

Abstract:

This abstract is based on the paper due to be published in the Journal of Future Studies, May 2006. A full copy of the paper will be available after publication date

‘Wildcards – Signals from a Future near you’. © Marcus Barber 2005, 2006

Wildcards can be classified as events well out of normal perception and yet with the ability to dramatically alter the way in which the world operates. Taking a lead from the work of John Petersen of The Arlington Institute in the United States, (whose work ‘Out of the Blue – How to anticipate big future surprises’ is arguably the best known and most widely used application of Wildcard events,) the author expands on Petersen’s application and classification of Wildcards.

At the outset, the author suggests that the purpose of Wildcards in strategy development and organisational planning is to ‘stretch’, ‘expand’ or ‘crack’ existing paradigms of thinking so as to improve the organisation’s thinking BEFORE a potential Wildcard event occurs. The obvious link is a significant improvement to those working in Risk Management and creating contingency plans.

Further, the author identifies an inherent weakness in the existing useability of Wildcards for the consultant and foresight practitioner and offers an additional tool to bridge the gaps in order to make Wildcards a more functional and effective tool in strategic planning and strategic foresight applications.

The tool is named the ‘Reference Impact Grid’ (RIG) and enables the consultant and strategist to leverage and create Wildcards considered ‘more relevant’ to those involved in a strategy session. In doing so, the functionality and application of Wildcards are boosted significantly making them more ‘user friendly’, more readily accepted and leads to an expansion of the realm in which use of Wildcards may be made to fit the needs of the organisation.