An Brief Introduction to Framing Complex Issues

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Complex Problems

Conklin, 2008
Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky, 2009
Heifetz and Linsky, 2002
Heifetz, 1994
Traditional Problem Solving

Problem
Gather Data
Analyze Data
Formulate Solution
Implement

Solution

Time
The zigzag line represents what people actually focus on during the problem-solving process; non-linear thinking.
Wicked Problems

The term “wicked” is given to uniquely complex and challenging problems.

(Rittel & Webber, 1973)
Wicked Problems

• You don’t understand the problem until you have developed a solution - due to the complexity and framing

• No stopping rule: the problem will consume as many resources as you are willing to expend

• No right or wrong: “better” or “worse” might be the best you can accomplish

• Each problem is unique and novel: requiring custom design and solutions – “trial and error” and/or “trial and better”

• The initial problem linked/interconnected to other problems and systems: solutions/attempted solutions create an evolving problem and unanticipated consequences (+ & -)
Fragmentation

Social Complexity: number and diversity of stakeholders

Technical Complexity: number and level of technologies in the problem
Complex Problems

“Some problems are so complex that you have to be highly intelligent and well informed just to be undecided about them.”

Laurence J. Peter