



## A Study of the Role of Prediction in Futures Studies

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** This article consists of two parts. In the first part, we show the mean of prediction and its position in futures studies. In this regard, the opinions of various futurists regarding the role of prediction are examined, and then various types and forms of predicting are mentioned. In the next section, by dealing with Hempel and Oppenheim's deductive-nomological model, it is shown what attitude and approach this model has led to in futures studies.

**Method:** This article is descriptive. The data were collected in a library method and discussed and analyzed analytically.

**Findings:** Today, futures studies have moved from the era of positivist thinking (that is, accurate prediction and control of the future) to accepting multiple potential futures resulting from different perspectives and worldviews. Today, it is clear to everyone that accurate prediction of the future is practically impossible. Therefore, futures studies emphasizes discovering a wide range of alternative futures and choosing among them.

**Conclusion:** According to the findings of the research, it can be said that if accurate prediction were possible, we would no longer have the ability to shape the future and interfere in it. Therefore, the future is the output of action, intentionality, and unintended consequences of human actions. As a result, futures **Studies** is not only for definite prediction, but more for exploring future alternatives and choosing among them.

**Keywords:** Futures Studies, Prediction, Forecasting, Deductive-Nomological Model.

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## **Introduction**

Since ancient times, humans have been fascinated by predicting the future and trying to understand and shape future developments. In other words, the concern of the future is as old as humans themselves; since the moment when human was considered speaking and thinking being, he has been searching for the future, and thinking about the future has been one of the central activities of humans since the beginning of human civilization (Masini, ۲۰۰۶, p. ۱۱۵۸). From this perspective, there is not much difference between the initial motivation for pursuing futures studies then and now. What has changed are the tools and the role that Futures Studies has taken over from the desire to know about the future (Moll, 1996, p.16). Today we live in an era where the future no longer resembles the past or the present, and we cannot predict the future by imitating the past or the present. In this way, futures studies have become more necessary. Regarding the importance of futures studies, Dator (2019, p.3) suggests that futures studies are generally misunderstood from two perspectives. On the one hand, some believe that it is a predictive science. According to him, such futures studies is not worthy of attention. On the other hand, the fact that he desperately denied any prediction is not considered. Although the future cannot be predicted, there are theories and methods that futurists have developed in recent years that have proved useful. Applying futures studies theories and methods allows people to usefully predict the future and shape it according to their preferences (Dator, 2019, p.3).

The purpose of this article is to answer the question: what is prediction from the point of view of futures studies? To answer this question, the role of prediction in the natural and social sciences will be discussed first, then the definitions of prediction and its types and forms, and the different views that exist on prediction in the social sciences and on prediction will be discussed. Finally, the role of prediction and its implications for futures studies will be discussed regarding Hempel and Oppenheim's a Deductive-Nomological.

## **Methodology**

The method used in this study is to literature review and classify the findings. The data were collected from secondary sources using a literature review. The data analysis procedure was analytical-interpretational, and the findings were based on the investigation of the prediction concept and its different types and forms in futures studies.

## **Results Conclusions**

Reviews showed that futures studies has two aspects: prediction and constructing the future. Of course, the view of future social construction is

more important. This does not mean that the predictive role of future studies should be denied. But by accepting Hume's criticism that observing a repeated phenomenon alone is not a guarantee for the continuation of its occurrence in the future, or in other words, a part of the elements involved in the construction of the future, have not yet existed and are not known, and cannot even be identified in advance. In addition, the future is the output of human agency (intended or not), so our extrapolation based on past and present knowledge is likely to fail. As a result, in the best case, predictions are probable, conditional, and uncertain. But what Bell (2003) points out is that predictions, even if they are wrong, can be useful. At its lowest level, a prediction is ultimately wrong, but people use that prediction to persuade others of the benefits of a particular action, and eventually, when the prediction is presented, people communicate with it and it becomes part of reality.

In addition, it has been noted that analyses in the philosophy of science often emphasize the logical symmetry between prediction and explanation and that the only difference between explanation and prediction is that one focuses on the past and the other on the future, and this distinction alone separates these two processes. Otherwise, they are the same. But the state of our scientific knowledge today is such that we have to accept the asymmetry in our knowledge of the relationship between the present and the future. As has been said, Aligica (2003) argues against the logical symmetry between explanation and prediction, and the acceptance of this epistemological position limits the scientific research field of futures studies. Therefore, To establish its position, futures studies must focus on its predictive methodology and, by knowing different aspects of reality (the future), it helps to know and reduce the inherent uncertainties of the future.

In this context, after accepting the asymmetry between prediction and explanation, Helmer (1983) emphasized that when we think about the future, we are not only dealing with quantitative data and we cannot use empirical tools. It can be said that when dealing with the future, statistical and past evidence is necessary but not sufficient. This is because Helmer emphasizes that knowing the future reality requires the use of the implicit knowledge of experts and that its process is formed in the context of a social process.

## **Conclusions**

Prediction in futures studies is a vague concept because it allows different predictions to be made from the findings (explanations). For example, the scenario method can be used to obtain alternative futures for a key factor. If futures studies is seen as a science in the sense of Hempel and Oppenheim, then one of its goals would be to make accurate predictions, which is not possible. Because social science deals with human action, it is almost certain

that prediction is not accurate. The practical aim of futures studies (especially foresight) and its scientific aim are not the same. Futures studies is not about making predictions, but about making decisions. Social science and futures studies are concerned with making decisions, policy choices and social action more effective, successful and intelligent by thinking about alternative futures. In general, then, it can be said that both aspects of futures studies, i.e. prediction and cooperative construction of the desired future among possible futures, are not independent of each other, and that prediction of the future and its consequences are an integral part of the activity of futures studies. What futures studies does not consider is the prediction of the inevitable and single future. Therefore, what futures studies can do is to use its theories, tools and methods to better understand the future, control and activism to reach the desired future.

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