

61. Wicked Problem Scorecard

How can I assess how challenging the problem is that I am facing?

Key Definitions

Managers are *problem-solvers* – they are oriented towards tackling issues that impede an organization from reaching its goals. They constantly try to understand what types of problems are holding the organization back, or might threaten the organization in future, and then look for a solution to enable the organization to move forward.

Yet, problems differ in their level of difficulty. Rittel and Webber (1973) famously made a distinction between tame and wicked problems. *Tame problems* are by their nature easy to solve, even though they might require a lot of work. *Wicked problems*, however, are challenging messes that are difficult, if not impossible, to resolve.

Conceptual Model

The *Wicked Problem Scorecard* is an evaluation framework for assessing a problem's relative difficulty. An index value can be calculated for any type of problem by using 15 characteristics to judge its level of wickedness. By giving a score of 1 (fully tame) to five (fully wicked) for each of the 15 measures, then adding all the scores together and dividing by 15, an index value is calculated indicating the relative difficulty of the problem. This scorecard is not intended to convey an objective truth, but to give a rough estimation to sensitize the problem-solver(s).

		Tame Problem					Wicked Problem				
Problem		1	2	3	4	5					
Definition	The problem can be objectively defined						The problem definition is a matter of perspective				
Separation	The problem stands on its own						The problem is linked to many others				
Timing	There is plenty of time to solve the problem						There is time pressure to solve the problem				
Data	All data to solve the problem is available						Most data to solve the problem is missing				
Predictability	The future of the problem can be forecast						The future of the problem is unknowable				
Stakeholders		1	2	3	4	5					
Identity	The problem stakeholders are known						The problem stakeholders are unclear				
Drivers	The stakeholders have similar values						The stakeholders have differing values				
Motivation	The stakeholders want to solve the problem						The stakeholders want to ignore the problem				
Separation	The solvers are separated from the problem						The solvers are part of the problem				
Capability	The solvers have the power to solve it						The solvers have limited power to solve it				
Solution		1	2	3	4	5					
Availability	The potential solutions are known						The potential solutions need to be created				
Predictability	The impact of each solution is known						The impact of each solution is unpredictable				
Selection	There is one optimal solution						Each solution has advantages and drawbacks				
Execution	The potential solutions are easy to implement						The potential solutions are hard to implement				
Impact	Solution actions don't change the problem						Solution actions change the problem				

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Key Elements

The scorecard consists of three categories of five characteristics each:

1. **Problem.** The first part focuses on the nature of the problem itself, without consideration of the stakeholders. A wicked problem is not evil, but just outright confusing and frustrating

by its very structure. This is also often referred to as a problem's level of complexity or complication. A problem is wicked if it has the following characteristics:

- a. *Definition*. The interpretation of the problem varies widely depending on who you ask;
 - b. *Separation*. The problem is linked to an intricate web of other problems;
 - c. *Timing*. The problem requires immediate attention and needs to be resolved quickly;
 - d. *Data*. Most information needed to understand and solve the problem is unavailable;
 - e. *Predictability*. How the problem will evolve in future can't be objectively foreseen.
2. **Stakeholders**. The second part of the scorecard focuses on the people who play a role in the problem. Some stakeholders are involved because they believe that their interests (or those of third parties) are at stake, while others can be involved as potential problem-solvers. A problem is wicked if the stakeholders have the following characteristics:
- a. *Identity*. The stakeholders are unknown or there are different views on who they are;
 - b. *Drivers*. The stakeholders' worldview and understanding of what is important differs;
 - c. *Motivation*. Some or all of the stakeholders don't really want to solve the problem;
 - d. *Separation*. Some or all of the problem solvers are themselves part of the problem;
 - e. *Capability*. The problem solvers have limited power to influence the problem.
3. **Solution**. The third part of the scorecard focuses of the nature of the potential solutions. A solution is any type of practical intervention directed at alleviating the problem. Some integrative solutions can resolve the entire problem, while some narrower measures can nudge the problem a bit closer to a solution. A problem is wicked if the solution is like this:
- a. *Availability*. There is no fixed set from which to choose, so solutions must be invented;
 - b. *Predictability*. How possible interventions will influence solving the problem is uncertain;
 - c. *Selection*. No solution is the best, as each has its own strengths and weaknesses;
 - d. *Execution*. All potential solutions are very difficult to put into practice;
 - e. *Impact*. Any intervention will immediately change the nature of the problem.

Key Insights

- ***Wicked problems are everywhere***. At school we learn to solve tame puzzles, but we seldom learn to grapple with wicked messes. Yet, wicked problems abound, when setting strategy, developing new policies, innovating, and implementing organizational change. The more senior the manager, the more their work consists of managing wicked problems.
- ***Wicked problems need to be recognized***. It is important to know the level of wickedness of a problem, to avoid overoptimism, naïve quick fixes, and mounting frustration. In many cases, the realistic manager will understand the problem can't be solved but only managed.
- ***Wicked problems need to be assessed***. The level of wickedness can't be scientifically determined, but can be pragmatically estimated, by evaluating three types of characteristics – what is the nature of the *problem*, what is the profile of the *stakeholders* and what is the nature of the possible *solutions*.
- ***Wicked problems need to be measured***. The *Wicked Problem Scorecard* is a pragmatic way to quickly measure the level of wickedness of a problem. This helps to clarify the difficulty of the challenge and create a shared understanding among all involved.
- ***Wicked problems need to be tamed***. It is foolish to treat a wicked problem as if it was tame, but it is pessimistic to assume that a wicked problem can't be tamed a bit. A first step towards taming a wicked problem is by recognizing and measuring its level of wickedness. Calculating an index number is useful, but doing the assessment together is even better.

Meyer's Management Models

Insightful Tools to Kickstart Your Thinking

Publication Schedule

<i>July 2019</i>	<i>Mind the Gap Model</i>	<i>Change Management</i>
<i>August 2019</i>	<i>Digital Platform Map</i>	<i>Digital Strategy</i>
<i>September 2019</i>	<i>Interaction Pressure Gauge</i>	<i>Interpersonal Interaction</i>
<i>October 2019</i>	<i>Revenue Model Framework</i>	<i>Revenue Model Typology</i>
<i>November 2019</i>	<i>House of Engagement</i>	<i>Organizational Engagement</i>
<i>December 2019</i>	<i>Confidence Quotient</i>	<i>Trust Building</i>
<i>January 2020</i>	<i>Competition Tornado</i>	<i>Competitive Strategy</i>
<i>February 2020</i>	<i>11C Synergy Model</i>	<i>Corporate Synergy Management</i>
<i>March 2020</i>	<i>Leadership Fairness Model</i>	<i>Leader-Follower Interaction</i>
<i>April 2020</i>	<i>Strategic Agility Model</i>	<i>Strategy Process Approach</i>
<i>May 2020</i>	<i>Control Panel</i>	<i>Corporate Control Dimensions</i>
<i>June 2020</i>	<i>Rising Star Framework</i>	<i>Talent Management</i>
<i>July 2020</i>	<i>Strategy Development Cycle</i>	<i>Strategy Process Steps</i>
<i>August 2020</i>	<i>7I Corporate Center Model</i>	<i>Corporate Organization</i>
<i>September 2020</i>	<i>Storytelling Scripts</i>	<i>Leadership Communication</i>
<i>October 2020</i>	<i>Strategic Bets Framework</i>	<i>Strategic Decision-Making</i>
<i>November 2020</i>	<i>Rebound Model of Resilience</i>	<i>Organizational Resilience</i>
<i>December 2020</i>	<i>4C Leadership Capabilities</i>	<i>Leadership Competences</i>
<i>January 2021</i>	<i>Digital Product Model Dial</i>	<i>Digital Strategy</i>
<i>February 2021</i>	<i>Digital Distribution Model Dial</i>	<i>Digital Strategy</i>
<i>March 2021</i>	<i>Empowerment Cycle</i>	<i>Employee Empowerment</i>
<i>April 2021</i>	<i>Innovation Box</i>	<i>Innovation Approaches</i>
<i>May 2021</i>	<i>Knowledge Sharing Bridges</i>	<i>Best Practice Sharing</i>
<i>June 2021</i>	<i>Followership Cycle</i>	<i>Leader-Follower Interaction</i>
<i>July 2021</i>	<i>Everest Model of Change</i>	<i>Change Management</i>
<i>August 2021</i>	<i>Fruits & Nuts Matrix</i>	<i>Priority-Setting</i>
<i>September 2021</i>	<i>Powerhouse Framework</i>	<i>People & Organization Strategy</i>
<i>October 2021</i>	<i>Strategy Hourglass</i>	<i>Strategy-Making Steps</i>
<i>November 2021</i>	<i>Disciplined Dialogue Model</i>	<i>Interpersonal Communication</i>
<i>December 2021</i>	<i>Team Building Cycle</i>	<i>Team Building Process</i>
<i>January 2022</i>	<i>Market System Map</i>	<i>External Analysis Framework</i>
<i>February 2022</i>	<i>Strategic Alignment Model</i>	<i>Business Level Strategy</i>
<i>March 2022</i>	<i>Creativity X-Factor</i>	<i>Creativity Enhancement</i>
<i>April 2022</i>	<i>Organizational System Map</i>	<i>Organizational Analysis</i>
<i>May 2022</i>	<i>Corporate Value Creation Model</i>	<i>Corporate Level Strategy</i>
<i>June 2022</i>	<i>Change Manager's Toolbox</i>	<i>Change Methodologies</i>

July 2022	Sustainable You Model	Personal Sustainability
August 2022	Value Proposition Dial	Business Level Strategy
September 2022	The Tree of Power	Organizational Power
October 2022	Psychological Safety Compass	Team Dynamics
November 2022	Strategic Action Modes	Strategy Process
December 2022	Corporate Management Styles	HQ Management
January 2023	Thinking Directions Framework	Reasoning Skills
February 2023	5I Innovation Pipeline	Innovation Process
March 2023	Resistance to Change Typology	Change Management
April 2023	Ambition Radar Screen	Motivation Analysis
May 2023	Corporate Strategy Framework	Corporate Strategy
June 2023	Cultural Fabric Model	Organizational Culture
July 2023	New Pyramid Principle	Presentation Approaches
August 2023	Activity System Dial	Value Creation Analysis
September 2023	Customer-Centricity Circle	Organizational Design
October 2023	Status Snakes & Ladders	Leadership Branding
November 2023	Stakeholder Stance Map	Stakeholder Management
December 2023	Best Practice Sharing Modes	Sharing Methods
January 2024	Duty of Care Feedback Model	Feedback Method
February 2024	BOLD Vision Framework	Organizational Vision
March 2024	MOVING Mission Framework	Organizational Mission
April 2024	Leadership Circle Map	Leadership Skills
May 2024	Digitalization Staircase	Digital Strategy
June 2024	Time Management Funnel	Personal Time Management
July 2024	Wicked Problem Scorecard	Organizational Decision-Making
August 2024	Performance Assignment Matrix	Corporate Strategy
September 2024	Farming & Hunting Matrix	Sales Management
October 2024	Self-Centered Thinking Framework	Thinking Styles
November 2024	Sustainability Maturity Model	Sustainability Management
December 2024	Triple Diamond Model	Organizational Decision-Making
January 2025	Interpersonal Interaction Levels	Communication Approaches
February 2025	Synergy Value Matrix	Corporate Level Strategy
March 2025	Dynamic Organization Paradigm	Human-centered Organization
April 2025	New Learning Curve	Personal Learning
May 2025	Partnership Distance Model	Interorganizational Relations
June 2025	Embedded Identity Model	Personal Awareness