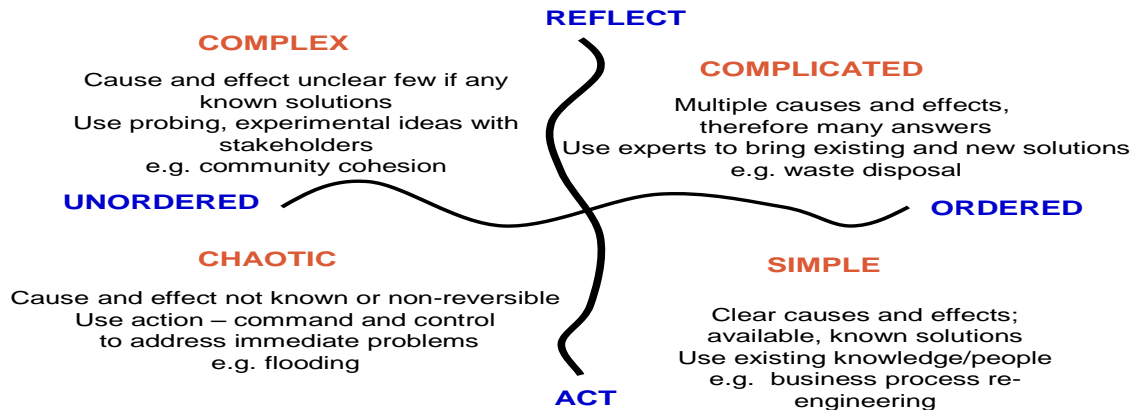


Not Getting Confused With Complexity

The volume and complexity of the tasks that face managers and politicians in the public service can be overwhelming. We have found a framework by David Snowden extremely useful for identifying, prioritising and tackling four different types of challenges – making the leadership challenge clearer and more manageable.

Leadership Domains



Adapted from D.J.Snowden & M.E.Boone; A Leader's Framework for Decision Making, HBR, Nov 2007

How to tackle them

Simple challenges: Where past experience works

These are the types of challenges you understand and have the people and experience to tackle them. You know what experience is needed and the right sort of techniques necessary, e.g. problem solving, creativity, business process re-engineering.

Complicated challenges: Where expertise matters

Some challenges require expert advice, e.g. waste disposal, traffic calming, elderly care. How do you weigh the expert advice? – avoiding believing everything or nothing and balancing them against other views?

Complex challenges: Where innovation and diverse perspectives count

These are challenges for which we don't know 'the answer', e.g. responding to the recession, community cohesion. Here we need methods to create new ways of tackling the challenges: producing innovation and diversity of views. Use of methods suited to complexity such as ritual dissent, exploratory techniques and safe-to-fail experiments.

Chaotic challenges: Working with emergencies

Emergencies require first and foremost the re-introduction of order, e.g. responding to flooding, major accidents, terrorism. What procedures do you have for tackling chaotic situations? How rapidly do you then classify and tackle the underlying problems which may be simple, complicated or complex?

Management teams and cabinets/executives are using the framework to map their current tasks onto it, prioritise them and, most importantly, tackle them in the most appropriate way.