Institute for the Future

The **Institute for the Future** (**IFTF**) is a Palo Alto, California, US–based not-for-profit think tank. It was established, in 1968, as a spin-off from the RAND Corporation to help organizations plan for the long-term future, a subject known as futures studies.[1]

Contents

Institute for the Future	
Type	Not for profit
Industry	Future Forecasting
Founded	1968 in Middletown, Connecticut, United States
Founders	Frank Davidson, Olaf Helmer, Paul Baran, Arnold Kramish, and Theodore Gordon
Headquarters	201 Hamilton Avenue, Palo Alto, United States
Key people	Marina Gorbis
Services	Ten Year Forecast, Technology Horizons, Health Horizons
Website	iftf.org (http://iftf.org)

History

Genesis

First references to the idea of an *Institute for the Future* may be found in a 1966 Prospectus by Olaf Helmer and others.[2] While at RAND Corporation, Helmer had already been involved with developing the Delphi method of futures studies. He, and others, wished to extend the work further with an emphasis on examining multiple scenarios. This can be seen in the prospectus summary:

- *To explore systematically the possible futures for our [USA] nation and for the international community.*
- *To ascertain which among these possible futures seems desirable, and why.*
- *To seek means by which the probability of their occurrence can be enhanced through appropriate purposeful action.*[1]

First years

The Institute opened in 1968, in Middletown, Connecticut. The initial group was led by Frank Davidson and included Olaf Helmer, Paul Baran, Arnold Kramish, and Theodore Gordon.[1]

The Institute's work initially relied on the forecasting methods built upon by Helmer while at RAND. The Delphi method was used to glean information from multiple anonymous sources. It was augmented by Cross Impact Analysis, which encouraged analysts to consider multiple future scenarios.[3]

While precise and powerful, the methods that had been developed in a corporate environment were oriented to providing business and economic analyses. At a 1971 conference on mathematical modelling Helmer noted the need for similar improvements in societal modelling.[4] Early attempts at doing so included a 'Future State of the Union' report, formatted according to the traditional US Presidential address to the Nation.[5]

Despite establishing an excellent reputation for painstaking analysis of future analyses and forecasting methods, various problems meant that the Institute struggled to find its footing at first. In 1970 Helmer took over the leadership from Davidson, and the Institute shifted its headquarters to Menlo Park, California.[6]

In 1971 Roy Amara took over from Helmer, who continued to run the Middletown office until his departure in 1973.[1][6] Amara held this position until 1990. During Amara's presidency, the Institute conducted some of the earliest studies of the impact of the ARPANET on collaborative work and scientific research, and was notable for its research on computer mediated communications, also known as groupware.[7]

Starting from the early seventies astrophysicist and computer scientist Jacques Vallee, sociologist Bob Johansen, and technology forecaster Paul Saffo worked for IFTF.[8]

An increase in corporate focus

In 1975 the Corporate Associates Program was started to assist private organisations interpret emerging trends and the long-term consequences.[9] Although this program operated until 2001, its role as the Institute's main reporting tool was superseded by the Ten Year Forecast in 1978.[10]

In 1984 the sociologist Herbert L Smith noted that, by the late 1970s, the idea of an open Union reporting format had given way to the proprietary Ten Year Forecast. Smith interpreted this as a renewed focus on business forecasting as public funds became scarce.[11]

It is not clear how pertinent Smith's observations were to how the Institute was operating in this period. Sociologists such as Bob Johansen continued to be active in the Institute's projects. Having taken part in early ARPANET development, Institute staff were well aware of the impact that computer networking would have on society and its inclusion in policy making.[12] However, in a 1984 essay, Roy Amara appeared to acknowledge some form of crisis, and a renewed interest in societal forecasting.[13]

Evolution of societal forecasting

New ways of presenting studies to a less specialised audience were adopted, or developed. As an aid to memory retention, 'Vignetting' presented future scenarios as short stories; to illustrate the point of the scenario, and engage the reader's attention.[14] Later initiatives showed an increasing emphasis on narrative engagement, e.g. 'Artifacts of the future',[15] and 'Human-future interaction'.[16][17]

Ethnographic forecasting was adopted as it became recognised that "society" was actually a myriad of sub-cultures, each with its own outlook. [18] [19]

While older forecasting methods sought the advice of field experts, newer techniques sought the statistical input from all members of society. Public interaction, provided via the internet and social media, made it possible to engage in "bottom up forecasting".[20] While roleplaying and simulation games had long been part of a forecaster's tools, they could now be scaled up into "massively multiplayer forecasting games" such as

Superstruct. This game enlisted the blogs and wikis of over 5,000 people to discuss life 10 years in the future; presenting them with a set of hypothetical, overlapping social threats, and encouraging them to seek collaborative "superstruct" solutions.[21] The concept of the superstruct was subsequently incorporated into the Institute's 'Foresight Engine' tool.[22]

Work

The Institute maintains research programs on the futures of technology, health, and organizations. It publishes a variety of reports and maps, as well as *Future Now,* a blog on emerging technologies. It offers three programs to its clients:

- The Ten year forecast is the Institute's signature piece, having operated since 1978.[10] It tracks today's latent signals, and forecasts what they might mean for business in ten years' time.[23][24]
- The Technology Horizons program, beginning around 2004,[25] is described by the Institute as "*combining a deep understanding of technology and societal forces to identify and evaluate discontinuities and innovations in the next three to ten years*".[26][27]
- The Health horizons program has operated since 2005.[28] The Institute describes its purpose as "*seeking more resilient responses for the complex challenges facing global health*".[29][30]

In 2014 the Institute moved its headquarters to 201 Hamilton Avenue, Palo Alto, California.[31]

The Institute's annual publication *Future Now* is intended to provide summaries of the Institute's body of research. The inaugural edition was published in February 2017. Its theme *The New Body Language* concentrated on the Technology Horizons Program's studies on human and machine symbiosis.

People

As of 2016 the Institute's executive director is Marina Gorbis. Also associated with the institute are David Pescovitz, Anthony M. Townsend, Jane McGonigal, and Jamais Cascio.

Marina Gorbis, 2013

Past leaders

- Frank Davidson (1968–70)
- Olaf Helmer (1970)
- Roy Amara (1971–90)
- Ian Morrison (1990–96)
- Bob Johansen (1996-2004)
- Peter Banks (2004–06)
- Marina Gorbis (2006-)

References

1. Edward Cornish (2004). *Futuring: The Exploration of the Future* (https://books.google.com/?id= phGB2Hc3XZ8C&pg=PA196#v=onepage). World Future Society. pp. 196–97. ISBN 978-0930242572. Retrieved 19 Feb 2016.

2. Olaf Helmer; et al. (26 May 1966). "Prospectus for an Institute for the Future" (https://saltworks.s tanford.edu/catalog/druid:hn553xs4979). Organising Committee for an Institute for the Future. Retrieved 19 Feb 2016.

3. Stephen M. Millett (May 2009). "Should Probabilities Be Used with Scenarios?" (https://web.arc hive.org/web/20160303085919/http://archive.cspo.org/projects/plausibility/files/read_Millett-Sh ould-Probabilities-Be-Used-with-Scenerios.pdf) (PDF). Journal of Future Studies: 61–68. Archived from the original (http://archive.cspo.org/projects/plausibility/files/read_Millett-Should-Probabilities-Be-Used-with-Scenerios.pdf) (PDF) on 3 March 2016. Retrieved 24 February 2016. "[Helmer] and his close associate, Selwyn Enzer, developed a computer-based cross-impact model to generate multiple scenarios as alternative futures."

4. Olaf Helmer (May 2009). Nigel Hawkes (ed.). The Role of Futures Research in Societal Modelling (https://books.google.com/?id=zVHuCAAAQBAJ&pg=PA9#v=onepage). *International Seminar on Trends in Mathematical Modelling: Venice, 13–18 December 1971*. pp. 9–13. ISBN 9783642807336. Retrieved 24 February 2016.

5. Olaf Helmer (1972), "*On the Future State of the Union*", *Report R-27*

6. Nicholas Rescher (28 Feb 2005). *Studies in 20th Century Philosophy* (https://books.google.com/?id=zbK3DklrwEkC&pg=PA203#v=onepage). Ontos Verlag. p. 203. ISBN 978-3937202785. Retrieved 19 Feb 2016.

7. *Electronic enterprises : looking to the future* (https://books.google.com/?id=p2rIkxJ_eHMC&pg=PA44). DIANE Publishing. 1994. pp. 44–. ISBN 978-1-4289-2051-4.

8. Jacques Vallee (2003). *The Heart of the Internet: An Insider's View of the Origin and Promise of the On-Line Revolution* (https://books.google.com/?id=EH46qowjvasC). Jacques Vallee. ISBN 978-1-57174-369-5.

9. Edward Cornish (1 January 1977). *The Study of the Future: An Introduction to the Art and Science of Understanding and Shaping Tomorrow's World* (https://books.google.com/?id=UMbylT5nsD0C&pg=PA241). Transaction publishers. p. 241. ISBN 9781412839259. Retrieved 29 February 2016.

10. Catalog entry for Ten year forecast (http://www.iucat.iu.edu/iub/6623677). IUCat. Retrieved 29 February 2016. "Publishing history: began in 1978"

11. Herbert L Smith (1987). "The Social Forecasting Industry". In Kenneth C. Land; Stephen H. Schneider (eds.). *Forecasting in the Social and Natural Sciences* (https://books.google.com/?id=izLrCAAAQBAJ&pg=PA43#v=onepage). p. 43. ISBN 9789400940116. Retrieved 24 February 2016.

12. Robert Rheinhold (14 June 1982). "*Study Says Technology Could Transform Society*" (https://www.nytimes.com/1982/06/14/us/study-says-technology-could-transform-society.html). *New York Times*. Retrieved 24 February 2016.

13. Roy Amara (August 1984). "*New directions for futures research —setting the stage*". *Futures*. **16** (4): 401–404. doi:10.1016/0016-3287(84)90103-4 (https://doi.org/10.1016%2F0016-3287%2884%2990103-4). "Futures research is currently in a state of abeyance and may well be approaching a critical crossroad... The primary focus of futures research in the next decade should be in the public sector where the need is greater,..."

14. Victoria J. Marsick; Karen E. Watkins (1999). *Facilitating Learning Organizations: Making Learning Count* (https://archive.org/details/facilitatinglear0000mars). Gower publishing. pp. 90 (https://archive.org/details/facilitatinglear0000mars/page/90). ISBN 9780566080395. Retrieved 24 February 2016.

15. C. Andrew Doyle (1 October 2015). A Generous Community: Being the Church in a New Missionary Age (https://books.google.com/?id=dID5CgAAQBAJ&pg=PT26#v=onepage). Church publishing inc. p. 26. ISBN 9780819232311. Retrieved 24 February 2016. "*In 2008 Johansen...challenged the group to see bits and pieces of artifacts from the surrounding culture as "provocative moments"*"

16. David Pescovitz (21 February 2007). "Jason Tester: Case for Human-Future Interaction" (http s://boingboing.net/2007/02/21/jason-tester-case-fo.html). Boing Boing. Retrieved 25 February 2016.

17. Patrick van der Duin (13 January 2016). *Foresight in Organizations: Methods and Tools* (https:// books.google.com/?id=GKZeCwAAQBAJ&pg=PA228#v=onepage). Routledge. p. 228. ISBN 9781317543152. Retrieved 25 February 2016.

18. Victoria M. Razak (2000). T Stevenson (ed.). "Essays in Anticipatory Anthropology" (https://boo ks.google.com/books?id=puB3iqOeAggC). *Futures*. **32** (8): 717–723. doi:10.1016/s0016-3287(00)00022-7 (https://doi.org/10.1016%2Fs0016-3287%2800%2900022-7). Retrieved 25 February 2016.

19. J.A. English-Lueck; Charles N. Darrah; Andrea Saveri (2002). Brian D. Loader; William H. Dutton (eds.). "Trusting Strangers: Work Relationships in Four High-Tech Communities". *Information, Communication & Society*. **5** (1): 90–108. doi:10.1080/13691180110117677 (http s://doi.org/10.1080%2F13691180110117677).

20. J.A. English-Lueck (20 September 2010). *Being and Well-Being: Health and the Working Bodies of Silicon Valley* (https://books.google.com/?id=q2aMv-cr1bYC&pg=PR10#v=onepage). Stanford University Press. p. x. ISBN 9780804775793. Retrieved 25 February 2016.

21. Daniel Terdiman (9 January 2009). "*MMOs to help futurists solve world problems?*" (https://ww w.cnet.com/news/mmos-to-help-futurists-solve-world-problems/). CNet. Retrieved 25 February 2016.

22. Jörg Schatzmann, René Schäfer, Frederik Eichelbaum (December 2013). "*Foresight 2.0 - Definition, overview & evaluation*" (https://doi.org/10.1007/s40309-013-0015-4). *European Journal of Futures Research*. **1**. doi:10.1007/s40309-013-0015-4 (https://doi.org/10.1007%2Fs4 0309-013-0015-4).

23. Anne Balsamo (19 June 2011). Designing Culture: The Technological Imagination at Work (htt ps://books.google.com/?id=_BsQudpHXn4C&pg=PA52#v=onepage). Duke University Press. pp. 52–53. ISBN 978-0822344452. Retrieved 29 February 2016.

24. Schwartz, Ariel (20 January 2015). "Predictions About The Last Decade, From Futurists In 2005" (http://www.fastcoexist.com/3041052/futurist-forum/predictions-about-the-last-decade-fro m-futurists-in-2005). *Fast Company*. Retrieved 17 September 2015.

25. Andrea Saveri, Howard Rheingold, Alex Soojung-Kim Pang, and Kathi Vian (June 2004). "*Toward a New Literacy of Cooperation in Business*" (http://www.iftf.org/uploads/media/SR-851 A_New_Literacy_Cooperation.pdf) (PDF). *Technological Horizons Program*. Retrieved 1 March 2016.

26. "IFTF: Technology Horizons" (http://www.iftf.org/iftf-you/programs-initiatives/technology-horizon s/). *IFTF Web site*. Retrieved 3 March 2016.

27. (reprinted from InnovationNewsDaily) (11 January 2012). "*What's next? Predictions from the Institute for the Future*" (http://www.mnn.com/green-tech/research-innovations/stories/whats-nex t-predictions-from-the-institute-for-the-future). *Mother Nature Network*. Retrieved 1 March 2016. "Earlier this month, IFTF announced a list of predictions for the next three-to-10 years, at the Technology Horizons Program."

28. Bern Shen (May 2005). "*Top Ten Impediments to Better Health & Health Care in the United States [SR-900]*" (https://web.archive.org/web/20160306022901/http://www.iftf.org/member/syst em/files/deliverables/SR-900_Top_Ten_Impediments.pdf) (PDF). *Health Horizons Program*. Archived from the original (http://www.iftf.org/member/system/files/deliverables/SR-900_Top_Te n_Impediments.pdf) (PDF) on 6 March 2016. Retrieved 1 March 2016.

29. "IFTF: Health Horizons" (http://www.iftf.org/healthfutures/). *IFTF Web site*. Retrieved 4 March 2016.

30. Bob Johansen (1 August 2007). Get There Early: Sensing the Future to Compete in the Present (https://books.google.com/?id=ie5loN3ycecC&pg=PA42#v=onepage). Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc. p. 42. ISBN 9781459609198. Retrieved 1 March 2016.

31. Daryl Savage (23 June 2014). "*ShopTalk: Ming's still open, downtown Palo Alto retail moves out*" (https://www.paloaltoonline.com/news/2014/06/23/shoptalk-mings-still-open-downtown-retail-moves-out). *Palo Alto Online*. Retrieved 2 March 2016. "The prestigious think tank Institute for the Future recently moved into 201 Hamilton Ave., at the corner of Emerson Street."

External links

- Official website (http://iftf.org) ✎