

# Evaluation and complexity

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# Different types of systems

Let's watch a short [video](#) ...

- Dave will be talking about three types of systems – chaotic, ordered and complex.
- Pay close attention to the strategies he suggests using in each of these systems.



# Different types of systems

What are the general strategies employed in each situation?

In what system do you see your evaluation happening?

# Exercise

With your colleagues, quickly brainstorm about 10 different issues connected to your evaluations, write them on sticky notes

➤ Decisions, processes, methods, questions, struggles

## Examples:

- Calculating necessary sample size
- Travel booking
- Moderation of a multi-stakeholder workshop
- Ensuring evaluation results uptake
- Getting expenses refunded

# Cynefin

Not everything is complex!

## COMPLEX

- Repeated actions do not lead to same results
  - Evidence supports competing hypotheses
  - Constraints are shifting
  - Emergent practice
- 
- Everything can happen
  - No constraints
  - Novel practice



## ORDERED

- Multiple right answers to a problem
- Good practice



- The same action always leads to the same result.
- Solutions are either known or can be found through analysis or expertise.
- Options are constrained and constraints are fixed

- One right answer to a problem
- Best practice

## CHAOTIC

# Cynefin



# Exercise

Draw a Cynefin framework on a flipchart on your table and sort your sticky notes into the five domains!

Add these if you don't have 10:

- Calculating necessary sample size
- Travel booking
- Moderation of a multi-stakeholder workshop
- Ensuring evaluation results uptake
- Getting expenses refunded
- Measuring change in attitudes of people
- Terrorist attack in the evaluation area



# Some theory

Complex Adaptive Systems

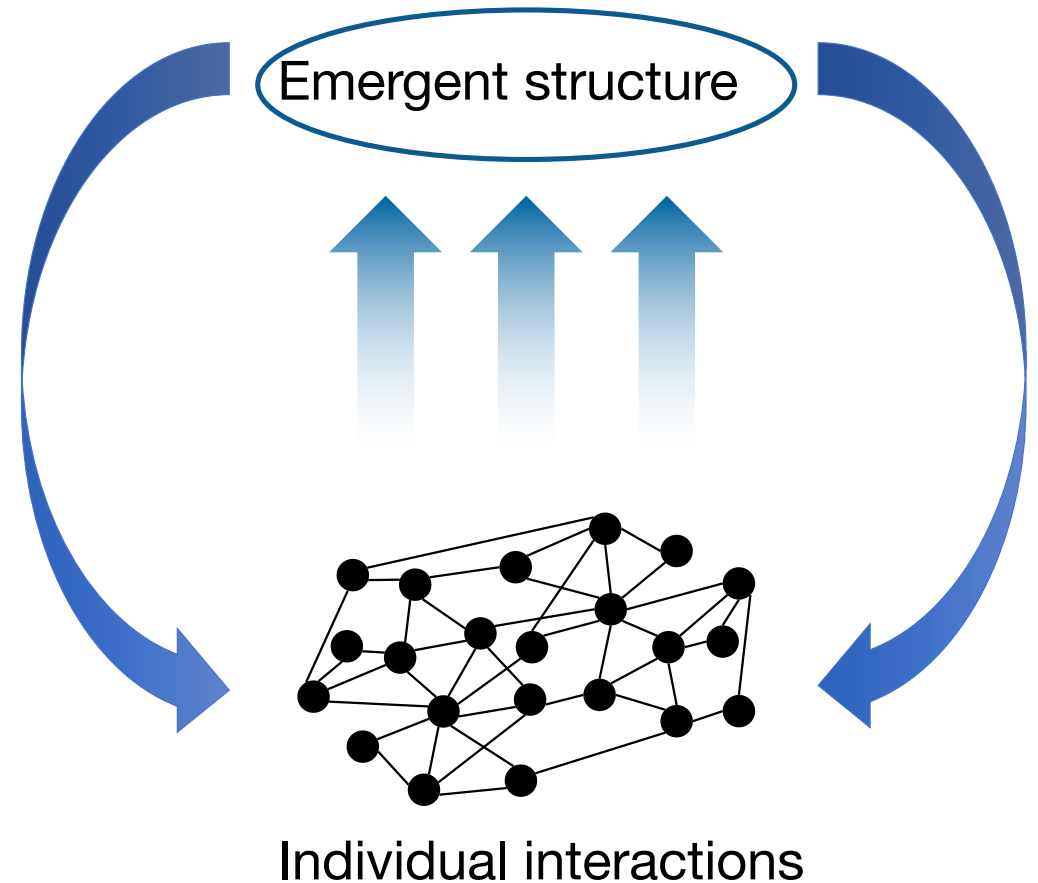
# Complex Adaptive Systems

- Large number of actors that interact dynamically
- Adaptive strategies
- Rich set of interactions leads to
  - high levels of interdependency
  - non-linear effects
  - feedback loops



# Emergence

- Two types of interdependency:
  - between individual agents
  - between agents and emergent structure
- Interdependencies create continuous dynamic adaptation



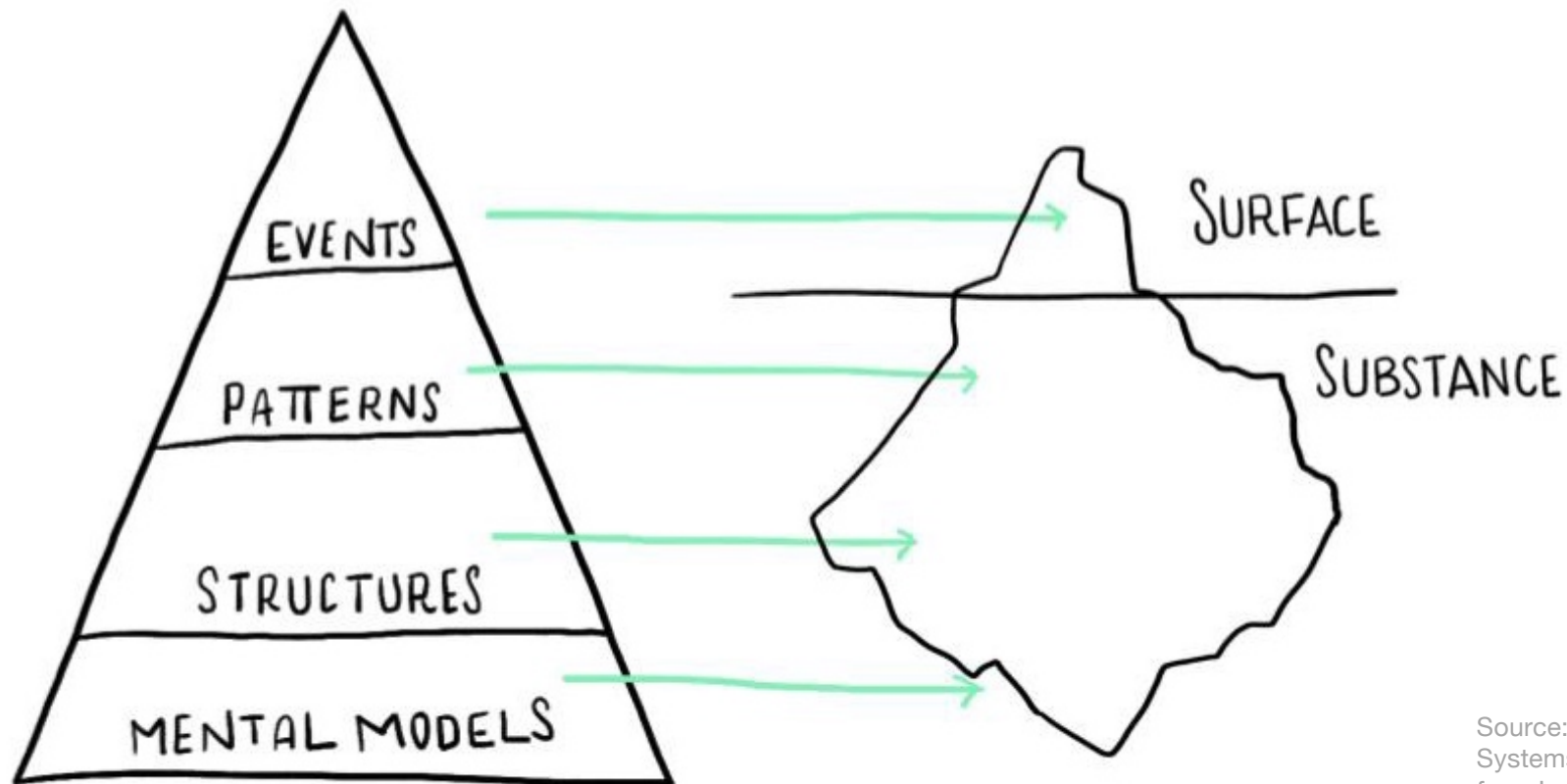
# A brief reflection

Think back to the community you grew up in ...

In reflection with your neighbour, answer these three questions:

- What are specific characteristics of that community that made the community that particular community and not any other? What made it unique?
- What things you did were enabled through the community and its uniqueness?
- What things you wanted to do were constrained by the community?

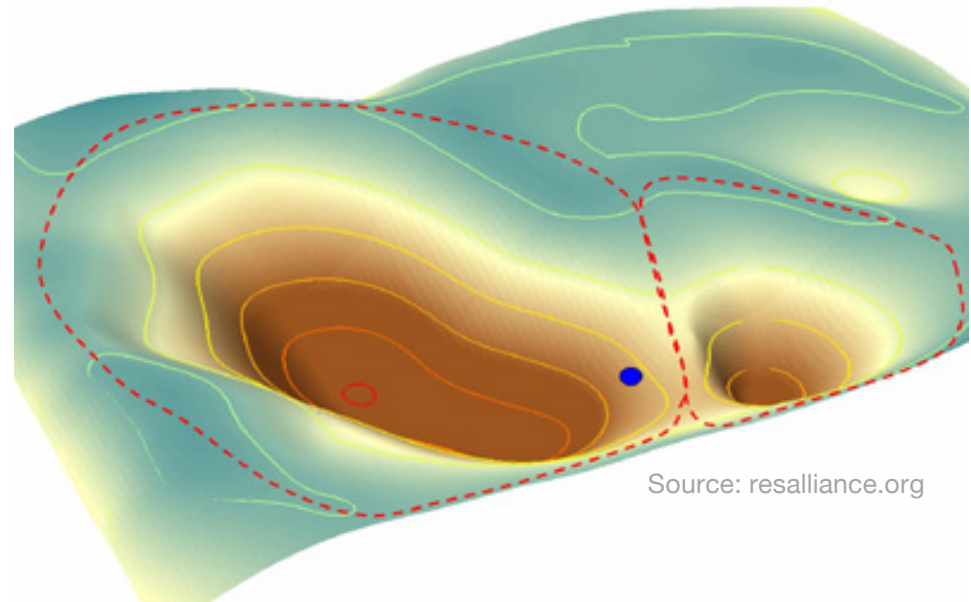
# Conceptualising complex systems



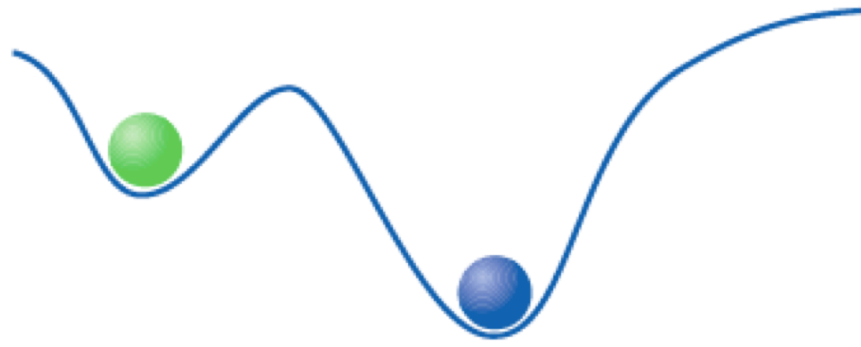
Source: Acaroglu, L. 2017. Tools for Systems Thinkers: 7 Steps to Move from Insights to Interventions.

# Dynamics in complex systems: attractors

- Embody a set of coherent values and beliefs
- Encode specific behavioural norms
- Modulate how new information is processed
- Define a systems' disposition



# A simple example



Source: Westley, F., et al. (2011)  
Tipping Toward Sustainability:  
Emerging Pathways of Transformation.  
Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences

# Constraints

- Constraints can be governing or enabling
- Define what is possible or perceived to be possible – or enable things to be possible
- Can be physical or social
- Define a system's propensities





# Causality in complex systems

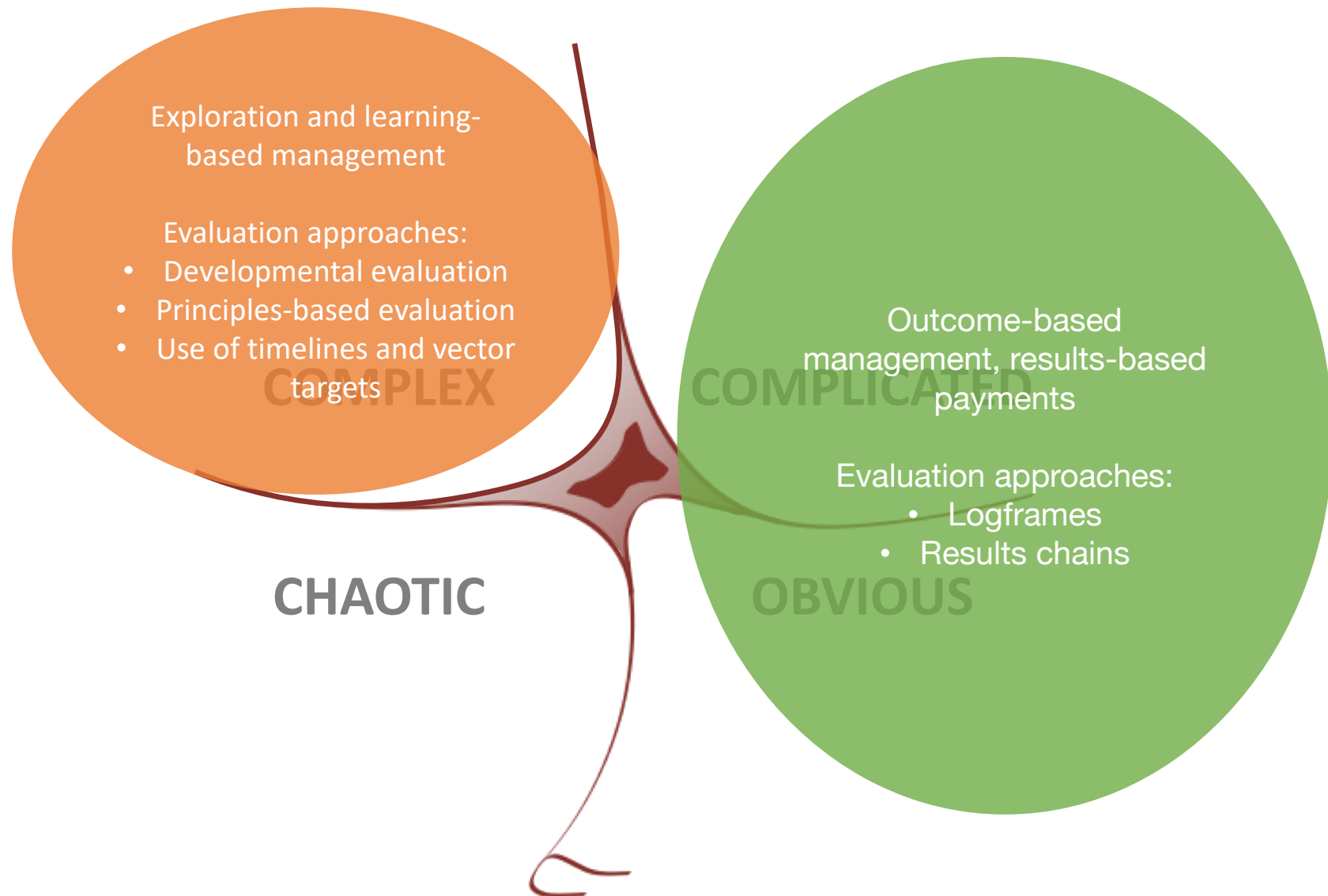
The structure of a CAS gives it a disposition and propensity for change

There is no predictable causality

BUT: there is retrospective coherence

# Discussion: Implications for Evaluation

- What does it mean for evaluation that behaviour in CAS is not predictable?
- What does it mean for evaluation that objectives and causality cannot be predefined in CAS?
- How can evaluations be designed to still deliver insights for implementers and funders?



# Thank you!

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