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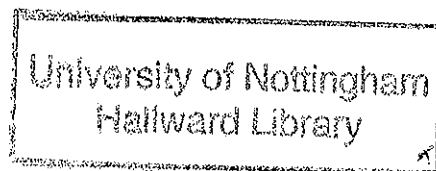
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Scenario Planning and Strategizing:  
An Integrated Approach



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PhD. Thesis  
October 2007

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## Abstract

This thesis presents an analysis of how one UK Regional Development Agency (RDA) used scenario planning in its construction of the region's Regional Economic Strategy (RES). Strategists are broadly defined to include those within the RDA charged with developing and enacting a consultative strategy making process, the consultants engaged to provide advice and expertise to ensure workshops were conducted effectively, and, individuals representing stakeholder organizations that attended these workshops and responded to written consultations. Four scenarios depicting the region in the year 2020 were produced, which were subsequently presented as an evidence-base for the strategy process. A draft RES was created and issued for consultation. Previous RES development processes had been criticized for their lack of consultation, in this iteration strategists skillfully utilized a recognized strategy making practice as a means of responding to this. The scenario planning approach they adopted bore little resemblance to the sanitised and context-free recipes commonly presented in the strategy textbooks. The research is a reflective, longitudinal study with data drawn from forty-six semi-structured interviews producing an authentic rich description that illustrates how actors enacted a strategizing process in the complex environment of the UK public sector. The analysis highlights how the strategists were influenced by sometimes conflicting desires and aspirations, and that to reconcile these and ensure deadlines were met inductive, interpretive and subjective acts were required. This analysis presents strategists as bricoleurs, with the documents and draft strategies produced being socially situated co-constructions emerging from negotiated, temporally-bound, power-laden and politically-infused interactions.

# Introduction

## 1.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces the study, identifies the theoretical gap it addresses and explains why the topic is worthy of research. Scenario planning is an approach to strategy making that has received only a limited amount of critical academic attention. Strategizing is a relatively recent research approach that seeks to explain and analyse what strategists actually do when they are making their strategies. By analysing a scenario planning episode through a strategizing perspective these two forms are brought together and examined so that insight is developed on how these strategists used scenario planning. By identifying scenario planning as a strategizing practice this study makes a contribution through its analysis of scenario planning in practice, which questions many of the taken for granted assumptions traditional descriptions of scenario planning have advanced.

The subject matter is the East of England Development Agency's (EEDA) use of scenario planning in the construction of its Regional Economic Strategy. All the Regional Development Agencies in the UK are currently charged with producing Regional Economic Strategies every three years, and scenario planning is an approach to strategy making and futures thinking that has been identified in a recent UK Government sponsored report (Henley Centre, 2001) as one means by which public sector practitioners may improve their capacity to think through multiple potential future storylines about how their environments may play out. Although the single in-depth case

is based on a UK public sector organization, the experiences of these actors will have resonance with others who find themselves having to cope with organizing strategy in power-filled, complex environments.

The first section of the chapter sets out the research and the theoretical background for the study. The contextual background, which witnessed the Labour Government establish the region, by statute, as part of its regionalisation agenda is explained. Linked to this is a description of how the Regional Economic Strategies were foreseen, the roles they would have, and the key requirements and characteristics they were expected to embody. Following this is an explanation of the East of England region, which is the focus of this study; its demographics, geography and recent economic performance are outlined. The research methodology employed in this study locates the work as a single in-depth case study that seeks to generate a multi-layered description of agents actually doing strategy. This study is representative of the wider 'Re-turn to Practice' (EGOS, 2005) observable in organizational and management studies, which is seen as part of a renewed interest in the character of society and human action, taking hold in several social science arenas. A practice agenda privileges the study of actors engaged in strategizing and as an example of this the consultants engaged by EEDA to develop the East of England scenarios are integrated into this strategy-as-practice analysis. Therefore, the next section gives background information about the Henley Centre organization and the consultants that worked with EEDA. The six chapters of this dissertation are then outlined. The delimitations of the research and the scope it endeavours to cover are presented and discussed, key assumptions underpinning the work are explained in relation to how they may have influenced what has been done. The chapter ends with concluding remarks.

## 1.1 The research

This research represents an analysis of how the East of England Development Agency (EEDA) used scenario planning as a strategizing approach in construction of its third Regional Economic Strategy (RES). The study is limited to the scenario planning phase of the RES review process. Appendix A presents a chronological rendering of the main stages of the RES review, development and publication episode: this study focuses on actions one to thirty-five of this sixty-two stage process. The aim of the research has been to develop an in-depth understanding of how actors coped with the pressures of creating and enacting a strategy making approach in the complex environment of a UK public sector organization. The objective of the study has been to develop fresh insight into the actions and reflections of strategists, consultants and stakeholders, who come together for brief periods of time to enact strategy making routines. Through achieving this aim and realising this objective, the study makes a contribution to both theory and practice. This research therefore, examines existing theories and ideas around scenario planning and strategizing, and the related concepts of sensemaking and narrative in particular organizational and social contexts created by EEDA staff, their stakeholders, and consultants from Henley Centre (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe, 2002).

## 1.2 Theoretical background

This study considers two theoretical conceptualizations relevant to both research and practice in the UK and internationally.

### 1.2.1 Scenario planning

Since Pierre Wack (1985a & 1985b) first introduced scenario planning to a wider readership by relating his experiences at Royal Dutch Shell (RDS) during the 1970s and 1980s, scenario planning has been the subject of considerable debate amongst practitioners and consultants (e.g. Fahey & Randall, 1998; Ringland, 1998). It frequently appears in generalist strategy texts as being one approach aspiring strategists may wish to employ during their organizational strategy making (e.g. de Wit & Meyer, 2004, Johnson, Scholes & Whittington, 2005). And, there exists specific scenario planning textbooks offering more detailed advice while describing case examples of the approach being practiced in a variety of settings (e.g. Fahey & Randall, 1998; Ogilvy, 2002; Ringland, 1998; Schwartz, 1996; Schwartz, Leyden & Hyatt, 2000; van der Heijden, 1996 & 2005; van der Heijden, et al., 2002). Scholarly literature is rarer and it has been noted by a number of authors that scenario planning is a practice that has received only a limited amount of critical academic attention (Cairns, Wright, Bradfield, van der Heijden & Burt, 2004; Chermack, 2003; Goodwin & Wright, 2001; Hodgkinson & Wright, 2002; Schoemaker, 1995). The few academic studies that have been published have not developed scenario planning theoretically much beyond its original conceptualizations established during the early descriptions of the RDS experience.

This study provides a critical analysis of the use of scenario planning in practice. This is largely absent from the scenario planning literature published thus far and represents a gap that this study seeks to address. Through this it contributes significantly to theoretical knowledge of the approach by questioning several of the unchallenged assumptions evident in the early work on scenario planning. By examining scenario

planning through a strategizing lens the typical scenario planning recipes that have remained largely unchanged since they were formed (e.g. van der Heijden, 1996 & 2005) are critically revisited, and are found to be of little practical relevance to actors who are engaged in developing strategies within complex, and often contradictory, environments. The sanitised versions of scenario planning frequently found in the promotional ('look at what we are doing'), or how-to-do-it ('a guide to...') guides (Pollitt, 2000) tend to ignore contextual influencers, and discount the roles and motivations of individuals or groups, which may result in practitioners holding conflicting aspirations for their strategy making routines. Strategists in this study did draw from the scenario planning literature, but this was done largely as a means of legitimizing the strategizing approach it wanted to adopt. The notion of a 'strategic conversation' was taken (van der Heijden, 1996 & 2005) to explain what EEDA wanted to achieve with its planned RES stakeholder consultation process. A strategizing perspective highlights how sensemaking and sensegiving are integral components of any consultation-based strategy making process, and how the practice of scenario planning is founded on a narrative basis, made up of talk, text and discourse. This account provides the first comprehensive examination of scenario planning in practice and through this offers important insights into how strategists actually use the approach when they are creating strategy.

### 1.2.2 Strategizing

There is an emerging consensus converging around the view that researchers know surprisingly little about how strategists and other practitioners enact strategy within and across organizations (e.g. Volberda, 2004). This has led to the recent charge being laid

against traditional strategy research that the field is on hard times and in something of a crisis (McKiernan & Carter, 2004; Wilson & Jarzabkowski, 2004). This criticism is primarily levelled at research that conceptualizes strategy as a plan through which actors seek to dominate and determine organizational structure (Clegg, Carter & Kornberger, 2004). Through this, strategy is turned into a commodity, a 'thing' perceived as being the product of an objective process involving actors in rational analysis and decision making activities. Strategy research has been heavily influenced by the study of big business experiences (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand & Lampel, 1998), which have encouraged macro examinations of organizational strategy making, leading to statements that claim generalisability across industry sectors and cultures.

The strategizing approach to the study of strategy seeks to address many of the weaknesses of traditional strategy research. Advocates of this perspective see it as embodying a practice agenda that aims to study strategy in organizations, as it is happening (e.g. Whittington, 1996). While studies of organizational strategizing based on data created and collected in the field have appeared (e.g. Maitlis & Lawrence, 2003), these are still quite rare, and often include retrospective analysis of studies that were conducted originally as process based research (e.g. Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2002; Jarzabkowski, 2004). This has meant that most strategizing papers published thus far have been conceptual pieces that theorize practice based strategy research and offer advice informing researchers how they may conduct their studies in the field and write up their findings (e.g. Balogun, Huff & Johnson, 2003; Johnson, Melin & Whittington, 2003; Whittington, 2003). For example, Watson (2003) urges strategizing researchers to seek a deeper understanding of who strategists are and consider how their motivations and personal preferences influence what strategy making processes are deemed legitimate. Timothy Clark (2004) calls for more research that examines the complex

relationships created and enacted by practitioners with the consultants they engage to advise them and lead their strategy workshops. Whittington, (2006) offers a vocabulary for discussing strategizing research based on the interrelated notions of praxis, practice and practitioners.

This study responds to these calls by focusing on how practitioners have used a particular practice (scenario planning) during their strategy making efforts. Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl (2007) identify a specific gap in strategizing research exists at this juncture, therefore this study represents an important move towards bridging this gap. A strategizing perspective has been adopted from the beginning of the study, as through this, what may have passed as mundane and uninteresting in process based research, is retained and brought to the fore in research that values nuance and micro activities. Scenario planning is the practice EEDA adopted in its strategy making efforts and therefore this research provides insight into how one public sector organization used a specific strategizing practice (Whittington, 2006) to create strategy within its particular context. The small team within EEDA that comprised the main strategists in the episode (EEDA's Policy Unit) were interviewed at several stages throughout the research and reflected on how they coped with the pressures and challenges they encountered during this major strategizing enactment, and how these influenced what was produced (Watson, 2003). The roles and influence of the consultants on this strategizing episode and on the documents produced during the process were complex and uneven (Clark, T., 2004). The consultants' agency mediated how strategizing was understood and enacted by EEDA and its stakeholders in both expected and unexpected ways, and offers new insight into how these relationships progress.



### 1.3 Background to the research

Within England, eight Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) were established under the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998, on 1 April 1999 ([www.opsi.gov.uk](http://www.opsi.gov.uk)). A ninth, in London, was established in July 2000 following the creation of the Greater London Authority (Appendix B). RDAs were formed as part of the Labour Government's wider Regionalisation agenda and support its declared public service agreement to, "Make sustainable improvements in the economic performance of all the English regions by 2008 and over the long term reduce the persistent gap in growth rates between the regions, demonstrating progress by 2006" (DTI, 2005: 1). At the time RDAs were formed they operated under the auspices of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), however on 5 May 2006, a constitutional change resulted in the responsibilities of this department being transferred to the newly formed Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG, 2006a). Sponsorship of the RDAs moved from the former Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) in 2001 (DTI, 2006a).

The Act sets out the purposes of an RDA as being:

- to further the economic development and the regeneration of its area;
- to promote business efficiency, investment and competitiveness in its area;
- to promote employment in its area;
- to enhance the development and application of skills relevant to employment in its area; and
- to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom where it is relevant to its area to do so.

The DCLG see the primary role of an RDA as acting as the strategic driver of regional economic development. Its aim is to co-ordinate regional economic development and regeneration, enabling the region to improve its relative competitiveness and reduce any imbalance between regions (DCLG, 2006a). Since April 2002, the RDAs have been financed through a Single Programme budget (the "Single Pot") (DTI, 2006b), and receive their funding from several Government Departments; the DTI, DCLG, Department for Education and Skills (DfES), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), and UK Trade and Investment (UKTI). The DTI (2006b) state that once the contributions from each department are pooled together into a single budget, each RDA is free to spend the money as it sees fit, to achieve the regional priorities identified in their Regional Economic Strategies (RES). However, Section 7 (2) of the Regional Development Agencies Act enables the Secretary of State to give guidance and direction to an Agency in relation to the exercise of its functions (DTI, 2005).

Regional Assemblies (RA) are designated under section 8 of the RDAs Act to provide regional accountability for the work of the RDAs, this assigns them a scrutiny role in relation to the activities of the RDA in its region. When reviewing the Regional Economic Strategy, RAs should have regard to the views expressed by the members of the Regional Assembly.

In summary, RDAs are creations of Government as part of its regionalization agenda. They were created by an act of parliament, which outlined their objective as being to advance the economic prosperity of the region, while at the same time, being cognizant

of national priorities and their own role in fulfilling these. RDAs are administrative organizations whose funding is provided by central government and, although they are afforded freedom in how they allocate their budgets, are subject to the guidance and direction of the Secretary of State of the DTI. Monitoring at the regional level is undertaken by Regional Assemblies, who have a scrutiny role over the performance of RDAs and through this mechanism are therefore considered the key stakeholder of RDAs.

### 1.3.1 Regional Economic Strategy

The Regional Economic Strategy (RES) is seen as playing a key part in the process of developing a region's sustainable economic performance (DTI, 2005). The DTI (2005) explain the role of the RES as being to provide a shared vision for the development of the region's economy, to improve economic performance and enhance the region's competitiveness. A RES should identify measures that will lead to an improvement in economic performance (DTI, 2005). An RDA is charged with drawing up a RES every three years. The DTI (2005) state that the strategy should be owned by the whole region, command wide support, and draw on the advocacy and resources of all the major partners in the region. As well as providing a strategic vision, it should be "...backed by a firm evidence base which will help ensure its influence on other regional strategies, and that these are mutually reinforcing, and on national and regional policies. It needs to ensure that delivery is effective at all levels. And it needs to identify priorities and ensure that common goals are adopted" (DTI, 2005: 1).

The RES should be underpinned by a “...sound evidence base...” (DTI, 2005: 2) and should ensure a better strategic focus exists that helps co-ordinate economic activity in the region. The DTI (2005: 2) claims the government regards the RES as a major tool for policy dialogue with the region. The DCLG state a region should draw on the support and resources of regional, sub-regional and local partners to address its particular needs, but should ensure its RES supports, enhances and delivers national policies (DCLG, 2006a). The tension between regional and national priorities is noted by the DTI (2005) who advise that central government departments, or the Government Office for the region, will provide guidance on the national policy context and its impact on the RES. Government departments have pledged to work closely with RDAs, ensuring that they are involved in the formation and delivery of national and regional policies. Through this, RDAs are said to be better placed to shape their Regional Economic Strategies in the light of national policies (DTI, 2005).

The DTI (2005: 4) suggests that the success and effectiveness of the RES will depend in large measure on the degree of support it commands in the region. This support is said to be dependent on the way in which the contribution of all partners, both national and regional, is best harnessed (DTI, 2005). The DTI (2005: 4) acknowledge that it is for each RDA to consider how best to foster and maintain regional and national partnership and co-operation, but state such processes should include an extensive list of elements:

- inclusivity;
- working with the Regional Assembly, other relevant regional partners and stakeholders;
- engaging with sub-regional partners;
- engaging with partners in other regions;

- ensuring equality and diversity issues are addressed, and
- working with national partners.

(DTI, 2005: 4)

The DTI (2005) require that the RDA consult widely within the region and that the RES should include a statement on the arrangements made for consultation, including a list of those consulted. The importance of a RDA taking steps to share learning from past RES consultation exercises and that good practice is applied as far as possible is stressed by the DTI (2005). It is seen as critical that the RDA develop a "...comprehensive and shared evidence base...", that is "...presented in a clear and persuasive way, both for reasons of transparency and to strengthen the ability of the RES to feed into and influence other key regional strategies, and national and regional policies" (DTI, 2005: 5). It is envisaged that the majority of the material comprising the evidence-base would be presented in a separate document.

In its guidance document to RDAs, the DTI (2005) suggests a RES should set out the region's policies, aims and objectives for the regional economy over the medium to long term (at least 5-10 years). Links with other areas such as the environment, transport, housing, tourism, culture, sport and health should be considered where these have an economic impact within the region. It sets out that the RES should identify who will be responsible for delivery of critical elements and over what timescale, and makes links with previous RESes by stating that it should describe how far the objectives of earlier RESes have been achieved (DTI, 2005).

RDAs are to ensure monitoring and evaluation of the RES is carried out transparently. The means and methods by which this is done is left open for the RDA to decide, but the

DTI offers a clear indication of the approaches it prefers, “It is for the RDAs in conjunction with Regional Assemblies and other regional partners to decide how to judge the success of their RES, but use should be made wherever possible of specific and quantifiable indicators” (DTI, 2005: 7). The RES must make clear how the region will evaluate its impact and how the results will be used to inform future versions of the RES.

To summarize, RDAs are charged with producing a RES at three yearly intervals. This document should provide a shared vision of economic performance within the region, its policies, aims and objectives, and contain quantitative measures that indicate how improvement will be monitored. The RES should be developed through extensive consultation with regional stakeholders and be informed by a strong evidence base. A crucial factor underpinning the creation of a RES is the assumption that it should be owned by the entire region and not just the RDA constructing it. To fulfil this requirement, the process of producing the RES is viewed as being as important as the strategy itself. The Regional Assembly, in its scrutiny role, ‘sign off’ the final document as a form of endorsement of the RES on behalf of the region.

### 1.3.2 East of England Development Agency

The administrative region of the East of England comprises the counties of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk, and the non-metropolitan districts of Luton, Peterborough, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock. It was created on 1 April 1999, alongside the seven other regions. Geographically, the East of England is the second largest region in England covering an area of 19,110 sq km (EEDA, 2005).

In contrast with other English regions, there is no obvious regional capital, although there are a number of regional cities, such as; Cambridge, Norwich, Ely and St. Edmundsbury. The region has a significant rural landscape and is home to around a fifth of England's market towns.

The region has a growing population of around 5.5 million, which has risen by over 11 per cent from 1982 to 2002 (EEDA, 2005). Population growth is forecast to increase by around half a million up to 2021, making it one of the fastest growing regions in England (EEDA, 2005). The demographic profile of the region reflects the change seen elsewhere in the country with an increasingly ageing population, especially in the coastal regions. The region experiences a net in-migration of around 20,000 people per annum, but also witnesses a significant out-migration of people in the 15-24 age group (EEDA, 2005).

The East of England's economy is claimed by EEDA (2005: 26) to be one of the strongest and fastest growing in England, with an output totaling £83 billion in 2003. The economy is diverse and includes a strong service sector, which is identified as the source of much of the region's wealth. The region is home to over 30 of the world's leading research centres (EEDA, 2005).

During the time period covered by this study, the East of England Development Agency (EEDA) was led by a non-executive board of 15 and an Executive Management Team (EMT) of four. It is worth noting that EEDA experienced a change in Chair and Chief Executive during the early stages of the RES review process. For the financial year 2004/05 EEDA made a surplus of £234,000 on a budget of £93 million, which was the smallest of all the RDAs (EEDA, 2005).

EEDA's Policy Unit team (PU1, PU2, PU3 & PU4), were given the responsibility to devise and implement a process for producing its third RES. During the timeframe of the RES process and this study, PU1 reported directly to the Chief Executive, although this has now changed and he now reports to the Director General Operations, but still retains his place on EEDA's Executive Management Team. None of the Policy Unit team had had significant involvement in any of the previous two RES development processes.

#### 1.4 Methodology

Methodology denotes the combination of techniques used to inquire into a specific situation (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2002: 31). The methodology employed in this study is a multi-methods approach comprising semi-structured interviews, document analysis, observation and (unrecorded) conversations conducted during the normal interactions occurring during forays in the field. This study is located in the emerging field of strategizing research, which seeks to develop in-depth understanding into how strategists do strategy in the unique contexts of their organizational environments (Samra-Fredericks, 2003). A strategizing research agenda privileges the close observation and detailed reflection of actors' situated use and collective manipulation of praxis and practices in their organizing efforts.

This research narrative eschews any attempt to locate it within a body of general theory and does not claim to offer an answer to a particular research question, or present a solution to a specific problem. Rather, the claim made for the study is that it represents a rich or thick description (e.g. Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) of EEDA's use of scenario



planning in the construction of its Regional Economic Strategy. Thick descriptions are valuable for the detailed accounts of a case's issues, contexts and interpretations (Stake, 2000) they provide. They also stand as a legitimate means of addressing theoretical gaps, as they offer context-rich analyses of elements of theory situated in a specific time and place. For this type of work it is not necessary for the researcher to be armed with a specific set of research questions, but for them to place their best intellect into the thick of what is going on (Stake, 2000). Researchers who adopt this approach need to ensure they are theoretically aware, so that their observations are informed, and also that they are reflective on how their own and the local meanings of actors mediate what sense is made of socially constituted phenomena.

## 1.5 Henley Centre

This research examines strategizing in the context of the East of England Development Agency's (EEDA) use of scenario planning in construction of its Regional Economic Strategy. To achieve this EEDA employed the services of a management consultancy organization, in this case Henley Centre. The role of consultants is one that is under-represented in strategy research (Clark, T., 2004; Jarzabkowski, et al., 2007), their role and influence on what is deemed legitimate strategizing, and on what organizational strategists actually do is a topic strategy researchers have yet to explore in detail. This case identifies the consultants as strategists, albeit of a different hue to those located in the host organization, and seeks to analyse and explain how their behaviours and actions influenced what EEDA produced in ways both intended and unintended.

Henley Centre was founded in 1974 by academics associated with the Henley Management College in Oxfordshire ([www.henleycentre.com](http://www.henleycentre.com)). It has no connection with Henley Management College, which is the UK's oldest business school and offers some similar services to Henley Centre. It was originally known as The Henley Centre for Forecasting, signifying its early focus on business forecasting and was initially run as a non-profit organization in partnership with the management college, before becoming privately owned in the early 1980s ([www.henleycentre.com](http://www.henleycentre.com)). In the 1990s it was acquired by WPP, one of the world's largest communications services groups with 97,000 employees worldwide and reported revenues (2004) of £5.4bn, and now sits within the Kantar Group, WPP's information, insight and consultancy division ([www.henleycentre.com](http://www.henleycentre.com)).

Henley Centre is based in London, but operates throughout the world, with a network of consultants in locations such as Shanghai, Tokyo, Mumbai and New Delhi. It undertakes international research through its HenleyWorld programme ([www.henleycentre.com](http://www.henleycentre.com)). Henley Centre states that it believes the role of consultants is to help organizations do those things they are not able to do on their own, and by doing so creates new value and new opportunities ([www.henleycentre.com](http://www.henleycentre.com)). In its description of its approach to projects, Henley Centre emphasizes its belief that every project is different, because every organization is different, and states that all its projects are designed in response to specific client needs ([www.henleycentre.com](http://www.henleycentre.com)). On its website it offers short case studies detailing work it has done with clients such as Sport England, Wales Tourist Board, Coca-Cola, AOL and other organizations that are specified by industry type rather than by name ([www.henleycentre.com](http://www.henleycentre.com)).

Henley Centre states that its experience and expertise is based on work in five industry sectors, one of which is the public sector. Its main focus has been on helping public sector organizations with their futures work, modelling and user satisfaction ([www.henleycentre.com](http://www.henleycentre.com)). It seeks to demonstrate its empathy with the challenges that public sector managers are facing by making several statements aimed directly at them, summarising its perceptions about the difficulties and complexities of making public policy ([www.henleycentre.com/HC\\_Whoweworkfor/HC\\_PublicSector.htm](http://www.henleycentre.com/HC_Whoweworkfor/HC_PublicSector.htm)):

- Making public policy is harder than ever. Service users are more affluent and more unpredictable. The expectations are higher than ever: if Tesco can, why can't Whitehall?
- And delivery is tougher, in a world where you have to work with more agencies to deliver joined up services based on evidence.
- Managing policy and service delivery is also a challenge. Your employees are better educated than they have ever been, but also expect more from the world of work.

The two consultants assigned to work with EEDA included one who is a Director at Henley Centre (HC1), and another (HC2) who had joined from DEFRA after being involved in a project with Henley Centre while there. HC1 joined Henley Centre in 1999 from Cable and Wireless Communications, and is described as having expertise in futures work, particularly in scenario development, and in-depth knowledge of media ([www.henleycentre.com](http://www.henleycentre.com)). He is credited with developing many of the Henley Centre's facilitation and workshop techniques, and has directed projects for a wide range of clients, including Vodafone, DEFRA, the Army and Sport England. HC2 had been invited to join Henley Centre following the conclusion of the project it was working on

with DEFRA and had subsequently worked on a number of assignments with the UK public sector.

## 1.6 Outline of this dissertation

This research narrative comprises six chapters; this introduction, a literature review, a description and justification of the research methodology employed, data presentation, data analysis and discussion, and a concluding chapter that presents the study's claimed contribution to theory and implications for practice.

### 1.6.1 Literature review

The literature review chapter focuses on an evaluation of the relevant academic studies published on the topics of strategizing, which is located within the larger strategy literature, and scenario planning. Due to the nature of how strategizing and scenario planning are understood in this research, the relevant literatures on sensemaking and narrative are also analysed as these concepts are integral to these acts. The literature review conveys the relevant key knowledge and ideas current within the fields that inform this research. These are analysed, synthesized, compared and contrasted as a means of providing a critical appraisal of the state of theoretical development of the dominant issues studied in this research. Conducting the literature review also ensured that the data construction and analysis phases of the research were undertaken with the main themes emerging from the literature informing the inquiries that were made.

### 1.6.2 Research methodology

The research methodology chapter sets out and justifies the approach taken with this study. Ontologically, the research has been conducted through the lens of social constructionism, which views social phenomena, such as strategy making, as being construed through the meaningful acts of multiple agents enacting temporal, cultural, moral, political and historical organizing routines (e.g. Greene, 2000). Epistemologically, narrative is the means through which knowledge about EEDA's use of scenario planning has been pursued. Within this study, interviews were the main data creation method utilised and were conceptualized as co-constructions, where meaningful data was produced through the interactions of interviewer and interviewee. Forty-six interviews were conducted, with individual Policy Unit team members interviewed at three separate stages throughout the life of the RES process. All major actors impacting upon the creation and construction of the scenarios were interviewed, including; EEDA and East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) staff, external stakeholders, consultants from the Henley Centre and representatives from the DTI and the Government Office for the East of England. Further insight was drawn from key documents produced during the strategizing episode, these included EEDA's Invitation to Tender, the Henley Centre's response to this and its final report on the scenario planning process. During my visits to EEDA's headquarters observations were made that helped to build up a rich contextual picture of the specific organizing milieu the scenarios were created within. For example, the open-plan style offices EEDA occupied meant that the term 'scenario planning' became an object of office conversation before any official announcement had been made, because staff located close to the Policy Unit team overheard them discussing it

among themselves. Furthermore, informal (unrecorded) conversations also contributed to knowledge of the case.

### 1.6.3 Data presentation

The fourth chapter presents data constructed and collected in the field. The main method of data construction used in this study has been one-to-one interviews and therefore voluminous direct quotations are taken and re-presented in this section. The direct quotes are used to illustrate and illuminate aspects of scenario planning, sensemaking and narrative that were experienced by agents during this specific strategy making episode. The interviews were transcribed such that the naturalized speech that occurred during the interview encounters is reproduced as faithfully as possible. However, it is acknowledged that transcribing is itself an act of interpretation (Rouleau, 2005) and therefore the texts produced are recognised as only a partial account of the interview meeting. The data represents a loose chronology of the scenario planning process, but in practice the actions and decisions practitioners took did not follow a neat sequential sequence. Several activities were undertaken simultaneously, but by necessity are reflected in this chapter linearly. For some of the scenario planning issues multiple quotations are presented from numerous sources. This is done so that shared meanings are revealed, or differing views compared. In addition to the data drawn from the interviews, five key documents are described. Three of these are produced by the Henley Centre (2003, 2004a & 2004b) and are aimed at senior managers within EEDA and EERA. Two are published by EEDA (2004a & 2004b) and include a review of the scenario planning process it used, which is intended to function as an 'evidence base' for the RES process. In addition, data is drawn from the document, *Sharing the*

*challenge: Playing your part in reviewing the regional economic strategy* (EEDA, 2004a), which operates as the first written consultation document intended to generate widespread engagement throughout the East of England region.

#### 1.6.4 Data analysis and discussion

Following data presentation is a chapter that analyses and discusses the empirical findings. The analysis focuses on the data constructed in this study that supports the literature reviewed in chapter two and that challenges it. There are also significant sections that, because strategizing is an emerging research perspective and aspects of practitioner strategy making have not been studied previously, have no relevant theory to link back to. Care has been taken not to reproduce interview data presented in the previous chapter, but where crucial to the story being composed snippets of the interview conversations are repeated. The discussion sections in this chapter are reflections upon the analysis and allow a deeper level of familiarity with the data to be established. The final reflections of the Policy Unit team represent their considered thoughts about the scenario planning phase of the RES review process some five months after it was officially issued, so are given within that wider historical context.

#### 1.6.5 Conclusion

The final chapter offers a conclusion to the study. The gaps the work addresses, the contribution to theory claimed and implications for practice drawn from the study are presented. The notion of strategizing research is reflected upon, which also includes some personal considerations on studying strategy-as-practice based on the

experiences of this case. The research aim and objective detailed earlier in this chapter are revisited and discussed in light of the findings drawn from this report. Some of the strengths of the study are presented, as are some of its limitations. Directions for further research are proffered, which are intended to form part of a research agenda to be pursued over the next few years that, it is hoped, will make a significant contribution to scenario planning research specifically and the strategizing agenda in general. Concluding remarks bring the study to a close.

### 1.7 Delimitations of scope and key assumptions

This research focuses on a specific strategizing episode that commenced when PU1 began thinking about and discussing potential approaches that EEDA could use in constructing its third RES. No fixed date is offered for when he began this process, but the stimulating event that introduced him to scenario planning and prompted inquiries into whether EEDA could use it in its strategizing occurred during his attendance on an MBA module at Nottingham University Business School on organizational learning in 2003. During the summer months of 2003, the process picked up speed with the issuing of an Invitation to Tender by EEDA, which Henley Centre responded to and were subsequently awarded with the contract. Scenario planning workshops were held in the latter months of 2003 and carried on through to March 2004. I began interviewing in April 2004 and continued on up to November 2004, when the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) was issued.

I returned to the case organization in April 2005 to re-interview the three members of the Policy Unit team that were still employed by EEDA (PU3 was on maternity leave), to help



construct their reflections on the process five months after the RES had been made public. So, my forays into the field did not coincide with EEDA enacting the scenario planning process, but required actors to reflect on the process and the workshops they had attended several months after the events. Being present during the early discussions held within EEDA and attending the workshops where the East of England scenarios were developed would have produced different data and a different research narrative. This study was built on the retrospective sensemaking and reflections of staff, who were able to contextualize their experience in ways they wouldn't have been able to do, had they been interviewed as they were going through the process. The data used in this research is no less authentic because it was constructed after the workshops events, for the reason that it is not claimed to represent a truthful account of what happened during the workshop exchanges. The claims made for the data are that they represent verisimilitudinous reflections of participant meaning-making, co-constructed during the interview conversation and are drawn from on that basis.

The primary data construction method was through in-depth one-to-one interviews. EEDA's Policy Unit team were interviewed at three different stages throughout the research process, while all the other interviewees were interviewed once. Interviewees included EEDA staff, representatives from the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) and GoEast (the Government Office for the East of England), the consultants from the Henley Centre and some of the external stakeholders that had been involved in the scenario planning workshops. While additional interviews with more people who had been involved in the process would have produced more insight, I took the decision that the intellectual, financial and time resources that would be needed for this were better allocated on addressing the data that had already been created.

This research represents a partial account of EEDA's strategizing efforts, more interviews with a greater number of people would still produce only a partial account, albeit one informed by the interview data from a higher number of participants. All the key actors involved in the process were interviewed, aside from the Policy Unit team, EEDA senior management, including a selection of Board members who had a particular connection with the process through their membership of the Strategy Committee were interviewed. The two EERA representatives, one of whom sat on the panel that awarded the contract to Henley Centre, were seen, and long in-depth conversations were held with the two consultants from the Henley Centre. PU1 was asked to identify a list of external stakeholders to contact. His understanding of the type of research approach I used meant that he identified those he felt it would be worthwhile for me to talk to. Rather than claim the interviewees comprise a representative sample, their differing perspectives meant that the claim that is made for them is that they stand for an interesting one (Bateson, 1989).

This research is an in-depth single case study where data collected and co-constructed with participants is subjectively explained and analyzed. The role of the researcher as both co-creator and interpreter of data means that my own thoughts, feelings and values mediate what is produced. This approach recognises that the research report is as much about the world of the researcher as it is about the world of the researched (Cunliffe, 2003), and highlights the importance of researcher reflexivity in the creative process of researching and writing. This is manifest in the way a researcher considers the complex ways his/her own intellectual constructs and subjective assumptions influence what data is constructed, and how order is imposed on it. This is not to say that such mediating forces can, or should, be removed from the research narrative, but

that any claims for the work are made while recognizing the role and influence of the author in what is being presented as useful knowledge.

All research undertakings contain limitations that restrict the claims that can be made for them. One important role for researchers is to be aware of the limitations effecting their research and to present their claims to a contribution to knowledge accordingly. The main assumption attached to this research is that the above delimitations of scope do not restrain the work such that what is produced does not provide a significant contribution to knowledge. A contribution is claimed on the basis that the topic studied is of interest to both practitioners and the research community, that it has been researched in a way that follows academic conventions brought together from a number of fields and that it is presented in a way that satisfies the requirements of the academic writing genre.

The challenges EEDA faced in this study are broadly the same as those that the nine other RDAs are, or will address in the near future. EEDA itself, is required to produce its fourth RES in 2007 and its fifth in 2010. So, the insights drawn from this study are immediately relevant to strategists from within the nine RDAs. Also, the experiences related and analysed in this research are meaningful to others who are in similar situations, where actors are seeking to cope with the multiple, conflicting expectations held by powerful internal and external agents. This study does not claim to have developed a new theory of strategizing, but does claim to offer up a challenge to existing theoretical propositions (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2002) through the production of an authentic, plausible and critical partial account of practitioners creating strategy. The claim that is advanced is that this research meets the call from scholars of strategizing for thick descriptions of actors doing strategy in practice (Chia, 2004; Clark, T., 2004;

Johnson, et al., 2003; Samra-Fredericks, 2003; Vaara, Kleymann & Seristö, 2004), and from the scenario planning community, for more critical analyses of the approach (Cairns, Wright, Bradfield, van der Heijden, & Burt, 2004; Chermack, 2003; Goodwin & Wright, 2001; Hodgkinson & Wright, 2002; Schoemaker, 1995).

## 1.8 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the study and put forward a justification detailing why the topic is deemed worthy of research. The theoretical background to the study is explained with gaps in current knowledge highlighted. A key contribution claimed is that this study integrates scenario planning with the emerging strategizing research agenda. The establishment of the nine Regional Development Agencies (RDA) is described and the historical and political contexts, created by the 1997 Labour Government, are explained. Regional Economic Strategies are one of the key documents RDAs are charged with producing and provide one means through which their effectiveness is evaluated. This micro-study is focused on how the East of England Development Agency used scenario planning in construction of its third RES. The actors from EEDA that constituted the process have been introduced, as have the consultants and their organization. The methodology adopted for the research is briefly outlined and expanded upon in chapter three. The following five chapters comprising the research report are introduced with a brief explanation incorporating the purpose of each chapter. Key assumptions that underpin the study are acknowledged and the scope of the research is explained with consideration given as to how these may have mediated what has been produced.

## Literature Review

### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews literatures surrounding strategizing and scenario planning. The strategizing literature is part of the broader strategy lexicon, therefore, the pertinent literature surrounding strategy is presented and analysed first, in order to present a contextual background that explains why the strategizing research agenda is growing in popularity. Whittington (2003: 119) argues for strategy to be taken seriously for the intended and unintended consequences it produces and the resources it consumes. Strategizing research pays attention to what actors do and the meaning they construe from such acts. Next, scenario planning is discussed and analyzed, and is identified as a strategy making practice that has received only a limited amount of critical analysis. Scenario planning involves the crafting of scenarios that function as stories of potential alternative futures. A strategizing perspective highlights the role of sensemaking and narrative in the construction of the scenarios, and the literatures surrounding these two concepts are described and analyzed in sections three and four of this chapter. Sensemaking is the process by which humans make their lives meaningful allowing them to act, and supply post-hoc rationalizations for their decisions and agency. Balogun and Johnson (2005) note that during strategizing activities, intersubjective sensemaking occurs when individual interpretations become merged or synthesized, producing fresh insight and understanding. In the fourth section, narrative is analyzed. Narrative is defined as incorporating, talk, text, story and discourse, and is advanced as the privileged means by which individuals order their experiences and construct their

own identities. Narrative perspectives of organizational life consider both the communications that are produced, and how such devices are known and understood (Czarniawska, 2004). Conclusions are drawn.

## 2.1 Strategy

### 2.1.1 History

The need for organizations to consider their strategy and strategic activities was initially framed in the work of academics such as Andrews (1971), Ansoff (1965) and Chandler (1962) (Farjoun, 2002; Heracleous, 2003; Knights & Morgan, 1991; Volberda, 2004). Knights and Morgan (1991) see the emergence of strategy in the organizational field as emblematic of the idea that market forces could be controlled through deliberate, formal, planning mechanisms. The classic management theories these works proposed and inspired, in many ways, represented western man's desire to control what was outside the organization in the same way as he had attempted to control what happened inside organizations during previous decades (Knights & Morgan, 1991). The theories put forward to achieve this largely shared a common conceptualization of strategy as; formal, top-down, rational and consistent (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Volberda, 2004; Wilson & Jarzabkowski, 2004). Caldart and Ricart (2004: 96) reflect upon the state of strategy scholarship and conclude that despite 30 years of abundant research, they do not consider the field of corporate strategy to be mature.

### 2.1.2 General conceptualizations

A common conception is to see strategy as, essentially, a plan or equivalent, that guides a course of action into the future (Mintzberg, 2002; Mintzberg, Ahlstrand & Lampel, 1998). Typically, such a plan would contain goals, scope and diversity, design of structure and systems, and the identification of actions for the coordination of work (Farjoun, 2002; Whittington, Jarzabkowski, Mayer, Mounoud, Nahapiet & Rouleau, 2003). For Farjoun, (2002) strategy comprises three interrelated points; it emphasizes the firm's behaviour over time, it includes some coordination of activity within space and time, and, deals with adaptation involving responses to and influences upon the environment. Whittington, et al. (2003) see strategy as being about the overall direction of organizations. A structurationist perspective of strategy defines it as comprising interactions among multiple agents, with intended and unintended consequences (Pozzebon, 2004). This view supports Quinn's (1982) assertion that the generation of strategy is by no means orderly or discrete. The notion of strategic 'fit', constructs the environment as singular and separate to the organization, and applies to strategies that actively pursue a match, fitting the firm with its environment (Caldart & Ricart, 2004; Mintzberg & Lampel, 1999). Challenges to the traditional notions of strategy put forward by the classic authors open out thinking around it. Mintzberg and Lampel (1999: 26) simply ask why strategy can't be "...everything a company does or consists of...?". Decentralizing strategy sees it as not merely a property of particular organizations, but as a discursive space (Knights & Morgan, 1991) and social practice that effects societies (Whittington, et al., 2003).

The strategic management literature is predominantly normative and prescriptive (Lowe & Jones, 2004), and is focused on explaining the sustained superior performance of firms in causal terms (Powell, 2001). The Resource Based View (RBV) (Barney, 1991; Priem & Butler, 2001; Wernerfelt, 1984) is one such construct used to theorize how organizations control and exploit key internal resources in an effort to maintain their survival and assure their success. Powell, Lovallo and Caringal (2006) see it as attempting to explain a dependent variable (relative firm performance) with independent variables (ambiguous competencies) that are largely unobservable. However, RBV is criticized for the assumptions prevalent in rationalist approaches that, for example, discount the dynamic nature of phenomena and assume a stability that can lead to oversimplified conceptualizations (Jarzabkowski, 2004). Strategy is too fluid, intuitive, emergent and essentially unfinished (Knights & Mueller, 2004; Mintzberg & Lampel, 1999) to be beset by the stasis of attainment implied in constructs that are theoretically privileged or signified as best practice (Jarzabkowski, 2004). Non-prescriptive strategic management is construed as a meaningful activity, realizing a plurality of values, objectives and motives, which involve political activity in internal coalitions and external networks by significant powerful actors and institutions (Clark, E., 2004: 622).

### 2.1.3 Strategy as plan

The 1970s witnessed a flurry of publications and practice that put forward the notion that strategy making should be a detached and systematic process of formal planning (Mintzberg, et al., 1998). The strategic plan was seen as an attempt to capture the 'true' nature of strategy (Knights & Mueller, 2004) and became an artefact that sought to drive, dominate and determine organizational structure (Clegg, Carter & Kornberger, 2004).



Planning provides managers with the comfort of feeling that their destiny is, at least partly, in their own hands (Knights & Morgan, 1991). Through this, the role of strategic planning advanced was that of enabling organizations to make better strategies by using a more systematic, logical and 'rational' approach to strategic choice (Langley, 1988). Strategic planning is criticized for assuming an environmental stability that trivializes and simplifies complex realities (Clegg, et al., 2004). In turbulent environments, Volberda (2004) claims planning is insufficient leading to rigidity, and that the annual planning process becomes merely an organizational ritual. Strategic plans are seen as self-serving in the sense that they articulate a vision in advance of offering a means of realising it (Clegg, et al., 2004; Knights & Morgan, 1991). The future is announced in the plan and by doing so its achievement is immediately turned into a calculable and linear process (Clegg, et al., 2004).

Mintzberg, et al. (1998) note the limitations of strategic planning have been acknowledged and compensations have been offered that purport to minimise these. They refer to Wack's (1985a & 1985b) descriptions of scenario planning within RDS as examples of planning at its best, as the intention was not to formulate strategy so much as improve how managers did it (Mintzberg, et al., 1998: 59). Quinn (1982) says sophisticated managements design their plans to be 'living' or 'evergreen', and are best thought of as frameworks that guide and provide consistency for future decision-making. Langley (1988: 40) suggests planning may play different roles to those presented in the normative literature, for her, planning's main functions rest more with creating networks of information, forcing managers to focus on the future, encouraging rigorous communications about strategic issues that raise comfort levels among managers and confirm earlier strategic decisions.

#### 2.1.4 Strategy and rationalism

Balogun, Huff and Johnson (2003) refer to a review of articles in the 1990s by Johnson and Bowman to show that most strategic management research is concerned with macro levels of analysis informed by modernist assumptions (Farjoun, 2002; Whittington, 2004). These typically conceptualize strategic management as a normative (Woods & Joyce, 2002), exploitation focused (Regnér, 2003), linear (Ericson, 2001), externally constrained, rational, and sequential process of formulation and implementation (Steinthorsson & Söderholm, 2002). From within this perspective, mechanistic generalizations (Whittington, et al., 2003) are sought that aim to position the organization within its external environment (Farjoun, 2002; Mintzberg & Lampel, 1999; Volberda, 2004).

The largely rationalist research profile of strategy and strategic management is coming under increasing criticism that aims to challenge the epistemological straight-jacket (Clegg, et al., 2004; Heracleous, 2003; Whittington, 2004) modernism is said to have gripped strategy within (McKiernan & Carter, 2004). Powell (2002) suggests that too many rationalist strategy propositions are untestable in practice and tautologous in their presentations, and advises researchers to cease defending the indefensible. Others are more caustic in their admonishments, describing rationalist strategy research as oversimplistic (Clark, T., 2004; Farjoun, 2002), lacking reflexivity and humility (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2004), and badly written, due to the self-imposed constraint of writing in the style of scientific prose. These charges lead some to conclude that strategy research is on hard times (Volberda, 2004) and in something of a crisis (McKiernan & Carter, 2004; Wilson & Jarzabkowski, 2004).

### 2.1.5 Strategic thinking

Volberda (2004) identifies current hypercompetitive environments as highlighting the need for strategic thinking where traditional static strategy models have proved inadequate. Mintzberg et al. (1998) suggest dropping the term strategic planning altogether and replacing it with the notion of strategic thinking connected to action. However, Heracleous (2003) notes that rationalist perspectives brought to bear on strategic thinking conceptualize it as a convergent and analytic thought process best practiced through the use of analytic tools. Within this interpretation, strategic planning itself, is often justified as enabling strategic thinking (Heracleous, 2003).

### 2.1.6 Strategizing

The concerns expressed over the state of strategy research have led to the emergence of the strategizing research agenda. Strategizing, or strategy-as-practice (Jarzabkowski, 2003 & 2004; Whittington, 1996) research, privileges the lived experiences of those engaged in making strategy as the location where insight into how strategy is done in organizations is best construed (Samra-Fredericks, 2003). Strategizing is conceptualized as a social practice (Whittington, 1996) that involves thinking and acting strategically (Wilson & Jarzabkowski, 2004). Whittington (2003) differentiates strategizing from process research by stating that what practice researchers are interested in is the sheer labour of strategy done by managers both within processes and between processes. Equally, process research tends to ignore the wider implications of strategy making; how decisions and actions are taken within societal

contexts that influence what is done, and are, in turn, effected by what is done (Whittington, 2003). Strategy process research tends to focus on the sequenced actions undertaken by strategists over time (e.g. Das & Van de Ven, 2000; Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2002; Jarzabkowski, 2004). The practice turn acknowledges the contribution of these actions, but also raises the issue of how the personal priorities, identities and values of strategy makers and consultants shape and influence what strategies are crafted together (Leavy, 1998; Watson, 2003; Whittington, 1996).

Strategizing research frequently problematizes taken-for-granted assumptions about the way strategy research has traditionally been accomplished (Balogun, Huff & Johnson, 2003). By focusing on strategists' everyday lived experiences, practice scholars aim to find out more about how strategy is enacted (Johnson, Melin & Whittington, 2003; Whittington, 1996). What strategists actually do may be substantially different from the formal stages and processes that are typically used to describe how strategies are created (Jarzabkowski, 2003). Whittington (2003) identifies a good deal of the micro-activities (Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2002; Johnson, et al., 2003; Wilson & Jarzabkowski, 2004) utilised in creating strategy would be similar to other project work such as; team meetings, report-writing and Powerpoint presentations. However, Chia (2004: 30) cautions against seeing these as necessarily strategy creation acts, as they could just as easily be *post hoc* justification activities for a strategic orientation that has already been arrived at *a priori*. Strategizing research aims to question the assumptions that strategy is created through the acts that are put forward as comprising the strategy process, and through this questioning to not mistake the 'menu for the dish' (Chia, 2004: 30).

Regnér's (2003) study of a single in-depth case with multiple retrospective case studies provides some examples of the type of insight strategizing research can produce. By

investigating how, in practice, strategy was created, a distinction was drawn between how managers located at organizational peripheries constructed meaningful strategy to how those at corporate centres engaged in their strategy making acts. At peripheries, managers were observed favouring inductive strategizing practices involving ongoing sensemaking acts, intuition, and trial and error (Regnér, 2003: 69). Whereas, at the corporate centre more deductive initiatives involving formal planning, analysis, reports and intelligence aimed at industry exploitation were encountered (Regnér, 2003). Crucially, the activities of managers at the centre appeared to have little influence on those individuals at the periphery, who viewed the strategy produced there as being of little help. When they are strategizing the context within which they work is considered to be so particular that the informal and formal networks built up by individual managers are of more use.

Whittington (2006) speaks confidently that strategizing research can help improve organizational strategy making by encouraging the study of intra and inter-organizational encounters. He distinguishes strategy praxis, practices and practitioners by seeing 'praxis' as the, often mundane, acts people do when they are strategizing, 'practices' refer to the shared routines of behaviour and strategy making recipes actors adopt, whereas practitioners are the agents engaged in doing strategy. Paying attention to praxis within the broader contexts of practice and organizational histories, can enable and inform the critiques of the competing strategizing recipes managers are presented with (Whittington, 2006).

#### 2.1.7 Strategists and strategizing

A strategizing turn in research raises in prominence the role of the individuals who collectively create strategy. As outsiders deem strategy to be important, those individuals within organizations who are charged with producing it are afforded a certain status that allows them to exert significant power over others (Knights & Morgan, 1991). In his discussion of strategists and strategy making, Watson (2003: 1319) suggests that individuals involved in the process are most effectively conceptualized as 'emergent' beings, who continually strive to make sense of their worlds and achieve an identity through processes of negotiation, exchange and rhetorical dialogue with others. One contribution strategizing research is said to offer is that it highlights the need for reflexivity on the part of managers (Johnson, et al., 2003), as strategists need to be sensitive to how they and others construct meaning out of the cues they encounter (Ericson, 2001). Additionally, Timothy Clark, (2004) calls for more insight into the role of consultants, as external agents, in legitimizing particular approaches to strategy making. He advances a series of questions for researchers to hold as they conduct their in-depth inquiries (Clark, T., 2004: 109):

- Why are they used and at what point?
- How do they all relate to one another?
- What facilitates and impedes the transfer of knowledge?
- To what extent is the character of the strategic ideas that emerge the responsibility of one or other, or both parties?
- What is the role of other groups, such as conference and workshop organizers?

#### 2.1.8 Strategy as talk

A strategizing research agenda that conceptualizes strategy as largely created within social encounters sees it as chiefly a linguistic, discursive or narrative construction (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2004; Hardy, Palmer & Phillips, 2000; Knights & Morgan, 1991; Knights & Mueller, 2004; Pozzebon, 2004). Maitlis and Lawrence (2003: 112) note that the activities and outcomes of strategizing episodes involve individual and organizational text and talk in the form of; meetings, memos, informal conversations, gossip, jokes and stories that combine to produce speeches, formal documents, presentations and more meetings. A research agenda that privileges talk embodies the maxim reproduced by Mahoney (1993: 174) that “Good science is good conversation”. In her strategizing ethnography undertaken within a manufacturing company, Samra-Fredericks (2003: 169) concludes that what she saw could ultimately be boiled down to embodied, emotional and moral human beings talking with each other. Through their talk, Hardy et al. (2000) note, actors are not mirroring social reality but creating it. Power relations mediate all strategizing interactions (Pozzebon, 2004), however the bargaining and compromise nature of much of this talk means that, according to Maitlis and Lawrence (2003), resulting decisions rarely reflect the preferences of a single group. Barry and Elmes state, perhaps conscious of strategy's high status and the frequent use of external consultants in the process, that it is one of the most prominent, influential, and costly of stories told in organizations (1997: 430).

#### 2.1.9 Public sector strategy

How and why public sector organizations create strategy has been relatively under-researched. New Public Management is the name given to the movement amongst governments to bring some private sector traits into the public sector. Its focus is on an

increase in the managerialization (Jas & Skelcher, 2005; MacKinnon, 2005; Rouillard & Giroux, 2005) of professional-bureaucratic public organizations in order to improve government performance (Butterfield, Edwards & Woodall, 2004; Chandler, Barry & Clark, 2002; Page, 2005; Pollitt, 2000; 2002; 2003; Thomas & Davies, 2005). Increasingly, as a manifestation of this, strategies are being required and requested from public sector organizations (Denis, Langley & Lozeau, 1991). Studies have been undertaken into strategy activities in hospitals (e.g. Denis, et al., 1991; Langley, 1988), unspecified public institutions (Clark, E., 2004; Langley, 1988), research foundations (Davenport & Leitch, 2005), orchestras (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2003), and national parks (Llewellyn & Tappin, 2003). What emerges from these is an understanding that the motives behind public sector organizations producing strategies and the roles they are intended to play are multiple and complex (Denis, et al., 1991).

Strategies are seen as a means through which public sector organizations profile themselves within the wider communities they serve and environments in which they are located (Langley, 1988; Llewellyn & Tappin, 2003). The managerialization (MacKinnon, 2000; Rouillard & Giroux, 2005) of the public sector has led to the desire for some organizations to use strategy as a way of presenting themselves as competent, responsible and rational (Denis, et al., 1991; Llewellyn & Tappin, 2003). Many public sector organizations produce strategies because they are required to by their funding bodies, who then adopt a scrutiny role in monitoring the organization's performance against it (Davenport & Leitch, 2005; Heracleous, 2003; Langley, 1988). Once strategies are produced, Langley (1988: 43-45, *italics in original*) identifies four potential roles for them:

- *Role 1. Public Relations: Positioning with Respect to External Organizations*
- *Role 2. Information: Self-knowledge and Input for Strategic Visions*



- *Role 3. Group Therapy: Consensus Building, Communication and Legitimization of Strategic Visions*
- *Role 4. Direction and Control: Giving Management More Control Over Strategic Decisions*

Llewellyn and Tappin (2003) note that public sector organizations have the seemingly unresolvable task of addressing inconsistent demands from powerful and political stakeholders (Clark, E., 2004) in their strategies. External funding organizations are seen to require an unambiguous statement, derived from careful analysis that sets out the organization's vision and the metrics by which it will indicate progress (Denis, et al., 1991; Heracleous, 2003; Llewellyn & Tappin, 2003). The resulting formal documented strategy is intended to become the basis for decision-making by senior management (Denis, et al., 1991; Langley, 1988). The social process of producing such a product is deemed to be beneficial to those who participate in it (Denis, et al., 1991; Langley, 1988). From an organizational perspective, wide consultation with network members is claimed to develop political support to the proposed direction (Denis, et al., 1991; Heracleous, 2003). Davenport and Leitch (2005) note strategic goals are often chosen and worded with as much consideration given as to how they will look as for what the organization is trying to achieve.

Politics are widely recognized as influencing the strategy making process within the public sector, due to the likelihood that the outcome of such a process will be a strategy that favours some actors and groups while disadvantaging others (Davenport & Leitch, 2005; Eden & Ackermann, 1998; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2003; Mintzberg, et al., 1998; Quinn, 1982). These political forces may take over the process and require organizations to use dubious 'best practice' approaches that result in a document that is

defendable, but which implicitly implies that important decisions surrounding it are subject to the approval or control of government (Denis, et al., 1991; Heracleous, 2003). Langley (1988) cautions that while organizations may genuinely hold the desire to conduct a strategy process that is more than merely a public relations exercise, the focus can become little more than producing an accomplished document designed to impress the scrutiny of stakeholders and government. Mueller and Carter (2005: 222) term the tendency to conform to stakeholder expectations 'mimetic isomorphism', which they see as referring to the propensity among managers to adopt practices already in place in other organizations that are assumed to be successful. Stakeholders are frequently needed to implement strategies that are beyond the scope of a single organization and, by necessity, involve the collaboration of organizations that in other situations are competing for resources (Davenport & Leitch, 2005). Maitlis and Lawrence (2003: 128) note that in their study, the Chief Executive of the orchestra told his management team 'to produce a strategy and get a document out'. How such a document is presented is important if it is to be seen as legitimate, meaning it must conform to the orthodoxy of the genre and look like others in the same field (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Llewellyn & Tappin, 2003). Langley (1988) feels that public sector strategy documents should raise tensions that stimulate debate and challenge conventional thinking. But, this is often incongruent with a mandate to produce a strategy that is widely accepted and from which responsibility and accountability can be assigned (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2003). Llewellyn and Tappin (2003: 968 & 969) draw from Brunsson's notion of 'hypocrisy', which they see as endemic in the public sector, to explain that organizations producing strategies for multiple external agencies end up creating 'dormant documents', that reside on shelves unused, gathering dust.

### 2.1.10 Emergent strategies and incrementalism

Deliberate strategies are said to be those whose intentions are fully realized in practice (Mintzberg, et al., 1998). This is the basis that underpins the planning approach to strategy; that strategies are articulated as plans, which are then implemented (Langley, 1988). Mintzberg et al. (1998) question how frequently in practice this happens and offer an alternative understanding of strategy as largely an emergent process. Most strategies are claimed to be neither wholly deliberate or emergent, but a combination of the two (Mintzberg, et al., 1998). Eden and Ackermann (1998: 6) describe strategic management as *deliberate emergent strategizing (italics in original)*, which is felt to explain how strategy is designed without the intention of controlling what strategy is enacted. Mintzberg, et al. (1998) feel the notion of emergence in strategy opens the door for learning to occur during the strategizing process. Because learning is seen as integral to this process, strategic change as a result of learning is conceptualized as incremental and reliant upon many 'small wins' rather than on any single 'big win' (Eden & Ackermann, 1998). Quinn (1982: 617) describes strategies emerging incrementally as growing organically as executives link together and create order out of a series of partially overlapping processes and interacting decisions that may span years. Such incrementalism is said to be a process of conscious adaptation managers engage in, in response to the psychological and informational problems and cues encountered during strategizing in complex dynamic environments (Quinn, 1982).

### 2.1.11 Environments and stakeholder analysis

Traditional rationalist perspectives of strategy have conceptualized the environment as singular, separate from the organization and see the primary role of strategy as to establish 'fit' with this external phenomena (de Witt & Mayer, 2004; Mintzberg, et al., 1998; Porter, 1996). This notion of the relationship sees the organization as passive and at the mercy of its environment (Heracleous, 2003). Within this viewpoint, the organization is limited in its potential responses to forecasting and reacting to environmental change (Mintzberg, et al., 1998). Schneider (1997) sees the interaction of the organization with its environment as constituting its strategy. A more empowering view of this relationship identifies the organization as in a constant state of embeddedness and enactment within its environment (Steinthorsson & Söderholm, 2002). It is through its active interpretations, that an organization is claimed to shape its environment as much as the environment shapes it (Clark, E., 2004; Steinthorsson & Söderholm, 2002).

#### 2.1.12 Power

Strategy, is perceived as a mechanism of power (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2004; Knights & Morgan, 1991), by which actors secure an identity as powerful and privileged organization members (Clark, E., 2004; Knights & Mueller, 2004). The authority that this status endows sees managers acting within a scope of legitimacy (Hardy, et al., 2000) where internal and external coalitions are established that support their own views and interests (Clark, E., 2004). Knights and Morgan (1991) also locate strategy as a technology of power that creates problems it then purports to solve. By doing so strategy is politicized, as what and how items are kept off the agenda become as important to understanding strategy as investigating those that are present (Clegg, et al.,

2004). Power is enacted during the strategy making process through the discourse that constitutes and surrounds strategy. The effects of such a power-laden discourse are that a language for; rationalizing success and failure, securing a sense of identity, legitimizing the exercise of power and demonstrating rationality to stakeholders is enacted that constitutes a desired individual and organizational identity and subjectivity (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Knights & Morgan, 1991).

### 2.1.13 Summary

This section has identified and critically analysed the pertinent literature for this present study surrounding strategy research. This study is located within the emerging strategizing agenda, which questions and challenges traditional concepts of strategy research. Strategizing is conceived as embedded within the structural, institutional, political and historical surroundings of the organization (Steinthorsson & Söderholm, 2002). Research that has tended to ignore these contextual mediators adopts the perspective of strategy as a plan, which is therefore seen as the embodiment of rational approaches that seek to determine an organization's future path. It is this notion of strategy that appears to have been adopted by most public sector organizations under the guise of New Public Management, although managers taking a more pragmatic stance see plans as having multiple roles. A focus on who strategists are and what they actually do during their strategy making activities results from perceiving strategy as a social construction (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Johnson, et al., 2003; Knights & Morgan, 1991; Lowe & Jones, 2004; Pozzebon, 2004). Traditional approaches conceptualizing strategy as a plan have tended to assume the strategists enacting strategy creating processes do not significantly influence what is done. Their absence from strategy

research has encouraged the view that strategists do not actively interpret strategy making recipes, adapting them to suit their particular circumstances, but follow the plan's instructions unthinkingly. Strategizing reframes strategy from, the no longer sustainable view of it as a detached, objective activity rational planners engage in, to an activity suffused with power relationships and enactments. Actors who do strategy are constantly faced with ambiguous cues (Bougon, 1992; Regnér, 2003) that are narrated and negotiated into meaningful wholes. The next section examines a particular strategizing practice: scenario planning and the production of scenarios. Whittington (2006) notes practices are constituents of societies whose use comes loaded with particular expectations. A strategizing perspective of scenario planning leads to a critical analysis of a typical six-stage approach to developing them in practice.

## 2.2 Scenarios and scenario planning

### 2.2.1 Introduction

In this section the literature associated with the production of scenarios through scenario planning is discussed and analysed. Scenario planning is an approach strategists may use when crafting strategy. Its origins are discussed with particular reference to the experience of Royal Dutch Shell and consideration is given as to how the 'Shell experience' has influenced the theoretical development of the field. A six stage approach to scenario planning drawing on the work of van der Heijden and colleagues (2002), and Schoemaker (1993) is critically examined and discussed against broader strategy related concepts. Criticisms of the scenario planning literature are made.

### 2.2.2 History and the influence of the Royal Dutch Shell scenarios

Scenario planning emerged following World War II, as a method of strategic planning, it was transferred from the military to the civil domain through the RAND Corporation headed by Herman Kahn (Morgan & Hunt, 2002; Schwartz, 1996; van der Heijden, 1996; Ringland, 1998). Kahn left the RAND Corporation and established the Hudson Institute in 1961 (van der Heijden, et al. 2002; Ringland, 1998) and began to apply scenario methodologies, which he described as 'thinking tools' (van der Heijden, et al. 2002, p.127) for social forecasting and public policy. From this work, Kahn produced the book; *The Year 2000: A Framework for Speculation* (Kahn & Wiener, 1967) and for this reason is regarded by some as the 'father' of modern-day scenarios (van der Heijden, 1996; van der Heijden, et al. 2002; Ringland, 1998). Concurrent with the developments in the scenario methodology propagated by Khan, Stanford University set up its own think tank called the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) to offer long-range planning for business (Ringland, 1998). In France, the philosopher Gaston Berger founded the *Centre d'Etudes Prospectives* in the 1950s, where he developed a scenario-based approach to long-term planning named prospective thinking or 'la prospective' (van der Heijden, et al., 2002: 128).

Scenario planning is most closely associated with Royal Dutch Shell (RDS) through its responses to the energy crisis of 1973 and oil price collapse of 1981. Wack (1985a & 1985b) explained how scenarios were used to explore potential futures that were not simple extrapolations of the past, but included the potential for discontinuous change in the form of an energy crisis or price collapse. The RDS scenarios did not seek to predict when such events would come about, but did communicate that such episodes were

plausible given certain environmental conditions (Schwartz, 1996; van der Heijden, 1996 & 2005; van der Heijden, et al. 2002). The influence of the RDS experience on the development of scenario planning cannot be over-stated (Postma & Liebl, 2005). It has been instrumental in the approach gaining credibility as a legitimate method by which strategists develop strategy, and has seen former RDS staff take up positions as academic faculty (e.g. van der Heijden), and academic faculty completing extended sabbaticals within RDS (e.g. Schoemaker) whose subsequent work has built upon, and in some cases promulgated their experiences at RDS. Additionally, authors who have attempted to introduce scenarios to a wider audience have often done so with reference to the RDS experience (e.g. Fulmer, Gibbs & Keys, 1998; Goodwin & Wright, 2001; Leemhuis, 1985; Quinn & Mason, 1994; Ringland, 1998; Schoemaker, 1993; Schoemaker & van der Heijden, 1992).

Wack (1985a & 1985b) claimed RDS developed the scenario methodology in response to a growing dissatisfaction with more traditional approaches to long-term planning. The orthodoxy of the time tended to be based on forecasts and on the non-explicit assumption that the future will be singular, much like today, only a little better (Wack, 1985a & 1985b). The oil industry experience and the RDS response suggested that although the future cannot be predicted, neither should it be ignored (Bernstein, Lebow, Stein & Weber, 2000) as it is still to be created (Godet & Roubelat, 1996).

### 2.2.3 Defining scenarios

Scenarios depict multiple frames of the future (van der Heijden, et al., 2002), being "...focused descriptions of fundamentally different futures presented in coherent script-



like or narrative fashion...” (Schoemaker, 1993: 195); with each scenario “...a coherent story about the business environment...” (Leemhuis, 1985: 30). Scenario planning is the collective act of producing scenarios (Ringland, 1998; van der Heijden, 1996 & 2005) usually undertaken within an organizational or societal setting. Goodwin and Wright (2001) claim scenarios can help organizations evaluate potential strategies and design ones that are robust against a range of potential futures. Mintzberg, et al. (1998: 58-59) locate scenarios as emerging from the ‘Planning School’ of strategy and see scenarios as having the capacity to aid managers in opening up their perspectives of the future, stimulating creative activity. This focus on the process of developing strategy through scenarios and the conversations that are required to do this, are said to encourage organizational learning (Schwartz, 1996; van der Heijden, 1996 & 2005; van der Heijden, et al., 2002).

#### 2.2.4 Doing scenarios

Scenario planning is a strategizing methodology that has been led by practitioners and has received only a limited amount of critical academic attention (Cairns, et al., 2004; Chermack, 2003; Goodwin & Wright, 2001; Hodgkinson & Wright, 2002; Schoemaker, 1995). A 1983 survey of *Fortune* 500 industrial companies conducted by Linneman and Klein (in Schoemaker, 1993) found that over 50 percent had turned to some form of scenario planning by 1983. Ringland (1998, 2002a,) noted the proliferation of the scenario approach in the public sector, in such organisations as; the UK National Health Service (NHS), North West Anglian Health Authority, Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E), Consignia, De La Salle Christian Brothers, Scottish Enterprise, US General Services Agency (GSA), World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD); and for

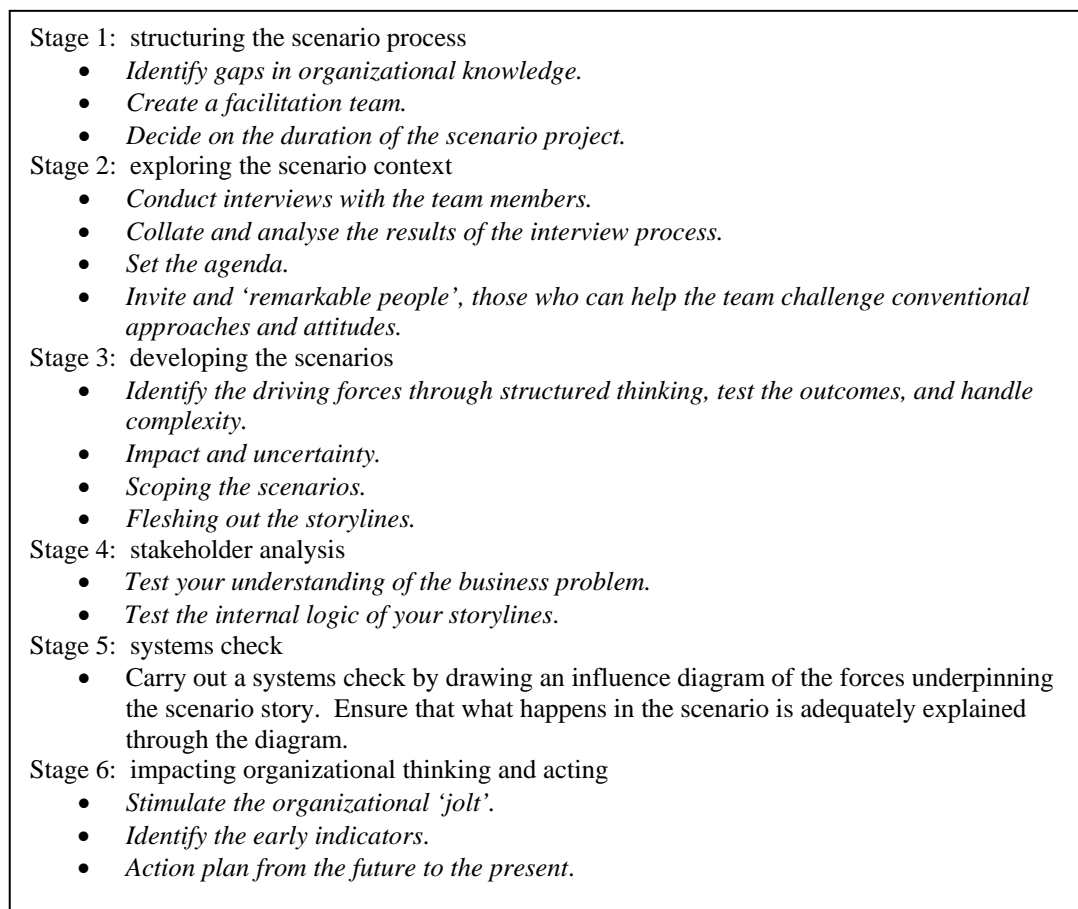
the city governments of; Rotterdam, Arnhem, Seattle and Bueren. In the private sector organisations such as; British Airways, Cable & Wireless, Digital Equipment Corporation, Electrolux, ICL, Krone (UK) Technique Ltd., Royal Dutch Shell, Statoil, United Distillers (UD), Texaco, Caledonian Paper and IPC Magazines, IDON Ltd, GlaxoSmithKline, Allied Irish Banks and Kinder-Care (Ringland, 1998, 2002b; Fahey & Randall, 1998) provide examples of the use of scenarios. Individual nations have also used the scenario approach as a way of exploring potential plausible futures; The 'Destino Columbia' project offered four scenarios for the future of Columbia; 'Kenya at the Crossroads' described four scenarios developed in 1999 and looked 20 years into the future; and the 'Mont Fleur Scenarios' for the future of South Africa were credited with influencing the subsequent changeover from apartheid to democracy (van der Heijden, 1996). Ratcliffe (2000) observed the increasing interest in the scenario methodology as being related to the wider attention given to techniques and approaches such as; the Delphi technique, cross-impact matrices, teamwork techniques, environmental scanning, systems thinking, network analysis and simulation modelling – all of which he identified as attempts to better understand an increasingly complex and uncertain world.

Scenario planning has been a topic that has frequently appeared as brief descriptions in generalist strategy texts (e.g. de Wit & Meyer, 2004, Johnson, Scholes & Whittington, 2005; Mintzberg, et al., 1998), that aim to introduce the reader to a range of strategy approaches. Specialist scenario planning textbooks are available offering more detailed advice to the aspiring scenario planner (e.g. Fahey & Randall, 1998; Ogilvy, 2002; Ringland, 1998; Schwartz, 1996; Schwartz, Leyden & Hyatt, 2000; van der Heijden, 1996 & 2005; van der Heijden, et al., 2002). Many of the journal articles published in this area are written by practitioners describing their own case experiences (e.g. Esterhuysen, 1992; Godet & Roubelat, 1996; Leemhuis, 1985; Moyer, 1996; Quinn &

Mason, 1994; Schoemaker & van der Heijden, 1992; Simpson, 1992; van Wieringen, 1999; Wack, 1985a & 1985b); or by consultants conceptualizing the approach (e.g. Courtney, 2003; Kennedy, Perrottet & Thomas, 2003; Mason, 1994; Mason & Herman, 2003; Millett, 2003; Ringland, Edwards, Hammond, Heinzen, Rendell, Sparrow & White, 1999).

Van der Heijden, et al. (2002: 224-227) offer the following six stage checklist as "...a guide to conducting an effective and purposeful scenario project". Schoemaker's (1993: 197) framework is conceptually similar.

Figure 2.1: Van der Heijden, et al.'s (2002: 224-227) six stage scenario planning process (italics in original)



#### 2.2.4.1 Structuring the scenario process

This is seen as the customized strategic issue, question or problem felt to have a critical impact on the organization and its business (Schoemaker, 1993: 197; van der Heijden, et al., 2002: 192 & 195), and around which the scenarios are to be built. This is characterized as being a key gap in organizational knowledge. This initial stage in the process witnesses the first influence of the RDS experience (Postma & Liebl, 2005). It operates within an atypical business environment where a small number of key variables, such as oil reserves and price, have a disproportionate effect on the dynamics of the business; these variables are largely outside of the organization's immediate areas of control and influence. For RDS, to construct scenarios around the single issue of the price of oil (Wack, 1985a) made sense as this was a key determinant of their business at that time. However, what is questionable is whether organizations that have different relationships with their external environments, such as service-based organizations that are said to shape their environments through their interpretations more than their environments shape them (Clark, E., 2004; Nathan, 2004), are best advised to begin their scenario planning by focusing on a single variable.

#### 2.2.4.2 Exploring the scenario context

Van der Heijden, et al. (2002) advise in-depth semi-structured interviews be conducted with key members of the organization, which are then analyzed to identify recurring themes. In an effort to bring diverse thinking into the process they (2002: 113) advocate the use of *remarkable people* "...observers who understand how the world works...", to

bring 'out of the box' thinking into the intervention. These *remarkable people* are said to most likely be professional observers and could be academics, commercial researchers, writers, artists, consultants or perceptive business people (Cairns, et al., 2004; van der Heijden, 1996). Use of the term *remarkable people* in this context, appearing to confer legitimacy on the view of a selected few, is another example of how techniques drawn from the RDS experience have transferred to the general vocabulary surrounding scenario planning, largely without question.

#### 2.2.4.3 Developing the scenarios

This stage results in the creation of scenario as narratives. It involves identifying the driving forces, their degree of uncertainty and potential impact on the organization, capturing the essence of the scenario end-state, and a fleshing out of the storylines of the narratives (van der Heijden, et al., 2002: 225-227). Driving forces (Schoemaker, 1993) are drawn out of the scenario planners by the facilitation team and bunched together with the aim of producing "...a set of clusters that are internally related and separate from any other cluster, although some driving forces may sit comfortably in more than one cluster" (van der Heijden, 2002: 205). The next step is to identify the two general areas that are deemed to have the highest level of uncertainty (Schoemaker, 1993) and potentially the greatest impact on the issue or question around which the scenarios are constructed. These areas are placed at either end of a two-dimensional axis and the scenario planners are asked to place the cluster headings in the appropriate quadrant depending on their presumed level of uncertainty and impact, relative to the scenario question (van der Heijden, 2002: 206). Scenario planners are then advised to "...capture the essence..." (van der Heijden, et al., 2002: 209), a

positivist perspective of what makes a thing what it is (Hughes & Sharrock, 1990), of each scenario taken to its plausible extreme. While the scenarios are acknowledged as stories with a storyline, the activity is not considered "...mere storytelling...", as they "...must have clearly stated implications for the organization" (van der Heijden, 2002: 214). Van der Heijden, et al. assert "...the scenarios themselves should never contain the organization as an actor. That is to say, the organization should not be shown to be having an input and impact on the story..." (2002: 214).

#### 2.2.4.4 Stakeholder analysis

This is designed to allow the scenario planners to identify the organization's key stakeholders who have high interest in the selected issue or problem and significant power to influence its realization (Schoemaker, 1993). The use of a matrix, similar to Eden and Ackermann's (1998) power/interest grid, is advocated, as the completion of which "...helps us to separate reality from emotion..." (van der Heijden, et al., 2002: 217). However, there exists a contradictory recognition that analysis cannot totally escape its situated nature. Van der Heijden et al. acknowledge assigning stakeholders to groups or categories is "...always time- and context-dependent..." (2002: 217). The narrow view of stakeholders proposed within the scenario planning literature appears to pay little heed of the developments surrounding stakeholder theory and seems emblematic of a desire for a "...normative core...", that permits managers to concentrate on the claims of only a few legitimate stakeholders (Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997: 857). By limiting analysis to a two dimensional matrix a resource dependence conceptualization is adopted (Jawahar & McLaughlin, 2001; Rowley, 1997), which results in stakeholders who do not appear to have obvious power or clear interest in the

strategic question being discarded. Mitchell, et al. (1997) note that stakeholder attributes are variable rather than fixed, and open to reframing as conditions change. A stakeholder that is felt to have low interest and little power can quickly become reframed as one with high interest and great power as a result of environmental conditions changing. Over the time period of the scenarios (generally, more than five years) an organization will evolve and will face different stakeholder pressures and demands (Jawahar & McLaughlin, 2001). Winn (2001) argues the naming and grouping of stakeholders is bound by culture and history, and that a consensus is emerging that is explicitly acknowledging social construction as inherent in defining stakeholders. In contrast to the simple power/interest configuration favored by Schoemaker, Mitchell et al. (1997) offer nine stakeholder categories; latent, dormant, discretionary, demanding, expectant, dominant, dependent, dangerous and definitive, to represent the complexity of stakeholder relationships, and are mindful that a single stakeholder, or an individual, may move between categories as circumstances change. Winn (2001) observes that stakeholders frequently form formal and informal groups and coalitions, and through these are able increase their power and potential impact. Rowley (1997) acknowledges that organizations such as RDS are in a strong position relative to their stakeholders and are able to resist some of their pressures. Whereas, those that operate within highly dense networks, such as service-based companies and public sector organizations, are likely to be more constrained by their stakeholders and will need to work with them in closer evolving relationships.

#### 2.2.4.5 Systems check

Van der Heijden et al. (2002: 219) advocate the use of systems thinking by the scenario planners at any time during the storytelling phase of the process to challenge the internal consistency of the storylines. It is recommended that, where possible, an influence diagram is created and turned into a quantitative model (Schoemaker, 1993) as this is argued to enrich the storylines and give the team the confidence that their stories "...cannot be faulted on internal consistency" (van der Heijden, 2002: 220). Postma and Liebl (2005) find this assumption problematic, as it seems to represent an inconsistency with the ontology of scenario planning that was originally so appealing to RDS planners. Scenario planning arose partly as a result of dissatisfaction with rationalist strategic planning techniques that failed to discern and consider discontinuous change in the business environment – precisely the type of change that if included in any narrative would render such a story inconsistent. Therefore, internally consistent scenarios run the risk of omitting the very forces that result in discontinuous change. It is these problematic and paradoxical forces that cannot be easily integrated into the underlying causal relationships powering the scenario stories (MacKay & McKiernan, 2004) that may be of most potential interest to managers. Perhaps Ralph Waldo Emerson's dictum reproduced by Poole and Van de Ven (1989: 562) is worth remembering here, "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds".

#### 2.2.4.6 Impacting organizational thinking and acting

Once the scenarios have been developed the task begins of communicating them to their intended audience; the key decision-makers (van der Heijden, et al., 2002). The purpose of this is said to be twofold: to influence the eventual decisions taken, ensuring they are robust against each scenario, or at least if they are not that the risks are known



(Goodwin & Wright, 2001); and to stimulate strategic thinking and consequently adaptive organizational learning skills through the 'strategic conversation' (Chesley & Wenger, 1999; van der Heijden, et al., 2002). A strategic conversation is described as an 'art' and is "...the sum-total of all exchanges, formal and informal, taking place between members of the organisation concerning aspects of the position of the organisation in its external environment, and how this can be changed from the inside out" (van der Heijden, 2004: 151). Postma and Liebl (2005) note RDS-inspired scenarios are more suited to deal with not too many uncertainties in the not too distant future. However, the social and constructive character of human talk is acknowledged when the conversation is described as inductive, adaptive, fluid and should contain space for alternative views, as these are vital if ongoing evolutionary learning is to be achieved (van der Heijden, 2004).

#### 2.2.5 Scenarios – criticisms

One of the characteristics of the literature surrounding scenario planning is that the majority of it is written by academics, who also operate as consultants, which may partly explain why most criticisms have tended to operate at the margins of the field and have yet to lead to any radical reflection (Cunliffe, 2003) by its key authors. For example, in one of the few articles to describe an unsuccessful scenario intervention the primary reason for its failure is assigned to managers having adopted, "...collective defensive avoidance strategies..." (Hodgkinson & Wright, 2002: 964). There appears to be little critical reflection by the authors of their own contribution as the project's consultants. However, a recent development in the field has seen more critical studies that have analysed scenario planning and scenarios from, for example, a broader discussion of

physical and social phenomena (Bernstein, Lebow, Stein & Weber, 2000); the human propensity to organize serial and non-serial information temporally (Ingvar, 1985); the assumption of multiple futures emerging from a singular shared present and past (List, 2004); constructivist learning (Chermack & van der Merwe, 2003); sensemaking (Nathan, 2004; Wright, 2005); discontinuity (van Notten, Slegers & van Asselt, 2005); uncertainty (Postma & Liebl, 2005); and, the epistemic questions the topic raises (Aligica, 2005).

Ontologically, scenario planning is positioned as an alternative strategy approach to rationalist techniques such as forecasting, single-point planning and positioning (Ogilvy, 2002; van der Heijden, 1996; van der Heijden et al., 2002). Scenario planning rejects the belief that the future can be predicted, but holds that multiple alternative futures are held in a continuous state of suspension. Single point strategic plans are discarded in favour of multiple, plausible stories that describe alternate future states. List (2004: 24) criticizes most scenario planning approaches that implicitly adopt a 'fan model' perspective, where multiple futures are seen to spring forth from a single shared present and past. The 'fan' model approach denies the situated and constructive natures of presents and pasts (List, 2004), which are not fixed and immobile, but subject to constant reframing and reinterpretation as actors reflect from different perspectives.

Hannabuss (2001) sees scenarios as drawing on ethnographic research, Chermack and van der Merwe (2003: 446) view social construction shaping scenario planning in four ways; in the individual construction of knowledge, the social influences on individual constructions, the situatedness and contextual requirements of knowledge construction, and, the social construction of realities. Creating scenarios involves actors – both scenario planners and consultants – engaged in multiple acts of creation and

interpretation (Ng & Cock, 2002; Ogilvy, 2002). Similarly, encountering scenarios, through reading or listening to presentations, sees individuals making sense of their content and context subjectively in an effort to make them meaningful, and thereby relevant and useful (Chermack, 2003).

Some of scenario planning's most prolific advocates appear to be suffering from epistemic uncertainty (Habermas in Schoemaker, 1993), and seek to deny its social and constructive qualities, going so far as to apologize for these interpretivist characteristics. Cairns et al., demonstrate this when they identify the "...central problem in scenario development, then, is the fact that aside from a limited set of tools, the task is essentially a creative one and the process is 'more art than science'" (2004: 233). This statement contradicts an earlier call from the same authors, in a different publication, for managers "...to embrace uncertainty, to think creatively yet systematically about possible future events" (van der Heijden, et al., 2002: 153). When discussing scenario planning methodologies, Cairns, et al. (2004: 231) negatively contrast "...simple unstructured models based on intuition and reasoned judgment...", with "...highly sophisticated probabilistic algorithms and causal simulation models". Goodwin and Wright (2001: 13) continue this trend by advocating for the integration of multiattribute value modelling as one way of meeting their self-identified need for a formal strategy evaluation process in the planning stage of scenario development. They propose a number of "...self evident advantages..." of employing this, but present only one; a formal decision process allowing for the possibility of retaining a record of the decision model yielding a documented and defensible rationale for why a particular strategy was chosen (2001: 4). This 'self evident advantage' appears more targeted toward forming an organization's activities as calculable, recordable, and normatively accountable; rather than as strategy capacity enhancing. Miller and Waller (2003: 94), on the other hand, suggest real option

analysis as a quantitative approach for rendering scenario planning more reckonable and controllable (Knights, 1992).

#### 2.2.6 Scenario thinking

Van der Heijden et al. (2002) and Burt and van der Heijden (2003) identify the notion of scenario thinking, closely linking it with scenario planning. Its main significance is found to be in helping to overcome thinking limitations through developing multiple futures. This is said to enable "...businesses to avoid conventional approaches that may be easily predicted and parried by a competitor, allowing new business ideas to be invented instead. Swift reaction times and the ability to get there before anyone else are vital" (van der Heijden, et al., 2002: 22). While scenario thinking is seen as desirable, the question as to whether the RDS-influenced scenario approach would help or hinder this remains largely undiscussed. Whittington (2004) notes that scenarios are not organizationally neutral and can be used as a pawn of organizational politics just as much as rational analysis. One issue to consider is the propensity among these authors to refer to scenario planning as a strategic or management *tool* (Schoemaker, 1995: Schoemaker & van der Heijden, 1992: van der Heijden, 1996: van der Heijden, et al., 2002). Use of the noun 'tool' to label a scenario is significant as it implies use rather than thought (Gabriel, 2002) and therefore suggests their role as limited to things to be used, rather than as a mode of thinking and re-perceiving the future. To refer to scenarios as tools downgrades them from narrative interpretations of plausible lived experiences to that of mechanistic strategic planning instruments (Iedema, et al., 2004). Another is van der Heijden's response to the notion of strategizing, which elsewhere is linked with thinking and sensemaking (e.g. Wilson & Jarzabkowski, 2004), but which he

dismisses as only making sense where "...our knowledge and theories give us a sense of control..." (2004: 147).

### 2.2.7 Summary

This section has analyzed the concepts of scenario planning and scenarios. It has been frequently identified that scenario planning has received only a limited amount of critical academic thought (Cairns, et al., 2004; Chermack, 2003; Goodwin & Wright, 2001; Hodgkinson & Wright, 2002; Schoemaker, 1995). This has resulted in a body of literature that is largely of the promotional ('look at what we are doing'), or how-to-do-it ('a guide to...') type (Pollitt, 2000). Descriptions of scenario planning episodes within organizations have been largely uncritical accounts that frequently involved the authors acting as consultants. Approaches that were developed within RDS over twenty years ago have generally been applied more or less unaltered in a variety of organizational settings, their universal applicability remaining unquestioned. As a result of this, theoretical development of scenario planning has not been a strong element of the discussions and reflections of its use in practice. As a first step towards this, each of the stages that comprise an RDS influenced six stage approach (van der Heijden, et al., 2002) to scenario planning has been critically examined from a strategizing perspective, which looks at how these steps may materialize in practice. Some worrying inconsistencies in the ontological and epistemological claims for scenario planning have been identified. A strategizing perspective of scenario planning encourages a focus on the many acts practitioners must undertake to develop the scenarios. This raises the notions of sensemaking and narrative as socio-psychological processes strategists must undertake when enacting scenario planning. The next section analyzes sensemaking.

## 2.3 Sensemaking

### 2.3.1 Introduction

Weick (1995) asserts sensemaking never starts or ends, and that humans are always in the middle of making sense of their environments and have been doing so all their lives. When making sense, actors interpret their environments, which then influence what and how meaning is constructed and subsequently, what sense is made (Ericson, 2001; Schneider, 1997). In Weick's (1995 & 2001) view, organizations, that depict themselves as open social systems are the ones that should be most concerned with sensemaking. It is this consideration of how cues are drawn from external environments influencing individual and collective behaviour that integrate the study of sensemaking with strategizing and scenario planning research. From a sensemaking perspective, strategy is conceptualized as interactions within external environments, where negotiated meanings are created from a wide variety of uncertainties and ambiguities (Ericson, 2001; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Schneider, 1997; Steinhörsson & Söderholm, 2002). Within the remainder of this section those aspects of sensemaking influencing strategizing activities are analysed.

### 2.3.2 General conceptualizations

Sensemaking challenges the role of purpose as a significant factor in understanding behaviour and replaces this by conceptualizing socio-psychological behaviour as driven

by a need to make lived experiences meaningful (Boland, 1984; Vaara, 2003). Through sensemaking, actors socially construct meaningful worlds allowing them to enact their realities (Allard-Poesi, 2005; Maitlis, 2005; Vaara, 2003; Weick, 1993). Weick's (1993) study of the Mann Gulch disaster alerts us to the potential consequences of a loss of meaning among individuals within organizations. When sensemaking collapses structure disintegrates, which can result in disasters occurring from preventable sources (Weick, 1993). Individual decision-making can mean small, subtle features have a surprisingly large effect on eventual outcomes (Weick, 1993; 1995). One of the conclusions Weick (1993; 1995) draws is that personal and collective disasters can occur from good decision-making undertaken within wrongheaded sensemaking, as decisions effective in one context may not be in others. While sensemaking, actors selectively enlarge small cues, or flesh out hunches, that both create and sustain the contexts for their past, current and future actions (Weick, 1995). Allard-Poesi (2005) identifies sensemaking as a social constructivist notion and locates the sense maker as active in the creation of their environments. At an organizational level, Ericson (2001) suggests actors spend a lot of time negotiating among themselves an acceptable shared version of what they are experiencing. By continually discussing a common understanding of what is going on, organizations and organizing are construed as emergent phenomena where actors evolve and learn in conjunction with the environments they, in part, create (Moss, 2001; Schwandt, 2005).

### 2.3.3 Defining sensemaking

Lamertz (2002: 21) conceives of sensemaking as mainly the formation of meaningful interpretations of the formal rules and norms of interpersonal treatment of organizational

events and institutions. Patriotta (2003: 351) sees sensemaking as unfolding towards agreed facts and epistemological closure. This focus on formal activities and normative outcomes is not one that is shared by other scholars in the field. The consensus seems to define sensemaking as an ongoing, cyclical, interpretative process where meaning is assigned to all ongoing occurrences and phenomena (Brown, 2000; Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Louis, 1980; Wagner III & Gooding, 1997). From this, intersubjective accounts of events are produced that serve as frameworks acting as precursors for all future purposeful individual and collective activity (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Brown, 2000; Brown & Jones, 2000; Wagner III & Gooding, 1997). Weber and Manning (2001) observe that through sensemaking agents shape and are shaped by the organizational events they encounter.

Organizational sensemaking is said to occur when individuals act collectively through social interactions (Maitlis, 2005). The relationship between individual and social sensemaking is one pondered by researchers. Brown (2000) and Maitlis (2005) see it as a fundamentally social activity, but caution against being trapped by the illusion that social sensemaking means all understand phenomena in the same way. Brown (2000: 45-46) notes that frequently disagreements and inconsistencies between individuals' viewpoints are overlooked in favour of the assumption that common perceptions are shared. Brannen (2004) notes sensemaking always occurs in contexts and meanings that may be shared in one context, but often shift when transferred to another. Organizational sensemaking is perhaps more accurately understood as the interpretation voiced by a relatively small group of privileged strategic-level managers (Weick, 2001). Maitlis (2005: 21) considers stakeholders engage in sensemaking from a variety of positions, histories and personal backgrounds when interacting with different organizational members (Gabriel, 2000). Weick (1995; 2001) recognises the social



activities necessary for sensemaking, but ultimately sees the sense, that is socially created, as residing within the realms of the singular mind.

### 2.3.3 Doing sensemaking

Thomas, Clark and Gioia (1993: 240) suggest sensemaking entails the three key processes of scanning, interpretation and action, with the enactment of these allowing individuals to make decisions consistent with new perceptions as they arise (Allard-Poesi, 2005; Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Orton, 2000). Following his study of the Mann Gulch disaster, Weick (1996: 147) offers the view that resilient groups demonstrate effectiveness in; improvisation, wisdom, respectful interaction and communication, and that these capabilities collectively help improve sensemaking. He asserts that decisions are taken after sense has been made and that this means, in practice, the outcome of most decisions can be known beforehand, because sensemaking has already determined their outcomes (1996: 149). Maitlis (2005) adds that sensemaking also follows the decision as the effects of it emerge and this further round of sensemaking may produce additional decision-making.

Although sensemaking is said to never end, but always exists in a process of doing (Weick, 1995), there are times when sensemaking activities are triggered into action and their effects are most acute (Balogun & Johnson, 2005). During times of perceived threat (Thomas, et al., 1993), surprise (Maitlis, 2005), or strategic change (Rouleau, 2005), agents experience a heightened need for sense to be made as emotions intensify (George & Jones, 2001). Such situations are typically characterised as those that hold a high degree of equivocality and ambiguity. Weick (1995) distinguishes between these

two concepts and prefers equivocality to ambiguity, as both suggest the presence of two or more interpretations, which can initiate sensemaking, but ambiguity can also mean a lack of clarity. Therefore, recognising a situation as highly ambiguous can have two meanings for managers; confusion created by multiple meanings, or lack of clarity caused by ignorance (Bruner, 1991; Weick, 1995). Weick (1995: 120) suggests that the presence of ambiguity allows people to maintain the perception that there is agreement when in fact, there is not. However, Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991: 445) view ambiguity as a potential generative force and argue for the creation of 'ambiguity-by-design', as a device for fostering an atmosphere of change among top management teams during times of strategy making. Similarly, Davenport and Leitch (2005: 1617) call for organizations operating within networks to foster ambiguity, as this is said to generate a 'state and space', where stakeholders are able to respond creatively to change messages.

Although there have been studies of sensemaking within public sector organizations (e.g. Brown & Jones, 2000; Orton, 2000), there has been relatively little consideration given over how this may differ to that that occurs within the private sector. Brown and Jones's (2000) study of sensemaking around the 'Arms to Iraq Affair' suggests hypocrisy may play an important role. They see hypocrisy as referring to a consciously entertained discrepancy between an individual's important attitudes or self-beliefs and his/her behaviours (Brown & Jones, 2000: 666). In public sector situations, knowing there will be documentation that is publicly available may influence behaviour and decision-making, and lead agents to see hypocrisy as not just subjectively appealing, but as a rational and sensible sensemaking mode (Brown & Jones, 2000).

#### 2.3.4 Identity

Brown (2000) considers how the role of identity influences sensemaking, and advances the view that contributors to a Government Inquiry and authors of the Inquiry, undertake acts that, in part, are attempts to enhance their own feelings of self-esteem and self-efficacy. Subjectively construed identity is a power effect (Currie & Brown, 2003), whose establishment and maintenance is a core preoccupation in sensemaking (Robichaud, Giroux & Taylor, 2004; Vaara, 2003; Weick, 1995). Gioia and Thomas (1996: 372) conceive organizational identity as comprising those features of the organization its members perceive as ostensibly central, enduring and distinctive in character, and that contribute to their own definition and identification with it. Organizational image is said to describe insiders' assessments of what outsiders think of it (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). Weick (1995) suggests that a close link between an individual's character and an organization's image will imply that individual will be personally motivated to preserve a positive organizational image and repair a negative one. An organization's identity can act as a filter mediating how interpretations are constructed and can constrain what actor's perceive as acceptable or legitimate (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). Gioia and Thomas (1991) caution that any strategic change initiative needs to take seriously issues of existing and future identity and image.

#### 2.3.5 Plausible and reasonable

The social and constructive nature of sensemaking means that its potency should not be judged in terms of accuracy, or whether the sense made is valid against some normative standard. Sensemaking is about plausibility, pragmatics, coherence, reasonableness,

creation, invention and instrumentality (Brown, 2000, Weick, 1995). Ultimately, good sensemaking is achieved through bricolage (Allard-Poesi, 2005; Weick, 1993 & 2001) and is said to produce accounts that are socially acceptable, authentic and credible.

If accuracy is nice but not necessary in sensemaking, then what is necessary? The answer is, something that perceives plausibility and coherence, something that is reasonable and memorable, something that embodies past experience and expectations, something that resonates with other people, something that can be constructed retrospectively but also can be used prospectively, something that captures both feeling and thought, something that allows for embellishment to fit current oddities, something that is fun to construct. In short, what is necessary in sensemaking is a good story.

(Weick 1995: 60-61)

### 2.3.6 Sensemaking through narrative

Watson (1998) notes some people are more storytellers than listeners, while others are more listeners than storytellers; either way, stories and narratives play an important part in framing the way people understand and act with respect to their encounters. Boje, Oswick and Ford (2004: 574) suggest the authors of sensemaking stories view them as instruments of power and hegemony. Brown (2000) asserts there is a reasonable consensus that narrative is the privileged form of sensemaking between individuals (Brown, 1986; Czarniawska, 2004; Gabriel, 2000; Robichaud, et al., 2004). Narratives are linked to sensemaking (Patriotta, 2003) due to the strong role conversation has in how change unfolds and is interpreted (Ford & Ford, 1995). Stories do not mirror reality, but act as a filter through which events are ordered to make them reasonable and manageable, and the unexpected expectable (Allard-Poesi, 2005, Boje, 2001; Boudens, 2005; Brown, 2000; Weick, 1995). Taking an organizational perspective, humans, as linguistic beings, are said to create organizations that can be understood as collective storytelling systems (Brown & Jones, 2000) populated by individuals who make sense of their realities by storying their lives. Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy (2004) note that

organizational sensemaking will generate texts that leave traces and become embedded within the organization.

### 2.3.7 Sensegiving

A parallel development to sensemaking, but one that has not received the same amount of research focus, is the notion of sensegiving. In contrast to sensemaking, sensegiving is concerned with the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others towards a preferred redefinition of, typically, an organizational reality (Dunford & Jones, 2000; Ericson, 2001; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Hill & Levenhagen, 1995; Snell, 2002). Rouleau sees sensemaking and sensegiving as "...two sides of the same coin..." (2005: p.1415), and in practice one permeates the other, meaning that the boundaries of where sensemaking ends and sensegiving begins is not clear. Sensegiving is associated with leadership and is encountered when a particular change position is pursued (Dunford & Jones, 2000; Hill & Levenhagen, 1995; Maitlis, 2005; Rouleau, 2005).

Unlike sensemaking, criticisms of sensegiving are not just limited to how it appears in practice, but also seem concerned with it as a concept. Sensegiving is a power affect and can be seen in Brown's (2000) description of the text of a Government Inquiry report, which he sees as embedded with the author's interpretations and which is assigned meaning in its relation to other similar texts. Snell's (2002) single case study of a Hong Kong organization found that attempts by a dominant coalition to impose its own interpretation on others resulted in a form of psychic imprisonment, where employees became locked inside a single-loop skillset. A single view of reality was adopted that

discouraged any questioning of it, resulting in a form of organizational myopia (Snell, 2002). Maitlis's (2005) study of three British symphony orchestras found further potentially limiting consequences of sensegiving. Her findings identified that high levels of leader sensegiving led to sensemaking processes that were highly *controlled* (2005: 30, *italics in original*). Leaders used only formal channels controlling the sensemaking context, communicating a unitary dominant interpretation following a single plot line. This method of sensegiving failed to provide a narrative base for actors to engage in any significant improvisation or extension (Maitlis, 2005).

### 2.3.8 Sensemaking – criticisms

Conceptually sensemaking has received very little criticism. Thomas, et al. (1993) partly explain this by noting that although sensemaking has been frequently cited for its substantial theoretical importance, relatively little empirical research has been produced that examines its relationships with managing and organizing. Weick's work has been criticised, for the perception among some (e.g. Schwandt, 2005; Slawomir, 1997), of ignoring or underestimating the role and influence of managerial reflection in his writings. A more justifiable criticism is presented by Maitlis (2005), who addresses her criticisms at the propensity among sensemaking scholars to focus their inquiry on situations where pressure, sometimes immense, is being felt by agents which then triggers their sensemaking activities (e.g. Brown, 2000; Brown & Jones, 2000; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Ericson, 2001; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Hill & Levenhagen, 1995; Orton, 2000; Weber & Manning, 2001; Weick, 1993 & 1996). This tendency has meant that while we may understand more about how individuals make sense of potential threats, or surprising encounters within high reliability organizations (e.g. fire crews and aircraft

carrier flight decks), less is known about how actors make sense within the mundanity of their everyday organizational experiences (Maitlis, 2005). A further legitimate criticism has been levelled by Weber and Glynn (2006), who point out that empirical studies of sensemaking have tended to neglect the mediating influences of political and historical contexts on how actors construct sense. Their argument suggests that studies of sensemaking have inclined to be ahistorical and largely acontextual.

### 2.3.9 Prospective sensemaking

In its early conceptions sensemaking was considered as solely a retrospective act (Louis, 1980) that became encapsulated in Weick's (1995: 18) famous utterance "How can I know what I think until I see what I say?". However, its supposed retrospective nature has become a problem for practitioners who operate in the present and make decisions that are realised in the future (Wright, 2005). Gioia and Thomas (1996), and Gioia, Corley and Fabbri (2002) suggest this dilemma may be resolved through the idea of prospective sensemaking. This process involves constructing a desired future state and then imagining how that position could be arrived at, as if individuals are retrospectively making sense of their current situation (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Gioia, et al. (2002). Through such exercises managers are said to be developing their environmental foresight while avoiding the trap of ignoring complexity and uncertainty in their ruminations (Schwandt, 2005). Unfortunately, such approaches assume a unitary future and therefore it is questionable how prospective sensemaking of this nature would help managers build, maintain and apply more complex cognitive maps ensuring that the unexpected is expected. However, Boland's (1984) study within a university film lending library combined sensemaking of the future with the creation of multiple scenarios. To

overcome the trap of assuming a single future would exist, managers were asked to construct several scenarios describing multiple futures and to take a position within each scenario where they looked back from the future (Boland, 1984). The scenarios were deliberately written so that they were plausible but also contained surprises, so that they stimulated participants' sensemaking processes (Boland, 1984). This approach avoided the mistake of assuming a singular future highlighted above by Gioia and colleagues.

### 2.3.10 Summary

This section has analysed the concept of sensemaking in relation to how such processes may influence strategizing activities. Sensemaking is concerned with how phenomena are interpreted into meaningful realities that allow for decision-making and action. It is a social process that progresses through talk and text. The relationships between strategy and sensemaking have been based on the idea that during strategic change initiatives, agents frequently encounter unfamiliar and sometimes threatening cues that stimulate sensemaking. Studies of sensemaking have tended to ignore or downplay the role historical contexts have in mediating how individuals collectively make sense of their experiences. When sensemaking has been investigated within the contexts of strategy, the histories of previous strategy making iterations do not appear to have integrated into the analysis researchers have produced. Historical experiences will have been interpreted differently by strategists and are likely to impact upon their sensemaking of strategy making routines in ways that strongly influence their agency. To better understand the relationships between sensemaking and strategy, the researcher and the researched should explore historical contexts and their potential influence on how experience is ordered. Sensegiving is said to occur when a leadership



group seeks to influence the sensemaking of others towards their preferred interpretation of a situation. This is problematic, as it seems to take what is presented as a social construction (e.g. Allard-Poesi, 2005; Maitlis, 2005; Vaara, 2003; Weick, 1993) and objectify it to be passed on to a recipient in a highly controlled manner. Sensemaking's claimed retrospective nature also causes a concern for practitioners charged with developing strategy as this provides little guidance when considering future issues. Boland's (1984) study is the only one that attempts to bring sensemaking and scenarios together within an organizational setting. The next section discusses and analyses narratives, which are integral to scenario planning and strategizing.

## 2.4 Narrative

### 2.4.1 Introduction

In this section conceptualizations and theories that discuss narrative are analysed. From a narrative perspective organizations are variously understood as socially constructed verbal or discursive systems (Fairclough, 2005; Hopkinson, 2003; Humphreys & Brown, 2002; Phillips, et al., 2004; Rhodes, 2001); storytelling millieux (Currie & Brown, 2003); sites of linguistic, discursive ontological activity (Boje, et al., 2004); and, ecologies of discourses (Robichaud, et al., 2004). Tsoukas and Hatch (2001) suggest the logic of complexity theory itself supports the use of a narrative mode in interpreting organizations. A narrative sensitivity assumes that organization emerges through the interaction of its members (Robichaud, et al., 2004). Such exchanges involve individuals in collective sensemaking, identity-defining, hegemonic, legitimacy and power-laden roles (Boje, et al., 2004; Currie & Brown, 2003; Rhodes, 2001). Actors

are felt to engage in these activities because humans are said to be story-telling animals (Fisher, 1984), who give meaning to and organize their lives through stories (Brown, 2004; Bruner, 1990; Czarniawska, 2004). The literature pertinent to narratives is identified, and its potential role and influence in strategizing activities discussed and analyzed.

#### 2.4.2 Narrative, discourse and story

The three terms; narrative, discourse and story are frequently used interchangeably leaving a lack of clarity as to their distinctive properties. Story is best understood as consisting of a plot comprising causally related episodes culminating in a solution to a problem (Czarniawska, 1997: 78). Discourse is a system of statements that rule in certain ways of talking and rule out others, and can comprise written documents, speech acts, pictures and symbols (Boje, et al., 2004; Fairclough, 2005; Grant & Hardy, 2004; Hardy, Lawrence & Grant, 2005; Iedema, Degeling, Braithwaite & White, 2004; Phillips, et al., 2004). Narrative incorporates both story and discourse, but also is a mode of knowing and understanding, as well as a mode of communication (Czarniawska, 1997 & 2004; Fisher, 1984; Maines, 1993). Therefore, narrative denotes a way of perceiving experience that includes stories, which are always embedded within wider discourses.

Narratives, in both modes (Czarniawska, 1997 & 2004), do not reflect an external reality, but are authored through selecting elements of experience and combining them into a meaningful, coherent, liveable, and adequate whole (Brown, 2004; Bruner, 1991 & 2002; Cunliffe, Luhman & Boje, 2004; Hopkinson, 2003; Pentland, 1999). Phillips (1995) asserts the barriers between fiction and fact, art and science, have blurred and are

increasingly difficult to defend. Political narratives of legitimation are said to become 'metanarratives' (Currie & Brown, 2003; Czarniawska, 2004), which are claimed to interact with other metanarratives operating at a similar level (Robichaud, et al., 2004). Both metanarratives and narratives invite encounters (Cottle, 2002), and are experienced by actors within a context embedded in the past, present and future, and within broader organizational, industry and societal narratives (Cunliffe, et al., 2004). Context is essential for interpreting narratives that occur within organizational settings, as without an appreciation of the context from which they emerge, their meanings remain superficial to the outsider (Boje, 1991; Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001).

#### 2.4.3 Strategy as narrative

There have been relatively few studies that have examined strategy from a narrative perspective. In the practice field, the technology company 3M has discussed how it presents its strategic plan as a story, in the belief that this form has more resonance with managers than a bullet pointed list (Shaw, Brown & Bromiley, 1998). Barry and Elmes (1997) conduct an in-depth review of strategy from a narrative interpretation and suggest that the effectiveness of strategy is intimately tied to its acceptance, approval and adoption, amongst its intended audience. They identify how a narrative perspective can bring to the surface some of the political economies of strategy and the rhetorical dynamics that present the strategy as authoritative and mask its subjectivities. Styhre (2005: 34 & 81) notes a recent trait amongst managerially produced texts to claim their work is based on "...rigorous and robust evidence..." analyzed using "...best practice..." approaches, which are never clearly explained. Barry and Elmes (1997) point out how most strategic plans erase individual and peoples' identities, departments are referred to

rather than named individuals, dehumanizing the organization. One of their most insightful contributions is through their claim that strategic texts can be effectively viewed as fictions, and strategists as authors of fictions (Barry & Elmes, 1997). Their claim to see practitioners as fiction writers is not made in the sense that strategists tell false stories, but more that their texts are the products of subjective human thought and action (Barry & Elmes, 1997).

#### 2.4.4 Narrative texts

In any strategizing activity it is likely that texts will be produced at several stages throughout the process. Kallinikos and Cooper (1996) note that writing is not an unproblematic transcription of speech. Similarly, Styhre (2005) sees any text as being a social manifestation of particular ways of thinking and writing. He identifies management texts as dependent upon the dominant beliefs existing about what constitutes proper management writing and the role it has in society. Brown (2004) analyzed the Cullen Report into the Piper Alpha disaster using a narrative perspective, and notes that such documents have to be regarded as authoritative if they are to be considered effective. As authority is not a property of texts per se, claims to authority are made in the text and in the Report's presentation, this leads Brown (2004: 95) to call such reports "...totalizing and monological rhetorical constructs...". Phillips, et al., (2004: 643) state a text that is not read, is not yet a text, and for it to become embedded with its audience it needs to be used as an organizing mechanism across individual situations (O'Connor, 2000). It is said to be advisable that to increase the likelihood a text will be used, it should conform to the genre it is intended to belong to (Harré, 2004; Phillips, et al., 2004; Styhre, 2005). Additionally, a text is more likely to be used and considered influential if it relates to other

texts and existing discourses, since it can then evoke more broadly grounded understandings and meanings (Grant & Hardy, 2004; Phillips, et al., 2004). In such circumstances, a producer may use their central position in a network to disseminate its text to a large number of other actors (Phillips, et al., 2004) increasing its chances of being noticed.

Important organizational or societal texts are rhetorical devices that tend to present a univocal view of reality, inevitably becoming an exercise in power and seek an hegemonic influence over their intended audience (Brown, 2004; Ferraro, Pfeffer & Sutton, 2005; Grant & Hardy, 2004; Robichaud, et al., 2004). Influence is more likely to be achieved if the texts are considered to be verisimilitudinous (Bruner, 1991; Brown, 2004; Maines, 1993; Styhre, 2005), which is described as the subjective resonance that occurs between the listener's/reader's experience of the world and the narrator's/author's rendition of it (Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001: 1000). Barry and Elmes (1997: 436) note that traditional strategy narratives are told from a singular external perspective, with the author(s) excluding themselves from the storyline. This is in contrast with the Cullen Report, where the author is omnipresent and is identified as the single 'author-in-the-text', interacting with the reader from a position of assumed superiority (Brown, 2004: 100-101). Both Czarniawska (2004) and Styhre (2005) identify problems with viewing texts as having a single author, and see authorship, more realistically, as never residing in one individual, but as taking place within an ongoing conversation. Robichaud et al., (2004) describe the final text produced as a metaconversation, and note that in large complex organizations those contributing to it become spokespersons for other conversations. The consultation process typically sees individuals engage in interdepartmental or interorganizational collaborations involving sets of conversations designed to produce some end result (Hardy, et al., 2005).

Managers hope that by implementing such processes, leverage and influence can be brought to bear around the complex problems they cannot solve themselves (Hardy, et al., 2005). Hardy et al., (2005) caution that typically a participant's own organization has priority in an individual's own mind, and although such collaborations may produce generalized membership, it is unlikely to be enduring. They state that while actors may not necessarily arrive with predetermined views they seek to "sell" to the convenors, they acknowledge this is a potential problem (Hardy, et al., 2005). One challenge strategists face is, through collaborative processes, to develop absorbing, compelling accounts that aesthetically engage stakeholders while competing with all the other bits of information managers have to juggle with (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Taylor, Fisher & Dufresne, 2002).

#### 2.4.5 Summary

In section four of this chapter the pertinent literature associated with narrative has been reviewed and analyzed. What distinguishes narrative from story and discourse is that the term is constituted by both of these communicative forms, but also includes, what Czarniawska (1997 & 2004) terms a 'mode of knowing'. As a mode of knowing, narrative refers to how experience is interpreted and made sense of, not just the talk and text that may constitute it. There are few studies that examine strategy from a narrative perspective, and none that look at strategists engaged in strategizing, and yet conversation, producing documents and issuing plans or frameworks frequently form an integral part of strategy creation in organizations. The absence of narrative based inquiries of strategizing limits our understanding of how strategists do strategy, as strategy making is enacted and strategies accomplished through talk, text and word play. Strategies themselves are frequently presented as metanarratives, being

authoritative 'modes of knowing' the future that describe how the organization will be successful in that future.

## 2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter the main concepts and theories surrounding scenario planning and strategizing have been identified, explained and critically analysed. The review has identified that where research on these two concepts has been undertaken it has been done without regard to the other. As yet, no study of scenario planning has been undertaken from a practice perspective. By conceptualizing scenario planning as a strategizing practice this study integrates these two notions in ways that bring together the two literatures and in so doing, enriches both traditions. Scenario planning is a well-established approach practitioners can use when creating strategy. The scenario planning literature has however, failed to adopt the strategizing agenda with one leading author dismissing it as lacking relevance. This disregarding of developments in associated areas of strategy is emblematic of an absence of critical analysis in scenario planning scholarship. This has resulted in the theoretical propositions, originally established following the RDS experience in the '70s and '80s, having developed comparatively little since the first descriptions were published over twenty years ago (Wack, 1985a & 1985b). By adopting the strategizing research agenda this study presents one means by which scenario planning's theoretical base can evolve and mature.

Strategizing is located within the wider literature on strategy to provide a contextual understanding. Traditional approaches to strategy research have resulted in it being

described as in crisis, due to the view that despite the huge amount of research conducted we know little about how strategy is actually practiced in organizations and who does it. The strategizing research agenda, which looks at how practitioners utilise strategy approaches, like scenario planning, is advanced as one way of bridging this knowledge gap. Whittington (2006) proposes a vocabulary for strategizing research focused on praxis, practice and practitioners. A practice agenda encourages an examination of the micro activities of agents engaged in while strategizing, therefore, sensemaking and narrative are also analyzed in this chapter. Sensemaking and narrative are socio-psychological acts that actors consciously and sub-consciously engage in whenever organizing activities are undertaken. A sensemaking understanding holds that actors' motivations are powered by a search for meaning, rather than a sense of purpose, and locates strategy as multi-contextual meaning making within equivocal environments. Within a narrative perspective, human agents are conceptualized as story-telling animals (Fisher, 1984), who enact their lives by creating stories to organize by. The role of and use of narrative as both a mode of knowing and a mode of communication (Czarniawska, 2004) is central of the creation of scenarios through a workshop-based consultation process. Concluding remarks are offered.



## Research Methodology

The accounts as I heard them are themselves part of the process of composing lives. They are autobiographical, not biographical, shaped by each person's choice and selective memory and by the circumstances of our work together. No doubt they are shaped again by my own selections, resonating variously with my own experience. These are stories I have used to think with, sometimes quoting at length and sometimes very briefly...

(Bateson, 1989: 33-34)

### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter justifies the research approach taken in this study. The chapter is structured into six main sections. Following this introduction, general research conceptualizations are discussed and considered in relation to this research. In the third section philosophies of research are briefly considered, leading into a presentation of the ontological and epistemological claims made for this study. Social constructionism is discussed in section four and is presented as the ontological standpoint of the author, this philosophical perspective is analysed and its influence on the research considered. The fifth section and most substantial of the chapter considers the qualitative research orthodoxy and how its conventions have informed and been present in this study. The final section presents a conclusion to the chapter.

This research meets the call from Chia (2004), Timothy Clark, (2004), Johnson, et al. (2003), Samra-Fredericks (2003) and Vaara, Kleymann and Seristö (2004), to examine and learn more about the actual practices of managers, consultants and their colleagues in their strategizing activities. Holistic and contextual understanding is called for (Johnson, et al., 2003) that enables in-depth understanding of the complexities of strategy making. In-depth single case studies are seen as one methodological means

by which knowledge about such complex organizing can be generated, and are advanced as a necessary feature of micro-strategy and strategizing research (Johnson, et al., 2003; Knights & Mueller, 2004; Lowe & Jones, 2004). This research is a single in-depth case study of the East of England Development Agency's strategizing activities resulting in its production of the Regional Economic Strategy in November 2004.

### 3.1 General research conceptualizations

Alvesson and Deetz (2000) note simply that management research aims to develop knowledge about the management of organizations, which are understood as social sites that share characteristics with other types of communities. Interpretivism requires sensitivity to constructed worlds that are interpreted into being, collectively and consensually constructed, and essentially, are relativistic (Astley, 1985; Gioia, 2003). A constructionist approach to research within the arc of interpretivism seeks to render the logic behind practice faithfully (Czarniawska, 2001) against the intentions of the actors. In addition, it explores how through a process of bricolage and locally contingent actions (Leuenberger & Pinch, 2000), this logic is created and made sense of (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). Research of this type presupposes agency takes place within contexts that are socially and historically defined and therefore open to investigation (Joseph & Kennedy, 2000). Tranfield and Starkey (1998) remind us that it is not just agency that is produced in organizations but also knowledge (Balogun, et al., 2003; Whittington, 2004). Czarniawska (2001) argues for the role of the researcher to understand, describe, explain and analyse (Kurzman, 2004; Whetten, 1989) how actors construct and interpret their practice through social reflection (Gioia, 2003). This is not to suggest that intentions always produce planned consequences, in social practice outcomes can

become aggregated to be wholly independent of what was singularly intended (Joseph & Kennedy, 2000; Knights, 1992). Constructionism's concern for the events and artefacts within human life, not observation of its processes perceived distantly as some removed external reality, represent its practice focus (Hughes & Sharrock, 1990). How actors use interpretive processes to make sense of events and artefacts is also considered, and often rendered through their own words (Astley, 1985; Gioia, 2003) in the research text.

Knights (1992) identifies the typical methods of positive research, such as; experiments, hypothesis testing and quantifications as practiced unreflexively, belying their origin in the natural sciences. These methods encourage the claim that the researcher is separate from, and therefore objective toward, what is being observed. Knowledge is assumed to be acquired sequentially and linearly, with one problem being addressed at a time (Bunge, 2000). Scientific writing has a long history of employing textual strategies for making claims towards objectivity for research that comply with the conventions of modernist scientific thought (Astley, 1985; Leuenberger & Pinch, 2000). Value-free scientific research assumes the neutrality of the researcher whereas, value-laden research requires reflexivity on the part of the inquirer, to be aware of how their own socio-historical backgrounds influence their interpretations of the first-level constructs they observe when researching (Steffy & Grimes, 1986). Each act of research sees it guided and constrained by the assumptions the researcher holds, which provide a reality that is taken as given (Gioia, 2003; Weick, 2004). The hermeneutical researcher needs to reflect upon three issues; his own status as historically produced, the contexts and historical dimensions of data collected, and, the relationships between theory and history (Steffy & Grimes, 1986).

Steffy and Grimes (1986) describe critical theory as drawing heavily from hermeneutics, whose aim is identified as the understanding of practical phenomena (Hughes & Sharrock, 1990). It has two primary objectives; to incorporate an analysis of ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions implicit and explicit into research acts and, to produce research that leads to change in organizational processes (Steffy & Grimes, 1986). Whilst rejecting modernist notions of generalizability across multiple organizations, Hughes and Sharrock (1990) suggest actionable findings should represent recognisable tendencies accessible to the intended audience. When successful, this results in research texts that describe organizational worlds that readers recognise and plausibly locate themselves within. To pursue these aims the critical theorist researcher consults actors about their interpretations of organizational phenomena and engages in discourse with them concerning the possible falsity of their interpretations (Steffy & Grimes, 1986: 333). Through such discourse, the delusions and illusions characterizing ideologies legitimizing ineffective structures and maintaining distorted organizational communication are revealed (Steffy & Grimes, 1986). Kurzman (2004) proposes that all research explanations involve retroactive predictions that are privileged over the reflections of the research subjects. Researchers themselves, are acknowledged to be laden with beliefs and values obtained through training, peer-group influences and by the goals of the research itself (Steffy & Grimes, 1986). These forces both guide and constrain research (Steffy & Grimes, 1986), but remain largely hidden from the consciousness of unreflective researchers.

### 3.2 Ontology and epistemology

Ontology concerns the nature of phenomena whereas, epistemology concerns concepts of knowledge creation about phenomena (Gioia, 2003; McLennan, 1992). These two philosophical considerations are frequently considered first in any sound method of inquiry (Hughes & Sharrock, 1990). Kilduff and Mehra (1997: 453) argue for a subjectivist epistemology that combines scepticism towards grand narratives with a rigorous inquiry posing challenges to what passes for scientific knowledge in society. To achieve this, an interpretivist epistemology is argued for that embraces tools, techniques, insights, methods and approaches from a variety of traditions, and from across academic boundaries (Kilduff & Mehra, 1997; Kincheloe, 2001; Said, 2003). Research approaches and techniques are frequently developed as implementations of an epistemological outlook (Hughes & Sharrock, 1990). Through the mix and match of various styles and methodologies interpretivist researchers are able to bring surprising new insight into established practice and form. Through such approaches, what can first appear as insignificant, arbitrary and 'lowly' is sometimes reinterpreted as having played an influential role in the development of noteworthy events (Foucault, 1977; Knights, 1992).

Every researcher approaches their topic from an ontological perspective that pertains to being (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000) and provides a guiding idea, framework or worldview (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2000). From this, an epistemological system of knowing that produces questions relevant to knowledge (Gabriel, 2002; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2000) is derived that are methodologically examined in specific ways (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) argue our vocation as humans is ontological as we interpret our world into being. They also suggest we epistemologically investigate our worlds in order to understand our existence and generate the themes that shape it (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). The widely held

view that researchers act within a single epistemology is challenged by Ladson-Billings (2000) who argues all humans operate within multiple epistemological positions that are in constant symbiotic relationships with their worldviews. Rather than privileging a hierarchical association where ontology dictates epistemology, Ladson-Billings (2000) suggests what knowledge is possessed and is deemed potentially pursuable is influenced deeply by the worldview that legitimises this knowledge. Hence, worldviews and knowledge – ontology and epistemology – are self-reinforcing forming an ecology of the mind (Bateson, 1972).

In contrast with an objectivist ontological view that assumes social and natural reality has an independent existence prior to human cognition, a subjectivist ontology assumes realities are outputs of human cognitive processes (Johnson & Duberley, 2003). Subjectivism offers an ontology that treats social phenomena as discursive products, and therefore privileges modes of inquiry that focus on understanding how and why they are constructed in the way they are (Hammersley, 2003). The narratives produced by qualitative researchers are acknowledged to be partial, situated and relative renderings of phenomena, reflecting and embodying a hermeneutical understanding of the subjectivities of both the researched and researcher (Dey, 2002; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000; Taylor, 2001).

There are those (e.g. Czarniawska, 2001; Knights, 2002) who view the two dominant ontological positions of positivism and interpretivism as having little in common, as their fundamental beliefs and assumptions are so incompatible as to represent deep-seated and irresolvable intellectual perspectives. Alternatively, there are some scholars (e.g. Kvale, 1996; Mahoney, 1993; Pozzebon, 2004) who pronounce the subjective-objective, positivism-intepretivism debates as misleading and unnecessary. Van Maanen (1998:

xii) neatly captures this perspective by assuring readers he doesn't see quantitative research as qualitative research's "evil twin".

Nevertheless, significant differences between the two traditions exist and my current view informing this present research has more in common with Czarniawska and Knights, than Kvale, Mahoney and Pozzebon. The following table represents a distillation of some attempts to contrast the ontological and epistemological characteristics of the two modes of feeling, thought and inquiry within the field of organization study:

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Positivism</i>	<i>Interpretivism</i>
Ontology	Truth is established through observation and facts are concrete (Burr, 1995; Easterby-Smith, et al., 2002). Reality can be captured and understood producing conclusive knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Mello, 2002).	Reality can never be fully apprehended only approximated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 2000). Truth is a relationship of power with facts as human creations (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2002). Language-based concepts are relative not absolute (Van Maanen, 1995).
Epistemology	Empiricism (Janesick, 2000). Events are instances of general laws (Ng & de Cock, 2002). Researchers stand back from their own humanity to reveal the objective nature of phenomena (Burr, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Follows the logic of theory (Czarniawska, 2003). Hypotheses are created and experimentally proven or disproved (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2002).	Constructivism (Janesick, 2000). We induct and interpret the storytelling of personal experience (Mello, 2002; Van Maanen, 1998). Objectivity is impossible, we must encounter the world from some perspective or other (Burr, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Follows the logic of practice (Czarniawska, 2003). Researchers pursue how through conversation social phenomena are made meaningful (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2002).

Table 3.1 Positivism and Interpretivism contrasted

This present research is a study undertaken from within a social constructionist ontological perspective which is discussed in the next section.

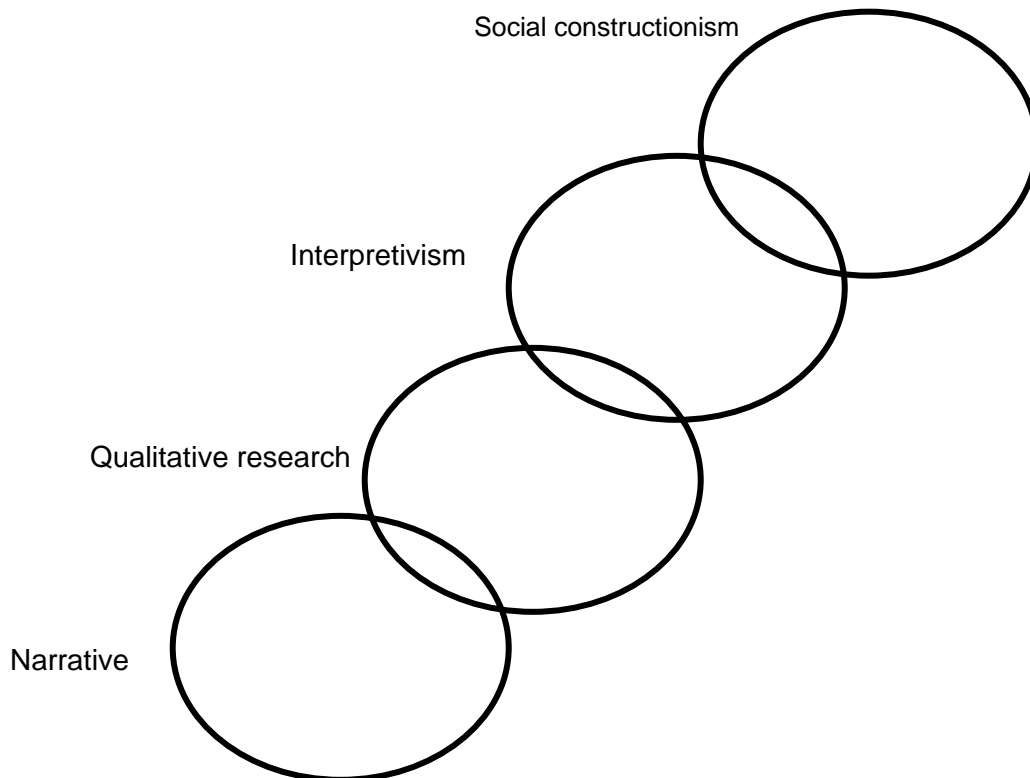
### 3.3 Social constructionism

The constructivist ontology is said to assume a relativist paradigm, a subjectivist or perspectivist epistemology and a naturalistic set of methodological procedures (Burr, 1995; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Greene, 2000; Kincheloe, 2001; Schwandt, 2000). Realities are seen to be ongoingly socially construed and semiotically posited (Isabella, 1990; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000: 293; Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Prasad & Prasad, 2002). Constructivists believe the human mind is active in the construction and interpretation of knowledge and meaning assigned to phenomena (Charmaz, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Dey, 2002; Fairclough, 2005; Gubrium & Holstein, 2000; Hammerlsey, 2003; Heracleous, 2002; Schwandt, 2000; Watson, 1998). Because of this, constructionism dismisses the possibility of a neutral observational language on the part of the researcher or the researched (Johnson, Buehring, Cassell & Symon, 2006). These constructions are influenced by temporal, cultural, moral, political and historical dimensions, and are achieved against a backdrop of shared understandings, language and social practices (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Boje, et al., 2004; Greene, 2000; Schwandt, 2000; Tierney, 2000). Social constructionist researchers hold that organizational members enact their realities into being and acknowledge that different actors construct different meanings in the same social structures (Greene, 2000; Isabella, 1990; Pozzebon, 2004).



Social constructionists and philosophical hermeneutics share a belief that humans are self-interpreting beings constituted through language (Schwandt, 2000). Hammersley (2003) identifies a distinctive characteristic of constructionist research is that phenomena are treated as discursive products that are talked into being by actors (Cunliffe, 2002). The constructivist researcher invites participants to take an active role in the research, but equally recognizes their accounts are themselves constructs; and that quite different stories are obtainable and therefore only a partial, interpreted version of reality is possible (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Hammersley, 2003). Denzin and Lincoln (2000: 23) note the iterative and interpretive nature of this type of study, identifying the creation of a research text as involving multiple cycles of research writing and interpretation, before finally producing an artefact for public consumption.

Figure 3.1: Interdependent relationships of ontology, epistemology and mode of inquiry



The figure above depicts the interdependent relationships between ontology, epistemology and the mode of inquiry used in this current study.

In the next section the conventions attached to qualitative research enacted from within a social constructionist perspective are presented, analysed and their relevance to this present research critically considered.

### 3.4 Qualitative research

Qualitative research began in the early 1900s and largely comprised positivist scientific writings of field experiences by anthropologists. A characteristic of this type of early research was to see research subjects as alien, foreign and strange, and as the derogatory 'other' to the researcher and his or her superior scientific tradition (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Said, 2003). The 'Chicago school' in the 1920s and 1930s established the importance of qualitative inquiry for the study of human group life (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), although Schwandt (2000) states that it came of age during the reformist movement in the early 1970s in the American Academy.

Qualitative management research is frequently defined by what it is not, and is a commonly applied umbrella term for the use of a vast array of non-statistical data collection and analysis techniques and approaches (Johnson, et al., 2006: 132). Alvesson and Deetz (2000) note qualitative research is typically oriented to the inductive study of socially constructed reality, focusing on meanings, ideas and practices (Boudens, 2005). Maitlis (2005) feels qualitative methods are appropriate when studying dynamic processes construed by individual and collective interpretations. Within an

interpretivist paradigm (Prasad & Prasad, 2002), qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the observed world (Silverman, 2000). This represents an emerging consensus that all inquiry reflects the standpoint of the inquirer, that all observation is theory laden, and that there is no possibility of theory-free knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

#### 3.4.1 Doing qualitative research

Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that highlight the nuance and sensitivity of language making everyday life meaningful (Brown, 2004; Gamson, 2000; Taylor, 2001). By inquiring these practices transform the world. They turn it into a series of representations, such as; field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the study of phenomena, and how social reality is negotiated, construed, managed and sustained (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000; Morgan & Smircich, 1980). This means qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of and interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people assign to them. A particular strength of qualitative research is seen as its interest in the often contradictory social interactions routinely enacted in situ (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Silverman, 2000; Skinner, Tagg & Holloway, 2000; Van Maanen, 1998).

Lincoln and Denzin (2000) see qualitative research as interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counterdisciplinary, its basic domain is social practices ordered across time and space (Pozzebon, 2004). Because of this plural nature, its advocates value

multimethod approaches. The qualitative inquirer is not an objective, authoritative, politically neutral observer deducing knowledge from observable data. Qualitative study is seen more appropriately as a negotiated co-creation, produced by both the researcher and the researched during an ongoing moral dialogue (Burr, 1995; Lincoln & Denzin, 2000).

In contrast with quantitative approaches that emphasize measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, qualitative researchers focus on developing a richer understanding of phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This materializes in the development of a research output that represents a valuable rich or thick description, but not a complete description, of social phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000; MacPherson, Brooker & Ainsworth, 2000; Neilsen & Rao, 1987; Stake, 2000; Wilson & Jarzabkowski, 2004). Ladson-Billings (2000: 272) warns that this should not lead to the belief that qualitative work is a more “authentic” form of research. Interpretive practices engage both the *hows* and *whats* of social realities; what things are and how meanings are assigned (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000). This entails the researcher making subjectively induced connections among lived experience, larger social and cultural structures, and the here and now (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Kemmis & Taggart, 2000).

Janesick (2000: 382) lists ten potential questions suited to qualitative inquiry (Appendix C). To pursue these types of questions, Janesick (2000: 384) advises researchers have open minds, but not empty minds, and to see such questions as guides but not constraints, as they should be under constant revision and continually evolve. What insight is construed is intimately bound up with the contexts in which it was learned and experienced (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000). Bateson (1989: 29-30) sees such work as

involving "...a continual reimagining of the future and reinterpretation of the past to give meaning to the present, remembering best those events that prefigured what followed, forgetting those that proved to have no meaning within the narrative."

When responding to the challenge that qualitative research is mere journalism or criticism, exploratory and unscientific (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), Silverman (2000) advises against making claims for research that are too grand and over ambitious. Qualitative work produces narratives that are historically situated and sociologically specified tales (Dey, 2002; Van Maanen, 1998). These texts cannot be judged by the same criteria as quantitative studies, but by claims towards plausibility, credibility and relevance (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Unlike Eisenhardt (1989), who sees the development of theory as a central activity of organizational research, and Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) who advocate qualitative researchers pursuing a version of truth in their studies: Van Maanen (1998: xxiii) is not alone when he states he is happy for qualitative texts to be inspired as much by artistic, aesthetic, and humanistic concerns as by social theory and research design (Richardson, 2000). Janesick (2000) recommends researchers make assertions drawn from data and support these by using direct quotations from notes and interviews (Winn, 2001). The researcher also needs to provide some reasoned interpretive commentary, thematizing the main findings and key ideas on the one hand, and analyzing specific cases and exceptions on the other (Janesick, 2000; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Van Maanen, 1998).

#### 3.4.2 Interpretive paradigms

Denzin and Lincoln (2000: 19-20) identify four major interpretive paradigms that structure qualitative research: positivist and postpositivist, constructivist-interpretive, critical, and feminist-poststructural. This present research is conducted mainly within the constructivist-interpretive paradigm, with elements of the critical paradigm influencing its design and execution. This cross-paradigmatical approach is consistent with the interdisciplinary nature of qualitative research (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000). A constructivist approach privileges interpretive case studies and ethnographic fictions as its chosen form of research narrative (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This research text is a single case study relying on interview, observation and document analysis for its data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Janesick, 2000; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2003). A critical researcher is someone who uses her or his work as a form of social or organizational criticism (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000). The seven assumptions below, inform the critical perspective of this present research and are drawn from Kincheloe and McLaren (2000: 290-291):

- that all thought is mediated by power relations that are socially and historically constituted;
- that facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription;
- that the relationship between concept and object, and between signifier and signified is never stable or fixed and is mediated by social relations and genre norms;
- that language is central to the formation of subjectivity;
- that certain groups are privileged over others and this is generally accepted by all as natural, necessary, or inevitable;

- that mainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicated in the reproduction of organizational life that results in the above points remaining hidden from consciousness.

### 3.5 Research design

Denzin and Lincoln (2000: 20) suggest the researcher develops the research process through five phases: an awareness of self as a multicultural subject; an understanding of theoretical paradigms and perspectives; an appreciation of alternative research strategies; knowledge of methods of collection and analysis; and the art, practices, and policies of interpretation and presentation. Eisenhardt (1989) advocates an approach to defining a research question that mirrors hypothesis-testing, more commonly associated with positivist research. Eisenhardt (1989: 536) sees this focus as essential in case study work that aspires to the building of theory, but advises against researchers thinking too much about specific relationships between variables and theories at the outset of the process as this may bias and limit the findings. This present study conducted within the constructivist-interpretive paradigm, aligns itself more with Van Maanen's (1998) view that the nature of qualitative work and its phenomenological focus on meaning assigned to both routine and non-routine events, necessitates a research design that acts as guidance that is simultaneously open-ended and rigorous (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Hammersley, 2003; Kvale, 1996; Schipper, 1999; Schwandt, 2000), does justice to the complexity of the social phenomena under study (Janesick, 2000), and is periodically re-designed as it is being done.

### 3.5.1 Research design – five questions

The research design provides a conceptual framework for the study, ensuring the conventions of qualitative inquiry are maintained and their application tested, so that by using them I learnt more about them, myself and the research process. Denzin and Lincoln's (2000: 368) five basic questions for structuring research design acted as prompts:

- a) How will the design connect to the paradigm or perspective being used?

The constructivist-interpretive paradigm, informed by the sensitivities of the critical paradigm, form the main philosophical perspective through which this research is undertaken. A paradigm is seen to comprise four concepts that go some way to encompassing the cognitive and humanistic attributes of an individual, these are the person's beliefs and outlook in terms of; ethics, ontology, epistemology and methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Situational ethics; a social constructivist ontology; inductive epistemology privileging a multi-methods approach have been utilised for this current study.

- b) How will these materials allow the researcher to speak to the problems of praxis and change?

The study is undertaken in congruence the recent strategy-as-practice or strategizing movement. This emerging intellectual tradition calls for research into the labour of strategy; how, what and why strategies are constructed, and focuses on the actors involved and their own meaning-making processes. This pragmatic focus links theory and praxis and is concerned with how individuals conduct their lives and affairs as members of a wider society (Fox-Wolfgramm, 1997; Greene, 2000; Greenwood & Levin, 2000). Balogun, et al. (2003: 203-204)



note strategizing often takes place within 'communities of practice' whose activity and knowledge is better seen as a property of the group and its interactions, rather than as an individual phenomena. Therefore, this research considers EEDA's Policy Unit as a 'community of practice'. This study is longitudinal in that the actions and events involved in producing a strategy were tracked and examined as they occurred. Changes and modifications to plans made by the organization were integrated into the overall focus of the research.

c) Who or what will be studied?

The organization that is the focus of this single case study is a Regional Development Agency (RDA) within the United Kingdom. This organization was chosen because it was in the process of using the scenario planning technique in the active creation of a Regional Economic Strategy (RES). RDAs are facilitating organizations that require the cooperation of partner organizations and stakeholders if they are to achieve their objectives. Chia (2004) compliments practice-based based studies that see researchers immerse themselves into the precarious and fluid goings-on of organizational strategizing and sensemaking. Access to individuals from stakeholder organizations who were not directly employed by the RDA, but who added diversity and breadth to the range of views, was secured. All key actors within the RDA were interviewed for the study, with staff from the Policy Unit (the team charged with leading the scenario planning process and writing up the final RES document) interviewed at three stages throughout the life of the project.

d) What strategies of inquiry will be used?

The mode of inquiry adopted is that of narratology. This privileges discourse, in all its forms, as the most effective means of investigating how social realities are construed and made meaningful. It gives access to an ample metaphorical 'bag

of tricks', rather than formal method or paradigm (Czarniawska, 2004: 136). Maines (1993: 21-22) notes that inquiry acts necessitate the researcher entering respondents' lives, which are still forming as unfolding stories. As lives are being lived as the research progresses, subjects will likely tell different stories about the same thing at different times and to different people (Maines, 1993). This sees the research conversations as negotiated accounts embedded in subjectively experienced moments of time and context (Cunliffe, et al., 2004).

- e) What methods or research tools will be used for collecting and analyzing empirical materials?

Alvesson & Deetz (2000) view method broadly, as a framework for engaging with empirical material and see it not a matter of 'data management', but as a reflective activity where empirical material calls for careful interpretation. Three main methods were used; document analysis, interview and observation. Key documents pertaining to the study were provided by the RDA, additional documents were obtained from its website *East of England Observatory*, and relevant stakeholders. Forty-four individual and one group interview took place, these typically lasted for 60 minutes and were audio recorded and transcribed. Observation of two 'Accountability' meetings was done, alongside a review meeting held between the Policy Unit team and consultants from the Henley Centre. In addition to these, many informal conversations and observations were conducted during the life-time of the study. These data are analysed with the aim of producing a coherent, plausible and interesting scholarly text.

### 3.6 Interpretivism

It is through interpreting the beliefs and behaviours of participants that research is made qualitative (Janesick, 2000). The design of the research and the processes of carrying it out are themselves interpretive acts that produce partial descriptions of reality, and require the researcher to understand both interpretation and interpreted phenomena (Isabella, 1990; Janesick, 2000; Taylor, 2001). Prasad and Prasad (2002) feel interpretive organizational scholarship is emerging from under the shadow of mainstream positivist research and characterize this present time as the “coming of age” of interpretivism in organizational research. This present study’s dual focus on individual meaning-making within the RDA’s Policy Unit, within the macro structures that comprise EEDA’s stakeholder relationships, represent an example of this “coming of age” in practice (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Boudens, 2005; Prasad & Prasad, 2002). Isabella (1990: 9-10) identifies four assumptions of interpretive inquiry assumed to be present within this research:

- Organizational members actively create the realities they inhabit.
- Individuals share frames of reference existing within a wider collectivity.
- The views of managers as a collective are salient because managers appear to be at the heart of cognitive shifts.
- Interpretations are made after phenomena have been experienced.

The above assumptions underpinned the research planning and data collection phases, and were cognitively present during the interviews, when participants were asked to reflect upon the workshops they had attended as a participant and consider how these compared to similar events they had previously experienced (Isabella, 1990). For Alvesson and Deetz (2000: 141), successful interpretation: (a) addresses something

non-obvious, (b) makes sense of something, and (c) is perceived as enriching understanding of the subject.

Prasad and Prasad (2002), and Prasad (2002) argue that the traditional separation of interpretivism from critique is no longer sustainable. Such a separation constitutes a lack of ambition on the part of interpretivist researchers, who need to ensure their work holds relevance for practitioners as well as academics. This is achieved by researchers providing a critique integrated into their interpretations of the ideological aspects of socially constructed realities (Prasad, 2002). This present research has been conducted within two of the interpretivist paradigms identified by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) above; constructivist-interpretive and critical, following Prasad and Prasad (2002), and Prasad (2002) it might be more appropriate to describe the paradigm I operated from as constructivist-interpretivist-critical.

### 3.7 Case study

A case study represents a mode of inquiry comprising; skills, assumptions, enactments and material practices, that are applied to move research from a paradigm, through design to the construction and collection of data, and finally production of a research text (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Stake, 2000). The study of a single case indicates an interest in its uniqueness, and what makes it both alike and unlike similar examples (MacPherson, et al., 2000). Case study research can be categorised into; intrinsic, instrumental and collective (Stake, 2000). This present research is an *instrumental* case study, as my primary motive is to develop and provide insight strategizing through the practice of scenario planning. My interest in the host organization (EEDA) as a case in

itself is negligible and is only relevant in relation to the themes above, therefore it is not intrinsic, and as only one case is studied it is not a collective inquiry either (Stake, 2000). My agreement with EEDA runs to me presenting them with a report based on my research that is separate to this script and will be produced after completion of this project (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000).

Johnson, et al. (2003) hold case study research as being a necessary feature of strategizing scholarship for the close observation of managerial work they provide (Rouleau, 2005). Eisenhardt (1989) advocates theory-building through case study and states that this is not likely to be achieved through studying less than four cases, as the empirical grounding is problematic (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). Munir (2005) concurs with this and suggests through such approaches novel theories can then be tested through hypotheses and measurement. Mintzberg and Lampel (1999: 29) call for fewer hypotheses but better questions that allow researchers to be pulled by the real-life concerns of practice, rather than the reified concepts of theory. This present instrumental case study makes no claims towards empirical theory-building and reliability in the traditional sense of replication (Janesick, 2000). Rather, the claims I make for this case is that it represents an authentic, plausible and critical partial account of the topic studied (Mueller & Carter, 2005) from which theoretical generalizations may be drawn by the reader (Watson, 2003).

Single instrumental case studies contribute to knowledge through their descriptions and analysis of everyday actions in specific locations and represent an epistemology of the particular (Lowe & Jones, 2004; Stake, 2000; Van Maanen, 1998). Responsibility for comparing and considering how individual cases both resemble and differ from each other, and what may be drawn from them that constitutes new knowledge, is assigned to

the reader (Czarniawska, 2003). Case study researchers assist readers in their construction of knowledge by placing their best intellect into the thick of what is going on and producing their reflective accounts (Lowe & Jones, 2004; Stake, 2000).

This present research utilises the accepted case study data collection methodologies of interview, observation, and document analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), and supplemented these with three 'community of practice' meetings, which I participated in. These methods were employed to construct and develop the case material, not as ends in themselves (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Van Maanen (1998) notes that case study researchers rely on secondary data sources for their documents and spend brief forays in the field location, rather than the extensive periods more commonly associated with ethnography. Balogun, et al. (2003) still feel case study inquiry is expensive in terms of researcher time and call for more involvement of practitioners in strategizing research. Weick (2004: 654) reflects that his own research involves him practicing virtual ethnography while seated in his armchair, which he characterizes as moves of imagination working within soft constraints. My own attempts at 'virtual ethnography' took place predominantly while engaged in the long drive to and from the research site and interview locations. Notwithstanding my acts of virtual ethnography, the primary data collection tool used was interviews, as is the case in an estimated 90% of all social science investigations (Rapley, 2001; Roulston, deMarris & Lewis, 2003).

### 3.8 Interviews

Roulston et al. (2003) note moving through the research phases to data collection can produce a state of anxiety, excitement and anticipation for researchers. For no matter

how much planning and thought has been given to the interview process the conversations that are produced cannot be prefigured. Alvesson (2003) sees qualitative interviews as examples of loosely structured modes of knowledge production. In deciding who to interview, Janesick (2000) advises against basing this on a pre-determined number of interviews and suggests the aims of the study should dictate who to interview. In this research, the Head of the Policy Unit (PU1), was asked to draw up a list of likely participants to be interviewed, who had played an important role in the scenario planning and RES process, and who could provide both a broad and deep perspective of the issues involved. Informal access was also pursued which resulted in additional interviews being arranged (e.g. interview thirty-four and forty-three) complementing the list provided by PU1 (Llewellyn & Tappin, 2003; Mueller & Carter, 2005). PU1 and his team at the Policy Unit are regarded as key informants for this study and were interviewed at three different stages throughout the project (Maitlis, 2005). Following the first interviews, which took place on different days, the second round of interviews with the Policy Unity team were held on 26<sup>th</sup> August 2004 and the third on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2005. The interviewees are not claimed to be representative of those who participated in the project and do not provide a statistically valid sample, but hopefully, an interesting one (Bateson, 1989).

Alvesson (2003: 28) notes that a high number of interview reports does not necessarily guarantee high validity, and may indicate that these people have undergone a similar impression management tactics, or are engaged in the same discourse. I have interviewed those individuals from different communities of interpretation (Cunliffe, Luhman & Boje, 2004; Jarzabkowski, 2004), who could provide an interesting view and reflection on EEDA's RES construction process. These were:

- Twenty-seven EEDA staff interviews 248,356 words

- Two EERA staff interviews 16,742 words
- Two Henley Centre interviews 27,057 words
- Three DTI staff interviews (one double interview) 34,125 words
- Eleven stakeholder interviews 102,593 words

Total interview words 429,356

The interviews varied in length, but as an average lasted approximately one hour. The number of words spoken during the encounters are shown above and average out at 9,541 per interview.

### 3.8.1 The case interviews

All participants were contacted by email by PU1 (Appendix E); who explained the research, introduced me to them and requested their participation. I then followed up this communiqué by emailing a request for an interview at a mutually convenient time and location, in this communication I also reiterated the broad aim of the research and my own role as a PhD. student at Nottingham University Business School (Taylor, 2001). Axiological considerations meant acknowledging the asymmetrical power relations (Pozzebon, 2004; Taylor, 2001) present in the interview setting and centered around obtaining informed consent prior to the interview, recognising the participant's right to privacy in the writing-up of the research (interviewees are referred to as numbers or, where pertinent to the study, their job role), and protection from harm during and after the encounter, as appropriate under the banner of "situational ethics" (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Upon arriving at the interview site and being introduced to the interviewee, I explained the conventions of the exploratory interview I would be conducting; as open



with little formal structure allowing respondents to talk in their own words, where I would introduce a topic for discussion and reflection, which may necessarily take the conversation into new avenues (Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2000; Jarzabkowski, 2003; Kvale, 1996; Langley, 1988; Llewellyn & Tappin, 2003; Silverman, 2000).

The interviews conducted for this research were not neutral data collection events, but socially situated co-constructed conversations between two or more people leading to a negotiated, context-rich, power-laden interview text (Alvesson, 2003; Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Czarniawska, 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Kvale, 1996; Rapley, 2001; Roulston, deMarris & Lewis, 2003). This approach favours analysis of talk as structured in and through social interaction at the time of the encounter, reducing in importance individual interviewees assumed motivations and external determinants (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000). Kvale (1996) reconceptualizes the term *interview* to an *inter view* or *InterView* to represent it as an interactional social encounter, and emphasize the collaborative relationship existing between interviewer and interviewee (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Rapley, 2001). Cottle (2002) perceives such social interactions as sites where narratives of Self encounter narratives of the Other. The interview act does not allow access to immutable stories held in the minds of participants, but draws out and creates narratives through the active participation of both interviewer and interviewee (Alvesson, 2003; Rapley, 2001). Thus the data that is produced is not a 'true' picture of 'reality,' but a necessarily ambiguous, temporally bound and culturally marked artefact that, although locally construed, is situated within wider cultural and social arenas (Alvesson, 2003; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Rapley, 2001; Silverman, 2000). Interviewees are thinking entities who are continually making sense through social interaction of their contexts (Johnson, et al., 2006), the interview setting merely provides one more opportunity for this. Czarniawska (2004)

warns simply that interviews do not stand for anything else; they represent nothing else but themselves and are records of interactions between researcher and subjects.

Prior to undertaking the first interview for this study I gave a copy of the proposed themes (some of which were worded as questions) to my supervisor for comment. His response was simply that “you don’t know how good your questions are until you ask them”. The sheet of paper with these themes on was taken along to every interview to act as a prompt, but was referred to less and less as I became more familiar with the process, and comfortable with the exchanges. Fontana and Frey (2002) say the qualitative researcher needs to establish rapport with the interviewee to enable an intellectual connection to be made, so that reflections move beyond the merely superficial to represent the deeper feelings of the participant. One interview at the Department of Trade and Industry was conducted with two interviewees at their request because of time pressures. This was recorded and transcribed in the same way as the one-to-one interviews.

### 3.8.2 Interviewing tales

Rouston, et al., (2003) describe the disquieting experiences of novice interviewers when confronted by unanticipated events. This happened during my interviews: when a participant ate an apple during the interview (interviewee one); an interview was interrupted by someone telling the interviewee her car had run into the back of another in the car park (interview four); a low-flying aircraft made the interview room shake as if in an earthquake (interview eight); an interview held in a “Starbucks” in Cambridge had to be relocated to the basement because of external noise (interview thirty-five); an

interview at DTI headquarters in London was interrupted by a security incident (interview thirty-two); and, a woman entered the room I had been assigned for my interviews during what I thought was a gap in my interview schedule, the interview began and only after approximately fifteen minutes did she and I realise that she was in the wrong room and should be next door (interview fifteen); I kept this interview within the data set as I consider it legitimate for the study.

During the interviews I held in mind the rubric that the proportion of talk of interviewee to interviewer should be in the favour of the participants as much as possible. Roulston, et al. (2003: 651) suggest this ratio should be in the region of 80% / 20%. In their discussion of the experiences of novice interviewers, Roulston, et al. (2003) detail a number of situations encountered during my interviewing experiences. One instance occurred when an interviewee (interview forty-four) became emotional when reflecting upon how the friends he had grown up with could no longer afford to live in the town where he was now Head of Economic Development. One interviewee questioned me during an interview, and I began to invite questions at the end of each interview. I found managing the self-talk going on in my head during the interview problematic in the initial interviews, and had to balance taking notes, keeping an eye on the audio recorder and thinking about the next question, with listening to what the interviewee was saying (Roulston, et al., 2003). Inevitably, this balance was not equal, my focus was on the conversation we were having as I felt this was the most valuable element of the encounter for my study. Johnson and Duberley (2003: 1284) offer the useful suggestion of avoiding 'overrapport' with participants, by maintaining a social and intellectual distance, and analytical space. My style of listening was to attempt to convey an impression of thoughtful integration leavened with warmth and flashes of mischief (Bateson, 1989).

Alvesson and Deetz (2000) consider the relationship between interviewer and interviewee and note that both may want to give a good impression, and just make the situation work. Following the interview conclusion I was frequently asked "...was that alright for you?..." (e.g. interviewee forty-three), indicating a concern from the interviewee as to whether their contribution had been useful to me. It is important to remember the interviewee is also an active sensemaker who makes sense of the interviewer and the interview situation through the pre-interview information and understanding he/she constructs (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). Organizational actors are also political actors who live in a world of scarce resources and competition for promotion, status and budgets, and therefore, are less inclined to tell stories that may hurt their own interests (Alvesson, 2003; Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). I realise I may have been naïve in assuming each interviewee was supplying me with reliable data about the RES and its process, but hope that by interviewing broadly I have not relied on one individual's, or one group's interpretation solely. Alvesson (2003) advises replacing this assumption with one of scepticism but not rejection (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2004).

The interview process as a learning experience for the researcher is not restricted to the phenomena focused upon (Kvale, 1996), but included in this instance, a deeper awareness and understanding of constructivist-interpretivist-critical research. Reflecting upon this research inquiry, I found the asymmetrical power relations in the interview surprisingly stark at times. I realised that I was enacting multiple identities during my conversations; "researcher", "male", "Yorkshireman"; so were my interviewees; "woman", "leader", "director", "civil servant", "representative of central government in the regions" (Interviewee forty-three). In my field notes produced during the interviews I attempted to record overt non-verbal communication (Fontana & Frey, 2000) as an indicator of the

emotional state of the participant. During the interview with the Chairman of EEDA (interview twenty-seven) I noted two instances of defensive posturing (arm-folding and leaning backwards), when issues were raised that challenged his view of the perception of the RES document among its stakeholders. Another revealing incident occurred when interviewee forty-two associated himself with me as on an equal intellectual level and that others were somehow below this and didn't understand things as "we" did (Taylor, 2001). Behar (2003: 25) expresses this coming into power in apt terms, as "...neither easy nor pretty".

My questioning of interviewees involved demonstrating my interest in them as individuals through the use of such phrases as "what do you think?" (Rapley, 2001). Expressions used by the participants were re-phrased back to them when clarification was required, or when I wanted to return to a particular issue raised earlier in the conversation. I occasionally referred to other interviews and the discussions held in my questioning (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). Interviewee forty-one was told his response to a question about RES ownership was rare, this surprised him and later in the interview he admitted that knowing that his view was not one that was shared by his colleagues was quite challenging for him. I used 'drilling' as a means of working towards an interviewee's in-depth thoughts and reflections to reveal second-order complexity – when the interviewee thinks about the complexity of their thoughts (Styhre, 2005; Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001) – often referring to the experiences of other organizations, drawn from published literature or my own experience, to challenge their assumptions and normalize my own views of certain issues. For example, during interview thirty-two/thirty-three at the DTI, I brought into the conversation the experience of Novotel UK who had undertaken a strategy workshop at Templeton College, Oxford, but had produced no strategy document, for them the value of the workshop was in the deliberations and discussions that had taken

place during the event, which they felt would have been hindered had they been charged with producing a document from those discussions. In general, topic-initiating questions were asked to open up issues for discussion, with follow-up questions used to draw out more detailed and comprehensive talk on these specific topics (Rapley, 2001).

The quotation presented at the beginning of this chapter, from Anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson, led to me realise that the primary purpose of the interviews I conducted was to draw out the participants' stories to help me to think. Whilst this may seem obvious, it doesn't appear to be a subject that is discussed substantively in the literature. My use of interviews as a data collection tool was entirely selfish; as my sole concern was with the material I would get from the encounters and how useful it would prove for my study. My motive for trying to establish a rapport and create a relaxed environment, where the interviewee felt able to talk about their experiences freely and in detail, was to provide rich data for me. After each interview I sent the interviewee a brief email thanking them for sparing the time to see me and assuring them that I found the conversation useful for my work, but after that, my concern for them and with them, other than in a general human sense, ended.

### 3.8.3 Transcription

Each audio tape was listened to within 24 hours of the encounter (Gioia & Thomas, 1996) and I recorded my thoughts in an electronic diary. This supplemented the written field notes made during the interview. Rouleau (2005: 1425) views transcribing as an act of authoring, because the translator selects the relevant elements of the situation and brings these disparate elements together. The transcripts provide an artefact

representing the interview as a finely co-ordinated interactional work of both speakers (Rapley, 2001). Through the act of transcription such artefacts become negotiated texts (Silverman, 2000) and only a partial account of each encounter. Hammersley (2003) notes the recordings themselves are selective, as much went on before they started and much after in the wider realm of happenings. I concur with Tilley's (2003) point that most researchers consider transcription a mundane and time-consuming chore, and it is partly for this reason that I took the decision to have my audio tapes transcribed by a second party.

#### 3.8.4 Second party transcription

While undoubtedly mundane and time-consuming, I nevertheless consider transcription to be a crucial element of generating data by interview and decided to draw on the skills of a colleague who had experience of transcribing qualitative interview recordings, and was fully appraised of the need to provide a thorough account of an oral record (Roulston, et al., 2003). The layout of the transcriptions was jointly agreed between the transcriber and I (Hammersley, 2003). Whilst handing transcription over to a second party I was aware that I may miss out on certain understandings that may have been developed through this act. However, the transcriber was a colleague at my place of work and regular contact was maintained throughout the process, and provided ample opportunity to discuss decisions (Tilley, 2003). Upon receipt of the transcriptions I listened to the tapes again, reviewed the transcriptions and added any contextual comments that may be informative, or clarified points highlighted by the transcriber as unclear. It quickly became apparent, when looking at naturalised talk on the page that we do not talk in neat sentences and paragraphs. I discussed this with the transcriber

and we agreed that unless there appeared clear pauses to indicate sentence end, and definite changes of subject indicating a paragraph end, we would transcribe without putting sentence breaks or paragraph ends in. This has produced interview transcriptions that appear visually more like 'streams of consciousness', but that hopefully, render the conversations that took place more faithfully, than would sanitised texts that present interviewees' talk in neat sentences and paragraphs.

After twenty-five of the forty-five tapes had been transcribed in this manner, the person doing the transcriptions suddenly left employment with the University Wolverhampton Business School and broke off all contact with her former colleagues, including myself. When I eventually got my un-transcribed tapes back I set about finding new people who were willing to undertake the transcriptions. I contacted several people recommended to me, but unfortunately they were unable to help, so I sent a universal email to all staff at the University of Wolverhampton asking for details of anyone who would be prepared to undertake interview transcription. From the replies I received, I contacted several people to discuss my requirements with them and to find out what previous experience they had. Based upon these conversations, I selected five people and sent four audio tapes to each.

Upon receiving an emailed copy of the transcription, I went through the text to make any obvious corrections or alterations. When I received the audio tape I played this back, while at the same time, going through the transcription again and made any further alterations I felt were necessary. Through this process each transcription was reviewed on four occasions; once within 24 hours of the interview, twice when I received an electronic copy, a third time when I played the audio tape, before I ultimately set out to analyse the transcribed text which was the fourth reading. One of my transcribers



returned a text where, in it, she had put “G\*d” (interview five), for the word “God”, this appeared later on in the text and was transcribed in the same way. I contacted her to discuss why she had done this, she told me she was a committed Christian and did not like blasphemy. The way the word had been used was in what I would consider quite a mild manner “...‘God, that is just, that is just ridiculous’...” (interview five), but for her, this was not the case. Interestingly, she said she would not have a problem transcribing profanity, because she felt that was just the way people spoke. This raises an intriguing issue about how the beliefs and values of the second party transcriber impact upon the transcription or, have to be taken into account when considering whether the content of the interview may offend their sensitivities.

By listening and reviewing each tape before and several times after transcription, I feel that, whilst acknowledging transcription represents an interpretive act that results in a constructed re-presentation of the interview event (Tilley, 2003), the impact of my not transcribing on the subsequent analysis is not to the study's detriment. On the contrary, it allowed the material to retain a certain freshness that may have been lost had I transcribed the audio tapes myself. I did not send the completed transcripts to the interviewee, as I did not consider it their role to ‘check’ the transcriptions. Czarniawska (2004: 70) claims a ‘checked’ and corrected transcript would have little to do with the original speech, because the two are different forms of discourse and my decision is to use the transcripts co-produced by my transcribers and myself.

### 3.8.5 Transcription analysis

Kvale (1996) views hermeneutics as of special relevance when analysing the interview text; first, in its production and then during acts of interpretation which he characterises as having a dialogue with the text. Hammersley (2003) notes our option to slow down, stop and replay the recording affirms our role as spectators during analysis. This form of analysis necessarily assumes meanings are stable enough to allow transportation beyond the local context of the interview situation (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000). The importance of the interview setting to the analysis adds a contextual dimension frequently missing from many studies (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000). Rapley (2001: 306) advises that, *at the very least* [emphasis in original] the interviewer's talk prior to the words reproduced in the research script should *always* [emphasis in original] be included. In this way, readers have some understanding of how the talk has been co-constructed. Although I had intended to follow this advice, I found, in practice, this to be unrealistic. Due to the interviews being conducted and transcribed as naturalized talk (Silverman, 2001), frequently our discussion wandered around topics so there was not, necessarily, a direct relationship between the questions I asked and the responses elicited. Where appropriate, I have included my questions, or more commonly, I have included my own largely affirming verbal utterances.

### 3.9 'Community of practice'

Balogun, et al. (2003) introduce the term 'communities of practice'; representing a group of people who normally work together, as being a potential fruitful source of data for the study of strategizing. These groups differ from traditional focus groups or discussion groups (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Madriz, 2000), in that they comprise individuals whose daily strategizing activities mean they are in close contact with each-other, frequently

within group situations. At the beginning of the research I was invited to attend a 'Review' meeting involving the Policy Unit team and the two consultants from the Henley Centre. This meeting did not have a formal agenda and involved the Policy Unit team meeting half an hour before the meeting's scheduled start to clarify what they wanted to talk to the Henley Centre representatives about. This gave me the opportunity to observe two communities of practice meeting together to discuss mutually relevant issues.

At two stages during the research (26.08.04 & 21.04.05), I requested a meeting with the Policy Unit team, principally to clarify my understanding of the chronological steps in the scenario planning and RES process, and to draw out any other salient points. During these sessions I acted in a moderator/facilitator role (Balogun, et al., 2003), standing while the group remained seated, and sketching out on flipchart paper the RES process steps (Appendix A) which acted as prompts for the discussion. This allowed and enabled the group participants to explore what they considered to be important and relevant against each chronological step. The group situation encouraged the individuals to spark off each other during this situation as they would during their normal group-based strategizing, rather than respond directly to my questions as they did during the one-to-one interviews (Balogun, et al, 2003). The first of these sessions was recorded on audio-tape, but not transcribed, for the second meeting I neglected to press the record button, so had to rely on my written notes for recall.

### 3.10 Fieldnotes

Fieldnotes represent an ongoing description of whatever researchers deem most interesting, noteworthy or telling about their encounters in the field (Wolfinger, 2002). What makes an observation salient is highly subjective and depends upon what aspects of the contextual characteristics of the research encounters are felt to be instructive to record (Wolfinger, 2002). Fontana and Frey (2000) advise researchers to take notes regularly and promptly so they become a contemporaneous record; to be as inconspicuous as possible if note-taking during research encounters; and, to analyze fieldnotes frequently. A “comprehensive note-taking strategy” sees the researcher attempting to document everything that happened during a particular period of time spent in the field (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Wolfinger, 2002: 90). A claim to have documented ‘everything’ is an ambitious one to make. For this present research I made longhand notes during the interviews and observation sessions in a several forty sheets A5 size notebooks, to avoid being too obvious. This method owes more to a salience hierarchy strategy and represents an ongoing stream-of-consciousness about what was happening in the research (Eisenhardt, 1989; Wolfinger, 2002). These field notes provided the sole data collection instrument when observing meetings and for one ‘community of practice’ meeting that I participated in, and supplemented the audio recordings made during the interviews.

### 3.11 Document analysis - hermeneutics

The word hermeneutic is said to imply that there is a text *through* which somebody has been trying to express a meaning and *from* which somebody is trying to extract a meaning (Bruner, 1991: 7 *italics in original*). Bruner (1991: 7 *italics in original*) further advances that such an understanding implies that there is a difference between what is

*expressed* in the text and what the text might *mean*. Kvale (1996) tends to restrict the role of hermeneutics within qualitative research to the study of the interpretation of interview scripts. This limited reading draws from hermeneutics' historical roots in the study of biblical and other religious texts; where the goal of understanding was to reproduce and re-experience the author's creative process and original intent (Cunliffe, et al., 2004; Prasad, 2002). This identifies the purpose of textual interpretation as to understand the original intended meaning of the script's author. Broader perspectives of hermeneutics see its relevance to all organizational artefacts and activities that become the subjects of interpretive inquiry (Prasad, 2002). Philosophical hermeneutics argues for understanding as an essential condition of being (Schwandt, 2000), and directs researchers to think through the conditions through which interpretation and understanding take place (Czarniawska, 2004; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). This sees meaning as negotiated between the interpreter and the text, where the interpreter puts questions to the text, and the text, in turn, puts questions to the interpreter (Prasad, 2002; Schwandt, 2000).

Two hermeneutical traditions are relevant for the analysis of documents in this present research; critical hermeneutics and the hermeneutical circle. Kincheloe & McLaren (2000) state critical hermeneutics holds that in qualitative inquiry there is only interpretation, therefore how these interpretations are negotiated, allowing individuals to make sense of their realities, is a focus of study. Critical hermeneutics considers phenomena in social contexts and is comfortable with the assumption that the meaning of human experience can never be fully disclosed to the researcher, nor to the human who experienced it (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000), therefore there is no original meaning to uncover. The hermeneutical circle is a process of analysis in which interpreters ponder the historical and social dynamics that shape textual interpretations (Kincheloe &

McLaren, 2000). The cyclical nature of this interpretive act is said to begin with an often vague and intuitive understanding of the text as a whole, followed by an interpretation of the separate parts, and then a re-ordering of these parts within a totality, and so on (Kvale, 1996). Both of these approaches inform this research; the social and historical contexts surrounding the RES process were sought. This included direct questioning about the interviewee's experience of the previous RES and in some cases, seeking the interviewee's view on how he/she felt the experience of others involved in previous iterations had influenced their views of this process. Document and interview transcription analysis comprised major components of a totality.

### 3.12 Bricoleur and the bricolage

Claude Lévi-Strauss was the first to bring the notion of *bricoleur* to the consciousness of the scholarly community. He described this French term as being an appropriate description for someone who;

...is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but, unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project. His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with "whatever is at hand", that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous, because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or destructions.

(Lévi-Strauss, 1966: 17)

The *bricolage* is the product of the bricoleur's activities. In the context of this present research, the bricolage is the research script that has been constructed through my own bricoleur-like thoughts and actions. There appears to be an emerging consensus that the multi-paradigmatic, cross-discipline and multi-methods approaches of interpretivist study locate the organizational researcher as critical bricoleur rather than rational

scientist (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Gabriel, 2002; Kincheloe, 2001; Lincoln & Denzin, 2000; Van Maanen, 1995). This view is sustained through the researcher conducting his/her inquiry through a variety of techniques; some of which have a long and established position in academic study, while others are invented, combined and reinvented as the research progresses (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln & Denzin, 2000). Balogun, et al. (2003: 220) note that to produce their scholarly work, researchers, at various times, need to be project managers, skilled negotiators, trainers, co-workers and collaborators as well as writers, methodologists, analysts and theorists. Gabriel (2002: 140) criticizes the limited use of bricolage in organization theory that tends to restrict its application to describing modes of *use* rather than *thought* [emphasis in original]. This restricts its potential application to methodological tools, whereas a deeper claim can be made for the concept to provide insight into acts of cognition. Bateson (1989) – without using the term – describes life as an act of bricolage, when she refers to it as being both composed and as an improvisatory art that involves an underlying structure and evolving aesthetic.

Kincheloe (2001) offers a thorough analysis and discussion of the potential role of bricolage within qualitative research. His (2001) argument is based upon the assumption that the issue is not whether researchers should adopt the idea of bricolage and the position of bricoleurs, but that this is already happening and reflexively aware (Cunliffe, 2002; 2003) researchers should realise this. Bricolage is produced whenever concepts from more than one discipline are combined to produce something new. Bricoleurs seek the different and unusual to spark researcher creativity (Kincheloe, 2001). By drawing from disparate research perspectives and incorporating the views of a broad range of research participants complexity is both acknowledged and created. To make sense of this and construct a research narrative, bricoleurs employ any method

necessary to tell a many-sided 'story' that differs from the unity, consistency and smoothness of the 'old story' (Kincheloe, 2001; Lincoln & Denzin, 2000).

### 3.13 Reflexivity

Research is a reflexive process (Hassard & Lee, 1999), wherein Knights (1992) criticizes qualitative researchers for not being reflexive enough, but fails to elaborate on what or how this is to be developed. Weick (2004: 654) ponders how the work of others influences and affects his own work, "My dependence on the work of others *is* [italics in original] complex, irregular, intricate, and filled with 'hidden transformations'." These 'hidden transformations', resulting from the socio-historic background of the researcher as well as from the work of others, are what the reflective researcher seeks to uncover, but as Weick says "Hidden means hidden" (2004: 657). Constructivist researchers acknowledge their own role in the creation of data (Tierney, 2000) and accept that their assumptions about their modes of engagement in the field will always deny the assumptions of alternative modes (Johnson, et al., 2006). As interpretation and critique in contemporary interpretive organizational study coalesce, self-reflexivity takes on a heightened importance on the part of scholars (Hassard & Lee, 1999; Johnson & Duberley, 2003; Prasad & Prasad, 2002).

Reflexivity is described as: the process of reflecting upon the self as an instrument of research and on the impact of the researcher's behaviour on the social setting under investigation (Johnson & Duberley, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Taylor (2001) adds that reflection also involves pondering how the research setting acts upon the researcher, and sees the relationship as cyclical and reinforcing. From their critical



management perspective, Alvesson and Deetz (2000: 112-113) see reflexivity as involving the "...self-critical consideration of one's own assumptions and consistent consideration of alternative interpretive lines and the use of different research vocabularies...". Lincoln and Guba (2000: 183) describe reflexivity as the conscious experiencing of the researcher-self as created in the field, through his/her roles as inquirer and respondent, teacher and learner. Bruner (1990: 109) sees reflexivity as demonstrating our capacity to turn around on the past and alter the present in its light, or to alter the past in light of the present. Drawing from her feminist research, Speer (2002: 785) characterises the researcher as a "...potentially contaminating force whose interventions can affect – not only the respondent – but also the quality and validity of the data obtained and the conclusions that can be drawn about it". Whereas, Taylor (2001) suggests acknowledging interviewer contribution by advocating that where data collection involves interviews, the researcher's identity to the research is worthy of consideration. Styhre (2005: 55) takes what he sees as a pragmatic approach and notes that in real life settings, and during the turmoil of research, there are no pockets of time in which one can be reflexive; instead, reflexivity is undertaken en route, during the course of activity.

### 3.13.1 Methodological reflexivity and epistemological reflexivity

Johnson and Duberley (2003) identify methodological reflexivity as limited reflection on the technical aspects of the research methodology employed; whereas epistemic reflexivity takes reflection deeper, and causes researchers to consider their own ontological social location and how this affects research acts. Epistemic reflexivity reframes the researcher's self knowledge, but does not lead to a better or more accurate

account (Johnson & Duberley, 2003), but brings to consciousness some of the complex political and/or ideological agendas hidden in our writing (Alvesson, 2003; Richardson, 2000). Cunliffe (2002) calls for constructivist researchers to question the ways through which they reflect upon their research experiences. For her, reflexivity means questioning and complexifying our thinking, or experience, by exposing contradictions, doubts, dilemmas and possibilities, and through this representation the researcher becomes 'unsettled' (2002: 38 & 2003: 985) and the act of representing unsettling.

### 3.13.2 Radical reflexivity

Cunliffe's (2002 & 2003) notion of 'radical reflexivity' represents a call for a more robust reflexive practice, and is closely aligned with social constructionist and interpretive bricolage approaches to organizational inquiry. A key point underpinning 'radical reflexivity' is that research is as much about the world of the researcher as it is about the world being studied (2003: 994-995). Radical self-reflexivity involves making sense of our ongoing actions as researchers by pondering and linking theory and practice, through reflective dialogue with self and others (Alvesson, 2003; Cunliffe, 2002). Constructionist approaches within a radically reflexive stance focus on ways of being and acting in the world, and are therefore centred on the ontological issues the researcher brings to the research (Cunliffe, 2003). Radical reflexivity requires scholars to recognize their own place in the research processes during their social construction of meaning.

In this present research my first mode of reflection was to acknowledge that the research acts I undertook were as revealing of me as they were of the research topic. Constant

reflecting upon who I am, what I believe, what experiences I have had and what I wanted to achieve with the research, were ever-present in my thoughts and affected what, how, and why I studied (Ladson-Billings, 2000). I identify strongly with Speer's (2002) comments surrounding her own doubts as to whether she possesses the necessary skills to do reflexivity effectively. In accepting that the case and research participants have affected me, I acknowledge that for a brief period their lives and mine became mingled, and will no doubt provide material for me long after this research is concluded (Bateson, 1989).

My concern for how I influenced the research setting beyond the questions I asked, led me to consider my appearance and the verbal exchanges I held with both research participants and non-participants, who were employed by EEDA and its stakeholder organizations. Angrosino and Mays de Pérez (2000) advise identities are negotiated in the research situation, it is a tentative process that involves the continuous testing of all participants of the conceptions they have of the roles of others. I sensed that participants were more comfortable when I appeared dressed casually, than when I wore a suit, shirt and tie. Through this I may have conformed more to their view of what a 'researcher' looked like. In the early stages of data collection towards the end of the interviews, I would ask questions that indicated my interest as a consultant in their perception of scenario planning. This was done with a view to exploring possible consultancy opportunities with them at a later date. However, I quickly felt this confused my role with them and led to some uncomfortable moments as the meetings were drawing to a close. I abandoned this line of questioning quickly and maintained my identity as 'the researcher' throughout my contacts. This also meant I reflected upon the data solely from a researcher perspective.

The mere fact that I was conducting this research had interesting effects on the participants and subsequently on the interactions experienced. Those who occupied lower levels in organizational hierarchies generally reacted positively, and seemed genuinely surprised and pleased that a University researcher valued their thoughts and reflections enough to travel to meet with them, and record their speech. Those in senior positions tended to react more defensively, and see my research as potentially a threat that could expose the limitations of their thoughts and actions. An example of this occurred when I mentioned to the EEDA Chair (interview twenty-seven) that I would be conducting a critical analysis of the approach they had undertaken. His response was that he 'welcomed' criticism, as long as it was fair.

At several times during the data collection process I found my knowledge of the participants, gained through analysis of key documents and the material created during the interviews, confused the mental picture I had built up about them. From reading documents pertaining to the Henley Centre consultancy, particularly its response to the original invitation to tender, and from my attendance at their review with the Policy Unit team, I had built up a mental preconception of the two main consultants including what I felt about them. My picture of them was not positive as my view before interviewing them was that the Henley Centre had not provided services consistent with its tender response, and that during the review meeting much time had been spent massaging the Policy Unit's collective ego. However, upon meeting the two consultants at the Henley Centre offices I found them helpful, candid and willing participants in the research. I was provided with documents they felt would be useful for my research and I sent them a paper I had been working on. There was also an invitation to keep in touch and an offer of further help if I needed it. Similarly, my original schedule of interviewing two DTI staff was expanded at their suggestion as one interviewee felt it would helpful to my study to

talk with some staff who have responsibility for strategy with the DTI. Whilst interviewing these two people I became increasingly concerned and worried for the consequences of their view of strategy for RDAs and the UK public sector in general. My concern was particularly acute surrounding their views on the role of data gathering and analysis, to support and provide an evidence-base for strategies. However, this concern was tempered by my feeling for the interviewees, who came across to me as authentic people who were striving to do a good job under trying circumstances. Their apparent decency conflicted with my feelings towards what they were saying. I felt internally conflicted in my feelings, as I did not feel an intellectual connection with their view of strategy, but did feel a humane connection with them.

### 3.13.3 Criticisms of reflexivity

Criticisms of researcher reflexivity mirror those of practitioner reflection that focus on the paralysing affects of over-reflection; although Czarniawska (2003) cautions unreflected action will sooner or later lead to disaster. One basis for the questioning of reflexivity is made from a deconstructionist perspective that implies an imagined act of stepping back and observing oneself as an actor within the research setting (Allard-Poesi, 2005; Cunliffe, 2002; Taylor, 2001). Johnson and Duberley (2003) question whether one is able to step back and scrutinize one's role within a research setting, as being inconsistent with a constructivist ontology and epistemology that sees the self as intimately active in knowledge creation. A final criticism originating from quantitative mindsets argues reflexivity has little to offer; in that its endless questioning of what is real, what is knowledge, and who (or what) is self, leads only to intellectual chaos, self-indulgent navel-gazing, politically-motivated subjectivism, and ultimately undermines

claims for research as activities distinct from fictional writing (Cunliffe, 2003: 990; Hammersley, 2003). Ladson-Billings (2000: 268) foreshadows some of these charges by claiming her own reflections are not a 'new narcissism', rather, represent a concern for how she is situated within her research.

### 3.14 Evaluating qualitative research

There is widespread agreement that the judgment criteria by which scientific quantitative research is evaluated is not appropriate when assessing qualitative research studies (e.g. Czarniawska, 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The philosophical underpinnings and epistemological characteristics are so divergent to make comparison of their claims to knowledge meaningless. Johnson, et al. (2006: 132) explain that unlike the behaviour of non-sentient objects, human action is inter-subjective in the sense that it is created and reproduced through social interaction. Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2002) are unusual in their decision to send their results back to their host organization to check for omissions and factual inaccuracies, which they believe would support a claim for validity in their own research. It is generally accepted that the scientist notion of validity has to be reframed for interpretive studies. For qualitative inquiry, validity is reframed variously as; authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Mueller & Carter, 2005), increased understanding of particular situations (Mueller, Sillince, Harvey & Howorth, 2004), usefulness (Burr, 1995; Mahoney, 1993), credibility (Janesick, 2000), verisimilitudiness (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), criticality (Mueller & Carter, 2005), hegemony (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000), plausibility and credibility (Brown & Jones, 2000), and as the trustworthiness of language used (Schipper, 1999). Johnson, et al. (2006: 141) suggest that the notion of authenticity in qualitative research is multi-faceted integrating aspects of ontological and educative

authenticity, analytical authenticity, and tactical authenticity, and should demonstrate fairness in how different actors' realities are represented in research accounts.

Phillips (1995) suggests the reader of a qualitative research script should be able to learn something about him or herself through the act of reading. Smith and Deemer (2000) note validating interpretive descriptions of cases cannot go beyond simple checking of whether a researcher actually spoke to a participant and what was said. Qualitative researchers focus their analyses on describing and interpreting phenomena, rather than providing explanations purporting to identify cause and effect relationships (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000; Janesick, 2000). Qualitative rigour is achieved not through formalization, procedure and technique, but through interpretive and theoretical awareness and sensitivity (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000: 69).

Kincheloe (2001) argues that because of the bricolage activities associated with interpretive research, no neat step-by-step process exists to be tested and validated. The bricoleur constructs from whatever is at hand to fulfil the present need, therefore, it is the usefulness of the bricolage that is the ultimate assessment of its scholaristic worth. Stake (2000) notes that case study researchers have to balance a search for the particular with that for the generalizable. However, in this present study of a single case I concur with Czarniawska's (2003: 354) assertion that generalization is not the job of the author, but of the reader. The transfer of knowledge from one setting to another requires understanding of the contextual conditions of the new setting and of the location of the original work, as contexts are continually evolving, the concept of generalisation under these terms is questionable (Greenwood & Levin, 2000). What constitutes 'good' qualitative research is a somewhat elusive concept, which sees Johnson, et al. (2006) advocate for a move towards a contingent criteriology. Alternatively, Richardson (2000:

937) offers five criteria for reviewing qualitative narratives that have been considered during the process of this present research:

1. *Substantive contribution*: Does this piece contribute to our *understanding* of organizational life?
2. *Aesthetic merit*: Does this piece succeed aesthetically? Does the use of creative analytic practices open up the text, invite interpretive responses? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex, and not boring?
3. *Reflexivity*: Is the author cognizant of the epistemology of postmodernism? How did the author come to write this text? How was the information gathered? Are there ethical issues? How has the author's subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text? Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgments about the point of view? Does the author hold him- or her-self accountable to the standards of knowing and telling of the people he or she has studied?
4. *Impact*: Does this affect me? Emotionally? Intellectually? Does it generate new questions? Move me to write? Move me to try new research practices? Move me to action?
5. *Expression of a reality*: Does this text embody a fleshed out, embodied sense of lived experience? Does it seem "true" – a credible account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the "real"?"

### 3.15 Analysis

The iterative nature of qualitative research means that data collection and data analysis activities are not cleanly demarcated. Data is an outcome of interpretation and



construction (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). The acts of constructing and analysing data often take place symbiotically within a ceaseless flow of relational activity going on in the background, but analysis is often undertaken in a different time and context from that where the data was created (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Cunliffe, et al., 2004; Shotter, 2005). Similarly, analysis can involve returning to the data at various stages in the writing up of research as fresh insight is developed through the creative act of writing. As interpretive researchers can only ever claim to tell a partial story, analysis is never complete as the data is always open to new reinterpretations. The insights constructed for this particular writing up are drawn from a combination of empirical experience and theoretical reflection (Watson, 2003).

Silverman (2000) notes that data comprising mainly audio recordings is open to the charge of being incomplete, but he counters that the idea of 'complete' data may itself be an illusion. However, Samra-Fredericks (2003) posits that it is only from recording events can we begin to answer basic questions about how people constitute their experiences through their talk. In this present research, the first material collected were documents from EEDA relating to the study; these included the original "call to tender" and the Henley Centre's (Curry, et al., 2003) response (Janesick, 2000). These documents and the subsequent interview data are representations of experience, not experience itself (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, Johnson, et al., 2003), and their reading was theoretically guided (Cunliffe, et al., 2004; Mueller & Carter, 2005). Rapley (2001) cautions interview data is decontextualized when it is analysed, as it is necessarily removed from the contexts in which it was created. For this reason he advocates researchers demonstrate their awareness of their own talk in the interview setting and how they contribute to the negotiated interview text (Rapley, 2001).

### 3.15.1 Analysing interview texts

The option of using software such as NUD\*IST, Code-A-Text, NVivo or HYPERResearch to aid analysis of qualitative data was considered only briefly for this present research. Whilst the idea of having software that sorted through the data for you is attractive, I discounted this on the basis that one of the essential experiences of conducting interpretive research focused on meaning creation and recreation, is to immerse oneself in the data as a bricoleur, to construct fresh, innovative, complex and exciting interpretations (Charmaz, 2000). Mello (2002) suggests qualitative computer software programs reduce data into neat, discrete fragments to aid analysis, but in doing so lose a sense of the ragged wholeness of the narrative (Ng & de Cock, 2002). Additionally, I took the decision not to share my data with anyone else, for them to conduct an analysis and then compare that with mine as a form of validation. Alvesson and Deetz (2000) comment that the idea of letting another person look at data to remove the potential biases of the researcher is misguided, as frequently such second parties have undergone the same training and socialization as the original researcher, employ the same vocabulary and may easily share the same biases.

Janesick (2000) suggests qualitative researchers use inductive analysis to draw themes, categories and patterns from the data; adding that these are not imposed prior to data collection but emerge from field notes, documents and interviews (Regnér, 2003). My approach has been to construct abstract themes before, during and after data collection (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Ryan & Bernard, 2000), which resulted in sixty such themes being created (Appendix F). By using the verb 'emerge' to describe this process, Janesick suggests a detachment on the part of the researcher from the themes

produced. This approach has resonance with Grounded Theory qualitative research, where data is coded to make connections between categories and sub categories (Charmaz, 2000; Mello, 2002; Silverman, 2000). My approach has been to avoid coding, which can result in awkward scientific terms, clumsy categories (Charmaz, 2000) and mere list making (Silverman, 2000), and instead, to use narrative analysis as a 'toolbox' providing a set of concepts and methods to use the data to illuminate my analysis producing a plausible and informative research story (Silverman, 2000). This was achieved by working back and forth through the data to construct my narrative using verbatim quotes from respondents as exemplars of the issues I describe (Ryan & Bernard, 2000; Silverman, 2000). Narrative segments within the texts were highlighted as particularly significant as they expressed aspects of the prior theoretical interests of the research within the empirical material (Llewellyn & Tappin, 2003: 962). These highlighted segments were then allocated to a theme to aid conceptualizing and analysis.

### 3.16 Triangulation to crystallization

Triangulation has been traditionally understood in scientist terms as a means by which, through using multi-methods and multi-perceptions, observations are validated and their repeatability verified (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Janesick, 2000; Stake, 2000). Richardson (2000: 934) advances that postmodern mixed-genre texts are far more than 'three sided', and that rather than triangulate we *crystallize*. Kincheloe (2001) argues that multi-methodologies and multi-voiced interpretations help to synthesize analysis of phenomena, providing added depth and richness to the research script. Crystallization deconstructs the traditional idea of validity and provides a new conceptual lens that

acknowledges our thoroughly partial understandings, leaving us both knowing more and doubting our own knowledge levels (Richardson, 2000).

### 3.17 Writing up

Quoting Schopenhauer, Styhre (2005: 3 & 172) points out that the first rule of good writing is *to have something to say (italics in original)*, but cautions against the authorial ambition of being understood by every possible reader at every possible moment. A modest justification for research is given by Sims (2005: 1626) who says his work "...offers a brief reflexive passage in which I say what I have learned about the topic...". Phillips (1995:) notes that social scientists often do what creative writers do: they create rather than discover, focus on the unique and individual, and use illusion and rhetoric to make their case (Styhre, 2005). An author must acknowledge that a rich array of interpretations is possible from the empirical data created through a single in-depth case (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). Alvesson and Deetz (2000) claim qualitative scripts should demonstrate insight and criticism. Insight is seen as the leading edge of human thought and is structured along the lines of the powerful exemplar rather than mass of data (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). Critique requires the author to counteract the dominance of taken-for-granted goals, ideas, ideologies and discourses which put their imprints on management and organization phenomena (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000: 18; Mueller & Carter, 2005).

Cunliffe, et al. (2004) warn authors that rather than telling the stories of organizational members, we narrate our own accounts of the lived experiences of others, and our research narratives are as much about our lives as the lives of others. Therefore, I do

not claim to be writing from the perspective of the research subjects, as is sometimes claimed (e.g. Maitlis, 2005), but relate my story of their lives informed by my interviews with them. Styhre (2005) notes the performative function of writing cannot be wholly detached from the social environment where it is produced. The use of quotations in writing up qualitative research is not unproblematic. Czarniawska (2004) advises writers to respect their interlocutors, but this does not have to be expressed in literal repetition of what has been said, as there is no authentic relationship between words and texts (Styhre, 2005). Hopkinson (2003: 1944) identifies the use of quotations as representing a reification of a socially constructed 'reality' transposed to another context, and suggests that the processes that constituted it should also be considered. Styhre (2004: 25) concedes writing entails giving birth to texts that involves feelings of anxiety, ambition, expectation, sweat and tears, hard labour, dexterity, cunning and numerous other human skills and capabilities.

### 3.18 Conclusion

This chapter has justified the research approach taken in this single in-depth case study of a strategizing episode. The philosophical guidance underpinning the research has been explained as has that of social constructionism. Epistemologically, the paradigm is constructionist-interpretivist, with elements of the critical paradigm influencing its design and execution (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Data has been collected utilising a methodological 'bag of tricks' (Czarniawska, 2004), from which I have induced meaning allowing a rich description of strategizing to be produced. Writing-up research is ultimately a personal experience informed by the social encounters, both real and vicarious, that form its substance. The importance of researcher reflection has been

stressed and I endeavoured to ensure that as the research progressed I considered how my own identities have impacted upon it. I recall Bateson's (1989) quotation at the beginning of this chapter and remember that research involves lives coming together, the research subjects and mine, but that I can only write my thoughts not theirs.

## Data Presentation

### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents data co-constructed during the interviews, and describes the purpose and content of the key documents produced by both EEDA and the Henley Centre during the scenario planning phase of the Regional Economic Strategy development process. In general terms, the data represents a chronology of the process (Appendix A), however in practice the process did not follow a neat linear progression. Thoughts and discussions were taking place simultaneously and in parallel so that, for example, PU1 visited the Henley Centre to discuss scenario planning and its experiences within the public sector while conversations within EEDA about the possibility of using the approach were taking place. Indeed, the meeting at the Henley Centre appeared to inform early discussions within EEDA. The data contains the interviewees reflections on the process undertaken and the steps this involved, and also their deeper thoughts and meditations on aspects that help to represent the nuance of fashioning strategy in an organization operating at the centre of a network while having multiple stakeholders to consider and satisfy.

The chapter is structured as follows. The first section presents data related to how PU1 arrived at the decision to advocate for using scenario planning within EEDA for construction of its RES, the internal and external discussions surrounding this, the approval to go ahead with the process and the letting of the contract to the Henley Centre to provide consultancy support. The next section picks up from the Henley

Centre being awarded the contract and details its data gathering activities prior to holding the workshops. Two drivers workshops are described, the output of which is used to formulate draft scenario axes and outline scenarios which, were presented to the EEDA Strategy Committee by PU1, and to the EEDA board by the Henley Centre consultants, as well as to stakeholders at a meeting on December 15<sup>th</sup> 2003. By this time, a large number of people had been exposed to the scenarios and had the opportunity to debate their merit, therefore the next section includes interviewees' reflections and considerations of various aspects of scenarios as strategy artefacts. This includes agents' descriptions of scenarios, their views on authorship and ownership, and the role of scenarios in developing a strategic conversation. If and how the East of England scenarios are or have been used in the RES process is also discussed and considered. The penultimate section describes the five main documents produced during the scenario planning phase. The four scenarios are presented in full in the documents *Scenario planning for the East of England – A report for the East of England Development Agency on the scenario development phase* produced by the Henley Centre (2004a), and *Scenario planning: Developing a shared understanding of the influences on the economic development of the East of England* published by EEDA (2004b). A conclusion to the chapter is then offered.

As was explained in chapter three, the interviews conducted were semi-structured and the transcriptions represent an attempt to interpret the audiotape and transcribe these encounters as naturalized talk. What is presented in this chapter are examples of interviewee and interviewer interaction. Interviewee talk is set out that illuminates aspects of scenario planning and strategy that help to understand how, in practice, EEDA and its stakeholders constructed and used four scenarios for the East of England. The talk that is included has had punctuation added, but otherwise is a faithful



interpretation of the actual conversation that took place. This means that correct written English is sacrificed for authenticity. While I considered Rapley's (2001) call for researchers to include their own words prior to the words of the interviewee as a way of showing how the insight was jointly arrived at, in this case the interviews were conducted as an uneven conversation. I held in mind the notion that the interviewee should talk for the majority of the encounter (Roulston, et al., 2003), actor talk far outweighed my own. Typically, I would ask an opening question and then through various verbal and non-verbal activities encourage the interviewee to talk and it is often several minutes into the interviewee's response that the reflection that is most illuminating occurs. Therefore, I have only included my activating question where it is relevant to the response. The interviewees can be categorized into five main groups; EEDA Policy Unit staff, other EEDA staff, East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) staff, external stakeholders, and the two consultants from the Henley Centre. The four Policy Unit staff (PU1, PU2, PU3 & PU4) were engaged in multiple interviews that took place at the beginning, middle and six months after the issue of the RES (one member of staff had left EEDA and was not available for the last set of interviews). Where an issue is supported by the use of quotations from multiple sources, these are presented in an hierarchical order with actors from the Policy Unit first, followed by other EEDA staff, then EERA staff, external stakeholders and finally the consultants.

#### 4.1 Deciding upon scenario planning

##### 4.1.1 Past RES processes

The decisions that led to the use of scenario planning by EEDA in the construction of its Regional Economic Strategy (RES) need to be understood in relation to the historical contexts within which the two previous RESes were produced. EEDA was charged by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) with producing a RES for the East of England at three yearly intervals. The first was done shortly after EEDA was established and was largely a marketing document, the second was issued in November 2002. EEDA took the decision to produce its third RES one year earlier than required, due to the adverse reception the second RES received. The Policy Unit, under the leadership of PU1, was asked to come up with a process for producing a third RES for issue in November 2004. The processes that had produced the previous two RESes were seen as quite insular with the only significant contributions coming from EEDA staff:

‘...you know, people going away writing a draft document and just presenting it for comments to, a range of external stakeholders...’ (Interviewee 1)

And:

‘...in previous RES reviews we’d been accused of not being particularly consultative, or haven’t consulted widely...’ (Interviewee 2)

The majority of the current Policy Unit team had not been actively involved in producing the previous RES and held quite negative views of it:

‘...I wasn’t here when we did the last RES, but from my perception from how people reacted to the last RES, there wasn’t a common feeling across the region that this was some something they all agreed with.’ (Interviewee 4)

And:

‘...The last RES document was, erm, to me, was completely impenetrable...’ (Interviewee 4)

Even those EEDA staff that had been involved in constructing the last RES spoke of it in negative terms:

'...I hadn't been that comfortable with the way the previous RES process had been, erm, constructed, erm, in that, it was almost a case of, go away and write a chapter to about a dozen people within EEDA...' (Interviewee 14)

It was also identified that the process used on the previous RES had caused relations with the Regional Assembly (RA) to worsen:

'...towards the end of the process there was major dissonance from the Regional Assembly, which created lots of problems politically both at Regional and National levels...' (Interviewee 18)

Even those staff that were not employed by EEDA at the time, were aware that the previous RES had been badly received by the RA:

'...EEDA was very scarred by the previous RES and, I obviously wasn't around at the time, but the way it has been reported to me, um, the process had clearly not been very successful and culminated in the Assembly, the Regional Assembly, reserving its position, in some way, sort of withholding endorsement of the RES and that then had to be ... finessed in some way, and I'm not quite sure how it was finessed, but it was finessed in some way, and that left significant scars on EEDA in process terms...' (Interviewee 24)

A representative from the RA offered the succinct view:

'...I mean, there have only been two so far and they've both had a fairly good kicking in the Assembly...' (Interviewee 29)

The external stakeholders held similar opinions on the previous RES and the process used to construct it:

'...the last two RESEs were not as good as they would have hoped, had been too tops down, and had been very much driven, I think, second, certainly secondly, by DTI really...' (Interviewee 37)  
'Well, the first one was a shambles, and the second one was a bit hurried...' (Interviewee 41)

The lack of consultation with the external stakeholders on previous RESEs had clearly left its mark on them:

'...the previous, first RES was a disaster. (Interviewee 36)  
*Mmm.* (AW)

For a variety of reasons. Erm, we felt very bruised on the ground. Erm, we felt that everything that we'd said had just been totally ignored. Erm, I think internally, it was a disaster...' (Interviewee 36)

It is against this historical backdrop that EEDA and, more specifically, PU1 and the Policy Unit team, sought a process that would result in the production of a RES that would be regarded as an effective strategy achieved through a consultative process that engaged as broad a range of stakeholders as practicable and that would be recognised as such by those taking part.

#### 4.1.2 Origin of the decision

PU1 first came across the notion of scenario planning on an MBA module he was studying while on Nottingham University Business School's MBA programme:

'...it was one of the topics that was picked up very briefly in a, sort of, near, towards the end of the course I think, and they were about, sort of, large group methods of, I guess, tackling issues effectively.' (Interviewee 1)

Scenario planning was discussed as a method for large group organizational learning and it was at this point that PU1 began considering the approach for the upcoming RES review. EEDA needed a process that could engage a significant number of people from disparate stakeholder organizations:

'...I guess, based on that, I went away and did some further reading on the subject, so that was the, kind of, the beginning of it all.' (Interviewee 1)

PU1's literature search on scenario planning brought him into contact with the works of Kees van der Heijden and Gill Ringland, and around the same time (April, 2003), he attended a network meeting involving representatives from the other Regional Development Agencies (RDA):

‘...one of the things they were talking about was how they were using some futures work to help them work in, with a range of stakeholders, and they mentioned, you know, they mentioned, some of the same references, I guess, and that, sort of, I guess that kind of reinforced that might be a good approach...’.  
(Interviewee 1)

It was here that PU1 first came across the Henley Centre management consultancy who were, at that time, helping a number of the RDAs in their strategy work. Following the network meeting, PU1 searched the DTI database and came across the Henley Centre authored report *Benchmarking UK Strategic Futures Work: A report for the Performance and Innovation Unit* (2001). The report compared the approaches to futures work of a sample of UK companies with similar organizations from 14 different countries across the world. While the report did not exclusively focus on scenario planning, it is identified as the dominant model for futures thinking, and as more likely than other conventional planning approaches to be inclusive and influence attitudes within organisations (Henley Centre, 2001: 13). Interestingly, for a DTI sponsored document, the report also criticizes previous governments for their inactivity:

It is possible to argue that the UK’s unwillingness to engage in strategic futures thinking during the 1980s derived from a political standpoint within government which was certain in its world view and regarded diverse or dissenting opinions with suspicion ... The cost of this has been that the British government is to some extent still catching up in its use of futures techniques and its understanding of them. (Henley Centre, 2001: 21)

#### 4.1.3 Appeal of scenario planning

Although PU1 first encountered the scenario planning approach within the context of an MBA discussion on large group strategy making techniques, its potential role for galvanizing support for a particular strategic direction also appealed:

‘...it’s also about getting people to sign up to the strategy as well and it seemed to me it was a better technique for doing that...’ (Interviewee 1)

The benefits of the approach as an aid to futures thinking quickly became a secondary attraction to that of its potential for gaining and maintaining involvement from the disparate stakeholders EEDA would need to successfully engage:

‘...I mean, a little bit the, kind of, futures aspect of it, but that wasn’t really, the futures side of it wasn’t the most, you know, it was a level of participation and the fact that it could get, a way, a way of engaging a lot of people I think were the main, the primary, sort of, drivers for it...’ (Interviewee 1)

PU1 introduced the concept to the rest of the Policy Unit team and discussed with them the idea of basing the RES development process around the notion of scenario planning. Their responses were positive as they quickly grasped the potential benefits of such an approach:

‘...one of the key attractions was that it was such an interactive process and that it would be able to, erm, um, enable a discussion where, um, different stakeholder groups would come out of their, um, their silos and their areas of interest..’ (Interviewee 4)

The approach was also perceived as being a good way of overcoming individual defences among the likely participants:

‘...we also wanted to engage partners in a way that was non-confrontational...’ (Interviewee 10)

#### 4.1.4 How the decision was taken

Following brief discussions with a colleague from One North East RDA, PU1 visited the Henley Centre to talk with them about the potential use of scenario planning, as it had acted as advisors to One North East. This was done prior to any proposal being presented to the EEDA senior team or Board, and was done so that PU1 could talk about the approach more knowledgeably and relate previous examples of how scenario planning had been used within the UK public sector. During this period PU1 continued

discussing his ideas with the rest of the Policy Unit team, seeking to convince them of the benefits of scenario planning:

‘...I guess the first step was to, kind of, discuss it with my own team in the organisation, and kind of, see what their response was. And they were, erm, ... relatively keen on the idea I think ... so I managed, I managed to sell it to them...’ (Interviewee 1)

‘...it was interesting when I came, came here and (PU1) mentioned something, or we talked about scenario planning, I was like, oh Christ, it was quite an enjoyable thing to do, so I was quite keen when he said he’s considering it, I thought it was a good idea as well.’ [the interviewee had prior experience of scenario planning in her previous role as a consultant] (Interviewee 9)

‘...we, erm, you know, we had some questions when (PU1) presented the idea and he, he, sort of, answered those questions, he was, it was obvious he was enthusiastic and keen on that, on that concept, so it was, you know, he, [unclear] I think I was a doubter at that stage...’ (Interviewee 4)

Next, he broached the subject tentatively with both the Chairman and Chief Executive:

‘...and then, I, sort of, tried to drop a few hints about it to the Chief Executive and the Chairman, and say this was the sort of thing I was doing, what did they think? Erm, and they, sort of, didn’t dismiss it out of hand...’ (Interviewee 1)

By not receiving a negative response to his hints, PU1 considered he had implicit approval to go ahead and present a more formal proposal to use the technique at a senior managers’ away-day (12.06.03):

‘...I guess the, kind of, first formal decision point was, er, we had a, sort of, senior managers’ away-day, where one of the items was to talk about the strategy review, and that was where I, sort of, said, that’s where I really intro. introduced the concept and said; “this is how I think we should do it!”...’ (Interviewee 1)

The ease by which the proposal, in principle, was accepted surprised PU1, who had expected more questioning from the senior management team. However, pressure of time may have played a part as it was already June 2003 and the final strategy was scheduled for issue in November 2004, less than 18 months away. The full formal proposal was presented by PU1 and the consultants from the Henley Centre to the EEDA Board on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2003. Again, considering EEDA’s role as a regional leader for economic development, surprisingly little discussion and questioning seems to have

taken place to agree this critical process for producing what would become the region's economic strategy:

'...it's either June or July, and that was the formal, you know, for the organisation, that was the actual decision point, because the Board ... has to take those, kind of, decisions but, so that was when it was signed and sealed effectively, erm... (Interviewee 1)

Was there much discussion about it, at Board level? (AW)

No. No, they will ... it was, erm, (laugh) it was last Board meeting before they went on their summer holidays, so they were in, sort of, holiday mood.' (Interviewee 1)

Other members of the Policy Unit team also expected more questioning of the proposal due to consultative nature of the approach:

'...I actually expected it to be more of a battle, because it is quite a, is a very innovative way of doing a strategy, none of the other RDAs have done it, and it's quite a, erm, brave thing to do, because you are handing over a lot of the res., of the responsibility to your stakeholders to come up with the idea. It's not that we're doing something and we're presenting it to them ... I don't, I don't think they necessarily completely (laugh) understood that.' (Interviewee 9)

One or two Board members had prior experience of using scenario planning and appear to have restricted their comments to warnings about how scenarios, as stand alone documents, could be misused and misinterpreted by those not fully aware of the contexts within which they are created:

'...they just made the point that, you know, scenarios can be misused in, if they get into the public domain, you know, the media can take them and misuse them...' (Interviewee 1)

Having representatives from the Henley Centre attend and participate in the presentation appears to have added legitimacy and authority to PU1's proposal:

'Yeah. Do you know, or can you describe how the decision was taken to go with scenarios? (AW)

Er, I, I must admit that was taken, I think, essentially by the Executive and the Chairman, er, rather than, er, by, by the Board, as such. I mean, we did have a presentation from the Henley Centre for forecasting, er, and, er, obviously, the Board felt happy with going along that particular route.' (Interviewee 16)



These decisions coincided with a change in Chair and Chief Executive (CE), so that approval for the process was granted by a Chair and CE who would not be around to see the process through:

'I think also the timing may have been, erm, may have been significant in, in a way that the Chief Executive who signed up for this process would not be here when the process was complete, and therefore, it was maybe, organisationally, easier for him to sign up to taking the risk, because at the beginning of the process it looked like a bold inclusive move, and if it went wrong he'd be gone, and the egg would be on somebody else's face, the problem would be someone else's...' (Interviewee 14)

The scenario planning process quickly became associated personally with PU1:

'...the head of the Policy Unit is an extremely bright man ... he's a very bright man, erm, and I would trust his judgement on something like this...' (Interviewee 14)

#### 4.1.5 Choosing the Henley Centre

The decision to use a third party to act as consultants to help with developing scenarios was taken partly because there was a recognition that "...we didn't have enough expertise within the organisation" (Interviewee 1), but also there was a feeling that "...our external partners would see it as a better process if it was facilitated by a third party" (Interviewee 1). In order to write the Invitation to Tender (EEDA, 2003), PU1 consulted with the Henley Centre to ensure the wording effectively set out what EEDA wanted from the contract. Inevitably this meant the Invitation to Tender also reflected the Henley Centre's experience and perspective of scenario planning:

'...he was quite sure this was where we were going to go and he actually wrote this specification for the tender, for the consultants to come up and help us with the review around, that, kind of, concept so, it was, I was a bit unsure about the thing and because it was so specific it was obvious that they, the, the people at the Henley Centre, who he'd spoken to, were going to get the tender because they were the experts in the way we described it. It was a, kind of, you know, they, he was so convinced by that idea he wanted, that and the people who could deliver it, obviously the people with most experience were the ones he'd already

spoken to, because, they had had the experience of delivering that same material for other companies.’ (Interviewee 4)

The Invitation to Tender was issued on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2003. Nineteen responses were received, including one from the Henley Centre, and four organizations were invited to present their bid to EEDA. The interview panel consisted of representatives from the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA), as well as EEDA, as EERA were contributing £50,000 to the cost of the project. The EEDA panel members who had not had such a close involvement with the Henley Centre appear to have a clear idea of what they were looking for from the presentations:

‘...the key things I was looking for were; obviously, ability to deliver the project, two, a genuine understanding of why this just wasn’t another Shell project, erm, three, what have I said? capability, genuine understanding, some, some real enthusiasm for taking on a different, sort of, task, because we needed it to be done well, not just competently, but done well...’ (Interviewee 14)

‘...er, so in terms of using consultants it was really about their capabilities, but also increasing our capacity, erm, as much as anything else...’ (Interviewee 18)

A consultancy that had worked with EEDA in the past, but did not have experience of scenario planning did not make an effective presentation:

‘...One, I was very surprised, they were appalling, erm, which, which was a big surprise, because they had done some excellent work for us in the past, work that both they and we are, are proud of and has been recognised by other Agencies as quite a ground breaking project, so, I was really surprised by that, in fact, they rang up the next day to basically apologise and say we were appalling, we didn’t get it, did we?...’ (Interviewee 14)

The second presentation was by an extremely well-known scenario planning consultancy, whose key members combine a prolific academic career with consultancy assignments:

‘...the guy walked into, very, very experienced and competent, and basically, the guy walked into the office and, you know, I do this for breakfast every day, here’s a copy of my book, here’s a copy of my blah, and he just lectured us and, they was, highly experienced in the corporate sector, very little experienced in our sector, and clearly of a mindset that all he was going to do was tell people he knew how to do this, and not to draw them into the process...’ (Interviewee 14)

The Henley Centre presented last and clearly had considerable experience of presenting in this type of environment:

'There was Henley, which was very glossy, very competent, very slick, very confident, highly experienced, had good answers to everything that we asked ... there were no weaknesses, everything was good. But, they knew it!...' (Interviewee 14)

The Henley Centre claimed legitimacy and authority in its response to the Invitation to Tender. It stressed its track record of working on similar projects both within the public sector and with major clients from the private sector: "...We are a leading research based strategic consultancy, which has led a number of very similar projects in the public sector in recent years. For over 25 years, we have researched and analysed the drivers of social and market change, and worked with our clients and their stakeholders to help them apply this knowledge to shape future business strategy and long term planning. Recent public sector clients include DEFRA, the Cabinet Office, the DTI's Foresight Programme, the Inland Revenue, the Army and other Regional Development Agencies; our private sector clients include British Telecom, Vodafone, Centrica and Marks and Spencer, among many others. Relevant consultancy assignments and projects span a range of 'futures' capabilities including visioning, scenario development, strategic planning and strategy development." (Curry, Harrison & Burdett, 2003: 2). The Henley Centre name and reputation also acted in its favour, as did the perception that a third party overseeing the process would enhance the level of debate during the planned workshops:

'...having almost a household name would help minimise any anxiety that might be there, that would, it would ratchet up the buy-in...' (Interviewee 14)  
'...and an honest broker to a certain extent, because there are probably things Henley could pose, ... ..erm, you know, there are ways Henley could say things that erm, in a sense, they could, they could pose naively as being outside the Region not aware of the politics, although they were, because they'd been briefed... (Interviewee 18)

So, do you feel that Henley, in a sense, confirmed, conferred a bit of legitimacy on the process? (AW)

Erm ... yes, but what, but no, they did, but, I wouldn't say it was purely because of their brand, as such, it was more the independence or relative independence of, you know, a third party.' (Interviewee 18)

The EERA representative related his judgment to its financial contribution to the project:

'...they made a lot of their track record, on their name, and I think, to be fair, we were paying for that jointly, between us and EEDA we were paying for that, we were paying for their undoubted, sort of, reputation in this and, the fact that they had made, sort of, scenarios work, it made it workable in a variety of contexts in our, in our thematic, in our sectoral context, and in our geographical context. So, they were very reassuring that, even though all of this was tricky stuff, and this was new stuff, you know, they would, they would hold our hands, metaphorically, through it, and would guide us and, you know, nothing in their experience would be thrown off, it would be handled and dealt with.' (Interviewee 28)

#### 4.1.6 Initial thoughts on scenario planning

The issue of the Invitation to Tender, the holding of the interviews and the awarding of the contract to the Henley Centre, inevitably made scenario planning a topic of conversation within EEDA:

'I suppose the first thing was when the idea began to, to circulate from them, the policy team. (Interviewee 14)

How did it circulate, can you remember? (AW)

Erm, I think to start with it just, sort of, appeared to be a term that was cropping up in briefings or whatever...' (Interviewee 14)

The Policy Unit were located in an open-plan office so conversations were over-heard by colleagues sitting at adjacent work-stations:

'I sit next to the policy team, so I heard about it (laugh)... (Interviewee 20)

You earwigged then did you? That this, sort of... (AW)

Yeah (laugh)... (Interviewee 20)

'Erm, I think somebody in the Policy Unit would have mentioned it, because I sit down here with them, so I tend to pick up things informally from them before I get formally told.' (Interviewee 19)

A number of EEDA staff had a role that entailed regular contact with external stakeholders. As the process became more advanced PU1 had to brief these staff so that they could respond to questions posed by the external stakeholders:

'...it was just when the contract had just been let, I think, erm, and I heard from (PU1), erm, either a briefing paper or verbally, I can't remember, about the process that would be followed, because I attended an external partnership meeting and I had to explain what it is we were doing with the RES, so I had to take a paper to them and explain what the scenario planning was about, even though I wasn't entirely sure...' (laugh) (Interviewee 15)

External stakeholders began to become aware that EEDA was going to adopt a scenario planning approach to constructing the RES through their regular contacts with EEDA staff. Generally, the response was positive as this was seen as an improvement on the processes used for the previous two RESes:

'I immediately saw it was an opportunity to, in a sense, take the discussion back to first principles really...' (Interviewee 35)

'So, when it first became, er, apparent then that EEDA were considering, erm, using scenarios, what were your thoughts at that time? (AW)

Good! That seems like a positive step forward...' (Interviewee 36)

However, some were less enthusiastic and were unsure how the use of scenario planning would be different to alternative approaches:

'Err, well I wasn't so sure what it was all about, or what it entailed, erm, I, I wouldn't go so far as to say non-plused, it just didn't strike me in any particular way at all, with regards to the general approach...' (Interviewee 41)

#### 4.1.7 Previous experience of scenario planning within EEDA

Apart from PU1's encounter with scenario planning during his MBA studies, one member of the Policy Unit team had previous experience of scenario planning when working for a management consultancy:

'I've actually used scenario planning in my previous work... ...I've also used it myself, I've written reports on using it.' (Interviewee 9)

Others had come across scenario planning in their various postgraduate studies and this typically entailed reference to Royal Dutch Shell's (RDS) experiences during the '70s and '80s:

'...I mean, it drew heavily on the work of, you know, Shell and, and that...'  
(Interviewee 13)

One EEDA staff member reflected on his experience of using scenario planning in a county council setting 10 to 15 years ago:

'I think back to, to work when I was at Hampshire County Council where, erm, I suppose, we did a similar sort of approach when the, we were looking at, erm, developing a strategy for Hampshire County, and, erm, rather than looking at scenarios, erm, across a region they looked at how scenarios affected people, and they developed portraits of individuals and projected it forward 20 years with these, sort of, fictitious characters and tried to look at what they, almost what the nuclear family might look like, you know... (Interviewee 19)

I see... (AW)

What sort of jobs these people would be doing and how they organise their lives and their work and so on, I've been, you know, aware of it but not, never really...'  
(Interviewee 19)

'...but I think, in hindsight I probably think it was better than I, I did at the time.'  
(Interviewee 19)

An EEDA board member had had considerable involvement in scenario planning in the health care sector, in a project run by the Office of Public Management on behalf of the East Anglia Regional Office of Health. This process took the form of a three day scenario planning event attended by around 150 people. EEDA's new Chief Executive (CE) exposure to scenario planning was of a more exotic nature:

'...come to think of it, I was involved in a very interesting project in the '80s which was modelling the future of the Island of Montserrat under various different scenarios...'  
(Interviewee 24)

Several external stakeholders had experience of scenario planning in a variety of different settings and locations. Some individuals' knowledge was related to their professional role:

'...I had, sort of, in my own professional reading, I mean, I am a planner and an Economic Development Officer...' (Interviewee 19)

Others had come across the ubiquitous RDS examples:

'...I was aware, for example, that Shell had used it and because Shell had used it, the '72 oil, or was it '73, erm, oil price crash did not come as a complete surprise to them, because it was something they had already thought about beforehand...' (Interviewee 36)

While others had more active involvement of setting up and running scenario planning projects:

'...I was helping to run scenario planning for, erm, the West Australian Police Strategic Vision, erm, which I think got published two years ago or something, so, er, I actually knew a, a lot more than, than I thought I would do about how the process was going to run, because I had actually been part of the process in previous times...' (Interviewee 34)

#### 4.1.8 What EEDA wanted to achieve

In its Invitation to Tender, EEDA, following discussions with the Henley Centre, identified the objectives of the scenario planning element of the RES process as to:

- (i) Engage stakeholders across the East of England in a 'strategic conversation' about the region's future. This 'conversation', which will be workshop based, will take place within a broad economic development context.
- (ii) Translate the results of the 'strategic conversation' into a high level strategy and action plan that will form the basis of the revised RES.

(EEDA, 2003)

The consultation aspect of scenario planning, through the generating of a 'strategic conversation', was foremost in the mind of PU1 when he was asked what he felt EEDA wanted to achieve by adopting this approach:

'...a way of holding a, kind of, an initial consultation on what the strategy should contain. Erm, and also a way, I guess, of shaping, shaping the overall direction of the strategy. Erm ... I suppose we wanted to make our stakeholders feel involved in the process... ...it was all about the participation of a wide range of

people really, to get, trying to get their buy-in and their involvement in producing something, so those were the main objectives I think...' (Interviewee 1)

The rest of the Policy Unit team had their own perspective on what EEDA wanted to achieve by using scenario planning:

'...what we thought we could get from the scenario planning process was erm, a, kind of, erm, jointly owned vision ... just getting a vision that people sign up to...' (Interviewee 4)

The notion of the scenario planning activity feeding into a RES embodied in a document figured prominently:

'...a kind of, a galvanising document or something like that...' (Interviewee 4)  
'...I think we wanted some way of developing the strategy and particularly getting the goals decided, erm. Which involved a lot of stakeholders, erm, but which was a different way of involving them than before, trying to get them to think outside of their own particular camps ... so, try and make it a bit more strategic if you like, a bit more of a strategy with a vision...' (Interviewee 9)  
'...we wanted a better strategy. We found that, well, we felt, all of us, that the previous document was just too thinly spread, and we wanted to get to issues, erm, that would allow us to be more strategic ... But the, the other thing was I think, the involvement, which was involving external partners, which was always of very high importance, that is, and I think now it, it pays back so, it was the two main points.' (Interviewee 7)

The importance of the final strategy being owned by a population wider than that of just EEDA was stressed:

'...we wanted to be able to, um, have a document that could really be seen as the region's economic strategy, rather than just EEDA's economic strategy, because we saw more and more that our importance in the region was in being able to influence other partners and this would be one of the key documents...' (Interviewee 5)

When this was put to the new CEO he pointed out one of the assumptions behind the question:

'...What do you think EEDA wanted to achieve with using scenarios in this way? (AW)  
Um, now that, I think, is a really interesting question, because it implies that EEDA is homogenous. I suspect that different people wanted to achieve different things...' (Interviewee 24)



Some interviewees did seem to attempt to consider the decision EEDA took in a wider context than just their own area of interest:

‘Well, erm, erm, to have a framework really, for engaging partners, for, coming from different perspectives, to try and get people to focus on a long term vision, erm, and the future, rather than getting bogged down in the problems of now, so to speak, erm, so trying to get them to have a different perspective, probably, and then, then to understand the fact that you have to, erm, make compromises, balances and things like that, there are pressures and trends in different directions that you have to take into account, erm, so [unclear].’ (Interviewee 15)

Others saw the decision to use scenario planning as more influenced by the approach’s highly visible, consultative nature, than as an exercise in thinking through multiple potential futures:

‘...my perception was it was eventually a political decision to, to get the buy-in ... in terms of whether you would get a better, erm, technical document, I wouldn’t say I’m totally convinced that it’s any better or worse, the process, than some of the other ones...’ (Interviewee 19)

While some thought the dual desire for a process providing a framework for thinking through potential futures in an open, cooperative and inclusive atmosphere was achievable through the use of scenarios and scenario planning:

‘...I think there are a number of things we wanted to achieve, erm, at the pure level we want, we really, we honestly did want to, erm, sound out with partners what fut., the future might look like, and, get them to share the, the sometimes difficult decision making that sometimes has to go on about where you put the balance of your activity, in terms of the economy, erm. There is, there is a more cynical thing, which one can’t ignore, which is, you have to be seen to be including partners very overtly, otherwise they claim they haven’t been included, and including partners is a major feature, erm... ...we have been accused of not engaging partners effectively, and quite often we have engaged partners, it’s the definition of effectively that’s been the issue... So, the, there’s, there’s, there was a pure and honest approach at one level, but I am aware at another level we, we had to be seen to be doing it, and we had to do it more effectively than we’ve done in the past...’ (Interviewee 22)

One EEDA board member saw the decision to use scenario planning as firmly routed in the pragmatic desire to avoid the problems of the previous RES:

'I think that, that the Board itself, and I hope to speak on behalf of the Board, but I think the Board itself wanted to end up with a RES that was not contested and that had as much support as was possible.' (Interviewee 16)

EERA representatives also considered the use of scenario planning would help produce a RES fashioned from the views of stakeholders within the Region, and that by adopting such an approach the criticisms that had been levelled at previous RES processes would be forestalled:

'They wanted to achieve a RES which was rooted in realism, and, er, based on the creative input of a broad range of partners' views.' (Interviewee 29)

'I think it was trying to, erm, buy off at a very early stage some of the inevitable carping and criticism erm, that consultees would, would throw up. Erm, so it, er, it wanted to have a stronger evidence base...' (Interviewee 28)

## 4.2 Creating scenarios

### 4.2.1 Scenario planning workshops

Once the Henley Centre had been awarded the contract for the *Scenario planning exercise for the East of England* (EEDA, 2003) PU1 and a colleague (PU4) visited its headquarters in London on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 2003 to discuss how the project would be undertaken. This was followed by a further meeting at EEDA headquarters on September 12<sup>th</sup>, where the two lead consultants for the project presented their proposal for a series of workshops to be held across the Region. These would provide the raw material to be used in the construction of the scenarios. The output of these workshops would be a number of scenarios that would then form the basis of the new RES. At the September 12<sup>th</sup> meeting the Henley Centre and the Policy Unit created a strategic question to be used to set the framework around which subsequent actions would be focused upon. In EEDA's case the question was:

“What actions does EEDA and its key stakeholders need to take over the medium term to maximise the East of England’s sustainable economic development, and minimise the risks to this, in the period to 2020?”

(Burdett, 2003: 1)

The Henley Centre then did a presentation to the EEDA Strategy Committee on September 15<sup>th</sup> which outlined the planned process and introduced the strategic question that had been agreed earlier with the Policy Unit.

On October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2003, the Policy Unit conducted a briefing for EEDA staff on the process that had been agreed with the Henley Centre and ratified by EEDA’s Strategy Committee. During this period the Henley Centre consultants conducted a number of telephone interviews with individuals drawn from a list supplied by the Policy Unit. The interview questions were designed to illicit what would become the ‘drivers’ that would be the focus of the first series of workshops. The approach the consultants used was to first, ask the interviewee to think back over the previous five to ten years and identify what the key drivers of change there had been, before looking forward over the next five to ten years to pick out the key drivers of change for the future. The reason for looking back first is because, in the experience of the consultants, this produces better thought-through drivers of the future:

‘...if you ask people what drivers of the future are, you tend to get this, “I can only think of the here and now sort of scenario”, to, sort of, break it up. So we try and ask people what they think was the, sort of, key drivers over the last five to ten years.’ (Interviewee 46)

Following this enforced reflection the interviewee was asked to look forward and consider the possible drivers over the next five to ten years:

‘So, they’re looking back for us, then as a sort of, “okay, what do you think the drivers are going to be in the next five to ten years?”. To be honest, the answers we get there are probably more relevant to the next two or three years, to be perfectly honest...’ (Interviewee 46)

The strategic question asked what actions would be necessary in the period up to 2020, so the next set of questions encouraged the interviewee to think beyond the next ten years:

'We said, "what do you think the drivers are over the next fifteen to twenty years?" Um, broke that down into five or six categories um, social, technology, giving a sort of, [unclear] frame of which [unclear] and then we went on to do, off the back of that, er, a very quick sort of SWOT question, you know, the strengths, current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats in the region. Um, again, it's just asking the same question, to be honest in a slightly different way. Um, and then we'd get slightly more creative asking people to develop, you know, as, sort of, um, we ask them to develop, sort of, a rose tinted view of what might happen to these three million, 2025 or 2020, I can't remember the date now, er, as a, sort of, black, horrible dark scenario for East of England and that was simply to then, to unpick those scenarios with them and say, "okay, why are you saying that could happen?" and again, it's another way of getting to some of those drivers and trends that are in their minds and also spotting the areas of uncertainty which could go either way. Um, and I think then we, I can't remember exactly what the final few questions are, but they're questions for... I remember one of them is, you know, if, if I had a crystal ball, what would you want me to tell you about what is happening in 2025?...' (Interviewee 46)

At this stage, the consultants became slightly concerned that the homogeneity of the group they were interviewing was producing a set of drivers that were too uniform and not sufficiently expansive:

'...we were slightly worried, er, er, EEDA reacted well to this, that the group that we'd been asked to interview wasn't quite diverse enough to give us a full flavour of the issues around the development of the Region. So we did that, we trawled our own, sort of, data banks here at the Henley Centre for information, um, we looked at various pieces of research that had done, either on a regional level or local level, or indeed a national level around issues that, sort of, um, seemed to be relevant to the question.' (Interviewee 46)

This data construction phase provided the material used by the consultants to prepare the drivers workshops.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> October the consultants presented their list of drivers, constructed through a combination of telephone interview and desk-based research, to the Policy Unit for

review. They were then presented to the EEDA Heads of Service for comment and at the same time the consultants began preliminary work on the possible axes for the scenarios.

#### 4.2.2 Drivers workshops

Two drivers workshops were held on November 6<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>. These involved around fifty participants taken from a cross-section of the stakeholder group and included staff from EEDA. Participation was by invitation, which could come direct from EEDA or through one of the Local Economic Partnerships (LEP):

‘...then we took the drivers into a series of workshops, um, two in this case, um, asked participants in the workshops to prioritise them, in terms of importance or impact on the region’s future development, and from that exercise we got both a set of about fifteen which were. We had about fifty to start with, we had about fifteen of those fifty that emerged through the two workshops, as a consensus of these, were, kind of, the key ones. (Interviewee 46)

Did anything surprise you about what they identified? (AW)

...Um, I think you could have predicted at least 90% of them.’ (Interviewee 46)

The purpose of the workshops was to prioritise the fifty drivers the Henley Centre had created to a more manageable number that could then be used to sketch out an outline of potential scenarios. By the time the workshops had taken place the drivers had been presented at two internal EEDA meetings:

‘...first of all we had two that were driver workshops, which we just drew into one another, but with different people, and those were very successful, I think those two, those were about, erm, identifying, well, we’d actually already got together, sort of, 50 drivers and presented them to the groups and had asked them to look at which they thought most important.’ (Interviewee 9)

Some EEDA staff attended one of the drivers workshops and identified the consultants used a form of multi-voting to reduce the list to a manageable number:

'Erm, the process was, er, I think we took them maybe in, in two halves and the consultants presented the drivers and just gave some background to that particular issue, and just tried to whittle through them fairly quickly, and then we broke up into, erm, some small groups and, just off the top of my head, there might have been 50 people there, or something like that, so we broke down into smaller groups, erm, to discuss some of those and see if we could help how we could identify the key ones, and then we went through a, sort of, voting process, which I'd come across, for a, sort of, colour sticker thing, where you get x amount of dots to stick on the, on the wall against various drivers.' (Interviewee 19)

One of the EEDA staff had come across this type of approach in his professional setting and was unusually articulate in reflecting critically on the process and of the participants inability to take the challenging issues the consultants introduced and really develop some creative ideas:

'...Henley were very challenging about, you know, which really were key drivers, and the, kind of, scale at which they operated, so, you know, they very much, which was very helpful, raised the game in terms of globalisation and, erm, some of the bigger macro trends effecting regional economic performance... ...And, in a sense, to me, what you got repeated back was, erm, sort of, mainstream understandings of causal factors, erm, rather than a challenge...' (Interviewee 18)

This resulted in a response questioning whether the interviewee thought the drivers workshops were a worthwhile experience:

'Do you think the drivers that you ended up with, were significantly different to what you could have done, in a sense, without that input? (AW)  
Erm ... probably not, in reality, I think they were probably articulated in a much more coherent way, erm ... but, as I say, you know, I think their emphasis on some of the macro influences on the regional economic performance, you know, were actually very significant and the impact of globalisation so, you know, but, but, you know, probably 80% of the drivers are the ones we would have articulated...' (Interviewee 18)

Or, whether he had learnt anything new from the experience:

'...is there anything, was there anything about the workshop that surprised you in any way? (AW)  
... No, no and erm ... no, (sigh) this is going to sound paternalistic, but, there wasn't anything else, there wasn't really much new that was heard either, I mean, I think there was some, to some extent, a small negotiation of people's relative positions around certain issues but, you know, I don't think there was a radical re-thinking of what really were regional priorities...' (Interviewee 18)

The notion that the list of fifty drivers contained very little that was new or surprising was shared by some of the external stakeholders attending the sessions:

‘...but, but when we had the, the 50 aspirations, they really, not really aspirations but 50 ideas, I think, before they were even exposed, I could’ve written up a, you know, the majority of those as being the issues...’ (Interviewee 34)

One related the view that nothing was new because of the number of years he’d been involved in economic development:

‘Erm, I suppose I’ve been doing the game, not really, I’ve been around too long I suppose...’ (Interviewee 37)

One of the EERA representatives who attended a drivers workshop was concerned that the drivers list he had been presented with was not the result of specific work for the East of England:

‘...I remember thinking to myself, at the time, em, this isn’t perhaps not bespoke work for the East of England. This is perhaps, output from another project, erm...’ (Interviewee 28)

This person sat on the interview panel that appointed the Henley Centre in the consultancy role and therefore, would be aware that they had done work previously for other RDAs:

‘You know, so, you know, while they were speaking it seemed to me this was more like scenario planning for, say, the North West...’ (Interviewee 28)

And, when reviewing the drivers:

‘...you could say, “a-ha, that’s, you know, Liverpool, Wigan, Manchester, whatever”, so, there was just perhaps, an element that they, they came with a, not terribly customised thing, but, they were looking for local expertise to sharpen that off, to tell them what didn’t play well, what was over-emphasised, what was under-emphasised. But having said that, I think most of it was, kind of right, let’s call it 80% was right...’ (Interviewee 28)

The other EERA interviewee was concerned about how the process would be received by the EERA members:

‘...the thing that I remember principally, about the first meeting was that it was an extremely positive meeting, good buzz, very effective workshops it really [unclear] along, it was very, very good, very well received as well.’ (Interviewee 29)

And:

‘I just remember being very comfortable with the process and thinking, thank God for that...’ (Interviewee 29)

This was important because of the experience of the previous RES process, which led him to fear that:

‘...I thought we might get a kicking along the way...’ (Interviewee 29)

The output from the two drivers workshops were two sets of around fifteen key drivers felt to be critical to the sustainable economic development of the Region up to 2020. This data was to be used to establish the scenario axes.

#### 4.2.3 Scenario axes

The Henley Centre consultants met with the Policy Unity team on December 4<sup>th</sup> to consider the prioritised drivers and debate what scenario axes would be appropriate. This meeting was immediately followed on 5<sup>th</sup> December with a workshop solely for Regional Assembly members for them to undertake a similar activity:

‘...we um, held a session with (PU1), his team and, um, a few other key figures we were going to need, and I think the Regional Assembly as well, um, to basically see how those drivers mapped onto them and try and understand the relationships between, what influences what. Um, and the essence of that is to try and find out those things that are, kind of ... all the things that were in that mix are obviously quite important because they’ve been prioritised as such, but it was



a case of which of these are uncertain, you know, how sure are we about what. If some things are dependent on five other things, then the direction in which it's going to go is fairly uncertain...' (Interviewee 46)

The participants were asked to make a judgment about how drivers influence other drivers:

'...What we essentially did, was work through each driver and ask people, um, "okay, what do you think is going to influence this driver, and what is this driver influencing?". So you have a sort of, very complicated, either a very complicated spreadsheet, or a very complicated chart on the wall. Though, I think with this project we had both, actually.' (laughs) (Interviewee 46)

Each driver is then plotted onto a two-by-two matrix based on its perceived importance and certainty:

'... And on the back of that exercise, we essentially built a, sort of, set of scenario axes which are based on the highly important, highly uncertain drivers. And then you build the scenarios, sort of, one in each corner, sort of, two-by-two matrix scheme.' (Interviewee 46)

At this stage, thought is given as to what the eventual scenarios may look like:

'...probably the most important two things are: a) do the axis and the scenarios most reflect the drivers? and, b) um, do the scenarios that emerge out of them actually ask the right kind of questions?' (Interviewee 46)

The Policy Unit team described this phase as a mini internal EEDA workshop led by the consultants and involving an informal group of EEDA staff that were termed the 'project team', for administrative purposes:

'It's mainly the Policy Team but, there's representatives from other teams, but it's a bit haphazard to be honest, erm, and we did, they tried to get us to think of which drivers were dependent or dominant, and from that we, sort of, did some axes, and, erm, and I think that was an area which, I think it was right that we did it without all of the, everybody else in the workshops, erm, but, I think we weren't, we didn't really know what we were in store for on that one, and it was probably the weakest workshop, in a way.' (Interviewee 9)

'Erm, I mean, basically it was, it was a consultant led process, erm, and I think it was quite hard for most people, including myself, to understand (laugh) exactly how that was working...' (Interviewee 1)

'...there was, that was really a kind of a closed group of the, of the consultants working with us, and they did work and they did bring in that wider, wider cross-

team, EEDA group I was talking about, to look at, erm, the axes and decide how we're going to, to, erm, split these factors and what kind of scenarios they would generate. Erm, so that was quite a, that was a smaller group, erm.' (Interviewee 4)

Figure 4.1 Dominant and dependent drivers

<b>High Dominance/ Impact</b>	Regional Leadership London	Environmental Technologies Globalisation Gateways to the sky	Entrepreneurship & enterprise Gaps in the skills base Importance of flexible businesses R & D base
<b>Medium Dominance</b>	Importance of knowledge and service sector Gateways to the sea		Network society Importance of knowledge specialists Business composition & lifecycle Surface transport & connectivity
<b>Low Dominance</b>		Quality of life	Polarisation Homes not houses
	<b>Low dependency</b>	<b>Medium dependency</b>	<b>High dependency/ uncertainty</b>

(EEDA, 2004b: 28)

The importance of generating the axes that would eventually frame the scenarios was a concern for some who received reassurance from the consultants:

'...That was a funny part as well, because it did feel, it did feel like that was a really, it felt to me like that was a really crucial decision, what scenarios we ended up with, but the consultants kept telling us it doesn't matter. They, they said it doesn't, you know, we don't need to sweat too long and hard over what different, what different way we cut this, because it will still generate the same, erm, concepts.' (Interviewee 4)

The notion that the process of scenario development was more important than the scenarios that would be constructed was a constant theme introduced by the consultants and taken up by the Policy Unit team:

'...So, the scenarios ... I mean, obviously they're a part of the process, but I don't think, I think the actual, it was more a process that was gone through to arrive at them rather than what's written down there I think and then the way they were used, erm, which I guess is right...' (Interviewee 1)

'The consultants kept saying it was the process that was most important...' (Interviewee 9)

'... in some ways it didn't really matter what scenarios you came up with...' (Interviewee 9)

#### 4.2.4 Scenario development

As the two-by-two matrix was constructed outline scenarios were quickly produced that sought to incorporate the main issues that had emerged:

'...following that workshop they basically went away and then came up with some, the consultants then came up with some initial suggested outlines ... they used those as a basis for the initial scenarios and then, I mean basically it was mainly the consultants did it, but in liaison with my team, follow, following that, sort of, initial mini-workshop. So then, once we had a, kind of, outline scenarios which were a couple of paragraphs, maybe 3 or 4 paragraphs long...' (Interviewee 1)

The consultants viewed this as a process of testing the scenarios with the client:

'Are they, sort of, feasible scenarios? ...just quickly look at what the scenarios are and just, sort of, test them with the client and a few other people who know the issues. Are they interesting enough? Are sufficiently, sort of, diverse and feasible?' (Interviewee 46)

The Head of the Policy Unit undertook a presentation to the EEDA Strategy Committee of the drivers, scenario axes and outline scenarios (09.12.03). This was followed two days later by a presentation by the Henley Centre to the EEDA Board (11.12.03). The presentation now included provisional names for the scenarios:

'I remember before the Board we were having a meeting with the Henley Centre trying to, kind of, give them a name, or give them a, kind of, concept that would give them quite an extreme, erm, headline that you could really remember what this was, what this was summing up. Erm, and they didn't have to be realistic, that was the thing as well, so we tried to make them quite, quite, quite extreme and, erm, I think they had silly names as well based on game shows or something like that, but something that would, people could... (Interviewee 4)  
Who decided the names? (AW)  
Erm, erm, (PU4) and myself, and, erm, (HC1), from, erm, from the Henley Centre. Mmm.' (Interviewee 4)

The scenarios produced by the consultants, with input from the Policy Unit team, were then presented at the next stakeholder workshop on December 15<sup>th</sup>. At this meeting participants were invited to review the draft scenarios and report back on whether they were felt to be interesting, feasible and sufficiently diverse to provoke multiple reactions:

'...you know, part of the workshop process was actually to get people to develop the sc., develop the scenarios themselves, so, while they didn't actually write bits of text, they, they were encouraged to come up with ideas for other things, you know, they were asked the question what else, what else happens in this scenario? so they were act.. they were actually encouraged to help develop the scenarios and they were also asked to come up with titles for the scenarios as well. So, to, you know, to a reasonable extent the, kind of, stakeholders were invited to also broaden out the scenarios, although to be honest, I think they didn't. That didn't work particularly well or they didn't do that as much, I think they didn't quite understand what they were being asked to do...' (Interviewee 1)

And:

'...I think when the scenarios first got presented to them they, erm, they weren't sure what to make of them, and they weren't sure whether this was a kind of... they were being told, 'well, this is what happens!'. (Interviewee 1)

However, one stakeholder was impressed by how the drivers had been used to fashion the scenarios:

'I was, erm, impressed by how they turned the drivers into scenarios, (laughs) how they made sense of that...' (Interviewee 35)

One stakeholder was sufficiently enthused to arrange his own scenarios workshop, facilitated by the Henley Centre and populated by invited members of the Local Economic Partnership he represents:

'... we set up our own workshop at the second stage. (Interviewee 36)

Right! (AW)

Erm, where we managed to get our whole partnership involved, where we were looking at the scenarios, this is the second stage after the trends and drivers had been sorted out, and the four scenarios had been identified... (Interviewee 36)

Was that facilitated by Henley? (AW)

It was. Yeah and, erm, one, one of our partners, or two of our partners er, erm, the Chamber, the Chamber paid for that, and the Chamber facilitated that for us, paid for the Henley cost of the, cost of the er, [unclear] conference centre to do it. So, that we were able to get all our partners involved. (Interviewee 36)

So, you took this decision at, in a sense, at the first stage, or before that, that you would hold your own workshop? (AW)

We, we took the decision I think after the first round of workshops... .. So, I think EEDA ought to be jolly grateful that we have done, because what it has meant, from EEDA's point of view, is that nobody in, er, any major organisation here can say that they've not had the chance to stick their oar in to this. They've been involved in the process and we paid for it ourselves, I mean, it wasn't as if it came out of EEDA's budget it came out of, er, out of our budget.' (Interviewee 36)

An EERA representative remembered how the Henley Centre mooted that there would probably be four scenarios produced from the drivers stage and were as good as their word:

'There was an element of what I would call a, 'a black box', where, you know, there was stuff that was, that was taken, er, in, and you know, the Henley Centre would, would do that, erm, you know, they would take the outputs of the, of these first workshops and then start to, to produce four scenarios. Now, at the workshops I went to, the workshop I went to, they said they would probably produce four scenarios, and low and behold there was four scenarios...'  
(Interviewee 28)

These workshops provided the input for the scenarios to be fleshed out, with more detail added to the original 3 or 4 paragraphs to produce four narratives of around one and a half sides of single-sided A4 paper:

'...we had, sort of, a side and a half of A4 type scenarios I think, erm, which were then also used for looking at, sort of, opportunities and threats and so forth of the different scenarios so, so that was the, sort of, process, but it was very much consultant led, I guess.' (Interviewee 1)

Authorship of the scenarios is an interesting issue as there was some discrepancy in how this was perceived:

'Who actually wrote them? (AW)

Erm, the consultants, but with comments from my team.' (Interviewee 1)

And:

'The scenarios themselves, who actually wrote them? (AW)

The Henley Centre wrote them.' (Interviewee 4)

Whereas, the consultant's perspective was somewhat different:

'...I see it as EEDA's work, advised by us...' (Interviewee 46)

The knowledge that the scenarios would be publicly available and therefore open to public scrutiny removed from the contexts in which they were created, meant that the authors had to consider the possible reactions readers would have upon reading the texts. For this reason the tone of the scenarios were carefully considered. The Henley Centre consultants reported that:

'...quite often when we do write, sort of, racy stuff the clients say this is too exciting, this is too exciting for a public document, I know, I'm perhaps putting it across slightly unfairly, but, what they mean is, you know, they want a document that is fairly dispassionate...' (Interviewee 45)

And:

'...there's a sense to which, there's a, kind of, um, if you were, were EEDA and putting something out there in the public domain, which I think was always part of their, their desire on the project. It's, kind of, if you write it from a one person's perspective, it can, it might work with the general public, it might seem a bit jokey to some of the stakeholders and there's always that slight, we want people to understand this and understand it in a quite simple way, and I think a lot of the people who were involved in were quite hard, I was going to say hard nosed, that's probably not the right word, but they were quite serious practitioners and they were willing to have a laugh and a joke, but at the end of the day, as far as they were concerned, it was quite a serious set of issues. So, although we, I'm sure there's one or two, sort of, humorous lines in the scenario actually, almost pruning them from one person's perspective, almost sca..., it can be seen to

trigger off ... I don't personally see it like that, but, people have said to us in the past when we've written them in that kind of way, maybe we trivialised it. But, actually I quite like the idea of doing it as 'a day in the life', and particularly we've done that with things where we're looking at sticky technology issues, or things that directly affect the way that people use their time, information, those kind of things, very good at expressing that in a very simple way, but it wasn't the route we went down on, on this one.' (Interviewee 46)

The Head of the Policy Unit did not recall any specific conversations instructing the consultants to consider the tone of the scenario texts:

'...it was never discussed, but I think I agree that probably they were very mindful that these, we were going to make these things public, you know, and because we're a public agency, you know, I imag., I probably agree that if, if it had been an internal process, you know, it could have been done a different way, possibly, but, so I, probably the public nature of the, of the thing did influence that, but I say there was no, you know, other than making it clear that they were going to be public, there was no, kind of, um, discussion of, you know, whether to individualise them or not.' (Interviewee 2)

#### 4.2.5 Scenarios described

The final versions of the four scenarios, written by the Henley Centre, were signed off by the Policy Unit team on January 9<sup>th</sup> 2004. These were presented by the Head of the Policy Unit to the EEDA Strategy Committee and EEDA Board on January 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>. Interviewees were asked to describe the scenarios in a way that was meaningful to them. The Policy Unit team were the individuals that had devised and administered the process:

'... Well, I suppose (laugh), I suppose to coin a, er, (laugh) a semi-quote I suppose they are stories about the future, they're, sort of, written, I think the ones that we had, were, sort of, written in the style, well we use different... I guess they're written in the style of a bit like a, sort of, a serious newspaper article or, a research report about the future I think, erm, rather than say a, sort of, tabloid newspaper or a (laugh) erm, they're basically, sort of, st, I think they're written, they are written in kind of a story type format, as I recall erm, and they just pick out, I guess, a number of events or describe certain conditions and how those things are in the future let's say (laugh).'

(Interviewee 1)

'...I would describe them as, erm, extreme views of how the future could play out...'

(Interviewee 4)

'I would say the scenarios are interpretations of different possible futures, but they're not necessarily stand alone different elements of the futures [unclear] at the same time, or, there might be elements that happen and not other elements but, they a, they're, kind of, constructs really, erm, exaggerated constructs of four diverse ways the region could go. Yeah, so that's (laugh).'

 (Interviewee 9)

'Well, the scenarios are little stories that describe, erm, a possible future of the region, what can happen, what things will look like, how things will work out, so, it's a little story that you can say.'

 (Interviewee 7)

Other staff within EEDA were asked to describe the scenarios:

'Scenarios are effectively trying to create a number of environments in which a business, or your economic strategy will live...'

 (Interviewee 16)

'...a scenario seems to be a picture, a future picture of how things could be, if we behaved and invested in a certain way...'

 (Interviewee 14)

'...a creative flight of fancy...'

 (Interviewee 23)

'Scenarios are, erm ... pictures of what the world might look like in the future.'

 (Interviewee 19)

'...in simple terms they, they are a, a way of establishing some parameters about what might be happening, erm, for the future and putting, giving you a framework within which you can work with the, with the possible...'

 (Interviewee 22)

'...a scenario is, is, is a possible situation that could emerge from doing certain things in a certain way...'

 (Interviewee 12)

An EERA representative brought in the notion of rationality in describing scenarios:

'I would say they are, erm, caricatures of the future that should inform rational choices.'

 (Interviewee 28)

External stakeholders were asked to describe scenarios:

'...It's about mapping, I guess, not a route but a, sort of, terrain.'

 (Interviewee 35)

'...scenarios are various ways of imagining what the future actually is, and, to try and, sort of, give/provide some direction that services should be planned for.'

 (Interviewee 34)

'Visions of the future, alternative visions of the future.'

 (Interviewee 36)

The interviewees were asked if they viewed the scenarios as different to other types of strategic documents. Some were clear that they did not consider the scenarios as strategic:

'Erm ... I don't think they're really strategic are they? because they're not telling you an answer, they're not telling you what you should do. The, the scenarios themselves, erm, I suppose what they're doing is bringing out the, the linkages and the, it's kind of a ... bringing out the linkages between, erm, decision making



and outcomes, but in a, in such an extreme way that it's not really, it's not a strategy because it's not something that you're intending to do. It's just, sort of, taking things to their, sort of, logical conclusion but it's not, I wouldn't see it as a strategy document, it's more of, it's more of an evidence kind of foundation document and then the strategy comes from that, I think.' (Interviewee 4)

'I don't see the scenarios as part of the strategy document.' (Interviewee 7)

'No, because we're not trying to realise what is in that vision, they're a device for ex...' (Interviewee 14)

'No, I don't think, I don't think they are strategic documents...' (Interviewee 22)

'Mmm, not on their own no, not really, I mean, you know, they are flights of fancy, what, 'what ifs' and, erm, you know, strategy for me is, is, is to do with, er, almost being able to direct the 'what if', almost saying the 'what if' is, is what I want to do, how do I make it happen?' (Interviewee 23)

'...well, I see them being a useful document in the formation of, of, sort of, strategic thinking, but on their own, no.' (Interviewee 13)

'Oh, I would be worried if people think they are strategic documents, because they are, they're not designed to be I don't think, I think they're there to unlock ideas and potential, and, people started using them in that way will run the risk of, like I say, upping the, kind of, ante what people might expect the region to look like...' (Interviewee 20)

'No, it's the means to get to a strategic document.' (Interviewee 17)

'No, I don't...' (Interviewee 23)

'Er, they probably ought to be, but I'm not sure if I'd use them in that sense.' (Interviewee 19)

'No, erm, I think they are, they are a tool, they are, they are an aid to the development of strategic documents.' (Interviewee 28)

Others were more comfortable with the notion that the scenarios were strategic:

'Do you see them as strategic documents? (AW)

Yes.' (Interviewee 16)

'Yes, I think they are strategic...' (Interviewee 35)

The interviewees were reminded that in the literature surrounding scenarios they are frequently referred to as stories:

'...I suppose yeah, stories was a term that they used quite a lot actually, I forgot about that.' (Interviewee 4)

'...I do actually, stories is a good way of saying, yes.' (Interviewee 9)

'...they're not necessarily, sort of, beginning, middle and an end, but, they're stories in that they're not necessarily, they, they, they try and convey something of a sense of what could happen, rather, than necessarily every single thing is a, is a fact, that's why, they're trying to tell you, tell you the story of, I can't think of the word for it.' (interviewee 9)

Again, EEDA staff from outside of the Policy Unit team were asked whether they perceived of scenarios as stories:

'No, I, I, it's, it's perhaps difficult in economic terms, to, to, to call them stories, I, I saw them as, er, an amalgam of, of certain factors...' (Interviewee 16)

'Constructed stories certainly...' (Interviewee 18)

'Often in the literature the scenarios are described as stories, would you see them as stories? (AW)

... Not really, no. (laugh) (Interviewee 17)

Why's that? (AW)

It's erm ... well, they should be based on, on evidence, and on a solid, and I would see a story as being just the fabricated pieces of information really, and don't think, a scenario is more about, where you are now and where you want to be...' (Interviewee 17)

'Erm, yes, yes, I mean, I think in some ways, erm, I think that's quite damaging, 'cos I think it seems to me, that that supports the view that, maybe I've got, that they're not about reality, they're stories, there's fiction in there, bit of make believe, er, you know, pushing things to extremities, erm, and therefore, yes, I think its maybe it's a little bit, a bit damaging.' (Interviewee 19)

'I think story is too long, too long a concept, they shouldn't be that long...' (Interviewee 22)

'Erm ... yes, yes, er, I think that's, I think that's accurate... ... it is more than just a, erm, a literal description of something, it's, it's looking, looking, yes, it's looking at the literal description but, it's looking at what it will mean for people who are involved...' (Interviewee 12)

'Simulations rather than stories, a bit like reading the, the genre of alternative histories...' (Interviewee 21)

'I do see them as stories, yeah, erm, but, yes, stories in its, in the loosest sense that, erm, you know, they, they are fiction okay, but they are informed fiction...' (Interviewee 34)

The interviewees were asked to reflect on the scenarios that had been produced for the East of England and consider whether they thought they told a good story, one that engaged the reader:

'...they're more like a collection of news of newspaper.. not exactly newspaper headlines, but a collection of excerpts, you know, about different parts of the economy...' (Interviewee 1)

'I don't think they'd be very meaningful to somebody who hasn't been involved, because, because of their extreme nature, people just wouldn't believe them...' (Interviewee 4)

'I think they were quite interesting, but...' (laugh) (Interviewee 9)

'Um. I, I was disappointed in them, erm, I, because I thought that, whilst the process of going through drivers and going through, um, that, sort of, dominance dependency analysis was actually quite useful, um, to then collapse them into a 2 x 2 matrix, erm, 2 axis process, seemed to me to, um; a) diminish the power of

the analysis; and b) to be potentially open to the charge of manipulation.’ (Interviewee 24)

‘...It never convinced me and indeed it diminished, in my view, the influence of the exercise on the eventual texts...’ (Interviewee 24)

The consultants again referred to the fact that the scenarios would be publicly available and that this influenced what was included in the content:

‘...it’s almost like the more information you put in, the more there is out there for people to, sort of, criticise and think about, and when you’re trying to get to, sort of, quite a complex, but fairly high level strategic view to begin with um, sometimes that’s not terribly helpful...’ (Interviewee 46)

#### 4.2.6 Scenarios as tools

When describing scenarios the word “tool” was frequently used, unprompted by myself, by members of the Policy Unit team, EEDA and EERA staff in their descriptions and explanations:

‘...you know, they are just a tool to help you think about things...’ (Interviewee 1)

‘...it’s a tool to get people to start... (Interviewee 10)

Right. (AW)

Thinking...’ (Interviewee 10)

‘...it was a good tool, we wanted to have a good tool, we wanted to have a good tool for that conversation, I think.’ (Interviewee 7)

‘...I always took it as a tool. Er, for this exercise, what I can, I can see it to be used as a tool in the future, for monitoring further development, but as a tool, I enjoy them, I enjoy the process, so it was entertaining but, they are still a tool.’ (Interviewee 8)

‘I think they are a tool and not an end in themselves...’ (Interviewee 14)

‘...they are a tool to help us do something, the tool is used by EEDA to help the partners think differently...’ (Interviewee 20)

‘...it’s a useful, it’s a very useful tool. It’s a very useful tool and it was really refreshing to think completely outside one’s box...’ (Interviewee 22)

‘...I think they’re tools, I think they are, they are tools, and they should be seen as tools, they’re something you use as a tool to help your understanding, so that you can then make the strategic decisions, I think we would be, we would be in grave error if we turned them into anything else... (Interviewee 22)

That comes across quite a lot, people describing them as tools. (AW)

Good, well that’s probably good, so they don’t think they’re strategic documents, thank God! Phew!’ (Interviewee 22)

‘I think they were just a tool for a job.’ (Interviewee 29)

One of the Policy Unit team perceived scenarios as a tool to be used for a specific purpose:

‘...a tool for developing the RES.’ (Interviewee 9)

‘...they’re just a tool that leads you to the strategy...’ (Interviewee 9)

The idea that scenarios were tools came across so strongly that the issue was raised with the Henley Centre lead consultant:

‘...we deliberately, sort of, say scenarios are tools to get to the strategy because otherwise there is this big hole you fall into where you’ve got great stories and you don’t know what next.’ (Interviewee 45)

And, recalling a particular moment during a presentation introducing scenarios:

‘...we have a slide which is, kind of, a small, small box which is the, kind of, the forecasting box, you know, [unclear] before the assumptions, a bigger box which is, kind of, like, [unclear] futurist testing. You’ve got a wider range of, sort of, futurist possibilities because you’ve got customer perception widening, but even so, you know, [unclear] just a toolkit strategy, so I suspect we’ve had, subliminally affected the culture, because everybody, we almost always show that slide and so everybody who has been through a workshop will have seen it.’ (Interviewee 45)

#### 4.2.7 Strategic conversation

The notion of the process generating a strategic conversation was first raised in EEDA’s Invitation to Tender. The drivers and scenario development workshops were conceived of as mechanisms by which this conversation may be constituted and the scenarios themselves are seen as, in part, products of the strategic conversation. The term itself is the only referenced phrase in the Invitation to Tender document. The Head of the Policy Unit explained where the term came from and reflected on how it may be applied in this process:

‘...I suppose the actual, the term itself, I guess, I picked up from the title of one of the, erm, books, I, erm, but I suppose it is ... I guess in a way it does, sort of, encapsulate the workshop process that we went through, to some extent,

because it was a, I guess you can think of it as a, kind of, a (laugh) a conversation between, well, either between EEDA and a range of stakeholders or between, all those stakeholders about what the Regional Economic Strategy should contain, so, you know, the workshop process, or the scenario planning process, was a way of facilitating discussion or a conversation about the strategy, erm, so I guess that's (laugh) that's how I, I suppose, I would interpret it, or fit it to (laugh) fit to what happened.' (Interviewee 1)

The term 'strategic conversation' was introduced during the interview encounters and interviewees were asked what they understood by it and whether they felt such a conversation was being maintained:

'I think it means about having discussions with partners or, a group of people which is about, erm ... it's about, er, I don't know, can't think of how to put this. It's really about looking to the, looking at the future what strategic choices there might be for the region, so not just a discussion about, erm ... maybe not just a discussion about one, one particular priority above another priority, which tends to be what our discussions tend to be about. Somebody wants one thing, somebody wants another and they're just arguing about, I want more money in my bit, I want more money in my bit. But, having a conversation which actually understands how it's linked together, and what the relationship is between each other, erm, I'd say that was, should be what's about (laughs).' (Interviewee 9)

And:

'...it's come out of its use within the scenario planning world, it wasn't something that we generated, as this is what we want as an uniquely EEDA perspective, it was (PU1), I guess, leaning on his understanding of the scenario planning process.' (Interviewee 18)

For some the term provoked exasperation:

'(Laugh) We're a, we're a great organisation for that sort of thing...' (Interviewee 13)

'There's a lot of 'strategic' in our documents.' (laugh) (Interviewee 20)

'Yeah, erm, I think probably is one of those words that people use when they don't really know exactly what they mean, so it's a bit of a catch all...' (Interviewee 19)

'(laugh) In what context were we using this dreadful phrase?' (Interviewee 22)

The idea that a strategic conversation may be sustainable after the series of workshops had ended was doubted:

'... I'm not sure how much it's kind of continued ... because so few EEDA staff outside of my team were, were, were, sort of, heavily involved in the process, it doesn't live on with them (laugh), as much as the people who were involved in it.'  
(Interviewee 1)

External stakeholders held differing views as to whether they felt part of an ongoing strategic conversation. Some were positive, but with reservations:

'Yes, of that there's no doubt, whether that was as a result of the scenario planning or whether that was merely facilitated by the scenario planning, or whether that was in despite of the scenario planning is another issue.'  
(Interviewee 41)

While others more negative:

'Do you think that EEDA have established a strategic conversation? (AW)  
No. (Interviewee 34)  
Do you feel part of that? (AW)  
I don't at all, and, I'm not sure, I'm not sure my organisation does either...  
(Interviewee 34)

#### 4.2.8 Scenario authorship

The four scenarios produced during the process represent negotiated texts. During the interview encounters interviewees were asked about whether they perceived the scenarios as having an author. Responses differed as some saw the scenarios as solely authored by the consultants from the Henley Centre:

'... Erm, yes, I think, I would say that the Henley Centre is really the author of the scenarios, erm, and even, even at, where we were, erm, because, I think they started off being a, kind of, half a page long, maybe a page, and then they were fleshed out more in the workshops, as I said, you know, people will say things and then that is, that, so you, you get the response, "okay, so what you're saying is...", and then they say it back in a slightly different way, and then they, and then that is captured, and then that's interpreted. So, they really control the, how it is, how it's written process.' (Interviewee 4)  
'Erm, who actually wrote the scenarios? (AW)  
The consultants... (Interviewee 9)  
The consultants! (AW)  
Yeah, but then they let us look at them and [unclear] you know, we had comments on them. In some ways we were less worried about those, the script

of the scenarios, than some of the rest of what they were saying, because scenarios by nature were creative and it didn't matter if you agreed or didn't agree with them. Whereas, we probably were more worried about if they'd put a driver in which we didn't think was right...' (Interviewee 9)

'...I presume the author is the Henley Centre, but I think it's a rather immaterial question.' (Interviewee 14)

While others viewed authorship as Henley Centre dominated, but with input from EEDA through the Policy Unit:

'Erm ... well I mean that, they were authored I suspect by several people, mainly by the consultants, but with a bit of input from us, erm, so they didn't have a single author, erm.' (Interviewee 1)

'Er, they were, it was the consultants. So based, based on this initial discussion that we had within EEDA, we grouped, er, the scenarios and they came up with an, they came up then with an idea, just an initial idea of what the scenarios could be, and we had still then internal discussions how they could be tweaked, and, and then there was another set of workshops, scenario planning workshops where the people, erm ... could erm, kind of, extend on this initial idea of the scenario.' (Interviewee 7)

'I mean, they have an author in that ultimately the, the narrative that is written down is very much determined ultimately by the Henley Centre, but, actually of course, that narrative was actually constructed from the process we went through with multiple stakeholders.' (Interviewee 18)

'I mean, at the end of the day I would say it's the Henley Centre who authored it, yeah.' (Interviewee 13)

'Erm, erm, I, I would probably associate them with the Henley Centre.' (Interviewee 19)

'Who, to your knowledge, wrote the scenarios? (AW)

...The consultants. (Interviewee 22)

The consultants wrote them, okay. (AW)

I'd have expected them to. (Interviewee 22)

Mmm, why's that? (AW)

Because we were paying them to engage us and partners in the process, so that they could be written, and I would be, I'd consider myself short-changed if we'd ended up having to write them ourselves.' (Interviewee 22)

'What about the scenarios, who authored the scenarios? (AW)

Erm, I hope that people would perceive them as being authored by Hen, by the Henley Centre, because that's where the credibility lies, but would give EEDA the credit for, for, for using them and bringing them into play...' (Interviewee 22)

'Well, I think it was Henley, Henley wrote them, then got, if you like, EEDA's, erm, initial approval, at least, to test them more widely.' (Interviewee 28)

Some identified the Policy Unit team as the author of the scenarios:

'Erm, well, I'm assuming the policy team did, (laugh) between them, I don't know exactly who, who in their right mind came up with them, but, erm, (laugh) I'm sure there's plenty of creat., creativity there.' (Interviewee 23)

A few of the interviewees felt the best way of responding to the question asking who authored the scenarios was to view the scenarios as having no author:

'Do you see the scenarios as having an author? (AW)

No.' (Interviewee 16)

'No, I think it's, they've been derived from people getting together.' (Interviewee 17)

Later, interviewees were asked whether they felt authorship was important for documents such as scenarios:

'...I don't think they were so carefully crafted, you know, erm, the words, that it really mattered, people didn't labour over them and look at them as documents, in that sense.' (Interviewee 4)

'No, not really, erm, I think it's actually important to show that you've represented the different views, rather than having a sin, a single view...' (interviewee 9)

'...there was a workshop here at EEDA, then discussions with the consultants, so, no, there's no author to them, I mean, obviously, they wrote it up, but I think it's a creation of many people?' (Interviewee 7)

'Okay, you don't feel then, in this sense then, that authorship is important? (AW)

No, no.' (Interviewee 16)

'No, I don't actually, not in, not in this context.' (Interviewee 23)

'So, you think the authorship is important, in terms of credibility. (AW)

Yes. Crucially. Crucial importance, yes.' (Interviewee 22)

'I think for them to work throughout the process, the people who are in the workshops need to feel that they have emerged from their thinking.' (Interviewee 29)

External stakeholders expressed their view:

'I, I, I do, in the sense, okay, if the EEDA corporate, if it's an EEDA corporate authorship, then it should be said 'EEDA have written these because we are the ones taking forward the, the,' okay, or, EEDA have commissioned these...' (Interviewee 34)

The issue of authorship was raised with the Henley Centre consultants:

'The actual scenarios themselves, who wrote them? (AW)

Um, we wrote a very, very short bald draft, three hundred words for each one, very neutral language. We took those back into the scenarios workshop and got them to develop them and capture the stuff that came back from both the group that developed them and the discussion and then we re-wrote them. And um, we needed to revise them. (Interviewee 45)

Do you see them as having an author? (AW)



Huh, I, I think authorship is part of the process actually.' (Interviewee 45)  
'Do you ultimately then, see the scenarios as having an author? (AW)  
That's a good question. In a sense if they have an author, it's, it is probably us, but I don't think we really see it like that. I think, really, if it has an author, then the author is basically there to ensure that the views that have been given through that, sort of, iterative strategic conversation, um, are reflected in the scenario. Um, I think, I think that's really the author's purpose. So, it's not ... yes, it's the author's purpose to write, literally, to write it, um, but in being the author, they're not writing their view of what happens, they're writing a view that has been, sort of, assembled from a discursive process.' (Interviewee 46)

#### 4.2.9 Scenario ownership

The issue of ownership is one EEDA were addressing in connection with the final Regional Economic Strategy it was charged with presenting. However, the idea of ownership of a specific document or documents being tied to authorship of the said documents seemed a fruitful topic to pursue during the interviews. Therefore, following questions around authorship of the scenarios, interviewees were asked for their thoughts and reflections concerning ownership of the texts:

'Who do you see as owning the scenarios? (AW)  
Erm ... nobody, I think (laugh), erm, because they were, I mean, and it explicitly says I think on the top of each one that, you know, these doc.. these scenarios do not in any way (laugh), express the views or of either the Henley Centre or EEDA, so, there's an explicit statement to the effect that we don't.' (Interviewee 1)

'Erm ... I think, I suppose they should be owned by all the stakeholders at the workshops really, erm, I don't think they, I don't think they probably feel like that too much, to be honest. I don't think they feel like they're owned by them, although, when they read them, I think they would feel like they could see discussions they'd had in them. Erm, I think really, probably, probably say EEDA owns, owns them, as an evidence-base, and it's a, it's our evidence of process, and probably we own them in that respect.' (Interviewee 4)

'Erm, well, you would say it be all the stakeholders that came to the workshops but, I'm not sure they would say they own them...' (Interviewee 9)

'Oh, I think EEDA, EEDA are happy to own them, erm, but we, we don't want to own them as being all our own work, erm, we need, we need to have the credibility of the Henley Centre attached to it.' (Interviewee 22)

'Anybody, I suppose, that attended and paid attention, owns it as part of their intellectual capital. In a sense of copyright, (laugh) I guess, it's Henley.' (Interviewee 21)

'...I mean, I don't, I mean just looking at them in summary right now, (reading) 'Who wants to be a Millionaire', 'Crystal Maze', 'Going for Gold', 'University Challenge', I don't feel any ownership of that myself.' (Interviewee 24)

The consultants saw ownership of the scenarios as being held jointly between EEDA, and more specifically the Policy Unit, and themselves:

'I'm just ... I think in this case, the owner is probably a combination of what, I would call it, project team, which in this case was EEDA and the Henley Centre, so, (PU1) and his team and ourselves...' (Interviewee 46)

Although when disagreement arose the consultants referred to their role as the author as a way of framing their response:

'...And I think it is, it is crucial, though ultimately you have to have somebody who owns that work and I would see that as EEDA in this respect. Um, although I say that, there are times when EEDA have come back to us and said, "actually we don't think that's right", and we, as the authors, if you like, have gone back to them and said, "well actually, let's just talk through why we think it's important that that piece stays as it is, or..." (Interviewee 46)

#### 4.2.10 Scenarios – organizational learning

In its response to the original Invitation to Tender the Henley Centre stressed how the process it proposed would "...maximise the transfer of knowledge between The Henley Centre and EEDA..." (Curry, et al., 2003: 1). To facilitate this the process the Henley Centre would follow is claimed to "...reflect best practice in organisational learning, cycling between surfacing tacit knowledge among the region's stakeholders, capturing explicit knowledge, and testing that knowledge against external knowledge. (This external knowledge is an important part of the benefit that The Henley Centre brings to the process). This approach creates capacity development and change within the network." (Curry, et al., 2003: 2). The Policy Unit team, who had most involvement in the process and with the consultants from the Henley Centre, were asked for their

reflections on whether the process had resulted in knowledge transfer and organizational learning:

'...all of us that were closely involved in the process think we learnt a lot through it. Erm, I think EEDA staff who are, er, out. outside of my team, EEDA staff who probably at most came to one or two workshops, erm, obviously won't have seen, won't have seen the whole process, they would have learnt much less, erm, you know, learnt things from the workshops they went to. But, erm, I think to get the full benefit of it, in a way, you had to, kind of, be in there in the whole process, erm, which is a, you know, I think that ... for the organisation it probably hasn't. The organisation as a whole, I would say, probably hasn't gained as much from it as it could have done, if it had been more engaged, erm...' (Interviewee 1)

Mmm (AW)

Erm, so it from that point of view the organisation as a whole, I suspect, didn't get as much benefit as it could.' (Interviewee 1)

'Um, but the organisation as a whole, I don't think has benefited particularly, in terms of, you know, any sort of, longer term learning...' (Interviewee 2)

'Erm ... personally, I think I've learnt, erm, quite a lot about, erm ... kind of, process management, erm, and, erm ... a, kind of, managing a project that's quite so long, I haven't been involved in something that's quite as long as this before, where you know, it's been six months, and we're not even, you know, half-way finished yet, and it's something that's, you know, ongoing, and its really important for the organisation in terms of how we, how we work with the organisation, how we work with stakeholders, that's been, erm, interesting and, kind of, a new experience for me. Erm, from the Henley Centre I think I've learnt quite a bit about, erm, discussion management, and how they, how they work with people, to get people involved in discussions and, erm, hold people back and bring other people in, and take the discussion forward. I think they were very, very skilful at that...' (Interviewee 4)

'What about within, er, EEDA wider, outside of your group, do you think people have, have learnt through this process? (AW)

Erm, that's probably, that's probably been one of the weaknesses of the process I think, is that how its worked within EEDA.' (Interviewee 4)

'...I still think the process has been better internally that it was the last time. But, I think people might feel slightly, erm, alienated from it, separated, cause we had such a, a tight control on it and, erm, and the wider EEDA team that we worked with didn't necessarily disseminate as, as much as they could have...' (Interviewee 4)

'I think there's been quite a lot of organisational skills learning within our team, it's been a big project to take on and I think there's been a lot of things we've learnt about dealing with other teams, setting up, setting up things, workshops up, very practical sorts of things. But, I think that's been quite a big learning curve for us, erm, and I think it's probably, we've learnt a lot about. A lot of the things we thought we should do at the beginning, we didn't do, organisationally, for whatever reason, we probably should have done, and I think it's made us realise we have to be, you know, this is what we want and there's good reasons for it which, you know, we should say that and stick to it. Erm, but I think I've learnt a lot about the region actually, not knowing an awful lot, I think, my, just my knowledge has gone up enormously because of this...' (Interviewee 9)

'I think, EEDA could have got more out of it ... as an organisation, than they did.'  
(Interviewee 10)

'...it might have been more of a ... organisational learning thing, whereas instead, it was just seen as the process for the RES.' (Interviewee 10)

'...well, I know much more about scenario planning now (laugh) for one (laugh)...' (Interviewee 7)

I linked the issue of organizational learning associated with the process to the first encounter the Head of Policy had with scenario planning, which was on an Organizational Learning module attended as part of his MBA studies:

'Going back to your initial encounter was through the Learning Organisations module that Ken taught, so do you think it has helped the organisation to learn, going through this process, or do you think the learning, has perhaps, remained just within the team that you had? (AW)

Erm, well the organisation has benefited because we're still in the organisation (laugh), but (laugh), when we're not in the organisation anymore it's not going to benefit ... erm ... you know, I think a lot of the learning is encapsulated, is in the heads of the people who are involved in the process and ... mmm, I'm not sure if we were no longer here (laugh), that the organisation would do anything differently.' (Interviewee 1)

'...I think all that kind of learning is in the people that were involved in it, and once they go it will be lost to the organisation, I would say.' (Interviewee 1)

'...I don't think the organisation as a whole has benefited beyond the individuals who gained through being involved in it.' (Interviewee 1)

EEDA staff from outside of the Policy Unit team were asked for their reflections on the scenario planning process as a learning experience. Some were sceptical about any learning that may have been stimulated by the process:

'Well, this is the bit I'm concerned about because I think when we come to the second stage, I got a bit more disillusioned with the process, because it seemed to indicate that maybe we were falling into some of the, the same old traps and that maybe there was a danger that, that what I thought we'd learned and the, the progress that we'd made, maybe, wasn't going to be consolidated by the second stage and that we were moving back into the old behaviours and old comfort zones. (Interviewee 14)

So, what were those traps specifically? (AW)

The, the first workshop, as I said, was very much about shedding your old way of thinking, trying to imagine testing different visions and did they fit, did they feel comfortable, did you want to add something more, did you want to take something away? When we got to the second set of workshops, which were the testing the priorities, we seemed to have, the same people kept in their prejudices with them much more.' (Interviewee 14)

'I don't think I can point to anything specific, I mean, I think just having gone through the RES process for the third time you move on a bit each time, I'm sure, erm, but I wouldn't, I don't think I'd point to anything where I'd suddenly think, 'oh, you know I've seen the light now, that's how you do it or...'' (Interviewee 19)

'Not from this process. Erm, the partners we've met were all known to us, I wouldn't have, there were no new partners at the table, erm, and to be honest, they were saying what one would always expect them to say, the whole of Norfolk County Council talks about nothing but the A47, that's the only thing they're interested in talking about... ... their contributions tended to be un, disappointingly, more of the usual stuff.' (Interviewee 22)

Whereas others were more positive in seeing the process as a learning experience:

'...maybe not directly, but I think it is, it has informed the way that I've approached meetings and so on, and it has probably helped to give a clearer idea to me of what sort of things I might want to get out of, I might, whereas, I might have been seeking to gain, gain things from meetings, on a, on a micro level, previously...' (Interviewee 12)

'...I think the learning has operated at a number of levels um, but, I mean, I do think it has introduced key regional role players including EEDA to a strategic, to a way of thinking strategically about um, drivers and drivers of change, and about managing those drivers, and about trade offs between them, and I, I, I think it has given a set of analytic tools that can be used in other contexts.' (Interviewee 24)

An EERA representative recounted how they had used some of the techniques they experienced during the workshops in their own group meetings:

'...we've actually used something of the same format about, you know, breaking them up into workshops, asking them to do a piece of work, bringing them back, you know, we've done that, we've had the courage to do that since this. Whereas, we'd never have done that before, we'd always treated it like an old fashioned council meeting, you know, the business reports, we went through the agenda, you know, we didn't ever, you know, jump up and do a powerpoint presentation, and then say any questions or, you didn't say "right, all you people there go into that room now for ten minutes and look at this issue", we've actually done that as a result of this, so.' (Interviewee 28)

The consultants reflected how often the learning that takes place does so subconsciously. That workshop participants are learning without realising they are doing so:

'...I think the other thing that's, the other thing that goes on in scenarios which you can never explain to people beforehand, is the way in which, you know, that kind of iterative sense going through the drivers, going through the scenarios,

thinking of the political implications, actually changes the way in which people understand the environment they're operating in...' (Interviewee 45)

'And it really does allow people to almost learn without realising they're doing it, it's a, kind of, subconscious, but actually a bit deeper than that being that they've gained something and are willing to accept alternative views.' (Interviewee 46)

'I personally think you have to have the strategic conversation to have the organisational learning...' (Interviewee 46)

## 4.3 Using scenarios

### 4.3.1 Scenarios influencing behaviour

As the process EEDA adopted had as an aim the establishment of a 'strategic conversation' and because of the importance of knowledge transfer stressed by the Henley Centre, interviewees were asked about how they felt the scenarios, and the process they had gone through in creating them, had influenced subsequent behaviour and decision making. From within the Policy Unit team the scenario process seems to have influenced their immediate relationships through the perceived effectiveness of the workshop sessions:

'Erm ... it's hard to think of other, sort of, changes in behaviour, erm, I suppose it, I guess for all of us who are closely involved in it, I suppose you did see how, you know, how a really effective facilitator can, can run an event and how you can do, use different tech... use more creative ways I guess, of discussing things. You know, there are a lot of techniques that we use that were, were good ways of facilitating good discussion, so I suppose those, I guess we would try to use those kind of things in the future, let's say (laugh).'

 (Interviewee 1)

'Erm ... I can't think of any particular instances of things that, that people have said have necessarily come from the discussion of the scenario planning process. I think, I felt that a lot more at meetings with, kind of, maybe Government Office and EERA, they have been very positive about EEDA and the way EEDA has run this process, which is something that hasn't happened before, which I think is because of the way we've done this. I don't think it neces., I don't know if it's scenario planning as such, or the inclusiveness of the process, although the two things are very close related, erm, I can't think of a particular instance.'

 (Interviewee 4)

However, one member of the team reflected back more purposefully on the process as she was in the final stages of completing the document, *Scenario planning for the East of England – scenario development phase*:

‘...it’s interesting now looking, I’ve been looking back at the notes on the scenario workshops, we’re doing this document, and actually, I don’t think we probably gave credit to how much of the decisions we made did come out of those. It’s only when you read it back, you realise ‘oh yes, we did, you know’, they’ll say there’s a decision to be made here and we’ll have made it, and perhaps because, because of the way it was some of the decisions became evident...’ (Interviewee 9)

Elsewhere within EEDA, interviewees were less forthcoming about whether scenario planning had influenced behaviour or decision making:

‘Er, not at this stage, because I think we are at, at the early stage, we’ve just got into consultation, and it was used specifically to generate the Regional Economic Strategy.’ (Interviewee 16)

‘Erm ... (sigh) the honest answer is profoundly, no... ...It’s more that it, erm, it enabled issues to be aired and to some extent some understanding of how they would play out in the future if you took different courses, then I think, yeah, it raised awareness and perhaps changed behaviour in the sense that, that, erm, relationships were negotiated and the way those issues could be dealt with.’ (Interviewee 18)

‘Erm, it’s hard to say, because I can’t remember them. But, erm, I, I suspect it’s one of those things that is, actually, really useful at the time and it will be really useful for the policy team, but for actually people like me, it’s probably less useful in, in the longer run...’ (Interviewee 23)

‘Not at my level, maybe at the, er, executive level.’ (Interviewee 17)

#### 4.3.2 Scenarios use

The scenarios that were produced for this process were created with the express purpose of them feeding into the final round of workshops that would look at action planning. It was envisaged that this final round of workshops would provide data for the RES that would identify the specific actions the East of England would need to take if it was to realise its vision. So, while the scenarios had a specific role in construction of the

RES, interviewees were asked about whether the scenarios were something referred to now (roughly four to nine months after their creation) and what role, if any, they were felt to have in the future. The Head of the Policy Unit was clear about their role in the process:

'...to me all the useful, the usefulness of the scenarios was in their, in the process, in the processes that went into making them and that was around them and the discussions that were had at that time, in a way I see them now as, sort of, as dead, dead things, erm, you know, the document contains, the strategy document that we have produced contains a lot of the, kind of, discussions that were, or reflects on a lot of the discussions that were had around the scenarios, but that's it, I think as I understand it at the moment. You know, the scenarios are pretty much finished in this process and we'll have the strategy and we'll move forward with that.' (Interviewee 1)

This view seemed to be shared among the rest of the Policy Unit team:

'...they're not actually being used, after we got to the stage of the eight goals, they're not used in the process in an ongoing basis, so they're a, they're a kind of an evidence-base "how we got to these eight goals", but they haven't been published, because I think it, it, we'd discussed how we were going to use that information, but it's quite complicated and I think it still has a great potential to be misunderstood.' (Interviewee 4)

'If you use the word scenario and put it into the, put it in the document, people will say, "well okay which scenario did you choose?" You know, it's, it's, it's not easy and I think its probably better to keep that separate rather than...'  
(Interviewee 4)

'...I think to me they're useful as a proof of what we did, and how we engaged people, and how we thought widely...'  
(Interviewee 4)

'I would say that, em, at the moment, they're not. I think ... the actual scenarios themselves, I don't think will be used a lot more in the future, erm, which is a shame, to me...'  
(Interviewee 9)

In general, the view outside of the Policy Unit but still within EEDA, seemed to be that the construction of the scenarios was an important early stage of the process and that they represent evidence of the consultation process, but that they were not used currently or were expected to be used in the future:

'...they might be used in the sense of, erm, ... how, how did the RES come to be written, what was the process, they would have a place in that story, and, they might have a place in, er ... erm, you know, if somebody is arguing about a component of the RES or criticising it...'  
(Interviewee 14)



'Erm, the honest answer is, we do not use them in our day-to-day work...'  
(Interviewee 18)

'...I think we've, kind of, moved on from there, it was an early stage in the process which, well, as I see it anyway...'  
(Interviewee 15)

'I didn't think it really, erm, informs the conversations anymore, it was a, kind of, tool that, er, was used to help construct the RES and seems to have been disregarded...'  
(Interviewee 21)

'...So, I do think we, sort of, we've missed the trick to, sort of, really implementing the scenario planning approach, I think that's gone, that's passed us by...'  
(Interviewee 27)

'I, from my experience, it's, it's, it's been much more informal and you have to remember it's been, um, there have been sort of, 'live' during the process, but have not survived the process itself, no-one's ever said to me that, you know, that scenario's the one which we wanted to work towards, no-one's ever referred back to any of the scenarios to me.'  
(Interviewee 27)

An EERA representative concurred with these views:

'I think they've served their purpose.'  
(Interviewee 29)

An external stakeholder who had considerable experience of creating scenarios in a previous role in Australia questioned the view that the scenarios had a specific life within the process:

'They've actually been described as 'dead documents,' they, they had a purpose and their purpose was to create the, what became the goals and the RES, and it had nothing, no life after that. (AW)

But they should have, in, in my view, they should have a life, because they should be kind of aspirational of where EEDA thinks we should be taking...  
(Interviewee 34)

Again, it's actually been said that, erm, the scenarios themselves, it didn't matter what they were, what, what mattered was the Goals that came from them. (AW)  
I disagree...'  
(Interviewee 34)

#### 4.4 Key documents produced during the process

##### 4.4.1 Scenario planning for the East of England – A report for the East of England Development Agency on the drivers phase

This report was the first produced by the Henley Centre for EEDA and detailed its summary of the output from the desk-based research, interviews, two ‘drivers’ workshops and other discussions carried out during the first phase of work. This phase identified and constructed the key drivers and issues felt to affect the future sustainable regional economic development of the region. During the workshops a list of 50 drivers was presented, reviewed and refined to a more workable total. Twenty key drivers are presented with, where necessary, a brief one-sentence explanation. Following this, 18 drivers are noted that were also felt to be important, but not critical to the process. Mention is made that other drivers were discussed but were rejected as being of only minor importance, in terms of their potential impact on the future economic development of the region. The stakeholder interviews are described and the drivers obtained from these presented. The two drivers workshops are described with the output for each being a prioritised list of drivers. The final section contains an overall summary of the two workshops as a table identifying each workshop’s high, medium and low priority drivers. Although they are presented side-by-side no attempt is made at cross comparison.

#### 4.4.2 Scenario planning for the East of England – A report for the East of England Development Agency on the scenario development phase

This 36 page report was produced by the Henley Centre and issued to EEDA on January 30, 2004. The report focuses on the work carried out with stakeholders during the second phase of the process, which centred on taking the list of drivers formed during the first phase, developing draft scenarios from these, and testing them with the workshop attendees. The report provides a summary for EEDA of the work that led to

the development of the scenarios and presents a high-level summary of the discussion of the scenarios up to January 2004. The report reiterates the strategic question used to guide the process, and briefly describes the actions and decisions that occurred in developing the scenario axes, constructing the scenarios and the discussions the scenarios generated. The fifth section of the report offers some thoughts on what priorities appear to be emerging from the discussions that may form the basis of an eventual Regional Economic Strategy. Ten strategic priorities are presented, the first six of which are termed 'strategic imperatives' and the latter four then become 'strategic preferences'. A short commentary of one paragraph in length is then attached to each imperative/preference. Pages 21 to 23 of the report contain an attempt by the Henley Centre to explicitly link initial thoughts drawn from the scenario planning workshops with the draft RES Goals circulating at this time. Appendix G contains the full text versions of the four scenarios for the East of England in 2020: "Who wants to be a Millionaire", "Going for Gold", "The Crystal Maze" and "University Challenge".

#### 4.4.3 Scenario planning for the East of England: A report for the East of England Development Agency on the strategy and action planning phase

This document produced by the Henley Centre for EEDA contains an executive summary that identifies its focus as reporting on the work carried out with stakeholders in the third phase of the process, which related to strategy development and action planning. It purports to summarize the work testing the high level vision and strategy goals published in *Sharing the challenge*, and provides "...a high level summary of the discussion of the draft vision, strategic goals and also the suggestions that were made about the priority actions required to deliver these goals" (Henley Centre, 2004b: 1). The

Henley Centre authors advise this document should be read "...in connection with the 4 scenarios developed in the earlier stages of the project" (2004: 1). Three action planning workshops held in early February, the first two involved stakeholders from across the region while the third was an internal workshop for EEDA staff only, are mentioned with brief conclusions presented. The draft vision is presented with an accompanying explanation. The bulk of the report is taken up with displaying the ten goals, each supported by general comments of about two paragraphs in length, and suggested priorities and actions in the form of a bullet pointed list.

#### 4.4.4 Scenario planning: Developing a shared understanding of the influences on the economic development of the East of England

During May 2004 the Policy Unit of EEDA produced this 59 page booklet as an accompaniment to the eventual RES. The document provides a detailed overview of the scenario planning process and culminates with a re-production of the four scenarios in full in the appendices. The audience for the document appears to be primarily stakeholders of EEDA, the wider population of the East of England and those from regional and central government who may wish to be informed of evidence of process. Brief background to the process of scenario planning is provided along with an explanation of the purpose of scenarios in a general sense. EEDA state "...the purpose of the exercise is not to predict the future, for that is impossible without knowing all of the variables, but to explore a number of wide ranging possible futures and assess their implications for an organisation, or in this case, the East of England" (2004b: 3). The driver development and analysis phase is presented with each driver detailed along with a brief description. While it is noted that many drivers will cut across single

categorization they are nevertheless, set out under STEEPO (Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, Political, Organisational) category headings. The driver development and analysis section culminates in a listing of the 17 drivers drawn from the workshops deemed to be most important in determining the future economic development of the region. The next section relates how the scenarios were developed and tested, and reports, in brief, the discussion that took place against each scenario. In the strategy development and action planning section the risks and opportunities associated with each scenario are presented in tabular form, this is followed by a listing and brief explanation of strategic imperatives and strategic preferences. Table 2 (2004b: 37) attempts to link each imperative and preference to the goals identified in the *Sharing the challenge* document. Ten goals are then presented followed by general comments and a bullet pointed list of proposed priorities and actions attached. The final appendix witnesses an expression of gratitude to the 87 organizations that were represented at one or more of the scenario workshops.

#### 4.4.5 Sharing the challenge: Playing your part in reviewing the regional economic strategy

This EEDA produced document was issued in February 2004, and is described as a “high level issues consultation document” (EEDA, 2004a). The principle purpose of this publication is to illicit comments and questions from all regional stakeholders, as part of the RES consultation process, on the goals and priorities that have emerged from the process up to this point. *Sharing the challenge* is described as the “first written consultation” (EEDA, 2004a: 1) document to be followed by a second available during May-July 2004, this document will be a full draft RES. The document describes the

purpose of the Regional Economic Strategy, outlines the review process incorporating the scenario planning element, presents a vision for the region, and the ten goals and associated priorities EEDA would like feedback on. EEDA states its preference for responses to be sent to them by email and provide an address for this, alternatively, a postal address is provided for those who wish to respond through this medium. To guide and provide a focus for the responses, interspersed throughout the document are 24 questions posed as icons that are intended to prompt the reader and engage them in a dialogue. For example, the purpose of the Regional Economic Strategy is detailed followed by an icon which asks “Q1 Do you agree with the purpose of the strategy, as described here?” (EEDA, 2004: 2). Appendix I lists the Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets for 2003-2006 of relevance to EEDA. It is explained that EEDA are charged with addressing targets set by several central government departments: Her Majesty’s Treasury (HMT); Department of Trade and Industry (DTI); Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra); Department for Education and Skills (DfES); and, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). A deadline for receipt of completed responses is set at 27<sup>th</sup> February 2004.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented data drawn from semi-structured interviews and key documents surrounding EEDA’s use of scenario planning in construction of the East of England’s Regional Economic Strategy. The context within which the decision to use scenario planning was taken has been explored with the participants. This has highlighted the importance of actors’ experiences with EEDA’s previous RESes, the last one of which saw EERA (who has a scrutiny role over EEDA) reserving its position and

not endorsing it. The perception among interviewees appears to be that EEDA did not conduct an effective consultation exercise with previous processes and therefore engagement of stakeholders in the process was seen as a critical objective this time around. The Head of the Policy Unit first encountered the scenario planning approach on an MBA module on Organizational Learning, and following this began discussing with colleagues from other RDAs and with consultants its appropriateness for EEDA. During these conversations staff within EEDA became aware that scenario planning was being considered for the RES process and this inevitably led to some internal discussions in which its perceived merits were debated. An Invitation to Tender was issued and responses received, a shortlist of candidates were interviewed and the contract let to the Henley Centre consultancy, who had earlier met with the Head of Policy Unit to discuss its experience of similar projects in the public sector.

The Henley Centre devised a workshop-based process with input from EEDA's Policy Unit team. Briefings were held within EEDA by Policy Unit staff or the consultants and external stakeholders were informed of the intended process. The Henley Centre consultants conducted desk-based research designed to provide data informing the drawing up of an original list of 50 proposed drivers that were considered potentially of critical importance in the future economic development of the region. Two drivers workshop were held in early November 2003 to review the 50 and refine the list to something more manageable. Ultimately, 18 East of England key economic drivers were identified and taken forward to the next stage – that of constructing scenario axes and early drafts of the scenarios. The consultants produced draft scenarios that were then tested at two workshops; an EERA only workshop and an external stakeholder one. Following these, more detailed scenarios of 1500 words or so were produced by the Henley Centre and cleared with the Policy Unit. The final versions of the four scenarios,

written by the Henley Centre, were signed off by the Policy Unit on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2004. Three action planning workshops were held in early February '04 with the purpose of taking the ten goals drawn up by the Head of the Policy Unit over Christmas 2003, and identifying the strategic imperatives, priorities and actions it would be necessary for the region to take.

To gain deeper insight into how the practice of scenario planning had been enacted in this particular context interviewees were asked to reflect on the process used, and spend time examining some of the nuanced, seemingly mundane, routine actions and decisions required to construct scenarios. Actors were asked to describe scenarios and consider them as an artefact of strategy. The role of authorship was explored and its significance discussed, and the related notion of ownership was brought into the conversation, as EEDA made strong claims for the regional ownership of the RES once it was produced, seeing itself as more of a facilitator, administrator and editor of the final document. EEDA stated in its original Invitation to Tender its desire to develop a strategic conversation within the region and felt that the scenarios would form an integral part of that. The notion of organizational learning was stressed in the Henley Centre's response to the Invitation to Tender, but interviewees held mixed views as to whether organizational learning had taken place, or mechanisms established. Actors were asked to consider how they felt the scenarios and the scenario planning approach had influenced their decision making and thought processes, and what use they foresaw for the East of England's four scenarios in the future. Key documents produced by the Henley Centre for EEDA, and by EEDA for the external stakeholder population during the process are explained.



## Data Analysis and Discussion

### 5.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse and discuss data constructed in the field and obtained from the host organization. The main source of data is the interviews that took place between April 2004 and April 2005 and which were presented in the previous chapter, this is supplemented by documents, observations and (unrecorded) conversations also held during this period. Data is analysed against the key literature reviewed in chapter two. A strategizing perspective encourages a focus on strategists, the approaches they use and the actions they undertake (Whittington, 2006), as they seek to fashion strategy from the material they access and the information they create. This case involved EEDA's Policy Unit team identifying a strategy making approach and engaging others from a range of organizations in enacting strategizing activities intended to produce a set of scenarios for the East of England, which would then form the basis of a new economic strategy for the region.

The section following this introduction considers how EEDA came to adopt scenario planning as the main method for constructing its third RES. Investigating the historical contexts influencing the choice of a particular approach provides for deeper and broader understanding, revealing a richer picture of the strategizing episode (Boje, 1991; Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001; Whittington, 2006). In EEDA's case the poor reception its first two RESes had received led it to search for a methodology that would address the perceived deficiencies of previous RES processes. The multiple acts and conversations

involved in arriving at a strategizing approach are frequently overlooked, with most descriptions of strategy-in-practice assuming strategists begin with an historically clean slate. The data from this case indicates that such early explorative activities are unpredictable, serendipitous and emergent. This section ends with a discussion of the findings.

The next section focuses on how the scenarios for the East of England were constructed. It begins by analyzing the strategic question agreed between the consultants and the Policy Unit. Constructing the scenarios involved a series of workshops facilitated by consultants from the Henley Centre and additional work undertaken away from these formal settings, which involved informal gatherings of the consultants and selected EEDA staff. The four scenarios were written by the consultants and are the output of the power filled relationships that existed between them and EEDA's Policy Unit team. The scenarios as texts are analyzed and criticized.

The fourth section briefly analyzes how the completed scenarios were used. The next examines how an early intervention by EEDA's new Chief Executive put the process in jeopardy and led to the ten action-oriented goals being produced over Christmas 2003, which were then subsequently refined. This subverted the process agreed with the Henley Centre, as action planning workshops were scheduled for February 2004. A short section then focuses on the reflections of staff from the Policy Unit, providing insight into how strategists make sense of their own strategizing. A seventh section follows that interprets the five key documents published during the scenario planning phase of the RES process, collectively they function as a substantial evidence-base for the process. A conclusion is then offered that brings together some of the main issues from the case.

## 5.1 Choosing scenario planning

The six-stage checklist for conducting an effective and purposeful scenario project advocated by van der Heijden, Bradfield, Burt, Cairns and Wright (2002), and the ten steps to scenario construction put forward by Schoemaker (1993) begin with the assumption that the choice to use scenario planning to create strategy has already been made. However, a strategizing perspective encourages a focus on the contexts within which such decisions are taken (Whittington, 2006). The backgrounds to the decision to use scenario planning as a method for generating strategy inevitably influence what processes are enacted and what outcomes are achieved. EEDA's choice to use scenario planning in construction of its third RES was a decision that was neither orderly or discrete (Quinn, 1982), but involved actors in continual processes of narrative interaction as they made their judgments about how to cope with their emerging realities.

EEDA was required to produce an economic strategy for the East of England at three-yearly intervals by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). Denis, Langley and Lozeau (1991) note that strategies are being requested from public sector organizations and this move is increasingly being seen as a manifestation of the managerialization of professional-bureaucratic public institutions (Jas & Skelcher, 2005; Mackinnon, 2005, Rouillard & Giroux, 2005). Successive governments around the world have sought to improve government performance through importing private sector business practices into the public sector under the guise of New Public Management (Butterfield, Edwards & Woodall, 2004; Chandler, Barry & Clark, 2002; Page, 2005; Pollitt, 2000; 2002; 2003; Thomas & Davies, 2005). What marks EEDA out as an unusual example of this is that

the economic strategy it is charged with producing is not one it can implement. The East of England Regional Economic Strategy (RES) is envisaged as being a strategy produced by EEDA, but owned by the region. While EEDA have a role in implementing the actions associated with the strategy, it is not able to carry through these activities on its own. For the strategy to be effective EEDA must rely on the commitment and engagement of its partners and external stakeholder organizations, to buy into the strategy, its aims and objectives, and undertake those tasks EEDA cannot do (Davenport & Leitch, 2005).

EEDA used the first RES as an opportunity to profile itself with its stakeholders, some of whom were highly sceptical over the legitimacy of this new entity, and identify what role it perceived for itself in the region (Langley, 1988; Llewellyn & Tappin, 2003). The second RES was issued in 2002 and was seen as a crucial document for setting out a perspective that would influence how economic development progressed within the region. This RES was received badly by the regional stakeholders and the process of achieving it criticised internally within EEDA. The East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) have a scrutiny role over EEDA (Davenport & Leitch, 2005; Heracleous, 2003; Langley, 1988) and are, therefore, a key stakeholder whose support it must gain if it is to secure wider regional acceptance. Each RES is presented to EERA for comment and approval, and the previous two have "...had a fairly good kicking..." (Interviewee 29) from Assembly members. EEDA staff are aware of the reception given to the two previous RESes and some are keen to distance themselves from them (e.g. Interviewees 4 & 24). This attempt at distancing is understandable when such documents also take on the role of presenting the originating organization as competent, responsible and rational (Denis, et al., 1991; Llewellyn & Tappin, 2003). The new Chief Executive (CE) felt that EEDA's experience in having to finesse the last RES in order to

get EERA endorsement had left significant scars on it (Interviewee 24). The processes by which the RESEs have been created were criticized by both EEDA staff and external stakeholders. Some partners considered their input had been ignored (e.g. Interviewee 36), while even those EEDA staff that had been involved in writing the document felt this had been done within an organizational vacuum, with little integration of ideas (e.g. Interviewees 14 & 18).

The Policy Unit team was given the responsibility of proposing a process for creating a third RES. EEDA made the offer to do this one year earlier than required through the DTI to the ODPM. While none of the Policy Unity team had direct involvement in producing previous RESEs, they were clearly aware of the feelings they had generated both within EEDA and with external partners. Strategizing is dynamic, intuitive, emergent and unfinished (Knights & Mueller, 2004; Mintzberg & Lampel, 1999), this means we can not distinguish when previous episodes end and when a new one begins. It is with this somewhat damaging experience fresh in their minds that the team began thinking about potential approaches.

PU1 first came across scenario planning while studying for an MBA qualification with Nottingham University Business School (NUBS). The module it appeared in was one that focused on organizational learning and was delivered by the NUBS Professor of Strategy of the time. Subsequently, PU1 discussed the possibility of using scenario type techniques in relation to a strategy review process in an assignment he submitted, no doubt receiving feedback from the Professor on his ideas. Weick (1995) notes that an individual's first encounter with a phenomenon provokes an episode of sensemaking, as that individual seeks to understand and locate the stimulus within his or her existing frames of reference. This initial act of sensemaking is said to influence all future acts of

sensemaking (Weick, 1995) as a cognitive schema has been established by the individual that orders future cues associated with the topic. PU1 (Interviewee 1) recalled scenario planning was discussed as a method for large groups to tackle complex issues effectively. The topic was delivered by the Professor of Strategy thereby implicitly establishing the approach as one connected with strategic management. The module was on organizational learning, therefore PU1's first exposure to scenario planning seemed to have led him to perceive the approach as a strategic management method, suitable for large groups, tackling complex issues, that could also help stimulate organizational learning.

Following PU1's introduction to scenario planning he set about learning more about the approach. First, he obtained a couple of books that had been cited on the NUBS module by Kees van der Heijden (1996) and Gill Ringland (1998). Van der Heijden's original experience was with Royal Dutch Shell (RDS) and he subsequently built upon this by combining an academic career with that of scenario planning consultant. Ringland's work as a consultant included a large number of projects with UK public sector organizations, detailed in her publication *Scenarios in Public Policy* (2002a). These books are aimed at the reflective practitioner audience and can be looked at as promotional ('look at what we are doing') or how-to-do-it ('a guide to...') texts (Pollitt, 2000). At the same time, PU1 drew upon his formal and informal networks to discuss with staff from other RDAs the appropriateness of scenario planning for constructing the RES. Although these interactions were not explored during the interviews, it seems unlikely that such conversations were limited to mere factual exchanges, but that they took the form of semi-structured conversations where experiences are related in the form of stories from the field. Czarniawska (1997 & 2004) conceives of narrative as a both a mode of communication and a mode of knowing. What PU1 was doing through

reading scenario planning texts and discussions with colleagues was constructing his own discourse, by listening to and contributing to the stories and discourses of others.

This inductive data construction and gathering (Regnér, 2003) was given further focus and impetus when, on the advice of colleagues from the RDA network, he searched the DTI document database and came across the Henley Centre authored report *Benchmarking UK Strategic Futures Work: A report for the Performance and Innovation Unit* (2001). Rather than any specific detail or piece of information, what PU1 took from the report was further reinforcement that the approach might be a good one (Interviewee 1) and the developing notion that to successfully utilize the approach EEDA would need to engage the services of an external consultancy organization.

Langley (1988: 43-45) identifies strategies as having four potential roles; that of public relations document, source of information, group therapy exercise, and as providing direction and control over strategic decisions. EEDA's first two RESes appeared to function primarily as public relations documents. Due to the adverse reaction these received the third RES EEDA were preparing needed to fulfil substantially different roles. PU1's increasing conviction that scenario planning would provide an effective process for RES construction appeared to be principally based on the consultative nature of the approach rather than for any insights into potential futures it may generate. PU1's reading and discussions seem to have cemented the view, formed on his first encounter with scenario planning, that the approach was an effective way for large groups to address complex strategic issues, "...the futures side wasn't the most, you know, it was a level of participation and the fact that it could get, a way, a way of engaging a lot of people, I think were the main, the primary, sort of, drivers for it..." (Interviewee 1). While

Langley's roles are not mutually exclusive, it seems PU1 was moving towards seeing the process as one focused on group consensus building and legitimization.

The position EEDA was in at this time and the damaged relationships it had formed through its previous RESEs, saw it in the unenviable position of needing to satisfy the disparate demands of powerful and political stakeholders (Clark, E., 2004; Llewellyn & Tappin, 2003). The chief conflict PU1 seemed to be grappling with at this early stage was that of prioritizing the focus of the RES construction process: on the one hand the focus could be on gaining strategic insight into the multiple potential futures likely to effect the economic development of the region, or on the other, devising a process that facilitated the involvement and consultation of as many stakeholders in the region as practicable, and thus gaining political support for the strategy. The strategizing approach of scenario planning may be capable of doing both, but the major appeal of the process, and the key attraction of it to PU1, was for its potential role for engaging partners and gaining commitment to the final output.

Brown (2000) identifies narrative as the preferred medium through which individuals make sense of their experiences and from this perspective, organizing is understood as involving socially constructed storytelling encounters (Currie & Brown, 2003; Fairclough, 2005; Hopkinson, 2003; Humphreys & Brown, 2002; Phillips, Lawrence & Hardy, 2004; Rhodes, 2001). Having come across the work of the Henley Centre and heard of their involvement with other RDAs, PU1 visited it at its headquarters in London. This was to develop his knowledge and a deeper understanding of the method to enable him to conduct more effective discussions within EEDA. Timothy Clark (2004) asks why are consultants used in strategy making and at what point. In this case, the Henley Centre were seen as a source of expertise and was contacted at a very early stage in the



process, during PU1's initial data gathering and sensemaking. PU1 began to talk with the rest of the Policy Unit staff, to "...discuss it with my own team...", but also to "...sell it to them..." (Interview 1). It seems that PU1 had already made up his mind at this preliminary stage that using scenario planning was the way he wanted to go, but still felt he needed to engage his team around the idea. Unbeknown to PU1, a relatively new member of the Policy Unit team had previous experience of scenario planning in her former role as a consultant. She was immediately positive about the idea (PU4), perhaps she felt by going down this route she would be able to contribute significantly to an important major project, and thereby establish herself within the team. Another team member, who had had no previous experience was "...a doubter at that stage..." (Interviewee 4), but could recognise PU1's enthusiasm for the approach.

Much of what constitutes organizing in organizations occurs in the informal 'off the cuff' remarks that are sometimes made to test out ideas and assess likely responses to more formal proposals (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2003). PU1 did this with the CE and Chair to see what their response to a more formal proposal might be, "...I, sort of, tried to drop a few hints about it to the Chief Executive and the Chairman, and say this was the sort of thing I was doing, what did they think?" (Interview 1). The CE and Chair's response was not a positive endorsement, but again more of a hint "...they, sort of, didn't dismiss it out of hand..." (Interview 1). A non-negative response was interpreted by PU1 as tacit acquiescence to proceed. PU1 then arranged to make a more formal proposal to use scenario planning at a senior managers' away-day scheduled for 12<sup>th</sup> June 2003.

PU1 introduced scenario planning to EEDA senior managers and presented his proposal detailing how it may be used in developing the RES. This was accepted with little questioning. One reason for this may have been pressure of time, as the RES was

scheduled to be issued in November 2004, less than eighteen months away, and as no alternative was offered the senior managers may have felt they were not in a position to refuse. The decision was taken to make a further proposal to the EEDA Board on 10<sup>th</sup> July and it would be here where final go-ahead would be granted or withheld. PU1 accepted the Henley Centre's offer to jointly present the proposal at the July Board meeting. PU1 felt this added weight and expertise to the proposal, from Henley's perspective it also meant it was being closely identified with the project from the very beginning of its formal life.

PU1 again recalled very little discussion taking place at Board level and offered the, perhaps not altogether 'tongue in cheek' view that, "...it was the last Board meeting before they went on their summer holidays, so they were in, sort of, holiday mood" (Interviewee 1). Maybe the shortening timescale and impending summer holidays did contribute to a briefer than normal discussion amongst Board members. Another member of the Policy Unit team had expected "...more of a battle..." (Interviewee 9) with the Board, but then felt the reason for this may have been because they didn't really understand what it was that was being proposed. Having consultants from the Henley Centre co-present lent the presentation authority and legitimacy, and also perhaps flattered the Board a little. One Board member remembered, "...we did have a presentation from the Henley Centre for forecasting, er, and, er, obviously, the Board felt happy to go along that particular route" (Interviewee 16). However, PU1's personal reputation within EEDA also contributed to the proposal being closely linked to him, the perception held by some colleagues that he is "...an extremely bright man..." and therefore someone whose judgment can be trusted on something like this clearly aided its smooth passage by the Board (Interviewee 14). PU1 may have benefited from the status afforded to those within organizations who are given responsibility for developing

strategy. Strategy is seen to be an important organizational activity and therefore strategists, by association, are likely to become individuals who exert authority and power over others (Knights & Morgan, 1991). One other point that may have played a significant role in seeing the proposal accepted quickly and relatively trouble-free, was the knowledge that the Chair and CE agreeing to the process would not be in post when the outcomes emerged and the RES was issued.

PU1 realised EEDA would need the help of an external consultancy organization because it didn't possess the expertise internally to execute a project on the scale it required. Additionally, the involvement of a reputable third party was felt to add credibility to the process. PU1 and a colleague from within the Policy Unit visited the Henley Centre again, this time to seek advice on the wording of the Invitation to Tender. Henley Centre's involvement at this stage inevitably meant that the resulting Invitation to Tender document, as well as setting out what EEDA wanted to achieve with the project, would also be infused with its particular take on scenario planning in the public sector (Clark, T., 2004). Also, it sent the message to some staff that although an open tender process would be followed, the decision on who would get the contract had, perhaps, already been made, "...he [PU1] was so convinced by that idea he wanted, that and the people who could deliver it, obviously the people with most experience were the ones he'd already spoken to..." (Interviewee 4).

Following receipt of 19 responses, four organizations were invited to present their bids. As well as senior staff from EEDA, EERA had two representatives on the panel as it had been agreed that it would be a jointly funded project, with EERA contributing £50,000, just under 50% of the cost of the work. The four short-listed organizations provided an interesting mix with one company having considerable previous experience of working

with EEDA, but little of scenario planning. This deficiency came across in the presentation that was so bad the company felt compelled to ring up afterwards and apologise for its poor showing (Interviewee 14). One presentation was by a Scottish organization with a great deal of experience and a high academic profile in the field of scenario planning. Its presenter gave a copy of his book as part of the pitch, but came across to one panel member as rather arrogant and precious about its own scenario planning process (Interviewee 14). Representatives from the Henley Centre presented last and were "...very glossy, very competent, very slick, very confident, highly experienced, had good answers to everything we asked..." (Interviewee 14).

Having a "...household name..." (Interviewee 14) such as the Henley Centre on board was felt to minimise any anxiety stakeholders may have about the process. As a third party it was assumed that it would be perceived as an honest broker acting independently, facilitating the discussions that would generate the ideas needed to creatively consider potential futures. Part of the role the consultants were envisaged having throughout the process was that of the 'naïve questioner', who would be seen by stakeholders as outside of the region and unaware of the historical politics effecting economic development. This would be a false position, because as one interviewee pointed out, "...they'd been briefed..." (Interviewee 18) on what the contentious issues were. The EERA representatives had less involvement in the process up to the presentations, but as well as funding it, had had the unnerving experience of having seen the previous RES criticized in its own Assembly. So for them it was very important that the Henley Centre consultants could reassure them that they would make the process work this time, "...they were very reassuring ... you know, they would, they would hold our hands, metaphorically, through it, and would guide us ... nothing in their experience would be thrown off, it would be handled and dealt with" (Interviewee 28).

New topics entering the storytelling milieu of organizing generate new conversations between actors. Others inevitably picked up when PU1, and then his team, began to discuss the possibility of using scenario planning for the RES process. The Policy Unit team is located within open-plan style offices, so colleagues heard the term and were curious as to what context it was being investigated, “I sit next to the policy team, so I heard about it [laugh]...” (Interviewee 20). These colleagues then, in turn, discussed it within their networks and gradually the idea of EEDA using scenario planning for developing the region’s economic strategy became a topic of informal talk long before any formal communication was issued. Additionally, a high number of EEDA staff had regular contact with external stakeholders, who were also beginning to pick up on the idea that EEDA was looking at scenario planning. Just after the contract had been let one of these staff attended an external partnership meeting where she “...had to take a paper to them and explain what the scenario planning was about, even though I wasn’t entirely sure...” (Interviewee 15).

PU1 pursued a somewhat lone furrow, developing his knowledge of scenario planning through reading books and reports, and through conversations with colleagues from other RDAs and ultimately, with the Henley Centre consultancy. Several EEDA staff and external stakeholders had previous experience of scenario planning, but did not seem to have been involved in PU1’s information gathering. Some referred to the Royal Dutch Shell examples (e.g. Interviewees 13 & 36), while others cited their professional reading as sources of their knowledge of scenario planning. The new EEDA CE had participated in drawing up scenarios for Montserrat during the 1980s, whereas an external stakeholder had been heavily involved in a scenario planning project for the Western Australian Police Service.

The Invitation to Tender EEDA issued stated the project had two objectives, to:

- (iii) Engage stakeholders across the East of England in a 'strategic conversation' about the region's future. This 'conversation', which will be workshop based, will take place within a broad economic development context.
- (iv) Translate the results of the 'strategic conversation' into a high level strategy and action plan that will form the basis of the revised RES.

(EEDA 2003)

The first objective expresses the desire to develop a 'conversation', identifying this as workshop-based and that the context for it will be economic development. Essentially, this objective recognizes that the process EEDA wished to instigate conceptualized strategizing as a fundamentally social practice (Whittington, 1996). The second objective states that the results of this 'conversation' will then be translated into an action plan that will provide the basis for a revised RES. This signifies that the output of the process will be an action plan. The construction of a RES based on this action plan is not included in the contract that the Henley Centre won. These activities were to be completed by the Policy Unit team after the scenario planning stage, following the end of the involvement of the Henley Centre.

One EEDA staff member who had been on the panel that chose the Henley Centre held the view that the decision to use scenario planning as the dominant process for constructing the RES was ultimately a political decision (Interviewee 19). He felt the choice of using scenario planning would not necessarily result in a better strategy document, nor would it produce a worse one, but that the process of achieving it would be more acceptable to external partners. This perspective seemed to be shared and reinforced by the more senior members of staff from both EEDA and EERA. An EEDA Board member (Interviewee 16) expressed the belief that he spoke on behalf of the Board when he stated that what he hoped EEDA would end up with, through using a

scenario planning approach, was a RES that was not contested and had as much political support as possible (Denis, et al., 1991; Heracleous, 2003). Another senior manager within EEDA made her hopes and fears clear "...I think the RES will be better received this time than it was last time, I certainly hope it will be, erm, if it is not, and it needs to be ... God knows what we're going to do" (Interviewee 14). The CE of EERA felt that by following this approach EEDA would be able to "...buy off at a very early stage some of the inevitable carping and criticism..." (Interviewee 28), shared this desire for a consultation process that was broad and inclusive.

Denis, et al. (1991) note that within public sector organizations the motives for producing strategies are multiple and complex. Staff who did not hold senior positions tended to focus their hopes for the process on producing a better strategy document, rather than just as a way of large group consensus building. Staff within the Policy Unit other than PU1, spoke of their desire for a final document that was more strategic, being the result of stakeholders thinking outside of their normal areas of responsibility. Again, staff who had significant daily contact with external partners spoke of their frustration in getting bogged down in the problems of today when discussing economic projects (Interviewee 15). They hoped that by engaging in scenario planning stakeholders would be able to see broader and different perspectives, which may then lead to greater understanding of the need for compromise and longer term thinking.

#### 5.1.1 Discussion

When do actors begin their strategizing activities? If we are to develop a better understanding about how strategies are created within organizations it may be

necessary to reframe our perceptions about when and where strategy-in-practice originates. Most of the strategy recipes traditionally offered to managers appear to assume that conversations held internally have resulted in an agreement about what the organization wants its strategy to achieve. Once the decision has been made to proceed down a particular route to a strategy these conversations are not seen to impact further on the process. However, it may be more useful to consider actors have multiple hopes for an intended strategy making process, and that these different views can be maintained throughout the life of the strategizing episode and subsequently influence how the strategy is perceived once it is issued. Dominant aspirations for a strategy suppress competing and alternative hopes less powerful practitioners may hold for a strategizing episode.

The EEDA case provides an interesting example of a public sector organization coping with the knowledge that it does not have the option of not producing a strategy. The power to exercise that decision rested with the ODPM, who required all RDAs to go through the ritual (Volberda, 2004) of producing a Regional Economic Strategy (RES) every three years. EEDA exercised its power to produce a RES a year earlier than necessary and imposed its own deadline identifying when this would be done. However, this decision was taken, in part, as a reaction to how the previous RES was received amongst its stakeholders. Knowing it had to produce a strategy led to discussions about how to do it, not whether to do it.

By examining the actions and thoughts of EEDA staff involved in deciding on the process for constructing its third RES, what has been revealed is the importance of their previous experiences in shaping what would be identified as the objectives of the process. EEDA felt bruised by the receptions the previous two RESes received. Both



the strategies and the processes by which they had been created were criticized internally within EEDA, and externally by its key partners. These experiences influenced the discourse that was emerging about the forthcoming RES process. When PU1 began thinking about a suitable approach his primary concern was to find a way of involving external stakeholders in a wide-ranging consultation exercise. This can be seen as a reaction against the criticism the previous processes had received for not being consultative enough. Had the criticism been focused on a different aspect this would have influenced the types of methods PU1 would consider. The retrospective sense made about the previous RESEs meant that certain approaches were ruled in while others were ruled out. A poorly received RES was seen as being the result of a process that lacked involvement from stakeholders, leading to the belief that greater consultation would see a RES more acceptable to partners. From a strategy-in-practice perspective, strategizing involves actor reflections on previous strategy making episodes and the reactions these stimulated, as a precursor to, and mediator of, the initial discussions and investigations leading to decisions about the impending strategy process. Strategy making rarely begins with an historically clean slate. More commonly, strategists have to make their decisions about how to create strategy with the experience of their previous efforts still fresh in their minds.

PU1 serendipitously encountered scenario planning while studying for his MBA with NUBS. This initial engagement was followed by a period of inductive data gathering, ongoing sensemaking (Regnér, 2003) and connection building, as PU1 developed his knowledge and understanding of scenario planning. Primarily, PU1 read management texts on scenario planning and relied upon his existing networks to discuss the ideas he came across. He spoke with colleagues who related their own stories of scenario planning in action and through this came across Henley Centre management

consultancy. PU1 made contact with Henley Centre and visited its headquarters to further his understanding. As a consultancy organization, Henley Centre did not provide a neutral and impartial perspective, but one that promoted its own view on how scenario planning projects in the public sector could and should be done. To develop the relationship with PU1 and by extension EEDA, the Henley Centre offered to support PU1 in his presentation of the proposal to use scenario planning in construction of its RES to the EEDA Board.

The interactions where scenario planning was discussed and eventually accepted as the process EEDA would use can be characterized as subtle and nuanced. Hints were dropped about what PU1 felt such a process would entail and because these tentative suggestions were not dismissed this was interpreted as permission to continue exploring this possibility. When formal presentations were made, PU1 was surprised that so few questions were asked and that the proposal was accepted without him having to defend his recommendation. There may be several explanations why there was so little questioning by the Board members; the timescale was short and deadlines were already looming, the standing of the presenter within the organization, the existing Chair and CE were to depart shortly and would not be around when the process came to fruition, and, as no alternative was being considered they really had no option but to endorse what was being presented. The presence of consultants from the Henley Centre may also have added legitimacy and authority to the presentation made by PU1.

PU1 and a colleague visited the Henley Centre again to seek its advice concerning the wording of the Invitation to Tender to be issued. The Henley Centre was awarded with the contract after EEDA and EERA interviewed four short-listed organizations. PU1's close contact with the Henley Centre, up to this stage, was noted by some staff who felt

the letting of the contract to them was certain, based on the close collaboration established. PU1's decision to form such close relations with the Henley Centre prior to it being awarded the contract may be seen as ethically questionable as he may be accused of a conflict of interests, but from his perspective, meeting with the consultancy that had done previous work of a similar nature with other RDAs was the most effective way of learning about how such relationships had worked.

What strategists do when they are strategizing more than anything else is think and talk, Balogun and Johnson (2005) describe this as intersubjective sensemaking. As PU1 and the rest of the Policy Unit team were closing in on the idea of using scenario planning for construction of the RES, the term became current within EEDA. Its open-plan style offices meant that those staff closest to the Policy Unit heard the term as it was being discussed, their curiosity led to questions about what it was and how was being considered. Office gossip then meant that the term would spread around EEDA and to its external stakeholders long before it was announced formally. Staff who are in regular contact with external partners had to be briefed about the topic, so they could inform stakeholders about what was being developed. This provided an opportunity for EEDA to influence how partners would understand scenario planning, as it could communicate the sense it had made to them and receive their reaction to it. These initial sensegiving encounters (Rouleau, 2005), both internally and externally, would help frame the future sensemaking activities of EEDA staff and external stakeholders.

As EEDA is approaching the point when most strategy recipes begin (e.g. Schoemaker, 1993; van der Heijden, et al., 2002), prior conversations in the form of meetings, presentations, hints and gossip individuals engaged in, have established in their minds the frames of reference within which future encounters will be interpreted. What this

case is raising is the importance of personal and group priorities, identities and values (Leavy, 1998; Watson, 2003; Whittington, 1996) in how an emerging strategizing episode is constructed, and the purposes assigned for it. For EEDA Board members and senior managers from EERA, it appears that they would interpret the process in terms of how it would generate consensus within the Region, and help produce a RES that was uncontested and endorsed by the Assembly members. While for those located in more middle management positions, their desire for a better strategy that helped its users to consider broader issues over a longer timescale were set to frame how they interpreted the process.

## 5.2 Creating scenarios

The Henley Centre consultants met with the Policy Unit team and formulated a strategic question intended to provide focus for the project. The question became:

“What actions does EEDA and its key stakeholders need to take over the medium term to maximise the East of England’s sustainable economic development, and minimise the risks to this, in the period to 2020?”

(Burdett, 2003: 1)

The framing of a strategic issue is the point at which most scenario planning recipes begin (e.g. Schoemaker, 1993; van der Heijden, et al., 2002). In EEDA’s case the focus appeared to be on identifying actions implementable by EEDA and key stakeholders. A series of workshops devised and led by the consultants would be the means through which EEDA and its stakeholders would achieve this. The question can be seen as self-serving in the sense that it is posted as *the* question, followed by a consultant-devised process, intended as *the* means of realising it (Clegg, et al., 2004; Knights & Morgan, 1991). This approach provides managers with the comfort of feeling that their destiny is,

at least partly, in their own hands (Knights & Morgan, 1991), as the process of answering the question is made linear and progress towards it reckonable and monitorable (Clegg, et al., 2004).

The consultants combined material from telephone interviews with data taken from the Henley Centre's own databases to construct a list of 50 potential drivers of economic development for the region. Van der Heijden, et al. (2002) advocate the use of *remarkable people* to bring 'out of the box' thinking to the process, the Henley Centre didn't do this, but did request an additional list of interviewees from EEDA as it felt the responses it was initially getting were too homogenous. The consultants' approach to the interviews was to ask quite rigid questions and to avoid getting drawn into any type of conversation with the interviewee. Although qualitative data was being constructed the style used saw the exchange more as a highly structured 'talking questionnaire' (Alvesson, 2003) than an Interview as styled by Kvale (1996). The purpose here was to *get* data rather explore issues deeply or reflectively, the interviewee was felt to *possess* knowledge that the consultants wanted to access in order to develop a list of drivers. The consultants experience of such interviews suggests to them that most of the answers they receive relate to the next two or three years, not the 15 years identified in the strategic question. If the consultants know this why do they persist in using this method? Perhaps it is done because that is what is expected from them and they feel it is necessary to conform to the conventions of strategy consultancy encounters, for example, van der Heijden et al. (2002) advise the same technique be used to gather data about key players' perceptions of the future, or maybe it is done in the genuine hope that sometimes such interviews do throw up a useful nugget of information.

Two drivers workshops were held to discuss the 50 potential drivers identified by the Henley Centre and to reduce them to the most important 15 or so. Prioritization was achieved through a form of multi-voting. The majority of the attendees felt comfortable with the process the consultants used, engendering a feeling of relief among EERA representatives "...thank God for that..." (Interviewee 29). There existed a generally shared view that the exercise had not produced anything new or surprising, but may have been useful in ensuring political support for the RES that would emerge in the future (Denis, et al., 1991; Heracleous, 2003). Several of the workshop participants felt they could have produced a similar list of drivers without the help of the Henley Centre (e.g. Interviewees 18 & 34), some felt this was down to the fact that "...I've been doing the game ... I've been around too long, I suppose..." (Interviewee 37). Some were disappointed in their colleagues responses to the prompts supplied by the consultants and felt that these merely reflected mainstream understandings of causal factors (Interviewee 18). While the consultants also felt they could have predicted at least 90% (Interviewee 46) of the prioritized drivers. One of the EERA representatives felt able to identify traces of previous work the Henley Centre had done for another RDA in the drivers that were presented and saw their role as providing local expertise to this list to customize it for the East of England (Interviewee 28).

The next stage involved the consultants meeting with the Policy Unit team and a few other staff from within EEDA to identify the dominance, or relative impact, of each driver and how dependent that was felt to be on other drivers (figure 1). The output of this was a very complicated spreadsheet and wall chart (Interviewee 46). The next step was to build a set of scenario axes based on highly important but highly uncertain drivers. The Henley Centre state that at this stage it is most important that the scenario axes reflect the drivers and that the scenarios that emerge out of them ask the right questions

(Interviewee 46). The belief that there are *right* questions to be asked indicates that this drives the consultants' work and failure at this stage would be interpreted as no, or the wrong questions being asked. This exercise was conducted by a "...closed group..." (Interviewee 4) and was described as "...consultant led..." (Interviewee 1), but appears to have been one of the least satisfying of the workshop sessions, "...we didn't really know what we were in store for ... it was probably the weakest workshop..." (Interviewee 9). It seems the group didn't really understand what was happening and were uncomfortable with how the process was working, "...it felt to me like that was a really crucial decision, what scenarios we ended up with, but the consultants kept telling us it doesn't matter..." (Interviewee 4). The consultants repeatedly reassured the group that the process they were going through would produce appropriate scenarios. The "...consultants kept saying it was the process that was most important..." and that, "...in some ways it didn't really matter what scenarios you came up with..." (Interviewee 9). The group and PU1 seemed to accept this, but indicated some reservations "...it was more a process that was gone through to arrive at them, rather than what's written down there ... which I guess is right..." (Interviewee 1). The consultants' faith in the process calls to mind Chia's (2004: 30) warning of not mistaking the 'menu for the dish', where a misplaced confidence in established strategy making practices can obscure what strategists are doing and experiencing. These sessions can be understood as involving sensemaking of the drivers and organizing these into scenarios. However, while it can be viewed as a negotiation process, the consultants appeared to impose their dominant meanings of the drivers on to EEDA staff (Ericson, 2001; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Schneider, 1997; Stenhorsson & Söderholm, 2002).

The consultants then produced outline scenarios of about 3 or 4 paragraphs, roughly locating each scenario in one of the four quadrants of the matrix. These were tested

with the Policy Unit team, who were asked if they felt the developing scenarios were interesting, sufficiently diverse and feasible (Interviewee 46). One of the Policy Team members commented that, "...there was quite a bit that happened, erm, happened actually separate from the workshops..." (Interviewee 4). These acts occurring outside of the formal scenario planning process represent what Whittington (2003) terms the labour of strategy, referring to those tasks undertaken *between* process steps. These actions are often more influential in shaping the outputs of strategizing than the formal stages detailed in many of the 'how to' recipes traditionally offered.

Shortly before they were to be presented to the EEDA Board, two members of the team and one of the consultants named the scenarios after television gameshows; "Who wants to be a Millionaire", "Going for Gold", "The Crystal Maze" and "University Challenge". These scenarios provide examples of the 'fan model' approach to scenario development criticized by List (2004), for implying that multiple futures spring forth from a shared past and present. At the next workshop participants were asked to review, develop and broaden out the scenarios, although PU1 admits that "...didn't work particularly well ... I think they didn't quite understand what they were being asked to do..." (Interviewee 1). An EERA only workshop was also held to develop and test the scenarios. The output of these workshops led to the scenarios being fleshed out by the consultants to about one and a half pages in length. PU1 viewed this stage as "...very much consultant led..." (Interviewee 1). At this point the subject of authorship was broached with differing opinions offered: PU1 saw it as "...the consultants, but with comments from my team..." (Interviewee 1), whereas the consultants' view was that "...it was EEDA's work, advised by us..." (interviewee 46).



Interviewee 19 had previous experience of scenario planning while at Hampshire County Council, and recalled how they were constructed around fictitious characters that explored how they perceived their lives within each potential future. The EEDA scenarios didn't do this, they did not describe the region from any particular point of view. The consultants explained that "...when we do write, sort of, racy stuff the clients say ... 'this is too exciting for a public document' ... what they mean is ... they want a document that is fairly dispassionate..." (interviewee 45). On previous scenario development projects they had been accused of trivialising complex issues, of making them seem "... a bit jokey..." (Interviewee 46) when they were written from one person's perspective. Knowing they would be made publicly available led to the consultants limiting what was included, as "...the more information you put in, the more there is out there for people to, sort of, criticize...", which, when you are endeavouring to create meaningful scenarios, is "... Sometimes not terribly helpful..." (Interviewee 46). Styhre (2005) suggests scenarios written with a public audience in mind will conform to the dominant beliefs held about how such texts should look. The Henley Centre acted to avoid criticism, and protect its identity (Currie & Brown, 2003) and status as a credible management consultancy (Leavy, 1988; Watson, 2003; Whittington, 1996). PU1 did not recall any specific conversations with the consultants about this, but did agree that because the scenarios would be in the public domain they needed to be texts that conformed to the 'business-like' orthodoxy hinted at by EEDA and the Henley Centre (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Llewellyn & Tappin, 2003).

The scenarios produced in this case were key documents intended to influence and inform the economic strategy for the East of England. If writing is not an innocent practice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), but inevitably reveals something of the values and prejudices of those who write, then it is important to consider the role of authorship in

construction of them. Views differed as to who was seen as having authored the scenarios. Within EEDA, some saw the author as being the Henley Centre (e.g. Interviewees 4, 9, 13, 14, 19 & 22), others felt it had been the dominant voice, but with input from EEDA and its stakeholders (e.g. Interviewees 1, 7, 18 & 28), while a couple of interviewees felt the scenarios had no author (Interviewees 16 & 17) (Barry & Elmes, 1997). Some felt the issue of authorship was not important for documents of this type (Interviewees 14, 16 & 23). The consultants admitted that "...if they have an author ... it is probably us...", but were at pains to explain that "...in being the author, they're not writing their view of what happens, they're writing a view that has been, sort of, assembled from a discursive process" (Interviewee 46).

Tied with the notion of authorship is that of ownership and the question whether a document authored by one party can be owned by another, or have multiple owners. Most staff felt that ownership belonged to those stakeholders that attended the workshops, but doubted whether partners would feel any sense of it. One external partner expressed the view "...[reading] 'Who wants to be a Millionaire', 'Crystal Maze', 'Going for Gold, 'University Challenge', I don't feel any ownership of that myself" (Interviewee 24). Brown (2000) and Maitlis (2005) both caution against being trapped by the illusion that social sensemaking would result in the scenarios being understood in the same way. The Henley Centre stated strongly "...I would see that as EEDA in this respect...", but then proceeded to relate "...although I say that, there are times when EEDA have come back to us and said, 'actually, we don't think that's right', and we, as the authors, if you like, have gone back to them and said, 'well actually, let's just talk through why we think it's important that that piece stays as it is'..." (Interviewee 46). Timothy Clark (2004) ponders the extent to which the ideas that emerge during a strategizing episode are the responsibility of the consultants or organization, or both.

What this example illustrates is that such responsibility is complex and fluid, and involved the consultants in sensegiving activities with EEDA (Dunford & Jones, 2000; Ericson, 2001; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Hill & Levenhagen, 1995; Snell, 2002). The connections between authorship and ownership are under-explored, but are indicative of the tangled power relationships at play between consultants and their clients.

A strategizing perspective encourages the notion that strategy becomes something actors do rather than possess. As part of their doing strategy, in this case, scenarios were created, therefore interviewees were asked for their thoughts on whether they perceived the scenarios as strategic documents. Although a few did see them as strategic documents (Interviewees 16 & 35), most didn't, and in their reasoning it became clear that, for them, a strategy should be a document providing a clear and unambiguous direction, containing actionable statements (e.g. Interviewees 4, 14 & 23) (Langley, 1988). Some saw them as intermediary documents, useful in creating strategies, but not strategic in themselves, although one did concede that "...they probably ought to be..." (Interviewee 19).

The description of scenarios as stories was explored, but some saw this as too loose a label and felt that seeing them as stories could be damaging as it could reinforce the view that "...there's fiction in there, bit of make believe..." (Interviewee 19). While others were more comfortable with this description (e.g. Interviewees 4 & 12), and supported this by saying they contained both facts (Interviewee 9) and informed fiction (Interviewee 34). Whether the East of England scenarios succeeded as stories was doubted "...I don't think they'd be very meaningful to somebody who hasn't been involved..." (Interviewee 4). The new CE of EEDA (Interviewee 24) expressed his disappointment in the scenarios, feeling that the acts of creating a 2 x 2 matrix and then drawing up

scenarios based on this, diminished the power of the drivers analysis and left the authors open to the charge of manipulation.

In their descriptions of scenario planning EEDA and EERA staff frequently applied the noun “tool” in their explanations (e.g. Interviewees 7, 8, 10, 14, 20, 22 & 29). The word is also found in the literature on scenario planning (e.g. Schoemaker, 1995; Schoemaker & van der Heijden, 1992; van der Heijden, 1996; van der Heijden, et al., 2002), but its use can be interpreted as downgrading scenarios from narrative interpretations of plausible lived experiences to mechanistic strategic planning instruments (Iedema, et al., 2004). A member of the Policy Unit team described them as being “...just a tool that leads you to the strategy...” (Interviewee 9). This uniform description was raised with the Henley Centre who revealed that it is a view it promotes because, in its experience, there is a danger that clients see the production of scenarios as the end of the process and neglect drawing up a strategy informed by them (Interviewee 45). The consultant explained that its standard presentation introducing scenarios contains one slide which identifies scenario planning as part of the strategist’s toolkit and that anyone who attended this session will have been exposed to this (Interviewee 45).

PU1 identified that he wanted the process to facilitate the development of a ‘strategic conversation’, a term he took from the title of one of van der Heijden’s (1996) books. The term represented what he felt the workshops were capable of generating, “...a conversation between ... EEDA and a range of stakeholders or between, all those stakeholders...” (Interviewee 1) about what the scenarios should contain. This differs from the idea of a strategic conversation detailed by Chesley and Wenger (1999), and van der Heijden, et al. (2002), who describe it as an ongoing conversation stimulated *by* the scenarios. In the EEDA case, the emphasis appeared to be on generating a

conversation to develop the scenarios. The notion of a conversation indicated a desire for a discussion that moved beyond individuals remaining entrenched in and advocating for their own position (Interviewee 9), to one where participants empathised with differing views and sought to develop new responses to long-standing issues. However, amongst EEDA staff outside of the Policy Unit the phrase provoked cynicism and exasperation (e.g. Interviewees 13, 19, 20 & 22). The nature of the process meant that any conversations that were established were limited to the workshops and did not appear to have a life outside of these.

PU1's first encounter with scenario planning occurred within the context of a module on organizational learning. The Henley Centre's response to EEDA's Invitation to Tender emphasized its commitment to best practice in organizational learning (Curry, et al., 2003), but did not elaborate on what it felt this was (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Styhre, 2005). The feeling within EEDA appears to be that little organizational learning resulted from the project, "...the organization as a whole, I don't think has benefited particularly, in terms of, you know, any sort of longer term learning..." (Interviewee 2). PU1 repeatedly offered the view that what learning did take place was limited to the individuals that comprise the Policy Unit team and would remain within this small team, "...the organization has benefited because we're still in the organization ... when we're not in the organization anymore it's not going to benefit..." (Interviewee 1). This view was shared by staff outside of the Policy Unit and regretted (Interviewee 14). Members of the Policy Unit team spoke about how, through close engagement with the process, they had learnt about how major projects of over six months duration can be managed (Interviewee 1). Observing how the consultants handled difficult discussions during the workshops left its mark (Interviewee 4), and even the very practical acts of setting up and arranging the workshops entailed a steep learning curve (Interviewee 9). An EERA

representative also related how they had adopted some of the group working techniques experienced in the workshops in its own managing of the Regional Assembly (Interviewee 28). The consultants emphasized that because of the iterative nature of much of the process, learning can take place without people being aware they are learning (Interviewee 45 & 46). Although, one did concede the view that "...you have to have the strategic conversation to have the organizational learning..." (Interviewee 46).

### 5.2.1 East of England scenarios

The scenarios (Appendix G) are negotiated narrative texts that perceive experience embedded within the wider discourses of the workshops, and the meetings and encounters that took place between the workshops. They do not reflect future realities, but are attempts draw from prioritized drivers, meaningful, coherent, liveable, and adequate wholes (Brown, 2004; Bruner, 1991 & 2002; Cunliffe, et al., 2004; Hopkinson, 2003; Pentland, 1999). A text is more likely to be read, used and considered influential if it relates to other texts and existing discourses, since it can then evoke more broadly grounded understandings and meanings (Grant & Hardy, 2004; Phillips, et al., 2004). EEDA used its central position within the East of England economic network to disseminate the scenarios to a large number of other actors through the workshops and through its attachment to documents published at various stages of the RES process (Phillips, et al., 2004). The primary challenge the authors of the scenarios faced was to produce absorbing, compelling accounts of potential futures of the East of England that aesthetically engaged stakeholders and their organizations (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Taylor, et al., 2002). intellectually and artistically.

#### 5.2.1.1 Scenario 1: “Who wants to be a Millionaire”

This scenario is subtitled “Building Businesses, rapid growth in transport and ICT infrastructure”, and attempts to convey a region that is economically vibrant, having become a rival to the South East in terms of its role as the commercial heart of Britain. The text is not an easy one to read and connect with, there are around twenty-two spelling, punctuation, grammatical and stylistic peculiarities in the eleven paragraphs that make up the scenario. These range from simple spelling mistakes “...beginning to overtaking [*sic*] the South East...”, to common punctuation lapses “...the regions [*sic*] burgeoning economy...”, to more complex stylistic issues when sentences are structured that are so long and complex to be almost unreadable, “The Thames Gateway, once an embarrassing adjunct to the region, is fast becoming a jewel in its crown – in many ways emblematic of this newfound success in a truly 21<sup>st</sup> century economic environment: well connected by road, rail and the new high-speed maglev train to London, and with high level ICT connections incorporated into its new housing and business structures, it is providing a fertile area for blossoming entrepreneurs to cultivate their businesses in easy reach of London, and via Stansted and Luton, the principles cities of Europe.”. There also exists an assumption that the reader is familiar with quite detailed information about the region “Whilst Cambridge and Norwich were once seen as leaders in their field...”, it is not made clear what industries Cambridge and Norwich were leaders in.

#### 5.2.1.2 Scenario 2: “Going for Gold”

The subtitle to this scenario reads “Exporting ideas, rapid growth in transport and ICT infrastructure” and appears closely related to the first scenario, the key difference being

that in this scenario research and development figure more prominently. Like scenario one the 12 paragraphs that comprise the scenario are littered with around 37 textual quirks making reading the document difficult. Capital letters are missing from names “...Norwich International airport... [sic]”, plurals and singulars are mixed together “...nearby towns and cities, with the growth of stylish retail shopping centres, café culture[s] and other services...”, an idiosyncratic approach to the use or non-use of punctuation “Similarly there is growing...”. Some sections appear contradictory: Stansted and Luton have an increase in surface transport and the region’s ports have “...grown in importance as international gateways...”, but there is also a “significant drop in road traffic levels in and around major urban centres and small market towns.”. Overuse of the definite article ‘the’ mean sentences are fragmented interrupting the flow of the text, “The communities are much more transient...”, and “...there is concern that the quality of life has declined...”.

#### 5.2.1.3 Scenario 3: “The Crystal Maze”

Subtitled “Building businesses, minimal growth in transport and ICT infrastructure”, this scenario describes a region building businesses, as in scenario 2, but achieving this with little growth in transport and ICT infrastructure. The scenario description covers sixteen paragraphs that are littered with stylistic idiosyncrasies, punctuation and grammatical errors. One sentence provides a potent example of this, “Equally there have been an increasing emphasis on building a strong regional identity based around cultural regeneration and a small number of flagship developments, with a view to raising aspirations in the region and making the region more attractive to those from outside.”, commas are missing when they should be present, “have” is used when it should have



been “has”, the word “region” is repeated twice unnecessarily and the ideas contained in the section would have been better served in two sentences rather than one. Elsewhere, apostrophises are missing “...the 90s...”, and sentences are confusing, “The population is increasingly ageing, and many of them feel disengaged in the new economy and SMEs that emerge.”, and “Many local schools are under threat, and the health sector is a growth sector.”. These two examples seem to represent attempts by the consultants to integrate issues that may not naturally fall together and would benefit from being treated separately.

#### 5.2.1.4 Scenario 4: “University Challenge”

The fourth scenario is subtitled “Exporting, ideas minimal improvements in transport and ICT infrastructure”, and describes a region close to scenario 2, but with the main difference being that it has experienced minimal improvements in transport and ICT infrastructure. The ten paragraphs that comprise it again contain spelling and punctuation errors, and grammatical peculiarities, making reading it difficult and frustrating. Sentences do not always start with a capital letter “...do business in manufacturing... [sic]”, words are missing from sentences “...Luton residents say it will soon be quicker for them to [sic] the US than get to Bedford by car...”, and typographical errors exist that should have been eliminated through more careful checking “...East Anglian faming [sic] co-operative.”. As the authors, the consultants seem to have tried to force drivers together into a single sentence, this may have been done because they genuinely felt the issues belonged together, or it may have been because they were consciously trying to keep the scenarios short. But what results in some cases is a sentence that reads as strained and would have benefited, stylistically, from separating

out. For example the sentence “Some local authorities have looked into encouraging or providing new sustainable forms of public transport, but with little agreement across the region, most plans don’t get beyond the thinking stage – another sign of the lack of regional leadership, or ability of the region to punch its weight in policy discussions at regional and national level”. There are multiple issues included in this sentence: local authorities encouraging or providing sustainable forms of public transport; lack of agreement for this across the region; plans not progressing beyond the idea stage; lack of regional leadership; and the region not punching its weight at regional and national levels. Each of these are deserving of a discussion on their own, and are diminished by being artificially linked into one complex and confusing sentence.

It is surprising that a prominent management consultancy organization such as Henley Centre could produce documents, it knew would be publicly available, that were so poorly written, containing so many obvious mistakes. Furthermore, it is equally striking that none of the interviewees mentioned how badly they were written during the interviews. Maybe the majority had not read them. The only consistent comment made about the scenarios was that they represented *extreme* views (e.g. Interviewee 4), yet it is their homogeneity that struck me upon reading them. Their subtitles indicate that the differences between are not stark enough to represent extreme views of the region, but merely differing emphases. The scenarios represent examples of the discourse of strategic management consulting enacted by Henley Centre, they conform to the general genre that it both creates and contributes to.

### 5.2.2 Discussion

In agreement with most scenario planning recipes (e.g. Schoemaker, 1993; van der Heijden, et al., 2002), the Policy Unit team and the consultants from the Henley Centre produced a strategic question. What impact this had on the process as it was enacted is unclear as it was rarely referred to during the interviews. It is mentioned in some of the key documentation that was produced (e.g. *Scenario planning for the East of England – A report for the East of England Development Agency on the scenario development phase*), but seems not to have influenced the many acts required to carry through the project. The idea that the strategic question would act as a guiding principle seems to have been subverted by the desire to meet the more pressing demands of satisfying the more immediate need for wide consultation.

The consultants undertook to gather qualitative data to prepare the drivers workshops through structured telephone interviewing and document analysis. Although these acts dealt with words and required subjective interpretation, this aspect was regarded as if the consultant carrying out these tasks did not influence what was produced. The consultants expressed some disappointment at the information the telephone respondents gave them and confirmed that this reflected their previous experience of this type of exercise. Interviewees appear to find it difficult to identify drivers relevant for longer than a two to three year timescale. The drivers workshops were considered a success, as the first workshops in the process they were approached with some apprehension (Interviewee 29), but appear to have left attendees generally satisfied. This level of satisfaction may indicate the rather low expectations people had for the events based on previous RES consultation exercises. It seems that the process of driver presentation, discussion and prioritization contained little that was new or surprising to the majority of actors involved. Most appeared to go along with the process reasonably contentedly and seemed resigned to the view that such workshops are a

necessary mechanism of consultation. This raises the possibility that such workshops are valuable for the opportunity they give for people to come together and be involved in the process, and thus determine this stage of the process as group therapy (Langley, 1988), rather than for the results they produce. These are likely to have been obtainable from a much smaller group and with fewer telephone interviews.

The Henley Centre followed an approach similar to those advanced by van der Heijden, et al (2002) and Schoemaker (1993), involving two-dimensional matrixes and driver evaluation. How the East of England prioritized drivers were then taken and turned into, first, a complicated spreadsheet, then a two-by-two matrix that became the scenario axes, followed by an outline of the scenarios which were then developed during further workshops, reveals something of the complicated and uneven nature of the relationships the consultants and the Policy Unit team had developed. When the Policy Unit team felt unsure and uncomfortable with the process, or when it appeared they or other actors did not understand what was required, they described these sessions as “...very much consultant led...” (Interviewee 1). The consultants spent much of their time during these encounters reiterating their faith in the process they had devised and reassuring participants that it would produce the desired outcomes.

The scenarios were written by the Henley Centre, but authorship seems to be something that is disputed. The consultants saw the work as EEDA's advised by them, but PU1 viewed the work as produced by the consultants and commented on by the Policy Unit team. The scenario development workshops involved stakeholders fleshing out the draft scenarios the Henley Centre produced. But, in the workshops it was observed that “...people will say things and then that is ... you get the response, ‘okay, so what you’re saying is...’, and then they say it back in a slightly different way ... and then that is

captured, and then that's interpreted. So, they [the consultants] really control the, how it is, how it's written..." (interviewee 4). While the scenarios may be regarded as negotiated texts their creation resulted from asymmetrical power relations. The Henley Centre devised and controlled the process by which they were created, the consultants wrote them and when EEDA questioned aspects it did not agree with, the Henley Centre exercised its power to accept or reject these comments. This example raises the importance of authorship and ownership of key texts associated with strategizing, and highlights how such texts are not only powerful and hegemonic (Boje, et al., 2004) artefacts in themselves, but also the result of power-laden discourses between actors representing different organizations and identities (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Knights & Morgan, 1991).

The scenarios were designed to fulfil a particular role in this RES construction process, but were also written with a view to how they would be read and interpreted away from this. Both PU1 and the consultants perceived a danger in the scenarios being read outside of the context of the RES review and consequently being criticised as trivial. The Henley Centre and EEDA appeared mindful and protective of their respective reputations and sought to safeguard these by constructing scenarios that were "serious" and "business-like". Barry and Elmes (1997) note that most strategic plans erase individuals and peoples' identities, with departments referred to rather than named individuals. It seems to have been implicitly understood that the scenarios would not focus on how the region would look through the eyes of an individual or small group, but would be constructed from an assumed value-free perspective. An alternative approach would be to write the scenarios from the standpoint of, for example, a family based in the region. This would have focused the stories on how the family encountered and behaved in four alternative descriptions of the region. Interviewee 19 had previous

experience of scenarios written in this way and could recall them more easily than the ones EEDA had just produced.

Scenario planning was consistently described as a tool, to be used to get to a strategy. So strategy was conceptualized as a thing to be achieved. Within this understanding, the activities EEDA and its stakeholders engaged in were not seen as strategy in themselves, but as necessary moves leading to a strategy. Generally, the scenarios were not seen as strategic documents, but as workshop milestones. By perceiving scenario planning as merely a tool, the deeper potential benefits of scenario thinking have not been explored. Conceiving scenario planning as a tool denotes use rather than thought (Gabriel, 2002) and in this case did not encourage individuals to challenge their existing frames of reference, meaning that deeper lying assumptions remained hidden and untested. What this example also illustrates is how consultants can influence the language within an organization in ways they neither intended or expected.

PU1's use of the term "strategic conversation" can be traced directly to an encounter with a scenario planning text (van der Heijden, 1996). The conversation EEDA tried to engage stakeholders in was limited to the workshop sessions, and therefore remained formal and controlled. Despite the emphasis the Henley Centre placed on its ability to develop organizational learning, PU1 admits that the only learning he felt took place was among the Policy Unit team. Wider organizational learning did not take hold, "...it was just seen as the process for the RES" (interviewee 10). The consultants felt organizational learning would occur through the iterative process of scenario development it advocated. However, one conceded the opinion that for organizational learning to occur a strategic conversation had to be established.

The four East of England scenarios are criticized for their poor craftsmanship. Van der Heijden et al. (2002) and Schoemaker (1993) advise that some form of systems check be used on the scenarios to test that they are internally consistent. It is doubtful if these scenarios have been subjected to any form of check, even a typographical one, as they contain so many mistakes. The consultants (Interviewee 46) said they wanted the scenarios to be interesting, diverse, feasible and lead to the right questions being asked, but it seems inconceivable that anyone could genuinely believe that these scenarios could fulfil this task. Chermack (2003) notes that individuals encounter scenarios, through reading or listening to presentations, and then proceed to make them meaningful, relevant and useful by making sense of them, subjectively locating them within their own frames of reference. These four scenarios do not invite such encounters, they do not appear to have been written with the reader in mind, rather it seems to have been regarded as just another step to go through on the way to getting to the RES.

### 5.3 Using scenarios

Interviewees found it difficult to recall any instances when the scenario planning process, or the scenarios influenced behaviour beyond their immediate impact. One EEDA middle manager responded "...not at my level, maybe at the, er, executive level..." (Interviewee 17), indicating that perhaps this person viewed strategic thinking and acting as acts only to be undertaken by those at a senior level within the organization. One member of the Policy Unit team reported how at meetings she'd noticed other regional organizations, such as EERA and the Government Office, talk more favourably about EEDA, even when discussing issues that had no obvious connection to the RES, and

associated this the scenario planning workshops having generated goodwill among its key stakeholders.

PU1 envisaged the scenario planning phase as a micro-process, the results of which would feed into the larger and more important process of developing the Regional Economic Strategy for the East of England. The scenarios were only seen as useful in terms of the contribution they made to the action planning workshops held later in the process. This led PU1 to describe the four scenarios as "...dead, dead things..." (Interviewee 1), at a relatively early stage in the process (April, 2004). This view was shared among the Policy Unit team who felt that once the ten goals of the RES had been developed the scenarios would no longer be referred to. The scenarios were felt to represent an "...evidence-base 'how we got to these ... goals'..." and would be useful as "...proof of what we did..." (interviewee 4). One did reflect that perhaps it was "...a shame..." (Interviewee 9), that the scenarios would not be used in the future. The view that the scenarios had served their purpose and were now effectively finished with, was commonly held within EEDA and EERA (e.g. Interviewees 14, 15, 18, 21 & 29). One EEDA staff member did lament this approach and felt that EEDA had "...missed the trick to, sort of, really implementing the scenario planning approach, I think that's gone, that's passed us by..." (Interviewee 27).

#### 5.4 The ten goals

The strategic question the consultants and EEDA agreed asks what actions are necessary for it and its key stakeholders to take to maximise the East of England's sustainable economic development, and minimise the risks to this, in the period to 2020.



In the final RES document these actions would appear as ten goals. The process the Henley Centre were engaged to progress involved; identifying the drivers, constructing the scenarios and then holding action planning workshops, which would be large group sessions where the key actions would identified and ownership for carrying them through established. However, what occurred in practice didn't follow this linear and sequential layout. The goals that describe the actions EEDA and its key stakeholders need to take were drawn up in December 2003, at the same time as the scenarios were being developed and before any action planning workshops were held.

In an unrecorded conversation with "Interviewee 4", she mentioned that around the middle of December 2003, EEDA's new CE produced some goals "...on the back of a fag packet..." that he felt the strategy should be based on. The CE had produced these independently of the process the Henley Centre had been charged with leading, and therefore PU1 and the Policy Unit team were unaware of their existence until they were given to them. PU1 expressed the fears for the process this generated among the team, "...this could potentially be a complete [laughs] disaster, in terms of, you know, EEDA engaged ... all these stakeholders and then ignores all the input from that, and comes up with it's own sense of priorities..." (Interviewee 2). To offset the impact of the CE's goals, PU1 produced his own set, based on the scenario planning activity up to that stage, over Christmas 2003.

PU1 described this time, when the CE produced goals and his own were in circulation, as a "...period of about a, you know, a few weeks ... of to-ing and fro-ing I s'pose, where those were ... brought together into a single ... document..." (Interviewee 2). Whereas, a member of the Policy Unit team remembered fearing the CE was "...going to, sort of, derail the whole thing..." (Interviewee 5). The two sets of goals were sufficiently close in

tone to be integrated eventually, although PU1 recalls agreement required "...me and other people in my team ... arguing effectively with the Chief Executive over what should, or shouldn't be in..." (Interviewee 2). The headings that PU1 had drawn from the scenario planning process were retained and the CE's suggestions incorporated into what became the goals in the *Sharing the Challenge* consultation document, issued at the end of January 2004. The CE's deviation from the agreed RES construction process was puzzling, "I don't know, I don't know why he did it actually, I don't know what, like what, why it happened, or why he decided to..." (Interviewee 5).

The CE was new to EEDA and had not been in post when the scenario planning process had been agreed. By taking the action he did, in drawing up his own set of goals, he was demonstrating a lack of confidence in the people who had been given responsibility for doing it and in the process to deliver the outcomes he wanted. Perhaps this crisis of confidence was stimulated by a concern over how the goals would be worded as much as for what actions they indicated (Davenport & Leitch, 2005). The exchanges that took place between the CE and the Policy Unit team reveal that, while ultimate authority rested with CE to impose his will on the process, legitimacy lay with PU1 and his team (Hardy, et al., 2000). In this case, legitimacy won out over authority. Had the CE been in place for a longer period and felt more secure in his position, perhaps he would have held out for his own version of the goals to be accepted. Although the CE's actions prompted PU1 to develop his own goals in response, it is unclear whether they would have been produced for the *Sharing the Challenge* consultation document anyway. If so, they would still have been assembled before the action planning workshops had been held. By constructing the goals when they did and sending them out for consultation, the action planning workshops seem to have been subverted. The goals had, in practice, been decided by PU1 over the Christmas 2003 period, refined by the

Policy Unit team and the CE, and issued for consultation at the end of January 2004. The strategic question asked what actions are necessary for EEDA and its stakeholders to take, by creating the goals as he did, PU1 effectively answered this at the stage when the scenarios were only just being developed.

## 5.5 Strategists

During the interviews the Policy Unit team reflected upon the strategizing episode they had experienced. From a career perspective, leading a RES review process had been good for the team. The Policy Unit was regarded more credibly within EEDA (Interviewee 3) and two of the team had received promotions based on their work (Interviewees 4 & 8). PU1 regarded the work as the most significant of his career, "...when the question comes ... give me an example of something that you're, you know, very proud of in your career, you know, you'd obviously point to that as ... a major achievement" (Interviewee 3). Some aspects of strategizing surprised PU1: decisions he expected to be made by senior management or by the EEDA Board did not get made, which led to "...a lot of things just get decided by, by passivity let's say...", meaning that "...you'll write something, or post something, and because nobody could be bothered to read it, or decide about it, they just accept what's there, so lots of things get through like that ... there were very few big strategic issues that the senior management team, or the Board decided on..." (Interviewee 3). This view was shared among his team, "...I think within our team, even me ... have made quite strategic decisions about things, and try and put them to the management team and they don't really ... grasp that they are quite big strategic decisions, so we might end up [laugh] making them sometimes..." (Interviewee 7). Strategizing appears to involve decision

making by osmosis, actions are undertaken because they are not actively disagreed with, silence is interpreted as consent.

The Policy Unit team had to engage in ongoing social sensemaking as they individually and collectively came across situations they had not encountered before (Maitlis, 2005). Equivocal information needed to be assimilated into an emergent frame of reference and this was achieved through processes of negotiation, exchange and rhetorical dialogue with others (Watson, 2003). One described how she was conscious of her own lack of experience in the field of strategy, "...after every workshop ... if we thought that was a good day, "okay, what's the next stage?" I guess I was always questioning, erm, questioning them, erm, I don't think they necessarily told me what the answer was..." (Interviewee 6). Not all the information coming from the workshops was consistent, frequently it was contradictory, and the team had to set about reconciling it, "You just sit and talk, [laugh] really, that's the way we do it" (Interviewee 9). During these discussions PU1 provided guidance by advising how he felt the EEDA Management Team would view their resolutions (Interviewee 9). Through their conversations, these strategists conceptualized strategizing as chiefly a social, linguistic, discursive and narrative construction (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2004; Hardy, et al., 2000; Knights & Morgan, 1991; Knights & Mueller, 2004; Pozzebon, 2004)

PU1 gave voice to the responsibility and stress common to most strategists, "...there's a lot of responsibility ... it was quite stressful [laughs] being in charge of it, um, and also I think that, that, sort of, project, because basically you start from, you start from nothing at all, you know, nobody had any suggestion about what to do, to review the RES, so I s'pose basically, you know, based on, based on, you know, an MBA module effectively, or you know, ha., or an hour session in an MBA module, that's what gave me the idea

for the, you know, using the scenario planning approach. So, it's quite a big thing I think to sell, you know, to think, I s'pose, to think of that, to think it, you know, to decide, to decide for yourself that that would be a good way to do it and then you've got to convince your, sort of, senior management that that's a good thing to do, and then the Board ... my own team as well, had to be, kind of, [laughs] persuaded it was a good idea, um, and then obviously [muffled] starts to work on it, implementing it, you know, it is a, quite a massive thing..." (Interviewee 3).

## 5.6 Key documents

The key documents produced during the scenario planning phase originated from two sources. The Henley Centre issued three reports during this period. The audience for these were the EEDA Board and the senior representatives from EERA. The three reports provide a description of the workshops associated with; the drivers phase, scenarios development and the action planning stage. The reports are formal in tone and serve mainly to operate as records of these events. On one level they provide evidence detailing what EEDA and EERA got for its investment in the Henley Centre. On another, they represent retrospective sensemaking efforts on the part of the consultants as they seek to justify their costs and legitimize their actions.

EEDA published two documents during this time. The first was the high level consultation document *Sharing the challenge: Playing your part in reviewing the regional economic strategy*, issued at the end of January 2004, which sought to describe the RES process and engender feedback from stakeholders on the goals identified by PU1 over the previous Christmas. While the style of the document is to describe issues and

then post questions, with the intention of engaging the reader in a virtual dialogue with EEDA, it is unclear what influence this feedback will have. Question one asks, “Do you agree with the purpose of the [Regional Economic] strategy, as described here?” (EEDA, 2004: 2), however it is unclear that if it received responses from people saying they did not agree with the stated purpose, what actions EEDA could take to address this. The requirement on EEDA to produce a RES was made by the ODPM. EEDA have no power to refuse to do this or to change its purpose, therefore, why ask the question whether people agree with this? The Policy Unit prioritized the workshop sessions, as a consultation mechanism, over the written feedback they received, “...we probably didn’t, erm, pay as much attention to, as we paid attention to the early conversations we had at the start ... we tried to keep true to that vision, rather than necessarily altering the document in response to written consultations...” (Interviewee 6). Importantly, the document also serves as public evidence of consultation.

The second document EEDA published was *Scenario planning: Developing a shared understanding of the influences on the economic development of the East of England*, which describes in detail the process EEDA undertook and operates as an evidence-base for the RES exercise. The decision to produce this document came from within EEDA, but was not met with universal enthusiasm from the Policy Unit team who was charged with writing it, “...I was sick of the RES anyway, and then being given this, was one of these completely, seeming to us, slightly random comments from the Strategy Committee, [laughs] that we need to do these extra documents...” (Interviewee 9). Nevertheless, writing the document afforded the Policy Unit team the opportunity to reflect on the scenario planning process it had enacted and make sense of the approach it had gone through with the Henley Centre.

## 5.7 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates that decisions about what strategic approach organizations adopt are taken within historical contexts. Previous strategy experiences influence how actors perceive strategy and what approaches are deemed appropriate. In this case, the poor reception the previous two RESes received meant that the approach chosen for this iteration was, in some ways, a direct response to this. Three of Langley's (1988) four potential roles for strategies are focused on the strategy once it has been produced. Only one looks at the processes of creating strategy and this identifies one potential role as that of group therapy exercise. In EEDA's case, the strategizing process was imbued with two roles emanating from different managerial levels. Senior managers within EEDA and EERA largely perceived the role of the RES process as repairing the damage of the previous RESes and thereby, establishing the legitimacy of the RES, and by association and extension, EEDA and the ODPM led policy of regionalization. From their perspective, what they wanted was a process of consultation and consensus building that would result in an uncontested RES. This conceptualized the scenario planning process as a means of strategy making where success is judged on whether the final product is accepted. In EEDA's case the focus became on getting the final strategy through the East of England Regional Assembly, which had withheld its endorsement of the previous RES. Ultimately, this was achieved and on this basis the decision to use scenario planning was seen as appropriate, "...we did it, it succeeded, it's, um, been signed off..." (Interviewee 6).

Managers located away from the senior levels and positioned within more of a middle management strata, tended to begin the process with the desire to produce a better

strategy. While still mindful of the reception the previous two RESEs received, these individuals perceived the purpose of the strategizing process as creating a better strategy than had been achieved previously, "...we honestly did want to, erm, sound out with partners what ... the future might look like, and, get them to share the, the sometimes difficult decision making that sometimes has to go on about where you put the balance of your activity, in terms of the economy..." (Interviewee 17). However, as time progressed and deadlines began to loom more prominently, the role of the process became to be seen more widely as to get a strategy issued on time (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2003) that was acceptable to key stakeholders.

PU1's journey towards scenario planning highlights how academic modules can and do influence what managers subsequently do in practice. Coming across scenario planning within an academic environment stimulated his sensemaking capacities, forming a frame of reference within which additional scenario planning encounters were interpreted and made sense of. This was further developed with selected texts read from the module reading list. PU1 also drew from his existing networks (Regnér, 2003) and held conversations with those who had previous experience of scenario planning within the context of an RDA. These discussions led to a widening of the network to include consultants from the Henley Centre. PU1 reflected on the eighteen months strategizing process he led and spoke with relief at it being over, "...I guess when you get to the end of it you don't, you would never want to go through the thing again...", but then considered that, "...I'm very ... glad I did it really, there were times of, er, [laughs] ... extreme stress, um, and lots of hard work, but looking back on it I think it, er, was worthwhile." (Interviewee 3). Concluding that "...it's a funny, um, it's a funny process, really..." (Interviewee 3).



The role and influence of the consultants on this strategizing episode was complex and irregular. They became involved at a very early stage, first as a name that was being bandied about by PU1's colleagues within the RDA network, then as the author of a report into futures thinking sourced from the DTI's database, before meeting with him to talk about their experience of scenario planning within the UK public sector. In this case, the Henley Centre performed many of the roles traditionally associated with strategy consultants, such as a source of knowledge and expertise, support mechanism, guide, planner, workshop facilitator and naïve questioner. However, several other roles were enacted such as; qualitative researcher, inductive interpreter, bricoleur, conversationalist, sensemaker and sensegiver, author, owner, powerful actor and politically aware agent. This saw the consultants operating within multiple identities engaging with strategists who were also enacting within multiple identities. The consultants appeared comfortable in their traditional roles and seemed unaware of their more constructionist responsibilities. The actions of the consultants in this case highlight the need for greater reflection and humility on their part (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2004), so that they can begin to understand how their individual and corporately espoused thoughts, feeling and values mediate their actions (Clark, E., 2004).

The scenario planning recipes offered by the key authors (e.g. Schoemaker, 1993; van der Heijden, et al., 2002), were known by the consultants and PU1, but the extent to which they influenced what actually happened in the case is not clear. PU1 took the notion of a strategic conversation from van der Heijden's (1996) first book and inserted the term into the Invitation to Tender as the first of two objectives the project was to achieve. However, the conversation PU1 envisaged the region having differed markedly from that advanced by van der Heijden. His idea was that it would be limited to the workshop sessions, whereas, to establish wider organizational learning, the

conversation needs to be experienced more pervasively and include informal gatherings as well (van der Heijden, et al, 2002). While the recipes appeared useful to construct the Invitation to Tender setting out what EEDA wanted to achieve, as the process progressed they became less helpful as the pragmatic issues of emerging deadlines and competing priorities meant the Policy Unit team became less *recipe followers* and more *interpretive bricoleurs* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Gabriel, 2002; Kincheloe, 2001; Lincoln & Denzin, 2000; Van Maanen, 1995; Weick, 2003).

In this case the scenarios constructed for the East of England were designed to influence the action planning phase that would then inform the Regional Economic Strategy. However, perhaps stimulated by the attempted intervention of the Chief Executive, the goals setting out the actions EEDA and its stakeholders would need to do were written by PU1 in parallel with the development of the scenarios. Effectively, this circumvented the scenario planning process as the actions were not drawn from the scenarios, but were created alongside them. It also negated the second objective identified in the Invitation to Tender, which stated the action plan would be drawn from the strategic conversation. This intervention may have reduced in importance the scenarios as the focus within the Policy Unit inevitably shifted to reviewing and refining the goals, rather than exploring the scenarios. The scenarios are poorly written texts that do not engage the reader, they are littered with typographical and grammatical errors which would surely have been identified had they been subjected to more rigorous proof-reading.

The data analyzed in this chapter has given an insight into how managers and consultants working together undertake strategizing activities. Although the case has focused on how the East of England Development Agency set about constructing its

Regional Economic Strategy, it speaks of 'practitioners' engaged in 'practices' involving multiple enactments of 'praxis' (Whittington, 2006) that will resonate with others who are charged with devising and implementing strategy construction processes. This enactment of scenario planning in the East of England offers an example of the phenomenon of strategizing in intra- and extra-organizational settings, which may help us get closer to what managers actually do during their immersion within larger patterns of strategic activity (Whittington, 2006).

# Conclusion

## 6.0 Introduction

This final chapter presents the conclusions of the research. The main findings drawn from the data presented and analysed in chapters four and five are summarised. The main theoretical contributions claimed are directed towards the scenario planning and strategizing research agendas. By studying scenario planning in practice new insights into how strategists enact strategy are constructed. By analysing a scenario planning episode from a strategizing perspective the use of this practice by actors is revealed. Some of the contextual issues mediating the case are then discussed. These focus on how this strategizing episode was enacted within a UK public sector sensibility of strategy, where dominant beliefs about what strategy is and how it should be created were made explicit by a powerful central government source influencing what actions EEDA, its stakeholders and consultants took. The role and contribution made by the consultants is reflected upon and summarised, providing an account for how these individuals influenced what was done in both expected and unexpected ways. Implications for practitioners are drawn from the research. This strategy-as-practice study challenges and extends the notion of the 'strategist', and this is advanced as one significant outcome of this research. Strengths for the work are claimed that focus on it providing a rich or thick description of a strategizing episode. However, limitations are acknowledged in the form of epistemological, methodological and researcher assumptions and constraints. Some personal reflections on doing strategizing research are offered that may prove useful to others. Directions for further study are offered.

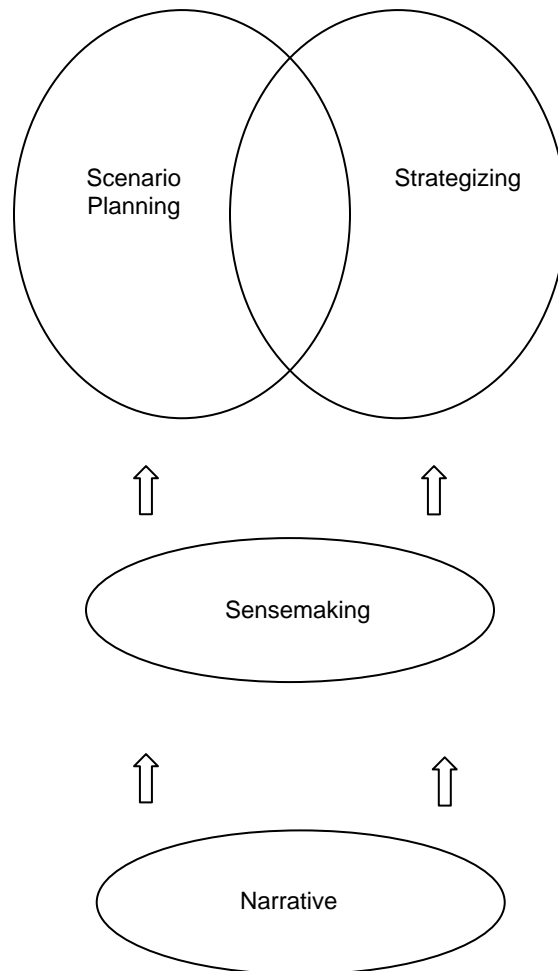
## 6.1 Theoretical contributions

This study examined EEDA's use of scenario planning in the construction of the East of England's third RES. The key themes that provided the broad theoretical framework were scenario planning and strategizing. The strategists enacted strategy making workshops that contributed to the production of four scenarios for the region. The original intention was for these to form the basis of a further series of workshops aimed at action planning. Strategy was conceptualized as a document that was to be constructed by EEDA's Policy Unit team from the data and information produced from the workshops, and the widespread consultation exercise that was running concurrently.

Figure 6.1 overleaf depicts a theoretical framework inductively drawn from the study. At the base, narrative acts as both a mode of knowing and communication (Czarniawska, 2004), as information is sought and created as actors begin to understand the contexts of their strategy making. Sensemaking and sensegiving is progressed through exposure to text, talk and word play, as individuals and groups seek to make sense of what they are encountering and communicate an emerging understanding of reality to others. The highly consultative nature of the RES process results in multiple acts of sensegiving as stakeholders offer their versions of reality to the Policy Unit team. These responses were selectively interpreted with priority assigned to those emanating from powerful sources. EEDA's use of scenario planning as a strategy making practice provided a legitimate strategizing approach that was used to engage stakeholders in a participatory process of large group consensus building. While creating the RES involved acts outside of the scenario planning process, it did provide an anchor around which these

additional activities were undertaken. Similarly, EEDA's use of scenario planning involved it purposefully drawing on only those aspects of the approach that it felt would be most useful to it fulfilling its objective. These are discussed more fully below.

Figure 6.1 Theoretical framework of strategy making



### 6.1.1 Scenario planning

EEDA's Policy Unit team used scenario planning in a different fashion from how its advocates promote the practice. While PU1 was aware that scenario planning is

presented to practitioners as an approach that can be used to improve the effectiveness of futures thinking and strategic decision making (e.g. Schoemaker, 1993, van der Heijden, 1996 & 2005), in this instance it was chosen largely for its role as a means of large group consensus building. Senior managers within EEDA and EERA required the practice to fulfil multiple objectives, including achieving an uncontested RES and, by doing so, redressing the perceived deficiencies and damage caused by previous RES processes that had alienated key stakeholders within the region. EEDA managers located away from the corporate centre held different aspirations for the scenario planning process (Regnér's, 2003). For them, the promise of a more effective strategy that would be useful in their daily interactions with stakeholders was their primary hope for the scenario planning process. EEDA's use of scenario planning suggests that organizations may adapt strategy practices to fulfil their own perceived needs and that these may not necessarily have developing strategic thinking at the forefront, but be more focused on addressing the concerns of external stakeholders, and through doing this establishing organizational legitimacy (Clark, E., 2004; Hardy, et al., 2000). It also indicates that strategizing occurs in contexts where organizational members have differing and potentially competing aspirations for the strategy making process it adopts.

EEDA devised a scenario planning process, along with consultants from Henley Centre, that only loosely followed the scenario planning recipes offered by its key proponents. Throughout the process PU1 held the view, supported by the consultants, that it was the process of producing the scenarios that was more important than the scenarios themselves. To this end, priority was given to the workshop sessions and the degree of participation these engendered as providing the focus of activities. This was due to the desire to develop a RES that was 'owned' by all regional stakeholders. A strategic question was devised that was intended to frame the scenario development

(Schoemaker, 1993; van der Heijden, et al., 2002), but this seemed to have little impact on subsequent activities as more pressing priorities emerged around meeting deadlines and responding to unexpected developments in the process. A strategic conversation was desired that would stimulate wider organizational learning, but in practice stakeholders felt no such dialogue had been experienced, and consequently learning was not felt to have been embedded any wider than within the four members of the Policy Unit team. The consultants admitted that they felt without the emergence of a strategic conversation organizational learning could not be established (van der Heijden, 1996). However, within EEDA this wasn't seen as problematic, just rather disappointing.

The original idea was for the four scenarios to provide the stimulus for 'action planning' sessions that would help develop the RES goals and therefore produce a document that was seen by stakeholders to have been constructed out of the scenarios that they had helped to create. However, this stage was undermined by an intervention by EEDA's Chief Executive who attempted to produce his own goals during December 2003. PU1 responded to this by developing alternative goals more closely informed by the workshops that had taken place by that stage. What this exemplifies is how EEDA's strategists had to cope with unexpected events and manage critical relationships, which are activities not acknowledged in the sanitised descriptions of scenario planning (e.g. Schoemaker, 1993; van der Heijden, 1996). It further supports the view held by strategizing scholars (e.g. Whittington, 2003) that the really important work done by strategists is that that occurs between the formal process phases and outside of the 'steps' to scenario planning typically found in the 'how to' literature (e.g. van der Heijden, et al., 2002).



The four East of England scenarios that were developed represent one of the outputs of the scenario planning process. Henley Centre and EEDA's belief that the actual scenarios produced did not matter significantly and that the most important responsibility was to follow the scenario development process faithfully, resulted in scenario texts that were riddled with grammatical errors and stylistic idiosyncracies. The documents were authored by consultants from the Henley Centre, who were conscious that they would be made publicly available, and sought to produce texts that were dispassionate and conformed to perceived ideas about how such business-like narratives should look (Harré, 2004; Phillips, et al., 2004; Styhre, 2005). The recollections of the discussions that took place during their creation by the consultants and the Policy Unit team highlighted how such documents become negotiated texts, resulting from the asymmetrical power relations existing between consultants and clients (Brown, 2004; Ferraro, et al., 2005; Grant & Hardy, 2004; Robichaud, et al., 2004). The scenario texts failed to engage their intended readership, did not impact significantly on the construction of the RES and were quickly forgotten by all but the Policy Unit team. In the first interview conducted for this study, PU1 described the scenarios as "...dead, dead things..." (Interviewee 1), which demonstrated how, for him, the scenarios were only ever viewed as having a temporary life and represented one of the many milestones to be achieved along the journey towards getting a strategy. This perspective of scenarios is not one supported by the literature, which tends to portray scenario stories as documents that should live long in the minds of managers and operate as an ever-present resource against which strategic alternatives are evaluated (e.g. Goodwin & Wright, 2001; Schoemaker, 1993; van der Heijden, 1996).

### 6.1.2 Strategizing

Adopting Whittington's (2006) proposed strategizing vocabulary, contributions are advanced for praxis, practice and practitioners.

#### 6.1.2.1 Praxis

This study revealed how the Policy Unit team coped with the demands of satisfying the multiple and conflicting requirements of powerful internal and external stakeholders. These strategists had to balance, and where possible reconcile incompatible expectations regarding what people wanted from the RES and the scenario planning process, while at the same time maintaining critical relationships. PU1 and his team enacted this episode of strategizing by drawing upon their existing networks, and creating new ones with consultants and external stakeholders. Through this, praxes were performed that required the strategists to draw from whatever resources were at hand, or could be accessed, to do strategizing and fashion a strategy through bricoleur-type activities (Gabriel, 2002, Lévi-Strauss, 1966). Frequently, decisions had to be made by the Policy Unit team because otherwise the process would have faltered. Issues that they assumed would be addressed at a senior management level were not attended to and had to be actioned by the team to keep things moving along. Considering how important the RES is in how EEDA's efficacy is judged, it is perhaps surprising how little involvement its senior management group had in this strategizing process. Other than approving the proposal to adopt scenario planning as the RES construction process, the senior management team appear to have had no other collective role to play.

These strategists engaged in inductive acts of creation through subjective interpretation of selectively extracted data (Regnér, 2003). Through their extensive consultation methods they were faced with an overwhelming amount of information in the form of the verbal exchanges witnessed at the workshops, views expressed informally outside of the formal sessions and the written submissions. Their way of coping with this and making sense of it all was to immerse themselves in this data and use their best individual and collective intellects to extract from it what they took to be useful (Stake, 2000). Meaning making from this material was a process of negotiation, where individual views were exchanged before a shared understanding was developed (Watson, 2003). These conversations did not exist outside of the power relations evident between the strategists, but were informed by them and, in part, constituted by them (Pozzebon, 2004). For example, PU1, as Head of the Policy Unit, had a complex role in that he was seen as being the main driver of scenario planning within EEDA, indeed the process became quickly associated with him personally, and also he was identified, within the team, as the person who would provide them with the likely view of senior managers to their tentative musings. What became clear from the interviews was that the Policy Unit team's own conceptualisation of strategists as detached, objective, rational analysts was significantly challenged by their own experiences and, for some, remained unreconciled. The notion that the scenarios could be described as stories (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Leemhuis, 1985; van der Heijden, 2002) and that they may be strategic for example, brought out conflicting views, possibly because this term denotes the active hand of an author in creating a text, and such an idea runs contrary to perceived wisdom over what constitutes the production of strategy.

#### 6.1.2.2 Practice

The practice of scenario planning was adopted by EEDA as its preferred method of creating a new RES. The origins of this decision can be found in the residue left over from the experience of previous RES reviews (Weick, 1995). These had been criticized for not being consultative enough by both EEDA and EERA staff, and by its key external stakeholders. Therefore, the dominating desire amongst senior EEDA personnel was for a RES process that would redress this and be seen by its partners as involving and consultative. Historical contexts guided and restricted what practices were considered and what were not (Whittington, 2003). The search for a practice involved looking at those methods that had the potential to deliver what senior staff at EEDA had prioritized for the process – high involvement and, through this, an assumed sense of ownership for the final product (Langley, 1988).

PU1 was attracted to scenario planning for its potential role as a large group consultation technique. As he had no previous experience of the approach he sought to increase his knowledge by talking with those who had: in this case, these were colleagues from within his own professional networks and crucially, consultants from Henley Centre. By proposing scenario planning PU1, with the support of Henley Centre, was able to present a story to senior managers of what a successful RES process would look like (Czarniawska, 1997). The presence of the consultants added authority and legitimacy to what was being narrated (Boje, et al., 2004; Currie & Brown, 2003; Rhodes, 2001). In practice, the episode did not follow neat sequential phases, but this did not seem to matter greatly to the strategists. Scenario planning provided EEDA with a recognized approach to creating the region's third RES that was acceptable to others and through

which it could convince sceptical stakeholders of the consultative nature of this RES review iteration. And, with publication of *Scenario planning: Developing a shared understanding of the influences on the economic development of the East of England* (EEDA, 2004b), provides material for a separate evidence-base document to be created alongside the RES.

#### 6.1.2.3 Practitioners

The main strategists in this case were located in EEDA's Policy Unit. Their experiences suggest a need to understand that strategizing neither begins nor ends, but is always in a state of doing. They did not begin their particular strategizing episode with a clean strategy making slate, but with the previous experiences of actors framing the expectations that were placed on them. Strategists go through periods when their strategy making activities are acute and intense; such as when deadlines are looming near, but then also experience times when pressures are less immediate; such as once key documents are issued. During stressful times the Policy Unit team closely relied on one another, and turned to each other for support and reassurance. This was particularly evident when the strategizing process seemed to be overwhelming them, or when they were confronted with information that they found difficult to order and make sense of. During less stressful times strategizing became focused on reflection, retrospective sensemaking and consideration of future activity (Balogun & Johnson, 2005). The pressures the strategists encountered were uneven and often unanticipated as new requirements were placed on the Policy Unit team unexpectedly. At the end of the process, having achieved their aim of producing an uncontested RES, the Policy Unit team described how they felt a sense of pride in their achievement.

## 6.2 Sensemaking and narrative

An examination of scenario planning in practice highlights the role and contribution of sensemaking and narrative to the strategizing acts of practitioners.

### 6.2.1 Sensemaking

Two of the major criticisms levelled at sensemaking are that studies have tended to concentrate on agent sensemaking during times of crisis or when they are encountering extraordinary events (Maitlis, 2005), and that they have, generally, neglected to consider the influence of political and historical contexts on how sense is constructed (Weber & Glynn, 2006). The focus of this research has been on how strategists engaged in making strategy made sense of their experiences and coped with the challenges, both anticipated and unanticipated, that comprise scenario planning in organizations and how broader contextual influences mediated what was done. This strategy making episode is both alike and unlike strategizing encounters enacted by agents in other organizations, and occurred within contexts strongly influenced by past strategizing processes. The issues practitioners invented and coped with witnessed them making sense of the scenarios they were creating as they were creating them. For some (e.g. Ericson, 2001; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Schneider, 1997; Steinthorsson & Söderholm, 2002), strategy *is* multi-contextual sensemaking where negotiated meanings are created from a wide variety of uncertainties and ambiguities.

Sensemaking was triggered (Balogun & Johnson, 2005) in this case when PU1 was introduced to the idea of scenario planning and then utilised his existing networks to talk to others about how they had used scenario planning and what effects it had produced. This was followed by multiple examples of mundane sensemaking where actors slowly began to build up their knowledge and understanding of this strategy practice. These involved deliberate sensemaking activities, such as reading textbooks and special reports, and more emergent processes whereby, because EEDA occupy open-plan offices, the term 'scenario planning' was overheard in conversations taking place within the Policy Unit team by staff from other departments, who then began inquiring into it and using it in their own conversations. This meant that the term became current within EEDA long before any formal decision had been taken to use it in constructing the third RES.

Rouleau's (2005: p.1415) description of sensemaking and sensegiving as being "...two sides of the same coin..." is apt in this case, as during the times when sensemaking seemed most acute, sensegiving appears to have been present. For example, the consultants influenced the sensemaking activities amongst the Policy Unit team by explaining their sense of the emerging scenario planning process. Also, the consultation exercise EEDA wished to hold can be interpreted as a large scale sensegiving process (Dunford & Jones, 2000; Ericson, 2001; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Hill & Levenhagen, 1995; Snell, 2002), whereby stakeholders are invited to communicate to it the sense they made of the information they were presented with, which then informed further sensemaking acts within EEDA as the RES gradually took shape. The prominence of consultation in this case leads to a sensemaking perspective of strategy being reframed to give greater prominence to the role of sensegiving and to the subjective interpretations required to draw meaning from the sense offered by stakeholders.

## 6.2.2 Narrative

This case is one of the few to incorporate narrative into the study of a strategizing experience (e.g. Sminia, 2005). All the concepts that comprise narrative are observable in the data collected and constructed from the field. Stories are present in the way a problem or issue is identified, in this case the strategic issue, and then causally related episodes, in the form of the scenario planning process identified by the consultants, are devised and enacted as a means of realising this (Czarniawska, 1997). The systems of statements used by actors that legitimate certain ways of talking and privilege these over other alternative language uses are evident in the many discussions taking place during the process (Boje, et al., 2004; Grant & Hardy, 2004; Hardy, et al., 2005). For example, the discourse surrounding the conceptualization of scenarios as 'tools to be used' is clearly the dominant form of interpretation held by actors, and it has been shown this view was strongly influenced by the consultants (Boje, et al., 2004; Fairclough, 2005; Grant & Hardy, 2004; Hardy, et al., 2005; Iedema, et al., 2004; Phillips, et al., 2004). In addition, the discourse emanating from EEDA staff has influenced the discourse of its stakeholders, so that phrases originating from the consultants and the Policy Unit team have become embedded within the discourses used by external stakeholders in their daily interactions. Narrative is constituted by both story and discourse, but is also a mode of knowing and understanding (Czarniawska, 1997 & 2004; Fisher, 1984; Maines, 1993). In this case, narrative was the medium and means by which strategists and consultants enacted strategizing. This was achieved through talk, text and reflection that assigned meaning to what they were encountering and what they were doing.



A narrative understanding of this case highlights how EEDA and EERA senior managers were more concerned with implementing a process that would be deemed to be acceptable to stakeholders and win their approval, than with developing strategic insight within the region (Barry & Elmes, 1997). And, that this was achieved through the political negotiation of powerful internal and external actors, who used rhetorical dynamics to create and present their strategizing efforts as authoritative, and masked or ignored its contradictions and assumptions (Barry & Elmes, 1997). For example, the consultants were presented as an 'independent' third party who would act as an 'honest broker' during the workshop sessions, when they had been fully briefed on the appropriate response to give should a contentious issue arise and how to deal with the person who raised it. EEDA's use of scenario planning itself seemed to be based on the assumption that greater consultation with external stakeholders would result in a final document that would be uncontested, because multiple opportunities for agents to get involved and contribute to the process had been established.

A narrative perspective encourages a focus on the texts produced during the scenario planning process, their authorship, and the roles and purposes assigned to them (Boje, et al., 2004; Currie & Brown, 2003). The scenarios were created by the consultants from Henley Centre, but they held the view that they were owned by EEDA and were a co-constructed artefact developed jointly by the Policy Unit team and themselves. However, they then preceded to relate an example of how they had exercised their authorial control in deciding what the scenarios should contain by accepting or rejecting the suggestions put forward by PU1 and his team. This exercise of power (Knights & Morgan, 1991) questions their assumed role as neutral information processors and transforms them into active political players (Barry & Elmes, 1997). It also raises doubts about the plausibility of the perceptions held by many of the practitioners interviewed in

this study that writing is a value free activity (Kallinikos & Cooper, 1996). EEDA produced an accompanying document to the strategy, *Scenario planning: Developing a shared understanding of the influences on the economic development of the East of England* (EEDA, 2004b), which acted as a record of the “...rigorous and robust evidence...” (Styhre, 2005) it had created and drawn from during the RES process. This, along with other documents produced during the process by EEDA and Henley Centre, seemed designed primarily to act as formal evidence of activity, aimed at presenting a univocal view of the RES creation process to powerful external stakeholders (Brown, 2004; Ferraro, et al., 2005; Grant & Hardy, 2004; Robichaud, et al., 2004).

### 6.3 Contextual issues

#### 6.3.1 Public sector strategy

This case provides insight into how one public sector organization conceptualized strategy and then implemented a process to achieve it. EEDA’s understanding of strategy has been heavily influenced by Central Government, specifically the Department of Trade and Industry. The view of a Regional Economic Strategy that emerges is that it is a document to be produced and the process to do this must involve wide consultation if it is to be owned by the general population of the region. The key assumption underpinning this is that strategy is an object (Clegg, et al., 2004), a thing to be owned, and that its ownership is engendered through participation. So, a further assumption appears to have taken hold that if stakeholder organizations are represented at events held as part of the process of creating the strategy, and are invited to comment

on the output of these sessions, ownership of the product is shared amongst this population. This is assumed to be the case without reference to who arranges the events, how they are facilitated and led, or who writes up the document, as these roles are perceived by the individuals that undertake them as neutral and value-free.

The Department of Communities and Local Government's (DCLG) review of strategy development and partnership working in Regional Development Agencies (RDA) (2006b) lays bare some of these assumptions, and reinforces the view of strategy as a product and of the importance of consultation in the strategizing process. One of its key findings declares that "...the extent of consultation on the draft Regional Economic Strategy (RES) was impressive, with a wide range of partner interests involved in formal meetings, conferences and written consultation." (2006b: p.1). The report recognises that several RDAs, such as EEDA, "...undertook initial consultation with partners at an early stage of the process on the main issues, themes, underlying principals and broad format of the strategy", and that this was "...seen as positive in enabling an open and inclusive discussion [of] priorities and in building consensus, engagement and ownership in the Strategy from the outset..." (2006b: p.3). The belief seems to have taken hold within DCLG that a good strategizing process is one that involves as much consultation as possible, "...RDAs need to build on this by developing more extensive and focussed engagement with [...] stakeholders..." (2006b: p.4). While the DCLG acknowledge that it is "...the quality not just the quantity of partner engagement..." (2006b: p.6) that is important, it is clear from EEDA's experience that quantity is prioritized over quality. Consultation processes were enacted when the information that was coming from them was already known, or when RES goals had been produced and would not be affected by the substance of the consultation. Although PU1 held the view that the scenario

planning process had done little to enable organizational learning, the report concludes with the bold statement that "...RDAs are learning organisations..." (2006b: p.6).

### 6.3.2 Consultants

The consultants from Henley Centre that acted as advisors to EEDA contributed significantly to the strategizing episode experienced within the region. Their involvement in the strategy making process was initially informal and consisted of PU1 holding discussions with them about scenario planning. These early encounters were arranged so that PU1 could further his knowledge and understanding about scenario planning by talking with representatives from the Henley Centre about how they had used the approach with a variety of UK public sector organizations in the past. These exploratory interactions consisted of early sensemaking experiences where both sides were attempting to make sense of the other. This took the form of interpreting the other's ability to deliver the proposed project and an assessment about whether each party felt they could work effectively with the other. As a means of cementing their relationship, Henley Centre made the offer, which was accepted, to be present when the proposal was presented to the EEDA Board, to support PU1 and his recommendation. This example demonstrates one means by which consultants influenced the process in ways not previously considered by researchers or practitioners, typically consultant involvement is perceived by actors as being restricted to the more formal acts of strategy making .

The activities the consultants engaged in and the influences they brought to bare on the process were many and varied. Their actions resulted in intended outcomes in the

forms of the conversations they facilitated and the documents they produced, but their exploits also produced unintended consequences (Pozzebon, 2004). These materialized largely in the residue left with practitioners by their actions. For example, there were times when the strategists from the Policy Unit team were feeling anxious about how the process was developing and growing concerned over the development of the scenarios. The consultants sought to allay these fears by stressing the importance of the scenario planning process over the scenarios that were emerging. The intended outcome of these actions was for the Policy Unit team to be reassured that the process they were following would produce the desired outcome. But, an unintended consequence of this was that the importance of the scenario stories themselves diminished in the eyes of the team such that they became almost inconsequential to the scenario planning process. Because this was the case, some of the wider benefits of scenario planning, such as establishing a strategic conversation, were lost. This contributed to a general feeling within EEDA that it had not benefited from scenario planning as much as expected, leading one staff member to comment that it had "...missed a trick..." (Interviewee 27) in not fully engaging with the practice.

#### 6.4 Strategists

The data analysed highlights the activities and contributions made by agents in a strategizing episode, and in doing so, re-humanizes strategy making. Who qualifies for the title 'strategist' is widened from traditional conceptualizations that hold strategy to be a largely senior manager privilege, and therefore see top management as the only strategists within an organization, to one that includes individuals from other groups whose contribution is critical to the successful completion of a strategy development

process. The label 'strategist' on its own does little to explain how strategies are realised in practice. By disaggregating the term a deeper and richer understanding of the contribution the various 'strategists' in this case made can be discerned. This enables us to learn more about just how it is that strategies are constructed. The table below identifies six levels of strategist observed in this case.

<b>Level</b>	<b>Strategists</b>	<b>Main roles and responsibilities</b>	<b>Praxis</b>
1	PU1	Lead strategist. Assigned responsibility for devising the RES development process. Involved and integral to the whole process.	Talk, reading, negotiation – multi-contextual sensemaking.
2	Policy Unit team	Administered the process. Responsible for ensuring the process was enacted as agreed and to the timetable allocated.	Talk, sensemaking, production of documentation, interpretation of consultation feedback.
3	Henley Centre consultants	Advisors, facilitators and leaders of the process. Contracted to lead the workshops and produce documentation commensurate with this.	Talk, sensemaking and sensegiving, direction-giving, production of documentation.
4	External stakeholders	Workshop participants and consultees. Attended workshops to develop scenarios and produce action plans. Commented on drafts of the RES at various stages and fed these back to the Policy Unit team.	Talk, sensemaking and sensegiving, negotiation, interpretation and assimilation.
5	RDA staff	Workshop participants on a voluntary basis. RDA-Only workshop attendance. Responsible for providing specific expertise as required by the Policy Unit team.	Talk, share knowledge and expertise, negotiation.
6	RDA senior managers	Overall responsibility for the RES process, delegated this to PU1. Involvement restricted to agreeing to the use of scenario planning and appointing of ROTH. Little practical involvement hereafter.	Sensemaking, detached monitoring.

Table 6.2 Strategists, their roles, responsibilities and main praxis

At the first level PU1 is located. He was given responsibility for devising the RES review process and overseeing its implementation. He was involved in all stages of the process, and he made presentations to senior managers at the RDA and gave regular progress reports. PU1's involvement in the workshops tended to be restricted to introducing the day and 'behind the scenes' duties. His leadership role in the process was defined by quietly effective negotiation, rarely demonstrative, he achieved his aims through gentle but firm persuasion. Strategizing for this level one strategist was characterized as multi-contextual sensemaking through talk, text and narrative interaction.

The remaining Policy Unit team members can be classified as level two strategists. They responded to the strategy making thoughts of PU1 and collectively developed these ideas turning them into a cohesive and coherent multi-stage process. While they instigated less, they worked on ensuring the proposal to use scenario planning was realisable in practice. They were involved in the seemingly mundane, but nevertheless crucial, acts of arranging the workshop sessions, making sure the right people were invited to attend and that all the practical arrangements were in place. They produced key documentation such as the draft RES and the scenario planning booklet, and made sense of the consultation exercises and the feedback these elicited. Their strategizing acts can be characterized as focusing on communication with others both within the RDA and externally with stakeholders, bringing them into contact with individuals they would not normally have interacted with in their previous roles within the Policy Unit.

The consultants from Henley Centre represent level three strategists. While not directly employed by the RDA, their influence on its strategizing should not be underestimated. Their advisory and workshop facilitation functions are commonly regarded as strategy

consultancy activities; less readily acknowledged however, are their leadership and direction-giving roles, which witnessed them shaping how scenario planning, strategizing and strategy have been understood by the RDA strategists. An argument can be made that suggests this group made the single most important contribution to how the scenarios were formed. They advised the Policy Unit team on the workshop process and lead and facilitated the workshop activities. However, they also exercised their power in framing how consultation contributions were interpreted. They enacted their identities as consultants, which saw them bringing their authority to bear on issues they felt strongly about, sometimes contradicting the views expressed from within the RDA. At times they strongly led the process when the Policy Unit team were unsure of progress. Their presence reassured sceptical stakeholders of the veracity of the RES review process and their name conferred legitimacy on what was done. They authored the four scenario narratives, and accepted or rejected the comments on the drafts as they saw fit. They produced progress reports for RDA senior management. The consultants strategizing activities can be summarized as involving sensegiving as well as sensemaking. Their interactions and dealings with the other strategists were mediated by their own motivations, values and emotions, but these subjective qualities were not readily acknowledged.

External stakeholders are located as level four strategists. They were seen as a vital component of the RES creation process, as their involvement and engagement was critical if this third iteration was to circumvent the criticisms of the previous two RESes. The practice of scenario planning was chosen for the level of engagement it promised. As level four strategists external stakeholders were brought into the process at the workshop stages and as consultees on the draft RESes produced by the level two strategists. Their input at the workshops was controlled by the facilitation and



interpretation put on their contribution, chiefly by the consultants, but also by the Policy Unit staff that were in attendance. They were invited to express the sense they made of the scenarios and the RES as it was forming, and to make sense of the interpretations put on these by the RDA. As strategists their involvement in the process was limited and carefully controlled by the process being enacted, but it was their very involvement that was the catalyst for the highly consultative process that characterized this third RES, as it was seen by EEDA that through this its goal of an uncontested RES was achievable.

RDA staff are level five strategists in this example. Their collective involvement in the process was limited to attendance at the workshops arranged around the region. To encourage their participation in the process a EEDA-only workshop was arranged. Aside from this, targeted staff were co-opted into the process to provide specific advice on particular issues. For example, those staff that possessed expertise around the issue of employment and skills were brought in to the process to provide input on these issues as they arose in the creation of key documentation. Strategizing activities at this level were characterized as involving narrative communication of specific knowledge, negotiation of its meanings and sensemaking of the emerging phenomena of the RES as it impacted upon their normal day-to-day interactions.

Located at the last level, level six, are RDA senior managers. This is because their involvement in the process appears to have been limited to sanctioning the practice to be used in developing the third RES and periodically receiving monitoring reports from strategists at level one, two and three. While the Chief Executive did make an attempt to get around the RES development process when he proposed a number of goals for the RES that had not been drawn from the consultation process, this active involvement in the process was an isolated exception. At RDA senior manager level strategizing can

characterized as early sensemaking activity around a strategy making proposal, followed by detached monitoring of progress. The contribution they made during the enactment of the various strategizing steps was as a non-present check on what was being done. In practice this meant that when decisions were being taken the Policy Unit team would look to PU1 for a view of how senior managers would react to their choice of action and this would shape what was done. Senior managers placed their faith in PU1 and his team and remained removed from how strategy was actually created.

The emerging strategizing research agenda calls for a rethinking of who 'strategists' are, and a widening of the concept to include additional actors from both within and without the host organization (Whittington, 2003). A broadening understanding of who strategizes raises accompanying questions about what they do and how they contribute to how strategies are constructed. In this case six levels of strategists have been identified, their roles and responsibilities briefly outlined and their main means of achieving these presented. What this demonstrates is how different strategists have different roles to fulfil if the process as a whole is to be accomplished successfully. To describe an individual or group as strategists, does not get to the heart of what they do, we need to know what type of strategist they are if we are to better understand how they strategize. The above analysis of how participants in this case enacted their identities as strategists sheds new light on how strategies are created.

## 6.5 Implications for practice

What this case suggests is that during the initial stages of strategy, when strategists are forming their early thoughts about which strategizing practices may be appropriate,

practitioners may test their ideas with those more senior in the organization's hierarchy, to see what the response may be to a more formal proposal. Managers do not want to have their proposals rejected, as this reflects badly upon them personally and may influence how subsequent schemes are received. Instead, strategists undertake a type of veiled dance, where subtle hints are dropped about the strategizing process that is forming in their minds and reactions to this are studied. These actions may provoke equally vague reactions that do not offer an unambiguous *yes* or *no*, but more of a neither yes or no, but *perhaps*. Strategists have to be skilled at interpreting deliberately vague responses by senior managers towards their evolving proposals.

When strategists begin considering adopting practices that are new to the organization unfamiliar terms enter the storytelling milieu. It would be misguided to think that practitioners can control how such terms are used. As open-plan style offices become more prevalent staff hear snippets of conversations held by their colleagues and when new expressions are used these inevitably pique their curiosity. Typically, questions are asked about what the terms mean and brief answers are given, these stimulate the sensemaking actions of staff who then discuss the concept within their own networks (Brown, 2000). Gradually, the expression becomes one that is known by a significant number of staff, long before any formal announcement is undertaken, or attempts at authoritative sensegiving have been made. On the one hand this means that care should be taken when discussing new techniques, but on the other, it can be seen as an opportunity to get issues into the open, and for responses to these to be assessed.

Practitioners have been fed a diet that conceptualizes strategy as realised through a series of prescribed steps or stages. However, strategists should be aware that much of what constitutes strategy-in-practice typically occurs outside of the formal meetings,

workshops and presentations that have traditionally been assumed to comprise strategy creation. Informal activities taking place outside of these are often more influential on what strategies are produced than the formal praxis actors engage in (Whittington, 2003). Sometimes, workshops legitimize decisions taken beforehand, or small informal groups are formed to resolve the conflicting outcomes of meetings allowing the process to continue on to the next stage. Rather than ignoring this element of strategizing, practitioners would be better advised to develop their abilities to manage these non-formal situations.

## 6.6 Strengths

It is acknowledged by Johnson, et al. (2006: 133) that what constitutes 'good' qualitative research is polysemous and therefore, a somewhat elusive concept. The importance of this research stems from it being a micro-study of actors creating strategy together. This locates the work as belonging to the emerging strategizing agenda, and as such, it responds to the call from scholars for research that examines and learns more about the actual practices of managers, consultants and their colleagues in their strategy making activities (Chia, 2004; Clark, T., 2004; Johnson, et al., 2003; Samra-Fredericks, 2003; Vaara, et al., 2004). It is an approach that seeks to bring the contextual nuance of strategizing to the fore, and by doing so, offer up a challenge to the existing research conceptualizations of strategy in action (Balogun, et al., 2003; Johnson, et al., 2003). The contribution this type of study makes is that it addresses research gaps through producing rich descriptions of agents coping with the everyday pressures of organizing strategy within unique environments.

The aim of the research has been to construct an in-depth understanding of how actors within the East of England coped with the pressures of developing and enacting a strategy making approach in the complex environment of a UK Public Sector organization. This research script represents a partial account of this socially constituted phenomena, not the full rendering of it (Mueller & Carter, 2005). The production of this densely layered case study narrative of a micro-strategy episode, that incorporates a discussion of how the broader historical and political macro-strategy contexts constrained and framed praxis, stands as an example of how one community of practice enacted its identities through experiencing a strategy making process (Balogun, et al., 2003). The objective of the study has been achieved, as new insights into the actions and reflections of strategists – incorporating consultants and stakeholders – have been identified and constructed from the data that make for a rich picture of actors coming together for brief periods of time to enact strategy making routines.

#### 6.6.1 Rich description

Qualitative research differs from quantitative research in its practice and in the research narratives that are produced from it. Qualitative research seeks to represent the research experience in the form of rich or thick descriptions that claim to speak of the lives of practitioners engaged in the practice of organizing, in this case organizing through scenario planning. However rich the subsequent texts prove to be, they only stand as a partial account of the phenomena studied and should never make the claim to represent the whole story of the research encounter (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000; MacPherson, et al., 2000; Neilsen & Rao, 1987; Stake, 2000; Wilson & Jarzabkowski, 2004). This research report is temporally bound and

formed from the subjective interpretations made of the data and relevant literature. Were a new script to be produced from the same material by the same author, a different partial account would be produced that would contain some of the same elements of this dissertation, but would also include new observations and insights. This is because writing itself is a creative act (Phillips, 1995; Styhre, 2005) and the, largely hidden, influences that have mediated my writing can not be reproduced or replicated at another point in time. A new creative act occurs everytime writing is done or re-done.

Despite the consistent calls for qualitative researchers to write rich descriptions of their research, there is surprisingly little advice offered concerning what such narratives may contain. This research is claimed to be a rich description of EEDA's use of scenario planning because it is primarily driven by the constructionist's desire to seek and construct meanings with the participants, and from these produce a plausible and authentic narrative that communicates and analyses the meaning making of agents (Charmaz, 2000). This is achieved by interviewing the key actors in the process and holding in-depth conversations with them, where they were encouraged, and given the time to reflect upon their experiences, and retrospectively make sense of their strategizing enactments. This data has been analysed through making connections to existing literature where this helps to elaborate the points made, and where this is not possible, the actions and meaning making of agents is examined through my engagement with what Weick (2004) terms *theorizing*, which he sees as being an ongoing creative process involving disciplined imagination on the part of the researcher.

The contribution to knowledge rich descriptions make is not in the identification of a small number of findings that are claimed to be generalisable over a wider population. Rather, their value lies in the fertile stories of practitioners organizing in specific contexts

they produce that connect with readers as they describe worlds they are familiar with. They do not offer sanitized, context-free versions of actors coping with their pressures and challenges, but speak of the concerns and doubts of practitioners as they serendipitously enact their realities, making it up as they do along, utilizing trial and error approaches (Regnér, 2003). Context-rich research such as this contributes to knowledge in the nuanced micro-descriptions it offers.

## 6.7 Limitations

Readers expecting to find answers to specific questions, or understand how a particular theoretical model has been applied in practice will be disappointed. Rather, they will encounter a narrative that analyses practice against a range of theoretical constructs and in doing so, reflections are offered on how these particular practitioners utilized theory in their own strategizing. This benefits the scholarly community by providing context-rich accounts of actors doing strategy at the nexus of where theory and praxis meet (Jarzabkowski, et al., 2007). Additionally, it benefits practitioners by encouraging them to reflect on their own practice in their own specific contexts and consider how the experience of actors in this case resonates with their own experience.

One characteristic of this type of research is the role of the researcher in the process. Researcher independence and objectivity is not claimed, rather the researcher is intimately connected to the research such that data is conceptualized as a co-construction between respondent and researcher. This means the interview events were interpreted as socially situated co-constructed conversations between two or more people leading to a negotiated, context-rich, power-laden interview transcript (Alvesson,

2003; Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Czarniawska, 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Kvale, 1996; Rapley, 2001; Roulston, et al., 2003). The active involvement of the researcher in these events means that the data produced and later analysed are not the hidden thoughts of respondents somehow revealed through the interview exchange, more the product of an exploratory conversation where the reflections voiced by the interviewee are the generative outcome of an uneven encounter.

Because of the approach to data construction outlined above, it is important to conduct interviews with numerous practitioners so that multiple meanings of phenomena can be described that allow for rich descriptions to be produced. Also, as co-constructions, the interviews are limited by the performance of both interviewee and interviewer. My performance, as the interviewer, will not be consistent across the forty-six interview encounters conducted for this study. Therefore, acts of researcher reflexivity become vital components of a research narrative, which is held by Cunliffe (2003) to be as much about the researcher as of the researched. This means that what is ultimately produced is a research account that is infused with the socio-historical influences of the researcher (Steffy & Grimes, 1986).

Although the research can be considered longitudinal, as the data collection and construction phases took place over a twelve months period, it began after the scenario planning workshops had already been held, so all the conversations conducted with participants represent retrospective sensemaking encounters on their part. Had the study commenced earlier, when EEDA's Policy Unit team were forming their initial views about using scenario planning in developing the region's third RES, then more 'real-time' observations could have been made and reflections could have been more immediate to



the strategizing encounter just experienced. As it was, some interviewees were asked to recall their thoughts about workshops that had taken place four or five months previously. While this distance may have effected their memory of certain events and aspects of praxis, it did allow them the benefit of reflecting upon the process in light of the broader contextual framing of the region's RES, which at the time of most of the interviews was in its final draft.

In summary, epistemological limitations exist in the assumptions about knowledge that underpin this research. These centre on the belief that the use of specific research questions and the pursuit of generalisable knowledge unnecessarily constrain research and are not the most effective means for better understanding how strategists actually enact their strategizing routines. Methodological limitations focus on the means by which the data were collected and co-constructed. The choice of interviews as the primary means for constructing case data privileged a narrative form of data, which ultimately limited how concepts were operationalised. Researcher limitations centre on the ability of the author to execute a study of this type.

## 6.8 Reflections on doing strategizing research

Strategizing research is an approach that is still in its academic infancy. The notion that through studying the actual behaviour of strategists, and then helping them to reflect on their actions and the motivations that drove them, would prove a fruitful means of developing knowledge about strategy-as-practice is one that has only been discussed relatively recently within the scholarly community (e.g. Jarzabkowski, 2003 & 2004; Samra-Fredericks, 2003; Whittington, 1996; Wilson & Jarzabkowski, 2004). So, studies

that begin with this approach in mind and then carry it through to conclusion are rare (Jarzabkowski, et al., 2007). Therefore, some reflections on what it feels like to do this kind of research may prove helpful to others intending to embark on similar adventures.

What attracted me to this method was the promise that through such an inquiry a better understanding of what practitioners actually do, when they are coping with the challenges of organizing within complex environments, was possible. A strategizing approach seemed to offer the opportunity to study praxis, practices and practitioners closely, to relate my findings to literature, and hopefully shed some light on this strange relationship. For me, this appeared to provide the most effective means of developing a better grasp of what actors do when organizing strategy, while at the same time, offering a perspective through which long-standing and largely unquestioned theoretical propositions could be investigated.

Doing this research required a broad and deep awareness of the current conceptualizations surrounding the main themes of scenario planning and strategizing, as well as the related concepts of sensemaking and narrative. Rather than focus on a single hegemonic management recipe and investigate that in depth, I was guided by several dominating, alternative theoretical constructs, and drew from them as appropriate, to aid the construction and analysis of data. This was because strategizing research encourages the examination of issues that had hitherto been neglected from traditional studies of strategy. In part, it is the absence of the more mundane aspects of strategizing, such as the acts a single individual or small group go through as they try to make sense of a particular strategy making approach, or, the authoring of key texts produced during the process and the meanings assigned to them, that have led to a number of scholars to conclude that strategy research is on hard times (Volberda, 2004)

and in something of a crisis (McKiernan & Carter, 2004; Wilson & Jarzabkowski, 2004), which form fundamental components of this study.

Because my interests lie in the things that traditionally had not been considered integral to fashioning strategy, participants sometimes struggled to see the relevance of my questioning. Interviewees would readily reflect upon the workshop sessions and describe what had happened during these events, but had some difficulty recalling what they did prior to the event and who they talked with after the sessions, and what these conversations were about. With this kind of probing I was seeking to understand better what Whittington (2003) terms the sheer labour of strategy, which includes the actions between the formal stages of strategy making as well the established orthodoxy of meetings and away-days. I asked participants about their actions after the workshops, who they spoke with, what they talked about, et cetera, but found that they were often reluctant to speak of such things. I would talk them through the workshop they had attended and they would speak of their mixed feelings about the day, of their surprise at the use of some of the techniques, of their admiration of others, and how the event related to other similar workshops they had attended in the past. But, when I asked them if and about what they talked about with their spouse or friends in their homes, or in more social settings, most would dry up and claim they didn't talk about such things when they got home. I found this frustrating, because of the possibility that most people do talk about their work experiences at home, particularly when they have attended an unusual event (a scenario planning workshop), and that these conversations may prove interesting examples of actor sensemaking that inform how such encounters are interpreted and what meanings are assigned.

Despite the problem encountered above, most interviewees gave of their time willingly, and seemed to be genuinely concerned that our interview encounters would prove useful and provide meaningful data for me. Some appeared flattered that I valued their input, and wanted their thoughts and reflections on how they had contributed to the strategizing process. To relax participants I would ask questions about their backgrounds and how they had come to occupy their current positions, and was usually informed of their 'unconventional journeys'. Very few seemed to consider their careers had followed straightforward trajectories. The more senior managers in organizations appeared more defensive when responding to my questions, while middle managers seemed more open and willing to reflect on their thoughts and feelings more readily. As my interests lie in what meanings were assigned to strategizing events and how these were constructed, the truth of what I was being told was not a strong consideration. Truthfulness was assumed, simple factual statements were cross-checked, but more importantly, the key properties of verisimilitude and authenticity were the main qualities sought in the interview exchanges.

I had to recognise the unevenness of my own performance during the interview encounters early on in the process. My forty-six interviews witnessed forty-six enactments of my identity as a researcher and interviewer. I re-created myself as an interviewer on forty-six occasions during these exchanges. Each of these unique occasions were mediated by different contextual considerations, and the socio-historical and political influences shaping both the interviewee and myself. While reflecting on my performance during the interviews and the motivations that were driving me, I concluded that the methods I was employing to create data fashioned my approach as fundamentally selfish. I interviewed people who I thought would be interesting to talk to. The conversations I hoped to hold were envisaged as being stimulating encounters that

would help me to think (Bateson, 1989). My primary motivation for interviewing a particular actor was because I held the view that a discussion with that person would be useful for me. It would provide me with a new additional layer of meaning with which I could understand how strategists strategized in the East of England. My concern for what they would get out of the experience was limited to a vague feeling that they may find the interview a good opportunity to reflect on their thought and actions – something they may not normally find the time to do – and that there may be general benefits to practitioners from any published work that may emerge. But, my driving motivation was to use the interviews as a praxis that would help me to think. If I felt an individual interview was doing that I would try and prolong it, if not, I would look to wrap it up quickly to avoid wasting my time and that of the interviewee.

Writing up the case first involved immersing myself in the interview transcripts, reading and re-reading them again and again, to draw out revealing descriptions of actor strategizing. Through engaging with the texts in this way, it became clear that a one hour interview resulting in an eight thousand word transcript may produce only a small number of sentences that actually appear in the final script. And, that most of the one hour conversation acts as a preamble or winding down from the key insights that will eventually be used. The selected data was inserted into the text and analysed against the literature through writing. This subjective selection process confirms the claims for this narrative to represent only a partial interpretation of this strategizing process (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Hammersley, 2003). Other researchers, or indeed I at a future time, may select a different set of data and produce an alternative partial interpretation of how scenario planning was used in this instance. Often, I didn't know what I was going to write until I engaged in the act of writing. Through writing I developed my situated understanding of the data, and created the thoughts and ideas I wanted to communicate.

My developing understanding of writing as a creative act reinforced my assumption that documents produced by organizations during strategizing episodes are themselves acts of creation, however much their (often unidentified) authors may wish to hide from this.

## 6.9 Directions for further research

The focus of this narrative is the scenario planning aspect of strategizing EEDA and its stakeholders undertook during the creation of the region's third RES. Due to limitations of space, the construction of the Regional Economic Strategy and the reflections of the Policy Unit team following its issue have remained outside of the scope of this study. However, these further strategizing acts were researched during the interviews. For example, in-depth conversations were held with key staff from the Department of Trade and Industry to understand how they conceptualized strategy and what role and function an 'evidence base' – an illusive concept that was never satisfactorily explained to me – was envisaged in having. Further, a last minute intervention by the then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister resulted in the Policy Unit team changing a small section of the RES text before it would give its approval. These and other events further contributed to the strategizing episode experienced by EEDA's strategists during the period of the study, and will be the focus of future research reports that will seek to explore these in more depth, providing for a more comprehensive description and analysis of this particular strategizing phenomena in the UK public sector.

The micro-practices of strategizing will provide fertile grounds for research for many years to come. The experiences of this study will benefit any future efforts, in that researchers who read it, and any other publishing outputs, will be in a better position to

be clearer about the type of access required and the events they might want to observe. Access to strategists could be sought in the build-up to planned workshops and immediately following them, to explore the assumption that important retrospective sensemaking occurs here.

This research was focused on an organization within the UK public sector. This was not because of a particular desire to study such an organization, but arose from an exploratory search on the internet. In the future, research into a private sector organization's strategizing episode would be desirable, as this may provide fruitful ground for drawing comparisons with this experience during any retrospective case study analysis.

The practice utilised by this research was scenario planning. Further investigations examining how practitioners, from both public and private sector organizations, utilize this approach in their strategizing activities would shed more light on how this process is being used in practice. More studies of practitioners using this practice would help address the deficits in strategy research outlined by McKiernan and Carter (2004), Volberda (2004), and Wilson and Jarzabkowski (2004). This would also provide a means for further considerations of how the theories and recipes offered by the leading academics in the field represent, and are relevant to, the experiences of practitioners.

Scenario planning is not the only practice adopted by managers to help them enact their strategy making routines. Therefore, studies undertaken in the future of alternative practices in practice are likely to offer additional insights into how strategists strategize, and provide further data to consider how strategy making recipes influence what practitioners actually do.

Strategy practices are enacted by practitioners in specific contexts, so further research should incorporate into it praxis that develops understanding about how actors do strategy, and how their personalities and motivations influence what choices are made and actions undertaken. Strategists are emergent beings (Watson, 2003), who strive to make sense of their challenges and the contexts they operate within. They do strategy while at the same time constructing and maintaining their identities through processes of negotiation, exchange and rhetorical dialogue with others. More knowledge and understanding of these acts would help us describe and analyse strategy-in-practice by focusing on who strategists are and how this influences what is done.

The role of consultants in organizational strategizing is one that has been identified as being under-researched within the strategy field (e.g. Clark, T., 2004; Jarzabkowski, et al., 2007; Whittington, 2006). This study has focused on the contributions made by the two consultants from Henley Centre to the scenario planning process experienced by EEDA and its stakeholders. The integration of the role of the consultants in strategizing episodes should be carried forward in future research. Consultants impacted on the process in ways that were only revealed to them when they were engaged in reflective in-depth interviews, this resulted in them speculating more deeply on their role and is an area that might be pursued in the future. Rather than putting strategists from an organization at the centre of a research project, it might prove more interesting to anchor the process around the consultants and their interactions with clients, colleagues and their formal and informal networks. As this may help develop understanding about how certain practices and techniques assume a hegemonic status within the strategy community.



## Appendix A

### EEDA's RES Process

PU1 introduced to scenario planning at NUBS (Ken Starkey) 1	PU1 discusses scenario planning with One North East (Henley Centre) 09.05.03 2	PU1 meets with Henley Centre to discuss proposal 04.06.03 3	EMT away-day. General discussion of RES review 12.06.03 4
PU1 presents Board paper proposing RES review process 10.07.03 5	PU4 conducts a dry-run of mini-scenarios within the Policy Unit 6	EEDA (PU1) issue Invitation to Tender 30.07.03 7	19 responses received (inc. Henley Centre) 8
Interviews of short-listed organisations 27.08.03 9	Executive Management Team paper, update on progress (PU1) 02.09.03 10	PU1 and PU4 visit Henley Centre 03.09.03 11	Henley Centre meet with Policy Unit to agree process 12.09.03 12
Henley Centre presentation to Strategy Committee. Strategic question presented. New Chair in attendance 15.09.03 13	Policy Unit briefings to EEDA staff 02.10.03 14	Henley Centre workshop with EEDA Board. New CEO and Chair in attendance. 08.10.03 15	Henley Centre workshop with Local Economic Partnerships 09.10.03 16

<p>Henley Centre telephone interview 10–20 key people and conduct desk research</p> <p>17</p>	<p>Henley Centre's 'drivers' reviewed by Policy Unit and presented to EEDA Strategy Committee</p> <p>22.10.03</p> <p>18</p>	<p>Henley Centre meet with Policy Unit and Heads of Service to discuss provisional 'drivers' and prepare initial scenario axes</p> <p>14.11.03</p> <p>19</p>	<p>'Drivers' workshops</p> <p>06.11.03 11.11.03</p> <p>20</p>
<p>Scenario development – stakeholder testing workshop</p> <p>04.12.03</p> <p>21</p>	<p>EERA Scenarios workshop</p> <p>05.12.03</p> <p>22</p>	<p>PU1 presentation on 'drivers', scenario axes and outline scenarios to EEDA Strategy Committee</p> <p>09.12.03</p> <p>23</p>	<p>Henley Centre presentation on 'drivers', scenario axes and outline scenarios including names to EEDA Board</p> <p>11.12.03</p> <p>24</p>
<p>Scenario development – stakeholder testing workshop</p> <p>15.12.03</p> <p>25</p>	<p>More detailed scenarios (2 pages) produced by Henley Centre, cleared with Policy Unit. Goals drafted</p> <p>15.12.03</p> <p>26</p>	<p>CEO produces goals in parallel to scenario planning process</p> <p>18.12.03</p> <p>27</p>	<p>PU1 produces ten goals over Christmas 2003 that appear in 'Sharing the Challenge'</p> <p>28</p>
<p>Final versions of the four scenarios written by Henley Centre and signed off by the Policy Unit</p> <p>09.01.04</p> <p>29</p>	<p>PU1 presents final scenarios, emerging vision and goals and priorities to EEDA Strategy Committee</p> <p>21.01.04</p> <p>30</p>	<p>PU1 presents final scenarios. Emerging vision and goals and priorities to EEDA Board</p> <p>22.01.04</p> <p>31</p>	<p>Henley Centre report 'Scenario planning for the East of England – scenario development phase'</p> <p>30.01.04</p> <p>32</p>

<p>Action Planning workshops 04.02.04 06.02.04 11.02.04</p> <p style="text-align: right;">33</p>	<p>Henley Centre report 'Scenario planning for the East of England – strategy and action planning' 02.04</p> <p style="text-align: right;">34</p>	<p>Policy Unit and key contacts within EEDA produce 'Sharing the Challenge' 02.04</p> <p style="text-align: right;">35</p>	<p>DTI review 'Sharing the Challenge' 07.04.04</p> <p style="text-align: right;">36</p>
<p>Internal draft of the RES put before EEDA Strategy Committee 15.04.04</p> <p style="text-align: right;">37</p>	<p>Internal draft of the summary report of responses to 'Sharing the Challenge', signed off by the EEDA Board 22.04.04</p> <p style="text-align: right;">38</p>	<p>Policy Unit produce summary report of responses to 'Sharing the Challenge' 30.04.04</p> <p style="text-align: right;">39</p>	<p>Policy Unit hold review meeting with Henley Centre 07.05.04</p> <p style="text-align: right;">40</p>
<p>Policy Unit produce 'Scenario Planning' booklet 05.04</p> <p style="text-align: right;">41</p>	<p>Draft RES 'Progressing a Shared Vision' issued for consultation 10.05.04</p> <p style="text-align: right;">42</p>	<p>Seminar on Diversity Issues within the RES 25.05.04</p> <p style="text-align: right;">43</p>	<p>80 Public Consultation Meetings arranged May/June/July</p> <p style="text-align: right;">44</p>
<p>RES presented and discussed through Accountability meetings June/July</p> <p style="text-align: right;">45</p>	<p>Policy Unit make RES presentation to DTI 23.06.04</p> <p style="text-align: right;">46</p>	<p>DTI secondees work with Policy Unit to examine the interface between the RES and Central Government June/July/August</p> <p style="text-align: right;">47</p>	<p>Meeting with London Development Agency to elicit their feedback on the RES draft 14.07.04</p> <p style="text-align: right;">48</p>

Draft RES presented at seminars to all relevant Government departments  
07.04  
49

Policy Unit make RES presentation (grilling) to Treasury  
14.07.04  
50

RES public consultation period ends  
30.07.04  
51

Update on RES consultation and feedback on progress to EEDA/EERA liaison panel  
01.09.04  
52

RES discussed at EEDA Board meeting  
02.09.04  
53

RES discussed at EEDA Strategy Committee meeting  
14.09.04  
54

RES discussed at EEDA/EERA liaison panel meeting  
30.09.04  
55

EEDA EMT approve final version of the RES  
12.10.04  
56

RES discussed at EEDA Strategy Committee meeting  
20.10.04  
57

EEDA Board approve RES  
21.10.04  
58

EERA give the RES qualified endorsement  
05.11.04  
59

RES is officially launched internally within EEDA  
17.11.04  
60

ODPM intervention with instruction for minor changes in the RES text  
19.11.04  
61

Re-drafted RES publicly launched at EEDA AGM  
24.11.04  
62

## Appendix B

### The Nine English Regional Development Agencies

Northwest Regional Development Agency

OneNorthEast

Yorkshire Forward

Advantage West Midlands

East Midlands Development Agency

East of England Development Agency

South West of England Development Agency

London Development Agency

South East England Development Agency

## Appendix C

1. Questions concerning the quality of a given innovation or program;
2. Questions regarding the meaning or interpretation of some component of the context under study;
3. Questions that relate to organizations and society in terms of their sociolinguistic aspects;
4. Questions related to the whole system, as in a classroom, school, school district, city, country, organization, hospital, or prison;
5. Questions regarding the political, economic, or sociopsychological aspects of organizations and society;
6. Questions regarding the hidden curriculum or hidden agendas in the organization;
7. Questions pertaining to the social context of an organization;
8. Questions pertaining to participant's implicit theories about their work;
9. Questions about the meaning of an individual's life;
10. Questions that afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted."

Janesick, 2000: 382

## Appendix D

MEGGINSON, J. (2003) Invitation to tender – Scenario planning exercise for the East of England ref T 03/64 Internal document

“The assignment is to  
Conduct a scenario planning exercise as part of the review of the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) for the East of England”

### *Project assignment*

“EEDA's agenda is wide-ranging and challenging, it includes:  
economic development and social and physical regeneration;  
business support, investment and competitiveness;  
skills development;  
improving employment opportunities;  
ensuring sustainable development.”

### *Five points describing EEDA's wide ranging agenda*

“The government-appointed RDA Boards are business led and the overall purpose of EEDA is to promote the prosperity and well being of the East of England, focusing on economic development.”

### *RDA's are business led. Overall purpose of EEDA is...*

““East of England 2010: Prosperity and opportunity for all' (the current RES) sets out EEDA's goal to 'make the East of England a world-class economy, in the top 20 wealthiest European regions by 2010, bringing greater prosperity and opportunity for everyone who lives, works, invests and does business here'.”

### *Refers to current RES and its goal*

“The scenario planning exercise that is the subject of this invitation to tender will form a major part of the development of a revised strategy.”

### *Links scenario planning exercise with development of a revised strategy*

“What is a RES and what is its purpose? The existing RES states, ‘this strategy is the framework and the focus for the economic development of the East of England over the next ten years.’ The RES is about setting a long term vision for the region. It is about agreeing regional priorities and actions and promoting more effective co-ordination of activities over a relatively long time horizon.”

### *Background to RES and its purpose*

“The nature of the overall review is influenced by the following factors:

The need for large scale consultation  
Ideally, close involvement of stakeholders in the process  
Taking a long-term view  
The strategy is for the region, though its development and review is lead by the RDA  
It can be hard to agree objectives and targets  
The strategy should be high level, strategic but action oriented  
The existing strategy (together with other regional strategies) is the starting point”

*Seven factors influencing the RES review*

“The objectives of the scenario planning exercise are to:

Engage stakeholders across the East of England in a ‘strategic conversation<sup>1</sup>’ about the region’s future. This ‘conversation’, which will be workshop based, will take place within a broad economic development context.  
Translate the results of the ‘strategic conversation’ into a high level strategy and action plan that will form the basis of the revised RES.”

*Two objectives of the scenario planning exercise identified. Strategic conversation*

“The following outputs are expected as part of the scenario planning exercise:

Collection and presentation of background information about the region - and information on the future trends, drivers and uncertainties that are likely to be an important influence on the future economic development of the region - as an input to the scenario building process. This will be drawn from a number of sources including existing regional strategies and action plans and research that has already been undertaken within and outside the region. An indicative list of existing regional strategies is provided in Appendix 1. Existing research relating to the region can be found at:

[www.eastofenglandobservatory.org.uk](http://www.eastofenglandobservatory.org.uk).

Facilitation of - and recording the results from - a series of workshops, across the region, involving a wide range of regional stakeholders. An indicative list of stakeholder organisations is provided in Appendix 2.

Based on the information assembled in (i) and the discussions generated in (ii), the drafting of inputs for the documents that will comprise the revised strategy.”

*Three outputs expected from the scenario planning exercise*

The consultant will:

Prepare and produce background material to inform the workshop stage of the exercise. Lead on the planning of - and then be responsible for facilitating - a series of workshops within which the ‘strategic conversation’ will take place.

Based on the background material produced and the discussions that take place in the workshops, draft material to be used as an input to the revised strategy document.

*Three points the ‘consultant will’*



“EEDA will:

Identify and make available information from a range of sources including existing regional strategies and action plans and research that has already been undertaken within the region.

Assist with the preparation of background material to inform the workshop stage of the exercise.

Organise and administer the series of workshops (this will include booking venues and sending invites).

Assist with the drafting of material that will be used as an input to the revised strategy document.

Edit and produce the revised strategy document.

Five EEDA staff will be available, devoting approximately 50% of their time to this project. In addition, it will be possible to draw on other EEDA staff resources on an occasional basis.”

*Five points EEDA will. Five EEDA staff will devote 50% of their time to the project*

“A key issue will be the number and type of workshops that are required to satisfactorily complete the process. The consultant is invited to make an initial proposal on this.

Factors to bear in mind include:

the need to take the process ‘around the region’

the wide range of economic development issues to be considered

the most appropriate way to engage different stakeholder groups

the need to involve people at different levels of seniority”

*Four points on the number and type of workshop envisaged*

“The main outputs of the project will be reviewed and directed by a sub-committee of the EEDA Board (the Strategy Committee). On a day to day basis this function will be carried out by EEDA’s Head of Policy. The primary contact within EEDA will be via the EEDA Policy Unit, led by the Head of Policy.

It is anticipated that the consultant will be required to make a number of presentations, reporting the progress of their work, to:

the Strategy Committee;

the full EEDA Board and

the EEDA/EERA Liaison panel.”

*Reporting mechanisms and project management*

“The Board Strategy Committee is comprised of the Chair, four Board Members and six representatives from external stakeholder groups. The latter are drawn from a mixture of business and voluntary sector organisations and from EERA.”

*Board Strategy Committee*

## Appendix E

Interviews		
Interview no.	Date	Participant Description
Interview 1	29.04.04	PU1
Interview 2	26.08.04	PU1
Interview 3	21.04.05	PU1
Interview 4	06.05.04	PU2
Interview 5	26.08.04	PU2
Interview 6	21.04.05	PU2
Interview 7	06.05.04	PU3
Interview 8	26.08.04	PU3
Interview 9	06.05.04	PU4
Interview 10	26.08.04	PU4
Interview 11	21.04.05	PU4
Interview 12	07.05.04	EEDA1
Interview 13	13.05.04	EEDA2
Interview 14	13.05.04	EEDA3
Interview 15	13.05.04	EEDA4
Interview 16	18.05.04	EEDA5
Interview 17	18.05.04	EEDA6
Interview 18	19.05.04	EEDA7
Interview 19	19.05.04	EEDA8
Interview 20	20.05.04	EEDA9
Interview 21	20.05.04	EEDA10
Interview 22	20.05.04	EEDA11
Interview 23	20.05.04	EEDA12
Interview 24	22.06.04	EEDA13
Interview 25	24.06.04	EEDA14
Interview 26	27.08.04	EEDA15
Interview 27	17.11.04	EEDA16
Interview 28	19.05.04	EERA1
Interview 29	19.05.04	EERA2
Interview 30	01.10.04	DTI1
Interview 31	01.10.04	DTI2
Interview 32/33	04.11.04	DTI3
Interview 34	20.05.04	External 1
Interview 35	13.07.04	External 2
Interview 36	14.07.04	External 3
Interview 37	22.07.04	External 4
Interview 38	22.07.04	External 5
Interview 39	25.08.04	External 6
Interview 40	25.08.04	External 7
Interview 41	27.08.04	External 8
Interview 42	07.10.04	External 9
Interview 43	17.09.04	External 10
Interview 44	17.09.04	External 11

Interview 45	23.06.04	HC1
Interview 46	23.06.04	HC2

## Appendix F

### Data Analysis Themes

1. Origin of decision
2. Appeal of Scenario Planning
3. Past RES process
4. Decision was taken
5. Initial feelings of staff
6. Previous experience of Scenario Planning
7. Discussion of SP, EEDA
8. EEDA wanted to achieve
9. HC and the SP process
10. Workshop – process
11. Scenarios – tools
12. Why use HC?
13. Who authored the Scenarios
14. Scenarios use, now
15. Strategic conversation
16. Organizational learning
17. SP influencing behaviour
18. Things done differently
19. Scenarios described
20. Authorship
21. Ownership
22. Scenarios – good stories
23. Chief Executive
24. Miscellaneous
25. Discussion outside of EEDA
26. Whose RES
27. Sensemaking
28. Future prepared
29. RES use/product
30. Writing the RES Goals
31. RES
32. Region wants a RES
33. Consultation
34. Gov. DTI relationship
35. EEDA
36. Strategy
37. Audience
38. After effects
39. No RES
40. Analysis
41. Henley
42. EERA
43. Stakeholders
44. DTI
45. Evidence-base

46. Government Policy.
47. Metrics/targets
48. Strategic Thinking.
49. The document
50. Relationship with EEDA
51. RES a success
52. Criticism
53. LEPs.
54. Go East
55. Reflection
56. RES, 6 months on
57. ODPM intervention
58. Strategists
59. Next RES
60. Strategy committee

## Appendix G

### Scenario 1: “Who wants to be a Millionaire”

#### Building businesses, rapid growth in transport and ICT infrastructure

Over the last 15 years, the East of England’s identity has been completely reinvented. Long known for its quaint sea-side towns, the detached intellectual rigour of Cambridge University and expansive rural landscape, the region in 2020 is seen as one of the economic hotbeds of Europe, beginning to overtaking the South East in many league tables of economic performance.

There have been two key elements to this dramatic change in fortune. First of all, an ambitious programme of transport infrastructure development has improved the quality of access to many key areas of the East of England. Air travel is a key driver, with infrastructure plans including the further development of Stansted, a planned second runway at Luton by 2025, and significant support for some smaller airports – both of which have significant increases in traffic. In fact, Easyjet and Ryanair have both agreed a deal with Norwich airport which will see numerous flights to key cities throughout Europe on a regular basis. Many roads including the heavily congested A14 have been widened, and augmented by a series of new links stretching east-west across the region. This is not only true of road – a series of dedicated rail links now connect the larger conurbations with significant towns and cities throughout the country. These investments have been accompanied by the embedding of ICT throughout the region – broadband connections are no longer an exciting innovation, but a part of everyday life for both businesses and the home.

The second key change is the increased sense of entrepreneurialism palpable throughout the region. This may be partly due to the increased connectivity of the region, but it has also been facilitated by increased interactions between the intellectual heartlands of the region and businesses in their hinterlands, perhaps personified by the flagship development of the sparkling new and modern ‘bridge of ideas’ between Harwich and Felixstowe.

The bio-tech community in Norwich has provided some exciting business propositions, and whilst little new pure research is being conducted, a new company producing functional foods has had huge success and is now a key employer in the region. On the coast, the improvements in road and rail transport have led to a renaissance in container traffic. However, there are indications that this is now starting to plateau, calling into question further development proposals for Shellhaven. Such activity has been met with great enthusiasm by the newly elected regional government, who have put into a place a series of initiatives aimed not only at encouraging and nurturing new businesses to grow, particularly in the urban areas like Luton and Bedford previously dominated by traditional forms of manufacturing, but also by marketing the region’s strengths, brand and vision nationally and internationally. This atmosphere of innovation seems to be infectious, and new and successful companies are sprouting up in Bedfordshire, Essex, on the coast and around the universities. Collaboration with London and the South East is a key part of the strategy, promoting the region’s role and assets as part of the wider

national economy, and reaping the rewards of the attention received from national government as a result.

In itself, this success has attracted the attentions of bigger international companies, and many global and European companies looking for space for head offices are relocating to the region, finding the likes of Bedford, Stevenage and St Albans close enough to London to keep financiers happy, but far enough away to offer their employees' families good quality of life and decent services. Where larger businesses plant themselves, smaller suppliers are following and locating in the surrounding area. There is huge growth in the Oxford – Cambridge arc, which has spin off benefits for small distribution businesses in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire.

The Thames Gateway, once an embarrassing adjunct to the region, is fast becoming a jewel in its crown – in many ways emblematic of this newfound success in a truly 21st century economic environment: well connected by road, rail and the new high-speed maglev train to London, and with high level ICT connections incorporated into its new housing and business structures, it is providing a fertile area for blossoming entrepreneurs to cultivate their businesses in easy reach of London and, via Stansted and Luton, the principal cities of Europe.

However, the path isn't entirely smooth. Some of the proposed roads and related development of new business parks were the subject of tenacious environmental campaigners, while others were largely disregarded. In addition to a fairly militant fringe, a more general feeling is spreading throughout the region that some of the natural beauty of the region has been lost. Despite a fairly aggressive policy of maintaining large areas of unspoilt natural beauty such as the Broads, vast swathes of land have been swallowed up by roads, business parks and housing developments required by the regions burgeoning economy. Some hotspots have become heavily polluted and congested. Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire increasingly feel like parts of outer London, with the continuing growth of the commuter belt spreading rapidly outwards from the capital. Just as worryingly, it appears the speed of growth has taken many by surprise and the related social infrastructure in many areas is struggling to keep up. Quality of life is not what it used to be in some parts of these areas, with the growth of gated communities to keep the 'have-nots' out perhaps best illustrated by rumours that Woburn Abbey will soon be sold off and converted into luxury executive housing and a health farm. The local press recently ran with a headline of "Welcome to London's newest Borough" with a picture of Luton station and a new housing development nearby.

There is also concern about the fate of Cambridge. Whilst both Cambridge and Norwich were once seem as leaders in their field, this has slid somewhat in recent years. As large international firms have come in and poached many leading research scientists, there is a feeling that genuine R&D is being supplanted by the exploitation of existing ideas for new business opportunities. Cambridge as a whole seems to be labouring under this accusation that it is no longer a centre of excellence but a lackey of big business. Fears about the sustainability of such a position are increasingly being expressed by the Cambridge Evening News, although rumours that it will soon be renamed Glaxo-Wellbeing University will surely prove unfounded.

The effects upon social polarisation are complex. In many urban areas, economic and social polarisation are declining as new jobs are created, providing opportunities for social inclusion. This has been accompanied by a greater engagement among sections

of the population that used to feel disenfranchised and ignored. However, the picture is not entirely rosy: pockets of deprivation in the towns still exist, and the proximity of extreme wealth and deprivation is causing some tension in the major urban conurbation.

Furthermore, the development of businesses around a number of hubs has worsened that rural-urban divide, made worse by the continuing decline in farming and the resulting downturn in the traditional food processing sector. Most have switched to local marketing, guaranteeing quicker times from farm to market than ever before, and focusing on the premium products sector, which is growing as a result of new wealth coming to the urban areas and suburbs. Less are employed in this more technical and fast moving food sector, but some of the more business like farmers can still make a decent living. However, the stewardship of the land remain a problem in some rural areas, with fears that green field land will become dustbowls with the onset of climate change, new developments, and older farmers deserting their land. In these rural areas, social division has dramatically increased. Rural towns are not so much isolated but rather increasingly gentrified, as they have become homes for the rich and affluent in society who commute to the major towns nearby or buy second homes as country retreats. The increased accessibility has had a particularly noticeable effect on the seaside towns, which are now almost entirely populated by affluent workers in new executive style developments, and ageing retirement communities. Less affluent families and low skilled workers have been pushed out of their home communities, and this is beginning to cause significant problems around social identity and rising crime in some areas.

Even the state of rural tourism is changing, with more focus on flagship facilities and attractions, bringing new money into the region, but placing it in the hands of the few. Some areas with high quality attractions do well, but other traditional market towns no longer have the pulling power for visitors they once did.



## Scenario 2: “Going for Gold”

### Exporting ideas, rapid growth in transport and ICT infrastructure

The East of England is one of Europe's most renowned centres of research and development, a global knowledge hub which is talked of enviously across the continent. Leading pharmaceutical companies have expanded their R&D capacity, and other global companies have put down research roots. The focus on ideas and innovation has provided an important platform from which to differentiate the region and help build a strong identity. The region's brand has helped to attract large numbers of highly skilled workers in the region, as well as numerous wide-ranging investment programmes.

The development of such a prestigious reputation has come at a price, however. The highly competitive nature of the ideas market means that it is imperative to remain at the cutting edge of innovation. In recent years, some have started to question the long-term feasibility and sustainability of an economy based exclusively on ideas and innovation. Some firms are already deciding to relocate their R&D outside the region in order to be closer to their manufacturing base, prompting The Norwich Evening Post to run an article arguing that the lack of a comprehensive approach encompassing both business innovation and R&D was putting the region at a severe disadvantage. Even with the recently announced expansion of Norwich International airport, due to problems concerning the planned expansion of Luton, and the promise that “Norfolk never looked closer”, the region just isn't attracting the business growth that was hoped for.

Despite these concerns, the East of England has enjoyed near-full employment for the last few years, mainly as a result of the many new, high-skill jobs that have been created as a result of the burgeoning R&D sector, and knock on demand for local shops and services. Average incomes across the region have increased but an unfortunate side effect has been the creation of a dual labour market in the region, with increasing levels of polarization between high and low skill worker. Many of the high skilled jobs are occupied by those coming into the region. The links between the US and the burgeoning film and TV industry in East Anglia and Hertfordshire is one of the region's success stories, but most of the benefit has gone to creative directors and producers moving or commuting from London. There have been some side-effects on the nearby towns and cities, with the growth of stylish retail shopping centres, café culture and other services, providing employment for those nearby.

The main cities and towns are becoming less and less unique in character, and despite the rising trend for retail, it seems spending is not increasing the happiness and well being of everyone in the region.

Many of those coming into the area for research, or quality of life reasons can command globally competitive salaries, enabling to buy most of the good quality housing. The communities in which these highly skilled workers live are changing too, especially in rural areas, many of which are littered with so-called virtual villages where knowledge workers increasingly working part of the week from home. The communities are much more transient as many of these workers tend to live in an area for a short period of time, then move on elsewhere. The sense of community is dissipating in many areas, despite and increase in the number of people spending time working from home during the week. Another change is the decreasing numbers of young people: more and more young people are leaving the region in order to get on to the property ladder elsewhere.

Supply of new homes has become a controversial issue. A lack of skilled construction workers means some house-building plans have been delayed, or in one high profile case near Cambridge, cancelled. National and regional agencies have been criticized for over-emphasising the importance of intangible skills in the 'knowledge economy' leading to shortages of workers in other key areas, such as construction and health care. An increasing reliance on overseas workers to fill these skills gaps has led to instances of social unrest in Great Yarmouth and other deprived areas. While migrant Portuguese agricultural workers were much in evidence 15 years ago, most plumbers, builders and taxi drivers in some parts of the region are now from Central and Eastern Europe.

Similarly there is growing press coverage concerning a planned repeat of the so-called 'Town vs Gown' riots at this year's graduation ceremonies in the university towns. Cranfield University's class of 2019 found themselves pelted with tomatoes and flour as the University's new campus was said to provide better accommodation than many locals enjoyed. Press reports suggest that Cambridge, Luton and Hatfield are set for similar protests this year from local residents, linked as much to employment opportunities as housing shortages.

Quality of infrastructure is now a strong selling point for the East of England. Stansted and Luton have been an important part of this, with many more air routes flying into the airport, as well as an increase in surface transport links within the region and beyond. The region's ports have grown in importance as international gateways, but without being connected to the rest of the region; the trucks roll across from the North and the West, but do little for the East of England, apart from distribution firms in the surrounding areas.

However, the development of the region's transport infrastructure has been a hard fight, and new housing and business developments have made the area a magnet for environmental campaigners. Individuals in the region have quickly realized that they can only influence public policy through collaboration with others, either by joining existing organizations, or more frequently by forming transient, single issue groups which increasingly employ shock tactics in order to garner publicity for their cause. The social impact of the environmental protests has been mixed. Whilst in some areas protests have acted as a catalyst, helping to foster a strong sense of local community, in other localities the protests have had quite the opposite effect: creating antagonism between local communities and the land owners who are profiting from development.

The simultaneous development of the region's IT infrastructure has enabled increasing numbers of workers to work from home. Although few do this on a full time basis, there is a significant drop in road traffic levels in and around the major urban centres and smaller market towns. Improved physical and IT infrastructures have meant that the workforce is now more evenly distributed around the region, which has alleviated many of the space and traffic problems which were previously a problem in many urban localities.

However, improved infrastructure has not had an entirely beneficial impact on the region. Whilst the rural parts of the region are no longer so isolated, there is concern that the quality of life has declined as a direct result. Many areas have simply become thoroughfares for goods and people travelling between the rest of the UK and continental Europe with all the pollution that entails. Furthermore, the growth in

infrastructure has made the areas closest to London increasingly attractive to commuters, further exacerbating housing problems.

The foundation of the region's success in exporting ideas has been the strong partnerships that organizations such as EEDA and EERA have consciously sought to develop between the public and private sectors, and the higher education establishments. The universities have benefited most obviously from the strategic focus on R&D. Many of the region's universities now rank amongst the best in the country, topping the league tables to attract the most able candidates, and able to charge the highest student fees, but others lag behind, focusing on producing high volumes of graduates, rather than new innovations and ideas. Continuous development in innovation and ideas means continuous investment is vital. Some HE institutions are following UEA's lead of the University of East Anglia and setting up intellectual capital funds. Suffolk has finally got its university – a unique private/public initiative in which a leading UK telecoms company opened up much of Martlesham to create a technology centre which specialized only in higher degrees. The influential 'Committee of Vice Chancellors' has been instrumental in creating awareness of the value of the East of England's research capability in the City. Investment finance hasn't been a problem. The same hi-speed rail connections that link Cambridge and the City of London mean that Europe, too is closer at hand.

### Scenario 3: “The Crystal Maze”

#### Building businesses, minimal growth in transport and ICT infrastructure

The region has got something right. After years of complaints about gaps in commercial and managerial skills, it has invested heavily in developing these, at all levels of the educational sector from secondary school onwards. Despite some initial concern from parts of the education sector, who feared that lifelong skills were being traded for the short-term needs of the employment market, it has quickly become clear that there isn't a trade-off.

Equally there have been an increasing emphasis on building a strong regional identity based around cultural regeneration and a small number of flagship developments, with a view to raising aspirations in the region and making the region more attractive to those from outside. Key city centres have been modernised. Luton and Peterborough are now thriving retail metropolises which attract many shoppers from London and the South East, while Cambridge's thriving arts scene is popular with young and old alike.

The result has been a steady growth in skills and aspirations in the region, which has improved the size, and effectiveness, of the region's SMEs, and given rise to a significant number of smaller micro businesses. Those who have found ways to connect themselves with the region's existing gateways and the growth of hubs around North London, Cambridge and Milton Keynes tend to do better, as do the emerging leagues of smaller micro businesses who manage to tap into and grow from some of the ideas coming out of the university sector.

However, the relatively poor quality of infrastructure in most areas, and failed attempts to improve road, rail and air links mean that larger companies mostly stay away. There are a few exceptions – the south and west of the region, where the infrastructure has long been in place, has done relatively well, spurred on a by a new generation of middle managers and entrepreneurs who have moved out of London to enjoy the quality of life and new levels of venture capital and business support afforded to local businesses by regional agencies. Some traditional niche sectors continue to do well, such as the automotive industry including Formula One.

However, even the growth of SMEs and micro businesses has been stifled in recent years. Despite the relative skilled workforce many of the most successful SMEs look to move elsewhere in order to expand their business.

Similar patterns seem set to follow for the micro firms, many of whom are looking to sell their ideas to the highest bidder and move onto something new, or try to merge with other small firms working in the same sector in order to achieve critical mass and service larger companies on a national or international scale. Alongside the lack of infrastructure, the lack of larger companies in the region is a key factor in this relocation of small firms who are anxious to get closer to their customers. Skills shortages are not a problem, except in some areas – last week's press front page announced “Doctor lands Plumb Job”, referring to a PHD student from Ca,bridge who had recently trained to become a plumber and was now looking to establish a co-operative of like minded self employed tradesman in the region.

Many in the key urban areas say little has changed in the last twenty years and the recent government report on 'The State of the Regions' suggest they are right. Statistical indicators in relation to GDP, employment, housing, congestion, health, and quality of life indicators etc, in almost all parts of the region, whether it be Bedfordshire, Essex or Norfolk look the same as they were at the turn of the century. Research shows that internal and external perceptions of the region are also unchanged. Such a situation seems tolerable for some local residents, but the exception is young people who seem to be heading either North and South in search of excitement and opportunity, unimpressed by the retail parks and service jobs that seem to dominate local employment opportunities for school leavers.

The population is increasingly ageing, and many of them feel disengaged in the new economy and SMEs that emerge. Most are left out of the upskilling initiatives which have tended to focus in investing in youth for the future (many of whom are leaving to find work elsewhere). Most of those who are working beyond the traditional retirement age are in low paid service sector jobs, many of them working in the growing health sector in the region. However, reports of so called 'saga louts' have been a recent feature in some areas of the local press, as many elderly feel devalued and disenchanted with the opportunities available to them in the employment market.

The surprise package is the development around some of the port towns. Some of them, notably those in the South of the region thrive, as they have the infrastructure in place, and in the last five years seem to have taken on a life of their own as European companies invest there, and visitor numbers increase. Others, in the North of the region are struggling by comparison, in the light of creaking infrastructure and land use restrictions.

Another success story is the promising developments in new renewable energy technologies and other types of sustainable business. Wind farms off the east coast are now an accepted site, bringing new employment and growth to the region during what has otherwise been a fairly stagnant period. Farm land is increasingly being turned to alternative uses, either small plots used for growing premium products, or other products sold in local food markets (a growth market due to congestion in the region and across much of the UK), or biofuels, another growth sector. The region is beginning to develop a reputation as a role model for sustainable production, including locally sustainable transport solutions, something it has pursued as a method for dealing with the environmental damage caused by congestion and lack of major infrastructure.

Although SMEs hadn't been the vision for the region at the turn of the century, there are undoubted benefits. The lack of transport investment means that the region's countryside and landscape are left relatively unspoilt. Rural and coastal tourism are on the increase, particularly in the unspoilt countryside and market towns of the North and East of the region, as more and more urban dwellers look to escape for weekends away. The related service sector has also fared well, although the planned improvement to the east coast mainline will mean London dwellers can get to Yorkshire and Northumbria as quickly as they can to East Anglia.

Rural depopulation is on the increase. While population in the region generally is on the increase at all age ranges, the rural villages and towns are increasingly home to retirement communities, as the old are attracted by the pace of life, the only young

families around are those who have made their fortune in the City of London and enjoy the change of pace of their second homes at the weekends.

Norfolk and Suffolk are increasingly being described as the region's executive playground, with local press covering the possibility of a resort casino opening somewhere in East Anglia (Great Yarmouth is the favourite), further building the vision that some US citizens have of parts of the region such as Hertfordshire and East Anglia slowly becoming small extensions of Hollywood.

Broadband access is universal, but it has sparked the arrival of city workers at weekends for short breaks and conferences, rather than major new business growth which benefits the local economy. Many local schools are under threat, and the health sector is a growth sector, particularly in the North of the region. Many former rural primary schools are being bought up and developed into local health care centres, part of the government drive for locally delivered services, although some are bought up by the private sector. While many of the young go south to get a job, there is a migration of the elderly in the opposite direction.

Higher skilled people are more inventive in using ICT to compensate for growing transport congestion, often opening up new market opportunities online. Diffusion of this technical expertise has given additional energy to the leisure and tourism sector, which also finds itself reaching new customers virtually, creating opportunities for a virtuous cycle of new investment, more affluent visitors, and higher margins.

Cambridge, on the other hand, does not do so well. The boom years of the 90s and the 'phenomenon' seem very distant as the local economy over-heats. It is hard to afford to live anywhere close to the city, except in new high density housing complexes, (and congestion makes it impossible to work in Cambridge and live further away).

#### Scenario 4: “University Challenge”

##### Exporting ideas, minimal improvements in transport and ICT infrastructure

The national and European competition for those with business management skills has intensified; and the East of England, which has always suffered from gaps in this area, has lost out. Its Business Link has been too fragmented across the region to compete when other areas developed their ‘business super-hubs’. At the same time, the region has lost out in the battle for new transport infrastructure. The Thames Gateway has been developed, along with the roads which connects it. But the M11 is a mass of gridlock, despite ever steeper tolls, and the region’s rail links are as slow as ever, with the exception of the high speed East Coast link connecting Edinburgh to Stratford (via Peterborough) and the Channel tunnel. Stansted’s long-awaited additional runway has stalled in a morass of protest and litigation.

The areas that prosper are those which have been able to connect innovation with some degree of entrepreneurialism. Cambridge is still a world class asset – and brand – which attracts the best brains from around the world (although decreasingly from the UK). In Norwich, UEA has become a hub for research into new and renewable energy technologies. Colchester, drawing on the strengths of the University in Social Sciences, is a European leader in social entrepreneurship. The new University of Suffolk has finally given the region a knowledge base to match its maritime sector. As it establishes itself, there are signs of an emerging ‘R&D corridor’ along the A14 to Ipswich. Not all of this innovation has been driven by the academic sector. As the pharmaceuticals sector becomes less dependent on the ‘long patent’ model and moves increasingly into the well-being sector, so its innovation model has become more like the games and software sector, and Hertfordshire has evolved as a ‘new pharmaceuticals’ centre, one of the European leaders.

Generally, though, the lack of large firms in the region has put a brake on the economic potential. The problem is that the evolution of these knowledge businesses isn’t sustainable. They fizz and grow, and then are acquired for their patents or move elsewhere, often to London. The skills base has repeatedly been found wanting when it comes to long-term development, despite repeated efforts by regional economic and skills agencies to remedy this. One sector which has done has been the venture capital sector. The financial connections which initially existed around Cambridge expanded across the region, benefiting from the easy access to their City colleagues. This proved to be a mixed blessing, however: the inevitable pressure from VCs for early exit strategies tended to enrich entrepreneurs at the expense of the region, even if some of those entrepreneurs stayed in the region and ploughed their gains back into new ventures.

Without investment in transport infrastructure, the ICT has to work harder. Although the fibre provision in the region is no better than elsewhere in the UK, a ‘social technology’ team originally sponsored by a leading telecoms firm and the University of Essex has pioneered a wave of technologies which gives rural areas and market towns fast access to data. While large businesses stay away, cottage industries do well; niche businesses delivering specialist services and premium craft products to London and elsewhere. Such businesses, sometimes sneered at as ‘lifestyle hobbies’ for the partners of people commuting to London to the south or the new Milton Keynes conurbation to the North West, nonetheless do something to mitigate rural deprivation in the region. Farming has

continued to decline, split between ‘hobbyists’ and small organic or alternative crop providers on the one hand, and ever more capital intensive agri-businesses on the other. Land use inevitably starts to change, with some reverting to the traditionally diverse landscape, which benefited tourism and also improved perceptions of the quality of life for those who lived in the area. The RSPB, already a significant regional employer, has just opened a new research centre in north Norfolk, and a new wetland reserve is created in Suffolk. Biodiversity and the natural environment is a big winner, with the combination of exclusively blue flag beaches along the east coast of the region, new taxes on air travel, and rapid climate change springing a steady growth in landscape tourism in the east of the region.

Other land has been converted to energy crops and biofuels, with the growth of a new East Anglian farming co-operative promoting their sustainable energy products under the ‘from field to furnace’ brand. ‘Transport infrastructure wasn’t everything’, observe the protagonists of this ‘new rural economy’. In a knowledge economy where the service sector continued to expand remorselessly, point of view is said to be the most valuable asset you can have.

If the British population is generally ageing, then the East of England is ageing faster. The region has long since suffered an outflow of younger people in their early twenties, and the lack of city life in most of the region means that this trend has not changed. But the low impact development means that the region was the sort of place that increasing number of families move to later in life, helped by more flexible working patterns which mean that those who would once have been daily commuters tend now to work from home some of the time. The coastal areas are increasingly the preserve of older people, alongside the holidaymakers, some more retired than others, with parts of Norfolk known by the local press as “God’s waiting room”. The resulting pressures on public services and the voluntary sector are apparent from the lack of key service workers. Suffolk’s local press recently ran a report on a key worker caravan site outside Ipswich where migrant service workers were staying while searching for affordable housing in the area. Similar stories have been heard elsewhere in the region.

Congestion and new tax regimes discourage car use, but it still takes an age to travel from Bedford to Luton in the rush-hour. The region’s conurbation are not attracting investment with the congestion, including bumper to bumper traffic on the key road routes in the south-west of the region, discouraging investment or any potential tourism benefit from increased numbers of people passing through the airports. The south and west of the region is increasing a thoroughfare through which many people pass but few stop to visit or do business in. manufacturing is all but gone in the region – the major players in the automotive industry have withdrawn and located elsewhere, frustrated by the lack of skills investment in the local workforce and creaking transport infrastructure. Travel links benefit the visitors, but do little for the local community or business. Some Luton residents say it will soon be quicker for them to the US than get to Bedford by car in the rush hour. Some local authorities have looked into encouraging or providing new sustainable forms of public transport, but with little agreement across the region, most plans don’t get beyond the thinking stage – another sign of the lack of regional leadership, or ability of the region to punch its weight in policy discussions at regional and national level. Pockets of deprivation in the inner urban areas go unnoticed, and the large employers in key urban areas are all but gone. Employment is a major issue in some parts of the region where traditional manufacturing and engineering have gone. Some jobs have come from University spin off activity, and smaller hi-tech led



businesses, but some parts of the region have been losing jobs at the rate of 7,000 a year, and these hi-tech innovation companies are not filling the gaps in urban communities like Dunstable and Luton, increasing seen as part of the commuter belt for Milton Keynes and Greater London rather than part of the East England's future growth potential.

If economic growth is slow and patchy, at least the environmental impact of the region's development is low. The region's turbines export power (an increasingly valuable commodity) to London and to the Netherlands. Nevertheless, the East of England has the last laugh at the expense of those critics who have accused it of lacking ambition. In 2017, in the face of impending ecological catastrophe in Europe, the EU introduced a radical environmental directive with tough new environmental assessment and compliance conditions. As the Regional Assembly's leaders assessed the effect of the measures on the region's economy of complying with the new measures would be the least disruptive of any region in England. The region is self sufficient in energy, and water, unlike many of its neighbours, is top of many green league tables and predicts that if it can get new transport systems to work it will be the first CO2 emissions neutral region in Europe.

(EEDA, 2004b: 50-57)

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