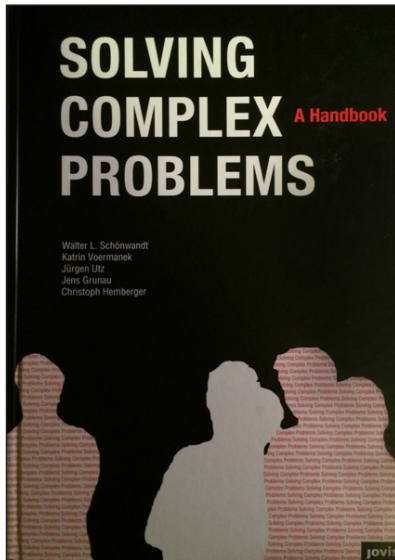# Solving Complex Problems

A Handbook

Autoren: W. L. Schönwandt, K. Voermanek, J. Utz, J. Grunau, C. Hemberger
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Is there a one size fits all solution when it comes to problem solving? Every profession dealing with planning faces complex problems daily. How, if possible, is the perfect solution achievable? City planner and architect Walter L. Schönwandt together with his colleagues Katrin Voermanek, Jürgen Utz, Jens Grunau and Christoph Hemberger published a handbook in 2013 to make the handling of complex problems manageable. The 200-page pocketbook does not offer a fixed approach to fit all problems, but a new flexible "toolbox" to fix the problem at hand and achieve improved solutions.

Each of the six chapters presents different parts of the problem solving process. The two first chapters describe the main technique: How to look beyond the obvious problem to find the manageable problems and the method of resolution. The approach, albeit complicated, is thoroughly explained and illustrated with examples and simple charts. The next 4 chapters discuss additional techniques, terms and definitions that may help to improve the problem solving process, including how to avoid cognitive traps. Although the language is easy flowing and understandable it is quite repetitive and verbose as the same things are emphasized many times throughout the book. The publication's final chapter even consists of a commentary upon all the others. The chapters are divided with subtitles and many different types of highlighted text, but are lacking an overall orienting structure.

The theme of the book is important and the reflections upon how to solve complex problems are excellent. However, the book does not work as a "toolbox". The publication is rather a protocol of a philosophic discussion including tips and techniques on how to think, or not to think during a problem solving process. Although the authors do not teach one fixed approach to fit all problems they also do not succeed in developing a practical handbook. The verbose and repetitive language makes it difficult to understand the definitions and hard to follow the explanations. The main approach is extremely complicated and time-consuming, and the additional "tools" are difficult to grasp as they are hidden in philosophical reflections. The many types of highlighted text make it even more difficult to understand what actually is a definition, a technique or just a quote. The authors do, however, promote a philosophical discussion on an important theme.

The book is by no means insignificant as the terms, definitions and the way of thinking that are discussed too often are forgotten in every planning process. The publication moves the focus from the fastest and easiest solution to the real problem and the best solution. It discusses the possibility of objectivity and the necessity of subjectivity. The authors take us beyond what we usually take for granted and give us a lesson in meta thinking. This is not a practical handbook for everyday planning processes, it is, nevertheless, a must read not only to the planning profession.

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