

WHAT COLOUR ARE LAWYERS' COLLARS? SCENARIO PLANNING AND THE LEGAL PROFESSION

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A severe depression like that of 1920-1921 is outside the range of probability.
(The Harvard Economic Society, 16 November 1929).

1. The Scouting Process:

All business activity depends on the ability to plan for the foreseeable future. For a business to remain competitive and healthy, the management must be able to "see" where the business is going in the next 2 to 5 years. But in a world where the only constant is change, planning can only go so far. When a stage of uncertainty is reached, it doesn't necessarily mean that a manager should start gazing into an opaque black wall. Instead, it helps to gaze a bit into the proverbial "crystal ball".

The "glass ball" activity is not as esoteric as it sounds. It does not involve Ouija boards, or the invocation of one's long-lost ancestors via a medium. What it does involve is a mixture of information harvesting, application of common sense, creativity and imagination. It is a serious business that can be seriously fun - *scenario planning*.

But before one can attempt to create a scenario, a few initial processes must take place. Scenarios are not built out of a vacuum, and the initial step of gathering and interpreting trend setting information about the business environment is a necessity. This part of the process is known as *environmental scanning*.

Environmental scanning is the acquisition and use of information about events, trends, and relationships in an organization's external environment, the knowledge of which would assist management in planning the organization's future course of action ([Choo, 2001](#)). [Brown and Weiner \(1985\)](#) define environmental scanning as "a kind of radar to scan the world systematically and signal the new, the unexpected, the major and the minor". [Aguilar \(1967\)](#) defined scanning as the systematic collection of external information in order to (1) lessen the randomness of information flowing into the organization and (2) provide early warnings for managers of changing external conditions.

Four modes of scanning may be differentiated: undirected viewing, conditioned viewing, enacting, and searching ([Aguilar, 1967](#)). Organizations scan the environment in order to understand the external forces of change so that they may develop effective responses which secure or improve their position in the future. They scan in order to avoid surprises, identify threats and opportunities, gain competitive advantage, and improve long-term and short-term planning ([Sutton, 1988](#)). An organization's overall strategy is related to the sophistication and scope of its scanning activities. Scanning must be able to provide the information and information processing needed to develop and pursue the elected strategy. [Fahey and Narayanan \(1986\)](#) suggest that an effective environmental scanning program should enable decisionmakers to understand. Research has so far found that most managers, although they use a wide variety of sources, prefer personal over outside sources ([Goshal, 1985](#); [Correia & Wilson, 2001](#)).

Environmental scanning is important to organisations for the following practical and theoretical issues:

- The great need that managers have to predict and understand the changes that take place within the external business environment, which, as time goes by, is getting more complex and is expanding.
- The inadequate knowledge of managers, in relation to the scanning process and the lack of research data and evidence on this issue, complicates far more the study of the whole problem.
- The fact that the literature on management, in relation to the theoretical and empirical approach of the scanning process, has not devoted proper attention to this issue ([Kourteli, 2000](#)).

The benefits of scanning are not solely economic or financial. As [Murphy \(1987\)](#) and [Ptaszynski \(1989\)](#) concluded, scanning is an important component of the organization's strategic planning process, improving the ability to react to and implement change in response to external factors. Furthermore, scanning has also contributes to increased communication among the line and staff personnel of the organization, and greater

employee involvement in the decision making process. Scanning has a positive effect on the organization in the areas of communication, shared vision, strategic planning and management, and future orientation. Most significantly, scanning provides a structured process which encourages people to regularly participate in face-to-face discussions on planning issues, enabling the organisation to develop a number of strategic options that could be used proactively to cope with external change. However, the practice of scanning by itself is insufficient to assure performance – scanning must be aligned with strategy, and scanning information must be effectively utilized in the strategic planning process. An important effect of scanning is to increase and enhance communication and discussion about future-oriented issues by people in the organization. Coupled with the availability of information on external change, scanning can induce strategic, generative organizational learning.

Environmental scanning depends on the levels of uncertainty and information/knowledge availability. Organisations can either scan passively or actively. An organization that intrudes actively into the environment is one that allocates substantial resources for information search and for testing or manipulating the environment. A passive organization on the other hand takes whatever environmental information comes its way, and tries to interpret the environment with the given information ([Morrison, Renfro, and Boucher, 1984](#)). The organizational consequences of passive scanning are that we do not systematically use the information as strategic information for planning, and we miss many ideas that signal changes in the environment. Another way of looking at scanning was described by [Fahey, King, and Narayanan \(1981\)](#). Their typology views scanning as irregular, periodic, and continuous. Irregular systems are used on an ad hoc basis and tend to be crisis initiated. Periodic systems are used when the planners periodically update a scan, perhaps in preparation for a new planning cycle. Continuous systems use the active scanning mode of data collection to systematically inform the strategic planning function of the organization.

Establishing a continuous scanning system requires most in terms of effort and resources. First, a resource commitment from the senior official responsible for planning has to be secured. At a minimum, a continuous scanning system requires a professional and a support person on to devote half of their time to the enterprise. Further, a continuous scanning program requires a number of scanners who agree to rigorously and systematically review specific information resources. Assuming that the resources can be secured, the next step is to recruit and train volunteers to perform active scanning. These will then engage in looking for signs of change, for signals of potential events on the horizon, forecasts of experts, and indirect effects. The volunteers will then write abstracts on their finds, including a statement of the implications of the article for the institution ([Morrison, 1992](#)). Periodically the planning committee should meet to sort, sift, and evaluate the significance of the abstracts the scanners write. At the conclusion, the planners should summarize by sector (i.e., social, technological, economic, environmental, and political) all abstracts for use in the institution's strategic planning process. The findings could then be incorporated into a newsletter, and widely distributed.

Environmental scanning is only one component of external analysis. It is the starting point, however, from which you and your colleagues can identify trends and events in the environment worthy of monitoring. More importantly, it provides a basis for discerning the strategic direction of your institution from which you may plan far more effectively.

2. Crystal Ball Gazing:

Scenario planning is a processual approach ([van der Heijden, 1996](#)) to strategy that takes the view that the business world is indeed unpredictable, but that certain events are predetermined. Growth is often a significant factor of complexity leading to business crisis. Uncontrolled decisions giving rise to higher business assets or activity volumes may generate shortages in available resources, in spite of increasing revenues. According to [Ratcliffe \(2000\)](#) the term "scenario" describes a fuzzy concept that is used, misused and even abused, with various shades of meaning attached to it. A dictionary definition holds it as "an outline of a natural or expected course of events", but in the field of futures studies it has gained a more specialised connotation.

Decision-makers often do not take into account the evolving structure of relationships between different functional areas inside the firm, and between the company and its relevant environment. Most managers never discuss the future. They are too much focused on reducing the complexity of managing today. The implicit vision of the future they create in their mind tends to be set and unchanging. Human beings are subject to biases and imperfect reasoning about uncertainty. They tend to misperceive events that are quite unlikely and to ignore or stress other possible unpleasant outcomes. Today, business complexity has proved to be a primary cause of failure. Understanding complexity is not a matter of reducing it. It is, rather, important to deal with management complexity and unpredictability, and to foster organisational learning.

Understanding business systems does not imply the need to draw up detailed and long term plans. Planning does not usually mean learning to anticipate possible futures. It is, instead, typically seen as the work of reducing uncertainty through prediction. Decision-making based on such an approach gives an *illusion of control*. Many companies use spreadsheet simulation tools to forecast the financial implications of plans. Quite often, such analyses are based on simplistic and misleading hypotheses that can lead decision makers to dangerous conclusions. In fact, usually such tools do not make explicit interdependencies between relevant variables, delays, non-linearities and policy levers.

Scenario planning is a tool to support organisational learning and decision-making during times of rapid strategic change, when discontinuities in the business environment make extrapolation from available historical data misleading or meaningless. Through scenario planning, decision-makers are able to focus the relevant environment and to generate a spanning set of alternative futures, upon which strategic analysis and diagnosis will be developed.

Scenario planning is the use of internally consistent narrative descriptions of possible states of affairs or development in the future. Usually, alternative scenarios are developed in order to allow people to conceptualize alternative futures and to clarify possible consequences of present developments and decisions. As an approach to strategic development it first emerged following World War II as a method for military *planning*, was pioneered in the industrial field by Royal Dutch/Shell in the early 1970s under the tutelage of Pierre Wack ([Schwartz, 1996](#)), and is credited with helping Shell to brace itself for the OPEC-induced oil price hike of 1974 ([Baldock, 1999](#)). *Scenario planning* differs significantly from traditional approaches to strategic development, which have been characterized by [Kees van der Heijden](#) (1996) as either rationalistic, which involves seeking to identify the one 'optimal strategy' for an organization, or evolutionary, which suggests that strategy emerges, and can only be understood in retrospect.

Scenario planning methods are both descriptive and prescriptive. Descriptive methods, sometimes also called extrapolative, attempt to describe objectively what the future will be or could be. Prescriptive methods, also called normative, focus on what the future should be. Prescriptive methods try to help people clarify their values and preferences so they can develop visions of desirable futures. Once they understand what they would like the future to be, they're better able to take the appropriate steps to create that preferred future.

Scenarios are written as narratives-literally as stories-which typically describe a customer's experience of a transaction with a company, in each of the different scenario settings. There are two reasons for this. First, traditional methods of communication rely on tables, graphs, numbers, etc. ([Schwartz, 1996](#)), however this represents an inward focus characterized by simplistic functional analysis with little context given for these data. Without a context it is difficult for the recipient of this information to gain useful meaning or understanding. Second, stories have a psychological impact that graphs and equations lack ([Schwartz, 1996](#)); they help to explain why things happen by setting events within a customer-focused context. This outward focus also helps employees to 'connect' emotionally with the stories, as they represent a situation that is familiar to those they have experienced in the past. By contrast, it is difficult to feel emotionally attached to a set of tables, graphs and figures.

Fundamentally, scenarios are tools for ordering our perceptions about alternative futures in which today's decisions may play out.

- First, it makes us aware of potential problems that might occur if we were to take the proposed action. We can then (1) abandon the proposed action or (2) prepare to take precautions that will minimize the problems that might result.
- Second, the scenario gives us an opportunity to escape from a potentially disastrous action -- or to realize a tremendous opportunity. Either eventuality may be tentatively identified by developing a number of scenarios.
- Third, the scenario can mobilize others to get them involved in assessing a situation and planning action. People tend to become more involved in a situation when they are faced with a concrete choice. At that point, they must think about consequences and are led into the various aspects of the problem. Some writers have used the scenario as a useful technique to get people to focus on a certain problem.

Scenarios should identify key driving forces and should be tailored to those who make decisions. For example, complex methodologies should be avoided, as they discourage involvement. Although it is possible for an individual to develop useful scenarios, current scenario planning usually involves a participatory workshop that directly involves the decision-makers. This is because scenario planning is a learning tool, in

which the process used to create the scenario has at least as much and probably more to do with helping an organization learn and adapt than the final scenario product.

Scenario planning follows systematic and recognizable stages. The first stage is to isolate the decision to be made and to rigorously challenge the mental maps that shape one's perceptions. The second stage is to identify and prioritize driving forces, such as technology, economics, politics, etc. In this process one must identify predetermined elements -- those things that are almost certainly inevitable -- and one must identify the critical uncertainties -- those items that are important to the decision but extremely difficult to predict. Predetermined elements might be the location of a factory or a strict environmental regulation, assuming one's analysis shows these elements are extremely unlikely to turn out differently from one's projections. With these inputs, one can construct plausible scenario plots. These will typically be an extrapolative, business-as-usual scenario buttressed by other plausible scenarios. In the final stage, one identifies the implications of each scenario and tests possible decisions against the scenarios. If we chose X, what happens under each scenario? What happens if we choose Y? ([Wright, 2000](#))

3. The Colour of His Honour's Collar:

As an example of how scenarios can be used, let me present three for the Australian legal profession.

Successful management of law firms depends upon the ability of the senior partners to adapt to rapidly changing external environment. Unfortunately, the lead time once enjoyed by decision-makers to analyze and respond to these and other changes is decreasing. Traditional long-range planning models, with their inward focus and reliance on historical data, do not encourage decision-makers to anticipate environmental changes and assess their impact on the organization ([Cope, 1981](#)). The underlying assumption of such models is that any future change is a continuation of the direction and rate of present trends among a limited number of social, technological, economic, and political variables. Thus, the future for the institution is assumed to reflect the past and present or, in essence, to be "surprise-free." However, we know that this is not true, and the further we plan into the future, the less it will be true.

The centrality of technological change to accounts of the possible future is also not new. While the speed with which inventions are introduced that impact the content and methods of law has never been higher, we've already lived through centuries in which that speed was significant enough to assure interesting changes during one's professional career. Even the predominance of information technology in future scenarios is longstanding. Printing presses, typewriters, calculators, tape recorders, telephones, radios, televisions, copiers, and fax machines have all wrought substantial changes in what lawyers do and how they do it. The personal computer and the World Wide Web are but some of the latest entrants in an ongoing parade of increasingly impressive information technology accomplishments.

The world is embracing information technology at an alarming rate. The legal profession is no exception, but here the pace is far too slow for a healthy integration. Lawyers increasingly use email to communicate with their colleagues and clients. Major litigation and due diligence investigations depend on sophisticated database and imaging technology. Powerful online knowledge bases enhance research. Firms are implementing increasingly sophisticated practice management systems. And of course, no firm would be without word processing and spreadsheet software. The Internet is radically changing the way in which legal services are delivered. Electronic legal "products" have begun to alter the way in which lawyers market themselves and deliver services. These products are designed to complement and, in some instances, replace "traditional" legal services. The new eServices address a range of training, advisory, investigative and compliance needs. Examples include internet delivered expert systems known as "virtual advisers"-computer software that carries out work traditionally done by lawyers. In many situations major global companies can use virtual advisers in place of lawyers. Another very recent development is the virtual deal room. The radical changes which the Internet has brought in other disciplines suggest that lawyers who ignore this trend do so at their own risk.

The fact that this has to be said is indicative of the resistance the legal profession is showing when it comes to becoming "informationalised". There are two main objections that lawyers have to legal eServices. Some argue that these electronic products cannot replace the judgement and skill or the physical presence of an experienced lawyer. Paradoxically, the other objection is that increased reliance on legal software products reduces opportunities for lawyers, because clients have less need for direct consultation. The argument that eServices cannot replace the expert personal service of a skilled practitioner overlooks the real nature of much legal work. Although a great deal of any lawyer's daily work involves considerable professional judgement, much time is also expended in repetitive or "process" tasks. Clients are well aware of this, and

are becoming increasingly reluctant to pay hefty legal fees for these services. In seeking to meet clients' needs in the most effective and efficient manner possible, the legal profession will be increasingly forced to explore alternative ways of performing standardised work. In fact, in many instances these types of services can be provided to clients very cost effectively online: conveyancing ([Flint, 1999](#)); the automation of the process of discovery for Email messages. In addition, over the last two years a number of online services have been set up to enable clients to draft documents such as wills, prenuptial agreements, joint ventures and other less complex documents online. ([Schmitt, 1999](#))

The implications for lawyers of this "commoditisation" is undoubtedly threatening. And the most uncomfortable question is what proportion of standard legal work falls into this category. Is it only the high-volume, low-margin work or does it extend further? Below are three possible scenarios for the future of the legal profession. The first deals with a situation where the resistance to IT among the lawyers remains high. The second deals with a situation where lawyers adapt and adopt to the technologies. The third one deals with a situation where the technologies dispense with lawyers altogether. Many lawyers are concerned about the potential for legal eServices to impact on (decimate even) their traditional sources of revenue. Some refer to it as the "cannibalisation" of the business ([Burns, 2000](#)).

It seems safe to assume that we will soon have all the information products and services we now reasonably imagine. Effectively unlimited bandwidth will be available at modest cost. We will see the unification of media, organized around the poles of one-to-one (telephone/fax/e-mail), and some-to-many (television/radio/newspapers/magazines/Web). New many-to-many media, such as robust computer conferencing and "collaborative filtering," will start to thrive. The familiar desktop computer and other common items of hardware are likely to disappear as computing and telecommunications become more transparently and pervasively available.

- *Scenario one - The Law According to Moore*

In this scenario, lawyers will continue their reluctance to alter the status quo resistance to the encroachment of IT on the legal profession, regardless of the demand from clients for a less expensive and faster service, and concerned with preventative lawyering. [Susskind \(1988\)](#) notes that there are many areas of commercial activity in which non lawyers would benefit from legal advice but don't attempt to seek it out. The reason they don't is that obtaining advice via traditional means is too expensive, too time consuming or too difficult. Lawyers remain convinced that the new technology is a fad that will soon pass them by and leave them in peace. They continue practising reactively, on paper-based and precedent-based systems, using the IT available minimally and through intermediaries. Legal secretaries proliferate – they are necessary for reading His Honour emails and responding to them. Legal education will not dramatically different from that of the 1870s: groups of neophytes being taught with books and Socratic classroom dialogs to "think like a lawyer" so that they can enter a learned profession.

As a result of their reluctance to adapt to the new situation, lawyers will continue their time-based billing (which is increasingly critiqued by clients and lawyers alike as producing all the wrong incentives), thus promoting *inefficiency*. Other, non-legal, services (such as accounting and management consulting firms) will take over many of the functions of lawyers. Businesses themselves will "take law in their hands", and opt for a less expensive way of accessing law. This will leave many a lawyer behind in terms of competitive advantage. Lawyers will also be ill-prepared to deal with the increasing demands of the legal side of IT (e-business, privacy, fraud, etc.). Large legal firms will continue being profitable on the basis of their reputation and momentum. Smaller firms will go out of practice. This will further monopolise the remaining legal activity that can be done without recourse to IT in the hands of the few large remaining field.

Lawyers will finally see the risk to their existence and try to pass legislation (federal and state) that will enhance their status quo (there were attempts in Australia to prevent government bodies from considering electronic correspondence as equivalent to paper-based documents, but it failed).

- *Scenario two - The Law According to Susskind*

In this scenario, lawyers embrace IT to their benefit. They no longer wear wigs to court, but still retain their white collars. Success in this new online environment is gauged by shifting the extranet focus from serving the firm to true client focus. Firms will move from brochureware sites to designing web-based systems which are essential to their clients. By delivering sophisticated eServices, legal firms will remove many of the service and quality nightmares in the legal service delivery system, as well as delivering a dramatically more effective and involving client experience. With the online experience designed appropriately, it will allow the profession to build true dynamic learning relationships with its client base. More and more lawyers will be

adopting cyberspace not merely as a medium through which to advertise their services, but as a *place of business*: a virtual work space. Lawyers will be finding and serving clients through the Net.

The Internet permits the delivery of legal advice to anywhere in the world 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The significant benefits for legal firms providing online services will also fuel the drive to legal product development. Products help to cement a firm's relationship with existing clients who purchase the products. They also give you a reason to contact a large number of companies, many of whom will be your competitors' clients. While products often cover routine legal issues, they encourage referrals of more complex issues. They also demonstrate to clients a firm's commitment to provide cost effective and innovative service.

Although some legal work will always require the judgement and skill of an experienced practitioner ([Susskind, 1988](#)) even this element of legal practice can be "streamlined and optimised through information technology, using ever more powerful communications and information systems ([Susskind, 1999](#))." There are also elements of legal practice which will always require human contact.

Lawyers, judges, and legislators will thus find plenty of subjects *about* which to perform their characteristic advocacy, decision making, and policy making jobs. The kinds of work lawyers do will certainly change. There will be more attention to alternative forms of dispute resolution like mediation and arbitration. Personal and business life will become more legalized as transactions and relationships become increasingly virtual and intangible. Elaborate new opportunities for tax minimization and estate planning will undoubtedly arise in a world of digital cash and trans-jurisdictional enterprises. Some kinds of legal activity may even be pursued by some as a form of entertainment, and lawyers may find themselves promoting esoteric legal procedures the way some doctors now promote cosmetic surgery ([Lauritsen, 2000](#)).

Value billing, task-based billing, and other alternatives will be promoted. Lawyers *in* the future will be more concerned *about* the future. We will have different attitudes about time in general. Lawyers will become "legal information engineers" ([Susskind, 1996](#)), and observes that this will require a fundamental shift in current legal practice with the "strongest candidates for assuming this role [being] barristers and specialist solicitors." (*ibid.*). The use of technology will allow small legal firms to compete effectively with large legal firms.

Firms will focus on two aspects of their internal environment. First, they will increasingly find themselves serving as institutions of higher education, both to compensate for the lack of serious practical training in law schools and to address the need for life-long learning by practitioners. Second, they will recognize that much of their competitive advantage depends upon how well they capture their lawyers' collective knowledge and distribute it throughout the firm by advanced information systems. Knowledge management will become an integral part of every legal firm.

- *Scenario three: The Law According to StarTrek*

In this scenario, lawyers stop wearing wigs and collars, courthouses move into cyberspace and legal knowledge is made available for everyone online, preferably free of charge. Legal education changes, making learning and practical work intermix. Some law schools will certainly also need to become genuinely global, with multiple international campuses glued together by broadband networks. Law teaching will naturally be carried out with the tools, and in the groves, of cyberspace. We will have virtual campuses and classrooms, and seminar participation via telepresence. Legal offices no longer exist in bricks and mortar, they are completely virtual. Lawyers are fewer in number, because legal advice can be obtained online through intelligent expert knowledge systems using the latest artificial intelligence.

One consequence of the market for interactive legal content will be that "mere" expertise will become devalued. Not only will legal content have become a commodity, but expertise in analyzing and interpreting that content will begin to be commodified. There will be a new premium placed on expertise in systematizing expertise, and in exploiting systematized expertise.

Basic improvements in the performance and reliability of the Internet will continue to accompany these developments, resulting in perhaps as little as ten years in the availability of interactive legal content that is nearly ubiquitous and effectively instantaneous. Lawyers and non-lawyers alike will have ready access to this vast library of legal knowledge, embellished by increasingly useful indices, maps, commentaries, and other kinds of "metacontent" that provide orientation and interpretation. Basic forms of legal information and redress are becoming available to citizens without an intervening priesthood. As this disintermediation

proceeds, some lawyers who have simply been middlemen will join cars salesmen and bank tellers in the unemployment line. (Some of them may find low-paying work as "checkers" who review the transcripts of online sessions in which consumers receive computer-generated advice and documents.) The future of law depending so heavily upon information management and manipulation, the latent legal market will be better served by turning to existing 'information engineers' such as publishers, consultants, and others who have already grasped the nettle of IT tool development.

4. Caveat Emptor:

All said and done, a few caveats have to be put in place:

1. Forecasts will be incomplete. The most surprising future is one which contains no surprises.
2. No forecast that depends on what humans will do can be 100 percent accurate.
3. Futures depend on chance.
4. Accurate forecasts of some complex and nonlinear systems may be impossible.
5. Extrapolation is bound to be wrong eventually
6. Forecasting and planning must be dynamic and able to respond to new information and insights

[Wright \(2000\)](#) identifies 20 common pitfalls to avoid, beginning with the perennial call for top-management support, and ending with "failure to stimulate new strategic options". Others worthy of note include: seeing the *scenario* process as an interesting but isolated activity that is not integrated with other organizational decision-making processes; balancing the immediate concerns of managers with a sufficiently long-term focus, which appears particularly difficult for UK and Australian managers, who are largely evaluated on short-term results, to see the value in investing in a long-term perspective and confronting managers' current thinking in such a way that results in a defensive reaction that rejects any challenge.

In her case study of the National City Corp., [Levinson \(2000\)](#) states the cons and pros of scenario planning. In her opinion, "scenario planning accounts for a range of visions, while traditional forms of strategic thinking, such as forecasting, only consider one version of the future. Whereas forecasting makes predictions based on a company's past performance or by previous trends, scenario planning acknowledges that the future is unpredictable and takes a company's uncertainty about the future into account."

The pros in place, Levinson then states the cons: Scenarios are not something that can be done quick and dirty by unexperienced people. It takes serious research, significant resources, time and engagement.

[Roy Amara](#) (1991) has suggested this list of do's and don'ts for improving forecasting and planning:

- 1) Don't be a vacuum cleaner, collecting every speck of information that comes across your field of view -- rather, construct a set of lenses or filters to avoid infoglut;
- 2) Don't substitute error for uncertainty: some variables are more uncertain than others, and this must be acknowledged;
- 3) At times, lean against the wind and question conventional wisdom or turn a trend on its head;
- 4) Hedge forecasts with possible low probability/high impact surprises;
- 5) Look for breakpoints and discontinuities;
- 6) Focus on underlying driving forces;
- 7) Look for clusters of drivers;
- 8) Translate environmental forecasts into forms that have direct meaning for the organizational functions;
- 9) Don't over- or underestimate the rate of adopting some technologies;
- 10) Keep asking "So What?"

Scenarios are stories of the future based on past experience and the identification of end-states and predetermined events. *Scenarios* are a long-range *planning* tool within which short-term thinking should be avoided. Brian Marsh ([Fahey & Randall, 1998](#)) advises that appropriate time-scales depend upon the likely changes in technology, foreign trade practices and environmental priorities that influence an organization's ability to operate effectively. Owing to the time-scales involved, no *scenario* can be an accurate description of the future, their role is to help managers recognize, consider and reflect upon the uncertainties they will face. Additionally, they encourage managers to acknowledge that the decisions they take today represent their current mental model ([Senge et al., 1999](#)), which in turn is composed of certain assumptions about the future taken for granted. How managers respond to *scenarios* will be dictated by how strongly they identify personally with their assumptions. If a challenge to an assumption is seen as a personal challenge, it is likely to be rejected. Therefore, a commitment to *scenario planning* is also a commitment to challenge assumptions.

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