



# COMPLEXITY NAVIGATOR

## 9 BUILDING BLOCKS FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION FOR THE COMMON GOOD

*Complex challenges are journeys of discovery, involving many actors and factors that are intertwined. The result of their interaction is unpredictable. Fortunately, we can deal with complexity in a sensible way!*

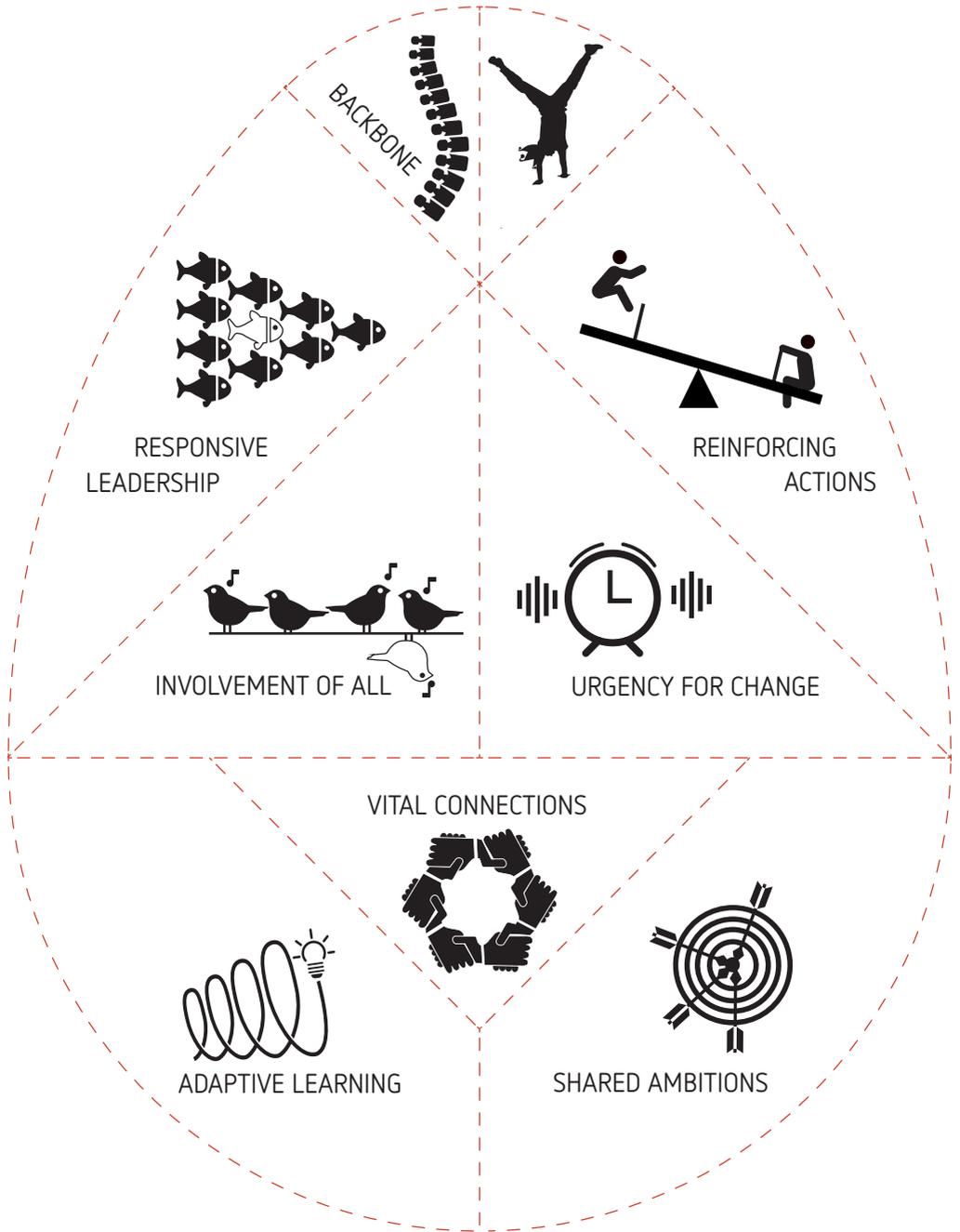
Perspectivity has developed a transformation tool to help you navigate complexity. The Complexity Navigator is made up of nine building blocks. Each block is a stepping stone on the journey to create collective impact. The extent to which you need each block depends on your situation.

### Embrace uncertainty

But be aware, complex situations have no predetermined steps. They are journeys of discovery, not a train schedule with fixed times and a destination. Anything can happen during the trip.

At the start of the journey, the end result cannot be predicted. The outcome is beyond the horizon. New patterns and practices will emerge along the journey. This means that you may achieve different results than you were originally aiming for. To navigate complexity successfully, you will need to embrace uncertainty.

This guide will help you reflect on your specific situation.



# COMPLEXITY NAVIGATOR

## BEFORE YOU START

Complex challenges cannot be ‘solved’ by experts alone. We need to involve the ‘whole system’, people with different stakes, interests and perspectives on the situation. This will enable us to unlock the collective wisdom, passion and creativity, and to drive action build on common ground.

With all these different perspectives, we can choose to focus on what is different or on what is common. Each can take different forms. When we magnify differences by classifying them as better versus worse, this often leads to polarization. And when we use power to suppress differences, this creates forced unification.

Alternatively, we can also choose to embrace differences by promoting self-expression so people can realize their unique potential. And we can foster appreciative understanding, in which we listen openly with the aim to truly understand each other to discover common ground. This often leads to more generative solutions, characterised by integration, co-creation and innovation.

### **People realize transformation**

Complex situations call upon us to have an open mind, an open heart and an open will. On the journey, you need stamina to actually achieve your goals. You need to get to know each other and feel that you are in it together. In the end, people shape organizations, transform themselves, create change and bring about meaningful results.

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# BUILDING BLOCKS

## URGENCY FOR CHANGE

*People do not change because they see the light, but because they feel the heat.*

What is the urgency for change and who feels the heat? In complex situations, the wake-up call is usually only a part of the whole issue. The essence of this building block is to really understand the urgency that is felt and see how this can fuel the transformation process.

The most common pitfall is to focus only on the most urgent issue, without trying to paint a complete picture of the situation. At this stage, we map the parties and their stakes as well as the history and trends at play. This is the more rational part of the process.

- What is the urgency, issue or opportunity?
- Can you see the whole picture and the system?
- Who is part of the system and what are the stakes?
- What is the history of this system and what are the trends at play?
- Who feels the 'urgency for change'?



## SHARED AMBITIONS

*If you want to build a ship together, make people long for the endless sea.*

To achieve collective impact, the people involved need to have a shared vision for change. This includes a mutual understanding of the challenge, a joint approach to solving it, and a common agenda that guides all actions. This is what we call 'shared ambitions'.

This building block is about passion, energy and hearts. About discovering what the people involved actually want to achieve in the world. This is where you establish how interdependent the parties involved actually are. The goal is to establish common ground on the issue at stake, the shared ambitions, and the vision for change.

- How are participants interdependent?
- Is there a vision for change? A dream for the future?
- Can you get the whole system in the room?
- How do you engage hearts and minds?
- What is the common agenda?



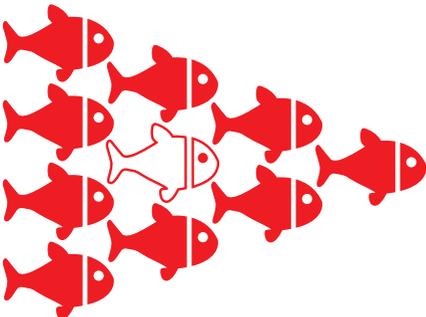
## RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP

*There go my people. I must find out where they are going, so I can lead them.*

Although all parties are needed to achieve a meaningful result, someone needs to drive the process from the start. This role can be fulfilled by different people at different stages and does not have to be a formal leader.

Responsive leaders will observe and listen deeply to what is going on and will continuously respond to change. They are able to hold various viewpoints and perspectives, and adjust their style, role and interventions to the situation. They cherish the minority and odd voices to realise a sustainable outcome. At the same time they maintain a sense of direction that connects the stakeholders and keeps the process going.

- Who drives the process?
- Who are the influential champion(s)?
- Who are the followers or potential new leaders?
- What style and interventions are useful at this moment?
- What is the flexibility of the partners in the process?
- Are they able to adapt their role?



## REINFORCING ACTIONS

*If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.*

The power of collective action comes from coherence between different activities. Mutually reinforcing actions ensure that efforts and activities of all people involved are aligned towards achieving the shared ambitions and contribute to adaptive learning.

Collective impact requires active steering of all parties concerned. Stakeholders should be aware that each individual action could influence the action of somebody else or of the system as a whole. If all actions are aligned, they reinforce each other like the rowers in a rowing boat who row perfectly synchronized. Together, they contribute to achieving the shared ambitions.

- How do we translate the common agenda into inspired collective action?
- Which concrete actions can be executed at this moment in time?
- What iconic actions and results symbolize the urgency for change or the shared ambition?
- How do our actions mutually reinforce each other?
- How do we continuously check this?

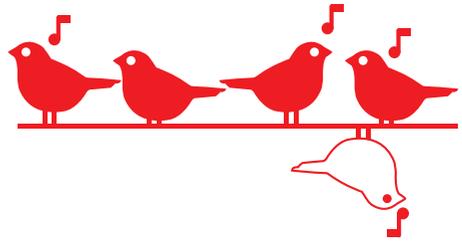
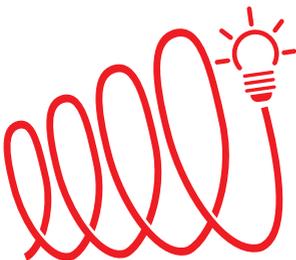
## ADAPTIVE LEARNING

*It's about progress, not about perfection.*

To realize shared ambitions, we need to agree on how progress will be monitored along the way. Measuring results consistently across all parties involved ensures that all efforts remain aligned. In addition, it enables stakeholders to hold one another accountable and learn from everybody's successes and failures. The learning is future-oriented and focuses on both improving the results and the collaboration process.

In complex processes we work in short cycles, instead of employing log frames for long term plans. We constantly develop prototypes, test them in real life and regularly build in time for reflection and learning. What works in this particular situation? What does it provoke? How does it feel? Shared measurement provides data, feelings and energy to fuel the process and sculpt the next step.

- How do we take time for emergence?
- How do we facilitate experiments?
- How do we create effective feedback loops?
- How do we collect and share the stories from the people?
- How do we ensure that people learn and hold each other accountable?



## INVOLVEMENT OF ALL

*We look up at the same stars and see such different things.*

Successful and lasting change occurs when we involve all voices in the process. This means the usual suspects, such as the people who have the authority, resources, information and expertise, as well as the people with need and the odd voices.

In complexity, we have to nourish the margins, embrace conflicting perspectives and ambiguity. Many times these margins and differing perspectives are seen as slowing down, while in reality they often hold an answer or provide insights that will contribute to more robust decisions.

- Who are the ARE IN: Authority, Resources, Expertise, Information and people with Need?
- How do we nourish the margins?
- How do we embrace conflicting perspectives and ambiguity?
- What is our flexibility towards disruptive and odd voices?
- How do we keep all people aligned?

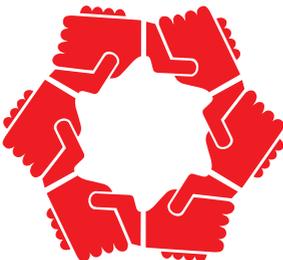
## VITAL CONNECTIONS

*Vital connections are like the oil that greases the process.*

To be able to commit to shared ambitions, adaptive learning and mutually reinforcing actions, stakeholders need to trust each other. They need to know that their interests are equally valued and protected. By creating vital connections that foster regular communication, interests can be shared, concerns addressed, and ideas discussed among all parties involved.

Hence, vital connections are conditional for collective impact. Because complex settings are continuously changing, connections have to be timely and suit the needs of all players. They must be designed and maintained in such a way that everybody can be involved. Creating vital connections is never the task of just one participant, but the responsibility of all involved.

- How do we cultivate relationships and trust in the system?
- How do we share progress about actions and experiments?
- How does everyone want to be connected to the process and to each other?
- Which communication tools and channels are best suited for this system?
- How do we keep the connections alive?
- How do we show and celebrate progress?



## BACKBONE

*Because change doesn't just happen by itself.*

A supporting backbone structure ensures that the transformation process maintains momentum and facilitates progress. A backbone can be a small team, a special unit, or a specialized organization. Essential focus points for the backbone are facilitating planning, resource mobilization, vital connections, decision making and shared measurement.

The classic pitfall is to install steering committees, advisory boards or staff organizations. A genuine backbone is not a standard department or group but is tailored to the process and supports it. It has a clearly defined role and focus and provides just enough organizational structure that is needed to drive the process, not the solutions.

- Who takes care of the planning, decision making process and communication?
- Who and how will we acquire the required financial means?
- What is the role of our backbone organization?
- Who will be participating in this role?
- At what moments will we evaluate if the backbone still supports the process?





## JOKER

*What to do with a blueprint in an emerging situation?*

Creating collective impact in complexity leads to unique processes. The eight building blocks are vital to grasp and analyze these processes. The blocks are based on experiences in the execution of diverse projects, processes and transformation assignments in different cultures and organizational settings. They are grounded in real life and supported by diverse research. Although they are sturdy, it does not mean that these eight blocks will give the whole picture in every situation. This is not a blueprint approach.

The joker is the special piece that you can use to craft your own situation. Maybe the questions stir up some insight that is not being addressed fully or directly by the eight other blocks. The joker is meant to customize the building blocks to your situation. It reminds us that every complex setting is unique.



### Questions?

**Do you want to know how to use the Complexity Navigator in your situation?**

**Contact us at:**

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**or call +31 610 334 466.**

**[www.perspectivity.org](http://www.perspectivity.org)**

