

# Identifying and organising options

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## Abstract

This document traces option pathways common in academic environments, and displays the reasoning in descriptive causal diagrams (DCD).

## 1 Introduction

Situations of loosely defined or generally expressed ideas — for instance, as in the ‘Systems Thinking’ book (Perdicoulis, 2010, p.98) or in an earlier issue of the ‘Systems Planner’ (Perdicoulis, 2012) — require some resolution by providing more details so that they become implementable. Identifying options reduces uncertainty by putting order into known information, showing where to seek further information, and helps form ‘packages’ that can be selected in decision-making.

To illustrate the creation and appearance of option trees, let us consider some common workflows from the academic environment expressed as descriptive causal diagrams (DCD). The first workflow (Figure 1) represents the need for specification originating from a general request for a deliverable such as a project presentation or a project report.

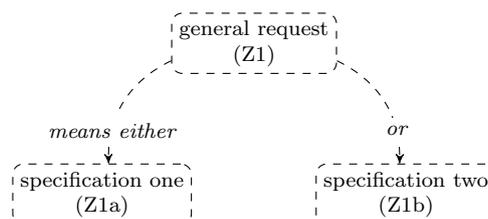


FIGURE 1 Workflow 1: specifying a general request

The second workflow (Figure 2) represents the need for identification of options for action, including tasks, techniques, and means. Hence, the action is not only about ‘what to do’, but also about ‘how to do it’.

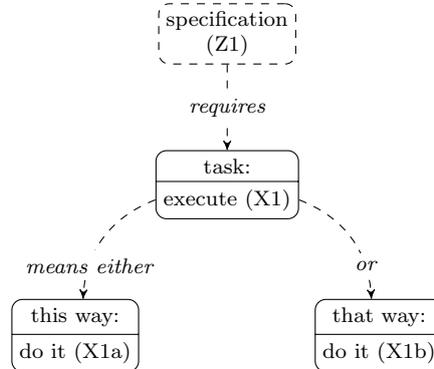


FIGURE 2 Workflow 2: identifying options for action

To see how to identify and organise options in practice, let us build on a the frameshow preparation example presented in an earlier issue (Perdicóúlis, 2012).

## 2 Example

Starting with the general request for a ‘frameshow’, authors are confronted with many options along a number of issues — for instance, content (e.g. story, material), quality (e.g. interest, appearance), and production (e.g. software, resources). Let us focus the example on ‘production’. Figure 3 includes both workflows from Figures 1 and 2.

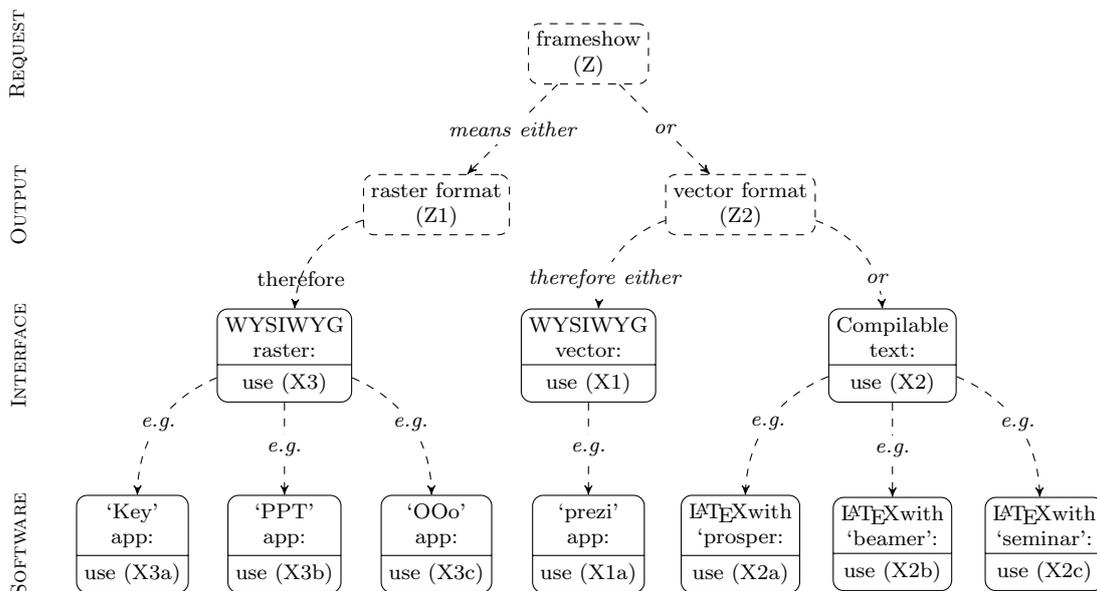


FIGURE 3 Production options for creating a frameshow

### 3 Discussion

The methodic identification and organisation of options, as in Figure 3, is a good base for decision-making. Assuming a ‘systems learning’ decision making model (Perdicoulis, 2010, pp.42–44), the second ingredient for making a decision is the selection rules (or criteria).

Identification of options is primarily a ‘creative’ inductive process (Perdicoulis, 2010, pp.50–51), requiring knowledge, imagination, organisation, curiosity, and a bit of daring — at least not being easily intimidated. Exploring options is also good training to make people curious (as to what exists besides this), critical (e.g. is this the best option?), and trains their ‘zoom’ capacity (e.g. abstraction/ concretisation) (Perdicoulis, 2011b, p.11).

Finally, it is important to observe that any of the sequences of *exploratory* workflows presented in Figures 1 to 3 is exactly in the reverse order from the actual application workflow.

### 4 Conclusion

Specifying general requests and exploring options for action is a good help for decision-making. Diagrams such as DCDs are a helpful medium to identify and organise options in a variety of planning contexts.

### References

- Perdicoulis, A. (2010) *Systems Thinking and Decision Making in Urban and Environmental Planning*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Perdicoulis, A. (2011) *Building Competences for Spatial Planners: Methods and Techniques for Performing Tasks with Efficiency*. London: Routledge.
- Perdicoulis, A. (2012) Design by principles. *Systems Planner*, 8.

