



Utilizing horizon scanning to attain timely awareness in a future of uncertainty

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The article aims to help leaders understand Horizon Scanning and its benefits in addressing unforeseen challenges arising from various calamities and emergencies in a world of increasing uncertainty. Leaders armed with the necessary tools and resources will be able to create a focused vision, clear identity, and secure future for their organization. Furthermore, the swiftness of their response will indicate a sense of urgency and significantly define their leadership, positively impacting their stakeholders. Therefore, the appropriate application of Horizon Scanning is crucial to business success both now and in the future.

Keywords: disruption, horizon scanning, foresight, uncertainty

Horizon Scanning is a technique used to assess the level of preparedness for future changes or risks across a wide range of businesses. It is essential for prospective, prospective, or anticipatory actions, as well as those investigating the future, "emerging issues," and all forms of signals. In addition, Horizon Scanning evaluates the relevance of upcoming events. In recent years, numerous "Horizon Scanning Models" have been developed by experimenting with unique methodological combinations and establishing institutes specializing in "Horizon Scanning." Horizon Scanning (HS) approaches enhance policymaking's resiliency, address policymakers' demands and concerns regarding new issues, identify corporate possibilities by anticipating consumer and social needs, and prepare society for sudden or unexpected change (Cuhls, 2020).

The definition of Horizon Scanning (Cuhls et al., 2015) is as follows:

Horizon scanning is a methodical examination of the horizon for early indicators of potentially significant developments. This can include weak (or early) signals, trends, wild cards or other goods, persistent difficulties, hazards, and threats, as well as matters at the periphery of current thought that question previous assumptions. Horizon scanning can be entirely exploratory and open, or it can be a restricted search for knowledge in a certain field, depending on the aims of the

various projects and activities. It attempts to determine what is consistent, what is subject to change, and what is in a continual state of flux over the analyzed time period. In the search or filtering process, a set of criteria is utilized. The horizon of time may be short, medium, or long-term.

Although horizon scanning primarily pertains to information collection, it is closely associated with sense-making. Therefore, time frames (the "horizons") might vary based on the approach's subject and objective.

Horizon Scanning is essential for:

- Identifying potential risks
- Ensuring adequate preparation
- Exploiting opportunities, and
- Surviving challenges

Thus, Horizon Scanning can be seen as a type of environmental scanning that focuses on producing actionable intelligence and foresight over the "horizon of foresight" for the relevant enterprise. For some businesses, this horizon could range from the next quarter to the next fifty years. The selection and number of scanning categories will influence the kind, depth, and balance of information gathered; therefore, practitioners should select categories (input bins) that are most pertinent to their usage context.

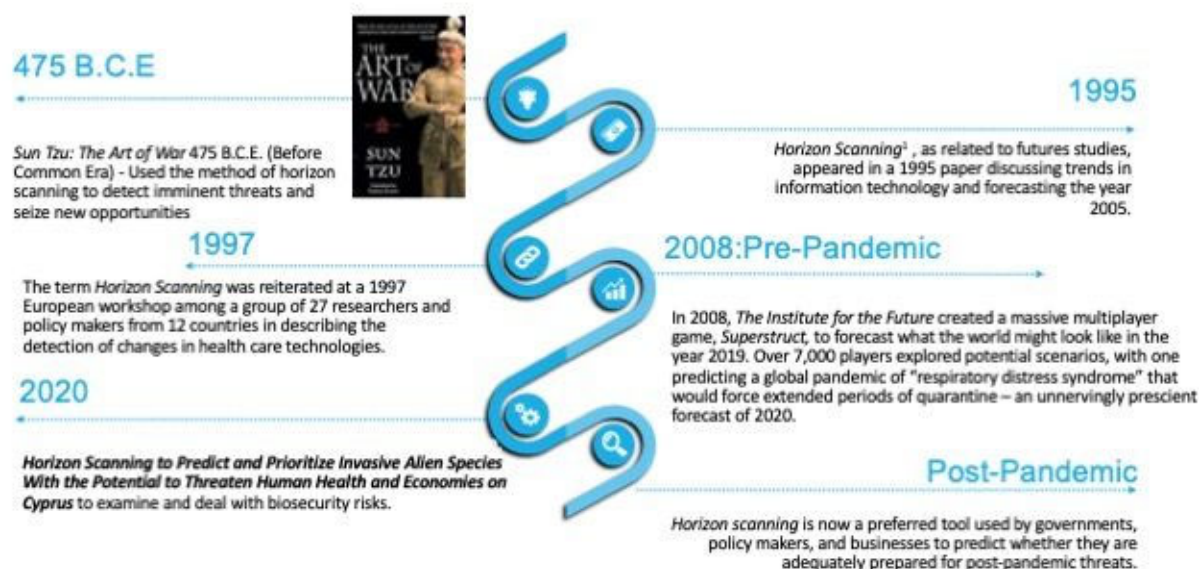
A Brief History

Figure 1 depicts the evolution of scanning. One of the earliest uses of the term "horizon scanning" in the context of future studies was in 1995 in a report addressing information technology trends and predicting the year 2005 (Gates, 1995). In September 1997, 27 officials and academics from 12 countries participated in a European workshop (Carlsson & Jorgensen, 1998) in which horizon scanning was employed for early discovery and evaluation of health care innovations. This workshop was held in conjunction with the European Health Technology Assessment (HTA) project (Carlsson & Jorgensen, 1998). Horizon Scanning was primarily intended for policymakers and service planners in the health care industry (Carlsson & Jorgensen, 1998).

Horizon Scanning is based on a technique created and refined by the Stanford Research Institute in the 1960s for generating societal change scenarios (Loveridge, 2008). This method was previously used to develop the analysis of politics, economy, society, and technology (PEST) (Aguilar, 1967). In the history of the development of Horizon Scanning, the previously described method of scenario planning was also an offshoot that has gained widespread use (Washida & Yahata, 2020).

Figure 1

A brief history of horizon scanning



Source. Author's Research.

Horizontal Scanning has become one of the most prominent foresight techniques, especially in Europe, and its deployment as a practical tool for policymaking has been the topic of substantial research (Washida & Yahata, 2020).

Benefits and application

Horizon Scanning can enhance planning and preparation for emerging opportunities, threats, and trends. If they detect disruptions early, leaders have a considerably greater chance of surviving and thriving in times of increasingly unexpected, rapid, and profound change in the external environment. Recent events such as Brexit, COVID-19, and the global supply chain difficulties indicate disruption's challenges. Concerning global business models, digital technology increasingly undermines the conventional roles of personnel. It is dangerous to manage these and other fundamental difficulties solely with short-term measures. In times of turbulence, a global company's ability to survive hinges on its capacity for extensive strategic planning.

The benefits of Horizon Scanning are evident: reducing unanticipated risk and positioning a company to produce better results. In addition, given the complexity of today's prospects and problems, enabling Horizon Scanning will have a much more accurate image. Furthermore, if leaders add sources from other industries, their foresight will be much more relevant and reliable.

Application

The future is in constant motion. Future environmental change reflects the present-day transformations. Organizations can plan for multiple future possibilities and capture innovation chances in advance if they maintain vigilance over current changes.

Horizon Scanning enables enterprises to navigate the VUCA world confidently. It provides a complete, methodical, and long-term picture of all future knowledge impacting an organization's operating environment. It also allows businesses to assess risks and opportunities and continuously re-prioritize accordingly.

If companies rely solely on historical data, their comprehension of the future ramifications of any strategy or decision remains inadequate, resulting in unnecessary risks and missed opportunities. The more the future gets explored, the fewer mysteries remain.

Horizon Scanning enables one to:

- Identify key drivers influencing the organization's operational environment
- Recognize significant development themes and needs
- Enhance operational readiness and organizational agility
- Team members should have a common understanding of potential risks, hazards, developing issues, and opportunities
- Formulate strategies that are solid and future-focused

Continuous Horizon Scanning keeps businesses' Future Situational Awareness grounded in the most recent events, ensuring that all decision-making considers a variety of potential future situations.

Conclusion and next steps

Horizon scanning is essential to formulating a company's strategy, as would be agreed upon by many top executives in larger firms. Typically, it occurs at the beginning of multi-year planning cycles, frequently accompanied by an externally commissioned trend report. After an in-depth discussion on Horizon Scanning and incorporating findings into decision-making, it became clear what Horizon Scanning can provide and how to make the most of it.

Foresight cannot foretell the future, but as a regular, methodical effort, it can help discover developing patterns and disruptions in sufficient time to comprehend their significance and direction and to prepare. According to one of the most prominent studies, the Horizon Scanning technique may be as significant as its actual discoveries. For instance, while environmental scan results may be enlightening, they may have little influence if decision-makers retain limited ownership or short-term goals prevail. In contrast, if programs and country offices are required to conduct and share their sector-level or national scans, and senior management participates in a variety of ways in trend analysis interpretation and decision-making, this can result in the consolidation of dispersed organizational knowledge and experience, the development of competencies and ownership, and the promotion of a culture that embraces change. Such a technique of horizon scanning can become a potent tool for organizational transformation.

Next steps

The following are observations of what works in trend analysis and how to make it applicable to strategy:

- Assign scanning responsibilities.

Horizon Scanning is usually the duty of units specializing in strategy, innovation, or research; however, some corporations maintain autonomous foresight units. Although there is no one-size-fits-all approach, organizational structure and reporting lines must reflect the importance of foresight and the assignment of roles.

- Regularly engage senior management in formal and informal Horizon Scanning.

It is easier for decision-makers to maintain a long-term perspective if they participate in both formal and informal scanning and analysis methods. This elicits the opinions and experiences of senior leaders, increases comprehension and ownership, and focuses

forward-thinking. It is advantageous to include scanning as a standing agenda item for senior management meetings and to provide informal opportunities for senior management to become familiar with scanning findings – outside of decision-making circumstances. The opportunity for executives to present and discuss their company's scanning results with an external audience also adds to developing additional skills. Regardless of the attempt, high-quality inputs and process direction are required.

- Regularly engage all organizational levels in scanning, using knowledge, and enhancing adaptability.

By incorporating people from across the organization, trends in programs, subject departments, and country offices are consolidated. It simultaneously develops future literacy, an external emphasis, and a heightened awareness of the need to anticipate and adapt to external developments. It is vital to create protocols that enable effective cross-organizational communication and knowledge management to ensure that findings are collated and disseminated to decision-makers.

- Engage with external perspectives and various tools and sources to acquire a complete understanding.

To strengthen an organization's assessments and acquire a complete picture, it is vital to incorporate different perspectives, such as those of government decision-makers, the business sector, and academia. In addition, the same objective can be achieved by utilizing a wider variety of sources, such as daily news, reports, conferences, and various approaches.

- Select the time frame and scope of scanning deliberately.

It is essential to make a strategic decision for the period to scan and how the data will be included in the strategy-building process. This guarantees that organizations remain watchful and flexible enough to respond to the present while also planning for the future. When deciding on the scope of the analysis, it is necessary to make it broad enough to identify broader patterns with substantial disruption potential. For example, some organizations use scanning patterns that cut over, overlay or complement thematic or geographical grids, or they explore the intersection of megatrends and developments that directly affect their job.

- Collaborate to add additional value to Horizon Scanning.

As previously stated, sharing findings and efforts minimizes costs and improves outcomes by assisting in the elimination of internal biases and enabling the development of more exhaustive analyses and proposals. Comparing scanning data and examining trends does not necessarily entail a future consensus. In contrast, sometimes different ideas yield the most convincing results. Collaboration may provide a lever to position civil society more proactively in how issues are discussed and framed by

identifying emerging ideas and narratives that may be used for advocacy and assisting with responding to and adapting to change over time. Finally, it encourages organizational learning by exchanging scanning and foresight tactics experiences.

Closing Thought

The future is in constant motion. Future environmental change is a reflection of present-day transformations. Organizations may plan for multiple future situations and capture innovation possibilities in advance if they remain aware of current changes.

Horizon Scanning enables organizations to navigate the VUCA world confidently. It provides a complete, methodical, and long-term picture of all future knowledge impacting an organization's operating environment. It allows organizations to assess risks and opportunities and continuously re-prioritize accordingly.

If organizations rely solely on historical data, their comprehension of the future ramifications of any strategy or decision remains inadequate, resulting in unnecessary risks and missed opportunities. The more the future gets explored, the fewer mysteries remain. In its most evolved form, futures intelligence generation is a continuous system that provides all stakeholders and decision-makers with high-quality, future-oriented information.

Continuous horizon scanning and future intelligence initiatives keep organizations' Future Situational Awareness grounded in the most recent events, ensuring that all decision-making considers a variety of potential future situations.

About the Author

Dr. Rodney B. Woods is a 2021 Strategic Foresight doctoral graduate from Regent University and is the Vice President and Chief Clinical Engineer for BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee. He also serves as the Board Chair for the Kosovo Leadership Academy, a private STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) school in Mitrovica, Kosovo, where he teaches leadership classes and mentors students.

Dr. Woods's primary research interest lies in strategic foresight, leadership, strategy, innovation, culture, and social change. He is currently working on his first book, *Envision: Leading and Thriving in Disruption*, and several workshop modules teaching the Envision Adaptive System.

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