

# Can Wicked Problems Help Fix our Strategies to Fit Healthcare?



Institute of Health Policy, Management & Evaluation  
**UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO**

Strategy is frustrating.  
Out of synch.

More change.  
More work.

I'll conceive.  
I'll deliver.

Doesn't fit.  
A day late and dollar short.  
Trying to boil the ocean.

(Go ahead with your strategy, I'll help the patients



Being more generous to strategy ... are we setting it up to succeed?

Strategy adds positive to negative so we can fix, innovate, enable.

We sometimes set up polarities of success and failure then create disappointment that we can't meet the expectations we set for ourselves.



Disappointment and problems have a common formulation as both occur when expectations don't meet reality.

Tension between the observed and desired state.

## What if... .

Stop before we try to solve.

Stop seeing problems as threats that derail the best laid plans.

Start seeing problems as the way the system tells us what it needs.

Incorporate the problems out of our reach and lurking in gray areas into our strategic thinking to refine our approaches and **hedge our risks in bringing strategy to action.**



# what's the Problem?



Institute of Health Policy, Management & Evaluation  
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

We need a common language

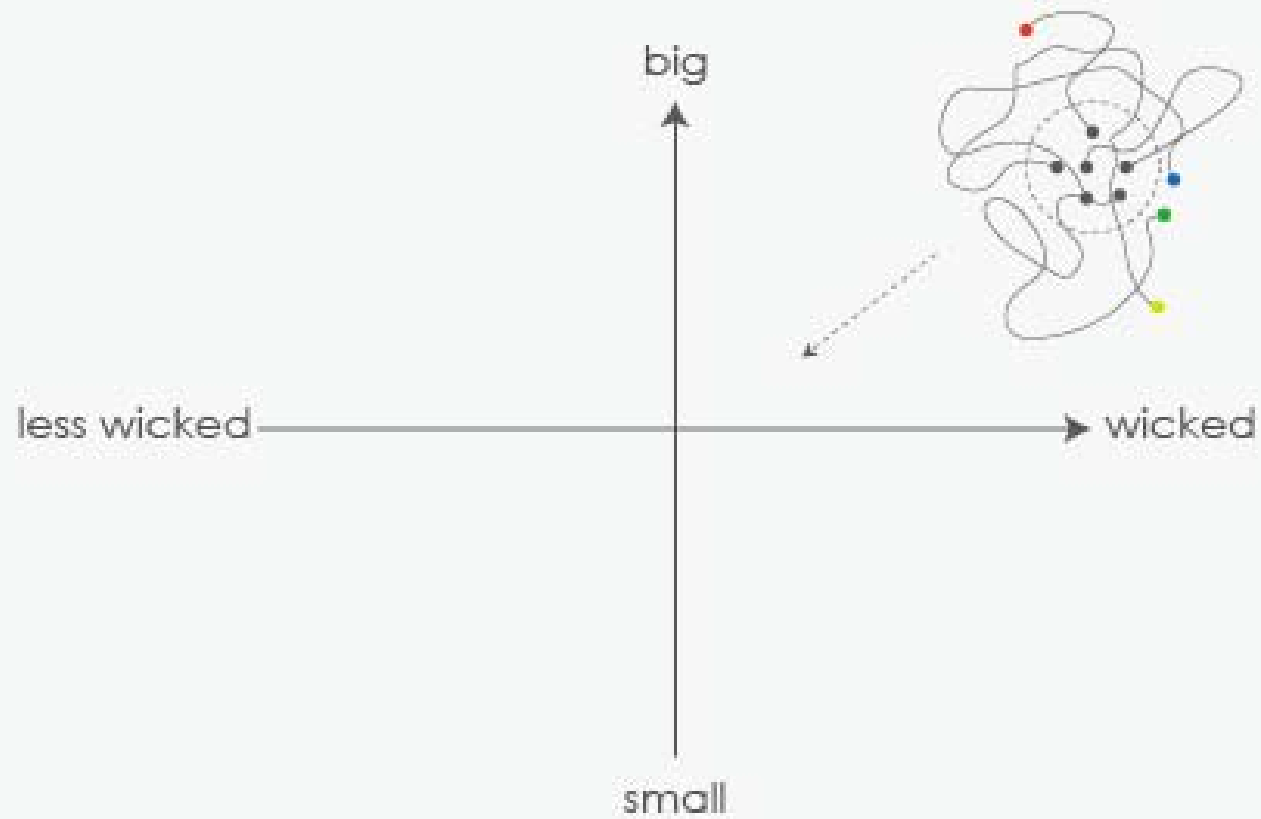
Identify what we see

Assess weight + potential impact

Plan to mitigate

Profile risks in the gray areas to help  
define our strategic approach.





*Wicked Problem - (Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber, 1973)*

*Wicked Problem in Design Thinking - (Richard Buchanan, 1992)*



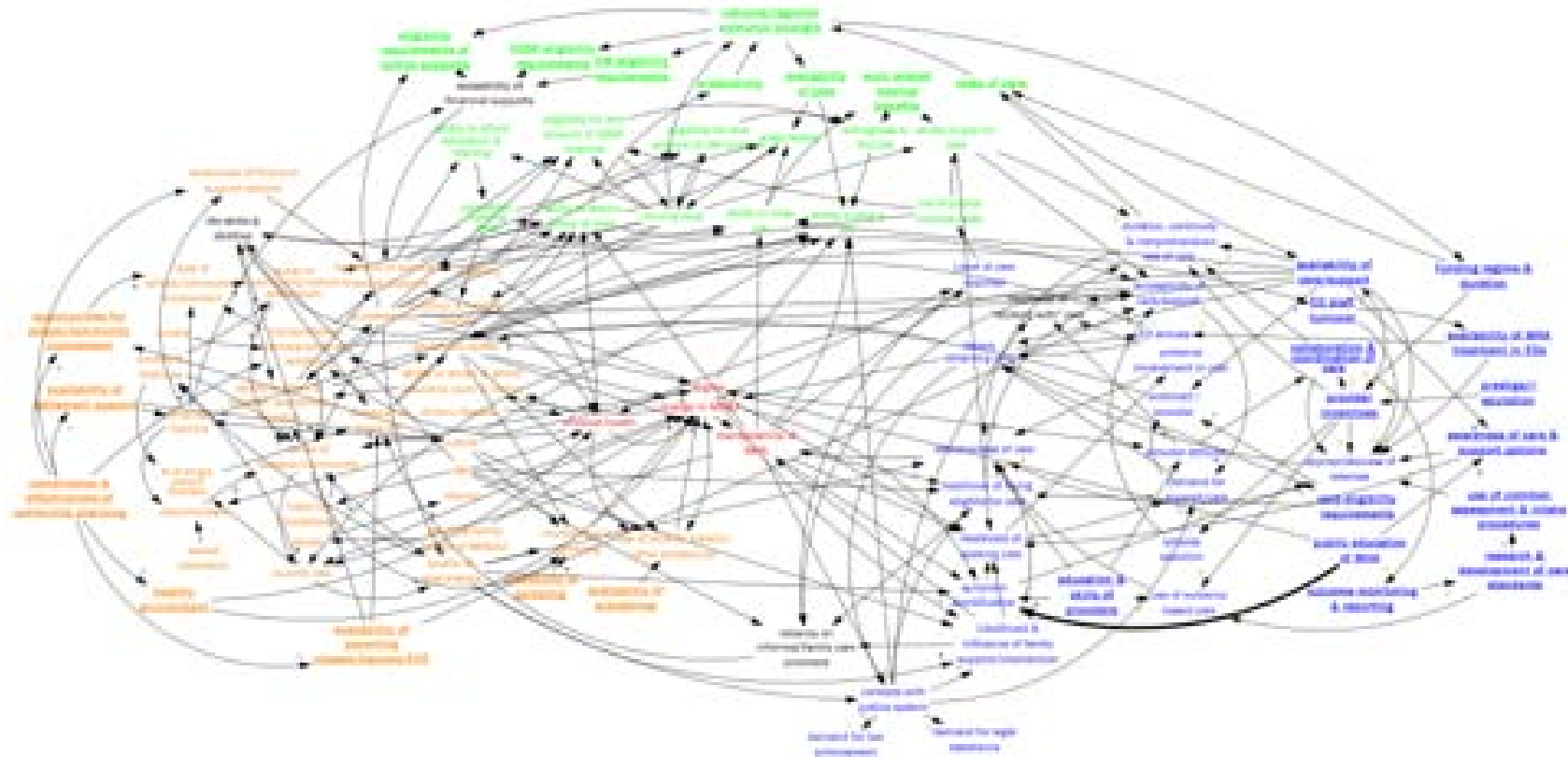
**Wicked Problem** "A problem is difficult or impossible to solve because of incomplete, contradictory and changing requirements that are often difficult to recognize. Moreover, because of complex interdependencies, the effort to solve one aspect of a wicked problem may reveal or create another." Wikipedia.

"Wickedness isn't a degree of difficulty. Wicked issues are different because traditional processes can't resolve them" according to Horst W.J. Rittel and Melvin M. Webber.





# System Dynamics of the Mental Health System



The problem isn't understood until a solution is developed.

The constraints change over time.

There is no immediate and no ultimate test of a solution to a wicked problem. There are ripple effects.



Every wicked problem can be considered to be a symptom of another problem.



Much relies on individual **perspective, trust, credibility and realistic judgment**

...“OK let's try that.” (RW 164)

Everybody picks a solution to best fit their interests and intentions .

There are several people with something at stake in how the problem is resolved.

Conklin; Rittel & Webber



There is a no stopping rule.

The problem-solving process ends when the resources run out.

Work only stops for external consideration i.e. running out of time, money or patience.

"That's good enough"



Solutions to wicked problems are not true-or-false, but  
good-or-bad

Every solution to a wicked problem is a 'one-shot  
operation'; because there is no opportunity  
to learn by trial-and-error, every attempt counts  
significantly.

There is no right to be wrong. Liable for consequences.



# IHPME CONNECT 05.2016

STUDENTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

## MHI STUDENTS APPLY KNOWLEDGE AT HINCKS- DELLCREST

It is not only physicians that must ensure they "do no



CONNECT NEWSLETTER



*MHI Students worked together to create a site map and review the content management system at Hincks-Dellcrest Centre.*

Zarb saw the potential for a capstone student project that could provide a rewarding experience for students and valuable



Institute of Health Policy, Management & Evaluation  
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

# Works Cited

- [Austin Center for Design.  
http://www.ac4d.com/home/philosophy/understanding-wicked-problems/](http://www.ac4d.com/home/philosophy/understanding-wicked-problems/)
- [Heigh, Jeremy. To be Undecided. Sift/ Invoke Ventures Ltd. Online Publication. http://www.sifteverything.com/wicked-problems-define-decisions-and-impact-business/](http://www.sifteverything.com/wicked-problems-define-decisions-and-impact-business/)
- [Kolko, Jon. Wicked Problems: Problems Worth Solving. ISBN 978-0615593159. http://www.ac4d.com/home/philosophy/understanding-wicked-problems/](http://www.ac4d.com/home/philosophy/understanding-wicked-problems/)
- Rittel, Horst. "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning." Policy Sciences, 1973: 155-169  
[http://www.uctc.net/mwebber/Rittel+Webber+Dilemmas+General\\_Theory\\_of\\_Planning.pdf](http://www.uctc.net/mwebber/Rittel+Webber+Dilemmas+General_Theory_of_Planning.pdf)
- [https://www.wickedproblems.com/5\\_methods\\_for\\_synthesis.php](https://www.wickedproblems.com/5_methods_for_synthesis.php)
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wicked\\_problem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wicked_problem)

