CYNEFIN FRAMEWORK

EMERGENT PRACTICE

COMPLEX
PROBE · SENSE · RESPOND

GOOD PRACTICE

COMPLICATED
SENSE · **ANALYZE** · RESPOND

UNORDERED

DISORDER

ORDERED

CHAOTIC
ACT · SENSE · RESPOND

NOVEL PRACTICE

SIMPLE
SENSE · **CATAGORIZE** · RESPOND

BEST PRACTICE

SOLUTIONS LAB

Adapted from David Snowden

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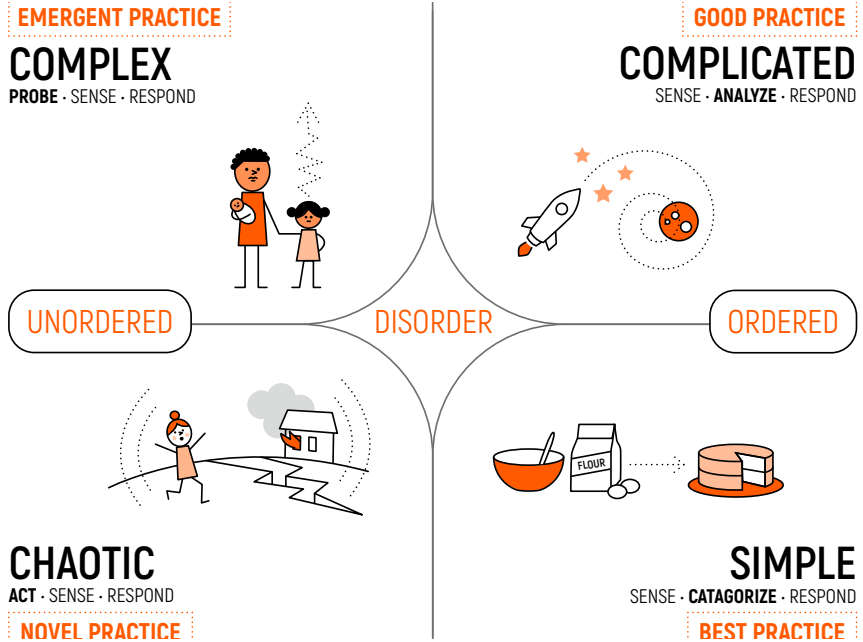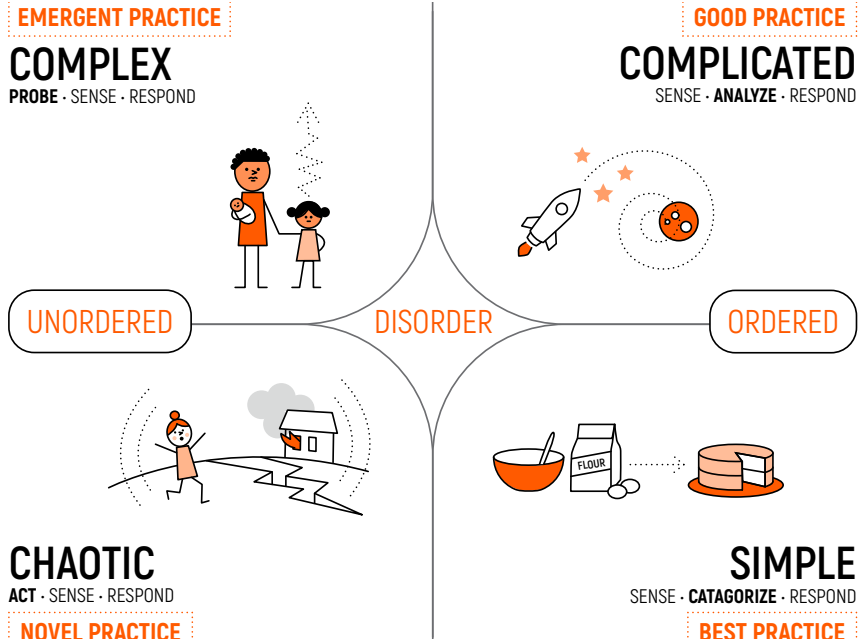SENSE · **CATAGORIZE** · RESPOND

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What is it?

Cynefin is a Welsh word meaning habitat, and this framework helps with making sense of the nature of the problem domain that one is working with. Simple challenges are like baking a cake, and play in the domain of "known knowns". There is a recipe that - if followed - will result in a reliably delicious cake. There are clear causes and effects, and there is generally a high level of agreement and certainty about the appropriate response. Complicated challenges are like flying a rocket to the moon, and operate with "known unknowns". A great deal of intelligence and expertise is required to analyse options and come up with a range of potential solutions. They can often have a high level of certainty but a lower level of agreement. Complex challenges are like raising a child, and engage with "unknown unknowns". There are no clear right answers, and causes and effects are only visible afterwards (if then). Properties of solutions are unpredictable, emergent, and non-linear. They are usually characterised by low agreement and low certainty. Chaotic challenges are analogous to responding to an earthquake. They are confused, and first require action to create stability before any other responses could potentially be effective. Another version of this graphic includes political decisions, characterised by low agreement and high certainty, and requiring a different type of response.

How is it used?

Cynefin can be used to help categorise the nature of a challenge, and then aid in determining an appropriate and strategic response to working toward solving it, drawing from the right kinds of processes and techniques.

More info:

ARTICLE: A leader's framework for decision-making, Snowdon + Boone

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