

An aerial photograph of a complex multi-level highway interchange in a city. A train is visible on an elevated track that crosses over the highway. The scene is filled with concrete structures, roads, and some greenery. The lighting suggests late afternoon or early morning.

W

CENTRE FOR THE STUDY
OF WICKED PROBLEMS

PRELIMINARY PROJECT PLAN

WICKED PROBLEMS

10 Properties of Wickedness

No Clear Definition

No 'Stopping' Rule

Solutions are not Right/Wrong but Better/Worse

No Right to be Wrong

No Immediate or Ultimate Test for a Solution

Solutions Limited by 'World View'

'One Shot' Solution have Consequences

Every Problem is a Symptom of Another Problem

No Final End to Solutions

Unique

INTRODUCTION

On a planetary scale, the challenges that we are facing from changing global conditions, whether it is climate change and adverse weather patterns, global supply chains, impacts on food production and distribution, or the increasingly common high-impact failures of global infrastructures such as power, water and information, are creating conditions that go beyond anything we have faced before.

These challenges are caused by a range of factors, including social, economic, environmental and technological developments that have fundamentally changed the way we live and work. Their complexity requires us to approach them in new and innovative ways. Traditional solutions are no longer sufficient, and we need to think beyond the conventional boundaries of our respective fields to find effective solutions.

This is the issue that was discussed in one of the seminal risk management papers, “Dilemmas in general theory of planning”, written by Horst Rittel and Melvin Weber in 1973.

The paper introduced the concept of ‘wicked problems’, that is, a class of complex issues that defies definition. They are problems for which any resolution that could be proposed only generates further issues, and where solutions are not true or false or good or bad, but merely the best that can be done at the time based on the available evidence.

Addressing wicked problems is a critical challenge for organisations, governments and communities worldwide. It requires us to think creatively, work collaboratively and remain committed to finding sustainable solutions.

This project aims to explore wicked problems and increase understanding of their complexities through a collaborative and multidisciplinary approach. It will engage practitioners and policy-makers, students and academics to examine and write about wicked problems, with the goal of developing a platform for sharing and disseminating research on these issues. By fostering dialogue and knowledge sharing, this project aims to contribute to ongoing efforts to address wicked problems and to promote sustainable and effective solutions.

OUR APPROACH TO WICKED PROBLEMS

Although it may seem that wicked problems by their very nature are both non-rational and undefinable, that does not mean that they are formless or without structure.

In fact it is our belief that there is both an underlying set of principles and an overarching meta-architecture that can be applied to wicked problems, and which in turn give us an opportunity to engage with them in a proactive and agenda-setting manner.

Whilst all wicked problems – and to a certain extent, all crisis events – are fundamentally unique, there is also a class or set of problems which under that umbrella label have common characteristics, even if that is in the nature of the challenges that they set rather than in the way that they manifest.

The fundamental approach that we take is based on the work of Garry Klein and others in terms of Recognition Primed Decision Making.

That is, even if we are not aware of the specific issues associated with a particular wicked problem, there are common qualities that would allow us to transfer knowledge, learning and insights from other similar challenging events to develop capabilities that would allow us to respond appropriately and effectively (or at least, more appropriately and more effectively), than if that learning did not take place.

In fact, it is the recognition that rather than the specific responses to individual wicked problems, it is the understanding of the range of challenges that they pose and the issues that causes for us in modelling, preparing for and responding to such events, that gives us the theoretical and practitioner tools to develop appropriate response frameworks and capabilities.

Covid-19 was an outstanding example of the power that RPDM can bring, if not in solving wicked problems, at least in down-playing them from insolvable irrational dilemmas to rational if challenging major incidents.

The countries of south-east Asia that had experienced SARS in 2003 (namely Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea) were able to recognise the significance and implications of Coronavirus / Covid-19 much earlier in its development cycle, and were able to use the lessons learned from their previous pandemic experience to develop a range of potential options, utilising existing and emergent technologies, and based on the collaborative networks of academics, theoreticians, practitioners, policy-makers and community representatives. This stood in stark contrast to the (non-)response of the European and other governments whose main response to the emerging news of a potentially significant health threat coming out of China was to largely ignore it until the impacts started having high-profile impacts with their own borders.

Given the nature of the strategic risk and threats that we are likely to be facing over the coming years – and which we are in fact already facing today – the ability to have this level of pattern recognition in what would otherwise be considered as unique and unprecedented events, is something that can set the foundation for a structured approach to modelling and engaging with wicked problems from a multi-disciplinary perspective, including the engagement with every sector of society, all of whom will be affected by every aspect of the emergent challenges we are facing.



THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE 'CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF WICKED PROBLEMS'

The ISRM-led Centre for the Study of Wicked Problems will be an academic institution dedicated to researching, analyzing and addressing wicked problems.

The Centre will bring together researchers, scholars, policy-makers, practitioners and students from diverse fields and disciplines, such as social sciences, natural sciences, humanities, law, engineering and business, to collaborate on addressing wicked problems.

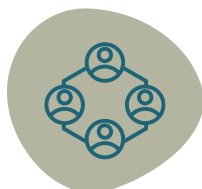
The Centre will have several key functions, including:



RESEARCH: Conducting interdisciplinary research on wicked problems, analyzing and synthesizing existing research and disseminating research findings through publications, conferences and other media.



EDUCATION: Offering workshops and training programs on wicked problems to equip students, scholars and practitioners with the knowledge, skills and tools to address these problems.



COLLABORATION: Fostering collaboration and partnerships among researchers, policymakers, international governmental organisations, NGOs, civil society organizations and private sector actors to develop innovative solutions to wicked problems.



ADVOCACY: Raising public awareness about wicked problems and their impact on society, advocating for change and promoting social justice.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

This project has three main objectives:



TO INCREASE UNDERSTANDING OF WICKED PROBLEMS AND THEIR COMPLEXITY

It is crucial to raise our awareness and deepen our understanding of wicked problems and their characteristics, including their complexity, uncertainty and ambiguity. By applying a multidisciplinary approach in examining and discussing these problems, the project aims to promote a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of wicked problems, and to encourage more effective and innovative solutions to these challenges.



TO ENGAGE ACADEMICS, POLICY-MAKERS AND PRACTITIONERS IN THE EXAMINATION AND DISCUSSION OF WICKED PROBLEMS

By bringing together researchers and experts from diverse backgrounds, the project aims to promote cross-disciplinary collaboration and knowledge sharing, and to encourage new and innovative approaches to addressing wicked problems. The project aims to facilitate a broad discussion of wicked problems, one that takes into account the diverse perspectives and experiences of people from around the world. This approach will not only help to deepen our understanding of wicked problems but will also lead to the development of more effective and sustainable solutions to these challenges.



TO FURTHER DEVELOP THE PLATFORMS FOR SHARING AND DISSEMINATING RESEARCH ON WICKED PROBLEMS

By calling for submissions of articles, case studies and research papers, the project aims to foster a community of researchers and practitioners who are committed to addressing wicked problems. The platforms will also provide an opportunity for participants to showcase their research and findings, and to contribute to ongoing efforts to address these critical challenges.

PROJECT COMPONENTS

This project will have three main components:



CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS OF ARTICLES AND RESEARCH PAPERS

The project will issue a call for submissions of articles, case studies and research papers on wicked problems, open to both students and academics. These submissions will be peer-reviewed and published on the ISRM website and through a dedicated CSWP Journal.



ONLINE FORUM AND DISCUSSION GROUP

To facilitate ongoing conversations and knowledge sharing among participants, the project will establish an online forum or discussion group. This forum is already available to members of the ISRM and ISRM Student Network. This will provide a space for researchers and practitioners to share ideas, ask questions and discuss their work.



ISRM CONFERENCES ON WICKED PROBLEMS

Finally, the project will involve a series of on-going conferences to showcase the research and findings from the project. These events will be run in partnership with our global network of academic, research and policy institutions, and will create a dynamic framework where wicked problem issues can be discussed from both a global and a regionally-contextual perspective.





ISRM CSWP JOURNAL & CONFERENCE

INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC RISK MANAGEMENT ONLINE JOURNAL

The ISRM Online Journal will be a platform for publishing cutting-edge research and insights on all aspects strategic risk and crisis management as discussed through the lens of wicked problems perspective.

The Journal is planned to be published twice a year – in June and December. By showcasing the latest thinking from academics, researchers, and practitioners around the world, the journal will help to position the ISRM CSWP as a leading authority in the field.

ANNUAL ISRM CSWP CONFERENCE

The conference will bring together leading thinkers and experts from around the world to share their latest research and insights on strategic risk and crisis management from a wicked problems perspective. The conference will feature keynote speakers, panel discussions, and networking opportunities, and will be open to academics, researchers, practitioners and students.

Our goal is to make the ISRM CSWP Research Conference the premier event of its kind in the field, and to further cement the ISRM's reputation as a global leader in strategic risk management.

ABOUT THE ISRM

ISRM

The ISRM was established in 2019 in order to create a global centre where practitioners, academics and policy makers can come together to share information, help progress and promote the underlying understanding and capabilities associated with strategic risk and crisis management, and develop their own personal and professional networks.

It currently has over 30 International Chapters, and works closely with some of the largest organisations in the world.



Australia
Queensland, Western Australia,
New South Wales, ACT, Victoria,
South Australia

Caribbean
Antigua

Egypt

Germany

India

Indonesia

Ireland

Israel

Malaysia

Mediterranean

New Zealand

Nigeria

Philippines

Qatar

Saudi Arabia

SE Europe
Balkan States

Singapore

UAE / Dubai

UK

London, South West, Manchester

USA

Atlanta, Houston, Madison,
New York, Oklahoma City, Portland,
South California

OUR GLOBAL NETWORK

ISRM has developed a global network of academic, policy and research institutions operating in multiple sectors and from multiple perspectives.

This creates a living ecosphere of active practitioners, researchers and scholars who are already engaged in and collaborating on multiple programmes.

act:onaid



BOSSERMAN CENTER
for Conflict Resolution



THE CAPE TOWN
DROUGHT RESPONSE
LEARNING INITIATIVE



DCNAustria
Disaster Competence Network Austria



Global Resilience Institute
at Northeastern University



RSiS | S. RAJARATHNAM
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL
STUDIES
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore



UNIVERSITY OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE
at Cheltenham and Gloucester





VISIT CSWP WEBSITE

A square graphic with a white background and a grey border. It features a QR code in the center, with a stylized grey letter 'W' overlaid on it. Below the QR code, the text "VISIT CSWP WEBSITE" is written in a bold, sans-serif font.