

A Review of Elina Hiltunen's "Foresight and Innovation: How Companies are Coping with the Future" Palgrave, 2013.

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As anyone living in the 'trenches' would attest, organisations can be impervious to futures praxis. Indeed, practitioners operating in this space repeatedly face the dilemma of working within the existing dominant paradigms with little but cursory references to foresight work. The overt application of such discourse can be alienating and contribute to the view of futures thinking as esoteric, and dare I say it, having little consequence to organisational actions outcomes.

Many futures thinkers and writers seldom favour the nitty-gritty application to the abstract discourse. Although it may pain the purist to concede, one of the greatest ways of getting traction is to move beyond the margins (as peculiar conceptualising organisational beings) to the mainstream. Eminent futurist Elina Hiltunen attempts to bridge this chasm by sharing her well-practiced, piquant perspectives of applied futures thinking in her first non-academic book. *Foresight and Innovation* speaks to a number of practiced ideas of how an individual (or organisation) can better prepare for the future and is a fine example of maintaining the delicate balance of academic rigor and pragmatic utility.

Book structure

Hiltunen's thoughts and experiences are dissected into a number of sequenced parts: anticipating the future, innovating the future and communicating the future – three issues that the author considers as critical in futures thinking and practice.

Though not all encompassing, the first section of the book offers a concise summary of purposefully selected change theory. The important contribution here lies in the extension of this dialogue to the perils of predication and change blindness. In discussing the cornerstones of anticipation, *Foresight and Innovation* provides the reader with an overview of a range of methods from megatrends to causal layered analysis.

The author's notable work on weak signals is brought into sharp focus by the significant contribution to this topic in the book. This is coupled with a number of critiques and case studies that reveal numerous strategies to assist in the utility of anticipation methods.

A noteworthy addition to this section is the links between the methods and their application through strategy.

Part two of the book conceives that innovation is an essential part of futures studies. In this setting, Hiltunen sees innovation as a process in which futures thinking can be applied. It is here where Hiltunen also introduces her (admirable) bespoke methods to assist in employing innovation, that is, the Futures Window, Strategic Serendipity and Futuropoly, all worthy of further exploration.

The final section in the book focuses on the importance of communicating the future. *Foresight and Innovation* provides the reader with a number of examples and tips of how to effectively communicate futuristic views in an organisational setting. Hiltunen does however invoke a very slender brush on this topic, most of which may already be evident to readers. That said, it is easy to see the addition of this section as an important bookend to earlier topics.

Other musings

What is interesting to note upon immediate reading, is the inference made in the book's title. As the rubric suggests, "How Companies *Cope* with the Future" implies a sense of acquiesce. However, when juxtaposed with the book's content there is a conflicting story of empowerment. At the heart of the book is the eloquently noted maxim that one should be humble when facing the future, not subservient. In fact, Hiltunen's own synopsis of the book contends, "We can all affect our own future..."

Conclusion

Although obviously founded on solid disciplines, Hiltunen places considerable faith in the methods and insight offered in the book and makes no excuses for its corporate and practical focus. It is also abundantly clear that the book is not intended as a stimulant to academia. Its limited and selective scope may confirm this. Indeed, on a single reading, its light theoretical touch may leave some readers searching for a more extensive alternative. Nevertheless, the book offers a significant collection of thoughts, experiences and insights and deserves its widespread acknowledgement. Hiltunen contributes eloquently and insightfully to the growing knowledge of applied futures - a field that could benefit from an increased focus.

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