

Step 4: Change Drivers in the Horizons Foresight Method

Overview

What they are: A change driver causes significant change in the system under study. In *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu advises the General to go to the highest point possible to see the whole battlefield and visualize how different developments could play out. In similar fashion, imagine change drivers sweeping across the landscape and impacting the system. Some drivers change only one system element, but others might change several elements.

A change driver can impact a system in two ways: 1) Most people can guess some of the initial or first-order consequences of a driver, but few people have thought through to the second-, third-, fourth- and fifth-order consequences over time. The Horizons Foresight Method uses cascade diagrams to explore the potential consequences and unanticipated surprises of a driver over time. 2) Change drivers can also interact with each other to create surprises separate from their direct impact on the system. The Horizons Foresight Method uses a cross-impact matrix to explore this source of surprise.

Where they fit in the Horizons Foresight Method: After the scanning phase and the development of a system map, the testing and formulation of change drivers can start. Each insight is studied to see where and how it could impact the system. The insights that appear to have strategically significant impacts on the system are used as change drivers in the scenarios. Interesting insights that are not used as change drivers can show up in the scenarios in other ways.

Challenges in this step: There is a chicken-and-egg relationship between the system map and the change drivers. The choice of system elements does influence the choice of change drivers and vice versa. With considerable experience, you can play with these two sets of variables to find a combination that offers the best strategic insight into your problem. For newcomers, it is better to lock down the system map and choose the drivers that offer the most insightful interactions.

Summary: Some foresight methods rely on intuition to choose the drivers. In this case, very general drivers like globalization, climate change, demographics, etc., can produce scenario results that are often extraordinarily general and obvious. The Horizons Foresight Method filters through the weak signals and insights to find and formulate change drivers that have a significant disruptive impact on one or more elements in the system.

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