

Leading in Uncertainty



Andrew Griffiths is the Founder and Director of Coral Leadership, a strategic leadership development consultancy. His work specialises in training senior leaders how to lead in a crisis, through a range of exercises designed to develop leadership agility. His experience of strategic thinking and leading teams in uncertainty has been honed in a military career which he has linked to business results through a 2 day training course using a unique simulator.

As the UK slowly emerges from the permafrost of recession and businesses start to think about growing, there is an emerging issue of how do organisations up-skill when reductions in just about everything means businesses have forgotten how to grow? If companies begin to see the green shoots of recovery, what will the playing field look like when this recovery will take place?

One thing is certain, the landscape that lies ahead is chaotic and ambiguous and senior leaders need to anticipate disruption and chaos as being the norm. The ability to strategize businesses that can succeed in that environment is a whole new realm which requires a new leadership mindset. Few would have predicted how the recent cold weather could have paralysed a strategic asset such as Heathrow airport for the third year in a row, could BAA have been better prepared to cope with this situation?



In 1998 a strategic planning team in The Ministry of Defence ‘dreamt’ up 26 ‘worst case scenarios’ that could potentially involve military intervention or a commitment from UK armed forces. By 2009 22 scenarios had actually taken place. Fighting in Iraq with Land Rovers designed for Northern Ireland and engaging an enemy in Afghanistan you cannot see with heavy equipment designed for the open plains in Germany brought home some unwelcome truths. The reality of these scenarios was the world had changed but mindsets hadn’t.

When an Executive Director at Duke University was asked to design a programme for a US medical company keen to enter the Chinese market, he came up with an innovative idea. The learning didn’t take place in a classroom in Minnesota; he bused them round in a van in China and gave each of them a symptom. You’ve got flu, you’ve got liver problems, you’ve got a headache, and he sent them off to find Eastern medical remedies for each symptom. The delegates began to understand a different psychology, a different approach to understanding how competitors might approach the problem and win the battle for trade in an uncertain market. There is no substitute for this type of experience.

At Coral Leadership, the 2 day Leading in Uncertainty course aims to immerse leaders in a totally unfamiliar environment allowing participants to experience uncertainty ‘in the skin’. Using a unique Royal Navy training resource which simulates a sinking ship, participants can experience uncertainty



and then begin to get comfortable with the idea of leading in chaos. You may not have all the answers but making sense of this environment and integrating a new experience of acting quickly, decisively and correctly builds the confidence to deal with future challenges in the business space.

Next, we help leaders recognize and respond to weak signals. How do we know what is important? Signals are weaker than they used to be and it takes a 'Mindful' leader to be able to recognise the importance of acting on weak signals. Coral leadership is at the leading edge of providing experiential training to simulate uncertainty to help participants create a new leadership mindset. The 'suspense and surprise' approach of the facilitation adds to what is already a powerful vehicle for understanding uncertainty. Business has been going through a prolonged downturn, as growth returns, particular attention needs to be paid to how organisations prepare their senior leaders to deal with uncertainty. Is this the opportunity to accelerate the upside?

For more information on Coral Leadership programmes contact info@coralleadership.com