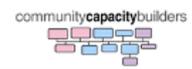


Wicked Problems



In this lecture we are going to define wicked problems and look at how to address them.

Wicked Problems

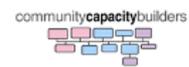


Horst Rittel
<http://www.siemerjph.com/wp/horst>



Melvin Webber
http://www.berkeley.edu/news/med34/reason/2006/12/01_webber.shtml

- Term coined by Rittel and Webber in 1973
- A type of complex problem: a complex social policy problem



The term Wicked Problems was first coined in 1973 by Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber - two urban planners at the University of Berkley in California.

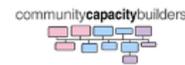
Rittel and Webber, wrote an article in 1973 – "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning". In this seminal article, Rittel and Webber observed that there is a whole dimension of social policy problems that cannot be successfully addressed with traditional linear, analytical approaches. They called these problems wicked problems.

Wicked Problems are a specific type of complex problem: they are complex social policy problems. So they have the same properties as complex problems. Their difference is that governments are committed to addressing them.

Characteristics of Wicked Problems

- Multi-causal
- Many interdependencies
- Different stakeholders have a different understanding of what the problem is and they therefore have conflicting goals
- No clear solution
- Attempts to address them often leads to unforeseen consequences due to their multi-causality and interdependency
- They adapt
- They are context specific

Australian Public Service Commission, 2007



The common characteristics that different types of wicked problems are considered to share include:

- They have multiple causes
- They have many interdependencies
- Different stakeholders have a different understanding of what the problem is and therefore different stakeholders have conflicting goals
- They have no clear solution
- Attempts to address them often leads to unforeseen consequences due to their multi-causality and interdependency
- They adapt - because of the interdependencies changes to one part of the problem can have unforeseen consequences for other parts of the problem
- And they are context specific – for example, poverty is different in different communities - there will be different combinations of intertwined causal factors in different communities

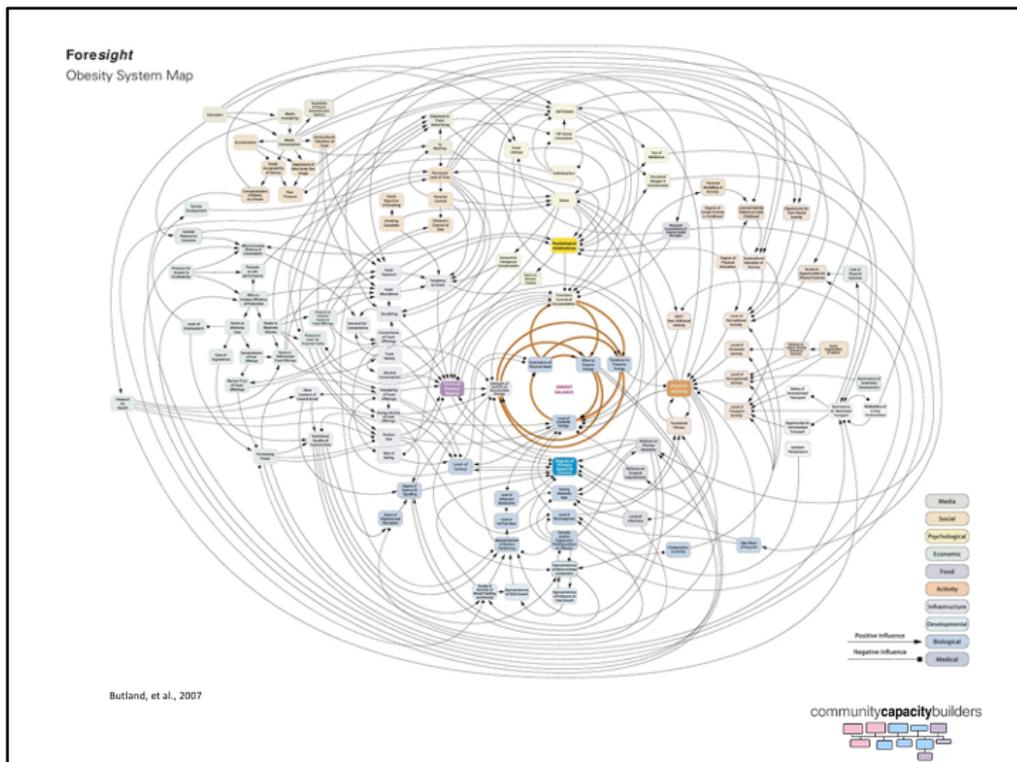
Examples of Wicked Problems



communitycapacitybuilders

Here are some examples of wicked problems:

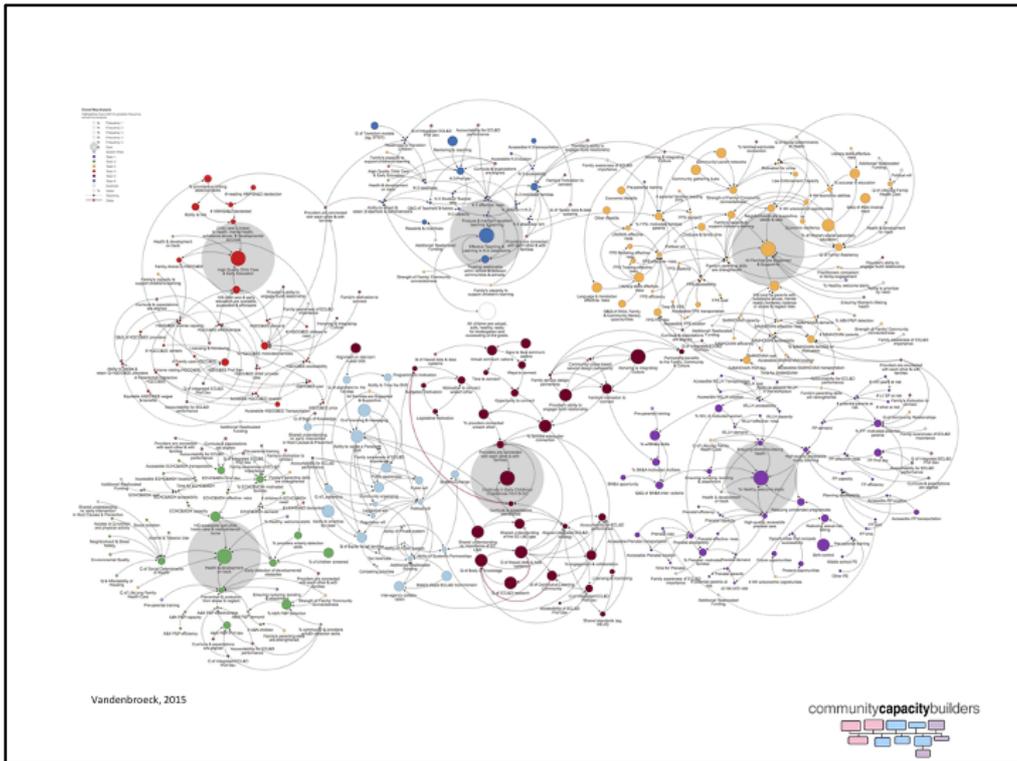
- Energy security
- Affordable healthcare
- River catchment management
- Place-based disadvantage
- Environmental degradation
- Terrorism
- Indigenous disadvantage
- Food insecurity
- Climate change
- Poverty
- Ageing populations, and
- Obesity



We looked at the wicked problem of obesity in Unit 1: We looked at this Obesity System Influence Diagram.

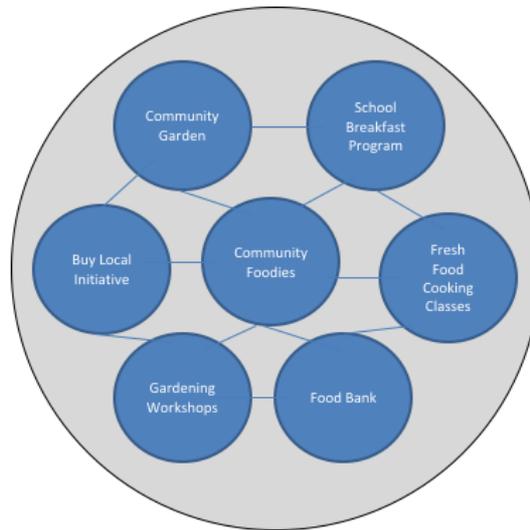
Which illustrated the multitude of causal factors that influence obesity and the multitude of interdependencies between these causal factors – there are all of these positive and negative feedback loops.

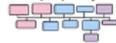
This is the same for all wicked problems.



Another Wicked Problem, that is illustrated in this slide, is early child development. This slide shows a map of the system of early childhood development that was produced for Hawaii's Early Childhood Action Strategy.

Transitioning All Initiatives



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As we noted in Unit 1 to address this type of problem, to address a wicked problem, we need to transition at the same time, all of the initiatives that are addressing any of the underpinning causal factors of the wicked problem in a place. We need to transition all of the initiatives to a more effective and coherent way of working that is better able to address the complex social policy problem.

References

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- Butland, B., Jebb, S., Kopelman, P., McPherson, K., Thomas, S., Mardell, J., & Parry, V. (2007), Foresight. Tackling obesities: future choices project report, Government Office for Science, London.
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