



TOOL | NAVIGATING THE LANDSCAPE DIAGRAM

TIME REQUIRED: 30 – 60 MINUTES

The Landscape Diagram, developed by [Human Systems Dynamics Institute](#), is a useful tool to help community changemakers see, understand, map and influence current conditions and the systems barriers that might be enabling or preventing them from moving forward.

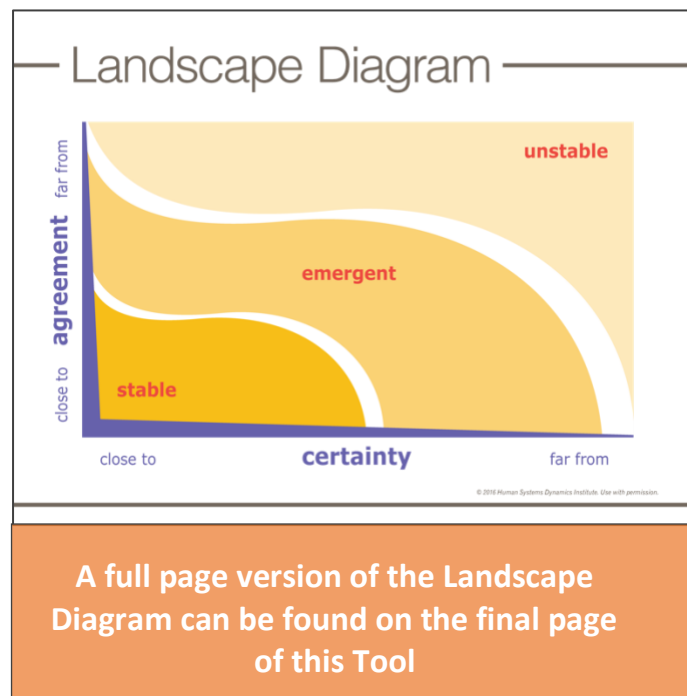
USING THIS TOOL WILL HELP YOU:

- To map your current position and that of your group and/or colleagues on the landscape
- To determine how much agreement and certainty might be required to move from one zone to another
- To ask questions which might prompt shifts or changes in the landscape

OVERVIEW

The [Human Systems Dynamics Institute](#) developed the [Landscape Diagram](#) in 2016. The Landscape Diagram is an approach to understand the conditions that shape your ability to respond and/or act in dynamic times. Mapping your personal and collective locations on the Landscape Diagram helps changemakers to understand the levels of certainty and agreement required to advance change.

When different actors are in different places on the landscape diagram, this can create tension. Mapping across the Landscape Diagram helps to surface some of the underlying or hidden challenges facing the



collaborative effort. Using this tool, a collaborative group can reflect on their current and future states and then discuss the differences. This reflection can lead to developing a more cohesive path forward.

THE TWO AXIS

There are two axis on the Landscape Diagram. The horizontal axis is the **degree of certainty** that might exist in the project, activity, group or system. Being close to certainty indicates a higher degree of stability while being further away means that the situation likely has higher degrees of uncertainty.

The vertical axis indicates the **degree of agreement** there is amongst various components and/or partners. In a highly volatile or unstable environment, the degree of agreement might vary significantly across partners or they may require more information to create stability.

THE THREE ZONES

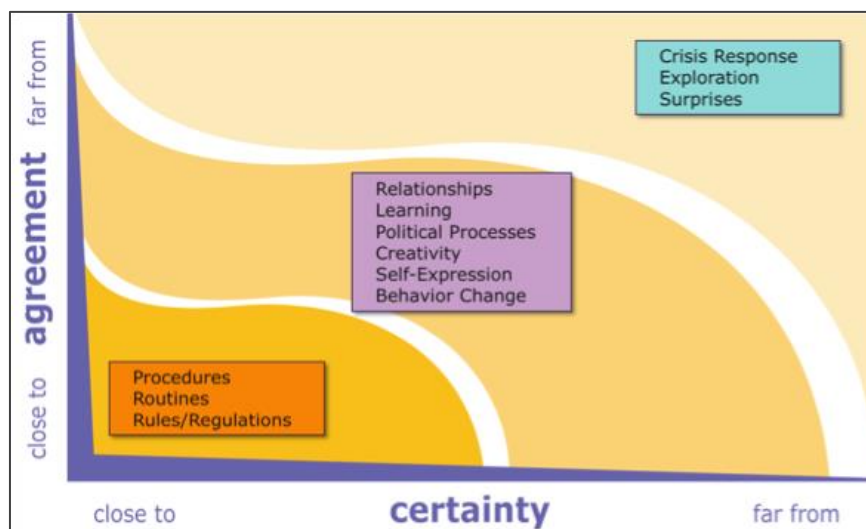
The **Stable Zone** is both close to certainty and close to agreement. Elements in this zone are predictable and constrained at the same time. This zone is usually governed by rules, policies and procedures.

The **Emergent Zone** is a little further away from both agreement and certainty.

The constraints that are found in the emergent zone are often more flexible. The constraints will hold elements in the emergent zone but there is also the potential for innovation and change. Usually, the emergent zone is governed by a set of simple rules or agreements which enable movement and creativity.

The **Unstable Zone** is the zone furthest away from the axis of agreement and certainty. In this zone there are few systems constraints and activity can be random, unpredictable and surprising. This is a great zone for experimentation and prototyping. A highly unstable zone environment might require a crisis response in the short term to stabilize and then a move toward policies and procedures to respond to the crisis.

There can be fluidity across the zones depending on the situation and context of the collaborative group or the individual. For example, an individual starting a new role in an organization or on a collaborative, might begin by looking for procedures, routines and rules. Once these have been



established, they can move from stable to emergent where the focus might be on relationships, self-expression and creativity. At some point in their career or in their collaborative group, there might be significant change which leads into an unstable environment.

The Landscape Diagram can also be used to map various members of the collaborative and their organizations. Understanding where each is situated on the Landscape Diagram and their anticipated movements over time can be a helpful for planning.

THE TOOL – A STEP BY STEP PROCESS

The Landscape Diagram can be used in two ways.

- **Printed Format:** Print out the Landscape Diagram on a regular sheet of paper for each individual. They can use the diagram as a navigation map.
- **Experience Format:** Using masking tape, re-create the Landscape Diagram on the floor. Be sure to create enough space for people to move around the landscape. You will need at least a 5 x 8-meter space for the landscape. Be sure to add the certainty and agreement axis as well as the sections for stable, emergent and unstable.

STEPS

1. Provide participants with an overview of the Landscape Diagram and how it can be used to navigate different situations (See [Application of the Landscape Diagram](#) for more information).
2. Ask participants to navigate the landscape in silence and then welcome reflection at the end of the exercise.
3. **Where are YOU Today?** Ask each participant to identify on the Landscape Diagram where they might place themselves today. Ask them to consider both the two axis (certainty and agreement) and the three zones (stable, emergent and unstable). If using a Printed Format the participants can signal where they are today by writing ME TODAY on the Landscape Diagram. In the Experience Format, ask participants to move to where they think they are today.
4. **Where is the GROUP Today?** In this step you ask each participant to identify where on the Landscape Diagram their group, colleagues or collaborative might be today. If using a Printed Format the participants can signal where they are today by writing GROUP TODAY on the Landscape Diagram. In the Experience Format, ask participants to move to where they think they are today.
5. **Where will YOU be in one year?** Now ask each participant to plot on the Landscape Diagram where they hope to be in a year from today (or a shorter or longer period based on your project). If using a Printed Format the participants can signal where they are

today by writing ME ONE YEAR on the Landscape Diagram. In the Experience Format, ask participants to move to where they think they might be one year from now.

6. **Where will our GROUP be in one year?** Now ask each participant to plot on the Landscape Diagram where they hope the group will be in a year from today (or a shorter or longer period based on your project). If using a Printed Format the participants can signal where they are today by writing GROUP ONE YEAR on the Landscape Diagram. In the Experience Format, ask participants to move to where they think they might be one year from now.
7. **Reflection Discussion:** Ask the following questions to deepen your individual and collective reflection about the Landscape Diagram.
 - a. What did you consider when mapping the different elements on the Landscape Diagram?
 - b. How much movement was there for you as an individual and for your group?
 - c. What would you need to move yourself and your group from one location to another?
 - d. What will you or the group need to consider from the axis of certainty and agreement?
8. **Path Development:** From the mapping process and reflection discussion, develop a simple path forward.

PRINCIPLES FOR USING THIS TOOL

- The Landscape Diagram and the mapping process can be helpful for understanding your current location and projecting forward to your next location.
- While we have provided questions for your group to consider, you can also develop other questions that would be relevant to your current experience or challenge.
- The Agreement and Certainty Axis can be helpful to identify intervention strategies.
- Each of the zones has positive and negative implications. There is no right or wrong place on the Landscape Diagram.
- Sense-making is important. Track the movement over time and determine what might be needed to move forward.
- The Landscape Diagram could be done at different points in time to determine if patterns have emerged.

There are no right or wrong places on the Landscape Diagram.

Remember to ask the questions: What is happening right now, so what does this mean, and now what will I do with this?

THE TOOL IN PRACTICE

During a recent workshop on Co-Design, ten workshop participants were asked to experience and navigate the Landscape Diagram which had been taped to the floor in the training room. The participants moved around the Landscape Diagram in silence, pausing and reflecting as they moved in response to one question and then another.

At the end of the five questions, the participants were asked to reflect on what they were thinking at each point on the landscape. They were also asked about what this experience meant for how they engaged or supported a collaborative group. All participants described a deeper understanding of both their own contributions and the contributions of the group and also how they would move their work forward.

DIVING DEEPER

¹ The Landscape Diagram – HSD Institute - <https://www.hsdinstitute.org/resources/application-of-the-landscape-diagram.html> - a backgrounder about applying the Landscape Diagram

² Plan in Uncertainty – HSD Institute - <https://www.hsdinstitute.org/practice-hsd/what-is-your-issue/plan-in-uncertainty.html> - this link provides tools and resources for navigating in times of uncertainty

“ In simple times, when change is slow, you can use the past to predict the future. Long-term goals, milestones, task lists, and unchanging assumptions make perfect sense. Few of us live in those times these days. Our futures are complex and fast changing, so our processes for preparing for them have to be, too.

- HSD Institute

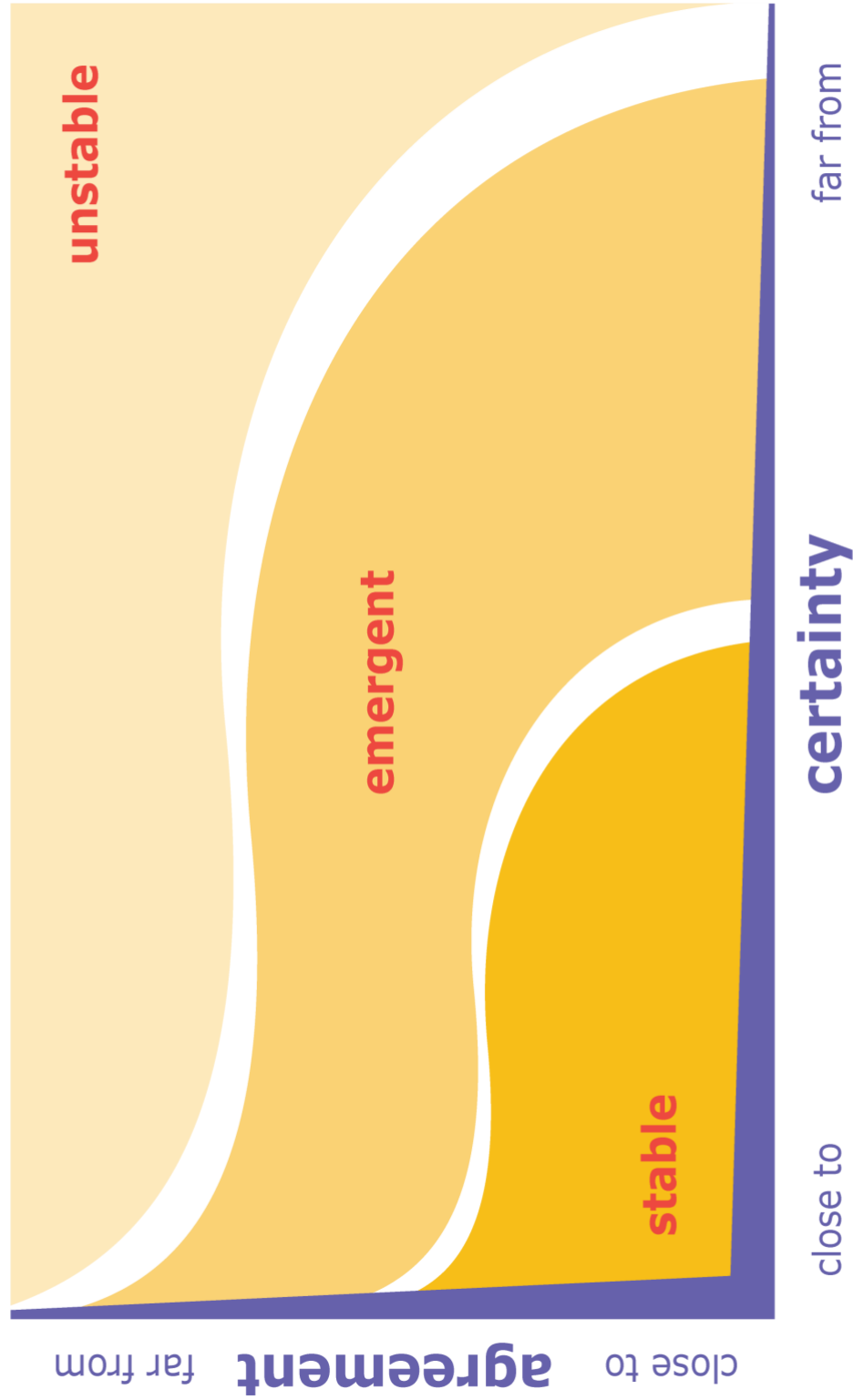
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— Landscape Diagram —



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