

# Institutional Learning: Can research provide the necessary critical reflection?

*IAC-Wageningen*

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# Why Institutional Learning?

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-What are Institutions?

-What is Institutional Learning?

-How can research support Institutional Learning?

# Institutional Learning is to address

## “wicked problems:”

- Complex interconnected biophysical and social factors
- Uncertain consequences
- Causes and effects and costs and benefits separated over space and time
- Multiple stakeholders at different scales
- Issues are value laden
- Powerful vested interests
- Coordination across political boundaries
- Action is required at multiple scales

# Between Free Markets and Big Government

Let the  
Market  
Rule

Government  
will solve  
everyone's  
problems

Interactive  
Strategies for  
Governance

Ideas about  
complexity, social  
construction of  
knowledge,  
democratic rights  
and **institutional  
transformation**

Ideas about the  
supremacy of  
science, 'experts'  
and technical  
solutions

Ideas about  
selfish  
'human  
nature'

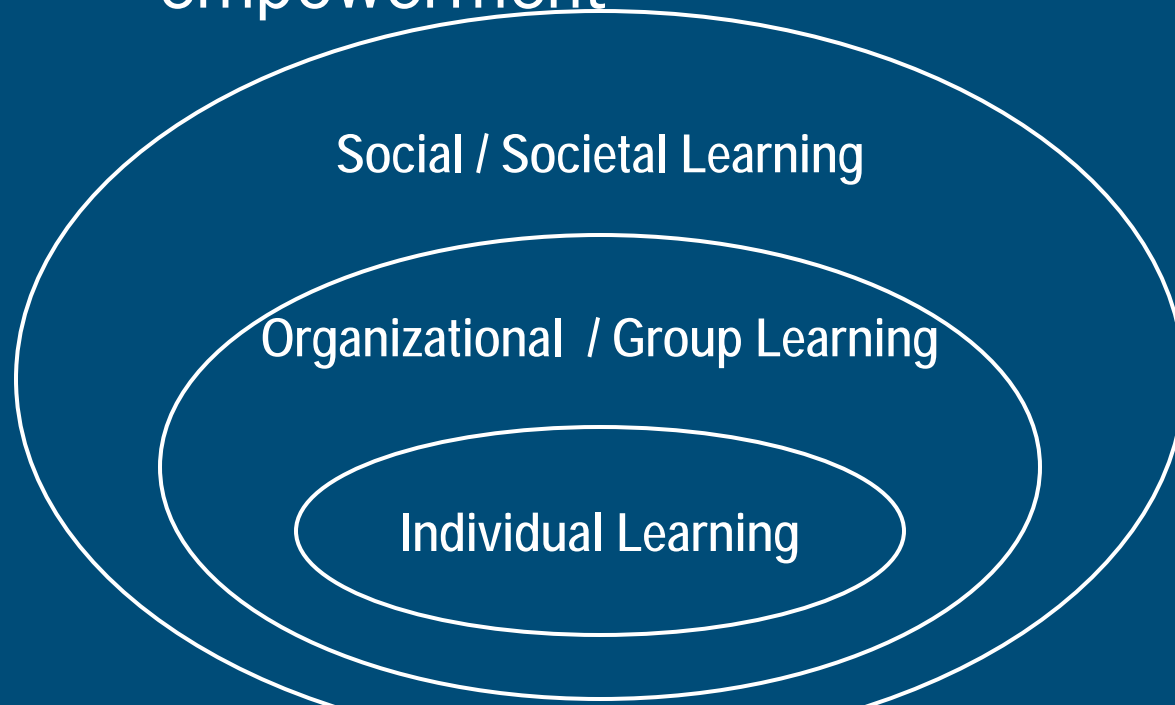
*Economic  
(strategic)*

*Interactive  
(communicative)*

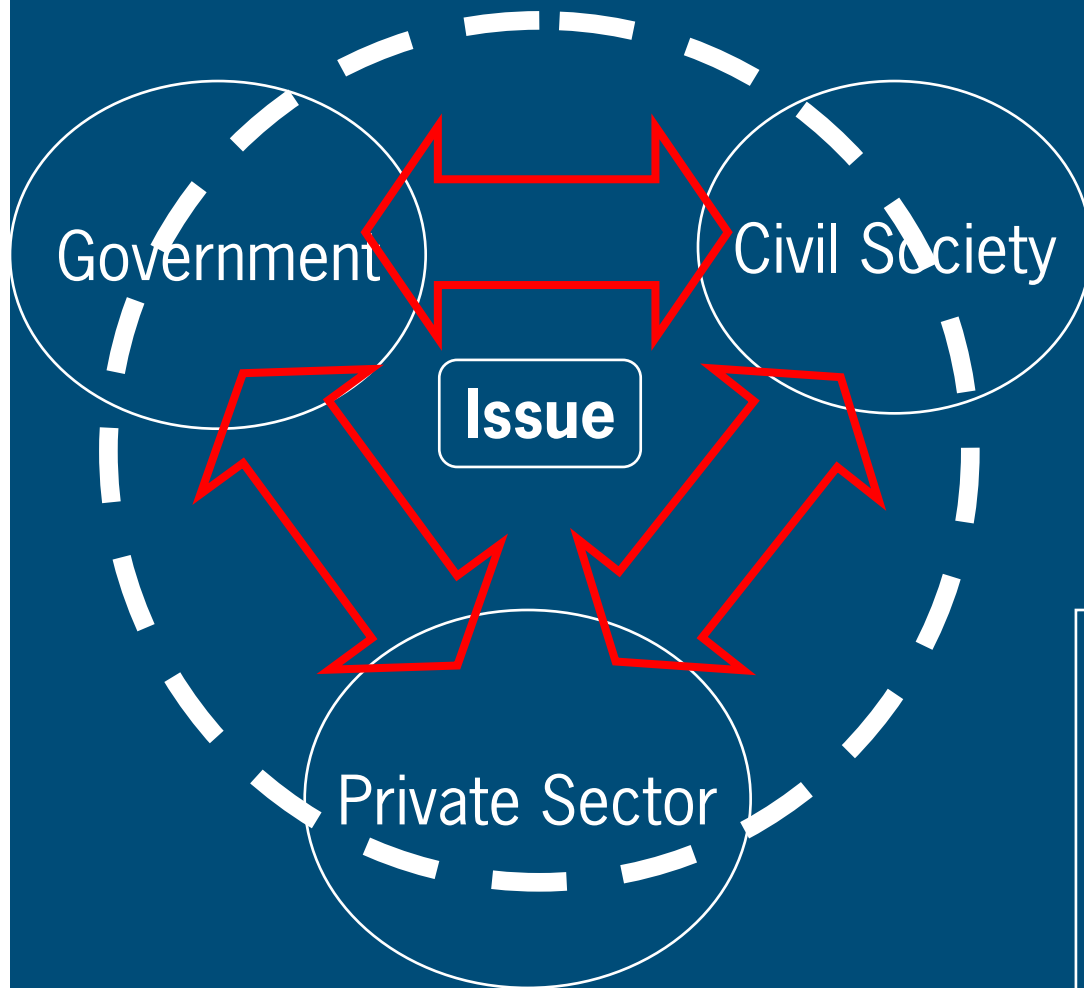
*Technical  
(instrumental)*

# Social / Societal Learning

- Social Learning / Societal Learning = facilitated social (institutional) change based on collective learning processes, democratic participation and empowerment



# Institutional Learning is critical to address Wicked Problems



## *Societal goals:*

- Social equity
- Economic growth
- Environmental sustainability

# Dealing with the issues requires Institutional Learning

*Institutions are by definition stable entities in society*

*Our institutions do not change as quick as developments  
require*

*Therefore we need to learn about institutional learning*

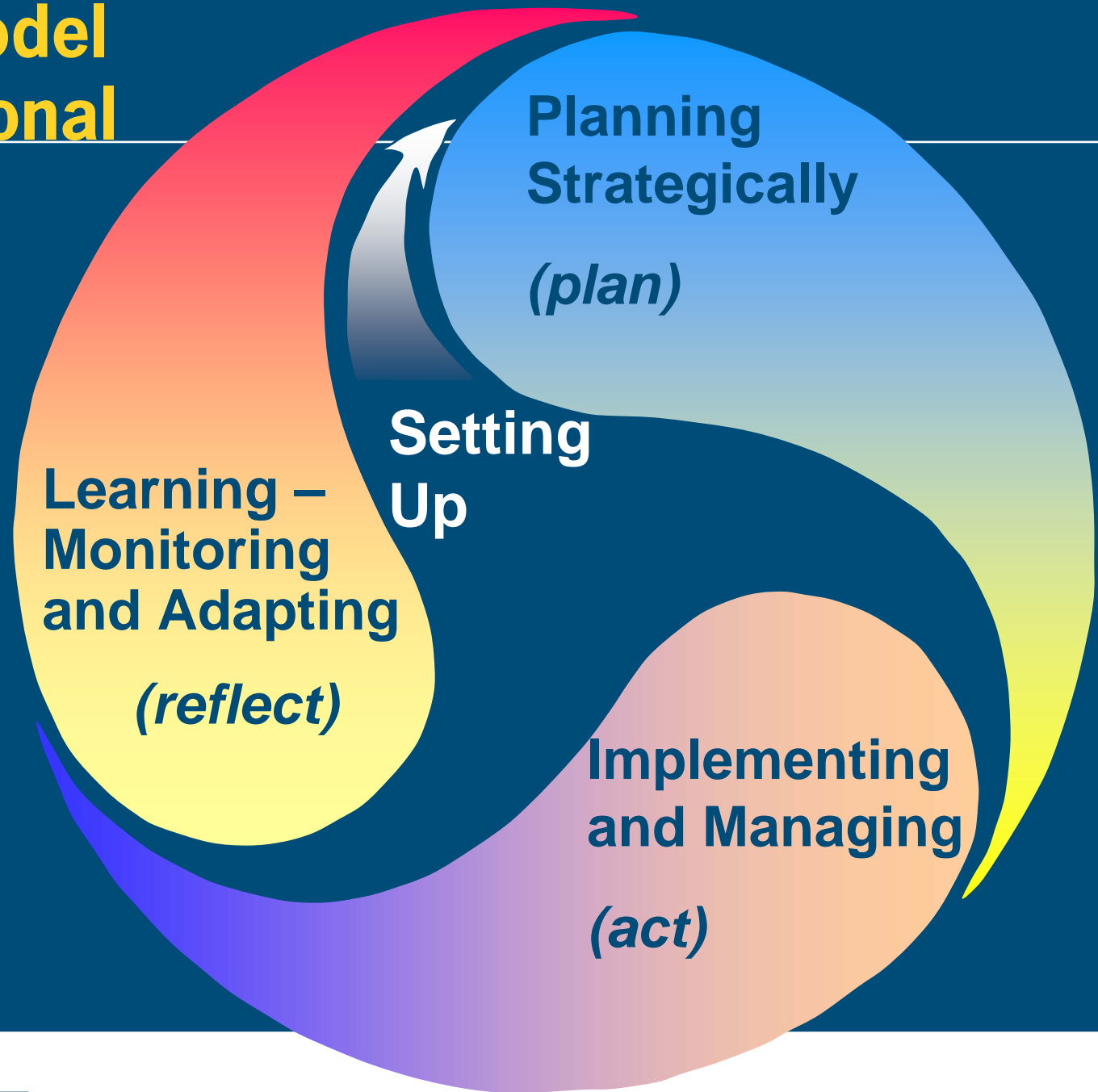
*Institutional change is poorly understood – so we need  
research support*

# Institutions and Technology

- Many Institutional dilemmas
  - Natural resources and market mechanisms
  - Equitable property and resource rights
  - Legal issues
  - Cultural attitudes
  - Role of knowledge institutions
  - Functioning of public institutions
  - Power and influence of the corporate sector
- But ...
- Modern societies capacity is highly focused towards technological innovation and development not institutional innovation
- This equals a crisis in governance



# Process Model for Institutional Change

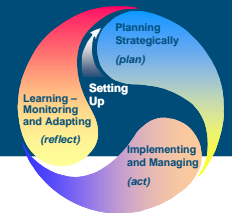


# Role of researcher in the Institutional Learning Process

- The researcher can assume a role in any position
- Obvious research roles overlap with facilitation roles in the process
- **Typical researcher's roles** (where conceptual understanding is critical):

# Learning - monitoring and adapting

- Create a learning culture and environment
- Define success criteria (performance questions and indicators)
- Develop and implement monitoring mechanisms
- Review and evaluate progress and **identify lessons**
- Feed lessons learned back into strategies and implementation procedures





- Clarify the reasons for an MSP
- Undertake initial situation analysis (stakeholders, issues, institutions, power and politics)
- Establish an interim steering body
- Build stakeholder support
- Establish the scope, mandate and stakeholder expectations
- **Outline the process**, time frame, **institutional requirements** and resources needs

*Throughout: learning – monitoring and adapting*



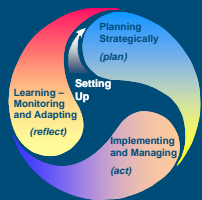
# Setting Up



# Planning Strategically

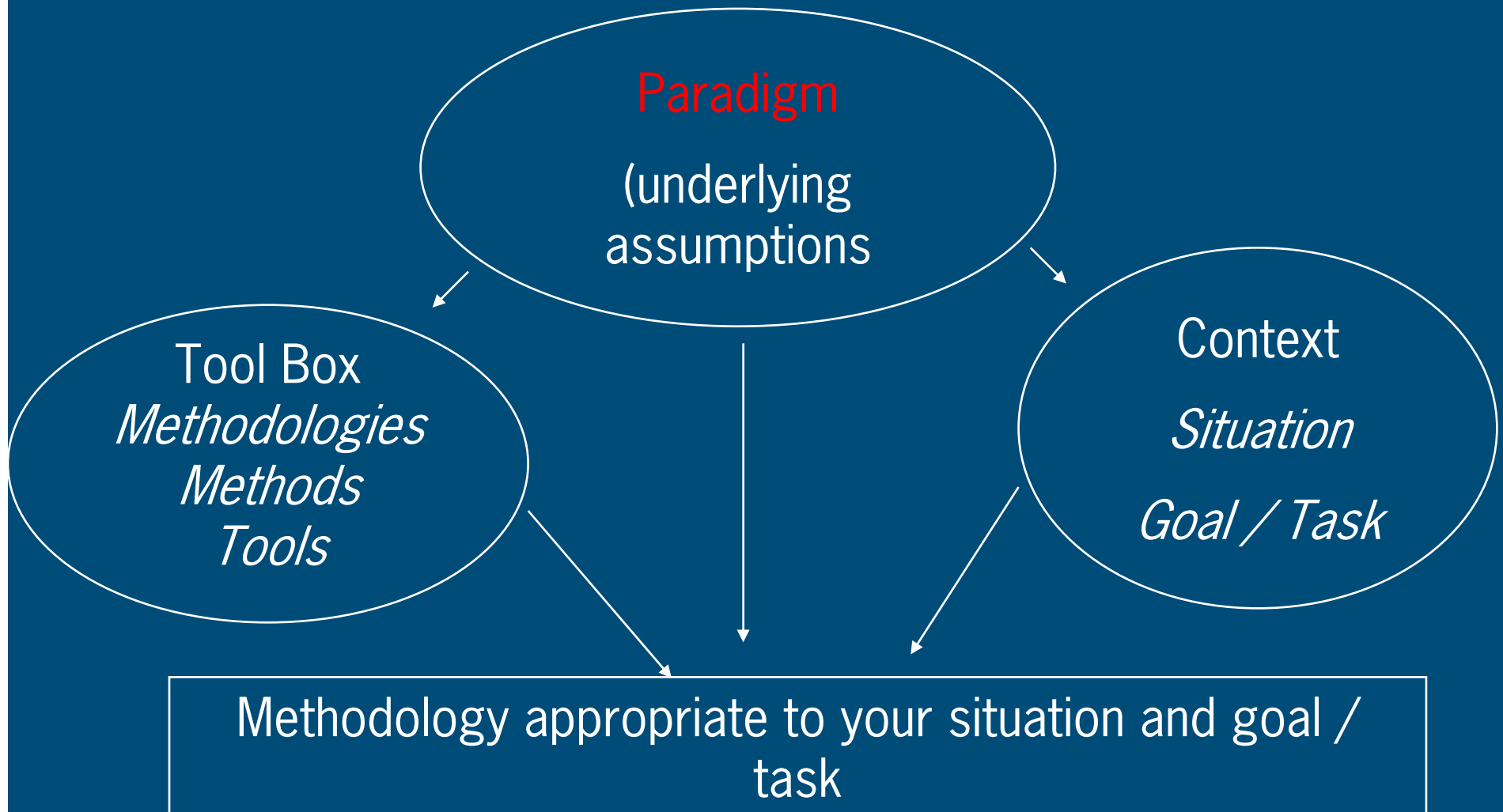
- Build stakeholders **understanding of each other's values, motivations, concerns and interests**
- Generate visions for the future
- Identify issues, problems and opportunities
- Examine future scenarios and feasible options
- Make decisions and agree on key strategies
- Set objectives and identify actions, timeframes and responsibilities
- Document and communicate planning outcomes

- Develop integrated initiatives and detailed action plans
- Secure resources and technical support
- Develop capacity of stakeholders
- Establish required management structures and procedures
- Manage the implementation process
- Maintain stakeholder commitment
- Identify “black cats in the dark”

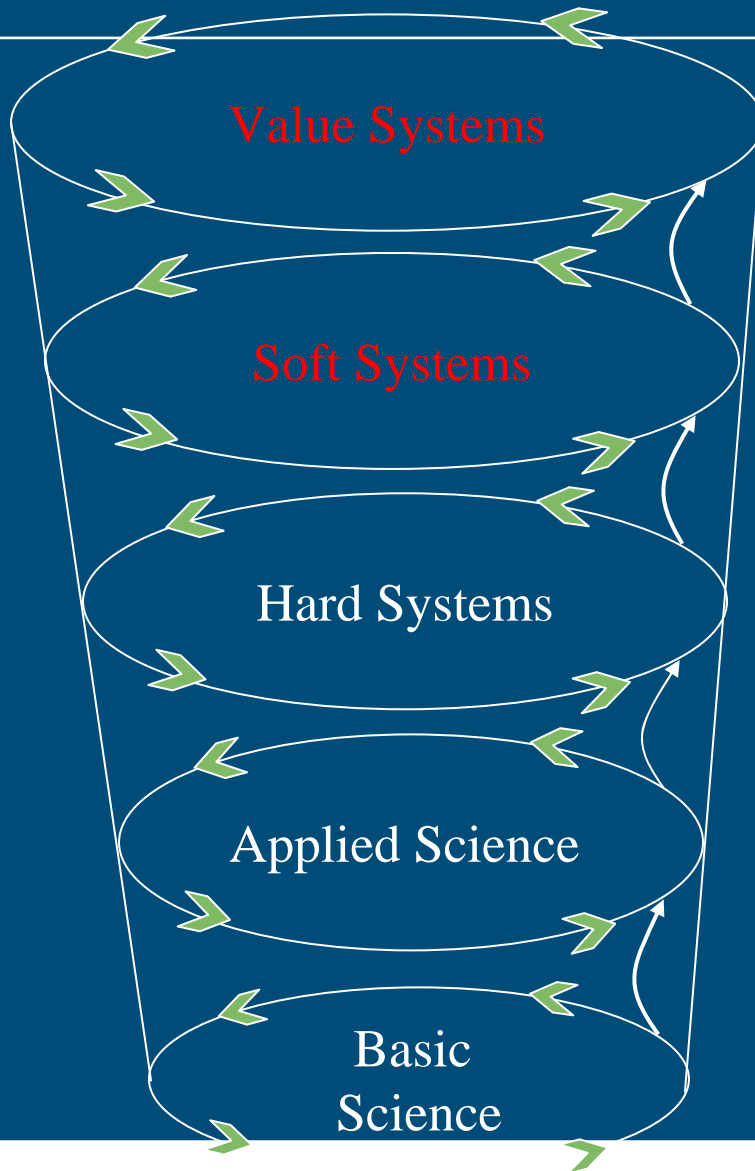


**Implementing &  
Managing**

# Designing an Institutional Learning Process



# The Hawkesbury Cycle



Value Systems

Why - moral, ethical and spiritual



Soft Systems

How social change

Hard Systems

How complex technology

Applied Science

How simple technology

Basic  
Science

Why specific phenomena



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# Understanding institutional change requires research capacity engaged in real-life processes

- To detect “black cats in the dark forest” – institutional barriers that practitioners overlook or regard as standard problem (“corruption”)
- To appreciate institutional learning achievements – by documenting essential, but poorly visible barriers taken (such as change in values or administrative procedures)
- To test theoretical notions – e.g., constructivism, and refine them upon exposure to practice
- Researcher in committed or facilitation role