



# Success and Failure of OR in a Complex Bureaucratic Environment

Roger Forder  
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“Infandum, regina, iubes renovare dolorem”

*Aeneas to Dido, Vergil, Aeneid II*



## Success and Failure of OR in a Complex Bureaucratic Environment

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“O Queen, thou bidst me bring to mind an experience of  
unspeakable grief”

*Aeneas to Dido, Vergil, Aeneid II*

# Organisations and decision-making

- The high-level decision-making process within organisations is “a complicated drama ... which involves power, influence, negotiation, game playing, organisation politics, complex social relationships with real people not merely office holders”.
  - Eden, C, and Sims, D. On the nature of problems in consulting practice. *Omega* 7, 119-127 (1979)

# Making an impact

- Probably many modes of successful analytical impact
  - Glacier mode (slow, steady but remorseless)
  - ‘Integral part of important, well-established process’ mode
  - etc, etc
- This talk is about the ‘Engage directly with senior decision-makers when it really matters’ mode
  - Concern arose from Chief Scientific Adviser’s Review of OA in MoD (2004)



- Study of “Best Practice in OA Support to Senior Decision-Makers”
- Considered how our colleagues do it (or don’t do it) in
  - UK organisations with in-house OR groups
  - Management consultancies
  - Defence analysis groups in allied nations
- Also conducted a review of the academic literature

External consultancies

OR groups as part of a research establishment or agency

OR groups as an integral part of their organisation's HQ structure

## External consultancies

OR groups as part of a research establishment or agency

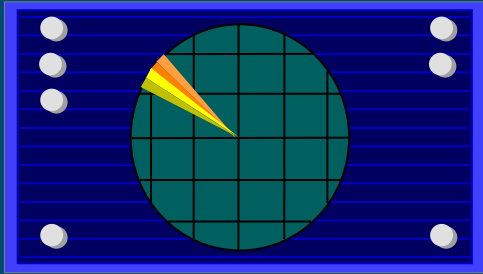
OR groups as an integral part of their organisation's HQ structure

# Integral, in-house OR : advantages

- Heads of OR branches or divisions are seen as members of the same peer group as policy-making or executive colleagues
- Key decision-makers may only be one layer above heads of OR
- Requirements for analysis, and changing priorities, are identified naturally, and quickly, as part of day-to-day business
- Decision-makers have regular exposure to even quite junior analysts, allowing trust to build up



# Lessons from in-house groups (1)



- Agility in identifying opportunities for analytical intervention and capturing requirements accordingly
  - Be there: right place, right time
  - Understand the real issues
  - Commit resources

# Lessons from in-house groups (2)



- Ruthless matching of the focus, approach and tempo of analysis to decision-making timescales
  - “We did 6 months of analysis in 24 hours, but it made an impact with the Minister”
  - Analysis of one or two key issues can illuminate a whole problem
  - But by no means all “quick and dirty”

# Lessons from in-house groups (3)



- Communication of results in a form appropriate to senior management working styles
  - Two-pager ... 10-minute rule ... a few PowerPoint slides
  - “I haven’t written a report since I have been in the company”
  - “We put more effort into the presentation than into the analysis”
  - At-the-desk interaction with simple model can be effective
  - **Must match presentational formats to individual preferences**

# Lessons from in-house groups (4)



- Generation and maintenance of trust
  - Senior managers can only operate if they trust their advisers ... applies to analysts as well as managerial subordinates

# Lessons from in-house groups (5)

- Most fruitful relationships generated by working closely with individual senior managers, rather than committees
- Also embed analysts into multi-disciplinary 'tiger teams'



## External consultancies

OR groups as part of a research establishment or agency

OR groups as an integral part of their organisation's HQ structure

# How do management consultancies overcome the disadvantages of their external position?



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# Lessons from consultancies

- Intensive networking and account management at senior level (to establish senior contacts, generate trust, win business)
- Insistence on dealing with client at appropriate (ie senior) level at key points within projects ...
- ... with senior person (eg 'partner-in-charge') on the consultancy side
- Emphasis on understanding senior-level expectations from project, surprise-free reporting and digestible presentation



External consultancies

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# National defence analysis organisations

- Even when formally part of parent MoD, usually embedded within separate research establishment or agency
- Need to maximise exploitation of “internal” positioning while learning lessons from management consultancies

# Building on internal positioning

- Locate OR function within MoD HQ, regardless of organisational positioning
- Dual-hat research establishment CE as MoD chief scientist (or equivalent dual-hatting for head of OR group)
- Second analysts into MoD HQ teams for specific tasks
- Arrange direct involvement in analysis in earlier career paths of senior decision-makers (*not so easy if not already a tradition!*)
- Develop genuinely symbiotic relationship with scientific / analytical posts in MoD (at both senior and staff levels) to co-own and champion analysis

# But also learn from consultancies ...

- Senior-level account management and networking within customer / stakeholder community
- Involvement of senior staff in key projects from beginning ...
- ... interacting at critical stages with senior stakeholders
- Surprise-free reporting in formats compatible with top management working styles



# How to fail

- Fail to understand the real issues
- Fail to understand whom you need to influence and “where they are coming from”
- Conduct key interactions at an inappropriately junior level
- Deliver late
- Surprise the customer in public or when it’s too late to do “what if” analysis
- Report in indigestible formats not matched to individual preferences
- Fail to engender trust

- Or, of course, try to make an impact using a different mode, and ignore *its* rules ...
- ... but that's another story!



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# Issue Selling

- Organisations can be seen as pluralistic market-places of ideas in which issues and answers are 'sold' and 'bought' ...
- ... or, organisations are systems of 'distributed attention' to issues and answers
- Issue sellers are 'players' who use a repertoire of 'moves' to sell issues and attract top management's attention.

Dutton *et al.* Moves that matter: issue selling and organizational change.  
*Academy of Management Journal* 44, 716-736 (2001)



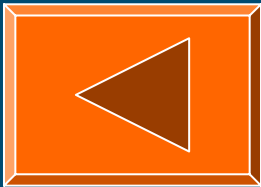
# Issue Selling : moves

- Packaging moves
  - How issues are ‘framed’
  - How they are presented
  - How an issue’s boundaries are defined and presented (‘bundling’)
- Involvement moves
  - Targets (whom to involve)
  - Nature of involvement (eg formal / informal channels)

# Issue Selling : contextual knowledge

- Relational knowledge
  - Knowledge that actors have about each other's intentions, stakes, goals, territories
  - Helps anticipate and address resistance, find and enlist expertise, learn and work the power structure
- Normative knowledge
  - Knowledge about accepted or appropriate norms and behavioural patterns in a particular organisational setting
  - Helps seller to choose moves and execute them well in that specific setting
- Strategic knowledge
  - Knowledge about the organisation's goals, plans and priorities.
  - Particularly assists in determining 'bundling' moves

Knowledge type	Questions
<b>Relational</b>	<p>Who will be affected by the issue?</p> <p>Who has experience with the issue?</p> <p>Who cares about the issue?</p> <p>What groups can help with advocating the issue?</p> <p>Does this issue threaten anyone or any group?</p> <p>Who has decision authority relevant to the issue?</p> <p>Who has power to promote or hinder the issue?</p> <p>When will people be ready to hear about this issue?</p>
<b>Normative</b>	<p>What kinds of data do (important) people use?</p> <p>How are data normally presented?</p> <p>How are arguments made against the issue?</p> <p>What kinds of protocols are followed?</p> <p>What kinds of meetings or social gatherings are legitimate decision fora?</p> <p>How much time does it usually take to sell an issue?</p> <p>How have similar issues been sold (or failed) before?</p>
<b>Strategic</b>	<p>What are the organisation's goals and values?</p> <p>How does the organisation plan to achieve these goals?</p> <p>What are the critical strategic issues for top management?</p> <p>What is the broader competitive / political context?</p>



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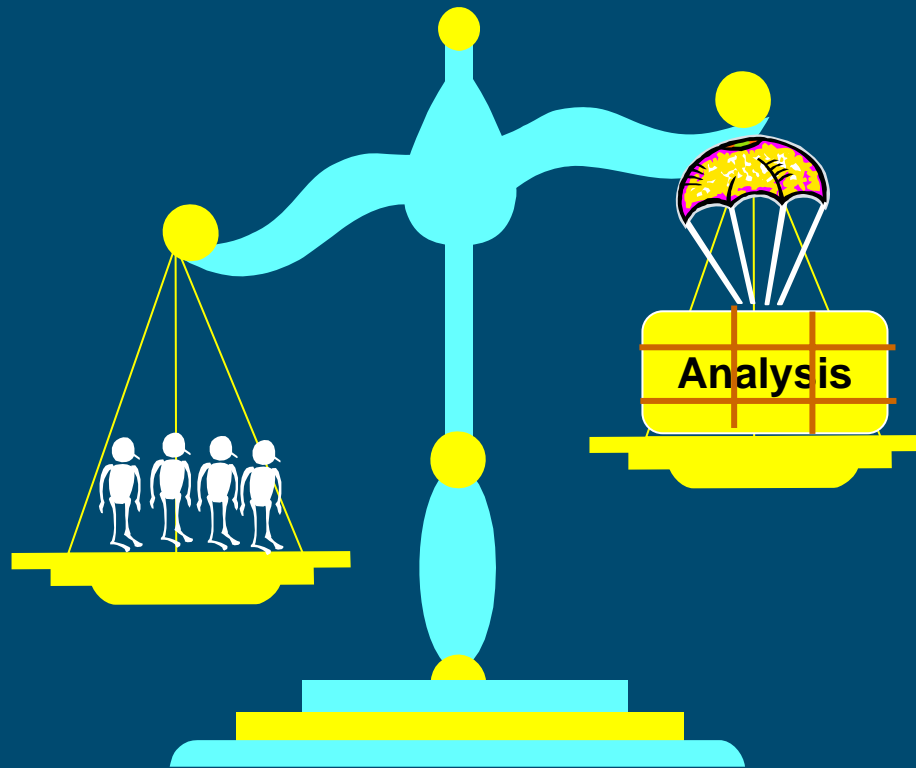


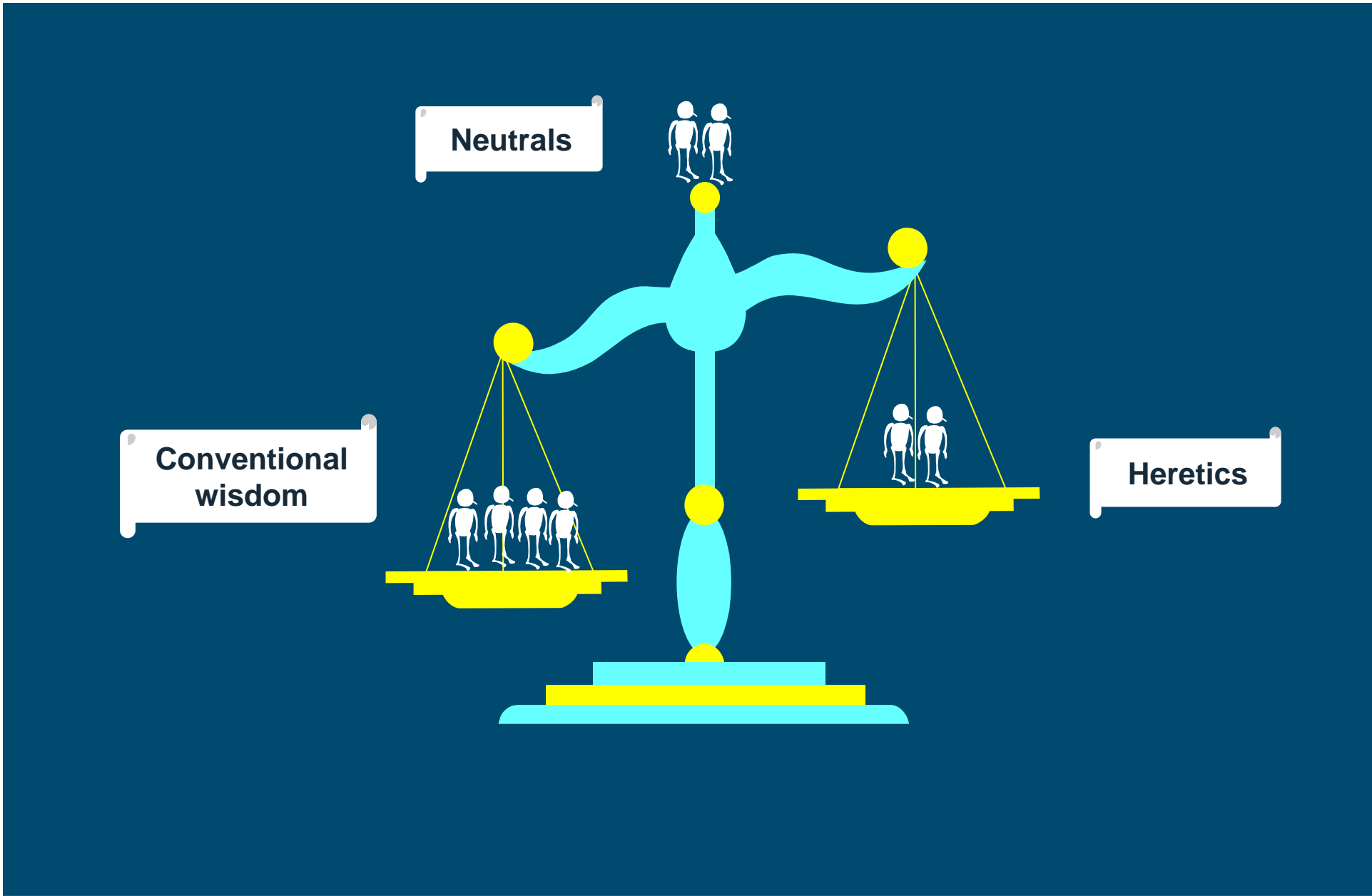
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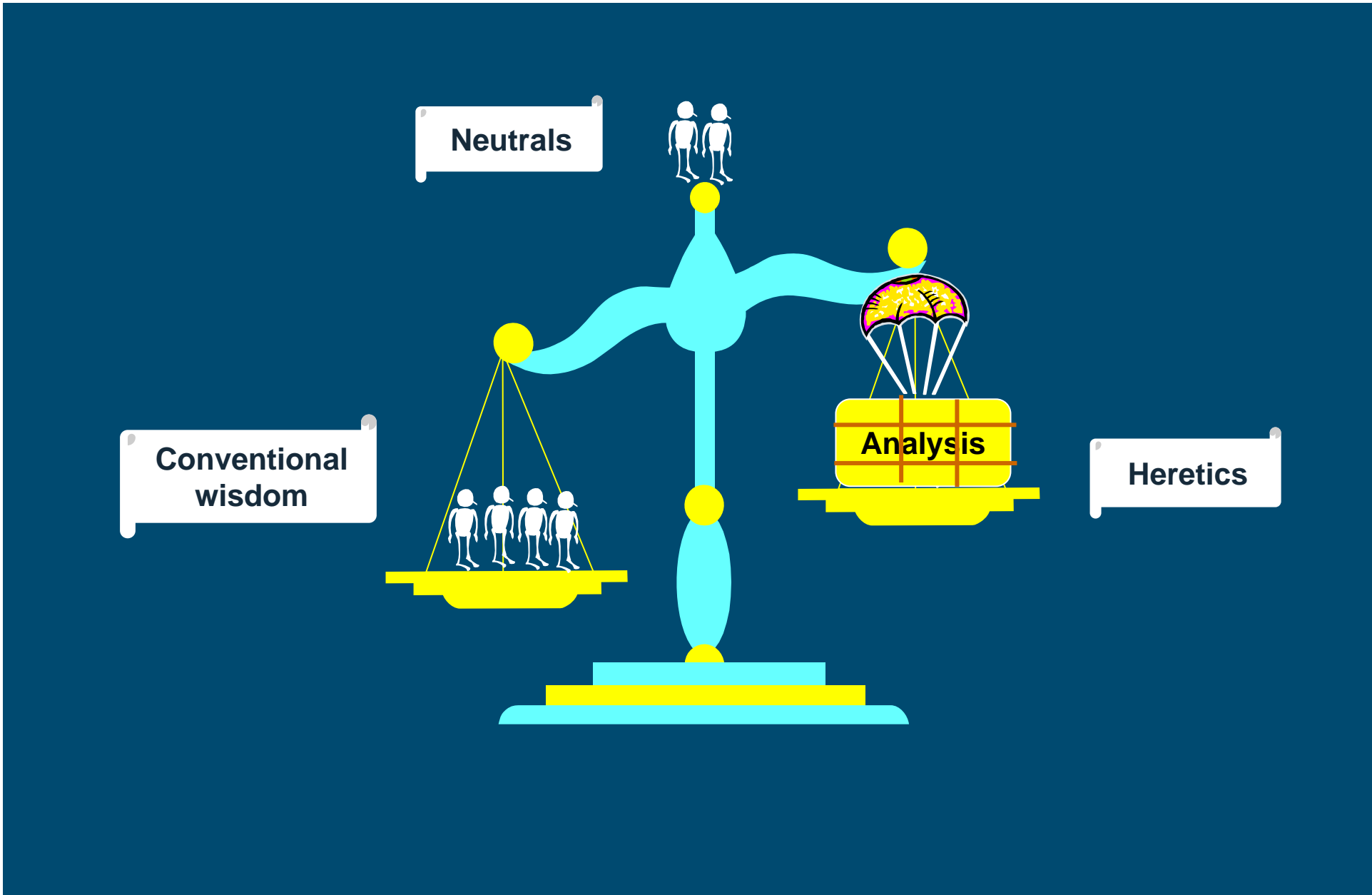


- One way of making an impact with OA : slow, steady but remorseless

Conventional  
wisdom









**Doubters**



**Conventional wisdom**



**Heretics**



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Who cares?

Old Guard

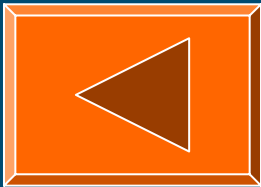
Conventional wisdom



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