FORESIGHT AS A SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL PHENOMENON: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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Foresight is commonly used as group activities that support ability to detect, interpret and respond to discontinuous change in mid-term and long-term future (Slaughter, 2004; Tsoukas, Shepherd, 2004; Rohrbeck, 2011). Cognitive mechanisms of foresight studies in the technology and innovation sphere command the growing interest of researchers (MacKay, McKiernan, 2004; Meissner, Wulf, 2012; Boe-Lillegravena, Monterdeb, 2015; Warnke, Schirrmeister, 2016). However, no systemic reviews of cognitive and socio-psychological factors affecting foresight studies' productivity have yet been conducted, those that take into account the various effects emerging over the course of experts' joint work in developing possible future scenarios. This paper fills this gap on the basis of Russian and international socio-psychological studies.

Group reflection is the key foresight mechanism, i.e., team members' open discussions about their common goals and ways to accomplish them by changing internal and external environments (West, 1996; Zhuravlev, Nestik, 2012). Without using the term, numerous researchers call "reflection" a basic foresight mechanism. One of group reflection's strengths is its potential to support "strategic dialogue" as a precondition of productive scenario planning (Schwartz, 1996; van der Heijden, 2005; Mack, 2013). Another major principle of the Foresight methodology is discussing competing visions of the future (Berkhout, 2006; Durand, 2009), comparing alternative interpretations of the present (Ogilvy, 2002), and forging a common basic vision of tomorrow (Blackman, Henderson, 2004).

Our previous empirical studies of Russian companies and their managers' behavior allowed us to identify three main socio-psychological mechanisms which affect community's attitudes towards the future: 1) group reflection of a common future; 2) group identification, based upon a positive vision of the common future forged by the leaders (leadership vision); and 3) collective anxiety and protective mechanisms launched by a perceived threat to the group's continued existence (Nestik, 2013; Nestik, 2014b). If group reflection increases the team's ability to adapt to changing conditions (strategic flexibility), group identification based on a positive vision of the future performs a quite different function: it increases loyalty to common goals despite changing conditions for joint activities. The vision of the future forged by the leaders motivates the community and brings it closer together, while at the same time "blinding" individual group members and strengthening peer pressure and risk proneness effects. On the contrary, group reflection promotes greater openness to information which contradicts basic group convictions. Despite their different directions, these processes are closely linked to each other: group reflection of the long-term future can only be possible if a positive group identity and trust are in place. Looking ahead, foresight participants face a paradox: the delusions of being able to control the future and excessive optimism negatively affect the quality of strategic decisions, however, they are necessary to support the team's focus on long-term goals (Rosenzweig, 2014). The foresight methodology is expected to deal with this psychological controversy through a strategic dialogue about the future based upon reliable information.

The results of an expert panel (N=42) revealed several organizational and psychological barriers than hinder corporate foresight effectiveness in Russia. Answering an open question about the problems encountered while trying to foresee the future in Russia, along with the above barriers, the experts also noted managers' insufficient focus on the future and the public administration

system being primarily interested in accomplishing short-term objectives (22 and 14% of the experts, respectively); an insufficiently transparent market for Foresight studies (19%); weak connections between the public authorities and society (16%); the low level of social trust and the lack of a cooperation culture (14%), etc. The above barriers predominantly have institutional and psychological characteristics. The more common mistakes associated with group attempts to foresee the future have turned out to be of a psychological nature because: 1) events in the distant future were perceived by participants as less important than the current or forthcoming ones; 2) participants described the future on the basis of information that has caught their attention in the media and on social networks; and 3) experts tend to underestimate the probability of events with which they have no personal experience (or similar ones). The study shows that there are several psychological effects encountered by moderators and participants in Foresight sessions: effects of overconfidence, desirability, framing, future anxiety, defense of group positive identity, risk scope neglect, availability effect, visualization effect, hindsight bias, future discounting, cognitive dissonance, planning fallacy, common knowledge and polarization effects, technophile's bias, self-fulfilling prophecies.

The 2nd study examined the influence of prospective reflection during foresight sessions on the socio-psychological characteristics of the personality and attitudes to the future (N = 298). The data were gathered in Russia during an annual event called the "Foresight fleet", organized by the Russian Agency for Strategic Initiatives: for 6 days, participants – technology entrepreneurs, venture investors, scientists, representatives of scientific environment and development institutes, business and social associations, leaders of enterprises in the real sector economy, federal executive bodies – have been designing the prospective markets and developing the "roadmaps" by 2035. In the all sessions the same techniques were used ("Rapid Foresight"). The regression analysis revealed that ingroup and outgroup trust, civil and global identity are predictors of positive evaluations of nearest, mid-term and long-term future (in 1, 5 and 20 years). The structural modeling shows (X2=30,432; df=26; CMIN/DF=1,170; p=,250; CFI=,997; GFI=,980; RMSEA=,024; Hi 90=,054; Pclose=,916) that after foresight sessions the perceived predictability of future is negatively affected by its positive evaluation, that could be explained by growth of the tolerance to uncertainty. The comparison of experimental (N = 146) and control group (N = 77) showed that after foresight brainstorms the perceived predictability of long-term future remain unaffected, but significantly higher levels of time perspective extension, importance of long-distant collective future, social trust, and global identity were found. The study showed that discussing common future at the brainstorming sessions don't affect individual time perspective and future predictability, but it increases the extension of the individual perspective, the relevance of the distant common future, the social trust, and the readiness to identify with humanity. The higher the social trust, the higher the perceived ability to influence the future, but the lower its predictability. These data indicate that prospective group reflection at the foresight workshops, under the condition of high group trust, increases optimism and tolerance for the uncertainty of the future. We can conclude, that the key psychological effect of foresight sessions is less about extending time perspective and much more about coping with uncertainty by building social trust and shared cognitions.