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Strategic Options Development and Analysis (SODA): Hints and Tips from Practice

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Seminar jointly organised by the:
Operational Research and Information Systems Group at Warwick Business School, and
Problem Structuring Methods (PSM) Special Interest Group of the OR Society.

Warwick Business School, Social Studies Lounge
3.30 pm - 5.30 pm on Monday 20 February 2006

An integral part of SODA (now known as Journey Making) is causal mapping. Mapping for OR can be used in many different ways – with individuals, groups, for the analysis of documents. Mapping when working with a group to reach agreements about how to deal with strategic issues can be employed through manual techniques (such as the Oval Mapping Technique OMT), or computer supported using *Decision Explorer* and/or *Group Explorer*.

Mapping is a formal modelling technique, and the analyses of the model to support problem resolution depend upon the mapping formalities being followed. However, the management of group processes is also crucial to the modelling being effective in *negotiating* agreements through the map displaying 'visible thinking' (and as a 'transitional object').

Group Explorer provides participants with the opportunity to contribute directly to the construction of the group map. The seminar will provide 'hands on' experience with mapping through *Group Explorer*. This will act as the focus for reviewing coding practice, 'on-the-hoof' analyses, and group process issues (with discussion about identifying emergent goals, options, and seeking agreement). Managing both content and process in group support events is demanding; the session will address some of the ways this can be addressed in practice.

Examples from recent interventions with organizations will also be used to illustrate the talk.

Colin Eden is Director of the University of Strathclyde Graduate School of Business and Professor of Strategic Management and Management Science. His major research interests are into the processes of strategy making in senior management teams; the use of group decision support in the analysis and making of strategy; managerial and organisational cognition; 'soft OR' modelling approaches and methodologies, including particular emphasis on the role of cognitive mapping; the theory of consultancy practice; the process and practice of 'action research'; and the modelling of the behaviour of large projects disruptions and delays, including issues of the dynamics of productivity changes, and learning curves.

Colin is the author of 8 books and over 150 scholarly articles in management science and strategic management. His most recent book, with Fran Ackermann, is *The Practice of Making Strategy*, Sage 2005. The most recent book about mapping is Bryson, J.; Ackermann, F.; Eden, C., and Finn, C. *Visible Thinking: Unlocking Causal Mapping for Practical Business Results*. Chichester: Wiley; 2004.

Fran Ackermann is a Professor in Strategy and Information systems in the Department of Management Science at Strathclyde University. Her interests focus upon the use of cognitive and cause mapping and its application to messy complex problems. As a result she has worked with a wide range of public and private organizations in the arenas of problem structuring, strategy development, risk assessment and the modelling of disruption and delay in large projects. Along with working for a range of organizations, she has been integrally involved in a number of research projects; for example 'Scenarios for Scotland', 'Economic Scenarios of the Value of Renewable Obligation Certificates', and the 'Assessment and Management of Risk in complex projects'.

Her interest in harnessing technology to support group working has resulted in her exploring the role Information Systems can play in supporting groups, and along with Colin Eden, she has been instrumental in developing software tools namely *Decision Explorer* and *Group Explorer* for the modelling of qualitative data. More recently she has been working with multi-organizational groups exploring how group support systems can be developed to support these particular types of organizations. She is Coordinator of the European Working Group on Group Decision and Negotiation, an Affiliate Professor at Bordeaux Business School, and an Associate Editor for two leading Information Systems journals. She has written extensively and has published 3 books, and numerous book chapters and journal articles (two of which have won best paper prizes).

Tea/coffee and biscuits/cakes will be provided. Please e-mail *Alberto Franco*, alberto.franco@wbs.ac.uk or *Mike Cushman*, m.cushman@lse.ac.uk to confirm attendance.

