

Visioning Scenarios: Show the Future

Scenario testing is a group activity. But the basic premise can also be used more widely in all kinds of communication, whether in a policy paper (e.g. outline three possible future scenarios in the introduction), a workshop presentation, or an email debate. Generally, scenario testing would deliver three scenarios: a positive (or optimistic), negative (or pessimistic), and neutral (or middle of the road) scenario.

By actively using 'scenarios' in all kinds of communication activities, several concerns and outcomes can be communicated at the same time. You are able to:

- Identify general, broad, driving forces, which are applicable to all scenarios;
- Identify a variety of *plausible* trends within each issue or trend (trends that vary depending on your assumptions so you get positive and negative perspectives);
- Combine the trends so you get a series of scenarios (for example, mostly positive trends identified in relation to an issue would give a positive scenario).

'Scenario testing's greatest use is in developing an understanding of the situation, rather than trying to predict the future' (Caldwell, 2001).

Scenarios are a way of developing alternative futures based on different combinations of assumptions, facts and trends, and areas where more understanding is needed for your particular scenario project. They are called 'scenarios' because they are like 'scenes' in the theatre – a series of differing views or presentations on the same general topic. Once you see several scenarios at the same time, you better understand your options or possibilities (seminar on Futures Techniques, <http://ag.arizona.edu/futures/tou/tut2-buildscenarios.html>).

Method

- Invite participants who have knowledge of, or are affected by, the proposal or issue of interest.
- Invite participants to identify the underlying paradigms or unwritten laws of change; trends or driving forces and collect into general categories (economy, socio/political, etc.); and wildcards or uncertainties.
- Consider how these might affect a situation, either singly or in combination, using these steps:
 - review the big picture
 - review general approaches to future studies
 - identify what you know and what you don't know
 - select possible paradigm shifts and use them as an overall guide
 - cluster trends and see which driving forces are most relevant to your scenario
- Create alternative scenarios (similar to alternate scenes in a play) by mixing wildcards with trends and driving forces; keep the number of scenarios small (four is ideal because it avoids the 'either/or' choice of two, and the good/bad/medium choice of three).
- Write a brief report that states assumptions and future framework; provides observations and conclusions; gives a range of possibilities; and focuses on the next steps coming out of this study. Each scenario should be about one page.

Source

- Coastal CRC's Citizen Science Toolbox: <http://www.coastal.crc.org.au/toolbox/index.asp>

Further resources on scenarios

- Caldwell, R. (2001) 'Tutorial 2: Building Scenarios', Arizona University, <http://ag.arizona.edu/futures/tou/tut2-buildscenarios.html>.
- *Futures Research Quarterly*, Summer 2001, 17 (2). Issue devoted to scenario building, Available from World Future Society.
- US Department. of Transportation (2001) Land Use/Transportation Scenario Testing: A Tool for the 1990s, <http://tmip.fhwa.dot.gov/clearinghouse/docs/landuse/luts/intro.stm>.

Visioning

'Visioning' is similar to scenario planning. Visioning is a collective exercise, but can also be adapted and used in various other communication activities. The main objective is to make the problem and solution *visual*. It follows the age-old communication advice: show, don't tell.

Collective visioning exercises, carried out in a group, are used to define and help achieve a desirable future. Visioning exercises are regularly used in urban and strategic planning and allow participants to create images that can help to guide change in the city. The outcome of a visioning exercise is a long term plan, generally with a 20 to 30 year horizon. Visioning exercises also provide a frame for a strategy for the achievement of the vision. Alternatively, some visioning tools may be used to promote thought and encourage discussion of future land use and planning options, without the need to create a future orientated document.

Method

In a typical visioning exercise a facilitator asks participants to close their eyes and imagine they are walking along their shoreline as they would like to see it in 15 years. What do they see? What do the buildings look like? Where do people gather? How do they make decisions? What are they eating? Where are they working? How are they travelling? What is happening on the street? Where is the centre of the neighbourhood? How does green space and water fit into the picture? What do you see when you walk around after dark?

People record their visions in written or pictorial form: in diagrams, sketches, models, photographic montages, and in written briefs. Sometimes a professional illustrator helps turn mental images into drawings of the city that people can extend and modify (see: http://www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook/2_16_visioning.html). Invite the group to comment on these choices. Invite the participants to discuss what was easy and what was difficult about the process, what they learned, and how they might use the game in the future.

Uses/strengths

- Use when integration between issues is required.
- Use when a wide variety of ideas should be heard.
- Use when a range of potential solutions are needed.
- Visioning encourages participation for developing a long-range plan.
- Visioning is an integrated approach to policymaking. With overall goals in view, it helps avoid piecemeal and reactionary approaches to addressing problems. Visioning uses participation as a source of ideas in the establishment of long-range policy. It draws upon deeply-held feelings about overall directions of public agencies to solicit opinions about the future.
- When completed, visioning presents a democratically-derived consensus.

- When using games such as 'Wheel of Coastal Fortune' as a visioning tool, this offers the following advantages:
 - Can access sections of the population who are typically disempowered in traditional consultative processes (Luckie, 1995).
 - Can be used to assess willingness to pay to preserve specific environmental attributes or willingness to accept the loss of these attributes.
 - Can involve a broad range of participants (in demographic terms).

Special considerations/weaknesses

- Organisation of the visioning exercise can be costly.
- Vision can be difficult to transfer into strategy and policy.

Source

- Coastal CRC's Citizen Science Toolbox: <http://www.coastal.crc.org.au/toolbox/index.asp>

Further resources on visioning

- Ames, Steven C. (1989) *Charting a Course for Corvallis: A Case Study of Community Visioning in Oregon*, Gresham, Oregon: American Planning Association (Oregon Chapter), Oregon Visions Project, May.
- Ames, Steven C. (1993) *The Agency Visioning Handbook: Developing A Vision for the Future of Public Agencies, A Hands-on Guide for Planners and Facilitators in State and Federal Natural Resource Agencies*. Arlington, Virginia: US Fish and Wildlife Service.
- United States Fish and Wildlife Service Cointelligence Institute (2002) 'A Toolbox of processes for community work', see: http://www.co-intelligence.org/CIPol_CommunityProcesses.html
- COSLA (1998) 'Focusing on Citizens: A Guide to Approaches and Methods', see: <http://www.communityplanning.org.uk/documents/Engagingcommunitiesmethods.pdf>
- New Economics Foundation and UK Participation Network (1998) 'Participation Works: 21 Techniques of community participation for the 21st century', see: http://www.neweconomics.org/gen/uploads/doc_1910200062310_PWA4.doc
- US Department of Transportation (1996) Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making, see: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/vision.htm>
- US Environmental Protection Agency (2002) 'Green Communities Where Do We Want To Be?', see: <http://www.epa.gov/greenkit/3tools.htm>
- Vancouver Citizens Committee and Charles Dobson, 'The Citizens Handbook', see: <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook/>