



AGILE CHANGE
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How to create scenarios for change

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Introduction

Organisational change, by its very nature is uncertain. The best we can hope for is clarity about what we hope to achieve in the next few months, because our achievements, coupled with changes in our environment make subsequent changes hard to predict and design in detail now. However, most people want certainty, they want to know how they will be working in the future, and what will be required of them. The answer "I don't know, it depends on lots of factors..." is not an inspiring message.

To overcome the dilemma of needing certainty whilst remaining flexible, I use scenario planning. Scenarios are potential situations, not guaranteed to happen as described, but containing enough detail to demonstrate likely possibilities for how things will be in the future.

This paper provides guidance on how create useful scenarios, suggesting a structure, potential content and activities for developing the level of detail required.

What is a scenario?

A scenario is the description of a specific situation. It outlines how this situation started, what is happening and how it concludes. Scenario planning is a method for developing and thinking through possible future states on the basis of different factors and assumptions.

The aim of the technique is not to accurately predict the future but rather identify and prepare for a range of possibilities. Scenario planning is based upon the assumption that future developments are largely uncertain so let's help managers and staff acknowledge this uncertainty and translate it into a range of potential options.

Benefits of using scenarios

Effective change requires the involvement and ownership of all those impacted by the change. Developing scenarios is a collaborative exercise beginning with the assumption that no-one has the definitive answer so everyone ideas and opinions are valid.

I have also found that because we are dealing with "what if..." and not "what does..." people are encouraged to look at a wide range of possibilities. They can use guesswork and their intuition and their view of the world to create a range of alternative realities. These alternatives enable them to challenge existing assumptions and constraints.

To get the most from this technique, careful facilitation is required to enable everyone to share their ideas and opinions. Encourage people to explain the reasoning for their answers to broaden the information being shared to maximise the number of different situations generated.

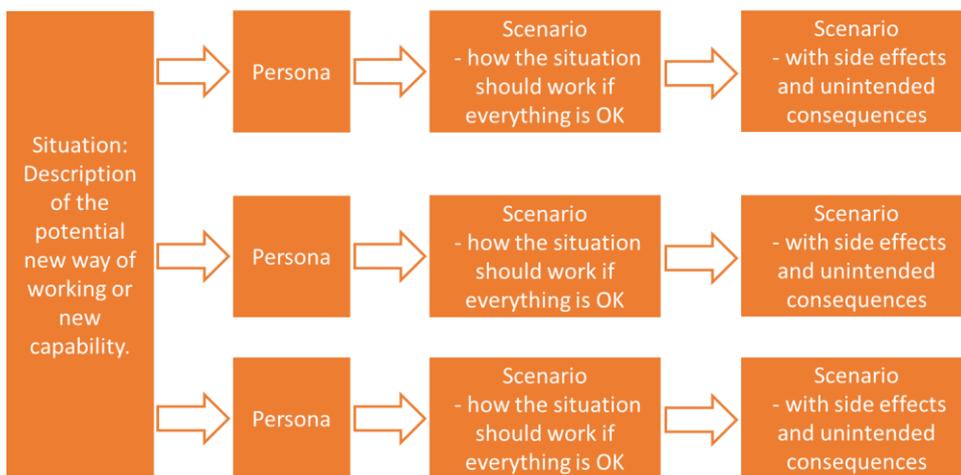
Preparing for scenario creation

To enable scenarios to have enough detail to be useful it is important to gather a wide range of ideas outside of the current arrangements. As the facilitator of scenario workshops, I do a lot of research so that I can bring ideas from global best practice, leaders and experts in the field, disruptors in other industries and professional bodies, consultancies and academics.

I trawl the websites of expos and conferences on the subject that I will be creating scenarios for, looking for past presentations to provide new insights and ideas. These examples from other organisations, industries and cultures might not be directly relevant to the change being planned but it stimulates thought and discussion and enriches the range of scenarios created and the details included in them.

How to create scenarios

To help your workshop participants create their scenarios, it helps to have a structure to follow, so I have created this visual to represent the various elements of a scenario, which has worked for me, whatever the change I am creating scenarios for:



Source: Melanie Franklin 2018

Situation description

The situation is the scope of your scenario. Consider who and what is impacted by the change you are planning and select an aspect of this impact to define in more detail. I think there are two categories of situation: Normal – a routine activity that applies to the majority of your customers and/or staff, or tackles the impact on your most frequently bought products or most often delivered services; Exceptional – rare situations, that deal with special circumstances that don't occur very often, but require a lot of manual intervention or are high risk or involve additional staff etc.

In your description, clearly state what the situation is, who is involved in creating it and who is the recipient. For example, for situations involving changes to recruitment, the situations might include hiring new members of staff using social media, hiring staff from overseas and hiring new graduates.

Start by asking your group to brainstorm their ideas about the impact of the change, and all the ways it might affect current working arrangements. A friend of mine who uses this technique to identify situations relevant to a change in leadership culture starts ensures he is working with a wide range of representatives from across the business. He includes different roles including operational staff, sales and marketing, finance and audit as they all see situations differently. This gives him a breadth of experience which he enhances by inviting people with different levels of seniority to give a depth of understanding of the impact. He asks his participants to share examples of things they have seen done well in their organisation and other places which will be useful to expand and mistakes and failures which will help later with the identification of risk mitigation and contingency actions.

Another colleague always starts her session with a 'proud moment. She asks everyone present what, in a work context they are most proud of achieving in the last few months. This elicits a wide range of responses and I have noticed that when people talk about why the issue was so good and made them feel proud of their colleagues or their organisation it stimulates ideas about how we should be working and what good really looks like. This is a great basis for identifying new ways of working which can be described using this scenario planning technique.

Persona

It is important to try to understand the change from the perspective of those being impacted by it, to gain a greater appreciation for the urgency and importance that they ascribe to elements of the change, and which aspects of the change they might consider less important.

A simple technique for considering the views of others is to write a 'persona' or 'characterisation' that describes the how the stakeholder is affected by the change. Personas are commonly used in marketing to understand the needs and wants of a customer segment so that messages about the change can focus on the information that they need.

The personas should be relatively short, perhaps five or six paragraphs. They should cover the same information for each stakeholder group or customer segment so that the messages about the change will contain similar depth and breadth of information.

Whilst the information contained in the persona will be based on your knowledge and assumptions, try to make it as accurate as possible by meeting with as many of those involved in the change as possible. If you cannot get access to customers directly then interview those in customer facing roles within your organisation including sales/call centre staff, customer services teams, marketing and business development roles. Similarly interview those who work most closely with the suppliers including procurement

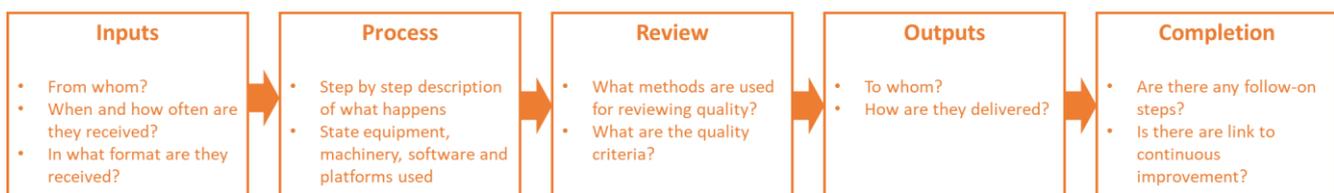
Information to include in your persona:

- Name - create a name for each persona, which might be a category name or a real name to 'humanise' the analysis of the change.
- Position - name of their organisation, job title and their level of seniority and or reporting line if they are a member of staff, or if they are a customer, are they an individual, part of a company etc
- Power - level of authority or influence that they have in connection with the change i.e. do they have the authority to demand certain features or functions, are they responsible for any part of the budget for the change, will they be a signatory to any contracts with suppliers. If they are a customer, how long they have been a customer, and how valuable their customer relationship is e.g. how much they buy and/or how frequently they buy from you.
- Key relationships – who do they work with or have the closest relationships with as a member of staff or as a customer or supplier.
- Reasons why they are likely to support the change.
- Issues are problems they are most likely to raise about the change.
- Key outcomes that they would like to see the change achieve.
- Why these would be of benefit to them.

Scenario - How things work in the future

The scenario must tell a story. It explains how things might work in the future, so it needs a beginning, a middle and an end. Start by describing each of the steps in your situation, from the initial trigger, which might be a request from a customer, or the identification of a problem. Explain what happens next, and what happens after that until you reach a conclusion where the problem has been solved or the product or service has been delivered to the customer.

This is the structure I use to make sure I am including as much detail as possible, and that my scenario has a logical flow from beginning to end:



Source: Melanie Franklin 2018

For a recent change programme, I have written a scenario about hiring new members of staff. To get a full picture of the scenarios I needed, I considered the different types of staff to be hired, and I thought about the different perspectives I could view the situation from. To make sure I hadn't forgotten anything, I drew this table:

	Manager hiring member of staff	HR Manager responsible for hiring process	Job seekers
Hiring permanent employee			
Hiring fixed term contract			
Hiring temporary worker			

Source: Melanie Franklin 2018

I then wrote about the impact of innovative ideas for advertising vacancies, conducting interviews and issuing employment contracts using the social media platform WhatsApp. Writing these scenarios enabled me to pretend I was each of the three personas and imagine what I liked and disliked about the process, what was unclear, what I found easy or hard and what my reaction was to each of the activities.

I imagined what I might tell others about my experience and what questions I had that would need to be answered by the process. These scenarios helped me identify the training needs for the managers and the information needed on the website for potential candidates.

I have also written some scenarios for introducing new lesson planning ideas for teachers. For each new approach, I imagined how it would feel to be the teacher, empathising with new qualified teachers and very experienced teachers. This helped me identify the concerns that experienced teachers might have and the coaching that could be made available to them to help them unlearn their current methods of lesson planning.

I also explored how lessons would feel and the differences pupils would notice at different age ranges, which helped me identify some of the quality criteria needed for effective lesson planning.

Alternative courses of action

Finally, I ask everyone to ask the question: "What if it doesn't happen like that?" to identify potential side effects, unexpected impacts and knock on effects to other work that might not have been considered so far.

It is not easy to ask a group who are feeling motivated by the potential impacts of change that they have described to find alternatives. However, it is important because the more we discuss potential undesirable outcomes, the better prepared we are to address the concerns of all those we are asking to work in new ways.

Conclusion

Scenarios are a risk-free way of imagining the future, to understand how the change might work in reality. The benefits of this technique are:

- An opportunity to understand the change in detail, getting a really good feel for how things will work and what is going to become the new norm;
- Giving those impacted a chance to be the architects of their new future, which enables them to feel connected to the changes, to be responsible for them and to avoid the risk that change is being done to them.

About the author

I have been responsible for the successful delivery of effective change and for creating environments that support transformational change for over twenty years. I have an impressive track record of successful consulting assignments and I am an acknowledged thought leader in Change Management.

I am the Co-Chair of the Change Management Institute UK and a respected author of text books and articles on change, project and programme management. I am a talented communicator with a reputation for delivering complex information with humour and passion. I draw on my wealth of practical experience to illustrate concepts and to engage my audience in lively debates on advantages and disadvantages of each approach that I outline.

To access more resources about change management, connect with Melanie on LinkedIn
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