Title: Acknowledging Complexity in Family Support Work

When we begin to work with families we do not know how we will begin. We sense our way through. We try one strategy or another until we sense that the family members are responding. We in turn respond to them by amplifying our use of a particular practice. We can see what works after it has worked but we cannot know it will work before we have undertaken the particular approach. This is how work with families actually happens. We may organise our understanding of events retrospectively to fit into a system, but in the ‘living present’ (Stacey, 2001) we are often sensing our way.

The exclusive use of systems based approaches to family support eliminates the opportunity for novel and family specific solutions to emerge. It defines the outcomes before the activity. While the systems approach is valuable within a highly structured and homogenous environment e.g. manufacturing, it is not always useful in a highly unstructured and heterogeneous environment such as Family Support Work. This paper will explore the value of broadening the approaches to family support and will demonstrate how understanding the management of family support using more than one theoretical model will benefit both the success of family support practice and the efficacy of the evaluation of family support outcomes in Ireland. This presentation will use the Cynefin Framework (Snowden, 2007) as it relates to Family Support Work and demonstrate its potential in this context.

Cynefin Framework
