

Cynefin

Decision Making Framework

Shawn Stumme, August 5, 2020

Cynefin

Ku-nev-in

Welsh word - habitat or place

Signifies the multiple factors in our
environment and our experiences that
influence us in ways we don't understand

Developed by David Snowden



Framework

Not a model

A model tries to represent reality

Framework is a way of looking at reality



Categorization Frameworks

Categorization Frameworks - the framework proceeds the data

- Put the data in
- Fast to use
- Can lose subtle contexts
- Good for exploitation; not for exploration & change

Sense-making Frameworks

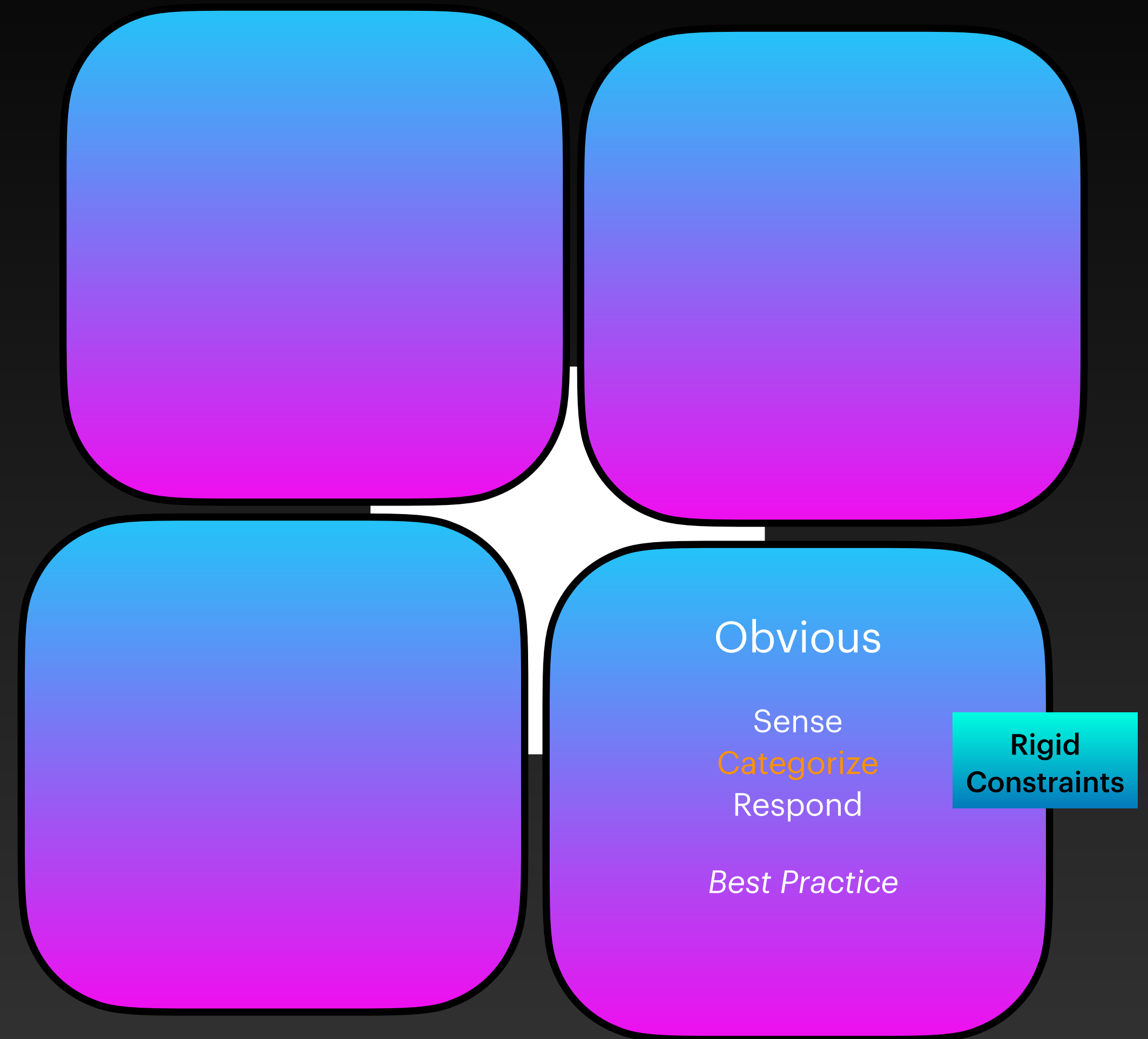
Sense-making framework - the data proceeds the framework

- Capture the data
- Patterns emerge from the data
- Provides context and awareness
- Good for non-trivial domains

Obvious

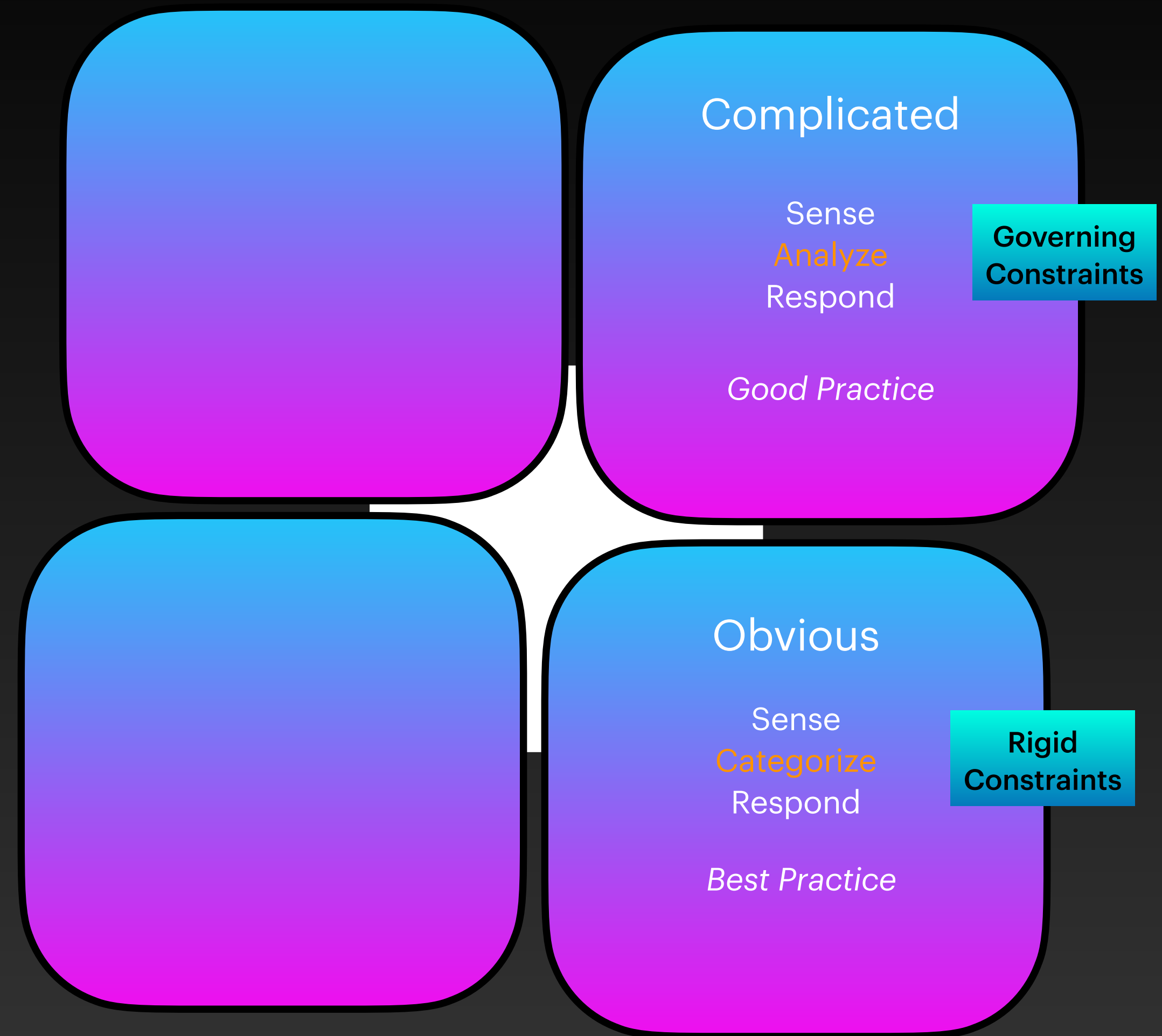
Ordered Systems

- Cause & Effect Relationships exist
- Relationships are predictable & repeatable
- Relationships are self-evident to a reasonable person
- Sense - Categorize - Respond
- Apply “Best Practices”



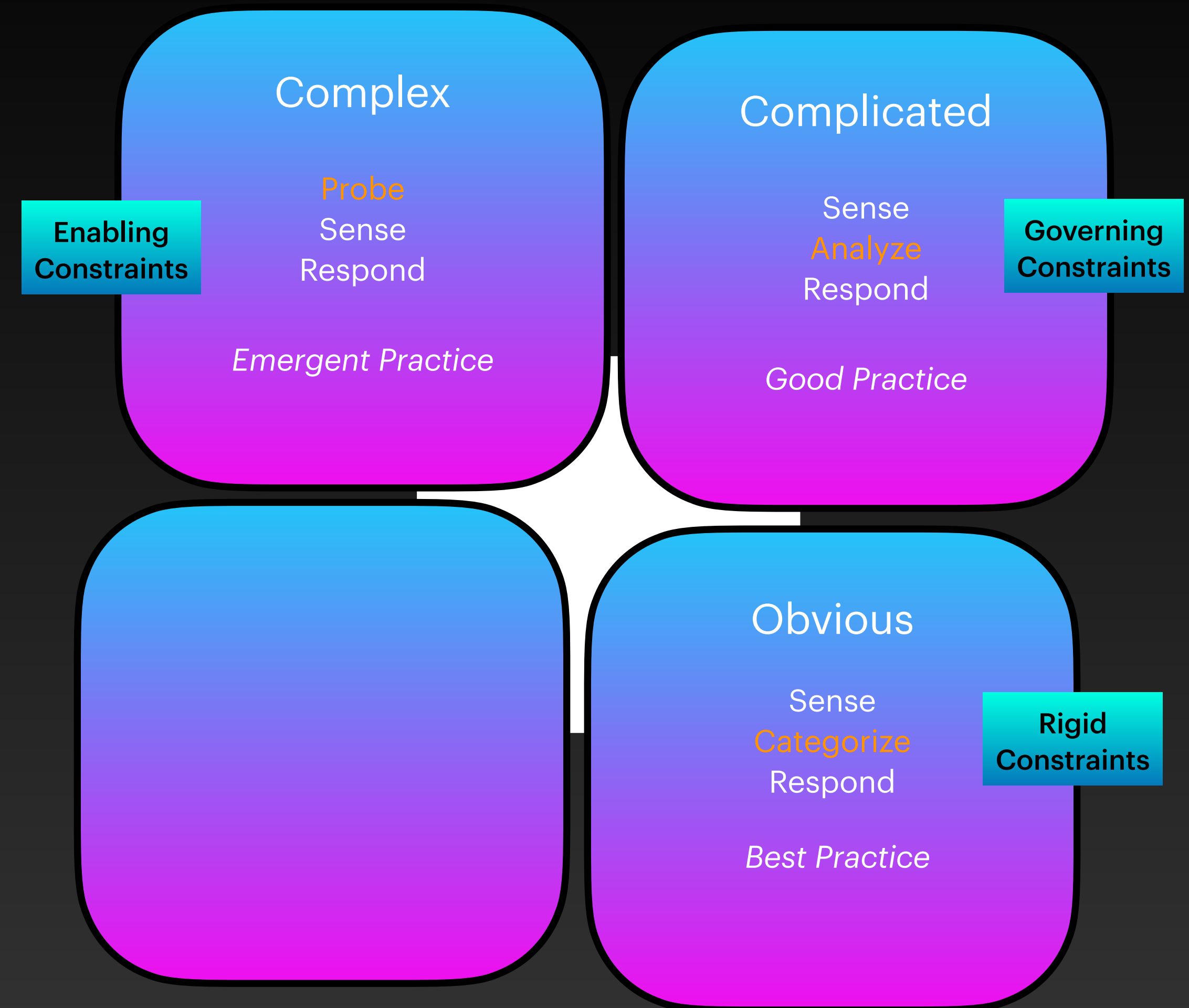
Complicated Ordered Systems

- Cause & Effect Relationships exist
- Relationships are not self-evident
- Requires expertise, SMEs, or analytics
- Sense - Analyze - Respond
- Apply “Good Practices”



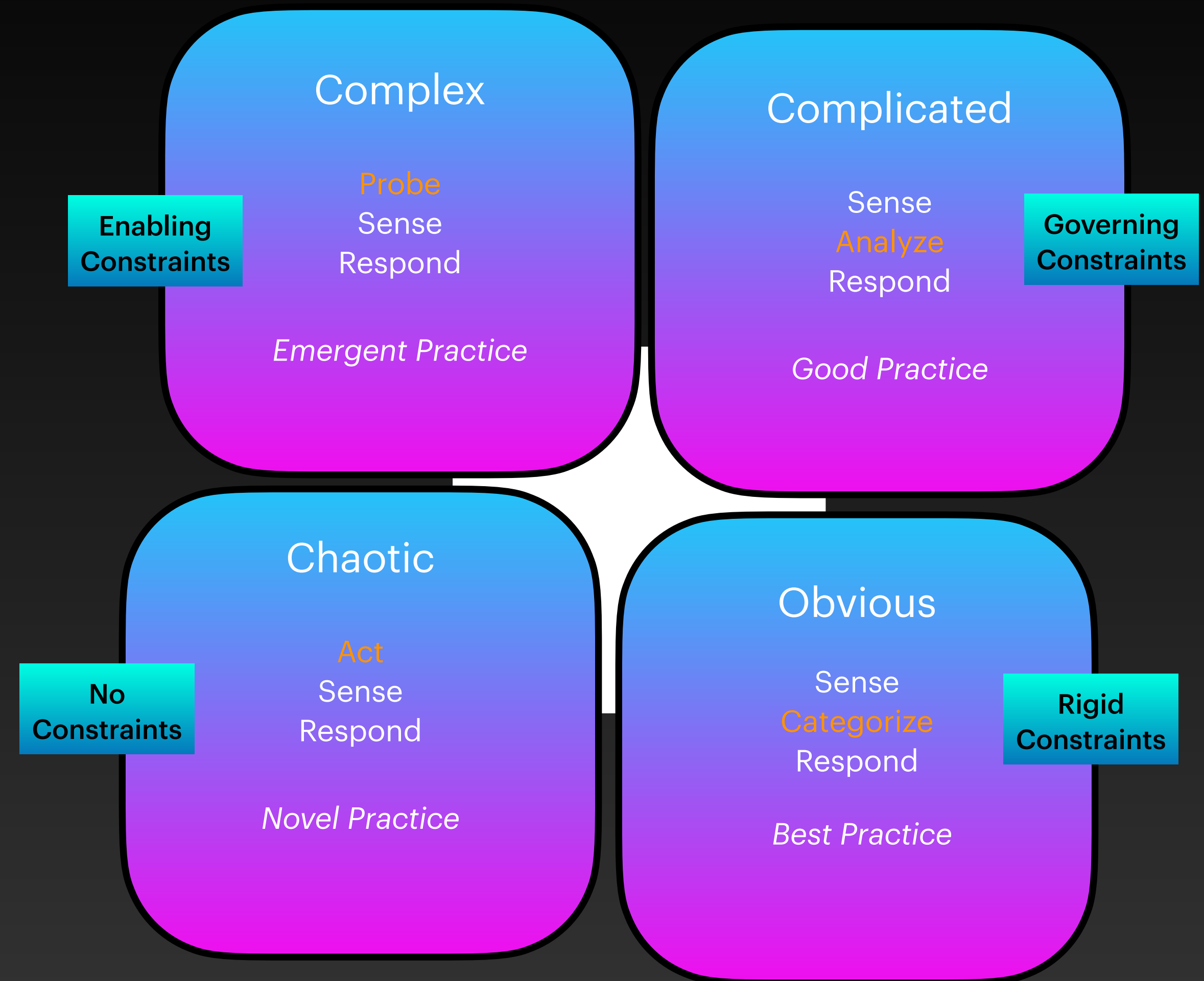
Complex Unordered Systems

- Systems are without causality
- Cause & Effect Relationships only obvious in hindsight
- Relationships will be unpredictable and emergent
- Limited constraints on agents in the system; agents also modify the system
- Probe - Sense - Respond
- Apply “Emergent Practices”



Chaotic Unordered Systems

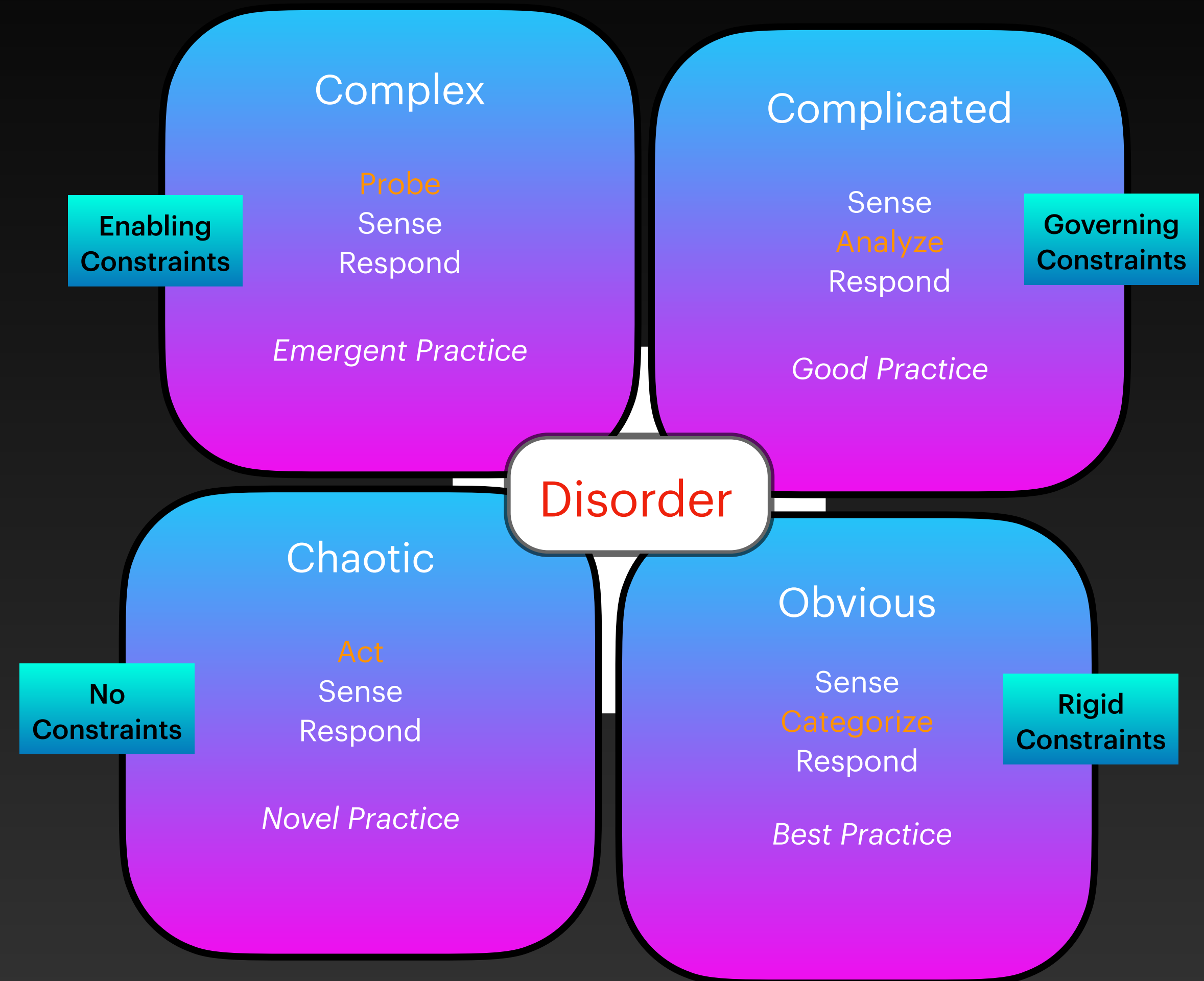
- No cause & effect relationship can be determined.
- Enter deliberately to foster innovation
- Entered accidentally - stabilize the situation quickly
- Act - Sense - Respond
- Any practice will be novel



Disorder

Unordered Systems

- The space of not knowing which domain you are actually in
- Spend most time in Disorder
- Interpret based upon our personal preference for action
- We'll most likely get things wrong



What domain am I in?

Act accordingly - there's no one size fits all

Danger Zone Examples

Obvious - bureaucratic organization or roles typically see it as a failure of process

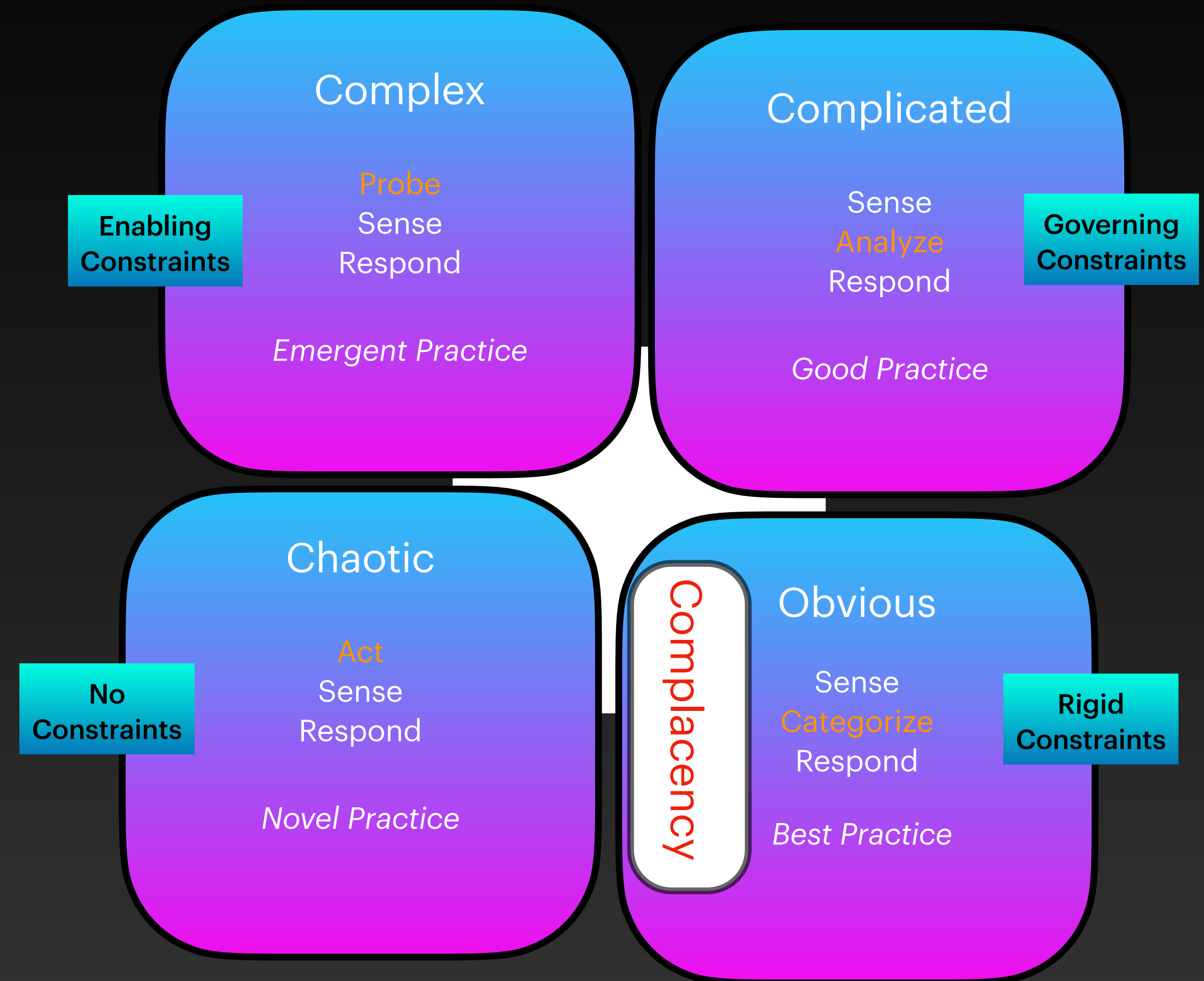
Complicated - deep experts see failures because didn't have enough time or analysis

Complex - politicians, battlefield commanders will get lots of people from lots of backgrounds and hope someone comes up with the right solution

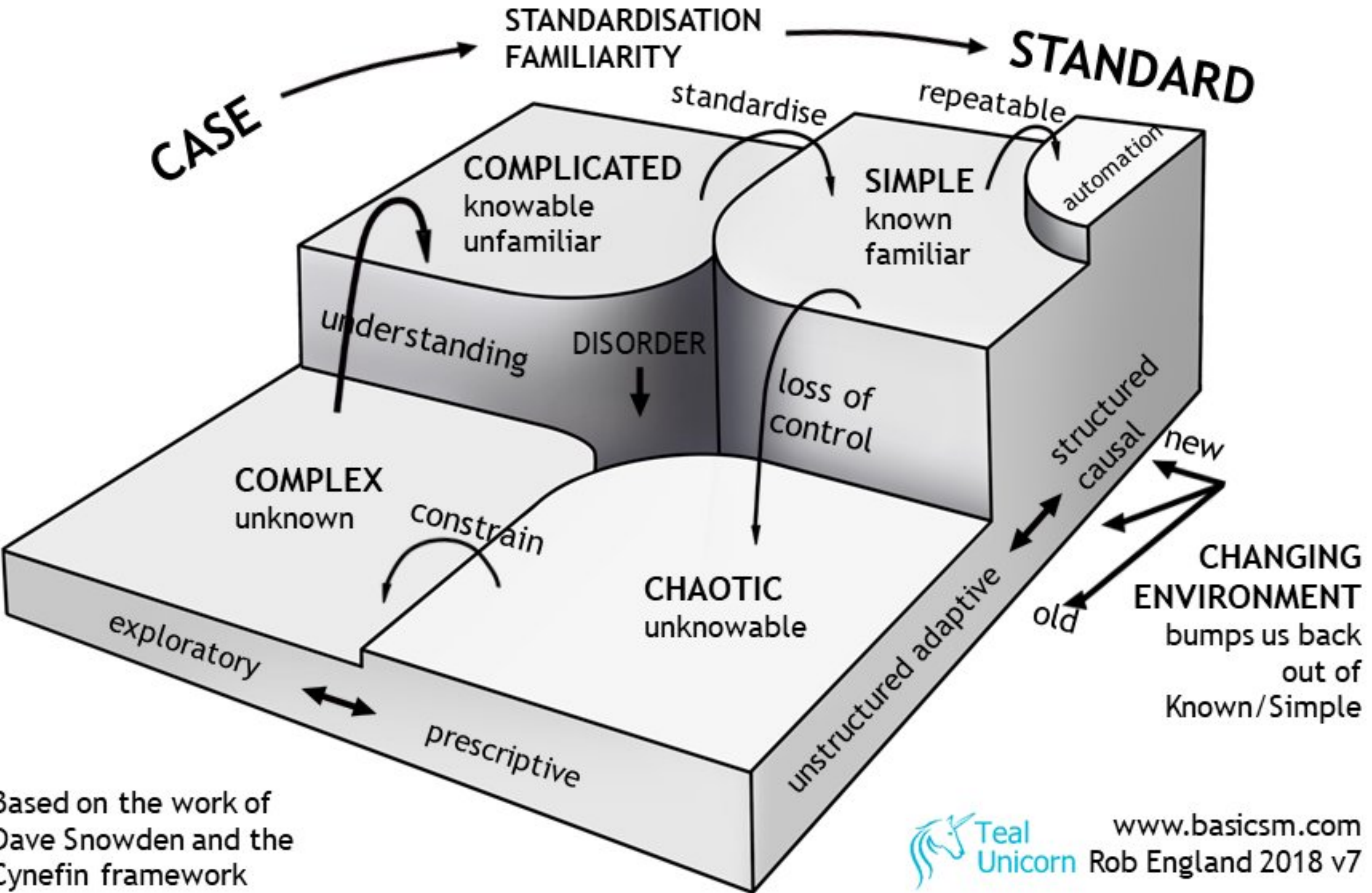
Chaotic - Power hungry individuals take absolute command, give orders, everybody does as their told

Obvious/Chaotic Boundary

- Complacency Zone
- Belief in past success makes one invulnerable to failure
- It's a cliff - don't fall off - recovery is EXPENSIVE
- Crisis will often cause the fall
- Limit what is moved to Obvious; highly vulnerable to rapid change



CYNEFIN & STANDARD+CASE



Based on the work of
Dave Snowden and the
Cynefin framework

**Manage a complex world by
discovering the enabling constraints
that naturally exist**

Codify them & make them teaching stories

Managing in a Complex Domain

- Open discussion - need interactive communication, try crowd-sourcing or positive deviance - allow people to discuss solutions that are already working within the organization itself, rather than looking to outside best practices.
- Set barriers - these limit behavior and the system can self-regulate within the boundaries & barriers
- Stimulate attractors - phenomena that arise when small stimuli & probes resonate with people. They provide structure & coherence as they gain momentum.
- Encourage dissent & format debate - allow rigorous review, critique, and drive the best approach
- Monitor for emergence - foster creative environment rather than predetermined results.

Go Do Good Things

