

Futures Research Quarterly

Volume 2, Number 1

Spring 1986

CONTENTS

- The Future of State Court Administration**
by Sohail Inayatullah 5
- The Three Zones of Transition: A Guide to Riding the
Tiger of Change**
by Hazel Henderson 19
- Who Forecasts Better—Business People or
Professional Forecasters?**
by Charles H. Little 39
- Mapping the Issues of an Industry: An Exercise in
Issues Identification**
by Joseph F. Coates and Jennifer Jarratt 53
- The State Scanning Network: An Issue Identification
System for State Policy Managers**
by Lauren Cook 65

SPECIAL FEATURES

- Around the World** 79
Sohail Inayatullah: Futures, Planning, and the YMCA
Congressional Clearinghouse on the Future:
How the United States Congress Examines
Long-Term Issues and Options
- Book Review** 93
Joseph Coates: Lost at the Frontier: US Science and
Technology Policy Adrift

AROUND THE WORLD

FUTURES, PLANNING, AND THE YMCA

The Nuuanu (Hawaii) YMCA (Y) Long Range Planning Committee started at the grassroots level, through the vision of a few key administrators, particularly the Executive Director. It involved various board members, YMCA staff and consulting futurists.

The goal of the Committee was to (1) futurize and (2) develop a strategic plan. To do this, they discussed futures and planning methodology and then attempted to discern in a cursory fashion key trends in the future. The next task was that of determining why the YMCA was interested in futures. Basically, this effort grew out of the belief that at one time the Y was one of the premiere organizations/associations in the USA and that, although it had declined, it might once again regain its past stature. The YMCA had pioneered learn-to-swim campaigns and father-son programs, and led the way to the formation of Boy Scouts and Camp Fire Girls. In addition, basketball and volleyball both were Y inventions.

The Planning Committee then examined the purpose of the Y. They attempted to discern whether the functions it filled in the past were still relevant today—those of a young men's Christian association concerned with the whole person: mind, body and spirit.

They tried to understand why the Y was no longer the premiere association and why it had lost a great deal of its market-share since the 1960s. Some reasons for this loss were that schools had opened their own gyms, health awareness had led to private sector spas, and networking was no longer done at the Y but through different institutions and associations. The sense of group awareness that symbolized the Y in the 1960s was lost in the 1970s. In addition to its loss of marketshare, the Y had lost a clear vision or direction. Should it compete with spas, should it simply wait and see how different programs are working at the community colleges or at the city and parks and then adopt the ones that work, or should it plan for the future?

Some administrators felt that the Y should not **react** to the future; rather it should, as evidenced in its historical roots, **create and thereby shape the future**. The consensus of the Long Range Planning Committee was that the Y should forecast societal futures and then shape its own future. This, however, is not an easy task, and administrators in any organization rarely start new directions and policies unless confronted by severe crises.

Practically speaking—at least on the technical, apolitical level—that involved analyzing key trends of the future, key future images,

and probable societal futures, and then developing programs and plans to meet these trends. However, before this could be done, the YMCA on a national level and local level needed to examine whether the YMCA was still necessary. That is, why not simply disband?

One response was that, while other groups may be meeting various needs—physical, or computer, or social-community, or religious—the Y could play an important part in social development by meeting physical, mental and spiritual needs, thereby helping to create tomorrow's citizens and leaders. This "human development" aspect, having youngsters develop responsibility for their lives, has always, in fact, been an integral part of the Y.

The next part of the planning process was to look at alternative futures. The purpose of constructing "futures wheels" was to impart the "gut feeling" of alternative futures to the Y planning group. Through this technique, the Committee attempted to show how changes in assumptions and conditions could, through a series of interactive relationships, cause the system as a whole to change. The Continued Growth future, i.e. things will pretty much continue (but bigger and better), is such a fundamental part of all our mindsets that we rarely believe that things may be different.

The Committee used two futures wheels. The first was based on common sense notions with respect to the rising force of the elderly. In a brainstorming session, they attempted to deduce the impact on the Y if the following conditions occurred: (a) 50% of the population was 65 or older, (b) 40% of the population was between 40 to 60 years, and (c) 10% of the population was between 1 and 40. With this scenario, they deduced that the basic mission of the Y might change; its clientele would change; its programs would change: there might be death and dying programs, nutrition programs, programs that dealt with post-retirement; there would also be a prime demand for youth in this society, as well as increased volunteerism, to mention only a few possibilities.

The second wheel looked at another possible condition: the Y becomes a "for profit" group (or loses a considerable part of its donations). Of course, the basic nature of the Y would change then. It would have to adopt a corporate model, with bottom line pressures—it might even decide to change its whole mission, become primarily a hotel business, or lease its properties.

A third possible wheel is the impact of telecommunications and computer technologies on the Y. Would its basic missions, programs and priorities change?

Following the futurization of the Long Range Planning Committee, they held a conference to futurize the Nuuanu Y Board Members. At this conference they adopted a one day compressed format. They attempted to examine, in addition to the Y's future, their personal futures and Hawaii's futures. These futures were then

placed in global context through the discussion of trends such as (1) Earth to Space, (2) Globalization of Capital, and (3) Decline of the US and Emergence of Japan/China as "Core" states. Finally a variety of brainstorming exercises were held to gather emerging issues and trend information from conference participants.

These futures exercises greatly helped "open up" committee and board members to two of the key concepts in the futures perspective: (1) that there is no one future and (2) that tomorrow may be radically different from today.

With the planning committee and the board futurized, the question before the group was, "where to now?" At this point, as in any organization, the structure and politics of the organization decide the future directions. The Nuuanu Y, as any branch or corporate subdivision, must follow guidelines from the Metro Y, the Center. Would it then be better to develop a strategic plan for the Nuuanu Y (with high symbolic use, but low implementation probability), or attempt to futurize the Center directly, or further the futurization process at the Nuuanu Y?

They decided at that time to hold off on the strategic plan, given the budget costs and given the view that any **real** plan must come from the Center, and instead to continue the futurization process on the committee level at the Nuuanu Y.

They thus initially engaged the Y's Physical Education and Marketing Committee in emerging issues analysis and trend identification. This, however, they quickly discovered was a mistake. In a conference setting, individuals are receptive to innovation and the macro-perspective. But standing and ad-hoc committees are created to solve **present problems**, not identify future problems. Futurizing them beyond simple consciousness raising simply wastes their time. While it is important for them to incorporate an alternative futures perspective in their thinking, they normally do not have the time or expertise to identify emerging issues or specific research trends such as the impact of aging on services. Thus, we left these committees with comments such as "thank you, but now we have pressing matters to deal with."

It was then obvious that a strategic plan, even an experimental symbolic one, needed to be developed. This plan—given that it would be a written document which would include futures methodologies such as extrapolation and delphi—potentially could be used to futurize the Center and legitimate futures activities at the local level. It would also, at the operational level, aid by developing a futures context for problem-solving. Committee members would then have a better idea of the missions of the Y and the impact of new technologies and social issues on their problem solving efforts.

This is where the project stood at the end of 1985, ready and waiting for a plan to be written. Given that the implementation of

this plan is predicated on fundamental rethinking of the Y's directions, input from beyond the local unit Y is a necessity. This plan, then, would have to be more of a framework for thinking and dialog than an actual blueprint. That is, it would not attempt to link the futures process with the budget and personnel allocation process, nor could it attempt in any way to usurp power or prestige from other Ys. Rather, it must provide normative and quantitative data in the form of key images, trends and events within the context of the Y's present missions, structures and functions. The plan should also attempt to develop alternative missions and directions (such as providing services for the aging).

Hopefully, through such a plan, the futures dialog in the YMCA can continue at all levels.

Although it is far too soon to label futures at the Y a success, there have been positive preliminary impacts on the YMCA's organizational culture. The reasons why futures has "worked" here appear to be the same as those for the success of futures in other organizations:

The first, and perhaps the key, variable for futures working in any organization is the existence of a chief administrator whose goal is more than simply solving operational problems, that is, someone who is concerned with the organization's long term future, who is a visionary. The Nuuanu YMCA was fortunate to have such an individual.

Secondly, broad participation from all relevant stakeholders is critical. Implementing any plan is always easier when those affected are involved in the design process. Thus, for the Nuuanu Y's strategic plan to succeed, it must—at the appropriate time—also include key actors from the Metro Y. Through broad participation the plan can become a design vehicle for the organization as a whole instead of merely a pet project of an enthusiastic administrator.

Thirdly, regular face-to-face meetings between organizational representatives and consulting futurists are essential. These meetings were critical in futurizing the Y. They provided a dialog wherein ideas could be dialectically tested and the horizons of the Y's future expanded. Also, while barraging the organization with information about the future may be at times necessary, it is important to have a focus. During the YMCA meetings, they constantly stressed the unpredictability and the openness of the future.

Fourthly, for the futures process to work, it must impact the personal lives of those involved in the process. That is, the futures process must not only convey an intellectual message, it must also impart at a gut level the need for

long range vision. At the Y, they found individuals easily taking the basic concepts of the futures field to their personal businesses.

These, in general, were the key variables for the preliminary success of the incorporation of the futures perspective at the YMCA. Of course, there are other salient factors as well; for example, the perception that the organization is in a crisis state or approaching such a state. Those at the Y had an intuitive feeling that this was the case; they provided evidence which confirmed this perception. Also, dissemination of futures information through a newsletter of some sort or research report is equally important. That step is presently being developed at the Y.

The discussion thus far has focused on the process and strategy of futures studies in organizations in general and the YMCA in particular. Now we turn to substantive issues with respect to the Y's future which will be the core of the strategic plan. Some of these trends and issues include the following:

- The YMCA should develop a worldwide computer health network;
- As the information explosion continues, the Y could become a knowledge broker-authority in the distribution of appropriate health, recreation and leisure-oriented information;
- The Y should become the place to investigate high-tech and high interpersonal touch activities;
- The Y should expand its Third World activities, especially as it appears that the Pacific Rim countries may form the new global culture and economy for the twenty-first century;
- The Y should become an international organization, not one like McDonald's™ where it homogenizes world culture, but one where it expands cultural diversity, such that each Y is adapted to local conditions;
- As there might develop in the future a creative leisure society, where tourists come on packaged tours that combine relaxation, personal development, health and professional training, the Y could in this scenario lead the way in packaging such tours;
- It could also look at robotics, provide community computers for collective use, and develop neighborhood technology centers;
- The Y could invent new games (that deal with robotics, or inner spiritual, cooperative games that, through the very process of playing, result in a change of consciousness);
- It could examine its own corporate culture and see how it could change in light of studies which show the most exciting and profitable corporations are those with flex time, decreased bureaucracy, profit sharing, clarity of vision and purpose;
- Activities could be geared towards new immigrants to

Hawaii—Vietnamese and others;

- The Y could examine the use of the new brain drugs (that increase memory, pleasure, and pain) and the "New Biology" in general;

- It could be prepared for the aggressive entry of for-profit groups in traditional nonprofit areas as the New Federalism and other similar structural changes may reduce State support of human services; and,

- Linkages could be developed with other religious organizations, such as Buddhists—as well as the new transcendental spiritual movements.

In summary, the YMCA, by attempting to trace its past and revision its future, is making an important step in becoming a proactive organization. While simply adopting the futures perspective does not guarantee that it will regain its marketshare and prominence, the YMCA will certainly be prepared for future challenges and opportunities.

Sohail Inayatullah.