

Feel the 'Pain'

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Context... the complex milieu of organisational life

- Most senior *managers are busy people*
 - dealing with a portfolio of issues that vary enormously in significance and are often unrelated to each other.
- Some problems/issues are urgent, some are interesting, some are strategic, and some are tedious but require immediate attention.
- Client will often give the impression that the issue is crucial, and indeed will believe this to be the case – *at that particular point in time*, and yet later, when the work of the analysts is presented, it will have apparently lost importance.
- *Boredom levels* can rise quickly as one issue is traded for another as a result of the shifting demands of the organization

the salience of issues comes and goes

Context... invisible objectives

- managers are involved in addressing issues that engage both the 'rational' needs of the organization and the needs to *make things work* – political feasibility
- there will be undeclared/'invisible' objectives related to persuading staff, helping negotiate change with more senior managers, encouraging compromises, etc
- danger of an OR study paying little attention to the organisational realities:
 - “yes, very nice analysis, thankyou” [but, impossible to implement/ I don't understand it – it's a black box/ etc]
 - “without sacking all my staff, this would never work”
 - “I simply don't have the money to do what you suggest”

Find the 'pain'

- *identify the client* (person not organization)
- use simple *problem structuring* techniques, perhaps not directly with client
- do not avoid attention to *discovering the politics*: discover the pressures on the client – empathy, and demonstrate it
- these will enable you to:
 - demonstrate that you're a *good listener*, and so *build trust*
 - possibly *relieve* at least some of the pain fast – 'stop the bleeding nose'
 - and 'on the side' *identify* some 'quick and dirty' *consultancy craft skills*

Understand the 'pain': problem structuring

- STEP 1: map the issues (causal map or cognitive map) and understand goals and negative goals **
- if no opportunity for a deep interview, then empathise

** possibly of use to the client as well as analyst

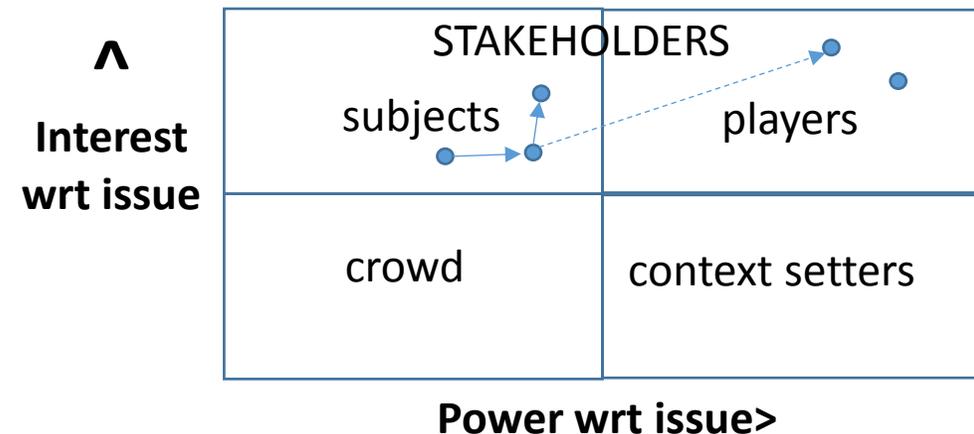
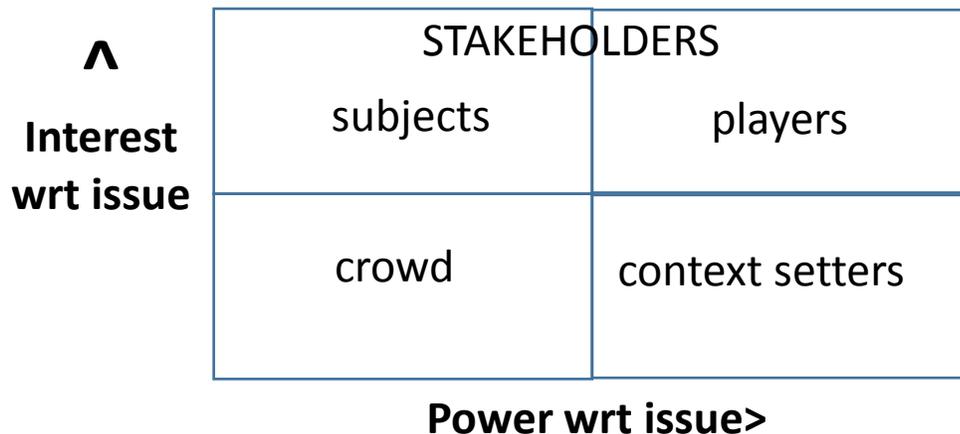
Understand the 'pain': problem structuring

- STEP 2: understand the futures context - how is the client's world likely to change
 - simple alternative futures/scenario analysis **
 - their personal world over the life of the project

** possibly of use to the client as well as analyst

Understand the 'pain': problem structuring

- it is rare for any serious OR project to involve a single player
 - the client sits within a team of powerful actors, each with a stake in the outcome of the project
- **STEP 3: stakeholder mapping: at least simple power/interest grid**
 - and network (informal and formal)
 - labelling each of the actors on the grid as anticipated winners or anticipated /losers



Pay an inordinate attention to developing trust

- clearly demonstrate that you *understand their world* through good listening skills and an understanding of their political setting
- *by relieving some of the pain*
- allows you (and the client) to accept *changing versions of the problem* (which implies a belief that your role as an ORer is to *help the client change his/her mind continuously* rather than just at the end of a study)

Pay an inordinate attention to developing trust

- the analyst as consultant is also there to help *the client change his/her mind continuously* rather than just at the end of a project through a final report (but 'contract')
- the politics of the problem framing, the emergence of new data, and new ways of construing the problem situation mean that the problem definition/structure will continuously change.
- ideally the formal contract needs to change to reflect the changes in problem definition, but this is rarely possible

Relieve at least some of the pain as fast as possible

- *establish clear short term milestones* (probably event related) rather than a tight project terms of reference
- adhere to at least some form of *interaction* (telephone or face to face) with the client within a '*psychological week*' (Monday of one week to Friday of the next week) - and by carefully *discovering the nature of the 'pain'*
- this will allow the client to appreciate some '*added value*' from your presence

Adhere to the notion of interactions within a 'psychological week' (Monday to Friday of next week)

- accept that *senior management teams can be fast moving* (in terms of problem redefinition);
 - they talk about the issues in corridors, lavatories, over lunch etc;
- this will allow you to *watch for clues* about their evaluation of your contribution (adding value), which in turn will mean that you can keep in touch with the politics - it will mean you stand a much better chance of both *identifying and relieving some of the pain*

Demonstrate some added value (in their terms)

- *demonstrate some consultant trade/craft skills*
- ***relieve at least some of the pain: example***
- so that you can begin to *locate more tractable problems* amenable to more formal analysis techniques, and so continue to add value

Notes...

- Unless there is sympathy, and empathy, for the realities of managerial life then the client may end up feeling embarrassed and possibly trapped by the expectations of the analyst.
 - even a supposedly simple question such as “what are your objectives?” or “what are your priorities” can be wholly unhelpful
 - and so, the analyst gets an answer, but a *misleading* one...

Notes...

- Operational Research 'solutions' are usually expected to change, by sometimes large amounts, the way an organization works.
 - change of any sort will always be seen to have winners and losers by those who are the recipients of change.
 - most of the key actors in implementing the solutions will see themselves, rightly or wrongly, as *potential winners or losers*
- Explore the *dynamics* of stakeholder responses to your proposals

Notes...

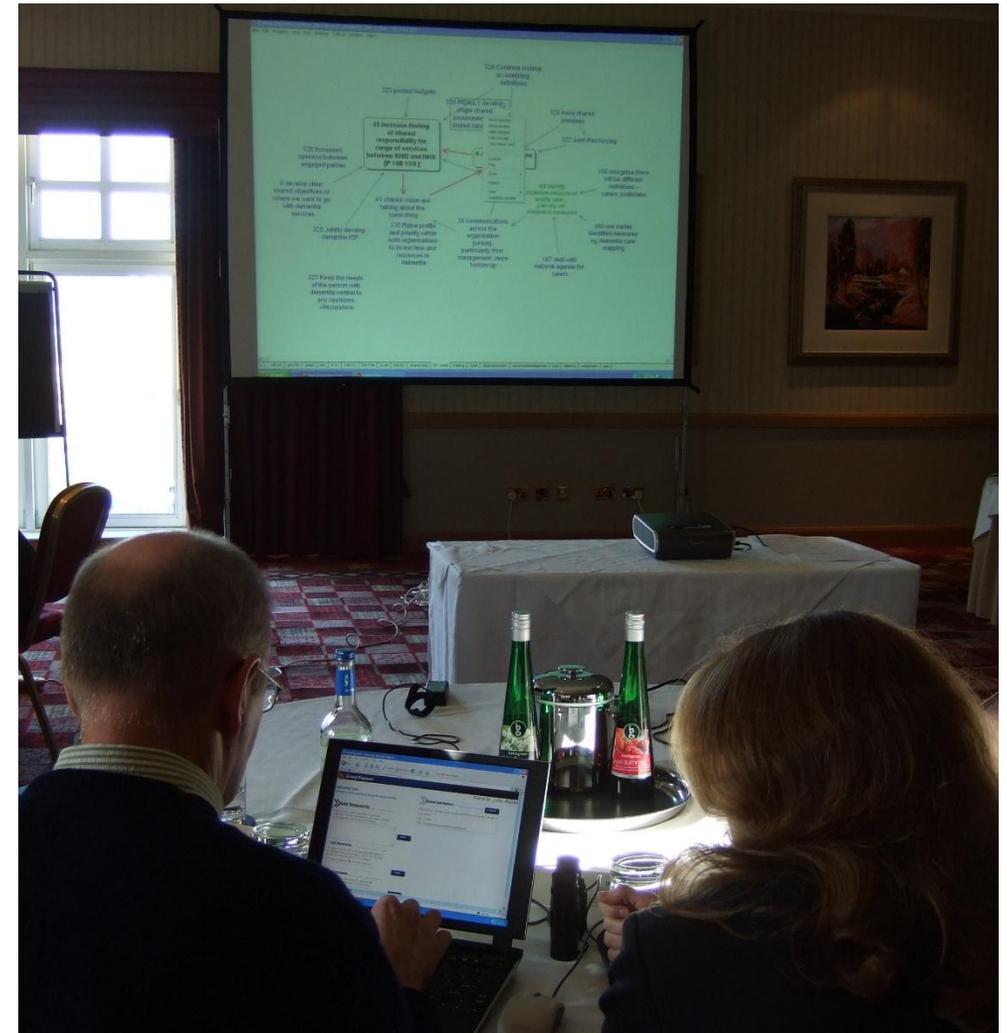
- useful question to have in mind at all times:
 - “if the client were to call me now, because they have to decide now, what can I usefully tell them as a result of my work to date?”
 - forces the discipline of focusing on ‘added value’ for the client rather than becoming entrenched in the esoterics of analysis
 - delivering added value against short-term milestones encourages the location of more tractable problems amenable to quick analysis

Notes...

- Simple 'cognitive maps', produced during an interview or fed-back later, are a hugely powerful way of demonstrating listening and so, an interest in *their problem*, not your version of it
- Feeding back a map won't work when your map is your map!
- Usually it also adds value through crude analysis:
 - Clusters
 - Centrality
 - 'Heads': goals and negative goals
 - Feedback

For me...

- Always: initial cognitive/causal mapping with client
- Small group problem definition with key stakeholders, using a group support system so that the client group can:
 - Define the problem for themselves
 - Gain clarity on goals and negative-goals
 - Identify the 'nubs of the situation'
 - Make some progress in negotiating agreements
 - Identify 'back-room' work programme: research, formal modelling: simulation models (SD and DE), systemic risk assessment and mitigation models, strategy models



Examples of *Group Explorer* in session
(NOTE: portability - almost always set up in 'clients' premises, not purpose built support room)

A Note on *Group Explorer*

- KIT=Chauffeur to drive kit; Public that projects the work of the group; Console for each participant (simple laptop with IE and wifi); good quality data projector; router. Operates as a private local network. Uses Decision Explorer as the 'front-end'.
- Used by me for:
 - messy problem resolution,
 - development of strategy,
 - systemic risk assessment on complex projects,
 - and conflict management (including in the Northern Ireland peace process).

Some reading...

- Eden, C. and Ackermann, F. Use of 'soft-OR' models by clients - what do they want from them? Pidd, M., Editor. *Systems Modelling Theory and Practice*. Chichester Wiley; 2004; pp. 146-163.
 - Some aspects of the presentation based on this chapter
- Eden, C. and Ackermann, F. Problem structuring on the nature of, and reaching agreement about, goals. *EURO Journal of Decision Processes*. 2013; 1(1)7-28.
 - On the nature of multiple goals, negative goals, goal systems
- Howick, S. and Ackermann, F. Mixing OR Methods in Practice Past, Present and Future Directions. *European Journal of Operational Research*. 2011; 215503-511.
 - Mixing 'soft' and 'hard'
- Ackermann, F. and Eden, C. Strategic Management of Stakeholders theory and practice. *Long Range Planning*. 2011; 44(3)179-196.
 - Stakeholder analysis and management
- Bryson, J.M., Ackermann, F. and Eden, C. *Visual Strategy*. Jossey-Bass. 2014
 - Full mapping case study of strategy development