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Futures Studies and Sustainability

by Dr Peter Saul

The Scope of this Paper

This paper focuses on the contribution that the discipline of futures studies has made in the past, and the contribution that it can make in the future, to promoting the enhanced sustainability of a natural system, whether that system be a geographical space, a nation, an industry or an organisation.

According to leading Australian futurist, Dr Richard Slaughter (2004), one of the earliest definitions of futures studies was given by Professor Henry David (1970) who proposed that futures research may be defined as “the intellectual form in which a society renders account to itself of its probable and possible futures”. It is the developing body of knowledge and practice designed to help people make decisions in the present that are more likely to lead to preferred future states and less likely to lead to distressing or painful future states.

Modern futures studies methods encompass data collection on emerging trends; brainstorming on possible future surprises and on our desired futures; exploration of our cultural and personal and organisational biases and habits when thinking and making choices affecting the future; designing possible future scenarios and sequences of events that might connect those scenarios to our present circumstances; etc. Slaughter and Inayatullah (2005) have assembled a comprehensive compilation of the emerging knowledge base of futures studies. Their CD draws together many articles by a wide diversity of writers that document the historical development of the field of futures studies and give an overview of its major concepts and methods. The compilation also describes the various professional associations to which futurists may belong as well as describing some of the tertiary courses that are now available in the discipline; e.g. the Master of Management (Strategic Foresight) degree offered by the Australian Graduate School of Entrepreneurship at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne.

Futures methodologies help us to explore alternatives, assumptions, choices and consequences. Futures techniques help to reveal the assumptions, biases and dreams that shape our choices in the present. Futures studies, tools and methodologies can also help someone seeking ways of challenging the views of colleagues who feel comfortable in their assumptions about the future, or who feel that planning is a waste of time. However, futures studies methodologies do not give the psychic ability to see into the future, which often disappoints the clients of professional futurists. Too often, practising managers are driven by short-term performance targets and financial incentives and see little value in strategic analysis and planning tools that have a long term focus.

Paraphrasing (slightly) Professor Dexter Dunphy and Dr Andrew Griffiths (1998) who accepted the point of view on “sustainability” espoused by Crosby and Knight (1995): the goal of sustainability is to ensure that we as individuals, organisations and nations are living and working in such a way that human society will be possible for many generations to

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come. Others have defined living sustainably as meaning that we are not closing down the life options of future generations; that we are not bequeathing a poorer standard of living to our children and grandchildren than we enjoy ourselves.

Sustainability does not mean preservation of a comfortable status quo; it does mean aligning how we live in the present with lifestyles that are compatible with the health and wellbeing of future generations of humans, other species and the natural environment. This realignment will require that we develop new measures of social and economic “progress”. There are increasing signs that this re-engineering of our notion of “progress” is under way (e.g. Theobald 1997; ABS 2010; Murphy 2010).

All definitions of sustainability imply, to some extent, that we can know the values of future generations and how they will conceive of things like “standard of living” or “health and wellbeing”, or “success”. The methods of futures studies can help us to explore how these terms that are at the core of the sustainability debate are likely to be conceived in various plausible futures so that we might make decisions in the present that are likely to be seen as “good” or “sustainable” by future generations.

The Track Record of Futures Studies to Date

There are many examples of where futures studies techniques have been used around the world to help nations, organisations, and communities chart pathways into the future that will enable them and their stakeholder communities to thrive for generations to come – a core requirement of sustainability. Indeed, the British Government maintains an ongoing Foresight project that aims to “help government think systematically about the future”. They do this in three ways:

- “Foresight projects are in-depth studies looking at major issues 20-80 years in the future.
- The Foresight Horizon Scanning Centre does short projects looking at more discrete issues 10-15 years in the future.
- Foresight Toolkits and Networks look to strengthen futures thinking capacity and share best practice within and across government.”
(Source: www.bis.gov.uk/foresight/about-us)

Several futures case study examples are briefly sketched below:

Creating a sustainable nation

Example 1: The history of South Africa was transformed when, in 1991, 22 prominent South Africans had a meeting with a team of scenario writers from the Shell oil company. They explored the likely consequences of continuing apartheid and imagined new futures and the paths that might lead to them. Their four scenarios were widely published in South

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Africa and a 30-minute video was released. In brief, the scenarios were (Global Business Network, 1992, pp. 1-3):

- ***Ostrich***, in which a negotiated settlement to the crisis in South Africa is not achieved, and the country's government continues to be non-representative...

The message of *Ostrich* was that a non-negotiated resolution of the crisis would not be sustainable. This was important because elements of the National Party (NP) government and the business community wished to believe that a deal with their allies, instead of a negotiation with their opponents, could be sufficient. After hearing about the team's work, NP leader F. W. de Klerk was quoted as saying, "I am not an *Ostrich*."

- ***Lame Duck***, in which a settlement is achieved but the transition to a new dispensation is slow and indecisive...

Lame Duck's message was that a weak coalition government would not be able to deliver and therefore could not last. This was important because the nature, composition, and rules governing the Government of National Unity (GNU) were a central issue in the pre-election negotiations. The NP wanted the GNU to operate subject to vetoes and other restrictions, and the ANC wanted unfettered "winner takes all" rules. *Lame Duck* explored the boundary in a GNU between compromise and incapacitation.

- ***Icarus***, in which transition is rapid but the new government unwisely pursues unsustainable, populist economic policies...

Icarus warned of the dangers of a new government implementing populist economic policy. This message—coming from a team which included several of the left's most influential economists—was very challenging to the left, which had assumed that government money could be used to eradicate poverty quickly. The business community, which was worried about *Icarus* policies, found the team's articulation reassuring. The fiscal conservatism of the GNU was one of the important surprises of the post-election period.

- ***Flight of the Flamingos***, in which the government's policies are sustainable and the country takes a path of inclusive growth and democracy...

The simple message of *Flight of the Flamingos* was that the team believed in the potential for a positive outcome. In a country in the midst of turbulence and uncertainty, a credible and optimistic story makes a strong impact. One participant said recently that the main result of the project was that 'We mapped out in very broad terms the outline of a successful outcome, which is now being filled in. We captured the way forward of those committed to finding a way forward.'

The team that developed the scenarios made presentations to more than 50 influential groups in South Africa and Europe, and to the World Bank. But the real success was that the scenarios became a popular conversation topic for South Africans, including taxi drivers and

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talk-show hosts. Thousands of South Africans were stimulated to become engaged in exploring the futures for their country that could plausibly result from continuing apartheid and current forms of national governance or from taking very different paths into the future. Seven years later, South Africa made a peaceful transition to representative government. The parties involved acknowledge that the scenarios played an important role in that transition.

If South Africa does not always appear to be truly fulfilling its original vision for peaceful co-existence between tribes and between blacks and whites it may be because the processes that led to change have not continued to be employed in managing the ongoing journey into the future. It may also be because the national transition management process has been too slow to re-align the “carrots and sticks” in South Africa’s governance systems to reward the behaviours that will nurture and reinforce the preferred scenario.

Example 2: From 2002-2004, I was involved in a project managed by Macquarie University for the Government of Malaysia which developed several plausible scenarios for that nation in 2020 and then explored the mix of knowledge and skills that the Malaysian workforce would need if the country was to prosper in the context defined by each of the various scenarios. The range of knowledge and skill outputs that were likely to be required under the various scenarios were estimated through the use of sophisticated economic models and were then used to shape planning for development of the country’s education and training systems.

As with most futures studies projects, the main goal was not to determine the future of Malaysia and the associated optimal education and training system. Rather, one important initial goal was to engage leaders from government, business, education and training institutions in conversations that expanded their thinking about the changes that would be necessary in their country’s learning systems to ensure that Malaysia was sustainably successful regardless of which scenario actually unfolded in the ensuing years. They were also assisted to identify indicators that they could monitor to determine which of the scenarios that had been developed was actually unfolding (or whether some new future was emerging that had not previously been contemplated). The scenarios were also used as important input to the economic models that forecast Malaysia’s future economy and the mix of knowledge and skills that it would require.

Finally, the project recommended a long term Human Resources Development Strategy for the Malaysian Government designed to provide the capacity to succeed under a range of plausible scenarios.

Example 3: In 2009, I assisted Skills Australia in a similar project to Example 2 that was designed to shape the training and education systems in Australia to ensure that Australia had the knowledge and skills it would need in order to sustain success through 2025. The project examined Australia’s possible place in the world of 2025 using scenarios that were based on three *Global Scenarios to 2025* developed by the Royal Dutch/Shell Group in 2005. The very different concepts of “success” in each of the three scenarios suggest that

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sustainability would be interpreted, valued and used to guide decision making very differently in each possible global future (Saul 2009): e.g.

Scenario 1:

- The global efforts to deal cooperatively with the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) end up being more rhetoric than reality (as in 1930).
- Voters around the world push governments to protect jobs and part of the strategy for doing this is to discourage migration and foreign investment. Large corporations push governments to protect their interests – even at the longer-term cost of the environment or the wider community (e.g. bail-outs to manufacturing and construction industries; and continuing subsidies to agricultural regions made uneconomic by climate change).
- Markets deliver very positive outcomes for some but there is a growing divide between the haves and the have nots.
- “Success” in this world means winning in the markets that are relevant to you or your organisation; e.g. consumer, labour, capital, member, electoral, etc.

In this world, “sustainability” is likely to be seen variously as a product, an input, a cost, or a political nuisance to be “managed” rather than genuinely addressed. This future scenario is where climate change sceptics and adherents to market-based solutions to global challenges will probably choose to live.

Scenario 2:

- The GFC and climate change bring nations together in new governance forums in order to deal with problems that cannot be addressed by nations working independently. It becomes clear that pursuing self-interest in a globalised world only invites retaliation and continuing (expensive) conflict. Initially, peace is simply seen to be cheaper. However, trust gradually grows from there.
- The success of cooperative efforts at the international level reinforces and is reinforced by new governance mechanisms that are emerging at the corporate and community levels. Sustainability, triple bottom line, closing opportunity gaps, and social networking technology are ideas and forces that increasingly drive towards more participative governance mechanisms. They also reduce social inequality.
- We see many more reviews, consultative conferences, and community cabinet meetings in the search for “win-win” policies, solutions and decisions. This slows down decision making but speeds up implementation.
- Regulatory negotiation is common as NGOs, industry groups and regulators work together to set standards and lower barriers to the movement of people and ideas.
- “Success” in this world means being a good local, corporate and global citizen. It means living by one’s values, fulfilling one’s economic, social and environmental responsibilities and respecting the rights and values of others (including those who will come after us).

In this world, sustainability is likely to be widely embraced as an important dimension of progress and “success” at the global, national, organisational, community and individual levels. This scenario is the preferred home for supporters of Greenpeace and the World

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Wildlife Fund and “green” political parties. In this future, people embrace sustainability because it is the “right” thing to do (from a holistic, systems, ethical perspective).

Scenario 3:

- The global efforts to deal cooperatively with the GFC end up being more rhetoric than reality (as in 1930). The GFC morphs into a protracted global depression.
- Weakened international institutions, including increasingly under-funded bodies like the UN and WTO, provide little discipline to control the tendency of nationalistic governments to lean towards “beggar thy neighbour” policies. Across many realms where reciprocal action among nations is the key to success (as in the management of the GFC and climate change; and food, water and energy security) worldwide policy efforts flounder.
- In the absence of strong multinational agencies of global governance, bilateral and regional alliances and agreements are entered into by governments and national bodies in areas of mutual national interest.
- Increasingly desperate voters around the world push their governments to protect jobs at all costs and part of the strategy for doing this is to discourage migration and foreign investment and to impose trade barriers and “buy local” incentives.
- “Success” in this world means being judged to be a “good” member of the important “tribes” to which you belong. This means that many definitions of “success” proliferate and these are often in conflict with each other. Loyalty and adherence to corporate values are important (if often implicit) dimensions of assessments of a person’s “performance”.

In this future world, sustainability is likely to have a much more narrow, local focus. People will do what they can to protect their own patch without worrying too much about what is going on in other regions, industries or nations. In this future, the sustainability of me and my “tribe” (organisational, community, professional, online, etc) is my primary concern. In this scenario, people will have a wide diversity of views of sustainability (including the views associated with the two scenarios outlined above). There will also be very different local embodiments of what it means to live and work in a sustainable way.

Creating a sustainable community

In 2007, I was part of a team that assisted a Western Sydney Council with their long term planning. The goal was to ensure that the shire maintained its unique semi-rural character in the face of growing centres of cosmopolitan urban life. In this sense, the Council was trying to ensure the sustainable future development of the region under its jurisdiction.

Through a process of community consultation, the characteristics and values that defined the identity of the shire in people’s minds – and which attracted them to live and work there – were identified. Several critical uncertainties about future development of the shire were identified and scenarios were constructed around these uncertainties (see Figure1 on page 16).

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The four scenarios provided a structured basis for engaging people in the process of choosing a future for their shire that either embraced one for the four possible scenarios or stimulated planning that respected the diversity of views around what elements of the past needed to be reinforced and protected and what new elements needed to be woven into a shared future vision for the shire.

Other areas of State and local government in Australia have also used futures studies methods in their attempts to define future visions for their areas of responsibility that are likely to be supported by all key constituents (e.g. see Inayatullah 2002, Albury-Wodonga Development Corporation 2004, Gould 2008, State Library of NSW, 2009).

Creating a sustainable organisation

Many organisations in both the public and private sectors have used futures studies methods to improve their planning and decision making processes in the present. Defence and intelligence agencies around the world are also committed users of futures studies methods. The most experienced users of futures study methodology tend to be organisations in industries that have long planning horizons; e.g. insurance; oil and mining exploration; defence; etc. Typing “the future of [*insert name of an industry*]” into a search engine such as Google will generate dozens (in some case, hundreds) of examples of the corporate use of futures studies tools and techniques.

While Slaughter and Inayatullah (2005) show that futures studies methodology is much more than scenario writing, many organisations seem most comfortable with the scenario process. This may be because it has been given a perceived legitimacy through its successful use by Shell and others. Scenarios are most effective in stimulating new thinking in organisations when they are presented through rich stories from the future; e.g. an imagined newspaper front page in 2015; or the CEO’s address in the annual report of 2025; or a stockbroker’s analysis of your company in 2020.

Involvement in the futures studies process typically broadens management thinking from a narrow view of the future which is based on prevailing (and undiscussed) preconceptions, beliefs, and biases to an awareness of several possible futures that may arise if the unstated assumptions underlying current views of the future prove to be unfounded. The futures process also heightens management’s awareness of the broader context in which they are operating and it is here that a deeper understanding is built of the forces influencing the future sustainability of the organisation.

By imagining plausible long term futures that may coalesce out of the melting pot of social, technical, economic, environmental and political trends and potential surprises that will shape our tomorrows, managers can be encouraged to lift their thinking above all the constraints of today and think about novel pathways to desired futures – pathways that give them a competitive advantage. For example, the futures technique of “backcasting” can also help managers to imagine a series of decisions and actions that might plausibly lead to each of the imagined futures. Backcasting involves imagining you are already in a particular

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future scenario and, from that future perspective, looking back on how you got there. What would have had to happen for that particular future to have unfolded?

For example, in 2000, Zurich Australia Insurance planned to introduce a new business model and asked a team of futurists, including myself, to design a visioning project that would help senior management gain a better understanding of the broader context in which the proposed new business model might have to operate in the future. Specifically, the proposed “research objectives” were:

- To develop a common understanding of the environment in which the [new business] model will operate – today and in the future
- To identify the ‘best’ market opportunities and key issues – today and in the future
- To challenge the current [business] model with the view to assessing the degree to which (and how) it must change to leverage market opportunities
- To generate ideas about how the model might be refined/ developed to compete most effectively
- To identify the most compelling offers – for customers and [the business]. Note, that in this context, the concept of offer includes brand, product set, service experience, advertising, support.

The general process used to respond to this brief was as follows:

Meeting between futurist and client to discuss:

- this proposal
- management of the project
- selection of joint steering committee; and
- selection of participants for workshops

Briefing:

- provision of brief and market scanning data electronically for futurist team
- initial futures provocations, plus proposals for research to be done by workshop participants
- distribute provocations with research brief to participants
- participants conduct research tasks

Preliminary working session (steering committee and two futurists):

- to assess current client approach, plans and obstacles, explore data and identify potentially fruitful elements to be incorporated into full workshop
- to interpret and extend hard data on contextual trends and their implications
- to design the scenario planning workshop
- to enhance readiness of steering committee to manage this process

Full workshop with all client participants, four futurists and stakeholders:

- overview of scenario planning and expected outcomes
- refresh from preliminary workshop and break down barriers to understanding results
- identification and testing of ‘most likely’, ‘probable and ‘unlikely but possible’ scenarios for the specified list of considerations
- agreement of format of final report.

Report and presentation of results to be prepared by steering committee.

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The project developed three possible futures for the financial services industry which differed fundamentally in the values surrounding money in the future: e.g.

- Scenario 1: Money creates an ethical future and relationships
- Scenario 2: Money buys manufactured experiences
- Scenario 3: Money is security, status

The three scenarios were built around three different but internally coherent and plausible views of “risk”; money/wealth; community; individual identity or self; relationship with the natural environment; need for financial services; preferred financial services providers; etc.

It became clear that there opportunities and threats for Zurich in each of the three imagined futures but that the company would not be able to serve the different future markets under the same brand and service offering. Consequently, the Board and senior management were faced with a strategic choice as to which future they would design the company and the new business model around (as well as building the corporate agility and transition pathways that would enable the company to continue to succeed if other scenarios unfolded).

As well as their use by individual organisations, futures methods have been used by researchers analysing possible futures of whole industries. For example, Kivits, Charles and Ryan (2010) have developed future scenarios of the airline industry in a post-carbon world. Paul Steedman and Wendy Schultz in research for the UK Food Ethics Council (2009) have developed scenarios for the future of the UK “food system”. Bradfield and El-Sayed (2009) have explored four scenarios of the future of the pharmaceutical industry.

Futures Studies as an Enabler of Innovation

One of the challenges facing leaders in an increasingly slow-growth world, where a lot of cost cutting has already happened as a result of the global financial crisis, is to grow the revenue and profit lines of their business. This, of course, requires innovation to win new market segments, gain increased market share, and/or increase productivity and perceived customer value so that margins can be increased. Harvard Professor Clayton Christensen, a world leader in the dynamics of successful corporate innovation, has suggested that three customer groups should be analysed to identify opportunities for product/ service innovation. The three groups and the kinds of innovators that are likely to successfully target them are (Christensen et al. 2004, p.4):

- ***Nonconsumers:*** Potential customers who are not currently consuming any products or who are consuming only in inconvenient settings. This potential market niche is likely to be targeted by companies (typically new entrants to the industry) introducing disruptive technologies that bring these “nonconsumers” into the market in profitable ways.

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- **Undershot customers:** Consuming customers whose needs are currently undershot by the current product/service offerings. These customers are likely to be the target of companies (typically existing players in the industry) introducing upmarket “sustaining innovations”.
- **Overshot customers:** Consuming customers whose needs are currently being overshot. This market niche is likely to be the focus of companies introducing no-frills products or new features that enable customers to get more value out of a basic product/service offering.

However, as a futurist, I would add that leaders should also analyse another customer segment when planning how best to allocate their research and development dollars: viz.,

- **Tomorrow’s customers:** People who will be entering your market over the next 5, 10, or 20 years (depending on your planning horizon). These potential customers will be successfully targeted by companies that have more accurately anticipated the demographic, social, environmental and technological changes that will shape the needs and wants of tomorrows’ customers as well as the new delivery (more cost-effective) platforms that will emerge for satisfying those needs.

Especially in a world that is as dynamic (some would say “chaotic”) as today’s, it is likely that tomorrow’s market environment, tomorrow’s competitors, and tomorrow’s customers are likely to be different from today’s. Tomorrow’s technology, tomorrow’s organisation structures and tomorrow’s workforce are also likely to be different. Futures studies methodology can assist leaders in grappling with these future uncertainties in ways that can improve the quality of today’s strategic planning (including planning for R&D or innovation).

Futures Studies and Organisational Development

As implied in the previous paragraph, it is not enough to innovate around the products and services that are likely to meet the needs and wants of tomorrow’s customers. Successful leaders also innovate around the organisational structures, the technology platforms and the workforce characteristics that will most profitably make, deliver and service those future products and services; and which will build and sustain strong customer relationships and brand loyalty.

In 2002, I worked with a team of change consultants to help senior management in the corporate services division of a large NSW government agency to explore the likely future nature of corporate shared services organisations. Once again, the scenario development methodology was utilised as it was a methodology that the client was familiar with and had faith in. The four scenarios in Figure 2 were developed as a result of our work with this client.

Part of the brief in this organisation was to identify the characteristic of the workforce that would be best suited to life in each of the possible future corporate service “worlds”. So, behind the brief “Staff characteristics” descriptors shown in Figure 2 (on page 17) were detailed descriptions of the kinds of work behaviours that would underpin the

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organisation's success in each of the imagined futures. The mix of experience, education and training that was likely to enable these behaviours was also identified. An organisational development strategy was then planned to prepare the workforce for the preferred future and also to develop the corporate agility that might be necessary to enable the organisation to adapt quickly to whichever future scenario unfolded.

Futures Studies and Stakeholder Engagement

Futures methodologies provide very attractive opportunities to engage an organisation's stakeholders in planning for the future. The benefits of partnering with other stakeholders in implementing an organisation's sustainability strategy and an overview of some of the "dos and don'ts" of stakeholder partnerships have been thoroughly canvassed by Elkington (1998). Others have gone further and argued for a fundamental overhaul of traditional scientific method in areas of high uncertainty and high stakes (e.g. climate change, sustainability) so that "societal stakeholders and citizens" are involved in participatory approaches to knowledge creation in order "to foster the 'social robustness' of [new] knowledge" (Hage et al. 2010, p. 256).

Simply by asking representatives of each major stakeholder group the following question...

"What would you expect to see happening if this organisation was outstandingly successful in your eyes?"

...it is possible to get the stakeholders in an organisation starting to explore areas of potential synergy and possible cooperation in creating a future that serves all their interests. In a very real sense, the stakeholder community is the organisation and effective leaders think about their organisations this way. Stakeholders can also be led to think about "the organisation" this way – they are then "in" the organisation rather than outside it; i.e. they are truly "engaged".

As part of the futures process, stakeholders can be invited to contribute their views on the major forces they believe are likely to shape the future domain that is being focussed on for planning and decision making purposes (e.g. this industry or this market). In my experience, the fact that stakeholders are asked for their views and can see that senior management is building the future of the organisation and its future products and services around their input (as well as other inputs) strengthens the organisation-stakeholder relationship and also motivates continuing stakeholder involvement in future strategic planning, innovation and performance monitoring.

Involving all stakeholders in the strategic planning process also provides opportunities for leaders to help create more realistic stakeholder expectations by exposing individual stakeholders to the demands and expectations of the other stakeholders that the organisation is also trying to satisfy.

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The Future of Futures Studies: Useful Directions for Future Research

In this paper, I have summarised some of the basic tools currently used by futurists to improve today's planning and decision. Futures studies is a field of research and practice that spans many other disciplines. An exploration of the "future of futures" by Pang (2010) reviews research in the areas of neuroscience and psychology that examines how we perceive the world and process information; and how we make decisions about the future in the face of uncertainty. Sardar (2010) examined the historical development of futures studies and suggests four core characteristics that define futures research. Riedy (2009) has explored the current impact of futures studies including the factors limiting its practical usefulness in influencing decision makers. He concludes:

"However, most futures work fails to achieve influence because it runs up against a dominant western worldview in which short-term thinking is entrenched. To overcome this barrier to influence, futurists need to become politically engaged in the critical task of developing or contributing to new social movements. At the same time, futurists need to understand their audience better and to work to translate their findings or transform their audience." Riedy (2009, p. 53)

Researchers interested in helping to enhance the usefulness and impact of futures studies could make valuable contributions through initiating empirical investigations and theory building designed to answer the following questions:

- To what extent does the regular use of futures studies methodologies as part of an organisation's strategic planning processes impact on organisational profitability, innovation and resilience to external shocks?
- To what extent do managers who are skilled in using futures studies methodologies get promoted faster and higher than managers who do not use these methodologies?
- To what extent does the investment community rate publicly listed organisations that regularly use futures studies methodologies as being more attractive, and more ethical, long term investments?
- What experience, knowledge and skills do successful futurists possess? These may extend beyond just knowledge of futures studies techniques and include facilitation skills, knowledge of the client's industry, change leadership skills and organisational development knowledge.
- What decision path is likely to lead to the best outcomes for managers and futurists charged with selecting or designing a futures studies process for an organisation? Presumably, the decision path would consider variables like organisation size and maturity; industry characteristics and rates of change; knowledge and skills of the organisation's workforce; the nature of existing planning processes; the competitive landscape facing the organisation; etc. The challenge here for futurists and change agents is to choose futures studies processes that will deliver the required senior management outcomes but that are within or near managers' current comfort zones (i.e. the methodologies are seen as credible, effective, aligned with corporate culture and the current skills of the people who will have to implement them).

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In a world where leaders in the private and public sectors are regularly surprised by global events (“nobody could have foreseen the global financial crisis”) because the prevailing planning tools and techniques are deficient, then it must surely be a good investment to experiment with the new array of tools and techniques offered by the emerging field of futures studies. Using them is cheap but not using them is proving to be increasingly expensive.

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Figure 1: FOUR POSSIBLE SCENARIOS FOR A WESTERN SYDNEY SHIRE



