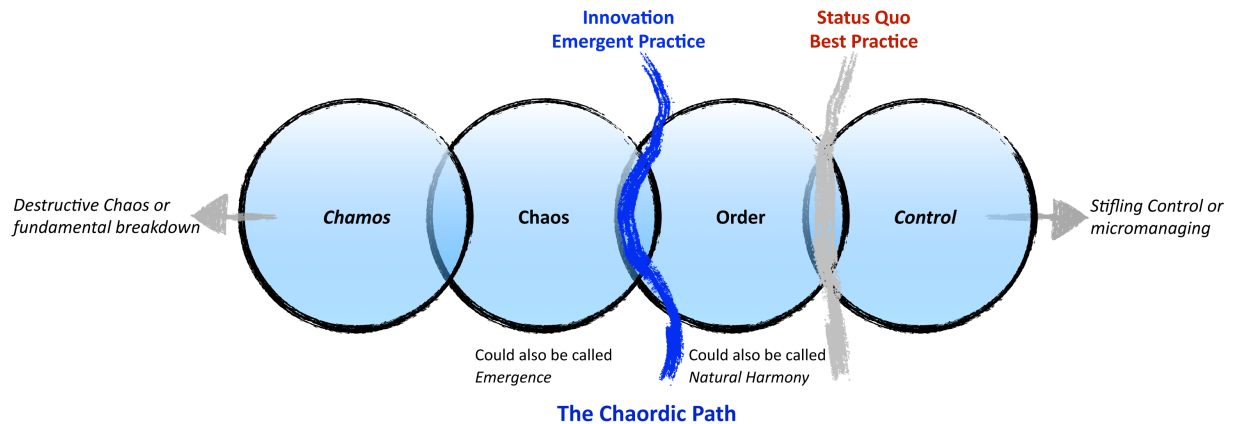


The Chaordic Path



Chaos—Order—Control are different states of being and experiencing. We tend to feel safest in the state of order, or for some people, in control. Being out of control is scary if we are looking for predictability. If we have a mechanistic view on organisations, our tendency will be to stay within the realms of order and control, where things are predictable and stable—and where we produce status quo or “more of the same”—which in some cases is exactly what is needed.

The world and times we live in are, however, neither predictable nor stable and call for more flexibility, as “more of the same” solutions are not meeting the challenges. If we are looking for innovative, new solutions we will find them in a place between chaos and order—the chaordic path.

The chaordic path is actually the story of our natural world, as form arises out of nonlinear, complex, diverse systems. “At the edge of chaos” is where life innovates, where things are not hard-wired, but are flexible enough for new connections and solutions to occur. New levels of order become possible out of chaos.

As in nature, so in organisations the path between Chaos and Order leads us to the new—to collective learning and real-time innovation. Instead of relying on controlling every detail in our organisations or communities from the top down, many leaders today see the need to access the collective intelligence and collective wisdom of everyone, which can be, at times, a “messy” process until we reach new insight and clarity.

To lead our organisation on the chaordic path we need “chaordic confidence”, to have the courage to stay in the dance of order and chaos long enough to support a generative emergence that allows the new, collective intelligence and wise action to occur.

As we tread the line between chaos and order, individually and collectively, we move through confusion and conflict toward clarity. It is in the phase of not knowing, before we reach new clarity, that the temptation to rush for certainty or grab for control is

strongest. We are all called to walk this path with open minds and some confidence if we want to reach something wholly new.

In this space of emergence, we leave our collective encounters with something that not one of us individually brought into the room.

The art is to stay in the fine balance between chaos and order. Straying too far to either side is counterproductive. On the far side of chaos is chamos or destructive chaos where everything disintegrates and dies. On the far side of order is stifling control—where there is no movement that eventually means death. When we move toward either of these extremes, the result is apathy or rebellion—the very opposite of chaordic confidence. Staying on the chaordic path is where the balance is and where life thrives.

Chaos/Order is the Place for Leadership

The practice of leadership and particularly participatory leadership resides in the place between chaos and order. When facing new challenges that cannot be met with the same way we are currently working, we need to learn new ways of operating. It is during these times of uncertainty and increased complexity, where results cannot be predicted, that leaders need to invite others to share diverse knowledge to discover new purpose and strategy and decide the way forward.

Order/Control is a Place for Management

The practice of management lies between order and control where activities need to be maintained and executed routinely so that a particular standard results. It is the place where 'more of the same' is required, e.g. landing an airplane safely, operating on a patient, etc. Therefore, it is where predictability is called for and where procedures and standards are clearly defined and need to be adhered to.

Link with the Cynefin Framework

The path between **Order and Chaos** is informed by the complexity insights: Order emerges out of Chaos and is stabilised against it. We know that we do not know and we stay in constant learning mode.

The path between **Control and Order** is when we begin declaring and defining best practices or recipes or procedures to follow. They are not emergent and fluid but constrain the whole system.

We are then leading as in the simple or complicated domain with the inherent risk of increasing the possible chaos, and to suppress creativity and learning. Here we assume that we know and reality has to follow.

When you learn to practice the Chaordic Path, it begins to look like this...

