Lecture 2
Basic Grouping

Key Concepts
- Group
- Grouping principle
- Coherence
- Hierarchical Grouping
- Abstraction
- Level consistency

Group
- A group is a collection of items which belong together in some way.

Groups can contain anything
- popular musicians
- beetles
- words
- principles
- ideas
- reasons
- etc.

Grouping Principle
- an explicit statement of the essence of the group, i.e., the sense or respect in which the items belong together
- roughly, completing the following: "A thing belongs to the group if it is a ..."
- Grouping principles should be specified clearly and precisely
Coherent Groups

A group should be well-thought-out and well-presented – i.e., coherent.

Example: making a coherent group. How to classify the animal kingdom?

Borges describes a certain Chinese Encyclopedia, the Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge:

'...in which it is written that animals are divided into:
1. those that belong to the Emperor
2. embalmed animals,
3. those that are trained,
4. suckling pigs,
5. mermaids,
6. fabulous ones,
7. stray dogs,
8. those included in the present classification,
9. those that tremble as if they were mad,
10. innumerable ones,
11. those drawn with a very fine camelhair brush,
12. others,
13. those that have just broken a flower vase,
14. those that from a long way off look like flies.'

Jorge Luis Borges, The Analytical Language of Jon Wilkins

“MECE” is one way of defining when a group is well-thought-out.
“mutually exclusive, collectively exhaustive”

Is this group MECE?
No – it is not ME, since Ringo Starr and Richard Starkey are not distinct.
No – it is not CE, since George Harrison is missing.

MECE at McKinsey

"MECE...is a sine qua non of the problem-solving process at McKinsey. MECE gets pounded into every new associate’s head from the moment of entering the Firm. Every document (including internal memos), every presentation, every email and voice mail produced by a McKinsey-ite is supposed to be MECE. Ask any number of McKinsey alumni what they remember most about the way the Firm solves problems and they will tell you, "MECE, MECE, MECE."


McKinsey is one of the world’s leading management consulting firms. The McKinsey Way is a book, by an ex-McKinsey person, about how McKinsey does its work.

Is MECE MECE?

How many different kinds of incoherence affect this group?
Are there kinds of incoherence which are not failures of MECE?

- If the grouping principle is "people who played for The Beatles" then the group is not ME, but it is CE.
- In addition, the group is not minimal – there is an item that doesn’t belong (Brian Epstein) and is not presented in any sensible order.
- Since the group has serious deficiencies which are not violations of MECE, MECE itself is not CE.
**Principles of Coherence**

- Complete
- Internally Distinct
- Minimal
- Ordered

- No gaps
- No overlaps
- No outsiders
- In order

Hierarchical grouping should, in general, observe the principle of abstraction. Items at a given level—even across distinct branches—should be at approximately the same level of abstraction—i.e., **consistent** in their degree of generality.

**Key Concepts**

- Group
- Grouping principle
- Coherence
  - Complete, internally distinct, minimal, ordered
- Hierarchical Grouping
- Abstraction
- Level consistency

Homework task: specify this group coherently.