Futures and foresight

Sharing models and practical tools

Q is led by the Health Foundation
and supported by partners across
the UK and Ireland

What do we mean by futures and foresight?

Futures and foresight methodologies encourage and support us to think about and plan strategically for the future.

- **They are less about predicting the future:** though they are based on the fact that the future is not predetermined, and actions taken now will help shape what comes next.
- **They are more about helping us to make sense of the present:** to identify trends, map alternative futures, and come up with plans for how to reach the future that we most desire.

Futures and health care

- Futures work can be particularly useful in health care, as many of the models acknowledge and pay attention to the complexity that exists in systems.
- While futures theory is used most in policy or academia, there are many tools and methods that have been developed or adapted for teams and organisations as part of planning and strategy development.
- On the following slides, we have provided some introductory information on models that you may find helpful.

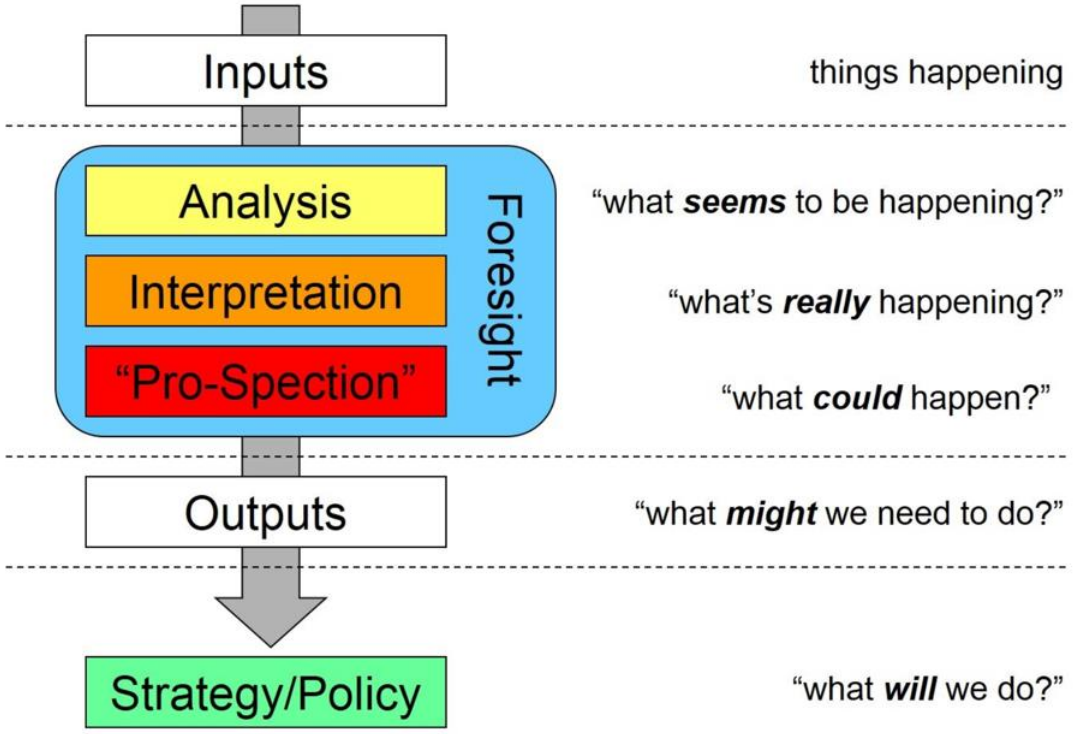
Shaping Health Futures

The Health Foundation is leading a programme of work that explores long-term issues impacting health and social care, and their implications for policy.

You can find out more about this programme on our website.

Generic foresight process

- One of the most common models is the ***generic foresight process***, from Joseph Voros.
- It shows the phases you need to move between and, in particular, the questions that need to be explored at each stage.
- On the next slide we've provided a bit more detail on each phase and the tools that might be helpful as you work through.

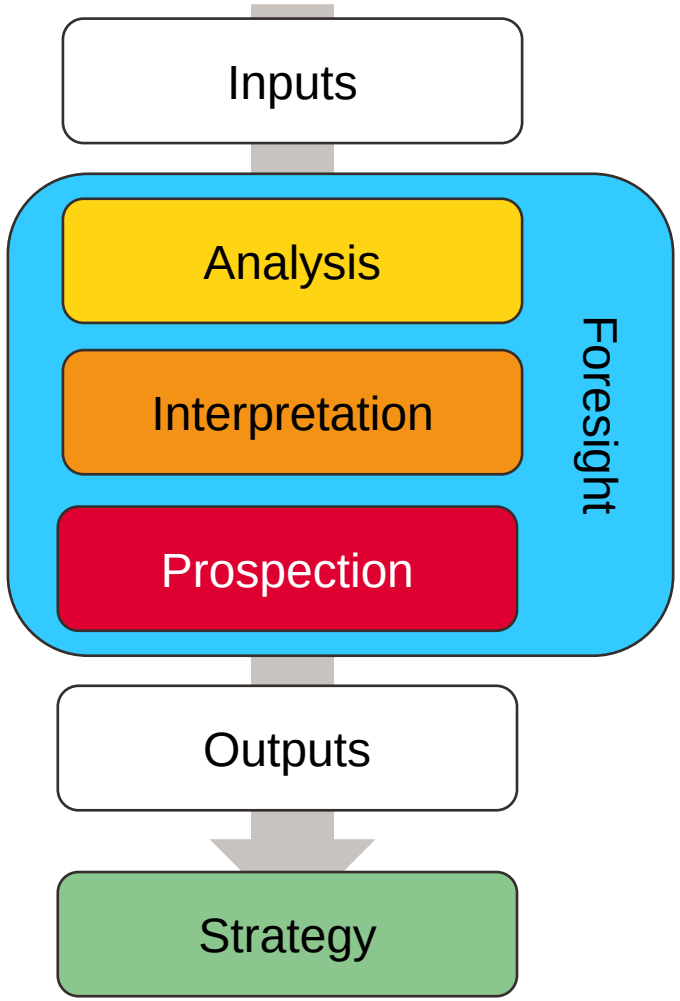


Joseph Voros, Generic Foresight Process, 2003

Find out more:

- Joseph Voros - A generic foresight process framework
- Thinking Futures - foresight approaches
- Joseph Voros, The futures cone use and history

Generic foresight process



Things happening

What **seems** to be happening?

What's **really** happening?

What **could** happen?

What **might** we do?

What **will** we do?

Tools to consider

- **Three horizons**
- **Iceberg model**
- **Scenario planning**

Joseph Voros, Generic Foresight Process, 2003

Generic foresight process: the phases

Inputs

This phase can include scanning the external environment to identify changes with potential to shape the future of your organisation.

Tools can include: PESTLE, STEEP

Analysis

This phase includes analysing what you have seen, spotting patterns or major shifts, to understand the one that matters for your organisation.

Tools can include: Trend analysis tools, Three Horizons

Interpretation

This phase encourages a deeper understanding of forces for change, surfacing unquestioned assumptions and biases.

Tools can include: Causal layered analysis

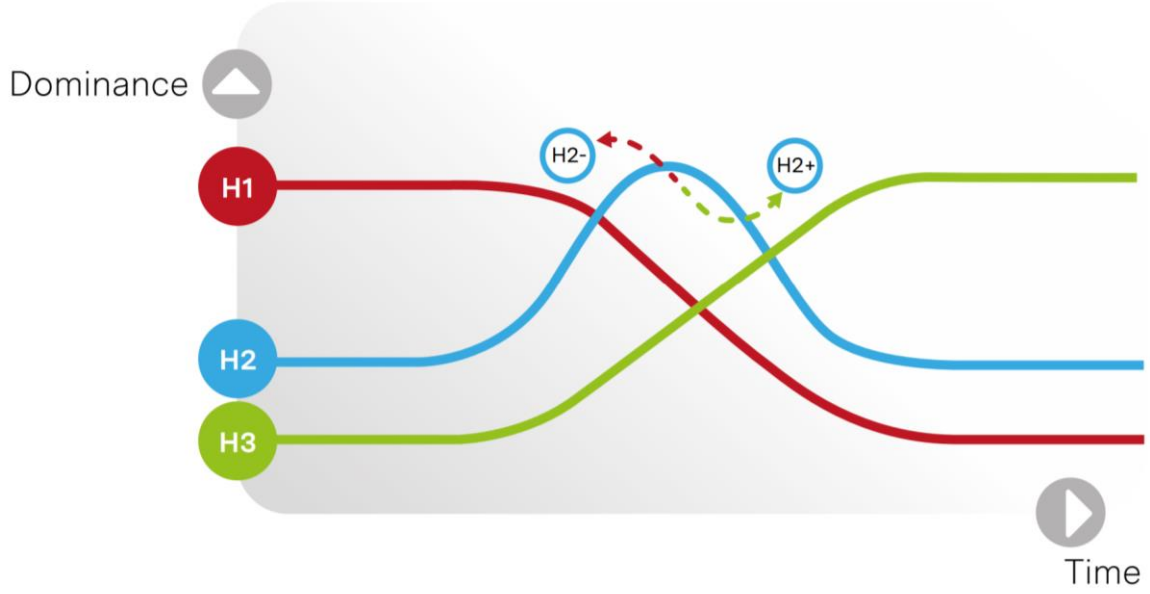
Prospection

This phase includes purposefully looking forward to explore alternative futures: potential, possible, probably, plausible, preferred.

Tools can include: Scenario planning

Three horizons model

The **three horizons model** was developed by Bill Sharpe at International Futures Forum. It is a visual model that can work well to support group discussions.



Bill Sharpe, Three horizons: The patterning of hope
Graphic by Public Health Wales, Three horizons: A toolkit to help you think and plan for the long-term

The **vertical axis** is about dominance and the **horizontal axis** shows time.

The model shows that in most scenarios there is a dominant way of doing things right now (horizon 1).

In the future, this will be replaced by a completely different way of doing things (horizon 3).

Changes and innovations that take place between them can both speed up and slow down this change (horizon 2).

On the next slide we have described each of the horizons in more detail.

Find out more:

Bill Sharpe - Three Horizons: The patterning of hope

Three horizons: the phases

Horizon 1

- This is the most dominant way of doing things right now: the current situation.
- The model assumes that eventually the way we do things now will be superseded by new, better ways.
- The systems and processes that are working fine at the moment, will become less and less fit for purpose as the context changes.

Horizon 3

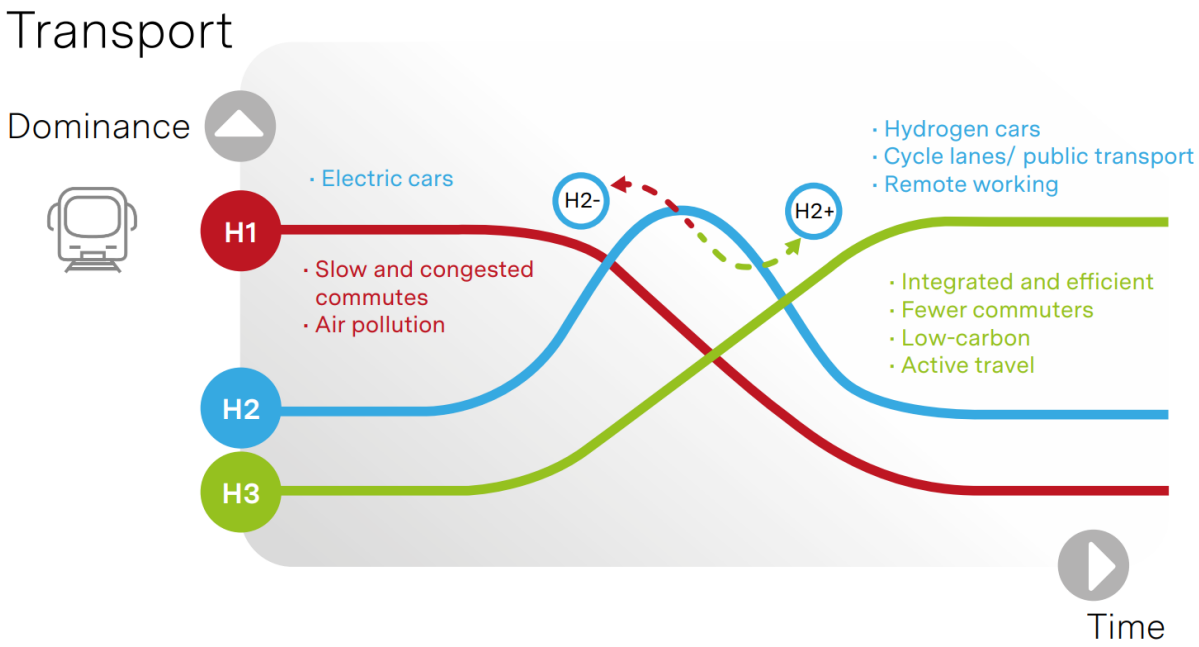
- This is the way we want things to work in the future.
- It represents a completely different way of working. This will in time become it's own H1 or new normal.
- It points out that there will be some pockets of H3 happening now, in the fringes, even though it's nowhere near a dominant model.
- This means thinking about the future doesn't need to be about predicting the future, rather being able to spot emerging trends.

Horizon 2

- These are the innovations that help make the transition between the two different world views.
- Innovations can either help to maintain the status quo, by making H1 successful for longer, or they can help speed up the process for reaching H3.

A worked example from Public Health Wales

- This example is about transport
- **Horizon 1:** The dominant transport model right now includes slow and congested commutes, with high levels of traffic and pollution.
- **Horizon 2:** Electric cars, while feeling innovative, may reinforce many of the current problems. Most electricity is still being made by burning fuels and roads are still being built to prioritise cars. More ambitious changes relate to infrastructure changes towards cycling and public transport, and increased remote working as we're seeing at scale during COVID.
- **Horizon 3:** To move away from a car-dominated society we will need to embrace flexible working, encourage active travel and the wider decarbonisation agenda.



Public Health Wales, Three horizons: A toolkit to help you think and plan for the long-term

Activities you can try

Practical ways to use futures in your work

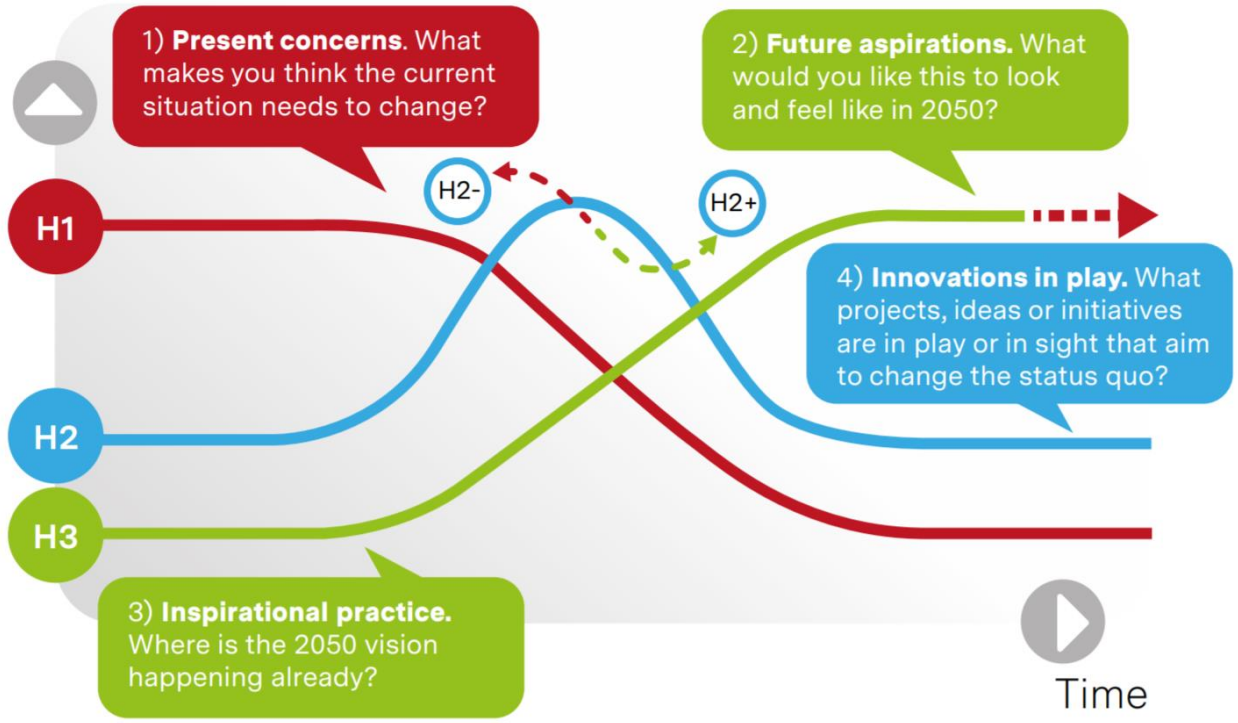
Using the three horizons model in teams

Three horizons can be used in lots of different ways, including:

- Helping you to make sense of trends and emerging changes
- Helping you to understand different perspectives about change
- Coming up with ideas for innovations

There are lots of activities in the Public Health Wales toolkit including this simple activity exploring four key questions about the horizons.

You can find other resources in the International Training Centre - Foresight toolkit



Exercise from Public Health Wales, Three horizons: A toolkit to help you think and plan for the long-term

The Iceberg model

Scenario planning using the 4 Ps

If your team is planning to identify potential futures, you may find it helpful to discuss which of them is possible, plausible, probable, and preferable. This is a very common model in foresight that can be used in lots of different ways. Here we've pulled out some of the main questions for you to explore.

Possible What might happen?	• Focus on **divergent** thinking. What futures can you imagine? • What is the best and the worst case?
Plausible What could happen?	• Focus on **convergent** thinking. What is feasible from the scenarios you've already identified?
Probable What is likely to happen?	• Focus on **analytic** and **systems** thinking. What events would need to happen to make this future a reality? What assumptions are we making?
Preferable What do you want to happen?	• Focus on the preferred **future state.** What do you want to happen and what choices can you make now?