

Briefing Your Futurist

Overview:

This document aims to provide some guidance for Organisations wanting to engage a Futurist. It should not be considered as a comprehensive document and could be used in conjunction with internal processes you may have in place.

Introduction

The Client Brief (the Brief) exists to provide clarity and understanding for both the Organisation and the Futurists Consultant to maximise the level of success emerging through the engagement. The most effective Briefs should enable you to understand the background and experience of the Futurist and allow you to determine what options are available to you with regard to processes or methodologies the Futurist may suggest.

From the Futurist's perspective it will be important for them to understand the reason for the engagement or project, your desired outcomes from the process and any 'framing' issue(s) that might guide the engagement.

Framing Your Brief

The simplest process for creating a Brief is what we refer to as the Inside / Outside method. What this means is that there is information that you need to bring into the Organisation to assist you in developing your understanding of the suitability of both the Futurist and the possible processes; and there is information that you hold that needs to go outside, that is be given to the consulting futurist in order for them to understand your needs and desires.

When we discuss the idea of Framing we suggest that you provide some guidelines to the Futurist that informs them:

- Whether the content needs to be subject specific or broad;
- Immediately relevant and useable or able to be connected over time;
- Business specific or Industry general
- Gentle to the audience or highly provocative
- Any Agendas that might need to be considered or catered for

This list are 'Outside' components, the things that help the external party (your Futurist) understand what needs to be catered for as they put together their approach for the project. In this way the Futurist can begin to build their structure around the type and style of content likely to be suitable.

Providing insights as to process needs for participants can also be helpful -

- Are participants likely to prefer a lecture style or something more interactive?
- Should delivery be prescriptive or exploratory?
- Is it desirable for participants to generate some form of report or output from the session?

And so on

This will shape the way the session or project is likely to unfold over its duration. Briefing your Futurist then needs to be an exchange of understanding. The Futurist will be trying to determine whether they are the best placed to assist you, the methodology likely to suit and ultimately whether the project is something they want to work on. You will likely want to be convinced the Futurist understands your needs and desired outcomes, has the right type of experience as a variety of

processes that may be suitable and finally, meets your budget.

The following checklist can be a useful guide for the type of information exchange when meeting with a Futurist:

Inside	Outside
Futurist's History & Experience	Purpose of Project
Track record	Desired outcomes
Client testimonials	Participant Numbers & Needs
Client references	Dates & Location
Methodologies Available	Process (Prescriptive v Open)
Pricing	Information (Specific v Broad)
Availability	Style (Comforting v Provocative)
Style of facilitation / project management	Internal Agendas
	Stakeholder Agendas

It is likely you will have other elements you will want to know or like the Futurist to know. As a rule of thumb, the checklist above provides the most common and core elements that form your Brief to the Futurist.

Keep in mind that the more clear everyone is at the outset of the process, the more likely it is that the desired outcomes can be realistically met. Where there are competing agendas or assumptions haven't been tested, the process used may not match your expectations, even if ultimately generating the output you're looking for.

Futures projects live and die on Valid Assumptions and Realistic Expectations. A well developed 'Brief' will play a significant role in allowing that to happen.

If you'd like to discuss some further ideas regarding engaging a futurist to assist you with some part of your organisational strategy development or planning, feel free to contact the author of this document, Marcus Barber at futurist@lufg.com.au