

DYNAMIC STABILITY

When so many things are accelerating at once, it's easy to feel like you're in a kayak in rushing white water, being carried along by the current at a faster and faster clip. In such conditions, there is an almost irresistible temptation to do the instinctive thing—but the wrong thing: stick your paddle in the water to try to slow down.

“Why ‘Keep Your Paddle in the Water’ Is Bad Advice for Beginners.” Have you ever stopped to consider what the phrase “keep your paddle in the water” actually means? If you did you wouldn't ever recommend it to a beginner whitewater paddler. The paddlers and instructors who give this advice are well intended and what they are really expressing is: “Keep paddling to maintain your stability through rapids.” When beginners hear “keep your paddle in the water,” they end up doing a bad version of a rudder dragging their paddle in the water back by their stern while using their blade to steer. This is a really bad position to be in ... To enhance stability in rapids it's important to move as fast or faster than the current. Every time you rudder or drag your paddle in the water to steer you lose momentum and that makes you more vulnerable to flipping over.

The only way to thrive is by maintaining dynamic stability—[a] bike-riding trick ...But what is the political and social equivalent of paddling as fast as the water or maintaining dynamic stability? It's innovation in everything other than technology. It is reimagining and redesigning your society's workplace, politics, geopolitics, ethics, and communities—in ways that will enable more citizens on more days in more ways to keep pace with how these accelerations are reshaping their lives and generate more stability as we shoot through these rapids.

It will take workplace innovation to identify exactly what humans can do better than machines and better with machines and increasingly train people for those roles. It will take geopolitical innovation to figure out how we collectively manage a world where the power of one, the power of machines, the power of flows, and the power of many are collapsing weak states, super-empowering breakers, and stressing strong states. It will take political innovation to adjust our traditional left-right party platforms, born to respond to the Industrial Revolution, the New Deal, and the Cold War, to meet the new demands for societal resilience in the age of the three great accelerations. It will take moral innovation—to reimagine how we scale sustainable values to everyone we possibly can when the power of one and the power of machines become so amplified that human beings become almost godlike. And, finally, it will take societal innovation, learning to build new social contracts, lifelong learning opportunities, and expanded public-private partnerships, to anchor and propel more diverse populations and build more healthy communities.

This is a full-on societal reinvention challenge.

It is time to redouble our efforts to close that anxiety gap with imagination and innovation and not scare tactics and simplistic solutions that will not work.

The last thing we want is for everyone to stick their paddles in the white water to slow down. That is exactly how you destabilize a kayak and a country.