Meta-Matching-Method

How to choose among methods? A meta-tool to select and adapt the right method for your project.

Contributor

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Executive Summary

In the last decades the range of tools and methods to facilitate change and reform processes has exploded. This is on the one side great: the toolbox out of which to choose is well fitted. But on the other side this makes the selection, the mixing and the adaptation of the best suitable procedure more and more complex.

That is why in a transdisciplinary R+D process over the last years we have developed a meta-tool guiding facilitators and change agents through this tool-finding and improving process. Core of this so called **Meta-Matching-Method** (**MMM**) is the profiling and then matching of the requirement-profile of the case with the performance-profile of appropriate tools.

In a deliberative process lasting approximate 6-18 hours the facilitator together with the case-owners go through the four phases of the MMM-process: **Mapping, Profiling, Matching, Re-Designing**. The result is the finding and adaptation of a well-founded and best-suitable method for the specific case with its own particularities.

The benefits of this systematic and at the same time sensitive meta-procedure are for both, the case-owners and the facilitators, striking: not only the best known tool has been chosen but the stakeholders have gained a common view and deeper understanding of the coming venture. But most important, through the analytical and participatory proceeding the tool later on used has been developed together so that the backing and motivation during the project is sustainable.

Background of the Meta-Matching-Method (MMM)

Every facilitator/change agent in change-management or organisational development processes knows the problems: **Which method should be adapted to a certain project? Do the owners of the project and the relevant actors support the method? How can we establish shared assumptions among the participants about the case and the chosen method?**

As cases differ from each other also the most suitable methods to each project differ. Therefore it is necessary in every new job to analyse the case *and* the method to address it. Imagine a tool that not only helps to profile the demands of the *case and* the capacity of the methods, but also produces support of the chosen method and a shared understanding among participants.

MMM was developed in a research project on "Procedural Approaches to Conflict Resolution" at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research at the University of Bielefeld in 2002/2003. It is grounded in solid scientific work and an elaborated theory of procedures. As a meta-tool it offers a theoretical and systematic understanding of change as a process and supports the proceeding with change in practical cases. Since then it has been presented several times on conferences and workshops and **was practised in cases as in public participation, change-management, project development and network organising**. Further theoretical underpinning is under way in a **R&D-project on Procedural Practice** which also offers trainings for facilitators.

The Meta-Matching-Method is deeply rooted in the systemic approach to organisational development and change-management and modern governance discourse. Based on these approaches of systemic interaction and intervention the holistic approach of MMM encloses **the past, the present and the future** of a project.

The basics of MMM

MMM is a **deliberative** and **systematic** approach to profile the *case and* the method which should be adapted. Consequently it is an efficient and effective tool to gain comprehensive understanding of the case in combination with an overview of the methods' capacities. At the end of the profiling process the facilitator is able to decide whether or not to use the method in a certain case and how to adjust it. Therefore, **MMM is a helpful tool for every facilitator to choose among and adjust the chosen methods for change-management, organisational development and other co-active problem solving processes.**

The profiling process is deliberative: In contrast to other participatory methods **MMM integrates the owners and other key actors** of the project already in the stage of process designing which is normally undertaken by the facilitator himself. They do not experience the service of the facilitator as a top-down decision but rather feel taken seriously and involved. As the owners, other key-actors and the facilitator complement one another **MMM guaran-**

tees an extremely deep understanding of the matter and establishes shared assumptions about the case and the problem.

The method to adapt becomes transparent: After profiling the case all the participants also profile the chosen method. Therefore, they gain a common understanding not only of the problem to solve but also of the procedure to be used. The common profiling process fosters the support of the method and eases the job of the facilitator. **MMM produces support and understanding of the method among owners and actors.**

From my own experiences but also from colleagues, I know that **MMM saves a lot of resources from all sides involved**. With professional moderation it is a question of hours to profile both the case and the methods and to match them. Even more important in order to save resources is the fact, that it guarantees an analysis of all important factors interacting with a case which is a prerequisite for **lasting results**. Additionally MMM is a tool to ensure the adaptation of the best addressing method to a certain case which consequently **produces the most dramatic results**.

The question of choosing among methods is not restricted to the field of change management. **MMM can be carried out in all social fields**. It has been used in politics, companies, science and churches. The interaction of facilitator, owners and actors during the profiling process is the best way to respect cultural diversity as MMM makes it explicit and offers the room to establish shared assumptions among the participants.

Support for the application of MMM can be offered in several ways: Several institutions in Germany spread it such as a R&D-project on procedural practice (www.procedere.org (under construction)), the Center for Technology and Society (www.ztg.tu-berlin.de/reg001001_en.shtml) and the nexus-Institute for Cooperation Management and Interdisciplinary Research (www.nexus-berlin.com/Nexus/index_en.html).

MMM in use

The application process of MMM is highly sophisticated as every stage has clear objectives combined with differentiated procedures. In this draft I just present the four stages:

- Mapping
- Profiling
- Matching
- Re-Designing

Mapping: At this stage all participants commonly draw "mindmaps" of the project or the case. The mapping asks for the real problem underlying the case and looks for power and the interests of the actors. It is a first approach to the topic following the rule of "quick and dirty". That means aspects of the case are expressed but not further deepened nor systematized. It has to be considered that the actors may have different backgrounds, competing assumptions and do not know each other: If the different issues of the project are deeply discussed at this stage, the actors will distance themselves from

each other with nearly no chance to bring them together later. On the contrary, the mapping-process brings them together and establishes a first but still weak collective awareness and solidarity.

Profiling: The profiling process has to be done with the case as well as one or some alternative methods suitable to the case. The profiles consist of six categories. Each of them can take on a low to high intensity. These categories are:

- **Complexity of Topic**
- **Complexity of the Actors**
- **Methods' variability**
- **Time pressure**
- **Resources**
- **Degree of commitment**

With these categories it is possible to profile the case and the chosen method comprehensively. Following the mapping-process the participants go further into the details at this stage. Especially their view of the problem or the case broadens during the profiling as they analyse and systematize it deliberatively.

Matching: At the third stage of the MMM process the profile of the case is compared with the profile of a certain method. All participants discuss together whether or not the method is suitable for the case and compare the methods with each other. Together they decide for the best method to use in the case.

Re-Designing: After the discussion about the best fitting method the chosen procedure is re-designed to adapt it to the case. A chosen method will never fit absolutely to a certain case. Therefore it is necessary to discuss adjustments of the method before it starts. All participants of MMM are able to participate at this stage as they have known the case and the chosen method.

Current References

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