

Risk Assessments with the Futures Triangle

What if risk management could evolve into a forward-looking, creative, and strategic enabler - helping decision-makers anticipate risks before they emerge? This is where the **Futures Triangle**, a foresight methodology developed by Professor Sohail Inayatullah, offers a powerful approach to risk assessments and risk management in general.

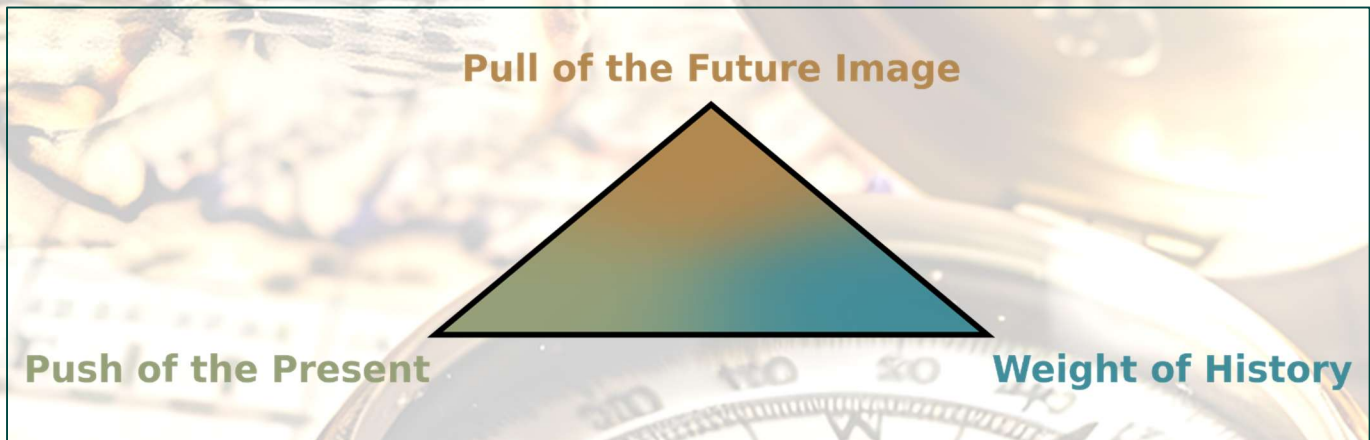
At Futura International, we use this model not just as a tool for futures research, but as a *Strategic Accelerator for Risk Identification and Mitigation*. It empowers clients to look beyond compliance, fostering strategic (risk) agility. **This approach enables businesses to pursue opportunities while effectively managing the risks that come with them.**

The Futures Triangle Explained

The Futures Triangle explores **three time-based forces** that shape both risk and business opportunity:

- **Foresight:** Envisioning the future, or the “Pull of the Future Image”
- **Insight:** Understanding present-day trends, or the “Push of the Present”
- **Hindsight:** Reflecting on the past, or the “Weight of History”

Figure 1: The Futures Triangle



As Inayatullah¹ (2004: 8) explains:

- The **Pull of the Future Image** represents the “dominant and contending images of the future” (this is the preferred or plausible futures drawing the organisation forward)
- The **Push of the Present** encompasses trends, acting now, such as demographics, technology, and (increasingly during the last few years) de-globalization
- The **Weight of History** reflects “deep patterns resistant to change” - such as patriarchy, feudal structures, silos, and macro patterns in change (macro-history). In other words the Weight of History consist of deep patterns, legacies, and constraints inherited from the past

1. Inayatullah, S. 2004. Futures and Change: From Strategy to Transformation. International Asia-Pacific Course in Futures Studies and Policymaking, 24 August, 1 - 24.

Pull of the Future Image

This is the **desired or preferred future** of an organisation – i.e., the strategic vision of what the organisation aims to achieve.

- **Example (Geopolitical):** A global manufacturer envisions expanding into new trade zones unaffected by tariffs or sanctions
- **Example (Political):** A public-sector institution plans to modernize governance in anticipation of decentralization reforms
- **Example (Strategic):** A healthcare provider's vision to become an AI-driven, patient-centric platform within a number of years
- **Example (Cyber):** An IT department planning for a fully cloud-native, zero-trust architecture

Push of the Present

These are the **current trends, pressures, and drivers** - spanning demographic shifts, emerging technologies, regulatory requirements, supply chain vulnerabilities, market competition, geopolitical tensions, macroeconomic changes, political reforms, regional instability etc. The Push of the Present can drive an organisation toward its desired future - or divert it in an unintended direction.

- **Example (Geopolitical):** Rising tensions in key supplier regions are affecting raw material flows
- **Example (Economic):** Currency fluctuations and inflation are reshaping operational cost models across borders
- **Example (Operational):** Increasing customer demand for real-time support is driving change in service delivery
- **Example (Finance):** Central bank rate hikes are tightening credit conditions

Weight of History

These are the **legacies** within (or outside) an organisation **that weigh its future vision down** - namely, past decisions, cultural norms, systemic constraints, and historical events that continue to influence the present. Past events may be organisation-specific or broader historical developments at the national or global level. They are often underestimated yet exert immense influence.

- **Example (Political):** A legacy of corruption or weak rule of law undermines institutional reform efforts
- **Example (Economic):** Past financial crises continue to influence conservative investment behaviours
- **Example (Strategic):** A retailer clinging to its brick-and-mortar business model despite declining foot traffic
- **Example (Cyber):** Legacy systems that expose the organisation to modern-day threats

A Unique Lens for Risk Discovery

Most risk assessments lean heavily on the present and the past - what happened and what is happening. But as a trained Futurist and multi-disciplinary Risk Professional, I approach risk through a more layered, time-conscious lens. The Futures Triangle allows us to surface risks that traditional tools often overlook.

Applying the Futures Triangle: Examples

Strategic Risk

- **Pull:** A multinational seeks to establish influence in emerging political alliances
- **Push:** Trade realignments and regional blocs are changing global economic landscapes
- **Weight:** The organisation has a legacy of focusing only on the US-EU corridor (mature "North Atlantic" markets)

⚠ **Emerging Risk:** Strategic myopia may result in loss of access to rising economies.

Operational Risk

- **Pull:** A shipping company plans to expand routes into politically stable corridors
- **Push:** Geopolitical instability in key sea straits is driving rerouting and cost increases

- **Weight:** Past investment in high-risk infrastructure now limits agility

⚠ **Emerging Risk:** Inability to pivot could cause long-term operational disruptions.

Financial Risk

- **Pull:** A sovereign wealth fund aims to diversify into frontier markets
- **Push:** Shifting macroeconomic policies and global interest rates introduce volatility
- **Weight:** Previous financial policies favoured domestic assets only

⚠ **Emerging Risk:** Underperformance due to overexposure to domestic downturns.

Cybersecurity Risk

- **Pull:** Government institutions aim for stronger cyber sovereignty policies
- **Push:** Political disinformation campaigns and geopolitical cyber warfare increase
- **Weight:** Historical underinvestment in sovereign digital infrastructure

⚠ **Emerging Risk:** Critical data exposed to foreign influence or surveillance risks.

Why this Matters to your Organisation

Traditional risk assessments are often checklist-based, compliance-driven, and rooted in outdated thinking, where decisions are shaped by best practice frameworks. The issue with this “run-of-the-mill” approach is that best practice, by definition, reflects past practices, which *may no longer be relevant in the face of evolving risks*. They fail to account for the complex interplay of time, ambition, resistance, and trends. At Futura International, we provide something radically different, namely a:

- Futurist’s method to challenge assumptions
- Narrative-based framework to surface hidden risks
- Cross-domain perspective (history, (geo)politics, economics, social, legal, environmental, industry)
- Dialogue tool for (risk) strategy, not just compliance

Final Thought: Risk is a Story, Not a Spreadsheet

Risk management is not just about what might go wrong; it’s also about identifying what’s missing from the conversation. As a Generalist (Historian, Political Scientist, IT/Cyber Auditor, and Futurist), I bring a deeply layered approach to helping organisations surface hidden threats and seize emerging opportunities.

Working with Futura International goes beyond traditional risk management; we embed foresight into your risk assessments.

Warm regards,



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Director

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