

## How can we be futurists?

In our business we have been doing a lot of thinking lately; thinking about how the world is changing, thinking about our own organisation's place in it and thinking about what all organisations must do to cope, manage, thrive, grow (select your own verb!) within it.

We have already refocused our service approach into three categories: futurist, agilist and humanist, as well as the topics and content within each. And it is the first one that we and many of our clients are pedalling fast learning to work out exactly what we do to be more futurist in approach. So how *can* we be futurists?

### What does being a futurist mean?

At the core of being a futurist is the bravery and confidence to turn away from the past and turn towards the future, when finding direction or the way forward for your organisation. And it is a physical action in addition to that mental step, I should say right from the start.

It's also the following things as well:

- Being proactively conscious that your organisation as it exists now has a much shorter 'shelf life' than even 20 years ago.
- Convincing yourself, or colleagues, who create strategy to do it differently. From hammering out detailed, structured business plans towards creating clear directions of travel that leave room for flexibility, change and re-routing on the journey.
- And that means developing a structure, business model and ways of operating that allow flexibility and responsiveness to change quickly wherever the impetus comes from; new ideas and opportunities driven from inside, competitive pressure coming from outside or macro-events like the pandemic, or economic cycles.



### How do I put this into practice?

It's not easy! In many ways futurist type actions involve dismantling the DNA of organisations as we have known them for a century or more, so we naturally feel internal resistance as well as resistance and rejection from others. Another challenge we face is in creating the new tools, processes and practices needed to assist and prompt different thinking, as well as getting familiar with practically how to use them.

Let me share a few ideas to get you started...

**Scan the horizon** – In an era where exponential change catches people out it pays to be hyper-alert. Most business people see the signs too late, so put in place (with as many people as possible) a way to seek out the emerging shoots in all aspects that are important for your company. Whether that means technology, product innovation, competitors, the economy, and especially societal or employee (the last two affect every organisation), it's important to see them before they got popular or common place. Look out for things that may grow quickly, and then act quickly. Don't forget that if you adopt something early it's a double win, as it's a positive for you and negative for your competitors.

**More strategy, less operations** – Many leadership conversations focus on operational issues when it would be better spent on strategic topics. Everyone can list dead organisations who got disrupted, but we still seem to get trapped in the very same *Titanic Syndrome* behaviour. If this is you or your colleagues, your organisation could be next! We all need to think of change in terms of an ever-present and ongoing facet of business life. This means it makes no sense to develop long-term strategies, even mid-term ones. Instead, a more pragmatic, act and iterate as you go strategic process makes more sense. So where you once evaluated operational planning frequently, look at strategic direction instead so you can re-assess and refocus more often.

**Internal reinvention drives change** – By this I don't just mean shifting the boxes and wires of your structure. Assist people in your business to adopt continuous change and reinvention mindsets. For example, during the past 12 months we have assisted nearly all our clients to re-imagine what the core of their organisation should be and get the whole team on board to reinvent how they market/sell/supply their services or products.

It's also about supporting people as they learn new skills and behaviours, perhaps Agile practices, maybe skillsets to take on different responsibilities. And most importantly encouraging everyone to talk about their challenges and mistakes as they 'try on' new roles, or even in switching to flexible and networked teams.

Finally, a big part of internal reinvention is considering how the whole thing fits together as a system and making it work – changed business models, structures, processes, and technology that are aligned with appropriate mindsets, ways of communicating, and behaviours.

**Don't wait till you feel ready...**

The two biggest shifts to make so we can think and operate as futurists are accepting that ongoing, multi-level and exponential change is inevitable and that solutions for your organisation's future are not rooted in the past, nor on your core competencies, but in something you might not even be aware of yet.

We have to force ourselves to realise that the organisation we pictured a year, 6 months or even a week ago may transform into something completely different within a month, and we need let go of expectations or dreams quickly and take on that new challenge, ready or not! We also need to be ready to navigate that transition successfully, personally as well as organisationally. Then we can take that step forward, being brave and bold, accepting messy and beautiful action, as we prepare and move into each of our perfectly imperfect futures.

That is how we can be futurists. But don't wait till you feel ready...you might miss the boat.