ManagerWISSEN

Ad Special in Harvard Business manager
www.manager-wissen.com

ADVERTISEMENT

October 2026 Issue

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

The future requires decisions: today

Why Strategic Foresight is about more than trends, data and AI, and how companies can prepare for possible futures

By Giordano Koch

Why companies must think in terms of possibilities rather than forecasts

The future is becoming increasingly difficult for companies to predict. It is not individual changes but their simultaneous occurrence and dynamic interaction th at shape strategic planning. Successful leadership therefore does not mean forecasting one single future but understanding different possible futures and preparing for them.

Many companies, however, continue to base their strategies on a preferred vision of the future. If the underlying assumptions change, the decisions and investments built on them quickly come under pressure.

What is Strategic Foresight?

Strategic Foresight is the structured examination of changes in the business environment and an increasingly uncertain future. It is not focused on predicting the future, but on understanding multiple plausible developments.

Core idea: Companies use Foresight to develop scenarios, identify opportunities and risks, and derive strategic options from them. This enables them to remain capable of action even under conditions of uncertainty and to actively shape their own future.

More than a method: Strategic Foresight is a future-oriented mindset which ideally shapes the entire organization. What matters is the ability to understand different futures, discuss them and incorporate them into decisions.

A key future competence: This ability is known as Futures Literacy, that is the competence to engage productively with different visions of the future.

Strategic Foresight helps companies understand plausible developments, derive strategic options, and make the underlying assumptions transparent. This creates orientation in uncertain times and provides a shared compass for strategy, innovation, and decision-making.

Companies are not inactive in this regard. They maintain trend radars, analyze the maturity of new technologies, develop strategies, and introduce digital platforms. Yet years of working with different companies and conducting 100 podcast interviews have shown me that trend analyses, future radars, studies, scenarios, and platforms alone do not create future readiness.

What matters is whether leadership teams connect the individual building blocks into an overall picture. And whether they actually use the different information and perspectives to make better decisions. Strategic Foresight work therefore does not begin with another tool, nor can it simply be carried out by AI today. It begins with an organization's ability to translate knowledge about possible futures into orientation and concrete action.

The following sections show which steps are crucial when implementing Strategic Foresight, how AI can provide support and which levers can significantly increase its value.

1. How to spot the future drivers of your industries at an early stage

Continuously monitoring your company's environment is the foundation of effective Foresight work. Organizations need to identify developments in their own, as well as adjacent industries at an early stage. AI expands the possibilities: it analyzes large data volumes,

What to expect from this Special?

Data is now available in abundance – orientation is becoming the decisive competitive advantage. This is where Foresight comes in: not as a forecasting tool, but as a basis for better decisions under uncertainty. This Special shows how companies can use Foresight, artificial intelligence and human judgement to develop strategic options, and why Futures Literacy is becoming a key competence for executives. Practical examples demonstrate how Foresight is used today to gain new perspectives and prepare strategic decisions.

Because the future does not emerge from better forecasts, but from the ability to make decisions today that will stand the test of tomorrow.

Imprint

Publisher: Reif Verlag GmbH · Alfred-Jost-Straße 11 · 69124 Heidelberg
Peter Reif · peter.reif@reifverlag.de · www.manager-wissen.com

Editorial team: Christian Deutsch · info@deutsch-werkstatt.de
Regina Gödde, email: regina.goedde@reifverlag.de
Layout: metropolmedia, 69245 Bammental · Printing: ColorDruck Solutions, 69181 Leimen

FSC www.fsc.org MIX Papier | Fördert gute Waldnutzung FSC® C110307

recognizes patterns and identifies trends, technology cycles and market movements faster than ever before.

AI helps companies see more but not to automatically understand better. Only human interpretation turns data into a basis for strategic orientation. Experience, contextual knowledge and exchanges with internal specialists, as well as external trend receivers and experts, help identify weak signals at an early stage, interpret them and develop relevant visions of the future.

2. How to develop different, plausible visions of the future of your industry

Scenario planning is a suitable way to develop plausible visions of the future for an industry based on different drivers of change. First, particularly uncertain and relevant influencing factors are identified and mapped against one another in a future grid. Their different manifestations give rise to scenarios that are initially explored independently of a company's own positioning.

For Qvest, the world's leading systems integrator for the media industry, we developed scenarios, for example, along the axes of "intensity of AI/technology adoption" and "market fragmentation". These included the scenarios "AI-Thunderstorm" (high adoption, high fragmentation) and "Consolidated European Infrastructure" (lower adoption, lower fragmentation), each with different strategic implications for Qvest and its portfolio of services.

AI can support scenario development by combining data, recognizing patterns and extrapolating developments. Its limitations become apparent, however, when the task is to open up or deliberately disrupt strategic areas of tension. Scenarios should not only show what is probable, they should also indicate what is possible. This raises new questions for strategy development.

Work with scenarios therefore does not end once they have been developed. Leadership teams must understand the different visions of the future and derive consequences from them. The key is not to commit prematurely to a single future, but to deal with the simultaneity of several possible futures. From this point onward, three elements are central. Automation can support them, but above all they require one thing: human engagement. Our collaboration with the co-authors from Enpulse (EnBW) and Henkel has shown that clear governance, appropriate structures and processes are important enablers. A culture of exchange, collaboration and shared reflection provides the basis for strategic alignment, thus enabling Foresight to achieve its full impact.

Three central elements of scenario work

- **Actively thinking about the future:** Foresight is not a trend report, but a shared thinking process. Leadership teams must consciously accept uncertainty as the basis for strategic decisions.
- **Talking about the future:** Futures Literacy emerges through discussion, change of perspective and joint reflection. Only in this way can an organization develop a shared understanding of possible futures.
- **Actively shaping the future:** The value of Foresight only becomes apparent in decisions and their consistent implementation. AI supports analysis, leadership sets priorities and creates commitment.

3. How to develop different futures for your company

The next step is to translate possible futures into company-specific implications. The strategic scope can vary: Foresight processes can be conducted at company level, for individual business units or - in smaller formats - for product areas and functions.

The key questions are: What opportunities and risks arise for our company? Which developments fit us? Which assumptions convince different stakeholders within the company, and why? This process should result in different visions of the future, opportunity spaces and strategic implications. These can serve as a basis for further decisions: to prepare more quickly and effectively for change, to explore relevant areas in greater depth or to provide different parts of the company with strategic orientation.

The three elements described above are also crucial at this stage.

Foresight workshops create the space to bring together different perspectives and jointly assess strategic consequences. This is how knowledge becomes collective action.

4. Backcasting: How to move from different futures to concrete steps

In many companies, the final step is seriously neglected: the consistent translation of options into concrete measures. Because future readiness does not arise simply because companies understand possible futures. They must make the decisions today that increase the likelihood of a desired future becoming reality in the first place.

This is precisely where Backcasting comes in. Starting from a desired future state, the necessary implications and courses of action are derived and prioritized backwards along a timeline: systematically, transparently and while taking dependencies into account. This makes it easier to determine the implications for strategy, organization, portfolio, innovation and the required competencies.

AI can structure and assess courses of action. Prioritization and decision-making remain the responsibility of company leadership.

Conclusion: AI creates capacity - Futures Literacy determines how companies use it

AI facilitates analysis, supports the development of scenarios and helps derive strategic options. However, future readiness only emerges when companies translate these insights into decisions and consistent action. The resources freed up through automation should therefore be re-invested in what strengthens organizations over the long term: reflection, exchange, leadership and a culture that systematically incorporates different futures into strategic decisions.

The best ideas emerge through exchange. Agree, disagree, or have something interesting to add? I always welcome feedback at giordano.koch@hyve.net or via LinkedIn.

The author

Dr. Giordano Koch *has worked at the intersection of business, academia, and innovation for more than 15 years. As Managing Director of the innovation agency HYVE (www.hyve.net), he is responsible for developing and implementing innovation strategies, identifying new growth fields and supporting his clients in developing new products, services and business models. He teaches at various universities and passes on his knowledge through exMBA programs. He is also the founder of the innovation network "The Secret Source of Innovation" (www.the-secret-source-of-innovation.net) and, under this name, hosts the podcast of the same title, organizes local meetups and the annual Innovation Summit.*

Foresight has an impact – but perhaps not in the way you think

By Jan Oliver Schwarz

Foresight is currently gaining significantly in importance. Companies are investing in trend analyses, scenarios, and future workshops to prepare for an increasingly uncertain world. The key question, however, is not how well Foresight predicts the future. What matters instead is why some Foresight initiatives have a strategic impact while others, despite elaborate analyses, produce no lasting results.

Foresight refers to the structured and planned examination of changes in the business environment and possible future developments. In view of accelerating technological, social and economic change, companies must create long-term orientation: product life cycles, business models and investment decisions require a perspective that extends beyond the next planning cycle. At the same time, employees need a vision and a clear purpose. Simply reacting in an agile manner is not enough. But how does Foresight actually work, and how can its impact be increased?

Why taking the long view pays off

Before turning to the how, it is worth looking at the why. A study by the McKinsey Global Institute tracked 615 US companies from 2001 to 2015: companies with a genuine long-term orientation outperformed their short-term-focused competitors (Barton et al., 2017). Other researchers (Flammer and Bansal, 2017) have shown that long-term executive compensation plans increase investment intensity, reduce short-term thinking, and measurably improve corporate performance. Long-term orientation is therefore not a vague commitment, but an investment decision with measurable returns.

Foresight helps companies achieve a long-term orientation. René Rohrbeck, Professor at EDHEC Business School in Lille (France) has proven that companies with Foresight practices are able to achieve higher profitability and market capitalization than their competitors over an extended period (Rohrbeck and Kum, 2018).

The empirical foundation is solid. The real question is: Why, then, does Foresight so often fail to have an impact?

The impact chain: Foresight works differently than expected

Two empirical studies - one involving around 400 senior managers from large US and European companies (Schwarz et al., 2025), and another involving 147 senior executives from global corporations (Schwarz et al., 2020) - reveal a consistent pattern that calls many basic assumptions about Foresight into question.

The central insight: Foresight does not work because it predicts the future. It works because it changes how people talk, think, and act.

This impact chain unfolds across several stages: Foresight initially generates more and better strategy discussions. When these are well designed, cognitive shifts occur - a broader field of perception and more critical questioning of assumptions. This gives rise to stronger organizational capabilities: earlier resource reallocation, greater attention to weak signals, and more proactive strategy renewal. Finally, the innovation climate improves - that shared sense of whether it is safe to introduce something new and challenge the status quo.

What matters in Foresight

- Long-term orientation creates economic value
- Foresight works through cognitive change – not through better predictions
- Strategic impact emerges through shared reflection, not through additional reports

The Foresight paradox: More conversations, no better decisions

This is where the critical stumbling block lies. The study of 400 executives reveals that Foresight reliably increases the number and visibility of future-oriented conversations - but the connection between these conversations and improved decisions is weak. Executives talk more about the future, but do not question assumptions more deeply. The conversations remain polite and linear, embedded in the existing worldview. Trends are exchanged, while mental models remain untouched.

The problem is structural: Foresight is treated as a function that produces reports, which then become part of decision-making processes. But the fundamental engagement with the future, or with different futures, does not take place.

What really works: Prospecting rather than perceiving

The research highlights a crucial distinction: Perceiving – scanning, monitoring, trend research - provides new information. Prospecting - scenario development, sensemaking, future-oriented dialogue - provides new interpretive frameworks. The 2025 study (Wach et al., 2025) shows: Prospecting is the stronger lever for the innovation climate and cognitive change. Scanning tells us what is happening. Prospecting invites us to experience what could happen - and those who engage intensively with different scenarios that challenge the logic of their own business model practice to think in alternatives.

This cognitive shift requires participation. Reading a report or listening to a presentation changes very little. Executives must experience the cognitive tension themselves: grapple with scenarios and make assumptions explicit.

Foresight must be experienced - not consumed

This is the blind spot that even well-intentioned Foresight programs often have, and that AI-supported Foresight tools could exacerbate despite their undeniable efficiency gains.

AI can scan, synthesize, and structure. It significantly accelerates the production of trend reports and scenarios. But it cannot replace what Foresight ultimately achieves: the cognitive work that emerges when executives genuinely engage with alternative futures.

The difference lies between Consuming and Understanding. Anyone who reads an AI-generated report consumes information. Anyone who wrestles with colleagues in a scenario workshop over which assumptions support their strategy - and which could cause it to break - understands. And only understanding changes how people make decisions later.

The question for every executive and every organization is therefore not: Do we have Foresight? Instead, it is: Do our executives experience Foresight - or are they merely consuming it?

Sources:

The author

***Prof. Dr. Jan Oliver Schwarz** is Professor of Strategic Foresight and Trend Analysis at Ingolstadt Technical University (THI), where he also heads the Bavarian Foresight Institute. His latest book, Robust Leadership: Leading with Confidence into an Uncertain Future" has just been published.*

Foresight Platforms and AI as Virtual Colleagues in Futures Research

By Thomas Kolonko

The greatest danger when using AI in the Foresight process is not introducing it too late but entrusting it with too much. Those who view AI as a specialized employee with clearly defined tasks gain speed, new perspectives, and more room for their own judgement. This enables companies, especially those without a dedicated Foresight department, to access capabilities that were previously available primarily to large organizations. In this way, they can better prepare strategic decisions under uncertain conditions.

Foresight platforms now deliver analyses and results in seconds rather than weeks. This is precisely where danger lies. When a result is produced quickly and sounds plausible, hardly anyone asks what it is based on. We observe this type of blind trust repeatedly among our customers. Speed alone does not necessarily lead to good decisions. What matters is whether the data fits the problem, whether reliable insights can be derived from it and whether a well-founded decision is made in the end.

AI as an agent with a clearly defined task

It is worth thinking of AI less as a generic tool and more as an agent with a clearly defined task. It is particularly well suited to continuously scan for new signals, monitor developments, and assess information against defined criteria. It also provides efficient support when structuring, visualizing, and creating visions of the future. Its strength lies in speed and consistency, not so much in creativity or strategic judgement. This is creating new access to Foresight, particularly for small to medium-sized companies: tasks that previously required dedicated teams of scouts, analysts and editors can now be carried out with AI support.

> AI accelerates analysis.
> The decision remains human.

Quality through contextualization

Generic language models often produce imprecise results when asked Foresight-related questions, because sources, regions and time horizons get blended together. Contextualization provides a solution for this: AI agents are given defined sources and perspectives, such as a regional focus or a scientific viewpoint. A profile called "West", for example, draws exclusively on media from the US, Canada, the UK, and Europe, while another focuses primarily on patents and academic publications. The key point is that AI agents do not run themselves. Companies must actively maintain them, question their results and continuously adapt them to their own questions.

Transitions between phases keep humans in the loop

Classical Foresight processes generally follow the same pattern: scanning, assessing, interpreting, and deciding. However, the greatest errors occur at the transitions between these phases, for example, when signals are assessed too broadly or personal judgements are interpreted as facts.

Every transition should therefore include a human decision point. AI can work at high speed within an individual phase, but approval to move on to the next phase must still be given by a person.

A company's own data creates value - and deserves protection

AI generates the greatest value when it compares external perspectives with a company´s own data and projects them into the future. Only then does an observation become a basis for making quicker decisions with greater confidence. What matters is where external and internal perspectives converge, and where they diverge.

For companies to connect their internal data with AI, they must consider the infrastructure trustworthy. For us, this means: the platform can be operated entirely in-house, physically in the company's own data center and certified according to established security standards – as opposed to a rented service by a major cloud provider. This also applies to smaller companies without large IT departments.

This keeps sensitive data within the company, and leadership teams can trust the assessments because they can understand how they were reached. AI must not be a black box in Foresight: every assessment must be explainable.

AI also has its limits

Despite its strengths in data processing and pattern recognition, AI remains a specialist with a limited mandate. It recognizes patterns in existing information, but not genuine disruptions beyond its database. Where signals are contradictory or strategic priorities need to be set, it provides options but not decisions. Synthesis, assessment and responsibility therefore remain leadership tasks. If an assessment subsequently proves to be wrong, responsibility lies with the person who approved it, not with the agent that produced it.

Conclusion

AI does not make Foresight more successful simply because it processes more information. Its real value lies in better preparing strategic decisions. Companies identify opportunities and risks earlier, reduce the analytical workload, and gain time to develop robust courses of action. Modern Foresight platforms create the necessary link between continuous scanning, AI-supported analysis, and company-specific context. One thing remains crucial, however: responsibility for strategic decisions lies with people.

Recommendations: How companies create value with applying AI in Foresight

- **Define clear AI tasks:**
  Use AI selectively for analysis, monitoring and structuring, but not as a substitute for strategic assessment.
- **Create transparency:**
  Document sources and results in a traceable manner. Only transparent analyses provide a reliable basis for decisions.
- **Establish human decision points:**
  Consciously review and prioritize results at the transitions between scanning, assessment, interpretation and decision-making.
- **Ensure data sovereignty:**
  Operate the platform in-house and process sensitive company data securely. This allows you to retain control over data and decisions within the company.

The author

***Thomas Kolonko** is the founder and Managing Director of 4strat GmbH. Through the company's Foresight platform, he supports public- and private-sector clients of all sizes worldwide in translating AI-supported analyses into strategic decisions.*

We Decide the Future Today

How Foresight, AI and human creativity lead to better decisions

Giordano Koch in conversation with Tanja Schindler

Strategic Foresight helps executives make deliberate decisions today. AI accelerates analysis and synthesis but reaches its limits without human interpretation. Futurist Tanja Schindler explains why companies should consider multiple futures, how imagination becomes a strategic resource and why responsibility ultimately remains with people.

Ms. Schindler, why do companies need Foresight, and how does it lead to better decisions?

Imagine your company is preparing to fly into space. No one would set off without a defined destination, the right crew, possible routes, and preparation for weightlessness. The future is similarly complex and uncertain, yet many companies steer into it largely unprepared. Foresight is therefore not an add-on, but a way of thinking that enables better decisions here and now.

Foresight combines two perspectives. On the one hand, it analyses developments that are already discernible today, such as data, trends, and weak signals. On the other hand, it develops different possible futures, which may be plausible, surprising, or desirable. Strategic decisions are then examined from the perspective of these future scenarios: Under what conditions will they remain viable? Which risks or opportunities have so far been overlooked? Which options should remain open?

Foresight therefore does not provide forecasts. It expands our decision-making space. We do not ask only what might happen, but also which future we want to encourage through the decisions we make today.

Why should leadership teams consider multiple possible futures instead of focusing only on the expected one?

Anyone who plans for just one expected future optimizes their strategy for a single assumption. Yet developments that appear unlikely or even absurd today can become reality.

Thinking through multiple possible futures helps companies identify dependencies at an early stage, prepare alternatives, and respond more quickly. The aim is not to have a finished plan for every conceivable development, but to remain flexible and avoid being caught off guard by unexpected changes.

What role does AI play, and why does the human element nevertheless remain indispensable?

AI is "not an oracle of the future, but a high-performance sparring partner". It identifies weak signals in large, unstructured datasets and establishes connections that people can easily overlook.

Its limits become obvious where new possibilities emerge from known patterns. Here is an example: if you ask language models for a random number between one and ten, they often name the number seven because they reproduce the most common human response pattern. Without creative inspiration, AI can therefore easily deliver the statistical consensus of the present - the "number seven" of futures research, so to speak. Yet we do not just want to continue the past, but we want to learn from it in order to design better futures.

Although AI can point to options, it can never relieve us of responsibility. It lacks a finely tuned sense of cultural nuances, ethical dimensions, and complex conflicts of interest. We are therefore far more than a mere final control authority: it is up to us to develop radical hypotheses, assess results in context, and ultimately accept responsibility for the consequences. Human judgement and creative imagination thus remain the indispensable foundation of every forward-looking decision.

How do visions of the future emerge, and why are positive visions important?

Visions of the future emerge when people consciously move beyond familiar patterns of thought, contribute different experiences and actively rethink the future. AI can combine and visualize these ideas, but the imagination, meaning and direction behind them come from human diversity: from different lived experiences, cultures, areas of expertise and values. Human creativity broadens our shared horizons and helps us critically question assumptions and routines.

Positive visions provide orientation in a crisis-ridden present. They open up space for solutions and innovation without glossing over reality. They represent a strategic look ahead: the future first emerges in our imagination, and then through what we decide and do today.

Why do workshops remain important, and how does European differ from international futures work?

Working with AI makes it possible to develop scenarios more quickly, but a shared understanding of the future emerges through dialogue. Only discussion makes conflicts of interest visible and creates a common basis for decision-making. Foresight is both analytical and social: trust, learning and responsibility cannot be replaced digitally.

In my international work, I often encounter greater openness to storytelling and speculative methods. Germany and Europe place greater emphasis on trends, feasibility and long-term societal consequences. The strongest Foresight approaches combine both: creative openness and data-based systematic analysis.

What concrete steps can executives take to integrate Foresight, AI and human creativity into their decision-making processes?

The best starting point is not a general trend study, but a specific strategic decision. Executives should formulate a relevant question about the future and assemble as diverse a team as possible to test the pending decision under different future conditions.

AI can radically accelerate research, pattern recognition, and synthesis. However, discussion of the significance of the results and the consequences arising from them must take place within the human team.

Above all, futures work must not remain a one-off project. To avoid the inevitable blindness that comes from operating within established structures, companies need permanent roles that systematically challenge existing assumptions and introduce new perspectives. A "Futurist in Residence" is one possible model, enabling close collaboration with management, the introduction of impulses from beyond industry boundaries and a role as a constructive strategic disruptor. Good Foresight work repeatedly requires friction and outside impulses to prevent thinking from becoming trapped in the structures of the present.

© Borut Cvetko, Mediaspeed

The author

Tanja Schindler *is a futurist, keynote speaker and Foresight Lead at Kaufland. She is a former Chair of the Association of Professional Futurists and has international experience from her work with the European Commission, the WEF GFN, and various ministries in Dubai.*

Scenarios Beyond the Shelf: What Makes Foresight Truly Effective

By Tanja Bogenrieder

Strategic Foresight often generates valuable insights, yet too often they end up gathering dust on the shelf. The problem is rarely the quality of the scenarios themselves, but rather their actionability in decision-making and day-to-day work.

Using the "New Energy Society 2038" project as an example, this article shows which methods truly bring scenarios to life, and why the decisive work only begins afterwards.

The "So What?" Problem in Foresight

Working on the future is expensive. And yet it often ends up gathering dust on the shelf. Not because the scenarios are poor, but because simply knowing about the future does not yet create a willingness to act. Those who present Foresight findings as a report receive a polite nod. Those who actively involve people get decisions. AI is now significantly accelerating the creation of scenarios. This shifts the actual bottleneck: Foresight succeeds not because of the development of future visions, but because they are translated into concrete decisions. This translation work is becoming a central management responsibility.

Bringing Scenarios to Life: The First Step

At Enpulse, the venture studio of EnBW, we developed four future scenarios in the "New Energy Society 2038" project. They show how the world of energy customers could change by 2038, from "Resilience Islands - New Self-Sufficiency" to "Energy Elite - Intelligent Inequality." Before scenarios can have a strategic impact, they need to become tangible. To achieve this, we tested various formats. One that proved effective was "A day in the life of": a story describing the daily routine of a fictional person in the respective scenario. Role-play exercises with focused exchanges between pro and con positions were also helpful, making different perspectives visible and open to discussion. We also prepared the scenarios as a VR experience. The real value lies in this: anyone who actually enters a scenario develops a sense of it that no slide deck can create. VR and other immersive formats are not mandatory, however. But when used, they can significantly strengthen the emotional connection to the future vision.

From Scenario to Decision: Translation as the Real Lever

The experience opens the door. But the real impact comes from targeted questions. In our workshops, we deliberately work with participants from across the company in terms of both expertise and hierarchy. The process is usually similar: following a brief introduction and a role-play exercise, participants physically position themselves along a scale ranging from "very likely" to "very unlikely." This simple method makes different assessments visible and immediately gets the discussion started. What makes this scenario likely? What speaks against it? What can we influence as a company at all? The second step involves the actual process of deriving implications: What capabilities will we need if this scenario becomes reality? Which roles do we want to take, and which do we deliberately not want to take? The crucial insight usually emerges only when several scenarios are compared: capabilities that appear in all or most scenarios are a strong signal that they will need to play a central role in the future strategy. This is exactly how we approached our scenarios for the grid operations of the future. We subsequently compared the topics identified with existing roadmap initiatives, thereby conducting a white-spot analysis. This approach enabled us to identify specific topics for our innovation strategy, particularly in the areas of automation and AI.

Scenarios as a Stress Test for Existing Strategies

Foresight also works in the opposite direction. When a strategy or venture portfolio is already in place, scenarios can be used to challenge individual initiatives: Which topics are robust across several scenarios? Which are relevant in only one? How would an initiative need to adapt in order to succeed across different futures? Scenarios thus become a living tool; not only for strategy development, but also for continuously checking whether the company is still on the right course. What once took months solely for scenario development can now be accelerated considerably with the support of AI, making Foresight a continuous process rather than a one-off project. The capacity gained should be invested deliberately where Foresight really has an impact: in making scenarios tangible and deriving concrete implications.

Foresight Is Not a Pure Management Tool

One underestimated factor is who is in the room when scenarios are discussed. Foresight does not have an impact only at the leadership level, but wherever people make decisions every day: in product teams, sales and development. Those who build tomorrow's products need a vision of how their customers' world might change, and what will influence them. Broad involvement is not a nice-to-have, but it determines whether future visions truly filter into the company's day-to-day work or not.

What Companies Can Learn from This

Foresight becomes a decision-making tool when three things come together: First, scenarios need a format that genuinely allows people to engage with them, whether through a story, role-play, or immersion. Second, it is not only the quality of the analysis that determines whether insights are translated into strategy, but also the quality of the questions asked afterwards. And third, Foresight is not the preserve of senior management. Companies that anchor it broadly across the organization build an organization capable of actively shaping the future.

Strategic Foresight does not create value through better future visions, but through better decisions. The crucial step is to translate scenarios into strategic action.

The Key Questions After the Scenario

Scenarios provide orientation - but not yet a strategy.

Strategic value emerges only when companies systematically translate future visions into implications.

The key questions are:

What does this scenario mean for our business?

- Which assumptions do we need to question?
- Which capabilities will be important across several future scenarios?
- Which investments should we begin making today?
- Which initiatives are becoming less important?

The author

Tanja Bogenrieder *is Head of Explore & Design at Enpulse Ventures, EnBW's venture studio. Her team is responsible for Strategic Foresight, trend radars, and the development of new business models.*

Future Visions at Henkel: AI Provides Input. People Decide.

By Philipp Senft

Artificial intelligence (AI) can generate future visions, scenarios, and hypotheses in a matter of seconds. Foresight shows which future scenarios are possible, while Futures Literacy turns them into the basis for better decisions. At Henkel, we use these perspectives to assess possible developments together and translate them into strategic options. Because the future is not created through predictions, but through the ability to make better decisions for tomorrow today. In the year of our 150th anniversary, this ambition connects with our purpose: shaping the future together and responsibly.

More signals do not automatically lead to better decisions

Companies now have access to more data, trend reports, and Foresight tools than ever before. The crucial ability is therefore not to collect more and more signals, but to recognize their strategic relevance and derive shared decisions from them.

At Henkel, Futures Literacy means considering several plausible future scenarios, assessing their significance for the business and deriving concrete options for action in the present. The focus is not on predicting the future, but on the ability to make well-founded decisions even when the information available is unclear.

In the year of our 150th anniversary, this ambition takes on particular significance: it connects with our purpose, "Pioneers at heart for the good of generations." Making the future visible is not enough. We want to shape it together and responsibly.

AI makes strategic options visible

AI makes it possible to analyze and consolidate a wide range of signals from markets, consumer behavior, competition, technology, and regulation quickly. It helps identify patterns, develop scenarios, and make different future visions tangible. This creates a broader spectrum of strategic options that extends beyond the perspectives of individual teams.

The greatest benefit of AI does not lie in the supposed precision of individual scenarios, but in the diversity of new perspectives and strategic options it provides. AI can challenge assumptions, reveal alternative developments, and highlight areas of tension. This requires traceable sources, transparent assumptions, and a critical assessment of the results. Strategic interpretation and decision-making remain human responsibilities.

From future visions to shared decisions

At Henkel, AI-supported scenarios are not presented as finished answers. In facilitated workshops, decision-makers from category strategy, research and development, market research and innovation assess which developments are relevant to a category or business area. They examine key assumptions, compare opportunities and risks, and evaluate which strategic options would remain viable across several future scenarios.

The focus is on concrete management questions: Which signals deserve particular attention? Where are innovation or portfolio opportunities emerging? Which hypotheses should we test? And which issues require a management decision? The result is a set of prioritized fields of action, testable hypotheses, and a shared understanding of the next steps. At the same time, this collaborative approach strengthens the willingness to implement the resulting future agenda.

Governance anchors future-oriented work in the company

To ensure that results do not end with the workshop, Futures Literacy needs a clear mandate and a connection to existing decision-making processes. Clear organizational structures and clearly assigned responsibilities provide teams with the necessary support, as well as the time and resources required for future-oriented work. Defined decision-making rights clarify who evaluates signals, prioritizes hypotheses and decides on tests or investments.

The results are incorporated into strategy, innovation, and portfolio processes. For prioritized areas of exploration, responsibilities, next steps, review dates, and early indicators are defined. This makes it possible to regularly assess which assumptions are being confirmed and which need to be adjusted or discarded. Governance creates a learning cycle of observing, assessing, deciding, implementing, and reviewing. Future-oriented work thus becomes a recurring management process rather than a one-off initiative.

Conclusion

AI accelerates the development of possible future visions. But it replaces neither strategic judgement nor responsibility. Futures Literacy creates value where companies assess AI-generated perspectives, derive robust options for action and anchor decisions collectively. To us, a pioneering spirit means not merely recognizing the future earlier, but shaping it together and responsibly.

Futures Literacy in practice: Five principles for decision-makers

1. Create a clear mandate

Future-oriented work requires time, resources and visible management support. Only then will it become part of the corporate strategy rather than remaining an isolated side initiative.

2. Use AI as a source of inspiration

Use AI to develop alternative future visions, scenarios and hypotheses. Strategic assessment and decision-making remain the responsibility of the relevant teams.

3. Start with the decision

The starting point is not the analysis, but the strategic question. Only when the need for a decision and the time horizon are clear can AI generate relevant insights instead of additional data.

4. Bring perspectives together early

Strategy, innovation, research and development, market research and other functions should assess future visions together. Different perspectives improve the quality of decisions and increase acceptance of their implementation.

5. Embed learning permanently

Define assumptions, responsibilities, early indicators, and fixed review dates. This turns Futures Literacy into a continuous learning and decision-making process.

The author

Philipp Senft *is Senior Manager Trends and Insights at Henkel AG & Co. KGaA. His focus is on Foresight, consumer and market understanding, and translating future signals into global category and innovation strategies.*

The Future Is a Team Sport: Time for Open Foresight

By Christian Beck

There is a flood of future-oriented data - the art lies in using it purposefully and making clear decisions. Yet despite AI-supported trend scouting, genuine strategic course-setting often fails to materialize. Why? Because we look at the future in isolation. At BSH Hausgeräte GmbH, we have radically redesigned Strategic Foresight to make it more efficient and impact-oriented. Through "Open Foresight" - the joint interpretation of trends with partners from outside our industry - we break down silos of thinking and create genuine business impact. Because the future is a team sport.

Open Foresight expands futures work through exchange between industries. Rather than developing innovations, the focus is on jointly interpreting trends and uncertainties. Different perspectives open up new insights, help identify blind spots, and improve strategic decision-making.

The Data Mojo Is Gone: Why Conventional Tools Fail

We live in an era of polycrises. Geopolitical shifts, volatile energy markets, and disruptive technologies such as generative AI pose constant challenges for companies. The conventional business response? Scale up, invest in expensive analytical software, feed algorithms with countless data points, and build internal dashboards. Yet global experience shows that radar screens filled with colorful megatrends do not automatically lead to strategic clarity. Instead, they often result in a paralyzing flood of information.

The problem is not a lack of data, but perspective. Every company views the world through a highly specialized industry tunnel. We interpret the same global signals in isolation from one another. This creates bias: we see only what we already know. At worst, such an approach is not only inefficient but also an expensive data graveyard with no added value for the core business.

Open Foresight: Maximum Impact with Minimal Resource Investment

To break out of this cycle, BSH has taken a radically efficient approach that we call "Open Foresight". The principle breaks with the old dogma of strict confidentiality: we deliberately open our Foresight process to dialogue across industries. We share our observations and weak signals with partners from entirely different sectors - including the automotive industry, the energy sector, and the digital economy.

The value lies not in exchange for its own sake, but in combining different perspectives. Joint exchange reduces duplicated effort in trend scouting while simultaneously improving the quality of interpretation. Companies benefit from a broader range of experience without having to build all the necessary analytical capabilities themselves.

> ***The future is a team sport. Let's play together!***
>
> Would you like to make your Foresight activities more efficient and gain new perspectives? I am seeking active dialogue with decision-makers, strategists, and experts from other industries for specific Open Foresight projects and joint trend interpretation.
>
> Contact me directly:
> LinkedIn: Christian Beck |
> www.linkedin.com/in/christian-beck-muc
> email: Christian.Beck@bshg.com

A trend such as increasing urbanization or connected energy management means something different to a home-appliance manufacturer than it does to an energy supplier or logistics company. When different industries bring together their perspectives on the same future signals, new insights emerge that an individual company would scarcely be able to gain on its own.

From the Future to the Present: The New BSH Oven Platform as a Lever

Our guiding principle, "From Foresight to Business", shows that this is not a theoretical exercise. One concrete example is the development of our new global oven platform. In the home-appliance industry, platforms represent investments spanning many years. Decisions made today must still hold up ten to fifteen years from now.

For the development of the new oven platform, Open Foresight meant systematically incorporating questions about the future at an early stage of product development. Developers, product managers, and designers jointly discussed different future scenarios. Input from cross-industry exchange deliberately broadened the view beyond the boundaries of our own industry. It also helped us critically question established assumptions about future consumer needs, forms of living, energy use, and cooking habits.

> ***Lessons Learned***
>
> **1. Focus on interpretation rather than data collection**
>
> The true value lies not in possessing data, but in interpreting it collaboratively.
>
> **2. Integrate Foresight directly**
>
> Embed future scenarios directly into the operational milestone processes of your product development (as BSH does with "Backcasting").
>
> **3. Conserve resources through collaboration**
>
> Do not build expensive data silos. Instead, use Open Foresight as a highly efficient lever for cross-industry insights. Exchanging ideas with companies from other industries helps break down established patterns of thinking and improve the quality of strategic decisions.

Using the "Backcasting" method, these future scenarios were translated step by step into concrete hardware and software requirements. The result was a product roadmap based not solely on forecasts, but on different perspectives on the future. Open Foresight helped make investment decisions more robust and identify long-term development risks at an early stage. What matters is not predicting the future precisely, but making better decisions under uncertainty.

Conclusion: Make the Future a Team Sport

Strategic Foresight must not be a luxury reserved for quieter times. When set up properly, it is an extremely lean and effective tool for minimizing risk and steering innovation. CEOs and decision-makers should not regard Foresight as a cost center, but as the most efficient compass their company can possess in turbulent times. But this compass should not be built alone.

The author

***Christian Beck** is Head of Strategic Foresight Management at BSH (BSH Hausgeräte GmbH). For more than ten years, he has driven forward-looking innovation, established a global early-warning system, and championed Open Foresight approaches.*