Soft Systems Methodology

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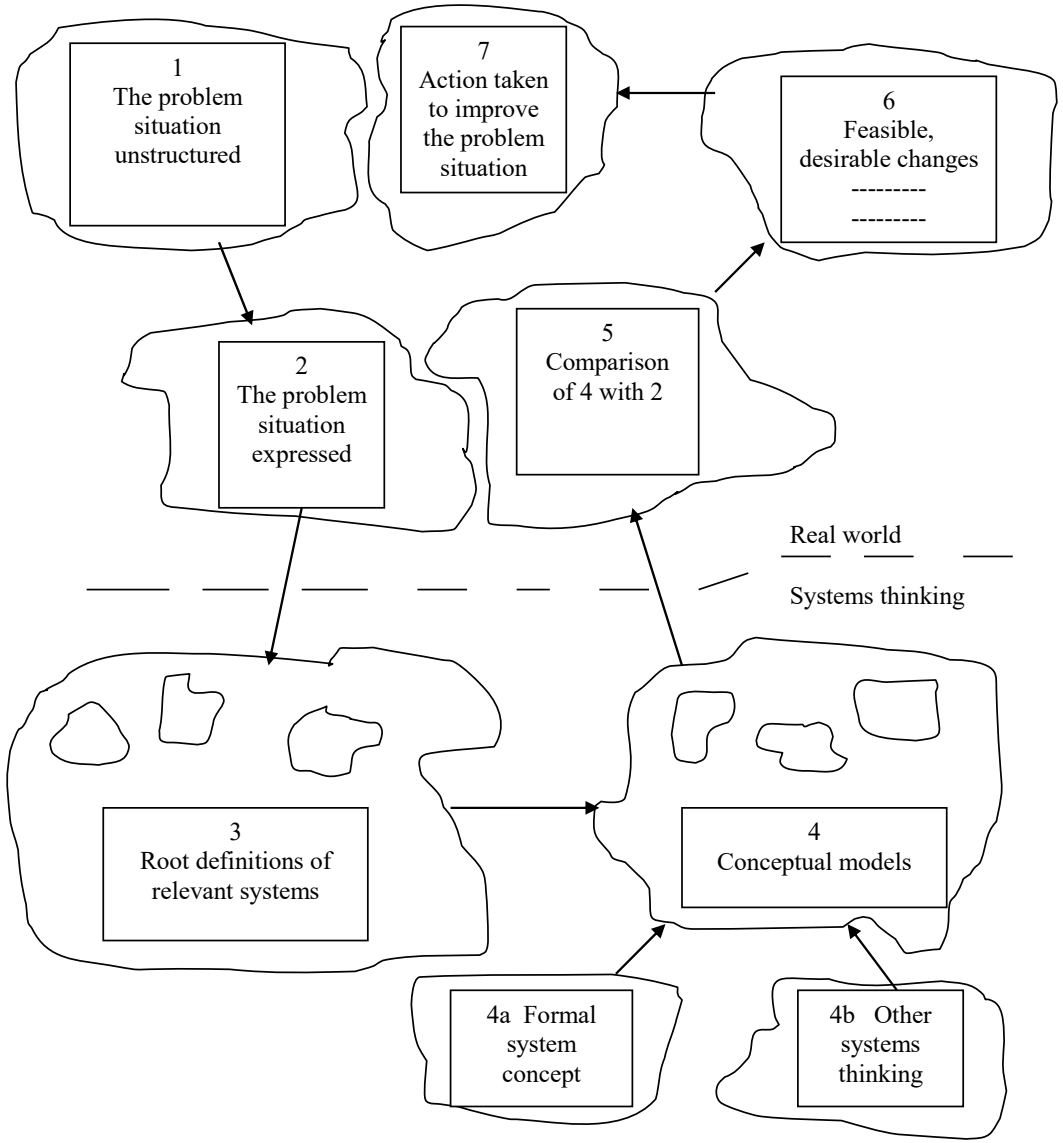
What are typical situations you would use SSM?

- Situations involving complex problems
- Where you need to design a new system or process
- Where there are a range of different stakeholders and views
- Where you need community input into design or redesign of systems or services
- Where creative solutions are required

Soft Systems Methodology

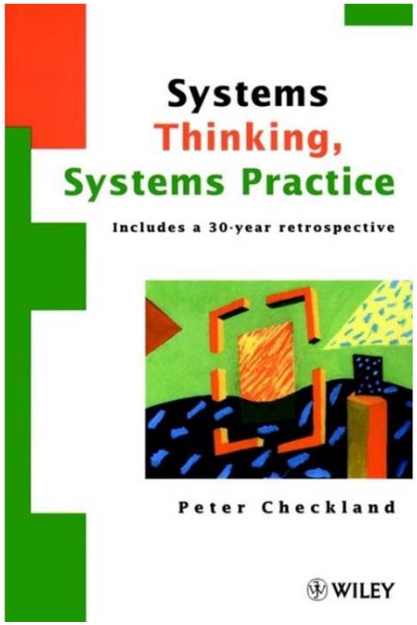
Process diagram

Adapted from:
Peter Checkland
(1981)



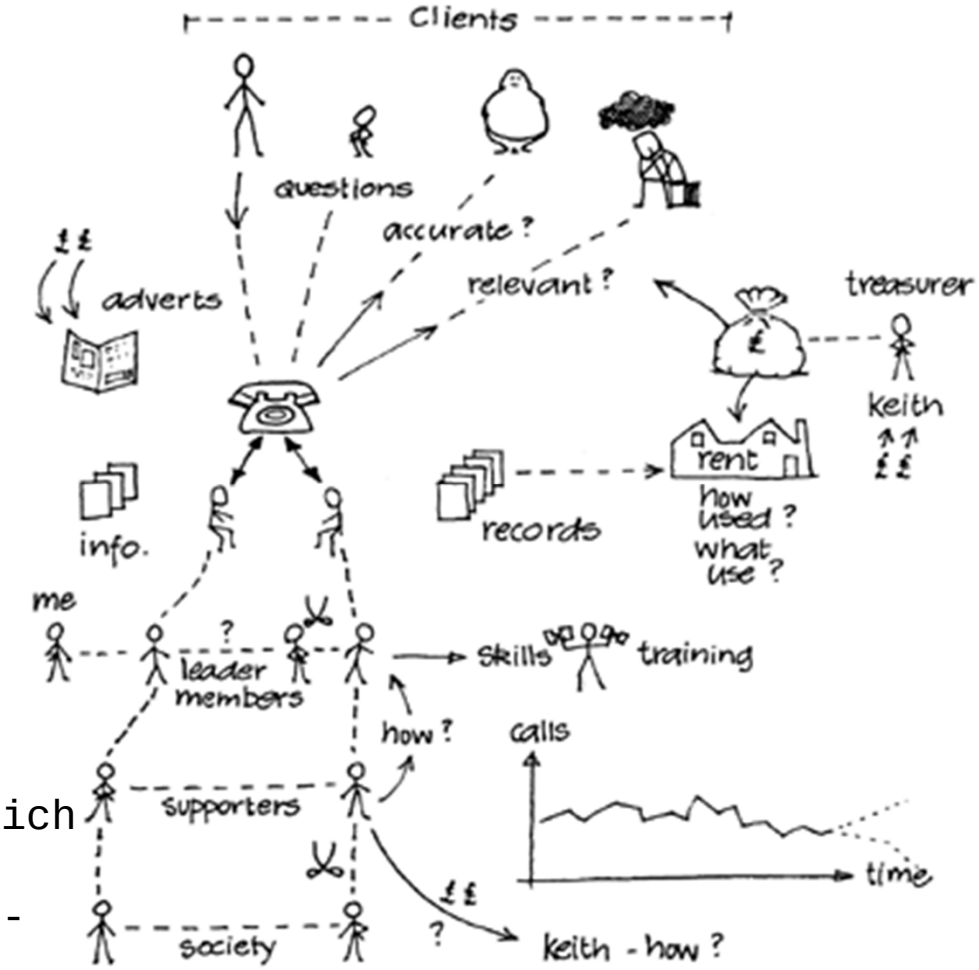
Initial introduction to an SSM workshop

- Outline the reason for the workshop
- Find out who is in the room
- Set out the organisation context
- Explore who else is involved in the project
- Understand the timeframe required
- Let people know who decides on the outcome
- Give an introduction to system design and SSM
  - SSM was developed using action research by Peter Checkland and



1. The problem situation – unstructured

- Describe the current system in question
- Draw a rich picture of the problem and issues in small groups
- Encourage creativity



Example of a rich picture – telephone help-line in NFP

2. The problem situation – expressed

- Explain the rich picture to other groups
- Get the other groups to ask clarifying questions and make suggestions
- Look at system components
- Review key decision points

3. Root definitions of relevant systems (1)

- Design an ideal system
  - List names of ideal systems
  - Choose one or more to work on
  - Describe each system in one sentence:

  The XXX system is designed to do YYY and achieve ZZZ

  E.g. The Welcoming System is designed to welcome, induct and engage new employees into our organisation so that the new employees will feel

3. Root definitions of relevant systems (2)

- Use TWOACES to define aspects of an ideal system
  - T – Transformation – what is the system trying to do? (Purpose)
  - W – What is the world view behind it? (Why)
  - O – Owners – who can make the decision to change?
  - A – Actors – who are the stakeholders involved?
  - C – Customers – who are the beneficiaries and victims of the system?
  - E – Environment – what are the environmental restraints?
  - S – Systems – what are the other systems impacted by this ideal system?

4. Building conceptual models

- List action words in relation to your ideal system
- Organise these into activities
- Design a logical flow
- Draw a systems map linking these activities

5. Comparison of problem with ideal system

- Write up a table of the new system activities
- Ask the question – do we do this now? Yes/No/Partly
- Add comments for clarification

Activity	Yes	No	Partly	Comment
Activity 1				
Activity 2				
Activity 3				
Activity 4				

6. Feasible and desirable changes

- Will the new design work?
- Ask these questions:
  - Is it systemically viable? Can it be done?
  - Is it culturally feasible? Will it fit into the existing culture?
  - Is it politically acceptable? Who needs to be engaged/lobbied?
  - Discuss the possibilities of advancing the new system

7. Action taken for improvement

- Write an action plan for improvement
  - Who is responsible for doing what in implementing the new system?
  - What needs to be done, and how will it occur?
  - When does it need to be done?
- Self-evaluate the new system
  - Ethical – is it the right thing to
  - Equitable – does it enable fairness
  - Effective – will it achieve the req
  - Efficient – will it optimise the us
  - Efficacious – is it workable/practi
  - Elegant – is it a pleasing design?