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Youth Foresight Germany 2020

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Young People Can Shape Their Future!

'Jugend denkt Zukunft' was setup to make this vision come true and translated directly into English it means 'young people are thinking about their future'. This single issue foresight exercise is designed to involve young adults in the process of economic development. Together with companies, students between the age of 15 and 18 develop new products and services for the world of tomorrow. The main pillar of this program is the nature of co-operation between companies and schools. Further support comes from politics and science. Together they are strong partners for re-creating a culture of innovation.

Re-Creating Germany's Culture of Innovation

If it wants to be 'fit for the future' Germany needs to establish a culture with enthusiasm for innovation. To foster such a culture some basic ingredients are necessary: interest for new ideas, an eagerness to develop them and an urge to try out the new products and services. This can only be achieved through collaboration involving society, politics and the economy. It is therefore important to find new ways to develop visions and create knowledge as a basis for innovation.

The goal of this exercise was to foster such a culture of innovation, a culture of 'get-up-and-do-it' based on the belief that ideas can be realized.

The Innovation Game

The heart of the initiative is a five-day 'innovation game'. In this 'game', students in cooperation with companies develop products and services for the future. The concept, structure and feasibility of the method were tested in the pilot phase in summer 2004. Since then, numerous 'games' have been successfully played.



Over a timeframe of five consecutive days, the participating students simulate an exemplary innovation process that starts with the analysis of global mega trends and identification of industry-specific trends right through to the development and marketing of a new product or a service, the students study and go through the complete process. All of this is condensed to fit into a single week.

The innovation game is prepared, organized and controlled by IFOK - the Institute for Organisational Communication, represented in each game by a professional moderator. The moderator's task is to keep the approach clearly structured.

It is a prerequisite that each innovation game has a clear company sponsor. So far over 180 student groups in classes 9-12, representing students of age 15 to 18, of all school types have been adopted by companies through a sponsorship.

In addition to the sponsors of single innovation games, mentors of various kinds also sign up to support the initiative.

These include high ranking federal and state governmental officials as well as representatives of chambers of commerce and numerous foundations have helped out and continue to help in this initiative to evoke a culture of innovation among German youth.

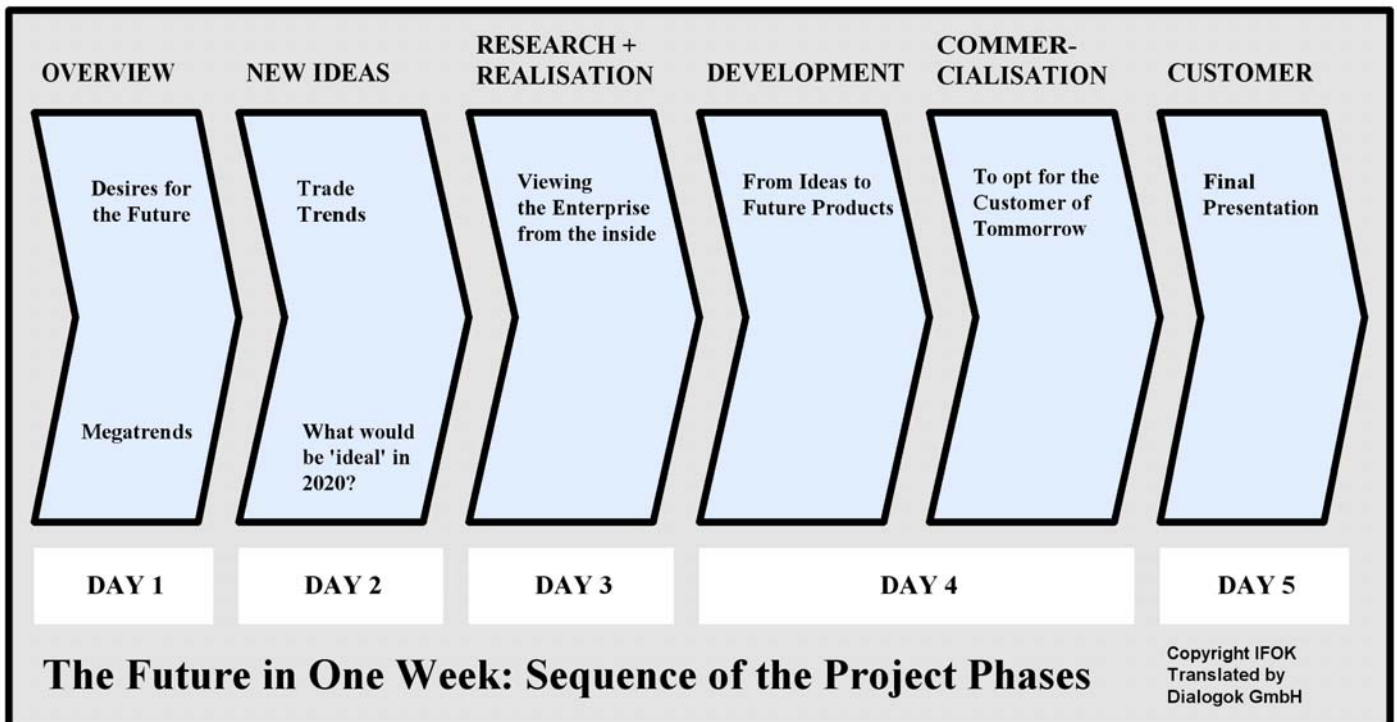
To support the main goal that of creating an innovative culture in Germany several activities are carried out at national level. These include events like a discussion forum involving decision makers in politics and business. They include contests among all participating groups for the best ideas. The best selected ideas receive 'innovation awards'. The activities on the national level are made possible by the three main sponsors of the project Wrigley GmbH, BASF Aktiengesellschaft and Vodafone D2 GmbH.

Another important activity funded by these three sponsors is the continuous enhancement and improvement of the foresight process as a whole.

Method of the Game

One cycle of the innovation game consists of three main phases and five sub-phases. The timeframe for one cycle comprises five conjoint days.

The student group has to pick a topic out of a range of mega trends laid out by the framework of the innovation game and a range of topics related to products and services of the enterprise with which the school co-operates (see diagram below).



Making Mega-Trends Manageable

The innovation game requires the student groups to choose working topics related to general Mega-Trends which apply to society and the economy as a whole and are of relevance to the products and services provided by the sponsoring company.

The Mega-Trends covered in the framework of Youth Foresight Germany are:

- Lifelong learning
- Demographic change and the aging society
- Resource conflict and excessive use of ecological systems
- Life in the networked world
 - The use of Information and Communication Technologies,
 - The Knowledge Company,
 - The Information Society and
 - Globalization
- New technologies, miniaturization and nanotechnologies
- Migration, Mobility, Urbanisation, diversity in value systems
- Climatic change
- Humans and economics
- New epidemics
- Individualisation and self-responsibility.

These Mega-Trends have been made more manageable by linking them to specific subjects and targets of importance to companies.

So far the student groups have dealt with the following subjects:

- Nutrition
- Health,

- Pharmaceuticals and the prevention of disease
- Life-style, Recreation, Vacation and Tourism
- The Future of the Work Place
- Services and Consumption of Tomorrow,
 - Financial services of the future
 - Economics of the future and alternative trading,
- Work life balance
- Housing and living
- The Future of Cleaning
- Living in the year 2020
- Information, Communication and Digitalization
 - Sensor Technologies
 - Media
- Mobility and Transport
- New Energy Sources, Alternative use of Resources

They are required to think about them, not for the point of view of contemporary life but from a perspective set about 15 years in the future. The groups are asked to put themselves into a mindset of 2020 and to find solutions and ideas relevant for living then.

During the five-day 'innovation game' the participants not only get to know the method of the innovation game but learn what it takes to make an idea feasible. They are confronted with the whole chain of innovation, from the first brilliant idea to the market analysis, to the choice of appropriate marketing concept and finally to the development and marketing of the innovative product or service.

A third benefit for the students lies in their development of personal skills and orientations. They learn presentation techniques. They acquire method and process knowledge. They find out how to do research, how to find relevant information and filter it in order to gain orientation for their task.

Young People Becoming Entrepreneurs

Youth Foresight Germany has already had and still continues to have impacts on a number of levels. The following examples are supposed to give an idea how innovation can have an impact on the self-esteem of young people, how it can foster co-operation between different actors in the economy and society and how it changing society by giving its youth the confidence and the courage to create and to innovate. One of the goals was to demonstrate to young people that they are not only able to dream but they are capable of making their dreams come true. The following examples demonstrate the success of the 'innovation game' initiative:

Five female 11th grade students founded their own enterprise called PIA which stands for Produkte im Alltag or Solutions for Daily Life.

Their services focus on mundane chores such as car cleaning, services around the house or in office buildings, as well as babysitting or indeed any other service which can be handled by the five ladies. Advertising is successfully done via word-of-mouth.

Through the 'innovation game' the girls had the idea and found the courage to actually make it happen. Although this is not a new high-tech enterprise it could be the first step towards something bigger in the career of the five young ladies. For sure they have earned valuable practical experience in busi-

ness management – and all this while continuing their education.



Photo by Dorn - The five ladies of PIA - 'Produkte im Alltag' (Solutions in Daily Life)

Initiating Long-time Co-operation

Youth Foresight Germany is not a one-off exercise. By continuous support for 'innovation games' at every level of schooling and throughout the school year long-time co-operation between the sponsoring companies and the sponsored school can be established.

Since their participation in the 'innovation game' students from one of the participating schools now work for the local newspaper 'Bergsträßer Anzeiger'. They work on a conceptual basis and on editorial issues. At the same time the newspaper co-operates closely with the school especially within the framework of a voluntary working group on 'Media'.

Another effect of cooperation between companies and the schools they sponsor lies in the field of job-offers and applications. Students apply to sponsoring companies for apprenticeships and for other training positions. This is regarded as a very important effect especially at schools for lower-level education.

Companies Pick up Ideas

The innovation game is a win-win-situation for both main actors:

- The school with their students, and
- The companies who sponsor them.

One example for the company side is the first branch of a bank for young people: 'banking and fun' which was opened as a subsidiary of the Volksbank Rhein-Neckar on 9 February 2006. This subsidiary is a direct result of the innovation game!

The examples given here are only a few out of the very many now available, but they already give a good impression of what initiatives such as 'Youth Foresight Germany' can achieve.

Furthermore, the success of Youth Foresight Germany is underscored by its growth beyond the world of business into other areas of the society. In future new organisations will develop co-operation with school, among them are hospitals, churches, administrations such as Brandenburg with its state chancellery and the municipalities.

Sources and References

This brief has been written based on information available at www.jugend-denkt-zukunft.de and based on informa-

tion provided by IFOK the Institute for Organisational Communication with website at www.ifok.de.

About the EFMN: Policy Professionals dealing with RTD, Innovation and Economic Development increasingly recognize a need to base decisions on broadly based participative processes of deliberation and consultation with stakeholders. One of the most important tools they apply is FORESIGHT. The EFMN or European Foresight Monitoring Network supports policy professionals by monitoring and analyzing Foresight activities in the European Union, its neighbours and the world. The EFMN helps those involved in policy development to stay up to date on current practice in Foresight. It helps them to tap into a network of know-how and experience on issues related to the day to day design, management and execution of Foresight and Foresight related processes.