P-day on Complexity and the Cynefin framework

On Saturday the 5\textsuperscript{th} of October during the Perspectivity Network event in The Netherlands we elaborated on 'complexity'. From 9.30 AM till 15.30 PM around 25 network participants gathered at the Hoorneboeg in Hilversum for an interactive day of learning. The resource persons were Friso Gosliga and Dave van Mourik of SenseGuide.

The theme for the day

Complexity theory provides a scientific approach to understand an organisation's interactions as a complex ecology. Cynefin is one of the leading frameworks in complexity theory, winning awards from the Academy of Management as well as a feature on the cover of the Harvard Business Review (HBR) in November 2007. In 2011 the same paper was one of the most quoted scientific publications on leadership in that year. The author, Dave Snowden, is a Welshman (and the term 'cynefin' means in welsh 'the place of my multiple belongings...'). Perspectivity Enterprise has been successfully using the Cynefin framework for some time in its trainings and consultancy work (and Lisette Gast took the full course on Cynefin/Sensemaker by Cognitive Edge, Dave Snowden’s firm). The HBR paper is attached. Complexity stands at the top of the Perspectivity model and the first paragraph of the Passion Code is about complexity. This indicates how important it is for us to truly understand what it is (and what it is not) as it forms the basis of much that we think and do.

The morning session

During the morning program we made use of the narratives that many network participants wrote about a highpoint in Perspectivity. They were posted all around the room and the group was instructed to read (or scan) the multitude of stories. Hereafter, in small groups we were tasked to brainstorm (for individually, than as a group) about issues-challenges-questions or other observations that we took from that first exercise. After clustering them, we proceeded with putting these clusters in a framework by considering how to come to answers or progress on the clusters. (Groups were continuously disrupted by removing one group member and replacing it with a different group representative. This led to progressive insights). Framing them sparked the discussion on the character of the issues: easy to order, expertise required, wide ownership needed, urgency and time, straightforwardness, and so on. And the realization that it is better to split certain challenges as the ways of coming to solutions have different characteristics.

A clarifying interactive presentation took us deeper into the concept of complexity from different angles. The ppt is attached.

The afternoon session

After the lunch Friso and Dave continued with Sensemaker, a software that allows people to make
sense of their complex reality, based on (large numbers of) narratives, by making use of signifiers (which is a way to give meaning to all that information.) They also provide a quick overview of case studies ranging from horizon scanning & risk assessment and aid & development on an (inter)national level to leadership & organizational development and strategy & innovation on a corporate level. Sensemaker was developed by the group of Dave Snowden and provides a practical instrument to make sense of complex settings. The ppt is attached.

All-in-all we experienced a very interesting day where in we came to better understand the ins-and-outs of complexity, and the many mysteries, jargon, perceptions, interpretations, feelings, instruments, behaviours, frustrations, stories, opportunities, questions surrounding it.