

IMBIBING THE FUTURE'S THINKING MIND SET IN FUTURE-PROOFING PHILIPPINE TVET



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*How's Future Thinking going to be
embedded in PH TVET?*

I. Futures Thinking as a Mindset

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Futures Thinking is a method for informed reflection on the major changes that will occur in the next 10, 20 or more years in all areas of social life, including education. While the future cannot be reliably predicted, one can foresee a range of possible futures and relate the most desirable scenario for a particular groups and societies. Methods include either qualitative, quantitative, normative, and exploratory – to help illuminate the possibilities, outline policy choices, and assess the possible alternatives.

Futures Thinking offers strategies in addressing and trying to influence the future. It presents actions or policies that could be considered to promote desirable futures and help prevent those we consider

undesirable. It encourages strategic dialogue, widens our understanding of the possible, strengthens leadership and informed decision-making.

It is worth noting that as new as this term may sound, futures thinking is by no means a young practice. Different people from different walks of life who have a complete understanding of its advantages, have been using futures thinking as a method to anticipate the future and prepare for it.

Futures thinking is predominantly concerned with systemic factors, and is less concerned with immediate problems. It recognizes that everything is interrelated, and that in order to make meaningful and long-lasting impact, one must understand and intervene in the overall system rather than addressing only individual components (Prosser & Basra, 2019).

In recent years, the practice has shifted its focus away from predictions of the future, known as forecasting, toward the critical exploration of future possibilities, known as foresight.

II. Importance of Futures Thinking

Futures thinking and foresight is a powerful planning approach that help and equip us to better deal with the challenges of the future, in a proactive manner. For government policy-makers, this provides guidance in dealing with economic, political, social, and environmental challenges. By being proactive, this entails addressing or resolving issues and concerns of the future before they even happen.

Futures Thinking looks beyond immediate constraints. It helps people remember that existing attitudes and frameworks, which often seem immutable and insurmountable in the short term, are ripe for change in the long term. Futures Thinking creates an environment for deeply informed decision-making with a sustainable balance between short- and long-term policy goals, smoothing the transition toward a positive future (OECD, 2021).

In the Philippines, the first futures thinking webinar “FutureSpeak” for members of the House of Representatives was held last July 17, 2020. This was organized by the Committee on Sustainable

Development Goals, Innovation, and Futures Thinking. Dr. Lizan Perante-Calina, the PhilFutures President and one of the resource speakers stressed the importance of linking futures thinking to “leadership, communication, and accountability.” It was discussed that foresight helps key leaders and agencies to concentrate on long-term priorities by taking a whole-of-nation approach to government reform. Futures thinking can help to improve the method, implementation, and generation of novel policy responses, as well as the creation of new ideas and policies (Philippines Future Thinking Society, 2020).

III. Futures Thinking in Education Sector

OECD (2021) also highlighted that the current educational policymaking consists primarily of short-term efforts to solve immediate problems or improve efficiency. While it was recognized that short-term efforts may be effective at first but over time will reveal that they are only temporary solutions.

Another problem is that the institutional culture tends to look back at the past rather than forward to the future. Most institutions have not yet fully integrated themselves into the fast-paced world that we currently live in. The rapid changes entail never-ending innovation of not only ourselves but also the systems and

processes we have put into place (OECD, 2021).

Futures Thinking seeks to address these challenges by clarifying and deepening the understandings on the dynamics of change in the education systems, schools and communities. The policy-makers, planning officers, and all people responsible in the formulation or amendment of policies should be equipped with the right skills and mindset in order for it to be effective.

It could be noted however, that Futures Thinking is not limited to policy makers and executives alone. It can be applied to all areas including in the learning environment.

A. How to teach Futures Thinking?

Encounter Edu (2021) devised a set of questions primarily made for classroom purposes, which can be also be used in engaging learners from different walks of life into practicing futures thinking.

The guide questions below show how we should structure our chosen topic into futures thinking by looking at “what it might be like in the future”, and all inputs shall be processed as— which ideas are possible, which are probable, and which are preferable,

which then guides us in making informed recommendations and/or decisions.

Existing situation

What is happening now and why? Who benefits and who loses?

Trends

How does the existing situation compare to the past? Are there patterns in the changes?

Drivers

What is causing the changes? The causes might be specific community perceptions, beliefs, values or attitudes. It might be that other changes have caused ripple effects, such as demographic changes, environmental damage, developments in science and technology or changes in political policy

Possible futures

What might happen in the future?

Probable futures

What is most likely to happen in the future? Which trends and drivers are likely to persist?

Preferable futures

What do you want to happen in the future? Why? Who benefits and who loses?

B. Skills Foresight and Labor Market Planning

Training and long-term labor market preparation benefit from foresight in the same way as education and other sectors with long lead times do. Foresight encourages the discovery and implementation of more future-proofed, robust policies by assisting in predicting and recognizing future changes in a policy field, industry, or the system as a whole (ETF, 2017).

One way that foresight can help policymakers in preparing and fulfilling potential ability requirements in the economy and society is through the anticipation of future skills needs -- skills foresight. It enables meaningful discussions with a diverse range of stakeholders about "not only what we think education might become, but also what we want education to become" (ETF, 2017).

IV. Futures Thinking in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

As the leading authority in TVET in the country, the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) has to supervise and manage TVET in the Philippines as mandated by Republic Act

7796, otherwise known as the "TESDA Act of 1994."

A. National Technical Education and Skills Development Plan (NTESDP)

One of the mandates of TESDA is the formulation of a comprehensive development plan, also known as the National Technical Education and Skills Development Plan (NTESDP). The NTESDP is a medium-term (five-year) plan that envisions a Vibrant Quality TVET for Decent Work and Sustainable Inclusive Growth via a two-pronged thrust: TVET for Global Competitiveness and Workforce Readiness and TVET for Social Equity for Workforce Inclusion and Poverty Reduction.

The plan provides direction for the optimum allocation, development, and utilization of skilled workers for employment, entrepreneurship, and technology development for economic and social growth. It is now in its third cycle covering the period 2018-2022 and is developed in close coordination with other national government agencies, the private sector, and the academe to ensure a holistic approach in determining the thrusts

and priorities of the TVET sector.

Among the NTESDP objectives are creating a conducive and enabling environment in the TVET sector and preparing our workers for the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Some of the strategies that are geared towards forward-looking and futuristic directions are establishing a flexible and agile system, rationalizing the TVET delivery system, and instituting mechanisms to address rapidly-changing jobs.

B. TVET PH 4.0 Framework

Apart from the NTESDP, TESDA has also created a TVET PH 4.0 Framework, which presents Philippine TVET strategies in addressing the requirements of the Fourth Industrial Revolutions that will make PH TVET 4.0 ready. These include modernization of our TESDA Technology Institutions, establishment of innovation centers, and developing a culture of research in TVET.

C. Skills Needs Anticipation

TESDA, in partnership with the ILO, has conducted the Skills Needs Anticipation (SNA) to address the issue of

skills mismatch. The program aims to determine the employers' desired skills and competencies from its workers as well as to determine their satisfaction on the competencies and performance of TVET graduates in the workplace. Priority sectors were identified, which includes the Information Technology-Business Process Management (IT-BPM). The anticipation of the skills requirements is undertaken through the conduct of the Workplace Skills and Satisfaction (WSS) Survey.

Skills Needs Anticipation is an education and employment strategy that uses labor market information with proper methodological tools and analyses. It responds to the challenge of anticipating the skills need 5-10 years before the demand in the labor market exists.

D. MOU with SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG)

Likewise, TESDA with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the SkillsFuture

Singapore (SSG), on the cooperation on Human Capital Development and Reskilling, and Skills Upgrading of Workforce today.

The MOU is a collaboration on issues pertaining to workforce skills development which involves the sharing of information and best practices, as well as facilitating relevant training programs and capability transfer projects. In addition, both parties will facilitate coordination with appropriate industry stakeholders, and education and training institutions to support relevant skills development efforts. Through the MOU, education and training institutions from Singapore will be facilitated to operate in the Philippines and contribute towards the development of their workforce.

E. Internationalization

TESDA as the authority in TVET needs to have a strategic TVET internationalization framework that is aligned to the government's foreign policy and international commitments through

bilateral and multi-lateral cooperation.

TVET internationalization shall focus on the development and implementation of TVET policies, programs and initiatives that integrates international, intercultural and global dimension into policy making, standards development, teaching/learning, research and service functions of TESDA and the TVET institutions including but not limited to, participation in bilateral & multilateral cooperation, benchmarking of standards, exchange programs, institutional twinning arrangements, overseas program registration, participation in skills competition, and liberalization of TVET education services.

F. Other existing mechanisms

TESDA also has existing mechanisms which enables the Agency to make plans for the future such as, but not limited to, the regular conduct of planning workshops, industry consultations, and skills needs anticipation. While these are considered short and/or medium term plans, these

processes may also be translated to well-informed policies and plans.

The abovementioned initiatives somehow indicate that are related undertakings that the agency is doing to contribute in preparing the Filipino skilled workforce ready with the anticipated future developments.

V. Way Forward: Future Proofing TVET

Long-term thinking is imperative given the rapidity and complexity of change today (OECD, 2021). As part of the trifocal education system, TESDA has a very important role in anchoring futures thinking in the TVET sector, specifically in equipping Filipino skilled workforce with competencies required in the next years.

Although TESDA has existing mechanisms for short- and medium-term planning and budgeting for the Philippine TVET sector, futures thinking requires critical exploration of future possibilities also known as "foresight" which is considered a more long-term approach.

As TESDA prides itself as the transformational leader in the technical education and skills development of the Filipino workforce, TESDA needs to

guide and direct the TVET sector to a more likeable outcome or future. Utilization of the futures thinking, foresight, and skills anticipation approach should be maximized for a more informed decision-making thereby sustaining the balance between short- and long-term policy goals.

A Futures Thinking Framework may be considered in envisioning not only what we think the TVET sector might become, but also what we want the TVET sector to become in the future. The guide questions provided by the Encounter Edu as one of the tools to be utilized in every TVET related plans, programs, projects and research which incorporate futures thinking in TVET.

As much as medium-term plans are important in determining the direction by which TESDA shall operate to achieve its goals, the institutionalization of futures thinking within the TESDA organizational structure, is of paramount importance. This will ensure that it will be preserved in the organization's systems and processes unaffected by the threat of socio-political factors such as change in leadership, technological disruptions, and health crisis, and the like.

The agency can start adopting future thinking mechanism in the development of the next cycle of the National TESD Plan. This can also be considered in the continuous

development in anticipating skills requirements and other programs related to the Fourth Industrial Revolutions.

Futures thinking is a mindset, and not just a method. Through this, the Philippine TVET sector should become resilient to changes in the education and employment spheres. TESDA needs to reinvent itself, to prepare the workforce of today to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

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