

Research Note: Social Interests and Types of Foresight

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One of the tenets of Critical Futures Study (CFS) is that in any account of futures or foresight work social interests need to be taken fully into account. Indeed, one of the structural deficiencies in early American work was its singular difficulty in opening to this dimension. But it was a fact then, and it remains one now, that such interests provide a good deal of the driving force, motivation and social resource(s) for futures and foresight work. They help to select the practitioners employed. They colour its character, purposes and operational details. In earlier work I defined three types of foresight in the following way.

Pragmatic foresight is ... about carrying out today's business better and, indeed, there is a range of fairly straightforward means by which foresight can be used to improve and extend current practice in a wide range of organisations. The fact that it is paradigmatically naïve does not reduce its usefulness in a taken-for-granted way. Most organisations can benefit from some use of pragmatic foresight and there are many consultants and consulting organisations that can supply it.

Progressive foresight ... contains some sort of explicit commitment to systemic improvement. Thus foresight in this mode can readily be linked with genuine attempts to reformulate business and organisational practices in the light of wider social and environmental concerns. Hence there is a strong link with what has been called 'triple bottom line' accounting, Factor 4, Factor 10 (terms that basically refer to 'doing much more with less') and many other such innovations. Such work is about going beyond conventional thinking and practices and reformulating processes, products, services using quite different assumptions.

Civilisational foresight ... seeks to understand aspects of the next level of civilisation – the one that lies beyond the current impasse, the prevailing hegemony of techno / industrial / capitalist interests. Civilisational foresight is perhaps the most fascinating and demanding domain of futures enquiry. It seeks to clarify just what might be involved in long term shifts towards a more balanced and sustainable world. By definition it draws on countless fields of culture and enquiry to set up notions of 'design forward'. Such work allows us to speculate openly about such questions as: worldview design, underlying assumptions and values, civilisational myths and so on, as well as more down-to-earth matters such as infrastructure, governance and economic relations.

From, *Futures Beyond Dystopia*, 2004, Routledge, London, p 217.