

Being 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. The challenges of global development require 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 approaches for social and technological innovation. Think of social entrepreneurship, strategic innovation, managing by simple principles, the Cynefin Framework, resilience thinking and innovation systems. Though not silver bullets, such approaches do offer insights to work in unpredictable and rapidly changing contexts.

Such ideas revolve around networks and alliances for learning. They challenge traditional roles and

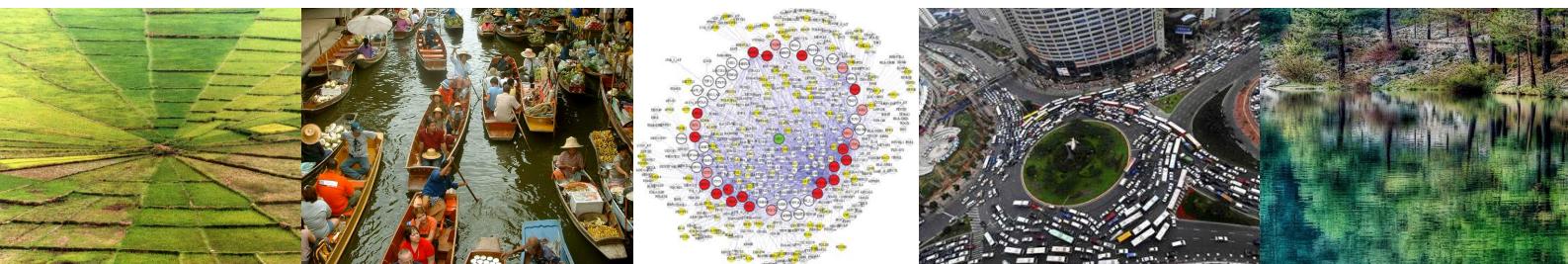
responsibilities of government, business, NGOs, science and citizens. And, they seek ways to work with - rather than against - the complexity of human and natural systems. Global development processes are already being driven by new dynamics between the public, private and civil society sectors.

How well equipped are people and organisations to work with these new ideas, approaches and dynamics? What is needed to embed required 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 international development 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](#) and the [Seminar on Institutions, Theories of Change and Capacity Development](#). The Navigating Complexity event introduced the idea of complexity and its implications. This dialogue will focus on practical ways to be effective in complex situations.



Programme

| 30 November The Challenges and the Options | 1 December Exploring New Practices and Capacities |
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| 9:00 Opening & welcome <i>Martin Kropff (Rector Magnificus, WUR)</i> | 9:00 Invited reflections |
| 9:10 Setting the scene , questions from practice <i>Jim Woodhill (Wageningen International)</i> | 9:30 Speakers and debate |
| 9:20 Speakers and debate <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> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Policy entrepreneurship: the role of research in innovation <i>John Young (Overseas Development Institute)</i>Global development trends: implications for partnerships and capacities <i>Lisa Jordan (Bernard van Leer Foundation, ex-Ford Foundation)</i> |
| 13:30 Interactive Workshops: principles and practices <ul style="list-style-type: none">Cynefin framework and strategic sense-making, <i>Dave Snowden (Cognitive Edge)</i>Social entrepreneurship <i>Alejandro Litovsky (Volans)</i>Policy processes, governance and complexity, <i>Katrien Termeer (Wageningen UR)</i>Science, complexity and innovation <i>Cees Leeuwis (Wageningen UR)</i>Strategic consideration of theories of change, <i>Irene Guijt (Learning by Design)</i>Strategic innovation capacity, <i>Liselore Berghman (Free University, Amsterdam)</i>Perspectives on strategic thinking, <i>Dany Jacobs (University of Amsterdam)</i>Visualizing Complexity to Realize Change <i>Steve Waddell (Networking Action)</i> | 13:30 Roundtable Dialogues: Linking to arenas of practice (To be adapted on basis of interest after registration closes) <ul style="list-style-type: none">Development policy <i>Rosalind Eyben (IDS)</i>Sustainable supply chains <i>Myrtille Danse (LEI/Wageningen UR)</i>Water governance <i>John Dore (M-POWER)</i>Competing claims over natural resources <i>Ken Giller (Wageningen UR)</i>Civic-driven change <i>Alan Fowler (ISS/Erasmus University)</i>Education for sustainability <i>Arjen Wals (Wageningen UR)</i>The drive for socio-ecological sustainability <i>tbc</i>Disaster & conflict situations <i>Jeroen Warner (Wageningen UR)</i>Capacity development <i>Heather Baser (consultant affiliated with ECDPM and CIDA)</i>Sense-making and learning for strategic M&E <i>Dave Snowden and Irene Guijt</i> |
| 15:30 Synthesis | 15:30 Emerging issues for leadership and capacity |
| 17:00 Drinks & Links | 17:00 Drinks & Links |

Organisation

Wageningen International is hosting the Dialogue, in collaboration with four Groups of Wageningen University and Research Centre: Communication and Innovation Studies; Disaster Studies; Education & Competence Studies; and Public Administration & Policy.

Our media partner for the event is The Broker (www.thebrokeronline.eu). The event will be supported by blogs, background reading, and an annotated bibliography, with much material available for browsing during the two days. An on-site cartoonist will provide visual food for thought.

Registration and Venue

Fee: € 250 (includes drinks and lunches)

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

Registration deadline: 1 November 2009. Participants will receive additional information after registration.

The event will take place at the Hof van Wageningen, Lawickse Allee 9, Wageningen, the Netherlands. For accommodation options: <http://www.hotels.nl/Wageningen/>.

