

Using Scenarios to Effect Change

Scenarios are word pictures of plausible futures that challenge us to be proactive in identifying risks and opportunities and developing strategies and policies to address those challenges. Scenario is a narrative device, employing dramatic tension to drive thinking towards innovation and insight. Purpose of using scenarios is more important than the implementation. If you have the purpose and reason for scenarios than the implementation will be natural.

Effective scenarios arise from the concept of emergence. There are no ranks all is open, multiple paradigms coexisting. Scenarios are a devise for perception and reconceiving. One of the benefits of scenario work is in stimulating your thought processes by getting people to ask questions that they may not have asked before within the context of not knowing the answers and not being required to know the answers. Futures thinking then moves from accomplishing goals to being an asset in exploration as plausibility is a co-created construct between people. Scenarios should not be best case/worst case. They should all have good and bad and should all be considered.

The test of good/bad scenarios is did the work produce the client's needs? 1/3rd of the work is in producing scenarios and at least 2/3rd is in understanding what they are for and how they can be used. This 2/3rd to 4/5th is the work upfront which is very important. The timeframe for scenarios depends on the purpose you have given for your self or for someone, as the client is always an individual not an organisation. The outcomes sought are to help individuals to focus on their own actions to support them to take responsibility for innovation and creation by becoming more comfortable with taking some risk and to provide relevant data that identifies issues or trends that may not have been considered. Then as a group, going forward collectively to think about and map out what happens today versus what you want in the future, and how you might work better together to build a work environment supportive of change and innovation.

Trends are left overs of yesterday's futures. Clarifying scenarios are about their future context and how to use this context to inform what to do in the present. They are about sensemaking, value judgement, and learning to enhance our instrumental judgement to reveal what could happen so as a clear set of decision points can be constructed. Scenarios are inviting you, as part of your job, to get to places of alternative thinking and to see the world as less narrow. Facts are always in the past and knowledge theory is usually evidence and fact based. However for effective scenario work taking something for a fact is a lazy persons way of thinking.

It is the history of the context not the organisation that is important as the future is coming at you independent of your will. Scenarios are manufactured not chosen. They are like bamboo scaffolding because they bend. The method is one of first initiation, followed by orientation, to begin the building of the scenarios as a process of engagement and communication to clarify, not necessarily simplify, as the job is to help structure a mind of enquiry (joint enquiry) and to question 'how do you do (end) it'?