Hello, today I am going to talk about An Overview of Foresight Methodologies. I will speak 10 minutes and show 10 slides.

**Introduction**

Foresight is “a university human capacity which allows people to think ahead and consider, model, create and respond to, future eventualities” (Foresight International, 2006). Foresight is, however, usually an unconscious thinking process – we all think about the future, but often do not recognize that we are engaging in foresight.

This presentation outlines the strategy process in organizations and the use of foresight methodologies in the strategic thinking stage of this process. It then provides a broad overview of the development of foresight methodologies over time, and briefly discusses different types of methodologies that can be used in organizations. The presentation aims to provide a summary of foresight methodologies rather than a detailed analysis of the methodologies themselves.

**Organisational Strategy Processes**

Strategy development and implementation in organizations is best understood as a series of three interdependent steps: strategic thinking; strategic decision making; and strategic implementation.

As shown in Figure 1, strategic thinking focuses on futures options available to an organization, before decision are made about which options to pursue. Action is then taken to implement the chosen options. **Foresight is a strategic thinking capability**, so the use of foresight methodologies occurs at this first stage of the strategy development process – that is, the use of foresight methodologies seeks to expand the perception of the range of strategic options available to an organization.

**Аn Overview of Foresight Methodologies**

The use of particular methodologies depends on two factors: the tradition in which a practitioner works, and the organizational context in which the work has to be carried out. Every practitioner will have preferred methodologies, but the choice of which to use must ultimately depend on what is appropriate for the organization.

Foresight methodologies can be classified into four levels (Voros, 2003), each with its own guiding questions: Input: what is going on? Analytical: what seems to be happening? Interpretive: what’s really happening? Prospective: what might happen?

The model developed by Voros (2003) is shown in Figure 2, and demonstrates clearly that foresight work comes before strategic decision making (what might we need to do?) and strategic planning (what will we do? and, how will we do it?).

Traditional strategy processes in organizations already use methods to gather input, and to analyze and interpret that input, but work at the prospective stage is either not included or not done in enough depth.

An inclusive and in depth discussion of methodologies is beyond the scope of this presentation, so the following sections describe some key approaches at each level.

**Input Methods: what’s going on?**

Input methods gather information that is needed for organizations to understand the environments in which they operate. Delphi approaches, which seek opinions about the future from experts in the field, are one of the oldest input methods and most recently, have been used regularly in government science and technology foresight projects.

Environmental scanning is perhaps the most commonly used input method in organisational strategy processes. Figure 3 shows the interdependence of the different types of scanning.

**Analytical Methods: what seems to be happening?**

Analytical methods are used to categories the information obtained during the input stage. Trend analysis looks for existing themes and patterns already evident in society. Trends tend to follow a predictable cycle as shown in Figure. An issue emerges at the fringes or periphery of society, and is of interest to an eclectic group of people. Over time there is usually some sort of defining public event that turns the issue into a trend – data is collected about it, and it appears in newspapers, magazines and other media. Finally, the trend becomes mainstream, as manifested in government policy and take up by institutions.

Emerging issues analysis looks for signals that underpin the emergence of trends, on the periphery of mainstream trends. One define emerging issues as having a low probability of occurring, but if they did, would have a dramatic impact on society.

The analytical stage therefore needs to include more than just trend analysis. Good analytical approaches use a combination of methods.

**Interpretive Methods: what’s really happening?**

Interpretive methods seek to make sense of the information that has been collected and categorised in the previous two steps, in a more in-depth way. A key concept in interpretive methods is that of layers, particularly layers of depth.

Causal Layered Analysis (2004), as shown in Figure 5, is an example of a methodology designed to explore below surface events. With four layers – litany, social causes, worldview and myth/metaphor – this approach takes the litany, commonly held public views and statements about issues and events and interprets it using progressively deeper approaches. The second layer looks for social causes or factors underpinning the events and issues being discussed.

Analysis at the third, worldview level explores structures and worldviews, seeking to understand assumptions at work, including understanding how the worldview of participants helps to frame understanding of the issue.

The fourth layer of analysis explores metaphor and myth to identify intuitive beliefs about the future, and to deconstruct those beliefs to identify what Inayatullah (2003: 8) calls the „civilisational level of identity‟.

**Prospective Methods: what might happen?**

Methods at this level are seeking to develop a view of alternative futures for an organization.

For example, Scenario planning is a well know prospective method. If done well, this method has two significant strengths: it can integrate information about the external environment, both qualitative and quantitative, with information about the internal environment of an organization.

Backcasting is another method that is used to identify how potential futures worlds might emerged. Starting in a future world, people work backwards in time, exploring events and decision points until they reach the present.

**Concluding Comments**

Foresight methodologies seek to gather data and make sense of it so that people can think in different and new ways about the future. That data might be collected from humans or from the analysis of documents and artefacts, or both. The data might be analysed using qualitative or quantitative techniques, or both. To be used in strategy processes, however, data needs to be analysed, interpreted and used in ways that make sense to the organisation. Information emerging from this analysis and interpretation allows an organisation to better understand its past and present, which provides the basis for using foresight methods to explore potential futures.