Translating the Future: Strategic communication in the presentation of scenarios for different stakeholders

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Abstract

This article investigates a dimension that remains underexplored in the field of foresight: the adaptation of the presentation of ready-made scenarios for different audiences. To do so, it draws on communication concepts as a way of understanding and discussing this dimension in the practice of a foresight process. The study adopts a qualitative, exploratory approach, based on 11 interviews conducted with Brazilian professionals with practical experience in corporate foresight. The interviews were carried out online, using a semi-structured guide, recorded with the participants' consent, transcribed, and manually analyzed thematically from an interpretive perspective. The results indicate that the adaptation of scenario presentation already occurs in practice, but not in a systematized way, appearing more as an intuitive response to specific reception conditions than as a formally incorporated stage in the foresight process. As a contribution, the article proposes an initial approximation between foresight and communication, treating language, narrative framing, and presentation format as relevant dimensions for the understanding, appropriation, and use of scenarios in organizational contexts.

Keywords: Foresight, communication, scenarios, stakeholders.

Scenarios are already widely recognized in the field of foresight for their ability to organize information in complex contexts, deal with uncertainty, and construct meaning through narratives (Lehr *et al.*, 2017; Schoemaker, 1993; Milojević & Inayatullah, 2015; Rohrbeck *et al.*, 2015). Still, a closer look at the literature shows that most discussions remain focused on how these scenarios are constructed, while the way they are presented to the audiences who need to understand them, debate them, or act upon them remains less developed.

It is from this concern that this article takes shape. Although the field of foresight already recognizes the importance of narrative, framing, and biases, the discussion of adapting scenario presentation in terms of language, narrative framing, and format according to audience profile still remains underexplored. This study therefore seeks to understand how

such adaptation appears in practice and what, from the practitioners' perspective, it reveals in relation to communication concepts.

To this end, an exploratory qualitative study was conducted with 11 Brazilian professionals with practical experience in corporate foresight. The interviews were conducted online using a semi-structured script, recorded with the participants' consent, transcribed, and manually analyzed by theme within an interpretive perspective.

By proposing this discussion, the article seeks to make an initial move toward bringing foresight and communication closer together. Not because these fields are dissociated in practice, but because their relationship remains underexplored in the literature.

Theoretical background in foresight

There is a convergence among authors regarding the role of scenarios in foresight processes. Scenarios are seen as a tool capable of organizing data in complex contexts, creating meaning through narratives, and challenging mental models that limit strategic thinking. From this perspective, scenarios also support the construction of shared views of possible, plausible, and desirable futures within organizations, increasing their capacity to deal with uncertainty (Lehr *et al.*, 2017; Schoemaker, 1993; Milojević & Inayatullah, 2015; Rohrbeck *et al.*, 2015).

Studies also draw attention to the need to ensure understanding and commitment from senior management, while recognizing the difficulty of maintaining the direct participation of decision-makers throughout the process, especially when limited time reduces their exposure to large volumes of raw data (Lehr *et al.*, 2017; Rohrbeck *et al.*, 2015).

From a more cognitive perspective, Bradfield (2008) points out that certain phenomena may act as barriers to learning in the scenario method. This argument is important because it reinforces that the effectiveness of scenarios does not end with their construction, but also depends on how they are received, interpreted, and incorporated by the actors involved.

The literature on narrative foresight develops this perception even further. Authors such as Milojević and Inayatullah (2015) connect the debate on scenarios with issues such as framing, reframing, identity, personal repertoire, and social and cultural belonging. The effectiveness of narrated futures depends on the frames and meaning structures through

which these futures become plausible, desirable, and understandable to different actors (Milojević & Inayatullah, 2015).

Although the foresight literature has moved toward questions of repertoire, identity, and meaning structures, it still does not address more directly the adaptation of scenario presentation for different actor profiles, which may be an important step in increasing the understanding, engagement, and impact of these studies.

This need, however, can be examined more deeply through some communication theories, which help explain how certain processes of understanding take place and how they can also be used strategically when adapting the presentation of scenarios for different audiences.

Understanding the construction of meaning

Before moving directly to strategic issues, it is important to understand how the communication process itself takes place. In encoding/decoding theory, Stuart Hall (1980) argues that communication does not happen in a linear way. The process of sending and receiving a message involves distinct and independent stages between the person who encodes a message and the person who decodes it.

This helps explain why distorted interpretations and misunderstandings may occur: they arise precisely from the lack of equivalence between the structures of meaning, shaped by the sociocultural, ideological, and individual repertoires of both the sender and the receiver (Hall, 1980).

In a contemporary context, Giannini (2016) shows that this nonlinearity becomes even more visible in interactions mediated by social media, where messages usually have their own language, are heavily shaped by context, and, once taken up, can be shared across an entire network of connections. Going beyond the specific context discussed by the author, when a message circulates beyond the codes originally assumed in its production, the chances of divergent readings, disputes over meaning, and public escalation of interpretation increase, especially in digital environments.

According to Hall (1980), message decoding may occur through three different codes: dominant, negotiated, and oppositional. In the dominant

code, the message is decoded according to the same references through which it was constructed. In the negotiated code, part of those references is accepted, but they need to be adjusted to the receiver's preferences and experiences for understanding to occur. In the oppositional code, the elements of the message are recognized, but interpreted through an alternative frame of reference.

This suggests that understanding between sender and receiver tends to occur when they share, even if only partially, the same codes of a message. Even so, because this is an identity-based process, it is not possible to control how decoding will take place (Hall, 1980).

Given this context, it is important to consider that, in the presentation of scenarios, friction between repertoires will not only occur, but is also expected and forms part of the communication process.

Importance of narrative framing

While Hall (1980) helps to explain why the meaning of communication is not linear, his argument also leads to an earlier question: how such a message is constructed. This is where the discussion of framing becomes relevant.

Although this is a concept that has been widely explored in futures studies since the formation of the field (Milojević & Inayatullah, 2015), it is used here through a communication lens, precisely to help understand the elements that shape it and the role it plays.

Media framing refers to the way information is organized and presented in order to guide the audience's interpretation. It works as a mechanism for constructing reality by giving greater relevance to, or leaving out, certain factors in a narrative (Entman, 1993, as cited in Zaklama, 2025).

For Entman (1993, as cited in Zaklama, 2025), framing analysis needs to consider four main elements in its construction: the communicator, who is responsible for selecting elements and defining the framing; the text, where the message is expressed through structures of words and images; the receiver, who interprets the information based on their experiences and beliefs; and culture, understood as the social context that shapes both the construction and the reception of the message.

Framing can also be understood as a cognitive process that helps identify problems, diagnose causes, define moral judgments, and suggest

solutions. By placing new developments into familiar structures, it gives meaning and relevance to complex events, making it easier to understand what might otherwise seem confusing or ambiguous (Entman, 1993, as cited in Zaklama, 2025).

Adaptation in the communication process

Even so, framing alone does not solve the fact that different audience profiles interpret messages in different ways according to their sociocultural context and personal repertoire. This makes it necessary to understand how communication can be adjusted in relation to the interlocutor.

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) helps move this discussion forward by examining how individuals adjust their verbal and nonverbal communication, consciously or unconsciously, in order to create proximity with the interlocutor (Giles *et al.*, 2023).

It can also be understood as a tool for regulating social interaction, capable of decreasing or increasing the social distance between communicators and, in doing so, reflecting differences in status and power (Giles *et al.*, 2023).

According to Giles *et al.* (2023), the main strategies identified are convergence, divergence, maintenance, over-accommodation, and under-accommodation. Convergence occurs when communicative behavior is adapted in order to create a sense of closeness with the interlocutor. Divergence, in turn, emphasizes differences in communicative behavior so as to increase social distance. Maintenance refers to situations in which communicative behavior is not adapted and remains faithful to one's original style. Over-accommodation takes place when adaptation goes beyond the appropriate level of adjustment, whereas under-accommodation occurs when adaptation does not happen at the expected level.

The theory also considers group-based identity, when communicative behavior is adapted in relation to the social identity of a group, as in cases of religious, political, or ethnic belonging, for example (Giles *et al.*, 2023).

Approximation moves can be understood as more refined developments of the broader idea of convergence, detailing different ways in which communication may be adjusted toward the interlocutor. In this sense, interpretability refers to efforts to make the message easier for the interlocutor to understand; discourse management concerns adjustments

related to the social and conversational needs of the interaction; interpersonal control involves strategies that recognize, legitimize, reinforce, or soften power relations and social roles; and emotional expression refers to accommodation in relation to the interlocutor's affective state (Giles *et al.*, 2023).

CAT also includes contexts of technology-mediated communication. In this type of interaction, accommodation is not limited to verbal content, but also involves the way the message is mediated, which can affect trust, mutual understanding, and social distance (Giles *et al.*, 2023).

In this discussion, McLuhan (1964) also helps reinforce the importance of the medium in the circulation of the message, since it affects its scale and rhythm. In scenario-building processes, Bradfield (2008) identifies that media influence can operate as a cognitive bias, leading widely publicized events to receive greater relevance and to be more easily categorized as potential drivers of change, in comparison with other factors that also show evidence of high impact.

It is worth noting, however, that the relationship between medium and message is also complementary and equally important, since it is the content that generates an impact capable of transforming individual perception into action and promoting collective change (Gupta, 2021).

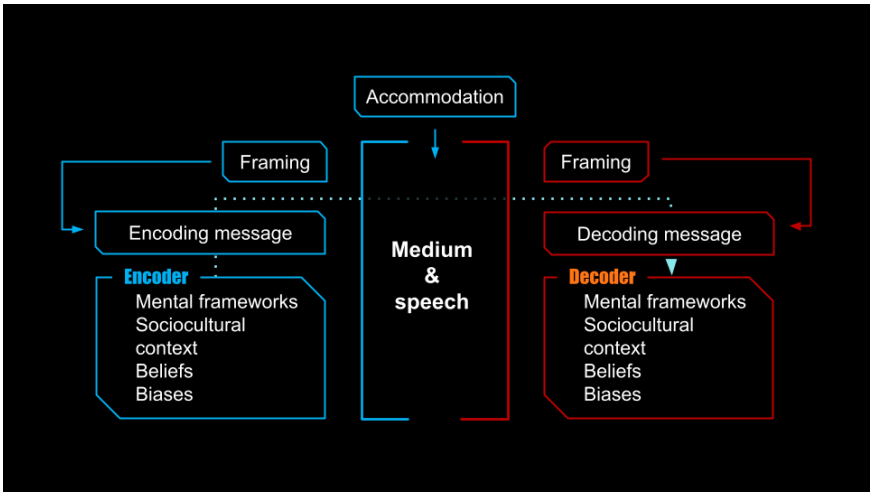


Figure 1 – Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding flowchart, adapted based on the articulation between the communication theories presented in the article.

To support the understanding and articulation of the theories presen-

ted here, a flowchart was developed based on an adapted version of Hall's (1980) encoding and decoding model, with the aim of reinforcing the importance of communication strategies that take into account the different actor profiles that need to be reached in the presentation of scenarios within a foresight process.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, exploratory approach aimed at understanding how foresight professionals perceive and carry out the adaptation of scenario presentations for different audiences, as well as the engagement and outcomes related to this process.

To this end, 11 interviews were conducted with Brazilian professionals with practical experience in corporate foresight. Participants were selected through referrals, based on connections established on LinkedIn with students and professionals in the field. The decision to interview practitioners was intended to bring a broader perspective to the study on the presentation of scenarios, grounded in the experience of professionals directly involved in this type of practice and who do not necessarily approach it from a communication-centered perspective.

The interviews were conducted online, via video calls, between July and August 2025. A previously prepared semi-structured interview guide was used to conduct the conversations, focusing on issues related to adapting the language and format of scenarios to different audience profiles, how engagement was measured, and the outcomes observed by professionals in their practice. The audio was recorded with the participants' authorization, which was obtained at the beginning of each interview. Participation was voluntary, and all statements were treated anonymously.

After the interviews were completed, the material was transcribed and analyzed thematically from an interpretive perspective. The procedure involved reading the transcripts, identifying recurring patterns, and grouping statements into broader themes. ATLAS.ti was used to support the organization and systematization of the material, but the definition of the broader themes was carried out manually, based on an interpretive reading.

Analysis and discussion

When asked whether adaptations were made in the way scenarios were presented, the interviewees generally showed a certain degree of hesitation, as they were initially unsure about what this adaptation referred to. It was therefore necessary to clarify that this process did not involve the construction of the scenario itself, but rather a later stage: adapting the format, language, and storytelling according to the audience to whom the scenarios would be presented, while fully preserving the scenarios developed throughout the foresight process.

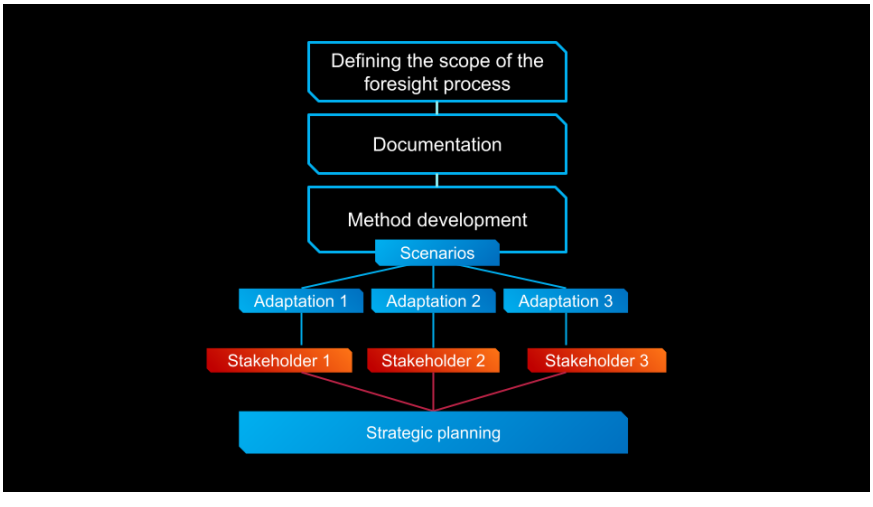


Figure 2 – Flowchart illustrating when adaptation occurs in the presentation of scenarios.

It is worth noting that the flowchart above was not shown to the interviewees during the interviews; it is used here solely as a visual aid to facilitate understanding of where this adaptation takes place.

Based on the interviews, it was possible to identify that some professionals do adapt the way scenarios are presented, but this tends to occur in a more intuitive than systematic manner. Among the criteria mentioned for this adaptation were presentation time, audience profile, sociocultural factors, the purpose of the presentation, the audience's foresight mindset,

the number of scenarios presented, and the search for more engaging formats, which help define the storytelling, format, and language adopted. These elements, however, do not appear as shared criteria among all interviewees, but rather as recurring patterns identified across the interviews. What this initial finding already suggests is that adaptation does exist in practice, but it still does not appear as a clearly named or formalized stage within the process.

This becomes even clearer when looking at the conditions under which adaptation takes place in response to how information is received.

The main reasons for carrying it out usually emerge in three situations: when scenarios are presented to senior management; when it is intuitively perceived that the audience profile responds better to more quantitative than qualitative information; and when, during the presentation, a divergence in perspective arises with the audience, requiring a reconsideration of how the scenario will be reorganized in terms of language and form of presentation, while always respecting its methodological character.

When this adaptation is not carried out, the main argument observed is that what is delivered is simply what had already been defined in the original contracted scope. In many cases, such adaptation requires resources that affect delivery time, the professionals involved, and the budget, leaving little or no room for it to happen without additional investment. This makes an important point of the research more visible: adaptation is not necessarily absent from the process because its importance is unrecognized, but because it is still treated as something additional, rather than as a systematic part of scenario presentation.

Beyond observing when this adaptation does or does not occur, the interviews also brought up elements concerning the perceived effects at the moment scenarios are presented. When asked about this, some common points emerged.

The first point is related to organizational culture and the way it interferes with the reception of scenarios. Although companies recognize the importance of corporate foresight for guiding strategy, there is often an expectation of more immediate results, which creates tension with the time required for the assimilation and use of this type of study. In this context, difficulties arise in extracting actionable directions from the scenarios and, in some cases, even a reluctance to take a position in relation to what has been presented. This suggests that organizational expectations also shape the way scenarios are received and appropriated.

The second point concerns the difficulty of maintaining participants' attention during the presentation of scenarios. In many cases, the volume of information causes the audience to lose focus and begin using that time to deal with parallel matters, especially in senior management settings. This finding resonates with the discussion of accommodation, particularly with regard to discourse management and interpretability, as it highlights the need to vary the format, rhythm, and support of the presentation according to the audience profile.

Third, futurewashing (Mereu & Preira, 2024) emerges as an important lateral tension, since in some cases the study was found to have been commissioned in order to confirm the client's preferred scenario, or even to enhance brand reputation, without any real intention of strategically applying the insights produced. Although this moves somewhat beyond the initial objective of the research, it also suggests the hypothesis that some of the resistance to investing in foresight processes within organizations may be related to this issue.

In addition to the issue of adaptation, the interviews also sought to understand which signs practitioners use to perceive engagement with the scenarios presented. The main indicators mentioned were predominantly qualitative: the appropriation of terms used in the scenarios and the quality of the questions asked afterward. These elements suggest that engagement is not expressed only in the immediate reaction to the presentation, but also in the way the scenario comes to be appropriated by the audience (Milojević & Inayatullah, 2015).

When invited to reflect on what they have observed in the market and on the aspects they still consider fragile in the presentation of scenarios, the interviewees brought up points that speak directly to the communication theories discussed in this study. One of them concerns the need to present signals and drivers of change before the scenarios themselves, so that the audience can build a sufficient frame of reference to understand the tensions that structure them. This point is closely related to framing theory, as it highlights the importance of organizing complex information before presenting futures (Entman, 1993, as cited in Zaklama, 2025). Another point concerns the need to think about formats that create impact. In many cases, the content of the study is rich, but the form of presentation does not sustain the same effect. In this sense, the interviews suggest that the medium directly shapes the attention and rhythm of a presentation (McLuhan, 1964). Finally, the interviewees pointed to the

problem of academic jargon: excessively academic presentations and terminology can create distance from the audience, reinforcing the need to accommodate both verbal and nonverbal language to the audience profile (Giles *et al.*, 2023).

Conclusion

This study began with the hypothesis that the same scenario, when presented from different perspectives, may give rise to narrative framings that are better aligned with the needs of different interlocutors. Throughout the research, it became clear that such adaptation already exists in practice, but still in a largely unsystematic way. In general, it appears as a response to specific conditions in how information is received, rather than as a recognized part of the scenario presentation process itself.

This does not mean that practitioners fail to recognize its importance. What the interviews suggest is that this adaptation is usually treated as something additional, whose implementation depends on factors such as scope, budget, time, and the organizational expectations surrounding foresight itself.

At the same time, the research reinforces a gap that had already appeared in the literature: although the field of foresight acknowledges the importance of narrative, framing, and biases, discussion remains limited and not very explicit when it comes to adapting language, narrative framing, and presentation format according to audience profile.

The main contribution of this article may lie precisely in making an initial move toward bringing foresight and communication into closer dialogue, based on the understanding that different audiences interpret and engage with scenarios in different ways. This means that scenario presentation can no longer be seen as a mere operational detail, but rather as a relevant dimension of the process, since without adaptation its potential for comprehension, engagement, and impact may be reduced.

Among the limitations of this article is the bibliographic scope adopted. Although the field of foresight already includes some discussions related to concepts from communication studies, this study focused on a delimited set of authors and references. Another limitation lies in the empirical scope: the interviews were conducted only with Brazilian foresight practitioners, which restricts the reach of the analysis.

As a next step, future research may broaden this bibliographic mapping and incorporate the perspective of organizations and of the audiences who receive scenario presentations. Case studies comparing situations in which formats are adapted with others in which they are not, according to audience profile, may also help deepen this discussion.

By looking at scenario presentation as a relevant part of the process, rather than merely as a final stage of communication, it becomes possible to better understand how these futures are actually appropriated by different audiences.

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