Start with a quick question
A bit about me

• Co-founder, Sensanalytics Consulting.

• Senior Lecturer, Connected Intelligence Centre UTS.

• Award winning author.
Objectives of this session

• Gain an awareness of the hidden behaviours that hinder communication and collaboration in the workplace.

• Understand the difference between complicated and complex problems

• Learn a couple of tools that can enhance the quality of collaboration in your day-to-day work.
Activity: Deal or No Deal

- Estimate the number of Knowledge Management professionals in Singapore who have a red car

Your estimate should have:
Upper and lower bound
90% confidence level
Deal or No Deal!

Option 1
If we count the number of KM pros with red cars and the number falls within your range, then you win a million bucks. If it doesn’t, you win nothing.

Option 2
A bag contains 10 marbles: 9 white and 1 black. You have to draw 1 marble. If you draw white, you win a million bucks, if you draw black you get...
Deal or No Deal – Which option will you choose?

- Which option will you choose?
  - Stick with your estimate
  - Pull a marble out of the bag
• How did you feel when doing this exercise?
Structure of this session

• To collaborate effectively you have to:
  • Know yourself
  • Know the problem
  • Know the tools
Part 1 - Know yourself

“Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom.”

~ Aristotle
In the beginning was the plan
And then came the assumptions
And the assumptions were without form
And the plan was completely without substance
And darkness was upon the faces of the workers
And they spoketh unto their marketing managers saying

“it is a pot of manure and it stinketh”
a pot of manure...

And the marketing managers went unto the strategists and sayeth

“It is a pile of dung, and none may abide the odour thereof”
a pile of dung...

And the strategists went unto the business managers and sayeth

“It is a container of excrement, and it is very strong and such that none may abide by it”
a container of excrement...

And the business managers went unto the director and sayeth

"It is a vessel of fertilizer, and none may abide its strength"
a vessel of fertiliser...

And the director went to the vice president and sayeth

“It contains that which aids plant growth and it is very strong”
...aids growth...

And the vice president went unto the senior vice president and sayeth

“It promoteth growth, and it is powerful”
a powerful new plan...

And the senior vice president went unto the president and sayeth

“This powerful new plan will actively promote growth and efficiency of the company and the business in general”
a powerful new plan...

And the president looked upon the plan and saw that it was good

And the plan became policy

APPROVED

President

Senior vice president

Vice President

Director

Business manager

Strategic Manager

Marketing Manager

Workers
The legacy of the plan

IT WAS HIM!

TEAMWORK
WHEN IT ALL GOES HORRIBLY WRONG

IT WAS HIM!
Our three instinctual needs

- **Safety and security**
  "if I say this will I lose my job?"

- **Approval, esteem and affection**
  “if I say this will I be laughed at?”
  “If I say this will people think less of me?”

- **Power and control.**
  “If I say this what will I gain or lose?”
  “If I say this what does it to do my status?”
  “If I trust my team, will they let me down?”
“Rather than enduring an uncomfortable (but highly necessary) period of ambiguity, we fall into the trap of limiting our creativity by setting a goal that is too narrowly defined from the start.” (Scott Belsky)
The difference between risk and ambiguity

**Risk**
- Tackled by *deductive* reasoning
- Our reactions to it are *logical*

**Ambiguity**
- Dealt with by *abductive* reasoning
- Our reactions to it are *emotional*

*Our natural reaction to ambiguity is to try to force it into a logical framework.....*
Some examples of how we “cope” with ambiguity

- **Lock down the problem definition**
  - Focus on a simplistic definition of the problem, ignoring complications
  - ‘For example, looking upon KM as a means of structuring, classifying and controlling information artefacts”

- **Assert that the problem is solved**
  - Declare that the problem is solved – this often required dictatorial or autocratic management styles
  - ‘For example, declaring that the KM problem is solved once the KM system is rolled out,

- **Oh we’ve seen this before, its simple …**
  - Naïve simplicity occurs when we ignore or filter out evidence that may complicate the problem
  - ‘For example, All organisations have similar KM problems’

- **Close down the possibilities by declaring the other point of view to be wrong**
  - ‘Fitting the requirements to the tool“
Characteristics of ambiguity intolerance (Bochner)

• Need for categorisation

• Need for certainty

• A preference for the familiar over the unfamiliar

• Early selection and maintenance of one solution in an ambiguous situation

• Premature closure

All these are anxiety reduction mechanisms.
How do kids cope with anxiety?
Common anxiety reduction mechanisms in the corporate world:

- Management models
- Certifications
- BOKs and Guides
- Systems

If you use these, make sure you’re doing so for the right reasons.
That’s not the whole story...

There are other blind spots that can trip you up in your quest to solve complex problems
The role of cognitive bias

• Research has shown that humans are prone to making *systematic errors of judgement* based on *flawed perceptions* (*Thinking Fast and Slow* – *Daniel Kahneman*).

• **Example**: buying a lottery ticket.

• These biases play a role in how we perceive and deal with ambiguity.
Examples – Selective Perception

• Hear what you want to hear; see what you want to see
Examples – Availability / Recency

• Giving undue weight to recent or memorable events.

Who was America’s greatest president?

- Ronald Reagan: 24%
- John Kennedy: 22%
- Abraham Lincoln: 22%
- Franklin Roosevelt: 18%
- George Washington: 9%
Examples – Over-optimism

• Deluding yourself into believing that things will go according to plan (we’re particularly good at thi
Examples – Loss Aversion

- The tendency to give preference to avoiding losses (even small losses) over making gains
Activity

- Examine several personas and examine the instinctual needs, biases and tolerance for ambiguity for each

- Self-examine your own behaviours. What is driving them and how might it effect your team?
Taming ambiguity

• **Self awareness** –
  • “Are my decisions being driven by anxiety”
  • “I could be wrong”

• **Mindfulness** – being aware and attuned to what is happening in the present moment without judgement or an automatic reaction. Avoid jumping to conclusions.

• **Objectivity** – seeing things as they are
  – Ask others what can go wrong
  – Actively seeking points of view that are different from yours
Part 2 - Know the problem

Confidence is the feeling you have before you understand the problem....

IT ISN'T THAT THEY CAN'T SEE THE SOLUTION.

IT IS THAT THEY CAN'T SEE THE PROBLEM.
Aspirational future state

Present state

There

Here

state
Governance

Aspirational future state :-) → There

Present state :-( → Here
Governance

Here

Aspirational future state :-)
Governance

Aspirational future state :-)  

Present state :(  

There  

WHY?  

WHAT?
Governance

Aspirational future state :-)  

Present state :-(

Here

There

WHO?

WHY?

WHAT?
Governance

Aspirational future state :-)  

Present state :-(

Here

There

WHAT?

WHO?

HOW?

WHY?
What project is this?

- Aspirational future state :-)
- Present state :-(
- Earth
- Moon
- HOW?
- WHO?
- WHY?
- WHAT?
What project is this?

KM System

Improved Collaboration

Aspirational future state :-)

Present state :-(

Poor Collaboration

HOW?

WHO?

WHY?

WHAT?
Divergence: Multiple futures

Aspirational future states :-(

Present state :-(

Poor Collaboration

HOW?
WHO?
WHY?
WHAT?
Complicated vs Complex

• Complicated problems
  • Logical
  • Predictable
  • Repeatable result

• Does not mean they are easy!
Complicated vs Complex

• Complex problems
  • Different points of view
  • Unpredictable
  • Difficult to repeat the results

• No “perfect” solution, only a “best fit” solution

• Complex problems are sometimes called Wicked Problems
Complex problems

- Multifaceted problems that are hard to define, let alone solve. **Examples:** Urban Planning, Crime, Climate Change

- Many interdependent variables and constraints

- Many opinions as to what the problem *really* is

- …Can you think of some examples from your line of work?
Discussion – complicated or complex?

- Replacing a PBX with VOIP
- Replacing old mail system with Exchange
- Putting in a new intranet
- Implementing enterprise social networking
- Implementing an ERP system
- Implementing a project to reduce complexity
- Phase 3 trial of a new drug
- Relocating offices
There is a HUGE difference between complicated and complex problems.

It is important...no, critical, to recognise the kind of problem you’re dealing with.

...but it can be hard to tell the difference because complex problems are often disguised as complicated ones....
An oft unspoken truth…

Most stated project goals are **platitudes** – they say nothing, but hide behind words.

Examples: The aim of this project is to –
“Improve communication”
“Improve processes”
“Harmonize platforms”
"Excellence" – an Olympic Grade Platitute

"The Montgomery Burns Award for Outstanding Achievement in the Field of Excellence"
If you had \textlt{\langle insert platitude here \rangle} how would things be different from the way they are now?

This forces people to think in terms of \textit{concrete outcomes}. 
To sum up

- A platitude is like a mirage. From a distance it looks like a worthwhile goal, but it disappears as you approach it.

- Platitudes delude us into thinking we have a goal in mind when we actually do not.

- Disarm platitudes by asking what difference the project, initiative or system will make.
Discussion

- What are some of the best KM platitudes you have heard?
- Hint: vendor and advisory whitepapers are an excellent source
Some conclusions for part 2

- When dealing with complex problems, we often think we understand each other when we really don’t.

- Consequently, we need to spend more time upfront developing a shared understanding of the issues involved.

- This is best done using facilitated dialogue rather than analysis.
Analysis versus Facilitation

- An analyst provides data and information to aid decision-making
  - Relies on expertise
  - Can be done in the “back room”
  - Realm of complicated problems

- A facilitator aims to resolve differences between stakeholders through dialogue:
  - Leverages the wisdom of the crowd
  - Objective is to reach a shared understanding of the problem (sometimes called sensemaking)
  - Realm of complex problems
Do we need a break?
For dialogue to work people must be willing to accept that they may be wrong.

Discussion is impossible with someone who claims not to seek the truth, but already to possess it.

— Romain Rolland —
Three tools for complex problems

- Cynefin Framework
- Powerful Questions
- Dialogue Mapping
The Cynefin Framework (David Snowden)

Purpose:
A mental model that allows people to understand the nature of problems and situations that occur in organisations and what sort of explanations and/or solutions may apply.
• What’s the **worst** way to elicit requirements?  
  ...it is to ask people **“what are your requirements?”**

• It is almost always better to ask questions that open up possibilities rather than close them down.

• We have already seen one example of such a question...
The Platitude Buster Question

• “So if we had [insert platitude here], how would things be different to now?”

• Examples:
  • If we had an enterprise data warehouse, how would things be different to now?
  • If we had big data, how would things be different to now?
  • Let’s say this project was hugely successful. How would things be different to now?
The Platitude Buster Question

- Answers tend to be “Increased..”, “Decreased…”, “More of…”, “Less of…”
- These are potentially measurable and can form KPI’s.

- **Tip**: If the answer is another platitude, keep asking!
  - “What would that get you?”
  - “What would that look like?”
  - “How would you know if you succeeded?”

*Let’s say this project was hugely successful. How would things be different to now?*
The Key Focus Area Question

• “What aspects should we consider with this initiative to [insert platitude here]”?

• Examples:
  • What are the aspects of the enterprise data warehouse that we should be aware of.
  • What points do we need to consider in relation to the big data proof of concept that we plan to do?
  • What in your opinion are the key elements that will determine the outcome of this project?
The Key Focus Area Question

- Neutrally framed question that admits both risks and opportunities.

- **Tip:** listen out for answers that summarise themes…
  - “At the end of the day this is really about…”
  - “No matter what we do, we need to…”

- **Tip:** The focus areas may change as the groups understanding of the problem develops. So, ask this question again at different points in the discussion.
The “I told you so” Question

- “What keeps you up at night on this project?”
- Why not just ask for risks and opportunities?
• Can you spot a common feature of the all the questions?

• **Platitude buster question**: “So if we had [insert platitude here], how would things be different to now?”

• **Key focus area question**: “What aspects should we consider with this initiative to [insert platitude here]”?  

• **“I told you so” question**: “What keeps you up at night on this project?”
Mapping a group discussion on a shared display.
- Questions
- Ideas (or answers)
- Pros
- Cons
- Decisions

- The notation is called Issue-Based Information System (IBIS)
What is IBIS?

**Issue Based Information System**
- A means to document the logic of a conversation
  - Questions, ideas and arguments (pros and cons)

**Compendium** - an open source IBIS mapping tool:
http://compendium.open.ac.uk/
IBIS syntax at a glance

Diagram showing the flow of ideas and questions with 'Pro', 'Con', 'Idea', and 'Question' nodes.
Mapping dialogue using IBIS
Mapping dialogue using IBIS
Mapping dialogue using IBIS
Mapping dialogue using IBIS
Mapping dialogue using IBIS
Mapping dialogue using IBIS
Mapping dialogue using IBIS
Mapping dialogue using IBIS
Mapping dialogue using IBIS
Mapping dialogue using IBIS
IBIS / Dialogue Mapping for complex problems

What should we do about the budget?

- Cut costs
  - Just went through cost cutting last year
  - How can we cut costs?
    - Cut staff
    - Renegotiate salaries
  - Eliminate special programs
    - Which special programs?

- Increase revenue
  - Petition county for tax increase
  - Charge fees for special programs

- Accept the deficit
Activity – What is wrong with this map?

- Nothing - they are already good
- Hire better screenwriters?
- The acting is lamer than the plot
- Jackie Chan is getting a bit old
- Jackie Chan does cool stunts
- Won't make any difference
- Bigger budget
- His movies make no money
- Not have Steven Segal
- What can we do to make Steven Segal movies good?
- Get Jackie Chan to co-star
Corrected map

What can we do to make Steven Segal movies good?

- Nothing - they are already good
- Hire better screenwriters
  - The acting is lamer than the plot
  - Jackie Chan does cool stunts
  - Jackie Chan is getting a bit old
  - Won't make any difference
  - His movies make no money

- Get Jackie Chan to co-star
- Send Stephen Segal to acting school
  - Bigger budget
- Not have Stephen Segal
Mapping by hand

What should we do about the budget?

- Cut costs
- Increase revenue
- Accept the deficit

- Just went through cost cutting last year
- Cut staff
- Renegotiate salaries
- Petition county for tax increase
- Charge fees for special programs

- How can we cut costs?
- How can we increase revenue?
- There is a strong economic forecast for next year

- Which special program should be eliminated?
- Takes too long
- unlikely to work
IBIS Mapping Exercise:

Breakout into groups of 2 or 3 and map the provided dialogue by hand
Benefits of using IBIS to map complex problems

• Surfaces difficult issues on which there are a variety of opinions

• Makes logical connections between issues explicit

• Provides the group a basis for developing a shared understanding of the issues involved.

• Provides a basis for organisational
Wrapping up – Key Takeways

• Understand your and others tolerance for ambiguity as well as their biases and instinctual needs

• Understand the difference between “Complicated” and “Complex” problems – and learn to figure out upfront which one you are dealing with.

• Do not be duped by platitudes. Ask powerful questions

• Shared understanding leads to shared commitment – use IBIS or other tools to facilitate shared understanding

All 4 are critical – no exceptions

Develop people, tools and approaches so that collaboration can thrive in conditions of ambiguity because ambiguity is the new normal!
Thanks for listening & participating!

For further information check out:

• **My blog:**  *Eight to Late*
  [http://eight2late.wordpress.com](http://eight2late.wordpress.com)

• **My books:**
  • *The Heretic’s Guide to Best Practices*
  • *The Heretic’s Guide to Management*
  [http://hereticsguidebooks.com](http://hereticsguidebooks.com)

• **Contact me:**
  • For organising collaboration workshops for your teams
  • For advice on documenting / tackling complex problems that you or your business colleagues face.
Questions?