

BOOK REVIEW

*Complex Adaptive Leadership: Embracing Paradox
And Uncertainty*
Nick Obolensky

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The key aim of this volume is to highlight the damage that is caused by adhering to out-dated, traditional “oligarchic” notions of leadership that fail to recognise the role of subordinates in providing solutions that ensure success on the ground. In answer to the question, “What percentage of solutions for implementing significant change within your organisation came from the top?” the author’s own research involving some 1000 executives from over 40 countries suggests a rather low figure – less than 10% on average for top executives (but always below 15%), compared to 30% and 60% from within the middle and bottom levels respectively. According to the author oligarchic notions of leadership encourage inertia: top executives often do not have solutions for dealing with the complexity of rapidly changing technology, yet they act as if they do know, while those at the bottom of the organisation (who usually do have solutions) are content to wait for solutions to emanate from the top. This out-dated role-playing based on oligarchic leadership models can have disastrous consequences for an organisation.

It is proposed in this volume to change the leadership paradigm by moving from an oligarchic to a polyarchic mode of leadership. The latter recognises the key role played by subordinates in providing solutions that help organisations respond effectively to rapidly changing environments.

This challenging volume provides an excellent conceptual framework that permits a comprehensive analysis of every aspect of leadership. The analysis is supported throughout by examples and organisational scenarios, research findings, self-diagnostic Q&A sessions, charts and flow-diagrams that help reinforce one’s grasp of key concepts.

The author has been a Fellow at both the London Business School and the Centre for Leadership Studies, University of Exeter, Professor of Leadership at Nyenrode University, The Netherlands, and a Visiting Professor at the graduate business school INSEAD’s European campus, France. Business experience includes positions as Associate Director of a FTSE 100 firm and Executive Strategy Consultant at Ernst and Young, management consultants.

