

<http://www.gowerpublishing.com/isbn/9781409419051>

Leading Complex Projects

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SECTION ONE:

What Good Leadership Does When Projects Are Complex

The chapter headings in this section reflect the key themes from our interviews. They describe what the leaders we interviewed actually did to lead themselves and their teams through almost impossible situations to deliver positive outcomes for their key stakeholders. The chapters are presented roughly in the order of frequency of theme from the interviews. The emphasis is on what worked for them. The chapters then explore current knowledge from research and practice around each of the major themes. Some of the themes will be familiar to readers. Chapter 1 announces a repeated view by the leaders we interviewed, that leader and key stakeholders must recognise that they are dealing with a complex project, rather than just a difficult or challenging one, and that they need to understand why it is complex. Chapter 2 is entitled: 'Communicate, Communicate, Communicate.' It reflects the enormous emphasis placed on communication by those whom we interviewed. Nevertheless, the focus is communication in complex environments, rather than project communication in general. Chapter 3 explores another frequently cited theme; that a complex project depends on the interaction of teams at many different levels, from the executive teams to those actually doing the work. Chapter 4 discusses the value of conceptualising the project as a programme; part of a business portfolio. Chapter 5 reflects a key theme in our studies (2004–2011); the value of challenging others to develop innovative approaches to management. Chapter 6 explores how leaders use critical and reflective thinking skills to help them to navigate complex environments. Chapter 7 also reflects a common theme, the critical understanding of disparate organisational, national and generational cultures and how differences can affect project teams and their

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interactions. Chapter 8 has been built around the acute awareness of the need to manage organisational politics by the project leaders in our sample. Chapter 9 explores crises, from the perspective of complexity theory, and how leaders guide both their teams and their key stakeholders through major risk events.

Chapter 1: Comprehend Complexity

Chapter 2: Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

Chapter 3: Cultivate the Right Teams *from Project Teams to Executive Board*

Chapter 4: Employ Portfolio-programme Thinking

Chapter 5: Challenge Through Innovation

Chapter 6: Think About Thinking

Chapter 7: Consider Culture

Chapter 8: Exercise Political Skills

Chapter 9: Pilot Project Through Crises

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