

Futures Research Program

Bringing structure to the way we think about the future

Melanie Swan, Futurist
MS Futures Group
Phone: 650-681-9482
Fax: 504-910-3803
<http://www.melanieswan.com>
m@melanieswan.com

Agenda

- What is Futures Research?
- Why a Futures Research program?
- Worldwide Futures Studies in Academia
- Futures Research Techniques
- Futures Research Topical Coverage

What is Futures Research?

- An approach, structure and philosophy for thinking about the future
 - Formal quantitative and qualitative techniques
- How does Futures Research fit with other organizational planning techniques?
 - Most organizational planning is limited to forecasting, short-term (months, quarters) linear predictions with many data elements present
 - Futures Research uses a variety of quantitative and qualitative techniques to think more abstractly about the longer-term future (5-20+ years out), identify potential discontinuities and compose strategies for responding to whatever future scenarios occur
- Futures Research is not explicitly about making predictions
 - Too easy to be wrong, hard to add value
 - Incidental predictions arise such as the likelihood of certain trends

Why a Futures Research program?

- The future is important and many institutions have Futures Groups
 - Most branches of the US government (FBI, Army, Navy, DHS, DARPA)
 - Many non-profit organizations (AARP, American Cancer Society)
 - A growing # of corporations (British Telecom, IBM, Hallmark, Nortel)
- Futures Studies is a discipline, there are formal ways to think about the future
 - University of Hawaii and University of Houston offer undergraduate and advanced degrees
 - A futures studies course is compulsory for all undergraduates in Taiwan
- Useful offerings flow from the Futures Studies discipline; cutting edge Futures Research is valuable to a number of audiences
 - People must be quickly and effectively informed of new technologies and ideas from a trusted source
 - Pace of technology creation and adoption continues to accelerate
 - New concepts are applying across industries (e.g.; open source, long tail, tagging, globalization, interactive entertainment)

Futures Studies is an important global academic imperative

- Degree programs and/or research centers
 - University of Hawaii
 - <http://www.futures.hawaii.edu/>
 - University of Houston
 - <http://b3308-adm.cl.uh.edu/futureweb/>
 - Finland Futures Research Centre
 - Tamkang University, Taiwan
 - Stellenbosch
 - Charles University, Prague

Formal Techniques: Quantitative and Qualitative

Forecasting: Short-term linear extrapolation from the present state

Scenario Planning: Unlikely but possible future states of the world and accompanying action plans

Systems Thinking: How system complexity influences outputs

Business Intelligence and Trend Prediction: How are competitive dynamics and other forces changing

Ecosystem Collaboration: web-based interaction between customers, vendors, end-users, financial community

Simulation: Multi-party role play and experience of impact of decision-making through successive steps

Futures Research: Topical Coverage as of October 2005

■ **New World Phenomena**

- The world is flat (globalization, localization); outsourcing, insourcing, rightsourcing
- New business models: open source, flat tail, collaboration, wikis, folksonomy
- News and entertainment trends, interactivity, gaming, metaverse-worlds, PVRs, flat panel, HDTV, IPTV, storage is free, blogging, podcasting, vlogging
- Communications: Skype; worldwide wireless broadband, mobile devices, wearable computing, heads-up display

■ **Institution evolution**

- Corporate citizenship, resource sustainability, poverty eradication, social entrepreneuring, meaningful work; post-money transcendence culture
- Rethinking institutions; government, law enforcement, patents, healthcare, insurance, universities

■ **Long-term state of the world trends**

- Demographics: global graying, young adults living at home
- Energy: worldwide rate of energy consumption declining, hybrids, alternative fuel
- Decline of US and Western productivity; declining numbers of immigrants, PhDs and patents awarded, papers published, corporate scandals, Sarbanes Oxley
- Rise of the creative class, services economy, informal learning

Thank You!

Melanie Swan, Futurist
MS Futures Group
Phone: 650-681-9482
Fax: 504-910-3803
<http://www.melanieswan.com>
m@melanieswan.com

Licensing: [Creative Commons 3.0](#)