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**Research highlights:**

- This paper starts under the premise that making dilemmas explicit for those facing them is the stepping stone towards realizing their potential.
- This paper presents and tests a three-dimensional cognitive mapping, the 'dilemma cube', to make dilemmas explicit in a multi-actor context.
- The use of the 'dilemma cube' guided and structured the contribution of participants, enabling to surface different interpretations about actions and effects in the project.
- The three-dimensional nature of the dilemma cube allowed visualizing co-existing conflicting interpretations about issues at stake, and surfacing the interrelatedness of issues in the project, revealing dilemmas in the project that would have remained concealed otherwise.

**1. Introduction**

For decades, dilemmas have been a topic of reflection for practitioners (Ghebali, 2006; Christensen, 2013; Vringer et al., 2015) and scholars (Rittel and Webber, 1973; Benner and Tushman, 2003; Höijer et al., 2006; Northcraft and Tenbrunsel, 2011) in different fields. Dilemmas manifest in decision making when actors need to make a choice and the available options exclude one another, and have consequences that make them equally desirable and undesirable.

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