

**The consultant, the client, the problem  
and requirements elicitation**

A potted journey into IT Consultant's life

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# Disclaimer

- Quotes in this document were made in various contexts.
- We are fully aware that most of them were for a wider and more philosophic, psychoanalytic, physics, marketing research purposes.
- But we do think they illustrate our points.

# The client



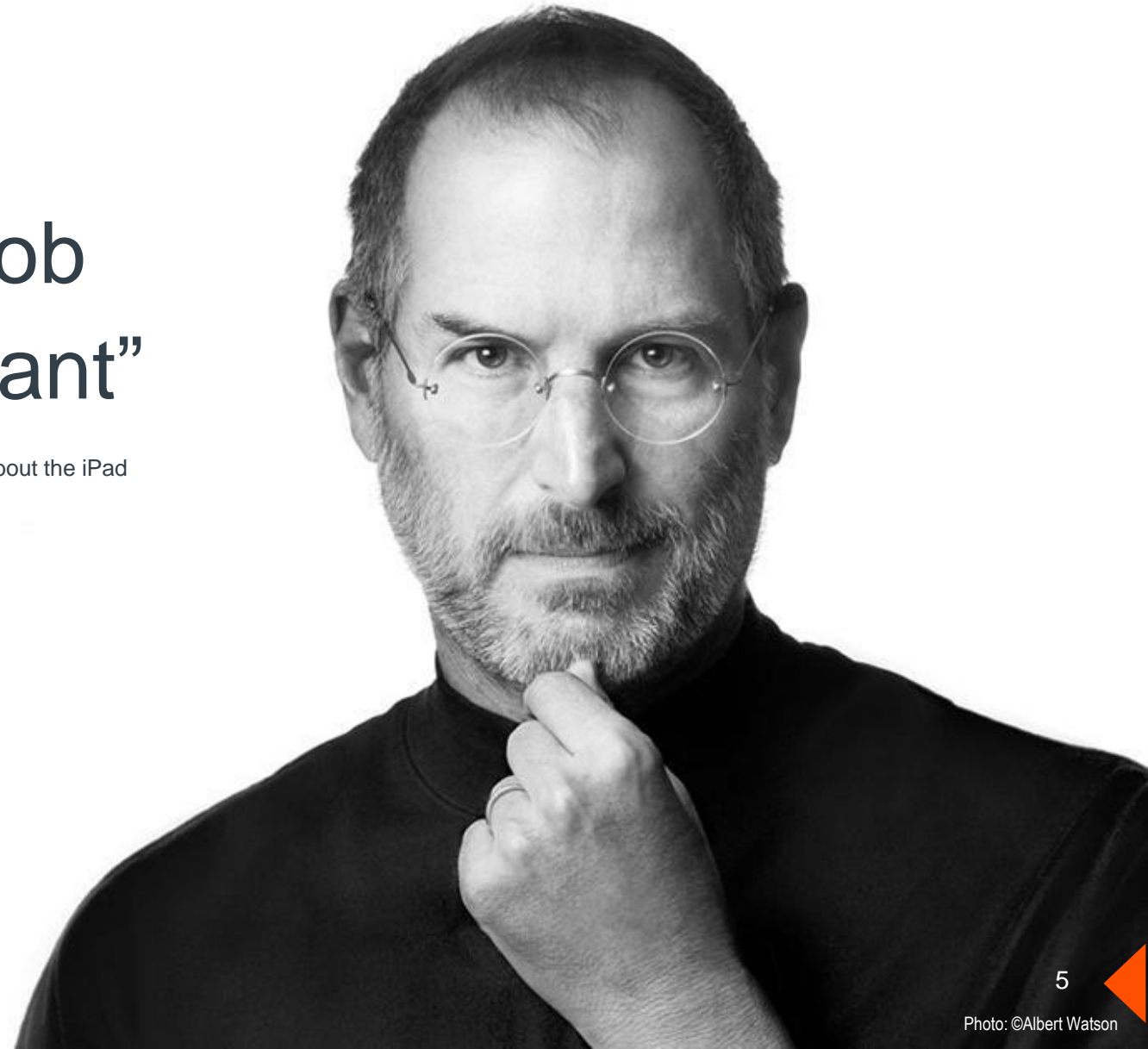


# You may tell yourself of clients that...

- *they don't know what they need...*
- *they don't even know what they want...*
- *they keep changing their mind...*
- *they don't understand anything...*
- *they are hopeless...*

“It’s not the consumers’ job  
to figure out what they want”

Steve Jobs about the iPad



# The problem

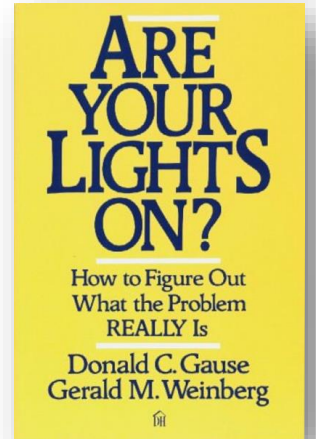


# What is a problem?

- Clients call you when they have a “problem”, even if they name it
  - a need
  - an objective
  - an ambition
  - an opportunity
  - a concern
  - a challenge
  - a room for improvement
  - a situation
  - ...
  
- Let's define what we call **a problem**

# A problem is a discrepancy

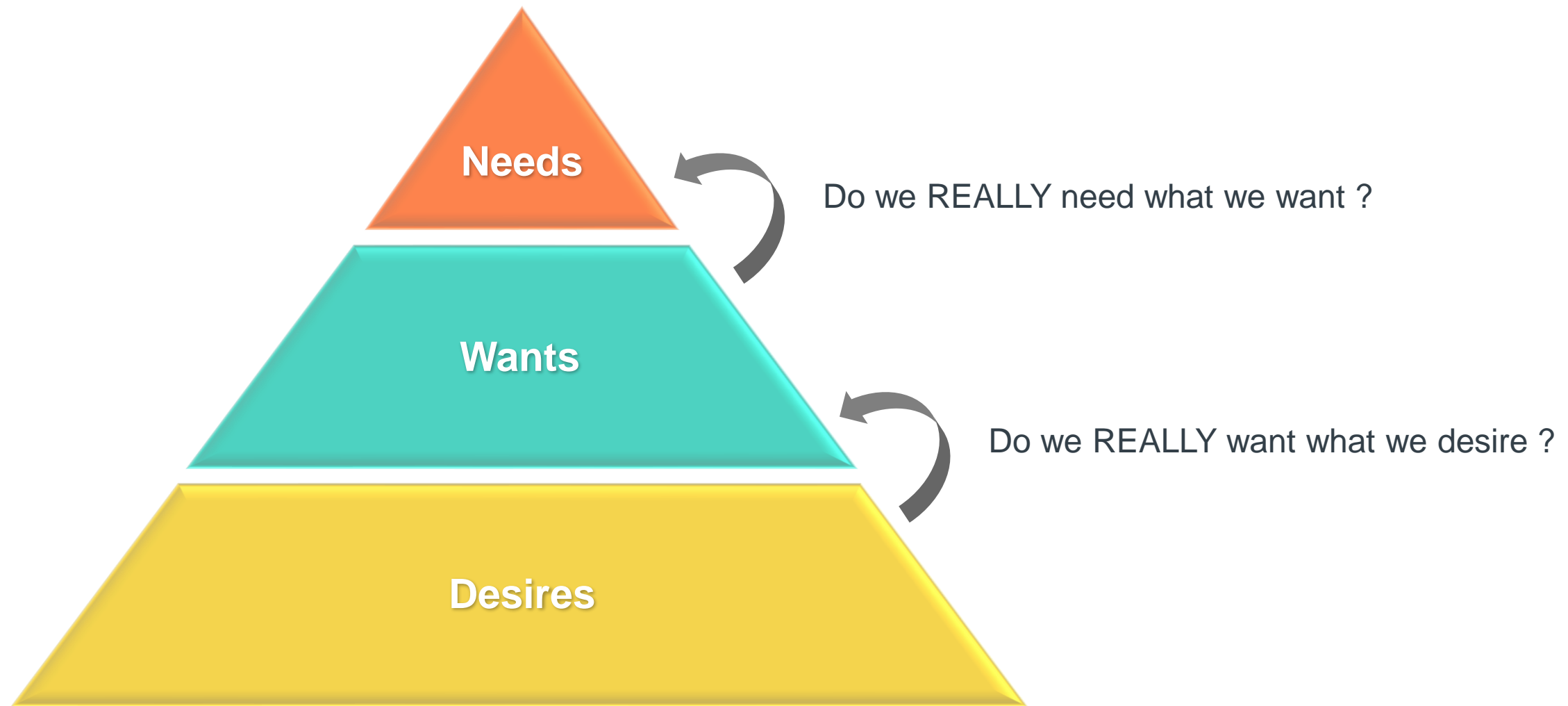
“A problem is a difference between things as **desired** and things as **perceived**.”



→ Client's satisfaction: things perceived as desired



# Needs, Wants and Desires\*



# Needs, Wants and Desires

## > What we REALLY need

- “First, consider the word “desire”. Some readers would prefer that we say “attempt to discover what is needed”, **but we don't know how to figure out what people need**, as opposed to what they desire.”

— Donald C. Gause and Gerald M. Weinberg

## > What we REALLY want

- “the subject [...] is called to be reborn in order to know **if (s)he wants what (s)he desires.**”

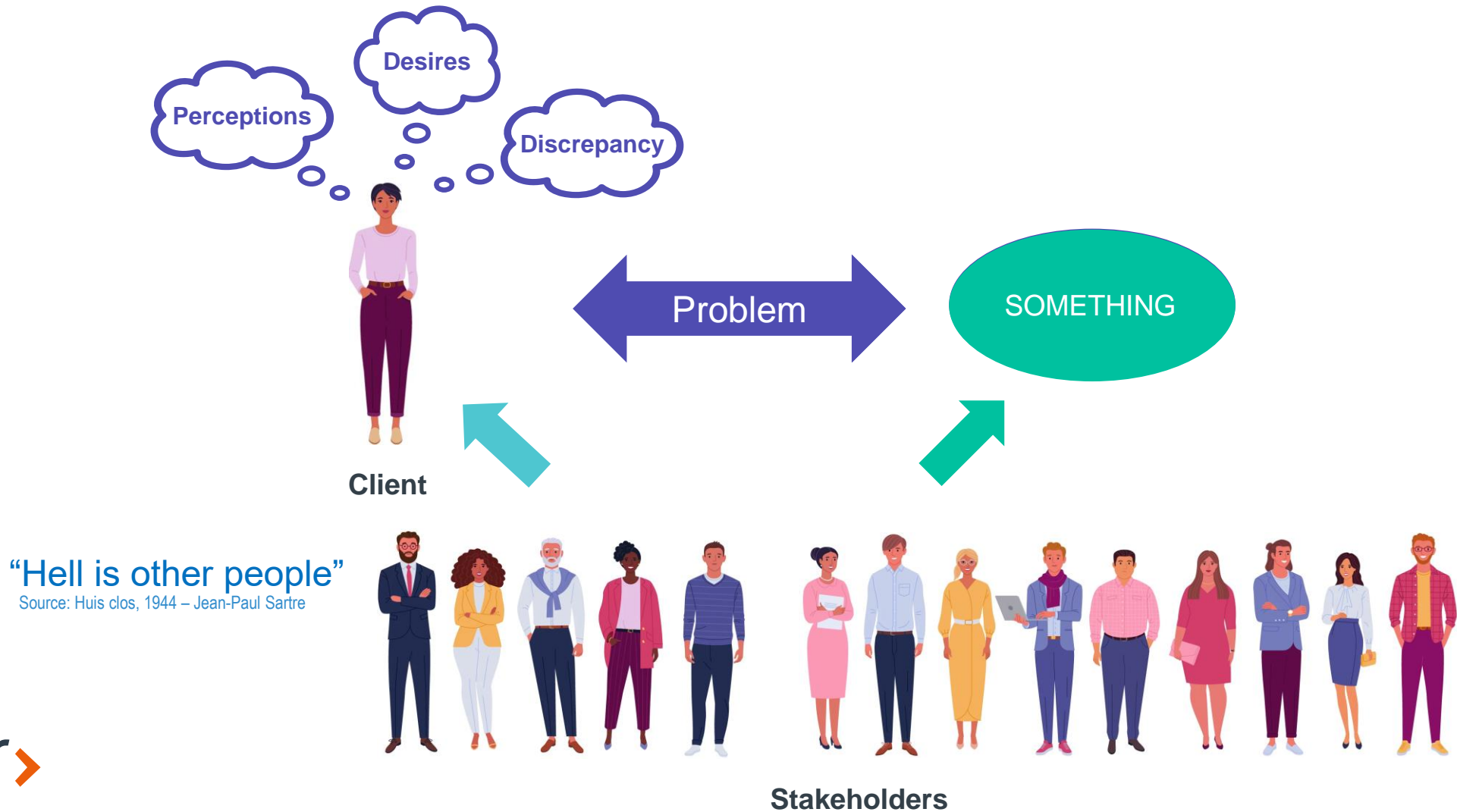
— Jacques Lacan

## > What we desire

- “**people don't always buy what they need**, but **they always desire what they buy**, even if the desire is only transitory. By clarifying their desires, people sometimes clarify what they really need and don't need.”

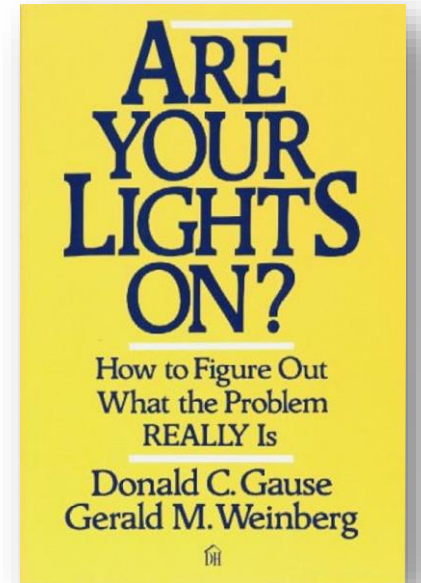
— Donald C. Gause and Gerald M. Weinberg

# Problem positioning



# Is there a REAL problem ?

Be careful with utterances such as “the **REAL** problem is...”





# The observer

- “**Observations** not only disturb what is to be measured, they **produce it**. We compel [the electron] to assume a definite position. **We** ourselves **produce the results of measurement**.”

— Pascual Jordan

Source: Marin, J. M. (2009). ‘Mysticism’ in quantum mechanics: The forgotten controversy. European Journal of Physics

- “[...] since the **measuring device** has been constructed by the **observer**, [...] we have to remember that **what we observe** is not nature itself but **nature exposed to our method of questioning**.”

— Werner Heisenberg

Source: Heisenberg, W., Physics and Philosophy, (1958)

- “Perhaps I did use such a philosophy earlier, perhaps I even wrote it, but it is nonsense all the same. ... It is the **theory** which **decides what we can observe**.”

— Werner Heisenberg quoting Albert Einstein

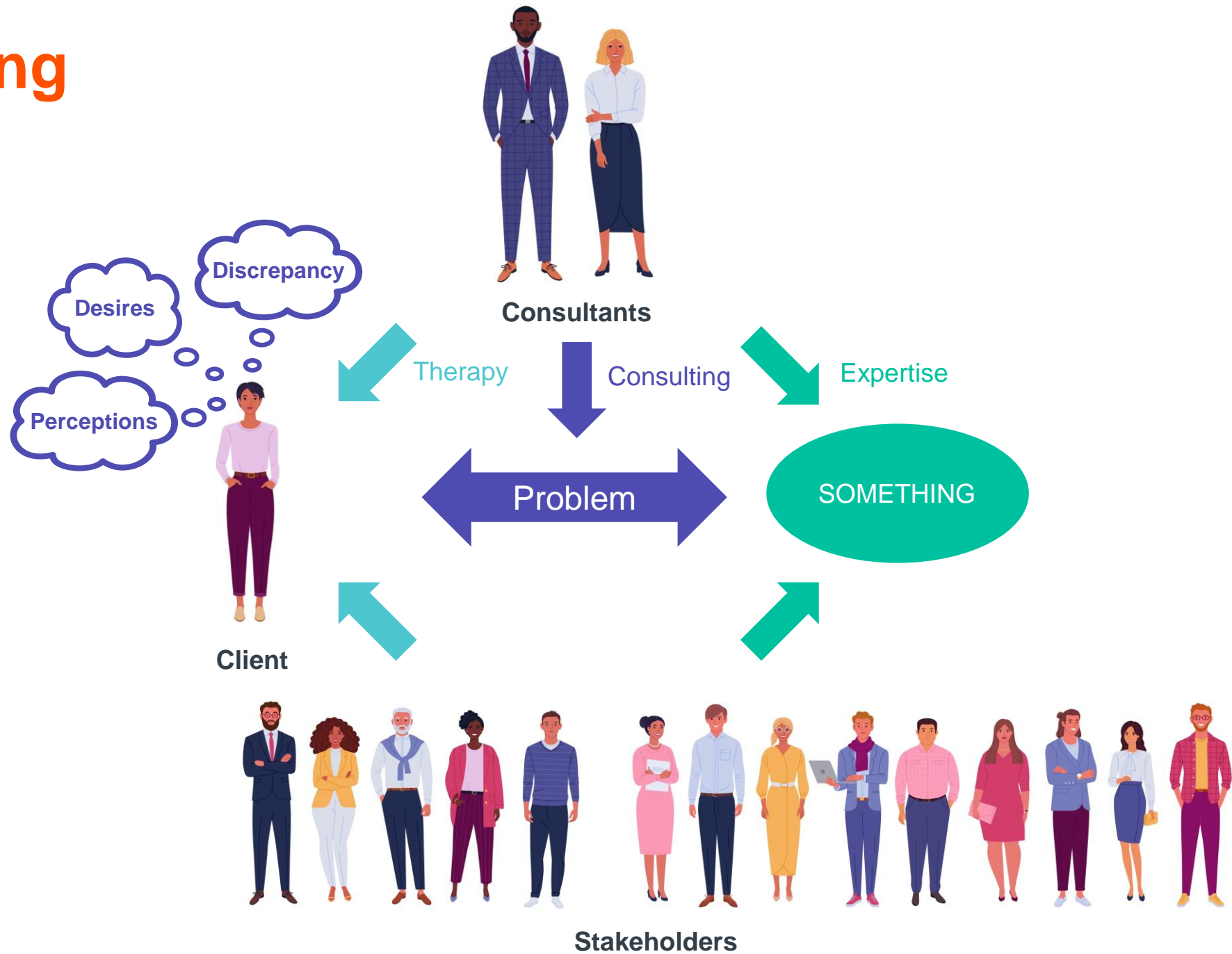
Source: Heisenberg, W., Physics and Beyond, Harper & Row, Publishers, (1971)



# The consultant



# Consulting



# IT consultant role

- Maieutics [μαιευτική τέχνη]: “the art of delivering”
  - the art of assisting minds in giving birth to the truth, by asking questions

The Socratic Dialogues, 4<sup>th</sup> century BC – Plato

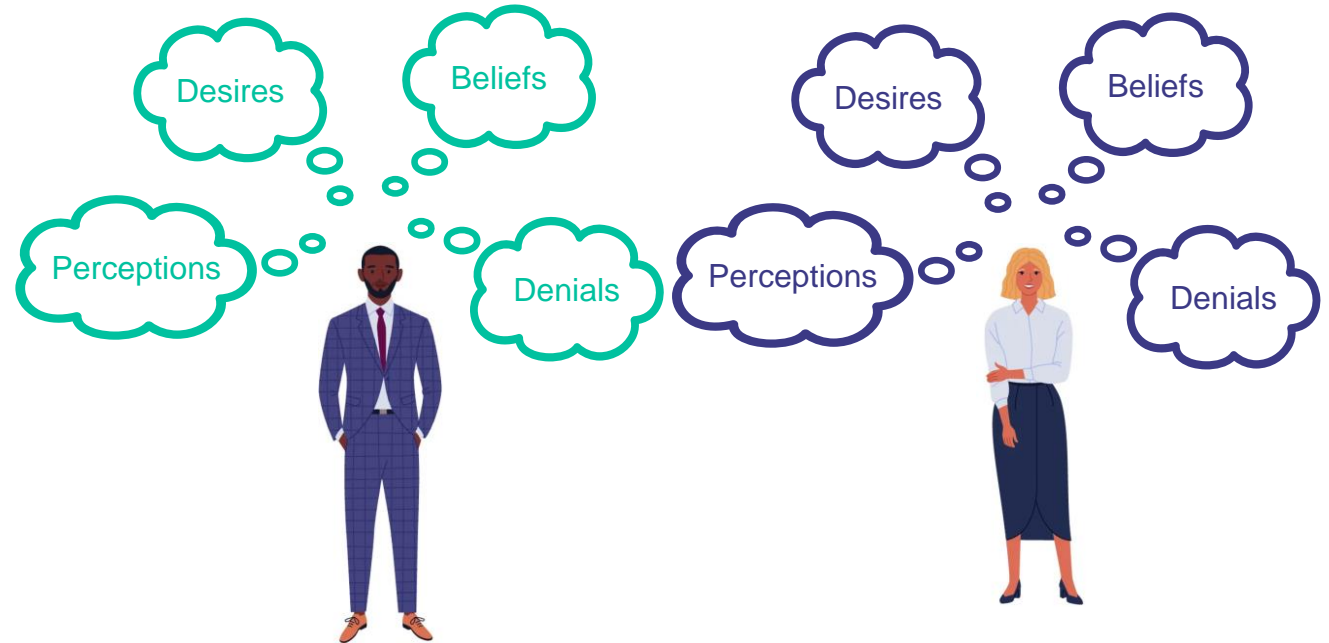
- The IT consultant’s job is to « give birth » to the client’s needs and not to take the client’s role



# To be or not to be empathical



Client



Consultants

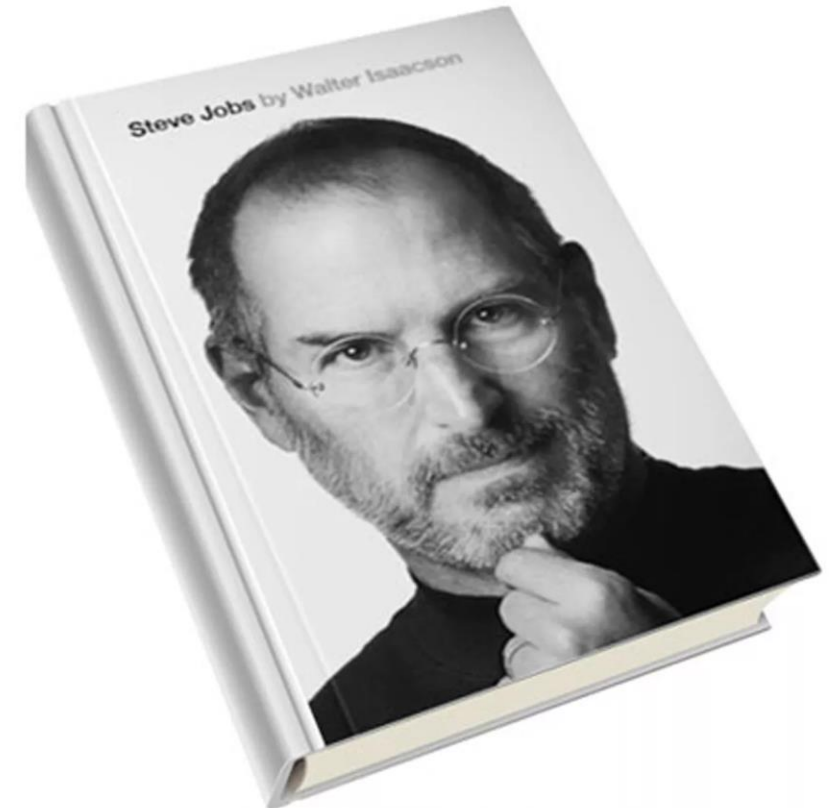


Stakeholders

Apple's publicist to Steve Jobs trying to pacify him:

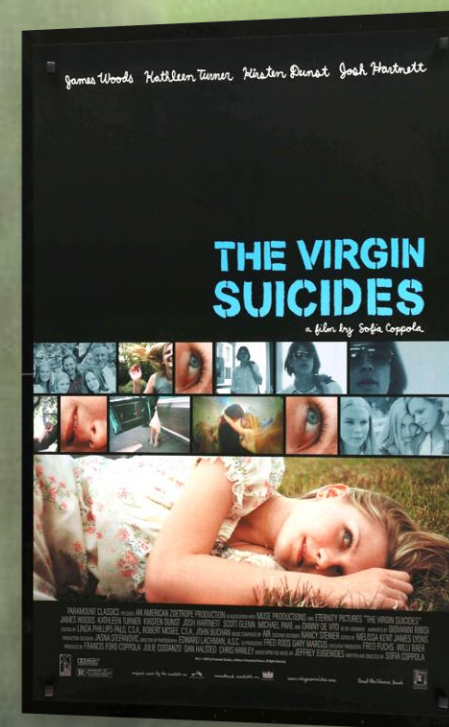
"Look, I know you're angry, and I know how you feel," she said.

"You have no fucking idea how I feel," he shot back,  
"no fucking idea what it's like to be me."





*Obviously, Doctor,  
you've never been a 13-year-old girl.*



**The Virgin Suicides - 1999**  
Directed by Sofia Coppola



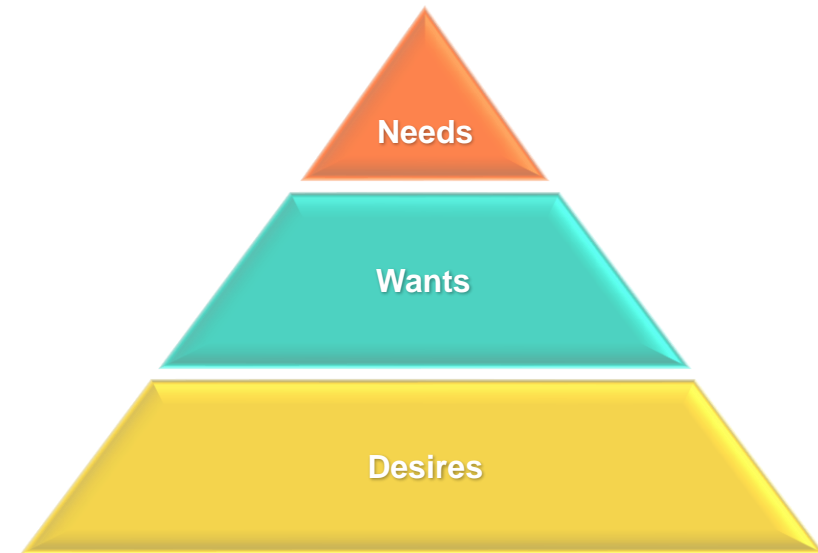






# Requirements elicitation

- Requirements are the **formalisation** of a need
- Needs are not given
- Emerge needs from desires

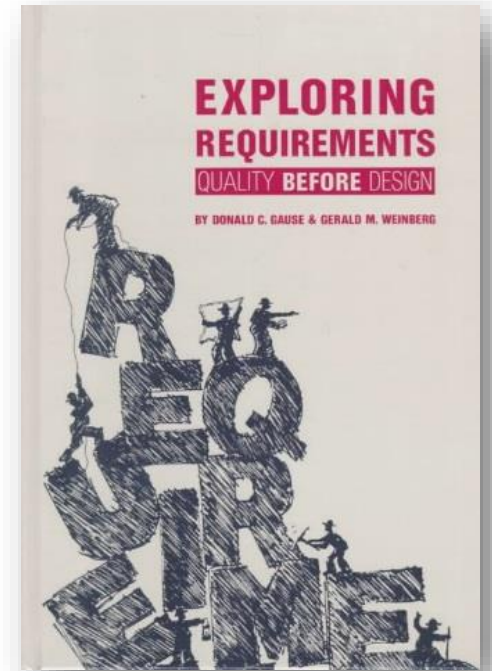


# Exploring Requirements

- “If people don't know what they want, no development process – no matter how exact, how clever, or how efficient – will satisfy them.

And **that's why we do requirements work** – so we don't design systems people don't want.”

- “Anything not worth doing is not worth doing right.”



# IEEE Requirement definition



- (A) A **condition** or **capability** **needed** by a **user** to **solve a problem** or **achieve an objective**.
- (B) A **condition** or **capability** that must be met or possessed by a system or system component to satisfy a contract, standard, specification, or other **formally** imposed documents.
- (C) A **documented representation** of a **condition** or **capability** as in (A) or (B).

# Hierarchy of Requirements

(Requirements scope in a business context)

## External Environment

market trends  
laws & regulations  
legal liabilities  
social responsibilities  
technology base  
labor pool  
competing products  
standards & specifications  
public culture  
physical/natural environment

External Requirement  
(not in IEEE standard)

## Organization Environment

policies & procedures  
standards & specifications  
guidelines  
domain technologies  
local culture

Stakeholder Requirement  
(business management level)

## Business Operation

business operational  
processes  
constraints  
policies & rules  
modes  
quality  
business structure



Users



Operators

## System Operation

System

System Element

Software

System Element

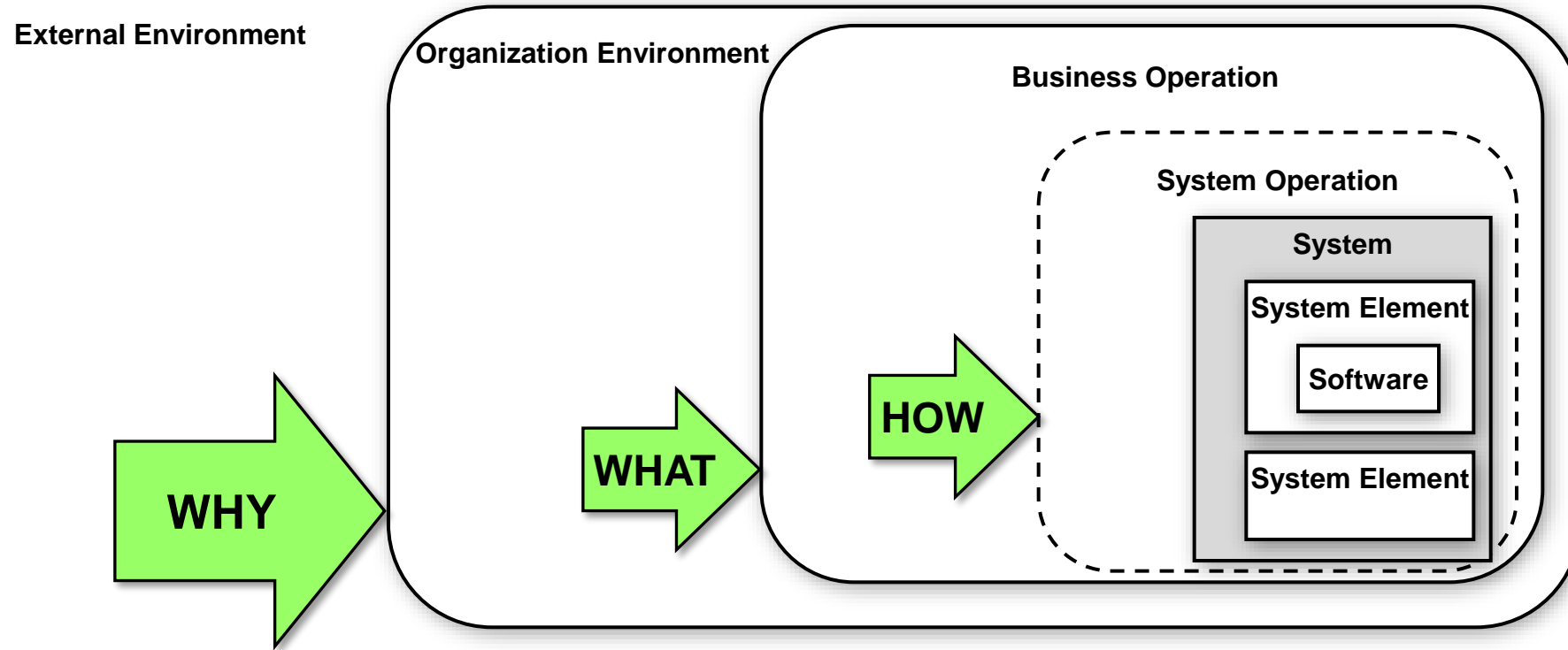
Software Requirement

System Requirement

Stakeholder Requirement  
(business operational level)



# Why? What? How?



# Accommodation of ends and means

- At each level, choices are made (design / architecture) to satisfy requirements from upper level
- These choices are in turn generating requirements for lower levels
- **Objectives** from one level are the **means** to achieve **objectives** from upper level



# Mind the request and the whys

I need a drill



REAL need ?

I want to make a hole



REAL want ?

I desire to hang a frame



Desire



Q&A







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