

## **Staying Ahead of the Curve with 'Horizon Scanning'**

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A member of RAI's staff recently sat down with a former head of analysis at Israeli government official to discuss the concept of horizon scanning. This concept, and the term horizon scanning, has entered both the government and corporate policy-making vernacular in recent years. In short, it refers to an ongoing analysis of the future; with an effort towards looking beyond the pressing but short-term issues in order to understand how, in this instance, Israel's strategic environment will evolve over decades.

### **Horizon Scanning in Government**

The approach is not unique to Israel. The term and general approach has been adopted within various governments, including the United States, The United Kingdom, Singapore, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and others. Applications are broad ranging from long-term strategic analysis conducted by the US National Intelligence Council to healthcare planning in the UK.

The UK Cabinet Office and Government Office for Science has qualified this term for analyzing the future as an ongoing "[consideration of] how emerging trends and developments might potentially affect current policy and practice. This helps policy makers in government to take a longer-term strategic approach, and makes present policy more resilient to future uncertainty."<sup>1</sup>

The establishment of the National Security Council (国家安全保障会議) and the publication of Japan's National Security Strategy—both in 2013—are solid indications that the *Kantei* has an interest in better long term strategic planning. The adoption of Horizon Scanning as a methodology, and potentially an annual publication along the lines of the United States' National Intelligence Council reports—could provide the civil government, the defense apparatus and private industry with better guidance as to how to invest in projects and research that will strengthen Japan.

### **Horizon Scanning in the Corporate World**

An informed strategic vision for the development and implementation of policy is also key for business survival. A good many companies have failed to predict the game changers in their industry and struggled to respond tactically. Examples of this might include consumer camera companies that have lost out smartphones, or computer hard drive companies that have failed to predict the movement of much data storage into the cloud. In effect the concentrated definitions of these and other markets have become more diluted. Such trends towards dilution or, conversely, towards concentration command much

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<sup>1</sup> UK Cabinet Office and UK Government Office for Science. *Horizon Scanning Programme: a new approach for policy making*. Published on July 12, 2013. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/horizon-scanning-programme-a-new-approach-for-policy-making> Accessed on June 29, 2018.

attention from stakeholders. Horizon scanning constitutes a methodology to identify these changes and, hopefully, adapt accordingly.

In terms more relatable for business, futureSME describes horizon scanning as “the continuous process of gathering information about customers, suppliers, competitors, society, technology, and so on, and using this information to make informed decisions about your business.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Training and Implementation of Horizon Scanning**

futureSME has further provided on its website a graphic detailing the steps involved in horizon scanning for businesses<sup>3</sup>, along with links to files for a Horizon Scanning Workbook<sup>4</sup> and a Horizon Scanning Overview<sup>5</sup>. These references are merely indicative of the kinds of materials used in methodology training for horizon scanning. futureSME is just one example of a company that partners with the University of Strathclyde, in the UK, to provide corporate training and certification programs for horizon scanning methodologies.

A proven methodology widely adopted across government and in industry, horizon scanning constitutes an important approach in proactively dealing with the pace of change relating to domestic and foreign policy concerns, as well as business and technology.

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<sup>2</sup> futureSME Website. *Horizon Scanning*. Available at: <http://www.futuresme.eu/resources/adaptive/horizon-scanning>. Accessed on June 29, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Maguire, Dr. Catherine. *Horizon Scanning Workbook*. University of Strathclyde. Available at: <http://www.futuresme.eu/adaptive-apps/horizon-scanning-workbook>. Accessed on June 29, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Maguire, Dr. Catherine. *Horizon Scanning Overview*. University of Strathclyde. Available at: <http://www.futuresme.eu/adaptive-apps/horizon-scanning-overview>. Accessed on June 29, 2018.