

## A Review of Strategic Governance Foresight Policies in Human Geographies In Iran

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** Human activity is necessarily limited to time and the future. This includes all levels of policy and policy-making, regardless of the level or type of governance. In principle, policymakers do not pay enough attention to the long-term consequences of their policy choices or lack the ability to reflect on the various possible future states of the world and how to achieve or avoid them. Government decisions with poor foresight will cause harm to society. On the other hand, it should be noted that strategic foresight has nothing to do with predicting the future. The growing need to deal with the pressures of short-term policy on long-term decisions and issues related to long-term decision-making and wide-ranging intergovernmental justice has necessitated such futuristic research. The aim of this study is to design and institutionalize foresight in governance systems to provide the logic of intervention and the basic hypotheses of the risks associated with it and possible solutions.

**Method:** This research is practical from the point of view of the goal and is considered as mixed research and it uses the methods of library studies, expert panel.

**Findings:** Research has shown that while strategic foresight provides a useful tool for navigating unexpected realms, it alone cannot guarantee wise decision-making for policies and other human skills and characteristics.

**Conclusion:** This study argues that futurism activities face three important, interconnected, and enduring challenges, including paying attention to the value of futurism, ensuring that policy-making processes are properly integrated with futurism activities, and maintaining They are attracting the attention of policymakers and their senior advisers.

**Keywords:** Institutionalization, Strategic Foresight, Governance, Policy Making, Intervention Logic

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## Introduction

The term "futurism" was first coined in the early 1930s by the English novelist H.G. Wells was invented to refer to principled thinking about the future. This word is in contrast to "retrospection" which pays attention to the lesson from the past (Sardar, 2010).

The exploration of "futurism" and "retrospection" is the product of man's deep desire for "insight", that is, more knowledge, wisdom and understanding. The basis of futurism is that the future is still being formed and built, and it can be actively influenced in shaping it or even building it. This attitude is an empowering understanding for government and citizens. For example, flexible foresight (Eriksson & Weber, 2008) and sustainability foresight (Truffer, Voss, & Konard, 2006) are examples of attempts to use foresight in decision making. While technical and scientific terms vary around the world, "foresight" and "strategic foresight" can be used interchangeably. Simply put, strategic foresight is designed to enhance the capacity of what it calls "optimistic governance" (Fuerth & Faber, 2012). In fact, it means seeing the ability of elected officials to look ahead, anticipate, imagine, evaluate, plan, explore, respond. The main purpose of predictive governance, even if not all of them can be fully strengthened, is to help policymakers to influence current decisions, events and trends, to pay attention to important dependencies on routes, to filter important signals of deviant noises. Identifying risks, opportunities, and problems early is gradual and sudden. With such approaches, policymakers need to be more prepared for what lies ahead and be able to make more informed investments and policies, use a variety of policy innovations to improve overall adaptability and flexibility. Ideally, the strategic foresight should take corrective or preventive action sooner and incrementally, and make broader and disruptive policy changes in the next period after causing significant damage. In fact, the goal here is not to predict the future, but to equip leaders to shape and guide the future.

Studying the views of experts on how futurism is implemented, concludes that there is diversity in their views. Havas (2003) in his article "Social, Economic and Developmental Needs: The Focus on Futuristic Plans" in the field of futuristic process design argues that if decision makers are in favor of a particular approach and process, it is not desirable to Frameworks with different approaches should be developed according to the context and other factors. Therefore, designing futuristic frameworks with different approaches seems to be a necessity. In his book *The Picture of the Future*, Freddie Polak (1973) says that we live in two worlds, the present and what is imagined, the future is born outside of this analysis. The future is a concept that is completely mental and dependent on thought and has no external existence, and what can be experienced is the present. Goodarzi et

al. (2016) in the article "Presenting a proposed framework of regional foresight as an interdisciplinary research field in the Yazd province planning document" while introducing the approach of foresight and futures studies by criticizing the existing planning process to a new planning process And examines the need to use a futuristic approach and presents a new process based on poststructuralist paradigms. But in order to apply the futuristic approach in this research, there will be two basic assumptions. First, the future can't be known at all; The future remains uncertain. There are many possible futures, some seem to be much more desirable than others. While the possibility of these alternative futures can be explored, it is not possible to know in advance which one will happen (Conway, 2006). Given this situation, the main purpose of foresight is to generate more knowledge about possible futures and to collect a lot of related quantitative and qualitative data, identify emerging trends and issues, assess risks and opportunities, and estimate probabilities. Such analyzes enable policymakers to better prepare for the future and, if necessary, take the necessary predictive and corrective actions. Using foresight, policymakers can reduce the likelihood of a crisis or surprise due to unexpected events. But to what extent may prudent and precautionary measures not be exaggerated? Research in the fields of intertwined, complex science, and complex adaptive systems has shown that many limitations on humanity's ability to "make sense," confirm future system configurations, or imaginary scenarios before a phenomenon occurs, or There is an event. Contrary to this view, there are questionable policies, and it is likely that governments and communities will face significant costs in the future if no preventive or precautionary measures are taken (e.g., the impact of demographic change). (European Environment Agency, 2013; Olson, 2016)

The second and related assumption is that the future of the first degree will not be determined by gradual, linear, and largely predictable processes. In contrast, dynamic change will occur and will often be accompanied by great surprises, nonlinear changes, and unexpected events, with such events quoted by Donald Rumsfeld as "Black Swans" (Taleb, 2007) and "The Unknown. From a policy perspective, the goal is not to anticipate events, but rather to create institutions and political frameworks that need to be considered. Institutions and frameworks that have sufficient resilience to deal with negative shocks and at the same time have sufficient ability and adaptability to take advantage of the opportunities caused by positive shocks ( For example, the invention of the Internet and 3D printing or the development of robots have led to standardization measures). According to Steve Rainer, the goal should be to design policies for the "unpredictable future" or to "strengthen resilience to deal with the unexpected" (House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, 2014). Of course,

combining strength and skill is not an easy task, but it certainly involves maintaining a degree of organizational deficiency or redundancy without which the ability to respond to unforeseen events is greatly reduced. Sporadic assessments of current and future trends and developments, based on the intuition of those in charge as has been the practice in the past, are no longer sufficient, and the lack of respective strategic and operational capacities may become even more dangerous if complexity and the dynamics of change continue to increase. Policy-makers in government (but also leaders in business or civil society organizations) are increasingly forced to assess their environments systematically and to identify the relevant upcoming issues early on. They must think ahead strategically in order to reduce “surprises”, to increase the room for maneuver, and to improve the overall flexibility of governance. There are several reasons why strategic foresight should attract researchers. First, foresight and foresight methods are well-known areas and have long been applied in practice. Strategic foresight as a concept, however, is fairly new and puts emphasis on bringing these forward-looking techniques into strategic decision making. Strategic foresight provides insights into organizations' operating environment of challenges and opportunities and identification of innovations and opens up the competitive space. Second, strategic foresight must be anchored in strategic management—a multidisciplinary area that should attract researchers from areas such as management, economics, organizations, sociology, and psychology. Third, although research on strategic foresight is still limited, there is a growing research interest in the field. The existing literature is nevertheless fragmented and not properly integrated. The academic field is weakly organized. In this context, it is argued that foresight activities face three important, interconnected and enduring challenges, including paying attention to the value of foresight, ensuring the proper integration of policy-making processes with foresight activities, and Maintain the attention of policymakers and their senior advisers. With this introduction, the purpose of this research is to describe the nature, history of futuristic activities and the methods used to examine the reason for these activities in the next step. In doing so, four interventional logics of drawing and basic hypotheses, associated risks, and possible solutions are listed. Therefore, the main question of this research is organized in this direction that: What kind of foresight do governments need? What principles should guide the location and organization of such capabilities? And how can more incentives be created for government decision-makers to pay proper attention to the results of foresight?

### **Theoretical Foundations**

Strategic foresight has nothing to do with predicting the future. Futurism has a real interest in future possibilities, and its intellectual roots and

methodological approach are different. Futurism has strong links with the field of futurology (in many different forms, including futurism and futurology). Foresight is also related to strategic thinking, planning methods and different types of planning, especially strategic planning and long-term planning. In addition, many other activities, both in the public and private sectors, have futuristic dimensions, although they are not typically considered "futuristic activities." Almost all governments make systematic predictions and forecasts, including long-term forecasts. Although foresight is more prevalent, especially in macroeconomic policies, it is also characteristic of many policy areas (for example, trying to determine the potential future demand for public services such as Health, education and remedial services. Undoubtedly, careful foresight is essential for serious strategy and future planning and is therefore an important part of good governance (Boston, 2017). The two main potentials of futurism for governance are accountability for continuous change and the establishment of citizen-centered governance, which highlight the current issues of governance and the role of government. Futurism can be used at different levels and steps of governance. Among the different paradigms of futurism, the approach of each of them to the discussion of governance may be different. Slaughter considers the main categories of futurism to be the three categories of popular futurism, problem-oriented futurism, and epistemological and critical futurism (Slaughter, 2002).

Futurism is more related to governance than any other; Critical foresight is based on active consensus with communities and stakeholders, and instead of a one-process approach to decision-making, it requires forms of institutions that allow for critical reflection and reorientation of strategies in the ongoing process. . In this approach, transparency and openness in the decision-making process are considered (Puglisi & While, 2004) and there will always be concerns for times beyond the present time. This includes not only the interests (needs or rights) of future generations, but also all those who have not yet been born. Assuming that governments must also serve the interests of today's people (Lawrence, 2014). Otherwise, there are many areas that indicate the dominance of short-term goals over long-term goals. Democratically elected governments have strong political incentives to focus on the immediate issues and concerns of society and prioritize political options with short-term and positive electoral returns. For these reasons, Dennis Thompson states: "Democracies are systematically inclined to present needs and, if weighed, they overlook the future." This means that democratic systems have an innate tendency to prioritize the interests of the present generation over the interests of the next generation and the interests of the present electorate over the electorate of the future (Thompson, 2005). Democracy has historically been the best political system, but we still face many challenges: Can democracy in the world act

as a military to maintain intergenerational neutrality? Representatives in a parliamentary democracy are serving the people present, but when it comes to exploring the interests of future generations, there are no guarantees. This policy structure calls for pressure on future silent generations and avoids problem solving (quoted in The Washington Post, October 2013). The only way to meet these challenges is to look at some form of intergenerational exchange that is a lasting and inevitable feature of forward-looking governments. Understanding the nature, demands and limitations of interim exchanges, making realistic proposals for innovative democratic reforms, protecting future interests and helping to build and strengthen the foundations of a good society over several generations, the need for future decisions It is more pictorial. Although such goals may seem ambitious, the approach taken in this study is based on a critical point of view and is not entirely an exercise in utopian fantasy. The need for a complex system of understanding the dynamics of the values of nations and societies in such an approach will lead us to a more comprehensive and inclusive

### **Material and methods**

The data analysis method of Brown and Clark (2006) was used to analyze the data, and all interviews were analyzed line by line. It can be said that Brown and Clark consider the data analysis process to have three general stages: text description, text explanation and interpretation, and text integration and reintegration. Therefore, the data analysis of this study was carried out in three stages: 1) identification of topics, features, and contexts (basic concepts), 2) classification of themes (organized themes), and 3) overarching themes. There are various ways to assess the quality and validity of the findings of the content analysis, such as using independent coders, receiving feedback from interviewees, and applying consistency and coherence with research literature and valid studies in the field of research.

The research data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with fourteen specialists in futures studies with different research fields and in different regions of Iran. In fact, the main research tool was the interview. Half of the interviews were conducted online due to COVID-19 pandemic conditions.

### **Research findings**

#### **- The logic of strategic foresight intervention**

Based on the opinion of the interviewees, there are four main rationale for intervention for governments investing in futuristic activities. These logics cover both the supply and demand side of the democratic process. First, it

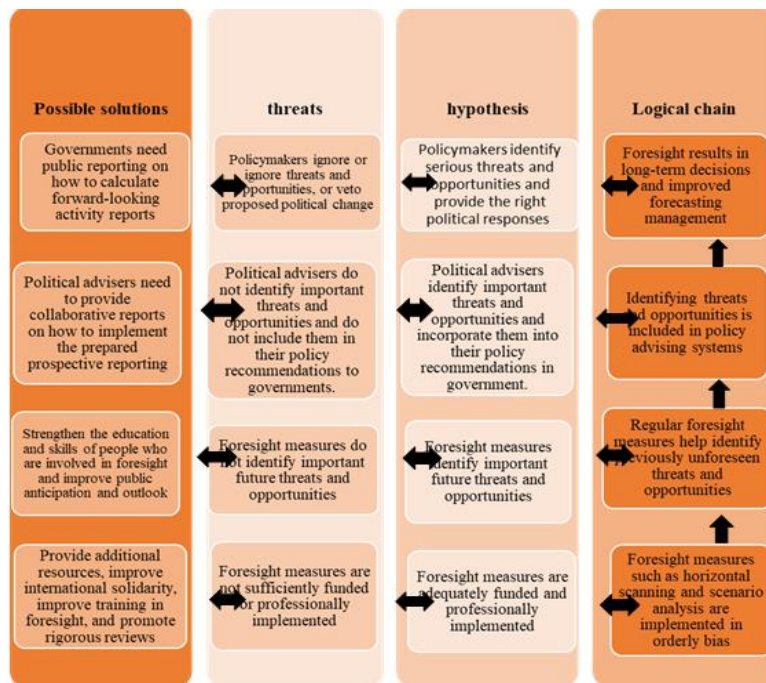
is believed that foresight can increase the ability and capacity of "forecast management". One envisaged way to do this is to create new knowledge related to awareness of the possible future (Olson ,2016)

The basic logic chain under this perspective is presented in Figure (1) along with the hypotheses, risks, and possible therapeutic measures. Additional steps can easily be added, however, Figure (1) predicts the rationale for the supply side to perform futuristic activities, and also shows why this rationale may be wrong. To be considered. In particular, investing in strategic foresight does not involve the wise use of resources by policymakers, so from an institutional design perspective, the fundamental issue is how to make a close and lasting connection between foresight processes and day-to-day government policy-making. The second inbound logic, which also works on the supply side, includes: foresight actions while being able to identify previously unforeseen risks and opportunities, drawing policymakers' attention to issues and considerations. They also consider the future. Identified subjects may also be "out of mind" because they are far-sighted (Jacobs and Matthews, 2012; Jones & Bamgartner, 2005). They can be referred to as "attention bias", "attention deficit" or "selective attention problem". In this way, futuristic activities can be used as "magnifying devices" or "virtual shocks": futuristic activities can shut down memory, reducing long-term risks. More intensely and urgently, the elected officials' understanding of the nature of the path and the collective effects reinforce many gradual problems, the extent of threats and effects in the next election or in some important events Increase political and attract the attention of the government. But in order to be logically effective, they must involve policymakers. They should have a good time and attention to the information provided, and policymakers should consider them in discussions and responses to their policies. This is where the most practical challenges arise.

While there are two logics of intervention in the supply side of the democratic process, the other two logics are identified, both of which are mainly on demand, either by changing the structure of political incentives or by increasing decision constraints. Receptors are affected. High-quality foresight processes and the production of useful and timely outputs (such as reports and recommendations) not only empower forecasting management but also drive more demand for long-term thinking and management. Proper risk also helps.

The rationale for the third intervention is as follows: Foresight can strengthen political incentives for policymakers to make prudent long-term decisions. This is done, for example, in bringing together key actors in the consultative policymaking community. Such processes create a shared understanding of possible futures and influence attitudes, values, and motivations. Such processes, in turn, influence the nature of the wider

public debate on future policy options. Thus, robust and well-designed foresight processes have the potential to influence the dimensions of decision-making and make difficult but at the same time sensible investments and implement policies. There are various hypotheses at the heart of intervention logic, each of which can be questioned. Consultative processes, for example, may not create a greater measure of consensus among the political elite and may only be more fragmented. Likewise, there is no guarantee that elite-based processes will have a significant impact on public opinion or reduce opposition to decisions that impose the costs of leading policymaking. The logic of the fourth intervention is linked to the third: futuristic activities impose political constraints on policymakers (Boston, 2017). It is politically difficult to ignore constraints when gradual or separate policies are clearly defined and widely discussed at the general level. Again, this intervention logic depends on a number of questionable hypotheses. If the occurrence of gradual or severe problems leads to distant years, it causes less concern in the members of the community. Likewise, governments may only announce policy changes and claim solutions. In this case, even if the policies are poorly designed or poorly implemented, the differences will be minor. On the other hand, the proposed changes may be deliberately delayed for several years. Under this scenario, there is a threat that the future government will decide not to implement the planned changes.



(a) *ne of the two logics of providing collateral for strategic futures in governance*



## **Main challenges**

In practice, few doubt that the reason for public investment in futurism is intuitively attractive. After all, why do governments not want to think about the future? Why do they not want to prepare well for the future or understand the serious advice about the threats and dangers that have arisen? Nevertheless intuitive attractions, diverse areas of intervention may be presented on paper: a careful examination of the extensive literature on foresight theory and practices reveals many concerns, objections, and problems. To take. In relation to government foresight activities, there are three important challenges that are interconnected, enduring, and well-defined: Certainly, efforts without providing value for action, and how to ensure that the findings of foresight action are correct in the integration process. It would be futile with policies and how to secure the attention of political leaders and senior executives.

### **-Theatrical value**

The debate over the value of futuristic activities in governments continues. Critics argue that there is little evidence of an increase in the added value of foresight activities or an improvement in the quality of decisions. It is argued that the consequences of such actions are usually too general, intangible, open, speculative, or vague to be useful or easily usable for specific policy problems (Day, 2013)

Fans do not agree on such claims. For a variety of reasons, the validity of these allegations and claims against it is indeed difficult. The first is the methodological issue, evaluation and presentation of impact.

How can it be determined whether specific foresight measures or influencing a particular policy decision are very important? What is the right alternative truth? On the other hand, the question arises as to whether foresight processes have correctly identified sufficiently predictable problems.

But still this question creates problems. Many often argue in favor of the idea that the global financial crisis during 2009 was easily predictable. Of course, some economists and experts in the months and years before the crisis had predicted that serious economic problems would follow. Even if the crisis had been better predicted, few governments would have been able to take the necessary measures to deal with the crisis. The second is the problem of

evaluating the assessed impact of foresight and determining its cost-effectiveness. Which evaluation method is appropriate? In addition, which particular futuristic methods and approaches will generate the most benefit in generating practical insights and policy knowledge? The answers are not clear; Of course, this does not mean that regular activity is useless for thinking about the future. The argument is not that long-term economic forecasts, or any other type of forecast, are worthless; But showing their application is not easy either.

. Another related topic is the discussion of the scientific state of "futurism". The central issue of any debate is how "science" is defined. According to Popper's approach, "science" is defined by precise speculation and is controlled by repeated experiments and tested and repeated using precise methods and standards (Popper, 2002). From this perspective, most "futuristic" activities are not "scientific." A small number of environmental conditions affecting future events are controllable; Therefore, repetitive experiments are not possible. In addition, the findings or results of foresight activities are not, in principle, reproducible in the form of predictions or hypotheses. Hence, in this approach, most futuristic activities, although strict and systematic in nature, are best seen as an art or skill.

### **-Integration with the policy-making process**

Effective future thinking must be "closely linked to government policies and strategies" (Committee on the General Administration of the House of Commons, 2007). This means that the day-to-day policy-making actions of government departments and organizations must also be integrated with the decision-making processes of elected officials. However, it is easier said than done, and practical obstacles have proven this. As a result, it is often difficult to incorporate prospective activities and findings into timely, coordinated, and orderly government decision-making processes (Dee, 2013). Those responsible for foresight are often organizationally separate from those who prepare policy papers and advise elected officials. In fact, they are usually far from the heart of the policy apparatus. Hence, their entry into important policy-making processes may not be easy. Foresight, on the other hand, may only occur intermittently and do not have constant communication. Problems will arise if horizontal vision is poorly coordinated in government apparatuses. Another

problem arises from differences in analytical traditions, research methods, and practices created by the foresight team and related policymakers. For example, it has been suggested that such groups have cognitive differences and conflicting approaches to problem solving (Dryer & Steng, 2013).

### **-Leadership commitment**

Ensuring and maintaining the appropriate level of interest of policymakers and senior officials in finding futuristic processes poses another challenge. Political leaders in their time face constant demands; Their opportunities for serious long-term horizon scrutiny are limited. They face the current short-term electoral requirements. In addition, elected officials are more politically encouraged to address urgent problems than to solve emergencies where little information is available to voters. In such a situation, it is very easy for politicians to ignore or downplay the efforts of those involved in futurism. Furthermore, careful thinking about the future may call into question current microcosms, long-term assumptions, and current policy plans. Accordingly, even if it does not cause political disgrace, it will cause tension. Surprisingly, critical thinking is often unacceptable to policymakers and may disappear quickly.

But the issue is not limited to political leadership; There are also difficulties in attracting senior managers in government organizations to the interest in long-term thinking. People involved in directing the work of foresight units, strategic policy units, and policy planning units often find it difficult to get the attention of their senior managers. If the focus of bureaucratic leaders as well as their political masters is still short-lived. Many agency heads reject requests for commission studies on long-term issues and foresight measures such as scenario analysis. For some senior executives, only the threats or political problems that arise during their tenure seem to be worth noting. Anything beyond this time is someone else's problem. In addition, it has been widely observed that in times of budget cuts, public sector organizations to reduce their investment in future policy-making work focus on various examples of the closure of established units and strategic units. Of the three problems discussed above, the most challenging is the challenge of paying attention to value. But this is not an acute problem. Moreover, almost the same issue has been widely supported in most policy consultations and

government activities. For two problems, there are a number of potential solutions that are discussed below.

Retreating from the details and ignoring the various conditions makes a case likely to move forward. Strategic foresight sees this situation as a necessary condition for long-term management. If leaders fail in their horizontal dynamics or progressive issues for gradual or sudden problems, good future management will be impossible. Strong foresight processes can help identify such problems, assess their potential impact, and provide opportunities to explore possible solutions. But if foresight is a prerequisite for good long-term management, it is clearly not a sufficient condition. Strategic foresight does not automatically become strategic decisions. The strengths of your rights may prevent you from making cautious decisions. Therefore, for prudent long-term management, strategic foresight must be complemented by other mechanisms and tools, including appropriate commitment devices.

## **Conclusion**

Long-term governance requires proper foresight, and closing one's eyes to the future is irresponsible and immoral. Policymakers should not ignore significant problems and harms beyond their potential "tenure." But what constitutes a "true futurism"? Foresight means investing well in the supply side and paying close attention to demand-side incentives. Only if the supply and demand side participates in the democratic process will the necessary conditions for forecasting management be met. But exactly what it means in terms of resources and institutional design is less clear. "Adequate investment" cannot be easily determined. In any case, there is no absolute right amount, and it is obvious that investing in nothing is very small.

Similarly, there is no ideal or optimal model for futurism in advanced democracies, and there are only plausible approaches. Therefore, each country must adjust, refine and design its institutional frameworks in accordance with the specific needs and the reconstruction of these arrangements in response to changing conditions and ongoing studies. It is certainly possible to draw on useful design principles and strategies and identify realistic options (Dryer and Stang, 2013; Habger, 2009; Schmidt, 2015). First, in terms of methods, the set of future tools, albeit in part, is still

evolving; Providing a set of useful tools for examining long-term threats and opportunities and examining alternative futures should be considered as a complement to comprehensive analytical tools in the hands of professional policy advisers. Properly applied forecasting methods can provide rational basis hypotheses, a common framework for scenario planning, and common reference points for long-term planning. This means that they do not end at all. They can identify "weak signals" and magnify the issues needed, but they can't provide ethical advice on what policymakers should do in response. They can identify challenges, but they cannot solve difficult political choices. Wisdom in such cases must come from other sources.

Second, if foresight is to be done, it must be done well (King and Thomas, 2007). False and critical thinking about the future will not add value. Accurate thinking requires expertise, logic and strong evidence. This requires the close collaboration of highly skilled scientists with subject matter experts with appropriate public resource investments (eg, training in foresight, database development, modeling and future capability). Blogging, conducting surveys and supporting consulting processes). Foresight reports should be subject to proper external scrutiny and make available to the public.

Third, while there are benefits to creating a dedicated central foresight unit with good resources in all government agencies, foresight activities should also be widely distributed and properly distributed in government offices and agencies. Be networked. In addition, those with visionary responsibilities must be in the organizational (not just physical) vicinity of those who provide policy advice to decision-makers, whether ministers or presidents. In other words, futuristic activities must be done in a "dominant society" and "interconnected" way: they must be organized and correct (ongoing and not merely episodic) in planning. Normalities should be integrated and preferably integrated into routine programs and decisions, executive branches and legislatures. Efforts should also be made to engage people regularly in special foresight activities through open, transparent, consultative processes.

Fourth, to the extent that cross-sectional prejudice leads to insufficient demand for policy-making in future thinking, there are conflicting mechanisms that apply at both the policy-making level and the administrative system. In short, heroes must be at the heart of the government sector and at the heart of the policy-making system

for the future. Only in this way can we be very sure that long-term strategies and horizontal dynamics are properly prepared from serious sources and taken seriously. But not all political leaders and policymakers value foresight, and not everyone welcomes the political challenges posed by such processes. Therefore, there is a constant risk that futuristic activity will be neglected or underestimated. Using committed devices to address this political asymmetry offers a partial solution. Such devices create enduring motivations and constraints and help shift time scales toward the future. There may be other ways to encourage and explore futurism. A vibrant and invigorating culture seems to act as a tool of internal commitment. But cultivating and maintaining such a culture requires inspiring leadership, sacrifice, empowerment, and possibly the continuation of internal or external threats. These conditions are rarely offered immediately. An alternative would be to build a strong ecosystem of the future through public and private partnerships in key business organizations, local governments, civil society organizations, research institutes and voluntary departments. Such an approach could include national initiatives and specific sectors. Finally, while foresight measures can provide greater insight and improve decision-making capabilities, the future does not necessarily always remain uncertain; There will be many unpredictable, sudden and destructive events. Unexpected events are inevitable. Governments cannot prepare for all events, and not all risks can be identified or reduced. While strategic foresight provides a useful tool for navigating unexpected realms, it cannot guarantee wise policymaking, let alone flexibility or greater social adjustment. These require other human skills and characteristics.

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