

Strategic Foresight Primer for the 2026 Agile Mission Assurance Workshop

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Contents

1.	Aerospace Strategic Foresight Primer.....	1
1.1	Foundational Foresight Concepts.....	1
1.2	Key terms used in Figure 1.....	2
1.3	Key terms used in Figure 2.....	3
2.	References.....	4

Figures

Figure 1.	The Futures Mindset Model [1].	2
Figure 2.	An example process flow for Foresight Workshop activities.	3

1. Aerospace Strategic Foresight Primer

Strategic Foresight is a diverse set of frameworks, methods, processes, and tools used to explore and increase understanding of multiple potential futures to inform better decisions today by helping us move toward futures we want, avoid futures we don't want, and improve our ability to avoid and/or be resilient against surprise. It does not seek to predict a singular future but rather to illuminate different potential futures [1][2].

Strategic Foresight is a recognized academic and business discipline with its own lexicon and taxonomy. This document is intended to introduce the reader to some foundational portions of that lexicon and taxonomy to help provide understanding of “what we mean when we say...”

1.1 Foundational Foresight Concepts

Four Futures Model – A Foresight Concept that describes four structural patterns of change or archetypes associated with emergent futures: Growth, Collapse, Discipline, and Transformation. These archetypes characterize shifts in the way a domain operates, or in the rules of the domain’s operating system [3][4].

- Growth – A continuation or extrapolation of the present into the future. Present trends continue within the system without any major disturbances. The current system and its way of doing things prevails. | “Same rules” [3][4].
- Collapse – The system is stuck in dysfunction. Collapse does not necessarily suggest an apocalypse, but the system regresses or dips into a level of dysfunction, e.g., economic stagnation or recession. | “No rules” [3][4].
- Discipline – A challenge to the system leads to compromise to save the existing way of doing things. The system is challenged and responds in a way to save itself. It actively seeks to return to stability and is willing to make some compromises to preserve its essence, e.g., bailing out banks and companies in the Great Recession. | “Changing rules” [3][4].
- Transformation – The system can’t be saved, so a new one with new ways of doing things emerges. Transformation entails fundamental changes to the system, which could be driven by any number of factors, values, technologies, or economics. It essentially involves creating new operating rules or guidelines for the domain or system. | “New rules” [3][4].

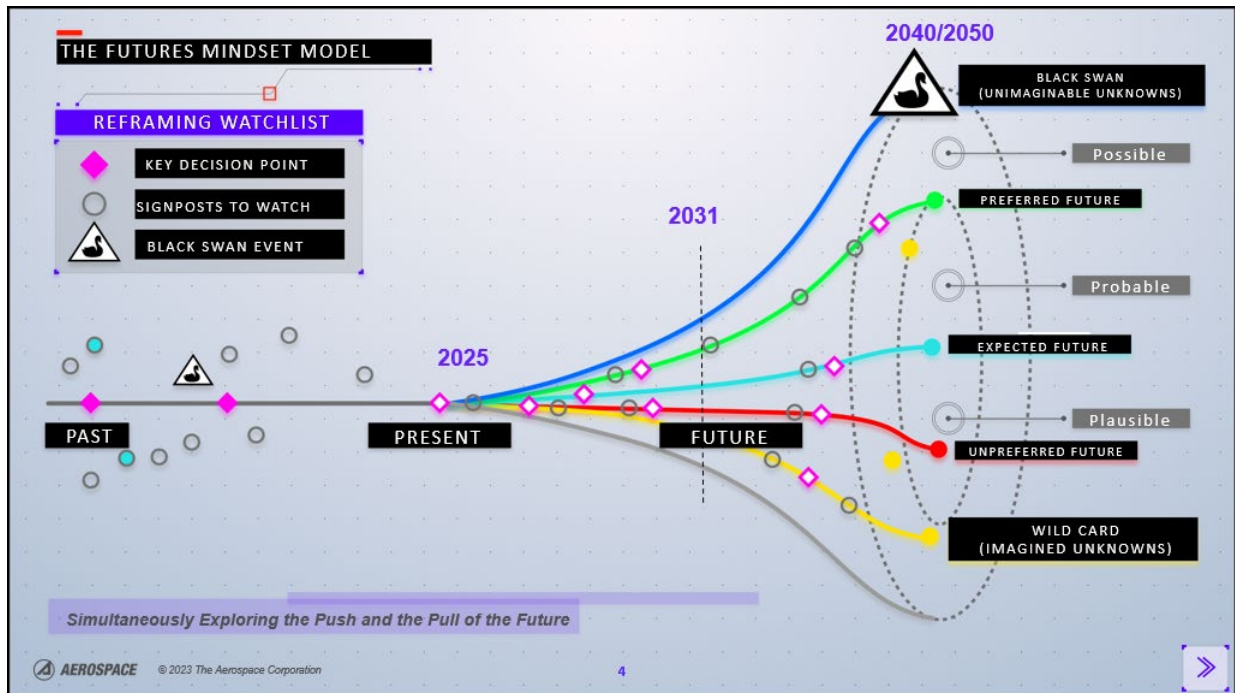


Figure 1. The Futures Mindset Model [1].

1.2 Key terms used in Figure 1

- Expected Future – Also known as the “Baseline Future.” The singular, default, business as usual, extrapolated ‘continuation of the past through the present’ future. This single future could also be considered as being ‘the most probable’ of the Probable Futures [5].
- Probable Futures – The futures we think are ‘likely to’ happen, usually based on (in many cases, quantitative) current trends [5].
- Preferred Futures – The futures we think ‘should’ or ‘ought to’ happen, often based on normative value judgements as opposed to mostly cognitive assessments [5].
- Plausible Futures – The futures we think ‘could’ happen based on our current understanding of how the world works (physical laws, social processes, etc.) [5]; that is, we know everything we need to know for these to emerge.
- Possible Futures – The futures we think ‘might’ emerge, based on some future knowledge we do not yet possess, but which we might possess someday (e.g., faster than light travel) [5]; that is, we do not yet know everything we need to know for these to emerge.
- Wildcards – Imagined unknowns; low probability events that would have very large impact if they occurred. Since they are considered ‘low probability,’ any member of any class of future outside the range of Probable Futures could be considered a Wildcard (although this usage is not common, as the focus tends to be on ‘high impact’ events) [5].
- Black Swans – Unimagined unknowns; although similar to Wildcards in the low probability/high impact sense, Black Swans are events which have not previously been imagined. Their existence only becomes known when they emerge [5].

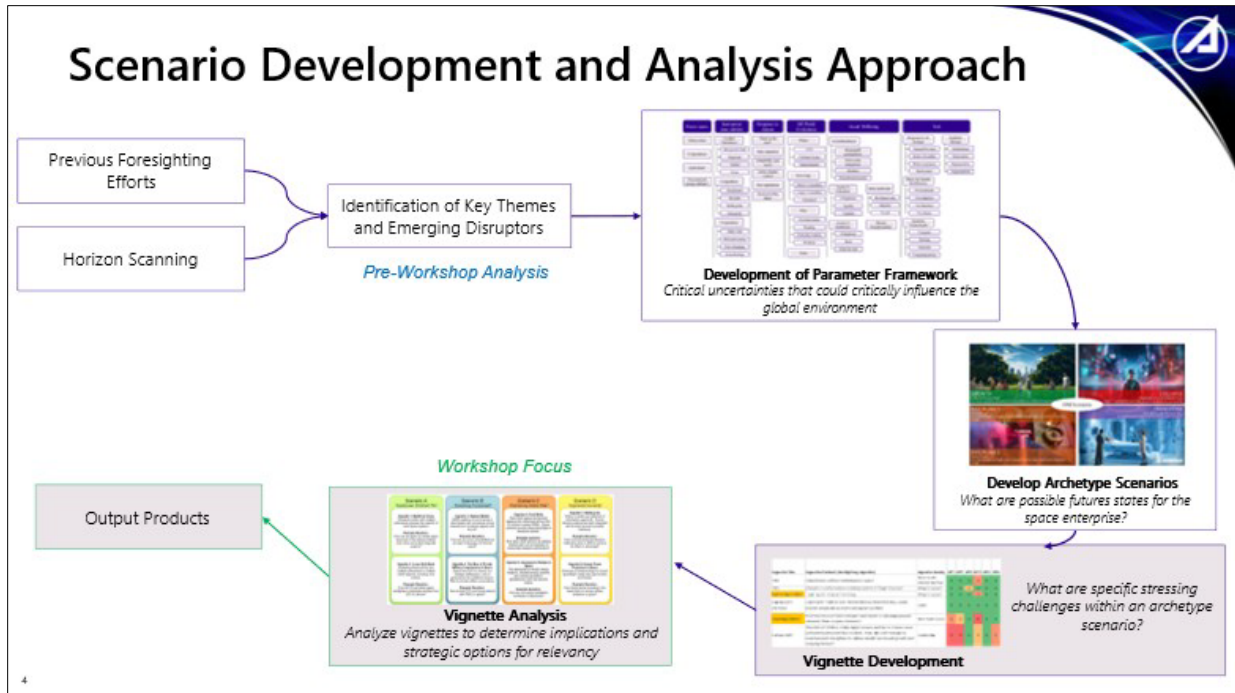


Figure 2. An example process flow for Foresight Workshop activities.

1.3 Key terms used in Figure 2

- Horizon Scanning – The practice of observing, surveilling, or searching the macro-environment for signals of change [6].
- Parameter Framework – A Foresight Methodology developed by the Aerospace Strategic Foresight Team for exploring potential futures by assessing various states of specific uncertainties that could critically influence the macro-environment as it relates to the domain [1].
- Emerging Disruptors – Signals of future change that appear in the present [1]. Usually articles, videos, or other media forms, but can also be identified from direct observations such as surveys or expert interviews.
- Critical Uncertainties – Drivers of change that are crucial to the domain of the Foresight Project and whose outcome is too uncertain to be forecasted or estimated [1].
- Archetype Scenarios – Scenarios developed in support of a Foresight Project that align to one of the Four Futures Model archetypes [1].
- Vignettes – Micro-narratives that describe and visualize specific stressing challenges within a scenario, thematically similar to “a day in the life” stories [1].
- Signposts – Signals of change that are precursors to assessed critical or significant yet-to-emerge changes [1].

2. References

- [1] Adapted from Cunzeman, K., Frakes, P., Dickey, R., Jones, S., “Strategic Foresight for the Space Enterprise”, 2021, <https://csps.aerospace.org/papers/strategic-foresight-space-enterprise>
- [2] Adapted from Hines, A. “What is Foresight?”, n.d., <https://www.houstonforesight.org/#foresight-definition>
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- [4] Adapted from Hines, A., “Pathways to the Future”, 2023, <https://www.ascend.events/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Pathways-to-the-Future-Andy-Hines-Presentation.pdf>
- [5] Adapted from Voros, J., “The Futures Cone, use and history”, 2017, <https://thevoroscope.com/2017/02/24/the-futures-cone-use-and-history/>
- [6] Adapted from Hines, A., “The Evolution of Framework Foresight”, 2020, https://www.andyhinesight.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Evolution-of-Framework-Foresight_Proof.pdf

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