

# Tips for Better Strategic Foresight

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- 1. Keep an open mind and "learning approach" to change:** Never catch yourself saying you *know the future*. Given the complexity and pace of change, the illusion of certainty exacts a high price: complacency, hubris, inevitable surprise, and often demise.
- 2. Surface & challenge your assumptions:** Try to identify your personal blind-spots as a leader. Test the conventional wisdom in your organization. What assumptions are weak and no longer useful? *How do you do this?*
  -  **Through multiple perspectives:** Consult the heretics, the fringe, different cultural and generational views, and stakeholders. Look at problems using multiple frameworks and disciplinary lenses. Read unfamiliar magazines and periodicals you disagree with.
  -  **Through the long view:** Look back in time twice as far as you look forwards. This will help overcome the parochialism of the present.
  -  **Through strategic dialogue in groups:** Assumptions are best explored in groups. "Dialogue" is a special form of communication that creates a shared space for this while enabling the conditions for action.
- 3. Embrace uncertainty:** Most of us hate uncertainty and change—yet these are also the sources of strategic advantage and opportunity. Talk to artists and "creatives" who have learned to harness uncertainty to perform well and be productive.
- 4. Think about alternative futures, not just forecasts.** Many risk assessment tools ignore or minimize uncertainties. We are still too dependent on single-point linear forecasts which only work in the short term (and increasingly less so). *Scenario thinking* and other tools can help overcome these planning traps when thinking ahead. Also, look for *patterns* in addition to data. Disruptive trends always escape conventional measures. The past is often a poor guide to understanding our future.
- 5. Become an explorer (again):** Many of us have been trained to exploit incremental advantage in business. Yet good strategic foresight requires a different mindset as well: the ability to explore the unknown— skills that are often discouraged in large organizations. *So how do you do this?*
  -  **Take some field trips —don't hide behind a desk:** *The future is already here; it's just not evenly distributed yet. Field trips can help you get "out of your box" and experience first hand experiments, innovations, entrepreneurs. Seeing is often believing, especially when HQ is far from emerging markets, which are increasingly the source of innovation.*
- 6. Prototype the future.** Try new experiments. Instead of taking a "plan, predict, and control" approach, take a *discovery-driven* approach. You'll never have enough information in a complex situation, so the only way to succeed is to try something low risk and see if it works. Iterate. Review. Then scale.