Weathering the Pandemic: The 'What If' Experience in Scenario Planning

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ABSTRACT

The onset of the pandemic introduced unprecedented uncertainties, prompting school leaders to urgently take decisive actions to ensure the resilience of higher education institutions. The institution under review had no choice but to navigate unfamiliar challenges brought by uncertainties to ensure the smooth transition of its instructional responsibilities. Planning in such uncertain times proved challenging, as the unprecedented nature of the situation made it difficult to draw insights from the past (Knight, 1921, 2009). In the context of this framework, scenario planning, an integral aspect of strategic planning emphasizing tools and technologies to navigate future uncertainties, has emerged as a strategically sound approach (Chermack, Lynham, & Ruona, 2001). This study describes the central role of scenario planning in shaping the strategic direction of a university in response to the ambiguous challenges presented by COVID-19. The process involved applying Heidrick & Struggles' Scenario Model, as detailed by Barnakova, Snyder, & Skoritowski (2020). Four 'what if' scenarios were thoughtfully formulated, that were set in the backdrop of economic recovery and social trust. Each scenario was assigned to a team, tasked with developing a playbook outlining potential future developments. Strategies were then formulated for each 'what if' scenario, detailing the institution's response. This article presents a thorough overview of the institution's proactive scenario planning endeavors aimed at navigating the uncertainties introduced by the pandemic within the education sector and society. The narrative unfolds the entire process, spanning from scenario generation to the formulation of strategies. Building upon the strategies crafted within the four scenarios, the article distinguished the identification of goals, strategic priorities, and outcome measures. These pivotal components now form the bedrock of the institution's strategic plan for the next three years.

Keywords: Scenario planning, strategic foresight, scenario thinking, 'What If" Scenario

INTRODUCTION

Just when higher education institutions were at the midst of addressing an unclear volatile future ushered mainly by rapid technological pace, increasing economic interdependence and the mounting political volatility, COVID-19 hit. The pandemic took nearly everyone by surprise, generating widespread uncertainty. The existence of COVID-19 compelled numerous higher education institutions to redefine their instructional goals, transitioning from the conventional approach to online teaching and services. Universities tend to selectively adapt to external environment challenges, necessarily addressing survival or growth according to Shin (2010).

As a radical response of the university, shift from the traditional instructional mode, online teaching and learning was implemented with due consideration to the ICT status of both students and teachers, and the school administration. Because of its newness, the learning management system was fraught with challenges -- kinks needed to be ironed out reactively to ensure standards of academic quality and integrity in all aspects of teaching and learning are not compromised. The university's ICT infrastructure and human capability have been instrumental in subsisting the pandemic's blow day after day.

But the institution was also aware that it could not continue to subsist/ and or be reactive in living one day at a time in a period fraught with uncertainties. Consequently, an urgent mandate to craft a strategic plan was released by the top management. There was a need to "establish enduring yet adaptable connections between current actions and future considerations" became increasingly vital (Scobolic, 2020). Given the numerous unexpected challenges brought about by COVID-19, planning appeared overwhelming, as past experiences traditionally played a crucial role in shaping future actions. Knight (1921, 2009) in studies have recognized "that uncertainty is marked by novelty, that lacks antecedents, and it makes little sense to look back in time for clues about the future." Scenario planning was the only option.

This article recounts the University's experience as it went through the process of scenario planning that became the conduit in the creation of a three-year strategic plan. The value of this report lies primarily on what it can offer in higher education in crafting a strategic plan amid uncertainties. While the background of this project may limit the generalizability of findings, it is recognized that even

the uniqueness of this university experience may offer insight on the effectiveness of the scenario planning process in setting directions even in times of ambiguities.

RELATED LITERATURE

The term 'scenario planning' has been defined in several ways. Cambridge Business English Dictionary defined it as the study of possible future events in society, an industry, the economy, etc., and how they might affect an organization, and the action of planning to prepare for them. In contrast, Kotler & Keller (2012) described scenario planning as a strategic planning process that employs tools and technologies to navigate the complexities of future uncertainties. Schoemaker (1995) described scenario planning as a methodical approach for envisioning potential futures, a practice widely embraced by companies confronting diverse issues. Emphasizing the need for distinct alternatives, Schoemaker (1955) underscored that scenarios should portray markedly different futures rather than mere variations on a single theme. In the university experience, four futures were used in the context of 'what if' within the framework of existing driving forces, the economy and social trust strategically directed inherent uncertainties (Savkin, 2022). There are a ranged of definitions but there are common threads that run across these definitions such as working within uncertainties pointing out that they are not predictions or forecasts. It points to imagining or perceiving of future and uncertainties with strategic foresight, making simpler several data that used to be considered in a conventional planning, into a limited number of possible states. Horwarth (2006) presented a helpful analogy that compares scenario planning to driving a car: it involves navigating using the windshield, representing the future, rather than relying on the rearview mirror, which signifies the past.

Herman Kahn (1965, 2017) is widely acknowledged for the development of scenario planning. His pivotal role in shaping this approach can be traced back to his experiences at the Rand Corporation, a non-profit research and development organization working for the US Government during the 1950s, as well as his involvement with the Hudson Foundation in the 1960s. In the 1970s, he conveyed his concepts to the Royal Dutch Shell through Pierre Wack. Wack then applied Kahn's ideas in the business realm, employing scenario creation to assist Shell in navigating the uncertainties arising from the assertiveness of oil-rich nations in the Middle East in the global oil market.

When the infamous OPEC oil embargo in terms of price shocks happened in 1973, it was said that Shell was able to weather the crisis out much better than

its competitors (Scobolic, 2020). Scenario planning became more formalized as a planning approach in the corporate world after the Royal Dutch Shell and the Consulting Firm SRI International successful experiences in 1970s (Scobolic, 2020).

In planning, this paper finds the thoughts of Fulton & Scearce (2004) on scenario thinking simpler. It used 'What If?' as a tool for motivating people to question the prevailing status quo. Asking 'What if?' in a disciplined way prepares one to practice the possibilities of tomorrow, and then act at present because the plausibility of the propositions and insights are empowering. It can be considered a practice for the future where scenarios are stories about how the future will develop accordingly. Different approaches to scenario planning can be found in literature, yet they universally adhere to and ultimately converge on identifying the key forces that contribute to uncertainties (Savkin, 2022; Ogilvy, 2015).

Uncertainties are manifestations that the behavior of complex systems such as organizations may follow laws and yet their future status remain unpredictable in principle. In Edward Lorenz's Chaos Theory he explained that the behavior of complex systems is exquisitely sensitive to conditions, so that small changes at the start can result in ever larger changes over time as what happened to the recent pandemic. Lorenz hypothesized in his 1963 paper on Chaos Theory, "Does the flap of a butterfly's wings in Brazil cause a tornado in Texas? Snyder, Skoritowski, Roeder, and Libson (2020) said "substitute a bat in a Wuhan wet market for the butterfly and the spread of the coronavirus for the weather, and you have the same effect showing how fragile and uncertain our world is." Lorenz from his series of experiments with Mathematical models realized that the imprecision innate in human measurement could become magnified into wildly incorrect forecasts. The same condition can also be in the business or social world.

The proponents in their article "Planning for Post-Covid-19 Workforce: Four Scenarios" in *Knowledge at Wharton* on June 1, 2020, further assert that Scenario Planning offers a structure to counteract inherent human biases and question deeply ingrained perspectives held by leaders and organizations during times of uncertainty and crisis. Accepting scenarios can be a humbling experience, aiding in reducing the risks associated with placing undue emphasis on the current situation, constructing plans based on a presumed predictable future, and excessively relying on overly confident forecasts. Scenarios transcend conventional narratives; they embody plausible "what if" situations that not only question existing beliefs but also foster agility, adaptability, and resilience. This preparation is crucial for navigating a world inherently more uncertain than

commonly acknowledged (Snyder et al., 2020).

In 2020, Heidrick & Struggles crafted the scenario model following an extensive examination of potential influences on human capital in a post-COVID-19 context. This involved consulting 40 leaders to pinpoint 70 potential forces, from which they identified 30 key trends and uncertainties, evaluating each based-on likelihood and impact. The highest-impact uncertainties and a spectrum of potential outcomes were then amalgamated to create a two-by-two scenario mix centered on economic recovery and social trust. These scenarios provide a framework for challenging traditional perspectives, uncovering market opportunities, and managing strategic risks.

They went further to develop additional detail for each scenario in terms of key themes and early signals (Barnakova, Snyder, & Skoritowski, 2020). The 2x2 scenario mix developed are a) *digital enclaves*, this is when social trust is low, but the economic recovery is high; b) *growing divide*, when economic recovery is low and the social trust is also low; c) *tech-powered humanity*, economic rebound is high and social trust is high; and d) *in this together*, the economic recovery is low, but the social trust is high.

Popular in business, scenario planning also figures in the higher education landscape. Many higher education institutions have been using this approach extensively. Citing Purdue University in Fort Wayne, Indiana, used scenario planning. The university organized an extensive three-week scenario planning initiative, involving a robust participation of over 13% of the full-time staff. This approach underscored the importance placed on harnessing the expertise of faculty and staff, fostering lasting buy-in and trust. Moreover, the valuable insights gleaned from this endeavor played a pivotal role in shaping the university's planning procedures for the academic year 2021-2022. The emphasis was on leveraging the experiences with COVID-19 to establish a more improved normalcy for the institution (Malanson, 2022).

A Melbourne based consulting firm, SJS Strategy, reported a Scenario Planning Case Study at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT). Among the foremost outcomes included key performance indicators that shaped the future environment, a range of relevant and plausible future scenarios, and alternatives that can address the challenges of the organization. At the end of the scenario planning processes, with the alignment about the future, RMIT decisionmakers have the wider options to congregate crucial assumptions and choices (SJS Strategy, 2019).

Sayers (2010) cited case studies in higher education starting with Universiti Sains Malaysia that used scenario planning for crafting their vision. It was

participated by 20 top level leaders, senior administrators, officers, and academics representing the various schools and campuses of the university. The whole process ended with their vision for the next 25 years which they called *University in the Garden*. Another case of scenario planning was that of the Open University (UK). This time, the process took a longer period since the purpose of the university was culture change "something which does not happen quickly" (Sayers, 2010). In this case, scenario planning was used not just over a single period for planning purposes but became an ongoing practice. It was reported that the preliminary scenario planning process was the most in-depth and was described as a major culture change. It was also considered as a major strategic thinking event. Strategic conversations remained as a continuing practice at the OU, together with various scenario planning exercises. These became subsequently a means to refresh and continue the change in culture and thinking (Sayers, 2010).

In the Philippines, Southern Leyte State University (SLSU) conducted a webinar foresight-scenario planning session to identify robust and realistic strategies as well as to revisit and update the university's strategic plan. In August 2021, the institution conducted a scenario planning focused on strategic challenges in relation to the existing Seven-Year Development Plan. Likewise, the activity also revisited the strategic map of the university's vision, mission, core values, goals, objectives, and accomplishments and gaps to formulate strategic objectives, and measures and targets. "While it cannot predict the future, it however scans and analyzes the environment to identify potential outcomes and how they might impact SLSU especially the long-term effect of COVID-19," according to (Teves, 2021), in emphasizing the importance of conducting the scenario planning activity.

Studies revealed that the major benefit of scenario planning, beside trying to foresee the future, is encouraging managers to explore strategic responses beyond their previous experiences and to make strategic decisions in a rapidly changing environment (Gray et al, 2020 in Malekakhlagh, Safari, Beigi, & Rokhideh (2022). Going beyond previous experiences encourages innovative thinking.

An article published by Wharton Executive Education, "*Scenario Planning: Where Strategy and Innovation Intersect*", suggested that organizations seeking to transition from a consistently reactive approach to a more strategically proactive position should consider adopting scenario planning. This methodology, when applied, encourages the envisioning and planning of potential future changes, thereby creating opportunities for innovation.

THE SCENARIO PLANNING

The Preliminaries. When the University in review decided to use Scenario Planning as its tool for the 2021-2024 Strategic Plan, a team was formed to lay the groundwork for the actual planning workshops. This was composed of top-level leaders, middle level administrators, faculty members and rank and file personnel. Sequential group dynamics ensued, characterized with meaningful sessions of brainstorming and consensus-building as the team discussed the intricacies of scenario planning. Further discussions on Chaos Theory of Edward Lorenz also followed. After having gone through the educational group processes, it decided to recommend the Scenario model developed by Heidrick and Struggles, as explained by Barnakova, Snyder, & Skoritowski (2020), as the guiding framework in the actual workshop. This conceptual framework was further enriched by incorporating additional related literature and studies, and reinforced with insights from Snyder, Skoritowski, Roeder, and Libson (2020) specifically on workforce challenges posed by COVID-19.

The university planning team was convinced that the scenario mix/key drivers proposed by Barnakova et al. (2020) was the most appropriate guide to develop the university's strategic plan for the next three years in the new normal. It also decided to use the 'what ifs' context (Fulton & Scearce, 2004). Andrew of KPMG (2020) emphatically advises that, for the sustained survival of universities, it is imperative to chart directions utilizing "what if" scenarios tailored to their specific context. Table 1 presents the group dynamics results in preparation for the scenario planning workshop.

Table 1

Summary of the Outputs for the Scenario Planning Workshop Preparation

Particulars	Details
Objective	To draw a three-year University strategic plan
Prevailing Situation/ Key Drivers	Post Covid – 19: The New Normal
Timeline	2021-2024
Scenario Mix with 2x2 matrix	Economic Recovery and Social Trust Digital enclaves, Growing divide, Tech powered economy, and In this together (Barnakova et. al., 2020)
Actual Workshops	Two - days
Participant Requirement	Inclusion criteria: At least three years with the University, cross-sectional from across the ranks, highly recommended by their immediate supervisors as individuals known for their foresight thinking. No. of Participants: 25

Since the University's Roadmap 2020 was on its last year, and the prevailing situation of Post Covid-19, the new normal, the team agreed that the workshop shall draw the institutional 2021-2024 Strategic Plan using the scenario planning model of Barnakova et. al. (2020); Heidrick and Struggles (2020). Furthermore, the scenario mix recommended the use of the two-by-two matrix with economic recovery and social trust as the determining axes identified into four quadrants: *digital enclaves, growing divide*, *tech powered economy*, and *in this together*. Preliminary informational reading materials were sent to the prospective participants to be studied before coming to the actual planning workshop to be conducted in a span of two days. Included in the materials is the Vision, Mission, Goal of the university. Participants with 'significantly different organizational roles, points of view, and personal experiences' were chosen having in mind Kees van der Heijden's (2005) advice about participants - three powers necessary for any effective conversation about strategy: the power to perceive, the power to think, and the power to act.

The Workshops. The activities were on a working assumption that these powers are basic in strategic foresight, the tool for scenario planning. Scenario thinking can help organizations better anticipate and adapt to dramatic changes, increase agility and resilience, and turn uncertainty into advantage (Gailey, 2020). Hence, workshop activities started with group dynamics that aimed to enhance the strategic foresight of the participants.

Discussions on the intricacies of scenario planning where critical questions were emphasized as points of reflections in the scenario planning framework. Open forums were facilitated to allow participants to clarify/verify some gray areas of the planning processes. The participants were also reminded that the institutional Vision and Mission shall necessarily comprise the guiding star in the activities and reference fall backs when there were stand offs in the consensus building within the team and even in the plenary sessions.

Four (4) teams were organized. They further discussed the dynamics of scenario planning within through guide questions. Given ample time for the thorough discussion, The introduction of the major activity given the four 'what if' scenarios proceeded within the context of economic recovery and social trust. Each team was assigned a specific scenario, tasked to build a playbook envisioning the potential future trajectory of the university under those circumstances.

In their brainstorming and consensus building, the questions used Snyder et. al. (2020) guide such as: "Where are we headed?", "Would our current organizational structure meet the future we painted in our playbooks?", "What talents shall we be needing?", "What cultural values should we be needing to fit into the future?", "Are we ready to fully embrace digitalization?" The actual playbook created by each team in each scenario that showed their outputs were also presented during plenary sessions for comments and recommendations; these were eventually also considered.

Figure 1 shows the four (4) "what if" scenarios with their respective playbooks. The teams painted the scenarios with what they conceived as their 'specific futures'. For digital enclaves, where social trust is low but with the regained economy, parents were assumed to be wary of sending their children physically to school; deterioration of social interaction as well as indifference to community issues were also foreseen to happen. Preference for homeschooling was considered. This was what was referred to all along when the authors described this scenario that people in digital enclaves take on new behaviors, where virtual interactions and small groups are preferred because of accessibility and health concerns (Heidrick et al. (2020). Unemployment was also presumed to occur as industries shifted to machines and automation. On the other hand, in growing divide, when both the economy and the social trust are low, being the worst scenario. Snyder et al (2020) described this as a world in which a protracted economic recession fractures trust between people, communities, and institutions. Parents are implicitly most affected, and in cases of lack of trust on the long-term economic viability of private institution, decisions of transferring their kids from private school to the public schools would likely happen because of lesser cost in tuition fees. There is a stark 'digital divide' where parents who can still afford may transfer their children to 'top schools' in the country or abroad for online class arrangements.

Figure 1

Summary of Playbooks Created by Each Team Given Their "What IF" Scenario
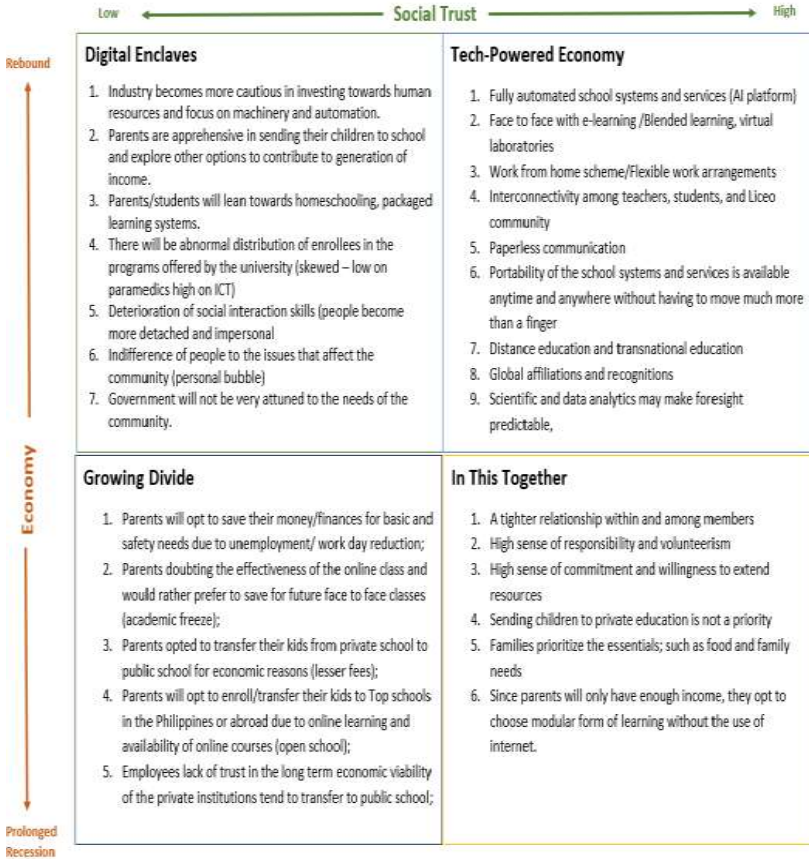
For the scenario of '*In this together*', social trust is high but economic recovery is still low. Tighter relationships within family members are likely to happen, and stretching of resources, volunteerism may also come about. Heidrick et al (2020) described this world as "the prolonged impact of virus brings communities/ families together." Snyder et al (2020) also says that "from a long lockdown, but families, communities and NGOs have come together to support one another." Parents may not send children to private schools is not a priority; food and family needs become more of the major concerns. Parents with just enough income for family needs chose to enroll their children on the modular form of

learning without the use of internet. In the '*Tech-powered*' scenario where both the economy and social trust has recovered, a fully automated school system and services that include blended learning and virtual laboratory, with workable 'work from home'/ and or flexible work arrangements can happen. Interconnectivity among teachers, students, and the university community, distance education/ transnational education, scientific and data analytics, as well as global affiliations and recognitions were seen as most likely situation in this scenario.

Moving from Scenarios to Decisions. After creating their playbooks in their respective scenarios, the teams were asked to go back to their respective group and brainstorm on the question: *What should we be doing now that would enable us to operate better in these specific futures?* Given ample time to brainstorm, each team huddled and reviewed the specific futures, that they have described in their scenarios.

 After the sessions of brainstorming and consensus building, they generated proposed strategies to address their 'what if' worlds - - their specific futures. These initial strategies were presented during the Plenary Sessions. Some comments and recommendations were considered.

Figure 2 shows the first round of strategies identified by each team. The strategies presented by each group were intended to address the situation stated in their playbooks. For example, in the playbook of Tech-Powered Economy, establishing a fully automated system which will enable portability, interconnectivity, and foresight predictability was one of the strategies that answered the scenario on Tech-Powered economy which is characterized in the backdrop as high social trust and high economy rebound.

Furthermore, in Digital Enclaves where the social trust factor is still low, but the economic rebound is high, among the strategies presented by the group was retooling and upgrading competencies of the workforce by providing necessary measure to sustain employment. It is worthy to note that during the total lockdown, the university positively meet the challenge by retaining all its employees. Nobody was laid off in the context of no work, no pay. For students, the distance learning approach using a learning management platform was launched.

The summary of strategies was further studied by each group considering the comments and suggestions from the panel during the plenary session. Another session was again provided with the opportunities to compare notes and determined some commonalities that run across the four scenarios. Presentation of their strategies, including some details that were meant to give flesh to the broad strategy statements followed the thorough analysis and comparing of notes.

Figure 2

Summary of Original Strategies of Each Team Given their "What If" Scenario
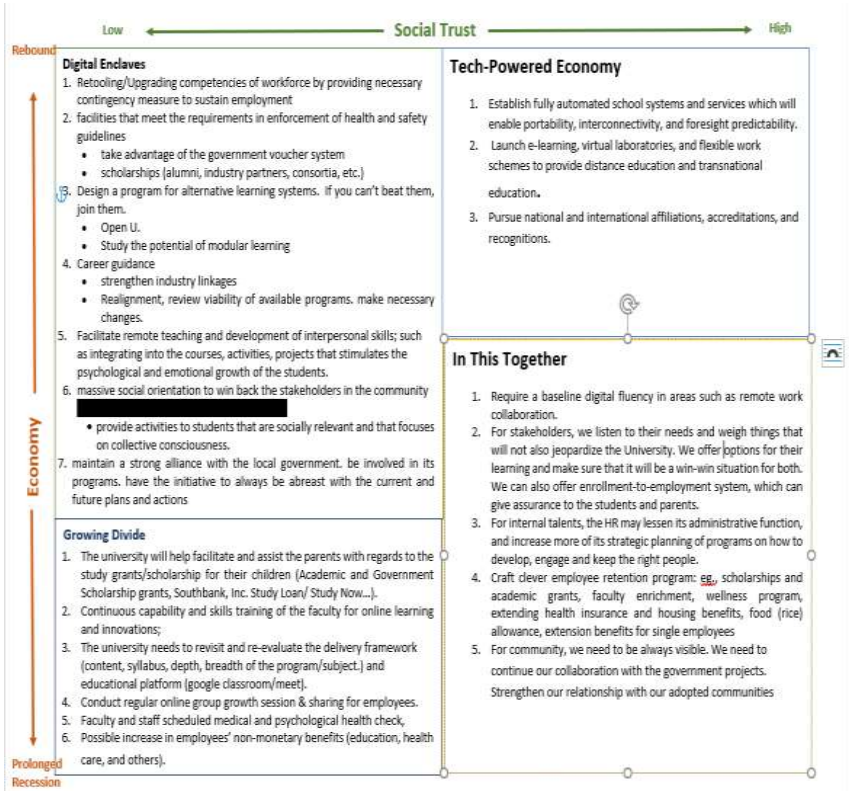

Following the presentations of each group, plenary sessions were held to gather observations, including the identification of common strategies. There were convergence of strategies that were consistently expressed by multiple teams.

Figure 3 shows the parallel strategies in colored arrows expressed by the teams, although stated differently but directed to the identical concerns. Among these were the need for the "university's governance & management to revisit policies, systems, and structures, ….", "digitization of services & academic delivery models….", stewardship and accountability", "leveraging technology", "enhancing global presence", among all others.

Figure 3

Summary of Comparable Strategies of Each "What If" Scenario
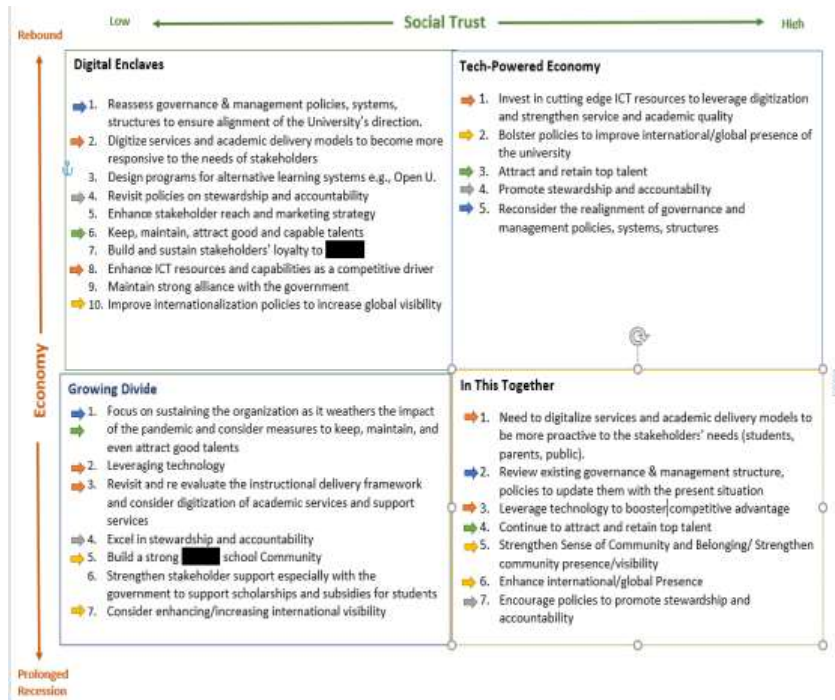
The parallel strategies are presented in same-colored arrows expressed by the teams, although stated differently but directed to the same concerns. The blue arrow represented identical concerns such as "reassess governance policies, systems, structures to ensure alignment of the university's direction" … "review existing governance & management structure, policies to update them with the present situation" …. "focus on sustaining the organization as it weathers the impact of the pandemic and consider measures to keep, maintain, and even attract good talents" … "reconsider the realignment of governance and management policies, systems & structures." All the four scenarios suggested revisit policies, systems, and structures, ….", "digitization of services & academic delivery models….", stewardship and accountability", "leveraging technology", "enhancing global presence", among all others. During the presentation, these major strategies were presented with corresponding detailed approaches. An example is presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Examples of Strategies with Suggested Details

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"Revisit and realign governance and management policies, systems, structures to ensure alignment of the University's direction."
- Conduct an organizational analysis to review the present organizational structure, work units, and manpower.
- Simplify organizational structures, less matrix, flatter hierarchies, and more network thinking.
- Review existing operational tools (manuals, handbooks, etc.)
- Strengthen work-from home structures.
- Develop productivity monitoring scheme.
- Retool operating models to reach new markets characterized by heightened consumer expectations and global connectivity.
- Put premium on leaders that can understand emerging technology at a high level while also maintaining human relationships.
- Promote a culture of inclusion and diversity in background and thought.

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"Leveraging Technology"
- Require a more digitally fluent workforce through continuous capability and skills training of the faculty and non-teaching personnel for online teaching, innovations, and services.
- Cultivate external networks and strong recruiting capabilities to bring in top digital talent (for employees) and to increase student enrollment.
- Continue to offer distance/online education for those who have strong connectivity, while strengthening/enhancing the modular delivery for asynchronous students.
- Revisit and re-evaluate the effectiveness of online delivery framework.
- Develop ICT automated system for all institutional services.

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MAPPING THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Upon identifying commonalities among strategies, a reconstituted team was formed, consisting of members from the existing four groups and supplemented by individuals from top management. This newly constituted team took on the task of examining shared themes derived from the detailed strategies.

After a thorough analysis, the core statements delineating the goals of the Strategic Plan underwent refinement, resulting in more specific and targeted objectives. Subsequently, strategic priorities were articulated with enhanced clarity; concrete performance indicators were established as outcome measures.

The document titled "Weathering the Pandemic: Our Strategic Priorities 2021-2024," spanning 19 pages, intricately details the university's goals, strategic priorities, and outcome measures. This comprehensive roadmap sets the course for the institution over the next three years, providing a detailed guide for navigating challenges and pursuing excellence.

Figure 5

Outline of Goals, Strategic Priorities, and Outcome Measure of the Strategic Plan

Goal 1:	Goal 2:	Goal 3:	Goal 4
Engaging /students in a More Empowering and Transformative	*Growing, Sustaining, and Building*	*Leveraging Technology*	*Strengthen Community and International Visibility*
Strategic Priorities	**Strategic Priorities**	**Strategic Priorities**	**Strategic Priorities**
• Teacher-Learner Experience	• Governance & Management Structural Review	• Digitization of Academic & Non-Academic Services	• Increasing our Enrolment and Visibility Through Digital Branding Strategies
• Building a Sense of Community and Belongingness: Retaining Strategies	• People & Culture	• Provision of Fully Integrated, Institutional, and Automated Business-Driven System	• Enhancing Stakeholder Reach and Marketing Strategy
• Innovation in Programs	• Sustainable Systems and Business Processes		• Enhancing the University's profile in Research, Scholarly and Artistic Work
• Student Online Services			• Raising Visibility through Research and Certifications
• Building & Sustaining Students' Loyalty to ▮			
Outcome Measures	**Outcome Measures**	**Outcome Measures**	**Outcome Measures**
• Student Retention	• Staff satisfaction rate	• Stakeholders/Customer Service Satisfaction rate	- Total domestic student enrolment
• Student & Completion Rates	• Teacher Performance/Teacher Satisfaction	• Completed ICT infrastructure supporting automated business-driven system covering various services of the university.	- Total international student enrolment
• Student Engagement with Services	• Staff/Teacher Retention Rate	• Student performance and satisfaction on virtual labs and simulations for laboratory-based course.	- Increased productive partnerships in research, culture & artistic works, and consortia
• Student Satisfaction	• Net operating profit as a percentage of net operating revenue		- No. of commissioned research
	• Strengthened risk management and enhanced ability to mitigate and respond to human, financial, infrastructure, and strategic risks.		- Earned international certifications

CONCLUSION

It is plausible to craft a strategic plan amid uncertainties using the processes of scenario planning. The strategic plan has been laid out, approved by the top management. It presents a range of outcomes that came from scenario thinking ……breaking the molds and thinking out of the box most especially. While we may aspire for the realization of a technologically advanced human scenario, history teaches us the importance of planning for a spectrum of outcomes rather than placing all bets on a single version of the future. As Barnakova, Snyder, and

Skoritowski (2020) suggest, it is wiser to be "roughly right" in our planning than to be "precisely wrong." Scenarios offer a framework for questioning conventional thoughts, identifying market potentials, and minimizing strategic risks. Valuable insights have been gained from these experiences. In times of uncertainty, strategic foresight and scenario thinking empower effective planning. The exploration of 'what if' scenarios challenges conventional thought processes, that guided participants towards strategic innovation.

The experience substantially confirms previous research, highlighting the positive and significant impact of scenario planning on strategic innovation. It served as a unique opportunity for thinking beyond traditional constraints and breaking molds.

This unique university experience provides valuable insights of encouraging conditions to achieve the positive effects of scenario planning, particularly in motivating talents and involving them in decision-making processes that were traditionally confined to top and middle management.

Higher education institutions can greatly benefit from cultivating a culture of scenario thinking when adopting a proactive stance. This approach allows for a better anticipation of forthcoming dramatic shifts and transforms uncertainty into an advantage. Embracing scenario thinking encourages the envisioning and planning of potential future changes, thereby creating opportunities for innovation.

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