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a multidimensional framework
for EVALUATING AND influencing change

Carole Kayrooz
Lecturer, Counselling
University of Canberra

Outcomes of the session

By the end of the session the participants should be able to understand seven types of triangulation; interpret recent changes and appreciate triangulation as a reframing evaluation tool for managing change.

Overview of the content

1. Triangulation model for evaluating change
2. Derivation of the model: systems thinking theory, multiple descriptors, principle of convergence
- 3.. Case study of change
4. Analysis from multiple perspectives
5. Reflection by participants

OVERVIEW OF THE MODEL

"Nothing is permanent but change" Heraclitus

Triangulation: Multiple Description in the Methodological Domain
Any attempt to understand and influence social or behavioural phenomena can be aided by the use of multiple perspectives or vantage points. The combination of various perspectives in the study of the same phenomenon constitutes what sociologists refer to as "triangulation", a metaphor borrowed from military strategy where multiple reference points are used to pinpoint an object's exact location. Using this idea and given basic geometric principles, multiple viewpoints allow for greater accuracy, creativity, and growth.

According to Bateson (1972), it is the perception of difference that makes a difference. That is, it is the perception of information that is different from the information we currently have that gives us a deeper and more complete understanding and can often promote fresh ways of looking at

events. However, multiple perspectives do more than add up to the sum total of the different perspectives; they also imply a 'bonus' that is, an added dimension that is more than just the sum total of the different perspectives.. This concept is best illustrated by a simple analogy. Monocular vision is one-eyed and flat; binocular vision gives us the bonus of depth perception. The right eye sees things in its own way, while simultaneously the left eye sees things differently. Clearly, it is not the right eye that is wrong while the left eye is correct or vice versa. A search for difference provided by the use of multiple perspectives is a fundamental process involved in releasing solutions to the dilemmas and challenges posed by the process of change.

Although the idea of triangulation originates in the validation of research methodology, these principles of research suggest useful theoretical frameworks and practical strategies for understanding and influencing the process of change.

In the domain of research methodology the underlying principle of these frameworks and, indeed, of both quasiexperimental approaches and qualitative approaches is the principle of triangulation (Cohen and Manion, 1980). Though many would perceive quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches to evaluation to be philosophically opposed, if one, like an alchemist was to extract the essence of both, the gold would be that convergence of information that is discovered through the principle of triangulation.

Triangulation is the use of two or more perspectives in the study of some aspect of human behaviour – the more rigorous the promotion and consideration of difference perspectives through multiple means and the more the analysis converges or is different but for predictable reasons, the more reliable the observations and results. Table 1 summarises, defines and illustrates types of triangulation that can be used to influence the process of change– multiple perspectives in the form of conceptual, information, and contextual frameworks form ways in which the change agent promotes alternative views of a situation and thereby release solutions.

Seen from this perspective, triangulation is Bateson's idea of multiple perspectives enacted in the domain of change. Triangular techniques attempt to map out the richness or complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint. The discovery of underlying truth is not the goal of triangulation but rather a convergence of information that assures more credibility to the change processes under study. If the use of controlled experimentation to assess critical factors necessary for change is not possible or desirable, then a corroboration of approaches is the way to influence change. Indeed, on the subject of truth and the scientific method, even Karl Popper asserts:

The old scientific ideal of episteme – of absolutely certain, demonstrable knowledge – has proved to be an idol. The demand for scientific

objectivity makes it inevitable that every scientific statement must remain tentative for ever. It may indeed be corroborated, but every corroboration is relative to other statements which again are tentative" (Popper, 1959)

The use of multiple perspectives to influence change demands new thinking about the notion of causation. Traditionally, we have attempted to understand change by searching for causes. The physical sciences, predominantly physics, posit cause and effect as the explanation of change. This understanding of change is linear, sequential and progressive emanating from some dim point in the past. According to this view, we need to analytically find this beginning point and revisit and revamp the triggering condition before anything can be done about the current situation. This linear framework is quite different from a circular framework. A circular framework does not talk of cause and effect when considering human affairs but rather talks of living systems in which a process is taking place - a process whose units affect and are affected by all other units.

The differences between these two frameworks become apparent with analysis of an example borrowed from an explanation of inefficiency. Let's take an example from the organisational realm. Explanation 1 is based on the linear causal effect framework:

A bad manager produces gross inefficiency in her staff.

Explanation 2, based on a circular notion posits a network of circular causal loops in which everyone's behaviour impacts on everyone else.

An unhappy manager, struggling with dwindling resources and staffing cutbacks doesn't give constructive feedback to staff and overinvolves herself with her family. Some of her staff, feeling a lack of direction and involvement, engage in flagrant abuse of the resources that are available, to the considerable distress of the manager and those further up the line. The manager's boss, fearful of retribution, insists on tight controls on how things are to be done. The manager's staff become depressed because they are not trusted to do their jobs the way they wish and blame the situation on upper management. Upper management, in turn, become angry and defensive and their work relationships suffer. The staff respond to the ensuing coldness in different ways - some withdraw and others call on their immediate manager even more feeling insecure about the satisfactory completion of the task.

Any attempt to establish causality for the staff's behaviour seems naive in the context of the complex web of interrelationships. An explanation of their collective behaviour as a network of causal loops in which everyone's behaviour impacts on everyone else seems closer to an adequate description.

This way of thinking about problems has certain implications for problem-

solving and the implementation of change in the organisation. Firstly, it is not always necessary to locate the specific cause of an organisational problem in order to effect some changes. It may be that the change agent or evaluator can start anywhere in the system and produce a change or analyse a change. As Gertrude Stein said "A solution is a solution is a solution." Change may occur in the system similar to the way a ripple effect occurs when you throw a stone into a pond - in ever widening and amplifying waves. Indeed, the notion of circular causality allows interventions and analysis of those interventions at seemingly unrelated points in the interlocking of systems.

The idea of multiple perspectives also invokes the notion of complementarity. Both sides of a dichotomy need to be acknowledged. Neither is correct or incorrect. If we take this 'complementarity' position we must logically ascribe to a theoretical relativity (the utility of both theories is relative to a given context) as opposed to theoretical absolutism (embracing one theory implies the rejection of another). With theoretical relativity, each theory gives meaning to the other and each has a utility relative to a given context.

This is an 'and-also' perspective, as opposed to a digital 'either-or' perspective. An 'and-also' perspective is common in aesthetics. The aesthetic imperative requires that if you desire to see you need to learn how to act. A three dimensional object in a painting is represented by the movement of light and dark across the surface. It is common knowledge in this world that in order to make an object look brighter, you need to make the darker bits darker. In music it is the high key or loud as well as the low key or soft that combines to form the whole piece. Similarly for the dance form, large movements as well as small movements that go together to form the piece; or we could talk about an aggressive person. However there is also a submissive person in a complementary relationship with that aggressive person. Or a distancing person who is being pursued by a pursuing person form a complementary relationship; A depressed wife, a cheerful husband. An overly competent mother, an incompetent son.

Table 1 invites a consideration of ways in which the phenomena under study could be analysed from multiple perspectives, incorporated into our understanding of change and so, ensure more creative and effective responses. Even a cursory look at Table 1 suggests a number of ways in which change agents or evaluators could include multiple perspectives in their work.

The promotion and celebration of 'difference' that is encouraged through the process of triangulation is the 'food for perception'. Different perspectives on a situation allow change agents and evaluators to move from a oneeyed view to the 'bonus' of depth perception. Triangulation has the builtin advantage of providing multiple views from a diverse population of lenses. The people involved glimpse the whole ecology and begin to

construct patterns connecting diverse views. These patterns are a kind of higher order more encompassing view. The use of multiple perspectives allows change agents and evaluators to discern higher order patterns of social choreography and establishes a basis for the dynamic and sometime dialectical processes involved in creativity.

Table 1: Triangulation

Type of Triangulation	Definition	Domain of Influence	Domain of Evaluation
Conceptual	Seeing from different perspectives/models	Contrasting accounts of events from many approaches	
Information	Collecting different sources and types of data	Level vertical/horizontal; one way, two way or recursive	
Directionality	Self/other reports; frequency of behaviour;	psycho-metric & standardised information, e.g. scales	
Researcher	Using different enquirers to gather information	Team members collect information and data	Different trained researchers collect data/information
Methodological	Same methods with different clients and different occasions	Using one method of change with different clients	Using one method of change with different subjects
	Different methods with same clients to get different results but for predictable reasons	Using different methods with same person	Using different standardised methods with same person
Time	Using time periods to show factors of change and process	Using methods that highlight the passage of time	Using a longitudinal pre- post-long-term follow up approach
Space	Collecting information across settings		Across sub-cultures
Contextual	Information about change in surrounding systems		Highlighting change reported in identified client & in surrounding relationships
	Assessment of change in primary system and surrounding systems		

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