

NICK OBOLENSKY**Chief Executive Officer, Complex Adaptive Leadership, United Kingdom**

Nick has had a complex emergent career. He was a UK army major in his late 20's specialising in armoured warfare and also special forces, mountain and intelligence trained. In his 30s he was both a strategy consultant for a blue chip consultancy, as well as a young FTSE 100 director in charge of a complex turnaround programme for 45,000 staff whilst holding line responsibility for 12,000 staff. In his 40s he was a visiting professor in various business schools including Nyenrode in Holland, LBS in UK, INSEAD and CEDEP in France, and IMD in Switzerland. He still holds affiliation with CEDEP and IMD (Singapore campus). In his 50s he set up various green energy companies as well as a charity for housing homeless people. He has authored various books.

He is now focused on building up two companies: Complex Adaptive Leadership in the west and Agile Plus in China. These take his work on complexity to the wider benefit, based on his international best-selling book "Complex Adaptive Leadership – Embracing paradox and uncertainty" (shortly to be republished in Chinese).

A military view

The military have been grappling with the emerging science of complexity to manage better the dynamic between causality and reality. Major (ret'd.) Nick Obolensky will show how enabling an organisation, on tactical field operations, to work as a non-hierarchical complex adaptive system, instead of as a traditionally hierarchical one, can get surprising results. Surprising results both for the friendly forces involved as well as the "enemy". The scenario is from the Cold War when the political will of Germany finally changed to accept the need to give ground to any Soviet invasion. Giving ground would enable the strategy to change from static to dynamic defence. This changed the need for operational tactics to move from positional ones, where the causality-reality conundrum is easier, to a fast moving highly mobile battle where the dynamics of causality-reality are far more complex.

Nick used this experience to explore complexity science further and it served as the root of his personal journey of exploration and discovery of basic principles. He will also show in a more recent war how the lack/misdirection of any one of these principles, and the desire for simple narrative and simplification in complexity, can get the opposite result of intention and result in disaster. Although the talk will focus on military warfare, he will also briefly share how the principles learned can be applied to organisations generally, to achieve superior sustainable performance, as the world becomes more dynamic, complex and fast moving. Rather than seeing complexity creating problems for “managing” causality-reality, the principles underlying complexity can be applied to see the conundrum not so much as a problem to be solved, but an opportunity, if understood, to be leveraged and made use of.