Cynefin & Complexity Foundations

...building the basic scaffolds of complexity approaches, and providing the sense-making toolkit for working in complex environments
In today’s increasingly volatile and uncertain world, there is a need for new ways of making sense of current situations and managing in new and rapidly shifting contexts. Our past practices and approaches are failing us and what had worked reliably during more stable times in the past is unfortunately proving inadequate for the dynamic present. This course introduces concepts which challenge the deeply rooted thinking patterns that have been ingrained by years of conventional thinking.

Take a dive into complexity theory, and the practical implications for operating in a world of inherent uncertainty. Learn about the Cynefin framework – and how to apply it in organisations; how to make better decisions, dependent on the situation; as well as a range of practical methods that you can apply directly in organisations.

Much ado about complexity

Complexity has become a buzzword for the world we work within - this course provides you with the foundational tools to understand what it means to act and manage in complexity.

Cynefin and Complexity Foundations forms the core component of Cognitive Edge’s training offerings. It contributes the basic scaffolds and key components of your sense-making toolkit for working in complex environments.

A world of inherent uncertainty

This course designed for people who work in constantly-evolving, dynamic situations, dealing daily with uncertainty and risk, and looking for a enhanced compass for building organisations that are both resilient and innovative.

Whether you work in an organisation navigating great change and intractable problems, or are a consultant looking to include complexity principles into your practice - or if you are simply complexity-curious - this Foundations class is for you.
This has been designed as a 2-day session - a combination of deep immersion into the fundamentals of working in complexity, and with the Cynefin framework. This will be substantiated by lots of hands-on methods-based activities, and group-based discussions. The session will begin with an introduction to complexity, and the natural and human science that sit behind the naturalising tradition in sense-making. Discover and manage the evolutionary potential of the present by increasing situational awareness of the types of systems that we sit within, and how to modulate within complex systems.

The Cynefin framework has subtleties and nuances which are not easily accessible to the casual reader. Building on the basics outlined in the Harvard Business Review article, this 2-day session will help you dig deeper into the uses of the framework, accompanied by facilitated workshop activities and tools that have been used in organisations as diverse as the European Commission, multinational telecoms companies and R&D departments of FMCG companies to bring diverse teams together in pursuit of corporate objectives.

Modular structure

Day 1:
Basic complexity & 3 types of systems
Cynefin construction
Managing through Heuristics
Serendipity & Evolutionary potential

Day 2:
Going beyond Cynefin 101
Cynefin dynamics
Complex Facilitation Techniques
Working with Unorder

“this course was a great example of how Cognitive Edge 'walks the talk' of equipping people with management tools to address the complex space. The tutors weren't rigidly stuck to sharing 'best practices' of the CE toolkit - rather we had a space to engage in co-creative learning with them and together as participants. This allowed me to take the most out of the days we had together and form connections with the participants that I have already tapped into after the class”

“The Class was a good mix of theory and practice. The venue Cognitive Edge selected was a great environment. There’s not many classes where I come away feeling that I’ve developed my capabilities further. I did on this class”

course reviews
Who is Cognitive Edge?

The ability to manage and navigate complexity is a key strategic advantage. However, many organisations are trapped in past practices and structures. Breaking through such inertia requires praxis - theory informed practice. Cognitive Edge is focused on rejuvenating management practices to better equip organisations when addressing intractable problems or seizing new opportunities in uncertain and complex situations. Where traditional approaches have failed to deliver success, Cognitive Edge techniques enable the emergence of fresh and insightful solutions seen from multiple perspectives.

...making sense of complexity so we can act

The Cynefin framework

The Academy of Management awarded the Harvard Business Review article, Cynefin & Leadership, the "Best Practitioner Paper". Their citation reads:

*This paper introduces an important new perspective that has enormous future value, and does so in a clear way that shows it can be used. The article makes several significant contributions. First, and most importantly, it introduces complexity science to guide managers’ thoughts and actions. Second, it applies this perspective to advance a typology of contexts to help leaders to sort out the wide variety of situations in which they must lead decisions. Third, it advises leaders concerning what actions they should take in response*