

How to be Strategic in the Face of Complexity

Implications for Global Development Capacities

Wageningen, The Netherlands, 30 November – 1 December, 2009

The Issue

We face turbulent times. Engaging with the challenges of global development means dealing with much that is unpredictable and surprising. Tackling poverty and inequality, climate change, environmental problems and human conflicts is not a simple business. Moving beyond the current path of development - environmentally unsustainable and condemning vast numbers to poverty - will require deep societal transformations. Yet, too often our strategies for undertaking such change are linear. They incorrectly assume simple and predictable cause and effect relations. And they hinder the very innovation and risk taking that is needed for transformation.

Is it possible to be strategic in the face of complexity? Or is this a contradiction? What does complexity thinking imply for mainstream planning and accountability, and stakeholder expectations? What is the role of scientific analysis in complex situations?

Increasingly the business sector, government, civil society organisations and research institutions are facing up to such questions. Emerging from tensions between old patterns of linear thinking and a growing acceptance of complexity are new ideas and new approaches for social and technological innovation. These include social entrepreneurship, strategic innovation, managing by simple principles, the Cynefin Framework, resilience thinking and innovation systems. While not silver bullets, such approaches offer interesting insights for working in highly unpredictable and rapidly changing contexts.

Such ideas revolve around networks and alliances for learning. They challenge traditional roles and responsibilities of government, business, NGOs, science and citizens. And, they seek out ways for working with - rather than against - the complexity of

human and natural systems. This implies that global development processes will be driven by a very different dynamic between the public, private and civil society sectors.

How well equipped are people and organisations to work with these new ideas and approaches? What is needed to embed such capacities in our communities, businesses, and political systems? What are the implications for leadership and management?

This Innovation Dialogue will bring together people working on sustainable business strategies, social entrepreneurship and international development. Leading thinkers and practitioners will work with participants to gain clarity about what it means to "be strategic in complex times".

Background

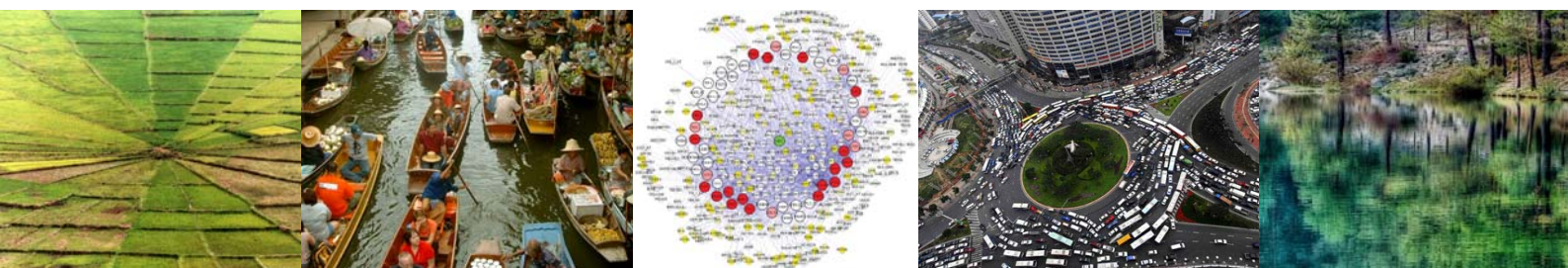
This event is part of a growing dialogue in the international development sector about the complexities of social, economic and political change. It builds on two previous events hosted by Wageningen International – the Innovation Dialogue on Navigating Complexity (May 2009) and the Seminar on Institutions, Theories of Change and Capacity Development (December 2008). See:

<http://portals.wi.wur.nl/navigatingcomplexity>;

<http://portals.wi.wur.nl/successfailuredevelopment>.

It also aligns with a series of events on complexity and development being held in the UK.

The Navigating Complexity event introduced the idea of complexity and its implications. This dialogue will look closely at practical ways for intervening in complex situations.



Organisation

The Dialogue is being organized by Wageningen International, the Communication and Innovation Studies Group, the Public Administration & Policy Group and the Disaster Studies Group of Wageningen University and Research Centre. Discussions about this event will be communicated through our media partner, The Broker (www.thebrokeronline.eu).

Draft Programme (venue: Hof van Wageningen, Wageningen, the Netherlands)

<p>30 November - Day One: The Challenges and the Options</p> <p>Setting the scene – Questions from practice</p> <p>Key note presentations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complexity and the implications for strategy – <i>Dave Snowden (Cognitive Edge)</i> The business of social innovation: social entrepreneurship and complexity – <i>Alejandro Litovsky (Volans)</i> <p>Invited responses</p> <p>Interactive Workshops: principles and practices for being strategic in the face of complexity:</p> <p>Confirmed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cynefin framework and sense making: <i>Dave Snowden</i> Social entrepreneurship – <i>Alejandro Litovsky</i> Policy processes, governance and complexity – <i>Katrien Termeer (Wageningen UR)</i> Spaces for change: science and innovation systems – <i>Cees Leeuwis (Wageningen UR)</i> Theories of change application – <i>Irene Guijt (Learning by Design)</i> <p>Yet to be confirmed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic innovation capacity Resilience thinking Perspectives on strategic thinking <p>Synthesis Session</p>	<p>1 December - Day Two: Exploring New Practices and Capacities</p> <p>Reflections from Day One</p> <p>Key note presentations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy entrepreneurship: the role of research in innovation – <i>John Young (Overseas Development Institute)</i> Global development trends and implications for partnerships and capacities – <i>Lisa Jordan (Bernard van Leer Foundation, and previously Ford Foundation)</i> <p>Invited responses</p> <p>Round Table Dialogues – Linking to Arenas of Practice. (Indicative topics to be refined on basis of interest)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development policy Social entrepreneurship Capacity development Public private partnerships The role of scientific research Competing claims The drive for socio-ecological sustainability Sustainable supply chains Development partnerships Disaster – conflict situations Planning and monitoring development interventions <p>Emerging Issues for Leadership and Capacity</p>
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- The event will be supported by blogs and access to relevant background articles and books and an annotated bibliography. A wide selection of this material will be available for browsing during the two days. Those who register will receive an updated programme and list of contributors well before the event.

Registration

Fee: € 250 (includes drinks and lunch on both days)

Registration deadline: 1 November 2009

Register at: <http://tinyurl.com/complexityID>

For overnight stay options please visit <http://www.hofvanwageningen.nl/> |

