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Finnish entrepreneur Pekka Viljakainen would be considered as successful by most measures. At only 38 years of age, he has managed a staff of 8,000 across 20 countries from Munich. His information technology (IT) consultancy, Oy Visual Systems, had merged with Tieto, another European IT firm, and Viljakainen was made executive vice-president.

Unlike most people, Viljakainen got into business very early in life. By the time he was 14, the self-confessed overweight, zit-faced boy was already training people to use technology. It was his way of getting other people's attention. He even bought a 1969 Volvo and hired a chauffeur to drive him to his business appointments.

Given his extensive business knowledge and technological savvy, one would think that Viljakainen's new book, "*No Fear: Business Leadership in the Age of Digital Cowboys (http://nofear-community.com/intro.php)*", would make for fascinating reading. The book – written in collaboration with eight others, including a Russian economist, and other IT professionals – is, however, not quite as engaging as one might have hoped.
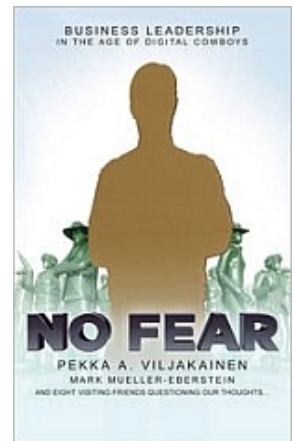
Taking its title from the name of a now bankrupt motocross apparel retailer (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No_Fear), the book argues that companies must be bold in adapting quickly to new technology trends, driven by what Viljakainen describes as the "Playstation generation" or "digital cowboys".

The father of two, a helicopter pilot, and "a nerd past his sell-by date" also says that this Playstation generation – people born after 1985 – will dramatically reshape business, not least because their "language, values, freedom and social context" differ greatly from the experiences of executives between the 70s and the 90s.

If it does not already seem terribly obvious that Viljakainen is stating the obvious that every new generation is different and less conservative than its predecessor, he continues to argue that the key to the future lies with such young innovators, who grew up wired to the internet, who disdain traditional business culture, and who understand the value of networks.

These digital cowboys are creative, unorthodox, and thrive in companies that have leaders who can inspire and empower them. They are connected, decentralized professionals who mine information from a multitude of sources to make autonomous decisions, he says rather sweepingly.

Viljakainen sees it as his mission to help train and prepare leadership capabilities for this generational shift – something that he feels he must do before his planned retirement in 2040.

But, without rigorous research, statistical data or documented interviews, 'No Fear', as the author admits, is simply a collection of anecdotes, informal interviews, and thoughts from Viljakainen's coaching sessions.

Impressive achievements and accolades aside, the book is steeped in clichéd business lingo – all to promulgate what are essentially generalisations about the future of leadership. Indeed, words like "key performance indicator", "thought-leaders", "leverage", "authenticity" and "expert network" appear early on in the book – along with a host of unedifying noun-verb mash-ups, such as "networkification"

At the heart of it is the author's belief that companies should not allow their fear of change to restrain innovation and progress. Having shared a room with his brother in his childhood, young Viljakainen was inspired by his brother's poster of motocross apparel retailer. He would stare at the words, No Fear, every night as he fell asleep – a habit that he claims, has had a profound influence on his take on leadership.

A willingness to deal with the fear of change, transparency and honesty are some of the crucial traits required of leaders in managing younger, tech-savvy colleagues, he wrote. It is also important to give them the space to network and collaborate on projects without bureaucratic obstacles.

Referring to Alexander the Great, Viljakainen adds that a leader's most important task "is to be where the battle rages – in the middle of the throng consisting of the troops, the customers and the competition."

"Many good organizations come to a point where protecting the status quo for the leading individuals becomes the main motivation and reward. Taking risks and failing are more frightening for those who are supposed to lead the troops... Organizations that can take calculated risks, that chart new territories and take advantage of new

opportunities, are the ones that stay ahead. And they need leaders who are not afraid to fail."

Chief executives can no longer be administrative, supervisory and recruiting figureheads. Using the analogy of TV producers, Viljakainen says that leaders, like producers, are responsible for ensuring that "a team of virtuosos actually completes the production". As producers may be juggling several productions simultaneously, they have to hire associate producers without blindly delegating responsibilities. Furthermore, the producer has to understand the production from all levels.

Producers rarely produce shows identical to their previous work. Also, they are forced to rely on others and they cannot simply stick to a script. "The producer has to start training his or her own network and its central players. You have to get to know each other, communicate shared goals to everyone and learn about how the people in your network function," Viljakainen says.

"Utilising the network requires high-quality leadership, sensitivity in the front line and vision. The members of the network must be equal players and all the members must learn faster than the competition. Learning can't happen if knowledge is concealed and communication is overshadowed by a constant fear of failure." This would seem like good, albeit banal advice; that leaders who are inept at marshalling talent will surely not fare well in the long term.

However, beyond new talent acquisition, the book does not go into how companies can help existing staff learn better or faster than their rivals. Instead, it goes: "You must pick the brightest pearls in the same way the maestro brought together a group of virtuosi to work as a single, productive team. The shiniest pearl is surely the leader's own vision of the direction in which a product, service or innovation is heading."

To put it simply, talent management has never been more important for business success. 'No Fear' tells this in ways that seem longer than necessary.

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