

Uncertainty Deconstructed, by Bruce Garvey

Getting to grips with a universal decision-making problem

For anyone involved in planning and decision-taking, combatting risk and uncertainty is a major part of the job. In this refreshing analysis Bruce Garvey argues that uncertainty often reveals lack of foresight and imagination, as well as reluctance to think the unthinkable and be ready to deal with it.

The challenge for politicians, corporates, strategists and policy makers across the private and public sectors is to recognise that uncertainty is about exploring the possible, not the impossible. This is especially relevant in a world complicated by pandemic, digital change, social and political unrest.

The term “unknown–unknowns” is often used to excuse decision makers from facing the challenge of grappling with uncertainty. “We could not have seen it coming” is no defence. Yet few uncertain events fall into this category. Most future uncertainties are “known-unknowns”. There may have been good thinking based on experience and circumstances, but the prime culprits for wrong outcomes are poor insight and poor foresight. Reliance on accepted decision models, and unwillingness to consider alternative or challenging options, limit thinking and clarity of analysis.

Most situations are behavioural, so reliance on conventional metrics and models is not enough. A diversified creative and psychological approach is required. The impact of risk can be mitigated by re-evaluating uncertainty and then planning for contingencies. The enemy of decision making is not uncertainty but lack of imagination when visualising the future.

To understand uncertainty, it needs to be deconstructed. The main questions are - What are the main elements in the conditions which create uncertainty? What scenarios can be used to explore uncertainty? What behavioural factors should be considered in analysing human responses to uncertainty? Anyone making decisions under uncertainty will find this book a useful guide.

*Publisher: Springer, £64.99 For information Email – garvey@strategyforesight.org
Dr Bruce Garvey has 40 years' international business experience. Based also on his research at Imperial College London, he advises organisations facing high levels of uncertainty on their decisions affecting technology, innovation, futures and systems. He brings fresh thinking, clarity and practical solutions to a universal problem.*

UNCERTAINTY DECONSTRUCTED by BRUCE GARVEY – REVIEWS

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A Practical Guide

This book performs a great service for consultants, planners and those interested about the future. Through a comprehensive survey of methods and techniques, it provides a practical guide to unpacking the uncertainty besetting all human endeavour. Readers applying the book's lessons may find themselves saying "if only we'd known..." less frequently.

Nick Bush

Director - CMCE (Centre for Management Consulting Excellence)

Should be a Standard Text

Academic literature and practical guides to uncertainty management are disparate: this edition brings it all together. Garvey describes critical dimensions of uncertainty, before examining scenarios and behavioural aspects, the latter often neglected. This well-structured, engagingly written guide should serve as a standard text for students, academics and practitioners across policy making, business and industry.

Dr Geoff Darch

Water Resources Strategy Manager, Anglian Water

Co-Founder, Analysis under Uncertainty for Decision-Makers (AU4DM) Network

A Corrective to False Thinking

This is a valuable companion volume to Kay and King's "Radical Uncertainty" - and is a necessary corrective to disciplines such as economics which achieve a false sense of certainty by creating highly plausible but unreliable simplifications of things through over generalisation - leading to simplistic proposals for interventions which can only rightly be judged through a lens of complexity and probability.

Rory Sutherland

Vice Chairman, Ogilvy Group

Insightful Analysis

Here is a most insightful book, which holistically examines the 'world of uncertainty', particularly as it impacts on sense- to decision-making processes for many different stakeholders. Uncertainty can demonstrably be negotiated much more effectively. Both scholars and practitioners, strategists to operators, soon gain from reading.

*Adam D.M. Svendsen, PhD, International Intelligence & Defence Strategist,
Researcher, Analyst, Educator & Consultant*