

# Hybrid working: Planning for the future



# Gweithio hybrid: Cynllunio ar gyfer y dyfodol



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# Introduction

Planning for the future is key for any organisation to thrive, be successful and have positive outcomes for your stakeholders and customers, or students if you are a higher education institution.

Organisations are constantly evolving and there is a continual planning cycle of updating strategic documents, unit business plans and responding to operational needs. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic which required rapid reactive planning, there was a need for organisations to focus on futures planning and develop their workforce's understanding and skills.

The [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) and the role of the Future Generations Commissioner is ensuring that public bodies are 'Acting today for a better tomorrow and aiming to make 'long-lasting, positive change to current and future generations' (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, n.d.a).

This course takes a human-centred approach to planning, draws on the Future Generations Commissioner's resources and introduces you to 'recognised' approaches. These methodologies will help you understand the needs of your organisation to evolve their ways of working, particularly in hybrid working and digital transformation. It is part of the [Supporting hybrid working and digital transformation](#) collection and is designed to give you the opportunity to review the environment and context that you, your team, and organisation are operating in.

While futures planning often is focused on innovation, this course will encourage you to reflect on whether your organisation's approach is fit-for-purpose as you explore different methods for planning with foresight, sense-making of situations, continuous improvement of ways of working, and managing change. You will develop a strategy to use a single framework model or a mix of models whilst considering elements of business strategies, workplace values and culture, wellbeing and sustainability as well as the digital skills and capabilities you require to meet your objectives.

The course does not focus on understanding and developing an organisational strategy. Instead, it focuses on how you can help to achieve a strategy's desired outcomes by concentrating on planning, connected to operational and functional needs.

## Learning Outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:


- develop your futures planning understanding and approach
- evaluate how to define your purpose as a team, department, or organisation
- analyse your 'Why' to enable better decision-making
- explore a selection of methods and methodologies to make sense of situations and plan any changes required with foresight
- interpret and manage uncertainty more confidently and effectively.

## 1 Future possibilities

To start this course, we want to move away from thinking specifically about your own organisational internal and external environments. Instead, we want you to consider what the future could be like and to encourage you to be open to possibilities and uncertainties. This first section aims to enable you to feel comfortable with the fact that you may have

questions you may think you should know the answer to, and don't. Futures planning often involves unknowns and ideas that may seem impossible. The course has been designed to help you to manage unknowns more effectively and the later sections become more structured as we explore futures planning in detail.

### Activity 1 Reflect on the past and think about the future

 10 minutes



**Figure 1** Sultan the Pit Pony sculpture in south Wales

Watch the video 'Sultan the Pit Pony' below. Reflect on the past and think about future, both from a personal and organisational perspective.

Then make a note of how you imagine the future.

[BBC Wales - The Slate, Sultan the Pit Pony](#)

**Video 1** Sultan the Pit Pony

#### Answer


It may have seemed strange to have been asked to watch a video about a sculpture dedicated to the memory of pit ponies and coal mines. Many of us may be too young to remember the scale of the coal industry in Britain, as importing from overseas became more cost effective from the 1970s British coal mining started to rapidly decline. At its peak in the 1920-30's it may have been unimaginable for those involved in the industry that this was an energy source in the future we would actively decide to stop using. As we came aware of the impact it had on our climate the focus on long-term energy sources is a fundamental part of futures planning, to find more sustainable ways of working and ensure we meet the net-zero climate targets.

While you may not be directly involved in finding the solution for cleaner energy resources, your vision of the future is dependent on energy in some form. The purpose of the video was to redirect your thinking from your own understanding of the world and technology. Often when you are asked to imagine the future the first reaction is to talk about technology. The video highlighted the human impact of an evolving world and as future planners you have to balance both organisational and people's needs. This requires you to be open to collaborating with others and to draw on examples from other industries and areas of work. It also requires you to become comfortable managing uncertainty and to imagine the unknown and maybe impossible, in order to develop your own sense-making skills and assist in the evolution of your organisation.

The future possibilities for the world are infinite, and as an organisation predicting your own role in that future and how you continue to succeed, will either be an exciting or daunting prospect. For some this may feel overwhelming as, for most organisations, your focus is often on the immediate needs to survive and operate. Others may be fortunate to have Futures and Innovations, or Research and Development teams, but many rely on the knowledge, experience and enthusiasm of those in the workforce tasked with planning, implementing and sustaining change.

In the previous activity you considered the future. We now explore the idea of a futurist mindset.

## Activity 2 Do you have a futurist mindset?

 10 minutes

In the video below Jacob Morgan, four times best-selling author, speaker and professionally trained futurist explains the futurist mindset.

As you watch the video, consider how you think about the future and when working on tasks, consider how you approach these – do you think about different possibilities? Then answer the poll.

Video content is not available in this format.

**Video 2** The skills of the futurist



Do you feel you have a futurist mindset?

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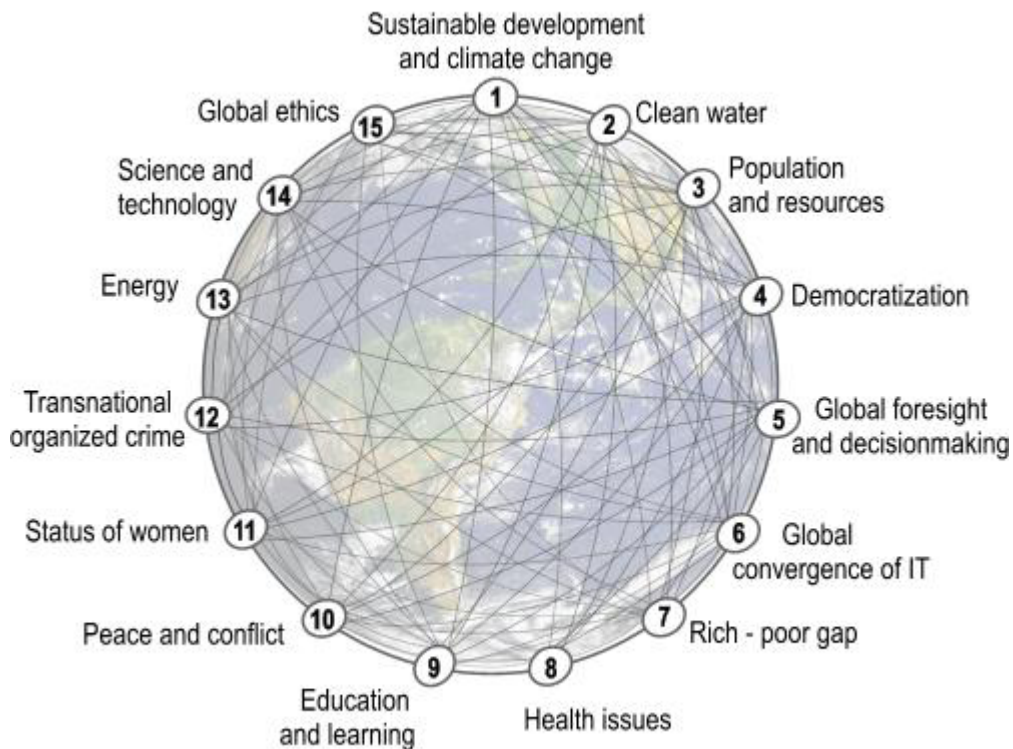
### Answer

Having a futurist mindset draws on many skills and approaches you may already use, but perhaps you have not considered that on daily basis you do futures planning in your approach to everyday tasks and decisions. These include the act of considering possibilities, exploring options and asking questions such as those Jacob Morgan posed in the video:

- Why might this happen?
- What else might happen?
- What factors may influence it happening/not happening?
- What is the future of work that YOU want to see happen?

## 1.1 Sustainable futures

Those focusing on futures planning also now need to ensure that sustainability is an embedded part of their approach. The [Millennium Project](#), a global participatory think tank established in 1996, identifies 15 Global Challenges that have an impact on the future – see Figure 2.



**Figure 2** The 15 Global Challenges impacting the future (The Millennium Project, 2022)

For those familiar with the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), you will note the similarities of these global challenges to the UN SDGs shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3** The 17 UN global goals for sustainable development (United Nations, n.d.)

The challenge is to balance the UN global goals for sustainable development with the needs for organisations to evolve, especially in relation to digital transformation which, due to innovation and development as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, has had an unprecedented acceleration. This will continue to require organisations to embrace technology and ensure they have the capability to utilise it to its full potential. The World Economic Forum article '[17 ways technology could change the world by 2025](#)' written in June 2020, during the global COVID-19 pandemic, provides insights into the

technology we may already need to understand and engage with, in both our personal and professional lives (World Economic Forum, 2020).

The unintended benefits to the environment during lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic 'due to movement restrictions and a significant slowdown of social and economic activities has led to the air quality improving in many cities with a reduction in water pollution in different parts of the world' (Rume and Islam, 2020). These benefits are being rapidly reserved as we move more freely again, leading to the question: how can organisations adapt, drawing on appropriate evidence and research to ensure that net-zero targets are achieved?

All UK organisations are required by law to reduce their carbon emissions. The approach to this varies throughout the UK. You can explore these for your nation via the links below:

- Wales – [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) (Public bodies only) and [Environment \(Wales\) Act 2016](#) (Legislation.gov.uk, n.d.a)
- England – [Climate Change Act 2008](#) (Legislation.gov.uk, n.d.b) and ' [Sustainability and climate change: a strategy for the education and children's services systems](#)' (GOV.UK, 2022)
- Scotland – [Climate Change \(Emissions Reduction Targets\) \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#) (Gov.SCOTLAND, n.d.)
- Northern Ireland – [Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme](#) (Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, n.d.)

## 1.2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

In the UK, the most developed approach to reducing carbon emissions is the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, n.d.a). It is seen as a world leading approach to protecting future generations and addressing climate change.

### The seven wellbeing goals

To ensure that Wales is working towards the same shared purpose and vision, the Act has seven wellbeing goals that all public bodies must work towards achieving. These are outlined in Figure 4 and explained in Table 1.





**Figure 4** The seven wellbeing goals in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

**Table 1** Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 - Seven well-being goals

	<p><b>A Prosperous Wales</b></p> <p>An innovative, productive, and low carbon society that recognises the limits of the global environment and therefore uses resources efficiently and proportionately (including acting on climate change); and which develops a skilled and well-educated population in an economy that generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing decent work.</p>
	<p><b>A Resilient Wales</b></p> <p>A nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change.</p>



### **A More Equal Wales**

A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio-economic circumstances).



### **A Healthier Wales**

A society in which people's physical and mental wellbeing is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood.



### **A Wales of Cohesive Communities**

Attractive, safe, viable and well-connected.



### **A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language**

A society that promotes and protects culture, heritage, and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts, and sports and recreation.



### **A Globally Responsible Wales**

A nation which, when doing anything to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales, takes account of whether doing such a thing may make a positive contribution to global wellbeing.

Source: [Future Generations Commissioner for Wales](#), n.d.a

The Act has a strong focus on how the goals will be achieved by encouraging public bodies and organisations to use sustainable development principles of long-term, prevention, integration, collaboration, and involvement, as depicted in Table 2 below.

**Table 2 Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 - Five ways of working**



**Long-term:** The importance of balancing short-term needs with the needs to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.



**Integration:** Considering how the public body's wellbeing objectives may impact upon each of the wellbeing goals, on their objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies.



**Involvement:** The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the wellbeing goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves.




**Collaboration:** Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its wellbeing objectives.



**Prevention:** How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives.

Source: [Future Generations Commissioner for Wales](#), n.d.a)

### Activity 3 Thinking about the possibilities for higher education institutions

 15 minutes

In the video below, Scott Stonham, Independent Sustainable Technology Analyst and author, shares the role higher education institutions (HEIs) could play in the future.

As you watch the video make a note of the following:

- the strengths within your own organisation
- areas that are of interest to you
- how you might be able to make a difference in the future.

Video content is not available in this format.

**Video 3** HEIs for the future



Provide your answer...

#### Feedback

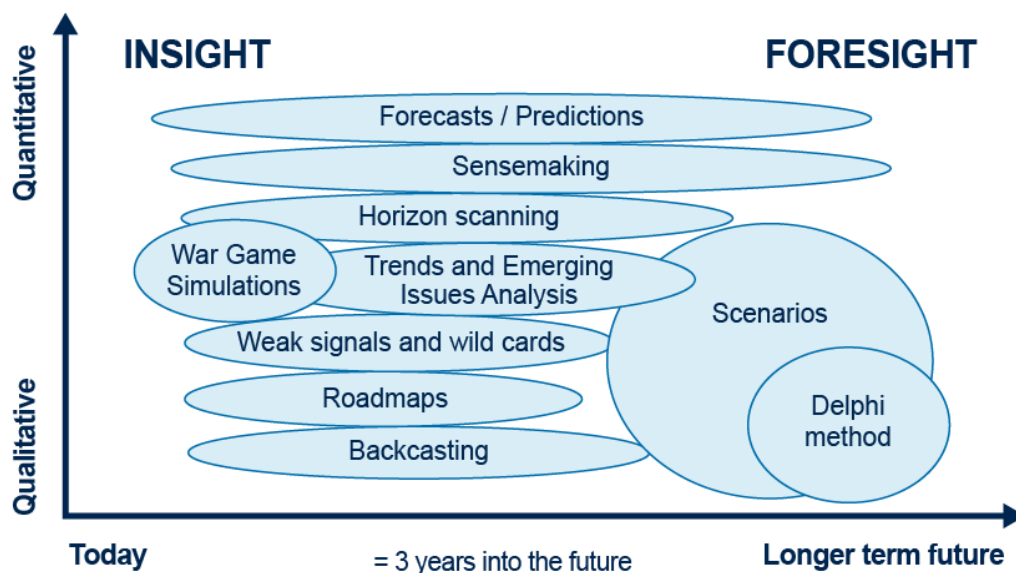
Scott Stonham is the author of the Jisc report [Exploring digital carbon footprints](#) (Soneham, 2022), which focuses on the hidden environmental cost of the digital revolution and the steps universities and colleges can take. Feel free to download and read the report in your own time.

### 1.3 Futures planning for the world today

In the last few years, all industry sectors including the higher education (HE) sector have had to react to unprecedented change and uncertainty, while being mindful of the impact on wellbeing of those within your organisation and wider community. The COVID-19 pandemic required us to adapt continually and rapidly, as restrictions and guidance changed between 2019 and 2022. The external environment is still uncertain, as economic, and social stability continue to fluctuate, and the cost of living rises.

How you lead your organisation and plan for business continuity and growth is critical to address your short-, medium-, and long-term needs, aims and objectives.

There are various approaches to foresight and futures planning, as shown in the figure below, and in this course, we only explore a few of these.



**Figure 5** Different approaches to foresight and futures planning (Futures Platform, n.d.)

In the video below Dr Matt Finch (Associate Fellow, Saïd Business School) and Professor Rafael Ramírez (Professor of Practice, Saïd Business School, University of Oxford) provide an introduction to futures and scenario planning. As you watch think about your own understanding of this type of planning.

Video content is not available in this format.

**Video 4** What is futures planning?



To assist you as you move through the course and consider your approach to futures planning, the 'Hybrid ways of working: a contextual sustainability framework' illustrated below, has been designed for this collection of courses. It highlights the key areas you may wish to think about developing for your organisation while managing the expectations, needs and wellbeing of your stakeholders.

The framework helps you to consider and understand your organisational context and needs through a different lens, while being mindful of your own wellbeing.

1. You and your ways of working should take account of the key stakeholders within your environment and their needs in relation to organisational development.
2. You need to understand organisational requirements, the context, connections, and requirements for key areas of focus, and how these relate to the needs of your stakeholders.
3. You need to consider your ways of working for the wellbeing of future generations.



**Figure 6** Hybrid ways of working: a contextual sustainability framework

If you are unfamiliar with the term 'lens' this term is used to encapsulate looking at things from different perspectives, with an empathic approach. By placing yourself in different situations or by looking at things from someone else's perspective – considering those points of view and repeating this for the different elements/

stakeholders/areas involved – builds a more holistic and consolidated view of the needs, support available and possible questions and solutions that may evolve.

## 1.4 Future trends of work

Many higher education institutions (HEIs) are reflecting on lessons learned from reactive ways of working during the pandemic and evolving their working practices and policies to embed more inclusive and proactive ways of working. In higher education (HE) this has resulted in more hybrid work environments and developing their capabilities in response to digital transformation. While there is more for organisations to navigate and implement, many can now take a more reflective approach. They can take the time to plan for what is needed in both the short- and long-term and continue to embed more sustainable ways of working.

As organisations plan for the future, the wellbeing and expectations of employees and the employee experience, need to be priorities. As teams are more distributed, traditional unit functions may no longer be appropriate for these new ways of working, so organisational structures need to be developed in line with these changes.

The Gartner article '[9 Future of work trends post covid-19](#)' (Turner and Baker, 2022) identify trends that have the greatest impact on the employee experience as:

1. Hybrid work becomes mainstream
2. There's a shortage of critical talent
3. Well-being is a key metric
4. DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) outcomes could worsen
5. Turnover will increase
6. Managers' roles are changing
7. Gen Z wants in-person work experiences
8. Shorter work weeks are a new EVP (employee value proposition)
9. Data collection is expanding

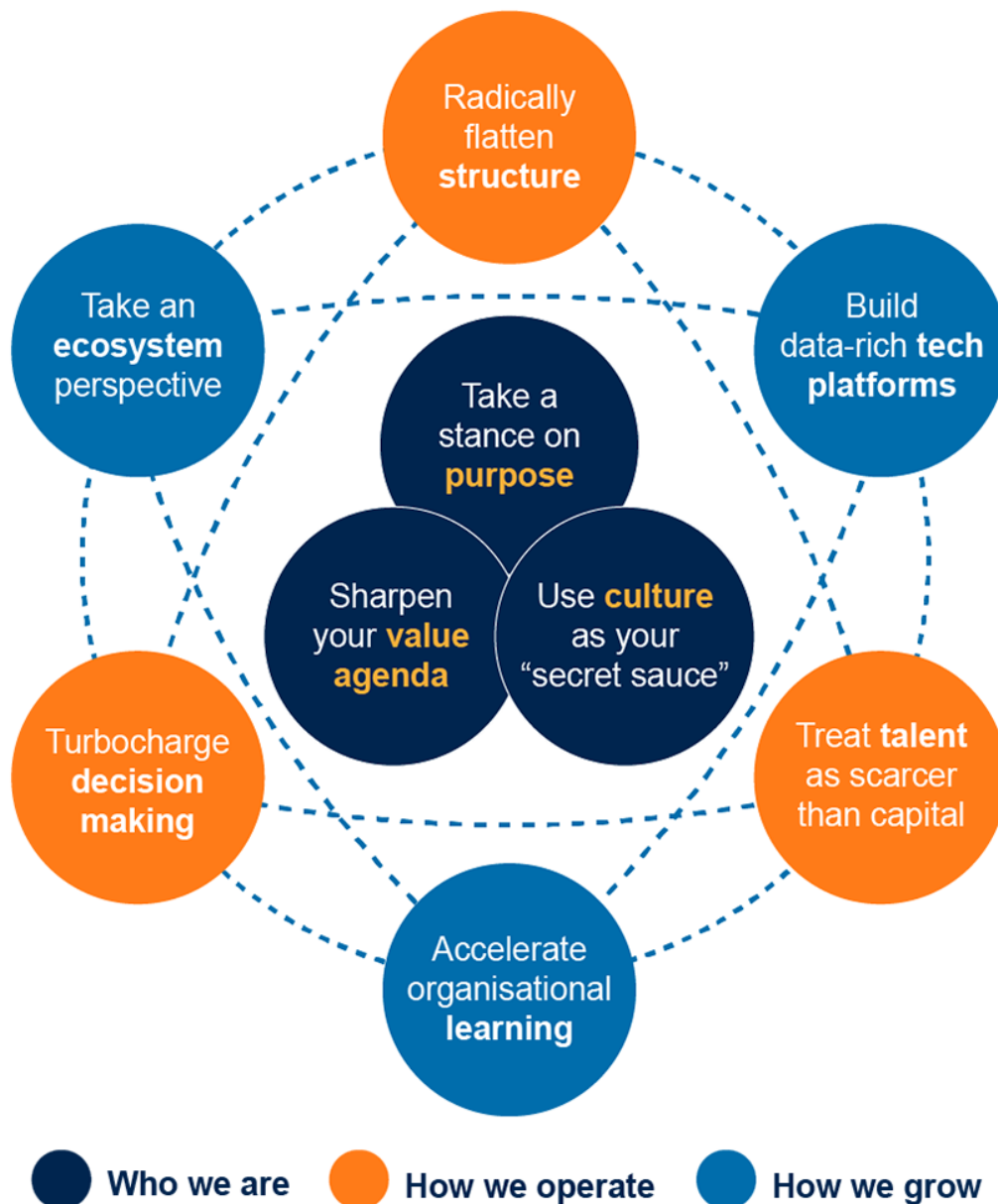
You may recognise some of these trends in your organisation today, others you may feel are on the horizon. When it comes to identifying the need to plan for hybrid working, Turner and Baker, (2022) suggest you are not alone – their article states nearly 39% of organisations would risk losing employees if they went back to fully on-site arrangements. While according to the Office for National Statistics (2022), of all employees surveyed, 84% of workers that worked from home during the pandemic intend to carry out a mix of working at home and in their place of work in the future.

Of course, there is a difference between *having* to work remotely during a period of global crisis, where individuals and organisations had to be quick to adapt to working and learning from home, and developing a long-term strategy to support workers, customers and other stakeholders who *choose* to work remotely at least some of the time.

This means, as an organisation, your awareness and understanding of employees' expectations is critical to managing expectations and also for effective planning and strategy development. We frequently hear 'one size does not fit all' but for an organisation the reality is, you have to find a balance in order to operate effectively. This may require radical transformation. The McKinsey and Company article '[Organizing for the future: Nine keys to becoming a future-ready company](#)' (De Smet



et al., 2021) states reinvention is needed, and proposes the following nine imperatives that future-ready companies will exhibit.




**Figure 7** Nine organisational imperatives for future-ready companies

(De Smet et al., 2021)

The trends and imperatives may be areas you already consider, however, delivering such a strategy requires embarking on a journey from understanding why you want to do it, through consideration of the challenge from every angle (organisationally, personally, and societally) to careful planning and change management – all within a context of continual uncertainty.



### Activity 4 What will these trends and imperatives mean to your organisation?

 10 minutes

Refer back to the Gartner article '[9 Future of Work Trends Post Covid-19](#)' (Tuner and Baker, 2022) and the McKinsey article '[Organizing for the future: Nine keys to becoming a future-ready company](#)' (De Smet et al., 2021).

Consider the trends that may impact the employee experience, then think about organisational imperatives that are required to be a future-ready organisation.

How future ready do you think your organisation is, and what might your need to focus on?

Provide your answer...

## 1.5 Future global trends and risks

The COVID-19 pandemic sought as a reminder that the external environment is not something we can control. While we adapted and found solutions to live with COVID-19, we continually have to develop an awareness of our external environment and ensure that we have plans and strategies for dealing with the knowns and unknowns.

It is not realistic or appropriate to plan for every possible scenario but having an awareness and focus on those that are most likely to happen, or impact your organisation, is sensible. Most of these are likely to be areas that you already monitor through formal and informal channels and are embedded within your organisational planning.

The UN report [Shaping the Trends of Our Time](#) (United Nations, 2020) identifies the following five megatrends at a global level:

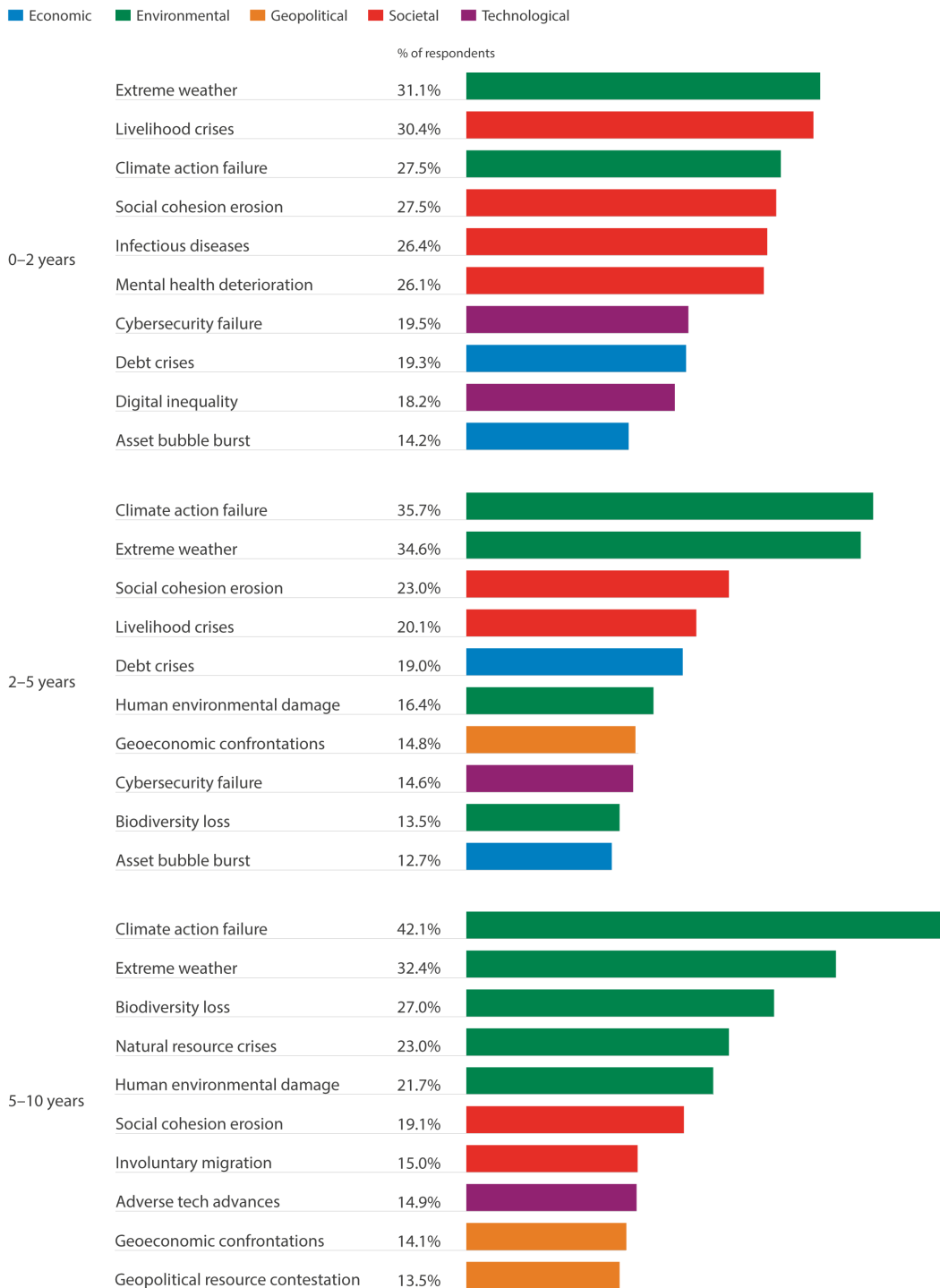
1. Climate change and environmental degradation
2. Demographic trends and population ageing
3. Sustainable urbanization
4. Digital technologies
5. Inequalities

These are equally reflected in the World Economic Forum's *Global Risks Report 2022* (World Economic Forum, 2022a). This report and the resources on the website provide insights into areas organisations need to have an awareness of and which risks they have control over and can contribute to mitigating the impact of. Knowledge of these can potentially prevent negative outcomes both within their organisation, and externally through collaboration.

The figure below shows the Global Risks Horizon – when the risks will become a critical threat to the world. You may already be familiar with many of these. Most organisations now have net-zero targets and focus on cyber security and digital capabilities, and while mental health and the wellbeing of those within in your organisation have always been important, they have become more of a priority as the impact of COVID-19 and hybrid working, both on our mental and physical wellbeing, started to be more fully understood.

## Global Risks Horizon

When will risks become a critical threat to the world?



**Figure 8** Global Risks Horizon (World Economic Forum, 2022a)

## Activity 5 Explore the Global Risks Report 2022

 15 minutes

Explore the Global Risks Report and the data on global risk perceptions on the World Economic Forum website.

- [The Global Risks Report 2022](#) (World Economic Forum, 2022a)
- [Data on Global Risks Perceptions](#) (World Economic Forum, 2022b)

1. Consider how you, your team and organisation can respond to and help minimise the impact on your stakeholders from the short-, medium- and long-term risks the World Economic Forum have identified. Make some notes on this below.

Provide your answer...

2. Answer the following question in the report by voting in the poll below.  
How do you feel about the outlook for the world?

Interactive content is not available in this format.



### Answer

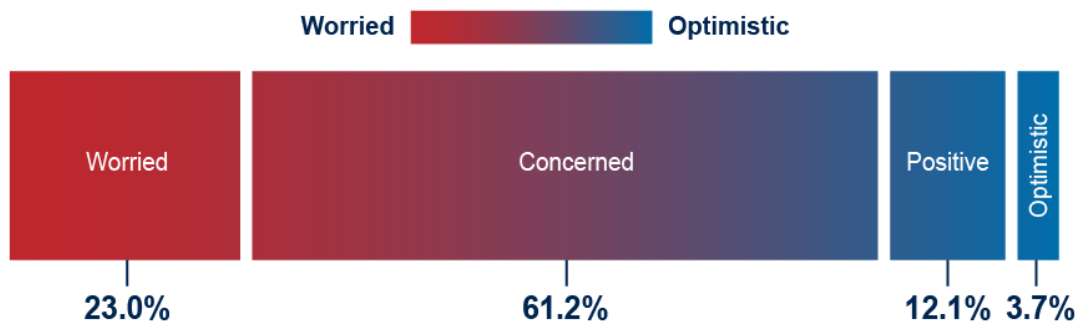
The Global Risk Report is something that many people in organisations do not need to engage with at a detailed level, but you may have seen similar themes and trends that you are focusing on within your organisation.

Your response to the poll will be based on your own experiences, what is of interest/concern to you and how you feel about uncertainty. Do you actually worry about the trends identified or are they a fleeting concern?

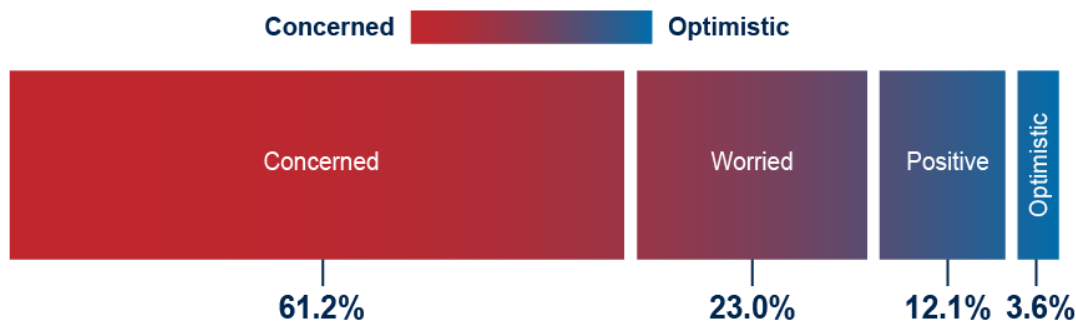
The results from respondents as part of the report for this question are available in two places from the World Economic Forum, one within the report and the other on their website. Interestingly these are displayed differently in the two images (figure 9 below) One is presented left to right, negative to positive and the other, left to right, by percentage biggest to smallest.

Does seeing the data in the different ways change your reaction to how worried/concerned you might need to be?

### World Outlook sentiment: How do you feel about the outlook for the world?



▲ Source: Global Risks Report 2022



▲ Source: World Economic Forum website

**Figure 9** Ways of presenting data. Source: World Economic, Forum Global Risks Reports 2022

Later in the course we explore how to present evidence and data to your stakeholders in a meaningful way.

Although there are many views of future trends (and some are certainly bleaker than others), it must be understood that these are only *possible* futures, that may or not come about, and need to be understood in the context of your sector, organisation or project.

Traditional planning normally relies on past and current factors whereas, according to the OECD's OPSI [Futures & Foresight website](#), futures and foresight methods 'embrace uncertainty and encourage the analysis and consideration of a range of future possibilities to inform decision making' (OECD, n.d.). They suggest that there is 'no *absolute* future, but there are many *relative* futures' which 'can take many different forms: predicted, projected, preferred, path-dependant, probably, plausible and possible'.

## 2 Futures Planning and organisational strategy

While having an appreciation of global trends, understanding how the workplace is evolving and thinking about possible futures enables you to broaden your perspective. For most people involved in futures planning, your primary focus will be on solving problems, innovating, and delivering outcomes linked to your organisation's strategy.

Strategy, according to Davide Sola and Jerome Couturier, 'is a set of coordinated, creative and sustainable actions (a plan) designed to overcome one or more core challenges that create value' (Sola and Couturier, 2014). They go on to say these core challenges need to be overcome as they may be preventing you from delivering your 'higher purpose', the 'ultimate goal', the reason you, your project, your team, or your business exists.

Post the COVID-19 pandemic organisations have had to review their strategies, and how as an organisation they evolve and thrive, in a politically turbulent, financial, and economic uncertain and increasingly insecure world. Widening inequality and external drivers are forcing organisations to rethink their operating models, ways of working, and reconsider their resilience in terms of people, technology, processes, supply chains and impact on the planet.

Futures planning for an organisation is not easy as the further into the future you seek to look, the more uncertainty exists. Couple this uncertainty with external factors outside of your control or influence, and planning becomes even more challenging. Global imperatives, such as the UN's Sustainability Development Goals, and National initiatives, such as the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act add additional drivers (and potentially constraints) for change to the mix.

### 2.1 Managing expectations

It is also important to manage expectations, taking a human-centred design approach to futures planning. While this may feel like a challenge to balance the needs of the organisation to the needs of individuals and teams, it can help build empathy within an organisation, create better experiences, and build resilience to and trust in change. As a result, the organisation's culture enables confidence to try new ways of working, learn and evolve.



**Figure 10** Putting people first

Human-centred design is a creative approach to problem solving that starts with the needs of the user, emphasises the importance of diverse perspectives, and encourages solution-seeking among multiple actors. It consists of five phases: Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype and Test. What differentiates human-centred design from other problem-solving approaches is its focus on understanding the perspective of the person who experiences a problem most acutely.

(UNDP, n.d., Human-Centered Design )

This involves observing, using empathy to explore the problem further, to uncover what at first might not be obvious, generating ideas, with test-and-learn activities to gather feedback, prior to implementing a potential solution.

You may have noted when exploring future trends that individual personal expectations of working have changed, having had to adapt to hybrid working environments and living through lockdowns. For organisations this has meant they are having to re-evaluate the employee value proposition and experience. Many employees in a position to do so, have simply left organisations that do not align with their values or expectations, and

prospective candidates are now often in a position to be more selective when choosing to work for an organisation.

Those within organisations being asked to adjust to new ways of working equally will have expectations that may not now align to the needs of the business, especially if they were recruited during a lockdown period. In addition, the impact on leaders and managers needs to be supported as those responsible for managing others and implementing change often are at the front line of managing expectations of all stakeholders.

People must be considered in any planning activity and as a futures planner you will need to work with appropriate teams to ensure that your strategy reflects what is possible within your organisation.

## 2.2 Mission, vision, values and objectives

In order for strategies to be successful they are underpinned by your mission, vision and values, and how the objectives throughout the organisations are set to ensure success, as such these need to be considered and understood when futures planning.

According to Richard Whittington (Professor of strategic management, Saïd Business School, University of Oxford) and colleagues:

A **mission statement** aims to provide employees and stakeholders with clarity about what the organisation is fundamentally there to do. This is often ascertained by asking for a description of what the organisation does, then keep asking 'why?' until the real mission of the organisation reveals itself.

A **vision statement** is concerned with the future the organisation seeks to create. This 'typically expresses an aspiration that will enthuse, gain commitment and stretch performance'.

Statements of **corporate values** communicate the underlying and enduring core 'principles' that guide the organisation's strategy and define the way that the organisation operates. These values need to be enduring and should not change with circumstances.

**Objectives** are statements of specific outcomes that are to be achieved.

(Whittington et al., 2020, pp. 8-9)

The following case study allows you to explore how mission, vision, values and objectives connect, and can be presented for all stakeholders.

### Case Study: Bangor University

[Bangor University's Strategy 2030](#) (Bangor University, n.d.) provides a notable example of the above statements:

OUR MISSION: A research-led University of and for North Wales, providing transformative learning experiences and nurturing a positive impact on society regionally, nationally, and internationally.

OUR VISION: A globally connected University, realising opportunities for success through transformative, innovative, impact-driven research and teaching, with a focus on sustainability: safeguarding the environment, revitalising society's health, and promoting economic, social, bilingual, and cultural vibrancy.

OUR VALUES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES: These six values and guiding principles are our cultural cornerstones, guiding our decision-making and how we work together as a University community.



**Ambition**

Inspired by our history and our people, we enable the extraordinary. We are courageous, ambitious for our University, our colleagues, and our students, as well as supporting the ambitions of our partners.

**Inclusivity**

We provide equal access, equal rights, and equal justice to all. We will promote mutual regard for the rights and liberties of diverse people and their ideas, backgrounds, and approaches to the pursuit of knowledge and understanding.

**Integrity**

We act with honesty and transparency and will seek to collaborate in all we do. We will facilitate intellectual growth through academic freedom, creative expression and communication of truth, knowledge, social and moral development.

**Respect**

We trust, value, empower and care for each other, and we hold ourselves accountable. As collaborators we will be responsive and will achieve more together. We will foster civic engagement and social responsibility that supports and enhances education, research, service-learning, culture, and quality of life on and beyond our campus environments in Welsh and English.

**Sustainability**

We are passionate about promoting a culture and scholarship of environmental stewardship, living in harmony, and caring for the world in ways that meet our economic, social, environmental, and cultural needs. Underpinned by our world-renowned research, we will support the development of Wales as a bilingual learning country with a knowledge driven economy for the benefit of the world and future generations.

**Transformation**

As a place of academic endeavour, innovation, and transformation, we are driven to help enrich society. We are committed to excellence at all levels of the educational and creative experience and will support everyone in our University community to achieve their dreams and fulfil their potential.


And their objectives (goals) are clear, and measurable. Importantly, there is also recognition that there is a need to retain 'some degree of flexibility to remain relevant in an ever-changing political and operating environment':

- Improved performance in respected rankings that align to our mission, vision, and values
- Improve graduate skills, employment, and job creation outcomes
- Research of scale and quality that is internationally recognised and underpinned by our Global Excellence in Sustainability
- Build market share of students
- A sector-leading student experience
- Enhanced Welsh language provision
- Financially sustainable and resilient
- Strategic tertiary education partnerships across North Wales
- Deliver ambitious, transformative Campus and Digital infrastructure developments

- Increase life sciences research and innovation, underpinned by an inter-professional Health and Medical School for North Wales

Next, work through the activity below to find out more about your organisation's higher purpose.

### Activity 6 What are your organisation's mission, vision, values and objectives?

 10 minutes

Does your organisation have published mission, vision, values, and objectives statements? Can you get a true sense of your organisation's 'Why' from them? If not how would amend them to draw out and clarify your organisation's higher purpose? Capture your thoughts in the text box below, and then read our feedback for this activity.

Provide your answer...

#### Answer

**Strategy statements** succinctly summarise an organisation's strategy in a paragraph or two. According to Whittington et al. (2020), these should cover three main themes:

- The fundamental mission, vision, values, and objectives the organisation seeks (as outlined above).
- The scope or domain of the organisation's activities (customers/clients they serve, geographic location, and extent of 'vertical integration' i.e., the activities they deliver themselves versus the activities they outsource or sub-contract).
- The advantages or capabilities they have to deliver all of these.

Strategies can work at many levels:

- **Corporate-level:** concerned with aspects of geographic scope, diversity of products/services, and how resources are allocated. So, in terms of Higher Education, this might be the overarching university strategy.
- **Business-level:** concerned with 'business units' and how they should compete in their particular markets – this could be a 'faculty strategy' or 'research strategy'.
- **Function-level:** concerned with how *components* of an organisation deliver the corporate and business level strategies in terms of resources, processes, and people. This could be the 'IT Strategy', or 'Teaching & Learning Strategy' when thinking about it in an HE setting.

(Whittington et al., 2020)

Strategies can also be developed at a **project** (or **personal**) level – it is all about the scope. For projects, in a similar vein to business and function level strategies, the stronger the link or integration between a project's 'Why' and the higher levels of

strategy it will support, the more likely it is going to get the advocacy, and resources, it requires to succeed.

## 2.3 Planning for new ways of working

Most people within an organisation are not directly involved with creating the organisational strategy but may be involved in activities and objectives with specific outcomes that are required in order to achieve the organisation's purpose. Now that you have thought about possible futures, gained an understanding of trends to be aware of and are thinking about your own organisation's strategy, we focus next on developing your skills for futures planning.

In this course you will be looking at how to approach futures planning for your organisation. When we think of futures planning sometimes it can be approached with a simple question – What might the future look like?

More often you will be looking to solve a particular problem or be focusing on an area/topic where a strategic need has been identified.

As many organisations have permanently moved to hybrid working as we live with COVID-19, it is important to learn from the journey of adapting due the pandemic and draw on the experience to help planning for a future where digital transformation will continue, and sustainability becomes ever more important.

### Activity 7 Thinking about a problem you need to solve

 15 minutes

Spend some time reflecting on how your organisation has evolved and responded over the last few years, and the lessons that have been learnt.

Then take time to review what your organisation has, or is doing now, in relation to ways of working – has it adopted a hybrid model? What are its digital transformation and sustainability plans?

Consider the following questions then make some notes in the box below:

- How aligned should delivery programmes be to the organisational strategy?
- How will these programmes impact stakeholders (positively and negatively)?
- What capabilities can you draw upon within your organisation to ensure the success of a hybrid working or digital transformation?
- How can you look at the problem through different lens?

Then think about a problem your organisation may need to solve or is already addressing, that you may wish to use and draw on as you work through this course, and consider:

Why does this problem need solving?

If you do not have a problem that needs solving/addressing you can simply consider: What does the future of your organisation look like?

Provide your answer...

.....

**Answer**

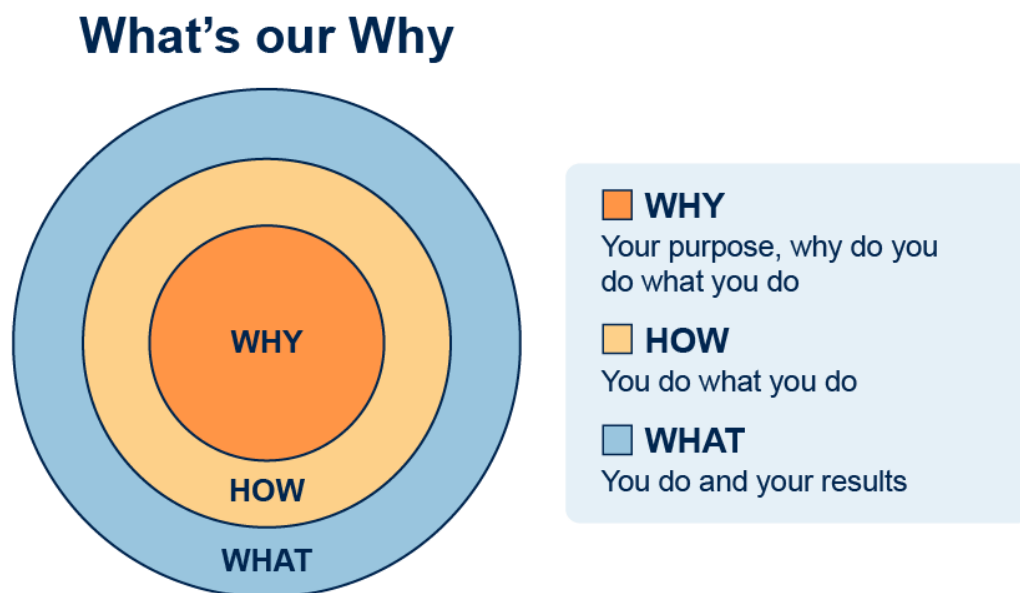
As you did this activity, you may have found that specific reference to hybrid working is not in your organisational strategy, but that there are initiatives across your organisation that are focusing on specific requirements for hybrid working. This may in part be due to the frequency that organisational strategies are updated, or many of the activities which need to be planned for are in fact fall under business continuity and operating strategy which tend to be captured at a more granular level. Whereas it is likely that digital transformation and building digital capabilities will be, as the impact of technology has been and will continue to be, a priority for most organisations.

### 3 Identifying and understanding your 'why'

In the last activity we asked you to think about Why a problem may need solving. It may seem obvious, but how often have you asked 'why' are you doing something? Most initiatives fail or do not deliver the expected outcomes because there was not the appropriate level of understanding of why something needs to be done, and how that 'why' relates to the purpose (strategy) of your organisation. It is the purpose of an organisation that should inspire those within it to work collectively to ensure that the organisation succeeds.

If a strategy is developed to move an organisation from the current state to some envisioned future state, where a problem is solved, an opportunity is exploited and/or a benefit is realised, then it is extremely important to understand what that future state looks like and why we need to get there.

Simon Sinek (2011) an author and inspirational speaker, calls this the 'Why' and puts this at the centre of his 'Golden Circle' as shown in the figure below. His belief is that most people will know the 'How' and 'What' an organisation does, but not necessary the 'Why'. The 'Why' for organisations is often encapsulated in their mission statement. The vision statement reflects the 'What', and the values and objectives statements describe the 'How'.




**Figure 11** Simon Sinek's (2011) 'Golden Circle'

Sinek suggests that when thinking about developing a strategy and a plan, not just at an organisational level, but also when working on problems and initiatives, this is where we should start because without knowing why we do something (our higher purpose) we will find it extremely difficult to attract the right people that believe in what we do, and who will work hard together towards achieving it.

'The goal' Sinek says, 'is to do business with everybody who needs what you have, the goal is to do business with people who believe what you believe' (Sinek, 2011).

## Activity 9 Start with Why

 30 minutes

Watch 'Start with Why', the TED Talk by Simon Sinek in which he introduces the golden circle and the concept of 'Why'. As you watch think about the 'Why', 'How' and 'What', and how can you use this approach to help to establish your 'Why' for futures planning?

Make notes in the box below in order to refer back to these for later activities in the course or you may wish to draw your own Golden Circle.

View at: [youtube:u4ZoJKF\\_VuA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4ZoJKF_VuA)



### Video 5 Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Action

*Provide your answer...*

2. Look at the following links to see examples of how the Golden Circle has been used.

- [Our Golden Circle](#) (TADA n.d.)
- [Golden Circle](#) (cerculdeaur.ro)

In the next section we consider establishing your 'Why' further.

## 3.1 Discovering your 'Why'

For those who hold a leadership position, creating an environment in which the people in your charge feel like they are a part of something bigger than themselves is your responsibility as a leader.

(Sinek et al. 2017)

Being a leader or manager is challenging, especially to ensure that our teams, departments, or organisations understand the mission they are working for and their purpose in an organisation.

Simon Sinek doesn't claim to have invented asking 'why', he codified it when he noticed that companies, organisations, and people throughout history with similar backgrounds and purposes perform so differently; only some seem to defy the average with greater success.

Knowing your 'Why' is equally important at a function, team, or project level, and it can be especially powerful if your project's 'Why' is directly supporting the organisations 'Why'. Sinek (2011) calls this a 'Nested WHY'.

It can be a useful approach before starting future's planning, to ensure that those involved understand the organisational 'Why' but also the 'why' for the futures planning you intend

to do. In order to help bring this process to life, we take you through the stages for running a workshop to discover your 'Why'.

## Finding the fundamental purpose

Finding the 'real why' can be challenging but if you ask the question at least five times you should be able to get to the fundamental purpose.

An organisation, team or individual can be guided through the discovery of their 'Why' by following a simple three-stage process, according to Sinek et al. (2017). This is explained in the figure and table below:



**Figure 12** What's your 'Why?' – three stage process

**Table 3** What's your 'Why?' – three stage process

Stage	Action
Stage 1 – Gather stories and share them.	Look into your past to find meaningful, emotionally charged stories to help connect with or find your 'Why'.
Stage 2 – Identifying your themes.	Begin to recognise emerging themes from your stories in order to pull together your 'Why' into something cohesive.
Stage 3 – Draft and refine your 'Why' statement	Produce a simple and clear single sentence, which is actionable, focused on how you contribute to others, and what Sinek calls 'evergreen' (applicable to everything you do).

While you can do this as an individual, bringing others into the conversation can help to consider your 'Why' through a different lens, and help you define it more effectively. This could be done in a workshop. As you read through the following suggested approach to running the workshop, consider how you might use this for discovering your 'Why' with your team or organisation. The output from doing this activity should provide you with valuable insights and a better understanding of your 'Why'. You can then use this to develop outputs you are responsible for, such as reports or project/programme proposals.

## 3.2 Preparing the workshop

Who needs to be involved? Ideally you will have a diverse team of representatives, who may be internal or external to your organisation – this could be staff, suppliers and students if you are in higher education?

Who will facilitate the workshop? It's helpful if this is someone who is the problem owner to provide context and guidance. The facilitator manages the workshop and keeps



participants focused and on track. According to Sinek, the 'ideal person for this role is someone trusted by the organisation who has a desire to serve, a strong natural curiosity and an ability to ask probing questions.' (Sinek et al., 2017, p.165)

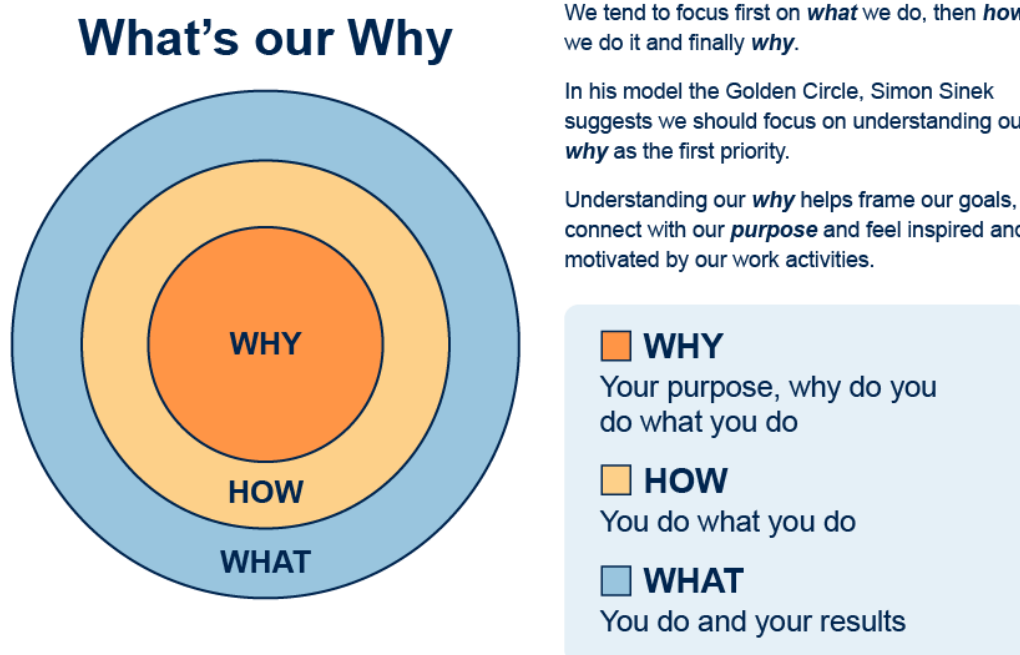
Depending on your participants, decide the most appropriate environment for your workshop – remote, hybrid or face-to-face. What tools will you need and will they be physical or online, or a mix, e.g.

- whiteboards
- sticky notes
- breakout rooms
- polls
- drawing 'rich pictures' (if you are unfamiliar with rich pictures and would like a brief overview, you can access video tutorials from the OpenLearn [Rich Pictures](#) resource).

Depending on the size of your group you may wish to put participants into sub-groups for certain activities at each stage and allow time to come back as a group to discuss the outcomes. When forming sub-groups, consider the diversity of the groups to ensure a range of voices are in the room.

- the purpose and focus of the workshop
- the Golden Circle, and explain this is to think about their 'Why', 'How' and 'What'
- questions you may wish them to think about.

This can be done as an email with the agenda, some slides, a video explaining what they can expect, or another method of your choice. Below is a suggested template you can draw upon.



**Figure 13** Example slide to introduce the Golden Circle.

### 3.3 During the workshop

It is sensible at the start of the workshop to run through the checklist below, to help set expectations and clarify the outcomes you hope to achieve.

- Overview of what to expect depending on the purpose.
- The context for the workshop
- The outcome intended for the workshop
- Be prepared to active listen – provide overview of what this means in your context
- Preparing – do they need to know how use online tools?
- Accessibility and inclusion considerations
- Workshop 'house keeping'.

As participants may not be familiar with the What's your Why? three stage process shown in Figure 12 (repeated), take them through the stages and what to expect (these are explained in the next sections in detail).



**Figure 12** (repeated) What's your 'Why?' – three stage process

Each stage should be structured in two parts **Discovery** and **Reporting out** (as Sinek calls the replay). The workshops are not about agreeing the 'How' and 'What', this should be done through other approach appropriate to your requirements.

Remember, your output from the workshop is to understand 'Why'. Reaching agreement on your 'Why' may take refinement depending on the complexity of the focus for your 'Why'. At a team level this might be achievable in one or two workshops, but for organisational-wide initiatives this could take several sessions and conversations to reach agreement.

In order to assist with capturing the output from the stages you may wish to use the template in the table below:

**Table 4 Workshop output template**

Now	Future
This is our 'Why'	This could be our 'Why'
How we work now	How we could work
What we do now	What we could do

Areas we would like to improve	
Anything we should stop doing?	

## Stage 1: Gather stories and share them

Discovering your 'Why' requires active listening, allowing those in the room to share their experiences and views, and not interrupting them – let them tell their story. Encourage participants to make notes as others talk and wait till, they come to a natural finish.

It can be useful to start with an icebreaker, which is linked to discovering your 'Why'. This helps to make participants comfortable and build confidence to fully participate.

For example, an activity could: Share three things that you were proud about on the last thing you delivered. Write these on a sticky note. Then go round the group for them to summarise and identify common themes. Or ask everyone to draw a rich picture of their story on a piece of paper and talk through their story.

For example, an activity could: Share three things that you were proud about on the last thing you delivered. Write these on a sticky note. Then go round the group for them to summarise and identify common themes. Or ask everyone to draw a rich picture of their story on a piece of paper and talk through their story.

### Discovery

This is time to focus on the 'Why' questions and allowing participants to share their stories, you could ask:

#### What is your understanding of:

- your organisational 'mission'
- the role of your team to support that mission
- your role as an individual to contribute to that mission
- what our end users want.

#### Supporting the mission:

- How do your team and you as an individual add value?
- What can you solve, deliver, contribute?
- What are your strengths as a team and individual?
- How do you measure success?
- What is the impact of what you do, both for students, staff and the organisation?

#### Do you agree with the mission?

- How your team and you as an individual contribute toward the mission.
- What would you change?
- This is an important question, as to challenge the mission and your role, can help to identify areas that help with refocusing your 'Why' and generate areas for further exploration – if something is not quite right – why?

#### Learning from failure:

If your workshop is focusing on a specific issue, ask participants to imagine they are two years in the future, and the solution chosen had failed. This approach can help with reframing an issue but thinking of possible future outcomes.

- How do they feel about this?
- What might cause a failure?
- How could it be mitigated?

Capture the stories in short **story statements**. These might be a bulleted list, a sentence or paragraph, or their 'rich picture' with a heading that reflects the focus of the story.

### Reporting out Stage 1

- How do participants feel?
- What has been the impact on them?
- What else do they want to know?
- What else do they want to share?
- Is this what they expected?

This is time to review what you have explored and the opportunity for clarification and further probing:

Then focus on the **story statements** and look for the themes that are emerging, and capture these for Stage 2.

## Stage 2: Identifying your themes

Your 'reporting out' in Stage 1 should help to start the conversation of recognising the emerging themes from your **story statements**. In this section of the workshop your aim is to explore the themes further to develop your 'Why' into something more cohesive, but also to consider your 'How'.

### Discovery

Agree the emerging themes, and list these – is anything missing?

### Ask participants to:

- Discuss the contribution they can make to others in relation to the themes
- What are the most interesting and impactful stories from your participants in relation to the themes?
- What inspires them, and did they feel they could share their own story because of it – what was their story?

### Developing the themes:

- What do the themes mean in reality – ask participants to reshare their stories but focus on:
  - Why they did it.
  - How they did it.
  - What they did.
- What themes emerge from sharing the stories? Focus on the reasons and what was involved?
- As a group rewrite the stories and emerging themes as **action statements**, e.g., 'to include all', 'to inspire innovation'.

Ensure these are captured to refer back to for reporting out Stage 2.

### **Reporting out Stage 2**

Review and discuss the outputs.

- How do participants feel?
- What has been the impact on them?
- What else do they want to know?
- What else do they want to share?
- Is this what they expected?

Then take the action statements and collate these into similar themes and discuss which might be the most relevant to your current focus and those that might be important for the future.

## **Stage 3: Draft and refine your 'Why' statement**

The last stage of discovering your 'Why' is to agree and refine it. This focuses on thinking about the contribution that is required to enable all within an organisation (internal or external) to succeed.

### **Discovery**

#### **Review how to support the mission:**

- How does your team and you as an individual, add value?
- What can you solve, deliver, contribute?
- What are your strengths as a team and individual?
- How do you measure success?
- What is the impact of what you do, both for students, staff and the organisation?
- What is the emotional impact of what you do, both for students, staff and the organisation?

#### **What has changed from Stage 1 to Stage 3?**

- Who is in your story now?
- What might change for the people in your story as a result of the actions of your team?
- How might it effect the people in the story, or those who witnessed it?
- What can you do differently?

Ensure that these are captured as short **contribution statements**, to be able to refer back to for reporting out Stage 3.

Review and discuss the outputs:

- How do participants feel?
- What has been the impact on them?
- What else do they want to know?
- What else do they want to share?
- Is this what they expected?

### **Reporting out Stage 3**

Then look at the outputs from the gathering stage and ask the group to adopt a signal phrase to encapsulate the impact and produce **impact statements**.

### Draft the 'Why' statement

The stories from Stage 1 help to maintain the meaning behind the action and impact statements. Your 'Why' statement draft is normally linked to one or two stories from Stage 1.

- Select the **action statements** and map them to the **impact statements** and choose one or two that you feel strong align to the 'mission' and then craft the most inspiring draft **'Why' statement**.
- Then review the 'Why' statement as a group and define it further if required.
- This should enable you to produce your key outcome for the workshop – your draft 'Why'.

The last part of Stage 3 is to consider your action statements again, based on your draft 'Why' statement and produce **context statements**. These help you to refocus on the context of your 'Why' and how it links to a 'problem' you think you need to solve. Why are you doing it?

An example, would be if you were focusing on an 'inclusion theme' you might produce the following context statements:

- Be kind, be curious, be inclusive.

Be open and keen to learning about others, their backgrounds and lived experiences – be curious and interested about people's differences as there is no such thing as 'normal'.

## 3.4 'How' and 'What'

According to Sinek (2011), the 'How' and the 'What' are just as important as the 'Why' and should be reviewed and planned once you have agreed your 'Why'. This starts by reconsidering or gathering more evidence or data whether a change is required. What outcomes do you hope to achieve? How will you achieve them? How will you measure the impact of your achieved outcomes?

If the outcome is that a change is required and if you do not define what you need to get done or plan how to get it done, then the 'why do it?' is irrelevant: the impact will not be achieved, and progress will not be made.

The context for your 'Why', will normally direct the approach for working on your 'How' and 'What', and may use different frameworks, conversations and resources available to you to make the change. This is especially true when futures planning as the how and what maybe unknown, as options are explored for different possible futures. Later in the course we introduce frameworks that are commonly used for futures planning.


As a final part of your workshop, it can be useful to look at your 'How' and 'What' now, to capture what might need to change, to inform further sessions to look at these in detail. If you have used the workshop output template review and update it.

**Table 4 (repeated) Workshop output template**

Now	Future
This is our 'Why'	This could be our 'Why'

How we work now	How we could work
What we do now	What we could do
Areas we would like to improve	
Anything we should stop doing?	

### Activity 9 What's our Why? – Planning a workshop

 30 minutes

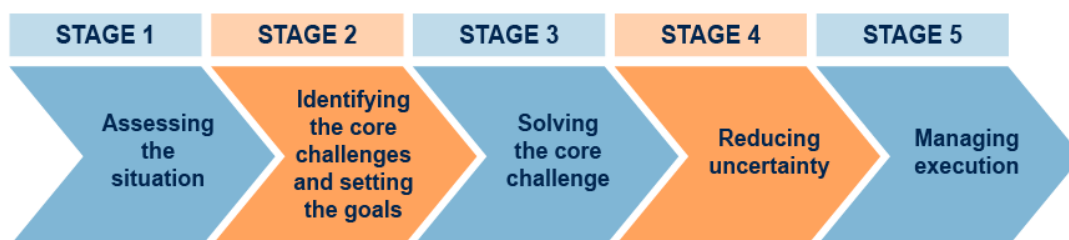
Drawing on the outline of running a 'What's our Why?' workshop, plan a workshop you could run with either a team you are part of, or group that you collaborate with. We have provided a What's your why toolkit which is a downloadable PDF/PowerPoint that contains elements from this section to use for running your own workshop.

[Download the toolkit](#)

## 3.5 Developing the 'How'

Once you have established your 'Why' and have a feel for the future vision you are going to explore, the 'How' and the 'What' come next, and for that we need to develop a strategy and approach for planning.

According to Sola and Couturier (2014), there are five stages in the strategy development process which can be applied for planning, and one force that will need constant consideration – organisational culture (they call this the 'Invisible Hand') – which can be difficult to manage:



**Figure 14** Five stages of the strategy development process (Adapted from Sola and Couturier, 2014)

This can be done through:

- an analysis of the current business model
- value proposition
- key activities



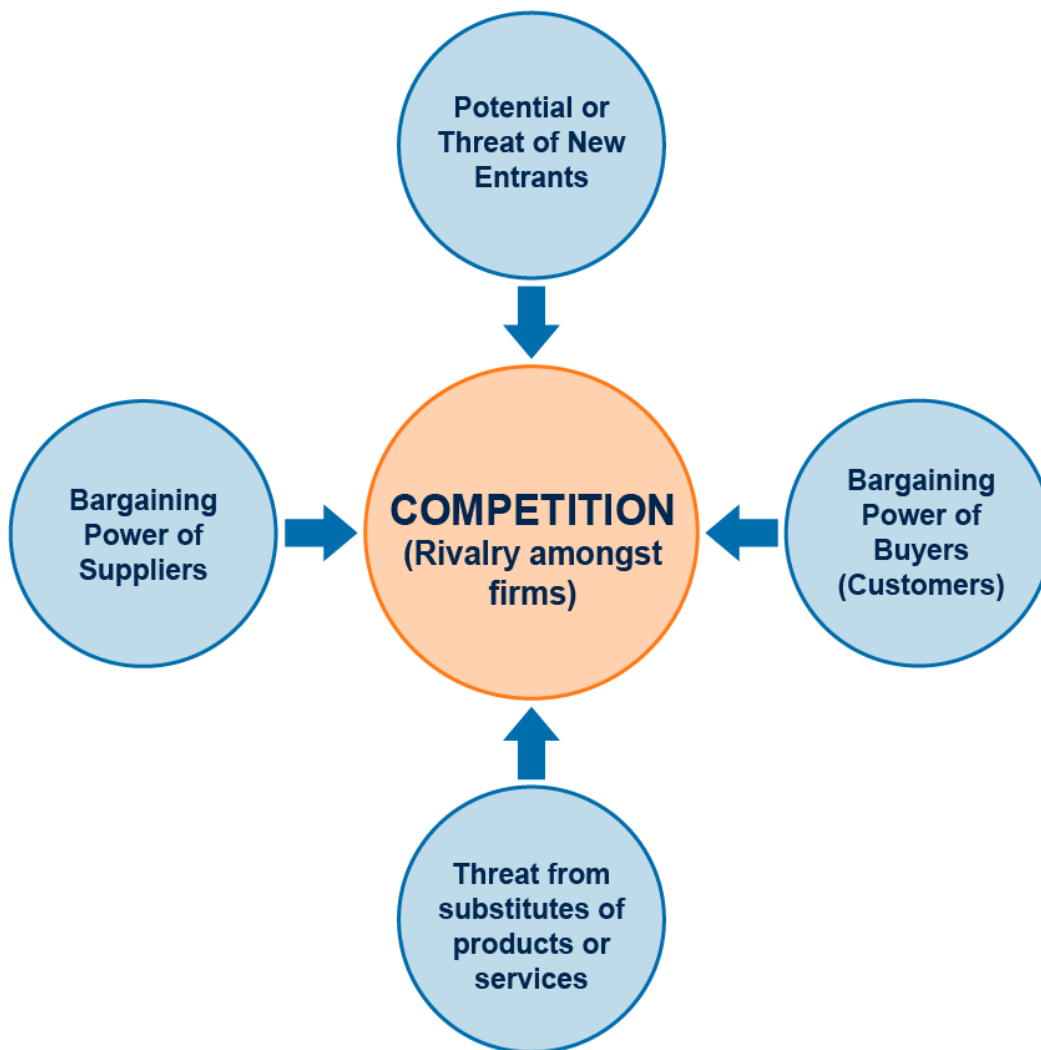
- resources and capabilities
- value network (partnerships, supply chain)
- differentiation.

## Stage 1: Assess the situation

Sola and Couturier (2014) suggest you should also look at your position relative to your sectoral peers, macro-environmental factors (PESTLE analysis is useful here – see Figure 15), and sector/industry-related factors and trends (maybe use Michael Porter's five forces model for this one – see Figure 16).

P	E	S	T	L	E
POLITICAL	ECONOMICAL	SOCIAL	TECHNOLOGICAL	LEGAL	ENVIRONMENTAL
<b>Example:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current tax policy</li> <li>• Brexit</li> <li>• Trade policies</li> <li>• Political stability</li> <li>• Government policy</li> <li>• Climate Change Acts</li> </ul>	<b>Example:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inflation rate</li> <li>• Exchange rates</li> <li>• Economic growth</li> <li>• Interest rates</li> <li>• Disposable income</li> <li>• Unemployment rate</li> </ul>	<b>Example:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lifestyle attitudes</li> <li>• Cultural barriers</li> <li>• Population growth</li> <li>• Population age</li> <li>• Health consciousness</li> <li>• Target demographics</li> </ul>	<b>Example:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of innovation</li> <li>• Automation</li> <li>• Technological awareness</li> <li>• Cybersecurity</li> <li>• Technological change</li> <li>• Internet availability/speed</li> </ul>	<b>Example:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment laws</li> <li>• Discrimination laws</li> <li>• Health and safety</li> <li>• Copyright protection</li> <li>• Consumer safety</li> </ul>	<b>Example:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weather</li> <li>• Climate change</li> <li>• Environmental policies</li> <li>• NGO pressure</li> <li>• Recycling</li> <li>• Pollution</li> <li>• Sustainability</li> <li>• Waste disposal</li> <li>• Energy consumption</li> </ul>

**Figure 15** PESTLE analysis chart. (Source: Impact Innovation, n.d)



**Figure 16** Porter's Five Forces and complements (Source: adapted from Porter, 2008)

## Stage 2: Identifying the core challenges and setting the goals

Using a SWOT analysis (see Table 5) can be helpful but identified positive and negative effects should be validated against their cause.

**Table 5 Common questions used in a SWOT analysis**

Internal factors	External factors
<b>Strengths</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are we best at?</li> <li>• What intellectual property do we own?</li> <li>• What specific skills does the workforce have?</li> <li>• What financial resources do we have?</li> <li>• What connections and alliances do we have?</li> <li>• What is our bargaining power with suppliers and intermediaries?</li> </ul>	<b>Opportunities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What changes in the external environment can we exploit?</li> <li>• What weaknesses in our competition can we attack?</li> <li>• What new technology might become available for us?</li> <li>• What new markets might be opening up to us?</li> </ul>
<b>Weaknesses</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are we poor at doing?</li> <li>• Is our intellectual property outdated?</li> <li>• What training does our workforce lack?</li> <li>• What financial constraints do we have?</li> <li>• What connections and alliances should we have, but don't?</li> </ul>	<b>Threats</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What might our competitors be able to do to hurt us?</li> <li>• What new legislation might damage our interests?</li> <li>• What social changes might threaten us?</li> <li>• How might an economic cycle affect us?</li> </ul>

(Source: based on Blythe, 2001, p. 17)

To reduce the number of core challenges, you can ask whether overcoming them will create value for the organisation (or destroy value if it is not addressed). You can ask whether you have the right resources or capabilities to address the core challenge, and finally, will the organisational culture assist in overcoming it, or will it get in the way?

#### **Setting strategic objectives:**

You then need to set the strategic objectives – these need to:

- have a clear timeframe (2–5 years)
- be easy to understand/communicate
- be challenging but achievable
- have a clear impact on competitive advantage or delivering to your 'Why'.

Once these have been identified, strategic guidelines need to be developed for each.

### **Stage 3: Solving the core challenges**

This is never easy as they often involve social/human, economic, legal, and technological elements. Often it is best to try to reduce the core challenge's complexity, by breaking it down into key constituents and understanding their importance. Once the complexity is reduced, solution options can be identified.

Once solutions options are identified, you will need to select the best potential option. You will need to assess which one will have the most impact on addressing the core challenge, cost/benefit and *when* they can be implemented.

## Stage 4: Reducing uncertainty

Uncertainty in strategy exists in three ways:

1. Uncertainty around value creation, whether the delivered benefits outweigh the investment.
2. Uncertainty around the ability to scale the initiative and keep the levels of return.
3. Uncertainty regarding sustainability of the actions the organisation has chosen to implement.

Sola and Couturier (2014) suggest testing the options using the 'lean testing' approach to reduce uncertainty. The approach consists of four phases:

1. Stating the underlying assumptions along three dimensions – value, growth, and sustainability.
2. Testing assumptions about value.
3. Testing assumptions about growth.
4. Testing assumptions about sustainability.

## Stage 5: Managing execution

This is where we get to implement the tested solutions and achieve the results we expect. Executing your strategy is about taking action that is coordinated and complementary and, according to Sola and Couturier (2014), most strategy failures can 'be traced back to issues that undermine or prevent this coordination'.

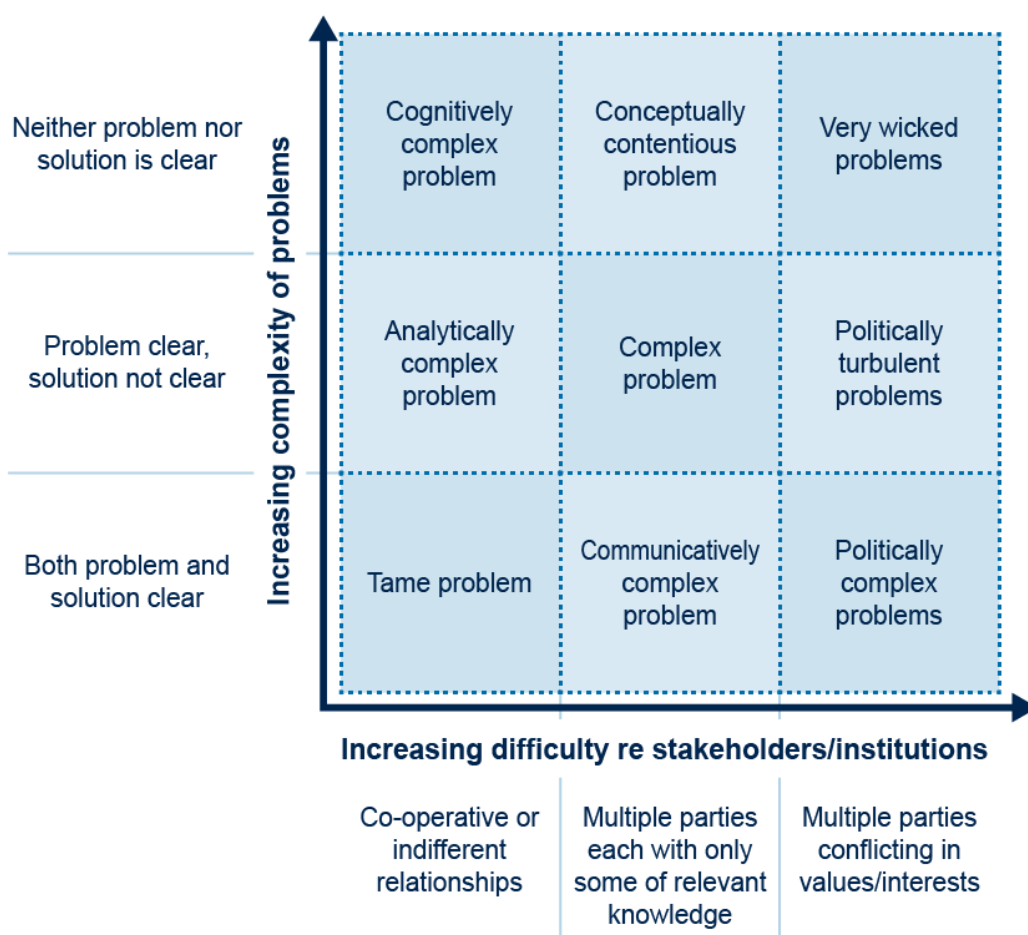
They cite culture, communication, and corporate structure amongst these issues. They also cite two other reasons for failure: people do not understand the 'Why' and 'What' to change, and even if they do, they don't know 'How' as they fail to see the link between strategy and practical change (Sola and Couturier, 2014).

## 4 The complexity of problems

Of course, the scope of the strategy and detail behind the execution plan will depend on the type of problem you are trying to solve and the urgency within which you are trying to solve it. Some plans need to rapidly react to a situation and others have time to plan and explore 'what could be possible'.

Stage 1 of Sola and Couturier's (2014) five stages in the strategy development process is 'Assessing the situation' and Stage 2 is 'Identifying the core challenges and setting the goals'. Both of these together give you a view of the problem you are trying to solve.

There are many ways of describing, analysing, and resolving problems depending on their level of difficulty and complexity as shown in the figure below. There are even concepts that describe complex problems in terms of 'tame' to 'wicked' (Alford and Head, 2017).



**Figure 17** Types of complex problems. Source: Alford and Head, 2017)

John Alford and Brian Head (2017) suggest that a 'problem' is more likely to be wicked if several conditions (or most of them) are present. These include the following.

- *Structural complexity*: inherent intractability of the technical (i.e., non-stakeholder-related) aspects of the problem.
- *Knowability*: Not only is there little knowledge about the issue, but the nature of the problem or its solution is such that it is unknowable – that is: the relevant information is hidden, disguised or intangible; it comprises multiple complex

variables; and/or its workings require taking action to discover causal links and probable outcomes.

- *Knowledge fragmentation*: the available knowledge is fragmented among multiple stakeholders, each holding some but not all of what is required to address the problem.
- *Knowledge-framing*: some of the knowledge receives either too much or too little attention because of the way it is framed, thereby distorting our understanding.
- *Interest-differentiation*: the various stakeholders have interests (or values) which are substantially in conflict with those of others.
- *Power-distribution*: There is a dysfunctional distribution of power among stakeholders, whereby very powerful actors can overwhelm less powerful ones, even if the latter constitute a majority consensus; or whereby sharply divided interests are matched by sharply divided power.

(Alford and Head, 2017, p. 407)

Russell Ackoff coined the term 'Messes' in 1974 to distinguish between different types of problems. 'Messes' are larger in scale than 'difficulties' and have more serious implications due to the larger number of people affected, the longer duration of the situation, and they are more complex. Additionally, there is an uncertainty element to 'Messes', and it is not easy to succinctly define the situation or problem.

These problems can be categorised as shown in the table below.

**Table 6 Categorising messes**

<p><b>Wicked</b> issues are difficult to define and change with time, several stakeholders are involved, problem root cause analysis leads to alternate solutions that diverge into other possible solutions (i.e., each resolution creates new issues)</p>	<p><b>Wicked Mess</b> wicked and has the complexity of interrelated issues, suboptimal solutions pose other problems</p>
<p><b>Tame</b> issues can be clearly defined, few stakeholders are involved, problem root cause analysis leads to alternate solutions that converge into a single possible solution (i.e., resolution is definitive)</p>	<p><b>Tame Mess</b> but has the complexity of interrelated issues, suboptimal solutions pose other problems</p>

In addition, Rittel and Webber (1973) identified ten characteristics of wicked problems, which helps to further understand the complexity of considering what may be involved with approach problems you have. See Figure 18.



**Figure 18** Wicked problems, adapted by Sarkar and Kotler (no date) from Rittel and Webber (1973)


By its very nature, you may not be able to solve the overall wicked problem, but you can mitigate some of the consequences. This requires being open to ideas and experimenting with different approaches, such as human-centred design or an interdisciplinary focus (IDEO, 2015).

While wicked problems have frameworks from which to consider them, another approach is to think about problems as 'intractable' – those for which there is no obvious approach to solving them. As you consider a problem you reframe it and try to make sense of the problem and look for different paths that will help to mitigate the issue. This draws from taking a more human-centred approach to problem solving.

That involves observing, using empathy to explore the problem further, to uncover what at first might not be obvious, generating ideas, with test-and-learn activities to gather feedback, prior to implementing a potential solution.



### Activity 10 Reframing your problem

 10 minutes

Think about a complex and challenging scenario in your life or work-life and take a moment to judge whether your situation/problem is a tame or wicked mess, and if it is intractable? Then start to reframe your situation/problem to explore if there are elements that could be tamed.

Make some notes about this process in the box below.

*Provide your answer...*

## 4.1 Sensemaking for futures planning

In Activity 10 in which you planned a workshop to discover your Why, you started the process of sense-making. In Section 1.4 you viewed some predicted trends towards a vastly different post-pandemic world to the world before 2020. Irrespective of where these trends are heading, in order for us to continue to deliver on our personal, project, team and organisational mission, we need to respond accordingly.

Responding in an era of uncertainty is complex, especially where people are involved. Fortunately, tools, frameworks and concepts are available to help us through the complexity.

One such concept that builds on thinking by others, was developed by Karl Weick in 1995 and is known as 'sense-making'. 'Sense-making involves turning circumstances into a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a springboard into action' (Weick et al., 2005).

Sense-making helps us understand a situation, how elements of the situation are connected (whether tightly coupled or looser), and how and why people behave in it in the way that they do. Sense-making is particularly helpful in a complex situation when some aspects are not obvious. Taking into consideration the personal interest of those impacted by a change when planning is extremely important to a successful implementation, as 'personal investment' in a change can be a great motivator.

Sense-making is particularly useful in understanding how people and teams engage and organise following a crisis or change.

Dave Snowden founder of the [Cynefin framework](#) defines sense-making in his '[What is Sense-making?](#)' reflections as: 'How do we make sense of the world so we can act in it' (Snowden, 2008). In the video below he explains how sense-making can be used for exploring problems and making decisions.

Video content is not available in this format.

**Video 6** Sense-making for exploring problems and making decisions



### Activity 11 Sensemaking conversations

 15 minutes

Drawing on the insights that Dave Snowden shared in the video above, now watch Video 7 below, 'Sensemaking: using conversations to make a difference every day'. In this second video, Alan Arnett explains how sensemaking can move us forward, to answer the following three questions:

1. What are we solving?
2. Where are we heading?
3. How might we get there?

View at: [youtube:XwC5Gfh\\_h0U](https://youtube.com/watch?v=XwC5Gfh_h0U)



#### **Video 7** Sensemaking: using conversations to make a difference every day

As you watch the video make notes in the box below and consider:

- How can sense-making aid understanding what you are solving?
- How can it help with a human centred approach to making sense of problems, and understand where you might be heading?
- How could it lead to better conversations, to understand how you might get there?

*Provide your answer...*

### Answer

The language we use is a key part of assisting with sense-making, how we have conversations and the language we use helps both ourselves and others come to common understandings and enables us to explore the world in different ways, especially in uncertain times.

In the video 6 Dave Snowden highlights:

'Most human beings communicate novel ideas through metaphors and stories, and that's still the most successful way of doing it.' (Snowden, 2022)

Storytelling is a powerful tool for engaging others and helping people understand problems and the world, by helping them to visualise what is possible in a way that is relatable and meaningful to them. This can also assist with encouraging people to talk to each other, as Alan Arnett highlighted in the video, it can be a challenge to have better conversations in order to make sense of our world.

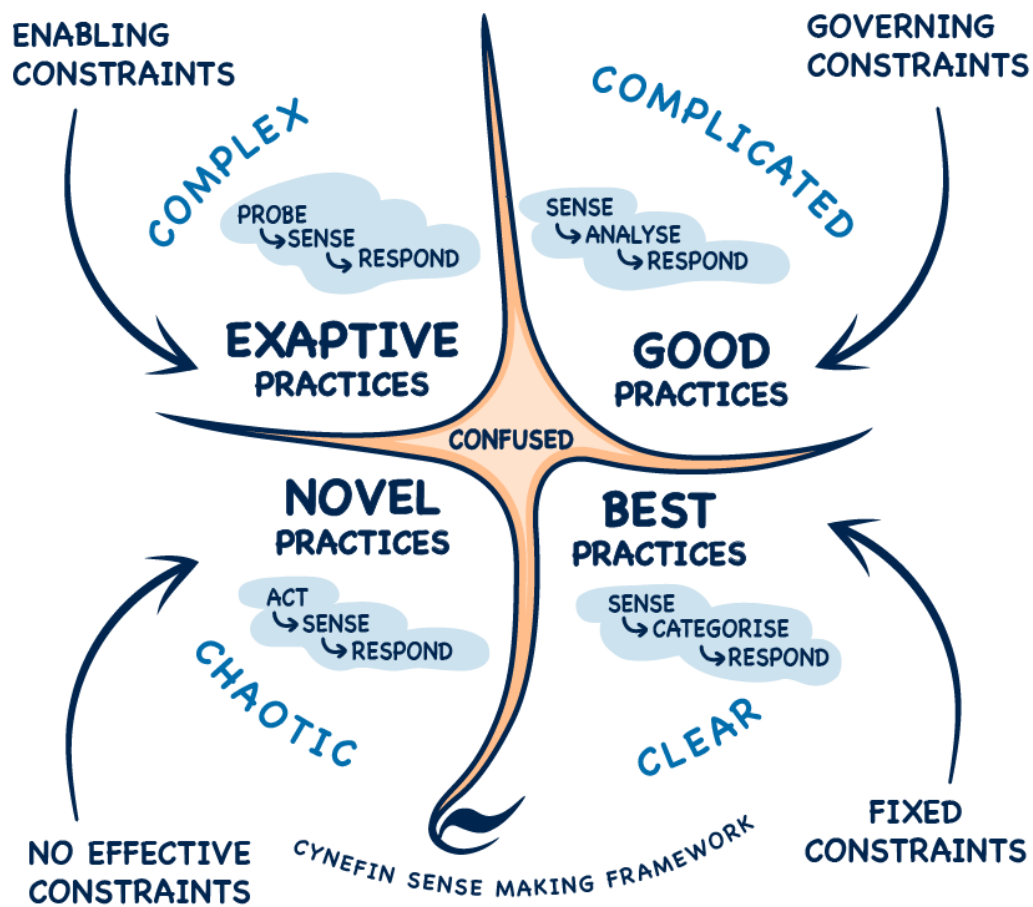
## 4.2 Cynefin – making better decisions

The Cynefin® Framework (pronounced 'ku-nev-in') is the Welsh word for 'place of your multiple belongings,' (Cynefin, n.d.a) and was developed by David Snowden in 1999. David Snowden and Mary Boone published the framework in the [Harvard Business Review](#) in 2007 and since then it has helped leaders understand their challenges and make decisions in context, based on the different environments we are operating in. By sense-making we can develop an awareness of what is really complex and what isn't and respond accordingly. This ensures no energy is wasted in overthinking the routine but also ensures that we shouldn't try to resolve complex scenarios with standard solutions.

When making decisions and planning for change, the Cynefin framework is designed to develop your ability for sensemaking, by learning from the past and exploring possible future scenarios. The model focuses on five situational domains that organisations and leaders operate in:

1. confused
2. clear
3. complicated
4. chaotic
5. complex.

Constraints are then applied to each of them, and the model then helps to indicate the type of processing that works best in each domain. Figure 19 shows the five domains of the Cynefin framework.



**Figure 19** Cynefin sense-making framework

In the video 'Introduction to Cynefin', Dave explains how the framework evolved and how it can be used to make better decisions, both as a leader and within teams developing future scenarios and managing change projects.

Video content is not available in this format.

**Video 8** Introduction to Cynefin



As Dave Snowden explains in Video 8 'Cynefin Framework – Getting started with Cynefin', there is an element of simplicity in its approach for problem solving as 'one size does not fit all', and he highlights the importance of informal networks for better and more effective problem solving. The Cynefin framework can be adapted, to provide a simple approach that could be fitted on the back of a napkin, and he refers the [children's party story](#) to demonstrate the simplest of the framework.

He believes there are three things all organisations that should do to build employees' confidence for anticipating and dealing with unknowns and change, and to build informal and formal networks:

- Map your knowledge to the granularity required
- Repurpose what you are already good at
- Build formal networks.

### Activity 12 Getting started with Cynefin

 30 minutes

We recommend you allow up to 30 minutes for the introduction, then allocate time outside studying this course to take your understanding further.

1. Take some time to explore the Cynefin framework, using the following resources and the video below:

- [The Cynefin Co - Home](#) (Cynefin, n.d.b)
- [The Cynefin Co - Estuarine mapping](#)(Cynefin, n.d.c)
- [Cynefin.io – Naturalising Sense-Making wiki](#) (Cynefin, n.d.d)
- [Cynefin.io - Field guide to managing complexity \(and chaos\) in times of crisis](#) (n.d.e)
- [Cynefin.io - Flexous curves](#)(Cynefin, n.d.f)

In the following video 'Cynefin Framework – Getting started with Cynefin', Dave Snowden explains the framework in more detail.

How could it help you make better decisions? Consider the following questions and make notes in the text box below:

- What are the challenges for understanding which 'system' you are in?
- What does 'ontology' mean to you? (If this is a new term to you, you may wish to research it first.)
- What are your formal and informal networks that you can draw on?
- What is your personal preference: chaos, complexity or order? Why is that?

View at: [youtube:ogtpxA6brGo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogtpxA6brGo)



### Video 9 Cynefin Framework – Getting started with Cynefin (2022)

2. Write a short introduction to Cynefin, based on your learning so far.

(If you would like to take your learning further, feel free to allocate time to this outside your study time for this course.)

*Provide your answer...*

### Answer

Understanding your challenges and the support you have to assist in approaching problems is fundamental for futures planning and implementing change. The Cynefin framework can help you make sense of the problem and highlight who can support you and lead to better decisions being made. It can help to ask those you trust so you can become more comfortable with talking about uncertainty and dealing with 'unknowns' as it can help you accept that often we are operating in an environment where the unknowns will not necessarily become known.



## 5 Approaches for Futures Planning

Once you have an understanding of the problem you need to solve, the next stage is solving the core challenges. This is at the heart of futures planning, options are explored, and possible solutions tested using approaches to challenge and guide your exploration. First though you need to be open to the concept of the 'Art of the Possible'.

Tom Cheesewright, applied futurist, in his article

[The art of probable, the possible and the desirable](#) states that the art of the possible has come to mean 'achieving what we can (possible), rather than what we want (often impossible) (Cheesewright, n.d)', but Paul Mahoney suggests in his article

[The Art of Possible](#) that it should be viewed as a tool for moving forward with ideas that are big and bold as well as small and innovative. (Mahony, 2021)

As you start to plan for the future, considering what is both possible and impossible, often will lead to ideas that provide the solution, or enable your organisation to innovate and evolve in ways they may not have considered at the start of the process.

### Activity 13 Simple changes

The '[Art of the Possible](#)' programme of work (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, n.d.b), focused on how public bodies and other organisations could start to focus on long term changes that will improve the wellbeing of communities across Wales, and start their journey to meeting the wellbeing goals of the Act.

One of the outputs from this programme was the creation of a resource bank of 'Simple Changes'. These are important as it is often the simple changes that assist in finding solutions for more complex problems you need to solve, but also those small changes you can make often have the most impact for those within your organisation.

Spend some time exploring some of the 'Simple Changes' (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, n.d.c) resources, to start to collate ideas that could help you in your approach to problem solving.

[Simple Changes – The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales](#)

### Further reading

If you are a public body based in Wales, you may wish to use the following resources to establish connections of your change initiatives (or projects) to the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015*'s (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, n.d.a) seven wellbeing goals:

- [Future Generations Framework for scrutiny](#) (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2019)
- [Future Generations Framework for service design](#) (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2018)
- [Future Generations Framework for projects](#) (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, n.d.d)
- [Guidance on using the Future Generations Framework for projects](#) (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, n.d.e)



## Selecting an approach for planning

When looking at developing options to resolving problems, there are many approaches available to help you. Some help at a high level to frame your thinking, others help you delve deeper into the detail.

If you are new to planning, it often helps to use a single approach, but as you become more familiar and experience, those involved with futures planning, often will combine approaches drawing on the elements that work best for the problem they are trying to solve, or the context within they are working.

This section is slightly different to the rest of the course, as we explore three approaches that you can use for assisting with futures planning and problem solving. Due to the length of the content to introduce and provide guidance for these, you may wish to only focus on one in detail while studying this course, and come back to the others outside time allocated. As you work through the section consider the 'Hybrid ways of working: a contextual sustainability framework' we introduced at the start of the course.

## 5.1 Three Horizons

The International Futures Forum's '[Three Horizons model](#)' is a simple way to encourage conversations about challenges in the present, aspirations for the future and the innovation and solutions that maybe required to address these.

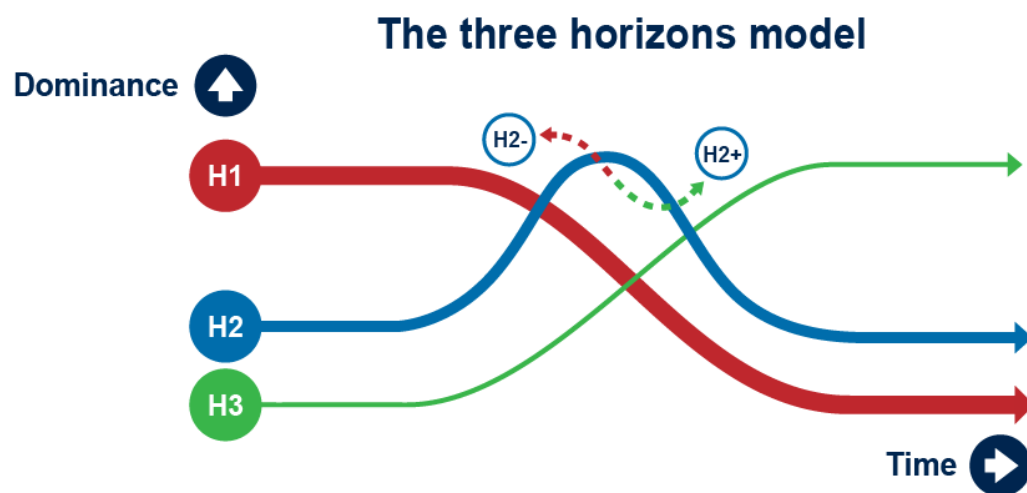
It is an approach that has been adopted and adapted by the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, to create a toolkit for public bodies to use to assist with their long term futures planning.

In Video 10, Bill Sharpe (Founding Partner – Future Stewards, Independent Researcher in Science, Technology and Society) and Dr Louisa Petchey (Senior Policy Specialist – Public Health Wales) discuss how the Three Horizons approach was used to develop an approach to futures thinking.

As you watch the video, think about some of the earlier sections of the course and reflect on how comfortable you feel about futures planning now.

Video content is not available in this format.

**Video 10** Using the Three Horizons for futures planning



**Figure 20** Three Horizons model. (Source: Petchey, n.d.)

The Three Horizons approach can be used to consider the issue, how it might change over time and the different perspective of stakeholders. This is shown in Figure 20 and Table 7.

**Table 7** How the Three Horizons model can be applied

	What	How	Stakeholder perspectives
<b>Horizon 1</b> Business as usual – the current situation	The need for the current situation to change	Right now, current trends and issues	Power holders

<b>Horizon 2</b> Activities and innovations for doing things differently	Ideas for how to get from where we are now	Emerging trends	Innovators
<b>Horizon 3</b> Long-term solutions and new ways of doing business as usual	A vision for the future	Trends that might dominate the future, competing visions	Visionary

(Petchey, n.d.)

In video 11 below Bill Sharpe explains the Three Horizons approach.

Video content is not available in this format.

**Video 11** Overview of the Three Horizons approach



In the video Bill Sharpe explained that the Three Horizons approach draws attention to the three horizons as existing in the present moment, from which we can gather evidence about the future from the present, in order to consider different possible futures.

Each horizon is designed to allow you to explore the different possibilities.

### **H1 – The First Horizon...**

... is the dominant system at present. It represents 'business as usual'. We rely on these systems being stable and reliable but as the world changes, so aspects of business as usual begin to feel out of place or no longer fit for purpose. Eventually business as usual will be superseded by new ways of doing things.

### **H3 – The Third Horizon...**

...emerges as the long term successor to business-as-usual. It grows from fringe activity in the present that introduces completely new ways of doing things but which turn out to be much better fitted to the world that is emerging than the dominant H1 systems. We call these early manifestations 'pockets of the future in the present.'


## H2 – The Second Horizon...

...is a pattern of transition activities and innovations, people trying things out in response to the ways in which the landscape is changing. Some of these innovations will be taken up by H1 systems to prolong their life while some will pave the way for the emergence of the radically different H3 systems.

(Sharpe, 2019)

All horizons should be looked at together to think about the changes between them overtime.

### Activity 14 Consider how you can use the Three Horizons approach

 15 minutes

1. Watch the video in which Dr Louisa Petchey, explains the Three Horizons approach and how it can be used by public bodies to assist with long term planning.

Video content is not available in this format.

**Video 12** Using Three Horizons for long term planning



2. Review the [‘Three horizons: A toolkit to help you think and plan for the long-term’](#) (Petchey, n.d.) and plan a workshop (see p. 11 of the toolkit) with your colleagues outside the time allocated to studying this course. Familiarise yourself with the model and focus on an issue/problem you wish to address together.

You may wish to make notes on how you will approach this, below.

*Provide your answer...*

If you wish to develop your understanding of the Three Horizons approach further, the International Futures Forum and H3 Unit provide access to guidance on using the approach and resources that are freely available for use.

- [Three Horizons](http://iffpraxis.com) (iffpraxis.com)
- [Three Horizons](http://h3uni.org) (h3uni.org)

## 5.2 The Oxford Scenario Planning Approach

The Oxford Scenario Planning Approach (OSPA) focuses on scenarios and strategic options should something change to an organisation's status quo, either as immediate issues, or to plan for possible versions of the future.

The OSPA is particularly robust as it ensures that the scenarios created are actually used by the person they are developed for and for the purpose that they were devised.

Professor Rafael Ramírez (Professor of Practice, Saïd Business School, University of Oxford) defines scenarios as 'a small set of manufactured possible future contexts of something for someone for a purpose with a pre-specified use interface [and that is its] actual use'.

In the video below he explains OSPA further.

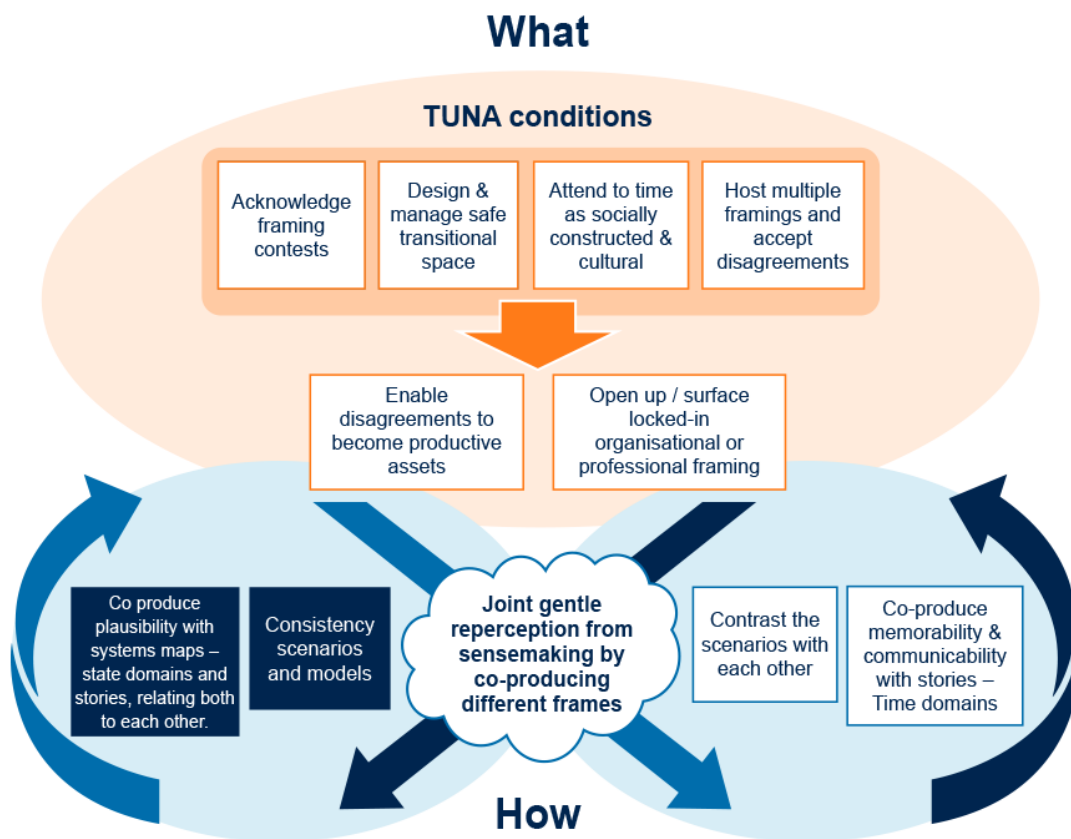
Video content is not available in this format.

**Video 13** Introduction to Oxford Scenario Planning Approach



In the video, Professor Rafael Ramírez refers to TUNA conditions – Turbulence, Uncertainty, Novelty (& unique) and Ambiguity. This may help to reframe scenarios as a social process in times of uncertainty, in order to consider and search for new ways to survive and succeed. Figure 21 provides more information.





**Figure 21** The OSPA as a social process (Source: Adapted from Ramírez and Wilkinson, 2016)

### Activity 15 Thinking about TUNA conditions

10 minutes

Reflect on Video 13 'Oxford Scenario Planning Approach' and how you might reframe scenarios drawing on the TUNA conditions described. How might the impact of these conditions influence decision-making and help you respond to your external environment?

You may wish to make notes on this below.

*Provide your answer...*

### Discussion

Managing and responding in times of uncertainty, requires the confidence to make decisions based on unknown factors to try to mitigate risks. Exploring TUNA conditions can help to reframe and consider the alternative futures that may unfold, to allow you to develop scenarios and design approaches for a number of eventual possibilities.

In the next section we focus on Islands in the Sky, created by Dr Matt Finch, and how it draws on elements of OSPA, to provide a simplified approach to enable teams and organisations to carry out rapid scenario planning – as was required during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 – when organisations were dealing with continual uncertainty. The approach offers a framework for those less familiar with futures and scenario planning to engage with different approaches, feel comfortable planning for the unknown, and consider future possibilities.

## 5.3 Introduction to Islands in the Sky

Islands in the Sky is a situational awareness and scenario-based strategic planning tool that is especially useful for managing uncertainty. It is designed for structuring conversations about the future business environment to inform decision-making in the present. This allows a voice for everyone and for things to get done quickly. It might not be perfect, but it helps form a base from which we can learn and iteratively develop.

The approach encourages you to bring a range of voices into the conversation and to consider different cultural and social values. Different lived experiences and perceptions of reality are all considered to navigate what the most important things are in a culture, society or organisation.

Individuals and/or teams are brought together to explore the environment and consider the future. This normally takes place in a workshop, and it is recommended that you either do this remotely or face to face, rather than hybrid. You then work through a series of stages, using collaboration tools to input into the sessions.

### Activity 16 Riding a bicycle

 15 minutes

In the video below, Dr Matt Finch (Associate Fellow, Saïd Business School) explains the Islands in the Sky approach and how it can help with navigating uncertain futures and understanding your transactional relationships with an introduction from Professor Rafael Ramírez.

1. As you watch the video, think about the following question posed by Matt at the end of the video:

How do I go beyond expectation and the things I currently anticipate – even beyond my hopes and fears – to really see how the future could be different, in ways that previously lay in my blind spot? (Extract from Video 14)

Video content is not available in this format.

**Video 14** Introduction to Islands in the Sky





*Provide your answer...*

### Answer

Rafael states that this methodology expects action learning, where you give it a try and make a few mistakes, using the riding a bicycle analogy that is similar to this kind of learning – if you fall off, you get back on and try again.

2. Think about the statement by Rafael and the bicycle analogy, and how might this help you be aware of your blind spots. Consider how open to action learning for uncertain futures you are. Then vote in poll below:

Interactive content is not available in this format.



### Answer

How comfortable you feel with this approach will depend on your experience of managing uncertainty and change. In an organisational setting where we often have little control over the strategic direction and organisational objectives, uncertainty can be a common feeling.

This approach can help with managing your feelings towards uncertainty by reframing the context and helping you feel more comfortable with the unknown. Similar to if you learned to ride a bicycle – the first time you tried you had no idea what it would feel like, but as your ability and confidence grows, you are willing to try new things. How many of you tried this as a child, or are even now still trying, to ride your bike with no hands?

In the introduction to *Islands in the Sky*, Matt and Rafael discuss the need to consider your transactional relationships, against a backdrop of rapid change and uncertainty, where you can't see what tomorrow is going to hold. They refer to 'TUNA' conditions – turbulence, uncertainty, novelty and ambiguity. You started thinking about these in Activity 16. Below, Table 6 provides more information about TUNA conditions. These conditions take a systems thinking approach and can enable teams/organisations to develop their situational awareness, and better understand the context they are operating in to create a better future.

**Table 8 TUNA conditions (based on Ramírez and Wilkinson, 2016, pp. 28–32)**

Turbulence	Uncertainty	Novelty (& unique)	Ambiguity
Speed of change, with high complexity and uncertainty.	Uncertainty is unpredictable, disruptive and can be uncontrollable.	Response to situations that are both imaginable and unimaginable that require new concepts, technologies and approaches.	Managing and understanding different interpretations of situations, often when there is little or contradictory information available.

In Video 15 'Working with uncertainty', Dr Matt Finch explains that when we are operating in times of unpredictable uncertainty, and we cannot draw on data or our experience of similar situations, then we have to find vantage points from which to draw.

Video content is not available in this format.

**Video 15** Working with uncertainty




## An invitation to work with uncertainty

The name of 'Islands in the Sky' itself, is an invitation. It lets people know that when they take part in this process, there is an element of play. There is an element of 'make believe' and they are actually the foundations of these imagined future contexts, precisely because they won't be like yesterday. They're not purely founded in the expectations and assumptions of the past. They can also be built based on 'what if' and the questions of 'what might be' – the things which go beyond our usual expectations, the ways that we think that trends are going to play out, their way of thinking about what happens if a trend bends or even breaks.

And that means that they are, in a way, more like looking up at the sky and seeing pictures in the clouds, seeing faces drifting past us. But that doesn't mean that they don't anchor something very real and very serious when it comes to the decisions we face in turbulent times.

(Finch, 2022)

### Activity 17 Build your confidence with uncertainty

 10 minutes

Islands in the Sky is designed to build confidence with uncertainty by posing questions such as:

- What if things turn out differently to how I expect?
- What if those choices and their consequences have to exist in that future?
- Are they still good choices?
- IF that future was going to happen, what would it mean for our choices today?

Think about these questions, and Matt's encouragement that this approach is an invitation to play and look up to the sky. If you were to look up to the sky and think about possible futures, and the 'islands' and relationships on those islands, what would this look like.

To help with your thinking, take a piece of paper and draw the images that come to mind. This is a concept often referred to as 'rich pictures'. You came across this idea in Section 3, Figure 22 below is a 'rich picture' visualising what Islands in the Sky might look, by one of our course authors. These pictures do not have to be master pieces, just a reflection of your thinking.



**Figure 22** Example of a simple rich picture

In the next section we take you through the Islands in the Sky methodology in detail.

## 5.4 Islands in the Sky – the methodology

Islands in the Sky can help surface insights about future challenges and opportunities. It creates a space for creative discussion and fresh ideas regarding different possible futures, in order to develop future strategies.

The approach for this is normally through workshops with a diverse group of participants, to ensure a range of voices in the room. The methodology has six stages:

1. Confirm the purpose (normally you will know what you want to explore in advance of a workshop, but remind participants of the purpose).
2. Map the transactional environment – internal and external relationships involved in the mission.
3. Label the relationships with 'social' and 'functional' value generated for both parties.
4. Identify the uncertainties that shape decisions on the island, and how these might play out to redraw the future.
5. Review the opportunities and challenges:
  - select those that require more investigation or could be progressed
  - apply the learnings.
6. Feedback and follow up.

In the video Dr Matt Finch provides insights as to how you can use and adapt Islands in the Sky for your purposes and better conversations. As you read through the stages of the methodology reflect on the insights that he shares.

Video content is not available in this format.

**Video 16** Adapting Islands in the Sky for better conversations



## Stage 1: Purpose

Review your current mission statement (purpose), then clarify what are you trying to imagine a different future of/for?

The method can be used for a variety of purposes from organisational future planning, focusing on a specific topic, change required due to issues, or for generating ideas for innovation.

**Consider:**

- What decisions are you trying to explore?
- What is your time 'horizon' frame?
- Which entity has to make that decision?

You may wish to use the 'What's your Why?' approach prior to running the Islands in the Sky workshop if you are not clear of the purpose.



## Stage 2: Transactional environment



**Figure 23** The transactional environment

A transactional environment is the 'island' that you inhabit based on communication and relationships between those that you interact with in the course of business. It is important to understand the different needs and perspectives of each person, to reach an understanding or an agreement together.

Participants map their transactional environment and capture all the entities they interact with directly as they carry out their work, to map the internal and external relationships involved in their mission.

**Consider:**

Internally and externally:

- Who do you work with?
- Who do you have to consider?

### Stage 3: Value of the relationships



**Figure 24** The value of relationships in the transactional environment

The Islands methodology was originally devised to explore post-pandemic hybrid ways of working. This meant considering when people and teams needed to gather in person or online for social, collaborative reasons, and when the reasons were purely task-focused. Consider the relationships with social and functional value generated by both parties and label these with the value they generate for both parties.

**Social:** you discuss and collaborate.

**Functional:** primarily transactional/task-focused.

Ask quantitatively and qualitatively:

- what difference does each relationship make in each direction?

Think of the things that influence the decisions people or organisations make and the things that may change their behaviours. You can use a template like the one shown in Table 9 below to help your thinking.

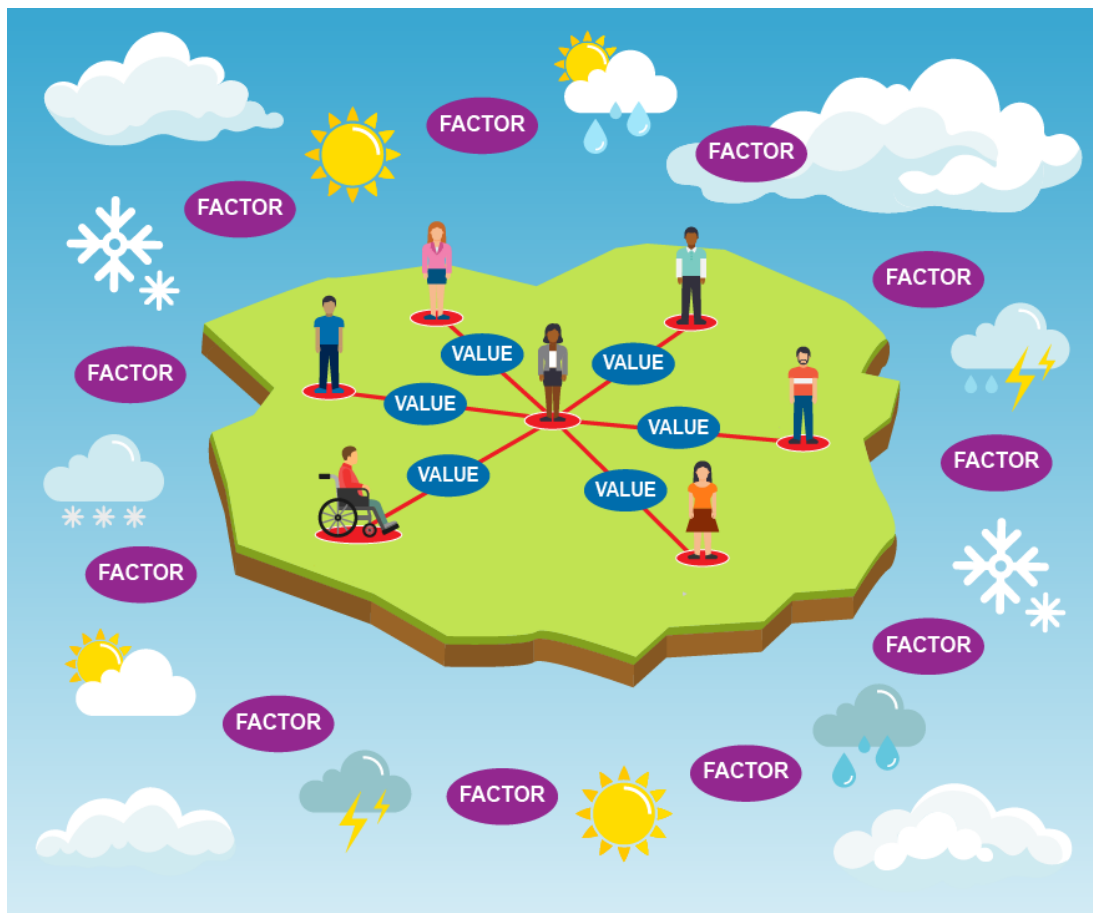
**Table 9** Decision influence categories

Political	Technological	Feelings	Challenges
<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>



<b>Economic</b>	<b>Legal</b>	<b>Perceptions</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>
<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
<b>Social</b>	<b>Environmental</b>	<b>Trends</b>	<b>Threats</b>
<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>

## Stage 4 Part A: Uncertainties



**Figure 25** The uncertainties that shape and drive decisions within the transactional environment

Participants are then asked to identify the uncertainties that shape and drive decisions made by the entities on the island. Which factors beyond our own direct control shape the decisions of the other actors on our island? Such factors could affect just one actor, or many. Participants then consider the factors or forces that can't be fully predicted in advance, and that might result in a redraw of the map of the island in the future.

**What:**

- do you feel most uncertain about?

- has the biggest impact?
- takes you out of business-as-usual thinking?
- do you not really think about?
- could really change your focus/how you go about your day to day, if it changed?
- offers a different perspective?

**Consider your forces, external and internal environment:**

- Which forces are most uncertain or uncomfortable?
- Which forces aren't you paying attention to?
- Which forces can't be known in advance?
- What does the island look like if these forces play out?

How is your decision maker's ecosystem reshaped?

