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INITIATING THE ENTIRE PROCESS

The Strategic Prospective Workshop

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The *Strategic Prospective* Workshop

How did the futures workshop develop? To answer that question, we think back to a period of several years when we trained forty-odd newly promoted executives at Renault. The seminar topic was "future watch" *(vigilance prospective)*, or a form of foresight similar to technological foresight. In 1985, we were asked to design a more participatory method so that the attendees would be more than consumers of foresight and actually become participants actively thinking about foreseeable change and the strategic consequences of such change. The following three types of workshop took shape:

1) Anticipating and mastering change;
2) Hunting down clichés (conventional thinking);
3) Negotiating the short- and long-term.

From 1989 to 1990, a fourth type came naturally from the concept of competence trees, e.g. the past, present and future of an organization or a territorial collectivity. In this sense what began as a training tool, the competence tree, became a full futures-thinking exercise for a group, be it a corporate department or regional council. Creating the tree enables members of the group to outline problems and priorities according to the stakes, identify possible strategic actions and, most of all, simulate the entire process; in other words, outline within a few hours what would later take place in detail over several months. That group, be it a working committee or an informal assembly, is thus better prepared to become aware of potential obstacles. The group can then lay out an efficient plan adapted to the specific nature of both the problems at hand and the approach adopted by the group.

Futures workshops, or futures-thinking exercises, are suitable for groups of ten to one-hundred people with a shared experience or interest. They must be people who want to think together about possible and desirable changes with a view to charting a common course and mastering those changes.

The ideal number for a group is thirty. The main group can always be broken down into sub-groups or cells of five to ten. These sub-groups can then participate in different workshops. The laws of group dynamics tend to support at least two sub-groups on anticipating change. This division allows the group leaders or facilitators to later reconvene the two groups as one and compare notes. A sub-group for the clichés or conventional thinking workshop is a must. This workshop usually provides participants with a chance to release tension and speak more openly than usual.

In an ideal world, there would be 30 workshop participants meeting over two days. Obviously thinking about the future requires some mental preparation, a bit of a warm-up and a break from routine thinking. Given the logistics, the actual workshops should start only

in the afternoon of the first day to end in the evening of the second day. The morning of the first day should be an introduction with debate about futures thinking. This initiation includes analysis of the causes of forecasting errors, warnings about clichés and landmarks in planning, e.g. probable trends and major uncertainties. It also shows participants how behavior and structures must be adapted, even transformed, in times of change. This introductory lecture should be thought-provoking, not dry or academic. Ideally participants will want to roll up their shirtsleeves and get started.

Overall, this two-day seminar aims to present the most important, most easily appropriated concepts and tools to participants. Through immersion, the futures workshop seeks to harness the collective thought process and apply it to strategic action. The workshops themselves allow participants to identify and prioritize as a group the stakes that their company or region has in its future environment. Note that the environment may be general or competitive, local or international. After two days, participants are ready to define their priorities and goals, draw up schedules, list methods and organize the follow-up to the workshops.

We have presented these workshops a hundred times over the past fifteen years. Each time the process must be adapted to the context, but little else changes in terms of alternating the participants' passive consumption and active production. The two-day format is preferable for tapping into the group dynamics without overwhelming participants and losing their attention. One day is simply not enough to introduce, explore and apply the concepts and tools mentioned above. And the last thing we want to do is frustrate participants who have just discovered their role in creating futures.

Futures-thinking exercises can spark incredible interest and enthusiasm in participants, as best seen in the BASF example. (Please see the full case study in chapter 8). In short, BASF Agriculture in France met with its distributors over three to four years. The process began with an initial encounter in Venice in 1995.

The workshops serve initially as a launching pad for two processes: collective thinking and mastering change. In some instances, however, it seems that the workshops are actually useful sooner than expected. In the case of BASF, it seemed smart to translate future stakes (results from workshops in terms of related goals), the identification of sub-goals, courses of action, projects and studies contributing to these goals (determined with pertinence trees) and to align the potential reality with studies and projects already under way. As a result, we soon could pinpoint the projects or research missions already undertaken but with an unspecified aim and the main stakes that required new courses of action.

Workshop Outlines

One of the most valuable pre-seminar tools is a basic questionnaire asking participants to list:
    – changes that they have confronted in the past;
    – ways in which they reacted to change;
    – changes that they expect in the future;
    – ways in which they expect to react.

Usually anonymous, the input provides the facilitator or group leader with a crash course in the company's problems and history plus the position of each participant. A summary may be prepared and presented at a plenary session before the workshops begin.

What follows below are thumbnail sketches of the four workshops mentioned earlier.

Anticipating Change and Inertia

This workshop takes place in two phases, exploratory and normative. The first phase answers the question "what can happen?" while the second leads to the question "What can I do?".

Anticipating Change (Exploratory Phase)

List the technological, economic, social and organizational changes that each participant perceives or wants. Each participant then makes his/her own list (15-20 minutes). These ideas are collected and regrouped as each participant around the table is called upon to comment. The entire workshop should take one to two hours.

A simple point system enables everyone to see the five or ten main changes and future stakes among the fifty to seventy originally listed. Although simple, this system places the ideas in a matrix which could be called generically "Importance × Control". The selected changes are graphically displayed and the current level of mastery is evaluated, too. The axis (ordinates) gives the importance of the so-called critical changes while the abscissa (coordinates) gives the current mastery of those changes.
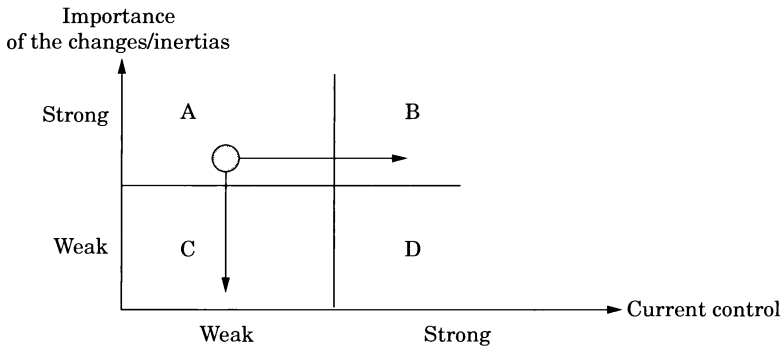
Mastering Change (Normative Phase)

    – Identify strategic objectives in terms of stakes.
    – Take actions and choose the means to reach objectives.
    – Assess the strategic gap or, roughly, the difference between an objective and what will happen if you do not act.

During the normative phase, participants ask the following questions:

    – Who are the other actors (players) implicated by these changes?
    – What "levers", "drivers" or "brakes" are involved in the actions?

– How can we improve our control when dealing with important changes?

– How can we reduce the impact of changes that we do not control?

– In short, how can we reduce our weaknesses and maximize our strengths?

Position with regard to changes and inertias
Matrix: importance versus control

```
Importance
of the changes/inertias
          ▲
Strong  │   A              B
        │      ○──────────────►
  ──────┼──────────────────────
        │      │
Weak    │   C  │           D
        │      │
        │      ▼
  ──────┴──────────────────────────► Current control
          Weak            Strong
```

○ Critical changes & inertias
   How to reduce their importance?
   How to increase their control?

The four zones break down as follows:

Zone A: *Critical changes affecting future stakes. Important changes that we have not yet mastered.*

Zone B: *Important changes already mastered.*

Zone C: *Unimportant changes that are not yet mastered. (Guiltless Weaknesses)*

Zone D: *Important changes that are mastered. We probably talk about them more because we master them. (Useless Strengths)*

From critical changes to action

Critical Changes	Stakes for Company	Corporate Objectives Given These Stakes	Ideas to Apply
1: ...			
2: ...			
3: ...			

Hunting Down Clichés

A cliché, whether true or false, is generally accepted without questioning. As a result, you may have often heard remarks like...
     – "Young people don't know as much as previous generations did";
     – "Americans (Brits, Spaniards, etc) are not good at learning languages";
     – "Consultants are expensive."

In this workshop, participants list individually and then collectively examples of conventional thinking that they hear in their field. Sometimes mentioning a few clichés breaks the ice. Participants soon catch on.

The Top Ten Preconcieved Ideas from Various Workshops

1. The customer knows best.
2. Might makes right.
3. Women take more time off work than men.
4. Consultants are expensive.
5. A good consultant seldom intervenes.
6. Medicine is a product like none other.
7. Bigger is better.
8. Change has to start at the top.
9. Decentralization makes more people responsible but also dilutes responsibility.
10. Insurance companies are a band of thieves.

The facilitator then asks the following questions:
     – can some of these examples of conventional thinking be considered partially true, at least?

If so, why and which ones?
     – how do you explain the popularity of these clichés, this type of thinking?
     – what results do you see from this type of thinking?
     – is there a lesson to be drawn from this analysis?
     – what can be done to correct a cliché if it is negative and what can be done to utilize a cliché if it is positive?

Here is a personal favorite: "Consultants are expensive."

Does this idea have any foundation in fact? Why?

     – Gray matter has no price tag.
     – Service exceeds the billed time (e.g. proposal writing, research, analysis, reports).
     – The cost-benefit ratio must always be considered.
     – It is a net cost for the company.
     – The consultant has a high level of expertise.

– The consultant is efficient and knows how to deal with the problem quickly.

Why does this idea prevail?

– Daily rate versus a salary.
– Recommendations seem obvious when *expost*.
– Weight of history.
– Misunderstood profession.
– Advice is not considered and investment.
– It is not easy to judge what the ROI (return on investment) will be.
– Some recommendations are not followed and thus become expensive!
– Quantity is favored, e.g. the thickness of the report not the quality.
– The consultant's look.
– Since it is expensive, cost is a good excuse for not using a consultant's services.

Consequences of the above

– Undervalued profession.
– Image problem.
– Potential for quick earnings attracts new consultants.
– Small-to-medium-size firms seldom use consultants.

Lessons to be learned...

– Clichés and conventional thinking are based on incomplete and biased information.
– Resistance to something new is strong partly because people have a system of references that they know and trust.
– Any excuse may be a good one to avoid asking difficult questions.

Negotiating between the Short- and Long-Term

Here we ask participants to draw upon their experience.
– What are the advantages and disadvantages of a course of action set out over the long-term, e.g. beyond one year?
– What are the advantages and disadvantages of a course of action set out over the short-term?
– What problems in choosing the short or long-term have you experienced in your field?

Although used less frequently than the others, this workshop suits audiences who admit that futures-thinking exercises hold little appeal for them. We have met negative reactions to futures-thinking among comptrollers as well as human resources directors. Yet no matter what their thoughts on the future may be, they have all faced choosing between the short and long-term in buying equipment, e.g. credit con-

ditions, cost amortization, or in hiring people, e.g. which skills will we need in the future? This workshop provides decisionmaking criteria that enable participants to weigh the advantages between the short- and long-term.

Drawing Competence Trees (Past, Present and Future)

In the1980s, Marc Giget, head of Euroconsult, came up with the concept of a competence tree to assist managers in strategic thinking. Competence trees serve to analyze and evaluate the overall technological, industrial and commercial skills of a company. Properly used, this tool enables one to mobilize the key people involved at a corporation as well as quantify accurately and exhaustively that company's competences.
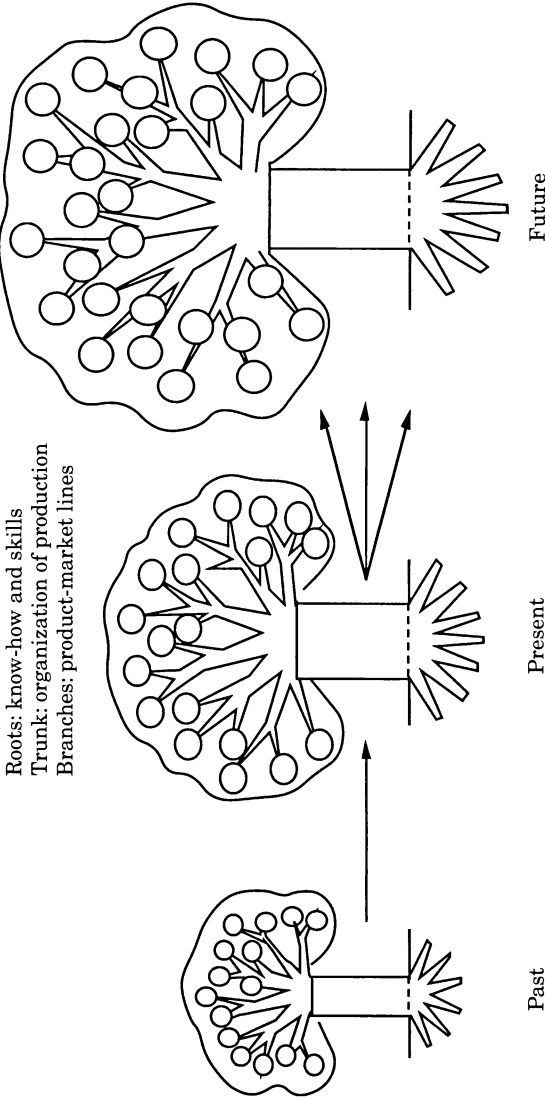
The purpose of the exercise within a workshop is not to come up with a detailed analysis and exact evaluation but rather to use the principle of the competence tree so that the participants or working committee develops a collective vision of reality for the company, city or region under study.

The workshop outline goes as follows:
1) Draw the past tree (20 years) and the present tree according to
– roots (vocation, competence, skills, know-how);
– trunk (implementation, organization);
– branches (product or service lines, markets).

2) Pinpoint the strengths and weaknesses on the tree according to the company's environment, the actors and implementation of strategies.

3) List major changes in the environment, e.g. technological breakthroughs, socio-economic shifts and political movements, that could affect the tree. Note whether these changes are desired, feared or perceived.

4) Match up the parts of the tree (roots, trunk, branches) that correspond to these changes and outline the advantages and limitations of other actors.

5) Build a competence tree for the future, e.g. which products or skills should be kept, discontinued or further developed.

The Competence Tree and Its Dynamic

Roots: know-how and skills
Trunk: organization of production
Branches: product-market lines

Past

Present

Future

The past is unique; analysing it allows us to understand the constants and continuity of the company's business, to improve our knowledge of the company project in its historical reality.

The future is uncertain; its analysis allows us to identify the threats and opportunities presented to the company, and to define the issues and challenges it faces, in order to determine its desired future and to incorporate this future into the company's strategy.

Giget, La conduite de la réflexion et de l'action stratégique dans l'entreprise (Euroconsult, 1988).

Illustration: Regulation of the Telecommunications Industry (Horizon 2010)

The results presented in this section come from a futures-thinking seminar called "Determining Factors in Regulating the Telecommunications Industry (Horizon 2010)". This event took place February 3-4 in 1999 at the French Secretary of State for Industry. The comments and opinions expressed in our report and this section present the different points of view of those in attendance. Nevertheless the opinions are those of the author and co-author, Stéphane Leroy-Therville, do not necessarily reflect those of the specific department or companies involved. Note the full report of this futures-thinking exercise was published in French in the LIPS working paper series, Cahier n° 12 "The Future of Regulation in Telecommunications".

The Context of Futures Thinking

The legislative document which establishes the French federal secretariat of industry, information technology and postal service gives the Sub-Directorate of Telecommunications Regulations responsibility for analysis of the future of those sectors falling under its mandate. Sub-directorate management took the initiative of launching a series of futures-thinking exercises on regulation of telecommunications companies for two reasons.

First of all, the Telecom Review, a revision of the European regulatory framework was starting that year, so France needed to define its position. What was needed was a snapshot of the current situation and an idea of how circumstances may develop along with possible orientations. At the national level, it soon became apparent that principles of economic doctrine were needed to take into account increasingly numerous technologies, converging networks and services, as well as the specific a nature of the local network, often called *the last mile*.

Another vital component in this process was sharing experiences and exploring ideas. This was achieved by bringing together representatives from all the various units of the system under study. In fact representatives from the telecommunications regulatory bodies and administrations from the French telecommunications regulatory body (ART), from the European Union, and also various users such as the French Telegraph and Telecommunications Union (AFUTT) took part. Consultants along with certain experts known in the field also participated. Operators, manufacturers, service providers and distributors were either consulted, later on, or brought on board later as participants in working groups.

During the seminar itself, two workshops (Anticipating and Mastering Change and Hunting Down Clichés) were held. The results from the workshops are presented here first, followed by overall comments or observations.

Major Changes and Clichés Detected during the Workshops

1) Converging services and infrastructures in telecommunications, computers and audiovisual equipment. The main feature that was immediately noted was the mobile versus traditional stationary distinction.

2) Regulatory model, in other words, the level and basis of regulation.

3) Balance between sectoral regulation and competition.

4) Development of e-business/e-commerce.

5) Globalization, in other words, the spread of networks and markets around the world.

6) Sectorial and trans-sectorial alliances among companies involved in the information society.

7) Technological developments (digitization, packet-switching, Internet protocol).

8) The local system and ungrouping, last mile, legal rights, etc.

9) Consideration of market demand and pressure.

10) Standardization, in terms of harmonization, be it *de facto* or already underway.

11) Importance of satellites, groups of satellites and geostationary satellites.

12) Development of added value from transmission to content.

13) Role of the State: Actor or Arbitrator?

All of the above appears in the following diagram.

Hunting Down Clichés about the Telecommunications Sector

This workshop follows the format of the so-called change workshop. The first step involves listing clichés or pearls of conventional thinking both individually and collectively. In this exercise, a cliché, or preconceived idea, is part of what we call conventional thinking. It is an idea that has been accepted by the participants or by the public without any debate or critical thinking.

Proving or Disproving Clichés

The process of confirming clichés and debating them proved very stimulating in this field. The following charts show how the process goes right to the core of each cliché.

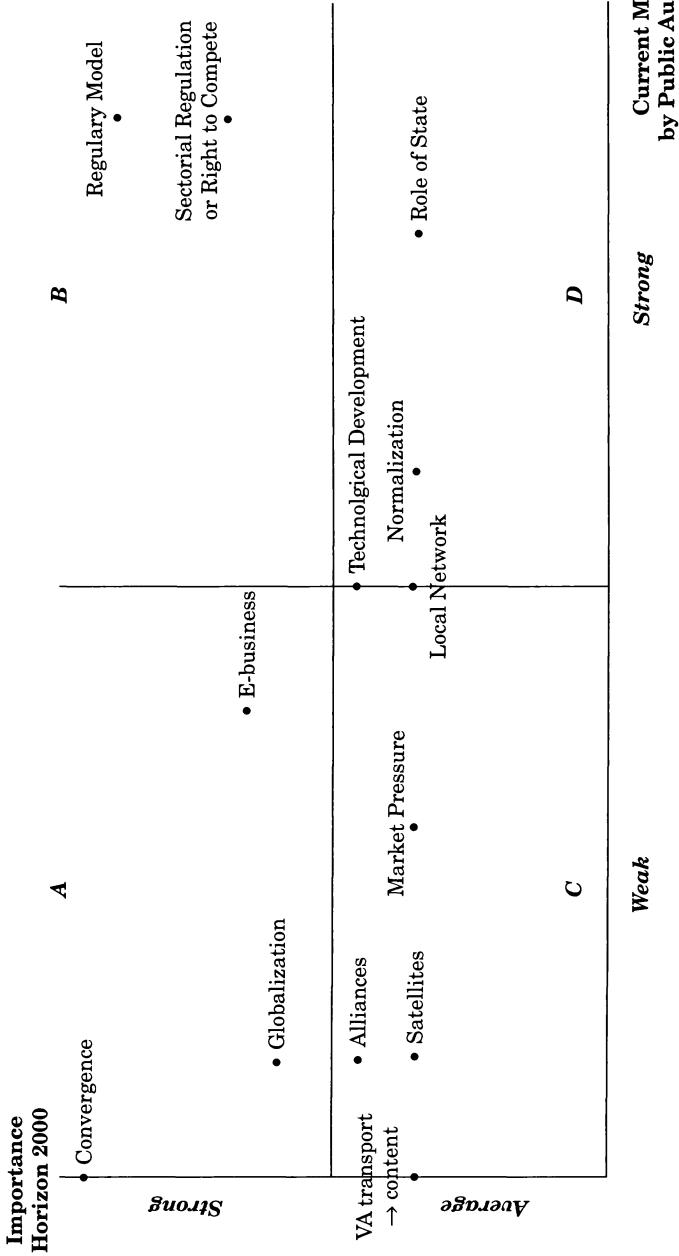### *Among the 17 main clichés, the first one was:*

"Promoting universal Internet access is vital to France's competitiveness."

Statements that disprove...

This is only one dimension among many.

The economic rules affecting the Internet have not yet stabilized.

The Internet is not safe and does not make the public feel safe.

Importance
Horizon 2000

Strong

Average

VA transport
→ content

A

B

C

D

- Convergence
- Globalization
- Alliances
- Satellites
- Market Pressure
- E-business
- Technolgical Development
- Normalization
- Local Network
- Regulary Model
- Sectorial Regulation or Right to Compete
- Role of State

Weak   *Strong*

Current Mastery
by Public Authorities

Zone A: Critical changes, future stakes. These are the major changes that are not mastered currently. One strategy here might be to increase mastery or reduce the importance of the stakes in this zone.
Zone B: Major changes well mastered.
Zone C: Unimportant changes, not well mastered (no serious consequences).
Zone D: Unimportant changes, well mastered (do not focus on this zone).

There is a danger of building a virtual society, at the expense of the real society.

The Internet is is just a fad.

France is not behind technologically.

The important thing is to master usage and not spread the tools.

Universal Internet access plus illiteracy?

Statements that prove...

There is an increase in business on the Internet (e-business or e-commerce).

There is a "club effect" at work among the actors, thus increasing new uses.

Telephone services, such as VoIP, are developing on the Internet.

Increased productivity is linked to the circulation of information. This decreases the price of information.

It is a tool serving research and innovation.

It is a self-fulfilling prophecy.

This facilitates the economic reach of certain regions, thus breaking down enclaves.

The younger generation is interested (an age gap may form).

It is a competitive component in the telecommunications sector.

It is a weapon in the war against illiteracy.

The second cliché off the top of the list: "Telecoms, computer and multimedia firms will merge."

Statements that disprove...

Limits to wireless technology may slow down any attempts to merge.

Global regulation is required; an idea that does not please either the economic actors or the regulators.

Industrial logic is contradictory over the long-term, (questions of diversity and mass distribution).

In multimedia, mergers might slow down the penetration of certain markets.

Statements that prove...

Technology allows for it.

There is already a convergence in the technologies involved.

The actors' strategies are heading that way.

There is a will within the industry to provide a complete offer, all around the world.

The movement has already begun.

Distributors must maximize their channels; producers must show their programmes.

From Key Issues to Actor's Strategies

An initial analysis of the results from the three workshop groups reveals a high degree of similarity among participants' perspectives.

Key differences appear in the importance that they assigned to fore-seen changes or to the corresponding clichés. In this sense, the changes cited the most often by the first two groups are convergence (networks, services, sectors), the regulatory model, problems at the local level and management of scarce resources. The main clichés or preconceived ideas elicit exactly the same topics. The telecom, cliché workshop is typical, yet especially enriching when we look back now.

At this stage; four issues appeared:
Issue 1
Converging services, networks and markets.
Issue 2
The Evolving Regulatory Model.
Issue 3
Problems in the "Last Mile" or Local Network.
Issue 4
Management of Rare Resources at the National; Regional or Inter-national Level.

On the basis of their analyses, the working groups decided that French public authorities had a rather mediocre mastery of these issues. Yet these are key stakes which need to be monitored closely.

Workshops provide an initial image of the system, but conclusions must be translated into action. Two strategy workshops follow the "changes" and "clichés" workshops so that participants can plot possible courses of action. Workshops and follow-up usually take a few meetings. In this case, two groups were formed. Half the participants worked on the analysis of actors' strategies; the other half worked on building scenarios through morphological analysis. Their results follow with comments.

By analyzing actors' strategies, confronting their agendas, and con-sidering the balance of power, participants can see how strategic stakes are evolving. They can then ask key questions about the future. In this instance, the group used the Mactor method to consider issues and consequences of foreseeable conflicts. (For the Mactor method, see the BASF case study, chapter 8, or *From Anticipation to Action* pub-lished by Unesco, 1994.)

The main changes identified during the previous sessions of this workshop were translated as stakes for regulation. The participants then identifed the actors associated with each "battlefield". The group thus built a list of actors who play a leading or supporting role in the telecommunication sector or whose views could fall in the balance when making certain decisions. The group then constructed a matrix "Actors × Actors" which pinpoints the powers that each actor has over the others, analyzes the balance of power associated with the stakes set out initially and then lists, as follows, the information.

This group tackled the issues through seven stakes. The actors influencing each stake were then listed in the next column.

Stakes	Associated Actors
E1: Regulation Model	European Commission, government, ART, CSA, operators, media
E2: Anti-trust Legislation	European Union, government, WCC (Geneva), Justice Dept./Min.
E3: Convergence Voice-Data	Industrials, operators
E4: Mode of Access to Subscriber	Industrials, operators, ART, government,
E5: Interoperablility/compatibility	Industrials, operators, ETSI, public authority
E6: Frequency Management	Public authority, NGOs
E7: Market	Government, consumers, operators, media

A list of actors was then drawn up as follows:
A1: Europe (standards, justice dept. EU).
A2: Government.
A3: ART.
A4: CSA.
A5: Territorial groups.
A6: Investors.
A7: Historical operator.
A8: New operators.
A9: Equipment suppliers.
A10: Distributors.
A11: Corporate customers.
A12: Private customers.
A13: Media.

With a Few Improvements for Better Thinking

First of all, the list of actors seems too limited, especially in terms of legal power. Legislation could play a key role in competition over the next ten years. Think of the AT&T case which launched the telephone wars in the United States. The state's opinion on the various law suits brought to court by local collectivities also indicates the role that the legal system may have in the European telecom landscape to come. Yet, in general, the European justice system does not have the same checks and balances or self-regulating tradition as the American, and the telecommunications sector is currently regulated sectorally and controlled by public agencies.

Here the working group decided to water-down the national and European judicial power potential into the actors considered public authorities. Nevertheless, a more detailed analysis will surely rank the legal system as a full-fledged actor on its own.

Second, the list excludes international aspects and focuses on Europe. The external world is considered benevolent, at best, and non-existent, at worst. Yet, nowadays, most battlefields are chosen by the Americans who essentially oblige the Europeans to follow along. The decisions made in Asia, notably Japan, will also likely have an influence on several choices for the future. The list could be extended by taking international pressures into account.

Leading to Four Initial Scenarios

A path, in other words, a combination associating a configuration from each dimension is a scenario. Without considering the incompatibilities, the array of possible futures according to these dimensions and configurations generates $2 \times 3 \times 3 \times 3 = 54$ scenarios. By introducing limits like exclusion and preference, this "morphological space" may be reduced. Within the time allotted for this exercise, the group was able to tease out four paths without analyzing them.

The four paths or scenarios were given easy-to-understand and retain titles:
1) Much Ado about Nothing.
2) The Information Society.
3) Happy Few.
4) Major Trusts.

More and More Technology; Less and Less Security

This exercise helped participants map out the major forces in telecom scenarios developed by others over the previous few years. When aligned, the various scenarios reveal a few gaps. First, the technology dimension was highlighted whereas most experts agree that while technology will remain a basic tool in actors' strategies and their transactions, it is not shaping the market as much as before. Indeed from this point on, marketing and the service/product offer itself are dominating the system and from an increasingly short-term perspective. The reign of engineers has given way to that of merchants before what may be the advent of the consumer. Nevertheless, the inertia factors, considered very strong in the telecommunications sector, must be kept in mind at all times.

However, consumers are concerned about the security of their transactions as well as risks of violation of privacy. Security systems may well condition the development of new communication tools. Indeed, this dimension seems to have been glossed over in the scenarios presented.

Although catchy, the title given to the first scenario should not act as a smoke screen. Even if the effects of opening up this sector to competition did not have the impact expected; even if the national champions and local monopolies have held their ground, the telecommunica-

tions sector will never be able to go back to the situation at the beginning of the information age. The behaviour of both the actors and consumers has already been not only greatly but also permanently modified.

The weakness in the second scenario, "Information Society", lies in the plurality of the information society. There are many societies not one, if we take into account usage and possible changes in lifestyle as well as in products that are truly accepted. Of course, the impact of technology may be positive or negative, thus this scenario could easily be refined and subdivided.

A Few Lessons from the Basque Region 2010 Exercise

The territorial foresight exercises done for the Basque Region with a horizon of 2010 is exemplary in more ways than one. [1] Started in 1992 with the support of the regional French government agency, and with the participation of active territorial forces in workshops which brought over one-hundred people to St Palais (elected representatives, economic agents, academics) for two days. These endeavours led to the publication of entire pages in the regional newspapers and continued to do so for some two years. A structural analysis was carried out and scenarios were drafted. The group involvement process led to an outline of the development of the territory and serve as a reference to this very day.

We thus were able to test in the field during the Basque exercise the main idea expressed by Philippe Gabillet (1999) [2] throughout his work entitled "Savoir anticiper"; in other words, "the same tools, the same mental and intellectual processes enable a collectivity, a group, even an isolated individual to project itself/himself into the future". The charter of the Basque exercise was simply transposed from the one we had helped create for the Mides Operation at Renault in 1984. The same collective and participatory methods applied to the 1992 Basque country exercise and almost the same rules of the game as those used at Renault.

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1. Although often quoted, few articles have been written on this topic notably because of the modesty of François Bourse, the main facilitator, who succeeded me in the follow-up to the initial launching seminar. The Basque exercise is nonetheless outlined in the group publication "Projectique" published by Economica in 1996, under the direction of Jean-Michel Larrasquet et al.
2. Philippe Gabillet, "Savoir Anticiper". ESF Editeurs, 1999.

Basque Region 2010

A Charter Designed to Put Futures Thinking into Action. (extracts)

A Need, A Will
In the face of an ever-changing world, what do we want for the Basque Region? That the territory changes with us, without us or against us? To liberate the Basque region from the tyranny of hazard and determinism and to restore the future as the fruit of will, some foresight was needed. Futures-thinking exercises are no longer the domain of only a handful of specialists or the fare of large corporations only. In the case of the Basque region, like other territories, does not want to only suffer its fate but rather to master it.

Foresight, be it for a city, region or any other unity, provides a unique opportunity to surpass the short-term constrictions and limitations and make all those involved aware of the need to change habits and behaviours in order to face change. To do that, we must rely on local expertise and use the exercise as a chance to crystallise skills that are often spread out in the region.

A State of Mind
The Basque Region 2010 exercise was also a state of mind, inspired by the following:

Opening and anticipation
– Understand better what is going on around us and know how to distinguish limits and opportunities so as to influence them or adapt to them in order to face them.

Pluralism and cooperation
– Recognize and accept our differences.
– Take into account contradictory opinions, e.g., knowing how to listen, one of the fundamentals of cooperation.
– Know how not to abandon one's options or responsibilities, this is the basis of relationships in the social world.

Method and imagination
– Set out the problem properly and seek to solve them.
– Promote participation from each individual present.
– Stimulate imagination and creativity.
– Highlight all the possible choices, their advantages and disadvantages.
– Associate all the actors involved at all levels of thinking and decision-making processes.
These are the principles that guarantee that a solution corresponds to both the problems and needs of those involved.

Autonomy and responsibility
– Take into greater account the aspirations of the people working or active in the organisation of everyday life.
– Base authority on the capacity to motivate men, to pool their skills together
– Define fully at every level of local life and in an organized manner, clear and measurable objectives.
These are the principles that guarantee each participant a zone of independence equal to the measure of the responsibilities that he/she is assigned.

Practical Guide for *Strategic Prospective*

First, one unofficial statistic: many futures-thinking exercises have motivated many people in a rich, collective process; whereas not too many have led to real, implemented action. Without harping, the voice of experience urges us to improve the functional side of creating futures with some practical advice.

The first condition (a *sine qua non!*) is to identify the source of the origin and the nature of the request for a futures-thinking exercise. In marketing terms, who is the client? If we continue the checklist, there are at least five key questions.

1) What position/power does the client hold within the corporate hierarchy?

2) What is the real problem or issue presented?

3) Who are the other actors involved?

4) How can they become involved in the process?

5) How does this exercise fit into the corporate culture of the client?

The most important yet often ignored condition is time. What is the timeframe or the final deadline? We have memories of major corporate clients (Renault, the Post Office, William Saurin, Péchiney) who had good intentions but was unable to embody those intentions due to a subsequent change of leadership. Many futures projects suddenly die when the pioneering executive who started the process leaves the company. Successors rarely continue projects started by their predecessors. It is important to have corporate executives personally committed to the project and active in the steering committee. It is also important that this committee have enough time for the collective thinking activities without dragging them on for too long.

The Components and Functions of the Technical group

The mandate and tasks of each group or committee must be made clear from the start. (A checklist including request source, problem, report recipients and deadline should be given.) Intermediary documents and the final report should be the responsibility of the technical group which reports regularly to the steering committee.

Each group should have some type of leader or representative chosen by the group once it has been formed. This leader will also act as facilitator and coordinate the various tasks performed by group members. This "pilot" must be prepared to follow the course previously elaborated and complete the mandate. In other words, the leader must set an example by monitoring activity, modifying tools but not goals, and, of course, meeting deadlines.

Launching Workshops to Initiate the Process

In our experience, a two-day, on-site seminar starts the futures process off right. Participants become group members initiated in the ways and means that may prove effective in the futures-thinking activities to follow. In this way, the group is not only consumer but also producer. The product remains the same: thought on the future. The group is ready to dive in when the workshops outlined earlier begin.

After the two days, the group is better prepared to determine the topic and define the work method jointly. The method is not fully validated until a later meeting by which time participants have had time to step back and look objectively at the process.

Organizing and Assigning Tasks

Our rule of thumb…
   – three or four meetings as the process is getting started;
   – at least three meetings annually when at "cruising speed";
   – then three to four meetings clustered near the conclusion. Again, experience shows that it is smart to set the dates of meetings and their objectives at least five to six sessions ahead of time.

Basic Housekeeping Tips

   – Always present an agenda and take the minutes at meetings.
   – During meetings every group member should give a progress report on his/her area.
   – At the end of each meeting, each participant's tasks and the agenda for the next meeting should be reviewed.

Over the course of the full futures-thinking exercise, specialists (internal or external) should be called in for advice on specific fields or applications. If possible, the expert could make a presentation, answer questions and a summary could be circulated almost immediately. If necessary, assistance or expertise may be subcontracted, e.g. in specific technical or sectoral issues.

Forming a team or working group is never easy. Group dynamics always require some effort. The hardest part is choosing an in-house leader or facilitator who can invest company and even personal time in the process. The facilitator prepares meetings, writes summaries, takes notes and encourages groups members' participation by delegating tasks. The group leader or facilitator must also foresee the various stages, problems and methods and schedule accordingly.

Here the outside consultant may prove very useful. An experienced expert not only enhances methodology but also reacts to the group's ideas, and stimulates debate. The outside expert is not needed at all meetings. The in-house facilitator should call upon a specialist or consultant only as needed.

Choosing the Right Method: Efficiency, Motivation and Communication

No single method is imposed, but choosing a method determines how efficient the meetings will be. In other words, without a method, there is no common language, no exchange, little consistency, and few structured ideas. Nevertheless, choosing a method is not the be all and end all. We do not want to become a prisoner to the results of one method. As mentioned before, a method is a tool, among several, that helps people think better, together, about the future.

A rigorous method is a necessary factor if the group is to stick together and stay motivated. Partial results contribute to this group dynamic and should be distributed. Lastly, the choice of method must correspond to the problem(s) presented in the initial seminar, the timeframe and the way in which the results will be presented. The tools chosen must be sufficiently simple as to allow the users to appropriate them.

In the end, advice, be it on using coloured pens or from contractual consultants, should be taken and taken and adapted to fit the organization's needs. The one definite obligation is preparation (agenda, objectives, method selection, proposals, etc.) Of course in the futures workshops, we use less systematic but nonetheless effective working methods e.g. imposed "time- out periods" of silence a rare feature in any group activity and a simple voting system.

A Process Rather than a Final Report

The credibility, utility and quality of a futures-thinking exercise depend on the participants' respecting certain conditions. A common breach is to subcontract thinking about the future to an outside firm or consultant. Far too many corporations and even regions have thought that hiring a well-known management consulting firm was the best idea. They missed the point. In any futures study, the final report counts for less than the process leading up to it. It is, therefore, more important to draw upon local or internal talent and use the futures-thinking exercise as a way to change the way people think and behave. The idea is to "think globally but act locally" so that participants can truly be part of the creative process in a company.

Before undertaking the more or less onerous exercise of forward-looking strategic analysis, it is advisable to take time to reflect on the nature of the problem posed and the approach to be used to find and implement solutions. This will make it possible to avoid wasting time on false problems and to frame the problem clearly, which is half the battle towards finding a solution. When beginning this process of reflection, which can often involve dozens of people for many months, it is also useful to plan that the overall procedure follow a timetable of intermediate objectives and deadlines and by choosing methods that are not only adapted to the nature of the problem identified, but also to the time and resource constraints of the futures-thinking group.

Whatever the procedure adopted, it is useful to begin this collective reflection process with a two-day seminar devoted to training participants in Strategic Prospective analysis. This seminar enables participants to discover and familiarise themselves with the main concepts and tools of collective Strategic Prospective analysis. The purpose of this seminar, in which several dozen persons may be involved, is the total immersion of participants in foresight thinking aimed at strategic action. Such workshops try to frame the problem clearly and dispel any prejudices and stereotypes that distort perception of the issues. They make it possible collectively to define and prioritise the future challenges facing the enterprise in its national and international environment. At the end of these two days, the participants are able to specify the priorities, objectives, timetable and method to be used to organise their Strategic Prospective reflection. [1]

Although there is no single, set method for this process, it is indispensable that a method be chosen for the meetings to be effective, for without a method, there can be no common language, exchange or consistent framework for ideas. However, the method is not an end in itself, and the results produced must not be followed slavishly, for it is only a tool to help ensure the relevance of the reflection process. A rigorous method is also an invaluable factor for promoting the cohesiveness and motivation of the group, as are the intermediary results, which should be disseminated.

Lastly, the method should be chosen in the light of the problems identified (see the initial seminar) and the time constraints, and with a concern for communicating the results. The tools should be sufficiently simple to be easily used by participants.

Recommendations for Regional Foresight

Since I have had the opportunity of becoming either familiar or directly involved with a number of forward-looking territorial exercises (Basque Country 2010, Reunion Island, Lorraine 2010, Ardennes, Ille-et-Vilaine, Pyrénées Atlantiques, Martinique, etc.), I would like to share some of the lessons learnt from their successes and failures.

First, certain conditions must be met to ensure the credibility, usefulness and quality of regional foresight. It is essential that the process of contemplating an area's future not be outsourced completely.

In any study, regardless of its quality, the final report is less important than the process leading up to it. In this respect, it is important to

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1. A comprehensive description of forward-looking analysis workshops was published in the *Cahiers du Lips, No. 12, "L'avenir de la réglementation des télécommunications, Etats des lieux et ateliers de prospective"*, by Stéphane Leroy-Therville, March 2000.

rely on local expertise and to use the forward-looking exercise to trig-
ger a process of change, at least in people's minds. The goal is not so
much one of completing a forward-looking study than initiating a pro-
cess of participatory reflection and discussion. Stimulating thinking
on overall issues at the local level can make actors want to come
together and agree to support one or more projects for an area.

The use of three colours for the three phases of regional foresight

– Using three colours (blue for "foresight", yellow for "ownership" and
green for "action"), it is possible to organise regional foresight in three
separate phases for which three types of documents can be produced:
– a blue book. The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of
the past, present and future environment of the area. On the basis of
summary key figures, it includes elements of a diagnosis; it identifies
problem areas and indicates probable trends, major uncertainties and
possible future crises. This document, which is intended as a mono-
graphic study, can largely be outsourced to an external consultant;
– yellow books in which each operational centre makes its proposals for
local action to prepare for the overall changes foreseen in the blue book
(pre-activity), but also to achieve the strategic objectives and local
projects (pro-activity). These yellow books can be prepared by depart-
ments in enterprises or in local and regional authorities, and embody the
collective ownership of the forward-looking regional foresight;
– a green book proposing an overall strategic plan for the area of the
region and city, listing each objective and the corresponding action. It is
a synthesis of the blue and yellow books. This green book is a strategic
document that commits leaders and elected officials. It is therefore pro-
duced under their sole responsibility.

The tools of business foresight can be used just as effectively in ter-
ritorial foresight since both methods aim at planning and organising a
collective reflection process while they also facilitate communication
and promote more creative and collective thinking.

However, regional foresight is more difficult than business fore-
sight for the consultants involved. The origin and purposes of their
mandate are rarely clear, the actors have many and often contradic-
tory expectations and the financial resources are not always adequate
for the objectives targeted. In short, the consultant is the perfect tar-
get when the inconsistencies become too great. The safest approach in
terms of image – and the one that is simplest to communicate and eas-
iest for consultants – is to settle for a traditional study report. Unfor-
tunately, this solution has little operational value or lasting effect, for
it ignores the fact that unless local actors appropriate the process, it
will be impossible to bridge the gap between foresight and action.