

Conference Report

Using Futures Studies to Transform: Exploring the SmartState Uision

A conference jointly sponsored by
The Futures Foundation and the University of The Sunshine Coast
Hotel Diana, Woolloongabba, Brisbane
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Caloundra City Council, Australia

Aims of the Futures Foundation

The Futures Foundation is a forum that promotes the generation of futures epistemologies. The use of futures 'ways of knowing' can mean sharing with each other our likes and dislikes through conversational storytelling of images that transform our future existences. It can mean the re-dreaming of diverse alternatives for futures that we shape in the theatre of our minds and work daily on in our careers and in our personal lives. And it can mean thinking globally and acting locally to benefit from not only the outcomes of our efforts but intrinsically through our learning from the application of the futures methodologies.

Introduction to the Conference

Many of the attendees were experienced futures studies practitioners from State and Local Governments. The practitioners expressed an interest in understanding the futures methodologies, their applications to achieve outcomes and how these outcomes could be "lived" even when futures proponents move between organisations. These methodologies were a constant feature throughout the conference and were led by futurist Dr. Sohail Inayatullah.

Vehicles for expression of these goals were multiple. The conference began with a reflection of the past that took the form an Aboriginal 'welcome' message from a very respected indigenous elder who discussed the origins of Aboriginal life in the very area that the conference was being held and more broadly to the perimeters of Brisbane's geography. Dr. Robert (Uncle Bob) Anderson explained that existing Brisbane streets alongside watercourses such as rivers and tributaries were many of the pathways that aborigines walked for 'countless centuries.' Part of the welcome message led Dr. Anderson to describe the meaning of "Woollongabba" as a swirling body of water at the center of many streams.

An appealing part of the conference was the vitality intro-

duced into the "human side of futures." Jan Archer and Sharon Parkes enthused participants with left-brain and right-brain activities that also sustained the emotional intelligence among participants. The aim was to balance head, heart and hand through the two day session and to collectively construct knowledge and responsibility for the outcomes. The first exercise aimed to introduce participants to each other by each participant disclosing something about themselves that could not be known through their appearance. This was intended to gently open participants up to sharing, disclosing and building trust. Participants then provided words that described their previous positive experience of conferencing for the conference and why they had chosen to attend the event. Words such as: 'cutting edge,' learning, and 'challenging' were recorded and then reflected to participants (in true action learning style) at intervals during the conference. This list set the benchmark for the group to reflect on the processes used in the conference and was revisited in the closing session as a 'checklist' to stimulate reflective discussions on what was created through the two days together.

Smartstate 'visions'

The Office of the Premier has been promoting the notion of Queensland as the Smartstate. At this point the notion is an idea for Queenslanders to embrace. The conference attendees used the concept as a means of generating Smart-futures that challenged them in their business and community workplaces. These futures included:

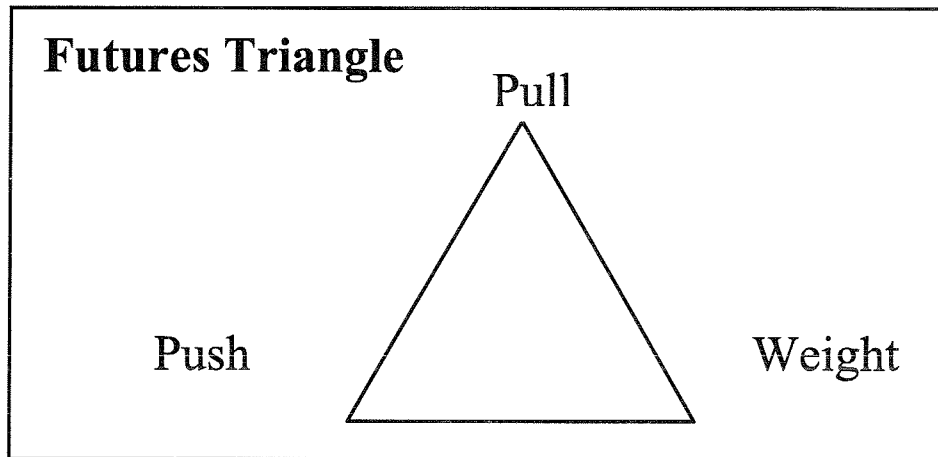
- The Cultural Creative Future: knowing and asserting ones rights; caring for and creating cultural diversity;
- The Triple Bottom Line Future: social, environmental and economic sustainability, in addition to culture, spirituality and healing;
- Participation in the democratic process of decision making particularly as it applies to the government policy, strategy and

- service and product development processes; and
- The multiple ways of knowing. The epistemology of the Smartstate includes the use of futures methods as inclusive processes that can be driven by the whole of government.

The Futures Triangle was introduced to enrich

and deepen these futures and to explain them in terms of a futures methodology. The futures triangle's three points are described below.

At the apex of the triangle the "Pull" is represented. This is the pull toward a range of futures types e.g. the desired or the least desired future.



The lower left point of the triangle represents the "push" or the factors that push us toward one type of future, e.g., policy or legislative requirement and the pathology of an issue.

The lower right point of the triangle is the "weight". Factors that impede progress toward the future are represented here. Weight can be seen as 'saving us' from a least desired future or impeding progress toward a desired future, e.g., availability of technology.

'Workshopping' the Futures Triangle

In Action Learning style conference participants applied the above technique to the Smartstate visions prepared in the earlier session. Four futures theme groups were formed: 'community consultation'; 'educated Queensland'; family, youth & community caring'; and 'emergency services'.

Community Consultation Futures

One of the futures included community consultation as an information provision and collection process often conducted by government organisations.

Community consultation pulls

A simple, friendly and fun consultation process that reaches out to the minority and the majority groups was the first preferred vision. A second preferred vision for community consultation was the community development model where community is empowered to develop its own decision-making processes. Government devolves power to enable this. The work-

shop participants provided the push and weight factors for these visions in the following statements.

Community consultation pushes

The pushes include legislative requirements to consult, complexity of issues, multiplicity of needs, increasingly diverse communities, community expectations and awareness for inclusive, consistent and accountable consultation processes, and the government need for information such as local insights about local issues.

Community consultation weight

Apathy, negative experience, disillusionment, information communication technologies that are not equitably accessed and infrastructure not available or developed are all weights that prevent the achievement of the preferred vision.

Educated Queensland Futures

The educated Queensland future provides a solution to traditional social problems through education.

Educated Queensland Pulls

The future of educated Queensland would include the polemic of earning or learning; skilling Queensland; generating a learning community; provision of jobs, jobs, jobs (breaking the unemployment cycle); and lifelong learning.

Educated Queensland Pushes

The Educated Queensland pushes were identified as changing employment needs; economic and envi-

ronmental/global; changes to the skills base, information technology and science; demographics of aging and youth; changing expectations regarding careers; lifelong learning agendas; reducing inequities; mutual obligations; responsiveness and flexible delivery.

Educated Queensland Weight

The Educated Queensland 'weight' includes the existing TAFE system inflexibilities; education resource availability; user pays evaluations; training only available for jobs; mutual obligations; how we value employment vs. the unemployed and volunteering; casualisation; gender/women in the workplace and childcare.

Families Youth and Community Care Futures

Family and youth are integrated under one clear uniting future.

Families Youth and Community Care Pulls

The preferred future is in the safe functioning of families in communities that are caring and concerned about the development and nurturing of families as entities.

Families Youth and Community Care Pushes

Safe functioning families are an outcome of the innate goal of self-actualisation as represented by Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The front page of the newspaper is an indicator of how well Queensland as a society is progressing. Reports of family disputes/sieges are a push toward the desirable future.

Families Youth and Community Care Weight

Professional staff vs. bureaucracy, competing pressures, value judgements, short term vision, lack of resources, breakdown of the extended family, "who cares"/apathy and unassigned responsibility are weights against achievement of preferred Youth and Community Care futures.

Emergency Services Futures

A more responsive and enabled Department of Emergency Services is the preferred future.

Emergency Services Pulls

The desired future would increase "000" services and would have clearly identified where responsibility can be shared between the government organisations, the community and with industry.

Emergency Services Pushes

The Emergency Services pushes include the provision of a safety for all Queenslanders to benefit from. The triple bottom line of social, economic and environmental systems would also be a beneficiary of the emergency services.

Emergency Services Weights

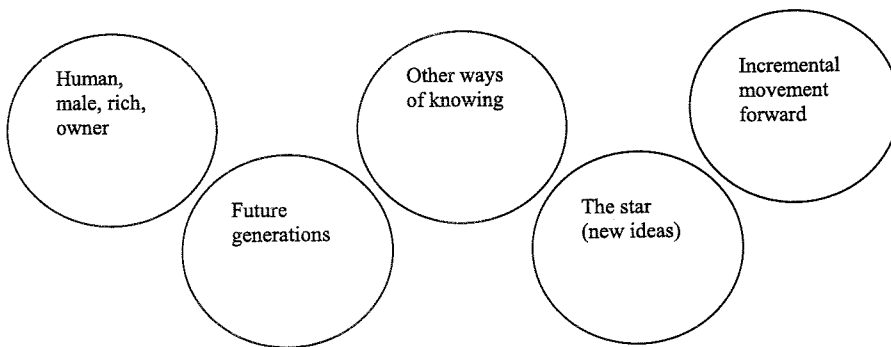
Emergency Services weights include the "uniformed worker" mentality; overwhelming lack of resources; the need for community education on a continuous basis; and the need for improved traditional infrastructure.

Futures paradigms

A stream of futures paradigms were presented and discussed during the conference.

At the macro level these methods can be considered through the concepts of: (1) action and learning as a 'jungle;' (2) action and learning as strategic thinking; and, (3) action and learning as an advanced form of strategic thinking in 'forethought.' Although this appears to be an evolutionary stream from the 'jungle to advanced forethought,' the jungle paradigm involves a form of competition and thus holds significance in activating and motivating the thinker.

Another continuum of 'existences' is represented by the following thought stream:



Causal Layered Analysis

There is depth in futures. Causal Layered Analysis is a method that enables the layering of four key aspects of futures studies. The four layers are represented below:

Litany

The real world, the facts and the smart state are represented as a litany.

Systems

The systemic level comprises health, courts and machinery of government including inter-governmental relations.

Worldview

The Christian, Marxist, Evolutionist and Fundamentalist 'religions' are represented in the worldview level as well as the dominant capitalist secular market perspective and social movement perspectives including Green and feminist.

Mythological View (Myth Metaphor)

The mythological view embraces the underlying stories. These stories may be understood as metaphors: "a yacht can go everywhere in the world that it wants" represents freedom; "praying together to Mecca" represents unity; "Australians and the dice" represents the lucky country.

The real challenge is to work up and down the layers to gather wholistic data for decision making.

Emerging Issues Analysis

Emerging Issues Analysis involved participants in a workshop format where they identified potential emerging issues. Some of the issues identified included:

- Fortress Australia
- A right wing resurgence
- Intelligent cars
- A female Prime Minister
- Tribalism
- Aliens coming out of the closet
- Global warming
- Encouragement for the bonding of pets and children
- The collapse of capitalism
- The monoculture society turning to agricultural better practices
- Smartfood

Dr. Inayatullah then led an exercise in deductive analysis to filter out issues that were not truly emergent issues. Issues that had already emerged in some way

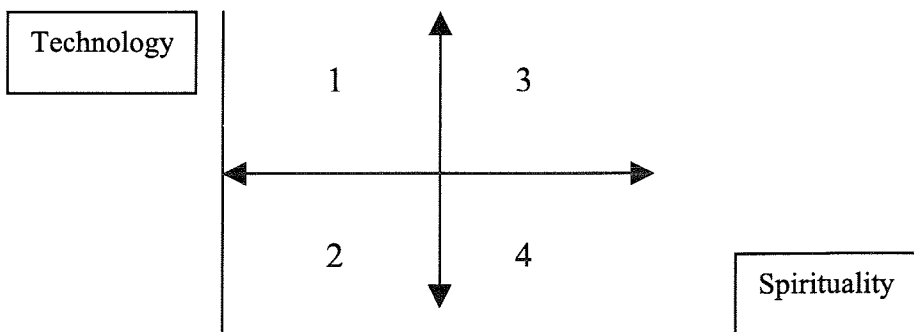
through media exposure; or through organized attempts to deconstruct the issue in the workplace were eliminated. Only the emergent issues remained. The exercise showed that there were very few emerging issues. The exercise proved to be effective in identifying where each issue was prevalent in society.

Applications of Futures Studies in Queensland Government Organisations

Staff and Managers of a range of State and Local Government Departments provided five excellent futures presentations. Each presentation applied futures in a unique way to achieve contrasting objectives. Presentations were from the Department of State Development, Maroochy Shire Council, Redcliffe Bribie Division of General Practice, Department of Tourism, Racing and Fair Trading and the Department of Primary Industries.

At the end of these presentations a key question was asked: "what would you tell the Premier of Queensland about the future of your organisation in the Smartstate?" The following issues were described:

- The topic of wealth creation should be re-invigorated. New targets should be set and existing targets revitalized as they are not being achieved and further discussion is required. Whole of government approaches and truly global research is required on an ongoing basis to inform how business is conducted on a daily business by Queensland government.
- The issue of the SmartState needs clarification and coherency. Community consultation is required. Shared scenario development processes in community are required. A real mandate to change can then exist.
- The pioneers in each field in Queensland should be supported. An overall wholistic framework needs to be encouraged and nurtured.
- The worldview regarding systems approaches and



outcomes need to become much more prevalent.

- The cost of not attending to futures and stimulating grand dialogue on these matters is real and should be quantified and this would lead to serious attention to community engagement in futures that could be 'smart'.

Overall there is a very strong interest in generating exciting futures processes that can be "lived".

Scenario Development

Scenario development is what many people would like futures to be. A range of scenario archetypes were provided that assist the mapping of epistemologies:

1. Preferred
 - Possible
 - Probable
 - Plausible
2. The least preferred
 - Aspirational
 - Current trends continued
 - The outlier
3. Continued Growth
 - Collapse
 - Steady State
 - Transformation
4. From Globalization to Artificial Societies
 - From Triple Bottom line to Communicative Gaian Inclusive
 - From Localization to Back to Imagined Past
 - From Industrial growth to collapse

These futures were contrasted with the duality of technology and spirituality.

The world view of Australian futures might be positioned in quadrant one and might have high technology and low spirituality. Futures that are low in technology and spirituality would be positioned in quadrant two and might be reflective of North Korean futures. These are indicators only and detailed analysis might be required to confirm quadrant positions and these may change entirely in the future. Tibetan futures might be high in spirituality but low in technology and would be positioned in quadrant four (etc.).

There was a great deal of support for continued practitioner's forums to discuss the evolution of futures within organisations in Queensland. There was a feeling of impatience for the work that can be achieved combined with the inspiration that futures studies brings to organisational planning and implementation processes.

Deborah Robertson introduced a range of performance activities. These activities transformed participants from observers into actors of futures scenarios. These activities were full of shared understandings, questioning of self and others, fun, and reflection. The defining factors were seeing conference participants displaying their emotions and thoughts in planned and spontaneous scenes whilst swapping roles between public servants and Queensland citizens. Each participant worked in groups to model an aspect of the future through performance that lead to surprising insights.

One group formed a line and attempted to walk a figure of eight (an aboriginal symbol of unity) in procession whilst calling out a word from a different culture. The interweaving of the figure of eight proved very difficult to coordinate particularly while speaking in another language. The group discussed the symbolism of: (a) the differences between planning and implementation; and, (b) the difficulty of coordinating exercises across cultures that have not understood each other's language.

A higher level of analysis was then added to the performance experience. The group reflectively deconstructed the performances by applying analytical categories to the scenarios under observation. The categories were:

- 'Goal' (what were the observers/actors perceptions of the goal of the scenario),
- 'obstacle' (what were the obstacles that had to be circumvented or that inhibited achievement of the goal),
- 'tactics' (what tactics were used to avoid obstacles),
- 'expectation' (what were the expectations that were achieved or were not achieved from the observers/actors perspectives); and
- 'myth' (what were the myths that were borrowed/enlisted or exploited to communicate a message)?

Each category was used to understand the scenario/cabaret experience from the observer's perspective and then the actor's perspective. The benefit of this activity was that a methodical approach to analysis is rigorous and provides more insights of differing value. The activity enabled physical processes to be labeled, discussed and understood.

Conclusion

There were many reflections on how to apply the methodologies presented to achieve better futures. These futures were both long term outcomes for organisations and short term outcomes for participants and related to:

- increasing the level of advice regarding futures planning processes available in government Departments
- promotion of whole of government practices and sharing of futures successes and learning

- meeting as a futures oriented group to share insights for transforming organisations pursuing SmartState visions
- to introduce futures to staff involved in strategic planning processes to enable the time, space and methodologies that encourage long sightedness in planning
- to encourage achievement of goals that were represented as priorities in the triple bottom line approach and that currently have a minority place in government planning processes e.g., developing a common and official discourse to communicate about wellbeing, spiritual and cultural issues.
- The need to set real performance indicators for achieving the soft issues of better communication between and within State Government Departments.

Planning processes are recognized as needed to achieve physical goals with implications for built environment, social, environmental, economic, road and transport, however the efficiency of day to day communication is often left unaccounted for within the triple bottom line futures in the Smart State vision.

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