Learning futures and having fun – Futuropoly

by Elina Hiltunen
What's Next Consulting (whatsnext@luukku.com)
Finland

Learning is not always fun. Sitting in boring lectures that never seem to end, trying to read textbooks that do not inspire or engage you, or trying to learn things by rote and memory without even trying them by yourself are teaching methodologies that can quench your enthusiasm, as happened to me. Now, as a teacher myself, I try to make learning fun and avoid boredom. That's why I invented Futuropoly, a tool that students can use for learning and testing futures methods themselves. I have been using this method for teaching Korean business people in the Helsinki School of Economics for several years and for educating business people about futures tools.

The other inspiration for Futuropoly was Monopoly ®, possibly the world's most famous game. Time has changed this famous game a lot. For example, there have been changes in the tokens. In the good old times the tokens included a dog, an old iron, and an old shoe and today you can find laptop, hamburger, and roller-skate tokens. The monetary system has changed from paper currency to credit cards, and the names of properties have also changed. These changes through the years have inspired a question: What would the Monopoly ® of the future look like? Well you would only know that by designing it. That is the impetus for the Futuropoly gameboard design.

As a teaching tool, Futuropoly incorporates the basic concepts of futures studies (megatrends, trends, wild cards, weak signals) and various methods (scenario method, futures table, futures wheel, and Delphi method). However, all the lectures are tightly connected to hands on futures work, i. e. designing the gameboard. Designing the gameboard is a process of learning how to use different futures techniques and applying them into practice from macro level thinking to practical future business cases. The process is as follows:
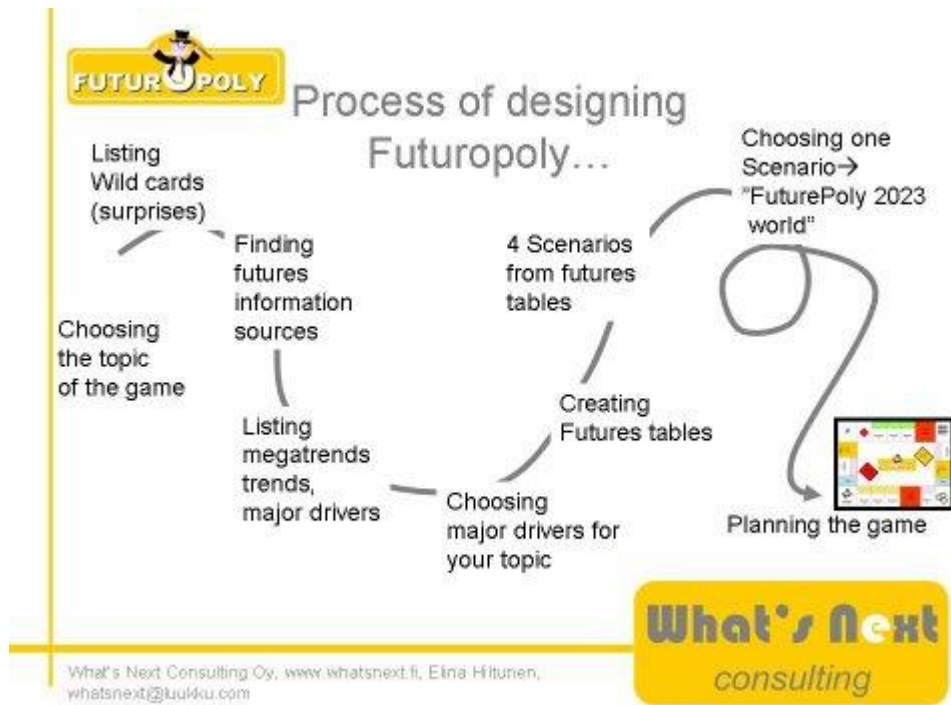
1. The first step is to choose the topic of the game. When I was teaching my Korean MBA students we used a topic for the game: Korea 2023. The topic can just as easily be very macro level (world 2050) or some industry (car industry 2040) or geographic region (Europe scenarios 2050).

2. In the Monopoly ® game there are cards called *Chance* and *Community Chest*. In Futuropoly these cards are replaced by wild cards and weak signals cards. In my teaching I present the definition of these concepts and make the students find out sources for weak signals and identify examples of them. In the case of wild cards I encourage students to think about the unthinkable and about unforeseeable events. The students' task is to identify ten wild cards and ten weak signals. For this exercise, it is important to look for good information sources (the starting point of every futures activity!!).

3. When the cards are ready, it is time to start thinking about various scenarios, for example four different ones. In my courses I use the futures table method, where various drivers of the future are listed and given certain values. By combining various drivers with various values, one can get different kinds of scenario skeletons. In my courses, students spend considerable time for this scenario work, because I personally value scenarios as a good method for futures work in organizations too.

4. When the students end up with different scenarios (for example "Green Finland 2020", "Red Finland 2020", "Blue Finland" and "Brown Finland 2020"), then I instruct the group to identify the scenarios they prefer and dislike.

5. To make it ugly (and more challenging), the students are asked to design the Futuropoly gameboard for the scenario they dislike the most. For example, if they would have chosen the scenario Brown Finland 2020 as the most unpreferred, they would start to design my

gameboard for that scenario. For the gameboard the groups have to think about the following:

- How are successful businesses identified and represented on the gameboard? For example, in the brown Finland scenario (dystopia scenario), the security business would be a successful one.
- What are the tokens that correspond to future customers and professions? (For example, one token can represent Rufus, a 34 year old unemployed male.) The tokens can also present something valid to the scenarios
- What is the payment system? (For example, is there no money anymore, and why not? Do people pay with credit cards or mobile devices, or is there a return to paper currency?)
- For what are taxes paid, and why?
- What is the transportation system?
- How is the game played (is it a computer game, hologram, mobile game, etc.)?

Your task is to design:

- Rules of the game
- 9 good businesses
- Tokens, e.g. future people/customers (5 pieces)
- Monetary system (paying)
- 10 wild cards
- 10 weak signals
- Taxation
- Transportation
- Prison (reasons why people are taken there)

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At the end, all the groups present their outcomes from their Futuropoly gameboards. It has been amazing how different and innovative all the outcomes have been so far. The key of this exercise is to give as much freedom to the students as possible for designing the gameboard. This inspires them to innovate. The students appear to have been quite happy designing their gameboards while they were also learning.

Students designing the gameboard while being inspired at the same time with the beautiful scenery (Summer 2008)
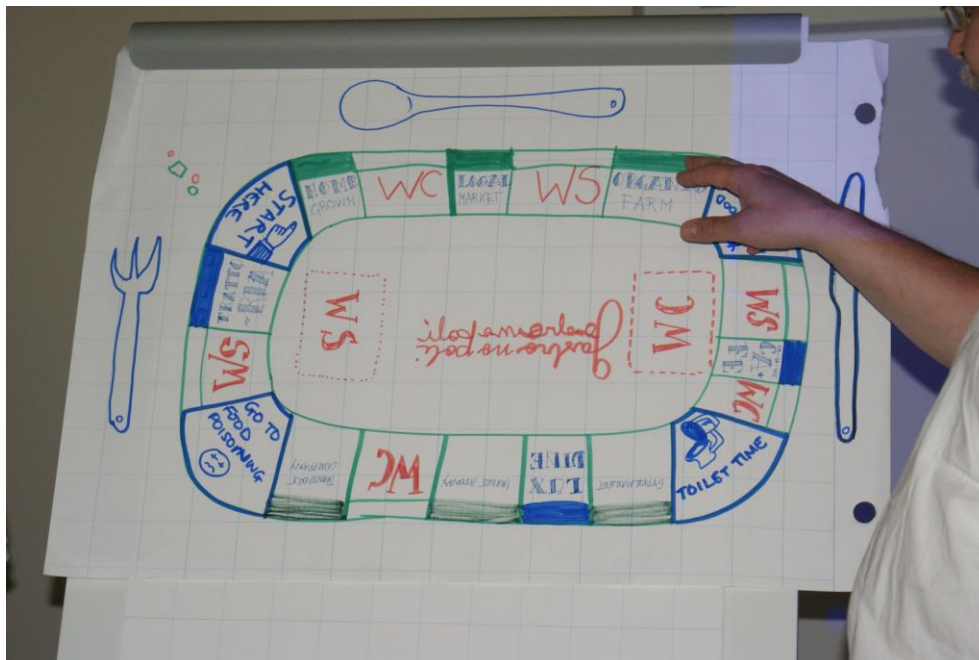
An outcome of the group work
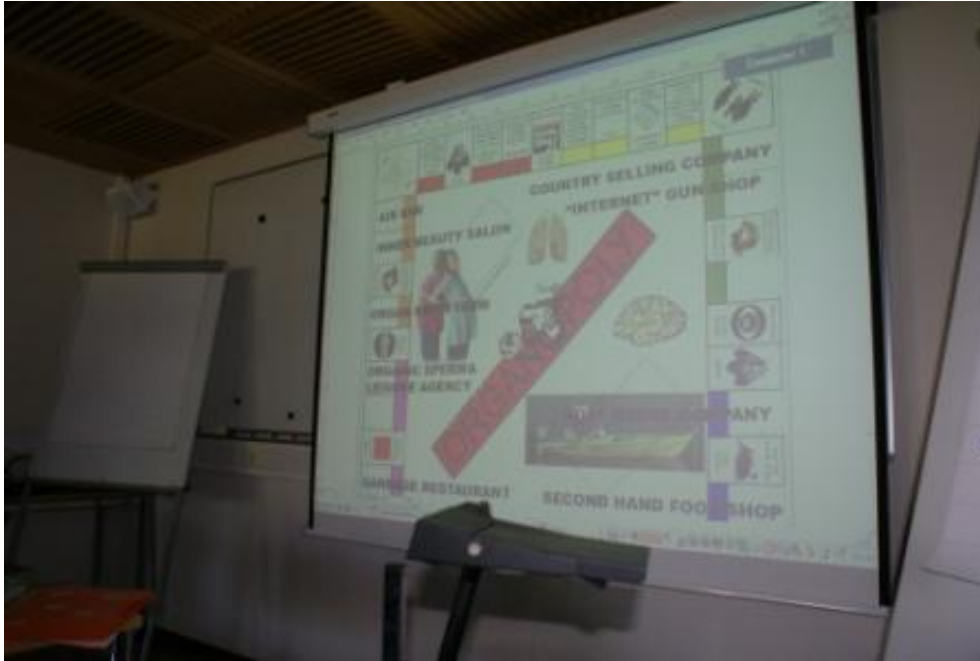
Another outcome of the group work