

PSYCHOLOGY OF WORK AND ORGANIZATIONS

Epistemology of complexity

An organization is a **formally established** group of **people** with **explicit goals**, characterized by processes of **differentiation**—such as division of labor, specialization, roles, functions, tasks, and activities—and processes of **integration**, including communication systems, internal culture, organizational charts, and coordination mechanisms.

Epistemology of complexity

Epistemology of objectivity/positivistic

Truth/fact based
Science as a neutralization of subject/human
general descriptions and prescriptions for understanding phenomena but also for controlling and predicting reality
(one best way)

Epistemology of complexity

Epistemology of Construction
way in which the subjects act on reality / actively intervene
no invariable laws / ways of describing reality and actions
Every subject knows reality on the basis of his/her own categories
different perspectives, points of view

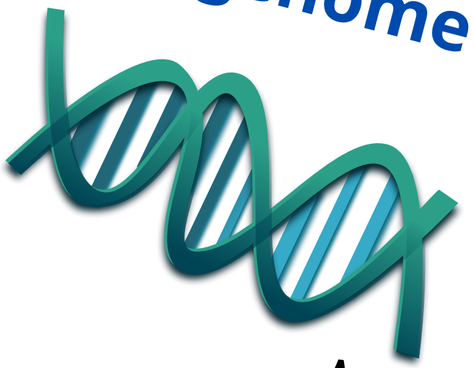
Epistemology of complexity

Morgan, 1986

Organization as a machine



Organization as a genome



Brain

Political Systems

Flows

IMPORTANCE OF SUBJECTS AND OF THEIR RELATIONSHIPS

Epistemology of complexity

Organization

system of objective, concrete, rational and predominantly conscious elements of any social body (ie human, financial and technological resources, products, roles, procedures, mission, strategies, the
authority management and leadership, in short its structure and culture organizational)

Institution

complex of subjective and intersubjective aspects, phantasmatic, irrational and predominantly unconscious dimensions that represent the way in which an organization is experienced and conceived by
people and groups who are part and interact with it

Managers are typically trained to manage only the visible side: equipped to operate within the formal organization, where everything appears rational, controllable, and predictable: in many organizational cultures, emotions are treated as foreign elements

Epistemology of complexity

Official/ideal organization vs. lived organization: Organizations have a formal life (roles, procedures, structures, strategies) but also an experienced life made of emotions, relationships, tensions, expectations and informal dynamics. Both of them are real

People bring their histories into organizations, and organizations have histories too: individuals interpret authority, conflict, recognition and change through previous experiences. At the same time, organizations develop their own culture, memories, implicit rules and recurring ways of relating

Person, role and organization are interconnected: A role exists beyond the individual who occupies it, but each person interprets and transforms that role. Organizational life therefore emerges from the interaction between person, role, group and institution.

Epistemology of complexity

Organizational behaviour is not fully rational: people do not act only according to formal roles and explicit goals. Anxiety, recognition, conflict, dependency, trust and defensive processes can also shape organizational behaviour

Organizations can contain anxiety: structures, roles, authority and routines do not only organize work: they can also provide certainty, boundaries, belonging and protection from uncertainty. For this reason, people may defend organizational arrangements that also make them suffer

Epistemology of complexity

Dialectical relationship among different levels



Epistemology of complexity

Organizational structure
Organizational chart
Hierarchies and reporting lines
Departments, teams, units

Roles and functions
Job descriptions
Assigned responsibilities
Task distribution

Operational procedures
Standard Operating Procedures
Workflow systems
Monitoring and control mechanisms

Internal rules and policies
Codes of conduct
Company regulations
Official guidelines

Stated goals and strategies
Vision and mission
Strategic planning
Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Formal communication systems
Official meetings
Internal communications (emails, newsletters, memos)
Reports and documentation

Tangible resources and infrastructure
Office spaces, tools, equipment
Technology and software
Budget and financial resources

Visible leadership style
Decision-making processes
Supervision and control
Performance evaluation systems

Epistemology of complexity

Unofficial interpersonal relationships

Personal alliances, sympathies, and rivalries
Informal leaders
Hidden hierarchies of influence

Unwritten norms and rules

“How things are really done” vs. official procedures
Behaviors that are tolerated or rewarded unofficially
Organizational taboos (topics that are avoided)

Emotional and cultural climate

Atmosphere of trust, fear, or competition
Collective emotional states (e.g., anxiety, frustration, excitement)
Unspoken group feelings

Informal communication

Gossip, rumors, hints
Informal channels outside official ones

Hidden power dynamics and conflicts

Suppressed or avoided conflicts
Manipulations, passive resistance, silent sabotage
Fear of authority or of making mistakes

Shared assumptions and unconscious beliefs

Beliefs about how things “should” be
Collective ideas about leadership, risk, success, or failure
Group fantasies (e.g., the “perfect boss,” the “enemy outside”)

Organizational defense mechanisms

Collective strategies to avoid change or conflict
Denial, rationalization, avoidance
Emotional protection systems

Symbolic identity and belonging

"Us vs. them" dynamics (between teams, departments, levels)
Pride or inferiority linked to roles or status
Internal narratives ("we’ve always done it this way", "no one listens to us")

Epistemology of complexity

Family

biological union
Affective roles
bond self-justified
Division is a failure
Division from children is an act of love
Result in the children' s autonomy
Produce cohabitation/coexistence

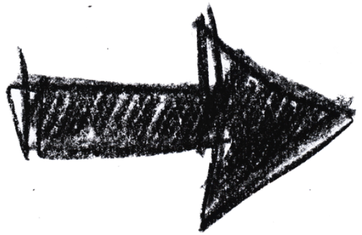
Organization

functional/rational union
Division of labour
bond is subordinated to the results
Is based on the management of inclusion/exclusion
Division depends on the results
The outcome is the integration of roles
Produce products or services

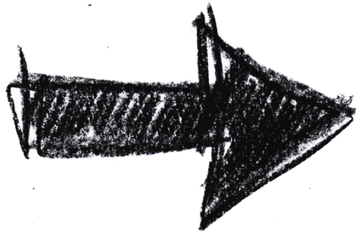
Epistemology of complexity

	object	Fantasmatic dynamic	Institutional agency	result
Dual institution	mother	Present = good Absent = bad	idealization/ destruction	Emotional dependence
Triadic institution	Father-mother relationship	Exclusion from the object	Fusional group	Resistency to change
Tetradic institution	Father-mother-brothers and sisters relationship	Split between parental copule And brothers/sisters	Ideologization complementarity	Difference Intergenerational conflict,

Epistemology of complexity



Maternal role --> accomodate, accept, forgive, apologize, understand, help...



Paternal role --> empower, differentiate, evaluate, clarify, decide, guide...

GOOD ENOUGH ORGANIZATION / GOOD ENOUGH LEADERSHIP

Epistemology of complexity

Does not identify general rules -> does not indicate rules for organizations, which are invariant with respect to people and contexts of use.

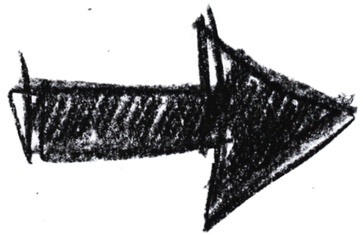
Psychological view

organization is the meeting and clash point between mind (organized place of cognitive and affective processes) and the social (organized place with institutions, values, cultures, ideologies).

EXERCISE



Exercise



Give a title to the story

Who are the subjects

What are they doing

What are they feeling

Which are the outcomes

Which is the end of the story

Exercise

What you have observed…

What happened inside the group

What are the differences between the individual and group work?

Dynamics and emotions…

Epistemology of complexity



One cold winter's day, a number of porcupines huddled together quite closely in order through their mutual warmth to prevent themselves from being frozen. But they soon felt the effect of their quills on one another, which made them again move apart. Now when the need for warmth once more brought them together, the drawback of the quills was repeated so that they were tossed between two evils, until they had discovered the proper distance from which they could best tolerate one another.

Epistemology of complexity

Work is "living work: full involvement of the worker’s subjectivity — emotions, intelligence, and values — in dealing with real work situations". It’s not mechanical; it’s an active, personal effort that requires creativity and engagement

Working means constantly bridging the **gap between what is prescribed (rules, procedures, expectations) and what actually happens in real work situations**. This gap always exists, and workers must invent individual and collective ways to fill it, often using creativity and judgment beyond what is formally required

Work resposnds to fundamental identity questions such as: "Who am I?", "Am I capable?", "Will I be seen as competent?". **Work is not merely a site of production, but a space where people seek recognition, meaning, and a sense of self**

Epistemology of complexity

Guides individual, groups and organizational behaviors,

Often implicit and not clear

Objectives

It is a symbolized fact

It is a rational fact

Epistemology of complexity

Derives from interactions in a specific context

Cause strong feelings

Relationships

Social phenomena conscoius and uncoscious

Quality/quantity

Epistemology of complexity

Size of a group

3-5 people = **small group**

16-30 people = **median group**

31-70 = **large group**

71 and more = **mass/collective, crowd**

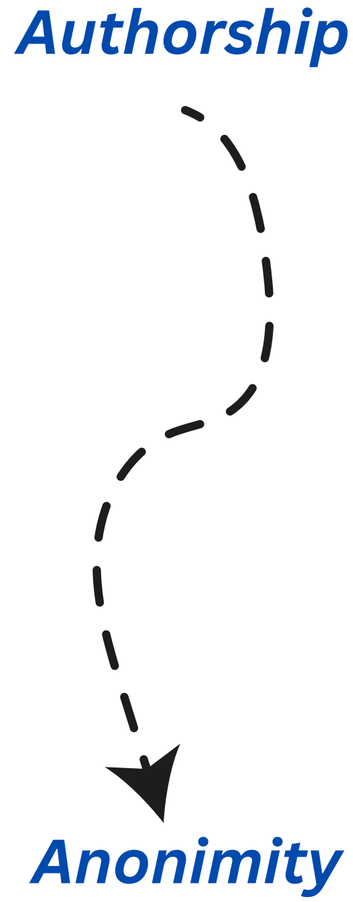
Dynamics (usually attributed)

sense of coalition, intimacy, spontaneity, face to face interaction, interdependence, informality, full productivity of the group

Creation of subgroups, regression, dependence from the leader

experience of caos, regression, anonimity, need of rules, creativity

Sense of being part of an anonymous crowd, de-responsibilization, regression



Epistemology of complexity

Relationships and objects are chatergorized

Primitive needs

Belonging

Risk of regressive mechanisms

Understand what is the meaning of staying together

Epistemology of complexity

value: status and position

Enemies and active

Prescriptive

needs of stability and security

Absence of emotions, coldness

Organization as a violation of autonomy

Grouping

Isolation - equality

Enemies and passive

Independence

Maternal/paternal code

Trust based on competence

TEAM

collective recognition

Friends- active

Values: loyalty and protection

Friends - passive

Belonging

Needs of affiliation

Maternal code