CHAPTER 1

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ESCAPING THE TYRANNY OF THE PRESENT

Is This Any Way to Plan?

Most organizations do some kind of long-range planning. Yours probably does.

At many companies, though, in spite of all the time and personnel invested in planning, the actual strategic plan that emerges at the end of the process is based on—no, practically joined at the hip with—a set of forecasts that implicitly consider the future as an extrapolation of the present, a more or less linear continuation of the situation these companies are already in, right here, right now. Isn't that convenient?

The planners in your company might disagree. I'm sure they see their work as being a little more sophisticated than that. "Extrapolation? No way!" they will sputter. "Stop insulting us! We do a *lot* more than just taking known data points from the past and extending a straight tangent line beyond the present limit!" (I'm not sure if people actually talk like that, but this is more or less how they will defend themselves.)

PRETTY MUCH THE SAME

But that *is* what they're doing. Well, to be more precise, there are two kinds of extrapolations going on in most companies. The first is a *mathematical* operation. And here, I could sympathize with why planning experts might take umbrage at the idea that "extrapolation" is all they do, since any high school sophomore should be able to produce a decent projection in 10 minutes on an Excel spreadsheet: Just plug in the numbers from the last couple of years and you're done. *"Hey guys! I did the forecast! Hurry up and write the strategic plan so we can get back to Call of Duty!"*

This is not the image highly paid strategic planners want to project.

Despite their protests, mathematical extrapolation is the mechanical basis for most forecasting. To cover all the bases, planners may also come up with what they misleadingly call *scenarios*—separate forecasts representing the "most likely" set of variables, the "best" case, and the "worst" case. All this is achieved by increasing or decreasing some or all of the variables, running the numbers again, and seeing what pops out. Numbers down: worst case. Numbers up: best case. *It's easy!*

So, yes, this is all the product of extrapolation. But not just the mathematical kind. At the heart of this kind of planning, a second kind of extrapolation is at work here, and for lack of a better phrase, I'll call it *mental extrapolation*. What I mean by this is that the plans and strategies that emerge from the usual process are based on forecasts that are ultimately predicated on the idea that everything that will shape the future is represented by the variables in the model. Short and sweet: "We've got it all covered!"

No, they don't. What the planners don't see is that, in addition to tweaking the numbers, what they're really extrapolating is an entire mental image of how their business environment will evolve: "*As far as we're concerned,*" they're telling themselves, *"tomorrow will just be a variation of today. A bit more of this, a bit less of that, depending on how the variables change. It won't be exactly the same as today, but. . . pretty much."*

With this mind-set, next month will be *pretty much* like this month, next year *pretty much* like this year, and 10 years from now *pretty much* like today. For them, as long as the forecasting model includes all the "right" variables, then the future can be only a few mathematical tweaks off of today.

This is flawed thinking. So flawed that it could have fatal consequences for any organization that relies too much on such forecasts.

Because no matter how sophisticated their forecasting model may be, the planners—by basing their view of the future exclusively on how the variables develop—are making an underlying assumption that, other than these variables, nothing much will change. They're saying that the risks and opportunities tomorrow will be similar to those they're dealing with today; only the magnitude will change. That's an egregious oversight.

DOOMED TO IRRELEVANCE

In a world where nothing much changes, this would probably be an acceptable way of forecasting the future. But here's the problem: *We don't live in that world*.

Exchange rates and raw material prices and market shares and hundreds of other variables may move up, down, or sideways, but no amount of manipulating these inputs will reveal to you that a new competitor may appear, a new technology may emerge, an entirely new market may be created (or an existing one wiped out), or a new type of customer may be developing. And *these* are the kinds of events and developments that are more likely to shape a company's future!

So, the strategic plans meticulously drawn up based on the notion of continuous, incremental, evolutionary, and ultimately rather predictable change are, well, perhaps not *totally* worthless, but doomed to irrelevance the moment something big and unforeseen in the business environment does change.

In fact, one of the few things you can say with certainty about plans drawn up this way is that the "most likely scenario" will never actually materialize! How comforting it is to have this forecast in the drawer! It creates such a wonderful sense of security. . . reassuring you. . . lulling you. . . zzzzzz.

I ask you: Is this any way to plan for the future?

Two thousand years ago, Cicero spoke of "the tyranny of the present," and there is hardly a more apt phrase to describe the mind-set that can lull even a highly intelligent executive into believing that the future will just be a variation on a theme—that theme being "today."

With projections in hand—best case, worst case, most likely case—it's easy for managers to delude themselves into thinking they can see the future they'll be competing in. And once they've tricked themselves into seeing the road to the future as a nice, straight line, it's not a big leap of faith to start believing they are in control of the way the future will turn out.

However, by basing their view of tomorrow on the lay of the land today, there's a good chance that they will also base important decisions on the assumption that they know how their future business environment will look, when in fact that environment may be radically different from their expectations—and not because the variables they projected evolved differently, but because entirely different factors came into play that they hadn't anticipated and hadn't even thought about.

Instead of developing in a nice straight line, the road to the future twists and turns. It's forked, bumpy, and full of potholes and unexpected dead ends. The guardrails are flimsy. And there are very few road signs to guide you. You have to navigate much of it without a map. To paraphrase the late, great Peter Drucker, predicting the future based on extrapolating from the present is like driving down this road at night while looking out the back window.

Instead, we need to figure out a way to see where the road ahead is leading. That way is called *scenario planning*.

Don’t Forecast the Future—Anticipate It

If one of your tasks as a manager is to help ensure that your organization remains competitive 5 or even 10 years from today, then visualizing how the future may develop between now and then is not a meaningless parlor game; it’s a vital necessity. You need to understand today how your company is likely to be challenged when, tomorrow, the competitive landscape around you changes—and change it will!

But if forecasting isn’t the best way to visualize the future lay of the land, what is? Nobody has a crystal ball. Is there really a way to see what’s ahead?

Yes and no.

No, because, well, as I said: Nobody has a crystal ball. You will never be able to see with absolute certainty today the one and only future that will materialize even next Tuesday, let alone 10 years from now.

Yes, because a methodology does exist that can help you visualize the future. Or to be more precise, it doesn’t help you see *the* future, but *a range of alternative futures.* Each one of these futures, called *scenarios*, could plausibly emerge, depending on how developments that are going on today continue to unfold. None of the futures is guaranteed to come to pass, of course. And in fact, they are not likely to be very accurate, at least not in detail. But accuracy is not the objective. By creating several alternative visions that you believe have a reasonable chance of emerging, you are in a better position to prepare yourself and your organization for the flexibility you’ll need to face whichever future does, in fact, unfold.

The method is called *scenario planning*, and it’s a productive, creative, and even exciting way to develop the groundwork for a strategic plan that doesn’t bet the company’s future on the emergence of a single “most likely scenario” (i.e., one that’s largely extrapolated from today’s numbers).

Instead of relying on projections that basically paint a picture of your future business landscape as a variation on the way it currently looks, scenario planning challenges the very idea that there is *a* future that is “most likely” to emerge. Instead, it recognizes that at any point in time, there is not one *single* future that is certain to develop, but an array of possible futures that could potentially unfold. Which one actually does emerge depends on how trends that are happening all around us now play out, as well as on other potentially significant events and changes that might occur along the way.

The outcome of the scenario planning process is a portfolio of future scenarios, each representing a different way your business landscape could look in a few years, and not just the landscape, but also the players who inhabit it—your competitors, customers, suppliers, employees, and other stakeholders. The scenarios will naturally differ from each other in some key aspects, probably even dramatically so, but in its essential makeup, each one will be realistic and entirely possible, given your reading of today’s trends. Based on these different scenarios, you and your planning team can then sit down and formulate more flexible strategies that ensure your organization has the agility to compete in whichever future does in fact come to pass—even one that is different again from the scenarios envisaged.

The key benefit of the process is therefore not that it reveals tomorrow’s deep mysteries to you. Alas, the unknown will remain unknown. Rather, what scenario planning does do is open your eyes to different ways the future might (i.e., *could*) develop, and with these insights, you’re more likely to make more flexible, more thoughtful, and *better* decisions today.

“But Our Projections Were Right!”

When Being Right Isn’t Enough

It may be a tired cliché, but over time, constant change is about the only thing you can count on in your business landscape. Unfortunately, conventional forecasting gives you only a dim idea of how different the future environment may be that’s in store for you. It can’t capture the full extent of the changes that *could* take place—some of them monumental in terms of a company’s future success. . . or failure.

With a few rare exceptions, when a company fails, it’s not because it didn’t project next year’s interest rates accurately, or get the price of a barrel of oil right. More often, a company goes out of business because of its inability to visualize how fundamentally its competitive landscape would change for the worse if an unanticipated new technology were to arrive on the scene, if a new competitor were to appear, or a restrictive new regulation were to be put in place. Or the company simply didn’t have the imagination to recognize changing market preferences—that is, needs that would be better fulfilled by someone else.

Taken by surprise, a firm in this situation usually tries to react, but sometimes it's just too late. The corporate graveyard is full of companies that were unprepared for changes in their business landscape, among them:

- **Polaroid.** For 50 years, the name Polaroid was synonymous with instant photography. The company declared bankruptcy in 2001, having failed to anticipate the advent of a new kind of photography—digital—that really *was* instant and didn't require that you shell out money for film.
- **Sun Microsystems.** Failed, you say? Sun was acquired by Oracle in 2010 for $7.4 billion, which doesn't sound like a failure. But that amount pales in comparison to its peak valuation of over $200 billion a few years earlier. Even though it was one of the great innovators during the IT boom of the 1980s and 1990s, Sun failed to adapt its strategy from a focus on hardware to one on software; as a result of its hardware fixation, in the words of one of its own executives, "We did not understand the economic disruptive force of either Intel or open source until it was too late."

- **Swissair.** For decades, Swissair was considered one of the world's best airlines. However, it was pursuing a cash-intensive strategy of snapping up smaller regional airlines in Europe when two factors came into play that the company hadn't foreseen. First was the launch of budget carrier EasyJet, which undercut Swissair's much more expensive fares and took passenger traffic away. Second were the terror attacks on September 11, 2001. Air travel was hit hard, and Swissair's profitability and cash flow, already weakened, suffered a catastrophic blow. Unable to make debt payments and unexpectedly cut off from additional funding by its largest bank (a third nasty surprise), the airline's fleet was grounded, and within six months the once-proud carrier went into liquidation.
- **Borders.** Once the pioneer of the "big-box" book-retailing concept, Borders closed its doors for good in 2011. The company wasn't able to adapt to two changes brought about by the Internet: competition from online booksellers and the rise of the e-book. "I'll miss them," said one customer, "but I'm not going to buy another paperback in my life. There's no reason anymore." Could Borders have adapted to this sea change in the way people read? We'll never know, although rival retailer Barnes & Noble seems to be managing all right for the time being.
- **Napster.** Napster may seem an odd example to include on such a list, since the company was essentially shut down by lawsuits aiming to stop the infamous peer-to-peer file sharing service from distributing copyrighted music illegally. But could there be a clearer case of management failing to foresee a critical change looming in its legal environment?

In the annals of corporate history, sadder words than these may be hard to imagine: "We didn't have a plan for X. And then X happened."

It’s a Leadership Issue

How can you lead if you can’t see where you’re heading?

As I noted in the Introduction, Albert Einstein didn’t find it very compelling to waste his time worrying about the future. For him, it was the present, and all the knowledge that can be gleaned right now, that held more interest. Being a scientist, this was apparently his default way of looking at the world. The present matters. The future, Einstein must have thought, can wait.

This unfortunate Einsteinian attitude would make for a serious leadership shortcoming in a manager. In business, someone who thought this way wouldn’t be able to lead his or her organization much further than the company cafeteria, to say nothing of leading that organization into the great unknown—the future. How can you make ambitious plans for your organization 5 or 10 years from now and convince your colleagues (not to mention your board) to support your vision, if your time horizon doesn’t stretch beyond 6:00 p.m.?

Such a manager would forever be *reacting* to events instead of *anticipating* them. And that is the key skill you need as a business leader to maximize your company’s chances of success over the long term: the ability to *anticipate the changes* that could emerge in your landscape tomorrow. Only with this understanding is it possible to confidently make the decisions that will help prepare your organization for the changes to come.

The essence of leadership, therefore, is to be constantly gaming the future—grasping its possibilities, communicating a vision of the role you want your organization to play in this new future landscape, and inspiring your team to help you make that vision a reality.

Scenario planning is therefore a critical tool for anyone who is not just managing, but also leading. It facilitates your ability to create a realistic vision for the future, as well as your ability to craft the strategies that will make you successful once you get there.

Scenarios ≠ Predictions!

Before we delve into scenario planning and how it works, it's important to dispel a potential misunderstanding.

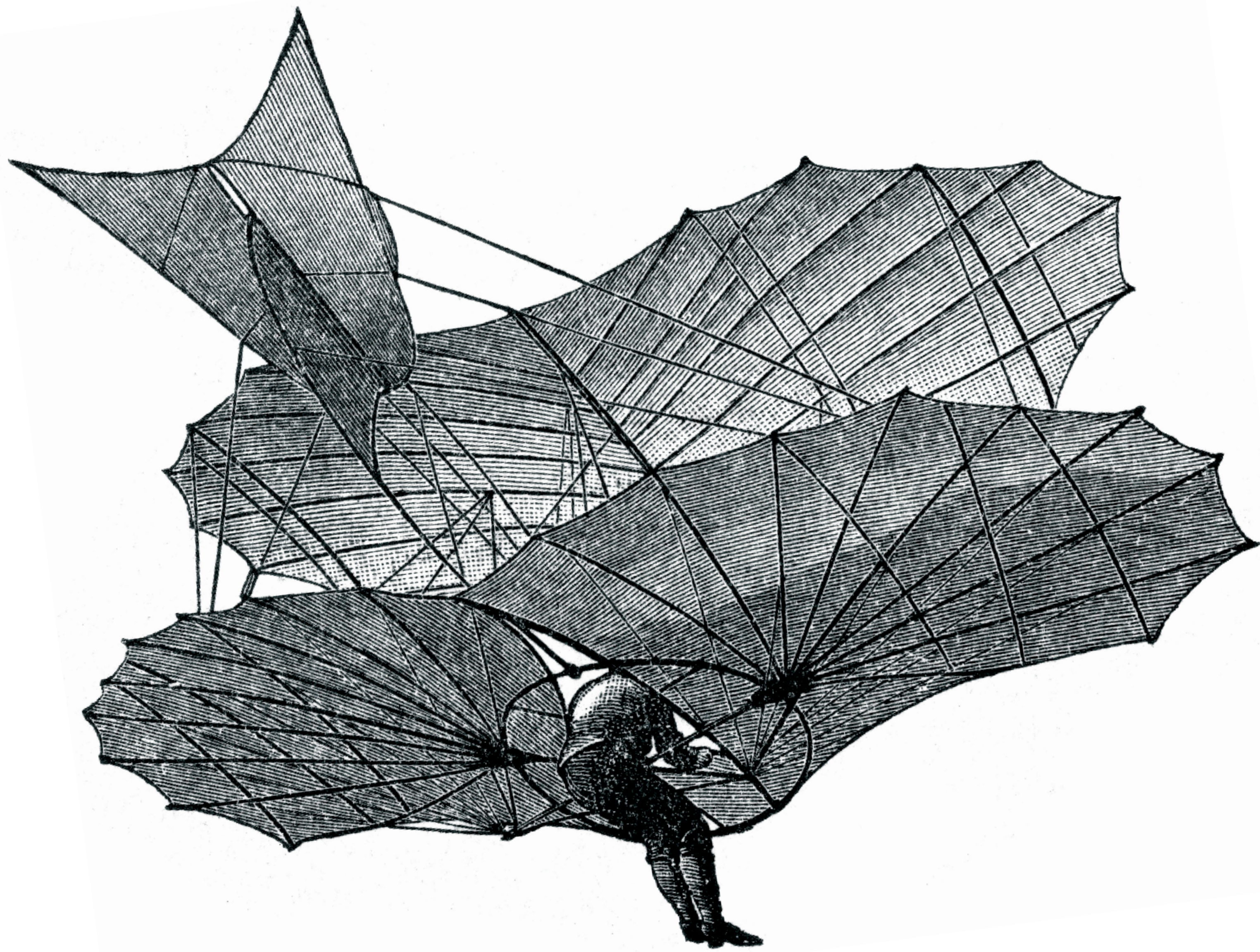
Scenario planning doesn't try to predict an ironclad picture of how the future will turn out. Only Nostradamus could do that.

Instead, scenario planning aims to illuminate and explore different ways the future *might* realistically develop. The scenarios generated by this thinking (always more than one, as we'll see in a moment) should be regarded as insightful indicators of what *could* come to pass in the future, depending on the breaks.

The idea is that this mix of trends and developments will make a particular kind of future more likely. Scenarios are therefore stories that reveal how a certain future constellation of market and environmental factors would look and feel.

But alas, a scenario is not a prophecy that any particular future will actually come to pass. If only it were that easy!

By going through a scenario planning process, you're acknowledging that predicting "the" future is not possible and that instead, there are myriad forces, interacting and feeding off each other, that will be driving your organization toward some unknown future. Think about that. It's a humbling admission to make, not always an easy one for a Master of the Universe who is used to calling all the shots in his or her company. To get the most out of scenario planning, you have to let the shots call themselves!



That Newfangled* Thing? Why, It's Just a Flash in the Pan!

How can you analyze a market that doesn't exist? The answer: You can't. Which helps explain why many companies fail to recognize the potential threat of a disruptive new product that comes along, nibbling away at their market share while flying below the radar (to mix a metaphor). The newcomer may be selling only to fringe customers at that early stage of the game. If they notice the upstart at all, the big established companies talk themselves into believing that it's not a serious threat, but just a flash in the pan.

However, this flash in the pan may move from fringe customers to the mainstream and succeed in supplanting the big companies' products, eventually even forcing the big guys to launch their own me-too version of the newfangled product, just to remain competitive. But by then it may be too late to regain their market leadership.

Why do companies deceive themselves this way? Clayton Christensen explored this failing in his book *The Innovator's Dilemma*. In a nutshell, here's what he says happens:

- Established leaders use conventional market research tools and techniques to gather feedback from their major customers. "Are you interested in this new gadget? No? Whew!" All's well, then. The problem is that by studying the reaction of their best customers to the new product, they aren't really finding out about its potential, because it's precisely these customers who will be among the *last* to make the switch to something new and disruptive. In other words, don't always trust your own market research. If you do, you're screwed!

- While the leading companies are busy making decisions based on standard metrics such as market size and growth, the disruptive new products may manage to encroach into the market on such a small scale that, at first, they don't set off any alarm bells. Almost by definition, upstarts are elusive and unpredictable. Conventional measuring tools can miss them, or at least fail to recognize the impact they are starting to have.

- Big companies, for the most part, also tend to focus on big markets. They have to; that's where they have to go for growth and high returns. Disruptive innovations, on the other hand, may start out selling to a small, low-margin segment of the market—one that's not only less visible but less attractive as well. What's more, upstarts may be willing to forego profits until they've gained a toehold in the business. The big companies simply don't notice what's happening until the threat to their market share has actually materialized.

All this boils down to one thing: Even very good forecasts made today will never capture the eventual impact tomorrow of a small, disruptive innovation. But a company that questions what *could* happen *if* a disruptive new product enters its market will be in a better position to respond to one if and when the situation comes up.

Organizations need to ask themselves these what-if questions on a regular basis. Once again, scenario planning to the rescue!

**Insert your own choice of "newfangled thing" here: personal computer, cable TV, digital camera, DVD, e-book, iPod. . .*

A BINARY FUTURE?

Imagine you're the CEO of a company that operates in an unusually simple environment: In this make-believe world, there is only one variable that is relevant to your ability to compete. Let's say this variable can become either red or yellow. If it's red, your company will be in great shape. But if it's yellow, you'll face an uphill struggle.

To make matters a little more interesting, imagine that for the moment, this red or yellow variable is a wishy-washy shade of orange, and you will know only one year from now whether the "red scenario" or the "yellow scenario" will prevail. One of them *will* prevail, however. You just don't know which one.

What kind of strategic plan would you formulate in this situation? If you're like most CEOs, you would recognize that it's very risky to bet the company's future on only one outcome. Instead, you would want to develop a strategy that maximizes your readiness for *either* red *or* yellow to emerge. This means devising a plan to assure you the flexibility and agility that you'll need to adapt quickly to whichever scenario actually materializes a year down the road.

In practice, what would this mean? Keeping your eyes open, making sure you're adept at recognizing when orange no longer looks quite so orange but is becoming a little more red or yellow than before, and having all the operational elements in place to take advantage of the favorable red scenario, if that's what happens, or to quickly put your defensive plan into action if the yellow scenario emerges instead.

In other words, you would not establish a plan based on projections of the current environment, but one based on the idea that the future could unfold in more than one way, resulting in alternative scenarios: a red one or a yellow one.

Let's look at what would happen if you did base your view of the future on projecting today's situation to tomorrow. Instead of arriving at two alternatives, red and yellow, your analysis of today's conditions would lead you to believe that what the future has in store is simply more orange.

However, we know (because we made up this example) that "orangeness" is just a temporary condition. In reality, one of the two scenarios, red or yellow, is going to dominate. If your strategy is predicated on the future being orange, you are going to be poorly positioned if the red scenario materializes, and possibly just as poorly positioned if the yellow one does.

Your planning team may try to convince you that orange will be the most likely scenario to develop. Why wouldn't they? Life has been orange so far. But betting on things to stay orange will guarantee you a suboptimal outcome, because either outcome (red *or* yellow) will take you by surprise. The result: You'll be scrambling to get a more appropriate strategy in place rather than calmly implementing one that anticipated the possibilities.

Today, your only problem is that you don't know which scenario will materialize. That's not an ideal situation to be in, but it isn't the end of the world. It just means that a good plan should try to accommodate both possibilities.

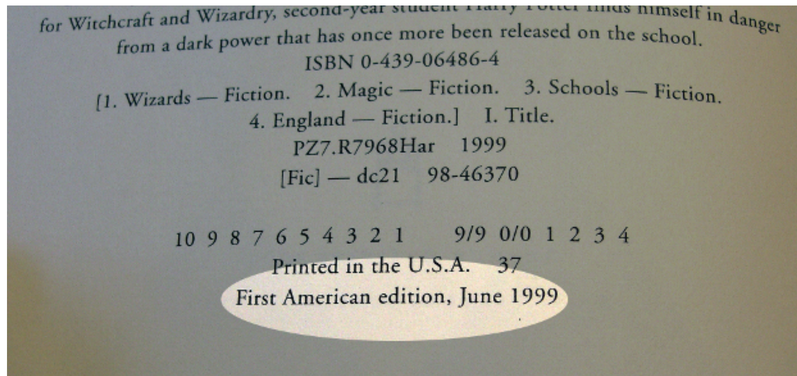
Obviously, this is a vastly oversimplified example. Real life is a little more complicated. But not always. Here's a real situation that closely mirrors this made-up example:

In 1999, my son Malcolm turned nine. For his birthday, he received a big hardcover novel from his aunt called *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. Who was this Harry Potter fellow? Apparently, another book about Harry and his friends had already been published, but in 1999, neither Malcolm nor I had heard of him yet.

Two years later, the first Harry Potter movie came out, and as everybody now knows (unless you've been living under a rock), Harry Potter became a global phenomenon. Malcolm, like every kid his age, was enthralled. But for one reason or another, the book remained unread on his shelf.

Three more years passed, and more books and movies appeared in the series. One day, Malcolm excitedly announced that he'd been on the Internet and discovered that his Harry Potter book had become a collectors' item. It turned out that his birthday present happened to be a first edition—and books just like his were being sold online for the princely sum of $300!

"Fantastic!" I said. *"So, are you going to sell it?"*


for Witchcraft and Wizardry, second-year student Harry Potter finds himself in danger
from a dark power that has once more been released on the school.
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Malcolm gave me one of those boy-Dad-are-you-ever-stupid looks. You see, he'd been doing some math. If the price of his book was $17.95 in 1999, and now (in 2004) it was worth $300, then it was a simple calculation to show that in 2014, the book's value would be $83,700. I may have raised an eyebrow at that point, but Malcolm carried on, unperturbed. "Dad, you won't believe it," he said, "but in 2024, the book will be worth $23,343,000! *I'll be rich*!" He began dancing around the room.

Alas, Malcolm had fallen into the dreaded extrapolation trap. (He had an excuse: He was 14.) The sad task fell to me to explain to him that yes, the value of the book had gone up very smartly since he first got it, but this linear growth wouldn't go on forever. Maybe, I suggested, he should work out a plan, a strategy, for getting the highest possible price for the book at some point in the future. I could help him. Why, we could conduct a scenario planning exercise!

So, that's what we did. First we defined our goal: to sell the book for as high a price as possible. In this sense, Malcolm's book was a kind of proxy for a "business" and we were trying to maximize its value. First, we had to define the value drivers of this business (i.e., the factors that determine its long-term chances of success). In Malcolm's case, that meant working out what conditions would have to be met for him to sell the book at the best price possible. Malcolm decided it all came down to two things: First, the book had to stay in pristine condition. That was the easy part; Malcolm was completely in control of the book's physical condition. The second factor was trickier, though. Harry Potter had to continue to be popular—wildly popular. How long would this remain the case? What popularity scenarios could unfold that would have an impact on the book's value?

We decided there were two likely scenarios for the future, a bit like the earlier example of red or yellow. Scenario one we called *Big Harry*. The Harry Potter phenomenon would stay big for the foreseeable future. In this scenario, the book would continue to go up in value.

Scenario two we called *Fade-Out*. Here, the Harry Potter phenomenon would diminish. In this case, the book would definitely go down in value—maybe very fast.

So, the flexible, value-maximizing strategy Malcolm had to pursue was now becoming clear. At the moment, with one blockbuster after another coming out, we were certainly experiencing the *Big Harry* scenario, so Malcolm's action plan was simply to keep the book safe and let its value go up and up on its own.

But sooner or later, *Fade-Out* would emerge—Harry Potter couldn't stay at the top of the best-seller lists forever. But when would this occur? We didn't know, but Malcolm had to be ready for it. And that meant reading the signals in the environment that would tell him when the scenarios were shifting.

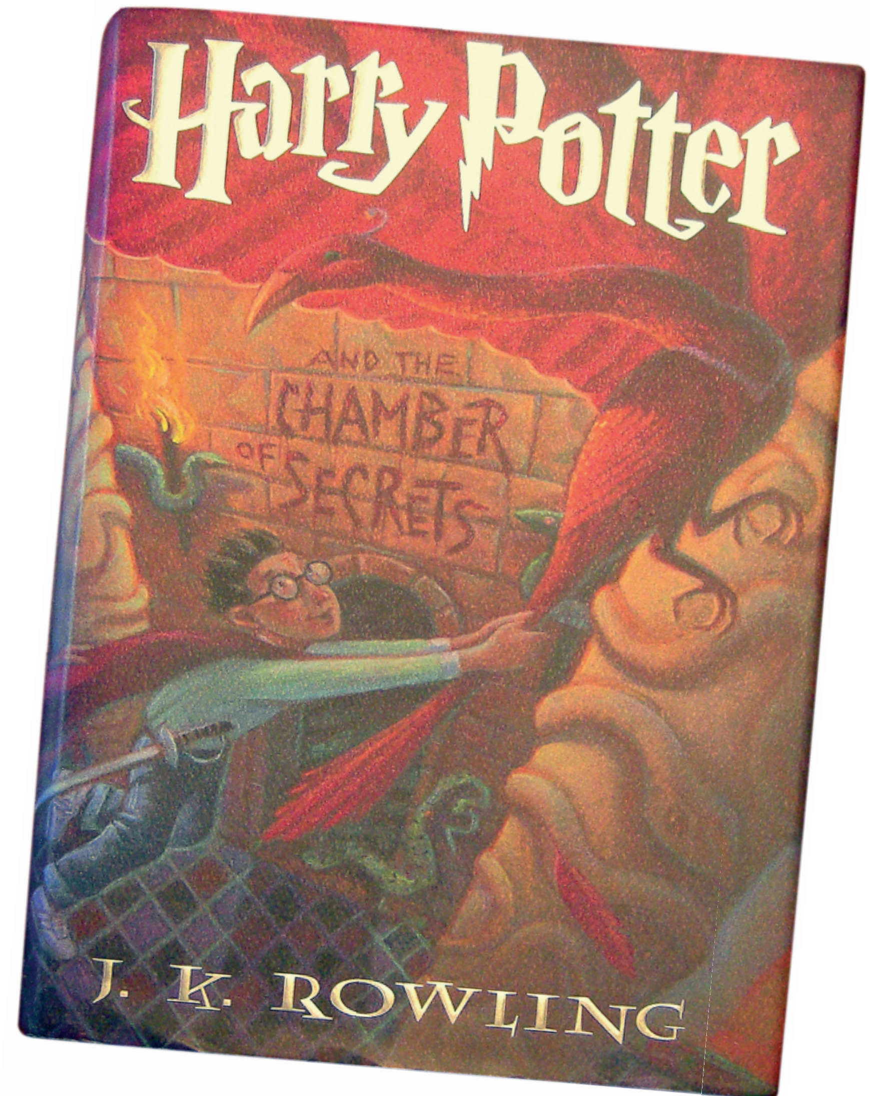
We had to identify what those signals might be. Here's what we came up with. First, as long as J. K. Rowling kept publishing new Harry Potter books that became instant best sellers, Malcolm knew that *Big Harry* was still the operative scenario. So, one signal that would indicate the scenarios were shifting would be if a new Harry Potter book came out that didn't sell as well as the previous books.

Second, we figured that the movies played an even bigger role than the books in keeping the Harry Potter flame burning bright. If ticket sales for the Harry Potter movies were an even better proxy for his popularity than book sales, we should keep an eye on this. We decided that if the box office receipts from any Harry Potter movie on its first weekend after release were lower than for the previous movie in the series, this would mean that *Fade-Out* had started and that it was time to sell the book before its value started falling.

Last, we knew that eventually there *would* be a final Harry Potter movie. In 2004, when we were having this discussion, we didn't know when that would be. Could Ms. Rowling write five more books? Ten? Twenty? We had no idea, but we knew (sad as it was to admit) that it couldn't go on forever. On the assumption that the *Fade-Out* scenario would begin, at the latest, sometime after the last movie in the series was released, Malcolm decided he would sell his First Edition within two months after the final movie came out.

For the next seven years, the Harry Potter machine kept pumping out books and movies, right on schedule. Each film was a blockbuster, so Malcolm stuck to his strategy of merely holding onto the book. He checked the collectibles websites and, sure enough, the book's value kept rising.

Finally, in the summer of 2011, the last Harry Potter movie came out—*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hollows, Part 2*. In line with the plan we'd worked out way back in 2004, Malcolm, now a young man of 21, put the book up for sale on the Internet, and a few weeks later sold it for $1,600, or 89 times the 1999 retail price.



WHAT'S PLANNING ALL ABOUT, ANYWAY?

"I can't see the future, but I have to plan for it anyway." That's the CEO's classic dilemma.

How do you resolve this paradox? In a perfect world, the logical thing to do would be to predict the future. Just get that right, and everything else falls into place. Sounds so simple! But this isn't a perfect world. Down here on planet Earth, how can anyone even dream of predicting the future, when all around us, everything is in a state of constant and ever-accelerating change? Like it or not, the future is, and always will be, unknowable.

But just because it's fraught with uncertainty doesn't absolve you of your responsibility to plan for it. What's the first thing you should do, other than consoling yourself with a stiff whisky? In my opinion, your first task is to make a mental leap. It's to face, and accept, the hard fact that if absolute predictions are impossible (and they are), then planning based on absolute predictions is useless.

Once you've accepted this fact, then real planning can begin. By "real planning" I mean that you have let go of the attempt to figure out how the future *will* turn out and instead focus on understanding how the future *could* turn out. Depending on how countless trends develop, all of which are completely unknown today, things *could* turn out very differently. Or, to put it another way, several futures are possible. Having taken this critically important idea on board, you will then see that planning isn't a question of *predicting* the future but *preparing* for it—no matter which future actually unfolds.

In this new mental framework, the function of planning is to explore these possible futures and then confidently take the steps needed to improve your organization's flexibility and responsiveness to the different opportunities and threats these futures may bring your way. Exploration plus preparation: *That's* what planning's all about.

The New Highway

Have you ever heard a story like this?

Bill's gas station was a thriving business, the only service station on the old highway north of town. But then a new Interstate bypass was built on the south side of town, and nobody used the old road anymore. Within six months, Bill's went belly-up.

Sound familiar?

Is your business as vulnerable as Bill's gas station? It could be, if its success heavily depends on just one or two elements of the business environment that you have little control over. If those elements change in some unfavorable way—*poof!*—you're gone.

Think about your company's vulnerabilities. Do you suffer from a potential weak spot that could put you out of business if one or two external factors unexpectedly changed for the worse?

What's *your* "new highway"? Shouldn't you know what it is? And shouldn't you have a plan ready in case that scenario comes about?

“Our lives are defined by opportunities, even the ones we **miss**.”

F. Scott Fitzgerald