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Sharing Ideas with Visuals

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Policy Horizons Canada anticipates emerging policy challenges and opportunities in a rapidly changing and complex world. Through scanning and foresight, we monitor and explore social, economic, environmental, and technological changes in Canada and around the world and how they may interact in the future.

Given our business, we recognize the importance of using innovative methods to co-create knowledge that will inform choices. By developing the skills to design, lead and capture visual meeting processes, – that is, meetings that make use of techniques for visually representing ideas - we are able to engage people and examine mental models in a whole new way.

David Sibbet, author of **Visual Leaders**, describes a visual leader as someone who:

- Practices being more conscious of his/her visual communications – that is, about how the use of images and other visual aids can play an essential function in conveying ideas.
- Helps pick the right display formats to support what he or she is talking about.
- Harvests multiple different metaphors/mental models to illustrate ideas.
- Encourages people to talk about the metaphors, analogies and mental models they are using to make choices.

We love David's message that visual thinking skills are for everyone. No matter what organization you work for, or what position you hold, you can develop visual leadership skills. The reward? Ultimately the regular practice of visualizing thinking leads to more effective understanding of complex systems, and can help design more effective approaches to challenges or opportunities.

As the visual revolution gains momentum, more and more organizations are reaching out to learn visual thinking/meeting methods. They are training entire teams in these skills so that they can transform their own work process into a visual process. Horizons is no exception. In February 2013, **Get the Picture** – a graphic facilitation company – provided a customized visual facilitation workshop to the Policy Horizons Canada team.

We may have only started our visual learning journey, but we are becoming true visual leaders! Here's why...!

We set high expectations - Our vision is that the entire team will develop visual communication skills.



We use visuals actively - Around the Horizons office you will find team members building their visual vocabulary on daily basis in a number of ways. Here is what we are doing:

- Taking visual notes during regular meetings
- Partnering to visualize concepts and practice drawing icons (building our visual library)
- Constructing visual maps of project teams and visual agendas
- Creating additional visual starter toolkits for colleagues and sharing their new skills
- Browsing online galleries of visual recordings to learn from other styles

We are using visuals during meetings to harvest mental models – Horizons has facilitated several workshops which provided a space for participants to share insights, learn, experiment and test new practices and ideas. Here are just a few:

Come Scan with Us is an initiative where participants from various departments and agencies come together to discuss exciting changes happening in the world that might have policy implications for Canada, and beyond. Each session introduces a different tool or methodology and incorporates visuals into the process.



We have used visuals to map out processes and timelines for our current cycle of foresight projects. The communications team at Horizons hosted a five-part series called “What’s the Word on Comms Street” using visuals to help improve the staff’s understanding of communications.

We are contributing to the visual community – Horizons is always on the lookout for new opportunities to learn more about visual facilitation and explore new tools we can use in our visual practice. This July, some creative team members will continue their visual journey at the International Forum of Visual Practitioners (IFVP) Conference where they will explore the future of visualization and how visual practice may evolve.

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PH4-125/2013E-PDF
978-1-100-21454-2

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