

# Mind the innovation gap:

the unfortunate tale of great programme design let down  
by traditional commissioning and contracting methods,  
and what this means for evaluators

Presented by  
Judy Oakden, Director, Pragmatica,  
Kinnect Group member

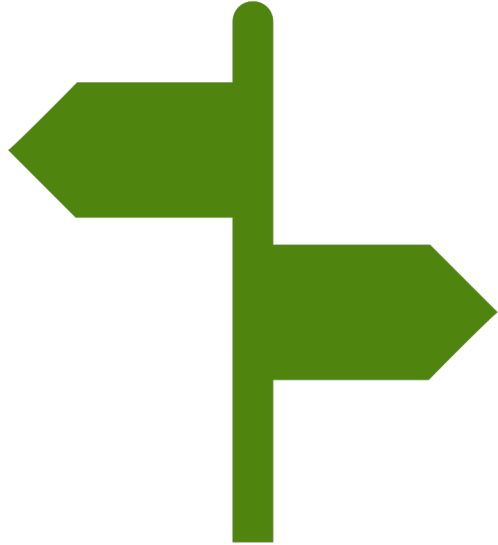
Julie Elliott, Independent evaluation  
scholar-practitioner.

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Pragmatica

# This session covers

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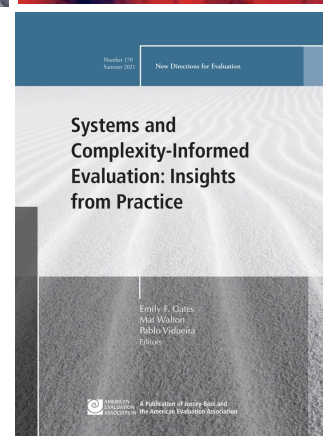
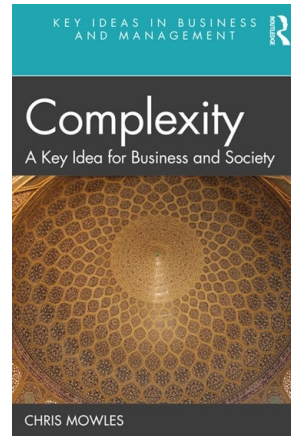
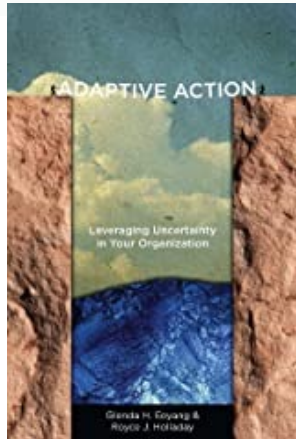
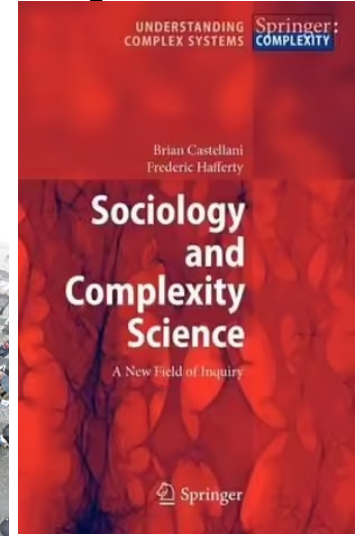
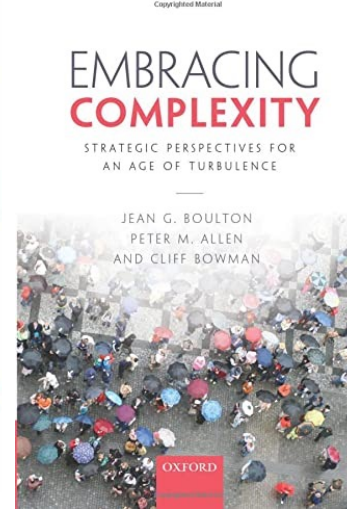
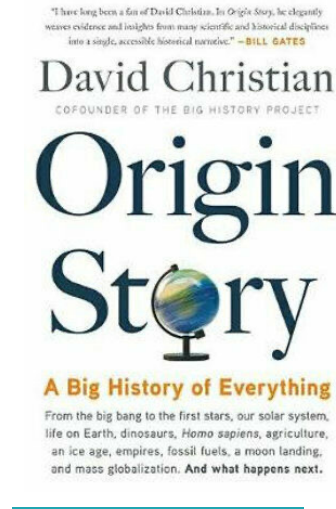
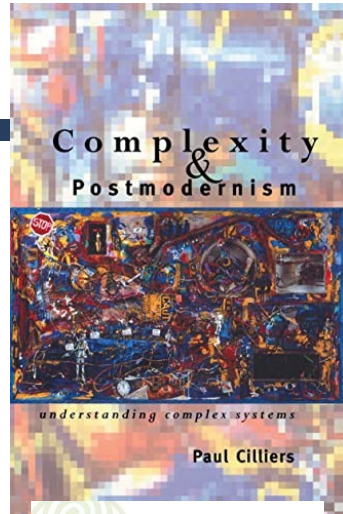
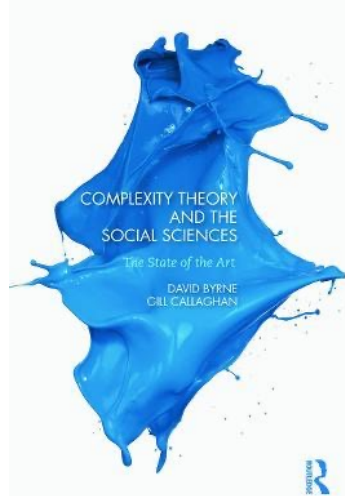
- ▣ What is a complexity informed view?
- ▣ Applying complexity theory to contracting out for human services
- ▣ Where can we have influence?
- ▣ Lessons for evaluators.

1.

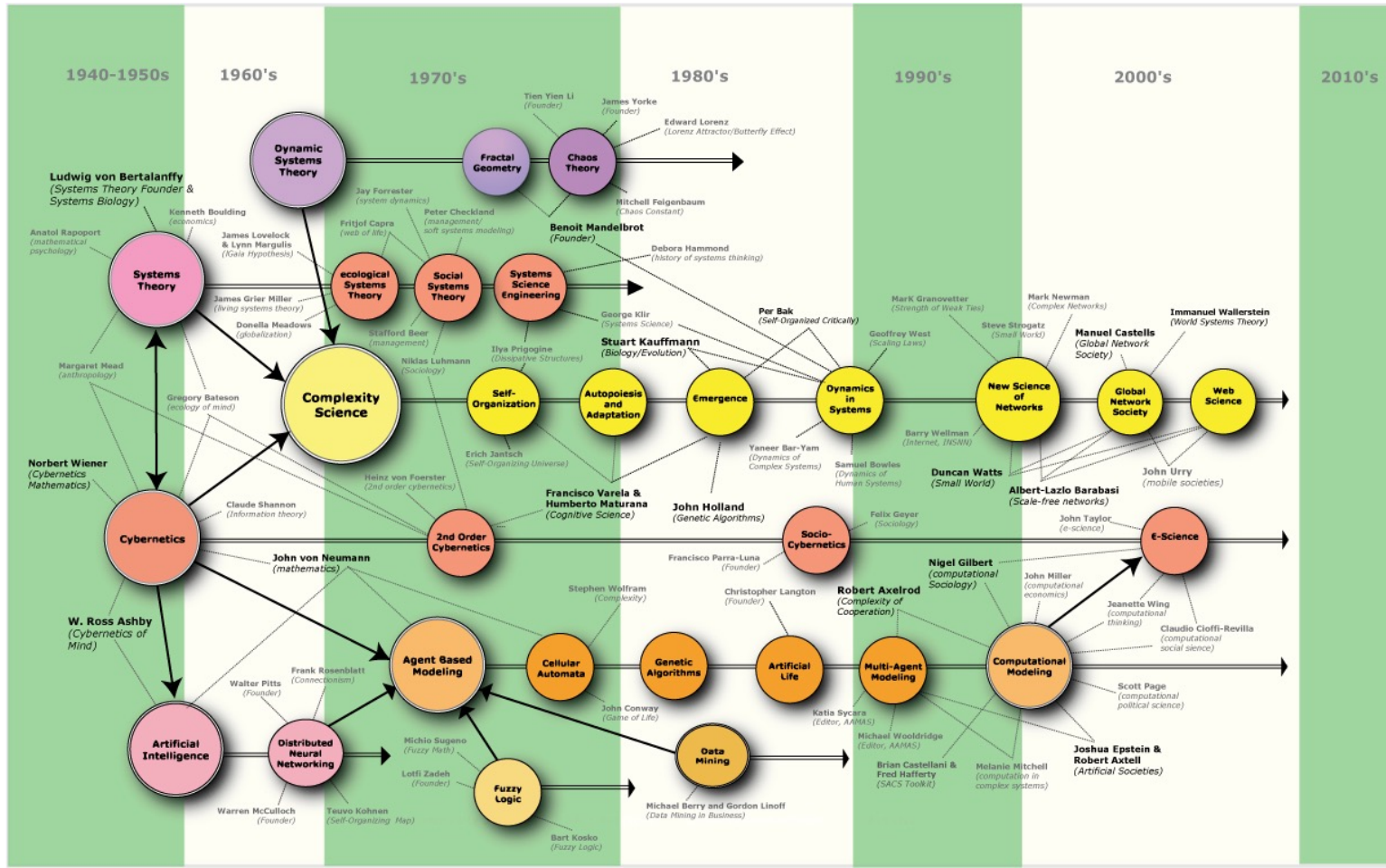
# Complexity informed view

What do we  
mean by  
complexity?

# Positioning ourselves in complexity



# Brian Castellani's Complexity Map (2009)

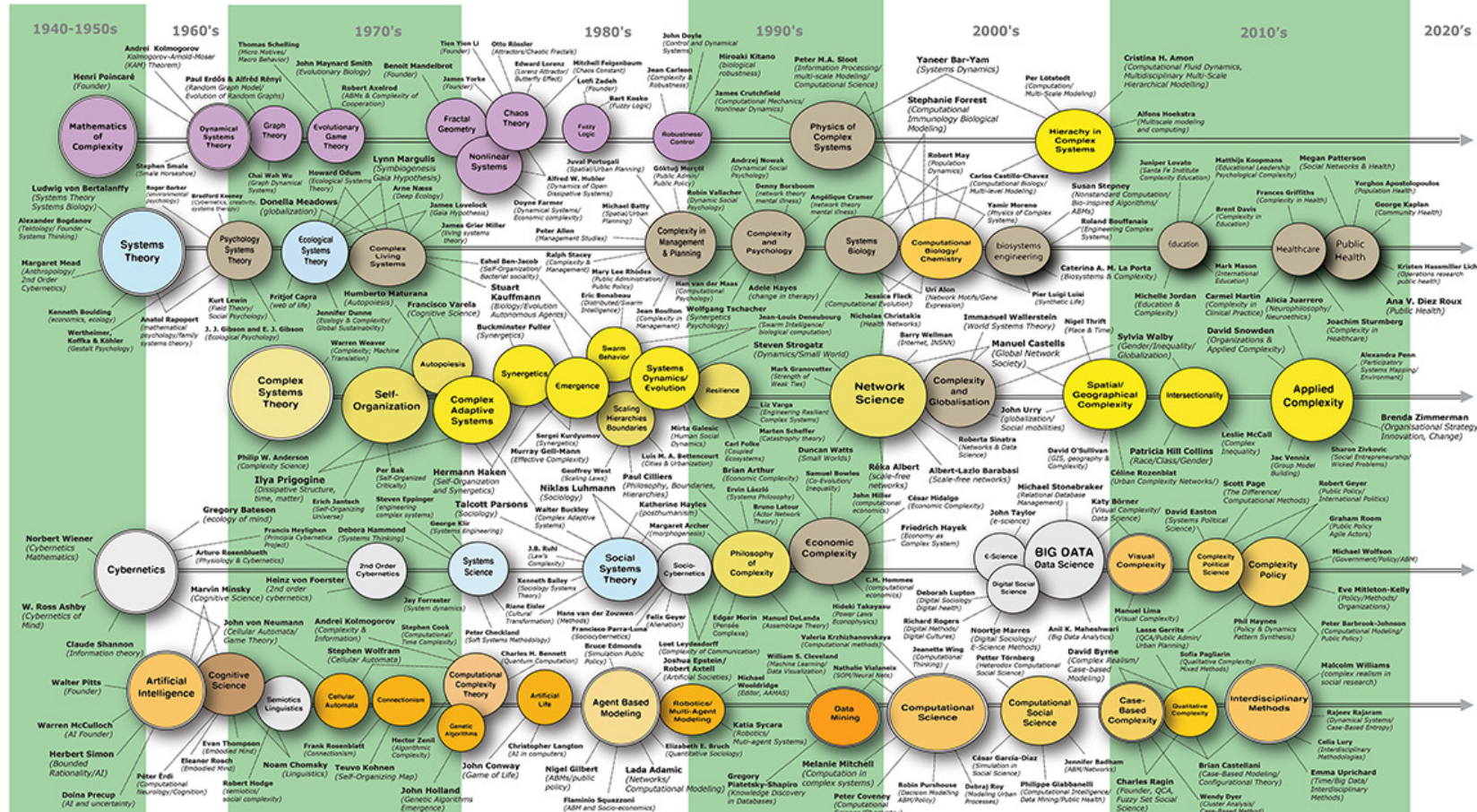




# 2021 Map of the Complexity Sciences

Brian Castellani & Lasse Gerrits

# 2021



# The complexity turn

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The complexity sciences are one of the key influences on an emerging alternative frame of post-normal evaluation.

From systematic (breaking down the parts)  
To systemic (viewing as a whole)



## EVALUATING AND VALUING IN SOCIAL RESEARCH

THOMAS A. SCHWANDT  
EMILY F. GATES

# Evaluating as situated practical reasoning\*

## Evaluative judgements

How did we do? What should we do together now? Where do we go from here? Who gains and who loses from what we plan to do or have done?

Inform

## Evidence

Facts of the matter, data

## Values

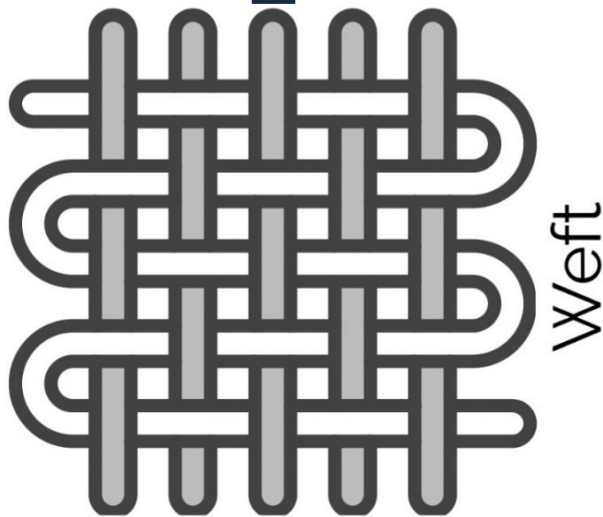
Moral, political and epistemic, both individual and social

## Perspectives

Viewpoints and framings that include interests, aims and desires

## Power/authority

Moral, political and epistemic: both individual and collective



Warp

Influence

\*Adapted from Schwandt & Gates (2021)



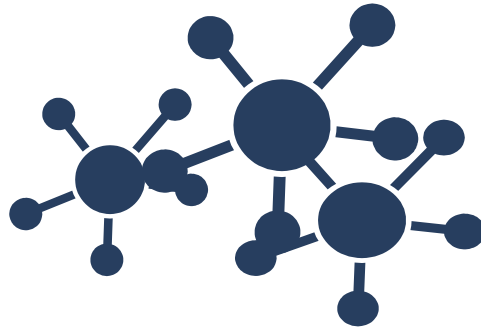
# Conditions for complexity

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Exposed to wider context



Interconnected relationships



Variation exists



# Conditions for complexity – providers and evaluators

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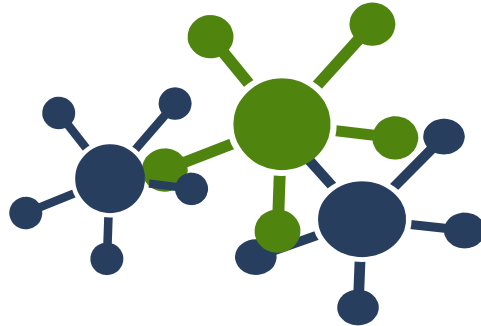
Exposed to wider context

Need to navigate



Interconnected relationships

Influence what's achievable



Variation exists

Different responses



# Implications

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- ▣ **Path dependency:** History, timing, sequence matter
- ▣ **Self organising:** Emerging, stabilising and dissolving patterns
- ▣ **Emergence:** Radically new evolves (within bounds) is non-linear and episodic, so change is disproportionate to effort
- ▣ What happens can amplify or dampen (**feedback**) the trajectory of change

# What can we know?

## Limits to knowledge:

- we can consider the past
- we can observe the present
- the future doesn't exist, it doesn't know itself, so we can't know the future

But we can feel uncertain. This is a psychological response to not knowing the future.



**lizandmollie**

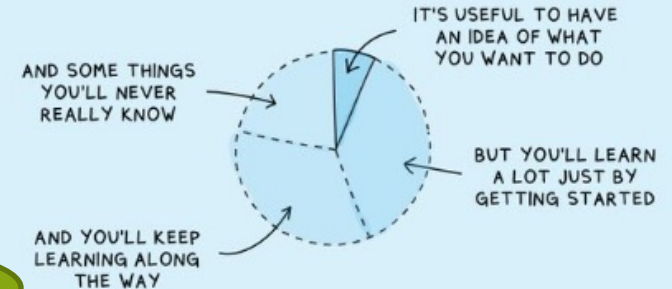
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WHAT I THOUGHT I NEEDED TO  
KNOW TO GET STARTED



THE TRUTH



@LIZ ANDMOLLIE



# 2.

**Applying complexity  
framing to contracting out  
for human services**

This is not  
buying widgets  
but human  
services for  
situated or  
contextual  
problems

# So what could possibly go wrong?

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# In a nutshell

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- ▣ No level playing field (not always fair)
- ▣ Plans may not work
- ▣ Variable traction
- ▣ Unexpected may occur
- ▣ Managing risk



# Influence

There are ways to influence in  
conditions of complexity



# Past histories mean there is no level playing field...

- ❑ Contract for circumstance, not one size fits all.

What does this mean for the evaluation methodologies we might use?



# Plans may not work because things self-organise...

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- ▣ Hold plans lightly, expect unanticipated outcomes

What relationships do we need, to notice self organising?



# Different results in different contexts...

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- ▣ Learn what works-FAST

What processes or forms of evaluation help us provide fast feedback?



# When the unexpected emerges

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- ▣ Seek opportunity, rather than fidelity

What does this mean for how we set up contracts and evaluate programmes?





# Managing risk

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- ▣ Balance between accountability and learning
- ▣ Recognise you can't see everything



How do we seek diverse views and focus on both accountability and learning

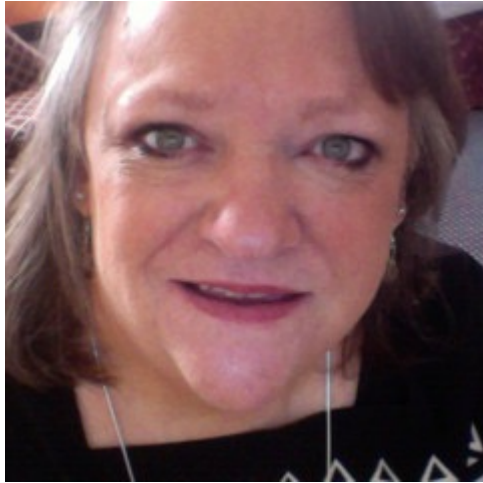
# 3.

## Lessons for evaluators

What are our  
key takeaways

# Adopt a mindset of inquiry ...

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Royce Holladay  
Human Systems Dynamics  
Institute

“There ain’t no  
naughty or  
nice, there is  
just fit for  
function?”

So what IS  
fit for  
function?

# Find and navigate the tensions

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## NPM informed contracting

- ▣ transactions at a distance
- ▣ low trust/competitive
- ▣ tightly controlled
- ▣ standardised
- ▣ accountability focus



## Complexity framed contracting

- ▣ human relationship-driven
- ▣ high trust/collaborative
- ▣ adaptive
- ▣ flexible
- ▣ builds on joint learning

What do the contracts you are working on look and feel like?



# Talk around your table

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- What do the contracts or evaluations look and feel like that you are working on, or have any experience of? Are they set up on a premise of predictability or flexibility?
- How are relationships managed and encouraged
- Is there a learning mindset or an accountability mindset
- In what ways do the contracts constrain or enable evaluating in conditions of complexity?

# Consider

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Might some of these approaches work for you to navigate the tensions?

- Longer-term more flexible contracts AND evaluations
- Use high trust and collaborative ways of working and share the risk
- Use evaluation methodologies that are more participatory and learning focussed
- Design and use administrative data where you can to speed up feedback
- Give back information to funders and providers in small bite-sized chunks
- Set up and use regular sensemaking processes with funders and providers to learn.

**Thought to take away:**

**What assumptions do you hold?  
Has this session challenged any  
of them?**

# References

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# Thanks!

**Any questions?**

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# Photo credits

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Special thanks to all the people who made and released these awesome resources for free:

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