Professionalizing foresight: Why do it, where it stands, and what needs to be done

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Abstract

This article advocates for the professionalization of foresight as beneficial to development of the field. It offers three reasons why: providing a focus for field-building, aiding credibility, and attracting talent. It then explores the current state of professionalization by assessing where foresight stands against the standard criteria of a profession. It concludes with recommendations on what needs to be done and how to proceed, suggesting social constructionism as a guiding perspective and five projects or initiatives to guide the process.

Introduction

Thirteen years ago futurist Verne Wheelwright (2000, p.319) considered the prospects for the professionalization of foresight and concluded that, "By nearly any traditional academic standard, "Futurist" or "Studies of the Future" [aka foresight] is not a profession. There are no professional standards, no code of ethics, no professional organization [no longer the case] and little public recognition or acceptance." While there have been long-held views about the inadequacies of professionalism (Houle, 1981) and scepticism about professional competence and abilities (Frost, 2001) which have required changes and a redefinition of professional status, it remains the case that such status has continuing value in organizations and society more generally (Evetts, 2011). Further, given the continuing problems of uncertainty facing decision-makers and their on-going "bounded rationality" (Simon, 1972), perhaps there is never a better time for futurists to establish the "economic basis" of their expertise in helping

decision-makers confront their experience of ignorance in the face of complexity (Dietrich and Roberts, 1997).

In this paper, we will seek to answer the following questions in relation to the field of "foresight" and "futurist" practitioners:

- Why professionalize?
- Where does professionalization stand?
- What needs to be done?

Our purpose in responding to these questions is to advance the progress of foresight and futurists toward professionalization. We recognise that this will not solve all the problems of the field and that there is more work to be done, such as building the academic base, and that these efforts can be carried out simultaneously. The focus on professionalization is not intended to suggest it is more important than other work. Nor do we consider that progress toward professionalization is entirely in futurists hands alone. As we will suggest, it is necessary to argue the case for foresight and futurists and in making such an argument, to accept that responses cannot always be predicted with certainty. However, without such efforts, we suspect the future of foresight and futurists could continue in the shadows of recognition. It is also important to note that many of the issues raised here are not new, particularly in regard to the field as a whole, but are being reconsidered here in light of professionalization.

Why professionalize?

Professionals have been an important feature of life for many years and many can trace their roots to pre-Enlightenment days. In the twentieth century, the professions were seen as a favourable force in society. For example, Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1964, p.497) saw the professions as "stabilizing elements" and "centres of resistance to crude forces which threaten steady and peaceful evolution." Freidson (1970, p.303) emphasised the way professionals were a feature of a "complex civilization." When it comes to consideration of what is unique or special about professionalism, it is usual to point to the specialised knowledge and skill which, if valued by others, becomes the rationale for a high status in society. Once granted, such status allows a professional to work with autonomy, authority over other occupational groups and a degree of altruism (Hodson and Sullivan, 2002). Clearly, not all professions have the same status and power. Thus those with the most valued knowledge are able to complete the most challenging and complex tasks and acquire the most power. It is very evident that in many organizations, some professional voices have more influence and more authority than others, e.g., finance, law, etc. What is important is how, among different professional groups within organizations, each with their own specialized knowledge and skills, come be accepted not just on the basis of technical authority but also a moral authority which have a valuational force to guide behaviour (Halliday, 1987). It is usually those professions that provide moral authority, often disguised as technical advice, which gain most influence and whose voices will be heard and proceed to dominate.

Foresight needs to move more quickly towards professionalization to that it can exert influence with moral authority. We suggest three reasons for why professionalization would help the development of the foresight field.

Provide Focus to Field Building

Firstly, professionalization could provide focus to field building. Clearly there is more to be done to build the field than simply building the profession, such as building the academic base and developing a capacity for social foresight. In fact, it is unlikely that profession-building can be successful on its own, but rather needs to be a part of and linked to other field-building activities. The case for field building starts with a striking lack of consensus over what the field should be called, what it entails, and where it stands. The issue of what to call the field has received intermittent attention over the years (Cornish, 1977; Horton, 1999; Becker, 2002; Schwarz, 2005; Amsteus, 2008; Sardar, 2010; Masini, 2010; Marien, 2010; Tonn, 2010; Rohrbeck, 2011). There does appear to be some movement toward "foresight" as the name:

- A Google (2011) trends comparison of the search volume of foresight and futures studies found that futures studies was only mentioned 2% as frequently as foresight from 2004 to the present.
- There is a small trend toward academic programs being named foresight/ strategic foresight rather than futures studies; of 16 dedicated graduate programs, three of the four newer ones are called strategic foresight, and the longest running program at the University of Houston is seeking to change from futures studies to foresight (Ramos, 2002; Acceleration Studies Foundation, 2011).
- The many European national technology foresight programs use the term, which emerged somewhat serendipitously as shorthand for a wide range of future-related activities (Martin, 2010).
- Foresight is often accompanied with a descriptor, thus social foresight (Slaughter, 2004), corporate foresight (Daheim & Eurz, 2006), adaptive foresight (Eriksson, 2008) strategic foresight (Slaughter, 2009), and technology foresight (Martin, 2010).

Many thoughtful and useful definitions of foresight have been proposed but consensus has not been achieved (Amsteus, 2008; Coates, 2010; Rohrbeck, 2011). Beyond naming and defining, there is the question of "what's in and what's out? The boundary question is not new. Amara (1984, p.401) lamented that "Futures Research is currently in a state of abeyance and may well be approaching a critical crossroad. In order to survive it needs to dispense with its tendency to be "all things to all people", dealing with almost any activity that involves the future, and define for itself a unique and synthesizing role within a larger forecasting and planning framework." Finding a degree of joint understanding of what we mean by foresight is crucial because no profession exists in a self-contained pocket of knowledge and practice. However if such a pocket can be asserted, and finds acceptance, the reality of the profession can be generated by those who practice (Fournier, 2000). If we consider medicine, or the law, or any of the established professions, all will make some claim referring to how their specialised knowledge and skills represent or "mirror" some feature of the world that occurs "naturally" (Fournier, 2000, p. 271). Therefore it is essential that futurists cohere around an initial feature of the world that they can claim is theirs.

However the multi-disciplinary nature of foresight, while a strength for

practice, creates a challenge in terms of boundary-setting. Schultz (2002) observed that foresight is "inter-, trans-, and meta-disciplinary" and noted influences from philosophy, political science, history, international relations, systems science, economics, sociology, psychology, and literature. Boundary-setting is also difficult because much foresight work takes place without "professional" futurists. Failure to set a boundary means permeability in terms of who can practice foresight, with or without qualifying credentials (Freidson, 2001). Kuosa (2011, p.332) notes that a "futures orientation is really not 'owned' by futurists alone and this leads to fragmentation. Different disciplines have their own interest in the future and their own ways of producing knowledge about it.

So, is technology forecasting part of foresight? Operations research? Technology assessment? Strategic planning? Some scenario planners have set themselves up as "forecasters" or "scenarists" rather than futurists. Some futurists have crafted names for their work as a way to carve out a professional niche, for example, Micic (2006, p.20) coined "Future Management" as a bridge between futures research and strategic management.

Addressing the "what's in" question is important because clients[1] seeking expertise will often look for it at its source. For example, if they are looking for strategic planning help, for instance, will they turn to or even consider futurists as the central source? Will strategic planners themselves identify as futurists? Most likely futurists would agree that they have some role to play in strategic planning. But to what extent are futurists even in the conversation? Do they want to be? What will strategic planners say about it? And will clients "buy it?" A clearer bounding of the field would help determine whether futurists see it as a core or ancillary, and thus inform and help clarify relationships with strategic planners and clients.

Table 1 summarizes several attempts that have been made to define the field, organized by author, the organizing principle used, and listing of the major categories or descriptors that highlight the organizing principle.

Table 1. *Proposals to organize the field of foresight*

Author	Organizing Principle	Major Categories/Descriptors
Historical, evolving paradigms/perspectives		
Inayatullah (1990)	Traditions/ perspectives	Predictive, interpretive, critical and action learning
Mannermaa (1991)	Research paradigm	Descriptive, scenario, and evolutionary paradigm
Slaughter (2004)	Traditions/ perspectives	Empirical and cultural, critical, integral
Kuosa (2011)	Paradigms	Prediction, management, and dialectic thinking
Static perspectives		
Amara (1981)	Types of futures	Possible, probable and preferred

Linstone (1981)	Multiple perspectives	Technical, organizational and personal
Marien (2002)	Futurist's thinking	Probable futures, possible futures, preferable futures, present changes, panoramic views, and questioning
Approaches/methods		
Hines & Bishop (2007)	Foresight approach (activities)	Framing, scanning, forecasting, visioning, planning, and acting
Von der Gracht (2010, p.384) citing Daheim & Uerz	Methodological evolution	Expert-based foresight, e.g., the Delphi; Framework-based foresight, e.g., quantitative forecasting; trend-based foresight, e.g., environmental scanning; context-based open foresight
Content		
Slaughter (2005)	Knowledge base (core elements of the field)	Futures concepts and metaphors, futures literature, futures organisations, futures methods and tools, images and imaging processes, and social innovations
Bishop & Hines (2012)	Teaching curriculum	A conceptual description of the field as taught by the University of Houston's Futures Studies program.

It reveals that the most common approach is using paradigms or perspectives and how they have evolved over time. The challenge ahead is not to select the "right" approach, but to gain agreement on how they fit together and what agreement can be found around a common core.

On the academic front, while some promising developments are underway, clearly there is much work ahead (Wheelwright, 2000). There are only 16 graduate degree programs in foresight globally (Ramos, 2002; Acceleration Studies Foundation, 2011). There may be greater opportunities to reinforce cooperation between academics and practitioners, as well as clients; for instance, a gathering of academic programs could initiate a best practices research project. Crucially, such programs play a crucial part in the preparation and dissemination of specialized knowledge. The statement of such knowledge in abstract terms through theories, models and skills for practice is a distinguishing feature of a profession and part of its control of boundaries (Abbott, 1998). There clearly need to be further advances in building specialized knowledge of foresight. For example, Slaughter (2004, 2006, 2010) and Poli (2013) have made an elegant case for the need to build the capacity for social foresight. One could argue that futurists remain on the fringes of important social debates, and that important questions about the future are routinely addressed without any reference to futurists or foresight (Hines, 2012). One could argue that if futurists don't lay claim to foresight, someone else will. Already, many organizations do not seek the help of foresight or futurists. Gavigan & Scapolo (1999) observed that over the past 30 years, much strategy and policy-planning work has been

conducted without using the foresight label, in some cases purposely avoiding it because it was in disrepute in planning circles. Nor has the case been decisively made that foresight can deliver on this promise for those who do use it. A 2002 scenario project exploring the future of the field by the Association of Professional Futurists (APF) identified a "lifeboat" scenario in which the field proved unable to differentiate itself from others, resulting in a watered-down use of foresight that was often inadequate or even harmful (Hines, 2003).

Naming, defining, and bounding are important first steps to field-building. Consensus around the questions could help to frame the core purposes, concepts, theories and methods of the field, as well as providing a basis for clarifying who the members of the community are and ought to be.

Aid Credibility

A second reason for professionalization it to aid the credibility of foresight as a professional field. Foresight, of course is a relatively new field emerging after World War Two from the military and related think tanks in the US and along a separate path in Europe at about the same time (Bell, 2003). It moved into national planning efforts and eventually was adopted by the private sector, with Shell's use of scenario planning in the 1970s being the most well-known example (Wack, 1985a, 1985b). The APF was founded in 2002 with a goal of creating a "credible profession, thriving professionals" noting that "we are living in critical times for our profession….it's ours to envision the future of the profession" (Hines, 2003b, pp.32-33). But, introducing a new capability raises credibility issues that any novel field faces. Organizations want to know what the capability purports to do and then assess whether it believes it can do it. Since in organizations, it is always easier to not do something than to try something new (Kleiner, 1996; Kahane, 2004; Hines & Bishop 2007, pp.228-229), legitimacy and credibility questions are inevitable. Slaughter (1999) pointed out that all fields must pass through a process of academic, professional and social legitimation to be taken seriously.

Hines (2003a) developed the Organizational Futurist audit for the purpose of assessing the potential responsiveness of the client audience to foresight before a project is undertaken. Rohrbeck et al. (2008, p.27) suggest that "a corporate culture needs to provide support to SF (strategic foresight) and foster openness for applying new concepts." He observes that it helps the futurist if the organization is supportive of foresight and is willing to take risks and try new concepts. This puts the burden on the client and client organization to be open and receptive to novel concepts. But as Shotter (1993, p.5) put it, "for those who currently occupy the centre, new approaches can often seem like dangerous monsters on the prowl." Institutional theory suggests that "deviation from the accepted institutional order is costly in some way, and the more highly institutionalized a particular social pattern becomes, the more costly such deviations are (Lawrence et al, 2001).

Organizations provide guidance to its members on the established ways of doing things. Its discourses, defined as structured collections of meaningful texts that include any kind of "symbolic expression requiring a physical medium and permitting of permanent storage" (Parker, 1992; Taylor & Van Every, 1993, p.109), make "certain ways of thinking and acting possible, and others impossible or costly" (Phillips et al, 2004, p.638).

Those who suggest new ways of doing things, such as futurists, thus ought to assume the burden of proof that the established way of doing things is either not up to the task, or that the proposed new approach will achieve better results, since they are asking clients to take on a risk. Mack (2005, p.75) embraces this notion that the burden is on the futurist by noting the need to create a safe haven for change, not simply to assume that it ought to be there. Failure to do so makes it less likely to overcome client tendencies to being timid about risk (Kahneman & Lovallo, 1993). Middleton and Kennie (1997) suggest that professionals engage in rhetoric to persuade clients of their legitimacy and this includes expert and highly valued knowledge, understanding, and skill which allow the establishment and the exercise of trust as a basis for relationships with clients.

Why should clients believe us? Establishing a profession and the work that goes along with that (common terminology, purposes, ethics, standards, best practices, etc.) would provide help to futurists in their efforts to persuade organizations to adopt foresight.

Attract Talent

The third key reason to professionalize is that it is difficult to attract talented individuals into it due to a perceived (or real) lack of jobs and career paths. Futurist is not yet a recognized profession in the US or UK and most that have searched for a job as a futurist can attest to the difficulty of finding them. The Princeton Review (2013) observes that: "there are two reasons to choose a major: to prepare for a specific field or job, or to immerse yourself in a subject that fascinates you." Foresight does well in the latter, but often struggles in the former. According to CIRP"s 2009 Freshman Survey, 56.5% of students--the highest since 1983--said that "graduates getting good jobs" was an important factor when choosing where to go to college. And The National Center for Education Statistics in the US reports that the number of bachelor's degrees in "employment friendly" fields has been on the rise since 1970, while others declined (Conner and Ching, 2010). Indeed, many of students in the University of Houston's Graduate Program in Futures Studies are interested in preparing for a career in foresight, both of the many who choose not to enrol cite uncertainty around the career prospects. Simply being recognized as a profession is a beginning rather than an end. It will not create or lure students into the field but it could help. Perhaps some good news is that futurist was recently cited as "one of 7 awesome jobs that people have not heard of" (Favreau, 2012).

This section suggests that the professionalization of foresight would provide at least three benefits to the field and its practitioners by providing a focus to field-building, aiding credibility, and attracting talent. The next section looks at the current state of professionalization.

Where Does Professionalization stand?

Any new field faces the issue of credibility and gaining acceptance by demonstrating to others, that in seeking to make complex decisions when they are ignorant, those with knowledge and skills can provide satisfaction. Organizations want to know what the capability purports to do and then assess whether it believes it. What is it, what can it do, and do we believe it can do it? And in organizations, it is always easier to not do something new than it is to try something new (Kleiner,

1996; Kahane, 2004; Hines & Bishop 2007, p.228-229). This raises legitimacy and credibility questions. Why should we take the risk of change? Foresight is no different in facing questions about legitimacy. Slaughter (1999) points out that all fields must pass through a process of academic, professional and social legitimation to be taken seriously. Table 2 provides an analysis of where foresight "stands," based on how it measures up to standard definitions, from least to most complex.

Table 2. *Where does foresight stand?*

Definition (Cambridge Online Dictionary)		Meet the criteria
Capability	the ability to do something	Yes (Hines, 2002)
Field	an area of activity or interest	Yes (Hines, 2002)
Discipline	a particular area of study, especially a subject studied at a college or university	Maybe; 16 graduate degree programs globally
Profession	any type of work which needs special training or a particular skill, often one respected because it involves a high level of education	No, see Table 1 and description in 1.3.2

A literature review suggests that foresight meets the capability test even with debate over what the "something" is. It also meets the definition of a field, but with some dissension. Marien (2002, pp.261,264) for instance, argues: "….for those who persist in proclaiming that there is a "field", I simply ask that you tell me who is in it, and who is not, and why." Whether foresight is a discipline is a trickier. As we indicated above, there are 16 graduate degree programs globally and at least two dozen universities offering a course or courses--it could be more or less depending on how one defines a foresight course (Ramos, 2002; Acceleration Studies Foundation, 2011). It is not clear if that represents sufficient critical mass for a discipline.

Table 2 submits that foresight has not yet met the criteria of a profession, but other professions have been in similar positions at this point in their development. Henshel (1981) explored this question thirty years ago and found interesting parallels. In short, the "marginal respectability" of foresight at that time was very similar to that of the social sciences in their early years. Sociology began with the rather grandiose claim that it was going to create a science of society using natural science methods. Henshel suggested the foresight may also have been guilty of grandiose claims about oversimplifying the study of the future. He found that new fields tend to make "imperialist" claims to Iarge territories, yet colonize only a fraction of the area claimed….sociology often became the study of what was left over" (Henshel, 1981, pp.404,410).

The situation has not substantially changed in the thirty years since Henshel suggested that foresight might be on a slow path to professionalism. The continuing confusion around what foresight is and what professional futurists are makes it difficult to determine whether the field is growing or not. Slaughter (2009, p.7) observes that it is "impossible to quantify the number of futurists in the world,

mainly because of the lack of an agreed definition."

Table 3 provides a view on the state of professionalization drawing on Gold & Bratton (2003) and Wheelwright (2000). Wheelwright surveyed 300 random participants from the World Future Studies Federation, the World Future Society, and University of Houston Futures Studies program alumni. The survey questions mixed a focus on individual practice and the field. Our analysis, drawing upon Hines (2003b; 2004) and his subsequent vantage point as Chair or Board Member of the APF (Association of Professional Futurists) through 2010, and the literature review, provides a judgement of yes and but mostly no. It suggests that of the ten criteria in Table 3, foresight meets three, and doesn't meet seven. A development favouring professionalization is that for one of those three—the need for a professional association-- just 54% agreed on the need for one in 2000, but one was nonetheless founded in 2002. That said, it is perhaps problematic that 41% preferred not to be identified as futurists, though it may be that the survey design included those who would not likely identify as professional futurists. Based on this analysis, it seems reasonable to conclude that foresight has not yet achieved professional status.

Table 3. *Foresight and professionalization criteria*

Hodson &Sullivan (2002, p.282)	Freidson (2001, p.180) "ideal-type profession"	Wheelwright (2000) drawing on Barber (1965) & Pavalko (1988)	Does foresight meet it?	What to do (Research Agenda Item below)
Specialized knowledge	Specialized work that is grounded in a body of theoretically based, discretionary knowledge and skill that is given special status	Theory and intellectual technique	Yes; 57% agree their practice meets this criterion; Slaughter (2005) attempted to codify a knowledge base	#1 and #3 could update and spread knowledge base, working towards a competency model and standards
Autonomy	Exclusive jurisdiction created and controlled by occupational negotiation	Autonomy	No; only 30% agreed they had autonomy in using their knowledge vis-à-vis clients	#1 Discuss whether this is an appropriate goal

Authority over other subordinate occupational groups	A sheltered position with labour markets based on qualifying credentials of the occupation	[Addressed in "Autonomy"]	No; futurist is not listed as an occupation by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) in the US or the Office for National Statistics (2011) in the UK	#4 and #5 Advocacy as part of public relations campaign.
A degree of altruism	An ideology that asserts a commitment to doing good and quality	Social values	No; not yet agreed as a field, but 65% agree in their individual practice	#4 and #5 Could fit with effort to develop ethics
	A formal training programme to provide qualifying credentials		No; Hines (2004) notes failure to agree on certification; still the case today	#2 and #4 Building some sort of certificate/ certification process
		Sense of community and commitment	Yes; 66% agree	#1, #3 and #4 could further improve collaboration among various groups
		Ethics	No; 61% agree on need; APF and WFSF (World Futures Studies Federation) have not adopted a code of ethics	#5 Craft the code; either one organization proposes and others decide; or creative collaboratively
		Standards	No; 62% agree on need; Slaughter's (1999) call for professional standards not yet addressed	#3 and #4 Evaluation of field could suggest how much works needs to be done here

		Professional association	Yes, APF founded in 2002; 54% agreed on need at the time, before the APF was founded	Expand its scope; decide on whether it wants to drive professionalization
		A new name?	No; 41% preferred not to be identified as futurists; Futures 42 (3) issue with 4 articles citing disagreement on name: Sardar (2010); Masini (2010); Marien (2010); Tonn (2010)	#1 One of central questions

Table 3 suggest there is work to be done and the next section suggests that this work can be approached through a series of projects guided by a social constructionist perspective.

What Needs to Be Done?

According to Dietrich and Roberts (1997, p.16), the starting point for professionalism is that clients are "incapable of pre-thinking all the issues involved with a decision because of the complexities involved." This provides the core requirement and "economic basis" for professionalism since clients faced with ignorance and "information asymmetry" seek the services of those they recognise as experts, Such recognition, as a favourable response to services offered, highlights the relational and socially constructed features of professionals and their work.

As noted earlier on pages 9-11 on "aiding credibility and page12, foresight as a relatively new capability and field faces credibility challenges – can it help deal with the ignorance and information asymmetry regarding the future? We believe a social constructionist approach provides a useful perspective for guiding a process of building that credibility over time.

A social constructionist approach suggests that meaning is collectively constructed through language and dialogue–it's not about finding the right answer, but negotiating and constructing shared meaning together. Social constructionism has previously been suggested as useful in aiding the professionalization of a field and its clients (Fournier, 2000; Gold & Bratton, 2003). For example, accounting "took an active part in the construction of the organizational and social order it now claims to know" (Fournier, 2000, p.71).

According to Gergen (1985, pp.3, 6), social constructionism is concerned with "elucidating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world in which they live". It is further suggested that through such

processes of interaction, meanings are made between people and such meanings become embedded into on-going ways of talking and acting, which may in turn become accepted versions of reality. Whatever meanings are made, leading to accepted facts or truths about the world, are, however, always "highly circumscribed by culture, history or social context." For such meanings to continue to remain acceptable is dependent on the day-to-day workings of social process and what comes to be accepted as real serves a function within a particular historical and cultural context. Therefore, for foresight to become recognised as meaningful, there is a requirement for many conversations among futurists themselves, but also with clients and the public, that produce a succession of positive and valued interactions over time, because such work satisfies particular needs, desires and interests within a particular situation. Shotter (1993, p.9) noted the importance of creating a "multi-voiced conversation" as essential to meaning-making. Indeed, Fuller & Loogma (2009, p.78) note that "foresight, as a concept and as practice, is a social construction."

In other words, the boundaries of foresight will not somehow be "revealed," but, in social constructionist terms, must be proactively developed as part of an on-going dialogue process among futurists and between futurists and clients. As the field has been wrestling with these questions, clients have been left with what Shotter (1993, p.148) calls a "chaotic welter of impressions." He advises avoiding a "Neo-Darwinian struggle" for the correct view or approach but rather to create "a continuous, non-eliminative, multi-voiced conversation" (p.9). This suggests it may be most beneficial for futurists to first seek consensus among themselves on the questions of naming, defining, bounding as well as the key canons of the field before engaging with clients in a significant way.

As Henshel (1981) observed, foresight is travelling down a path that other fields have traversed before it. The current wide range of views about what to call it how to define it and how to bound and describe it (see Table 2) can be viewed as a natural, though not inevitable, stage in the social construction of the profession. The literature review revealed a significant opportunity for improving this dialogue by including more of the client perspective. This may require incentivizing practitioners to share their client experience and capturing the learning from the dialogues in texts, sharing those texts, and integrating them into an overall discourse about integrating foresight. But practitioners, struggling to make a living, arguably have an incentive to keep client dialogues private as a competitive advantage. They may see little gain in sharing with the field at present. Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy (2004) suggest that sharing can be incentivized by making the case that a more coherent dialogue about foresight will help enlarge the pool of potential clients.

There will be a need to create forums to host this sense- and meaning-making process that can build the discourse about what foresight is and what if offers. While the question has been occasionally addressed by the field, it has yet to catalyse toward consensus. There is no guarantee of consensus and attempts to enlarge the conversation could be perceived as a power play or insult or encroachment upon one's "defined turf" (Schein, 2010, p.96). These challenges suggest a need for research to identify potential approaches for engaging the field and its stakeholders in this dialogue.

Steps in building the field toward a profession could benefit futurists and clients, and their firms, in a way that creates reinforcing feedback loops. One might

argue that the problem has been an inability to achieve "critical mass" to ignite the process.

Conclusion: A Proposed Action Agenda

Five items are offered as projects to create focus and impetus for action toward professionalization. The first three are aimed at foresight building its own discourse, with the aim of developing a more coherent proposal to share with clients and the public. It could then be modified as appropriate. An argument could be made for bringing in external perspectives sooner--the suggestion here is to for the field to get its house in better order first and then go external. Armed with the input, then a public relation campaign makes sense. The five agenda times are:

1. Design a "Building the Profession" project to identify potential approaches for naming, defining (competencies), and bounding the field.

2. Create a "Learn from other fields" project.

3. Assess the state of foresight.

4. Incorporate client and public input on professionalization.

5. Design potential approaches for a public relations campaign to promote awareness of foresight.

The items are explained below.

1. Design a "Building the Profession" project to identify potential approaches for naming, defining (competencies), and bounding the field and evaluating outcomes. The APF is a logical initiator and convener for this project, which could provide a design for how to approach and talk about these vital issues for the field. It would aim toward eventually gathering stakeholders for dialogue, potentially combining publications, meetings, conferences, etc. Perhaps the most difficult of the issues in terms of approach is bounding. One recommendation is to borrow from Gold et al's (2003) "field of competence" and Prahalad & Hamel's (1990) core competencies ideas and do a core competence activity. The goal would be to map out a foresight "ecosystem" that would help clarify which approaches and tools are unique to futurists and which are best shared with like-minded groups--and explore the resulting relationships between approaches, tools, and groups. Developing a code of ethics would also fit here and could help in the unifying aspect of this work.

2. Create a "Learn from other fields" project. The research for this work frequently went outside the foresight literature to social constructionism, organizational development, organizational learning, narratives and discourse, and institutional theory among others. While foresight prides itself on including multiple disciplines and perspectives in carrying out its project work, there is an opportunity to expand the application of this multi-disciplinary perspective to looking at itself as a field. Along those lines, a project to explore how other new fields have dealt with professionalization, including the questions identified here, could be initiated.

3. Assess the state of foresight. This project would look for patterns in adoption and use of foresight. A place to start on the demand or client side was raised by Coates et al (1994) in mapping the landscape of science and technology foresight and looking for patterns among industries or sectors. It did not identify whether particular sectors or fields had used foresight to a greater extent than others. To do this properly would require gathering input from individual futurists and firms and sharing them with the field. Researching and discussing these questions among the foresight field could lead to adjustments in the publicizing and introducing

dialogue and activities of the integration process. Case studies could be an effective mechanism to broaden insights into the patterns that govern foresight adoption, rejection, or ignorance.

An excellent head start is available on the supply side from the State of Play in the Futures Field research program (Slaughter, 2009). It addresses the field as a whole, rather than professionalization specifically, but nonetheless has valuable lessons and building blocks for a more focused look at professionalization. A team of researchers characterized where foresight is being used, the interests or purposes behind that work, and what methods are being used. Interestingly, the program found more work being done with government agencies and research institutes than private firms, closely followed by universities and non-profits. Professional foresight can cut across these categories, but the numbers suggest purely commercial foresight is perhaps relatively under-represented. It found "that about half of the activity scanned appears to be conventional, routine and basically concerned either with maintaining the status quo or at least not significantly challenging it" compared to progressive or civilizational foresight (Slaugher, 2009, p.10). This raises an important issue for the professional agenda – is there an appropriate balance of these interests? It also found that conventional methods (linear and systematic) are vastly over-represented compared to post-conventional methods (critical and integral). Again, an excellent issue for professionalization to discuss in terms of an appropriate balance.

The research program agrees with this article in the need for "deeper insight into 'what's actually going on'' requires more detailed case studies" (Slaughter, 2009, p. 14). It noted the role of the Association of Professional Futurists in trying to build the credibility of the field, and the importance of the credibility issue.

4. Incorporate client and public input on professionalization. The first three items are aimed at helping the field develop a more coherent story about what it is and what it offers to clients and the public. This item brings in the perspectives of clients and the public. Where #3 above focused on case studies to build an understanding of how foresight is being used, this item would focus more on the "why" than the "how." It would most likely use survey and interviewing to gain the deeper insights. It could draw upon existing responsiveness and assessment instruments, such as the Organizational Futurist Audit (Hines, 2003a), Foresight Styles Assessment (Dian, 2009), Leadership Development Profile (Cook-Greuter, 1985), Strategic Orientation (Miles & Snow, 1978) or Grim (2009) and Rohrbeck's (2011) Maturity Models.

5. Design potential approaches for a public relations campaign to promote awareness of foresight. A public relations campaign could be designed to raise awareness of foresight capabilities with the goal of stimulating dialogues with potential clients. But how to go about it? What have other fields done? What particular points might be most useful to promote? A useful first step would be to gather data around the current degree of awareness of foresight in organizations and the public-at-large, which could build off of the previous items.

This item is last because the field would benefit from clarifying its discourses before going public. This position is not meant to suggest that current publicizing efforts stop, but that it might be more useful to invest time and resources in building the discourse first. Jumping into a public relations campaign, for example, without addressing foundational theoretical questions, could reinforce the current confusion among clients and the public about foresight and drive them elsewhere for answers.

As noted earlier, professionalization will not solve all the problems of the field,

but should be viewed as a part of the field's overall development. These items could be crafted as projects or initiatives. If guided by a social constructionist perspective, it could avoid the unproductive possibilities of competing stakeholders putting forth and arguing for hard-and-fast positions—and thus be aimed at discovery rather than argumentation. There is a lot to be done, but if professionalization is indeed a preferred future, there is no time like the present to get started.

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Notes

1 defined here as individuals or organizations in business, government, and non-profits for whom professional services are provided

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