HM Government

The Futures Toolkit:

Tools for strategic futures for policy-makers and analysts

Welcome

The Futures Toolkit is for use by policy officials and analysts across government. It provides a set of tools to help embed long-term strategic thinking within the policy process, and explains how to ensure they have real impact.

The toolkit aims to bring together the best ideas and suggestions for ways to approach futures thinking. These have been shaped by contributions and insight from experts across government, academia, industry, and third sector in the UK and internationally.

This is a beta version of the toolkit. That means we are continuing to test and improve it. The Horizon Scanning Programme team will regularly review and update this set of tools to ensure it continues to meet the needs of policy-makers and reflects the latest, leading-edge techniques of futures experts.

This toolkit is not intended to be prescriptive, definitive or comprehensive, nor are the tools useful only to policy officials in government. However, we hope it will be a valuable guide to teams shaping existing policy or facing new challenges.

We welcome comments and feedback to improve this toolkit. Please contact the team via the Horizon Scanning blog with your suggestions.

About Us
The Horizon Scanning Programme team is a joint Cabinet Office and Government Office for Science initiative that reports to the Cabinet Secretary and the Government Chief Scientific Adviser.

What is futures analysis?

Futures analysis is a way of thinking about the long term issues and challenges associated with achieving a particular objective or to understand what a future operating environment may look like and how we may need to respond. It can be carried out using a number of different techniques or tools, many of which are described in this toolkit.

It is difficult to think of a government policy that does not need to consider long-term uncertainty. The long lead-times associated with policy decisions mean that it is difficult to make informed decisions today without having given careful thought to their effects years and even decades ahead.

Futures analysis is not designed to predict the future nor is it intended to replace traditional forms of analysis (projections, modelling, etc.). It allows policy officials to have structured conversations about uncertainty, and to take account of the impact this uncertainty has on their policy and delivery model design. Futures analysis is designed to make uncertainty more tangible; to qualify and quantify the impact of abstract issues and trends that are often difficult to translate into near-term policy effects. By enabling more considered analysis, it can complement conventional forms of analysis and shape short- to medium-term policy responses in a way that is consistent with addressing major long-term challenges.

Contents page

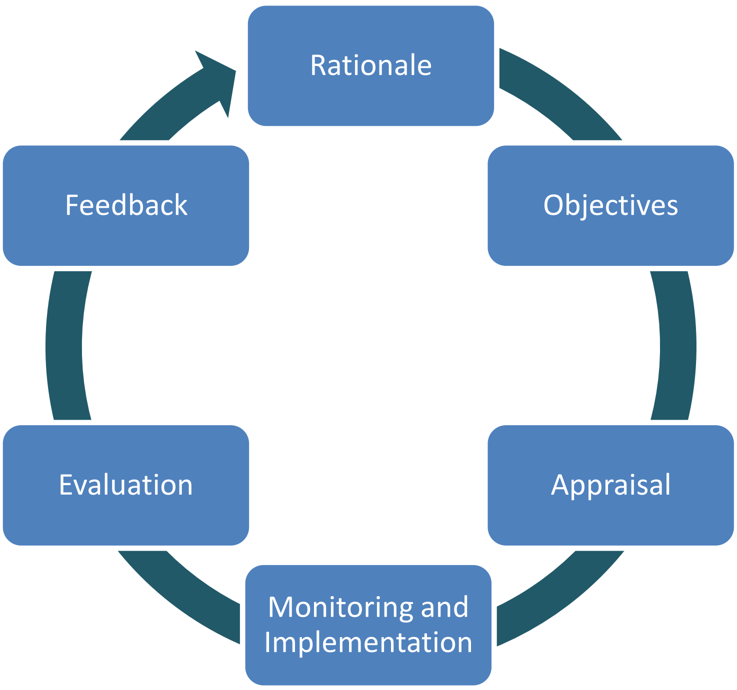
Futures approaches in the Policy Cycle

Designing policy that is fit for purpose for years or even decades is a challenge. Futures analysis can help to mitigate but not eliminate this uncertainty and, when used alongside conventional analytical tools, produce policies that are more resilient to shocks. As well as providing structure to uncertainty, futures analysis is useful for developing alternative views of policy challenges that may not fall within conventional understanding. This breadth allows policy to be tested more thoroughly, reducing the likelihood of unintended consequences that could create bigger problems than the original policy challenge.

Futures techniques can be used throughout the policy cycle. Diagrams on the following pages show where each one is best applied. The greatest amount of uncertainty exists at the beginning of the policy cycle in the Rationale, Objectives and Appraisal stages of policy development. This is where future analysis adds the most value. However, there are a range of techniques to evaluate how policies may be affected by future drivers of change that can be deployed in the Evaluation and Feedback phases.

Whilst these approaches do not predict the future, at the beginning of the policy cycle they can help systematise and evaluate the available evidence for emerging issues, project possible outcomes and provide useful, interactive platforms for discussing proposed policy options. At the later stages of the policy cycle futures can be used to evaluate policy performance and resilience to projected trends and emerging issues.

The policy cycle is not as simple as shown by the illustrative ROAMEF model and is subject to various feedback loops, iterations and disruptions due to new evidence and the way the political system works. But using futures helps policy development reflect a broader set of challenges over a longer timescale, reducing the risk of policy failure by various factors.



ROAMEF policy cycle

Using futures in everyday work

Making and delivering policy is a central part of government work and strategic futures can – and should be – used throughout the policy cycle to ensure more robust outcomes. Futures analysis as an approach has taken time to develop in government thinking and there are several challenges to ensuring success which should be considered at the beginning of any new piece of work. To gain traction futures work needs to have a committed senior customer, fit into the corporate planning cycle, use the language of the organisation and ultimately be useful (rather than just "interesting"). Proving the success of futures in small, iterative steps (proof of concept), will usually generate trust for larger, more ambitious pieces of work later on.

There are some basic principles to remember when using futures, which are similar to the policy cycle in some regards.

1. Identify a need

There needs to be a clear purpose for futures to succeed in an organisation – a political priority, organisational strategic aim or response to an external shock. Before starting work see if similar work has been done previously; utilising government networks will prove invaluable at this stage. Engage widely within your organisation, particularly with senior leadership and identify both appetite and boundaries early on, to ensure appropriate effort is used.

2. Secure a committed senior champion/customer

Developing bottom-up futures can be highly exciting and provide excellent products for use by the team. However, without wider engagement and committed senior buy-in, those products will not gain traction and be short-lived. In order to deliver long term futures success engage a senior champion as soon as possible to guide the work, champion it at senior levels and to protect it when other priorities emerge. Co-design the product with your intended customers to help achieve and maintain senior buy-in.

3. Develop a response

Remember to look both widely and deeply when first considering your futures work and challenge the organisation to do the same where needed. Don't just talk to the "usual suspects" but seek out challenging, but robust, alternative perspectives (from academia, think tanks, industry, the third sector, and so on).

The toolkit provides DIY approaches that can be used, with case studies highlighting successful applications.

Futures approaches are decision support tools and any commission of work should reiterate the business need being addressed by the work. If there is a need to outsource, remember to engage with the Horizon Scanning Programme team which is developing a procurement framework for external experts that have proven experience of delivering good futures analysis.

As with any other piece of work, poor execution will hamper its uptake in an organisation. Manage futures work as any other piece of work and use best practice in project management, communications and engagement.

4. Achieve sign-off and roll out the programme

Ensure that the work includes, rather than competes with, other parts of the organisation. This will buy goodwill and will make the products stronger. This in turn makes futures thinking easier to embed and eventually an instinctive part of good policy making.

It takes time to embed futures. It is useful to start with discrete pieces of work that prove the concept, before moving on to larger projects. It can be tempting to go straight to complex scenarios, for example, but without an engaged organisation these can fail at great cost (money, time, and reputation). After conducting analysis, explore where it can add value to other areas of the organization and disseminate the work widely. This will help to increase support for the findings and add value to the original product.

5. Evaluate

It is essential to measure the impact of the products developed. Have they answered the original aim? Have they provided fresh and robust evidence and/or insights unavailable from traditional approaches?

Be honest with the findings and test them with senior leadership and customers to gauge success. The approach may not have worked – but this can be acceptable provided that the customer has been closely involved throughout and the organisation has benefitted from the evidence gathered. If it has worked then maintaining and promoting that success is an essential next step.

6. Embed

Continue to build futures products into corporate cycles and monitor carefully. With successful products to build upon, develop a longer term programme of work with set products that are communicated widely. Target converts in your organisation to amplify the message.

7. And finally, be open, positive and persevere

Even though work should be planned effectively and (initially) work within the current corporate process, it is important to remember that futures work allows organisations the headspace to challenge the current norms. When starting futures work it is important to try and remove bias. It can be tempting to define work too narrowly or identify a preferred future too early and, as a result, you will miss significant emerging threats and opportunities (the real value of this work). This problem becomes apparent when multiple government departments view the same multi-layered challenges only from their particular perspective, creating duplication and a homogenous response at best and, at worst, tension, competition, and confusion.

About the techniques

There are over 25 techniques that could be considered part of futures analysis, ranging from workshops to long term processes. These techniques help to frame discussions and decision making.

Futures analysis is not a panacea. If the issue you are looking at is less than 2 years away, then the value of futures is questionable. Typically, futures analysis works best when looking at questions that are 10 or more years away.

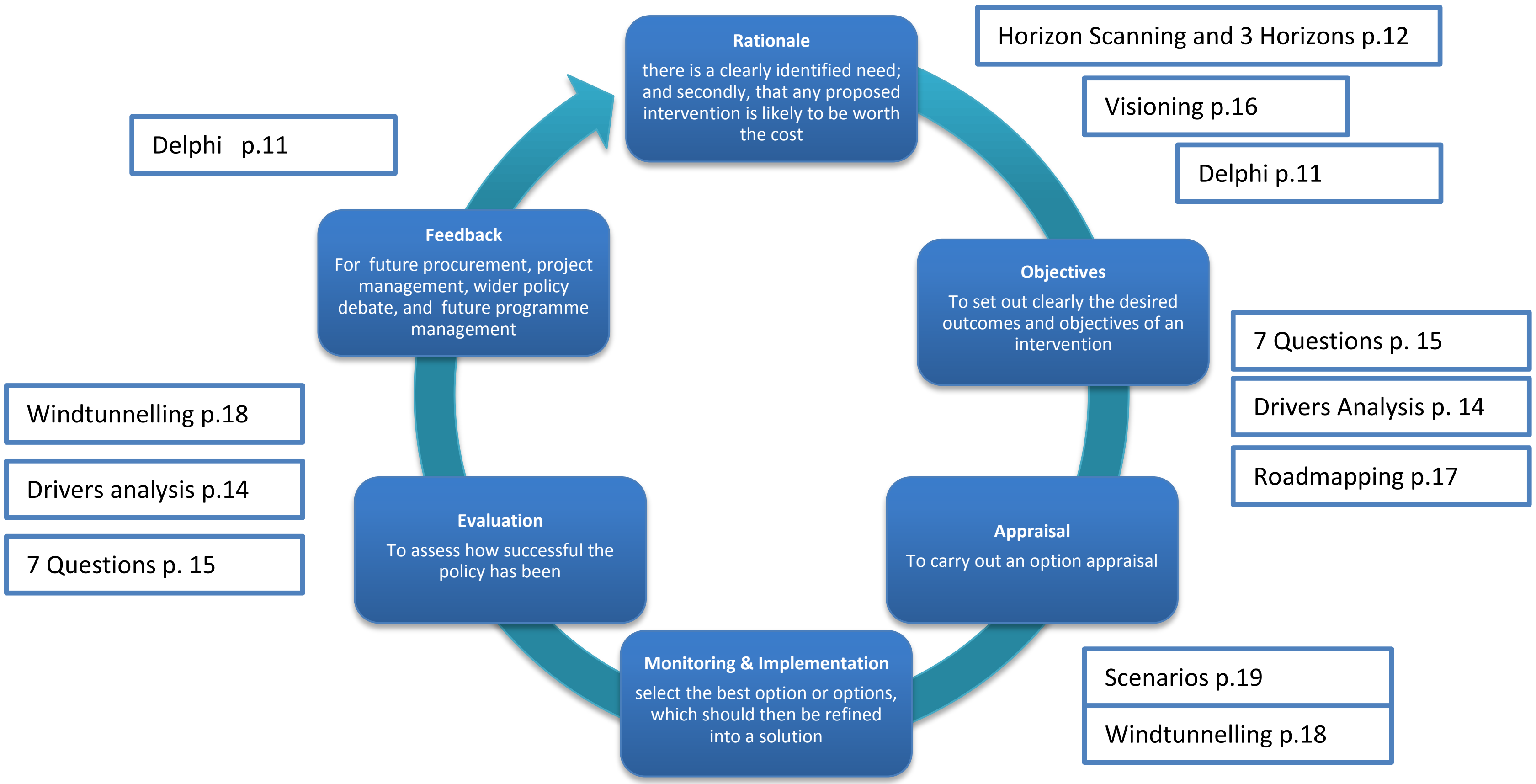
We have chosen to discuss only the most useful and widely tested techniques for government in this toolkit. For information on other techniques there is a wide range of resources available online, such as the Millennium Project.

Over the next two pages we explain where futures techniques can be applied to the policy process. For each technique, there is a brief overview, methodology, outcomes and a case study from within government.

Feedback on the alpha version of this toolkit included asks for ‘shortcut’ versions of the techniques, for use where time or resource is scarce. These have now been included, and can be used for team meetings or informal brainstorming sessions. However, it is worth noting that they will be less reliable than applying the technique as in full.

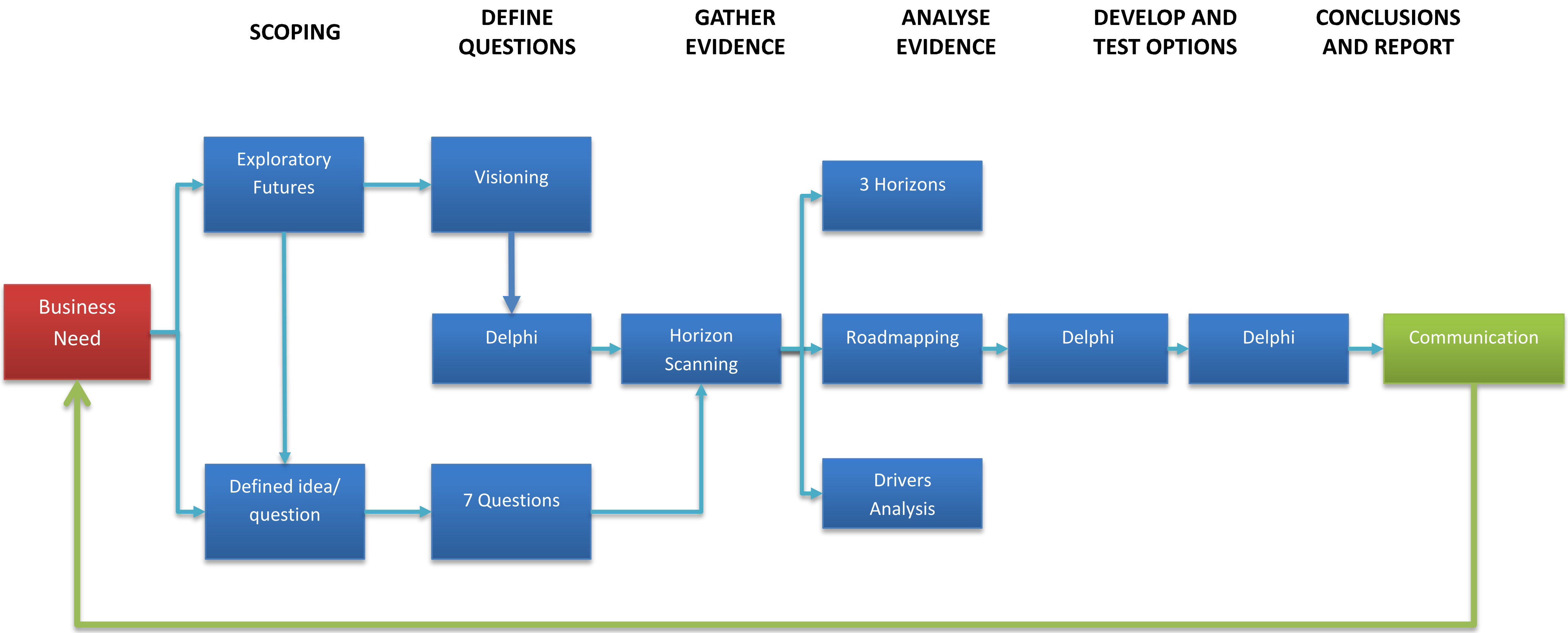
Futures techniques across the policy cycle

The diagram below illustrates from user experience where futures techniques have had the greatest impact in the policy making process. Each technique has a page number where a detailed explanation of the technique can be found.



Futures techniques across the project lifecycle

The diagram below shows where futures techniques can be used at different stages of a typical project with the arrows showing how techniques can be added together to create more powerful products. These are not prescriptive and are based on current experience across government.



Delphi

Delphi is a consultation process involving a wide group of participants. The process applies a set of predefined questions to seek participant opinions on *when* events are likely to happen and *what* their underlying influences are.

When should I use it in a project?

At the beginning of the project to gain views on the issue at hand and define early questions.

Who should attend/take part?

External experts on the issue you are looking at. This works well with dispersed experts to increase original ideas and reduce group think.

How do I do it?

1. Determine a well-defined set of questions aligned to the overall area of interest. Select a moderator to administer the consultation.

2. Enlist a Delphi panel consisting of experts on all or portions of the topic. A secondary panel consisting of a broader stakeholder set can be consulted in later iterations of the process.

3. Circulate the set of questions to each expert on the panel. Each panelist responds anonymously to the questions. A moderator guides the process but not participant responses. This is round one.

4. Analyse the responses, capturing the range of opinion for each of the questions.

5. Share the analysis with the panel. Gather feedback. Repeat further rounds if greater clarity is needed.

6. If desired, circulate the questions to a wider stakeholder group to test the expert panel's opinion with that of other stakeholders.

What outcomes should I get from it?

A report of the findings of the consultation which will provide a rich evidence base that can either be used on its own or (preferably) to complement evidence gained through other processes such as horizon scanning or standard forms of analysis.

Rapid Approach: Use your team, other colleagues and contacts as a quick test group for your work

Horizon Scanning

Horizon Scanning is one of the most well known of futures approaches. It seeks emerging issues that are starting to appear in the evidence base, and helps assess and prioritise them for decision making. Most of us scan all the time in our "day jobs" and our personal lives from keeping track of new developments at work (e.g. new legislation) to identifying new opportunities like which new smartphone to buy.

When should I use it in a project?

At the beginning of any futures project and as part of a continual corporate scanning approach.

Who should attend/take part?

This is a desk based exercise and would be carried out by a team member.

How do I do it?

To develop effective scanning we need to structure our efforts. The best way to structure horizon scanning is to use a STEEPLE framework (shown below) which is, at its most basic level, a taxonomy for scanning the contextual, external environment (Societal, Technological, Economic, Environmental, Political, Legal, and Ethical areas). Other factors could be included apart from STEEPLE and should be considered when creating the system, such as Military, Demographic, etc. Starting with the blank framework you can quickly populate it with sources of information on your particular topic/ work area and highlight where areas of evidence may be missing.

	0-2 Years	2-5 Years	5+ Years
Society			
Technology			
Environment			
Economics			
Politics			
Legal			
Ethical			

This framework is a living document and can then be amended as new sources are added or others removed. You can also use this in Drivers Analysis workshops [see page 12] if you wish to be more comprehensive. From this framework, scanning documents can be created for corporate use. To make scanning more effective it is useful to apply metrics to the issues that are sourced. In recent years there has been a rise in knowledge management software that can greatly aid this process, allowing images reports and hyperlinks to be linked together visually and analysed by keyword, relationship and other parameters. Two that have been used successfully in government are Pearltrees by DEFRA and TheBrain by SEPA.

Analysis

Each organisation will choose different metrics to evaluate emerging issues, but it can be useful to think about the scale of the issue geographically, the cost including staff, how it may change working practices and when it may impact. This will allow a coarse filter for prioritizing issues for further work.

Presenting your findings

There is a range of ways to present horizon scanning outputs including newsletters, blogs and briefings and these should typically be in the format that the organisation uses everyday to normalise futures. When presenting the outputs to senior managers, there is a powerful tool to demonstrate the importance of thinking long term – the 3 horizons approach.

What outcomes should I get from it?

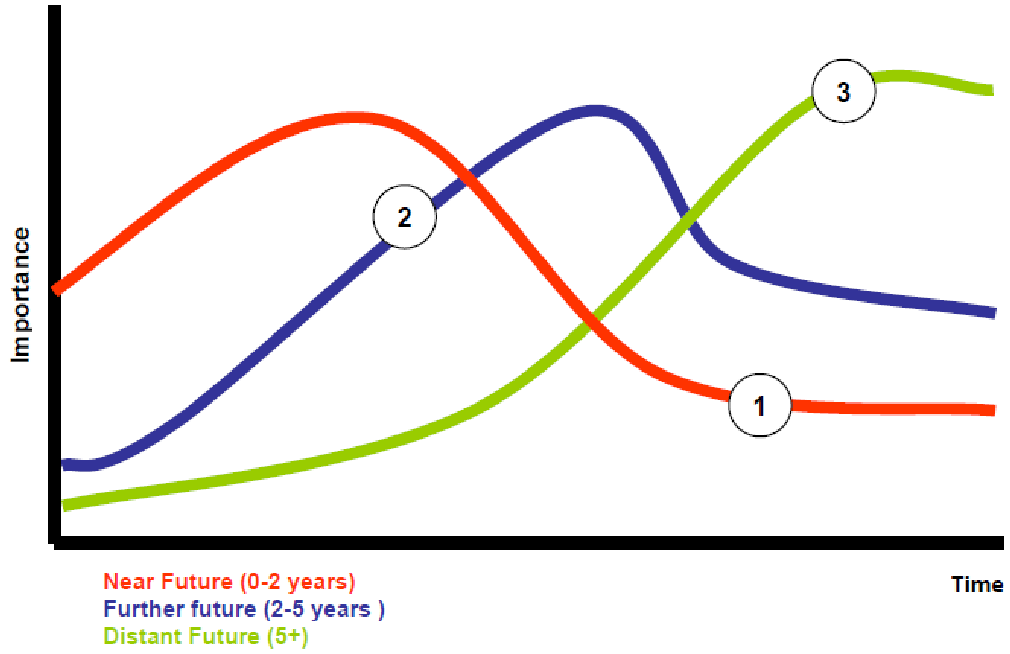
Horizon scanning provides you with the evidence base that you need to use to explore future issues and create management approaches to respond to them.

Rapid Approach: Find a synthesis report by others on your chosen area and use as a basis for your work. This may limit the possible shocks you know about and diversity of views.

3 Horizons

3 Horizons is a graphical approach developed to show how the importance of issues will change over time and that urgent issues may not be as important as longer term issues. Climate Change is a classic example. Using 3 horizons you can quickly present a range of issues that will be developing over a range of timelines on one page. This is incredibly useful for engaging with Senior Officials.

To create one, simply plot the results of your horizon scanning according to time and importance/impact as defined by your organisations most appropriate metric e.g. cost/ reputation/staff numbers/legal changes. An example is below



Drivers Analysis

Drivers are underlying issues or trends that share a common theme and will "drive" future change. Drivers can inform an overall outcome, such as a scenario. The technique of driver analysis determines which of the drivers are most critical for consideration for a given topic.

When should I use it in a project?

At the beginning of the process (project initiation).

This approach is also useful as an imaginative but work-focused team-building exercise, enabling teams to check and challenge key assumptions as well as to share ideas and experiences beyond their specific post's portfolio.

Who should attend/take part?

A policy-specific team or a cross-cutting project team (drawn from several teams) with a shared interest in a topic.

How do I do it?

Using a workshop format, Driver Analysis identifies drivers that may affect a chosen topic or theme before prioritising them by impact and uncertainty. Drivers analysis is an excellent workshop method for gleaning future issues from attendees and can provide a quick horizon scan, but comes with several important caveats.

Method

1. This can be used for a workshop, typically up to 25 and for two hours. Create poster-sized (A0/A1) STEEPLE frameworks as detailed in Horizon Scanning.

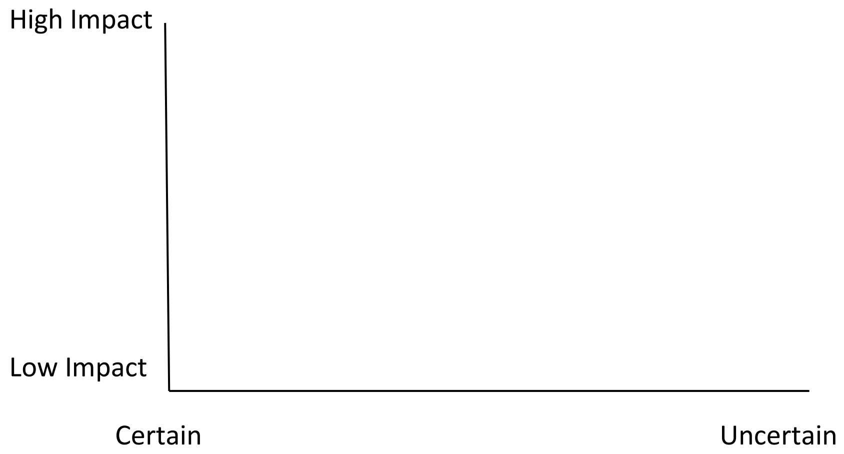
2. Set the question: using active language define what you are looking at. i.e. "what will affect the future prosperity of UK cities in 2030?" or "what will have an impact on the future of market towns in 2050?" or "what will drive changes in light saber production in 2040?" Defining topic and timescale are essential for useful feedback.

3. Tables of 4-8 are ideal.

4. For the first 45-60 min ask attendees to work in their tables to come up with as many drivers that could affect your question, across the STEEPLE range, each on a post it note on the prepared STEEPLE poster framework These drivers need active language as well, so not just writing 'people' but 'young people leaving market towns for employment'. Photograph all STEEPLE frameworks for later analysis if required.

5. Ask the whole workshop to populate an A0 Certainty/Impact matrix (illustration below) with the post it notes, judging each driver according to perceived impact and certainty (as far as possible based on the group's knowledge/experience). Related issues should be clustered as they go on the matrix. **Note**: some participants may challenge the process on the grounds that they lack knowledge about the subject being discussed. This should not be an impediment to participation but an invitation to fresh thinking and you might observe that, in a generalist civil service, a Minister could ask that person tomorrow to join a team specialising in that topic.

6. This ends the exercise; however the top right, High Impact/High Uncertainty drivers *can* be used to create scenarios.



What outcomes should I get from it?

The output will be a set of drivers that could affect the issue that you are considering and a qualitative analysis of how much impact they will have and how certain that impact may be. The exercise helps the group to test and reach a common understanding of key assumptions and provides a qualitative evidence base of the certainty and impact of a set of policy-relevant trends and issues where quantitative evidence may not be available or other forms of analysis may not be effective.

Rapid Approach: Run it as a round table with your team, discussing and populating as you go.

7 Questions

This technique is used to draw information from key individuals, such as senior managers and decision makers, regarding the future. The seven open-ended questions cause the interviewee to pause, think out loud and to place themselves in the future. The seven questions are designed to explore information that the interviewee may have about the future, but which they may not have expressed yet.

When should I use it in a project?

At the beginning of the project

Who should attend/take part?

Senior managers or other people who may have a good overview of the subject you are addressing

How do I do it?

This technique was pioneered by Shell. Gill Ringland, futures analyst, in her book Scenario planning: Managing for the future, lists the seven questions as follows which are typically asked in an interview format.

Methodology

1. What would you identify as the critical issue for the future?

2. If things went well, being optimistic but realistic, talk about what you would see as a desirable outcome.

3. If things went wrong, what factors would you worry about?

4. Looking at internal systems, how might these need to be changed to help bring about the desired outcome?

5. Looking back, what would you identify as the significant events which have produced the current situation?

6. Looking forward, what would you see as priority actions which should be carried out soon? If you were responsible

7. If all constraints were removed and you could direct what is done, what more would you wish to include?

There is always scope to modify or reword the questions to suit the project, but this general outline is maintained. The Seven Questions tool has been modified successfully as the basis for roundtable discussions in a number of recent workshops facilitated by GO-Science.

What outcomes should I get from it?

This is a useful way to engage with senior decision-makers that is formal and allows them the opportunity for deep and wide-ranging thought.

Rapid Approach: Run it as a simple survey exercise. This will lose the context and debate but provide a quick initial analysis.

Visioning

Who should attend/take part?

The most senior people available as they will have the clearest view of the vision for the work and also the control over it.

How do I do it?

The methodology here describes a visioning process that can be run over two hours in a workshop environment, with a group or team who know each other reasonably well. The questions here are quite generic and may need to be refined.

Step 1: Describe the vision

Imagine it is ten years from today. You have successfully delivered the project and it has been very successful. Your task in this session, as a team, is to describe what it looks like as if you could see it around you.

Use the following questions as triggers give everyone the opportunity to contribute and capture the conversation on flipcharts. Try and speak in the present tense.

1. What have we achieved?
2. Who are our stakeholders? How have they benefited from what we've done?
3. What are the most visible indications of our success?
4. What are we most pleased about?
5. What arrangements have we have put in place to make sure the project is a sustained success?
6. How are we measuring progress and success?
7. Is there anything we still need to tackle?
8. What are the challenges we face now?
9. What have we learnt from our successes and failures?

Step 2: Current reality

Now come back to the present day and explore a related set of questions:

1. How close are we to our vision?
2. What aspects of our organisation and our systems do we need to change to achieve the vision?
3. What resources do we need?
4. Is our people's experience of change positive or negative? How do we manage the change process to ensure they come with us?
5. What do we need to do now to get started?

What outcomes should I get from it?

A short vision of less than half a page that describes what the ideal outcome from the project will be, with a paragraph on the challenges that it faces and insight into the themes and challenges. The vision can then be used to guide future work and priorities ("does this decision take us closer to our vision?")

Rapid Approach: remove the process and take a walk in the park and discuss what you want for your work. Write it up or record it

Roadmapping

Roadmapping allows participants and users to plot visually when key events or decision points may have an impact upon a chosen issues, theme or topic. Roadmapping is an approach to ‘step in’ to the future by defining what we know already and what we may be able to speculate on. This is a useful device for engagement as it allows people to see how chronological changes over time may result in a future that looks different from today.

When should I use it in a project?

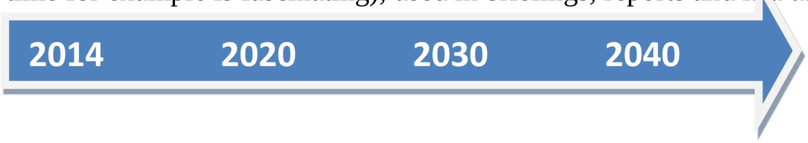
At the beginning of the project

Who should attend/take part?

Roadmapping can be desk based or workshop based and should use the experts for the issues you are looking at.

How do I do it?

Roadmapping can be used as an exercise in workshops, as an example on presentations (the development of money over time for example is fascinating), used in briefings, reports and is a useful tool for scenario processes. Typically roadmaps



Process for Reports and Presentations

• Ensure you are using a robust evidence base

• Using a timeline arrow specific to your needs (as above) populate the slide or page with issues that you can define such as legislation being enacted and more speculative issues that may affect the issue you are looking at

Process for Workshop (60 minutes)

• Create an A0 poster or similar size sheet with the arrow in the centre – to your own timeline

• If possible, pre-populate with some known milestones

• Invite people to write and/or post it note with issues that they know and speculate on, using different colours for each

• This will create a roadmap of people’s views of developments of your area

What outcomes should I get from it?

A roadmap of the issues over the desired time period and with insight into the underpinning evidence and key uncertainties.

> **Rapid Approach:** keep a live roadmap in your office on a whiteboard updating it with new issues as they emerge. This will allow the office to see what’s happening at a glance and allow quicker formulation when needed.

Windtunnelling

Windtunnelling helps to test how future changes might affect the ability to deliver a particular project or set of strategic objectives. By inviting participants to imagine how they would meet their objectives in different scenarios, windtunnelling helps them identify critical planning points where strategy needs to be flexible and adaptable and what policies may need to be strengthened. Windtunnelling is viewed as a good public sector technique for policy testing.

When should I use it in a project?

Usually most effective when used in conjunction with scenarios. Best applied when a policy of strategy has been developed but before deployment or during a review of a policy or strategy.

Who should attend/take part?

Participants with a good grasp of the policy/strategy that has been designed, with knowledge of what may happen if parameters are changed.

How do I do it?

Steps

1. Develop scenarios (usually 2-4), or work with suitable existing ones.

2. Clarify the project idea or desired outcome to be tested – participants must clearly understand the desired outcome of the project, policy or strategic goal that is being tested and, ideally, the strategy for delivering it. If there is a formal set of objectives written down, these should be circulated in advance of the workshop; if there isn't, participants will need to take time at the start of the workshop to articulate them.

3. Examine how the external conditions described in each scenario affect delivery of the desired outcome. Participants should split into two groups – each group should work with a different scenario and, imagining that the world is as described in the scenario, should identify:

4. Identify the implications for strategy implementation:

A. whether the desired outcome is still achievable and desirable
B. whether the desired outcome needs to be modified in any way
C. how the desired outcome should be achieved in this scenario
D. how the current strategy for delivery needs to be modified.

5. Each group should repeat this discussion with a new scenario until all scenarios have been considered.

6. Identify the implications for strategy implementations – participants should feedback and discuss the findings of the exercise and draw conclusions for delivery of the desired outcome.

What outcomes should I get from it?

Detailed feedback on how a new or existing strategy/policy may be affected by different but plausible future scenarios and how it may need to be modified to ensure effective delivery.

Scenarios

Scenarios are a way to structure, think about, and plan for, future uncertainties. It requires the articulation of more than one possible future (sometimes two but typically three or four). Scenarios do not predict the future; rather they provide the means to consider today's policies and decision-making processes in light of potential future developments.

When should I use it in a project?

A scenario planning exercise represents a healthy commitment to futures investigations. It is a popular and robust tool but it is also resource hungry and can occupy several months of 'mental' time. Thus, it is imperative that solid expectations are stated and shared at the outset. It is recommended by several contributors to this toolkit that an experienced practitioner be retained before embarking upon such a large piece of work. The Horizon Scanning Programme team can help advise you and direct you to the new Procurement Framework.

Who should attend/take part?

The team involved in creating the new policy or strategy and stakeholders as required.

How do I do it?

Scenario creation can be one of the larger, more involved futures activities. To fully engage all stakeholders, it may be necessary to conduct several workshops over a number of months. Workshop focus could be loosely divided as follows:

•Workshop 1: driver identification [See Driver Analysis, p12]

•Workshop 2: scenario construction

•Workshop 3: feedback on the developed scenario narrative and seek further input.

The exercise overview below, describes each activity in a workshop setting. It does not prescribe individual workshops.

Research

Research occurs throughout the scenario construction process. However, emphasis should be placed on research early in the process to inform the process and engage key players. Desk-based research can be used to kick off the project, stimulate discussion, or fill gaps that become evident. Primary research, via interviews, provides rich contextual information, while engaging participants. "7 questions" [see p16] is a good tool for this activity. Both desk-based and interview research can be used to seek contribution from non-participating experts.

Scenario construction

This stage involves intensive and closely connected work. First, drivers are identified. This begins as a broad set and is reduced through methods such as ranking, voting, dialogue and de-selection. Once a set of the most critical drivers remain, these are assessed in terms of impact and uncertainty. Scenarios are the ideal method for dealing with uncertain and high impact possibilities (see Driver Analysis, p12). In fact, should the assessment of drivers reveal no uncertain and high impact possibilities – then scenarios do not need to be developed and more predictive and strategic tools should be used instead

Construction of the scenario frame can now begin by identifying the axes that will comprise the scenario matrix. It is important to select axes that are independent of each other.

In this exercise overview, we will build four scenarios using a 2x2 matrix. It is the most familiar method. Alternative frameworks include three axes to build three scenarios, or a 'cube' of axes, producing eight scenarios. In each case, it is the combination of two or more converging axes that produces the context of each scenario. Finally, it is possible to build scenarios that follow storylines and which are not attached to any frame. Here the scenario count could be higher still.

The most critical uncertainties (high impact and high uncertainty) are then placed into clusters (say five to ten). Each cluster is named and its importance is assessed. Usually the most important clusters – the ones seen as most pertinent to the topic – are used as axes. However, it is important to test several axes for fit. It is fair to say that many times in policy areas, the two axes of a 2x2 matrix concern a governance trait and a societal perspective. Once the axes are defined, the end states of each axis need to be described. These descriptions should be polar opposites and extreme in their representation, however, descriptions should be made in neutral rather than judgemental terms (e.g. 'high' or 'low' rather than 'good' or 'bad'). With the axes in place, drafting the scenarios can begin.

Begin by capturing bulleted information about each scenario. Try to address a set of key questions in each – such as 'What will be the position of consumers in this scenario' and 'Who are the winners and losers?'

From here, scenario narrative is developed. A narrative can be very rich, or quite thin, depending on the output needs of the process and the time/cost constraints involved. A richer narrative has obvious benefits for strategists and decision-makers. Bear in mind that the narrative will also be used to introduce new stakeholders to the project team and the work completed. Some scenario narrative features as books, or as complements to planning manuals. Others are only as illustrative as they need to be to facilitate a strategic review.

Test the scenarios

The first true test of scenarios is to consider if they offer any additional insights. Comparing existing policy platforms against the various scenarios and looking for any deficiencies or ill-addressed areas is one way to achieve this. Scenario tests include windtunnelling and reverse engineering (which isn't detailed in this toolkit). These tests emphasise the relative robustness of individual decisions or policies within each of the scenarios.

What outcomes should I get from it?

The scenario planning process is not an end of itself. The scenarios should be used as extensively as possible as information, a strategic tool or as a communication aid. An effective communications programme should accompany any scenario planning exercise. It should reach the participants, stakeholders, decision-makers, planners, strategy-formers and interested parties.

Scenario narratives can be long and detailed and developing presentations that use relevant and interesting images can make them more easily communicated in, for example, workshop settings. It is often helpful to summarise the main differences between scenarios in a comparison chart that can both act as an aide memoire for readers and provide an overview of the scenarios themselves.

Rapid Approach: – instead of in depth scenarios create **'strategic lenses'** where scenarios are described on one slide max. These are great to keep and bring out for a variety of uses.

How to plan an excellent workshop

Many of the techniques used in futures are designed to generate discussion. They lend themselves to using the workshop format and are great to participate in due the open and creative nature of the debate that occurs. Whilst it is important to focus on the technique, there are a number of variables that are critical to the success of any workshop.

Have a clear question or need

Ensure that the workshop has a clear objective or question to meet. This could be to look at a particular topic or theme, or discuss the future more generally. Specifying the need will encourage more people to attend, be more useful and allow the workshop to be built into a larger programme of futures work. Running a one-off speculative workshop may lead to either a demand that can not be met or suffer from poor turnout and subsequent loss of reputation and trust.

Structure and plan

As with any other piece of work, spend time developing the workshop plan and how it fits into wider work, developing communications and follow up to embed the findings of the workshop. Where possible co-design the workshop with the ultimate customer of the work to ensure that their views are built in to ensure the product is wanted.

Prepare the participants

Futures approaches and topics can be challenging for participants as they typically ask people to think outside their comfort zone and normal working practices. To ensure confidence in the process prebriefing participants at least a week in advance is useful. Setting out the aims, objectives and methods for the workshop helps to demystify the approaches used.

Use a confident facilitator – This could be you, a colleague or one of the many excellent government and private sector facilitators that work in futures. In futures work the concepts and approaches can be counterintuitive and disruptive to current thinking; a confident facilitator will be able to explain these challenges to the attendees and manage

Venue and logistics

Where and how the workshop takes place affects how creative and engaged people may be. Try to arrange a comfortable area with windows and suitable airflow. Arrange for coffee, tea and biscuit/sweets if possible. Workshops of between 15 and 40 are ideal, below this number and the critical mass for active discussion will not be there and above 40 can be hard to manage. Tables of 4 to 8 are optimal for the same reasons.

A notable exception to these parameters is when hosting a roundtable discussion, where 10-15 people can work around one table.

Creativity and Disruption

Remember futures is meant to be challenging to the current norms and will be disruptive. Remember to embrace this in workshops, spending time on being creative with more routine work being carried out in follow up.

Useful sources

There are a number of excellent sources of futures thinking both within and outside government.

Strategic Futures: Understanding Best Practice in Strategic Futures work (2011). Futures Company
Link: www.thefuturescompany.com/free-thinking/strategic-futures/

Blackett Review of High Impact, Low Probability Risks (2011) Government Office for Science
Link: www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-impact-low-probability-risks-blackett-review

Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds (2012) National Intelligence Council
www.dni.gov/index.php/about/organization/national-intelligence-council-global-trends

The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable (2008) Nassim Taleb, Penguin, New York

Global Strategic Trends (2013) Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, Ministry of Defence.
www.gov.uk/government/publications/dcdc-global-strategic-trends-programme-global-strategic-trends-out-to-2040