

Abstract

Obstacles to Effective Horizon Scanning **Timothy Mack, President, World Future Society, United States**

There are three major elements one should address when considering the challenges to horizon scanning. The first is assessment of what levels of data may be consistently available to inform this process, including the quality and comprehensiveness of information resources, that is, their reliability. The second is analysis of the data chosen, in terms of relevance and meaning. Finally, I want to talk about methodological dynamics and the potential issues with specific approaches to foresight.

When we talk about what we can know in terms of data reliability, we are usually thinking in terms of three elements:

- 1). The Shape of the data and the interrelationships involved
- 2) The Thresholds within these relationships and their discontinuities
- 3) The Interaction multiple factors that change their effects.

As well, there are multiple social, political and methodological factors affecting reliability. Other questions influencing analysis of the vast range of possible scanning tools are the horizon (how far ahead to look) and the level of detail. These choices will then influence which assessment tools are most appropriate to deliver relevant results within an appropriate context.

Finally, each scanning tool has its own set of innate biases, in terms of assumptions, political dynamics, organizational culture, and the nature of the analytical tools and their operation. The manner in which various tools emphasize certain elements and ignore others is essential to understand, when using them effectively.

When thinking through choices, it is critical to have decided whether the scanning system will highlight the most probable outcomes or the most critical, i.e. potential disasters. Understanding of the causes of change is one of the most essential elements in effectively assessing impacts and outcomes, as well as how these assessments can best be utilized by the policy making mechanisms which will receive its analytical summaries.