Three Horizons: From Foresight to Action – Facilitator's Guide

OBJECTIVE: TO BEGIN CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN CONTENT PRESENTED IN FORESIGHT DOCUMENTS AND THE IMMEDIATE NEEDS AND CHALLENGES FACED BY THE POLICY COMMUNITY.

This exercise takes approximately two hours, including about one hour of discussion in breakout groups where participants explore how ideas put forth in a foresight research project (10–15 year horizon) could apply to a more actionable 3–5 year timeline.

People:
- 1 primary facilitator
- 1–2 supporting facilitators for each breakout group (familiar with foresight document)
- 4–50 participants (to be divided into breakout groups of 4–8 participants)

Materials:
Post on the wall of the plenary room:
- A visual agenda (optional)
- Rules of engagement (optional)
- 1 large flipchart page for each group (with sticky notes for room assignment; and later for report back)
- 2 headings on flipchart pages (optional):
- What worked? & What could be better?

For each breakout group:
- Fine-tip marker for each participant
- 3 pads of sticky notes (in 3 different colours)
- Projector/computer (optional)
- 1 printed foresight document
- 1 clear wall that can be used as a working space

Meeting Space:
A central meeting room to present the exercise and breakout rooms (or spaces within the meeting room) for each group.

Agenda at a Glance

TIME	ACTIVITY
5 minutes	1. Give context for the exercise and its goal
23 minutes	2. Present findings from foresight project
5 minutes	3. Provide instructions for the exercise
2 minutes	4. Participants break into groups
60 minutes	5. Group discussion
2 minutes	6. Groups reconvene
13 minutes	7. Each group shares 1–3 insights from their discussion
10 minutes	8. Reflect on / evaluate the exercise
EST. TOTAL TIME: 120 minutes	

BEFORE THE MEETING: HOW THIS EXERCISE HELPS AN AUDIENCE MAKE USE OF FORESIGHT FINDINGS

When the results of a foresight study are shared with a new audience (e.g. through a foresight report), it can be difficult to know what to do with this information. Some readers may even be frustrated if:

1. the plausible implications seem too distant into the future (it may be hard to see the connection to current policy discourse);

2. the plausible implications are very negative/frightening (this may lead audiences to avoid and deny the content); and/or

3. the audience concludes that these futures are inevitable (there is nothing that can be done but wait for these potential futures to happen).

This activity helps policymakers begin to close the gap between the future they would like to see (e.g. reflected in policy aspirations such as departmental mandates, speeches, budgets, etc.) and the plausible futures the study suggests for consideration. Empowering policymakers with these conversations reminds them that the future is not written. With constructive early conversations, we may set the course for actions that mitigate unwanted potential challenges and harness potential opportunities. This is the ultimate goal of foresight.

In advance: Prepare a presentation of the foresight study findings

A presenter will need to become familiar with the content of the foresight document and prepare a presentation. Participants can also be asked to read the document before the activity. However, a brief presentation of the content is still strongly recommended so that all participants are aware of the ideas in the foresight document.

Prepare the room(s)

•   The plenary meeting room will be used to present the guidelines for the main activity. Participants should be seated around one or more tables with a good view of the presentation.

•   Develop and post in the room any visual aids that will be referred to in the meeting.

•   A large agenda should be placed on a wall at the front of the room and should clearly indicate

the locations of the breakout spaces. Letters, numbers or colours can be used to name the breakout spaces.

- Breakout spaces:

  ° The breakout spaces can be separate rooms or various corners within the plenary room.

  ° Groups will need a large board or section of wall. A two-metre wide section of wall is ideal.

  ° Each participant will need a chair, writing surface and a clear sightline to the wall that will collect sticky notes.

  ° In the breakout spaces, divide one wall into three columns labelled First, Second, and Third Horizon. The Second Horizon, in the middle, should take nearly 80% of the total allocated space.

  ° Each group will need three colours of sticky notes in order to keep the three separate Horizons clearly distinguishable.

  ° A photo example of a completed Three Horizons exercise appears at the end of this document.

ANNOTATED AGENDA

TIME	ACTIVITY	NOTES
5 minutes	**1. Give context for the exercise and its goals** • The goal of this activity is to help a group utilize the material from a finished foresight document for their day-to-day activities. • The group identifies a current policy area (First Horizon) that could be impacted in 10-15 years by one of the plausible alternative futures described in the foresight document (Third Horizon). The group then brainstorms to identify potential short- and medium-term strategies (Second Horizon) that would help prepare for the opportunities and challenges presented. • The First Horizon is the present reality. The present reality is fading away, as time will bring change in many forms. • The Third Horizon is the future. The future brings many uncertainties but also possibilities. The Third Horizon refers to concepts presented in the foresight document. • Between present-day realities (First Horizon) and the concepts explored in the foresight document (Third Horizon) lies the Second Horizon. The Second Horizon is the space of proactive and reactive responses. The Second Horizon is where participants explore both desired and dreaded futures as well as actions and setbacks envisioned on the path ahead.	• The facilitator should remind participants that this exercise is only an introduction to integrating a foresight perspective into policy decision-making. The more limited the time and the broader the range of issues explored, the more challenging it will be for participants to move beyond scratching the surface. • See the photo at the end of this guide for a visual of the Three Horizons.

23 minutes	2. **Present findings from foresight document**	
	• At the beginning of the presentation, participants should be asked to identify a policy area (First Horizon) relevant to their department's mandate that could be impacted by the possible changes mentioned in the presentation.	
5 minutes	3. **Provide instructions for the exercise**	Process for dividing participants into breakout groups:
	• The primary facilitator explains that the group will be exploring the Three Horizons in the next hour.	• In the plenary room, write each of the group/room names in large font (e.g. ROOM 1, ROOM 2) on individual flipchart sheets.
	• Participants are invited to choose which breakout group they would like to join based on which insight (Third Horizon) is relevant to the policy area (First Horizon) that they identified during the presentation (see the notes section for a process to ensure participants are evenly divided among groups).	• Below the name of each room, write an insight title from the foresight document.
	• Each breakout group will examine one insight from the foresight document (Third Horizon).	• Below the room names and insight title, place sticky notes (different colours for each room) with the specific room name written on it.
		• Make sure the number of sticky notes assigned to each room allows for an even spread of participants amongst the groups.

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		• Participants will each choose their room with the act of removing one sticky note from one of the room flipcharts. (If a participant's first choice of room has no sticky notes left, they must choose a different room).
2 minutes	**4. Participants break into groups of 4-8** • Remind participants of what time it is and the time at which they are expected to return.	• If the activity is running late, adjust the return time accordingly.
60 minutes **Round 1:** **10 minutes**	**5. Group discussion** **Round One: Establishing the First & Third Horizons** • The facilitator(s) should begin with a quick review of the insight that will be used as the Third Horizon during the group's discussion and then ask participants, **Do you have any questions about this insight?** • They are asked to answer the following question: **1. Identify a policy area relevant to your department's mandate that could be impacted by the insight presented.** • Each participant will write down a 3-5 word summary of their answer on a sticky note. One at a time, they will share and then place their sticky note on the left-hand side of the wall in the First Horizon space. • The group then selects one policy area to be explored further. A simple vote by a show of hands will allow the conversation to move forward as quickly as possible. Time permitting, a second and third policy area may be explored.	• Remind participants that the Third Horizon insight is not a prediction but simply a plausible future and that the conversation is about: What if the insight should come become a reality? • Give participants one colour of sticky notes (e.g. blue sticky) for each policy area explored in the first Horizons. (E.g. blue sticky for the first issue explored, green sticky for second insight explored).

Round 2: **10 minutes**	**Round Two: Shaping the boundaries of the conversation** • The facilitator asks the participant who provided the chosen policy area to elaborate (i.e. current objectives of policy area, etc.). • The facilitator then asks the group: **2. Do you have any questions about the selected policy area?** • These questions are meant to ensure that all participants understand the relevant relationship between the insight (Third Horizon) and the policy area (First Horizon) before discussing possible challenges and opportunities (Second Horizon). • By answering questions or calling on the group to answer, the facilitator helps the group define and categorize the important elements of the chosen policy area.	• After each question, participants write a short answer on a sticky note. The facilitator adds any additional information that comes up as the group explores their answers.
Round 3: **35 minutes**	**Round Three: Imagining a proactive response (Second Horizon)** • The facilitator then asks: **3. What challenges and opportunities related to this policy area may arise should this insight come to pass?** (15 mins) • The facilitator should attempt to record the challenges faced by policy makers in the Second Horizon column on sticky notes of the 3rd colour. • Once each participant has had a chance to contribute and the conversation seems to have yielded a few concrete insights, the facilitator summarizes the material to set the stage for the next question. • **4. What strategic initiatives could we take to address these new challenges and opportunities?** (15 mins)	

- The facilitator records the brainstorm and prompts participants to explore the finer details of their ideas. Ideally various ideas can be mapped out in a timeline, with one or more paths connecting the ideas that relate to one another. This might look like steps that could be taken as we move from the First to Second and finally to the Third Horizon.
- Finally, the facilitator asks the group:
  5. What could you do tomorrow? and tries to guide the discussion towards concrete first steps.
- If participants are stuck, the facilitator can keep a few ideas in mind, such as:
  - Conduct a research study (identify: what do we need to learn more about?)
  - Present the issue to a policy area or committee that are impacted by the discussion (identify: who?)
  - Explore best practices in a program area….(identify: what programs? Who might have these examples, e.g. provinces, communities, other countries?
  - Evaluate the effectiveness of a current initiative (identify: are there new risks/ opportunities we would want an existing initiative to address or at least monitor?)
  - Test pilot a new approach…. (identify: is something completely new needed?)

Summary:
5 minutes

Summary
- The facilitator asks the group to identify key findings to report back to the plenary session and prepares a summary to report back.

2 minutes   6. **Groups return to plenary session**

13 minutes	7. **Each group facilitator shares key findings in plenary session** • Time permitting, participants are invited to discuss and comment on the findings.	

10 minutes	8. **Reflect on and/or evaluate the exercise**
	• Give participants an opportunity to provide feedback on the exercise.
	• This might take the form of:
	  ° A Q&A discussion
	  ° Participant completion of an evaluation form
	  ° Informal evaluation—On their way out of the room, participants are asked to post one comment on a sticky note for each of two wall headings:
	    - What Worked?
	    - What Could Be Better?
		• Provide evaluation forms or sticky notes as appropriate.

Example: Three Horizons Activity

Below is an example of a Three Horizons activity. The discussion was around the insight "Asia's growing presence in cyberspace could heighten threats to security", drawn from Horizons' Future of Asia study.
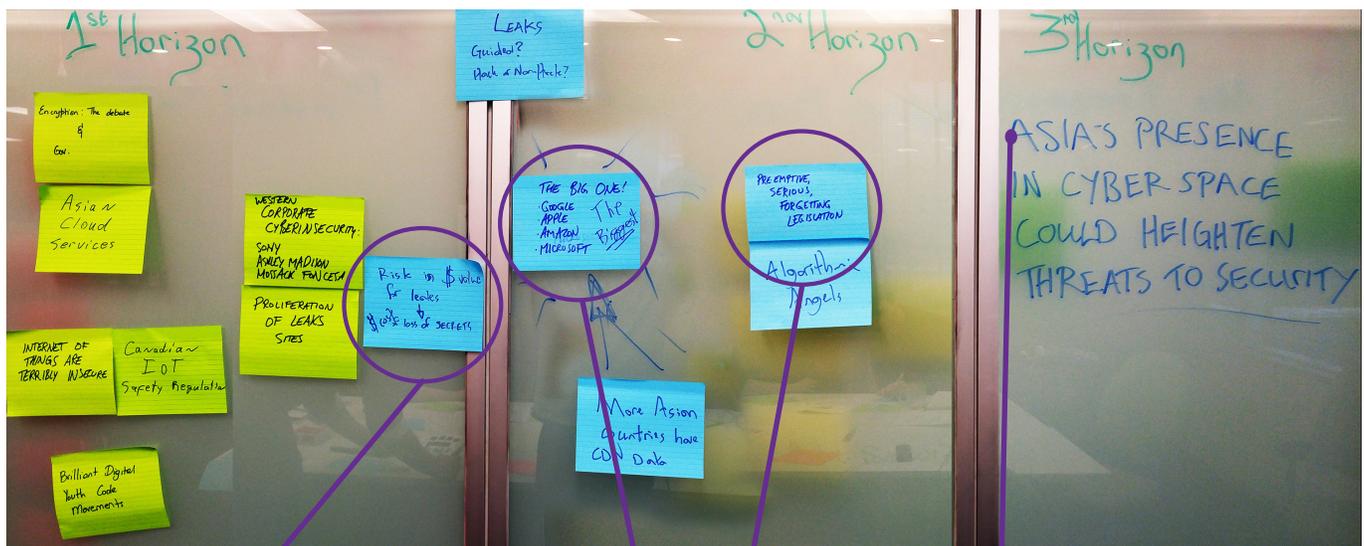
First Horizon
Risks associated with important data leaks.

1. Identify a policy area relevant to your department's mandate that could be impacted by the insight presented.
2. Do you have any questions about the selected policy area?

Second Horizon
Policy Challenge
The Big One: Is Canada ready to face a data leak at an unprecedented scale?

Proactive response
Enact robust 'forgettting' regulation

What can you do tomorrow?
Start a conversation with the right people

3. What challenges and opportunities around this policy area may arise should this insight become a reality?
4. What initiatives could we take now that would address these new challenges and opportunities?
5. What could you do tomorrow?

Third Horizon
Asia's growing presence in cyberspace could heighten threats to security