

DANGER! New ideas approaching

It's the time of year when many of us are making plans for 2005. Whether you see next year as an exciting set of new opportunities or simply an extension of this year may, to some extent, depend on how much you have investigated the future.

The global future forum (GFF) exists to help organisations factor the future into their strategic planning. Not just the usual trends, market research and analysts' views but the future that contains the radical, ground-breaking 'wild card' discontinuities, that change everything forever. I want to encourage you to embrace the possibilities of these 'Wild cards' and develop your own responses to them in your planning for 2005. Therein lies innovation, opportunity and security born of forethought.

Before we go much further let's understand that there are two very distinct types of change:

- Inbound - Change that happens to us
- Outbound - Change that we do to ourselves

Much annual planning revolves around the latter – Outbound change – but I want to concentrate on Inbound change in this article.

Inbound change can be further divided into:

- Continuous change - which takes place gradually over a long period
- Disruptive change – which is sudden and establishes a new paradigm

The end of Soviet communism, the fall of the Berlin wall and the shocking events of the 9/11 terrorist attacks are examples of disruptive change.

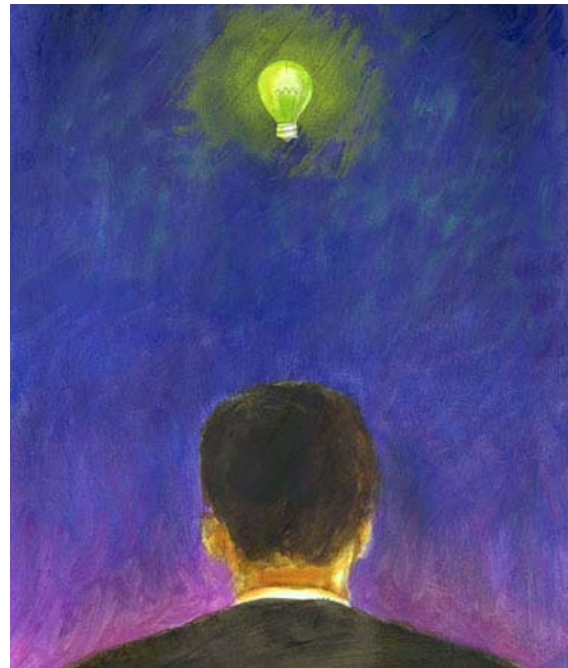
Continuous change tends to leave our reference framework intact and preserves our paradigm whereas disruptive change destroys our framework, a new paradigm is established and 'nothing' is the same afterwards. A new set of values, norms and beliefs exist afterwards.

We frequently factor in continuous change into our planning process from such sources as market research, industry and economic analysis and, of course, our own organisation's views of the future.

Traditionally strategic planning, whilst looking in some degree to the future, seldom includes the potential impacts of 'Wild Card' disruptive change thus leaving organisations vulnerable.

In 1929 Irving Fisher, Professor of Economics, Yale University, said "The share prices have reached what looks like a permanently high plateau". Taking Professor Fisher's view alone would have led to disaster, as the 'Black Friday' stock market collapse was right around the corner. Equally, when NN said that "In 40 – 50 years the Berlin Wall might be gone..." he didn't foresee that in the same year communism in the Soviet Union would collapse and the wall with it. How wrong can we be?

We quite naturally see tomorrow as an extension of today, of ongoing stability, of gradual trends. We less frequently



see the weak signals of fundamental change.

Frequently the catalysts of highly disruptive market shifts have been 'simmering' quietly for a long while. For example; the patent for the first cellular telephone was established in 1912; 75 years later construction workers and executives had them, for entirely differing reasons, ten years on the price break kicked in, the technology took off and communicating with one another was never the same again.

At times of great change there are both great opportunities and threats to business. One thing is sure, after a new paradigm is established; things are never the same again.

Factoring in the future isn't entirely about predicting the future accurately, but more preparing alternative strategies for changes that might occur. For example, within hours of the 9/11 attacks in the USA, British Airways laid off 7,000 staff. They had developed an alternate future scenario which was relevant to the circumstances they found themselves in, which they could immediately implement that enables them to, saving millions of pounds

It might be helpful to define these types of alternate futures:

- Probable – Based on trends, extrapolation, science etc. (Market research, analyst report/view based)
- Plausible – Founded on discontinuities, 'Wild Cards', surprises, speculation, imagination, simulation etc. (Various strands of thinking brought together in scenarios)
- Preferable – Based on choices, vision, images, empowerment, planning etc. (The view you base your plan against)

In your organisation do you have different views of the future; alternate scenarios?

Have you created your preferred future?

Do you know how you track the weak signals that are major factors in your alternate scenarios?

To create these views there are a number of activities you will be undertaking:

- ➔ Scanning - Intelligence gathering
- ➔ Forecasting - Developing a baseline, building scenarios
- ➔ Visions - Establishing and reaffirming values and preferences
- ➔ Planning - Forming strategies and setting goals
- ➔ Activity – Managing change and monitoring results

Scanning and forecasting are the *raison d'être* of the Global Future Forum. Not only does the GFF form views of the future but its future thinkers actively engage with organisations to help factor the future into strategic planning.

This is done in such a way that it dovetails with your own visions and ideas of the future. Casting visions, activity planning and goal setting form the central pillars of most planning cycles.

This year I want to encourage you to factor in the future, using some of the tools available through the GFF, and create a research baseline of the future, some alternate futures and 'Wild Card' scenarios. Generating implications for your organization against each future and seeking innovative responses to them.



**There are many futures for us
to consider**

Whatever market or organisation you operate in, it wasn't always the way it is today, you and your organisation aren't the same as a decade ago, and next year **will** be different from this year.

Today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday.

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Visit The GFF web site at www.thegff.com.