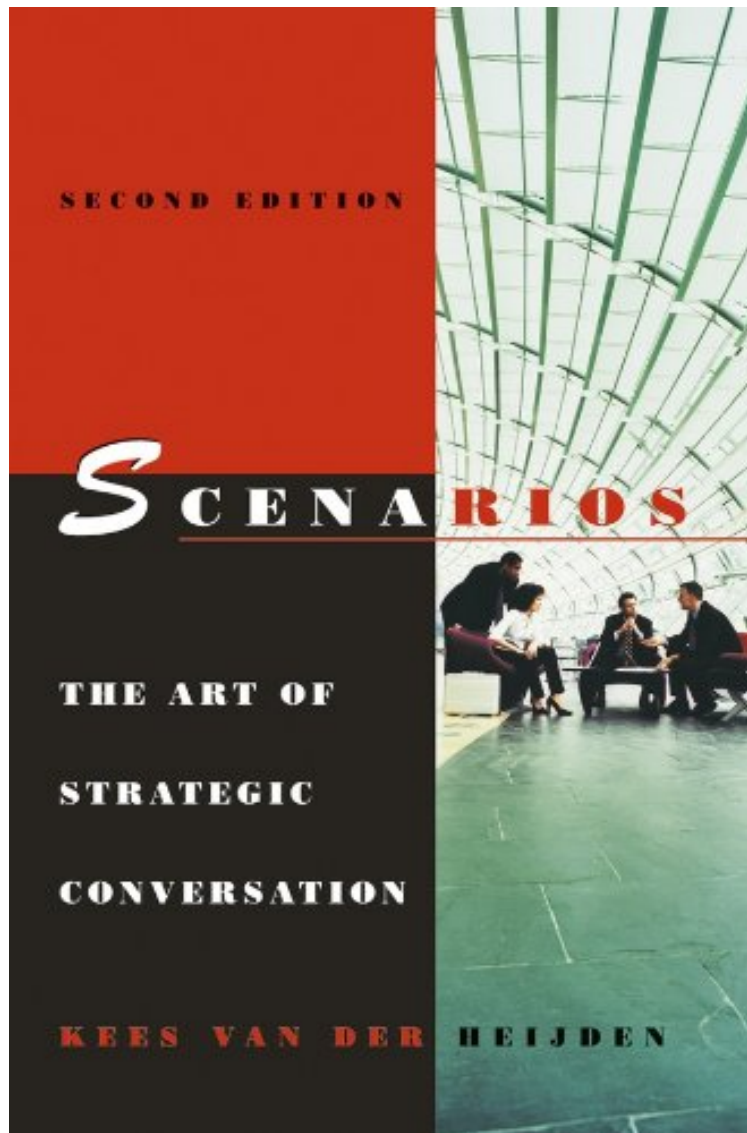


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Scenarios: The Art of Strategic Conversation

Kees van der Heijden

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Kees van der Heijden : Scenarios: The Art of Strategic Conversation before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Scenarios: The Art of Strategic Conversation:

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A new version of the 'Crystal Ball' By Thomas M. Magee Everyone wants a Crystal Ball for many different reasons. That is the one thing that keeps the physics industry alive. Now you have a book to tell you a new way to build your own crystal ball to unveil the secrets of the future. My title paragraph is not far from the truth, with a twist. This twist is how to build a crystal ball not to see if your sports team wins the big game or if that person loves you but how to survive the future. This book explains the process of scenario utilization to guide strategic planning. This process calls for people to create a picture of the future. This picture is based off of the

key factors critical to your business. Then the book calls for facilitators to walk people through the process to see where they are short. The author does mention several times that this is a long process done in waves. The process doesn't really unveil secrets. It teaches people how to think differently. Staff who have gone through this view problems and issues in a new light than they did before. The book has several good historical cases that prove his point like Shell Oil. Those cases really enhances the point. The main audience for the book is consultants. It is a "how to book" for consultants of in house experts. The book walks you through the process in very intimate detail. There is a wealth of information on almost every page. Any reader will have to go slow through this for sure out of fear of losing something. The reading of this book for sure will help set you ahead in the field for sure. I can't think of anything else short of contracting with the author that will help you out as much.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.
A Masterpiece
By Barry Simpson
I have been studying strategy and strategic planning for some time now and was lucky enough to come across this book. The insights are truly enlightening and I feel privileged to be able to have access to the wealth of knowledge and expertise in the book. Not only on scenario planning but on the reality of strategy itself. One of the best I have read. Truly inspiring and written by an expert

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful.
Embrace strategic uncertainty with continuous learning
By Erik Gfesser
This effort seemed to be among the most respected texts amongst the short list of scenario planning efforts in the current marketplace, but the opinions of other readers with regard to what Heijden has to offer vary quite a bit, so I was not sure what to expect. While this text exclaims that "the entire text has been rewritten to bring it up-to-date and make it more practical whilst retaining the underlying rigor", and reading it in its entirety points in the direction of the author looking to practicality, I do not expect much of what is offered here to be tangible enough for most readers who seek to bring scenario planning into their workplaces. That said, the underlying rigor of this text will probably lend itself well to an academic setting, because the author does go into a fairly high degree of theoretical detail that instructors and students will likely find of value. The information provided is applicable to the workplace, but it will be challenging to apply.

After discussing a number of assumptions on which thinking about strategy is based, the author discusses the theory of scenario thinking, followed by the scenario-based planning process (the bulk of what the author presents, consuming approximately 35% of the text), and the wider institutional behavior context (approximately 23% of the text). In my opinion, these first two areas of discussion are more well done than the latter two. The initial preface and contextual chapters are especially well done. The book starts with an interview of the author by Peter Schwartz, a well known scenario planner, about scenarios and the art of strategic conversation. In some ways, I think that more books should start in this manner, because this formula does introduce the material well, but from another perspective it seems awkward because much of the book is consumed by the nature of scenario planning rather than how to actually apply it, and so the author spends a lot of time refining his thoughts on topics which could consume much less space had editors been involved in the process.

For readers new to the concept of scenario planning, the author explains that "in the final analysis the organization needs a good and unique fit with its ever-changing environment if its aims are to be achieved. The purpose of strategising is to develop policies guiding personal behaviour of individuals in the organization such that the total system achieves and maintains a good and unique fit. The problem is that this has to be achieved in a situation of uncertainty and ambiguity. If everything is known and predetermined there is no place for strategy. But equally, if everything is totally uncertain and nothing is predictable strategy is impossible. The idea of strategising for the future is fundamentally based on the unpredictability of the future, of which some aspects, we assume, can be foreseen...Scenario planning distinguishes itself from other more traditional approaches to strategic planning through its explicit approach towards ambiguity and uncertainty in the strategic question. The most fundamental aspect of introducing uncertainty in the strategic equation is that it turns planning for the future from a once-off episodic design activity into an ongoing learning proposition." "In a situation of uncertainty, planning becomes learning, which never stops. We have an in-built urge to try to pin down situations, and to try to reach a point where we have got it sorted out in our mind. If uncertainty is acknowledged it is not any longer possible to take this position of 'we have done the planning'. The idea of continuous learning may be less comfortable for some, as it does not give us the feeling of problem closure. However, strategy is about the future, and therefore involves uncertainty. The traditional approach tries to eliminate uncertainty from the strategic equation, by the assumption of the existence of knowledgeable people who have privileged knowledge about 'the most likely future', who can assess the probabilities of specific outcomes. Scenario-based planning, on the other hand, assumes that there is irreducible indeterminacy and ambiguity in any situation faced by the strategist, and that successful strategy can only be developed in an ongoing dynamic response to this." The author argues that the very nature of strategy in itself is a bit esoteric, and his extensive exploration of the subject is what makes this book appealing, although I find writers of other texts in the strategy space to be much more relatable, such as Henry Mintzberg, Bruce Ahlstrand, and Joseph Lampel in their book "Strategy Safari: A Guided Tour Through the Wilds of Strategic Management" (see my review). In my opinion, one of the best takeaways from what Kees van der Heijden has to offer here, even if the reader does not make their way through the entire text, is as follows: "Strategy is a highly dynamic area, full of fads and fashions that come and go. Yet a few texts seem to remain valid over the years. These mostly aim at analysing underlying structures rather than proposing specific strategies. After all, copying ideas that 'work' for others is unlikely to be a winning strategy. Success can only be based on being

different from (existing or potential) competitors." Well said.

Scenario planning allows companies to move away from linear thinking and better understand external change. Eight years (and 30,000 copies) after publication *Scenarios* is still acknowledged as the definitive work in the field. Now, Kees van der Heijden brings his bestseller up to date, following up on his original case studies and adding significant new material. The Second Edition changes focus slightly by providing more in-depth analysis and application of the concept of the 'strategic conversation'. While maintaining the underlying rigour of the first edition, van der Heijden revisits the text to make it far more practical and accessible, and in doing so gives you the tools you need to set out and negotiate a successful future course for your organization in the face of significant uncertainty.

...all important subjects for the modern manager are covered in 5 parts... (Business Books - web) From the Publisher This book shows how to use scenarios--a powerful new approach to strategic planning--to pilot your company profitably through unknown territory. First developed at Royal Dutch/Shell, scenario planning is a technique that enables you to imagine--and prepare for--discontinuous change. When initially developed, scenario planning helped companies understand external change--change in markets, the competitive arena, technology, demographics and so on. In this book, the author takes the art of scenario planning one giant step further. After tackling external forces, he shows you how to apply the logic of scenario planning to internal forces. When applied internally as well as externally, scenarios become the driving force for learning as well as planning. From the Inside Flap *Scenarios* deals with how managers can set out and negotiate a successful course into the future for the organization in the face of significant uncertainty. Uncertainties about the future are often felt to be uncomfortable and thus "swept under the table" by collapsing them into a single-line forecast. This is tantamount to abdication of managerial responsibility. At worst it means a wild jump in the dark. Facing up to uncertainty changes the perspective on the future completely. The secret of success moves from "finding the best strategy" to "finding the best process". Thinking about scenarios - the different plausible future environments that can be imagined - is the key to thinking the process through and to keep thinking about it as the plans for the future unfold. Scenario planning is dynamic. The focus of attention needs to be on the ongoing "strategic conversation", penetrating both the formal and informal exchange of views through which the strategic understanding develops - and actions result. *Scenarios* deals first with the principles of organizational learning and then moves on to describe practical and down-to-earth ways in which the organization can develop its skill in conducting an ongoing scenario-based strategy process. The methods described are based on many years of practical experience of managers in both large and small organizations; and they are grounded in solid logic.