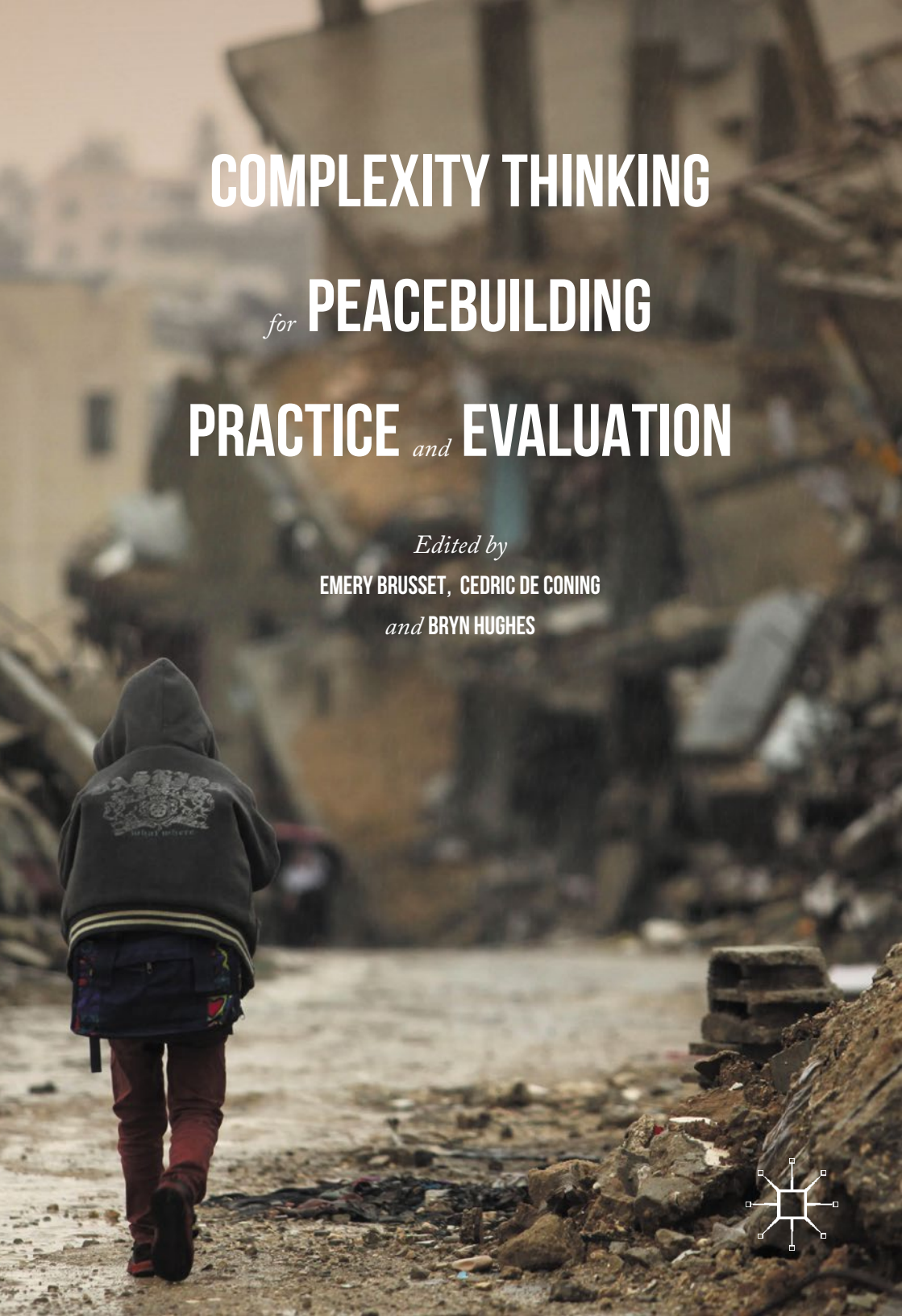




COMPLEXITY THINKING

for **PEACEBUILDING**

PRACTICE *and* EVALUATION

Edited by
EMERY BRUSSET, CEDRIC DE CONING
and BRYN HUGHES



Complexity Thinking for *Peacebuilding* Practice and Evaluation

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Editors

Complexity Thinking for *Peacebuilding* Practice and Evaluation

palgrave
macmillan

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ISBN 978-1-137-60110-0 ISBN 978-1-137-60111-7 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-60111-7

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016948415

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This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Macmillan Publishers Ltd. London

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book emerged from the rich and stimulating exchanges that took place among a group of practitioners and researchers that have met at the Phoenix Network since 2009. What brought us together was a shared interest in the challenges of evaluating peacebuilding campaigns and programmes. The network collected a multidisciplinary group of individuals from consultancy, academia, think tanks, donor agencies, defence research, and conflict management NGOs. In the course of our meetings we realised that we shared a frustration with the limitations of the mainstream approaches to monitoring and evaluation. An interest in Complexity gradually developed in the group. It is out of this creative and collaborative atmosphere that this book emerged.

Many members of the Phoenix Network provided feedback and thoughtful comments, to whom we are very grateful. Apart from the authors who reviewed one another's chapters, we wish to name here: Arne Disch (Scanteam), Marianne Jago-Bassingthwaite (Social Terrain), Ainura Umetalieva (Channel Research), Russell McKay (Palladium), Meghan Riley (Crisis Management Centre Finland), Jari Mustonen (Crisis Management Centre Finland), and David Harriman (FOI).

Hilary Brusset made a significant contribution with the final style edit and preparation of the manuscript for submission.

The book was also made possible thanks to the support of our employers: ACCORD in South Africa, Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) of Finland, the Defence Research Agency (FOI) in Sweden, the Norwegian Institute of Foreign Affairs (NUPI) in Norway, Social Terrain in the UK, and the University of Queensland in Australia.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACCORD	African Centre for Constructive Resolution of Disputes
APCP	African <i>Peacebuilding</i> Coordination Programme
CAR	Central African Republic
CivCom	Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management (in the Council of the European Union)
CMI	Crisis Management Initiative
CMPD	Crisis Management and Planning Directorate
CONOPS	Concept of Operations
CPCC	Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (of the OECD)
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
DG NEAR	EU Commission General Directorate for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
DFID	Department for International Development
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EEAS	European External Action Service
EU	European Union
EULEX	EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo
EUPM	EU Police Mission (in Bosnia and Herzegovina)
EUSR	EU Special Representative
FOI	Swedish Defence Research Agency
HR	The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
ICITAP	International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (US. Department of Justice)
ICO	International Civilian Office

ICR	International Civilian Representative
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IPA	Instrument of Pre-Accession Assistance
KFOR	Kosovo Force, NATO peace support operation in Kosovo
KRTI	Kyrgyz Republic Transition Initiative
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MELC	Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Communication
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MIP	Mission Implementation Plan
MMA	Monitoring, Mentoring and Advising
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPLAN	Operational Plan
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OTI	Office for Transition Initiatives
OVI	Objectively Verifiable Indicator
PME	Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
PSC	Political and Security Committee (in the Council of the European Union)
RBB	Results Based Budgeting
RBM	Results Based Management
SAPD	Stabilisation and Association Process Dialogue
SRSG	Special Representative of the Secretary-General
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNMIK	United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo
UNPOL	United Nations Police
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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Introduction

Why Consider New Approaches to Peacebuilding and Evaluation, and Why Turn to Complexity for Answers?

Emery Brusset, Cedric de Coning, and Bryn Hughes

This book addresses the core dilemma that every peacebuilding practitioner has to confront. How do we function effectively in situations that are often fast changing and always complex, when we are equipped with tools designed for neither? To be more specific, how do we reconcile the tension between a programming culture that requires us to use linear causal logic and assumptions in the design of our peacebuilding interventions, with the highly dynamic political nature of the societies in transition that peacebuilding interventions are meant to assist?

This tension is especially apparent and problematic to those tasked to evaluate peacebuilding programmes.¹ In order to present a potential donor or political incumbent with a clear and persuasive argument as to why a particular peacebuilding intervention deserves their support, those

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responsible for the design have to simplify complex political and social change processes into simple linear causal frameworks. The linear causal assumptions underpinning these reductionist frameworks are increasingly packaged in neat, single-sentence ‘theories of change’ to make it easier for the funding agency to understand what they are supporting and why. This mainstream practice provides evaluators with a specific set of causal assumptions to analyse, with most evaluations tasked to assess the extent to which a given project achieved what it set out to do.

It should come as no surprise therefore that most evaluations of peacebuilding projects in this day and age follow a remarkably similar logic. They analyse how the money was spent and what it was spent on. They also attempt to answer the question whether the project achieved what it said it would do, within the limited context of the ‘theory of change’ logic.

To use an automobile analogy: a mechanic looked under the bonnet and then drew up a report that showed which parts needed what types of repairs and at what cost in order to function well, all based on the manufacturer’s original designs and official instructions. The report does not worry about whether the designs themselves are appropriate or even if a different mode of transportation altogether might have been a better choice.

These kinds of evaluations serve an administrative purpose: they give the funder the necessary confidence to continue funding such projects, as well as a basis (namely, a few easily rectifiable technical fixes) from which to exercise fiduciary responsibility. In other words, they satisfy the administrative need to demonstrate that accountability is in place.

The problem is that while linear causal logic is well suited for *complicated* systems such as automobiles, it is decidedly inadequate for examining the highly dynamic and *complex* social systems that peacebuilding interventions are attempting to influence.² The contrasts between the ontologies are many, and stark. Peacebuilding evaluations thus have to grapple with matching the linear causal logic inherent in the design with the highly complex social reality they observe, and they have to generate an assessment that meets the funder’s expectations of providing definitive findings and clear recommendations for improvements.

It is this mismatch, and the inherent tensions that it generates in peacebuilding practice, and especially evaluations, that is the focus of this book’s analysis. We explore a new approach to peacebuilding, and peacebuilding evaluation, which augments the growing debate around how insights from Complexity may bring new ideas, methods, and tools to peacebuilding practice and evaluation.

This is an approach which recognises the Complexity that peacebuilding interventions encounter, and that incorporates our understanding of how complex systems function into our methods and approaches, so that we are better able to influence such complex systems. What is more, it can be utilised to monitor and evaluate the effects, intentional and unintended, that our interventions are having on the societies that peacebuilding interventions are trying to assist.³

This book may serve as the introduction to Complexity thinking for many readers. We offer our own particular take on its implications for peacebuilding, including monitoring and evaluation. We analyse several specific attempts by peacebuilding practitioners to implement approaches informed by Complexity thinking, both in organisations and in international missions, and we share new tools and methods for analysis and engagement that have been inspired by Complexity thinking and practice. The application of Complexity thinking to the peacebuilding field, as well as to evaluation practice, is relatively new. However a body of experience has been slowly building that enables us to study and analyse the results of this new approach. This book represents one of the first attempts to do so.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RESULTS-BASED MONITORING AND EVALUATION

We argue that the rigours of the Results-Based Management approach force peacebuilding practitioners to apply linear causal assumptions in the design of peacebuilding programmes. The result is programming that is simplistic in its analysis and design, and therefore unlikely to be effective. At the same time there is an increased risk of harmful unintended side effects.⁴ However, we should not throw the baby (results) out with the bath water (simplistic design). It is important to be clear about what it is we want to achieve, and it is important to assess whether we are achieving our objectives.

Thus, we do not object to the importance of results per se, we are critical of the simplistic linear causal logic that has become the mainstay methodology associated with results inspired Logical Frameworks.

Thus analysing the conventional Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system helps us both to understand what is wrong with the simplistic logic of the linear results system, and to explore the value of alternative results frameworks. A useful starting point may be to revisit the underly-

ing reasons for M&E, so that we can then reassess how best to accomplish those purposes. Is M&E essentially about accountability? Is it, in other words, about making sure that scarce donor resources—the hard-earned tax payer’s contribution—are being used as efficiently and effectively as possible to make a material improvement to the lives of the people these programmes are meant to assist?

While concurring that accountability is important, we maintain, along with others such as Anderson, et al.,⁵ that M&E should also have an important learning function. M&E should be an important part of organisational and institutional learning, and learning is a critical element in the adaptation that needs to take place for programmes to remain relevant in any dynamic and complex environment. Organisational learning is an important sub-theme in this book and the various chapters highlight different facets and experiences of learning and the role M&E can play in helping peacebuilders make sense of, and adapt to, the environments within which they operate.

There can be no doubt that peacebuilding is one of the most challenging types of social interventions conceivable. Peacebuilding interventions take place in times of great social upheaval when even the most basic social institutions are likely to be contested and undergoing transformation. Peace is difficult to codify beyond the absence of violence, and its constituent elements such as justice, security, and good governance are highly contextual. Peace emerges from messy political processes embedded deep within the cultural belief systems of the societies in question. However, its emergence is not automatic, and what may have worked in another context, or in an earlier intervention, can rarely be guaranteed to work again. When peace does start to emerge, peacebuilders have to take into account that the rate for conflict recurrence is estimated to be as high as between 20 % and 50 %.⁶

Peacebuilding is also typically characterised by a large number of stakeholders that are engaged in attempts to influence the behaviour of the societies experiencing conflict. This means that there is usually a very large number of programmatic interventions being undertaken simultaneously at different levels, by different professional communities, and with widely ranging timeframes. There are also always conflicting notions of what final outcome would be considered desirable, and how best to arrive at such an outcome. When so many different interventions are targeting the same society it is obviously difficult, if not impossible, to isolate the causal

effects that one specific intervention may have from the many other causal factors at play.

It is thus highly challenging for evaluation analysts to make strong claims about the effects or impacts any one specific intervention may or may not have in such a highly dynamic and complex environment. However, as long as donors give financial support to programmes that intend to cause a particular effect in a social system, the question of whether that support has had the desired effect is a reasonable and inevitable question. And when we try to answer it, the investigation will have to follow the basic principles of causal inference in social science.

A set of basic standards that are required for evaluations in the field of peacebuilding should not be qualitatively different from the standards used in other areas of evaluation. The challenge lies in isolating linkages between causes and effects in complex social systems where many interventions are simultaneously underway. In addition to the sheer number of causal factors, other complex system effects are also at play, such as non-linear effects, unintended consequences, and feedback loops, as explained in the next chapters. These difficulties point to serious challenges for the design of peacebuilding interventions, and thus also for the methodology of peacebuilding evaluations.

WHAT IS THE CONTRIBUTION OF THIS BOOK?

Given that we are not the first ones to ponder ways in which Complexity thinking can be harnessed to improve programming and evaluation, what value can we add to the body of knowledge in this space? In the first instance, a diversity of perspective and experience is represented in this book. Not only do the authors come from vastly different parts of the world, operating from the myriad of organisational types spanning government, academe, private sector, and not-for-profit organisations, but also their empirical insights stem from places as varied as the Balkans and Africa. This richness of viewpoint is a key advantage of edited volumes like this one. At the same time it constructively reflects the Complexity of the very complex systems we examine herein.

These diverse perspectives come together as one voice to argue that the traditional peacebuilding design and M&E tools—and inescapably the underlying assumptions on which they are based—are inappropriate and inadequate for the complex environments in which they are meant to function. The issues summarised here indicate the wide array of challenges

troubling mainstream approaches. These are the challenges we address head-on in this edited volume.

Causality:

- The struggle to isolate variables, and thus rely on ‘specific problem’ diagnosis to design systems of indicators in environments. These are notoriously difficult to assess with any precision because the conditions are continuously changing and boundaries are blurred;
- The difficult task of analysing causality, and therefore defining influence itself, in situations where multiple and simultaneous factors impact outcomes, often with disproportionate effects;
- The impossibility of arriving at universally agreed-upon conclusions regarding causality in situations marked by multiple and contested stakeholder perspectives on all facets of interventions.

Local voices and capacity:

- The difficulty of situating local actors at the core of designing, planning, and evaluating interventions;
- The dearth of vital local perspectives and insights for evaluations that results from insufficient inclusion;
- The lack of local ownership and empowerment, as well as capacity building, that proceeds from a lack of involvement.

Approaches to M&E:

- The desire for certainty and predictability which leads to rigid, longer-term planning is ill-suited to ever-changing circumstances in which peacebuilding organisations must maintain fluid and tactically undefined objectives to adapt to unintended consequences;
- Cumbersome reporting conventions that espouse lengthy procedures and complicated formats make findings unnecessarily outdated and largely inaccessible to the many stakeholders in need of knowledge generation, while also frustrating practitioners by taking them away from their core business and giving them little say in the matter;
- The wide diversity and specialisation of methods for analysing conflict in a satisfactory way complicates and confuses those working in the space;

- The locking-in of plans with corresponding high-stakes pressure to meet performance indicators creates perverse incentives, including manipulated quantitative indicators, because ‘what gets measured, gets done’;
- A reliance on traditional, Western sources of data (e.g., government reports) in places where such sources are typically the least valid, not to mention least legitimate in the eyes of many local stakeholder groups.

To address these challenges, and to overcome the shortcomings of the traditional peacebuilding design and M&E tools, we turn to Complexity thinking and practice. In the next two chapters we introduce Complexity thinking. In the second part we turn to the application of Complexity thinking to practice by analysing several specific attempts by peacebuilding practitioners to implement approaches informed by Complexity thinking, both in organisations and in missions. And in the last part of the book we share new tools and methods for analysis and engagement that have been inspired by Complexity thinking and practice.

We thus suggest a shift in thinking and practice from the traditional linear Logical Framework (commonly referred to as Log Frame) or associated approaches to designing and evaluating peacebuilding projects, and in its place we suggest an approach that recognises the Complexity of the social systems and institutions that peacebuilding programmes are attempting to influence, and that tries to use the knowledge acquired from the research on Complexity to influence our assumptions, methods, and tools.

This area of exploration is gaining ground amongst a rapidly widening audience that comprises research scholars, practitioners affiliated with programming and evaluation, as well as many working for donor organisations or engaged in peacebuilding and development policy making. At the same time, it would be fair to say that the application of Complexity thinking to peacebuilding interventions and programming is still rare. There is, however, a growing acceptance within the operational and research agencies that the traditional approaches to programming and M&E are not generating the desired results. There is thus a desire for innovation and renewal. That makes this an exciting space, ripe with innovation, experimentation, and exploration.

In a paradoxical sense however, we are fortunate that this book is not as unique as it would have been ten years ago. Our ideas have benefited enormously from those who have pioneered the study of Complexity and

complex systems and those who have led its application to peacebuilding and evaluation.⁷ The more developed analyses and arguments contained herein, have been made possible by digesting countless reports and manuscripts that did not exist ten or more years ago. We owe a debt of gratitude to the many who have offered their insights and experience because our work is that much sounder as a result. In our case, precursors have already taken the brunt of much of the incredulity that new ideas face, which means the way is much less impeded now than in years gone by, and our audience is now much broader and more willing to consider and experiment with Complexity inspired methods and tools.

One example of the growing recognition of Complexity thinking by international institutions and funders, is reflected in recent remarks by the Director General of the World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group, Caroline Heider, when she refers to the Sustainable Development Goals as being complex, marked by interdependent targets and goals changing over time, and thereby requiring evaluation tools to move beyond the simple models of causality offered by Log Frames and results chains.⁸

What is more, we are philosophically aligned with the critiques of the Liberal Peace, in so far as the importance placed on the nature and the ownership of the concepts by which information is organised and analysed.⁹ There is also heightening attention paid to the role Big Data can play—in concert with other developments, such as Social Media—in Monitoring and Evaluation. And while we concur with Big Data's emphasis on inductive thinking and its relational ontologies, we find its reliance on digital information and on correlation wanting. This relates specifically to its understanding of the causal dynamics that would allow the development of effective strategies for mitigating social problems.¹⁰ Hence, Big Data does not form a considered part of the approaches set out herein.

A note about the need for precision with key terms is warranted before we continue. The already dense subject matter does not need further confusion; as such, words matter. And for these discussions, the meaning conveyed by central terms is vital to accurate and thus effective communication. In a practical sense, the field of Complexity thinking is a clear example of how legacies of meaning can undermine extant meaning if key concepts are not clarified from the outset.

Complexity is of course the prime example for our purposes herein: Complexity refers to the characteristics of systems that are open, fluid, unpredictable—the details of which are comprehensively unpacked throughout this manuscript. It does not carry the everyday English legacy

meaning synonymous with ‘complicated’. A key distinction reflected in the debates covered herein is thus that between complicated and complex systems.

The following chapters devote significant space to that distinction. In simple terms, complicated systems are ones in which the parts do equal the sum of the whole. Elements can be isolated and treated as relatively independent of one another, and the system can be replicated in its entirety time and again. An automobile is an everyday example of a complicated system: tyres, for instance, can be removed without changing the relationship or nature of the engine parts or the interior upholstery. Moreover, an identical car (system) can be replicated each time the same parts are placed together in the same manner.

Any living system, on the other hand, is an example of a complex system. Rather than being independent of one another, the elements are interconnected, and thus changes to one will directly affect some while indirectly affecting—even if to almost imperceptible degrees—others. Reducing or increasing the flies in an ecosystem, to offer a hypothetical example, will have significant consequences for the frogs and other animals for which flies are a source of food. The ripple effects will be felt up and down the food chain with consequences for both fauna and flora in cascading, non-linear, exponential, and unpredictable ways.

Peacebuilding interventions that attempt to influence the behaviour of social systems are equally complex and unpredictable. Peacebuilding interventions may achieve some of their intended effects, but they will also have side effects. Some may have been anticipated and steps may have been taken to mitigate those effects. However, when we attempt to influence complex systems we will also stimulate unintended consequences, some of which may cause harm. When we intervene in a complex system it is not possible to only affect one variable. Evaluations that only look into whether the intended results have been achieved will thus miss other important effects that such a programme will have had. Such an evaluation may also be blind to other influences that may have contributed to the intended results being achieved or not. Evaluation methodologies designed for complicated systems will thus be poorly suited for analysing complex system effects.

The Structure of the Book

The book is structured into three main parts. The first part introduces Complexity thinking, bringing to the fore the ontological move that enables us to understand the nature of peacebuilding contexts. The second part deals with Complexity in practice, and the third part deals with emergent methods of Complexity assessment. In Chap. 2 Cedric de Coning provides a theoretical and conceptual introduction and overview of Complexity. He starts off by looking at three of the core characteristics of Complexity, namely a whole-of-systems approach, non-linearity, and self-organisation. He then considers the implications of Complexity for peacebuilding policy and practice. Amongst others, de Coning considers what implications Complexity may have for conflict analysis, design and planning, management and coordination, and monitoring and evaluation. He concludes with a discussion on the implications of Complexity for the ethics of peacebuilding, and in particular the unintended consequences of peacebuilding. His core argument, based on the role of self-organisation in Complexity, is that peacebuilding has to be essentially local. This has significant implications for the agency of international or external actors, and de Coning highlights the ethical paradox of, on the one hand, the international community stating its goal of helping local populations to manage themselves, while on the other hand, knowingly or unknowingly, creating structures of dependency.

In the third chapter, Bryn Hughes exposes a little acknowledged yet highly problematic core assumption propping up conventional approaches to international interventions: the idea of *ceteris paribus*. *Ceteris paribus* is the notion that all other factors in a system can be kept the same, and thereby ignored, when analysing situations to identify problems and develop solutions; it was created for analytical convenience, delivering enormous simplification and certainty. Hughes notes that *ceteris paribus* may be innocuous or even helpful when attempting to understand complicated systems, with fixed, inanimate parts, such as for manufacturing automobiles. But, as Hughes then illustrates, its ubiquitous application to peacebuilding and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning has been highly pernicious, in numerous yet largely unrecognised ways, because all societies into which interventions are launched are complex systems, where none of the other factors ever remains the same, unchanged or unaffected. In addition, Hughes provides a practical, deliberately descriptive delineation of the main characteristics of complex systems, arguing that without a

straightforward portrayal of Complexity, it will remain inaccessible to the many in need of its insights. The chapter concludes by providing a brief look at how a number of popular methods may or may not be compatible with working in complex systems.

By the end of Part I, the core facets, a practical delineation of Complexity, important debate themes, and the overall landscape of Complexity and its implications for peacebuilding should be evident. The next two sections of the book shift the focus from the conceptual to the practical by offering several original empirical cases where various methods have been applied in practice, in addition to specific tools and techniques developed explicitly for complex systems.

In Chap. 4, Charles T. Hunt explores the potential of Complexity-informed M&E for the United Nations (UN) peace operations. Hunt focuses on the role of the UN police because they are more engaged in peacebuilding than many other major components of these operations. His chapter proceeds in three main parts. The first highlights a number of shortcomings with dominant approaches to M&E in these missions. Building on the arguments made for applying Complexity thinking to the peacebuilding realm earlier in this volume, the second section explains how Complexity thinking can inform approaches that help to overcome these frailties. The third section lays out key implications of a Complexity-oriented M&E system for the UN peace operations and the chapter concludes by arguing that Complexity not only provides useful ways of thinking about assessing impact, but can also inform practical approaches to the everyday M&E of the UN peace operations and its peacebuilding efforts.

In Chap. 5, Tanja Tamminen explores the space of civilian crisis management operations from a European Union (EU) perspective. Though she emphasises that the EU has come a long way in planning and preparing civilian crisis management operations, she points out that the evaluating impact is a much more complicated matter than merely reporting on mission activities. Tamminen proceeds to investigate how to measure the impact of the EU's interventions in the war-torn society of Kosovo. The aim of her chapter is to highlight some parameters and difficulties of such evaluation experiments that arise from the Complexity of the international presence in a conflict-affected environment. While she highlights that the EU Kosovo mission has been a pioneer when it comes to creating reporting and benchmarking structures, having moved from a programmatic approach to more of a joint exercise with the local stakeholders, she notes

that the EU is still far off the mark when it comes to having a practical impact assessment tool in the hands of its mission staff. Tamminen offers several conclusions around the need to provide missions with useful assessment tools: the EU institutions need to focus first of all on conflict evaluation and stakeholder analysis; for evolving negotiation/reconciliation processes, rigid objectives may be counterproductive; thus evaluations of the overall impact should take place in a more goal-free environment.

In Chap. 6, Oskari Eronen brings a unique perspective from a conflict resolution organisation, Finland's Crisis Management Initiative (CMI). Eronen reviews the advantages of taking an artisan approach, where the uniqueness of the context, processes, and outcomes of each conflict resolution initiative are kept to the fore, as opposed to the mainstream's production-line mindset, with its generic and prescriptive qualities. Eronen finds that perceptions of the 'facts' are diverse and contested; traditional modalities to both planning and M&E are ill-designed for the complex systems they struggle to understand—including that identifying, let alone demonstrating, simplistic cause and effect is out of the question; that there is a need for local actors to drive processes rather than to be in the back seat, so to speak, in a support role. One of many highly useful contributions of this chapter is the detailed and candid discussions Eronen offers regarding CMI's planning, monitoring, and evaluation methods consciously meant to work with Complexity. Through these discussions and the analogy of an artisan approach, Oskari allows the reader to take away numerous valuable insights.

In Chap. 7, Pravina Makan-Lakha shares the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes' (ACCORD) experiences and challenges with developing an M&E system for a conflict resolution NGO that specialises in peacebuilding and related interventions. Most M&E approaches towards evaluating programming in peacebuilding have been developed in development aid contexts, to help the donor assess whether its financial contribution has been used effectively. ACCORD has had to adapt the Logical Frameworks and assumptions of the development aid paradigm to the highly dynamic and complex reality of its peacebuilding work in places like Somalia, Central African Republic, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Burundi. In the process, ACCORD has learned valuable lessons that are consistent with insights from Complexity. This chapter shares some of these lessons from using M&E as a tool to stimulate organisational learning to improve responses to peacebuilding and conflict resolution, as well as to generate