

How the experts deal with complexity

Our working environments are interconnected, dynamic, and complex. This is a fact that no one would dispute anymore. However, the question of how to successfully manage and lead in such environments – both now and in the future – remains open in many people’s minds. Those who seek some sort of magic formula can often be heard asking, “So, what exactly should we do?” Unfortunately, however, no such magic formula exists! Instead, the very first step in the process is actually about cutting out all of the things that tend to get in the way of dealing with complexity.

The “Don’ts” of Dealing with Complexity

1. Chalking successes up to methods

Neither forecasting nor PM methodology nor systematic controlling can be the sole reason for a success – however, successes are often chalked up to such things after the fact. Tools, techniques, and processes are then modified when we seek to achieve improvements – while the underlying management philosophy largely remains untouched. It is precisely there, however, that we have the greatest leverage.

2. Thinking linearly

The future cannot be derived linearly from the past via a simple forward projection. Managers typically plan using assumptions based on the past – but this is insufficient in complex contexts. Management must take place in the present – very flexibly and in short cycles.

3. Training people to pursue egotistical goals

Individualized incentivization on the basis of achieving individual targets ensures that each employee focuses on achieving their own targets. This results in silo-thinking and -behavior – while cooperation happens only to a more limited

extent. However, overarching cooperation is ultimately what is most needed for solving complex problems.



4. Confusing symptoms with problems

“We need a suggestion system because employees keep their ideas to themselves,” is a classic example of treating symptoms instead of the problems behind them. Management often involves reacting to events. This reactive approach tends to alleviate symptoms – without solving the root problems. To solve them, a systemic overview is necessary in order to understand the relevant interactions and dynamic.

5. Invoking the image of the standout “hero”

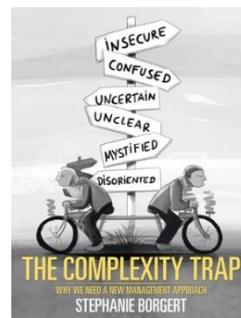
In addition to methods, we also often chalk successes up to individual managers and leaders and to what we believe are their innate personality traits. The “great man theory”, however, is outdated. Each and every manager and leader is “merely” a component of the system as a whole, and is never the only one who matters. Rather, successes and failures are always due to the performance of the system.

About the author



Stephanie Borgert is a speaker, management consultant, and forward thinker for a “modern” management approach. She helps managers, directors, and project leaders become “masters of complexity” and not leave their success to chance.

Recommended reading



The Complexity Trap: Why We Need a New Management Approach by Stephanie Borgert

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