

BOOK REVIEW

CHRIS PEACE

“Deciding: A guide to even better decision-making”

by Roger Estall and Grant Purdy

Einstein is credited with saying “If you can’t explain it simply, you don’t understand it well enough”. In this slim, self-published paperback book Roger and Grant succeed in explaining a great deal very simply. They understand the importance of the “purpose” of an organisation, and of uncertainty and assumptions in effective decision making.

Roger and Grant are friends and I have heard them talking about their beliefs for some years but, as expressed in Deciding, their ideas have extra force and conviction. In eight brief chapters plus five appendices they show how better decisions can be made using a few key principles and processes.

They strongly argue for the use of plain English and avoidance of jargon. Grant and Roger are especially averse to the words “risk” and “risk management” and related terms with a 22-page appendix on this subject, preferring to focus on the purpose of an organisation and uncertainty about achieving that purpose.

The chapter on the purpose of an organisation is key: if we don’t know what an organisation is for how can we manage uncertainties about achieving the goals? In my work as a consultant for 17 years and, more recently, academic researcher, a frequent problem was that managers did not know what the organisation was for. Whether called purposes, objectives, goals, targets or a range of other terms they boil down to what the organisation was set up to do. They are important from the governance level to the frontline of an organisation, requiring good decision making.

Deciding highlights the importance of understanding and monitoring the context in which the decision is made and any assumptions in a decision. Both should be explored and written down to help ensure they can be monitored for change.

Consultants, software package vendors, and others may dislike the book, dismissing it as simplistic. But after reading this book I will be revising the content of the two papers I teach at Victoria University of Wellington to be more focused on uncertainty and the purpose of organisations. Indeed, the book will be a set text in 2021.

I was unable to order the book via Amazon in New Zealand but Unity Books in Wellington was able to access it from the UK for \$34.

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CHRIS PEACE

After graduation in 1974 Chris worked in a regulatory role in the UK before moving to New Zealand in 1980. Here he changed careers and worked in risk management before returning to the UK in 1990 where he continued to work in risk management and studied for an MSc in risk management and safety technology.

Returning to New Zealand in 1995, Chris continued to work in risk management before joining the Natural Gas Corporation in 2000 as the corporate Risk Manager. In 2003 he left NGC and established Risk Management Ltd as an evidence-based risk management consultancy. From 2005-2012 Chris taught risk management at Massey University and then moved to Victoria University to research 'The effectiveness of risk assessments'; for his PhD, graduating in 2019.