

# Organisational learning through adaptive management

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# National parks are public assets

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- embedded in a dynamic social context constructed around beliefs, values and understandings
- we may all see the asset differently, at least partially, which often causes intrinsic tensions
- individuals and groups committed to their ideas may challenge governing assumptions, norms and values



# Complexity is SANParks' leading conservation value

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We respect the complexity, as well as the *richness* and *diversity* of the *socio-ecological system* making up each national park and the wider landscape and context



## Recognition of complexity implies use of adaptive management

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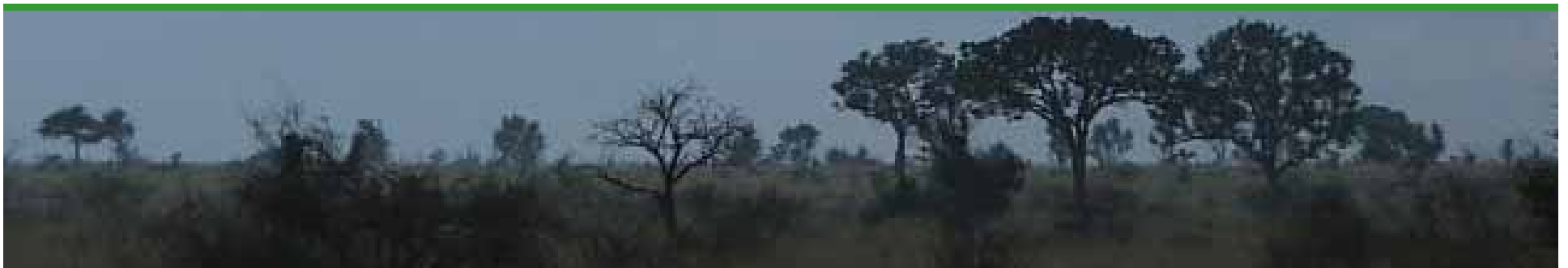
- Adaptive management : a human and organisational survival strategy emerging naturally as we sense and respond purposefully to change
- context in which change arises expands and grows in complexity as societies become more connected, inclusive and heterogeneous
- Thus more difficult to sense emergent issues and more necessary that we consider wider implications of our actions



## To enable and achieve purposive learning...

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- linkages must develop, or be facilitated to develop, between actors in the system
- actors are structured in *conceptually explicit 'societal patches'* analogous to spatially explicit 'ecosystem patches', together an interacting heterogeneous social-ecological system
- quality of trust characterising the inter-societal linkages in such a social web is a crucial factor in the success of collaboration in an adaptive model
- the "web" arises from *relational connectedness* and the levels of trust are reflected in *relational capital*



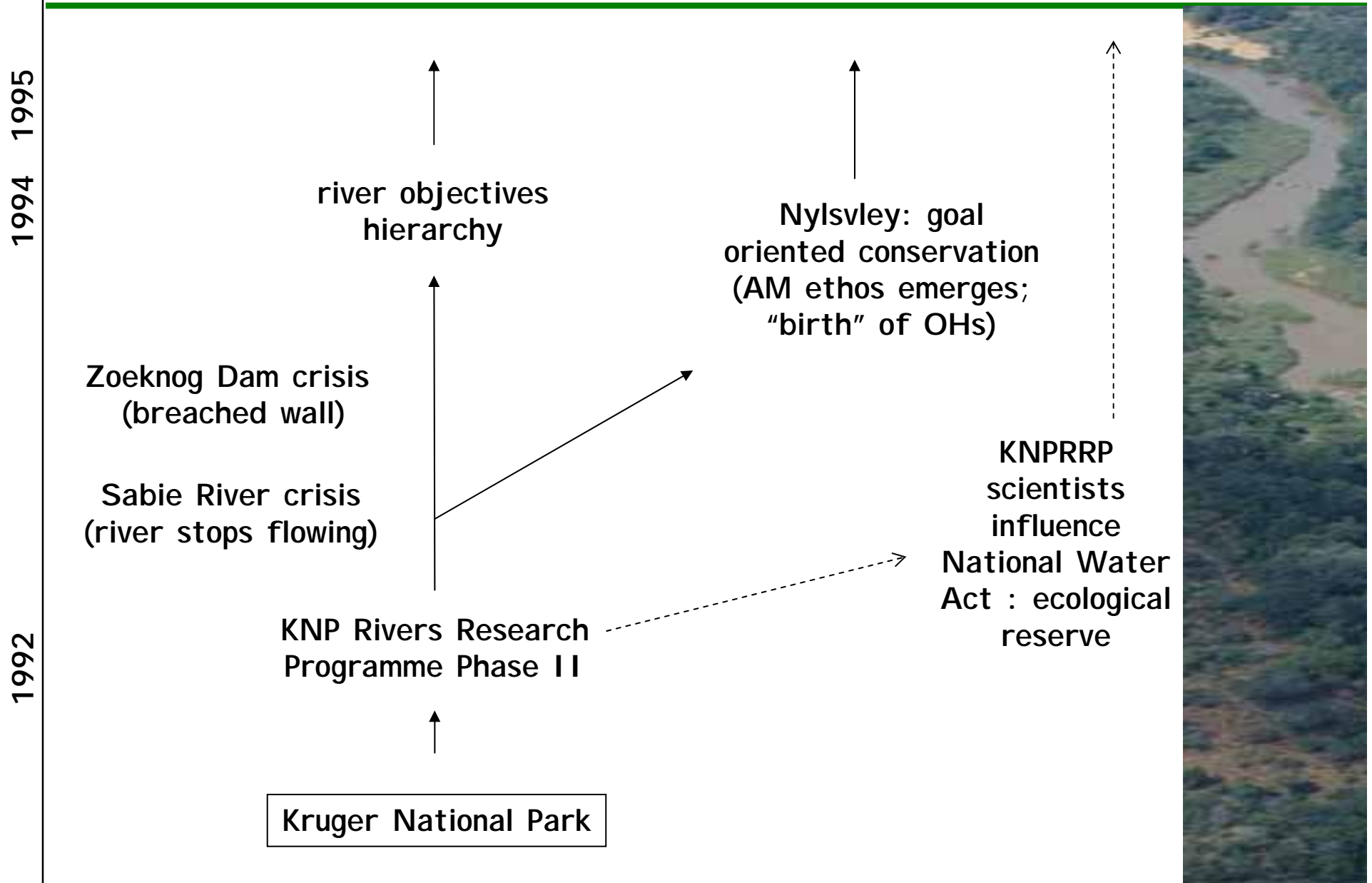
# Kruger National Park: the crucible for change

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- early 90s - close relationship and open communication between science and management; shared ethos
- exposed to trends and paradigm shifts in science through university-based researchers
- long-standing concerns around river health
- receptive to emerging concepts and approaches to managing change in complex social ecological systems



# Small beginnings, uncertainty and a shift from tactical to strategic management



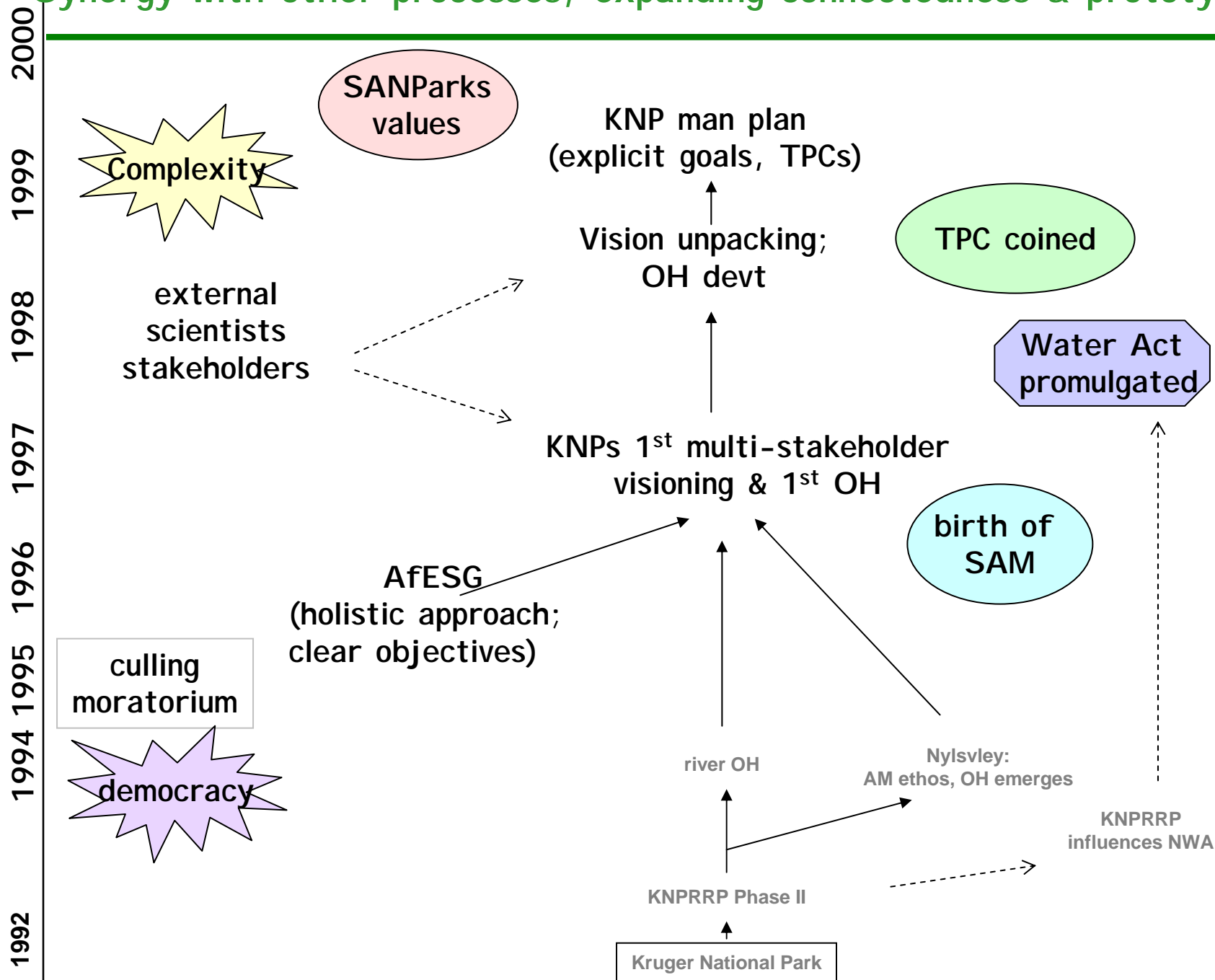
## Opportunity for institutionalizing AM created by:

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- growing appreciation of need for more holistic systems approach & necessity to accommodate change within social and ecological realms
- clear signs of a move towards adapting and responding to change
- possibility of wider and more open communication around water allocation
- communication supported by scientific rigor
- wider acceptance of notion that river flows needed to maintain aquatic/riparian systems, strongly promoted in ecological circles, could be quantified and implemented effectively
- existing and enabling science-management links in KNP



# Synergy with other processes, expanding connectedness & prototyping AM



## Small focused actions created synergy across processes and enabled opportunities to be grasped which then:

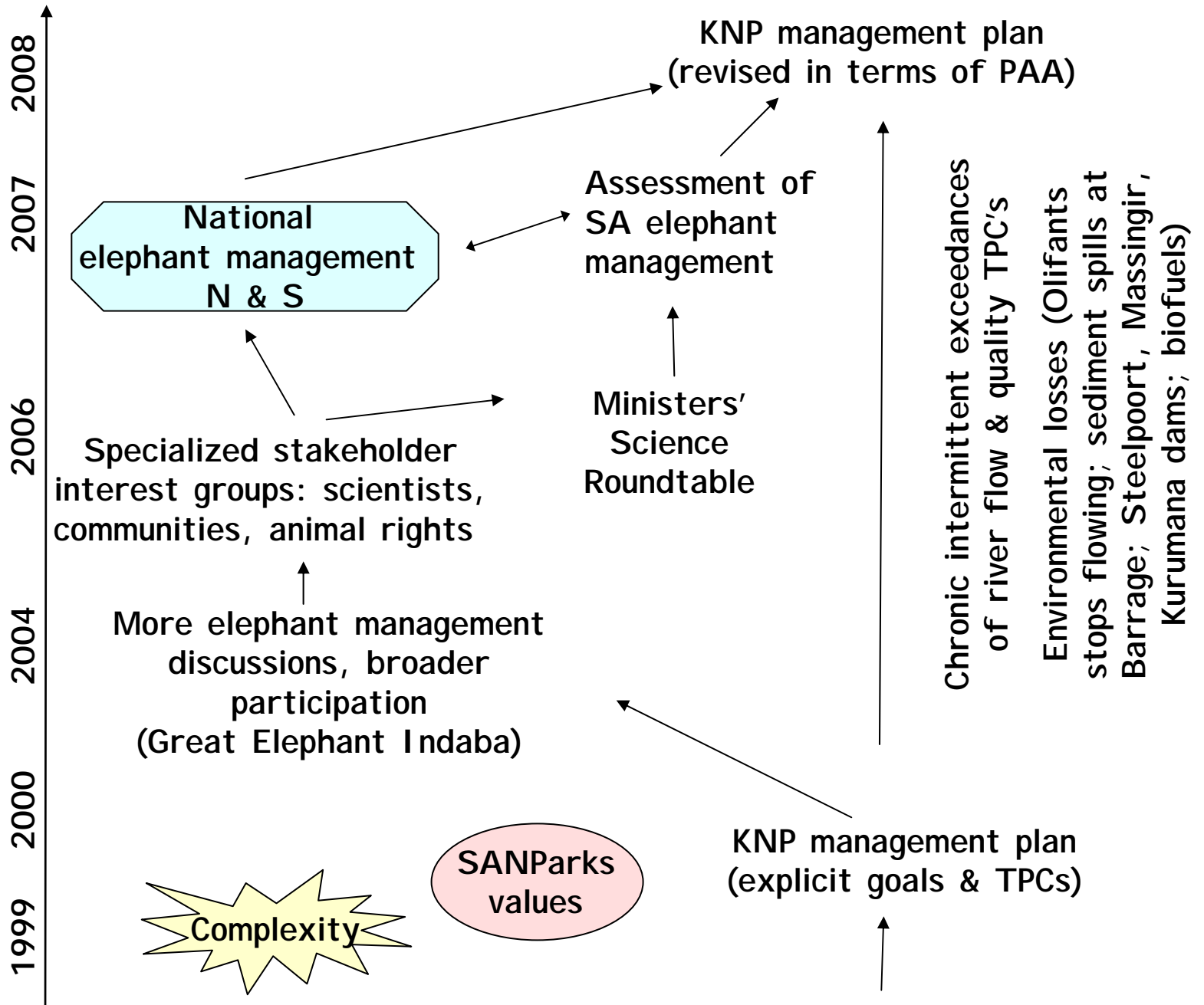
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- directed an upward connection between management and governance processes
- resulted in a change in social scale induced by active societal participation in the elephant management debate and by the changing political context in South Africa
- widened understanding of, and appreciation for, uncertainty that is inherent in conservation management
- helped actors recognize that conservation involved a dynamic interface between management and political imperatives

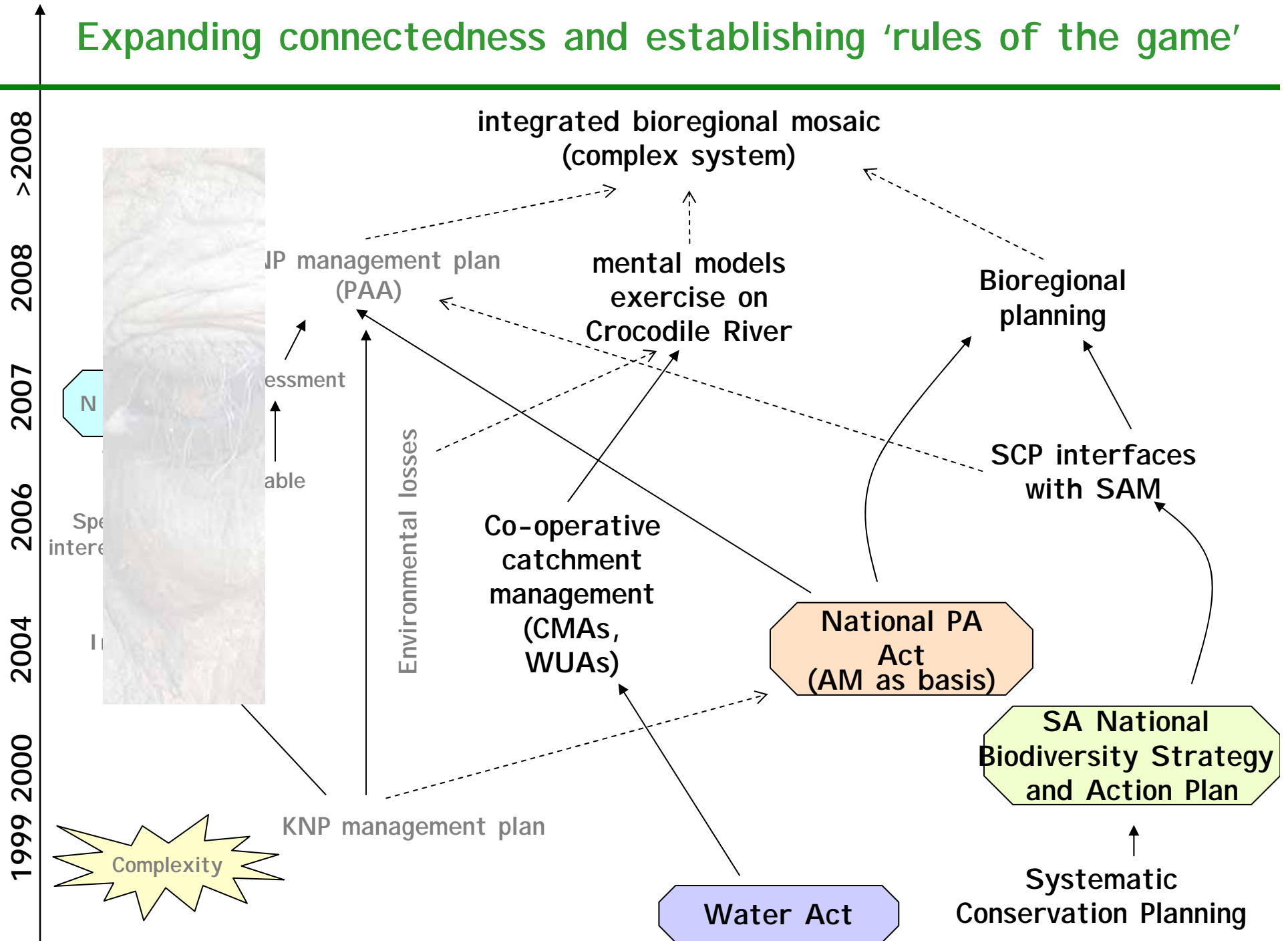
governance = rules of the game; management = way the game is played



# Expanding connectedness...

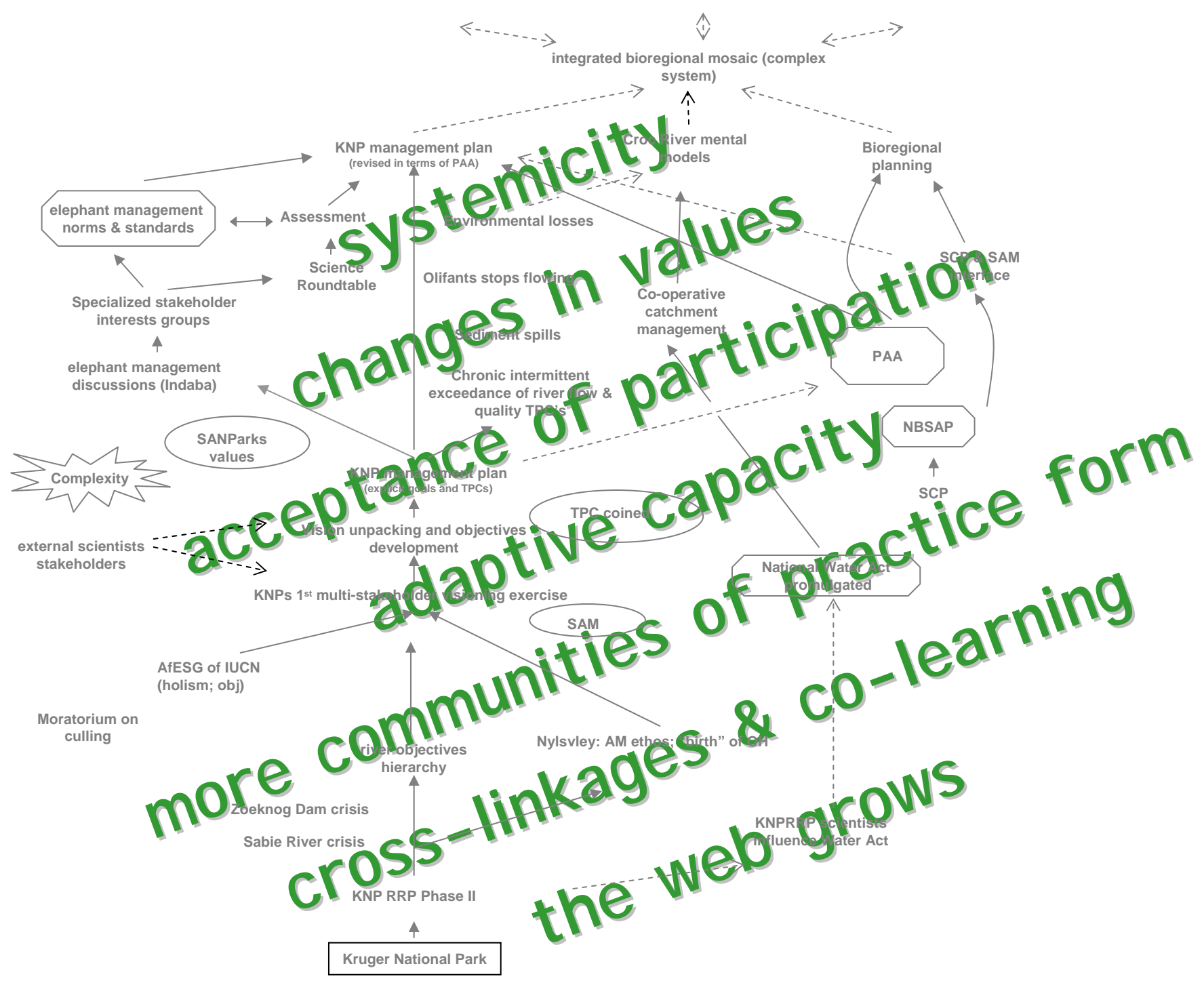


# Expanding connectedness and establishing 'rules of the game'



>2008

1992



systemicity

changes in values

acceptance of participation

more communities of practice form

cross-linkages & co-learning

the web grows

# SANParks' journey of adaptive management

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- organisational transformation to enable operation within an expanding and diversifying constituency
- used “crises” as learning opportunities
- growing organisational awareness of connectedness with associated feedbacks and lags
- recognition that the social system associated with protected areas exists in multiple states of relationships among stakeholders, reflecting how they perceive and choose to access and use



## Adaptive management requires acceptance that

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- paradox of resisting change and seeking change is confounded by separation of cause and effect in time and space
- must sometimes agree to disagree: anticipate that a large and heterogeneous conservation constituency will likely not always reach consensus



## Legitimacy as an outcome of AM

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- The dialogue process built into adaptive management brings understandings closer, but when consensus is not reached, the process still confers *legitimacy* on decisions, strategies and actions
- Decisions gain support because they are perceived to be legitimate. However, whether or not actors in a relationship support a decision also depends on relational capital, determined by among others, trust and commitment

governance = rules of the game; management = way the game is played



## AM: a purposive learning process

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involves 'unlearning' or 'letting go' of preconceived assumptions as we grapple with complexity and associated uncertainty

requires construction of relationships in a heterogenous social-ecological system

whether it meets expectations after institutionalization depends on

- committed leadership,
- individual and institutional *flexibility*
- *willingness to learn*
- *willingness to change*



Informal processes inadequate to deal with growing complexity

*Now face the paradox of formalizing a process in which we seek the informality that gives us freedom to experiment and learn by doing*



Thank-you