

**Openings:** The harvest is in, the jack-o-lanterns carved, and we are at the midpoint between the Thanksgiving celebrations on either side of the 49<sup>th</sup> Parallel. What better reason do we need for some graveyard inspired reverie?

**Spotlight:** When economists and market analysts provide forecasts, their predictions can influence the future. They are demonstrating what quantum mechanics labels chaos theory: the ultimate organising force in the universe. The core of this theory states that our perceptions are essential in determining how events unfold. Whether through studying the science or simply bringing a heightened awareness to our enterprises, we can put chaos to work.

Understanding chaos is mostly a linguistic challenge. While common usage of the word points towards disorder, chaos is really about evoking the underlying order. In the middle of a crisis—a lost shipment, an equipment breakdown—events crystallise and the appropriate course of action comes to us, seemingly from nowhere. Most people have experienced such occurrences without understanding how they are a part of the process. Not understanding the role we play does not diminish our knowing that our contribution is real. The experience of participating with the universe requires that we trust our experiences rather than our intellect.

If we can accept that chaos, the ultimate organising force, is at play and that it is beneficial, the next step is to foster its appearance in moment-to-moment activities. Fortunately, taking this step does not require reinventing, reinvesting, or reengineering your enterprise. What it does require, which may be more challenging, is letting go of a reliance on demonstrable cause and effect. Deterministic order and predictability need to be subservient to responsiveness and a trust in intuitions.

In practical terms, an enterprise must favour action over analysis and implementation over planning. Getting on with the job is the most effective route to determining what works and it also helps define, or refine, the desired outcome. Rather than imposing order through a strategic plan, the enterprise follows the order that arises through day-to-day interactions. It takes discipline to follow a course of action that is not prescribed, market tested, and contingency based. Still, the benefits far out weigh the risks. Elaborate plans and time lines require enormous effort to develop and are at best poor representations of the environment they attempt to model. Freeing people from these activities frees the enterprise to respond to events as they arise.

Recognising chaos within the enterprise is not a call to abandon strategy. It is a call to focus on strong intentions, to invest in general knowledge and to develop broad skills. Under chaos, new initiatives are established with ease and are quickly terminated when not productive. In the current business environment, an enterprise's responsiveness is the key indicator of success and embracing chaos is the shortest path to becoming responsive.

**Musings:** Living on the edge of the North Pacific, I have learned to be very suspect of weather forecasts. Even with the advent of satellite imagery, our accuracy in predicting what atmospheric conditions are spawned, along this rugged boundary between the aquatic and terrestrial realms, is statistically underwhelming. Still, every newspaper and newscast attempts to beat the odds.

Recording and reporting the weather is a noble science. Unfortunately, once a prognoses regarding tomorrow or the following day is rendered, we have slipped from science into divination. That sound minds continue to offer best guesses on the coming weather and that we continue to put stock in their guesses must tell us something about our psyche.

With so few people's livelihoods impacted by atmospheric conditions, there is no practical reason for most of us to be concerned whether the sun will shine. If we do venture outdoors, it is for such a brief period that if we are concerned, our concern is ill founded.

With all our technological advancement and our separation from our natural environment, we are still tied to our ancestors who hunted and tilled fields at the mercy of Mother Nature. The difference between our ancestors and us is that when it rained, they simply got wet and skipped worrying about getting wet.

**Lexicon:** The last night of October marks the last night of the year in the old Celtic calendar. The Roman Catholic Church co-opted the pagan celebration very early on, but the name Halloween has a much more recent origin. Dating from 1745, it is a contraction of the Scottish *Allhallow-even* (Eve of All Saints).

**Quote:** Margaret J. Wheatley, professor and management consultant, sees chaos theory describing a "new world":

*"In this new world, you and I make it up as we go along, not because we lack expertise or planning skills, but because that is the nature of reality. Reality changes shape and meaning because of our activity."*