

Social Analysis Systems^{2.0M}

Concepts and Tools for
Collaborative Research and Social Action

<http://www.sas-pm.com/>

Name of this technique: What If?

Author(s) and correct citation: Jacques M. Chevalier, 'SAS² 1.0: What If?,' in *Social Analysis Systems² 1.0*, <http://www-sas-pm.com/>.

What is the goal of What If?

What If? helps you track factors that are difficult to predict and that may greatly affect the outcome of your activities.

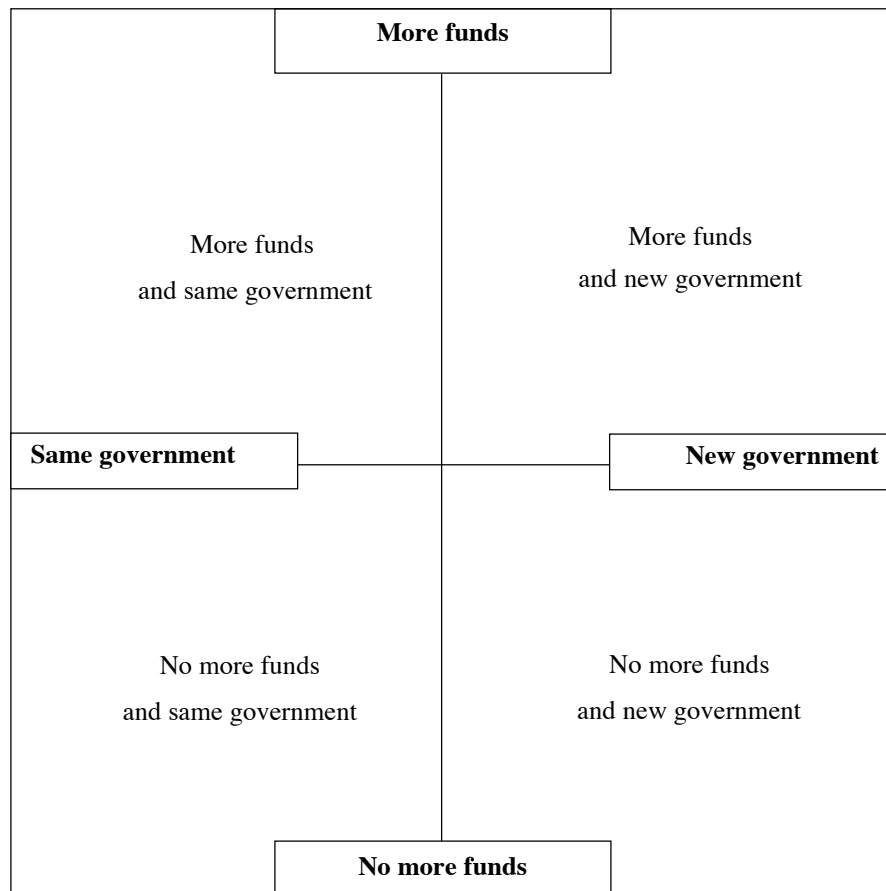
What are the guiding principles of What If?

- When you implement a plan of action, you must keep track of key factors that are difficult to predict.

Here's how to use What If?

1. Identify a plan of activity where you need to use *What If?*. Clarify the purpose of your analysis.
2. Make a list of **key factors** that may have a high impact on your current or planned activities, are very difficult to predict and may evolve in ways that you can track over time (such as stakeholder responses or changes in laws, government bodies, market prices, weather conditions, etc.). These may be factors over which you have some influence or no control at all. Define the factors as clearly as possible,
3. Select the **two factors** that may have the highest impact and are the most difficult to predict.

4. Create a diagram by drawing a horizontal line that crosses a vertical line (see example in Step 6). This creates a cross inside a square. Use the first factor to create **two opposite outcomes**, one for each half of the horizontal line (such as ‘No more funds’ versus ‘More funds’).
5. Use the second factor to create **two opposite outcomes**, one for each half of the vertical line (such as ‘A new government’ versus ‘The same government’).
6. In each corner of the diagram, write (or draw) the **scenario** that you obtain when you combine the possible outcomes. Here’s an example of a *What If?* diagram.



7. Discuss the expected **impact** of each scenario. In each corner of the diagram, record the expected impact using key words.

8. Identify *what* kind of information (or **indicators**) you need to track these two factors. Also identify *when* and *how* you will be able to obtain this information, and *who* will be responsible for doing this. This should help you know more about what to expect and also be able to adjust your plans.

Making this process work for you

For simpler versions

- Use only one indicator for each factor (Step 8).

For more advanced versions

- Take more time to gather the information you need to complete the exercise.
- During the exercise, discuss and record the views that participants express.
- Write a description for each factor and for each scenario.
- Use two or more indicators for each factor.
- Keep track of more than two key factors that are difficult to predict.
- Use indicators to calculate how likely it is that each outcome will happen.
- Discuss how you could respond to each scenario.

Readings and links

Vision 2010, Synopsis from Peter Schwartz's *The Art of the Long View*,
<http://www.si.umich.edu/V2010/scenproc.html>

L. Wollenberg with D. Edmunds and L. Buck, *Anticipating Change: Scenarios as a Tool for Adaptive Forest Management. A Guide*, Draft Version February 28, 2000. See CIFOR
<http://www.cifor.cgiar.org/acm/methods/fs.html>

Illustrations

Hue, Hue University, Vietnam, May 2003

