Solving Wicked Problems in the Workplace

Tim Dalmau and Jill Tideman

Resource Guide

Theory
How to
Workbook
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7: The overall approach and strategy (starting to bring it all together)</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8: Work and steps involved</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part V</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the Process Enneagram with others who have fewer years of</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>schooling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources on the Dalmau Consulting website</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part I

Introduction and Background

This guide is a resource to you to help you in addressing wicked problems as they arise. It is somewhere between a conceptual overview, a manual and a facilitator’s guide for it aims to describe the underlying theoretical base, show you “how” to do this work and also “guide” you on how to help others do this work.

Part I is the theory and underpinnings of the work/process. From Part II onwards we describe various practical uses.

If you are reading this document then you are likely to be a senior executive, team leader, organization development or HR person working inside a firm or company and already exposed to the thinking, processes and conceptual framework underpinning the Process Enneagram, or perhaps intrigued by the same.

It is important to set the context for what is to be described. We are consultants, not currently academics (although one of us was in a former life), and the people we work with tend to be Board members, senior executives and middle management in large companies in the resources sector, steel-making, healthcare systems, the financial services sector, the environmental sector and government generally.

We do this work in many different countries and contexts. Through good luck and circumstance we have had the privilege of working closely with Dick Knowles1 who introduced us to the Process Enneagram as a tool, some 15 years ago. This model intrigued us and we have made contributions to its development along the way. We soon began to realize that the model seemed particularly applicable to settings where there was a disconnect between the formal organizational system and the hidden informal network of relationships, where there was disagreement about the nature of the problem at hand and uncertainty as to the best solution set.

Context

We hold a view of organizations as constantly emerging spaces where real individuals converse with one another as they struggle to adapt to challenges.

1 It is hard to over-estimate the contribution that Dr. Richard Knowles has made to our thinking on this model that he created. His book, The Leadership Dance (2002) outlines the origins of the model and its application to the field of self-organizing leadership. The work outlined in this paper builds squarely on his original work, but has also comes from the active involvement of literally thousands of people in exploring, using and refining it in many different settings and countries. Pre-eminent among these is Steven Zuieback to whom we owe a great debt in helping us find new, different and practical ways to use it. Moreover, Ralph Stacey has been extremely formative of our thinking for the last 15 years or so. We are particularly grateful to Bob Dick for critical comment.
and dilemmas, becoming all that they are innately capable of becoming as individuals, as cohorts and as organizations (Neville and Dalmau, 2008). We expect that such spaces allow for both positive emergent solutions as well as fragmentation, for alignment as well as for alienation, but especially for surprise and temporary coherence as the actors involved build new meanings and actions.\footnote{In reviewing the writing of Ralph Stacey from about 1995 to the present, we find conceptual comfort in using insights from complex adaptive systems theory as analogues for understanding the issues and challenges we face. His concept of organizations as spaces in which complex responsive processes occur, describes (often quite accurately) the nature of the emergent conversations in which we find ourselves.} What is important to note, however, is that we often encounter a tension between the drive to solve problems at the altar of the ‘quick fix’ on the one hand and the realization that the problem is far more complicated than first thought; indeed a wicked problem. There are often cohorts with varying interests around the problem, quite different interpretations as to its nature and a growing awareness that there is no easy way of resolving these tensions.

The term “wicked problem” was first coined by C. West Churchman. He introduced the concept in a "Guest Editorial" of Management Science (Vol. 14, No. 4, December 1967) by referring to the work of Horst Rittel. Conklin later stated defining characteristics:

1. The problem is not understood until after the formulation of a solution.
2. Wicked problems have no stopping rule.
3. Solutions to wicked problems are not right or wrong.
4. Every wicked problem is essentially novel and unique.
5. Every solution to a wicked problem is a 'one shot operation.'
6. Wicked problems have no given alternative solutions.

Ralph Stacey, a leading organizational theorist has written extensively on the nature of problems that organizations face, and approaches to tackling them. His work is influenced strongly by systems thinking and complexity theory. There is a very high degree of overlap between what Churchman (and then Rittel) first called wicked problems and what Stacey suggests are complex problems, or those problems that lie in the “middle ground”. In our minds they are equivalent.
Stacey\(^3\) (1996) posits a way of distinguishing alternatives regarding both the context in which decisions are made and the degree of certainty surrounding them, as illustrated in Figure 1. We have used this as a simple means for distinguishing between those problems around which the dominant discourse of linear, top-down, leader directed decision-making is appropriate (what Hazy et al, 2007, describe as administrative or convergent leadership) and those problems where a more enabling or emergent disposition is called for. We have come to call this the “middle ground” – the domain of wicked problems. In the top right area of Figure 1 are those issues around which there is little agreement and little certainty. Stacey suggests this is an area for avoidance, anarchy and randomness.

It is our contention that the social environments and problem types that many executives and managers face are not in the bottom left hand corner of convergent thinking and cohesive social networks at all, but rather in the middle ground. They are problems and issues around which reasonable levels

\(^3\) Adapted from Stacey, 1996. Page 47
of uncertainty exist as to the likely efficacy of any known strategy and reasonable levels of disagreement arise from the hidden informal social networks of the organization as to the nature of the problem. This is the world of wicked problems.

It is also our contention that the pervasive and dominant model of change management that drives so much modification to structure, strategy and process in the corporate world largely fails to achieve its desired outcomes because

1. It is often conceived and executed within the frames of thinking that sit in the bottom left hand corner rather than the middle ground, and

2. It lacks the appropriate style of leadership to support what emerges.

It is not that such thinking about change is inappropriate. It works well for those problems and issues that sit in this bottom left hand corner and are susceptible to resolution by linear, mechanistic modes – the dominant discourse as Stacey calls it. Rather, this approach is often based on a failure to comprehend that so much change is large, complex and engenders a range of reactions among stakeholders that squarely define it as a middle ground phenomenon.

Stacey suggests strongly that wicked problems in the middle ground (complex problems) addressed with the thinking or processes suitable to the bottom left hand corner (ordinary management) will tend to make the problem worse and are not likely to lead to a resolution.

Wicked problems require different thinking and different approaches (extraordinary management)

It is our experience that wicked problems and the social spaces in which they arise often have the following characteristics;

- The issue at hand is complex: there are many enmeshed and interacting parts some of which have either amplifying (positive feedback) or dampening (negative feedback) effects.
- The future is under construction in the minds of the players involved; often it is either wholly or partially unknowable in real and pragmatic ways
- The drive to convergent thinking is balanced by an awareness of the very different (and often quite emotionally invested) interests that stakeholder groups have around the issue.

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4 The term complex is used in a technical sense: for simplicity’s sake a complex system is one that contains both order and disorder simultaneously.
• It is beginning to dawn on the executives and managers involved that they actually can’t control for the future and that there are real limits to their drive for efficiency

• Establishing the boundary of the system is often fraught because of the various hidden and informal interests around the issue

• Social strange attractors (Stacey, 2010) are at play in the form of established cultures, i.e. sets of assumptions, beliefs and perspectives that, in turn, guide action.

Snowden and Boone (2007) describe a complex system as one that

• Involves interacting elements

• That are non-linear

• With emergent properties

• Arising from a history of internal engagement of the parts and with the environment, and

• Where what happens next cannot be predicted

We contend that the situations we often face (and that are the subjects of this paper) tend to look like complex systems and we take from Stacey (2010) the thought that complex adaptive systems theory, in particular, provides us with some useful analogues.

The forces described above are being played out in the very local and personal interactions between the players involved over time. The following characteristics are typical of the situations susceptible to the approach we describe:

• More often than not problems get to be resolved by ordinary people in organizations sitting down together and communicating in real time face to face.

• Their interaction (arising from their diversity) produces new forms of knowledge and a coherence to their shared understanding of the problem

• The focus of conversation is the current actual activity in which the players are engaged and the emerging future they desire to resolve tensions between reality and desire.

• It is in the conversation about these tensions that the players come to see new forms and patterns emerge, surprise often occurs, and the result is a shared will to act in some new manner. Mostly this produces
new and more effective forms and processes, but it can also occasionally lead to less effective ones. In other forums, we have suggested this can be stated as creating rational, emotional and social outcomes for those involved.

- They are conversations in which their success depends on two critical variables, having the right people in the room and having a real and strong diversity of views among those voices.

- Among these right people in the room are a broad spectrum of both overt and covert power potential.

- Although the conversation is loosely directed, nevertheless self-organization and the emergence of both stable and novel patterns occur at the boundary of order and disorder in the interaction (Suchman, 2002). Making the diversity public is a key feature of the conversation and one which thereby fosters the emergence of new meaning and surprise.

- The interaction often starts with expression of affect and exploration of relationships. In other words feelings and emotions, meanings and personal constructs, beliefs and personal perspectives become part of the interaction; both the rational and the non-rational are grist for the mill.

- The end result is that the participants move more “towards” the issue, the problem or dilemma than away from it – they tend to personalize it more, attach some personal investment of their own to it and are far less likely to objectify it, i.e. remove themselves from it.

It is our contention that the previous lists seem to suggest the following: firstly, that the situations and issues we often find ourselves addressing with client personnel seem analogous in their characteristics to complex adaptive systems, and secondly that the nature of the process which emerges when we apply this process seems to bear many of the hallmarks of complex responses processes. We do not say this is what occurs every time, but it does so more often than not. If not approached with both alertness and sensitivity it can quickly “degenerate” into another variation of mediocre critical systems thinking. Worse still, if applied “mechanistically” then it is little more than another form of convergent thinking and management.

In the context of the distinctions outlined so far, we now describe a practical approach to embracing complexity in the real world.

How do you know if you have a wicked problem?

If you can place a check mark against one or more of the following, then it is highly likely you have a middle ground or wicked problem on your hands.
Whenever the situation is complex
Whenever the change you seek is complex
Whenever the outcomes are vague or unclear
Whenever there are unknown or unpredictable forces at work that can influence or interfere
Whenever people’s feelings or reactions are likely to be triggered significantly
Whenever you will need to equip, educate or train others to implement and sustain a change
Whenever their any politics involved or likely
Whenever individuals or groups have the potential to feel disenfranchised as a result of the change

Whenever you and your colleagues seek to do needs to satisfy the following five criteria in order to be achievable. Your engagement with the issue at hand needs to be

1. Possible
2. Formulated, stated and communicated in the positive
3. Yours to do
4. Worthwhile
5. Ecological to the wider system of which you and they are part.

There is a way that will both address the middle ground or wicked problem and ensure that your outcomes satisfy these 5 criteria. It is based on the Process Enneagram.

The Process Enneagram is, in our experience, a powerful conversation model, a planning framework and a diagnostic tool that has been used extensively in a range of organizational settings internationally over the last 10-15 years. It is particularly well suited to engage with those types of problems and situations that are analogous to the complex problem spaces described above.

It has been used in diagnosis, planning, facilitation or engagement, conversation mapping, coaching, integrating and clarifying issues, and galvanizing and coalescing shared will. It has been used in hostile union-management conflict resolution, safety assessments, client diagnosis, project planning and review, facilitating mergers and acquisitions, roll outs of enterprise resource planning systems (e.g. SAP, JDE), re-aligning world-wide marketing strategies, team building, and change processes including the re-configuration of whole industries within and across countries. People from accountants to coal miners, health workers, steel makers, corporate executives, marketing professionals, IT professionals, social workers,
administrators, politicians and community workers have used the Process Enneagram with success and satisfaction.

The Process Enneagram
At this stage in the development of ideas and processes, we know that using the Process Enneagram will invariably allow you to engage with a middle ground (wicked) problem and make real progress to its resolution. At its simplest the Process Enneagram is a map that allows you and your colleagues to think and address problems and issues from a whole-of-systems viewpoint in nine dimensions.

The nine dimensions are

1. Identity and current state
2. Relationships and connections
3. Information and will
4. Intention
5. Principles and standards
6. Tensions and issues
7. New context, strategies and structures
8. The work
9. Deep learning and sustainability

The nine steps and the power of the Process Enneagram comes in large part from the sequence of the conversations and their capacity to produce rational, social and emotional outcomes, along with the presence of someone who can ask fearless questions at each of the nine points.

Now we have asserted that there are a class of problems often found in organizations in which the dominant reductionist mindset is not only ill-suited but will tend to drive them towards entropy – these are the wickedest of problems. We have suggested that the nature of these problems can be informed analogously from complex adaptive systems theory. Moreover, we suggest the methodology or approach outlined in this paper is, of its nature, both complex and responsive in the manner described by Stacey (2001).

Olson and Eoyang (2001) suggest that a complex adaptive system does not admit to any order or sequence of steps in a process or predictable, staged outcomes. Goldstein (2005) suggests otherwise when he states

Dick Knowles developed the Process Enneagram. The processes outlined in this guide arise from the work of Dick Knowles, Tim Dalmau, Steve Zueiback, Julia Zimmerman and Jill Tideman. Do not confuse the Process Enneagram with the Personality Enneagram of which much has been written. Practically speaking there is no connection between the two.
"self-organization (is) a term that suggests spontaneity and the inner-driven onset of new order. ...a careful inspection of research in complexity theory reveals the emergence of new order is more appropriately constructed than self-organized as such."

We tend to agree with this point of view, and contend that conversations by real people in real settings, sensitively stimulated around these nine dimensions, allow for emergence, paradox and surprise to come forth. Paradox and surprise are important elements of deep learning – the contradictions, inconsistencies and absurdities to which they are attendant foster new perceptions, different perspectives and a level of disassociation that allow a group to move forward.

The nine dimensions tend to bring clarity to those in the conversation, stimulate commitment or a “drawing to” new aligned action, and enhance the relationships of those involved. This outcome seems to result from, at a process level, the order of the conversation as represented in Figure 2.

The order tends to produce these three types of outcomes: rational, emotional and social and as such, the Process Enneagram shares this space with very few other processes, e.g. the process of dialogue fostered by Bill Isaacs (1999) and his colleagues and the early work in the 1950s of the Institute of Cultural Affairs. Put another way, the order of a conversation or engagement seems to profoundly influence the outcomes of the engagement in terms of the emergent clarity of direction or purpose, the sense of commitment or attachment that a group feels towards the issue or problem at hand, and the willingness of the individuals to be part of the action going forward. A note of caution: using this model and approach to address problems in the bottom left hand corner of Figure 1 tends to over-complicate and confuse what should be routine rational problem solving.

In the remainder of this guide, you will find advice on a number of ways in which you can use the Process Enneagram to address wicked or middle ground problems.
Two important points of note:-

You do not need to share the diagram with others in order to use the model and its processes successfully, though it does help in certain settings.

You probably should not consider doing this yourself alone. The advice given in this document is best undertaken with the help of one of your colleagues.

Nine points of inquiry
In its simplest representation the Process Enneagram can be viewed as nine areas of inquiry and conversation, which are as follows;

Identity and Current State: Sense of purpose and meaning – the area of focus that unleashes energy and commitment. The description of the present state in which the players find themselves and the historical forces and factors that have shaped them.

Relationships and Connections: Description of the nature of relationships that the players have with other individuals, groups in and across organizations as a whole, both among people but also among units, functions, groups, and processes. This area includes both ideal and actual relationships.

Information and Will: Understandings about the importance of information and beliefs about the relationship of information to individual and organizational effectiveness, and its impact in coalescing shared meaning to marshal concerted action.

Intention: What is it that the players want to create and achieve with people, within their areas of responsibility, around the problem or issue under consideration, or the organization as a whole?

Principles, Ground Rules and Standards: The priorities they hold, the principles they work to, the ground rules they seek to abide by and the standards that model their beliefs and aspirations within the organization, i.e. the underlying ground rules and priorities that guide (or should guide) behavior, strategies and tactics – both espoused and in-use (Dick and Dalmau, 1990)

Tensions and Issues: The existing dilemmas, constraints, contradictions and behavioral patterns that are currently keeping individuals, teams and the organization as a whole from realizing the desired outcomes.

New Contexts, Structures and Approaches: The creative perspectives, strategies, structures and approaches that model the espoused principles, ground rules and standards, resolve the tensions, and thus move the “system” toward the intended outcomes.
Work: The actions associated with the strategies that need to be implemented.

Deep Learning and Sustainability: This describes a process of ongoing reflection whereby individuals, groups and organizations can learn what is working relative to their outcomes and make course corrections based on the learning, combined with mechanisms for adjustment and regeneration to ensure sustainability.

The green triangle

The three points of the green triangle that underpin this model are identity/current state, relationships/connections and information/will. First developed by Meg Wheatley (1992), she originally called them relationships, information and vision.

Within organizations, there is a continuous shaping and re-shaping of the identity of the system itself, an evolving of connections and relationships and incessant flows of information. These intangible aspects of any social system have a profound influence on all other aspects of the system. Unfortunately in many organizations where the dominant discourse is that of a reductionist mentality (bottom left hand corner Figure 1) the leaders regularly seek to improve performance without paying attention to these three key variables. The first recourse seems to be to re-structure the hierarchy, re-engineer the procedures or re-vitalize the strategic plan, and often all three, without attention to the impact of how relationships, identity and information interact together to create a dominant mindset that will often undo the best efforts and good intentions at organizational improvement.

These three factors need to be functional (at a minimum) in the group of players brought together to address a middle ground issue or problem. If not, they need attention first. In reality when we have players come together to address a wicked problem the degree of coherence among these three can vary enormously and it is usual to devote significant energy to these three elements first. Indeed, The green triangle in the diagram underpins the other six elements and, we suggest, should be foci of constant attention and energy for leaders. It seems common sense to us that if a group of people have re-asserted some current identity, opened up the information flow among them, and enhanced their relationships with one another they will be in a far better place to discover a shared intention, priorities, address issues and resolve how to move forward together.

The conversation

In reality, a group comes together to address an issue, resolve a wicked problem or create some new outcome that exists in the “middle ground”. Depending on the issue the conversation could take anywhere from two
hours to a few days. The conversation works through these nine points of inquiry more or less in the order indicated by the arrows – the ordering of the conversation is not prescriptive: common sense, surprise, paradox and emergent contradictions may dictate varying either the order or the amount of time spent on any given point. That said, the most powerful clarity and/or attachment seems to emerge when the order indicated in the diagram is followed.

In using the Process Enneagram to guide or map a conversation the normal starting point produces a shared and explicit understanding of the identity, history and current state of the group, the relationships and connections in the system that exist or are desired and the access to and flow of information throughout the system along with the extent to which this information flow does or does not promote shared will to act. The conversation then moves on to the intention (or vision, objectives, aim or purpose) or possible intent that can emerge or is required about the issue. Kellner-Rogers stated that too often we ask the question “What is the problem and how do we fix it?” when we should be asking the question “What’s possible here and who cares enough to make it happen?” This simple shift in questioning at this point seems to move the conversation, from the bottom left hand corner to the middle ground, and starts to build an emergent coherence. In other words, it tends to pre-empt the drive to reductionist, mechanistic, linear models of thinking.

The conversation then moves on to two highly related but distinct foci: the principles, ground rules and standards the players espouse and those they actually use (Dick and Dalmau, 1990). Next tensions, issues and dilemmas are explored. It is important to note that by the time these come to the fore the players have already considered the following:-

1. The current state and how it came to be
2. The nature and functionality of their relationships and connections
3. The availability or otherwise of all the information that flows around the issue
4. What they want to achieve, and
5. The ground rules/principles they use and espouse

In our experience the fact that they start examining “the problem” only after these previous five foci have been examined plays a very large role in both fostering a willingness to act in concert to create something different and in preventing deficiency and reductionist models of thought from taking hold in the group.

It seems to set the stage for emergence and novelty to come forth as the players consider the next part of their dialogue, viz: what new context is being
called for, what approaches are needed and what strategy shall follow? The quality and efficacy of this part of the conversation depends on all previous six elements being covered thoroughly. It seems normal that groups then move to the phase of who is going to do what and this part of the conversation may look and familiar to those who take comfort in the bottom left hand corner of Figure 1, i.e. action planning. It is a natural result of all the steps that have preceded it. The conversation then moves to a deeper reflective phase. The players are invited to reflect on their own experience in the conversation, to assign meaning to it, to signify it in terms of other experiences that come to mind, and to examine how they will sustain the work that has started.

These conversations involve ordinary people sitting down together in real time. Providing that the right people are in the room – representing those who can affect outcomes or are affected by the outcomes and a diversity of mind set and interest groups – then focusing on these nine domains of inquiry combined with the order in which they are addressed seems to produce new forms of knowledge, surfaces paradox and contradiction, and allows coherence to emerge at all three levels of rational, emotional and social outcomes. In our view this seems to be at a local level not unlike what Stacey (2001) describes as a complex responsive process. In saying this we are mindful that Stacey presents such processes as occurring naturally in the daily intercourse of the hidden informal system in organizations. We agree, and believe it is also possible to create social spaces that trigger and foster such processes.

It should also be noted there are often issues and problems, which of their nature, cannot be addressed in one sitting, so to speak, no matter how long it goes for. This model allows for groups to iterate their conversation on a number of occasions, “spiralling” if you will, coming back to it with new insights, fresh understandings, more divergent thought that enriches the conversation next time . In our experience these become extremely significant and powerful conversations, and we are reminded of one such conversation of which we were part with a US-based steel company senior executive cohort that continued over 11 years!

The Process Enneagram in use

The Process Enneagram is, at one level, a guide to a type of conversation that, we believe, has some key similarities to what Stacey (2001) describes as a complex responsive process. As such it can be as simple or complicated as is needed by the group and the issue/problem. Simple generic questions for the nine points of the Process Enneagram that can guide conversations is shown below in Figure 3. These questions can be tailored for the specific situation and setting.
In addition the Process Enneagram can also be used as a way to record a conversation.

In our experience the starting point is often placing a small version of the diagram at the center of a large canvas of flip chart paper (4 sheets taped together), and then over the course of the conversation, recording key points at the appropriate location on the Process Enneagram. See Figure 4 that shows a Process Enneagram that was created to guide and stimulate a conversation with 3 different coal mine leadership teams from a company in Queensland, Australia. Figure 5 is the summary created following a day-long conversation with each of the 3 coal mine leadership teams. It was collated from 3 similar one-page records to share with the corporate office and help them gain some insight into the challenges facing these teams and the next steps required to improve their performance.
When should I consider using the Process Enneagram?
The strong suggestion is that you should consider using the Process
Enneagram whenever the situation meets any one or more of the criteria
mentioned above.

Typical examples might include things such as

- Six monthly strategic safety review by a supervisor with his/her crew
- Engagement with the community around issues such as noise or
airborne particles, if you happen to be a mining operation
- Making the drive to and from work safer for everyone
- Strategic planning for a department or group
- Inter-departmental tension or conflict
- Team development
- Working effectively with project personnel on the expansion

These are just a few examples. The file entitled “An Enclave of Enneagrams”
can be downloaded from the Dalmau Consulting website and contains sets
of questions for a large range of settings and situations.

On the other hand, if the situation you face does not meet any of the criteria
that would define it as a wicked or middle ground problem, if it is clearly a
bottom left hand corner problem and if there are known solutions or
processes to address it, then using the Process Enneagram will only over
complicate things.

What can I expect if I use a Process Enneagram approach?
If you follow the nine points and their suggested sequence you can expect
that through the dialogue

- Whatever issue you and your colleagues are addressing will be better
understood at a whole-of-system level by all involved
- A clear intention will emerge
- So will strategies and detailed work to be done
- Relationships among those involved will take a step forward
- There will be an increase in the emotional willingness of those involved
to get in and address the problem together

These correspond to rational (task), emotional (feeling) and social
(relationship) outcomes.

But because middle ground problems are complex, they are also emergent.
In simple terms this means you can expect surprises along the way, either in
terms of new insights, different perspectives and solutions or new relationships and connections being formed.

You can also expect that people will be more dis-associated around the issue or problem, i.e. more in their green hats (third position)

Parts of this guide
This guide is divided into four parts as follows:-

1. This section you are now reading
2. Leading and driving a dialogue based on the Process Enneagram
3. Leading a short working session around a specific issue using the Process Enneagram
4. Workbook approach for using a Process Enneagram
5. Using the Process Enneagram with others with fewer years of schooling
Part II

Leading a dialogue based on the Process Enneagram

Here is the strongest piece of advice we can give you about using this approach with your own team: don’t!

Get one of your colleagues to come and assist you by facilitating the process.

This part of this Guide is directed at these colleagues as they help you.

Getting ready

We assume from this point on that you are helping one of your colleagues address a middle ground issue. So it will be necessary to have a pre-meeting discussion with them and ensure from that discussion that you understand the following:

1. Why they think it is a middle ground problem?
2. The context behind the problem
3. What success looks like at all three levels of
   a. Task (rational outcomes)
   b. Feelings (emotional outcomes)
   c. Relationships (social outcomes)

You might ask questions such as

1. What do you hope will be the tangible deliverables from the time together?
2. How would you hope people will be feeling at the end of it all?
3. In what way would you hope relationships among the group have improved at the end of it all?

As part of your preparation it is suggested you download the Enclave of Enneagrams from the Dalmau Consulting website. If there happens to be an Enneagram that “just fits the bill” then print out that page and use it as your guide for the dialogue.

More frequently, however, the situation you are going to facilitate will not exactly fit one of the Enneagrams in the Enclave, so use these notes to help you make up one of your own, i.e. make up your own set of questions using those in the Enclave as a guide.
This work should be done a couple of days in advance of the meeting and it will help to clarify the questions you have constructed with your “client”, i.e. the colleague you are helping by facilitating this upcoming dialogue.

### Setting up

Be sure the dialogue will occur in a comfortable space with room to move, room for individuals to stand up and walk around and still be part of the conversation.

It generally will not help things if people are sitting behind tables, so ensure the group is in a circle in front of a large wall space and without tables.

It is usually better if the meeting room is off site to stimulate new thinking, new perspectives.

Get to the room well in advance of the group and create a large canvas on the wall space using four sheets of flip chart paper, taped together on the back-side with masking tape, then pasted on a large wall space. In the center of the canvas draw a small circle without any names or labels.

### Welcome / Introduction

Ask your colleague to set the scene, stating what s/he understands the situation to be regarding the issue at hand, how s/he feels about it and what they see as the responses in broad terms of the various players to the issue.

You write these up without fuss or announcement, assigning them on the flip charts to point where they go. It is likely that most of your colleague’s introduction will fall under Identity and Current State.

But beware …. There could be elements that fall under any of the categories of Intention, Principles and Standards, Relationships and Connections and Information and Will.

### Check-in

Ask now for a check-in from each other person in the meeting as to how they see the current state of affairs under three headings: myself, this group and the issue at hand.

As each comments, continue to make notes on the flip chart paper, sorting and placing each comment or key point made according to their nature on the Process Enneagram, i.e. according to where they fit against each of the 9 dimensions. It is unlikely that there will be much material at this stage in the discussion will relate to the left hand side of the Process Enneagram, except that of Information and Will.
Tip: It is going to work better if you can avoid using single nouns, but rather phrases and clauses with verbs ("doing" words / words which describe action) in them

Continuing the process
After this phase is over request them to “say some more about this group” and how it is working together around the issue under consideration.

As each person contributes deliberately look down as they speak, get up out of seat to add a comment to the paper as each point they are making becomes clear.

Then work through all the other points on the Process Enneagram that have not been covered sufficiently until all are covered.

Some prompts
You can use the following or questions to prompt further discussion under each of the nine points of the Process Enneagram. Use these as a guide only. Ideally you will have made up your own after consulting your colleague on whose behalf you are doing this work and the Enclave of Enneagrams file.

Current state
What is really going on in around this issue or in this group?
Where and how are we positioned?
How did this issue arise?
What are its critical or key aspects?
What major things still need to be done?
And, if appropriate, what is the group’s history and what have been the significant events and stages in the development of the team?

Relationships / connections:
What are the relationships like in this group?
How functional are they?
What impact do they have on the issue at hand?
What are the key groups and stakeholders around this issue and how do they relate to it, to this group, and to each other?
What connections exist among people and parts of the system?
Information/ Will
How is information handled?
What is needed?
What is critical?
How available is it? – to us, key stakeholders, other parts of the business?
How do we use information to work together?
What are the undiscussables?

Intention
Do we have a shared and explicit understanding about what it is that we are trying to achieve around this issue?
If yes, then what is it?
If not, then what are the key elements for us to discuss and come to grips about?
What might be possible around this issue, if we dared to dream?
Be sure to document under Intention elements of the conversation related to the issue at hand, the stakeholders, and the group itself, including how they will be living the values they have committed to.

Principles/ standards
What are the espoused principles that should guide actions around this issue?
Are they really practiced or just what we say or like to think are our principles?
If so, then what are the real principles practiced around this issue?
What principles or ground rules will we need going forward to achieve our intention, guide our behaviors and strategies?
When documenting the group’s comments on the flip charts it is often helpful to set aside two different areas in the bottom right hand corner, for the espoused principles and another for the actual principles in use.

Tensions and Issues
What are the issues, dilemmas, constraints and problems facing us around this issue?

Context, strategy, structure
What are our approaches to achieving our intention and tackling the issues whilst living our principles?
Is what we are doing enough – or are new strategies needed? If so what?

The work
What are we going to do from now on? Specifically?

Deep learning/ sustainability
How will we continue to learn and grow as a group and around this issue?

Reflection
It is usually helpful to give the group a break at this stage – coffee, or similar. Whilst the group is on its break, now label each of the nine points on the circle that describe the Process Enneagram and draw an arrow to the block of writing concerned.

When the group returns settle them down and ask them is there anything else they would like to add in the form of comments, etc. …. If so, place these comments in the appropriate place on the flip charts as well.

Then at the appropriate time, stand up, go to the flip chart and (starting with identity/current state start reading the material by the lead in that goes “So what we have here is a situation that ….”) And so on. String together the points you have written on the flip chart under this block of writing into a set of prose, i.e. as it was a paragraph of comments.

Then move across to relationships and connections and use the lead in “And when we look at the relationships and connections within and without the system we find ….”

Then to information/will where the lead in is “When we look at this system, we find that information in the system could be characterized as ….”

From here move up to intention with the lead in “So what we have here is a situation where success looks like this. It involves ….” Or …. “Now if we step back a minute, and ask what we might be trying to achieve, we find ….”

For principles the lead in is “In order to achieve this intention, it will be important to pay honor to these principles/ground rules/standards …. “ At this point read from the espoused principles. Then say “But unfortunately, it seems as though some of the ground rules we unconsciously and actually live by are ….. “ At this stage you are reading from the principles-in-use”

For the tensions and issues the lead in is “Now, in order to achieve this intention we are going to have to resolve these issues ….”

Then move across to new context, strategy and structure where the lead in is “And so, it seems as though this is the context we need to create …. And these are the broad strategies we need to follow….”
For the work section the lead in is “These are the specific things we will need to do soon …”

All of this rhetoric is best done with due pausing, sense of moment, etc … for effect on the group. Then give the group time to just simply react to what they were seeing and had just heard from you..

So say something like the following to the group: “When you look at this intention (gesture), and these principles-in-use (gesture) are you likely to achieve your intention (gesture)?”

The answer is no, always.

Then say “So, if you want to achieve this intention (gesture), follows these espoused principles (gesture) and solve these tensions (gesture) what other approaches or strategies (gesture) will you need to put in place and what extra work (gesture) will need to be done.?”

Again all of this rhetoric and questioning is done with due pausing, sense of moment, etc …

This series of statements usually produces quite a number of additional items for Strategy and Work.

Now most commonly very little will have emerged during the dialogue that could be placed under the heading of Learning and Sustainability, at least up to this point. Then say to the group “So what are we learning about this system for which we are responsible?” This will generally produce the material for the point on deep learning and sustainability. It more often than not also produces a much deeper discussion about the system and their part in maintaining/changing it

Depending on the issue at hand and the group itself, it may be appropriate at this stage to take the elements documented under Context/Strategy/Approach and Work and put them through a standard action planning process with which you and your colleagues are all familiar.

But … make sure it is visual, i.e. on some different sheets of flip chart paper or a whiteboard.

The key to nailing this whole process is not just the action list that comes out of the Strategy and Work, but agreed ground rules that come from the Principles and Standards. A discussion of these items will create “the bowl” around this issue, i.e. the agreed behavioral and operational norms or ground rules.

Resources
You can find a Power Point template for documenting your Process Enneagram on the Dalmau Network Group website
Part III

Leading a short working session around a specific issue based on the Process Enneagram

Here is the strongest piece of advice we can give you about using this approach with your own team: don’t!

Get one of your colleagues to come and assist you by facilitating the process.

This part of this Guide is directed at these colleagues as they help you.

The approach outlined in this Part III of this Guide is best used where the team or group involved is already functioning well. If this is not the case and there are some difficulties then we strongly recommend that you follow the guidelines in Part II of this document.

It will also help if the group involved is 8 or less in number.

Getting ready

We assume from this point on that you are helping one of your colleagues address a wicked problem or middle ground issue.

So it will be necessary to have a pre-meeting discussion with them and ensure from that discussion that you understand the following:-

1. Why they think it is a wicked or middle ground problem?
2. The context behind the problem
3. What success looks like at all three levels of
   a. Task (rational outcomes)
   b. Feelings (emotional outcomes)
   c. Relationships (social outcomes)

You might ask questions such as

1. What do you hope will be the tangible deliverables from the time together?
2. How would you hope people will be feeling at the end of it all?
3. In what way would you hope relationships among the group have improved at the end of it all?

As part of your preparation it is suggested you now download the Enclave of Enneagrams from the Dalmau Network Group website. If there happens to be
an Enneagram that “just fits the bill” then print out that page and use it as your guide for the dialogue.

More frequently, however, the situation you are going to facilitate will not exactly fit one of the Enneagrams in the Enclave, so it will behoove you to use these and make up one of your own, i.e. make up your own set of questions using those in the Enclave as a guide.

This work should be done a couple of days in advance of the meeting and it will help to clarify the questions you have constructed with your “client”, i.e. the colleague you are helping by facilitating this upcoming dialogue.

When you have done this print it out, make multiple copies and take them to the meeting room for the working session.

Setting up
Be sure the dialogue will occur in a comfortable space with room to move, room for individuals to stand up and walk around and still be part of the conversation.

It generally will not help things if people are sitting behind tables, so ensure the group is in a circle in front of a large wall space and without tables. It is usually better if the meeting room is off site to stimulate new thinking, new perspectives. Most, if not all of this discussion will probably take place with the group standing up.

Get to the room well in advance of the group and paste the laminated large Process Enneagram chart on the wall.

Introduction and setting the scene
Ask your colleague to set the scene, stating what s/he understands the situation to be regarding the issue at hand, how s/he feels about it and what they see as the responses in broad terms of the various players to the issue.

You write these up without fuss or announcement, assigning them on the laminated Process Enneagram chart to point where they go.

It is likely that most of your colleague’s introduction will fall under Identity and Current State. But beware …. There could be elements that fall under any of the categories of Intention, Principles and Standards, Relationships and Connections and Information and Will.

Engaging the group
Hand out to the group the printed copy of the Process Enneagram questions you have already constructed and brought to the meeting, and suggest to them that you are all going to work through the questions.
Ask now for a comment from each other person in the meeting as to how they see the current state of affairs under the headings: this group and the issue at hand.

Use the handout you have made for the group and suggest to the group that as a group they are going to work through the questions on the handout. Now use the handout as a guide to lead the team through the conversation.

As each comments, continue to make notes on the laminated Process Enneagram chart, sorting and placing each comment or key point made according to their nature on the Process Enneagram, i.e. according to where they fit against each of the 9 dimensions. It is unlikely that there will be much material at this stage in the discussion related to Learning, Strategy and Work points.

**Tip: It is going to work better if you can avoid using single nouns, but rather phrases and clauses with verbs in them**

As each person contributes deliberately look down as they speak, then add a comment to the laminated Process Enneagram chart as each point they are making becomes clear. Then work through all the other points on the Process Enneagram that have not been covered sufficiently until all are covered.

**Reflection**

It is usually helpful to give the group a break at this stage – coffee, or similar. When the group returns, ask them if there is anything else they would like to add in the form of comments, etc. If so, place these comments in the appropriate place on the laminated Process Enneagram chart as well.

Then at the appropriate time, stand up, go to the flip chart and (starting with identity/current state) start reading the material by the lead in that goes “So what we have here is a situation that ….” And so on. String together the points you have written on the flip chart under this block of writing into a set of prose, i.e. as it was a paragraph of comments.

Then move across to relationships and connections and use the lead in “And when we look at the relationships and connections within and without the system we find ….”

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All of this rhetoric is best done with due pausing, sense of moment, etc ... for effect on the group. Then give the group time to just simply react to what they were seeing and had just heard from you..

So say something like the following to the group: “When you look at this intention (gesture), and these principles-in-use (gesture) are you likely to achieve your intention (gesture)?”

The answer is no, always.

Then say “So, if you want to achieve this intention (gesture), follows these espoused principles (gesture) and solve these tensions (gesture) what other approaches or strategies (gesture) will you need to put in place and what extra work (gesture) will need to be done.? 

Again all of this rhetoric and questioning was done with due pausing, sense of moment, etc ...

This series of statements usually produces quite a number of additional items for Strategy and Work.

Now most commonly very little will have emerged during the dialogue that could be placed under the heading of Learning and Sustainability, at least up to this point

Then say to the group “So what are we learning about this system for which we are responsible?” This will generally produce the material for the point on deep learning and sustainability.
Depending on the issue at hand and the group itself, it may be appropriate at this stage to take the elements documented under Context/Strategy/Approach and Work and put them through a standard action planning process with which you and your colleagues are all familiar.

But … make sure it is visual, i.e. on sheets of flip chart paper or a whiteboard.
Part IV

Workbook approach to using the Process Enneagram

This approach is best used when there are very few people and you wish to “think / talk” together through a complex middle ground issue or wicked problem that lies at the heart of some improvement you seek to make. It is a workbook and the best way to use it is to sit down with the other few people involved with the issue and talk through each question, each making notes as you go.

Getting ready

Building a good improvement plan is really about getting the right information about the issue at hand and the right players in the room together. The three most basic questions are

1. What is “the system” we are seeking to improve?
2. Who needs to be in the room to build the plan for this improvement?
3. What outcomes are we going for?

There are some guidelines that are worth considering in answering the second of these questions, i.e. who needs to be involved?

1. Few pertinent well informed individuals
2. Who can put self interest aside, have good social skills and teaming behaviors
3. Who know the reality and the real information about the system and about the change to be implemented
4. Probably less than 5 in number
5. Who can think conceptually yet pragmatically

If you can find individuals such as these who can relate to the issue at hand then we are confident it will dramatically increase the likelihood of a good result for you.

You and your colleagues now work through the following steps and questions.

The questions that follow are suggestions for consideration, but dialogue should not be limited to them. It is important to document your work on flip charts and walls and ensure that diverse input best comes from all in the team. You can either make notes in this workbook or even better paste it on flip charts on the wall.
1: Current state assessment

What is the change we seek to implement or the issue we must address – nature, size, cost?

What is the system we seek to change or improve?

- Individuals
- Groups
- Teams
- Departments
- Business
- Customers
- Vendors and suppliers
- Others
Where is the focus for the improvement we seek? Specifics ..... Is it essentially about changing the

• Way individuals do tasks
• Way pairs of people do work together?
• Way teams work?
• Way different teams interact over common work?
• Business-wide shifts?

How deep is it? Specifics ... Is it essentially about improving

• Practices and procedures? (The way things are done)
• Directions and purposes (Underlying beliefs, reasons & goals)
• Underlying unity and identity (Culture, style, attitudes)
What is its core? Specifics ... Is it essentially about improving

- The way jobs, tasks, processes or procedures are implemented?
- The way groups, units or departments interact over organ donation work together
- The underlying style or climate

What’s missing from the way things are at the moment? Specifics....?

- Processes and/or outcomes
- People dynamics and/or other types of connections
- Energy, commitments, synergies among people
- Knowledge or skill required to implement to do something or do it better

Where did it come from? Whose baby is it? Why?
2. Relationships & dynamics among people and parts of the system

Who are the individuals, groups and other entities who will be involved as a result of this improvement or engagement we seek? Specifics ....

- Needed for buy in and endorsement
- Needed for implementation
- Impacted on by the change?

How will each be impacted by the change?

What is at stake for each and all of these? Specifics ....

- Status?
- Information?
- Power?
- Belonging?
- Identity?
- Time?

What are the core values and preferred styles of individuals and groups involved?
Who are the critical stakeholders who need to buy into this improvement?

Whose political and actual support is needed to drive, lead and energize the improvement?
3: Information and communication
Who currently knows what about this issue at hand and the improvement you seek? Specifics …

- Real and accurate knowledge
- Partial and inaccurate knowledge
- Fear, fantasy
- Simply don’t know

Who needs to know what by when – regard this as a minimum standard

What is hidden and or kept quiet about the improvement?
What is the most sensitive and/or “dangerous” elements of information about the change? To whom? Why?

How can we connect with all those affected about

- The purpose of the improvement
- The picture we have of how it will work when complete
- Our plans for getting to that success result
- What their part in it will be

Who is going to put this information together?
How will the engagement and communication happen?

4: Goals and outcomes
What are the specific benefits and results sought from this improvement?

• Task, professional, operational
• Social, relational, connectional
• Emotional, sentiment, energy

For whom?

Why?
What new goals for the team, department or business will need to be put in place in order to achieve and sustain these outcomes

5: Principles, priorities and ground rules
What are some of the important standards that are either missing or failing in the system at the moment? Specifics ....

• Around performance
• Around behavior, mindset

For whom?
What lies behind these failures? How?

What principles or ground rules seem, in fact, to have underpinned how “the system” is currently configured/structured? Specifics ....
Looking from the outside as an objective bystander what would you say the system’s real priorities have been? Specifics …

• If this improvement is going to be successful in achieving the new goals for the system then what different and new principles, priorities and ground rules will we need to ensure are part and parcel of day to day life for
  • Individuals
  • Teams
  • Units
  • Departments
  • The business

Be as specific as possible
6: Tensions, dilemmas, constraints, demands & limits

What is likely to limit the success and effectiveness of this improvement or engagement we seek? How? Specifics ..... 

• People?  
• Funds?  
• Time?  
• Resources?  
• Mindset and/or culture?

What demands must we meet? By whom? When? How? Why?

What dilemmas do we have to find our way through?
In what way is each a dilemma? Specifics ....

What tensions will we have to negotiate as we get underway with this change?

What specific constraints, dilemmas, limits or tensions are ...

- Acts of God: no change possible
- Acts of lesser Gods: some minor impact possible
- Acts of mere mortals: things which can and need to be addressed
7: The overall approach and strategy (starting to bring it all together)
What elements will make up our overall approach and in what mix?

- Edict and proclamation (Rarely works)
- Engagement and communication
- Relationship building
- Education and skilling
- Technical training
- Replacement with technology

For whom?

How?
When?

How (and with whom) will we construct

- The case for this improvement?
- Its overall context, purpose and anticipated benefits
- Our overall plan for its implementation
- Our specific picture of how it all will work when completed
- What each individual/group’s part in it all will be

What type, extent and nature of support, leadership and guidance will this change need?
Who can best provide it?

Looking back on all the work done in this Section #7 where can we get some short term wins and then how might we consolidate on these?

What resources are needed?

- Financial
- Organizational
- People
- Time
- Effort
- Support
From whom?

When and in what way?

How do we get them?

Who is responsible?
If you have gone through the suggested steps and questions in Sections #1 through #7 then you are probably about ready to do your first draft of your improvement plan.

There are many different techniques for doing this and most would be well known to you and your colleagues but the end result should be a document that pulls together all the action implications from Sections #1 through #7 and specifies:

- Time lines
- Actions
- Responsibilities and accountabilities
- Resourcing requirements
- Reporting requirements
Part V

Using the Process Enneagram with others who have fewer years of schooling

The number of years a person spends at school (statistically) improves two things: the number of words in your vocabulary and your capacity to make finer internal visual distinctions as a form of thought. It has little to do with your level of intelligence.

Through no fault of their own there are likely to be some people in the workforce for whom this is true, really bright people who nevertheless would probably benefit from you having a simpler and less overtly structured conversation about a middle ground problem that affects them.

There is a mixture of art and science here, especially in terms of when to move on to the next question. And we suggest strongly that you ask a colleague to help you keep notes of the conversation.

If this is the case then we suggest you bring the team or group together in a natural setting and start a conversation with them around the following questions in the order in which they are presented. You will probably need to follow each question up with a series of

- Who specifically?
- How exactly?
- Etc ...

But remember this questioning needs to be done in a highly approachable style.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Question for the Group</th>
<th>Why</th>
<th>Process Enneagram Step</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Given that we need to know as much as we can about the issue at hand, what are the important pieces for us all to know?</td>
<td>You need to learn about what is currently in place and what has been done before the group came together with you to discuss the issue.</td>
<td>Identity and current state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are we connected to this issue? Who else is involved and how well are we connected with them? And ... how are well are we connected to each other?</td>
<td>You need to learn about what is the level of functionality in their relationships with one another, other stakeholders and with the issue at hand.</td>
<td>Relationships and connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do we know? What don’t we know? What is hidden from view? Who has the information?</td>
<td>You need to understand how open or closed the system is to providing authentic and real information on which people can act.</td>
<td>Information and will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So now that we know a lot about the current state of affairs in relation to this issue, what do we then need to know about what is possible and what needs to be achieved?</td>
<td>We need to understand the rational, emotional and social outcomes and make sure that they make sense (well – formed)</td>
<td>Intention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So if we going after this intention, what will be important to keep front of mind and be sure we honor?</td>
<td>You need to work with the group to identify the ground rules that will guide actions and behavior going forward.</td>
<td>Principles and standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the challenges we face in achieving our intention? What hidden dynamics and forces will we need to contend with? What dilemmas will we have to face?</td>
<td>You need to understand what challenges the group has in achieving its outcomes.</td>
<td>Tensions and issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think we are ready to do now, broadly speaking?</td>
<td>The group should now be ready to talk about strategies and plans.</td>
<td>New context, strategies and structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So now we have some powerful broad strategies and buckets of key work that is going to need to be done. What exactly should we do next?</td>
<td>You need to know all the detailed steps and actions and have them choreographed along a time line with dates and responsible parties.</td>
<td>The work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What will we need to do to stay on top of the plan?</td>
<td>This will help establish a process that continually tracks progress and adjusts the plan as they go.</td>
<td>Deep learning and sustainability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


10. Conklin, Jeff; Building Shared Understanding of Wicked Problems, Rotman Magazine, the alumni magazine of Rotman School of Management (Winter 2009).


Resources on the Dalmau Consulting website

1. An Enclave of Enneagrams
2. A one page Process Enneagram recording template (PPT file)
3. A multi page Process Enneagram recording template (PPT file)

www.dalmau.com/resources