



## The “SNAKE-OIL” Effect

... encountered along the road to introducing companies to structured problem solving

(for management and salespersons)

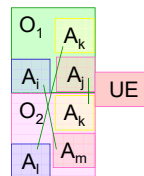
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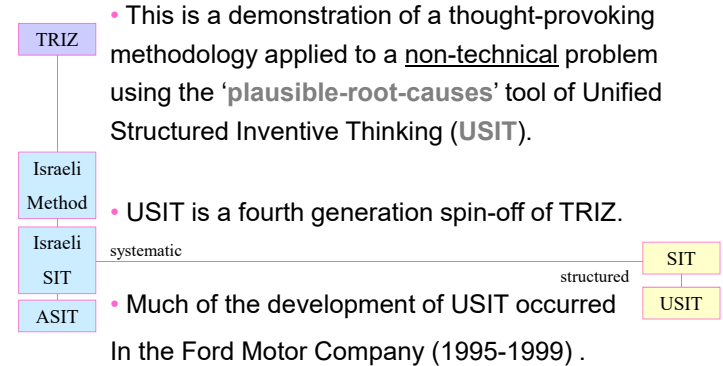
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The “Snake-Oil” Effect

**Abstract:** A USIT Demonstration



The “Snake-Oil” Effect

**Abstract:** A USIT Demonstration

### Outline

- Definition of a two-part, non-technical problem to be solved.
    - Part 1: Develop a written or oral topical discourse.
    - Part 2: Apply USIT to discover relevant points.
- Selecting or accepting a topic for discourse is rather straight forward; sometimes intimidating, but straightforward.
- Proceeding to develop relevant points to be made in the discourse is not so straightforward, and can fail for lack of inspiration.



The “Snake-Oil” Effect

**Abstract:** A USIT Demonstration

### Outline

- Identify an unwanted effect.
  - (only one)
- Identify its minimum set of objects.
  - (fewer is better)
- Demonstrate the USIT plausible root-cause analysis.
  - (originally developed for technical problems)
- Extend analysis results to topical relevance.
  - (post USIT)
- Draw conclusions for the topic and the solution process.



The “Snake-Oil” Effect

**Abstract:** Incredulous Management

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**Selected problem:** how to structure a discourse on the negative “snake oil” label sometimes attributed by management to sales pitches for problem-solving methodologies (PSMs).

Conclusions are drawn from two perspectives :

Management’s & Salesperson’s



The “Snake-Oil” Effect

**Abstract:** Incredulous Management

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Snake oil:

any of various liquid concoctions of questionable medical value sold as an all-purpose curative, especially by traveling hucksters.

Ref: The American Heritage Dictionary



The “Snake-Oil” Effect

**Abstract:** A plausible Root-Causes Tool

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- The USIT plausible root-causes tool is used.
- It purports to support speed and focus but not **uniqueness**, because the same solution could be found by other methods.
- Its likely competition, in this kind of application, is Mind Mapping.

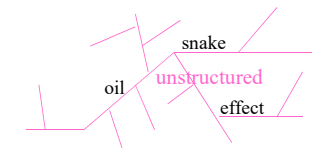


The “Snake-Oil” Effect

**Abstract:** Mind Mapping

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Given the topic, “The Snake Oil Effect”, a mind mapping approach to formulating a discourse would be to build a meandering diagram of words that come to mind as one thinks about the words “snake”, “oil”, and “effect”. Each new word may spawn a secondary path, and so on. The paths are collected into some logical order that formulates in one’s mind as they are examined.

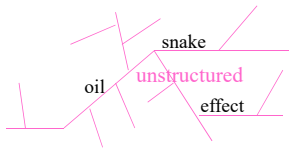




The “Snake-Oil” Effect

### Abstract: Mind Mapping

- The mind mapping method works but lacks speed and focus resulting from *too much irrelevant information* that must be culled. This is a consequence of a lack of guiding structure, and an underlying theory that provides a finish point.



The “Snake-Oil” Effect

### Abstract: A Self-Reflexive Ploy

Two things are going on in this paper:

- a discourse on the snake-oil effect, and
- a demonstration of the USIT plausible-root-causes tool as used to formulate the discourse.

Also two perspectives are visited: that of

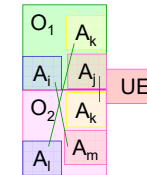
- a PSM salesperson, and
- a potential PSM buyer -- a manager.



The “Snake-Oil” Effect

### Abstract: USIT

- It will be seen that USIT defines a more focused approach with little or no culling of information.



The “Snake-Oil” Effect

### Introduction: The Sales Job

“We have met the enemy and he is us!” Walt Kelly in the Pogo Papers

Our zeal to convey personal excitement about the effectiveness of our pet problem-solving methodology, coupled with a salesperson-like determination, can engender negative results of incredulity and distrust.

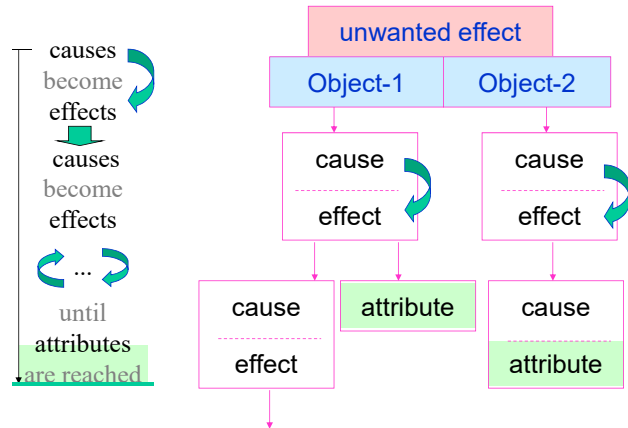
These, of course, are *unwanted effects*.





The "Snake-Oil" Effect

### Cause-Effect: USIT's Plausible Root-Cause Tool



The "Snake-Oil" Effect

### Problem: the Unwanted Effect

Focus begins with quick identification of an unwanted effect:

Earlier, we identified "... negative results of incredulity and distrust ..." -- two effects?

To simplify, we can assume that incredulity gives rise to distrust, and therefore is the more basic unwanted effect.



The "Snake-Oil" Effect

### Problem: Start - Focus - Speed

Our problem is ...

- to generate a discourse on "The Snake-Oil Effect",
- to find an effective starting point,
- to focus on relevant issues, and
- to accomplish the task quickly.

How long does it take you to outline a talk and produce all of the relevant points you wish to make?



The "Snake-Oil" Effect

### Problem: Objects and Functional Contact

USIT problem definition begins with an unwanted effect couched in terms of functional contact of objects.

We have salesperson making sales pitch to incredulous management -- but what or where is the functional contact?

Evidently we are dealing with information-type objects:

- sales person's pitch => information,
- management's mental image => information



The "Snake-Oil" Effect

**Problem:** Objects and Functional Contact

At first glance, Salesperson <=> Management may appear as the relevant interacting objects.

Salesperson's perspective:

The wanted effect is sales pitch makes product desirable.

The unwanted effect is sales pitch makes product undesirable.

but, product desirability is management's perspective.

On second glance, the interacting objects may exist in only one place -- management's mind.



The "Snake-Oil" Effect

**Problem:** Objects and Functional Contact

Effects (like USIT functions) result from the interaction of two objects through an attribute of each.

Incredulity derives from comparisons of pairs of information objects:

- salesperson's sales pitch as understood by management,
- management's experience (likes/dislikes, business plans, etc.)

Both objects exist in **management's mind**.

Comparison is a single-mind operation.



The "Snake-Oil" Effect

**Problem:** Objects and Functional Contact

- The interacting objects are information-type objects.
- They exist in one person's mind (management).
- They are characterized by their attributes.

Then what is the nature of their interaction?

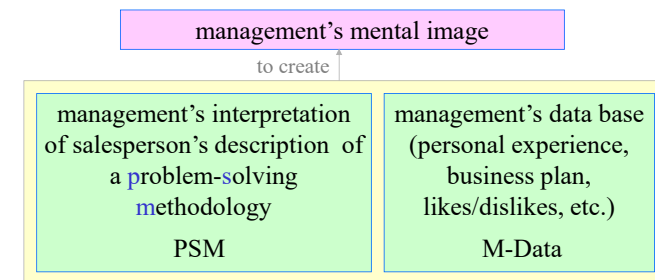
Incredulity derives from comparisons of pairs of attributes of information objects: sales person's information and management's data base. This interaction creates a new information-type object -- management's image of a PSM.



The "Snake-Oil" Effect

**Problem:** Interacting Objects

object-object interaction to support an effect:



We can assume that the initial state of management's mental image is negative or neutral toward an unfamiliar PSM.



The "Snake-Oil" Effect

**PSM: USIT Plausible Root-Cause Analysis**

unwanted effect → management's incredulity to a sales pitch

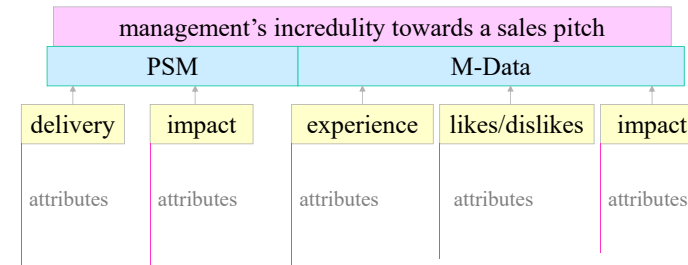
minimal set of objects → PSM M-Data

- Each object is examined **independently** for plausible contributory causes.
  - Each cause becomes an effect. -- iteration --
  - Search ends on attributes.
  - Multiple attributes are listed.
- (without concern for eventual paring with attributes of contacting objects; i.e., without concern for their specific interactions)



The "Snake-Oil" Effect

**PSM: USIT Plausible Root-Cause Analysis**

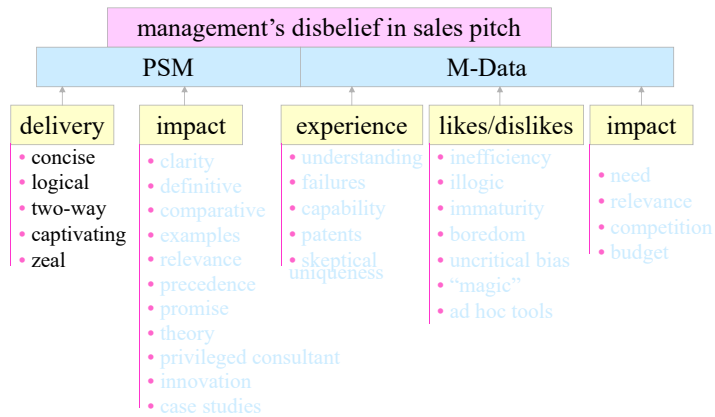


Note: In the interest of simplicity, search for causes was terminated at the first level.



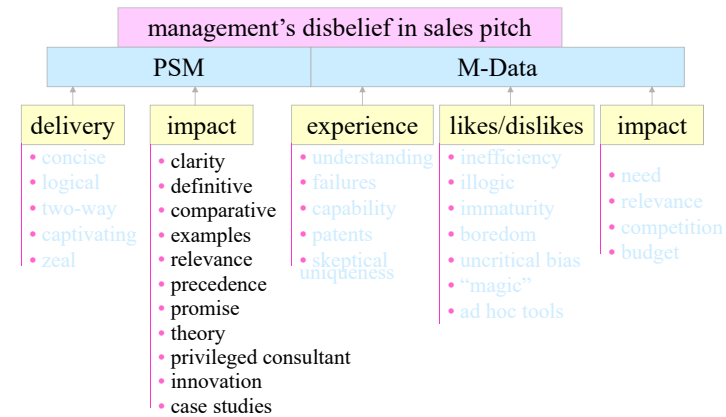
The "Snake-Oil" Effect

**PSM: USIT Plausible Root-Cause Analysis**



The "Snake-Oil" Effect

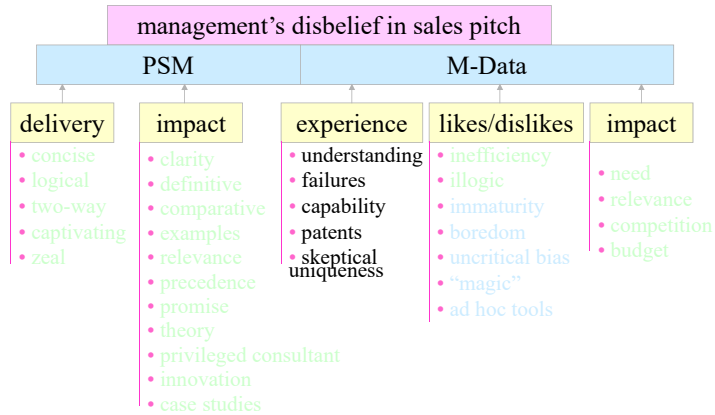
**PSM: USIT Plausible Root-Cause Analysis**





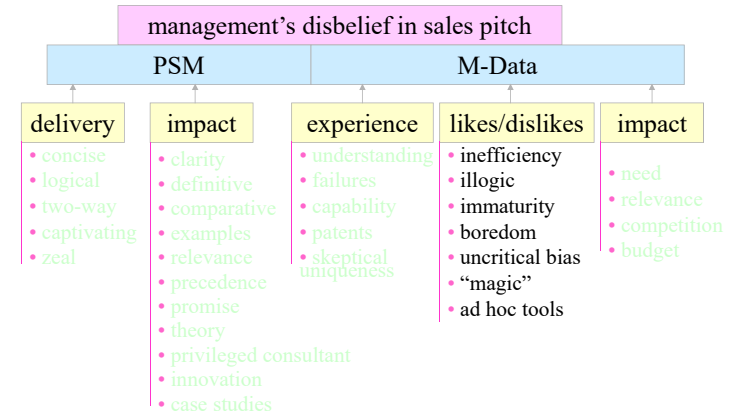
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PSM: USIT Plausible Root-Cause Analysis



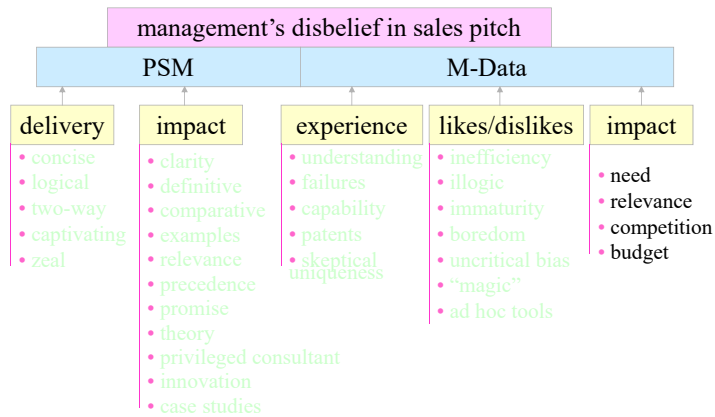
The "Snake-Oil" Effect

PSM: USIT Plausible Root-Cause Analysis



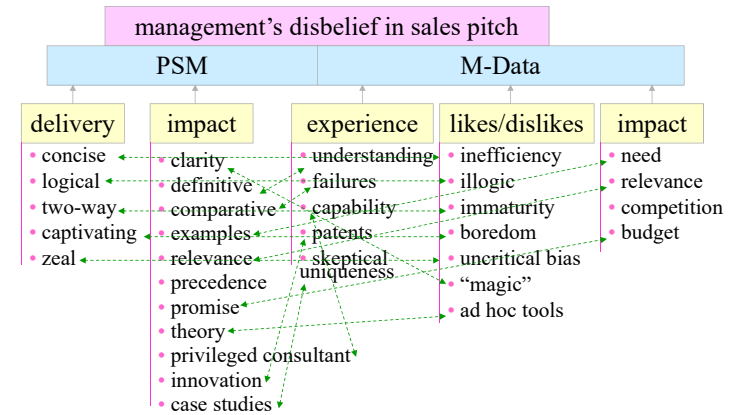
The "Snake-Oil" Effect

PSM: USIT Plausible Root-Cause Analysis



The "Snake-Oil" Effect

PSM: USIT Plausible Root-Cause Analysis







The “Snake-Oil” Effect

### PSM: USIT Plausible Root-Cause Analysis

{End of USIT plausible root causes analysis}

These effects are analyzed in terms of their negative causal attributes by searching quickly for logical pairings.

We may note in advance that management’s ...

- ... experience is the metric for gauging credibility of the sales pitch,
- ... likes/dislikes bias the judgment process, and
- ... business plans define the urgency of the situation.



The “Snake-Oil” Effect

### PSM: USIT Plausible Root-Cause Analysis

Pairings of attributes addressing unwanted effects:

6. *Clarity* of content is essential to dispel a dislike of “*magic*”.
7. A *non-definitive* presentation produces little *understanding*.
8. Degrading *comparisons* with other PSMs smell of hidden *weaknesses* or even failures.
9. Absence of, or poorly presented *examples* limit the recognition of *need* for the PSM.
10. The salesperson’s concept of *relevance* must be in sync with management’s concept of *relevance*.



The “Snake-Oil” Effect

### PSM: USIT Plausible Root-Cause Analysis

Pairings of attributes addressing unwanted effects:

1. Lack of *conciseness* of delivery shows *inefficiency*.
2. *Illogical* presentation affronts management’s need of *logical* methodologies.
3. Lack of *two-way communication* may imply *immaturity* of the method.
4. A *non-captivating* presentation loses through *boredom*.
5. Overly *zealous* presentations may raise suspicions of *uncritical bias*.



The “Snake-Oil” Effect

### PSM: USIT Plausible Root-Cause Analysis

Pairings of attributes addressing unwanted effects:

11. A lack of *precedence* implies that no pressure exists from the *competition*.
12. Lack of underlying *theory* implies an *ad hoc tool*.
13. The *promise* of a PSM must speak to *budget* issues.
14. PSMs “for hire” (*privileged consultants*) build no corporate *capability*.
15. Oversold promise of *innovation* threatens the expectation of *patents*.
16. *Case studies* can raise concern of *skeptical uniqueness*.



The “Snake-Oil” Effect

### PSM: USIT Plausible Root-Cause Analysis

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Notice how in the pairing of attributes, as soon as a pair is read in a connecting sentence, other logical sentences follow. These expound, emphasize, and enlighten -- the makings of a persuading discourse.



The “Snake-Oil” Effect

### PSM: USIT Plausible Root-Cause Analysis

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Recap of the thought-provoking process:

1. Five causes of the unwanted effect were found from two independent objects.
2. Causes were examined independently for attributes that may foster negative images.
3. Attributes were then combined in pairs, from different objects, to create 16 logical statements of causes relevant to the topic.



The “Snake-Oil” Effect

### PSM: Conclusions for Management

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- PSM sales pitches can be misrepresented and misinterpreted.
- To see through “snake oil”, analyze all attributes of a sales pitch.
- Know your corporate PSM capabilities and needs.
- Are you investing solely in innovation?
- Claims of solution uniqueness are suspect.



The “Snake-Oil” Effect

### PSM: Conclusions for Management

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- Example problems/solutions are needed only to understand underlying theory.
- Do you wish to adopt the PSM as a corporate asset?
- PSM’s “for hire” build no corporate capability.



The “Snake-Oil” Effect

### PSM: Conclusions for Salespersons

- The main tool needed was the plausible root-causes tool.
- The application of USIT to a non-technical problem turned out to be simpler than for a technical problem.
- Note that the problem addressed was not how to end the “snake-oil effect”, but how to amass quickly relevant material for a logical discourse.
- Identifying the underlying unwanted effect as an information object and its causal objects was key to quick focus.



The “Snake-Oil” Effect

### PSM: (see paper for topical discourse)

This talk has focused on the process of producing a topical discourse as a demonstration of applying USIT to a non-technical problem. Topical details are in the printed paper. See the following sections ...

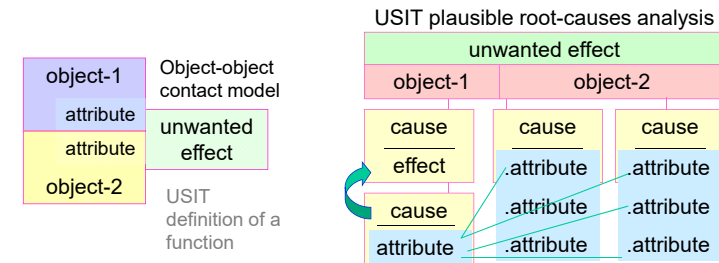
- Management’s Perspective
- Salesperson’s Perspective
- Conclusion for Management
- Discussion for PSM Experts
- Conclusion for PSM Experts



The “Snake-Oil” Effect

### PSM: Recap of the USIT Process

1. Unwanted effect
2. Minimum set of objects
3. Cause/effect iteration
4. Paring of attributes



The “Snake-Oil” Effect

### PSM: Resources

More about [Unified Structured Inventive Thinking](#) can be found at the Ntelleck, LLC website:

[www.U-SIT.net](http://www.U-SIT.net)

To be creative, U-SIT and think.