

Futurists in Australia

Ryota Ono, Aichi University, Japan

Introduction

In the country where the author lives and works, few people have heard of futures studies and foresight. The exception is an extremely small number of people who remember that there was a time long ago when such a field attracted attention. But even among this group, most are not aware that futures studies as a discipline has been advanced in the wider world.

There are probably many other countries where the present extent of recognition and development of futures studies and foresight is similar to that of the author's country. A quick glance at the source countries of articles in futures-related journals and at where authors of futures-related books reside easily reveals that many of the works on futures have come from a small number of countries in the world.

In *Foundations of Futures Studies*, Bell (1997) devotes one chapter to discussion of the history of futures studies. He writes that the seeds of futures studies were cast and sprouted in countries such as the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Finland, Norway and Italy. One of the many other countries left out of this discussion was Australia. In the year 2010, however, it would not be difficult for most futurists to identify futures research and futures projects in Australia, and futures methods and futures writings from Australia. Further, in one of the international organizations in the futures field, the World Futures Studies Federation (WFSF), three presidents have been elected from Australia so far. Thus, Australia is the country, especially in terms of the Asia Pacific region, where futures studies, futures thinking, foresight and futurists have been blossoming most vigorously.

There should be no doubt that one of the drivers of such an active state of futures studies in Australia is a group of active futurists there. Futurists are those professional people who commit themselves to helping politicians, bureaucrats, specialists, executives, teachers, students, and people in the community comprehensively understand and wisely utilise the concept of futures thinking in their work as well as in their personal lives. In addition, futurists advance the field of futures studies and futures research with their respective missions, passions, actions, and learning.

Given that futures studies has been a very active field in Australia, the present study will attempt to clarify the reasons for such activity by looking into futurists in Australia.

Studies about futurists

Marien and Jennings (1987) compiled essays from 17 American futurists who were members of the World Future Society in the book "*What I Have Learned*". Marien and Jennings had sent invitations to the contributors, in which they asked "How has the realized future of the 1980s differed from what you anticipated and/or advocated? What have you learned since the 1960s about social change and non-change, thought and action, ideals and realities, hopes and fears?" (p.x).

On one hand, they found that the futurists were much diversified in their answers to the above questions, and as a result, dismissed their attempt to come to some generalisations about "What futurists think". On the other hand, it was clear that all the contributors thought that thinking about the future was a useful endeavor despite the many imperfections and uncertainties. Marien and Jennings stated the meaning of their attempt as follows:

If others who seek to think about the future were to heed some of the lessons learned that have been stated here, we might hope for a new generation of wiser futurists who have learned their essential lessons at an earlier age. (p xiv)

Two years later, Coates and Jarratt (1989) wrote a book on futurists titled "*What Futurists Believe*". They analysed the published works of 17 prominent, primarily American, futurists and interviewed 15 of them. They compared and contrasted the views of those futurists on a broad range of issues pertinent to the future. They also discussed each futurist separately, clarifying individual positions and/or perspectives on a variety of themes about the future.

In response to Coates and Jarratt, Inayatullah edited a double special issue of *Futures*, "What futurists think". The special issue compiled life stories of over 50 futurists in the world. It was an attempt by Inayatullah "to make an inventory of the range of futures thinking/activities as input into the knowledge base of futures studies and to present a balanced account of futures studies, visions and activities throughout the world" (1996, p 509).

Over 100 people – not only in the United States but also in other countries – were asked to contribute to the project and a half of them managed to write an essay. The potential contributors were selected based on excellence in a variety of futures activities, excellence in publication, active participation in a futures course, difference in episteme, a balance of gender, culture, age civilisation and theoretical perspective, and finally, self

definition as a futurist (pp. 510-511)

The contributors' essays were driven by the following questions that Inayatullah had posed (pp. 516-517):

- 1) What are the main sources that have influenced your future-related studies, activities and research?
- 2) What is the focus of your work?
- 3) What do you think are the main forces and trends creating the future in the next 30 years that you prefer or fear?
- 4) What type of world would you like to see in the next 30 years or so?; and,
- 5) What projects you have finished, you are working on, or anticipate?

As one of the results, Inayatullah identified five clusters of futurists: civilisational futurists, feminist futurists, environmental and social justice futurists, transformational futurists, and problem-oriented futurists (p 512). A further expansion of the study to one including over 100 individuals was subsequently undertaken by Jose Ramos and Richard Slaughter and published as volume 4 of *The Knowledge Base of Futures Studies* (2005). Thus, the goals of the original project - to cast the net wider with greater gender, national and cultural inclusion and broader plurality regarding future possibilities – were even more broadly achieved.

Ramos (2004), who is a futurist in Australia, completed a meta-scan of futurists and futures organisations in Australia as part of the Australian Foresight Institute Research Program in 2000. The main purpose of the study was to develop a broad understanding of the practices of foresight, which had been carried out by practitioners and organisations in Australia, so that it could then be fed into designing a National Foresight Strategy (NFS). Ramos (2004) constructed profiles of a number of practitioners and organisations based on a questionnaire survey, a scan of websites, and relevant literature. The survey asked the following questions (p 48):

- What particular foresight tools and methods have you used?
- What is the general domain in which the futures tools and methods have been employed? (i.e., education, transport, a particular industry, water, aging, etc.)
- Where, and with whom have you conducted such futures exercises?
- What is the purpose of your organisation?

The study used integrally informed theories and frameworks. It analysed types of foresight in terms of the social interests behind foresight work (i.e., pragmatic, progressive, civilisational), foresight methods (i.e., linear, systems, critical, integral), the focal domain of foresight work (psychological, inter-subjective, behavioral,

structural), the capacity building focus of foresight work (i.e, conceptual, methodological, structural, social), organisational types, and practices by region.

Ramos identified certain ‘centers of gravity’ in Australia as follows (p xii):

- the majority of practitioners are ‘progressive’ in their interests;
- the majority of practitioners use methods and approaches beyond ‘linear extrapolation’;
- the major focus of their works are on ‘structural’ issues;
- the majority of work is done by small consultancies and private practices; and,
- most practitioners and organisations are clustered in Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra and Brisbane.

The results of the study presented key challenges and opportunities to develop a NFS in Australia (p xiii):

1. foresight and progressive and civilisational work needs to be more widely disseminated to the public;
2. approaches that facilitate the foresight, awareness, responsibility and leadership of individuals need to be developed;
3. theory and practice need to be drawn together without leaving each other isolated;
4. greater focus needs to be placed on how institutional foresight capacity is effectively built;
5. more work with progressive and civilisational interests is needed; and,
6. a more focused and active process of developing a NFS is needed.

Ramos (2003) also looked into two of the most influential futurists in Australia, Richard Slaughter and Sohail Inayatullah. Ramos compared and contrasted the education, the focus of futures work, the importance of inner exploration and development, the focus of examination and the challenges faced by the two futurists. He also examined the contributions made by Slaughter and Inayatullah to critical futures studies. Both of them are key researchers and practitioners in Australia, who have developed, implemented, and advanced critical futures studies. He found that Slaughter had developed critical futures by drawing on many of the ideas in the epistemological revolution and that Slaughter’s vision for a critical and future oriented education had stemmed from his realisation that the present education systems were not able to equip young generations with the ability to deal effectively with future oriented issues (p 30). For Inayatullah, by delving into the four layers of Causal Layered Analysis (CLA), Ramos revealed how those layers were linked with not only knowledge but also the life experiences of Inayatullah.

The present study will focus on futurists in Australia as did Ramos. By looking into their life journeys as futurists, the study will try to reveal the characteristics of those futurists who are a significant source of the development of futures studies and foresight in Australia.

Method

While this study was not designed to be a social network study, it borrowed an approach from social network analysis to define the target population for the study. Scott (2000) identifies two general approaches to define the target population for social network study: the 'positional' and the 'reputational' approaches (pp. 55-56).

The positional approach requires formally defined positions or group membership, which could not be applied to this study. The reputational approach, on the other hand, is defined by Scott as one which:

... can be used where there are no relevant positions, where there is no comprehensive listing available, or where the knowledge of the agents themselves is crucial in determining the boundaries of the population. In the reputational approach, the researcher studies all or some of those named on a list of nominees produced by knowledgeable informants (p 56).

The researcher decided to use the reputational approach to identify subjects of the study. As Ramos's study (2003) has already demonstrated that Inayatullah and Slaughter are two of the key futurists in Australia, the researcher asked them as knowledgeable informants to nominate other active futurists in Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales as potential subjects of the study. The researcher then contacted those nominated by email and made appointments for a face-to-face interview with many of those who agreed to participate in the study.

After the first round of interviews was conducted in 2008, the researcher asked those interviewees taking part to suggest futurists in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory to expand the subject population in the study. This 'snowballing' technique is a modification of the reputational approach (Scott, 2000, p 56). The researcher carried out a second round interview survey in 2009. All together, 26 futurists kindly gave time for a face-to-face interview with the researcher. Among the 26 futurists, 9 were female and 17 were male.

In each interview, the researcher asked a set of open-ended questions. Each interview lasted for about 60 minutes on average and was electronically recorded. A

transcript of the interview was later prepared by the researcher and was sent to each interviewee by email for his/her checking.

Interview questions

Admitting that no single set of questions could be enough to comprehensively reveal one individual, the study set up seven questions, which were placed in both a horizontal axis of time (past, present, future) and a vertical axis of up and down. By locating the questions in these three temporal stages, the study tries to clarify where the futurist came from, where he/she is now, and where he/she is going. All the questions were open-ended and phrased broadly so that the interviewee would be able to talk about whatever he/she felt needed to be expressed in the interview.

The seven questions are depicted graphically in Figure 1.

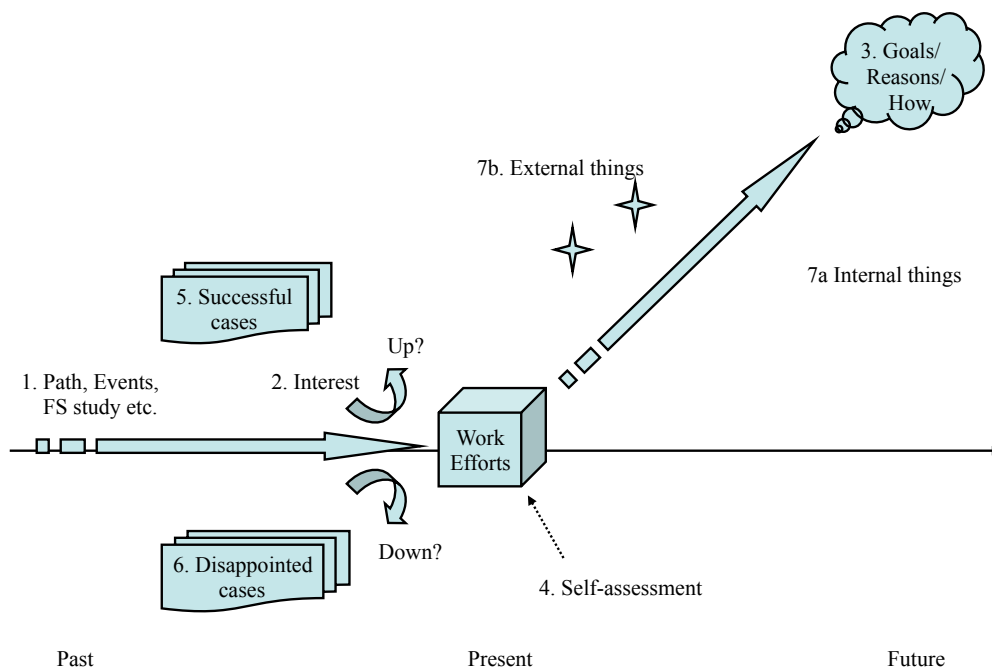


Figure. 1 Interview questions

The seven questions were as follows:

1. What paths and/or key events have brought you where you are and to what you are doing in relation to the futures field?
2. Have you seen any signs indicating either up or down of interest in thinking about the future? If yes, where?

3. What have you been trying to achieve in your individual and/or organisational work? Why and how?
4. Can you assess your own work objectively with a third person perspective?
5. Can you share with me the most successful cases and your thoughts on what made them so successful?
6. If there were any very disappointed or depressing cases, can you tell me what you think their pulling down factors were?
7. In order to help you achieve your goals better:
 - 7-1. Is there anything that you wish to see would happen externally?
 - 7-2. Is there anything that you would like to obtain internally?

As the number of futurists interviewed is small, the results of this study cannot represent active futurists in Australia in general. Therefore, the following sections should be read on one hand as reflections of the unique experiences and perspectives of those futurists surveyed. On the other hand, since their experiences in foresight and their perspectives about futures probably have not developed in isolation from those of other futurists in Australia, some common important characteristics of futurists and futures work may appear.

Becoming a futurist through meeting a futurist

Question 1 asked “What paths and/or key events have brought you where you are and to what you are doing in relation to the futures field?” Many of the interviewed futurists testified that a meeting with a prominent futurist had been a turning point in their careers.

For Tony Stevenson, such futurists were Jim Dator and Eleonora Masini. In 1978 Stevenson was in a Masters program at the University of Hawaii at Manoa (UHM) and took one of Jim Dator’s classes as an elective. Stevenson immediately became interested in futures studies. He later worked for the Communication Research Centre at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT). He hosted a symposium called “Communications Futures” there in 1987 by inviting Jim Dator and Eleonora Masini, both of who were leaders of the World Futures Studies Federation (WFSF) at that time. Later he himself served the president of WFSF from 1997 to 2001.

An attendee at a workshop on issue management (an area where public relations and futures intersect) conducted by Stevenson and his colleagues was Jan Lee Martin. When she became more knowledgeable about future studies, from Stevenson, Lee Martin was delighted to find it provided a framework for all those other sub-domains in

which she had been interested. In 1996, she started the Futures Foundation in Sydney, which was an organisation made up of futurists and people who were just interested in the future. Until a few years ago, the Futures Foundation put on workshops and seminars for corporate members, introduced them to futures, and helped them to enter the field.

Sohail Inayatullah had been looking for a field which could integrate multiple perspectives. In 1977 when he took Dator's course at UHM, Inayatullah found that futures studies was such a field. He was inspired by Dator's theory of social change, his theory of technology and his idealism. In 1994, Inayatullah started to work at the Communication Centre at QUT with Stevenson, who let him teach some WFSF courses in Fiji, Andorra, Bangkok, and Malaysia. For Inayatullah, Jan Lee Martin was also instrumental as she invited him to deliver speeches and undertake some consultancy in the futures field.

For Greg Hearn, his colleague Tony Stevenson at the QUT Centre opened a path to futures studies. Inayatullah, who joined the Centre a little later, helped him to develop a broader understanding of the futures.

A certain fortunate incident in the war situation allowed Ivana Milojević to attend a two weeks course on futures studies in Andorra in 1993. At the course, Eleonora Masini ran a workshop on futures scenarios. The process of how to develop alternative futures taught in the workshop gave Milojević a structure, a methodology and a conceptual framework to think about the future in her country (the former Yugoslavia), where people were constantly presented with only one or two choices about the future: either they would defend themselves or they would be dead. Later she and Inayatullah – whom she met in Andorra – married. She left her country and came to Australia with him in 1994.

Peter Saul has worked as a self-employed consultant for a long time in the areas of human resources, management development, corporate culture, and strategic planning. He became involved in the futures field through a meeting with Jan Lee Martin at a function and then through working as a part of her group in planning for the Futures Foundation. Through that connection, he met Inayatullah and a number of other futurists. By teaming up with futurists, he encouraged clients to think about the future differently and to manage the process of changing themselves and their organisations to adapt to the future.

For Jennifer Bartlett, Mike Mcallum was the first futurist brought in to her organisation to help her team develop a vision of her city for 2010. A second futurist involved was Inayatullah. She participated in a one-day course about the future, run by

Inayatullah. She found that Inayatullah had a set of tools (futures policy and planning) that she could use to develop a training program in policy in her organization. Bartlett, with the help of Inayatullah, ran five training courses over two years in her organization.

Colin Russo had some very positive discussions with Stevenson and Inayatullah while he was a post-graduate student at QUT. After he joined a government organisation, he went to one of the courses run by Bartlett and Inayatullah and began to develop a full understanding of Inayatullah's methods. Later he engaged Inayatullah to run futures courses and to carry out a community future project for his own organisation.

In 1989, Marcus Bussey met Inayatullah in India. Both had been to see the same guru, a teacher of spiritual practices. Bussey met Inayatullah again when Inayatullah moved to Australia. Then Bussey was introduced to futures studies. Very quickly he realised that it complemented the critical, philosophical, pedagogical work that he had been engaging in for many years. He was later awarded a Masters degree and PhD in Futures Studies by the University of the Sunshine Coast, both degrees being supervised by Inayatullah.

Steve Gould worked for the Sunshine Coast Council and was introduced to Inayatullah at a workshop. He became very interested in futures, understanding that there was an opportunity to explore how futures might add value to strategic planning processes. He became involved in a 20 year community plan for the local council, called "Maroochy 2025", and used it a case study for his Masters in Futures at the University of Sunshine Coast, again supervised by Inayatullah.

When José Ramos was taking a backpacking trip in Europe, he had a strong vision that he would need to study 'futures' in his Masters degree. He had no idea what 'futures' meant. After returning to the United States, he started to look for universities where he could learn about futures. He ended up 'discovering' Jim Dator, and through him, the futures program in Houston; he later attended a summer school in that program. He then went to Taipei to study a foreign language. While looking for some futurists in Taiwan, through Peter Bishop in Houston and Tony Stevenson in Australia, he reached Kuo-Hua Chen at Tamkang University. He visited him and met Inayatullah who was also was there at the time. There was a strong connection between Inayatullah's ways of seeing the world and what Ramos was seeking. Later Ramos moved to Melbourne and joined Richard Slaughter's program in 2001.

Richard Slaughter, when he lived in the United Kingdom, attended the First Global Conference on the Future in Toronto in 1980 and started to meet people in the field. The

more people he got to know, the more he was able to map the field and find his natural place in it. A few years later he took up a position in the Institute of Education at the University of Melbourne (UM) in Australia for five years (1989-94). Later, he became the first director of the Foresight Institute at Swinburne University of Technology, a position he held for five years, leaving there in 2004.

When Caroline Smith was considering what her university students (i.e., future teachers) would need to know to teach children – who were not yet born – in primary or secondary school, she heard about Richard Slaughter’s University of Melbourne work through Susan Oliver in the Commission for the Future. Smith asked Slaughter to run a professional development day for staff and faculty at her university. After the session, she and a colleague started to run professional workshops for teachers based on what they had learned from Slaughter and from literature in the futures field. They developed two Masters units and one undergraduate unit in Futures in Education.

When Debra Bateman was completing a Masters of Education, she took a compulsory unit taught by Caroline Smith and her colleague about futures. This unit made her think about the futures of the children in her school. She started to implement more practices in futures education, expecting that they would help young children to overcome some of the disrupting things happening in their homes.

Peter Hayward got involved in scenario projects in 1999 and 2000 within the Tax Office. In 2001, he heard that Richard Slaughter was starting a course in Strategic Foresight through Swinburne University. After his first two hours sitting in Slaughter’s class, Hayward found that the course had what he really wanted. He left the Tax Office and enrolled in a PhD at Swinburne. He became the program director in 2004 and completed his PhD in 2005.

In 1998, Joseph Voros was looking for ways to become a futurist and ended up meeting Richard Slaughter. After the meeting, Voros immersed himself in futures literature for one year. He started to work for a Foresight Planning Unit at Swinburne as a foresight analyst in 2000. From 2001 he began to sit in Slaughter’s classes to contribute to discussions from a practitioner’s perspective and in 2003 joined the Foresight Institute as a Lecturer.

Joshua Floyd was a mechanical engineer in the metallurgical industry and worked in countries such as India, China and Peru for about a decade. In 2003, a friend of his suggested that Floyd speak with Professor Frank Fisher at Monash University. As Fisher noticed that what Floyd was talking about sounded relevant to the futures field, he suggested that Floyd contact Slaughter. Floyd found the sort of questions being asked in Slaughter’s Strategic Foresight Course were congruent with those he had been

exploring. He studied in the course from 2004 to 2006. In parallel, he started to teach in a new Sustainability Course at Swinburne with Professor Frank Fisher.

Becoming a futurist through one's work

The rest of the interviewees became futurists because the nature of their work became increasingly relevant to what futures studies offered.

Gretchen Young had a responsible role in leadership and management in the children's health sector and became interested in exploring her skills further in a postgraduate program. She wanted to focus on the issues of leadership and ethics at deeper levels. She found by chance the Strategic Foresight Course at Swinburne University of Technology and studied there. At the end, she came to understand that behaviors, values and social dynamics in the 'present' were the creators of the 'future'. She now focuses on this as her most important driver.

When Kristin Alford was trying to consolidate her knowledge and experiences in engineering, human resources development, strategy, marketing communication and emerging technology, she found the Strategic Foresight Course. She began her study there in 2006, starting consulting work as well. She began to teach a futures unit as an Adjunct Lecturer at a university in Adelaide in 2009.

Robert Burke was a CEO, Managing Director of the Australian arm of a multi national company. His first contact with futures studies was through Peter Ellyard's book in early 1980s. Burke was interested in futures studies because futures studies had changed his thinking and he knew that the traditional strategic planning processes were not working effectively. Later he was greatly enthused by Inayatullah. They have taught business people at Mt. Eliza Executive Education, part of Melbourne Business School, for more than nine years.

Triggered by a futures magazine circulated by a forward thinking senior executive at Westpac, Janine Cahill began to read widely about the future. After having taken quite a few planning roles, she moved to London to teach in the Strategic Management Program at the European Business School. She introduced "Foresight" and "Corporate Social Responsibility and Business Ethics" into the strategy program. She conducted some foresight workshops, called Strategic Leadership Weekend. She taught in the UK for two years. Her program was very successful in that it had a big impact on students' lives and on their interest in their future. She set up and did some strategy and foresight work in London, and then moved to Sydney and set up her company there.

Dominique Jaurola worked for NOKIA in Finland during the 1990s. In 1994, she was the product marketing leader for the overall global platform of mobile phones that

would be launched in three years time. As she realised that market research just talked about ‘today’ but could not talk about ‘tomorrow’, she initiated and led the “Consumer Foresight” group inside NOKIA, whose role was to look and understand beyond what was being said. In 1995, she had a chance to go to the World Future Society Conference and felt “Ah, this is home”. Participation in the conference confirmed for her that what she had been doing was worthwhile and needed to be continued. In 1996, she attended scenario planning training at the Global Business Network. She began to do a number of different things in order to really bring in the NOKIA tools and methods and ways in which to take the future into the strategic agenda. Later she left NOKIA, setting up an Internet-based business to help people better understand others in a range of decision-making contexts.

Richard Eckersley became very interested in the environmental movement, and in what it meant for the future of the planet and humanity, when he attended a public lecture on the Emerging Ecological Crisis delivered by a professor at the Australian National University (ANU). After graduating from ANU, he joined the *Sydney Morning Herald*. His interest in science journalism and science communications led him to futures research. A couple of years later, he left the company temporarily and traveled through Africa, Western and Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and Asia for two years. That experience changed him, making him much more critical about the dominant qualities of western societies, particularly their pursuit of material progress and individualism, and the effects of the mass media and especially television. After working for the media company for three years as a science reporter, he joined CSIRO, which is the national scientific research organisation, as head of the Media Liaison Office. He then spent two years at the Australian Commission for the Future, which was established in the late 1980s, on a part time basis, subsequently serving as a senior advisor to the Minister for Science and Technology, returned to CSIRO and then went to ANU. He is now affiliated with a small, non-profit, public-interest, research company, called “Australia 21”, which works to bring researchers and policy people together to consider what need to be done now in order to create a good life in Australia in the year 2100.

In 1968, Douglas Cocks moved from the University of California in the USA to CSIRO to work on the question of developing Northern Australia in an economically viable way. He gradually became interested in land use planning, a very future-oriented discipline that tries to determine how land is going to be used over coming decades or even centuries. Since he wrote his book about land use planning and land use management in 1992, Cocks has been much more interested in things that are more

obviously future-oriented. His two recent books are on Australian futures and on global futures and futures of species.

Mark Diesendorf was shocked when informed that his PhD thesis in an area of Theoretical Physics had been used for hydrogen bomb calculations. The revelation greatly influenced the rest of his career. He committed himself to never working directly or indirectly for the military, big government operations or other big businesses and that he would instead do science in the public interest. In the early 1970s, part of his work moved into developing scenarios for future renewable energy systems in Australia. He became increasingly interested in how to move towards a future society that would be ecologically sustainable and socially just. This made him reconsider the existing economy and develop a new field called “Ecological Economics” in Australia. At various times he tried to combine these elements, and eventually he found himself in the Institute of Environmental Studies where he started to teach environmental studies, sustainable development, renewable energy, and greenhouse response with a strong futures orientation. He enjoyed being part of the Future Foundation, while it was thriving under the energy of Jan Lee Martin. Although he would not call himself a futurist, he does look at sustainable development as a process into the future.

Australia’s soil for futures and connections of the futurists

The stories about the paths that the futurists took revealed that several of them had come to Australia from other countries. Slaughter came from the United Kingdom, Inayatullah was from Pakistan, Ramos came from the United States, Jaurola came from Finland, Milojević moved from Yugoslavia, and Lee Martin came from New Zealand. All of them have greatly contributed to the development of futures studies and foresight in Australia. Perhaps, as a multicultural nation, Australia has a rich soil to attract, accept and nurture new ideas and capacities. Futures studies and foresight were probably thus readily accepted and the open atmosphere might draw these futurists to Australia from abroad.

While Ramos (2003) made it clear that Slaughter and Inayatullah had been the key futurists in developing critical futures in Australia, the present study found that they played other roles in spreading futures studies to people in Australia. Inayatullah and Slaughter explored a variety of opportunities to disseminate futures studies; as a result, many people were exposed to a first hand learning experience led by either or both of them. Many of the interviewed futurists had been taught by either Slaughter or Inayatullah in certain training and/or educational courses or at some opportunities. The passion, inspiration, and encouragement that Slaughter and Inayatullah gave these

fledgling futurists cannot be overlooked. Figure 2 depicts the relationship between each of the interviewees and people or things that led the futurist to the future field. While the figure was drawn not necessarily to highlight any specific futurist, it ends up showing that Slaughter and Inayatullah are in deed two influential figures in the futures field in Australia.

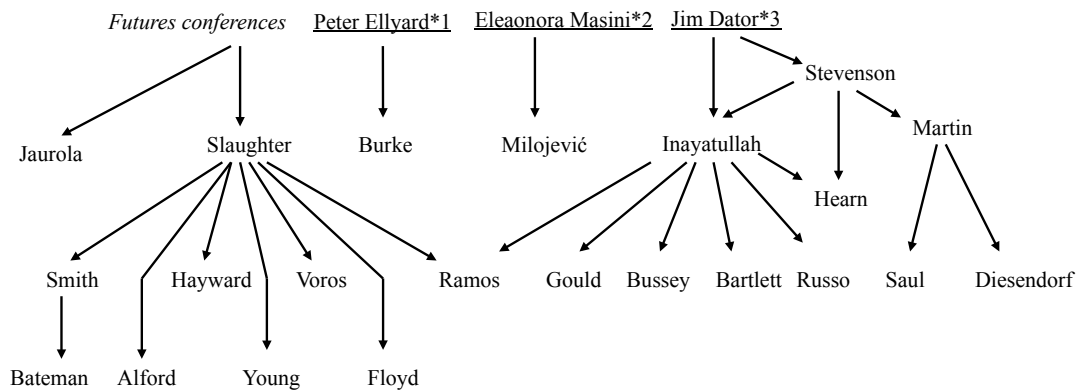


Figure. 2 First-order influential relationship between futurists

*1,2,3: These futurists are not among the interviewed futurists

Several interviewees may not be comfortable being called ‘futurist’ because they do not consider their specialised field the ‘futures’ field. Nevertheless, what they focus on is definitely to create better futures. All of them were included in the survey based on suggestions made by ‘futurists’. This demonstrates that there are futurists who are aware of what specialists in other fields are doing with respect to futures. This kind of information must be an important asset in the futurists’ network in Australia.

Key conditions and unique approaches

Question 2 asked “What have you been trying to achieve in your individual and/or organizational work? Why and how?”

The answers to the question indicated that all of the interviewed futurists held “a better future” as the fundamental goal of their work and efforts. The futurists’

approaches to the common goal were, however, quite varied. Those differences seem to have stemmed from each futurist's belief about what constituted the key conditions for the goal. Each interviewee compared the present state of futures thinking and a better future that could be created by the present generation and future generations. Then he/she concluded what key conditions needed to be met in order to close the gap between the present and the future.

The key conditions that Slaughter, Smith, Bateman and Ramos considered had to do with futures studies. Slaughter believes that the futures field continues to grow, enabling it to become a successful and dynamic part of how societies and organizations work and how people live. To that end, firstly, he writes to help build the intellectual capital of the field. Secondly, he takes seriously the idea of mentoring younger students and new entrants to the field. He considers it critical that an intergenerational process occurs. Thirdly, he wants to help facilitate emergence of high quality futures literature. The *Knowledge Base of Futures Studies* (KBFS) is his major project in this line. Fourthly, he works to support the next generations of foresight practitioners in Australia. He sees that as a result of the Australian Foresight Institute (AFI), there are now many more people who are capable of doing high quality futures work.

Smith has continued to try to have futures perspectives become more embedded in Bachelor's degrees, even though she has had not many successes so far: universities in Australia have been preoccupied with the economic agenda. Smith's main interest is in sustainable futures with a special focus on permaculture. She would like to have people 'get to grips' with what a sustainable future might be like. She tries to bring futures thinking, concepts and tools into education for sustainability.

For Bateman, the key condition is to empower children. She argues that futures should be part of curriculum. If we can have futures explicitly taught, she believes that children's minds become more open and creative, that they can be more critical in making decisions and in thinking about different choices, and that they can make connections between what they are studying in classrooms and what's happening in their lives.

Ramos thinks that the futures field is overly conceptual or extremely theoretical. Therefore, the key condition for him is that we bring the future back into the present so that we can innovate and/or enact changes. He believes that the future should be something that informs us what we develop today, arguing that what futures studies should do is inform people of how to create social innovations or enterprises that can respond to critical social issues and emerging issues.

The key condition for Bartlett, Burke and Hayward is in the area of organisation.

Bartlett regards a strong pull (i.e., vision) of a large group of people as the key. She is committed not just to understanding emerging issues but also to developing a vision. She is interested in testing Polak's theory. Bartlett always asks people questions, such as what they will want and what they believe needs to be preserved. In asking these questions, she wants to have people pay attention to their heart rather than to problems.

Burke expects that organisations will become much more human-based, treat people better and less mechanistically, and become more inclusive of society as a whole. He focuses on teaching organisations that they can make real differences in the way people live their lives. Hayward's course at Swinburne has tried to teach students to think differently, how to use tools of foresight based on that thinking, and how to apply those tools in a variety of organisational settings. On the surface, organisations seem to like people who come in, challenge their existing thinking, and open it up. After a while, however, the organisation says "That's enough. Stop challenging". Given this reality, most foresight practitioners have not been able to work in organisations for extended periods. What he is interested in exploring is how we might create and run an organisation that holds radical thinkers. He calls such an organisation a "21st century organisation".

The key condition perceived by many of the other futurists was the ways of thinking used by society in general.

While Burke works to change the thinking of organisations, he would also like to make futures more widely accepted, to keep it multidisciplinary, and to make it available to the general public rather than just to an elite. Stevenson continues to generate discussions about the future, possibilities, futures scenarios, and futures opportunities and difficulties through writing and workshops. He encourages foresight wherever the opportunity arises in any workshop, for example. He works in his local community to bring foresight into discussions and decisions. He argues that, if we are to accept an ethical duty to future generations, we need to take responsibility for the consequences of our decisions and actions and to consider long-term effects. He believes that thinking about the future helps us redefine the present world.

Diesendorf regards informing people well as one of the major responsibilities of a scholar. On average, he gives 1.2 talks per week in communities around the country, particularly on greenhouse mitigation and sustainable energy. In addition, he does media. So he calls himself as an activist as well as an academic. He thinks that in a democratic system it's a responsibility of those who have the knowledge to share that knowledge with the public so that better decision-making takes place. A major part of Eckersley's work is to address a wide audience via conferences (educators, health

workers, public servants, students, etc.) on issues of population health and wellbeing and thereby to influence scientific, public and political opinion. He writes not only for journals, but also for specialist magazines and newspapers, and broadcasts for the national radio and television service, the ABC, around these issues, too. He tries to establish connections and networks at all these different levels. He hopes that by influencing people's thinking we begin to change things in a way that we make the world better.

Morrow would like to make explicit - in organizations and groups - the implicit foresight, which all individuals have and use in their personal lives. Even though everybody is capable of using foresight, she thinks, some people have not yet turned it on. Thus, she sees two key conditions. Firstly, we need to increase the number of people who can think with foresight, and secondly, we need systems and processes at society level in order to grow foresight on a social scale. Her long-term goal is to develop the means to implement such measures. Cahill is very keen on giving a balanced view about the future to people. For instance, many active environmentalists pay attention only to how the environment is degrading. As a result, they tend to feel pessimistic. But if they started to track other trends - that Germany had chosen to move away from nuclear power, for example, and towards wind-generated electricity, and had actually produced good results - they should find such a trend pretty amazing. When people in a specialised field actually see the whole picture rather than a narrowly focused one, the general level of their stress seems likely to decrease. And when they become less stressed, they can become more creative. As a result, they can get the idea that they can do something and that they can have a positive impact, either on a small, local level or more widely. She tries to help people move out their specialisations and into a broader way of thinking.

Bussey, too, tries to help people break free from their constraints, liberating themselves from their context by challenging accepted habits. Futures is a very powerful tool for social change. He is pleased if he can help others in any way to maximise their own impact on their own context. Similarly, Inayatullah sees one role of futurists as being to work with individuals to help them find where they truly want to go. Another role is to help them see that there are many futures. He believes that a futurist's role in helping people to bring out their best is crucial, arguing that futures is not only an external but also an internal journey. Milojević thinks that futures studies teaches us there are always more than two choices; and, for every choice made, there is a second, third and fourth-rate impact. The key condition for her is people's realisation that they have more choices than they may at first perceive. She strongly believes that if a whole

society went through a process of developing scenarios, of envisioning alternatives and of looking at desired futures, it would never choose the direction as they do now.

For Voros, the key condition is rigor. He thinks that people need to have the rigorous disciplined thinking from academic studies combined with the particularity of getting things done in the real world. He is endeavoring to find ways of pushing people's boundaries of thinking in a rigorous way. He believes that rigor is to be achieved via a scientific style of inquiry, which is open to critique and discussion and has some basis in evidence. He would like to improve the quality of people's decision making so that the present we live through becomes the best possible present informed by a wise choice of future.

Jaurola regards improvement in the understanding of people as the key condition. We make foolish assumptions simply because we do not know others well and fear differences. She expects that her project, "Hunome", could help people everywhere understand the similarities and differences in who and how we are. If she can increase the world's understanding even a little, she's happy.

Young focuses on children. She would like to shape a better world for children and young people to grow up in. To do this, she tries to enhance the diversity of future possibilities explored by the community by involving children and young people in futures processes.

For Martin, the key condition is to change direction. She thinks that we have allowed ourselves to be captured by the culture we inherited. The culture says "Humans own the planet", "Look how clever we are. We can control everything", "More is always better", and "There are no limits to abundance". It is the culture that also says "Growth is good and necessary". She is concerned that we are running in the wrong direction, creating chaos, pain, and confusion, which are not necessary. She believes that the future needs to be rescued, and argues that the wisdom of the past needs rescuing before it is too late.

Gould sees the key in an international relationship between Australia and a global futurists' network. He thinks that it is no point for futurists in Australia to remain isolated in their work. Networking internationally comprises a greater sharing of knowledge, information, opportunities, education and case studies and a better relationship between Australian futurists and international companies. He hopes that it will put Australia 'on the map' as a credible source of futurists for international companies.

All the conditions discussed above are summarised into a few steps moving from the present to better futures in Figure 3.

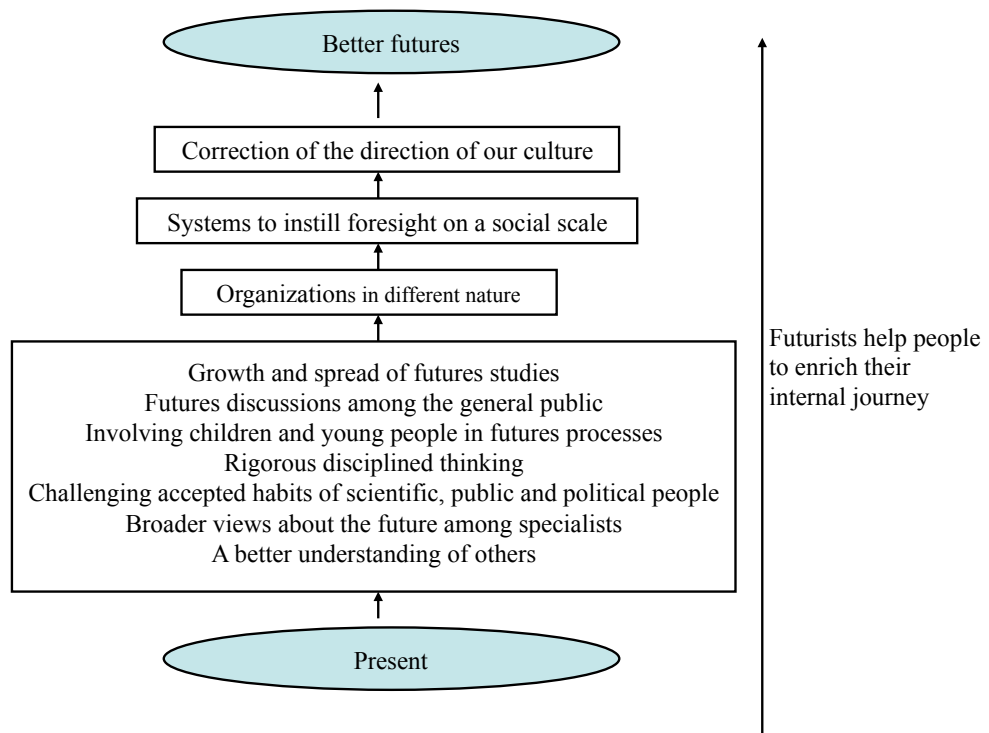


Figure. 3 Key Conditions for Better Futures

Many of the interviewed futurists have taken the first step in shifting people's thinking towards futures. In parallel with those efforts, several futurists have paid attention to the potential impacts that foresighted organisations could have on society and have started to work for and with organisations. These futurists also consider it inevitable that we will gradually build a critical mass of people and organisations and that social foresight will become a shared and treasured capacity in society. As a result of all these changes, it is expected that the direction of the present materialist culture will be corrected towards a more human, more nature and more future-oriented one.

The internal journey

The present culture has led people to take an external journey, marked by visible and measurable milestones such as power, wealth, and success. The futurists in Australia, however, are on an internal journey and are helping people to embark on such a journey with them.

Some of the futurists explicitly talk about their images of the relationship between their goals as futurists and who they want to be. For instance, Russo states that he wants a fulfilling personal and professional life. He would like to continually educate himself

and help others educate themselves. Burke is interested in his own learning so that he can help organisations learn better. Hayward takes personal responsibility for how he lives and what he does in order to make a difference in the school, in organisations and in his life. Floyd has tried to create a microcosm of a positive, healthy future in his own life. He seeks out work that is aligned with how he hopes the world will unfold.

It is not always an easy task for one person to change others; people prefer the status quo to a new, unfamiliar state. One effective way to proceed with the difficult task of change could be to *demonstrate* that it is possible to shift from the present state to a new state. The more the futurist himself/herself has such experiences, the more convincingly his/her message is communicated.

Although the futurists in Australia never alter their fundamental goal, they are very flexible in inventing whatever means they think might work to help others move closer to the goal. Openness to new experiences as well as willingness to learn new things was clearly identified as a common characteristic among the futurists in Australia in the study. In addition, it might not miss the point to state that they love the people for and/or with whom they do futures work. Those people are seen by futurists as important partners.

A futurist's core activity is the alteration - with sensitivity and foresight - of the prevailing culture and of the direction of human civilisation. It is an effort to help people awaken to the real dangers in the popular external journey and to lead them to their individual internal journey. It was apparent that all of the futurists interviewed in Australia were passionate about this big challenge.

This paper has focused on the internal aspects of the interviewed futurists. What success and failures they have experienced and what they have learned from them will be discussed in another paper.

Note

A version of this paper was first published in the *Journal of Futures Studies*, Vol 15 No 2 pp 115-132 2010

Correspondence

Ryota Ono, Associate Professor, Department of Business Administration

Aichi University, 4-60-6 Hiraike-cho, Nakamura-ku, Nagoya city, Aichi 453-8777,

Japan. E-mail: ryota@aichi-u.ac.jp Phone: +81-52-564-6119 ex. 80344

References

- Bell, Wendell. (1997). *Foundations of futures studies* (Vol. 1). New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Inayatullah, Sohail. (1996). What futurists think: Stories, methods and visions of the future. *Futures*, 28(6/7), 509-694.
- Ramos, José. (2003). From critique to cultural renewal: Critical futures studies and Causal Layered Analysis, *Australian Foresight Institute, Monograph Series*, No.2. Melbourne: Swinburne University of Technology.
- Ramos, José. (2004). Foresight practice in Australia: A meta-scan of parishioners and organisations, *Australian Foresight Institute Monograph Series*, No.7. Melbourne: Swinburne University of Technology
- Scott, John. (2000). *Social Network Analysis: A handbook* (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Slaughter, Richard (2005) *The Knowledge Base of Futures Studies: Professional Edition* CD-ROM. Brisbane: Foresight International.