

ABOUT A TEXT ABOUT A TOOL: EXPLORING SHELL'S EXPLORER'S GUIDE

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About a text about a tool: Exploring Shell's Explorer's Guide

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About a text about a tool: Exploring Shell's Explorer's Guide**Abstract**

Shell's Explorer's Guide is a publicly available document whose avowed purpose is to disseminate the practice of scenario planning. Inspired by deconstruction, an exploration of the Guide finds a persuasive but not convincing rhetoric. The text's persuasiveness rests with calls to universal values and resonance with historical achievements such as the discovery of America, operated through an abundant use of metaphors, including the map metaphor while the reader's gaze is highly disciplined by prescribed reading rules. Given the importance of scenario planning in the practice of strategy, it is suggested that future studies zoom in on the role of facilitators and do not shy away from power issues.

Keywords: Future; metaphor; rhetoric; scenario planning; strategy tool.

Introduction

“Because the way you tell the story influences the way people think about the future”

Davis-Floyd (1998: 154)

Jeremy B. Bentham’s letter of presentation for Shell’s Explorer’s Guide ends with an intent for the document: *“I hope this book will inspire and encourage you and your organisation to build scenarios and embark on your own exploration of the future”* (Shell, 2008: 5).

In the context of a practice where ignorance about the social construction of the future has not prevented the widespread acceptance of scenarios for the practice of strategy and because the epistemological grounding of futuring practices has been in question for decades (Bell & Olick, 1989) and no satisfactory answer formulated, I started this study of Shell’s Explorer’s Guide with the motivation to get a grip on the epistemological grounding of scenario planning as defined by Shell. But instead, I found a rhetoric of legitimacy. Hence, this paper is asking the question: How does Shell’s Explorer’s Guide entice its readers to adopt scenarios? This exploratory study focuses on a text about a tool and more precisely on the first twenty pages of this ninety-eight page book – profusely illustrated and using limited technical jargon – which is explicitly dedicated to an exposition of why scenarios should be used. Just as an annual report’s letter to shareholders can be seen as framing the reading of the subsequent financial data, the Guide’s presentation of scenarios frames the understanding of the subsequent exposition of the approach.

Scenario planning as a strategic tool has caught the attention of strategy-as-practice scholars whose interests focus on its actual use in strategic planning (Hodgkinson, Whittington, Johnson & Schwarz, 2006; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2009). Acknowledging the benefit of comparing intended and actual uses, I want to start my examination of this strategic tool a step behind, and concern myself with how the intended use is being presented. Perhaps as with any management tool disseminated through consultants, legitimacy or the appearance thereof is paramount. In the specific case of futuring practices for strategic management, Wong's (2008) ethnography has shown that consultants' ability to sell their futuring expertise rests not on their knowledge base but rather on their capacity to convince potential customers that the knowledge produced is credible, again pointing to the importance of examining rhetorical devices.

Amidst a context where first, crises appear to make scenario use swell and second, scholarly and less scholarly discourses advocate a necessary turn towards a future orientation while assimilating the past to a dangerous kind of knowledge (See for instance, Carter, Clegg & Kornberger, 2008: 72 and referring to Taleb, 2007) and third, evidence of scenario planning's helpfulness in increasing organizations' long-term survival in the face of uncertain futures is acknowledged as "*anecdotal*" (Hodgkinson & Healey, 2008: 435), I contend there is a scholarly need for scrutinizing scenario planning and other futuring practices' claims.

In the following pages, I develop my contribution to the understanding of the rhetoric mobilized by Shell's Explorer's Guide by articulating two themes: First, I provide some background on scenarios as tools for strategy practice. Second, I briefly explore the link between rhetoric and the adoption of management tools. In the subsequent sections of the article, I will say a few words on

methods before presenting my findings. I will review the text for its calls to reason and emotions as well as its use of metaphors in order to understand how it entices its audience to adopt scenarios.

Scenarios: Tools in the practice of strategy

A recent survey of UK managers shows that scenario planning is the third analytical tool most used in strategy workshops (Hodgkinson, Whittington, Johnson & Schwarz, 2006). Although scenario planning did not make it onto the 2009 Bain's Top 10 Tools list¹, this last survey² of more than 1400 executives from around the world shows that, between 2001 and 2006, close to seventy percent of respondents made use of scenario and contingency planning tools, an unprecedented level. However, use has returned close to its long time base of around forty percent in 2008, perhaps giving credit to Rigby & Bilodeau's (2007) assessment that crises such as 9/11 may explain the surge in use of such tools. In addition to corporate settings and the military, scenario planning is now increasingly conducted in pluralistic contexts for public policy on matters such as climate change, sustainability or the emergence of new technologies, as well as academic research.

Scenario planning uses workshops either to build scenarios or to disseminate them and again, the workshop setting for strategy practice has just recently become actively researched (Hodgkinson, Whittington, Johnson & Schwarz, 2006; Whittington, Molloy, Mayer & Smith, 2006). Benefits of

¹ www.bain.com/management_tools/home.asp (Page accessed June 8, 2010).

² www.bain.com/management_tools/tools_scenario_contingency.asp?groupCode=2 (Page accessed June 8, 2010).

strategy workshops, including those using scenario planning, have been reported as improving communication and co-ordination of strategy (Hodgkinson et al., 2006: 486). However, a more critical stance has been espoused by Spee and Jarzabkowski (2009: 225) who tackle head on the power dimension of tools reminding us that “*While tools provide a common language in which to have a strategy conversation (Barry and Elmes, 1997; van der Heijden, 2005), this does not necessarily indicate shared meanings*”. Even more troubling perhaps is the study of Denis, Langley & Rouleau (2006: 349) of how a tool for strategizing, here “*numbers*”, can be used to manipulate stakeholders as long as the tool reconciles a diversity of values and interests, is “*embedded in shared systems of meaning*” and whose practice thereof “*support the legitimacy of their promoters as disinterested advocates for the collective good*”.

Two reasons militate for the specific examination of Shell’s Explorer’s Guide. First, if the history of scenarios is often recounted as having three separate strands³ - The French “Prospective” tradition with Pierre Berger, Bertrand de Jouvenel and Jacques Lesourne; the work of Herman Kahn at Rand Corporation; as well as that of Pierre Wack (1985a; 1985b) then Head of Business Environment Division at Royal Dutch Shell - Shell remains “*the foremost exponent of scenario planning within the corporate sector*” (Grant, 2003: 493). Second, Shell has been and remains instrumental in the dissemination of this practice directly or indirectly through the influence of ex-employees who have become scenario planning consultants, including those of Global Business Network.

³ For an account acknowledging both de Jouvenel and the Rand Corporation but devoid of references to Shell, see Bell (1996).

Finally, my curiosity was aroused by the contrast I found between the account of the Guide and that of the actual writing of scenarios at Shell as found in Davis-Floyd's (1998) interviews with Betty Sue Flowers, a professional writer hired by Shell for its 1992 and 1995 scenarios. Flowers candidly depicts "*quite a political process*" involving the active participation of numerous Shell members in the crafting of stories including their daily review of Flowers' prose "*Because the way you tell the story influences the way people think about the future*" (Davis-Floyd, 1998:158, 154).

Rhetoric and the adoption of management tools

A previous study of discourse surrounding another popular management tool, the Balanced Scorecard, recognizes the importance of both "*rhetoric and sound argumentation*" in influencing the adoption of the tool by a managerial audience (Nørreklit, 2003: 592). Attempting to characterize the kind of discourse that appeals to managers, Nørreklit (2003) distinguishes between two types of rhetoric: a convincing rhetoric based on sound argumentation and a persuasive rhetoric, which fails to use sound argumentation and relies predominantly on calls to the audience's emotions, a characteristic of management guru texts about tools and theories. Both types of rhetoric make different use of Aristotle's three means of persuasion located with the speaker (ethos), the subject (logos) and the audience (pathos). A convincing rhetoric would be constructed by a speaker who appears credible through what he says and who uses calls to reason (logos) more than calls to emotions (pathos). By contrast, persuasive rhetoric tends to rely predominantly on calls to emotions and fails to build a sound argumentation (logos). In the case of management tools, soundness of argumentation may be conveyed through unbiased assertions, robust methodology and extensive empirical data that support claims and should be devoid of

logical transgressions and contradictions. And while calls to emotions may be present, their predominance over logos would tend to make the text “*emotional, imprecise and open to interpretation*” (Nørreklit, 2003: 595).

In his letter, Jeremy B. Bentham acknowledges the Guide’s use of metaphors to explain “*how we think about building scenarios*”. Metaphors are a particular kind of tropes or “*figures of speech in which words are used in non-literal ways*”. Tropes participate in the construction of rhetoric and it is suggested that they “*project resonance and dissonance*” (Oswick, Putnam & Keenoy, 2004: 105, 106). For instance, metaphor can be seen as the dominant form of resonance tropes, functioning through resemblance or comparison such that it ties “*the unfamiliar and abstract to the familiar and concrete*” (Oswick et al., 2004: 107), a relationship that tends to reinforce a paradigm or argumentation. Irony may be considered the dominant form of dissonance tropes whose function rests on ambiguities and contradictions and reveals incongruity which would tend to disrupt or delegitimize a paradigm. Tropes can and are strategically mobilized and given the power of their sense-making imagery can be expected to illuminate, obscure and confound.

Methods

In my reading of this book, I am guided by the spirit of deconstruction which is a textual analysis approach that purposely reveals alternative interpretations of a text without making claims about a single truthful one or about authors’ intents (Martin, 1990). Deconstruction has been applied to documents that can be viewed as part of a body of knowledge such as Sergi (2010) deconstructing multiple versions of the PMBOK introduction or Beath & Orlikowski (1994) examining an information systems methodology as well as to foundational texts such as Kilduff’s

(1993) work on *Organizations*, March & Simon's (1958) seminal book or Kilduff and Kelemen's (2004) deconstruction of Chester Barnard's (1938) *The Functions of the Executive* or again Bowring's (2000) work on Meyer and Rowan's (1977) *Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony*. But, to my knowledge this approach has yet to be applied to methods or foundational texts about futuring practices.

I chose to focus on the first twenty pages of this ninety-eight page book because those pages specifically announce a rationale behind the use of scenarios, which makes them an appropriate material to answer the research question about how Shell entices its audience to take up scenarios. Although the Guide is profusely illustrated, I have not tackled a visual analysis which could be the topic for a whole other study.

I chose to make this document part of my study of the epistemological grounding of futuring practices after having broadly reviewed its content. I was expecting to apply a utilitarian reading, examining it at face value for its content about how to use scenarios for strategic thinking. The idea of a second, metaphoric reading, was sparked by the conscious decision on the part of the author of the Guide to “use a metaphor of exploration and map-making to describe how we think about building scenarios” (Shell, 2008: 6). A metaphor “uses language to tie the unfamiliar and abstract to the familiar and concrete”. Because metaphors can also be seen as one of “the four primary or master tropes” put to use for varied intents including “to persuade and influence clients in the consultant industry” (Oswick & al., 2004: 107, 105, 112), I decided that the third reading would be a political reading.

I soon found myself incapable of going ahead with a utilitarian reading, overwhelmed as I was by the ample use of metaphors in the text. So instead, I decided to adopt a dictation strategy, assessing the Guide out loud, taping my observations and using this material to pursue my thinking and feed other reflections and associations.

I first abided by the reading rules prescribed in the Guide attempting to see where the reader's gaze was directed. I followed this by repeated readings that would transgress the prescriptions. Once I identified the excerpts at the top of pages as claims, I was able to look at the text as supporting evidence for them. I organized my findings in a Power Point presentation that I shared with departmental colleagues for feedback.

Findings

I will first review my general impressions from this exploration of the Guide. Then I will analyze the Guide in terms of logos, pathos and metaphors in order to show the most salient rhetorical devices that help anchor the legitimacy of scenarios as a futuring tool. Finally, I will offer additional interpretation as to how these aspects of the text work in unison.

Several features of the guide are striking. First, this is a well crafted document that makes a succinct and careful use of words, reminiscent of a similar care put into Shell's scenarios as mentioned by Flowers: "*These are highly nuanced stories so every word mattered in the summary book*" (Davis-Floyd, 1998: 150). Its text is intricately and abundantly weaved with metaphors such as those of the "*journey*", "*navigation*", "*exploration*", "*maps*" as well as "*map-*

making". In particular, the map metaphor is detailed at length and parallels are drawn between graphic and mental maps (Shell, 2008: 13).

Second, the Guide also makes use of dualities such as a focus on both individuals and universal history linked through the map metaphor, "*analytical structures*" are combined with "*intuition*", human reason with emotions, "*images*" with "*numbers*", the past and future opposed, the former both untrustworthy and a reference, the latter requiring to be attended to despite generating anxiety. Still, the tight weaving of calls to both reason and emotions (logos and pathos) left me with a sense of unease. In addition, whereas the text conveys a sort of openness to ideas, the act of reading is tightly constrained by the guiding rules procured to the reader in an early section of the book.

Thirdly, as just alluded to, the reader is instructed to follow rules to read the document: On the left page, she will find "*intent*" followed by "*examples*" on the right hand page. My own repeated exploration of the Guide showed me that abiding by these rules may tend to somewhat prevent the questioning of evidence supporting the claim which appears on the top of the left page. I have grouped an overview of section titles, claims and examples under Addendum I. Rather than logical arguments (logos), the five left-right narratives (presented over ten pages) associate assertions with testimonials, metaphors and calls to emotions (pathos), blurring frontiers between individuals and organisations.

Noteworthy is also the fact that authors refrain from formulating any hint that the scenario approach might fail. Rather, scenarios are cast as resolving or overcoming difficult and

problematic situations such as cognitive flaws or biases, anxiety about the future and uncertainties, limitations of expert knowledge and of discipline-based research as well as emotionally-charged discussions, conflicts and dilemmas. There is an overall tone of harmony which contrasts with Flowers' account of a messier process. Perhaps, contributing to this harmony is the disclaimer about what scenarios are not: "*a consensus view of the future*", "*predictions*", descriptions of "*the implications of scenarios*" or prescriptions for how users must respond to them. Hence, the one-sided account of scenarios and what could be assessed as a veiled evasion of responsibility tend to limit the Guide's credibility (ethos) and draws it closer to the discourse of promotional material.

In the subsequent part of the findings, I will present my analysis of the Guide in terms of logos, pathos and metaphors. With calls to reason constructed on the basis of unsubstantiated claims and an overall tone of appealing to universal emotions, it should become evident that this text's balance is tipped over towards pathos with respect to logos. Although, this state of affairs may make for an appealing and persuasive document, it falls short of qualifying as a convincing document (Nørreklit, 2003).

Each of the following paragraphs on logos, pathos and metaphors will tackle their own two themes. Calls to reason will be illustrated with first, claims about the benefits of scenarios and second, the distancing of scenarios from forecasting. Calls to emotions will be illustrated with first, the choice of the audience and second, universal emotions. Finally, I will show the abundant use of metaphors as well as zoom in on the spatial metaphor of the future.

Logos

Claims about scenarios' benefits are supported mainly by other assertions and by Shell's self-testimonial (See Addendum I). The Guide does not present references to published studies or to empirical data. Rather, assertions are intricately woven into the tapestry of the narrative relying at least partly on metaphors. The casting of scenarios is in line with the epic achievements of Columbus and Ptolemy. They are portrayed as overcoming or resolving numerous problematic situations found in making decisions and thinking about the future such as cognitive flaws or biases, anxiety about the future, limitations of expert knowledge and of discipline-based research as well as conflict and dilemmas and strong emotions about the future. No small feat! Self-testimonial examples refer to Shell's own global scenarios as well as Jeremy B. Bentham's letter testifying to the fact that "*Shell has been working with scenarios for almost 40 years, and we are still learning*" (Shell, 2008: 5). Hence, scenarios' credibility rests on Shell's authority and experience communicated with a hint of humility. Of course, there is no mention of any debate in the scholarly literature as to how scenarios' effectiveness should be assessed or to any qualms Shell itself might have had in continuing to use scenarios over the course of its history.

The credibility of the scenario approach is also portrayed as resting on the failures of another futuring tool, forecasting. The Guide carefully distances scenarios from forecasting. This is achieved through the example "*Mapping uncertainty*" (Shell, 2008: 15) which presents a graph shown as evidence of the failures of forecasting in anticipating oil prices from 1981 to 1995 along with a supporting narrative that disparages the "*fascination with forecasting*", a tool associated with a narrow point of view that does not accommodate uncertainties. There is no

mention of the necessity to analyze limitations of both approaches. Rather the exposition that forecasting has failed in the past suffices to warrant the use of scenarios.

Pathos

I found ambiguous how the Guide identifies its target audience, oscillating between a management audience interested in scenarios and “*people*” of all sorts caring about their personal growth. Indeed, this ambiguity is first woven through two sentences provided with a prominent position, on the inside front cover of the guide. The first sentence identifies “*people who would like to build and use scenarios, and also for those who want to enhance their scenario thinking skills*”, which is to be expected for a guide about a management tool although the word “*people*” is substituting for any other word that would indicate a business role: manager, executive, planner or consultant for instance. However the second sentence brings in a personal angle: “*We visualise our audience as people who are curious by nature, who want to make a difference, and who are highly motivated to acquire a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them*”.

The virtual absence of technical jargon is coherent with a target audience of non-specialists. This does not preclude other parts of the text at hinting to an audience having some organisational link. For instance, Jeremy B. Bentham’s letter does state: “*I hope this book will inspire and encourage you and your organisation to build scenarios and embark on your own exploration of the future.*” (Shell, 2008: 5) or in the section on how to use the guide, individuals involved in working with scenarios: “*This book is intended to be of relevance to those wishing to undertake scenario projects.*” (Shell, 2008: 6).

The frontier between the individual and the collective is further blurred through the use of collective forms such as “we”, “us” and “our” (Shell, 2008: 14, 16), culminating in the use of the term “human beings” as in: “*Most human beings go to the opposite extreme: uncertainty makes most people profoundly uncomfortable and we prefer to ignore it*”, invoking a universal experience and universal emotions and then bringing this to a closer group, “we” who are reading the Guide (Shell, 2008: 14).

The rhetorical strategy of the collective “we” has two further effects: First, it obscures the political process for any idea or mindset to bridge the gap between individual and group levels. For instance, on page 12 under the “*Confronting assumptions*” section organisational mental maps are naturally equated to individual ones and the political process relegated to one of comparing assumptions:

“When organisations or individuals make decisions, they tend to do so on the basis of their ‘mental map’ of the future. People can only have a partial understanding of their context, and this helps to shape their particular map of the future, influencing their assumptions about which aspects of the future are important to the choices they face. Until we compare our assumptions with those of others, we often don’t even know we have such a map, let alone what is distinctive about it.”

Second, the multiple references about people’s shared experience, characteristics and flaws are more than just mere calls to individual emotions rather they are calls to essentialism or “*a micro theory, an appeal to a fundamental essential of human character*” (Boje, 1995:1025) which not

only engages the audience in the content of the text at an emotional level but as well comforts them in thinking that their experience, including their flaws, are shared by their fellow humans, as for instance in the following examples: “*We all face decisions that prove to be turning points in our lives*”, “*Most human beings go to the opposite extreme: uncertainty makes most people profoundly uncomfortable and we prefer to ignore it*” (Shell, 2008: 12, 14). What is implied is that scenarios by overcoming these difficulties can be applied in all settings: Businesses, NGOs, governments, schools etc.

Metaphors

There is an abundance of metaphors in the Guide. Scenarios are explained through the metaphors of journey, navigation, map, map-making and exploration. These metaphors are cast in a heroic past of the discovery of America by Columbus and the rediscovery of Ptolemy’s maps during the Renaissance and its impact on the discovery of “*another half of the world*” (Shell, 2008: 17). The acknowledgement of the detrimental consequences of map-making on the silencing of Native American naming of places explored by Europeans saves this epic narrative from being totally one-sided.

Not only are metaphors used, they are explicitly acknowledged as communication tools. Jeremy B. Bentham devotes a whole paragraph, about a fifth of his presentation letter, to rendering explicit the use of metaphors in the Guide (Shell, 2008:5):

In this book, we use a metaphor of exploration and map-making to describe how we think about building scenarios. Like a set of maps describing different aspects of a landscape,

scenarios provide us with a range of perspectives on what might happen, helping us to navigate more successfully. Exploration - of a territory or the future - involves both analytical thinking rooted in whatever facts are clear, and also informed intuition.

The apparent transparency about the communication of what scenarios are is pushed one step further in the text from a page titled “*mental maps*” that reveals how maps work, how they can be seen as bordering on fallacy and used to manipulate: maps are not “*objective*” even if “*we like to think*” so, “*maps both codify a particular perspective on reality, and, in turn, influence our view of the landscapes they represent*” and “*a mapmaker deliberately concentrates on one aspect of a territory*” (Shell, 2008: 13).

The metaphors of maps and map-making, navigation and exploration contribute to naturalizing the spatial metaphor of the future. One notes that the title of Jeremy B. Bentham’s presentation letter is “*Exploring the Future*” and the letter starts with: “*The future is “terra incognita”*”. The future becomes a “*territory*”, an “*unmapped zone full of uncertainty*” that scenarios help explore just as maps helped explorers in the past (Shell, 2008: 5). Once the spatial metaphor of the future has been drawn into the narrative, scenarios can be cast as being as helpful as maps without being “*accurate descriptions of future events*”. (Shell, 2008: 17).

In this last part of the findings section, I offer a reconstruction of the workings of the Guide’s rhetoric. I suggest mechanisms of the text and acknowledge that they lie beneath the surface of the text and are not readily apparent to the reader. Of course, I do not claim that this is a right or sole interpretation of the workings of text.

I want to stress two points. First, Shell's Explorer's Guide offers a model of the habitual decision-making process about the future and second, it shows how scenarios are said to improve the decision-making model (See Addenda II and III for specifics).

To start with, the Guide defines what a decision-making process without scenarios is. The demonstration rests on the fact that the process is bound to produce failure, the main culprit being the human flaw of "*blind spots*" (Shell, 2008: 16) which are generated by emotions, viewed negatively, as well as expertise and disciplinary knowledge. Indeed, the Guide's bashing of forecasting supports the other bashing, that of expert and disciplinary knowledge. In conjunction with blind spots, simplifications contribute to a diminished ability to understand and a partial view of the context.

As mentioned previously, the Guide's assertions and testimonials, or arguments from authority, as well as calls to emotions prepare readers to consider this narrative as truthful and trustworthy, dampening resistance and critical thinking. The metaphors fill out the void left by the lack of actual data to support the claims. Thus, the map metaphor used in the Guide supports the argumentation that runs from the assumptions about the future through to the decisions about the future (See Addendum II). The metaphor is also helpful in glossing over a conflation between the "*mental map of the future*" and the "*way we think the world works*". Once this metaphor is put to use, readers are directed to link the "*assumptions about the future*" to the other elements leading to decisions. The argument becomes seamless and prevents a real reflection about the future as a

temporal and not spatial dimension that could include for instance the consideration of an intergenerational point of view on the future (Adam & Groves, 2007).

Secondly, the Guide claims that scenarios improve the decision-making process about the future. Both scenarios and the exploration of the future keep emotions in check. The former by bringing clarity and the latter by diminishing uncertainty (See Addendum III). Scenarios are purported to offer a safe place to test uncertainties hence to keep emotions in check which provides an opportunity for exploring uncertainties about the future. Scenarios also allow for a range of views in assumptions about the future and their comparison is said to diminish blind spots.

The map metaphor, especially in its prestigious association with the conceptual breakthrough brought about by the rediscovery of Ptolemy's maps during the Renaissance, along with the exploration metaphor both support the view that scenarios, now viewed by the reader as maps, can provoke a cognitive breakthrough.

Discussion

This exploratory study, guided by the question: How does Shell's Explorer's Guide entice its readers to adopt scenarios?, reveals a text that anchors the legitimacy of scenarios as a futuring tool first, in claims supported by other claims and second, in the credibility of Shell based on its long use of the tool and one important event associated with its scenario planning's team anticipation of the 1970's oil shocks. This text is beautifully crafted with an abundance of metaphors that contribute to a sense of harmony and cast the practice of scenarios as an epic journey resonating with universal values, a sort of grand human experience. The characteristics of

the text reviewed in the findings section work in unison while the reader's gaze is being directed through adherence to reading rules. This text has left me puzzled, thinking that it invokes rationality in an irrational manner. Hence in the words of Nørreklit (2003), Shell's Explorer's Guide is a *persuasive* rather than a *convincing* document.

To become convincing the text would have to answer questions such as but not limited to:

- Why should the exploration of the future diminish uncertainty? Could the extension of possibilities not contribute to augmenting uncertainty instead? Is it rather that the exploration of the future is about changing from a specific view to another specific view and hence can be said to be reassuring?
- How do scenarios bring clarity and what impact does it actually have on emotions? What about the impact of clarity on rationality?
- Indeed, is thinking about the future marred mainly by emotional difficulties?
- What is the process that combines individual mental maps into organizational mental maps?

I will sketch here three avenues worthy of future study in line with this current exploratory research whose starting purpose was to get a grip on the knowledge base of scenario planning. First, pursuing the study of Shell's Explorer's Guide. Second, comparing two reference books on scenario planning and third, zooming in on facilitation and facilitators in actual scenario planning exercises.

First, this exploratory study has opened questions about the actual intent behind this Guide which could be illuminated by focusing more specifically on the context of its crafting. Areas to be

pursued include the journey of the Guide itself from a document first geared towards an internal Shell audience to what it is today, a public document widely disseminated and easily available on the Internet. Areas to be investigated include the actual crafting and writing of the document, the context of Shell's scenario planning team involved in the preparation of the Guide at the time as well as the dissemination of the scenario planning practice and the movement of ex-Shell employees since the document was written. Taking this direction would augment the interpretation provided herein by situating the document in interaction with its "*context of construction*" (Hansen, 2006: 1050).

Second, another way to take this research forward is to posit that Shell's Explorer's Guide plays a promotional role rather than a pedagogical or scholarly one, hence does not qualify as a sound source document for the study of the epistemological grounding of scenario planning. Consequently, it would be more appropriate to research such books as van der Heijden's (2005) *Scenarios. The art of strategic conversation*, used in executive education training on the Shell scenario method, for instance, as well as Godet's (2006) *Creating futures*, which follows the tradition of "La Prospective". As suggested by Vaara, Kleymann & Seristö (2004: 30), to "*concentrate on specifically widespread texts and deconstruct those [would] highlight specific discursive and rhetorical elements in the legitimization and naturalization of specific strategic ideas*". Comparison with other scholarly work on bodies of knowledge mentioned previously in this paper as well as Nørreklit's (2003) research on the Balanced Scorecard are expected to be fruitful.

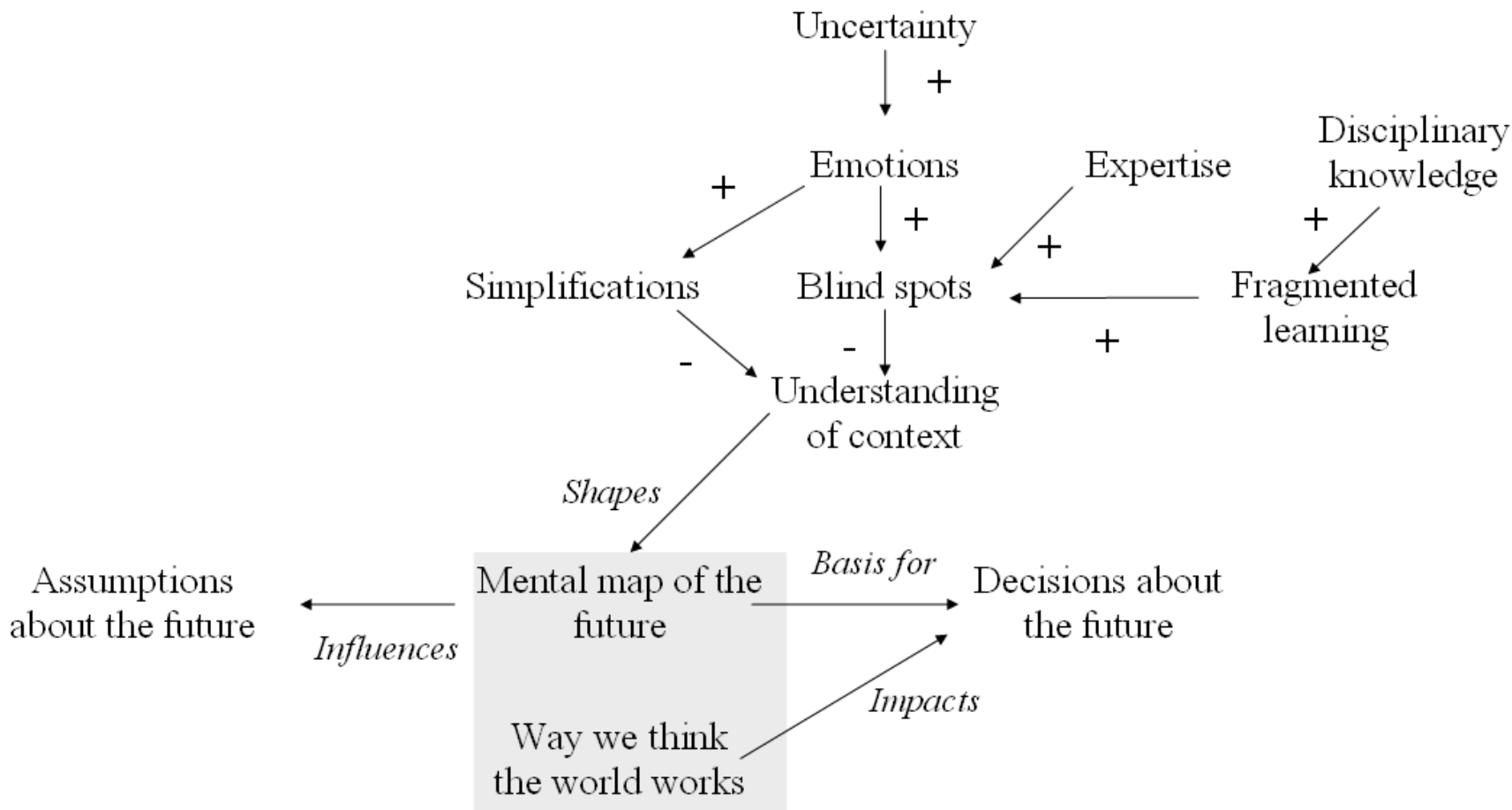
Both avenues mentioned here will contribute to surfacing intents of documents, tools and approaches. But in order to satisfy a strategy-as-practice perspective, it will become essential to zoom in on the work of facilitators in the construction of futures through scenario planning exercises, a concern also expressed about all powerful workshop participants: “*What roles are played by senior/middle managers, facilitators (external and/or internal) and how do these potentially powerful actors influence the process, content and context of strategy workshops?*” (Hodgkinson et al. 2006: 491). This avenue is also in line with Spee & Jarzabkowski’s (2009) work in that it would prod researchers to scratch beneath the sales pitch’s surface of harmonious stories about the future and entice them to get closer to their actual co-construction. Finally, the study of the construction of futures in scenario planning mediated by facilitators may find inspiration in Lezaun’s (2007) study of the manufacture of opinions in focus groups and his zooming in on the work of moderators.

In conclusion, there is a need for rigorous scholarly studies of scenario planning and other futuring practices mobilized in the practice of strategic management in order to bring a much needed “*explicit analytical distance [in] look[ing] at how futuring is accomplished by practitioners*” (Wong, 2008: 43). In particular, the facilitator’s role needs to be scrutinized not only as an interpreter of the partition of a foundational book or another, but as well, as a true performer attuned to the situation and the audience at hand.

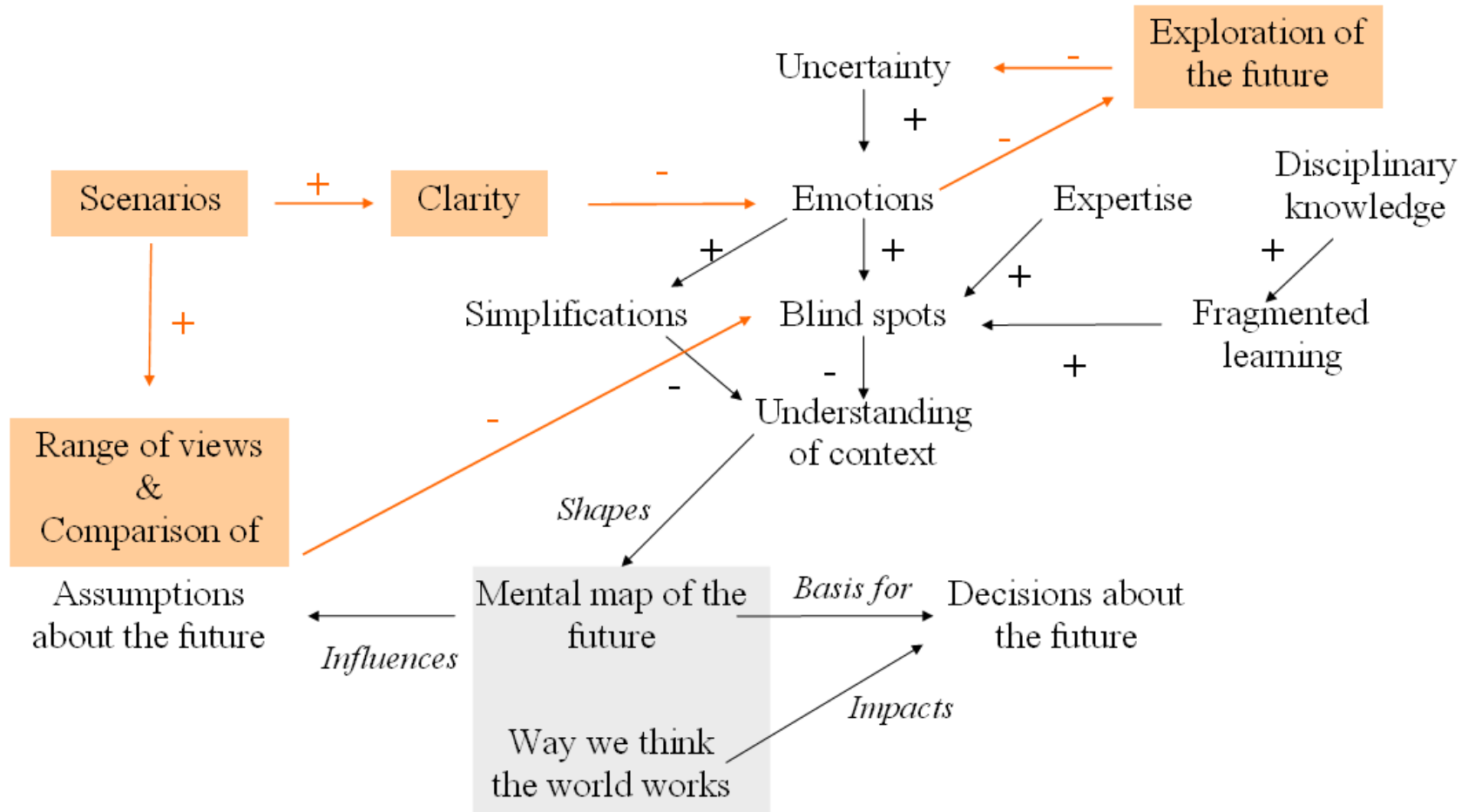
Addendum I. Shell’s Explorer’s Guide: Examples of claims and argument

Section/Claim	Examples	Argument
<p>What are scenarios and why use them?</p> <p>Building scenarios is like making a journey of exploration—it can change how we see and understand the world.</p>	<p>Shell’s Global Scenarios People and Connections</p>	<p>Use scenarios because Shell is using them.</p>
<p>Why?</p> <p>Confronting Assumptions</p> <p>Our decisions about the future depend on how we think the world works.</p>	<p>Mental maps</p>	<p>Humans have mental maps that are just as untrustworthy as medieval mappae mundi were as they are not a “<i>true representation of reality</i>” (Shell, 2008: 13).</p>
<p>Why?</p> <p>Recognising degrees of uncertainty</p> <p>Scenario planning provides a method for acknowledging—and working with—what we don’t know (and what we don’t know we don’t know!).</p>	<p>Mapping uncertainty (“<i>Oil price forecasting has failed</i>”) Shell, 2008: 15</p>	<p>Scenario is appropriate because forecasting is not.</p>
<p>Why?</p> <p>Widening perspectives</p> <p>Scenarios address blind spots by challenging assumptions, expanding vision and combining information from many different disciplines.</p>	<p>New maps yield...new perspectives</p>	<p>Scenarios do not need to be accurate to be inspirational.</p>
<p>Why?</p> <p>Addressing dilemmas and conflicts</p> <p>Scenarios can help clarify or even resolve the conflicts and dilemmas confronting their users.</p>	<p>Explaining conflicts and dilemmas</p>	<p>Scenarios clarify areas of uncertainty at the root of dilemma and conflicts.</p>

Addendum II. Flawed human thinking about the future (without scenarios)



Addendum III. Thinking about the future with scenarios



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