

Leading from the Future

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by Jay Gary

What has occupied your executive team's attention the past three years? Chances are you have been restructuring departments or reengineering core programs for immediate gain, rather than regenerating your strategies or reinventing your organization for the future. It is said that on average, corporate management devotes 90% of their time on the "Inside and Now," leaving 10% of their energy to focus on the "Outside and Then."

That forward focus might be even less in the non-profit or small business sectors given that the urgent often preempts the important due to limited resources. While shoring up today's operations is vital and necessary, it is no substitute for creating tomorrow's programs. So, how can we lead from the future, rather than the past?

Enter Strategic Foresight

Over the past decade, an applied field has emerged that holds great promise for any Christian leader who seeks to raise their organization to the next level, 30, 60 or even 100-fold. This field has been christened "strategic foresight," and has emerged from four disciplines: future studies, organizational development, technological forecasting and strategic planning.



The premise is straightforward. Leaders should cultivate foresight, or broaden their forward sight to complement planning. Planning develops strategies for present operations, while foresight creates the framework for future actions, five to ten years out. Where certainty and continuity prevail, planning works best. By contrast, foresight aims to identify those uncertainties and discontinuities that could become "game changers."

Australian educator Richard Slaughter sees foresight as an internal capacity of leadership, much like creativity or vision. He defines foresight as "the ability to create and maintain a high-quality, coherent and functional forward view and to use the insights arising in organizationally useful ways."

Useful ways in a faith context might mean to illuminate emerging issues in ethics, reinvent aging institutions, leverage outreach through strategic alliances, reach new generations, act proactively in light of demographic changes, or introduce a more holistic paradigm for cross-cultural organizations.

Mental Model 2

Strategic foresight is largely about creating a "Mental Model 2" (MM2) to follow your present "Mental Model 1" (MM1). This can be in a ministry or marketplace context, or within any sector of society. MM1 is the prevailing organizational paradigm. It is the way you see the world and the future of faith. It is the predominant view of the present and the assumption that, given past success, the future will be more of the same. MM2 is a new

set of assumptions that your team develops in view of prevailing change in your sector. Rather than a traditional belief, MM2 is an emerging view of how your audience and core competencies might change in ten years. In the midst of preserving the gains that MM1 has spawned, MM2 aims to shift your ministry or organization to match future realities.

Developing a MM2 is an intentional journey that executive teams take together, usually lasting from six months to one year. The foresight process is either led from the inside by a CEO or development director, or led from the outside by ministry association leaders. Ultimately, however, strategic foresight can be used by anyone in any type of organization.

When asked for the secret to his goal-scoring success, Canadian hockey player Wayne Gretsky expressed the essence of strategic foresight: "I don't skate to where the puck is. I skate to where the puck is going to be."

About the Author



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