

# Embedding Strategic Foresight into Strategic Planning and Management

**Bert George, PhD**  
City University of Hong Kong



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**Bert George, PhD**

City University of Hong Kong  
Department of Public and International Affairs  
Tat Chee Avenue, Kowloon Tong  
Hong Kong SAR

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*At its best, strategic planning helps public managers, policymakers and other professionals understand trends in their organization's political, economic, socio-cultural, technological, environmental and legislative (PESTEL) context, and develop the capabilities needed to meet those trends moving forward.*





# Foreword

On behalf of the IBM Center for The Business of Government, we are pleased to release this new report: *Embedding Strategic Foresight into Strategic Planning and Management*, by Professor Bert George, Department of Public and International Affairs, City University of Hong Kong.

In an age of accelerating change and unprecedented complexity, governments worldwide face the formidable challenge of governing not just for today, but for tomorrow. These challenges underscore a fundamental truth: reactive governance is no longer sufficient. Public leaders must anticipate, prepare, and adapt to emerging realities with unprecedented speed and sophistication.

Professor Bert George's timely report addresses one of the most critical gaps in contemporary public administration: the disconnect between strategic foresight activities and the ongoing strategic planning and management processes that drive government decision-making. While many governments have embraced strategic foresight tools and established dedicated futures units, too often these efforts remain isolated from the core machinery of government strategy. This isolation not only limits the impact of foresight work but also diminishes the forward-looking capacity of strategic planning itself.

The research presented here offers something rare in the field of public administration: concrete, evidence-based guidance drawn from successful practice across diverse governmental contexts. By analyzing strategic foresight initiatives in Flanders, Singapore, the European Union, and the United States, Professor George demonstrates that effective integration is not only possible but essential for building governmental resilience and effectiveness.

What makes this report particularly valuable is its systems perspective. Rather than advocating for specific foresight tools or techniques, the analysis focuses on the foundational elements that enable sustainable integration: governance structures that connect foresight to strategy, capabilities that span both domains, processes that embed future-thinking into planning cycles, and practices that ensure relevance to real-world decision-making.

The recommendations contained within this report reflect insights from practitioners who have navigated the complex terrain of embedding foresight into government operations. They acknowledge the political realities, resource constraints, and organizational dynamics that shape public sector innovation. Most importantly, they recognize that successful integration requires sustained commitment and continuous adaptation rather than one-time implementation.

For public administrators, policymakers, and researchers interested in strengthening the government's capacity to anticipate and respond to future challenges, this report provides invaluable recommendations and insights. It demonstrates that when strategic foresight and strategic planning work in concert, they create a powerful engine for adaptive governance—one that our increasingly complex world desperately needs.



**Daniel J. Chenok**



**Bill Davis**



The report builds on multiple IBM Center reports that highlight tools and strategies that work to help government leaders navigate uncertainty and more effectively anticipate the unexpected, including *Addressing Complex and Cross-Boundary Challenges in Government: The Value of Strategy Mapping*; *Preparing Governments for Future Shocks*; *A Guide to Adaptive Government: Preparing for Disruption*.

The IBM Center for The Business of Government is proud to support research that bridges the gap between academic insight and practical application. Professor George's work exemplifies this mission, offering evidence-based recommendations that can help governments at all levels build more resilient, forward-looking institutions capable of serving citizens not just today, but in the decades to come.

**Daniel J. Chenok**  
Executive Director  
IBM Center for  
The Business of Government  
[chenokd@us.ibm.com](mailto:chenokd@us.ibm.com)

**Bill Davis**  
Senior Partner  
U.S. Federal Enterprise  
Strategy Leader  
[william.davis@us.ibm.com](mailto:william.davis@us.ibm.com)



# Executive Summary

Governments across the globe and at all levels are engaging with strategic foresight tools as a means to become more resilient and robust. At their best, such tools indeed enable policy-makers, public managers, and other professionals to better prepare for the future today and be ready for absorbing future shocks.

Yet, despite strategic foresight's popularity, it is often detached from more ongoing strategic planning and management in government. This goes against the origins of strategic foresight, which was developed as an approach to making strategic planning and management more future-oriented. This report makes the claim that when strategic foresight and strategic planning and management are better integrated, the effectiveness of both approaches in government and for government enhances greatly. But how to provide such integration?

Four cases of strategic foresight from across the globe are analyzed in this report, namely:

- Strategic Insights and Analyses Team of the Flemish Government
- Centre for Strategic Futures of the Singaporean Government
- Strategic Foresight of the European Commission
- Center for Strategic Foresight of the United States' Government Accountability Office

These cases come from Asia, Europe, and the U.S., as well as from federal, regional, and supranational government entities. Drawing on the cases, public administration research about strategic planning and management, and the author's experience, a total of 27 recommendations are offered to help integrate strategic foresight into ongoing strategic planning and management. These recommendations are systemic and represent four crucial dimensions where integration needs to occur, namely: *Governance*, *Capabilities*, *Processes*, and *Practice*. In an era of great turbulence, this report hopes to help governments across the globe engage in sustainable foresight practices that facilitate strategic thinking, acting, and learning.



## GovCaPP Recommendations

This report provides concrete recommendations to help ensure strategic foresight is indeed “strategic” and embedded in government strategic planning and management. It does so by drawing on the experience of the previously cited four cases, combined with research and theory on strategic planning and management in public administration, and the author’s experience. These recommendations offer a systemic perspective that goes beyond simply recommending one specific tool.

Taken together the insights outlined in this report provide a sustainable approach to integrating strategic foresight and strategic planning into government operations. Such an approach includes attention to the following elements:

- **Governance:** Putting the structures in place to ensure strategic foresight and strategic planning are linked on a continuous basis.
- **Capabilities:** Having the right people and skills in relevant teams and in the organization to embed strategic foresight into strategic planning.
- **Processes:** Making sure strategic planning processes and more ongoing strategic management have strategic foresight embedded as steps.
- **Practice:** Strategic foresight needs to be useful for planners and policymakers as well as for other potential end users and sponsors.

The scope of this report is thus the “whole” of strategic foresight and strategic planning as opposed to the “parts.” It is not the aim to offer specific tools and methods that could help “do” foresight; indeed many great guides exist providing specific foresight tools for practitioners. Rather, the focus lies on providing practitioners with systems thinking focused on *governance*, *capabilities*, *processes*, and *practice* that can help to create durable links between strategic foresight, strategic planning, and more ongoing strategic management.





## Governance

1. Embed strategic foresight experts into government strategy and strategic planning teams (or committees) at the highest level.
2. Strategic foresight is as much, if not more, bottom-up than top-down. So, foresight representatives throughout government are needed, not just at the central level.
3. Strategic foresight is both demand- and supply-driven, taking into account strategic agendas and helping shape them.
4. Strategic foresight requires strong leadership support and a strong mandate that may need to be shaped and clarified over time.
5. There needs to be a business case for strategic foresight, evidence of the public value it can help to create, a so-called public value statement or narrative.

## Capabilities

1. Offer strategic foresight and strategic planning and management training throughout the government, and at all levels of staff.
2. Create formal strategic foresight entities, dedicated teams, but do not make them too big! Small is beautiful.
3. Strategic foresight teams demand diversity, driven by curiosity and research evidence but with a pragmatic attitude.
4. Strategic foresight teams need to have co-creation and co-production skills to bring together collective intelligence and engage with stakeholders.
5. Strategic foresight teams require both fixed resources and variable, flexible, theme-based resources.
6. Being a learning organization facilitates the integration of strategic foresight into strategic planning and management.
7. The integration of strategic foresight into strategic planning and management may require outside help.

## Processes

1. If integrating strategic foresight into strategic planning and management feels comfortable, you're not doing it right.
2. Strategic foresight may be easier to link with design and agile approaches to strategic planning and management.
3. Strategic foresight should especially support whole-of-government strategic planning and management.
4. Not all foresight is (nor should be) strategic.
5. Embed strategic foresight into strategic planning and management cycles, steps and documents.

6. Like strategic planning and management, strategic foresight needs to be adapted to fit the configuration of the organizations in which it is applied. There's no one best way nor off-the-shelf approach.
7. Strategically foreseeing how strategic foresight activities will be conducted is needed.
8. Strategic foresight should not only be part of the development of strategic plans, but should also be conducted during annual reviews of strategic plans.
9. Strategic foresight can involve early warning systems, including dynamic, easy-to-use dashboards with indicators, especially related to strategic issues and the overall strategic agenda.
10. Digital tools and trends, including artificial intelligence and big data analytics, can be identified through strategic foresight and further explored during strategic planning and management.
11. Strategic foresight should focus on partners, collaborators and competitors as well, not only on the organization at hand.

## Practice

1. Strategic foresight capabilities and products need to be useful for the actual end users, which requires continuous service management activities.
2. Strategic foresight can be an approach to enhance inclusiveness and transparency of strategic planning and management (i.e., "Open Strategy").
3. Strategic foresight teams need to understand practical politics and political rationalities, and learn how to manage politics.
4. Strategic foresight should aim to be unpartisan, neutral and unbiased, if it is to endure organizational and societal politics. But it should also be actionable, present options and scenarios to support decision-making.



# Introduction



*Everybody loves strategic foresight, and everybody hates strategic planning.*



This quote came directly from a senior-level public official in a major supranational public organization during an interview as part of a larger research project. It is also supported by a range of empirical evidence showing negative attitudes towards strategic planning especially among non-managerial government actors like policymakers.<sup>1,2</sup> For those specialized in strategic planning, this quote may come as a surprise. After all, most strategic planning models will consider strategic foresight, and related terms like future thinking, as an inherent part of strategic planning.<sup>3</sup>

At its best, strategic planning helps public managers, policymakers, and other professionals understand trends in their organization's political, economic, sociocultural, technological, environmental, and legislative (PESTEL) context, and develop the capabilities needed to meet those trends moving forward. Yet, it seems that to some, strategic planning and strategic foresight are more antagonists than complements. Even though strategic foresight in origin comes from the strategic planning and management field, in many governments and other public organizations across the globe strategic planning and strategic foresight teams and processes are not intertwined but seemingly distinct. Why would this be the case? The answer to that question is not as straightforward as one might think and is speculation at best. But let's give it a try:

- 
1. George, B. (2017). Does strategic planning 'work' in public organizations? Insights from Flemish municipalities. *Public Money & Management*, 37(7), 527-530.
  2. Johnsen, Å. (2023). Strategic planning in turbulent times: Still useful? *Public Policy and Administration*, 38(4), 445-465.
  3. Bryson, J. M., & George, B. (2024). *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations: A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement*, 6th edition. Hoboken: Wiley.



- Strategic foresight is a massive hype in government at the moment whereas strategic planning has become institutionalized and can hardly be considered a hype anymore.
- Like any organization, government entities are also influenced by management fads and fashions—some of which endure while others do not last.
- At the moment, strategic foresight teams, networks, and initiatives are popping up across the globe and at all levels of government (e.g., United Nations Futures Lab Network, European Commission’s activities including the EU-wide Foresight Network, Center for Strategic Foresight of the U.S. Government Accountability Office).
- For many public managers, policymakers, and other professionals, strategic foresight is something “new” that means they can leave their daily setting for a minute and think about what the future will look like. What’s not to like about that?

Strategic planning, on the other hand, might be considered this burdensome, administrative process that they must go through every couple of years to develop strategy documents, forces them to make and clarify choices, links with implementation and accountability mechanisms, and often requires annual evaluations and updates as well—hardly as exciting as spending time coming up with wacky ideas about the future! Strategic planning may have become institutionalized for a reason, because when done well it can drive organizational effectiveness and make policy goals achievable.<sup>4</sup> Though this argument and the evidence supporting it may be lost on some people who have to go through onerous strategic planning exercises.

## Why are planning and foresight complements, not antagonists?

Strategic planning and strategic foresight should not be antagonists but rather complements. Indeed, foresight can enhance planning and planning can enhance foresight. Without a critical consideration of multiple possible futures, strategic plans can end up as nothing more than static documents.

Similarly, without planning strategic foresight risks becoming merely a “fun” game, a brainstorm session that is not linked to feasible strategies and implementation initiatives, making it lose relevance for its actual end users. When a practice loses relevance to end users in government and does not result in actual solutions, it is often the first to go when budget cuts are needed, especially in an era where trust in government is already under pressure and a client-centric, more agile government is being promoted.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, it is not “either/or.” Rather, it is essential that strategic planning and strategic foresight become linked together to enhance the capacity of government to deliver on its varied missions and achieve policy goals, while being better positioned to deal with new challenges and opportunities. This report makes the argument that strategic planning and strategic foresight complement and strengthen each other when they are used in tandem. The recommendations offered in this report aim to provide a systemic perspective on how to embed strategic foresight into strategic planning. It does so by investigating strategic foresight in several government organizations across the globe, namely:

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4. George, B., Walker, R. M., & Monster, J. (2019). Does strategic planning improve organizational performance? A meta-analysis. *Public Administration Review*, 79(6), 810-819.

5. DeSeve, E. G. (2022). *The future of agile government*. Washington, D.C.: IBM Center for The Business of Government.

- Strategic Insights and Analyses Team of the Flemish Government
- Centre for Strategic Futures of the Singaporean Government
- Strategic Foresight at the European Commission
- Center for Strategic Foresight of the United States' Government Accountability Office

## What does this report offer?

This report provides concrete recommendations to help ensure strategic foresight is indeed “strategic” and embedded in government strategic planning and management.

It does so by drawing on the experience of the previously cited four cases, combined with research and theory on strategic planning and management in public administration, and the author's experience. These recommendations offer a systemic perspective that goes beyond simply recommending one specific tool.

Taken together the insights outlined in this report provide a sustainable approach to integrating strategic foresight and strategic planning into government operations. Such an approach includes attention to the following elements:

- **Governance:** Putting the structures in place to ensure strategic foresight and strategic planning are linked on a continuous basis.
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The scope of this report is thus the “whole” of strategic foresight and strategic planning as opposed to the “parts.” It is not the aim to offer specific tools and methods that could help “do” foresight, indeed many great guides exist providing specific foresight tools for practitioners.<sup>6,7,8</sup>

Rather, the focus lies on providing practitioners with systems thinking focused on *governance*, *capabilities*, *processes*, and *practice* that can help to create durable links between strategic foresight, strategic planning, and more ongoing strategic management. Such systems thinking is the first step in designing a future-oriented strategic planning and management approach in government, the selection of specific tools and methods follows from that approach. Figure 1 illustrates this approach using the metaphor of a house:

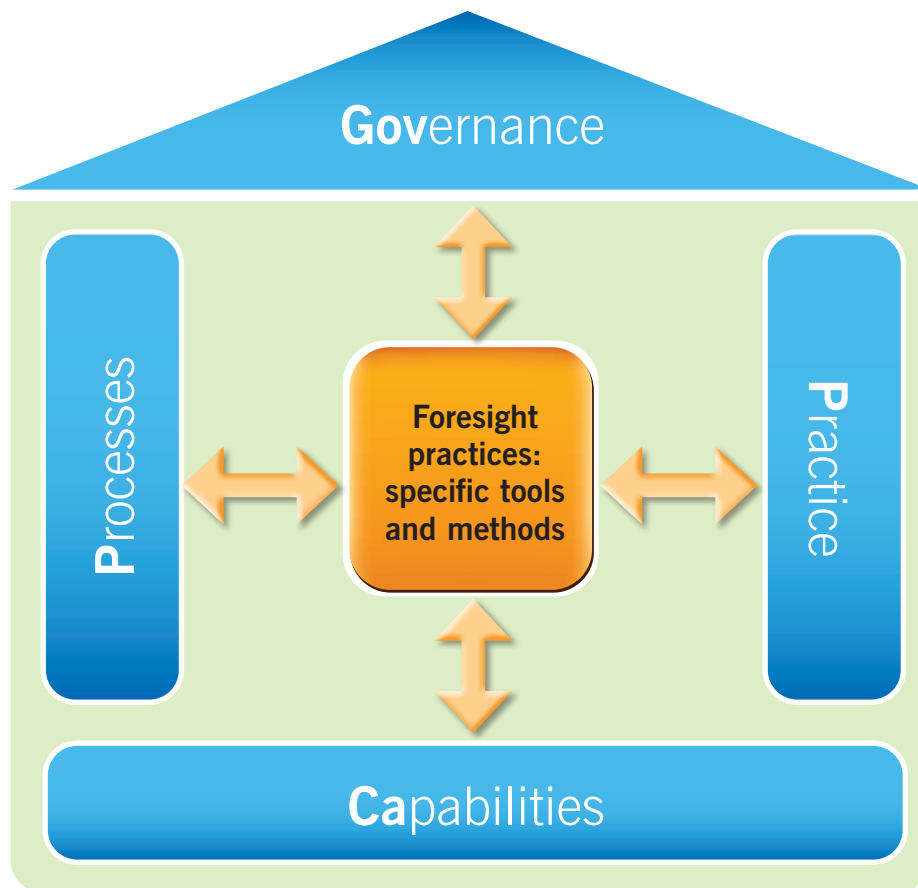
- Capabilities are the *foundation*.
- Processes and practice are the *walls* keeping the house up.
- Governance is the *roof* overarching it all.

6. Carleton, T., Cockayne, W., & Tahvanainen, A. (2013). Playbook for strategic foresight and innovation. Stanford: Stanford University.  
 7. OECD OPSI. (2024). Building strategic foresight and anticipatory capacity and knowledge in government. Paris: OECD Publishing.  
 8. United Nations. (2023). UN Strategic Foresight Guide. UN Futures Lab. <https://un-futureslab.org/media/uploads/2024/03/UN-Futures-Lab-2023-UN-Strategic-Foresight-Guide.pdf> (consulted on 25/11/2024).

Within the house are all the different foresight practices that can be used—i.e., specific tools and methods. But without the needed foundation, walls, and roof, it is unlikely that these tools and methods will help to make strategic planning and management in government more future oriented.

In what follows, strategic planning and strategic foresight are defined and explained including the linkages between them. Next, the four cases from across the globe are introduced as well as how data were collected and analyzed. The case results are also presented, giving insights into how these cases “do” strategic foresight. In conclusion, 27 specific recommendations are provided and structured around the *GovCaPP* elements cited earlier; and finally an overall more “macro” recommendation is offered to end the report with a checklist that can be used to move forward on making strategic planning and management in government more future-oriented.

**Figure 1. The House of Future-oriented Strategic Planning based on GovCaPP**







# Strategic Foresight and Strategic Planning

## What is strategic planning and management?

Most definitions of *strategic planning* argue that it is an approach to strategy formulation used by organizations and related entities (e.g., networks, collaborations, communities).<sup>9</sup> Typically, strategic planning is a reasonably deliberate and analytical approach where a number of steps are followed to develop a strategic plan, taking into account stakeholder needs and other analytics. Some oft-cited steps include:<sup>10</sup>

- Formulating an initial agreement outlining the targeted results of the strategic planning exercise, what will be done, why, when and how, who will do it and with which resources
- Analyzing mandates of the organization, including regulations, legislation, and demands from core stakeholders
- Analyzing mission and values of the organization, which could entail updating the mission and values
- Analyzing the external environment of the organization, which typically includes identifying trends in the political, economic, socio-cultural, technological, ecological and legislative (PESTEL) context
- Analyzing the organization itself, including its resources and capabilities, the current strategy, and its performance
- Formulating a strategic agenda based on these analyses, which includes the core issues to tackle in the strategic plan
- Developing concrete strategies aimed at addressing the identifying issues.
- Stipulating a vision of success, what the world will look like if the organization realizes its strategic plan.

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9. Bryson, J. M., & George, B. (2020). Strategic management in public administration. In Oxford research encyclopedia: politics.

10. Bryson, J. M., & George, B. (2024). *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations: A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement*, 6th edition. Hoboken: Wiley.

During these steps, many different tools can be used including SWOT-analysis, scenario planning, core competency analysis, brainstorm sessions, strategic off-sites, balanced scorecards, stakeholder identification and engagement tools, and many others. One especially powerful tool is strategy mapping, which integrates the benefits of many other tools.<sup>11</sup> Recently, tools and methods related to design thinking have also become increasingly popular as a way to formulate concrete strategies during strategic planning, especially when agility is needed.<sup>12</sup>

While much criticism exists towards strategic planning, especially indicating it is too static, creates a false illusion of control, does not allow space for emerging ideas and is not ideal for complex settings,<sup>13,14</sup> empirical evidence overwhelmingly indicates that—when done well—strategic planning does correlate with a range of positive outcomes and, especially, organizational effectiveness.<sup>15</sup> It should thus be no surprise that strategic planning is one of the most used managerial and governance approaches in contemporary organizations across the globe and is particularly popular in government. In government, it is even often mandated, government organizations have to develop, report and monitor strategic plans.

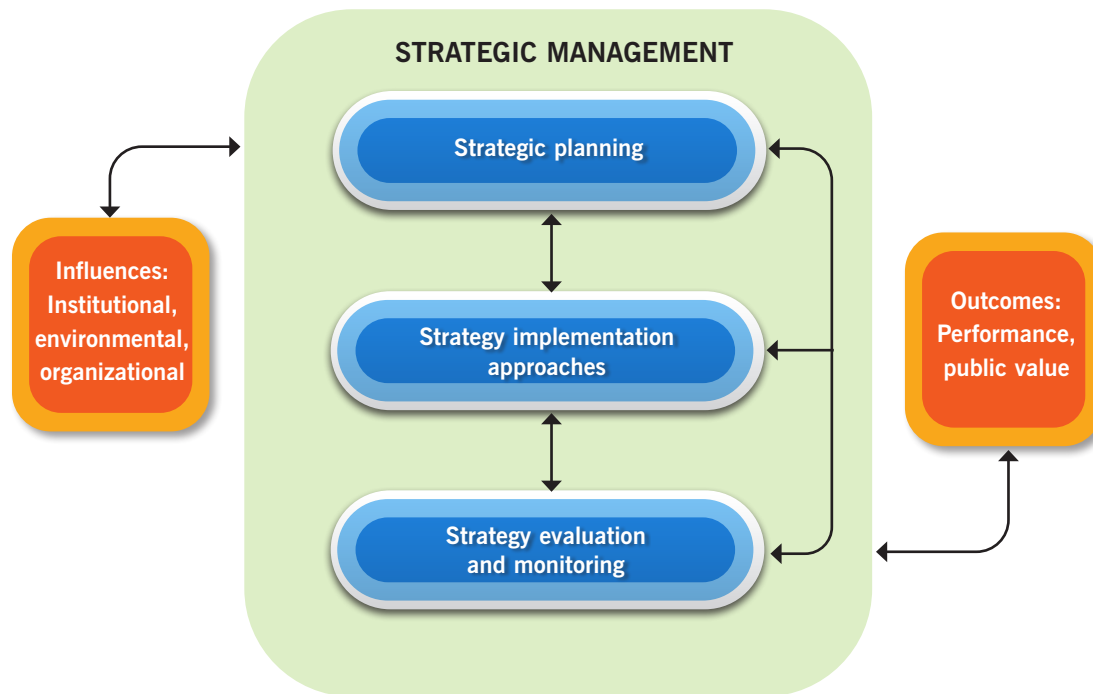
Importantly, strategic planning is an approach which means there are many different ways to “do” strategic planning. Whether or not it works will thus likely depend on whether the adopted approach to strategic planning is fit for the organization doing it. Strategic planning in a small city or municipality will likely be very different in an NGO or federal agency. Theory and research labels this as a “configurational approach,” meaning strategists need to configure strategic planning to the context at hand.<sup>16</sup>

Whereas strategic planning is typically linked to specific policy cycles, something one does every couple of years, *strategic management* is the more continuous “doing” of strategy. Specifically, strategic management encompasses strategic planning but also links it with.<sup>17,18</sup>

- Strategy implementation, which typically includes performance-oriented (e.g., performance management), structural (e.g., project and program management), relational (e.g., change management) and agile approaches
- Evaluation and monitoring
- Continuous learning

Figure 2 illustrates what strategic management encompasses. Double-headed arrows show feedback loops throughout, in other words the learning that occurs as all these different elements are linked with each other on a continuous basis. Influences also impact strategic management, meaning it is not a closed but rather an open system contingent upon context. And, of course, it should result in something, strategic management should help the organization create public value and perform well.

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11. Bryson, J. M., Barberg, B., Carroll, A., Eden, C., George, B., Gonzalez, J. J., Rochester, J., Vandersmissen, L., & Zaki, B. (2023). *Addressing Complex and Cross-Boundary Challenges in Government: The Value of Strategy Mapping*. Washington, D.C.: IBM Center for The Business of Government.
  12. Liedtka, J., & Salzman, R. (2018). *Applying design thinking to public service delivery*. Washington, D.C.: IBM Center for The Business of Government.
  13. Bovaird, T. (2008). Emergent strategic management and planning mechanisms in complex adaptive systems: the case of the UK Best Value initiative. *Public Management Review*, 10(3), 319-340.
  14. Martin, R. L. (2014). The big lie of strategic planning. *Harvard Business Review*, 92(1/2), 3-8.
  15. George, B., Walker, R. M., & Monster, J. (2019). Does strategic planning improve organizational performance? A meta-analysis. *Public Administration Review*, 79(6), 810-819.
  16. Vandersmissen, L., & George, B. (2024). Strategic planning in public organizations: reviewing 35 years of research. *International Public Management Journal*, 27(4), 633-658.
  17. Bryson, J. M., & George, B. (2020). Strategic management in public administration. In Oxford research encyclopedia: politics.
  18. Bryson, J. M., & George, B. (2024). *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations: A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement*, 6th edition. Hoboken: Wiley.

**Figure 2. Strategic planning and management**

## What is strategic foresight?

The term strategic foresight is attributed to Slaughter,<sup>19</sup> who used it to indicate the blend of future thinking methods with strategic management. In practice, many terms are used interchangeably, including future thinking, strategic foresight, forecasting, anticipatory governance and others. Basically, all of these terms relate to one core idea: more consideration needs to be paid to the future and potential futures during decision-making. Originally, much literature centered on companies, where foresight is employed to identify trends and reflect on consequences of potential actions all in order to create and sustain competitive advantage.<sup>20,21</sup> Although strategic foresight has long been around in government as well, recently, it has gained in popularity in government for several reasons:<sup>22</sup>

- Complexity has become the norm in governance, and a series of crises have shown the need for policymakers to be proactive and not just reactive.
- Society at large needs to become more resilient, robust and anticipatory, able to handle shocks as they may (or better *will*) emerge in the future.
- Policymakers do not just need to navigate in a complex world, they need to explore, experiment and learn using new solutions and ways of thinking.
- Government organizations are often working in silos, more integrated approaches are needed to tackle societal challenges.

19. Slaughter, R. A. (1997). Developing and applying strategic foresight. ABN Report, 5(10), 13-27.

20. Ahuja, G., Coff, R. W., & Lee, P. M. (2005). Managerial foresight and attempted rent appropriation: Insider trading on knowledge of imminent breakthroughs. *Strategic Management Journal*, 26(9), 791-808.

21. Hamel, G., & Prahalad, C. K. (1994). Competing for the future. *Harvard Business Review*, 72(4), 122.

22. OECD OPSI. (2024). *Building strategic foresight and anticipatory capacity and knowledge in government*. Paris: OECD Publishing.



While strategic foresight may not offer “the” solution to all these challenges, when done well it can certainly help. What is interesting, though, is that while strategic foresight was basically invented for the integration of future thinking into strategic management, it does not seem that many governments follow suit. As indicated in the introduction, too often strategic planning and management exist “separately” from strategic foresight in government organizations. This makes it challenging for foresight to really be “strategic,” as this requires several design features:<sup>23,24,25</sup>

- The emphasis lies on people making decisions in teams, the social process of trying to understand the future and consequences of actions together. It is as much a sensemaking, coalition-shaping approach as it is an analytical approach.
- Decision-makers need to be involved in the whole strategic foresight process to ensure clear links with and relevance to strategic management.
- Strategic foresight should result in a clear actionable agenda, by looking at future states concrete consequences of actions need to be discussed and several options explored.
- Strategic foresight is an ongoing activity, something that needs to be continuously done in order to act as an environmental scanning support showing potential factors that may spark future changes.
- Strategic foresight should result in organizational responses to identified changes, it should not be separate from organizational activities but rather clearly linked to them.

## Linking foresight and planning

There are a number of ways in which strategic foresight can feed into strategic planning and management to make it more future-oriented. Figure 3 again illustrates strategic management, and to each aspect a statement in bold is added indicating how strategic foresight can add value to it. Basically, there are five major ways in which strategic foresight can enhance strategic planning and management (there are likely many other ways, and of course added value can cross components, so again Figure 3 is not a magic bullet but rather a point of orientation):

- The environmental scanning inherent to strategic foresight can help to ensure that strategists have an early warning system to identify exogenous shocks in their environment that could influence their strategic management.
- Strategic foresight can help to identify opportunities and challenges during strategic planning, especially based on trends in the PESTEL context, that may need to be prioritized as issues in the organization’s strategic agenda.
- Strategic foresight can help with visioning exercises to facilitate strategy implementation. It can motivate and inspire by envisioning a future of success, and it can create a sense of urgency by envisioning futures to avoid.

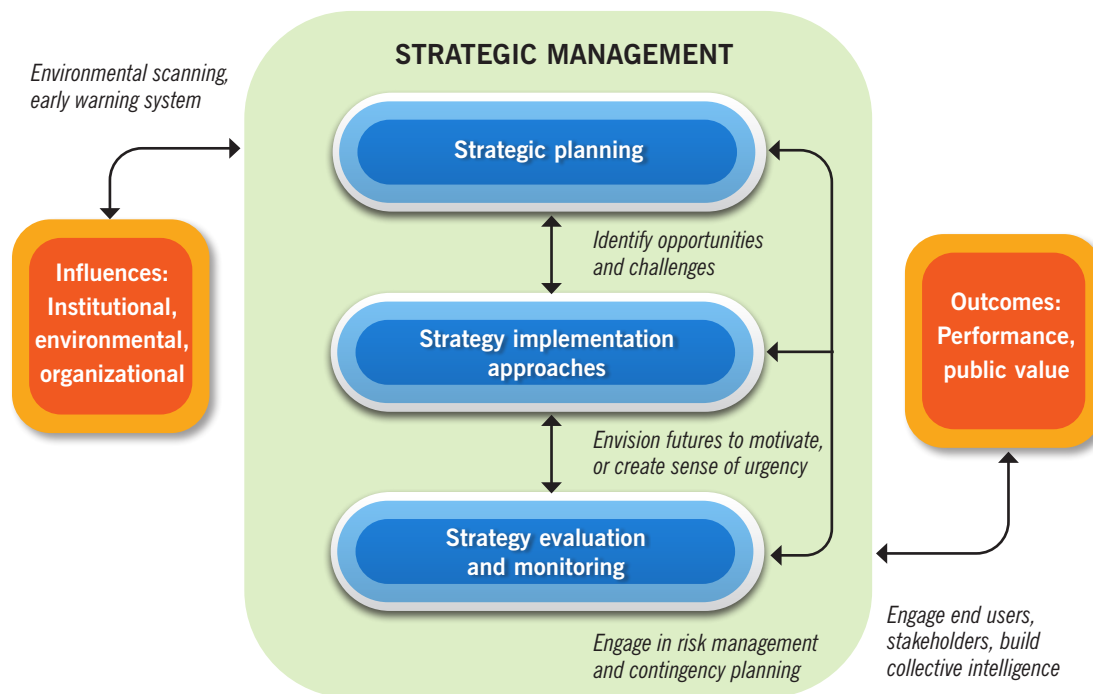
23. Coates, J., Durance, P., & Godet, M. (2010). Strategic foresight issue: introduction. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 77(9), 1423-1425.

24. Iden, J., Methlie, L. B., & Christensen, G. E. (2017). The nature of strategic foresight research: A systematic literature review. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 116, 87-97.

25. Vecchiato, R. (2012). Environmental uncertainty, foresight and strategic decision making: An integrated study. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 79(3), 436-447.

- Strategic foresight can help to embed risk management and contingency planning in strategy evaluation and monitoring, ensuring different scenarios are taken into account and capabilities are continuously developed to cope with these scenario's and potential risks harming strategy realization in the future.
- By engaging a variety of stakeholders, including actual end users, strategic foresight helps to better understand stakeholder needs, engage with stakeholders and bring collective intelligence from society at large into strategic management.

**Figure 3. Links between strategic foresight and strategic planning and management**  
(in bold and cursive)





# Methods

## Overall approach

Having established what strategic planning and management and strategic foresight entail, as well as the links between them, this section starts the empirical part of this report. The overall approach adopted is a comparative case study with the aim of inductively distilling theory-driven and empirically grounded recommendations from these cases.<sup>26</sup> Expert interviews are conducted with actual strategic foresight in government practitioners, and insights from these interviews are combined with research on strategic planning and management in public administration and the author's experience in the field. The cases are most similar in that they all represent strategic foresight teams or units within government, and most dissimilar in terms of geographical spread and level of government namely covering the U.S., EU, and Asia as well as federal, national, regional, and supranational governments. This approach allows comparisons of the same type of activities, namely strategic foresight, but across different government and geographical settings.

## Cases and data collection

Four cases were investigated. As indicated, core to this study were expert interviews combined with research on strategic planning and management in public administration, and the author's experience. For anonymity purposes, interviewees are not named and recommendations discussed later in this report are not explicitly linked to any one unit or team. Though the case analysis (see next section) of course does indicate the concrete experience of each case with strategic foresight.

The four cases are:

- Strategic Insights and Analyses Team of the Flemish Government (EU, regional)
- Centre for Strategic Futures of the Singaporean Government (Asia, national)
- Strategic Foresight of the European Commission (EU, supranational)
- Center for Strategic Foresight of the United States' Government Accountability Office (U.S., federal)

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26. Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 532-550.





Table 1 indicates the mission of each case, links for more information about them as well as the type of profiles who were interviewed. As can be seen from Table 1, the Singapore case has the longest tenure being founded in 2009 with the other cases starting—at least formally as units, teams or centers—later (respectively 2021 for the Flemish case, 2020 for the EU case and 2018 for the U.S. case). Importantly, all cases indicate that strategic foresight, in one form or the other, had long existed in their respective governments though embedding it into these formal structures tends to be a more recent initiative indicating its contemporary importance and salience.

Table 1. Overview of cases.

| Cases  | Missions (from the websites, consulted on 28/11/2024)  | Links for more information   | Interviewees  |
|--|--|--|---|
| <b>Centre for Strategic Futures of the Singaporean Government</b>                            | “[Founded in 2009] To position the Singapore government to navigate emerging strategic challenges and harness potential opportunities by: (1) building capacities, mindsets, expertise and tools for strategic anticipation and risk management; (2) developing insights into future trends, discontinuities and strategic surprises; and (3) communicating insights to decision-makers for informed policy planning.” <sup>27</sup> | <a href="https://www.csf.gov.sg/">https://www.csf.gov.sg/</a>  | Two senior experts from the Centre  |
| <b>Strategic Insights and Analyses Team of the Flemish Government</b>                        | “Given the important role of strategic foresight in policy-making and resilience, the government of Flanders has been taking steps to systematize its capabilities in the area. In 2021, a new and dedicated unit—Strategic Insights and Analyses (SIA)—was created at the Chancellery and Foreign Office [...].” <sup>28</sup>  | <a href="https://www.vlaanderen.be/en/authorities/flanders-and-the-eu/strategic-foresight-in-an-international-context">https://www.vlaanderen.be/en/authorities/flanders-and-the-eu/strategic-foresight-in-an-international-context</a> and also <a href="https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/06/the-strategic-foresight-system-of-the-government-of-flanders-belgium_624f419a/e55125c5-en.pdf">https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/06/the-strategic-foresight-system-of-the-government-of-flanders-belgium_624f419a/e55125c5-en.pdf</a> | One senior expert from the Team   |
| <b>Strategic Foresight of the European Commission</b>  | “Strategic foresight work of the European Commission seeks to embed future insights into European Union policymaking, strategic planning, and preparedness. It helps the EU to prepare for and anticipate future shocks and opportunities, and shape the future we want.” <sup>29</sup>  | <a href="https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/strategic-foresight_en">https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/strategic-foresight_en</a>  | Two senior experts, one with a more scientific focus and one with a more policymaking focus |
| <b>Center for Strategic Foresight of the United States' Government Accountability Office</b> | “[The Government Accountability Office (GAO)] created the Center for Strategic Foresight in 2018 to serve as the agency’s principal hub for identifying, monitoring, and analyzing emerging issues facing policymakers. The Center reflects GAO’s mandate to provide Congress with reliable, fact-based information for overseeing federal agencies and programs.” <sup>30</sup>   | <a href="https://www.gao.gov/about/what-gao-does/audit-role/csf">https://www.gao.gov/about/what-gao-does/audit-role/csf</a>  | One senior expert from the Center   |

27. <https://www.csf.gov.sg/>.28. OECD. (2024). *The strategic foresight system of the Government of Flanders, Belgium*. Paris: OECD Publishing.29. Interviewee and [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/strategic-foresight\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/strategic-foresight_en).30. <https://www.gao.gov/about/what-gao-does/audit-role/csf>.

## Data analysis

In total, about six hours of interview material was carefully analyzed to distill concrete recommendations. Interview questions were broad and semi-structured around five pillars:

- Purpose: Why are they doing strategic foresight?
- Subject: Who is involved in strategic foresight?
- Object: On which topics is strategic foresight applied?
- Community: Who is the end user of strategic foresight initiatives?
- General: What are lessons learned from applying strategic foresight in the organization?

The goal was to not explicitly talk about links with strategic planning and management as this would frame the respondents upfront. Rather, such links were uncovered latently in the data during the analysis of the interviews. All interviews were transcribed, and potential recommendations in each interview transcript were highlighted. Next, from these transcripts recommendations were extracted in a separate file, and a saturation technique was applied. Basically, this technique implied a stepwise approach moving from case to case and identifying new recommendations as they pop up (or further substantiating earlier recommendations popping up across the cases). The first case resulted in *13 initial recommendations*, the second case added *7 new recommendations* to the list, the third case added *4 new recommendations* and the final case added *3 new recommendations*—indicating saturation.

Once all recommendations had been listed up, these were clustered together using the GovCaPP framework. Of course, this categorization is especially aimed at providing a systemic understanding of how to embed strategic foresight into strategic planning and management. Categories are not fixed, but should be considered dynamic and permeable, with potentially some overlap existing between them. In what follows, the case results are first discussed, and then the recommendations are given and further explained using the GovCaPP structure.



## Case Results: Strategic Foresight at the Four Cases

### **Purpose: Why are they doing strategic foresight?**

Strategic foresight in all four cases is typically aimed at supporting policymakers, public managers and other policy professionals, by providing an understanding of the environment, trends, opportunities and challenges, and potential futures that need to be prepared for. Singapore's Centre for Strategic Futures (CSF) is embedded in the Strategy Group of the Prime Minister's Office signaling its direct policymaking link. One of the interviewees indicated that Singapore is "a very open society, very multicultural, very multinational these days, very open to external influences." Hence, strategic foresight is important because "Singapore's government needs to pay attention to what is happening outside of Singapore before it enters Singapore." So strategic foresight here is about "making better decisions today for tomorrow." To make such decisions, an "understanding of where [they] think the world is going and whether [they] are prepared for the world" is required.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO)'s Center for Strategic Foresight interviewee specifically indicated their main client, namely U.S. Congress, and mentioned they're "providing fact-based information to Congress, to think about the future in areas like cybersecurity and science and technology, to make recommendations about cost savings for taxpayer dollars, and how to make government more efficient and effective." In line with this mandate, the interviewee indicated that "there has been an element of foresight within the whole of GAO throughout [their] auditing practices." Thus, foresight serves both an external purpose in relation to providing insights to Congress as well as an internal purpose in relation to being embedded in the auditing practices of GAO, of which strategic planning is also an essential component.

Strategic planning and strategic foresight were also explicitly linked as indicated by the interviewee, with planning processes typically starting with a first step aimed at thinking about the future.



For the Strategic Insights and Analyses (SIA) Team of the Flemish Government, strategic foresight is related to one of its core strategic goals namely to “support policy, help move towards an evidence-informed policymaking.” SIA directly works for the highest political leader of the Flemish Government, and thus especially focuses on “big programs and projects linked to the strategic goals of the Government.” The interviewee indicated how strategic foresight offers a different way of doing things compared to what many policy experts typically do: “policy experts often focus on how policy is being implemented today, whereas strategic foresight focuses more on what is going to happen in the future.” So strategic foresights help to assess whether the “strategic goals of the Government can still be achieved in a fast-changing world.” The importance of shaping the future is also indicated, “to avoid waking up in a future we did not desire nor want, which may be shaped by other actors with other objectives that could make the future less open or just.”

The European Commission uses strategic foresight to embed future insights into European Union policymaking, strategic planning, and preparedness. This approach helps the EU to prepare for and anticipate future shocks and opportunities, and shape the future they want. The political responsibility lies with a dedicated commissioner (member of the College of Commissioners). At the administrative level, policy coordination is managed by the Secretariat General. Much of the development and application of strategic foresight tools, approaches, and processes is carried out by the Joint Research Centre. Among various strategic foresight related initiatives developed by the European Commission, there is also the EU-wide Foresight Network, which focuses on building joint futures intelligence and peer-to-peer learning across the EU member states.

The network adds to other levels of coordination of foresight related activities, e.g., the European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (ESPAS) bringing together all EU Institutions and bodies, or the Commission’s internal Strategic Foresight Network. One of the interviewees linked foresight with regulation and indicated that foresight is part of a “whole package of different elements that should lead to better regulation at the EU level, and, in the end, also at the member states level.” The different purposes of foresight generally and strategic foresight specifically were also indicated, with the latter implying foresight that is “really meant for policymaking in the EU context, so as part of the better regulation aims.” Impact assessments were mentioned as one important application area for doing strategic foresight.

## **Subject: Who is involved in strategic foresight?**

Typically, strategic foresight teams and units are diverse and involve both content experts linked to specific subjects (e.g., AI, climate change) and process experts who facilitate strategic foresight exercises, provide training and embed expert knowledge in policy advice. Interestingly, the core strategic foresight teams with the process experts tend to be small, and rely on a broader network of internal and external experts. At GAO, the Center for Strategic Foresight is led by three GAO staff who work on strategic planning and foresight, among other responsibilities, and who work with the whole organization. As part of the Center, GAO has established a network of internal foresight focal points in all the key mission teams. And the senior executives also have a part to play, as part of their leadership program they participate in an intensive training course in foresight, with “the idea being that they understand foresight as a leadership competency.” So while the core team is small, there are content experts as well as satellite teams and experts throughout the organization supporting the core team’s work. The Center also has 8 non-resident fellows who are “foresight subject matter experts from around the world” who can answer technical questions about foresight when needed.



Singapore's CSF has a similar approach. The team itself comprises 12 officers, and all of them "even the management layer winds up doing practicing, being practitioners" of strategic foresight. These officers are very diverse profiles with different academic and professional backgrounds. "The most critical characteristic is curiosity" in relation to recruiting these officers. They should also have the "ability to connect their existing expertise and experience with other domains of knowledge," and "expand their skills and perceptions of the world." This core team does the heavy lifting, but for larger foresight exercises, an interagency team may be appointed, and external experts are involved where and when needed. These external experts are labelled "subject matter experts." Like the GAO case, a satellite network exists across government with strategic foresight experts engaging in different teams and departments, supported by the core team.

The European Commission follows a somewhat different logic, though there are similarities. Indeed, the Joint Research Centre (JRC) is "the scientific arm of the Commission" and has a "competence center on foresight with about 17 people working there." They do the studies and horizon scanning and also offer training on foresight practices. Being the JRC, they have access to a large number of scientists working on different fields in the JRC, so they can bring their knowledge and expertise in when and where it is needed. Then the political "arm" as discussed before focuses more on how to "manage all the corporate processes." A vice president within the Commission has been given the mandate related to foresight, and is supported by a small team. In essence, this team is more focused on doing "the liaison between the foresight work that the JRC is doing" and the policymaking or political level. In addition, this small team also engages in coordination with experts across directorates at the Commission as well as across European member states, including for instance through an annual meeting about "the ministries of the future." So there is a "continuum," from "the really scientific foresight, hardcore foresight work" to the "political level" via this smaller team.

For this smaller team, "political sensitivity" and the "ability to coordinate" are crucial skills whereas the JRC's work requires advanced foresight expertise and subject-knowledge.

The Flemish SIA team links more with Singapore's CSF and GAO's approaches. It has a core team of six people with diverse backgrounds ranging from environmental science, psychology, macro-economics to history. This is a deliberate choice to exemplify scientific diversity. Foreign affairs are also crucial within the team, with two team members seeking additional degrees in this field to make sure this knowledge is captured by the team. Similar to Singapore's CSF,

though, curiosity and openness were indicated as core characteristics of team members, in addition to a motivation to look beyond their own fields. Collaborations with other departments in the Flemish Government also occur, including with the experts from the Department of Economics, Science and Innovation. External scientific experts are also consulted where needed, with an interesting partner being the “Young Academy”—an organization clustering young Flemish scientists.

## Object: On which topics is strategic foresight applied?

All four cases indicate both bottom-up and top-down approaches in selecting topics for which strategic foresight is applied. Top-down meaning that topics link to strategic priorities, issues and goals from the relevant government (i.e., demand-driven), and bottom-up meaning the foresight team itself comes up with specific topics (i.e., supply-driven). Of course, these approaches are not antagonistic but complement each other. In the case of Singapore’s CSF, the Centre is embedded within the Strategy Group, which gives the Centre “a much better ambient awareness of what the ongoing policy reviews or big questions the government is struggling with *maybe*.” This can act as a crucial filter helping the Centre identify, select, and prioritize specific topics. At the same time, the team collectively identifies topics or issues, which are discussed in relation to their relevance for Singapore’s government, and then acted upon.

Finding that balance between “incubating such new ideas” versus working on topics within existing frameworks is “a judgment call” that the team has to make based on where it can invest its resources and where the strongest needs emerge.

At the European Commission, a demand and supply approach is equally present. Annual Strategic Foresight Reports are produced, and the content of such reports is “decided in an internal process taking into account both scientific analysis and political demand.” As indicated by the interviewees, “while foresight aims to provide mid- to long-term analysis, there is still flexibility to react to events as they happen.” One example given relates to COVID and the need for a general topic related to resilience as a result of the pandemic, which was indeed adopted further. So, there is enough “leeway for flexibility,” because “there are big events happening” that may require strategic foresight.

The GAO’s Center especially emphasized that how they do “foresight is a bottom-up review.” So, “from the ground up.” The interviewee indicated that foresight “doesn’t cascade from the top down. It’s not the top telling us what they want to envision for the future.” Though, as in previous cases, “they set the tone through our goals and objectives of our strategic plans.” But the idea is that topics indeed emerge from GAO staff in the Center working with the “entire agency.” One way of doing this is through having 15 different GAO mission teams that cover “the breadth and work of the whole of government.” By working with these GAO teams, a comprehensive “continuous environmental scan” is conducted, which also feeds information into strategic foresight initiatives. And the nonresidential fellows indicated earlier similarly have an important part to play in that they can answer technical questions related to foresight.

The Flemish SIA supports the Flemish Government’s highest political leader and serves the Flemish Government and its executive branch. Thus, the strategic goals as put forth by this government shape the topics on which strategic foresight is applied, as SIA’s mandate relates to evidence-informed policymaking.

But that does not mean there is no openness for a bottom-up, supply driven approach to topic selection. To do so, SIA specifically employs four functions in relation to their strategic foresight activities, which were defined with the support of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD): Discover, explore, map, and create. Each of these functions contains specific activities that combine more top-down with bottom-up approaches, and imply the need to involve external experts, connect with policymakers and other departments, and build a coalition of the future. Employing such a methodology helped SIA in “being transparent about which output would be delivered using which techniques” and in “being given the time and resources to go through all functions,” as well as demonstrating accountability and transparency and managing expectations.

## Community: Who is the end user of strategic foresight initiatives?

All four cases clearly work for their specific political leaders, policymakers, agency, or organization, and typically do not actively target end users beyond those indicated in their mandate. This is, of course, also a matter of capacity. As indicated by Singapore’s CSF, “we don’t have the capacity to serve that many stakeholders.” If they engage in work with stakeholders outside of Singapore’s Government it is “ancillary work” in that they “have these products already” and are “happy to share them.” Indeed, the CSF has “one client, Singapore’s Government,” and that is already “made up of many different types of entities.” “So, the CSF works with Singapore’s political leadership, senior public service leaders, and policy, strategy and foresight teams across the public service.” That already indicates a diverse end user base within the whole of government.

The same applies to Flanders’ SIA, with the Flemish Government and executive branch being their main end user. Focusing on that end users is important because it “gives direction to the topics that need to be worked with.”

The interviewee also indicated here an interesting link with another case, namely the European Commission and the JRC and states that “their analyses, reports and frameworks form a crucial part of our intelligence.” In addition, they connect with many other European institutions and international organizations where they share their experiences and reports related to strategic foresight.

GAO’s Center pointed in the same direction, serving U.S. Congress with “reliable, fact-based information for overseeing federal agencies and programs.” So that is their main mandate giver and end user. But, of course, federal agencies and programs—as well as their leaders—are also served by the Center due to GAO’s mission to provide oversight and accountability of government programs and operations both now and in the future. And auditors within GAO can also draw on the insights of GAO’s staff in the Center who are foresight experts to inform their audit practice while executive leaders within GAO can benefit from trainings organized by the GAO staff working in the Center. So, several stakeholders do benefit from the Center’s activities.

The European Commission follows a similar logic, though it may have a more extensive reach (as also indicated in the Flemish SIA case) as a standard setter across European member states. Clearly, strategic foresights serve and support the Commission’s leadership at the different levels. But Strategic Foresight Reports and other analytics produced by JRC are also used beyond the Commission, for instance by member state governments. Several networks at the European level were also established to further connect foresight across Europe, with an example being the European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (ESPAS). This is “an unofficial network with several institutional bodies involved” and “was set up to think about the future of Europe.” Such network building also goes beyond Europe, for instance by being “very much involved with the UN and different UN bodies.” So, these network partners in a way also become end users of the insights produced by the Commission’s foresight initiatives.





# Recommendations

Having discussed the cases and how they “do” strategic foresight, this section moves to the recommendations distilled from the cases as well as the broader public administration literature on strategic planning and management, and the author’s expertise in the subject. The GovCaPP structure is followed as indicated before to cluster recommendations.

## Recommendations linked to *governance*

The cases all showed clear structures and leadership support needed to embed strategic foresight into strategic planning and management. Formal mandates helped to clarify and anchor the role of strategic foresight, and platforms were created for planners and foresight experts to engage with each other in strategy making. Simultaneously, strategic foresight was never a rigid, top-down exercise but very much bottom-up—supporting the realization of a larger strategic agenda while also helping to identify new issues for that agenda. Similarly, strategic foresight was considered valuable, adding to the organization, and all cases clearly articulated a value proposition for strategic foresight in their organization. The following recommendations are distilled:

***Recommendation 1: Embed strategic foresight experts into government strategy and strategic planning teams (or committees) at the highest level.***

To ensure that strategic foresight really plays a part during strategic planning and management, there should be some sort of organized integration between strategic foresight teams and strategic planning or strategy teams. These should not be two totally separate entities, but should be integrated and collaborate. Top-level strategy committees in government can have representatives from strategic foresight to enable integration. And, similarly, top-level strategic planning teams can have strategic foresight experts as team members to ensure formal integration. Vice versa, representatives from strategy and strategic planning teams can also be involved in strategic foresight activities, further ensuring continuous integration between both. Having this top-level integration puts strategic foresight exactly where it ought to be—influencing strategy at the top policymaking level of government.



**Recommendation 2:** *Strategic foresight is as much, if not more, bottom-up than top-down. So, foresight representatives throughout government are needed, not just at the central level.*

It is not enough to integrate strategic foresight with top-level strategy and strategic planning teams, a bottom-up approach is equally necessary. Throughout government, local strategic foresight representatives can be embedded to ensure that different departments and teams not just at the top level of government engage with strategic foresight practices. Often, factors sparking the need for strategic foresight pop-up not at the top level of government, but where actual public services are offered or supported.

Having decentralized strategic foresight representatives, people from this level trained in strategy and foresight approaches, and in direct connection with the central team, can help to ensure that such insights make it to the more central strategic foresight team, and are embedded in their activities (and in strategic planning and management through the organization).

**Recommendation 3:** *Strategic foresight is both demand- and supply-driven, taking into account strategic agendas and helping shape them.*

As indicated, strategic planning is very much about creating a map, a strategic agenda, to help navigate in a complex world. Strategic management is then actually doing this navigation, but also exploring and adjusting as new challenges pop up over time. Strategic foresight should help with both. So, it should be partially demand-driven, based on overall strategic priorities identified during strategic planning. But it should also be supply-driven, meaning it should help to identify new challenges and needed actions during more continuous strategic management. This implies that strategic foresight should always allow some flexibility for exploration and curiosity, thinking about blind spots that may affect government and are not yet embedded in strategic planning nor strategic agendas.

**Recommendation 4:** *Strategic foresight requires strong leadership support and a strong mandate that may need to be shaped and clarified over time.*

For top-level strategists and strategic planners to take strategic foresight seriously, it needs to be strongly supported by top-level leaders. Moreover, such leaders should not only include policymakers but also top bureaucrats due to potential political volatility and changes in political leadership. This support also needs to be formalized in an explicit mandate for strategic foresight teams, laying out why they exist, what they ought to be doing and how. Such a mandate legitimizes strategic foresight activities.

Importantly, such a mandate should have some degree of flexibility as it is likely the mandate will shape more over time as strategic foresight activities become more mature and integrated within the organization. As indicated before, strategic foresight is also about exploring, experimenting, finding blind spots and the mandate should leave space for such exploration (while simultaneously setting in stone the need for, scope and resources of strategic foresight teams).

**Recommendation 5:** *There needs to be a business case for strategic foresight, evidence of the public value it can help to create, a so-called public value statement or narrative.*

It is not enough to simply “say” strategic foresight is useful, it is important that strategic foresight teams continuously communicate their added value. And not just communicate but also provide proof.

A straightforward way of doing so is having a dynamic public value statement or narrative showcasing how exactly strategic foresight is or has been useful. Such a statement typically includes:<sup>31</sup>

- *Qualitative stories*, specific examples of specific people or teams, or issues that were helped through strategic foresight. This makes it identifiable for others, they can relate to such examples.
- *Statistics*, showing added value in a more quantitative way, indicating for instance just how impactful potential future trends could be or have been.
- *Research*, highlighting based on evidence how exactly strategic foresight is argued to have helped or will help in tackling identified challenges.
- *Readability*, making sure the statement is short, informative, easy-to-understand, and dynamic.

This recommendation also implies that added value needs to be continuously proven, not just once when starting a strategic foresight team but on a continuous basis during its operation. It needs to be clear to policymakers, public managers, planners, and other strategists what exactly can be expected from strategic foresight teams and how that is useful for their practice. In other words, usefulness, a focus on end users, and a focus on value creation should be at the heart of strategic foresight to make sure it is embedded in strategic planning and management.

31. George, B. (2021a). *Making public organizations work*. Ghent: Owl Press.

## Recommendations linked to *capabilities*

All cases had dedicated strategic foresight staff, with expertise and training in both strategic planning and management, and strategic foresight. Importantly, such staff was especially skilled in organizing the “doing” of strategic foresight using a range of co-production tools, whereas experts on specific topics were often involved in an ad-hoc, flexible but organized manner based on specific needs. Training initiatives on the subject were typically offered to different stakeholders, and learning was considered a crucial theme running across all foresight initiatives. Tied to learning was also a degree of openness, openness to learn from others, from foresight communities and experts to enhance their own practices continuously. Following recommendations ensue:

***Recommendation 1: Offer strategic foresight and strategic planning and management training throughout government, and at all levels of staff.***

Too often, strategic planning and management and strategic foresight training is limited to top-level staff. This is not unsurprising as indeed these practices tend to occur at the top-level of government. However, as was argued earlier, to create an overall strategic capability as a government to engage in and integrate strategic planning and management and strategic foresight, training, and other professional development activities should not be limited to the top of the organization but should involve a range of middle managers, team leaders, and frontline staff. Importantly, such initiatives should not present strategic planning and management and strategic foresight as two separate trainings but, rather, directly integrate them and demonstrate how both enable each other and are needed for a strategically savvy organization. Many signals, trends, issues are experienced first by frontline staff, and ensuring such staff has strategic competencies will help them communicate such insights to relevant entities and act on them.





**Recommendation 2:** *Create formal strategic foresight entities, dedicated teams, but do not make them too big! Small is beautiful.*

All four cases represent formal strategic foresight teams or entities. Having an actual structure in place, a team or unit or center, is one of the most effective ways to ensure a practice is more thoroughly embedded in the organization and its activities (i.e., the structural approach to strategy implementation).<sup>32,33</sup>

It also helps to have single-points-of-contact (SPOCs) for strategic foresight, enable coordination of foresight activities, institutionalize knowledge and create links with other teams, centers, or departments (including those focused on strategic planning). Importantly, such strategic foresight units do not need to be big—indeed all four cases worked with a relatively limited number of core staff. Firstly, being relatively small helps such teams endure as these do not “move the needle” in relation to budget and potential budget cuts—making them more likely to endure cutback initiatives. Secondly, smaller teams can have greater agility, responsiveness and proximity to end users, and flexibility, while needing to collaborate with others and build a larger network throughout government.<sup>34</sup>

**Recommendation 3:** *Strategic foresight teams demand diversity, driven by curiosity and research evidence but with a pragmatic attitude.*

There is no such a thing as the ideal strategic foresight expert. All experts need a degree of curiosity, respect for research evidence and a pragmatic nature to have practical impact. Ideally, teams are diverse in terms of experts with a more scientific (e.g., PhD level) versus a more policy or administrative background (e.g., extensive public-sector work experience), and a more humanities or social sciences versus STEM background. Diversity is key to look at issues from different angles and offer the best possible recommendations. With that said, however, it is crucial that team members are also well-versed in strategic planning and management and understand strategic foresight's place therein.

This may require extensive training upon hiring and during staff development, they should not only be trained in foresight techniques but equally in strategic planning and management approaches. They need to be savvy strategists, not only futurists. Soft skills also matter, but will be discussed in other recommendations.

32. Bryson, J. M., & George, B. (2024). *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations: A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement*, 6th edition. Hoboken: Wiley.

33. George, B., Worth, M. J., Pandey, S., & Pandey, S. K. (2024). Strategic management of social responsibilities: a mixed methods study of US universities. *Public Money & Management*, 44(1), 15-25.

34. Walker, R. M., Andrews, R., George, B., & Tu, X. (2024). Organizational size and public service performance: a meta-analysis and an agenda for future research. *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration*, 46(1), 32-65.

***Recommendation 4: Strategic foresight teams need to have co-creation and co-production skills to bring together collective intelligence and engage with stakeholders.***

Strategic foresight team members need soft skills to enable data collection from a range of experts. In effect, they need to act as “boundary spanners,”<sup>35</sup> who can bridge the boundaries between the so-called triple helix: government, industry, and academia. And, of course, society at large, including interest groups, nonprofits, communities, etc., as these could also have relevant expertise or act as core stakeholders. This implies that co-production and co-creation techniques should be standard in the toolbox of strategic foresight teams, and again training and professional development initiatives as well as recruitment for these teams need to be adapted accordingly.

Co-production and co-creation imply active involvement of a variety of stakeholders (including not only experts but also end users) in strategic planning and management, and in strategic foresight, and the field has a host of tools and methods that can be used to do so.<sup>36</sup>

***Recommendation 5: Strategic foresight teams require both fixed resources and variable, flexible, theme-based resources.***

Having some sort of dynamic, adaptive capabilities in strategic foresight teams can ensure that expertise is brought in when and where relevant, and this can change over time. An example is using a fellowship program where fellows, who are experts in specific domains linked to large trends, become part of the strategic foresight team for some time to share their expertise and help provide actionable recommendations.

The advantage of having such capability is that fresh, new insights and ways of thinking are being brought into the team and organization frequently, again helping to identify and tackle specific blind spots. Another advantage is that having such capability does not put too much pressure on overall budget as it is a variable cost. Fellows could be academics, experts from industry or potentially other parts of government. They can also become ambassadors for the team, and provide a sort of antenna and network within society that again can help to leverage collective intelligence beyond government.

***Recommendation 6: Being a learning organization facilitates the integration of strategic foresight into strategic planning and management.***

This recommendation goes beyond the capabilities of the strategic foresight team as well as strategic planning and management, rather it is about how government in general approaches learning.

It is unlikely that government strategic planning and management is going to incorporate insights from strategic foresight if vision, leadership, culture, systems, teams, etc., are not geared towards learning. Indeed, one may remember that a core component of strategic

35. Van Meerkerk, I., & Edelenbos, J. (2018). *Boundary spanners in public management and governance: An interdisciplinary assessment*. London: Edward Elgar Publishing.

36. Voorberg, W. H., Bekkers, V. J., & Tummers, L. G. (2015). A systematic review of co-creation and co-production: Embarking on the social innovation journey. *Public Management Review*, 17(9), 1333-1357.

management was learning, and that strategic foresight plays a crucial role therein. Many governments across the world are investing in becoming learning organizations, and some features include:<sup>37,38,39</sup>

- Having a shared and integrated vision across government, which also engages staff and other stakeholders
- Having in place professional development and learning opportunities for all staff to engage in
- Making sure teams learn from each other, build trust and collaborate across departmental boundaries
- Having systems in place which collect information from the environment systematically, and acting on that information
- Establishing a culture where exploration, experimentation, and innovation are encouraged
- Engaging frequently with stakeholders from outside of the government organization, learning from these external stakeholders
- Training leaders to become facilitators of learning, encouraging their teams to engage in learning opportunities

It is likely that governments which are learning organizations will have the integration of strategic foresight into strategic planning and management in their DNA.

Moreover, a range of other benefits have been attributed to learning organization elements, including enhanced well-being of public-sector workers.<sup>40</sup>

***Recommendation 7: The integration of strategic foresight into strategic planning and management may require outside help.***

Especially in strategic foresight teams which are starting up, it is unlikely that the needed capabilities are in place to facilitate integration or even start up useful foresight activities. In such cases, outside help could be useful and there are several organizations supporting governments across the globe that want to engage in strategic foresight. An example includes OECD OPSI (<https://oecd-opsi.org/>), which has helped a range of governments adopt strategic foresight and presents a number of cases as well as manuals on their website. There are also several strategic foresight networks, which could help to learn about practices undertaken by other governments that may prove useful. An example here is the United Nations' Futures Lab Network (<https://un-futureslab.org/>).

A host of conferences are also organized where futurists share experiences, learn from each other and further build their network (e.g., the Emirates' Strategic Planning and Future Foresight Annual Conference).

37. Kools, M., & George, B. (2020). Debate: The learning organization—a key construct linking strategic planning and strategic management. *Public Money & Management*, 40(4), 262-264.

38. Kools, M., Stoll, L., George, B., Steijn, B., Bekkers, V., & Gouédard, P. (2020). The school as a learning organisation: The concept and its measurement. *European Journal of Education*, 55(1), 24-42.

39. OECD. (2018). *Developing Schools as Learning Organisations in Wales*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

40. Gouédard, P., Kools, M., & George, B. (2023). The impact of schools as learning organisations on teachers' self-efficacy and job satisfaction: A cross-country analysis. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 34(3), 331-357.



## Recommendations linked to *processes*

Some form of process integration between strategic foresight and strategic planning and management was apparent in all four cases. Looking back at the earlier Figure 3, we can indeed see that strategic foresight supported strategic planning and management in the cases in different ways: To act as an early warning system for changes in the environment, to understand trends, opportunities, and challenges in the environment and among collaborators and competitors, to make strategies more robust and agile, and to avoid blind spots. Yet, there was also a realization that process integration needed to take the organizational context into account—something that worked in one case may have been difficult in another—and that not all foresight is strategic thus implying a careful need to differentiate *strategic* from *operational* (while keeping in mind that the operational may suddenly become strategic). Following recommendations are drawn:

***Recommendation 1: If integrating strategic foresight into strategic planning and management feels comfortable, you're not doing it right!***

Strategic foresight is about identifying blind spots, pushing people out of their comfort zone, and encouraging constructive conflict.

As such, it especially helps avoid typical “planning” traps, including strategic plans becoming overly fixed and focused on one potential future, or strategic planning processes giving a false sense of control.

Planners may have a tendency to extrapolate trends based on historical data, but that data and extrapolation could be flawed and present only one possible future. Or strategic planning may become nothing more than an operationalization of the ideas of a dominant leader, without giving much room for debate or other approaches. Having constructive conflict during strategic planning as well as adopting a fact-seeking approach has been associated with successful plan implementation,<sup>41</sup> and strategic foresight can help with both. Moreover, much of behavioral economics has demonstrated how cognitive biases can influence decision-making

41. George, B. (2021b). Successful strategic plan implementation in public organizations: Connecting people, process, and plan (3Ps). *Public Administration Review*, 81(4), 793-798.

and strategy processes, implying that approaches that push people to think more, reflect, debate, discuss, offer new angles, come up with creative ideas and engage end users are much needed to avoid biased decision-making.<sup>42</sup> But by doing that, strategic foresight should create some *managed* discomfort, or you're not doing it correctly!

***Recommendation 2: Strategic foresight may be easier to link with design and agile approaches to strategic planning and management.***

Design and agile thinking have become increasingly popular in government in general, and have been identified as useful approaches for strategic planning and management as well. It seems that strategic planning and management grounded in design and agile may be easier to connect with strategic foresight than other approaches.

In essence, agile and design suggest more engagement with end users, shorter, flexible cycles of decision-making, prototyping of solutions, and temporary teams with diverse experts involved—and all working on strategic issues identified during strategic planning (but also continuously discussing and addressing new issues as they emerge over time and may hamper mission and mandate achievement).<sup>43</sup> All of this links well with strategic foresight, and the integration of foresight experts into design and agile teams would seem logical. Do note that agile and design require a specific culture and, often, major transformations of government organization, so it may not be realistic.<sup>44</sup>

Strategic foresight may be easier in agile and design contexts, but that does not mean it is not useful in settings where these approaches are not yet well embedded.

***Recommendation 3: Strategic foresight should especially support whole-of-government strategic planning and management.***

One of the big challenges for strategic planning and management in government is ensuring strategies are integrated across government entities, departments and other divisions. Indeed, governments love developing plans and typically many different strategies, plans, and documents will exist within a same government system. That does not necessarily have to be a problem as long as these different plans are integrated in an overarching strategy. Such a strategy looks for synergies between plans, and solves contradictions between them. It enhances coordination, making different strategies work “for” as opposed to “against” each other.

Indeed, this is a core reason behind doing strategic planning and management at the whole of government level—to ensure strategic alignment between the many different governmental levels.<sup>45</sup> Strategic foresight can certainly help in this regard, by identifying contradictions and synergies, as well as trends and insights that will likely affect the whole of government as opposed to only specific entities, departments, or divisions.

42. George, B. (2023). Behavioral public strategy. *Behavioural Public Policy*, 7(2), 442-456.

43. Bryson, J. M., & George, B. (2024). *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations: A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement*, 6th edition. Hoboken: Wiley.

44. Mergel, I., Ganapati, S., & Whitford, A. B. (2021). Agile: A new way of governing. *Public Administration Review*, 81(1), 161-165.

45. George, B., Drumaux, A., Joyce, P., & Longo, F. (2020). Theme: Strategic planning that works: evidence from the European public sector. *Public Money & Management*, 40(4).



***Recommendation 4: Not all foresight is (nor should be) strategic!***

Strategists are focusing on core priorities, the strategic issues facing the organization. But that does not mean that operational issues do not require foresight. As was made clear in the previous sections, what makes foresight “strategic” is its integration into strategic planning and management. But there may be different issues and concerns throughout the organization and its network requiring foresight. In no way does this report imply that such issues and concerns should be neglected. Indeed, what is operational today may very well become strategic in the future. It does raise the question about who does what.

Strategic foresight teams ought to be spending their time focusing on strategic issues, but capabilities throughout the organization could enable others to do foresight at other levels. See also the *capabilities-focused recommendations*. Foresight is not only an approach useful to strategists but can equally prove useful for team and project leaders, and other public-sector workers at different levels of government. Thus, as indicated before, to some extent foresight needs to be both centralized and decentralized in government—*centralized* in a strategic foresight team focused on strategic planning and management and *decentralized* through foresight “antennas” throughout government who may be focusing on more operational issues.

***Recommendation 5: Embed strategic foresight into strategic planning and management cycles, steps, and documents.***

To integrate strategic foresight with strategic planning and management it may be necessary to make more formal links between both. This can be done in several ways. Firstly, the output of strategic planning and management—namely strategic plans and documents—could have a dedicated section to strategic foresight. Such a section could indicate some more trends moving forward and how they affected the strategic plan. Or it could also focus on the overall vision of success underlying the plan, the envisaged future if the plan would be successful (or both). So, embedding the “future” more into documents could help make links explicit and, also, make these documents a bit more appealing. In a way, such a future describes perhaps the most important aspect of strategy: the *why*-question, why are we doing all of this? Next to the documents, strategic foresight should also be included in several steps of the broader strategic planning and management-cycle. If it is not part of the overall process flow and included as a formal step, it may remain a “side” exercise that is not really taken seriously or considered in overall resource allocation. It can be included as trend analysis, visioning exercises, as a way to identify issues, as risk management, for more stakeholder engagement or for other purposes (see before).

***Recommendation 6: Like strategic planning and management, strategic foresight needs to be adapted to fit the configuration of the organizations in which it is applied. There's no one best way nor off-the-shelf approach.***

Strategic planning and management is an approach, as indicated before, that is highly likely to vary based on the setting where it is applied. A big, complex, supranational entity will need a very different approach from a small city. So logically, the same goes for strategic foresight.

It is not about blindly following hypes, fads, and fashions, we're doing it because "others do it," it is about thinking carefully which type of foresight is needed based on your organizational realities. If funding and support is limited, it is unlikely a formal foresight unit will be created (and sustained); if activities are very controlled and predictable other types of foresight (like forecasting) will be needed. So good futurists understand their context very well and are able to adopt an approach best fit for their purpose, as opposed to simple mimicry of others or blindly following recommendations from consultants or other experts.

***Recommendation 7: Strategically foreseeing how strategic foresight activities will be conducted is needed.***

Doing strategic foresight well may require some strategic foresight about how to do strategic foresight! Like "making a plan to do planning," the typical first step of strategic planning, it is important to spend enough time on the design of actual strategic foresight activities. At least several questions ought to be answered:

- Who will be leading these activities? Who will be on the team? Which committee will be reported to on progress and who will sit on this committee? Who are sponsors and champions?
- How will these activities support strategic planning and management, and be useful to end users? How do they create value (see before)?
- Who exactly are the end users, and how will they be engaged?
- Which steps will be taken, over how much time and with which resources?

These are just some questions to answer, but it is important that strategic foresight activities are not "only" ad-hoc initiatives that seem fun to do. They should be actual projects with project governance tied to them, and careful reflection and planning to make sure they are useful and feasible.

Note that this does not mean that out-of-the-box ideas should not be explored, but it does mean that some planning and accountability will be needed for strategic foresight to be legitimate enough to really impact strategic planning and management.

***Recommendation 8: Strategic foresight should not only be part of the development of strategic plans, but should also be conducted during annual reviews of strategic plans.***

Moving from strategic planning to strategic management requires continuous attention to implementation, evaluation and monitoring, and learning. Foresight initiatives are sometimes only limited to strategic planning, typically when identifying trends and their potential impact on the organization. A way to more structurally turn foresight into an ongoing activity embedded in strategic management is by linking it to review documents of strategies and plans. Such reviews happen at least annually, sometimes even quarterly. It could be useful to push these reviews and evaluations to explicitly involve futurists and strategic foresight teams. These reviews and evaluations are ideal moments to reflect on the future and assess whether, taking into account potential futures, the current strategy is still good or may need some adjusting. Indeed, we do not want evaluation to be only a *backward*-looking exercise, it should also be a *forward*-looking exercise.

***Recommendation 9:*** Strategic foresight can involve early warning systems, including dynamic, easy-to-use dashboards with indicators, especially related to strategic issues and the overall strategic agenda.

In an era of digital governance and smart government, data are abundant. Strategic foresight needs to leverage such data availability by developing useful dashboards that could indicate potential issues as they pop-up in real-time.

Likely, much of these data are already present somewhere in the organization but foresight teams together with strategy teams could leverage these data and turn these into useful dashboards to monitor both strategy achievement as well as engage in continuous environmental scanning. One way to approach this is by linking strategic issues—i.e., the main challenges confronting the organization, to relevant indicators in an overall strategic agenda “dashboard.”

We do not want futurists to get involved into operational measurement, there are many other teams for that. But they could develop dashboards related to strategic issues and make sure these are monitored and updated continuously to act as early warning systems shaping the strategic agenda. Again, this helps to move from strategic planning to strategic management by making sure strategic issues are not just identified once and then kept stable over time. Likely issues will change, and these strategic agenda dashboards are ways in which strategic foresight could help advance continuous strategic management.

***Recommendation 10:*** Digital tools and trends, including artificial intelligence and big data analytics, can be identified through strategic foresight and further explored during strategic planning and management.

Strategic foresight is in many ways a technology enabler in government. It identifies technology trends and assesses how these could be useful or otherwise impact government. Similarly, strategic planning and management are increasingly relying on the use of specific digital tools. So, another potential contribution to strategic planning and management lies in optimizing and innovating these processes using new technology. Strategic foresight can help planners and strategists identify new tools and adapt them to enhance strategic planning and management.

Vice versa, planners and strategists could also feedback how exactly tools have helped or not to futurists again better helping to understand the potential administrative impact of technology trends across government. Together, futurists, planners, and strategists can become early adopters of useful digital tools, configure these to the context at hand, and further disseminate these across government.

***Recommendation 11:*** Strategic foresight should focus on partners, collaborators and competitors as well, not only on the organization at hand.

Strategic planning and management is not only focused on the organization itself, but also looks at what (potential) partners, collaborators, and competitors are doing, and potentially other important stakeholders as well. This implies that to be especially useful for strategic planning and management, strategic foresight should not only center on identifying the impact of specific trends on the organization but also on its broader environment—like partners, collaborators, and competitors. At the heart of any strategy approach in government lies the creation of public value. And sustained value creation requires government organizations to carefully consider their collaborative and competitive advantages. Strategic foresight could be useful in this regard by helping to reflect on what other actors in the organization's environment may do, and how that could influence organizational action. This approach is sometimes labelled “war gaming,” linking it to a military logic. But it goes beyond the military and can help ensure strategic planning and management is not “just” an intra-organizational, *managerial* approach but also an interorganizational, *governance* one.<sup>46</sup>



## Recommendations linked to *practice*

Strategic foresight in all four cases was aimed at being useful for practice, and not just a purely theoretical, academic exercise. This was typically achieved by ensuring a sound understanding of the end users of foresight exercises, the community being served and what their requirements and needs were. To do so, strategic foresight was designed in a way that it would help to open up strategic planning and management to actual practitioners—engaging with practice to also showcase attention to inclusiveness and transparency. Often, practitioners using strategic foresight were policymakers and politicians, meaning that the cases also needed to show a degree of political astuteness to produce insights that were considered neutral and bipartisan yet pragmatic and valuable. Following recommendations are drawn:

46. Vandersmissen, L., George, B., & Voets, J. (2024). Strategic planning and performance perceptions of managers and citizens: analyzing multiple mediations. *Public Management Review*, 26(2), 514-538.

**Recommendation 1:** *Strategic foresight capabilities and products need to be useful for the actual end users, which requires continuous service management activities.*

Service management can be a very useful approach to use when thinking about strategic foresight. In a way, strategic foresight teams are providing a public service—maybe not a very tangible one offered to citizens directly—but they are providing insights, options, analyses, process guidance, etc., for clients within government. Usefulness of the offered services is always the core concern on the mind of clients, they need foresight to be useful for their decision-making, their strategic planning, and management.

Using tools from service management could help foresight teams better understand client segments, value added, client needs, client channels, client satisfaction (and retention), client usage of insights, etc.—this requires foresight team to have some *commercial skills* as well, thinking of their entity as a service-delivery organization with actual clients who need to be understood, engaged, and kept satisfied. In the literature, this is called a Public Service Logic, embedded in service management tools (some of which were discussed before like co-production and co-creation, end user engagement, public value creation), which runs opposed to a more traditional Product Manufacturing Logic.<sup>47</sup>

**Recommendation 2:** *Strategic foresight can be an approach to enhance inclusiveness and transparency of strategic planning and management (i.e., “Open Strategy”).*

One of the oft-cited criticisms on strategic planning and management is that it is not inclusive and transparent enough. Plans are made in ivory towers and then forced upon the organization in a top-down, and not very democratic manner.

This is one of the reasons underlying the recent emergence of the “Open Strategy” movement, which centers around understanding how strategic planning and management can be opened-up more to engage with stakeholders, and enhance inclusiveness and transparency.<sup>48</sup> Strategic foresight can be particularly useful in this regard, much foresight requires outside experts, roundtables, stakeholder fora, and other tools of engagement. In an era where trust in government is challenged and where government entities continuously need to demonstrate their value and legitimacy, strategic foresight can thus help make strategic planning and management more open and engaging. This is important because the best plans fail to realize if not supported by a coalition, and do not take into account stakeholder needs and concerns.

**Recommendation 3:** *Strategic foresight teams need to understand practical politics and political rationalities, and learn how to manage politics.*

The biggest difference between strategic planning and management in government versus in business is the need to account for a *political* rationality, next to a more *substantive* and *procedural* one.<sup>49</sup> Futurists (and strategists) need to understand the highly political nature of gov-

47. Osborne, S. (2020). *Public service logic: Creating value for public service users, citizens, and society through public service delivery*. New York: Routledge.

48. Hansen, J. R., Pop, M., Skov, M. B., & George, B. (2024). A review of open strategy: bridging strategy and public management research. *Public Management Review*, 26(3), 678-700.

49. Bryson, J. M., & George, B. (2024). *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations: A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement*, 6th edition. Hoboken: Wiley.



ernment strategy and strategic planning, and find a way to manage politics. They cannot “only” be procedural experts (e.g., how to co-produce and co-create content and “do” foresight) and substantive experts (e.g., experts in AI, biotech, or macroeconomics) but also need to be experts at managing politics. This can include many things, but at least three (interconnected) activities are typically argued to be part of the managing politics toolbox:<sup>50</sup>

- *Agenda and issue management skills:* Understand how to put issues on the strategic agenda of policymakers and politicians. Basically, this includes lobbying and network building.
- *Symbolic management skills:* Understand how to use symbols to convince policymakers, often symbols of issues going wrong are more powerful than statistics as they are more relatable and speak to emotions.
- *Risk management skills:* Understand how to use risk to your advantage, demonstrating “negative-avoidance” goals—namely what would happen if you don’t achieve a goal; this negative framing tends to spark more attention than positive framing among policymakers.

***Recommendation 4:*** Strategic foresight should aim to be unpartisan, neutral and unbiased, if it is to endure organizational and societal politics. But it should also be actionable, present options and scenarios to support decision-making.

Related to the need to manage politics, is also the importance of being unpartisan, neutral, and unbiased if strategic foresight is to be embedded into strategic planning and management. Strategic foresight teams need to be considered reliable partners not driven by political ideology and personal preferences. This is a tightrope to walk on, because on the one hand managing politics may also imply the need to raise specific issues but on the other hand navigating in a context of high political volatility requires neutral “anchors.” So strategic foresight should help to generate different options, different potential choices to make and help policymakers go through these options to fully understand consequences of decisions. In a way, strategic foresight can help with both divergence and convergence during strategic planning and management.

*Divergence* in presenting many different options based on many different scenarios, and *convergence* in guiding policymakers through these options to help make informed decisions. Options is the key word here, while strategic foresight indeed should aim to be neutral, it should also be actionable—not just present broad trends and analyses but also actual options for policymakers to work with and build on.

50. Noordegraaf, M. (2017). *Public management: Performance, professionalism and politics*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Table 2 provides an overview of all recommendations, which can be used as a checklist for practitioners.

**Table 2. Summary of recommendations in the report**

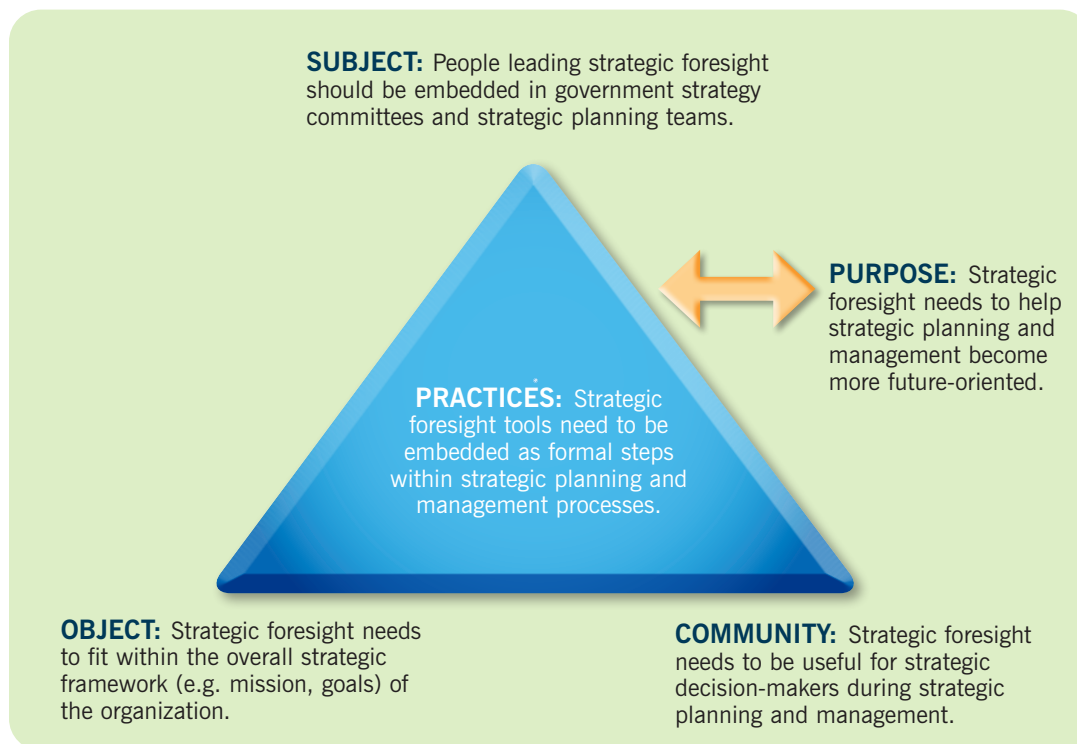
| GovCaPP component   | Recommendation   |
|---------------------|--|
| <b>Governance</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embed strategic foresight experts into government strategy and strategic planning teams (or committees) at the highest level.</li> <li>• Strategic foresight is as much, if not more, bottom-up than top-down. So, foresight representatives throughout government are needed, not just at the central level.</li> <li>• Strategic foresight is both demand- and supply-driven, taking into account strategic agendas and helping shape them.</li> <li>• Strategic foresight requires strong leadership support and a strong mandate that may need to be shaped and clarified over time.</li> <li>• There needs to be a business case for strategic foresight, evidence of the public value it can help to create, a so-called public value statement or narrative.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Capabilities</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer strategic foresight and strategic planning and management training throughout government, and at all levels of staff.</li> <li>• Create formal strategic foresight entities, dedicated teams, but do not make them too big! Small is beautiful.</li> <li>• Strategic foresight teams demand diversity, driven by curiosity and research evidence but with a pragmatic attitude.</li> <li>• Strategic foresight teams need to have co-creation and co-production skills to bring together collective intelligence and engage with stakeholders.</li> <li>• Strategic foresight teams require both fixed resources and variable, flexible, theme-based resources.</li> <li>• Being a learning organization facilitates the integration of strategic foresight into strategic planning and management.</li> <li>• The integration of strategic foresight into strategic planning and management may require outside help.</li> </ul> |

| GovCaPP component | Recommendation  |
|-------------------|---|
| Processes         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If integrating strategic foresight into strategic planning and management feels comfortable, you're not doing it right!</li> <li>• Strategic foresight may be easier to link with design and agile approaches to strategic planning and management.</li> <li>• Strategic foresight should especially support whole-of-government strategic planning and management.</li> <li>• Not all foresight is (nor should be) strategic!</li> <li>• Embed strategic foresight into strategic planning and management cycles, steps and documents.</li> <li>• Like strategic planning and management, strategic foresight needs to be adapted to fit the configuration of the organizations in which it is applied. There's no one best way nor off-the-shelf approach.</li> <li>• Strategically foreseeing how strategic foresight activities will be conducted is needed.</li> <li>• Strategic foresight should not only be part of the development of strategic plans, but should also be conducted during annual reviews of strategic plans.</li> <li>• Strategic foresight can involve early warning systems, including dynamic, easy-to-use dashboards with indicators, especially related to strategic issues and the overall strategic agenda.</li> <li>• Digital tools and trends, including artificial intelligence and big data analytics, can be identified through strategic foresight and further explored during strategic planning and management.</li> <li>• Strategic foresight should focus on partners, collaborators and competitors as well, not only on the organization at hand.</li> </ul> |
| Practice          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic foresight capabilities and products need to be useful for the actual end users, which requires continuous service management activities.</li> <li>• Strategic foresight can be an approach to enhance inclusiveness and transparency of strategic planning and management (i.e., "Open Strategy").</li> <li>• Strategic foresight teams need to understand practical politics and political rationalities, and learn how to manage politics.</li> <li>• Strategic foresight should aim to be unpartisan, neutral and unbiased, if it is to endure organizational and societal politics. But this should also be actionable, present options and scenarios to support decision-making.</li> </ul>   |

# Conclusion

This report set out to provide a systemic approach and recommendations on how to embed strategic foresight into strategic planning and management in government. Twenty-seven recommendations were offered structured around **governance**, **capabilities**, **processes** and **practice** (**GovCaPP**). These recommendations were grounded in strategic foresight initiatives from Europe, Flanders, Singapore and the U.S., as well as research and theory from strategic planning and management in public administration. They offer a systemic perspective on making strategic planning more future oriented, not looking at any one specific tool but rather focusing on the overall ecosystem and what is needed to enable a sustainable connection between strategic foresight and strategic planning. As a way to provide a conclusion to this report, Figure 4 further distills these recommendations drawing on activity theory—an often-used framework to understand “how” practitioners do strategy.

**Figure 4. How to embed strategic foresight into strategic planning?**



This framework provides a starting point, a fundamental checklist that practitioners can use when aiming to understand the links between strategic foresight and strategic planning in their organization.

- To really embed such a link, the core purpose of strategic foresight should be geared towards making strategic planning and management more future oriented.
- People leading foresight should also be embedded in strategy or strategic planning teams and committees, making links explicit.
- Decision-makers who need to “call the shots” during strategic planning and management should find the output of foresight initiatives useful for their decision-making, and such output should fit within the overall strategy of the organization, including its mission and goals.
- Moreover, strategic foresight steps need to be embedded in strategic planning and management processes, thus making them core to any strategic planning exercise as opposed to a “side exercise” to identify some trends.

If any points on this checklist are found lacking, the 27 stipulated recommendations can provide some concrete actions that could be undertaken to strengthen links. Again, the overall aim is to build a House of Future-oriented Strategic Planning (see Figure 1) acknowledging the importance of the “whole” and not just the “parts.” Though other actions could, of course, be equally valuable depending on the context in which one operates. Indeed, in no way are the 27 recommendations, the House, and the framework magic bullets, what will work is highly contingent upon context. But they do provide points of reference and orientation, relevant insights and approaches one can learn from to further make strategic planning and management in government more future-oriented.

Policymakers, public managers and other public professionals are living in very complex, turbulent times, and sound strategizing is needed now more than ever. Such strategizing involves both purposeful strategic planning<sup>51</sup> and strategic foresight. Connecting the two together will undoubtedly benefit the capability of government organizations to address the many challenges ahead. Hopefully, this report provides some inspiration on how to do exactly that. By no means is this report an endpoint, rather consider it a starting point aimed at providing the foundation for more strategic thinking, acting, and learning in government.

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51. George, B. (2025). Towards purposeful strategic planning: a mixed research synthesis across disciplines. *Long Range Planning*, 58(4), 102563.



## About the Author

**Bert George, PhD**

Professor in Public and Nonprofit Strategy  
City University of Hong Kong, Department of Public and  
International Affairs  
Tat Chee Avenue, Kowloon Tong  
Hong Kong SAR

E: [brgeorge@cityu.edu.hk](mailto:brgeorge@cityu.edu.hk)

**Bert George** is Professor of Public and Nonprofit Strategy at the Department of Public and International Affairs, City University of Hong Kong. Bert is also Associate Dean for Engagement and Knowledge Transfer and Director of the Research Cluster on Brain, Behavior and Society at the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences of CityU. His research, teaching, and service focus especially on how strategy processes and practices can help public and nonprofit organizations perform better and create public value. He has published widely on the topic, including co-authoring the bestselling sixth edition of *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations* with John M Bryson. He is Co-Editor in Chief of *Public Management Review*, a leading academic journal in the field, engages in executive teaching in institutions across the globe, and regularly consults for international organizations, nonprofits, companies, and governments at all levels.

His work has been awarded with the Louis Brownlow Award and the Joseph Wholley Award by the American Society for Public Administration. His doctoral work on strategic planning in local government received awards from the European Group for Public Administration, European Academy of Management, and International Centre of Research and Information on the Public, Social and Cooperative Economy. His research has shaped government reform across the world and has been cited by, among others, the U.S. White House, UNICEF, OECD, European Commission, and World Bank. He also co-chairs the study group on Strategizing and Entrepreneurship for the Common Good at the International Research Society for Public Management. Originally from Belgium, Bert holds a BSc in Business Administration, MSc in Strategic Management, and PhD in Applied Economics from Ghent University.

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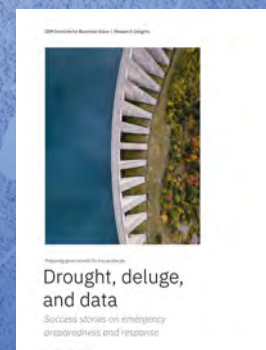
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### For more information:

**Daniel J. Chenok**

Executive Director

IBM Center for The Business of Government

600 14th Street NW  
Second Floor  
Washington, D.C. 20005  
(202) 551-9342

website: [www.businessofgovernment.org](http://www.businessofgovernment.org)  
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