



A Monthly e-Newsletter From:

 Institute for Alternative Futures

October 2008

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Forward Perspectives

Futures and Organizational Strategy

By IAF Futurist [Devin Fidler](#)

There is a strong connection in our culture between chess and organizational strategy. A simple internet image search for the word "strategy," for example, reveals picture after picture of chess boards and chess pieces. The association is certainly understandable. Chess encourages players to think ahead several turns and to have a clear purpose behind each move that they make. It encourages strategic foresight and rewards those who think several moves ahead. Yet, for all these parallels, it is a mistake to take the analogy too far.

Indeed, professional futurists are often called in at just the point where the chess metaphor breaks down. For all its incredible complexity (there are more than nine-million possible board arrangements after the first three moves) chess still fails to capture the fundamental dynamism of an actual company's operating environment. Consider the constraints. Chess is a zero-sum game between a fixed number of players, with defined rules, defined boundaries and defined roles. Absolute competitive victory is the central objective.

In the globalized business environment, the biggest shock-waves are often the direct result of factors that chess-players assume as given. In business the playing board can change. The ongoing fallout from overheated sub-prime lending is a timely example. Innovative strategies

for outflanking competitive rivals were common among these lenders. Far less common, however, was the foresight necessary to envision scenarios for how this competitive maneuvering could impact the structure of the financial industry as a whole. Only the most astute players took into account the fact that the structure of the game itself was changing - an insight that board games certainly never prepared them for. Not coincidentally, this is exactly the territory that futurists inhabit.

To successfully navigate in a dynamic real world environment, organizations need to comprehend changing players, changing rules, changing boundaries and changing roles. In this landscape, strong competition is a byproduct of organizations pursuing overlapping objectives, and not an end in and of itself. Launching an all-out war of attrition against a competitor is almost never the best real-world strategy simply because unlike at the chess-board, wins are never permanent or absolute and new players can easily enter after the dust has cleared. If executives are wedded to chess as a metaphor for their decision-making, an organization can reliably anticipate both short-term wins and long-term consternation.

Interestingly, for all their importance, strategic planning projects are frequently riddled with these shortcomings. Too often, these sessions simply encourage divisions to plan the next several moves with no reference to changes in the overall game. Genuinely forward-looking organizations, on the other hand, tend to distinguish themselves at just this stage. These are the companies that look beyond just the competition toward larger changes taking shape. A broader perspective can not only check the impulse to pursue competitors into unsafe territory, but also allows an organization to sense new "games" emerging that others simply do not see. In business, unlike in chess, it is precisely the ability to see beyond fixed boundaries that distinguishes merely competent players from true visionaries.

Trends & Insights

The 2019 Project Shows New Way to Approach Science & Technology

The current healthcare system will go into crisis by 2019 unless it changes to become more sustainable. Growing costs, inefficiency, poor quality, bad outcomes and a lack of access to care define a system that is deeply dysfunctional. The 2019 Project describes what successful responses can accomplish over ten years if the crisis comes for the next administration. The U.S. approaches innovation in science and technology will play a large role in shaping the future healthcare system. IAF's newest brief, [Science & Technology Base in 2019](#), looks at a future system that provides better research and technologies for healthcare.

Creating a better system for research and development requires a new approach that is more open and interdisciplinary. Science can contribute more to health by focusing on preventing sickness, controlling costs, improving quality, and developing therapies for neglected and high disparity diseases. Some of the forecasts for a better healthcare system in 2019 outlined in the brief are:

- Science will change to integrate traditionally separate "soft" and "hard" science to better understand the complex interrelationships between environment, social interactions and biology. Research in fields such epigenetics will lead this shift.
- New technologies for collaboration will connect scientists from around the world. The cultural silos of the global scientific community will change by including more eastern values in the scientific process and focusing on scientific problems of the developing

world.

- The ethos and methods of open source will propel the free flow of ideas and reverse the propensity to over-patent and restrict basic research, which has been an unintended consequence of the 1980 Bayh-Dole Act.
- Better computer simulations and advances in molecular biology will make it easier for both regulators and drug companies to identify promising candidates early in clinical trials and eliminate those most likely to fail.

IAF believes the nation approaches a period of tumult that could presage dramatic change in our healthcare system. The recent debates in Congress over the \$700 billion bailout plan for the financial industry may provide the impetus necessary to finally force change in our expensive and inadequate healthcare system.

IAF President Jonathan Peck discussed this message in recent speeches on the 2019 Project to the [Drug Information Association](#) and the [American Society of Health-System Pharmacists \(ASHP\)](#). You can read the 2019 briefs available so far at the [2019 Healthcare That Works for All](#) webpage. Email futurist@altfutures.com if you are interested in having an IAF futurist come to talk about the 2019 Project at your meeting.

News and Events

IAF Thanks Sandra Tinkham for Seven Years of Service

IAF would like to thank Sandra Tinkham for her incredible work at IAF over the last seven years. Ms. Tinkham is leaving IAF at the end of the month to pursue other projects and travels to Chile with her husband H. Stetson Tinkham.

Ms. Tinkham was not only the Executive Assistant to IAF Founder and Chairman of the Board Clement Bezold, but a go to source for all the futurists at IAF. Long-standing and complex projects, such as the [DRA Project](#), would have been impossible without the dedication and organizational efficiency of Ms. Tinkham. The success of many IAF projects over the years would not have been possible without Sandy's tireless attention to detail and her amazing ability to impose order on the inevitable chaos associated with large futures projects and conferences.

IAF Welcomes Eric Meade

IAF is proud to welcome Eric Meade as the newest IAF Futurist and V.P. for Business Development. Mr. Meade brings a wealth of business experience to IAF as an entrepreneur and business representative in China. He now brings his international perspective and extensive experience in the "world's workshop" to IAF projects such as the [China 2028 Scenarios](#).

Eric Meade joins IAF after an extended stay overseas. After completing an MBA at INSEAD in France and Singapore, Mr. Meade spent six years working in China - first as the Chief Representative of a major U.S. toy company and then with his own company. While in China he attained fluency in Mandarin and gained deep insights into Chinese culture and business practices, which he now brings to IAF's ongoing work on the future of China. Prior to his MBA, Mr. Meade served for five years as a submarine officer in the U.S. Navy. He holds a B.A. in history from the University of Virginia.

Katilyn Wilkins Joins the IAF Team

IAF welcomes Katilyn Wilkins to our growing IAF team as Project and Executive Assistant to IAF Founder and Chairman of the Board Clement Bezold. Ms. Wilkins has extensive professional experience in administration and organization of projects in the non-profit space.

Prior to joining IAF, Katilyn Wilkins worked as an administrative assistant at the American Red Cross and has also provided administrative support for the D.C. Bar Foundation and D.C. Vote. Ms. Wilkins received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies from the San Francisco Art Institute.

IAF Welcomes New Interns

IAF is continuing its internship program during the Fall Semester with two new interns from [George Washington University \(GWU\)](#). Vidya Nag Nukala, Ph.D., and Evan Faber are both students in the [International Science and Technology Program \(ISTP\)](#) at the [Elliott School of International Affairs](#).

Vid Nukala brings his knowledge of aging, emerging neuro-technologies, biomedical policy and ethics to the [DRA Project](#), and will be working with IAF Founder and Chairman of the Board Clement Bezold. The DRA Project is IAF's multi-year, multi-stakeholder project on health inequities. Prior to joining the ISTP program and IAF, Dr. Nukala received his Ph.D. in Anatomy and Neurobiology from University of Kentucky. Dr. Nukala has also worked as a fellow at the Indo-U.S. Science & Technology Forum (IUSSTF), and is currently organizing a Technology & Innovation monthly seminar series run by the [Center for International Science & Technology Policy \(CISTP\)](#) at GWU. He will be also be co-chairing the [ST Global Consortium's 2008-09 Science & Technology in Society](#) graduate student conference hosted at AAAS headquarters, Washington D.C.

Evan Faber will be assisting IAF President Jonathan Peck and other futurists with a range projects while at IAF. Mr. Faber has a background in philosophy of science and extensive experience working with futures tools during his time with the Woodrow Wilson Center on the [Project on Emerging Nanotechnologies](#), [Techcast](#), the [WFUNA Millennium Project](#) and the [Project on Forward Engagement](#). Mr. Faber is also co-founder and associate director of [Banaa](#), a program which empowers Sudanese survivors of war with expert peacemaking skills through scholarship and mentorship opportunities at US universities. IAF will be looking again for interns in the spring semester and again in the summer. If you or someone you know is interested in interning with IAF, please contact Craig Bettles at cbettles@altfutures.com.

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