

# Futures for Everyone

Verne Wheelwright  
Personal Futures Network

## Abstract

*This research sought to determine whether or not futures methods are scalable and applicable to individual lives. Could the same futures methods that are used effectively around the world by governments, institutions and businesses be applied successfully to individuals? This paper describes the development of a futuring process for individuals. This system substantially reduces complexity and guides individuals through the steps of personal research, scenario development, and personal strategic planning. Post-doctoral experience suggests some effective learning approaches.*

**Keywords:** Personal futures, personal scenarios, personal strategic planning, micro-futures

## Introduction

The capstone course in the University of Houston's MS program in Futures Studies includes an assignment requiring students to develop a personal strategic plan. Many students find that despite having studied futures methods for two years, scaling the process down to the individual level is surprisingly complex. This realization led to dissertation research and subsequently to the development of a system that substantially reduced the complexity of the futuring process for individuals.

The original research was completed in 2005, then defended, accepted and published in 2006. During 2006, a Personal Futures Workbook based on the research was developed and introduced in workshops during 2006 and 2007. In early 2008, an electronic (PDF) version of the workbook was introduced and offered as a free download at [www.personalfutures.net](http://www.personalfutures.net). This paper covers both the doctoral research period and the post doctoral experience with the workbook in workshops, as a self learning tool and as a college and graduate level text.

This paper is written in part to encourage futurists, students and researchers to consider participating in the Personal Futures area of this profession.

## Planning the research

The stated intent of the research was to reduce the complexity of the futuring process to the extent that individuals could use and benefit from futures methods. Thus the first steps in the research included identifying the areas of complexity that were preventing individuals from using futures methods, then finding ways to reduce that complexity. Large scale futures projects usually start with research to understand the present position of the organization and what forces of change are at work. When that research is complete, major methods such as scenario development or strategic planning can then be undertaken. With that process in mind, the research was divided into two main parts, (1) Life Research, determining what must be learned

in the research of each individual's life, and (2) Futures Methods, determining how best to scale down and apply futures methods to individuals.

### **Life research**

Life research focused on finding “universals” or learning what parts of life are common to all or nearly all humans. This area included research to collect data from individuals through surveys, interviews and observation. As the information was analyzed and categorized, concepts formed which led to literature searches in a number of disciplines.

From the beginning, the research was recognized as exploratory, so Grounded Theory as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was selected as the methodology. Grounded theory research is a circular and iterative process based on four steps that start with the collection of data. The data is then categorized and concepts developed. These concepts are then researched in the literature and new data developed as the circle repeats.

Initial data for the research was collected from people age 60 and above through surveys, participant observation and interviews. The research sought to learn about life experience that might provide indicators that would be helpful in understanding areas of life that are common to nearly everyone. From that research, three areas of interest emerged:

#### ***Life stages***

Life stages are based largely on biological and physical change. These stages have been recognized since early records of ancient Greece and are the foundation of psychological theory based largely on the work of Eric Erickson (1980). The research suggested that Erickson's last stage, Old Age, had been outdated by modern health and longevity. An alternative approach was recommended that separated life changes from chronological aging after age sixty. The term “Independent” was substituted for “Old Age” as more acceptable to people over age sixty. Three optional stages were suggested; Vulnerable, Dependent and End of Life stages, reflecting the physical changes experienced by some, but not all older people.

Why is it important for individuals to understand the stages of life? Because each stage represents important sequential change in each individual's life, and life's stages are something all people have in common. Futurists look for driving forces to anticipate future change, and aging is a primary driving force in human life that moves every individual through the sequence of life stages. Understanding the life stages allows individuals to anticipate future change in their own lives and in the lives of family members. In addition, life stages suggest images of the future, both positive and negative, that can be helpful to individuals as they plan their own futures. For example, individuals may have images in mind of the lives led by their grandparents or their parents at various stages in their lives. Those images may be positive or negative, but in either case suggest directions in the future.

#### ***Life forces***

As the research data was analyzed and categorized, six groups of forces in people's lives emerged. Futures literature emphasizes the importance of forces and driving forces as the foundation for developing scenarios (Schwartz, 1991), but the categories of forces commonly recognized by futurists, such as Social, Technological, Economic, Ecologic and Political forces were clearly too broad to be meaningful in individual lives. The personal forces (Activities, Finances, Health, Housing, Social and Transportation) developed during the research proved to be more meaningful for individuals. This categorization of life forces is a primary contribution of the research.

#### ***Life events***

Information on specific life events, their impacts and probability of occurrence emerged in the survey research and was subsequently studied in the literature. Holmes and Rahe (1967) and later Miller and Rahe (1997) studied the effects of high stress life events, developing scales that ranked the events by impact. Some of the high ranking events listed in the original study included: Death of a spouse, Divorce, Marital separation, Imprisonment, Personal injury or illness, and Marriage. Some of these events appeared to have a high risk of occurrence during one's life, and some had higher risk during specific life stages.

This research suggested that some of these high probability/high impact events should be considered in personal planning for the future.

### **Futures methods**

The first concern was with determining which futures methods would be most useful to individuals. The second was with how those methods could best be presented in their most useful form. Selection and refinement of futures methods from those in use by organizations would require that the methods be scalable to individuals. The research into the application of futures methods to individual lives broke down into three areas:

#### ***Which futures methods are most appropriate?***

This entire research project was triggered by my personal need to develop a personal strategic plan, which I felt was a valuable experience and a valuable tool. I also felt that strategic planning at any scale should include a component for exploring the future. Finally, I was concerned about what would be most useful for individuals.

I felt there should be an exploration of the future and that scenario development would be appropriate because scenarios are, effective, easily understood and familiar to the general public.

I also felt that for knowledge of the future to be useful, strategic planning was appropriate for preparing for the future and that the two methods would work well together. An important factor here was that strategic planning seemed to have value for nearly any age group that was making decisions about the future, from adolescents through retirees.

#### ***Are the selected methods scalable?***

I was pretty confident that scenarios would be scalable, but soon discovered that the driving forces to which futurists in business and government are accustomed (Social, Technology, Economic, Ecologic, Political) really were not very meaningful to individuals. That suggested that the method was scalable, but that better inputs were necessary to represent driving forces. During the life research, six categories of forces that were common to all individuals emerged. These were later labeled "Personal Domains," and provided the driving forces that made personal scenarios workable.

Morrissey (1992) had already demonstrated that strategic planning was scalable to the individual level. At the time of the research there were questions being raised about the value of strategic planning at the corporate level, fueled by Mintzberg's book, *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning* (1994). From my experience I felt that a simple version of this method was both effective and valuable for individuals.

### **How Should Futures Methods Be Presented to Individuals?**

The overriding consideration in developing a learning system for personal futures was simplicity. The system had to be simple enough for individuals to understand and use effectively. That meant breaking each step of the system down to its smallest part and presenting those parts in a logical, easy to understand manner.

Worksheets for each step seemed a logical approach. It would give the process an appearance of simply filling in the blanks, leading individuals step by step through the futuring process. Morrissey (1992), Smith (1993), and others had also used worksheets, and they appeared to be an effective approach to learning. As the number of worksheets increased, combining them into a workbook was the logical next step.

Jungk and Mullert (1987) pioneered futures workshops to bring people together to work on problems or situations that dealt with the future. Their approach suggested that individuals with diverse interests could learn together in a workshop format. Modifying the format of the workshop to a step-by-step learning system following the workbook was the next step. In this way, individuals with completely different lives and futures could benefit by learning futures methods together.

Experience in actually conducting workshops demonstrated the importance of keeping the discussion confined to using the workbook and futures methods, but avoiding a discussion of individual's lives. When people brought their life stories into the discussion, I explained that the workshop was only about applying futures methods, not life coaching.

The combination of the workbook and the workshop has been well received in long (full day), medium (half day) and short (one hour) formats. The short format is effective for bringing the concepts of Personal Futures to large groups, but relies entirely on the initiative of the individual to actually go through the futuring process.

## **Results**

The original research resulted in my dissertation Personal Futures: Foresight and Futures Studies for Individuals (Wheelwright, 2006) . Copies are available as a free download at [www.personalfutures.net](http://www.personalfutures.net). That initial research resulted in a workable system for applying futures methods to individual lives that broke the futuring process down to easily understood steps.

Subsequently, a workbook was developed and workshops were conducted. Each workshop or presentation brought out new questions and new information.

## **A Personal Futures System**

The personal futures system is composed of three main parts, Personal Research, Scenario Development and Personal Strategic Planning.

### ***Personal research***

Personal research provides the foundation for the application of futures methods to individual lives. Personal research explores life stages, stakeholders, personal domains (forces), life events and personal values.

### **Life stages**

Life stages introduce a long term view of the human life cycle; starting at birth, through each stage of life to death. Each life stage brings about change in every person's life. The life stages from Adolescent through Adult are each ten years, which make good periods for planning for the future, and they are in sync with major life changes. From Middle Age onward, ten year periods work well. (See Table 1.)

Table 1.

*Stages of life, periods of change*

<b>Life Stage</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Infant</b>	Birth through two years. Dependent, brain developing, learning motor skills and sensory abilities.
<b>Child</b>	3-9 years. Growing and mastering motor skills and language. Learning to play and socialize. Continued growth, school and organized activities.
<b>Adolescent</b>	10-19 years. Growth spurts. Puberty brings hormonal change and reactions.. Strong emotions often rule decisions. Risks for injury, alcohol, drugs, tobacco, etc. In some cultures, education ends and decisions are made about marriage and family.
<b>Young Adult</b>	20-29 years. Completing higher education; beginning career and family. Potential coping and financial pressures.
<b>Adult</b>	30-39 years. Managing family and career growth with attendant conflicts. Increasing numbers of couples are starting families in this stage. Continued coping pressures, divorce risk.
<b>Middle Age</b>	40-60 years. First visible signs of aging and effects of life style. Menopause, children leaving the family home, grandchildren arrive, career peak. Aging parents may require help. Two ten-year planning periods.
<b>Independent</b>	Age 60 onward. More signs of aging and lifestyle effects. Eligible for Social Security and Medicare (U.S.), pensions. Retirement. More discretionary time and opportunities for travel, hobbies and sports. Some health problems and medications. May be providing care for a spouse or others.
<b>Vulnerable (optional)</b>	Beginning frailty, cognitive or health problems,. Require some assistance. Possible move to assisted living facility.
<b>Dependent (optional)</b>	Requires daily care. Unable to perform all daily functions without assistance. Possible move to a nursing home.
<b>End of Life (optional)</b>	Diagnosed with terminal condition or end stage of a disease. May require hospice care, hospitalizations, or nursing home care. This stage may be very brief.

The last three stages are shown here as optional because not everyone goes through those stages. They were formerly considered a normal part of aging, but the number of people who experience disability seems to be declining.

### **Stakeholders**

Just as organizations have stakeholders who influence the organization's future, individuals have stakeholders. Once an individual understands life stages, it is helpful to recognize those stakeholders; the family members and others who have a stake, an interest, in that individual's future. Understanding these relationships and the way they are affected over time by normal personal change is helpful to preparing for the future. As each individual passes through life's stages, children, parents and other stakeholders are living on parallel tracks, but in different stages.

In recent years the term "sandwich generation" has become popular, referring to parents in middle age who are still raising adolescent or young adult children while also providing care

for parents who are experiencing the problems associated with the latest stages of life. This illustrates the value of understanding the nature of life stages and how stakeholders will change in future years.

### **Personal domains**

The six personal domains described below represent the forces in every individual's life. These domains are in our lives from birth to death, but vary in importance or dominance during different times of our lives. Table 2 lists the six domains and their attributes:

Table 2.

*Six Personal domains, categories of forces in life*

<b>Personal Domain</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Activities</b>	All the things you do. For example, education, work, career, religion, sports, hobbies, travel.
<b>Finances</b>	Everything related to your finances. For example, income, assets, investments, expense, debt, liabilities, insurance, taxes, credit cards.
<b>Health</b>	Everything related to your health. For example, physical and mental health status, diet, exercise, medications, personal hygiene, medical care, personal care.
<b>Housing</b>	Everything related to where you live. Your home, neighborhood, city, country, climate.
<b>Social</b>	Everything related to people. Your family, friends, co-workers,, neighbors, advisors, organizations.
<b>Transportation</b>	Everything related to mobility and transport. Walking, commute time, bicycle, motorcycle, auto, local and long distance public transport.

Simply telling individuals that these domains and forces exist does little to help them understand future change, so a simple graphing system was devised that helps individuals graph the quality of life in each domain from birth to the present, producing a trend line for each domain. Whether in workshops or using the workbook on their own, individuals learn how to extrapolate their trend lines ten years into the future, creating both positive and negative extrapolations. Those two extrapolations are intended to bracket the plausible future for each of the six domains. The extrapolations also provide the foundation for developing scenarios as well as for creating personal visions, strategies and plans for the future.

### **Life events**

Events are simply the things that happen in your life. Some are high probability events, but they may be low impact such as birthdays and anniversaries. Other events may be high probability events, but also high impact events, and these must be planned for. Some high probability events may also be turning point events that change the direction of your life, such as marriage, birth of a first child, or retirement.

Strategic planning focuses on high probability, high impact events. The worksheet for life events helps identify those events for your own life as well as the high impact events for stakeholders.

### **Personal values**

People's lives are guided by their personal values, because personal values include beliefs about what is right and what is wrong as well as what is important to the individual. Some values are related to culture while others may be related to the individual's ambitions, desires or needs. Some people may be aware of their values but others may have to think about what is really important in their lives. Some time values conflict, and it is helpful for a person to be aware of his or her selection of one value over another.

Personal values are not a specific part of scenario development, but values certainly influence the visioning process, and there is value in self awareness. The Personal Values worksheet provides a list of values that are common to many people, then leaves space to add other values. The exercise consists of ranking one's values, starting with the most important.

### ***Exploring the future with scenarios***

There are at least a dozen recognized methods for developing scenarios (Hines, 2006). In personal futures, we use the matrix method for four scenarios. This approach to developing scenarios is simple to follow and is easily understood. In the workbook is a two-page worksheet in table format with headings for four scenarios across the top and the six domains listed on the left. This allows workbook users to enter information for each domain into each scenario including high probability, high impact events . The completed worksheet provides the primary information for the user to write out each of the four scenarios.

Participants and readers are asked to identify the two personal domains that they feel will be dominant in the next life stage (or the next ten years) for which they are planning. Those two domains will provide the dominant forces for the scenarios, although all six domains are considered.

#### **Positive scenario**

The positive scenario is based on the positive extrapolations from the six personal domains, with emphasis on the two domains that are expected to drive the coming stage of life or the next ten years.

#### **Normative scenario**

The normative scenario is based on an extension of the present into the ten-year future with little change in any of the domains.

#### **Negative scenario**

The negative scenario is based on the negative extrapolations from the six personal domains, with emphasis on the two domains that are expected to drive the coming stage of life over the next ten years.

#### **Wild card or transformational scenario**

Although the 2008 workbook refers only to "Wild Cards" in this scenario, I've started incorporating transformational or aspirational alternatives, following the lead of the Alternative Futures Group (Bezold, Peck and Olson, 1998). This is in part due to the difficulty for many people of choosing a wild card, but also to give people a choice, an opportunity to reach for the future that challenges them.

In workshops, I emphasize that scenarios are not "choices" for the future, but guides to what the individual's future might be, then remind them that we develop positive and negative extrapolations to "bracket" the future, placing the boundaries for what Taylor (1991) called the "cone of plausibility"(p.32).

### ***Personal strategic plan***

Strategic planning offers some advantages to individuals in that personal strategic planning has only one or two decision makers, and those decision makers have a vested interest in the plan. For individuals, there is also the advantage of greater flexibility; the ability to adjust and alter the plan or even change direction. Although corporate and organizational strategic planning may include a great number of steps personal strategic planning as practiced in this system includes only four steps:

**Vision** – A vision of the future

In early workshops, visioning was presented simply as writing out a sentence or two about what each individual wanted for their ten-year future. Participants quickly made clear that they needed something more specific as they didn't know where to start. I suggested that they start with their six personal domains, asking themselves what future they wanted for each domain. From there, most found it relatively simple to write a one or two sentence vision of their future. I also suggested that individuals see the vision as a destination in the future, or the "where?" of strategic planning, offering an analogy based on planning a vacation. "Before you can plan your vacation, you need a destination."

**Strategies**- How to achieve a vision

Strategies are the "How?" of strategic planning. How will you achieve each element of your vision? How will you deal with high probability, high impact events in your life? Referring back to the earlier analogy of planning a vacation, I pointed out that once a destination had been selected, a next decision would be "How?"

How would they get to the destination? Fly? Drive? Cruise Ship? Train? The answers to these "How?" questions are strategies. I also found that some people seemed to attach something of a mystique to the word strategy, relating strategy to competitions including sports, chess and war. Once they understood that a strategy was simply a way to do something, some of the mental barriers disappeared.

**Action plan**- Steps to the future

The purpose of the action plan is to develop a sequence of actions necessary to achieve one's vision. The focus of the action plan is achieving the individual's vision of the future.

The complete action plan will list each action the individual should take during each year over the next ten years. Generally, this will include actions for each of the six personal domains. Planning a sequence of actions over ten years is sometimes challenging to workshop participants, so I have suggested backcasting as an effective tool for building those sequences.

Backcasting is a tool that helps people imagine themselves in their own future, ten years away, after successfully achieving their vision of the future. Once immersed in imagining that future, the individual asks, "What was the last action I took to achieve my vision? What was the action before that? And before that? Backcasting lets the individual step backward from the future to develop a sequence of actions.

**Contingency plan**- Preparing for the future

The contingency plan lays out strategies and specific plans to deal with high impact events that may occur over the next ten years. The high impact events include both high probability and low probability (wild card) events. These might be called "If...then" strategies-- If this event occurs, then this is how to deal with it. In my workshops, I use hurricanes on the Texas coast as an example of one of my personal contingency plans. After ten years with a plan for our present home, Hurricane Dolly struck in 2008. We were prepared with a plan and a backup. We used both, and that demonstrates the value of contingency planning.



This is an area of preparing for the future where people should ask themselves, “Am I prepared for...?” This could apply to the serious illness, injury or death of a family member; birth, marriage or divorce of a child; loss of a job; or any other high impact event that can be anticipated but is not planned for.

### **Workbooks**

The first version of the workbook was included in my dissertation as an appendix. An expanded version was published a few months later as the Personal Futures Workbook (Wheelwright, 2006a), intended for use in half-day or full-day workshops. Later that workbook was offered with a CD containing a narrated PowerPoint presentation, a complete workshop for individuals. After conducting several workshops in various formats, I published a PDF version of the workbook, The Personal Futures Workbook (Wheelwright, 2008) which could be downloaded into a computer and all work entered and saved from the keyboard. This version was simplified to include only the essentials, and this format has proven successful. Substantial numbers of the PDF workbook have been downloaded from [www.personalfutures.net](http://www.personalfutures.net) as well as from other sites.

### **Workshops, presentations, discussion**

Since completing my dissertation, I have conducted a number of workshops and given presentations explaining Personal Futures. Workshop formats have included full day, half day and one-hour variations. In the full day version, participants generally complete a personal strategic plan in the workshop. In the half-day workshop, much of the workbook is filled in, but much of the strategic plan must be completed by the individual after the workshop. The one-hour workshop simply explains the workbook and the methods, including details of extrapolation of dominant forces, scenario development and strategic planning. Participants complete the workbook, develop scenarios and create a strategic plan after the workshop. Day and half-day workshops are generally limited to twenty-five participants, but the one hour workshop is not limited. Recently I spoke to over one thousand people in one session and five hundred in another. Feedback to date suggests that people are satisfied in all three cases, but the extent to which people actually complete the process outside the workshop is unknown at this time. Comments from participants have ranged from “Thank you” to “That workshop changed my life!”

During various workshop, attendees asked questions and made suggestions including the following examples:

“More examples, including completed worksheets.”

”How do I build a vision? What are the steps?”

“How do I make strategies?”

“Won’t all this planning take the spontaneity out of my life?” (Asked often.)

From these and other questions, I modified some existing worksheets, improved explanations and developed new worksheets. I also looked for good analogies that would help people understand each topic better. For each workshop or presentation, I tried new slides, new analogies, testing to see which combinations worked best. This process continues to evolve.

## **Conclusions**

Futures methods are applicable to individual lives and appear to be beneficial. The system presented here permits individuals to effectively explore the future using scenarios and to create a personal strategic plan for the future.

Futures methods are clearly scalable. The same methods that work for large multinational organizations also work for individuals. Scalability also appears to offer benefits in the opposite direction. Individuals who learn how to use futures methods in their personal lives appear to gain an understanding of those methods that can carry into their careers in organizations of any size.

The Personal Futures system is workable for individuals. In full day and half day workshops, participants have demonstrated the ability to develop scenarios and create personal strategic plans with little or no difficulty using the Personal Futures Workbook.

## **Discussion**

What is the future for Personal Futures? Is Personal Futures as a system destined to become widely accepted and used by the general public, or will it fade due to lack of interest?

Over the past three years as I have introduced Personal Futures to futurists, organizations, universities, and individuals, there have been no challenges or even questions as to the value of futures methods to individuals or to the system presented in the workbook. The responses from individual users and workshop attendees have been quite positive.

Interest in Personal Futures over the past year has increased substantially, possibly fueled by the offer of free downloads of the workbook and related materials at my web site. On the other hand, awareness may simply be growing. After all, Personal Futures as a system first appeared to futurists and the public in an article in *The Futurist* in 2006 (Wheelwright, 2006b), so there is the possibility for growth as awareness increases.

If the broad general public were to become knowledgeable about futures methods, what would be the consequences for futurists and professional futurists? On the positive side, there could be a substantial demand for futurist educators and futures consultants. On the other hand, some futurists fear that if there was broad public knowledge of futures methods, there would be less need for futurists. That, with general knowledge of futures methods, futures planning in organizations could be done without the guidance of professional futurists. Personally, I believe that the greater awareness and understanding the general (and business) population has of the methods of foresight and futures studies, the greater acceptance and demand for professional services. Somewhat parallel to accounting. In universities, business majors learn the principles of accounting, so they understand how accounting is done. But this widespread knowledge of accounting methods has certainly not damaged the accounting profession. There is still a need for professionals. I believe that will be true as well for professional futurists.

Several thousand people have received workbooks, attended workshops or heard presentations about Personal Futures. In addition, several schools, colleges and universities are using the Personal Futures Workbook for their classes in Foresight, which suggests that Personal Futures is beginning to have some impact. But what should be next? In my opinion, research is the key. Research could evaluate and quantify the benefits or values of Personal Futures, not only to the general population but also to specific segments of the population. Research has the potential to develop meaningful data about the value of futures methods. I also believe that research will open up new areas for Personal Futures that will not only benefit the general public, but could also open up career opportunities for futures researchers.

### **Further research**

The research described above concludes that futures methods are scalable and that the system for studying personal futures is a workable system. Workable, yes but any system can be improved or even replaced with a better system. The approach to studying personal futures

presented here offers a start, but future research will be needed to develop better ways to prepare more people for the future. In fact, research is needed to determine how effective this present system really is. There are a number of areas that invite either application of personal futures or research into the applicability of personal futures to that area. Some areas that might benefit from specific research into the applicability and benefits of applying Personal Futures include:

### ***Teens planning to continue education***

Young people and their parents who are thinking about the importance of higher education are already preparing for the future. This group might be very receptive to learning about their personal futures, but research could verify that interest and identify appropriate approaches that would benefit this segment of the population.

### ***Teens at risk***

Large numbers of young people are at risk of dropping out of school. Surveys of students in the U.S who dropped out of school found the sixty-nine percent "...were not motivated or inspired to work hard," (Bridgeland, et al. 2006). It is plausible that young people would benefit from a long term perspective on their lives. Research is needed to prove or disprove the benefits of learning Personal Futures for this segment of the population. Further research should identify ways and means to introduce Personal Futures into school systems to help reduce dropout rates.

### ***Incarcerated, all ages***

To what extent might the incarcerated benefit from a long term perspective on their lives? Research would determine whether or not a long term perspective based on training in Personal Futures would change attitudes, impact violence and/or reduce recidivism. Specific research would be required to determine how Personal Futures training could be introduced into juvenile facilities and prisons and which populations among the incarcerated would receive the greatest benefit.

### ***Retirement planning***

Substantial advertising encourages people to save money for retirement, but there is much more to retirement planning than finances or even health. A critical question is, "What will people do during a long retirement?" A generation that is already retired is finding that decades of retirement is a long time. I have interviewed people who retired with a dream of playing golf every day for the rest of their lives. After twenty years of golf, some are looking for other activities. Researchers could be studying this segment of the population to learn how to help future retirees prepare for their Personal Futures.

### ***Leadership***

Research by Kouzes and Posner (2003) suggests that among the desirable attributes of leadership, respondents selected forward-looking, "...the ability to look ahead as one of their most sought after traits" (p.28). In fact, long term thinking was second only to honesty in their surveys. The question raised by this research is, "How do people learn long term thinking?" Personal Futures may be a realistic approach to teaching and learning leadership as well as futures methods, but research will be required to determine who should lead this training and how training should best be presented.

### ***How effective is Personal Futures?***

Although a sizeable number of people have had some exposure to Personal Futures, there are no statistics on how many have benefited or to what extent. Research could suggest ways to improve the Personal Futures system and how to present Personal futures to assure that there are real benefits for individuals. There is a real need to determine if futures methods are effective at the personal level, and if so, how effective.

These examples of research areas in personal futures provide an opportunity for students and professional researchers to develop quantitative data and real statistics about the benefits of futures methods.

Over the years, research on the successes and/or failures of futures methods have been hard to identify, in part because organizations that have found futures methods to be successful or beneficial don't want that information to be made public.

Since it appears evident that futures methods scale up as well as down, research into Personal Futures offers the potential to provide solid data and statistics that would benefit all levels of foresight and futures studies.

## **Summary**

There are two major points to this paper:

- 1- A workable system has been developed and tested that permits individuals to use futures methods to explore and plan for their personal futures.
- 2- The personal futures system offers researchers at all levels a tool that can produce data about futures methods.

In the first point, I suggest that the Personal Futures system demonstrates the scalability of futures methods while offering individuals the benefits of exploring, planning and preparing for their personal futures using known futures methods. I go on to point out that although the numbers of people acquiring the workbook, attending workshops and hearing lectures is growing and user comments are positive, very little quantitative data has been developed about either the benefits of the Personal futures system or the success of the methods.

In the second point, I suggest that the Personal Futures system has the potential to be a powerful tool for research, whether by students or professional researchers. Further, I believe that such research has the potential to benefit the entire community of Foresight and Futures Studies.

Finally, the goal of this paper is to stimulate interest and encourage research into the various areas and potentials of Personal Futures. You are invited to participate, whether in exploring your own future, teaching Personal Futures or conducting research to determine the value of Personal Futures to others.

## **Correspondence**

Verne Wheelwright, PhD.  
Personal Futures Network  
[www.personalfutures.net](http://www.personalfutures.net)  
Member, Association of Professional Futurists  
1917 Guava Circle  
Harlingen, TX 78552  
Email: [verne@personalfutures.net](mailto:verne@personalfutures.net)  
Phone: +1-956-423-5758

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