Cynefin Framework Worksheet

Purpose: Categorize problems for better decision-making.

1. Define the problem.
2. Which category does it fit?
3. Choose the best approach based on category.

My problem/obstacle/decision:

Clear (Sense-Categorize-Respond)

Complicated (Sense-Analyze-Respond)

Complex (Probe-Sense-Respond)

Chaotic (Act-Sense-Respond)

How To Use (Pro Tips)

Context Assessment:
- ➜ Develop a simple assessment tool or checklist to help categorize your situation into one of the five Cynefin domains.
- ➜ Use guiding questions: "Is the relationship between cause and effect obvious, or does it emerge only in hindsight?"

Tailor Your Approach:
- ➜ In a clear domain, rely on best practices; in a complicated domain, seek expert analysis.
- ➜ For complex situations, use safe-to-fail experiments (probe, sense, respond).
- ➜ In chaos, take decisive, stabilizing actions (act, sense, respond).
- ➜ If you're in disorder, focus on gathering sufficient information to re-categorize the situation.

Dynamic Application:
- ➜ Recognize that contexts can shift over time. Regularly review your classification and be ready to adjust your management style accordingly.
- ➜ Document examples and case studies of past decisions to learn when a shift occurred and how best to respond.

Facilitate Collaborative Sensemaking:
- ➜ Use group discussions to collectively determine the domain you are operating in—diversity of perspective can prevent misclassification.
- ➜ Incorporate visual aids into team meetings to remind everyone of the current context and appropriate responses.

Questions To Reflect On

Domain Identification:
- ➜ What key characteristics of the current situation signal that it belongs to the Clear, Complicated, Complex, Chaotic, or Disorder domain?
- ➜ Which concrete examples or indicators (data, feedback, events) support your classification?

Response Strategy:
- ➜ Based on the domain, what is the recommended approach (sense-categorize-respond, analyze, probe-sense-respond, etc.)?

Assumption Check:
- ➜ What assumptions are you making about cause and effect in this context, and how could they be challenged?
- ➜ In what ways could new information force a reclassification of the situation?

Application Context:
- ➜ In a business or financial scenario, how does the framework help you decide whether to stick to standard procedures or innovate?
- ➜ For personal or team challenges, how can you leverage the Cynefin insights to tailor your problem-solving strategy?