Book Description

Brave New Worldview
The Way to Infinite Possibilities in the 21st Century
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Your ideas [will] help to shatter a lot of orthodoxies. I honestly believe you have a point of view about the future of management and business that is more radical and more coherent than just about anyone else I’ve talked with.


In the wake of the Crash of 2008 a flood of explanations for why it happened inundated the media landscape. Many blamed government for taking its eye off the regulatory ball. The inevitable outcome of a bubble, said others. One of the most commonly cited reasons was predatory subprime lending. Bloggers by the thousands fingered greed as the primary cause.

But almost no one got it right. To do so requires a journey back in time to the 18th Century. Isaac Newton bears a greater responsibility for the Crash of 2008 than all the morally defective executives and greedy investors in the country combined. He inspired the worldview that catalyzed the Crash. When this worldview emerged in the 18th Century it liberated the human mind from the narrowing perspectives of the Church. But it also limited how much people could see beyond what can be measured.

Classic science is a closed system, always pointed toward a reductionist conclusion. Truth is defined solely by what is measurable. It is revealed by stripping away everything that appears irrelevant to the investigation at hand. Nuances, ambiguities, and discontinuities have no place in this kind of science.

Uncertainty is the bane of classical science. Yet, with the development of quantum science in the 20th Century we learned that the work of nature begins where uncertainty is the rule.

In clinging to the false comfort of Newtonian certainty, we overlook the fact that where uncertainty prevails possibilities are infinite. Three and a half billion years of evolving life on earth bear out that point. The
first living cell on earth opened a doorway to unlimited possibilities for all the cells that followed. You and I are each an expression of that potential. A worldview that that embraces this idea will open the ready mind to virtually limitless possibilities. It is with that idea in mind that this book is written.

The world is in desperate need of a new worldview that authentically represents reality. The Newtonian worldview falls short of that because it pointedly disregards the best things about being human. These include discovery through unconventional pathways, trusting your gut, appreciating failure as your greatest teacher, and having a worldview that keeps you centered on what really counts most in life: your relationships with your fellow beings, nature and the Cosmos, and the purposes you fulfill in honoring those relationships.

Worldviews play a decisive role in how we make sense of all things in life and death. Science writer Danah Zohar nicely captures the meaning of worldview in calling it “A theme which integrates the sense of self, the sense of self and others, and the sense of how these relate to the wider world – to Nature and other creatures, to the environment as a whole, to the planet, the universe, and ultimately to God – to some overall purpose and direction.”

Isaac Newton gave us a scientific theme to integrate our sense of self into the cosmic scheme of things. By defining several basic laws of Nature he took much of the mystery out of ecclesiastical explanations of God’s universe.

Newton saw the universe as a giant clockwork mechanism, all parts of which perform as predicted by natural law. This idea was highly seductive to 18th Century philosophers. They extended it beyond the natural world to include events caused by man. Some said that with enough information in hand nothing was beyond predictability. Newton had introduced them to the power of gods. What greater power could there be on this earth than the power to predict the future?

Heady with this enlarging sense of power, philosophers laid down the first planks of economics. They considered the twists and turns of markets to be as knowable in advance as the movements of celestial bodies. That view overshadows our lives today our behavior in the marketplace. Economists’ forlorn longing for Newtonian certainty has tricked them into regarding people as virtual automatons acting predictably rationally on their own behalf in the marketplace.
The forces that brought on the Crash of 2008 are rooted in 18th century notions of predictability. Thinking like 18th Century philosophers, many on Wall Street regard predictions of market outcomes as primarily a computational process. They believe that sophisticated computer models can remove nearly all uncertainty from predictions. Or so it was that many thought until the fall of 2008.

*Brave New Worldview* builds a solid case for the contention that most companies today are seriously limited by a worldview that reflects the perspectives of the 18th world. However, no more than a car can be built with the tools and skills of a 18th century carriage maker can the major challenges facing companies in the 21st Century be solved within the cognitive limits of a worldview formed in the 18th century.

*Brave New Worldview* shows why the worldview that grew out of Newtonian science is largely irrelevant today. Worse, it supports forms of organizational sociology that inhibit innovation, quickness of response to changing conditions and employees’ committed involvement. Survival without those values in place is becoming increasingly difficult.

*Brave New Worldview* challenges readers to change the lens through which they view themselves, the world, and the organizations they manage and work for. In that sense, this is more a *how to see* than a *how to do* it book though it shows the way with uplifting clarity to a brighter future for those who are ready to change the way they see life.

Most books in business school libraries today, belong to another era ruled by mechanistic definitions of companies, markets and people. Contemporary challenges facing business can be better met through the lens of a worldview that is *organic* and reflects the real world. This is what *Brave New Worldview* is about.

In the course of co-authoring an earlier book, *Firms of Endearment* (Wharton 2007), I was struck by how differently the CEOs we profiled viewed their companies and place in society. They subscribed to what we called *ironic management*. They are prone to actions that by conventional reasoning should produce unwanted results yet often are ironically successful. Though working in the same business landscapes as competing CEOs they see things other CEOs don’t. Theirs is a different cognitive lens. It is the cognitive lens of an *organic* worldview –the inevitable successor to the mechanistic Newtonian worldview.
The neatly predictable world of business past no longer exists. Companies that remain organized around such worldview face extinction. Survival and growth in the 21st century is more certain for companies that are guided by the organic structures of natural ecosystems. *Brave New Worldview* is a roadmap to a future of limitless potential based on the principals by which nature has been operating for three and a half billion years.