Road Mapping the Way Forward

A Foresight Roadmap to Help Think Through a COVID-19 Future

Navigating a Time of Great Uncertainty

The world is in the midst of the most frightening pandemic since the Spanish Flu in 1918 and many of us have been thrown into a situation of significant uncertainty and very real anxiety. In the United States, the COVID-19 death toll continues to rise while unemployment claims surged to 10 million in a two-week period. With stay-at-home orders in effect across much of the country and with so many businesses forced to shut their doors and suspend operations for an indefinite period of time, we are all rightly and deeply concerned about understanding what is going on and where it might lead.

Vision Foresight Strategy (VFS) is a foresight firm. While we cannot actually predict the future (no one really can), we do have a number of tools we use to help think critically about how change happens and how it might shape the future. One of those tools that might help right now is one we developed in-house called a "foresight roadmap."

A COVID-19 Foresight Roadmap

The particular roadmap we are sharing here is a recent and early iteration of a foresight roadmap we have been working on to map out key uncertainties and future emerging issues that may result from the COVID-19 pandemic. As many journalists, writers, and experts have been discussing in recent weeks, the possible impacts of this global pandemic are many and varied. Some of these possibilities are (hopefully) short-term disruptions, while others represent long-term structural changes in institutions, economies, and geopolitics.

Some of the things that we have been considering:

	Nearer-term	Farther-term
Key uncertainties	COVID-19 death toll 2020 presidential election Extent of any economic recovery	Impact of the pandemic on the worldview of the Homeland Generation (will this be their "9/11"?)
Emerging issues	Expansion of societal surveillance systems	Opportunity to reshore and reinvent American manufacturing Health and wealth gaps/disparity worsened? Futures of the gig economy? New wave of business model innovation and new business creation Accelerated loss of US stature and influence abroad

The map shared here is an early iteration and it certainly does not capture every possible emerging issue of importance. In fact, this particular roadmap is US-focused (we are US-based) and intentionally high-level. Given our typical project portfolio, it is focused more on thinking through strategic and systemic changes in society. While it may not capture some of the things most relevant to you, it offers a jumpstart for your own foresight and planning discussions.

You can use this roadmap to forecast out how the current pandemic may ripple across society and impact your organization from various directions. How will the changes illustrated here impact your specific industry or community? What other changes are missing from the map? How will your current crisis-response position your organization for some of the emerging issues illustrated in the mid- and long-term?

Using the Foresight Roadmap

The foresight roadmap is a tool to help map out important changes that have been occurring in society and to explore the various uncertainties and emerging issues that may result in the future. The roadmap combines a few different approaches to thinking about the future into a single easy-to-read diagram. It is a visualization tool to help you map out your thinking, and it is a planning tool that helps to identify the best type of foresight work to conduct on the uncertainties and issues that most concern your organization.

First, the roadmap uses multiple time frames. In this way it tries to make sure you are able to explore the longer-term threats and opportunities set in motion by more recent changes. Even as you address what is urgent in the here-and-now, you don't want to fully ignore what is likely to follow. Second, the roadmap explores the changes going on in the world across multiple layers. Change in society happens at different rates at different layers, and the strategies for addressing change at one layer don't necessarily work on other layers.

Third, the roadmap helps to map out a more "systems" view of change, illustrating how changes will likely ripple across the layers of society over time. Change begets more change, and the roadmap captures this through the causal links drawn between items. Fourth, the roadmap distinguishes between things like key uncertainties and emerging issues, which helps to identify important pivot points that carry a lot of inherent uncertainty.

Finally, the roadmap is used to think through the different types of foresight work that might best suit an organization, given their particular industry and issues. There are many approaches and methods for foresight and selecting the right tool for your situation is critical for producing useful foresight.

Key to the Foresight Map

Surface: issues and changes in daily experience and practices; change tends to happen often, seemingly erratic, and *tends* to have little deep immediate impact on society

System: changes at the level of infrastructure, institutions, and law; changes take longer, and take much more energy to make

Worldview: change in values, outlook, and shared stories about the world; change *tends* to unfold over long periods of time

Short-term: for this particular roadmap, short-term is the next 6 months

Mid-term: for this roadmap, mid-term is 6 – 18 months

Long-term: 18+ months

Issues and changes: recent changes that have happened or more enduring issues of importance; a general item (shape) used in the roadmap

Key uncertainties: important uncertainties that represent pivot points for the future

Emerging issues: possible threats and opportunities in the future; typically, things like future technologies, public policy issues, or new concepts and philosophies

Scenario forecasting: any one of a number of qualitative methods for forecasting multiple possible futures; selecting the right scenario method for a given project is key to the project success

Emerging issues analysis: conducting environmental scanning and identifying possible future technologies, policy issues, and concepts that might play a big role in shaping the future

Modeling: any of a number of methods for quantifying relationships between key variables in order to forecast future outcomes

Probabilistic forecasting: developing probabilities for a range of possible, discrete outcomes

Vision Foresight Strategy LLC

Vision Foresight Strategy is a foresight and strategic analysis firm headquartered in Honolulu, Hawai'i. We are a global network of trained foresight professionals that works with organizational leaders to navigate the uncertainty and complexity they face in the world today. Our services include original futures research and analysis, facilitated workshops, and foresight training.

If you would like assistance with building out a roadmap for your organization, then please contact us and we will be happy to work with you.

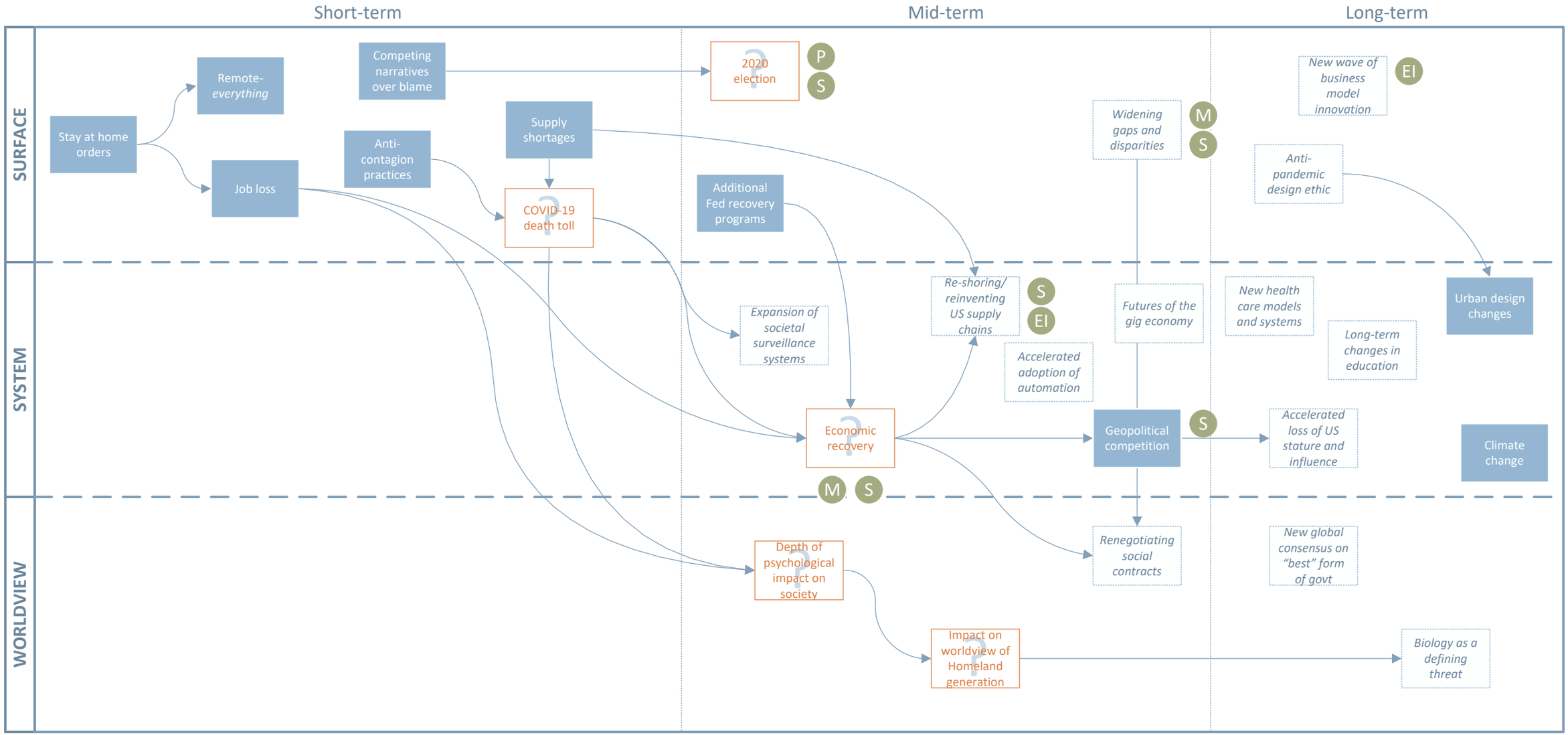
We can also assist with doing a range of rapid forecasts, horizon scanning and emerging issues analysis, and scenario forecasting.

Another excellent resource is the book, *4 Steps the Future: A Quick and Clean Guide to Creating Foresight*. Written by Dr. Richard Lum, it is an easy-to-read guide to essential foresight work. It is available to order from Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble, and other book sellers.

Find out more at www.visionforesightstrategy.com

Foresight Roadmap (US-focused)

What is missing from this map? What future issues, opportunities, and threats may confront your organization or community?



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