About Current Reality Trees

The 'Current Reality Tree' (CRT) starts with the identification of Undesirable Effects (UDEs) present in our reality. Such UDEs are not only present; they contribute to inefficiencies or problems. If we want to be effective we need to identify the minimum necessary things that need to change. To do this we identify the few things causing the majority of the current problems. The fewer the elements we find that cause the problems the more powerful and focused our improvement process will be.

In a CRT problems are called 'UnDesirable Effects' (UDEs) to remind us that these are not things that exist in isolation but are the negative effects of some cause. UDEs are symptoms and they result from a cause. Therefore to identify the few things that need to be changed we should rely on cause and effect relationships. The CRT shows the relationships and links between the current UDEs.

How to Build a Current Reality Tree
Adapted from Dr K. J. Youngman

How do we construct a current reality tree? If you are working with a group of more than a 3-4 people, then Bill Dettmer's description of the Crawford Slip Method (1, 2) is a highly recommended and very effective adjunct to eliciting the required information to construct the tree.

In a nutshell, we need to develop of list of up to 10 UDEs that affect our current reality, written in the present tense. Let's limit ourselves to 5 in this simple explanation.

1. Let's arrange them on in a line in front of us.

| UDE-1 | UDE-2 | UDE-3 | UDE-4 | UDE-5 |

2. Ask yourself, are any a cause or an effect of another. If so, we can place the cause at the bottom and the effect at the top. Let's do that.

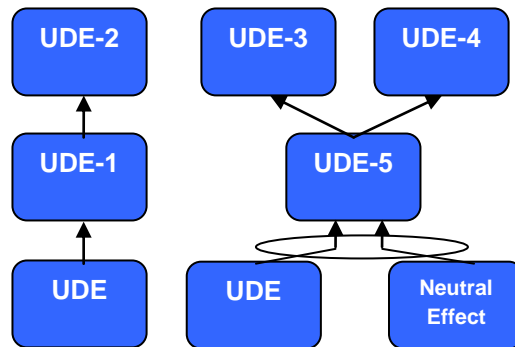| UDE-2 | UDE-3 | UDE-4 |

| UDE-1 | | UDE-5 |
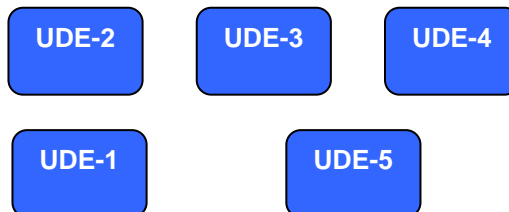
3. It seems that UDE-1 is a cause of UDE-2 and that UDE-3 and UDE-4 are both an effect of UDE-5. We can indicate the cause and effect relationship using arrows.
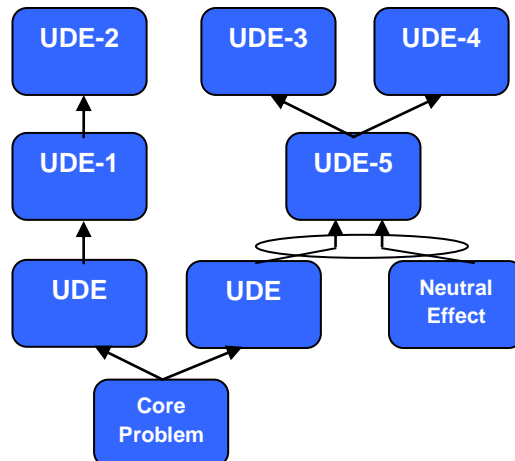
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  UDE-2        UDE-3      UDE-4
    ↑             ↖      ↗
  UDE-1            UDE-5
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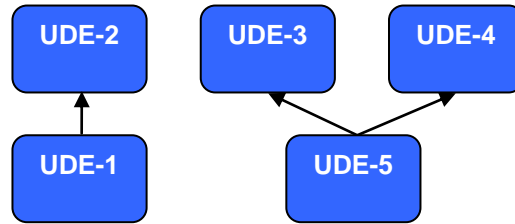
We can read the relationship as "If UDE-1 then UDE-2." Or "If UDE-5 then UDE-3," or "If UDE-5 then UDE-4."

4. Build down from these symptom problems to the deeper underlying causes by adding new UDE's or neutral effects in order to sufficiently describe our current reality.

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  UDE-2        UDE-3      UDE-4
    ↑             ↖      ↗
  UDE-1            UDE-5
    ↑              ↑  ↑
   UDE       UDE     Neutral
                     Effect
```

Notice now that UDE-5 is an effect of an underlying UDE and a neutral effect? These two entities *together* are the cause of UDE-5 and this is shown by the used of the ellipse. We read this as "If cause and if other cause then effect."

5. Let's go down one further step.

```
  UDE-2        UDE-3      UDE-4
    ↑             ↖      ↗
  UDE-1            UDE-5
    ↑              ↑  ↑
   UDE       UDE     Neutral
     ↖       ↗       Effect
       Core
      Problem
```
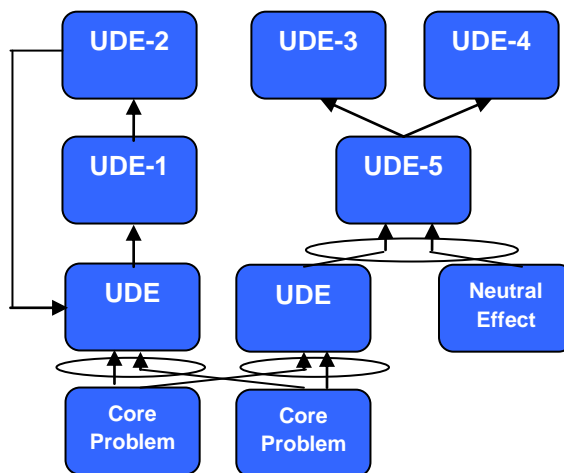
Now we have tied the two arms of the current reality tree together with a common core problem.

6. For completeness let's add a negative reinforcing loop into this tree.
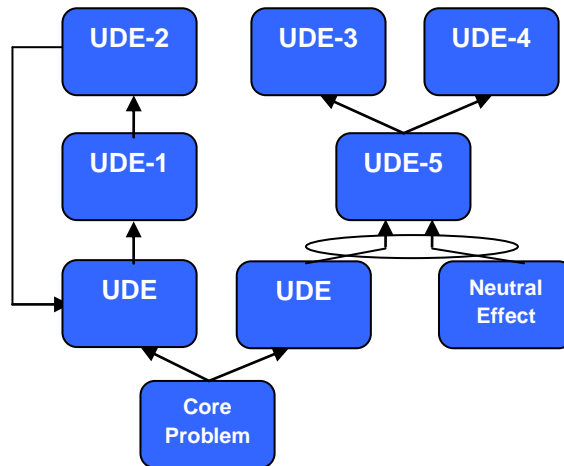
7. And finally let's also consider the case of a core conflict rather than a core problem.

Current reality trees have no "preferred shape," they just happen as you work back down through the underlying cause and effect to a problem or conflict that seems to account for most of the observed symptoms. Once completed, we are in a position to develop a solution to address the core problem and the resulting symptoms.

References

(1) Dettmer, H. W., (2003) Strategic navigation: a systems approach to business strategy. ASQ Quality Press, pp 91-93 & 215-228.

(2) Dettmer, H. W., (2003) Brainpower networking using the Crawford Slip method. Trafford Publishing, Inc., 181 pp.