

FUTURECASTING

A New Model of Strategic Planning

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Many of today's church leaders know they must be forward thinking to be effective. They want to influence culture and make a positive difference in their communities but they don't know how to get there. Cultural turbulence caused by rapidly changing conditions generates a multitude of options that can create paralyzing uncertainty and inhibit creative action.

As a pastor for over 30 years, I am aware that church leaders tend to underestimate the influence that external factors such as technological advancements or socio-cultural changes can have on internal church life. We church leaders also tend to be more past and present focused and not tuned to indicators of emergent realities around us. Consequently, the ground is shifting beneath us and we find ourselves unprepared for the impact that social and cultural changes are having or will have on the needs and habits of the people we serve.

Futurecasting is a tool to sensitize church leaders to external and emerging issues before they are overwhelmed by them and to provide leaders with a process for sorting through a myriad of challenges and opportunities to clarify strategic direction.

- It enables church leaders to create and act upon a shared dream for their church and community across generations.
- It serves as a catalyst for a bolder and more creative vision.
- It increases the leader's ability to influence the future by anticipating, clarifying, and responding to emerging opportunities.

Leading from the future

Futurecasting provokes innovative approaches to strategy through the application of foresight methodologies. Foresight is the ability to anticipate what could happen before it happens and then identifying the arising opportunities for innovation. The goal is not to predict the future but to provoke bold creativity. When leaders mentally position themselves ten or more years into the future, they gain new perspective on the present, enriching their strategic thinking capabilities and enabling them to lead from the future.

Futurecasting Benefits

The Futurecasting experience provides tools and builds skills that will help you avoid three common problems:

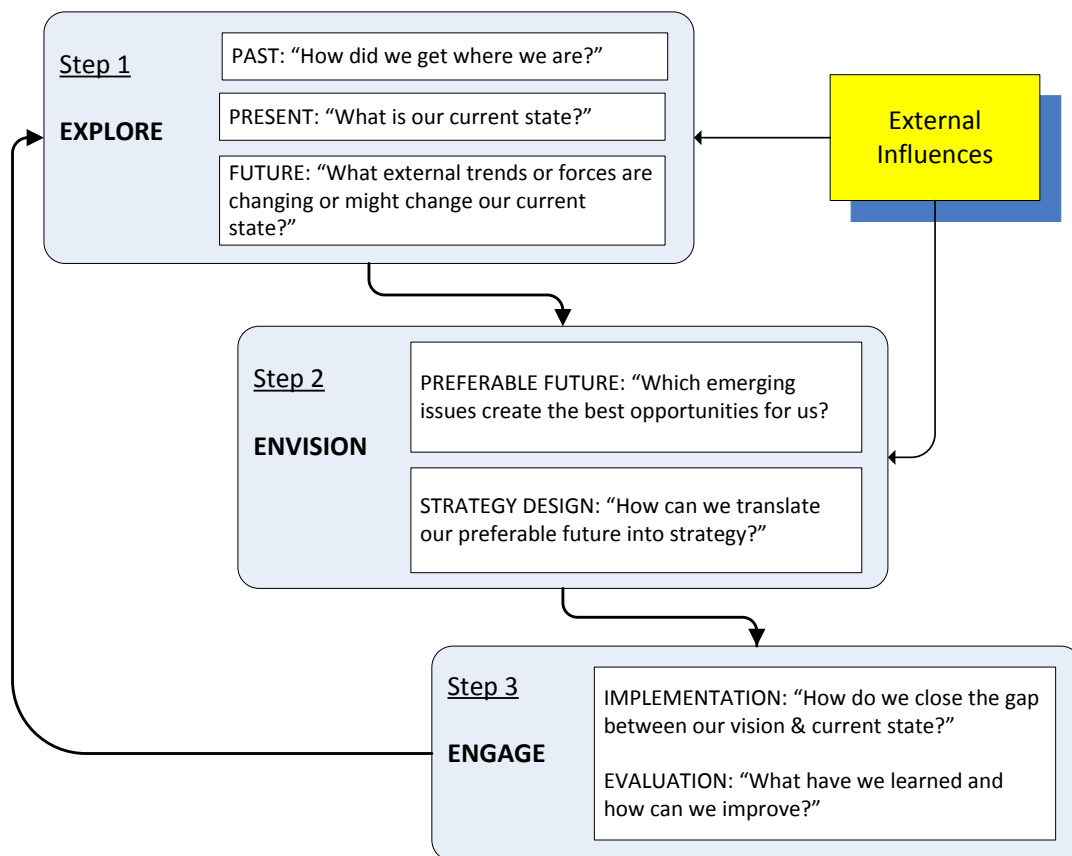
- **A repeatable process** for decision-making that doesn't lock you in but creates a roadmap for leaders to follow
- **Anticipatory leadership skills** to avoid decision-making based on reaction to unexpected changes
- **Financial risk management skills** to guard against expensive redoing caused by unanticipated emerging conditions.

E3 Futurecasting Model

The E3 Futurecasting Model provides a process for strategic decision-making. It guides a group of people through a series of exercises to identify potential opportunities and threatening challenges. It helps the group understand themselves and their context in order to choose the opportunities that are the best fit for them. It unifies participants around an agreed-upon preferable future toward which they are motivated to venture.

Futurecasting is a three-step process: *Explore* to *Envision* to *Engage* (see Figure 1). This process is sequential, with each succeeding step building on the outputs of the previous one. Futurecasting begins with the *Explore* step, which considers the church's past, then its present, and then its possible futures. The *Envision* step utilizes information from the *Explore* step to design a preferable future and a strategy to support it. The *Engage* step develops and implements action plans to translate the strategy into a realized dream.

E3 Futurecasting Model



Source: Stephen E. Brimmer, 2009

Figure 1

The Futurecasting process consists of the following activities:

Explore

- *Exploring the past* – it is often easier to look forward by first looking back. Leaders are usually more effective in planning forward if they look backward an equivalent number of years.
- *Exploring the present* – assess current conditions to create a baseline against which future change strategies can be measured.
- *Exploring the future* – we look back at the present from the future by employing foresight activities to investigate trends and forces that are changing or might change the future state of the church.

Envision

- *Preferable future* – once emerging issues are identified and evaluated and church leaders are armed with fresh insight, create or revisit a vision of the preferable future for the church and its community.
- *Strategy design* – translate the vision into a strategic plan.

Engage

- *Implementation* – assess gaps between the current state of the church and the envisioned future, and then develop a plan to close them.
- *Evaluation* – from start to finish, Futurecasting is a learning process. Identify lessons learned and apply them to the next round of strategic planning.

Futurecasting Process Flows

To illustrate the Futurecasting process, the activities and outputs of the *Explore*, *Envision*, and *Engage* steps are shown in Table 1. Outputs from *Explore* become inputs to *Envision* and outputs from *Envision* are inputs to *Engage*.

Steps	Activities	Outputs / Deliverables
Explore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring the Past - Defining Moments exercise • Exploring the Present - Assess current state of the church and community needs • Exploring the Future - Scan external trends & forces for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trend analysis • SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats)

Steps	Activities	Outputs / Deliverables
	emerging issues	
Envision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preferable future - identify strategic issues and define / refine the vision • Strategy design – translate vision into strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision Statement • Strategic Plan
Engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation – action plans to close gap between vision & current state • Evaluation – develop measurements to define success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation Plan • Assessment Plan

Table 1

Futurecasting Workshops

Futurecasting is a three-day consultant-led experience consisting of a series of foresight based activities. The following workshops are available.

- Vision Mapping

The Vision Mapping experience is a catalyst for your church or faith-based organization to create a bolder, more creative vision. Leading from the future is now widely recognized as effective and essential. Futurecasting methodology provides the tools and guidelines for developing a collaborative vision, translating the vision into strategy, and turning the strategy into action plans.

- Community Engagement

The Community Engagement workshop is a three-day experience designed for churches and faith-based organizations that want to take a leadership role in transforming their community. This workshop utilizes foresight methodologies as a catalyst for creating a bold vision of a healthy community for future generations.

- Facilities Planning

The Facilities Planning experience is designed for churches and faith-based organizations that are beginning to think about designing or redesigning facilities. This activity utilizes foresight methodologies as a catalyst for thinking differently about building priorities and design. It is Intended to provoke discussion about program and facility needs for the future and how today's investment will impact the next generation.

You can also customize a Futurecasting workshop to your specific needs. For more information or to schedule a workshop, contact Steve Brimmer at:

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