for example, through unemployment, poor track record, age, and gender.		Between the late 80s and the early 90s I designed and developed the SEV scheme (discussed above) as a micro-credit facility for people who had low or no security or business track record and who often were unemployed. In 1994 I was involved in the establishment of an ethical finance organisation without support from the banks. The initiative ran for 4 years.	15	In 2001 micro credit is embedded in the private sector.	I have recently done a presentation to Bendigo Bank about basic training and self-vetting of micro credit clients. Bendigo Bank is a small community based banking network – now expanding to other parts of Australia.	2 / 3-4a
Structural Unemployment	1987: Structural unemployment was starting to emerge in Australia in the mid-1980s with few effective public responses. Subsequently Rifkin, Dator et al. confirmed this global trend. I served as a State representative on a national inquiry – The National Advisory Group on Local Employment Initiatives (Nagle 1) – that reported in 1987. The report was 'swamped' by attention given to the formal education sectors (vocational and higher).		Early 1990s: issue raised in my doctoral thesis, as well as through my role as Director of Labour Markets, Department of Labour Markets and Training, Queensland. Labour market programmes in Queensland and in other states had been dismantled by 1995, by governments of both major parties. The solution appears to lie in new ways of working. NeWork (see footnotes, earlier) is one such project, in which communities can work and learn by combining formal and informal sectors.	12	Late 1990s: Issue re-emerged through S11, M1 and other demonstrations against globalisation. In mid-2001 the Queensland Government staged a summit – 'Job creation outside the box: Creative ways for stimulating jobs in the future' to solicit ideas on job futures and job creation.	My focus has been on facilitating the NeWork concept. In the absence of support from existing Job Network members, I have formed an alliance with a recently established rural community organisation based in Toowoomba, Queensland (Leading Australia Foundation). A pilot project with the Foundation commenced on June 1 <sup>st</sup> 2001.	2 / 3-4a

Future University	1988: Australian government reforms (the Dawkins restructuring) of Tertiary Education from 1988 indicated that changing funding and resourcing structures would have major impacts on the future viability of universities.	1997: A colleague and I conducted a workshop with University Deans and Vice Chancellors at Southern Cross University – 'Creating the Future University: Alternative futures for Southern Cross University' (January 1997).	4	April 2001: Media reported that Chair of Australian university Vice Chancellors committee had stated that funding in the future will be a significant issue.	See Wildman (2000)	3 / 4a
Aboriginal Deaths in Custody	1991: A Royal Commission into the high rate of Aboriginal (indigenous Australians) deaths in custody was held in Australia. The Commission examined some 99 deaths from 1980. The Commission cost \$30m (\$A) with a further \$470m being set aside for implementation of the 339 recommendations.	1991-92: I was interviewed by researchers for the Royal Commission on ways of developing employment opportunities for indigenous Australians. When, in 1999, an Aboriginal youth hung himself while in detention (not prison) from a hanging spot identified in 1992, my concerns were re-ignited.	10+	The issue has not re-emerged in any meaningful way. There is some indication that the jurisprudence system viewed the Commission as thorough, and that implementation has been unsatisfactory. I have sought to apply Causal Layered Analysis to the Commission's recommendations in order to design a public inquiry systems that can cross cultures and embrace futures.	An article I wrote on this topic has been accepted for publication in <i>Futures</i> . As well, I am presenting a workshop in July this year in the category of 'Ethics and Regulation of Correctional Systems' at the conference: 'Governance and Justice 2001' (Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance, Griffith University). The workshop is entitled 'Learning from the Litany of Death - A deep futures critique of the Australian Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody with a view to reorientating Custodial Governance from reverse causation to intentionality'.	2-3 – no change

Future of Work	1992: Awareness of structural unemployment led me to question how society (public policy, business and educational institutions) will configure itself in a world without work. 1993: I noted that no political party in Australia currently has, or ever has had, a futures generations policy.	In the mid 90s I developed and conducted a series of presentations on the future of work for the Queensland Development Department.	7	2001: The future of work still receives little attention, despite concepts such as NeWork.	I am directly involved in NeWork (see footnotes).	3 – no change
Policy Futures		1996: I approached Australia's major political parties in 1996 and again in 1998. With several colleagues, I worked with the Australian Democrats to develop a futures policy; it has been largely ignored.	4-5	March 2001: Significant electoral losses sustained by the Australian Democrats spurred a number of changes, including Senator Murray publicly stating the need for consideration of futures in policy development.	I was contacted but presently lack enthusiasm for work done three years ago.	3 / 3-4a
Futures Ethics	1994: In a culture of corruption – especially in politics – the issue of how citizens can assist in ensuring an ethical future for their children.	Late 1999 – early 2000: Issue comprehensively raised through my foundation membership of the NGO 'Civic Integrity Development Association' (CIVIDA).	2	Reporting of the UN Commission for Global Governance (Harper & Ramphal 1994) and the ongoing identification of the need for a global ethic (Glenn & Gordon 2000-1) by the UN University's Millennium project.	Before the 2000 Queensland election, I formed a citizens action group (Australians for Integrity In Politics), undertook an ethics survey of those standing and of all political parties, processed the result using Delphi and published the result.	3 / 3-4a
Ethical Finance	1995: Became aware that mainstream financial institutions are notoriously inept at facilitating the provision of ethical finance to those wishing to establish investment profiles that favour ethical destinations for our funds.	1997: I prepared reports on Ethical Finance for Ananda Marga and Career Employment Australia.	5	2001: Bendigo Bank and others are delivering many ethical finance services.	Ananda Marga and Career Employment Australia have insufficient resources to enable my continued involvement.	3 / 4a

CD-ROM learning delivery	1995: Noted that the internet and CD-ROMs were starting to offer learning opportunities far beyond the 'chalk and talk' of conventional educational pedagogy.	1997: I became aware of CD ROM technology that enabled the use of text for long downloads, and linkage to Internet chat rooms and web sites through a common web browser. This technology was used for a CD ROM on futures (Inayatullah and Wildman, 1998), the first time this technology had been used anywhere in the world for learning delivery.	4	2001: CD's are now ubiquitous.	I was directly involved in launching and distributing the Futures Studies CD ROM. I am not directly involved at present.	3 / 4b
Brokers and the Internet	1998: Many pundits believed that the Internet would mean the end of broking. I suspected the emergence of a different pattern – Brokers + Internet = smart consumers.	1998: I proposed this pattern – especially in relation to a training brokerage – to a company I was working for, but received no positive response. This experience was repeated in mid-2000.	3	2001: Brokers in finance and motor vehicles have become commonplace. The Bank of Queensland, who in 1995 rejected the notion of broker use, now receive two thirds of their business from brokers.	Directly involved in Total Training Brokers.	4a / 4b
International Futures Masters	Early 1990s: In the early 90s I had discussions with several futurists who brought up the idea of an International Masters degree in Futures.	1994: The issue was recognised by me and codified into the world's first online Futures Masters specialisation through Southern Cross University, Queensland. The course was run in 1996 and 1997. However, neither the WFSF nor the University had the resources or foresight (respectively) to follow through with this initiative.	6+	The issue has never re-emerged successfully, but remains under discussion on the WFSF Internet list serve. The Futures CD ROM (Inayatullah and Wildman 1998) is a product of this issue.	I have withdrawn from the debate. Discussion on the WFSF list serve is developing only slowly.	3-4a – no change

Web based futures course	1994: By the mid-90s, it was relatively easy to see that the web could change learning relationships forever. However, many academics strongly resisted the development and delivery of web-based courses. I believe that the prospective change in teaching pedagogy from 'sage on stage' to 'learning facilitator' was the chief cause for their concern.	The Futures Masters course I designed and delivered in 1996-97 at Southern Cross University was the first web based futures course in the world.	4-5	2001: Most universities offer at least chat room course contact, as well as some web-based courses. <sup>6</sup> However, many online university courses are re-inscriptions of the existing text based material. Further, many universities have failed to provide the instructional design and technical support resources necessary.	4a / 4b
'Gap' – SR 5; LR 15; A <sub>v</sub> = 9.7 years					

Source: P Wildman no 6 5-01 EIA – Emerging Issues Analysis; SR – Short Run; LR – Long Run;

\* This table is not meant to imply I was the initiator of the issue, or even the first one to work on it, only that I was working on it before it gained general acceptability.