

Futurists Are Different

Doubts about the usefulness of futurists used to be rampant but are now merely common. Dismissive questions include: Aren't they just like other consultants? What special insights can we gain from them?

Like the vulgar T-shirts of a few years ago, however, futurists really *do* do it differently—and to your advantage!

Most corporate business planning covers the next three to five years, with the planners concentrating on progress in implementation and impending revisions of the plan. That's a tall order, and doesn't allow much time for the consideration of the 10- to 30-year future.

The big business consultancies specialize in reorganizing the client for greater effectiveness and efficiency over the next five years or so-useful, laudable, but hardly futuristic. Most other business consultants specialize in some relatively small aspect of the business. That specialization can be most useful if the business is stable, but whose business is, these days?

The futurist consultant is not likely to replace any internal staff, but rather will complement their thinking to help assure the survival and thrival in these increasingly complex and fast changing times. "How Futurists Differ," next page, compares futurist and conventional business thinking.

For a more specific taste of longer-term thinking, check these web sites:

- The Arlington Institute, <http://www.arlingtoninstitute.org>
- Kurzweil's newsletter, <http://www.kurzweilai.net>
- The Shaping Tomorrow newsletter, <http://www.sharingtomorrow.com>
- Or the author's, www.josephcoates.com

And for more details on exploring the future, see my recent article in *RTM* "Coming to Grips with the Future" (Sept.-Oct. 2004, pp. 23-32) along with other articles in that issue's special report on "Predicting the Unpredictable."

As a working futurist, I have only one general objective: to change minds. I have no agenda, universal goal, or ideological base. I just believe that almost any change of mind will benefit a person, and his or her firm.

FUTURIST'S THINKING

1. **Depth of vision**
2. **Pan-disciplinary**
3. **Breadth of vision**
4. **Broad trend orientation**
5. **A systems approach**
6. **Interaction of trends and factors, build up of cross relationships**
7. **Attention to wildcards and discontinuities**
8. **Full time exploration of the future**
9. **Strategic focus**
10. **Speak the unspeakable**
11. **Long-term orientation**
12. **Futures exploration process yields fresh ideas**
13. **Emphasis on alternative futures, their implications for action**
14. **Mind changers**
15. **The future dominates recommended actions**

CONVENTIONAL BUSINESS THINKING

- Immediate term
- Knows its own business
- Conscious attention to detail
- Techno-economic trends orientation
- Problem approach
- Less emphasis on connections
- Continuity assumption dominates
- Attention episodic or part time
- Bottom line focus
- Uncongenial thoughts/ideas suppressed
- Short-term focus and reward structure
- Builds on best current idea
- A single future often dominates
- Mainstream thinking dominates
- Past experiences, present concerns dominate