Anticipating STRAtegic Long-term challenges

Module 3. Section 6: Systems Mapping: Seeing the Bigger Picture (12.1 Task 1: Scenario with Trend-Impact Mapping)

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Module 3. Section *6*: 12.1 Task 1 (L03.1, L03.4)

Task 1 — Scenario with Trend-Impact Mapping

The following task will provide questions and guidelines for you to identify potential trends which can impact your organization and use them to create long-term future scenarios (10-20+ years). The task can be done individually but doing it in a group is recommended, as this brings many more perspectives to the discussion.

Identifying Trends

- What trends are currently affecting your organization?
  - Think of social, environmental, technological, political, and economic trends.
  - Use some of the mentioned methods in this module such as:
    - Horizon scanning
    - Weak signals
    - Trend-to-Impact Mapping
    - Systems mapping
    - AI assisted versions of the above
  - How might these trends reshape:
    - Customer behavior?
    - Value chains or ecosystems?
    - Competitive dynamics?
    - Business models?
- What can the causes of these trends be?
  - Here systems mapping can be used.
- Make notes of the all the trends that you have identified and explore them with the following questions:
  - What makes these trends persistent, high-impact, or system-shaping?
  - What could cause the trends to slow down or reverse?
  - Are any of the trends connected in any way?
  - Do some trends stem from the same underlying causes?
  - How are they connected to your organization?
  - Who are the key actors shaping these trends (e.g. Big Tech, startups, governments, research institutions)?
- Rank the trends and chose the top 5 most prominent and impactful trends for the next phase of the task.
  - Remember the common mistakes in reading trends that have been explained in section 4.1 in this module:
    - *Confusing Hype with Long-Term Change:* Not every popular topic becomes strategically important.
    - *Over-Reliance on Current Data***:** Forecasting must also consider emerging developments and uncertainty.
    - *Ignoring Indirect Consequences***:** Secondary impacts may be more important than immediate effects.
    - *Linear Thinking:* It is often assumed that trends develop in a predictable manner.. Real systems are more complex and uncertain.
    - *Confirmation Bias***:** Analysts may focus only on trends that support existing beliefs. Critical reflection is essential.

This step can take a while and require many resources depending on the depth of understanding you seek.

Creating your Scenario

- Find some pictures, quotes, figures, products or something else that you think represents the 5 most prominent trends discovered in the previous phase and create a collage of them. This or these collages can be used as inspiration for the scenario creation process.
- In small breakout groups or individually start creating scenarios. The following questions are built on the work of Zaidi (2017). Her work includes the Seven Foundations model which can be used to create more realistic scenarios. Use the trends identified to enhance the scenarios. Remember that these scenarios are for the far-future (10-20+ years) and you can therefore let the imagination loose. Everything is possible :P

1. Scientific & Technological Foundation (Knowledge, innovation, systems impact)
    - Which technologies or scientific breakthroughs are central to this scenario, and what problems do they solve (or create)?
    - Who controls, develops, and has access to these technologies—and what are the implications?
    - How have these technologies reshaped systems, industries, or human capabilities over time?
2. Environmental Foundation (Ecology, resources, physical and spatial systems)
    - What are the key characteristics of the natural and built environment in this future (e.g. cities, climate, ecosystems)?
    - How do organizations and societies interact with and manage natural resources?
    - What environmental changes have had the largest impact on business and daily life, and how have actors adapted?
3. Political Foundation (Governance, power, law, rights)
    - What forms of governance and decision-making exist in this scenario, and how have they evolved over time?
    - How are power, responsibility, and accountability distributed among governments, corporations, and citizens?
    - What new or transformed laws, rights, or global agreements shape how society operates?
4. Social Foundation (Relationships, institutions, norms, behaviors)
    - How do people live, work, and interact in this future on a daily basis?
    - What changes have occurred in social structures, communities, and institutions (e.g. family, education, networks)?
    - What major social tensions, inequalities, or new forms of cohesion define this society?
5. Economic Foundation (Resources, markets, labor, value systems)
    - How is economic value created and distributed in this future (e.g. labor, data, automation, resources)?
    - What has changed in the nature of work, income, and productivity for individuals and organizations?
    - What new economic systems or models (e.g. decentralized, circular, post-growth) define the marketplace?
6. Philosophical Foundation (Values, ethics, worldview, human nature)

- What core values, beliefs, or ethical principles define society in this future—and how do they differ from today?
- How has the understanding of human identity or purpose changed (e.g. human vs. machine, individual vs. collective)?
- What moral dilemmas or philosophical tensions shape everyday decisions for individuals and organizations?

7. Artistic Foundation (Culture, expression, narratives, imagination)
   - What forms of art, media, and storytelling are prominent in this future—and what do they express about society?
   - How is creativity used to shape narratives about the future or respond to change?
   - In what ways does artistic expression influence behavior, identity, or innovation within this world?

After having answered the questions to all of these seven categories, the task is to gather it all up into one or a few scenarios.

After this exercise, you should have several trend-impact mapping enhanced scenarios that can be used for other exercises such as backcasting from module 8.