Berghof Foundation

Transformative Scenarios Process

How stories of the future help to transform conflict in the present

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Scenarios are stories of possible futures. Human beings have always used stories to talk about things that are difficult, complex, or even taboo, to encourage a change in thinking, illuminate pathways, and inspire right action. Creating and telling stories about possible futures allows us to lift our gaze above our current stuck situations and polarized conversations into a longer time horizon and ask ourselves *"what if?"*

Scenario methods are gaining popularity as a way of engaging with accelerating complexity and uncertainty, and involving diverse stakeholders in a dialogue about the future. Various approaches to scenarios exist, commonly grouped under the label of "foresight methods", making up an increasingly lively field.[1] The fact that scenario thinking is about entertaining multiple possibilities is reflected also in a diversity of scenario approaches. Scenario practitioners and academics alike tend to recognize that different methods are shaped to fit different tasks and become valid in different circumstances.

This article is written from the perspective of a reflective practitioner with the intention to explore in particular the approach called "Transformative Scenarios Process" (TSP), developed by Adam Kahane, and its relevance to the field of conflict transformation. I first encountered Kahane and his work in 1999, and subsequently started working with him in 2004. Since then, I have worked as an organizer and facilitator of multi-stakeholder processes at international, national and local levels, in many cases applying a TSP approach.

TSP has not previously been directly considered as a method of the fields of peacebuilding and conflict transformation. It is applied in some contexts where direct violence is present, but more frequently in domains such as education, food security or healthcare, where social systems are polarized and stuck due to non-violent clashes of ideas and interests. As the international peacebuilding field expands to include conflict prevention and sustaining peace, and as TSP increasingly demonstrates its relevance to peace processes and situations affected by violent conflict, these two conversations are starting to connect more closely. As this happens, it is worth noting a shared underlying paradigm that emphasizes systemic change, inclusion, root causes, and drivers of change, as well as a shared acknowledgment of the transformative potential of conflict.

The first four sections of this article relate to the origins, basic concepts, and purpose of Transformative Scenarios Process in order to orient the reader to where the approach comes from and why it matters. Section five outlines the key phases and steps of how the approach works in practice. The final three sections offer linkages to the field of conflict transformation, as well as key questions and challenges to pull TSP practice forward. Throughout, I offer small case examples to illustrate key messages as well as one longer case story of how the approach has been applied various times over the past 20 years in Colombia. The field of conflict transformation and the practice of TSP apply in different but overlapping contexts and each offers fresh challenges and perspective to the other.

1 Origins

Scenario Planning has been applied for many decades as a tool to explore future uncertainties. The concept emerged in the 1950s, where it was initially used by military strategists to pre-empt the moves of the enemy and prepare alternative strategies to respond. Later, it was adopted by corporate strategists to anticipate trends, adapt to a changing context, and outsmart competitors. Only more recently have scenarios gained traction as a tool for the social change field to explore future trajectories of social systems and as a potentially relevant contribution to conflict transformation.

In the late 1960s, the Shell company started working with scenarios. In 1972, the company's head of strategy, Pierre Wack, led a process of scenario-construction that included the possibility of an oil crisis.

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1   For a typology of Scenario Development approaches, see Van Notten 2006.

These scenarios were presented around the world to country managers, so that when the oil crisis hit, Shell managed to adapt. This enabled the company's rise to becoming one of the strongest players of the international oil industry. Over the next 40 years, Shell has continued to develop a rigorous and innovative method of scenario planning. In the 1990s, the company started publishing and sharing its scenarios, probing the impact of emerging trends and conveying hard truths not only for its own industry but for the wider world as well. Shell has without a doubt the most well-known corporate scenarios division, and its alumni have become leading academics, trainers, and consultants in scenarios methods, contributing significantly to the spread of the approach.

The TSP approach was originally born out of a scenarios process in South Africa called the Mont Fleur scenarios, which took place in 1991-92 at a time of significant uncertainty and turmoil – after apartheid had officially ended and Nelson Mandela had been released but before the first democratic elections. Adam Kahane was at the time working in the scenario group at Shell, and was "unexpectedly plunged into working with a team of leaders from all parts of South African society – black and white, left and right, opposition and establishment – who were trying to construct a better future for their country" (Kahane 2012, XIV).

2 Adaptive vs. Transformative Scenarios

As a member of the Shell team, Kahane had experienced the effectiveness of the adaptive approach to scenarios – the value of understanding what could happen in the future to more easily adapt and succeed. But the Mont Fleur scenarios had a different nature: Here, the scenario planners were not experts developing scenarios for management or a client, but rather stakeholders from the entire political spectrum developing scenarios for themselves and other leaders like them. The intention was not just to adapt to the context but also to shape the future of the country. The impact was not just a more robust strategy to stay ahead of the competition but transformed intentions and relationships of a group that were to play a central role in leading the South African transition.

Kahane was intrigued by the potential value of scenarios for such transformative work. He continued to work in this way in many other conflict contexts, including Colombia, Guatemala, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Thailand and Mexico. In 2012 he coined the term "Transformative Scenarios" as a way of describing this way of working and distinguishing it from adaptive scenario approaches.[2]

Transformative and adaptive stances toward scenarios are not entirely mutually exclusive. The "Serenity Prayer" attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr (1941) poetically reflects the distinction between these stances and the capacity of discernment required: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." The transformative approach to scenarios recognizes that there are some situations where we need to accept things we cannot change and adapting may be the only option. But it works in situations where there is intention, courage and determination to transform the things we can.

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2   Kahane's 2012 book is entitled *Transformative Scenario Planning*. In 2016, he and his colleagues shifted this language to "Transformative Scenarios Process", maintaining the abbreviation TSP, but distinguishing further from traditional scenario "planning" approaches and acknowledging the process emphasis of this particular approach.

	Adaptive Scenarios	Transformative Scenarios
Intention	To understand what could happen to more easily adapt to it and succeed.	To understand what could happen to more easily influence it and bring about a better future.
Participants	A team of experts.	A diverse team of actors from across the whole system.
Process	A rigorous process.	A structured process and an enabling container for dialogue and co-creation.
Results	New understanding and more robust strategies.	Shifts in understanding and strategy, and in relationships, language and intentions.

Table 1: Contrasting Adaptive and Transformative Scenarios

3   Why transformative scenarios?

The need for a Transformative Scenarios Process tends to be justified by three key conditions.

Uncertainty

All scenario planners will say that scenarios are needed because there is uncertainty. The presence of uncertainty may seem obvious today. Yet, we spend too little time identifying, expressing and exploring our uncertainties in generative dialogue, compared to the time we spend expressing and attending to answers, and to that which we believe to be known and true. Not knowing is an uncomfortable place to be.

Rafael Ramirez and Jerome Ravetz (2011) distinguish between "tame futures", which we think we can readily forecast based on our past experiences (for example how the traffic will behave in a near-term future), and "wild futures", where you cannot rely on tomorrow being like yesterday, but where there is still room for influence. This is where the terrain is fertile for scenarios. A "feral future" results from attacking wild situations with tame tools and technologies. The result is often a situation that is out of control. Scenarios are a tool that can help us to recognize wild futures and engage with them to avoid feral futures.

Complexity

TSP is based on an assumption that we are dealing with complex social situations. These situations are *dynamically complex* in that cause and effect are non-linear, interdependent and far apart in space and time. They are *generatively complex* in the sense that the reality is emerging and existing answers and solutions are insufficient. Finally, they are *socially complex* in that the problem involves an abundance of highly diverse actors with different perspectives, logics and interests (Scharmer/Senge 2001, 23). Faced with such complexity, leaders are unable to transform their situation unilaterally and directly. TSP is useful in these situations because it enables a socially complex group of stakeholders to come together, and because scenarios – as stories – can capture and convey great complexity in an accessible way.

Discomfort

Uncertainty and complexity are present in all scenarios work. A third, and perhaps most important, key condition for engaging in a *transformative* scenarios process is that a core group of stakeholders see the situation they are in – or the direction they are moving in – as unacceptable and/or unsustainable, and believe that they cannot carry on as they have been. This discomfort is not always well defined, nor is

there usually alignment among the stakeholders about what the problem is. Different people will find the situation problematic for different reasons, but they share a discomfort with the status quo and a sense of potential that things could be different. This offers them a common starting point.

Shared discomfort provides critical fuel for the process. If the stakeholders are comfortable with the status quo, there will be insufficient energy to sustain a full process, shift out of habitual ways of operating and stay engaged with opponents. A TSP exercise is most likely to get off the ground when "problem owners" experience significant discomfort. Rather than external players assessing the situation as problematic from the outside, these problem owners are leading stakeholders who in their daily work are involved in and affected by the situation, and whose interests depend on shifting it.

Case example: In 2013-2014, I facilitated a scenarios process around the future of democracy in Latin America. Early in the process, I made a comment about the topic of democracy being abstract. The response I received from one of the participants was: *"In Latin America, the presence or absence of democracy is not abstract; it is something we feel every day on our skin."* The discomfort was in the room.

In these conditions, scenarios offer a shared task around which to build a team comprising opposing interest groups – people who would not otherwise agree to come together to collaborate. The invitation to construct scenarios together enables what Kahane in his most recent book calls "Stretch Collaboration" i.e. learning to work together with people you do not agree with, like, or trust. In this book, Kahane (2016, 18) points out that collaboration is a choice. When faced with a complex and conflictual situation, we can either try and *force* our way, we can *adapt* to the situation, we can *exit*, or we can choose to *collaborate*. Collaboration is often not the first choice – it is something we step into because the other options are somehow not effective or acceptable for us. TSP lowers the bar to making this step into dialogue and collaboration because the invitation is 'simply' to come together to explore possible futures with people who see something you do not.

4 The task: Building "useful" and transformative scenarios

Scenarios are stories about what *could* happen in the world around us. They are not stories about what *will* happen (forecasts or predictions), about what *should* happen (visions/proposals) or about what we could *do* (options). Drawing on the original methodology from Shell and the work of Kees Van der Heijden (1996), the Transformative Scenarios Process affirms that scenarios are *useful* when they meet four criteria:

Firstly, they must be *relevant*. This means that they illuminate current circumstances and concerns, addressing the uncertainties and anxieties of today's stakeholders. Scenarios are about informing today's strategies and actions, not about predicting the future. In order to inform today's actions, they must speak the language and touch the hearts of today's actors.

Secondly, they should be *challenging*, making the invisible visible, illuminating blind spots, and questioning current assumptions and mental models (i.e. our understandings of how things work). Challenging scenarios have impact because they can prompt actors to see, think and act differently than before. But to achieve this, they must meet a third criterion, that of plausibility.

Plausibility is the most complex and conflictual concept among the criteria, and often the one that generates the most discussion. It means that the key stakeholders *believe* the scenario *could* happen i.e. it is not out of the realm of possibility from their perspective. The difficulty is that our beliefs about what is

plausible for the future are based on our experience of the past and therefore limited to the space in which we live and move. They are also subject to our blindspots. One stakeholder may believe a scenario is implausible which another sees coming straight at them in their context.

Scenario planners distinguish between *probability* and *plausibility* and often cite Pierre Wack who said that if a scenario is plausible and would carry a very high cost – even if it is not *probable* – we should prepare for it (cited in Kleiner 1996). A useful way of understanding the concept of plausibility in scenario work is with the image of the 'plausibility cone' or 'futures cone', originally developed by strategic futurist Charles Taylor (1990) and since adapted by Joseph Voros (2003, 2017) and others.

> **Case Example:** When we worked on scenarios for the future of the drug problem in the Americas, the scenarios report was credited for "breaking a taboo". It brought something to the surface that was undiscussable in many official fora (the option of decriminalization of drugs and the failures of the war on drugs). This challenged the system, and was possible because it was done in the form of stories.
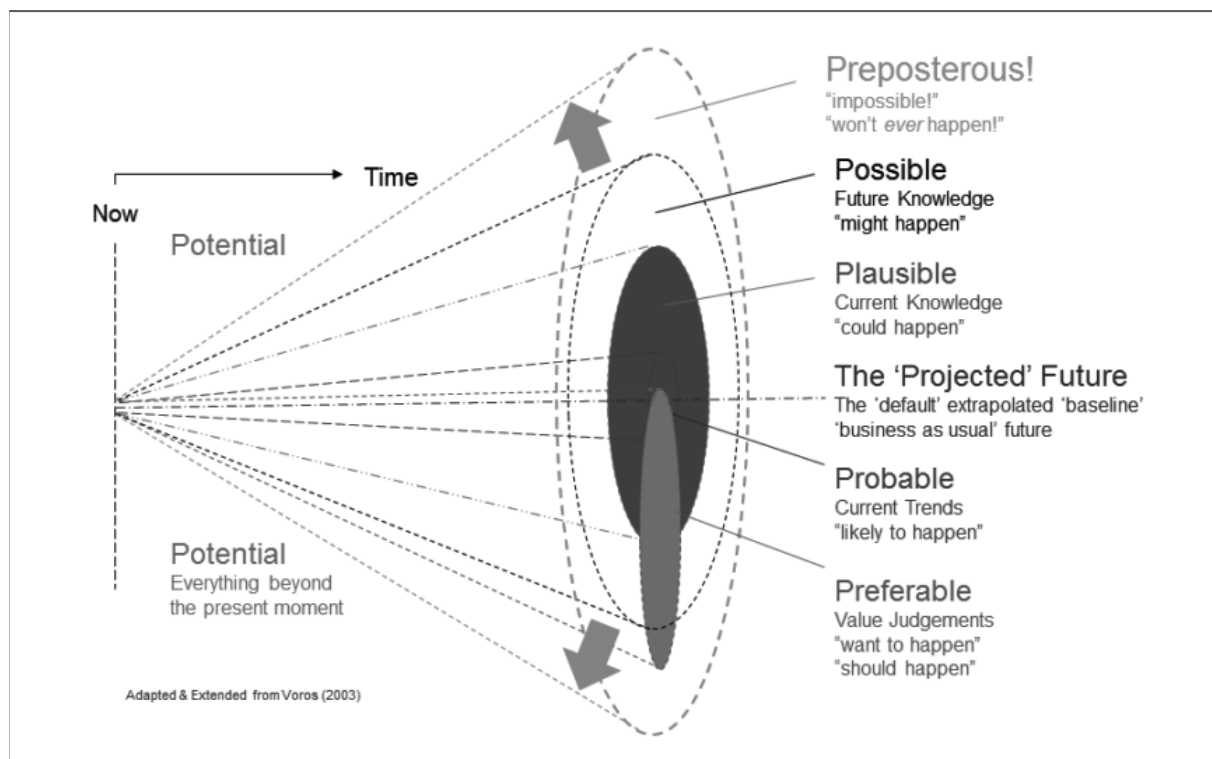

Figure 1: The Futures Cone (Voros 2017, adapted from Voros 2003 and Taylor 1990)

The important message of this image is that there is a domain of plausible futures, which is greater than the domain of *probable* futures and different from the domain of *preferable* futures (both domains to which we tend to give the most of our attention). There are scenarios that lie beyond the domain of plausibility (Taylor and Voros call these the possible, the preposterous, and the potential), but there is also an infinity of different scenarios within it. When we manage to tell stories that are distant from each other within the full space of plausibility and perhaps around the boundaries of it, we improve systemic understanding because we see more of the whole future. We shift our gaze to a broader view of the landscape of possible futures, including parts of that landscape which we might have been ignoring previously. I recall that a participant in a 2013 scenarios process *on the future of civil society in Brazil said, "the usefulness of the scenarios was that they painted the possible futures in brighter colours so they became easier for us to see."*

Finally, the scenarios must be *clear*. This means they must be accessible, memorable and distinct from one another. The names of the scenarios play an important role here. Kahane cites former South

African finance minister and Mont Fleur scenario team member Trevor Manuel, who many years later said, *"I could close my eyes now and give you those scenarios just like this. I have internalized them and if you have internalized something then you probably carry it for life"* (Kahane 2012, 12). If the scenarios are not clear, they will not stick and they will not travel – clarity is the vehicle that the scenarios ride to reach a wider public.

These four criteria for usefulness become a key facilitation tool in the scenario construction process, where the group uses them actively throughout the process to test, refine and iterate its scenarios along the way. Meanwhile, the label "transformative scenarios" begs the question of what makes scenarios not just *useful* to decision-makers, but actually *transformative* to society.

Steve Waddell (2016) distinguishes between incremental and transformative approaches to change. Incremental approaches aim to improve performance and replicate best practices within existing rules, mindsets, narratives and power structures. Transformative approaches, on the other hand, cause shifts in rules, mindsets, narratives and power structures. This leads into a domain that is both more subtle and more activist than traditional scenario planning. The question that is often posed to scenario builders in TSP is: "What are the stories that need to be told?" This question implies that we are seeking stories that meet the four criteria above *and* which the "system" or the society needs to hear and absorb and attend to, in order to fundamentally shift rules, power structures, and mindsets towards a better future.

> **Case example:** The names of the Mont Fleur Scenarios (South Africa 1991-92) are still remembered today.
> *Ostrich:* A white government that sticks its head in the sand.
> *Lame Duck:* A constraining and ineffective negotiated settlement.
> *Icarus:* A populist government that crashes the economy.
> *Flight of the Flamingos:* Building blocks are being put in place for gradual and sustained development.

5 The transformative scenarios process

Kahane (2012) breaks the transformative scenarios process into five steps:

1. Convene a team from across the whole system

2. Observe what is happening

3. Construct stories about what could happen

4. Discover what can and must be done

5. Act to transform the system

For the purposes of this article, I have divided these steps into three phases. The first phase "Convening and container-building" covers Kahane's step 1. The second phase "Scenario construction" covers steps 2 and 3, and the third phase "Action and dissemination for impact" covers steps 4 and 5.

Phase One: Convening and container-building

Rebecca Freeth and Scott Drimie (2016, 36) emphasize that TSP differs from other forms of participatory scenario planning by the weight it places on *convening*. Great importance is placed on convening because the transformative effect of the scenarios depends largely on who is in the room, i.e. on the composition of the "scenario team". There are several reasons for this. The first is that the deepest impact of the process will always be on those who participate in it. They are the most likely to act on the insights they have gained (see also Figure 3 below).

Secondly, the group composition matters because of legitimacy. The scenario team are effectively the authors of the scenarios and they together sign on to the product. When the completed scenarios are disseminated, a key question on readers' minds is "who produced this?" If the authors[3] are seen as only of "the opposition", "the left", "the right" or a single sector, their product is easily dismissed. However, if every reader can identify with at least one of the authors and the composition evokes a reaction of amazement at how this radically diverse group came together to create a common product, this establishes credibility and respect for the outcome. This in turn enables it to spread.

> **Case example:** The impact of the Mont Fleur scenarios was in large part due to the fact that the participants included people who later became Minister of Finance and Governor of the Reserve Bank and others like them, and the scenarios influenced their thinking and subsequent policy decisions. In particular, they were influenced by the warnings of the "Icarus" scenario, a scenario in which a populist government flies too close to the sun, pursuing an economic policy that leads to a short-term boom and a long-term bust.

Thirdly, the group matters because of the richness and quality of the product. A diverse group will require more time to produce stories together. But when they do, their stories contain more comprehensive perspective, more coherence, and more relevance because of the richness of their contributions. Finally, the scenario team are the most important bearers of the scenarios, they are the ones who will disseminate, i.e. plant the seeds of the scenarios through their diverse networks.

The scenario team are a group of 25-40 diverse and committed stakeholders from across the system. This number in our experience allows the group to span a broad enough spectrum of diversity, while not reaching a size that is too big to establish connection, be in one conversation, and come to a shared output. Supported by facilitators and a scenario editor, these stakeholders are the owners and authors of the scenarios. They are not "participants" to be "consulted" in a process that belongs to the convenor. They participate in the entire process, collectively draft and approve the final output, and have a crucial role to play in the dissemination of, as well as reflection and action on, the scenarios. To achieve this, the convenors must fully acknowledge and respect their authorship.

Individually, the members of the team should be insightful, influential, committed, willing and able to speak openly. As a collective, the scenario team should be *representative* of the whole system and of a range of backgrounds and perspectives (sectoral, ideological, professional, geographical and so on). Each scenario team member brings certain voices into the group – voices of government, of activists, of business, of youth, of minorities, etc. This allows them together to see the emerging system as a whole and subsequently to influence the system towards transformation. Crucially, however, they are not *representatives* in the sense that they are not elected by a constituency to be there, and they are not speaking the official line of their group or institution, but rather participating freely as individual, whole persons. Each whole person in reality brings more than one voice or role into the process, i.e. someone may be at the same time a woman, a businessperson, a conservative, of a minority ethnic group or marginalized sexual

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3   In most TSP initiatives, the list of authors/ scenario team members is published with the report to show the legitimacy of the work. In a few cases, some stakeholders have requested not to appear and in a few projects, the list is kept fully confidential due to concerns over the safety of the group.

orientation, etc. This acknowledgement of multiple roles of each person alleviates some of the projection, judgment and stereotyping which diverse groups sometimes fall into.

It is important to ensure that the group is embedded in a diversity of networks and to include some people who are not "usual suspects". It should not be the same group that always runs into each other at conferences on the topic at hand. New voices can help to bring stakeholders out of their habitual conversations and to see things through different eyes. Further, a few elders in the scenario team can play an important role in enabling people to feel safe and to show up authentically.

In some cases, individual people or stakeholder groups will not agree to join or there will be stakeholder groups that the convenors choose to exclude because they are unacceptable, for example because they employ violent means or would violate the confidentiality and safe space of the process. In these cases, it is usually not necessary to give up completely on including their voice. It may be possible to find a stakeholder who is sympathetic to, close to, or a former member of the group in question who can act as a 'proxy' and bring their perspective in.

Convening power

To bring such a team together requires *convening power*. This convening power is a function of the legitimacy, authority and trustworthiness of the convening institution or group. It is also dependent on whether the timing is right, the invitation is clear, and resources are adequate so that being a part of the process is attractive to participants.

Convenors may be institutions or individuals – one or more. Often, it is difficult for an individual person or institution to hold the convening power to bring together a diverse group, and the initiator must seek partners from other parts of the system to create a more balanced and legitimate convening alliance. According to Kahane (2012, 32), "The more fragmented and polarized the social system you are working with, the more important it is that the project be seen from the outset as nonpartisan and inclusive, and not driven by or for the benefit of only one part or faction." However, this does not mean that the convenor should be an outsider. While it is crucial that the process facilitators be impartial, in our experience the most effective convening leadership comes from convenors who themselves share and express the discomfort and concern with the problem situation and are knowledgeable on the content and context. In TSP, the convenors usually participate in the process alongside the other scenario team members with an equal voice. They need to set aside their ego and their need to control the outcome.

The capacity to bring together such radical diversity is facilitated by the nature of the task. Often, stakeholders refuse to collaborate with people they do not agree with or trust, who represent "the other side" of a polarized situation. What helps is to lower the barriers to collaboration. This is part of the effectiveness of transformative scenarios: There is no pressure to define a common vision or agree on what must be done. There is no common baseline of values that everyone must sign onto to participate. The invitation is simply to join with people different from you in an exercise to build a set of three or four stories of possible futures. In this sense, the product enables the process. It is about the future, which allows the stakeholders to be more creative, more curious and more adventurous. The fact that it is a set of multiple scenarios (not one vision) allows people to have the freedom not to agree. People will at times sit at the table and engage in dialogue together only for scenarios and not for any other reason.

In some cases, there is a need for a cycle of "quiet convening" before the official convening begins. During this quiet convening cycle, the intention and commitment is there from a motivated

Case example: In 2014, in a transformative scenarios process about the future of education in Brazil, a long "quiet convening" cycle was needed to bring together a legitimate convening alliance of six institutions, which together had a balanced enough composition to convene the whole system. Once convened, the stakeholder group at first refused to be labelled "scenario team" because they did not see themselves as a team. After much discussion, they agreed to use the word "team" solely for the purposes of the scenarios exercise.

initiator, but the legitimacy, clarity and resources are not yet in place. There is some behind-the-scenes work needed in terms of stakeholder mapping, understanding the dynamics and discomforts of the system, and identifying the appropriate convening structure needed before the more official convening can begin.

The convening process is time- and resource-intensive in part because the most effective method for it is one-on-one in-depth dialogue interviews. These interviews help to elicit the key concerns, uncertainties, hopes and fears about the situation as well as the expectations of the project. Through these interviews the participants warm up to the process, get a feel for the level of dialogue and start to build a relationship with the facilitators and convenors. It is a chance to raise their concerns and feel heard and included. This in turn builds ownership and means they come into the first workshop with less built-up frustration. The interviews are usually synthesized through selecting unattributed quotes, which are organized by theme and shared back with the whole group in document form and otherwise.

Container-building

Through the stakeholder interviews and through the work of the convening phase, a "*container*" is built for the process. While the product is fully in the hands of the scenario team, the container in which the process will take place is initially established by the convenors, funders and facilitators. This container has physical, political and psychosocial dimensions, and it does significantly influence (though not determine) the outcome.

Building the *physical* container entails choosing and curating a venue that is secure and enabling for participants, preferably without other groups around, with proximity to nature and natural light, comfortable seating arrangements, and nourishing food. The *political* container entails appropriateness, clarity and transparency around the scope and purpose, governance structure, power and funder dynamics, and institutional home of the process. The *psychosocial* container involves facilitation that offers safety and encouragement to engage in dialogue and think creatively, and establishing the principles that will guide the work. Generally, the process is framed in the beginning emphasizing the importance of confidentiality (Chatham House Rules), such that participants may mention topics discussed but not cite individuals for what they have said during the process. In violent contexts, there may also be rules preventing any photos from being taken, and any names and contacts of participants from being shared. Participants are also invited to be fully present during the process, turning off all devices.

Case example: During a TSP for the future of land reform in South Africa, the participants were all offered individual accompaniment. Over the 16-month process, only one participant dropped out. One participant noted that the accompaniment process helped her clarify her own thinking in order to participate as a minority view, among more dominant voices. "We sometimes need a nudge to be awake and alert."

In some processes, in order to further strengthen the psychosocial container and the transformational impact, participants are offered individual *accompaniment* in the form of one-on-one conversations after each workshop. These conversations with facilitators or coaches may help participants to speak their voice more fully in the process, to feel more ownership of the work, to be more resilient throughout the demanding experience, and to take up the opportunities and challenges the scenarios present to them in their own leadership. This helps participants to focus on the "self in the issue" (the inner) and not just on the "outer" issue. It enhances their awareness of the need to suspend and reappraise their assumptions – both of the subject and each other – and to consider what is emerging for them. Accompaniment is a voluntary process that offers a combination of support and stretch. It is primarily affirming, but also challenges growth in participants.

Phase Two: Scenario Construction

Once the convening and container-building process is complete, the scenario team gets to work, usually over the course of 3-4 workshops (usually of 2-3 days each) on steps 2 and 3 of the TSP approach: *Observing what is happening* and *Constructing stories about what could happen.* Because of the high level of diversity in the room, usually including people of different levels of education, different languages, value systems and worldviews, this process needs to be more qualitative and creative than an expert-driven scenarios process would tend to be. Freeth and Drimie (2016, 42) point out that a transformative scenarios process "tends to privilege an 'informed imagination' over data-heavy modelling or projection exercises, precisely so that people can reveal and interrogate their deeply held but often implicit values and assumptions about key uncertainties and the ways in which they interact."

The group begins by expressing their core concerns and mapping these on the wall. This map of concerns constitutes the "strategic agenda". It usually stays on the wall throughout the multiple workshops of the process as a reminder of what matters most. It serves essentially as the test for relevance of the scenarios: If the scenarios are to be relevant, they need to speak to that which most concerns the stakeholders today. This strategic agenda does not need to be consensual. Some concerns will be more shared than others, but there is no judgment at this stage on which concerns are more or less legitimate and valid. The act of stakeholders placing their key concerns on the map strengthens the sense of inclusion and ownership.

> **Case example:** When we developed scenarios for the future of the drug problem in the Americas, the strongest concern on the strategic agenda was not drug consumption but rather the levels of violence and the erosion of democracy caused by this problem. If scenarios failed to address these issues, they would fail the test of relevance.

With this strategic agenda in mind, the group maps the forces that they believe will shape the future of their concerns. These driving forces may be social, technological, environmental, economic, political, cultural or demographic. They should be described as specifically as possible and without judgment. These forces will already be present in our current reality and different parts of that reality will be intensely visible to different members of the scenario team. This requires the group to listen to each other's stories and perceptions of what is going on in different parts of the system where each one of them spends their daily lives. In addition to workshop sessions that surface these perceptions, the scenario team often engage in evening story-telling circles as well as learning journeys where they physically leave the workshop room and immerse themselves in the reality to sense together what is emerging.

The group is invited to look not only at the big obvious and dominant forces, but also at more emergent "seeds" which they think may become important in the future. Essentially, the conversation about the future depends on deeply observing and sensing into the present; it is a way of describing the present in the form of the future stories contained within it. As stated by science fiction writer William Gibson (1999) "the future is already here – it's just not very evenly distributed."

The group prioritizes their driving forces according to their expected level of impact and their perceived unpredictability. They then identify key uncertainties and certainties about the future. The high-impact certainties will be present across all the scenarios. The high-impact uncertainties will be the key differentiators across the scenarios, i.e. different scenarios will tell different stories about the outcome in relation to the uncertainties.

> **Case example:** Stakeholders working on the future of drugs in the Americas unanimously identified a key certainty: people will continue using drugs. Key uncertainties included whether public opinion will support drug policy reform, whether violence will go up, and whether cartels will move further into politics. Hence, in all four scenario narratives, people continue using drugs, but the drug policies, and the levels of violence and institutional erosion differ across the scenarios.

Deductive and inductive methods

Having identified core concerns, drivers, certainties and uncertainties, the group is ready to start building scenarios. Generally, scenario planners take one of two approaches to this, known as the "deductive" approach and the "inductive" approach (Van der Heijden 1996, 255). The value of the deductive approach is that it is more logical, clear and straightforward, while the inductive approach is more creative and emergent. In the deductive approach, two key uncertainties are selected because they are high in impact and unpredictability. Opposite outcomes on these uncertainties are then placed on two axes and four scenarios are generated out of the four resulting quadrants.

In the inductive method, on the other hand, the group brainstorms many possible scenarios, then clusters, iterates and refines them until they have 3-4 scenarios that are relevant, challenging, plausible and clear. In the inductive method, the decision about what the scenarios will be is taken later than in the deductive method.
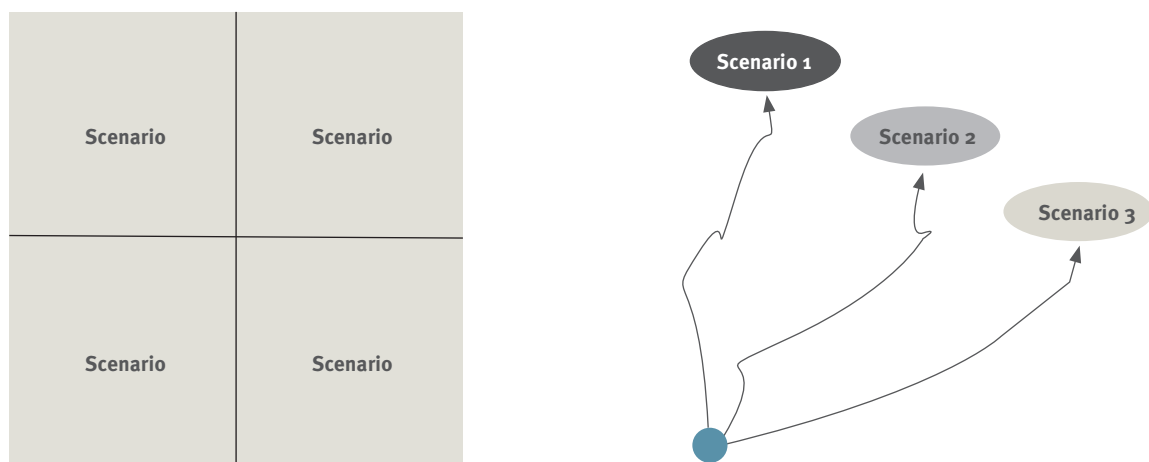
Figure 2: Mapping deductive and inductive scenario building paths

Both the deductive and the inductive approaches are valid. However, when we work with transformative scenarios processes, we tend to favour the inductive approach despite the fact that it takes more time, is messier, more conflictual, and involves significant inter-subjective negotiation about what stories need to be told. We do this because we are aiming to generate something less obvious, more challenging, surprising and transformative. We also do it because of the experiential impact it has on the group in that it invites the story-telling capacities of the team. This has a power-levelling effect in a diverse group, rather than favouring the more intellectual participants who are more likely to engage with a 4-quadrant frame of mind.

Once the basic skeleton of the scenarios has been developed, the group needs to flesh out the scenarios. Each scenario needs to have not only a landscape of what the system will look like at the time horizon (which is chosen by the group and tends to span 5-15 years depending on the time they believe it will take to see change without being beyond their imagination). The scenario also includes the narrative of how the world will get to that future reality from our current reality. The group needs to choose a set of names for the scenarios and ideally some visuals that show how the scenarios relate to one another and what the essence of each storyline is.

When the scenarios start to take shape, the writing process begins. The group authors the scenarios with the help of a scenario editor. Betty Sue Flowers (2008), perhaps the world's most talented scenario writer, who worked on Shell's scenario reports for many years as well as on several TSP reports, says "I came to the conclusion that the better model for a successful scenario is a sort of play, or more precisely, a stage set created by words. In this model, the future is imagined as if it were a stage-set description, where every element contributes to the effect of the whole. However, the stage-set waits for the key actors... to animate it. By experiencing each scenario as a separate stage set, [they] have the opportunity to participate

in each alternate world." I find this to be one of the most important guidelines for a scenario editor to remember: present the scenarios as different worlds where leaders can imagine themselves and decide for themselves what they would do, rather than reading a story that tells them what they would or should do.

Phase Three: Action and dissemination for impact

Once the scenarios have been constructed and written up, it is time to move into step 4 *Discover what can and must be done*, and step 5 *Act to transform the system*. The scenarios are an important collective product. According to the theory of change of TSP, this product, together with the process itself, generates five outcomes, which in turn are expected to achieve transformation in the wider reality:

1. *Understandings* that are systemic

2. *Relationships* among actors from across the system

3. *Intentions* which take into account the whole system

4. *Capacities* to lead systemic transformation

5. *Actions* to transform the system

The combination of these five impacts – not just the actions, not just the relationships, not just the understandings – together generates a renewed flow and system-level capacity to move towards a transformed situation. This works if the people in the room have truly reflected a microcosm of a bigger system, embedded in multiple networks and spheres of influence.

Along these lines, Freeth and Drimie (2016, 36) point out that the "scenarios are not the main outcome. Although it can be very useful to have a 'product', jointly produced by a group of unlike-minded people, more ambitious and longer term outcomes are stronger relationships and understanding between influential role-players who have historically worked in parallel or at cross-purposes. The idea is that if the barriers that divide role-players are lowered, they will be more able to accept (if not embrace) different ways of seeing and thinking about the issues of shared concern. Transformative scenarios can enable role players to then turn to face future uncertainties without the distractions of having to decide whose perceptions are right or wrong, and thus focus on the task of working together toward mutually preferred futures."

Transformative scenarios inspire action by concentric circles of change agents. At the core is the scenario team, i.e. the multi-stakeholder group. It is crucial that the scenario team themselves feel the ownership and commitment to use, communicate and act on the scenarios because they have had the deepest learning experience through the process. The wider circle is the people with whom the scenario team come into direct contact. The widest circle is the group of people who come in contact with the material of the scenarios without necessarily meeting members of the scenario team directly.
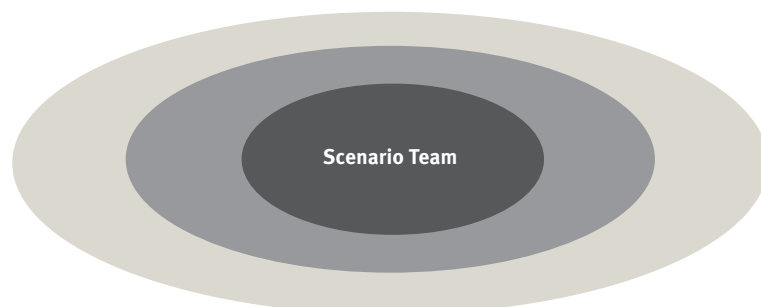

Figure 3: Circles of impact

The dissemination process is key to reaching the wider concentric circles. According to Kahane (2012, 76), "This is not just about distributing, but about disseminating – to plant seeds that contain – the team's generative understandings, relationships, and intentions. TSP contributes to transforming systems only if the seeds it produces propagate and spread." Freeth and Drimie (2016, 43) referring to the South African food futures scenarios reflected, "the scenarios can be accessed in the form of a report, a set of slides, or a 4-minute animation on YouTube. A dedicated website carries the materials. The key, however, has been shown to lie in the participants themselves owning "their" scenarios, and carrying them into myriad big and small strategic conversations about the future.... This turns the more traditional approach of a centralized dissemination strategy on its head and is proving to be more dynamic." Such strategic conversations may be both face-to-face as well as virtual.

Scenario writer Betty Sue Flowers (in Kahane 2012, 90) has said, "Scenarios can mutate into empowering myths. Myths give us courage. If it is already true in the story, then, paradoxically, we can make it happen." At the same time, it is important to be realistic in recognizing that scenarios do not automatically or directly drive action or impact in the societal sphere. The scenarios are conversation starters toward more collaborative action for change. They may point to leverage points and tell stories of what may happen if certain policies or strategies are pursued. But it is usually necessary to explicitly draw out the "actionable insights" and create processes that incorporate the scenarios and support stakeholders in turning the learnings from the scenarios into action. These may be strategy workshops for individual organizations or sectors based on the scenarios, or system-wide "social labs" that continue to bring multiple stakeholders of the system together to develop and test actions they can take based on the insights of the scenarios. It is important to be prepared to consider and resource such subsequent phases to the scenarios work, and/or to embed the scenarios process upfront in a platform that can also incubate action.

Case example: In 2015, in the midst of a national crisis of three compounding issues: inequality, insecurity, and illegality, a group of concerned Mexican leaders started convening a TSP. The reflection on the four scenarios created led to a variety of experiments at local, regional and national levels, which continue to be supported and accompanied in the ongoing platform, *Mexicos Posibles*. www.mexicosposibles.mx

Case Story: Scenarios for Colombia

The Destino Colombia scenario project was initiated in 1996 by businessman Manuel José Carvajal together with Juan Manuel Santos, who was at the time a journalist recently turned politician. The two men started by organizing a large meeting to test the idea with a diverse spectrum of national actors. Kahane (2012, 80) recalls: "The participants were both excited and nervous to find themselves in such an unusually heterogeneous group. One Communist Party city councillor, spotting a paramilitary warlord across the room, asked Santos: 'Do you really expect me to sit down with this man, who has tried to have me killed five times?'; Santos replied: 'It is precisely so that he does not do so a sixth time that I am inviting you to sit down.'"

Santos understood that he was too partisan to convene such a process, and therefore stepped down in favour of a broader organizing committee. This committee's aim was to put together a scenario team representative of the whole conflicted society, a team of legitimate players with plausible commitments to the future of Colombia but that were not too criminal or corrupt. The group they convened included guerrillas and paramilitaries, as well as academics, activists, businesspeople, journalists, military officers, peasants, politicians, trade unionists, and young people. The most remarkable feature of the team was the participation of the two illegal, armed, left-wing guerrilla groups: the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the ELN (National Liberation Army). This group met a total of ten days over three workshops, with the guerrillas participating by telephone from prison, exile, or the mountains. One of the guerrillas dialling in asked if it was necessary to agree to a ceasefire to participate in the scenario workshop. Kahane responded, "A scenario process is not a negotiation. There are no preconditions to participating except a willingness to talk and to listen."

The team developed four scenarios: "When the Sun Rises We'll See," – a warning of the chaos that would result if Colombians just let things be; "A Bird in the Hand Is Worth Two in the Bush," – a story of a negotiated compromise; "Forward March!" – a story of the government implementing a policy of crushing the guerrillas militarily and pacifying the country; and, "In Unity Lies Strength," – a story of a transformation of the country's mentality toward mutual respect and cooperation.

One team member later said: "Never have such diverse people in Colombia done so much together. It is very difficult to bring into the same process the extremes that are tearing apart the country and who beforehand had made it clear that they would not have any dealings with one another. For each of the extremes, the other does not exist or should cease to exist. We succeeded in this process of dialogue, of respecting the rules of the game, and of improving the way we treat one another, our manner of conversing, and the quality of our long-term thinking" (Kahane 2012, 83).

The scenarios were disseminated through a summary published in all the country's major newspapers, a video shown on national TV, and large public meetings in all the region's capitals. They were also taken up in strategic conversations across government, business and community groups. But the impact was not readily clear. Many years later, when Santos became president in 2010, he recalled the scenarios, the remarkable convening of radical diversity, and described the fourth scenario as a leitmotif for his new government, placing the scenarios at the centre of his narrative about what was unfolding in the country. When he later won the Nobel Peace Prize, after the national peace accord in 2016, he cited the *Destino Colombia* process as the process that made him see that peace was possible and could be achieved through negotiation (Litvinoff 2016).

The Colombian peace process remains a conflictual and contested story. Kahane and our colleagues at Reos Partners embarked in 2017 on a new transformative scenarios process in Colombia. They were invited in by actors in the region of the North Cauca Valley and Buenaventura who feel that a peace accord alone will not be enough to bring peace and prosperity after years of conflict. They believe that they will need to develop new ways of being and doing in this new context. The new scenario team includes farmers, landowners, Indigenous leaders, Afro-descendant leaders, the FARC, other political parties, as well as academic and business leaders. Following the initial scenarios process, and having understood what factors can and will influence the future of peace in the region, the group has now identified and begun to act on opportunities for action to create positive change. Still ongoing, this project has created four scenarios about possible futures in the region that illuminate the need for action. The project has also generated initial connections between leaders in the region, some of whom were involved in armed conflict with one another previously. Further, by creating a local team of skilled facilitators, it has created an environment where other similar processes can take root and receive the support that they require.***

6 Links and lessons for conflict transformation

Not all scenario planning is transformative. Often, scenarios are used to inform strategies to reinforce existing power structures and give priority to intellectual and conceptual knowledge of experts rather than to the practical wisdom of other stakeholder groups. Although the origins of the tools applied in transformative scenarios process draw on the original approach used in the Shell corporation, the spirit and purpose of this particular approach was born out of South Africa at a time of deep transformation.

The discovery at that time was the usefulness of scenarios in providing a common task to enable groups characterized by radical diversity and tension to engage in dialogue and collaboration. Over the past 20 years, TSP facilitators have combined and complemented the original methods with facilitation tools and styles that help to level power, invite in different ways of knowing, exercise the imagination, and build capacity to lead in situations where stakes are high and trust is low.

The Berghof Glossary on Conflict Transformation (2012, 22) states that "in the face of violence, there are three main impulses. The first is an immediate one – to stop it. The second is a medium-term one – to deal with the wounds resulting from it. The third, finally, is a long-term one – to change the underlying conditions that have led, and may lead again, to violence. Conflict transformation is the comprehensive approach that attempts to achieve the last of these three goals, without neglecting the others."

TSP is in this third space as well, in that it aims for transformation through understanding underlying causes and drivers of change and inspiring action on this level. I would like to explore here the links and lessons of TSP for conflict transformation in four key domains: purpose and framing; timing in conflict contexts; power; and change from within.

Purpose and framing

Mary B. Anderson and Lara Olson (2003) have argued that one of the key strategies to ensure that the impact of peacebuilding dialogues goes beyond the individual level to the socio-political level is to move the focus to concrete problems. The starting point in TSP is generally not the conflict itself, but rather the discomfort of a group of stakeholder leaders with a specific problematic situation they are a part of: A stuck land reform situation, a failed approach to the drug problem, a polarized education system, and so on.

In such situations, TSP offers a structured process and a clear, shared, creative task around which to engage with each other constructively. The concrete problems are both causes and results of bigger conflicts, but it is more accessible for stakeholders to come together to explore how to move out of this specific discomfort into a situation that is more sustainable and acceptable. The journey through specific process steps and the complexity of the task keeps the group together over a sustained period of multiple gatherings with constant forward movement, allowing them over time to generate a mutual understanding of each other's interests and needs. The container held by experienced facilitators allows the group to work on the conflict over the course of this process, recognizing it as a source of 'stuckness' but also discovering it as a source of creativity and a driver for change.

Timing in conflict contexts

As stated earlier, there are certain conditions that create a ripeness for a TSP: uncertainty, complexity and discomfort. TSP is considered useful when stakeholders recognize that they cannot carry on as they have, they cannot force their own interest through, and they must find a way to engage somehow with their adversaries. This discomfort can be associated with the concept in conflict transformation of a "mutually hurting stalemate": "a situation in which neither party thinks it can win a given conflict without incurring excessive loss, and in which both are suffering from a continuation of fighting" (US Institute of Peace 2018). The mutually hurting stalemate implies a "ripeness", a propitious moment where the parties will be open to mediation. Considering this, at which stage, in a "live" conflict context, can TSP be applied?

If conditions of physical safety can be guaranteed, it is possible that TSP can be useful before a mutually hurting stalemate. The request of coming together to build scenarios is more modest than the request to engage in a mutually negotiated settlement, and so the pain does not have to be as great. In the case of Colombia, the "*Destino Colombia*" scenarios process (1996-97) preceded by many years the mutually hurting stalemate when the conflict was judged to have entered a period of ripeness for negotiation (around 2015). Alongside many other factors, the scenarios process likely contributed to creating conditions for negotiation to happen.

In South Africa, the Mont Fleur Scenarios can be considered to have taken place in parallel to more official "track 1" processes, after an opening in the conflict and an engagement across the two sides, but before the terms of settlement and the way forward had been defined. TSP is also useful in dealing with the many specific consequences of past or lingering conflict, such as in addressing the issue of land reform 20 years after the democratic transition in South Africa.

Power

Anderson and Olson (2003, 58-59) point out that "to end war or to prevent it through sustainable peace requires the involvement of those people who hold power and therefore, of necessity, must agree to a peace and maintain the systems that sustain it – namely, governments, combatants or so-called 'hardliners'. These are the groups often referred to by peace practitioners as the 'hard to reach'." TSP successfully brings together the "unlike-minded" and may offer a way to engage some of these harder to reach stakeholders, including combatants, politicians, generals and business executives along with the "easier to reach" civil society leaders, social movements, indigenous groups, youth, etc. If the appropriate convening power and dissemination potential is in place, these actors choose to join because they want to influence the outcome and because their diverse interests and perspectives are welcome and needed, rather than judged and labelled as the problem.

Each scenario team member has been invited deliberately and their participation is justified because they hold a "piece of the puzzle". Through their experience and role in the system, they see something others might not see, and which can help to inform the collective product. If someone is excluded, the final product will be lacking in depth. If they choose not to sign on at the end, it will be lacking also in legitimacy with important stakeholder segments. It therefore does not make sense for a scenario team member to be silent or for the group not to invite their voice in. In the specific context of the scenarios process then, there is a convincing logic and meaning to the need for power levelling.

The fact that the stakeholders are officially equal within the confines of the scenarios process does not imply the absence of power dynamics. Asymmetric power relations show up consistently in the room, posing a significant challenge to facilitators to ensure that all voices are included. The group is invited to practice "democracy of time", calling their awareness to how much they are speaking in relation to each other. Facilitators often need to bring attention to the power dynamics in the room in the context of the power logic of the process, and to help the group to see the ways in which the dynamics of the problematic reality and power structure "out there" plays out "in here".

Change from within the system

Often the starting point in international conflict transformation is external intervention. This is frequently necessary, but it also creates a problematic political "container", by limiting local ownership and legitimacy. Transformative scenarios process is not about intervening in someone else's conflict. As mentioned earlier, the initiators and convenors of the process are ideally of the system itself. They are "problem owners", who feel the situation is unacceptable and/or unsustainable and who recognize that unilateral action is either not possible or not sufficient. These initiating problem owners convene a larger group of problem owners, the scenario team, and invite impartial facilitators to conduct the process. If the starting point of the process is an external initiator, there is often a cycle of "quiet convening" to support the establishment of the convening power from within before the process really gets underway.

The key impact of transformative scenarios is through the transformation of the participants. But paradoxically, the process does not require up front that these players be willing or see the need to transform. Rather, it offers a space in which they can change themselves if and when they want to. Kahane (2015) speaks of a moment which he calls "el click", which is the moment when a person realizes that if the whole system is in the room, and everyone in the room believes that the others are causing the problem,

it is not possible that they are all right. They are pointing a finger at others, but meanwhile there are three fingers pointing back at themselves. El click is then the realization that in order for the situation we are working on to change, we ourselves have to change. El click does not "keep office hours": it cannot be scheduled into the process, rather it must be noticed and supported when it happens.

7 Learning edges

The transformative scenarios approach is continually evolving. It has some inherent limitations and recurring challenges, as well as learning edges and questions to be explored. Recent exchanges with TSP practitioners reflected them grappling with the following challenging questions.

Do scenarios become an excuse, in the face of complexity, not to do something else?
A multi-stakeholder scenario process of this nature is an intensive process, occupying a great deal of attention and resources. It is based on an assumption that there is a need to slow down before we can speed up. Even though TSP is challenging to pull off, it is at the same time a structured and clear process that can give a system "something to do" when it is lost in the face of uncertainty, complexity and discomfort. There is a risk that convenors do this instead of doing something more demanding (coming to agreement) or action-oriented (collaborating for change), and that they run out of resources or energy by the end of the scenario construction. Even though there is always an impact in terms of relationships and insight, this is a dilemma. How to ensure that the scenario process is needed and worthwhile and how to deepen the sense of purpose and determination to actually transform reality? TSP works in part because it "only" involves talking together – how to shift to acting together? Part of the answer has been found to lie in embedding TSP in sustained platforms that allow participants to act creatively on the learnings, while still choosing freely whether they want to act together or separately.

How to reach more people and incorporate new technologies?
Anderson and Olson (2003) distinguish between peacebuilding processes designed to reach "key people" vs. processes designed to reach "more people". They argue that work with more people is not enough if it does not reach key people and vice versa.

TSP is mainly a process that involves "key people", i.e. a scenario team of 25-40 members. The most visible impact is on this group. It is sometimes perceived as a "top-down" approach because of this, despite the fact that the group usually includes leaders from all levels of society. The success of TSP relies greatly on this carefully convened and curated group that is representative of the whole system, and much of what makes it work would be lost if it were an open, large, and self-selecting process.

It is important to shift the notion that TSP is about affecting 25-40 people, as well as proactively to explore ways to reach "more people". Two key channels for this are the scenario team themselves as multipliers and agents of transformation, and the use of technology for dissemination and communication of the scenarios. On the first point, while such action of the scenario team cannot be controlled or driven by the convenors, it can be facilitated by creating space in the process for explicit conversation and accompaniment around personal agency.

On the second point, there is increasing pressure on TSP convenors and facilitators to use technology and audio-visuals to incorporate voices far beyond the exclusive group of scenario team members. It is possible to bring many more voices into the process through creative use of technology before the

scenario construction as well as during the dissemination phase. Rapidly evolving technologies offer other new possibilities to this space such as crowdsourcing inputs, gaming and the use of virtual reality for communicating scenarios more broadly and vividly. These possibilities are worth exploring further, while keeping in mind risks associated and avoiding compromising the potency of the face-to-face interactions.

Should TSP deal with conflict more directly?

The Transformative Scenarios Process is relevant and applicable in conflictual situations, as described in this article. At the same time, the approach taken to the conflict is in some ways to convene and move through the structured exercise in spite of the conflict, to shift understandings and relationships over the course of the sustained process. It rarely tackles the conflict head-on through specific conflict transformation sessions. It is possible that deeper change could be achieved by bringing conflict transformation methods more directly into the transformative scenarios process, and ensuring that TSP facilitators are trained in such approaches. This would entail allowing time for the group to attend to the conflict itself when it emerges over the course of the process, and would potentially build the scenario team's capacity to embrace and process conflict as a key outcome.

How to assess impact – whose results are we talking about?

TSP is about story-telling. The impacts are also best communicated through stories. The direct impacts are mostly intangible in the form of insights, capacities and mutual trust and understanding. TSP guarantees impact on individuals and relationships. But the intention is to influence concrete economic, social, political and physical realities. How can the shifts that happen through a TSP be linked to more visible outcomes in terms of systems transformation? It is useful to build an explicit theory of change that traces more clearly the link between the outputs and the impact of this approach.

Conclusion

The nature and vision of peacebuilding and conflict transformation work make it inevitably a multi-stakeholder endeavour. There are, and have been, many multi-stakeholder efforts in conflict contexts around the world, and there are many successful dialogue methods available to facilitators of such processes, each more useful in certain contexts than in others (Bojer et al. 2008). Convenors and facilitators must judge based on each situation and the conditions in place which method to apply. The role of TSP in conflict transformation and the acknowledgement of conflict in TSP deserve further reflection and practice.

Transformative scenarios processes in real life are inspiring, rewarding and impactful, while at the same time messy, complex and imperfect. The key promise of TSP is that it lowers the barriers for key stakeholders to step through the door and into a room with their adversaries. It is an invitation to a journey that they can accept to embark on. It is a journey where they do not need to "enemify" each other, where they can face reality together, lift their gaze to a new horizon, and discover each other as whole persons. Each of them holds a valuable piece of a wider puzzle, not only in their knowledge but also in their agency and sphere of influence. Over the course of the journey, they build a vision that is reality-infused and powered by an awareness that shifting their problematic situation depends on all of them.

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