MOBTS 50th Annual Conference

University of Jacksonville

June 6-9, 2023

**Minding Our Teaching Practice Using Peter Vaill’s Conjectures**

A Professional Development Workshop

**Abstract**

We concentrate on preparing our learners to be effectively practicing managerial leaders in these times of turbulence and destabilizing institutional change. Yet, what about ourselves? We are being tossed about in the same “Permanent White Water” that Peter Vaill famously predicted for managers nearly forty years ago. This workshop turns our attention to our own OB teaching practice - our chosen way of being in this world. Vaill generated 32 conjectures on the universal nature of Practice. They are used in this workshop to understand better and appreciate the *practice* that keeps us teaching regardless of complex conditions and challenges.

Key Words: Theory-Practice Teaching Change

**Introduction**

I created this workshop for our MOBTS 50th anniversary recognizing my own 50+ year OB teaching practice, honored by this Society with the David L. Bradford Outstanding Educator Award, succeeded in a seemingly ancient context of stable academe and substantially accepted theoretical material. Peter Vaill, another Bradford honoree, and I retired long before the Pandemic upended the faculty way of life in which both of us once thrived. Teaching was our *calling.* This workshop is for those still feeling the pull of this calling, countered by unprecedented pressures to change in our workplaces.

Fortunately for my workshop participants, Peter and I collaborated to reveal what we think about the working nature of our OB teaching practice -all practices, for that matter. Unfortunately, he passed away in March 2020, leaving me the honor of co-authoring and publishing Peter Vaill’s last book. Now, *On Practice as a Way of Being: Peter Vaill’s Conjectures on Why Your Practice Matters* provides an encouraging basis for optimism.

Each of our thirty-two Conjectures opens a fruitful conversation about how our practice works on us while we are working on teaching others. They stem from Vaill’s original way of thinking about Practice. **“Practice is the conscious ability, fairly consistently, to produce intended results, and to do so across a range of circumstances, and to do so while growing and changing oneself to meet the changing circumstances in which one’s practice exists.The keyword in this definition is “conscious.” Practice is not random or casual behavior. It is not “on impulse.” It is mindful. Practice is, moreover, an intentional, gratifying way of being.** Accordingly,we will shift to a Practice state of mind, apply a selection of the Vaill Conjectures to the workshop, and co-initiate ideas for fortifying our signature teaching practices. Participants will journey through this Conference and beyond as encouraged teachers - ‘white water’ teachers preparing ‘white water’ learners.

**Learning Objectives, Engagement, and Takeaways**

Participants will complete this highly interactive workshop:

1. Resolved to make a continuing study of their emerging teaching practice, recognized as the principal vessel for sustaining personal and professional well-being;
2. Inspired to carry on the process of Vaill-Fearon’s conjecturing on the ineffable nature of Practice, its meaning to oneself, students, and Management practitioners under study.
3. Now conversing with their M&OB colleagues about Peter Vaill’s question, “We know Theory, but do we know Practice?”.

**PDW Overview**

Do we know Practice? This is the open question informing our 75-minute workshop. Accordingly, participants act as Practice Search Parties of two or three, tracking, discovering, and reporting essential teaching meanings taken from several of the 32 Vaill Conjectures. The search ground is the digital Vaill-Fearon Book *On Practice as a Way of Being: Peter Vaill’s Conjectures on Why Your Practice Matters*. Their digital Conjecture  ‘quarries’ are tracked to their phones, pads, or laptops. They will have temporary access to the book, then the option of a discounted purchase. This Practice Search finds and creates keys to understanding Practice to unlock endless self-discoveries of one’s teaching nature. The timing is as follows:

1. (15 minutes) Search Parties (triads) are organized and introduced to the elusive quarry - the nature of their teaching practice. Each party has three Vaill Conjectures. Their purpose is to find the keys to changing and adapting oneself and what one does.
2. (40 minutes) Search Parties examine the Conjectures found at their table, discussing what each reveals and illuminates the best ways of being OB teachers that can be reinforced or revised in the face of mounting collegiate White Waters. Parties create their own “Practice is” conjectures, building from what Vaill gave them.
3. (20 minutes) Search Parties return to base to share findings and address the prime workshop question, “Do we know Practice? What are newly discovered keys to Practice change?

 References

Vaill, PB & Fearon, DS. On Practice as a Way of Being: Peter Vaill’s Conjectures on Why Your Practice Matters. Perrysburg (OH):@myLibrary.world