

The Heartbeat of the Organization

HK KM Society

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Common Knowledge Associates

www.commonknowledge.org

Collective Sensemaking

A conversational event where people intentionally come together for the purpose of using their varied perspectives and cognitive abilities to make sense of an issue or problem they are mutually facing.



Changing the Culture through Changing the Conversation

Utrecht Government– The Netherlands

The Problem:

- The city government of Utrecht is increasingly facing issues that require the eight city policy departments to work together – but the departments have always been siloed.
- Endless discussions - Government officials hold many discussions but with few, if any, resulting changes



“Problem was, there were issues in the organization that didn’t get solved. We noticed that it was not the issue itself, but it was the way people talked about it. People attributed the problems to the way the other was talking. It’s easy to talk about the topic, but it’s difficult talking about the way others are talking. We wanted to talk about the whole issue, to talk deeper, do the whole talk, and not just do it the way we usually talk.”



Hans van Soelen, Program Manager, Organizational Change

The Solution – Hold Pleinin

- That changes the format of the conversations
- And broadens the topic of the conversations to include both the content and how we talk about the content



Each Plein brings together 10-40 people from different departments as well as external stakeholders to talk about a city problem that needs to be solved. There is:

- a problem owner who frames the issue
- a chair person who is a high level official, but who is not involved in the issue
- a coach or facilitator who helps the interaction and reflects on what is happening



Westplein

The next stage of development of the city building program

“For eight years we used our traditional way of working to get a plan, but with little progress. There were too many different views about how we should go in the future. We didn’t have commitment from the citizens, government, or the bank, which has a big building there and needs for people to have access by car. But how do we develop the homes and infrastructure when we have too many cars?”

During the Westplein we focused on finding a basis for trust in order to reach a breakthrough in a long lingering and complicated process. We gave as much attention to commitment as to the plan and we took more time to get to know each other.

It now seems to be progressing well.
We can now make further steps.”

Jan den Boer, Project Manager



“We changed the setting and that helped enormously. People started to focus on how we talk.”

“When you did the coaching workshop for us, you started by asking each person, ‘Why are you here at this workshop?’ Something changes when you start that way. So that is how we start now – we give people the opportunity to put themselves, with all they have, into solving the problem.”

“This will change the organization totally in another year!”



Hans van Soelen, Program Manager, Organizational Change

"Isolate to concentrate



Convene to make collective sense”



All of Us Are Smarter Than Any One of Us

- Tough business challenges get crowd-sourced to the organization
- The “collective wisdom” of the entire organization gets harnessed in making “executive” decisions around strategic direction, resource allocation and key appointments.
- Everyone gets to see the “big picture” as trends and developments around the world get tagged and shared across the enterprise
- Change is “socially constructed” and ripples out, rather than cascading down.

What is critical, even more than the fact that such organizations convene, is what happens when the group is convened.



How We Come Together to Make Collective Sense

- Circles connect
- Connection before content
- Learn in small groups- integrate ideas in the large group
- Ensure diversity in participants
- All voices in the room are heard
- Experts inform our thinking not provide us answers
- The role of the leader changes

The Shift in the Role of Leaders

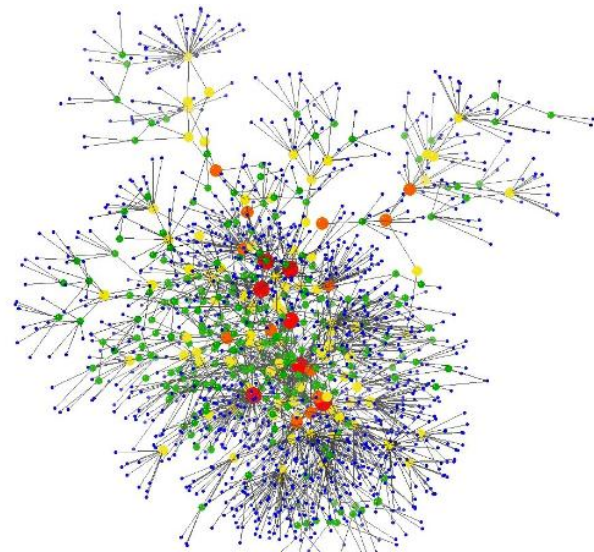


No single person, no matter how intelligent or highly placed, is smart enough to deal with the wicked/complex problems organizations now face

The time of the heroic leader, who is expected to have all the answers, is over. It is the time for drawing on the collective intelligence of the organization to generate both strategy and action.



Knowledge is distributed across the organization and to use it we have to bring those people together to collectively make sense



Leader as Conversational Architect

1. Identify complex challenges the organization is facing – “adaptive challenges”
2. Frame the conversation
3. Identify who needs to be in the conversation – ensure diversity
4. Provide Transparency - make all information on the issue available
5. Design for interaction – facilitation
6. Give the work to the group – participate as a member