

The White Raven.

“WHAT COLOR IS A RAVEN?”

Most of us would say it's black.”

How do we know this? We know from experience. In fact, we've all seen a few ravens in our lives and they've **all** been black. So, given probability mathematics, the probability that the next raven we'll see is black is 01.

That's how probability math works. Given (B), in this case, that every raven we've ever seen has been black, the next raven will not likely be white (A). It's the simple model for calculating probability; you take what you know, divide it by what you expect and come up with something we call probability. Then we act like we've done our due diligence. Well, we can just throw that old math out the window. It will not work anymore.

The White Raven is an anomaly, an asymmetric threat, the unthinkable. It's an outlier, beyond statistical probability. It is at the core of why we underestimate and overreact. It is terror brought by human agency or natural catastrophe. The White Raven concept is at the center of popular management titles like The Black Swan, by Nassim Nicholas Taleb.

The bottom line is we just can't predict what's going to happen next no matter how hard we try. When we think about white ravens, we're thinking about things we've never seen before. Things like planes flying into the side of buildings. Things like tidal waves crashing on top of tourists and trashing hotels on a lazy tropical coastline. How many times has that happened before? Zero. What was the expected probability? Zero.

What did they say after it happened? Well, the 911 panel report said, **“There was a failure of imagination...”** to prepare for this type of an event. Some react with terror, some react in fear, still others; amazingly, don't react at all. Because this one thing, this one horrible thing, lulls them into complacency, making them believe it will never happen again. Like earthquakes in California, one small tremor somehow lowers the probability of the “big one” coming soon.

It doesn't matter if we think the world is flat, sideways, green, networked or more complex. It doesn't matter if we have read one of the 40,000 books published this year alone (according to the Library of Congress) on all of this massive change taking place around us. We can argue the benefits of each

on their own merit. Most of those authors, like us, would agree that we are not striking out to predict anything at all, just to bring the world's attention to that which is possible.



In a world where a failure of imagination has allowed us time and again to dive headlong, face first and blinded into tragedy, it seems to us that contemplating possibility has much more utility than simply sticking our head in the sand and ignoring the white raven which soars above us. Not just in a risk assessment, not just in a sales brochure, not just in a Business Impact Analysis. The point of all hazards planning is to consider what is possible **along** with what's probable and plan accordingly. If we don't consider what's possible when planning for disaster recovery and business continuity, we don't understand risk at all.

“We have no idea now, of who or what the inhabitants of our future might be. In that sense, we have no future. Not in the sense that our Grandparent's had a future, or thought they did. Fully imagined cultural futures were the luxury of another day, one in which 'now' was of some greater duration. For us, of course, things can change so abruptly, so violently, so profoundly, that futures like our Grandparent's have insufficient 'now' to stand on. We have no future because our present is too volatile. We have only risk management. The spinning of a given moment's scenarios. Pattern Recognition.”

- Hubbard Bigend, character from William Gibson's “Pattern Recognition”

Re:Think...

how we plan for, prepare for, and respond to the disasters of the future.

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