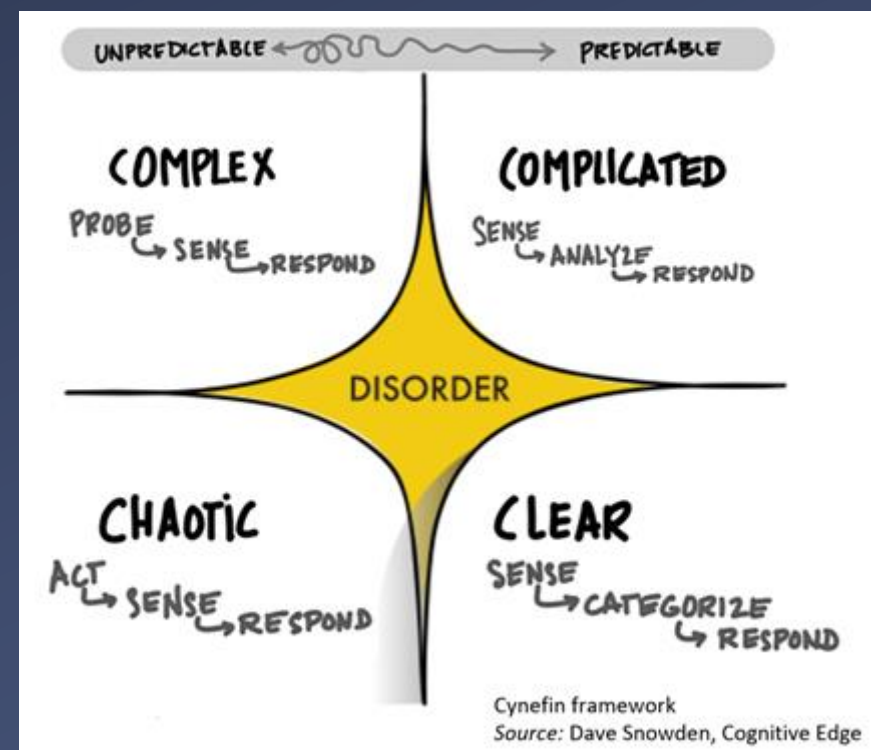


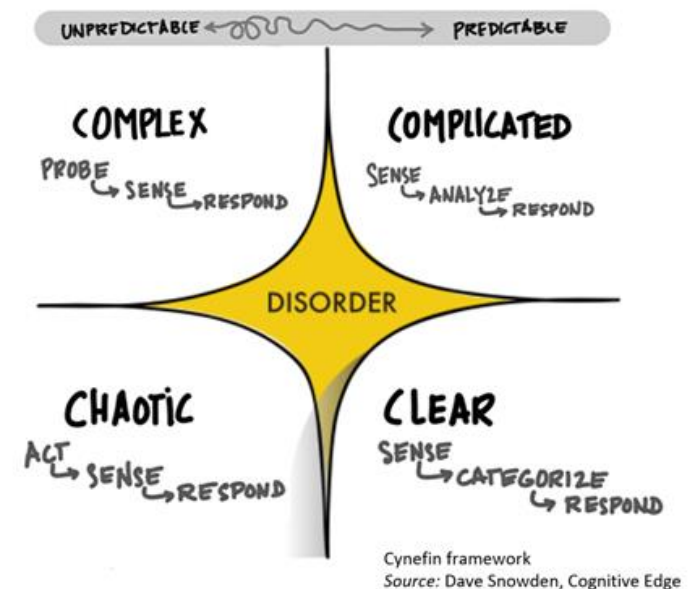
The Cynefin framework



How complex is your project?

You can determine **project complexity** in several ways. For example, with a **risk analysis**. Or the scan: new technology? - new application? - new market? (which is also basically a risk analysis).

The Cynefin framework, developed by Dave Snowden, helps in another way to identify **the type of complexity and uncertainty to which the project belongs**. Moreover, it answers the question of which actions and solution types fit it and which do not. It is therefore also a **decision-making instrument** that helps you choose the optimal project approach.



Source: Snowden, 2007

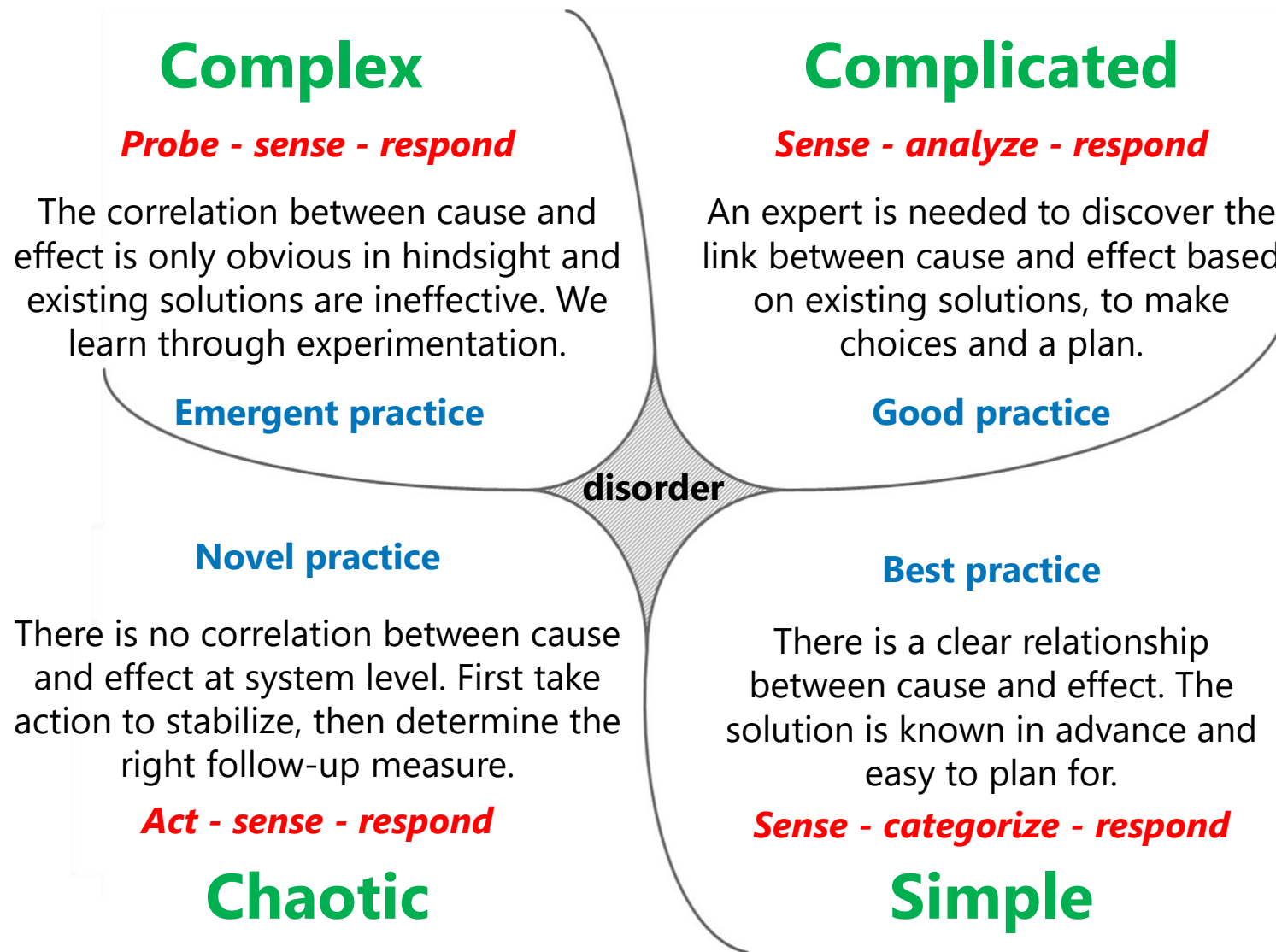
How complex is your project?

Dave Snowden distinguishes between **simple** and **complicated** situations on the one hand and **complex** and **chaotic** on the other. Indeed, in situations simple and complicated, the solution is known in advance, albeit simple situations can be solved by anyone and complicated problems require an expert. ***So there is sufficient degree of predictability to be able to make a plan and start project implementation.***

This is not the case for complex and chaotic situations, because too many factors are predictable or changeable. Complex situations call for experiments that you can learn from; routine actions and standard solutions will not work. Rather, these situations require innovative and creative methods: try first, plan later. Chaotic situations, on the other hand, demand immediate action. There is an ongoing crisis that must be dealt with as soon as possible to restore order. Only then can work begin to determine the correct follow-up measures. Act first, before starting the definition phase.

Source: *The complete project manager, 2016*

The Cynefin framework



Source: Snowden, 2007

Take charge and don't be a wind vane



Personally, what I love about Snowden's model is that it ties in seamlessly with my common sense as I make choices concerning the project approach. **Simple and complicated projects are predictable and therefore plannable from the start.** *You should, therefore, focus on gathering the right information or the right experts, rather than on brainstorming, experimentation or other needless distractions. It is also important to develop a unified vision with the rest of the team.* There are as many suppositions as there are persons involved, even for predictable projects. The definition phase is about moving ahead, communicating, making choices and not allowing yourself to be distracted until a plan has been drawn up. **Just do it!**

This is not the case for complex projects. As you have probably guessed, most projects that involve the development of new products or services fall into this category, as do projects that involve many people and interests, such as reorganizations and work process improvements. At the start of these projects, not enough is yet known about the right approach and solution. Depending on the degree of complexity, it may be possible to resolve some of these uncertainties during the definition phase. ***If the amount of uncertainty is limited and if a feasibility study (using the principle of probe, sense, respond) can provide more clarity quickly, you can bring the project down from complex to complicated before making a commitment.*** In other words, you make a commitment with a plan for the execution phase based on a predictable project course. ***However, this is not possible for projects with a higher degree of uncertainty or changeability. For these projects, the execution phase begins when a significant amount of uncertainty and changeability is still to be expected.***

Source: The complete project manager, 2016

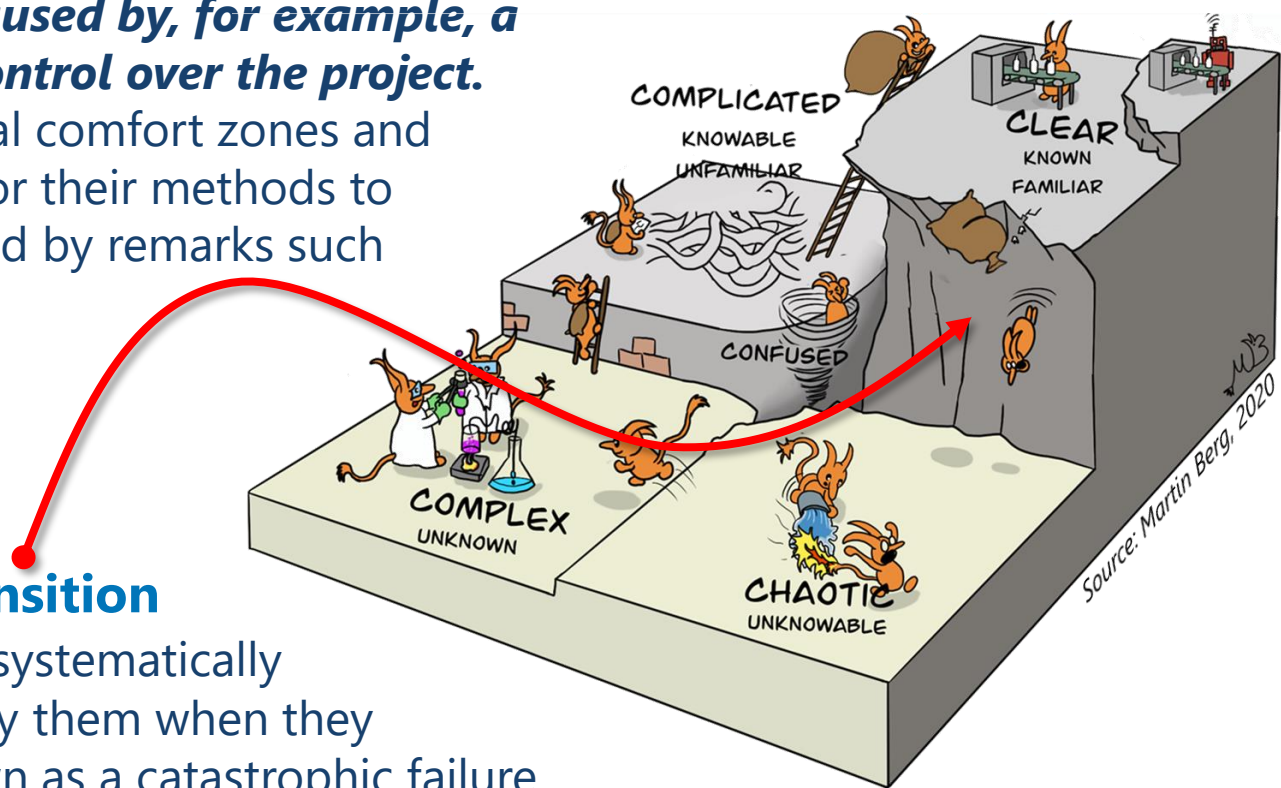
Take charge and don't be a wind vane



To conclude, I want to address **two special circumstances that Dave Snowden touches upon** with his model. Firstly, the model actually features a fifth domain: **disorder**. A situation is classified as disorderly when it is unclear to which of the aforementioned four quadrants it belongs. This makes for an exceptionally dangerous situation. ***It may be caused by, for example, a project manager who fails to seize enough control over the project.***

The project members will revert to their personal comfort zones and make wrong decisions because they do not tailor their methods to the problem at hand. Disorder can be recognized by remarks such as “this is how we always do things.” In this type of situation, it is important to take action immediately and leave the domain as soon as possible.

The other element is the remarkable transition from simple to chaotic. Organizations that systematically underestimate situations or changes (i.e. simplify them when they really shouldn't) can fall into chaos. This is known as a catastrophic failure. As Snowden says: “complacency leads to failure.”



Source: *The complete project manager*, 2016



Nothing from this publication may be reproduced, recorded in an automated database or published on or via any medium, either electronically, mechanically, through photocopying or any other method, without prior written permission from the author.

This publication was produced with the utmost care and attention. Nevertheless, the text may contain errors. PULZ Project Management & Leadership Development B.V. and the author are not liable for any errors and/or inaccuracies in this text.

www.roelwessels.nl