

# Innovadership: Marrying Strategic Leadership with Complexity

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*Through circular response we are creating each other all the time...The most fundamental thought about all this is that reaction is always reaction to a relating ... In human relations, as I have said, this is obvious: I never react to you but to you-plus-me; or to be more accurate, it is I-plus you reacting to you-plus-me. "I" can never influence "you" because you have already influenced me; that is, in the very process of meeting, by the very process of meeting, we both become something different. It begins even before we meet, in the anticipation of meeting. (Mary Parker Follett, 1924/2013, p. 62)*

## INTRODUCTION

We're living in strange times, indeed. While *modi operandi* have already collapsed, nevertheless, long-lasting proclivities toward assumptions of the machine metaphor are still here to stay. Organizations flounder about in the turbulence on an even keel as they adhere to rule-like feeble references of linear causality to survive under ambiguities of the interregnum. The global business is constantly being woven by the cobweb interactions such that monitoring markets is merely a glance through just for a moment. Any emergent phenomenon that organizations are supposed to deal with seems to be a *fait accompli* with manifold aspects beyond astute evaluation. The unique qualities imposed by the current way of doing business overwhelm the traditional habits of linear mindset in an age of fluidity. Organizations are far from being capable to grasp the very insight of the emergent phenomena just by dismantling the whole into parts. Not because it is intricate, but because it is impossible to predict the whole from the knowledge of the parts and emergent phenomena is irreversible.

Linearity, in a broader sense, means that it is possible to reach a value for the whole by adding up the value of its constituents. A function is deemed as linear if the value of the function, for any set of values assigned to its arguments, is simply a weighted sum of those values (Holland, 1995). Linear thinking is the kernel of the mechanistic ontology on which the entire organizational studies have been built during twentieth century. As described by Boal and Schultz (2007) "...the linear view conceives of time as a sequence where a unique past leads to the future. The past is considered in determining behavior, but its effect is constrained to the immediate future that follows since each point in time presents a largely unique set of contingencies to be considered." In compliance with the prevalent assumptions provided by the mechanistic view organizations have been conceived of as machines, which were supposed to exhibit features such as regularity, predictability, order and efficiency (Tsoukas & Cummings, 1997). Any complex social phenomena were considered as being composed of variables that evinced linearity among their constituting agents, which eventually led to a definition of organizational and managerial experiences from reductionist, deterministic and equilibrium-oriented perspectives (Dooley, 1997; Mendenhall, Macomber, & Cutright, 2000). However, in nonlinear dynamical systems relationship between

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the agents are inter-relationships, thus, the distinction between independent and dependent variables breaks down into interdependence between agents (Mendenhall, Macomber, & Cutright, 2000). Nonlinear interactions always make the behavior of the aggregate more complicated than would be predicted by summing or averaging (Holland, 1995). That means outcomes of a nonlinear dynamic system are not proportional to the anticipated influence of inputs in the beginning of the process.

The Internet and other technologies have collapsed time and space, hence, changes in any part of the world, which may at first be overlooked or ignored because of their seemingly insignificant nature, might serve as the root reason for a series of upcoming events in the entire global system not through incrementalism but because every small system participates in an unbroken wholeness and by no chance agents in a network may know how small activities will trigger others through fabric of our connectedness (Rosenau, 2003; Wheatley, 2006). Turbulence has virtually become a definitive character of global business that confronted organizations since the beginning of the new millennium. Magnitude of the extensive amount of flows that is generated in global networks, high level of intensity of the interconnectedness and velocity of mobilities around the globe have powerful effects derived from powerful local perturbations in the system that result in unpredictable branching emerging across the global system (Urry, 2003). Leadership actions taken to respond to a number of events burst in the last fifteen years divulging their inability to deal with the environmental turbulence. Leaders' inept handling of highly improbable situations raised the need to extend beyond the ingrained assumptions in leadership studies.

There is a widely heralded need to emancipate leadership from 'the leader' under the circumstances of pervasive dynamism and non-linearity posing organizations, especially competing on a global scale (Osborn & Hunt, 2007). The increased complexity of markets accentuate for innovative solutions to emerging novel needs of organizations. The key catalyst in the facilitation of innovation is the capacity of an organization to attract, develop, motivate, and retain an adequate pool of leaders with appropriate characteristics to influence the context of creativity in the workplace (Halbesleben, Novicevic, Harley & Buckley, 2003). Leadership should be repositioned as the critical function that enables intellectual assets to flow through networks of social interaction (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). Dynamic leadership processes occurring between the members of the organization appear as the kernel of an innovative organization in a world of complexity (Karp & Helgo, 2008). Development of a healthy organizational culture that places special emphasis on core values of innovation, learning, and valuing human capital and team actions should be among the highest priorities of strategic leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Hitt, Haynes, & Serpa, 2010).

The term *innoveadership* has been coined in this paper with an attempt to merge leadership and innovation in the domain of complexity science. The distinctive attributes associated with complexity overlap the ones mentioned to describe innovation. Complexity thinking is based on creative destruction, so is innovation. The meaning conveyed in the previous sentence is preserved when 'complexity thinking' and 'innovation' change places. Innovation is based on creative destruction, so is complexity thinking. Innovation keeps the economy in a far-from-equilibrium state by renewing the set of products/services and altering/creating small worlds networks around emergent technologies (Andriani, 2011), hence, complexity thinking might guide studies of leadership and management on the way to achieve building innovation-intensive workplaces. This raises the need to question whether organizations should be in pursuit of innovation via resorting to structural interventions. How plausible is it to assume that deliberate managerial actions taken to sculpt work process design will eventually lead to innovative outcomes when the very organization itself is constantly being reconfigured by the innovative outcomes that emerge in a global system, which is defined by its current level of interconnectedness and interdependence at an unprecedented level? Should organizations strive for innovation or instill an enabling context that cata-

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