

CONCERN SOLVING: EMANCIPATING PROBLEM SOLVING

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ABSTRACT

This paper is about how problems get defined - typically the sort of problems associated with organisational decision making. The author is concerned that by objectifying problem definition, scientific management make invisible whose problems they are and so silences solutions that may be attractive to others. This paper will argue that problem definition should focus on the person having the problem, not the objectified thing said to be the problem. Problems exist only in people's heads; a problem needs a concerned person to be present. Separating the human concern (lens, perspective) and the thing being concerned about has been found useful as it allows for them to be critiqued separately. However, it has also has emancipatory implications as problems like 'efficiency' can be seen as a particular owner's problem not automatically a problem for all. Evidence to support this conclusion is drawn from the multiple perspectives and the human systems literature. The author also draws on his experiences of working in a political office to demonstrate the usefulness of seeing problems primarily as someone's concerns.

Keywords: *Problem solving, people's concerns, multiple perspectives, emancipation, human systems thinking.*

INTRODUCTION

"...organisms must have begun with a concern for their internal problems and prospects, eventually graduating to a concern for proximal problems and prospects at their boundaries, before advancing to the concern for, cognitive appreciation of, ever more distal problems or prospects."

[Dennett, on Damasio's 'Descartes's Error', 1995]

This paper is about what has become called problem solving. Organisational change can be seen as a problem solving exercise, both at the personal and organisational level [Tucker, Edmondson, Spear, 2002]. Problem solving is often perceived as dealing with a situation that anyone would have seen as a problem and solving it on behalf of this universal everybody. The very language of calling it a 'problem' objectifies it, making it appear not to have any particular owners. This 'scientific management' language encourages the assumption that problems are universal objective facts that exist independently of the human mind. In this way, management's problems become everybody's problem capable of solution by an elite few.

Efficiency is an example. The 'problem' of process efficiency is commonly used to undertake organisational change. However, who has this problem with efficiency? It is more often than not only a problem perceived by the managers of capital rather than the workforce. Certainly those concerned with the environment often resist more efficient extraction of the earth's resources. Objectifying problems, by calling them 'problems' rather than some particular person's concerns, makes them universal, and discourages appreciation of who has what

concern. This leads to minority ‘others’ having the solutions of the dominant thrust upon them without consultation. This paper explores the conjecture that simply using the language ‘concern solving’ rather than problem solving will first make explicit who has what concern and second encourage an approach to the solution that is more likely to give a voice to all those involved. That change in language can have significant impact on emancipation is well acknowledged in the critical literature [Butcher D and Atkinson S, 2001]

This paper therefore presents a more human-centred approach to problem solving, justified out of remembering that nature has no problems because it has no purpose. Problems arise from human purposeful action [Ulrich, 1983]. Only purposeful action leads to a perceived gap between a sought after state and the present state; a problem. Using perspectival thinking [Haynes, 2001; Checkland, 2000], some clarification to this impersonal universal perspective on problems becomes possible by explicitly separating problems into the problematic object and the concerns (perspective) of the problem owners. This approach emphasises that problems exist only if a concerned problem owner is present.

First the concept of ‘concerns’ will be scoped, and then some examples will be provided.

CONCERN SOLVING

As scientific management is the dominant perspective in organisational problem solving, it is assumed that many managers are, if anything, overly comfortable with the objectification of problems. For example, if asked to solve the problem of a person’s car being broken, then the suggested solution of shooting the owner will feel unsatisfactory, if only because the car still appears to be unfixed. This reflects an objectification perspective; the problem solution is being perceived as independent of anyone. In contrast, those with a subjective perspective will argue that problems are social constructs only existing in the collective heads of concerned persons. Let us agree, for the sake of the present argument, that there is some use in acting as if there were such a thing as an ‘out there’ objectivist problem if negotiating with powerful decision makers who think there is. I need some linguistic device to draw out of this objectivist perception of problems at a dual or alternative subjective perspective. One approach that the author finds promising after applying it in a range of situations works simply by questioning a problem definition group about what *concerns* them about the thing at the centre of their problem, and what they think will be concerning others about that thing. This linguistic device helps them see there can be a range of different concerns about the same problem-object, without having to give up their objective perspective. For example, using the example above they can appreciate that a traffic policeman might be concerned that the broken car problem may cause a traffic-jam; but the car is still broken. This then opens up the possibility of multiple perspectives and some emancipation from the objectification of scientific thinking applied to social problems.

This act of separating the apparent objectified problem from the concerned person’s perception strives to be emancipatory as it opens the door to seeing problem definition as a collective exercise that really must involve all those concerned with the problem. However, in order to explain why the author has selected the concerns approach to giving a voice to all involved in the problem, the concept, roots and usefulness of ‘concerns’ as a pragmatic linguistic approach in dealing with decision makers needs some clarification.

Wilson [1983] defines concern as “a readiness to exert influence: a readiness to act”. A failure to be able to act often heightens concern. Use of the word “concerns” does come up in

the organisational literature. Baskerville et al [1998] use it frequently in their explanation of research, in particular action research, as “Area of Concern”. This, they argue, needs to be determined up-front in any investigative process. This fits in well with what is being argued here, in that a problem is defined by first noting people’s (area of) concerns. Keen [2000] also talks about exploring communities’ concerns rather than “topics” when looking for research agenda. Dewey (as cited in Argyris & Schon, 1996) uses the term “doubts” as the driver for human inquiry. This must be a similar concept to concerns, as must be Habermas’ cognitive interests [Ulrich, 1983].

Concerns can therefore be classified as from nature (instinctive) or nurture (communicated). For primal survival concerns, language is not thought paramount. Small children instinctively know to stay away from rows of sharp teeth whereas concerns over being burnt may be learnt either from touching a fire or from observing the panic-like actions of parents. More complex concerns, such as promotion at work, are socially constructed through dialogue later in life. Barnes and Bloor [1982] argue that humans not only have, like all species, instinctive concerns, but uniquely appear to have a concern anticipation and concern solving disposition. Humans do seem to have an environmental competitive advantage in our desire, supported by our language skills, to create and solve concerns of our own perception. For example, NASA scientists are exploring for water (oxygen and hydrogen) on planets to allow the building of life support systems and for rocket fuel. Is there a problem here that “needs” to be solved, or is the real driver merely curiosity or threat anticipation? Extreme sports are another example, in this case, solving the problem of how to get a safe thrill. If dealing with threats is seen as concern solving, the evolutionary advantage becomes clearer. Those humans who have avoided death by anticipating threats may have produced more off-spring. Technological advancement itself can be seen as overcoming basic human concerns about controlling nature and food resources.

Wilson [1983] uses the term ‘cognitive authority’ to describe those people who influence our concerns. Influencing people’s concerns may act to alter their information wants. Persuasion is really about altering people’s concerns; a practice well versed in advertising. Managing an organisational problem, from appreciation to solution, can be perceived as managing people’s concerns. This will include appreciating those concerns, trying to clarify them, trying to satisfy them, and trying to alter them. Put another way, managers and specialists can act to alter the perceptions of those involved in the problem, which, in turn, affects their concerns.

Landry [1995] tracks the history of systems change through operational research criticising an over emphasis on the objective side of problems, which he describes as leading to a view of a problem as ‘like an island’ that anyone can circumnavigate and therefore understand. He calls for more appreciation of the fact that problems are perceptions in people’s minds. Therefore solutions require changing those perceptions, sometimes by altering the performance of the object of the perception and sometimes by re-directing the perception. We see these perceptions as being determined by concerns.

Metcalfe and Powell [1995] argue that it is people’s concerns (real interests) that they use to interpret the millions of messages they constantly receive from the environment. The author believes that these ‘concerns’ are the primary lens for processing information. The idea being that, if you are concerned about something, this ‘determines’ your priorities to these messages. Put another way, your personal ethics or values act to interpret how you evaluate the world, so concerns and values (and ethics) appear to be linked and provide perspectives on life and its problems.

Checkland's [1999] strongly argues that project managers (and academic researchers) should approach their 'inquiries' by first articulating their 'intellectual framework' (lens, conceptual scheme, filter, frame, world view, etc). This provides the 'lens' with which a system is being observed. While critical to good inquiry, this terminology is very hard for many managers to understand. Therefore, it has been found useful to use the word 'concerns' to assist in this process. Rather than ask, "With what conceptual scheme do you intend to study this system?", it has been more productive to ask, "What is it about the system that concerns you?" From the answer, it is possible to appreciate how the manager is 'seeing' the system. For example, if he or she says, "I am concerned about how the system aligns with the corporate purpose", then the concern with which the manager is seeing the system is 'alignment'.

Haynes [2001] revisits Polaymi's work on tacit knowledge. He argues that one way of interpreting Polaymi's definition of tacit knowledge is that experience will change a person's perspective on a problem. Using concern as that which gives the perspective, this can be translated as saying that an experienced person will perceive a problem differently from an inexperienced one. Learning from the experienced therefore involves the inexperienced trying to understand the difference in their concerns compared to the experienced.

An Illustration

It is being argued, in line with Dennett's quote at the head of this paper, that we are born with survival concerns. We learn others from our families, friends and tutors. Upon receiving an external message (stimuli) through the senses, such as the presence of someone or food, these concerns motivate our brains to make assertions (claims, decisions) from which we decide to try some action. In babies, this action might cause a missed grab. In an organisational setting, it may be an employee successfully clicking on a computer menu or having the idea to develop a new product. This action may be just to move, to say something, or to build something. If the action is long enough, as in building something, then information will be sought to sustain that action. The action, regardless of whether it is successful or not, creates new knowledge (or perception) and will be followed by a period of reflection. Argyris and Schon [1996] argue that, for complex tasks, this reflection should be explicit, sustained, collegiate but importantly the reflection needs to be against explicitly articulated concerns in order to achieve maximum learning.

A 'problem' occurs when this reflection on a responsive action identifies a gap between what was thought desirable and what is now perceived to exist. It is so all pervasive that it is hard to envisage, with a person going around this 'concern resolution loop' hundreds of times a day, sometimes dealing with trivia and sometimes working on an innovative complex task. Consider a simplified example: while designing a new process, an employee may be talking through options at a meeting and scratching her nose. In that situation there are at least three iterations.

First, the nose scratching started with a sensory input of an itch. Concerned over the presence of a bug on her skin, the manager uses her memory to quickly come up with a possible action; she rubs her nose. Information from her fingertips suggests there is no bug. The rubbing worked, there was learning through action. No external information was required and a moment's reflection saves the experience in her memory.

Second, assume at the meeting someone boldly states, "Lets take that section out of the process altogether". The woman's concerns make the thought (claim) jump into her mind that, if this is done, her job may be affected. She thinks about it for a while (information from

her memory), asks for a point of clarification (confirming information from outside), then agrees, maybe asking for it to be put in writing (creating explicit knowledge). The whole meeting agrees and the woman reflects, maybe even making a note, on who said what, and why. She thinks that more information should really have been called upon before the idea was verbalised, but it was a good solution - one she might use herself sometime, in some form or another in the future.

Third, the meeting mentioned above was part of a three monthly review of progress on a project the woman had initiated. It involved designing a process. The project was the result of complaints about the old way of doing things. She had felt the need for something different. She started thinking about how best to do the changes, calling on some colleagues and reading the manual for a few suggestions. While not yet finished, she had learnt a lot and was reflecting on what she had learned and could be useful in the future.

In all three cases, the woman is going through the ‘concern resolution loop’. In one case, there was a need for external information, beyond her memory, for the more complex tasks. The more complex the task, the more iterations were taken as the task was broken down into smaller concerns and ‘claims’. Further, the more complex the task, the more formal the reflective process needed to reinforce the storage of memories. This is also happening in the minds of those involved with the woman.

The implication of the ‘concern resolution loop’ is that it makes the connection between concerns and problems. But, in reverse, it can be seen how problems, under this perspective, be defined by finding out different people’s concerns, and give them all a voice. Satisfactory solutions occur when these multiple perspectives have been alleviated.

MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

Having talked about the concerns side of the object-concern separation, it may be reasonable to talk now about the separation act through seeking a range of concerns on one problem. In the human or soft systems design literature, the practical approach of talking through splitting the problem-object from different persons’ perspectives on that object is normally attributed to Churchman [1971]. Checkland has operationalised it into his soft systems methodology, Mitroff and Linstone [1993] in their technical, organisational and personal perspectives on complex social problems, and Haynes [2001] has made the connections for this approach through the theory of knowledge philosophy literature down to Polaymi, and Churchman. I have used this literature, and the argumentation literature, to develop a practice of making concerns explicit. This practice has been used in over 70 ‘problem’ definition exercises from research proposals to web design through drafting of land title agreements and student industry placement exercises. While very simple, or maybe because of that, the author has found it a very useful to ask groups trying to define a problem to try to separate people’s concerns from the problem-as-object. It is a linguistic device, not a formal method, which uses a simple set of semi structured questions. As mentioned in the introduction, the unique feature of the method is that it focuses on the problem owners’ concerns and yet also keeps the object of those concerns ‘in the picture’. That is, the approach assumes the object being concerned about exists and differs from the concern. It is thought useful to raise the issue of other involved persons’ concerns as upfront as possible and be re-used constantly during the attempts at coming up with a perception of the problem (see diagram 1).

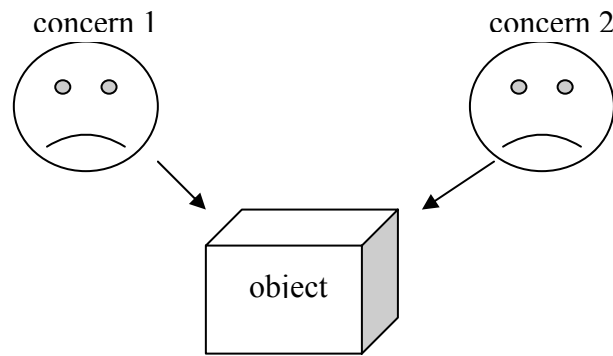


Diagram 1. The Object/Concern Separation

The process of deconstructing the concern from the object of those concerns is a beginning to attempt to develop a collective perception of the problem. Typically, the problem definition process starts by someone saying there is a problem that others need to fix. The first step is to separate the thing under consideration from the person's concerns. First ask, "What exactly is the "Object" under consideration?" Let's say the answer is, "Production efficiency". This can be drawn up as the box in diagram 1, with the object as "efficiency". As there are many different issues over efficiency that could concern someone, the next question that is asked is, "What is it that "concerns" you about efficiency?" Let's say the response is, "How best to redesign the organisation". 'Redesign' can then be written up next to the smiley-face (concern 1). Typically, the discussion is not as straight forward as this. If the client has several concerns then these need to be identified as different problems. Usually there will be some very important debate about these two parts; they may switch, or change noticeably. The dialogue is very important not only so the person with the problem takes some ownership of the two parts but also to help clarify the two parts as separate entities.

However, all this will only make explicit the concerns of one person. The strength of concern appreciation is to make explicit the *range* of concerns that exist on one problem. With the example above another concern may be 'redundancies' (concern 2 in Diagram 1). It is important to seek-out purposefully as many different perspectives on the problem as can be found, as this will develop a collective perspective on the problem - one very relevant to a collective solution. Seeking these perspectives can be justified both on moral and rational grounds given the extensive small group performance literature demonstrating the innovation of group solutions when concerned people are involved. Moreover, this collective perspective is suggesting consensus decision making or imposing some excessively bureaucratic process.

A REAL CASE

To appreciate better how the concern solving works in practice, a summary of a situation where the approach was almost demanded is described below. The opportunity arose for the author to undertake a full time, two and half year study of problem definition in an executive strategic management setting, when offered a job as adviser to the Deputy Premier of South Australia. The Minister was also the Treasurer, Minister for Mines and Energy and the Minister for IT.

The Minister's Office is made up of the Minister, his appointments secretary, a liaison officer to ensure the smooth and timely flow of paperwork, a 'Chief of Staff' - in this case a ex-

political journalist who was very much a political adviser, a media (or PR) adviser who was also an ex journalist, and the author who helped with 'commercial advice'. For example, the author's role included reading commercial contracts prior to the Minister signing them, informing the Minister of any delays or problems in the progress of projects, and interpreting the Minister's policy when public servants sought clarification to the progress of projects. In some cases, this reached the point of joining the public servants as a negotiator on behalf of the Minister.

This work situation was unusual for organisational studies because it involved the policy function for large public service departments. The entire resources of the public service are at the Minister's control to turn his policy into practice. The Minister made use of all forms of knowledge: explicit, tacit, calculative, opinion, hearsay, experience, and scientific detail, to make large impact, complex decisions in a politically charged, hostile atmosphere. The author's role included identifying problems, from the Minister's perspective, and solving them to the Minister's satisfaction, that is, to address his concerns.

Being a politician is very much about being in tune with peoples' concerns. As a manager of a totally social process, success is defined by those involved. This contrasts with purely engineering tasks where some outcomes can be demonstrated objectively enough. With 'political solutions', the Minister had to define success depending on whether those with influence over him felt it was a satisfactory outcome. Saying that politicians are concerned with other people's concerns is not being a bit utopian. What is being suggested is that their advancement depends on the feelings of a select group of people, typically the collective electorate, party members, or in case of a Minister, the Premier (Chief or Prime Minister). These 'colleagues' decide whether the MP has been successful. However, this may well be true for most, if not all, careers.

It is possible to understand the role of a Minister's Office as a cynical perception of Vicker's appreciative systems. Vickers [1984] was referring to change being about changing people's appreciation of the world being altered, which is very much aligned with the concept of addressing 'concerns'. The Minister in this study had a very acute sense that his role was to do things that *other people* appreciated. For example, the sale of public assets was not decided upon by following some pseudo-mathematical analysis. Rather, it was undertaken because the right people would be appreciative of the sale, but it was not to be done without a clear appreciation of how the wrong people would react.

The first general observation from working in the office was the 'queen bee' nature of the job; after everyone's concern was appreciated, he decided. It was not a consensus. The day was filled with meetings and the evenings with signing off correspondence from the public service agencies. The Minister did not have a computer; those with computers used them to write speeches, letters or policy documents. There were no databases, no spreadsheets and no internet. Email, faxes, the telephone and yet more meetings filled the day. The job was about communication, in and out, not about calculations. Information came from experts' written or verbal reports. All discussions were aimed at minimising controversy and in addressing someone's concerns. If the Premier was concerned about something, that took priority. The Minister had concerns, as did the public, public servants and industry representatives.

Company representatives would arrange to meet with the Minister so they could outline their concerns or lack of them. Concerns had to be communicated and balanced. Stories carrying concerns were told by people claiming to represent large numbers of people. The more credible the story, which was rarely formally confirmed, and the greater number of people it

claimed to involve, determined the priority given to the story. People's apparent accuracy, sincerity, past reputation and general level headedness was also important in making the stories have influence.

What follows is a sample of the typical problems handled by the Minister's Office. Each is intended to illustrate the usefulness of seeing the problem in terms of the stakeholder's concerns rather than as being about the object these concerns are about.

The Emergency Services Communications Problem

The police, ambulance and fire brigade were looking to upgrade and integrate their communication systems to digital, for more reliable coverage and to carry a lot more traffic, such as graphics files. (That was the object under consideration). The State had a mishmash of different systems managed by a range of public service departments including fisheries and the utilities. It was an innovative I.T. project which had the risk of blowing its budget. Moreover, attempts in London and Melbourne had been disasters with their new systems simply not being clever enough to replace human operators. The State had a recent history of an I.T. project cost blow-outs and of emergency services communications failures leading to a fatal error.

The concerns involved were about value for money, whether integration would rob the smaller departments of their autonomy, about a failure during an emergency and about the Minister losing financial control because of the technical nature of the project. In previous cases, one suspects public servants had received Cabinet permission for projects, knowing the budget estimates were too low, but relying on the Government becoming so publicly committed to a project that further requests for funds were reluctantly approved. As so many Government agencies and commercial consulting companies were involved, the task of keeping all parties involved was massive. This included first creating concerns about the complexity of this project in stakeholders' minds and then to work through solving them. The project did go to large cost blow-outs.

It would be hard to present this 'issue' as an objective reality or being only about the technical issues. It was about the concerns of all stakeholders. The police were concerned with being in control of the project as well as there not being any 'incidents' that put the police at the scene in any unnecessary danger. As 'owner' of the project, the Minister was also concerned about financial liability. The other emergency services wanted coordination of services but did not want to come under the direction of police. A lot of knowledge was sought to argue for alternative designs using the experience of those who operated similar systems elsewhere. Each side had their own numbers to support their arguments, none of which seemed to impress the other side. A lot was learnt about how all the agencies involved operated. Had the Minister's Office concentrated on the efficiency or effectiveness of the basic technical system then no real progress would have been made.

The Problem of Norwood's Trees

The State owned electricity utility was pushing the Minister to pass legislation to empower it to cut roadside trees in danger of touching overhead electricity wires. The utility wanted to cut back the trees to an extent that meant it would not have to revisit the tree for 3 or 4 years. As this considerably reduced the tree size, local residents in the established "leafy suburbs"

wanted a modest annual trim, but preferably have the wires put underground. They were making it an election issue in a marginal seat.

It would be hard to present this “problem” as an objective reality. It is about the concerns of all stakeholders. The utility was concerned with repair costs and the residents with aesthetics. As “owner” of the utility, the Minister tended to be more concerned about financial liability than aesthetics but wanted an agreed outcome so as to not overly affect votes. A lot of knowledge was sought about tree growth rates, about treatments to slow down tree growth, about horizontal boring to underground wires, and about the effect of tree branches growing between wires. Each side had their own numbers to support their arguments, none of which seemed to impress the other side¹. A lot was learnt about how all the agencies involved operated, about tree growth and the law on owner’s liabilities. At the end of the day, all sides compromised because of the threat of an election changing the balance of power in the Upper House. An independent arbitration process was established. It took many hours of meetings and a focus on stakeholders’ needs, not on tree branches in wires.

The concerns-learning cycle approach fits well with this problem. The role was the management of concerns, in the provision for information to test claims and in the preservation of explicit new knowledge. Concerns were altered for residents in ways now familiar, given the communications technology, such as newspapers, posters, letters, email and talkback radio. Domination of these allowed concerns to be manipulated and aggravated both by the residents and the utility. During discussions, rapid access to authentic information on costs, such as undergrounding, may have speeded up the negotiations. However, more information may have had the opposite effect if contrary views were found. Participants seemed to keep themselves informed by telephoning² experts for estimates. For example, several horizontal boring companies, local and overseas, were contacted for approximate estimates. Last, while the new procedures for tree cutting were captured in regulations, technology may have helped in capturing more of the tacit knowledge gained from the exercise.

The Gun Buy-back Problem

Following the massacre of tourists in Tasmania by a disturbed lone gunman, the Federal Government funded compensation for the States to insist on the forced surrender of certain types of weapons. Typically, these were semi-automatic weapons. The gun lobby objected, arguing for the right to carry arms. In South Australia, the legislation was passed quite quickly, while there was a need for the careful enactment of the content of the legislation, including ensuring the budget was not exceeded. Moreover, the Minister was concerned that those administering the buy back process were doing their job effectively. Numerous requests for special consideration were received, plus numerous threats.

The concerns are obvious. From the State Minister’s perspective, this issue was created by the passing of Federal Laws. His role was to arrange the buy back to minimise voter dissent at the local level. Information was sought from Police records about numbers of registered guns and estimates provided of the number of unregistered guns. Much of the debate was

¹ The more experienced Ministers avoided using quantitative or statistical evidence, as then it had to be fully validated, in arguments as it usually turned out to be open to alternative interpretation.

² Reinforcing the suggestion that the best piece of technology for problem solving (addressing concerns) is a mobile phone.

about personal liberty rather than being based on explicit stored information. The media, and its related communications technology, was most useful in heightening and alleviating concerns from each stakeholder's perspective.

To repeat, the point about all these cases is that the optimum problem solving approach was to focus on the various stakeholders' concerns. The primary managerial task was to get from, or communicate to, stakeholders a clear understanding of the other stakeholder's concerns; the subject part of problem definition. In some cases, this was to make stakeholders concerned and in others to alleviate those concerns. There were endless meetings but the problem definer's task was to ensure these lead to an improved definition of concerns. From these the Minister could make decisions after weighing the pros and cons of stakeholders likely reactions.

DISCUSSION

This paper argued that the author has found it effective to focus on people's concerns when trying to define problems. It may be a small linguistic turn but it opens the door to a far more collective and therefore possibly emancipatory approach. It works by first drawing on what Argyris [1994] calls 'theory in action' as opposed to espoused theory, meaning what participants are really worried about so avoiding their vocalising meaningless rationalised responses. Second, it opens the door to seeking the perspectives of everybody involved in the problem domain. So, minorities and the weak may get a chance to voice their concerns. Moreover, it discourages the superman perspective so dominant in the management literature whereby privileged gurus, who have not lived the situation, feel they can out-think all others and solve complex social problems, including organisational re-design, with little consultation.

The justification for the concern appreciation language has drawn on the human systems thinking literature that has long held that organisations are far too complex to model, and anticipate-in-change due to the massive complication of dynamic inter-connectivity. The systems thinking solution is to draw on experienced-participants' perspectives as a means of 'X-raying' the complex whole. Outsiders may prompt perspectives and provide breakthrough resources but the problem is best 'seen' by listening to all those involved in the problem. It is believed that using the concerns appreciation language aligns with this and will more likely result in the often overlooked getting at least a small look-in at the definition process.

Argyris [1994], like critical praxis, advises that management inquiry does not end with an explanation but rather with suggestions for social action (actionable knowledge). This action advice needs to avoid being either too theoretical or too specific to one particular situation. This paper has tried to take this advice by justifying a simple heuristic that employees or community members can draw on when asked to be involved in any thinking about any problem situation (eg brainstorming). My advice is simply to steer the conversation towards seeking to appreciate the concerns of those affected by the problem. It is believed this will in many situations lead not only to better decisions but also more emancipatory ones.

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Should Haynes be 2000 or 2001?

Need Argyris reference

Author Biography

MIKE METCALFE is presently an associate research professor at the University of South Australia, with a PhD from Adelaide, Australia 1994, and an M.Sc. in Business Planning (Salford, UK) 1981. His publications include 4 books plus numerous refereed articles around the theme 'the design of human inquiry', including information strategies, research methods and forecasting. Aged 51 yrs, Mike has worked in the merchant navy, the army reserves, system design, teaching and consulting including two and half years as adviser to the Deputy Premier of South Australia. Present research interests include the use of argument and multiple perspectives to define projects and his present employment is as thesis advisor for PhD candidates in system design.