Federal Foresight Community of Interest (FFCOI)

Anticipatory Governance for Democracy

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Democracy in peril…

Democracy is in peril because a substantial number of voters have either decided that it is not serving them, or because they have been led to unwittingly support ideas that destroy it.

Peril…

- This peril is now in the acute stage, and events in the present are dispositive.

- Assume, however, that we emerge intact from the current risk. It would be a mistake to confuse a remission with a cure and go on with business as usual.

Systemic Problems…

- There are deep, systemic problems involved. These need to be addressed now or they are likely to become unmanageable. It is a difference between the complex and the chaotic. We are drifting rapidly from the former towards the latter.

- There is a new class of system challenges here, already being felt -- but with the tsunami still on the way... From AAI to global climate change.

From Complexity to Chaos: Civilizational Challenges

- Meanwhile, unfortunately, this process is about to be overtaken by what might be thought of as "Nextgen" challenges operating at the civilizational level: e.g. advanced forms of artificial intelligence; advanced levels of genetic manipulation; advanced levels of human-induced disorganization of the biosphere; and advanced levels of risks of war that are existential, including the uncontrolled use of nuclear weapons. These challenges are maturing very rapidly, and they are interactive, with the prospective effect of accelerating rates of societal change across the board.

- Moreover, Artificial Intelligence will act as an accelerant to this process, with the possibility that systems will rapidly descend from complex to chaotic, at which point they will become impossible to control.

Chaos…

- Chaos is what happens when a system is pushed beyond its inherent capacity for self-regulating behavior. Once chaos has established itself, restoring control is highly problematic, requiring great expenditures of energy.

Extinction Event

- In the realm of human affairs, the potential now exists for those costs to reach the level of an extinction event (e.g. catastrophic levels of climate change; nuclear war triggered by climate change; Nuclear Winter resulting from nuclear war, etc..) It is, however, possible to improve the odds for what might be termed a "soft-landing," by developing systems of governance that are anticipatory, on the basis of which it is possible to make changes in how we do things that can delay the onset of chaos, and perhaps even dampen its effects by shortening its intensity and duration, and by improving societal resilience.

Precursors of Chaos:
All is not lost…

- There are <u>precursors</u> of chaos which, if identified and acted upon, might create chances for re-stabilization by means that are compatible with the survival of democracy. Managing this kind of system is possible, but <u>only upon the condition</u> that there exists an electorate educated for citizenship at a new level of awareness.
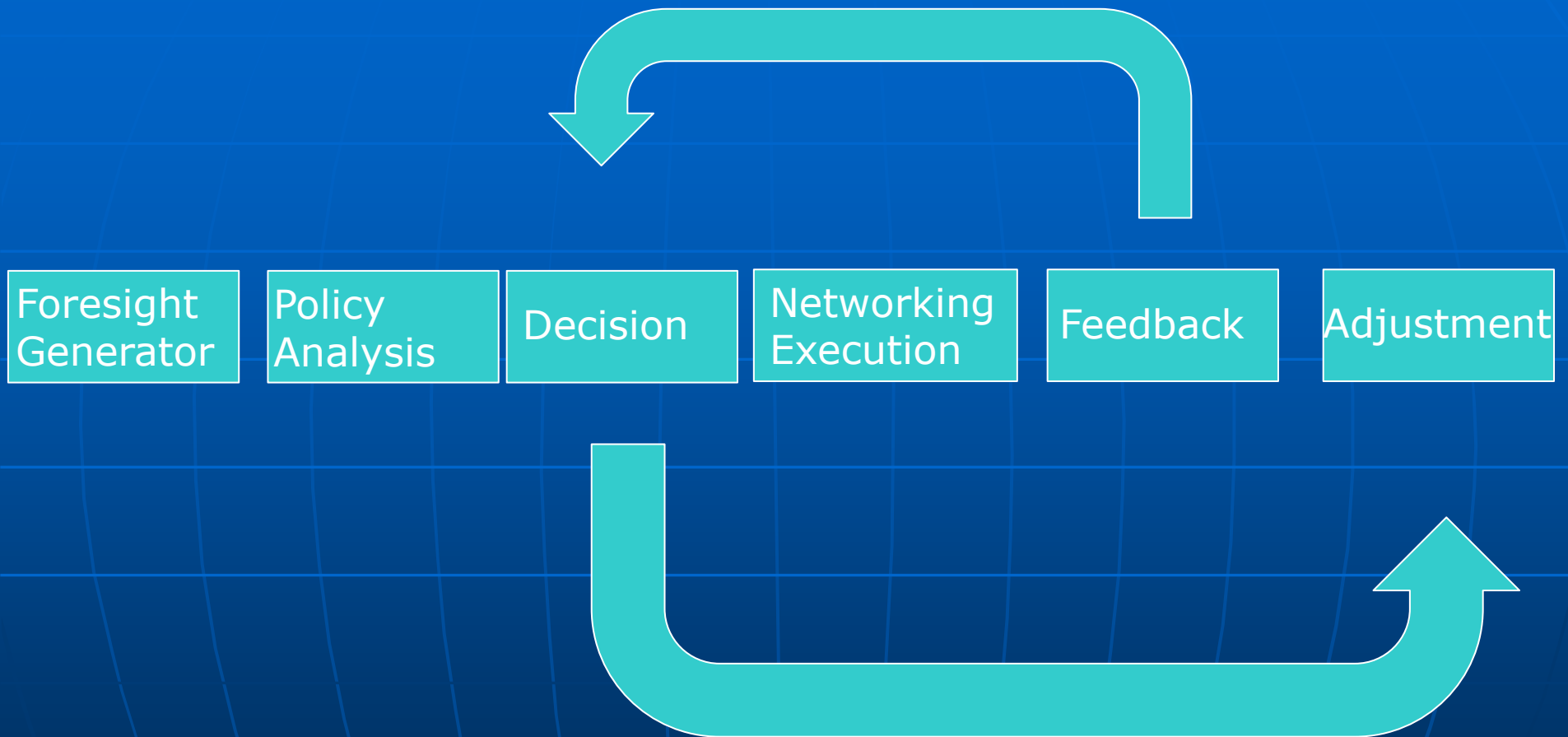
Strategic Foresight and Anticipatory Governance

Even as we work through the present crisis, there needs to be improvements that can be made in our systems of governance, using existing laws, precedents, and systems. These improvements involve ways to develop foresight as a tool of government; and to improve the ability of government to convert that knowledge into better policy.

Strategic foresight is a term of art for the former. Anticipatory governance is a term of art for the latter.

Anticipatory Governance

- Foresight (Strategic Intelligence)
- Policy Analysis (Round Table)
- Discussion
- Execution (Network, whole of government)
- Feedback

Foresight Generator → Policy Analysis → Decision → Networking Execution → Feedback → Adjustment

Strategic Foresight for Democracy

- Strategic foresight is a discipline for studying alternative futures when used as an integral element of policy-making systems. The resulting fusion of systems constitutes "anticipatory governance", a system of systems which – in theory – would substantially improve capacity to handle complex issues. It accomplishes this by integrating strategic intelligence with strategic planning at the level of systems of administration,; by enabling the planning and execution functions to make more effective use of intelligence; and by coupling this to a feed-back system that can detect and adjust for error more readily.

- There is growing interest in the practical application of this concept on the part of major international organizations such as the European Union and the OECD, and by a number of individual governments including the United States, although we are not in the front ranks.

Anticipatory Governance: Practical Upgrades, by Leon S. Fuerth with Evan M.H. Faber, Project on Forward Engagement, Washington, D.C., October 2012.

The shift from complicated to complex

- A common denominator in all these efforts is recognition of a shift from problems that are complicated to those that are complex.

- Complicated problems may be difficult but can be solved with precision. Example, orbital mechanics. on the basis of Newtonian physics.

- Complex problems have solutions based on probability. For example, quantum mechanics on the basis of probability.

- The implications of complexity for policy making are such problems can at best be influenced, but not definitively resolved. Where social questions are concerned, this requires a profound distinction from the political approach, which insists on choice between ostensibly perfect, permanent solutions.

- Years ago, strategic foresight identified the following forces as examples of complex problems capable of profoundly disturbing the existing order: climate change; artificial intelligence; artificial biology; highly effective methods for molding mass behavior; major forms of demographic shifts (e.g. end of white preponderance in the United States population and elsewhere). These subjects gradually moved from the lower levels of priority to serious levels of policy discussion.

Education for Democracy

The Round Table Method

- The Round Table Method is a sequence of steps designed to forestall ideological polarization in discussion groups, to encourage awareness of the complex nature of almost all real-world issues, and to establish a common framework for discussion, based on foresight analysis which encourages the widening of concepts about the future as opposed to the narrowing that is typical of most discussions.

The Round Table Method

- The early stages are: discussion of complexity, discussion of foresight methods.

- Later stages were discussion of values; impact of values and policies on each other and substantive presentations of information about emerging issues; application of these methods by members of the group; and consolidation of views.

The Round Table Method

- Trial runs of the method have been run in a wide variety of circumstances: at the high school level in the public education system of Philadelphia; over a one-semester period with discussion groups from various parts of the United States that are parts of the World Affairs Council network: with college-age students ranging from first year to doctoral graduate students; and in a number of one-day training exercises organized within the Federal Government.

The Round Table Method

The Round Table Method has evolved as the result of trial runs in a wide variety of settings, including:

- Discussion groups in various parts of the United States;
- At age levels from adolescence to young adult, to mature adults.
- A broad range of occupations, ranging from business people, military, government, retired.
- Engagement with participants from a range of ethnic and racial backgrounds.
- Taking advantage of virtual forms of communication.

The Round Table Method

- Typical observed outcomes were:

  - Delayed formation of opinion
  - Non-ideological final views
  - Awareness and appreciation for alternative futures
  - Awareness of complexity as a major factor to be accounted for in realistic planning
  - Resistance to single point analyses and solutions
  - Discussion rather than debate

Thank you!
Questions?

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Questions

- How important is democracy?

- Is it in crisis?

- What should be the pillars of a revitalized social contract for the 21st century?

- What insights, approaches and tools from the world of futures and foresight can be brought to bear on the challenges to democracy?

- How to better involve younger generations in building a common future of democracy?

- What practical approaches to this exist or are under development?

- What is governance able to offer?