

# Skidmore Consulting

Communication + Leadership Services

## White Paper:

Why Leaders Should Care about Strategic Foresight

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## Thinking about the Future

The practice of futuring impacts an organization's decisions, actions, and strategies. One scholar holds that this type of future thinking is so foundational and integral to organizations that strategic foresight "should be part of the fabric of the organization."<sup>1</sup> Incorporating this future-thinking approach is transformative to an organization's strategy formation process. Consider the analogy of organizational leaders to that of explorers. "The great explorers dreamed their ships across the seas long before sailing them."<sup>2</sup> These explorers imagined and prepared in anticipation of their future dreams.<sup>3</sup> So too must organizational leaders imagine and prepare for the future.

## Definition of Strategic Foresight

In simplistic terms, foresight allows leaders to imagine alternative futures and bring insights from those futures to current contexts.<sup>4</sup> With futuring the idea is not to develop an exact reality of what is to come but rather develop scenarios that point towards a direction or path.<sup>5</sup> This effort to embrace future smart practices gained larger recognition during World War II and grew in corporate arenas during the 1990's.<sup>6</sup> Some scholars hold that strategic foresight is an "ongoing creative reconfiguration of sources of potentialities and limits into resources and productive outcomes."<sup>7</sup>

## Value of Strategic Foresight

By incorporating foresight principles in the strategy formation process, organizations see a transition in their efforts. They move from a short-term perspective to a long-term perspective while additionally move from a perspective of survival to sustainability.<sup>8</sup> Strategic foresight work allows organizations to gather data, give meaning to that data, and then act based on that based.<sup>9</sup> This is a proactive perspective that allows organization to identify opportunities of growth and incorporate those opportunities into their strategy formation process.<sup>10</sup>

In principle, though not a time machine, this practice provides leaders with techniques to understand the future within the context of the present day.<sup>11</sup> Leaders using these techniques use the information to identify opportunities in the future that shape strategic decisions today.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hines, 2006, p. 21

<sup>2</sup> Cornish, 2004, p. 7

<sup>3</sup> Cornish, 2004

<sup>4</sup> Marsh, 2002

<sup>5</sup> Gordon, 2009

<sup>6</sup> Weber, Sailer & Katzy, 2015

<sup>7</sup> Sarpong & Maclean, 2016, p. 2813

<sup>8</sup> Slaughter, 1993

<sup>9</sup> Rohrbeck & Schwarz, 2013

<sup>10</sup> Rohrbeck & Schwarz, 2013

<sup>11</sup> Marsh, 2002

<sup>12</sup> Sarpong & Maclean, 2014

## Preparing for the Future

From a future smart perspective, preparation takes several forms. These leaders conduct prep work such as paying attention, collaborating, redesigning, deciphering, predicting, and creating to name a few.<sup>13</sup> This work happens fast, boldly, and radically on a daily basis.<sup>14</sup> A key characteristic of this future smart preparation is a positive mindset where leaders view the future with optimism and see opportunities that may potentially arise.<sup>15</sup> The intent and spirit of this preparation is to support the complex, uncertain, and systematic approach to decisions and strategies.<sup>16</sup>

In a corporate arena, working to become future smart can follow the process of “discovery, extrapolation, integration, and planning” with deliverables at each step along the process.<sup>17</sup> However, this preparation is never truly complete and must be continually tested and foresight practices are needed as we never reach the future.<sup>18</sup> There will always be 10 years from now, 20 years from now, etc. Future smart is a perspective and an approach to communicate, influence, and prepare for the future all within one.<sup>19</sup>

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**For more information on the topics covered in this white paper, please contact Sarah Skidmore at [sarah@skidmore-consulting](mailto:sarah@skidmore-consulting).**



### About the Author

Sarah Skidmore, Chief Strategist at Skidmore Consulting, brings innovative and transformative thought to both non-profit organizations and for-profit businesses in industries including construction, medical & pharmaceutical, food & beverage, and consumer products. Guiding executive leaders, she delivers forward-thinking strategies founded on integrity. Sarah serves as a dynamic speaker at universities, globally recognized conferences, and industry events. Currently, Sarah is pursuing a Doctorate of Strategic Leadership from Regent University.

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<sup>13</sup> Canton, 2015

<sup>14</sup> Canton, 2015

<sup>15</sup> Canton, 2015

<sup>16</sup> Weber, Sailer & Katzy, 2015

<sup>17</sup> Farrington, Henson, Crews, 2012, p. 27

<sup>18</sup> Farrington, Henson, Crews, 2012

<sup>19</sup> Farrington, Henson, Crews, 2012

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