



Collaborative tools, services and training

Meet smarter, not harder!

Either you deal with what is the reality, or you can be sure that the reality is going to deal with you.

– Alex Haley

Reality is not what it seems to be, nor is it otherwise.

– Tibetan Buddhist teaching

Reality is just a convenient measure of complexity.

– Alvy Ray Smith

The world is older and bigger than we are. This is a hard truth for some folks to swallow.

– Edward Abbey

Reality is a crutch for people who can't cope with drugs.

– Lily Tomlin

Real world analysis leads to real life options

The second phase of the **ToP Strategic Thinking & Planning framework** is a sober analysis of the **Underlying Reality**. Done well, this workshop provides windows of opportunity to the future. It identifies which things need to change, or be acted on, and which things need to be retained, and enhanced or strengthened.

In business, other aspects include (or could be stated as) SWOT, environmental or **force field analysis**. In project management, it can kick start risk management.

The Underlying Reality is about:

- **Asking** the basic question: why is the vision not in place already?
- **Honestly** and **frankly** describing the group's real situation – what is actually present – right here and right now.
- **Accurately** describing the factors the group is dealing with. These are both:
 - ▶ those that are **preventing** the group from achieving its vision; and
 - ▶ those that are **supporting** its efforts.
- Claiming the **freedom** that comes from addressing the actual situation, rather than an imaginary one.

Things to consider:

- Rather than identifying and analysing forces, people will often:
 - ▶ advocate for their (often entrenched) feelings or perceptions.
 - ▶ jump to preferred solutions.
- Participants often identify a “lack of...” This is often a way to refuse to own an issue, and put the responsibility to act onto someone else.
- “It's all too hard”. People often use obstacles to rationalise the status quo.
- Your data will always be incomplete. Again, this is not a reason to give up.



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Underlying Reality Workshop – Process Steps

Context

- * **Recap** the ST&P flow. **Outline** the work from the practical vision. Provide the practical result and the process for session.
- * **What is helping or hindering us?**
 - *Driving/restraining forces/factors in our current situation.*
 - *Specific, underlying causes.*
 - *Lack of time, people, money...*
 - *Assets to keep and strengthen.*

Brainstorm

- * **List:** *X blocks that are preventing us from realising the vision; X aspects that move us towards the vision.*
- * **Need specific, concrete data:**
 - *Objective statements of reality.*
 - **EG:** *Priority is XYZ whereas the vision needs ABC.*

Organise

- * **Identify** items that have a common factor. EG: same root cause.
- * **Cluster** them together. This can be an iterative process.

Name

- * **Articulate** underlying strengths or blocks. **Start** with the largest cluster:
 - *What is the focus of this cluster?*
 - *What “window of opportunity” do you see?*
 - *Name the underlying reality.*

Reflect

- * For each area, decide whether you can **control** or **influence** it, or if it is simply something you are **concerned** about.
- * *What are our clear focus areas?*

So, where have you enabled a group to objectively assess its current situation, and open windows of opportunity to their desired future? What went well/not so well? What did you learn for next time?

Go well!

David