

*Report on the Corporate Foresight track at the ISPIM Conference 2012*

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## **The road ahead for research on Corporate Foresight: Report on the Corporate Foresight track at the ISPIM Annual Conference 2012**

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### **1 Introduction**

In the past decade we have seen a steep increase in the interest on corporate foresight, both from managers and scholars. Such a growing community of researchers and practitioners is thus in need of a common platform for discussions to advance the field. There have been some attempts to establish such a platform in the past, for example the British Academy of Management Conference, the Oxford Futures Forum and the “Foresight: learning for the future” conference of the University of Strathclyde. All of these have clearly contributed to the emergence and further development of the field.

Our corporate foresight track in the ISPIM conference follows from the tradition of our practitioner conferences on foresight and organizational future orientation [1]. These conferences were organized initially as a platform of exchange between our 20 case-study companies from our research project on building a maturity model for the future orientation of a firm [2].

We have now decided to revive this tradition of the corporate foresight conference and to team up with the International Society for Professional Innovation Management (ISPIM). In the next ISPIM events we will organize the exchange on corporate foresight and future orientation as a “conference in a conference”. We will run different activities related to corporate foresight: paper sessions, round tables, panel discussions and workshops. At the same time we offer the opportunity for the corporate foresight participants to interact with the wider innovation management community of ISPIM.

To invite a broader discussion we have broadened the scope of our track to “Corporate Foresight, Strategic Agility and Organizational Future Orientation”. Under the term corporate foresight we discuss systematic approaches to create insights into the

future and translate them into managerial actions (intelligence and planning perspective). For the discussion on strategic agility we follow the definition set out by Doz & Kosonen [3], which includes actions and organizational setups that build (1) strategic sensitivity, (2) leadership unity, and (3) resource fluidity. Finally the term organizational future orientation (action and organizational structure perspective) is used to describe:

*...the ability to identify and interpret changes in the environment and trigger adequate responses to ensure long-term survival and success. This ability can be build on the basis of (formal) planning and implementation systems of through structural means.*

Widening the perspective beyond intelligence and planning allows us to stimulate a broader discussion about how to integrate foresight with the existing and future management systems. Linking corporate foresight closer to for example the strategic and innovation management activities of firms will increase its value contribution in firms and enlarge its role towards becoming a key driver for ensuring sustained competitive advantage (see Figure 1).

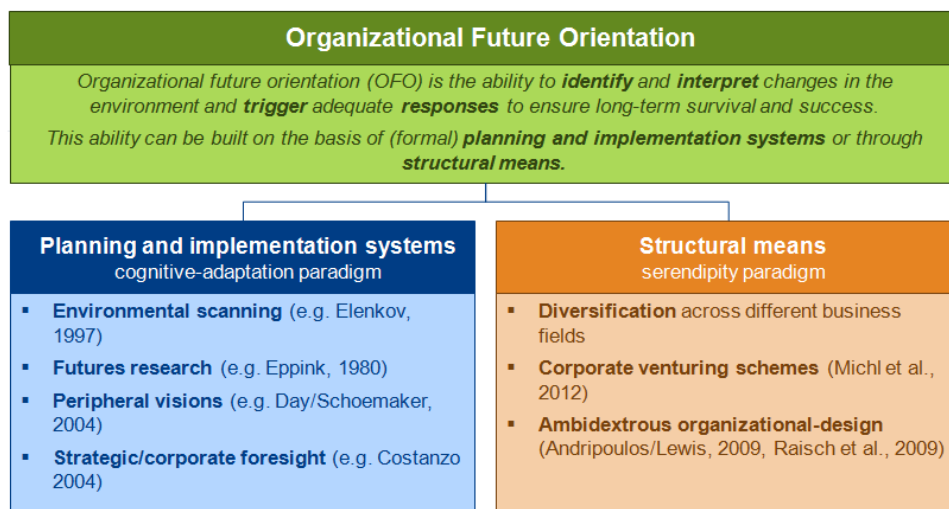


Figure 1: Scope and topics of our conference track

## 2 Paper session - Foresight track

In this first event (the ISPIM 2012 Conference in Barcelona) we had 16 papers from 11 different organizations joining us from 10 different countries. All papers have been selected through a peer review process and have been good contributions to the conference. We however also would like to point out the five papers that have triggered the most intensive discussions. In the following table you find a summary of the papers.

**Table 1** Our selection of the TOP 5 papers in alphabetical order

<i>Paper title (authors)</i>	<i>Data and method</i>	<i>Findings</i>
Exploring the organizational design for resilience and foresight (Cinzia Battistella, University of Udine) [4]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literature analysis</li> <li>• 8 case studies</li> </ul>	First evidence and hypotheses on how organization of corporate foresight (CF) can be linked to CF performance (efficiency and effectiveness)
Foresight and Open Innovation at Volkswagen: Creating strategic value by combining Scenario & innovation Market Method (Caroline Rudzinski, Volkswagen AG) [5]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion of an application case</li> </ul>	<p>Identification of 5 key implementation enablers for foresight projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparent process</li> <li>• Tailored outputs to be relevant for corporate strategy</li> <li>• Iterative/on-going</li> <li>• Integrated into planning process</li> <li>• Established audience (and tailored to audience?)</li> </ul> <p>Description of an application case where foresight was linked with an innovation market with 600 people from outside the company.</p>
Foresight-oriented product-service systems (Sebastian Ley, Unity AG) [6]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selection of industry examples</li> <li>• Conceptual</li> </ul>	Proposal of an integrated methodology that uses scenarios and a service radar to create propose hybrid products
Learning from the future – modelling scenarios based on normativity, performativity and transparency (Henning Breuer, Deutsche Telekom) [7]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conceptual</li> <li>• Discussion of an application case</li> </ul>	<p>Reports on an approach that uses an exploratory scenario analysis to identify and select innovation opportunities.</p> <p>Proposes three success criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normativity</li> <li>• Performativity</li> <li>• Transparency</li> </ul>
Supporting Technology Product Planning processes with Serious Gaming (Edward Faber, T-Xchange) [8]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action research</li> </ul>	Presentation and discussion of an integrated approach that uses scenario planning, business modelling, technology roadmapping and serious gaming to strategically plan technology development

### **3 The workshop**

During the conference, we also organized a 1.5 hour workshop. The primary goal of this first workshop was to identify the issues in corporate foresight, strategic agility and organizational future orientation that are important and currently less understood. A secondary goal was to enable both practitioners and academics that are experts or interested in corporate foresight to meet each other and share their thoughts.

The first part was dedicated to three presentations that propose a hot topic overview for research and practice in the field of foresight.

#### *Short abstract of Cinzia Battistella's talk on policy foresight*

The first presentation was dedicated to the policy foresight perspective. Cinzia Battistella, defined three roles of policy foresight in:

- informing *decision-making* (e.g. broadening the knowledge base to increase awareness of risks and opportunities),
- assisting *implementation* of decisions (e.g. disrupt lock-in thinking and strengthen communities)
- *creating new capabilities* (e.g. helping to develop a “foresight culture”).

#### *Short abstract about Nils Müller's talk on foresight practices*

The second presentation was by Nils Müller, CEO of TrendONE GmbH. He provided the corporate foresight practitioner perspective and explained how companies can succeed in fast-moving business sectors by organising to detect and analyse micro-trends and key technologies.

Nils Müller explained that high-impact trends are

- *new*
- *smart* (connected with a specific business model)
- *adaptable* for mass markets
- *structure changing*

His company, a trend scouting agency, registers 1200-1500 innovations a month and publishes a trend report based on observations from 80 trend scouts worldwide.

#### *Short abstract about René Rohrbeck's talk on foresight research*

The last presentation was dedicated to the corporate foresight research perspective. Many firms of today face a triple challenge:

- high rates of change
- ignorance
- inertia.

In order to survive they need to build adequate sensors and reflexes, proactively scan the environment and develop suitable response systems.

Corporate foresight can help innovation management and strategic management by respectively increasing innovation and learning capacity and overcoming life-threatening path-dependency.

### Workshop results

The second part was dedicated to identify and rate hot topics within foresight research and practice. By using the available expert knowledge of the participants we intended to establish which topics are of high relevance in the field of corporate foresight, strategic agility and organizational future orientation.

To identify topics we split into 3 groups, in which we brainstormed and defined potential topics. After the group discussions we came together again in a plenary session to rate the topics. For the rating we used two dimensions: the expected *future importance* for practice and academia, and the capability level - i.e. how good firms are at mastering the topic. The result of this rating is shown in Figure 2.

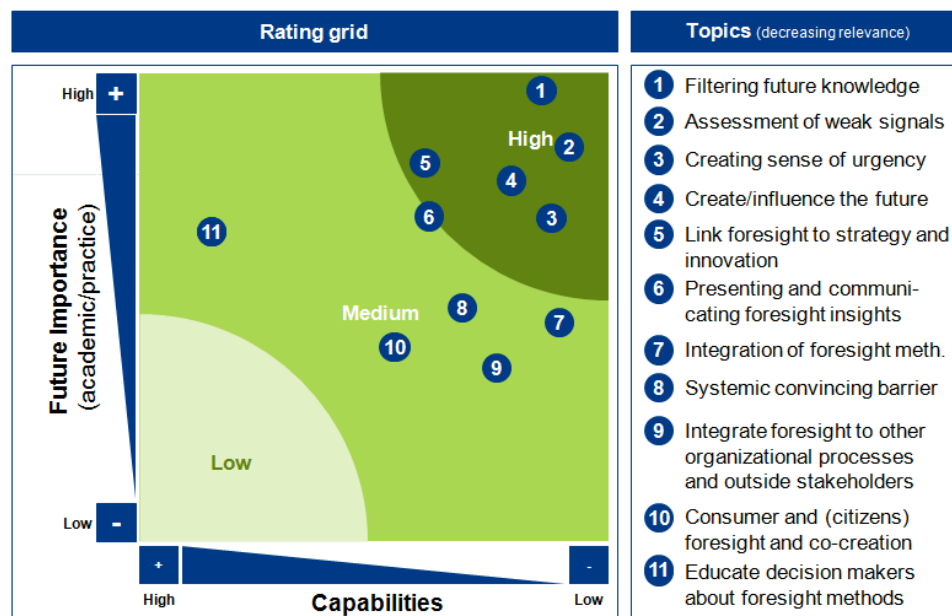


Figure 2: Rating of topics that contribute to the future orientation of firms

Overall 11 topics were identified by the groups. Of these, 5 were rated as highly relevant and 6 received ratings indicating lower relevance. The 5 high-relevance topics are:

- *Filtering future knowledge*: Relates to the difficulty of assessing the increasingly large amount of trend reports, future reports and the like. It is also increasingly difficult to evaluate the credibility of such reports, it was commented.
- *Assessment of weak signals*: While the relevance of a weak signal can easily be determined in hindsight when the trend is in full force, it is very challenging to anticipate its potential relevance in the emergence phase.

- *Creating a sense of urgency*: Firms are primarily focused on exploiting and optimizing their current business. When it comes to future developments the interest of (top) management is often very low. Thus a key to success for corporate foresight is the ability to create a sense of urgency in the organization.
- *Create/influence the future*: Corporate foresight methods are designed to enhance understandings about future developments, but are often not sufficient to trigger organizational responses. When the response includes convincing multiple stakeholders, getting to action is even more difficult.
- *Link foresight to strategy and innovation*: One way of ensuring that insights into the future trigger organizational responses is linking foresight to follow up processes such as strategy and innovation management. However, very few firms report to have successfully established such links.

#### **4 Future activities and staying up to date**

The Special Interest Group will continue through different types of activities:

##### *Discussing and sharing knowledge*

- **[ISPIM Innovation for Financial Service Summit](#)**  
19-21 September 2012, Luxembourg
- **[5<sup>th</sup> ISPIM Innovation Symposium 2012](#)**  
“Stimulating Innovation - Challenges for Management, Science & Technology”  
9-12 December 2012, Seoul, Korea  
(submission deadline for outlines 14 September 2012)
- **[XXIV ISPIM Annual Conference 2013](#)**  
“Innovating in Global Markets: Challenges for Sustainable Growth”  
9-12 June 2013, Helsinki, Finland  
(submission deadline for outlines 31 December 2012)

##### *Researching and publishing through two special issues on*

- **[Corporate Foresight](#)** in *Technological Forecasting & Social Change*, submission deadline 30.06.2013
- **[Organizational Future Orientation](#)** in *Futures* with submission deadline 30.06.2013

##### *Networking*

- Through our linkedIn group **[Strategic Foresight - Strategische Frühaufklärung -Veille Stratégique](#)**;

*Educating*

- [PhD course on “Strategic Foresight in Engineering”, Copenhagen, 17-21 September 2012](#) by the University of Aarhus

We are looking forward to jointly with you contribute to advancing the research and practice of “Corporate Foresight, Strategic Agility and Organizational Future Orientation” and to continue fostering peer-to-peer interaction, proactive discussion and exchange of ideas.

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