

WORKSHEET: Wicked Problems, Wicked Questions

Wicked problems are often ill-defined (there is no prescribed way forward), involve stakeholders with different perspectives, and have no “right” or “optimal” solution. Thus, wicked problems cannot be solved by the application of standard (or known) methods; they demand creative solutions. Complex challenges are typically wicked problems.

Wicked questions capture the central underlying tension that stands at the core of a wicked problem – the tension between equally necessary – but apparently irreconcilable – goals, each of which must be achieved for progress to be made. The existence of this tension beneath the surface of a complex challenge is one test of it being genuinely complex. The built-in paradox demands that we not settle for one or other of the horns of the dilemma, but rather search for an imaginative reframing of the problem that moves us beyond the tension toward a new understanding of its potential.

Our Complex Challenge is.....

What opposing-yet-complementary goals do we need to pursue simultaneously in order to respond successfully to our complex challenge?

“How is it that we need to _____ and we need to _____ simultaneously?”

Wicked Question #1

Wicked Question #2

Wicked Question #3