Why We Can't Proceduralize Everything: And a Practical Alternative

WHY DO SO MANY ORGANIZATIONS TRY TO PROCEDURALIZE EVERYTHING?

"It is only through enforced standardization of methods… that this faster work can be assured."
  ~ F.W. Taylor, *Principles of Scientific Management*, (1911), ch.2, p.83.

"If you can't describe what you are doing as a process, then you don't know what you are doing."
~ W. Edwards Deming, *The Essential Deming*, (J.N. Orsini, Ed.), (2012).

WHY WE CAN'T PROCEDURALIZE EVERYTHING?

"When Taylor started propounding his principles, nine out of every 10 working people did manual work... By 2010 it will constitute no more than one-tenth...
    ~ Peter Drucker, *The Rise of the Knowledge Society*, Wilson Quarterly, (Spring 1993), p.63-65.

"...you cannot write procedures to anticipate all the situations and conditions that shape people's work…"
    ~ Karl Weick & Kathleen Sutcliffe, *Managing the Unexpected*, (2007).

FOUR TYPES OF WORK PLANNING -- A PRACTICAL ALTERNATIVE

Use this model to debunk the myth that:
"Without strict procedures, all we would have is chaos."

- More mechanistic tasks (1-5) may get done best via procedures.

- But more adaptive tasks (6-10) may get done best via a blend of procedures, heuristics / ROT (rules-of-thumb), principles and tacit skill.

- For more adaptive tasks, consider transforming procedures into a more effective blend of all four types of work planning.

Mechanistic
- Like a machine
- Closed / Controllable
- Deterministic / Cause → Effect
- Errors = defects to eliminate
- Build robust systems

Adaptive
- Like a living organism
- Open / Dynamic
- Probabilistic / Cause ~ Effect
- Errors = signals to adapt
- Build *resilient* systems

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Factory — Routine lab work — Routine Healthcare — Scientific Experiment — Trouble-shooting — Disaster response e.g., COVID — Combat

Procedures	Heuristics / ROTs	Principles	Tacit Skill
How to do a task	What to do, but not how	How a system works	Unwritten knowledge
"Step 1) Turn power off…"	*"De-energize before…"*	*"Electricity takes…"*	*"Can do. Can't explain."*

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