

We Love Complexity

Transformation building blocks

Complex processes are journeys of discovery. The result of these processes is not evident. The only thing we know for sure is that transformation is needed. People and organizations are mutually interdependent and need each other to realize change.

Is it complicated or complex?

One of the first things to do is to determine if you are in the obvious, complicated, complex or in the chaotic domain, because all require a different approach. In complexity, many actors and factors are involved. Cause and effect are interrelated. New patterns and practices emerge.

Embrace uncertainty

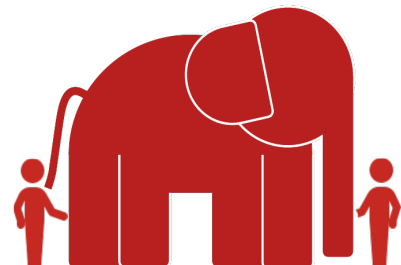
At the start of the process, the final results are unknown. The outcome is beyond the horizon and emerges during the process. When you are involved in a complex process, results will be achieved, but not always the ones you think. Cause and effect are not linear, but systemic.

People realize transformation

Complex processes are not just rational. They are processes of the heart and mind. You need stamina on such a journey to actually achieve your goals. You need to get know each other and feel that you are in it together. Because people shape organizations, create transformation and bring about meaningful results. You need to uncover what you really want and what the need of others is.

Conditions for success

- Whole system approach
- Inspired dialogue and adaptive learning
- Beyond polarization and forced unification
- Full person engagement: head, heart and will
- Self expression – finding your voice
- Appreciative understanding: hearing others
- Suspending judgment and bearing witness



Explore the whole elephant

Building blocks

The building blocks are stepping stones you can use during the process. But be aware, complex processes have no predetermined steps. They are journeys of discovery, not a railroad trip with a time schedule. Anything might happen during the trip.

The building blocks are the equivalent of the equipment you need during your discovery. The tools you need to have packed. The extent to which you need or will use them depends on the situation and the process.

This questionnaire will help you discover if you are addressing all the major issues you will encounter in complex transformations.

What drives the need for change?

Every journey of discovery starts with an issue or opportunity. Usually there is a trigger that ignites the need for action. Not all situations are complex and need to be treated that way. If a process is complex we need to assess the urgency of the situation, the stakes and parties involved. A central question is who actually feels the need for change. This is the more rational part of the process which focuses on the “here” and “now”. The analysis of the situation is necessary to have a clear view of the first steps we should take.

- Is it complex or complicated, obvious or chaos?
- What is the urgency, issue or opportunity?
- Can you see the whole picture?
- Who is part of the system?
- What are the stakes?
- Who feels the need for change?



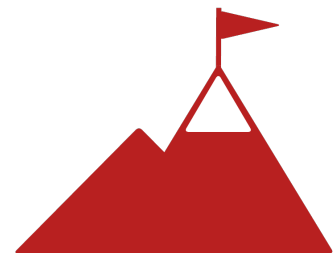
Take a balloon ride to take a picture of the landscape.



Do you have a shared ambition?

Every process needs ambition. The ambition fuels the need for change and drives stakeholders. This part is about passion, energy and hearts. We need to know what the concerned parties actually want to achieve in the world. We need to discover common ground and develop a shared agenda that connects the concerned parties to the need for change. What do all stakeholders really want to achieve in relation to the need for change?

- How are participants interdependent?
- Is there a vision of change?
- Can you get the whole system in the room?
- How can you align the system?
- How do you engage hearts and minds?
- Can you establish common ground?
- What is the common agenda?
- Can the system embrace uncertainty?



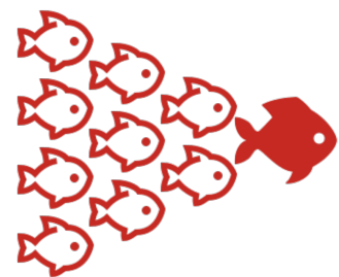
If you want to build a ship, make people long for the endless sea.

Where is the leader?

Although all parties are needed to achieve a meaningful result, an authority figure needs to hold the process. The leader needs to be servant of the people and understand that minority and odd voices will always be part of the process and are needed for a good outcome.

In addition there are usually other influential champions, people with expertise, resources, information, and or need who are indispensable as well.

- Who is the authority figure to hold the process?
- Who are the influential champion(s)?
- How will you hold the space for disruptives?
- What resources are needed?
- Who else “ARE IN”? Resources, Expertise, Information & Need
- Is the leader ready to serve?



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



Develop mutually reinforcing activities

Complex processes require active steering of all concerned parties. If parties are not connected during execution, they will miss opportunities to reinforce activities. Stakeholders should be aware that each individual action could influence the action of another party 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 ambition.

As a journey of discovery, these processes need to be organized and coordinated. In some cases, a backbone group or steering committee can help drive conditions for co-creation.

- How do we convert common ground & agenda into inspired collective action?
- How do we organize and coordinate change?
- How do we share progress about the actions and experiments?
- How will we facilitate experiments?
- How do the actions mutually reinforce each other?
- How do we show and celebrate success?



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

Foster adaptive learning

In complex processes we need to work in short cycles, make lots of prototypes, test in real life and build in regular time for reflection and learning. What really works? What does it provoke? How does it feel? Are we able to hear all the voices?

Time to reflect and adapt is essential for a robust transformation. The reflection provides information, feelings and energy to fuel the process and sculpt the next step.

- How will we take time for emergence?
- How will we create effective feedback loops?
- How will we share the stories from the people?
- How will we ensure people learn and hold each other accountable?
- How will reflective learning lead to adaptation and inspire new actions?



Change is the only constant.

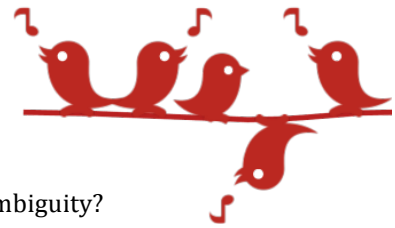


Invite involvement of all

Successful and lasting change occurs when we involve all voices in the design of the process. The odd voices may have relevant information or a decisive role in the process. In practice the margins are often ignored, because they appear to slow down progress.

In complexity we have to nourish the margins, embrace conflicting perspectives and ambiguity. Many times these margins and differing perspectives hold an answer or provide insights - in the behaviour of people - we need to achieve the meaningful change we seek. The art of complex processes is the way we keep people aligned.

- How do we involve all voices in the process?
- How do we nourish the margins?
- How do we embrace conflicting perspectives and embrace ambiguity?
- How do we build and maintain relationships and trust within the system?
- How do we keep all people aligned?



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

