

Disastrous Decisions

Disastrous High-Tech Decision Making Averting Catastrophe Frederick F. Lighthall Cass R. Sunstein

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Disastrous high tech decision making from disasters to safety offers new insights for scholars studying management decision making cognition in the wild and safety in the context of imperatives to continue operations this book takes you inside the deliberations and action that have produced high tech disasters in safetycritical enterprises from primary data and analyses never before considered in scholarly assessments of the challenger disaster frederick f lighthall professor emeritus at the university of chicago applies the insights of macroergonomics social psychology naturalistic decision making and legal argumentation to this expanded set of documents and data he argues that the challenger case represents a prototype of decision making that arises whenever a possibly threatening change in operating conditions becomes evident in this situation inevitable in boundarypushing enterprises four generic decision making pitfalls await engineers and managers who must decide whether continuing to operate is safe or dangerous these four decision making vulnerabilities are also evident lighthall argues in the decision situations of other high tech disasters both similar the columbia shuttle and dissimilar deepwater horizon oil spill disaster in part i of the book lighthall traces decision participants chart by chart deliberations and argument about whether proceeding with the challenger s launch would be dangerous part ii analyzes from contrasting perspectives the dynamics revealed in the narrative lighthall s analysis ends by examining the demanding changes in outlook knowledge disciplines and learning processes required for safety to compete with the production imperatives of high tech enterprises operating in unforgiving environments this book is a must read both for students of management and of engineering who may find themselves working in these high tech settings and for managers and engineers who now work in these settings

the new york times bestselling author of nudge and the world according to star wars examines how governments handle worst case scenarios the world is increasingly confronted with new challenges related to climate change globalization disease and technology governments are faced with having to decide how much risk is worth taking how much destruction and death can be tolerated and how much money should be invested in the hopes of avoiding catastrophe lacking full information should decision makers focus on avoiding the most catastrophic outcomes when should extreme measures be taken to prevent as much destruction as possible averting

catastrophe explores how governments ought to make decisions in times of imminent disaster. Cass R. Sunstein argues that using the maximin rule, which calls for choosing the approach that eliminates the worst of the worst case scenarios, may be necessary when public officials lack important information and when the worst case scenario is too disastrous to contemplate. He underscores this argument by emphasizing the reality of Knightian uncertainty found in circumstances in which it is not possible to assign probabilities to various outcomes. Sunstein brings foundational issues in decision theory in close contact with real problems in regulation, law, and daily life and considers other potential future risks at once. An approachable introduction to decision theory and a provocative argument for how governments ought to handle risk, averting catastrophe offers a definitive path forward in a world rife with uncertainty.

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