

Scenario-Building: AI and Data Governance Landscapes in 2035

The aim of this document is to bring into better focus the method and aims of the Symposium; and to clarify your roles in the program and the contributions we look forward to you making.

The symposium is designed around small group discussions and plenary sharing sessions. In contrast with typical conference format, we are not asking you to prepare any written material or planned remarks. Instead, we are inviting you to join the program as creative conversation partners and keen listeners. In identifying participants, our goal was to assemble a “community of inquiry” rich with differences in culture, professional training and expertise, career stage, and lived experience. Our hope is that these differences can become the basis of critically insightful and yet harmonious mutual contribution.

Why Scenarios?

Scenario-building is undertaken to develop strategic foresight and foster adaptive responses, thus contributing to organizational transformation and success. In our case, the aim is to facilitate systems of collaboration across national, cultural, sectoral and generational boundaries for the purpose of envisioning pathways to more humane syntheses of human and artificial intelligences.

Scenarios are hypotheses about the future, not predictions. They are developed to envision and critically engage dynamic possibilities, to anticipate significant discontinuities, and to prepare for the potentially conflicting opportunities in which they may result. Unlike forecasts, which are valued for their accuracy, scenarios are valued for their utility in exposing presuppositions, breaking habits of thinking, and undermining creativity-constraining biases.

There will be two major dimensions to our scenario-building process: exploratory and evaluative. The exploratory dimension will consist in discussions of our central themes of privacy and social cohesion, with attention to potential tensions between them in light of external forces and critical uncertainties. The goal here is to develop scenario logics that can be “fleshed out” in alternative narratives of future history. The evaluative dimension shifts attention from what seems most *likely* to happen to what *should* and *should not* occur if our futures are to be more equitable and humane, and then focuses on creative “backcasting” to outline means for arriving at desired and humane futures.

You will find below a synopsis of the symposium activities, followed by an appendix containing some sample scenarios and a conceptual contrast of tools and technologies that we find useful in critically engaging the risks and ethical ramifications of intelligent technology. Also attached is a draft symposium schedule.

<h3>Overview of Activities</h3>

Each day of the Symposium will serve a distinct purpose in a progressive, three-part scenario-building process designed to foster collective reflection and imagination.

Day 1: Participants will be pre-assigned to one of four small groups. Each will be tasked with

developing an optimistic and pessimistic scenario of the state of the world in 2035. A plenary session will be hosted in which groups report on the scenarios they have developed.

Day 2: Reconvening, each group will select one of the four optimistic scenarios and one of the four pessimistic scenarios developed on Day 1 to further develop and refine. A plenary session will be hosted in which groups report on the scenarios they have developed, and the participants will choose two of the optimistic scenarios for strategic elaboration on Day 3.

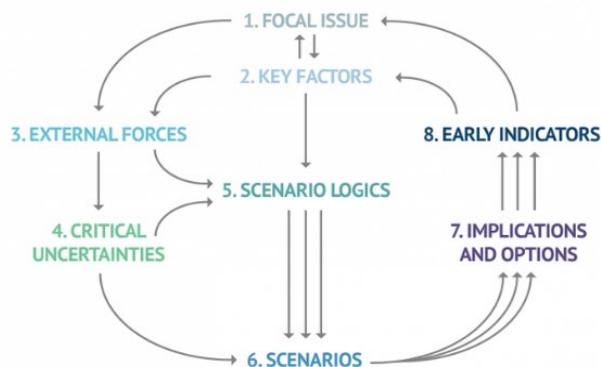
Day 3: Participants will each choose one of the two optimistic scenarios selected at the end of Day 2. Four new groups will be formed—with approximately half of the participants working on each of the scenarios. The purpose of these sessions will be to develop strategies for operationalizing trajectories of change aligned with realizing the chosen scenario.

Day 1: Building Alternative Scenarios

Participants will convene in the small groups to which they have been assigned. Each group will develop two future scenarios, imagining the state of the world in 2035 in relation to the Symposium themes of AI, data governance, privacy and social cohesion, including a brief account of key events from 2021 to 2035. One scenario will be optimistic/utopian; one scenario will be pessimistic/dystopian. Each scenario will briefly address EU/US/PRC perspectives and tensions.

This can be visualized as an 8-step process in which each group brainstorms about key factors influencing change dynamics related to the impacts of intelligent technology on privacy and social cohesion, as well as such external forces as geopolitical competitions that may both shape those change dynamics and accentuate specific domains of uncertainty. With these considerations in mind, the group will develop two plausible “logics” of change—one more promising, the other more perilous—and imaginatively develop narratives describing the “state” of the world in 2035 with respect to intelligent technology and the Symposium themes of privacy and social cohesion.

THE EIGHT-STEP SCENARIO PLANNING PROCESS



Copyright Stratfor 2015 www.stratfor.com

Day 2: Refining the Scenarios

Working in the same groups, participants will work to refine one of the four optimistic/utopian scenarios and one of the four pessimistic/dystopian scenarios that were shared in the Day 1

plenary sharing session. Discussions should be balanced, according each scenario 25 minutes of joint reflection. Effort should be made to add detail to the scenarios, including a “timeline” of key events transpiring between 2021 and 2035, and also highlighting regional differences, tensions and synergies.

Day 3: Backcasting Scenarios

Working in new small groups, participants will add a 4th dimension to one of the two scenarios selected for further elaboration by developing “backcasting” strategies for operationalizing shared commitments realizing change dynamics aligned with making the target scenario a global reality. The effort here is to move from a predictive, forecasting mind(set) to an anticipatory and improvisational mind(set), considering the interplay of what *could* and *should* occur in the coming decade in relation to intelligent technology, and how best to develop the resources and responses needed to realize globally optimistic data governance outcomes in the coming decades.

APPENDIX

TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGIES

A distinction that we believe will be helpful in our scenario-buildings is that between tools and technologies. Although we often identify technologies with iconic tools that are associated with them—identifying communications technology, for instance, with smartphones—tools and technologies exist at different ontological registers.

Tools are things: localized materializations of intentions to extend or augment human capacities for carrying out particular kinds of work. Tools thus have task-specific utilities and are aptly evaluated in terms of how well they enable us to accomplish what we want. With tools, we can exercise “exit rights” by refusing to use them. Smartphones and deep learning neural networks, for example, are communication and computational tools.

Technologies are relational systems: non-localizable patterns of material and conceptual practices that embody and deploy both strategic and normative values, qualitatively transforming the ways we relate to the world and with one another. We in actuality neither *build* nor *use* technologies; we *participate* in them. Technologies emerge from and inform/structure our conduct much as natural ecosystems emerge from and dynamically inform/structure species relationships. It is thus impossible to exercise effective exit rights from ubiquitously deployed technologies or to evaluate them in terms of task-specific utility. Technologies can only be fully evaluated *ethically*, in terms of how they qualitatively affect human-human and human-world relational dynamics.

This distinction makes it clear that tools and technologies give rise to distinct categories of dangers and risks. Accidents-of-design and misuse-by-design are tool risks. The risks of technology are structural and relational. The localized nature of tools means that their risks can be assessed in terms of the likelihood of *pre-identifiable, harmful events*. The non-localized nature of technologies means that their risks can only be evaluated in terms of *emergent patterns of environmental/relational dynamics*.

Unlike all previous technologies, intelligent technology is not a passive conductor of human intentions and values. It is an active and innovative amplifier of those intentions and values and it is thus capable of scaling up the risks of *accident* and *misuse* that come with all new tools, but also of multiplying them by the *structural* and *relational risks* that arise when decision environments are rapidly and recursively refashioned in alignment with uncoordinated and often conflicting values.

SAMPLE SCENARIOS

Since scenario-building is new to many of you, we would like to provide you with some samples with the hope that they will help you envision the kind of narratives we hope will emerge from our discussions. Of course, providing samples comes with the risk of “front-loading” content and thus constraining critical imagination. With that in mind, we have selected brief descriptions of scenarios developed by the Shell Oil Scenarios team in 2018.

Digital islands. In this scenario the global order fragments. The key forces at work here, are people power and government power. It is a future in which individualism and autonomy develop as prime social values. So how does this future come about?

It starts with more and more security breaches, greater misinformation, and the growing use of personal data for profit by corporations. People begin to resist giving up information they consider private. This growing focus on privacy and individualism mirrors national trends against globalization. Greater importance is placed on local identity, family values, nationalism and ethnicity – and as a result, populist politics continue to grow more powerful.

By 2030, governments step in to address individual privacy. They constrain technology companies and force them to make their data available for official use. Some countries set up firewalls to close their digital borders. Cooperation is rare. This a world once again made up of a kaleidoscope of states – some successful, some not. This future is the least economically prosperous of our three scenarios, but there are benefits, particularly in terms of localized social cohesion. The world is a place where technological advances have slowed and there is a return to traditional values, face-to-face interaction and decisions made by humans rather than algorithms.

Open platforms. The second scenario, is that of a more open world. This is a future of even greater global digital connectivity and internationalism. It is the one most shaped by market forces and people power.

In the early 2020s, digitalization grows further thanks to the ever greater convenience it offers. People benefit from the increased personalization of goods and services. They delegate more and more of their day-to-day lives to algorithms. Technology companies innovate, expand and move further into sectors such as banking, health and even... energy. There is an economic boom, but this increases the gap between the digital “haves” and “have-nots” and leads to growing unrest. The international digital architecture continues to strengthen but as social interaction becomes more digital and virtual, traditional social structures weaken. Increasingly, the public sees the big technology companies as too powerful and becoming too close to politicians.

By 2030, the public backlash reaches critical mass and this makes governments finally step in with greater regulation. Technology companies begin to restructure and over time adopt more open business models. As access to information grows broader, the established digital architecture leads to the renewal of open, internationalist values.

This scenario represents a bumpy route to a more prosperous future. The challenge here is finding ways to ensure that no one is left behind by the digital advance.

Comply and Prosper. In the final scenario, the prime forces are legal and market-led. In this world, societies place value on stability, social cohesion and convenience above everything else.

In the early 2020s, technological and digital advances continue to boost economic growth. There are, however, increasing concerns about cyber-attacks. These are matched with unease about the role of news platforms, social media and chat groups in polarizing society, provoking unrest and

fuelling populist politics. Even in free-market economies, people come to expect government intervention in the digital world. Over time, all important systems and infrastructure are intelligently optimized and controlled by governments. They use public and private data to do this.

By 2030, governments begin to work closely with technology companies and gradually seek to control innovation. At the same time, increased surveillance reduces low-level crime. And, the use of personal data means social support structures such as healthcare are personalized and improved. People are both rewarded and sanctioned for the way they live their lives. It is a world where people are a little richer and safer but generally, less free than today.