



# Building a foresight system in the government

## Lessons from 11 countries

**DRAFT for discussion only**

Public Service Foresight Network  
20 October 2017

If you have information to improve  
this study please contact:  
Peter Padbury, Chief Futurist  
[Peter.Padbury@horizons.gc.ca](mailto:Peter.Padbury@horizons.gc.ca)



Government  
of Canada  
Policy Horizons  
Canada

Gouvernement  
du Canada  
Horizons de politiques  
Canada

Canada

# Outline

---

1. Review of foresight systems in 11 countries in 2017
2. Lessons learned from foresight practice in other countries
3. Forecasting vs foresight
4. Key elements in the ideal foresight system

# SINGAPORE: THE FORESIGHT SYSTEM IN 2017

---

- **Strategic Future Network** – A regular forward-looking conversation of top bureaucrats chaired by the Head of the Public Service.
- **Centre for Strategic Futures** in the Prime Minister's Office Strategy Group supports the Strategic Futures Network, convenes strategic conversations, manages the national scenario process, coordinates foresight across the government and curates key information.
- **Strategic Foresight Units** in a number of Departments support departmental policy development and work collaboratively with the Centre to develop strategic and applied foresight products.
- **Government Foresight Network** convenes a monthly conversation of working level scanners and foresight people from across the government to share insights, ideas and analysis.
- **Horizon Scanning Centre** conducts on-going scanning to identify weak signal of change particularly in the security and intelligence area.
- **Key products:** Customized scans, foresight studies, “National Scenarios” provide broad context; and a national-wide dialogue on the future.

# UK: THE FORESIGHT SYSTEM IN 2017

---

- **Senior Management:** regular meeting at most senior level to discuss emerging issues.
- **Cabinet Office:** Scanning team explores short and medium term issues; convenes monthly meeting with key scanning and foresight players.
- **Government Office for Science** hosts
  - Horizon Scanning Program: identifies potential longer-term opportunities and threats; prepares a scan of scans using STEEP and current themes to frame; producing evidence cards to facilitate discussion; coordinates scanning across departments
  - Foresight Program: Conducts foresight studies; conducts coordination, oversight and capacity building across all departments
- **Departments:** In many departments foresight is done or managed in the Office of the Science Advisor.

# GERMANY: THE FORESIGHT SYSTEM IN 2017

---

- **Bottom-up process:** There is a champion in the Chancellor's Office who encourages and facilitates dialogue and capacity-building.
- **Training:** Once or twice a year there is a foresight training session open to all public servants;
- **Networking:** There are regular networking sessions to share experience and to identify and frame questions that need to be answered.
- **Building foresight into policy process:** There is growing interest and demand to integrate foresight into policy process. It may become a legislated requirement.
- **Foresight units:** Military has only dedicated foresight unit.

# FRANCE: THE FORESIGHT SYSTEM IN 2017

---

- **Prime Minister's Office:** Centre strategique does short and some medium term foresight. Effort is made to promote media and public debate.
- **Foreign Affairs:** The Policy Planning Group does global geopolitical scenarios every two years to stimulate awareness and debate. Method: Research, brainstorm consequences, build and share, present.
- **Decentralized:** Other departments have some capacity which is “loosely coordinated”.
- **Think tanks:** Several think tanks play an active role in promoting public dialogue on emerging issues.

# FINLAND: THE FORESIGHT SYSTEM IN 2017

---

- **Political briefing:** Public service prepare a published scan of emerging issues for the next government.
- **Prime Minister's Office:** Coordinates scanning; conducts foresight studies and coordinates foresight in departments; convenes strategic conversations; has tried trend cards to facilitate discussion.
- **Departments are active:**
- **Extensive national capacity:** Government draws on extensive scanning and foresight capacity in universities and private sector to support innovation agenda.

# NORWAY: THE FORESIGHT SYSTEM IN 2017

---



# OTHER COUNTRIES IN 2017

---

- **JAPAN:** NISTEP has focussed on technological forecasting to support innovation. This year there is an interest in building foresight capacity.
- **AUSTRALIA:** CSIRO has a ten person foresight team that provides consulting service inside and outside the organization. Some interest / capacity in several departments including military and tax office. Scanning is managed by an external contractor.
- **DENMARK:** The Prime minister chairs a “Disruption Council” with 7 ministers and 32 stakeholders looking at how to use technology to promote prosperity and equality while maintaining the essence of Danish society.
- **SWEDEN:** Closed the Minister of the Future. New government frustrated with long-term advice.
- **CHINA:** Interest in State Council and National Development and Reform Comm
- **INDIA:** Interest in S&T Centre
- **OECD:** Foresight Advisor in SG’s Office, Digital Futures project, growing interest across the organization.
- **Other UN:** UNESCO, UNHCR, UNDP/Singapore

# LESSONS LEARNED FROM FORESIGHT UNITS IN OTHER COUNTRIES

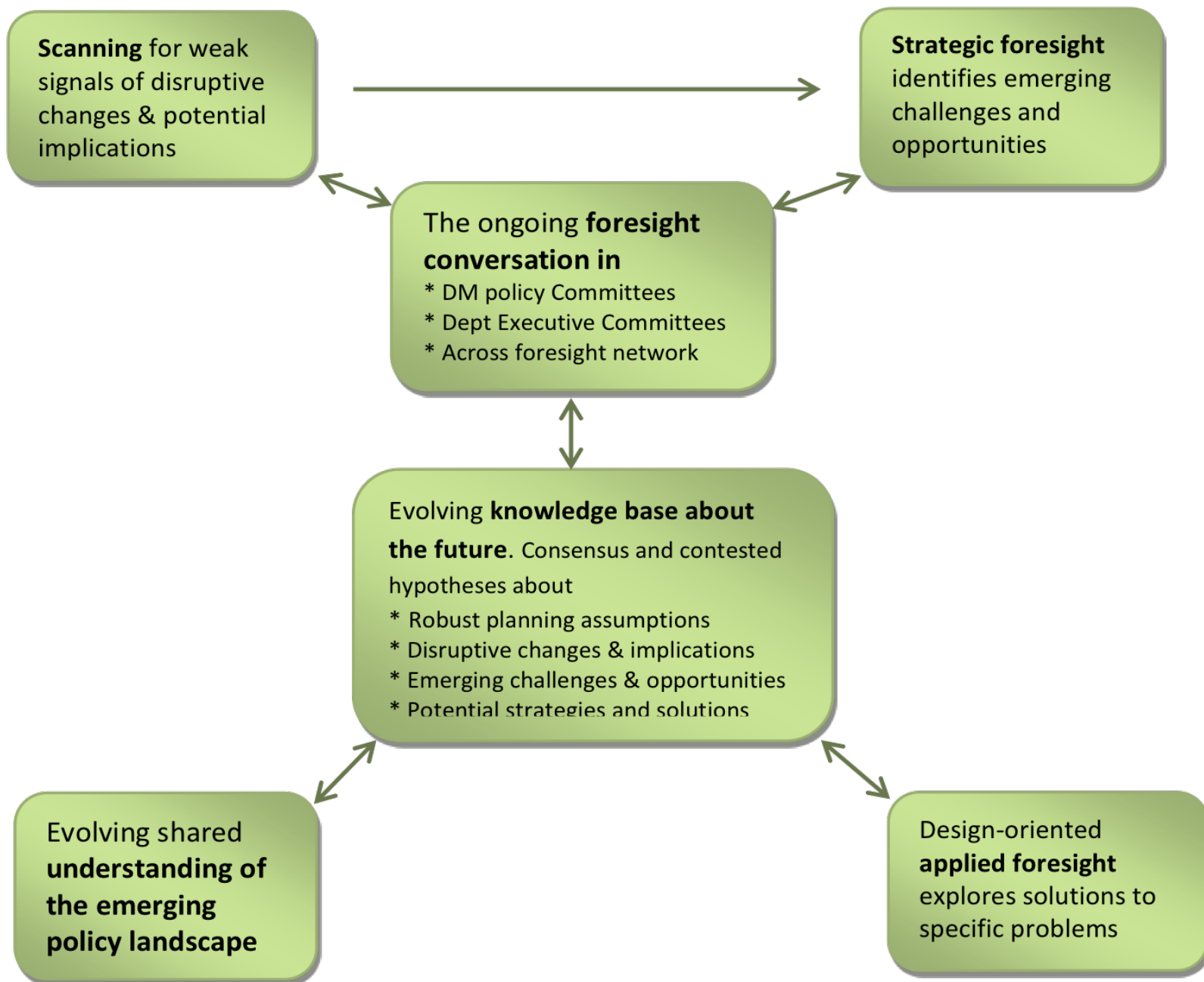
---

1. In countries that take foresight seriously, the senior public servants are active in an **ongoing foresight conversation**.
2. In Singapore, UK and Finland **sophisticated scanning processes** familiarize leaders with the early signs of potentially disruptive change on the horizon.
3. Several countries use **strategic foresight** to explore how large systems and complex public policy problems could evolve and the surprises that could emerge.
4. Several countries use **applied foresight**, which draws on design thinking to help groups develop solutions to specific problems.
5. Several countries are attempting to **curate “building blocks” from the foresight conversation** so the next conversation or project does not start at the beginning.
6. Issue: **citizen engagement** – if citizens are not immersed in the real possibilities of disruptive change, dialogue often focuses on / reproduces the expected future.

# FORECASTING vs FORESIGHT

APPROACH	TOOLS	IMPLICIT ASSUMPTIONS	PRODUCT
<b>Forecasting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scanning for trends</li> <li>• Data analysis</li> <li>• Trend extrapolation</li> <li>• Trend impact assessment</li> </ul>	The future is an extension of the present. Surprises come from changes in the value of the known variables	<b>An understanding of the expected future</b>
<b>Strategic Foresight</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scanning for weak signals of change</li> <li>• Driver analysis</li> <li>• Influence maps</li> <li>• Cross impact analysis</li> <li>• System analysis</li> <li>• Scenarios</li> <li>• Assumption testing</li> </ul>	The underlying system is evolving. Surprises come from changes that disrupt the system	<b>An understanding of the range of plausible futures and the potential surprises that current policies and institutions are not ready to address</b>
<b>Applied Foresight</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Builds on strategic foresight</li> <li>• Stakeholder analysis</li> <li>• Design thinking</li> <li>• Strategy and vision building</li> </ul>	By understanding how the system could evolve and the surprises that could emerge, we can develop more robust policies, strategies and visions	<b>Policies, strategies and visions that are robust across the range of plausible futures</b>

# KEY ELEMENTS IN A FORESIGHT SYSTEM



# Appendix: Horizons Strategic Foresight Method

## FRAMING

- Identify the issue or problem of interest
- Consider the larger system(s) shaping the issue
- Prepare a simple domain diagram of what is “in” or “out” as a guide. Allow it to evolve over the study.

## ASSUMPTIONS

- Identify “current assumptions” buried in public dialogue and policy documents
- Identify key trends people assume are true
- Summarize key assumptions as a description of the expected future.

## SCANNING

- Scan for weak signals of potentially disruptive changes
- Conduct interviews and facilitate dialogue to understand the system and develop insights

## SYSTEM MAPPING

- Identify key elements or nodes in the system
- Describe key relationships
- Use a system map to identify where change could occur and direct further scanning for weak signals as needed

## CHANGE DRIVERS

- Use insights from scanning to identify change drivers shaping the system. A useful change driver disrupts the system map in a surprising way.
- Do influence maps to see 2nd to 5th order consequences
- Do cross impact analysis to explore surprises from driver interaction

## SCENARIOS

- Develop scenarios to explore a range of futures
- Identify potential challenges and discontinuities
- Test robustness of current assumptions and strategies

## RESULTS

- Identify robust planning assumptions and strategies
- Identify key uncertainties, surprises and emerging issues
- Better understanding of how the system or issue could evolve
- Improved policies and programs that are robust across the range of plausible futures

---

If you have information to inform or update this study  
please contact:  
Peter Padbury, Chief Futurist  
[Peter.Padbury@horizons.gc.ca](mailto:Peter.Padbury@horizons.gc.ca)

**Policy Horizons Canada**

**[www.horizons.gc.ca](http://www.horizons.gc.ca)**