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Motivation: Global Opportunity Scenarios for an International Corporation

?The future does not merely happen, it is being shaped? ? that was the overarching philosophy of this corporate foresight. The client, a global player in science and technology, wanted to understand: - What will the world of 2020 be like, if it is not actively shaped? - What can be done to make the world a better place in the course of the next fifteen years? What kind of place could it be by then, if a serious effort is made to design a better future? The consultants running the project approached these questions with scenarios (consistent, plausible and alternative pictures of the future); in the end, one global business-as-usual scenario and three opportunity scenarios for different world regions were identified.

Twofold Objective: Communication & Strategy Agenda

The foresight process had two main objectives: on the one hand, to communicate the client?s innovative orientation in a large-scale project, on the other hand, to generate an all-embracing strategy agenda for the future of the company, forming an expandable knowledge base. The project lasted more than a year.

Project Set-Up: Three groups involved in every step

The consultant?s core team for this project was made up of three people; in research-intensive phases, however, it consisted of up to eight researchers. The client set up an internal task force, which united experts from every department of the company and was involved regularly. And to gain a global perspective on this large-scale foresight process, the consultant founded a group of International Foresight Expertise (IFE). This external IFE comprised know-how from every continent and every kind of foresight research background (educational, private, non-governmental), guaranteeing an overarching approach to world future scenarios and giving regional insights from every part of the world. All three teams were involved in every major step.

The Foresight Process: Three Main Phases

In general, the project was very process-oriented, and shaping its design and methodology was as big a task as conducting the research. The entire process was subdivided into three phases: (1) Trend Analysis, (2) Key Factor Identification and (3) Scenario Description. Each phase included three steps: (1) the consultants created an initial research / analysis paper, (2) this paper was enriched and/or modified in a workshop, involving the client's internal task force, the IFE and the consultant's team, and in a last step (3) the paper was finalised in a report.

Phase 1. Global Trends. The main task of the first phase was to identify and analyse global trends, i.e. *?Increasing Access to and Performance of Information and Communication Technology?*. For this purpose, trends with global relevance, continuity for a time horizon beyond 2015 and a high impact were selected by the consultants, considering the STEEP factors: Society, Technology, Economy, Ecology and Politics. In a Delphi Survey, questioning the IFE and the client, regional impacts of the key trends, their relevance and possible disruptions in the trend development were identified. Thus, the first milestone was a report describing about 100 important global trends.

Phase 2. Key Factors. The second phase dealt with Key Factors and their projections (several plausible and probable alternative future developments in the subject area of a Key Factor). For example, in the field of the Key Factor *Technology Development*, three Key Factor projections could be: *Shift from ICT to Biotech* or *ICT remains the main driver* or *Parallel Growth of ICTs & Biotech*. Based on a workshop, a Key Factor report was authored, the second milestone of this project.

Phase 3. Scenarios. For the third and last phase ? the scenario phase ? software, workshops and another survey were applied. First, the Key Factor projections were analysed for probability and consistency with one another. Then, those projections were systematically synthesised into bundles with the help of scenario software, and in the end, a set of four scenarios were selected and described. The outcome was one business-as-usual (BAU) scenario in order to answer the question *"What will the World of 2020 be like, if we don't try to actively shape it?"* and three scenarios, focusing on three courses of development, three scopes of challenges and three world regions: - Africa (representing developing countries), facing large challenges in infrastructure developments - Asia (emerging countries), challenged to cope with massive growth and a shortage of resources - Europe (developed world), facing an economic shift and an overall transformation. Each scenario reflected a certain global challenge and focused on a key area of change. Then the scenarios were authored in a narrative approach and answered questions like: Which trends, events and actors contributed to the future scenario? Where does the scenario take place exactly? Who are the key actors in this scenario? Which applications, technical and social innovations are plausible within the given horizon 2020? The entire process was finalised by a Scenario Report.

Challenges

A challenge, which generally appears (not only) in software-based scenario processes, is the translating of projection bundles into fully-fledged scenarios. In this methodological "grey area", creativity and visionary thinking is needed in order to develop a holistic concept that really gets to the heart of the topic and still is easy to communicate. However, this challenge is rarely discussed in methodological literature.

The four scenarios described in the previous section - one global BAU scenario and three regional Opportunity scenarios - were a solution to another challenge, which revealed itself in the course of the scenario writing: How to find a balance between - Global perspectives & regional specifications? - Methodological rigour, content-wise ?freshness? and communication ?fitness? In other words, the scenarios developed out of the most methodological rigour are neither necessarily the ones with the highest relevance, nor the ones that can be communicated well. This methodological gap in foresight research should be discussed further among the futurist community.

Secondly, a key challenge lay in connecting and "translating between" science and research perspectives and language and corporate needs and expectations.

Learnings

One characteristic of this project was the extremely large amount of material that was produced during the consulting process. In the end, however, only very condensed and essential information was presented and really taken into account in the corporate context. Another lesson that this project taught: the IFE was really useful for a global / regional perspective, and its input was highly interesting, but too much feedback during the process multiplied the effort.

One of the best experiences within the project was the opportunity of testing a wide variety of creative formats in the workshops. The consultant introduced for example a newspaper from the future, asked the participants to bring future objects to the workshop, conducted a dialogue in the dark and had a futurist dinner (including a grasshopper hors d??uvre). With the meetings being very productive, those ?gadgets? triggered innovative thinking and creative approaches.

The client and the consultant took several major benefits from this project. It instituted a broad foundation in future thinking inside the client?s company and rose awareness for crucial future trends, perspectives and opportunities. The project opened the doors to a follow-up process in Top Management Trainings, focussing the acquired insights on one business field of the company. The findings ? Global Trend analysis, Key Factor report and the four scenarios ? were presented in PowerPoint, a format that proved especially useful and accessible for internal innovation processes and circulation inside the client?s company. Still years after the project was finished, the project managers received very positive feedback on the trend material that was put together and that diffused in all corners of the business, and different departments inside the company contacted the former team for new internal innovation projects.

Unfinalized Notes during the workshop - Otherwise forgotten moments in this project: When I realized my actual customer was someone else then I who I thought was my customer, and wanted something else - Challenge: Role as intermediary as a foresight consultant: Corporate Foresight needs / Foresight needs from customer perspective - research perspective - academics opposition to openness and fuzyness of foresight - Challenge: Make impact - keep question character and don't start making predictions, but give advise

Notes Feedback: - Eating Grashoppers - Eating Grashoppers with the CEO - Inclusion of Foresight Group / Regional - Challenges / Opportunity -