

NEXT GENERATION LEADERSHIP

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Organizational Design teaches the necessity of matching leaders with environments. When determining the best leadership over the next decades, it's important to first look at the changing environment:

THIS VUCA WORLD: VOLATILE, UNCERTAIN, COMPLEX AND AMBIGUOUS

During the next decade and beyond, natural and social crises will continue as the world becomes increasingly crowded, the environment undergoes uncertain evolution, and scientific and technological innovation drives new issues surrounding healthcare, longevity, and social structure. The financial markets will fluctuate since the sudden awareness of some issues cause even rational investments to feel like bubbles. Even the wealthy will be unable to shield the effects of the VUCA environment.

VUCALICIOUS

Leadership in this environment will be strongest from people who naturally thrive in VUCA environments, rather than people for whom a VUCA world presents a puzzle they must understand. Those who succeed will be those who approach a VUCA environment in a sophisticated and anticipatory way.

What types of leadership strategies might be useful in a VUCA environment?

Volatility – Reap benefits at the edge; be extreme. Lack of change becomes a risk to be managed.

Uncertainty – Instead of managing risks using “need to know,” build open, transparent systems that facilitate alliance building.

Complexity – Simplify through narrative, humor, music, tactical focus.

Ambiguity – Move fast. Don't buy in. Don't drink the Kool-aid. Don't push. Don't press. Hedge. Be satisfied with what you have. Be willing to accept non-critical imperfections and failures.

LEAD & FOLLOW & GET OUT OF THE WAY

In an ad hoc world, leaders are sometimes followers (and sometimes irrelevant). Consequently, a good leader isn't always “on.” In fact, a good leader is able to switch “off.” Because of this, a good leader is not ego-driven or narcissistic, and may not even appear particularly charismatic, at least in a “stand on the soapbox” kind of way. Instead, a good leader is one that succeeds in an open environment where the success is transparent and admission and discussion of failures only serve to validate overall integrity.

How do followers deal with VUCA environments from “below the line”?

Volatility -- Commit and release commitments easily. Develop contingent passion. Develop deep “buffers.”

Uncertainty -- Make release conditions clear. Once committed, stay loyal until the release conditions are met.

Complexity -- Be smart about who you are and what you can and cannot do. Think fast: value people who can function at the actual and meta levels in several areas, simultaneously.

Ambiguity -- Push for clarity (act dumb). Cynically challenge kool-aid-speak, forgive messiness/insanity/humanity so long as there's movement towards improvement.

WHEN THERE'S NOWHERE ELSE TO RUN

Environmental upheavals and projections may become sufficiently dire that the only possible route for avoiding widespread chaos is an all-hands-on-deck level of engagement in finding solutions. The more dramatic the natural and social catastrophes, the more social and political will must be generated to produce reforms to prevent future occurrences. Harnessing that will may reform the institutional landscape to conform to the new generation of leaders, who prefer leadership and followership techniques described above.

KOOL-AID-ISM

Baby Boomers had Jingoism, and Generation X has Kool-Aid-ism. For the Boomers, Viet Nam was the question: Would you go? Would you NOT go? If you didn't go, would you protest? Leave the country? What is a hero? Where are your national duties? You may have relatives who served or even died during World War II; how can you oppose your government's call to duty?

Generation X has had a similar pivotal issue: Will you go to work in corporation? Will you refuse? If you don't go, will you start your own business? How should you support yourself; what role should your livelihood play in your life? What about your family? Where are your obligations? How should you effect change?

"Drinking the Corporate Kool-Aid" is an expression often used to mean the degree to which an employee buys into the goals and objectives as stated by the executives in the firm they work.

The degree to which (US-raised) Generation Xers bought into to the framework of unfettered capitalism is as much a litmus test as the degree to which Boomers bought into the framework of unfettered nationalism. It even has the same polarizing issues: If you're going to do it, do it right! (Be much more aggressive in Viet Nam; make a LOT of money in the corporate world.) If you object to the powerful treating you badly, then you'd better not do the same thing yourself ("Make love not war"; "First, do no evil").