

SONJA WEKEMA & MATTHIAS SCHRAMM

# LEADING IN A WICKED WORLD



HOW TO UNRAVEL, EXPLORE  
& MAKE SUSTAINABLE IMPACT



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# **LEADING IN A WICKED WORLD**

How to unravel, explore & make sustainable impact

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**THE OTHER  
PERSPECTIVE**

# Introduction

*In a world that often feels like a complex puzzle, Leading in a Wicked World emerges as a guiding light, taking you on a journey through the intricate labyrinth of organisational dynamics. It's a journey that might seem whimsical at times like Alice in Wonderland, enchanting like The Wizard of Oz, or simply fantastic and almost impossible to believe, like M.C. Escher's mind-bending illusions.*



This book is not a conventional guide. See it as a collection of riddles, with each chapter inviting you to dive deeper into the unknown. While you are reading this you might wonder at times if you've fallen down the rabbit hole or entered a technicoloured fantasy land. But fear not. Within these pages, you are being encouraged to keep following the path, wherever it leads, because this journey is not about finding all the answers at your destination. It's about keeping an open, sharp mind while facing uncertainty on the road ahead.

*Leading in a Wicked World* offers something profound. It provides you with the tools to navigate the enigmatic terrain of modern organisations with confidence. It also encourages you not to fear complexity but to embrace it, for it is within chaos that true leadership emerges.

Leadership in today's world is no easy task. One of the biggest challenges facing leaders is the relentless pace of change, pushing you to continually adapt. The world is becoming increasingly complex, what we call "Wicked," with a multitude of interconnected issues and problems that are difficult to understand and even harder to solve. Add to that the growing complexity of today's organisations – with more people, departments, and stakeholders involved than ever before, including the community at large, leaders must artfully navigate rough, uncharted waters while getting everyone on board to work towards a common goal.

In that sense, *Leading in a Wicked World* offers you a new way of looking at organisations, seeing them as social entities whose purpose is to flourish. We see this book as a much needed, original perspective and are offering you our vision about how organisations can thrive in a chaotic world filled with Wicked problems.

Importantly, we believe that leading in the Wicked World must be done with sustainability in mind for we have arrived at a time when the fate of individuals, society, organisations, and the planet are all intertwined. As the world becomes increasingly connected, the actions organisations take fall under ever greater scrutiny and leaders are now being asked to consider the impact their decisions make on society and the environment at large. This is why our book provides you with the knowledge and practical strategies to benefit not only your personal leadership, but also your organisation and the greater collective.

In a nutshell, leadership in the Wicked World is a tricky and complex task. You need to be adaptable, adept at dealing with complexity, able to take bold action while remaining ethical, and as M.C. Escher (1898-1972) once said of his artwork, you must also "retain a sense of wonder." With this book, we encourage you to assess and revise your leadership style by looking at your personal scripts, bringing your whole self to your organisation and therefore, inspiring those you manage to do the same.

This book offers you a

*j o u r n e y*  
*of self-discovery*

and  
*collaborative*

**growth,**

one of wisdom gained from

*fearless*

***self-reflection***

... and it begins on page **01!**



## How this book came about

This story begins in a magical place where powerful kings and queens once lived, and in the year 2020, a time full of wicked twists and turns.

We met during the final year studying for our Master at Hult Ashridge Centre for Executive Coaching. Located just north of London, Ashridge House is a beautiful estate built by the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Bridgewater that became a university in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Once a royal residence to Henry VIII, its elegant architecture and landscaped gardens are truly magical – parts of the Harry Potter movies were meant to be filmed here, although the film was inspired by the Main Hall's grand staircase.

The story gets its start in one of the university's classrooms. Both of us were seeking answers to questions we had gathered over the years as organisational development practitioners, leaders, and coaches. We quickly discovered that we were drawn to this place



for similar reasons: we were both supporting clients and leaders in making sense of a world that was moving faster than ever as their organisations struggled to keep up the pace of change in their respective ecosystems. We also sought to support them in reflecting on their personal leadership style.

We saw that the only true constant our clients faced was the fact that rapid change, uncertain environments, and volatile markets and societal developments were ubiquitous and going to stay. All these elements lingered in the dark like phantom creatures from a fairy tale which were hard to grasp, but whose shadows were frightening. It felt like the world we knew from the past – or at least the world we thought we knew – had gone wicked and unpredictably weird.

We knew then that we wanted to write a guide to explore this new world, knowing we can't avoid or withdraw from it because it's never going away. Ironically, only a month after we met at Ashridge, the global COVID pandemic hit, bringing with it suffering, social distancing, and isolation. But we decided to continue our quest, despite only meeting once in person.

In writing this book, our tour of the Wicked World led us into the deeper realms of psychology because business thrives on understanding people. We also learned that no true guide can comprehensively explore the Wicked World because that world changes continually, so there's no magic compass that will keep you on track, and no guarantee that reading this book will grant you unlimited wisdom.

Still, we invite you to join and experience this world with us, setting off on an adventure that requires courage, patience, and curiosity. Having gone through it ourselves, we promise you're in for quite a ride!

Happy reading!

**Sonja Wekema & Matthias Schramm**

## CHAPTER ONE

### **The Wicked World Dilemma**

This chapter covers the rapid developments and complexities we face in the world around us. We illustrate how we've ended up in a complex, uncertain situation and how to start navigating the complicated web of contemporary challenges. We provide guidance on how to deal with the unknown and insights to understand the chapters to come.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Your Personal Script**

This chapter emphasises the importance of self-reflection and self-awareness, particularly from your perspective as a leader. When you understand yourself – how you tick, your preferences, behaviours, assumptions, and more – you will live a better life, forging deep connections with those around you. You will be encouraged to actively examine your personal patterns, learning more about yourself so you can apply it going forward.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **The Org Script**

We introduce you to innovative approaches to understand organisations within their respective contexts. This approach challenges traditional perspectives on organisational structures and invites you to embrace alternative viewpoints, the unfamiliar, and collaborative efforts and empowerment. The chapter empowers you to take responsibility for your own understanding and decisions without imposing expert opinions. It's a perspective you can also apply to your organisation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Embracing Different Perspectives**

This chapter builds on the previous ones and introduces a third, a systemic perspective. We introduce suggestions for reflection, which you can use after finishing the book, empowering you to take further steps in your personal and professional life.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Dance with the Wicked World**

This chapter is full of food for thought, inspiration, and suggestions for you to consider before continuing your journey alone. We offer some exciting perspectives for making a positive impact in the Wicked World.

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With ***Leading in a Wicked World***, we aim to leave all our readers transformed and give you the confidence and inspiration to make your life, organisation, and the world a better place. Starting today!

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“

***Toto, I have a feeling,  
we're not in Kansas  
anymore.”***

*Dorothy, The Wizard of Oz*

