

Chapter 9 – THE ESSENCE OF THE CODE OF BEST PRACTICE

This chapter concludes the analyst-oriented volume of the Guide and summarises its essential points.

Three key aspects characterise a judgement-based ('soft') OA study:

- It enables progress to be made for some otherwise intractable and complex decisions.
- It involves a creative journey of discovery and learning that can be used to the advantage of decision makers.
- The inherent uncertainty of complicated decision situations that the defence sector faces, leads the client for judgement-based OA to what are perhaps his most pressing concerns – its validity, credibility and acceptance. Study methods must therefore be well documented to withstand scrutiny.

Judgement-based OA is used to inform decisions where the subject matter is incompletely known or understood, where many and possibly conflicting viewpoints are involved and there is initially, at least, no obvious single solution. Many real-world and military issues can be described in this way. The term 'soft' is used in the academic community to denote such OA studies as often much of the input and output comprises subjective information. These issues may be compared to cases where most of the issues of a problematic situation are known and there is a logical process to derive more quantitative 'hard' insights. In reality there is no rigid distinction and most analyses comprise both 'hard' and 'soft' elements.

An easy way to distinguish between the two is to note that 'hard' OA is more likely to give checkable *facts* whereas 'soft' OA is predominantly based on judgement (i.e. informed opinions) and more likely to lead to a body of evidence allowing exploration and comparison of *possibilities*. Many real-world issues lie in the latter category: particularly, high-level questions relating to strategy, capability development and major acquisitions.

It should also be noted that a judgement-based approach may still include some 'hard' or quantitative elements (ref. bottom boxes of Figure 3-1); this is known as 'complementarity'. It is often the case that the analyst needs to dig deep into a problem, for instance, to test the feasibility of adopting a particular option.

Chapter 2 of this Code contains a table (Table 2-2) that characterises 'soft' and 'hard' OA and suggests which is more suitable for different types of problematic situations. Chapter 6 contains a list of questions (checkboxes; Section 6.2) that helps determine the nature of a problematic situation. The decision on whether to take a typical judgement-based approach should properly be left to the analyst after due discussion with the client.

This volume of the Guide is focused for the benefit of an analyst on the concept and structure of a 'soft' OA study and its methods and on how to achieve rigorous and auditable quality control of both process and content. However, good practice requires that both the analyst and client are aware of their roles and responsibilities regarding the study and that judgement-based OA is in many ways a collaborative journey involving subject-matter experts, clients and analysts.

The analyst is the expert in the design, development and implementation of the study plan. He should be guided by established practice, previous work and experience and his general skills. Part of his expertise lies in knowing what steps to take to ensure that a sound process has been followed in two respects:

- Was the approach taken appropriate for the maturity of the issue? (*Was the right study done?*)
- Was due diligence employed in carrying out the study? (*Was the study done right?*)

The good 'soft' OA analyst will have many attributes and skills to bring to problematic situations. He will also be responsible for assembling an analytical team comprising the appropriate skill sets and access to

computers and other resources. Chapter 4 discusses the skills needed by a good ‘soft’ OA analyst, including a summary of his responsibilities (Section 4.5).

As has been discussed in the CoBP, the validity of a judgement-based OA study is hard to assess. Similarly, it is difficult to define in advance a formal pattern of analytical work. Thus a flexible approach, allowing for review and iteration, is preferred to a rigid mechanism where every step has to be completed before the next can be started. Chapter 5 discusses this iterative and divergent/convergent nature of a ‘soft’ OA study.

The CoBP has discussed key activities to be conducted by the analyst and has suggested ways of conducting them so as to maximise the study’s validity. It is, of course, recognised that individual Nations will chose to implement the recommendations of the Code in different ways. For instance, some parts may be strengthened, others ignored. It is, however, to be noted that documentary record of the design process would provide good primary evidence of validity for any judgement-based study that was likely to generate contentious debate, such as for major acquisitions. This should not indicate simply that every step was completed, but rather that each one was reflected upon with reasons given where it was not followed.

It needs to be remembered that a study outcome is only one input into a decision-making process. For more quantitative OA, these decisions may be easy to make as there is clear numerical evidence presented for a well-understood issue. For judgement-based OA neither the initial issue is well understood, nor are the results of the study usually clear cut. These circumstances can be seen in both a positive and negative light, leading to the identification of the benefits of, and threats to, a ‘soft’ OA study. The benefits are set out in Table 9-1.

Table 9-1: Benefits of a ‘Soft’ OA Study.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The ability to analyse, make progress on, and perhaps resolve, problematic situations that would otherwise remain intractable.• An improved and more widely shared understanding of issues and solutions.• An improved sense of common purpose and greater commitment to ways forward.• The discovery of alternative options for dealing with an issue.• The iterative development of acceptable ways forward.• The systematic gathering and analysis of relevant information and knowledge.• A better appreciation of different objectives, perspectives and values, and the ability to reconcile them.• The delivery of usable products throughout the study. |
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All of these items contribute to the development of a shared common picture of the issues, even if there is disagreement on detail. They add value to the client and allow an informed climate of debate. If these items are conducted in the best possible way, that value is likely to be maximised.

The threats to a ‘soft’ OA study, whether intentional or unconsciously directed by individuals’ decision making preferences or backgrounds, are set out in Table 9-2.

Table 9-2: Threats to a 'Soft' OA Study.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Disagreement with a specific part of the study leading to a dismissal of the rest of the material.• Treating 'soft' OA study results with too much certainty (e.g. as a prediction).• Too rapid a progression from an ill-formed concern to a rigid plan for change (e.g. an acquisition).• Biased preference of some forms of evidence (e.g. quantitative sources).• Selective interpretation to support a specific argument. |
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It is the key task of both the analyst and, if present, the facilitator to recognise and minimise the effect of the threats. If done properly, this will also add to the study's validity and thereby credibility and acceptance.

In summary, the analyst should work with the client to ensure that an appropriate degree of validation has been achieved by a judgement-based OA study, particularly when SMEs or other stakeholders may bring information into the study at any time (Chapters 6 and 7). This cooperation is of crucial importance through the entire cycle of the study in order to generate ownership. The CoBP addresses how the approach to a study, and the cooperation with the stakeholders, contribute to validity. Chapter 3 in particular discusses the general philosophy of achieving validity (Figure 3-1). Chapter 4 addresses the responsibilities that stakeholders (including clients) may discharge in this matter.

Finally, Annex A collects together the key statement boxes which open each chapter. Reflecting upon the key statements and exploiting the checklists is one possible use of this CoBP in seeking to achieve valid and thereby credible and accepted study outcomes.

