Building Leadership for Sustainability
Building leadership for sustainability is a professional development workshop designed to help current and future leaders to see sustainability as a leadership issue. The workshop challenges fundamental assumptions about leadership and responsibility by promoting an approach to leading that aims to support the understanding of the complex system and to design actions to address global environmental and societal challenges.

The workshop is based on the Scenario Exploration System (SES), a serious gaming platform developed by the European Commission’s Joint Research Centre to facilitate the practical use of scenarios from foresight studies. The original motivation behind its development was to engage EU policymakers with scenarios in a quick process to make it easier to apply foresight to policy-making. Later, the Academy of Business in Society - ABIS created a new version with the scope to engage learners in a role-play simulation to develop a mindset and the skills required to thrive in an increasingly complex business environment, while simultaneously contributing to long-term social, environmental and economic (‘sustainability’) goals.

Participants are engaged in systemic thinking with a long-term perspective with the objective to explore alternative futures for specific issues. The game methodology enables the acquisition of a solid understanding of sustainable development through an interactive process based on the integration of sustainability into the long-term strategies of different societal stakeholders.

The purpose of each session is to enable participants to experience and act through plausible sustainable alternative futures, by thinking and conversing outside of their usual frame of reference. The aim is not to play a game and win, but rather to promote a constructive conversation amongst key actors, and to promote integrated long-term thinking in a spirit of collaboration. The innovation of the Scenario Exploration System is the introduction and the application of elements of games to improve the development of leadership skills of future generations as well as encouraging professors to invest in gamified curriculum.
Sustainability and long-term thinking

The game enables participants to acquire a solid understanding of sustainable development through an interactive process based on the integration of sustainability into the long-term strategies of different societal actors.

Thinking outside the box

The purpose of the Scenario Exploration System is to enable participants to experience and act through plausible sustainable alternative futures for Europe, by thinking and conversing outside of their usual frame of reference. The aim is not to play a game and win, but rather to promote a constructive conversation amongst key actors, and to promote integrated long-term thinking in a spirit of collaboration.

Gamification & Innovation

The innovation aspect of the Scenario Exploration System is the introduction and the application of game techniques to improve the development of leadership skills of future generations as well as encourage educators to invest in gamified curricula.
How it works

5 Scenario Explorers
- Pursue their long-term objective
- Interact with each other
- Limited resources to explore each scenario
- Subject to foreseen and unforeseen event

2 Public voice
- Pursue their long-term objective
- Interact with each other
- Limited resources to explore each scenario
- Subject to foreseen and unforeseen event

The SES engages 5 participants to build a role for themselves and create unique stories while exploring possible futures.

The participants must take action across three-time horizons (10, 20, 30 years) to reach their long-term objectives as a policy maker, an established business, a small-medium enterprise, a civil society organization or a citizen innovator while the two public voice observes and assesses future impacts according to their interests.

Game components

- The game takes a minimum of 1.5 hour to explore 1 scenario and 2 hours to complete 2 scenarios. A proper session should engage participant to explore 2 scenarios.

- Every session involves 7 actors [each played by one person or in pairs (up to 12 person)] and one Games Master.

- Play consists of three 'rounds' in which actors are given a set of circumstances that have unfolded at 10, 20 and 30 years into the timeline, and must decide from a range of options how they will respond.

- All the resources you needed for running the game (apart from the players!) are included in the game pack. You’ll simply need a table and chairs to play.
Elements of the game

The gamification methodology at the base of the Scenario Exploration System - SES can be broken down into three types of elements. Each brings specific advantages to the collaboration, motivation, and engagement of the participants.

In the SES the incremental progression is defined by three temporal steps (10, 20, 30 years), and it is up to each explorer to define challenges and the strategy. First, the attention of the participant is captured with an easy task <<define your long-term objective for the next 30 years>>. Then, the incremental complexity of the dynamics between the other players pursuing different long-term objectives ensures a progressive engagement.

The Game Master is in charge of the onboarding of participants. Framing elements, roles & rules, scenario and scoring system are presented in the first 30min of the workshop. This moment is essential to guarantee a meaningful experience for participants since the Game Master frames the exploration of the scenarios around specific topics or case studies discussed in the class.

Tokens are the main reward for participants and the base of the game scoring system. There are two types of tokens: 1. Resource Tokens: A limited amount of resources attributed to each role and weighted differently according to the scenario. 2. Impact Tokens: A multiplier system embedded into the feedback system of the SES game, the Public Voice, whose main task is to judge actions taken by the scenario explorers.

The SES game has a responsive feedback system embedded in the role of the Public Voice, who judges each players' actions. This system gives the players the opportunity to measure immediately how their actions are perceived by the Public Voice. It is an important cue to help them calibrate the strategy and the narrative according to the vision of the person behind the role of the Public Voice. At the same time, the participants who take the role of the Public Voice must engage in critical thinking and analysis to assess if and how each player is achieving its long term objectives.

The SES allows participants to assume different identities with the freedom to experiment realistic elements of customization (identity, nature of the role, objective). There are five types of explorers associate to five societal stakeholders (established business, small business, policy maker, civil society organization and citizen innovator) and two public voices (truthful and post-truthful).

The SES has been designed to use group-based interaction to provide an incentive for the scenario explorers to keep learning from the actions played by the other actors. After the first round, explorers can collaborate with each other and use part of their limited resources to support the other’s actions. This dynamic empower participant with a high level of social responsibility that enhances the development of emotional intelligence skills in relation to the ability to influence, inspire, motivate and build strong relationships with the others.

Like all the role-player game, also the SES ranks the explorers performance based on the achievements measured by the final number of tokens. This point-based system identifies a winner in each scenario exploration. Since the aim is not to play a game and win, but rather to promote a constructive conversation amongst players, the scoreboards set the stage for the Game Master who helps players reflect on their experiences and the output of the session.

The flow channel is the state of mind that allows participants to remain focused on an activity. Since each SES session can last up to 2.5h, this is a critical component in order to establish a group dynamic long-term thinking in a spirit of collaboration. To ensure an engaging flow experience, each player creates the specifics of its role (identity, nature of role, objectives, and other role details) based on self-awareness and self-reflection. The flow channel is not a linear state of mind and the SES offers wide coverage of potential experiences to fit in different players’ flow zones. From extremely simple tasks to complex problem solving, the explorers are always able to find the right amount of challenges to engage during each session.

Every SES session generates a uniquely different story. Each story transforms the game session into a tailored experience. The objective is to immerse each explorer inside a narrative that keeps them engaged because it reproduces a story which is always somehow tangible. Since each player creates the specifics of its own role based on real societal actors, the game narrative is never extremely abstract or too simplistic.
Skills and leadership development

Complex problem solving
Players go through two phases, the knowledge acquisition related to their avatars and the scenario and, the knowledge application concerning the implementation of the right strategy needed to achieve their long-term objective in systems that contain many highly interrelated elements (complex system).

Critical thinking
Questioning the evolution towards sustainable scenarios, enhance raising awareness of issues related to global challenges. Participant can apply critical thinking and problem-solving needed to achieve a long-term objective in an environment based on active participation and constructive dialogue.

Creativity
The freedom to explore and to fail, leads the players to develop creative problem-solving skills to compete in environment characterised by limited resources. Creativity is crucial for storytelling which is needed to enhance collaboration with the other stakeholders and convince the public voices.

Negotiation
Explorers goes through a process by which compromises and agreements are reached while avoiding arguments and disputes. The opportunity to support other stakeholders during the scenario exploration, stimulates the players to seek mutual benefits and maintaining good relationship with the other participants.

Emotional intelligence
The objective of each player is to act responsibly and take action for a more sustainable future. This forward-thinking process creates an ecosystem in which players can develop the three main skills of the emotional intelligence: self-awareness; self-management; social awareness. Emotional intelligence been identified as key skills in channeling team effort towards sustainability.

The "four freedoms of play"

- Freedom to experiment
  The participants can explore and discover new strategies during the evolution of the scenario in order to achieve their long-term objective.

- Freedom of effort
  Explorers go through periods of intense activity and relative inactivity. When watching other people play, players can pause and reflect on their actions to understand how to adapt their strategy based on the evolution of the scenario.

- Freedom to fail
  The SES allows the explorers to make mistakes in the implementation of different strategies to achieve their long-term objective.

- Freedom to assume different identities
  The SES played in a simulation mode, allows participants to simulate what could happen in a new context by taking other identities to discover the world from a different perspective.

What you can learn about systemic change for sustainability

- Ideas for how you can lead change from where you are; on your own and in collaboration with others
- Everything is changing around us all the time so it’s something to influence not something to create
- The impact isn’t achieved through direct, causal relationships. You’ll consider the indirect, knock-on consequences of your own actions and how to deal with these more intentionally
- You’ll recognise the importance and wide options for collaborating with others
- You’ll realise the need - and the challenges - of changing yourself in response to a changing context
- The future isn’t predictable, nor is it set
- We are all playing a part in making the future, all of the time. We can become system change agents by being aware of the influence we already have and using it in ways that recognise everything is connected.
- Our world is a single, interconnected system: ecological, psychological, social, economic and technological
Players have found the game to be very fun and enjoyable, while increasing the understanding of alternative possible future scenarios. After each session, participants also expressed that they appreciated gaining a better understanding of possible long-term consequences of actions played. Many acknowledged that they had faced unexpected developments during the game that broadened their perspectives. The SES has thereby demonstrated its ability to generate pleasant experiences for the players and to raise player awareness of the importance of external framing conditions.

Students players have also found the game to have a good connection with reality, by simplifying the rules and the complex dynamics of how developments happen in real life. Many students expressed appreciation about the scenario information given by professor (and Game Master), and some would like even more. Overall it looks like the game has found a satisfactory balance between giving sufficient information, keeping some complexity from reality and establish dynamics for fun and creativity.
Built on the success and the results achieved by the Scenario Exploration System as an educational tool, ABIS and the European Commission's Joint Research Centre are working to develop and test a new version of the game. While engaging participants in scenario exploration and future-oriented systemic thinking, this new version is optimised to facilitate the understanding of the UN Agenda 2030, the discovery of the inter-linkages between the SDGs and the understanding of how the SDGs relate concretely to issues of specific concern to the participants.
Acknowledgement

This Report was made possible thanks to the support and advice of many individuals and organizations. The ABIS team would like to thank everyone who contributed to this endeavour.

The European Commission’s Joint Research Centre (JRC) played a key role in providing guidance and support at all stages of the Report’s cycle. A special thanks to Mr Laurent Bontoux, Foresight Specialist and Senior Policy Advisor at the JRC, whose contribution in stimulating suggestions and encouragement, helped to coordinate many training sessions and in writing this report.

This report could not have been written without the contributions of those who participated in EUInnovatE project and all the professors and researchers who participated during this year. We would like to thank them for sharing their expertise and time: Rosina Watson, Carl Khul, Emma K. Macdonald, Angheloiu Corina, Guénola Nonet, Hugh Wilson, Steffen Farny

Contact

Marco Matrisciano
Manager Research and Funding Programme
Email: marco.matrisciano@abis-global.org

ABIS - The Academy of Business in Society
Avenue Molière 128, Ixelles 1050, Brussels, Belgium
Tel. +32 (0)2 539 37 02 | Fax. +32 (0)2 544 14 29 |

www.abis-global.org | info@abis-global.org