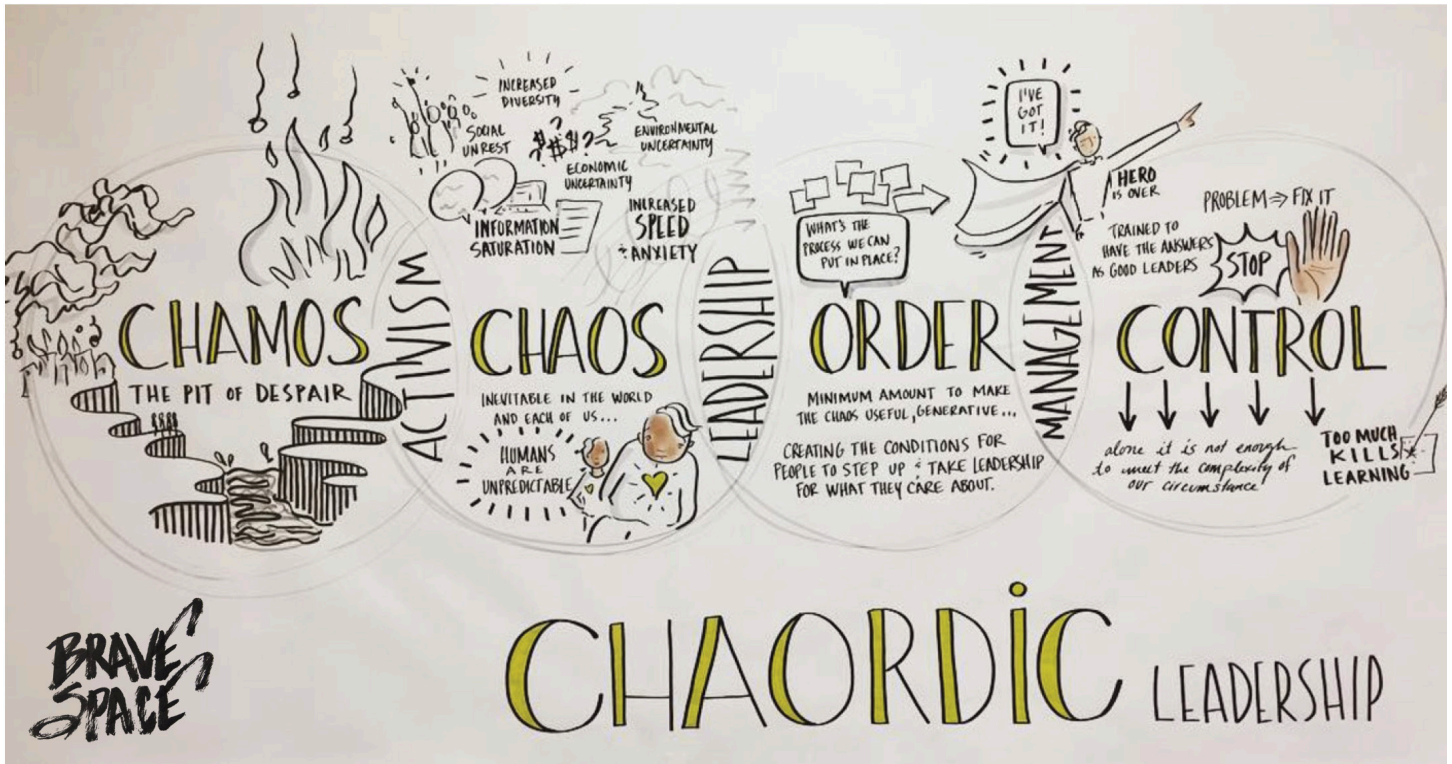


CHAORDIC PATH



visual by Brave Space (<http://bravespace.ca>)

Chaos, order, and control are different states of being and experiencing. We tend to feel safest in the state of order, or for some people, in the state of control. Being out of control is scary if we are looking for predictability. If we have a mechanistic view on organizations, our tendency will be to stay within the realms of order and control, where things are predictable and stable — and where we produce status quo or more of the same— which, in some cases, is exactly what is needed.

There is a path to take between Chaos and Order that leads us to new, collective learning, real time innovation. Instead of relying on controlling every detail in our organizations or communities from the top down, many leaders today see the need to access the collective intelligence and collective wisdom of everyone, which can be a “messy” process until we reach new insight and clarity. If we are looking for innovative, new solutions, we will find them in a place between chaos and order: the chaordic path.

The chaordic path is actually the story of our natural world — form arises out of nonlinear, complex, diverse systems.

At the edge of chaos is where life innovates — where things are not hard wired but are flexible enough for new connections and solutions to occur. New levels of order become possible out of chaos.

In nature, so too in organizations, the path between Chaos and Order leads us to the new.

To lead our organization on the chaordic path, we need “chaordic confidence,” to have the courage to stay in the dance of order and chaos long enough to support generative emergence that allows the new, collective intelligence and wise action processes to occur.

As we tread the line between chaos and order, individually and collectively, we move through confusion and conflict toward clarity. It is in the phase of not knowing, before we reach new clarity, that the temptation to rush for certainty or grab for control is strongest. We are all called to walk this path with open minds and some confidence if we want to reach something wholly new.

In this space of emergence, we leave our collective encounters with something that not one of us individually brought into the room.

The art is to stay in the fine balance between chaos and order. Straying too far to either side is counterproductive. On the far side of chaos is chamos, or destructive chaos, where everything disintegrates and dies. On the far side of order is stifling control, where there is no movement, which eventually means death. When we move toward either of these extremes, the result is apathy or rebellion, the very opposite of chaordic confidence. Staying on the chaordic path is where the balance is and where life thrives.

CHAOS/ORDER IS THE PLACE FOR LEADERSHIP

The practice of leadership resides in the place between chaos and order. When facing new challenges that cannot be met the same way we are currently working, we need to learn new ways of operating. It is during these times of uncertainty and increased complexity, where results cannot be predicted, that leaders need to invite others to share diverse knowledge to discover new purposes and strategies and decide the way forward.

ORDER/CONTROL IS A PLACE FOR MANAGEMENT

The practice of management lies between order and control, where activities need to be maintained and executed routinely so that a particular standard results. It is the place where “more of the same” is required (such as landing an airplane safely or performing a surgical procedure). Therefore, it is where predictability is called for and where procedures and standards are clearly defined and adhered to.

ACTIVISM IS THE PLACE FOR DISRUPTION

The practice of activism lies between chamos and chaos, where norms of dominant culture are challenged and there is call for a shift or change. Things move quickly in this space, requiring tactical strategies for approaching challenges as well as dealing with the ‘unknown’. This disturbance of the ‘norm’ makes room for new ways of knowing and doing to emerge.

How much order do we need? How much chaos would be helpful here?

