Exploring the Effect of the Scenario Building Process in Creating Personal Change and its Application in the Coaching Context

Research

Author: Dale Williams

Module PDF 4860

A Summary of the Research Project Submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfilment of the

requirements for the degree of Masters Work Based Learning Studies (Executive Coaching)

National Centre for Work Based Learning Partnerships

Title of project

Exploring the effect of the scenario building process in creating personal change and its application in the coaching context

> *This is a unique application of the methodology of Scenario Planning;*
> *but the idea of looking at the future through a prism of possibilities is as relevant to an individual as to a business.*
>
> Clem Sunter – Chariman Anglo American Chairman's Fund

Presented by:
Dale Williams
Student Number: 2248612

PO Box 847
Constantia
7848
South Africa

Phone: +27 (0)83 2020198
eMail: connnectedworld@gmail.com

Table of Contents

Table of Figures

Executive Summary

This study examines the use of scenarios in the coaching context. It does so by exploring two coaching clients experience of Personal Scenario coaching and places this alongside the personal experience of the participants of the Mont Fleur[1] scenario planning exercise.

This is the first piece of research on Personal Scenario coaching, and being exploratory in nature, brings together the main issues, successes and challenges of this approach. The scenario building process is expansive, exciting, fun and has the ability to significantly influence the mental models of participants directly leading to an improved ability to grapple with difficult problems.

The recommendations of this study are that:

- the coaching profession considers Personal Scenario coaching as a new approach to coaching
- the practice of Personal Scenario coaching is further developed specifically around process and theoretical understanding
- coaches should consider whether goal setting without the development of scenarios is effective
- use of the "Official Future" as the first scenario worked on with the client is potentially a valuable introduction to Personal Scenarios
- scenario planners consider the individual and coaching aspects of planning exercises
- Personal Scenario planning is undertaken with the help of a coach and not alone

In an increasingly disconnected world, coaching offers hope by reconnecting people, not only to each other, but also to their core values. In the case of Mont Fleur the scenario process successfully brought together people to work on difficult problems at a crucial time in South Africa's history. By applying scenarios to coaching, coaches get to add to a powerful new tool to their toolkits and scenario planners get to take scenarios into a new context.

---

[1] Mont Fleur took place in 1992 before South Africa's the first democratic elections and mapped out scenarios for the country in 2002.

Personal Scenario planning as a skill is a powerful technique for anybody wanting to challenge themselves to live their life to the full, avoiding blind spots and living life on purpose. In an environment which is more uncertain every day, and where everything depends on… well everything else, the words of Stewart Brand[2] are truer than ever; "Artful scenario spinning is a form of convergent thinking about divergent futures. It ensures not that you are always right about the future but - better - that you are almost never wrong about the future."

There is evidence that the use of scenarios is powerful on many different levels and, with the further development of the model, has the potential to significantly impact the field of coaching.

---

[2] Brand is co-founder with Danny Hillis of The Long Now Foundation. See http://www.well.com/user/sbb/bio.html

1. Introduction

The use of scenario planning in coaching brings together two disciplines which haven't previously been formally linked – scenario planning and coaching. It is an innovative and new approach[3].

I initially came across scenario planning in 1989 when I heard Clem Sunter present "The World and South Africa in the 1990's." (Sunter, 1992) At the time he was an Anglo American[4] executive and was giving speeches based on scenarios that Anglo had developed with the help of Pierre Wack[5]. Described by Peter Schwartz in, **The Art of the Long View**, the scenarios "…allowed South African's to see what would happen if they continued down the path of apartheid [the low road]. It also included an alternative scenario that many South African's had not considered before, a path in which apartheid could end *without* the blacks taking over and driving out the whites [the high road]." (Schwartz, 1996)

This was the same year that F.W. de Klerk became president of South Africa. Prior to that he was Minister of National Education. The Nobel Year Book **Les Prix** described him at this time as, "…a supporter of segregated universities, and as a leader of the National Party in the Transvaal, he was not known to advocate reform." (Frängsmyr, 1993)

[Sunter] spoke to hundreds of audiences, black and white, in churches, schools and government institutions. After each presentation, Sunter would facilitate a discussion with the idea of building a common

---

[3] Adam Kahane the facilitator of the Mont Fleur stated "I like it, very new". Clem Sunter stated that he hadn't heard of people using scenarios in coaching.

[4] Anglo American plc with its subsidiaries, joint ventures and associates is a global leader in the mining and natural resource sectors.

[5] Pierre Wack, who died in 1997, was the leader of the Royal Dutch/Shell Group of Companies' elite London-based scenario team. With his colleagues and successors at Shell's Group Planning department, he designed and refined this important business tool, in effect serving as the chief analyst of Shell's version of Her Majesty's Secret Service. Scenario planning alerted Shell's managing directors (its committee of CEO equivalents) in advance about some of the most confounding events of their times: the 1973 energy crisis, the more severe price shock of 1979, the collapse of the oil market in 1986, the fall of the Soviet Union, the rise of Muslim radicalism and the increasing pressure on companies to address environmental and social problems. The method has since become widely popular outside Shell, not just in corporations but in some governments. In South Africa, for example, scenario planning played a major role in the peaceful transition from a system of apartheid to a stable multiracial government (Kleiner, 2003).

understanding. This process is believed to have had a huge impact in eventually dismantling apartheid. (Hargrove, 1995) It is said that de Klerk, the South African president, took these scenarios very seriously, and that they influenced the release of Nelson Mandela. (Schwartz, 1997)

Using scenarios as possible outcomes for South Africa deeply influenced my outlook for the country. I could see no external signs that South Africa was about to embark on the remarkable journey that is now history. Sunter's presentation challenged me to think about the how the "high road" might happen, already a move from it being just a possibility. Sunter sums it up by saying that most experts at the time expected South Africa to take the "low road" because no government had ever negotiated itself out of power. (Illbury & Sunter, 2001)

Living through the following decade and watching most of that "high road" scenario unfold, was very meaningful and a strong learning experience for me. My take was that imagining a different future is the first step to making it possible, and when it is possible, then it can happen.

The events were amazing and unthinkable, but they illustrated the power of scenario planning, because nobody was brave enough at the time to *forecast* what actually happened. Instead, a possibility became a probability and a probability became a reality. (Illbury & Sunter, 2001)

I later studied the 1992 Mont Fleur Scenarios (le Roux et al., 1992) which described four possible scenarios for South Africa in 2002. What influenced me about this exercise was the deep impact that the exercise had on the participants who included key leaders in the African National Congress who later took up prominent positions in government.

In a reference to one of the scenarios named after a Greek mythological character, Tito Mboweni, who took part in Mont Fleur and later became Governor of the Reserve Bank in 1999, stated in his inauguration address "We are not Icarus; there is no need to fear that we will fly too close to the sun." (Mboweni, 1999)

With this as background, an article by the facilitator of the Mont Fleur Scenarios entitled **How to Change the World: Lessons for Entrepreneurs from Activists** (Kahane, 2001) interested me in the use of scenario planning as an approach to coaching. Hudson suggests that a good coach can design the future by converting planning into scenario building. Coaches, he says, work with the whole person, "weaving together the client's variety of concerns into an integrated plan that has vitality and purpose." (Hudson, 1999)
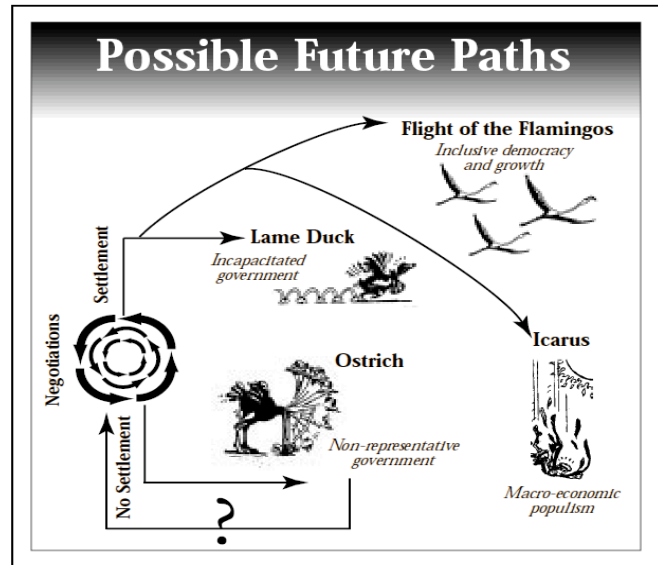
Figure 1: Mont Fleur Scenarios (le Roux et al., 1992)

Thus I arrived at Personal Scenario coaching, working with individuals in the coaching context to build scenarios for their lives. I took the lessons learnt from organisational scenario processes and adapted them for coaching by building a Personal Scenario coaching model. I have used the model, which I continue to develop, with my coaching clients for just under two years.

In order to initially validate my approach I made contact with the two people who had significantly influenced my thinking to that point, Clem Sunter and Adam Kahane. Both were very supportive of the idea and encouraged me to develop it further.

This project is important as it will be the first researched paper on Personal Scenario coaching and will provide a platform on which other researchers can build in both the fields of scenario planning and coaching.

2. Objectives, Boundaries and Literature Review

"Scenarios are a tool for helping us take a long view in a world of great uncertainty. The name comes from the theatrical term 'scenario' – the script for a film or play. Scenarios are stories about the way the world may turn out tomorrow, stories that can help us recognise and adapt to changing aspects of our present environment. They form a method for articulating the different pathways that may exist for you tomorrow, and finding your appropriate movements down each of those possible paths. Scenario planning is about making choices today with an understanding of how they might turn out."

Peter Schwartz – The Art of the Long View

Research Statement

Exploring scenario building as a coaching intervention.

Research Questions

Exploring the effect of the scenario building process in creating personal change and its application in the coaching context.

This project looks at the effect of the scenario building process in creating personal change in participants and its application in the coaching context. My hypothesis is that there is an effect and I will use three case studies to explore what the effects are.

In order to focus this study I have selected categories of personal change within which to examine the personal change in the people involved. These are:

a) a change of mental models

b) the development of new skills and tools

c) the establishment of new relationships and networks

d) improved ability to grapple with difficult problems / situations

In **Error! Reference source not found.** below, I give rationale for these four change measures. As this is an exploratory study I expect to discover additional effects which I will document in 5. Project Findings.

I have placed emphasis on coaching by having two coaching case studies and one non-coaching case study in order to provide sufficient understanding of the application of scenarios in the coaching context.

I have specifically not mentioned good or bad change (positive or negative change). Good and bad are personal and relative terms and although they could be answered by the participants in this study, another person having the same experience may draw different conclusions. I therefore do not believe that it is useful for this study to conclude whether a change is positive or negative.

Literature

Various searches of academic databases failed to reveal any prior work done on scenario planning specifically for coaching clients[6]. Using Mont Fleur as a focal point, I examined everything I could find related to that exercise. Mont Fleur literature is referenced at length in the case study (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). I then examined literature specifically on scenario planning and coaching looking for overlaps and relevant material. Lastly Narrative Therapy and Personal Constructs Psychology relate strongly to Personal Scenarios. I cover relevant literature in these two areas below.

In terms of handling conflicts, as I have been unable to find prior literature on the specific topic of Personal Scenario coaching, I am unlikely to find conflicting literature in that area. I do anticipate that, as scenario building is typically used in groups, most literature will refer to the group process. This is not however

---

[6] Searches of the following online academic and business databases for 'scenario AND coaching', 'scenario approach planning AND executive coaching' and 'scenario approach to coaching' returned results as per below:

- o   Ingenta / Zero results
- o   Emerald Fulltext / Zero results
- o   EBSCOhost / Zero results
- o   BIDS / Zero results
- o   PsycINFO / Zero results
- o   Wilson Web / Zero results
- o   ISI Web of knowledge / Zero results

problematic as I am looking at the effect on individuals in the process, without a primary focus on scenario building methodology.

Scenarios and Coaching

One of the challenges of thinking about the future is that we often don't want to see things outside of our current reality. Blind spots are things that are outside of, or obscured from, our vision, or things about which we are simply unaware. (Derosalia, 2001) In his book **Blindsided: How to Spot the Next Breakthrough That Will Change Your Business**, Jim Harris talks about companies that "are in fact 'blind' to reality and caught up in a dream of the official future." (Harris, 2002)

The "Official Future" is what happens if we keep doing what we have always done. The challenge with scenarios is to develop alternative stories to "the official future".

Preparing for possible futures which right now may seem unlikely and in many cases may be undesirable, is often hard for individuals to visualize without some assistance. When decision makers look at the future, denial acts as an automatic shut off valve. (Schwartz, 1996) Richard Kilburg in his book **Executive Coaching** describes denial as "A pattern of disavowing thoughts, feelings, wishes, needs, or external reality factors that are intolerable at a conscious level." (Kilburg, 2000)

Peltier says that coaches can often spot the denial before others. (Peltier, 2001) Thus the role of scenarios in a coaching context has the potential to give a person both a construct and, with the support of a coach, a container (a metaphor for a safe space) within which they can challenge blind spots and develop plausible and challenging stories about their future. Talking about scenarios, Peter Senge says that "without some discipline or practice like this, we tend to get stuck in a single story that we accept without thinking." (Senge et al., 2004)

Scenarios offer strong support for perceiving what a change may look like at a future point. They are "myths of the future" says Peter Schwartz. They are there to challenge us to think the unthinkable, which in turn allows us to cope with the change when the unthinkable happens. Talking about the nuclear reactor leak that happened in 1979, Schwartz says; "If the planners of Three Mile Island had written a story about how things

could go wrong, instead of numeric analysis of possible fault sequences, they would have been better prepared for the surprise they actually encountered when their complex machine went astray. They would have been better able to cope with the catastrophic change that happened on that day." (Schwartz, 1996)

Narrative Therapy

Narrative therapists work with their clients' [life] stories and assist them in seeking out alternative stories - not just any alternative story, but stories that are identified by the person seeking counselling as stories by which they would like to live their lives. (Morgan, 2000) Using the story metaphor for counselling, a narrative approach might focus on building a fuller picture of the plot development. (Monk, 1996)

While narrative therapists work with clients to look at their existing stories, the coach working with a client to build Personal Scenarios will work to create empowering, new and plausible future stories.

The coach working with scenarios shares a number of similar approaches with the narrative therapist. These include:

- Start by seeking to join people in their particular experiential worlds (not educating them about ours)
- try to understand the stories through which people are currently organising their lives and what they find problematic about those stories
- strive to perceive people as separate from their problems.

    (Whitehead & Combs, 2004)

While understanding the past is important, the coach's role is more about working with the client to build their future. Hudson's **Handbook of Coaching** details some points in this regard:

- Finds bridges to the future, connecting what is to what might be
- Models the way ahead
- Motivates, seeks deep results, explores new directions, innovates, invests in the future
- Facilitate compelling visions of the future with clients
- Convert planning into scenario building; design the future

    (Hudson, 1999)

Michael White, an originator of Narrative Therapy, noted that many clients adapted to their problems and did not notice the extent to which those problems affected their lives. (Monk, 1996) Gregory Bateson, an anthropologist and psychologist who inspired Michael White, introduced the concept of "news of difference". He suggested that in order to be able to detect and acquire new information, human beings must engage in a process of comparison, in which they distinguish between one set of events in time and another. (Monk, 1996) Scenario planning combines critical, convergent thinking with creative, divergent thinking. Scenario planning stands above most other approaches in delivering multiple futures. (More, 2001)

Personal Constructs Psychology

George Kelly, who invented the Theory of the Psychology of Personal Constructs (PCP), said "A person's processes are psychologically channelized by the way in which he anticipates events." (Kelly, 1992) Kelly saw people as driven by the need to cope with coming events in the world, and all other aspects of behaviour as deriving from this. (Shaw & Gaines, 1992) The basic premise of the PCP approach is about story telling… PCP was path-breaking in making the simple, profound proposition that human life is about the story that each person creates. (Duigen & Stoker, 2003)

In Personal Scenario coaching, clients have the opportunity to look at their 'Official Future' which happens if they go forward without changing either the narrative that drives their life, nor the constructs on which their life is based. In addition it affords the client the opportunity to challenge their existing constructs and to build alternative future stories or narratives for their lives.

4. Project Activity

Summary of project activity

- Interview with Adam Kahane, facilitator of Mont Fleur

- Interview with Clem Sunter, Anglo American scenario planner

- Completed research planning (PDF4811 Plan)

- Completed research proposal (PDF4825 Proposal)

- Ongoing review of research proposal and plan against actual research

- Overall development of knowledge about scenario planning with a specific focus on Mont Fleur

- Literature review of scenario planning, coaching, personal constructs theory and narrative therapy.

- Collated notes and reflections from coaching sessions with two clients

- Prepared for interviews with two coaching clients and Mont Fleur participant

- Interviewed two coaching clients

- Interviewed Michiel le Roux, a participant from Mont Fleur

- Interviewed the co-ordinator of Mont Fleur

- Analysed previous studies where 14 of 22 Mont Fleur participants were interviewed

- Wrote up case studies

- Wrote up this document

- Ongoing reviews with my supervisor

Planning

The project started with the plan (4811 Planning Document) which at that stage was fairly high level. As I got closer to the project, I worked the plan into more detail and revised start dates for all of the items. As I have been doing this project part-time, I have had to be flexible with my time and, where it has not been possible to make progress as planned, I have re-worked the plan so that I could make up the time elsewhere.

In addition to the plan, I worked out a framework for this thesis based on input from i-coach. By doing that work up front, I had a structure within which I worked and which dramatically simplified the writing of this document. This is a key learning for me as I often work in an unstructured manner.

As described in methodology above, my three different case studies allow me to look at the effect of scenarios on individuals in three different contexts.
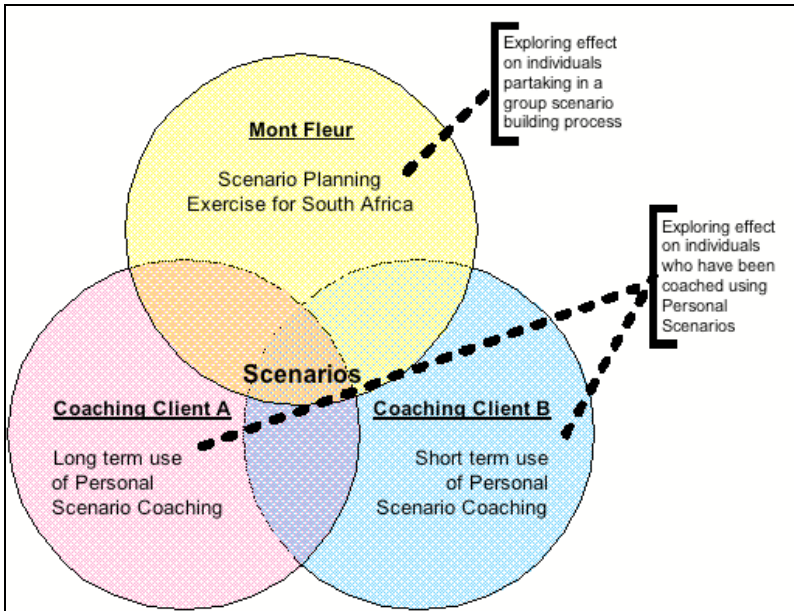

Figure 2: The three different scenario contexts

Development of ideas

In this section I will show how as a key project activity I developed my thinking.

Personal Meaning

This research project has a lot of personal meaning for me, so in approaching the activity I tried to do it in a way in which I could derive maximum benefit, not only from this academic exercise, but also by taking it into my coaching practice and my life. I found this a particularly useful approach as it kept me motivated throughout the project.

Scenarios

In this section I describe how my thinking about scenarios has developed during this project. It was helpful to have chosen a topic that linked in with the rest of my master's work[7]

---

[7] I have to date completed two assessments and have written two reflective essays together with a learning journey doc - all have covered Personal Scenario coaching.

I have also followed the Mont Fleur scenarios from shortly after they were completed in 1992. I have also studied various other scenario building exercises[8].

It was relevant for me to choose the Mont Fleur exercise as a specific case as it was Adam Kahane's[9] original article that sparked off the connection for me between scenarios and coaching. An early conversation with him confirmed that the idea had merit. Both Kahane and I have an interest in scenario planning. In an article he said, "What particularly interested me is that Shell had pioneered a sophisticated way to approach the future that centred on a methodology called scenario planning." (Kahane, 2001) I, however, wanted to take the approach further and apply it to coaching.

My thinking has been aided throughout this programme through the use of learning diaries and reflective essays to record my learning. In addition, the coaching community that has developed around this programme has become an incredible asset for me, providing a place for me to test my ideas, receive feedback and learn from others.

Although not all specifically part of this study I have, since 2002, been testing my ideas of using scenarios in coaching with clients, scenario planning experts, business executives and academics. The overwhelming response has been that it makes a lot of sense and almost everyone comments on how useful it would be to build scenarios for their own lives.

The more challenging aspects appear as one gets into more detail. Firstly the 'How' of building these scenarios is challenging, as there are a number of subtle aspects of scenarios which need to be understood before one can do this effectively.

One challenge is the "Goals masquerading as scenarios". This is where a person writes up three scenarios for their life over the next five years, one of which is their ideal view of the future, and the other two are

---

[8] Vision Guatamala, Destino Colombia, Anglo Scenarios, various Shell scenarios and GBN scenarios

[9] Mont Fleur facilitator

simply reasons why they should chose the first scenario. Whilst there is some value in this, the second and third scenarios are not divergent and plausible enough to challenge thinking in a meaningful way.

The relationship between goals and scenarios has been of particular interest to me. I have collated a view of how goals and scenarios look side by side with their different approaches. This is detailed in Figure 3 below.

Personal Scenarios	Goals
Multiple possible outcomes	One intended outcome
Focus on uncertainty	Remove uncertainty
Stories	Bullet points
Creates many possibilities	Narrows down possibilities
Attempts to identify the unforeseen	No methodology for handling the unforeseen
Looks beyond individual to environment	Focus on individual capabilities

Figure 3: Personal Scenarios and Goals

Whilst I don't think it is useful to compare Goals and Personal Scenarios with the intention of finding a winner, I think it is important that the relationship is defined. I believe goals can be tremendously powerful in coaching if they can be set within the context of a scenario. A goal on its own, with a measurable outcome by a certain date, lacks some fundamentals such as the effect of things outside of our control, proper plans for what happens if we over or undershoot the goal and a rich description of the environment in which we operate. It has in summary a somewhat linear approach.

A further way to illustrate the difference is that whatever goals an individual has should ideally stack up against all the scenarios. At the very least the person should be strategising on how they will achieve their goals within each of the scenarios.

In order to further develop the thinking, I have detailed below (see Innovation) the activity I undertook as part of this project, namely to develop the thinking around Personal Scenario coaching.

Innovation

The **idea** of using scenarios in coaching has merits, but I believe that the real innovation is in developing **how** to actually work with Personal Scenarios in coaching sessions. I have layered my suggested approaches and represent them diagrammatically below. I have included this under project activity as it is a key part of how my thinking about Personal Scenario coaching has developed while doing this project.

Tool

Scenarios in their basic form can be seen as a tool, a process to be followed taking people from a start point through to an end point where scenarios have been developed for the future. In this way scenarios are looked at purely as a technique which produces a result. This is the simplest way of looking at them, as in this form they could be distributed as an instruction book, and the coach would use them as they might any other tool.
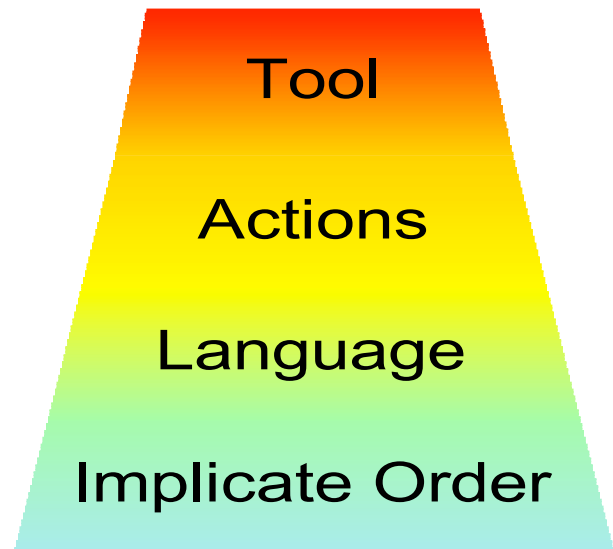
Figure 4: Personal Scenario Rainbow

Actions

The second layer is about the actions that the client may take as a result of the scenarios. By being able to describe what a possible future path looks like, the client is empowered and has the possibility of making it happen out in the real world. As in my case where in 1989 where I wasn't able to imagine a peaceful post-apartheid South Africa, by having someone describe the scenario to me, it became a possibility and with the possibility came an opportunity for me to partake in making it happen.

Language

The third layer is the language that the scenario provides. A way of looking at this is that a good scenario provides a new language for describing a possible future. Language is an indispensable starting point for the future to become first possible and then real. When Helen Keller describes her first encounter with water in her autobiography, we get a sense of her vocabulary increasing as a result of her teacher Anne Sullivan's actions:

> "We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the fragrance of the honey-suckle with which it was covered. Someone was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word water, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I

felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten, a thrill of returning thought, and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me." (Keller, 1960)

Without language, there was no existence of water for Helen – only an undifferentiated mass of impulses and sensations. Our word does create our world. In "making" a description of something, we are acting. (Edelson, 2003)

Our mastery of language allows us to make distinctions. In **Language and the Pursuit of Happiness**, Chalmers Brothers says, "These distinctions in language – coupled with our generative and creative interpretation of language itself – are the basis for designing and creating new results in virtually all aspects of our lives." (Brothers, 2004) Scenarios are themselves distinctions, different future paths that we may walk.

Marilyn Edelson in **The Universal Language of Coaching** lists the basic premises of coaching as[10]:

- When we speak we act.

- Language is generative.

- Listening does not necessarily result in receiving the accurate transmission of what is spoken but, rather, always involves an act of interpretation.

- If we change the language we use to describe our experience, we can change our interpretation and alter our experience–– even regarding traumatic events.

- Language spoken into a future that is open creates the possibility of something new; language that is past-referenced will give us "more of the same" of what we've already had.

- In language we have choice; our choices determine our actions therefore the language we choose to use can alter history— personally, socially and globally.

  (Edelson, 2003)

Implicate Order

Scenarios offer a way of not only changing the language that is used, but also a way to create the possibility of something new. By describing possible futures we open up the chance that those are the futures that will

---

[10] By contrast the basic premises of psychotherapy can be said to be:
- Development is a life process, driven by biology.
- There are biological influences and deviations.
- History, of both the individual and the family, is important.
- Trauma and abuse alter the life course.
- The self is formed from the confluence of the above influences and factors. (Edelson, 2003)

emerge. This leads into the last layer of innovation which can be described by David Bohm's implicate order (see **Error! Reference source not found.**).

In essence, so much in our world is fragmented and what is necessary more now than ever before is an ability to see the whole. David Pratt writing in **Sunrise Magazine** says of Bohm, "In Bohm's view, all the separate objects, entities, structures, and events in the visible or explicate world around us are relatively autonomous, stable, and temporary 'subtotalities' derived from a deeper, implicate order of unbroken wholeness." (Pratt, 1993) Scenarios enable us the ability to tell the story of the whole rather than the parts. Jaworski in **Sychronicity** says "…human beings can participate in the "unfolding" of the implicate wholeness into the manifest or explicate order."

Stories are about meaning; they help explain *why* things could happen in a certain way. They give order and meaning to events – a crucial aspect of understanding future possibilities. (Schwartz, 1996) In a later paragraph Schwartz adds, "Moreover stories help people to cope with complexity… Scenarios are stories that give meaning to events." (Schwartz, 1996)

In his paper on **Six Essential Elements for Leadership** Jaworski tells us that "life is constantly unfolding in an orderly way, and humans have the capacity to sense what it is that wants to happen in the world – what the emerging course of being in the world is." He later references existentialist philosopher Martin Buber, who made the subtle distinction between what he called our "unfree will," which is controlled by instincts and external influences, and our "grand will," which guides our destiny. The yielding that is part of the development of a leader is about surrendering to our grand will. (Jaworski, 2001) Scenarios are a tool for integrating our unfree and our grand will.

If we could only see reality more as it is, it would become obvious what we need to do. We wouldn't be acting out of our own histories, or our own needs, or our own purely reactive interpretations. We would see what is needed in the moment.   We would do exactly what's required of us, right now, right here. This is precisely what Bohm was talking about when he spoke of living one's life by 'participating in the unfolding." (Jaworski, 1996)

Case Study Formulation

I created three different case studies as defined under **Error! Reference source not found.**. The case studies are included in their entirety in the appendices. For easy reference the case studies and related documentation can be found at:

- **Error! Reference source not found.**
    - o **Error! Reference source not found.**
    - o **Error! Reference source not found.**
- **Error! Reference source not found.**
    - o **Error! Reference source not found.**
    - o **Error! Reference source not found.**
- **Error! Reference source not found.**
    - o **Error! Reference source not found.**
    - o **Error! Reference source not found.**

The three different case studies have been covered under methodology. In creating them I wrote them each up separately so that they could stand alone. I have included the three complete case studies in the appendix. In addition the two case studies relating to coaching also include the scenarios written by those clients. These are listed in a separate appendix.

It was valuable to interview Pieter le Roux, who with his colleague Vincent Maphai, convened the Mont Fleur Scenarios. He gave me valuable insights into the process, the thinking at the time, and what he perceived were the changes that the individual participants underwent as a result of being a part of the exercise.

5. Project Findings

This explorative study to look for evidence of personal change in people who had taken part in a scenario building process has found a number of instances where personal change has been noted.

Change of mental models

Our "mental models" determine not only how we make sense of the world, but how we take action. (Senge, 1994) In **Presence – Human purpose and the field of the future**, Betty Sue Flowers says, "…our willingness to hold and consider different stories can free us from being isolated in our own." (Senge et al., 2004)

In the case of the short term coaching client, he redefined how he would take himself out into the world, from a reactive approach to a proactive approach. This came about through him writing up his **official future scenario**. "Okay, one of the most striking scenarios, or the most significant scenarios, was the official future if nothing changes." In the interview he noted that things currently happen in his life without him being pro-active.

Later talking about the underlying philosophy of that scenario he said, "…to capture the philosophies around the official future, was one where I continue to live by the philosophy that as long as I am moving forwards in the world with my wings spread wide, that I will be available to opportunities that come my way. So it's very much a reactive process."

In the interview it was clear from the way he expressed it, that seeing what the official future looked like was a shift for him. As he put it, "So when I looked at that [the official future], it was like, s^&t, so if I don't pursue what we pursue in this conversation, that's what its going to look like. And I guess seeing that, was the thing that inspired or motivated me to say okay, well I must now actually be pro-active."

Elsewhere in the interview he said, "So the word pro-active stood out for me and the fact that it was pro-active setting a direction rather than an outcome is what appealed to me."

The client had previously described how he lived his life without future plans and really took things as they come – which is also what he described in the official future scenario.

There is quite extensive evidence that in the case of the participants in the Mont Fleur scenarios that they experienced changes in their mental models. Katrin Käufer studied participants in Mont Fleur and other similar scenario planning initiatives around the world[11]. The interviewees emphasized how the work on the scenarios changed their thinking and mental models and how they saw the world differently after participating in the workshops. (Käufer, 2000)

Specific changes in mental models included:

- Seeing themselves through the eyes of someone else made them think differently about their own roles.
- The work on the scenarios engaged participants in long-term thinking, what some described as a totally new perspective…
- Learning journeys and the presentation by experts changed their perception of reality.
- Participants said that the scenario work helped them develop hope and optimism.

    (Käufer, 2000)

The long term coaching client shifted his mental model about his relationship to his company as a result of the Personal Scenario coaching. At the beginning of the process, when we drew up the scenarios, he suggested that starting his own business was an option. This materialised into his Catalyst scenario. The reasons he stated at the time were so that he could have control and direct the business unit directly. Upon completion of the scenarios, and having integrated them into his life, he stated some months later, while still working for the same company, "I tend to come in when I want to, I make choices on where we go. So, it feels as though I'm in control, I make the choices of where we go. It's just, I'd like to think of it as my company with the holding company being [Company Name] as an investor. I'm sure there are different ways it can be looked at, but for me that's a nice way of looking at it." Later on he went on to say about his current work with his company, "I'd say I feel passionate about my current and future growth."

---

[11] Mont Fleur in South Africa (1991-92), Destino Colombia (1997-2000), and Visión Guatemala (1998-2000)

The development of new skills and tools

In the case of Mont Fleur, participants said that they learned dialogue and listening skills, how to apply the methodology of the scenario process, and new things about their own people and nation. (Käufer, 2000)

Said the Minister of Finance in South Africa: "I can't explain the shock I had when … X… called me and said: 'you are going to co-ordinate economic policy.'… I think that by working in the way that we did [at Mont Fleur], it kind of broke through that fear: I say I could engage with the [economic] issues.… The strength of a process like this is that it actually sends forth people with skills. Certainly, at a personal level, it was an enormous fillip for my own confidence and for doing what I needed to do…" (Gillespie, 2000)

Both coaching clients noted that learning about scenario planning was a new tool for them to use. The long term client noted, "…looking back at it now, just over a year later, I see it as a tool which I will definitely use again and again, as almost like an internal compass, of am I on the right track and take it as that" while the short term client said, "he had another arrow in his quiver… I think the most….I think that, if I were to just off the top of my head, what's changed….the most significant things is the additional tool and the tool is another set of lenses."

Initial difficulty in understanding the scenario process

There are indications that both the Mont Fleur participants and the short term coaching client initially struggled to understand how to work with scenarios. Participants in Mont Fleur noted confusion at the beginning of the process. One person said "My initial impression when I got involved in the Mont Fleur scenario project [was that] it was sort of semi-confused [and] unclear whether we were making any sense. The shortcoming is that the process confused me in the initial stages." (Gillespie, 2000)

Peter Schwartz, talking about The Scenario Building Animal in his book The Art of the Long View says, "Once you get used to the idea of scenarios, using them comes more easily. Some people are immediately great at building scenarios. Others need more practice. But this difference in proficiency has nothing to do with peoples' character. It's the result of differences in training, experience and intuition." (Schwartz, 1996)

The short term coaching client said, "So, the one thing was…it wasn't easy outside of our conversations to do it because it's something relatively new for me." He went on to talk specifically about what he struggled with, "…where I felt we…I wasn't making progress is when you were discussing with me the, the concept of scenario planning and speaking conceptually… I didn't feel that there was any progress out of that. Its like, yes I've got that but how do you actually apply that?"

In the case of the long term client, although he didn't mention specific challenges with understanding the scenario process, he did mention that the coaching relationship takes time to grow, "…the one-on-one relationship with a coach is something built up over time… an extended period needs to be taken before you can begin to work on the real work of discussing very private thoughts." This is consistent with Hudson who says that "the focus is to form trust" when building a coaching relationship. (Hudson, 1999)

The establishment of new relationships and networks

The long term client noted his relationship with the coach and how it had taken time to build that before he could work on really personal matters, "…the one-on-one relationship with a coach is something built up over time… an extended period needs to be taken before you can begin to work on the real work of discussing very private thoughts."

In addition to the relationship between coach and client, he is seeing that his work as a manager is primarily about the relationships that he builds. "The more I go along, the more I see the work being in how do you relate to other people." Scenarios are a useful tool for improving relationships. He went on to say, "For very important work relationships it becomes a very useful secret weapon of dealing with people without putting your foot in it, and practising your reaction to see up front how you feel about certain words, and certain environments, how you'd react to that – its not foolproof, you can lose it, but it gives you an idea of how to act in a situation."

Subsequent to completion of the scenarios, the client has received a promotion and is running a well functioning team in the mobile digital media space (this is a combination of what was described in Catalyst

and Grand Central). Based on this, I would suggest that the client has successfully built relations within the company to a point where he has the credibility to hold a more senior position.

In the case of Mont Fleur, "…it was taking place just after the white government had relaxed its "petty apartheid" restrictions on social interaction. The scenario team was excited to be able to work together across white-black, establishment-opposition lines. Many of them were meeting for the first time, and the relaxed, residential setting helped them to get to know one another." (Kahane, 2004)

Speaking about his relationship with Derek Keys[12], Trevor Manuel recalls, "Derek sat around and chatted with us, and it was very important, because we were trying to understand the Icarus scenario and the dangers of macro-economic populism. That was certainly profound for me." It was the start of a friendship and mentoring relationship across the political divide that Manuel and others admit was important in preparing the young team for the task that lay ahead. (Sparks, 2003)

The diversity of participants in Mont Fleur offered a unique opportunity for relationships to be built across lines which the apartheid system had prevented from happening. People not only with differing opinions but real adversaries were gathered in a room with the common purpose of talking about the future.

The short term client did not note any new relationships as a result of the coaching. This was partly attributed to the short period of the coaching.

An improved ability to grapple with difficult problems / situations

Both coaching clients grappled with issues about their lives and how they plan to take them forward, while the participants of Mont Fleur grappled with social, political and economic issues that were facing South Africa at that time.

---

[12] Derek Keys was at that time finance minister in de Klerk's government. Trevor Manuel took part in Mont Fleur and later became the minister of finance in Mandela's government.

The economy was a major issue and was potentially the biggest issue to be dealt with around the transition to democracy. There are a number of references to the role that Mont Fleur played in shifting the perspectives of the key people who have subsequently shaped South Africa's economic policy[13].

Allister Sparks in his book **Beyond the Miracle: Inside the New South Africa** commented, "The African National Congress has undergone an astonishing about-turn in the formulation of its economic policy, from a left wing socialist position that envisaged large-scale nationalisation to a position where it has now embraced free-market orthodoxy that involves large-scale privatisation." (Sparks, 2003)

There are strong indications that it changed as a result of the work done at Mont Fleur.

So, while an assessment of the extent to which Mont Fleur influenced economic policy is an indefinite matter at best, everyone who was interviewed agreed that the work done over the period of the scenario project gave them an opportunity to think through particular courses of action to their logical conclusion. Economic policy was a central issue in the national debate in the early 1990s, and economists representing all sides of the debate were present at Mont Fleur, along with many future leaders of the ANC government. These facts strongly suggest a connection between the development of the Icarus scenario, which looked squarely at the dangers of macroeconomic populism, and the unexpectedly conservative economic policies of the ANC after 1996, embodied in GEAR. (Gillespie, 2000)

In his book, **Solving Tough Problems: An Open Way of Talking, Listening, and Creating New Realities**, facilitator of Mont Fleur Adam Kahane quotes Trevor Manuel as saying "It's not a straight line [from Mont Fleur to GEAR[14]]. It meanders through, but there is a fair amount in all that going back to Mont Fleur... I could close my eyes now and give you those scenarios like this. I've internalised them and if you have internalised something then you probably carry it with you for life." (Kahane, 2004)

---

[13] Toto Mboweni the current governor of the reserve bank and Trevor Manuel the current minister of finance both partook in the building of the Mont Fleur Scenarios and were on the team that presented 'The flight of the flamingoes'.

[14] GEAR is the South African governments' Growth, Employment and Redistribution program

Exploration of other effects

In addition to the findings above, a number of additional areas were uncovered in the exploration. These are detailed below.

Group vs. Individual process

I was conscious when setting up this study that there are differences between the group scenario process [Mont Fleur] and the individual Personal Scenario coaching process [as per the two coaching clients]. This was something which I spoke to Adam Kahane and Clem Sunter about when I initially created my Personal Scenario coaching model.

My initial concern was that in a group there is an advantage that within the group there is a lot of knowledge and that ideas can be developed between people in the group process. In addition, the literature which covered group scenario building exercises generally included a research phase where a group of people went out and researched the issues in great depth. I was worried that an individual working with her coach would be missing out on something, and I was interested to see if this played out in the three case studies.

Looking at personal change in the way that I have, I wasn't able to identify any major differences which were brought about simply by the fact that an individual was working on their own scenario, as opposed to a group of people working on a collective scenario [in this case for South Africa]. The literature that looks at scenario planning for organisations, while often focusing on the process, always relates back to the individuals who partake, or who are the recipients, of the scenarios.

Shell, one of the pioneering businesses who have used scenarios say, "Scenarios are carefully crafted stories about the future embodying a wide variety of ideas and integrating them in a way that is communicable and useful. They help us link the uncertainties we hold about the future to the decisions we must make today." (www.shell.com/scenarios)

My conclusion is that while there are nuances between personal and organisational scenarios (detailed below in Figure 5: Personal Scenarios and Organisational Scenarios), there is nothing significant that a participant in an organisational scenario building exercise gets that the Personal Scenario builder does not .

This is borne out by the comparability of the Mont Fleur Scenario case study with the two Personal Scenario coaching case studies. In all three case studies it was possible to compare along the same grounds, i.e. a change of mental models, the development of new skills and tools, the establishment of new relationships and networks, improved ability to grapple with difficult problems / situations. Lastly, the difficulties experienced by both the short term coaching client and the Mont Fleur participants in arriving at an understanding of what scenarios are about is another common point between the group and personal approaches.

Personal Scenarios	Organisational Scenarios
Manage complex personal choices	Manage tactical choices
Challenge my mental models	Challenge group mental models
Know myself to relate better to others	Understand relationships
Plausible stories about my life	Plausible stories for the organisation
Set goals in the context of my scenarios	Scenarios influence strategy
Self discovery	Learning journey / Research
Coached	Facilitated

Figure 5: Personal Scenarios and Organisational Scenarios

I could find nothing in the literature that indicated that scenario building was the exclusive domain of groups. Looking at the definition give by Shell in their **Scenarios: An Explorers Guide**, "A scenario is a story that describes a possible future. It identifies some significant events, the main actors and their motivations, and it conveys how the world functions. Building and using scenarios can help people explore what the future might look like and the likely challenges of living in it," (Shell International, 2003) it could equally apply to individuals or organisations.

Narratives and Personal Constructs

In my analysis of the short term coaching client there is evidence that the construct he had regarding planning and being proactive was shifted during the coaching. His previous construct was that he would remain open and not plan anything, but be in a position to react when it suited him. I have covered in Change of mental models (above) his shift with regard to being proactive. Upon completion of the official future scenario, and speaking about being more proactive, he said, "It would just give me more options around my choices in the present moment or more awareness or a different lens through which to view my

choice of today rather than just the official lens of the official future that I guess I've always looked through." I

would suggest that this view, through a different lens, is in fact the opening of a new construct.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations.

"At times, the world can look so complex and unpredictable that it becomes hard to make decisions. Scenario building is a discipline for breaking through this barrier." - Ged Davis

There is clear evidence of personal change that has taken place in all three case studies as summarised in Figure 6 below[15]. From this we can conclude that personal change does happen as a result of the scenario building process.

Measure	Long term client	Short term client	Mont Fleur
Change of mental models	✓	✓	✓
The development of new skills and tools	✓	✓	✓
The establishment of new relationships and networks	✓	–	✓
Improved ability to grapple with difficult problems / situations	✓	✓	✓

Figure 6: Summary of change across case studies

This study is particularly interested in the coaching context hence it is useful to comment on the group versus individual scenario process. There is no evidence to suggest that scenario planning can only take place in a group setting. To the contrary this study finds that there is value gained both by the coaching clients and the Mont Fleur participants in their personal capacities. From this one can conclude that the personal aspects (what personal change occurs) of scenario building are important and warrant further research.

There are also strong indications that Personal Scenarios offer a valuable approach to coaching specifically in their ability to influence mental models and improve the ability of individuals to grapple with difficult problems or situations.

---

[15] In the case of the short term client he reported that at his interview that he didn't feel he had spent enough time developing and working with his scenarios.

The shift in mental models was consistent across all three case studies, and changes in mental models was significant and potentially life changing. The short term client, by writing up his "official future" scenario saw what his life would look like if he continued on his path of being more reactive than proactive. This spurred him into the realisation that, "…it would require me to actually be pro-active and set that now rather than as I would normally act and be reactive. So when I looked at that, it was like, s^&t, so if I don't pursue what we pursue in this conversation, that's what its going to look like."

It is not possible with this research to measure the overall effect that this coaching will have on the clients' life, however if we go back to Hudson's view that it is the coaches responsibility to, "weave together the client's variety of concerns into an integrated plan that has vitality and purpose," (Hudson, 1999) then we can conclude that scenario building and Personal Scenarios are an appropriate coaching intervention.

The long term client shifted his relationship with his work as a result of the scenarios he built. The reasons he was planning to leave the company (more control and ability to set direction), he addressed by reframing how he saw himself in the context of his work. Subsequent to completing his Personal Scenarios he has received a promotion and describes his work as; "So, it feels as though I'm in control, I make the choices of where we go. It's just, I'd like to think of it as my company with the holding company being [Company Name] as an investor." One can conclude that the change is a factor of both his ability to influence his environment (implicate order) and his ability to reframe (change of mental model) his relationship with his job.

The Mont Fleur scenarios have well documented evidence of changes in mental models. Within the context of the scenario planning exercise taking place while negotiations were underway for the "first government in the world negotiating itself out of power" (Illbury & Sunter, 2001) made them potentially very difficult. Bringing together 22 people from across the political, social and economic spectrum to talk about a very uncertain future was fraught with difficulty. The participants were in need of a process which allowed them to suspend their dearly held beliefs and to partake in jointly planning the future. The scenario planning as facilitated by Adam Kahane provided this and more. Evidence suggests that the scenario building process created the space for the shift in mental models to occur. Michiel le Roux described it, "But in terms of the actual outcome of this scenario process, I thought it was quite brilliant in the sense that it gives you the opportunity of looking at alternatives without sort of sacrificing your own dearly held beliefs."

The practice of scenario building is a skill that was acquired by participants across all three cases and it appears that it is not a common way of thinking about the future. It is a process which requires a certain amount of self-awareness to look beyond potential blind spots. In a group process these areas of potential denial can be uncovered by the group but, in the case of Personal Scenarios, this issue emphasises the role of the coach to help the client to see what they may have resistance to see. To put this another way, to assist the client to think the unthinkable. It is thus difficult for individuals to create scenarios on their own.

Perhaps it is the uncommonness of the type of thinking, or resistance to the process, which led to participants in all there contexts experiencing some difficulty with the process. In the case of Mont Fleur participants, they spoke about initial confusion. The short term coaching client reported understanding the theory but not the practice of scenario planning. This could also have been as a result of the approach taken by the coach. Lastly the long term client, although not reporting difficulties, noted that it was necessary to build the relationship before discussing "very private thoughts." More interesting was that both the short term client and the Mont Fleur participants experience difficulty even though they were in different contexts. This is further evidence of their not being a significant divide between organisational scenario planning and Personal Scenarios.

It is natural for relationships to develop in the context of how people are connecting, hence it is not surprising that at Mont Fleur, relationships (some of them significant and having lasting effects as in the case of Trevor Manuel and Derek Keys the current and former finance ministers) develop amongst the group. In the coaching, a key relationship which has to develop for the coaching to be successful is that of coach and client. This was noted by the long term client.

A conclusion which can be drawn by comparing the short and long term coaching client is that a coaching relationship takes time to build, and while certain types of coaching may be able to achieve results in the short term, any meaningful and deep work will only happen over a longer period.

In addition to the relationships within the scenario building process, the long term client also noted that scenarios were a "very useful secret weapon" in building work relationships and thinking through upfront how to deal with situations.

The link between an improved ability to grapple with difficult problems / situations and the ability to change mental models is well documented. In his chapter on Mental Models in **The Fifth Discipine**, Senge describes how Royal Dutch Shell successfully responded to the very complex 1973/74 oil crises as a direct result of the scenario work that they had done a year before. "The exercise had begun to unfreeze managers' mental models and incubate a new worldview." (Senge, 1994)

In this project there is a marked difference between the types of problems which the participants of Mont Fleur were facing and the very personal issues which the coaching clients were facing. The scenario process cannot be singled out as solving these issues, but it does provide a framework in which complex issues can be addressed, and alternatives which in some cases are previously unthought-of solutions, can be put on the table.

There is however, further work required on the process and the education of coaching clients in how to use scenarios. One key learning from this project is that the use of "The official future" is a powerful way to practically introduce what a scenario looks like, while at the same time providing the client with a meaningful context for decisions that they make about their life.

The art of the long view addresses this. One of our first tasks as consultants is to flush out the organisations version of the Official Future. Then we often present it as one of a group of scenarios, so that people can see it for exactly how likely or unlikely it is. They usually discover that, in labouring under the Official Future, they have been working toward an impossible or undesirable goal. (Schwartz, 1996)

The relationship between goals and scenarios holds ongoing intrigue for me. While personal goals are undoubtedly powerful in providing focus and direction, they often lack a critical review of the full context within which they operate. Personal Scenarios on the other hand provide this richness of context and

questioning about what the future may hold. My suggestion would be that goals and Personal Scenarios working together are a powerful combination.

The recommendations of this study are that:

- the coaching profession considers Personal Scenario coaching as a new approach to coaching

- the practice of Personal Scenario coaching is further developed specifically around process and theoretical understanding

- coaches should consider whether goal setting without the development of scenarios is effective

- use of the "Official Future" as the first scenario worked on with the client is potentially a valuable introduction to Personal Scenarios

- scenario planners consider the individual and coaching aspects of planning exercises

- Personal Scenario planning is undertaken with the help of a coach and not alone