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# Epistemic Mobility in Complex Intervention: Rethinking Knowledge in Systemic Practice

Clas Mellby<sup>1</sup> 

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## Abstract

This article argues that knowledge in intervention should not be conceptualized as a set of static types, but as a dynamic orientation that must shift in relation to changing situational dynamics. Under conditions of complexity, intervention falters when epistemic orientation remains anchored in predictive and analytic expectations of control rather than moving toward adaptive, relational engagement. The core competence of complex intervention is therefore not the accumulation of expertise, but the cultivation of epistemic mobility. The article develops epistemic inertia and epistemic mobility as analytical lenses and discusses their implications for systemic practitioners operating under conditions of distributed causality and uncertainty. Epistemic mobility refers to the capacity within intervention to reconfigure how knowledge is mobilized as relational dynamics evolve. It involves recognizing when predictive and analytic reasoning are misaligned with emergent dynamics and transitioning toward adaptive, relational, and exploratory engagement without relinquishing accountability or coherence. Epistemic mobility thus concerns the alignment of knowing with the evolving dynamics of the situation rather than the accumulation of additional information. Epistemic inertia refers to the persistence of stabilized knowledge orientations despite shifts in situational dynamics. It occurs when predictive, decompositional, and control-oriented modes of knowing continue to guide intervention under conditions that require adaptive and relational engagement.

**Keywords** Epistemic mobility · Systemic intervention · Epistemic inertia · Knowledge orientation · Complexity

## Introduction: The Hidden Constraint in Complex Intervention

Interventions in complex organizational settings often falter despite high levels of expertise, sophisticated analytical tools, and strong professional commitment. When initiatives stall or outcomes diverge from expectations, responses frequently involve intensified analysis,

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✉ Clas Mellby  
clas.mellby@gmail.com

<sup>1</sup> Department of Technology Management and Economics, Chalmers University of Technology, Gothenburg, Sweden

clearer role definitions, or strengthened accountability mechanisms. Yet such measures do not always generate the anticipated clarity or progress.

From a systemic perspective (Midgley 2000), these situations are commonly interpreted in terms of structural constraints, political dynamics, or misaligned incentives. While such factors undoubtedly shape intervention, this article argues that a less visible constraint often operates beneath them: the persistence of stabilized knowledge orientations calibrated to ordered expectations of predictability and control.

Under conditions of complexity, where causality is distributed and outcomes emerge non-linearly (Cilliers 1998; Stacey 2011), effective intervention requires not simply more knowledge but a different way of mobilizing it. When epistemic orientation remains anchored in predictive and decompositional reasoning despite shifting system conditions, intervention may inadvertently reproduce the very dynamics it seeks to transform.

This article introduces the concepts of *epistemic inertia* and *epistemic mobility* to clarify how knowledge moves—or fails to move—within complex intervention. It argues that the central challenge of systemic practice under conditions of complexity is not the accumulation of expertise, but the cultivation of epistemic mobility: the capacity to reconfigure how knowledge is mobilized as situational dynamics evolve.

This article is guided by the following research question:

How does epistemic inertia constrain intervention under conditions of complexity, and how can epistemic mobility be cultivated within systemic practice?

To explore this question, the analysis is structured around two analytical sub-questions:

1. How does epistemic inertia manifest in complex intervention contexts?
2. What characterizes epistemic mobility as a practical competence in systemic intervention?

For readability, the article occasionally uses ‘knowledge’ as shorthand for stabilized forms of knowing enacted in practice.

## Positioning the Contribution within Systemic Practice Traditions

Intervention is never epistemically neutral. Practice-based accounts of knowing have emphasized that knowledge is enacted rather than merely possessed (Schön 1983; Tsoukas 2005; Weick 1995). Every attempt to influence a social system presupposes assumptions about how that system can be known, predicted, and acted upon. Whether explicitly articulated or tacitly held, these assumptions shape what counts as relevant information, what forms of expertise are mobilized, and how responsibility is interpreted when outcomes diverge from expectations.

In relatively ordered contexts, predictive and decompositional modes of knowing often function effectively, particularly where causal relations can be stabilized through analysis (Stacey 2011). Problems can be analyzed into components, causal relationships can be traced, and expertise can be applied to produce reliable outcomes. Under such conditions, intervention is guided by the expectation that sufficient analysis will yield sufficient control.

Complex systems, however, challenge these expectations. Causality is distributed rather than linear; interactions generate emergent patterns that cannot be fully anticipated in

advance; and outcomes become intelligible only retrospectively. In such contexts, knowledge cannot be confined to prediction and control. Instead, intervention requires forms of engagement that are adaptive, relational, and experimental.

The difficulty arises not because predictive knowledge is inherently flawed, but because knowledge orientations that function well in ordered contexts tend to stabilize. Professional training, accountability structures, and institutional norms reinforce expectations of clarity, foresight, and control. As a result, when system conditions shift toward complexity, epistemic orientation may remain calibrated to ordered assumptions.

From a systemic perspective, the challenge of complex intervention is therefore not merely to acquire new information or apply better tools. It is to recognize when the underlying logic of knowing must shift. This dynamic dimension of knowledge, how it stabilizes, persists, and potentially reconfigures remains under-theorized within systemic practice. The following sections develop the concepts of epistemic inertia and epistemic mobility to address this gap.

While related to traditions of reflective practice, pragmatic inquiry, and sensemaking, the present argument shifts attention from reflection within a knowledge frame to movement between knowledge orientations as system conditions change.

## Epistemological Positioning

A further clarification concerns the epistemological position underlying the present argument. In this article, systems are not treated as fixed ontological entities existing independently in the world. Rather, consistent with traditions in systemic inquiry and soft systems thinking (Checkland 1981; Midgley 2000; Ison 2017), the concept of system is understood primarily as an epistemic and relational device through which situations may be explored, interpreted, and acted upon. References to “system dynamics,” “system conditions,” or “complex systems” should therefore not be read as claims about objectively bounded entities, but as shorthand expressions for evolving patterns of interaction, meaning-making, and relational complexity as experienced in practice.

This perspective also implies a shift from viewing knowledge as a static possession toward understanding knowing as situated and enacted within practice (Cook and Brown 1999; Tsoukas 2005). The distinction is important because intervention does not unfold through the application of detached knowledge to an external reality, but through ongoing engagement in situations where understanding and action co-emerge. In this sense, knowledge and knowing may be treated as a productive duality rather than as interchangeable concepts: knowledge referring to relatively stabilized forms of understanding, and knowing to the situated, relational, and performative enactment of practice.

The argument developed in this article is therefore grounded in a praxis-oriented understanding of systemic intervention. Epistemic mobility concerns not only shifts in analytical perspective, but shifts in how practitioners participate in, interpret, and respond to unfolding situations. The focus is thus less on systems as objects of intervention than on the situated choreography of inquiry, judgment, and action through which intervention itself becomes possible under conditions of uncertainty and emergence.

The present argument builds on and extends several established traditions in systemic and practice-based research while introducing a distinct analytical focus on how epistemic orientations stabilize and shift within intervention practice.

First, the article aligns with traditions in soft systems thinking and systemic inquiry associated with Checkland (1981, 2002), where systems are not treated as objective entities existing independently in the world, but as epistemic devices through which problematic situations may be explored and acted upon. This perspective also informs later developments within systemic practice and social learning traditions (Ison et al. 2007; Ison 2010, 2017), where inquiry is understood as a relational and situated process rather than the application of detached expertise to predefined problems.

Within these traditions, an important distinction has been developed between systematic and systemic forms of practice (Checkland 1981; Ison 2017). Systematic approaches privilege procedural order, decomposition, prediction, and control, whereas systemic approaches emphasize contextual responsiveness, relational understanding, reflexivity, and adaptive inquiry. The concepts of epistemic inertia and epistemic mobility developed here resonate strongly with this distinction. However, the present framework shifts attention toward the dynamics through which particular epistemic orientations become stabilized within intervention practice and the conditions under which movement between them becomes possible.

The article also draws on second-order cybernetic traditions (Maturana and Varela 1980; Glanville 2004), which emphasize that observers are always implicated in the situations they describe and act within. From this perspective, intervention cannot be understood as the application of neutral knowledge to an external system. Rather, knowing and acting are inseparable aspects of situated participation in unfolding relational dynamics. This reflexive orientation is central to the argument developed here, particularly in relation to how epistemic assumptions shape what becomes visible, actionable, and legitimate within practice.

Relatedly, the argument connects to practice-based epistemologies that distinguish between knowledge and knowing (Cook and Brown 1999; Cook and Wagenaar 2011). Rather than treating knowledge as a stable possession transferable across contexts, these perspectives emphasize knowing as enacted, embodied, and relationally accomplished in practice. The present article adopts this duality as an important point of departure. Epistemic inertia may thus be understood as the stabilization of particular modes of knowing, while epistemic mobility concerns the capacity to reconfigure knowing in response to changing situational dynamics.

The argument further resonates with traditions of systemic inquiry and social learning (Ison et al. 2007), where learning emerges through participation, interaction, and the joint exploration of situations characterized by uncertainty and complexity. In such traditions, inquiry is not directed toward discovering final solutions but toward cultivating capacities for ongoing adaptation and collective sensemaking. The present contribution extends this orientation by focusing specifically on the epistemic dynamics through which practitioners recognize misalignment between prevailing modes of knowing and the evolving character of the situation.

At the same time, the article remains closely related to Schön's (1983) notion of reflective practice and Weick's (1995) work on sensemaking. While these perspectives emphasize reflection and interpretation within practice, the present framework foregrounds movement between different epistemic orientations. The focus is therefore not only on how practitioners make sense of situations, but on how dominant logics of knowing persist, destabilize, and potentially shift over time.

The specific contribution of the article lies in conceptualizing epistemic mobility not simply as reflexivity, openness, or learning in a general sense, but as a situated capacity to

recalibrate the dominant orientation of knowing in relation to changing relational dynamics. In this respect, the concepts of epistemic inertia and epistemic mobility are intended as analytical lenses for examining how intervention practice may become constrained or enabled through the stabilization and transformation of epistemic orientations under conditions of uncertainty and emergence.

The present framework differs in emphasis from several adjacent traditions within systemic and practice-based research. Reflective practice (Schön 1983) primarily concerns the practitioner's capacity to reflect within and on action, while reflexivity foregrounds awareness of the observer's implication in the situation being described and enacted. Systemic inquiry and social learning traditions (Ison et al. 2007; Ison 2017) emphasize collaborative exploration, relational learning, and the co-evolution of understanding through participation. Similarly, notions such as systemic sensibility and systems thinking in practice capability focus on cultivating a general capacity for systemic awareness and judgment within complex situations.

The concept of epistemic mobility proposed here does not replace these perspectives but addresses a more specific analytical problem: how dominant orientations of knowing persist, destabilize, and shift as situational dynamics evolve. The central concern is therefore not reflection, inquiry, or systems awareness per se, but the movement between different epistemic orientations through which intervention is organized and enacted. In this respect, epistemic mobility foregrounds the dynamic reconfiguration of knowing under changing conditions rather than the cultivation of a particular mode of practice alone.

It may be helpful to state this analytical contribution explicitly. Reflective practice asks: how does the practitioner think within action? Sensemaking asks: how is meaning constructed under conditions of ambiguity? The systemic/systematic distinction asks: which orientation to practice is appropriate in a given situation? Epistemic mobility addresses a different question: what enables or constrains movement between epistemic orientations, and under what conditions does such movement become possible or remain blocked? Existing concepts largely presuppose that the practitioner can, in principle, reflect, inquire, or shift orientation when needed. What they leave undertheorized is the dynamics through which particular orientations become stabilized, persist despite misalignment, and are eventually reconfigured. It is this dynamic — the conditions, constraints, and processes of epistemic movement itself — that the present framework is designed to illuminate. The concepts of epistemic inertia and epistemic mobility thus add analytical precision to the question of why practitioners and organizations often remain locked into predictive and control-oriented modes of knowing even when situational dynamics no longer support them, and what kinds of conditions may enable reorientation.

## Epistemic Inertia in Complex Intervention

*Epistemic inertia* refers to the persistence of stabilized knowledge orientations despite shifts in system conditions. It occurs when predictive, decompositional, and control-oriented modes of knowing — that is, orientations that treat situations as analyzable into components, assume that sufficient information will yield reliable foresight, and organize intervention around the expectation of control over outcomes — continue to guide intervention under conditions that call for adaptive, relational engagement. Epistemic inertia is not a

deficit of intelligence or professionalism; rather, it reflects the durability of knowledge logics that have proven effective in more ordered contexts.

From a systemic perspective, epistemic inertia is both understandable and, in many respects, rational. Professional education privileges analytic reasoning and problem decomposition, reinforcing technical-rational assumptions about problem solving (Schön 1983). Accountability structures reward foresight and clear attribution. Institutional norms reinforce expectations of clarity, planning, and control. Under such conditions, predictive knowledge becomes not only useful but legitimate. The difficulty arises when system conditions shift toward complexity while epistemic orientation remains calibrated to ordered assumptions. In practice, epistemic inertia tends to manifest in recognizable patterns.

One manifestation is the *escalation of analysis*. When interventions encounter ambiguity or unexpected outcomes, the response often involves generating more data, refining metrics, or increasing analytical precision. While additional analysis can be valuable, it may also reflect an implicit assumption that sufficient information will restore predictability. In complex systems, however, increasing analytical depth does not necessarily yield proportional increases in control.

A second manifestation is the *attribution reflex*. When outcomes diverge from plans, responsibility is frequently located in individuals or discrete units: someone failed to anticipate, coordinate, or execute. Such patterns resonate with established analyses of defensive reasoning in organizations (Argyris 1990). This attribution is structurally reinforced in accountable systems. Yet in complex contexts, outcomes often emerge from interaction effects that exceed individual foresight. When predictive expectations remain dominant, emergence is easily reinterpreted as error.

A third manifestation is *defensive stabilization*. Faced with persistent uncertainty, organizations may tighten procedures, narrow discretion, or reassert formal mandates. These moves can restore a sense of order, but they may also constrain the adaptive experimentation required under complex conditions. In such cases, intervention reverts to ordered logic not because complexity has disappeared, but because epistemic security has become paramount.

A fourth, and often less visible, manifestation is *structural entrenchment*. Epistemic inertia is not solely a matter of professional habit or cognitive anchoring; it is actively generated and reproduced by the institutional environments within which intervention takes place. Funding mechanisms reward deliverables defined in advance. Evaluation frameworks privilege quantifiable and attributable outcomes. Professional hierarchies reinforce the authority of expert prediction. Incentive structures for organizational leaders reward decisiveness over adaptive inquiry. These conditions do not merely tolerate epistemic inertia — they systematically produce and reinforce it. Cultivating epistemic mobility therefore requires not only individual or collective reorientation, but sustained attention to the institutional affordances and design conditions that make relational and exploratory knowing viable over time. Where such conditions are absent or actively suppressed, even practitioners who recognize the need for reorientation may find it difficult to enact in practice.

These patterns illustrate that epistemic inertia does not stem from resistance to change in a simplistic sense. Rather, it reflects the systemic persistence of knowledge orientations aligned with predictability and control — a persistence that is both cognitively grounded and institutionally reinforced. In complex intervention, the challenge is therefore not to eliminate analytic reasoning, but to recognize when its dominance inhibits adaptive engage-

ment, and to attend to the structural conditions that sustain that dominance. This recognition marks the threshold between epistemic inertia and the possibility of epistemic mobility.

## Epistemic Mobility in Systemic Practice

Epistemic mobility is related to, but analytically distinct from, concepts such as reflective practice, reflexivity, systemic inquiry, and social learning. While these traditions emphasize reflection, participation, inquiry, and relational awareness within practice, the present framework focuses more specifically on how dominant orientations of knowing stabilize and shift in response to changing situational dynamics. The concern is therefore not only how practitioners reflect or learn within a given epistemic frame, but how the frame itself may become reconfigured through practice. This section addresses the second analytical sub-question posed in the introduction: what characterizes epistemic mobility as a practical competence in systemic intervention? Three interrelated dimensions are proposed.

It is important to clarify that epistemic mobility does not imply the abandonment of analytical reasoning, nor does it present adaptivity as inherently superior to analysis. Rather, it concerns the conditions under which different forms of reasoning are mobilized and what role they play. Analytical thinking can itself be part of epistemic mobility when it is deployed situationally and reflexively — as one instrument among several — rather than as the default or dominant logic through which all situations are interpreted. The distinction is therefore not between analysis and adaptation as competing values, but between rigid epistemic anchoring and the capacity to calibrate reasoning to the character of the situation. A practitioner demonstrating epistemic mobility may use precise analytical tools in one moment and shift to exploratory dialogue in the next — not because the tools have changed, but because the underlying orientation through which they are mobilized has shifted. Measurement, prediction, relational inquiry, and adaptive experimentation are often intertwined in practice; the question epistemic mobility raises is not which of these to privilege, but whether the dominant logic organizing their use remains appropriate to the evolving situation.

The first dimension is *epistemic recognition*. This involves the capacity to notice when prevailing modes of analysis no longer generate meaningful traction. Signals may include recurring surprises, escalating analytical effort without corresponding clarity, or persistent attribution conflicts. Recognition is not merely cognitive; it often entails tolerating the discomfort of uncertainty and suspending the expectation that additional analysis will restore control. It also involves acknowledging that much of professional knowing remains tacit and embodied rather than fully articulable (Polanyi 1966), a challenge that echoes Schön's analysis of how professional frames become visible primarily when they break down (Schön 1983).

The second dimension is *epistemic reorientation*. Once misalignment is acknowledged, intervention must shift in practice. This may involve reframing problems as evolving situations rather than solvable tasks, engaging stakeholders in exploratory probes rather than finalizing comprehensive plans, or prioritizing pattern detection over causal decomposition, shifting intervention toward ongoing sensemaking rather than retrospective explanation (Weick 1995).

Such shifts resonate with pragmatic accounts of inquiry in which knowledge emerges through experimental engagement with indeterminate situations (Dewey 1938). Reorientation does not eliminate structure or accountability; it recalibrates them to conditions where causality can only be partially anticipated.

The third dimension is *epistemic stabilization*. Adaptive engagement under conditions of complexity cannot remain momentary. Without some degree of stabilization, organizations tend to revert to familiar ordered logics, particularly in contexts where predictability and control are institutionally reinforced (Stacey 2011). Epistemic stabilization therefore concerns the ability to sustain relational and exploratory modes of knowing over time—maintaining tolerance for ambiguity while preserving coherence and responsibility. This dimension is particularly significant in politically governed or professionally structured environments, where pressures toward predictability are strong.

Epistemic mobility should not be understood as a permanent state of fluidity. Nor is it reducible to reflexivity or openness in a general sense. Reflexive awareness may accompany epistemic mobility, but mobility refers more specifically to the capacity to recalibrate the dominant logic of knowing in relation to system conditions. It concerns shifts in epistemic orientation rather than the deepening of reflection within a single epistemic frame. Ordered and complicated contexts continue to require analytic precision and expert reasoning. The competence at stake is therefore not continuous adaptability, but situational discernment: the ability to align knowledge orientation with evolving relational dynamics under conditions of distributed causality and emergent interaction (Cilliers 1998). In this respect, epistemic mobility resembles forms of practical judgment often described as phronetic rather than purely technical (Flyvbjerg 2001). Furthermore, epistemic mobility also differs subtly from the distinction between systemic and systematic practice developed within systemic inquiry traditions (Checkland 1981; Ison 2017). Whereas that distinction primarily contrasts two different orientations to practice, the present framework focuses on the movement between such orientations and the conditions under which one mode of knowing may remain dominant despite increasing misalignment with the evolving situation.

## Illustrative Examples of Epistemic Inertia and Mobility

The illustrations presented in this section are drawn from a practice-informed reconstruction of intervention processes in a Swedish municipal context. They are presented not as formal case studies subject to systematic empirical verification, but as theoretically informed composite illustrations intended to make visible how epistemic inertia and mobility manifest in recognizable patterns of intervention practice. Their purpose is analytical rather than evidentiary: to show how the concepts operate in concrete situations and to support further inquiry rather than to establish causal generalizations.

The dynamics described above can be observed in everyday intervention practice, often in subtle ways. Consider a situation in which a cross-departmental initiative encounters repeated delays and unexpected resistance. The initial response may involve commissioning further analysis, refining performance indicators, or clarifying lines of responsibility. Each step is reasonable in isolation. Yet as analytical effort increases, the situation does not necessarily become more predictable. Meetings grow more detailed, documentation expands, and accountability discussions intensify, while the underlying relational tensions remain largely

unaddressed. In such cases, epistemic inertia is not expressed through refusal to act, but through a continued reliance on decompositional reasoning in a context characterized by interdependence and emergence.

A different pattern can be seen when responsibility becomes the primary lens through which complexity is interpreted. When outcomes diverge from plans, attention may turn toward identifying where anticipation failed. The search for responsible actors is structurally legitimate in accountable systems. However, when interaction effects are interpreted primarily as lapses in foresight, the system's distributed causality becomes compressed into individual explanations. What might otherwise be approached as an emergent configuration of relationships is reframed as insufficient coordination or incomplete execution. Here epistemic inertia manifests as the persistence of predictive expectations even as the system behaves otherwise.

By contrast, moments of epistemic mobility often begin quietly. In a similar cross-departmental setting, participants may gradually acknowledge that the initiative is evolving in ways that cannot be fully anticipated. Rather than intensifying analysis, they may experiment with small-scale adjustments, engage in exploratory dialogue across boundaries, or temporarily suspend the demand for definitive plans. The shift is not dramatic, nor does it abandon accountability. Instead, it reflects a recalibration of how knowledge is mobilized. Predictive reasoning remains available, but it no longer defines the situation. Adaptive engagement becomes legitimate.

In one municipal sustainability initiative, this shift became visible when formal project coordination structures repeatedly failed to generate traction across administrative boundaries. The initiative involved departments responsible for urban planning, environmental management, and social services, and was tasked with developing an integrated approach to sustainable land use. Initial responses to coordination difficulties focused on clearer planning procedures, refined reporting structures, and strengthened accountability mechanisms — for instance, introducing detailed project plans with quarterly milestones and assigning cross-departmental responsibility for specific deliverables. While each intervention appeared reasonable, the initiative gradually became increasingly disconnected from everyday organizational practice. Over time, participants began to recognize that the difficulty did not primarily concern insufficient information or weak implementation, but the persistence of a mode of engagement oriented toward prediction and control in a situation characterized by evolving interdependencies, competing departmental priorities, and political ambiguity that resisted decomposition into fixed tasks.

A gradual reorientation followed. Rather than further intensifying formal coordination, the initiative increasingly relied on facilitated cross-departmental dialogue, exploratory workshops, and provisional forms of collaborative inquiry. Importantly, these activities were not introduced as alternative techniques alone, but as a different way of organizing knowing within practice. Small-scale interactions between previously disconnected actors enabled shared interpretations and adaptive responses to emerge without requiring prior consensus or fully stabilized plans. In this sense, epistemic mobility did not arise through the replacement of structure with openness, but through the institutional legitimization of exploratory and relational forms of engagement within an otherwise accountability-driven environment.

Sustaining such mobility requires ongoing attention. Under pressure, especially when political or professional stakes are high, there is a strong tendency to revert to familiar logics

of control. Epistemic stabilization therefore becomes critical. When exploratory practices are legitimized, when ambiguity can be discussed without immediate attribution, and when provisional steps are recognized as responsible rather than inadequate, epistemic mobility begins to take root. Intervention does not become less disciplined. It becomes differently disciplined.

## Implications for Systemic Practice

The distinction between epistemic inertia and epistemic mobility has direct implications for systemic practice. If intervention is always shaped by underlying orientations of knowing, then systemic practitioners must attend not only to system dynamics, stakeholder configurations, and methodological design, but also to the epistemic dynamics that shape how situations are interpreted in the first place.

A first implication concerns diagnosis. Systemic intervention commonly involves mapping relationships, surfacing assumptions, and exploring boundary judgments (Midgley 2000). The present argument suggests that practitioners should also inquire into how knowledge is being mobilized. Are recurring difficulties being approached through escalating analysis despite limited traction? Are attribution patterns narrowing attention to individual performance when interaction effects appear dominant? Such questions do not replace systemic tools but deepen their application by bringing epistemic orientation into view.

A second implication concerns intervention design. When epistemic inertia is present, introducing new information or additional analysis may reinforce rather than alleviate the problem. In such situations, the task is not to improve prediction but to create conditions under which epistemic reorientation becomes possible. This may involve legitimizing exploratory dialogue, framing initiatives as provisional rather than definitive, or explicitly acknowledging the limits of foresight under conditions of complexity. The shift is subtle but consequential.

A third implication relates to professional identity. Many systemic practitioners operate in environments that reward clarity, decisiveness, and demonstrable control. Cultivating epistemic mobility therefore requires holding a tension between accountability and emergence. Practitioners must be able to justify adaptive engagement as responsible practice rather than as indecision. This entails articulating why different modes of knowing are appropriate in different contexts and making epistemic alignment an explicit part of intervention rationale.

Finally, epistemic mobility should not be framed as a personal trait or moral virtue. It is a situated and collectively cultivated capacity within practice that can be fostered collectively. Teams can develop shared language for recognizing misalignment between system conditions and epistemic framing. Organizations can create spaces where uncertainty is discussable without immediate attribution. In this sense, cultivating epistemic mobility is itself a systemic intervention, one that operates at the level of how knowing is organized within practice.

The present argument is intentionally conceptual and practice-oriented rather than based on systematic comparative empirical analysis. The concepts of epistemic inertia and epistemic mobility are therefore proposed as analytical lenses intended to support inquiry into intervention practice rather than as empirically validated explanatory categories. Furthermore, the framework does not seek to replace political, institutional, or structural expla-

nations of intervention dynamics, but rather to complement them by foregrounding the epistemic dimensions through which intervention is interpreted and enacted. Future research may therefore explore how these concepts operate across different institutional, cultural, and professional contexts.

## Conclusion

Complex intervention does not take place in a vacuum of knowledge. It unfolds within stabilized knowing practices that shape what appears predictable, actionable, and accountable. When these orientations remain aligned with ordered expectations despite evolving situational dynamics, intervention may intensify effort without altering trajectory. The difficulty is rarely the absence of expertise. More often, it is the persistence of epistemic inertia.

By introducing the concepts of epistemic inertia and epistemic mobility, this article has sought to clarify how knowledge moves within systemic practice. The argument does not suggest that analytic reasoning or professional expertise should be displaced. Ordered contexts continue to require precision and control. The challenge arises when complexity is encountered without a corresponding shift in epistemic orientation.

Epistemic mobility, as developed here, concerns the capacity to reconfigure how knowledge is mobilized in response to relational dynamics. It is neither a permanent state nor a personal attribute, but a situated competence that emerges within practice. Where such mobility is cultivated, intervention can remain engaged under conditions of uncertainty without collapsing into either rigid control or unstructured improvisation.

If systemic practice is concerned with influencing patterns of interaction, it must also attend to patterns of knowing. The continued complexity-informed intervention may depend less on new tools and more on the disciplined cultivation of epistemic mobility within the very practices through which systems are engaged.

From this perspective, the challenge is not simply to become more reflective, systemic, or adaptive in general terms, but to cultivate the capacity to recognize when prevailing epistemic framings have become misaligned with the evolving dynamics of practice and must therefore be reconfigured.

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## Declarations

**Ethics Declaration** Not applicable.

**Competing Interests** The authors declare no competing interests.

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