



Trust and the illusive force of scenarios

Cynthia Selin^{a,b,*}

^a*Institute for Politics, Management and Philosophy, Copenhagen Business School,
Blaagaardsgade 23B, DK 2200 Copenhagen N, Denmark*

^b*Technology Scenarios, Risoe National Laboratory, Systems Analysis Department,
P.O. Box 49, DK 4000 Roskilde, Denmark*

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Abstract

Scenarios are typically defined as stories describing different but equally plausible futures that are developed using methods that systematically gather perceptions about certainties and uncertainties.

Scenarios are not intended to be truthful, but rather provocative and helpful in strategy formulation and decision-making. By definition, scenarios are *possible* versions of the future so judging and evaluating scenarios is thus not about revealing truthfulness, but rather demonstrating trust, reliability, credibility in the absence of truth and in the face of varied influences and possible frameworks for action.

Trust speaks to persuasion and how stories of the future become trustworthy and garner credibility when traditional measures are fundamentally insufficient and irrelevant. That is, if we take as an assumption that we are not transpiring for truth or truthfulness in scenarios, then what becomes interesting is how scenarios convey authority and trustworthiness. How is it that scenarios attain and maintain power to compel people to action, change their worldview, or influence the directions of decisions or consensus?

This piece examines the process, participation and products of scenario planning in light of conceptual understandings of trust. Such an inquiry highlights that scenarios have value inscriptions and varying degrees of normativity which are indebted to the particularities of their production

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* Address: Institute for Politics, Management and Philosophy, Copenhagen Business School, Blaagaardsgade 23B, DK 2200 Copenhagen N, Denmark. Tel.: +45 2712 1709/4677 5152; fax: +45 3815 3546.

E-mail address: cynthia.selin@risoe.dk.

1. Introduction

The aim of scenarios is to be somewhat believable for purposes of uptake, but also to invoke a fresh perspective on what's to come. Scenarios should not be so extraordinary that they are dismissed; people should be able to relate to them and imagine the stories as possibilities. Along with the imaginative side of generating scenarios, there ironically lays an appeal to telling the truth “and accurately representing what's going on” [12, p.11].

Having verifiable facts and a ‘sound analysis of reality’ are criteria for a successful scenario [25, p.4]. Scenarios want to be taken as legitimate and plausible and usually have a good deal of quantitative backing to buttress their validity.

How do scenarios become trustworthy or considered valid for action? In the practice of scenario planning, such criterion is vague. We see two contradicting frames of reference or epistemological grounds for building scenarios, one of *forces* and *maps* (objective and subjective) that obscures typical criterion of validation and hence make problematic any traditional assessments of validity and credibility normally associated with establishing and maintaining trust.

There are no right and true scenarios which is readily acknowledged by practitioners in the field,¹ not only because of their displacement in the future, into the realm of that which has not yet occurred, but also because there are multiple descriptions of the world that are right, even if they are contradicting. There is a diversity of descriptions, those told by artists, mothers, or scientists, that could all be considered valid world versions given their context. Literature on scenario planning accounts for the inevitability of values evident in scenarios [13]. Yet as we shall see, this interpretative flexibility does not dismiss scenarios from facing judgment in terms of quality and credibility.

There is little study conducted from actual scenario projects that look into whether or not people believe scenarios and how that impacts the effectiveness of the projects [17]. There is only anecdotal evidence available to determine on what basis and for what reasons people may believe or trust in a particular representation of the future described in a scenario and how their behavior or thinking changes as a result. After all, change is crucial as scenario exercises are undertaken to render some new action or perspective more clearly [22]. Taking some sort of action, whether a form of co-operation or competition, is the end goal of scenario exercises. Without action, or promises of action, the scenario exercise is moot and irrelevant.

Scenario planning is introduced in environments of uncertainty where there is a need for action, prioritizing agendas or making decisions. Many different groups, whether from policy, business or government, have a stake in reducing and understanding the uncertainty latent in their decision-making and finding rationale for their decisions. Managers, rather than drown in the uncertainties that plague them, can use scenarios to sketch out what may be known (even if the known is the articulation of what is unknown) and then base their decisions accordingly.

In general, trust concerns all future actions, which condition our present decisions. “Uncertainty, vulnerability and the possibility of avoiding risk or of making a choice based

¹ Practitioner here refers to individuals facilitating scenario planning exercises.

on judgment are seen as necessary conditions for the existence of trust. Under perfect information, it would be a question not of trust but of rational calculation. If there were no information, it would be a case of faith or gambling” [2, p.283]. This is to say that decision-making under uncertainty is intimately bound to issues of trust. When using scenarios to cope with uncertainty, the experience must be trustworthy for us to take action. The experience of scenarios implicates the production and distribution of scenarios thus evoking investigation of the trustworthiness of participants, facilitators, process (methodology) and product (the scenario stories). This paper ties together interdisciplinary conceptual understandings of trust and their dilemmas imposed on scenario planning.

2. Trust

Trust is a regular part of any relationship. It is required for good communication, problem solving and commitment. Each party must trust the other(s) in order to enter into agreement. Trust is thus a relational term, a two-way street down which all must travel to reach amiable ends. Having trust is to have a “positive expectation about another’s motives with respect to him/herself, within a situational context entailing risk” [3].

There are many different intellectual traditions that deal with trust including communications, political science, legal and business studies and sociology [19]. However, amidst the differences in terms of concept, use and means of negotiating trust, the similarities dominant.² In this piece, I draw from an interdisciplinary understanding of trust, though one from a more sociological tradition:

A formal definition of trust:

Trust is a particular level of the subjective probability with which an agent assess that another agent or group of agents will perform a particular action, both before he can monitor such action (or independent of his capacity ever to be able to monitor it) and in a context in which it affects his own action. When we say that we trust someone or that someone is trustworthy, we implicitly mean that he will perform an action that is beneficial or at least not detrimental to us and is important enough for us to consider engaging in some form of co-operation with him. Correspondingly, when we say that someone is untrustworthy, we imply that the probability is low enough for us to refrain from doing so [9, p.218].

More simply:

Trust is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another [19, p.395].

To further break down trust, we must be concerned with who or what we are trusting. Trust is a relational term that implies one who is to trust (‘trustor’) and one that is

² Each discipline has their own understandings of trust. See Blomqvist [2] who highlights the differences and similarities of economists, social psychologists, philosophers, market researchers and lawyers and Rousseau et al [19] for a focus on the similarities. This paper is a blending of understandings as it relates to the practice of scenario planning, a position justified by the controversies in defining trust absolutely without context.

trustworthy ('trustee'). We trust an agent to do or be something. One needs to trust one's ally to co-operate towards specific ends and even one's competitor is expected to follow certain rules. Further, it is necessary not only to trust others before acting co-operatively, but also to believe that one is trusted by others.

Credibility is like trust, yet implies believability and thus only grasps part of the implications of trustworthiness. Credibility is "a passive concept referring to the actor's claimed ability, which does not, however, say anything about the actor's intentions nor his will to do the requested" [2, p.279]. The concepts of intentions and will matter in terms of interpersonal trust, yet we also pay attention to trusting processes (like recipes), artefacts (airplanes and needles), organizations (post office) and ideas (free market).

Trust is active, rather than passive. Trust involves a process that it is built incrementally over time. In the beginning of the trust relationship, trust may be very important, as there is not much past experience to rely on. In this sense, trust is often evidence based. Trust is slow to build but can collapse quickly. Trust is built over time and especially in future scenarios when the future becomes history. As Currall and Epstein note, "trust feeds on itself, as does distrust" [6, p.203]. Loss of trust implicates the message and the messenger [11].

2.1. *Dilemmas of the future tense*

To confound our trust of scenarios, the scnearic stories are lodged in the future—a space intrinsically wrought with uncertainty and a profound lack of information/knowledge. Our central means of establishing trust—relying on previous positive, reassuring experiences or gathering of factual evidence—are thwarted when we deal in future terrains. That scenarios are set in the future automatically removes them from making any kind of traditional testament to fact, as fact is commonly defined as that which has actually happened. Since scenarios are set in the future, one cannot base a judgment of a scenario on whether or not it is right or wrong, true or false. Anyway, there is no move to say that we are making predictions that are bound to come true in the future. It is not about truth, but rather trust.

As posited by Gambetta, "If we were blessed with an unlimited computational ability to map out all possible contingencies in enforceable contracts, trust would not be a problem" [9, p.219]. Thus, the degree to which we see the future is knowable, to which the future can surprise us, points to the importance of trust. The more open and less constrained we see the future unfolding, the more relevant trust becomes. Risk creates the opportunity to trust. The following dichotomies clarify:

Security	Risk
Present	Future
Certainty	Uncertainty
Known	Unknown
Trust	Distrust

The needs for trust and the conditions that necessitate undertaking a scenario exercise are the same. This is to say that trust becomes critical in environments with: [15, p.76].

High uncertainty/ambiguity
No documented history
Early innovation with no documentation
No relevant people contacts
New area of work
Rapid change
Uncertain market

As the above conditions are often posited as rationales for using scenarios, trust becomes intrinsically entwined with the process.

The question becomes, how can stories of the future become trustworthy and garner credibility when traditional measures are fundamentally insufficient and even irrelevant? That is, if we take as an assumption that we are not transpiring for truth or truthfulness in scenarios, then what becomes interesting is how scenarios convey authority. It is about trust, rather than truth.

3. Why trust matters: interpretive flexibility

Scenarios are always about change—whether the change is oriented towards mental models or worldviews, company strategy or political agendas—and are often framed as tools in organizational change projects. Such change is often about overturning existing regimes of thought, of power or of organization. This is to say, that change involves a movement from something (or someone) towards something else. Who decides is being questioned and potentially undermined. Such power-plays encounter serious resistance and major upheavals in existing authorities since it is often entrenched players that are threatened in this process.

Contests for what counts as a ‘plausible’ future are negotiated, discussed and resolved through the guise of fictions. Who tells the story of the future sets up guideposts for our attention, defines what is important, and describes what options are most viable. Who has the influence to lay out what is to come, as sketched in the scenarios, is political. Yet scenarios exert political influence in a special way, with a kind of disconcerting humbleness. Instead of making outright claims to fact, they are instead characterized as art or imagining due to their inability to appeal to truth. As we have seen, it is their futured nature that introduces particular dilemmas with regard to trust.

There is a uniqueness bound to a method that wants to be trusted and hence persuasive, yet denies traditional tests of trustworthiness. Nonetheless, one commonality amidst the diversity of scenario methods is a consensus-based approach. In most cases, scenarios result from group discussion and reconciliation.³ Once consensus is reached, the debate cannot continue because the weight of group opinion has been established and serves to solidify the claims. This dilemma highlights the tricky steadfastness of trust. As Curall and

³ However, some scholars argue that consensus is not so much about co-operation, but rather about gaining closure to a debate. See Shackley and Wynne [27], Bruno Latour [28] and Latour and Woolgar [29] for various discussions on consensus.

Epstein explain, “once trust has been reached, we may cognitively discount new information that the other party is not trustworthy...once trust is built, we may actively reject evidence suggesting that a party whom we trust is actually untrustworthy” [6, p.197].

Also known as Festinger’s principle of cognitive dissonance, the obduracy of trust garnered through consensus indirectly contributes to the perceived trustworthiness of method.

Even though there may be innumerable possibilities for what the future will hold, the process of resolution leads to a discreet number of scenarios that are selected, developed and publicized. These final scenarios are buttressed by the backing of the group and become persuasive through the authority and trustworthiness granted through consensus. In short, when the stories are generated, from the beginning to end, values are inscribed that may, in effect, limit rather than open possibilities for choice and conscientious decision-making.

It is thus not just about garnering consensus within a group regarding an uncharted future terrain. The future is very much staked out within existing strategies, agendas and hierarchies. Scenarios are not innocent or distanced from these regimes, but rather often support or oppose them. Despite the aim to create objective or equally plausible scenarios, specific future worlds are sketched out and in the end scenarios are always selective and political. Objectivity is not possible. Rather, selectivity is the name of the game thus revealing another layer upon the importance of trust.

Upon recognition that scenarios’ content will always be partial and contingent yet surprisingly buttressed by the lack of testimony to truth latent in the future, certain measures of trustworthiness and consequential authority are mustered from the context in which they are engaged. Don Michael, a social psychologist who worked around future studies for many years, had an astute point when he said: “a prediction about the future can be interpreted as a repudiation or legitimization of both the explanation and the delineation of what is and what could be. As a result, there are very few neutral producers, critics, or users of social forecasts” [14, p.6].

What and whose political, economic, or ideological ends are promoted by the scenario stories that are told? Each group of scenarios divide and order the world in certain ways that will always account for certain conceptions of history, values, and mechanisms of change and will frame people, events, and beliefs in certain lights. We should question how the futures are conceived and represented and who is left out of the pictures entirely. Or, as Joan Fujimura says, “If truth is negotiated order (temporally and spatially located), we need to understand which perspectives are not included in the final product and how they were eliminated during the process of negotiation” [8, p.228]. We need to pay special attention to which perspectives are (and are not) included in the final product and how they were eliminated during the process of negotiation. The question of trusting scenarios should always be approached with eyes towards whose ends are being served by presenting futures in one way rather than another.

4. Trustworthy scenarios—trust in scenarios

Trust becomes critical when factuality and authenticity are questionable. For example, the typical understanding of trust implies the beliefs or doubts we have of and in other

people. With regard to scenarios, this interpersonal aspect of trust involves having confidence in the skills, reputation and knowledge of the facilitator and participants. Without trust in the facilitator, the entire process may lose respectability and end in futility.

Trust between the participants is often a prerequisite for open sharing and brainstorming that leads to the deep reflection which hallmarks scenario planning. It is not a matter of agreeing with the other participants, but rather that trust is a key element of good, transparent engagement. Distrust, implicit or explicit, can lead to factions, silencing insecurities, and other barriers to fruitful exchange in small groups. Nonetheless, in the process of discussion, despite different levels of sharing, simple engagement may be a benefit even with inadequate levels of trust and could actually begin to lay down positive experiences, thus paving the way to trust.⁴

Scenarios' ability to incorporate various perspectives in one simple package makes them apt vehicles for circulation outside the environment from which they are created. What happens to trust when scenarios move out of the generative workspace away from the facilitator and participants? Trustworthiness then becomes judged by an outsider—a generalized and often unanticipated audience. It is here that transparency of process is an important criterion for judging trustworthiness. In lieu of the interpersonal assessment, trust is then built upon other levels of legitimacy—such as the affiliations of the participants and practitioners, the methodological integrity and the perceived quality of the insight—which are explored in more detail below.

Therefore, it becomes evident that the scenario stories themselves must also garner trust along with the process that builds them. This is to say that the scenarios, along with the other actors in a scenario process (practitioner, participants), are also agents to trust or distrust. In this section, we consider the scenarios as agents to trust or distrust and explore what makes a scenario credible. Five basis of credibility, defined as that which is found to be reliable, compelling and trustworthy are addressed.⁵

4.1. Trust in sources

Source credibility relates to who is involved in the construction of the scenarios. Arie de Geus, Shell, author, has stressed, “The only relevant learning in a company is the learning done by those people that have the power to act” [24, p.13].

Those with decision-making power, or who are somehow influential actors involved in the issue at hand, are considered crucial to the process. Their active participation displays the importance and seriousness of the undertaking. Further, who is defined as a stakeholder participant is relevant and influences such source credibility.

It is crucial that the right people are engaged in the process. The evolution of scenario planning has undergone a shift from exclusive scenario projects to a more inclusive approach honoring diversity of thought, position and agenda. Involving a wide-range of

⁴ See for example, the multi-stakeholder work of Adam Kahane [30] that builds upon Clem Sunter's [31] earlier work.

⁵ Source credibility, content credibility, and channel credibility were suggested by P. J.H Shoemaker [32].

participant stakeholders has become a useful way of creating novel and productive scenarios and is indispensable when dealing with complexity and muddled uncertainty.

The scenarios should be credible for the participants, which often occurs due to their intimate engagement with creating them. Ownership of the final product lends integrity for the creators. As a long-time scenaric thinker, John Collman, relayed, “the participants can be very forgiving of bad scripts, particularly when they know that the stories are theirs and not forced on them by a team of experts”. Ownership lends a sort of accountability and trustworthiness to the final product.

Source credibility can also be attached to the practitioners and the scenario planning community that they represent. Like most professional consultants, scenario practitioners must also work to establish, build and maintain trust and credibility. Trust in this practice could be built upon displaying empathetic interviewing skills, developing a reputation for cogency, relevant and direct experience in the industry under study, a good track record, or maintaining a professional or business-like demeanor. Well-publicized past successes, a prestigious clientele list, or referrals from other companies could also lend credibility to the scenarios vis-à-vis the practitioners. Credibility is garnered not only from the practitioners but also from the status and power of the participants.

4.2. Trust in content

Content credibility refers to the strength and reliability of the data and information that make up the scenarios. Content here can refer to both the narrative, which is held to standards of internal consistency and plausibility, and to the other kinds of information in the final product. Good scenarios are typically buttressed with oodles of quantitative, historical and contextual data. Varied rates of change, demographics, economic trends, statistics and other ‘hard’ indicators are included to enhance the overall credibility of the scenarios. Beyond a simple story, scenarios should have texture and depth that can ally with the fortitude of economic and scientific reasoning, instead of simply relying on an imaginative narrative. The use of quantitative data may serve to legitimate the scenarios and lend to their overall trustworthiness.

Content trustworthiness can often be verified or at least investigated. Models can be assessed, data revealed, and qualitative assumptions made explicit. Validation of information typically rests on four main hinges: authority and reputation (where the data came from, which experts); coverage (depth and breadth); accuracy (reliable and authentic); and currency (relevance). Although, trust in numbers or scientific authority is often argued as undermined in today’s society.⁶ Nonetheless, such an appeal to quantification is persuasive in many contexts. Further, the kind of transparency that is possible in quantification further contributes to the trustworthiness of scenarios. All the same, the deluge of facts and figures and the sheer quantities of information available and incorporated into scenarios makes assessing the trustworthiness of the information an arduous task.

The last points speak more to the accuracy and the reliability of content but beg the critical question of the quality of insight that forms the basis of the scenarios. We are all

⁶ See for example, the work of Sheila Jasonoff, Brian Wynne and especially Theodore Porter [33].

familiar with the phrase ‘garbage in/garbage out’ referring to the case of imputing bad thinking or poorly observed phenomenon and then solidifying them with figures or computational models. Processing does nothing to improve the quality of insights garnered at the end of the process. Further, the quality of the outcome is linked to asking the right questions, a step that is often done wrong [18]. How, why and where the attention is focused within the foundational drivers of the scenarios speaks to the quality of the content and the value of the reflections. Thus, the level of insight and the depth of inquiry are also subject to trustworthiness (though arguably tougher to judge than the data populating the scenarios).

4.3. Methodological credibility

There is also a final layer on the trust question in scenarios: trust of the process or method itself. While categorizations and demarcations of scenario planning methodology can be made, it should not obscure the point that there is flexibility, both in the representation and application of these methods [23]. The methods are contingent, which is to say they are implemented selectively and differently dependent upon the setting, the goal, the audience, the scope of the problem and the type of organization engaged. The process involves so many choices along the way, those made by the practitioner as well as by the participants. This leads some practitioners to refer to scenario planning as ‘more art than science’, and insist that there is ‘no simple formula’ for generating scenarios [20]. Yet others insist that it is a ‘clearly defined technique’ with a ‘disciplined methodology’ [23, p.11]. Others note the absence of a structured theory behind the method [5]. In short, there is much debate over the norms of the method, if there is, indeed, a method, and on what foundations the method is based.

Nonetheless, each and every scenario exercise follows a discernable process. The process instructions are argued and practitioners assure logical transitions between the steps. The efficacy of any scenario project is intimately bound to how credible the process is and thus warrants further exploration.

There is a certain professionalism in the field that tends to canonize scenario planning into a highly systematic, replicable process, thus lending some credibility by ‘being scientific’. This enables teaching of method, the creation of manuals, and the development of experts leading to an organized profession. However, this issue of replication associated with method resurfaces its flexibility—it is replicable because it is flexible—and makes problematic the idea of practitioners building a professional reputation writ large. There is simply too much diversity in the field for a unified front. Indeed, the lack of agreement around methodology disables the development of standards that could guarantee quality. Although some practitioners have expressed interest in accreditation procedures as a means to boost quality and credibility, little progress has been made. Instead of trusting the method, trust and trustworthiness may lie with the individual practitioner(s), a participant’s experience, institutional affiliations (sponsorship), or within the content itself.

4.4. *Trust in narrative*

Scenarios gain discursive power from their storied character and use of compelling metaphors. Metaphor is a dynamic linguistic sign or symbol that expresses the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar. Donald Schon views metaphors as “central to the task of accounting for our perspectives on the world: how we think about things, make sense of reality, and set the problems we later try to solve” [21, p.137]. Metaphors often gain their power, or their “normative force from certain purposes and values, certain normative images, which have long been powerful in our culture” [21, p.147].

Pierre Wack, legendary developer of scenario planning at Shell, cited the use of metaphor as a good way to help people make connections between the past and the future. He said metaphors are “frequently helpful to transpose a conceptual framework from the old domain of experience to what will be the new one” [25, p.25].

Likewise, Schon refers to metaphor as a certain kind of perspective or frame, which is constructed in a specific process by which new perspectives of the world come into existence. Such a ‘generative metaphor’ must re-frame the perception of the object of study by adding new meaning, features, pathways, or views. If an approach to an object of study proves futile, confusing, or leaves the decision-makers without grounding or the ability to find an acceptable solution, one can create a generative metaphor by reframing what is going on or changing the perspective of the problematic situation. Once the re-framing has occurred, a new metaphor is transcribed on the situation that leads to a fresh perspective, and perhaps a way to conceptualize the problem situation as solvable.

Within scenario planning, metaphors are integrated into the story to bridge the old with the new, the past with the future, the familiar with the unfamiliar, and the known to the unknown. The mental anchor takes root with the former to help the individual process and accept the later. It is the realness, or the ready relation to one’s experience of reality, that allows the material not to require justification because it is witnessed as already trustworthy or valid. Rooting the scenarios in firmly held, pre-existing beliefs or feelings about how the world works leads to the uptake or credibility of the scenarios.

Credibility here also does not link with trust, but rather persuasiveness. Nelson Goodman in *Mind and Other Matters* says metaphor “participates fully in the progress of knowledges in replacing some stale ‘natural’ kinds with novel and illuminating categories, in contriving facts, in revising theory, and in bringing us new worlds” [10, p.74]. Goodman says that in poem or myth or novel or scenario, allegorical truth may matter more than literal truth. He says, “...even a literally false statement may be metaphorically true and may mark or make new associations and discriminations, change emphasis, effect exclusions and additions. And statements whether literally or metaphorically true or false may show what they do not say, may work as trenchant literal or metaphorical examples of unmentioned features and feelings” [26, p.18].

It also matters what the stories say in a more intellectual or discursive fashion as demonstrated by Betty Sue Flower’s experience with the tense lobbying she encountered in her work with Shell drafting the mythic element of their global scenarios. Flowers said

of her experience with Shell, “I got lobbied—all over. Because the way you tell the story influences the way people think about the future” [7, p.12].

While judging from Flower’s experience, what is said about the future is controversial and whose narrative to trust is not obvious and bound to questions of authority.

4.5. Trust in dissemination

Channel or dissemination credibility has to do with the range of distribution as well as who presents the scenarios and in what context. Many practitioners stress the importance of having influential members of the group present the scenarios. As aforementioned, scenarios are easily circulated broadly in newspapers, prominent journals and websites as well as company reports and white papers. In this process of circulation, scenarios may take on a different meaning when interpreted in different settings. For example, in a policy-making environment, a “policy-maker must either use the results of a futures research project to beat his opponents, or his opponents attack him by using futures research and he needs to have this kind of research available to hit back” [1, p.670]. Yet access to scenario research is often expensive and despite an often wide circulation, it should be noted that many scenarios are considered proprietary and kept secret.

In some contexts, it is not only the well-regarded newspapers, top executives or prominent politicians that lend the most credibility to the project. In the Mont Fleur scenarios project, for example, ministers, community leaders, and other respected locals presented the scenarios. Church preachers spread the Mont Fleur scenarios to their congregations and even went a step further and worked the metaphors and messages into their sermons. Other grassroots efforts were made to dispense the scenarios, such as open discussions on local radio stations. Their endorsement of the project, and presumably the results by way of presenting the scenarios in their milieu, enhanced people’s trust of the scenarios and their consequential uptake of the messages.

5. Contextual trust: constructing persuasive meanings

The tour through five elements of credibility in scenarios has revealed how much context determines trust and scenarios ability to persuade. This is to say that the results, including the levels of trust reached, are specific to the context, which means that repetition does not ensure the same results. In terms of trust, this is a problem since trustworthiness is evidence based. The process of building trust is heavily based upon past experiences that serve to prove and then reassure trustworthiness. However, it is hard to develop this kind of history between participants, practitioners and institutions in a fixed way given the variety of scenario making contexts that are not wholly replicable. This reliance upon track records is disturbed in scenario processes due to the inevitable dynamism. Trust is thus also an active relationship, rather than a condition that, once met, is easily maintained.

By suggesting the channels by which scenarios may gain credibility and trustworthiness, it is not to imply that people think the scenarios true and factual. Rather, it is

interesting to see how scenarios obtain weight and authority given their context. The importance of context is an analytic starting point to question scenarios and their effectiveness. If we stop taking for granted the messages inscribed in the scenarios, we can begin to ask how content, sources, actors, distribution and methods endow the stories with authority.

Persuasion is an important concept to uncouple the strict dichotomy between trust and truth, which can never be understood as diametrically opposed. Instead, our departure is that truth never existed as such, and rather we have always been dealing with how the right arguments at the right time build up a sense of trustworthiness and thus become persuasive. Being persuasive is about negotiating meaning between different, local meaning making systems in such a way to create shared, contextually based understandings.

Trust speaks to what is worth believing and, if convinced, what the intensity of the conviction should be. Being persuasive is a matter of judging new information, determining how it fits into existing frames of references, and then accommodating, or making room for, the new knowledge. This is Piaget's assimilation and accommodation, which has then been adapted by Weick as processes of enactment, selection and retention. [26] If something or someone, including a knowledge claim, is deemed trustworthy, it is also persuasive and we can build it into our architecture of understanding. "Being persuaded [is a process] of evaluating the meanings that one has evoked, not according to intrinsic merit as isolated entities, but according to suitability for inclusion in a system of belief" [4, p.20].

The degree to which the system of belief, or contextual frame of reference, will accommodate a new perspective is linked to modes of proof that are deemed legitimate. Persuasion is thus tied to rhetoric and unavoidably draws us to Aristotle's classical modes of proof that continue to serve as the bedrock for contemporary rhetorical accounts of judgement. As we have seen in this account of trust in scenarios, forms of ethos (persuasion based on the perceived character of the speaker), pathos (persuasion based on the appeal to the audiences emotions), and logos (persuasion based on reasoned arguments) are evident. Indeed, one can hardly trespass into the domain of persuasion without encountering the ways that ethos, pathos and logos are implicated in the formation and maintenance of good trust.

The question of trust is thus a question as to the persuasiveness of the process, participants and product of the scenario exercise. I have sketched some dimensions of trust as they come to bear on scenario planning by describing, in effect, how scenario exercises translate symbolic meanings to different communities of practice. Instead of trust in opposition to truth, trust is a relation that is born of persuasion where different modes of legitimization nurture (or work against) trustworthiness. Legitimization is based on good reason, locally defined and linked with practical requirements of credibility. Simply stated, what is reliable and credible in one setting would not be convincing in another. The legitimacy of scenarios processes, participants and products, I have argued, is bound to context and their ability to flexibly assimilate and accommodate the multiple meanings of their judging audience.

This also suggests that there are no hard and fast rules for creating trustworthy scenarios. Different communities will have different criterion for establishing trust so

what works in one setting may fail in another. Trust is emergent, fleeting and inconsistent.

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