ASH FUTURES LTD

7 Questions

The interviews

The 7 questions technique was pioneered by Shell in its scenario planning process. It is useful for capturing the views of senior decision makers and external stakeholders (who may not wish – or be able - to participate in strategy workshops) as well as being an extremely powerful tool for 'warming up' futures thinking.

The questions are open ended: interviewees should speak as much or as little as they want, without any prompting from the interviewer(s). That's not always easy.

There are several versions of the questions. The version we favour – and which we can customise slightly for each client group – is

1. If you could speak someone from the future who could tell you anything about *[this venture]*, what would you like to ask?

2. What is your vision for success?

3. What are the dangers of not achieving your vision?

4. What needs to change (systems, relationships, decision making processes, culture for example) if your vision is to be realised?

5. Looking back 10 years, what are the successes we can build on? And the failures we can learn from?

6. What needs to be done <u>now</u> to ensure that your vision becomes a reality?

7. If you had absolute authority and could do anything, is there anything else you would do?

Typically, 80% of the strategic issues for the future are uncovered in the first 12-15 internal interviews. Any other interviews are done to uncover the remaining issues and – critically – to include people in the process.

You may want to send a write up of the interview to the interviewee for them to verify – particularly if there are contentious issues or if you are planning on using the interview to produce an issues paper for wider circulation. In this case, having quotes verified can be valuable.

The natural agenda (or issues paper)

Once the interviews have been completed, a useful exercise is to draw up the natural agenda – the issues that have been covered in the interview processes.   The steps are relatively straightforward:

1. Highlight the ten issues (no more!) that seem to be most important in each interview. Spot them by

    • using your intuition

    • noticing where issues have come up repeatedly

    • paying attention to comments like – "this one is really key…"

2. Pull the issues into themed groupings (they'll probably change as you develop things) and copy quotes directly into the groupings

3. Amend the quotations so that any references that could lead to a speaker being identified are removed

4. Group quotes together by sub theme and by correlation (or opposition) of view point

There is no need to provide extensive analysis of the quotes as part of the issues paper – there is value in circulating it without comment to gauge reaction – but the analysis will flow out of the whole process and may form part of a final report.