THE PARTICIPATION PARADOX.

Critical reflections on the design and conduct of participatory foresight interventions in organizations
MOTIVATION

- **Practice**: Workshops, meetings, and other participatory formats are a key component of enacting the practice of corporate foresight.

- **Research**: Whereas research has extensively dealt with single foresight methods, not many deal with question how to select, orchestrate, and combine them in interventions.

Organization of foresight interventions and the importance of participation in corporate foresight systems are underexplored (Rohrbeck et al. 2015).
PARTICIPATION IN FORESIGHT

Rationale and benefits:

- **Normative**: empower stakeholders through democratic involvement
- **Substantive**: include diverse perspective, broaden the knowledge base and problem-solving capacity
- **Instrumental**: raise trust and acceptance, ensuring effective implementation and downward communication, improve decision-making style of participants


The role of participation in foresight has predominantly been discussed from a very positive point of view.
FORESIGHT INTERVENTION

- **Foresight Practice**: ongoing series of efforts to inform about possible future states and what is needed to realize them.

- **Foresight Episode**: ad hoc project or recurring process that has a clear start and end point.

- **Participatory Intervention**: temporaily-bound, small group setting that allows organizational members to leave the routine structures of communication, and deliberately remove themselves from day-to-day work to engage in strategic decision-making.

- **Foresight Method**: full range of concepts, ideas, techniques and approaches that structure or influence the foresight activity.
## Set-up of a Foresight Episode

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Own figure
RESEARCH DESIGN & DATA COLLECTION

Two projects

Participatory interventions

WS 1  WS 2  WS 3

WS 1  WS 2  WS 3

Data Sources

- Observations
- Video Recordings
- Documents
- Meeting Notes
- Self-reports of participants
PROJECT 1

- Foresight Project over 4 months, Small Danish consultancy
- Process driven by the CEO
- Entire company, even board members, took part
- 3 Workshops: Scenario, Persona, and Product Building
- No major deviations, delays, or adjustments to the process

The output and deliverables of the single interventions were achieved, but in their quality and nature they were not satisfactory – because they were not as ‘extreme’ or ‘radical’ as the foresight methods were expected to deliver.
Corporate foresight differs from managerial activity in that it is non-routine, non-programmable, unique and creative (Harrison, 1999).

+ Templates and structuring tasks enforce organizational members to reiterate until shared agreement is reached, yet

! in small group settings what gets to the surface has been filtered multiple times,

! foresight tools often rely on the “inductive” shaping of methods as they represent “need-centered” tools (Knott 2006).
Methods and the terminology provide a necessary channeling device for the thinking of the decision-makers involved, yet terms can become “sticky” and somewhat locked-in the communication and negotiations of decision-makers, possible futures can become almost ‘too real’ to participants → emotional attachment, blindness to the ‘in-between’ options and underlying assumptions
DISCUSSION & OUTLOOK

- Corporate foresight benefits from a variety of perspectives and ‘thinking broad’ – but it also requires consensus and alignment on an actionable account (Rohrbeck et al. 2013).

- While foresight methods are typically associated with “thinking broad” and “out-of-the-box” (perceiving), many of the methods used are geared towards focused thinking, i.e. finding direction, and deciding on a course of action (prospecting, probing).

- We find it worthwhile to critically discuss the role of participation within corporate foresight, more specifically how it influences the shaping of foresight methods and outcomes of foresight interventions.
REFERENCES


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INNOBOOSTER 2016

1. Research Phase: Consulting 2025
   - Articles, Trend Reports
   - Key Influencing Factors
   - First Draft Scenarios

2. Workshop I: Challenges for AKON
   - Validated Scenarios 2025
   - Key Challenges

3. Interviews: Customers and Non-Customers
   - Interviews Extreme Cases
   - Needs and Characteristics
   - First Draft Personas

4. Workshop II: Persona-Building and Value Proposition Insights
   - Validated Personas
   - Value Proposition Insights

5. Workshop III: Product Building and Portfolio Review
   - Product Building
   - Portfolio Review

Implementation 2017