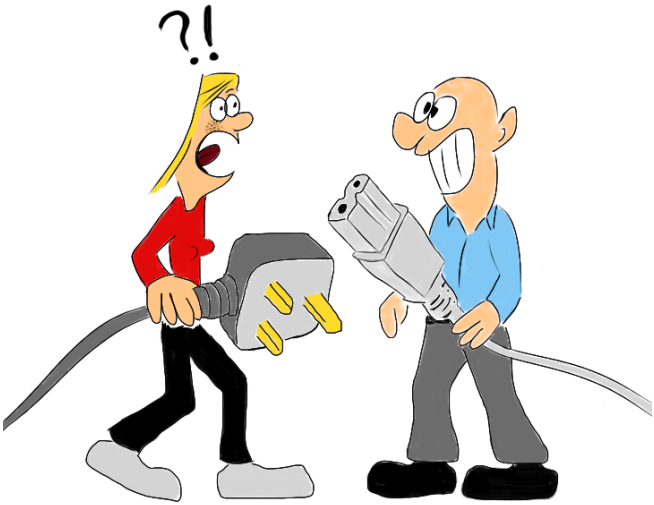
Client Encounters

of the Technical Kind



How to win, support and challenge customers … methodically

ABBREVIATED

Andy Betts PhD, MIEEE

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About the Author

I am Andy Betts and I run an independent consultancy called Iconda Solutions, based near Grenoble, France. The company is focused on the needs of technology companies and the critical B2B customer interface. We provide Technical Marketing and Applications Engineering services as well as Learning and Development products for engineers working in Field Operations.

My career has been all about interfaces: hardware-software, analog-digital, people-technology and England-France. They make life challenging, but rewarding

I have over 25 years' experience in industry, the first half in design roles, the second in the field (sales, marketing and applications support). Having obtained a first degree in Physics, I worked on automotive control software for a few years before returning to university and gaining a PhD in analog circuit design from University College London. This launched my career in the semiconductor industry, which started with STMicroelectronics. I have since worked in various technical, commercial and managerial roles, including leadership of a French consultancy (Qualis Europe: functional verification of integrated circuits) and the management of Application Engineering in Southern Europe for an American start-up (Magma Design Automation).

A teacher and trainer for over 20 years, I am also a qualified coach.

On *Client Encounters* and ICON9

'ICON9 has proven an effective way to engage our Applications, Sales and Marketing teams in adopting an efficient, collaborative approach to customer encounter optimisation. The tools are very practical and the accompanying examples have allowed our teams to translate what may appear to be common sense into embedded best practice.'

Jean-Philippe Lamarcq, VP of Sales, Professional Imaging
e2v technologies, 30 years' field experience

'I thoroughly enjoyed reading *Client Encounters* - it was easy going and informative. Even after many years in the field, I found the book very helpful in laying down the process of our customer relationship. It also highlights points that are difficult to navigate, some of which we may not even realise we are facing!'

Hayssam Balach, VP of Worldwide Sales
Sonics Inc., 23 years' field experience

'*Client Encounters* is an impressive training vehicle for handling Customer-Facing interactions—informative, practical content, methodically structured with a best practices approach to addressing real situational challenges, and with great tips on overcoming obstacles and avoiding pitfalls. The examples cited, the overall approachability, topics that resonate and the friendly, useful guidance make the book a delight to read while improving the likelihood of successful client encounters.'

Camille Kokozaki, Strategic Business Development
20+ years' field experience

'ICON9 contains the tools and processes you need to prepare, realise and follow any kind of customer interaction. Acquiring this know-how is the best way I know to improve your customer relationships, your support outcomes and, hence, your business.'

Bernard Godet, Technical Marketing and Support
e2v technologies, 20+ years' field experience

‘*Client Encounters* will assist committed Applications Engineers to become the next self-aware leaders by providing them with the tools to deal with ambiguous environments (in both their organisations and their customers’), to consistently achieve better results, faster. This is the most precious framework that any engineer dealing with customers can find.’

Alessandro Fasan, Senior Executive Account Manager
Synopsys, 16+ years’ field experience

‘*Client Encounters* helps application engineers realise the importance of their role in the value chain, from the factory to the end user. The book is also concise and the tools easy to remember and reuse—they helped me improve my communication both inside and outside of Cadence!’

Sélim Abou Samra, Staff Application Engineer
Cadence Design Systems, 15 years’ field experience

‘ICON9 is the best and the most useful non-technical training I have ever attended. It’s a collection of simple and efficient tools to maintain good relationships with customers, whatever happens. These tools are not only useful with customers, they also benefit other professional relationships.’

Etienne Bouin, Application Engineer
e2v technologies, 15 years’ field experience

‘This is a fantastic training system to provide us with great approaches for efficient communication and work. Well structured!’

Eric Xu, Senior FAE
Xilinx, 14 years’ field experience

‘I was lucky enough to take one of Andy’s trainings for Application Engineers several years ago—it really impressed me and I still use the simple, pragmatic tools and methods today.’

Stéphanie Fajtl, Customer Support & Application Engineer
STMicroelectronics, 13 years’ field experience

‘The ICON9 training helped me considerably with colleagues, not just with customers. My bug reports and improvement requests now go much more smoothly! I also find it easier to stand up for my interests when with customers, and I have a deeper understanding of the importance and meaning of “win–win”.’

Stéphane Gailhard, Customer Support Manager
Kalray, 13 years’ field experience

‘After following ICON9 training and reading *Client Encounters*, I have been much more structured and efficient when preparing meetings and when talking to prospective customers. It's the simplest tools that make all the difference—they are easy to remember and put into practice.’

David Faure, Managing Director
KDAB France, 12 years’ field experience

‘*Client Encounters* covers a broad spectrum of concepts and skills very much relevant to technical customer interactions. It presents the tools in a structured, methodical and didactic way, easy to apply in practical real-world situations. Beginners as well as seasoned professionals will find it useful and inspirational.’

Maxime Rocca, Senior Staff Field Application Engineer
Xilinx, 10+ years’ field experience

‘I had so much fun reading this book and the tools it has given me are great for dealing with my customers. A must read!’

Céline Tranquillin, Business Development Engineer
Aselta, 10 years’ field experience

‘Having benefited from both the AE training course and the ICON9 book, I believe that the combination makes a perfect package for any CAE or technical manager. The material works for both beginners and experienced people, which means that it’s great for improving teamwork.’

Hugo Kuo, Corporate Application Engineering
Dolphin Integration, 10 years’ field experience

‘I first took Andy’s training in 2011, then again in 2014 (by which time it had taken the ICON9 format). It immediately helped me with everything from preparing important meetings to producing complex documents … and I was surprised to find that the second course further reinforced my professional reflexes. I use the tools and the learning on a daily basis, and they save me a lot of time!’

Vincent Prevost, Senior Field Applications Engineer
7 years’ field experience

‘Clarity, simplicity, effectiveness: the keywords to describe ICON9. The training course really made me question some of my old ideas and the book helped fill the gaps!’

Simon-Alexis Abric, Application Engineer
edXact, 2 years’ field experience

‘It has been my pleasure to work with Andy on deploying the *Client Encounters* concepts across a large population of Customer-Facing Engineers over the past six years. This book is a great source of fundamental tools that help you deal effectively with any kind of client encounter. Witty and concise, and with a sensible emphasis on the meeting preparation phase, it helps with managing angry customers, dynamic product specifications, last-minute meetings and more. Highly recommended and tested in the high-tech environment. An essential read for all engineers!’

Marion McDevitt, Business Learning Manager
STMicroelectronics

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Andy Betts PhD, MIEEE

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This book is dedicated to Sue, Martin and George.
Thank you for your love and support.

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Contents

Preface

'All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way',
Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*

Not long ago, an encounter with a new client—a VP of Field Operations—reminded me of these words from Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. There was nothing extraordinary about him, though he was clearly well adjusted and competent. This impression was reinforced as we got to know each other better—even in the most confusing situations, he seemed to find the path of least resistance to unexpectedly positive outcomes. I have noticed others use similar, uncomplicated methods, with similar, happy results.

On the other hand, I meet plenty of professionals with the opposite tendency. They notice difficulties more readily than opportunities, feel seriously overloaded as a result and, to aggravate matters, get bogged down in non-essential tasks.[1] Their efforts to cope are as varied as their imaginations, in contrast with the simple, uniform approach of the more successful population.

When I shared these observations with others, I discovered not only that this phenomenon had already been noticed, but also that it had a name … the Anna Karenina Principle! In brief, it applies to complex systems where one small thing going wrong can cause big problems: where there is one way to get it right, and millions of ways to mess up.

A technology-driven, commercial environment is a good example of such a complex system. A small oversight or a piece of bad luck can send huge amounts of excellent work down the drain.

So what? Even if this is true, how does it help engineers in this situation?

We can't do much with the Anna Karenina Principle alone, as it is simply an observation. What is missing is a description of the way in which 'all happy Customer-Facing Engineers are alike' and instruction for those who wish to emulate them.

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[1] Surely all of us are like this from time to time—even my exemplary client.

I wrote this book to fill these gaps. It's based on over fifteen years' experience in the field, exposed to the challenges of Customer-Facing work, developing methodologies for my own use and for the teams that I have managed. In doing this work, I have had the good fortune to collaborate with hundreds of engineers, both in operational situations and in training classes, an experience complemented by research and practice in the field of psychology.

The result is the ICON9® toolkit, a collection of tools and methods to:

- Help engineers *win* new customers and bring existing ones over to their point of view
- Favour *support* outcomes which fully satisfy customers while keeping support costs under control
- Enable engineers to *challenge* their customers in a constructive and low-risk manner
- *Structure* pre- and post-sales work for efficiency, teamwork and continuous performance improvement.

The ICON9 tools and methods have been deployed successfully in multiple companies and types of business, in Europe, the USA and the Asia-Pacific region.

My experience shows that ICON9 is of value to both junior and senior engineers. People with little experience of the field appreciate an end-to-end view of the Customer-Facing aspect of their work, while senior engineers find the structure of the toolkit to be novel and helpful. In particular, the terminology, processes and checklists facilitate mentoring of junior colleagues and teamwork in general.

I hope that you enjoy this read and that you find it valuable.

Andy Betts, May 2015

1. Introduction

Customer-Facing Engineers (CFEs) have a pivotal and immensely interesting role in business. Not only are they, by virtue of their exposure to customers, obliged to stay at a high peak of technical competence, they are also pushed to understand the commercial context in which they work and cope with complex, often intercultural communication problems. While the role has considerable challenges (or, perhaps, *because* it has considerable challenges) the intellectual, professional and personal rewards are hard to match.

But who are these people? 'Customer-Facing Engineer' is not a job title, and the reader might legitimately ask what I mean by 'Customer', 'Customer-Facing' and even 'Engineer'.

What I have in mind, firstly, are engineers working in Field Operations in a Business-to-Business (B2B) context—Applications, Marketing and Sales Engineers are typical job titles. There are many others, since variations of company size, product type, commercial environment, etc. make Field Operations rich with exceptions. Product Engineers, Development Engineers, Chief Scientists and many other technically-savvy folk have to work with external clients too.

I therefore use the term 'Customer-Facing Engineer' to describe any person whose core competence is centred on technology but whose job brings them into contact with external clients.

My ambition in writing this book is to help Customer-Facing Engineers tackle confidently challenges at the interface between technology and communication. I propose a structured approach to the Customer-Facing role, providing not only tools for the work, but also terminology and models that can be customised to suit individual and team needs.

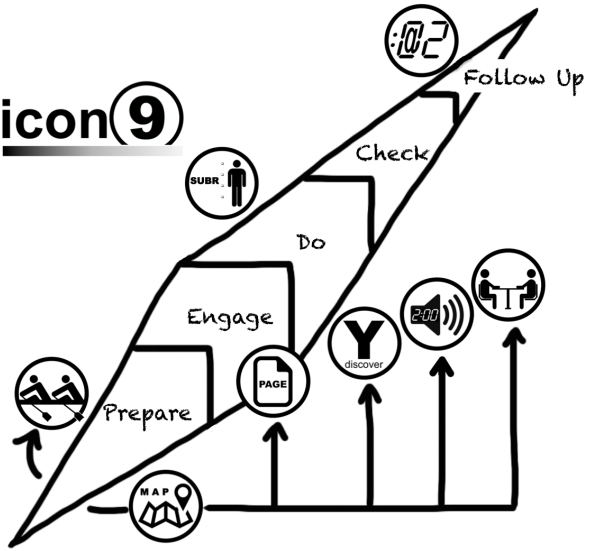
It is a fundamental principle of communication that a message must be adapted to its audience, and this is the main reason for focusing so strongly on Customer-Facing Engineers. Guided by this principle, I have selected (from the vast body of work on human psychology) the concepts that I believe are the most relevant to this audience, organised them in a way that they

will find familiar and illustrated them with relevant examples. I present the results in our tribal language, as scientifically as possible.

The second reason for my focus is that customers are a company's most precious asset. The engineers dealing with them must therefore have some formal basis for their actions.

Consider the strict procedures that companies adopt in order to protect themselves from errors in product releases. Hardware and software sign-off checks are onerous, since it is crucial to deliver near perfection to the customer. Similarly, the closer we get to the customer, the greater the need for communication excellence.

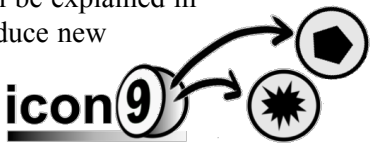
Of course, there is no question of adopting communication procedures as strict as the checks for hardware and software. Instead, we require a set of simple tools that give engineers the support they need when they need it and leaves them free to exploit their natural communication abilities. It must protect them from errors of communication on days when they are not on top form. It must give them a set of references for communicating about communication itself, providing them with a greater consciousness of their professional actions and putting them in a



position to improve their own technique over time. Finally, it must facilitate teamwork.

In summary, we need *a set of operational tools and methods that captures successful CFE practices,* and the ICON9® system provides this. It consists of eight tools organised around an Encounter Process, as shown in the diagram opposite. Each tool is represented by an icon, and the process by a compass needle. For convenience, I will usually refer to this ensemble as 'the Toolkit'.

The ninth icon, incorporated into the logo, represents the openness of the system. As will be explained in Chapter 11, users may easily introduce new tools and methods into ICON9, customising it to their tastes and requirements.



The system is based on well-established principles and described using terminology and examples that Customer-Facing Engineers can easily relate to. Let's consider some of the challenges that it addresses.

Challenges for Customer-Facing Engineers

In support of sales

As a product expert in a design management start-up company, I need to visit a client with my sales colleague to give an introductory presentation. We are expecting to meet about 15 people, including some decision makers. I must therefore sync up with my sales colleague, work on a presentation, prepare answers to the questions that we expect, review areas of the software that I don't know so well, and do some basic research on the customer in question. Of course, I will do these things in parallel with technical work: there is a software release coming up …

In the above example, the challenge is that my mindset for squeezing out the last few bugs from a software release is completely different from the one I need when creating an interesting presentation, and different again from the composed, unhurried attitude that I would like to have when I step up to perform. If I am not careful, I will carry my 'software debug'

mindset into the customer meeting and lose my audience in details that are more important to me than to them. The stress caused by the need to switch between these different attitudes and skills (especially if some of the skills are relatively weak) is often attributed to time pressure but, even if this is also present, it is not the main cause. The fundamental difficulty is managing people-oriented tasks in parallel with technical ones.

For a 'happy' outcome, I need tools that help me to rapidly switch between the various tasks. I am used to jumping quickly between half a dozen different tools on my desktop—this is possible because they each have a simple, well-defined use model. If the tasks of meeting preparation, presentation creation and email processing were equally well structured, then I could quickly switch between them too. I could also interleave them with my technical tasks. ICON9 provides the necessary structure.

Addressing customer issues

I have to make a call to a client to discuss a serious bug that he has found in my product. He has invited a couple of colleagues to the call. I feel a surge of adrenaline accompanied by a mixture of unhelpful emotions. On the one hand, I want to defend my product, which I strongly believe in (in fact, I suspect that the client may be the cause of their own problems). On the other hand, I fear the consequences of a conflict. We need to keep this customer happy, but at what cost? As I consider the possibilities, I become even more apprehensive …

In the second example, above, we are reminded that engineering training has developed my ability to find solutions through the systematic application of theory and process but that, unfortunately, these skills may be obliterated by strong surges of emotion. The danger is that, in my conversation with my customer, I may betray my low opinion of their competence or my irritation with the situation. This could be through a misplaced word, a tone of voice, or my body language. Alternatively, I could overcompensate for the felt emotion, become too passive and end up making unnecessary concessions in order to please the client.

For a 'happier' outcome, I need to have a technique for bringing my emotions under control, and even for using them to

my advantage. This is not going to be easy, since emotions are the enemy of technique, and they start with the upper hand. ICON9 not only provides tools that can be applied directly in a case like this (e.g. the SUBROUTINE and TABLE tools—Chapters 6 and 8), it also promotes professional self-awareness. That is, an ability to stand back from a situation and consider it dispassionately. This helps me to learn more from each client encounter and to see the similarities in circumstances that appear, on the surface, to be quite different. Over time, it therefore improves my ability to manage stressful situations.

Taking on a Sales and Marketing role

I have just taken the position of Technical Sales & Marketing Director in a company where, up to now, all Sales and Marketing work has been done by the CEO. With the growth of the company, this arrangement has become untenable and, since I have always taken a lead in communicating about our products, I got the job (up to now, I have had a series of engineering positions).

Already, I can see that my ability to build relationships and my deep knowledge of our products are necessary *but insufficient* for my new role. I have come away from several meetings with a warm fuzzy feeling, but without a useful result.

My third example, above, touches on an area with which many engineers are not comfortable at all—Sales and Marketing. A strong technical background is both a help and a hindrance in commercial work. While subject matter expertise wins credibility, it also represents a comfort zone that I may drift towards at the expense of my communication and business responsibilities. The work environment exaggerates this phenomenon by favouring specialisation, so that we reinforce our primary strengths at the expense of important secondary skills.

This case is a good example of where tools can help me extend my capabilities to address new roles. They allow me to question my intuition, which will tend to lead me back to my comfort zone, and to think and act differently in unfamiliar situations. It's a little like balancing a book on one's head to ensure correct posture. With enough practice, good posture

becomes instinctive, and only needs to be checked occasionally. The Toolkit favours better communication posture.

Coping with resistance and politics
I have to go to a distant location for a couple of days to introduce some software to our client's design team. It replaces a system that these designers produced and maintained themselves and I am told that the audience will be hostile. In addition, the group in question is being downsized and reorganised. Though I have no influence on any of these events, they are likely to make my task more difficult …

In the final example, above, the product that I will be presenting is complex and it is crucial that my audience grasps and accepts some tricky concepts. If not, they will be worse off than before. The cultural and language barriers are significant and it is going to be hard to win them over.

For a 'happy' outcome, I need a robust process for managing the encounter, a good awareness of the visible and hidden aspects of the communication and the ability to make in-course corrections if difficulties arise. It is not always possible to meet one's objectives, and the case described here looks pretty difficult. In these circumstances, it is all the more important that I act knowingly and with method, to give myself the maximum chance of success. As we'll see, ICON9 reinforces my sense of discipline and professional control, allowing me to cope confidently in tough circumstances.

Challenges for Organisations

The examples of the previous section illustrate how ICON9 helps individual CFEs. In practice, the benefits to them are as varied as their backgrounds and personalities. When we then look at the challenges which confront groups and organisations, yet other advantages emerge.

Modern, technology-based organisations need to reconfigure themselves very quickly in response to changes in their environment (i.e. technological and market forces). A common way to do this is to form 'workgroups', 'SWAT teams' or 'task forces'—just three of the terms used to describe a collection of

people assembled from across an organisation to tackle an extraordinary issue. In this way, CFEs can be thrown together with other CFEs, with Sales and Marketing colleagues, with Product Engineers, and so on, at a moment's notice. The assignments are generally short term, leaving little time for the 'forming, norming and storming' process that teams are supposed to go through in order to reach peak performance (TuckmanJensen 1977).

Although it can be stimulating to participate in such workgroups, it can also be frustrating. There is little motivation to develop a team culture because of the short-term nature of the arrangement. However, there is an urgent need to work efficiently (fulfilling objectives quickly and economically) and effectively (choosing the right objectives), since the people involved all need to get back to their 'day jobs'.

The value of an authoritative external reference

A newly formed work group of 10 engineers is assigned the task of building a house out of Lego® bricks. The only constraints given are the time available and a fixed supply of bricks, and the group is in competition with others who have been assigned the same task. Further, the members of the group all have some past experience of building Lego houses—some are even quite expert at it—but they have never worked together on such a project before.

I imagine two scenarios. In the first, there is a 10-way debate on how to approach the task while, in the second, a member of the group pulls out an existing recipe for the design and construction of Lego houses. An authoritative external reference such as this would allow the group to quickly get itself organised. Given the time pressure, it is likely that even the Lego-house-building veterans (whose own recipes might have been vastly superior to the one proposed, had they ever been written down) would concede that an imperfect reference is better than none at all. The group could then proceed with the recipe's first step: to choose one of five possible architectural styles, for example. It would then move on to the formula for the number of rooms, according to the number of bricks available, etc.

An external reference can structure the group's work without impinging upon its creativity, allowing it to complete its work on time.

To help groups tackle such problems, the Toolkit provides a ready-made set of references that they would otherwise have to develop themselves: simple, recognisable models, checklists and procedures for key tasks.

Of course, the benefits just described for workgroups also apply to fully fledged teams. When ICON9 becomes part of a team culture, the system acts like a foundation upon which high value-added activities can be built. Rather than spending precious time on the choice of method, the team focuses its energy on areas where it can innovate and differentiate. Having an explicit, clearly articulated way of working also helps with the integration of new members. It is both reassuring and motivating to join a team that is well organised and, for existing members, having a common reference—models, diagrams, vocabulary, etc.—facilitates on-the-job training of recruits.

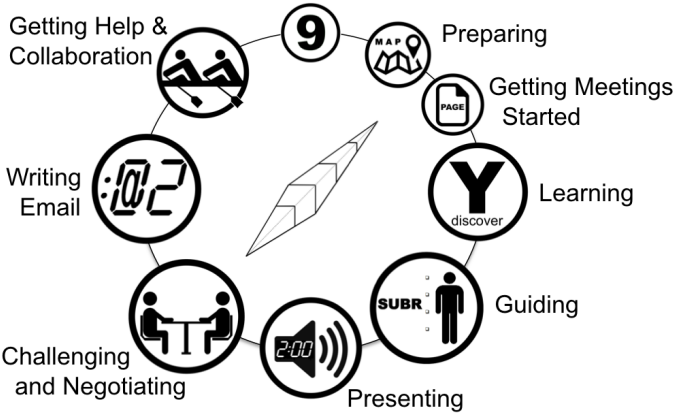
Cross-team coordination (a real case)

In a company that I worked with recently, the Sales and Applications team was involved in complex negotiations with a customer. There were many parameters involved in the deal, including product specification changes. Fortunately, the team included their engineering group in the planning process, copying information on their intended concessions plan to them. This approach is captured in the TABLE tool for negotiation, discussed in Chapter 8.

In this case, it worked extremely well. The engineering group noticed a number of specification changes, identified as potential concessions, that would have been prohibitively expensive to implement. Since these concessions were spotted before the customer had been made aware of them, they were removed from the plan *at zero cost.*

Finally, the example above illustrates the effectiveness of the tools when used across organisations, beyond individual groups and teams. By triggering the sharing of information, it reduces the chances of misunderstanding and collective error.

Organisation of the Book



The diagram above shows the order in which tools and topics are addressed and their relative weights (the size of each icon is proportional to the number of pages dedicated to its associated topic). Starting at the top with a brief introduction of ICON9 (already done), the text proceeds in a clockwise direction to return to ICON9 for a final summary. The first three topics—*Preparing* an encounter with MAP, *Getting Meetings Started* with PAGE and *Learning* with DISCOVER-Y—can be quickly learned. The more advanced topics start with *Guiding* and move on through *Presenting*, and so on.

The needle at the centre of the diagram represents the Encounter Process, which is presented in the next chapter and is a reference throughout the book.

Terminology and Scope

Encounters and Meetings

I use the word ‘encounter’ to describe a period during which I am in contact with a client for a specific purpose, such as selling a product or service, or a discussion of their support needs. An encounter may be face-to-face, screen-to-screen (using teleconferencing), by telephone, or by a combination of these means. It can span several meetings.

A ‘meeting’ is a single contact event. It can therefore be done using one of the methods just mentioned but, unless my teleconferencing system breaks down and I have to switch, it will not use a combination.

In the text, I use the terms encounter and meeting interchangeably when the discussion applies equally well to either (as it usually does).

Customer-Facing Engineers (CFEs)

The term ‘Customer-Facing Engineer’ represents any engineer with customer-facing duties, regular or occasional, working in a B2B context. For example:

Field Applications Engineers (FAEs)

Working to balance multiple, often conflicting, requirements in both pre-sales and post-sales roles.

Engineering Consultants

Working with clients from specification through to the delivery of services and custom products. Their work is a mix of direct intervention, training and teaching by example.

Applications and Product Engineers

Working in an office, lab or factory setting, liaising between Design / Research & Development (R&D) teams and field staff, with remote customer contact and perhaps some occasional face-to-face communication.

Design/R&D Engineers

Strongly focused on development tasks, but with a need to transfer their knowledge efficiently to their colleagues and customers.

Sales and Marketing Engineers

Commercially oriented but with strong technical backgrounds, they need to excel in all aspects of communication: to understand clients, to inform them and to negotiate with them.

Engineering Team Leaders/Managers

Guiding development and field operations and wishing to improve processes and outcomes. In FAE Managers and Sales Managers,

for example, these roles are often combined with others mentioned above.

Me (the Customer-Facing Engineer) and Aude

I would like to present Myself—easily recognisable from the M of my body shape. I write in the first person a lot, both to express ideas as an author and to put myself in the place of a Customer-Facing Engineer.

May I also introduce Aude, my client, who is referred to as the Audience in many contexts. Aude can generally be thought of as an individual, external client—a customer—though there will be occasions where Aude represents an internal client—a colleague—or multiple clients of either type. I always refer to clients with the neutral 'they', 'them' and 'their', to avoid 'he or she', 'his or her' and other clumsy constructions.

Navigating the Text

Please note the following points:

- There are two Tables of Contents (TOCs): a brief one at the start of the book and a detailed one at the end. While the book is not indexed, the Detailed TOC should enable you to find specific points quickly.
- Where a chapter includes the description of a new tool, the tool and its use model are summarised in an 'In Brief' section at the end of the chapter.

- www.icon9.net contains an online version of the Toolkit, an extended bibliography (with links to references) and other complementary material to the book.

I suggest that, once you have read the book, the Detailed TOC (Annex 3) is a good re-entry point. For sections that are of particular interest, I recommend consulting the associated information and references on the web.

I will be happy to receive comments, questions and suggestions for the book and the web pages.

2. The Encounter Process

'The electron is a theory that we use; it is so useful in understanding the way nature works that we can almost call it real',
Richard Feynman

Like the electron, an encounter is an abstract concept. It cannot be seen directly, and its existence is noticed only because of the effect that it has on the adjacent environment. Electrons produce current and light. Encounters result in progress and emotion (positive or negative, and of varying intensity). Like the electron, an encounter also has a model associated with it, which is the subject of this chapter.

Even if the models that are used to describe human interactions are less precise than those used for physics, they are just as useful when appropriately applied. When people come together in a meeting, they interact in ways that, while not predictable, do fall into a discernible pattern. As I will explain, if certain process steps are not followed, there is a high probability of problems such as resistance, incomprehension and slow progress. Here are a couple of examples:

It isn't just about relationships—process matters too

We finally got an order from Display22 and, in my role as Senior Applications Engineer, I am ramping up the technical support programme for them. Part of this job requires that I get to know their key technical people; I find out who they are and invite them to join my team for a short seminar followed by lunch. This works extremely well—my team is able to make many new contacts with their engineers. We all get on so well, in fact, that a bowling evening is organised (paid for by my company). This is a hit, too. Through close contact we become familiar with the inner workings of Display22 and settle into a comfortable routine, with weekly status meetings followed by a trip to a pub or restaurant.

Eventually, my boss loses patience. 'You've produced lots of random information, and some terrific expense bills', he tells me, 'but I don't see any progress in the account!'

The problem? The client relationship has left us comfortable, but stuck. Although we have done a great job of engaging and finding out what the client's problems are, we have not moved the conversation on to new business and commitments.

My second example is also based on 'Display22', but played out in a different way:

Jumping ahead too quickly

When the order is received from Display22, my first action is to contact the project manager, Ernest Mann, who I know from the pre-sales work. I am keen to have him try out some advanced software options, even if these are not covered by Display22's initial purchase.

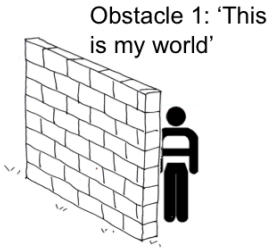
I take the opportunity of our first weekly meeting to introduce the subject. He is a little reluctant, citing the load that his engineers already have to learn the basics of the tool. I insist, however, as I know that the advanced options are powerful and impressive. I promise Ernest that I will cover them in the technical training and will install the extra software temporarily, all without charge.

This is to no avail. The Display22 engineers don't look at the extra options and Ernest, rather than being grateful for my proactive behaviour, becomes extremely critical of our software and rather impatient with the support.

The problem? I neglected to engage with Ernest or his team properly and pushed my ideas on them before finding out about their real needs. Furthermore, I focused all my efforts on one person, and ended up alienating him by being impatient!

The Obstacle Course

A client encounter, whether it consists of a single call or is stretched out over several meetings, is an obstacle course.



The first difficulty is the barrier that protects my client from the outside world: they are preoccupied with their

own plans and activities.[2] I have to overcome any resistance there may be to letting me into their world before I can get the meeting off to a good start.

Obstacle 2: 'You don't know me and my problems'

The next obstacle could be that my client feels they are the only one who can understand their 'unique' problems. I therefore have to find out as much as I can about their situation and convince them that I have fully understood their issues.

Even when my client can see that I have grasped their predicament, they are likely to have their own ideas about the solutions needed. This is the third obstacle: a client who is convinced that they know what they want. I have to overcome this resistance, which often takes the form of 'Yes, but …' responses to suggestions from my side.

Obstacle 3: 'I know what I want'

Obstacle 4: 'Oops, I have to go!'

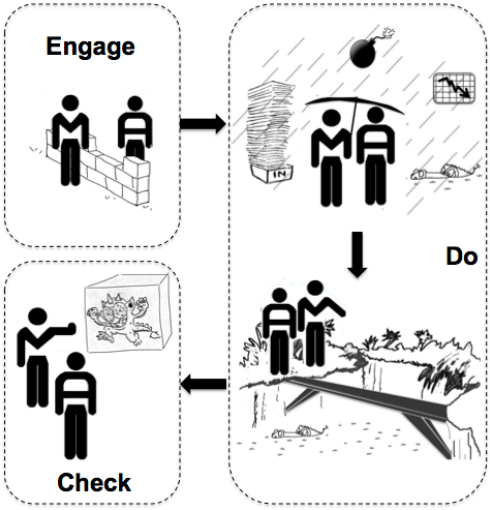
Once an agreeable solution is found, the final obstacle is the Hurry Monster, which causes everyone to run off from the meeting to do important things, forgetting to capture the results of their passage through the obstacle course together.

[2] As mentioned earlier, because the client is referred to as the Audience in several contexts in this book, they are represented by a figure with an A-shaped body in the diagrams.

Steps of the Encounter Process

Since I will be faced with this obstacle course wherever I go, it is critical to have a process for dealing with it.

In the diagram below, I illustrate the work done in the three steps of the Encounter Process where client contact is involved (remember that the person with the M-shaped body is me!).

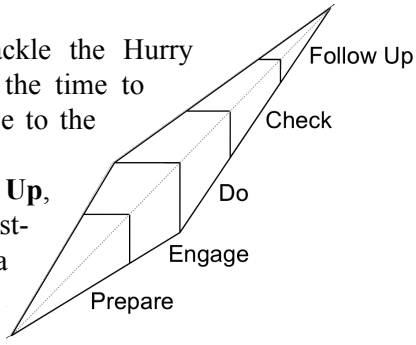


In the **Engage** step, the initial barriers to communication are broken down and an agreement reached on how to run the encounter.

The **Do** step is the core of the meeting, where I explore the client's concerns and try to work out a solution with them.

In the **Check** step, I tackle the Hurry Monster so that we can take the time to consolidate our work and agree to the next steps.

I add **Prepare** and **Follow Up**, where I look after pre- and post-meeting work. The result is a five-step process, as shown in the adjacent diagram.

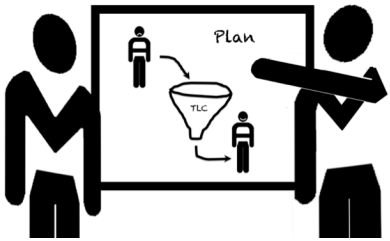


All five steps are critical, and their order too. Experience shows that, when an encounter goes wrong, problems are a result of process steps that have been skipped or addressed in the wrong sequence.

Prepare

'No plan ever survived contact with the enemy' is a popular military saying, and it may sometimes seem that time spent preparing an encounter is wasted. However, an alternative quote from Dwight Eisenhower illustrates the value of the Prepare step: 'In preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless, *but planning is indispensable*'.

For example, just a minute's thought before picking up the telephone can make a big difference to the outcome of a call. Encounter preparation time can vary widely, according to the importance of the event, but it's always beneficial.

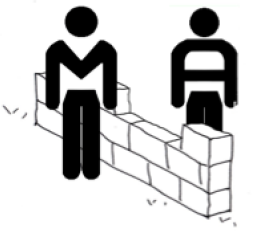


Joint preparation with colleagues is an important part of the preparation phase. As already mentioned, the 'Me' character can represent a single Customer-Facing Engineer or a number of people in my organisation. In the latter case, it's vital that this encounter team be aligned on roles, approach, goals and process.

For example, once in front of clients, it will be difficult to exchange information without them knowing. A well-prepared team will have agreed discreet ways of communicating in advance (this topic will be picked up again in Chapter 4).

The tools used in the preparation phase—to agree agendas, anticipate audiences, design presentations, etc.—are even more critical when multiple people are involved in the engagement with the client.

Engage



In this step I come into contact with my client, either physically or remotely. Even if I know them well, the first part of the Engage step is important for establishing good communications, allowing each party to understand the other's level of motivation and their readiness and ability to contribute. For example, if the person I am meeting seems less energetic and motivated than usual, an effective Engage step will allow me to notice that something is amiss (even if I cannot necessarily understand why).

Note that the obstacle of the initial wall of resistance exists even when people are open to meeting. It is the natural result of the coming together of entities travelling with different speeds and directions. Prior to the encounter, each person is moving independently, and so they have to perform a kind of docking manoeuvre, matching their trajectories.

It is important that I make a positive initial impression through my posture, voice, facial expression, etc. To do this, I need to make sure that I am in good shape—prepared, alert and reasonably relaxed—before the meeting starts. The client's overall impression will depend a great deal on what they pick up subconsciously.

These considerations are just as important when I already know my client. In fact, I should be particularly vigilant if I've already a good working relationship with my client and not take their willingness to receive me for granted. Perhaps they have particular worries today—pressures from work or elsewhere?

Let's start with the 'easy stuff':

9 CHECKLIST

- ☐ I should arrive 'on time', interpreting the latter expression according to the local culture (if in doubt, it is best to really be on time!).
- ☐ I take a minute or two to think about the people that I am meeting, to get focused on them.

- ☐ If I am meeting people for the first time, I prepare for the mental effort of remembering new names and I make sure that I have my business cards ready.

I should ensure that everyone in the meeting is properly *included*. Inclusion is a term that comes from the psychology of the workplace (Schutz 1994) and, in order to ensure a good level of inclusion, it is necessary to take some explicit action. Pre-meeting chat is not sufficient.

How I achieve inclusion will depend on the nature of the meeting, the culture I'm working in, the type of meeting, the duration, the mix of people, the medium (face-to-face or telephone?), etc.

The key thing is that each person should say something, however brief. This ensures that everyone is integrated into the proceedings, that they are acknowledged by the other people present, and they put their other concerns aside to concentrate on the meeting itself.

A simple technique—to break the ice at regular, weekly meetings, for example—is to ask each participant to mention one thing that has happened to them recently. For a three-day technical review meeting with a customer, a more serious introduction would be appropriate.

Whatever method is chosen, taking a few minutes out at the start of the Engage step to achieve this is an excellent practice.

The second half of the Engage step can then transition from the alignment of *people* to the alignment of *expectations and plans*. At the very least, there should be agreement on how much time is available. What's at stake here is both the efficiency and effectiveness of the encounter—the PAGE tool, which is presented in Chapter 4, can be used to facilitate this transition.

Do

I now enter into the core of the meeting. In the context of CFE work, the most common reason for meeting a client is to help them in some way. However, before offering any solutions to my

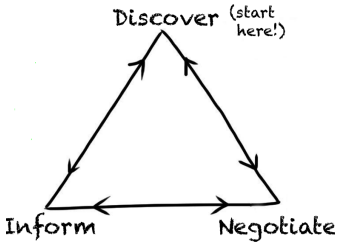
client, I have to find out what their problems are. To do this, I use Discovery—Learning Discovery to find out simple facts and Guiding Discovery to dig deeper and understand the reasons behind my client's stated needs. Spending sufficient time on Discovery is key to effective encounters. Not only does it ensure that my technical understanding of client issues is adequate, but it also allows me to establish the value of any solutions that I may ultimately propose.

Once enough has been learned about my client's situation and problems then, and only then, should I proceed to potential solutions and next steps.

While each encounter unfurls in its own unique way, this simple description leads me to identify three essential components:

- **Discover**, in which the information flow is predominantly from the client. I question them about their situation, problems and needs.
- **Inform**, in which the information flow is predominantly towards the client. I make suggestions and I may also express my needs.
- **Negotiate**, in which the information flow is in both directions. We search for mutually acceptable solutions.

I can picture these three components as a 'DIN triangle', and the core of any encounter will therefore be a dance around the triangle, starting from the D node.



Each of the three DIN components is a major topic in itself, with its own characteristics and tools, and each of them will be discussed in detail later.

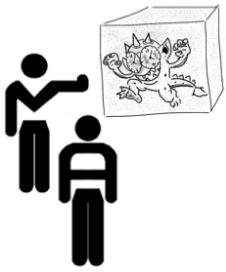
Check

Let's say that my encounter has gone well—prepared, engaged and executed correctly, so that everyone is enthusiastic about the agreed next steps.

As always, time is pressing and my client has to run off to another meeting. Also, in spite of our meeting's apparent success, a couple of unfinished items remain and a member of my client's team seems rather withdrawn. Do they not agree with what was decided? Do they need more information or debate? Or is some completely unrelated problem on their minds?

In other words, even the most successful meetings result in a number of open questions and things to tidy up. If they are left in an unresolved state, the good work of the encounter may be undone or even turn out to be counterproductive. For example, a bubble of enthusiasm can quickly turn into a feeling of disappointment if perceived promises are not fulfilled. If a client does not get the solution that they expect for an issue already discussed, then they may not want to talk to me about it again. As far as the withdrawn team member is concerned, have I inadvertently created an enemy? Are they now hostile to my cause and could they undermine my efforts? It is important to sort this out!

In order to make these checks, I need to stall the Hurry Monster. To do this, I have to anticipate his arrival, keeping a tight rein on the meeting agenda from the beginning. This does not mean sticking *rigidly* to the initial plan—who knows where the discussion will take us?—but it does mean:



- Finding out how much time people have available at the beginning of the meeting (during the Engage step)
- Bringing the Do step to a halt early enough so that there is time to check for completeness before everyone goes their separate ways.

These precautions in the Engage and Do steps then allow me to tidy up in the Check step. I must check for completeness and agree action points—just like a doctor who makes sure at the end of a consultation that their patient is in a fit state to leave the surgery and that all the necessary medicines have been prescribed.

In summary, the Check step is the essential link between the Do and Follow Up phases, ensuring that:

- ☐ Agenda points have been covered or we have decided how to deal with them (later, or not at all). In other words, that the *process* is complete.
- ☐ Goals have been met or we have decided how to deal with them (later, or not at all). In other words, that the *content* is complete.
- ☐ Next steps, owners and due dates are agreed.
- ☐ Everyone involved (including myself) is either comfortable with the meeting's outcome or I have noted potential issues, for me to address later.
- ☐ Anything else that could be considered as a lack of completeness—something not completely dealt with, a concern, a niggle—is noted and, if appropriate, discussed.

Follow Up

The first thing that can happen in this final phase is that all the good work done during the encounter is … forgotten. Everybody's personal Hurry Monster takes over. Other encounters and events occupy available mental bandwidth. Soon, just about the only vestige of our last meeting becomes the date of the next one. As a result, when we all get together again, people's memories of agreements are fuzzy and a significant portion of the work has to be reviewed—perhaps even renegotiated. Cans of worms reopen, to the frustration of all involved.

What is needed, of course, is a written record of the meeting outcome and its action points. An email of the meeting minutes is usually adequate, and techniques for the effective use of email are discussed in Chapter 9. This record is both a stimulus for agreed

actions and, for open items where agreement will be needed on actions, a written record helps to avoid arguments about who said who would do what.

This phase can also serve as a kind of cooling-off period. For example, I might use it to verify that certain ideas which came up during the encounter are implementable. This could involve technical and legal due diligence work—are the ideas OK from the engineering point of view, and do they meet confidentiality, business, procedural and other requirements?

Finally, notice that the Follow Up phase makes the Encounter Process recursive, since other Encounter Processes may result from it. In Chapter 10, I will discuss the business of following up on commitments using assistance from colleagues. This will involve new meetings and, therefore, the Encounter Process.

The Encounter Process		
Prepare	Pre-encounter work	Define objectives, audience and plan (possibly with colleagues).
Engage	First contact with the client (either first ever contact, or simply the initial phase of a new meeting)	Take the time to get in sync with the client, to understand their status and motivation.
	Getting down to work	Align on the purpose, agenda and goals for the encounter.
Do	The core of the encounter	Shift between questioning, informing and negotiating as needed (the Discover, Inform, Negotiate triangle).
Check	The end of the contact part of the encounter	Make sure that all loose ends are tied up and that next steps are agreed.
Follow Up	Post-encounter work	Record the outcome (minutes of the meeting) and perform assigned next steps where possible.
		Deal with known vulnerabilities and pitfalls (e.g. confidentiality, politics, technical failure).

In Brief

- Understanding and using the Encounter Process is a prerequisite to consistently achieving effective client meetings.
- The Prepare, Engage, Do, Check, Follow Up structure gives us a high-level view of essential meeting steps, and it is critical that none of these steps are skipped.
- The Prepare step is always beneficial, even when it turns out to be impossible to implement the plans that result from it.
- The Engage step describes initial contact with my client and the business of getting the encounter on track. Both these points must be attended to at every meeting, whether participants know each other and have already prepared the encounter or not.
- The Do step is the core of the encounter: Discover, Inform and Negotiate. These three components of the Do step are described in detail in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8.
- The Check step is used to verify the completeness of the encounter. It is necessary to ensure that all participants are OK with the encounter outcome and that the results of the work are reviewed. All open issues must either be closed, or noted for future closure (next steps).
- The Follow Up step completes the work started during the Check phase by recording agreements made in that phase and completing next steps in a timely way, where possible. The work of following up from the encounter inevitably launches new ones, making the Encounter Process recursive.

3. Preparing: MAP

Suppose that, when starting out to an unknown destination, I just type my target coordinates into my GPS and set off. If I am lucky, then I will end up at my destination on time. If not, then, lacking any feeling for the terrain, I could become hopelessly lost (how many GPS users end up in Ashford, Kent instead of Ashford, Surrey, I wonder?—both are just outside of London, but they are eighty miles apart). GPS is a fine system, but the technology can disconnect me from reality.

Be aware that there is an equivalent to GPS for encounter preparation: Get PowerPoint[3] Slides! It has similar mind-numbing properties to its route-finding counterpart and consists of planning a meeting around a slide set, then letting PowerPoint drive the proceedings. Slides are useful, of course, but I should not rely on them to manage meetings. Just as overuse of GPS can cause me to lose touch with the physical terrain, so the Get PowerPoint Slides approach can cause me to lose contact with my clients.

Even though I might still use slides, I use a tool called MAP for tactical encounter preparation.

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[3] PowerPoint® is a registered trademark of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and other countries.

Giving too much control to the slide set

While working for a company that was prominent in its field, I was involved in a Technical Review Meeting with a major customer. Our preparation was extensive, with a lot of work going into the presentations. Then, when it was all over and the wine and cheese were bringing matters to a close, I asked my champion customer for some feedback.

And why had he been so (uncharacteristically) quiet throughout the proceedings?

'Well,' he replied, 'you spent all day telling us how brilliant you were, and so there didn't seem to be much left to say.'

Oops! We had fallen into the old trap, focusing excessively on the slide set (GPS: Get PowerPoint Slides). As a result, the organisation of the meeting had been far too biased towards our presentations and what we wanted to tell the customer.

In fact, the only encounter preparation that worked out well that day was done by the Sales VP's Personal Assistant. She had baked a fantastic rhubarb pie for the break, and was the only one of us who had the client's real needs in mind!

Strategic versus Tactical Preparation

Broadly speaking, there are two types of encounter preparation: *strategic* and *tactical,* and it is best not to confuse them. If I do, then I may feel well prepared for a meeting when, in fact, I have overlooked one or the other.

Strategic preparation involves assessing my goals and capabilities, as a person and as a representative of my organisation, assessing the characteristics and requirements of my client base, understanding my potential value to this audience and working out how to transform this value into good business. Strategic preparation is usually not associated with a single encounter; it is more likely to be performed for a particular market or account. It is a long-term activity.

On the other hand, tactical preparation (the purpose of MAP) has to be done for each and every encounter. It must combine the results of my strategic preparation with specific information and constraints about the encounter in question, helping me to cope with the unexpected and make predictable progress.

MAP for Tactical Encounter Preparation

The MAP acronym provides a simple way to crystallise pre-encounter thoughts. It stands for:

- **My objectives** for this encounter, as an individual and for my organisation
- **Audience** research, background on the people I'll meet, anticipating their questions and concerns, and understanding their company/organisation's strengths and weaknesses
- **Plan,** adapted to the occasion.

This MAP provides the same benefit as a map for a journey: it gives me a picture of where I am going, makes me less dependent on technological props and helps me to adapt to changing circumstances. Here are some details of each of its three elements.

My objectives

My objectives are:

- Private (not for client viewing)
- Immediate (concerning just this encounter)
- Multidirectional (my needs and theirs).

The My in 'My objectives' is there to emphasise that these are *private* objectives which may go beyond the meeting goals that I expose to my client when we meet. They could include, for example, 'Convince my client that their project is doomed' or 'Have my client pay extra for a software upgrade', which are aims that I would not announce openly at the start of a meeting. This is OK—I can remain honest and authentic without being naively transparent.

My objectives are the *immediate* ones for the encounter, rather than for the project with which it is connected. For example, if my project is a $10 million order that we hope to receive next year, my immediate objective will be something like, 'Obtain an introduction to the VP of R&D', or 'Discover any possible

obstacles to the sale'. Focusing on immediate objectives *restricts the scope of the MAP to the encounter concerned*.

Finally, My objectives should be *multidirectional*:

- ☐ Information I want *from* my client
- ☐ Information to give *to* them
- ☐ Items to discuss or negotiate *with* them.

Whenever I work with Customer-Facing Engineers on the MAP tool I invariably find that they focus on the information that they wish to give *to* their clients, especially when the encounter preparation includes the production of a presentation. I speculate that this error has several, somewhat contradictory causes, including:

- An excessive focus on one's own products or technology, and a desire to impress the client with them.
- Blindness to the many holes in one's understanding of the client's needs and, therefore, to the importance of filling these holes.
- A misplaced or exaggerated desire to please the client.

All three can be resisted by ensuring that My objectives are multidirectional.

Of course, if I am working in the encounter with colleagues, then 'My objectives' means our joint objectives. In fact, MAP is particularly effective for collaborative work: it requires almost no time to learn and it provides a simple structure and order for group discussions.

Audience

The term 'Audience' is used here to mean the set of clients expected at the encounter. The Audience could also be a 'real' audience, in the sense of an audience at a seminar or training course.

Key data on my audience includes:

- ☐ Names, affiliations and connections to other people, organisations and projects
- ☐ Questions to anticipate and obstacles that may arise
- ☐ Aims and priorities of their organisation (see Chapter 8 and the importance of understanding intentions)
- ☐ Unknowns about the audience.

It is crucial to 'put myself in the audience's shoes'. I can do this by visualising my audience, or remembering a conversation that I have had with them, or perhaps by talking about them to someone. Just so long as I focus outwards, towards my audience, rather than retreating inwards, absorbed by my own preoccupations.

To anticipate the audience's state of mind, consider their:

- ☐ Situation: including their perception of that situation
- ☐ Problems: their issues and concerns
- ☐ Needs: what they want and what they expect from me.

These three simple points are crucial to client conversations, and they are discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

If the encounter is particularly important and an in-depth analysis is desired, then there are many tools available for this (for example, a web search for Stakeholder Analysis will reveal many ways to analyse an audience).

Just as important as the accuracy of my analysis is the effort taken to get the audience in mind. Experience shows that this pays off handsomely when the client meeting takes place. I get in tune with my audience much more quickly since my neural equipment is already up and running the right program.

What if I don't have the time to do any real audience preparation? Even if my call is in just two minutes, then I still have time to form a mental picture of the audience—their Situation, Problems and Needs—and push other preoccupations to the back of my mind.

Plan

The Plan must take a form that is suited to the task, and I can choose any planning tools that I like, or none at all. As already

noted, even if the planning process is always valuable it is often impossible to put plans into practice. They may become out of date even before the planning spreadsheet is closed and emailed out.

Cooper and Castellino articulated a *minimum* requirement for an effective plan (CooperCastellino 2012). I call this a *First Move* plan and it consists of just:

- A list of tasks to tackle (not prioritised)
- A decision on which of them to do first.

The First Move approach is not a panacea, but it can be a great panic-killer, allowing progress in complex situations that are nearly overwhelming.

As Cooper and Castellino wrote:

People are often surprised to find that having tackled the first thing, many of the other actions identified don't even need to be done. Yes, things change and people find themselves achieving their outcome in ways they hadn't known were possible. For example, think about a time you prepared for a difficult conversation. You may have had a clear outcome, worked out all the things you wanted to say and what to say first. After you said that first thing, a conversation ensued that you certainly didn't predict. You responded to what the other person said, and the conversation took a very different direction—yet you still met your outcome.

A First Move plan is not an easy way out either. It still requires careful thought and also the commitment to get on and tackle whichever task is identified as being the most important!

If something more elaborate than a First Move plan is called for, several of the tools in this book are designed for use with MAP, and they plug into its Plan step. This use model is described in the 'MAP as a Front End to Other Tools' section, on page 34.

Complex Situation, Simple Tactics

Strategic versus tactical, MAP-based preparation

I have just joined a company that makes robot arms. My strategic preparation for the job starts with my capabilities, which, I learn, are to produce light, robust, intelligent robot components to specification. My organisation has experience with industrial assembly, food sorting and military applications, though the range of possible uses for the robot arms is vast. At the personal level, I have a mix of electrical and mechanical engineering expertise, some of which was acquired through formal training, and some through an obsession with micro mouse competitions—racing custom-built electromechanical mice through a maze.

Our customer base—the audience—consists of Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs), who assemble end products from components provided by their suppliers. They are technically expert and prefer to keep us at a distance from the end customer (their clients) by reducing their requirements down to purely technical specifications. With the exception of the military projects, project lifetimes are around three to four years, and design cycles for new products are 12 to 18 months.

My company has developed a number of ways of interfacing with the OEMs. It first proposes a demonstration of our technology, using a purpose-built demonstration robot. If things go well, and since the technology is complicated, we then offer a two-day workshop, from which a specification should emerge for use in commercial negotiations. Once the OEM has become a customer, we then propose a support process that uses online tools.

The above three paragraphs give an idea of the type of information that figures in my strategic preparation of my work to support the robot arm business. Now suppose that an unexpected event appears on the horizon: a meeting request from the European Space Agency (ESA), who are interested in fitting a robot arm to a moon lander (not our Moon, a moon). I will need to present technical information about the robot arms, and maybe also tell them about our technology roadmap.

Continued on next page ...

cntd.

If I were to base my preparation on existing slide sets, then I would be starting from a presentation that explained our capabilities to an OEM audience and which led up to the proposal of a demonstration, followed by a two-day workshop. The technology roadmap would also be biased towards the characteristics of the OEM market—three- to four-year product lifetimes and 12- to 18-month design cycles. Instead, I define the following MAP:

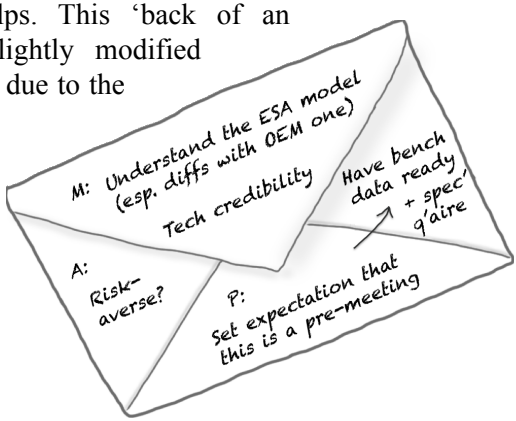
My objectives: (1) Understand the ESA project model, particularly the differences with the OEM one, (2) show technical credibility.

Audience: (1) I need to check the ESA project timescales, which I believe are five years plus, (2) I need to check how they address risks —I expect them to be conservative and risk-averse, given that reliability in their systems must be a strong requirement.

Plan: (1) Agree agenda and goals in advance, by mail, (2) find out if we have any links, however tenuous, with aerospace projects, (3) have ready a short presentation focused on technical capabilities, rather than applications examples (all our material for the latter is irrelevant).

In the above case, the extended description of the overall situation and strategic considerations contrasts with the narrow focus of the MAP-based preparation.

A simple variant of the above case is easy to imagine: suppose the ESA meeting request is received with extremely little notice. Further, it arrives on a day that's already crowded with important tasks. Even if the only pre-meeting planning that I have time for has to be jotted down on the nearest scrap of paper, MAP still helps. This 'back of an envelope' MAP is slightly modified from the previous one, due to the rushed circumstances.

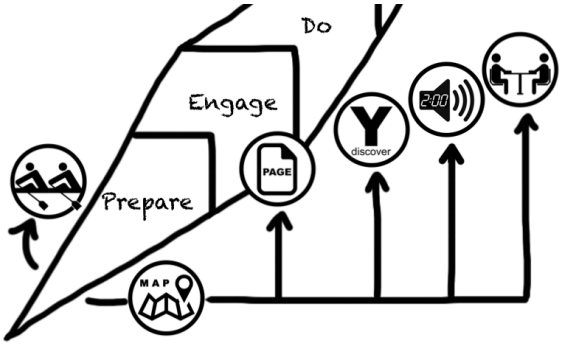


For the Plan part, I decide to play for time by suggesting that the meeting be treated as a preliminary to a later and, by implication, better prepared affair. Given the short notice, the only data I can think of that it is suitable (and safe) for this meeting is from some benchmarks that show our technology in a good light. I also have a list of questions on the client's technical requirements (the 'spec') that we could use to structure the 'discovery' part of the meeting (see Chapters 5 and 6 for more on Discovery techniques).

The tactical preparation of MAP helps me to focus on the key points that are needed here and now. Instead of my long-term strategy, I define my *immediate* objectives for the encounter. Aware of gaps in my knowledge about the client, I aim for a *multidirectional* exchange of information. Rather than a general idea of the market or an account, which was the focus of my strategic preparation, I now *focus on a specific client*. Instead of thinking of all the things that I might propose to my client, I *plan a particular action*—a presentation of a certain product or the negotiation of dates and resources, for example.

In summary, when I need to prepare a specific encounter, MAP helps me to crystallise the most important information and actions from the mass of data available. It provides a concise structure for my thoughts, making them clearer to me and easier to share with colleagues.

MAP as a Front End to Other Tools



For the following tools:

- PAGE
- DISCOVER-Y
- TWO-MINUTE MESSAGE
- TABLE
- OAR

… their use model starts with a definition of My objectives and Audience; then the Plan part of MAP is implemented by the tool in question. For example, the TWO-MINUTE MESSAGE is a tool for planning the content of presentations, and it produces a short synopsis (a message that can be read out in two minutes). Before I start writing this synopsis, however, I have to define My objectives and Audience for the presentation.

This relationship between MAP and the five tools mentioned is represented in the diagram of the ICON9® system opposite. This organisation simplifies the Toolkit, since the 'M' and 'A' parts of MAP do not have to be reinvented for each of the tools to which it 'connects'. They just reuse the terminology and methods discussed in this chapter to define the objectives and audience associated with their use.

Keeping It Simple

'It seems that perfection is attained not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing else to take away',[4]
Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (aviator and writer)

MAP is so simple that I used to feel uneasy about calling it a tool. Surely people would expect something more elaborate than these three letters? Engineers are used to rocket science, and the customer-related difficulties they face are extremely complex. Suggesting that MAP will help them seems like offering a hammer to someone trying to defuse a nuclear bomb!

However, my experience has shown that the brevity of MAP is a real, practical asset. It would be quite easy to augment the

[4] Original text (Saint-Exupéry 1939): Il semble que la perfection soit atteinte non quand il n'y a plus rien à ajouter, mais quand il n'y a plus rien à retrancher.

acronym with complex, subsidiary tools that formalise the different aspects of one's objectives, audience and plan. However, such complications would kill the spirit of the tool, which is that the key to preparation is *not* to think of everything. *It is to avoid overlooking anything really important.*

The advantage of simplicity is particularly evident when several people collaborate to prepare a meeting or a call. MAP allows us to exchange ideas quickly and not to overlook some crucial basics.

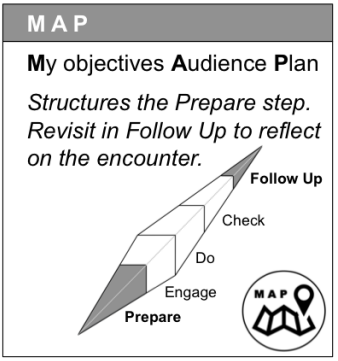
The latter point is just as important when some of the people concerned with a meeting don't actually attend it. MAP is then invaluable for the meeting debrief (in the Follow Up phase). If the MAP checklist that was agreed before the meeting is used to structure the minutes, then the absentees can quickly see which objectives were attained and which were not, how the audience turned out to be compared to expectations, and whether or not the original plan worked out.

I use MAP all the time and can vouch for its effectiveness. Even so, I am amazed by the positive feedback on the tool that I have received from training courses and workshops. In spite of (or perhaps because of) its simplicity, it is probably the most widely adopted of all the tools that I share with CFEs.

So, put aside that GPS and start preparing your next client encounter with a MAP!

In Brief

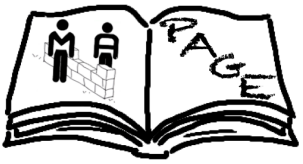
- Tactical preparation crystallises the output of long-term, strategic preparation into a concise form for a specific encounter: My objectives, Audience and Plan.
- My objectives are:
  - Private (not for client viewing)
  - Immediate (concern just this encounter)
  - Multidirectional.
- Multidirectional means:
  - Stuff that I wish to discover *from* my client
  - Information to give *to* them
  - Things to negotiate *with* them.
- To get the right focus on my Audience before an encounter, I assess their Situation, Problems and Needs—my perspective and theirs. Other tools, such as DISCOVER-Y (Chapter 5), may help me to anticipate the Audience's viewpoint.
- The Plan can be a simple 'First Move' plan, or it can be implemented using other tools.
- MAP may be used in combination with the tools PAGE, DISCOVER-Y, TWO-MINUTE MESSAGE, TABLE and OAR.



4. Getting Meetings Started: PAGE

'You don't manage time, you manage yourself within time',[5]
François Delivré

Persuading a client to take the time to meet can be a difficult task in itself. Having succeeded in organising a meeting, it is therefore extremely important to make best use of the time reserved for it. Furthermore, since my clients will also consider this time to be precious, effective management of the proceedings is a good way to build credibility with them.



A necessary condition for effective meetings is to get off to a good start. This means reaching agreement on the main meeting parameters so that there is a reference to steer it back to if the discussion ever strays off course. This is where the PAGE tool comes in. It aligns the expectations of those present, and gets them onto the same page.

The PAGE Acronym

PAGE stands for:

9 CHECKLIST

- **P**urpose: Why are we meeting? Is it to share information, plan something, review something, etc.?
- **A**genda: How are we going to work? How will we organise our time?
- **G**oals: What are we aiming to achieve *with this meeting*? (a list of specific points)
- **E**ndorsement: Does everyone agree? Are there other points to add?

[5] Original text (Delivré 1997): On ne gère pas son temps, on se gère soi-même dans le temps.

The first three points may be prepared in advance of the meeting, perhaps in collaboration with the client, but they must always be revisited in the meeting itself.

The difference between 'objectives', 'purpose' and 'goals' is important in this context. My objectives, as explained in the previous chapter, are private (hence *My* objectives). They are to be prepared in advance of the meeting, in collaboration with the appropriate colleagues. They may well include statements about my clients, and they are not intended for them to see. For instance a valid objective is 'We will try to get the client to accept a reduced level of on-site support', but it's not something that I would announce at the start of the meeting.

Purpose and Goals, on the other hand, are public. Defining the Purpose of a meeting replies to the question 'W*hy* are we having this meeting', whereas setting the Goals answers 'W*hat* will we achieve by the end of this meeting?' The Purpose of a meeting might be 'to discuss the proposal for on-site support changes', whereas the Goals of the same meeting might be: '(1) agree where on-site support is essential, (2) agree where remote support is acceptable, (3) identify people outside the meeting affected by this issue, (4) set a date for a teleconference to discuss an updated proposal.'

For the Agenda, there are two basic things to decide: the order of topics and the time to allocate for each. When setting an Agenda where both parties are expected to present material, I

The danger of going first (a real case)

A Customer-Facing Engineer had presented some character recognition technology to a client at the beginning of a meeting. During the presentation he explained that the colour contrast between text and background had to be reasonable in order for the system to work. 'But that should not be a problem', he said, 'because, for instance, no idiot would write white characters on an orange background.' Unfortunately, his presentation was before his client's and when the latter stood up to present, everyone saw that their text was white, and their background orange. Oops!

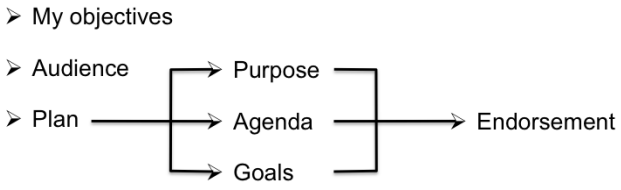
Moral: do everything possible to start with Discovery and, in particular, try to have the agenda organised so that clients present first.

endeavour to have my client present before I do, to allow me to take their view of the world into account when I speak. If the client insists that I go first, as they often do, then I present only limited information at first. After they have presented, I might follow on with relevant, more detailed material.

Several other guidelines for the Agenda aspect of PAGE depend on the Encounter type (above all, its length) and they are discussed in the next section.

The final point in the checklist—Endorsement—is a reminder to get explicit agreement on the Purpose, Agenda and Goals before proceeding with the main business of a meeting. It gives everyone in the meeting an opportunity to ask for modifications to the Purpose, Agenda and Goals, and allows the person driving the meeting to check that they have the attention of all participants.

Please note that, when asking for a confirmation of the Purpose, Agenda and Goals, the question 'Is everyone OK with that?' is not the best one to ask. It is a closed question which risks getting polite, rather meaningless agreement, since people may feel that to say 'no' would be rude (at least, in some cultures). I should therefore try to give my clients and colleagues a real opportunity to have their say by asking an open question, such as 'Do you want to change or add anything?'



The ideal use model for PAGE is illustrated above. If time allows (see the next section) the Purpose, Agenda and Goals of an encounter are thought out in advance, as a part of the Plan step of MAP. They are then endorsed by all concerned at the meeting itself. How this turns out in practice will depend on the circumstances of the encounter, as will now be discussed.

PAGE for Different Types of Encounter

Short Meetings and Calls

For minor encounters—meetings and telephone calls arranged at short notice, for example—I use MAP and PAGE to get my thoughts straight just before the event. It is quite likely, however, that a significant part of the meeting's organisation, especially the Agenda and Goals, will not be addressed until participants get together. I therefore use what information I have (typically an email thread) to do some modest preparation. This at least helps me to make the mental switch to the people and business of the encounter. I therefore arrive well prepared, given the circumstances, and in a position to take the lead if necessary.

As noted in Chapter 2, there are essentially two parts to the Engage step: an initial 'greeting' part, where participants get in sync, and a 'transition' part that gets the main work of the encounter started. PAGE is invaluable for this second part, especially for meetings and calls that would otherwise have little structure. The tool is essentially used 'on the fly', to help make sure that the minimum organisation is in place before the main discussions begin.

For example, the *absolute minimum to know about the Agenda* is the total amount of time available. It takes only a few seconds to check this. Similarly, it should not take long to agree on the Purpose and Goals, and if it does, then surely it is important to take that time!

Encounters Involving Significant Preparation

For encounters where a detailed agenda is negotiated or, at least, exchanged in advance, the work related to PAGE is shared with my external and internal clients ahead of the meeting. Email is often used to agree on an Agenda, and the Purpose and Goals can be inferred from the related correspondence. I should check that all three items are agreed.

As for short meetings, *the key to getting the meeting on track is to have PAGE used for the transition from the Engage to the Do steps*.

I stress this point because a common mistake at the start of well-prepared encounters is to announce the pre-agreed Agenda (often by displaying it on a slide) then move directly into the main part of the meeting (which usually means the continuation of a presentation). This only works if everyone in the room (physical or virtual) was involved in the agenda preparation, and if nothing has come up since. I would not normally bet on this, which is why the 'E' of PAGE is so important.

Even in situations where the Purpose, Agenda and Goals probably have everyone's approval, a presenter can reinforce contact with the audience by pausing to check. Both the presenter and the audience will be more comfortable if this is done.

Sounding natural

When using PAGE, there is no obligation to say the words 'Purpose', 'Agenda' and 'Goal', of course. For example: *'Good morning! As I think you know, we are here to discuss the content of the next product release (P). I would therefore like to start by gathering everyone's ideas and then setting some priorities (A). Since we have only an hour available (A), I suggest that we try to agree on the top 10 items today (G1) and arrange for a further meeting where we can review the list and plan the work in detail (G2). Are there any other suggestions or comments before we get started, please? (E)'*

Active versus Reactive

So far I have described the use of PAGE for actively driving encounters. A second way to use the tool is in a reactive mode, turning it into a defensive weapon. By this I mean for situations where someone else has taken the lead of the encounter.

In such circumstances, my familiarity with the Encounter Process and the PAGE tool helps me to quickly see whether there is an adequate transition from the Engage to the Do steps. If not, I can try to get things back on track with a specific request. For example, 'Would you mind if we worked out an agenda before getting any further into this discussion …?' or, 'Could we check how much time everyone has available before we go any further?'

The Role of Roles

Roles for Working Together as a Team

Use of roles is important when working together with colleagues in a meeting. Suppose that I go to see a client with my manager and a Salesperson. To be well coordinated in the meeting, we should discuss beforehand both the roles that we will adopt and how we will communicate during the meeting without necessarily drawing the attention of the client.

Typically, one person is assigned the role of leader. Another might take responsibility for recording what happens, and a third the job of watching for activity outside of the main part of the discussion. Frequently it's better for the manager not to get involved in the discussion, as that leaves an elegant way to have a second opinion if the discussions are deadlocked.

The most important private communication or signal is 'Stop!'. For example, we might agree that raising one's pen is a sign that a colleague should stop talking—perhaps to let the client respond. Another useful signal is 'Slow down!'.

These are simple points, but they have to be thought of before a meeting starts, for obvious reasons.

Roles for Keeping a Meeting on Track

Let's assume that the Purpose, Agenda and Goals of a meeting have been agreed by the participants. Then what?

It sometimes helps, particularly for major encounters, to think carefully about what to do if the discussion strays away from its reference course, and to have a plan for bringing it back. Usually, this is the task of the meeting chairperson—the individual who either explicitly or implicitly has been assigned to lead the meeting. This person's main job is to animate the meeting so that the knowledge and experience of its participants are used to best effect. They are therefore fully occupied with the content of the discussion and the needs of the people involved. Is this person really able to keep an eye on the clock, the agenda, the goals and the meeting minutes all at the same time?

To increase the chances that the Purpose, Agenda and Goals agreed at the start of an encounter are respected, it is sometimes a

good idea to lighten the load on the chairperson by assigning roles to other participants.

Standard roles are chairperson, timekeeper, process manager and scribe (minute taker). In large meetings, the chairperson can only possibly perform one or two of these roles adequately.

The role of process manager may need explaining. It involves managing the subprocesses in the meeting, such as discussions, brainstorms and presentations. For example, a process manager might suggest that, to collect ideas for XYZ, everyone should speak in turn until each person has had their say. This will ensure that everyone is able to contribute. An alternative process is to pass an object around—a ball, a plastic giraffe … anything!—and that only the person with the object is allowed to speak. It is the role of the process manager to ensure that such mini-procedures are agreed and respected.

In my experience, the explicit assignment of such roles is not common practice in industry. Sometimes, a well-run meeting starts with an agreement on who will take the minutes, and everyone is relieved when this happens (except maybe the 'volunteer'). I suggest that, to keep encounters aligned with their Purpose, Agenda and Goals, it is worth being aware of other roles and, where appropriate, making them explicit in the organisation of an encounter.

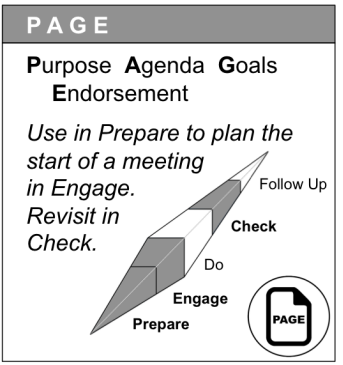
Gaining time by managing the source of the problem

At the beginning of a training course, someone asked if time management would be covered. I had to explain that it would not: there was no such module in the course.

The person who had raised the question came up to me at the end of the course and said, 'You were wrong: your system is going to save me a lot of time, since inefficient meetings are a big source of my problems. Running them more effectively is key to improving my time management.' This makes sense, of course. Gaining better control over meetings is a good way to save time and defeat the Hurry Monster!

In Brief

- PAGE is used at the end of the Engage step of the Encounter Process to transition from greetings to getting down to work.
- The tool can be used in short, impromptu meetings, or for much longer ones.
- It can be used on the fly (where no preparation was possible), or prepared in advance of a meeting.
- It can be used in proactive mode (to drive a meeting) or reactive mode (when participating but not leading).
- MAP and PAGE are used together, PAGE being a method for implementing the Plan part of MAP when preparing an encounter.
- My objectives, Purpose and Goals are distinct. My objectives are private, Purpose answers the 'why' question and Goals the 'what' question.
- The absolute minimum definition of an Agenda is the time available for the meeting.
- Having roles assigned to meeting participants can help the chairperson to keep the meeting to the plan captured by PAGE.
- 'Start with everyone on the same PAGE' is an easy way to remember this tool.



5. Learning: DISCOVER-Y

'There don't hardly nobody listen, and it's so easy! […] and there's one more part to this one […] they ain't nobody was ever insulted by a question',
Fauna, the whorehouse owner, priming one of her girls in Steinbeck's *Sweet Thursday*

Discovery is a technique for finding out what I need to know from my clients in a way that moves the conversation forward, to the benefit of both parties. As the quotation shows, this is not rocket science and it applies to all sorts of commerce. Nevertheless, in my enthusiasm for what I am explaining, it's easy to forget the importance of questions. Fortunately, an understanding of the Discovery approach, underpinned with some simple tools and methods, helps me to achieve a good balance between listening and speaking.

Discovery has many characteristics that one might *not* associate with engineering: it is an art rather than a science; it is more associated with commercial work than technical; its objectives are often indirect (relationships and influence) rather than direct (facts and figures). However, I suggest that Discovery can be of immense help to Customer-Facing Engineers, since (1) getting good data is a prerequisite to solving any technical problem, and (2) it is often much easier to persuade a client to accept a technical solution with an indirect, Discovery-based approach than with a head-on, logical explanation.

Advantages of Discovery

To perform Discovery I must take a questioning stance, especially at the beginning of the Do phase of the Encounter Process. This means that I will tend towards asking clients questions rather than explaining things to them. A major advantage of doing this is that it's *guaranteed to hold the client's attention.*

People are much more attentive when being asked questions than when being told facts. In school, it was easy to stop listening and gaze out of the window when the maths teacher droned on at

the front of the class. However, when they directed a killer question at me, I suddenly paid attention!

Similarly, taking a Discovery approach helps grab and retain clients' attention. From this point, it is a small step to influencing their view of a situation and moving their opinion in the 'right' direction (please also see the discussion on the difference between influence and manipulation, in Chapter 8).

Further, if I listen carefully to my clients with genuine interest, then *they will be more open to my arguments and more likely to accept my recommendations*. This is a question of confidence—their faith in my ability to help them will strongly depend on how well they think I have understood their situation. It's also a question of the investment that they make in our relationship. Once they have committed time to our conversation, then they will wish (probably subconsciously) to justify their

My client invites me to present

I am in a pre-sales situation and the prospect has invited me to present our design services.

I do what I am asked, and present my slides. The prospect is happy, asks lots of questions and then rushes to their next meeting (dutifully obeying the Hurry Monster). They seem satisfied, and I feel that I have made a good presentation. My colleagues congratulate me.

This kind of meeting is almost always a good investment for the prospect, but not necessarily for me. Potential clients are happy to obtain information at zero cost. They don't have to reveal very much and, thanks to the information that I provide, they improve their negotiating position with respect to both me and my competitors. On the other hand, I may miss an opportunity to learn about their business and project needs, how my services line up with those needs and how they compare with my competition. Furthermore, although I will certainly explain the main features of my offer, I am unlikely to pinpoint (or understand) its main benefits for the prospect in question.

Since, in this case, I was explicitly asked to present our services, I should have pushed back a little and done some Discovery. For example, I could have explained how important it was for me to understand more about the prospect's situation before I started my presentation.

decision to do so. Every time they decide to answer one of my questions, then their level of engagement grows.[6]

A common reason for failing to do enough Learning Discovery (i.e. talking too much!) is a desire for control over a conversation. As I write, I am reminded of an exhibition that I went to just a couple of days ago. As I went around the stands, learning about the Internet of Things, I talked with the Customer-Facing Engineers running them. To find out what I needed to know, I simply asked a banal question, and this triggered most of

A client complaint

Consider the case where my client has a complaint. Let's say that my company managed to sell them some software but that it is giving problems, and they are furious. Really angry.

They summon me to their offices to give me a piece of their mind and, into the bargain, insist that one of our engineers stay on their site for as long as the bugs are not fixed.

Discovery may seem irrelevant here, since there is no need to encourage the client to talk. Quite the opposite: my problem is to get a word in edgeways!

However, good Discovery is absolutely essential in these circumstances, if hard to do. My concern will be to calm the customer, regain their confidence and retain their loyalty. It will also be to minimise the impact of the crisis on me and my company. In particular, I don't want to agree to putting an engineer at the customer's site for 100% of the time—my resources are far too precious for that.

The first thing to do is to listen, and to do this until the client returns to a normal, calm state. Only once this has been achieved can the conversation move forward constructively.

I then need to understand what has gone wrong with the product (the technical view) and what impact this is having on the client from the human and business points of view. Of course, Discovery is the key to finding these things out. By adopting a questioning stance and, above all in these circumstances, avoiding premature explanations and solutions, I facilitate a calm, constructive and productive conversation.

[6] (JouleBeauvois 2002), after research by Kurt Lewin on our tendency to stick with our decisions, especially those we consider to have been made of our own free will.

An internal meeting

Consider the example of an internal meeting where I wish to persuade a manager in my own company to send a Product Engineer to help in my account for a few days. The reason is that my customer is putting me under a lot of pressure and I cannot satisfy their crazy requirements on my own.

The meeting opens with my colleague greeting me: 'Hi there! I see that you are having some problems with XYZ. What's up? What do you need from me?'

It would be natural to answer the question directly, explaining my woes in detail and asking for what I need. *That could work, but very often the result will be sympathy from my colleague, accompanied by a stout defence of their resources.*

What if I were to brush off the opening question with a smile and 'Oh, it's not as bad as all that—how are you doing?', then enter into some Discovery? I could find out a little about my colleague's state of mind, political situation, current pressures, etc. before making any requests. Then, when the conversation returns to my reason for calling the meeting, since I am reasonably up to date with my colleague's situation, I would be much better able to frame my request and move the conversation towards a good solution.

There is nothing dishonest or manipulative about this approach, since my intention is to work openly with my colleague to find a solution that suits both of us. However, I also want to waste as little time as possible on unproductive discussion. Discovery helps me to avoid conversation barriers that an excessively direct approach might create.

them to launch into their prepared talks. A couple more questions from me and even more information was forthcoming. Some of the exhibitors remembered to ask me about what I did, and most requested a visiting card, but the flow of data was heavily in my favour.

This experience clearly illustrates that *to stay in control of a conversation I must favour listening over talking as much as possible.* It is the person who is listening most, and directing the conversation with their questions, who has most influence on the direction that the discussion takes. In particular, this person can

move the conversation through a process of Learning then Guiding Discovery.

Last but not least, *Discovery will help me to optimise the delivery of any arguments or presentations that I intend to give*. It may even deter me from giving them at all. If, for example, I discover that my client is reeling from the consequences of a company reorganisation, then I will probably defer the presentation of ideas about our long-term relationship until a better time. While it may be disappointing to shelve work that I have taken a lot of trouble to prepare, it could be better to do this than to irritate or confuse my client with something inappropriate at that moment.

Learning Discovery and its Challenges

It helps to make a distinction between Learning and Guiding Discovery. Learning Discovery allows me to get facts and figures about projects, data about a client company's internal organisation, market statistics, and so on. Guiding Discovery, on the other hand, concentrates on the problems that the situation poses for the client and the needs that they have as a result (see the next chapter). This chapter focuses on Learning Discovery.

With reference to the Encounter Process, discussed in Chapter 2, Learning Discovery starts with the identification of Discovery targets—i.e. the things that I want to find out—during the Prepare step. However, such preparation can't guarantee sufficient coverage of the subjects worth addressing. This is because it is hard to anticipate all the topics that might lead to useful discussion, and because the dynamic of the client conversation can't be predicted.

There are occasions when clients' circumstances seem so complex that it is hard to know which points to focus on. Their projects are technically complicated, they are widely geographically distributed, they depend for their success on the evolution of international technical standards, they are working in consortia with companies that they usually consider to be competitors, the politics within their own organisations are intricate, etc. When faced with such bewildering complexity, it is

crucial not to overlook something that could later turn out to be important.

In conversations with clients, I'm going to have to accommodate unforeseen topics. Indeed, I must facilitate this process by moving the conversation on, so that it doesn't get stuck on one particular subject at the expense of others. I may also have to help my client to develop the scope of the conversation. As we come to better understand some of the issues, completely new ideas may pop up. They may not be clear at first and I may even have to help my client clarify their thoughts.

The potential for confusion can be counterbalanced by imposing some structure, both on the conversation and on the data arising from it. This will help me to navigate around the issues that must be discussed, remembering what has been covered and what has yet to be addressed, and it may also allow me to assist my client's attempts to explain their situation.

DISCOVER-Y is a tool that provides such a structure.

DISCOVER-Y

DISCOVER-Y (pronounced 'discover why') is derived from a coaching tool[7] developed by Vincent Lenhardt for coaching individuals who seek to improve some aspect of their personal or professional lives. Not surprisingly this is useful to Customer-Facing Engineers, since many aspects of conducting a client conversation are similar to coaching. In particular, it is essential for a coach to develop a holistic view of the client's situation, and not to focus too quickly on just one aspect. Further, a coach has to be aware of their own natural tendencies (their comfort zones and also the subjects that they shy away from), and they must compensate appropriately. A coach also needs the ability to clarify situations that were formerly obscure, to allow their clients to see things in a new light and to enable them to make new decisions.

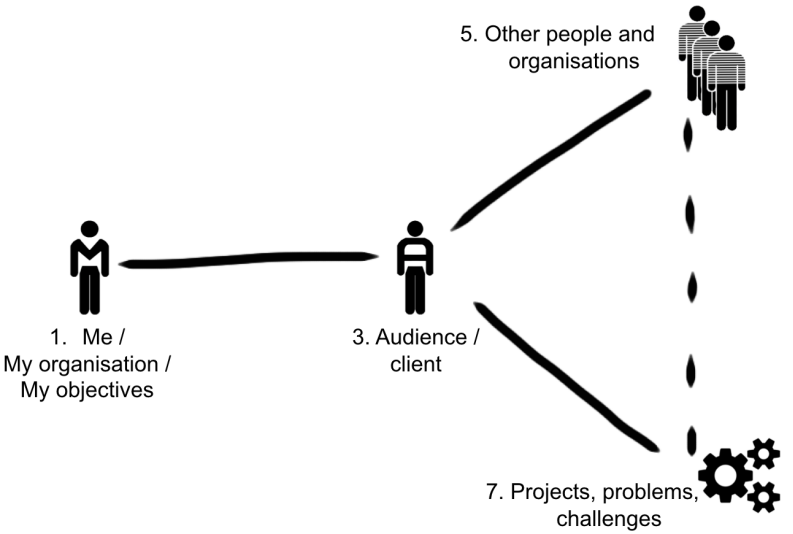
[7] See the '8 intervention zones' coaching tool in Vincent Lenhardt's *Coaching for Meaning* (Lenhardt 2004).

Basics

DISCOVER-Y can be used to:

- Identify Discovery targets before an encounter
- Identify new areas for exploration while in conversation
- Move the conversation on when it gets stuck on a topic
- Work with clients to visualise a situation
- Debrief to colleagues after an encounter.

The tool consists of a 'Y' on its side, and is essentially a Mind Map skeleton (see the diagram below). I am at the left-hand end of the Y, and my client is at the centre. Strictly speaking, the 'Me' node represents everyone from my organisation *at the encounter*, while the 'client' node represents the people *at the encounter* from the client organisation.

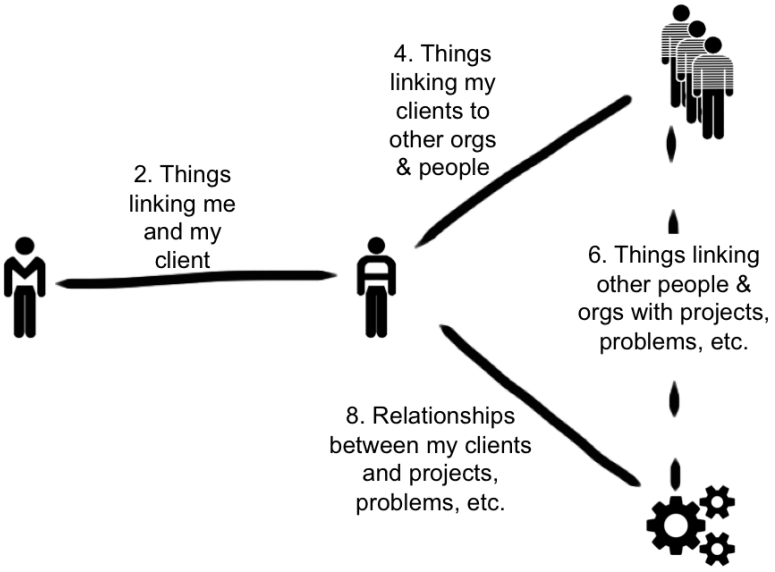


Above and to the right of my client are the people and organisations that they are linked to (the 'who' of the situation). Below and to the right of my client are their problems, projects, technical ideas and challenges (the 'what'). That makes four nodes, which we call the 'odd zones', since they are labelled with odd numbers. The lines joining them are the 'even zones',

representing the relationships between my client and the other zones and, in the case of zone 6, the relationship of other people and organisations with the projects etc. Since this is a Mind Map, we are free to draw other internodal relationships, and to add nodes.

The items to place in each of the odd zones will emerge during the course of a Discovery session, as will be described below. The easiest to imagine are the zone 7 items ('what'), which are typically the products and projects being discussed. Having identified items I proceed to ask for information about them, of course, and so I accumulate a list of knowns and unknowns about each of them.

As mentioned, the even zones capture the relationships between the objects in the odd zones: e.g. what I know about my client belongs to zone 3, whereas what I know about my client's relationship with my competitors belongs to zone 4.



Zone 1 is special, since it represents me and my organisation. Hence, instead of thinking of things to ask about this node I prepare answers for questions that I anticipate my client will ask.

In doing this, I can imagine two branches of the DISCOVER-Y diagram that go off to the left, mirroring zone 5: 'who' and zone 7: 'what'. These are not usually drawn, since the DISCOVER-Y tool is oriented towards the client's situation, but it is worth remembering that, logically speaking, they should exist.

An Exercise

The following exercise should help you to become familiar with DISCOVER-Y. You may either do it with pen and paper, or simply think it through in your head.

Part 1 (two to three minutes)

You are an engineer working for a small medical imaging company with responsibilities for technical support and technical marketing. A potential client tells you that they need an ultrasound scanner for use on the International Space Station. List the questions that you could ask them at an initial meeting.

Part 2 (two to three minutes)

Draw the DISCOVER-Y diagram, number the zones and complete zones 5 ('who') and 7 ('what') with the names of people, organisations, projects, products, as appropriate (zones 1 and 3 always represent the people in the meeting, called 'me' and 'the client' for simplicity).

Part 3 (two to three minutes)

Position the questions that you wrote in Part 1 in the appropriate zones, next to the names of the people, organisations, projects, etc. that they correspond to (e.g. by giving each question a letter and writing the letters in the zones).[8]

The Discovery work that is prepared in this exercise—aimed at factual information—will be familiar to the reader. In fact, this familiarity is one of the issues. When I introduce DISCOVER-Y to groups of engineers, we normally start by listing questions relevant to the type of example just described. When these questions are organised according to the eight zones on the diagram, we invariably find that zone 7 ('what') has far more

[8] Possible questions are listed in Annex 1.

items than any of the others. The result of the exercise changes if, for example, there are Salespeople in the room. They tend to ask more questions in zone 5 (‘who’), such as ‘Who is the project funded by?’, ‘Who is involved in the decision on which scanner to use?’, or ‘Which other suppliers are you talking to?’

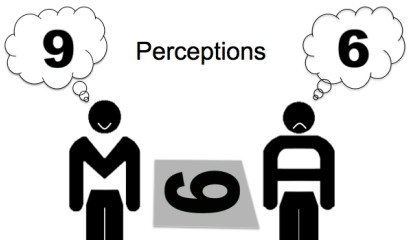
The exercise on the opposite page, that you may have just performed, is not only to familiarise you with DISCOVER-Y, it may also help you see if your questioning favours certain zones at the expense of others. Does it?

To be sure that you have interpreted the use of each zone as intended, please refer to the example responses in Annex 1. Generally, the odd zones (1: ‘me’, 3: ‘the client’, 5: ‘who’ and 7: ‘what’) do not pose any difficulty. However, the even zones deserve a closer look.

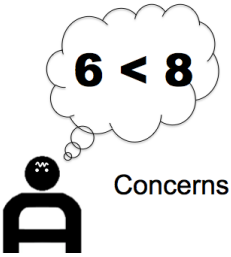
Even Zones

I pay special attention to the even zones since, as an engineer, my natural inclination is for straightforward, factual Discovery, which mainly involves asking for information about the odd zones. In particular, I am likely to have a preference for zone 7—the ‘what’ zone (see the suggested responses in Annex 1 for confirmation of this). While it is true that zone 7 deserves attention, it can also be thought of as the engineer’s ‘comfort zone’, with all the associated dangers!

So, let’s not neglect the even zones, which give me insight into the client’s view of the situation, starting with their *perceptions* of the items in zones 1: ‘me’, 5: ‘who’ and 7: ‘what’. These perceptions do not necessarily match mine, as the diagram illustrates.



Based on these perceptions, the client probably has a number of *concerns*. For example, if they think that my scanner system has a quality rating of 6 stars, whereas they need a minimum of 8, then this would be a problem for them. Note that , since my perception



of the quality rating is 9, I might easily overlook their concern if I did not discover their perception of the rating. Concerns therefore follow perceptions and they represent a second type of information to look out for in the even zones.

Finally, the client has certain *expectations* of me and my organisation (zone 2), of other people and organisations (zone 4) and of the projects, products, etc. that belong to this situation (zone 8). Pursuing the scanner system example, the client's expectations may incorporate some margin and so, rather than the minimum rating of 8, their expectation is for 10. Again, this is related to the previous pieces of information on the client's perceptions and concerns, but it cannot be deduced from them. It must be discovered through judicious questioning about the expectations themselves.

In summary, for the even zones, I must look out for:

- ☐ Perceptions
- ☐ Concerns
- ☐ Expectations.

Numbers were used in the above examples to clarify the meaning of these three factors, but it is rarely possible to be so precise. For example, if one of the items in zone 5 is my client's IT department, then zone 4 information could include my client's perceptions of the IT department (its power, competence, etc.), their concerns about the service it provides and their expectations for improvements. These are *qualitative* measures.

Notice that, since I feature on the DISCOVER-Y diagram in zone 1, my relationship with my client is represented by zone 2. The information associated with this zone can be particularly important—it includes the expectations that the client has of me and my organisation, and also their perception of our past performance.

Finally, Chapter 10 explains the use of a systemic approach for understanding complex organisations and situations, and this requires a good understanding of the relationships between the different parts of the system. In the DISCOVER-Y tool, this information is in the even zones, and the tool can therefore be used to support a systemic approach.

Use of DISCOVER-Y

For Encounter Preparation (with MAP)

DISCOVER-Y has two main uses during encounter preparation:

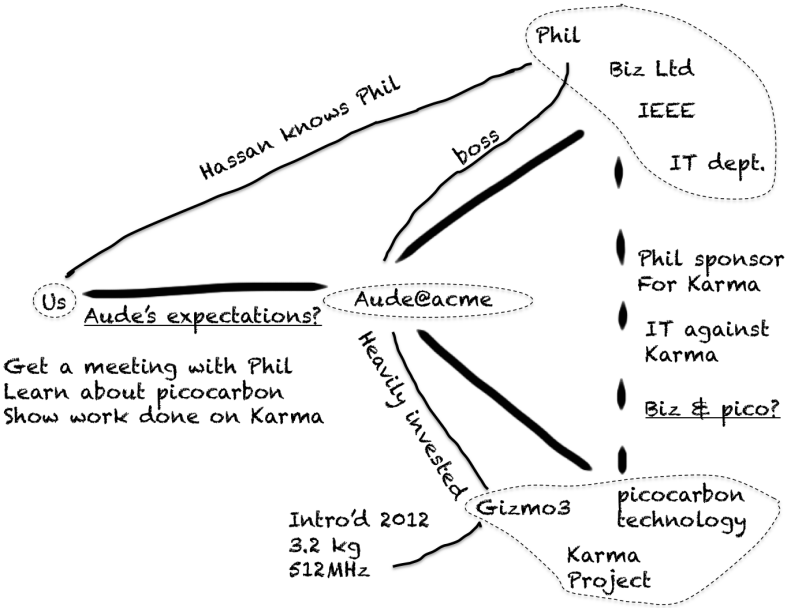
- The assessment of a situation (current knowledge)
- The identification of Discovery targets (info. to find).

It is used in conjunction with MAP, and is one of the tools used with its 'Plan' part. In fact, the 'My objectives' and 'Audience' parts of MAP can immediately be annotated on zones 1: 'me' and 3: 'the client' of the DISCOVER-Y diagram.

For encounter preparation, the diagram is drawn explicitly, then the different zones of the Y are annotated with information 'brainstorm style'. The Y diagram should be thought of as a basic Mind Map skeleton, and so I don't hesitate to add extra nodes and arcs as necessary. For example, if I have a direct relationship with one of the people or organisations listed in zone 5: 'who', I may draw an arc that represents it from zone 1 into the cluster of names at zone 5.

An example of the type of drawing that can be produced when using DISCOVER-Y for encounter preparation is given on the next page. In real life, this would be done on a wall chart, where there would be more room, coloured pens, and the participants would have the advantage of seeing information added to the diagram gradually. In order to clarify this one, I have added dotted lines around the items in the odd zones. The information associated with these zones is our objectives ('Get a meeting with Phil', etc.), and some data about Gizmo3 ('Intro'd 2012', etc.).

The other information on the diagram is about the relationship between nodes, and underline is used here to indicate where that information is missing. Specifically, we don't



understand either Aude's expectations or Biz Ltd's capabilities in pico carbon technology. We do know that Phil is Aude's boss, that someone in our organisation called Hassan knows him, and that Aude has invested a lot of energy in Gizmo3. There is some additional relationship information in zone 6.

Imagine working on this type of representation with one or two colleagues, using a large drawing surface, coloured pens and plenty of coffee. The Y drives you to think of certain types of information, and provides a useful constraint to an otherwise freeform visual brainstorming process. The resulting picture is unlikely to be very elegant, but the process of producing it is invaluable.

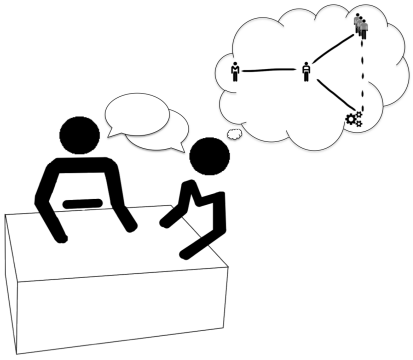
From this point, I may go on to prepare slides that support the envisaged Discovery process. I would require material to help me address the points of interest just identified with DISCOVER-Y (e.g. roadmap slides to encourage a discussion of project timing, benchmark results to lead the conversation to key technical points, etc.), as well as slides that anticipate my client's questions and needs (i.e. collateral for zone 1: 'me'). Some techniques for

organising this material—while maintaining a concise presentation style—are discussed in Chapter 7.

I finish this subsection on a warning note. Extensive preparation has a tendency to make me forget that my preliminary analysis of a situation is just that: preliminary. Armed with lots of data, ideas and slides, I may be tempted to share them with my client at the beginning of a meeting, instead of doing Discovery, as discussed. Groundwork is important, but it is wasted if it leads me away from a listening posture. It should be used instead to reinforce that posture, helping me to ask the right questions, to quickly understand the responses and therefore direct the conversation accordingly. In this way, my preparation has enormous value, since it makes my real-time Discovery (i.e. the Discovery done in the client meeting) so much more effective.

In Real Time, During an Encounter

DISCOVER-Y is particularly powerful as a 'real-time' tool, for impromptu use in client meetings. In this case it stays either in my head or in my notebook but, in either case, it is used during the conversation itself.

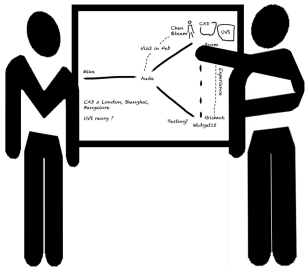


When using the tool without notes I cannot, of course, accumulate detailed information about the different zones in the same way that I would with the support of paper. Rather, I refer mentally to the Y from time to time, especially if the conversation starts to get repetitive, becoming stuck in one zone. When this

happens, DISCOVER-Y reminds me to move the discussion towards zones that have not yet been explored.

As discussed, it is particularly important not to let zone 7: 'what' dominate either my thinking or the discussion with my client. This is an easy trap to fall into: not only is gravity pulling me down into this zone (the lowest on the diagram), but also, as an engineer, I may tend to focus on projects and problems more readily than on people (zone 5) and relationships (the even zones).

I must also remember to pay attention to zone 2. For example, I may ask for feedback on the last software patch that I sent the client, or on their perception of my level of service in general. In a pre-sales situation, it may be appropriate to simply ask 'Why us?', in order to find out if I or my company had been recommended by someone, or if the client came to me for some other reason.



It is also possible to use DISCOVER-Y in an open way with clients. A common practice in meetings is to use a whiteboard or flip chart to clarify ideas. Drawings can often communicate an idea more effectively than words, though sometimes it is difficult to know how to represent a complex situation in two dimensions. The DISCOVER-Y diagram gives a handy starting point. If I feel that it would be a good idea to change the rhythm of a conversation by moving into drawing mode, I can sketch and explain the Y to my clients, add a few pieces of information and invite them to add more. Since the zones attract the full range of information that I am interested in, they guide our discussion in a helpful way.

As far as real-time use of DISCOVER-Y is concerned, that's it! Just like MAP and PAGE, the other 'routine' tools in the Toolkit, its brevity is one of its strengths.

As an Aid to Debrief

In a debrief situation, I can use the information I discovered during the client encounter to draw the Y diagram in advance of the discussion.

However, my experience is that once the Y diagram becomes densely populated with information and links, then the advantage of clarity that a sketch once offered starts to diminish. When this happens, the basic Y can be complemented with tables, charts and other representations. It may even be prepared in the form of slides or by using a Mind Map presentation program.[9]

The diagram on the next page shows a DISCOVER-Y chart that has been developed with a commercial Mind Map program. Some constraints are imposed by a book illustration—limited size and lack of colour, for example—but the essence of this technique is still apparent. I have chosen ovals for objects belonging to odd zones and rectangles with rounded corners for those in even zones. Data associated with objects in odd zones is contained in rectangles with right-angled corners. The picture shown is not completely expanded. If I were to click on the ⊕ symbols, then further branches and objects would be revealed. For example, my objectives, which appear in the rectangle to the bottom left of the picture, are not expanded. Neither is the information about the client (or Audience), Steve, which is represented by the rectangle towards the bottom of the picture.

Using a program, the amount of information that can be captured in this way is almost limitless, and it is easy to control which data is displayed at any one time. DISCOVER-Y has facilitated the organisation of this large quantity of information by providing the guiding principles for its structure. Without this, it would be easy to create a confusing rat's nest of data.

Mind Map programmes can export their data in many formats, including images, slide format and PDF. When a page-by-page or slide-by-slide presentation of information is desired, the table given below may provide inspiration on how to structure this. The table represents the same information as was captured in the Mind Map picture just discussed. It is divided into eight

[9] For an example of a free Mind Map program, see http://www.freeplane.org.

sections, one for each zone of the DISCOVER-Y diagram. I could choose to keep all this information together in a single table, as in this example, or split the table into a number of separate pages or slides, as necessary. The benefit of the representation shown is that a link is maintained with the DISCOVER-Y spatial organisation of information through the pictograms that accompany each set of bullet points. Many people are helped by visual representations, and this tabular format is therefore a good compromise between traditional, textual lists and a complete two-dimensional picture.

On Listening

Simply Listen

Of course, there is no point in asking high-quality Learning Discovery questions if these are not followed by listening of the same calibre.

I consider myself to be listening effectively if:

- I really hear what's being said (I don't filter or interpret)
- The client feels the benefit of being heard (something like a sense of satisfaction or relief).

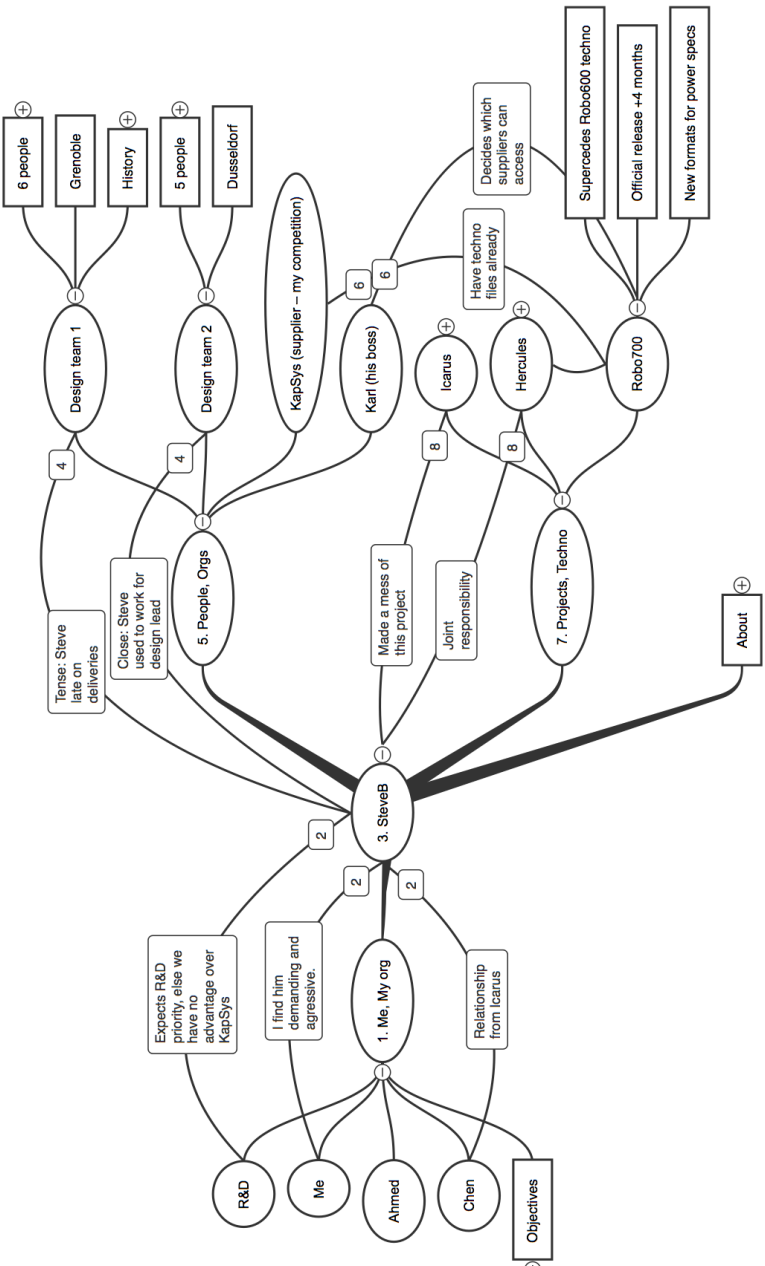
I regularly discuss the subject of effective listening in training classes, and participants quickly identify techniques that help, e.g:

- ☐ Use positive body language to encourage clients when they are speaking—eye contact, nods, etc.
- ☐ Take notes and ask for clarifications—these are not only useful, they show the client that you are listening.
- ☐ Use Playback—see the final subsection, below.

A corresponding blacklist of behaviours to avoid is useful too:

- ✖ Don't think about your next question
- ✖ Don't make premature judgements
- ✖ Don't get distracted by your own ideas
- ✖ Don't be anxious to suggest a solution
- ✖ Don't interrupt the other person—within reason.

A common mistake is to think of my next question when listening, and this is at the top of the blacklist. By letting my mind wander to my next question, I not only risk missing important information, I


6 people
Grenoble
History
5 people
Dusseldorf
Design team 1
Design team 2
KapSys (supplier – my competition)
Karl (this boss)
Icarus
Hercules
Robo700
Decides which suppliers can access
Have techno flies already
Supercedes Robo600 techno
Official release +4 months
New formats for power specs
4
4
6
6
8
8
Tense: Steve late on deliveries
Close: Steve used to work for design lead
5. People, Orgs
Made a mess of this project
Joint responsibility
7. Projects, Techno
About
2
3. SteveB
2
2
Expects R&D priority, else we have no advantage over KapSys
I find him demanding and agressive.
1. Me, My org
Relationship from Icarus
R&D
Me
Ahmed
Chen
Objectives

	• Objectives: learn more about Hercules; access Robo700 files • R&D, Ahmed, Chen • Me	• Expects R&D priority • I find him demanding/ aggressive • Chen relationship (from Icarus project)
	• Steve, snr engineer • 5 years at Plexi • Precise, workaholic	• Karl decides who accesses Robo700 tech data • KapSys already have access!!
	• Design team 1 (Gnb, data avail.) • Design team 2 (Ddforf, ditto) • KapSys (competitor) • Karl (Steve's boss)	• Tension with design team 1 (S late on deliveries) • Close to Design team 2 (S used to work for design lead)
	• Icarus (failed project, data avail) • Hercules (new project, ditto) • Robo700 (techno, release in 4 months, new power formats, …)	• S made a mess of Icarus project • Joint resp. for Hercules • H to use Robo700 tech.