

“It’s All Change” Mason’s ODKM program

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What's changing

- **Our worldview (paradigm):** *We are coming to understand people's practices.* Hence 'complexity', 'uncertainty', 'muddling through' *not* 'structure', 'control'.
- **Work:** social, collaborative, self-organizing (agile)...
- **Environment:** dynamic, fluid
- **Technology:** enables collaboration, participation
- **Problems:** wicked, values
- **Networks:** The 'informal organization' is real. This is how work gets done.

Getting down to work!

If the question behind management is: *'how (best) to organize to get things done'* The missing questions are “*what are we organizing*” or “*what (and where) is this work?*”

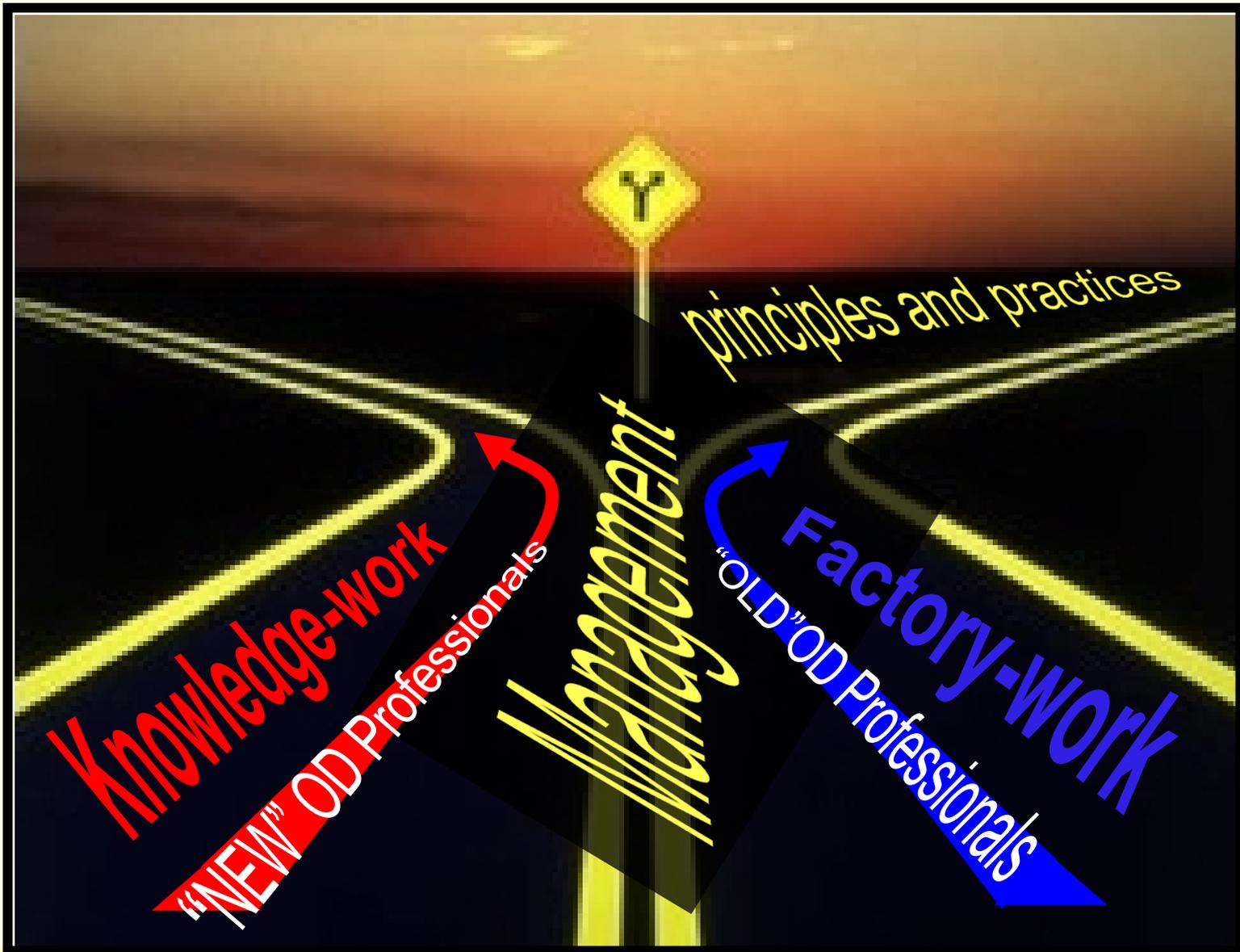
“Building the plane *and* airport while flying it”

Knowledge workers organize their work while the work (they assess the situation, define the problem, and make decisions)

- There is no difference between managing (organizing) and ‘work’
- They don’t get instructions. *They create their own work.*
- Their work is highly social – collective work, not individual.
- The issues they deal with are mostly wicked
- The work is not routine. Circumstances can change quickly.

All this points to the necessity of people *self-organizing* in teams and networks

A fork in the road



Why change?

“We won't solve our problems with the mindset that created them.”

Albert Einstein

“External supervision may correct errors but only ‘internal supervision’ can prevent their occurrence”.

Eric Trist quoted in Marv Weisbord, *Productive Workplaces*

KM:

**Political reform in order to build
knowledge-work friendly
practices**

Why organizing work is challenging

- *You have the 'task' itself (possibly technically complex).* With knowledge-work little is clear-cut. *It takes a joint 'effort' to solve problems* and get to what, when, why, how, with whom.
- *And you have the complex social dynamics of work.* Many of the 'problems' of the work environment have to do with social (interpersonal) dynamics – relationships and 'boundaries'. *Knowledge work is cooperative work.* People interacting ('networking'), sharing knowledge (negotiating meaning together).

To do this well



This work is necessarily

Organizing is '*adaptive work*' (Ron Heifetz), it has to do with values, beliefs, attitudes, relationships, ...

The status quo at work

Visible Management The view from the top

- Deliverables
 - Efficiency
- Bottom line performance
 - Structure
 - Compliance

Tools



Hidden Organizing The view from practice

- Possibilities
 - Interpretation
 - Creativity
 - Relationships
 - Qualitative
 - Conversations
 - Social networks
 - Cooperation
 - Participation
- Working out what to do
 - Getting things done well
 - A satisfactory outcome
 - Flexibility
 - Accountability

Talk

Sharing knowledge: two perspectives

“Collective work”

“We need to work ‘together’. You take this part, I’ll take the other. Then we’ll share our documents online.”

“Collaborative work”

“It’s *a partnership*. We’re all involved, doing it together, helping each other out, deciding together what to do... The work is really a joint effort, like music. If you take away one instrument it is not the same.”

The two kinds of “KM”

- One approach adds knowledge as a ‘layer’ to conventional management practices. People who approach KM this way generally place a lot of emphasis on **technology and other *tools***. It’s what I call the **‘little k, BIG M’** approach.
- Another approach is that organizing knowledge-work – which is social and collaborative – requires new practices that support collaboration and knowledge sharing. This is what I call the **‘BIG K, little m’** approach to Km. The **focus is on *talk*** rather than *tools*.

Approach

1. You start by looking at work

Organizing: 'Creating knowledge,' 'sharing knowledge,' making meaning

2. Then you look at knowledge

What is it?

Where does it come from?

How do you use it?

3. Then, how do we organize so people create and share knowledge effectively?

Focus on three sets of issues

- **Organizational.** The industrial-age culture: mindset, structures, and practices. Eliminate top-down decision-making, isolation, rigidity.
- **Situational.** The problem or task typically is complex, evolving. As any 'solution' involves diverse people/groups you need '*everyone in the room*'.
- **Personal.** When 'solutions' to problems require true participation and collaboration, people's attitudes, values, beliefs, and relationships matter.

Framing KM

1. Knowledge is messy
2. Knowledge is self-organizing
3. Knowledge seeks community
4. Knowledge travels via language
5. The more you try to pin it down, the more knowledge slips away
6. Looser is probably better
7. There is no one solution
8. Knowledge does not grow forever
9. No one is in charge
10. You can't impose rules and systems
11. There is no silver bullet
12. How you define knowledge determines how you manage it

The issue of KM in a nutshell

‘Knowledge is not a "thing" that can be "managed". It is a capacity of people and communities, continuously generated and renewed in their conversation, to meet new challenges and opportunities.

People responsible for knowledge value creation can be inspired and supported, but they cannot be "managed" as people were managed in the industrial era, as mere extensions of the machinery.’