

Successful Scenario Planning



What is Scenario Planning?

Scenario planning, or scenario thinking, is a strategic planning tool used to make flexible long-term plans.

Scenarios provide alternative views of the future. They identify some significant events, main actors and their motivations, and they convey different perspectives on how the world functions. Building and using scenarios can help us explore how we might face the future.



Key characteristics

- A **methodology for strategy development** useful for organisations, programmes or projects acting in a highly dynamic environment taking complex and often risky decisions
- A **group process** which encourages knowledge exchange and development of mutual deeper understanding of central issues important to the future of an organisation
- **Suitable for any level** within an organisation in a variety of contexts
- A **creative yet structured approach**, popular with marketing managers, programme managers and product developers that are looking for new markets, ideas, services or projects
- Provides rigour as well as opportunities to **draw upon the creativity** of those involved, resulting in new views and interpretations on important external developments
- Typically involves the **development of visual representations** of possible futures

Ten tips for successful scenarios...

1. Stay focused
2. Keep it simple
3. Keep it interactive
4. Plan to plan and allow enough time
5. Don't settle for a simple high, medium and low
6. Avoid probabilities or 'most likely' plots
7. Avoid drafting too many scenarios
8. Invent catchy names for the scenarios
9. Make the decision makers own the scenarios
10. Budget sufficient resources for communicating the scenarios

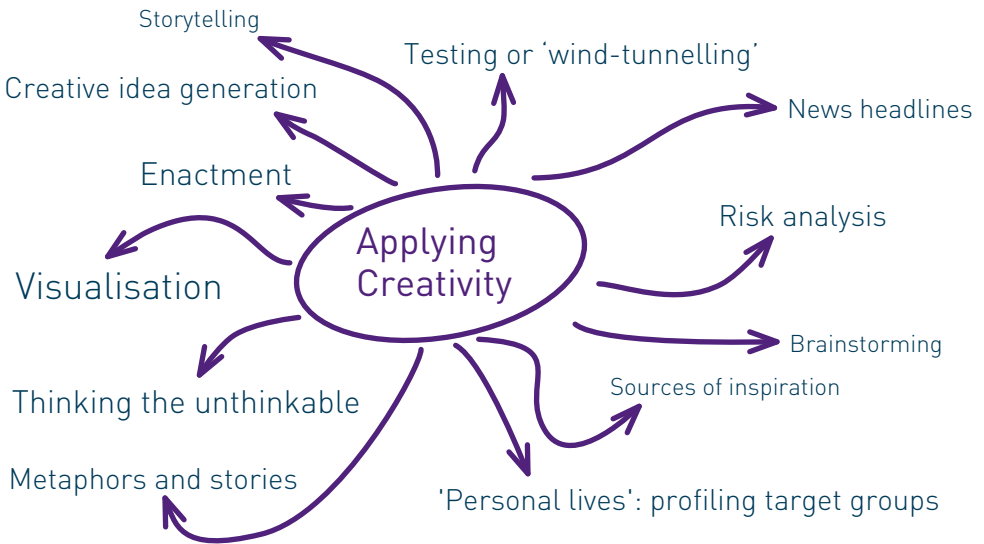
From Schwartz, P. and Ogilvy, J. (2004) 'Plotting your Scenarios: An Introduction to the Art and Process of Scenario Planning', GBN

...and some traps to avoid

- Don't treat scenarios as forecasts
- Don't construct scenarios based on too simplistic a difference – such as optimistic and pessimistic
- Make sure the scenarios are global enough in scope
- Ensure you focus the scenarios in areas of potential impact on the enterprise
- Treat scenarios as an informational or instructional tool rather than for participative learning and/or direct strategy formation
- Ensure adequate process for engaging management teams in the scenario planning process
- Don't stint on the imaginative stimulus in the scenario design
- Use experienced, or at least well-briefed, facilitator(s)

Applying Creativity

Scenario Planning can be used to consider potential issues and situations in a context that provides the luxury of careful thought and iterative planning rather than 'firefighting' at the point at which a weakness unexpectedly makes itself known.



Steps to Scenario Planning

- 1 Scoping**
What is the question/issue you want to address?
- 2 Trend Analysis**
Identify external forces in operation and consider the pressures they play
- 3 Building Scenarios**
Using outcomes from the first two stages, build your scenarios to explore
- 4 Generate Options**
Consider the options available within the scenarios - innovations, new services, projects or opportunities
- 5 Test Options**
Identify and discuss potential implications and impacts of scenarios on the identified options
- 6 Action Plan**
Define an action plan as a result of these activities

The Scenario Planning Toolkit

In 2007, JISC contracted CIBIT (www.cibit.com) to develop a scenario toolkit based on their existing work across European business, adding an education and more specifically IT perspective to their generic scenarios by running a series of pilot workshops aimed at higher education project management, and synthesising participants' contributions. The outputs from this pilot work have been further synthesised and enhanced and are

available in the online resource for you to use at a variety of levels.

Scenario planning sits alongside a number of other tools that can be useful in the strategic management process, some of which are featured in JISC infoNet's online Tools and Techniques library. Core infoKits include Risk Management (the scenarios being used to identify possible risks), Portfolio Management (the scenarios being used to shape your portfolio) and Change Management.



Want to know more?

Visit www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/tools/scenario-planning for the full scenario planning infoKit, which includes advice, guidance and ideas for your own successful scenario planning.

JISC's scenario planning work was originated by the Users and Innovation programme (www.jisc.ac.uk/usersinnovation), and further developed by JISC infoNet (www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk) in partnership with Netskills (www.netskills.ac.uk), providing a sustainable online resource as well as a range of workshops for the sector.

