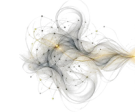


The Complexity Experiential



AIDEN M. A. THORNTON, PHD
COMPLEXITY | LEADERSHIP | TRUTH

A journey through the stages of hierarchical complexity

Overview

The Complexity Experiential is an immersive, one- or two-day learning experience designed to deepen leaders' engagement with complexity. Grounded in the Model of Hierarchical Complexity, the experiential takes leaders on a journey through different stages of hierarchical complexity while they collaboratively explore a real-world wicked issue.

Through a carefully designed sequence of activities, reflection, and dialogue, leaders gain conceptual insights into complexity while directly experiencing the demands of making sense of complexity at different stages. Along the way, they explore their potential complexity edges, examine the depth and breadth of their sensemaking, and discover how collective dynamics shape their capacity to make sense of complex challenges.

The Complexity Experiential provides a distinctive opportunity for leaders to challenge their habitual ways of thinking, expand their perspectives, and engage with complexity in ways that conventional leadership development rarely affords.

The Complexity Experiential is facilitated by Aiden M. A. Thornton, PhD, a leading expert in complexity leadership (aidenmathornton.com/#about).

The Problem

Approaches to introducing leaders to complexity often emphasise one of three dimensions: developing conceptual knowledge about complexity, helping leaders understand their complexity edges, or engaging leaders in experiential learning processes.

While each has value, they are rarely integrated into a single learning experience. As a result, leaders may develop an intellectual understanding of complexity without experiencing it, recognise their complexity edges without exploring how to move beyond them, or engage in experiential activities without understanding their deeper significance.

The Complexity Experiential addresses this fragmentation by bringing these dimensions together within a single, integrated learning experience centred on a real-world wicked issue.

Learning Outcomes

Through collaboratively making sense of a real-world wicked issue, leaders will have explored:

- What it feels like to operate at different stages of hierarchical complexity
- Their complexity edges, i.e., the points beyond which leaders struggle to extend their sensemaking
- The depth and breadth of their sensemaking
- The collective dynamics that emerge within the group and how these shape their ability to make sense of wicked issues

Illustrative Example of Experiential Design

Typically adapted to the unique needs of the cohort

Duration: 2 days (preferred) or 1 day (truncated version)

Audience: Middle leaders, senior leaders, executives, high-potential leaders

Format: In-person preferred, but can be delivered online over several modules

Number: Typically suits groups of 10–50 leaders

Price: Typically priced per head, with a sliding scale for NGOs, public sector, and private sector organisations

To discuss running a Complexity Experiential, please get in touch at

aidenmathornton.com/#contact

Sample Agenda

Prework

- Consultative conversations to identify the wicked issue(s) to be explored during the experiential
- Pre-reading on the Model of Hierarchical Complexity
- Reflective journaling in response to guided prompts
- Integrative Leadership Sensemaking Profile (ILSP) and individual debrief (optional)

During the Experiential (1–2 days)

- Expectations and framing
- Why complexity leadership matters
- Introduction to the Model of Hierarchical Complexity

Experiential exploration of hierarchical complexity:

Stages 8–10	Stage 11	Stage 12	Stages 13–14
Snapshots of Stage 8 (Primary), Stage 9 (Concrete), and Stage 10 (Abstract)	Deep dive into Stage 11 (Formal) and its transition steps	Deep dive into Stage 12 (Systematic) and its transition steps	Snapshots of Stage 13 (Metasystematic) and Stage 14 (Paradigmatic)

Interwoven throughout the exploration:

- Collaborative sensemaking of a real-world wicked issue
- Reflective exercises to explore participants' complexity edges
- Iterative cycles of sensemaking focused on depth, breadth, and collective dynamics
- Synthesis, collective sensemaking, and next steps

What Makes It Different

■ **Real work, not case studies:** Leaders work on real challenges that matter to them and their context(s).

■ **Based on cutting-edge thought leadership:** Conceptual tools, scientific research, practical application.

■ **Focus on sensemaking:** Focuses on how leaders think about complex leadership challenges, not just what they do.

■ **Multidimensional learning experience:** Combines conceptual insights into complexity, embodied experiences of different aspects of complexity, and insights into leaders' potential complexity edges.

■ **Grounded in the latest iteration of the Model of Hierarchical Complexity:** A mathematical theory of complexity that has been shown to predict a wide range of outcomes across the social sciences.