

Working paper: StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future Participant Feedback

Rory Sarten

Preamble

This working paper, written by Rory Sarten, provides an overview of the feedback we have received from participants in StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future, with particular emphasis on identifying ways of improving future events. I have added a further section at the end, 'Lessons from StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future', in which I reflect on and respond to the observations included in this paper. Thank you again for your constructive feedback.

Wendy McGuinness
Chief Executive

Purpose

The aim of this working paper is to synthesise participant feedback received by the Sustainable Future Institute on the StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future event, held in March 2011. This feedback is largely derived from an online feedback survey conducted by the Institute, and has been compiled together with feedback received after the event. In the Institute's [Report 11: A History of Future-thinking Initiatives in New Zealand 1936–2010: Learning from the past to build a better future](#) we highlight 12 key lessons learnt from reviewing New Zealand future thinking initiatives. Lesson eight was to 'Report and measure progress – before, during and after the initiative'. With this in mind, we hope this working paper will make us better able to deliver and encourage others to run successful future thinking initiatives.

About StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future, March 2011

StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future was held in the last four days of March 2011. The Institute published a pre-workshop workbook and organised a two-day introductory future studies course, taught by Dr Peter Bishop from the University of Houston. This course was followed by a two-day workshop that culminated in presentations at the Legislative Council Chamber. [Report 13: StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future Strategy Maps: From Te Papa to the Legislative Council Chamber](#) documents the event for participants and other interested parties. To learn more about the inputs, processes and outputs, we recommend you read [Report 13](#) and our [e-book StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future Reflections: From participants of the workshop](#), both available on the Institute's website.

Methodology

Participants were asked to complete an online survey form containing 29 questions that covered a broad range of key elements in StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future. A total of 34 participants (over a third of those that attended) responded to the survey; the responses do not include Sustainable Future Institute staff members who attended the event as participants. Feedback received from the survey has been summarised and divided into the following five sections:

- A. Feedback on the Workbook
- B. Feedback on the Future Studies Course
- C. Feedback on the Six Parts of the Workshop
- D. Feedback on the Institute's Performance
- E. Feedback on Follow-up Activity

A: Feedback on the Workbook

One of the key inputs prepared by the Institute for StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future was a [workbook](#), introducing elements of foresight techniques and strategy mapping. This workbook was designed to be a collection of useful and insightful information, to provide participants with concepts and context before attending the course. The survey feedback generally rated the workbook positively as a pre-workshop resource for its readability, the quality of information and the breadth of topics covered.

The workbook was distributed to participants online as a PDF file, and some respondents noted that they would have preferred to receive a hard copy of the publication. All but five respondents commented on the content of the workbook.

A few respondents have suggested that the workbook was ‘possibly too much pre-reading to do beforehand’. One respondent noted that the workbook was ‘so broad’, and that they found it ‘difficult to get focused on the most important stuff’. Another suggested that there was ‘no direct connection between the workbook and the “work” of the workshop’. It was also suggested that the workbook should contain more ‘thinking work’ to allow for more interaction with the content.

Some participants commented on the quality of the design and content, one saying ‘this was handsomely designed, engaging and opened the mind nicely’; another stating ‘well prepared workbook’. Some commented that the workbook was helpful preparation for the workshop; ‘It gave me a sense of what was to come.’ There was also positive feedback on the style of the book, with some respondents noting that the workbook was a resource that could be dipped into or ‘skimmed for articles’.

B: Feedback on the Future Studies Course

In the two days prior to the StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future workshop, Dr Peter Bishop, director of the graduate programme in Future Studies at the University of Houston, taught an introductory future studies course in foresight and scenario techniques to nearly half the workshop participants. More information on this course can be found in Report 13: *StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future Strategy Maps: From Te Papa to the Legislative Council Chamber*.

Exactly half the respondents to the feedback survey attended this course. We asked participants to rate the relevance of the course for their personal goals, the goals of their organisation and the goals of their wider community. Overall, feedback on the course content was generally positive, with most respondents highlighting its value: ‘The two days were packed with relevant content’ and ‘The course was stimulating and gave a good sense of the field of futures studies and the methods and techniques used’. Although one respondent noted that the course was ‘a little too specific for my needs’.

Participants were also asked to supply feedback on the depth and breadth of the content, presentation style, venue and food at the course. Dr Peter Bishop’s presentation style was very positively reported on. One respondent commented:

I thought that Peter Bishop was a superb teacher! [He has an] obvious academic prowess and the ability to impart his knowledge through a range of activities.

The depth and breadth of the content was fairly well received, with respondents providing a few suggestions for exploring alternative areas of interest. It was commented that there was a distinct disconnect between the content of the future studies course programme and the workshop programme. The contribution and level of input of other participants at the course was also very highly rated.

When asked whether they would recommend this course to a colleague almost all respondents replied ‘yes’. Respondents were split evenly on whether they would like to attend a refresher course. One respondent noted that they felt no need for a refresher because of the high quality of the presentations and quantity of the notes supplied by Dr Bishop.

Participants were asked to suggest who, if the Institute offered the course in the following year, they would like to hear from and what types of skills and expertise they would want to be exposed to, to extend their learning. Among the suggestions were:

- Behaviour change;
- More from humanitarians, people in social services and indigenous peoples;
- Bigger-picture thinking and more experiential process;
- The opportunity to work with others to develop more scenarios;
- Locally based speakers on sustainability and NZ in 25–50 years' time;
- More scenario-building where the speakers participate, and
- People who have been effective in influencing transformative changes based on futures-thinking.

C: Feedback on the Six Parts of the Workshop

The workshop comprised six distinct workshop components spread across two days:

- Part 1** Setting the global context
- Part 2** Where New Zealand is today
- Part 3** Preparing the strategy maps
- Part 4** Presenting and judging strategy maps
- Part 5** Three workstreams
- Part 6** Presentations to Members of Parliament at the Legislative Council Chamber

Feedback on the national and international speakers (Parts 1 and 2)

StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future featured prominent national and international speakers. We asked respondents to rate the quality of the speakers overall. The most common rating was 'very good', followed by 'excellent'. There were no responses of 'poor'. We asked respondents to rate each individual speaker. The most highly rated speakers were Sir Paul Callaghan, Dr Peter Bishop and Mai Chen. Respondents reflected very positively on the speaker line-up, one commenting that the speakers were a 'well-assembled collection of experts giving a range of thought-provoking inputs'. Interestingly, the feedback on all other speakers was also very high, with no consistent theme apparent, implying that participants enjoyed hearing from speakers in their respective areas of interest, rather than responding to any strong preferences on topic.

However, feedback also suggests that while the quality of speakers was high, people felt there were too many in too short a space of time. The survey also asked how participants felt about the length of time allocated for the speakers in the context of the two days. Most felt that speakers were allocated the right length of time, however a number felt that the speakers had too long and they would have appreciated more time for their group work at the expense of the number of speakers. One respondent in particular exemplifies this feedback, stating:

Probably too many speakers. They were all good but given the fact that we had insufficient time to prepare and produce the group material, the speakers could have been reduced. Or we could have viewed the presentations online prior to the workshop so we could have dedicated the 2 days to producing our ideas.

Participants were asked if there were any topics that were repeated or that they would reduce. Responses to this varied; one suggested there was far too much repetition, while others responded that they enjoyed the variety of topics discussed. Responses to this question also reflect a largely personal interest in speakers and topic areas. One respondent commented:

I think it was a good mix of speakers across topics – economic, social, environmental, political etc. Some are always going to seem more relevant, but we were a mixed audience with wide interests, so a wide range of speakers was necessary.

Finally we asked if there were any topic areas missing that might have added value to the discussion. Responses included:

- More about indigenous peoples from Aotearoa;
- Greater focus on youth;
- Education;
- Behaviour change;
- Future studies;
- Minimising carbon footprints;
- Health in New Zealand;
- Religious beliefs;
- Ethics and values;
- Social conditions.

Feedback on the facilitators and the strategy mapping process (Parts 3 to 5)

StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future aimed to utilise the Harvard Business School strategy mapping process to help groups translate their vision for New Zealand into a long-term strategic plan. More information on this process can be found in [Report 13: StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future Strategy Maps: From Te Papa to the Legislative Council Chamber](#).

We asked respondents to reflect on how well the group exercise on strategy mapping prepared them to complete an effective strategy map. The majority of responses rated preparation as ‘good’ or ‘fair’. Respondents supplied a number of very useful comments on how this aspect of the workshop could be improved. These are largely centred on six themes:

1. Time

As noted in the feedback on speakers, time was an important element for participants in the workshop. A number of respondents commented that the teams felt rushed during the strategy mapping process and this impacted on the quality of the group work; ‘limited time meant we were limited in the ability to drive original, innovative thinking.’ There were, however, participants who felt that the timeframes pushed their groups in a positive manner, and one noted, ‘Very tight timeframes force groups to work outside their comfort zones and that is quite good for breaking rigidities in thinking and the answer may be as good as if we [had] spent a lot more time on it.’

2. Group dynamics

The second theme that arose for the strategy mapping process was the nature of the group dynamics. Relating to the issue of time as noted above, a number of respondents commented that they would have appreciated time for introductions, one suggesting, ‘The groups needed an extra 20 minutes at the beginning to introduce who they were, why they were interested in these groups and what they hoped to get out of it!’ Another respondent noted that group introductions could have created ‘greater awareness of the team’s composition and would have enabled better delegation to occur’.

3. Designer

Participants rated the role of group designer very highly.

4. Students

The inclusion of school students in the groups was also commented on; almost all respondents noted that it was important to include young people in the discussion, although two were concerned about their ability to contribute on an even footing with other participants.

5. Facilitation – Process chairs

Most participants reflected positively on the role of the process chair in their group. It was noted that this role did vary considerably, with some process chairs taking ‘quite a hands-off’ approach while others were seen to govern the proceedings quite strongly. There was general agreement that for the strategy mapping to be successful process chairs need to have the ability to ‘draw out the thinking of the workshop participants’. Many of the process chairs were able to do this within the time constraints and the challenges of developing consensus among a group of diverse New Zealanders. A few respondents also suggested that it would have been valuable to have trained facilitators in this role due to its challenging nature. Some of the process chairs themselves noted that they would have liked greater knowledge of the process ahead of time.

6. Facilitation – Group exercise and consultants support

Respondents also commented on the framing of the strategy mapping process, saying it was important to ‘clarify what’s required for a mission/purpose, vision, strategic goal/theme etc.’ Some respondents also stressed the need for one person to make clear and concise announcements describing the purpose and outputs at the beginning of each session. Others, however, enjoyed the staged steps in the process and felt that the groups were well supported throughout. Responses on this topic tended to reflect the variation of experiences within the different groups. Most participants liked the strategy mapping process and saw it as an effective way to communicate a national strategy.

During the strategy mapping process a number of facilitators and consultants were in the room to help assist the groups. We asked participants to rate their experience of these people. Most respondents were not able to comment on their experience of the facilitators, experts and judges, as their experience was specific to who they had engaged with. In nearly all cases, those who had been in groups that were provided with assistance reflected positively on their experience.

Feedback on the Legislative Council Chamber (Part 6)

The final component of StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future was the presentation of the selected strategy maps to Members of Parliament and the public at the Legislative Council Chamber. Most respondents rated the importance of presenting at the Legislative Council Chamber highly, both in terms of its historic significance and for the incentive of presenting to Members of Parliament. Comments suggest that many participants also simply enjoyed the chance to relax, eat and drink after a hectic few days.

Some felt there could have been more ‘buy in’ and presence from politicians. One respondent commented, ‘It would have been an added bonus if we could have asked the MPs present questions after they had given feedback on the presentations.’ Some felt that the spontaneity and verve of the original presentations had been lost in the polishing process for the presentations. However, this aspect of the event was largely well received, with one respondent stating:

I loved the time to reflect with others and enjoy our success, whether that be the completion of the task; the achievements of each group; the relief of making it to the end; the opportunity to speak to others and gauge how they were and [how they] managed [in] their group; to regroup with people from the conference; and to speak with mayors and MPs.

D: Feedback on the Institute’s Performance

It is important to understand how the Institute could improve its interactions and experiences with participants. We asked participants to rate the Institute’s media presence across a number of different online mediums. Most people were aware of the Sustainable Future Institute’s website and the StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future website, predominantly rating these ‘good’ or ‘very good’ respectively. However, most respondents were not able to comment with regard to our presence on social media: YouTube, Blog, Twitter or Facebook. This suggests that there has not been a very strong awareness of the scope of the Institute’s media presence outside the Institute and the event websites.

Additionally, we asked respondents to rate their interactions with the Sustainable Future Institute staff before the workshop, during Dr Peter Bishop's course, during the workshop and after the event. We wanted to gain an understanding of how well we had engaged with participants both over time and after the event. The results suggest that by and large most people had positive experiences with the staff, although some have indicated that this tapered off slightly once the workshop was completed, suggesting that more effort was needed to maintain relationships after the event. The majority of responses were very supportive of the team and offered praise for running such a challenging event. One respondent commented:

My sense was that the two-day workshop 30th–31st March stretched the staff resources. But throughout [the duration] the courtesy and helpfulness were of a high standard.

Another respondent suggested that all the staff should have been introduced to participants at the start of the event, rather than just those who were in the room. Overall, we were pleased that participants enjoyed their experience and felt well looked after by Institute staff.

E: Feedback on Follow-up Activity

It is important to the Institute that StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future is much more than a two-day event. We see it instead as a place where a very necessary discussion was begun.

We asked participants if attending the event had led them to consider any follow-up activities. We were pleased to see that the majority of respondents have considered follow-up activities to the event. The comments associated with this question suggest that many people established new contacts at the event and that these have resulted in continuing dialogue and presentations to others on aspects of the workshop. Some participants indicated they are now involved with other events and are drawing from their experience of StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future. We asked if the Institute is able to assist these follow-up activities in any way and we are working to act on these comments where we can.

We asked respondents to evaluate the performance of the event in meeting a number of goals. We found that the greatest areas of success were in improving expertise in foresight, strengthening the local futurist community, learning new information and developing a process that can be replicated nationally and internationally to explore the future of countries. The performance areas that did not rate as strongly included: learning how to develop strategy maps; building consensus over New Zealand's long-term direction, and identifying innovative ways forward for New Zealand. Although this is understandable considering the length of the workshop, there was a clear indication that many of the participants wish to build on what they have learnt and develop a long-term strategy for New Zealand.

Lessons from StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future

The whole idea was largely an experiment to see if there was a way for citizens to get together to develop a strategy for their country. We hope that StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future can provide a blueprint for similar events in other countries and for other fields of study.

The Institute has learnt a great deal in the course of planning, executing and following up on this event. This feedback has been collected in part so that we can reflect on how events like this can be made more successful and so that we might pass on the insights that we have gained.

There were areas for improvement; two were the importance of putting in place a robust process, and allowing for sufficient time to implement that process. Many aspects of the event were very well received by participants; the workbook, Dr Peter Bishop's future studies course, the strategy mapping process, the Legislative Council Chamber, and engagement with the Institute staff all received good or very good feedback.

Strategy mapping process

For the strategy mapping process to be successful there needs to be a clear programme of action that is communicated concisely. The survey found some participants did not read the workbook and therefore missed the Brazilian example. This may have made them feel less confident in respect to the strategy mapping process. For this reason, we have included it again in Report 13: *StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future Strategy Maps: From Te Papa to the Legislative Council Chamber*. We encountered a challenge in finding a balance between delivering enough but not too much information, at the right time, and without excess repetition. This is also true in regard to providing the right amount of support to groups, as some needed very little while others needed significantly more. To this end we responded to a few requests where participants were concerned about the group dynamics or felt they needed more guidance. Providing the right process for delivering information and judging the appropriate level of support are both difficult tasks and do require consideration for those undertaking similar events. In retrospect, we got it right for some groups but not for others.

Timeframe

I felt very strongly that we could only expect participants to commit to a two-day workshop. Because of this, and to cover the necessary ground to produce strategy maps, the workshop needed to be crammed full of information, processes and presentations. It was always going to be tight but I believed, and still do, that the process of mapping a future for New Zealand must happen collectively, with a diverse group of committed and positive New Zealanders, ideally face-to-face. It was harder work than I had envisaged but the productivity of the groups and the high quality of their outputs were far in advance of what I had hoped. I feel very strongly that the results speak for themselves and hope that all those who attended can look at [Report 13: StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future Strategy Maps: From Te Papa to the Legislative Council Chamber](#) with pride.

Finally, I felt that I would leave you with these inspiring words from Sir Paul Callaghan: 'So my take is, we simply push on, ignore the pessimism, and lead by example. Then suddenly we find ourselves surrounded by success and telling ourselves that it was always meant to be this way.'

Thank you again for your reflections; now it is time 'to simply push on'.

All the best

Wendy McGuinness and the team

Published

Copyright © Sustainable Future Institute Limited, July 2011
ISBN 978-1-877473-86-9 (PDF).