



Leading Through Multiple Futures

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Exercise: Leading Through Multiple Futures

Objective:

Equip your leadership team to build resilience by preparing for multiple plausible futures rather than relying on 'most likely' forecasts or single-outcome planning.

Key messages:

- The future is unpredictable, but we can still prepare well
- Scenario thinking reveals how strategy performs under pressure
- Planning across futures helps organisations act decisively, not reactively
- It's not about what will happen, but what might happen and how we respond

Steps:

1. **Frame the Strategic Question** - Before identifying trends, agree on the focus of your scenario planning. Example prompts:

- “What might our operational environment look like in 5 years?”
- “How might external changes reshape how we deliver community services?”
- “What will define financial sustainability for our MAT in 2030?”

2. **Identify External Drivers** – Use horizon scanning to list 5–7 forces shaping your environment. Look across political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental domains. Examples:

- Government funding models
- Staffing supply and pay pressures
- OFSTED/CQC frameworks
- Charity Commission expectations
- Donor/public sentiment
- AI and digital transformation





3. **Select Two Critical Uncertainties** – Choose the two drivers that are both highly impactful and highly uncertain. Plot them on a 2x2 matrix: one on the X-axis, one on the Y-axis. E.g.

X-axis: “Level of central government intervention in our sector”

Y-axis: “Workforce stability and availability”

This creates four future worlds combining high/low levels of each driver.

4. **Build Four Scenarios** – Describe what your future operating environment would look like in each quadrant of that matrix. Use specific, plausible, engaging language. Then add a paragraph on what your organisation might do to succeed in that world

Give each scenario a distinctive title (e.g., “Lean and Local”, “Staffing Crunch”, “Micromanaged Mission”, “Autonomous Growth”)

5. **Strategic Implications** – For each scenario, explore:

- What stays constant across all scenarios?
- What must change or evolve in each?
- What risks or opportunities appear?
- What assumptions does our current strategy rely on?

6. **Board Report Prompt:** What do these scenarios suggest about the robustness or flexibility of our current strategy?

Facilitator Intro Script:

“This session is about strategic resilience - not predictions. We’re using scenario planning to stretch our thinking, prepare for change, and challenge our assumptions.

We’ll identify major uncertainties shaping our future, build four distinct future worlds, and explore what each might mean for us.

This tool helps organisations like ours - MATs, charities, CICs - think proactively about risk, opportunity, and long-term mission. Let’s dive in by naming the trends and uncertainties that feel most urgent right now.”

Facilitator Background Briefing:

What is the 2x2 Scenario Matrix?

One of the most widely used futures thinking tools, the 2x2 matrix is simple yet powerful.

It combines two high-impact uncertainties to generate four divergent scenarios. It's ideal for use in strategy, risk assessment, innovation, and communications.

Why It Works

Use of scenarios can:

- Help you think systematically about future change
- Illuminate strategic blind spots
- Show how today's decisions might play out differently
- Encourage leadership adaptability

When to Use It

- During strategy reviews or rethinks
- When facing turbulence or change
- To engage boards in meaningful future-focused discussion
- As part of risk management or resource planning



☒ Benefits

Encourages flexible, adaptive leadership

Surfaces hidden assumptions and risks

Supports creative but plausible planning

Builds consensus around shared uncertainties

☐ Challenges

Can feel speculative. Emphasise grounding each scenario in logic

Needs careful facilitation to stay focused and practical

May be unfamiliar. Be clear that this is an exploratory tool



Resources Needed: Large paper or whiteboard, marker pens, scenario grid template (X/Y axis), handouts of identified trends.

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Worked Example 1: Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)

Framing Question: What could the operating environment for our MAT look like by 2030?

Chosen Uncertainties: X-Axis: Degree of Government Intervention in MAT Autonomy
Y-Axis: Workforce Stability & Supply



Worked Example 2: Youth Mental Health Charity

Framing Question: What will affect how we deliver youth mental health support by 2030?


Chosen Uncertainties: X-Axis: Public support for mental health
Y-Axis: Availability of Government Funding



2x2 Scenario Matrix

Framing Question/Context:

Y-Axis:	High		
	Low		
		Low	High
		X-Axis:	



Each of our tools encourages structured, values-driven thinking. Use them to bring mastery, clarity and wisdom to volatile decision-making environments.

For help facilitating our activities or adapting them to your board or trust, contact Mastery | Clarity | Wisdom Ltd.

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