

Method

Scenario planning

A method for building several plausible stories of the future and checking which decisions work in all of them.

In Spanish

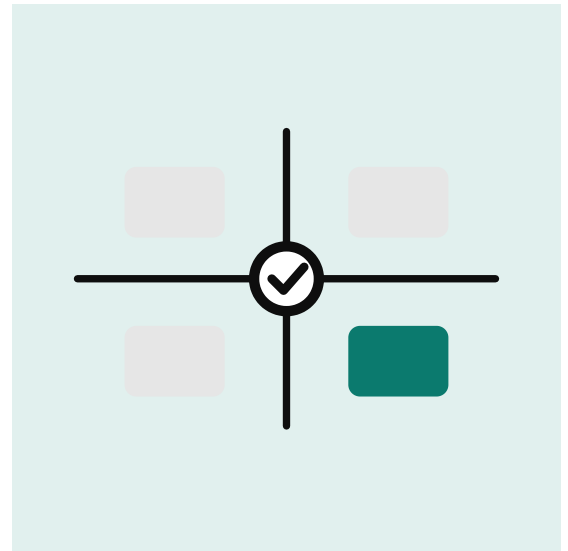
Planificación por escenarios

Origin

Kahn and Wiener (1967); Wack (1985)

Output

Several plausible stories of the future and the decisions that work in all of them



What it's for

It helps you decide when the future is uncertain, without betting everything on a single forecast that leaves the plan exposed if it fails.

Key elements

Critical uncertainties

Scenarios start from a few decisive factors about which there is no certainty.

Several plausible futures

Different from each other and believable, not a good, a bad and a normal one.

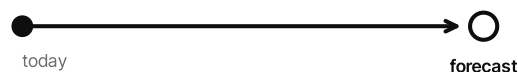
Robust decisions

Look for what works in every scenario.

An example

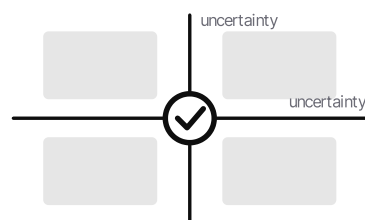
An organization decides what to invest in over the next ten years.

A forecast



The most likely forecast is chosen and the plan is made for it alone. **Fragile if it fails.**

Several scenarios



Two key uncertainties are crossed, four futures emerge and a plan is sought that holds up in all of them. **More robust.**

Scenarios don't predict the future: they prepare you for several.

How it's done



Choose the critical uncertainties: what matters most and is least known.



Crossing them produces several different, plausible futures.



Each decision is tested in every scenario.

Applications in design

✓ When to use it

Before a big decision that is hard to undo, such as launching a service, when the future depends on factors no one controls.

✗ Avoid

Making a "good", a "bad" and a "normal" scenario: in the end only the middle one gets looked at.

👁 Don't fall for it

Test each decision in two to four different scenarios and keep what works in all of them; don't assign them probabilities without data.

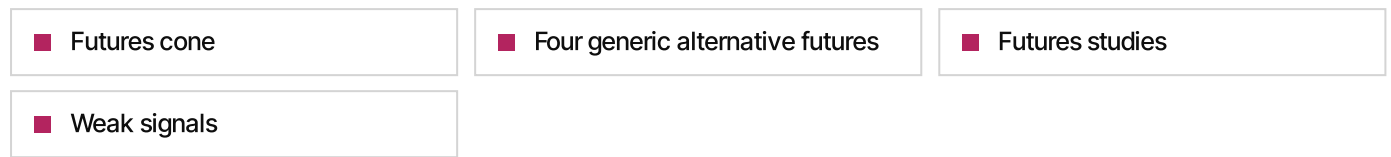
1973

What the research says

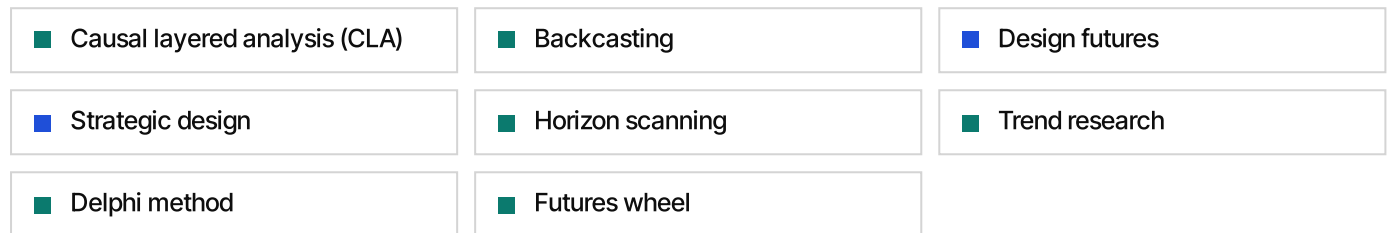
Shell was working with scenarios that considered an oil supply disruption before the 1973 crisis; that helped it react when it came (Wack, 1985).

Connections

Builds on



Related to



Authors and works

1967	Herman Kahn and Anthony J. Wiener	Used scenarios to explore alternative futures in <i>The Year 2000</i> .
1985	Pierre Wack	Told how Shell used scenarios to prepare for the oil crises.

Sources

Original sources

- Kahn, H., & Wiener, A. J. (1967). *The year 2000: A framework for speculation on the next thirty-three years*. Macmillan.
- Wack, P. (1985). Scenarios: Uncharted waters ahead. *Harvard Business Review*, 63(5), 73–89. [View source \(https://hbr.org/1985/09/scenarios-uncharted-waters-ahead\)](https://hbr.org/1985/09/scenarios-uncharted-waters-ahead)

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