HOW TO EXPLORE AND SHAPE THE FUTURE

A PLAYBOOK FOR APPLYING FORESIGHT TO PROJECTS, STRATEGIES, AND POLICIES

JANUARY 2022

ARUP

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ISBN 978-92-9269-140-0 (print); 978-92-9269-141-7 (electronic); 978-92-9269-142-4 (ebook)
Publication Stock No.: TIM210442-2
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.22617/TIM210442-2

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Cover design by Eleanor Tomlinson.

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How to Explore and Shape the Future...

...using Reimagining the Future of Transport Across Asia and the Pacific

This playbook, accompanying *Reimagining the Future of Transport Across Asia and the Pacific*, aims to guide deeper work into context and subthemes of this area or other topics. The main study describes trends and visions shaping the future of transport across the region, capturing the outcomes of research and stakeholder engagement by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Ove Arup and Partners International Limited (Arup) from June 2020 to August 2021.

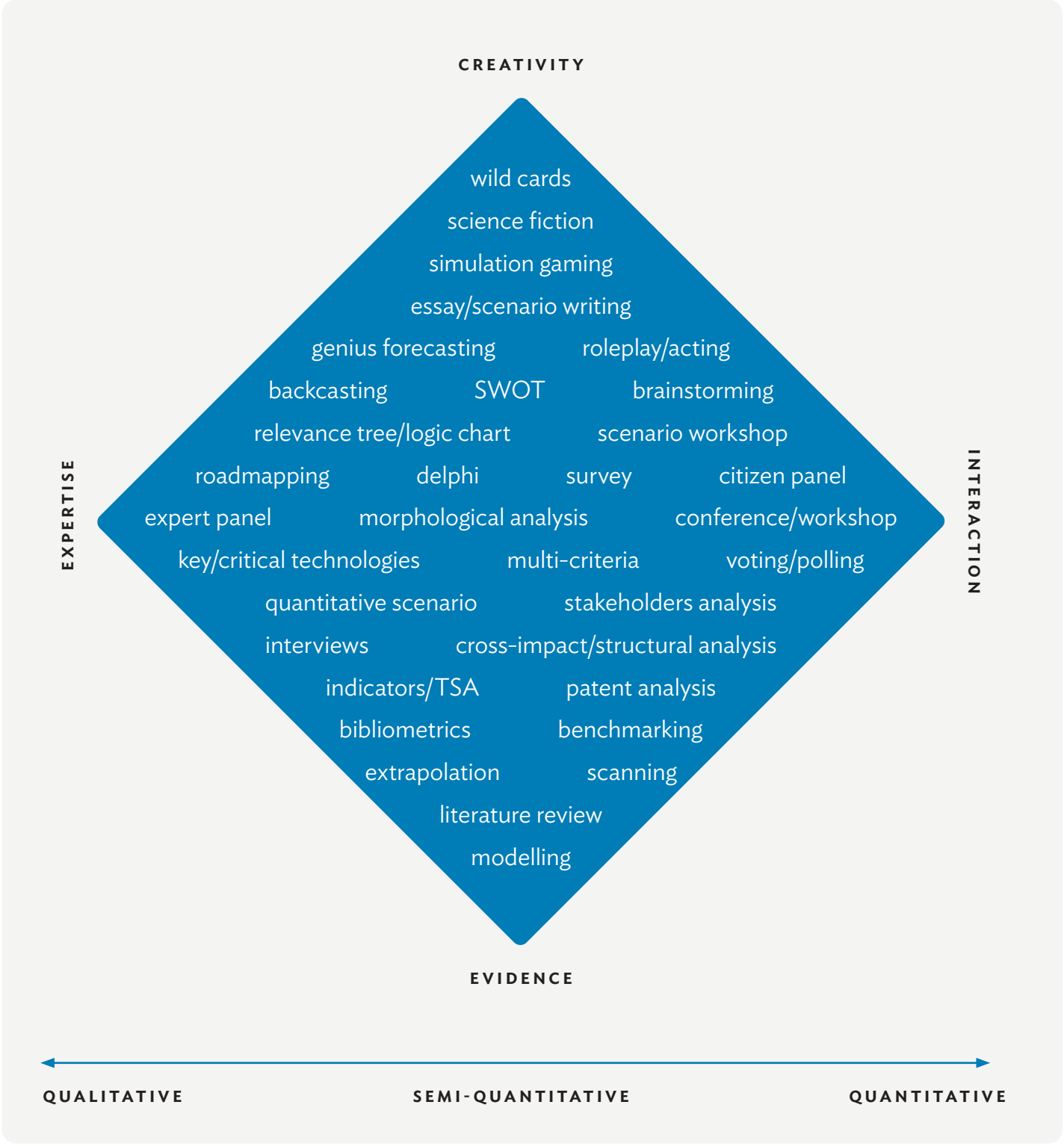
While the underlying study and trend cards focus on transport, your work need not stay within this boundary. In fact, the cross-sector nature of transport and the complexity of development challenges makes it essential to look for connections across themes and domains and to embrace complexity.

The playbook enables you to deliver your own "foresight engagements," building on this work, and adapting its content to your context and requirements. It gives you a set of tools you can use to question assumptions about the future, think through alternative futures, and identify opportunities and risks. You may find it useful when trying to influence strategy, policy, and project delivery, thus boosting innovation and resilience.

The playbook is designed to

- enable independent application of "futures" thinking and foresight methods to your work or agenda;
- provide structured pathways and easy-to-use templates for workshops;
- give access to key files, reference material, and tools to support workshop delivery; and
- support use of the trend cards and visions when collaborating with your stakeholders and clients.

FIGURE 1: FORESIGHT DIAMOND



SWOT = strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; TSA = time series analysis.

Source: R. Popper. 2008. Foresight Methodology. In L. Georghiou et al., eds. *The Handbook of Technology Foresight: Concepts and Practice*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar. pp. 44–88.

How to Use This Guide

STEP 1

CHOOSING THE RIGHT PATHWAY

Depending on your role, your area of responsibility, and the task at hand, you can choose one or more of the proposed pathways. This will allow you to engage further with existing research or create new material, individually or with your team.

The playbook's four suggested pathways are as follows:

A: Map trends
Create a "futures-informed" situation analysis, identifying the impact of emerging trends on a project, theme and/or sector, or context (subnational, national, subregional, regional, or global).

B: Generate ideas or get future-ready
Develop a concept note or review existing plans across the entire project cycle.

C: Develop a strategy
Build forward-looking strategies and policies, mapping out pathways toward their possible realization.

D: Create a vision
Create a desirable vision for your project or team, generating agreement on a preferred future state.

STEP 2

DOWNLOAD AND REVIEW RELEVANT TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Please use the reference section for access to all relevant files and resources. These can be printed or used in an online workshop as a virtual canvas. Further information can be obtained from the contacts listed at the end of this document.

STEP 3

FOLLOW THE STEPS IN THE PLAYBOOK TO DELIVER YOUR ENGAGEMENT

Once you choose your pathway(s), work through the recommended exercises individually, as a team, or in small groups. Outcomes from each exercise should be considered in the context of your specific region, project, or area of responsibility. All exercises are flexible in thematic focus, but you should agree on a focal point before getting started.

STEP 4

REVIEW YOUR EXPERIENCE, ADJUST YOUR APPROACH, OR EXPAND WITH OTHER TOOLS AND METHODS

After completing an exercise, it is useful to solicit honest feedback and suggestions for improvements. While the facilitation is not necessarily complex, the experience of participants can always be improved and is highly dependent on organizational culture and personal preferences of participants.

The pathways presented have been categorized into "basic", "intermediate," and "advanced" to provide some guidance on the complexity of each approach. However, even "advanced" methods should be feasible for most teams, with a little guidance from colleagues experienced in delivering foresight engagements. All pathways can be completed by an individual, a small team, or as groups in a workshop setting. We recommend that each hands-on group (e.g., breakout group) does not exceed six participants, to enable a balanced and inclusive debate.

We reference and suggest using the Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, and Political (STEEP) framework for your thinking, as this helps broaden perspective and delivers insights into key dimensions.[1]

The proposed approaches have leveraged a large and growing toolbox that foresight practitioners use to engage with alternative futures—many of which will be familiar to you from other contexts. Feel free to build on this playbook, explore other resources, and combine our approach with other methods. Adapting your approach to the task at hand and the context in which you operate is key to the success of your efforts.

[1] Firms often conduct STEEP analysis to get a detailed overview of what external factors determine trends. It also helps to make predictions.

PATHWAY A

Map Trends

Create a futures-informed situation analysis, identifying the impact of emerging trends on a project, theme and/or sector, or context (subnational, national, subregional, regional, or global)

This pathway focuses on deepening understanding of key trends shaping the future. You will use this insight to contextualize and explore how trends shape your specific project, theme and/or sector, region, or your overall area of responsibility as a leader, decision maker, or team.

APPROXIMATE TIME REQUIRED
Between half a day and 2 days, depending on depth of analysis.

OVERALL COMPLEXITY
Basic

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- Understand key global trends shaping the future
- Select and analyze trends relevant to you and your work
- Capture possible implications for a project, region, or sector/theme
- Develop a more holistic understanding of future trends that matter to you

REQUIRED MATERIALS AND PRO FORMAS

- *Reimagining the Future of Transport Across Asia and the Pacific* full study for reference and background information on trends
- *Reimagining the Future of Transport Across Asia and the Pacific* trend cards for use in workshops and interactions (where applicable)
- Workshop pro formas as listed in Table 1

TABLE 1: PATHWAY A INSTRUCTIONS	MATERIALS
STEP 1 Read the trend cards from *Reimagining the Future of Transport Across Asia and the Pacific* and make notes on possible priority trends and implications. Which of the trends feel most relevant to your project or context? What projections and data points are most impactful? Which uncertainties, opportunities, and risks should you consider?	*Trend cards and study*
STEP 2 Select the most relevant trends, using the trend cards. Start by selecting your top three trends per STEEP category, then select your top three trends from the previous selection across all categories. Selecting a few trends that you are less familiar with will challenge you to think beyond "the obvious." Add more trends if you feel that three are insufficient.	*Trend cards* *Pro forma for Activity 1*
STEP 3 Capture the opportunities and challenges associated with each top trend in the context of your project, theme and/or sector, region, or context. If necessary, repeat this process for different projects or contexts, or if you want to analyze a larger number of trends.	*Pro forma for Activity 2*
STEP 4 Consider the findings of this exercise during your routine work (at certain milestones of the project cycle, e.g., drafting of a concept note or while drafting strategies or policies). Share and discuss findings with relevant stakeholders.	*Not available*

STEEP = Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, and Political.

PATHWAY B

Generate Ideas or Get Future-Ready

Develop a concept note or review existing plans across the entire project cycle

This pathway focuses on generating new ideas and identifying opportunities that can help generate forward-looking and future-ready project concept notes or help review and/or refine existing ones. The aim is to "think beyond the obvious," discover opportunities, and explore how your project could become more resilient, sustainable, and inclusive.

APPROXIMATE TIME REQUIRED
1–3 days depending on depth of analysis

OVERALL COMPLEXITY
Intermediate

DESIRED OUTCOMES

Future-readiness—develop or refine project concept notes through a conscious consideration of emerging trends, opportunities, and challenges

Identify opportunities for thematic integration across different stakeholders

REQUIRED MATERIALS AND PRO FORMAS

Reimagining the Future of Transport Across Asia and the Pacific full study for reference and background information on trends

Reimagining the Future of Transport Across Asia and the Pacific trend cards for use in workshops and interactions (where applicable)

Workshop pro formas as listed in Table 2

TABLE 2: PATHWAY B INSTRUCTIONS	MATERIALS
STEP 1 Read the trend cards from *Reimagining the Future of Transport Across Asia and the Pacific* and make notes on possible priority trends and implications. Which of the trends feel most relevant to your project or context? What projections and data points are most impactful? Which uncertainties, opportunities, and risks should you consider?	*Trend cards and study*
STEP 2 Use the trend cards to select the most relevant trends. We recommend selecting your top 10 trends, choosing trends across STEEP. Ensure you select trends that you are less familiar with, that you are uncertain about, or that could challenge you to rethink your project.	*Trends cards*
STEP 3 Where required, conduct a horizon-scanning exercise (Pathway A) to discuss and identify additional trends shaping the future of your project. The aim is to identify topics that are currently not covered by the trend cards and the publication.	*Pro forma for Activity 3*
STEP 4 Consider the possible impact and associated uncertainty of your chosen trends. Further explore and prioritize trends within an agreed context, e.g., impact and uncertainty in how it may shape or change a new and/or existing project concept or brief. Select your top three trends based on this analysis.	*Pro forma for Activity 4*
STEP 5 Each of the three top trends is placed into a separate "futures wheel" to identify first- and second-order implications in the context of your project. Repeat for each trend that has been identified as "high priority." Select the most important impacts mapped on the wheel and discuss possible implications for your project.	*Pro forma for Activity 5*
STEP 6 Capture the opportunities and challenges associated with each top trend in the context of your project. Use this exercise to get specific about how your project can be adapted, improved, or developed further.	*Pro forma for Activity 2*
STEP 7 Ensure your findings are considered for your project (or strategies and policies, where relevant). Share and discuss findings with relevant stakeholders.	*Not available*

STEEP = Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, and Political.

PATHWAY C

Develop a Strategy

Build forward-looking strategies and policies, mapping out pathways toward their possible realization

This pathway utilizes scenario development to explore plausible futures and to stress-test existing strategies and policies or to support development of new ones. The aim is to make strategies more future-ready and resilient in the face of rapid change and frequent disruption.

APPROXIMATE TIME REQUIRED
1–6 days depending on depth of analysis

OVERALL COMPLEXITY
Advanced

DESIRED OUTCOMES

Explore plausible and consistent pathways toward the future

Develop a set of scenarios that represent different future states

Identify implications for transport strategy and policy

REQUIRED MATERIALS AND PRO FORMAS

Reimagining the Future of Transport Across Asia and the Pacific full study for reference and background information on trends

Workshop pro formas as listed in Table 3

TABLE 3: PATHWAY C INSTRUCTIONS	MATERIALS
STEP 1 Read the full study on *Reimagining the Future of Transport Across Asia and the Pacific*.	*Trend cards and study*
STEP 2 Conduct a horizon scanning exercise (Pathway A) to discuss and identify the key trends shaping the future of your strategy or policy domain.	*Pro forma for Activity 3*
STEP 3 Analyze the selected trends, considering possible impacts and associated uncertainty. The aim is to identify 2–5 trends orfactors with a high impact and high uncertainty. These will be considered as possible factors and will focus the scenario development process.	*Pro forma for Activity 4*
STEP 4 Use the "axis of uncertainty" pro forma to explore different opposing endpoints for your top factors (trends). For example, if you choose climate change as a trend, one end-point of your axis could be "high physical impacts," the other "low physical impacts." The aim is to capture the plausible range for each factor (trend). Create up to five axes to choose from. Select the two you feel would be most impactful and relevant for your strategy or policy process. They should be factors that complement each other: are not too similar, are mutually exclusive, and are from different themes or domains. The combination of two axes forms a 2x2 matrix.	*Pro forma for Activity 6*
STEP 5 After selecting your two axes, start detailing your scenarios by outlining plausible events, conditions, and outcomes for each quadrant. *As an example: a 2x2 matrix combining "high physical impacts of climate change" with "growing demand for low-carbon transport solutions" will generate four scenarios. One could be a scenario in which policies and strategies for electrification of transport modes and development of infrastructure solutions are resilient to extreme weather events.* Write a short scenario narrative and create a short title for each of the four quadrants in your matrix. Add as much detail and indicators to your scenarios as possible. Examples of completed scenarios can be found in the references section.	*Pro forma for Activity 7*

continued on next page

TABLE 3: PATHWAY C INSTRUCTIONS (CONTINUED)	MATERIALS
STEP 6 Review and stress-test your strategies and policies in the context of each scenario by exposing them to the "wind tunnel" of a given scenario. You are looking to gauge the consistency, plausibility, and relevance of your strategies or policies when under stress. *Which strategies or policies are "no-regret" options across all scenarios? Which need adapting to make them more resilient in the context of all plausible futures?* This exercise can also be completed with preexisting scenarios created by others, skipping steps 1–5. However, this loses some of the contextual nuances and stakeholder buy-in of your self-generated scenarios.	*Pro forma for Activity 8*
STEP 7 Ensure outcomes of all exercises are considered for the development and revaluation of transport strategies and policies. Share and discuss findings with relevant stakeholders.	*Not available*

PATHWAY D

Create a Vision

Create a desirable vision for your project or team, generating agreement on a preferred future state

This pathway focuses on the development of a clear vision for your project, theme, region, or team. The aim is to collectively agree on a desired future state. This vision can then act as a common framework and guide for decision-making, investments, plans, and strategies.

APPROXIMATE TIME REQUIRED
1–6 days depending on depth of analysis

OVERALL COMPLEXITY
Advanced

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- Understand key global trends shaping the future
- Select relevant trends and understand their implications
- Explore and select visions and associated strategies relevant to you
- Identify roadblocks and enablers toward your preferred vision

REQUIRED MATERIALS AND PRO FORMAS

- *Reimagining the Future of Transport Across Asia and the Pacific* full study for reference and background information on trends
- *Reimagining the Future of Transport Across Asia and the Pacific* trend cards for use in workshops and interactions (where applicable)
- Workshop pro formas as listed in Table 4

TABLE 4: PATHWAY D INSTRUCTIONS	MATERIALS
STEP 1 Read the trend cards and "Visions" section of the study on *Reimagining the Future of Transport Across Asia and the Pacific*	*Trend cards and study*
STEP 2 Select the most relevant trends, using the trend cards. Start by selecting your top three trends per STEEP category, then select your top three trends across all categories. Selecting a few trends that you are less familiar with will challenge you to think beyond "the obvious." Add more trends if you feel that three are insufficient.	*Trend cards* *Pro forma for Activity 1*
STEP 3 Each of the three top trends is placed into a separate "futures wheel" pro forma to identify first and second-order implications for your project. Repeat for each trend identified as high priority. Identify and mark up the most positive implications in both the first- and second-order implications. Which implications support a more positive future? Which tell stories of the positive outcomes you are hoping to achieve?	*Pro forma for Activity 5*
OPTION A1 Outline what an ideal future in the context of your project, region, or focal sector or theme would look like. Start describing this/these vision(s) with the key features, building on the "positive" implications identified previously (step 3). Then complete further sections in the pro forma before giving your vision(s) a title. Refine this to ensure that the vision has a strong relevance to your specific context and objectives as a group. Be mindful that this process benefits from having diverse views and opinions in the room and that it represents a choice that participants make based on their experiences, beliefs, and assumptions.	*Pro forma for Activity 9*
OPTION A2 Conduct a backcasting exercise to describe the possible steps, events, and/or decisions that could take you from the present to your desired future state. These should reflect both certainties and uncertainties that make sense for your timeline. Begin with your chosen end-point (e.g., 2030 or 2050) then work your way backward to the present. You can also prompt participants to add events to the timeline simultaneously where they make logical sense and debrief this exercise later to clarify, engage, and reach consensus in the group.	*Pro forma for Activity 10*
OPTION B1 (COMBINE WITH OPTION A1) Use the study on *Reimagining the Future of Transport Across Asia and the Pacific* to review the visions. Order the visions by impact and feasibility to identify those most relevant to your project, context, or region. This can be all or just some of the visions.	*Pro forma for Activity 11*

continued on next page

PATHWAY D INSTRUCTIONS (CONTINUED)	MATERIALS
OPTION B2 (COMBINE WITH OPTION A1) For each selected vision (under step A1), decide which strategies, listed under the visions and principles of the study, are most relevant for your project, context, or region. Try to be realistic about what strategies are most suitable while recognizing that these are long-term targets that should be ambitious. Once you have selected the strategies, use the pro forma provided to identify roadblocks and enablers to examine feasibility. You will need separate pro formas for each vision that you analyze. The outcomes of this exercise should inform the development of an overall vision specific to your project, context, or region.	*Pro forma for Activity 12*
STEP 6 Ensure outcomes of all exercises are considered for the development and revaluation of transport projects, strategies, and policies. Share and discuss findings with relevant stakeholders.	*Not available*

APPENDIX

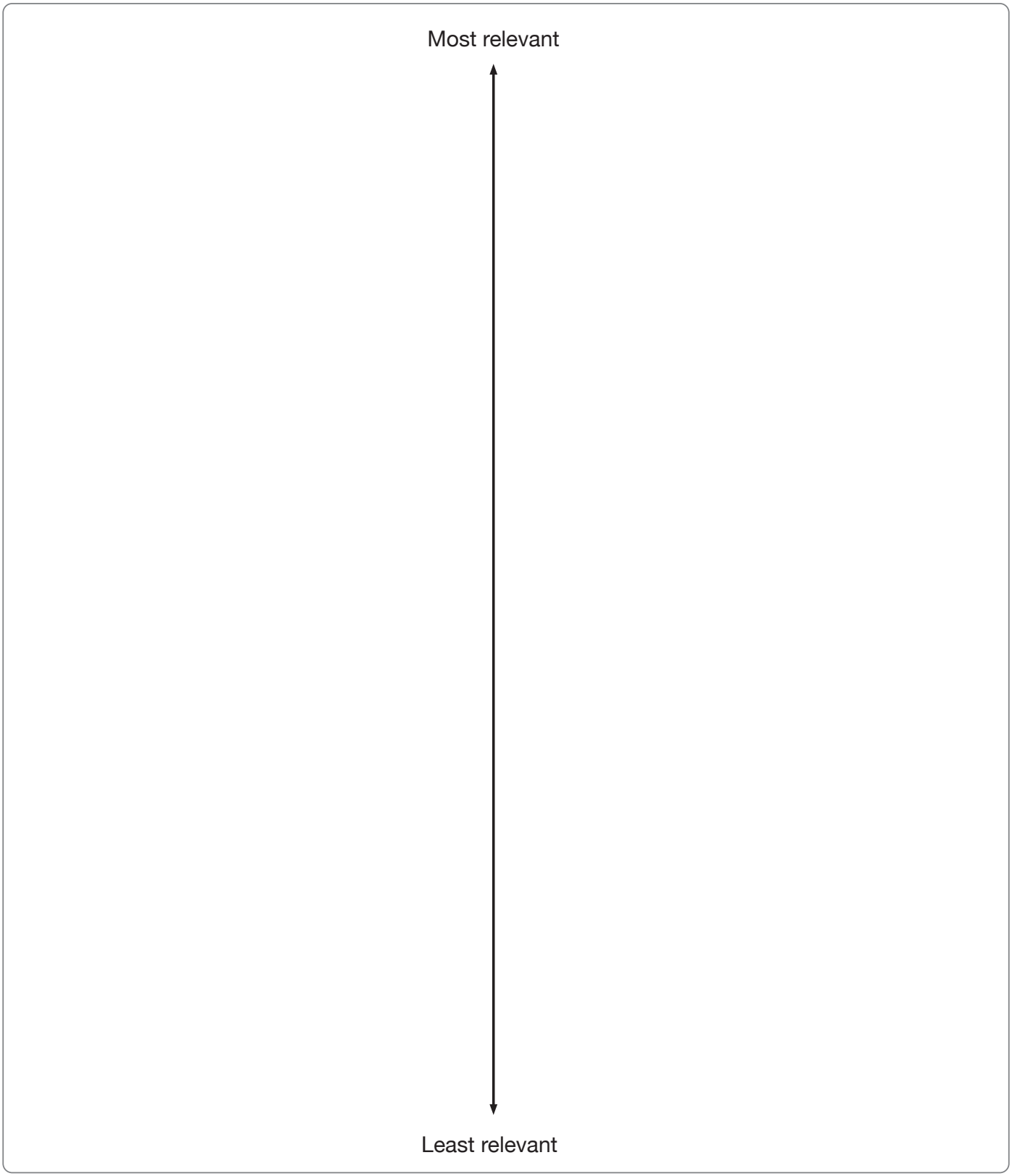
Pro Formas

The workshop pro formas are included in the following pages. We recommend printing these on A1-size paper to give participants plenty of space to write and think.

Activity 1: Ranking trends by relevance

20 mins

Use the *Reimagining the Future of Transport Across Asia and the Pacific* trend cards to select the trends most relevant to your project, theme, region, or context. Start with selecting your top 3 trends per STEEP category, then select your top 3 trends across all categories. Place the cards on the poster and discuss.



Activity 2: Explore opportunities and challenges

20 mins

Place your top 3 most relevant trends into the trend matrix below. Capture the opportunities and challenges associated with each top trend in the context of your project, theme, region, or context. Be as specific as you can.

Trends	Opportunities	Challenges
Trend 1		
Trend 2		
Trend 3		

Activity 3: Identifying trends and emerging issues

20 mins

Identify emerging issues, trends and megatrends impacting the future of your project, theme, region, or context. Place each item into a STEEP category. What have you seen, heard, or read that could be relevant for your future?

Domain	Weak signals, trends and/or megatrends
Social	
Technological	
Environmental	
Economic	
(Geo) Political	

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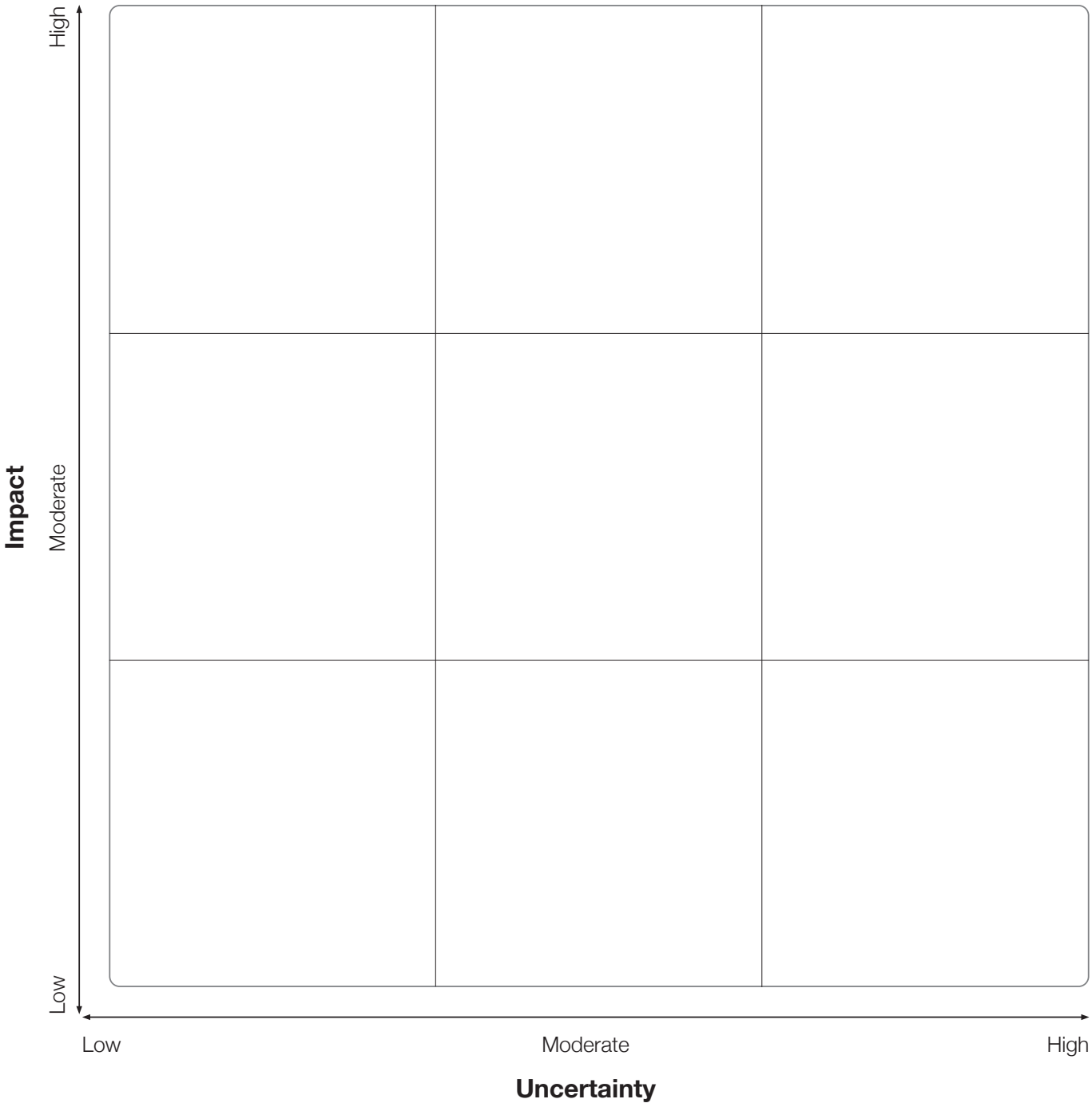
Activity 4: Ranking by impact and uncertainty

15 mins

Order the trends into the impact and uncertainty matrix below. This task asks you to make distinctions about the relative impact and uncertainty across the issues you have identified.

Method Note: *Uncertainty refers to how sure you are about the future direction of the issue, or the way it will impact on your project, theme, region, or context. For example, if you were looking at road congestion, you might identify autonomous vehicles (AVs) as a high impact trend, but be relatively uncertain about whether AVs will increase or decrease traffic congestion in cities; in this case it might be appropriate to put AVs in the top-right box.*



Activity 5: Futures wheel

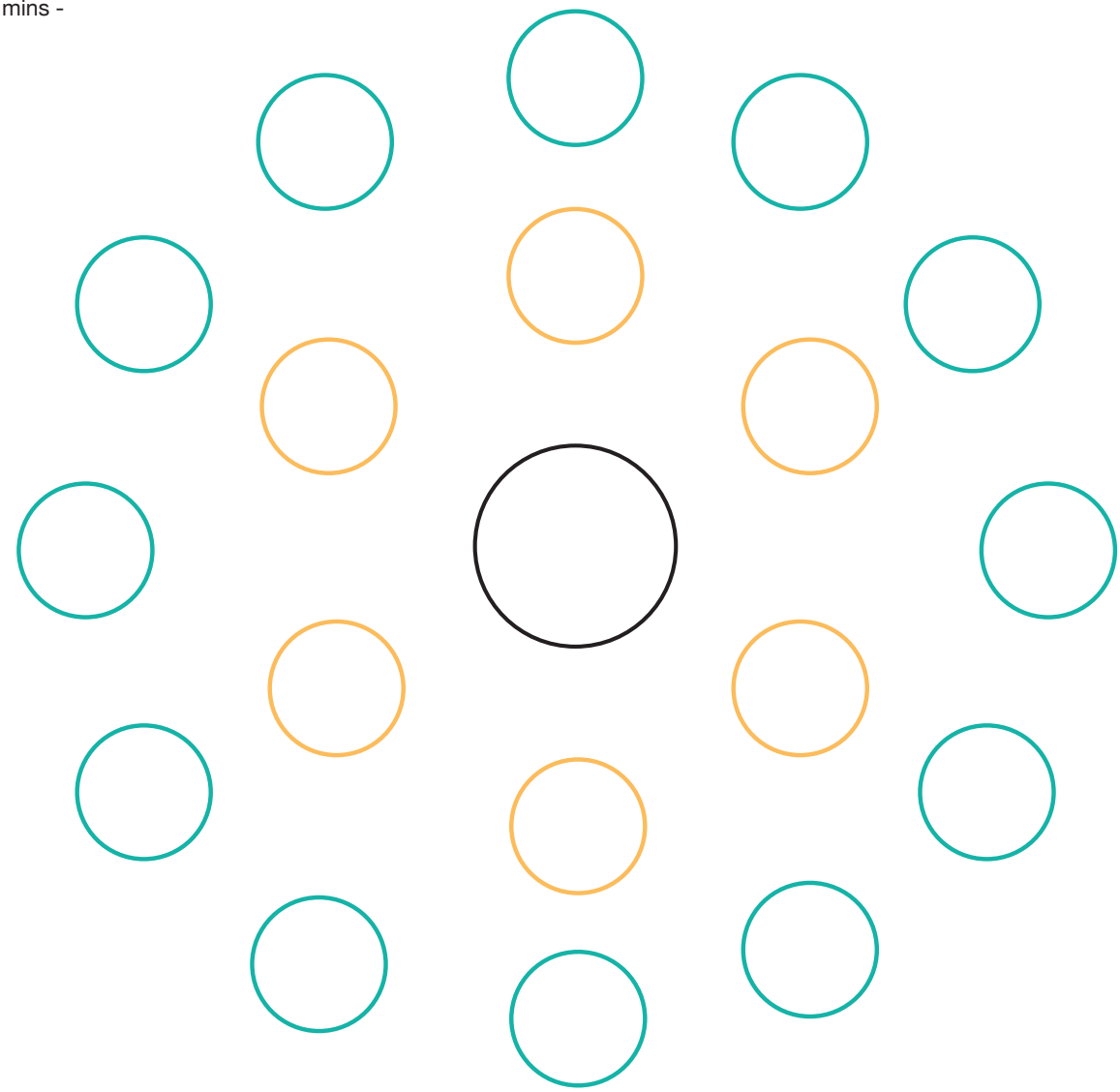
35 mins

Trend being investigated:

1. Think of all the first-order effects or implications that might result from this trend.
   Input these in the yellow circles
   - 15 mins -

2. List all second-order effects or consequences that stem from each first-order effect.
   Input these in the green circles
   - 10 mins -

3. Consider the overall relationships of the effects.
   Draw lines between circles
   - 5 mins -



Legend
- = Trend
- = First-order effects/implications
- = Second-order effects/implications

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Activity 6: Axes of uncertainty for scenarios

20 mins

The 2x2 scenario methodology utilizes a two axes approach to construct four alternative worlds. The first step in this process is to determine two possible axes that would work well together and create alternate scenarios of the future.

1. Translate up to 5 chosen factors into axis label descriptions (axis label boxes).
2. Enter a one- or two-word description in each end-point box, representing the contrasting futures for each axis (i.e., representing the span of uncertainty for the axis).
3. Once drafted, choose 2 axes you want to use to guide your scenarios.

Method note: *Uncertainty: how sure you are about the future direction of the issue, or the way it will impact on the focal topic.*

Example:

Axis label

Planning approach

Proactive approach ⟷ *Reactive approach*

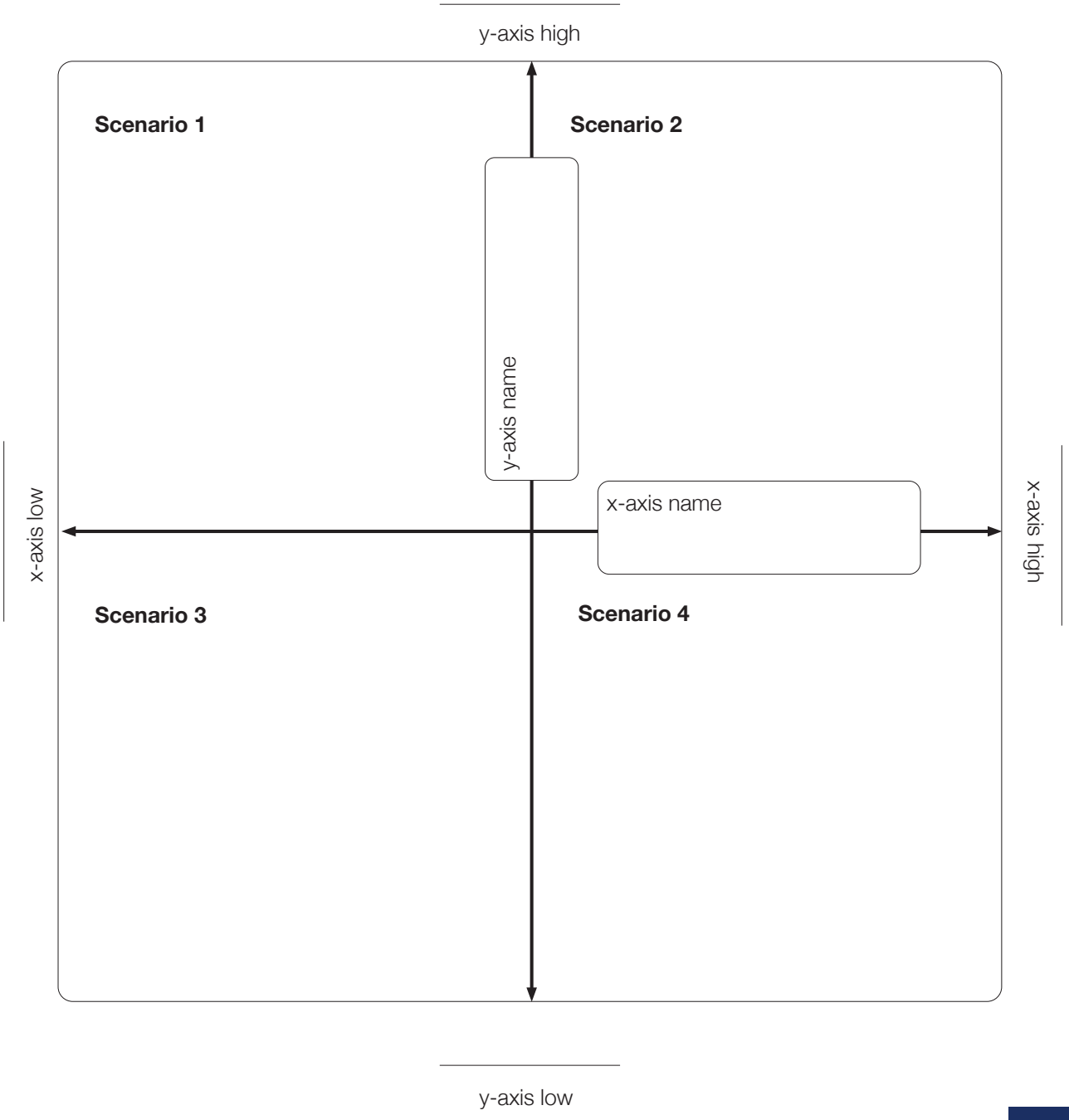
End-point A — End-point B

Activity 7: Scenario development

20 mins

1. Fill in axes as decided in previous exercise.
2. Discuss issues and events that could push the world into each scenario quadrant.
3. Write a sentence describing the main theme of each scenario.
4. Develop a name for each scenario (consider using a book or movie title).

Method note: *Try to pick axes that cover different themes. Remember, each quadrant is a combination of 2 axis end-points.*



Activity 8: Wind tunelling

20 mins

Review and “wind tunnel” your strategies and policies in the context of each scenario. Which strategies or policies are no-regret options across all scenarios? Which ones need adapting to make them more resilient in the context of all plausible futures? Use the rating system to score the strategies.

Rating system

1 = positive
0 = neutral
-1 = negative

Strategy	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Scenario 4

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Activity 9: Creating an ideal future vision

20 mins

Outline an ideal future vision in the context of your project, region, or focal theme. Start with the key features of your vision using the “positive” outcomes from your Futures Wheel. Then complete further sections before concluding with a vision title. Refine this to ensure that the vision has a strong relevance to your specific context and objectives as a group.

Vision title _____

What are the key features of your ideal future?

Who are the stakeholders? Who has benefited?

How do we measure sucess?

Sketch here to represent your ideal future

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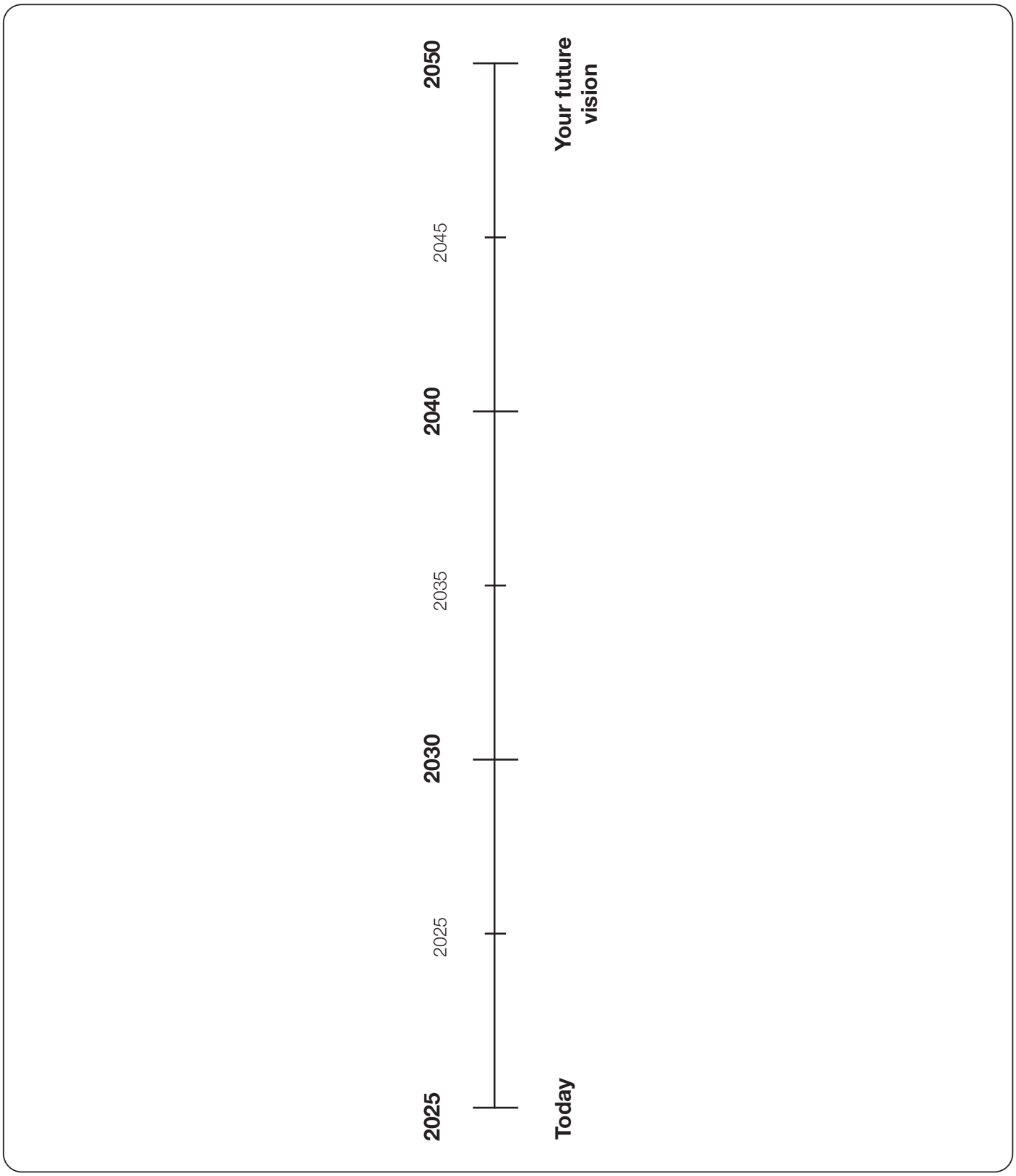
Activity 10: Backcasting

20 mins

Use the timeline below note the key events between now and 2050 that would enable your future vision to be achieved.

Method note: *This requires that events are plausible and link together in an achievable timeline.*



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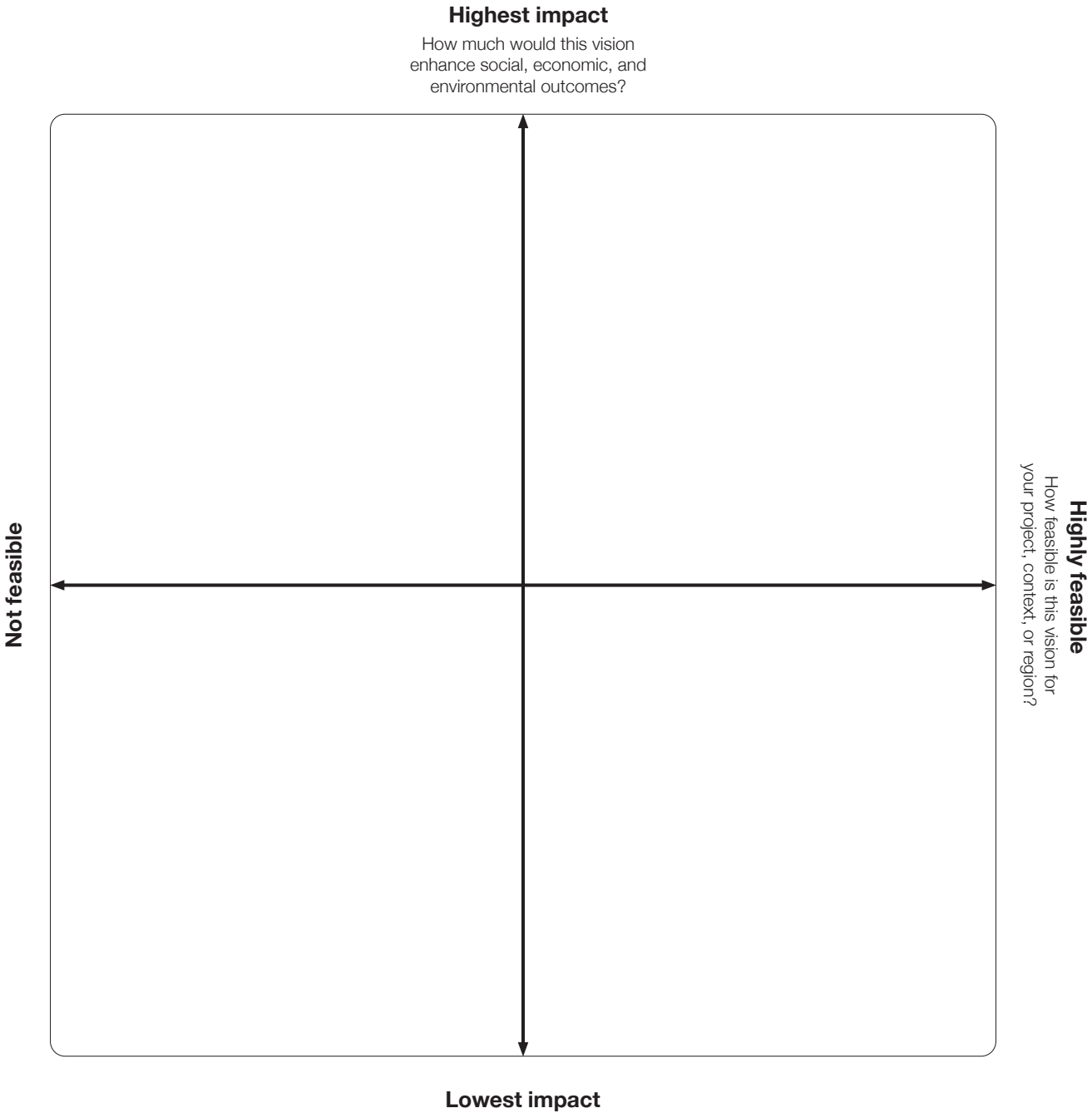
Activity 11: Analyze visions by impact and feasibility

20 mins

Use the *Reimagining the Future of Transport Across Asia and the Pacific* report to review the visions. Order the visions by impact and feasibility to identify those most relevant to your project, context, or region. Choose one vision that the team wants to work toward developing.



Activity 12: Identifying roadblocks and enablers

20 mins

What are the roadblocks and enablers for your chosen vision and associated strategies, in the context of your project, context, or region? Think about the levers, decision points, and stakeholders.

Vision title:

Strategies	Roadblocks	Enablers
Strategy 1		
Strategy 2		
Strategy 3		
Strategy 4		

APPENDIX

Resources and References

MATERIALS

The links provide access to all relevant materials and resources required to deliver your selected pathway(s).

Reimagining the Future of Transport Across Asia and the Pacific study

Trend workshop cards

FURTHER READING

ADB. 2020. Futures Thinking in Asia and the Pacific: Why Foresight Matters for Policy Makers.
https://www.adb.org/publications/futures-thinking-asia-pacific-policy-makers

ADB. 2021. Explainer: Why Foresight Matters for Policy Makers.
https://development.asia/explainer/why-foresight-matters-policy-makers

Arup. 2017. An Introduction to Corporate Foresight.
https://www.arup.com/perspectives/publications/research/section/an-introduction-to-corporate-foresight

CONTACT

For any questions on this playbook and foresight methodologies, please contact:

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How to Explore and Shape the Future

A Playbook for Applying Foresight to Projects, Strategies, and Policies

This playbook provides practical tools and guidance on how to apply foresight approaches in the transport sector for trend mapping, strategy building, policy development, and project planning. It is an accompanying resource to the publication *Reimagining the Future of Transport Across Asia and the Pacific*. Although designed for applying foresight approaches in the context of transport, it can also be adapted to other sectors to help users deep-dive into assumptions about the future, consider alternative futures, and identify opportunities and risks.

About the Asian Development Bank

ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members —49 from the region. Its main instruments for helping its developing member countries are policy dialogue, loans, equity investments, guarantees, grants, and technical assistance.

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