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How to Choose Systems Methods?

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Abstract. *This paper builds on David Alman's (2012) STW discussion "How do I figure out which System thinking method or model is appropriate to the situation I'm trying to figure out how to deal with?" In this paper I restrict myself to social systems, e.g. organizations, tribes, grassroots movements and regions such as communities or nations. The problem is reformulated to reflect some fundamental constraints. I then discuss five commonly used approaches to selecting methods: 1. Intuitive, 2. Action Research, 3. Heuristics, 4. Developing Viability, and 5. Rational Decision Framework.*

Part One: Appreciating the Question

A Strawman Decision Framework

A naïve, reductionist, mechanistic approach (what I will label a "Newtonian" approach) to selecting methods to match situations is simple. This approach is essentially the same as that used by reductionist medical practitioners: match a set of symptoms to a disease / injury and then to the best available therapy. This approach uses a diagnostic framework that says determine the characteristics of the situation and then select the method that most adequately deals with the situation.
This approach is based on several assumptions, all of which systems thinking (ST) considers inappropriate. These assumptions include:

- The characteristics of the situation are given and fixed.
- The characteristics of the various systems methods are fixed and can be accurately defined.

- Observer bias can be overcome to the extent that it can be disregarded as unimportant.
- Expert use of the diagnostic framework by different observers would come to the same conclusions regarding situation characteristics and most appropriate system methods.
- For organizational situations, it is sometimes assumed that the relevant managers have an adequate grasp on what the key problems are within the situation.

The ST critique of the Newtonian approach criticizes all of the assumptions listed above.

Any given real world situation can be viewed in an infinite number of different ways. It may be true that certain attributes of the situation are fixed, e.g. physical dimensions such as number of some particular component or mass of some resource. However, which of the innumerable aspects of the situation to focus on is not fixed and is strongly dependent on the specific observer. Therefore it is never the case that the relevant characteristics of the situation can be objectively determined.

The characteristics of a given systems method depends strongly upon the specific practitioner. Patrick Hoverstadt (2012, STW Alman, 187) said it well "…most methodologies are less different from one another than their practitioners… I've often heard it stated that VSM doesn't deal with power or multiple perspectives or how purpose is formed. None of these are true of VSM, but they are all true of some VSM practitioners". Thus it is not possible to objectively determine what can and cannot be done with a given systems method.

"Observer bias", in this context, always includes what the observer knows about systems methods. This knowledge distorts the analysis in at least two ways. First, what you know about methods influences what you perceive in the situation. Second, your expertise or lack thereof with specific methods colors how you see the appropriateness of those methods for a given situation. Thus, observer bias is both important and unavoidable.

Because of the previous three points, use of any diagnostic framework by different observers will come to different conclusion regarding both the situation's characteristics and most appropriate systems methods.

Organizational symptoms are often far removed from the real problems. For example, inventory control problems are often rooted in the compensation schemes of the salesmen or in shop floor policies. Managers often think the symptoms are the problems. Thus, the perceptions of responsible officials are often not an accurate guide to the most important aspects of the situation.

Fundamental Constraints

Our basic purpose in this paper is to explore a seemingly simple question which turns out to be extremely difficult. I consider two classes of constraints which I use to re-define the problem:

1. A constructivist view of science, knowledge and truth.
2. The people involved.

Constructivism. The constructivist view of science is well represented by these quotes:

"Whether you can observe a thing or not depends on the theory which you use. It is the theory which decides what can be observed" (Einstein, cited by Salam, p 99).

"Natural science, does not simply describe and explain nature; it is part of the interplay between nature and ourselves" (Einstein, BrainyQuotes).

"Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one" (Heisenberg, BrainyQuotes).

“What we see is not reality in itself, but reality exposed to our method of questioning” (Heisenberg, BrainyQuotes).

All four of these quotes were made in the context of the early debates about quantum mechanics, but they could equally well have been made for the current discussion.

The constructivists (von Foerster 1974, von Glaserfeld 1990) argue that our “reality” is a result of our nervous system’s computation of a (relatively) stable framework for making sense out of our sensory perceptions of the world. In the constructivist understanding, our individual reality, while it is self-constructed, is not arbitrary or random. There is some “fit” in an evolutionary sense between our personal, self-constructed reality and the “actual” reality “out there”. Whatever that “actual” reality is, it puts limits on us. For example, large trucks and cliffs can kill us whether or not we “believe” in them.

Most of our computation of our personal reality is necessarily below the level of conscious awareness. Thus, most of the development of our worldview is also below the level of conscious awareness. In short, the constructivist view is that our understanding of any social system is largely subjective. Vickers (1965) suggests that the closest we can come to objectivity is to consider the perspectives of multiple participants / observers. Churchman (1968, p 231) adds “The systems approach begins when we first see the world through the eyes of another”.

People / Roles. There are always certain people or, more precisely, certain roles involved in any selection of system methods to apply to social systems. Thorbjoern Mann advanced an argument very similar to mine in this section (2012, STW Alman, 81 & 332).

Please note a convention I use throughout the paper. Terms to which I give a specific meaning for this paper are capitalized. These terms include Client, Facilitator, Situation, Problem and a few others. For my purposes, it is useful to distinguish the following:

- Client = the person or group desiring to change or accomplish something within the social system.
- Facilitator = the person or group providing expertise in methods. The Client and Facilitator may or may not be the same person (or group). The facilitator may be a consultant, either internal or external, or may be in a leadership position or simply a volunteer with some relevant expertise.
- Situation = context within which the Client and Facilitator will attempt to accomplish something. The Situation includes all of the factors which in any way bear on the success or failure of the attempt to accomplish something.
- Problem = the provisional statement of what Client and Facilitator hope to change or accomplish. Note that I could equally well use “Goal” instead of “Problem” because a problem statement implies a goal and vice versa.

I make the following assumptions about Client:

- Client has an initial statement of what is desired, i.e. an initial Problem.
- Client’s initial statement of what is desired (initial Problem) is likely very different from what Client would ideally like to achieve (ideal Problem) (because of self imposed notions of feasibility).
- Client may or may not be open to exploring what might be ideally achieved.
- Client has limited resources, especially of time available, time span for accomplishing something, money, and personnel.
- Client is accountable to some group which will put limits on what can be tried. This group might be a board for a corporation or the citizens of her city or her followers for a mass movement (Sillett 2012, STW Alman, 363).

I make the following assumptions about Facilitator:

- Facilitator is expert in one or more systems methods.
- Facilitator is limited in that she does not have expertise in all system methods.
- Facilitator expertise can be augmented by bringing in some outside assistance.
- Facilitator augmentation that can be achieved is usually limited to those methods that the Client and the original Facilitator were already aware of. Thus the augmented set of systems methods is usually still limited.
- Facilitator's expertise always colors his perception of Situation and Problem.
- What a given Facilitator can or cannot do with a given systems method depends in part upon Facilitator's personal background and characteristics (Hoverstadt, 2012, STW Alman, 187)

I make the following assumptions about Client's Situation:

- Situation involves both technical and human aspects which interact in complex ways.
- Boundaries for the Situation can be chosen such that the resulting Problem will be Tame, Messy, or Wicked.
- Client's initial statement of Problem will imply that it is tame, messy, or wicked.
- Client's idealization for what is desired will likely imply either a Messy or Wicked problem definition.
- The selection of boundaries for Situation is always subjective.
- The articulation of a Problem is always a subjective process.

The Question

Jan Lelie (2012, STW Alman, 18) and Patrick Hoverstadt (2012, STW Alman, 187, 191, 299, & 303) both argued that our decision framework should not be selecting a method(s) to match a given situation. Rather our framework involves matching methods and situations where each is influenced by the other. Building on this insight, I developed figure 1 to represent some of the key relationships in this process of selecting methods.

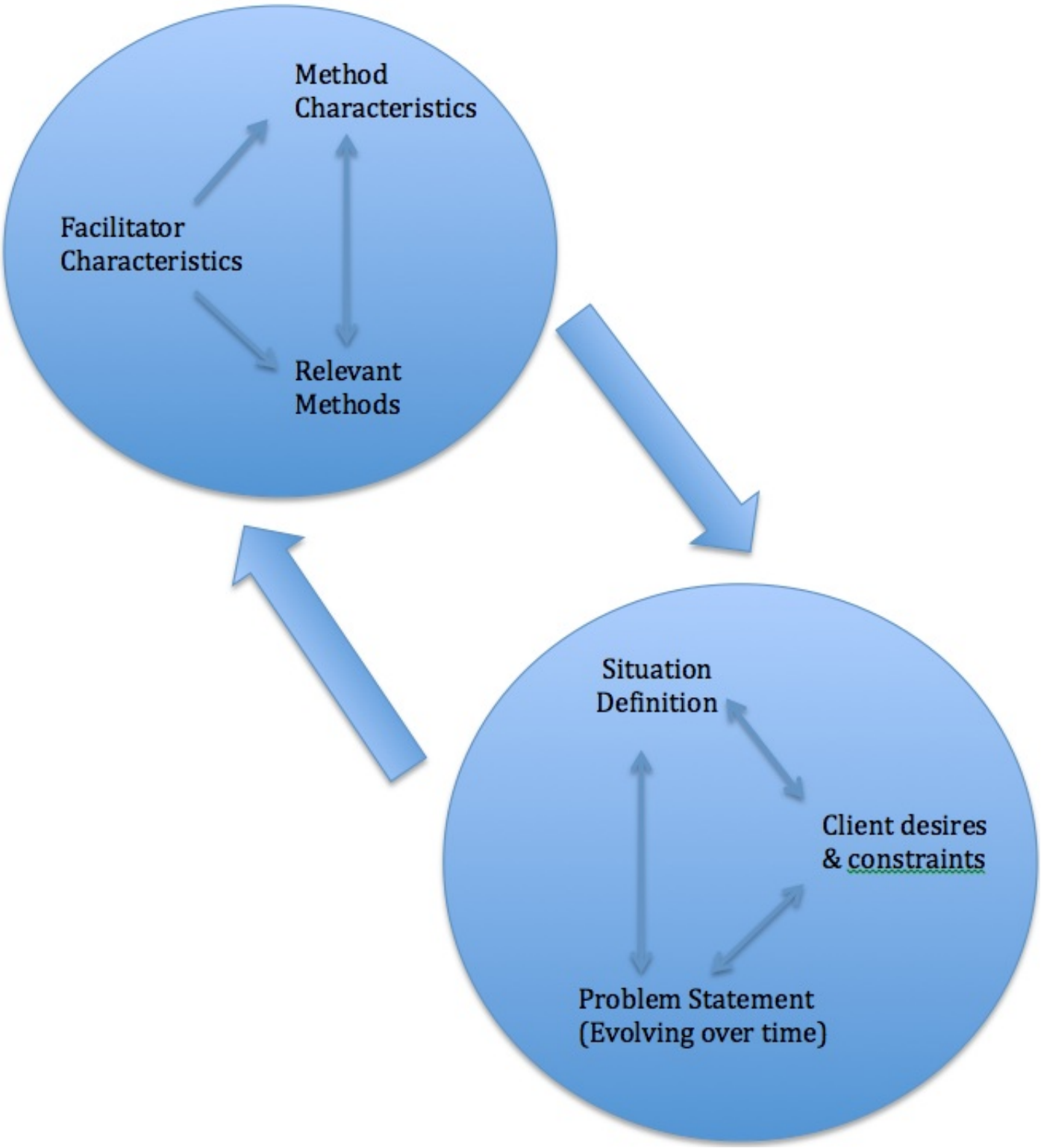

Figure 1. Some of the important relationships involved in selecting methods for a given situation. The arrows mean "influences". For instance, "Facilitator Characteristics" influence "Method Characteristics". Note that most of the arrows are double headed, which indicates a circular relationship, i.e. each influences the other.

Figure 1 does not show all of the important relationships. For instance, Facilitator Characteristics and Relevant Methods often are important influences on Client Desires and Constraints (Client's perceived constraints and the actual constraints are often very different).

The question of appropriate methods always comes up in the context of a specific client (even if the client is ourselves) and a specific Facilitator. Thus our original question can be usefully restated as:

"How should Facilitator proceed to select Methods for a given Client with particular Desires and Constraints embedded in some unique Situation, given that the relevant characteristics of each aspect of

the decision-space is influenced by all of the others?"

This formulation of the question draws attention to the most salient aspects that should be considered, as well as their interactions.

Syntegration. Syntegration (also called Team Syntegrity) (Beer, 1994) is a systems method that was developed to quickly deal with precisely the sort of messy question this paper addresses. While other systems methods can also address these messy questions, none that I am aware of can do so quickly, i.e. within a time frame of a couple of weeks.

The most common form of syntegration involves 30 people, selected to represent the full range of relevant perspectives. These 30 people, usually in a one week intensive workshop, begin with a broad open-ended question. In the first phase of the syntegration the group articulates 12 sub-questions. The second and longer phase involves working those twelve questions via a set of small team meetings that ensures that the insights of all 30 people are maximally shared and utilized. The sharing of insights is managed by an iterative process of relatively short small team meetings with shifting membership.

Much larger groups can be dealt with via a "super-syntegration". For the super-syntegration, multiple parallel syntegrations are held involving as many as 900 people (30 syntegrations of 30 people each). The second stage of the super syntegration is another syntegration involving representatives from each of the first group of syntegrations.

The "products" from a syntegration are, minimally, a widely shared understanding of the perspectives of the various participants. More commonly, a syntegration is used to develop an action plan for a company or community. In most cases, the action plan so developed is implemented quickly and easily. The ease of implementation following a syntegration seems to be based on the widely shared understanding that the process generates among the participants.

In conclusion, one good approach to our basic question is: conduct a syntegration with 30 of the relevant stakeholders where they are charged with answering this set of inter-related questions:

- What is our situation?
- What do we want to do about our situation?
- What methods should we use to change our situation?

The iterative nature of the syntegration process alllows the answers to these questions to inform each other and therefore for all of them to evolve. This approach assumes that at least one of the participants has a basic awareness of the available systems methods.

Part Two: Approaches to Selecting Methods

This section outlines five common approaches to our basic question. For simplicity, I present the approaches as if they were cleanly separate. This is a gross oversimplification in that most of us use more than one of them, often within the same engagement. I have personally used all of them although I have strong predilections toward two of them. The approaches discussed are:

- Intuitive
- Action Research
- Heuristics
- Developing Viability
- Rational Decision Framework

The Intuitive Practitioner

There are some very successful consultants who seem to intuit appropriate methods. These folks somehow "know" what to do and generally are successful in doing it (Lelie, 2012, STW Alman, 18).

The Buddhist zen master and some martial arts masters seem to operate similarly with their students. These masters somehow "know" what will help a given student along their chosen path.

The mystic also frequently "knows" how to act. For example, my wife is a mystic who is also a pastor. She often 'knows" not only what is going on with specific members of the congregation but also what to do about it.

The intuitive consultant can usually point to specific aspects of the situation as justifying their proposed course of action. The mystic may explain her knowing in terms of hearing God's voice or "the spirit told me". None of these folks are usually able to articulate why the aspects they focus on are more important than other aspects, they just "know" they are.

The troubling questions, for the intuitive practitioner, seem to be of two types:

- Did I "hear' my own inner source of wisdom correctly?
- Am I really up for what seems to be needed here? My Client is likely to be pretty upset …

Unfortunately for the rest of us, the intuitive practitioner is generally unable to articulate how they "know" or how they do what they do. Most of us can only marvel at the success of these intuitives without being able to emulate their work.

Cautions. An uncritical emulation of the Intuitive Practitioner will always get one in trouble because the Intuitive usually cannot explain how or what it is that they do and therefore the approach can not be easily taught or copied.

Action Research

The essence of this approach is to begin by attempting to gain a very deep appreciation of the situation by viewing it through multiple perspectives. This is usually done by a combination of in-depth observation and interviewing as many different stakeholders / participants as possible.

This approach has roots in a number of different disciplines including anthropology and qualitative program evaluation. Soft Systems Methodology (Checkland, 1981) is the best known of the systems methods that fit in this category. Some of the early work in Operations Research (OR) (Beer, 1968) might also be characterized as action research although the OR version emphasized the development of explicit models whereas most of the action research methods result in what might best be termed as "rich pictures" or "thick descriptions". David Alman (2012, STW Alman, 101 & 356) mentions numerous authors who emphasize the importance of this approach, including Laszlo, Flood & Jackson, Burns, Ison, and others.

This approach is often a "front-end" for other methods when the initial situation is perceived as messy or wicked.

Cautions. The application of these methods is perhaps even more dependent upon user characteristics than some of the other systems methods. For instance, a physicist, a biologist, a sociologist, and a psychologist

would undoubtedly "see" a given situation quite differently through application of SSM.

There are some situations where these methods are inappropriate overkill, e.g. if:

- The immediate problem is relatively simple and amenable to standard solutions.
- Client has unavoidable constraints which require action very quickly.

The Heuristics Practitioner

The Heuristics Practitioner is keenly aware of the circular relationship between his understanding of the situation and his systems methods. The best that the Heuristics Practitioner can do is to learn a range of methods and then use a set of heuristics that help guide a selection of methods for a given situation and simultaneously guard against the worst mistakes (Stampf, 2012, STW Alman, 15, 36). These heuristics include:

- Our world view includes many assumptions which we normally take for granted. As C. West Churchman (1970, p 231) said "… every world view is terribly restricted." To the extent that we become aware of these assumptions, we can avoid some blind spots (Alman, 2012, STW Alman, 35; Rheenen, 2012, STW Alman, 285).
- It is generally extremely difficult to spot our own blind spots. Assistance from others must be solicitied (Bellinger, 2012, STW Alman, 133).
- Before trying to change a social system, we must understand what has caused it to be the way it is (Bellinger, 2012, STW Alman, 1)
- Follow several different tracks for as long as possible (Martensson, 2012, STW Alman, 170). This means, at a minimum, keep several different methods in mind while investigating the Situation.
- The greater the uncertainty in the Situation, the faster you need to make the learning loops. One thing this means is that the degree of uncertainty in the Situation determines how frequently you need to ask if your approach is still making sense (Hoverstadt, 2012, STW Alman, 299)
- As a beginning step, map the desires of the people in the Situation in terms of "expect to see (need), like to see (want), and love to see (vision, idealization)". (Sillet, 2012, STW Alman, 273)
- Explicitly state the key characteristics of the Situation and the reasons for picking a given method. Periodically review this and ask if it still seems appropriate?
- Patrick's Precaution: Look for evidence that your preferred method does NOT fit the situation. This helps guard against our universal tendency to see what we expect and / or want to see. (Hoverstadt, 2012, STW Alman, 299 & 303)

Wicked problems require a unique approach. Wicked problems are characterized by being unique, causality is ambiguous and not understood, attempts to solve the problem change the nature of the problem, and there is no clear stopping rule (no way to know when you have solved it). A shorthand way of saying all this is that the Situation is exceedingly complex, not separable into parts, and unstable. In such cases the focus must be on simply gaining a better understanding of the situation, not on achieving a solution.

Cautions. The heuristics guide you but cannot guarantee to keep you out of trouble. For instance, as Bellinger (2012, STW Alman, 224) put it, especially for wicked problems, "the more focused one becomes on the objective the more likely they are to accomplish it and the less likely they are to be able to tell if the objective still makes sense". The heuristics are simply rules of thumb that experience suggests are helpful.

The Developing Viability Practitioner

Viable is defined as capable of working successfully. Viable includes the notions of adequate current operations and long term adaptation. The Developing Viability Practitioner acts out of several key assumptions:

- Better learning and adapting tends to make social systems more effective in achieving their given objectives and more desirable for their participants (worker, clients, stakeholders).
- More democratic structures and appropriate autonomy for subunits makes for better learning and adapting.
- Use of appropriate systems methods can substantially improve a social system's ability to learn and adapt.

In the absence of strong evidence indicating other courses of action, the Developing Viability Practitioner will advocate methods to improve learning and adaptability. Clearly, if there is some crisis involving say cash flow or one of the key functional areas of a business, then that crisis must be dealt with in the short-term. Focusing on long-term adaptability while ignoring a near-term crisis may result in the total collapse of the organization.

Numerous methods focus on some aspects of learning and adaptability, e.g. Lean, Cynefin, and the various approaches to total quality management (TQM) all focus on learning to improve specific aspects of an organization. However, only a few methods focus explicitly on learning and adaptablility for the entire organization. The pre-eminent methods for overall organizational learning and adaptability are due to Ackoff, Beer, and Senge (the reader should be aware that these methods are my personal favorites): These methods include:

- Idealized Design / Idealized Planning (Ackoff, 1974, 1981)
- Circular Organization / Democratic Corporation (Ackoff, 1994)
- Viable System Model (Beer, 1972,1979)
- Syntegration (Beer, 1994)
- The Learning Organization (Senge, 1990)

In some cases, immediate crises are most effectively dealt with via methods which also significantly improve long-term adaptability and organizational learning. For example, Ackoff's circular organization (1994) provides a mechanism for fairly quickly changing a top-down command and control organization into one where decision making is much more dispersed. For another example, syntegration (Beer, 1994) is a method for a large group to quickly come to a shared understanding of a complex situation and to adopt a plan of action for dealing with it. Finally, the Viable System Model (Beer, 1972,1979) can quickly illuminate situations in which an organization is unable to deal with the complexity presented by its relevant environment.

The Developing Viability Practitioner believes that it is generally worthwhile to use these methods to improve the social system's ability to learn and adapt. This is not to argue that these are the only methods needed or even that these methods should always be the top priority. Specific situations or difficulties will periodically arise that require other approaches.

Cautions. The specific methods discussed in this section (i.e. Ackoff's, Beer's, and Senge's) are so generally useful that there is a real danger that they may be used when they are completely inappropriate. Patrick's Precaution should be used here: Before finalizing your selection of systems methods, look for evidence that your preferred method does NOT fit the situation.

The Rational Decision Framework

The naïve "Newtonian" version of this approach was discussed (and discounted) at the beginning of this paper. This section discusses the very real advantages of attempting to achieve a systemically sound rational decision framework while avoiding the pitfalls of the naive version.

Attempts at a more realistic, constructivist approach to a rational decision framework dominated the discussion thread. Out of about 600 comments, my impression is that more than half of them were aimed at this general approach. David Alman summarized some of this discussion (2012, STW Alman, 101, 177, 356) and mentioned a number of authors in this regard, including Banathy (Systems Inquiry), Flood and Jackson (Total Systems Intervention), Jackson (System of System Methods), Stevens (Radar), Mingers & Brocklesby's (Multimethod), Rittel (IBIS 128) and the approach of human activity systems (HAS).

Many of these authors / approaches are insightful and helpful in deepening our understanding of various systems methods. However, we still have a dilemma. Recall that I restated the original question based on an understanding of the fundamental nature of Situation, Client, and Facilitator:

"How should Facilitator proceed to select Methods for a given Client with particular Desires and Constraints embedded in some unique Situation, given that the relevant characteristics of each aspect of the decision-space is influenced by all of the others?"

Any decision framework worthy of being labeled "systemic" must take the following into account:

- Our understanding of the Situation is partially dependent on our pre-existing understanding of methods and partially determined by Client's desires and constraints.
- The set of methods Facilitator considers is partially determined by our understanding of the Situation and Client's constraints.
- Facilitator's understanding of any given method is strongly dependent upon his/her prior experience and personal characteristics.

Thus we unavoidably have three causal loops: Client, Methods, and Situation each change both of the other two. Further, even if we somehow found a generally useful way to talk about Situations, we still have, for each Situation, a unique Client whose wishes and constraints are to some extent personality dependent. And the Facilitator also brings her own uniqueness to the situation. Thus a generally applicable decision framework will not generate the same answers for different Facilitators.

Does this mean that the quest for a rational decision framework should be abandoned? In my opinion, the answer is no, the quest is both important and useful.

The human brain is hardwired to detect patterns. Faced with a Situation and a desire to "do something" the human brain is going to detect some pattern that suggests a particular course of action. In other words, every Facilitator already has some sort of "rational decision framework" … the only question is how good or bad that framework is.

In my strong opinion, any systems thinker with any inclinations toward playing the role of Facilitator should give serious attention to his own decision framework for selecting methods.

Rather than seeking a generally applicable decision framework, we should turn our attention to the question of how each of us might improve our own personal decision framework. In a real sense, that is what this entire paper is about.

For most of us, our decision frameworks are partially tacit, i.e. we are not consciously aware of how we

make a particular decision. By reflecting on what we do as we do it, we can gain more insight into how we make decisions.

David Alman (2012, STW Alman, 348) provided the following very appropriate quote from Krishnamurti:

"To transform the world, we must begin with ourselves; and what is important in beginning with ourselves is intention. The intention must be to understand ourselves, and not to leave it to others to transform themselves. This is our responsibility, yours and mine; because, however small may be the world we live in, if we can bring about a radically different point of view in our own existence, then perhaps we shall affect the world at large."

My own decision framework for selecting methods includes the following:

1. Figure 1 (above) represents my current understanding of the most important aspects of the decision-space, i.e. the various "things" and their inter-relationships that I must consider.
2. Some of my earliest questions are:

- Does this look like other situations I've dealt with before?
- How fast is action needed? E.g., Is Client in a crisis situation or a long-term improvement situation?
- Is the Client one I can work with? Are our personalities going to clash?
- How realistic are the Client Desires and (Perceived) Constraints? Is the Client open to examining the Desires and Constraints, especially to enlarging the Desires and decreasing or removing some of the perceived Constraints?

3. I am biased toward the Developing Viability methods. Stafford Beer was not only my intellectual mentor but also a friend. I knew Russell Ackoff and like much of his work. And the whole idea of Senge's learning organization appeals to me. Further, I have more experience with the Viable System Model, syntegration, system dynamics and idealized planning than with other methods. I therefore have to guard against rushing into a selection of one or more of these methods. Patrick's Precaution about the need to search for disconfirming evidence is crucial in this regard.
4. Beyond this, my decision framework gets fuzzy, i.e. mostly tacit. Having done this paper, I am now much clearer on Heuristics and have thought more about how the five different approaches described herein work together … but much of my decision framework remains tacit, i.e., I don't know how I decide.

Heinz von Foerster, Gordon Pask, and Stafford Beer (personal communications) all liked to say that the poets got it long before the scientists. Argyris and Schon (1978) talked about tacit knowledge vs explicit knowledge. In short, we know a great deal more than we can say, i.e. most of our "knowing" is unconscious and not available for explicit articulation. Gaining additional clarity on one's own decision framework is hard work … and necessary work for anyone who truly wants to consider himself a systems thinker.

Cautions. I believe the following conclusions can be advanced with substantial certainty:

- There is no conceivable decision framework that will reliably generate the same answers when used by different Facilitators.
- A given Facilitator, either an individual or a close knit team, can develop a decision framework for selecting methods that will be generally useful for that Facilitator (or Facilitation team).
- A decision framework that fits one Facilitator should be a useful example for another Facilitator working on improving his / her own decision framework.

Each systems practitioner has a "rational decision framework" for selecting systems methods that is partly

explicit and partly tacit. To the extent that our rational decision framework is merely implicit, to that extent we may be operating out of unconscious biases and blind spots.

Conclusion

The question of how to select the most appropriate methods for a given Situation is not one that can be answered in any definitive way. However, the question is important in that it must be faced for every engagement. This paper discussed several commonly used approaches to the problem and attempted to show that Facilitators can improve in their skill in selecting methods.

The following quote from M. Scott Peck (Boray, 2012, STW Alman, 597) sums up the thrust of this paper nicely (note that I replaced "spiritual" with "systems thinking" in the quote):

"Seek greater understanding, but do not expect greater detail. There are many who by virtue of their passivity, dependency, fear, and laziness, seek to be shown every inch of the way and have it demonstrated to them that each step will be safe and worth their while. This cannot be done. For the journey of systems thinking growth requires courage and initiative and independence of thought and action. While the words of the prophets and the assistance of grace are available, the journey must still be traveled alone. No teacher can carry you there. There are no preset formulas. Rituals are only learning aids, they are not the learning." — The Road Less Traveled by M. Scott Peck

Barry Clemson. *I worked in custom manufacturing, community development, educational evaluation, software development, university teaching (organizations & system thinking), consulting, construction, and as a novelist (in roughly that order). My schooling and studies ranged broadly over the natural and social sciences. I discovered a paper by Stafford Beer in 1967. Stafford became a friend and my most important intellectual mentor. A love for wilderness and a wife who is a mystic and a Pastor help explain some of my other biases. I remain an optimist and am committed to helping turn the current global mess into an opportunity for renewal. www.barryclemson.net*

Acknowledgements

I was able to do this paper only because of the discussion thread so ably moderated by David Alman. The posts from several dozen different contributors to this thread kept setting off explosions of insights in my brain. I tried to acknowledge the most important of these "explosions" but with almost 600 posts, I was able to explicitly reference only a small fraction of them. Please know that I am most grateful to all of the participants in this discussion thread.

I make no claim to "representativeness" for this paper. The interpretations and conclusions are my own and some participants in the discussion disagree with portions of my paper.

Staff helping with this article: Editor: Gene Bellinger. Reviewers: David Alman, Patrick Hoverstadt, Ivan Taylor.

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Note: All of the in-text citations to the LinkedIn STW discussion refer to the single reference found at "Alman, David. (2012). STW Discussion …". The author of the specific comment is NOT listed in the "References".

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2 Comments

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1. Brendan Howley / May 15 2013

   This is one profound piece. I would very much like to discuss the paper and its genesis with you. Would that be possible? I read your Freedom Ride piece on your homepage with interest; I'm a former CBCTV investigative reporter—my producer did the definitive film on that amazing, heartbreaking story. I too am a novelist and someone wrestling a bit with what I understand to be history.
   Be good to connect.

cheers/

@brendanhowley

Reply

- Barry Clemson / Dec 24 2013

  Brendan,
  I am afraid this dropped thru the cracks for me … I would love to talk with you about these things if you are still interested.

  Barry

  Reply

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