

# HOW THE DANCE OF CHAOS AND ORDER CAN UNLEASH NEW IDEAS

*by Glenn Williams*



In ***Leadership & the New Science***, Wheatley explores a perspective on leadership rarely heard.

Pushing us beyond Sir Isaac Newton's mechanistic theories of *why* things work the way they do, Wheatley forces us to think more about the relationship of *how* things work together in a symbiotic and complementary manner where relationships are rarely static.

This challenges our preconceived notions and assumptions that organizational structures exist to create order by minimizing disorder and chaos. However, rather than view disorder and chaos as disruptive and unwanted, they can play a significant role in creating a new order when the old order is no longer sustainable. A new way of thinking is unleashed!

Wheatley cites the work of Nobel Peace Prize winner in chemistry, Ilya Prigogine, where his Theory of Dissipative Structures advocates that disturbance plays a crucial role in helping to self-organise into a new order (Wheatley, 2006, pp. 20). New conditions unsettle a system's equilibrium and create opportunities to awaken creativity and new resolutions.

*We grow up believing that 'chaos' and 'normal' are two separate states, rather than performing a unique dance where "neither one is primary; but both are absolutely necessary."*

Similarly, in the context of our desire for order in our organizations, we often find we focus on more rigid structures rather than fluid processes that inject creativity into the ebb and flow of chaos as it pushes up against a set order.

## **What's the bottom-line?**

What is important is that we should not run from chaos or seek to overturn it, but appreciate and encourage constant interchanges between chaos and order to bring about new orders and fresh ideas.

This doesn't mean we have to seek chaos and disorder to unleash creativity. Instead, we should seek to embrace the conflict even if the temptation is to revert to risk-adverse decisions, or a management style, organizational structure, and set of processes that have served us well in the past.

Wheatley is not suggesting that structure is unimportant. She does believe, however, that blind adherence to any one particular structure or way of doing things may in fact prevent growth, impede development and ultimately lead to the atrophy of a business.

The old way of doing things is often time-limited. Is it time to embrace the dance of chaos and order to find new ideas that will launch your business into another stratosphere?

Wheatley, Margaret. (2006). *Leadership and the New Science*. San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

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