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Robust action and scenarios: A rejoinder

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Abstract

This article is a rejoinder in response to commentaries written about a 25-year retrospective on Kees van der Heijden's seminal text *Scenarios: The Art of Strategic Conversation*. As a means to explore the commentaries and—without irony—bring them into conversation with one another, this piece engages in a thought experiment about the impact of *Scenarios* as well as the book's author through the sociologically informed notion of robust action from traditional thinking about social embeddedness.

KEYWORDS

emotion, luck, practitioner-academic, robust action, scenarios, social embeddedness, van der Heijden

1 | INTRODUCTION

We are grateful, as authors, to the *Futures & Foresight Science* community for the thought provoking, personally generous, and challenging replies to our 25-year retrospective on Kees van der Heijden's seminal text *Scenarios: The Art of Strategic Conversation*. Unbeknownst to those who replied, our piece took a number of forms before being selected as a focal article by the journal's chief editor George Wright.

The commentary replies—so thoughtfully reflective and oriented in so many different directions—challenged us to reflect upon our manuscript's journey and to answer a simple question: How did a modest book review become one of the longer articles published in the journal thus far? The easy answer: Not on purpose. The more difficult answer, we have come to learn, has as much to do with the book as it does with its author. In what follows, adopting a social embeddedness perspective on the notion of robust action, we feel compelled to examine the extent to which van der Heijden is a “robust actor”—as a multivocal broker between worlds, acting through the actions of others—as well as an adept facilitator of the “robust actions” of the clients, students, and colleagues that Kees served.

Before exploring this thought experiment, we unpack the social embeddedness framework as developed in the social sciences as well as the sensitizing concept of robust action. Then, we return to the original focal article, engage those replies to it, and re-examine a few of the interviews that informed our article on *Scenarios* that also enliven our current discussion. Along the way, we acknowledge that inevitable errors and omissions are our own.

2 | SOCIAL EMBEDDEDNESS

At least since Polanyi (1968) and Geertz (1972), scholars have used the term “embeddedness” to conceptualize noneconomic (e.g., social, political, and religious) constraints on economic behavior. Some years later, in a landmark paper, Granovetter (1985) articulated a perspective on embeddedness to describe how the structure of social networks shaped economic activity, thus, constraining, for example, access to some opportunities while simultaneously facilitating access to others (on embeddedness, see also Dequech, 2003; Jack, 2005; Piore, 1993; Uzzi & Gillespie, 2002; Zukin & DiMaggio, 1990).

Since then, the more general notion of “social embeddedness,” beyond the prediction of explicitly economic human behavior, has

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come to capture an insistence that actors do not select between context-free rational choices or cultural scripts that determine human interaction. Instead, from this perspective, behaviors and decisions are understood as shaped by the structure of social relations that they are embedded within, hence, the notion of social embeddedness. Put more colorfully by Padgett and Ansell (1993, p. 1310), to accomplish this, methodologically, the social analyst must “penetrate beneath the veneer of formal institutions and apparently clear goals, down to the relational substratum of people's actual lives.”

As applied to the case at hand, it was, in fact, Kees, in the opening remarks of the first edition of *Scenarios*, that planted this seed. Of course, with rare exception, nearly all books acknowledge intellectual forebears, helpful editors, colleagues in the academy, and loved ones. But Kees's preface was different. It was a map. It charted social network connections, drawing a bridge between the corporate world and the halls of academe that he inhabited as author of *Scenarios*. It positions the author's experiences, embedded in a particular milieu, as shared and collaboratively coproduced through the concrete actions of the author and the author's social network connections. It establishes an appreciation—both analytical and personal—for the concrete, localized, and, at times, chance social relations of individuals who lived in and around those places and times that he and they were fortunate enough to share.

3 | ROBUST ACTION

According to Ferraro et al. (2015, p. 370), the notion of “robust action” can be traced back to Leifer (1983, 1991) who coined it to conceptualize a specific strategy employed by the world's best chess players. In this study, Leifer laid the intellectual groundwork to generalize the chess-specific insight that the best players did not win with any regularity because they, during gameplay, could simply out-anticipate their opponent's vast range of potential moves. Rather, beyond the occasional streak of luck, the best players made moves that maintained a relatively wider range of options for themselves as compared with their opponent, making the opponent's moves progressively more anticipatable as the options dwindle. Robust action was subsequently popularized as a concept in the social and political sciences by a widely read article by Padgett and Ansell (1993) on the consolidation and concentration of state power by the Medici family during the Italian Renaissance, in particular, through the actions of Cosimo de' Medici.

Leifer (1991, p. 26) concluded that “an *ex ante* framework” to understand chess was ultimately “useless” because “evaluations and strategies are in constant flux.”¹ “Because an opponent's moves can never be predicted with much certainty,” Ferraro et al. (2015, p. 370) note, “Leifer theorized that chess masters exploited a robust action strategy, one that preserved flexibility.”

Generalizing this insight, Padgett and Powell (2012, p. 24) conceptualized robust action as “noncommittal actions that keep future lines of action open in strategic contexts where opponents are trying to narrow them.”² Padgett and Ansell (1993, p. 1263) also

claimed that robust action, defined by the creation and maintenance of “discretionary options across unforeseeable futures,” was facilitated by “multivocality,” recognizing “the fact that single actions can be interpreted coherently from multiple perspectives simultaneously” and “the fact that single actions can be moves in many games at once.”

A notable quality of robust action, multivocality, is the assignment of a “sphinxlike character” to those who employ it (p. 1263).³ This also hints at a structural quality of social networks fit for robust action strategies, namely, robust action is often required of actors positioned as brokers within and between multiple, sometimes competing, networks of social arrangements.

Padgett and Ansell (1993, p. 1307) are also unique in their analytical appreciation of “the structural preconditions for robust action.” They demonstrate that the potential for robust action is limited or facilitated by pre-existing sets of uncontrollable historical and cultural patterns (i.e., preconditions). Also, as rational and calculating as robust action may appear, it should not be mistaken for mere rational choice. A methodological reality is that the “rational” quality of a course of action or particular decision is assigned after the fact, in retrospect, during post hoc interpretation. Robust action strategies, in contrast, can be observed directly, even when the ultimate or upstream outcomes are not yet known to the actor or the analyst.

The nearest linkage to robust action related futures studies is found in a management text, *Beyond the Hype* (Eccles et al., 1992), which, coincidentally, came out around the same time as the first edition of van der Heijden's (2016) *Scenarios*. Starkey (1998, p. 531) links the titles suggesting that *Scenarios* responded to what Eccles et al. (1992, p. 2) characterized as a “desperate quest” for innovative techniques for leadership, decision-making, and management.

Predating Padgett and Ansell (1993), but consistent with Leifer (1991), Eccles et al. (1992, p. 11) depict action as robust if it “accomplishes short-term objectives while preserving long-term flexibility.” They define “seven principles of robust action” (p. 41–44), which Ferraro et al. (2015, p. 371) neatly summarize as “acting without certitude; constantly preserving flexibility; being politically savvy; having a keen sense of timing; judging the situation at hand; using rhetoric effectively; and working multiple agendas.”

On balance, however, an argument can be sustained that some of these principles seem to capture the qualities of a robust actor as opposed to observable robust actions. Likewise, many of these qualities, such as the effective use of rhetoric or demonstration of political savvy, are labels assigned afterward, once the impact of, for example, the effective use of rhetoric has materialized and is retroactively assigned a causal role in an unfolding sequence of events. Alternatively, employing a measured, noncommittal interactive style, which bows to uncertainty and embraces complexity, can be observed; it can be harnessed to preserve the flexibility needed to advance several programs of action on multiple time horizons and across multiple networks.

At this point, we would be remiss, as authors, not to acknowledge the obvious: the adroit facilitation of scenario planning

is, by most definitions, a form of robust action. In practice, scenario planning is intended to convey the merit of robust action during decision-making and, when possible, impart its acquisition by management. To this end, and for the remainder of this piece, we consider, to the best of our knowledge, the extent to which Kees van der Heijden was and is a “robust actor”—as a multivocal broker between worlds—as well as an adept facilitator of the “robust actions” of the clients, students, and colleagues that Kees served and those who have taken-up his book *Scenarios*.

4 | ROBUST ACTIONS AND FACILITATING THE ROBUST ACTIONS OF OTHERS

In their somewhat famous paper on robust action, Padgett and Ansell (1993) set out to explain the rise of the Medicean banking family and the concentration of state power in Florence during the Italian Renaissance. They depicted Cosimo de' Medici's robust actions as integral to the transpiring events. “On the surface,” Padgett and Ansell (1993, p. 1262) bait the reader, “it seems obvious that Cosimo ... did it all”—that he was somehow “riding herd on vast macropolitical and macroeconomic forces far beyond his control.” And yet, “contrary to Machiavelli's portrait in *The Prince* of effective leaders as decisive and goal oriented, eyewitness accounts describe Cosimo de' Medici as an indecipherable sphinx” (p. 1262). Just as Padgett and Ansell (1993) resisted the temptation to paint Cosimo in the familiar style of a Machiavellian caricature, we too, in our rejoinder about Kees, avoid conceptualizing robust action in simplistic, hyperrational terms.⁴

4.1 | Multivocality and “it depends on the client”

The first and most irresistible aspect of this thought experiment is to gauge if Kees was, in some nontrivial way, an “indecipherable sphinx” (Padgett & Ansell, 1993, p. 1262). To us, nothing seems so sphinxlike in scenario planning as “it depends on the client,” which, we note, Kees was often heard stating in response to questions (Rowland & Spaniol, 2021, p. 1). We surmise that this wonderful phrase must have frustrated more than a few who heard it. After all, it feels like a classic rhetorical dodge; an exasperating sidestep; literally, just another version of “it depends.” But we expect, like any utterance from the Sphinx, it was something more akin to a riddle, and beneath the surface lay untold wisdom.

There is no one, simple, or easy answer to the van der Heijden riddle. This speaks to the multivocal quality of the phrase, which is confirmed in the commentaries. The phrase means many things to many different audiences. Of course, it depends upon the client's stated wishes and needs, which, at times, may even be informed by having read *Scenarios*, Bowman (2021, p. 2) noted. It depends on the type of client too, Bradfield (2021, p. 2) contributes, whether there is internal organizational friction, and the readiness of leadership and stakeholders for scenario planning. It also depends on what the client

does not say or is not willing or able to articulate; “in addition to understanding the senior management concerns and what they are thinking about,” Bradfield writes, “importantly the interviews have revealed what they are not thinking about” (p. 2). Thus, it depends on the client's knowledge of their organization and their willingness to explore hitherto unexamined aspects of their business idea, their transactional environment, or their ability to sustain new directions into the future, as Bowman (2021, p. 2), Bradfield (2021, p. 2), Georgi-Kröhl (2021, p. 2), and von der Gracht (2021, p. 2) all comment. It especially depends upon the client if scenario planning is not yet embedded in their country of operation, as Schwarz (2021, p. 2) experienced firsthand. It even depends on, von der Gracht (2021, p. 2) notes, “getting the ‘right’ client” in the first place, that is, the type of client that “asks the right questions and allows for original, unconventional scenarios.”

Why does it depend on the client? Ramírez's (2021, p. 1) aptly titled commentary decodes and illuminates the underlying practical and theoretical advancements that lay undergird the notion that now, indelibly and unavoidably, “it depends on the client.” This is because, until recent decades, it did not always depend upon the client. A starting point that is as good as any is Normann's (1984) book *Service Management*, which Ramírez (2021, p. 1) positions historically, noting that “from 1986 to 1991, ... Kees and the late Jaap Leemhuis were the clients with whom Richard Normann and I worked” to bring these insights to life at Shell. “At the time,” Ramírez (2021, p. 2) recalls, “the ‘service management’ logic was being extended from firms that thought of themselves as service businesses ... to all kinds of businesses that did not classify themselves as service businesses ... but who had found that repositioning the [client-oriented] ‘service approach’ as a core of their strategy and the business idea made them more competitive.” In sum, to Ramírez (2021, p. 2), “Kees as a client highlighted many insights on how to coproduce value and values which my colleagues in consulting and academia, and my students and I, have strived to reuse, not least with other clients.” Thus, the sphinxlike phrase, “it depends on the client,” reveals a rich, seemingly invisible, largely unstated, underlayer of meaning. Only if the listener is sensitized to the client-orientation implicit in service management thinking as well as what Kees referred to, Ramírez (2021, p. 2) tell us, as “the Selsky turn.”⁵

4.2 | Broker between roles and worlds

Put another way, the multivocal quality of such a phrase also has the potential to prompt, stimulate, and provoke a wide range of conversations—a core imperative of van der Heijden's approach. After all, scenarios have diverse audiences, and, thus, facilitators like Kees, and many of those who provided commentaries, operate as brokers and translators between many different worlds. With regard to conversations about the process of scenario development, von der Gracht (2021, p. 2) is instructive: “When I, as a professional futurist, say ‘scenario planning,’ the client's Chief Financial Officer (CFO) automatically understands it to mean financial mathematical

modeling, the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) exciting storytelling on future market potential, the CEO a well-developed strategy, and the Chief Risk Officer a stress test.” Similarly, Georgi-Kröhl (2021) recognizes the essential need for multivocality in start-up contexts like incubators and accelerators, where strategic conversations simultaneously encompass investors, coaches, mentors, founders, and other stakeholders.

The facilitator, therefore, does not merely address a diverse audience, but must also, as the saying goes, “wear many hats” (or, in sociology-speak, play many roles in a number of different or overlapping networks). The commentaries were especially illuminating in this regard. For Ramírez (2021, p. 1), Kees was an instructive client: “The way Jaap and Kees acted as clients, with Richard and I as advisors, taught me a lot about how clients and advisors can collaborate effectively and work together in scenario planning and beyond.” “Kees was [also] a big promoter of what became the ‘Business Logics for Innovators’ club,” which Ramírez “had the privilege of running” (p. 1). A colorful anecdote from Kahane’s generous interview recalls Kees as a consultant, facilitating a workshop for Reos Partners in his retirement: “He stood at the flipchart, poised ready to take notes on anything interesting the partners had to say. But the marker did not move for a very long time. That was Kees’s way of telling them to ‘get down to business; cut the crap; what’s at the core of all this?’” For Bradfield (2021, p. 2), among many others, Kees was a mentor: “I joined Strathclyde as a ‘research fellow’ with the objective of learning all about scenario planning by working with Kees as his apprentice scenario planner and undertaking a doctorate under his supervision.” As Ramírez noted in an interview, Kees was an ardent listener, a sense that many shared including von der Gracht (2021, p. 1) who wrote “I remembered our hours in the seminar room when Kees answered the dozens of questions that we asked him.” Lang (2021: 2) recalls Kees’s programmatic efforts to establish scenario planning in a number of university settings, for example, at “Curtin University in Perth where he had previously mentored Jo Barker to establish the Scenario Planning and Research Unit,” and later at the “University of Oxford and Templeton College as an Associate Fellow where he co-established the executive Oxford Scenarios Programme,” among other places. To Schoemaker (2021, p. 3), Kees was a copresenter and coauthor, a practical scholar with whom we “share curiosity, learning, tolerance, and humility in face of the unknown.”

The necessity of multivocality is indicative of the experiences of many practitioner-academics. “van der Heijden is one of the true ‘prac-ademics’, operating, thinking, and writing at the nexus of practice and theory,” Bowman (2021, p. 1) comments, and, upon reflection, freely admits that he “could not think of a single foresight scholar who does not follow a similar model,” given that, as a role, the “foresight academic’s job is to understand and help improve ... facilitation (whether technical, psychological, sociological, etc.).” Schoemaker (2021, p. 2) describes a familiar challenge that brokers between worlds face, which is related to reward structures; he describes Kees’s transition from Shell to an increasing number of academic circles, noting that communicating “successful business

practices, even at leading companies like Shell, may not cut it in academia where skepticism and evidence are the coins of the realm.”

The practitioner-academic approach that Kees adopted in practice and employed in *Scenarios*, however, was not and is not without levelheaded criticism. In their commentaries, Fildes and Hodgkinson articulate a related set of these concerns. Momentarily setting aside legitimate concerns about the “continuing neglect of the role of forecasting in scenario construction,” Fildes (2021, p. 1) notes that *Scenarios* was and is an influential text, but this may be as laudable as it is concerning. “van der Heijden’s book,” Fildes (2021, p. 2) writes, “laid down many markers and has stimulated both research and practice but there remain many methodologically challenging issues of research design before we can be clear as to how best to construct and use scenarios.” Put another way, while it is assumed that Kees has documented, with great fidelity, the scenario planning techniques employed at Shell and beyond in *Scenarios*, these elaborate and experience-tested practices simply do not sit upon an empirically informed academic bedrock. Schoemaker (2021, p. 2), to some extent, confirms Fildes’s interpretation writing that among “executive audiences” Kees “could hold court with great authority,” but with academic audiences, Kees would often emphasize “that more conversation would be needed—across cultural and disciplinary borders—to distill, refine and validate the methodology.” While Fildes (2021) developed this critique based, in part, on a review of *Scenarios* some years ago (see Fildes, 1998), Hodgkinson (2022) positioned the 25-year-old text in the context of a recent discussion in *Futures & Foresight Science*. “The reluctance of practitioners more generally to engage with scientific theorizing (and the scientific method),” Hodgkinson (2022, p. 2) summarizes, “is an issue of enduring concern in the futures and foresight field.” Frustrating to many, the “net result is surely a major deficit of understanding regarding what particular features of scenario techniques work best, in what particular circumstances, and for what particular reasons” (Hodgkinson, 2022, p. 2; see also Hodgkinson & Healey, 2008; Hodgkinson & Wright, 2002; Schoemaker, 1993). Bowman (2021, p. 1), acknowledging that “critical forecasters, strategists, management theoreticians, and so forth, can easily discount the contribution of *Scenarios* for its lack of a clear, consistent theoretical underpinning,” and, on balance, admits that “those critics were, to a degree, correct.”

4.3 | Between worlds, even on the bookshelf

Who would have guessed that Bowman’s (2021, p. 1) bookshelf could literally and figuratively convey the reality that, in retrospect, Kees entered the academic scene in an interim space between two major trends in strategy? Reaching for *Scenarios*, Bowman confirms that the book “still sits on my office bookshelf, sandwiched,” both in time and place, “somewhat ironically, between Michael Porter’s (1985) *Competitive Advantage* and Paula Jarzabkowski’s (2005) *Strategy as Practice*” (p. 1). In the mid-1990s, when *Scenarios* was first published, research on strategy was “emerging from a place of rationality and control,” Bowman writes (p. 1). *Scenarios* bears the mark of having

been written at this inflection point. All of the taken-for-granted luxuries of yesteryear associated rationality-based argumentation had lost their luster. Though the practice turn, “immersed in theory,” would eventually reconceptualize “strategy as something that was *done* rather than something *had*,” this was no consolation for Kees while writing *Scenarios* (p. 1).⁶ Indeed, many of the insights from *Scenarios*, in an effort to articulate a space for strategy after rationality, have been taken-up in the more recent shifts to Open Strategy (Schwarz, 2020, 2021; Whittington et al., 2011). According to Bowman (2021, p. 2), for these reasons and many more, “*Scenarios* was perfectly suited to its time; it created legitimacy for something hyperrational (i.e., consulting) to become more learning-oriented.” Bowman ends the commentary with another poignant image to ponder: “So... there sits *Scenarios* on my shelf, the red parts of the dustcover bleached yellow, squashed between a hyperrational past and an overtheorized future” (p. 2).⁷

Schoemaker (2021) provides another way to slice the proverbial Gordian knot, positioning Kees as embracing a subjectivist approach to strategy and moving away from a rationalist line of thinking from the past. “In my view,” Schoemaker (2021, p. 1) observes, “Kees transitioned from searching for objective and rational answers to more deeply appreciating the inherently subjective nature of decision-making under uncertainty.” Put another way, Kees’s “intellectual alignment, as a trained rationalist and music lover, [came to co-exist] with deeper philosophical undercurrents that fully respect subjectivism in management and economics” (p. 2). While not employing the notion of subjectivism directly or explicitly, van der Heijden (2005, p. xv) openly embraces ideas sympathetic to such a perspective, assuming that strategy “takes place against a background of irreducible uncertainty and human/social interpretation, where communication is just as important as individual thinking, and where intuition and creativity are just as important as rational reasoning.”

Consistent with Bowman’s (2021) and Schoemaker’s (2021) assessments, van der Heijden (2005, p. xv) positioned *Scenarios* as existing amid “schools of thought” in the “rich literature of strategy,” namely, the rationalist school, the evolutionary school, and, the one Kees identifies with most, the processual school. Emphasis on strategy as a process is consistent with the eventual practice turn in strategy research and requires, at minimum, a basic acceptance of the significance of subjective aspects of action, strategy, decision-making, and leadership. One consequence of adopting a process-orientation in strategy, Schwarz (2021, p. 2) notes, was that it had “shifted the scenario work away from presenting polished scenarios to initiating a process that allowed the managers of Shell to participate in developing the scenario.” To wit, this approach found fertile soil at Shell, according to Schoemaker (2021, p. 1), as “Arie de Geus, the head of Group Planning based in London, wanted to expand the use of scenario planning in Shell’s vast empire which meant better connecting the external scenarios to the internal processes of strategy development and business planning.” This brings us to our final point about the circumstances that predate the potential for robust action and the facilitation of the robust actions of others.

4.4 | Preconditions and cultivating the capacity for robust action in others

In the preface to both editions of *Scenarios*, Kees is emphatic about naming supportive and influential persons, as if to say-without-saying “I didn’t do this alone.” What sort of preconditions set the stage for the book? Many—too numerous to catalog here, but the intellectual environment at Shell is a good example. As Schoemaker (2021, p. 1) recounts, during the 1980s, Shell invited and embraced outsiders: “at the invitation of Pierre Wack,” Schoemaker went to Shell and linked-up with Peter Schwartz who “was also there then full-time, as well as Charles Hamden-Turner,” and the whole band was there primarily “to enliven Shell’s growing scenario kitchen with a few mutants,” and, as it happens, “being outsiders, we were given much freedom to contribute to the intellectual stew as we saw fit.” Surely, much credit goes to Shell leadership, in general, and Pierre Wack, more specifically, for creating and cultivating something special at that organization. If we are compelled by the social embeddedness framework to “penetrate beneath the veneer of formal institutions ... down to the relational substratum of people’s actual lives,” then the commentaries, on the whole, document some of the concrete social network connections underlying the expansion and development of scenario planning as well as the preconditions that laid the groundwork for it (Padgett & Ansell, 1993, p. 1310).

These sorts of preconditions enabled robust action but also gave rise to the imperative to facilitate the robust actions of others through scenarios and strategic conversation. Ramírez (2021, p. 2) reflected on the idea of expanding the capacity of the client by facilitating their understanding of their business (idea) from the perspective of the future; “in the end what matters to produce useful value is seeing the world not from the future of the business as ‘anyone’ might see it, but primarily from the intended user’s (client’s) point of view.” This is because, as von der Gracht (2021, p. 2) explains, “determining what is attractive and exciting is not up to the scenario planner.” The shift was subtle, but the move to stop making scenarios for a client and begin coproducing scenarios reflects not the delivery of a product but the provision of a service associated with structured, facilitated organizational learning. Or, more colorfully and with greater emphasis on the linguistic aspects of strategic conversations, von der Gracht (2021, p. 3) frames the issue as a transference of learning to the client: “It is not solely a matter of the futurist mastering his mother tongue better than others. It is also about the fact that they are able to transform the linguistic practices of their recipients in a didactically clever and transfer-safe way, without getting all preachy about it.” The book *Scenarios*, as many commentators noted, had become a go-to resource not merely for interested clients, but also for facilitators to use and re-use. Hodgkinson (2022, p. 1), for example, recalls an engagement where “the strategic conversation in the organization ... had become rather stale, and the process tools and insights of *Scenarios: The Art of Strategic Conversation* were exactly the sorts of tools and insights that would enable us to help rejuvenate it.”

5 | CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article is a rejoinder in response to commentaries written about a 25-year retrospective on Kees van der Heijden's seminal text *Scenarios: The Art of Strategic Conversation*. As a means to explore the commentaries and—without irony—bring them into conversation with one another, this piece engages in a thought experiment about the impact of *Scenarios* as well as the book's author through the sociologically informed notion of robust action from traditional thinking about social embeddedness.

In our final remarks, we wish to take-up two items yet unaddressed in the rejoinder, namely, Hodgkinson's comments about the role of emotions in strategic conversations and von der Gracht's comments about the role of luck in the scenario planning process.⁸

In his commentary, Hodgkinson (2022, p. 2) raises concerns about the undertheorized “role of nonconscious cognitive-affective processes that fundamentally drive many aspects of scenario thinking and strategic conversations,” namely, the role of emotion and intuition. His first-hand experience in facilitating scenario workshops informs these concerns where “attendant dysfunctional socioemotional process dynamics ... can rapidly escalate” when “alternative framings and fresh insights so profound [...] threaten [powerful actors'] fundamental senses of self” (p. 2). Peter Schwartz, in the opening dialog of the preface of *Scenarios*, likewise reminds Kees “not to forget the incredibly important role of motivation and emotion in strategy” (van der Heijden, 2005, p. xi). For van der Heijden, having to deal with emotions in a facilitated workshop may, we speculate, indicate that something has already gone wrong. Tapping Herman Kahn's insight that scenarios can be “conceived as value neutral,” Kees explains that “scenarios only deal with the external world over which we don't have much control or influence” that, thus, afford “value-free exploration” by “keeping them away from the daily ‘playing field’” (p. 115). Again referencing Kahn, Kees adds that “there is considerable benefit in reducing [a scenario's] emotional charge, considering that each scenario is only one of ‘multiple possible futures’” (pp. 114–115). Even then, as the hypothetical nature of scenarios support value-free exploration, emotions from stakeholders do sometimes enter into the discussions. Rowland and Spaniol (2017) offer a range of empirical examples of the management of emotions during the scenarios process, including how reminders to participants to approach the discussion as engaging in a thought experiment can serve to de-escalate emotionally charged strategic conversations. In the end, however, we imagine that van der Heijden (2005, p. 59) would raise Hodgkinson's bet, describing scenario processes as needing “all cognitive aspects, experience, existing insights, pre-determiners, predictable structures, uncertainty, doubts, expert knowledge, remarkable people and their original ideas, intuition, curiosity, courage (to suspend disbelief), invention, originality, emotion, intellectual sparkle.”

In addition to emotions, scenario development also depends on luck. This is explored by von der Gracht (2021) in his commentary, “What's luck got to do with it?” Years prior, Schwartz and Ogilvy (1998, p. 73) wrote, after some facilitation, “the group will be able to see

several different scenarios in sufficient detail so that it's possible to draw out preliminary implications of each scenario” and “if you're lucky, some strategic implications of the set of scenarios taken as a whole.” Returning to von der Gracht (2021, p. 1), his interpretation is that successful scenario planning requires that the right client joins with the right facilitator to assess the right information at the right time to “unleash the magic” of van der Heijden's (2005, p. xv) “eureka moment of invention.” Wack (1985, p. 141) referred to this as the “aha” moment of clarity of “strategic insights beyond the mind's previous reach” and is “the real challenge of scenario analysis,” occurring “when your message reaches the microcosms of decision makers, obliges them to question their assumptions about how their business world works, and leads them to change and reorganize their inner models of reality.” Yet this moment requires more: In another conversation with Peter Schwartz in the introduction to their edited book, *Scenarios for Success* (Sharpe & van der Heijden, 2008, pp. 15–16), Schwartz explains that “even in a great ‘Aha!’ moment you may see a new possibility,” but asks, “have you internalized it sufficiently to act upon it?” because, according to Schwartz, “this is one of the ways scenarios often fail.”

That said, we are left to ponder, in our final remarks of this rejoinder, are “eureka” and “aha” moments really the same? For Kees (2005, p. 51), “each successful Business Idea for the future has at its core an original entrepreneurial invention, underpinned by a new and unique insight.” Likewise, “[e]very organisation must be involved in strategic renewal, making entrepreneurial inventions for which unique insight is required”(ibid. p. 85). Following Kees' indication, we may find that literature from entrepreneurship on opportunity recognition to be instructive. Murphy (2011) models entrepreneurial discovery on the efforts that are expended to search for opportunity against the intensity of the surprise connected to the generation of the insight. The serendipity experienced when a unique insight is “stumbled upon” without much deliberation differs from the Eureka moment in the intensity of the sense of relief generated when a problem's solution is clarified. Does this difference mark Schwartz' requirements for sufficient internalization for robust action?

To those in the *Futures & Foresight Science* community, let's keep the conversation going and good luck with your scenario planning.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data are available by request to the authors.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ An ex ante framework, in this instance, being the equivalent of an academic explanation for decisions or actions based on forecasts rather

than observable results. Please note that while superior ability to forecast was insufficient to explain the success of master chess players in Leifer's (1991, p. 26) research, to then subsequently conclude that ex ante frameworks are entirely "useless," specifically beyond chess, would be an unfortunate overstatement.

² As noted by Ferraro et al., 2015, see also Bothner et al. (2010).

³ This does not mean merely behaving in unpredictable, inconsistent, or ambiguous ways. According to Padgett and Ansell (1993, p. 1307), "robust action is not just a matter of behaving ambiguously. Others are too shrewd not to see through behavioral facades down to presumed self-interested motivations. To act credibly in a multivocal fashion, one's attributed interests must themselves be multivocal."

⁴ At this juncture, a note to the reader: The following examination is more akin to an earnest thought experiment than a formal analysis. Also, the authors acknowledge, fully and unambiguously, that becoming a central figure in the world of futures studies and becoming the ruler of Florence during the Renaissance are not meant, even figuratively, to be equivalencies.

⁵ As Ramírez (2021, p. 2) instructs, see also: Ramírez and Selsky (2016), Selsky et al. (2008), and van der Heijden (2016).

⁶ Emphasis in the original.

⁷ Ellipsis in original.

⁸ In our opinion, Fildes's (1998, 2021) comments about the role of forecasting in scenario development deserves its own manuscript-length discussion.

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