



THE LEADERSHIP REPORT

Is there a silver lining to the virus cloud?

The current spread of the Covid-19 virus is having a large negative impact, for both those and their families who have been infected (with tragic results for some), to companies whose supply chains have been thrown into disarray, to pension funds and pensioners / investors who have seen a decrease in their market holdings. But as a leadership and organisational development practitioner with clients around the world, including China, I wonder: **Is there something deeper we can learn? Is there a “silver lining” to this cloud? Is it an ill wind that blows no good?**



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First, there is a possible wider benefit from a complexity science viewpoint. Plague in China and beyond, locusts in Africa, fires in Australia, floods in parts of Europe, wider climate change....its all a bit gloomy. What’s going on? Nature and our environment is a complex system, and complex systems have an element of self-organising self correction. Everyone knows that the way we humans, as part of that system, are acting is unsustainable. So the wider silver lining here is that nature is sending a clear message—change how you operate in the system or, sooner or later, nature will change how many of you there are! It looks like sooner—and time is of the essence. **It is beholden for us all to think of ways we can limit our carbon footprint.** Meetings, workshops etc can be done on-line, cutting cost and carbon. For example, at CAL we do, amongst other things, 70-20-10 integrated programmes. Although support for the 90% part is on-line, we have calculated that a typical face-to-face workshop we run (the 10%) for an international group can release 10 tonnes of carbon into the atmosphere. We have delivered on-line interactive workshops for many years. Many decision makers are slow to adopt this approach. However, the on-line workshops we have delivered can get as good a “happy sheet” score (Kirkpatrick Level 1) as offline face-to-face. Stop and think what you are doing, and why!



In China, during the height of the virus, many companies shut down and workers have had to work from home. And linking back to the first more strategic point, nitrogen dioxide pollution levels dropped considerably due to not only factory closure but also less commuting. **This brings the “silver lining” consideration to a second, more operational benefit, on organization evolution and digital transformation.**



For weeks many teams and individuals have used digital means to carry on, and so many have now learned that offices, travel, meetings etc can be replaced by on-line resource. In an instant, the second largest economy in the world was forced to embrace “digital transformation”, assisted in a way that perhaps even the best consultants could not think of. MedTech has also had a boost [as this article](#) by Greeven shows.

Another benefit is on leadership, individual and organizational. With all this working from home one would think people would be less busy. However, and interestingly, our anecdotal research in China from our subsidiary there reported people were often MORE busy working form home, not less! Why was this? One direct reason is that team leaders, when faced with uncertainty, tended to do even more micro-



management, resulting in much non-productive work. Our earlier article, “Boosting Virtual Teams”, showed how this can be a big, albeit common, mistake (see [that article here](#)). **So, this reveals two opportunities for leadership:**

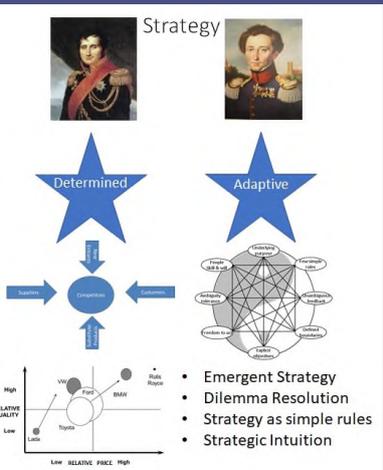
- 1. For leaders to learn how to lead in a digital world with more productivity;**
- 2. For companies to start thinking how to lead if they continue their “digital transformation” strategy.**



Dealing with the “digital transformation” strategy first, the common approach is that companies try to come up with a digital strategy. But in fact they should come up with **a strategy for a digital world**. The two are different. A digital strategy may fall foul of just doing a poor strategy but, using digital means, doing it quicker to get poor results faster!

Coming up with a strategy for a digital world opens up wider thinking. It also opens up more ways of doing strategy. Strategy in business is mostly based on a traditional approach, first widely publicised by the French Napoleonic General Jomini, and recognised by most: analyse the situation, come up with a strategy and then implement it. Still needed, but no longer sufficient. And for a digital world the traditional approach to strategy is too linear and slow. At the same as Jomini, another general was writing but sadly not many read his work—he was German not French and his book was harder and much, much longer than Jomini's. That was General Clausewitz who saw strategy as the “coup d’oeil” - the blink of an eye or the snap of the fingers. Both Jomini (the “Determined” strategy) and Clausewitz (the

a wider understanding of how the digital world is operating, and adapt to it. It is dynamic, not linear, fast changing not steady state, and unpredictable, uncertain and stressful. The Covid-19 virus is a typical “Black Swan” event—no one saw it coming and it has a big effect. We have found that an understanding of how complexity actually works (Complexity Science) coupled with the ability to know WHEN and HOW to let go, allowing their teams to self-organise as much as possible, gets better results, faster for less stress when in a highly uncertainly environment (an example of how this was used to turnaround a major 5G roll out programme is in [one of our earlier articles](#)). So for leaders facing such uncertainty here are some quick tips if teams end up working from home:



“Adaptive” strategy) approaches are needed but Clausewitz’s can open up more opportunities for the digital world. In business any MBA will recognise the Jomini approach. Meanwhile, the **Clausewitz approach looks more at HOW strategy is done rather than WHAT it is.** A stumbling block is HOW leaders need to lead well in a

virtual, increasingly digital world. They need to enable their teams to work in a better self-organised way which needs a more dynamic approach to leadership. We call this Leadership 4.0 (outlined in our [earlier article](#) “We don’t need another hero”). **This needs the willingness to experiment and try things out.** However, a recent [article on Forbes.Com](#) by Denning shows traditional organisational leadership approaches goes against experimentation. For leaders to lead well, with their teams forced to work virtually, they need

1. Relax! Don’t kid yourself that any performance they delivered was mainly due to you “controlling” them. In fact your control may have diminished them!
2. Have a meeting online with the team to discuss HOW they can operate without you and what support they need, rather than worry about how you can control.
3. Ensure with a daily quick “touch base” on-line meeting with the whole team so they can share progress not just with you, but with each other and link people together if they can support each other.
4. Agree a sensible reporting routine so you can keep the suits from upstairs off your back.

You will be better prepared for the next “Black Swan”.



Nick Obolensky

Nick Obolensky
 Founder, Complex Adaptive Leadership

WHO ARE COMPLEX ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP?



CAL is an ISO certified global firm which combines modern western Complexity Science with some ancient Chinese wisdom to enable leaders to get better results, faster for less resource/effort, resulting in enhanced organisational agility.

Our interventions extend mindsets from Leadership 1.0 (traditional, albeit redefined many times, with leadership done by leaders/managers, downwards), to cross-boundary organisational Leadership 2.0 (where leadership also has to go sideways and outwards without “formal power”), to Leadership 3.0 (where leadership needs to go upwards with leaders needing to enable and learn to follow the people they lead, and followers needing to learn to take the initiative and lead themselves) which all combine into Leadership 4.0 (where leadership becomes a dynamic, not just a role or attribute).



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For more information: www.ComplexAdaptiveLeadership.com Email: Info@AgilePlusLeadership.com