

The OIE has taken concrete steps to develop its foresight capability

‘Tomorrow belongs to those who can hear it coming.’

Apparently, this statement was made by David Bowie in 1977 when promoting his album *Heroes*. For anyone familiar with the legendary musician, reflecting upon his influence on music, fashion, film, society, gender... yes, one could say that he had not only heard (and seen) what was coming but had implemented trends of the future. In many ways, he created a future look and sound for music amongst other art forms and rattled societal norms.

He always seemed to be ahead of his time from the time he was known as David Jones through to Ziggy Stardust and right up to the point that he reverted back to stardust at his death in 2016. How did he manage this? Perhaps he was aware that the future is always present with us as it is always in flux, just like our day-to-day moments. This type of acceptance or awareness leaves a lot of opportunity for creativity, novelty and innovation.

Our present time is filled with uncertainty but also with possibilities for novelty and innovation. Can an inter-governmental organisation like the OIE, supporting a diverse stakeholder base of Members and Partners, understand and shape the future in our domain of animal health, animal welfare and veterinary public health, like David Bowie did in his? How do we operate in uncertainty both in the present and for the future? How do organisations and governments anticipate and innovate in a strategic manner?

One approach is to use Foresight – an applied set of methodologies to consider possible future outcomes or ‘futures’.

Foresight is not a means of forecasting or predicting the future. Rather it is a means of acknowledging that there are numerous possible futures;

some of which are hinted at given the information available to us today. To consider this information, numerous tools are used in Foresight; amongst them horizon scanning, megatrend analysis, scenario planning, and visioning and back-casting.

Horizon scanning – looking for signals of change today and trying to determine their impact tomorrow.

Megatrend analysis – exploring and reviewing large-scale changes developing in the present at the intersection of multiple policy domains, which are expected to have complex and multidimensional impacts on the future.

Scenario planning – developing multiple stories or images of how the future could look to explore and learn from in terms of implications for the present.

Visioning and back-casting – developing an image of an ideal (or undesirable) future state and working backwards to identify what steps to take (or avoid).

After exploring Foresight techniques during the 2019 Technical Item, and hearing from our Members and experts during the PVS Pathway review that strategic leadership capacity development for Veterinary Services should be part of the services we offer, the OIE has taken concrete steps to develop our Foresight capability through the establishment of a dedicated position within our management structure. This was done to consider emerging trends and issues that are shaping the world of today and tomorrow, so that our strategic planning responds to our Members' needs, both immediate and for an uncertain but undoubtedly challenging future.

We want to understand what could be heading our way and identify activities to 'future-proof' the organisation, and the Veterinary Services of our Members. Such connections are already being made in the Foresight (futures thinking) communities of OIE Members and within international organisations such as the OECD and UNESCO, and they will allow us to learn more about the methodologies involved how they can be applied and what expertise we can leverage for both the functioning of the OIE and for the benefit of its membership.

■ July 2020