SCiO Systems and Complexity in Organisation

SysPrac25

Overcoming the boundaries between stakeholders for project success

Anca Popa, MBA, ChPP

Talk

Hub Theatre

Day two, 11:20 – 11:45

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Systems Thinking Interest Network

Philip Macey, ChPP, MSc
Retired
Member of APM Systems Thinking Interest Network

Key member of large Defence Programmes and leading the delivery of ground-breaking technology projects.

He wrote his MSc thesis on improving the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement through social learning

Anca Popa, ChPP, MBA
Principal P3M Consultant, Costain
Member of APM Systems Thinking Interest Network

Delivering transport industry change initiatives where legacy systems and processes require replacing to meet compliance deadlines.

Her MSc thesis researched the taxonomy of composite boundaries used in determining areas of intervention for programmes.

Agenda

Context

Why stakeholder engagement matters?

Stakeholder's view of the world

The engagement challenge

Case study

Project context and stakeholder map

Building collaboration through system convening

Reflecting on power dynamics and marginalization by using Critical Systems Heuristics

Conclusions

Takeaways for Project Professionals

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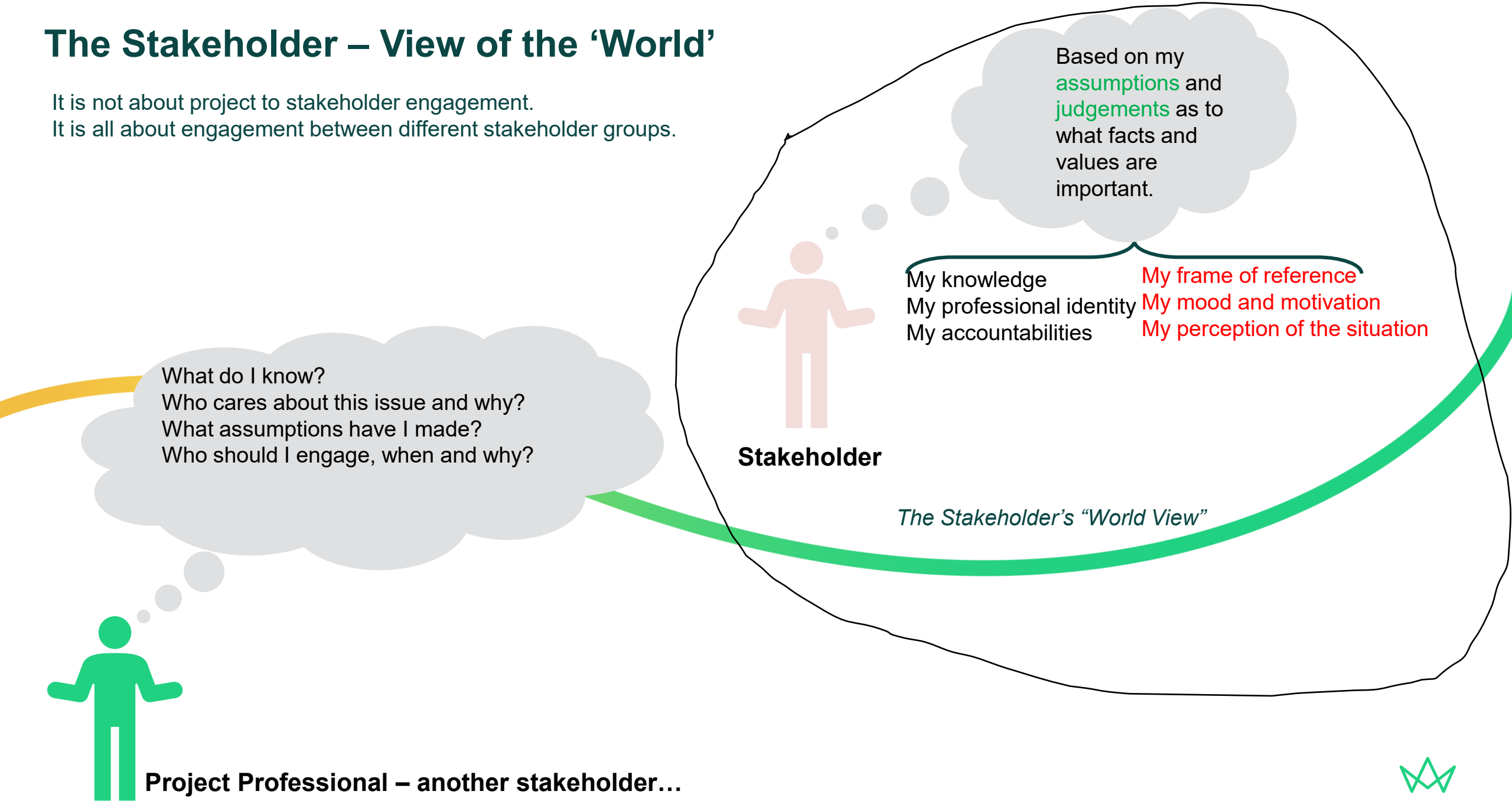
Why stakeholders matter for project success?

- They are internal and external beneficiaries of the product/ service
- They hold knowledge, resources, influence and power required to deliver the project
- Projects are a collaborative endeavour, it requires engagement, alignment, imagination

Unengaged stakeholders can act negatively towards the project, undermining it.

The Stakeholder – View of the 'World'

It is not about project to stakeholder engagement.
It is all about engagement between different stakeholder groups.

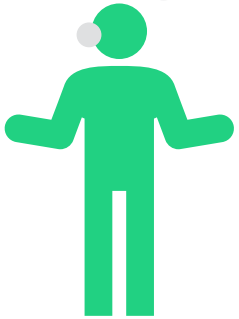


The Engagement Challenge

How can I understand why there are differences?

How are these impacting their attitude and actions toward the project?

Where is potential for alignment?



Project Professional

APM Systems Thinking Interest Network

Systems Thinking used to identify and engage with stakeholders

Critical Systems Heuristics – mapping the landscape
Systems convening – enhancing engagement effectiveness

A case study

Case study: Smart Ticketing Platform validator

Context

- DfT's objective was to increase adoption of smart ticketing

Challenge for TOCs at small stations:

- Cost prohibitive revenue protection solutions
- Inadequate infrastructure for Smart ticketing

End user pain points

- Fewer ticket buying options at small stations
- Could not Tap-in and Tap out at small stations

Opportunities

- Product launch accelerated by iterating on an existing product design
- Reuse smart ticketing software build for gated stations

Project constraints

- Order forecast low
- Tight timescales
- Initial design feedback not available
- Mandated project methodology

My first project in the UK delivered for a former employer

Case study: Smart Ticketing Platform validator

Stakeholder map

Stakeholders:

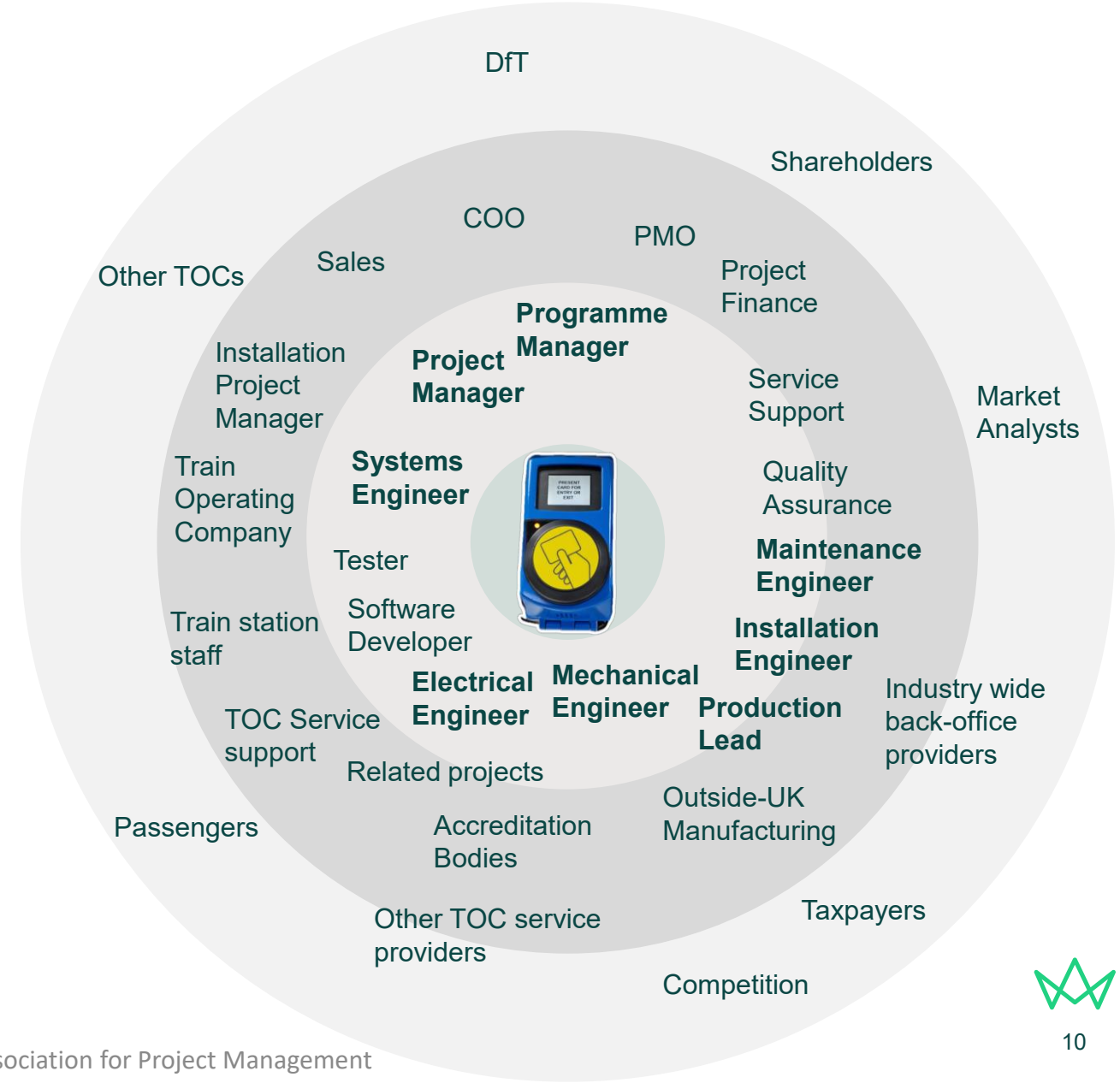
- **Intended**: Train Operating Company, Passengers
- **Witness**: production, installation and maintenance teams, TOC staff, other TOCs

Stakes:

- **Purpose**: Improved adoption of Smart Ticketing
- **Emancipation**: efficient production, installation, and maintenance processes.

Stakeholding issues:

- **Measure of improvement:** number of stations equipped with smart ticketing
- **Worldview**: ease of maintenance not only of use.



Using system convening to enable collaboration

Engineering reviews were repurposed as a collaborative space

The challenge and the motivations

Organizational emphasis on efficient delivery.

Internal stakeholders prioritised here-and-now demands.

Redesigning the outward appearance was cost prohibitive.

Employing system convening

Committed to reduce marginalization

Built dialogue on existing trust

The product became a boundary object

Invited boundary crossing to update frames of reference.

The outcomes

Improved levels of trust and collaboration

We built a better and lasting product

Stakeholders experienced new ways of learning and sense making

“A practice of any depth requires a sustained history of social learning, and this creates a boundary with those who do not share this history.

Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2014, p. 17)

Reflecting on power dynamics and marginalization

With Critical Systems Heuristics

- Organizational focus on project performance led to delays in identifying internal stakeholders as beneficiaries
- The project objective shifted from new product development to creating a new value chain.
- The initial measure of success was meeting project constraints rather than Total Cost of Ownership.

As project progressed…

- A shift in engagement happened due to proximity bias for stakeholders and governance pressures for the team.

In the hindsight….

- Additional touch points with the client could have been beneficial to guarantee wider product adoption.
- An early application of CSH could have improved product design and benefits.

Some advice to my younger self

By reflecting with system convening and CSH

- **Trust your intuition**: pause the deadline race and allow time for dialogue.
- Continuously iterate on scope elaboration and stakeholder identification.
- Hold stakeholders accountable to their aspirations and responsibilities.
- Work on building trust by engaging in active delivery of interim benefits.
- Test if the project scope is to deliver a product or an eco-system.
- Even Engineers like to play and use their imagination.

Takeaways for project professionals

and system thinkers…

Use boundaries to your advantage

- Use the boundary taxonomy to identify the differences that must be reconciled
- Contrast AS-IS and Ought–to-Be views to negotiate new purpose, boundaries and level of engagement
- They separate and **also connect** sub-systems

Aim for identity change not just cooperation

- Encourage stakeholders to inspect their practices and worldviews.
- Employ environments that sustain imagination
- Foster engagement iteratively

Seek for higher standards and purposes

- Enquire and disseminate stakeholder objectives, perspectives and pain points
- Build solutions that are an extension of stakeholder's agenda
- Prioritise delivery of initiatives that meet the needs of multiple stakeholder groups

The ecosystem is alive

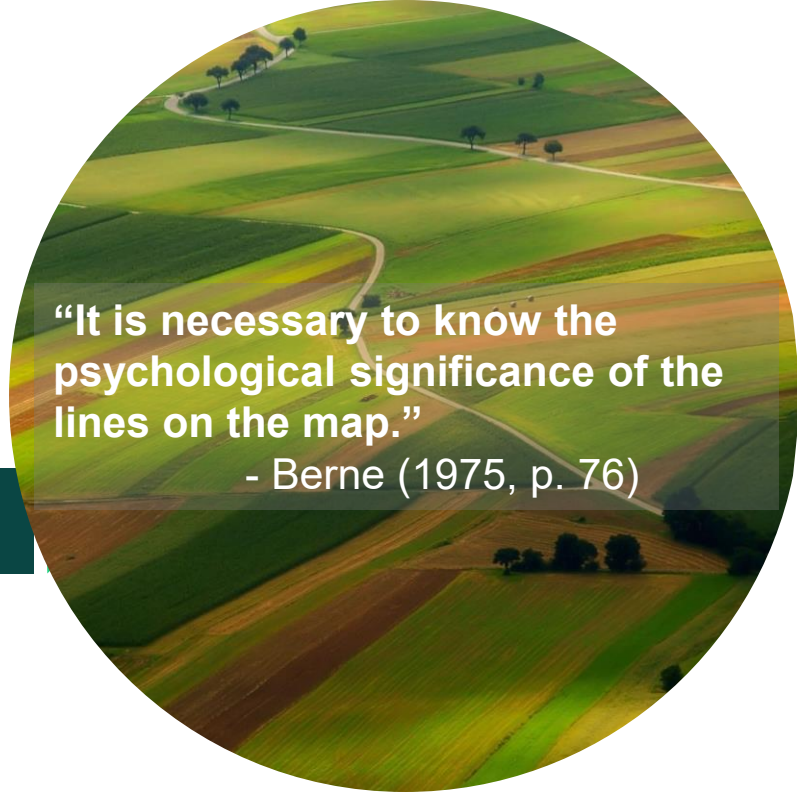
- Identify what points of no return are present in the ecosystem
- Every push has its pull: seek to understand unintended consequences at multiple levels
- There is power in diversity so harness it for success

Thank you,

Anca Popa, MBA, ChPP & Philip Macey,ChPP
APM Systems Thinking Network Volunteers

https://www.apm.org.uk/community/systems-thinking-interest-network/

Boundary taxonomy



High level order

- Change initiative scope and timescales – **the need for change**
- Value chain and competence – **what is changing**

Second order

- Physical
- Virtual and technology
- Structural
- Culture, leadership and power
- Practitioner landscape

Contextual

- Governance and resources
- Change landscape
- Near environment
- Far environment – mainly legal and legitimation
- Ethics and planet

(Popa, 2024)

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References

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