

Applying Intuitive Methods in Explorations of Preferred Futures

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Introduction

Western Industrial culture has trained us to ignore our inner knowing and intuitive senses in favor of purely “rational” thought processes. Yet one of the major shifts we’re experiencing in this culture today is an increasing acceptance of the validity of intuitive awareness.

The root meaning of the word Intuition is “teaching from within,” and elders and spiritual teachers across the ages have stated that much of what we really need to know about ourselves and the world around us can be learned more effectively by “going within” than by listening to others. An exploration of the literature – both experimental and experiential – provides a few simple principles which encourage consistency in this kind of intuitive awareness.

Applying these principles on a regular basis has been demonstrated anecdotally, and appears experimentally, to provide significant enhancement of analytical decision-making processes and can therefore lead to more effective implementation of plans for the future.

A Very Personal Search

The shift we’re experiencing in acceptance of the validity of intuitive awareness is visible in the media, with primetime TV shows on several networks about mediums and channeling; we see it in the scientific research of organizations such as the Institute of Noetic Sciences; we see it in the increasing number of books and videos being published that teach growing numbers of people to rely on “the still small voice,” angels, or spirit guides for help and wisdom; we see it in the growth of churches encouraging a spiritual science, we see it in the workplace as more and more executives openly admit how much they rely on “the gut” in their decision-making processes. We’re surrounded by references to another way of knowing, even as we teach children that there’s only one way to know.

I became interested in intuition and futures before I knew what either word meant. I was five years old when a man we knew came to the door of our new apartment for the first time - and I “remembered” the experience as it was happening. I knew exactly where he would walk and what he would say, just before it happened. It was an eerie feeling, even at that young age. Many dozens of times later, I’m still startled by such *déjà vu* experiences.

Growing up I sought to learn more. I devoured futuristic and psychical fiction. I read about biblical prophecy and ancient divination methods, and about famous people like Ruth Montgomery who predicted what was going to happen – but were wrong as often as not. In college I studied anthropology and learned that many cultures had someone called a shaman whose job it was to help the community understand what was going to happen, but the ethnographers had no idea how, or if, what they did really worked – and my psychological anthropology professor had no idea what my “precognitive dreams” might be, much less what caused them. After college I studied Edgar Cayce and found that, while his diagnoses and prescriptions were frequently accurate, his prophecies were often wide of the mark. I studied the methods of Silva Mind Control, Zen meditation, and Alpha Dynamics and learned ways to quiet the mind and heal the body, but had no profound insights about the future – or explanations for my *déjà vu* experiences.

I became involved in the environmental movement, assessing the impacts of government projects, facilitating study circles and centers, and drafting study guides for understanding the impacts of nuclear energy and other technologies on biological systems. I entered a masters degree program in cybernetic systems that included courses in general systems theory, computer modeling, futures studies, and the relationship between technology and society – all of which gave me a framework and set of tools for developing and evaluating alternative forecasts. Then working with Oliver Markley and Willis Harman at what is now SRI International provided an opportunity to integrate visionary methods with the analytical tools of futures research.

Finding Models

All of this led to a master’s thesis in which I proposed that intuition was an essential but unsung component of research and analysis and suggested ways to explicitly incorporate intuitive methods into the planning process (Miller & Miller, 1976). Exploring the literature on intuitive methods and consciousness research I discovered the works of Jane Roberts, Jean Houston and Robert Masters, Charles Tart, and Shakti Gawain. And in their works I found, not only a model process, but a model of the mechanism by which “going inside” could provide information about other times and places.

Jane Roberts offered a model of time and space in which all events are happening Now, but we choose to experience them in a linear fashion when we’re awake and using our linear left-brained thinking. When we’re asleep or in deep trance, she says that the mind, or soul, may step off that linear track and explore and affect other times and spaces. Effectively what she’s saying is that the 3-dimensional space-time continuum that we occupy in our normal, waking state is contained in a larger-dimensional space, and that we can step into that larger “container” and move around in space and time when we let go of the belief that we’re stuck on this timeline (Roberts, 1974).

Roberts’ model is consistent with some recent explanations of quantum entanglement, such as Dean Radin’s *Entangled Minds: Extrasensory Experiences in a Quantum Reality* (2006). It also explains my *déjà vu* experiences and the predictive visions of some trance mediums and shamans. I was delighted to find it and have used it effectively many times since in my teaching and consulting, as a

way to explain the otherwise unexplainable experiences students and clients have observed.

Houston and Masters didn't explain how it worked but the exercises in their book *Mind Games* (1972) were a process for achieving a state of consciousness in which clear, detailed images were easily accessed and sustained. They also offered guidelines for "traveling" in linear time as well as outside this space-time continuum while in a deeper-than-waking state of consciousness. Charles Tart's work on "discrete states of consciousness" (1975) was a useful guide to understanding the various *Mind Games* experiences.

Shakti Gawain's process was based on the understanding that the human capacity to create internal images was not only to explore what might be happening but also to bring into physical experience what was desired (Gawain, 1978). Drawing on a variety of Western and Eastern sources, she suggested that the very act of visualizing was creative – an aspect of her work that was probably overlooked by the business schools that integrated *Creative Visualization* in their curriculum through the 1980s. To see clearly, to feel the effects in one's body and emotions, is, she suggests, to experience. This model has been called Constructivist Psychology and is consistent with the guidelines offered in the "prosperity" writings, which became popular with Charles Haanel's *The Master Key System* and Wallace Waddles' *The Science of Getting Rich* back at the turn of the last century. Haanel, in particular, emphasizes the importance of clear imaging as an essential step toward making anything happen in this life (Haanel, 1916; Miller, 2008).

Another significant contribution to that Master's thesis work was Elise Boulding's translation of Polak's *The Image of the Future*:

"According to Polak, the human capacity to create mental images of the "totally other" – that which has never been experienced or recorded – is the key dynamic of history. At every level of awareness, from the individual to the macrosocietal, imagery is continuously generated about the not-yet. ... despite cultural differences, the same basic image themes appear in the imagined utopias of the ancient past as appear in the imagery of our late-20th century imagers – a clean, green world of abundance, joyfully shared by men and women. This kind of imaging is a special human gift..." (Boulding, <http://www.context.org/iclib/ic40/grass/>)

Both Elise, a sociologist, and her economist husband, Kenneth Boulding, a founder of the Society for General Systems Research, were convinced that the internal image we focus on guides our actions and affects our lives (Boulding, 1956). In that sense, they were not far from the concepts offered by the psychiatrist Maxwell Maltz in his book, *Psycho cybernetics*, though they applied the concept at the macro-societal, as well as the individual level.

Doctoral study with Harold Linstone at Portland State University included work on funded projects exploring decision-making processes (documented in Linstone, 1984) as well as alternative approaches to the assessment of long-term impacts of emerging technologies (Miller, 1984). Both pieces of research reinforced the ideas developed in previous years: intuition plays a huge, usually unstated role in all research and decision-making processes, and certain kinds of methods enhance the intuitive process.

Then I discovered the work of Carl Simonton, who was training people to reduce their pain – and often their tumors – through the use of imaging. Frank Lawlis documents dozens of successful cases using these methods in his book *Transpersonal Medicine* (1996).¹

At this point I had two ways to relate inner images with outer individual and collective experience. One, the Roberts-shamanic model, was predictive: in a specific state of consciousness someone could experience sensations of traveling outside the space-time continuum to other points and discovering what was happening then and there. The other, Haanel-Simonton model, was formative: by regularly focusing on intensely clear images, someone could increase the likelihood and ease of achieving specific events in the physical world.

Both relied on the same methods:

- Breathe long and slow, be quiet, and “enter the Silence”, the state of consciousness in which normal mind chatter is reduced or even eliminated;
- Learn to focus the attention on one thought, one process, one image until there is no thought except that one;
- Listen for what has been called “the still small voice” within; be expectant;
- Allow whatever sound or image or space that emerges, however vague, to take shape, using as many internal senses as possible – sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell;
- Though the normal reaction is to ignore it and wait for something clearer, focus on whatever vague thought, image, or urge that emerges, without censoring, changing, or trying to make sense of it. (This free expression is essential in order to begin to undo the old training and habit of ignoring and censoring what comes from within.)
- Continue to focus on it until it seems complete;
- Return slowly and gradually to normal waking consciousness with the explicit intention of remembering and using the information and/or experience gained in the altered state, and write down and act upon the experience.

Both led to a kind of certainty about what must happen, although they rarely resulted in clarity about when or specifically how it would come about.

Neither fit into the traditional “Alternative Futures” process that I was expected to use in my consulting work and teach in my classes.

Application

So I came up with a new futures-consulting process. Instead of helping my clients go through the development of alternative scenarios, I would use guided imagery to help them clarify their preferred scenario.

I would typically begin our work by explaining the concept of alternative futures and presenting them with variations of “Technological Success”, “Eco-political Distress”, and “Transformation” (adding a distinction between “Green” and “Transformation” since 2005) scenarios, having modified them to fit the client’s situation. Then I would have my clients describe their preferred scenario: some variation within the “cone” of the probabilities I had presented.

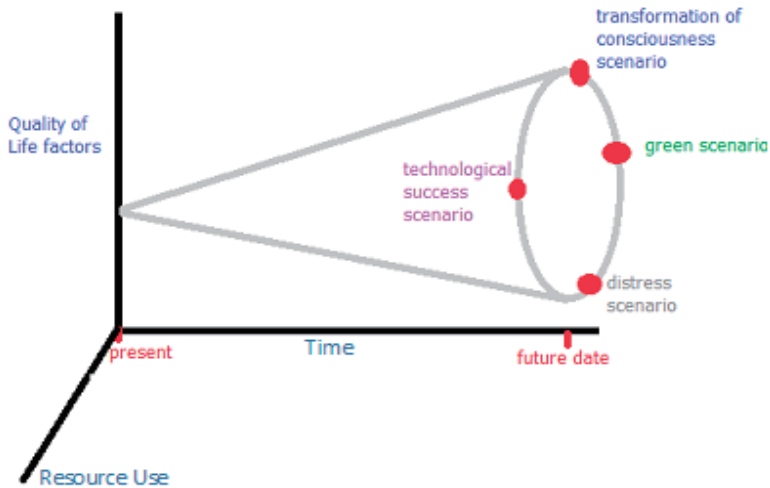


Figure 1. Cone of Probable Futures

Depending on the skills and interests of the group, the selection process has usually involved a combination of quantitative, qualitative, and intuitive methods.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) has been a particularly helpful method for bringing a group into positive alignment around the nature and potential already present in their organization. As outlined by its developer, David Cooperrider, and summarized by Gervase Bushe (2013, p. 1), the five principles of AI are:

1. The *constructionist principle* proposes that what we believe to be true determines what we do ... The purpose of inquiry is to stimulate new ideas, stories and images that generate new possibilities for action.
2. The *principle of simultaneity* ... as we inquire into human systems we change them ... Questions are never neutral, they are fateful, and social systems move in the direction of the questions they most persistently and passionately discuss.
3. The *poetic principle* ... organizational life is expressed in the stories people tell each other ... The words and topics chosen for inquiry have an impact far beyond just the words themselves.
4. The *anticipatory principle* ... what we do today is guided by our image of the future. Appreciative inquiry uses artful creation of positive imagery on a collective basis to refashion anticipatory reality.
5. The *positive principle* ... momentum and sustainable change requires positive affect and social bonding ... strong connections and relationships between people, particularly between groups in conflict...

These principles are very much in alignment with the models I've been working from, and they've made the too often tedious strategic planning process a positive experience for virtually every group in which I've offered it. It starts with the question "What's good about this organization?" and, depending on the size of the group, moves into dialogue or brainstorming format to share responses. "What would we like to see more of?" follows. And then "What would it take to get there?"

My role through this part of the process is primarily as facilitator, as members of the group tap into their own inner wisdom to find the answers that they usually have been considering for some time but haven't felt safe to offer. Typically, the results are recorded on a white board or chart paper, or on a shared computer screen, where all can see and add to what's been said.

Another very effective method is commonly used in Centers for Spiritual Living, a network of study centers and churches which were formed around the world based on the teachings of Ernest Holmes, author of *Science of Mind*. Called "Visioning," this method taps not only into the inner awareness, but goes to a deeper wisdom, accessing what Ralph Waldo Emerson called the Oversoul, or the "one mind of humanity" (Miller, 2011. p.75). Using a simple induction, trained practitioners are invited to set an intention that they will access this wisdom and then ask a question. As described by Michael Beckwith:

Visioning always begins with a deep sense that we're surrounded by unconditional love. We enter into the conscious awareness that we live, move, and have our being in this unconditional love, and we open ourselves up to what that love feels like. ... The feeling tone we develop is of a spiritual nature, and this feeling is the whole foundation of visioning. We then declare what it is we are doing the visioning about. For example, we may ask, "How does God see Itself as my life?" We then wait to inwardly hear, see, and catch what comes to us, what it looks like, what it feels and sounds like, and we pay close attention to any symbols or metaphors that appear. All of this is done without judgment (Juline, 1996, p.3).

Again, the group is invited, through dialogue or brainstorming, to share the results of their inner experience. Often pictures are used, as well as words, as members seek to find ways to communicate what may be a deep sense of communion.

Once the group feels complete with sharing the essentials, my next step is to synthesize the components that have been shared. Often, I've simply summarized the various points into a coherent narrative during a break in the proceedings. Usually this has been modified somewhat when the group gets together again and, typically, members of the group have shifted into their analytic mode, bringing facts and figures into the picture. Again, this is done in dialogue or brainstorming mode – they are simply sharing more insights. And again, I usually (though sometimes a leader within the client organization has offered to) summarize the information presented by the group, and relate it to the Cone of Probable Futures (Figure 1) we started with.

When a scenario has been deemed acceptable to all, my next task is to guide them in an imaging process in which they can imagine experiencing that scenario. This stage in the process starts with a series of instructions inducing relaxation of the body and mind into a mental state where they can use their internal senses to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch. Most often I provide a series of experiences: first, a remembered space, then a personally desired future, and then the group's selected future, feeling the emotions of experiencing that possible future as if it were happening now.² Over the years, I've used shorter and shorter inductions, as people seem to be able to enter a deeply relaxed state much more quickly now than when I started doing this work.

Often, this process of imaging – experiencing internally – a preferred future has led to modifications of a client’s original description. Almost as often, clients have come out of the imaging exercise expressing clarity about what steps were needed to experience something like that preferred future. When that has happened I’ve typically used a “cluster map” process to help define those steps and the connections between them. This map then becomes the basis for their strategic plan: they have a goal – their preferred scenario – and a set of steps to achieve it.

Of particular interest to me as a consultant who doesn’t want my work to sit on a shelf is the fact that, because they had the internal experience to draw on, my clients have had a feeling of certainty that it was achievable. This kind of certainty, as psychologists have demonstrated over several decades, usually increases the likelihood that they will achieve it (Harvard, online; also Czikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Over the years that I’ve been using this process with individuals and organizations, the results have been fairly consistent. The group achieves:

- Clarity about the preferred scenario that motivates action in the direction of its manifestation;
- Greater cohesion as a group and increased use of dialogue and positive stories;
- A sense of already having achieved the new state that helps to overcome any roadblocks and setbacks in the process;
- Course-correcting feedback over the weeks and months that follow by comparison at any stage along the way with the original imaging.

Effectively, then, the act of imaging a preferred scenario based on analysis of alternatives leads to something very close to a self-fulfilling prophecy – a result consistent with the ideas offered by Gawain, Boulding, and Polak, and with the principles of Appreciative Inquiry.

Closing Comment

In “What Future Studies Is and Is Not” Jim Dator (2007) reminds us that ““The future” cannot be “predicted,” but “preferred futures”” can and should be envisioned, invented, implemented, continuously evaluated, revised, and re-envisioned.

Thus the major task of futures studies is to facilitate individuals and groups in formulating, implementing, and re-envisioning their preferred futures (Hawaii.edu)

This being the case, the intuitive methods associated with imaging, providing access to an inner awareness that individuals bring to the table and of non-local possibilities that normal thought processes avoid, are appropriate tools for this aspect of the futurist’s work.

Notes

1. When, after completing the doctorate, I was faced with a significant health challenge of my own, I used these methods as part of my healing process and found them to have both immediate and lasting results.
2. Interestingly, whenever I’ve used a ‘warm-up’ exercise of visualizing their own personal preferred future, the results are nearly always the same. As Elise Boulding said in the above citation, they all saw comfortable homes in a clear, clean, and safe environment, where children played outside, good and beautiful things were growing in yards and in common spaces, and there was a sense of knowing and appreciating

the neighbors.

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