



Creating Scenarios to Improve Your Organization

What if you could see into the future? With this powerful tool, you can.

By Terrence Fernsler

What If? The Art of Scenario Thinking for Nonprofits

By Diana Searce & Katherine Fulton. 115 pages. Softcover. Emeryville, CA: Global Business Network, www.gbn.com.

Scenario thinking is a way to challenge the status quo by asking “What if?” It’s a way of exploring how tomorrow might look. It helps you understand what actions to take today to be ready for these possible tomorrows. Scenario thinking has been used by nations, corporations, scholars, and nonprofit organizations. The authors of this innovative book explain how nonprofits can use scenario thinking effectively for their own purposes or in their communities.

Scenario thinking requires looking far enough into the future to see new possibilities. It can be used on its own or with other strategy tools. It is used to clarify choices and create additional options before settling on a strategic plan, articulating a vision, or creating a theory for organizational change. In *What If?*, the authors explain how scenario thinking can help an organization develop a dynamic planning process or articulate inspiring visions.

The scenario thinking process begins with pondering externally-controlled changes that might

affect your organization’s work. It has five basic steps, and the authors guide you through each:

1. **Clarify** the issue at stake.
2. **Explore** the many forces that could shape this issue in the future.
3. **Combine** those forces in a variety of ways to create a set of plausible scenarios about the future.
4. **Use** those scenarios to inspire action.
5. **Monitor** shifts in the environment, and adjust your actions accordingly.

Not all organizations have the time or resources to use the entire process, or the process may not be well aligned with an organization’s desired outcomes. The authors explain how you can modify elements of the basic process to meet your organization’s needs or to use as stand-alone exercises. They provide examples of organizations that used the process, the framework each organization chose, and the outcomes.

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Scenario thinking helps organizations set strategic direction, take bold action, accelerate collaborative learning, and create usable visions. It seems especially suited to provide a reality check on strategic plans. Scenario thinking can be a powerful tool for embracing, influencing, and planning for an organization’s future, for those organizations motivated to work with it. ■

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Are You Ready to Guide Your Organization’s Evolution?

Why do organizations evolve the way they do? In *Organizational Evolution and Strategic Management* (Sage Publications, www.sagepub.com), Rodolphe Durand investigates three organizational evolution theories. Building on his findings, he develops a guideline for strategic management that rests on shaping favorable environmental conditions for an organization to evolve. He provides questions to help you identify criteria for fitness (as in survival of the fittest). After you choose these criteria, you can then decide how you will act on them. Although steeped in theory, this book can help innovative organizations control the way they evolve. □