



Performance and Innovation Unit

A Futurist's Toolbox

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Executive Summary

Introduction to Futures Work

Purposes

Futures work aims to strengthen awareness concerning the future, amongst ordinary people and within institutions and organisations, by offering alternative images of the future and choices of action in relation to these.

There is a wide range of specific purposes for doing Futures work. Basically, they can be summed up as *contemplation* and *action*.

Futures work broadens and deepens *contemplation* by increasing the range of policy options, expanding the time-scales, and stimulating creativity. Futures work is a useful tool for decision-making and *action* because it can be used for evaluating plans. Futures work can alert decision-makers to opportunities and dangers and help to examine where the organisation has the possibility to influence the future and where it could adapt.

Principles

If one takes an overall look at methodologies for Futures work, a number of broad assumptions can be identified.

Futures work:

- is not about predicting the future,
- creates a choice of futures by outlining alternative futures,
- makes it possible to envision future developments,
- is interdisciplinary,
- is often based on both imagination and historical knowledge,
- is often aimed at shaping present action.

Approaches

It is possible to define different methodologies within the field of Futures work; each has different aims and demands different methods and tools.

- Futures work has always worked within the three P's: the Possible future(s), Probable future(s), and Preferable future(s). (What may happen?, What is most likely to happen?, and What we would prefer to happen?, respectively).
- The classic division into the three P's can be complemented with a division of Futures work into the normative (formulation of goals/visions and "work" from the future back to the present) and the exploratory (from the driving forces of the present into the future).
- Finally, there is a tendency to divide Futures work on the basis of the use of respectively quantitative or qualitative methods. Often, both approaches are necessary and in most cases they work in interaction.

Futures Methodologies

There are many methodologies available in Futures work. This report presents six basic methods. Their application, advantages and disadvantages are summarised in the table below.

Table A: Application, advantages and disadvantages of six basic methods in Futures work

Method	Application	Advantages	Disadvantages
Quantitative Trend analyses Time-series, extrapolations, S-curve, envelope curve, cycles and long-waves analyses, neural networks	Typically used in areas such as demographics, economics, and technology, i.e. areas where solid and long data series exist. Ought not to stand alone.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Objective method - Valid and logical in a positivistic sense - Easy to communicate - Economical and easy to handle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not as neutral as may appear - Accepted as a kind of truth about the future - Narrow and isolated - Extrapolation of the past
Qualitative Trend analyses Trend spotting, megatrend analyses, cross-impact, scanning, environmental scanning, relevance trees	All areas. Though typically social, institutional, commercial and political topics. Often focusing on change and areas in change. By definition, megatrends are relevant to all areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Early warning tool - Outlining possibilities and risks - Starting point for formulating scenarios - Gives an overview of the system and inspiration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relies strongly on the observer - Difficult to distinguish fads from long-term trends, trends from counter trends - Megatrends can often be too general
Delphi survey Multi-round anonymous expert evaluation techniques	Any subject, but especially within technological forecasting and often combined with other methods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To some futurists it is an excellent method for producing more reliable forecasts than those of an individual expert - Quite fast and economical with the use of IT - Is often interpreted as "scientific" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To some futurists it is considered a "method of last resort" – when there is no other way to base a forecast - Difficult to define who is qualified as an "expert" - Is often interpreted as "scientific"
Scenario Methods Normative scenarios, Explorative scenarios, Strategy scenarios	Unstable systems or changing environments. Can also be used for exploring possibilities of change. In line with the assumption that the future is uncertain the method is becoming more widely used.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scenarios can be used as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a checklist/early warning - a debate creating tool - a tool for creating a common frame of reference - a strategic tool - an evaluation tool - a training tool - Give the decision-maker a choice of futures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Difficult to transform into decisions and actions - A qualitative method applied to a world used to quantification - Gives the decision-makers a choice of futures
Wild Cards Shocks	All areas and settings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Works with the possible futures - As early warning exercise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No explicit method - Rests heavily on the observer
Future workshops Visioning, backcasting, brainstorming, brainwriting, group idea generation techniques	Originally a method for mobilising the "silent majority". Today it's used by wide range of institutions e.g. companies, ministries, political parties, trade unions etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Founded on participation and potentially leading to empowerment - Defining the preferred future as an alternative to the many methods working with probable futures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can be seen as too "soft" or emotional - A rather negative experience if it's not followed by implementation in line with the conclusions - The risk of projecting people's fears and hopes of the past

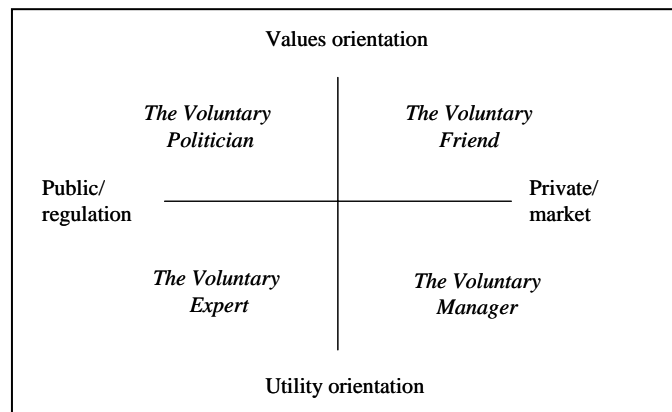
Case Study: The Strategy Scenario Method Applied to the Voluntary Sector

Finally, the report presents a case study on how to apply a specific method, the strategy scenario method, to a specific theme, namely the future of the UK voluntary sector.

The strategy scenario method deals with both structures and strategies. Those structural dimensions identified as most crucial, in relation to the system under investigation, are drawn on axes. In relation to the voluntary sector, the axes are defined as *values-orientation versus utility-orientation*, and *public/regulation versus private/market*. Afterwards, the strategies are defined in relation to these axes. In this case, the following four strategies were created: *The Voluntary Politician*, *The Voluntary Expert*, *The Voluntary Friend* and *The Voluntary Manager*.

The figure below illustrates the complete case study.

Figure A: Four strategy scenarios for the voluntary sector



1.0 Introduction to Futures Work¹

Whether as single individuals or as an organisation, corporation, authority or ministry, it is a daily exercise to consider possible plans of action and evaluate our possibilities in relation to our wishes and expectations. We make plans, project and strategize on all manners of things. In that sense, we are all doing Futures work everyday.

Politics is Futures work. Politics is about creating, changing or maintaining societal conditions and ideas. Politics is about seeking changes or seeking shelter against changes. Others have defined politics in short, but not less future-oriented, as “wanting”. The time scale of politics is the future, whether it be in the near or distant future.

This report is an audit of Futures methodologies.

The report is structured thus: Firstly, an overview of what Futures work is in terms of aims and objectives. Secondly, an audit of common methodologies. Thirdly, a case study is presented on how to apply a specific method (the strategy scenario method) to a specific theme, namely the future of the UK voluntary sector. Finally, the report is summed up in a perspective of Futures work.

In this first part of the report Futures work is introduced: The purposes, the principles and the approaches.

1.1 Purposes of Futures Work

Humanity has at all times been drawn to the idea of getting a sneak preview of what might be. Fortunately we have been able to sustain our curiosity alongside developing better methods to work out the expectations of the future.

Today, the objective of Futures work is partly to evaluate present policy options by broadening the perspective and partly to make the decision-maker aware of his/her own premises and expectations. Yehezkel Dror, formerly RAND Corporation, has phrased it even more simply, similarly focusing on output: “The core task of futures studies can be summed up as contemplation and action”².

The purposes listed below, structured around Dror`s focus on contemplation and action, give an insight into the field`s potential.

Futures work broadens and deepens *contemplation* by:

- expanding the time-scales within which issues are examined
- increasing the perceived range of realistic policy options and alternative future possibilities
- stimulating creativity through presenting original images of the future
- improving moral reasoning through the presentations of utopias and dystopias
- making cogitation more sophisticated by introducing advanced notions of uncertainty and inconceivability.

Futures work is a useful tool for decision-making and *action* because it:

- aids the implementation of decisions by anchoring present choices in the long term

¹ Besides the specific references throughout the text, this report in general is based on the author`s 10 years of experience in Futures work and on the report, Managing the Future (Steen Svendsen et al. (1996), Managing the Future, CIFS, Copenhagen)

² Yehezkel Dror (1996), Futures Studies for Contemplation and Action, The Knowledge Base of Futures Studies, vol. 3, DDM Media Group, Australia, p. 85

- alerts decision-makers to windows of opportunity and gates of danger
- outlines the evolutionary potential of present situations
- sensitises decision-makers to the unknown and the unknowable
- evaluates plans in relation to the future
- examines where the organisation has the possibility of influencing the future and where it might adapt
- identifies what needs to be kept under close scrutiny in times to come
- saves time and effort through structured foresight.

The list shows that there are a number of essential purposes as to why we should make use of futures studies methods and engage in Futures work. Purposes, which in light of the ever accelerating speed of change and complexity, seem to become even more essential.

1.2 Principles in Futures Work

All Futures work is founded on a number of principles and assumptions. Regardless of which approach is chosen, it is pertinent – explicitly and clearly – to define the assumptions on which the work is based. It is the general principles and specific assumptions, which create the framework for the work, decides its usefulness and enables others to observe and possibly repeat the work process.

Looking at mainstream Futures work, one can identify a number of general principles summed up as follows: The Future is not predictable, Futures work creates a choice of futures, Futures work makes it possible to envision future developments, Futures work is interdisciplinary, Futures work is often based on imagination and historical knowledge, and finally, Futures work is often aimed at shaping present action. The principles can be viewed as rule-of-thumbs, to which everyone developing Futures work must explicitly relate.

The Future is Not Predictable

“No serious futurists deals in “predictions”. These are left for television oracles and newspaper astrologers. No one even faintly familiar with the complexities of forecasting lays claim to absolute knowledge of tomorrow”³, writes Alvin Toffler in his book Future Shock.

Since the early 1970s, there has been a remarkable shift within Futures work from focusing on foreseeing and predicting the future to focusing on managing and “deciding” the future. Today the future is written in the plural – we do not speak of “The future” but of “Futures”. The change in focus can be described as a shift from what *will* happen to an emphasis on what *can* happen and what one *wants* from the future.

Futures Work Creates A Choice of Futures

Futures work is about creating ideas of alternative futures thereby creating a choice of futures. By formulating alternative futures, the comprehension of one’s own conceptions is expanded, and new possibilities and risks appear. We are given the opportunity to choose from a number of possible and probable futures. Within this spectrum of possible and probable futures, one may work with interpretations, weightings, priorities, strategies and most importantly choices.

Futures Work Makes it Possible to Envision Future Developments

Many futurists agree that you cannot foresee the future. However, most think it is possible to draw up Futures work, which can envision future developments. Using appropriate methods and tools, it is possible to give a coherent and convincing description of how a possible course of events might unfold.

Valid Futures work will often point to the wider aspects of a potential development and it will not single out concrete events and incidents. In most cases, that is clearly outside the realm of the methods. It is not about what the lottery numbers might be, but whether people will play the lottery at all in the future.

³ Alvin Toffler (1970), Future Shock, Pan Books, London, p.15

Prophecies may be self-fulfilling or self-denying. The aim is not to be spot on, but to draw up perspectives, which permit a better course of action to be taken and, if there is a need, to consciously work on changing the preconditions of the original Futures work.

Futures Work is Interdisciplinary

In a time where complexity and interdependence are growing, it is only natural to focus on Futures work as interdisciplinary work, both in defining the object of study and in relation to the people making the analyses. Futures work contains methods and tools to bridge various scientific disciplines, which are in demand due to the rise of interdependence and complexity.

It is not fruitful nor possible to isolate an issue from the surrounding world if one assumes that the future is unpredictable. There are numerous accounts of analyses which have misinterpreted developments altogether due to insufficient comprehension of the surrounding world. For example, transportation analyses which have not taken environmental problems into account; or technological analyses failing to take people's view on changes into account; and political analyses, which fail to take modern forms of communication into account. "After all, it is those things that come from left and right field and converge on traditional activities that have the most dramatic, beneficial or negative effects"⁴, as Joe Coates points out.

Obviously there is a limit to what one is able to include in a specific project, but as a point of reference one ought to adopt a wide perspective on the future and thereafter narrow it down as needed. A thorough study, with a focus on the wrong problem, may easily be worthless or even worse, distract attention from the real issues at hand. An advantageous way to avoid such pitfalls is to gather an interdisciplinary team to develop the analysis.

Futures Work is Often Based on Imagination and Historical Knowledge

The future will never be like today or yesterday. Futures work deals with the likelihood of that which has never occurred. Imagination, curiosity, and creativity are essential elements in futures work.

As history is the best available input to the future, it is, at the same time, necessary to have a good understanding of the historic development of the system under investigation. A rule-of-thumb is to look at the subject twice as many years back in time, as the Futures work projects the subject into the future. The combination of historical knowledge and imagination is one of the most challenging parts of Futures work.

Futures Work Often Shapes Present Action

The future is created by actions in the world of today. In this respect, Futures work is given the task of interpreting the present in relation to the future. It can be seen as a lawyer defending the vision of the future – in the present⁵.

1.3 Approaches to Futures Work

Futures work is an extremely heterogeneous discipline. Therefore, instead of searching for one overall approach to Futures work, it is more relevant to point at a variety of approaches.

Outlined below are three sets of approaches. The Possible, Probable and Preferable approaches are classical sets of approaches applied to Futures work, while the normative and explorative approaches and the quantitative and qualitative approaches are well known within social science.

⁴ Joseph F. Coates (1996), An Overview of Futures Methods, in The Knowledge Base of Futures Studies, vol.2, DDM Media Group, Australia, p. 59

⁵ Steen Svendsen (2000), "Tomorrow, today", in Scenario & Strategy Planning, October/November 2000, pp.12-14

The Possible, Probable and Preferable Futures

Futures studies and Futures work have always worked within the three Ps: the Possible future(s), the Probable future(s) and the Preferable future(s). Each approach points at a different aim and demands different methods and tools. At the same time, the various actors in the field of Futures work have different approaches and traditions, as seen in the table below.

Table 1: Possible, Probable and Preferable Futures

	Possible futures	Probable futures	Preferable futures
Goal	Open up Stimulate	Analyse Evaluate Systematise	Preparing preferences Winning support Supporting choice
Roles	Driven by pictures, General visions	Driven by analysis	Driven by values and visions
Tools	Realisable	Structural	Participation-orientated
Agents	Visionaries Geniuses Writers Futurists	Analysts Methodologists Futurists	Charismatic leaders Political leaders Social reformers Writers Futurists
Organisation form	None or one-person dominated Think tanks	Think tanks Political actors Businesses/ companies	Lobby groups NGOs Political actors Businesses/ companies

Sources: Roy Amara (1980), *The Futures Field, IFTF, Menlo Park*. Steen Svendsen et al. (1996), *Managing the Future, The Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies, Copenhagen*

To work with possible futures is not just to focus on “creation of certainty”, but a practical limitation – uncertainty is a reality, which must be dealt with. Working with probable futures though is still the mainstay of Futures work. At the time working out of the preferable futures approach has become increasingly more important as part of the strategic processes in businesses and public institutions and in line with the growing ambition to create the future instead of adopting to probable or possible futures.

The Normative and Exploratory Futures

The classic division of Futures work into the three P's can be complemented with a division of Futures work into normative and exploratory approaches.

Normative Futures work is related to defining, and subsequently attempting to realise, the preferred future. The approach, so to speak, is to work from the future back to the present by putting forward a number of probable or at least possible paths or series of events, which permits the preferred future to be realised.

Exploratory Futures work falls under the probable and possible futures approaches. Here the focus is on the driving forces/megatrends identified within the system examined, and suggestions of where they and the interactions between them might lead.

Strategy scenarios, which are dealt with later in this report, are an attempt to combine the two approaches.

Quantitative and Qualitative Futures Work

Finally, there is a tendency to divide Futures work on the basis of their use of respectively quantitative and qualitative methods. This division runs across the previous divisions; there are quantitative as well as qualitative based methods within all the above approaches, although there is a tendency that the probable approach to a greater extent than the others makes use of quantitative analyses. We are rarely speaking of either-or as in many other contexts. Often, both approaches are necessary and in many cases both approaches appear in an interaction. It is advantageous to build a conceptual framework before any quantification is done. This avoids the risk of focusing on the available data, rather than on the concepts and possibilities relevant to the case under scrutiny.

2.0 Futures Methodologies

The following part of the report describes futures methodologies - the methods and tools available in Futures work.

Six basic methods are presented below, some of which represent a range of related methods and tools. Seen together, they cover more or less the tools used by professional futurists today.

Multiple methods

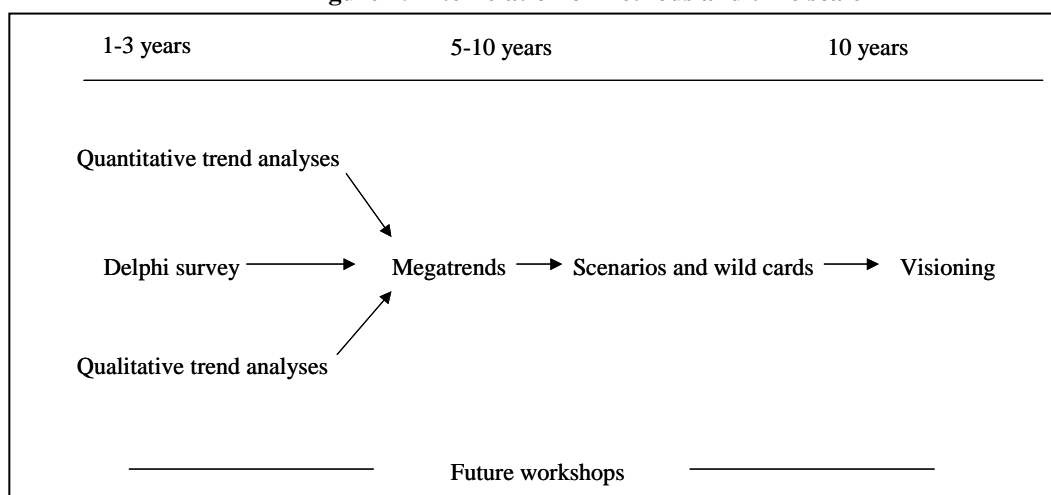
The methods are presented separately in handbook fashion to help the reader, although in reality the methods co-exist. A valid piece of Futures work will usually contain more than one method. As an example, scenarios are based on megatrends which again rest heavily on trend analyses. The illustration below shows how the methods, except for future workshops, are interrelated. Future workshops is a method that can actually stand alone.

The illustration below exaggerates the linear course of an integrated process. Usually, a Futures work will go back and forth as much as forward.

Time horizon

As illustrated below each method has a preferred time horizon. It is a rough generalisation, which can be challenged in specific situations and systems, though with a cost to reliability.

Figure 1: Interrelation of methods and time scale



Processes

It has not been possible in this short report to focus in detail on the actual processes of Futures work. Two points should be mentioned though. First, every Futures works will and must live a life of its own and be designed to the needs and resources of the specific project. Second, it is a rule-of-thumb that participation in the work equals devotion to and understanding of the results.

2.1 Quantitative Trend Analyses

Presentation and Background

Quantitative trend analyses are probably the most common method of forecasting. A long list of rather mechanical methods for basing quantitative trend analyses on historical sequence data exists. Some of these methods are fairly primitive; others are based on complex statistical analyses or, as with neural networks, based on complex mathematical structures. They are often criticised for their lack of creativity and consideration of future developments, but at the same time, this group of tools is essential in the toolbox used to evaluate possible future states. The general rule-of-thumb however is that these tools must be used carefully and ought not stand alone.

There are many specific methods and tools based on quantitative trend analyses, such as time-series forecasts, trend extrapolations, S-curve or envelope curve analyses, cycles analyses, long-waves analyses, and neural networks.

Application

Quantitative trend analyses are based on data and therefore, often applied to areas where there are solid and preferably long historical data collections. They play an important role in areas such as demographics, economics and technology. However, they are applied to more or less all areas and subjects.

The simple trend extrapolation is best viewed as a form of starting point for discussing alternative futures when considering what forces may change the directions of the extrapolation.

Advantages

These mechanical projections have a clear advantage, compared to the evaluation-based methods, in that they are non-personal and objective processes. This means that one has the possibility of testing whether the method has been used correctly, and the possibility of statistically evaluating its validity in a given surrounding world and within a given working area.

Furthermore, they perform an important function by showing what will *not* be the future. For example, if an extrapolation of a defined trend shows a logical inconsistency in the world picture. Perhaps, this in itself will force a structural modification, and may even lead to a proactive reaction, etc. The projection that shows what can take place if one does not do anything can in itself promote a change of policies. Indeed, this may be the very reason for making this projection.

The quantifying form makes these tools seem logical and makes them easy to communicate. They are also relatively inexpensive and easy to handle.

How to: Quantitative trend analysis

Step 1. Data collection

- At least twice the length of time to be forecast. Some futurists would even say 3 to 4 times the length.

Step 2. Plot the data

- Manual, using spreadsheets or other software.

Step 3. Identify the pattern

- By advanced statistical techniques or by simple observation. Whichever way, it is important to be explicit about the background of the pattern.

Step 4. Project the trend

- Clarity where the historical data ends and the projections start.
- Be aware of logical “ceilings” to the values.

Step 5. Evaluation and discussion

- What could change the direction or why is this not the future - or is it?

*Steen Svendsen et al. (1996),
Managing the Future, The
Copenhagen Institute for Futures
Studies, Copenhagen, pp. 30-35*

Disadvantages

The principal problem with quantitative analyses appears to be a tendency for some people to accept them as a kind of truth about the future and not as a starting point for discussion or as a tool for inspiration.

Quantitative trend analyses are especially suitable for handling developments in a relatively stable system. There is always a fundamental question of what might drive change towards a new direction; an increasing number of dynamic forces are always likely to be acting in the field and disturb the forecast.

Furthermore, the method is not as neutral as it may appear to be. In practice, there will very often be the possibility of choosing between various projection methods, which give somewhat different results using the same data. Moreover, there can easily be problems with the basis of data e.g. quantifying “soft” areas. Using this tool risks *quantumania*, overlooking aspects which are less easy to quantify, but perhaps more significant to the future of the subject.

In general, extrapolation only describes a very narrow aspect of the future development.

Quantitative trend analyses project trends and relations of the past out into the future. This means that they are actually *extrapolations of the past*. If one makes one's decisions about the future exclusively on quantitative trend analyses, one is thus dealing with a starting point in the past.

2.2 Qualitative Trend Analyses

Presentation and Background

Qualitative trend analysis is used by all of us, at all times. Whether as single individuals or as an organisation, we consciously or unconsciously filter a great number of impressions from the world around us, seen in relation to the problems, we grapple with in everyday life: Does my education fit the future demand and my wishes for the future? Is my daughter's school giving her the tools and values she needs in her life? Does the strategy of the organisation suit the developments in its environment?

The future does not arrive ready-made overnight. Traces of the future are already out there, albeit unequally distributed among people, organisations, and countries. The art in qualitative trend analyses is to spot these traces and their consequences for the system being investigated. While quantitative trend analyses are technical exercises, qualitative trend analyses are an art form.

This section pays special attention to one of the most challenging and popular exercises in Futures work – trend spotting in relation to the overall drivers of change often named megatrends.

Megatrends can be defined as developments, which in a specific time and space setting, have the potential to change society across all societal spheres e.g. politics, economics, technology, values, social relations and across all levels of society e.g. structures, actors and individuals.

Application

Qualitative trend analyses are typically concerned with social (value/moral), institutional, commercial and political themes. Typically, qualitative trend analyses deal with issues such as: What is the future of trade unions? What is the future of political parties or NGO's? What is the future of the entertainment business?

Qualitative trend analyses are applied to most areas, as is the case with quantitative trend analyses.

It is common to focus on *change* in qualitative trend analyses. More of the same is less interesting and would often be better dealt with by quantitative analyses.

Megatrends are by definition applicable to all areas within the explicit defined time and space setting. At the same time, it is important to be aware of the interaction between the defined megatrends and counter-trends.

Advantages

Trend analyses are used as early warning tools to pose the question 'What's in it for me?' in relation to possibilities and risks.

They are a starting point that is often needed for formulating scenarios by interpretations and looking for patterns in the material.

Trend analyses give an overview of the system.

Megatrends are relevant to all areas of Futures work. Hence, a basic toolbox in Futures work will always include an understanding of megatrends.

How to: Trend analysis

Step 1

- Develop a conceptual framework of the forces at play.

Step 2

- Look for theoretical constructs that shed light on those forces.
- Identify what is known and unknown about them.

Step 3

- Seek out any relevant information.

Step 4

- Derive an alternative future implied by the examination of that system.

Joseph F. Coates (1996), An Overview of Futures Methods, in The Knowledge Base of Futures Studies, vol.2, DDM Media Group, Australia, pp.63-65

Disadvantages

Trend analyses rely strongly on the observer at all stages of the analysis. To reduce socio-cultural bias, it is advisable to use a highly diversified workgroup in trend spotting.

It is not always possible to distinguish fads from long-term trends.

Megatrends are extremely broad. They are useful for discussing the basic setting, but we often need much more detail.

Megatrends may cause important backlashes. For example, ethnic rivalry may be seen as a reaction to globalism – trends and counter trends.

How to: Identify megatrends*Step 1: The setting*

- Assumptions regarding time and space are laid out.

Step 2: Defining societal spheres

- Society is categorized by defined and workable parts. The categories could be: Authority, wealth, communication, production, technology and science, social relations, cultures and values.

Step 3: Trends in each sphere

- A set of trends in every category is created based on all possible kinds of information. It is a working process based on an equal amount of research, common sense and imagination.

Step 4: Pattern in each sphere

- The most general trend or pattern in each sphere is defined by content analysis e.g. Grounded Theory.

Step 5: Identifying megatrends

- The qualitative changes crossing all spheres are identified as megatrends.

Specific Megatrends

A set of megatrends focusing on qualitative changes in the knowledge producing countries over a 10 year horizon has been developed by The Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies (CIFS):

- Globalism – one world many cultures.
- Empowerment - individualism and the burden of freedom.
- The Era of Knowledge Technology (digitalisation, information processes, biotechnology, genetic engineering).
- Knowledge Capital (competence and networks).
- Immaterial Wealth.
- Ethos – authority of the future.

Steen Svendsen (ed.)(2000), Fremtidens Fagbevægelse (The Trade Union of the Future), The Danish Confederation of Trade Unions, Copenhagen, pp. 40-44.

2.3 Delphi Survey

Presentation and background

The Delphi method was developed by RAND Corporation in the 1950s. It is one of several methods for gathering information, or notions, from a panel of experts about the timing, probability, importance, implications, trends, and events regarding the subject under consideration. Delphi surveys are an anonymous process, carried out over several rounds.

The main result of the method is typically a consensus forecast. Other results are additionally quite important. For example, how diversified the view is in the field. If something appears highly contentious, perhaps the survey has to be followed up by scenarios – while if all experts agree about certain trends, then perhaps it would be more fruitful to focus on other uncertainties in relation to the field.

Selecting the right panel of experts is crucial. One way of setting up the panel is to start at several places within society in order to achieve a suitable spread between the participants. This may be especially important if there is a homogenous view among the dominant institution(s) within the field in question.

Furthermore, it is advisable to use a broad definition of “experts”, like “everyone who has something to contribute in the field” or stakeholders. Participants can be asked to rate their expertise themselves in relation to the individual questions they answer.

Application

Though any area or concept can be examined by a Delphi survey, it is especially useful within technological forecasting. For instance, for determining expectations regarding possible technological breakthroughs i.e. ‘What will happen if?’, as well as ‘When will this happen?’

To some futurists, the Delphi survey is considered a technique of the last resort - only to be used where there is no other way to base a forecast. “Where there is insufficient data, no reliable time series or a high probability that existing patterns will change [...] or in a field where external factors such as political decisions are likely to have a determining effect”⁶.

Another way of applying this method is to combine it with other futures methods into a comprehensive forecasting output.

Advantages

The method is expected to produce more reliable forecasts than those of an individual expert.

Delphi surveys, and similar methods, can be run electronically, using the possibility of web technology to deal with questionnaires.

It is often interpreted as scientific i.e. it gives authority and legitimacy based merely on the participants.

Disadvantages

The Delphi survey has a number of similar problems to other types of expert evaluations, including:

- Over-pessimism in some fields (typically with regard to basic breakthroughs).
- Over-optimism in other fields (typically with regard to implementation).
- Lack of imagination ensuring the inclusion of structural alterations, which partly take place for other reasons, and partly are generated by modifications on the analysed field.

It can be difficult to define who may actually be qualified to be designated as an “expert” regarding long-term development.

The endeavour in the direction of consensus-forecasts is not always expedient. It can be more stimulating to focus on the extremities.

⁶ Graham H. May (1996), *Foreseeing, Managing and Creating the Future*, Adamantine, London, p. 180

The moderator can exert a very strong control over the content. Practical control is required in order to create synthesis, but at the risk that the form of presentation of the synthesis and the questionnaire actually distorts the expert panel's attitude, through the organisers' personal "filter".

How to: Set up a Delphi survey

Step 1: Determine the overall problem formulation

- With group discussions etc, if necessary.

Step 2: Appoint an expert panel

- Typically based on a multi-step process. One way is to have the first person nominated nominating the next. From 10 to 50 people are recommended.

Step 3: Outline the questionnaire

- Clarity of the process and purpose of the Delphi.

Step 4: The questionnaire is sent out

- The questionnaire is sent out and the feed-back is analysed.

Step 5: Rounds of questions and feed back

- The results are arranged and presented both in the form of an overview of the actual assertions and in the form of a short summary of the individual arguments for these assertions. Data are indicated with both median value, 1st quartile and 3rd quartile, so that the individual participant can see where his or her assertion is placed in comparison with the other participants. It is determined which participants have extreme evaluations. They are requested to give reasons for their evaluations in later rounds. Finally, the respondents are asked to answer the original questions again. The phases are repeated several times - at least twice.

Step 6: Concluding report to participants

Steen Svendsen et al. (1996), Managing the Future, The Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies, Copenhagen, pp.19-21

2.4 Scenario Methods

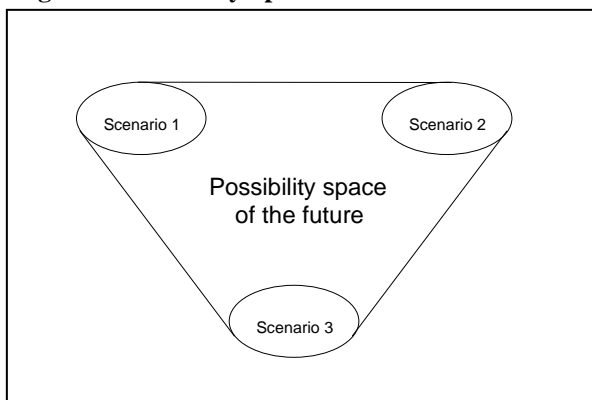
Presentation and background

Up to 1970, Futures work and planning were primarily based on traditional extrapolative methods. With the significant societal changes and the growing speed of the change, the view of the future and the methods changed too. The future was no longer just an extrapolation of the past. The future was considered uncertain. With this new focus, there was a serious need for developing new techniques. Scenario methods became one of these techniques. Scenarios were first used by the RAND Corporation (Herman Kahn), later by Royal Dutch Shell (Peter Schwartz), and other multinational companies. Today, scenario methods and processes are among the most frequently used methods in the futurist's toolbox. Often scenario processes function as a way to integrate a range of other methods in a futures project.

Scenarios can be defined as “internal coherent descriptions of alternative images of the future”⁷. Coates has defined scenarios as “holistic, integrated images of how the future may evolve”⁸. Hirschorn has the shortest version, which seems to sum it all up quite well. To him scenarios are “histories of the future”⁹.

Despite the variety of specific scenario methods used in Futures work, there is consensus on the main aspects of the method. Firstly, scenarios are not predictions of the future. The aim of scenario processes is not to foresee the future, but rather to show how different interpretations of driving forces can lead to different futures. Secondly, scenarios are developed to make better decisions in the present about matters that have long-term consequences for the future.

Figure 2: Possibility Space of the Future



Scenarios are normally prepared in multiples in order to emphasise the possibility of different alternative futures. By setting up several scenarios for the future development, one is delineating a “possibility space”, within which the future development is likely to unfold. In this way, simplified, single-dimensional evaluations are avoided.

This idea is illustrated in the figure above, with 3 scenarios demarcating the “possibility space” of the future.

Application

The application of scenario methods is not so much a question of areas or subjects, but more a question of stable or unstable environments. Scenario methods are suited for a changing environment; a society in change or discontinuities; a shift in values or a shift in logic. Given the common assumption that the future is uncertain and unpredictable, scenario methods are applied to more and more areas.

The scenario method is also a mind game, envisioning different and probable futures. Therefore it is often a good idea to involve the users in this process from start to finish.

⁷ Steen Svendsen (ed.) (2000), *Fremtidens Fagbevægelse (The Trade Union of the Future)*, The Danish Confederation of Trade Unions, Copenhagen, pp. 4-5

⁸ Joseph F. Coates (1996), *An Overview of Futures Methods*, in *The Knowledge Base of Futures Studies*, vol.2, DDM Media Group, Australia, p. 67

⁹ L. Hirschorn (1980), “Scenario Writing: A Developmental Approach”, *Journal of the American Planners` Association*, 46(2), pp. 172-183

Advantages

Scenario methods and processes can be used as a:

- Strategy evaluation or checklist in relation to general planning. Is there something we might have forgotten?
- Catalyst for creating debate – internal or external to the organisation. Scenarios can be a very powerful debate creating tool. A clarification of purposes and assumptions is extremely important.
- Clarifying tool creating a common frame of reference or general consensus. This may be applicable when an organisation wants to start an internal discussion, which possibly, but not necessarily, can lead to a reformulation of strategy.
- Strategic tool outlining choices of future or as a backcasting tool starting with a preferred future and outlining scenarios from the future to the present. As a combination of the two, the scenario process can be used to describe various futures from which it is possible to choose *the one* which optimises the degrees of desirability and probability. On the basis of such a “focus scenario”, a more detailed profile or specific strategy is drawn up.

The explorative scenario method is the most commonly used scenario method. And it is typically used as an “early warning” and strategy evaluation tool aiming at pinpointing *if* and *when* specific policies or overall strategies need to be changed.

Disadvantages

It can be difficult to transform the outcome of a scenario process to concrete decisions.

The method is based, for the most part, on qualitative information and we are living in a world of quantification.

The method draws up a “possibility space” in line with the assumption that the future cannot be predicted thereby giving the decision-maker a choice of futures. Decision-makers who are used to a solid piece of advice, an opinion, or a direction do not always welcome this.

Different scenario methods

Normative scenarios - backcasting – inside out scenarios

- Defining a vision or a set of goals in the future and outlining different pathways from the goal to the present.
Normative, choice driven, from the future to the present.
(Outlined further under Future Workshops)

Explorative scenarios - outside in scenarios

- Defining drivers, assessing the importance and the uncertainty of the drivers, selecting the scenario logics, and outlining the scenarios. Routine in planning and strategy.
Early warning of risk and possibilities, deterministic, from the present into the future.
(Outlined further at the end of this section)

Strategy scenarios - cross-scenarios

- Synthesis of determinism and choice; strategy and structures, creating pathways, problem solutions.
(Outlined further in the case study)

The good scenario is:

Creative

- Unlike or different from the present.

Consistent

- Probable.

Concise

- Logical and profiled.

Anchored

- Relevance, very clear on purpose and assumptions.

How to: An explorative scenario process

Step 1: The setting

- What are the central concerns, the key issues, of the users of the scenarios?

Step 2: Identify the drivers

- Identify the driving forces that are likely to have the most important influences on these central concerns of the future.

Step 3: Analyse the drivers

- Where can the drivers be reasonably predicted, what is known and unknown, the trends and the trend breaks?

Step 4: Assessment of the importance and the uncertainty of the drivers

- Identification of two or three critical factors of the central themes of the scenarios.

Step 5: Select the scenario logics

- Construct the main themes or assumptions around which the scenarios are to be built. It is important to end up with a few scenarios whose differences make a difference to decision-makers.

Step 6: Develop the scenarios

- Often done in the form of narratives that present a plausible sequence of events.

Step 7: Impact analyses

- Analyse the impact of the scenarios on the key concerns with which the process began.

Step 8: Policy implications

- Analyse the implications for policy and identify indicators that will help monitor changes as they occur.

*Huss and Honton and Schwarts quoted
from Graham H. May (1996), p.165*

2.5 Wild Cards

Presentation and Background

Scenarios cover an agreed space of probability. Wild cards lie on the very edge of, or outside, this space. Wild card exercises are tools for Futures works on the edge of what is considered probable. Wild cards are high impact low probability events.

In the late 1980s, the statement "Hong Kong will take over China in 1997" was a wild card based on the understanding that Hong Kong's market system would be introduced in China around 1997. Therefore, the fact that Hong Kong was to become part of China may only have been of interest to experts in constitutional law. Today, we must note that it is no longer a wild card. In fact, it is not improbable that the whole of China will be an open market economy. Notably, this development should at least be set up as *one* scenario amongst others.

Increasing uncertainty gives rise to the idea of using wild cards as tools in Futures work. We turn to wild card analyses when the exact sciences talk about chaos theories, prognoses go wrong, or when scenarios are too concise for the shifting logic of reality. Wild cards can be seen as an attempt to live up to a ever-changing reality.

The German sociologist Ulrich Beck has pointed out that our time in history can be defined by manufactured risks. He coins our society the 'risk society'. The proximity between risk society and a wild card society is rather close. Events in UK in the last couple of years seem to highlight this, e.g. BSE, foot and mouth disease, flooding of towns.

How to: Identify wild cards

- Extraordinary events require extraordinary approaches
- Accessing and understanding information is key
- A sophisticated, effective information gathering and analysis process is needed. Input from experts in systems behaviour, "new Sciences" as well as from many traditional disciplines. Access to a robust network of resources and constant outreach is a must.

John Petersen, Director of The Arlington Institute quoted from www.arlingtoninstitute.org,

Application

Wild cards can be applied to all areas and all settings.

Advantages

Wild card exercises can be considered as a tool for "early warning" and for general inspiration.

Wild card exercises can promote and enrich brainstorming and raise the level of ideas above the conventional ones. Wild cards are thereby ascribed a catalytic effect. They increase creativity, inventiveness and new thinking/thought processes. Wild card exercises can lead to decisive new ideas, products or policies.

Disadvantages

Calling wild cards a method is rather high-pitched. It is a part of more traditional scanning methods. In this case, scanning for the unlikely.

The exercises for identifying wild cards are based on ad hoc processes and rest heavily on the observer, which limits the possibility of validating the exercise.

2.6 Future Workshops

Presentation and Background

Future workshops is a very open process. The German, Robert Jungk, invented the concept when he conducted workshops in Vienna at the end of the 1950s. Since then, he has been a strong driving force in advocating their use¹⁰. He maintained that the process should be open, and borne out by example and verbal communication without being narrowed down by precepts and rules.

Application

The starting point for future workshops was a political objective aimed at mobilising citizens who did not normally express themselves during debates. The objective was that “the silent majority” would thus be given the opportunity to formulate their own desires and visions for the future. Typical examples of environments where future workshops have been used include housing areas, political parties, grass root movements and training institutions.

In recent years, the method has been applied to a much wider range of social environments including companies, government departments and trade unions. Jim Dator, one of the most experienced moderators of future workshops points out: “They (*the traditional institutions, ed.*) are no longer as influential, respected, or popular as they once were. They are uncertain about their current role and future mission. They wish to rethink what they are and where they are going. Many of the organisations we work with are internally divided, in turmoil, and uncertain of what to do”¹¹.

Advantages

As pointed out, this method has the potential to engage a wider range of people in envisioning their “future states” than with other methods.

It is a method founded on participation. Participation is a desirable and necessary quality in most Futures work.

In dealing with the preferred future, it is a viable alternative to the many methods focusing on the probable futures.

Disadvantages

The method can be regarded as too “soft” or emotional to some people, thereby risking a breakdown of the entire process.

It can be a rather negative experience to participate in a future workshop if it is not followed-up by concrete implementation or actual change in line with the conclusions.

Jim Dator points out, in relation to The Fantasy Phase (see box), that it is important that each person’s initial ideas about her preferred future be challenged, broadened, deepened, and strengthened. Otherwise, these initial ideas are almost certainly only going to be projected fears or hopes of the past or present i.e. they may not have much relevance to the future *per se*¹².

¹⁰ R Jungk and N Mullert (1987), *Future Workshops: How to Create Desirable Futures*, Institute for Social Inventions, London

¹¹ Jim Dator (1996), *From Future Workshops to Envisioning alternative Futures in The Knowledge Base of Futures Studies*, vol.2, DDM Media Group, p.162

¹² Jim Dator (1996), *From Future Workshops to Envisioning alternative Futures in The Knowledge Base of Futures Studies*, vol.2, DDM Media Group, p.165

How to: Future workshops

In the **criticism phase**, a “balance sheet” is made of the present situation. All forms of criticism are welcome. This means the participants can air their frustrations, and at the same time, they become aware that the others also have criticisms. The articulated dissatisfaction is an important step out of a possible paralysis of action.

The purpose of the **fantasy phase** is to formulate desires and aspirations including those which appear to be completely impossible. Here, it is a matter of catchwords such as:

- to think the unthinkable,
- to meet the irrational and “mad” with an open mind,
- to be receptive for all possible interests and information and
- to risk errors and fiascos.

Established ways of thinking must be challenged in this phase.

Thereafter, the purpose of the **realisation phase** is to confront the hopes with reality, thereby creating an awareness about what can be done and how. It is a question of what forms of resistance and barriers must be overcome.

Jungk and Mullert indicate that the size of the group should not exceed 15-25 persons, and that the future workshops should ideally run over two to three days.

R Jungk and N Mullert (1987), Future Workshops: How to Create Desirable Futures, Institute for Social Inventions, London

3.0 Case Study: The Strategy Scenario Method Applied to the UK Voluntary Sector

In this case study four scenarios for the future of the voluntary sector will be outlined by applying the strategy scenario method to this sector. The term “voluntary sector” is used in its broadest sense as a reference to organisations and activities in the space between the public and the private sectors. It is a very diverse field, including among others large international charities, small community groups, arts organisations, trade unions, trade associations, charitable trusts, and sports clubs.

The Method

In line with the growing popularity of scenario methods and processes in general, there has been a growing wish to combine the structural, deterministic elements in the explorative scenario approach with the strategic elements in the normative approach (see 2.4 Scenario Methods). The strategy scenario method is intended to do that.

In principle the strategy scenario method is quite simple: Analyse the structural surroundings of the system under investigation and identify two pairs of opposites, which are crucial to the system. Then draw them up as a *cross*, and four scenarios will arise, one in each quadrant. Analysing the surroundings and identifying the axis can be a rather challenging exercise facilitated by various methods, e.g. trend analyses, Delphi survey, megatrends analyses.

The strategy scenario method

Advantages

- It is a swift method - obviously depending on the amount of existing background research
- It is immediately understandable
- It is good for analysing conditions, which, on the face of it, appear to be paradoxical
- It contains the ability to combine determinism (the axis) and choice (the concrete strategy in each quadrant in the figure).

Disadvantages

- It is two-dimensional. With three-dimensions (eight pictures) clarity is lost.
- Differences or expressions for a scale delimit the axes.

*Steen Svendsen et al. (1996),
Managing the Future, The
Copenhagen Institute for Futures
Studies, Copenhagen, pp 46-50*

The Case: The Future of the UK Voluntary Sector

The voluntary sector is challenged, as is other sectors of society, by a range of overall changes in society – by a range of megatrends. The following megatrends are mentioned in several studies of the sector: Individualisation and the consequences for solidarity and family relations, ageing of the population, increased time pressure, changing values, changes in the organisation of work, and the changing relationship between the state and society¹³.

More specifically, the future of the voluntary sector has recently been in the media headlines and the focus of political discussion in the UK. With the Chancellor's comments that “the next five years will witness the biggest transformation in the relationships between the state and the voluntary sector”¹⁴ the debate was set in motion.

This case study concentrates on the changing welfare environment and the relationship between the state and the voluntary sector in the future. The focus is to outline some possible strategies for the voluntary sector by applying the strategy scenario method to the setting.

¹³ The Salvation Army/The Henley Centre (1999), *The Paradox of Prosperity*, The Henley Centre
Anders Hede et al. (2001), *Velfærdsbevægelsen (The Welfare Movement)*, House of Mandag Morgen, Copenhagen
Justin Davis Smith (1997), *The 1997 National Survey of Volunteering*, The National Centre for Volunteering

¹⁴ BBC News, 5-4-2001, news.bbc.co.uk

The aim is to give an inspirational input to the debate – as well as illustrating the practical use of the strategy scenario method.

The Axes

As pointed out, this method deals with both structures and strategies. The most crucial structural dimensions are identified and drawn up on axes. Then, the strategies are defined in relation to these axes. Focusing on the future welfare environment and the relationship between the state and the society, the two axes are defined. One axis is *values-orientation versus utility-orientation*. The other is *public/regulation versus private/market*. These axes are deliberately broad and inclusive, corresponding to the wide range of changes in this field and the broad definition of the field in this case study.

The dimension *values-utility* relates to the value foundation of the state, society and voluntary organisation. A value-orientated voluntary sector is first and foremost influenced by the ideal. The voluntaries do what they feel should be done. A utility-orientated sector is influenced by a much more narrow ends-means rationality. The voluntaries do what works.

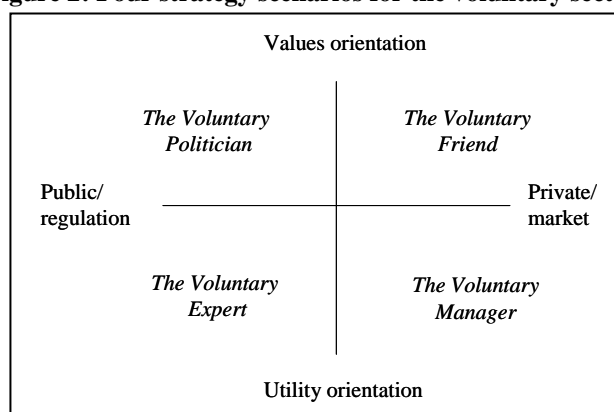
The dimension *public-private* relates to the specific societal arena in which the voluntary organisation's work takes place. This could be close to the public sector or the private market.

The method is based on the idea that each of the four scenarios is probable. If the voluntary sector, or others, do nothing nobody knows which scenario will unfold in the future.

Each of the four scenarios describes a more or less holistic picture of the future. For example, the combination of regulation and utility orientation can be described as a sort of no-nonsense society. It is a society that might sound disagreeable to some people, but appealing to others. The point is not whether one likes it or not, but whether it is a possible future. In the no-nonsense scenario, it is rather obvious that the *Voluntary expert* is a workable strategy and vice versa with the other three scenarios and related strategies.

The axes delineate a space of possibility for the future of the voluntary sector. Inside this space, four strategy scenarios for the voluntary sector, one in each quadrant, are created.

Figure 2: Four strategy scenarios for the voluntary sector



The Voluntary Politician

This is a political scenario where the voluntary organisation defines itself as an interest organisation, which aims to bring about changes in public service politics. These kinds of voluntary organisations have played and still play a vital role in the democratic process. Voluntary organisations are often faster and better than political parties at defining problems and developing measures aimed at political reform.

This scenario could, however, become increasingly problematic in the future. Already today, the welfare societies in the Western world suffer under an enormous pressure, partially created by an ever-increasing number of interest organisations. Further, a great number of the new demands on the welfare society, which relate to avoiding social disintegration in a broader sense, can only be solved partially through public services.

Public services can only to a certain extent counteract loneliness, ethnic conflicts, and fear of crime. Likewise, there is a great risk that traditional interest group arguments, where the victims represented are victims of a cruel and unjust society, can backfire. Very few problems in today's world are this simple and at the same time the argumentation could nurture a victimisation culture, where the "victims" own resources will systematically be ignored.

The Voluntary Expert

This is an expert-scenario, where the voluntary organisation accepts commission from the public sector for implementing specific public politics which are in line with the organisation's own values. If the expert-organisation influences political decision-makers this happens on a professional level. Also, this scenario represents a continuation of a classical historical tradition. Large parts of the modern Western welfare societies are developed and tested in voluntary organisations, which from the onset produced privately funded welfare services. Since then, this kind of organisation has to a larger or smaller extent become an integrated part of the public services system.

The Voluntary Manager

This is a commercial scenario, where voluntary organisations perform professionally on the "market for good causes" in the hunt for economical contributions. The modern, professional charity organisations and the new environmental organisations follow this scenario to a great extent. This kind of organisation can be difficult to tell apart from genuine for-profit organisations. It is a scenario, where the voluntary organisation comes very close to commercial organisations - and vice versa. There are a great number of examples of commercial corporations, which are engaged in voluntary work. They are investing significant resources in achieving status as "model citizen" and as a strong "social partner" in the local community. The difference between the concepts of being a member of an organisation and a consumer, between employee and citizen is reduced.

It is a future, where media can play a vital role in everybody's hunt for the exclusively good cause. Additionally, a future in which the voluntary sector survives by being ever present in the media picture and contributing with new ideas.

The members' task is often to be passive contributors to a management, which both outlines and implements the organisation's activities.

The Voluntary Friend

This is a social capital scenario. Voluntary organisations are widely acknowledged as central creators of social capital in society. Social capital here is, meant in its broad sense as trust and network between citizens in a society. Social capital creates cohesion on the micro level in a society and the precondition for an enlightened public debate. The starting point is the members' own voluntary work. This work holds significant welfare gains in the form of altruism, personal development and strengthened networks for the volunteers. In both cases added values, which a public sector, even with the best ambitions, will find very difficult to create.

Classical charity organisations are close to this scenario along with an exceptionally broad host of organisations from the field of sports, culture, community development, self help and social gatherings. This type of organisation has almost unlimited growth potential as they cover the requirements of practically all citizens. In fact, this type of organisation becomes increasingly important with the growing individualisation in society, exemplified, among other things, by the appearance of a reflective negotiation moral. To put it simply, modern, individualised citizens need others to negotiate their identity and moral values with. We are not shaped in an isolated vacuum. These are also the types of organisations, which without comparison, are the

best at counteracting the victimisation culture and further develop the members' strengths and resources.

The Strategy Scenario Method as Discussion Tool

In the work with the strategy scenarios, the individual voluntary organisation could promote a further debate around the following questions:

- Which strategy scenario are we closest to today?
- Which strategy scenario do we want to identify ourselves with in the future?
- How do we get from today's voluntary sector to the one we want in the future?

And finally, is it possible to relate to all the strategies? No. The four scenarios are not mutually exclusive, especially for the larger voluntary organisations, which can carry elements from all four scenarios. But in everyday work, there are very significant differences in the values, competencies, prioritisation of resources, external profiles and degrees of internal democracy, which apply in the four scenarios. Fundamentally speaking, they represent four different value bases.

It is not necessarily a question of discharging some of the strategies, but rather a question of choosing which strategic scenario is more important than the others.

Perspectives

The connecting theme of the many aspects of Futures work touched upon in this report is that Futures work is related to our views of the future. In this section, the fundamental shifts in and perspectives of the views of the future in mainstream Futures work will be connected to the changes in approaches, methodologies and tools in Futures work.

In the early 1970s, there was a fundamental shift from viewing the future as predictable to a view focusing on the probable and possible futures. It can be argued that we are in the middle of a similar shift in the view of the future today: A shift from emphasising the many alternative futures and the 'space of possibility' to emphasising the preferred and created future. A shift to a view in which uncertainty as well as an open view of future possibilities is the starting point - not the outcome.

Back in the 1960s it was still believed possible to make five-year projections of future developments. Those were the golden days for the 'ruler techniques' i.e. the linear extrapolations, and of the belief that tomorrow would resemble yesterday. Projections were carried out on the basis of planning towards a 'given' future. Futures work was often seen simply as long-term planning.

During the 1970s, many people changed their view of the future. This was precipitated by significant societal changes and, specifically, by the first oil crises in the early 1970s. Suddenly the future did not seem as predictable. On the contrary, it was uncertain. There was no longer only one probable development but several probable and possible futures. In light of this new view of the future, there was a serious need for deriving the future from the past and for developing techniques to handle the dynamic uncertainty. The scenario method, already used in military strategic research centres, was applied by Rand Corporation, Royal Dutch Shell, and others to new settings. Scenario methods are tailor-made for a time when the future is synonymous with uncertainty.

Since the 1970s, the mantra of Futures work has been 'the future is uncertain'. This will not necessarily be the focal point of Futures work in the years to come but rather an obvious assumption. It is not that the future is suddenly going to become more settled or more predictable, thus bringing Futures work back to the times of the naïve ruler techniques, rather that our view of the future is going to change. The observable trend is a change in focus: From a focus on the uncertain future to a focus on the desired future; from what is possible and probable to what is wanted. This view marks the many companies and public institutions already engaged in formulating their unique vision, ethos and mission, and outlining their desired future in relation to these, and it marks the many people engaged in creating their identity, choosing their destiny. This view is also well-known in political environments occupied by outlining and fulfilling a specific political aim.

It is a view of the future that emphasises the need to guide people and actors towards a future of countless possibilities and choices by developing better and more precise methods for defining what they want in the future and how they can achieve this.

The view of the future, and the paradigms in mainstream futures work, has shifted from viewing the future as certain to viewing the future as uncertain and now to viewing the future as created and chosen.

In the table overleaf, these three views are compared and seen in relation to the themes - purpose, principle, approach and methods - presented throughout this report.

Table 2: Views of the Future

	The Future is Certain “The Future”	The Future is Uncertain “Futures”	The Future is Created “The Preferred Future”
Behaviour	Passive adaptation	Proactive	Visionary
Purpose	To identify consequences	To outline possibilities and risks	To outline pathways, backcasting
Principle	Predicting the future	Outlining alternative futures	Defining and realising the preferred future
Approach	The probable future	The probable and possible futures	The preferred future
Favoured Methods	Quantitative trend analyses	Qualitative trend analyses Exploratory Scenarios	Normative scenarios, Future workshops (backcasting, visioning)

Focusing on the preferred and created future raises new challenges for Futures work. One of the most fundamental being the balance between, on the one hand, what may actually be chosen by the organisation or the individual and to what degree, and on the other hand, what is more or less given and uncertain. This brings the classical question of the dialectic relationship between structures and actors to the forefront of Futures work.

Finally, this toolbox of Futures work has presented the methods and approaches separately in order to help the reader make use of it. In the real world of Futures work as stated earlier, the methods and approaches co-exist. The same applies to the views of the future outlined above. There has been, and hopefully always will be, several views of the future and several ways to work with tomorrow today.

Acknowledgements

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