

WHEN HEALTH & SAFETY INTERVENTIONS MEET REAL-LIFE CHALLENGES

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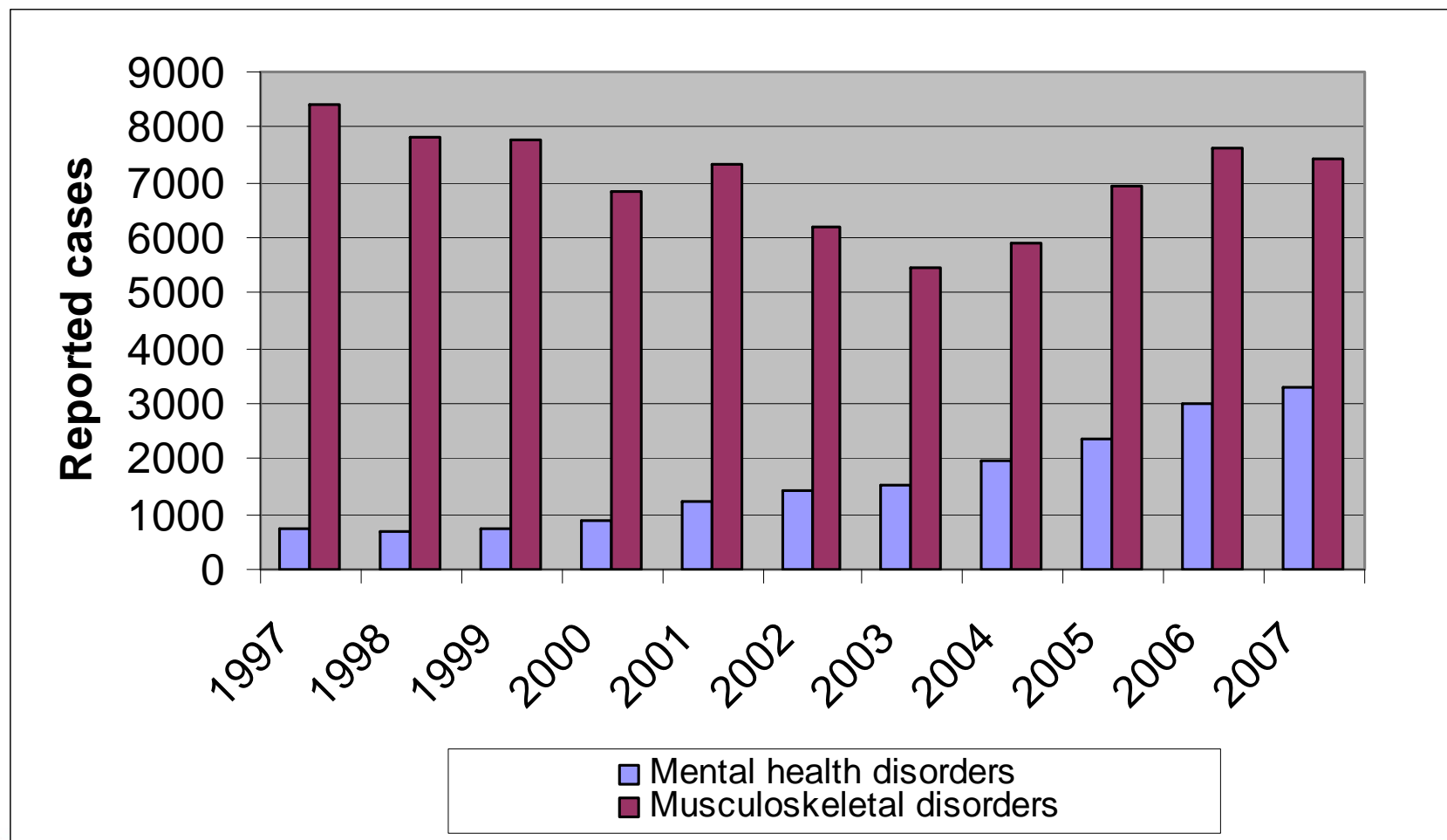


NATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE
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A paradox

- Many years of preventive efforts
- Increasing scientific knowledge about:
 - Relations between workplace exposure and health
 - Prevention which works
- Work related health is not really improving

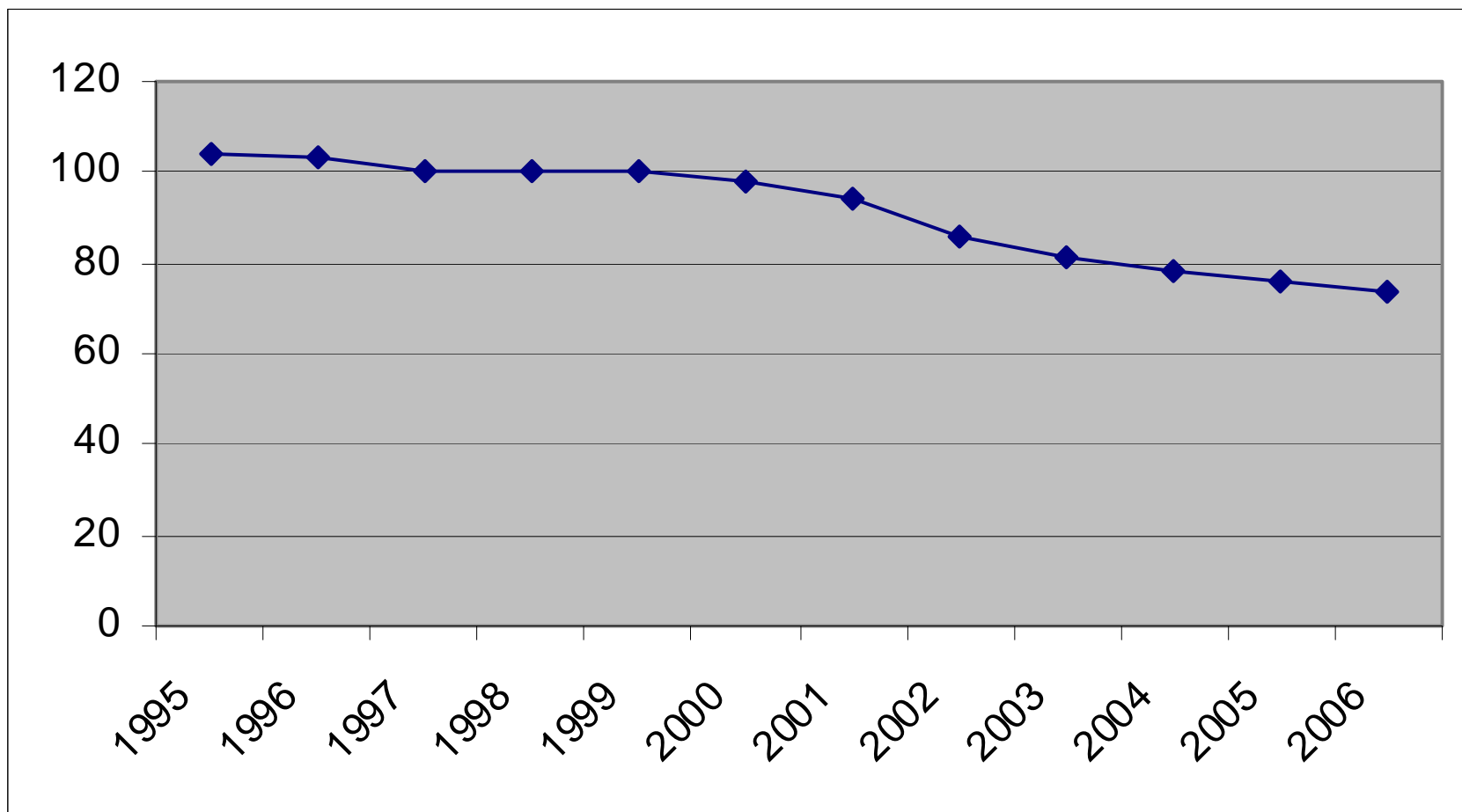
Development in work-related MSD and mental disorders in Denmark



Danish Working Environment Authority 2009

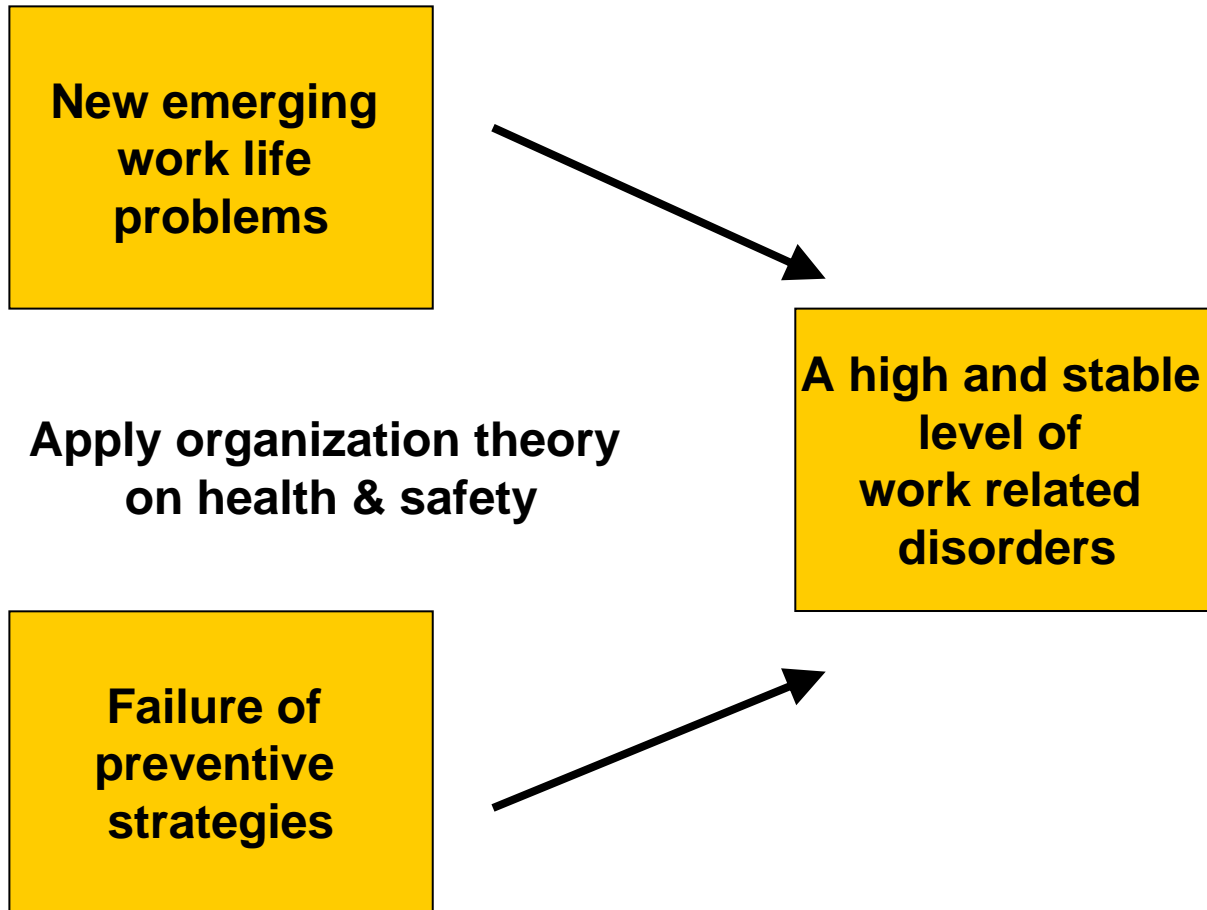
Peter Hasle

Serious accidents at work in European Union (EU 15, index 1998 = 100)



Eurostat 2009

Looking for explanations and strategies



A changing working life

- From industrial to knowledge society
- From stable markets to volatile competitive markets
- From stability to resolution of time and space
- From management responsibility to self-management
- From physical overload to inactivity
- From physical stress to mental stress
- From clear work roles to ambiguous roles
- And more

The conventional solutions

Such as:

- Safety devices on machinery
- Ventilation systems
- Personal protective equipment
- Lifting gear
- Workstation design
- Training
- And many more

- Still necessary but insufficient

Searching for new solutions

Such as:

- Balancing demands and control
- Clarifying work roles
- Social support
- Combine work life and private life
- Integrate physical activity in work life
- Develop qualifications
- Provide recognition and rewards
- And many more

Characteristics of the new solutions

Interfere with:

- Organization of work
- Central management decisions
- Personal preferences
- Private life

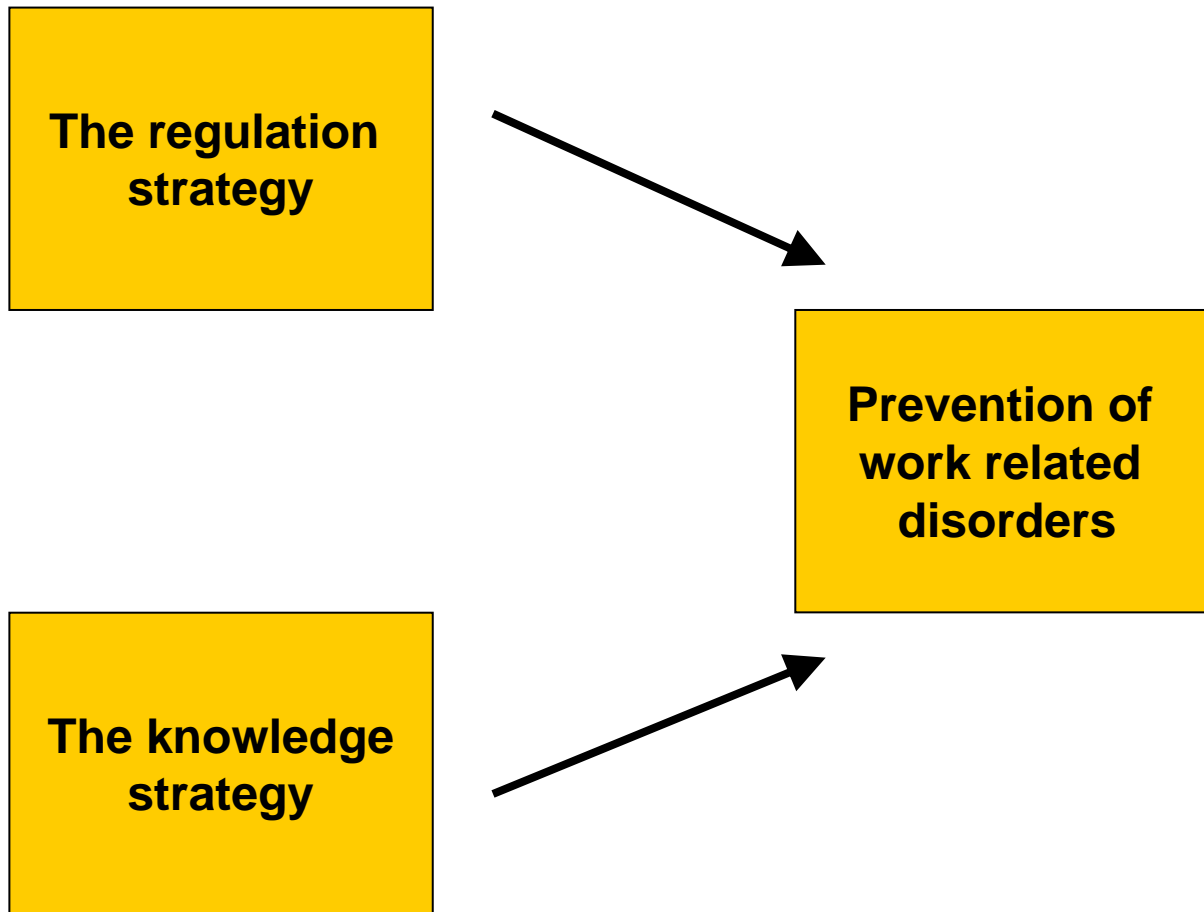
Uncertain causal relationships:

- Difficult to measure
- Standards for the best solution do not exist
- Effects are uncertain
- Benefits are blurred

A tentative conclusion on the new work life

- Successful preventive interventions require new (and difficult) solutions:
 - Move outside the traditional scope of OHS
 - Relate to work organization and the management prerogative
 - Relate to the employees preferences and qualifications
 - Accept blurred causal relationships and effects

The basic intervention strategies



The starting point of regulation

**Command –
control**

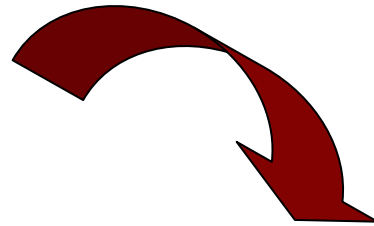
- Based on clear causal relations
- Definition of a standard for which compliance can be checked
- Control and punishment of violations by authorities

Consequence

- Everything which is not illegal is legal
- Standards will always lack behind the technical and organizational reality

Development of the regulation

**Command –
control**



**Reflexive
regulation**

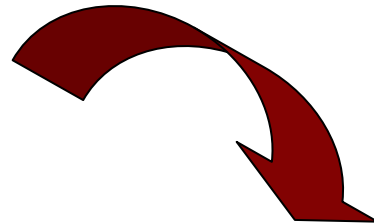
- The employer gets a generally duty to protect employees from health hazards

– Independent of a formalized standard

- Procedures such as compulsory risk assessment and a safety organization to secure the reflexive consideration
- Inspectors check whether the employer has fulfilled the obligation to assess and control all risks

The regulation strategy

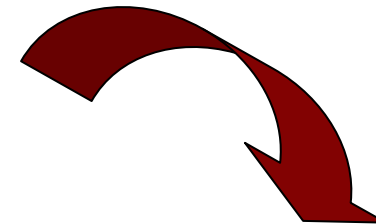
Command – control



- Difficult for authorities to assess the standard of reflexive risk assessment and control

- New soft regulation focus on incentives

Reflexive regulation



- Certified OHS management
- Public subventions
- Insurance schemes
- Agreements between Government and social partners

Emerging new forms of soft regulation

Playing the regulation card

Opportunities:

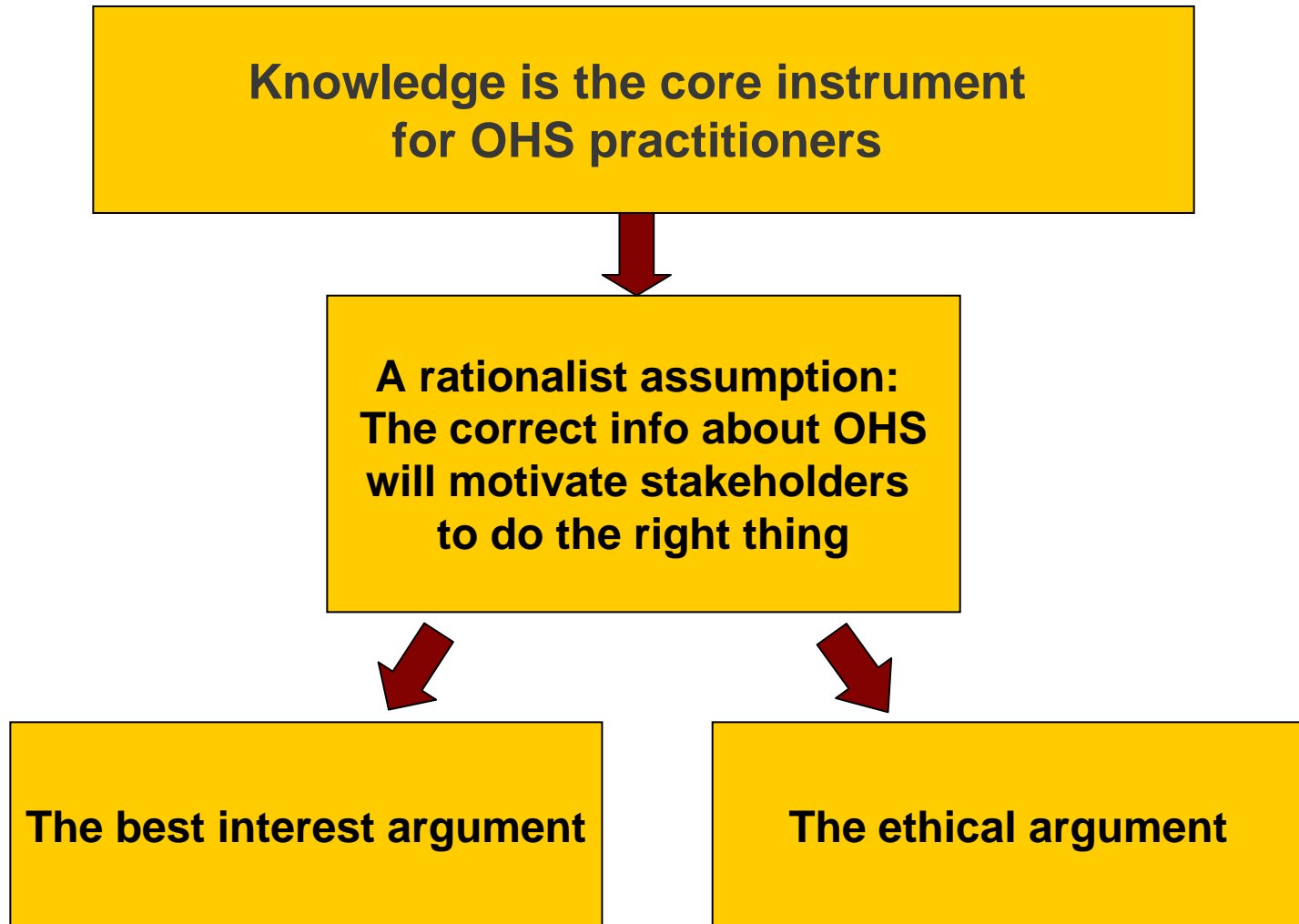
- Secure peace with with authorities
- Ensure public acceptance of the employer
- New incentives

Limitations:

- Improvements limited to the letter of the law
- Tedious interpretations
- OHS interpreted as something we do for the authorities

**A necessary foundation for practitioners:
It signals the seriousness society puts on OHS**

The knowledge strategy



The best interest argument

- The assumption is investments in OHS will pay off
- Calculations already from the "Safety first" movement
- Cost – benefit analysis often prove that OHS can be profitable
- Benefits are often savings such as:
 - Reduced cost of absenteeism, health care, and production disturbances
- But also effectiveness such as:
 - Working faster due to better work station design

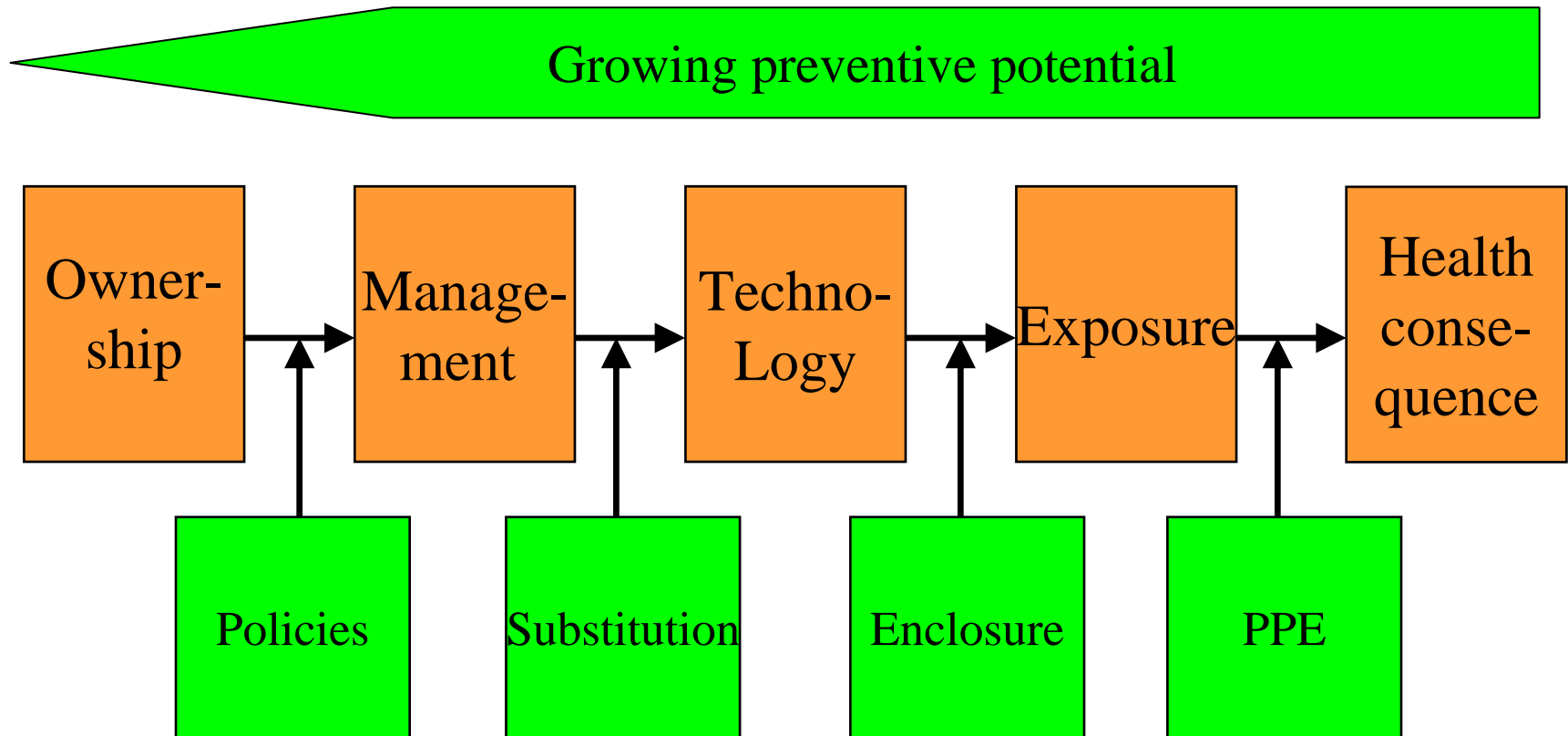
Limitations of the best interest argument

- "if safety pays, why don't employers invest in it?"
Dorman (2000)
- Any organization has a large number of possible profitable investments
- Management attention and time is a scarce resource
- OHS benefits are vague and do not contribute much to the core activities
- The cost-benefit analysis is rarely the decisive argument

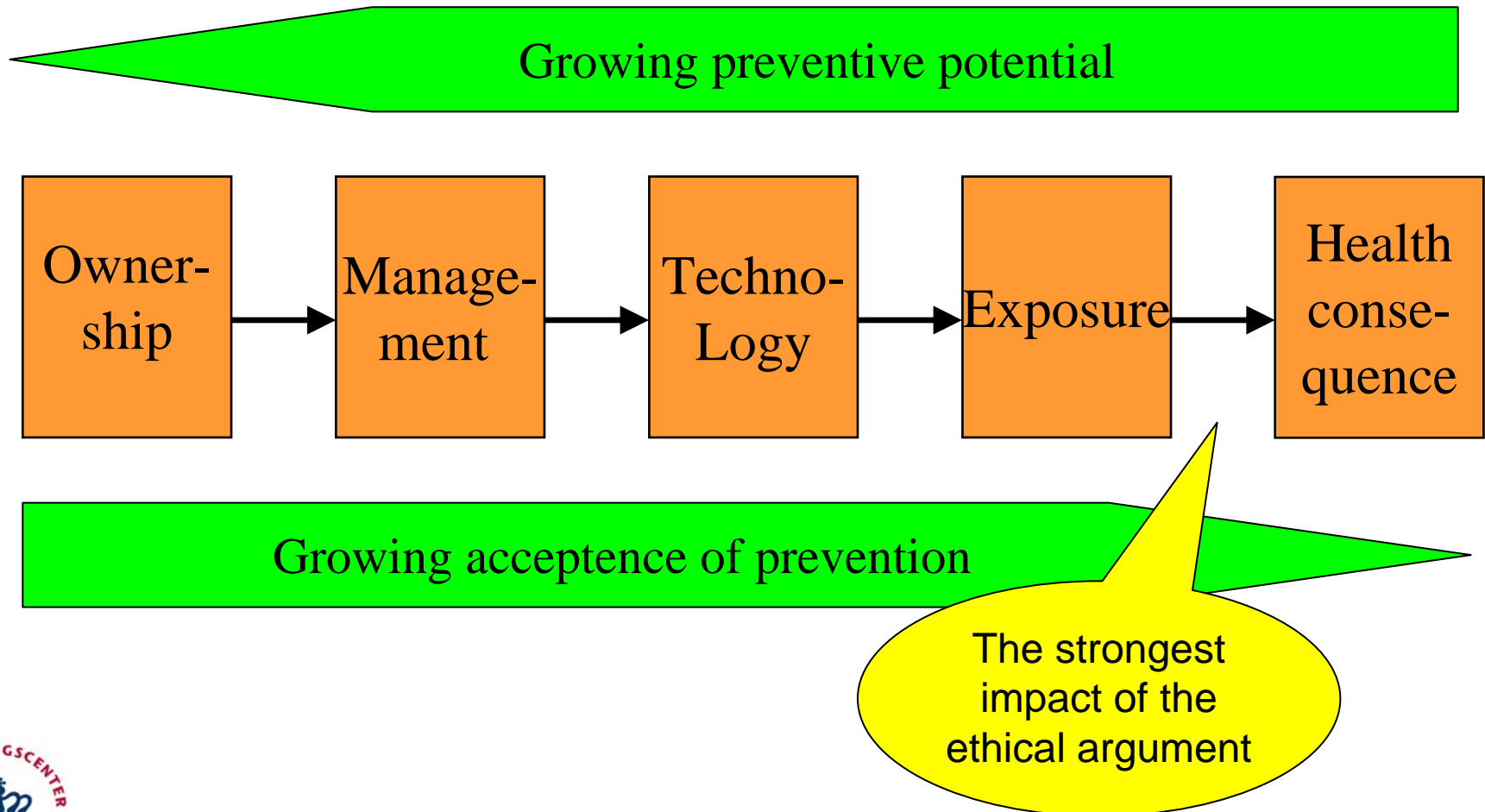
The ethical argument

- A strong potential:
 - Difficult to argue against a publically accepted ethical statement
 - When it is obvious that employees get seriously injured, everybody agrees that action must be taken
- Opponents try to circumvent
 - Evidence is not sufficient
 - The practice is legal
 - Effective preventive measures not available
 - etcetera

The causal chain in prevention



The preventive dilemma



Motivation from regulation and knowledge is necessary but not sufficient

- Even if stakeholders are convinced about the regulatory, economic and ethical benefits, interventions may fail
- Lack of
 - Skills
 - Resources
 - Support among employees
 - Enthusiasm
- Other disturbing internal or external agendas

OHS in the broader organizational context

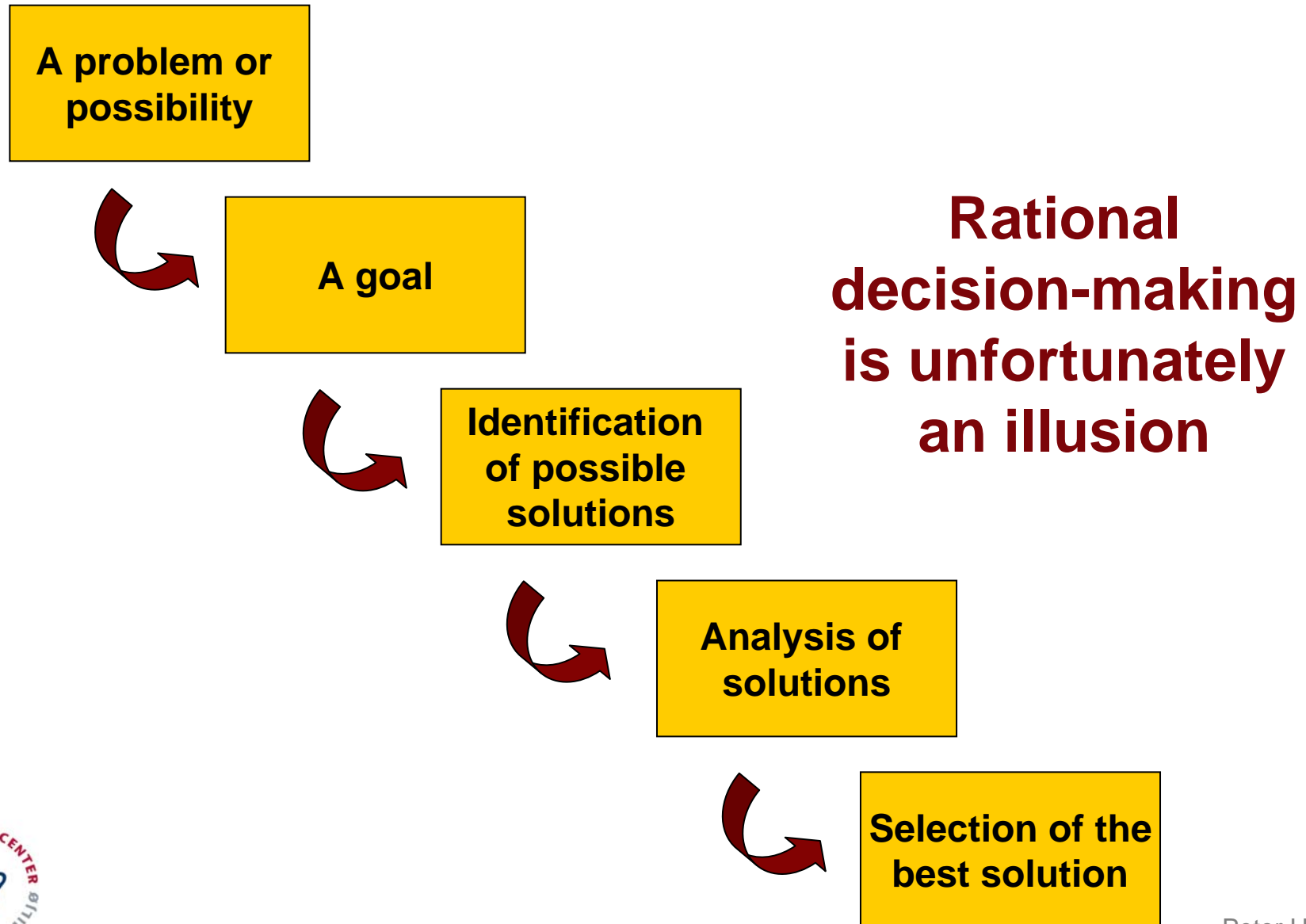
- Any organization has to deliver a core output
- OHS is always a peripheral issue
- Often considered a disturbance
- The new working life issues relate to core activities:
 - Demand-control imbalance causes stress and interventions will interfere with key management decisions
 - Prevention of repetitive strain injuries also relate to key decisions about work intensity

A huge challenge for the OHS practitioner

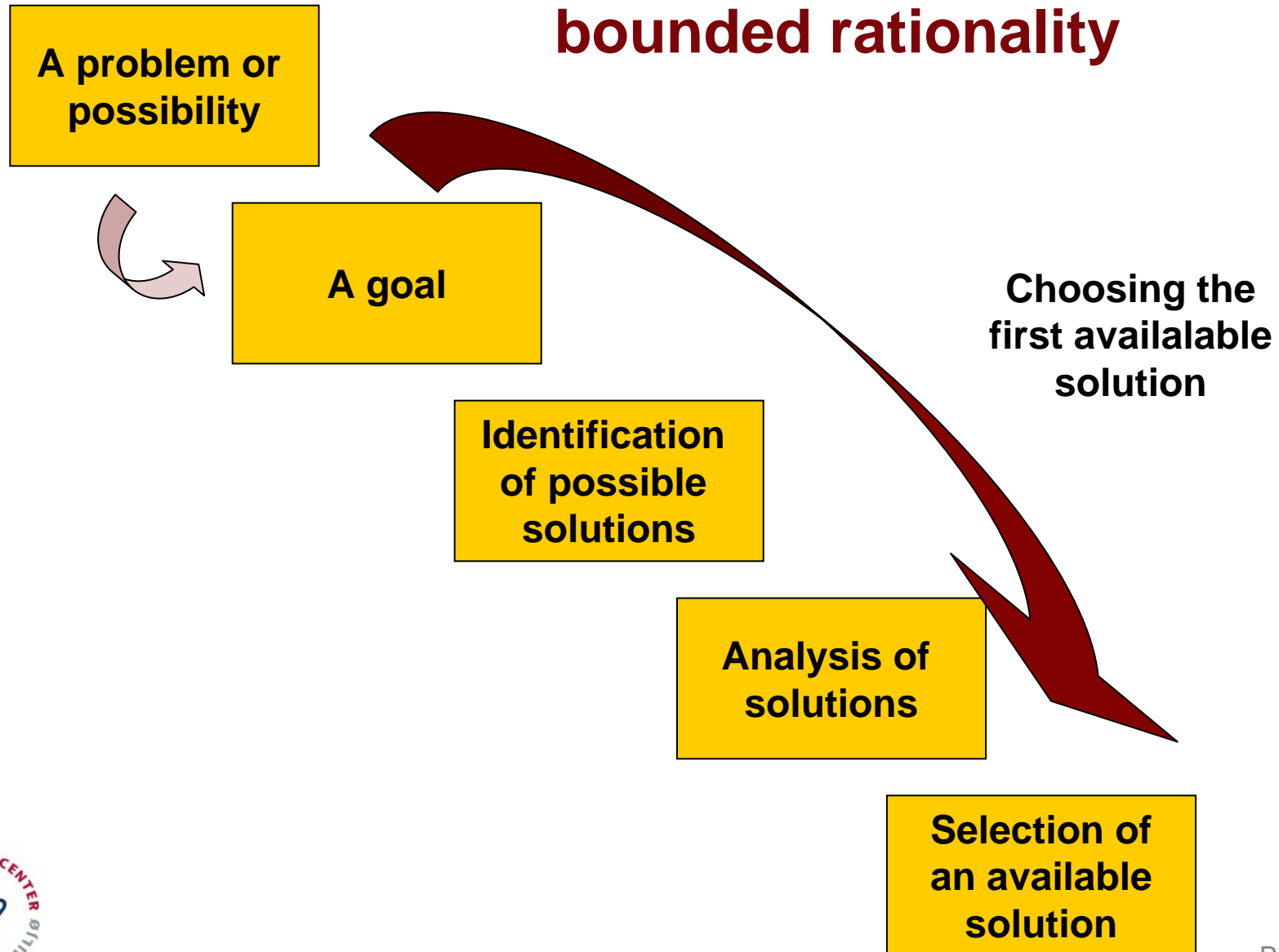
- Placed in a peripheral position
- Necessary to convince both management and employees
- that it is beneficial for all parties to implement improvements of more or less ambiguous problems
- that might involve substantial changes in managerial and organizational practice

The key is to influence central organizational decisions

The understanding of decision-making



At best: bounded rationality

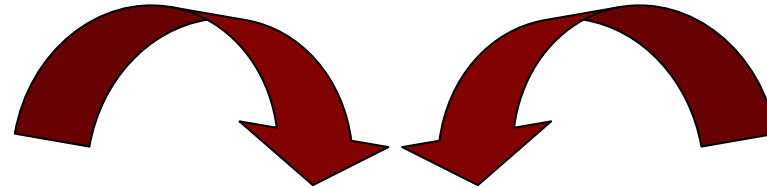


Carbage can decisions

Problems

Solutions

Opportunities



Decisions are made when problems and solutions meet

A more radical view: decisions are not taken – they are explained

- Responses to new problems are formed by incomplete cognitive maps of what happened in the past
- The response is considered by the actors as a natural and rational process
- The rationality behind the response is constructed afterwards as the actors try to make sense of what really happened

Decisions are still rational

- The alternative models necessary to reduce complexity and avoid sanding up in slow decision making
- The practitioner can interfere with decisions:
 - Be present at the forum and the occasion which makes a decision possible
 - Be able to present solutions which the actors consider relevant for their problems
 - Be able to make sense of what is going on in the organization

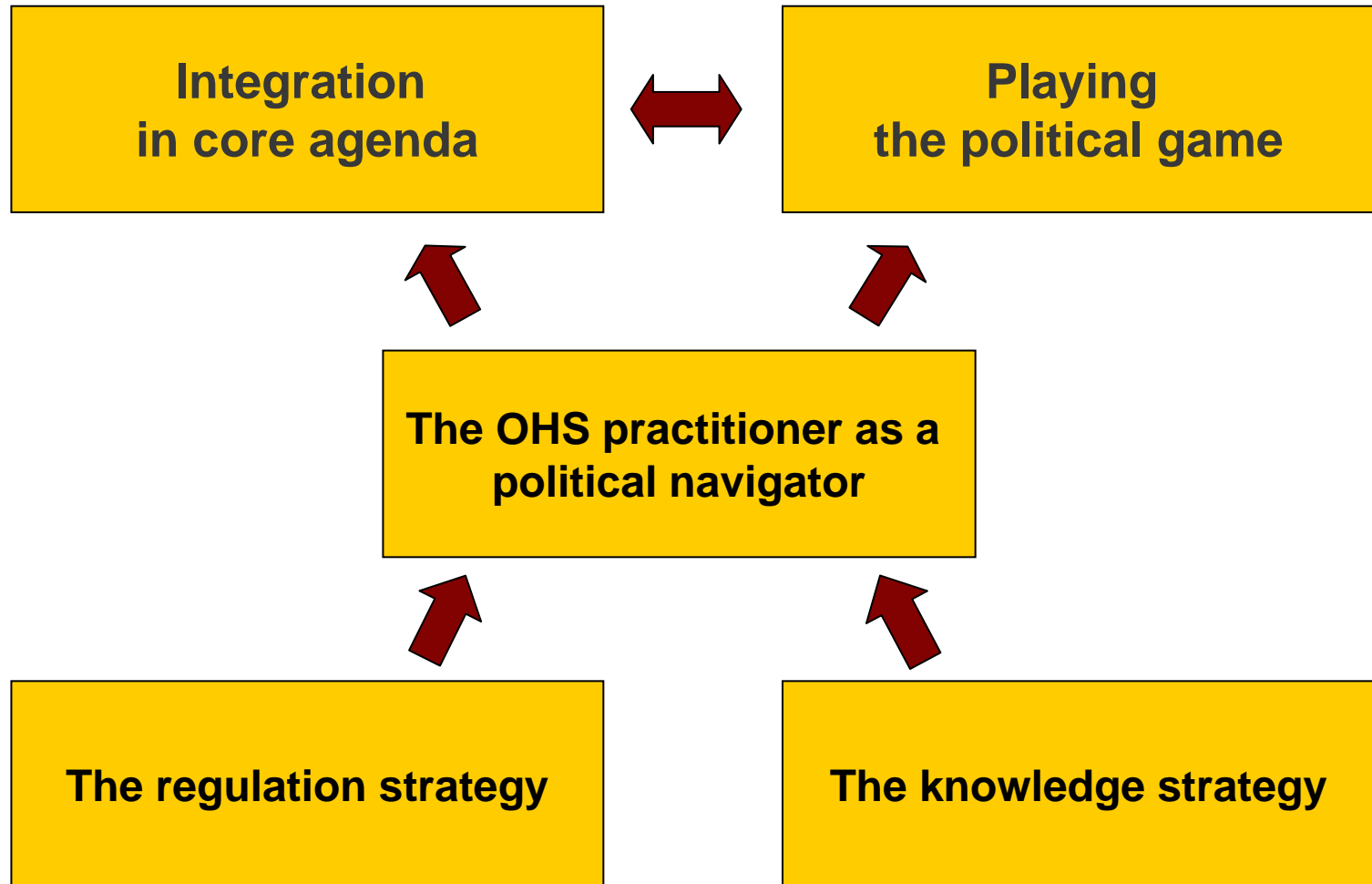
Decision-making is a political process

- Groups and individuals fight for their agendas
- The fight is based on the actors interpretation of what is best for the survival of the organization
 - (and for themselves)
- Actors build support and coalitions
- A decision is the resulting compromise
- Open conflict is normally avoided
- Management has most power but all parties have a share

Forms of organizational power

- Open power:
 - Coercive
 - Allocation of resources
- Indirect power:
 - Naming and framing
 - Networks
 - Possession of scarce resources
 - Allocation of non-material benefits
 - Personal charisma

Expanding the OHS strategy



Integration in the core agenda

A dogma:

- Effective and cost-effective prevention takes place at planning

Practice:

- It rarely works

Explanations:

- Perhaps practitioners use the wrong argument
 - Please remember OHS!
 - Or law requires you to remember OHS!
- Perhaps lack of recognition of other actors

Ask what OHS can do to solve others' problems

Such as:

- How can OHS help improve the core business activities?
- How can OHS help to ensure the planned change is working?
 - The proper functioning of the new technology
 - The implementaton of new organizational forms
- The participation of the practitioner will be sufficient to flag the OHS issues

Lean manufacturing as an example

- Can be used for intensification of work
- But also possible as a possibility to promote workers participation and improve job content
- Danish experience indicate many OHS proposals when workers participate in kaizen events
- The OHS practitioner can help to secure motivation to participate and to avoid adverse OHS effects

Playing the political game

- Too often other professionals see OHS practitioners as competitors:
 - You don't need to tell me how to do my job!

Possible means:

- Networking
- Building alliances
 - Help other actors and they help you
 - Refrase in the others' language (naming & framing)
- Get access to the forum for decisions
 - Invite other actors to help you

New qualifications for practitioners

- Organization and management theory
 - Decision making
 - Political process
 - Organizational culture
- Business strategy
 - Globalization
 - Lean
 - TQM
 - Balanced scorecards

A sufficient new strategy

Do the political navigator solve the paradox?

- No, OHS practitioners cannot solve the cross-cutting universal OHS problems
 - It is also necessary to develop new strategies for the public regulation and preventive efforts
- Yes, the strategy can improve efficiency of the OHS practice in real life organizations
 - The practitioner has to work at the given conditions and to utilize the available means to get effective preventive interventions implemented

Thank you for your attention



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