



مؤسسة دبي للمستقبل
DUBAI FUTURE FOUNDATION

منتدى دبي للمستقبل
DUBAI FUTURE FORUM

Transforming Futures:

DUBAI FORESIGHT PRINCIPLES

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The background features a complex, abstract pattern of flowing, wavy lines in shades of deep purple and dark blue. The lines create a sense of movement and depth, resembling liquid or fabric in motion. The overall effect is dynamic and futuristic.

TRANS-
FORMING
FUTURES:

DUBAI

FORESIGHT
PRINCIPLES



“We are living in the early moments of a future that is unfolding, bringing about huge changes. A catalyst of this fast-paced thrust to the future is unprecedented technological development. Coping with this pace will be complex and challenging.”

His Excellency Mohammad Abdullah Al Gergawi
Minister of Cabinet Affairs, Vice Chairman of the Board of Trustees
and Managing Director of Dubai Future Foundation

The world needs **more** **long-termism.**

Foresight offers the collaborative, problem solving, innovation mindset needed to overcome some of humanity’s greatest challenges. But its impact is not evenly distributed. Its present-shaping outputs are not widely understood. We need a set of principles to harness foresight to guide better decision making today.

As citizens, foresight helps us build stronger, more equitable communities and intergenerational solidarity. In business, foresight has an outsized impact on outcomes. Future-prepared firms outperform the average by a 33% higher profitability. For policymakers, it informs anticipatory regulation and improves social development.

Foresight does not attempt to predict the future. It does not reveal what’s to come as predetermined - rather it helps us shape it. Considering the complexity and interconnectivity of micro and macro forces driving change it helps us evaluate multiple alternative options, possibilities, and scenarios.

Foresight in practice, done well, is a mirror, not a crystal ball. It is reflexive, pluralistic, representative, empowering consecutive generations to flourish. In the coming century of transformations it offers transition narratives and tools every person and organisation needs to adapt to and shape new systems, markets and possible futures.

The following principles are a guide for coming transformations. Beacons for citizens, policymakers, leaders, organisations, and communities, as they ally with the unknown. As they work to embed foresight in their culture, practices and strategies. A way to present and push forward the agenda for foresight and its promise of preparedness.


WHY DO WE NEED FORESIGHT PRINCIPLES?

Humans aren't very good at using foresight to spur action; often only altering behaviours when crises strike. On a personal level, we go on a diet after a health scare. It takes largescale threats to force organisational change, such as flexible, remote working policies. Internationally, it is in the face of war or pandemic that we collaborate to save lives.

Had foresight better guided decision-makers the climate crisis might have been averted; global inequality reduced or dissolved; infrastructure made more adaptable to growing populations; legislation better aligned to technological advancements; consumption, more sustainable. We'd have more effective, affordable treatments for diseases.

We must move beyond the mindset of crisis control to focus on proactive betterment. We must not let pessimism paralyse us and instead use optimism to catalyse change. Improving awareness, understanding and implementation of foresight is paramount to the prosperity of future generations.

A favourite job interview question is "where do you see yourself in five years?". What if we asked: "Where do we see our species and others in 50 years? What will the planet look like in 100 years? How do we get there? What action should we take now? How do we measure success?" By fusing long-termism with imagination, we can mobilise to mitigate existential risks and create better futures.



“Governments, businesses and society are preoccupied with the present which is understandable. The amount of change we're living through is challenging and the stakes are unimaginably high.”

Amy Webb
CEO of the Future Today Institute

The background of the image is a complex, abstract pattern of wavy, glowing lines. The lines are primarily in shades of deep blue, purple, and magenta, with some areas appearing to glow with a bright, ethereal light. The overall effect is reminiscent of a topographical map or a fluid, organic structure. The lines flow across the frame, creating a sense of movement and depth.

THE

PRINCIPLES

01

VALUE

Envision futures that reflect the values we say we believe in.

Reframe what matters. Ensure your vision of prosperity and success matches core values.

Growth at any cost is an economic mantra running out of steam. As a society we should be [and finally are] reframing what we perceive as valuable to include wellbeing, planetary health, and fairness.

Focusing only on profits or GDP no longer reflects shifting mindsets and consumption models. Progressive leaders are pursuing policies that promote measures of prosperity that reflect the values we say we believe in. What if, like New Zealand, more countries shared a vision that wellbeing would overtake GDP in assessing the prosperity of nations and individuals?

What if, like in the UAE, the happiness of citizens and residents was a stated government objective?

The trickle down effect for businesses should be policies and strategies that ensure that public values help shape private value. And that economic growth results in collective social growth. This means tuning into quickening cultural currents and societal value shifts.

In 2022, Patagonia founder Yvon Chouinard gave his business away and made Planet Earth its only shareholder. When public expectation is for nature to be your biggest stakeholder, then profit is going to mean putting purpose on par - if not before - your bottom line.

98%

of Patagonia's stock transferred to a nonprofit group to help fight the climate crisis

02

IMAGINATION

Cultivate cultures and infrastructures that enhance collective imagination.

Shift focus. If it is easier to envision armageddon than positive possibilities, it is down to an emergency of imagination and a failure to frame foresight inclusively.

Are you truly doing enough to visualise better outcomes? Are you bringing others along with your vision? Within organisations and society **we must get better at looking into the future and translating values into new stories, giving oxygen to new possibilities.**

Upskill people with futures literacy to help them better understand the role of envisioning what's next to adapt how they think and act now. Provide psychological safety for people to share their future visions and ideas.

Establish frameworks to help people identify and prepare for oncoming challenges. To build the resilience to recover quickly from change and act in the best interests of other citizens and communities when faced with opportunities.

Embrace multi-layered scenarios over trends reports. Instead of focusing only on what's shifting now, encourage iterative imagining that evolves alongside developing technologies, needs, behaviours and mindstates.

“The Centre for Strategic Futures in Singapore is a manifestation of how the Singapore government institutionalises foresight decision-making, preparing a toolkit for the future. We connect ideas to have a broader global perspective and look at the world through a new lens to think and act differently. The future is exciting.”

Jeanette Kwek Huixian

Head of the Centre for Strategic Futures,
Prime Minister's Office Singapore



03

AGENCY

Don't wait. Empower people to turn risks into opportunities and build the future.

The world doesn't wait. Act and empower others to act now. New imaginaries reflecting shifting values need to be designed and implemented. Existential risks need to be turned into opportunities to accelerate our way from precarity into a better future.

Leaders wanting to practise foresight need to get comfortable with uncertainty and act. Hire a Chief Foresight Officer. Top down investment at board level means organisations have a champion to act in long-term interests. The CFFO (Chief Futures and Foresight Officer) will work as equal to the chief financial officer to build lasting purpose of the company, as society reevaluates the meaning of prosperity. Already, 88% of C-suite executives surveyed believe their companies will hire a head of betterment in the next five years to ensure continuous, positive change within their organisations.

Higher purpose self regulation is what's needed. Companies and industries should be doing everything to support the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and other common goods at home and globally. The challenge is that regulation today is often curative rather than preventative, happening only when damage has already been done.

Many of the innovations that accelerated human progress have been the result of existential threats. However, if we have the knowledge and resources to act proactively, rather than reactively, we can shape the future we want without panic.



C-suite executives believe their companies will hire a head of betterment in the next five years to ensure continuous, positive change within their organisations

AGENCY X ANCESTRY

Google's AlphaFold protein structure database is a key example of how AI is accelerating healthcare from mass to precision with an eye to becoming predictive and preventive for future generations. Some 97% of Deep Tech ventures - with the objective of providing technology solutions based on substantial scientific or engineering challenges - contribute to at least one UN SDG.

04

IMPACT

Make pathways to future goals measurable.

To transition to new systems we need new metrics that match our vision. Create roadmaps and frameworks to better track and measure the impact of long-term action. Collect, use, analyse and share historic and real-time data to establish best practice and tools and strategies for progress.

The gap between vision and risk-taking needs closing by being more comfortable with taking risks. Only 43% of CEOs give their company a good rating for investing in exploratory, long-term ROI projects that may not deliver a short-term return. With short-term KPIs linked to long-term goals, leaders encourage informed, foresight-led experimentation.

The future feels far away. **Many leaders focus only on today knowing that tomorrow is someone else’s problem.** By establishing long-termism as a core principle and objective through goal-setting and consistent review, we are held accountable for the impact of our decision making on the future.



43%

CEOs who give their company a good rating for investing in exploratory, long-term ROI projects that may not deliver a short-term return.

IMPACT X CONSENSUS

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change’s (UNFCCC) tracking, collaboration and accountability tool for member countries includes the ability to monitor commitment in real-time. Its Negotiations Status Snapshot collected and processed data on the positions of different parties during negotiations at the COP26 climate conference, for example.

05

REFLEXIVITY

Use foresight as a mirror to simultaneously consider impacts in near and long-term.

The future is not a destination we can escape to. We must find the right balance between foresight and being connected to the present. And take reflective action.

Instead of forecasting based on today’s needs, **imagine a better future and work backwards to uncover the path to that future.**

What does the ideal, citizen-friendly city/transport/communication/business/world look like in 2050? What do we need to do, and when, over the next 30 years to get there?

Using the metaphor of a two way mirror, we must on one side, practice humility, reflecting on our own motives and current need states. On the other side, we must play out possible scenarios and outcomes. Assess decisions on both a micro and macro level; through both a short- and long-term lens.

“We have to work hand in hand with tech experts and futurists to co-create law and regulations. We need to anticipate technology as it develops.”

Sahia Ahmad

Chief Executive Officer, Regulatory & Governance, Dubai Economy & Tourism

PLURALITY X REFLEXIVITY

The Partnership on AI, a non-profit organisation founded by Amazon, Apple, Google/DeepMind, Facebook, IBM, and Microsoft, aims to establish best practices for socially beneficial AI development. Newer members include: The Future of Humanity Institute (FHI), Sony, UNICEF, and Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence.



06

PLURALITY

The future needs everybody, transform diverse perspectives into mutual worlds.

The future, by definition, is made by everybody. We must think of ourselves as borderless and timeless citizens of the future and create diverse ecosystems that foster interdisciplinary, cross-functional, diverse collaboration.

It's about representation, but not representation alone. **We need a new inclusive, foresight-led operating system** that invites innovation from different places and perspectives.

History has shown that it's difficult - if not impossible - to solve some of the world's biggest challenges from a single angle. We're going to need to embrace plurality and technology to give people the ability to gather, decide, and act using community-building tools accessible to everyone.

PLURALITY X CONSENSUS

At the Dubai Futures Forum, Dr. Susann Roth, Chief of Knowledge Management, Asian Development Bank proposed that knowledge will be a key indicator of wealth for future generations. She suggests that there needs to be a global knowledge architecture in a similar vein to global financial architecture. A network that enables people and systems to connect, learn and exchange ideas to overcome global challenges.

We're going to need to minimise negative impacts for everyone by not only considering everyone, but also including them in discourse and decisions. By ensuring that everyone has the possibility to contribute meaningfully.

The effects of climate change on poorer countries created by the global use of fossil fuels highlight how not acting in the best interests of all can have serious knock on consequences. If we don't we are at risk of repeating history's mistakes.

“It's logical. If we're not using everything we have from the full pool of humanity we are missing out.”

Dr. Nnedi Okorafor

Writer, Africanfuturism Productions



07

FEELING

Use storytelling to make futures tangible and affecting to spark action in the present.

Create emotional connections to the future now. Make it relevant. Let people experience possibilities through immersion and learning. Be open to the fluidity of future possibilities.

It's hard for people to look beyond their current situation and lived experience. By creating safe spaces for foresight-led immersion, experimentation and innovation we can answer big questions.

Open more museums of the future. Take foresight to the streets. Embed futures into schools. Immerse people in simulations. Make objects and artefacts of the future. Make it all interactive. Build narratives.

IMAGINATION X FEELING

The Futures Bazaar: An Imagination Toolkit is a resource created by Situation Lab and the BBC as the result of a collaborative workshop. It is designed to help other organisations imagine the future in fun, interactive, immersive ways.



“It’s better to be surprised by a simulation than blindsided by reality. How do we not always learn the hard way? Intervene in the feedback loop.”

Stuart Candy

Director of Situation Lab and
Associate Professor at Carnegie Mellon

08

ANCESTRY

Be good ancestors to future generations.

Act now as if your descendents' lives depend on it. Because They do. Go further than you think possible. Commit. Work as an ambassador for generations yet to come. Ask: How will our children benefit from the decisions we make today?

Just as we live with our ancestors' structures and infrastructures, future generations will live with ours. As custodians of the future, we must plant seeds for growth and betterment.

To every mention of sustainability add the notion of regeneration. **The pace at which we burn through natural resources is unsustainable.** We need to think differently.

ANCESTRY X AGENCY

The city of Dubai, Museum of the Future and the Dubai Future Foundation offer examples of foresight principles in action. Concluding the Dubai Future Forum, His Excellency Khalfan Belhouli, CEO of Dubai Future Foundation, said: "For Dubai and the UAE, foreseeing the future is in our DNA. In just a few decades, Dubai transformed into a leading city of the future and a diverse metropolis... The foundation was built to not only embrace the future but to equip us, the people of today, with the right tools to take charge of building for tomorrow." The city of Dubai, Museum of the Future and the Dubai Future Foundation offer examples of foresight principles in action. Concluding the Dubai Future Forum, His Excellency Khalfan Belhouli, CEO of Dubai Future Foundation, said: "For Dubai and the UAE, foreseeing the future is in our DNA. In just a few decades, Dubai transformed into a leading city of the future and a diverse metropolis... The foundation was built to not only embrace the future but to equip us, the people of today, with the right tools to take charge of building for tomorrow."

Industries and governments must formulate ways to reestablish what has already been destroyed. To actively prevent further devastation and spur restoration.

We must enshrine the needs of future generations in law and government. For example, Wales' Future Generations Commissioner is charged with creating policies that benefit tomorrow's Welsh nationals, as well as today's.

The best solution for future humans is often a better solution for today. Thinking ahead helps ensure intergenerational prosperity.

"[Change] requires public institutions to demonstrate how and when to take decisions to meet today's needs without forsaking future generations... Foresight modelling allows you to work out the challenges and opportunities."

Sophie Howe

Future Generations Commissioner for Wales,
at the Dubai Futures Forum 2022



CONCLUSION

The background of the page is a dark, almost black, space filled with several large, overlapping, curved shapes. These shapes are rendered in a gradient of colors, ranging from deep purple to a dark blue. The lighting is soft and directional, creating a sense of depth and highlighting the smooth, rounded surfaces of the shapes. The overall effect is a modern, abstract, and somewhat ethereal aesthetic.

Long-term thinking is powerful, but only when applied and actioned.

Understandably as uncertainty ramps up so too does short-term focus as survival mechanisms kick in. Foresight offers an alternative. It accepts that uncertainty is a given and empowers leaders, and people, to harness threats as lights to guide the path ahead. It lays the groundwork for the future and informs action before crisis strikes. It enables the kind of adaptability that leads to evolutionary advantage and for future generations to thrive.

By envisioning what might be, experimenting with responses, and modelling outcomes, everyone is positioned to make better decisions. To act quickly and responsibly to oncoming disruption.

The above principles are designed to provoke and shift mindsets, as well as offering more strategic and tactical actions to take now. Leaders should use them as a guide towards change. Organisations should embed them in their culture. All should be encouraged and equipped with the capacity to envision a better way ahead.

Making foresight actionable will take determination, regulation, legislation and policy making. Corporations and governments will need to step up and define new metrics of value linked to future wellbeing.

We'll need futures thinking to permeate through organisational cultures and civil service. We'll need to create diverse ecosystems for change and knowledge exchange. We'll need to make all our endeavours shareable and more accessible. To build a better world for every human being, people and organisations need to find a greater capacity for imagination and the frameworks and tools to bring possibilities to life.

This is a journey of continual betterment, not a destination. It is about creating a meaningful legacy for our planetary heirs. The future is both exciting and scary, but it's a lot scarier without foresight so let's embrace long-termism and act now.





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