falls short of consensus between imperfectly aligned world views and preferred transformations of the problem situation.

The practical problem for feasibility that arises in our own experience is to gain and maintain the enduring commitment of those groups of ‘actors’ (often absent or excluded from the stakeholder conference) on whom the pain of the ‘clients’ problem situation impinges least. ‘Actors’ hold world views that diverge significantly from those of ‘clients’ and they control significant resources necessary for the ‘clients’ agenda. Modelling based on the bounded thinking of ‘clients’ may not be perceived as relevant by ‘actors’. It is blind to their perspectives.

‘Unbounded systems thinking’ (Mitroff & Linstone, 1993) takes divergence of world views as its point of departure. It distinguishes between ‘technical’, ‘organisational’ and ‘personal’ perspectives that condition the collaboration of ‘actors’ with ‘clients’. The ‘technical’ preference is to argue from one position of ‘factual’ certainty to another. The ‘organisational’ preference is to find an accommodation that everyone should be able to live with, so that attention can turn to the next set of pressing issues. Pressure of events and limits on human capacity lead to ‘satisficing’. The ‘personal’ perspective is biased by self- or sectional interest.

An ‘unbounded’ construction of the problem situation can expose the ostensibly ‘technical’ statements, of ‘actors’ in particular, about the *practicalities* they face, to critical and constructively sceptical evaluation, peeling these apart from ‘personal’, interested schemes of thinking and legitimate, ‘organisational’ schemes.

Conclusion

SD can elicit *dynamically coherent* proposals for change that are *desirable* when considered from the limited perspective of ‘clients’. To be *feasible*, proposals need to be capable of accommodation within a prevailing matrix of organisational sub-cultures, commitments and power asymmetries.

Reply to N Harrop, A Gillies and AT Wood-Harper

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The Authors Reply: We agree with the correspondent that proposals for change should be feasible as well as desirable. We did not assess the feasibility or desirability of proposals for change, because our objective was not to identify ‘conditions for successful action’ but, rather, generate hypotheses for how the system helped create the chronic troubling behaviour observed in the hospital. We used system dynamics as a framework to elicit system description and to better understand the problem. We felt it was most important to focus on how system dynamics helped the organization gain

The techniques of SD fit well with the ‘technical’ mode of thinking and lend certainty to hypotheses over the nature of the problem, the focus of change and the impact of change, viewed objectively. Use of the SD framework can help delay ‘satisficing’ until the consequences of a new plan have been thought through in a disciplined way. Their use addresses the ‘organisational’ mode of thinking but only within a narrow system boundary that excludes an engagement with ‘actors’, their subcultures and the sources of their power over the problem situation.

Notional feasibility and a *nominal* commitment by ‘actors’, to the preferred policy of ‘clients’, contrast with the *practical* commitment that is necessary if agreement with the rationale for change is to be backed up by sustained adherence to new practice and its consequences for ‘actors’.

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a clear understanding of their situation. Such an understanding is a prerequisite to generate proposals for change.

While we are not of the opinion that cultural and organizational-political factors are ‘ignored’ by system dynamics methodology, we are not suggesting that system dynamics is the only or best methodology in addressing complex issues. It, along with other methodologies, including soft systems methodologies are and should be used in a complementary fashion.

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