

# Organizational Alienation

An experience report of  
15 years of developing organizations.

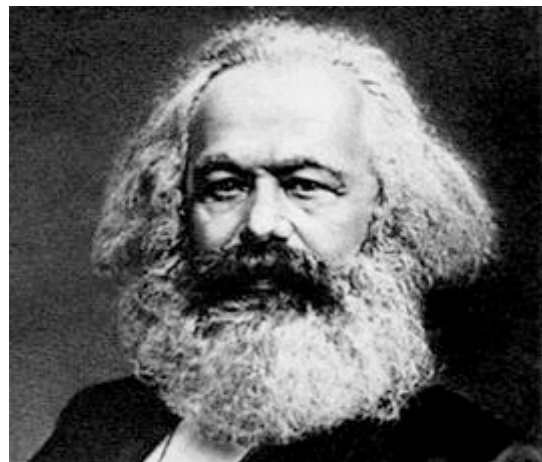
Ari Tikka, LESS 2011, 31.10.2011

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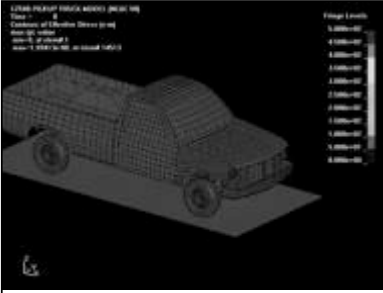
## Alienation?

Alienation refers to the separation of things that naturally belong together, or to put antagonism between things that are properly in harmony.

-- Karl Marx, influenced by  
Ludwig Feuerbach



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## Who says?



- Structural dynamics
- Embedded software
- Organizational therapist
- Agile and Lean consultant
- Lifelong interest in the mind
- Intensive Zen meditation



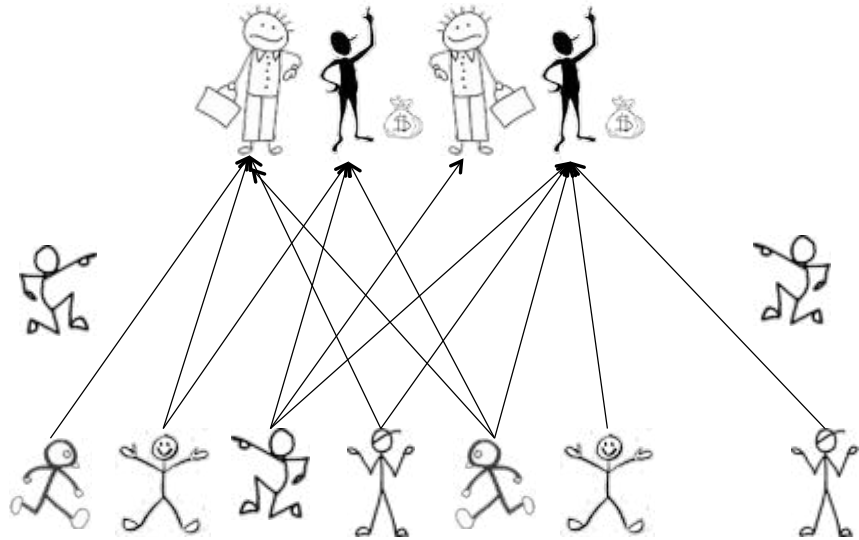
All models are wrong, some are useful. (GPE Box)

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# The natural evolution of an organization

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# Specialized professional coordinators



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# Coordination chaos

Expensive to coordinate the resources  
Slow to manage the portfolio  
Waste  
Exhaustion

**VALUE**

**COST**

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# The principles

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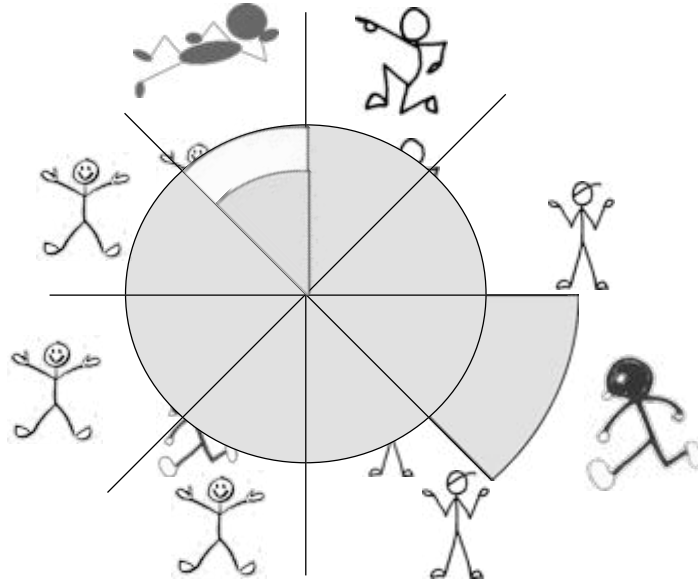
## The principles causing Organizational Alienation

1. Overspecialization
2. Batching
3. Conflict avoidance

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# Overspecialization

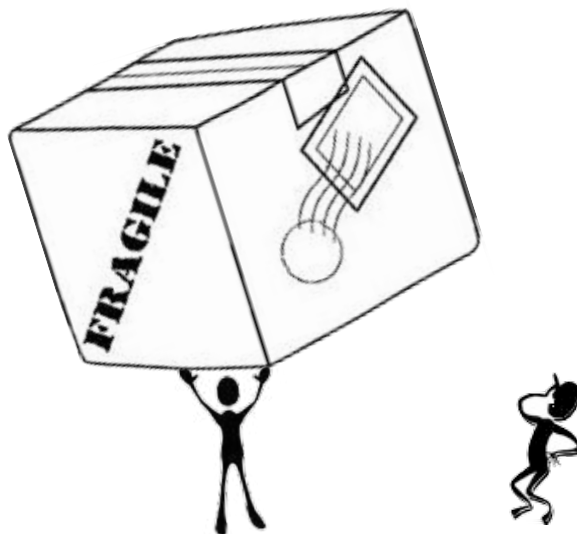
- Idling and bottlenecks



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# Big batches

- hide details, hide reality



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# Conflict = mismatch

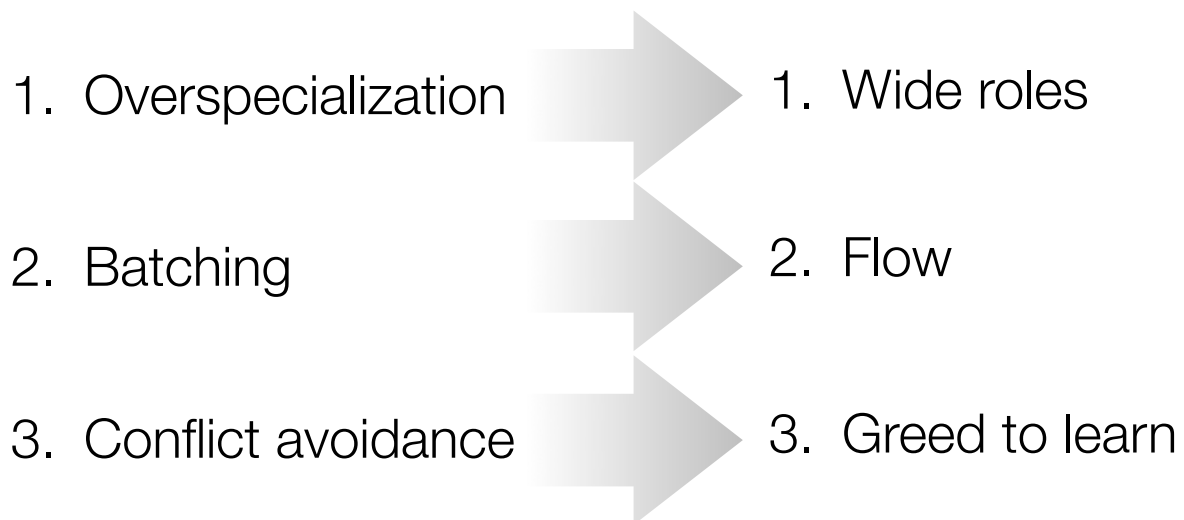
- *Mac Thesaurus:*

*“a conflict between his business and domestic life: clash, incompatibility, incongruity, friction; mismatch, variance, difference, divergence, contradiction, inconsistency. ANTONYMS harmony.”*

- Often unpleasant...
- The opposite of avoiding conflict?
  - Seek conflict?
  - Resolve conflicts?
  - Beyond conflict?

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## The countermeasures of Organizational Alienation



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# Relevance?

## Why these patterns?

- Verb / doing
- Coverage?
  - Space / structure - Overspecialization
  - Time / dynamics - Batching
  - Consciousness / decision / meta / control / choice / forces / interests / human needs - Conflict avoidance
- Can I influence? How?
  - Granularity / holographic principle / pervasiveness / generality
  - Enable micro- and macro level interventions

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# The human factor

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# Consciousness?

- Consciousness is an anticipation device
  - Makes decisions on behalf of the whole.
  - Passive -> Adaptive -> Anticipative
  - Mechanical -> Plant -> Mammal
- Organizational metaphors
  - Machine -> conscious by elite
  - Organic -> distributed consciousness
- How is Alienation effecting the consciousness?

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# Why groups are central?

- Collective
- Immediate
- Full bandwidth communication
  
- People always join bigger organizations through subgroups.

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# Why to choose alienation – why not connection?

- Culture, values and assumptions of the country and industry
  - Efficiency <-> Robustness
  - Long term <-> Short term
- Organizational culture and system
- Never underestimate stupidity
- Fear
- Shame / Guilt
- Anxiety

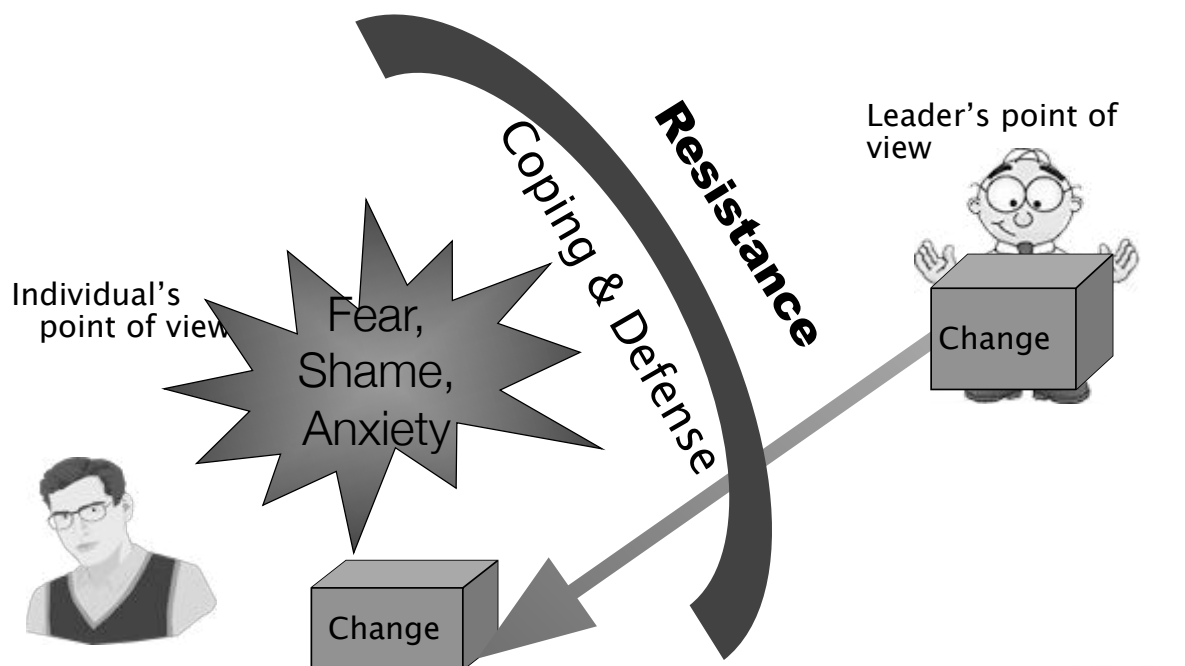
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# The unconscious decision making

- Coping
- Defensing
  - “The purpose of ego defence mechanisms is to protect the mind/self/ego from anxiety, social sanctions or to provide a refuge from a situation with which one cannot currently cope.”
- Change resistance

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# Resistance is a perspective



## Individual Defenses

- Pathological
  - Split, Denial
- Immature
  - Phantasy, Projection, Acting Out, Procrastination
- Neurotic
  - Dissociation, Intellectualization
- Mature
  - Humor, Altruism, Concentrating to the essential

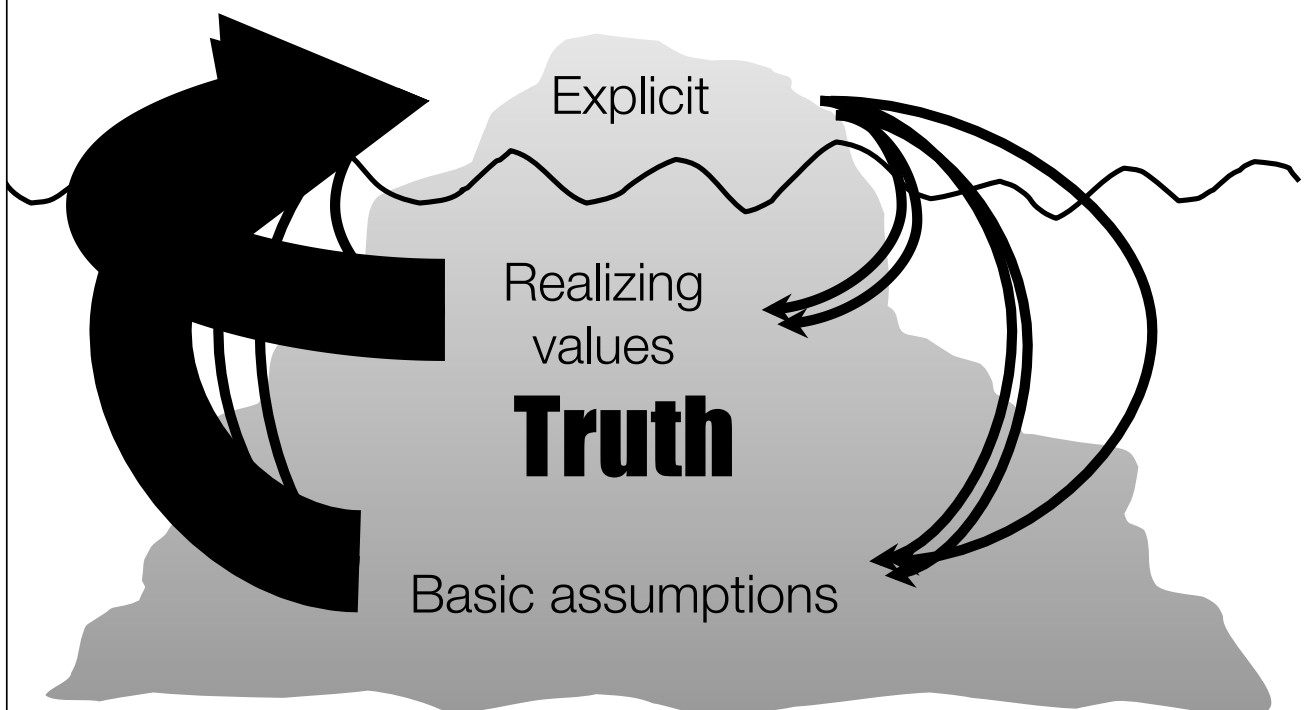
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Defense\\_mechanism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Defense_mechanism)

# Group defenses

- Humans as tribal animals have functional group communication patterns
  - Dependency
  - Fight-Flight
  - Pair forming
- Sometimes the group uses these patterns as defenses and the real task is forgotten

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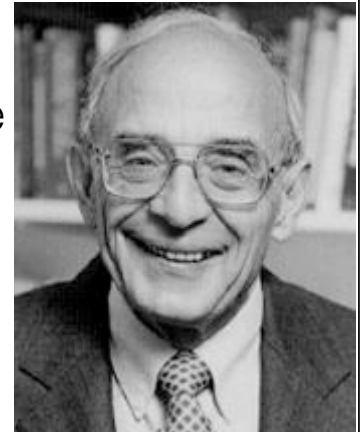
# The Power of Culture



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# Organizational defenses




- Organizations are designed to produce waste and error, in order to avoid embarrassment and threat, and to cover unacceptable acts.
- It is indiscussable. Indiscussability is indiscussable. But individuals know.
- Results in skilled incompetence and organizational depression



Chris Argyris: Overcoming Organizational Defenses,  
Facilitating Organizational Learning. 1990.

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## The contribution of defenses to the principles of Alienation

- |                       |   |                   |
|-----------------------|---|-------------------|
| 1. Overspecialization |  | 1. Wide roles     |
| 2. Batching           |  | 2. Flow           |
| 3. Conflict avoidance |  | 3. Greed to learn |

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# Examples

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## The Gap

Able and willing people



From firefighter to change driver  
Wide roles  
Flow  
Greed to learn

R&D

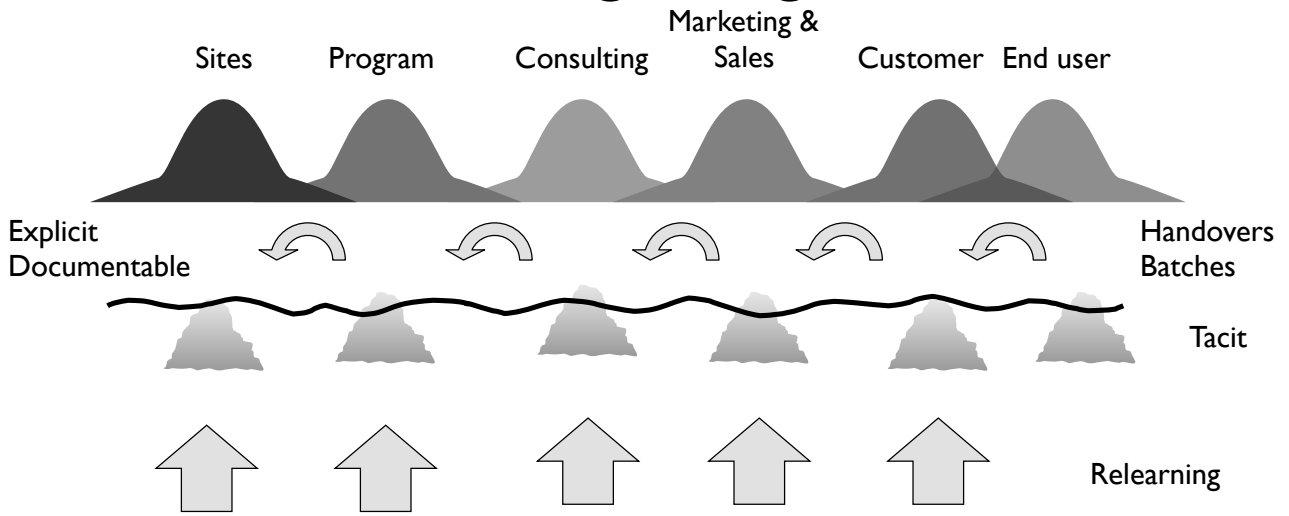
Product management

Technology

Customer

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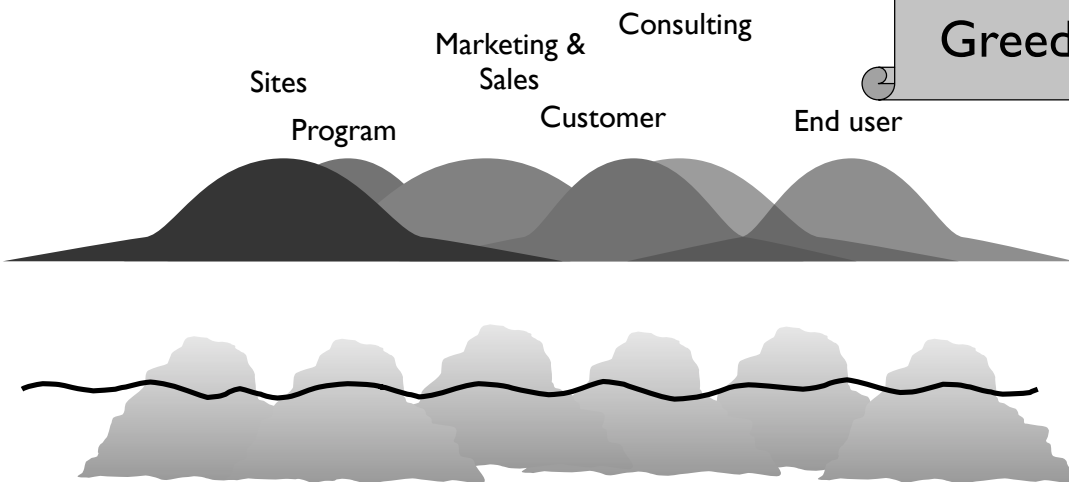
# Overspecialization and batches go together



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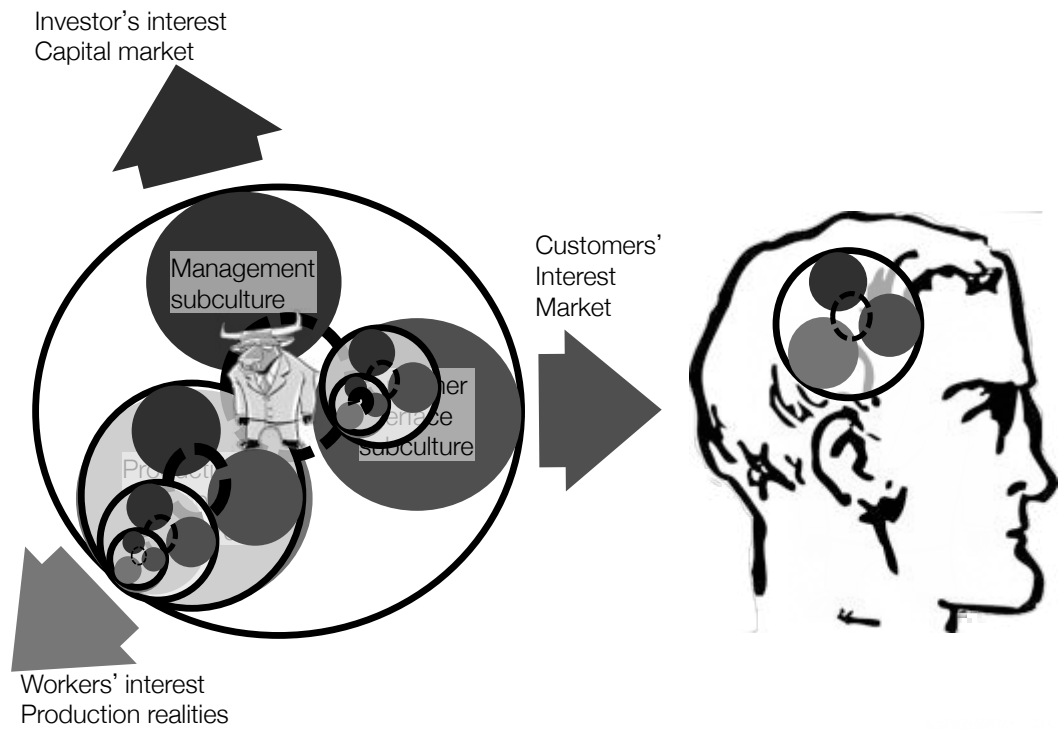
## Is this possible? Why not? How?

Wide roles  
Flow  
Greed to learn



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# Three Conflicting Interests

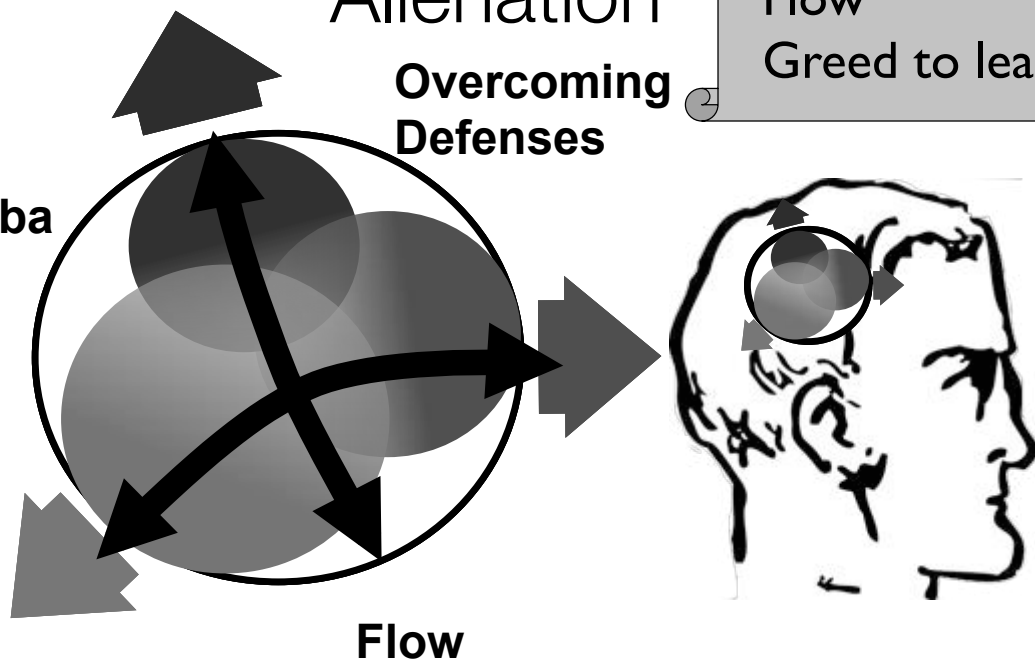


## Overcoming Alienation

### Overcoming Defenses

Wide roles  
Flow  
Greed to learn

Gemba



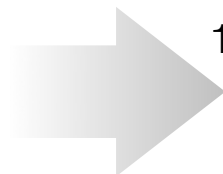
# Summary

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## From Alienation to Connection

### 1. Overspecialization

- Knowledge waste
- Coordination chaos

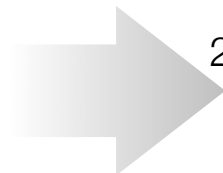


### 1. Wide roles and responsibilities

- Deep competencies in dialogue
- Sharing workload and learning

### 2. Batching

- Weak feedback
- Hide details

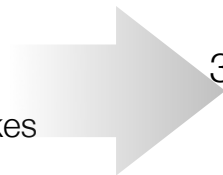


### 2. Flow

- Immediate and consequential
- Work with and learn from reality

### 3. Conflict avoidance

- Ignorance and mistakes
- Alienation



### 3. Greed to learn

- Wisdom
- Empowerment

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