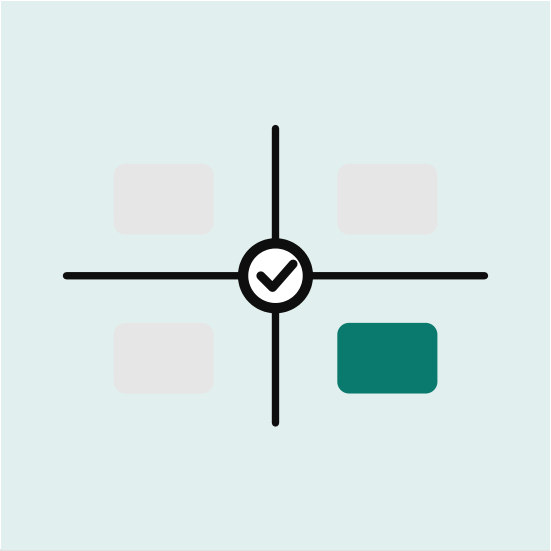
Method

Scenario planning

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



In Spanish
Planificación por escenarios

Origin
Kahn and Wiener (1967); Wack (1985)

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

What it's for

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

Key elements

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

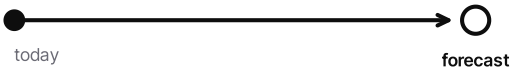
Several plausible futures
Different from each other and believable, not a good, a bad and a normal one.

Robust decisions
Look for what works in every scenario.

An example

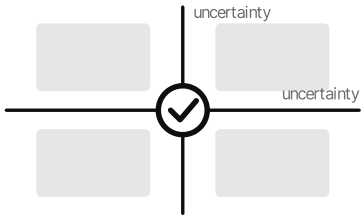
An organization decides what to invest in over the next ten years.

A forecast



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

Several scenarios



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

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

How it's done

1

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

2

Crossing them produces several different, plausible futures.

3

Each decision is tested in every scenario.

Applications in design

When to use it

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

Avoid

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

Don't fall for it

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

1973

What the research says

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

Connections

Builds on

- Futures cone
- Four generic alternative futures
- Futures studies
- Weak signals

Used by

- Design futures
- Business design
- Strategic design
- Systemic design
- Sustainable design

Related to

- Causal layered analysis (CLA)
- Morphological analysis
- Backcasting
- Horizon scanning
- Trend research
- Delphi method
- Futures wheel

Authors and works

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

Sources

Original sources

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

Last reviewed: October 25, 2026

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