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| **Complex Contexts: The Domain of Emergence****Cynefin framework**In a complicated context, at least one right answer exists. In a complex context, however, right answers can’t be ferreted out. It’s like the difference between, say, a Ferrari and the Brazilian rainforest. Ferraris are complicated machines, but an expert mechanic can take one apart and reassemble it without changing a thing. The car is static, and the whole is the sum of its parts. The rainforest, on the other hand, is in constant flux—a species becomes extinct, weather patterns change, an agricultural project reroutes a water source—and the whole is far more than the sum of its parts. This is the realm of “unknown unknowns,” and it is the domain to which much of contemporary business has shifted. | **Complicated Contexts: The Domain of Experts**Complicated contexts, unlike simple ones, may contain multiple right answers, and though there is a clear relationship between cause and effect, not everyone can see it. This is the realm of “known unknowns.” While leaders in a simple context must sense, categorize, and respond to a situation, those in a complicated context must sense, *analyze*, and respond. This approach is not easy and often requires expertise: A motorist may know that something is wrong with his car because the engine is knocking, but he has to take it to a mechanic to diagnose the problem. |
| **Chaotic Contexts: The Domain of Rapid Response**In a chaotic context, searching for right answers would be pointless: The relationships between cause and effect are impossible to determine because they shift constantly and no manageable patterns exist—only turbulence. This is the realm of unknowables. The events of September 11, 2001, fall into this category. In the chaotic domain, a leader’s immediate job is not to discover patterns but to stanch the bleeding. A leader must first *act* to establish order, then sense where stability is present and from where it is absent, and then respond by working to transform the situation from chaos to complexity, where the identification of emerging patterns can both help prevent future crises and discern new opportunities. Communication of the most direct top-down or broadcast kind is imperative; there’s simply no time to ask for input.**From “A Leader’s Framework for Decision Making”** byDavid J. Snowden & Mary E. Boone, Harvard Business Review (Nov 2007) | **Simple Contexts: The Domain of Best Practice**Simple contexts are characterized by stability and clear cause-and-effect relationships that are easily discernible by everyone. Often, the right answer is self-evident and undisputed. In this realm of “known knowns,” decisions are unquestioned because all parties share an understanding. Areas that are little subject to change, such as problems with order processing and fulfillment, usually belong here. |