Wicked Problems in the Built Environment: of health inequalities and bedbugs

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Outline

- Wicked problems
  - Tame and complex problems
  - Exercise
- Tackling wicked problems
  - Issue-based problem solving
  - Dialogue mapping
    - Discussion/debate/dialogue
      - Health inequalities
- Exercise
  - bedbugs
- Discussion/Conclusion

Wicked problems defined

Wicked problems cannot be defined once and for all

Wicked problems defined

They have no precise stopping point when they are solved

Wicked problems defined

There are no 'right' or 'wrong' solutions, only better or worse ones.

Wicked problems defined

Each wicked problem is unique and specific to its context

Wicked problems defined

Each attempt to solve a wicked problem is unique and may affect an infinite set of related problems

Wicked problems defined

They are essentially unstable and resistant to policy solutions insofar as interventions involve multiple stakeholders.

(Rittel & Webber, 1973; Roberts, 2000; Blackman et al., 2006; Conklin, 2006)

Wicked vs. Tame Problems – Key Features

WICKED PROBLEMS	TAME PROBLEMS
There is no definitive formulation of a wicked problem.	have a relatively well-defined and stable problem statement.
Wicked problems have no stopping rule.	have a definite stopping point, i.e. we know when the solution or a solution has been reached.
Solutions to wicked problems are not true-or-false, but better or worse.	have a solution which can be objectively evaluated as being right or wrong.
There is no immediate and no ultimate test of a solution to a wicked problem.	belong to a class of similar problems which can be solved in a similar manner.
Every wicked problem is essentially unique.	have solutions which can be tried and abandoned.
Wicked problems have no given alternative solutions	Comes with a limited set of alternative solutions.

(adapted from: Ison & Collins, 2008 and Conklin, 2006)

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Tame Problems

- Tame problems are those where stakeholders agree on the nature of the problem and on the best way to solve it

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Complex Problems

- Complex problems are those where stakeholders agree on the nature of the problem, but not on how to best solve it

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Wicked Problems

- With wicked problems, stakeholders agree neither on the nature of the problem, nor on its solution

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Name that problem (exercise)

- Removing mold in school building
- Reducing health inequalities
- Discovering cure for cancer

- Are these tame, complex, or wicked problems? Why?

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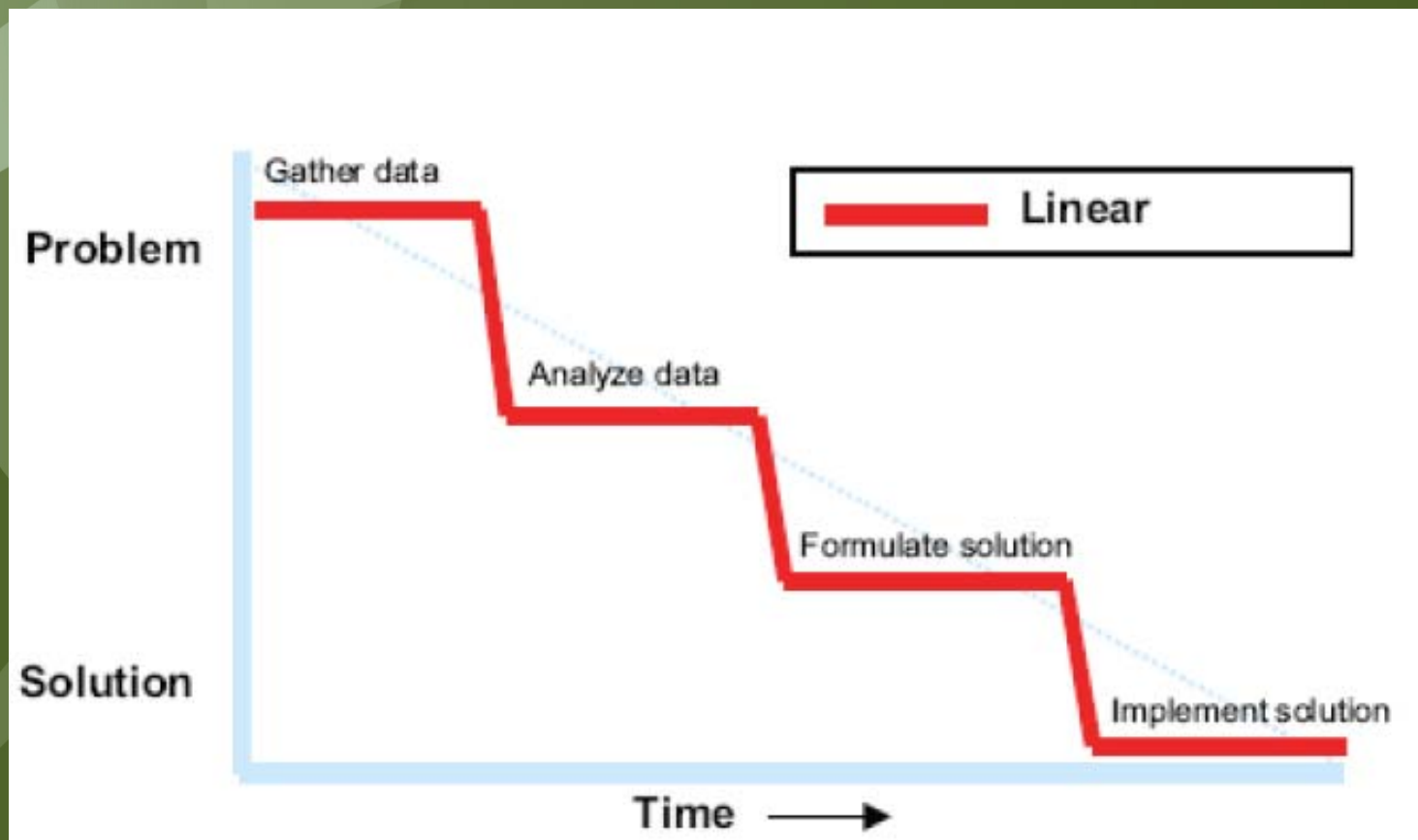*Institut national
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Tackling wicked problems

- If wicked problems are different from tame and complex ones, how do we approach them?

- The classic scientific approach may not work.

- Wicked problems are compounded by technical and social complexity.
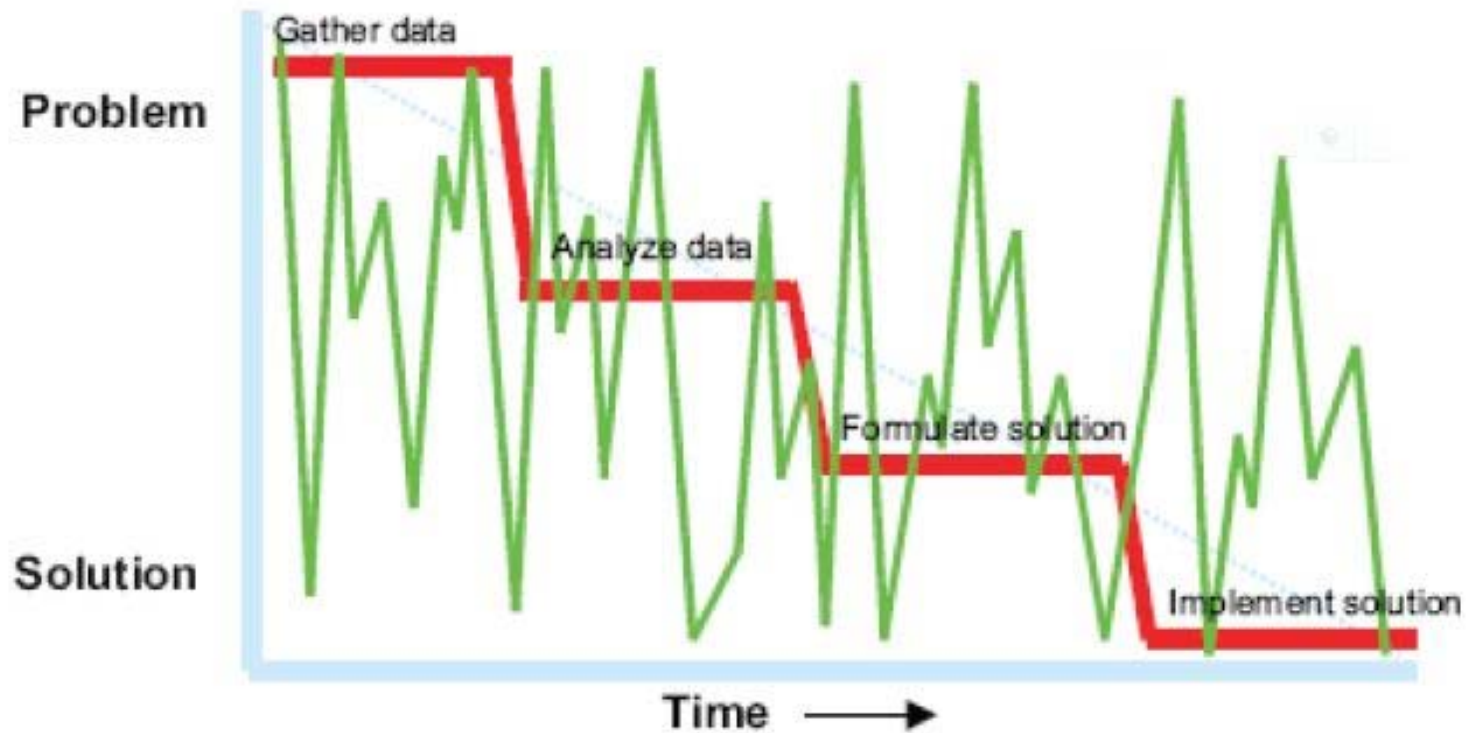
Traditional /Linear problem solution

(Conklin, 2006, p.9)

Opportunity-based problem solution

(Conklin, 2006, p.10)

Strategies for coping with wicked problems

- Authoritative

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Strategies for coping with wicked problems

- Competitive

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Strategies for coping with wicked problems

- Collaborative

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Discussion/Debate/Dialogue

Present ideas	Succeed or win	Broaden perspectives
Seek answers/solutions	**Look for weakness**	**Look for shared meaning**
Persuade others	Stress disagreement	Find places of agreement
Enlist support of others	**Defend our position**	**Express paradox/ambiguity**
Share information	Focus on 'right' and 'wrong'	Bring out areas of ambivalence
Solve our own and others' problems	**Advocate one perspective**	**Allow and invite differences of opinion and experience**
Give answers	Search for logic flaws	Discover collective meaning
Achieve preset goals	**Judge other perspectives as inferior, invalid or distorted**	**Challenge our preconceived notions**
Acknowledge feelings and discount as inappropriate	Deny (other's) feelings	Explore thoughts/feelings
Listen for areas of disagreement	**Listen with a view to countering**	**Listen with a view to understanding**
Avoid feelings	Discount the validity of feelings	Validate other's experience/feelings
Avoid areas of strong conflict and difference	**Focus on conflict and difference as advantage**	**Articulate areas of conflict/difference**
Retain relationships	Disregard relationships	Build relationships
Avoid silence	**Use silence to gain advantage**	**Respect/honour silence**

(Adapted from : Tanya Kachwaha, 2002)

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Dialogue Mapping
(Conklin, 2006)

- A technique for developing and mapping shared understanding of a problem

- Works outward from a basic question

- Used in trying to cope with wicked problems

- Questions / ideas / pros, cons / decisions

Types of questions

- Deontic (What should we do?)
- Instrumental (How should we do it?)
- Criterial (What are the criteria?)
- Conceptual (What does 'X' mean?)
- Factual (What is X? Is X true?)
- Background (What is the background to this problem?)
- Stakeholder (Who are they?)
- Future (What will happen…?)

(Adapted from, Cognexus, 2010, pp.29-30)

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Example of health inequalities

- How can we reduce health inequalities?
- What are our targets?
- What do we mean by health inequalities?
- What sectors need to be involved
- What are the numbers on inequalities?
- What has been tried elsewhere?
- What will happen if we do nothing?
- How will we measure success?

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Exercise - Bedbugs

- Begin with the deontic question: What are we going to do about bed bugs?
  - Follow worksheet and map (some of) your discussion in terms of Q (questions), I (ideas/answers), + (pros), - (cons), and finally reach a decision.

Conclusion / Discussion

- Most public policy problems are wicked in nature.

- Wicked problems must be tackled differently than tame or complex problems.

- Require collaboration, dialogue and shared understanding.

- « Mapping » dialogues can be useful in reaching decisions on how to tackle wicked problems.

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Thank you

Merci

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