Governance for the Future: An Inventor's Toolkit

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Started in 1968, the Institute for the Future (IFTF) is a nonprofit think tank in Palo Alto, California. The long-term perspective of IFTF programs and initiatives, including forecasts, workshops and conferences, boosts the "foresight IQ" of an organization while facilitating employee networking and building relationships with other organizations and industries.

The Governance Futures Lab is one IFTF initiative. An assumption is that global challenges exceed the capabilities of most contemporary governments. Thus "to reimagine and experiment with the basic architectures and processes of governance" is the mission of the Governance Futures Lab. The Inventor's Toolkit is a one method the lab developed to guide people through a governance design process and invent new forms of governance.

There are four steps in illuminating the landscape of governance in an interwoven world and preparing to lend a hand to better future governance: investigate, re-think, design and prototype.

Investigate
What are the core weaknesses of government today? Metrics include to what extent governance is undemocratic, unfuturistic, patriarchal, nationalistic, bureaucratic, violent, unjust and slow.

Re-think
Construct the foundational framework of the new governance system, incorporating an examination of values, cosmology, political subject, human nature, territory and metrics for success.

Design

Take into account general social, legal and technological mechanisms to implement the new governance architecture, including: commons (or self-organized and participatory solutions), markets, law and policy, technology, built environment and cultural norms.

Prototype

Choose a way to have people learn about the newly designed governance. Writing a constitution is one established technique. Other suggested possibilities include using a software algorithm, a performance piece, an architectural blueprint, a speech or a graphic novel. Templates are provided for these methods: publish a preamble / mission statement; start a crowd-funded campaign; and draft a news headline.

The Inventor's Toolkit concludes with a list of suggested "next step" actions: teach others the process; run a workshop; communicate your design; convene a community and solicit feedback of social inventors.