



FUTURE SEARCH

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Finding Common Ground in Face of the Future

Shared goals, achieved through an interactive and dynamic planning process. A Future Search Conference brings 50 – 500 representatives of different interest groups in dialogue. The process enables people to transform their capability for drastically new actions very quickly. It helps them taking responsibility for their own planning. After exploring past, present and desired future stakeholders discover their common ground. Only then do they make concrete action plans for next steps. Typical results are visions, policies, strategies and actions owned by all stakeholders.

Future searches have been run in every part of the world and sector of society. The highpoint of the process is the Future Search Conference wherein stakeholders search for common ground, during 3 days of intense dialogue.

What it achieves

The main deliverable of the conference is “the system” having discovered what it is ready, willing and able to do by accessing innate needs for meaning. Topics and actions are identified that are committed to by key stakeholders and that are considered as most critical to sustainable change. This can be shared visions, policies, strategic framework, action plan, work structures, and others.

Oftentimes, during a future search task forces or work groups are formed that assume responsibility for implementing the agreements. It is not uncommon that people devise new forms of cooperation that continue for months or years.

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Outstanding Global Work Award

Perspectivity is liaised with and a member of the future search network, which received the Outstanding Global Work Award from the Organisational Development Network in 2011 (futuresearch.net/odaward.cfm).

This recognizes an achievement which:

- Takes place on a global level or in an arena primarily outside the USA
- Breaks new ground or demonstrates an innovative approach
- Actively leads or contributes to positive change in the world
- Is sustainable
- Has a well-articulated purpose
- Demonstrates measurable change or progress toward change
- May represent either a large or small intervention of significant impact or import

Future Search initiatives have “actively led or contributed to positive change in the world”

“...The few hundreds of Future Search initiatives that have “actively led or contributed to positive change in the world” span the globe and cover practically every social issue. Leveraging efforts from Reproductive Health in Ethiopia to Drug Trafficking in the Maldives to Protecting Street Children in Iran to Engaging Communities in Education Reform in Indonesia to Demobilizing Child Soldiers in South Sudan veling Women Leaders in Siberia to Repairing a Fractured Economy in Derry-Londonderry in Northern Ireland to.....”

WHO APPLIED IT

Perspectivity has applied (modified) future searches in a broad variety of organisations:

- University of Dar es Salaam (Tanzania)
- Global Fund pre-replenishment (Netherlands)
- Solvay Pharmaceuticals (France)
- Office for First Minister and Deputy First Minister (Northern Ireland)
- Management for Development Foundation (Netherlands)
- East Africa Community (Uganda)
- Ministry of Education (Zanzibar)
- Cebu Uniting for Sustainable Water (Philippines)
- Ministry for Civil Service (Yemen)
- Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports (Netherlands)
- BPC fashion (Netherlands)
- Tanzania Education Authority (Tanzania)
- Community Radio Programme (Liberia)
- Regional Education Center Zadkine (Netherlands)
- Ministry of Telecommunication (Jordan)
- IKV Pax Christi (Netherlands)
- Department for Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland)

We conducted future searches in many countries and cultures. Hundreds of conferences have been held in communities, private and non-profit organizations in nearly every sector, including businesses, governments, banks, universities, hospitals, media institutes, child organisations, and so on.

The future search theme is of vital importance and is a “burning” question or issue that evokes the passion of stakeholders in their future.

For detailed case descriptions of future searches facilitated by Perspectivity please contact us at: enterprise@perspectivity.org or consult the future search network website.

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Why it works

A Future Search is based on a simple notion: If we want drastically new developments, we need to use processes equal to these aspirations. Such a “cultural transformation” or “paradigm shift” is initiated in and used to practical advantage.

The design comes from theories and principles tested in many cultures for the past 50 years. It relies on mutual learning among stakeholders as a catalyst for action and follow-up.



Nightingales Future Search for socio-economic development in the Limburg region

Who participates

Future search departs in major ways from top-down or bottom-up meetings. It brings people from all walks of life into the same conversation. The “whole system” in relation to the future topic is participating: people with authority, resources, expertise, information or need. The outcomes are therefore fully owned and agreed by all. A group of 50-100 diverse stakeholders is optimal. By running parallel conferences which converge at the common ground stage, it is possible to work with hundreds of people without compromising the principles.

KEY PRINCIPLES

A Future Search Conference enables any group to do productive work, applying the following key principles.

“Whole system” in the room

A cross section of many interested parties (the stakeholders), which means more diversity and less hierarchy than is usual in a working meeting, and multiple input.

Think global – act local

Future scenarios for the organization/community are put into perspective of the wider environment. This enhances shared understanding and greater commitment to act. It also increases the range of potential actions.

Future focus and common ground

...rather than conflict management is the frame of reference. That means honoring differences rather than having to reconcile them, generating positive energy.

Self management and responsibility for action

People self-manage their work and use dialogue – not problem solving as the main tool. That means helping each other do the tasks and taking responsibility for our perceptions and actions.



Future Search for peace building in Sudan

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WHAT WILL HAPPEN

The steps in a future search are:

1. Focus on the past

People make time lines of key events in the world, their own lives, and in the history of the conference topic. Small groups tell stories about each time line as well as the implications of their stories and lessons learned from the past for the work they have come to do.

2. Focus on the present

The whole group makes a "mind map" of trends affecting them now and identifies those trends most important for their topic. Thereafter, stakeholder groups describe what they are doing now about key trends and what they want to do in the future. They also report what they are proud of and sorry about, taking responsibility for the way they are contributing to the current developments.

3. Future scenarios

Diverse groups describe their preferred future as if it has already been accomplished.

4. Common ground

Small groups post themes they believe to be common ground for everyone. Whole group dialogues to agree on common ground for the future.

5. Action planning

People sign up to generate and implement plans. The whole group explores the way forward and suggests follow-up mechanisms to keep the momentum and sustain the generated energy.

REFERENCES

Future Search: Getting the Whole System in the Room for Vision, Commitment and Action 3rd ed, Marv Weisbord and Sandra Janoff (Berrett-Koehler, 2010)

Future Search Network: futuresearch.net

How to get started

In case you are interested, we can provide presentations, a short experiential orientation or a mini future search.

Nearly always a steering committee or planning group of key people plans the process. They should be people who, together, can get everyone else to the meeting. The planning typically takes from 1 up to 6 months. Key decisions are selecting and specifying the task, and selecting the right stakeholders for that task. The goal is to assemble a group that has whatever it needs to take next action steps without necessarily having to ask permission from anyone else.

The planners must also address the schedule, invitations, site, documentation, and logistics. Planning meeting agenda items may include: determining stakes of the planners - reviewing timeliness and need - selecting a conference task - reviewing the methodology - selecting stakeholders - time frames: how far backward or forward? - invitees and how to reach them - determine future scenario (what to include) - documenting and communicating results - expectations for action planning - worksheets and other materials - site, schedule, food and lodging, transportation and other logistics.

ABOUT PERSPECTIVITY

Perspectivity builds inspiring collaborations for sustainable growth. We work with groups and individuals to address complex realities in organisations and communities.

In current times of increasing complexity, blue prints have become obsolete. As Perspectivity, we dare to look at the world upside down. We bring a fresh perspective!

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