

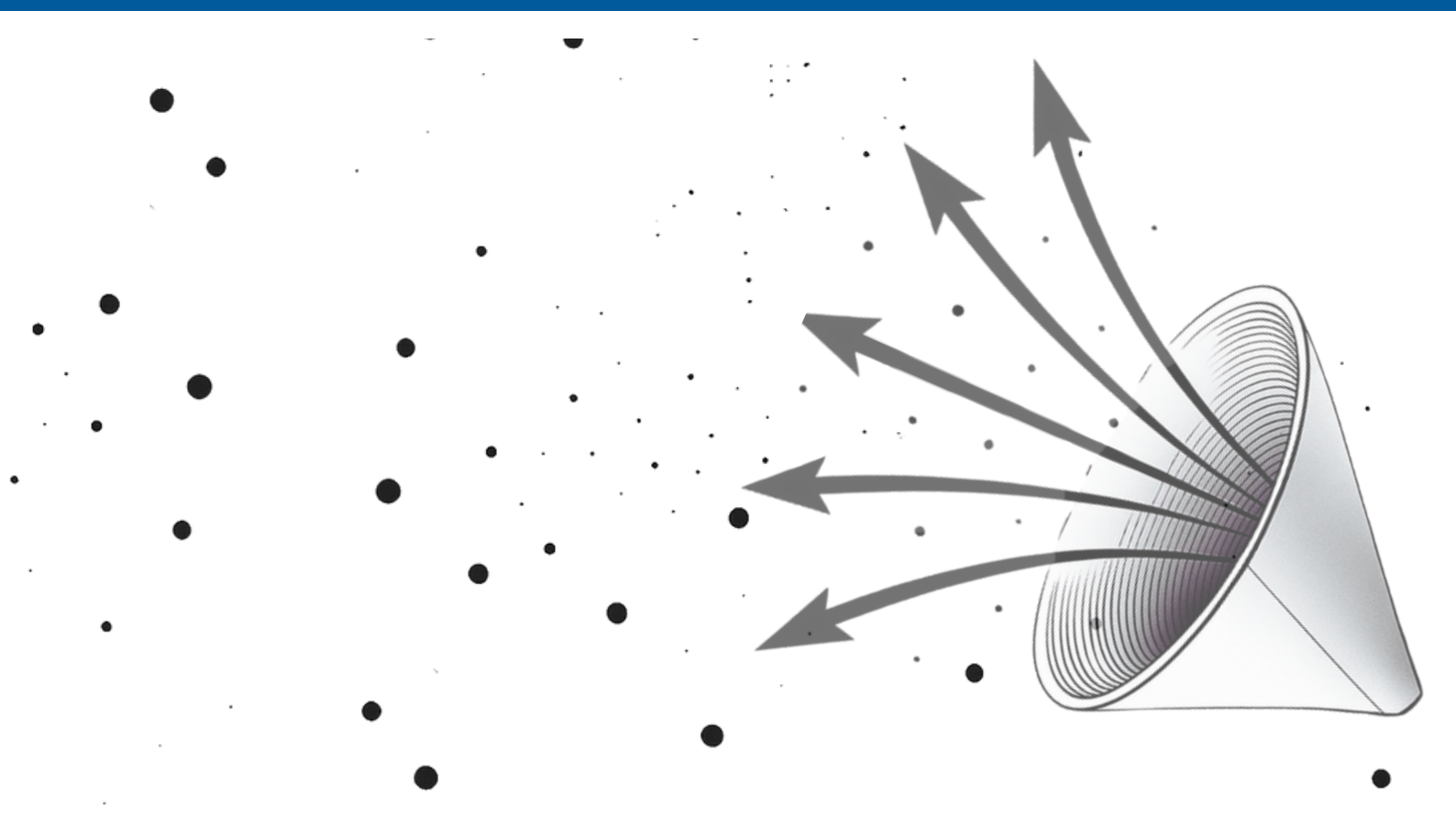


Technische Hochschule
Ingolstadt
Bayerisches
Foresight-Institut

The State of Corporate Foresight

Global Study on the Application
of Corporate Foresight

August 2025
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In an era shaped by volatility, complexity, and accelerating change, strategic foresight offers organizations a framework to anticipate future developments, challenge assumptions, and enables strategic resilience. This report summarizes the findings of the largest global study on corporate foresight to date, surveying over 400 executives from Forbes Global 2,000 firms. Conducted by the Bavarian Foresight-Institute and the Nuremberg Institute for Market Decisions (NIM) in late 2022, it provides a timely snapshot of foresight practices at a pivotal moment of post-pandemic recalibration.

Foresight structures are diverse and uneven.

Around 40% have dedicated foresight units, while others embed it into existing structures or operate without formal setups.

Foresight is operationally embedded, but lacks strategic depth.

Over 80% of firms apply foresight to goal setting, yet only around 40% use it in explorative or adaptive strategies - indicating a short-term, operational focus.

Customer and market foresight is well established.

Nearly all companies use foresight to understand customer needs and inform innovation and R&D.

Leadership engagement is growing, but risk aversion remains.

About half of executives are involved in foresight, yet many prefer established strategies over innovation.

External impact is still limited.

Only one third of firms see foresight as a tool to influence policy or shape wider industry narratives.

Foresight proves most valuable under uncertainty.

85% of firms see foresight as helpful in ambiguous contexts, supporting strategic reflection and coordination.

Planning horizons are limited.

Nearly 90% plan within 3-10 years; long-term foresight beyond 10 years is rare.

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01. INTRODUCTION



What is strategic foresight?

In a world of increasing uncertainty and complexity, the ability to anticipate and prepare for future developments is more critical than ever. Strategic foresight enables organizations to identify emerging trends, assess potential risks and opportunities, and shape long-term strategies.

The aim of this study was to explore how foresight is anchored in corporate structures, how it is applied in decision-making processes, and to what extent foresight insights influence strategic direction today. By surveying senior decision-makers from leading global firms through structured interviews, the study captures both organizational practices and leadership perspectives on the implementation, use, and perceived value of strategic foresight.

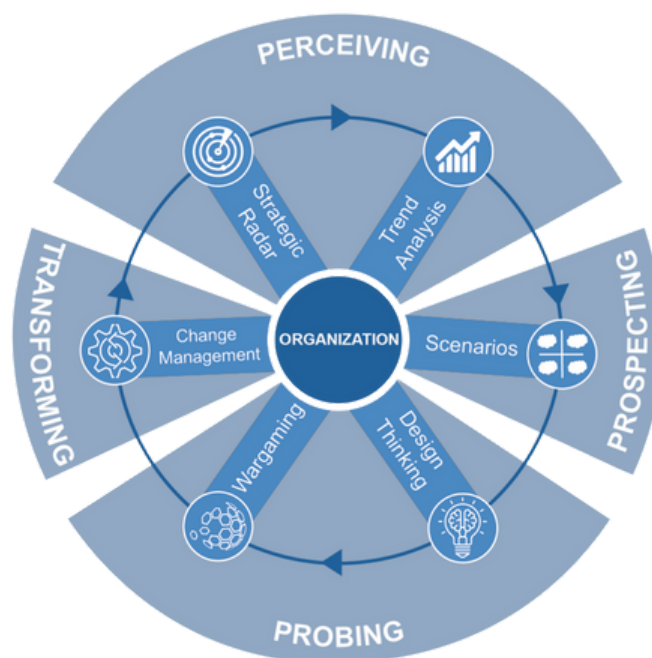


Figure 1: Process of strategic foresight
(Schwarz, J. O. 2023. Strategic Foresight: An Introductory
Guide to Practice. London: Taylor & Francis.)

01. INTRODUCTION



About the Study

The survey-based study, based on 400 executives from the Forbes Global 2,000 and therefore the largest Foresight study to date, provides a comprehensive overview of how leading corporations integrate foresight into decision-making, leadership practices, and organizational structures. Conducted in late 2022 by the Bavarian Foresight-Institute, Technical University of Applied Sciences Ingolstadt, Germany and the Nuremberg Institute for Market Decisions (NIM), Germany, it captures the delicate time of the post-pandemic shift in corporate strategy. The study examines four key dimensions of corporate foresight: how it is embedded in organizational structures, functionally applied across business areas, integrated into leadership and decision-making, and perceived in terms of its strategic impact (foresight effects).

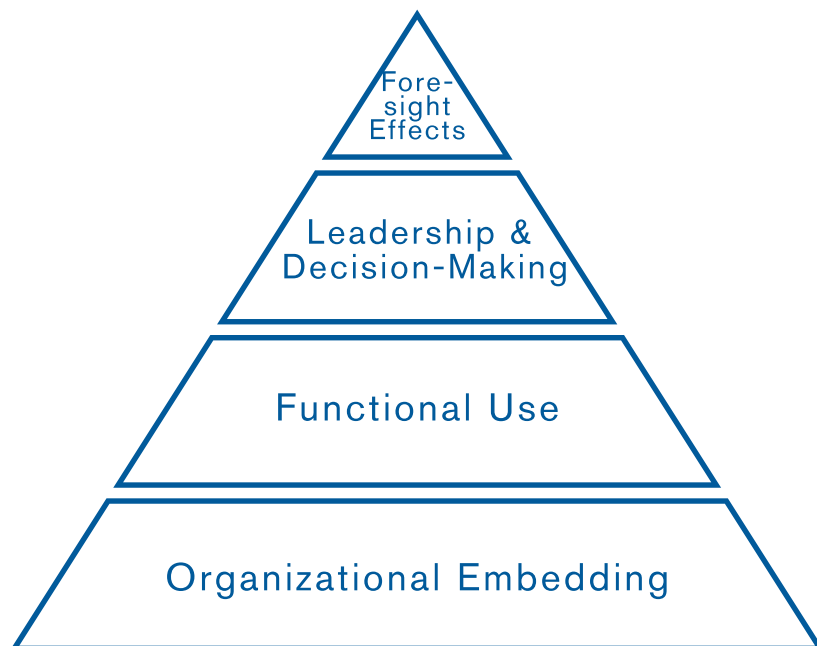


Figure 2: Four key dimensions of strategic foresight analyzed



02.

HOW STRATEGIC FORESIGHT IS ORGANIZED

The following section lays out how companies structure and apply strategic foresight practices, including their planning horizons, product life cycles, trend-scanning timelines, foresight team organization, staffing levels, and integration into corporate activities.

The majority of firms operate within a strategic planning horizon of 3 to 10 years, with 51% planning for 3 up to 5 years and 13% extending their foresight to 5 to 10 years. Only 4% of companies plan for less than one year, while only around 1% extend beyond a 10-year outlook. Similarly, scanning horizons - how far into the future companies monitor trends - mirror these patterns: 57% focus on changes occurring within 3 to 10 years, while only 3% scan for trends beyond 10 years and 4% scan for under a year.

Product development timelines influence foresight integration: 43% of firms report product life cycles between 3 and 5 years, while 34% fall in the 5 to 10-year range. Only 2% develop products with lifecycles under a year, suggesting that most surveyed companies operate in industries requiring long-term planning.

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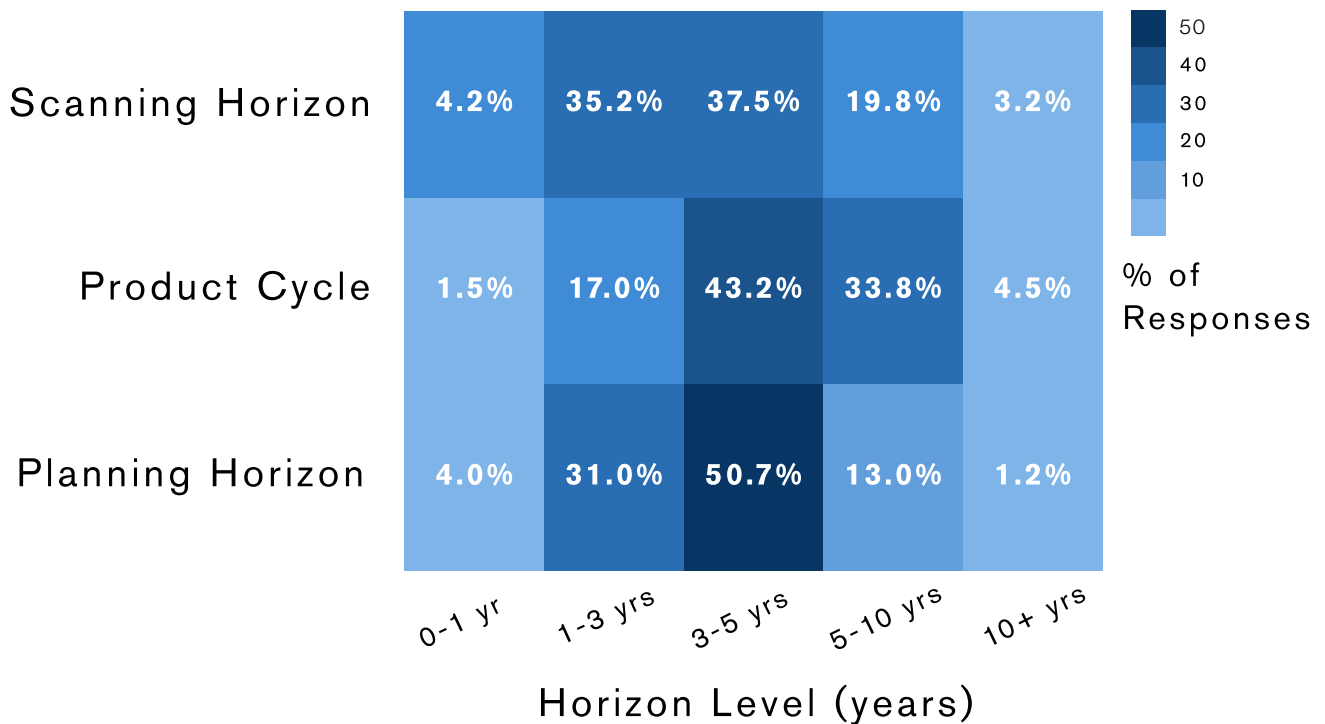


Figure 3: Assessment of scanning and planning horizons

Approaches to strategic foresight implementation vary across organizations. 36% embed foresight within existing business units, with staff responsible for strategic foresight alongside other tasks, while 42% maintain dedicated foresight units with allocated budgets and personnel. A minority (4%) report no structured foresight efforts at all.



02.

HOW STRATEGIC FORESIGHT IS ORGANIZED

Regarding staffing, the number of full-time equivalents dedicated to foresight also differs. 36% of firms employ more than 20 foresight professionals, while 25% have between 10 and 15 employees in foresight.

The distribution suggests that – while foresight functions exist across companies – only a subset of firms allocate substantial dedicated resources to it.

Strategic foresight is leveraged in various business functions, with 67% applying foresight in day-to-day operations, 53% in R&D, and 81% in goal setting and performance management. However, fewer companies use foresight for exploratory events (40%), adaptive activities (42%), or long-term strategic planning (43%), indicating that many firms prioritize immediate operational benefits over speculative long-term visioning. Companies exhibit differing levels of regularity in producing foresight deliverables. 41% follow a scheduled approach, generating deliverables annually or at predefined intervals, while 39% operate on a continuous basis, integrating foresight into ongoing strategic efforts. Only 20% take an ad-hoc approach, producing foresight outputs on demand.

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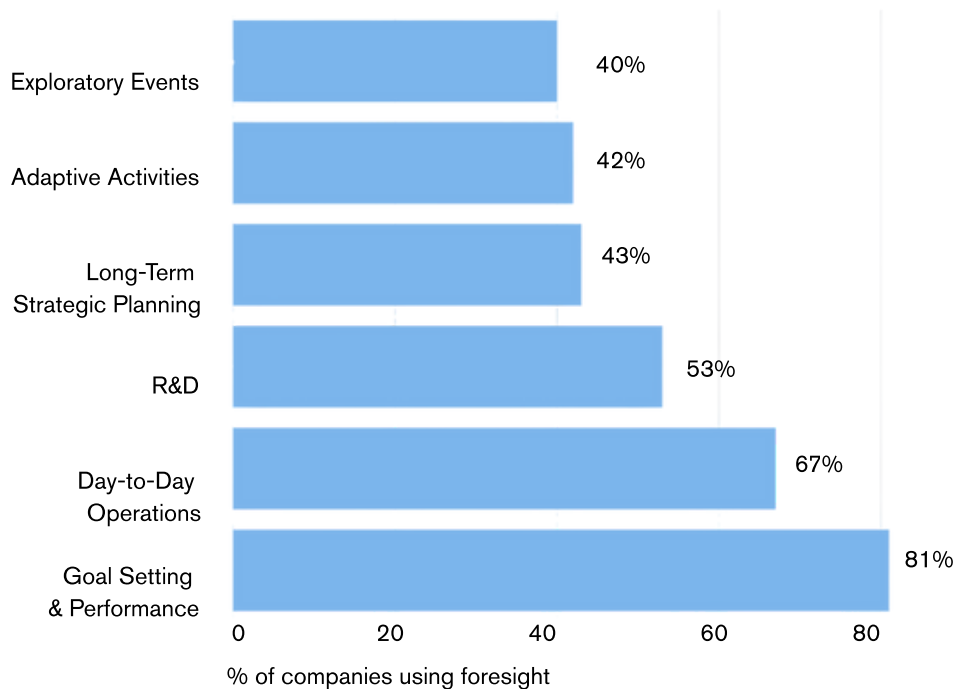


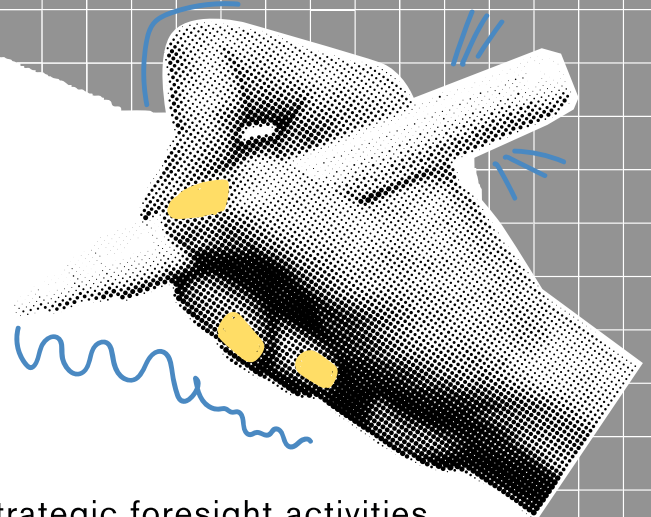
Figure 4: Use of foresight across different corporate functions

Key Takeaways

- Most firms adopt mid-range planning horizons (3-10 years; 86%), while only 4% plan beyond 10 years, indicating limited long-term visioning.
- Foresight structures vary: while 42% have dedicated foresight units, 36% integrate foresight into existing functions, and 4% report no structured foresight efforts.
- Foresight is primarily used in operational contexts (goal setting: 81%, day-to-day activities: 67%), while exploratory foresight (40%) and adaptive foresight (42%) remain less common.

03.

LEADERSHIP FOR FORESIGHT



This section outlines the perceived value of strategic foresight activities, focusing on how foresight contributes to uncertainty reduction, strategic discussions, business coordination, and innovation. The results indicate that – while foresight is widely recognized as valuable – its impact varies across different aspects of corporate decision-making.

The most widely acknowledged foresight benefit is gaining insights into changes in the environment, with 56% reporting partial impact and 44% stating full impact. Similarly, reducing uncertainty is a key function, with 87% of respondents recognizing a benefit, including 61% who confirm a strong impact.

Foresight also strongly supports strategic discussions and decision-making adjustments. 86% of firms confirm foresight helps adjust company strategy in uncertain situations, making this one of the strongest foresight contributions. Additionally, 77% state foresight fosters internal strategic conversations, and 53% confirm foresight improves business coordination. 49% believe foresight enables the adoption of alternative perspectives, suggesting that while its strategic role is evident, some firms still struggle to integrate multiple viewpoints effectively.

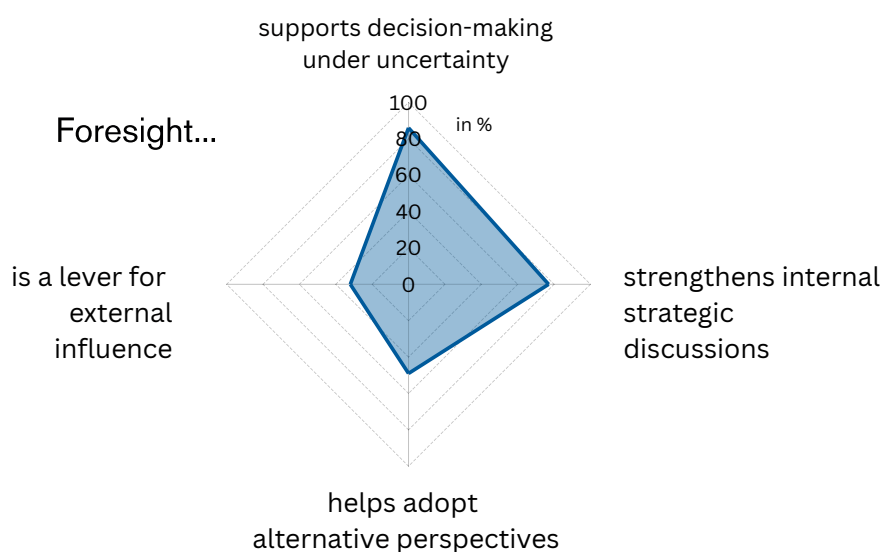
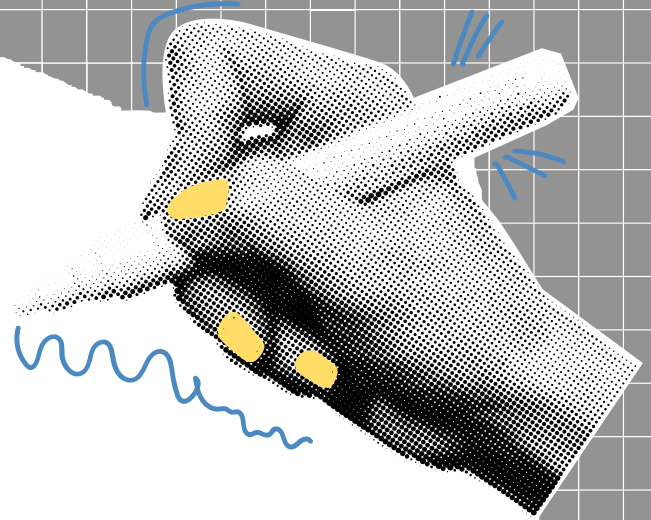


Figure 5: Strengths of foresight integration in firms

03.

LEADERSHIP FOR FORESIGHT



From an innovation and market perspective, foresight contributes significantly to customer and market intelligence. It is particularly effective in understanding customer needs (98%), identifying potential customers (99%), and enhancing market understanding (98%), suggesting that foresight is widely used in commercial strategy and business development. Similarly, its role in reducing R&D uncertainty (91%) is also notable, though slightly less pronounced than its influence in customer-driven foresight.

However, foresight's role in external influence remains less developed. While 97% believe foresight supports organizational learning, only 32% recognize it as a strong tool for influencing external players like policymakers or industry leaders.

Key Takeaways

- Foresight is most valued for uncertainty reduction (61%) and strategic discussions (86%), yet its influence on external decision-makers remains limited (32%).
- Customer and market intelligence are key benefits: 98% say foresight improves customer understanding, and 99% say it helps identify new market opportunities.
- Adoption of alternative perspectives remains a challenge, with only 49% stating foresight enables diverse viewpoints in strategy development.

04.

THE IMPACT OF FORESIGHT



The following section outlines the impact of foresight in corporate decision-making processes and leadership engagement, focusing on how internal and external foresight insights influence strategic choices, how leaders interact with foresight activities, and how organizations approach uncertainty and strategy development.

Companies demonstrate a strong reliance on internally generated foresight insights, with 66% of respondents rating their integration at 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale. Similarly, external foresight sources play a significant role, though to a slightly lesser extent - 74% of firms rate their use at 5 or higher, indicating that while internal foresight remains the dominant input, external insights still shape decision-making.

A notable proportion of organizations consider explicit future assumptions in decision-making - 72% score 5 or higher on the scale, suggesting that most companies actively incorporate foresight into their strategic frameworks rather than relying purely on reactive decision-making.

The degree to which leaders participate in foresight generation varies, with 54% of respondents rating engagement at 6 or 7, highlighting that while some executives are actively involved, a substantial portion remains at a moderate or lower level of participation. When facing decision-making under uncertainty, 56% of respondents score their organizations at 6 or 7, suggesting that a majority of leaders are comfortable navigating uncertainty. However, 22% report moderate uncertainty tolerance, indicating that for some companies, uncertainty remains a strategic challenge.

04.

THE IMPACT OF FORESIGHT



Leadership perspectives on strategy formulation and change vary significantly. When asked about their preference for established strategies versus exploring new paths, 43% of firms score 3 or lower, indicating a strong inclination toward traditional approaches. Only 37% indicate a preference for new paths, suggesting that while some organizations embrace innovation, many remain risk-averse. The question of how strategy is defined also reveals mixed approaches. 52% of organizations (scores 5–7) adopt a more participative strategy development process, while 41% (scores 3 or lower) follow a top-down leadership-defined approach. Similarly, companies were asked whether their strategic focus is short-term adaptability or long-term vision. 46% prioritize long-term orientation (scores 6–7), while 24% focus more on present operations (scores 3 or lower).

Key Takeaways

- Internally generated foresight is the dominant input (67% high integration), but external foresight sources also play a key role (74% use at 5+ on a 7-point scale).
- Leadership engagement in foresight varies, with 54% reporting high participation, but many executives remain passive or prioritize short-term stability.
- Companies are moderately comfortable with uncertainty (56% rate their organizations highly on uncertainty navigation), but many still favor established strategies (43%)

05.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION



The Research Approach

This study was conducted between November and December 2022 using computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI) with 400 senior executives from large multinational corporations listed in the Forbes Global 2,000 Index.

The sample included two cohorts: foresight specialists (executive-level employees responsible for strategic foresight) and foresight users (senior executives responsible for strategic decisions in marketing, product development, or business strategy). A soft quota sampling approach was applied to ensure representation across industries, including Finance & Insurance, Automobiles, Retail, and Food & Agriculture.

The research was carried out by an independent institute commissioned by the Bavarian Foresight-Institute and Nuremberg Institute for Market Decisions (NIM).

The survey assessed foresight practices, planning horizons, leadership engagement, and the impact of foresight insights on decision-making.

The data used in this report was provided by the Nürnberg Institut für Marktentscheidungen e. V.: www.nim.org/en

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION



Demographics of the Study

The focus of this study was on large multinational organizations. The industry representation captures a broad understanding of foresight across different sectors, and the varying levels of tenure and age provide insights from both seasoned professionals and emerging leaders.

The majority of surveyed organizations are headquartered in the United States (53%), followed by the European Union (32%), the United Kingdom (9%), and Switzerland (4%). Regarding industry representation, Finance & Insurance (30%) accounts for the largest sector, followed by Food & Agriculture (25%), Retail (24%), and Automobiles (20%).

83% of respondents belong to organizations with more than 10,000 employees, underscoring the relevance of foresight practices in large corporations. In terms of organizational hierarchy, 57% report directly to the corporate executive board. Only 42% explicitly state responsibility for foresight activities, indicating that foresight is often integrated within broader strategic functions rather than existing as a dedicated role.

The respondents have a diverse range of professional experience, with 30% having worked at their company for 2 to 5 years, followed by 26% with 6 to 10 years of tenure. Additionally, 18% have 11 to 20 years of experience, and 7% have been with their organization for more than two decades, which provides insight into both emerging and long-term perspectives on corporate foresight.

06.

FURTHER READING



on Strategic Foresight

Schwarz, J. O. 2023. Strategic Foresight: An Introductory Guide to Practice. London: Taylor & Francis.

on aspects of this study / academic journals

Do Internal Foresight Activities add Value to Decision-Making? Insights from an Empirical Investigation, Futures, 166,
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2025.103548>.

Corporate Foresight in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic – The Crisis as a Driver, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ffo2.178>.

on aspects of this study / World Economic Forum

Winning combinations when executing strategic foresight within an organization, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2024/03/strategic-foresight-for-business-success/>.

Strategic foresight: why it matters,
<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2024/01/strategic-foresight-corporate-business-planning/>.

By using strategic foresight, leaders are staying focused on opportunity,
<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/08/with-strategic-foresight-leaders-can-remain-focused-on-opportunity/>.

07.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Jan Oliver Schwarz is the Professor of Strategic Foresight and Trend Analysis at Technische Hochschule Ingolstadt and leads the Bavarian Foresight Institute. His research focuses on strategic foresight, scenario planning, and the role of corporate foresight in decision-making. He has published extensively on the subject and actively collaborates with organizations on foresight-driven strategy development.

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08.

ABOUT THE BAVARIAN FORESIGHT-INSTITUTE

The Bavarian Foresight-Institute specializes in technology-driven foresight research, exploring emerging technologies as well as their economic and social interdependencies. As part of the **Technische Hochschule Ingolstadt (THI)**, we bridge academic research with practical applications.

Our application-oriented research informs policy makers as well as consulting projects, contributes to scientific publications, and is shared with a broad variety of stakeholders from industry and society through dedicated exchange forums.

Further, we are committed to developing the next generation of foresight scholars and practitioners by offering PhD positions as well as a Master of Science program in Global Foresight and Technology Management.



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