

# *“Chaos Leadership and Polyarchy”*

## An explanation of the paper



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 British Academy of Management  
 Harrogate Conference  
 2008

This presentation is incomplete without the verbal commentary by the presenter



1

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## Conference theme:

### “The Academy goes relevant”

- The theme suggests an underlying tension between practitioner and academic
- Nick Obolensky – practitioner and academic
- Most research comes up with theory to apply to practice – this research emerged out of practice, and then looked for a theory to explain it
- So this is a “back-to-front” emergent story of relevance:
  - A few disturbing observations about leadership
  - An underlying need of modern leaders
  - A contextual explanation
  - Using scientific theories as metaphor to help understanding

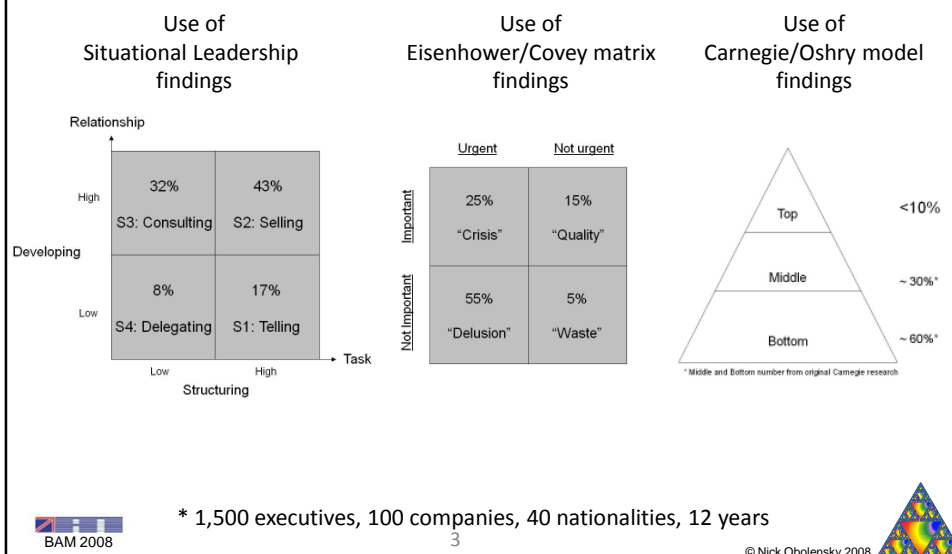


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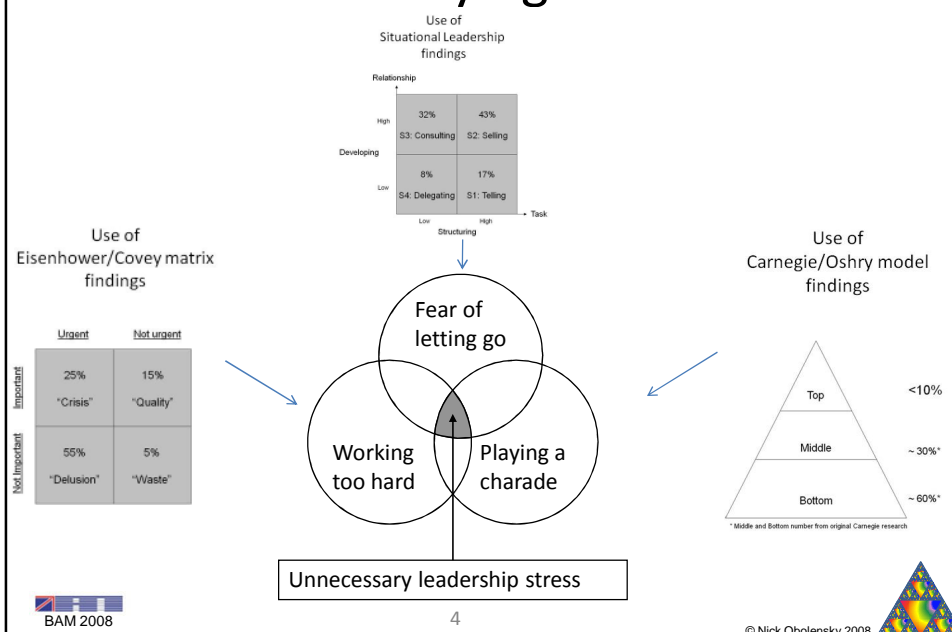
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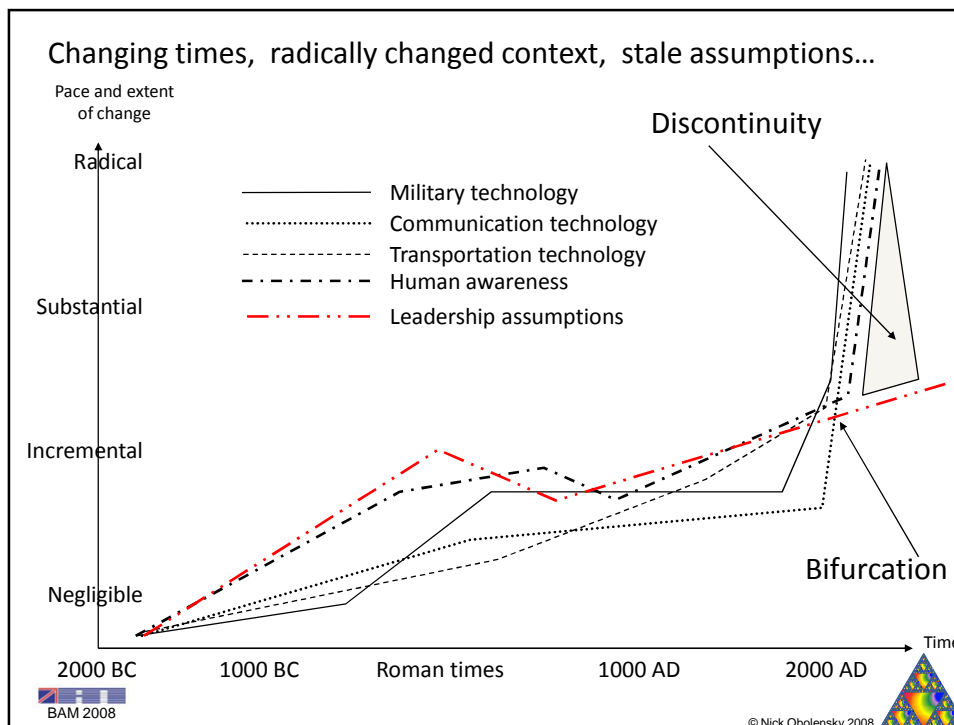


# A few disturbing observations\*



# An underlying need.....

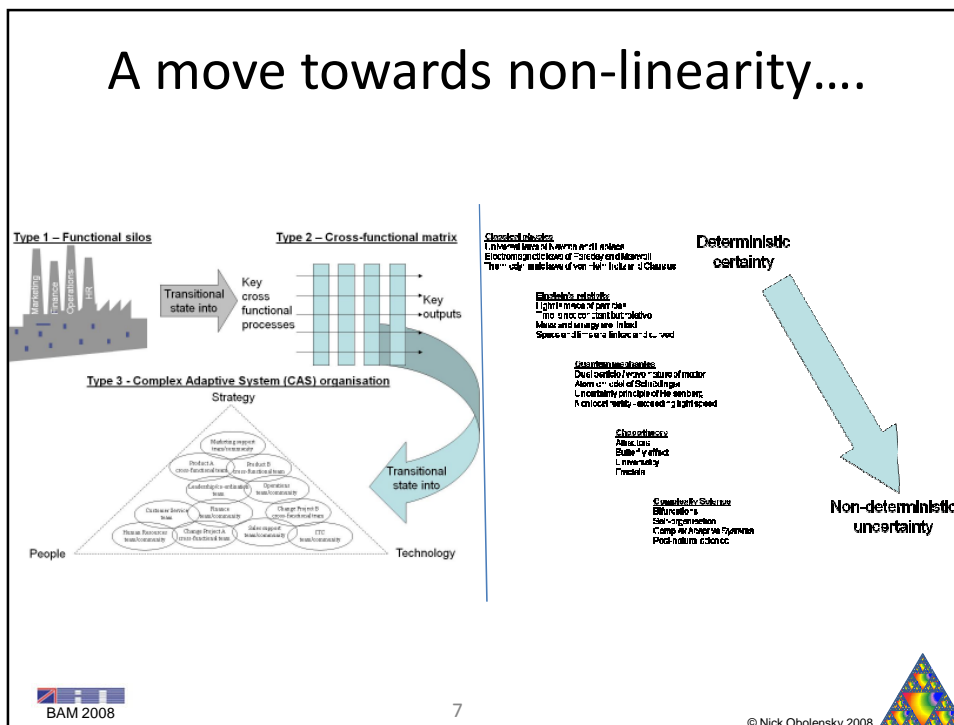




## Evidence of discontinuity?

- *“A charismatic visionary leader is absolutely not required for a visionary company, and in fact can be detrimental.....”*. (Collins & Porras 2000)
- *“Leading from Good to Great does not mean coming up with the answers and then motivating everyone to follow your messianic vision. It means having the humility to grasp the fact that you do not yet understand enough to have the answers and then to ask the right questions.....”* (Collins 2001)
- *“The more power you give a single individual in the face of complexity and uncertainty, the more likely it is that bad decisions will be made. As a result there are good reasons for companies to try to think past hierarchy.....”* (Surowiecki 2004)
- *“Subordinates need to challenge in order to follow, and superiors must listen in order to lead...the traditional organisational map describes a world that no longer exists ”* (Hirschorn and Gilmore 1992)
- *Organisations don't have ‘tops’ and ‘bottoms’. These are inaccurate metaphors.”* (Mintzberg 1983)

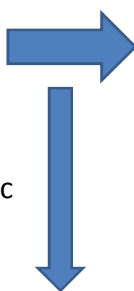
# A move towards non-linearity....



# .....a trend in leadership

## Oligarchy

- Leadership by the few
- Attribute driven
- Static role
- Challenge: effective "leadership" (e.g. Public speaking)



## Polyarchy

- Leadership by the many
- Context driven
- Dynamic
- Challenge: effective "followership" (e.g. public listening)

Transitional State? Rebalancing?  
 "Both/and" NOT "Either/or"



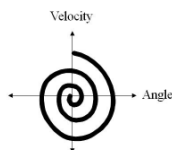
# Chaos theory and complexity science

- Complexity Science and Chaos Theory are two relatively new areas
- Much debate about boundary and difference between the two – largely irrelevant for the practitioner
- Use of science to help management (Taylor 1911)
- Some literature linking management to complexity science e.g. Stacey 2003, Wheatley 2007, Brohm 2005, Pascale et al 2000, Peters 1988
- This research adds to this thinking.
- Some resonance with other papers in this conference e.g. Beech, Edwards, Higgs & Rowland (Leadership), Rouse & Zietsma (Strategy), Andrews, Warren et al (Entrepreneurship) 2008
- Various levels of application –  $M^3$  = metaphor, modelling, manipulation
- Various areas can be used to help understanding/encourage change, e.g.:
  - Bifurcations
  - Fractals
  - Emergence
  - Boolean networks
  - Autopoiesis
  - Attractors

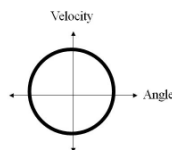


# Attractors

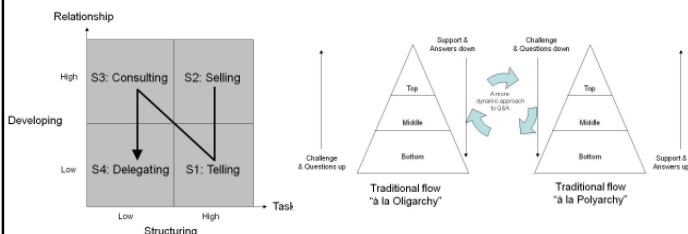
Point



Periodic



Strange



Catalytic mechanisms



## Summary – a practitioner perspective

- Leaders are stressed in part due to:
  - Fear of letting go
  - Working too hard
  - Playing a charade
- This is due to:
  - A bifurcation between context and assumption of what leadership is about
  - Things seem more complex and less linear
  - Leadership is trending from oligarchy to polyarchy, from attribute/static role to more of a dynamic
- Complexity science and chaos theory can be useful to help understanding and change behaviours – but more research is needed (M<sup>3</sup> - metaphor, modelling and manipulation)



## Bibliography

A variety of books and papers have been used to help develop the thoughts in this paper. Some are listed below.

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