

World Future Society - Arizona Chapter

Thinking About the Future

- *What makes a good futurist and how do they differ from one another?*
- *Practical books and websites for beginning and advanced futures activities*
- *Arizona futures activities and examples of global organizations and websites*

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<http://cals.arizona.edu/~caldwell/docs/azwfs.pdf>

Introduction

This outline of “thinking about the future” focuses on the three bullets in the subtitle. It is representative of futures work, but has my own biases built in (through the choices I made to summarize a lot of material into four pages). Use the address above to read this material on the web as all links will be active.

1. What is a futurist?

- The broadest definition is: anyone interested in the future.
- Wikipedia definition: The term 'futurists' most commonly describes authors, consultants, organizational leaders and others who engage in interdisciplinary and systems thinking to advise private and public organizations on such matters as diverse global trends, plausible scenarios, emerging market opportunities, and risk management.”
- Many people are “part time” futurists, some futurists include full time positions that do long or short term foresight work or organizations that are dedicated to understanding future options.
- There is a need for different approaches and different perspectives, especially in today’s times where extrapolation of past trends is not a reliable indicator of the future. Examples of scales to describe organization of topics are:.

Historic vs Future	Short Term vs Long Term	Pessimist vs Optimist
Traditional vs New Methods	Crises vs Opportunities	Hopes vs Fears
Theoretical vs Practical	Challenges vs Dilemmas	Rich vs Poor

2. What makes a good futurist and how do they differ from one another?

There are different perspectives on what constitutes a good futurist. In part, the answer depends on whether you want an overview or a detailed study, whether the person is a full time futurist or their job is mostly doing non-futures work, and what resources and tools they have available. My perspective on the characteristics of a good general futurist are:

- Develop anticipatory skills and maintain awareness of current and potential changes
- Believe in the idea that to study the future you have to understand the past
- Know what to look for and separating important events from noise
- Use a radar approach rather than a vacuum cleaner approach to data gathering
- Know what tools are available - and when to use them and when not to use them
- Prepare to react early to new changes while allowing for flexibility as more is learned
- Don't place undue trust in experts or in non-experts (or yourself)
- Watch out for the bandwagon effect (safety in keeping with fads)
- Watch out for group think (fear of standing out)
- Be wary of unstated assumptions or simplistic statements; know what you know and don't know
- Define your "future" time frame and don't go out too near or too far
- Implement foresight knowledge into your daily activities so you become an "automated futurist"

For other descriptions of what makes a good futurist, see the links below in section #6 “Brief Guidelines on How to Study the Future” and these websites: <http://cals.arizona.edu/~caldwell/understandingfutures.html> and <http://cals.arizona.edu/futures/ref/booksapproach.html>

3. Practical books for beginning and advanced futures activities

- Barker, Joel. 1992. *Paradigms: The Business of Discovering the Future*. 240 pages. A short book that gives the rationale of paradigms and how/why they shift, with many very good examples – almost 20 years old but still relevant.
- Drucker, Peter. 1969. *The Age of Discontinuity: Guidelines to Our Changing Society*. 402 pages. This is not a beginners book, but it is easy to read. It is listed here because it was published in 1969 but very relevant today.
- Hiemstra, Glen. 2006. *Turning the Future into Revenue: What Businesses and Individuals Need to Know to Shape Their Futures*. 224 pages. An easy to read and comprehensive book on how to learn about the future.
- Hines, Andy and Peter Bishop (editors). 2007. *Thinking About the Future, Guidelines for Strategic Foresight*. A practical and readable book edited by two very experienced futurists with contributions by 36 futurists.
- Johansen, Bob. 2007. *Get There Early: Sensing the Future to Compete in the Present (Institute for the Future)*. 256 pages. A good summary of the Institute of the Future study process of Foresight leads to Insight leads to Action. Easy to read, based on case histories done by the Institute over the last 40 years.
- Naisbitt, John. 2006. *Mindset*. 282 pages. Part I is a description of various "mindsets" and Part II focuses on "Pictures" (e.g., scenarios) of the future. An easy to read and practical guide to futures studies. It is especially relevant in these uncertain times but was written just before the current economic downturn.

4. The Big Five Futures Organizations

There are many futures organizations, including large and small consulting firms and government and academic organizations. There are five organizations that attempt to pull together those interested in the future, either as individuals or as organizations. The five listed below are the largest and most well known, but they all differ from one another. The basic descriptions below are those as defined by the organization. Your homework: find these sites yourself.

- **World Future Society.** Began 1966, Fee: \$59, members: 25,000. Purpose : Society strives to serve as a neutral clearinghouse for ideas about the future (forecasts, recommendations, and alternative scenarios”.
- **World Futures Studies Federation.** Began 1973. Fee \$68 (varies by euro exchange), members: 210. WFSF is a forum where the stimulation, exchange, and examination of ideas, visions, and plans for alternative, long-term futures can take place.
- **Millennium Project.** Founded in 1986. This is a global participatory futures research think-tank. The project is organized into “notes” of groups of individual and institutions that identify key futurists, politicians, scientists, business planners, and scholars in their region to participate in the research. (The Project works like a giant Delphi Study. They also define Global Challenges each year (there are 15 in the most recent report.)
- **Association for Professional Futurists.** Began 2002, fee: \$195, members: 223. Purpose: 1 .Promote professional excellence in the field, 2. Grow the community of professional futurists, 3. Demonstrate the value of futures thinking.
- **Shaping Tomorrow/Foresight Network.** Began 2003, fee: varies by service. Offers a futures intelligence, trends research tool and knowledge management portal that helps organizations better anticipate what's next through collaborative foresight and satisfies their increasing hunger for ingenuity. Companion organization is Foresight Network (free) that is entirely discussion groups.

5. Sources of Futures Sources via World Futures Studies Federation

There are a number of web sites that list sources for futures information such as books and reports or organizations. These lists vary as to current or completeness. One that is generally more comprehensive is that maintained by the World Futures Studies Federation (<http://wfsf.org>) . The direct links are below.

- Futures Organizations and Their Websites
http://wfsf.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=62&Itemid=82
- Higher Education Futures Courses or Futures Programs
http://wfsf.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=section&id=16&Itemid=108
- Books (in English – lists also available in Arabic, Finnish, French, German, and Hebrew) . Books are those as “favorite futures boos” of WFSF members and are listed by decade.
http://wfsf.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=100&Itemid=125

6. Links to Brief Guidelines on How to Study the Future

- **Short course of Futures Techniques.** 2003. Roger Caldwell. On web with multiple pages depending on what you select (this is a subset of a larger and connected course). <http://cals.arizona.edu/futures/shortcourse>
- **Coming to Grips With the Future.** 2004. Joseph Coates. Includes skills of the effective futurist (12 pages).
http://www.josephcoates.com/pdf_files/277_coming_to_grips.pdf
- **An Audit for Organizational Futurists: Ten Questions Every Organizational Futurist Should be Able to Answer.** 2005. Andy Hines. 14 pages. <http://tech.uh.edu/futureweb/faculty/ahines/organizational%20audit.pdf>
- **Teaching Future Studies: From Strategy to Transformative Change.** 2002. Sohail Inayatullah.
<http://www.metafuture.org/Articles/teachingfuturestudies.htm>

7. Arizona Futures

There are a variety of organizations in Arizona that study some portion of the future, many of them as part of the main function of the organization (e.g., business, coalitions, education, government). Those listed below are the major ones that are not highly specialized or focused on their own constituencies.

- **Center for the Future of Arizona (Phoenix).** <http://arizonafuture.org/>
Established in 2002, the Center helps to shape and define Arizona’s future through actions on critical topics for the state. While the focus is on education, in 2009 they published the a Gallup Arizona Poll that was comprehensive – The Arizona We Want - <http://www.thearizonawewant.org/>
- **Arizona Town Hall.** <http://aztownhall.org>
Established in 1962, the Town Hall is a nonprofit civic organization of about 1500 Arizona citizens. They meet twice a year to discuss issues that were voted on by the membership. A background report is prepared by one of the three state universities and following the discussion the attendees at a meeting (about 130) prepare recommendations; the background reports and recommendations posted online. Reports for 2009 are: “Riding the Fiscal Roller Coaster: Government Revenue in Arizona” (2009) and “From Here to There: Transportation Opportunities for Arizona“ (2008). Other recent topics include housing education, land use, health care, rapid growth and development, technology, and the economy.
- **Morrison Institute, Arizona State University.** <http://morrisoninstitute.asu.edu/>Established in 1882, the Morrison Institute issues a several different publication formats that cover a wide range of issues. Many of these are fundamental to futures thinking, with some focusing on a single subject (like water, national parks) and others covering a range of topics, like the following: Road to Recovery: Lessons from Arizon’s First Economy; Megapolitan: Arizona’s Sun Corridor (2008); Sustainability for Arizona: The Issue of Our Age (2007); Five Shoes Waiting to Drop on Arizona’s Future (2001); The New Economy: A Guide for Arizona (2000).

- **Political and Special Contract Studies**

Arizona Partnership for a New Economy (APNE). The program no longer exists and references are difficult to find. Here is a 2001 summary final report (39 pages). The report title is “An Economy that Works for Everyone: Why the New Economy is Important to Arizona’s Future and How Arizona Can Position Itself as a Leader.” <http://www.azcommerce.com/doclib/prop/AnEconthatWorksforEveryone-Report1-2001.pdf>

A Blueprint for Higher Education 2000-2020: Possible Approaches to Implementing the Recommendations of the Governor's Task Force on Higher Education .Limited information on Board of Regents minutes for November 16-17, 2000 meeting). http://azregents.edu/1_the_regents/meetings/minutes/nov2000.html

Arizona’s Bioscience Roadmap: A 10-Year Vision for Arizoan in the Biosciences. Study in 2000. Performed by Battelle for the Flinn Foundation (7 pages). http://www.flinn.org/file/az_bioscience_roadmap_brochure_2002.pdf

8. *Examples of Broad Scans Emphasizing Fundamental Changes*

- **Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World**, 2008

National Intelligence Council summary of trends, relative certainties and their likely impact, plus key uncertainties and their potential consequences. More change than continuity is the watchword, with the next 15-20 years seen as "one of those great historical turning points where multiple factors are linked to be in play.". Includes 7 alternative futures with 4 specific scenarios. This has a focus on globalization and military implications but it is comprehensive and applicable to any futures study, including university futures (120 pages).

- **Institute for the Future** (variety of reports)

This site has multiple reports and is a forward thinking organization. As part of that forward thinking the IFTF provides a range of studies and an annual "Map of the Decade " (only older versions are available to non-members). While broad issues are covered in the Map of the Decade summaries, the general focus areas are: science and technology, health, demographics, food, business, and consumer). Special summary sections focus on particular topics; one example is sustainability - <http://www.gemi.org/sustainabilitymap/>

- **Forces That Will Shape America's Future**, 2007.

This is a listing of themes from the U.S. General Accountability Office Strategic Plan. Includes are: Security Threats, Sustainability, Economic Growth, Global Interdependency, Societal Change, Quality of Life, and Science and Technology. The focus is on implications to the government but the theme contents are applicable to other institutions (40 pages).

- **Millennium Project – 15 Global Challenges**, 2009.

Consensus of annual global challenges, beginning in 1996. Challenges are described in one line, with a link to extensive discussion. Brief (2 minute) videos of each challenge are linked to YouTube. The topics are much more diverse than the typical environmental scan.

- **OECD Horizon Scan** - 2007

Focuses on Denmark but relevant to all OECD countries. Covered categories include: culture, development, economy, global, nature, people, resources, state, and work life. Some [additional efforts](#) address the various types of Global Infrastructure Needs for 2030. <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/22/56/39991237.pdf> (Horizon Scan) and http://www.oecd.org/department/0,3355,en_2649_36240452_1_1_1_1_1,00.html (infrastructure).

For more information: Anticipating the Future Course. This is material is a bit dated but still provides some futures guidance and has references to specific sites for further information. <http://cals.arizona.edu/futures/shortcourse>

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