



Principles and Process:

The Ranger Group's Approach
to Ensuring Quality Work

Introduction and Purpose

As a small analytic services business dedicated to providing decision makers the support they need to make difficult choices, we have expanded our scope both in the type of services we've performed and in the range of topics and issues we've taken on. As with all organizations in their evolution, change needs to be grounded in the principles of the organization, and this grounding is particularly important for a group in our business, that is, offering advice and recommendations that are, as our motto states, "seasoned, insightful, and straightforward." This purpose binds us to an implied but nonetheless unyielding requirement to ensure that the services we perform are done thoughtfully and with the utmost concern for thoroughness, rigor in analysis, and honesty in reporting.

The purpose of this document is twofold. First, to explicitly state our philosophy of analysis and service and, secondly, to formally institute a process for ensuring that the analysis, advice, and recommendations we provide are carefully considered and represent our best effort for the customer. As a small group of accomplished and proven professionals, we rely on our own good work habits and ethics to do our job and nothing I can put in writing will change this. However, setting down some general guidelines is useful as a touchstone to remind us all, particularly when the pressure is to either be quick or drive to a foregone conclusion, that our role is to provide leadership with an honest appreciation of the impact of tough decisions. This isn't always easy and may not lead to popularity, but it's ultimately why we're hired and our best insurance for our continued good reputation and success.

Terry McKearney

The Basics – What We Do

The Ranger Group (TRG) is a small analytic services company specializing in national defense issues. While we have grown in the scope of what we do in terms of subject matter and tools used, our foundation is in the analysis of problems, the study of operations and organizations, and using quantitative methods to study these problems and identify potential solutions to them. Our services have been used by a wide range of government agencies and commercial customers, with the common thread being an expectation that we will be thoughtful and creative in our evaluation of the problem or issue at hand and precise in both the articulation of the problem and insights into it.

Analysis as TRG practices it is usually in support of a specific problem or set of issues. We would prefer to be called in early as problems and issues are discovered, for example at the beginning of a technology development process, although we are commonly brought into a project in the end stages and when the client realizes that he or she needs our services to resolve a problem. This being the case, we have developed a reputation for flexibility that must be preserved as a core value of our business. We need to be adept at quickly looking at a problem, “showing up” to become involved in an issue when there are tensions and an already difficult work environment. It is in these situations that our dedication to level headedness and commitment to working with all levels of an organization is most needed and most productive.

Our Approach to Analysis

Analysis is at the core of what we do, even those “business areas” that do not directly involve the standard approach to operations analysis or research. Accordingly, our business model needs to emphasize the qualities of sound analysis: thoughtful definition of the problem, commitment to research in investigation the problem, clear articulation of standards for evaluation, and use of the scientific process in research.

Our work in experimentation and evaluation has emphasized the use of hypotheses and associated metrics. As we have seen in our work, there is a lack of understanding or a reluctance to follow such rigorous problem structuring in many cases. However, that does not absolve us from our obligation to follow an intellectual approach that focuses on the clear articulation of a problem in terms that relate to its causes.

Ensuring Quality in Our Work

It is essential that we maintain a reputation for clear, honest and practical evaluation. In doing so we need to have a process for our standard approach to an analytic project that is efficient and produces results. It should be mindful of TRG’s limited resources as well as the client’s need for rapidity, engagement, and ultimately, recommendations that will serve his or her needs.

In order to achieve these objectives, the following steps are critical in our analytic process:

1. Careful Assignment of Work. Our commitment to a sound effort begins with the first assignment of TRG personnel to a project. As a small staff, TRG analysts are used to “multitasking” but the initial assignment of any project must be to the analyst most familiar with the topic and the analytic skills needed to address the topic. In light of our reputation for operational proficiency, this assignment needs to account for the fundamental processes involved in the project.

2. *Collaborative Review of the Project.* While one “Ranger” may be assigned as the lead for project, an early first step in our approach is to collectively look at the project and the substance of the issues attendant to it and reach a consensus as to the salient issue. Just as important, we need to come to a common understanding of what the client needs in our work and what the final result of our work should provide him or her. This does not lock us in to a fixed solution or methodology; however it does set “the star to steer by” for our work.
3. *Deconstruct and Define the Essentials.* Fundamental to addressing the client’s issues is their definition. As mentioned in our Approach, we will use a scientific method-like model to problem definition that uses the well-established process of hypothesis development to articulate the nature of a problem or issue and in doing so, establishes a framework for metrics to precisely measure success or improvement. While the scientific method seems to have fallen out of favor in contemporary operational analysis and research, the difficulty of applying it should not be an excuse to abandon it. In applying the rigor of the scientific method, or at the very least in using it as guide for problem definition, TRG can focus on the key elements of a client’s problem and guide the discussion of the problem for a meaningful exploration and resolution.
4. *Conduct Research in the Library and in the Field.* TRG’s emphasis on operations analysis means that the projects we undertake will have sound component of practical or “field” level work. This necessarily follows and is even interwoven with, record research on a problem. Significantly, this balance must undertaken with some forethought for the sake of efficiency and timeliness. Initially, TRG analysts are expected to “do their homework” in researching the various aspects of a problem, a process that is obviously needed in the previous step of hypothesis and metric definition. Concomitant with this record research is the need to do the legwork necessary to see the effects of the problem or issue firsthand and *in situ*. This will usually mean traveling, meeting with users practitioners, and conducting personal observations. Throughout this process, our analysts need to have shown foresight and professionalism in their preparations, making sure that survey instruments, questionnaires, interviews are focused, non-intrusive, and respectful.
5. *Conduct Internal Reviews.* The essence of our approach to maintaining our standards in a given project is peer review. Just as the collective experience and insight of the larger TRG team is necessary for the scoping and initial understanding of problem, so, too is the collective review and criticism of the research and analysis of our efforts as we work towards final report for the client. While our work may be largely independent, it is the ability to come together at critical junctures in a project that validates the effort and makes it reflective of the breadth and depth of experience within TRG.
6. *Maintain a Dialogue with the Client.* As the TRG process of analysis moves forward, it is critical that an ongoing dialogue be maintained with the client to ensure that, first of all, TRG’s understanding of the problem and issues is accurate. Beyond this, experience has shown that a client’s needs relative to an issue shift over the course of time and TRG’s process must account for this shift within the context of the existent project. This keeps our efforts relevant and current and in step with client needs.
7. *Prepare and Present a Meaningful Final Product.* The end product of TRG's analysis project is a focused report that provides the client with the information needed to make meaningful decision relative to the issues studied. In terms of format this will include a written report of the size, format, and scope to allow the client to act upon recommendations quickly. It is the goal of our efforts relative to the written report that it be of the quality that it sits on the client’s desk, not on his or her bookshelf. Our report will also be accompanied by a face-to-face presentation to explain or results and answer any questions the client might have in regard to our analysis, results or recommendations.

The steps of this process are shown in Figure 1.

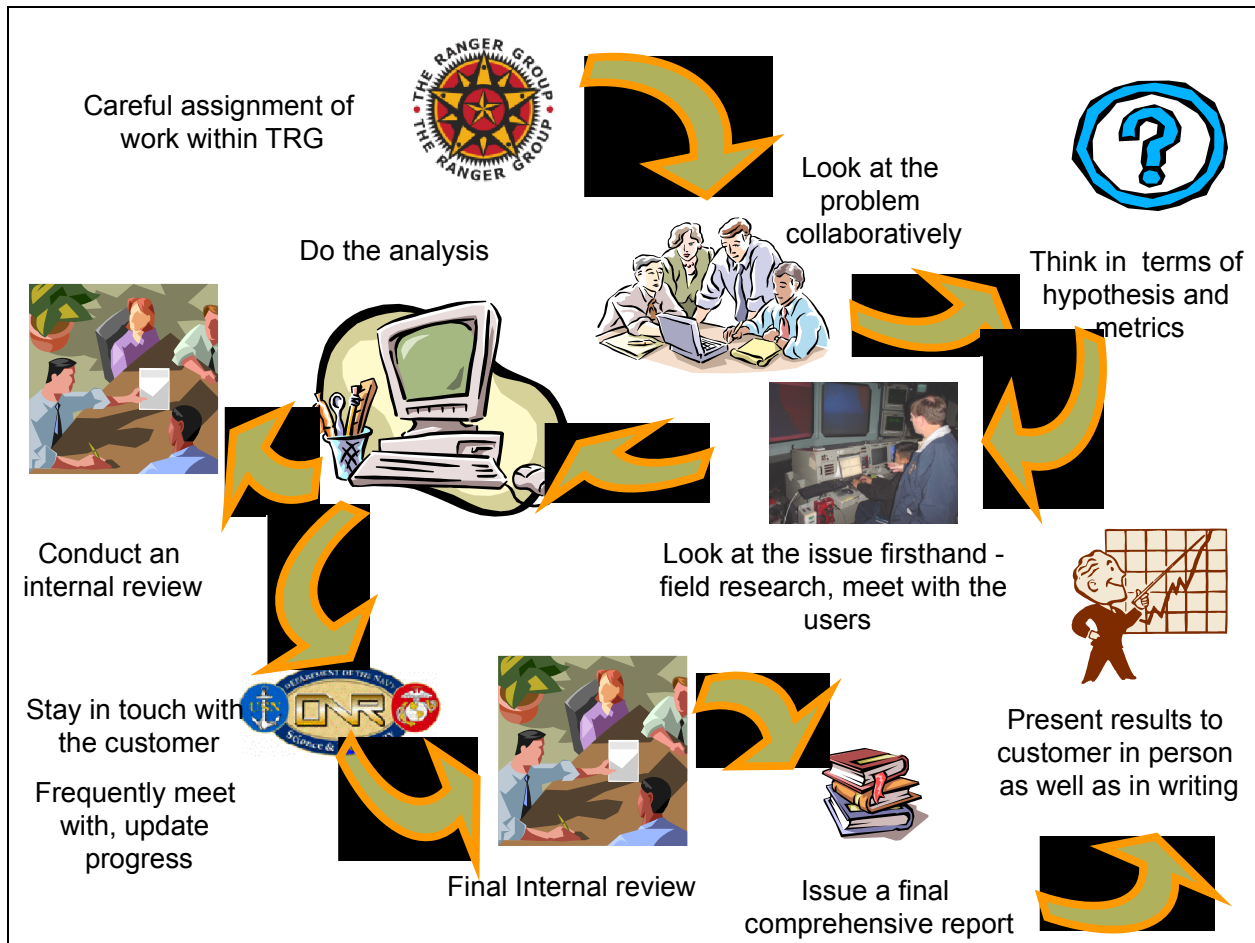


Figure 1: TRG Process for Analysis

As pointed out in the discussion of the analysis process followed by The Ranger Group, collaboration is an essential element of our approach. This is abetted by the use of TRG offices where provisions have been made for supporting individual analysts and for working as a group when necessary. However, there are occasions and circumstances where TRG analysts may need to work on their own timescale and away from the office. I will approve these cases and coordinate with the individual analysts to ensure that the standards set forth above are carried forward in these cases.

Summary

The above process is a general guideline and instances will arise wherein the step defined may need to be truncated or changed in their order. Such is the nature of analysis work. However the principles embedded in the process remain evident and constant and it is incumbent upon us to ensure that the intent of this process, and the sound analysis it is intended to guide, remain foremost in our work.