Strategic foresight and futures literacy concepts - potentials and use cases

National Drugs Forum 2023, Building Bridges for Evidence Informed Public Policy
16/11/2023

4CF The Futures Literacy Company

What's this?

CC BY-SA https://digitaltmuseum.no/011025226998/mobiltelefon

What's this?

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30 years ago...

Motorola International 3200, first digital hand-held

Introduced in 1992

½ - 1 hour talktime

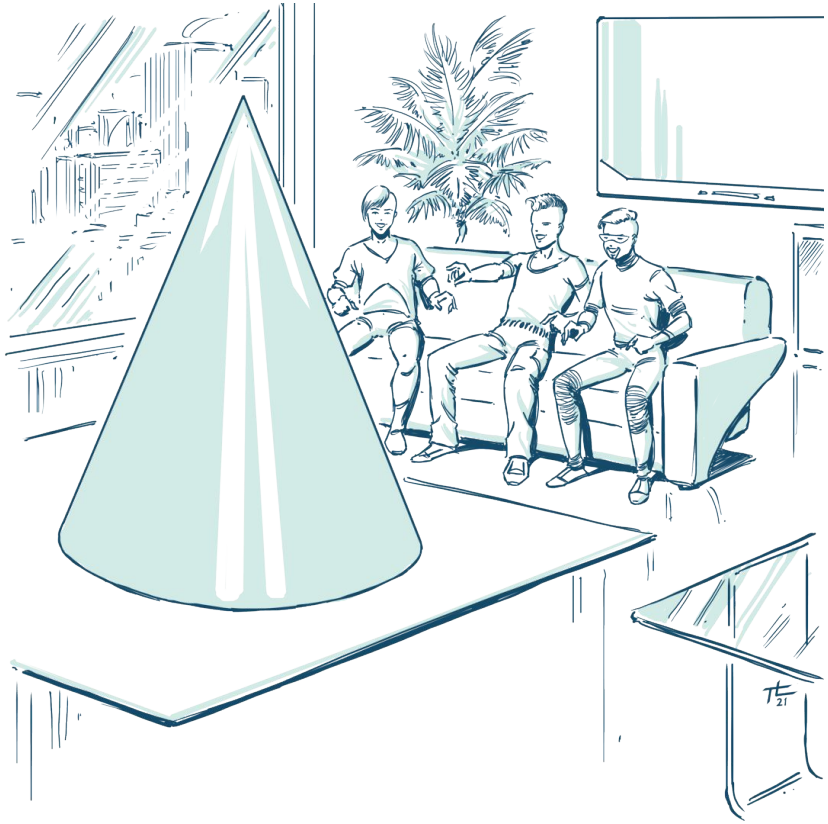
What's this?

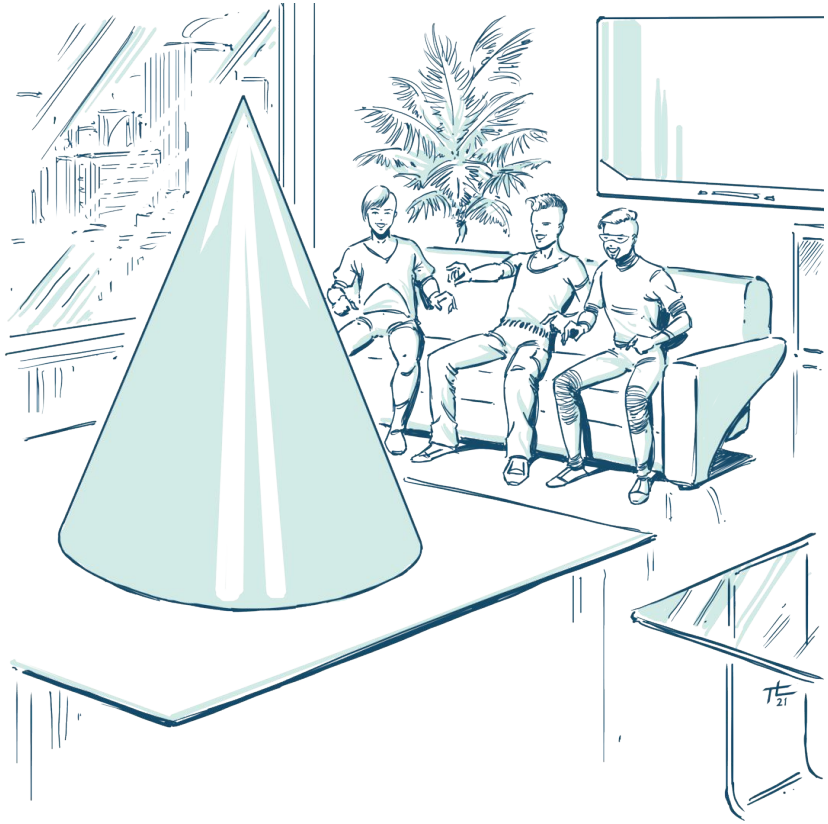
What's this?

You're living in 1992.

Someone asks you to try to imagine that you're living 30 years into the future - in **2023**.

The photo shows a very common object in 2023.
What is it???





Imagine that you're living 30 years from now, in the **2050s**.

This is a very common scene in the 2050s.

What's happening here???

The future will be.....

The future will be.....

DIFFERENT

Goal & expected outcomes of the workshop

- **Enhance Futures Literacy skills** of participants via working with the notions of uncertainty and scenarios.
- **Facilitate development of alternative scenario snapshots** of the problem substance use among young people in Ireland in a 17-year perspective, **and insights** regarding potential future threats and policy (or research) responses.

Agenda

- Introduction to foresight, futures literacy and scenarios,
- Presenting the results of the pre-workshop exercise:
  - List of uncertainties underlying the future of the problem substance use among young people in Ireland in a 17-year perspective with projections
- Launching the group scenario-making exercise.

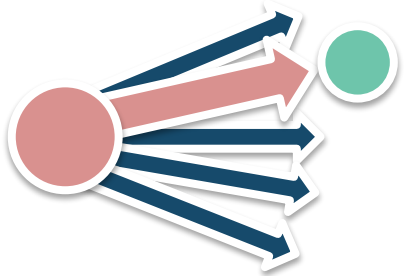
Introduction to foresight, Futures Literacy and scenarios

How to correctly think about the future?

- The future cannot be predicted, THEREFORE..
- The future is not determined, AND...
- It can be (partly) shaped by our choices, SO..

Foresight goes beyond forecasting

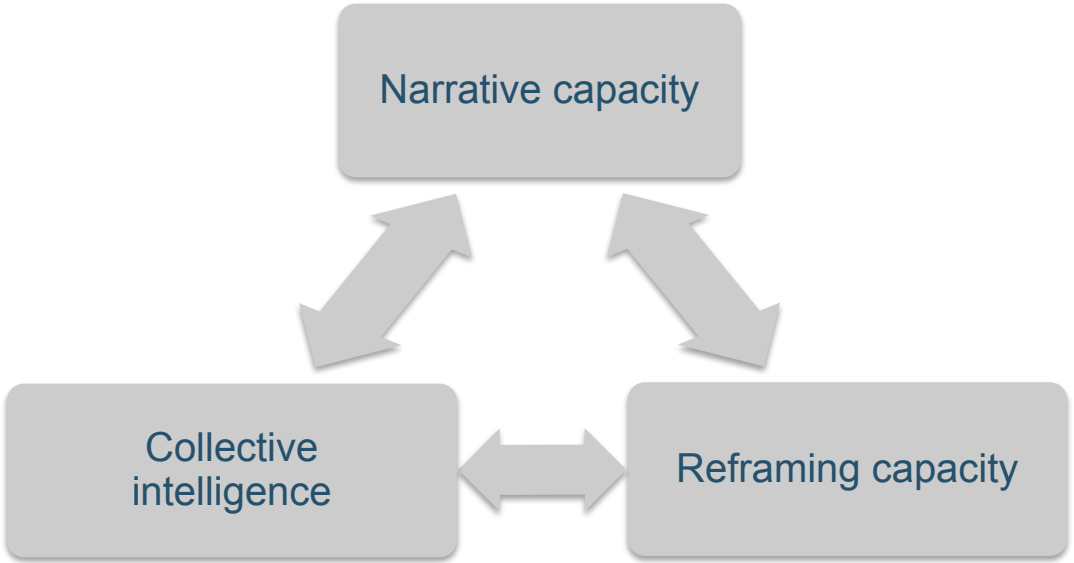
FORECAST ⇄ **FORESIGHT**



Futures Literacy

- Futures literacy originates from the **Futures Studies** & Anticipation disciplines
- It is an individual skill, which can be enhanced in the methodological process, which is called **foresight**

Futures Literacy (FL) = key skills, which allow to imagine alternative futures

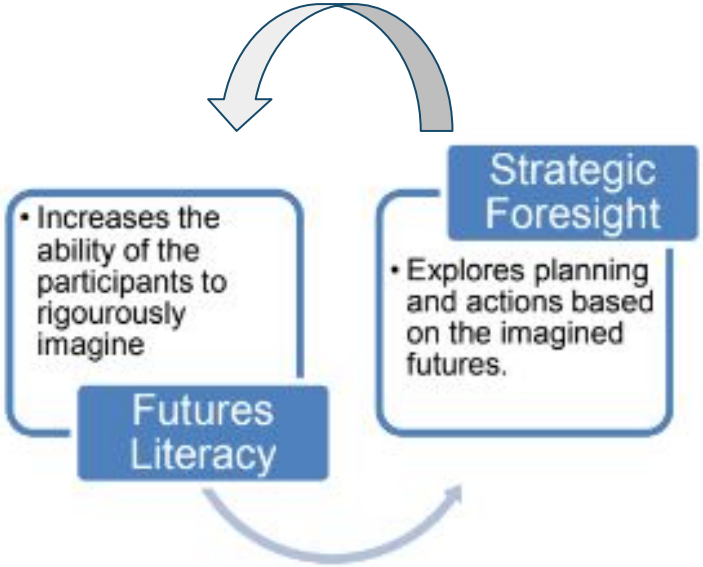


What is foresight?

- **Foresight** is an intellectual and creative exercise designed to:
  - help decision-makers develop and make choices,
  - challenge long-held beliefs and/or orthodoxies,
  - focus their resources and attention, and
  - help prevent and anticipate certain developments.

How does Futures Literacy link to strategic foresight?

- A futures literate person can answer the question:
  - "What is the possible future and how do I use it?"
- A futures literate person has acquired the skills needed to decide:
  - Why and how to introduce the non-existent future into the present decision-making.
- *A Futures Literate person does not have the ability to predict the future :)*

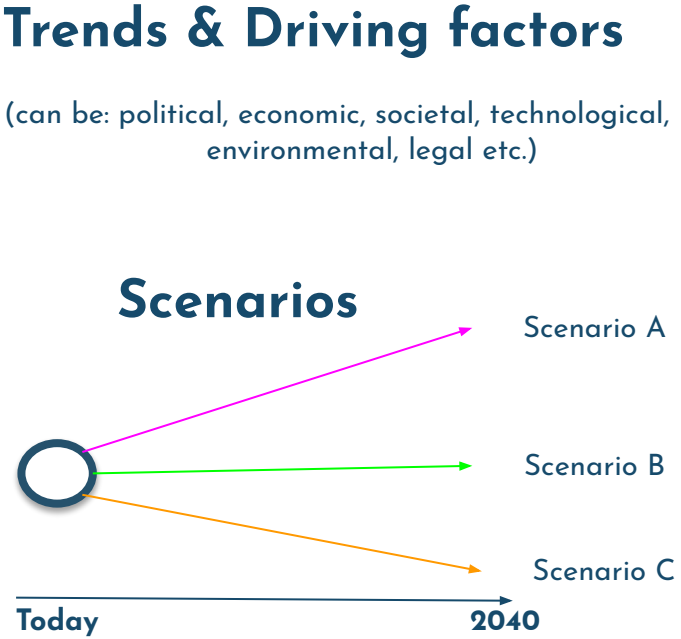


Source: OECD 2023

Two fundamentals of foresight

- 360 degree view of a given system
  - Recognising & understanding trends and other signals of change

- Anticipating alternative futures
  - Mapping out options



Source: C. Daheim (EMCDDA 2022)

Example from drugs field: EMCDDA foresight 1/4

Foresight project with Future Impacts:

- Educational material:
  - A foresight toolkit for the drugs field available online (Trend cards set, How to run a trends workshop manual..)
- Topical insights:
  - Trends towards 2040 in the drugs field
  - Three framework scenarios of the EU in 2040 (EU harmony, Barely managing, House of cards)

https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/toolkit/foresight-toolkit-drugs-field_en

Example from drugs field: EMCDDA foresight 2/4

- Foresight project with 4CF The Futures Literacy Company:
  - Pilot project to identify new emerging trends and weak signals significantly influencing the drugs field in the European Union by 2030
  - Method: Delphi study

4CF The Futures Literacy Company

Delphi Study Report "Identification of the drug-related future research priorities"

Pilot project to identify new emerging trends and weak signals significantly influencing the drugs field in the European Union by 2030

Methodology

The aim of this pilot project is to identify which of the new emerging trends and weak signals can significantly influence the drugs field in the European Union by 2030.

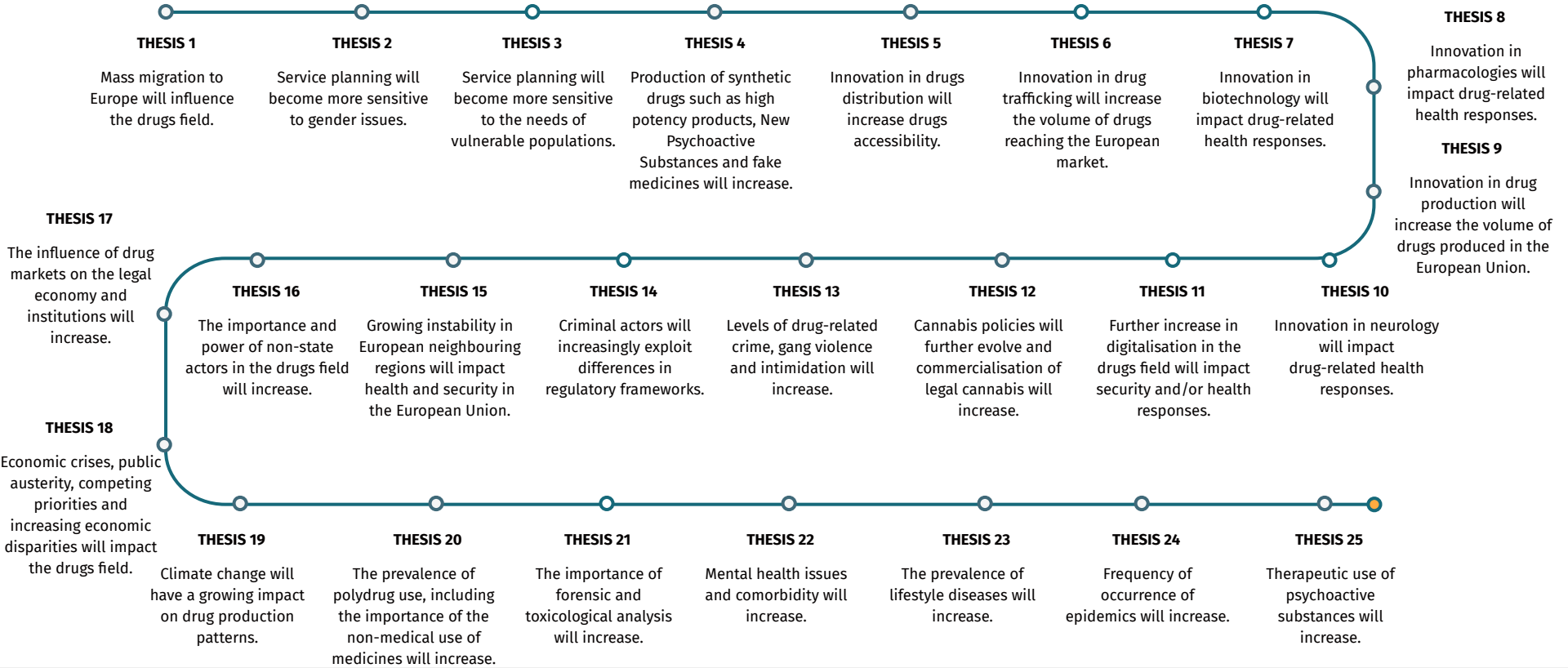
The study covered 25 hypotheses about the future, further referred to as "theses", that could influence the drugs field in the European Union. These were derived from the results of the EMCDDA Futures exercise "The future of drug monitoring in Europe until 2030" and extended via desk research covering additional relevant information sources, such as the *EU Strategy and Action Plan* on drugs 2021-25 or selected foresight reports. The theses were further discussed, complemented, and refined during three workshops with the EMCDDA representatives.

The survey included 3 questions concerning each thesis:

- assessing the expected certainty of the thesis to occur (on a metric scale ranging from 0 to 100%);
- assessing when, at the earliest, will the phenomenon described in the thesis mature, i.e. exert its full influence on the drugs field (in years);
- assessing the level of influence of the phenomenon described in the thesis on the drugs field (on the scale from 0 - 10).

The present Delphi study was conducted on the 4CF HolnyX online platform. A total of 22 selected experts were invited to join the online Delphi study. 15 experts (68%) took active part in the survey which lasted from 12 July to 22 August 2022.

TREND-BASED PROJECTIONS UNDER INVESTIGATION



THESIS 1

Mass migration to Europe will influence the drugs field.

THESIS 2

Service planning will become more sensitive to gender issues.

THESIS 3

Service planning will become more sensitive to the needs of vulnerable populations.

THESIS 4

Production of synthetic drugs such as high potency products, New Psychoactive Substances and fake medicines will increase.

THESIS 5

Innovation in drugs distribution will increase drugs accessibility.

THESIS 6

Innovation in drug trafficking will increase the volume of drugs reaching the European market.

THESIS 7

Innovation in biotechnology will impact drug-related health responses.

THESIS 8

Innovation in pharmacologies will impact drug-related health responses.

THESIS 9

Innovation in drug production will increase the volume of drugs produced in the European Union.

THESIS 10

Innovation in neurology will impact drug-related health responses.

THESIS 11

Further increase in digitalisation in the drugs field will impact security and/or health responses.

THESIS 12

Cannabis policies will further evolve and commercialisation of legal cannabis will increase.

THESIS 13

Levels of drug-related crime, gang violence and intimidation will increase.

THESIS 14

Criminal actors will increasingly exploit differences in regulatory frameworks.

THESIS 15

Growing instability in European neighbouring regions will impact health and security in the European Union.

THESIS 16

The importance and power of non-state actors in the drugs field will increase.

THESIS 17

The influence of drug markets on the legal economy and institutions will increase.

THESIS 18

Economic crises, public austerity, competing priorities and increasing economic disparities will impact the drugs field.

THESIS 19

Climate change will have a growing impact on drug production patterns.

THESIS 20

The prevalence of polydrug use, including the importance of the non-medical use of medicines will increase.

THESIS 21

The importance of forensic and toxicological analysis will increase.

THESIS 22

Mental health issues and comorbidity will increase.

THESIS 23

The prevalence of lifestyle diseases will increase.

THESIS 24

Frequency of occurrence of epidemics will increase.

THESIS 25

Therapeutic use of psychoactive substances will increase.

‘TRENDS’ RATED BY IMPACT AND CERTAINTY OVER THE NEXT 10 YEARS

Most impactful … *Least impactful*

THESIS 12
Cannabis policies will further evolve and commercialisation of legal cannabis will increase.

THESIS 11
Further increase in digitalisation in the drugs field will impact security and/or health responses.

THESIS 20
The prevalence of polydrug use, including the importance of the non-medical use of medicines will increase.

THESIS 4
Production of synthetic drugs such as high potency products, New Psychoactive Substances and fake medicines will increase.

THESIS 10
Innovation in neurology will impact drug-related health responses.

THESIS 7
Innovation in biotechnology will impact drug-related health responses.

THESIS 21
The importance of forensic and toxicological analysis will increase.

THESIS 3
Service planning will become more sensitive to the needs of vulnerable populations.

THESIS 2
Service planning will become more sensitive to gender issues.

‘TRENDS’ RATED AS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT FOR THE DRUGS FIELD OVER THE NEXT 20 YEARS BY CERTAINTY AND IMPACT

External experts

THESIS 12
Cannabis policies will further evolve and commercialisation of legal cannabis will increase.

THESIS 11
Further increase in digitalisation in the drugs field will impact security and/or health responses.

THESIS 4
Production of synthetic drugs such as high potency products, New Psychoactive Substances and fake medicines will increase

THESIS 20
The prevalence of polydrug use, including the importance of the non-medical use of medicines will increase

THESIS 22
Mental health issues and comorbidity will increase

Internal experts

THESIS 12
Cannabis policies will further evolve and commercialisation of legal cannabis will increase

THESIS 19
Climate change will have a growing impact on drug production patterns

‘TRENDS’ RATED AS THE LEAST SIGNIFICANT FOR THE DRUGS FIELD OVER THE NEXT 20 YEARS BY CERTAINTY AND IMPACT

External experts

THESIS 10
Innovation in neurology will impact drug-related health responses.

THESIS 7
Innovation in biotechnology will impact drug-related health responses.

THESIS 21
The importance of forensic and toxicological analysis will increase.

THESIS 3
Service planning will become more sensitive to the needs of vulnerable populations.

Internal experts

THESIS 6
Innovation in drug trafficking will increase the volume of drugs reaching the European market.

THESIS 3
Service planning will become more sensitive to the needs of vulnerable populations.

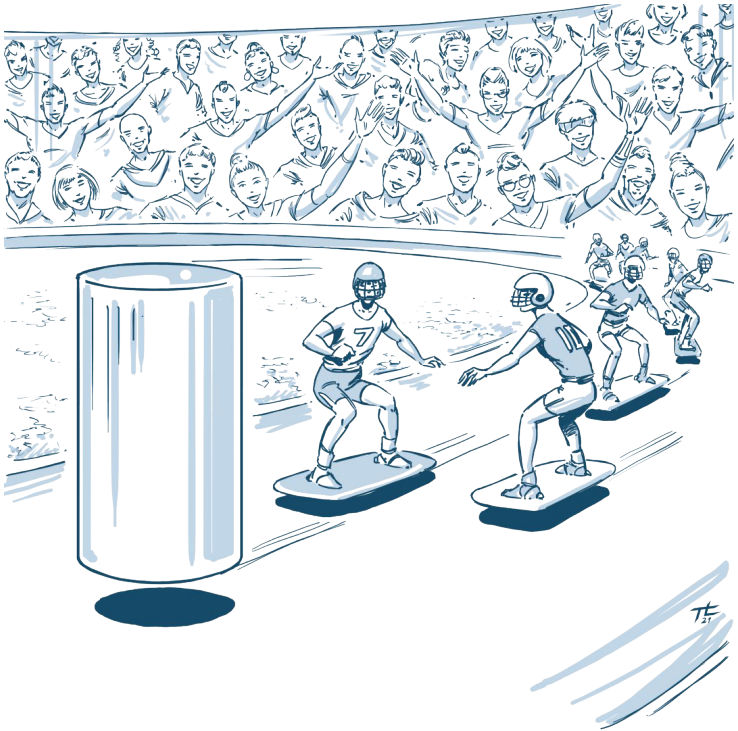
THESIS 23
The prevalence of lifestyle diseases will increase.

THESIS 2
Service planning will become more sensitive to gender issues.

THESIS 10
Innovation in neurology will impact drug-related health responses.

Why scenario-thinking

- People (still) tend to imagine the future as a continuation of the present
  - In an ever changing reality of disruptions:
    - September 11th
    - Financial crisis 2007
    - Pandemic
    - Ukraine war...



Example of a scenario experience

4CF FLEx is a set of **3 scenarios of the future**, describing hypothetical reality and everyday life in Europe in 2040.

SCENARIO **1**
THE NEW TECH GIANT

SCENARIO **2**
A WORLD WITHOUT WORK

SCENARIO **3**
LITTLE GENIUSES

What scenarios can/cannot do

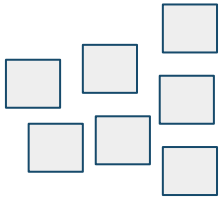
- Help people imagine and discuss future developments of a given topic or focal area.
- Test the robustness of a set of possible actions.
- Support anticipatory decision-making.
- Help reframe the present situation.

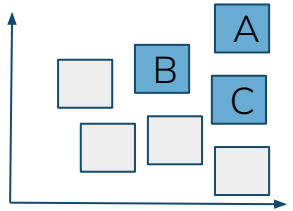
- Predict the future.
- Produce 100% comprehensive depictions of the future.
- Guarantee any choice today will actually be relevant when the future comes.

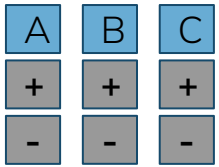
SCENARIOS => a tool, a means to an end, not an end in itself

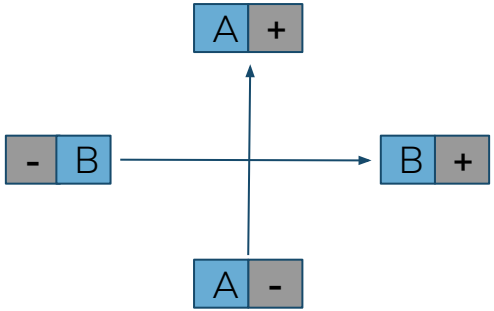
How the scenarios are developed*

1. Identifying factors that influence a given system/ topic of the analysis
2. Prioritizing key factors (drivers of change in a given system)
3. Developing projections of key factors (drivers)
4. Creating and describing alternative scenarios









** There are many approaches to scenario making*

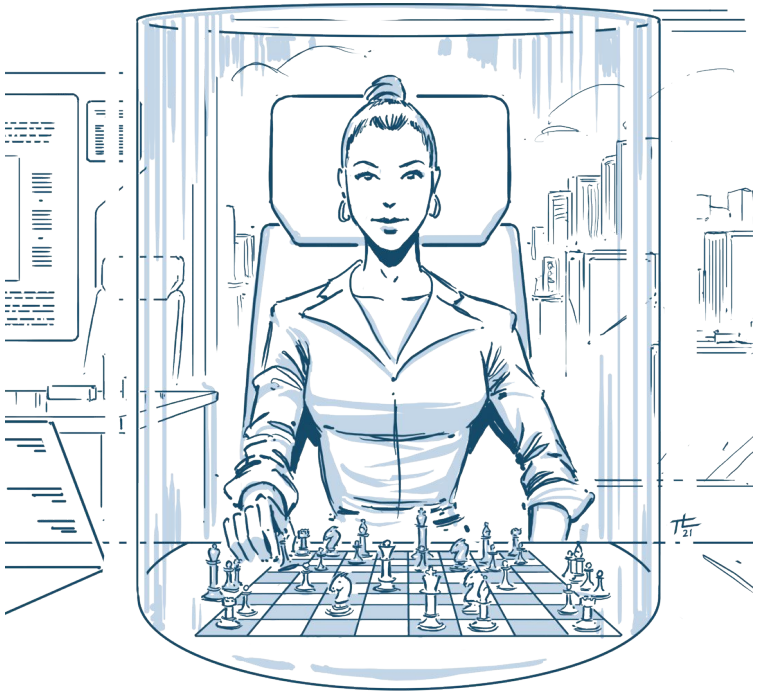
Results of the pre-workshop RvW exercise

Rip van Winkle exercise

The future of the problem substance use among young people in Ireland in 2040

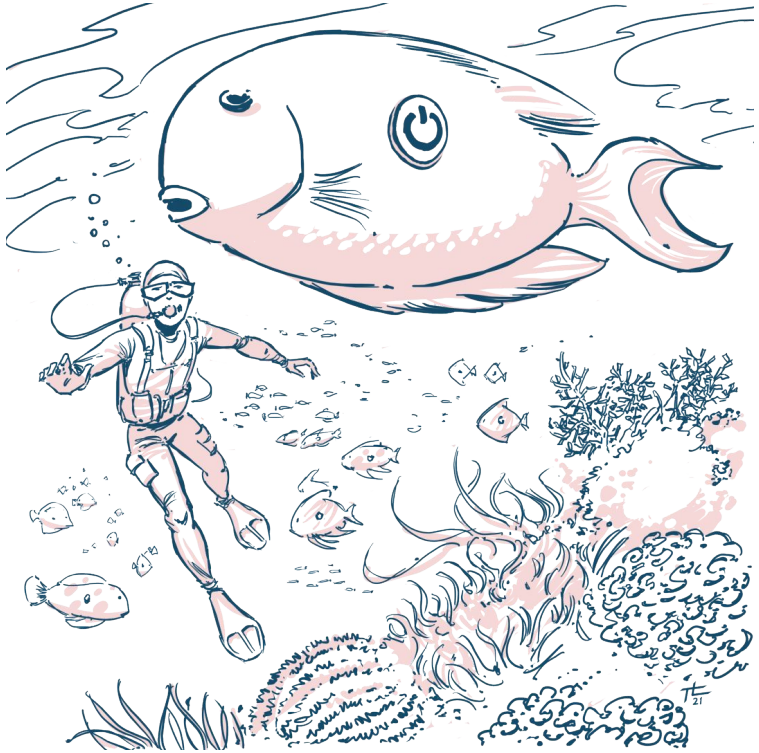
What was the task 1/2

- Imagine that you are able to talk to a person from the future – who lives in the year 2040 and is able to correctly answer any question about the world in 2040.
- You can ask this person up to **3 questions in order to find out more about the way in which young people in Ireland use problem substances in 2040**.
- Please choose your questions wisely to obtain valuable insights, which could support global strategic decisions during the next 17 years.

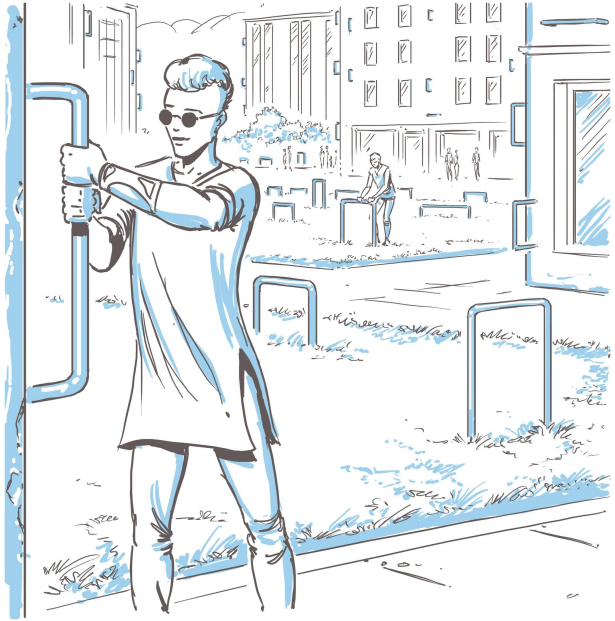


What was the task 2/2

- Each question must have **a yes or no answer** and none can be contingent on a previous question,
- **Example:**
  - Correct phrasing: Is teleportation available in 2040?
  - Wrong phrasing: How many teleportation devices are there in the world in 2040?
    If any - how expensive is it to use one?
    (doesn't have a yes/no answer; contains contingency)



Results of Step 1



Collecting RvW questions

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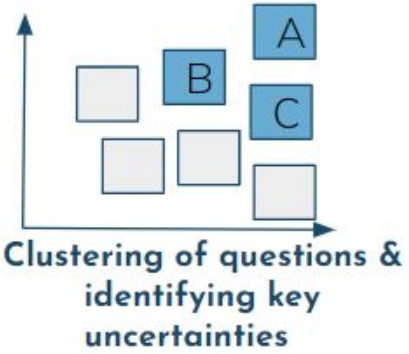
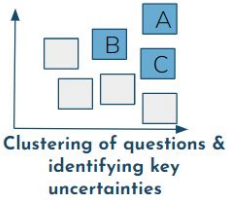
Valid YES/NO questions about the future of substance use in 2040 in Ireland

Results of Step 2

1. Substance use prevalence and trends
2. Normalization and social acceptance
3. Regulation, legalization, and criminal sanctions
4. Harm and safety
5. Mental health treatment
6. Education and prevention
7. Support services
8. Family & community
9. Funding, research & policy
10. Role of big tech
11. Cultural shift & media
12. External drivers (economic, environmental, geopolitical)
13. Crime violence and drug markets
14. Innovations in treatment



Step 2 (another view)

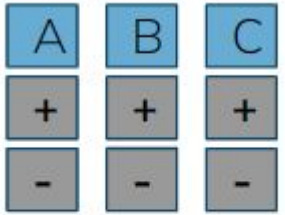


Political (policies)	Economic	Societal	Technological	Legal	Environmental	Health
6.Education and prevention 7.Support services	9.Funding, research & policy	1. Prevalence & trends 2.Normalization and social acceptance 8.Family & community 11.Cultural shift & media	10.Role of big tech	3.Regulation, legalization, and criminal sanctions 13.Crime violence and drug markets	12.External (environmental, geopolitical etc.) drivers	4.Harm and safety 5.Mental health treatment 14.Innovations in treatment

These are the key **driving factors**, which can influence the future of substance use
(*according to survey participants)

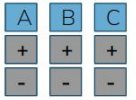
Results of Step 3

Clusters of uncertainties	Projection (Min)	Projection (Max)
1.Substance use prevalence and trends		
2. Normalization and social acceptance		
3. Regulation, legalization, and criminal sanctions		
4. Harm and safety		
5. Mental health treatment		
6. Education and prevention		

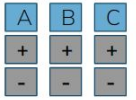


Developing projections

Clusters of uncertainties	Projection (Min)	Projection (Max)
1.Substance use prevalence and trends	Demand for synthetic drugs have collapsed and only plant-based substances are produced	Almost all substances being consumed are synthetic
2. Normalization and social acceptance	It is not socially acceptable, or considered appropriate to discuss drug consumption	It is socially accepted to consume drugs in public places
3. Regulation, legalization, and criminal sanctions	Criminal sanctions apply for possession of controlled substances, even for personal use	There are legal sanctions applying to possession or use of any substance
4. Harm and safety	Increasingly dangerous drugs have not deterred risky behaviour and poisonings increase every year	A highly regulated market provides relatively safe drugs in many outlets
5. Mental health treatment	Imposing strict limitations on medical substance use, increased control on licensed prescribers, narrowing down the list of substances, which can be used for medical purposes	Non-medical substance use increase: New cheap, safe drugs are easily available and widely used to deal with anxiety, stress, mood, etc (like vitamines today)
6. Education and prevention	There is a widespread lack of trust in prevention messages	Early intervention and prevention systems are in place and working effectively
7. Support services	Most health services are privatised	There is immediate access to specialised treatment for all
8. Family & community	Poor infrastructure and public services creates large areas of deprivation and alienation	The '15 minute city' is a reality and communities are vibrant and cohesive
9. Funding, research, policy	There is no public funding for drug-related research	Policy is based strongly on interdisciplinary research evidence

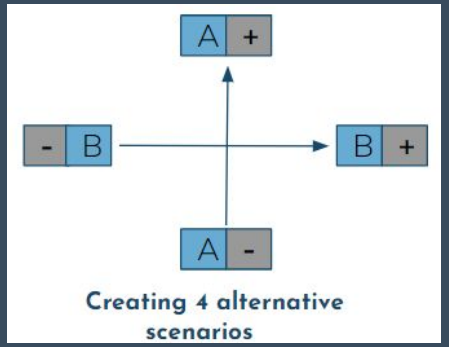


Developing projections



Developing projections

Clusters of uncertainties	Projection (Min)	Projection (Max)
10. Role of big tech	People do not have control over their personal data:. There is widespread usage of sensitive personal and medical data by big tech/AI companies to monitor users' behaviors as a predicament for automated health & treatment advice (social engineering, monopolist approach)	People have control over their personal health-related, medical personal data and their "digital footprint". They can decide to whom and which data they would like to provide access to in order to get personalised health and treatment advice. There are no big tech/AI monopolies.
11. Cultural shift & media	Development of metaverse has transferred all social activity into digital world, even substance use is happening in virtual communities facilitated by new functionalities of gaming and online dating apps	There is a massive return to real-life social encounters and interactions, people spend almost 0 time alone, new societal groups and movements are on the rise (substance-free and substance-liberated)
12. External drivers (economic, environmental, geopolitical)	Climate crisis and economic stagnation delays initiation into adulthood, career development and family formation	Climate catastrophe is averted and AI and renewable energy provides plentiful career opportunities.
13. Crime violence and drug markets	Security services tolerate operation of drug markets and OCG control large sections of urban environment	Drug markets operate at a low level with individuals making purchases online or outside locality.
14. Innovations in treatment	Substitution is no longer effective in treating dependency. Psychosocial counselling has limited impact in response to synthetic drugs	Treatment dependency is a major medical discipline, in response to need to reduce non communicable diseases. Telemedicine and personalised care is highly advanced.



Creating 4 alternative scenarios

Step 4: Scenario-making exercise in groups

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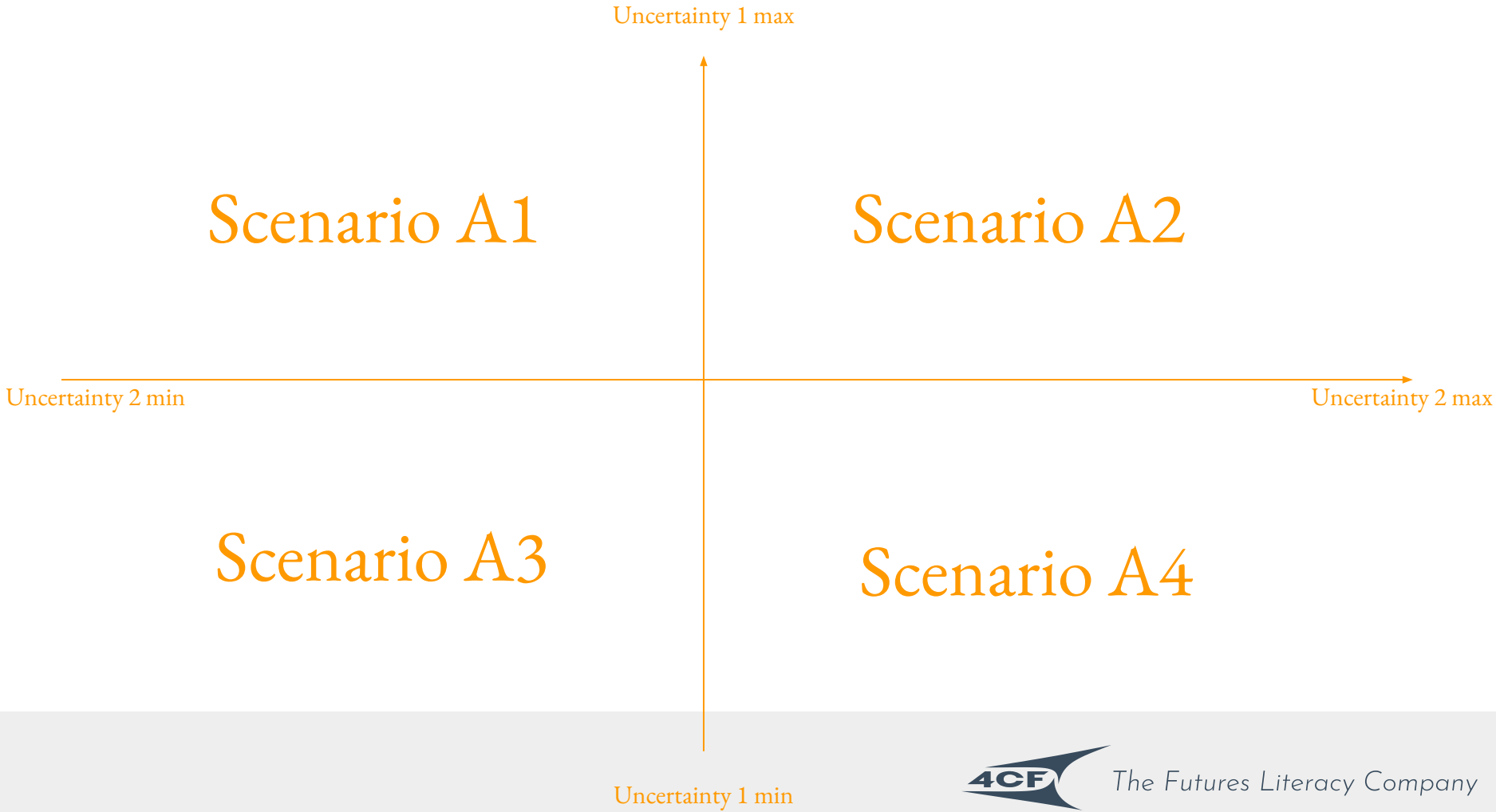
Group Work:

1. *Select 2 uncertainties*
2. *Plot the uncertainties' projections onto the 2x2 matrix*
3. *Create four hands-on scenario snapshots & give them titles*
4. *Identify min. 1 threat and min 1 policy response/ per scenario*
5. *Present your results*

SCENARIOS => Problem substance use among young people in Ireland in 2040



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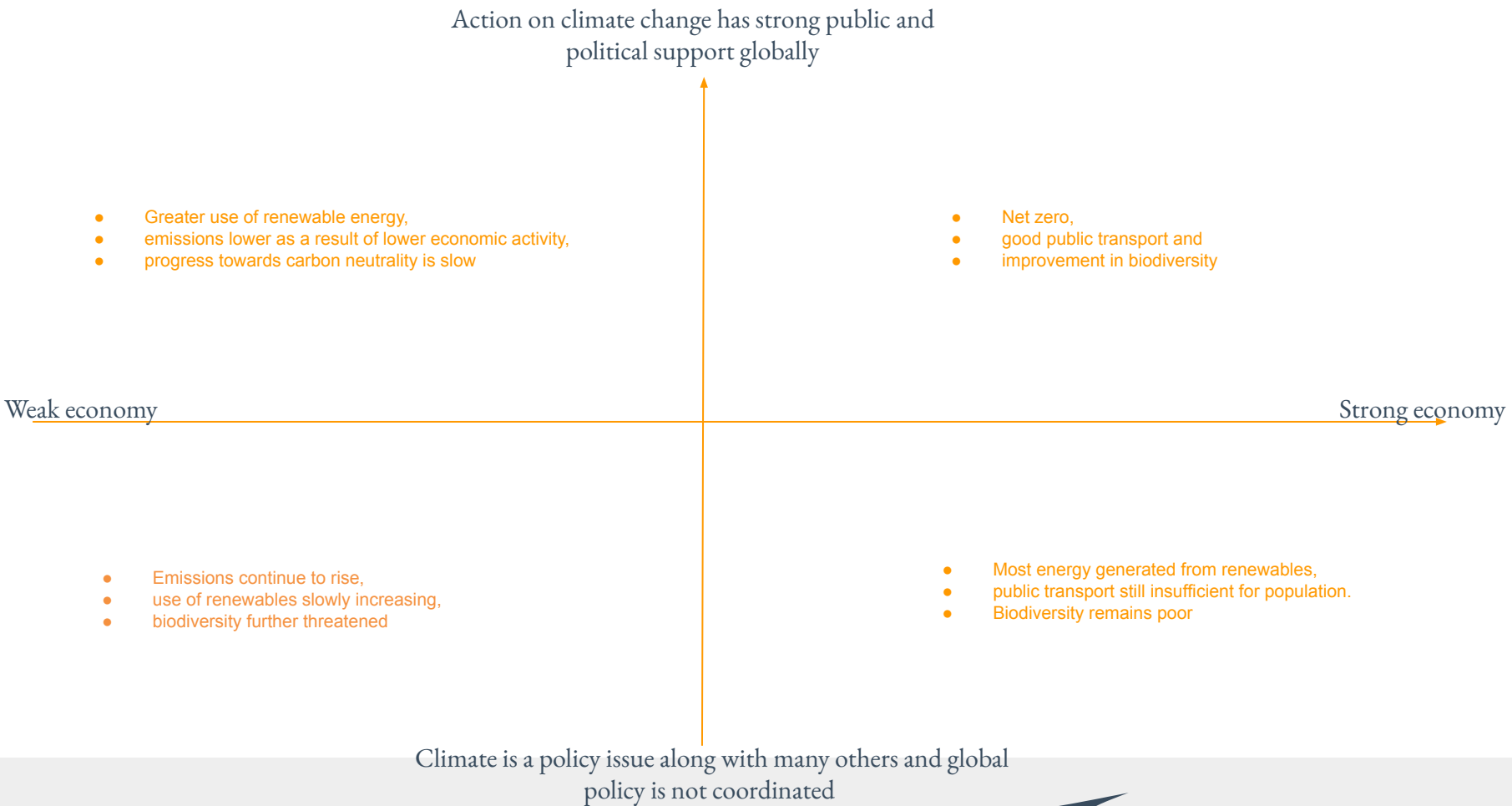


EXAMPLE 2x2 SCENARIO MATRIX

A1: Scenario title

- Key scenario characteristics in bullet points

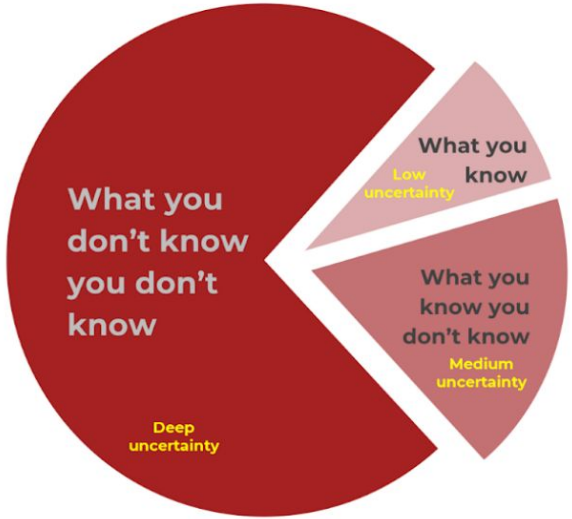
- Potential threat(s)
- Potential response(s)

[picture that illustrates the scenario]

Closing remarks

Identifying and defining uncertainty with RvW method

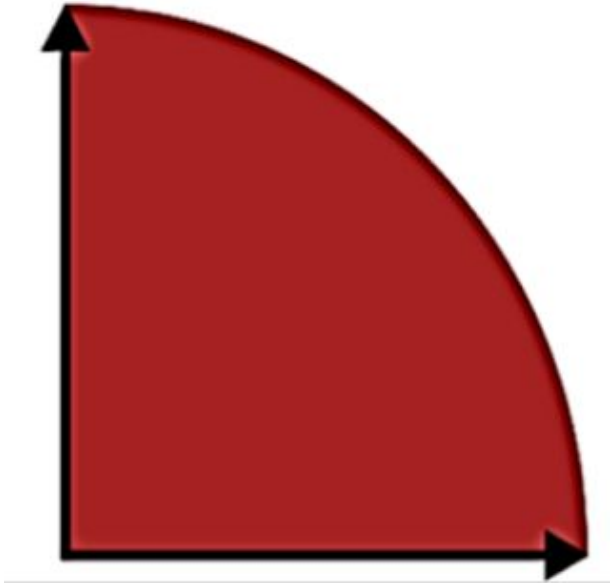
- The questions that the experts formulate reveal certain aspects of the future which they are **uncertain** about.
- The number of questions that the experts may ask is limited, forcing them to focus on the **most important** uncertainties that might influence the topic under discussion.



Linkages between uncertainty and scope of knowledge

From uncertainties to scenarios with 2x2 matrix

- Projections of two key uncertainties create a range of potential futures for the creation of hands-on scenarios.
- How to pick uncertainties:
  - selecting two uncertainties, the projections of which can be considered as the most surprising/challenging regarding the future of a given topic
  - selecting two uncertainties, which have a decisive impact on the future of the topic



Range of potential futures defined by a limited number of key variables

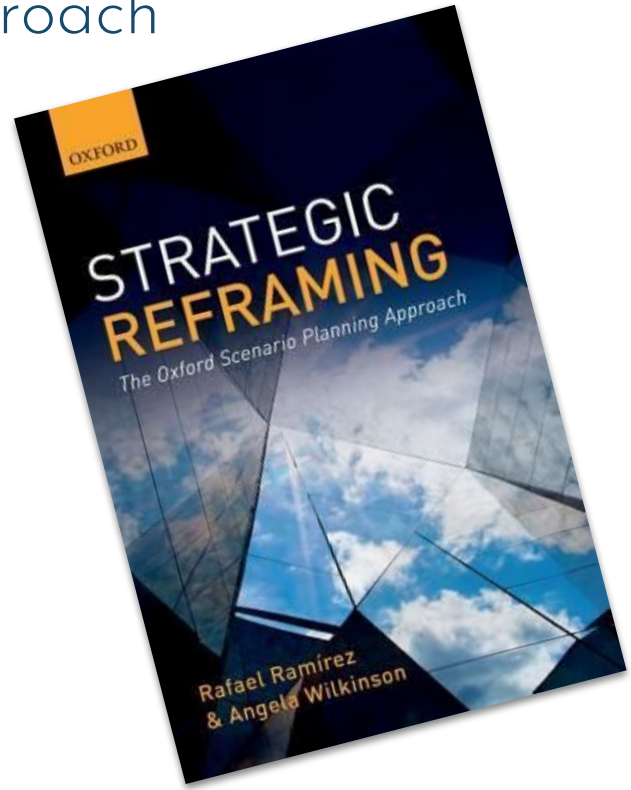
2x2 scenario matrix: pros & cons

- well-established method
- relatively easy to implement
- transparency of the process
- predetermined number of scenarios
- possibility to include any number of factors in the description
- relative flexibility

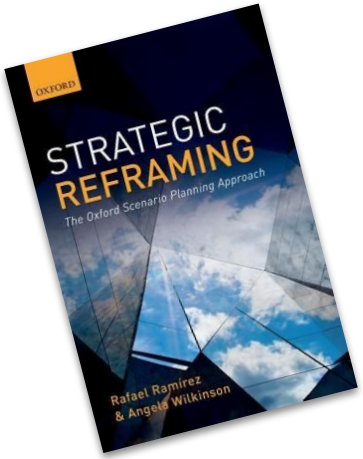
- limited, predetermined number of key factors
- "flatness", difficulty to take into account the greater complexity of the world and its sub-systems requiring an analytical approach
- difficulty to create non-obvious scenarios that break away from established assumptions about the future
- possibility of inconsistent scenarios
- difficulty to create complex and multi-level scenarios
- difficulty of creating iso-desired scenarios

Scenario planning—The Oxford Approach

1. Using scenarios in planning to enable organizations to learn faster and better about changing conditions.
2. This contrasts with the conventional approach to strategy which relies on knowing about the future.
3. Rafael Ramirez and Angela Wilkinson codified the OSPA in their 2016 book *Strategic Reframing*



Scenario planning—The Oxford Approach



Scenarios in OSPA are **NOT**:

- Data or facts
- Predictions
- About preference or probability
- About the self
- For anyone
- Truthful & timeless
- A number or projection
- A product

...but rather:

- Surfaced assumptions
- Structured fictions
- Plausible, purposeful
- About the context
- For someone
- Useful (and disposable)
- A 'reframing support'
- A dynamic process of inquiry

“

“It ain’t what you don’t know that gets you into trouble.
It’s what you know for sure that just ain’t so.“

Mark Twain

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