

Where is this so-called “Fifth Discipline” if project failures, blown-out budgets, decision disasters and poor investments continue to plague our society?

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ABSTRACT

We are living in a complex and ever changing world. Policy makers, managers and leaders today are expected to cope with increasing complexity, change, and diversity. Traditional and reductionist approaches have shown their inability to address such complex problems. Increasing complex issues and challenges in curating the conditions for a flourishing planet require new ways of thinking and a fresh approach to address the multi-dimensional and multidisciplinary nature of complexity. This paper argues that there is an urgent need for a societal change to deal with complexity in a world that focuses on reductionist approaches (breaking into parts; traditional linear thinking; seeking silver bullets). The need to step outside our collective ‘comfort zone’, develop new ways of thinking and act in the interest of our future is crucial. It is essential for future managers and leaders to be equipped with new ways of thinking that are systems thinking and design-led to deal with complex problems in a systemic, integrated and collaborative fashion – that is, finding long-lasting solutions to the root causes of issues rather than focusing on short-term fixes that doesn’t work. System thinking offers a holistic and integrative way of appreciating all the major dimensions of a complex problem, and enables the formation of effective and long-term management strategies (systemic interventions). The paper provides examples of how taking systems thinking out into the real world could help shifting the mindsets of managers and decision makers to avoid project failures and money wasting in complex project management and discusses the importance of ‘systems thinking’ to become ‘everyday language’ and a main stream concept embedded in all walks of life.

Keywords: systems concepts; holistic thinking; The Fifth Discipline; systems education; management of complex issues; improved decision making; systemic management.

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