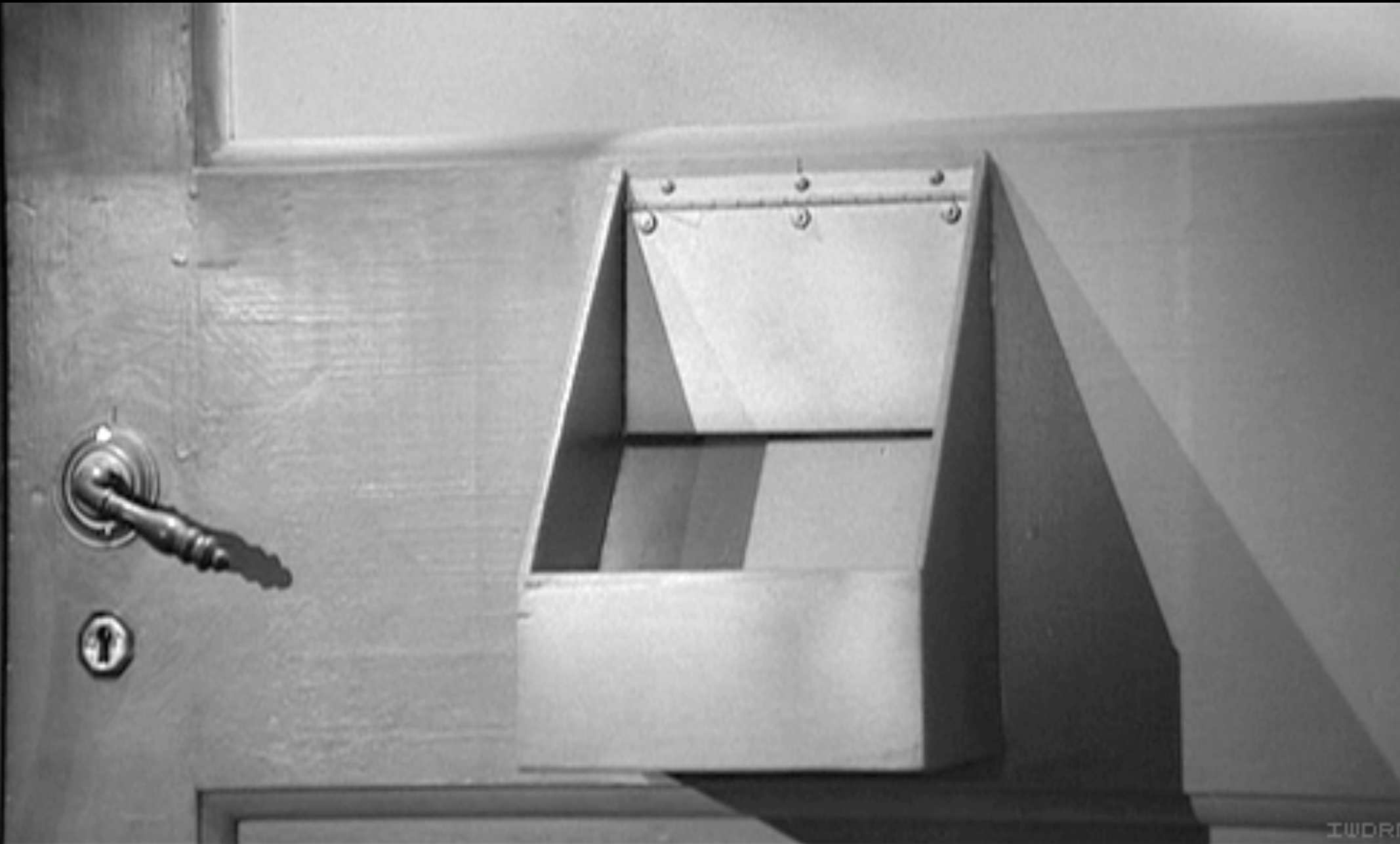


Navigating Adaptive Complex Systems

It's not complicated

UNDP New York, 28 September 2017

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Narrate



IWDRI

What we're skipping today ...

Non-causal systems

Foresight

Detecting radicalisation

**Misinterpretation of
field results**

**Rwandan gender
attitudes**

**Scaling programs using
complexity principles**

**Prejudice and
attitudes to ethnicity**

**Sharing knowledge
from crisis situations**

**The problems of using
measures as targets**

**The limits of
social taboos**

**Green economy
policy-making**

Peace and reconciliation in Eurasia

**Central monitoring,
local projects**

**Bangladesh latrine
habits**

**Risk assessment and horizon
scanning**

Impact assessment

Difficult times

Methods that worked previously are now reaching the limits of what they can do

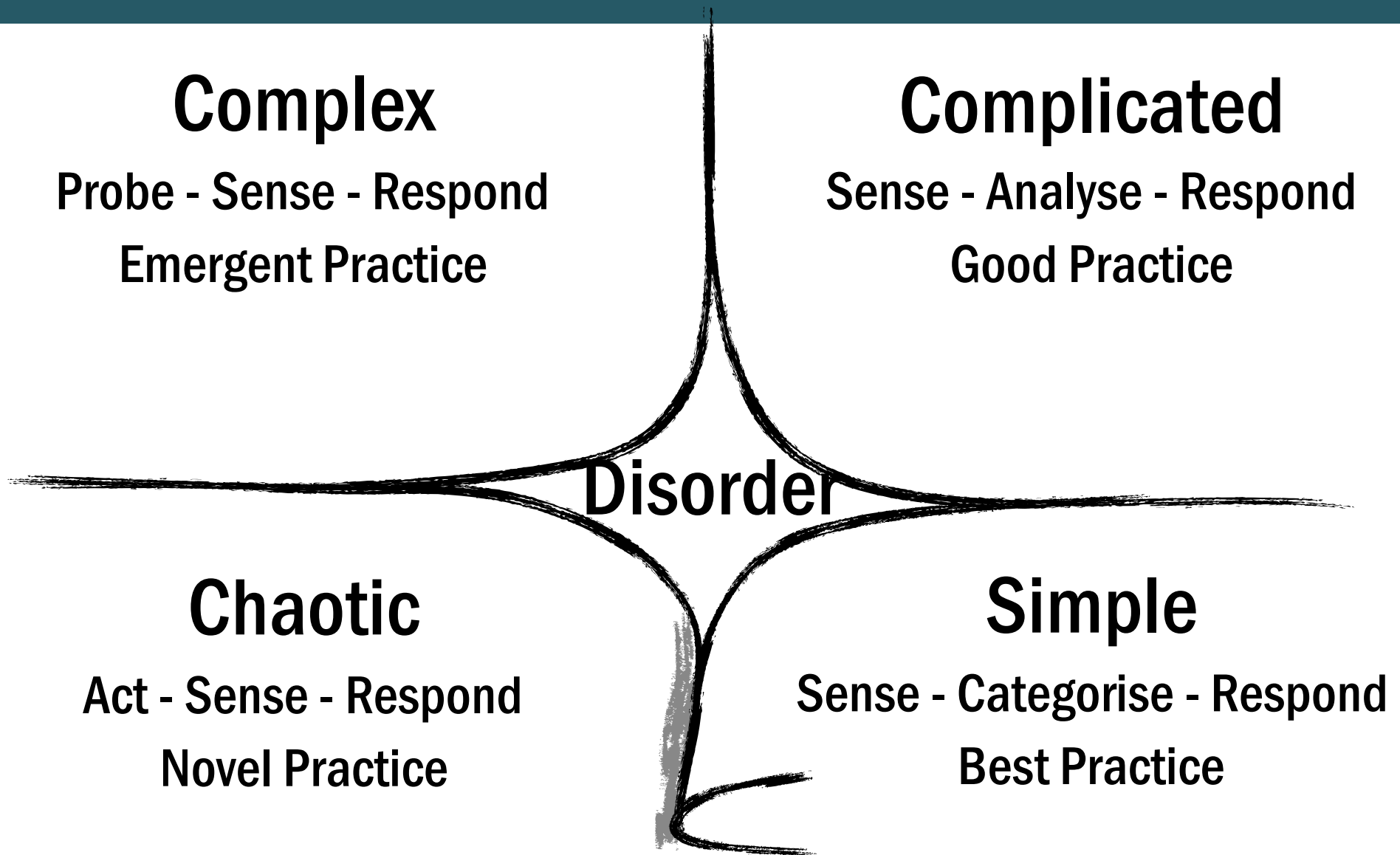
Past solutions becoming the source of present problems

Some issues seem immovable

And new goals cut across organisations and systems

But not all problems are complex

Cynefin framework



Complex problems

Small differences can have large impacts

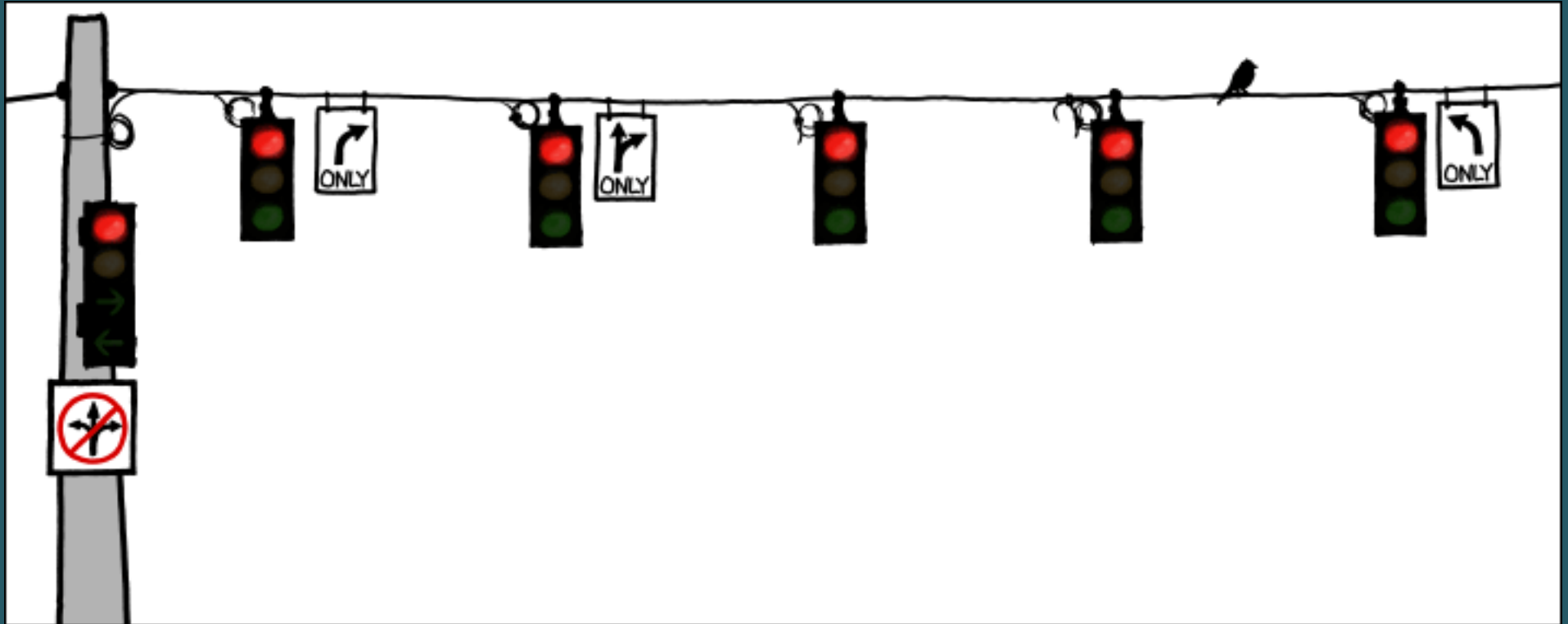
Constantly evolving

Perspective matters

Solutions don't repeat or scale

Prediction is impossible

Rules get more complicated to take scenarios into account



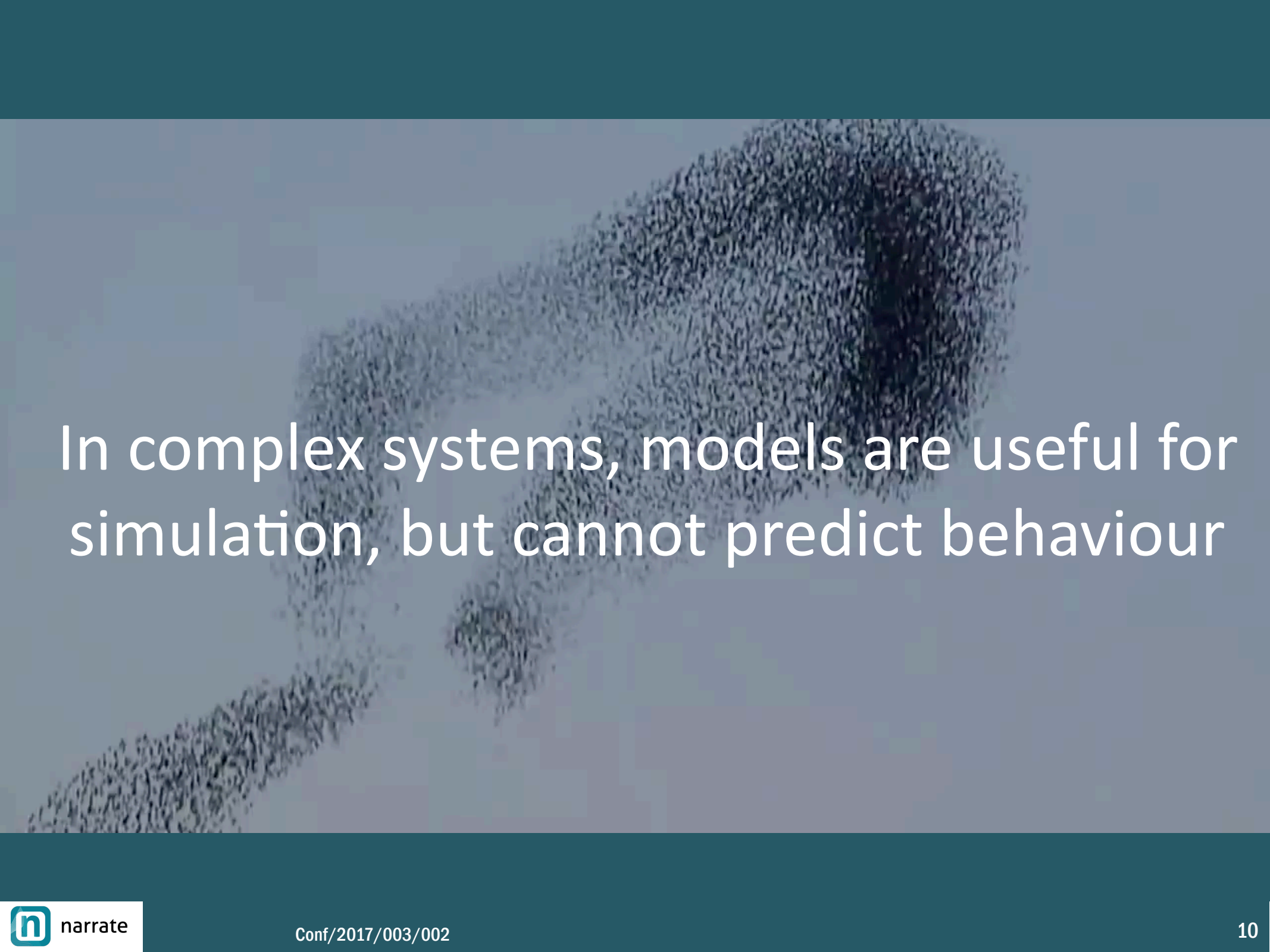
Principles of working in Complex Adaptive Systems

Obliquity - don't go after the problem directly

Diversity - spread the thinking as far as possible

Experimentation - safe-to-fail probes into the system

Feedback - monitor the effects for good, bad and unexpected



In complex systems, models are useful for simulation, but cannot predict behaviour



What are the key elements to explore in a complex adaptive system?

Constraints

Attractors

Modulators

Identities

Context

Design experiments en masse, not for individual issues

Look for clashes

Look for commonality

Look for unsupported SDGs

Table 1

		Sustainable Development Goals															
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
Behaviours/values modulators	1					Green	Green				Red						
	2		Green			Red				Red			Green				
	3				Green						Red			Green	Green		
	4				Green			Green						Red			
	5		Red						Red								
	6				Green					Green		Red					
	7	Red				Red				Red						Red	
	8			Green	Red	Red	Green	Green									
	9									Green							
	10	Green											Green				
	11			Red				Red		Green						Red	
	12	Green			Green				Red						Red		
	13		Red			Red		Green								Green	
	14			Green	Green				Red			Red				Red	
	15			Red				Red			Green	Red	Green	Green			
	16	Green															Green
	17						Green										
	18					Red									Red		Green
	19																

Complex problems

Deal with the system, don't break it down into components

Understand the reality of now, along with the possible and impossible routes forward

Set directions, not targets or fixed future visions

We adapt urban development to the physical landscape

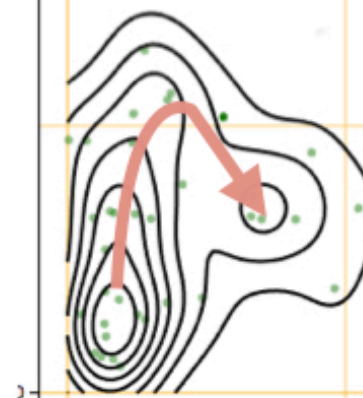


Corruption n=337

Engagement with community n=196

Trust in law and order n=358

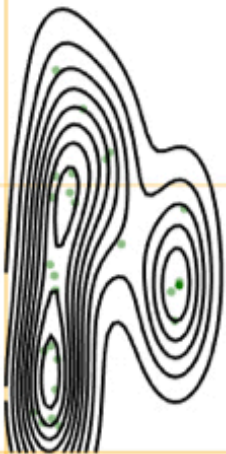
2. If this is the issue they believe is paramount, things are more likely to get worse



Inequality and unfair treatment n=260

Investment in education n=157

1. If this is the issue they believe is paramount, it will be very hard to improve things



Level of communication

Willingness to engage in democratic process

So what do we do?

Take oblique approaches, not direct ones

Understand the landscape of the system

- So look at all the SDGs as a whole, not one by one

Look at the modulators*

Build an effective feedback system that includes context and detail, not just a questionnaire

- And not a game-able system of visible measures

*Other elements to look at might include boundaries, attractors, gradients

What do we need?

Detailed data, that combines actual experience and context

Diverse perspectives, including non-NGO experts

Fast feedback mechanisms to monitor the impacts of the experiments

Impacts

Looking to evolve the system, not find the solution

Experiments may have positive unintended consequences

If you find it repeats the same way over time and in different situations, it may be complicated after all!

Greater resilience and lower resources than an imposed solution

Beware

Outcome targets in a complex situation

Working only with abstraction descriptions

Familiar patterns, familiar experts, familiar approaches

Retrospective coherence

Pre-defined categories

Pursuit of the perfect

PERFECT

THIS IS THE PERFECT
BOOK YOU WILL
NEVER WRITE.



THIS IS THE
PERFECT RACE
YOU WILL NEVER
RUN.



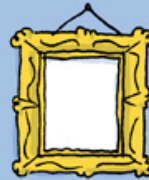
THIS IS THE PERFECT
IDEA THAT WILL
NEVER STRIKE.



THIS IS THE PERFECT
PERSON YOU WILL
NEVER BECOME.



THIS IS THE
PERFECT PAINTING
YOU WILL NEVER MAKE.



THIS IS THE
PERFECT SONG YOU
WILL NEVER HUM.



THIS IS THE
PERFECT MOUNTAIN
YOU WILL NEVER
CLIMB.



THIS IS THE
PERFECT CAKE YOU
WILL NEVER BAKE.



THIS IS THE
PERFECT SOLUTION
YOU WILL NEVER
FIND.



THIS IS PERFECTION:



IT DOESN'T EXIST.

TIME TO DESTROY
PERFECT...



AND GET
SOMETHING DONE.



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