

Te Pūaha Talks

System change with Future Search

Questions and Answers from 28th November 2023 webinar



FutureSearch *NETWORK*

Answers are compiled as a combination of thinking by:

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Te Pūaha o te Ako

Question:

Can you please comment on how Future Search methodology differs from the 'Placemakers' approach promoted by Milenko Matanovic from the Pomegranate Centre – Stephen MacKay

Answer:

Neither of us are familiar with the 'Placemakers' approach so we looked up the [website](#). The site does not give detailed explanation about how their process works. However, it does confirm that “well trained and neutral facilitators” do contribute to assisting “citizens to utilise their differences to find common goals and empower individuals to action.”

In preparing a Future Search, the planning group works to **get the right people in the right conditions** for success. Future Search is fundamentally focused on who is in the room in a way that other approaches are less focused. Having the 'right' people, as a consciously collated snapshot of the system in focus, influences the learning and decision-making that takes place at a Future Search event. The acronym **ARE IN** guides who gets invited.

Authority to act on their own

Resources of time, money, access, and influence

Expertise in the topic (social, cultural, economic, technical)

Information that others need

Need, people who will be affected by the outcome

Question:

Interested in what you have done or suggest in terms of evaluating and learning from a Future Search process – Rachael Trotman

Answer:

‘Evaluation’ is a judgement that is useful to guide future decisions. We don’t evaluate directly at the end of the Future Search event, rather we are looking to see what people do after a period of time. Each Future Search event has a Review meeting planned as part of the preparation for the event. The Review meetings reinforce locally that there is a transformed system.

Locally, people have their own systems for tracking the action that follows a Future Search, for example the [Waiheke Marine Project](#) was described in the webinar as showing ongoing actions. The Future Search Network has collected stories in the [book](#) *Future Search, The Complete Guide, Editions 1, 2 and 3* and on the website. Chapter 15 in the 3rd edition book speaks about evaluation and research.

Question:

Do you have any advice about cost for the approach as well as implementation funding / resources / commitments? Because often the great strategic and collaborative work happens without any funding for making it all happen - Naomi Singer

Answer:

Costs to run a Future Search vary, depending on the resources that can be donated or volunteered. Key expenses include Project Management, Facilitation, Documentation, Venue (Catering, Materials), Accommodation and Travel, Communication options (Event Promo, follow up, Participant pastoral care). The three Future Search events run in Aotearoa have had varying budgets with a range of \$70,000 – 120,000.

An effective approach to raising both the needed funds and collective commitment to the event, is to appeal to multiple funders or sponsors from the system of the issue being addressed. Encourage many funders to contribute a small amount. This achieves both the fundraising target for the event and a buy-in by stakeholders in the system to implement actions agreed at the event.

Results from the Future Search events can then be used to bolster ongoing fundraising efforts. Being able to demonstrate the collective will of such a diverse system is attractive to funders.

Chapter 6 of the book *Future Search, The Complete Guide* gives lots of advice for planning a Future Search event.

Question:

Reminds me a little of the intersecting methodologies of co-design, design thinking, systems thinking & futures thinking - Curious as to how you intentionally navigate power-dynamics during the hui and retain the full commitment of participants over these three days, and beyond? – Jade Tang-Taylor

Answer:

This is a multi-layered question, so we will briefly look at each methodology named:

Co-design can be described as a participatory approach to designing solutions, in which community members are treated as equal collaborators in the design process.

Thus, yes, Future Search is at its heart a co-design process.

Design thinking can be described as a methodology that provides a solution-based approach to solving problems. It's extremely useful when used to tackle complex problems that are ill-defined or unknown—because it serves to understand the human needs involved, reframe the problem in human-centric ways, create numerous ideas in.

Future Search resonates with design thinking and goes beyond, because Future Search genuinely gets the system in rather than just asking.

Steve Brown, deputy director of collaborative learning and strategic insight at Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) said that “systems thinking is about investigating what set of factors and interactions are contributing to or could contribute to a possible outcome.”

Te Pūaha o te Ako

Future Search pays attention to the interaction of the forces of a system.

- Force One: What is outside in the environment,
- Force Two: What is internal to the environment,
- Force Three: the impact of the environment on the system and the system's responses and
- Force Four: how the system can impact the environment.

People explore these forces (or factors, or interactions) together, in real time, so we call Future Search **systems-experiencing**.

Futures thinking can be described as a creative and exploratory process that uses divergent thinking, seeking many possible answers and acknowledging uncertainty. It's a different mind-set to analytical thinking which uses convergent thinking to seek the right answer and reduce uncertainty.

Yes, in a Future Search event, the journey from Past to Present and onto Creating Preferred Futures is most importantly a divergent process, after which people converge to Common Ground. And, again most importantly, it is not expert-driven.

Power dynamics are interrupted with the curation of who is in the room. This continues with the small group dialogue of both voice groups and mixed groups, ensuring that everyone speaks and has leadership roles.

Commitment of the people at the Future Search begins from the moment of invitation, in the build-up to the event as people organise their lives to be able to attend and is reinforced throughout the 3 days at each decision the people make. To speak, to listen, to share, to re-evaluate ideas and opinions and to stay for the entire Future Search event.

Some participants make financial contributions that add to their commitment to the efforts underway. Commitments are made throughout the event at personal levels, in small groups and at the whole group space. For example, some Future Search events get all participants in a circle at the conclusion of the three days, to make comment and commitments. The follow-up communications, the Review meeting and other small group meetings provide spaces for ongoing commitment from participants and their spheres of influence.



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