FOSTERING SOCIAL FORESIGHT IN THE COMMUNITY SECTOR

Joshua Floyd: Swinburne University Of Technology, Hawthorn, Australia
Peter Hayward: Swinburne University Of Technology, Hawthorn, Australia

~

Contact: Joshua Floyd, Swinburne University of Technology, Australian Graduate School of Entrepreneurship, Swinburne University of Technology, 3122 Hawthorn, Australia, (T) 03 9214 5982, (F) 03 9819 2117, Email: jfloyd@swin.edu.au

ABSTRACT

Slaughter's layered social foresight development model has played a central role in the Swinburne University Strategic Foresight Program's teaching and research since inception. The model formed the theoretical basis for a recent project to build foresight capacity with the Victorian community services sector. Following completion of the project, research was conducted into the effectiveness of the model and its prospects for enabling social foresight capacity. The application of the model and assessment of its outcomes in fostering social foresight form the subject of this paper. The prospects for a similar model to be applied more generally to the development of social innovation and entrepreneurship capacity are also considered briefly.

INTRODUCTION

The Strategic Foresight Program (SFP) at Swinburne University, as the successor to the Australian Foresight Institute established by Richard Slaughter in 1999, has as one of its foundational aims the fostering of *social foresight*. Slaughter (1999) characterises social foresight as an emergent, socially distributed capacity for systematic, long-term thinking that is applied to the maintenance and enhancement of collective well being. It is distinguished from, yet founded upon, individual human beings' innate capacity for speculative thought in relation to future temporal domains. Slaughter has proposed that social foresight capacity, whereby long-term thinking becomes a part of daily life in the realm of collective human endeavour, can be established by building increasingly sophisticated and formalised layers of long-term thinking.

The value of social foresight lies in the potential for widely distributed decision making and action based on "discrimination, profundity, compassionate understanding and anticipation," a set of characteristics that Hayward (2003, p. 16) describes as *sagacious wisdom*. Wider and more systematic exercise of sagacious wisdom would signal the arrival of what might be considered "wise societies," in which long-term well being of humans and other species is more highly valued and where well being is considered in broader terms than is conventional at present.

While the process for establishing social foresight has received significant theoretical attention (Slaughter 2006), and is a prime motivation for the Strategic Foresight Master's degree program at Swinburne, its enactment with participant groups has not previously been the subject of formal research. In early 2005, a process of engagement commenced with the community services sector (CSS) in Victoria with the broad aim of assisting CSS organisations to enhance the long-term sustainability of their operations.[1] Shortly after this, ANZ Trustees provided a funding grant for a pilot project to trial the use of foresight approaches for developing CSS sustainability. The project had the dual aims of establishing "proof of concept" while also generating a valuable outcome for the CSS. The intention was that the project might seed an ongoing interest in and capacity for foresight-enabled approaches to the CSS's major challenges, and that the knowledge generated through the project would contribute more generally to the SFP's ongoing work in the development of social foresight.

During an extended scoping process representatives of the CSS and the SFP worked together to design an engagement with potential to meet these aims. As a result of this process, the Victorian Community Sector Sustainability Project (VCSSP) took place from late 2006 to mid 2007, with the objective of developing a long-term vision for a sustainable CSS. Josh took over responsibility for the project in November 2006 and managed it through to its conclusion in June 2007. He acted as designer, researcher and facilitator for all phases of the VCSSP, with Peter acting as project director. Gretchen Young, a student in the Strategic Foresight Masters course, assisted with design, facilitation and report

writing. We structured the VCSSP as a consultancy engagement, with the Victorian Council of Social Services taking the role of client contact point for the CSS. Representatives from more than twenty organisations participated in elements of the project, with representatives from seven organisations participating in all stages from start to finish. For the CSS, this initiative presented an opportunity to develop a common strategic direction for sector organisations at a time of particularly adverse pressure from a variety of directions. For the SFP, the supra-organisational format of the engagement provided an opportunity to test the effectiveness of Slaughter's social foresight development model in a setting that allowed potential for monitoring and assessing its effectiveness.

In order to test Slaughter's model, Josh conducted interviews several months after completion of the VCSSP with a small number of consultancy participants. The interviews explored the way that each of the layers of foresight development manifested for the interviewees during the project and assessed the interviewees' views on the prospects for a socially embedded capacity for social foresight to emerge through more widespread use of similar processes.In this paper we first introduce Slaughter's model in more detail. Following this, we describe the VCSSP and its design basis. We then introduce the research methodology for testing Slaughter's model and present the findings in detail. Finally, we briefly discuss the implications of the findings in relation to Slaughter's model and consider the implications more generally for development of social innovation and entrepreneurship capacity.

SLAUGHTER'S MODEL FOR SOCIAL FORESIGHT DEVELOPMENT

Slaughter first introduced his layered model for social foresight development in the journal *Futures* in 1996 (Slaughter 1996). The ideas in this article later formed the basis for the Australian Foresight Institute research program "Creating and Sustaining Social Foresight." The research described here is the most recent stage of this ongoing project. Describing his layered model, Slaughter writes:

> [Social foresight] can be progressively enabled through five distinct layers, or levels of development. The first is grounded in the natural capacities of the human brain / mind system to comprehend a range of futures. The second focuses on the clarifying, enlivening and motivating role of futures concepts and ideas. Third are a number of analytic gains provided by futures tools and methods. Fourth, we turn to a range of practical applications, or contexts. The hypothesis is that when each of these levels functions in a coordinated way, grounds for the emergence of social foresight can clearly be seen. Hence the fifth stage involves the full implementation of social foresight. (Slaughter 2004, p. 171)

The model's details are depicted in Figure 1 below. Each of the five levels is associated with a general indicator as shown. Slaughter's hypothesis is that Level 5, *social capacity for foresight*, is a potential emergent property of human social systems. As an emergent property, it follows that social foresight cannot simply be imposed from outside or introduced by way of policy instruments. Social foresight must be *grown from within*; the metaphor of cultivation is more appropriate here. It follows from this that learning about how social foresight emerges will be most effective if it involves direct engagement in its cultivation.

Stages	←A futures-responsive culture→	Indicators
Level 5:	*Social capacity for foresight* as an emergent property	Long-term thinking becomes a social norm
Level 4:	Futures processes, projects & structures embodied in variety of *applications*	Foresight routinely applied in most organizations
Level 3:	*Futures tools & methodologies* increase analytic power	Widespread use of standard FS tools & methods
Level 2:	*Futures concepts* & ideas enable a futures discourse	Futures concepts & ideas become influential via discourse
Level 1:	*Raw capacities & perceptions* of the human brain-mind system	Unreflective use of forward thinking in daily life of individual
	←A past-driven culture→	

Figure 1: Slaughter's layered model for social foresight development (Slaughter 2004, p. 173)

While Level 5 can be enabled but not imposed, the same does not apply to the enabling layers, Levels 1 to 4. Levels 1 to 4 might be considered as analogous to the soil in which a seed is planted: the conditions of the soil (its physical, chemical and biological structure) can be readily changed from outside, providing the conditions in which the seed can germinate. But the process of germination is endogenous to the seed itself. The healthy flourishing of a plant is not guaranteed, but it can be influenced. Levels 1 to 4 play a similar role in relation to social foresight. We can create structures at each of these levels that support each of the higher levels in turn. The establishment of these structures would then form the background matrix out of which a self-generating, socially distributed foresight capacity might arise.

Informed by this overarching idea, the model provided the following broad principles for design of the VCSSP process:

Level 1: The project process would need to harness the participants' existing capacities for forward thinking by providing a setting in which to focus these capacities more sharply. This involved creating some initial guidance so that participants could experience what an organised foresight process "is like" so that they could then move forward more confidently and with a sense of self-directed agency.

Level 2: Particular concepts and language would need to be introduced and developed so that the participants could think together and communicate more directly and effectively about the CSS's long-term sustainability. This would also be important for sharing project outputs with people not directly involved. Norms for interaction amongst participants consistent with open sharing of ideas would also need to be established.

Level 3: Tool[2] and methods the use of which might more effectively and efficiently deepen participants' level of insight into the CSS's present situation and harness the group's creativity in responding to this would need to be designed and implemented. These tools would also need to be suitable for participants to use in other contexts beyond the VCSSP, to allow foresight thinking and practices to propagate more widely.

Level 4: The overall project would need to be structured in a sufficiently transparent way for participants to see how similar approaches might be applied in different organisational and problem-oriented contexts. In practice, this would entail making the frameworks and theories behind the process more prominent than for a more conventional consulting engagement.

With these general principles as background, in the next section we provide an overview of the actual project as it was run.

OVERVIEW OF THE VICTORIAN COMMUNITY SECTOR SUSTAINABILITY PROJECT

General overview

The consultancy phase of the VCSSP had five principal aims, determined by SFP and CSS representatives during the scoping phase. These aims were:

1. To create shared understanding of the sector's situation: *why* is *this* the Sector's situation?
2. To create a shared vision of a preferred future for the sector.
3. To propose actions for navigating between the present situation and the future vision.
4. To create a culture of shared agency: committed to working towards the envisioned future together, regardless of internal differences and external constraints.
5. To contribute to the development of a shared sense of responsibility for shaping better futures for the sector, through introducing foresight processes and methodologies into the sector's operating culture.

During the scoping phase, SFP and CSS representatives decided that the work to address these aims would entail an introductory *foresight readiness workshop* and that the project proper would then commence with a *situation analysis* research phase, followed by a series of three full-day workshops with CSS leaders, one each month from February to April 2007. This general structure was based on Voros's Generic Foresight Process (GFP), depicted in Figure 2. The relationships between the GFP stages, the phases of the project and project aims are depicted in Table 1. As will be clear from principal aims 2 to 5 above, from the outset there was an explicit intent to take a normative approach to exploring the CSS's future. On this basis, the second workshop—the prospection stage—was to be focused specifically on the normative question "what would we *like* to happen?" (see Figure 2). The three workshops corresponding with the interpretation, prospection and outputs stages of the GFP each consisted of a number of exercises that together constituted three relatively independent sub-processes. The outputs of each sub-process became the inputs to the following sub-process. The exercises making up each workshop sub-process incorporated various foresight methodologies and tools. We describe each of the project phases in more detail in the following sections.
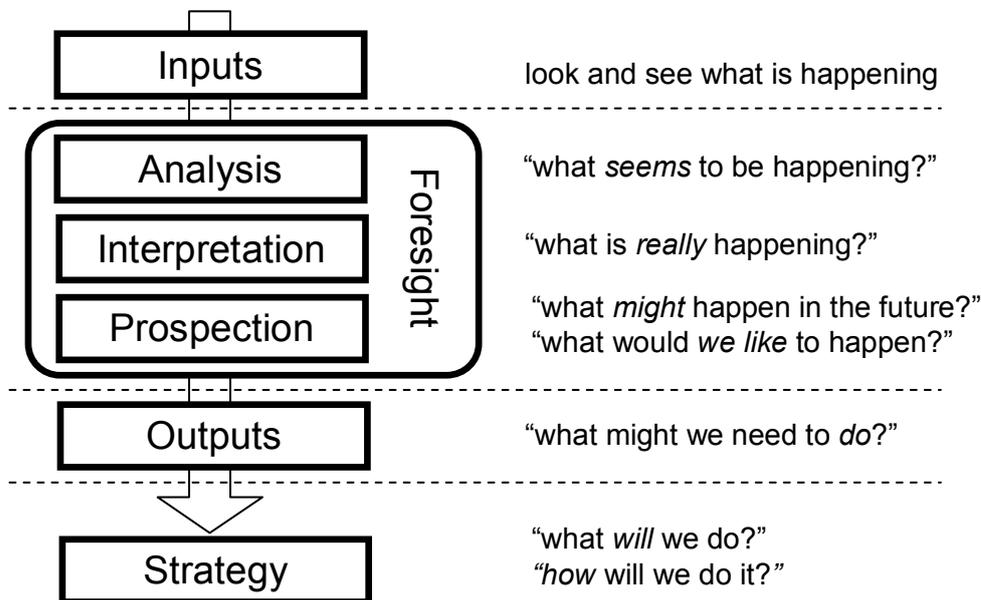

Figure 2: The Generic Foresight Process (Voros 2003)

GFP stage	Project phase	Principal aim addressed
Inputs	Situation analysis	
Analysis		
Interpretation	Workshop 1	1. Create shared understanding of sector's situation; also aims 4 & 5
Prospection	Workshop 2	2. Create a shared vision of a preferred future for the sector; also aims 4 & 5
Outputs	Workshop 3	3. Create proposed actions for navigating towards the preferred future; also aims 4 & 5
Strategy	Post-project engagement with other stakeholders	Continue to build towards aims 4 & 5

Table 1: GFP stages, project phases and principal aims addressed

Foresight readiness workshop
The first stage of the VCSSP was a half-day *foresight readiness workshop* conducted in December 2006 with a dozen CSS leaders. Workshop participants were introduced to futures thinking in general and to strategic foresight as a domain of practice. A number of frameworks, methodologies and tools were introduced and we looked at how these might be used in the community sector context. With this background on the nature of foresight practice and how it might be applied to developing CSS sustainability, the group then developed two questions that would orient their work for the remainder of the project:

1. How does the Victorian community sector see its future value to those organisations, communities and individuals that it works with?
2. How might the future seen for the sector, and the traits that are valued by those who it works with, be used to ensure the sector's longer-term sustainability and on-going value to those people?[3]

Participant engagement
With the focal questions established, leaders from across the Victorian CSS were invited to sign up for the workshops. Approximately twenty five places were available, with participants from the readiness workshop filling twelve of these. Commitment to attend all workshops was a requirement for signing up, although this was waived for readiness workshop participants who had existing commitments on the dates set. All places were filled prior to the first workshop. Actual attendance numbers for each of the three workshops were 21, 15 and 11 participants respectively.

Situation analysis
The situation analysis research was conducted during January 2007. This involved a literature review and a series of interviews with twenty senior leaders in the Victorian CSS to explore the present sustainability situation. Interview responses and literature review findings were analysed for broad themes under a range of categories. A detailed report on these findings was prepared. The report culminated in thirty provocations intended to stimulate creatively critical reflection on established thinking in regard to CSS sustainability. This report was distributed to participants prior to Workshop 1 and formed the primary input to the interpretation stage of the project.

Workshop 1: Interpretation
The Workshop 1 sub-process included the following exercises:
- Voting to reject or accept the situation analysis provocations. The exercise identified the four provocations that drew the most attention from participants, in terms of both acceptance and rejection. This was followed by discussion amongst participants about the implications of these provocations for understanding the CSS's present sustainability situation and how it had come about.
- Story telling. Four groups of participants each created a story to represent their understanding of the CSS situation and its origins. Each of the four groups then presented their story to the other participants as a simple play. The stories drew heavily on recognisable metaphors to depict the situation as each group understood it.

Participants set the time horizon for considering the CSS's future in Workshops 2 and 3 at twenty years from the present.

Workshop 2: Prospection

The Workshop 2 sub-process comprised the following exercises:

- Drawing on the descriptions of the CSS's present situation as described in the stories created in Workshop 1, decide which aspects from the present should be maintained, which should be discarded and which should be changed.
- Articulating the *future value* that participants think the CSS *should* provide.
- Visioning: Participants created a detailed description of what the CSS should be like in 2027, if it is to deliver this future value. The vision was described in terms of three broad themes. Participants wrote up each of the three vision themes following the workshop.

The detailed vision was then taken forward into Workshop 3.

Workshop 3: Action

The Workshop 3 sub-process included the following exercises:

- Consolidation of the vision themes: Participants reviewed the vision themes written up after Workshop 2 to ensure that they incorporated all of the desired elements. As a result, the original vision themes were significantly elaborated and refined.
- Backcasting key milestones: Participants worked back from 2027 to the present to identify key milestones that would need to occur on the way to realising the vision. This led to creation of a "future history" timeline for each theme.
- Setting strategic directions and planning actions: Participants grouped the milestones into a number of strategic direction areas and prepared strategy statements for each area. They then identified actions that would need to be carried out in relation to each strategy area.

Following the workshop, participants wrote up the final vision descriptions, the milestone timeline for each vision theme, the strategy statements and the action plans. These became the primary outputs from the project that would subsequently form the basis for engaging other stakeholders in the participants' twenty-year vision for the Victorian CSS. Compilation of the outputs formally concluded the VCSSP, although the intention was that the project would "roll over" into ongoing and emerging initiatives related to long-term, whole sector sustainability.

It is the efficacy of the VCSSP process for establishing Slaughter's Levels 1 to 4 and the prospects for these levels to support emergence of Level 5 social foresight that forms the subject of the research described in this paper. In the next section we outline the methodology for this research, and following this we describe the research findings in detail.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Following completion of the consultancy project, Josh assessed the project's efficacy in cultivating social foresight via interviews with participants from the VCSSP consultancy engagement. As this research involved human subjects, ethics approval was applied for and obtained from the Swinburne University Research Ethics Committee prior to inviting participants to be interviewed. Following receipt of ethics approval, ten VCSSP participants were identified who had either attended each of the three workshops, or who had attended the first and third workshops and also the foresight readiness workshop. Josh then conducted interviews with five of the ten people.

Drawing on Slaughter's model, we designed the interview questions to ascertain participants' impressions of the degree to which the project activities facilitated development of each of the levels of social foresight capacity. The questions used in the research interviews are presented in Table 2 below.

Level	Questions to project participants
1	a) Did you notice any changes in your own thinking during the course of the workshop series? b) If so, would you characterise this as a development of existing thinking? Or as the introduction of entirely new concepts? c) How would you describe what it was that changed or developed?
2	a) What did you notice about the conversations in the room, especially those with other participants in the workshops? What did you notice happening amongst participants in general during the workshop process? b) Did your understanding of the concept of 'sustainability' change during the workshops? c) What aspects, if any, of the workshop process could you point to as pivotal to any changes in conceptual understanding.
3	a) Did any of the workshop processes[4] strike you as particularly important or significant, and if so, why? b) Which tools would you consider to have been particularly significant?
4	a) Do you see future uses for engagements such as the one that you participated in, either for your own organisation or in other supra-organisational situations? What value would you see such processes providing elsewhere? b) If you do see such future uses as valuable, do you feel that you would be able to run such a process? If not, what do you feel you would require in order to be able to do so?
5	On the basis of your involvement in the workshop series, what do you think the prospects might be for Slaughter's hypothesised Level 5 social foresight capacity, in which long-term thinking is a social norm?

Table 2: Questions posed to five project participants to during research interviews

The questions set the general context for interviewees' responses, but did not rigidly constrain the conversation. For instance, interviewees sometimes offered reflections that were not directly related to the particular question on which the conversation was focused. During the interviews, interviewees' responses to the questions were recorded via hand written notes.

The hand written notes were transcribed into electronic format and a basic textual analysis was carried out to identify themes arising across the responses from the five interviews for each level of Slaughter's model. A theme consisted of responses from at least two interviewees that discussed similar or closely related issues and ideas associated with a particular level. In some cases, themes incorporated responses made to questions relating to multiple levels. In these cases, context generally indicated the level to which the response related.

Josh's multiple roles in the project will clearly have left their marks on the research findings. His existing relationships with the interviewees and direct personal experience of the situations and issues to which the interview responses related are integral to the research process and findings. The questions asked, the manner of asking, the responses heard and noted, the frameworks of analysis employed and the interpretations made have all been influenced by Josh's interests, perceptual biases and everything else that constitutes his self-in-action at the relevant point in time. The presentation of research findings incorporates his personal interpretive reflections on the themes that were identified. Context will indicate where the findings are based on analysis of the interview responses and where these are based on Josh's experience as designer, facilitator and observer of the workshops.

We consider this research to be of a preliminary nature. Given the small number of interview subjects and the basic nature of the analysis, it seems reasonable to treat the results as a precursor to larger scale and more rigorous investigation into the processes of social foresight development.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Level 1

In responding to questions about how the interviewees felt their own thinking had changed during the course of the VCSSP, a broad theme emerged around *boundary transformation*. This had two distinct characteristics:

- *Boundary expansion*: The issues and ideas explored during the project went beyond those that would normally be considered in strategy processes. A greater breadth of considerations was swept within the project boundary, and participants explored ideas that might ordinarily be deemed of insufficient relevance to justify giving them time and attention. This is perhaps best captured by one interviewee's opinion that "The workshop process cast the net very wide in terms of philosophical considerations."
- *Boundary crossing*: Participants made connections between issues and ideas that they had not previously seen as impacting on each other. For example, one interviewee described how a new awareness of the possibilities for "cross fertilizing" ideas arose during the project.

The boundary transformation theme was also evident in relation to participants' increasing awareness of taken-for-granted ideas behind some conventional ways of understanding the CSS's situation. The hidden frames underlying people's thinking were brought to the surface and reflected upon. For instance, one participant reported that the shift from thinking about the sector's future in terms of prediction or anticipation to taking an active role in the construction of preferred futures was very significant. Similar insight was reported in regard to exploring the sector's present situation as a series of provocative propositions rather than presenting these propositions as concrete facts. In summary, the interviewees seemed to take a more broadly systemic view of the CSS's situation, and this included increased awareness of the way that participants' internal systems of thought influenced the external view of the world "out there."

In regard to changes in individual thinking, most interviewees saw these as developments of existing thinking, rather than entirely new ways of thinking. This is interesting in light of Slaughter's proposal that social foresight can be developed by building upon the brain-mind system's raw capacities. Participants reported that their involvement in the project was accompanied by a restructuring of ideas of which their appreciation had previously been more ad hoc, or which had previously been seen as located outside the context of their work. The "bigger picture" came into view as a more integrated whole, without the picture becoming too rigid.

Level 2
As might be expected on the basis of the Level 1 findings, the boundary transformation noted in relation to individual thinking was reflected in the nature of the discourse between participants. Interviewees saw this as broader and more philosophical than for conventional strategy processes, in the sense that it progressed to the level of underlying world views and myths rather than focusing exclusively on operational issues or events and their proximate social, economic and political drivers. The particular character of the discourse was demonstrated in the changes that interviewees reported in their understanding of the sustainability concept. In the course of the project, several interviewees said that there was a shift from thinking about sustainability in terms of short-term funding, towards broader consideration of the role and value of the CSS in the wider community. There was also a shift from considering sustainability in organizational terms, to appreciating the importance of seeing it in sectorial terms. Interviewees came to see sustainability as "multi-layered." One interviewee saw sustainability relating to a level of thinking that could be seen emerging in other domains, in relation to environmental crisis for instance. By considering sustainability in this way, the possibility arose of sharing ideas across domains previously seen as unrelated. At the same time, along with the emergence of this broader conceptual insight, the enormous challenge of considering sustainability for the whole sector was noted by one interviewee. The interviewee experienced this as quite overwhelming. This suggests that increased insight coupled with a sense of responsibility was experienced differently by participants: for some it was empowering, while for others it may have triggered despair.

A central theme arising in relation to Level 2 centered on the *culture of participation*. One interviewee noted that during the course of the project, the discourse and language shifted from a focus on problems to a focus on solutions. This interviewee also observed that, for those who participated throughout project, a strong culture of engagement developed, indicating that the participants recognized the relationship between the quality of the process and their individual contributions.

At the same time, interviewees also observed that some participants had been unwilling to engage during the interpretation workshop. The interviewees noted a significant divergence amongst the participants in the first workshop, with some people clearly aware that the quality of the process was dependent on their contribution, while some others, in being less willing to contribute, seemed to treat the process quality and their personal contribution to it as independent. The drop off in participation following the first workshop reflected this. One interviewee felt that the drop off was particularly high

compared to other cross-sector initiatives. Another interviewee suggested that some people may have been uncomfortable about the openness of communication required by the process. One interviewee also offered the view that "there is always a cohort that refuses to suspend disbelief and trust the process." This is taken up in more detail in the implications section.

Level 3
The Level 3 questions surfaced responses relating to each of the workshop sub-processes and hence to all phases of the Generic Foresight Process. Even so, a clear theme emerged in relation to the significance of Workshop 1: Interpretation. The overall process in this workshop was designed so that participants might develop new insight in relation to the CSS's present situation and its historical context. The intent for this process was that participants leave with a different understanding of the CSS's situation compared with when they arrived; that this understanding should be more coherent or more integrated—the parts should be arranged to make sense as an integrated whole; and the understanding should be shared with other participants—there should be a greater level of common understanding of the situation. Feedback from interviewees indicated that the overall process for the workshop was generally successful in achieving the design intent.

In nominating specific exercises or tools that were regarded as particularly significant in developing shared insight, the interviewees focused on:
- Voting to accept or reject the Situation Analysis provocations, and subsequent discussion of the findings.
- Writing and presenting stories that captured the essence of the CSS's sustainability situation.

A linking theme in these exercises might be described as *holding multiple perspectives lightly*. That is, rather than presenting the current situation as a set of established facts (in the case of the provocations) or depicting shared understanding in a similarly factual way (in the case of the sector stories), these exercises allowed the participants to work at the level of ideas-as-constructs as they explored the CSS's situation together. In the case of the provocation exercise, this involved treating ideas about the situation and how it had arisen as perspectives to aid understanding rather than as concrete truths. Participants had the opportunity to make up their own minds about the merits of particular ideas, without the expectation that they should come to a final, uniform resolution. Ideas that might otherwise lead to participants taking polarized for-or-against positions could be treated as partially valid from a given perspective.

In the case of the story writing and presenting exercise, the participants gravitated quickly towards depicting the CSS situation in terms of recognisable metaphors (a circus theme, a nautical theme, a perilous journey). By representing their understanding of the situation with a range of metaphors, participants could show "what their experience of sector sustainability was like" without the need to reach concrete agreement on specific facts. It was sufficient to agree that a given set of metaphors captured the overall essence of the situation and its antecedents. This general understanding of the situation in the present formed the basis for moving forward to a vision of a sustainable future for the CSS.

A theme also arose relating to the Workshop 2 sub-process and the vision consolidation exercise in particular. While one interviewee reported that this exercise helped to make the activities that preceded it meaningful and gave more purposeful structure to the overall project flow, it also revealed the magnitude of the task that the participants had embarked upon. Following the exercise, some participants felt that it would be very challenging to achieve support for the vision for the sector's future from people who had not been involved in its creation. When it came to thinking about what a preferred future for the CSS might look like, the challenge of thinking sectorally became clearer: how could a finite depiction of a preferred future accommodate the diversity of interests encompassed by the CSS definition adopted for the project?

Level 4
In discussing the prospects for more widespread enactment of foresight processes across a range of applications, the interviewees concurred significantly that processes similar to the one that they participated in would be valuable both in individual organisations and in supra-organisational contexts. Nonetheless, interviewees did perceive that the implementation challenges and opportunities differed in each of these contexts. We discuss these challenges and opportunities below, in relation to the themes that arose in the interviewees' responses.

Time commitment: The time commitment required for a foresight process received significant attention in the interviews. Some interviewees felt that this was onerous and might inhibit wider supra-organisational application, whereas for individual organisations the significant time requirement would be less inhibiting. Interviewees felt that people participating as representatives of organisations would find it difficult to justify spending the scheduled amount of time (three and a half days of workshops, plus preparatory reading and some post-workshop write up of outputs) on matters that did not directly impact on shorter-term organisational goals. Even so, one interviewee felt that the workshops needed more time than had been available and that additional time spent would have increased the value of the outputs. This suggests that appreciation for the value of time spent on foresight activities can grow with direct participation, but that this value might be more difficult to establish with those who remain outside the process.

On a related note, some interviewees felt that it was not realistic for a supra-organisationl process to require participants to write up outputs following workshops, on the basis of the additional time demand entailed by this. Interviewees thought that this would not be a problem for an individual organisation as the requirements would be part of broader job-related responsibilities. In contrast to this finding from the interviews, it is interesting to note that one participant enrolled in the Strategic Foresight Masters program on the strength of the project experience. This tends to suggest that the time commitment issue, rather than being a general concern for the viability of foresight processes, is largely dependent on individual priorities.

Locus of agency: Interviewees identified the establishment of a sufficiently strong locus of agency with regard to implementing actions as a key challenge in carrying out supra-organisational foresight projects. This is closely related to the nature of the power structures through which the project is enacted. Where power is formalised—for instance, where a sector or industry body of which all represented organizations are members has empowered participants to act on its behalf—then a locus of agency can be clearly defined, and formal mechanisms put in place for making and enacting concrete decisions. If power is more diffuse and lines of authority are less clear, then implementation may be more difficult. In such cases, building support for implementation will be a more organic, "ground up" process, and will almost certainly require that participants take individual responsibility for building a broad coalition of support through conceptual power and personal commitment to the vision. The VCSSP seems to be aligned more closely with this latter situation. For foresight initiatives in individual organisations, establishing the locus of agency would be more readily accomplished.

External versus internal facilitation: Several interviewees discussed the significance of the relationship between the foresight process facilitator and the participants. In particular, some interviewees felt that a facilitator coming from outside the organisation, or outside the sector in the case of supra-organisational projects, would be better suited to challenging established ideas and beliefs in a non-confrontational and non-threatening way. In order for exercises that question existing ways of thinking to stimulate valuable insight, interviewees felt that the facilitator would need to maintain a non-attached stance in relation to provocative, controversial or non-conventional ideas, and that this stance would be more readily maintained by someone from outside.

One interviewee felt that the nature of power relationships was also important here, and that it would be more reasonable for an insider to facilitate a supra-organisational project than one that is organisation-specific. In the supra-organisational situation, an insider's power is likely to be more diffuse, and hence less likely to be seen as coercive.

Relevance of foresight for cross-sector applications: Two interviewees expressed the view that foresight processes would be particularly beneficial in cross- or multi-sector applications (for example, those with participants from community, business and government organisations), where the organisations represented have similar visions for a preferred future, but employ different approaches to enacting that vision. This could lead to valuable synergies between the respective approaches. Related to this, one interviewee felt that when employing a foresight process in an individual organisation, it would be valuable to bring in people from outside, such as representatives from peak bodies or from other sectors, in order to reveal blind spots in conventional thinking.

Grounding in theory and frameworks: Most of the interviewees felt that they would be able to run a foresight process in the future, however most said that this would require further experience, training and mentoring. In particular, several interviewees felt that a thorough grounding in foresight theory and conceptual frameworks would be necessary in order to support flexible implementation. That is,

interviewees recognised that the capacity to adapt to the needs of particular situations would require deeper familiarity with the theory behind processes, methods and tools. Even so, two interviewees also said that they would prefer less emphasis on making the background theory and frameworks transparent in the workshops themselves.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the Victorian CSS has commenced the process of formally establishing a cross-sector Futures Task Group and is currently in the process of establishing funding for taking the outputs from the VCSSP forward at significantly larger scale. This might be seen as evidence for the continued development of cross-sector Level 4 foresight capacity.

Level 5
Interviewees' confidence in the value of foresight processes at the organisational and supra-organisational level expressed in interviewees' discussion of Slaughter's Level 4 took on a more reserved tone in discussing the prospects for the hypothesized Level 5 emergence of foresight as a social norm. A theme that arose here was the relationship between *individual champions and social structures*. Interviewees felt that deeper and more widespread foresight capacity was more likely to emerge through highly motivated individual leaders but that structures to support these leaders, and to enact foresight processes in a more ordered way, would likely lag well behind this. A clear differentiation existed for at least one interviewee between the prospects for *long-term thinking* and *systems and structures for enacting* the outputs from this thinking.

A key idea was that social foresight is likely to remain a value that is appreciated and championed by a minority of people who see their responsibilities in broader terms than their conventionally-defined roles and norms, while for most people it will remain "off the radar." Interviewees felt that Level 5 social foresight, if it is to emerge, will be driven by highly motivated, altruistic people who are prepared to take personal responsibility for its enaction.

There was also some feeling that established structures and norms relating to short-term strategic timeframes would play a role in hindering efforts to develop longer-term foresight capacities and structures. One particular problem in relation to this is the entrenched idea that engaging with the future is necessarily about prediction. People's risk aversion in relation to the unreliability of long-term predictions may be a cultural barrier to engagement with time horizons beyond three-year strategy processes. Interviewees indicated that a shift from thinking about the future in terms of *prediction* to thinking in terms of *creation* would be important in enabling the emergence of social foresight. One interviewee saw such a shift as being linked to the development of a more empowered sense of responsibility—but a tendency to draw one's boundaries in more tightly as a coping strategy in a complex world would militate against this.

Even so, the interviewees' recognised the value of Level 5 social foresight and agreed on the whole that the ongoing effort to cultivate its development is important. One of the interviewees noted in particular that initiatives such as the VCSSP can play an important role in allowing those inclined to leadership to "step up to the plate." This perspective tends to strongly support the value of the layered model in enabling the emergence of social foresight as an awakening potential.

IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The research findings have implications both for the effectiveness of Slaughter's model as a pathway to developing the particular innovation of social foresight and more generally for processes of developing innovation and entrepreneurship capacity. We briefly consider some of the more significant implications here.

Implications for Slaughter's model of social foresight development
The research findings suggest that *who* participates in a foresight project may have significant bearing on the extent to which a vibrant futures discourse can be established. If the interviewees' perception that deeper and more organised foresight capacity will reside with a relatively small proportion of the population holds true, then it may be necessary to build into foresight processes some system for increasing the likelihood that these people are in the room. Two ways of achieving this would be either through a pre-selection process, or by designing projects with an opt-in/opt-out phase. The opt-in/opt-out approach is more consistent with respect for people as autonomous, meaning-making subjects, discussed further in the next section. Rather than predetermining who should be involved, this entails setting appropriate contexts in which prospective participants can appreciate what foresight processes

are about and decide for themselves if they will be a good fit. This also allows scope for people to "grow into" the process during the course of their involvement. It may be inappropriate to assume that a good foresight process is necessarily one in which all people will want to participate. It may be that the nature of the work is such that some people will always opt out. It is worth noting that in the VCSSP, the Foresight Readiness Workshop essentially constituted an opt-in/opt-out phase, and that the continuation rate amongst those who opted into the project after this workshop was far higher than for those who did not attend the workshop—8 of the 11 participants in Workshop 3 had also attended the Foresight Readiness Workshop.

A second critical implication of the findings for the effectiveness of Slaughter's model relates to the locus of agency by which outputs will be carried forward or implemented. This is especially important in supra-organisational foresight work. One suggestion from the research is that the diffuse nature of power in such situations may diminish the perceived effectiveness of foresight processes, and hence hinder the propagation of foresight applications. One response to this would be to tighten project boundaries, both in terms of participation and in terms of those directly served by an application. In practical terms, and with reference to the CSS, this might entail forming a coalition of organisations from a range of sub-sectors that would commit resources up front for the implementation of outputs. This would not preclude others supporting the project outputs, but it would help to ensure that the outputs of the foresight work are appropriately integrated with conventional strategy processes.

The layered model as a general model for generation of innovation and entrepreneurship capacity

As a study of the diffusion and take-up of foresight methodologies in the CSS, the research may have relevance for better understanding the development of innovation and entrepreneurship capacity. That is, if Slaughter's layered model applies to development of social foresight as a particular innovation, then it may also apply more generally to the development of innovation and entrepreneurship capacity. A key implication in this regard is the importance of approaching the generation of distributed human capacities such as these from a developmental systems perspective in which metaphors of cultivation, growth and self-generation are emphasized, rather than thinking in terms of top-down implementation or feed-forward policy alone. This approach recognises individuals as autonomous creators of meaning and also sees the meaning-meaning making individuals as always coupled with cultural and environmental situations (Thompson 2007).

The Level 2 research findings on the *culture of participation* are most directly relevant here. A common theme across processes for developing distributed human capacities such as foresight, innovation and entrepreneurship may be the importance of creating the conditions for self-motivated and committed participation, in which participants take up co-responsibility for value generation. A culture of committed participation is not something that can be imposed from outside by structures or processes alone. The culture will be shaped by the way that the individual agents contribute and participate; if *everyone* present expects the externally provided structures to determine the value of an initiative independent of their own committed action, then *ipso facto*, no such culture will be established. The character of any given process will be dependent on the way that the participants "bring it to life." If all agents come to a process with an attitude of scepticism, reserving commitment until the process has demonstrated its worth, nothing will get off the ground in the first place. That there is something at all to sceptically assess requires that other agents have been willing to take personal responsibility for enacting that something.

This raises the issue of the expectations that people have in entering a foresight, innovation or entrepreneurial process. If my expectation is that the process is prime, and as a "participant" my task is simply to provide inputs that will automatically be transformed to outputs by an externally-imposed system design (for a given input, the output is *determined* by system structure), then my sense of personal responsibility for the outcomes is likely to be greatly reduced. If on the other hand my expectation is that the process is a structured-and-flexible way of orchestrating a group of autonomous agents in order to assist *the group's* creation of unique outputs (for a given input, the output depends on the initial context and particular conditions arising in the course of the work), then my sense of personal responsibility for the outcomes is likely to be much greater.

How to work with people to stimulate their own internally-generated sense of personal responsibility then becomes a critical focus for those interested in fostering socially distributed and embedded capacity for foresight, innovation and entrepreneurship.

CONCLUSION

The preliminary research into the effectiveness of Slaughter's model of social foresight development and the prospects for establishment of Level 5 social foresight that we present in this paper tends to support Slaughter's underlying hypothesis. On the basis of the interview data, it seems clear that exposure to foresight methodologies, processes and applications generally contributes to development of support for the value of this type of approach. Uncertainties in regard to this tend to relate to the practical difficulties of overcoming the constraints of existing structures, rather than to scepticism in regard to alternatives to these. Clearly there are conventional limitations to be transcended and further innovations that must arise if socially distributed foresight is to flourish. More extensive and rigorous work will be required to adequately understand the conditions that will enable this to occur. The work described here should provide support for this effort. Beyond the foresight focus of the research, grounds also appear to be established for further investigating the development of distributed social innovation and entrepreneurship capacity from the perspective of layered enabling structures and emergent processes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge the support and assistance of the following people in carrying out the VCSSP and the subsequent research described in this paper:

- Gio Braidotti, who initiated the VCSSP for the Australian Foresight Institute during 2004 and the first half of 2005.
- Rowena Morrow, Project Manager, SFP during the scoping period, up until handover to me in November 2006.
- Cath Smith, CEO, Victorian Council of Social Services, and Paul Linossier, CEO, MacKillop Family Services, both of whom championed the project within the Victorian CSS.
- Gretchen Young, who assisted me in designing and facilitating the workshops and writing and editing reports.
- CSS leaders who participated in situation analysis research interviews.
- VCSSP workshop participants.
- The five interviewees for the research presented in this paper.

NOTES

[1] For the purposes of this project, the following definition of the community services sector was adopted:

"The community sector may be defined as a subset of the not for profit or third sector. [For present purposes] "community sector" is used to refer to those organisations that are not for profit, rely on high levels of volunteerism, and broadly respond to welfare needs. Community sector organisations work in related areas of health, education, employment and community services, amongst other industries. They comprise small informal community groups through to large incorporated organisations, and range in orientation from member-based consumer advocacy groups through to privately constituted but publicly-oriented service providers." (Barraket 2006, p. 3)

[2] We define foresight tools as conceptual devices that provides some advantage in accomplishing some task.

[3] The group developed the final questions by email following the workshop, and prior to commencement of the project proper.

[4] In the project overview section, the term *sub*-process is used in place of process, to distinguish the relatively independent workshop processes from the overall Generic Foresight Process that incorporated the situation analysis research and the three workshops.

REFERENCES

Barraket, J (2006), *Community sector sustainability: research evidence and public policy implications*, viewed 6 December 2006, http://www.vcoss.org.au/Sector%20Development/PAPER%20060824%20Barraket%20SSTG.doc.

Hayward, P (2003), *Foresight in everyday life,* Australian Foresight Institute, Hawthorn.

Slaughter, R (1996), "Futures studies: From individual to social capacity", *Futures*, vol. 28, no. 8, pp. 751-62.

Slaughter, R (1999), *Futures for the third millenium: Enabling the forward view,* Prospect Media, St Leonards.

Slaughter, R (2004), *Futures beyond dystopia: Creating social foresight,* RoutledgeFalmer, London.

Slaughter, R (2006), *Pathways and impediments to social foresight,* Australian Graduate School of Entrepreneurship Strategic Foresight Program, Swinburne University, Hawthorn.

Thompson, E (2007), *Mind in life: Biology, phenomenology, and the sciences of mind,* The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Voros, J (2003), "A generic foresight process framework", *Foresight*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 10-21.