

Author's Reflections on The Foresight Principle

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Richard A. Slaughter

The Foresight Principle began as a short paper of the same name published in *Futures* in October 1990, one year after I had started work at the Institute of Education, the University of Melbourne. It was only my fourth paper for *Futures*. Here is the abstract.

Foresight has ubiquitous uses in everyday life. But its implementation at the social level presents difficulties that have not yet been fully resolved. This article considers the nature of foresight as a human capacity, some barriers to its use and contexts where implementation is being attempted. It is concluded that foresight activities are basically driven by structural imperatives. They imply a growth of foresight work despite the considerable difficulties involved. ¹

At the time the term 'foresight' had not been widely used in a futures context if, indeed, it had been used at all. It seemed to me, however, that there was real value in the term. People might be confused by terms like 'futures studies'. But foresight was something that anyone could grasp and, moreover, see operating in daily life. While futures studies were remote and abstract, foresight was clearly grounded in everyday life. It therefore seemed an appropriate term. Then, on one of many trips from Australia to the UK, something quite remarkable happened. It felt as though two sources of inspiration - 'foresight' and 'wisdom' - were resonating together. I'm not implying that I understood in any depth what these terms meant. But whenever they came into proximity within my mind sparks would begin to fly. Something was obviously happening. A huge amount of energy was somehow being generated as these two entities interacted.

I reflected on and played around with these ideas for some time before writing a proposal to a UK publisher. Then, following some brief discussions, I returned to my office at the university during a vacation and wrote the basic text for the book in about two weeks. This would have been late 1993 or early 1994. It then took a while to edit the raw manuscript into shape. By the time I'd finished I felt as though I'd finally been able to assemble a reasonably concise statement about why foresight seemed to be such a powerful, yet underutilised, capacity. The book was published in 1995 after I had left the university and was again learning how to earn an independent living. I found it hard at first but soon adapted, adjusted, and even came to prefer this very different *modus operandi*.

It was another couple of years before I could begin to describe the links between individual -, and what I began to think of as social foresight. ² But the reviews were generally positive and I was encouraged to think that I might be on the right track. I was pleased, as any author would be, to see that the book appeared on the World Future Society's list of 'best sellers' for some time. Yet, as the book was taking off, so my relations with the publisher were deteriorating. This 'publisher of choice' for the futures arena, had risen fast and achieved much but then seemed to decline and fall almost as quickly. Royalties tailed off and stopped entirely. Interesting, then, to see the book still advertised on the Internet under a different imprint a decade later. Clearly someone was benefitting, but not the author.

During these post-Melbourne University years I worked out of a home office with a schedule determined largely by my own preferences. Still the energy contained in these ideas and propositions only continued to grow. *The Foresight Principle* had allowed me to express them coherently for the first time, but it was time for another approach. So with the help of other colleagues, members of the World Futures Studies Federation and the World Future Society, I began working on the *Knowledge Base of Futures Studies*.

And that, as they say, was a whole new ball game.

References

1. Slaughter, R. The Foresight Principle, *Futures* 22, 5, October 1990, 801-819.
2. Slaughter, R. Futures Studies: From Individual to Social Capacity, *Futures* 28, 1996, 751-762.

Richard Slaughter, February 2005, Brisbane.