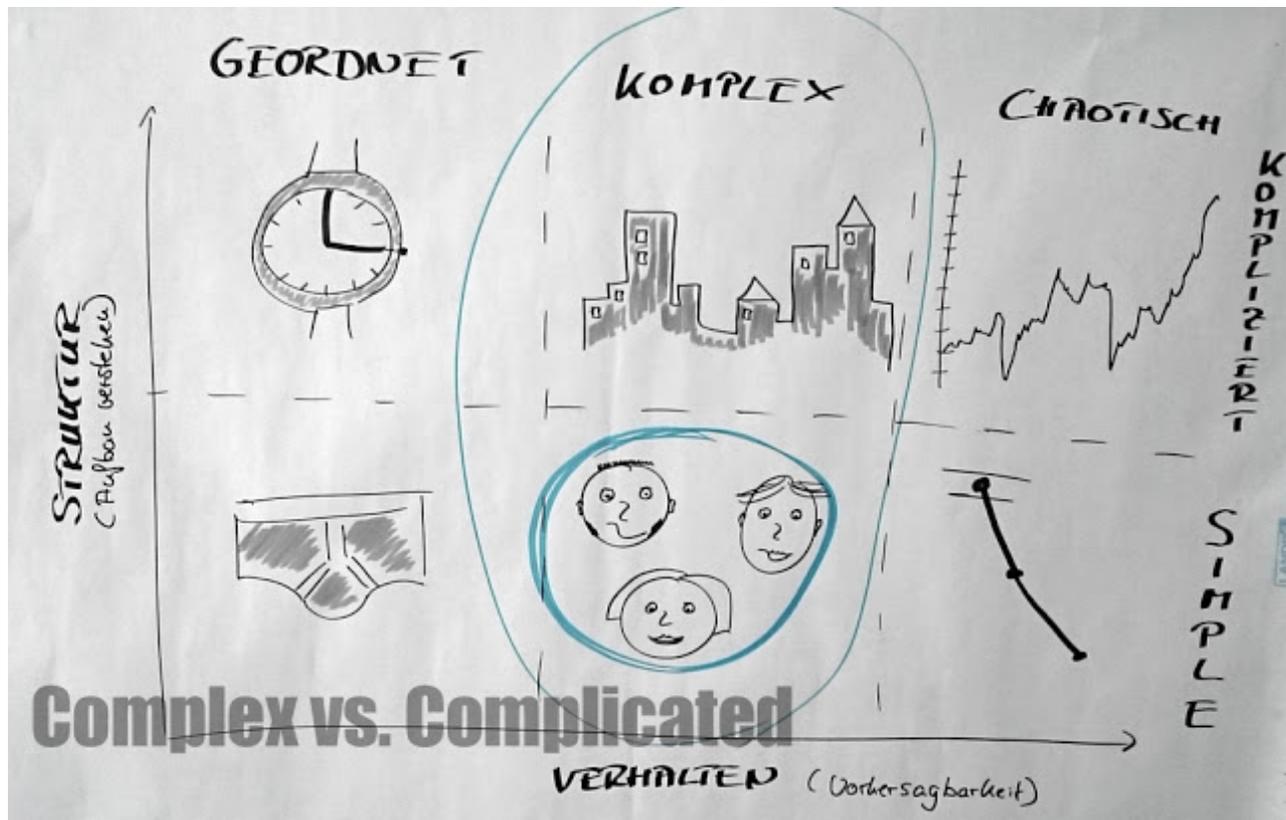


12 complextools for learning and agility to succeed in complex environments

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This post is part three to summarize methods to be used when working in complex environments and outlines 12 complextools for learning and agile project work.

By reading you get an impression what is necessary to support learning in complex environments.

I recommend to read part one and part two too, to get the background based on Nils Pfläging's books Organize for complexity and Komplexithoden (written together with Silke Hermann).

A short recap of complextools

Nils created the new term complextools for methods to be used in complex environments (in addition to methods to be used in environments that are not complex).

Characteristics of complextools

- are strongly connected with human interaction
 - integrate thinking and doing
 - tight relations are more important than the tool itself – complex tools increase social density
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#1 Agile project work

Project is highly dynamic and needs red methods.

- project results are not fixed in the beginning of a project and it's not fully known by the customer
- principle of iterations: result are not ready in five years but there will be versions with ongoing improvements
- fast trial and experimentation instead of long term planning and pre thinking
- self organization – team members decide every time (and not by fixed time slots), in orientation on customer needs (how and tooling)
- project management steals the most powerful resources: intuition, improvisation, consultation, dialog

#2 Innovation time

- innovation needs time
- not belonging to a small group of specialists but to the whole organization
- e.g. 20% time, used for own concrete ideas and creativity
- needs frames – e.g. via an internal innovation market (with funding for next steps to develop and idea, dependent on supporters in the company)
- Hackathatons, Codefests, BarCamps, Skunkworks
- Don't do innovation by a department, budget fixed

#3 Fluid workplaces

- instead of timely fixed workplaces, create multiple, distributed settings – following interactions and roles
- in alignment with a roles needs – partially with vis-a-vis interaction and partially with no interruptions and high focus and concentration – it's not one place but multiple possible locations
- for home office, don't use fixed goals to monitor employees
 - foster integration in value creation chain
 - can just be in addition to role based workplaces
 - responsibility for self managed time
 - up to date technical equipment
 - have to foster informal structure (and networking)
 - should increase get together and rearrangements

Complexitools for Learning

#4 Integration and mental hygiene

- for new employees – enable fast access to the way the organization works (business model, principles, problem solving approaches)
- the ability to integrate new members fast is important
 - e.g. a Newbie sign – the Newbie wears a sign and everyone gets in contact with her and explains backgrounds and stories from the company
 - take your time to explain

#5 Cultural observation

- culture can be observed, culture is read only (you cannot work on the culture directly but only on the organization ... and a cultural change can follow)
 - culture shows everything, official and unofficial, nice and nasty
 - culture can influence people in a way that creates blind spots – that's why employee surveys regarding culture are meaningless
- new employees, new leads and externals are an important source – they still see the crazy things — use them for a cultural observation (offices, boards and posters, intranets, meetings and rituals)

#6 Urgency work

- change is always
- sense of urgency – the groups consensus – WE HAVE TO ACT TOGETHER IMMEDIATELY – WE.TOGETHER.NOW.IMMEDIATELY
- 2 components – emotional and rational (facts alone are not enough)
- explain the situation as it is (in comparison to the competition)
- it need honest interest and common thinking why it is this way and what will move us forward
- it is voluntary
- needs common picture of the change – enable diverse ways of communication
- urgency basement – understanding, hope, identification

Change

- it's not a process we can control (thats why the metaphor of journey does not fit)
- many small switches (changes) create change effects
- change works with complex patterns – cannot be controlled neither be predicted
- emergent change – many small flips/changes
- we need to change the reality and the way we experience the reality (2 important aspects to consider for a change)
 - stereotypes, patterns, paradigms, dogmas
 - reality change needs – CREATION
 - team challenges
 - happens ongoing
 - introduces something new into the system
 - Input by ideas and proposals

- results can be observed and measured
- experience change – DISCOVERY
 - is a challenge for the individual
 - happens in jumps
 - creates imagination for something new
 - Input by questions, surprises and crazy ideas
 - sometimes observable but not measurable

Coalition for change

- deeper transformations is done by a group of people ... the coalition for change ... its a complex social process
 - need to find as a group, have to grow and accept the job
 - needs an informal structure and social density
 - don't manage the creation of the coalition
 - needs different inputs from ability, experience, formal power and informal influence, ability to communicate
 - don't try to integrate opponents

#7 Tandem talks

- organization is pure communication, one cannot not communicate
- regarding change the is often far to less communication
 - employees are integrated too late
 - more sending than receiving of information
 - often top down
- change needs dialog and discussion, integrating many people
- use the tandem talk
 - 2 members of the core change team – the tandem
 - based on a topic (but no presentation, agenda, decision, formal protocol) – focus on dialog
 - max. 12 participants, max. 90 minutes
 - free participation
 - the more diverse the better
 - take thoughts, impressions, fears, objections back to the core team

#8 Encapsulation

- capsules are red protected rooms where innovation and surprise can grow
- use experiments to try something new
 - provide a protecting frame from outside will of persistence
- can be created by locational and formal separation
- needs a red interface to the surrounding system and protecting the experiment cell
- successful experiments do not lead to a change outside the experimental frame by itself

#9 Error vs. mistake

- error – I know it better but I still do it wrong.
- mistake – I make an informed decision and it can be that it creates a bad result.
Mistakes are inevitable.
- not more stupid errors but more courage for intelligent mistakes

#10 Working on the informal structure

- do not ignore informal structure
- it needs room physical and non physical
 - how the rooms are created and equipped can influence the way informal structure works
- some formats
 - Billiard, Kicker-table
 - cool introduction and welcome week
 - knowledge conferences
 - cool internal communication systems
 - cool drinks and snacks
 - cool lounge areas and kitchens
 - cool system of work organization
 - cool office location, decoration
 - cool meeting rooms, conference areas
 - cool learn concepts
 - cool coffee machines, tea and wifi
 - cool Agile boards, facilitation material
 - cool workplaces
 - cool kindergarten
 - T-Shirts, Bags
 - cool celebrations
- weak and strong connections
 - weak – brings in new ideas, information and new team setups
 - strong – build strong communities
 - it needs a balance of weak and strong connections

#11 Communities of practice

- rooms for experts and groups to foster self organized learning
- expertise and interests not necessarily are connected with the official role
- how can we attract ability
- COP – embed learning, problem solving in context of social relationships
- self organized communities of common interests
- space to connect beside the default daily routine
- can be focussed on networking and knowledge exchange
- and even more interesting feed by current problems to solve – impulse to exercise, ponder ... problems attract experts
- free choice and self organization are important
- Wikis, Knowledge conferences, open spaces, bar camps, prototyping workshops

#12 Consultation

- consider social dynamics and emotions
- differentiate between topic matter specialist consulting
 - one does not have enough experience and knowledge
 - consulting delivers knowledge and expertise
- process help
 - consultants help to create expertise, ability
- consultation needs a relationship
- consider ambivalence – desire for the new way and change vs. fear of change —
consultation has to bring this into focus