

Concept paper for a 30-hour workshop to learn the scenario method

(Student version)

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BACKGROUND

The world we live in is no longer *materially* constrained. Where 'materially constrained' is a euphemism for poverty, gloom and often downright misery. Thus, it is good that we are getting richer, materially speaking. But the downside is that we can no longer take the context of our lives for granted.

Poverty, as painful as it is, does have the side effect that it simplifies life. A life worth living under poverty is one where you, your family and your children are at the end less poor. Everything – work, education, morals, behavior, love and marriage – is subordinate to that goal.

As poverty recedes, the organizing principle that simplified your life also recedes. The context of your life is no longer circumscribed by physical location nor social station. Everything has become variable, without respite and without mercy. You no longer get the context of your life with your mother's milk, you have to create it yourself, repeatedly and on the fly.

One of the better ways to do this, we found, is to create differing stories – narratives in the jargon of today – about the reality you live in now, as well as the future into which you will move. Not, we wish to emphasize, to tell tall tales, but to anchor yourself with integrity in the here and now, so you can explore and shape the future. By creating these stories, you re-perceive reality in a new way, you create opportunities and you widen your horizon. You no longer merely endure the future but begin to shape and form it. In short, you begin to live *your* life, with respect for, and in interaction with, others.

These stories – scenarios – take you away from the paralyzing question 'Will this or that happen?' to the more confident question 'What can I do, *should* this or that happen?' Away from bearing the burden towards doing something about it. And because your choices are embedded in stories, you create contextual knowledge. They become the recurrent themes in your life, a moral compass to guide you to a life worth living.

"Those who tell the stories will rule the world" (Attributed to Plato, 300 BC)

LEARNING HOW TO CREATE SCENARIOS

Learning how to create scenarios is a bit like learning how to swim. One can read about it, watch others swim, but in the end, one needs to get into the water. A good way to put a toe in the water is to take a 30-hour course where you learn all aspects of scenario planning, albeit in a mock-exercise. We teach such courses at the high-school and university, as well as at the executive education level. *What* we teach is shown on the next two pages in highly compressed form.

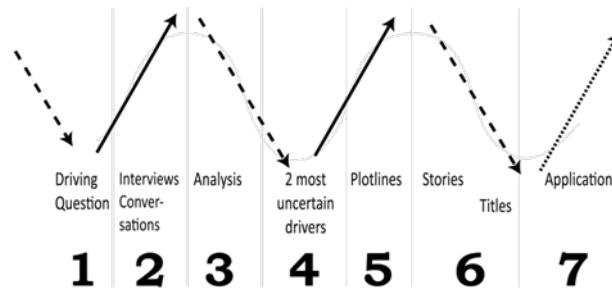
Scenario creation in a nutshell

Scenarios are inductive work

Since the future is not deterministic, the work must be an inductive process. Inductive, but not without rules or methodology: To move from the particular to the general, to generate at least hypotheses, if not theories, the scenario process moves back and forth between stages of opening,



i.e. creativity (solid line) and phases of closure (dashed line). All this in preparation for the last phase of application (dotted line):



1. Driving question

The time at the beginning of each explorative scenarios process should be used to make crystal clear what you want to have actually answered by the end of the project. This driving question must:

- be about the future (if you ask questions about the past or the present, you will spend a lot of time merely identifying irreconcilable differences)
- be something that the participants can actually influence
- be something you all care deeply about

2. Interviews / Conversations

To prepare the scenarios, you interview 'remarkable people' about different aspects of the driving question. The interviews are open-ended and are more like conversations in which the interviewer speaks very little. The purpose is to bring the full range of concerns, views, hopes and fears of the interviewees with respect to the driving question to the fore. In the 30-hour mock exercise you form teams and interview each other.

3. Analysis of the interviews

The information gathered in phase 2 is boiled down to one or two words per thought on post-it notes. These notes are clustered into themes.

4. Two uncertainties

The two drivers needed to span the canvas of the landscape of the future are those that are at the same time the most uncertain and the most important ones for the driving question of the scenario exercise. They emerge in interactive group work from the themes in phase 3.

5. Plotlines

The two uncertainties of phase 4 become the axis of the scenario space. Starting at the center of the axis, each of four small groups takes a quadrant and sketches a first story describing that future. They will then work all the way to the edge of the quadrant – i.e. throughout the entire time-space.

6. Causal stories with titles

The key to a good story is the switch from chronology to causality. In 99% of the cases, the first sketch created is a chronological sketch: A did this, then that happened, then C pushed B, D got elected, promoted or expelled, and finally F did that. The pattern is familiar because this is how we look at life and it is how history, overwhelmingly, gets taught. But chronology condemns you to be reactive. If time drives everything – as a chronological view presumes – then what can you do? Nothing at all – you can only wait. Instead, you will have to give reasons and logic. Once you think causally, you flesh out, repeatedly and again in interactive group work, the story with actors, events, dilemmas, the givens – all of them – titles and whatever else you can think of.



7. Application

This is why we do scenarios: to make better decisions in the here and now for an uncertain future!

Scenarios give us a tableau of possible futures. So we now have three choices of using them:

- 1 we adapt our strategies and (business) plans, at all levels, to the future landscape, so that we succeed by adapting better than others, gaining competitive advantage.
- 2 we shape the landscape of the future to play to our inherent strengths. The landscape is not deterministic; it is full of uncertainties, surprises and chance, thus, can be molded.
- 3 we transform the future into what we think - with others - it should be.

The second and third routes are the real challenges. They require a keen and truthful understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses; it also requires a deep understanding of the room to maneuver one has; and it requires the ability to consider the set of decisions one takes as variable – relatively easy in theory, very difficult in real life.

Usually, participants prepare a record of the workshop. An example can be seen here:

<http://www.blue-way.net/read.html#masterclassreport>



FEEDBACK

Though the 30 hours are intense, the feedback is very good. To give you a good feel, we show you the *entire* feedback – good and bad – from a recent MBA class:

Course name: *Scenario Planning*
 Semester & year: *Fall-Winter 2016-17*
 Professor(s): *Ulrich Golüke*

What was your overall opinion of the course and the professor? (place a cross in one of the boxes on each line)

	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Poor	Very Poor
Course	6	5	2	-	-
Professor	9	3	1	-	-
My participation	3	7	3	-	-

	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Poor	Very Poor
Course	46 %	38 %	15 %	-	-
Professor	69 %	23 %	8 %	-	-
My participation	23 %	54 %	23 %	-	-

What are your three core insights of this module:

- Scenarios can help you prepare for an uncertain future; align employees within a company and ensure your tactics are rooted in deep thinking
- Be open minded, think the unthinkable, listen to each other
- Scenario is a very complicated process; scenario planning is practical for facing unknown worlds; it is important to communicate in a team to do scenario planning
- New method for strategy definition; importance of scenarios; accept opinion of others in a more efficient way
- Uncertainty is not difficult; it's an opportunity to shape the future Interesting approach and methodology to preparing for the future Usefulness of the framework for strategic decision-making Thinking outside the box; exit comfort zone; be creative
- Scenario planning prepares us for the future. It is useful, but it must be used under the correct context. Glad to have added it in my (?)
- Interview skills, scenario planning tools; scenario planning is useful but very complicated process • Drive question that helps to build scenario planning; structure thinking to plan for the future; use scenarios to adapt the new future
- Picture in unknown; scenarios help to check the strategy; not give the answer on how it will be, but create several possible futures



What I appreciated most about the course:

- The experiential learning aspect; the professor who was very knowledgeable and kind
The interactive part, group exercises
- An overall process through the course
- The group work and the real case experience Intense thought process
- Learning to approach scenarios with an open mind. Foreseeing vs forecasting Dedicated time to practice and play with the framework
- The teacher had a lot of knowledge to share The way it is articulated
- It was very well organized; excellent guest speakers Teamwork, interactive environment
- I really started to look at the future through multi-images rather than imagine the future as I like it to be. In this aspect, I learned to be prepared rather than waiting and hope for the better
- Group discussions and several guest speakers

What I appreciated least about the course:

- Too short
- Pre-course assignment expectations were not 100 % clear
- Professor thinks too quickly and assumes we know what he knows, but that's normal with intelligent people. Not a big deal
- Accepting the ambiguity was difficult for me, yet not a reflection of the course itself The push on sustainability as a broad topic
- Pre-course assignment was too long: a lot of reading material plus exercise
- Too much reading in pre-course assignment. Only the reading requires more than 10 hours

Please tell us what you thought about the following aspects of the course: (place a cross in one of the boxes on each line)

	Agree Strongly	Agree	Disagree	Disagree Strongly
The course was too challenging	-	2	8	3
The course was not very well organised	-	-	7	6
Not much was gained by taking this course	-	-	7	6
I did not feel encouraged to learn, to dare new ideas and behaviours and to make mistakes	-	-	5	8
The pre-course assignment was too tough	2	2	7	2
The professor did not live the BSL values	-	-	5	7
I would recommend this course to others	8	5	-	-



I have made considerable learning progress in the topic during the course	8	5	-	-
The topics were applied and integrated with practical exercises	11	2	-	-
The professor encouraged active participation and interaction and was open to learning as well	11	2	-	-
The ... values formed the backbone of the module	9	4	-	-
The professor skilled and resourceful in creating a powerful and safe learning environment	8	5	-	-
The professor used personal examples to illustrate the topics	7	6	-	-
The professor showed a thorough knowledge of the subject	9	4	-	-

How would you summarize your experience in this course in 1 sentence?

- Very much enjoyed this interactive class where I feel I will take a lot away with me "It depends". Nothing is certain
- Exciting and interesting Very interesting
- It was challenging but well worth the time Interesting topic that I had no prior knowledge of
- Professor Golüke was fantastic and presented a useful tool Another extremely useful strategic tool
- It was vivid environment and interactive learning
- Excellent tool learning at both personal or professional level
- Very inspiring course, which makes the strategy developing process more prepared to

What else should we know:

- The course description when choosing the module does not give it justice, was not clear on what the class was about
- Guest speakers were very good! One of my favourite classes.

NEXT

The course takes 30 hours which can be stretched over up to four days or squeezed into 2 ½ days – your choice. It works best with 16 to 28 participants who must be present throughout the entire time. Either convince your teacher / professor / administrator to run such a course, or, better yet, get two dozen of your friends together, charge each of them much, much less than they will spend on their next smartphone and run the course over a weekend in a youth hostel or something comparative. You can download the result of such an event self-organized by industrial ecology students of the universities of Leiden and Delft here <http://www.blue-way.net/assets/scenariomasterclass-sept15-report.pdf> In any case, preparation is not necessary, however if you want to, or need the credit, pre- and / or post course assignments can be given by us. You also may want to read the short book “Scenarios: How to create them and Why you should” we wrote a while ago¹, then get in touch with us directly – the email is at the bottom of the page.

We look forward to working with you.

FINALLY, WHO ARE WE?

Ulrich Golüke has run scenario projects for over 20 years for the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, foundations, universities, companies and high school teachers. He has taught courses in scenario planning for Master and MBA students and is an Associate Professor at the Business School of Lausanne. He also has 40 years of experience of systems modelling in health care, shipping, real estate, climate change and macro-economics under social and resource constraints.

Andrea Cederquist has years of experience in social change management and communication working for NGOs, corporations and academia. She is a trained biologist and holds a M.Sc. in Environmental Management and Policy. Her practical and theoretical knowledge of social innovation comes from her experiences in CSR-reporting in the private sector, working as a campaigner within the NGO sector, and through her current academic engagement in the field of transformational learning processes, strategic communication and social entrepreneurship. Her research interests are about theories of change relating to societal transformation and sustainability. She is currently teaching sustainability communication and marketing at the Kiel School of Sustainability (Christian Albrecht Universität zu Kiel), Germany, with a focus on campaigning and communications for societal change.

¹ The link to the book is: <http://www.blue-way.net/read.html#HowAndWhy>

