

The Futures Wheel

Purpose: Identify the long-term implications (positive and negative) of a likely development or trend. Understand the dynamics of disruption from unusual places.



Set Up



Time
45 mins



Groups
3-5 participants per group



Materials
Markers, large sheets of butcher paper

The Implications Wheel: Steps



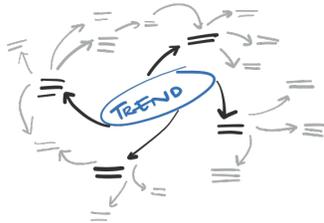
1. Identify likely developments and trends

Ask each group to select a likely development or trend to explore (these might be assigned). Provide 2 mins for brainstorming. Have each group write the central idea in the middle of their sheet of butcher paper and circle it. Ask a few groups to share the developments they've chosen.



2. Explore likely implications

Have the groups come up with four likely implications of the central trend or development. Give the groups 4 mins to draw/write the ideas extending from the center (as spokes on the wheel). Rapid ideation is more important than accuracy of the forecast. If time permits, do a round of share-outs.



3. Explore “second-order” effects

In the next round, have the groups come up with two new implications for each of the last round's four implications. There should be eight “second-order” effects generated from the initial idea.



4. Share possible futures

Have a spokesperson from each group share a particularly interesting/surprising/disruptive implication they've found in their wheel of possible futures.



5. Additional rounds and next steps

If time permits, do additional rounds/ shareouts of unexpected implications. Can suggest variations where groups choose an implication or future to focus their efforts on developing (e.g., most favorable, most interesting, etc.) rather than working with the full wheel.

Wrap-Up

Discuss how the activity can be used in a more formal strategy session to explore possible futures and inform plans to support a preferred future/mitigate against undesirable outcomes.

E.g., Assemble a diverse group of stakeholders for a full-wheel session working out implications. Rate each implication on Likelihood, Impact, and Favorability. Implications with high likelihood and high impact or favorability suggest futures to further explore. Implications with low favorability and high impact suggest futures to be guarded against to build the resiliency of the org.

SU Hacks

- Prime the group with a quick conversation about disruption from unusual places - see Paul Robert's autonomous vehicle “disruption map” (sketched on the next page) as one example
- Check out [Joel Barker's website](#) for more information on the background of the activity
- Check out Alida Draudt and Julia West's new strategic foresight book [What the Foresight?](#) for their version of this activity and more on the practice of foresight
- Groups with exposure to a sufficient number of xTechs will come up with more fertile ideas

The Implications Wheel Example

