

## SCENARIOS AT WORK Oxford Scenarios Programme

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# Creating culture change from the strategy process

As a healthcare charity, we are well aware of the way the world is changing – massively and rapidly. Technology is having a huge impact on the delivery of healthcare; there are the problems associated with an ageing population; and increased urbanisation creates numerous challenges to living healthy lifestyles.

Diabetes, our focus, is part of this change. Over 400 million people globally have the conditions now. That's 9 percent of the world population, and almost double the prevalence in 1980. In the UK, 4.6 million people are living with the condition, and almost 1 million of these are as yet undiagnosed. In particular we are seeing a rise in type 2 diabetes, which in a significant number of cases is related to lifestyle factors and could be prevented.

So when we last embarked on our regular five-year strategy round, we felt that we could not plan for the next five years on the basis of what the world is like now. We needed a new way to think about strategy. We'd heard about scenarios, looked around for a way to learn about them, and discovered that the Oxford Scenarios Programme was starting about a month later. So I booked myself on it.

*'We saw it as a culture-change process as well as a strategy process.'*

### Using the future as a lens

For me, the most powerful idea on the programme was that we could use the future scenarios as a lens to look 'back' at decisions being made now. You put yourself in a plausible version of the world in 2034 and from that vantage point you can assess your options in 2018. This means you are not making binary decisions. You might react tactically now, for example, but also at the same time plan strategically for the future. It is a much more sophisticated, richer approach that sets up the organisation to be a learning organisation.

When I came back from the programme, we set about creating our own scenarios using the Oxford approach. We saw it as a culture-change process as well as a strategy process.

We knew it had to be emergent: if it was pushed too hard from the top it would not become part of the culture. So once we had buy-in from the leadership team, it was a matter of working with a core group of people from all across the organisation who were interested and wanted to be involved.

An interview process was a really effective way of boosting engagement. We had people across the organisation going out and doing interviews internally and externally. So people enjoyed it, they found it interesting, and we got

some new strategic connections for the charity, and new mentors and helpful relationships for people individually.

We ran some set-piece workshops too, and at the same time we were running a consultation with 9,000 people with diabetes – types 1 and 2 – which was the biggest consultation of its kind in the UK. We have also just finished a big consultation with people living with diabetes on where scientific research should focus in the future. We put all of this rich input into our scenarios.

We created four scenarios, and we've just had our first 'so what?' workshop with the executive team.

All four scenarios place us very firmly within a value-creating system, and show our own core values and purpose as a charity as key to our future evolution. They raise questions about how we can play within the systemic values and where the 'fit' is with our organisational values. As a charity we are not driven by our bottom line, but by impact. This gives us an important perspective on our impact as part of the system as a whole, rather than as an individual player.

### **Robust and rigorous**

Since completing the Oxford Scenarios Programme I have looked at other organisations and read more about scenarios. I can see how easy it would be to reduce it to something simple – like a two by two matrix, but I do think Oxford's much more rigorous approach is more valuable and more robust. It's not a framework but a learning experience.

The cross-sectoral input in the programme was very important: I hadn't realised how stuck in a rut I had become. Yes, I'd kept up to date with things in the diabetes 'world', but had not thought as much about changes elsewhere. On the programme I was exposed to viewpoints from diverse geographies and sectors which really opened my eyes. I can see

how heavily we are likely to be influenced by new global players in insurance and healthcare. And I realise we need to look at the issue of health more broadly – there is always a danger of not looking enough at the contextual environment.

Scenarios is a way of grounding that data in the organisational strategy so that we can respond to it rather than react to changes as they happen. You can really see it as part of the learning process.

### **Empowering and transformational**

For example, in early discussions we asked what might happen to the NHS? Who might be other key players in the UK? This was a big issue in the early workshops, but in later stages it had become accepted as among the plausible futures. The process meant that we were constantly changing our limitations.

The first lot of scenarios all looked very much the same. People had stayed within their comfort zones and borrowed from each other. So we had to 'push them out' – to quote Rafael, they had to be 'uncomfortable enough that people were angry, but not so much that they would walk out of the door'! And indeed there was a lot of emotion – anger but also excitement, as people wanted to think too about the opportunities for the future.

It was an empowering process, and fitted very well with the work that we do in the charity through cross-team collaboration and external collaboration. The strategy no longer feels driven from the centre: people feel enabled to make the right call in the complex work they do together.

I found the whole experience transformational, both personally but also for all the other people involved in the scenarios work in the charity. There is a ripple effect as you take the learning back to the organisation and it opens doors in thinking, people and insights.

## **Oxford Scenarios Programme**

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