

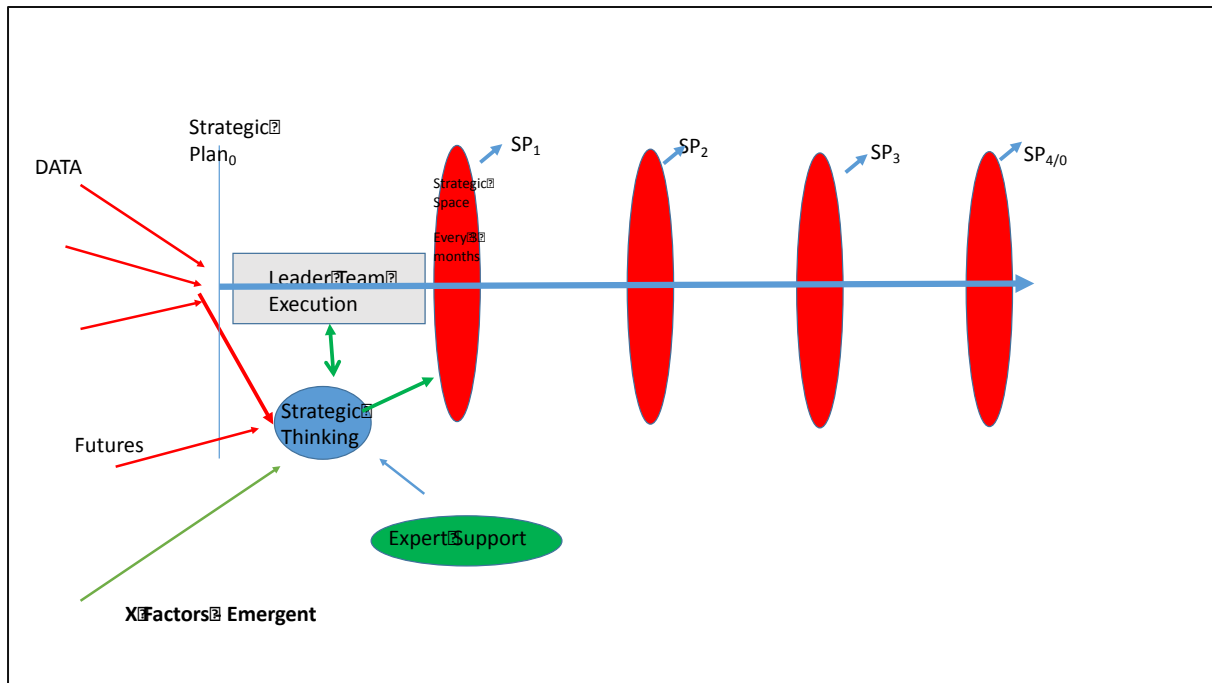
Organisation improvement: why we need to consider emergence and futures in making strategy

Over the course of working with many organisations over the last 30 years, ranging from MNCs, public and quasi public agencies (UK and overseas), mutual building societies, services and family businesses, it has become clear to me that any effort to raise productivity and improve an organisation requires managers and leaders who can think strategically and consider the futures to ensure robust decision-making. As a response, I have developed a model which I explain below. It is currently in use in 4 organisations.

Managers in organisations have viewed the process of planning strategy as deliberate and purposeful – to reconcile the gap between perceptions of current reality and desires for the future. However, strategies do not always go to plan but deviation from the plan is not always a bad thing – sometimes the best strategies emerge quite unexpectedly. The key to the success of any organisation is the ability to be proactive in capturing emergence from its current strategy, and the ability to develop an awareness of new factors that were not included in the first strategic plan.

In addition, and in response to the difficulties of predicting what will happen over the next ten years, the anticipation of the future can play an important role in the safeguarding and improvement of an organisation. Futures and Foresight is the interdisciplinary study of the future, drawing on a growing range of methods and techniques that allow consideration of possible, plausible, probable, preferable and potentially creatable long term futures. However, since the future is unpredictable, the purpose of futures and foresight is not and cannot be the prediction of the future, but rather its assistance to the decision-making process.

Professor Jeff Gold has developed a model of making and delivering strategy that considers the needs of the present, responses to emergent issues and the incorporation of probable future requirements for the next 10 years. The key ideas of the model, which has been operating in three companies over the last three years, are shown in the diagram below.



The key features of the approach are:

1. Formation of a strategic plan
2. Ongoing consideration of known issues for strategic thinking
3. Leading execution and support for leaders
4. Recognition of emergent issues
5. Expert help for complex issues that emerge
6. A Futures group to consider 10 years ahead, meeting every 8 weeks
7. Reviews of strategy every 3 months

Evidence from companies that have been using this approach show successful outcomes in delivery, faster responses to emergences, the ability to think strategically and alignment of leaders around the strategy.