

TPM1x - 1.2 - Actors

Welcome in week 1 of the course. This video is about the first step you will take when trying to get a grip on a complex situation. Complexity is everywhere, so if you want to apply this first step to your decision making on what to eat tonight, what policy to implement in your country to boost sustainable energy, or, to your own case does not matter.

OK, consider this situation; a government wants a connection between a major city and a major international airport. It wants to build a high-speed rail connection.

In such a large project, a lot of different people, and groups of people, have an interest in the project in whatever way.

It can be that they want things to change, since they are unsatisfied right now. Or, they prefer a specific solution that probably someone else dislikes. Someone might see himself as an expert on a certain related topic and wants to share this knowledge with other stakeholders.

The behaviour of these so-called stakeholders in such a project determines the success of that project. Without proper collaboration between stakeholders, a good implementation of a solution will be impossible.

Who could be involved in this problem field? Well, an obvious first list of actors involved is: the minister of transport, the travellers and the people living close to the proposed high speed rail line, the inhabitants.

And what can you contribute here as an analyst, consultant, or maybe as being one of these actors yourself?

Well, by identifying these actors and making the problem as they see it explicit, you help the different stakeholders in knowing and understanding the goals and interests of each other. You will reduce discussions about one solution being better than the other, as people focus more about what the stakeholders want to achieve with a certain solution.

Let me introduce you to the Dutch minister of Infrastructure and Environment.

She has a plan to improve the connection between the major Dutch international airport Amsterdam Schiphol and another major city in Europe.

The solution that eventually will be implemented to provide this new connection will always affect the actors involved. Some positively, and some negatively.

This traveller wants a safe journey from one destination to another and prefers to pay a low travel fee.

This man that tries to read his newspaper in his front yard. He lives nearby the railway.

This man likes to live in a safe and healthy environment and enjoys it when it is quiet.

Building a high speed rail line does not automatically match the interest of all these people. When trying to find a feasible solution, a first step toward doing this is listing all the different interests.

This table provides a brief overview of the interests of the actors involved in creating a new connection from Amsterdam Schiphol Airport to a major city on Europe. This particular table is quite small, because a lot of actors that were actually involved in real-life are left out in this table to have a simple example.

Now that you have an idea about the different interests that are at stake, the next step is to actually do something with this information. The different interests somehow relate, each and every one of them, to the total problem. A first step is to formulate a problem statement for each actor. Let's give you a simple example for one of the actors. You can easily expand this to the other actors involved. Try it for your own case!

The minister for instance, could use the next problem statement to create or find a solution acceptable for both herself as well as the people living near the railway line.

“How to provide a better connection between Schiphol Airport and Antwerp, without causing too much nuisance?”

Performing such an analysis in an early phase, not only for this actor, but for all actors involved helps to prevent problems that might occur along the way of problem solving and contributes, in the end, to finding a solution that is supported by all actors involved.

My name is Ernst ten Heuvelhof. I am a professor of public management at TU Delft. My field of research is decision making processes in networks of actors. The actors in these networks are interdependent, that is to say, they need each other to realize their goals. It is important to realize that actor's goals and criteria in networks are not so clear and well-defined as you might initially think.

In the first place actors are continually learning, including about their own goals and criteria. And as time passes and they carry out their work, they get an increasingly better insight in what they really find important and what their own objectives are.

Another learning process is that they gain insight into what is achievable within the network of actors in which they operate. And some of their objectives may be well-supported, and others less so. And this can lead to a certain adjustment of objectives and priorities. They adjust as it were, to what is achievable, and after a while they actually find this.

In the second place, actors in networks are well-aware that they need others if they are to get anything done. But they also know that other actors need them. Actors can meet each other in negotiating processes. A sensible negotiating technique can be to aim high in such

processes. This means that in many cases the objectives you first hear from an actor, are not his or her actual objectives.

In the third place, actors may be ashamed to openly admit their objectives, e.g., if their goals are associated with highly personal ambitions. These actors realize that honestly and openly admitting their objectives, will put them in an impossible position. So they don't express their true objectives.

What does all this mean? Does it mean that an analysis of actors and their goals is useless. No, not at all! I consider this analysis to be the first step to get the rich picture you need to understand what is going on in the world. To understand why the world is the way it is. And why it develops the way it develops.

You have seen Alexander's explanation and Ernst's experience with actors. They both use actor analysis as an initial step in getting a grip, as, eventually, we want to solve a complex problem. I will give you a day-to-day funny example that you can easily remember. Same principles apply here. Complexity is all around us. Also in our direct neighbourhood.

Helen throws a birthday party tonight, in her student house. Helen is, however, not alone. What other actors are present?

At both sides of the house, neighbours can be found.

These neighbours enjoy the peace and quiet environment they usually live in and want to have a good night sleep.

Of course, the police tries to take care of the well-being of the inhabitants in the neighbourhood.

And last, but not least, a lot of Helen's friends will show up tonight, looking for a whole lot of fun and a long night of partying.

Bringing all these interests together in one table, can you see a solution that might fit?

What could you do to make all these people choose for one solution?

Having seen the initial analysis step of actor analysis and some examples, now it is time to start applying it! The best way to learn this technique is to try and see what it brings you.

You can apply actor analysis on your own case, a chosen case in this course, or to the case of this week. Or all three if you would like to. It does not matter, as long as you apply. Preferably discuss the results with a few other students in this course.

And, don't forget to upload a final message you derive from your actor analysis in your case!

The best way to start is to study chapter 1 from the text book Solving Complex Problems.

When you're finished with that, I have the following two questions for you:

What actors are involved in this problem situation of your case? As a rough guide, make a list of around 10 actors.

Identify one of these actors as the owner of the problem. It could be yourself when you apply the techniques in this course on your own case! This actor is your (virtual) client from now on. You work for him or her, as an analyst, to help in deciding what to do.

While identifying stakeholders and their interests it is our experience is that some obvious mistakes are always made. No worries, it happens to everyone, it also happened to me!

In your book there is more elaborate list of obvious mistakes, but here are already two very common ones. Have a look at your work to see if you can avoid them!

Often, some of the most important stakeholders are forgotten. In most cases this happens because people think about solutions first. Only those needed to implement that solution are put on the list of stakeholders. Doing an actor analysis is not about who you need for a certain solution. The idea is to come to a decision about what to do. A joint decision. For that we need to know everybody is involved in the problem field.

Another common mistake is that the client you work for cannot make real decisions. If your client cannot make any changes in the system you analyse, there is nothing for that client to choose from. There is nothing he or she can do to make the situation better. So, in that case, there is no need for an analysis. If you do your analysis on your own case, just check whether you are capable of, in the end, implementing solutions. If not, you better make your analysis for another actor.

Good luck with the implementation of actor analysis on the cases you have chosen. Let us know what happened! You can upload a video with a message.

In the webinar later this week, we will give you some reactions and feedback on the work of some of you. And, of course, react on the most common questions raised in the discussion forum.

Have some great days and see you next time!