

Mastery | Clarity | Wisdom



# **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
  - Al 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.



# **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



#### "Empowered and Equipped"

By 2030, central government has adopted a lighttouch regulatory model, focusing on outcomes rather than process. MATs enjoy freedom to innovate locally. Meanwhile, targeted investment in teacher training and retention pays off; staffing is consistent and morale is high.

Therefore: double down on innovation; trial flexible curricula and AI-supported personalised learning. Develop internal leadership pipelines and multi-site staff development hubs to retain talent.

# ← Low Government Intervention

#### "Independent but Undermanned"

Regulation remains minimal, but recruitment is in crisis. High attrition, reduced ITE enrolments, and regional disparities leave many schools chronically understaffed. Flexibility in policy hasn't translated to capacity on the ground.

Therefore: invest in workforce wellbeing and retention initiatives. Develop cross-trust staffing pools and remote learning models. Partner with training providers to co-create talent pipelines.

#### "Standardised and Stable"

A centralised approach prevails, but staffing stabilises thanks to new bursaries and national recruitment campaigns. Schools have less say in how they operate but benefit from consistency in delivery and expectations.

Therefore: ensure leadership training aligns with national frameworks. Focus energy on influencing within the system (e.g. curriculum enrichment, local partnerships). Strengthen governance oversight of implementation quality.

#### High Government Intervention 🗲



#### "Directed and Drained"

Government exerts greater control over MAT operations—standardised curricula, top-down targets, and prescribed staff deployment. Meanwhile, the profession is under strain. Staff shortages are widespread, and burnout is common.

Therefore: focus on compliance efficiency. Simplify processes, automate reporting. Provide robust pastoral and mental health support. Use scenario-based evidence to advocate for policy change.

Low Workforce stability





# **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



#### "Backed by the State, Not by Society"

Mental health is funded by government, but the public narrative is hostile. Misinformation and stigma abound. Service uptake is low, particularly among marginalised groups.

So we use data to demonstrate impact. Build trust through storytelling and lived experience. Focus on outreach and culturally competent practice. Influence media messaging and policymaking.

# Low Public Support for Mental Health

### "Stigmatised and Struggling"

A culture shift sees mental health dismissed as a private issue. Budgets are slashed, public discourse is sceptical, and services are forced to shrink. Vulnerable young people suffer the most.

So we focus on advocacy and awareness campaigns. Partner with schools and youth orgs to stay embedded in communities. Prioritise core services and maintain strong safeguarding oversight.

#### "Mindful Momentum"

Mental health is no longer stigmatised; young people and parents actively seek support. Government investment has scaled up rapidly, allowing innovation and community-based solutions to flourish.

So we expand service reach to underserved regions. Launch early-intervention programmes. Co-produce resources with young people. Build evidence base for long-term policy influence.

#### High Public Support for Mental Health >



#### "Popular but Penniless"

Demand for youth mental health support is skyhigh, but government funding lags. Charities are stretched thin, relying heavily on short-term grants and donations.

So we diversify income streams; corporate partnerships, fee-for-service models. Train volunteers and peer mentors. Invest in digital tools to scale impact efficiently.

Availability of Government Funding





# 2x2 Scenario Matrix

X-Axis:

# Framing Question/Context:

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