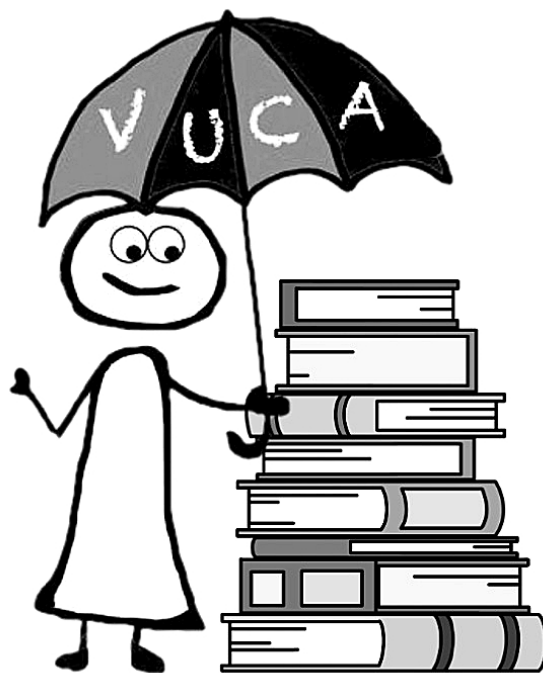


**Sysruption? “Why keep it simple if you
can make it complicated!?”**

“Multi-Crisis Management in a VUCA world”



Excerpt

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Summary

Foreword

1. Introduction

1.1 A slightly different approach

The 4 Es: Explore, Embed, Evolve, Enjoy

1.2 “Every feeling wants to be seen”

Guest article by Michael Mattis (founder and CEO of “Silicon Valley Europe”): The four stages of our digital reorientation

2. Explore

2.1 VUCA is out! Or is it?

2.2 VUCA positive (Prime)

2.3 VUCA, BANI, RUPT & UN-VICE

Guest article by Mike Schindler (US Navy veteran): VUCA is NOT the enemy – it is the opportunity.

2.4 Black swans

2.5 Disruption, Sysruption and Metarruption

2.6 VUCA conceived as a space for solutions

Guest contribution by Stefan Kermas (Olympic champion): Complexity at the starting whistle

2.7 Where do we stand today: technology, people and AI

2.8 Industry 5.0

2.9 Psychological safety

At the end of the chapter ...

3. Embed

3.1 Does the future need a past?

3.2 Challenges for organisations and businesses
Effects from the depths of the organisation

3.3 Meaningful navigation in the VUCA world
Digital leadership: Beyond the silos

3.4 The organisational dilemma: How slow systems survive in fast-moving times

3.5 Sysruption: When systems lose their environment

The new organisational logic

3.6 Prudence with the help of the 'Golden Circle'

Backcasting: From tomorrow to today – thinking from the future

3.7 Systems Thinking

3.8 Tolerance of ambiguity as a key competence

Guest contribution by Stefanie Stöckel (manager at a hospital, Switzerland): VUCA in nursing

At the end of the chapter ...

4. Evolve

4.1 Leadership and the importance of decision-making ability

4.2 Leading by roles – the concept of role-based organisation

Guest contribution by Dr Evert Smit (President of the European Adhesive Tape Association): How VUCA reveals what leadership really is

4.3 Challenges for organisations and businesses

4.4 Symbiotics: Human competence remains the linchpin

4.5 Courage as a resource: Between decision-making and effective deployment

4.6 From 'Predict & Control' to 'Sense & Respond'

4.7 Agility as a response to VUCA? Potential, limitations and current criticism

4.8 We can do it!

Guest contribution by Spyros Kollas (author, entrepreneur, Greece): The human decision-making level

At the end of the chapter ...

5. Enjoy

5.1 Recognition and appreciation

Organisations are made up of people

5.2 Why visibility and being noticed are strategic

5.3 Appreciation as an indispensable foundation

Between mission statement and everyday life

5.4 Leadership shapes the atmosphere and culture drives the impact

5.5 The quiet power of recognition: an example and a source of encouragement

5.6 The art of belittling in the workplace
The psychology of belittling in the workplace

5.7 Positive leadership

5.8 A culture of celebration

At the end of the chapter ...

About the author

References

Foreword

I'll start with the year 2015. It was a Sunday morning in the spring when I first came across the term VUCA. A newspaper article led me to an acronym from the last century that was hardly known at the time, a good 25 years after it first appeared in the context of leadership. The more I delved into the four components of this portmanteau word – volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity – the clearer the relevance of the phenomena described became to me. Even before digitalization and the use of artificial intelligence shaped daily life in business and society to the extent they do today, consciously dealing with uncertainty – and in particular, making decisions under conditions that are difficult to assess – was one of the central leadership tasks of our time. As a systemic organizational consultant, coach and sparring partner for decision-makers, I wanted to make a contribution to this, as this conviction forms the basis of my work and contributed to the creation of the websites vuca-welt.de and vuca-world.org. Giving further expression to this conviction is one of the motivations behind this book.

It is no coincidence that the term 'multi-crisis' or 'poly-crisis' has gained significant prominence in social and political debate in Germany in recent years, serving as a more precise description of a situation in which various crises (climate, energy, the war in Ukraine, inflation, the emergence of a new world order) overlap and reinforce one another.

But what good is lamenting and whining? This is, after all, the world we live in. The level of acceptance may vary greatly from person to person. For me, however, the motto has always been 'hands-on' and 'let's get started', because I consider that the more responsible decision than, at worst, ending up in a victim role with no room for influence!

System meets disruption and becomes sysruption. Sounds logical, doesn't it? For me, the term captures the systemic transformation of entire value chains and networks, as well as socio-technical systems, through the simultaneous interaction of multiple technological, institutional, and market-relevant innovations. The result is that entire cultural, social and economic patterns of interaction are reconfigured, and the scale of change and transformation may not be easy to grasp. Dealing with sysruptive events and effects demands answers that may still be found, because the questions themselves are framed differently. We need the willingness to accept 'illogic' or at least to anticipate it, because the logics that have applied to date regarding system understanding and control no longer hold under sysruptive conditions.

1. Introduction

1.1 A slightly different approach

The 4 Es: Explore, Embed, Evolve, Enjoy

With a view to disruption in its various facets and the approach of focusing on the positive interpretation of the four letters of VUCA and the solution spaces they contain, I offer the conceptual framework of my personal four Es. They stand for Explore, Embed, Evolve, Enjoy. How did I arrive at this?

The success of my work as a consultant, sparring partner and coach is largely down to my ability to identify which problems need solving and to develop an idea of which approach might be most effective for sustainable solutions. The starting point is rarely 'one-dimensional'. Far more often, I encounter a situation that initially appears rather complex, where the first step is to identify and sort out the individual issues and their interconnections. Active listening and asking questions are crucial here, right down to hearing and reading 'between the lines'.

A stroke of luck in terms of my training in the field of change management was my esteemed teacher Klaus Doppler. Together with Christoph Lauterburg, he played a key role in shaping and popularizing change management in Germany – a concept adopted from the Anglo-American world, particularly through the seminal work „Change-Management: Shaping Corporate Transformation“ ⁽³⁾, which has been regarded since the 1990s as a reference work and one of the first comprehensive German-language introductions to the subject. Klaus Doppler taught us students something that runs like a thread through my working method and which often makes the difference in a fast-paced world geared towards prompt answers. It is the sequence of the approach. First, it is a matter of understanding “what is going on?”. Only then does the focus shift to “what needs to be done?”.

In addition to my decision to adopt this sensible and effective sequence, my long-standing engagement with VUCA, and here specifically drawing on Bob Johansen's ⁽⁴⁾ positive reinterpretation of the four VUCA phenomena as vision, understanding, clarity, agility and adaptability, led me to a playful idea.

I did not want to view these two strands (the Doppler approach and positive VUCA) as separate ways of thinking, so I sought a connection. I succeeded in finding this in the form of what I call my personal '4 Es'.

Not only does this sequence reflect the dialogue with my clients and stakeholders, but I also invite you, through the structure of this book, to follow this logic.

Explore

This means: The initial focus is on understanding and grasping systemic interrelationships, enabling an initial understanding of what this is really about, or rather, what it is not, and what needs to be discussed and addressed. Much like how, in project management, it is often said that the start of a project already provides an indication of how it will end, this involves a relevant sequence that is critical to success and should not be underestimated. Therefore, the answers to the question 'what is going on?' form the basis for decisions regarding 'what needs to be done?'

Embed

Once sufficient space has been given to understanding the facts, the problem and the needs of the person I am speaking with, the next step is contextualization. This involves questions such as: 'Which topics are we discussing and which are we not?', 'Where does this belong? Where does it not?', 'What is it connected to?', "In what context should it be understood and explained?", "Which aspects are relevant to the situation at hand and how should they be categorized? Categorizing the topics and problems allows for prioritization, which at best leads to so-called "quick wins" or enables the harvesting of "low-hanging fruit", which, depending on the level of tension, can already constitute the first positive intervention in a consulting context. However, identifying topics is also useful in terms of mutual expectation management, which must never be overlooked and is another aspect critical to success within a change context.

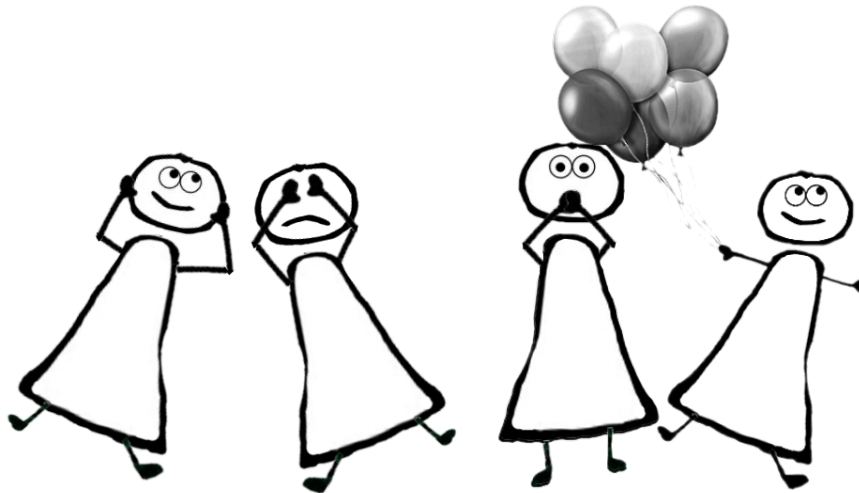
Evolve

The E for "Embed" is followed by the E for "Evolve." This concerns concrete interventions, measures and experiments, including the definition of 'who does what, how, when, and what are the next steps?' This can involve both a concrete plan or a roadmap with iterations, as well as preparation and adaptability to dynamically changing circumstances, which corresponds to agility in practice. The focus on 'change' encompasses what will endure, why this is so, and how it relates to what is changing. It is precisely the focus on what is worth preserving, the stable elements within a dynamic context, that is often inadequately defined. This amounts to a disregard for valuable success factors in successful change and should be avoided.

Enjoy

As the appreciation of what has been achieved and the celebration of successes are often neglected, particularly in our cultural context, the fourth 'E' is particularly important to me. It stands for enjoyment and its conscious integration: how do we design the process so that motivation, meaning and joy are maintained or even

enhanced? The fun and pleasure of working together should not be neglected, either during the process or afterwards. Pleasure requires motivating conditions as well as realistic goals, achievable results and clear criteria for success. Even setbacks and defeats should be valued as important components of a culture of learning from mistakes.



These four steps can be used as a framework for thinking, learning and leadership: anyone wishing to make sense of the wealth of ideas and follow the logic of the 4 Es begins with understanding. For managers, consultants and coaches, the learning benefit lies in viewing these four concepts not merely as a theoretical model, but as a personal approach to work and a way of thinking. With every new challenge, one can ask oneself: Have I really understood? Have I clearly identified the situation? Do I know what I want to change, how, for whom and with whom? And am I ensuring that there is also room for enjoyment in this process?

In this context, I would like to highlight another point that is important to me: in my work, I draw on insights from brain research and neuroleadership ⁽⁵⁾. The idea of my personal 4 Es as a framework for dealing with VUCA effects follows a 'brain-friendly' logic. Thanks to big data and the possibilities of artificial intelligence, today's leaders, consultants, coaches, business owners and other decision-makers are not lacking in data, checklists, models and concepts. The problem is rarely a lack of input, but rather the absence of a clear, logical structure that provides guidance, enables problem-solving and facilitates learning. I have therefore organised the book's content according to the four Es (Explore, Embed, Evolve, Enjoy) and invite you to dip into the relevant section and delve deeper, depending on your interests. It is important to me that there is no 'just because!' and that I do not claim to possess 'truth' or absolutism, but rather invite you to exchange ideas and experiment according to your own understanding and preferences. Independent thinking and making connections are encouraged!

In a VUCA world, no one will be able to resolve all ambiguities or avoid every uncertainty. But those who consciously link Explore, Embed, Evolve and Enjoy transform the flood of information into guidance, complexity into learning opportunities, and uncertainty into creative freedom. This is where leadership takes effect, and counselling and support become genuine assistance.

1.2 The 4 Es and one more ingredient: 'Every feeling wants to be seen.'

I mentioned at the outset that in today's VUCA world, with its BANI effects, questions and problems are rarely 'one-dimensional', and I therefore propose an approach to take this into account. The starting point consists of two steps: first, understanding 'what is going on', and second, deducing what to do (or not to do!). To this two-step process, I add the logic of the 4 Es. But that is not all! One ingredient is still missing, namely the invitation to adopt a fundamental attitude that states that 'every feeling wants to be seen'.

This fundamental attitude has its roots in Humanistic Psychology. Carl Rogers (1902–1987), one of its co-founders, significantly shaped the person-centred approach with his concept of empathic, unconditional appreciation. ⁽⁶⁾ This approach, revolutionary in its day, places the client's subjective experience at the centre rather than the therapist or the method, or the analysis of symptoms, and believes in the inherent powers of self-healing. The interplay of the three core attitudes – authenticity, unconditional appreciation and empathy – creates an atmosphere that fosters growth, self-actualisation and a more flexible self-concept. This, in turn, fosters the client's willingness to assume clear responsibility. Consequently, the approach is both meaningful and practical, as it is effective, resource-oriented and universally applicable in therapy, education and leadership. As an organisational consultant and sparring partner for executives, my focus lies on leadership and the organisation of collaboration.

By inviting consideration of the basic attitude proposed by Rogers and his colleagues, psychology and business can be combined in a way that preserves the original validity of both fields whilst still linking them intelligently, as it concerns the interaction between people and the organisation. This alone allows well-intentioned goals to be translated into measurable results; one need only consider the often contentious topics such as motivation and willingness to learn, which are, however, given too little thought and consideration.

Back to the 4 Es and their connection to the paradigm of the person-centred approach according to Carl Rogers. What can 'feeling' be linked to, when three of the 4 Es seem quite rational? Presumably, many people would agree that Explore, Embed and Evolve are primarily cognitive processes. The connection to the ingredient 'emotion wants to be seen' could probably best be associated with the fourth E: Enjoy.

If only because, generally speaking, the word 'Enjoy' stands for a positive feeling that one talks about, of which one would like to have enough and ensure there is sufficient of it, and hopes that it will remain so as far as possible. We associate Enjoy with pleasure, energy, a fresh start: in any case, a positive connotation (we are deliberately ignoring beliefs such as ' ' or 'No pain, no gain' at this point!). So far, so good! However, I will demonstrate later that "feeling" is present in all four Es when I have a closer look at the logic behind understanding, situating and changing, and describe what this entails. I will clarify how the element of the 'perceived feeling' becomes an often underestimated success factor with overlooked relevance when it comes to shaping change and transformation. We will therefore also have a look at the concept of cognitive dissonance introduced by Leon Festinger ⁽⁷⁾, which describes a motivationally effective state of tension that arises when contradictory cognitions (understood as beliefs, evaluations, expectations or affective states) are simultaneously present. In a VUCA world, it is not only leaders who are particularly susceptible to such internal conflicts. The phrase 'Every feeling wants to be seen' underscores that ignoring or suppressing emotions such as stress, feeling overwhelmed or doubt not only weakens individual resilience but also intensifies cognitive dissonance. It is therefore highly relevant to take this aspect into account when it comes to understanding, identifying, changing and enjoying.

Let us take a step back and, in the interests of a consistent understanding of the term 'feeling', examine two terms that are often used synonymously but which I believe are worth distinguishing: emotion and feeling. The key distinction lies in the fact that emotions are internal sensations comprising a feeling (e.g. joy, sadness or fear), a physical reaction (e.g. laughing, crying, feeling afraid) and a thought process (e.g. comparing, interpreting, deciding). A feeling is therefore merely a part of our emotion. Outwardly, those around us can recognise our emotions through their perception. However, how we feel at a particular moment is highly subjective and cannot be defined by other people and, a personal note, even less so dictated ⁽⁸⁾.

Understanding the difference between emotion and feeling is important so that we can perceive others' emotional states and draw respectful conclusions about their emotions. It enables us to interact with one another in an empathetic and compassionate manner, strengthens our own self-confidence as well as our openness to others' trust, and also promotes resilience. It allows for a degree of predictability and reliability and permits hypotheses and assessments. All in all, these are many relevant aspects when it comes to individual capacity for action and reaction. This opens up perspectives and options, particularly for navigating volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity.

Logic of thought and action

At this point, I could conclude that I have sufficiently outlined my proposal for the additional ingredient of the 'seen feeling'. But wait! Given all the complexity that needs to be taken into account, let us linger for a moment on the concept of 'capacity for action' and immediately add 'logic of thought and action' to the mix. Here, it is worth considering the question: what do management and psychology have to do with one another? Having gained experience in dealing with 'seasoned managers', I can mention that it creates 'special moments' when I pose this question in real-life situations, thereby creating the best opportunity to test the previously outlined fundamental principle that 'every feeling wants to be seen'. I will explain shortly what this question is all about and why reflecting on it is helpful!

First, let us have a look at the individual terms and their definitions here, in the interests of a basic understanding. We shall begin with management and read in the Organisation Handbook of the Federal Administrative Office ⁽⁹⁾: "Management in the functional sense refers to the goal-oriented steering of organisations. In terms of content, management can, for example, relate to the organisation

(organisational management), human resources

(human resources management) or quality

(Quality management). Regardless of the specific context, management comprises the following elements: objectives must be formulated, outcomes and impacts must be planned, measures must be defined and implemented, their fulfilment must be monitored, and the results must be evaluated. From this, conclusions can be drawn and adjustments made. All these elements constitute phases of a continuous management cycle." In the same passage, there is a reference to the renowned Fredmund Malik ⁽¹⁰⁾, according to whom: "It is management alone that makes people and organisations effective. It is only through management that wisdom, intelligence, talent and knowledge are transformed into what really counts: results." This serves to provide a clear understanding of what we mean when we talk about "management".

General Psychology

Now let us consider a definition of psychology, which is consistently defined in numerous sources as "the empirical science of human experience and behaviour". The search for further or redundant definitions also points to the concept of general psychology: "General psychology investigates systematic laws of experience and behaviour that apply to all people in a more or less comparable form, i.e. that are universally valid. These are laws governing the reception, processing and storage of information that humans use to control their behaviour. Research topics include perception, attention, consciousness, learning and memory, action and motor skills, language, thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, as well as motivation and emotion. As a basic science, General Psychology initially aims to describe and explain human experience and behaviour and to understand its biological (physiological and anatomical) basis. ⁽¹¹⁾

If we bring both definitions together and examine what management and psychology have in common, we can deduce that the connection between management and psychology is interesting because it bridges the gap between hard business metrics and the 'human factor'. Whilst management often focuses on processes, strategies and efficiency, psychology provides an understanding of why people behave in a certain way, what motivates them and how they make decisions. It is precisely this bridge that matters when solving shared problems and challenges. It links necessity and good intentions with qualitative and quantitative results. It is synonymous with transition, the combination of change (optimising the past) and transformation (shaping the future). In this context, and particularly with regard to leadership in practice, I would also draw attention to the concept of leadership, the origins of which, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, have been documented since 1821. In the 1960s and 1970s, it was further developed by Warren Bennis⁽¹²⁾, who is often described as one of the fathers of modern leadership theory ('Manager vs. Leader'). Since the 1980s, leadership has become further established in the process of distinguishing itself from management, notably through the work of John P. Kotter⁽¹³⁾ with a focus on motivation, vision and employees, as part of the process of distinguishing it from management. Compared to the traditional management concept of leadership, leadership focuses on soft factors, group dynamic processes and exemplifying values, which in turn draws a connection to psychology.

When I previously referred to the complex interplay of understanding, situating, changing and enjoyment which, when navigating a VUCA world, makes disciplines such as psychology, management and leadership part of day-to-day business. This also encompasses a person-centred understanding of systemic and organisational dynamics. I experience organisations as living social systems in which emotions operate not only individually but also collectively, manifesting themselves in culture, communication patterns and decision-making processes. A leader who wishes to learn to lead in complexity must therefore first learn to read their own emotional map, on which places such as stress, overwhelm and doubt are located (see the aspect of cognitive dissonance). Ignoring these feelings or dismissing them as a weakness would be the wrong approach. Instead of making tense decisions, suffering burnout or adopting an ineffective leadership style, leaders should allow themselves to consciously perceive these emotional signals and use them as a valuable source of information, leading to the previously mentioned and recommended increase in resilience and clarity of decision-making. Therefore, leaders should adopt the attitude that every feeling deserves to be acknowledged and that it is always right to start with oneself. After all, the good news here is that the only person who decides on my change is myself! And let's remember the instructions in an emergency, which we've all heard from charming flight attendants: "In case of emergency, put on your own mask first before assisting others!"

External impact

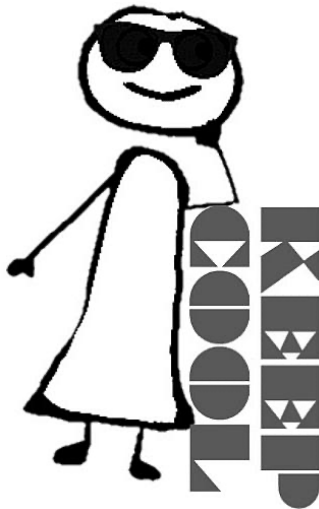
This willingness is even more crucial when it comes to the external impact. Teams navigating uncertain times go through collective emotional processes and need a

climate in which fear of change, frustration over setbacks or conflicts can be openly addressed. This does not mean that all feelings become guiding principles for action, but rather that they represent valid data points for leadership work. The Google study in “Project Aristotle” ⁽¹⁴⁾ impressively confirmed that psychological safety is the decisive factor for high-performing teams (that is, an environment in which one can express one’s opinions and concerns without risk). The leadership task at the organisational level is therefore to develop structures and processes that systematically embed emotional intelligence and view human-centred leadership as a guiding principle. This ranges from meeting cultures that create space for emotional sensitivities to feedback systems that keep an eye not only on performance but also on the emotional climate through active, empathetic listening and striking a balance between questions such as “How does this affect us?” and “How do we solve this?”

If leadership is based on inserting a conscious pause between exploring ‘what is going on?’ and ‘what needs to be done?’, because understanding, identifying, changing and enjoying are distinct and separate, albeit interlinked, process steps, and because emotions and feelings are indispensable ingredients for healthy collaboration, this strengthens the ability to communicate one’s own uncertainties in a congruent and authentic manner, rather than maintaining a façade of omniscience and omnipotence. (Note at this point: The age of leadership heroes is over!) Organisations that integrate emotional issues into strategic decision-making processes transform leadership from a purely controlling function into a relationship-building and enabling practice.

The organisational dimension

The organisational dimension of ‘being seen’ is a prerequisite for performance and innovation, not only of individual feelings, but also of collective emotional patterns within organisations. Uncovering which unspoken fears are holding things back or which silent frustrations are blocking collaboration between departments is part of making emotional system dynamics visible, which can then be channelled into productive development processes. In an increasingly complex world, technocratic solutions alone are no longer sufficient. The human factor, the emotional intelligence of the entire system, becomes a critical success factor. The simple yet powerful phrase ‘Every feeling wants to be seen’ serves as a reminder, particularly to leaders, that the task is to lead people, not to manage resources. This is one reason why the concept of ‘human resources’ is being debated, although this is a separate issue. Organisations that manage to acknowledge both individual and collective emotional realities with respect lay the foundation for trust, development and sustainable decisions in turbulent times. They develop organisational resilience that goes far beyond the sum of individual resilience. This is precisely where the transformative power of this seemingly simple attitude and way of thinking lies.



**Guest article by Michael Mattis (Founder and CEO of ‘Silicon Valley Europe’):
The four stages of our digital reorientation**

The world has become more complex. Global supply chains are shifting, technological breakthroughs are following one another in ever-shorter cycles, and geopolitical tensions are altering the framework for economic activity almost daily. Yet it is precisely in this situation that we must not allow ourselves to be paralysed. On the contrary: complexity and volatility are no reason for resignation, but a signal to act.

In this guest article, as founder and CEO of Silicon Valley Europe ⁽¹⁵⁾, I link the central tenets of my initiative with the 4 Vs, a navigation system for a time when orientation is more important than perfection. The four Vs represent a framework that helps us not only to understand the digital transformation, but also to actively shape it. For we are not on the brink of a crisis. We are at the beginning of a decision. Europe can either manage the digital future or shape it. The 4 Vs navigation system provides the coordinates to take the second path.

Explore

The first step is to put the changes into the right perspective. Many debates in Europe are still characterised by a defensive stance: new technologies are initially perceived as a risk. But this perspective falls short. Technological disruption is not an accident of history, but a logical consequence of human innovation. Platform economies, artificial intelligence and data-driven business models are changing the rules of global value creation, just as fundamentally as industrialisation once did. Anyone who understands this dynamic also realises that Europe is at a decisive turning point. The combination of industrial strength, scientific excellence and social stability provides a foundation that many regions of the world envy. Yet this strength will only come into its own if we accept the new rules of the game. Those who grasp the mechanisms of the platform economy, data ecosystems and AI will see in them

not merely a challenge, but perhaps the last great opportunity to redefine Europe's role in the digital world.

Embed

However, understanding alone is not enough. If you want to navigate, you also need to know where you stand. Europe finds itself caught between two digital superpowers: the US and China. Both pursue different models: the innovation-driven, capital-rich ecosystem of the American tech giants on the one hand, and China's state-orchestrated, strategically coordinated digital model on the other.

Europe has so far attempted to forge a third path: one that combines technological innovation with social responsibility. Yet without a clear sense of where we stand, this aspiration remains abstract.

Evolve

Analysis without action is ineffective. That is why defining our position must be followed by the decisive step: change.

Europe possesses enormous technological expertise. Unfortunately, this is often held back by structural inertia. Complex funding programmes, fragmented markets and a bureaucracy that administers rather than facilitates innovation make it difficult for new digital champions to emerge. If Europe is to survive in the digital competition, we must be prepared to question familiar structures. Above all, this means three things:

Firstly: bold investment in future technologies, particularly in AI, semiconductors, cybersecurity and digital infrastructure.

Secondly: a radical simplification of bureaucratic processes, so that founders can invest their energy in innovation rather than in filling out forms.

Thirdly: a genuine European single market for digital innovation that connects talent, capital and ideas more quickly.

Innovation 'Made in Europe' does not arise from declarations of intent, but from rewarding entrepreneurship. This is precisely where the key to our continent's digital renaissance lies.

Enjoy

Perhaps the most underestimated factor in digital transformation is emotion. Transformation is often portrayed as a threat. Yet progress does not arise from fear, but from enthusiasm. Digital transformation must therefore be more than a political project or an economic strategy. It must be a vision that inspires people. A vision that attracts talent, motivates founders and gives rise to a new generation of European innovators. This is precisely what Silicon Valley Europe is all about: not just technology, but a culture of creation. A culture that retains talent through opportunities. A culture that shows that the future is not something that happens to us, but something we actively create.

If Europe embraces this mindset, uncertainty will turn into creativity and complexity into opportunities.

The goal: a new operating system for Europe

Europe does not need another set of rules. We already have enough of those. What we need is a new operating system for innovation:

A system that enables speed without losing sight of responsibility.

A system that promotes entrepreneurship without sacrificing social values.

A system that combines technological strength with European identity.

At the end of this journey lies not a continent of regulation, but a continent of innovation. A Europe that no longer asks how it should deal with the digital revolution, but shows how it can be shaped. A self-assured, digital continent. That is precisely where our opportunity lies.

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Thank you for your interest.

Please get in touch with me if you have any questions or ideas:

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