



## Complex Adaptive Leadership

Embracing Paradox and Uncertainty

Nick Obolensky

August 2010  
256 pages  
978-0-566-08932-9  
includes 108 b&w illustrations

244 x 172 mm  
Hardback  
£65.00



Complex Adaptive Leadership argues leadership should not be something only exercised by nominated leaders. It is a complex dynamic process involving all those engaged in a particular enterprise. The theoretical background to this lies in complexity science and chaos theory - spoken and written about in the context of leadership for the last 20 years, but still little understood. We all seem intuitively to know leadership 'isn't what it used to be' but we still cling to old assumptions which look anachronistic in changing and challenging times. Organisations and their contexts are increasingly paradoxical and uncertain. A broader approach to leadership is needed. Nick Obolensky has practised leadership in the public, private and voluntary sectors. He has also researched it, and taught it over many years in leading business schools. In this exciting book he brings together his knowledge of theory, his own experience, and the results of 15 years of research involving 1,500 executives in 40 countries around the world. The main conclusion from that research is that the more complex things become, the less traditional directive leadership is needed. Those operating in the real world, nonetheless, need ways of coping. The book is focused on helping practitioners struggling to interpret and react to increasingly complex events.

Arranged in four parts, it provides a number of exercises, tools and models that will help the reader to understand:

- why the context for leadership has changed, and why complexities in organisations have emerged
- what complexity is and what lessons can be drawn from this emergent area of scientific study
- how Complex Adaptive Leadership can be exercised in a very practical way at two levels: organisationally and individually, and how to get more for less
- the actions that can be taken when Complex Adaptive Leadership is applied.

The book will particularly appeal to practitioners wishing to add to their knowledge of leadership theory.

### Contents

Preface: what's this all about?; Part I The Context: A journey of discovery; The world wide context - a flow towards polyarchy; The organisational context - evolve or die; Finita la comedia - stop playing charades; A quick breather between Parts I and II. Part II Chaos and Complexity: Order in chaos, simplicity in complexity - the deeper paradox; Getting to grips with chaos and complexity; Getting chaos and complexity to work; A quick breather between Parts II and III. Part III The Leadership Angle: What is leadership anyway?; What about the followers?; Complex adaptive leadership in action; A final breather between Parts III and IV. Part IV Looking Forward and Other Interests: Beyond this book - the choices you have...; Appendices; Bibliography; Index.

### About the Author

Nick Obolensky has enjoyed a successful career in a number of roles, in the military, third sector, academia and in business, including those of Associate Director of a FTSE 100 firm, MBA Professor of the Year more than once, and CEO and Chairman of entrepreneurial start-ups. He is a Chartered Management Consultant and was an Executive Strategy Consultant at Ernst and Young, where he also led the Research Associate Practice. He has been a Fellow at the London Business School and was a Founder Fellow at The Centre for Leadership Studies at the University of Exeter in the UK, Professor of Leadership at Nyenrode University in the Netherlands and a Visiting Professor at INSEAD in France. His work has been published by Kogan Page in several languages around the world as well as under the auspices of the University of Exeter Centre for Leadership Studies and the RSA.

[www.gowerpublishing.com/isbn/9780566089329](http://www.gowerpublishing.com/isbn/9780566089329)

# GOWER

To order this book please visit [www.gowerpublishing.com](http://www.gowerpublishing.com), or email [orders@ashgate.com](mailto:orders@ashgate.com)  
A 10% discount applies to orders placed through [www.gowerpublishing.com](http://www.gowerpublishing.com)