

## Stop managing the probable. Start leading what's possible.

*Stop managing the probable. Start leading what's possible.* exhorts my readers to lessen their reliance on a fixed mindset that there's a standard way of doing things and strengthen their **growth mindset** that new and different ways can be learned.

*Stop managing the probable. Start leading what's possible.* is drawn from the work of **McKinsey** over recent years. In January 2021 McKinsey wrote '*Standard problem-solving works well with standard problems, but sometimes – as we have recently learned – we face unexpected and novel ones. Using the standard tool kit to narrow down the ways of addressing them is exactly what we should not do*'.

### Key concept



Leading what's possible requires a shift towards expanding your range of choices, conducting low-risk experiments – i.e. thinking and acting lean – and striving to realise payoffs of which you've only dreamt and avoiding calamities. This shift requires the courage to cope with the inevitable anxieties about deliberately approaching the world as VUCA; see the link on VUCA in **More on this topic** below.

Here's how.

### Ask different questions

The questions we ask frequently stem from a sense of urgency and our habitual ways of thinking. This limits the data we can access and constrains the range of options we have for solving the problem or identifying the opportunities. Break this approach by slowing the process down and asking questions like: What do we expect *not* to find? What might we be explaining away or discounting too quickly? What would happen if we changed a core assumption on an issue, even if only to experiment?

### Take multiple perspectives

Considering multiple perspectives, including those that are 'left field' out of the ordinary, expanding our world view. This is why diversity in your team and those you consult is so vital. Diversity inevitably creates short-term disagreement and even conflict, but in an uncertain environment creates a wider set of options and solutions. These are some ways to take multiple perspectives: Look at the perspectives of those who frustrate or irritate you. What can you learn from them? Seek the opinions of those who are different from you, e.g. in a different industry or career stage.

### See the system as a whole

Seeing the system as a whole involves seeing patterns of behaviour and then trying small 'safe-to-fail' experiments to nudge the system in the desired direction. Don't only look at component parts, assume linear relationships between cause and effect or try to find root causes at the centre of the problem where the resistance to change is strongest. Rather, tinker at the periphery, embrace opposing ideas without trying to reconcile them, avoid either/or thinking and try several good solutions instead of trying to pick the 'best' one.

### Conclusion

Making these mind shifts comes at a cost: abandoning our often cherished image of the traditional leader: clear-minded, authoritative and confident in their opinion and decisions. This image is not consistent with qualities of humility, being the servant, and tolerance of uncertainty.

### More on this topic

**Embrace failure** my post citing the work of Carol Dweck and work on **The Right Mindset for Success**.

**Leadership in a (prolonged) crisis** my post which refers to leading in an environment that is famously described as **VUCA** – volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous.