How to Consider the Future with New Tools for Uncertain Times

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This present moment used to be the unimaginable future.

- Stewart Brand, The Clock of the Long Now
When you come to a fork in the road, take it.
- Yogi Berra
Learning Objectives

- Define scenario planning and the circumstances when this tool is most useful
- Describe several options for scenario development
- List the steps required to develop different narratives to help your network be flexible and agile
- Explain how to use scenarios to prepare for strategic planning
Agenda

• What is scenario planning and when is it useful?
• 5-Step process to Scenario Planning
• Inputs
• Analysis
• Interpretation
• Build scenarios
• Outputs
• From Scenarios to Strategic Planning
• Q & A / Preview of Peer Group Call
What is Scenario Planning?

- A structured way to think about the future
- Scenarios ask “What if...” in a disciplined way, bringing out new and unforeseen opportunities or challenges.

(Sometimes called “Contingency Planning”)

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When is This a Useful Tool?

• Use when things are going well
• Use when industry or future is unstable/uncertain
• Use when evaluating current strategies or formulating new ones
• Use to identify a limited set of examples of possible futures that provide a valuable point of reference
• Use as a response to a crisis (funding or personnel change)
• Use to free up thinking and create a common strategic conversations
Scenario Planning Process

Scenarios vs. Strategic Planning

• Scenario planning does not attempt to predict which of these will occur
• Through a formal process, identifies a limited set of examples of possible futures (scenarios)
• The scenarios then provide a reference when evaluating current strategies or formulating new ones
• Strategy then addresses ACTION to take. What will we do and how will we do it?
Scenario Planning Process (Cont’d)

Scenario Planning Process (Cont’d 2)

Inputs
- Analysis
- Interpretation
- Build Scenarios

What are the parameters?

Outputs
- Strategy
Step 1: Inputs

• What strategic question(s) do you want to explore?

• Examples:
  ◦ Should we introduce a new service/program?
  ◦ What if we lose our funding from our core funder?
  ◦ How would a gain of ______ affect our operations?

• Who should participate?
Scenario Planning Process (Cont’d 3)

Inputs

Analysis

What are the trends, issues, themes?

Interpretation

Build Scenarios

Outputs

Strategy

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Step 2: Analysis

• What seems to be happening? (trends)
• What are the potential critical events?
  ◦ Political
  ◦ Economic
  ◦ Social
  ◦ Technological
  ◦ Legal
  ◦ Environmental
Step 2: Analysis...continued

• Who are the potential critical players?
  ◦ Clients
  ◦ Funders
  ◦ Politicians
  ◦ Community organizations
  ◦ Patients
  ◦ Partners

• How might those events and key players combine?
To deal with the future we have to deal with possibilities. Analysis will only tell us “What is...”

-- Edward de Bono, Parallel Thinking
Scenario Planning Process (Cont’d 4)

- Inputs
- Analysis
- Interpretation
  - What are the deep drivers of change?
- Build Scenarios
- Outputs
- Strategy
Step 3: Interpretation

• What are the deep, systemic drivers of change?
• What examples can you name?
Scenario Planning Process (Cont’d 5)

Inputs

Analysis

Interpretation

Build Scenarios

What might happen?

Outputs

Strategy
Step 4: Build Scenarios

• What might happen?
  ◦ Methods to determine:
    ▪ 2 x 2 matrix
    ▪ Branch/Forks in the road
    ▪ Cone of plausibility
Vertical = Amount of funding
Horizontal = Availability of workforce

A
Extensive funding but lack of workforce

B
Extensive funding and easy access to qualified workforce

C
Low funding and lack of workforce

D
Low funding and huge workforce

Abundant funding

Lack of workforce

Abundant workforce
Branch “If...then...”

- Funding is increased
- Funding stays the same
- Funding is decreased

Lack of workforce
- Abundant workforce

Time

Abundant workforce
- Lack of workforce
Cone of Plausibility

Best used in contexts with a limited set of key drivers.

Is it possible to imagine what might happen?
Scenario Planning Process (Cont’d 6)

- Inputs
- Analysis
- Interpretation
- Build Scenarios

What might happen?

- Outputs
- Strategy
Scenario Planning Process (Cont’d 7)

Inputs

Analysis

Interpretation

Build Scenarios

Outputs

What potential strategies work best?

Strategy
Step 5: Outputs

• Each scenario should have a title, description, and a method of presentation
• Use the scenarios to review or test a range of strategic approaches and policy options
• Generally, each strategy is likely to work better in some scenarios than others
## “Cross-Walk” Scenarios & Strategy

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<th>Strategy 1</th>
<th>Strategy 2</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Scenario 3</strong></td>
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</tbody>
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Scenario Planning Process (final)

Inputs
- What are the parameters?

Analysis
- What are the trends, issues, themes?

Interpretation
- What are the deep drivers of change?

Build Scenarios
- What might happen?

Outputs
- What potential strategies work best?

Strategy
Upcoming Peer Group Call

• Review of Scenario Planning process
• Apply Scenario Planning to a specific case study
• Use scenarios created for strategic planning
• Complete a planning worksheet
“What’s comin’ will come, an’ we’ll meet it when it does.”

― J. K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire
Application and Q&A

• What is a key point for you today?

• What questions do you want addressed in the peer group call discussion on June 13th?
References


Strengthening the Sector, Scenario Planning Kit, Belfast City Council, Gren Armstrong workshop companion.
Thank you for this opportunity!

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