How Futures Thinking can benefit from Design Thinking and Strategic Thinking

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Future Strategic Thinking

Problem

- Futures Thinking, without a doubt, a multi-disciplinary field where professionals hail from a variety of schools of thought.

- When every ‘prediction’ is wrong, what makes a great Futures Thinker?

- Where is the cohesive foundation of thought that allows the structured growth of ‘futurists’?
Method

- What is a futures thinker?
  - Meta-analysis of literature
  - Original survey of active ‘futurists’ from World Futures Society
- What is design thinking and is that a useful construct?
- What is strategic thinking and is that a useful construct?

Futures thinking is undefined

- Is it a method?
- Is it a field of research?
- Is it discrete or an approach to all problems?
what is a futures thinker?

- Futurists appear to categorise themselves as either:
  - Explorers – what could be?
    - Driven to learn
  - Engineers – What is plausible?
    - Driven to understand
  - Guides – Follow Me!
    - Driven to improve

Design thinking - insights

- ‘...design thinking as a construct remains intangible’\(^1\) and ‘it is a mix of different kinds of thinking’\(^2\)

- There are a variety of interpretations of the generalised process. For example:

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1. Bading, Leigh and Williams, 2014, Models of thinking: Assessing the components of the design thinking process
2. Dorst and Kec, 2011, The core of 'design thinking' and its application
Discussion - Culture

- Design thinking can be thought of as a culture
- Culture refers to the values that all members of the group hold in common
- Organisational Culture also requires:
  - Structural stability – not reliant on an individual (WFSF, WFS, APF etc)
  - Depth – May be unconscious / simply the way you do things
  - Breadth – affects every part of the organisation
  - Patterning or integration – it is what makes values, rituals and behaviours coherent

2. Schein, Edgar. H., 2004, Organizational culture and leadership

Strategic Thinking - insights

- Strategy is a plan
- Good strategy is enabled by the capacity to foresee futures and the ability to act
- Strategic thinking is a ‘means-ends way of thinking that seek future value’

![Diagram of Strategic Thinking]

- Strategic thinking
- Strategic planning
- Emergent
- Deliberate

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Discussion – Cognitive Characteristics

- Visionary thinking
  - Inayatulla – ‘[scenarios] do not pull organizations and civilizations forward’

- Systems Thinking
  - Understanding interconnected complexity

- Creative thinking
  - New solutions to new problems

- Holistic Intuition
  - ‘intuition is of great use in finding solutions to complex problems’

Summary

- Future Thinkers appear to categorise themselves as Explorers, Engineers or Guides

- Future Thinking could be categorised as a culture, similar to Design Thinking

- Future Thinking capacity could be built using the cognitive traits of a Strategic Thinker