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# Think Again: Why Good Leaders Make Bad Decisions and How to Keep It from Happening to You

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improved by taking full advantage of the computer and telecommunications advances made over the last half-century. Friedman challenges NWCW proponents by redefining their central arguments about the relationship between nodes and networks. In effect, he argues that the “picture” is more important than the network itself for conducting military operations. The network serves the development of ever more complex and, presumably, accurate “pictures” available to operators and analysts.

If I have a problem with Friedman, it is with his definition and explanation of network-centric warfare, at least the variant espoused by Vice Admiral Cebrowski. (Full disclosure: Vice Admiral Cebrowski was the president of the Naval War College when I was hired there, and I enjoyed more than a few hours hashing out the intricacies of network-centric warfare in his presence.) I do not agree that picture-centric warfare is equivalent to network-centric warfare: the “pictures” highlighted by Friedman constitute only one dimension (albeit an important one) of the theory and practice of network-centric warfare. Another relatively minor quibble is that although the book’s title refers to three world wars, and indeed the narrative contains analysis and examples from all three—World War I, World War II, and the Cold War—this is somewhat misleading. As the table of contents suggests, the real structure underlying the work is instead three *technological eras*, those associated with radios, radar, and computers.

*Network-centric Warfare* is not an easy read. It is filled with jargon and focuses

largely on relatively obscure developments. It is not a popular history or an anecdote-filled volume designed to thrill devotees of warfare. It lists nearly fourteen pages of acronyms!

These complaints aside, this book is worth buying, reading, and studying. It is a most useful corrective to histories focusing on specific wars, campaigns, battles, personalities, or weapons systems.

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Finkelstein, Sydney, Jo Whitehead, and Andrew Campbell. *Think Again: Why Good Leaders Make Bad Decisions and How to Keep It from Happening to You*. Boston: Harvard Business School, 2008. 204pp. \$27.95

Bad decisions are common, but bad decisions by good leaders are perplexing. This book delves into the root causes of faulty decisions made by leaders who should have known better. The reader will be intrigued by the cognitive dynamics underlying defective decisions. Neuroscience is making aspects of traditional wisdom about decision making obsolete. It turns out that rational decision making is not really all that rational.

The book’s lead author, Sydney Finkelstein, teaches at Tuck School of Business, Dartmouth, and has written extensively on leadership. His coauthors both earned their MBAs at Harvard and teach at the Strategic Management Center at Ashridge Business School, outside London. Finkelstein also authored *Why Smart Executives Fail*.

The authors identify two common components in the flawed decisions they studied: judgment error and the absence of a corrective process. One example given is the case of Matthew Broderick, a retired Marine Corps general who was a seasoned decision maker in the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Operations Center during Hurricane Katrina. His experience had taught him that initial reports from a crisis area are often exaggerated and inaccurate. Twelve hours after the hurricane hit New Orleans, Broderick received conflicting information about breached levees and extensive flooding. His rational analysis was that the situation was not dire, and he went home. By the following morning, the magnitude of the catastrophe was unequivocal.

Broderick was a competent leader with proven crisis experience, so why did he assign great validity to one source of information while dismissing data from other credible sources? The authors contend that his misjudgment resulted from two cognitive errors: he incorrectly assumed that the Katrina situation "pattern-matched" his prior crisis experiences; and he exacerbated the error by "emotionally tagging" the information from his preferred source, the Army Corps of Engineers. Pattern recognition and emotional tagging are powerful subconscious influences on decision making.

Based on the authors' research, four "red flag conditions" are evident in defective decisions: misleading experiences, misleading prejudices, inappropriate self-interest, and inappropriate attachments. A red-flag condition forecasts vulnerability to cognitive bias. Notable examples of

flawed decisions made by exceptional military, business, and government leaders richly illustrate the latent peril in red-flag conditions.

The elements at play are subtle and subconscious. For example, the persistent tug of personal self-interest is hard to detect, because a self-serving bias is implicitly acceptable in our culture. Self-interest becomes inappropriate when it is unacknowledged and there is no self-awareness. It corrosively distorts the decision process. The authors' research found that inappropriate self-interest contributed to flawed strategic decisions in more than two-thirds of their research cases.

The book is repetitive at times, but that minor distraction is more than offset by its insightful advice and practical decision-process safeguards. The authors refer extensively to academic cognitive research and challenge the invincibility of "rational and analytic" decision making, especially for leaders in complex situations where information is ambiguous.

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Horner, Charles. *Rising China and Its Postmodern Fate: Memories of Empire in a New Global Context*. Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 2009. 224pp. \$34.95

This book connects China's past, present, and future and places them in a larger, evolving context. Horner's work is nothing short of a tour de force of world intellectual history as projected and contested on the canvas that is China. Eloquent and engaging, it is pointed without being overly