Codifying The Futures Process

Running an Exploration

Futures is the tool that the Frontier Tech Hub uses to explore the possible.

After initial planning, we use our bespoke SCAN process to answer critical questions faced by the FCDO. SCAN stands for Surface, Cluster, Add, and Network.

The process combines a suite of tested horizon scanning and foresight methods to produce a range of outputs that aim to help you understand what's coming. These are explained in our **MethodKit**.

We call each Futures project an Exploration (formerly a Cycle).

You might be asking yourself: so what? Why is this useful for me?

We strongly believe that the method and outputs of our Futures Explorations can help you to make decisions today that will impact the success of your programmes and policies in the future.

This document is designed to help you run Futures Explorations of your own or to understand how we run them, so we can collaborate effectively.

To contact the team to learn more about Futures, or to talk about collaborating, email ftlenquiries@dt-global.com

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The SCAN Process

Plan

Get everything ready for the Exploration to begin. Set yourself up for success.

You'll need to consider the following:

- Timeline for the Exploration. How long do you have? What needs to happen when?
- Goals for the Exploration.
    - What do you want to achieve?
    - What would success look like?
    - What is the question that you want to answer?
    - We gather all of this information in one place using a document called a **Topic Brief**. It includes initial answers to the above questions, along with some initial research into the topic to provide some context for colleagues, collaborators, and partners.

Surface

Research the topic to get a solid foundation of knowledge to build from.

This should include the following:

- Desk research looking at trends reports, relevant articles, academic journals, and documentaries.
- Interviews and workshops with internal and external experts to provide a range of perspectives.
- You can use a couple of methods for this
    - A **Crowdsourced Rapid Scan,** where you host 1 or more workshops with experts to quickly gather a wide range of insights and perspectives
    - An **Expert Interview,** where you have more in-depth conversations with experts to go deeper into niche areas of your topic.

Cluster

Now process that research to land on some themes you can get creative with.

This phase should include:

- Gathering all of your research in one place so you can identify themes and key facts, and figures. We use a collaborative whiteboard tool like **Miro** to do this.

- Summarising the insights from the research to share with collaborators.
- Running a **Driver Mapping** workshop with collaborators to land on some high-priority themes (or drivers of change) that will frame the next phase of the Exploration. See page 42 of the [Government Office for Science Futures Toolkit](#) for more information on this method.

Add

Add depth and meaning to those themes by creating scenarios and exploring their implications.

This phase should include:

- Taking the themes or drivers of change from the last phase and using them to create some imagined future scenarios that bring to life insights from your research and conversations with collaborators.
- Then, you'll want to validate those scenarios with your collaborators. Run a workshop to create a richer picture of what each scenario might look like. Identify the missing and unnecessary elements for each one. Use the **Drafting Scenarios** method to support this.
- Next, it's time to create the full versions of your scenarios. Use the **Building Scenarios** method for this. This is the creative high point of the Exploration. Divide and conquer to write full versions of the scenarios, then get feedback from your team and collaborators, and iterate as many times as it takes to get to the final versions. See page 51 of the [Government Office for Science Futures Toolkit](#) for more information on developing scenarios.
- Finally, you'll add further meaning to your scenarios by identifying potential interventions in the future and potential actions in the present. Use the **Backcasting** method to support this. See page 68 of the [Government Office for Science Futures Toolkit](#) for more information on backcasting.

Network

Share everything you've learned with relevant networks that are connected to the Exploration.

Package up all of the work you've done into clear, concise outputs for sharing. Formats might include:

- Podcast
- Infographic
- Card Deck

- Live Event
- Produced Video
- News Reports

See the outputs from our latest Exploration [here](#) for examples.

Methods

Our methods draw on a range of established Futures and Horizon Scanning toolkits.

We aim to test new methods on each Exploration. You can see more detail for each of the **Regular Use** methods in our MethodKit, linked below.

Here is a list of the methods that we've tested and now use regularly, along with a list of methods we'd like to test in the future.

Regular Use

- Topic Brief
- Hub-led Rapid Scan
- Crowdsourced Rapid Scan
- Expert Interview
- Driver Mapping
- Drafting Scenarios
- Building Scenarios
- Backcasting

To Test

- Futures Wheel
- Futures Cone
- Verge
- 3 Horizons Mapping
- Futures Wheel
- Systems Mapping
- Speed-Dating the Future
- Archetypes
- Visioning
- Living Futures
- Branch Analysis
- SWOT
- Wind Tunnelling
- Roadmap

👇 Access the current version of our MethodKit here 👇
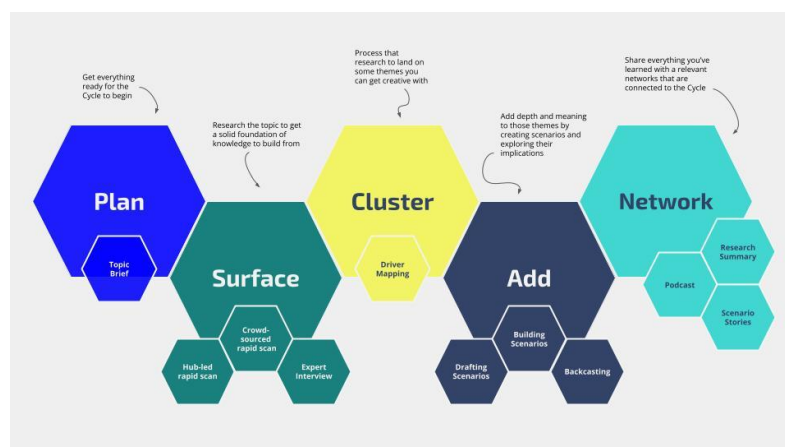
Roles

There are some key roles that you'll need to fill to ensure your Exploration is a success. Each might be held by one person, or a person could hold multiple roles:

Champion

Focused on guiding the team through the Exploration. In our case, this was the only role held by a colleague from FCDO. They instigate the exploration with a question that they want to be answered. They ensure that the research stays on track, that relevant people are invited to collaborate, and that the scenarios are interesting and useful for FCDO colleagues.

Learning Lead

Focused on designing and delivering the Exploration to be as smooth, useful, and effective as possible. This includes planning and running workshops, writing documents and reports, and creating outputs.

Project Manager

Focused on keeping the whole process moving at pace. Keeping track of the timeline and actions for the rest of the team. Spotting problems before they emerge. Managing the relationships with close collaborators. Keeping alignment with FCDO / stakeholders to make sure we're delivering to their needs.

Research & Community Manager

Focused on gathering and processing the desk research and inputs from all collaborators. Writing summaries of the work done and inputting into reports and outputs.

Also, engaging with the wider communities to get people along to workshops and events.

Learnings from the latest Exploration

The latest Exploration covered the *Future of Frontier Tech in Development*.

Previous to that, we have also explored topics like *The Future of Money*, *The Future of Elections*, and *Web3*.

Here are some key lessons we learned from running those explorations that we aim to apply to future projects:

Align your brief with strategic goals

It's crucial to have the right people in early conversations to make sure that the brief and questions are relevant to the goals of the organisation.

You'll want to keep these people close as the project develops to stay on track and realign to changing priorities.

Leverage internal networks

The Futures team sits outside of the FCDO, which presents our biggest challenge in finding relevant people to share insight and attend workshops and presentations.

We depend on our colleagues inside the organisation to connect us with existing networks, speaking opportunities, and the right teams.

Find a balance between breadth and depth

A broad topic is relevant to many people, but it makes the research and synthesis process much harder.

A narrow topic is obviously relevant to fewer people but can make it easier to tailor communications and content.

Get creative. It brings energy

The highest points for the delivery team are always when we have to get creative.

Writing scenarios, making videos, and finding compelling visuals are really rewarding because you get to see your ideas come to life.

Conversations vs Workshops

We tend to default to workshops, but they have sometimes failed to deliver the depth of insight that we achieve through a series of smaller conversations with experts.