Telfer Foresight Leadership Forum

Report

Workshop # 1

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Conclusions on TFLF Workshop #1

Introduction

The overall conclusion is that this initial session has been a very effective collaborative learning environment, as indicated by the participant feedback, first in the concluding commentary, second via the event evaluation forms and third in the (after two month's reflection) review of the session at the start of the second TFLF session.

An additional element that the participants asked to be included is an assessment by the Telfer Team of the current state and future potential of the participating Departments' foresight capacity and planning-design and delivery effectiveness according to the presentations and discussions at the first Session. This is not intended as a comprehensive assessment, nor is it a strategy for development. It is a series of observations, from an experienced analytical perspective, that are designed to build upon the participants' own learning at the Session, and strengthen their capacity to further develop their foresight initiatives, consistent with the goals of the TFLF.

The main basis for the Telfer Team's observations is the information from the analytical instruments employed to establish the database for the TFLF, filled out by the three teams of participants. The

secondary source comes from the Telfer Team's international comparative work on success factors, plus largely tacit knowledge of how many other countries have developed their foresight capacities, structured and funded ongoing programs and applied the outputs to policy challenges.

The Telfer Team's assessment is in two parts – general observations and more analytical matrix tables of key factors applied to the participant teams as whole – with the caveat that these are based on expert judgements and reflections on the information submitted, presentations made and commentary from peers and invited guests at the TFLF, rather than on an arms-length rigorous survey or evaluation methodology.

General Observations

- The Telfer Team has been impressed by the dedication and enthusiasm of all the participant teams to the peer group learning – the commentary has been excellent and the learning evident;
- Despite clear and continuing constraints on foresight delivery, funding and logistics, that do not seem to prevail in many other jurisdictions, particularly in Europe and the UK, the Canadian government foresight work to date has been comparatively quite effective in identifying key issues, strong on content exploration and development, and has provided excellent outputs for the costs deployed – i.e. existing Canadian foresight appears to be quite cost-effective within the comparative context of other government policy and research work combining external contracts with internal staff leadership.

- The major deficiencies seem to be connected mainly with the early state of foresight development – the low to moderate current capacity in some departments in terms of experienced staff and professionals, where foresight represents a rather new set of tools and approaches – and hence the rationale for this TFLF. As the TFLF develops, through sessions 2-5 we expect the transformation of several participants from learners to leaders will be accelerated;

- A persistent challenge remains in how we all can enlist and fully engage the policy stakeholders in using and internalizing foresight in the ongoing processes of government management of uncertainty. The three teams have all employed various techniques to do this with varying success to date – and clearly, this remains a priority topic for a future TFLF session, and by no means is it uniquely a *foresight* challenge in manoeuvring amidst the murky and ever changing currents of having influence and contributing to decision making inside government.

- A final observation concerns the still quite pervasive inability of the foresight community generally, and the three departments participating, to make definitive statements based upon cause and effect relationships derived from strong research analytics and so the further development of a TFLF analytical and research model for Canadian foresight,

  should continue to be pursued by the TFLF. Given the operational constraints of a federal funding cycle that starts realistically in late August, goes to mid December and then concludes with a brief flurry of February-March end of fiscal year activity, this low capacity for strong research based evidence is understandable.

- Notably, the one participant team that has not been fully subjected to this cycle because of a public-private project partnership structure that provides more administrative resilience, has been able to be more definitive in developing a model in which all stakeholders can find common expressions around definitive alignments around issues.

Workshop 1 Objective

The objective of the first session was to have participants describe their current foresight program. The intent was to provide a platform to compare approaches, methodologies and to get feedback and assistance in areas where there were concerns on how it was evolving.

Why this objective? Because as a starting point for the forum it was felt that it was important to identify what each Department was working on. Further, Departments wanted a peer review of their activities as a means of increasing their confidence that public money was being spent wisely.

Workshop 1 Methodology

Foresight projects can utilize many different methodologies, access different client groups, different time frames and so forth. Given the diversity in potential program and project design it was important to provide a method for focusing discussion. As such, Telfer has created a foresight program template which enables participants to record certain attributes of their programs (the template is included as part of this report). The template is based on three different sources.

- From the Foresight literature, the European Foresight Monitoring Network (EFMN) benchmark methodology that has been used by Keenan and Popper (2008) to analyze foresight activity around the world.
- As well, from *Foresight, Shaping Tomorrow* developed my Dr. Michael Jackson provides a foresight project information tool that is useful for categorizing projects.
- Finally, from competitive technical intelligence, various project forms were used. The final form is designed to capture the important elements of foresight program design including:

TFLF Foresight Program Template

1) Overall description of the foresight program
2) Overall objective(s) of the foresight program
3) List of all projects/activities under the program and their status
4) For each of the projects/activities
    a. Title of activity
    b. Key questions being addressed
    c. Resources
    d. Budget
    e. Scope/depth
    f. Number of participants involved
    g. Territorial scope
    h. Study period (how forward looking)
    i. Methods used (50 methods were provided)
    j. Intended project outputs

k. Target audience

l. How results will be communicated

m. Start date

n. End date

o. How success is defined

p. A priori hypothesis

q. Confidence level in your project/program

r. Concerns that you wish to have addressed by TFLF

Again the above form was not designed to assist in *evaluating* the foresight program and projects but in *describing* them. That being said, it is possible to provide substantive commentary and advice based on the answers provided in the form – see conclusion.

Tools and Approaches

As indicated above, the primary tools for the structured peer learning approach originate from work done in the EFMN, from global leader comparisons like the Critical Success Factors for Government Led Foresight publication authored by the Telfer team for *Science and Public Policy* in 2008-2009 and from CTI templates for analyzing comparative positioning factors by organizations engaged in managing uncertainty and forward planning decisions and investments. We (Telfer Team + participants) are clearly focused therefore on *building new capacities* not only through reviewing our present experiences using different lenses, but also by testing these tools, and by mixing outside "provocateurs" with internal champions and introducing big picture global challenges such as the European Grand Challenges.

What *capacities* specifically? These include, for example, the following: (only some of these will be developed in the first TFLF session – which is why multiple sessions are planned)

- Capacity to design a foresight project so that it effectively engages a range of key stakeholders;
- Capacity to develop leaders and teams who can convince reluctant champions, and deliver cost-effective results;
- Capacity to select and implement in a cost-effective manner a range of diverse foresight tools and analytical methods;
- Capacity to discern insights from these methods and results and translate them into effective policy cycle inputs;
- Capacity to recognize weak signals and incorporate these into project contexts to extend the reach and innovativeness of projects;

- Capacity to plan, develop and deliver tailored, impactful communications and key messages;

According to the initial feedback, these approaches have been favourably received by the participants with a rich array of comments about the learning experience that was triggered by the approach.

From Theory to Practice – Collaboration, Sharing, Learning

What follows below (the body of the report) is a summary of both the progression of the TFLF Session One, and the Learning aspects that were observed and recorded by the Telfer Team. These have been reviewed by the participants and revised as necessary. They constitute the primary outputs in terms of the shared peer leaders experience as interpreted by both the Telfer Team as observers-facilitators and the peer leaders as presenters, commentators and evaluators.

Matrix Tables with Telfer Team Commentary

Table 1: Telfer Team Success Factor Assessments (highlighting strengths and weaknesses)

Factor	***Commentary***
1. Focus on a clearly identified client	The focus has been there, but the client may not in all cases have comprehended what being a good receptor of foresight outputs requires – so some further effort may be required – perhaps even a future TFLF coaching session for Champions and Key Clients.
2. Establish a clear link between foresight and today's policy agenda.	As current policy agendas have grown more expedient and short term, through both political and bureaucratic pressures, the linkage challenges have been magnified. In the three projects being examined, it is not entirely clear how the foresight outputs are to be aligned with policy cycle requirements, or whether in fact the policy process in fact wants, can be influenced by or depends upon foresight to be more effective. Clearly more attention is needed to this challenge for foresight design and delivery – and again this is one of the areas deemed important for future TFLF sessions
3. Nurture direct links to senior policy makers	All three projects provided evidence of efforts to nurture these relationships – at least for the DG and ADM levels, but this raises two additional questions: – *in what context – why* ? especially if there are few demands from the policy level for forward engagement and , in an era when it is said that most substantive policy making is done at the centralized agency level of the PMO-PCO, *who actually qualifies* as a senior policy maker? In principle this nurturing is necessary, but it also may be irrelevant if not consistent with how decision making actually occurs.

4. Create strong public private partnerships	In the three projects noted, only one - that characterized by a defined funding contribution agreement between government and private sectors players, seems capable of leaving a partnership legacy upon completion; so it would seem the others still have a way to go to be able to suggest that they are creating strong partnerships. What they have done well, on a positive note is create stronger NGO-Government mutual appreciation and alignments around some key futures issues.
5. Develop and employ methodologies and skills that are not always used in other departments;	Because of a lack of comparatives, it is difficult to comment on this aspect of foresight design, but it does seem that all three projects did employ some foresight tools and knowledge management methods that are distinct from the usual array of socio-economic analysis and strategic planning tools.
6. Ensure clear communications strategy	By any firm measure – e.g. budget- priority or product precedence and quality, none of the three projects to date have adequately found the means to develop strong communications approaches, so clearly htis remains a challenge.
7. Integrate stakeholders into foresight programs	Internal stakeholders are well integrated but external ones are not being included in adequate numbers – thus potentially jeopardizing the prospects for broad engagement post project.
8. Take advantage of the existence of , or create a national academic receptor or training capacity	The TFLF represents a first attempt to build htis capacity into the programs and as such can be regarded as a positive development.

Table 2: Telfer Team Commentary on Foresight Capacity, Design and Delivery (derived from the Project Planning Forms and Presentations)	
Factor	***Commentary***
1. Staff Resources	The authorization and deployment of Departmental resources remains a key obstacle for the effective development of foresight capacity – both in absolute numbers (no single program reported over five staff) and in comparison to other national level programs of similar budget or scope of subjects. Although staff can compensate for budget shortages, this can only be fully assured where the staff is as experienced as the capacity that would be purchased in their absence
2. Budget	Budgets (annualized basis) ranged from $ 200 - $700 K – still well below what most comparable European or US projects would require. This necessitates methodology, participant and professional support trade-offs, for which additional experience is required – hopefully a contribution area that the TFLF can help the Leaders be better prepared to assess in future.
3. Scope/depth	In the case of two projects, it appears that the scope was quite responsive to annual budget and timing cycles, and therefore some limits to the depth of analysis were encountered. In the context of these constraints, some reasonable outputs ensued, but only in the case of the one project which clearly had a sufficient budget was there clear evidence of a strategic and structured approach to scoping and depth decisions.
4. Number of participants involved	The presentations showed considerable variance in the numbers of events and participants but again budget and bureaucratic limits served to inhibit the wider ranges of stakeholders and participants that are important for building support and developing momentum for effective policy engagement.

5. Territorial scope	In general all three projects seem to have demonstrated a national capital bias, and federal issues focus or at least a disproportionate emphasis on national level issues, although there has been a good recognition of global issues and impact potentials.
6. Study period (how forward looking)	The time frames (both explicit and implicit) selected by the three projects were more or less consistent , ranging from 2015-2030, (normal for most global foresight sponsored by governments) and while these could have been extended or, new approaches considered with longer time horizons, the present bureaucratic and policy environment has been discouraging longer term perspectives. This is unlikely to change in the medium term of 5-8 years
7. Methods used (50 methods were provided)	In general the three projects appear to still be in a learning mode with methods, with little in house expertise readily available, so this is clearly an area that represents a current weakness, but also one which can be strengthened through foresight training and collaborative learning and sharing. While methods used were certainly appropriate within the foresight field there was a lack of qualitative based analytical approaches.
8. Intended project outputs	For the most part the three projects appear to be realizing the intended outputs they started with, but as noted above, this can be relatively easy when the pressure to apply the outputs is low or medium. We believe that additional rigour in the selection of outputs and a more explicit matching of these to strategic goals will be useful.

Conclusion:

To restate, the objective of this session and the form designed was not to provide for an evaluation of the members' foresight programs, but to provide them with a useful form and tool for describing and planning their foresight activities. All members indicated that the form was very useful in this respect. Further in having a program and project discussion, the objective was to get members to assist in addressing perceived issues. This was an explicit part of the form where participants were able to fill in exactly what help they wanted from the group.

While there were certainly some strengths associated with the foresight programs and projects described by the participants, there were also several weaknesses that were consistent with the literature on Canadian and North American practices. Most notably were weaknesses in the use of quantitatively oriented analytical techniques, scope, number of participants, and range of stakeholders. This arose due to in most cases, relatively low budgets, tight frame frames and lack of trained staff. However, there is no question that appropriate approaches were done in the context of accepted foresight methodologies.

Finally, as already noted, one of the Departments which had a far greater budget clearly produced a plan based on these resources broader in scope, participants and stakeholders, but still limited in quantitative analytical techniques.

The next session of TFLF will have participants presenting the results of their foresight studies and programs with the intent of linking results together from the different department to create new insights. However, the methodology weaknesses identified through this assessment of the program and project methodologies may limit the extent to which insights can be created. Further, it will be evident at this point whether the problem arises solely from a funding limitation or whether additional capacity needs to be developed to assist with higher level analytical tasks.