

Walking in the Midst: Combining Complexity Concepts and Stories to Better Understand Impact

EES 2024 Conference workshop proposal

Basic Information

- **Course title:**
Walking in the Midst: Combining Complexity Concepts and Stories to Better Understand Impact
- **Level:**
Basic-Intermediate
- **Prerequisites for participants:**
No prerequisites, although some familiarity with systems thinking and complexity would be helpful
- **Target Number:**
15 minimum and maximum 30
- **Technical Support Material: requirements in addition to those normally supplied by the conference centres:**
Projector, Microphone

Workshop Description

- **Purpose, content, and anticipated learning outcomes of the workshop.**

Stories have an immense capacity to carry many complex patterns in tiny packages. Identifying these patterns can help us to understand the impact embedded in the stories we tell about our work. But these complexity concepts often are hidden in the plain language of those stories. We'll introduce you to ten key concepts of complexity that will act as a framework for breaking down and making sense of the stories we hear and tell each other about change.

In this workshop we will combine these complexity topics with an adaptive action methodology. This approach help us better understand what happened, understand the significance of these events, and figure out what we should do next.

By establishing a shared understanding of how complexity presents itself, we can begin to work towards a common language for working with stories in a systemic way. This allows for more rigorous collaboration over time, allowing for new patterns to emerge as story-work continues. A shared language makes these insights more accessible to everyone, no matter how much experience they have in evaluation or storytelling.

This hands-on workshop will guide you through the process of finding and working with these complexity topics in stories gathered from human rights work currently ongoing in the field. This approach will ground us in real-world situations that are naturally full of complexity. Much of the time in the workshop will be spent working collaboratively, learning from each other as we all learn from the stories and the people who are living them. Through this collaborative learning, we hope to create a miniature example of what a community of complexity practitioners can do when we work together to make sense of stories about impact and use that insight to develop a shared sense of meaning to guide our next wise actions.

You don't need to know anything about stories or complexity to join this workshop, but a little experience will go a long way! You should be excited to read lots of stories (in English) and work in

small groups. Other than that, the only prerequisites are other than being excited about learning and believing that stories can help guide us towards a better future.

- **Delivery Methods/Activities; Outline of interactive delivery methods and activities.**

The workshop will combine face-to-face facilitation by world-leading guides and facilitators with pre-recorded visual content. It will be engaging, creative, highly participatory, and full of inspiration. This workshop begins with a check-in to establish the collaborative space and let everyone begin the day with participation. From there we will flow into an interactive introduction to the ten complexity topics we will be working with. This will not be a traditional one-directional teaching moment, but rather will include: video, music, and, of course, stories to convey the fundamentals of concepts that can sometimes be obtuse.

Then, it is on to the story work! Participants will be provided with a set of stories and split into groups of three to begin exploring the stories and complexity patterns they contain. This group work will consist of three rounds, between each round we will come together to share with each other what we are learning from the stories and the people we are partnering with. Each round will focus on integrating the complexity concepts into a different stage of the adaptive action cycle.

After the third round is completed, the workshop will enter the reflective phase. First participants will be invited to reflect on their own, then in small groups, and finally we will all reflect together on the experiences of the day. We will close with a simple and uplifting check-out.

- **Handout Materials. Where relevant, provide a description of the materials participants will receive prior to or during the course; explain when they will be disseminated.**

Workshop participants will receive a one-page overview of the complexity topics including simple definitions, examples, and ideas for symbols that we will use to mark the concepts in the stories.

During the workshop participants will receive a pack of approximately a dozen stories that come from our work in the human rights field. These stories will be anonymized and slightly modified from their original format to protect the identities of the people whose lives they represent.

- **History of versions of the proposed workshop: title(s), number of times, where and to whom it has previously been delivered, number of attendees, evidence of its success.**

This workshop was delivered to a group of 45 international facilitators and change makers at a conference hosted by the WE Program in The Netherlands in 2023.