My Way of Writing Papers

Applying project formulation steps to ensure all round view of the subjects taken up

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My approach to writing a thesis is related with the project formulation method using it as a meta-model. It is hoped to include as many elements of the project formulation method as possible. If we break the method into basic elements, we can identify six essential steps.

Six steps

Step 1: Clarifying the stakeholders involved

Any topic is related with the stakeholders involved. Nothing takes place in a power neutral situation. When we deal with social science issues, especially when it is related with changing the status quo, there are always those who receive benefit and those who may be negatively affected.

Within those who welcome the change, we can identify different groups: i.e., those who benefit directly from the suggested change, those who can authorize the change from the higher positions, those who implement the change and those who can support the action financially.

With regard to those who take the necessary actions for the change, several matters need to be clarified; such as, what are the problems they faced, what are the motives behind the action, what benefit can be obtained if the change is realized, and what would be the specific actions necessary for the change.

If we are able to clarify these and tabulate the result, we can visually explain socio-economic forces working in the background. Tabulated below we can see the prototype model for the stakeholders' analysis.

Stakeholders' analysis: prototype

Groups	Benefit from system change	To negatively be affected by system change	Implement system change	Authorize system change	Support system change financially	Support system change by advocacy
Group1						
Group2						
Group3						

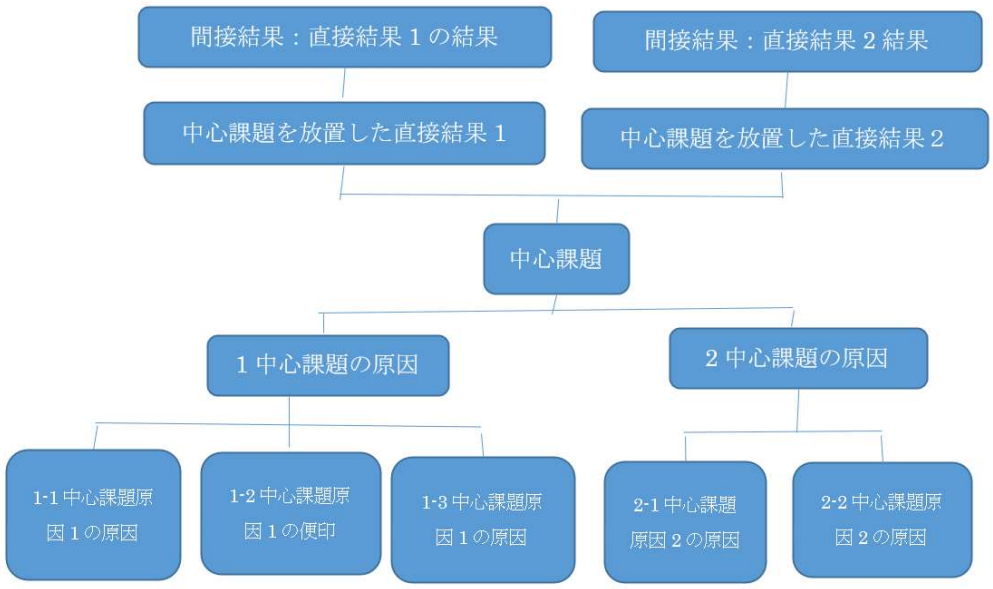
Note: It is not necessary to fill in three groups when not identifiable.

Step2: Structure of the target problem and related problems expressed with the tree diagram
Issues in question needs to be positioned in relation to the related matters and the structure has to be visually clarified and explained.

Almost all issues in question cannot stand alone. They are always linked with other factors. The main issue and related issue need to be connected with "cause and effect" logic. The main issue is positioned at the center, and expands downward looking for the cause and further cause. When several causes are identified, they are placed laterally if they are mutually independent. They are placed vertically if cause and effect logic is identified.

Effects of leaving the problem as it is, will be positioned upward. If we can identify several effects, we position them laterally if they are mutually independent. They are placed vertically if cause and effect logic is identified.

The result is the visually explainable tree shown below, with the main issue at the center and the cause and further cause written toward downward and effect toward upward.

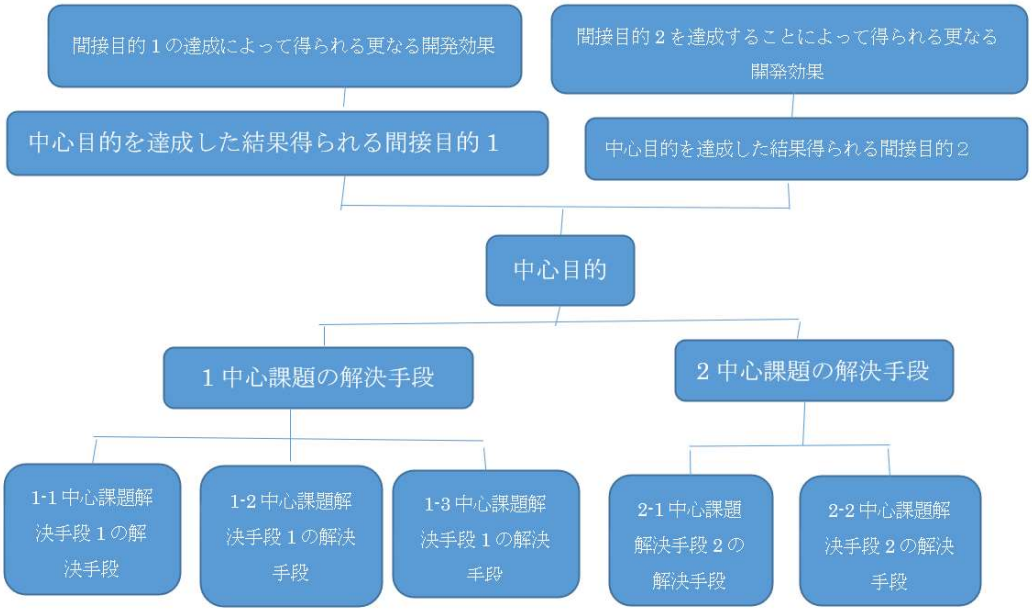


Note: You may extend the diagram if new causes are identified. It is desirable to explore wider and deeper to find as concrete causes as possible.

Step 3: Showing the means for problem solving with concrete expressions clarifying the structure of the related means.
Starting from the problems tree of Step-2 in the above diagram, means are presented which are necessary for problem solving. At this step, specificity and concreteness is the key points. After

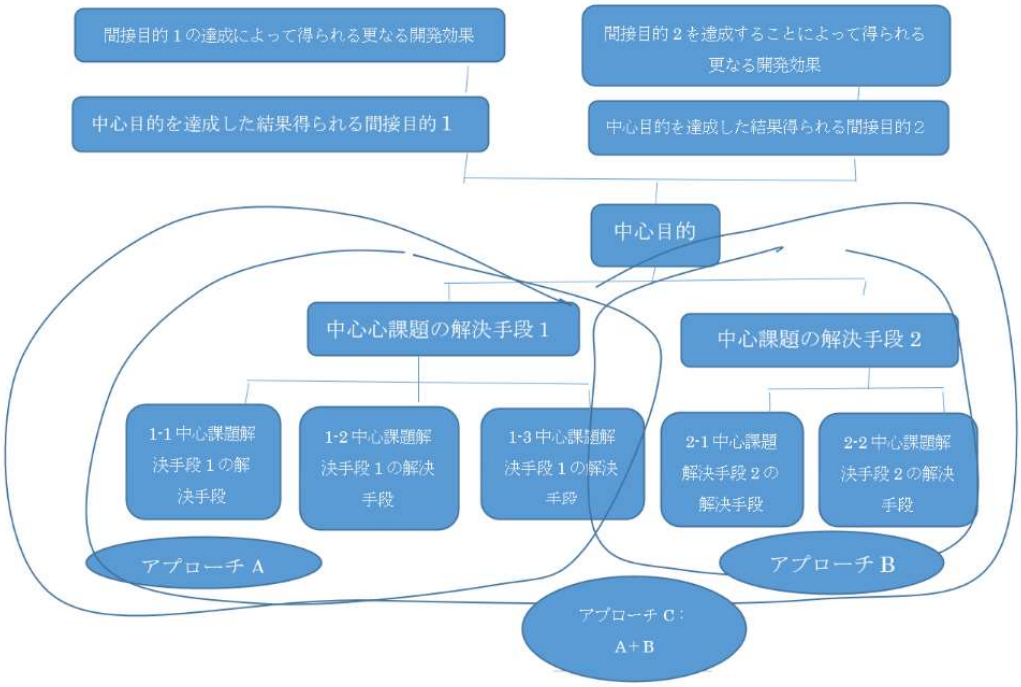
completing the diagram that shows the means and related means, group extracting the ones closely connected with a name as approach for problem solving is made.

3-1: Identifying the means to solve the problem



Note: It is desirable to explore wider and deeper until you can find the concrete entry point for problem solving.

3-2 Identifying approaches to solve the problem



Step-4: Looking for the most realistic and feasible approach

Approaches identified in above diagram 3 are compared with three criteria: i.e., i) cost, ii) technical difficulty – requiring new skill or manageable with already known skills, possibility of inviting widespread resistance vis a vis changes to be introduced, and iii) feasibility of solving the problem in question based on the proposed approach.

This analysis is sensitive but important when we are dealing with issues such as medical fee payment percentage change for people over 75 years old in relation with their income level. Introduction of ICT in the work process, for example, needs to be examined in relation with the technically required level including the present condition of telecommunication infrastructure based on the optical fiber.

Approaches	Approach A	Approach B	Approach C
Cost (high/low)			
Technical difficulties (significant/minimal/)			
Social resistance (significant/minimal/)			
Feasibility (high/low)			

Step 5: External factors and their relation with the proposed change project clarified with a logical framework matrix

After selecting the packages of means as an approach to solve the problem, external factors will be examined and related with the change project. This is to examine what the project intends to achieve or disturbed by the actions of other actors.

Taking the medical fee case in the above for example, we have to see whether the local doctors' association accepts the change or not. Taking the ICT propagation case in the above, we have to see whether the optical fiber network is maintained properly without disrupting the stability and speed of telecommunication.

Whole stories will be explained in a 4 row, 4 column logical framework matrix, with the intended change and the development of its effect and resulting impact written in the left column, with appropriate indices in the second column on the left, with each index data source being clarified in the third column on the left, together with the expected response of the external actors as assumption in the right column.

Logical framework

Developmental Progress	Indicators	Data Source for Indicator	External Condition
Overall goal			Policy factors
Project purpose			Project environment factors
Outputs			Factors related with concerned outside organization
Activities	Input (internal) -human -material -financial	Input (external) -human -material -financial	Internal human, material and financial resource sustainability to continue activities
			Preconditions e.g., major stakeholders' cooperation

Step 6: Action plan to be proposed

Problem solving types for the academic paper needs to be concluded with a proposal. For this to be realistic and convincing, it needs to have a deadline, bar chart that shows activity sequence, specific output expected to be generated, the name of the group who supervise, the name of groups who actually work, the way to obtain necessary human and material as well as financial resources, and key points to obtain collaboration from related external actors.

Project Actities

Activities	Concrete output	When to start and to end	Those responsible	Those who take charge of activities	Human, material and financial resource requirement	Collaboration with related outside organizations	Other factors to be considered
Activity 1							
Activity 2							
Activity 3							

Note: to visualize implementation flow, using a bar-chart is a desirable practice

Almost all themes can be handled. In fact, this logic model can handle almost all issues in social science. In the term of 2008-2010, for example, overseas Chinese businessmen groups launched the Chinatown Area concept in and around the North exit of Ikebukuro station. The local Japanese shop association opposed the idea and took to the street to crush the proposal. Chinese businessmen wanted to introduce foreign funds into the mix to activate the business activities, while the local Japanese shops were fed up with the way Chinese shops misuse the roads disregarding the cleanup and

lightening activities maintained by the resident Japanese shops.

Whether this now aborted Tokyo Chinatown Concept has a chance to be revived or not in the future, and under what condition both sides can reconcile themselves for the mutual benefit, for example, can be an excellent research project with in-depth interviews of the leaders of both sides, and secondary data. Data gathering and compilation with multiple stakeholders in mind is an extremely difficult task. But if we are able to use the above six steps, it is reasonably feasible to present the structure of the problem, structure of the possible means for solution, and concrete steps for reconciliation.

Ethnic minority problems and women's status issues in developing countries are two complex themes for research. CDD (community driven development) method, which is widely adopted by World Bank, is an approach to organize the minorities and women, to entrust them with the management of funds and materials provided by the aid to prevent the local business elites from controlling and misusing aid resources. With the use of the above Six-step analysis, it is reasonably feasible to explain the forces working in the project site, the impact CDD generated in the way minorities and the women's behaviors vis a vis local elite.

Relevance of the adopted policy can also be examined with this Six-step approach. Regional revitalization has been one of the high priority policies of Liberal Democratic Party of Japan, and it is time to evaluate its effect. Policy evaluation needs to be done, focusing on whether hometown tax donation programs have generated its expected effects. What kind of problems has surfaced in the urban cities which are the result of the present tax base system? An evaluation with multiple viewpoints can be carried out with the help of stakeholders' analysis (Step-1). An effective approach can be identified by identification of the feasible approach (Step-4).

Other applicable themes can be raised such as local infrastructure development, introduction of new transport systems, small startup business in typhoon damaged local cities, and so on.

Having generic and abstract but visually understandable structure, the Six-step approach can be applied to almost any themes of social science.

An additional Step: cost benefit analysis will make the proposal more convincing.
When the paper is a policy-oriented type of an academic paper, it is better to clarify cost and benefit with the cash-flow table analysis. This is the final addition which makes the paper more convincing. In case the appropriate index data are not available, it is often suggested to the students to use the surrogate indicator. Even with surrogate indicator, it makes the paper far more persuasive.

The above is the summative explanation of the approach I employ and I recommend to my undergraduates, master and PhD candidates. Compliance with the meta model is desirable, but it requires a lot of work in many cases. Thus, I satisfy myself with a minimum of 60% observance when

I evaluate the quality. Even with 60%, the result is well over the pass mark standard, which is far better than the so-called dissertation which mixes the subjective and objective opinions under one paper. I am of the opinion that using the project formulation method as the meta-model of dissertation writing is an easily explainable and understandable approach to ensure the quality of the results of dissertation writing.

Reference: FASID PCM: Project Cycle Management
MANAGEMENT TOOL FOR DEVEPMENT ASSISTANCE
Participatory Planning
2001March