



# FINLAND FUTURES RESEARCH CENTRE

## The Delphi Method and the Future of Deliberative Sense-making Systems

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# Preface: the Delphi Method

Used in a variety of fields to gather expert views of the future.

Developed for situations where trend forecasts and mathematical modeling were inefficient in providing useful information about the future.

The method rests on three basic principles:.

1. **Anonymity**, conflicts should be between arguments, not the experts.
2. **Iteration**, several rounds or interactive commenting during a limited time.
3. **Feedback**. Changing one's statements during the Delphi process is based on feedback from the other panelists

# The Challenge

- In this presentation we contrast the Delphi Method with emerging methods for structured conversation **to find insights for future development of the Delphi method.**
- Focus on two specific cases: the **Foresight Engine**, and the **Evidence Mapper.**

# The Foresight Engine

- An open game platform, developed by the Institute for the Future.
- Aims at directing attention to topics that are relevant for the future. Previous game themes, among others, the future of New Zealand after the earthquake, and eliminating poverty.
- The game is structured around cards of 140 characters length, that can contain an argument, a critique, a question or a comment related to the theme.
- The players get points for playing the cards, and if a card they have played attracts *a build*, another player playing a card that continues on the topic.



# The Evidence Mapper

- Developed by Jack Park as a part of his PhD work
- Belongs to the tradition of Issue-based Information Systems.
- Aims at bringing structure to conversations about wicked problems.
- It does this by analyzing, in a process called *federation*, text format material (arguments in conversations) and organizing them by sub-topics.
- All arguments must be supported by evidence, a linked text document that can back up the argument, or can be contrasted with new evidence.
- Central elements of the system include *a topic map*, a visualisation of the conversational sphere; and the ability to interlink different arguments and evidence.

# Ideas, discussion...

- There is significant overlap in the aims and approaches of the Delphi method and the two studied systems.
- All aim at bringing structure to complex and contested issues.
- The main foundational difference: the **Delphi is pronouncedly an expert** system, the other two draw from ***the wisdom of crowds* –paradigm**. There, insight is derived from the collaboration or aggregation of the outputs from **an unselected group**.

# Ideas & discussion (cont.)

- The key **strength** of the Foresight Engine is its ability to **engage participants** to the process in an unprecedented way. The key strength of the Evidence Mapper is the continued discussion and the **ability to draw links between seemingly unrelated topics.**
- **Weaknesses** in both include the lack of understanding about what the **sample** is (who are giving the answers), and the lack of **content based feedback.**
- Both lack the sophistication of the Delphi in the formulation of the arguments and the **analysis of the results.**

# Conclusions?

- Problem in the Delphi: experts locked in their own expertise, restrictions (cognitive and political) in giving out their knowledge.
- A general decline in participation in surveys.
- Could crowdsourcing and games point to solutions for these challenges?
- We argue that **combining selected features from the Delphi and the studied systems could result in a significantly improved method.** A Delphi method? If no, is something valuable lost in the process??
- How to device a study to address these questions?