



Open Source Scenarios A Primer

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Why Scenarios?

Many organizations operate in a context of high uncertainty. Markets and processes are increasingly unpredictable despite committed attempts to forecast their behavior. Planning once meant determining how to go *from* the present state *to* a desired state in the *single* future; now what does it really mean to plan, if we cannot predict or rely upon stability in the environment?

A single scenario is a single future, a story of how events might unfold in time. But multiple scenarios describe *multiple* futures that can be studied *concurrently* to develop strategies that survive the unavoidable and unintended consequences of our action and inactivity.

Why Scenario Planning?

Scenario based planning is a method to navigate uncertainty. Plans and strategies based on multiple scenarios become more emergent and less prescriptive, more resilient to future unknowns.

With scenarios, organizations manage uncertainty and not the unintended consequences of unfortunate guesswork.

Why Open Source Scenarios?

Most scenario plans unwittingly mix church and state – scenario and strategy. The amalgam of common-interest and self-interest yields strategy-bonded scenarios that must be guarded to their corporate graves. Scenario

development necessarily becomes a contained, instead of being inclusive and open to enrichment through diversity of opinion and perspective.

Software development and the analogy of open source software provide important insight into how this situation can improve. Open source software is source code that is freely available for testing and evaluation during its development. Those interested in contributing to its development may do so. The gradual introduction of free software that began about 1970 has accelerated with the growth of Linux in 1991. There is a growing community of skilled software developers who directly contribute to software code and to its distribution through a variety of freely available licenses hence the term open source software. Finished products are generated more quickly and at far less cost than with conventional software projects.

Considering the rapid development of freely available software in the variety open source software movements, why not make scenarios open source? Open to all those interested in the topic and with the ability to contribute to each step of development. Such an open source scenario would be of superior quality and of use to all.

How could a scenario become an *open source* scenario?

The Principle of Separation

Scenario based plans remain plans – they contain strategic and often sensitive corporate information that cannot be disclosed. This is because the scenarios and the strategies are bound together. By separating the two,



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scenario development can be a shared and benefit from diversity of expertise and experience.

When scenarios are separated from strategy, scenario development and distribution can openly engage many expert contributors. In the vernacular of open source software, there are many more eyeballs to find the bugs and make improvements. And like open source



software, open source scenarios provide a community of interest in developing scenarios that harness diversity. Scenario frameworks can be shared broadly for enrichment. They can be challenged and refined by inclusion of factors of highest volatility and impact.

Another analogy comes from the aerospace industry - wind tunnels. A wind tunnel provides arbitrarily specified wind and climate conditions to test aircraft designs. A good wind tunnel is the work of many experts, without specific knowledge of subsequent, competitive aircraft designs. The open source scenario is the wind tunnel; the strategic plan is the aircraft design.

Individual organizations are then free to utilize the scenario framework for strategic conversations in the sanctuary of their private

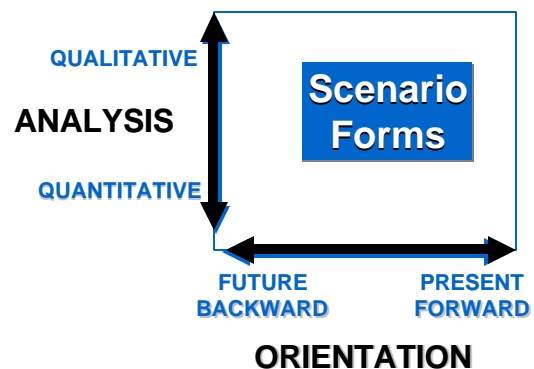
strategy chambers. These scenario-based strategies are integrated with other plans in order to sustain the maximum level of competitiveness.

Open Source Scenario Development

Open Source Scenarios are by definition, open in their content and development. The process to develop an open source scenario permits interested parties to **contribute** the various stages of development and to freely **utilize** the elements of the scenarios.

What method to use? To be as inclusive as possible, no particular method is used. Just as the future has ample room for diverse visions and beliefs, scenarios should take many forms to suite the needs, experience and expectations of those who wish to navigate their journey.

In order to facilitate the integration of various scenarios, a classification of scenario forms was developed. This was based on the orientation and method used in planning. Orientation may be *future-backward*, where the future is envisioned at the outset and its journey decomposed by looking backwards to the present. Orientation may also be *present-forward*, wherein future pathways are composed starting from current reality. Both orientations may use quantitative or qualitative analyses and descriptions.





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The classification is experimental, designed to be as inclusive as possible of all scenario-based planning methods, whilst retaining the principle of strategy separation. A major challenge has been to accommodate both passive and active planning philosophies that are open and non-proprietary. In active methods, so-called since they involve pre-defined end-states, factors and events are selected in creating maps to future end-points. *The future can be what you make it.* With a passive philosophy, the environment is studied for underlying forces of change that are both uncontrollable and unpredictable. *The future will be, so be agile and adaptable.*

1. Beliefs

Beliefs are reasoned visions or insights into the future. They are often attributed to experts; often inspirational in origin and supported with anecdotal data.

2. End States

End States are visions of future worlds, developed by experts through experience and group process. Once formulated, end states are positioned as the termination of logical sequences of events derived from collective expectations. (Reference: Nervewire.com)

3. Driving Forces

Driving Forces are independent variables in the environment. They are the variables of highest uncertainty and impact affecting a given situation. Driving forces are pivotal in that they *force* the present into a number of future states that are studied in detail. (Reference: GBN.org)

4. Simulated Emergence

Multi-agent models are used to simulate very complex systems. This relatively new technique offers the potential to study emergence of complexity from the unpredictable behavior of large numbers of interacting entities. (Reference Swarm.org)

5. System Dynamics

System Dynamics is a modeling technique that uses quantitatively defined relationships amongst elements in a feedback system in order to extrapolate the nature of future states. (Reference: www.Albany.edu/cpr/sds).

