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Complexity and Organizational Reality: Uncertainty and the Need to Rethink Management after the Collapse of Investment Capitalism

By Ralph D. Stacey



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Approaches to leadership and management are still dominated by prescriptions – usually claimed as scientific – for top executives to choose the future direction of their organization. The global financial recession and the collapse of investment capitalism (surely not planned by anyone) make it quite clear that top executives are simply not able to choose future directions. Despite this, current management literature mostly continues to avoid the obvious – management's inability to predict or control what will happen in the future. The key question now must be how we are to think about management if we take the uncertainty of organizational life seriously.

Ralph Stacey has turned to the sciences of uncertainty and complexity to develop an understanding of leadership and management as the ordinary politics of daily organizational life. In presenting organizations as a series of complex responsive processes, Stacey's new book helps us to see organizational reality for what it actually is – human beings engaged in many, many local conversational interactions and power relations in which they negotiate their ideologically based choices. Organizational continuity and change emerge unpredictably, rather than as a result of any overall plan. This is a radically different picture from the one painted by most of the management literature, which explains "organizational continuity and change" as the realization of the global plans and choices of a few powerful executives within an organization.

Providing a new foundation for understanding complexity and management, this important book is required reading for managers and leaders wanting to understand the reality of complexity in organizations, including those engaged in postgraduate studies in leadership, organizational behaviour and change management.



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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for the previous edition:

'The strength of this book is that it gives a framework for the assessment of much of the writing that has been done applying chaos theory, complexity and complex adaptive systems theory to management.' - *Tim Haslett, Monash University*

'In a world that is discovering the power of the application of complexity to the day-to-day life of organizations, this book offers a solid rock foundation. It gives all of us as practitioners a language on which to build our specific application of the theory to practice. It is a book that every executive concerned with the sustainability of a corporation's success can use, ranging from dotcom to traditional government organizations.' - *Dr. Alberto Bazzan, Leadership Development Leader at the World Bank Group, Washington DC and former Director of Leadership Development for IBM in Europe, Middle East and Africa*

'I think this book represents a remarkable synthesis and depth of reflection. What [the authors] have done in this text is to clarify all the different strands of work that have been going on, by looking at their foundations. They have really encompassed an enormous range of work, both in evolutionary thinking in management, and explained clearly the fundamental limitations in the approaches.' - *Professor Peter Allen, Head of the Complex Systems Management Centre, Cranfield School of Management, UK*

'This book is the first I know of to step firmly into the new space of creative participation that has been revealed by the Sciences of Complexity, showing clearly why it is necessary to move the limitations of systems thinking in order to engage with the full creative potential of life in relationship. It is a remarkable achievement that uniquely combines the philosophical depth, the psychological insight, and the practical experience that the authors have gained through direct engagement with the issues that puzzle, confuse, and frustrate people working at all levels of corporate life. It is liberating to read a text that tries to make sense of the paradoxes of creative living.' - *Professor Brian Goodwin, Schumacher College*

About the Author

Ralph Stacey is Professor of Management and Director of the Doctor of Management Program at the Business School of the University of Hertfordshire, UK.

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