## What are wicked problems?

Throughout the semester we will be encountering wicked problems, or at the very least, the origins of such problems. "A wicked problem is a social or cultural problem that is difficult or impossible to solve for as many as four reasons: incomplete or contradictory knowledge, the number of people and opinions involved, the large economic burden, and the interconnected nature of these problems with other problems. Poverty is linked with education, nutrition with poverty, the economy with nutrition, and so on."[1]

Some characteristics of wicked problems:

1. Wicked problems are difficult to clearly define.

2. Wicked problems have many interdependencies and are often multi-causal.

3. Attempts to address wicked problems often lead to unforeseen consequences.

4. Wicked problems are socially complex.

5. Wicked problems hardly ever sit conveniently within the responsibility of any one organization.

6. Wicked problems involve changing behavior.

## Institutionalized Hierarchies – A Wicked Problem?

In today's collaborative activity your group will focus on the wicked problem of institutionalized hierarchies (dividing communities by gender, wealth, ethnicity, lineage, and power). Consider the following questions before you begin this activity: Are institutionalized hierarchies necessary for a civilization to thrive or can they be eliminated with no repercussion? What impact would the abolishment of institutional hierarchies have on other facets of society? Why might this ordering of human relationships be referred to as wicked problem?

**Activity Steps**

1. Review the socioeconomic and political factors gave rise to institutionalized hierarchies in the ancient world and consider examples of how they were manifested and enforced.

2. Identify examples of institutionalized hierarchies that exist in your community today. Compare and contrast these examples with those in the ancient world.

3. Using the visual system of nodes and linkages and interdisciplinary thinking, arrive at an outcome for addressing one institutionalized hierarchy in your community.

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[1] http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/wicked_problems_problems_worth_solving