

# Change, Knowledge, Learning, and "The Human Factor"

Knowledge is also Learning a Mind  
Set

# The Speaker

- Management consultant through 30 years
- PhD-student at CBS: "Change Management"

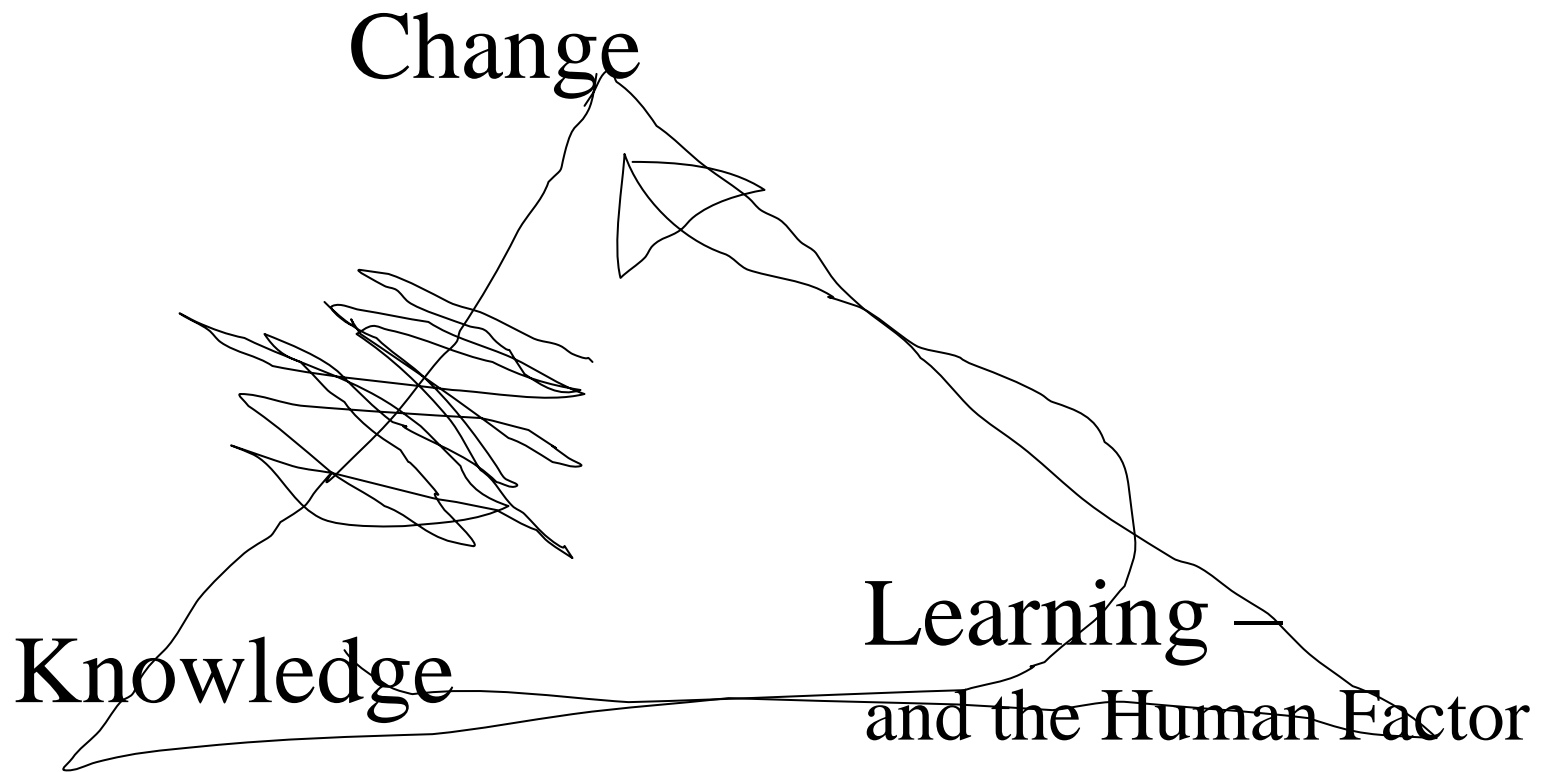
# The Problem

- Change projects and management concepts are conquering the world. (3-letter acronyms). They are knowledge.
- They often do not succeed. (IT, mergers, quality, BSC etc.). Organisations did not always learn what was expected.
- Literature does not help much.

# Literature

- Research literature is unreadable for practitioners
- And only descriptive
- Management literature (“Heathrow Academy”) is not well documented
- And extremely heterogeneous

# The Problem ii



# So I will:

- Given that much conventional knowledge does not lead to intended learning (= intended change):
- Go back to Aristotle and look for inspiration, and from there follow the track -
- Suggest a different sort of understanding of knowledge.

# The Knowledge Workers

- Aristotle
- Soeren Kierkegaard
- Max Weber
- Michael Polanyi
- Donald Schön

# Aristotle (384 – 322 before Christ)

- Techne: "know-how", the knowledge helping us to produce. Concrete, contextual, means-ends-rational, pragmatic. May be tacit: "thinking with your hands" without being able to explain how you were able to succeed.

# Episteme

- "know-why", being able to explain relations, cause-effect-relations, eternal, abstract, context-free knowledge. Formulas. Universals independent of time and space. "Scientific ideal".

# Problem! Again!

- Implementing a new concept is trying to replace people's techne with episteme ("not invented here"). Maybe that is difficult, maybe people don't like it. It is up-hill.

# And worse: Phronesis

- Knowledge based on values, the understanding of what is best for mankind. Practice-oriented, pragmatic, and contextual.

# Soeren Kierkegaard 1813 – 1855)

- ”The only reality, an existing person is more than knowing about, is his own reality, that he exists. And this reality is his absolute interest. The abstraction demands that he becomes interest-less so that he can obtain knowledge. The ethical demands him to be endlessly interested in existing.”

# Kierkegaard ii

- "Subjectivity is truth. Subjectivity is reality."
- "What is abstract thinking? That is thinking where there is no thinker....."
- "What is concrete thinking? It is the thinking where there is a thinking person, and a concrete something to be thought, where existence gives the existing thinker time and space."

# Kierkegaard iii

- So Kierkegaard rejects episteme and calls for phronesis.

# Max Weber 1904

- "Science can help the acting person to be conscious that all actions....through their consequences imply the accept of certain values and so .....reject other values. To make the choice is the acting person's task."
- "What we further can offer the person who is going to decide, is knowledge about which consequences the goal of the intended action has in itself."

# Max Weber ii

- Max Weber says that science should create knowledge that makes it easier for people to make choices on an informed basis regarding values, that is: phronesis.

# Michael Polanyi 1958

- "Even the most strictly mechanized procedure leaves something to personal skill in the exercise of which an individual bias may enter."
- "Acts of personal judgment form an essential part of science."
- "Impersonal allegation is a contradiction in terms – just as an anonymous check."

# Polanyi ii

- Polanyi argues that man acts on the basis of personal judgement anyway, best when he is....”striving passionately to fulfill his personal obligations to universal standards”.

This passion is phronesis.

# Donald Schön 1983

- "Technicians tend to promote their technique at the expense of the whole."
- "Technical rationality depends on agreement about the goals."
- "The technical rationality model does not have the possibility to handle conflicting paradigms for professional practice."

# Schön ii

- Technical rationality is techne founded on episteme. And that creates bigger and bigger problems for society. Consideration for the whole brings Schön to the quest of phronesis.

# Episteme

- Can bring strategic renewal to habit ridden companies. Can offer creative concepts and solutions. But it leaves out the personal and ethical dimension. The acting subject is invisible. Episteme-based concepts may dislodge valuable, techne-based know-how.

# Techné

- Can offer good advice.
- Communities of practice is a strong concept.
- Techné is what makes the company work and deliver.
- Techné tends to be conservative.

# Phronesis

- It is always there, also in ordinary people.
- So people decide. Either to change in the intended direction, or in the opposite – or to stall. The decision is always based in their own subjectively perceived reality and personal, intended goals.

# Problem again!

- What do we know about which sort(s) of knowledge leaders activate in order to bring about learning in change projects?

# Literature ii

- Very very little phronesis! Yet a little more in the later years (ethical accounts, environment discussions, green balance sheets).
- However much talk about ethics is aiming at doing better business = back in technical rationality!

# Literature ii

- And very little middle manager and supervisor. Literature is about top management and strategy.
- But it is often at the lower levels of the organisation things go wrong.

# What now?

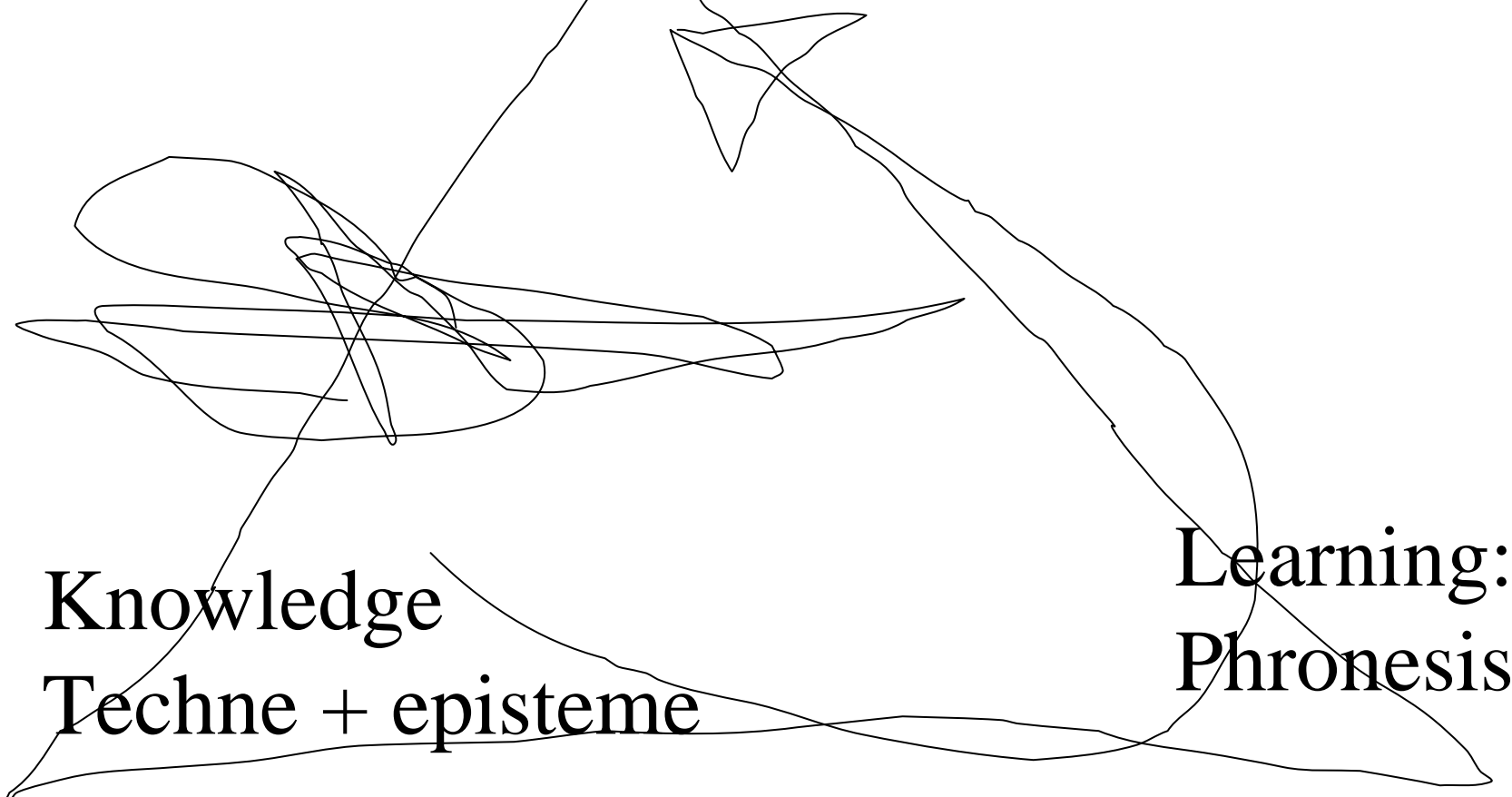
- Phronesis is about what is best for people, that is values.
- Values are about feelings. What people feel is right.
- No top manager can take care of people's feelings.
- The middle manager is back!

# What now ii?

- Episteme and techne may conflict. Concepts can kill very precious and irreplaceable know how.
- Implementation of a concept is an active decision and learning process, on the part of the employee, which has implications for his personal and professional identity.

# Problem iii

Change



Knowledge

Techne + episteme

Learning:  
Phronesis

# Knowledge and Learning

- If knowledge is also a way of looking, a mind set based on personal values, then dialogue is the key to unlock the door to learning and change.

# Horisontal Learning

- Learning within the same level of knowledge. More of the same. More techne or more episteme.

# Vertical Learning

- Learning across knowledge borders:
- Having techne, I learn to see my job in episteme perspective.
- Having episteme, I learn to see my job in techne perspective.
- Having techne and episteme perspective, I learn to view my job with phronetic eyes.

# Conclusion

- Leaders and change agents must engage in vertical learning applying the phronetic perspective to the change job and to the actors involved.
- This implies dialogue, involving in people's feelings which again involves the middle managers heavily.
- Otherwise the "Human Factor" will strike again!