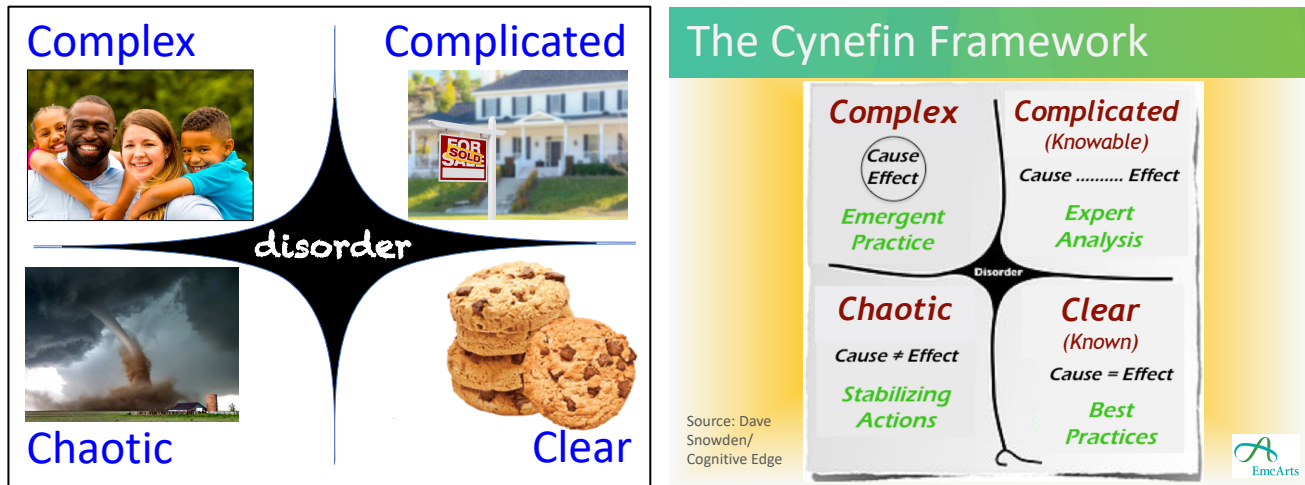


## THE CYNEFIN FRAMEWORK

(For more background, see 2007 HBR article by David Snowden and Mary Boone, *A Leader's Framework for Decision Making*)



Designed to assist leaders in identifying appropriate interventions in response to different challenges, the framework proposes **four primary contexts** that organizations have to work in:

- When the context is **Clear** (such as when we're baking a cookie), the relation between cause and effect is linear and tight; if we follow the recipe, we can be pretty sure of producing a good result. And doing it right once is highly predictive of future success. In this context, established *best practices* are what should guide us.
- When confronted by a **Complicated** challenge (such as selling a house), we recognize that the context is still ordered: cause and effect remain linear but are more distantly related. We need technical specialists, plus a good blueprint for the whole activity. With those, we can successfully address the challenge — using a lot of *technical assistance* to guide us along the way.
- But when we try to address **Complex** challenges (the familiar example is parenting), cause and effect circle each other, they are no longer in any kind of linear relationship — yesterday's solution doesn't work today, what works for one child doesn't for another, and often we're not sure what the problem even is . . . Unpredictability rules, established systems are in flux, and new patterns are struggling to form. In contexts like this, our most useful response is to *create the conditions for next practices to emerge*. This means probing, questioning, and experimenting to find the way forward. There's no formula, planning is of little use, and the relation between cause and effect is only discernible in retrospect.
- Occasionally, we may find ourselves facing challenges that are **Chaotic** in nature (such as losing a major organizational funder or experiencing a sudden severe weather event) — where there really may be no connection between cause and effect, and events appear random. In these situations, rapid stabilizing actions are called for to manage the chaos until some equilibrium can be regained.