

MENTAL MODELS

FIVE ORGANISING PARADIGMS

HOW DO WE ORGANISE IN WAYS THAT SERVE BOTH US AND THE NEED?

DESCRIPTION AND CORE PRINCIPLES:

Over the millennia, human beings have developed many different ways of organising together. Each new age of civilization has its signature form of organisation.

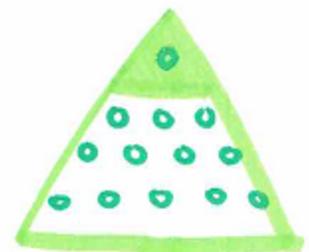
Circle

As nomads we lived in small groups. The circle became the mother of all our organisational forms—humans started sitting in circle as soon as they invented fires to sit around. We told stories, held elder councils and solved problems in this way. This form is very useful for reflection, storytelling, being together. Purpose is in the centre—it is shared by all.



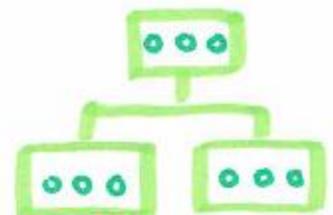
Hierarchy (Triangle)

As we stopped our nomadic wandering and settled in one place, we developed agriculture. Our communities grew bigger, and the clergy (for ritual) and the warrior or soldier (for protection) classes emerged. We began to develop hierarchies and organised in “levels” where one person or group of people had power over others. The triangular form of hierarchy is very useful for action, for getting things done. Purpose is held at the top level.



Bureaucracy (Square)

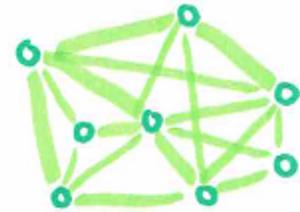
Simple hierarchies are not designed to deal with a high degree of complexity. The industrial age brought change and more complexity. Bureaucracy became the predominant organisational model, specializing horizontally and embracing hierarchy, which controlled vertically. Together they managed much greater complexity than either could do alone.



Bureaucracy is fantastic for stability, optimising and maintaining the status quo, and for managing complex situations to a certain degree. As Complexity and speed grows—the bureaucracy is not agile enough to respond quickly. It typically moves slowly in the face of change. Purpose in the bureaucracy is also at the top.

Networks

A more recent organisational form (first described in the 70's) of networks emerged in the information/communication age, as a response to a need to organise and re-organise quickly and flexibly. Networks are collections of individuals, circles (small groups) or triangles (hierarchies)—nodes that are connected together. Networks can link all types of organisations. Networks also exist inside bureaucracies. Networks usually gather around a shared purpose and are great for relationship, flexibility and innovation, and for getting things done fast.



The connection is guided by individual purpose harmonising with a collective purpose. The different nodes are connected together because their respective purposes need each other. Once the need is no longer there, the network connection will most often lapse.

When a new organisational form emerges, the older ones do not disappear. Each form has both advantages and shortcomings—each is good for different things. When we want to start an organisation ourselves or organise something in our lives, which one of these organisational forms do we choose? When something needs to get done, then triangle is great. When we need to stop and reflect, circle is useful. When we need stability and deal with some degree of complexity, it is good to have a bureaucracy. When we need to innovate, networks work best. So what is the next level of organisational form that can hold all of these?

The Fifth Organisational Pattern is a combination of the circle or council for collective clarity, the project team (hierarchy) for action, the bureaucracy for accountability, structure and stability and the network for rapid sharing of information, Inspiration and linking all the parts together. The ability to sense what is needed and engage the most appropriate form in a flexible way is the goal of the fifth organising paradigm.