

2nd European Futurists Conference

Making Sense of the Future

Global Challenges and Futures Thinking

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What I will cover

- **Critical need for conscious design of large systems under uncertainty ('global challenges')**
- **What are global challenges we face**
- **Attributes of global challenges**
- **Making foresight relevant**
- **Ethics of Futurism**
- **Future of Foresight**

Why 21st Century is different?

- Industrial Revolution and 18/19 century
- 20th century: x4 population; x10 GDP/capita
- 21st century:
 - Stabilise population +50%?; x 4 GDP/capita??
 - Need 2-3 planets to meet resource needs
 - Handle long (intergenerational) lead times
 - New technologies, transhumans, ethics
 - Critical macro-uncertainties
 - **Conscious design of large systems (cities, states, regions, domains and planet and PESTE)**

What are the Global Challenges we face?

ECONOMIC:

- Oil price shock/energy supply interruptions
- US current account deficit/fall in US\$
- China hard landing
- Coming fiscal crises
- Asset prices/excessive indebtedness

GEOPOLITICAL:

- International terrorism
- Proliferation of WMD
- Interstate and civil wars
- Failed and failing states
- Transnational crime and corruption
- Retrenchment from globalization
- Middle East

ENVIRONMENTAL:

- Climate change
- Loss of freshwater services
- NatCat: Tropical storms
- NatCat: Earthquakes
- NatCat: Inland Flooding

SOCIETAL RISKS:

- Pandemics (Avian Influenza)
- Developing world disease (HIV/AIDS, TB, Malaria)
- Liability regimes
- Chronic disease in developed countries

TECHNOLOGICAL RISKS:

- Critical Information Infrastructure (CII) (risk associated with internal systems breakdown)
- Nanotechnology

Attributes of Global Challenges

- Large-scale, non-linear, not fully conceivable and not well understood
- Significant uncertainties and subject to sudden discontinuities
- Need to appreciate multiple perspectives ('Elephant')
- Impacts cannot be fully anticipated (but can be partially managed)
- Need for multi-stakeholder responses

Making Foresight Relevant

- **Framing**
- **Foresight**
- **Affirmation**
- **Implications**
- **Options/Actions**

**Futurists are generally poor at harnessing
foresight to strategic action**

Ethics of Foresight

- **Non-manipulative Framing (risks: spin, politics)**
- **Rigorous, peer-reviewed analytical Foresight (risks: poor or insufficient analysis)**
- **Deep ownership in Affirmation (risks: ego, no processes to achieve ownership)**
- **Strategically relevant Implications (risks: 'academic' or irrelevant)**
- **New and valuable Options/Actions (risks: nothing new)**

Need a Hippocratic Oath for Futurists

A Hippocratic Oath for Futurists

- **A normative code of conduct for Futurists**
- **Defines higher aims and social purposes**
- **States the manner in which social purposes must be pursued**
- **Creates a sense of community and mutual obligation among members of the profession**
- **Provides guidance for education of Futurists**
- **Builds trust and reduces transaction costs between profession and society**

Moral Imperative: Do no harm and create options

Future of Foresight

- **Critical need for conscious design of large systems under uncertainty**
- **Large-scale inquiry projects with central role for foresight**
- **Global governance; who will ‘own’ the issue?**
- **Development of an institutional ‘conscience’ for foresight**