Survey Summary

Foresight Best Practises

March 3rd, 2020

CONTENT

▷ Opening Words

▷ Survey Main Approach & Key Questions

▷ Going Beyond the Averages

▷ Key Question 1: Collecting and Sharing of External Futures-Related Information

▷ Key Question 2: Making Sense of External Futures-Related Information

▷ Key Question 3: Using External Futures-Related Information

▷ Selected Suggestions for Improvement by Our Respondents

▷ Summary Conclusions

▷ About the Survey

▷ Contact Information

OPENING WORDS

We at FIBRES Online believe **the disciplines of market intelligence and strategic planning are going through a disruptive change**. This is the era of artificial intelligence, automated tools, and agility – but also the era of leadership, transparency, and collaboration.

Early understanding of the changes in your business landscape brings immense opportunities. Understanding of **different possible futures**, crafting of **visionary strategies**, and **learning by execution** is the combination of future winners.

We ourselves want to stay relevant. In our own business, we need to anticipate what are the **most valuable practices of foresight and futures work.**

As a part of our own work on understanding *our* relevant futures, we ran this survey. Even if no real science here, we feel the results offer a reasonable "**finger on the pulse**".

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OPENING WORDS

Our daily work suggests that organizations are moving away from traditional practices of market research and strategic planning. Moving **towards continuous foresight** methods, such as working with weak signals, trend scouting, and alternative future scenarios.

We believe this survey confirms such continuous foresight practices are seen as a value creator at organizations who systematically invest in them.

We also believe we may have identified some deeper insights into **which practices seem to contribute the most.**

We hope this summary of our survey results is of value to you. Please don't hesitate to contact us in case you wish to have an even deeper look into the result details.

Panu Kause, CEO, FIBRES Online

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SURVEY MAIN APPROACH & KEY SET OF QUESTIONS

In this survey, we referred to "Foresight and Futures Work" as the set of methods, processes, and tools of working with **futures-related understanding of an organization's external operating environment**.

Furthermore, we indicated that we are primarily interested in ways of working with **external futures-related information, i.e. information available outside one's own organization**.

All key questions were multiple choice with pre-set alternatives & 'Other' for open responses.

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SURVEY MAIN APPROACH & KEY SET OF QUESTIONS

As the key questions, we asked:

1. ”How does your organization currently **gather and share** external futures-related information”
2. ”How do you currently work to **make sense** of external futures-related information?”
3. ”How does your organization currently **use** external futures-related information?”

Pairwise with each of the three key questions, we asked *how satisfied* the respondent is with the current ways of gathering and sharing, making sense, and using of such information:

not satisfied at all   somewhat satisfied   very satisfied

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GOING BEYOND THE AVERAGES

On average, our respondents are "*somewhat satisfied*" on their current ways of working with external futures-related information.

In fact, as the "slider" for indicating one's satisfaction held values from 0 (not satisfied at all) to 100 (very satisfied), the resulting averages are *51 for gathering and sharing, 48 for making sense,* and *49 for using* such information.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

Averages are boring ;-)

Indeed averages were not what we were after, and this is just to highlight how wrong you can go by looking at averages only.

In fact, we did not even bother to summarize the average response profile to the actual key questions. You may think we are just lazy, but we *know* the truth is beyond the averages.

Please read on.

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GOING BEYOND THE AVERAGES

Analyzing the responses of the three key questions separately, we divided the respondents into three groups: "**Happy**", "**Unhappy**", and "**Average**".

"**Happy**" are the ones who score more than 60/100 for their satisfaction.

"**Unhappy**" are the ones with less than 40/100 indicated satisfaction.

"**Average**" are the ones with satisfaction in the range of 40 − 60 on the scale of 0 − 100.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

With these satisfaction scores, the distribution of respondents into the three groups is practically even.

In short, the three groups are almost exactly equal in size for each of the key questions separately.

Reading further, we pay special attention to the different sets of current activities among the Happy and the Unhappy Groups!

Key Question 1:

Collecting and Sharing of External Futures-Related Information

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"How does your organization currently **gather and share** external futures-related information?"
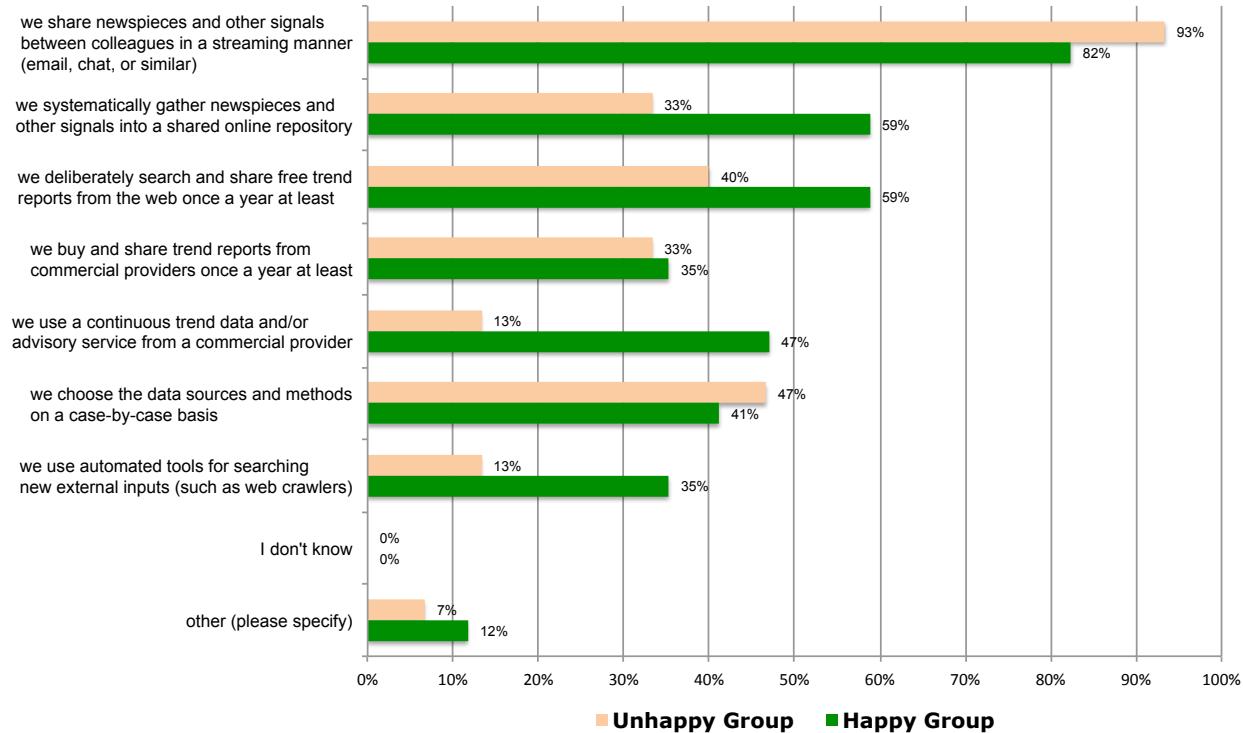
KEY TAKEAWAYS:

There seem to be three contributors to respondent satisfaction as it comes to gathering and sharing of futures-related information:

1) Systematically gathering new inputs into a shared online repository – not just streaming them.

2) Deliberately searching and sharing free trend reports.

3) Using continous feeds by commercial providers and/or new inputs via automated tools.

Chart data:

Category	Unhappy Group	Happy Group
we share newspieces and other signals between colleagues in a streaming manner (email, chat, or similar)	93%	82%
we systematically gather newspieces and other signals into a shared online repository	33%	59%
we deliberately search and share free trend reports from the web once a year at least	40%	59%
we buy and share trend reports from commercial providers once a year at least	33%	35%
we use a continuous trend data and/or advisory service from a commercial provider	13%	47%
we choose the data sources and methods on a case-by-case basis	47%	41%
we use automated tools for searching new external inputs (such as web crawlers)	13%	35%
I don't know	0%	0%
other (please specify)	7%	12%

■ **Unhappy Group** ■ **Happy Group**

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Key Question 2:

Making Sense of External Futures-Related Information

"Regardless of how you gather inputs, how do you currently work to **make sense** of external futures-related information?"

Chart data (Unhappy Group / Happy Group):

- there is a dedicated foresight or trend management process with pre-assigned roles and responsibilities — Unhappy: 13%, Happy: 36%
- such sense-making is a systematic part of the strategy process — Unhappy: 19%, Happy: 82%
- such sense-making is a systematic part of the innovation process — Unhappy: 50%, Happy: 64%
- such sense-making is a systematic part of another existing process — Unhappy: 6%, Happy: 36%
- we run ad-hoc workshops and/or analyses when needed to make sense of external trends — Unhappy: 50%, Happy: 55%
- futures-related considerations are part of everyone's job but there is no specific — Unhappy: 31%, Happy: 36%
- a summary of a single trend with its estimated impacts is a typical outcome of our sense-making — Unhappy: 13%, Happy: 27%
- a visual trend radar over several trends is a typical outcome of our sense-making — Unhappy: 6%, Happy: 45%
- a summarized scenario of our future operating environment is a typical outcome of such sense-making — Unhappy: 13%, Happy: 36%
- there are no "typical" outcomes of our sense-making but they are rather case-by-case — Unhappy: 50%, Happy: 36%
- I don't know — Unhappy: 6%, Happy: 0%
- other (please specify) — Unhappy: 0%, Happy: 9%

Unhappy Group ■ **Happy Group**

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

Two major drivers to satisfaction over futures sense-making:

1) Integrating such work as a part of a systematic process. There is a ***dramatic difference*** here between the Happy and the Unhappy Groups!

2) Having a pre-set model for sense-making outcomes. Especially a ***visual trend radar*** over several trends is more used among the Happy ones.

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Key Question 3:

Using External Futures-Related Information

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"How does your organization currently **use** external futures-related information?"
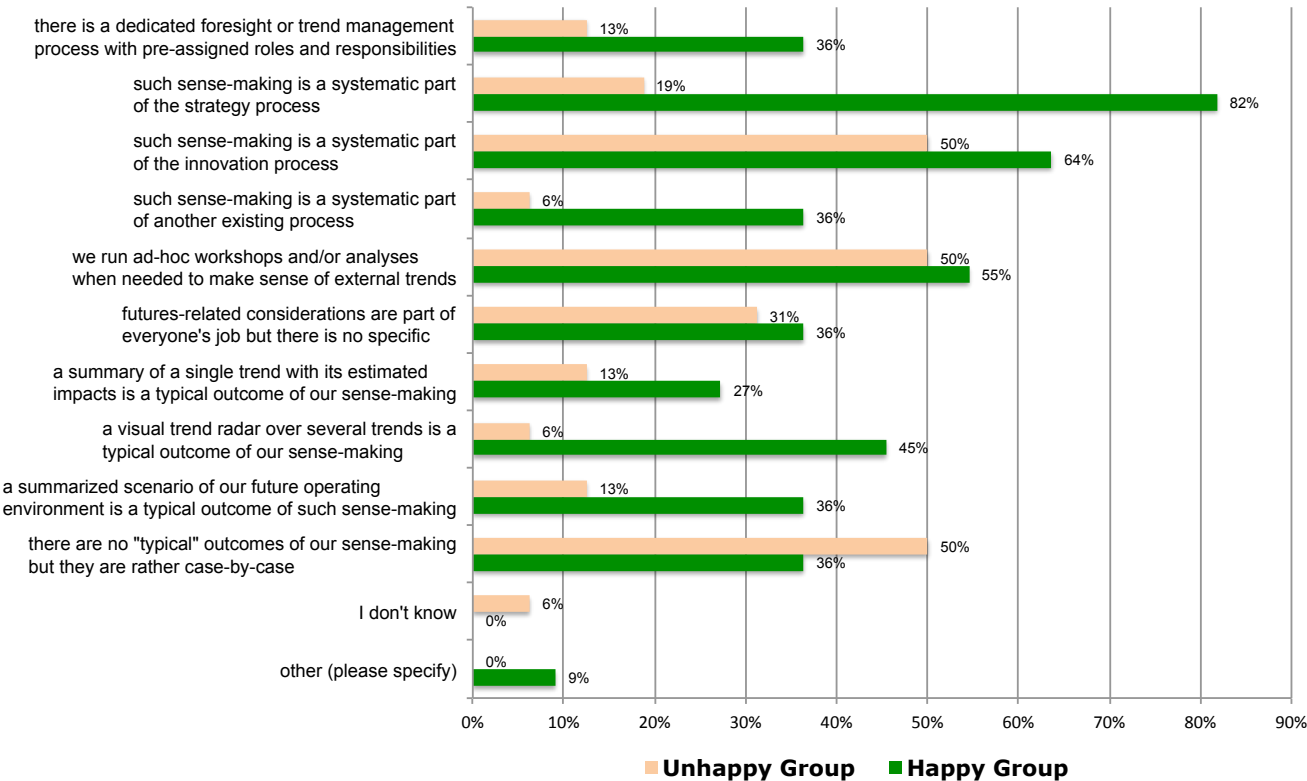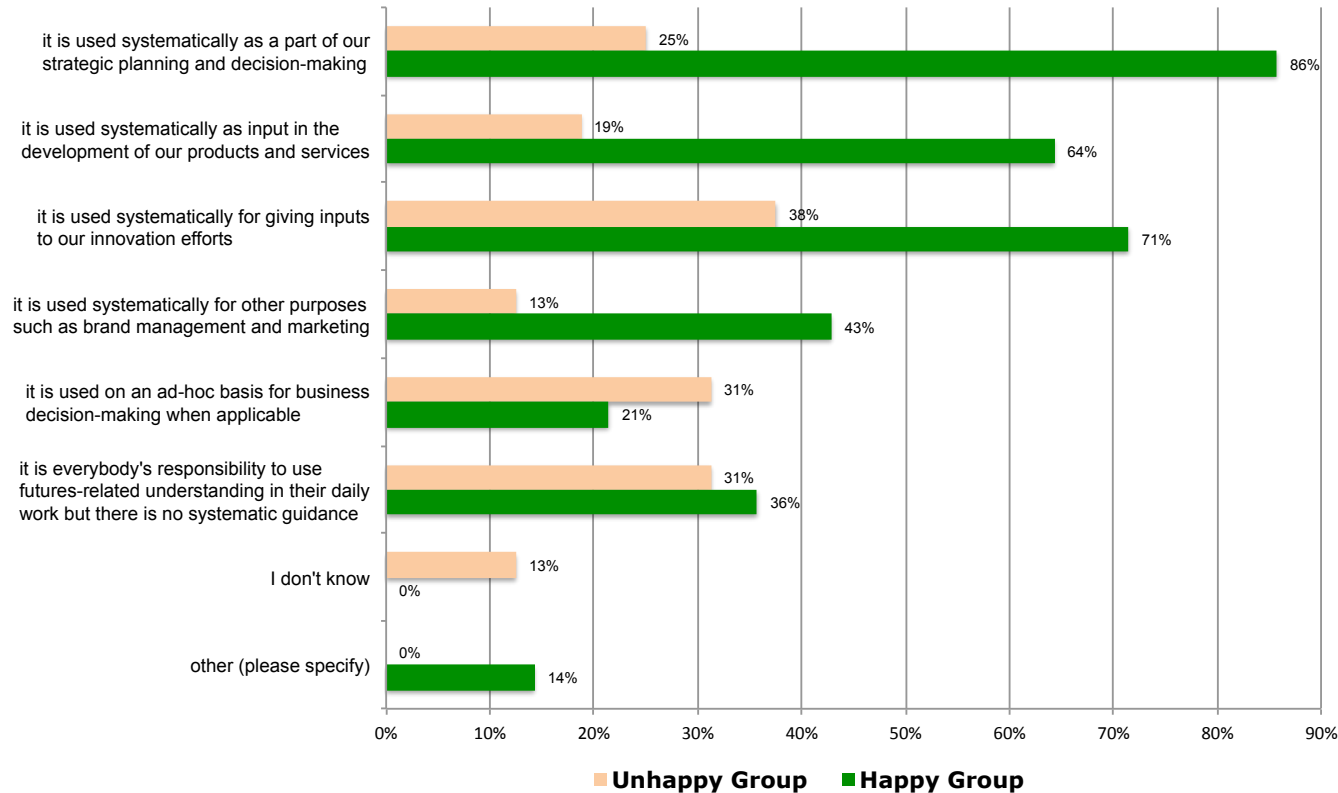

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

The response profiles of the Happy and the Unhappy Groups are very different here indeed!

Perhaps not too surprisingly, it is the *systematic approach to actually using external-related information* that makes the biggest difference.

Chart data:

Category	Unhappy Group	Happy Group
it is used systematically as a part of our strategic planning and decision-making	25%	86%
it is used systematically as input in the development of our products and services	19%	64%
it is used systematically for giving inputs to our innovation efforts	38%	71%
it is used systematically for other purposes such as brand management and marketing	13%	43%
it is used on an ad-hoc basis for business decision-making when applicable	31%	21%
it is everybody's responsibility to use futures-related understanding in their daily work but there is no systematic guidance	31%	36%
I don't know	13%	0%
other (please specify)	0%	14%

■ Unhappy Group ■ Happy Group

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SELECTED RESPONSES TO OUR OPEN QUESTION:
"How Do You Think the Ways of Working with External Futures-Related Information Should Be Improved in Your Organization?"

"More systematic and continuous way of working needed. Also perhaps a visualisation tool?"

"Theme / template oriented practical tools with relevant business processes and resources are needed."

"It could be more systematic and actionable."

"More sense-making together with external partners. More automation of research efforts."

"There is a lot of information available but the open and systematic handling process is missing."

"We are ramping up scanning and sensemaking processes!"

"Now it is not continuous - but is done around the strategy clock we have."

"We need a tool to allow our different organizations to co-create a futures forecast."

"Stronger focus from 5-10 years foresight to 10-25 years foresight."

"Automatization of trendsourcing, periodically summarized report."

SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS

We think the survey results **clearly indicate some of the major drivers to people's experience** on their own organization's work over **futures-related information**.

People feel such work should be **continuous, systematic, purpose-driven, and connected to real action**.

Also the quest for **automation of information sourcing**, and for **visualization of sense-making** continues.

In balance with expectations over automation, **human collaboration** across organizational boundaries is seen highly valuable.

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Perhaps no major surprises? Then again, why does the Unhappy Group not move into the direction of the Happy Group? Do they not recognize the valuable activities? **Is there something else stopping them**?

These will likely be among the key questions in our later surveys.

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ABOUT THE SURVEY

Company **headquarter locations** of the respondents include Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, UK.

Some 32% of the respondents' **company size** is over 1000 employees, 43% is below 50 employees, and the remaining 25% fall somewhere in between.

Industries represented include Automotive, Carbon Removal, Communications, Consulting, Chemicals and/or Fuels, Education, Healthcare, Health Tech, IT, Legal, Logistics, Manufacturing, Media, Pharmaceuticals, Public Sector, Software.

This was an online, anonymous survey.

Responses were collected during February, 2020.

Total number of responses was **46**.

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WANT MORE DETAILS?

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