



CIFS' 10 Principles for Strategic Foresight



The Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies has a long history and proven track-record of working with corporations and organisations worldwide, applying strategic foresight to specific societal and business challenges.

These are our 10 principles for strategic foresight that serves as the foundation for how we approach strategic foresight as a discipline. We have compiled and refined the principles from our own extensive experience, as well as drawn inspiration from other thinkers and practitioners within the field.

Organisations with a culture of strategic foresight fare better. However, every strategic foresight project is different, and should be based on its own specific context, premises and objectives. Some are large-scale, deeply integrated into the organisation, while others are more lightweight and ad hoc. Large-scale and comprehensive setups are not necessarily needed to benefit and learn from strategic foresight, and every organisation or team is capable of developing simple processes that give them the ability to better anticipate the future. Situation should define approach.

Strategic foresight is a systems-thinking approach to support resilient organisational futures

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In a time where forecasts and projections are not enough, strategic foresight aims to achieve a genuinely high-quality view of potential future outcomes. Overall, strategic foresight focuses on potential changes in an organisation's external environment – including outcomes 'beyond the numbers' and potentially impactful signals that would otherwise be disregarded. This in turn influence the strategic environment and consequently strategic decisions

Foresight and strategy are complementary parts of one process in pursuit of future organisational success

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Foresight should always be connected to strategic purpose. Without foresight, strategy easily becomes blind to contextual change and a recipe for failure when change occurs. Without strategy, foresight easily becomes conjecture and disconnected from organisational reality. Foresight outcomes are not strategies in themselves but should inspire insights for strategic planning

Strategic foresight looks beyond the traditional strategic planning time horizon

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Strategic foresight most often deals with the medium to long-term future. Thinking within the current strategic planning time horizon (three to five years) tends to limit 'mental flexibility' and often leads to path-dependent thinking. Thinking further out (10+ years) better enables the exploration of viable future alternatives that may be significantly different from today

Strategic foresight can be applied to a broad range of organisational contexts

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Contexts include: better strategic and policy anticipation to identify and prepare sooner for future opportunities and risks; business or policy innovation to spur new thinking, as well as; future-proofing to identify gaps and stress-test existing or proposed strategies against a range of plausible futures. Context can even be extended beyond the organisation to inspire thought-leadership or visioning

Strategic foresight is not about making predictions of the future, but rather exploring plausible futures

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The future is inherently unpredictable, and many factors may come together in complex ways to create surprising futures in a non-linear world. There are no definitive answers about what the future will hold. Hence, we seek to explore plausible futures, informed by trajectories and external sources of change, emergent signals of change, and emerging critical uncertainties

The strategic foresight process is at least as important as the final outcomes

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In strategic foresight, the future is not a destination – it is a tool. The process should develop learning, broadening participants' horizons and help build a shared understanding of potential future outcomes. The most difficult task when working with strategic foresight is to facilitate the transition of helping people think of the future in new ways

Strategic foresight focuses on exploring the future before considering implications for the present

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We are trying to learn about the present through the lens of the future, in contrast to trying to understand the future from the perspective of the present

Strategic foresight should be seen and approached as a form of collective intelligence

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Quality strategic foresight outcomes can only be generated and assessed through dialogue and exchanges between people bringing diverse perspectives to the table as non-partisan as possible. This is key to facilitate new, viable perspectives concerning future developments of relevance. It is not possible to passively 'study the future' and hope to learn much worthwhile

Strategic foresight seeks to challenge mental models and organisational perspectives

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Strategic foresight should challenge our tendency to favour the 'business as usual' future and not adequately exploring viable alternatives. Old and obsolete imagery of the future – so often held onto by organisations – should be refreshed, for the betterment of decisions that are more informed and less clouded by judgemental biases and misguided assumptions

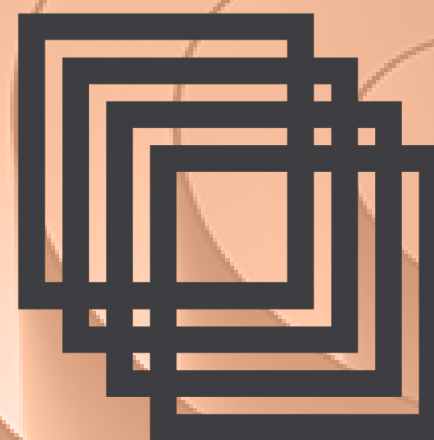
Applying strategic foresight in practice is not an academic exercise

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Foresight is a well-established field with a robust academic underpinning that adopts principles of good scientific practice. However, successful strategic foresight is pragmatic and hands-on. The practice of strategic foresight relies on both rigorous and structured methodologies as well as the fine art of sense-making, intuition, curiosity and creativity

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