

Imagining the Futures of Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders: New Ways to Think Using an Anticipatory Foresight Lens

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"The Future..."



A provocative term

A powerful term

A political term

When you think about the future...what do you think about? What do you feel?

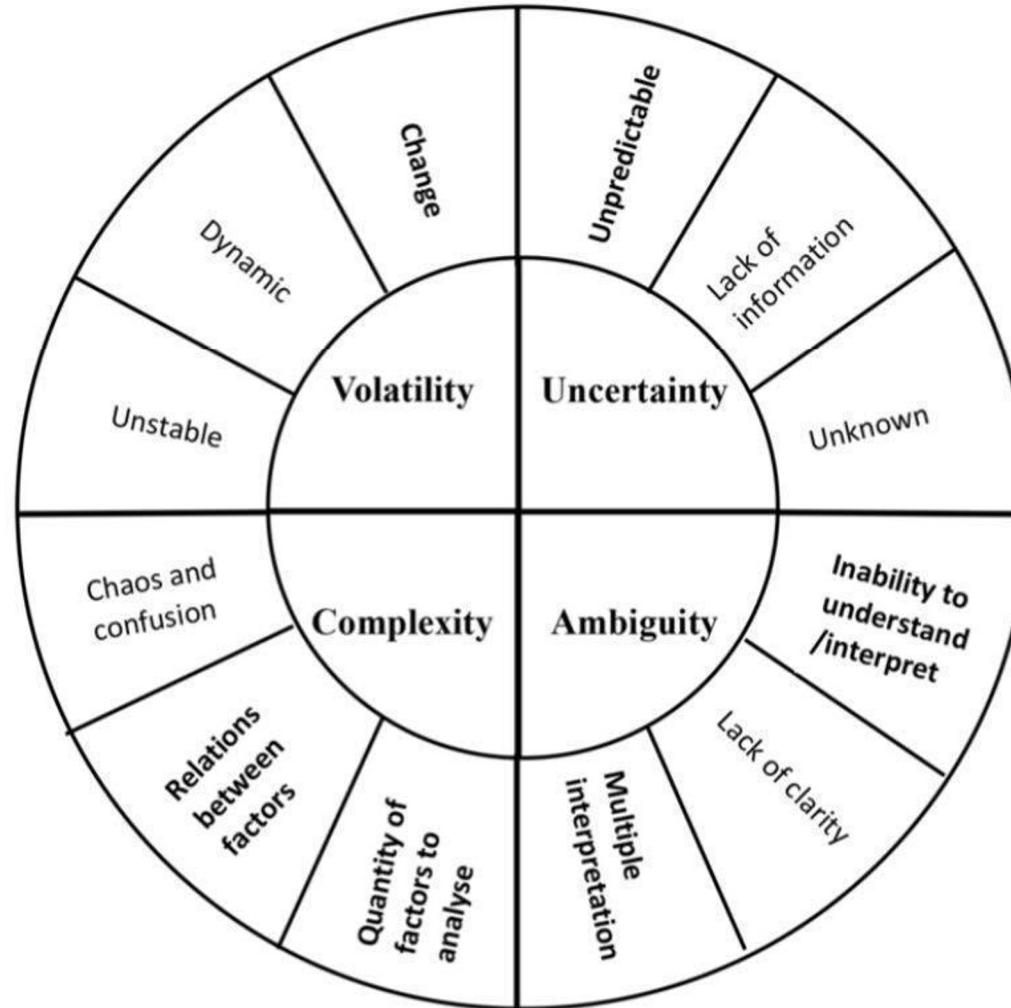
What do you do?

(Art by Alicia Eggert)

Foresight as a Set of Ideas and Tools to Bring More Agility, Expansive Set of Possibilities and More Dynamic Set of Options for Uncertain Futures

- Foresight is a global community of practice that “studies futures” (always plural) based on historical patterns, emergent social and technical phenomena, and the unbounded limits of human imagination
- Imagines/analyzes – doesn’t predict
- Operates in concert with governments, business, and other social groups to be better prepared for uncertain futures
- Imagines possible futures (there are no “facts” about the future and therefore there is not “a future” but many simultaneously possible) – we need to build a disciplined but imaginative set of structures to scaffold the way we think about the future(s)
- Challenges assumptions about future scenarios
- Always acknowledges the power dynamics present who asserts dominion over “the future” and who is not actively included (social determinants of the future)
- Think “strategic planning” squared – focus on having empathy for our future selves and those of every living thing on planet earth, to recognize our moral obligation to future generations, and to have agency to imaginatively act to embolden our collective best chance at a set of healthy and democratic futures

VUCA:
Acknowledge
our
circumstances
and find
containers big
enough to hold
our shared
complexities



Taskan, Junca-Silva & Caetano, 2022

How to Get There

- Assume extensive, rapid and non-linear change.
- Look for signals of change (trends already reflect existing changes...what is emerging around the edges?).
- Use signals to actively and collectively imagine multiple futures simultaneously with focus on those we most want.
- Account for inevitable power struggles among players regarding what counts as a future priority.
- Build adaptive, engaging forums, mechanisms and systems that anticipate desired and undesired evolution in the systems we work and live within, and are prepared to accelerate efforts to double down on what is most valued.
- Use imagination AND intellect via shared discipline (and playground) of foresight methods.
- Find ways to flip frightening VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity) to a more hopeful VUCA – vision, understanding, clarity and agility (Johansen, 2021).

What does the future of care and intervention look like?

Our roles, job duties and scopes of work	The laws that sanction and authorize our official status	Our specialty practice areas
Our knowledges and how we learn and expand them	How equity will look and factor into our work: Varieties of structural violence	Who is considered an essential partner
What is considered an urgent priority	Our tools and how we used them	Our ethics - what is and isn't considered ethical professional behavior

Things I'm Looking at as a Social Work Foresight Practitioner

- Anxiety futures/collective trauma
- Chronic underfunding and devolution of key safety net systems
- Mutual aid futures
- Backsliding of science (search for opportunities/protection of scientific gains/data)
- Backsliding on equity (searching for opportunities/protection of knowledges and leadership in this space)
- Social change forces and strategies
- Technological impacts – especially but not limited to AI (“Your AI therapist will see you now...”)
- Climate implications of life on planet earth
- Futures of professions themselves (AI as a new kind of partner)
- Bodily autonomy futures (gender, reproductive and cognitive)
- Emergent issues and lack of future facing shared radar screens
- Lack of foresightfulness in our political and social infrastructures
- Obvious larger policy shifts at play including social welfare and related funding streams
- Preparing higher education to prepare a workforce capable and ready for the VUCA environment they will inherit
- Other mutations of structural, social and political determinants of health



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Thank you

