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Twenty years of experience, five tales from the front line**

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Scenario projects in Japanese government: Twenty years of experience, five tales from the front line

Masahiro Kakuwa¹

Abstract: How does scenario planning in government differ from scenario planning in the corporate world? This paper considers five projects done in Japan – four from the public sector, one from the private sector – and finds that when comparing to people in the private business, public servants have cognitive and institutional constraints on their thinking. This makes it hard for them to contemplate multiple, ‘untidy’ futures, and imagine the possibility of policy failure: skills which are essential for successful scenario projects. The possible solution may be to shake them out of their thinking with ‘derailment’ – allowing them to discuss the future as they would like to come about, and then exploring ways in which that desired scenario might not occur. The other observation is that, although there has been growing demand from Japanese public sector organisation of scenario type brainstorming opportunities, for public servants, these are preferred as an isolated event rather than a routinely institutionalised process in the policy making and policy execution. They enjoy the scenario planning only as a refreshing event and as a chance to explore and learn new things.

1. Introduction

This paper is an attempt at disciplined reflection, by a scenario practitioner, on his twenty years’ experience in the field. In Japan, I work as a designer of study processes, a facilitator in workshops, and an editor/writer of scenario reports. I am writing this for the experts in scenario planning practices, in the hope that I can share my working experience with them, and become more of a resource to the scenario planning community outside Japan.

My reflection and thought will focus largely on projects for the Japanese public sector – especially since there is a growing need for scenario work in government. Scenario planners are summoned once there is an obvious break from the past, and here in Japan, now is such a time! However, scenario practitioners have to react with caution to this new enthusiasm. Consider the following scenario, no doubt taking place across Japan as this is written.

A government organisation asks a scenario planner to conduct a project, and dozens of bureaucrats come and join scenario workshops. Then, the planner gradually notices that a ‘scenario-type’ discussion is an unpleasant experience for the participants. Efforts to dig up big issues in future do not necessarily galvanize them.

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This is not a question of the facilitator's skill, but rather that their skills and practices originated in the private sector and need refinement for their new audience. This is a tale I know well.

My entrée into the scenario planning world was accidental. In 1992, my Japanese employer Showa Shell decided to send me to the scenario planning team in London, the UK headquarters of the Shell Group. Up until then I had been a company oil trader, a hardworking, high tension job, and the company seemed to expect me to develop another side of myself in London. I became a scenario planner in Europe. I returned to Japan in 1995, and ever since then scenario activities have always been part of my job. So that the methodology and skill I have been using at scenario projects are basically "Shell style". There is a distinctive characteristic in scenario project conducted by the Shell style, which are well captured by R.D.Shell's "Scenarios: An Explorer's Guide, 2003". [Shell International Ltd, 2003], and by Kees van der Heijden's "Scenarios : The art of strategic conversation" [van der Heijden, 1996]. Over and above, Wilkinson and Kupers [Wilkinson, 2014] successfully reviewed this Shell-style mainly in the historical perspective. In this book many precious insights are accrued from interviews of Shell scenario planners in these almost fifty years. I myself have modified some of the Shell style, tailored to Japan's local context, but by and large been with the development of the Shell-style process and product. Interestingly, however, much of my work has been for Japanese government, and has allowed me to consider in great depth the unique challenges of working with governments.

In the following, I will reflect on several scenario projects I have undertaken. Some will be successes, and others will be failures – the latter being much more memorable for me because the unsatisfactory outcome was often caused by my own mistakes, which I have learned from. Then, I will generalise my experience and discuss by referring to some of academic works related to scenario planning and Japanese public policy making process. However, I don't wish to discuss the analytical part fat and dull.

Some readers may wish to skip the in-depth description of scenario projects, the five examples of which I have chosen to analyse, and jump straight to the discussion and conclusions: however, I hope that practitioners will also find much of interest in my tales of scenario projects in Japan.

Acknowledgement

I appreciate the helpful comments on the drafts of this paper, including those from Dr Michael D. Rogers, Dr Tatsujiro Suzuki and Dr Kyoko Ohta.

2. Five tales: scenario projects in Japan

This paper is primarily meant to share my professional experiences with the peer scenario planning practitioners. To begin this consideration of scenario planning in Japanese government, let me start with a tale of a project in the private sector.

2.1. The CEO fires himself: a tragedy

This was a bitter experience for me, in which a scenario planning process aimed at helping managers make decisions eventually cost one of them his job.

The project was a series of top-management workshops, scenario-planning style, which could ultimately lead to the closure of a large factory and a significant number of staff redundancies. I led a team of young researchers and was the facilitator for the workshops themselves, in a process lasting half a year. I was commissioned to conduct three half-day workshops every forty to fifty days with the management team. The task and objective of each workshop was agreed beforehand, and well known to the participants. Voices representing the factory workers were not invited, but indirectly their opinions were well listened to.

A huge number of man-hours were mobilized, as the research team tried to explore every option to keep the factory open, but the team failed to arrive at any convincing scenario which allowed the factory to keep operating in the long term. Indeed, the possible closure was a long-standing issue for the company, so that our research and discussion was often overwhelmed by data and insights from previous studies. We were working under pressure: there was consensus amongst the executives that the time had come to hammer out a final decision.

The workshop discussion was choked with competing interests, and offered little space for exploring new things. I, as the facilitator, definitely needed this space. The idea I threw to the workshop was this: ‘think how your competitors could play their business games after our factory closes.’ This question worked, and some innovative ideas emerged. The management team talked intensively and thoroughly, fighting and bargaining with each other.

At the end of the second workshop, the discussion converged on the closure option, which emboldened me to design the third and last workshop for ‘option generation’, considering how best the company could execute the difficult job of the closure, from preparation to shut-down and aftercare. Some managers started to call researchers under me, to commission a detailed study preparing for the closure.

Here, a tragedy hit the company. Just two days before the third workshop, the CEO of the company suddenly resigned. The CEO had been one of those who hadn’t wanted to close the factory, and had been asking me to come up with ideas to defend it. Behind him there was an internal interest group, which had been strongly opposing the closure.

I realised that the research and discussion, which was transparent and rational, gradually drove the CEO into a tight corner. The CEO had had the courage to employ scenario planning and to face its implications, but at the end of the day he was forced to lose his manoeuvrability in the decision making process. With his position untenable, he resigned.

The workshop, the third and the last, took place as scheduled. I facilitated this almost-unwanted event in a frosty climate. The executives were not a unified team but a constituency with winners and losers. What they had to do was devastatingly

clear, however. Having come to a decision, they had to speak with one voice, and they did so. Later a young researcher asked me with resentment whether I had ignored the CEO's anguish. "I have noticed it", he said.

On reflection, four points should be borne in mind:

First, the theme of the scenario project was to be the objective assessment of the factory under several different business environments in the long term. However, top management came to the workshops with their own pre-determined opinions, underpinning a well-distilled Aye or Nay position on the closure.

Second, the scenario planning was expected to provide the discussion arena with analytical thinking, and transparency in the decision-making process. In this regard at least, it worked as planned.

Third, having observed the pressure for a decision, I tried to exercise my facilitation to nurture common sympathy among the management team. The integrated execution of the closure would be a big task requiring the skills of the whole company, but in between the second and the third workshops the internal power-games came back to life. I was duly concerned about this, but could not intervene, and this left me feeling powerless and marginalised.

Fourth, during that six month process I actually changed my client. In the beginning the client was the CEO who had initiated the project; however, gradually the client turned out to be the whole management team. In general, scenario planning is a process designed to create collective understanding and wisdom. I tried to be loyal to this idea but in the process I betrayed my original client, the CEO, and still I feel very sorry for him. A good scenario practitioner can act as a personal counsellor for the decision maker. I did not.

2.2 Nuclear power: the scenario as weapon and work of art

I will now move on to discuss my scenario projects for the Japanese public sector, largely the central government, where I have most experience. Four in particular stand out: "Nuclear Power scenario 2005", "Energy 2030", "Urban Mobility 2040" and "China Scenario 2007". Each project had different sponsors, with different reasons to employ the scenario planning methodology, and each project taught me a different lesson.

'Nuclear Power scenarios 2005' is the next story I want to share. This project was carried out in 2004/05 obviously before the earthquake, tsunami and Fukushima Nuclear power incident in March 2011. This was a failed project, and a negative personal experience. The scenario study in question would be abandoned, never to see the light of day.

I was working with a Japanese quasi-governmental research institute, which initiated this project. Top experts were mobilized from the nuclear and energy industries, and from academia and public bodies. The team diligently carried out its research and analysis, but gradually the president of the research institute's motives for sponsoring the study became clear.

The president was a former high-ranking bureaucrat, and still maintained his influence over Japan's energy policies. His hidden intention was to challenge the current policies of his younger successors. The president wanted to provide a plausible alternative, with himself as its champion. The world Japanese high-ranking bureaucrats inhabit is adversarial and competitive in policy-making and propagation. They behave not only as technocrats but also as politicians. This was a world which the president did not want to leave. I found 'his' scenario was pre-composed. The scenario research team was expected to write up a BAU (Business As Usual) story based on current government nuclear policies, and the alternative, 'his' story, yielding a better future.

My scenario practice could not meet the sponsor/client's expectations. I did not facilitate the discussion to arrive at the pre-composed storylines. The client's own vision was valid and quite consistent, but it was not the only vision, and we did not discard its rivals.

I now reflect that the sponsor/client expected only to get a neat policy paper, thick and dense, from the messy scenario study. Bureaucrats make it a habit to write papers in a sober, repressed style, not dwelling on potential complications. The paper inevitably becomes colourless, but can include subtle suggestions and room for politicians and bureaucrats to act upon the paper – in one direction. Contrary to that, scenario practitioners know that writing scenarios is a different task. The scenario story has to acknowledge that the present situation may develop in several different ways. Scenario researchers work to articulate stories that clearly and eloquently communicate the essence of the relevant issues – including any complications – to the wider public.

Toward the end of the study some workshop attendants increasingly became worried about the evocative style of the writing. The sponsor also found the work uncomfortable. He expected to have a well-written and watertight advocacy paper, not easily dismissed, but many things were being left unsettled. This fell short of his goal to establish a *de facto* high-powered expert council where, according to rules of the Japanese political system, he would have a chance to set the terms of the future policy debate.²

Nonetheless the research team marched on, and eventually arrived at a distillate of the issue. The key uncertainty was over unresolved policies for dealing with spent uranium fuel from nuclear power plants. Japan's official policy has long been to construct a reprocessing plant in Japan, hopefully for full reprocessing, which completes the so called 'closed fuel cycle': however, *where* to construct that plant has proved a difficult issue.

Over the past forty years, nuclear power plants were built one by one after time-consuming negotiations between local communities and private power companies. Government assisted these negotiations with schemes to hand out huge amounts of

² Academics domestic and foreign generally agree that in Japan the high-profile expert council is the arena where real political bargains among different interest parties take place, and that the administrative stake over the expert council is the power base of Japanese bureaucrats. Political bargaining and coordination among Ministries and Agencies is also tightly worked out in the process of fixing the official report by the expert council. See [Morita, 2006], and the classic work of [Johnson, 1975]

cash to the local governments that committed to take on the burden. Indeed, some local communities would become dependent on these subsidies. To date the only major issue which remains is the choice of disposal sites for high-level radioactive waste. This will have to be stored at deep underground repository, whose only purpose is to shelter the hazard. Japanese government and power industry were aware of the problem, but had been putting off tackling the issue. The scenario researchers jumped in and did so, only to find that they could not work unencumbered by competing voices and interests.

The study was finished. The scenario researchers had done their work articulating stories that could communicate the essence of the issue to the public. I tried to weave a variety of stories into the scenario picture. “Nuclear Power scenarios 2005” addressed how the spent fuel issue could be solved. One story mentioned the name of a local community, which was the proposed venue for a high-level radioactive waste disposal and storage facility. Some experts became hesitant to mention the name in order not to evoke local NUMBYism. (What is that? It stands for “Not Under My Back Yard”). Others insisted on mentioning it.

This was the start of a process of deterioration, as one after another, intriguing points in the scenarios were regarded as ‘best left unsaid’ and were discarded. The work started to lose purpose and clarity. The research team wallowed in frustration. I was terrified of being abandoned by the sponsor: and despite the concessions made on the report, that is exactly what happened. Six months’ work ended up scrapped.

To sum up, this project had eventually turned into a magnetic field for experts’ earnest debate on Japan’s nuclear policy. Seeing this unheralded development, the president switched off the project abruptly. I lost face to everyone. I could have shortened the reins when the research team started to rebel and resisted the substantial changes that were demanded in the scenario that they had made. But I couldn’t. My heart was with the researchers. Scenarios are an art form, rather than a political weapon.

2.3. Energy: a successful case of derailment

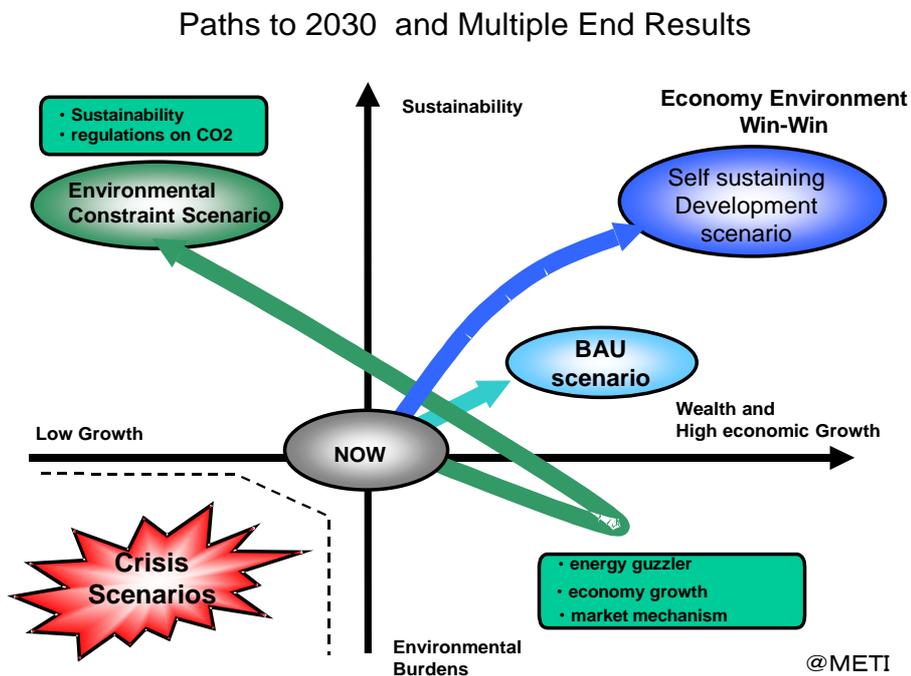
The “Energy 2030” project was sponsored by METI, the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, took nine months to finish, and was published in May 2005.

Renowned experts from inside and outside government were called in, and the scenario workshop was eventually made up of one-half METI personnel and one-half outsiders from academia and the private sector. In one scenario workshop, I invited a co-facilitator from the Shell Group, my old colleague, who was English speaking. Discussion in a foreign language brought a certain clumsiness to the discussion, but also a freshness for the Japanese participants. With that, METI recognized that its outlook should be publicized in English to acquire a wider audience. Hence, “Energy 2030” was later translated, and became available for English speakers.

In making the ‘Energy 2030’ scenario, we employed the inductive approach. In this, research starts from the issues seen at present, then the present transforms itself in multiple ways as the current set of issues interact and naturally develop. In ‘Energy

2030', the national economic system and Japan's changing society evolved naturally and interacted with each other. The framework of the scenario is shown below.

Figure 1.



The aspiration of the client, METI, was clear. They wanted to drive the present societal-industrial system to a less carbon-intensive model, given that it was the international fashion in 2004 to develop visions of the future 'low carbon society'.

Unsurprisingly, the "Self-sustaining Development" scenario was the one METI wanted to promote. During the scenario study process I accepted their eagerly chasing the low-carbon vision, and the storylines toward the year 2030 were created. Then, in the following workshop, I asked the participants to deliberately derail from the preferred scenario and think of any possible 'failed' scenarios. Suddenly, the workshop process was revitalized. The worrying future of No Action ("Environmental Constraint") and Not-Enough Action ("BAU" again) appeared. The research team willingly jumped in to consider the new issues. The METI client also decided to incorporate potential oil shocks into their thinking in order to give an abrupt discontinuity to their stories. Thus the scenario framework was found and fixed. All that remained for me to do was to edit scenario stories. "BAU", "Environmental Constraint" and "Crisis" were written to be as equally plausible as "Self-sustaining Development".

In March 2005, 'Energy 2030' was presented to a government-led, high-powered expert council advising on Japan's energy policy. The work was well-received, and I was pleased to see the scenario evoked a high quality debate. Also, the paper appeared on government website for several weeks to invite public comments, from which METI could collect many interesting inputs and opinions. The council decided to keep the scenario story in its policy paper, which went straight to politicians who are to decide Japan's long term energy policy. "Energy 2030" was a triumph.

Then there was a postscript. The METI senior official, a fan of scenario planning, moved to his next posting, and a new bureaucrat took over. His role was to make the “Self-sustaining Development” scenario come about. How to do it? Eventually he found the so-called ‘back casting approach’ which had been proliferating in IPCC papers: that is, defining a desirable future and then working backwards to identify policies and programmes which will connect that future to the present. The new official decided to introduce this novel approach to ‘his’ energy outlook. METI again called me with several econo-energo-metric³ modellers to set out, in narrative and in numbers, the solid path to “Self-sustaining Development” in the year 2030.

The back casting approach appealed to the modellers. They were suddenly free from the data sets of the past and were allowed to tinker with numerical targets in the future. Uncertainties and dynamics in the course of arriving at the distant targets were simply buried in the complex model. In this second-round study, industry was encouraged to provide information on state-of-the-art technologies and their possible development. The outcome was an Energy Road Map and a Technology Road Map.

In this study, I found I could not contribute much. For the modellers, a meddling scenario man was *persona non grata*. Government still called the outcome a scenario study; however the special flavour of the old exploratory spirit was lost.

“Energy 2030” was a timely work amid the increasing pressure to respond to the global climate change agenda. “Self-sustaining Development”, the vision scenario of METI, was presented to those who were to decide, which led to the follow up works: the Road Maps.

2.4. Urban planning: academia learns the public scenario game

In 2008/09, I edited a book of six scenario studies focusing on Japan’s long term future. This project was undertaken by university scholars and took two years. I joined the project as the designer, facilitator and writer of scenario stories. The academics would not act on the scenarios they created, but advocate implications of the study to the general public, especially those interested in public policy.

One of the works was “Urban Mobility 2040”. Here, we the study team tried to illustrate the several possible shapes of Japan’s urban design and civic mobility in the coming century. We came up with two scenarios. “Public Transport Scenario” told of heavy investment in, and utilization of, Japan’s public urban transport system, bringing about a society with low carbon emissions. “Private Transport Scenario” explained how electric vehicle (EV) technologies and related services would boost the Japanese economy and gradually change Japan’s transport and urban societal system.

³ An econo-energo-metric model is one of the tools energy economists use to forecast future developments in the energy system, nationally or regionally. In the simplest terms, experts use the model to measure past relationships among such variables as GDP growth, sectoral energy demand growth, tax rates or subsidies on energy use, supply availability of energy sources (oil, coal, gas uranium and renewables) and so on, and then try to forecast how changes in some variables will affect the future course of others.

Both scenarios called for the government to play a significant role in order to bring them about.

Figure 2.

Urban Mobility 2040

@Dr. Hironori Kato
Univ. of Tokyo

	Public Transport Scenario	Private Transport scenario
Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Invest Public transport infrastructure •Civic right to move around : Oldies and Poores •Compact city policy •Busy city centre with eye spies •Abandonment of many rural agricultural communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Virtual accessibility by ICT •People dwells dispatched •self responsibility •New life style •Income disparity widen •Local communities go bankruptcy •Small, medium towns cease public transport services
CO2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Public transport system reduces CO2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •EV dominates market, reduces CO2
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Regulation and redistribution •Low growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Gov't pour big R&D money to EV techs and dissemination •High growth, high logistic cost

This was an academic work trying to evoke civic discussion. We therefore tried to write stories that were easy to read, with lots of illustrations. In that regard, we succeeded: today we see some activity that refers to this scenario work, suggesting that it has been read and noticed. But, wait a minute: from the scenario practitioners' viewpoint, there is a weakness in the framework of this study.

The "Urban Mobility 2040" anticipates that problems will resolve themselves once the government notices that they exist, and can put its policies into effect. The Japanese government will exercise its masterful organising force, marshalling scientific and engineering enterprise to transform society. Indeed, this scenario work did communicate well with the Japanese government and other public sector organizations specializing in the urban planning. However, what then? Can we believe that governments will always do fine? That government has never failed? To get to grips with this question, I must introduce another scenario.

2.5. China: when governments go wrong

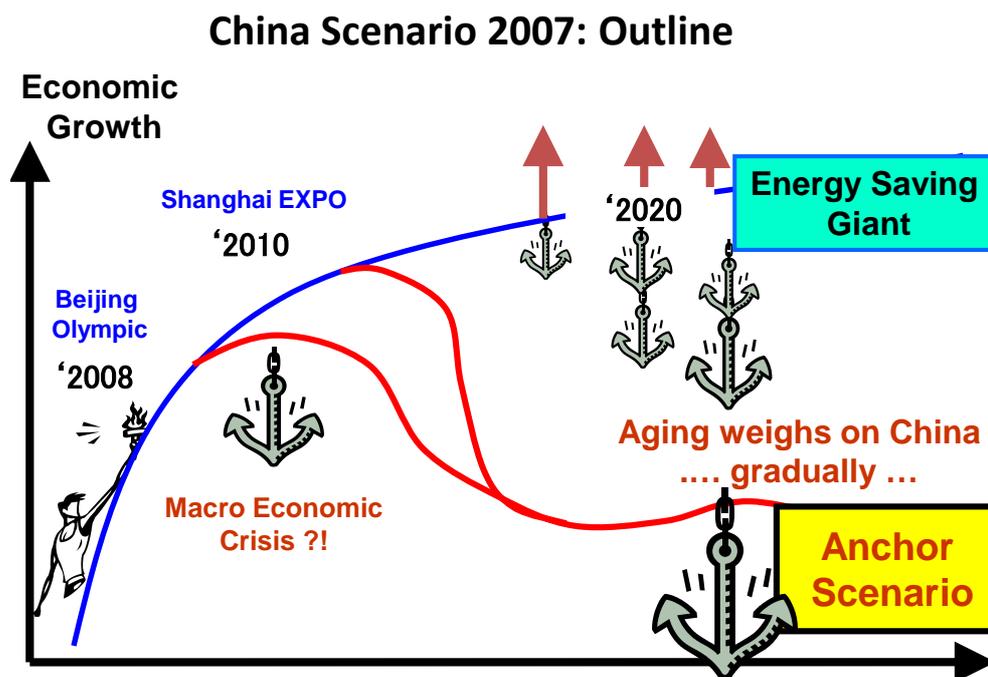
During the last ten years I have performed many scenario exercises relating to country risk analysis, particularly with regards to developing countries. There has been a good demand for this kind of work both from private and public organizations.

When discussing the future of certain developing countries, unstable domestic politics and/or malfunctioning governments very often come up as key uncertainty. For example, in 2006/07 I performed a scenario study on China for a Japanese research institute, a not-for profit organisation (NPO). The aim of the work was to ignite a conversation between Chinese and Japanese experts on energy saving issues.

In this scenario work we pointed out that the success of China's drive for an energy-saving society was conditional on the state of the Chinese domestic economy. A global economic downswing could happen any time, and would hit hard the Chinese economic boom, which for many people then (as now) appeared unstoppable. 'China Scenarios 2007' provocatively suggested that, if the Chinese government was incompetent to cope with an international or domestic macroeconomic crisis, the recession might be prolonged for years to come. Moreover, any recovery might become steadily more difficult, as China faced the onset of an ageing society, and a resultant smaller workforce and higher social welfare bills. Economic activity would plunge, resulting in less energy consumption but also eclipsing in peoples' minds the importance of energy saving. The scenario argued that the energy saving mind set is seeded mainly in city dwellers' affluent spending behaviour, not among the rural population in China. This is the message Japanese energy experts wanted to deliver, outspoken and undimmed. It ought to be noted that this work was finished and presented before the Lehman Shock in autumn 2008.

Figure 3.

@CRIEPI, 2007



We presented 'China Scenario 2007' at an international conference in Shanghai focused on energy conservation. Notable researchers, regulators and business leaders listened to the scenario. We received many comments and questions from the floor. Chinese experts wanted us to show the numerical relationship between a macroeconomic crisis and energy-saving habits, and having anticipated this line of questioning we were ready to share our research results. A good exchange of views took place, with Chinese and Japanese thinkers freely speaking their minds to each other. Later after the conference, we were told that many senior official in the Chinese government attended our presentation and conversed with energy experts.

I would like to return to our trail, and the question posed in the previous section. Governments can make mistakes. ‘China Scenarios 2007’ advocated that the Chinese government might do so. What, then, about Japan? We Japanese inherit an ancient wisdom saying that we must always live with the ‘four disasters’: earthquakes, thunderbolts, firestorms and unwise rulers. We know that they are always with us. The best we can do is learn to survive them.

However, for understandable reasons, Japanese government bureaucrats themselves are much less willing to accept this truth. When I work for them, it is quite hard to facilitate a discussion of how a dysfunctional government could cause a social disaster. This assumption instantly embarrasses bureaucrats; sometimes so much so that they won’t come to the next workshop.

From my experience, business people are generally more receptive to stories in which their (mis)management causes a crisis. They even giggle while jotting down their own possible mistakes. On the contrary, I observe that bureaucrats have a general inhibition to anticipate their eventual failure. A high-ranking bureaucrat once told me that the process of implementation in government is far more complex and wider in scope than that in private sector – and that therefore, the complex process of policy making and implementation *could only be trusted* to masterly public servants. The other, natural, interpretation – that because of the complexity, mistakes are *more likely* in government – had not occurred to him. Didn’t he ever call to mind the ancient wisdom about Japan and its rulers?

If people in the government feel very unwilling to acknowledge the chance of their work eventually going wrong, then the scenario exercise is pointless for them. This exercise usually depends on accepting the assumption that the environment around policy implementation may change over time, that implementation itself is imperfect, and that one therefore has to be ready for when things go wrong.

2.6. Recapitulation: Five scenario projects

In this paper I have shared tales of the five scenario projects. What have I learned from each?

“A tragedy” was a tough project for a business entity. It was designed as a series of workshops for the top management team, which had been divided over the possible closure of a large factory. During the exercise, scenario planners experienced compelling pressure calling for a decision, and the rebirth of internal power-games, which made it very difficult for the planner to facilitate the project.

“Nuclear Power scenarios 2005” was initiated by the personal aspirations of an ex high-ranking bureaucrat, after the possible revision of current government nuclear policies. The scenario planners learned that the world inhabited by Japanese high-ranking bureaucrats is adversarial and competitive in policy-making and propagation. The scenario exercise was conducted analytically but was unfit for the ex-bureaucrat because it was not designed to tell one story of his, namely that the chosen policy package would yield ‘a better future’ than any other.

The “Energy 2030” scenario was born amid increasing pressure to respond to the global climate change agenda. The Japanese government wanted to envision a low-

carbon society and the transition paths from the present to the future. The scenario planner allowed the participants to chase this vision, then asked them to deliberately derail from their visionary future and to think of possible 'failed' scenarios. This facilitation successfully revitalised the project.

"Urban Mobility 2040" was the scenario work conducted by a team from Japanese academia. The work illustrated two different stories of Japan's urban design and was intended to encourage wide civic discussion. The two stories expected that Japan would become a low carbon society and called for government to play a significant role to realize this future. The scenario planner questioned himself whether the government would always do so constructively.

Lastly, "China Scenarios 2007" was the work done by a Japanese research institute. The intention was to ignite a constructive conversation between Chinese and Japanese experts on energy saving issues. The scenario stories were crafted in an intentionally challenging manner. A Japanese-made scenario pointed out that the Chinese government could make mistakes in coping with an international or domestic macroeconomic crisis, which would have an influence on the behavioural aspect of Chinese energy use. This story was made cautiously, stemmed from solid analysis. The venue of the presentation was designed free from political debates, hence, this work brought about a good exchange of views among the policy makers and experts.

To sum up what I, as a practitioner, have learned:

First, scenario exercises under heavy pressure from the participants' political standpoints, such as "A tragedy" and "Nuclear Power Scenario 2007", are very difficult to conduct.

Second, in order to secure a free space amid existing agendas, the facilitator could employ the 'derailment' process seen in "Energy 2030", whereas in "Nuclear Power Scenario 2007" 'derailment' effort turned to be unsuccessful.

Third, assuming possible government failure in scenario stories is a tough task, both for the facilitator and participants from Japanese public sector.

Fourth, there is a difference between private and public entities as clients. Unlike the CEO, who had to face the possible closure of the large factory and the consequences for his job, bureaucrats in general expect (at least in theory) that the political process will work itself out externally to their workplace, which provides a destined policy objective set for them.

3. Analysis and Discussion: Scenario projects in government

Following is a trial to generalise my experience and discuss. Academic works related to the scenario planning and the Japanese public policy making processes are referred.

3.1. Review of scenario literature

Scenario planning has formed a growing area of interest in the interface of government policy-makers and private sector, scenario practitioners and academia.

There is a good recapitulation and evaluation of the scenario literatures by Volkery and Ribeiro [Volkery, 2009], where impacts and effectiveness of scenario planning on the environmental policy making is reviewed. Ringland produced two comprehensive books, “Scenarios in Public Policy, 2002”, and “Scenario Planning Managing for the future (2nd ed.), 2014”, which contain the records of many valuable case studies of scenario planning employed in the area of public policy making. Some of the records are contributed by practitioners on the ground.

As Ringland proposes we can establish two categories when sorting the cases for scenario projects related to public policy, namely ‘scenarios in public policy’ and ‘scenarios in the public sector’ [Ringland, Scenarios in Public Policy, 2002].

In the world of practitioners the former theme of ‘scenarios in public policy’ has been developed into a particular school. Here, the scenario planning process is regarded as a potentially useful tool for changing current societal, public situation into a better future. It ranges from Kahane [Kahane, 2012] who has been offering scenario planning to ignite collaboration among different, sometimes hostile parties⁴, to a campaign of Michel Godet who sees scenario planning (prospective stratégique) as a normative, constructive movement for creating better future. [Godet, 2004]⁵ This school calls those who involved in the scenario project for clarifying anticipatory choices and taking actions for the future.

Other practitioners regard scenario planning as a tool for inspiring organizational learning. This school is heralded by de Geus. [de Geus, 1997] In line with this, Chermack and van der Merwe clarified the theoretical relation between constructivist learning and teaching theory, and scenario planning process. [Chermack, 2003] This school calls those involved for the reflection and re-construction of their mental model; that is how to make renewed sense of the world. Naturally, for this school practices focus on how an organization and/or persons can be positively affected and can bring new things in their recognition after their engagement of the scenario planning.

As seen, this paper mainly covers Ringland’s category of ‘scenarios in the public sector’, and tries to discuss, firstly, the functional aspect of scenario projects

⁴ [Kahane, 2012] argues;

“Transformative scenario planning is a particularly effective away for a team of actors to generate collaborative forward movement on complex, stuck, problematic situation.” p.92, also; “Transformative scenario planning centres on constructing futures for our situation, but it take the well-established adaptive scenario planning methodology and turns it on its head- so that we construct scenarios not only to understand the future but also to influence it.” p. XV

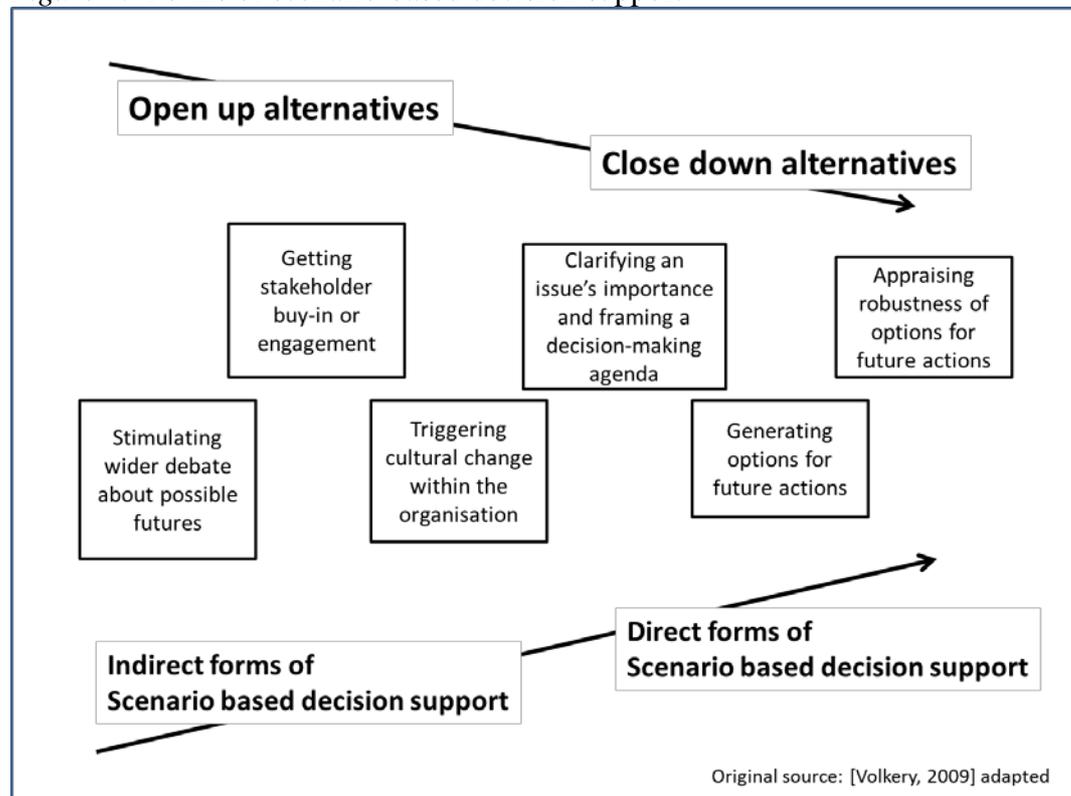
⁵ Particularly for the domain of strategic consultancy, Michel Godet argues;

“There are, of course, future studies containing no clear strategic character for an actor as well as strategic analysis of firms or sectors whose interest in the future is embryonic or even nonexistent, For the sake of clarity, the expression “strategic prospective” will, therefore, be reserves for futures studies having strategic ambitions and end points for those understanding them.” *The Art of Scenarios and Strategic Planning: Tools and Pitfalls*, Technological Forecasting and Social Change 65 (2000), 3-22, Elsevier Science Inc.

employed by the government officialdom, and secondly, its individual and organizational learning through the experience of scenario projects. In this context, the key question I would define is *what sort of roles and functions scenario projects has been expected by the public servants ?* In the following in order to highlight the unique character of the public organization, I sometimes refer to the scenario projects done by private entities.

In general, scenario projects for the public sector are to contribute to support better policy making. Howlett and Ramesh argues that there are five stages in policy making process, i.e. first, policy issue identification, second, policy issue-framing and agenda-setting, third, policy measure development, fourth, policy measure implementation and then fifth, policy measure effectiveness assessment or policy termination [Howlett, 2005]. Here, referring to Howlett’s work, a useful framework is proposed by Volkery and Ribeiro [Volkery, 2009] concerning the different functions of scenario planning in order to support the government policy making along with its different stages (Figure 4.). Volkery suggests followings; first, the indirect form of scenario based decision support is useful for the early stage of policy making. Because in this stage, public servants have to and are willing to explore alternative policy options widest possible. Novel ideas or criticism from the range of stakeholders will be welcomed in order to buy-in their engagement. Another suggestion of Volkery is that in the latter stage of policy making process, decision support activity may take more direct form such as framing decision-making agenda and option generation for further actions. Here, the policy making process often encounters the political debates where different interests crush seeking for compromise. This is the stage that logical and analytical discussion may not work. Serious political and administrative process dominates, and opportunities for wider participation of stakeholders become limited.

Figure 4. Forms of scenario-based decision support



3.2. Scenario Planning in Japanese government

Referring to the *Figure 4.*, one can observe that the tales from Japan in this paper confirm this theoretical framework. Different stages of policy making require different function of the scenario planning. In Japanese policy making process, government sometimes calls for a scenario style brainstorming event with participants outside the government, such as NGOs and academics. However these initiatives appear when the process is in the stage of issue identification and/or issue-framing and agenda-setting; that is the early stage of policy making process. This is seen in “Energy 2030” and, in a sense, in “Nuclear Power Scenarios 2005”. In ‘politically matured society’ there is a legitimate call from civic society for more involvement in the policy making process and Japan is not an exception. Those who wish to have a say on issues and agendas ask for venues to express, and government responds by providing the venues. For public servants, who have to administrate to make this venue happen with papers and budget, following *right* process is the base for the authenticity of the venue and discussion. And for scenario practitioners, as private consultants, they see this as the market to offer their expertness, and they commercially compete by proposing the *rightest* process and *rightest* venue to the clients/sponsors in the public sector. This circumstance may eventually lead to the standardization (and mechanization) of both process and venue.

On the other hand, when the process develops to the stage of policy development and policy measure assessment, Japanese government officialdom turns to be cautious to invite voices from outside. Obviously the policy making stage has reached the “close-down alternative”. As said above, bureaucrats will have to maneuver and craft compromise with limited number of stakeholders.

My experience of scenario projects for Japanese public organizations ranges from the early phase of “open up alternatives” to the later phase. In some cases, the scenario planning was employed to appraise the robustness of the preferred options for future actions. Alike the story of “CEO fires himself”, the facilitation for decision making support was a no laughing business. In this paper I can share few of the cases where bureaucrats were participants. *Circumstances* make me hesitant to publicise. Accordingly following analysis and discussion would be argued with inadequate data and examples, with regret, and scant to academic interests, with regret.

Let me allow moving forward by stating my general observation.

As a practitioner I have noticed a distinctive psychological barrier that Japanese government officials show in the scenario-type discussion.

Following, I am going to discuss the nature and origin of this barrier.

3.3. A Practitioner’s Tool: normative and exploratory approach

When I was conducting a workshop with government officials as my client, a symptom of this psychological barrier could often be observed.

In the scenario developing process a practitioner can choose one of the two approaches of how to frame scenarios i.e. normative approach and exploratory one. Everyone who has some knowledge of scenario planning theory has encountered this dichotomy in the way that a scenario framework and stories can be shaped, and in

how the workshop can be conducted⁶. This distinction is theoretically important, and often rescues the practitioner when he or she is stuck and confused in the middle of a workshop discussion.

The normative approach starts with that the set of characteristics at the end of time horizon, and works backwards to see what would take to get there. This approach is employed when the client knows the future he wants to describe. On the other hand, the exploratory approach can be used when the client doesn't need to be ready for his desired future. With the exploratory approach the client is open to explore and take up any uncertainties which might affect his future plans and wishes to achieve.

In general, the scenario exercises for Japanese government organizations follow the normative approach. As explained in "Energy 2030", bureaucrats can admit that the future is not a simple extrapolation of the past quantitatively modelled; however they very often cling on to one single future, which is desirable for them. Recognising that this is normative, scenario practitioners can assist them in understanding that the future can take several different shapes. In practice, the facilitator can allow the bureaucrats to write up a story line leading to their desirable future. Then in the next stage, the facilitator can ask them to think about the plausibility of the story they made, and to think through the critical uncertainties which might prevent the smooth development of their story from the present. I call this thinking process "derailment". Hence the bureaucrats are allowed to always refer to their normatively constructed future, with their exploratory adventure of derailing from it.

The exploratory approach is another choice, but I have learned that for public servants, this approach is psychologically challenging. In the course of exploring vague, unshaped uncertainties in the future, some of them start to feel insecure and soon invent excuses not to turn up at all. They feel insecure because this approach deploys qualitative, rather than quantitative, analysis⁷. When exploring, we have to get rid of the anchor of data sets and conventional modelling, and learn to experiment with the top-down, or 'deductive' approach. Because the data set and conventional framework is the prime source of confidence and legitimacy among bureaucrats, they often see the scenarios formulated through the exploratory approach either as baseless or overambitious.

This paper is not arguing that the normative approach our bureaucrats so much like is inappropriate. A society can agree on its desired direction, such as sustainable development, after which government and individual bureaucrats move on to their own agenda of how they can influence transition. However, as Grin et.al discussed [Grin, 2010] it seems reasonable to say that some issues are open-ended, and are best approached, or explored, with a mind-set that allows for the possibility of change.

Now let us go into more detail on the characteristics of the bureaucracy in Japan. I want to conduct my argument that the characteristics I am going to introduce would be a prime mover that the bureaucrats prefer and cling on to the normative approach notwithstanding in the *early stage* of policy making process.

⁶ See, *Scenarios: The art of strategic conversation*, Kees van der Heijden, 1996, John Wiley & Sons, pp.195-216

⁷ See, Shell International Ltd (2003), *Scenarios: An Explorer's Guide*, London: PXS Shell International. p.16. It argues that, "The story form of scenarios enables both qualitative and quantitative aspects to be incorporated, so ideas are not excluded on the basis that they can't be measured."

3.4. Technocrats

Bureaucrats are technocrats and want to be rational, neat and tight. They frame their questions in terms of what is *best* and what is *true* and they pride themselves on their professionalism. A technocrat wishes to be an excellent executor of given policy goals. For them, the goals have to be politically agreed beforehand. In this sense, the technocrat is like a good chef. He has meat, fish, vegetables and flavourings. He has his secret recipes, but definitely needs an order from his customers. Will the order be fish or meat? Italian or Chinese? Having taken the order, the chef will make every effort to satisfy customers' appetite. He is not allowed to fail.

Like the chef, the bureaucrat inhibits himself from even *imagining* any failure in their administrative execution. In fact, this psychological barrier seems commonly felt among anyone who regularly engages in the policy-making process. Academics and private-sector experts sometimes face such a psychological barrier when discussing the national policy agenda. The scenario exercise "Urban Mobility 2040" implicitly envisaged that the user of the scenario study would be the senior bureaucrats experienced in urban planning. I observed there was an unsaid consensus among the academic authors to discard any stories of government doing bad or foolish things. "Urban Mobility 2040" was keen, probably overkeen, to find an audience with bureaucrats.

Adding to the psychological barrier, there is an institutional one. For bureaucrats, the possible existence of several different but equally plausible futures means that a scenario project is going to jeopardize what the political process has officially foreseen and agreed. This means that bureaucrats will not yet be able to hook their policy packages onto the one comprehensive picture of the future. Hence, bureaucrats will flatly carry on the scenario study until the scenario project gives birth to an only child! The participants in any study around a politically sensitive issue, according to bureaucrats, have to arrive at the one single future, which will be a great improvement on the present, and bureaucrats will strive to bring about that future by spending taxpayers' money.

This is the institutional barrier that prevents the full usage of the scenario planning. We may be able to say that the technocratic nature of the government institution nourishes the technocratic personality of each bureaucrat. I have seen many times bureaucrats – and how smart they are! – arriving at my workshop already well-armed with their own thorough policy package, which would make Japan far better than it is today. For them, a scenario exercise is simply muddying their clear vision of a better future. Why, a bureaucrat asks himself, is this workshop so loosely managed? Why does the facilitator stubbornly push me to think of 'other' visions? The future has already been agreed, and shortly, the government will launch a concrete policy package to bring it closer. This exercise is dysfunctional and even dangerous. Is the facilitator a born cynic? Is he a trouble maker? The bureaucrat's frustration boils over. This is not simply a matter of a scenario exercise taking place at the wrong time for the bureaucrat's working mission, nor is he confused by the scenario making process. Simply, he has found the scenario workshop to be a dangerous event.

3.5. Politicisation

Another reason why bureaucrats want to have a single future is more subtle and tricky. Japan's government organization is compartmentalized. It is divided into Ministries. Ministries are divided into Secretariats (Kambo) and Bureaus (Kyoku), which further divided into Divisions (Bu), and the Divisions into Sections (Ka) and Rooms (Shitsu). Inside a Ministry, Bureau exercise huge influence over policy making process since majority of cabinet-sponsored bill are formulated here in Bureau. Each Bureau works almost independently and enjoys the independence. There is a saying "Bureaus but no Ministry". Thousands of bureaucrats, particularly in the higher ranks, are not living as one united officialdom, but in a very competitive working place⁸. One part of the government challenges another part. Each tries to promote its own policy packages to influential politicians. In order to demonstrate "its" policy is much better than "others", a visionary story of a bright future, told with colourful graphics and narration, is very much appreciated. Scenario stories can communicate well. They make it easy for listeners to capture the holistic image of a bright future. The vision and rhetoric are appreciated by politicians, who are the clients of the bureaucrats. But my story doesn't end at this point.

Japanese bureaucrats often make use of a scenario project as a benign negotiation place for their stakeholders: a place where a small interest group can develop around them. In the end the bureaucrats want to channel the stakeholders toward their preferred policy package. In a policy paper they habitually produce, there is "Part One: Vision", followed by the lengthy administrative narratives, as "Part Two", where they describe in detail how to implement the Vision. Armed with numbers, the writing style of Part Two is rather detached, passive and marked by compromise. It looks like a non-partisan document, but in reality it often represents the particular interest of one part of the government, most cases the interest of a particular Bureau or down under in a particular Ministry. The policy experts in academia and in private sector are welcomed to work on Part Two together with bureaucrats; however they are only welcome as faithful supporters (or clients). Although the experts have a chance to intervene and consider details in Part Two, the experts usually don't challenge Part One. As seen in "Nuclear Power scenario 2005", experts can often stumble across an important unsolved issue, a big fish, but bureaucrats ensure that at the end of the day it is put back in the refrigerator.

To them, Part One should be the smashing showcase, which one branch of the government wants to 'sell' to politicians; therefore it is understandable that the bureaucrats don't want to 'sell' a doomed future or a 'shock scenario'⁹. The great fear of political leaders is unexpected events, especially those which lie beyond their control. So it is with bureaucrats. They cannot envisage the government doing its job badly¹⁰. Bureaucrats are – and have to be – statisticians by nature.

⁸ For the short history of Japanese bureaucracy development, see Toye, John (2006), *Modern Bureaucracy*, Research Paper No. 2006/52, UNU-WIDER, United Nations University (UNU), p.9.

⁹ A 'shock scenario' seen in the "Energy 2030" only works for confirming the legitimacy of the existing policies around the energy supply security, which Japanese government has been very much eager to enhance.

¹⁰ This reaction looks common to an experience in the UK. Tom Ling writes in his *Decision making in the public sector* in Ringland [Ringland, Scenarios in Public Policy, 2002], P.129, that "If "what counts is what works" is part of the credo of the new policy maker, it will be frustrating to

3.6. Discussion

How can a scenario practitioner ease bureaucrats' psychological barriers? We know that the time horizon for politicians is rather short, while the policy execution needs to play out over a much longer period. This means that the environment around the policy execution, that is the task of bureaucrats, is ever more vulnerable to change with time. Hence, the methodological risk assessment of the implementation of the current plan must be in bureaucrats' interest. How to convince them?

The scale of uncertainty itself can be useful in making the case. As seen in "Energy 2030", in the year 2004/05 the issue of climate change loomed large on the agenda and Japanese civil society noticed that this was an issue not easily dismissed – but countermeasures to the issue were not at all fixed. This condition called for a scenario-style study, which could invite a variety of opinions and proposed solutions. Bureaucrats conceded that they couldn't control this new issue and appealed to the public: "let's think together." Then, gradually climate change became a matter of political and administrative negotiations, international and domestic; the technocrats became ready to construct their masterly regulatory actions. With this new phase, the role of scenario practitioners ended.

Another possible legitimisation for inviting scenario planning in Japanese officialdom might be to boldly demonstrate the unavoidable uncertain nature of future horizon. Scenario study will report the crude fact that any development of policy environment toward future contains some uncertainty. A well-argued scenario framework could convince audiences to accept the need of exploratory mind set and of being ready for future surprises. This means that by offering a thinking framework in scenario style, public servants can establish its independency from political decision process. Here, choice will be made by politicians for his/her preferred policies and their plausible outcomes. In return bureaucrats can claim with pride that their role is only to offer several equally possible policy choices. They are now living in the realm of professionalism; however, can they ever restrict their born ambition of being in part of important political decisions?

In this regard there was unique and appreciable event that may have affected the mind set of senior bureaucrats, who are specialised in the energy policies. This event may have told them that in some cases the political decision process offers no room for public servants to play.

The recent political turmoil in Japan has been teaching bureaucrats that the governing practices of the ruling party may not always work. In 2011/12, after the great earth quake, tsunami and Fukushima nuclear accidents, Democratic Party, then ruling party, strived hard and fixed the national energy plan with a package of numerical targets. Bureaucrats specialised in energy policies were mobilised heavily and with the help of outside energy experts crafted piles of supporting calculation and documents. Furthermore, Democratic Party introduced a novel process of 'deliberative poll' in order for the lay citizens to discuss and come to an ideological consensus around the future of nuclear energy and its industry. The conclusion was to disestablish nuclear

acknowledge that he cannot always clarify what works. Expressing uncertainty is seen to be politically the weak and administratively untidy. In response to such lack of certainty, the hard-writing of British public policy making becomes apparent."

power soonest possible. But, when in 2012 Liberal Democratic Party came back to power, the Democratic Party's energy plan was instantly abandoned. Prime minister decided to scrap the plan with a brief word of "it is not based on the reality, and need a full revision."

A gross humiliation for bureaucrats. And this is a crisis for Japanese bureaucracy because by force of habit, bureaucrats have been fixated on the high profile examples and the well-understood procedures of the past. As Cerase discussed [Cerase, 2002], this kind of administrative skill has been regarded as an important asset in order to handle critical situation with a sense of stability. The above case betrayed, and hence undermined the authority of officialdom. By drawing profound lessons, would the officials cautiously retreat to their proud professionalism?

My account is that senior public servants won't abandon their ambition to get involved in the high level political decision process, which may eventually take them to possible careers in politics. In Japan senior public servants are regarded by political parties as the reservoir of candidates for general election. Politicians and senior bureaucrats are both statist and reliant on each other. For them the boundary between political and administrative world is blurred. The senior public servants want to claim themselves, hardheaded, earnest and reliable personalities, and hence they are most hesitant to fiddle any hypothetical issues and questions, which the scenario planning is very much good at.

Let us be back on the track.

There is another idea for easing bureaucrats' psychological barriers. This idea is more practical and operational. Providing a venue for unfettered conversation often works fairly positive on bureaucrats' mind. This paper earlier pointed that government bureaucrats prefer the normative approach, which will arrive at one single better future. The truth is that, bureaucrats are not philosophically normative but are, once functioning in the officialdom, destined to behave normative. Therefore, for them there is a need of venue outside the officialdom.

This desire of Japanese bureaucrats to have a free space for freer discussion seems demonstrating in an interestingly subtle manner; weak governance on government sponsored scenario projects.

There is a growing demand from Japanese governmental organisation on scenario planning type project however; I, a practitioner, have been observing that when a project starts, the governance on the process is very often left weak and unclear. The client leaves the objectives of the project loosely defined at the initial stage, which would gradually be found and formulated through the course of the scenario type brainstorming. For the practitioner he/she will have to accept the shifting and even floating objectives that the client and the practitioner originally contracted. In these circumstances, the evaluation of success/failure of the project might be difficult if one wishes to employ the criteria of target-result axis.

The reason for this seems simple. The client and the sponsor see the project as one-off event and expect something novel would happen through the discussion process. In Japanese public sector, doing scenario type project is yet an isolated event compared to the day-to-day policy making and execution, therefore loose governance over scenario type project is understandable.

The clients of scenario planning in public sectors wish to have a learning experience, refreshment, breeze, wonder and intellectual adventure. Scenario practitioners working for them accept to undertake this allocated role modestly. I see participants are constructing individual meaning, taking in new information, accommodating them and changing their mental models. This is an individual learning, not an organisational one. And this is the niche for the scenario projects in Japanese public organisation.

4. Conclusion

Reflecting Ringland's proposal of two categories; 'scenarios in public policy' and 'scenarios in the public sector', in Japan, the former type of scenario projects can count numerous. Also in other part of the world. Future scanning projects and scenario projects have been developing in much more institutionalised and regularised manner in such as UK, Sweden, Norway, Singapore and notably EU. There, 'future scanning industry' has become popular and flourishing.

However, seeing the long history of R. D. Shell scenario planning, I may be able to point out that excess institutionalisation of these activity could bring about the loss of momentum both in client side and in scenario practitioners.

Above concern seems well noticed in Japan, especially in the public sector. I see that, the loose governance of the scenario project and the isolation from the policy making process might be intentional. Public officers hate to add administrative work for doing scenario project. Bureaucrats live the world where neat, evidence-based documents and proper administrative process are required, whereas a scenario project is in general very time consuming, and only yields stories of the several plausible futures! This may look awkward and disappointing outcome. The outcome can never ever translate into concrete actions. However, public officers have known the best cream of the project. The end result of the scenario project is not about a more accurate picture of tomorrow, nor producing an attractive report.

Since 2008, I have been working for the GraSPP (Graduate School for Public Policy) in The University of Tokyo, Japan, where I have been introducing academics and students to the methodology and practices of scenario planning. In 2012, a scenario planning course has established mainly for the graduate students who hope to make their career in the public sector.

I hope that in future I could establish another scenario planning course in GraSPP with the attendees of a mixture of Japanese bureaucrats, business people, students and academics. The bureaucrats will preferably not be freshmen, but instead with five to ten years of working experience behind them: they will have somehow experienced difficulty and disappointment in their tasks and assignments. Business people will come to the course to learn about the policy making and administrative process in practice. Studying with them, bureaucrats can touch *the real world* in which business people habitually claim they work.

Just alike "China Scenario 2007", Japanese officials look for a proper venue, politically safe, analytical but light hearted, to expose themselves onto outsiders' open criticism. In the course I could run in GraSPP, younger bureaucrats will be able to enjoy adventures in scenario planning, with classmates who want to trust the

government. For bureaucrats, open and frank talks about government dysfunction and mistakes, with people *outside* homogenous officialdom, are a tremendous opportunity, and even holding such talks will be a crucial concession by them. Plus, some of them will instantly recognise that scenario planning is an effective tool for communication and engagement with society.

For me this seems enough. I share the view of As Arie de Geus, who claims; Perception, to a human being, is an active engagement with the world¹¹. [de Geus, 1997]

In reflecting on my years working with the Japanese government, I have noticed that young bureaucrats are more and more conscious of the institutional barriers in government against scenario-type studies, as well as the psychological barriers within individuals. With recognition will come change: that is my hope. Scenario planning is a theory and practice to make public servants think exploratively, by making them 'derails' their expected future.

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¹¹ de Geus writes in *The Living Company* p.36, "We will not perceive a signal from the outside world unless it is relevant to an opinion for the future that we have already worked out in our imaginations. The more "memories of the future" we develop, the more open and receptive we will be to signals from the outside world."

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