Foresight in Public Service

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Some Context: Change and Complexity
Environmental Change

2050 sea level

2030 sea level

BEACH ScENERY
Technological Change
Social Change
Complexity…
So what does this all add up to?
New Realities
Volatile Environments
How to do public planning when:

• The world has gone VUCA: volatility, uncertainty, complexity & ambiguity reign supreme

• Experts and models get it consistently wrong, knowledge is distributed in the system

• Change, disruption, shocks are the new normal, and it comes from all over the place

• The future is in the making (emerging)

• Loss of a sense of agency
Classical Planning (simplified):

- Assumes slowly changing future which can be predicted
- Relies on expert knowledge and quantitative modeling
- Projects past and current trends into the future
- Assumes linear progress (clear causality)
- Emphasizes front-end analysis, mitigation of risks and mechanical planning
As a consequence

“Traditional governance is blind to the longer-term implications of its decisions, slow to detect the onset of major defects in policy and inattentive to its best options until they have been allowed to slide by”

Leon Fuerth
Enter Strategic Foresight

- Foresight-driven understanding, strategy & execution
- An actionable basis for adaptive strategic planning
- A framework to cope with uncertainty while avoiding ‘shell-shock’ & ‘doing business as usual’
Applied Foresight:

• On and over-the-horizon scanning, trend spotting
• Exploring alternative futures
• Developing alternative scenarios
• Testing the relevance and resilience of existing strategies
• Designing adaptive (‘what-if’) policies
• Constantly keeping a finger on the pulse
• Foresight ➔ Insight ➔ Action
data / modeling
consultations / research
- wild cards
- challenges
- uncertainty
- opportunities
- risks
preferred future
Benefits of foresight?

- Exploring change, risks, and opportunities to come – futures thinking
- Considering alternative futures / scenarios – pathways for planning and intervention
- Expecting, anticipating, embracing change – agility, flexibility & adaptability
- Integrating foresight skills – empowers & enables new conversations
- Engagement with partners – greater collaboration > sustainable results
Rest assured:

“Planning doesn’t disappear: the importance of long term visioning and short term resilience and improvisation is amplified”

Jake Dunagan, Institute For The Future
Examples of foresight as a strategic planning tool

- The Mont Fleur Scenario Exercise in South Africa, brought together key stakeholders to ‘imagine the nation’s future’ – created common ground, established mutual understanding, provided roadmap for transition from apartheid and shifted economic thinking.
Examples of foresight as a strategic planning tool

- ForesightXchange in Rwanda in 2014; key government stakeholder applied foresight to come up with alternative plans for guided urbanisation, rural development and large scale development project, stimulating resilience and cross-sectoral collaboration.
Examples of foresight as a strategic planning tool

- ForesightXchange in the Maldives: 50+ high-level representatives of the civil service made collaborative sense of what might possibly happen in the coming 5 years (alternative futures), what responses would be needed by the civil service and whether current policies and approaches would be enough. Result: an outline for the Strategic Plan (reform) for the civil service.
Foresight as a Strategic Long-Term Planning Tool for Developing Countries

www.bit.ly/foresight4dev
Thank you

Contact us for more information at
GCPSE

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