1. The place of foresight in Government: the PMO Strategy Group and its antecedents

2. History and landscape of foresight in Singapore

3. CSF: Set up + Functions
Governance context has become more challenging: the **Strategy Group** has dedicated teams focused on whole-of-government (WOG) and sector level strategic planning, and cross-cutting areas such as population and climate change policies.

The Centre for Strategic Futures houses the Singapore government’s foresight capabilities.
Evolution of Foresight in the Singapore Government

1980s: Scenario Planning in Ministry of Defence

1995: Scenario Planning Office Established in Prime Minister's Office

2003: Renamed as Strategic Policy Office

2009: Centre for Strategic Futures Established

2009: New Futures Units Established in Ministries

July 2015: Transferred to Strategy Group, Prime Minister’s Office, connected with a new strategic planning function under the Strategic Planning and Futures division.
The foresight landscape is burgeoning
CSF: Resourcing

- 9 Staff working on futures, diverse backgrounds
- Capabilities range engagement, research, methods
- Works closely with WOG strategic planning teams

Futures team:
- 6 strategists

Staff hierarchy:
- Senior Advisor
- Director
  - DD/Head (CSF)
  - Senior Advisor/Dy Head (CSF)
  - Principal Strategist
Foresight as part of the Strategic Planning cycle

**Strategy**

- Develop agenda to set common direction:
  - Articulate **direction, outcomes & priorities**

**Action Plan**

- Ensure alignment with agenda, address gaps, sequence:
  - Develop multi-year **policies & programmes** to execute priorities

**Outcomes**

- Build accountability, track progress and ensure delivery:
  - Progress assurance – **milestones** and **signposts** to track progress

**Delivery Capacity**

- Ensure agencies can deliver well, including system governance:
  - Ensure **resources, capabilities and structures** support policies & programmes

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How Foresight supports the strategic planning cycle

**Strategic Foresight**
- Develop agenda to set common direction:
  - Articulate direction, outcomes & priorities

**Strategy**
- Ensure alignment with agenda, address gaps, sequence:
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**Action Plan**
- Ensure agencies can deliver well, including system governance:
  - Ensure resources, capabilities and structures support policies & programmes

**Delivery Capacity**
- Build accountability, track progress and ensure delivery:
  - Progress assurance – milestones and signposts to track progress

**Outcomes**
- Translates into Enabled by Monitored by Government
- Feeds back into Agenda

**Identify emerging trends and issues to inform national priorities**
- Scan for longer term trends & emerging “weak signals”
- Seek new insights & “outside-in” perspective through networks
- Conduct deep dives to understand key issues

**Stress-test strategies against changing operating environment**
- Scenario planning to challenge prevailing assumptions
- Convene and facilitate conversations to set context for strategic discussions, sharpen existing strategies, develop new strategies for changing landscape

**Build system capability and capacity in strategic foresight**
- Targeted at various levels
  - **[entry-level]** FutureCraft courses at CSC;
  - **[leadership]** CSC milestones (FC, GLP, MDC etc.) to inculcate futures thinking in future leadership
- Consistent community building via Sandbox (staff-level) & SFN (DS-level)

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**Scout**
- Pushing the envelope and raising the level of ambition

**Challenge**
- Communicating & translating insights to inspire change and action

**Grow**
- Building capacities in the wider system to foster current and future alignment
Examples of CSF’s work—Scout, Challenge and Grow

**Scout**
- Pushing the envelope and raising the level of *ambition*

**Challenge**
- Communicating & translating insights to inspire change and *action*

**Grow**
- Building capacities in the wider system to foster current and future *alignment*

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**National Scenarios Exercise**

**Foresight Conference**

**Outreach & Networking (external)**
- Meeting thought leaders, thinkers; study trips and speaking engagements

**Foresight Methods Training, Customised workshops, Milestone courses**

**Sandbox and Strategic Futures Network**
- *Regular internal engagement platforms*

**Scanning for ESIs, CSF Research Deep Dives**

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In ~10 engagements per month
Scenario Planning Process

Preparation
• Background research & interviews

Driving Forces
• Interviews
• External perspectives
• Inter-agency teams

Scenario Development
• Develop range of plausible futures

Strategy (S2S)
• WOG effort in partnership with agencies
National Scenarios - a key vehicle

It identifies key shifts and trends, stress-tests current strategies and builds capabilities by developing a common understanding and vocabulary around how the future could change.

80-strong inter-agency team developed research around Driving Forces that will shape Singapore’s operating environment.

Stories and DF material written, road-tested and developed.

Leadership discussions convened at management level.

Public Service-wide engagement and sharing of scenarios via toolkits, customized workshops etc.

Decision-makers interviewed to reveal current hopes, fears and operating assumptions.

Impact:

- Scenario immersion via game, video, workshops
- NatScens toolkit for agencies = > 8,000 officers engaged, of which ~2,000 played the game (CSC to incorporate NS2035 game as part of SLEAD milestone prog)
- Some policy reviews channeled directly to agencies
- Commissioned inter-agency work groups to tackle specific issues (e.g. future of work)
- Incubated by CSF as deep dives e.g. Human Augmentation, AI Ethics & Governance
Foresight Methods Training and Customised workshops

**Formal Foresight Training**
*Future Craft*

- Every year, ~170 public service officers attend FutureCraft courses
  - A means of sharing insights from CSF’s deep dives
  - A platform for other futurists in Govt to share

**Customised workshops; Facilitation expertise**

- At least 1 customized workshop *per month* on futures (e.g. Natscens/Driving Forces-related)
- Or facilitation and workshop design expertise rendered to public agencies/groups

**Milestone Courses**

- About 8 scheduled *workshops per year* on foresight at leadership-development courses at the Civil Service College
Outreach and Networking efforts

Networking

• **External Affiliation Framework:** CSF Fellows, CSF Distinguished Fellows
• **CSF’s international network** (individuals and institutions)
• **CSF’s international counterparts:** ESPAS, OECD Govt Foresight Community, NISTEP (Japan), Policy Horizons (Canada), National Intelligence Council (USA).

Study Trips

• Curated or collaborative study trips with other public agencies
• Exploratory study trips to plug knowledge gaps (e.g. China, India)
• International conferences and meetings

Gleaning insights from diverse perspectives, plugging into foresight and governance community
CSF’s ESI scanning process and outcomes

ESIs are identified through CSF’s continuous horizon scanning process.
“Emerging” because the issues are nascent and their development trajectories are unclear and/or dependent on other critical developments.
“Strategic” because of their potential to significantly impact policy and overturn operating assumptions.

**Brief overview of the process**
*CSF is constantly reviewing and improving this scanning process*

- **Scan**
  - **Uncover surprising interconnections**
- **Frame the issue**
- **Investigate and evaluate current state of Singapore’s readiness**
- **Discuss with inter-agency group of officers**
- **Channel to relevant agencies for awareness**

**Primary sources**:  
- International networks  
- Study trips

**Secondary sources**:  
- Internal memos  
- Media outlets  
- Publications  
- Academic Journals

**Futures Methodologies**:  
- Futures Wheel  
- Causal Layered Analysis  
- Combining disparate signals

*Selected examples, not exhaustive*

**CSF connects with different agencies across Govt to gather inputs on current state of play and readiness**
- Brown Bag lunches, email exchanges, Community of Practice gatherings called *Sandbox*

Based on the inputs, ESIs are sharpened and shaped through multiple iterations
- Not all the identified issues complete the process, some are incubated for a longer period of time, others are dropped if agencies are already aware and responding to future developments

**ESIs are shared at various platforms**:  
- Presented at Strategic Futures Network (SFN)  
- Shared with the Futurist/Strat Planning community in Govt

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**ESIs on the ‘back-burner’**
- “Genetic Re-wilding”—Genetic re-wilding looks to recreate ecosystems by reintroducing new and possibly genetically modified species of fauna and vegetation that can cope with the new climate. Signs of this taking place in Germany and Russia.
- “Gaming as (clean) Gambling” ESI—convergence of signals about gaming being treated medically as an addiction, the growth of crypto-currency trading and investment as part of gamer behaviour and activity.
- “Growing Loneliness” ESI—about the rise in loneliness and related online scams despite/due to proliferation of connective technology (e.g. social media, chatbots).

**ESIs that have sparked discussion and action**
- “China’s global R&D ambition” ESI led to a deep dive on China’s growing prowess in R&D.
- “Direct-to-Consumer Genetic Testing” ESI prompted MOH to explore how it could strengthen and mandate the moratorium on the use of genetic information for insurance underwriting purposes.
- “Faker news” ESI led Min(Law) to ensure that legislation around misinformation would take into account technology advancements in video/ audio-editing.
Multiple Levels of Foresight

• **System – Inter-agency “common language”**
  • National Scenario processes (~ 3-5 years)
  • Emerging Strategic Issues (ongoing monitoring)

• **Structure & Architecture**
  • Centre for Strategic Futures Advisory Board (Permanent Secretaries)
  • Strategic Futures Network (Deputy Secretaries)
  • SFN Sandbox

• **Budgets & Incentives**
  • Cluster Strategic Reviews (sectors) / Strategic Budget Review Meetings (ministry)
  • Resources: Reinvestment Funding

• **Organisations & Teams**
  • Agency futures teams
  • Consultancy projects
  • Rotations – Administrative Service + emerging foresight “career track”

• **Individuals**
  • FutureCraft workshops
• #1 – Aim for better decisions, not predictions
• #2 – Embrace discomfort and friction
• #3 – Harness diverse networks
• #4 – Craft immersive experiences
• #5 – Adopt a “design” approach

Further details here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFScAEmd5zI
Emerging Challenges

• Foresight as a Governance, not just Government function
  • Public sector → Thinktanks, businesses, citizens

• Measuring value: insight, challenge versus “output”
  • “Any useful idea about the future should at first appear to be ridiculous” (Jim Dator)
  • Value for the polity, for policy, for politics

• Talent, expertise, habits of mind
  • continuity & retention VS change & renewal
Thank you.
aaronmaniam@gmail.com

www.csf.gov.sg