



Critical Systems Thinking for the Management of Complexity

A Vitally Important 21st Century Leadership Capability

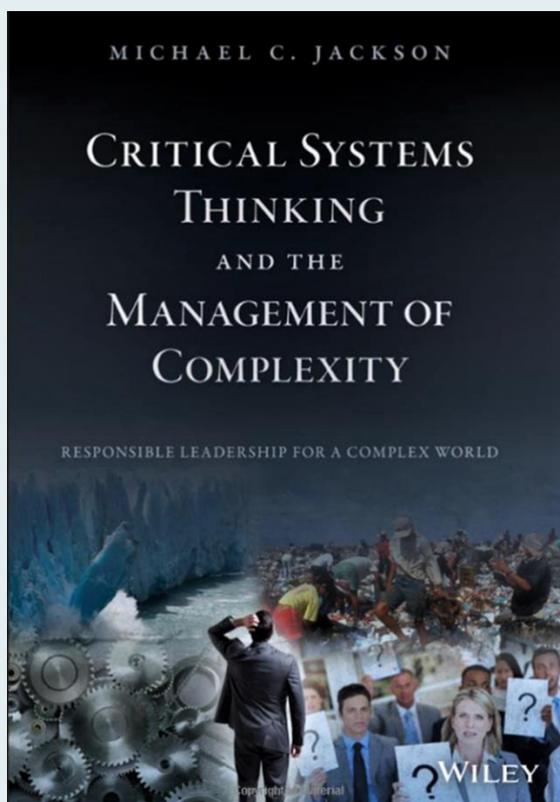
A TWELVE MODULE COURSE FOR EXECUTIVES

OPEN ENROLMENT: 12 X 90min Sessions Online Max. 20 Participants
& PRIVATE for corporate clients: contact@enlightenedenterprise.ac

With Dr Michael C Jackson OBE

Author of Critical Systems Thinking and the Management of Complexity

Few leaders are equipped with the skills needed to deal with the ‘messes,’ and ‘wicked’ problems they encounter today. They rely on management theories, methods, and tools designed for an era in which problems were relatively ‘tame’.



Michael C Jackson, the founder and former Dean of Hull University Business School, makes the point clearly in his book: “*what help can decision-makers expect when tackling the “messes” and “wicked problems” that proliferate in the age of complexity? They are usually brought up on classical management theory that emphasizes the need to forecast, plan, organise, lead, and control. This approach relies on there being a predictable future environment in which it is possible to set goals that remain relevant into the foreseeable future; on enough stability to*

ensure that tasks arranged in a fixed hierarchy continue to deliver efficiency and effectiveness; on a passive and unified workforce; and on a capacity to take control action on the basis of clear measures of success. These assumptions do not hold in the modern world, and classical management theory provides the wrong prescriptions.”

The labels Tame and Wicked are used to describe two quite different types of problem. Tame problems have causes that are easy to understand and they can be solved on the basis of prior experience or simple analytical methods. Wicked problems feature high levels of both systemic and people complexity. Systemic complexity relates to the interdependency of problems, which makes it impossible to solve them in isolation, and to environmental turbulence, which means solutions are out-of-date before they are implemented. People complexity refers to the pluralism of stakeholder perspectives which invariably surround social and organizational issues, and the different evaluations and conflicts that occur as a result. Wicked problems have to be managed using critical systems thinking.

Increasingly, in the modern world, people governing and managing enterprises are confronted by wicked problems. This is the case in the business, government, public and the not-for-profit sectors. With greater levels of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (summarised in the term VUCA), more of the problems they face exhibit systemic and people complexity. Few are tame.

There is, nevertheless, evidence that some leaders can enable their organizations to survive and thrive in the twenty first century, even in the face of increased complexity and frequent crises. The PwC Global Crisis Survey, 2021, says, “20 percent of organisations report the crisis had an overall positive effect on their business.” Whilst acknowledging “some of that success is sector driven,”

they conclude: “Every crisis presents its own challenges — particularly a once-in-a-generation disruption. But with clear-eyed self-evaluation and a willingness to change, an organisation can build resilience to weather any kind of crisis and emerge stronger on the other side”.

Boston Consulting Group, in its research into “corporate vitality”, found similar evidence and reaches the same conclusion. They discovered some businesses are able to survive, recover quickly, and go on to thrive in times of crisis, earning lasting competitive advantage. These organisations have a quite different approach to governance and leadership. In particular, their leaders seem to have the ability to think systemically over the long-term.

Leaders who have been successful have had to reject traditional management theory in favour of new ways of thinking and new approaches. Critical Systems Thinking seeks to refine the systems thinking and practice skills of leaders and managers who are already successful and to enhance the capacity of those wondering how to meet the challenges posed by increased complexity. The Enlightened Enterprise Academy believes Critical Systems Thinking is a vitally important capability for today’s leaders and should be considered an essential element of good governance and management.

Critical Systems Thinking embraces and builds upon those complexity theory and systems thinking approaches that are based on solid research and have proven the most valuable in improving problem situations in the face of complexity. The word “critical” in Critical Systems Thinking is used in a positive sense, meaning to understand the strengths and limitations of various systems thinking approaches in relation to particular types of complexity

found in problem situations. Critical Systems Thinking advocates using different systems approaches in combination to navigate the multi-dimensional complexity posed by wicked problems. It provides a comprehensive evaluation of outcomes and suggests what needs doing next to ensure continuous improvement. The pluralistic nature of Critical Systems Thinking corresponds to the type of leadership needed today. It fosters expansive thinking to help leaders get a fuller understanding of the range of issues they are dealing with, rather than advocating that all problems should be viewed through any single lens, systems-based or otherwise.

As Founder & CEO of the Enlightened Enterprise Academy I am proud and delighted that, in association with Professor Michael C Jackson OBE, an internationally recognised authority in the field, we can offer pioneering, up-to-the-minute, online executive education courses in Critical Systems Thinking. These are available to a global audience as an open enrolment program, or as a private program for corporations.

Enterprises are more ‘enlightened’ if they adopt Critical Systems Thinking. They make better decisions, dissolve more problems, innovate better, are more resilient, create more value, manage risks more effectively, and contribute to greater levels of sustainable widely shared prosperity, measured in terms of human flourishing and wellbeing. This is what the Academy argues all organisations must focus on to ensure their own long-term success and to be part of building a better world.

Paul Barnett
Founder & CEO

“The world of radical uncertainty, which we increasingly inhabit, is characterised by obscurity, ignorance, vagueness, ambiguity, ill-defined problems, and a lack of information that cannot be rectified. We simply do not know how to act. The problem situations produced by general complexity cannot be solved, only transformed or modified”

“In this context, it must be noted, few errors are more costly than treating systems that possess a high level of complexity with models and methodologies that lack the appropriate sophistication. And problem situations that initially appear ‘simple’ or ‘complicated’ often turn out ‘complex’ or ‘chaotic’ when examined more closely”

Dr Michael C Jackson

OBJECTIVES

Participants will develop an understanding of the characteristics of complexity, its ability to give rise to 'wicked problems', the nature of systems thinking and complexity theory, plus the power of systems thinking as a guide to leadership practice.

In particular, the program develops the capacity of participants to employ multiple perspectives and methodologies to improve problem situations using the Critical Systems Thinking approach.

WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE?

Critical Systems Thinking is designed to aid decision-makers in managing multi-dimensional 'messes', where technical, economic, organisational, human, cultural, and political elements interact. It can, therefore, be applied to assist strategic thinking; planning; implementation; innovation; organizational health; risk management; project management; and problem resolution. It will enhance the capacity of directors, executives, senior managers, project professionals, consultants, and others to understand and manage holistically the different, interrelated forms of complexity in their everyday reality.

We have already had expressions of interest in the program from leaders in a range of sectors - including business, central government, local government, and public sector organisations. It is equally relevant to not-for-profit organisations and charities, especially those larger in scale with international operations.

PROGRAM FORMAT

The sessions will take place online.

Preparation will involve reading one article, watching one video, and reading the relevant chapters of Professor Jackson's book 'Critical Systems Thinking and the Management of Complexity' (all materials included in the programme fee).

The one and a half hour sessions will consist of an introduction to each topic by Mike Jackson. The introduction will be followed by an interview by Paul Barnett, then a moderated discussion with participants.

There is no assessment, but participants will be invited to become Founding Members of the Critical Systems Institute upon completion of the program. (see below).

PRESENTERS



Michael C Jackson is Emeritus Professor at the University of Hull. He graduated from Oxford University, gained an MA from Lancaster University, and a PhD from Hull. He has worked in the civil service, in academia, and as a consultant. Mike has been researching and using systems ideas for forty years and is known internationally as a key figure in the development of Critical Systems Thinking. He has been President of the International Federation for Systems Research and The International Society for the Systems Sciences, has received many awards, two honorary degrees, and been a visiting professor at numerous international universities. In 2011 he was awarded an OBE for services to higher education and business. In 2017 he received the Beale Medal of the UK Operational Research Society for "a sustained contribution over many years to the theory, practice, and philosophy of Operational Research". Mike is donating his fees from the first year of the program to help establish the Critical Systems Institute.



Paul Barnett is Founder and CEO of the Enlightened Enterprise Academy which incorporates several forums including the Critical Systems Forum and the Strategic Management Forum. He created the academy to be a global platform for progressive thinking in pursuit of the goal of sustainable widely shared prosperity, measured in terms of human flourishing and wellbeing. He is working on a number of books including the Enlightened Enterprise Manifesto. He curates conferences and writes articles for journals.

PROGRAM AGENDA

Introductory Sessions

1. Systems Thinking and Complexity Theory: The Basics
2. The Development of Critical Systems Thinking

Exploring the 'Problem Situation' (Opportunities and Threats)

3. Critical Systems Practice: A Multiple Perspective Approach to Complexity

Producing an Intervention Strategy Based Upon Different Systems Methodologies

4. The Mechanical Systems Model: Achieving Goals Efficiently
5. The Organismic Systems Model: Maintaining Viability and Sustainability (the 'viable system model')
6. The Purposeful Systems Model 1: Determining Purposes, Achieving Value for Stakeholders ('idealized design')
7. The Purposeful Systems Model 2: Challenging Assumptions, Avoiding Groupthink ('strategic assumption surfacing and testing')
8. The Purposeful Systems Model 3: Managing Different Perceptions & Reaching Accommodations ('soft systems methodology')
9. The Societal/Environmental Systems Model: Addressing Issues of Fairness and Environmental Concerns ('critical systems heuristics')
10. The Interrelationships Systems Model: Anticipating System Behaviour and Avoiding Unintended Consequences ('system dynamics')

Intervening Flexibly

11. Critical Systems Practice: Using Multiple Systems Methodologies, Models, and Methods in Combination

Checking Outcomes

12. Critical Systems Practice: Evaluation of Outcomes and Moving Forward

THE PROGRAM COST

Costs for the Latest Programs are Detailed on the Website The Costs of All Programs Include:

- Access to 12 Live Online Sessions + Private Access to Recordings
- A Copy of 'Critical Systems Thinking and the Management of Complexity'
- All other program related materials
- Complimentary Membership of the Critical Systems Institute*
- Acknowledgement in "Critical Systems Thinking: A Practitioner's Guide" and a complimentary copy upon publication

**For the first year. Renewable annually for a fee and at the discretion of the board.*

SPECIAL BENEFITS FOR PARTICIPANTS STARTING IN 2021

MEMBERSHIP OF THE CRITICAL SYSTEMS INSTITUTE - The Enlightened Enterprise Academy established the Critical Systems Forum as a LinkedIn Group and this will continue. Additionally, we are planning to establish a not-for-profit Critical Systems Institute for people who want to pursue research and practice using Critical Systems Thinking and learn from each other while doing so. Participants beginning a program in 2021 will, upon completion, be eligible to join the Institute and will be offered complimentary membership for a year - with the option to renew annually thereafter, at the discretion of the board, and for the regular membership fee at that time.

BOOK CREDIT - During 2021, alongside delivery of this program, Mike will be compiling and writing a book "Critical Systems Thinking: A Practitioner's Guide". Discussions with participants engaged in the program will inform some of the thinking going into the book. For this reason, all participants completing the program will, with their consent, be acknowledged in the book. All participants will also receive a free signed copy of the book upon its publication.

START DATES

To keep each group to a maximum of 20 participants, whilst also accommodating various time zones, we will offer several launch dates.

[CHECK THE WEBSITE FOR DETAILS](#)

ALL ENQUIRIES:

contact@enlightenedenterprise.ac



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