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Fred Phillips

What About the Future?

New Perspectives on Planning,
Forecasting and Complexity

Fred Phillips
Anderson School of Management
University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, NM, USA

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I dedicate this book to the memory of my mentor Hal Linstone (1924–2016). I refer readers to Hal's Remembrance, in Technological Forecasting and Social Change, volume 111, page 1, 2016.

Preface

As Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, I've accumulated what seems to be a lot of books about the future. I can't complain. As so little is known about the future, how much can be written about it? Surely my colleagues in the history department are burdened with many, many more books!

Anyway, books on the future seem to fall into two kinds. The first kind makes specific predictions of social and technological developments and tells companies what they should do about them. The second kind are textbooks and manuals on forecasting techniques. Their topic coverage, it seems to me, does not provide what modern readers need.

Readers need to know how to form a fundamental perspective about the future—before they start to try to predict things.

Who are these readers? Students and graduates, whether they find themselves in the workplace yet or not, need such a perspective. (Or more accurately, the skills to form their own perspective. These skills are rarely taught in schools or universities.) Students taking a first course in strategy or public planning need this guidance for professional as well as personal reasons. As futurist Peter Bishop remarked, "It is critical to empower young people by showing them how to anticipate a range of possibilities and to influence the course of events."

Researchers, corporate strategists, practicing futurists, and government and NGO officials engaging in foresight exercises should occasionally "go back to basics," to firm up the foundations of their work. The ideas herein should help them in that regard.

I have assumed that all readers of this book work or study in an organization of some kind, or are about to, and are concerned about organizational, political, and personal/family futures. This book's examples move from each of those domains to another, sometimes abruptly, though the jumps should not be hard to follow.

Yet the book's main focus is on the individual. Readers will work for, or start, many companies during their working life. The average number of years any firm stays in the Fortune 500 continues to drop. I won't try to buck that tide by giving advice to companies. People, not firms, need this book's ideas. If they can then help their companies, so much the better.

I've written in a casual but precise style that should make the book easily digestible yet practically useful for all. I hope, also, to convince readers that the often simple perspectives presented here have serious and far-reaching implications.

Students and researchers may appreciate the footnoted citations. All readers are free to ignore the footnotes and just enjoy the text. Helpful “takeaways” at the end of each chapter summarize the most useful bits.

Some passages are updates, condensations, or expansions of material published earlier in scattered form, in my 2001 book *Market-Oriented Technology Management: Innovating for Profit in Entrepreneurial Times*, in my blogs, or in articles I’ve written for *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, herein brought together in a more useful format. Most of this book, however, is newly written. I hope it fills the gap between what’s in currently available books (on the one hand) and what readers need (on the other).

The book reflects the “multiple perspectives” and systems-thinking viewpoints pioneered in *TF&SC* by Dr. Harold Linstone, founding editor of the journal. I resonated with these viewpoints before becoming involved with the journal, extended them together with Hal during the years we worked together on the journal, and continued to embrace them when Hal handed the reins of the journal to me.

Albuquerque, NM
June 2019

Fred Phillips

Acknowledgments

My grandfather, Leon Julius Brandt, was a printer by trade. He painstakingly set letter type and engraved plates, by hand. This plate of his eerily asks, “What about the future?” As I desktop-typeset this book on Microsoft Word for Mac, changing fonts at will and in seconds, I say to his ghost, “Well, Leon, this is it!”



My father, Herbert Phillips, an inventor who also took engineering into the public policy arena, inspired my own approach to career and to this book. I also wish to acknowledge the nearly 100 members of the *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* editorial board, from whom I’ve learned so much and whose ideas, directly or indirectly, are reflected in this book. In particular, Leonid Gokhberg and Dirk Meissner of the Higher School of Economics in Moscow, editors of the *Science, Technology and Innovation Studies* series at Springer, initially spurred the idea for this book.

Thanks as well to my research assistant, La Anh Alice Nguyen, to illustrator Lily Nguyen, and to the institutions that have supported my writing time: Yuan Ze and National Chengchi Universities in Taiwan; University of New Mexico, USA; and the Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research at the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) in China. Peng Lu, Guo Baishu, and Jin Gui of CAS helped with final details.

Excerpts from F. Phillips, “Triple Helix and the Circle of Innovation.” *Journal of Contemporary Eastern Asia* (JCEA). Vol. 13, No. 1, April/May 2014, 57-68, are presented here under the journal’s Creative Commons license.

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- F. Phillips and H. Linstone, “Key Ideas from a 25-Year Collaboration at TFSC.” *Technological Forecasting & Social Change*, Vol. 105, pp.158–166, April, 2016.
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About the Author

Fred Phillips is Editor-in-Chief of the international journal *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*. He is currently a Professor at the University of New Mexico and Visiting Scientist at the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Beijing. He is the 2017 winner of the Kondratieff Medal, awarded by the Russian Academy of Sciences, and 2019 recipient of the INEKA Medal. He is a Senior Fellow (and formerly Research Director) at the IC² Institute of the University of Texas at Austin and a PICMET Fellow. He is a partner in General Informatics, LLC, providing advisory services to corporations, governments, and international agencies on research policy and technology-based economic development.