

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

Place & Health Conference
Fredericton, NB

Workshop | October 2012

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 

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)



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

Institut national
de santé publique
Québec

Wicked vs. Tame Problems – Key Features

WICKED PROBLEMS	TAME PROBLEMS
There is no definitive formulation of a wicked problem.	<u>have</u> a relatively well-defined and stable problem statement.
Wicked problems have no stopping rule.	<u>have</u> 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.	<u>have</u> 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.	<u>belong</u> to a class of similar problems which can be solved in a similar manner.
Every wicked problem is essentially unique.	<u>have</u> solutions which can be tried and abandoned.
Wicked problems have no given alternative solutions	Comes with a limited set of alternative solutions.

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



Tame Problems

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



Complex Problems

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



Wicked Problems

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



Name that problem (exercise)

- Removing mold in school building
 - Reducing health inequalities
 - Discovering cure for cancer
-
- Are these tame, complex, or wicked problems? Why?

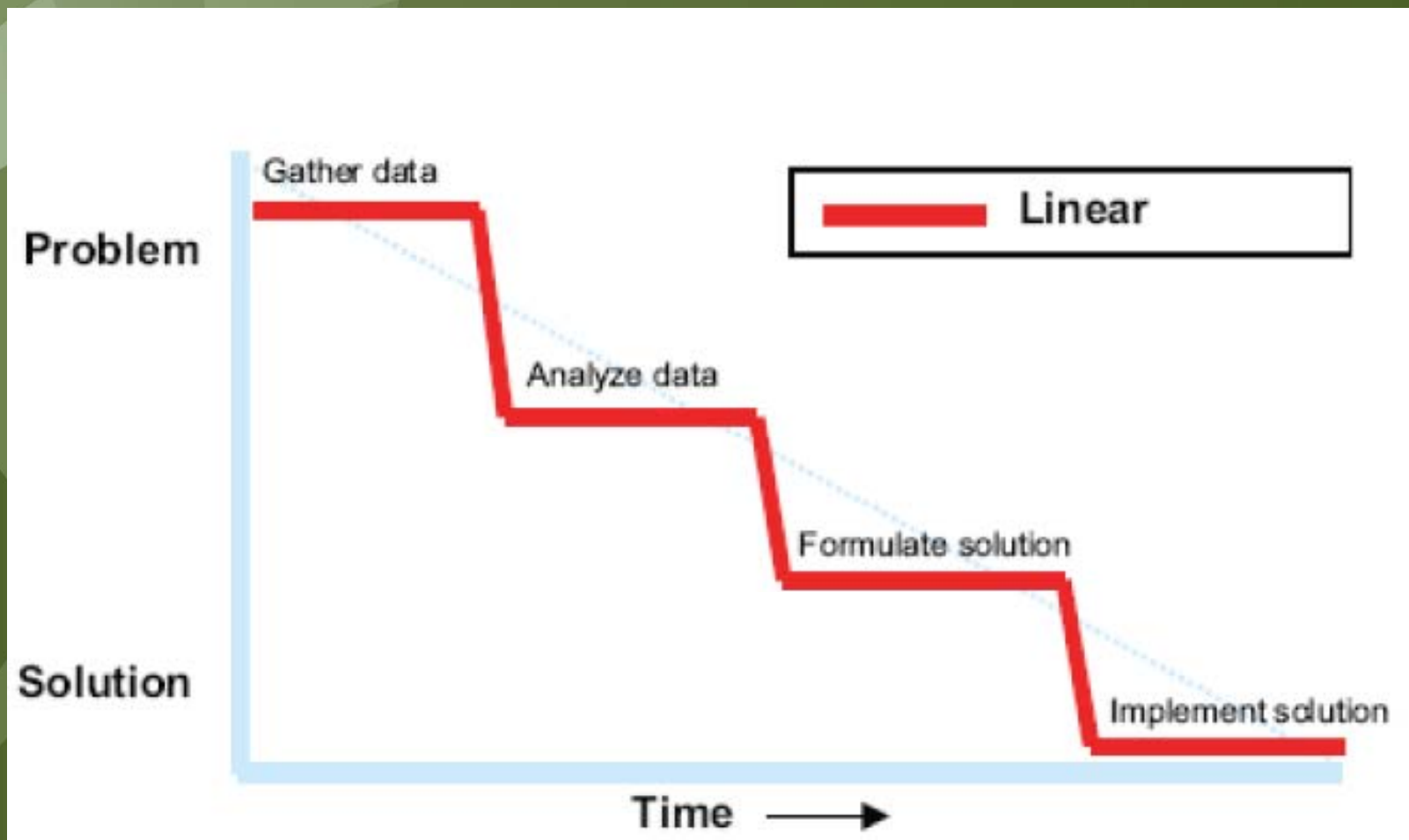


Tackling wicked problems

- 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.



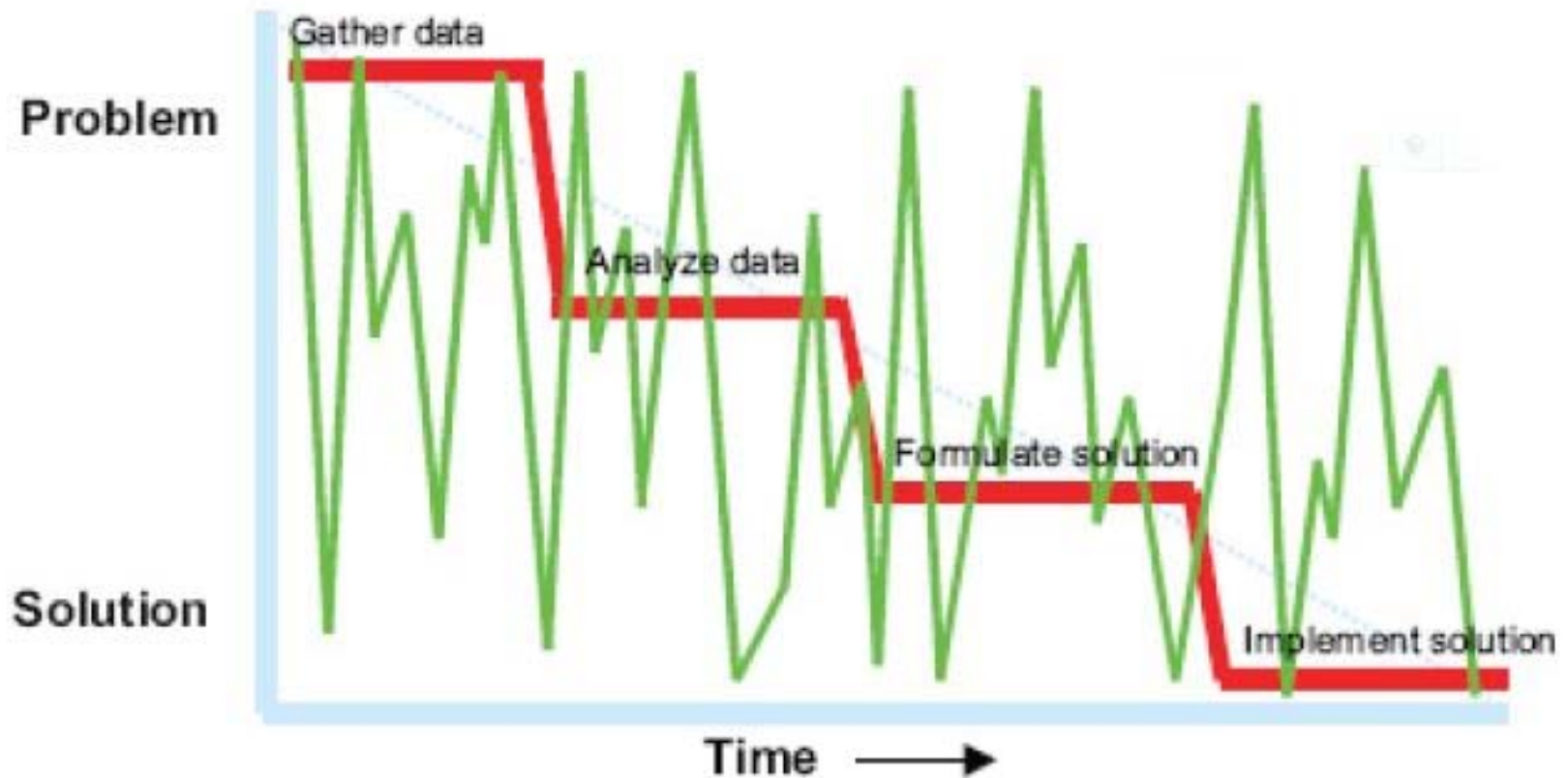
Traditional /Linear problem solution



(Conklin, 2006, p.9)



Opportunity-based problem solution



Strategies for coping with wicked problems

- Authoritative



Strategies for coping with wicked problems

- Competitive



(© iStockphoto.com/ porcorex)



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

Institut national
de santé publique
Québec



Strategies for coping with wicked problems

- Collaborative



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 : Tanva Kachwaha, 2002)



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)



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?



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.



Thank you

Merci



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

*Institut national
de santé publique*
Québec 

References

- Blackman, T., Greene, A., Hunter, D., McKee, L., Elliott, E., Harrington, B., Marks, L. & Williams, G. (2006). Performance assessment and wicked problems: The case of health inequalities. *Public Policy and Administration*, 21, 66-80.
- Conklin, J. (2006). Wicked problems and social complexity. in Conklin, J. *Dialogue mapping: building shared understanding of wicked problems*, Hoboken, NJ : Wiley, 1-20.
- Ison, R. & Collins K. (2008). « Public policy that does the right thing rather than the wrong thing righter » paper presented at Deliberative Democracy Group & The Crawford School of Economics & Government. The Australia National University. Canberra, 14th November
- CogNexus Institute (2010). Dialogue Mapping Workshop Manual. V1.9 USA, CogNexus Institute.
- Katchwaha, T. (2002). Exploring the differences between dialogue, discussion, and debate. Retrieved October 29, 2012 from: <http://winnebago.uwex.edu/files/2011/08/Dialogue-Debate-and-Discussion-handout.pdf>
- Rittel, H., and Webber, M. (1973). Dilemmas in a general theory of planning. *Policy Sciences*, 4: 155-169.
- Roberts, N. (2000). Coping with wicked problems. Working Paper, Department of Strategic Management, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California

