

STRATEGIES FOR WORKING IN PERMANENT WHITE WATER

Summarized By: Dr. Kathleen E. Allen

Managing as a Performing Art: New Ideas for a World of Chaotic Change

By: Peter B. Vaill (1989), Jossey-Bass.

1. Permanent White Water is used as a metaphor to describe the organizations and society in which we work and live.
2. Three common approaches for working smarter under traditional conditions are: “working harder” (workaholic), “studying harder” (technoholic), and “trying to be more clever and politically astute” (powerholic).

He believes that these strategies do not work in a world of permanent white water! He suggests: (1) working collectively smarter, (2) working reflectively smarter, and (3) working spiritually smarter!

1. Collectively smarter: is to remain in touch with those around us, both their ideas and with their energy (p. 30).
2. Reflectively smarter: is the capacity to “notice oneself noticing”; that is, to step back and see one’s mind working in relation to its projects. (Reflections greatest enemies are dogma, pressure, and hidden background assumptions.)
3. Spiritually smarter: is to pay more attention to one’s own spiritual qualities, feelings, insights, and yearnings. To reach more deeply into oneself for that which is unquestionably authentic. To attune oneself to those truths one considers timeless and unassailable, the deepest principles ones knows. (To know what one has faith in and why.)

He also has a chapter on Taoist management where he suggests that “going with the flow” and “moving with the available energy” might be very useful in an unfolding future.

He thinks that modern jobs of managerial leaders in organizations will have these nine characteristics:

1. More accountability.
2. More need for leadership.
3. More emphasis on teamwork.
4. More intense involvement with people.
5. Greater ambiguity of authority.
6. Greater emphasis on one’s individuality.
7. More involvement of the whole person.
8. More stress.
9. A new mix of an intellectual and an action of orientation.

Riding the Waves of Change: Developing Managerial Competencies for a Turbulent World

By: Gareth Morgan (1988), Jossey-Boss

He suggests the following competencies for meeting the challenges of a turbulent world. He uses the metaphor of riding the waves of change, much like a surfer. The concept of controlling the wave does not make sense. One must, instead, learn to catch the wave and flow with its energy.

1. Reading environmental change: search for potential fracture lines that can provide a powerful means of identifying trends and issues.
2. Approaching change proactively – by developing opportunity-seeing mindsets, and “outside-in” approach (like seeing your organization from your stakeholder’s point of view).
3. Providing an overall sense of vision and direction for an organization.
4. Empowering human resources – developing managerial and leadership abilities that will empower employees to be innovative and self-organizing.
5. Promoting creativity, innovation, and learning.
6. Developing skills in remote management – learning to manage flat, decentralized organizations.
7. Using technology as a creative force to refine products and services, and help create the flatter organization structures and decentralized styles of management.
8. Managing complexity and ambiguity.
9. Broaden point of view to embrace and influence relations outside one’s organization (“contextual understanding” and bridging).

Beyond Rational Management: Mastering the Paradoxes and Competing Demands of High Performance
By: Robert E. Quinn (1989), Jossey-Bass

He sees us as needing to develop new ways of thinking that will help us make sense of the paradoxes, competing demands, and contradictions of organizational life.

1. Cognitive complexity: need to be able to differentiate and integrate at the same time. Also need to think in multiple dimensions and domains.
2. Become a strategist: thinking process is highly complex, they delight in paradoxes, respond flexibly to the process as it unfolds, develop a capacity to generate new orders or organizations. Think in multiple frames. Develop action inquiry which is defined as the capacity to explore a developing situation while acting on the priority of highest apparent importance and, if appropriate, simultaneously inviting a reframing or restructuring. Action and inquiry are woven together in one fluid process.
3. Use holistic recognition to understand the situation. They have maps programmed into their heads that others are not aware of. See and know things intuitively, frame and reframe strategies, and read changing cues.

We need to develop thinking skills that are complex, holistic, and fluid.

The Leader’s Edge: The Seven Keys to Leadership in a Turbulent World
By: Burt Nanus (1989) published by Contemporary Books, Inc.

Nanus states that we are entering a new age where leadership will have to be different. “What we currently understand leadership to be is not wrong: It is simply not adequate to the challenge of a new age” (p. 53).

He suggests that the leader of the new age will need to lead from the head, heart, and a connection between the head and heart. The leader of the new age will need to be a combination of the three following kinds of leadership.

1. Visionary leadership: Leadership from the head; “As its head, the leader must attempt to steer the system through endless storms, scanning the horizon for new threats and opportunities. At the same time, he must redesign the system as it moves along, regulating macroprocesses, such as innovation, growth, and improvement” (p. 53).
2. Personal leadership: Leadership from the heart; “As its heart, the leader provides followers with the spiritual and emotional direction . . . common meaning and purpose, trust, empowerment, commitment, and a framework or culture within which to judge what is worth doing and what are acceptable means and ends” (p. 53-54).
3. Futures-creative leadership: Leadership where the head and heart are connected.

Seven megaskills needed to lead in turbulent times.

1. Farsightedness: The minds of futures-creative leaders must operate in the future tense, always searching for possible opportunities and threats, always asking “What if?” and “Why not?” and “So what?” Farsightedness means keeping the eye firmly fixed on the far horizon.
2. Mastery of Change: There is a pace and tempo to the internal operations of an organization, most conspicuously in the stream of information flow and the rhythm of decision making. The leader is responsible for regulating the speed, direction, and rhythm of the organization so that its growth and evolution matches the external pace of events.
3. Organization Design: The leader needs skills to design organizations that understand the human needs and desires, establish performance criteria, set its boundaries and relationships with outside constituents, provide structures and support systems, and then be able to implement the design.
4. Initiative: The leader must exercise initiative, decisiveness, determination, and follow-through expected of all leaders. The leader must be a change agent.
5. Mastery of Interdependence: In a complex, highly interdependent world, the leader must know how to develop cooperative systems rather than competitive systems.
6. High Standards of Integrity: A leader without trust is like a bird without wings. A leader must learn how to embody and inculcate both traditional and new moral imperatives. Traditional imperatives include fairness, honesty, tolerance, dependability, caring, loyalty, mutual respect, and commitment to the best traditions of the past. New ethical imperatives have to do with keeping faith with the future: caring about what the organization and its members become and do; being dedicated to improvement and progress; and preventing damage to innocent third parties, such as the environment, our children, or our consumers.
7. Anticipatory Learning: Every leader is a lifelong learner and is committed to promoting organizational learning as well.

“Managerial Implications of the Emerging Paradigm” by Anne Huff.

In Organizational Theory and Inquiry: The Paradigm Revolution

Edited by: Yvonna Lincoln (1985) Sage Press

The new paradigm that Huff refers to states that organizations are complex, unpredictable, rapidly changing, has multiple perspectives, is mutually causal, and links people through networks rather than hierarchical structures.

She suggests the following strategies for managing in this kind of organization. She separates these strategies into two parts: first, order implications (which suggest that our ways of thinking and acting have to be more complex and varied), and second, disorder implications (which suggest strategies to help people feel more secure in a constantly changing, unpredictable organization).

FIRST ORDER IMPLICATIONS:

1. **Maintain an Informal Information Network:** In order to understand the complex, heterarchical, organic, mutually causative aspects of the world, one must have complex, heterarchical, organic mutually causative sources of information.
2. **Play “What If”:** Thinking through responses to events that may not occur helps the administrator be prepared for the unpredictable events that do occur.
3. **Manage Premises rather than Outcomes:** Aim for a certain kind of outcome don’t form specific ideas, let the specifics evolve out of the process. Give careful attention to committee membership, the timing of meetings, the content of agendas, and other devices that might shape the general nature of a decision.
4. **Improvise:** Acting in a complicated world depends on improvising connections between different decision arenas. Look for streams of solutions, problems, and decision opportunities as information to help you improvise over a long time frame.
5. **Be Content with Multiple, Partial “Solutions”:** Problems and solutions are not separate events. Solving one problem often shapes the new set of problems one will have to deal with. Goals often are achieved through accomplishing a series of partial solutions. The ability to perceive issues is almost always bigger than the ability to act on issues. As a result, the administrator often must see each accomplishment as a small part of the larger whole. Also connected with this idea is the strategy that specific actions should rarely be taken unless it is compatible with several different issues because in a complicated world causal connections are often too weak to be reliable. The sensible action has several different utilities.
6. **Let Politics Influence the Substance of Policy:** In a complex, network-linked organization unilateral control is not just difficult, but frequently impossible. Administrators must share the construction of the future with their employees and other constituents.
7. **Think and Act in Contradictions:** There is a link between action and understanding. Sometimes one must leap before she looks in order to understand what she values or believes in. Weick said “How can I know what I think until I see what I say?” This relationship between thinking and action can be complex and contradictory at the same time. To build understanding of a complex and contradictory world, one must do complex and contradictory things.

PITFALLS: Complexity and administrative responses to complexity create three problems in particular in organizations.

1. **Misunderstanding and Incomprehension:** The more complex the leaders’ understanding of the organization and its environment, the more difficult it is likely to be to communicate that complexity to others. Therefore, misunderstanding can occur. An example of this occurs when a leader, who as been involved with an issue over time and has gathered information from many different sources has a different perspective on an issue than other members of the organization. The depth of information that the leader has makes it difficult to share all the nuances and sources of confidential information.

2. **Limited Participation:** The more complexly decisions are framed, the more time and effort participation requires. Some of the strategies for managing in a complex world require broad informal communication and information networks. These same networks can limit traditional participation at the same time they increase diversity of information.
3. **Dominance of Narrow Interests:** Often in complex organizations participation in decision is uneven. Other actors with narrower responsibilities and special interests may shape the decisions in ways that frustrate administrators who have a more complex understanding of the system.

SECOND ORDER IMPLICATIONS: Ways to help create a sense of order in a complex world.

1. **Develop Themes and Agendas:** People need to feel a consistency across issues they deal with. This sense of consistency can be created by themes and agendas. These themes help members predict and accommodate themselves to changing situations. They also help people maintain their bearings in a complicated world.
2. **Lay a Bread Crumb Trail:** Complexity breeds complex understandings. Leaders do not always have the time to communicate their full understanding. Bread crumb trails are a metaphor for editing larger concerns into smaller items that can be comprehended by others. Repetition of these “bits” is used to gain the attention of others and convince them of serious intent.
3. **Dramatize Events:** Use external events to draw attention to key issues. Or said another way, organizations must sometimes wait for Pearl Harbor before they can enter the war.
4. **Develop Familiar Administrative Mechanisms:** Staff meetings, budget forms, familiar reporting formats, and other “habits” of organizations help give people familiar structures to package new issues in ways for them to become a normal part of the organization.
5. **See the Same Individuals in Multiple Contexts:** Maintain contact with a few people and share with them multiple issues and concerns. They then have more cues to what is happening in the larger context and can help make sense for others in the organization.
6. **Rehearse and Repeat Explanations:** Talk is an important medium for bringing order and pattern to a complex world. Rehearsal (talking with others) helps the leader work out the ramifications of a new issue in his or her own mind. Repeated explanation makes the ideas familiar to constituents.
7. **Simplify and Rationalize:** In complex constantly changing organizations, there is often a difference between how people talk about issues in private and the way they talk about them in public. Rituals of rationality in meetings help create appearances of order and harmony, which, in turn, help create order and harmony.

“The New Managerial Work” by Rosebeth Moss Kanter, from the Harvard Business Review (November-December, 1989).

Kanter suggests that managerial work is undergoing enormous and rapid change. “With little precedent to guide them, they are watching hierarchy fade away and the clear distinctions of title, task, department, and even corporation, blur. Faced with extraordinary levels of complexity and interdependency, they watch traditional sources of power erode and the old motivational tools lose their magic” (p. 85).

She suggests that there are five elements that describe the changing picture of how companies operate in a world of rapid change.

1. There are a greater number and variety of channels for taking action and exerting influence.
2. Relationships of influence are shifting from the vertical to the horizontal, from chain of command to peer networks.
3. The distinction between managers and those managed is diminishing, especially in terms of information, control over assignments, and access to external relationships.
4. External relationships are increasingly important as sources of internal power and influence, even of career development.
5. As a result of the first four changes, career development has become less intelligible but also less circumscribed. There are fewer assured routes to success, which produces anxiety. At the same time, career paths are more open to innovation, which produces opportunity.

Managers must learn new ways to manage, confronting changes in their own bases of power and recognizing the need for new ways to motivate people. Greater speed and flexibility undermine hierarchy. Here are some of her suggestions for managing in this kind of world:

1. Develop a number of networks.
2. Learn to negotiate, facilitate, and collaborate.
3. Be trustworthy, trust makes partnerships work.
4. Search for internal synergies.
5. Develop strategic alliances.
6. Learn to juggle constituencies rather than control subordinates.

Sources of Motivation in a constantly changing world:

1. Mission: People need to believe in the importance of their work.
2. Agenda Control: As career paths lose their certainty and companies' future grow less predictable, people can at least be in charge of their own professional lives. Motivate others through giving them greater over their own activities and direction. Give people release time to work on pet projects, or a choice of their next project.
3. Share of Value Creation: give teams and individuals a piece of the action.
4. Learning: The change to learn new skills or apply them in new arenas.
5. Reputation: Create stars in your organization by providing abundant public recognition and visible awards.

These motivators signal shifts in reward systems from status to contribution, from regular promotion to excitement about mission and shared glory, and from employment security to employability security.

“Harlan Cleveland’s Seven Leadership Propositions,” from an address by Harlan Cleveland to the World Future Society’s Sixth General Assembly, Washington, D.C., July 16, 1989. Found in The Christian Science Monitor, Friday, September 1, 1989 (p. 12).

Cleveland states that we need to develop a set of leadership attitudes – not skills but attitudes – the attitudes that he’s been calling “the generalists mind set.” Citizens who lead their leaders into the future – into an information rich future in a nobody-in-charge world – need to come to terms with seven propositions.

1. A lively intellectual curiosity – an interest in everything, because everything really is related to everything else, and therefore, to what you’re doing, whatever it is.
2. A genuine interest in what other people think and what makes them tick, which means that you have to be a peace with yourself for a start.
3. An attitude that risks are there, not to be avoided, but to be taken.
4. The feeling that crises are normal, tensions can be promising, and complexity is fun.
5. The realization that paranoia and self-pity are reserved for people who don’t want to be leaders.
6. Unwarranted optimism – the conviction that there must be some more upbeat outcome than would result from adding up all the available expert advise.
7. A sense of personal responsibility for the general outcome of your efforts.

FROM: “Sources of Order in Underorganized Systems: Themes in Recent Organizational Theory” by Karl Weick.

FOUND IN: Organizational Theory and Inquiry: The paradigm Revolution.

EDITED BY: Yovonna Lincoln (1985), Sage Publications.

TABLE 4.1
CHARACTERISTICS OF AMBIGUOUS, CHANGING SITUATIONS

CHARACTERISTIC	DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS
Nature of problem is itself in question	“What the problem is” is unclear and shifting. Managers have only vague or competing definitions of the problem. Often, any one “problem” is intertwined with other messy problems.
Information (amount and reliability) is problematical	Because the definition of the problem is in doubt, collecting and categorizing, information becomes a problem. The information flow threatens either to become overwhelming or to be seriously insufficient. Data may be incomplete and of dubious reliability.
Multiple, conflicting interpretations	For those data that do exist, players develop multiple, and sometimes conflicting, interpretations. The facts and their significance can be read several different ways.
Different value orientations, political/emotional clashes	Without objective criteria, players rely more on personal and/or professional values to make sense of the situation. The clash of different values often politically and emotionally charges the situation.
Goals are unclear, or multiple and conflicting	Managers do not enjoy the guidance of clearly defined, coherent goals. Either the goals are vague, or they are clearly defined and contradictory.
Time, money, or attention are lacking	A difficult situation is made chaotic by severe shortages of one or more of these items.
Contradictions and paradoxes appear	Situation has seemingly inconsistent features, relationships, or demands.
Roles vague, responsibilities unclear	Players do not have a clearly defined set of activities they are expected to perform. On important issues, the locus of decision making and other responsibilities is vague or in dispute.
Success measures are lacking	People are unsure what success in resolving the situation would mean and/or they have no way of assessing the degree to which they have been successful.
Poor understanding of cause-effect relationships	Players do not understand what causes what in the situation. Even if sure of the effects they desire, they are uncertain how to obtain them.
Symbols and metaphors used	In place of precise definitions or logical arguments, players use symbols or metaphors to express their points of view.
Participation in decision-making fluid	Who the key decision makers and influence holders are changes as players enter and leave the decision arena.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ADMINISTRATION

Several implications for practice flow from the preceding analysis, and they are summarized below. The flavor of these suggestions is anticipated by Padgett (1980, p. 602), who warned, “don’t expect orthodoxy where ambiguity is salient.”

1. Look for small pockets of order and protect them, grow them, or diffuse them. A little order can go a long way, so don’t overdo it.
2. Assess when decision rationality works in your setting and when it doesn’t. Building your own ad hoc contingency theory of decision rationality.
3. Don’t treat rationality as a universal prescription. If you live by rationality alone, you lose options (use of intuition, quick response, trial and error) and you lose nondeliberated sources of variety (hunches).
4. Retrospective explanations are poor guides to prospective action. We know relatively little about how we actually get things done. We don’t know what works, because we misremember the process of accomplishment. We will always underestimate the number of false starts that went into the outcome. Furthermore, even though there were dead ends, we probably did learn from them – we learned more about the environment and about our capabilities. Keep good records during process, because hindsight will gloss over most of the difficulties you had while striving for the outcome. Failure to see difficulties may result in unrealistic expectations about how fast and how easily the next goal can be achieved.
5. Intention is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for action.
6. Practice enlightened delegation through control of the staffing process.
7. Don’t dismiss universities as mere ivory towers, at least until you understand more about how they actually function. They resemble your organization more closely than does a military organization. Think of your organization as a federation, market, or holding company.
8. Design around the stable subsystem. Assign critical tasks to small stable units. For any task ask, “Can this task be done in nine minutes by two people who attend to one thing at a time?” If the answer is yes, you have assigned critical tasks to a stable unit. If you can’t embed critical assignments in small, stable entities, then shield people against interruptions, simplify their tasks so stress has less disruptive effects on performance, or help people increase their tolerance for stress.
9. Don’t expect long chains of events to make sense. Sense occurs only in small bursts in organizations.
10. Be patient: Systems are sluggish and slightly disorderly, but they do eventually act in a systemlike manner. If you persist, you may create connections that are more continuous, constant, significant, direct, and immediate. If you persist, this “both increases the likelihood that a proposal will be current at an opportune time and creates a diffuse climate of availability and legitimacy for it” (March & Olson, 1982, pp. 25-26). A persistent recommendation will fit some situation sooner or later (“every rain dancer brings rain if he dances long enough”), the recommendation remains salient (“well, we could always do X”), the recommendation may accrue legitimacy (“we always hear about X, so at least it must have a place in this organization in someone’s view”), and persistence signifies that some people value whatever is affirmed repeatedly.
11. View loose coupling descriptively before you view it evaluatively, in order to see the functions it plays (generates variation, preserves autonomy, localizes trouble, is understandable to fallible minds).
12. Accuracy is less important than animation. Any old map or plan will do, if it gets you moving so that you learn more about what is actually in the environment. A map is not the territory; a plan is not the organization.
13. Anticipations matter; don’t adopt them casually. They tend to fulfill themselves.
14. Labels are a powerful means to reduce ambiguity. Impose them with caution and deliberation because they can direct action.

15. To manage meaning is to view your organization as a set of procedures for arguing and interpreting. In any organizational assessment, ask questions such as these: How do we declare winners of the argument? When do we interpret? What interpretations do we tend to favor (blind spots?)? Whose interpretations seem to stick?
16. To get things done, it more important to capture a person's attention than a person's intention. People act in response to salient concerns (e.g., deadlines). So, to control action, you need to control salience.
17. To learn about your goals, preferences, and capabilities, act and treat your actions as conjectures about what these goals, preferences, and capabilities are.
18. Be willing to leap before you look. If you look before you leap, you may not see anything. Action generates outcomes that ultimately provide the raw material for seeing something. Before action takes place, the meaning of any situation is essentially limitless. The situation could become anything whatsoever and, therefore, it is everything and nothing. The situation takes on distinct form and meaning only when action is inserted into it. When people examine the action they took, they see more clearly what the situation was and what it meant. By acting, often without the safety of knowing what the action will look like or amount to or come to mean, people learn something meaningful, even though what they learn may not be what they expected.
19. You can optimize either deliberation or action, but not both.

FROM: “Managerial Implications of the Emerging Paradigm” by Anne Huff.

FOUND IN: Organizational Theory and Inquiry: The Paradigm Revolution.

EDITED BY: Yovonna Lincoln (1985), Sage Publications.

**TABLE 6.3
BASIC AGREEMENT BETWEEN WEICK AND HUFF**

ISSUE	IMPLICATION FROM WEICK	ADVICE FROM HUFF
The usefulness of rationality.	Look for small pockets of order and protect them, grow them, or diffuse them. (1) If you persist, you may create connections that are more continuous, constant, significant, direct, and immediate. (10)	Develop themes and agendas. (8) Lay a bread crumb trail. (9) Dramatize events. (10) Develop familiar administration mechanisms. (11) See the same individuals in multiple contexts. (12) Rehearse and repeat explanations. (13) Simplify and rationalize. (14)
The importance of action; the drag created by analysis.	Intention is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for action. (5) Accuracy is less important than animation. (12) Act and treat your actions as conjectures about goals, preferences and capabilities. (17) Be willing to leap before you look. (18) You can optimize either deliberation or action, but not both. (19)	Improvise. (4) Narrow interests can dominate the decision the leader tries to frame as complex heterarchical and indeterminate. (3)
The difficulty of capturing others' attention.	It is more important to capture a person's attention than his intention. (16)	Lay a bread crumb trail. (9) Dramatize events. (10) Rehearse and repeat explanations. (13)
Patience and approximation as administrative virtues.	Be patient. Systems are sluggish and slightly disorderly, but they do eventually act in a system-like manner. (10)	Manage premises rather than outcomes. (3) Be content with multiple, partial solutions. (5)
Inconsistency, argument and improvisation as organization attributes.	View your organization as a set of procedures for arguing and interpreting. (15) Act and treat your acts as conjectures. (17)	Play “what if”. (2) Improvise. (4) Think and act in contradictions. (7)

TABLE 6.4
AREAS OF DISAGREEMENT

ISSUE	WEICK	HUFF
When should managers be careful?	<p>Anticipations matter, don't adopt them casually; they tend to fulfill themselves. (13)</p> <p>Labels are powerful means to reduce ambiguity. Impose them with caution and deliberation because they can direct action. (14)</p>	<p>Misunderstanding and incomprehension are linked to complex managerial action. (1)</p> <p>Rehearse and repeat explanations. (13)</p>
What is the virtue of hindsight? More broadly, what kind of understanding is possible?	<p>Retrospective explanations are poor guides to prospective action. Hindsight will gloss over difficulties. (4)</p> <p>Don't expect long chains of events to make sense. (9)</p>	<p>Play "what if". (2)</p> <p>Lay a bread crumb trail. (9)</p>
What is rationality? How should managers use it?	<p>Assess when decision rationality works in your setting and when it doesn't. (2)</p> <p>Don't treat rationality as a universal prescription. (3)</p> <p>Don't expect long chains of events to make sense. (9)</p>	<p>Develop themes and agendas. (8)</p> <p>Simplify and rationalize. (14)</p>