

CATWOE

This is a useful tool for thinking, identifying the problem and determining the solution.

When to use it

- Use it when identifying the problem, to prompt thinking about what you are really trying to achieve.
- Use it when seeking to implement the solution, to help consider the impact on the people involved.

How to use it

Consider the areas below to stimulate thinking about the problem and/or implementing the solution.

C = Customers

- Who is on the receiving end?
- What problem do they have now?
- How will they react to what you are proposing?
- Who are the winners and losers?

A = Actors

- Who are the actors who will 'do the doing', carrying out your solution?
- What is the impact on them?
- How might they react?

T = Transformation process

- What is the process for transforming inputs into outputs?
- What are the inputs? Where do they come from?
- What are the outputs? Where do they go to?
- What are all the steps in between?

W = World View

- What is the bigger picture into which the situation fits?
- What is the real problem you are working on?
- What is the wider impact of any solution?

O = Owner

- Who is the real owner or owners of the process or situation you are changing?
- Can they help you or stop you?
- What would cause them to get in your way?
- What would lead them to help you?

E = Environmental constraints

- What are the broader constraints that act on the situation and your ideas?
- What are the ethical limits, the laws, financial constraints, limited resources? regulations, and so on?
- How might these constrain your solution? How can you get around them?

Example

Situation: Thinking about way of putting advertisements inside cars.

CATWOE:

- Customers: Advertisers, drivers, passengers. May see things differently!
- Actors: Garage attendants, mechanics, car washes: Extra revenue for them.
- Transformation process: Putting sticker on car now in return for discounts next time.
- World View: Drivers seeking every economy, or fashion victims, maybe?
- Owner: Car owner - must be persuaded of value.
- Environmental constraints: Limits on marketing budget, which will be needed.

How it works

CATWOE was defined by Peter Checkland as a part of his Soft Systems Methodology (SSM). It is a simple checklist for thinking. Like many checklists, it can be surprisingly useful when used appropriately to stimulate open thought.