

Dear Executive and Wibo

I expect that each member of the 25 will have different impressions from the meeting and here are mine. I am writing as possibly the only person in the group with independent professional experience in this field, having worked as a facilitator for 20 years in 11 countries using various, mainly non-parametric decision approaches, although not Theory U, which is new to me.

Trager is a feeling experience and these are largely my feelings of how the process is working, but informed to some extent by my own workshop practice.

Preparation for the workshop

It was disappointing that neither the Exec or the consultant replied to most of my early and repeated written questions about the process or the contract. This failure of communication is disrespectful and seems to me to be at the core of what we are trying to address, so is not a good start! The participants arrived essentially without any understanding of what was to happen. The lack of preparatory material was, in my view, a classic failure. Unless participants understand what they are doing they waste time and need more introductory time that could otherwise be more focused. Otto's book is not much help in this respect and the contract tender is not much better. I felt unprepared and my questions ignored. Was anyone listening? Will there be any response to these comments?

Facilitation during the workshop

The facilitation was very professional and the workshop went smoothly and without any significant problems. I enjoyed the experience and there was the usual motivational high that follows most management workshops. However, there was not the sense of achievement that is usual in a decision workshop, since we were rushed at the end and I felt unconvinced that we had identified a way forward, that the prototypes were really very relevant, or that I understood what was to happen next.

The balance of exercises.

Some of the "letting go" exercises we did, which took much of the two days, though fun, were not so necessary with Trager people since we are quite good at this already. Some of this unneeded time might have been avoided if we had known what the program was, or a scoping exercise had been undertaken.

I felt we did too much modeling with clay and toys, but many others clearly enjoyed this.

As it was, the workshop should probably have been three days, for the final, decisive part of the sequence was rushed into the last half of the second day afternoon, which for me was both too hasty and not sufficiently thought through. It might have been avoided if a scoping exercise had been undertaken with a small subset of participants beforehand to produce a tested focus. Alternatively it would have been possible to structure the final part of the exercise more effectively from the 10 interviews. This does not seem to have been done, or if it

was, this was not communicated. In the final rushed exercise the participants produced some building blocks such as “hookup” and “lots of practitioners” that got votes but were not building blocks at all but properties; illustrating both the lack of guidance and of understanding of what was apparently intended. At this point the workshop, which was going well, began for me, to lose the plot a bit.

Unfortunately, after two days I still have no real feeling for where we are going except that it is vague, will take a long time and will be expensive. These are not the right feelings after a major workshop.

Reporting

I am surprised that the consultant is apparently not providing any kind of analysis or report on the sessions. In my view this is the fault of the Exec who seem to have little experience of commissioning or managing a contract like this and did not consult the COT. I would love a contract of this kind, for the facilitation is the enjoyable and easy part.

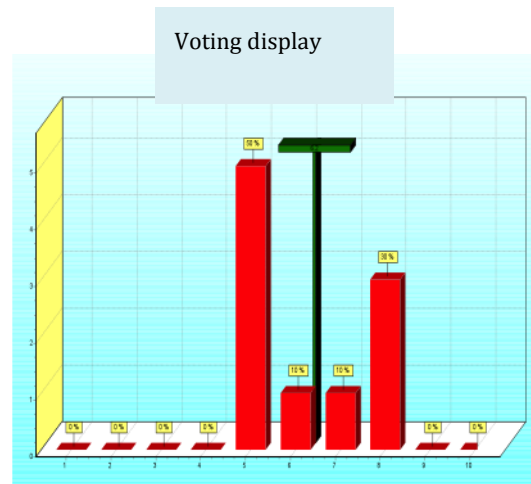
Structure of the team

I agree that a group of 25 is appropriate for this type of exercise. Such a group has reasonable authority and can still debate effectively. However, for a group of 5 or less to consider a prototype is in my experience too small a unit to produce an acceptable collective view and the whole group will need to look at any conclusions they draw. I am not so sure if the balance of people is really representative, but this is what we have to work with so is not worth further debate at this point.

What more might be done?

So far so good, but is there a possibility of combining Theory U with a more mainstream ranking and decision-tree approach to speed up the process and give a clearer and broader focus? Since the Consultant is not apparently reporting the process, it seems necessary and pertinent to ask these questions. It is particularly costly to bring together 25 people from all over the world and I personally feel that we need to make the meetings as effective as possible.

The ideas from the first two modeling exercises could be used to produce a Multi-Criteria Analysis [decision tree](#) that could be used to comprehensively rank the range of possibilities that we should be debating. This could include any imaginable scenario and any number of building blocks for simultaneous comparison. Decision trees can also be used to rank [criteria for discriminating between alternatives and give such criteria weightings reflecting their relative importance](#). . Such criteria would help us to evaluate and prioritize the various possibilities. I realize that the Exec are unfamiliar with this approach but it is widely used by the EU, National Governments, Health and Social Service departments, and I imagine that Wibo might have had some experience of Multi-Criteria Analysis.



Electronic keypad and computer display. The red columns show the numbers of individuals voting in each numerical band, and the green t bar shows the mean score and standard deviation

With this supplementary approach, more focused prototypes could be constructed based on debate and ranked criteria with a full audit trail for the conclusions. There is plenty of opportunity for participants to question and restructure the alternatives and also the criteria. Large numbers of alternatives can be proposed and compared with a [decision tree](#), particularly if this is used in conjunction with individual electronic voting, using hand-held [radio keypads](#).

These permit secret, rapid, and easily repeated voting, with the results shown instantly on a projected computer screen. The screen display shows the pattern of voting clearly and makes it very straight-forward to explore the views of different groups of voters. Another vote can be done within seconds to see if opinions have changed after debate. I have keypads for up to 35 participants, that could be provided without charge if it was thought to be useful. Stakeholders love using electronic voting and the process is very easily managed. This is not a take-over bid (I have neither the time or the inclination) and I don't wish to undermine the process, but to strengthen it. A combination of Theory U and Multi-criteria Analysis might be more effective than either alone. More detail is given in the notes below, and an example of a decision tree is given in the attached Powerpoint.

Whether or not these suggestions are adopted, we definitely need a route map of next steps. It is essential that the process runs as smoothly as possible and that it works. And that it feels right! Each meeting must be costing 20,000 Euros or more, and to blunder on into the future on a wish and a prayer (which is a bit how it feels) is not good enough, even though this approach undoubtedly appeals to many Trager people. Now that the preliminary Theory U meeting has been held could possibly be a good time to broaden the approach.

Best Regards Neil

More Detail: How to Establish Group Priorities

Establishing priorities of a group of stakeholders can be a very effective way of focusing discussion on the most important elements of a problem. The process raises the possibility of discussion that may easily change or modify how people think when they have heard other views. To achieve rapid and flexible priority values it is possible to sort numerous possible topics or building blocks into a decision tree. All possible topics can and should be included. Unimportant ones will simply drop out of the process through a lack of support. An example of a partially constructed Decision Tree for an NA is given in the attached Powerpoint file. Successive pages give different levels of branching. There is plenty of room under individual levels to add further categories or building blocks. This is purely to illustrate the process and is not meant to be either comprehensive or appropriate for TI.

What is suggested is a decision-tree process with secret electronic voting with results instantly visible on a computer screen. Stakeholders like this approach and it is very fast and efficient.

1. Stakeholders are invited to review the decision tree and make any changes / additions they like. This first stage can be done by e mail if appropriate, or left to a face to face meeting. The whole process is explained to participants well before the meeting so that they understand what is to happen.
2. They meet face to face and consider the first level of branching of the tree and individually select the most important element from those at that level of branching (normally a choice of five or less) and give it a score of 10. The others are ranked from 1-10 depending on their relative importance by comparison with the most important. No absolute values are required and the ranking procedure takes only a few seconds for each comparison. Each person has his own scoring, usually on a paper copy, before entering his scores electronically..
3. Next to the second level of branching and so on through the whole tree. It is never necessary to consider more than a few alternatives at a time.
4. When all the scores have been completed (about half an hour for about 50 choices) the scores are put together by secret Electronic voting. For each vote, every individual enters his score. If there is much variation in voting (seen instantly on the computer screen) the variation in views can be discussed and a new vote taken to see if anyone has modified their views in the light of discussion. If there is broad agreement this stage can be omitted. Then on to the next vote and so on.
5. The final scores are integrated by a simple arithmetic combination of scores at each level, to give a set of importance rankings. The final scores are weighted by the scores at each level of branching. This clearly shows the relative importance of each element of the decision tree based on scores for every element from every participant. The relative importance of any building block can be directly compared with any other anywhere else in the tree. [The final product is a ranked list of all the elements of the tree in order of priority.](#)
6. No other system of prioritization is so comprehensive, rapid or flexible.

7. Further deliberations can focus on key building blocks with the confidence that a complete audit trail of their selection has been provided. The process is easily repeatable later if required.

In the NA example, the first level of branching compares Focus, Outreach, Training and Administration. Each person ranks the four in importance relative to one they think most the most important. The second level subdivides each of these categories. For example Focus subdivides into Self development, Professional practice, Supplement to other modalities and Combination of purposes. Again, each is ranked relative to the most important. This is repeated throughout the tree, with additional categories added as necessary to ensure all possibilities are considered. This tree is not appropriate for our purposes but should be sufficiently similar to give a sense of how such a tree could be helpful to us.