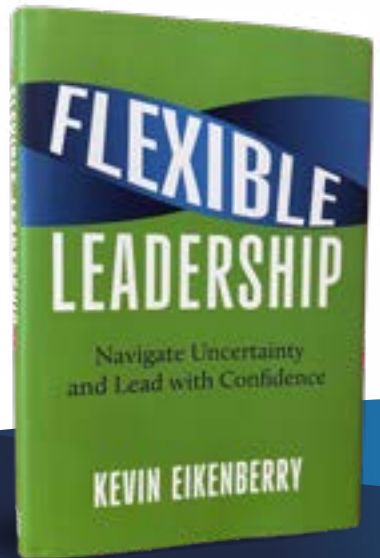


A Pocket Guide to **Understanding Context**



A PRODUCT OF THE KEVIN EIKENBERRY GROUP

Welcome to your pocket guide
to **understanding context**



A Pocket Guide to Understanding Context

To become a more Flexible Leader we need to understand the context of our situation. This digital pocket guide is meant to help you apply the ideas of the Cynefin Framework to a situation you are facing right now.

The better you understand the context of the situation you face, the smarter you will be – and the better choices you will make. That is the purpose of this Pocket Guide – to help you be a bit smarter.

There are more details in the full book, but after you have the larger context from the book (see what I did there?), this will help you diagnose your situation – and how you might best move forward with that insight.

I hope this Pocket Guide helps you lead more effectively and with greater confidence.

The Framework

UNORDERED

COMPLEX

- There are unknown unknowns
- Competing ideas and opinions exist
- Things are unpredictable and unstable
- Paradox and contradictions exist
- Need for ideas and innovation

ORDERED

COMPLICATED

- There are knowns and unknowns
- We can forecast or guess but it is hard to definitely know
- Experts are needed
- Situational analysis needed

CHAOTIC

- There are unknowables!
- High turbulence and tension
- No patterns seem to exist
- No time to think
- Many decisions to make . . . now

CLEAR

- The knowns are known
- Familiar and known patterns
- Wide agreement on cause and effect
- We have the facts and they are indisputable
- Obvious and agreed-on solutions

Finding Your Context

As you are learning to use the framework to make sense of the context of your situation, follow this approach.

1. Ordered or Unordered?

Ask these questions first:

- **Have you seen this situation before or do you have any relevant experience?** If so, the system is ordered and you are likely on the right side of the framework.
- **Does the situation look novel or unlike anything you have seen before?** If so, the system is unordered and you can likely start on the left side of the map.

2. Which Context?

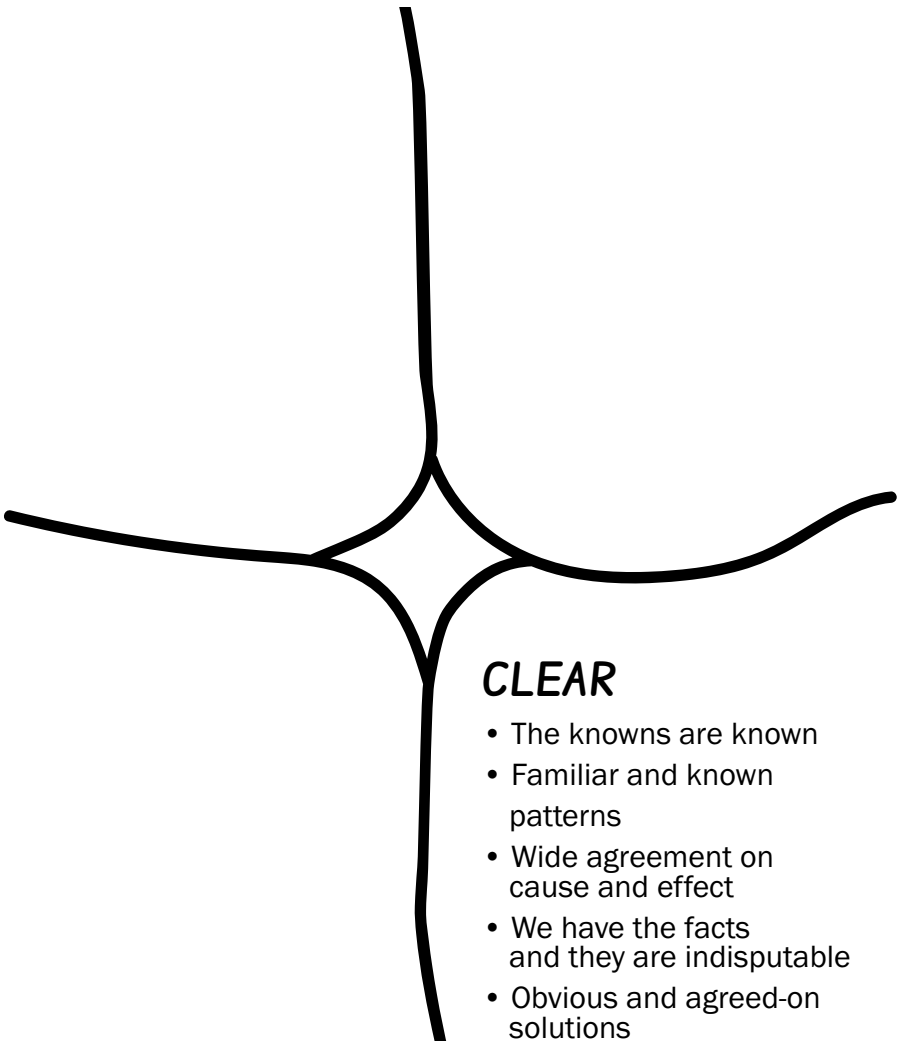
Next read the descriptions on the right or left side.

Which best describes our situation?

Knowing the Context, Now What?

Now that you know which context you are facing consider these:

When the Context is Clear



Suggestions:

- Create or follow best practices.
- Focus on replication of proven methods.
- Standardize processes.
- Create effective and clear documentation.
- Communicate clearly.
- Delegate or share responsibility.

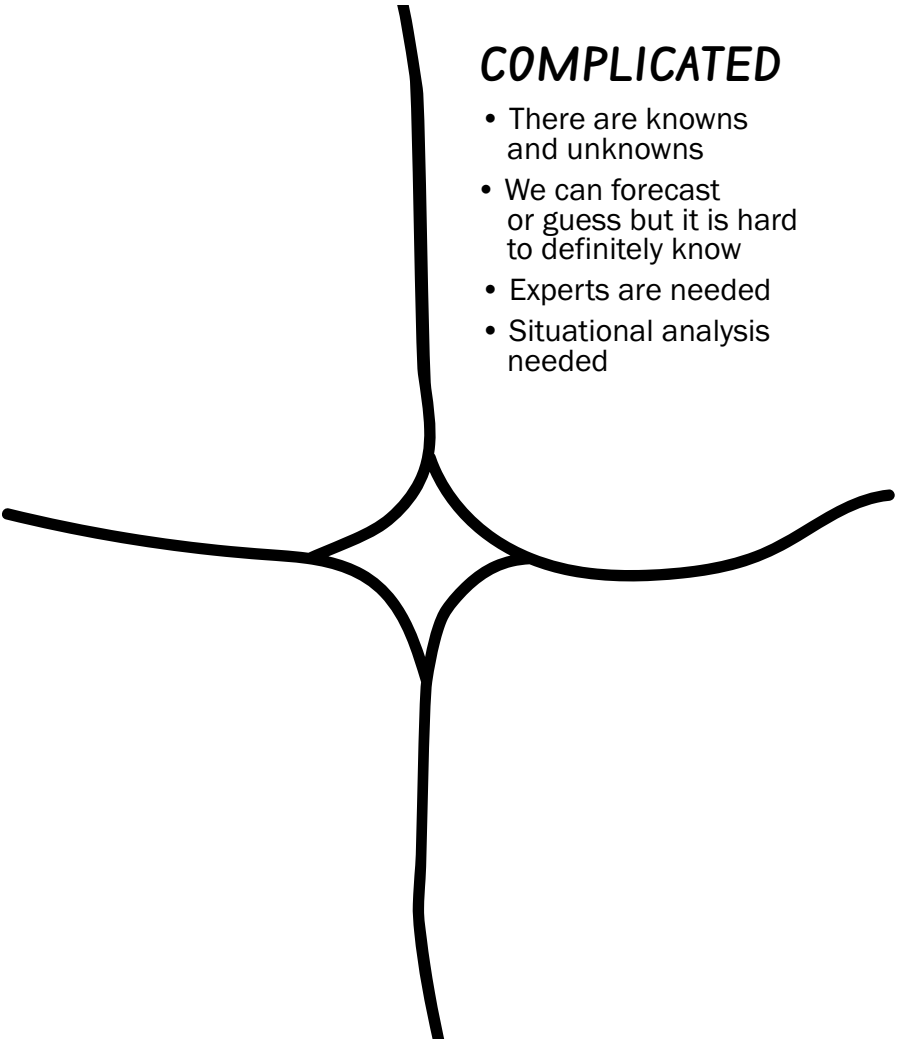
Beware of . . .

- Complacency or too much sense of comfort.
- Ignoring dissenting voices—something might be changing that we aren't seeing.
- Not seeing warning signs of change.
- Treating current best practices as evergreen or eternal.
- Closed minds—of you or others in the system.

When the Context is Complicated

COMPLICATED

- There are knowns and unknowns
- We can forecast or guess but it is hard to definitely know
- Experts are needed
- Situational analysis needed



Suggestions:

- Determine experts to help analyze the situation (whether across the team/organization or externally).
- Create space and opportunity for others to share their thoughts and ideas.
- Based on analysis of the situation, consider more options.
- Listen (much) more carefully.
- Help people see the full context.
- Consider shared decision-making.

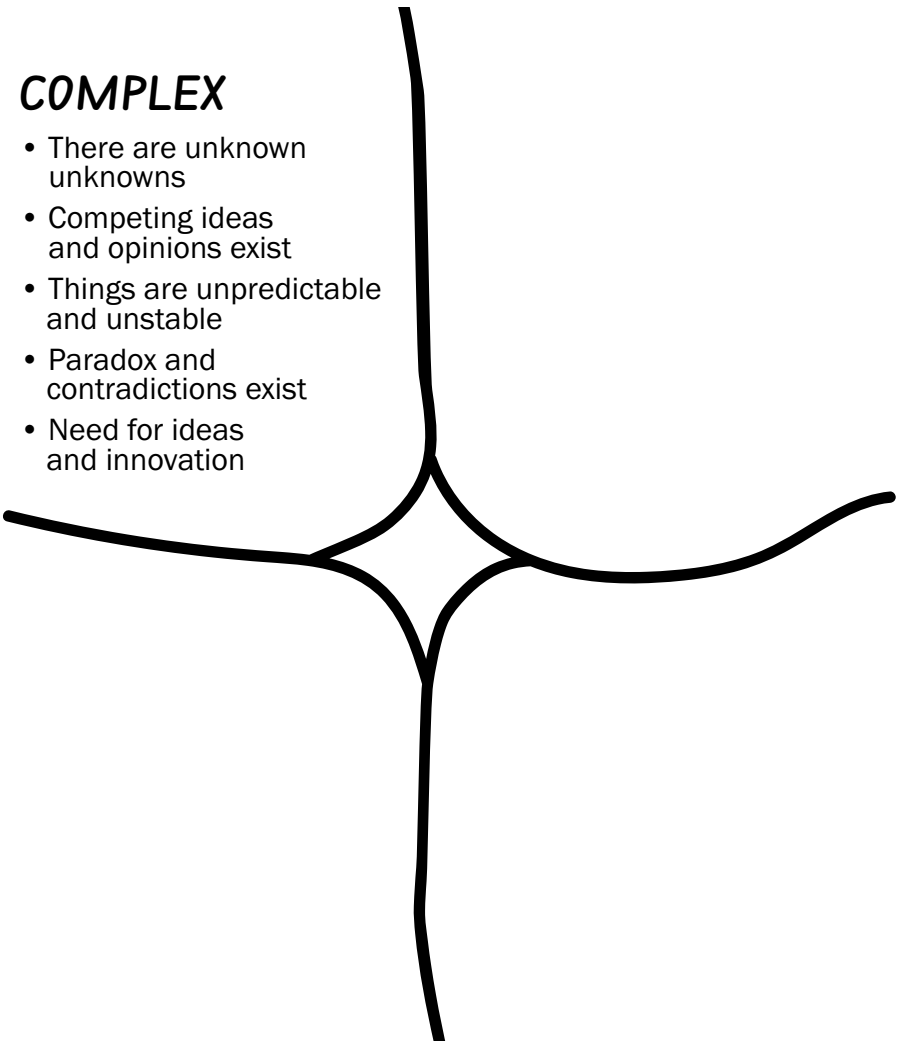
Beware of . . .

- Oversimplification
- Overconfident or dogmatic experts
- Blindly following expert opinions
- Not considering insights/ideas of “non-experts”
- Paralysis of (over) analysis

When the Context is Complex

COMPLEX

- There are unknown unknowns
- Competing ideas and opinions exist
- Things are unpredictable and unstable
- Paradox and contradictions exist
- Need for ideas and innovation



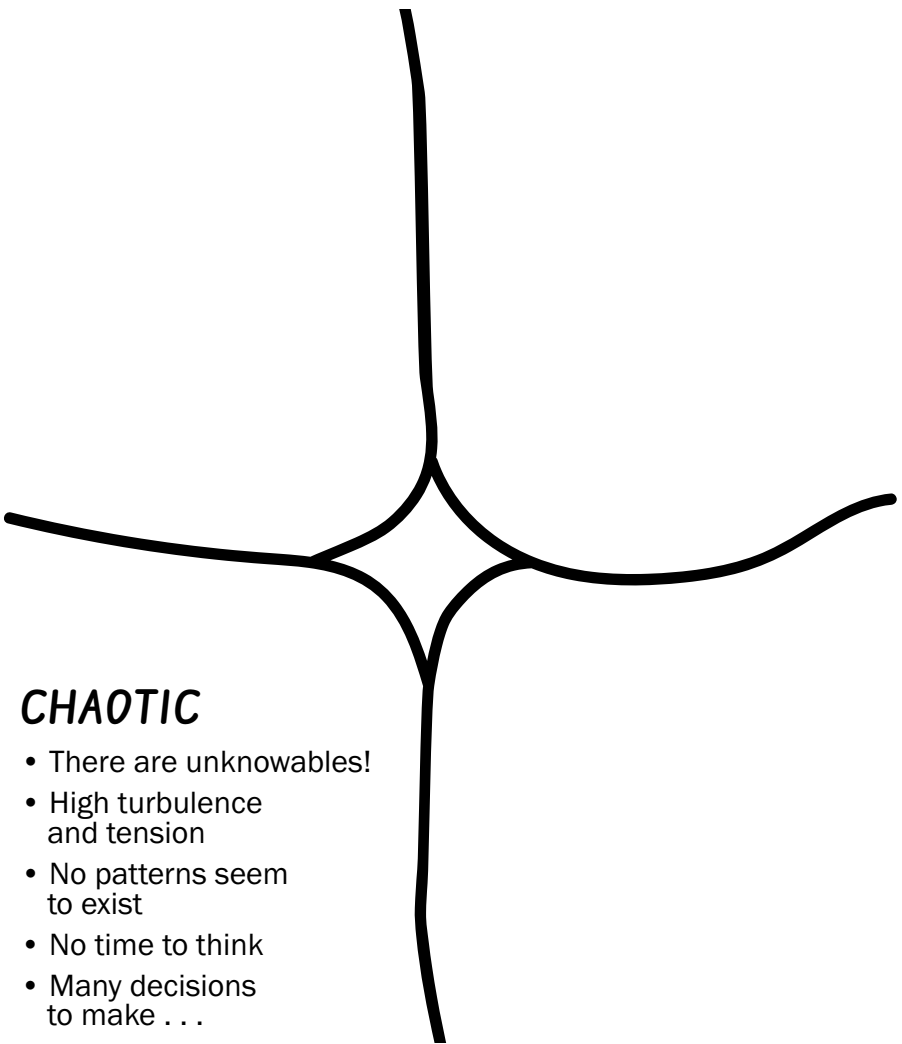
Suggestions:

- Look for a range of possible or plausible causes and solutions.
- Increase the level of communication and exploration.
- Rely less on past expertise and more on diversity of thought and perspectives.
- Keep your mind and others' minds open longer.
- Consider pilots and experiments and lower-risk testing.
- Look for trends and patterns to emerge.

Beware of . . .

- The temptation to take over and decide.
- The desire to move too quickly.

When the Context is Chaotic



CHAOTIC

- There are unknowables!
- High turbulence and tension
- No patterns seem to exist
- No time to think
- Many decisions to make . . .

Suggestions:

- Try things and see what you learn.
- Act in a “command and control” approach to leadership.
- Communicate clearly, directly, and quickly.
- Focus on getting out of Chaos and reassess context then.

Beware of . . .

- Staying in “command and control” too long (when the situation is no longer chaotic).
- Missing the chance for innovation as you stay with “one-off” actions.
- Feeling you are indispensable.

Get Started!

This guide should help you assess the context you are in with far greater confidence. Remember that getting the context right sets the table for you to be able to flex your approach to meet the needs of the situation.

A group of business professionals in a meeting. In the foreground, a woman with dark hair is seen from the back, looking towards the right. Behind her, a man with short brown hair is smiling and looking towards the right. To the left, a woman with dark hair is smiling. In the background, a man with short brown hair is looking towards the right. The image is a close-up shot of a group of people in a meeting, with a focus on their expressions and interactions. The text is overlaid on the image in a large, white, sans-serif font.

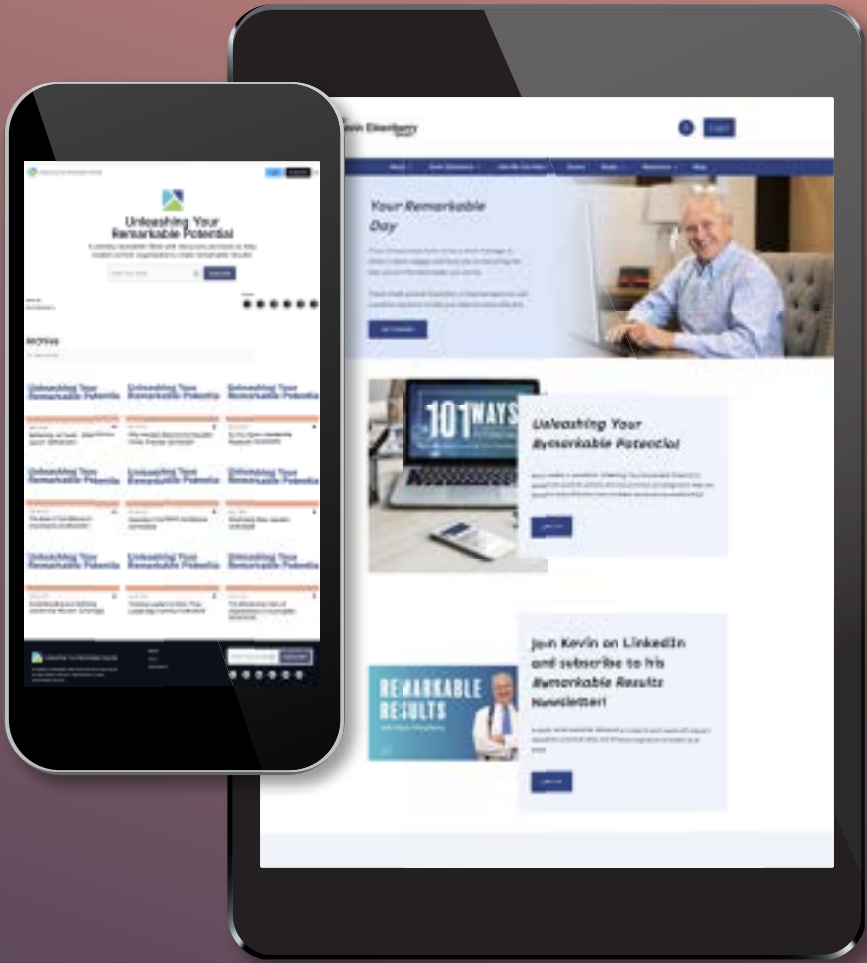
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