Prune the Future

Map future scenarios by creating a timeline of events. Prune unlikely or undesirable futures to focus on a preferred path. This helps teams align on strategy.

1 hour 30 min

Strategy

Intermediate

H HOW TO RUN

1. Create a future timeline: Create a timeline from now to 3-5 years out. Mark key intervals (quarterly, annually). Set the time horizon clearly — 20 min

2. **Branch out futures: Brainstorm future events/milestones** — 25 min
   - Product launches
   - Market changes
   - Competitor moves
   - Technology developments
   - Customer behavior shifts
   - Regulatory changes
   - Internal capabilities

   Each event creates a potential branch. Some futures are compatible, others mutually exclusive. Draw a tree diagram branching from now to the future.

3. **Assess futures: For each branch, consider** — 20 min
   - Likelihood: How probable is this?
   - Desirability: Do we want this?
   - Control: Can we influence this?

   Mark branches:
   - Green: Likely, desirable, we can influence
   - Yellow: Mixed signals
   - Red: Unlikely or undesirable

4. Prune: Remove (prune) red branches. Focus on green branches. Identify key decision points. Clarify dependencies — 15 min

5. **Action planning: For the preferred future path** — 10 min
   - What must happen first?
   - What decisions are coming?
   - What do we need to learn?
   - What should we start now?

KEY TIP

The prune metaphor comes from gardening: remove branches that won't bear fruit to focus energy on productive growth.

O OBJECTIVES

- Explore future scenarios
- Identify preferred future outcomes
- Create a realistic path forward
- Align the team on strategic direction

M MATERIALS

ESSENTIAL

- ☐ Large wall space for timeline.
- ☐ Sticky notes for events/branches.
- ☐ Markers in multiple colors (green, yellow, red).
- ☐ String or tape to show branches.
- ☐ Timeline template.

OPTIONAL

- ☐ Scenario planning frameworks .
- ☐ Industry trend data .
- ☐ Strategic planning documents .

P PARTICIPANTS

6 to 15 people

F FACILITATOR NOTES

REMEMBER

- The same applies to futures. Sometimes teams struggle to 'cut off' ideas - remind them it's about focus, not killing ideas forever.
- When creating branches: Be specific about events/milestones.
- Include external factors (not just internal plans).
- Consider wildcards and uncertainties.
- Don't censor initially – prune later.
- For likelihood assessment, base it on trends, data, and expert opinion, not wishful thinking.
- Be realistic about what you can't control.
- Remove branches that are very unlikely, undesirable (and you can't prevent), or incompatible with more important futures.
- Keep branches that are possible, desirable, within your influence, and aligned with your strategy.
- Key decision points are moments when you must choose a direction, an external event forces a response, or critical information becomes available.
- Use this exercise for strategic planning, long-term roadmapping, contingency planning, innovation portfolios, and risk assessment.
- Success looks like a clear preferred future path with key milestones, decision points, and identified next actions.