# Unstable, Impermanent and Unexpected

Increasingly the world environment is becoming more uncertain, volatile and turbulent. There is uncertainty about the future, but it is filled with probabilities and possibilities/opportunities. As a result, stability is no longer the perceived norm, yet we still crave stability, ie

- stable family

- stable job

- stable personality

- stable job history

- stable economic growth

- stable organisation

- stable political system

- stable currency

(source: Hilary Langford et al, 1997)

Impermanence (part of Buddhist philosophy) explains the lack of stability and uncertainty about the future

"...everything changes. It's important to look at impermanence as a fact of life. You bring discomfort and unhappiness if you try to hold onto something in a changing world..."

Ross Mackay as quoted by Susan Owen, 2001

"we are the temporary dwellers here. We try to build certainty into an impermanent world through financial security, approval, our bodies, our relevance. At the heart of it, is to get comfy..."

Graham McCann as quoted by Susan Owen, 2001

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Even though we live in an unpredictable, ever-changing world, most organisations and staff work on false assumptions based on a secure and stable environment. The challenge is to better recognise and manage the unpredictable - not to simplify and streamline. An organisation is not a "black and white matter" but a fluid entity. One of the keys is the sensitivity or mindfulness that staff are trained to have to identify the earliest signs that some kind of change or danger is approaching. Most organisations are under the illusion that they know what is going to happen next (including people's behaviour). They ignore the possibility that something unexpected may happen and that decisions can have unintended consequences. Everyday problems escalate to disaster status very quickly when people do not respond appropriately to incredibly weak warning signs. Successful organisations are

"...able to detect incredibly weak warning signs and then take strong, decisive action..."

Karl E Weick as quoted by Diane L Coutu, 2003

Furthermore, Weick states that by being aware and recognising the unexpected, they are linked in a need to be preoccupied with failure, committed to resilience and sensitive to operations; with managers being focused on the frontline, ie customers

"...the greater the repertoire of responses you have on your team, the more things you can do. And ultimately, the more ready you are to deal with reality, the more you can acknowledge its complexity..."

Karl E Weick as quoted by Diane L Coutu, 2003