In good hands? Foresight and strategic thinking capabilities of regional universities.

“Universities play a vital role in shaping Australia as a highly-skilled, innovative and prosperous nation. We are the champions of change, driving ideas and thinking for tomorrow”. Belinda Robinson, CEO, Universities Australia, 2012

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Background

- Regional – 80% GDP exports
- Regional Universities (QLD) -
  - $1.5 billion direct economic contribution
  - (times 3 indirect and induced) (Rolfe et al, 2008)

Leadership imperative in HE to transcend dominant short-term paradigms and open up creative emergence in regional universities that will impact regional development.
Context

‘Flatlands’
- Reductionist frameworks for thinking about the future in HE
- Confounded by regulatory inconsistency and the changing nature of knowledge’s

Implication
- Insufficiently understood and problematised change.
- Technology-LED paradigms remaining dominant.

Consequence
- Constrained sustainable development: limited foresight / strategic thinking / strategy.
Research Question

“How and to what extent do senior leaders in Queensland regional universities engage the future and fulfil the task of strategic thinking in formulating strategy”
Theory

- Effective Strategy = Organisational Success
- 72% failure of Strategic Plans
- Pre-determinants (as opposed to demographic proxies – Hambrick, 2007)
  - foresight & strategic thinking (Hamel, 2009; Day & Schoemaker, 2008, etc.)
- Makes no sense to speak of change, strategy, innovation, sustainability, futures without reference to the future
Concepts

- **Individual Foresight**
  - human ability to creatively envision possible futures, understand the complexity and ambiguity of systems
  - provide input for the taking of provident care in detecting and avoiding hazards while seeking to achieve a preferred future.
  - (van der Laan, 2010)

- **Strategic Thinking**
  - strategic thinking is regarded as a synthesis of systematic analysis and creative (generative) thought processes
  - that seek to determine the longer-term direction of the organisation.
  - (van der Laan, 2010)

  “A holistic understanding of the organisation and its environment, creativity and visioning” (Bonn, 2005)
Hypothesised competing model
Chi-square = 6.678
df = 3
p = .083
## Model Fit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Fit Indices</th>
<th>Goodness-of-fit</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square $(x^2)$</td>
<td>6.678</td>
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<tr>
<td>Degree of freedom (df)</td>
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<td>$p$</td>
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<td>Normed chi-square $(x^2/df)$</td>
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<td>Root Mean-Square of Error of Approximation (RMSEA)</td>
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<td>Goodness-of-fit Index (GFI)</td>
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<td>Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)</td>
<td>.905</td>
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<td>Comparative Fit Index (CFI)</td>
<td>.971</td>
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</table>
TripleV Model

FORESIGHT

Orientation to Time

Framer Foresight Style

STRATEGY FORMULATION

STRATEGIC THINKING

Analytical / Systems orientated Cognitions

Creative / Generative Cognitions

ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGY PROCESSES

VIABLE

Visible

Valuable

Education Level

Industry Experience

Foresight Education

Age
Descriptives

- N=17 (population = 28) 88% male
- 76.47% high / very high influence on strategy
- 23.52% ‘top down’
- 41.18% conflict / 47% same understanding
- 17.65% no clear strategy
Orientation to Time
Foresight Style

Sample
Idealised
Strategic Thinking

(Directive)

Conceptual

Analytic

(Behavioural)
Conclusions

- Need for sound HE strategies – high
- Capacity is ‘safe’ and responsive
- High foresight capabilities but not evident in strategic thinking and strategy of the org.
- Not driven by innovation / futures
- Adaptable, resilient open systems unlikely

Future research:
- Other regional areas (national / international)
- Validation of model
Flatlands: Higher Education Futures

Possible examples of constrained strategic thinking:
- ‘Technology led’ as opposed to technology enabled
- ‘Universal Connectedness’ not really connected
- ‘Past Success’ breeding failure
- ‘The’ future of education as opposed to innovative alternatives
- ‘Dominant Approaches’ to education as espoused by contextually maligned LOUD opinion
- Continued reliance on government funding as primary source of revenue in a context where this WILL reduce
- ‘Generation Theory’ based research being dominant driver
- ‘Language / Cultural’ dominance
- The market is limited! 165 million HE learners by 2020?