We will start
at 2 p.m.

Practical Approaches to Wicked Problems: What Works?

Webinar | March 6, 2018

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Val Morrison
National Collaborating Centre
for Healthy Public Policy

Centre de collaboration nationale sur les politiques publiques et la santé
National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy

Institut national de santé publique Québec

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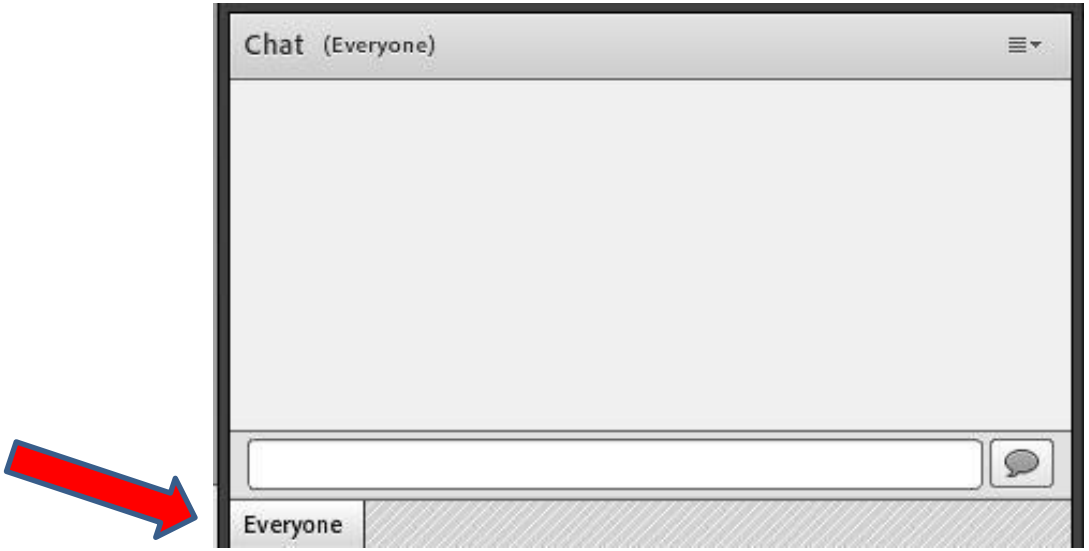


Please note that we are recording this webinar, including the chat, and we will be posting this on our website.

Presenter: Val Morrison

With:

Mylène Maguire: planning, logistics and technical support

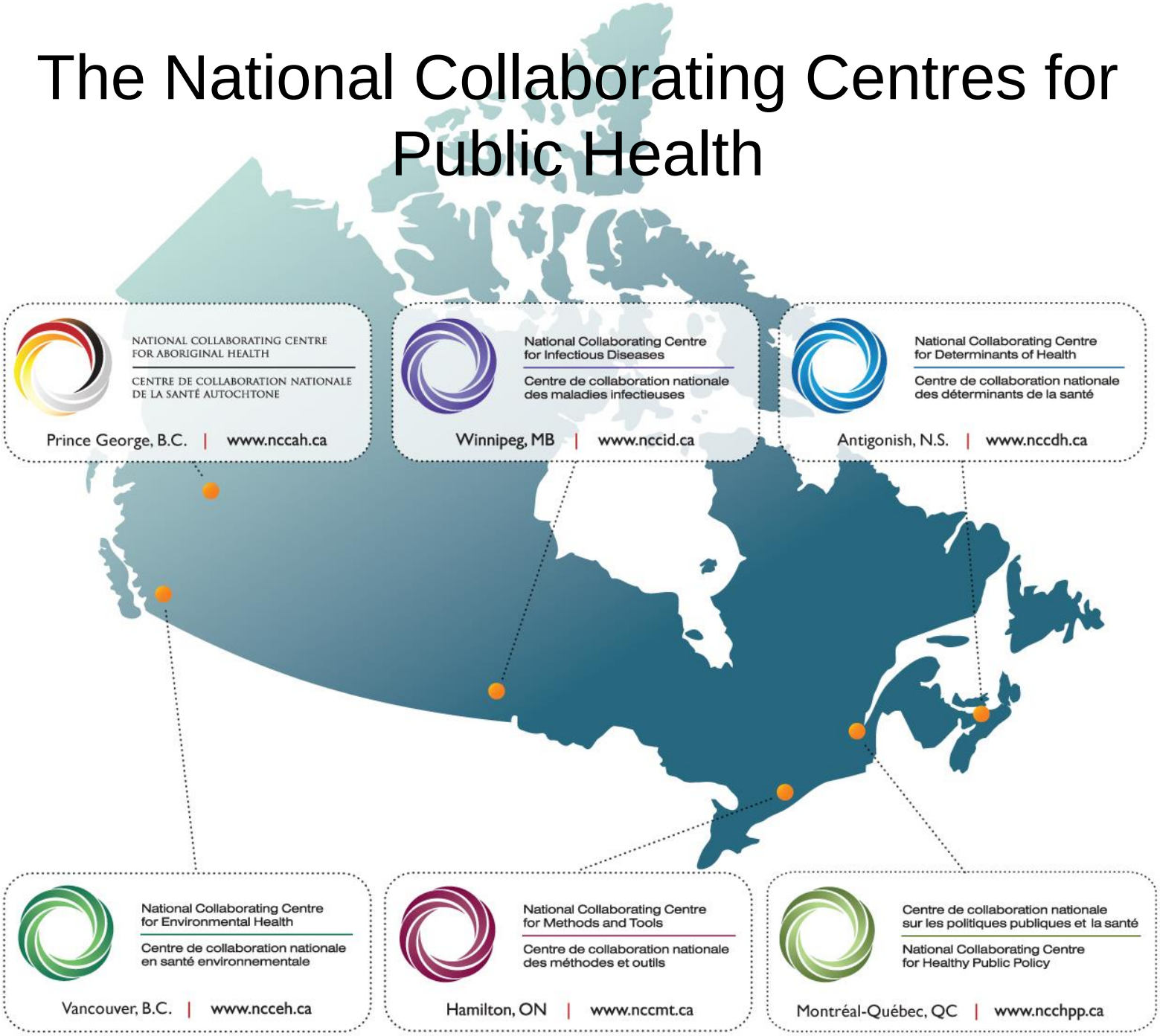
And Marianne Jacques: moderator

Declaration of real or potential conflicts of interest

Presenter:
Val Morrison

I have no real or potential conflict of interest related to the material that is being presented today.

The National Collaborating Centres for Public Health



National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy (NCCHPP)

Our mandate

- Support public health actors in their efforts to promote healthy public policies

Our areas of expertise

- The effects of public policies on health
- Generating and using knowledge about policies
- Intersectoral actors and mechanisms
- Strategies to influence policy making

Objectives for the webinar

- Differentiate different practical approaches to addressing wicked problems.
- Increase capacity to act on wicked problems in public health
- Understand the importants of ‘clumsy’/polyrational solutions
- Considerations for a ‘post-normal’ dialogue

Outline

- Wicked problems (summary)
- Tackling wicked problems
  - Dialogue mapping
    - Shared understanding
    - Collaboration
    - Dialogue
  - Clumsy solutions to wicked problems
    - Cultural theory
    - Social solidarities and polyrationality
    - ‘Post-normal’ dialogue?
- Discussion/Conclusion

Wicked Problems (summary)

- Concept first used in 1973 by Horst Rittel and Melvin Weber in their paper «Dilemmas in a general theory of planning» in the journal *Policy Studies.*
- Sometimes called social messes or messy policy problems

Wicked problems defined (summary)

1. Wicked problems cannot be defined once and for all.
2. They have no precise stopping point when they are solved.
3. There are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ solutions, only better or worse ones.
4. Each wicked problem is unique and specific to its context.
5. Each attempt to solve a wicked problem is unique and may affect an infinite set of related problems.
6. 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)

Dialogue Mapping
(Conklin, 2006)

- A technique for developing and mapping shared understanding of a problem
- Works outward from a basic question
- Questions / ideas / pros, cons / decisions

Strategies for coping with wicked problems

- Key ingredients
  - Collaboration
  - Dialogue
  - Shared Understanding

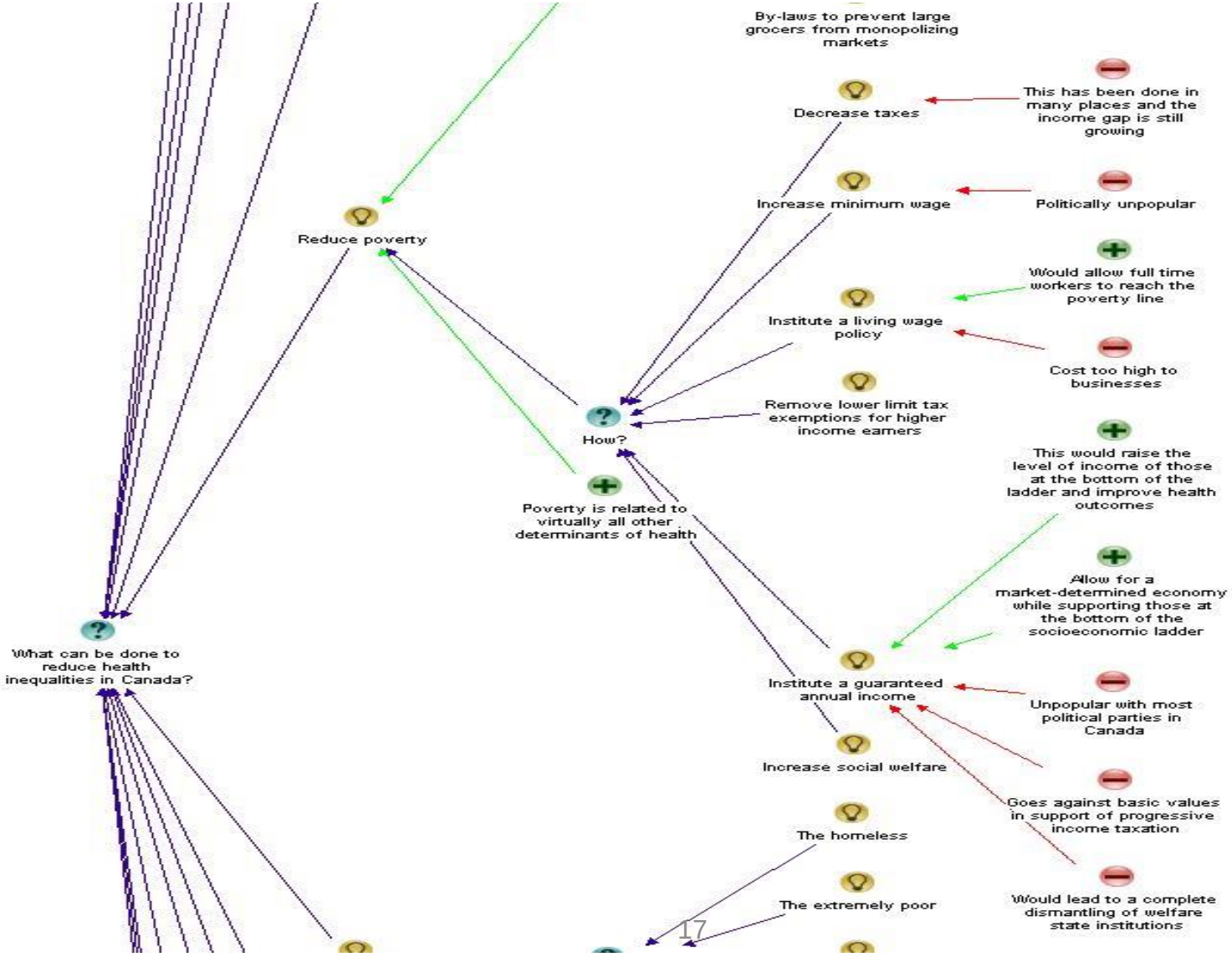
Dialogic communication

- Key elements
  - Engaging contact
  - Active listening
  - Mirroring
  - Exploratory questions

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 spaces of agreement
Share information	Focus on 'right' and 'wrong'	Bring out ambivalences
Solve our problems	Advocate one perspective	Invite/allow differences of opinion and expertise
Give answers	Search for logic flaws	Discover collective meaning
Achieve preset goals	Judge other perspectives as inferior or distorted	Challenge our preconceived notions
Listen for disagreement	Listen in order to counter	Listen in order to understand
Avoid areas of conflict and difference	Focus on conflict and difference as advantage	Articulate areas of conflict and difference
Retain relationships	Disregard relationships	Build relationships

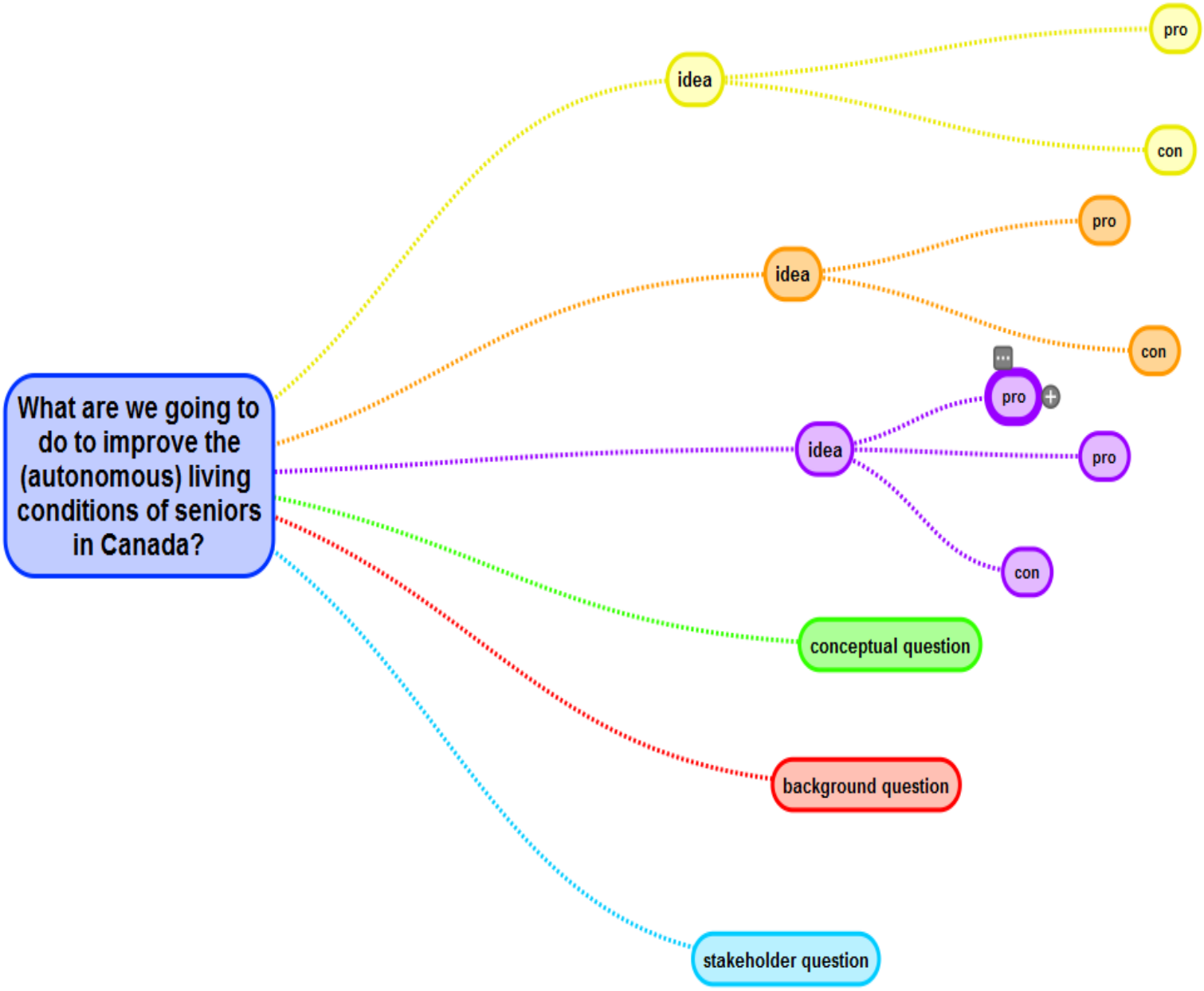
(Adapted from Kachwaha, 2002)

Example of health inequalities



Practical Exercise:
Ageing population and living conditions for seniors

- Who would need to be involved in a discussion about this in your region?
- How would you foster dialogue around this issue?
- I began this map with the question: What are we going to do to improve the (autonomous) living conditions of seniors in Canada?


What are we going to do to improve the (autonomous) living conditions of seniors in Canada?
idea
pro
con
idea
pro
con
idea
pro
pro
con
conceptual question
background question
stakeholder question

Frames, policy controversies and stories

- Understanding how frames operate allows us to concentrate on partnerships and collaboration.

- Combine wicked problems, framing, policy controversies and cultural theory?

(Ney, 2009)

Framing Defined

- « a way of selecting, organizing, interpreting, and making sense of a complex reality to provide guideposts for knowing, analyzing, persuading, and acting. » (Rein and Schön, 1993, p. 146)

Framing Policy

- Policy disagreements occur within a common frame (can be settled)
- Policy controversies occur when frames offer competing world views

  (same body of evidence can be used to support either frame) (Rein and Schön, 1993, p. 146)

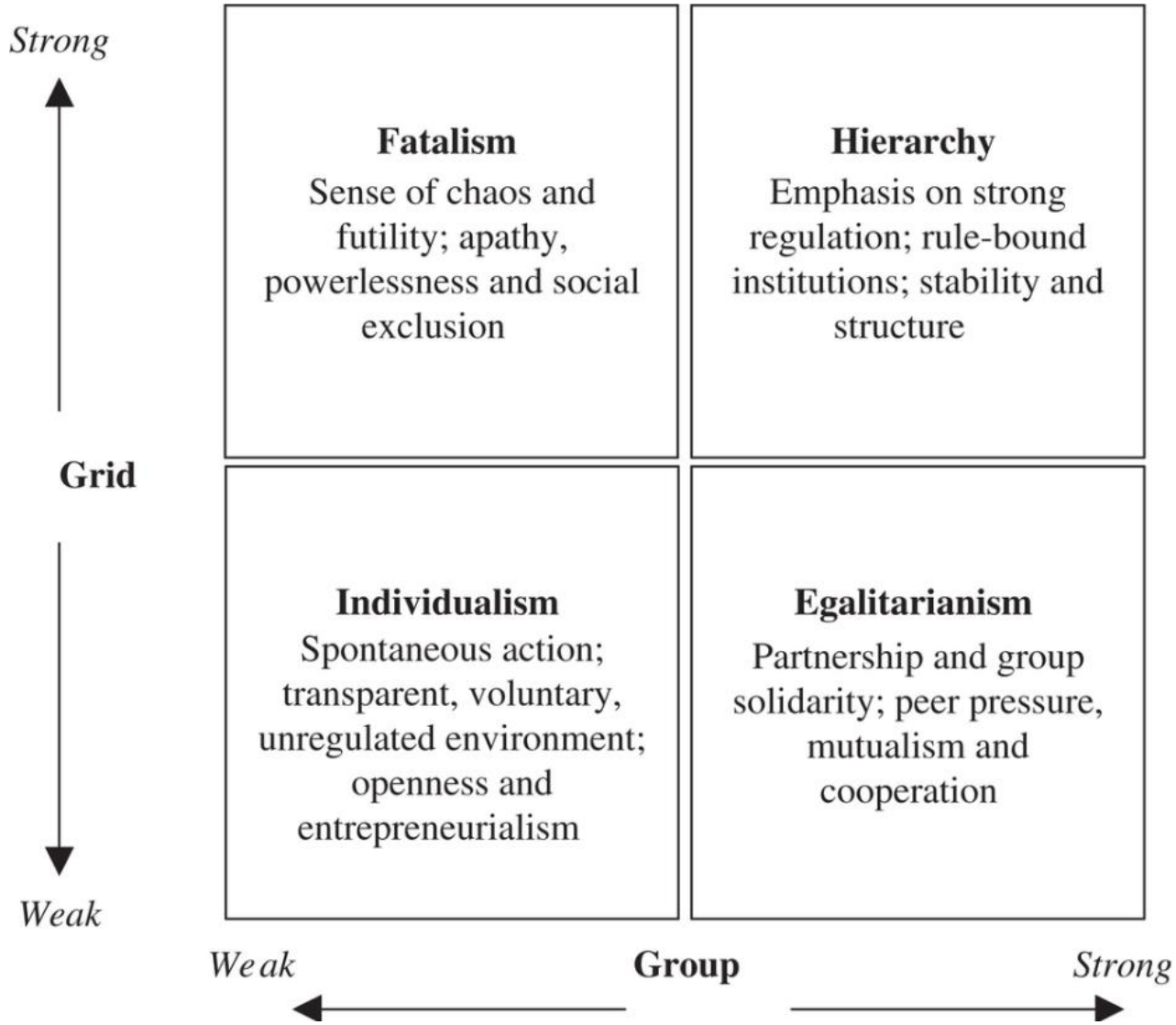
  – Intractable policy controversies are wicked problems

Social Solidarities in Cultural Theory

- Hierarchism
- Individualism
- Egalitarianism
- Fatalism

Each of these creates a « policy story » to make their case (setting, villians, heroes)

(Ney, 2009)



(Adapted from Ney & Verweij, 2015, p.1683)

Hierarchical social solidarity

- Tradition-bound institutions
  - Emphasize duty, obligation and loyalty
  - Managing and regulating from the top down

Individualist social solidarity

- Allow maximum individual freedom
  - Emphasize individual rights, liberties and responsibilities
  - Best environment is that of the free market

Egalitarian social solidarity

- Members do not differentiate between themselves but with the outside
  - Often unstable and fluid
  - Emphasize rejecting hierarchy and authoritarian institutions

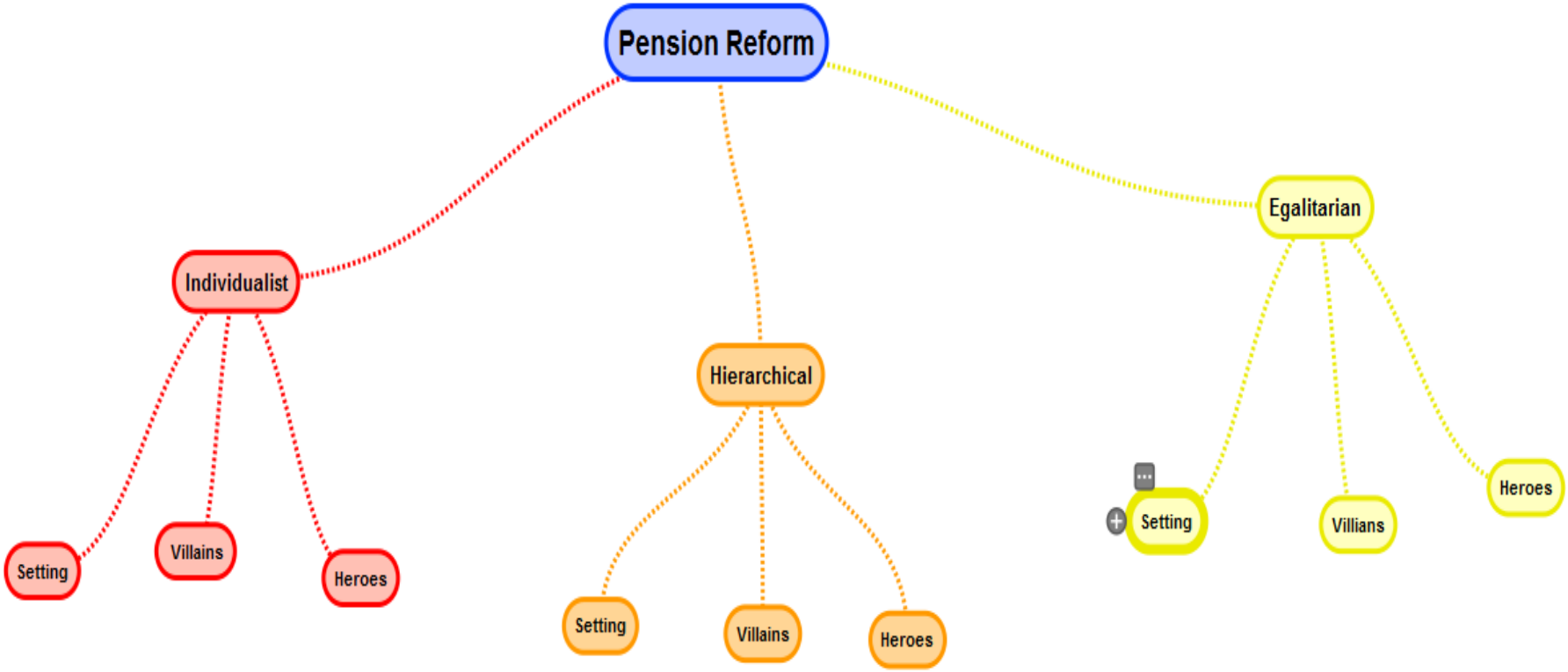
Fatalist social solidarity

- Isolated and see little purpose in participating
  - Strong emphasis on status distinctions (powerlessness)
  - Solutions are stumbled upon

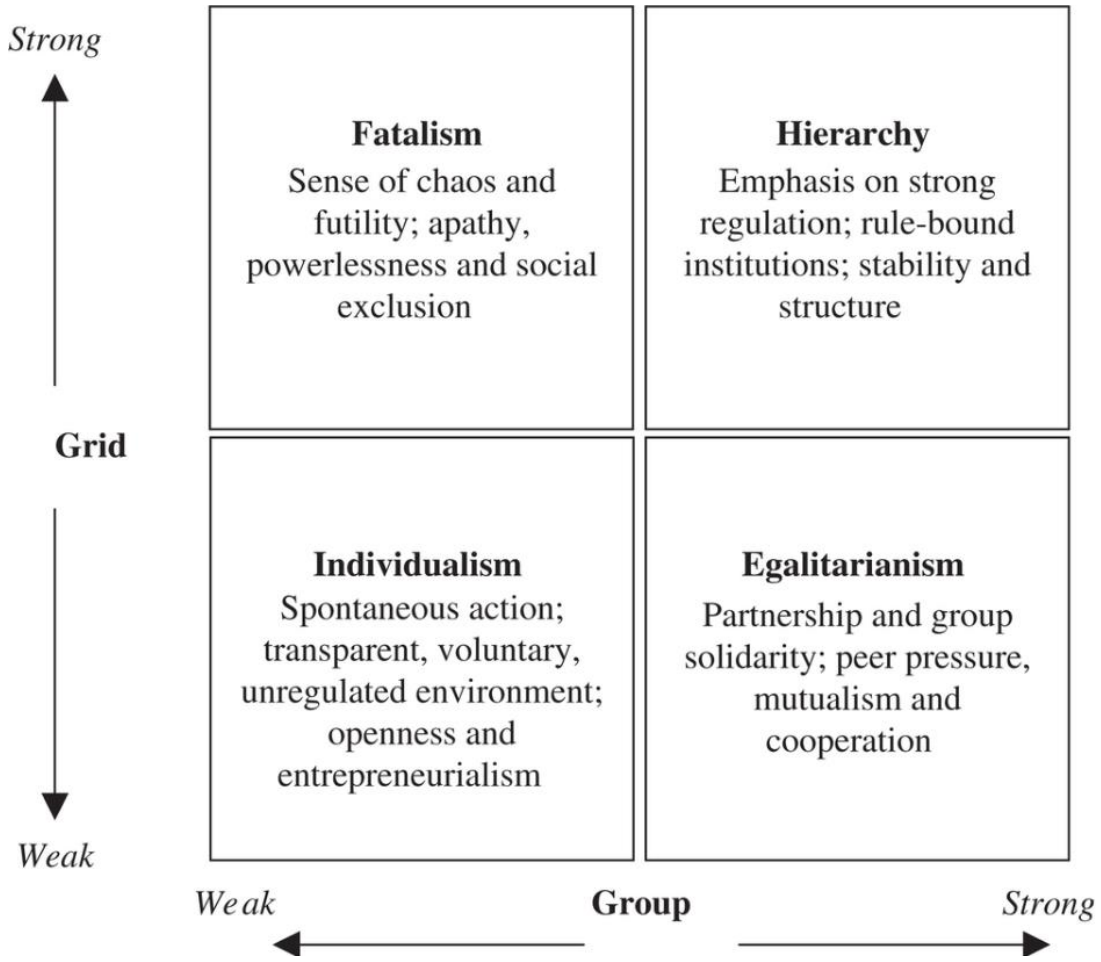
Can we use this to « map » policy stories?

- Settings
- Villains
- Heroes

(See Ney, 2009)


Pension Reform
Individualist
Setting
Villains
Heroes
Hierarchical
Setting
Villains
Heroes
Egalitarian
Setting
Villians
Heroes

‘Post-normal’ dialogue?



Extended peer communities

- 4 social solidarities represent frames or worldviews
  - Strong interdependence
  - Constantly evolving and changing

Clumsy/polyrational solutions

- Capactity to
  - embrace and engage messy pluralism
  - Engage contending scientific and epistemological positions
  - Generates the ‘methodological mess’ (Ney & Verweij, 2015) needed for tackling wicked problems.

Four perspectives on clumsy solutions

Table 2. Four perspectives on how to generate clumsy solutions.

	Individualism	Egalitarianism	Hierarchy	Fatalism
Who should contribute?	Those who want to be involved	Everyone affected by decisions	Authorities, experts and mediators – and those they designate/ perceive as stakeholders	Those picked by random selection
When, where and with whom to contribute?	At one's own time, in one's own space, and individually	When and where all the others meet	Depending on type of issue (with issue types and corresponding conditions set by experts)	Randomly
How to structure space in which decision-making takes place?	Fluidly (without clear, permanent boundaries or shapes)	As a round table: inclusive and equal	Depending on type of issue (with issue types and corresponding space determined by experts)	In an intimidating, impersonal manner, with space for 'backroom deals'
How to attract/ motivate people?	Appeal to self-interest (personal absolute gain)	Appeal to outrage and solidarity	Appeal to sense of duty	No need, and (anyway) cannot
How to divide tasks?	Individual participants should define and choose their own tasks	All tasks should be undertaken collectively	Tasks should be allocated by experts on basis of expertise	Unsystematically

(Ney & Verweij, 2015, p.1686)

Conclusion / Summary

- Most public policy problems are wicked in nature.
- Wicked problems must be tackled differently than tame or complex problems.
- Collaboration and dialogue are essential.
- « Mapping » dialogues can be useful in reaching decisions on how to tackle wicked problems.
- Most promising dialogues are ‘post-normal’ ones.
- Integrating polyrational approaches is crucial to tackling wicked problems.

Thank you

Merci

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