

Value Creators: A New Concept to Address Wicked Challenges

Liesbeth RIJSDIJK, The Netherlands

Key words: wicked challenges, SDGs, Climate Change, Value Creation, Education

SUMMARY

Society at large and organisations at a smaller scale, are being confronted with complex challenges that are global with a local impact, or local with a global impact and which are difficult, if not impossible, to solve. Examples are global warming, food security, global epidemics and depletion of resources. In 2015, The UN set an agenda to address these global challenges with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These challenges are “wicked”, because for each possible solution, due to interdependencies, other questions and challenges arise. In wicked challenges, many stakeholders are involved with different and often contradicting interests. We need to prepare young professionals on how to collaborate with these different stakeholders to address wicked challenges, such as climate change, together.

This interactive workshop gives an insight into the concept The Value Creators of the BBA program in Global Project and Change Management offered by Windesheim Honours College (WHC), the Netherlands. Participants will experience a method that is developed by the Value Creators Team, and which is called the 4E-model for Value Creation. This method can be used by stakeholders who are collaborating on complex challenges, like challenges with spatial and social aspects. The method guides the stakeholders through an individual and collective process in four steps:

1. Explore: What is the challenge about? What are possible causes and possible solutions? Think **BIG AND DREAM!**
2. Engage: if we want to realise one possible solution we selected; who should be involved? Think **CONNECTED!**
3. Elaborate: If we want to realise the solution we selected, what needs to be done by whom (stakeholders from step2)? Think **REALISTICLY!**
4. Evaluate: If we realise the solution we selected; which values will be created? Think **ETHICALLY!**

The method ensures that stakeholders discuss the challenge at hand from different perspectives, making us of collective knowledge and experiences and refocusing the attention from different interests to shared value creation.

Value Creators: A New Concept to Address Wicked Challenges

Liesbeth RIJSDIJK, The Netherlands

1. INTRODUCTION

Research Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences prepare students to operate in a VUCA world: a world that is constantly changing (Volatile), where it is difficult to anticipate events or predict how they will unfold (Uncertain), where problems are hard to understand and analyse, because of a great number of intertwined interrelationships (Complex) and where information to make sense of a situation or problem is either missing, inconsistent or contradictory (Ambiguity) (Kinsinger & Walch, 2012). We are increasingly confronted with developments and challenges that are “wicked” in nature, such as global warming, global food security and depletion of resources. In 2015, The UN set an agenda to address these global challenges with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These challenges are difficult, if not impossible, to solve. Moreover, due to interdependencies, with each solution, other questions and challenges arise (Rittel & Webber, 1973; Rijdsdijk & de Bot, 2017).

To prepare young professionals for these wicked challenges, the bachelor programme Global Project and Change Management of Windesheim Honours College in the Netherlands developed an innovative educational concept, “The Value Creators” and the 4E-model for Value Creation. As wicked problems cannot be solved, we should not be looking for solutions, but for value creation in different ways, for different people, for the planet and society.

2. WICKED CHALLENGES

Rittel and Webber (1973) were the first researchers to describe and define the concept of wicked problems. They distinguish wicked problems from tame, based on the number of uncertainties involved as well as the unsolvable nature of a wicked issue and argue that problems of social policy are “wicked” per definition. They even argue that the formulation of a wicked problem is problematic: “(....) *The formulation of a wicked problem is the problem! The process of formulating the problem and of conceiving a solution (or re-solution) are identical, since every specification of the problem is a specification of the direction of the treatment that is considered. Thus, if we recognise deficient mental health services as part of the problem, then- trivially enough- “improvement of mental health services”, is a specification of solution. If as the next step, we declare the lack of community centres one deficiency of the mental health services system, then “procurement of community centers” is the next specification of solution. If it is inadequate treatment within community centers, then improved therapy training of staff may be the locus of solution, and so on.*” (Rittel and Webber, 1973: 161).

Because of this wicked nature of problem formulation, a “system-approach” is very relevant for wicked challenges, meaning that you need to act at a system level rather than addressing

single elements within the system. There are no right or wrong answers, only better or worse developments and finding a consensus on the approach seems more important for wicked problem than finding a solution to it (Gosselin & Tindemans, 2016). The big question is: How do we do this? and How do we teach students to act at a system level rather than addressing single elements within that system? To find some answers to these questions, it is relevant to look at the main characteristics of Wicked Challenges. Based on a literature review and 9 in-depth interviews with senior project managers dealing with complex and wicked problems, Rijdsdijk, Groenevelt and de Bot (2016) defined 7 main dimensions of “wickedness” (see table 1).

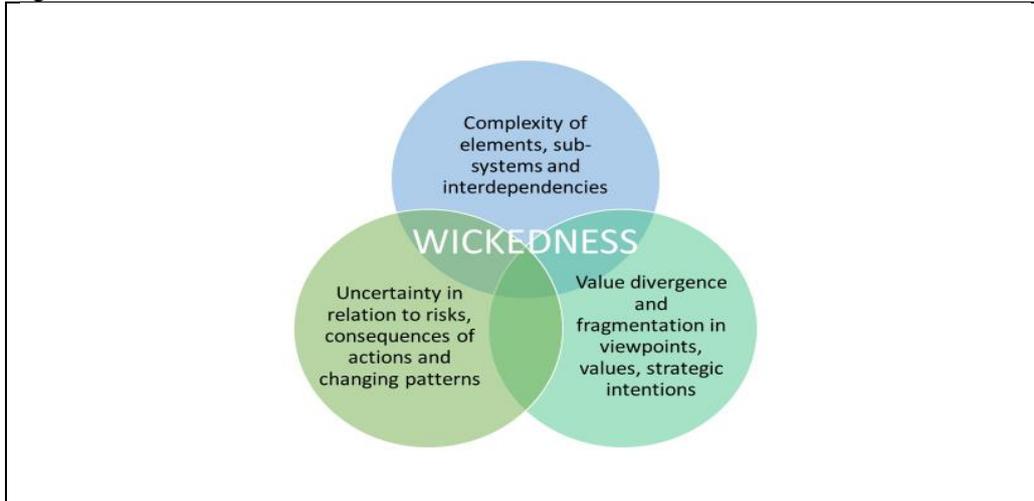
Table 1: Dimensions of Wickedness

	Dimensions	Items at the wicked end of the spectrum
1	Boundary crossing	diversity in countries of origin, regions, departments and/or organisations, crossing policy domains, political and administrative jurisdictions, and political “group” interests
2	Interdependency	of a high number of stakeholders, including institutions and organisations, regarding information, legislation, finances etc.
3	End goal	is not or not clearly defined, is open to change, does not encompass the complete scope of the challenge
4	Influence and context	high influence of political, organisational and other contexts
5	Information and interests	info is to derived from a variety of sources providing partly info and possible unreliable info, which may be influenced by their interests
6	Relevance to society	impact on society is high
7	Approach, process and result	the challenge is unlikely to be dealt with via a planned, well defined approach.

Head (2008), distinguishes three main clusters of wickedness:

1. Complexity and systemic characteristics
2. Value divergence and fragmented viewpoints
3. Uncertainty in relation to risks, consequences of actions and changing patterns (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Clusters of wickedness (Head, 2008)



Preparing young professionals and students to deal with wicked problems, means we need to prepare them to deal with above mentioned dimensions; dealing with different, often competing, interests, understanding the political, organisational and cultural context, how to approach the challenge at a system level and without a planned, well-defined approach, dealing with uncertainty, connecting with different networks and create value instead of solutions (because there are no solutions).

3. THE VALUE CREATORS

Global Project and Change Management is a four-year English taught Honours Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) programme for selected international students. The selection of these “honours” students is based on motivation, above-average ability and social involvement. In year 3 and 4 of the programme, students can follow the Value Creators semester, where they work on a so-called wicked challenge. Our departure point is the Global Goals for Sustainable Development framework (see figure 2).

Figure 2: The 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (Retrieved from: <https://www.transparency-one.com/3-ways-transparency-can-help-achieve-un-sustainable-development-goals/>)



These global goals are in essence wicked challenges; there is no template to follow, there is always more than one explanation, depending greatly on individual and political perspectives and the global goals are very much interdependent and interconnected; “solving” one problem immediately leads to the prominence of another problem. You need to address different goals at a system level to book progress. Students who follow the Value Creators semester can work on one or more of these Global Goals of their own choice.

The Value Creator educational concept is developed in co-creation with students and professional networks and is based on connectivism theory (Siemens, 2005), Theory U (Scharmer & Senge, 2009), Five Minds for the Future (Gardner, 2008) and communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). The mission of the Value Creators was formulated as follows: *“We believe in young potentials who can change the world and create value. We create environments where professionals and young students can co-create the future connecting local and global SOULutions to the challenges ahead.”*. We wanted to create an environment which enables students to use knowledge as a tool, instead of knowledge as a goal. As bounded freedom is a fundamental part of the DNA of Windesheim Honours College, we extended this concept in the Value Creators programme by taking away the class schedules and operating with education on demand. Students develop their own toolbox during the value creators journey by following and organising different workshops and with which they can operate in the “real world”, discovering and engaging with professional networks to co-create value and change.

To facilitate the students in the Value Creator journey, we developed our own methodology for value creation: The 4E-model. The 4E-model will be explained in below paragraph.

4. THE 4E-MODEL FOR VALUE CREATION

In order to help students to navigate complex issues, we developed the 4E-Model for Value Creation. Inspired by design thinking and incorporating elements of different theories mentioned before, this model is a method to help students and other stakeholders to focus, to identify the most important stakeholders and ingredients to take action and co-create societal change and value.

The 4E-model consists of the following four steps:

Step 1. Explore: We invite students and a network of professionals, researchers and business people to explore a wicked challenge, such as climate change or climate adaptation, they are addressing. To enable the participants to not focus on one element of the wicked challenge, they are invited to explore the context, possible causes and possible solution directions and make the challenge as big as possible. This is done by brainstorming, shaping good questions and discussing together the Big Dream.

Step 2. Engage: In the second step, participants identify together the relevant stakeholders and networks that are valuable in addressing the complexity of the challenge. Questions like: Who are they and why are they relevant in this process? Are they part of the problem or of the solution? What is their specific role or power in moving things forward?”, are being addressed and discussed.

Step 3. Elaborate: In the third step, participants become a bit more concrete in shaping ideas and being more specific on the role of each network and stakeholder in addressing the wicked challenge. In this step, participants define possible roles and activities for each stakeholder or network. It is about going from Dream to Action.

Step 4: Evaluate: During the last step of the model, the evaluation, participants first define the value that will be created and for whom. If necessary, adjustments and recommendations will be done for further actions.

The outcomes of the Value Creation process are gathered on a Game Board specifically developed for this purpose (see picture 1). The Value Creation process can be done in a pressure cooker session of 1 to 2 hours, and is used throughout the Value Creation process, which can take up many years. It is a continuous cyclic process.

REFERENCES

- Gosselin, D. & Tindemans, B. (2016). *Thinkin Futures. Strategy at the Edge of Complexity and Uncertainty*. Leuven: Lannoo Campus.
- Rijsdijk, L., Groenevelt, H. en Bot, de M. (2016). Developing a valid *wicked* meter to assess complexity, *IPMA Projectie Magazine*, 06.
- Rijsdijk, L., Groenevelt, H. en Bot, de M. (2016). Developing a valid *wicked* meter to assess complexity, *IPMA Projectie Magazine*, 06.
- Rijsdijk, L. & de Bot, M. (2017). Wicked questions and developing Leadership competences in a network society. Preparing young professionals for the future. Paper presented at the IPMA World Congress in Astana, Kazakhstan.
- Rittel, H., Webber, M. (1973), Dilemmas in a general theory of planning. *Policy Sciences*, 4, 155-69.
- Scharmer, C. O., & Senge, P. M. (2009). *Theory U: Leading from the future as it emerges*. San Francisco, CA (USA): Berrett-Koehler.
- Siemens, G. (2005). Connectivism: Learning as network-creation. *ASTD Learning News*, 10(1), 1-28.
- Weber, E.P. and Khademian, A.M. (2008). Wicked Problems, Knowledge Challenges, and Collaborative Capacity Builders in Network Settings. *Public Administration Review*, 68: 334–349.
- Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of practice: Learning as a social system. *Systems thinker*, 9(5), 2-3.

CONTACTS

Dr. Elisabeth (Liesbeth) Rijsdijk
Windesheim University of Applied Sciences
Windesheim Honours College
Campus 2
Zwolle
The Netherlands
+31 88 469 7767
e.rijsdijk@windesheim.nl
www.windesheimhonourscollege.nl