

# Pre Conference Workshop Proposal

**Course Title:** *Responding to wicked problems with systemic evaluation*

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**Level:** Intermediate

**Prerequisite:** Participant's have applied experience in design, planning and conducting evaluation

**Target number:** 20 - 24 (four groups of five to six people)

## **Rationale**

Wicked problems are a challenge due to their dynamic and uncertain behaviour, inter-relationships with multiple systems and sub-systems and actors, and scale and require a systemic response. There are many challenges associated with designing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) for wicked problems in complex environments and where evaluation and systemic thinking literacy maybe low. This workshop explores the nexus between M&E and wicked problems. This workshop will provide participants the opportunity to practice designing an M&E system to respond to a wicked problem. Real-life case studies including counter trafficking in persons (CTIP) will be shared to critique, compare and contrast their thinking. We will share tools, approaches and tips gained from our experience to help others design M&E systems for complex problems, and hopefully avoid some time-consuming and expensive pitfalls.

## **Workshop purpose and objectives**

This day-long workshop will enable participants to fully explore a highly relevant question to evaluators: **how can evaluation design respond to a wicked problem?**

Wicked problems across the globe are escalating in prevalence, severity and urgency. Geographic, resource, cultural, digital, economic and geo-political challenges all must be considered when developing an effective M&E system.

When designing M&E systems for wicked problems, it is tempting to take a reductionist view and define outcomes in a systematic way based on a few significant variables. However, as wicked problems do not have single causes, effects, or solutions, focussing on just a few significant variables is unlikely to increase understanding or insight. Given that wicked problems occur in a social-ecological context, adopting a systemic thinking lens may be more helpful to account for the complexity of interactions, ongoing change and an almost limitless number of variables that create and can solve these problems.

## **Learning objectives**

By the end of this workshop participants will be able to:

- Recognise the traits of wicked problems
- Use a systemic evaluation approach to apply systemic thinking to understand the problem and design the M&E system. This will include an assessment of marginalisation and vulnerability based on the 'GEMs' framework for complex intersectional analysis.
- Identify the essential design elements of a M&E system in the context of a wicked problem.
- Identify the components of the M&E system
- Describe a collaborative and consultative process that may contribute to the development of a M&E system for a wicked problem

## **Overview of the day – interactive activities**

The presenters have an accumulating and highly relevant set of learnings to share with others but don't have all the answers. Our intention is to engage in a two-way dialogue utilising our knowledge and the experience and stories of our workshop participants.

The workshop will discuss real life examples of how the authors have approached evaluation design for wicked problems. The participants will then be put into groups to role play a hypothetical scenario to explore a systemic evaluation and developmental approach to M&E system design. They will need to manage a variety of contingencies along the way.

Together we all build on our understanding of the value of systemic thinking for evaluation system design to meet the very messy and slightly daunting challenges posed by wicked problems.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Detail</b>
<b>Welcome and introductions</b>	Meet the presenters and your colleagues for the day - small groups for role play.
<b>Overview of the case study</b>	Showcase M&E system Case Study 1
<b>Principles of wickedness</b>	Brief presentation and discussion Provide Case Study 2: Identify what makes it 'wicked'?
<b>Principles and concepts of systemic thinking</b>	Brief presentation and discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Systematic / systemic</li> <li>- Power dynamics / marginalisation</li> <li>- Boundaries / perspectives / interrelationships</li> </ul>
<b>MORNING TEA</b>	
<b>Systemic thinking of the wicked problem</b>	Provide a hypothetical scenario. Assign role play roles to each member of the group (i.e. evaluator, World Bank (funder), UN (Sponsor), Customs officials, NGOs, Health Professionals, Ministers of Immigration, Refugee representatives, human rights officials, amnesty international, local police, shelter workers, armed forces, red cross representatives). Each role is described with a public profile (job title, skills and experience) and personal bio (their hidden agendas, needs and priorities). Working from the perspective of their role, participants contribute to the discussions of the following tasks.
<b>Facilitators to guide and time each activity with explicit instructions. Each group use butcher paper to record thinking</b>	
<b>Task 1: do a boundary analysis</b>	Participants workshop the evaluand and evaluation, who's missing, who's vulnerable?
<b>Task 2: perspectives that count</b>	Think about perspectives, who's missing?
<b>Task 3: vulnerability</b>	Power dynamics, identify those most powerful, most vulnerable
<b>Task 3: M&amp;E system goal</b>	What does each stakeholder want from the M&E system? Find a consensus (or series of compromises) and articulate the system goal.
<b>Display responses to each task on the wall</b>	
<b>LUNCH</b>	
<b>Applied M&amp;E for this wicked problem</b>	Continue in same group as the role assigned.
<b>Key design elements of an M&amp;E system</b>	Group discussion about the design elements for this wicked problem. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will change be known?</li> <li>• What are the key design elements of the M&amp;E System to meet the needs of stakeholder group?</li> </ul>
<b>Parts (or components) of the M&amp;E system</b> Facilitators to explain parts of M&E system	Group discussion about the parts of this M&E system. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there different parts to the M&amp;E system, which parts serve whom?</li> </ul>
<b>Data collection</b>	Group discussion about data collection

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think will be the best way to gather data / consult about the develop the M&amp;E System?</li> <li>• How iterative might this be?</li> <li>• Where are the GEMS captured?</li> </ul> <p>Draw a consultation / collaboration process for development of the M&amp;E system (1 page).</p> <p>Display on the wall.</p>
<b>AFTERNOON TEA</b>	Review each groups butcher paper notes and designs
<b>Group / share / feedback</b>	Groups report back on their challenges, processes, discussions, and learnings.
<b>Critiquing the real one</b>	<p>Look at its component parts of Case Study 1.</p> <p>How does this meet needs, how could it be better?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What's the collaborative action?</li> <li>• What's the collaborative thinking?</li> <li>• System design for transformational change</li> <li>• The role of the evaluator driving systemic change.</li> </ul>