

# Setting the Context: What is Scenario Planning?



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[www.adaptive-edge.com](http://www.adaptive-edge.com)

*Opening question:*

Who knows what scenario planning is?  
(...It's OK if you don't)



## 1970s Oil Shock



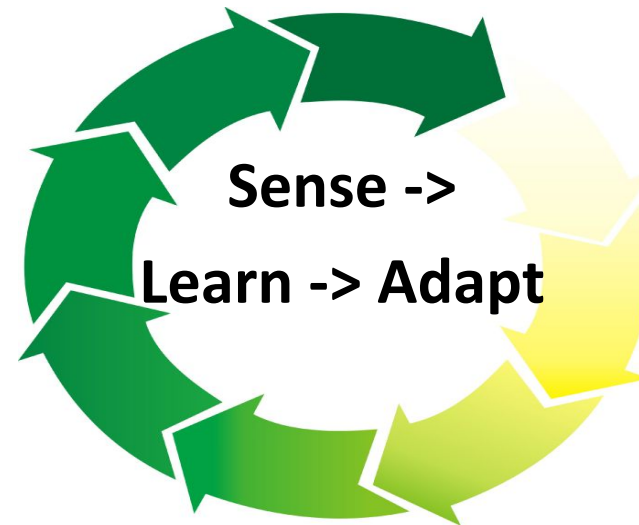
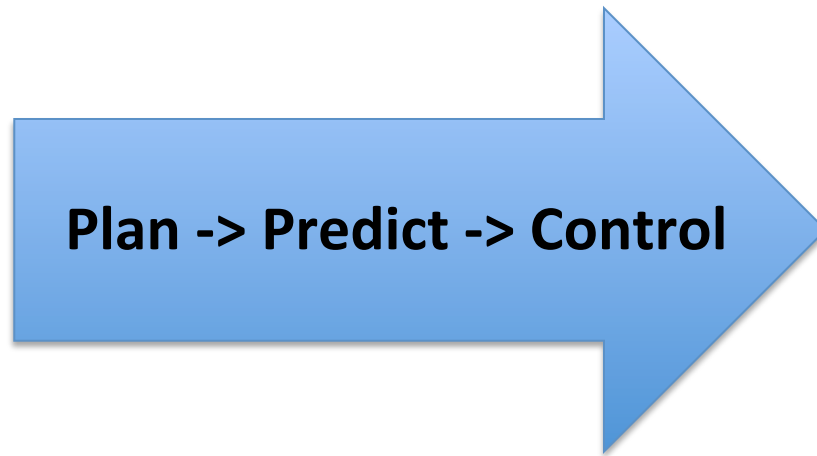
Big corporations and institutions began codifying scenario planning

**V**olatile  
**U**ncertain  
**C**omplex  
**A**mbiguous

"the new  
normal"



# Changing Planning Paradigm

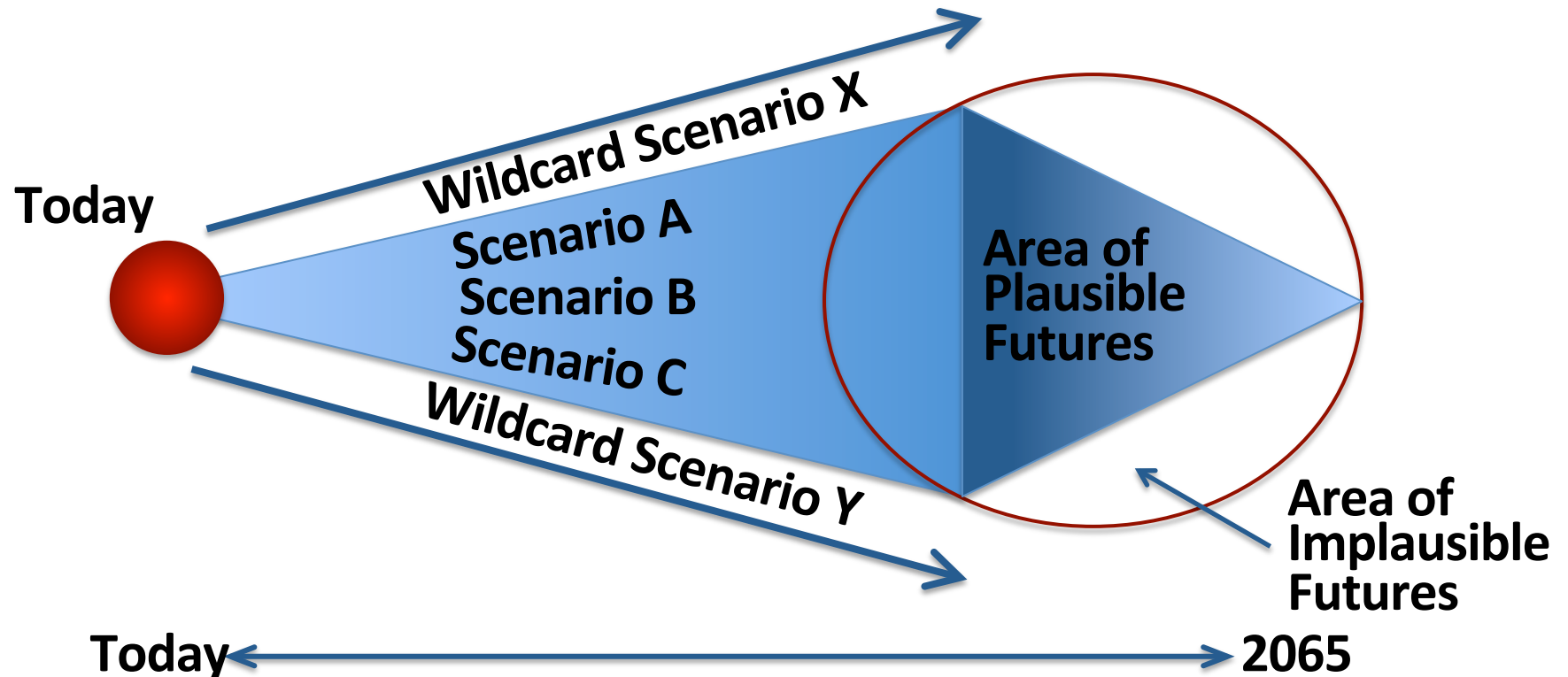


- Linear
- Static
- About the “**Plan**”
- About prediction
- About answers & experts

- Dynamic
- Adaptive
- About the “**strategic conversation**”
- About collaboration, collective action

# What is scenario planning?

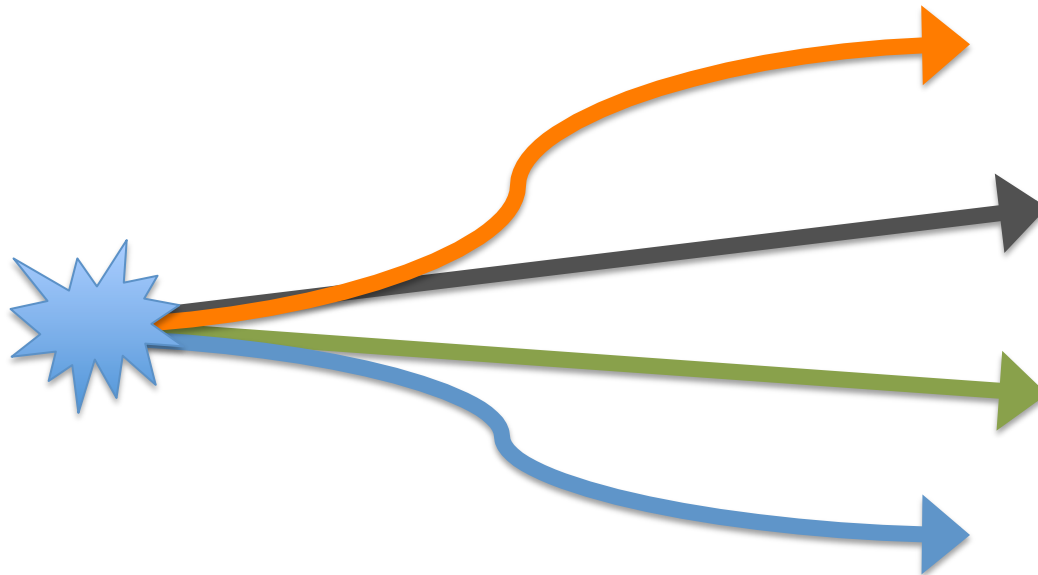
A method for *adaptive* planning and decision-making— for individuals and groups— under conditions of *uncertainty and complexity*



# Forecasting vs. Scenario Planning



- **Single** future
- Assumptions extrapolated from past (often not surfaced)
- Analytical tools only
- Uncertainty implicit (or ignored)



- Multiple **alternative** futures
- Assumptions surfaced & challenged
- Analysis + Creativity tools (“head + heart”)
- Uncertainty explicit

# Adaptive Learning

“The test of a good scenario process is not whether you get the future right, but **whether the organization adapts and learns.**”

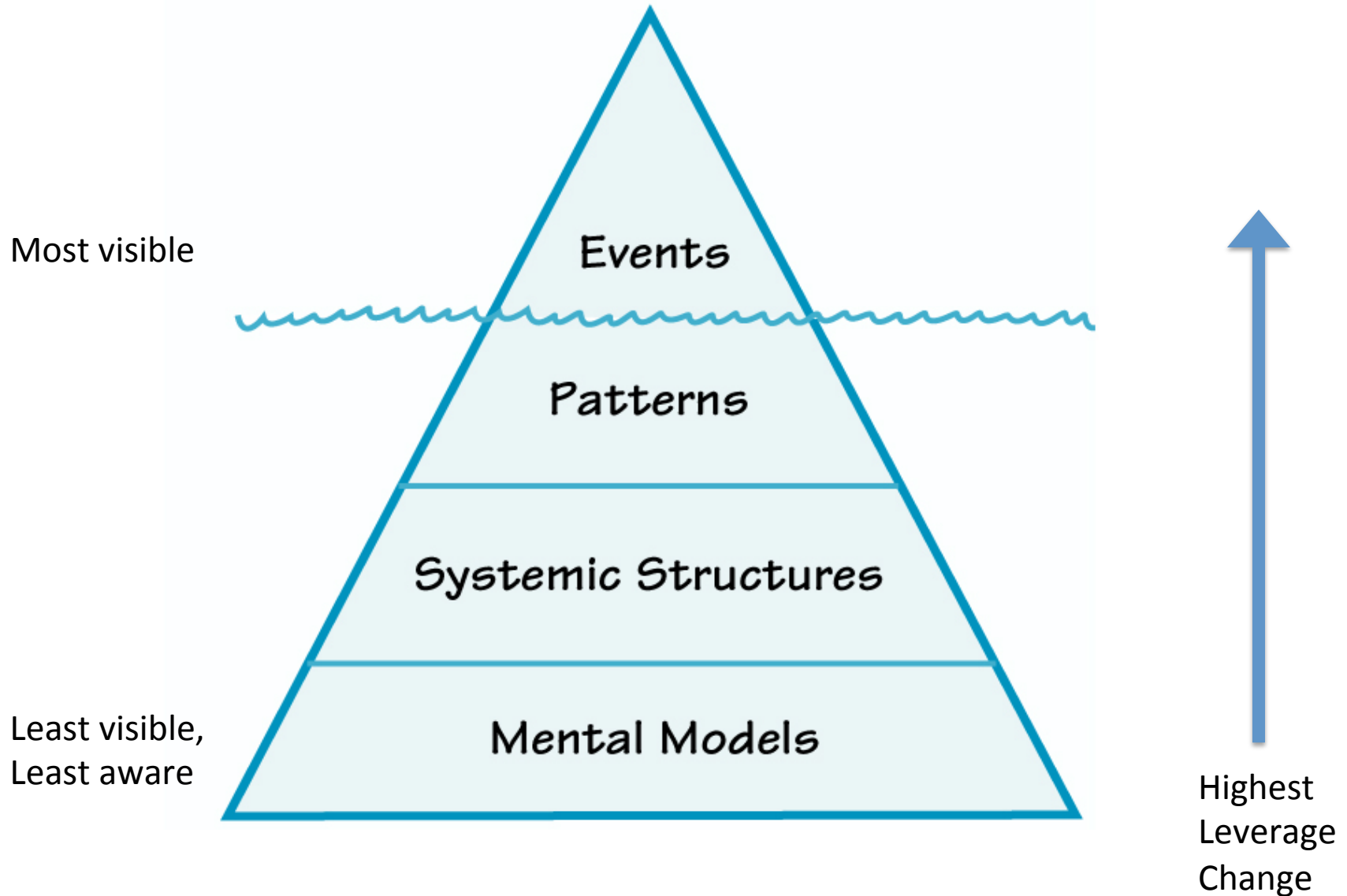
- Peter Schwartz,  
*The Art of the Long View*



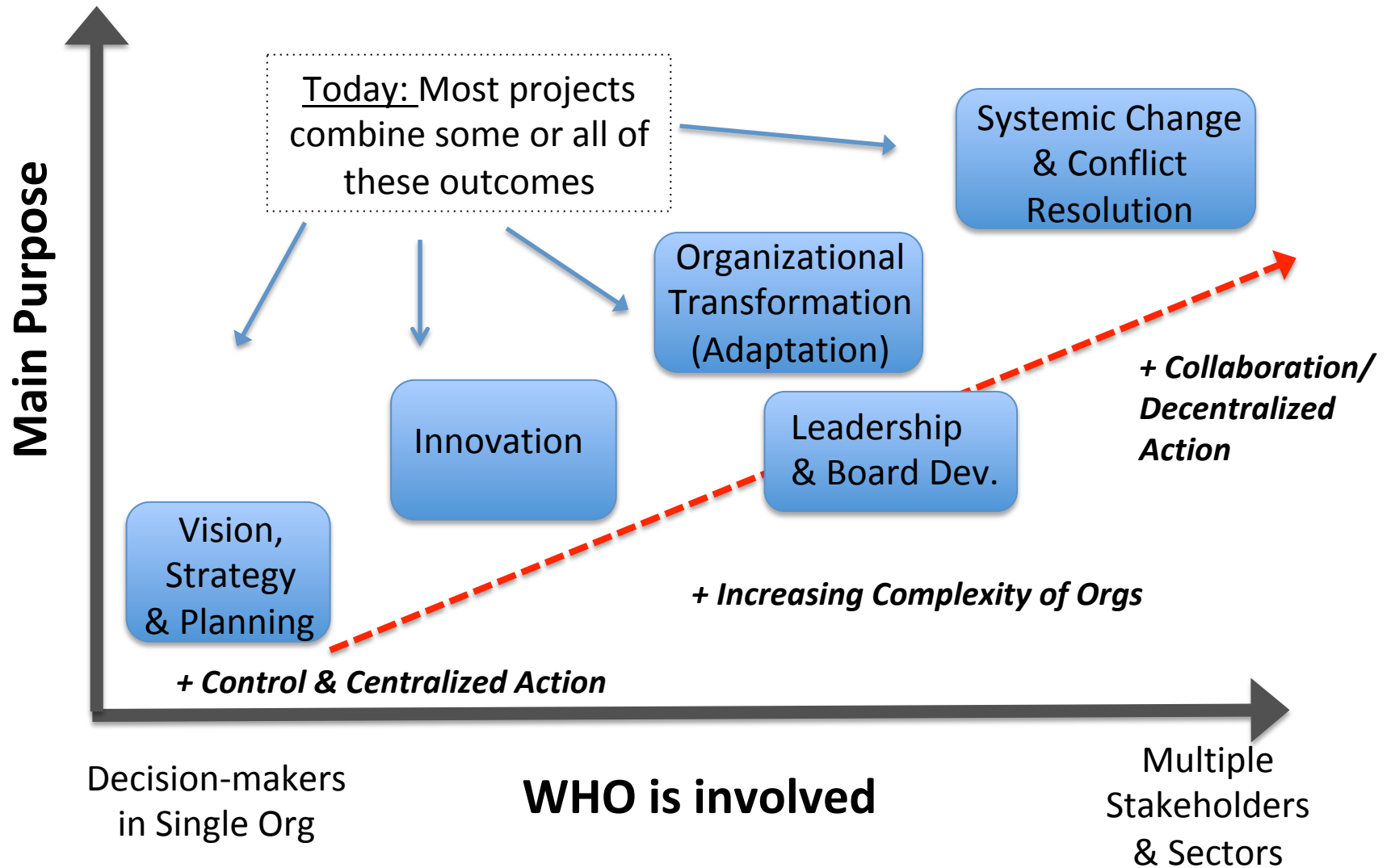


# Good scenario thinking is about **re-perception**

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# Applications of Scenario Planning



# Scenario planning

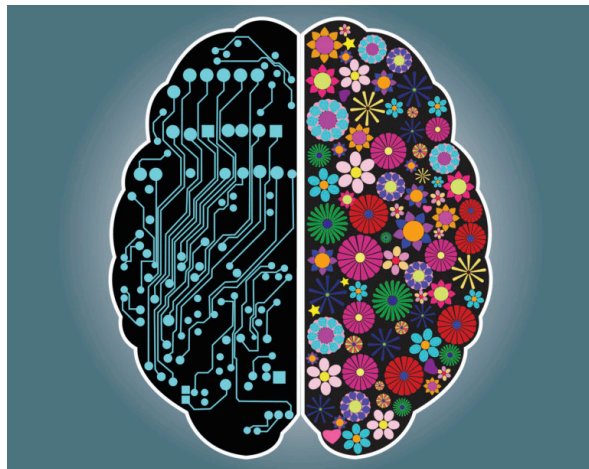
*A flexible* method with a range of tools and processes



## Integrating numerous disciplines

- Strategic thinking
- Risk & option analysis
- Decision-making scenario
- Systems thinking
- Design thinking
- Stakeholder engagement
- Story telling & World making
- Experiential & behavioral learning
- Creativity tools
- Collaboration tools
- Innovation labs / Change Labs
- Change Mgt.
- Adaptive Planning
- Leadership Development
- Venturing
- Conflict resolution & Negotiations

**World of  
Analysis**



**World of  
Imagination  
& Possibility**

**BOTH!**

# Concluding Discussion

What are the **pitfalls, potential, and ongoing problems** in applying the scenario planning toolbox to an urban planning context





## Nicole's starting thoughts...

### Pitfalls

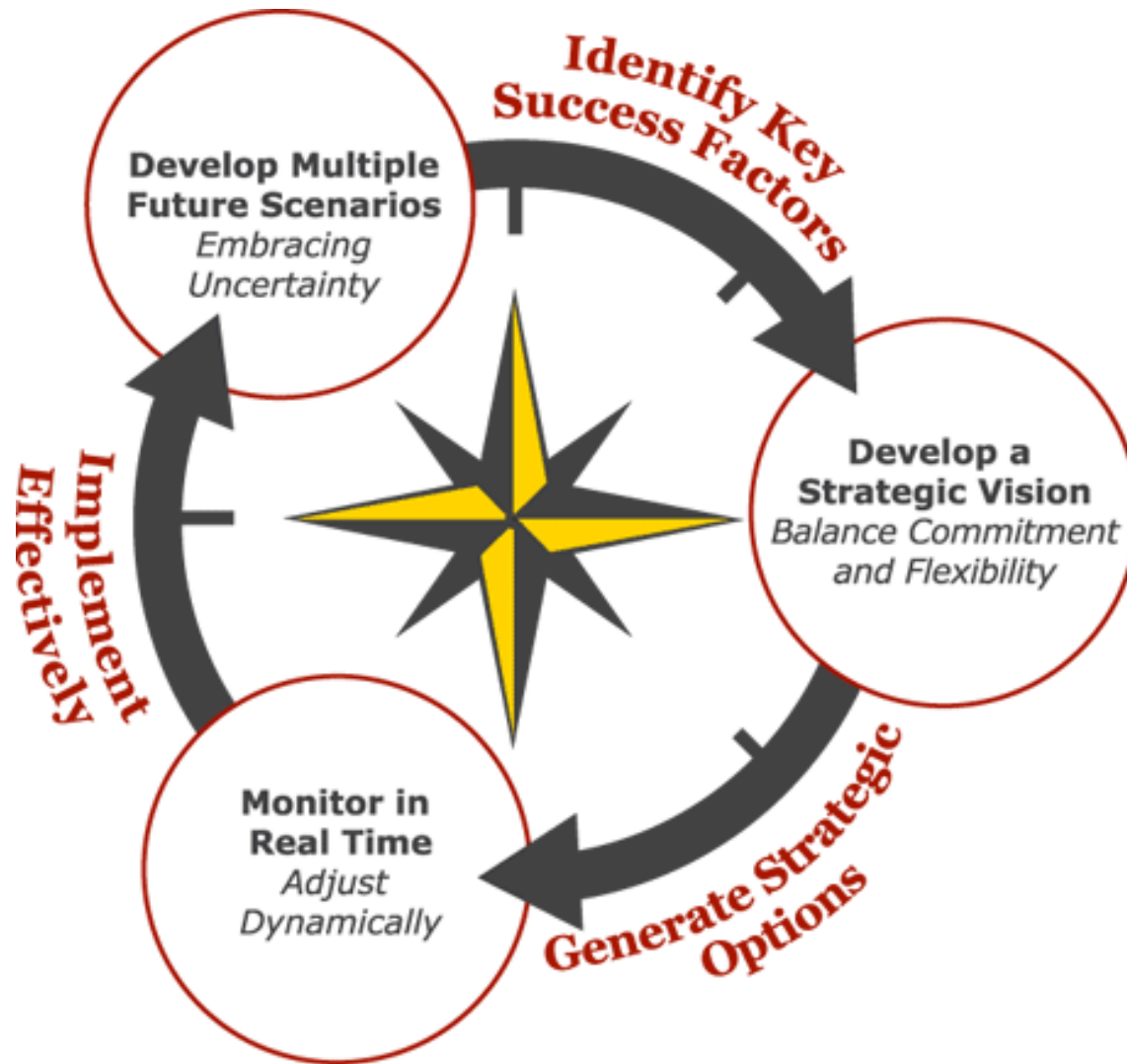
- Disconnected from key leaders and decision-making
- Not including voices outside conventional thinking & stakeholders
- Confusion around purpose & process: “putting square peg in round hole”
  - Skipping key steps that shift behavior, thinking & operationalize outcomes

### Dilemmas/ Challenges

- Dealing with power dynamics and political realities -> perceived lack of agency in shaping the future
- Interfacing with the many mandated planning, studies, and legal reqs.
- Shifting mental models of planners and planning
- Getting the time commitment and courage for real change



# Scenario Planning Cycle



# Nicole's starting thoughts...

## Potential

- Powerful, participatory engagement process beyond the “usual suspects”
- More robust ideas
- More adaptive planning process reflective of how world works
- Tool for empowering talent
- Re-imagining our cities is needed!

