

ANZSOG

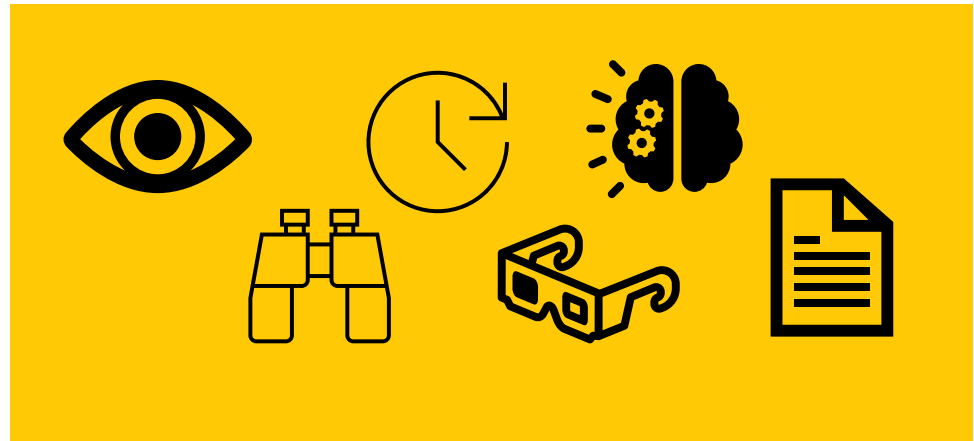


RESEARCH
INSIGHTS

Building foresight capability –
a curated conversation
between jurisdictions

Australia &
New Zealand
School Of
Government

BUILDING FORESIGHT CAPABILITY



A curated conversation between jurisdictions

29 September 2022

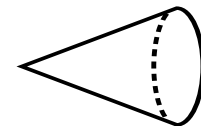
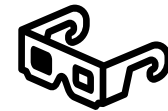
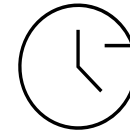
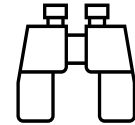
BACKGROUND & INTENT

The Covid-19 pandemic showed that few governments were able to anticipate and effectively prepare for future events. Even prior to the pandemic, the [OECD\(2018\)](#) warned, “Governments in general do not appear to have developed the institutions, processes and practices to focus on the long-term... This will inevitably weaken their ability to identify challenges and risks, or to mitigate and manage those risks, let alone to contribute to strong and resilient future economies and societies”. It called for governments to:

- Improve requirements of long-term economic, social, and environmental reporting
- Embed future considerations into policy and analytical frameworks
- Strengthen future-focused institutions and their connections to current policy processes
- Improve and join-up foresight capability across government.

ANZSOG highlights the importance of foresight in government decision-making, offering masterclasses in foresighted government and socialising foresight as an integral part of policy design, policy capability and policy stewardship. Governments need to be taking care of tomorrow, today.

Several ANZSOG jurisdictions are actively building foresight capability within and across government agencies. ANZSOG convened a ‘curated conversation’ to bring together senior officials from several jurisdictions to share lessons and approaches to improving foresight capability. The conversation was focused on ‘building capability in foresight’, rather than on ‘how to do foresight’. The session was held under Chatham House Rule, though participating jurisdictions were open to sharing their experience and insights with the broader ANZSOG community. All were keen to also engage with Singapore, considered a world leader in government foresight capability. The Head of Singapore’s Centre for Strategic Futures opened the session, providing a conversation starter to stimulate the discussion. This ‘conversation tracker’ outlines the main themes and insights from the discussion.



PARTICIPANTS, PROCESS AND THEMES

Contributors were put forward by each jurisdiction, with additional colleagues attending as observers. The session was held under Chatham House rule (quotations not attributed). [Sally Washington](#), ANZSOG Executive Director, Aotearoa, curated the session. Dr Ryan Young, Director of the National Security College’s Futures Hub at the Australian National University acted as ‘keynote listener’ to draw insights from the discussion. [Subho Banerjee](#), Deputy CEO, ANZSOG also contributed insights.

Jurisdictions shared their experiences based on the following themes:

- The imperative:** Why is foresight important? What’s driving the demand for foresight capability?
- Actions:** What are you doing to build capability in foresight? Institutions, collateral, offerings, skills.
- The change process:** How are you working to catalyse and embed change and to ensure that insights from foresight inform policy, strategy, and the quality of decision-making?
- Sharing insights and lessons:** what can jurisdictions learn from each other and share with other ANZSOG organisations and jurisdictions?



Jurisdiction	Participants
Singapore Prime Minister’s Office	Jeanette Kwek , Head of the Centre for Strategic Futures
Australia Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet	Nigel Evans , Senior Advisor, Policy Projects and Taskforce Office Ingrid Lundberg , Assistant Secretary, Policy Projects and Taskforce Office
New South Wales Department of Premier and Cabinet	Frances Foster-Thorpe , Executive Director, Shaping Futures branch Scott Perugini-Kelly , Director, Foresight team, Shaping Futures branch
South Australia Department of the Premier and Cabinet	Brenton Caffin , Executive Director, Strategy & Policy Ariella Helfgott , Director, Strategic Foresight

Acknowledgments: Thanks to Amy White, Te Tari Taiwhenua/Department of Internal Affairs, Aotearoa NZ; Cara Nolan, NSW Premier and Cabinet; and James Green and Anika Kylma, ANZSOG, for their crucial behind the scenes contributions.

CONVERSATION STARTER – SINGAPORE’S EXPERIENCE

Head of Singapore’s Centre for Strategic Futures, Jeanette Kwek, shared Singapore’s decades-long foresight journey. It has evolved from scenario planning at the Ministry of Defence to a central function – the [Centre for Strategic Futures](#) – in the Prime Minister’s Office. The centre works to embed foresight capability across Singapore’s public service. The evolution of the foresight function is documented in the [Conversations for the Future](#) series: Volume 1 looks at Singapore’s experiences with strategic planning from 1988-2011, while Volume 2 covers Singapore’s Foresight journey since 2011.

The imperative

The function has evolved over time, but the imperative became more acute in the face of shocks, such as 9/11, SARS and the global financial crisis. This resulted in a tightening of links between foresight and strategy; being able to understand, anticipate and adjust to changes in the external environment and how they might affect Singapore’s population. In 2015 the function became part of the Prime Minister’s Office to enable more deliberate whole-of-government coordination and strategic planning. This reflects the cross-cutting, changing nature of the challenges countries are facing – they no longer fit neatly into the remit of a single ministry or sector. Foresight work became more system-focused, embedded and applied, including as part of medium-term functions connected to longer-term contexts. Over time there has been a more participatory approach to foresight and subsequent strategy and planning. This includes understanding and involving Singapore’s diverse population in shaping its own future.

“These efforts are not just marginal add-ons to Singapore’s pre-existing bureaucracy. They lie at the heart of how we are reinventing governance in the face of a rapidly changing global environment...”

Peter Ong, Head of the Civil Service Foreword, *Conversations for the Future Vol 1*

Memo to the Future
(From a time capsule closed in 2011, to be opened in 2030)



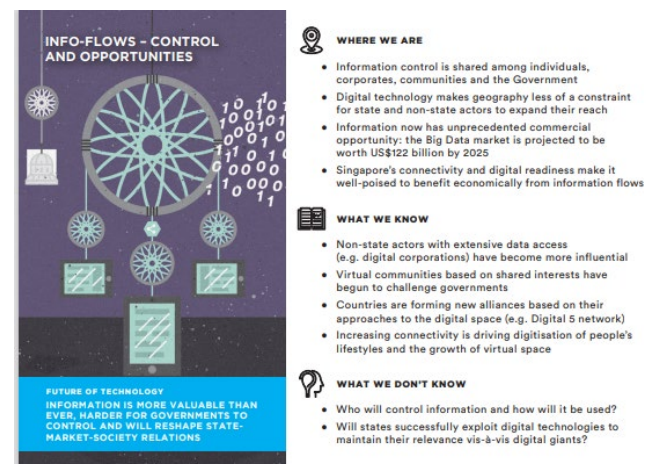
Conversations for the Future includes a “Memo to the Future”, from the CSF team to colleagues working in the future, so they “would get a glimpse into how futures work was done 20 years before...”

CONVERSATION STARTER – SINGAPORE’S EXPERIENCE

Actions, initiatives and collateral

A key role of the CSF is to deepen and strengthen the foresight capability across the public service, with three key functions described as: Scout / Challenge / Grow

- ❑ **Scout** - identifies emerging trends and issues to inform national priorities, scan for longer-term trends & emerging weak signals and share these insights to inform policy, strategy and planning
- ❑ **Challenge** - borrows from the future to talk about the present, using the future “as a safe space to challenge our own assumptions & mental models about what we should be doing and how we operate, and see whether those assumptions hold”. Future scenarios are used to improve current decision-making – through convening conversations and facilitation at various levels of the civil service.
- ❑ **Grow** - builds system capability and capacity in strategic foresight. A range of tools and professional development offerings support this function, including [Driving Forces Cards](#) (downloadable for anyone) to catalyse futures conversations, a set of foresight tools called “Scenario Planning Plus” (SP+) which have scenario planning at the core, but tap into a broader suite of tools suitable for the analysis of weak signals, and thinking about black swans (unexpected events) and wild cards. A key CSF role is to share the SP+ toolkit across Government. A main vehicle for this is a series of workshops dubbed [FutureCraft](#), to introduce key skills and tools relevant to government foresight work, held at the Civil Service College for Singapore public officers.



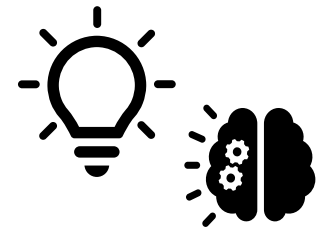
Example of a Driving Forces Card

CONVERSATION STARTER – SINGAPORE’S EXPERIENCE

Insights and lessons about the change process

Reflections on some critical success factors in Singapore’s foresight journey.

- ❑ **Engage decision-makers to build demand.** Regular workshops and forums catalyse discussions amongst public service leaders, help build consensus and a whole-of-government strategic agenda. Demand for foresight grows with awareness of the need to reduce shocks and not to be ‘caught off-guard’. A Strategic Futures Network is convened regularly for senior members of government departments to discuss emerging trends and their implications for Singapore.
- ❑ **Have a deliberate operating model.** The CSF works at the heart of the civil service with a goal of “Building a strategically agile public service ready to manage a complex and fast-changing environment”. Being at the centre with an outward focus helps to keep things grounded and to ensure scenarios and futures work can be translated into actionable insights that can influence strategy and planning.
- ❑ **Build networks for support.** A community of practice is critical to help small teams, or solo practitioners, have a core group to tap into for support / development.
- ❑ **Provide a range of tools and opportunities for people to build their futures literacy and apply it in their work. Make them fun and easy to use.** Providing an ‘experience’ is more powerful than a dry paper. Seeing material in a different way leads to richer policy conversations. Examples include:
 - Videos and games: These can help move civil servants into a different mindset or a different way of seeing the future. One video uses a set of scenarios with a young man taking three taxi journeys in parallel universes, talking with the taxi driver about the joys and frustrations of their daily lives, designed to help public servants ‘walk in the shoes’ of ordinary citizens.
 - Driving Forces Cards: a deck of cards can be more effective than a large report to catalyse discussions across government. They help people quickly understand the current state of play and some critical uncertainties, which they can use to think through potential trajectories and imagine the ‘cone of the future’.



“The language of scenarios – driving forces, critical uncertainties, predetermined elements and branching points – is now second nature to many policymakers who have been trained in the method”
Peter Ho – from *Conversations for the Future*

THEME 1: THE IMPERATIVE

Participating jurisdictions are all working to build foresight capability. They are at different stages of maturity, from starting out to relatively established functions, albeit not at the level of Singapore. All sit at the centre of government in their jurisdictions – Prime Ministers or Premiers departments – and all are focused on deliberately building capability across the jurisdiction, not just ‘doing foresight’ or providing foresight services. How and why did they get here?

WHY IS FORESIGHT IMPORTANT? WHAT’S DRIVING THE DEMAND FOR FORESIGHT?

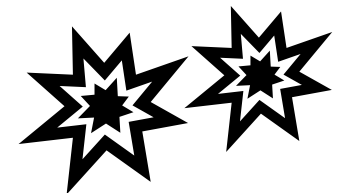
The trigger to build a foresight function ranged from system reform following an election, an explicit or implicit mandate from a new Premier or a visionary senior leader, and usually leverages or is associated with an existing function such as a strategy or strategic policy unit. All jurisdictions reported a growing realisation that a foresight or futures function was required to support critical state functions like infrastructure planning, or to provide advice on strategic goals or challenges that are cross-cutting and involve longer-term timeframes, like workforce issues, aging populations and climate change. Governments are increasingly aware that the ability to anticipate and respond to shocks or trends “outside our control” was weak. The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated this sense of being caught short and was an added impetus to accelerate the development of anticipatory capacities in government.

Foresight functions are not stand alone or separate to wider strategy and policy functions. Rather the goal is to be embedded and connected. Connections to functions related to innovation or data and analytics/insights were also noted as important.

Developing a foresight function, like anything new and potentially disruptive, is not all plain sailing. Often there is resistance and work is required to stimulate and ‘shape the demand’, “trying to anticipate what senior decision-makers might need and then imagining how this might trickle down to the policy engine room”.

“...we recognise that in many areas - whether tech, finance, or the economy – we can't always shape our own destiny. Our anticipatory muscles need to be as strong as they can be”.

“The foresight function can hide in plain sight in a strategy and policy function.”



THEME 2: ACTIONS

Participating jurisdictions described a multi-pronged approach to building a foresight function and foresight capability across government. This includes: proactively providing trend and foresight analysis, supporting or being commissioned to provide foresight input into specific projects or inquiries, developing frameworks and tools (collateral) akin to a foresight toolkit, and facilitating the development of foresight skills and futures literacy across the public service. Some examples are highlighted below.

WHAT ARE WE DOING TO BUILD FORESIGHT CAPABILITY?

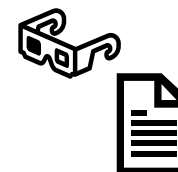
Proactively providing insights and intelligence from foresight

Making horizon scanning and related intelligence an ‘off the shelf’ or ‘self-service’ offering relies on proactively generating insights that others in government can pick up and use. There is an ‘efficiency saver’ benefit in having a whole-of-government offering – a ‘common foresight evidence base’ – rather than everyone reinventing the wheel (‘build once, use often’), especially where that amounts to some overall general trend analysis which others can draw on, and add to, for their own specific purposes. For example, a key offering in NSW is the [Trend Atlas](#), an interactive, strategic intelligence platform where users can access rich insights on local and global trends. It has already grown to over 1000 NSW Government sector users. This is powerful when linked to a broader system data strategy. NSW also offers “Insight notes” of 5–10 pages that showcase foresight insights in specific areas. Producing scenarios with “divergent plausible futures can help support strategic thinking by teams responsible for long-term, large-scale strategic planning”.

Supporting others with foresight analysis

Making the team available to support others needing foresight input into specific projects or strategic directions helps to show the value and practical application of foresight. This means embedding your expertise into other people’s policy or strategy work. This can be done in more or less proactive ways (being commissioned, operating as an ‘internal consultant’ or ‘poking your nose in’). At the outset it helps to be bold rather than waiting to be commissioned. This will build demand over time. But there are pros and cons in each approach.

“Content curation is important: making horizon scanning ‘an off-the-shelf experience’”



“On the demand side - I have rarely asked what senior decision-makers want - we seek to anticipate what they will need in a few months”

“[We tried]opportunistically attaching ourselves to an existing process. We found this had pros and cons: tangible impact and credibility...[but risks] getting caught up in the process issues and bureaucratic politics of those bigger processes!”

We talked about “inside consultants” ...but realised very quickly that implied that we wouldn’t strategically select the issues we thought we needed to focus on...our focus is now that we ‘partner’ with others on projects

WHAT ARE WE DOING TO BUILD FORESIGHT CAPABILITY?

Frameworks and tools – collateral to support foresight and futures thinking

Like Singapore, other participants have developed products and collateral to support public service colleagues to include foresight in their policy and strategy work. These take the form of things like engagement tools, dialogue starters, guidance on how to diagnose a problem through a futures lens. Having tangible accessible products that people can pick up and use makes it easier to build foresight into their day-to-day work. Participants referred to the importance of a ‘tactile experience’ – design features that take users into an ‘I feel’ rather than the typical ‘I think’ analytical space.



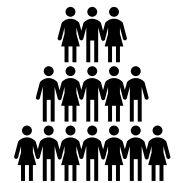
Building foresight literacy – supporting learning

Providing support for ‘learning experiences’ to help people know how and when to use foresight tools also features in jurisdictions attempts to build foresight capability. This ranges from sessions to ‘play with the tools’ (using generic themes or scenarios), to applying them to concrete real-life challenges (policy work in progress). Both help to build futures literacy over time (as has been the case in Singapore) but might depend on the existing level of literacy and maturity in the system (where there is already an appetite or permission to work on real life challenges). The Covid-19 pandemic offered a boost and some licence for foresight sessions exploring themes like: How might the pandemic end? What will a post pandemic world look like – with/without vaccines? How do we prepare for other ‘unanticipated’ events/shocks?



Networks and communities of practice

All jurisdictions referred to the importance of communities of practice and networks of fellow travellers to spread the word about the value of foresight as well as to provide support to those working to embed foresight into their work (often pushing against the tide of the status quo). Often communities of practice and networks form organically. No jurisdiction referred to any deliberate or formal network at the level of Singapore’s Strategic Futures network, although some referred to engaging senior decision-makers in foresight discussions. The APS benefits from the Strategic Futures Network – led by the National Security College’s Futures Hub – which includes around 25 agencies in Canberra.



WHAT ARE WE DOING TO BUILD FORESIGHT CAPABILITY?

Socialising foresight as a key ingredient of good policy & strategy

Building and socialising the narrative that foresight is a key input to policy and strategy is vital. This is part of building the wider ecosystem within which foresight sits. ANZSOG articulates foresight as an essential element of policy design, policy capability and policy stewardship, framing the necessary evidence base as including ‘hindsight – insight – foresight’. This framing is used by others including one of the participating jurisdictions, articulating **Hindsight** (as uncovering lessons from the past), **Insight** (as understanding opportunities and challenges and shaping spaces to take action) and **Foresight** (as scanning the horizon and shaping the future through stress testing reforms and designing enablers). All jurisdictions recognised the need to embed foresight into existing policy processes to demonstrate value and have impact. Foresight is not an end in itself.



Hindsight ‘Look back’	Insight ‘Look broad and deep’	Foresight ‘Look ahead’
Lessons from the past	Current opportunities & challenges. Data and deep insights about the current state.	Scanning the horizon

THEME 3. CATALYSING CHANGE AND MAKING IT STICK

Strategies to catalyse and embed foresight in organisations and across the public service are common to any change or transformation programme, especially where that change challenges the usual ‘way we do things around here’. They relate to shaping the demand and authorising environment, understanding the customer or audience for foresight work, and thinking deliberately about who needs to be convinced, how to build coalitions of champions and fellow travellers, and how to communicate the benefits and impact.

HOW ARE JURISDICTIONS WORKING TO ENSURE THAT INSIGHTS FROM FORESIGHT INFORM POLICY, STRATEGY AND THE QUALITY OF DECISION-MAKING?

Shaping demand and bold ambition

Participants reported a growing appetite for foresight work, partly as a result of deficiencies – a lack of anticipatory capabilities - highlighted during the pandemic. Some noted a general acknowledgement that more longer-term thinking is required in government, to anticipate and prepare for future shocks, for big projects like infrastructure planning, and in areas like climate change, and inter-generational disadvantage that will require concerted efforts over decades. Foresight makes policy and strategy “more robust”.

Participants showed high levels of ambition to contribute to and feed into significant areas of public sector and policy reform, up to the level of ‘national strategy’. The question is: where and when do you hitch the foresight wagon for maximum impact? Election promises, public sector reform initiatives or big policy or operational challenges can provide useful leverage. In terms of timing, there are multiple options. Being part of the early decision making process to “help generate a richer conversation” is important, as is using foresight later in the design process to “stress-test” options – how they might play out in future and/or what the future environment into which they fit might look like?

“We've made sure the foresight work we are doing is linked to a process and that we're clear about how foresight can contribute to more robust future focused plans. There's so much change on the horizon that people are ready for [this].”



HOW ARE JURISDICTIONS WORKING TO ENSURE THAT INSIGHTS FROM FORESIGHT INFORM POLICY, STRATEGY AND THE QUALITY OF DECISION-MAKING?

Customers and audience

Key questions for developing a foresight function include: do you have a clear sense of who your audience is? How does that relate to who you have to shift in the system? Who within the entire ecosystem is our key customer? Sometimes the answer is ‘it depends’. “Who you’re seeking to reach relates to the type of product you create”. Participants identified multiple audiences and stakeholders with influence over the demand for and supply of foresight capabilities. For example:

- ❑ **The public:** Participants mentioned the importance of bringing the public along, or working alongside the executive to raise public awareness of future issues. Like policy, foresight is becoming more participatory. The need for involvement is more acute at the nexus of how the public sees future risks (climate change, financial uncertainty) and the forces of mis-/dis-information that shape their perceptions. How might foresight practitioners support leaders to have public conversations about big, future-facing issues in open and transparent ways that bring people and their diverse perspectives into the conversation, especially as interventions are being investigated (or strategic bets being made)?
- ❑ **Within government** Customers are at different levels. The **most senior level** needs to be on board to enable the authorising environment. The **middle management** layer (often “under the pump” for day-to-day delivery of advice and services) can be problematic. As one participant noted: “We often get the question, ‘What do I do about it?’ That may relate to the level of empowerment those executives feel.” [In that case we are] “trying to be useful and fit into existing projects.”
- ❑ **Customers vs partners:** There was a distinction made between customers and partners. Foresight functions can help agencies build their authorising environment by engaging at multiple levels: “We can pick a working ‘partner’ within an agency and engage with a ‘customer’ higher up in their hierarchy.”
- ❑ **All of the above:** In our work, “we thought about the whole gamut of people who might use it”.

“We design with the public as an audience – it becomes easier for politicians and others to lean in if there’s a willing audience. Helping others tell the story (of net zero pathways, for example) and giving them the tools can be a key function.”

“Who is your customer, a great question. We have multiple [customers] at different levels. The top tier ‘get it’ but middle management is hard work! ...the institutional incentives are to stick to your own patch and deliverables”.

HOW ARE JURISDICTIONS WORKING TO ENSURE THAT INSIGHTS FROM FORESIGHT INFORM POLICY, STRATEGY AND THE QUALITY OF DECISION-MAKING?

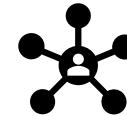
Leadership - A dedicated space in the system, building relationships

All the functions participating in this conversation sit at the centre of government with the concomitant authority that affords. As noted earlier, this can have benefits and costs for a change programme – it is important to have a dedicated place in the system to curate foresight intelligence and work to build capability across the system. But line agencies can resist change, protect their ‘territory’, or resort to compliance behaviour. Foresight work typically cuts across administrative boundaries and responsibilities. This dynamic requires expert leadership in collaboration and relationship management.

“My role is holding space or opening up new relationships for the team.”

“A big part of my job is stakeholder management, facilitation and communications.”

“We need to build the relationships at the working level to shift mental models about the future.”



Champions – support, helping to change minds and mindsets

Participants agreed they needed champions to help spread the word and build support for their work. Potential champions are not always the ‘usual suspects’, nor are they necessarily within government. Most of the participants described building support opportunistically: “We just found supporters wherever they were based on whoever we were useful to”, but realised that gaining “influence at all levels is important if doing reform”, and a deliberate strategy might be needed on this front, especially in unpredictable environments where support might dry up or move on. One participant noted that this was an ongoing challenge, “We need to do some work on champions”.

Those working inside government can also tap into the wider local and international foresight ecosystem, including to leverage trend analysis or foresight work done by others. For example, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) [global megatrends](#) report has been widely shared across ANZSOG jurisdictions (and was presented by the CSIRO Futures team at a recent ANZSOG masterclass).



“There are commonalities around how you establish any unit and create legitimacy, demand, space, trust, outputs and then impact and value. Any new thing needs to do all of this. Meet people where they’re at and then push”

“Think about ‘frenemies’ and competitors...we often have to justify our work as “not stepping into others’ territory...over time people come to understand that foresight can add a layer of value to policy and programs...”

“There's often more appetite than understanding. Have to bring people on a journey. Still finding that we have to humbly build the appetite and demonstrate the value as we go along, making tangible products that people can hold but marry this with digital information”

HOW ARE JURISDICTIONS WORKING TO ENSURE THAT INSIGHTS FROM FORESIGHT INFORM POLICY, STRATEGY AND THE QUALITY OF DECISION-MAKING?

Communities and communication

Building networks and communities of practice featured across jurisdictions. Sometimes these are deliberate and formal, other times informal and organic. Singapore stresses the importance of networks at various levels of government. Communities feed on regular opportunities to engage and regular communications.

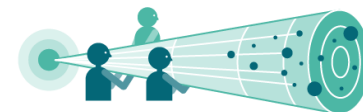
Communities of practice are often for public servants involved in ‘doing’, or learning to do, futures and foresight work, such as the APS’s Strategic Futures Network. Participants also saw the value of a community for those involved in building the case and the capability for foresight (this conversation showed the benefits of a safe space to share strategies, tactics and war stories).

Linking in to other relevant communities is also important; the intersection with policy communities of practice in particular. The APS Academy’s resources for Strategy, Policy & Evaluation links to Aotearoa New Zealand’s Policy Project ‘policy toolbox’ and its section on [futures and foresight tools](#), which in turn draws on material from a range of jurisdictions (UK, Singapore, Australia, Canada).

Several jurisdictions also reported efforts to communicate insights and content related to recent work on horizon scanning/trends through newsletters and other media accessible to or targeted at a range of public servants, or sometimes even the public.



Futures thinking



HOW ARE JURISDICTIONS WORKING TO ENSURE THAT INSIGHTS FROM FORESIGHT INFORM POLICY, STRATEGY AND THE QUALITY OF DECISION-MAKING?

What does success look like? Benefits realisation and showing impact

Participants discussed what success would look like if foresight were an integral part of policy, strategy and decision making. In general a systemic approach to foresight would enable more anticipatory governance and better decision making, with a focus on the longer-term (as opposed to short-term horizons to meet the immediate demands of ministers and election cycles) and coherent and sustainable policy based on shared foundational analysis. Agencies would do their own policy work but draw on a common repository of evidence and trend analysis. We would be better able to anticipate, respond to and “not be caught out by shocks or ‘unexpected events’”.

It was acknowledged that it is notoriously difficult to demonstrate the value of foresight as it can take so long between identifying a future challenge or opportunity, taking a decision based on foresight analysis, and that issue emerging down the track. It is difficult to show directly that the decision process was better as a result of a foresight component. Demonstrating the value of foresight and a foresight function therefore requires some interim indicators of success or signs that you are on the right track. Participants mentioned a few examples:

- Evidence of more demand for foresight work, decision-makers asking for it and referring to it
- Being ‘invited in’ to a policy challenge or strategy development process
- Examples of foresight work being proudly promoted in the public service
- Seeing public servants ‘having a go’ at using foresight tools and techniques and using the language of foresight in their work (or some similar indicator of developing ‘futures literacy’ across the public service)

The counterfactual is that “you are ignored”, and foresight analysis sits unused on a shelf.

When can we claim credit?... We are a disruptor that comes in and creates a step change in a system... But many of our big impacts will be about our partners taking ownership of the ideas/mindsets that we prompted (and they usually initially rejected”



“My favourite indicator of success is when someone sends me an email to say my analysis was wrong, because I've provoked a reaction. That's an opening to ask why do you hate it so much? What is it about this piece of work that gets under your skin?”

FINAL REFLECTIONS - SHARED INSIGHTS & CHALLENGES

Foresight is a key function of good government and an essential input to policy and strategy. It helps to identify new challenges and opportunities and to stress test or future proof policy responses. On the demand side, we need to build an appreciation that futures thinking is essential for rigorous long-term policy advice. “It’s not good policy advice unless you have thought about long-term impacts and future environments”.

On the supply side, foresight practitioners need to be savvy about the most effective way to land future-focused analysis and advice. How do we make our advice most compelling? It needs to be useful to be used. “We will only survive [as practitioners] as long as we’re demonstrating impact – that’s challenging but means we need to be always thinking about what we’re doing and how we’re doing it”. We need a theory of change and a deliberate operating model.

Things are changing. Many people across government are thinking about the future. “It’s not that people aren’t thinking about the future, they’re just doing it in an ad-hoc way. How can we be more systematic in supporting them?” “They may not know they need the skills”, or how to develop them.

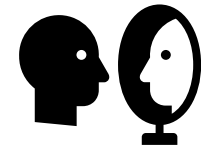
There is a diversity of approaches and platforms. In the end, what we’re dealing with is a people issue: How do we get people to think differently and grapple with the future? How do we enable government to ‘take care of tomorrow today’. Different tools will be needed for different audiences. What is common across our practice is:

- The need to build trust, networks, communities and capability. It’s a people-focused job even though the products are built on analysis.
- There’s a whole lot of skills in futures work. There’s also a craft element, and it requires judgment of what to do, when to do it, and being ready when the opportunity arises.
- Success is hard to measure. In the end success is when we see how the system is changing.
- We need to build coalitions of the willing and of the interested. Leverage and support others working to improve how governments works (innovation labs, data and digital etc).

More participatory and inclusive approaches will increase the visibility and quality of foresight work and is part of building more democratic anticipatory governance.

You can’t outsource strategy!”.

“Practitioners using new tools or processes - like design thinking - will run into the same challenges as futures teams – bumping up against reluctance to use new tools. We need to bring the innovative thinkers together”.



“Thinking about the permanence of these kinds of functions - futures people are outsiders, and being in the system can be uncomfortable. What’s the broader ecosystem of people inside and outside government, and how are we building that community?”

A FINAL WORD – FROM ANZSOG

The degree of ambition across the participating jurisdiction is impressive. The variations in approach and stage of the building capability journey provided a basis for dialogue that generated reflection, insights and shared learning. Participants clearly appreciated the opportunity to discuss common challenges and learn from each other. We hope the lessons and experiences will be useful for other organisations and other jurisdictions.

Singapore’s story was one of evolution in structure, approach and deliverables in response to their growing insight into what the task was, the tools they had to execute it, and how demand was evolving. It is not a “set and forget” function. If you’re doing the work properly you will naturally respond to the signals you’re picking up across the horizons including those that have implications for your own work and approach.

Building capability across government in any relatively new area is hard. It requires fortitude and resilience, experimentation and reflection. ANZSOG’s curated conversation format is designed to offer a safe place for these kinds of discussions. Get in touch if there’s a topic or jurisdiction you’d like us to engage in a curated conversation, at e.education@anzsog.edu.au.

Thanks to all our participants for their honest and open engagement. Special thanks to Jeannette Kwek for stimulating our conversation.

Postscript - Aotearoa New Zealand’s Long Term Insights Briefings

Aotearoa New Zealand’s Long Term Insights Briefings process was also of interest to participants. The NZ *Public Service Act 2020* requires chief executives of government departments to produce a LTIB once every 3 years. However, Aotearoa’s approach to building futures thinking into government contrasts with the jurisdictions involved in this curated conversation because currently there is no deliberate capability building effort associated with the LTIBs, or whole-of-government foresight team providing trend analysis. We will all be keeping a watching brief on developments and impact as the first round of briefings are progressively delivered over the coming months. You can read more about the process and access the briefings here: [Long-term Insights Briefings - Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission](#), and in this [ANZSOG article](#) (first published in *The Mandarin*).

“Opportunities to leverage the experiences of others are important”.

“Building capability and changing mindsets takes time, effort and resilience. Singapore has been on this journey for decades.”



REFERENCES & RESOURCES

References used in this document

- ❑ [Conversations for the Future \(csf.gov.sg\)](https://csf.gov.sg) outlines the history of strategic futures in Singapore in 2 documents. Singapore Government.
- ❑ CSIRO (2022) [Our Future World – global megatrends impacting the way we live over the coming decades](#)
- ❑ [Navigating uncertainty: the Future of Futures Analysis in the Australian Public Service](#), Policy Options Paper, National Security College, ANU, (June 2020)
- ❑ [Long-term Insights Briefings - Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission](#), for a description of the LTIB process and access to the briefings themselves.
- ❑ [Taking care of tomorrow today – New Zealand’s Long-term Insights Briefings \(themandarin.com.au\)](https://themandarin.com.au)
- ❑ OECD (2018) [Centre Stage 2: the organisation and functions at the centre of government in OECD countries](#)

Resources

- ❑ Singapore [Centre for Strategic Futures](#) website
- ❑ [Futures thinking | Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet \(DPMC\)](#) – Futures thinking tools from the Aotearoa New Zealand’s Policy Project ‘Policy Methods Toolbox’ (also forms part of the Australian Public Service Commission Academy resources [Policy Methods Toolbox | Australian Public Service Academy \(apsacademy.gov.au\)](#))