



Facing the Fold: Essays on Scenario Planning

James A. Ogilvy

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How do we face the uncertainty and complexity of the future? An overly optimistic perspective can be motivating but easily dismissed as naïve or shallow; the pessimistic outlook may be considered to be deeper and more ‘knowing’ but could lead to inaction. But limiting our visions of the future to simply one of these two ‘branches’ would mean adopting a position that is ultimately no more than a fatalistic rut. Facing The Fold is a collection of highly regarded journal essays about how scenario thinking uses the capacious space of the ‘fold’ to encourage thinking around alternative scenarios?to create the future we both want and need. Scenarios are not predictions, nor are they strategies. Scenarios are stories ? narratives of alternative futures, designed to highlight the risks and opportunities involved in specific strategic issues. According to Ogilvy, scenario planning has generally been considered an art, but here he discusses the extent to which it can also be considered an integral part of ‘the new sciences’, especially complexity science. The narrative of scenario planning is of particular importance to complexity practitioners. Like complexity approaches, the advantage of scenarios is that they take into account the values and the contextual complexity surrounding the community and provide a way to reflect on the consequences of any strategy changes. The book is divided into 3 clear sections: Section I is about the ‘nuts and bolts’ of scenario planning and, as outlined in the first chapter co-authored with Peter Schwartz, the steps involved in the practice of developing scenarios, and the key considerations to ensure successful scenario planning. Section II situates scenario planning in the larger context of the human sciences of anthropology, psychology, literary criticism, philosophy and sociology. Section III offers a set of case studies?actual scenarios created for real projects. Lessons learnt from working in the public and the private sector are followed by two in-depth case studies on the future of higher education in California and K-12 public education in Seattle. The challenges and opportunities that were faced at the time are uncannily similar to current problems in the funding of education facilities around the world. Alternative scenarios to the momentum of increasing deficit and declining quality were developed at the time, and the author provides an afterword to show how these scenarios have held up over time. As Adam Kahane (Reos Partners and the University of Oxford) said in his review ‘...This wonderful collection of his writings is a most welcome and valuable contribution to the field.’

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