

SCENARIOS AT WORK

Oxford Scenarios Programme



Samira Rhoads

Market and Competitive Intelligence
Manager, Strategy Team, BMJ, UK

‘Have faith in the process’ Samira’s story

With a strong ‘publish or perish’ culture that still persists across traditional academia, you would think that the journal publishing industry was solid. However, as with most other industries we are exposed to economic, geopolitical, technological and social change.

Through our competitive intelligence function and in partnership with colleagues around the business, we had already identified many disruptions to our industry and to the wider research environment that our customers operate in. Particular developments impacting on us relate to the so-called ‘open movement’, including the increasing expectation of free information, evolving business models, and the rise of open data and open source technologies. Given the vast number of factors influencing this rapid change, we needed an innovative method to engage across our organisation and prepare for an uncertain future. And not only be prepared for what is down the road, but to flourish and take a lead in our evolving industry.

‘The programme gave me the technical knowledge to successfully pitch to the BMJ senior executive and win their support for implementation.’

I attended the Oxford Scenarios Programme in October 2016. In attendance were managers, business owners and senior leaders from some of the world’s biggest corporations and across a number of industries. This brought a broad spectrum of experience to the programme, and I have carried the new ideas that I was exposed to through interactions during the classes and exercises forward into my organisational efforts. The intense schedule brought much camaraderie amongst the group and faculty members. Scenario planning is a creative process that can be uncomfortable to begin with, given its diversion from the traditional strategic planning process and its focus on the unknown unknowns. The faculty were extremely supportive in reminding the class to have faith in the process. For the group work each team was assigned a facilitator, which I found to be a very positive feature. On completion of each task another ‘piece of the puzzle’ was solved. This iterative process meant that once we had followed through on all the tasks, the scenarios which we produced were able to come together very quickly. Experiencing this within the confines of the programme gave me every

confidence of being able to implement scenario planning when back at BMJ.

The Oxford Scenarios Programme is an impressive blend of practical, theoretical, psychological and social learning. It gave me the technical knowledge to successfully pitch to the BMJ senior executive and win their support for the implementation of scenario planning. Our core scenario team completed extensive interviews with managers and leaders across the organisation, and with external experts and thought leaders. We have used our scenarios to inform our strategy and its implementation. I feel very privileged to have been given the opportunity to run the exercise, particularly as it involved time and resource away from pressing business as usual activity. Like with any new process, bringing people along in the journey is absolutely necessary, and this was highlighted during the programme. The value of scenario planning comes in the co-creation of solutions across the organisation. For those thinking of undertaking the programme at Oxford, it will be intense, but the long days and full schedule are enjoyable and very rewarding. The connections I made during the programme have also formed a useful network for me in the future.

Oxford Scenarios Programme

‘...we needed an innovative method to engage across our organisation and prepare for an uncertain future.’