

Best practice recommendation: Scenario workshops



Context and challenges

Scenario workshops are a well-documented and structured methodology, and through project-wide training and pilot trials, we applied this common ‘futures studies’ method to a range of hunting issues related to institutional change. This involved a series of workshops with stakeholders in game management in five countries. The aim of these workshops was the development of governance options for game management and hunting. This was a new method in the context of game management, and we have reflected on our experience of the workshops, providing best practice approaches for future researchers. Generating scenarios allows future possibilities to be investigated in a systematic manner, thus ‘clarifying present action in the light of possible and desirable futures’ (Durance and Godet, 2010). Furthermore, the scenario method deals with the uncertainty and complexity of human-environment problems with a range of players, providing a platform to anticipate the impact on different stakeholders, were certain governance options pursued. Thus, scenarios are not about the likelihood of what will happen in the future, but instead provide the opportunity to evaluate a range of different possible futures. Trade-offs between meaningfulness of the process for stakeholder participants and methodological strictness led to major differences in the implementation of the method across study areas. Nonetheless, scenario workshops proved to be a helpful tool with which to break down problems and generate discussion (Fig. 1).

Best practice approaches – our experience

Crucial for a successful workshop process was its situation within a so-called ‘window of opportunity’ – or period of uncertainty with institutional change. Utilising a window of opportunity within which to undertake this process ensures that it is more likely to prove useful and influential to participants, increasing ‘stakeholder buy-in’, given the tangible opportunity for workshop outcomes to inform policy development or other institutional change. For example in our study case Ethiopia, the upcoming revision of the legislation on revenue sharing from hunting provided an excellent opportunity to use the scenario method to review the governance of revenue sharing to date, and develop solutions for problems that had emerged. It appeared that if the participants had a high level of influence (i.e. if they were the policy makers themselves, initiating the institutional change), the value of the workshop process increased. Similarly, it was most meaningful with a mix of participant interests, rather than one dominant group. Therefore, it seems key to ensure that a representative range of interests attend the scenario workshops.

Furthermore, it seemed that the workshop method succeeded where stakeholders were happy to engage with the scenarios and explore hypothetical futures, which depended on clarity and transparency in the process of scenario co-construction. Finally, trust in the facilitator was a key point – for example, in



Figure 1: The stages of the scenario workshop method

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Slovenia, participant concern that scenario discussion was not achieving concrete actions was overcome due to the facilitator being a highly-respected researcher in her field. Building a rapport initially was important in creating good working relationships and maintaining stakeholder commitment to the process.

Conclusions for future research and practice

The scenario workshops were a good chance to 'confront' challenging issues, and there was evidence that it strengthened stakeholder networks through exchange of information and experience. Building and analysing the set of scenarios meant discussion could be kept at an abstract level (assisting agreement with distance from day-to-day reality) and it also allowed participants to at times 'speak out of turn' and not always toe the official organizational line, given that they were exploring potential alternative futures, and 'without consequence'.

The scenario workshop process illustrates several key principles that are central for positive stakeholder engagement in research, including transdisciplinarity, use of participatory processes, transparency in method and outcomes, and the importance of disseminating results for building trust between research/stakeholder communities. Social learning was considered a key theme, with further research required

regarding its achievement and measurement through the scenario workshop process. However, in Scotland, a stakeholder admitted that whilst the scenario method had provided a good opportunity for open discussion, it had also highlighted a gap between the language of the scientific community and that of practitioners and industry, which must be overcome in-order to co-construct and disseminate future research.

The governance of hunting and game management is complex, involves multi-players, with social, economic and environmental consequences; and can be rich in power struggles. Through the scenario workshops, participants could consider what they wanted from institutional change, and it gathered all the 'players' and gave them an equal voice. Furthermore, it provided a platform to anticipate the reaction to impacts on different stakeholders, were certain governance options pursued.

Reference

Durance, P. and Godet, M. (2010) Scenario building: Uses and abuses, *Technological Forecasting & Social Change* 77: 1488–1492.

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