

# DEVELOPING ORGANISATIONAL FUTURES ORIENTATION

## —A single case study exploring and conceptualizing the transformation process in practice

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# IN SHORT, WHAT MAKES THIS TOPIC IMPORTANT...

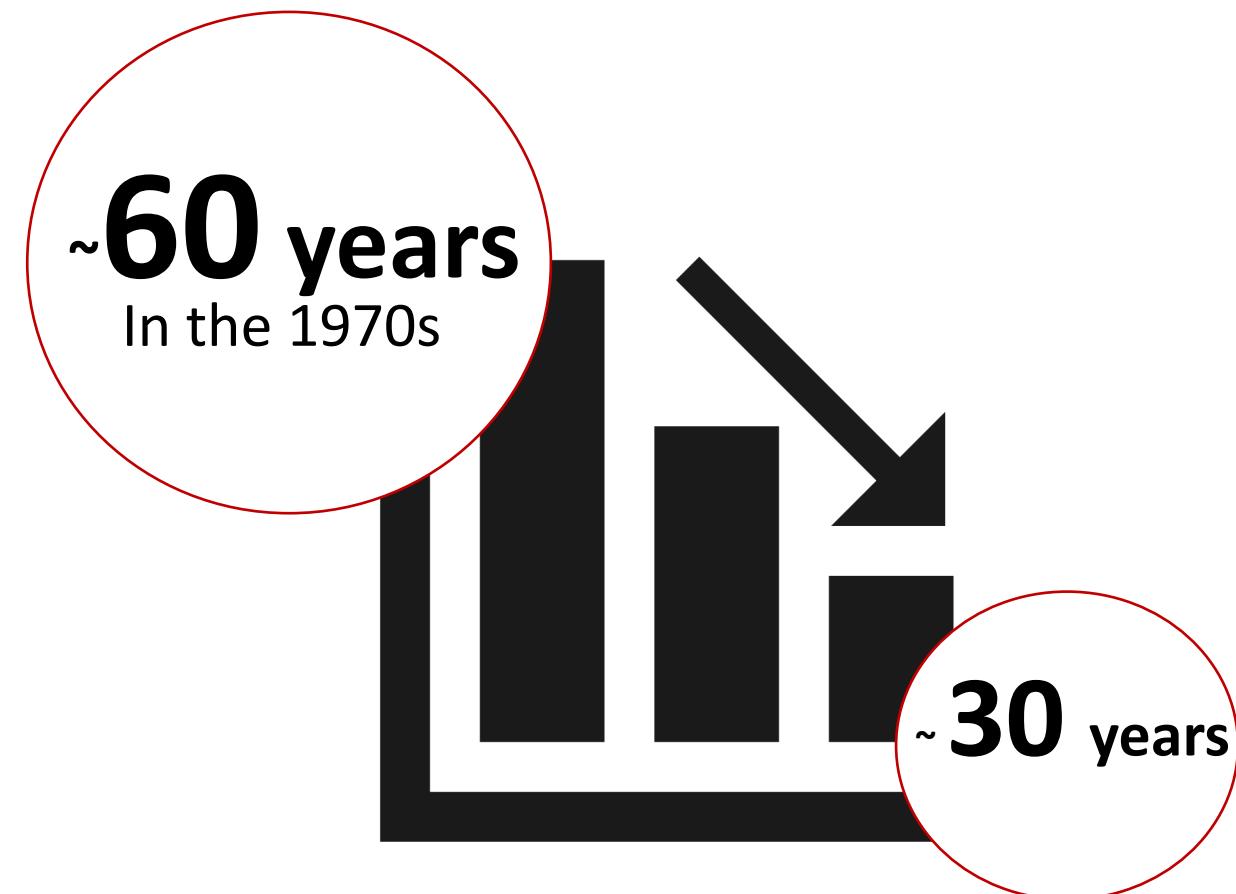
is the urgent need for more long term organisational vitality

## **Economic vitality**

In only a few decades, the average age of companies has dramatically decreased. At the same time, the cumulative profits generated over their life span have declined at an even sharper rate. (Reeves et Puschel, 2015).

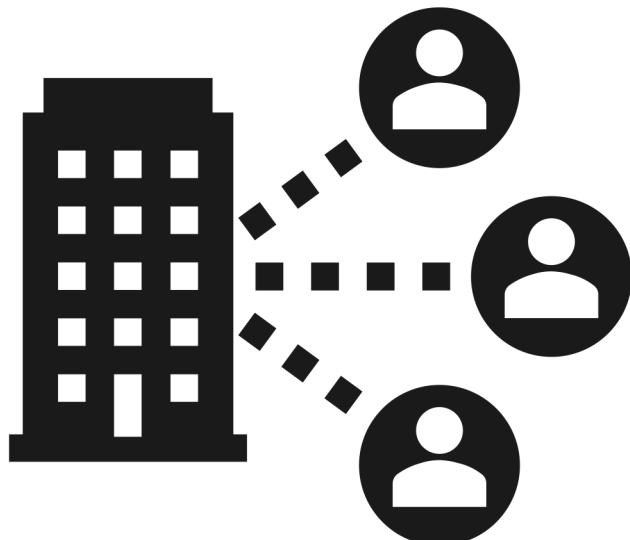
## **Societal wellbeing**

Companies investing on their long-term growth potential often outperform at times of crisis (Reeves et al, 2020). Or, in recent years, the interest in companies' role to consciously, systemically and sustainably contribute to the entire society has significantly increased (Cone & Porter-Novelli, 2018).



# INTERESTINGLY, WITH FUTURES ORIENTATION

companies can achieve a more sustainable market position



## **From organisational capability building...**

Having access to new knowledge, and to be able to make sense of it, has become a lifeline for many organisations. In order to go beyond simple trend scouting, it requires a deep dive into understanding what drives for that change. In order to strengthen the long-term organisational vitality, it is important to identify potential future markets and to building a strong position in those markets.

## **... to increased wellbeing and prosperity**

In fact, according to recent studies, futures oriented companies grow a lot faster than others (200 %), and they are clearly more profitable (33%) than companies in average (Rohrbeck & Gordon, 2018; Hojland & Rohrbeck, 2018).

# IN MANY SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZED (SME) COMPANIES

the level of futures orientation has remained low and deficient

## Unrealised potential?

With majority of studies having focused on large and pioneering companies, the methods and means of making future more accessible to all should be a lifeline to companies of all sizes. Besides playing a major role in most economies, the small and medium sized companies have a lot of potential in bringing immediate impacts on markets.

**SMEs**  
represent

**90 % of all companies, and**  
**50 % of all employment worldwide**

(Or, as many as 2/3 in Europe!)



# THE OBJECTIVE: TO EXPLORE AND CONCEPTUALISE

the process of developing organisational futures orientation

## Study context

One of the main objectives of the new European industrial strategy is to make European businesses more future-ready. With a focus on small and medium sized companies, it seeks to advance new forms of inclusive and sustainable economic growth. But even in Finland, with a highly developed and internationally recognised national foresight system, many organisations still base their actions on forecasts and not on creating connections between current actions and the future-yet-to-come.



## Case company

In this particular study, the process of developing organisational futures orientation was both directed and followed in a small privately owned company in the field of strategic consulting and training. Alongside applying more practice-oriented anticipatory approaches, methods, and practices, the process was conceptualised for the benefit of other companies with similar needs.

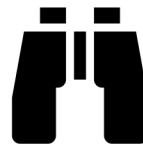
# THEORETICAL APPROACH:

## the six pillars of futures thinking for transforming

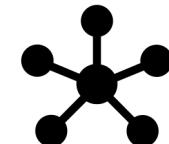
- The theory of six pillars of futures thinking for transforming was developed by professor, UNESCO chair Sohail Inayatullah in 2008, see [DOI 10.1108/14636680810855991](https://doi.org/10.1108/14636680810855991)
- The six pillars approach combines a variety of concepts and techniques used in futures studies.
- Its main focus is on the identification and exploitation of alternative futures – as well as on recognising the neglected cultural dimensions potentially found between the desired or used practices.
- The approach consists of six consecutive steps (see under).



(1) Mapping the current understanding about the future (the used future)



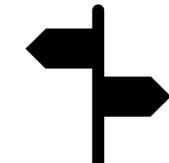
(2) Seeking for disruption in ways to look for the future (the disowned future)



(3) Understanding the need to shape established practices (alternative futures)



(4) Creating a common language between different stakeholders (alignment)



(5) Building alternative futures (modes of social change)



(6) Managing change in everyday life (uses of the future)

# TO BEGIN WITH,

the model builds on three consecutive target layers

Whether the question was about the case company, its client companies or other companies indirectly connected with the research, there were a few major observations influencing the fact that the model was built according to three consecutive yet continuously evolving maturity levels :

- It was important that the model would be easily adaptable for different types of companies – with varying levels of maturity in foresight, and with different levels of ambitions and objectives toward the process.
- It was even more important to develop the model in a way that takes into account the continuous evolution of futures thinking and anticipation, not overly constrained by a particular context or time.
- Finally, the model was built to reflect the current state of futures thinking and of foresight in an organisation, not the level of the leading foresight experts within.

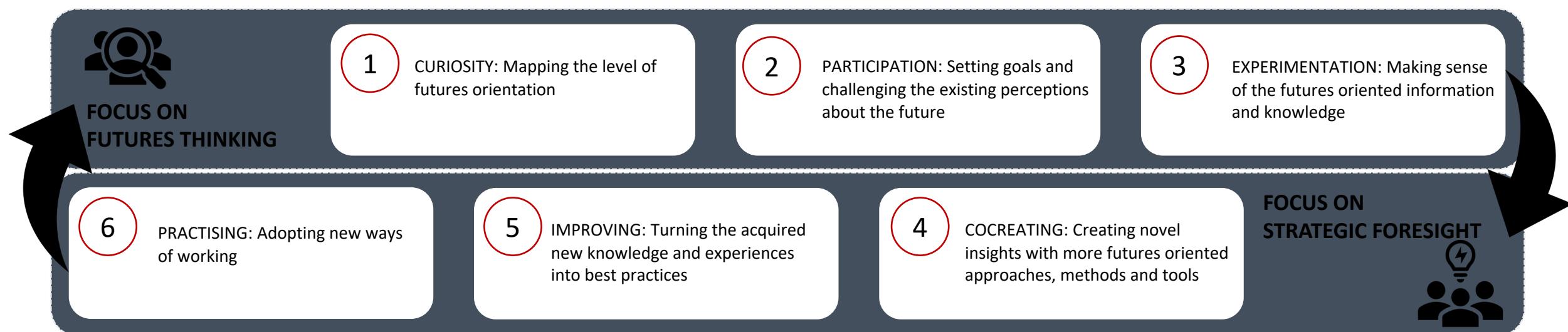


# EACH TARGET LAYER

then consists of two phases and of six essential steps

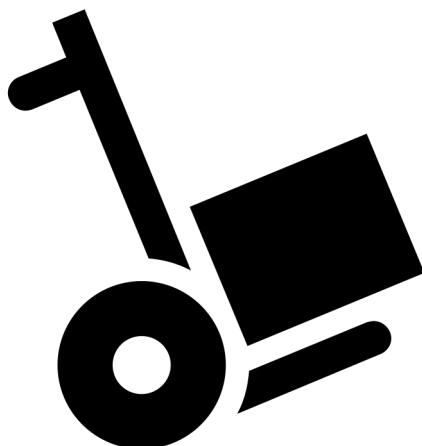
## A six-step model for developing organisational futures orientation

Considering the development of organisational futures orientation as a continuous process of learning and transformation – one goal at a time, and to yet make it simple and concrete enough to keep up the interest on it, some modifications were made to the six pillars approach, serving as the source of inspiration for the model. Importantly, the six steps were divided into two different phases:



# BESIDES THE SIX STEPS MODEL,

a few other remarks to be considered:



## **No quick wins**

Developing organisational futures orientation is not a project with short-term objectives. It is a collaborative transformation process that needs time and commitment to make any real and long-lasting impacts. Conflicts and frustrations are not to be avoided.

## **Focus on values, not on predefined outcomes**

Instead of fixed, predefined outcomes, give space and time for surprises and experimentations. The better the interventions are integrated into the companies' everyday operational models and the more concrete benefits result from them, the more participatory the process becomes and the more valuable benefits it brings along.

## **From cognitive biases to better information processing and interpretations**

At the end, the benefits of organisational futures orientation are strongly connected with our thinking patterns, often unconsciously impacting the use and applicability of foresight in different situations.

# p.s. SOME FINAL FACTS

about the study

## **Duration of the study**

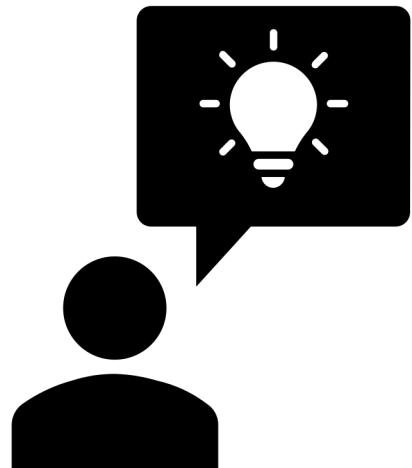
The case study began in September 2017, with a baseline review. The actual study took place from January 2018 until the end of 2019. = The total length of study was 27 months.

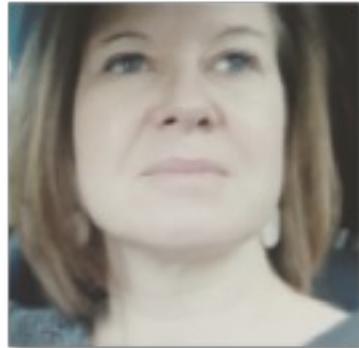
## **Methodological approach**

The study was built on abductive reasoning. The conclusions were drawn from the emerging situations and data, and explanations were constructed to either confirm or challenge the chosen theoretical foundations. Conducted as action research, the researcher was simultaneously working for the company, besides the case company employees. That is, the study consisted of series of timely managed interventions actualized to support, analyse, and encode the experimentations.

## **Major deficiencies?**

A baseline review and a survey to find out the cognitive-motivational attitudes and anticipatory assumptions toward the development process should have been carried out to shed light on how they evolved at different stages of the process.





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