



Systems Mapping of **WICKED PROBLEMS**

Strategic Foresight 2.0 Training and
Capacity Development Workshop

The most telling feature of a wicked problem is its complexity (see sidebar). The common way we address wicked problems is to deny their complexity. We pretend we can reduce them into smaller, more manageable issues with familiar parts. By doing so, we ignore the very nature of complexity – the dynamic interaction of the various parts of the problem. To address complex/wicked problems effectively we must recognize the systemic nature of the issue, keep the interactions intact, identify the dynamic structure and look for multiple points of intervention.

Systems Mapping is a well-developed method for representing complexity in a manner that supports appropriate analysis and action. A Systems Map is a picture of how a group thinks about an issue, challenge, problem or situation – a 'Cognitive Graphic' that represents the current thinking of a diverse group of people. As a visual representation, a Systems Map allows a number of analyses to be undertaken. Each type provides insight about an issue that is not possible from a single perspective or even from a summary of all perspectives. The process of developing Systems Maps creates a way to become conscious of embedded – tacit – knowledge and deep assumptions that do not normally appear in less structured dialogues.

This three-day workshop will provide participants with:

- A means to identify and select wicked problems for mapping.
- Ways to identify and analyse the truly significant dynamics in the system under consideration.
- A model of how to intervene in a wicked problem.
- Hands-on experience with all of the above.

The workshop is led and facilitated by Brian Woodward, Ph.D. Associate Executive Director, Foresight Canada. Since 1975 he has been an active member of the International Society of Systems Science – a body of researchers and practitioners in the areas of systems research, methodologies and applications. Dr. Woodward is also currently a Senior Faculty member at The Banff Centre. Brian will be assisted by Ruben Nelson, Executive Director, Foresight Canada.

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Wicked Problems* are complex and swampy conditions that are highly resistant to resolution.

Wicked problems cannot be dealt with within our dominant logics, mental models, sectors and organizational silos.

Wicked Problems:

- Display a high degree of complexity
- Are difficult to grasp
- Are immune to simple and clear solutions
- Are highly interdependent and multi-causal
- Are dynamic; not stable
- Involve changing our minds as well as our behaviour
- Are laden with unforeseen consequences
- Are often characterized by chronic policy failure

There are no quick fixes or formulas for addressing Wicked Problems. Yet the important and pressing issues that face us today, e.g. Climate Change, Obesity, Social Reputation, etc., require a response. There are increasing demands and expectations that these issues must be addressed.

Systems mapping offers a way through swampy problems.

* H. W. J. Rittel and M. M. Webber, 'Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning', Policy Sciences, Vol. 4, No. 2, June 1973, pp. 155–69.