
Editorial: An introspection

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The creation of radically new ideas, new technologies, new products, new services and new markets almost always need a foresight. The countries, organisations and individuals that have achieved something significant had their beginnings in foresight. Foresight is visualising and realising an extraordinary initiative others thought was impossible. Foresight is an important tool that organisations have to use if they have to meet the challenges of global competition whether it is at the national level or at the firm level [1]. One of the first studies that appeared on foresight was in 1984 [2].

Irvine and Martin [2], in their study, brought out five generic principles that foresight studies need to practise, namely:

- to stand any real chance of success, attempts to identify areas of basic research having long-term strategic importance need to be informed by up-to-date background information on research trends throughout the world's main industrial nations
- enable identification of emerging areas of strategic research is greatly facilitated by adopting an approach that fully integrates science push and demand pull perspectives

- the role of government ministries and agencies should be confined to the identification of broad trends only, leaving industry associations and individual firms to carry out more specific forecasting relating to identification of new products and processes and markets for them
- adopting a bottom-up approach to forecasting rather than the centralised top-down approach
- the value of foresight exercises is not so much the specific forecasts they yield, but the interactive processes by which the results are generated and disseminated.

The current wave of foresight exercises is the third generation of such exercises [1]. The first wave started in the 1970. The third generation is characterised by its integrative nature linking technological elements with economic, political, social, international and demographic futures. In that sense technology foresight is an integrated part of the strategic management of technology and encompasses technology scanning, technology forecasting, technology audit, technology evaluation and technology renewal. Technology foresight exercises are performed in firms at different levels and for different purposes. The essence of foresight exercise is not so much in making predictions but in clarifying future directions so that intelligent choices can be made without foreclosing future options.

This special issue brings out a set of papers on foresight experiences. They cover conceptual issues and national foresight experiences: Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan and Poland. Dr. Linstone, who is one of the founders of the technology forecasting movement, deals with the future of forecasting. Three papers are micro experiences at the firm level: Light Combat Aircraft development, fast breeder development and the polyolefin industry. The paper on science, technology and governance deals with the issue of innovation and governance connections.

The paper on relationships between national and regional foresight deals with the need for harmonising the foresight exercises for consistency. The Polish perspective is an example of a foresight exercise in a transitional economy.

These papers have been compiled so as to enhance our ability to create our own future without foreclosing future options. This is the ultimate purpose of foresight [3].

References

- 1 Reger, G. (2000) 'Technology foresight', *Proceedings of R&D Management Conference*, Prest, Manchester, pp.375-288.
- 2 Irvine, J. and Martin, B.R. (1984) *Foresight in Science: Picking the Winners*, Pinter, London.
- 3 Martin, B.R. and Irvine, J. (1989) *Research Foresight*, Pinter, London.