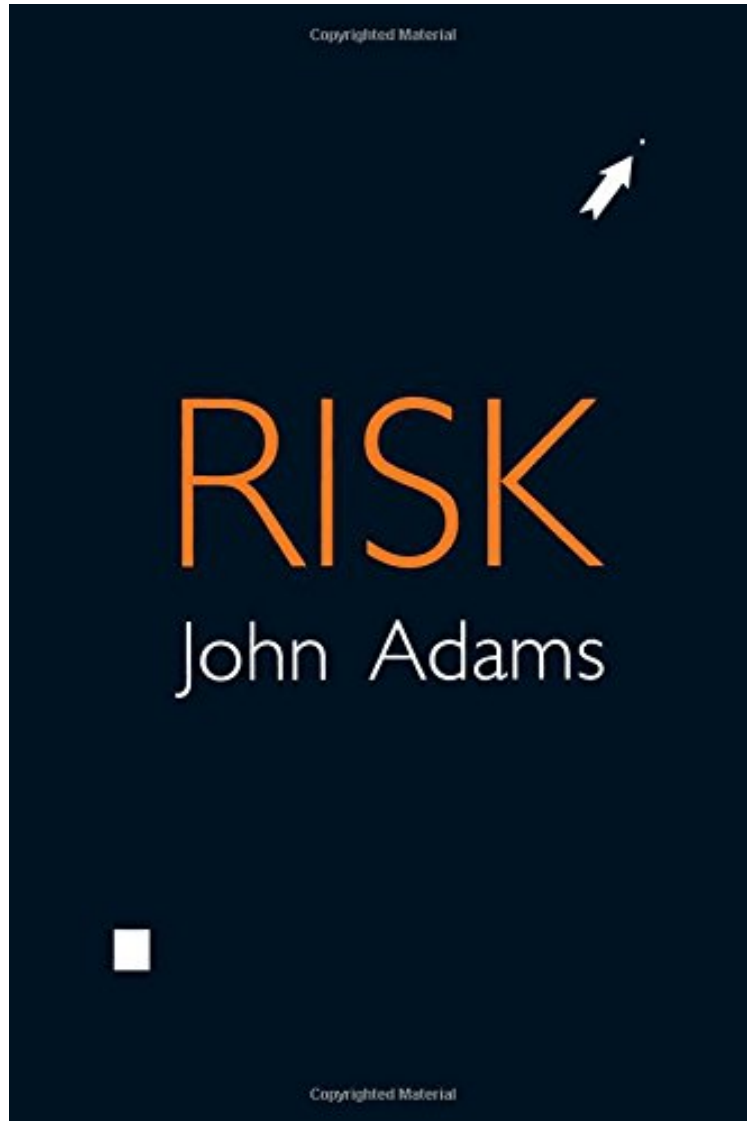


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Risk

John Adams

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John Adams : Risk before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Risk:

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Should be mandatroy reading in collegeBy Beaumont VanceJohn Adams is clearly one of the leading thinkers not only regarding Risk Management, but also decision-making where risk is involved. If you are expecting a book that limits itself to accident prevention and the purchase of insurance, you will be diligently suprised to find that Adams provides universal frameworks that apply to the entire universe of risk. Nor is this merely an ivory tower philosophical romp. Adams applies his frameworks to everything from the value of

infant car seats to global warming to "zero accident" policies in the workplace and does so with wit and empirical data. His conclusions are often very counterintuitive, but he provides the data to back up his conclusions, often with surprising results (for example, that mandatory infant car seats was correlated with an increase in infant deaths in auto accidents and that seat belt laws did not decrease injuries in auto accidents). The reader cannot help but benefit from Adam's wisdom, and he will enjoy the experience as well. The book is written so well that I finished it with sadness; I was hoping that it would go on for at least another 100 pages. Having read scores of risk related articles and books, I can attest to the rarity of this feeling--I am usually begging for the end at about page 10. It takes great ideas and a masterful pen to achieve this, and Adams has both in abundance. If you are in the risk or safety professions (or work in the political realm) this book is required reading. 31 of 31 people found the following review helpful. as gripping as a Grisham

By RootlessAgrarian

There are few works of nonfiction which I have been inspired to read in one sitting. Adams' *Risk* is one of those few. It's more than merely accessible: it's fascinating. The writing is more than merely competent: it's enjoyable. Like the best Grisham novels, *Risk* tells a tale of danger, skulduggery, bureaucracy, wrongful death, human nature, research, reasoning, the revelation and concealment of evidence, and the overturning of conventional beliefs and outcomes. Adams opens for the lay reader a window into the jargon-laden field of risk assessment and risk management. He brings to the table two qualities usually firmly segregated in the literature: a solid, rationalist facility with the traditional tools of the trade (scientific method, mathematics, statistics, data visualization), and an honest and humane assessment of the incalculable and the social (human variability, social equity, adaptive feedback, and chaotic systems). Adams' work is brilliantly contrarian, neither eccentric nor slipshod. He challenges the conventional dogma of regulatory safety authorities the world over; he cites verifiable figures from reputable sources to show that the authoritarian approach to risk management has not lived up to its overconfident initial promises. Further, he documents specific cases in which this failure has been denied and concealed, rather than admitted, confronted and used as a springboard to new approaches and more creative thinking. Adams' particular field of expertise is road/traffic safety, which he had studied for some 15 years at the time of writing. He uses several examples from this realm in the book. He recounts the peculiar history, for example, of mandatory seat belt legislation. Of the eighty principalities and regions which enacted such laws, over twenty years later only one (the UK) offers time-series data which support the initial claims for national traffic fatality reduction. Yet throughout the industrial world, the axiom "seatbelts save lives" is just that -- axiomatic. The average reader may find this story very disturbing; the beneficial result of seatbelt legislation is almost a religious dogma for residents of the industrial West. Yet it is hard to dismiss Adams' sober collection and presentation of data. His numbers are not from outlaw or revisionist sources; they are official statistics from the same countries which passed the laws. It's obvious (and crash tests demonstrate) that seatbelt-type restraints must prevent vehicle occupants from rattling around inside a car during a crash, and thereby mitigate injury and/or fatality. Adams asks, therefore, how it can possibly happen that there were not sudden, dramatic, documented reductions in total traffic fatalities for whole nations, after seatbelt laws were enforced? In answering this and other similar questions of "safety engineering" Adams introduces us to a fascinating problem in risk management theory: "risk homeostasis" or "risk compensation". Individuals, he argues, have a personal "risk thermostat", a risk level at which they are comfortable. If their sense of personal safety is enhanced by protective gear (or even by public information campaigns) then their behaviour becomes correspondingly riskier, until the "set point" of the individual risk thermostat is reached. Since the risk per individual per hour of traffic injury or fatality is very small, only a slight deviation in behaviour is necessary to raise it significantly. If a driver drives a little faster, brakes a little harder, corners a little more aggressively because of being strapped in securely, then this might easily negate (or more than negate) the risk reduction provided by the seatbelt itself. In support of this theory, Adams offers the troubling increase in pedestrian and cyclist deaths that immediately followed the UK seatbelt law. If drivers drive a little more dangerously, says Adams, it makes sense that more vulnerable road users would bear the brunt of the increased risk. Were it not for this sincere concern for social justice, Adams might easily be dismissed as yet another libertarian. Many a safety-legislation skeptic's argument begins and ends with individual rights, resistance to "nanny" legislation, etc. Adams asks a tougher question: if safety means *everyone's* safety, does traditional traffic safety engineering really work? Or does it just shuffle the risk around, making it safer to drive a car more dangerously, but imposing more risk on pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists, etc? This discussion occupies only a chapter or two of this thought-provoking book. Other chapters cover such diverse topics as: a taxonomy of personality types and their responses to risk; virtual risks versus immediate risks; and the fundamental contradictions of "cost/benefit analysis". Adams is forthright in criticizing the narrowness of the traditional highway and traffic engineers' vision. "Road safety engineers" consider their work successful if the fatality/injury rate declines on a given stretch of road. But the fatality rate may have fallen because people gave up walking or biking in that area. As long as the incident rate is low, the road is deemed "safe" -- even though residents and locals may know very well that it is dangerous, and make long detours to avoid it. Adams argues convincingly that this disconnect between people's real experience on the ground, and the abstract perceptions of planners and authorities, is a serious and intensifying problem. The ingenious adaptability of human beings to dangerous situations means that the engineers may be presented with false success (a dangerous road looks "safe" because of avoidance response) or with intractable riskiness (risk compensation defeating

imposed engineering solutions). Many of the traditionalist solutions into which we pour millions of dollars may simply not work, and the way we measure our success may be faulty as well. Risk is an excellent introduction to the challenging work of John Franklin, Mayer Hillman, Robert Davis, and other members of the "new school" of road safety analysis. It is a well-researched, well-written, and deeply provoking book. Risk should be *required* reading for all traffic engineers, police, safety analysts, city planners, parents, insurance company executives, and economists. For the reader with an open mind, Risk will raise more questions than it answers; it offers some really interesting new ways to think about and discuss risk. 17 of 17 people found the following review helpful. Great book!

By Tom N
This is an outstanding little book -- very insightful and thoroughly enjoyable. I am a pediatrician who has been involved with writing practice guidelines to prevent a very low probability but devastating outcome (brain damage following jaundice in newborns). The discussion of different types of people with different attitudes towards risk helped clarify some of the dynamics of the guideline committees I have been on. In fact, I liked the book so much I sent a copy to the head of the current committee working on these guidelines. I also like it when people question dogma, and point out ways in which our previous experience and perspectives influence the way we perceive reality. For example, the possibility that use of seat belts by drivers might shift some injuries from themselves to pedestrians and cyclists had never occurred to me. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in risk.

Thomas B. Newman,
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Risk compensation postulates that everyone has a "risk thermostat" and that safety measures that do not affect the setting of the thermostat will be circumvented by behaviour that re-establishes the level of risk with which people were originally comfortable. It explains why, for example, motorists drive faster after a bend in the road is straightened. Cultural theory explains risk-taking behaviour by the operation of cultural filters. It postulates that behaviour is governed by the probable costs and benefits of alternative courses of action which are perceived through filters formed from all the previous incidents and associations in the risk-taker's life.; "Risk" should be of interest to many readers throughout the social sciences and in the world of industry, business, engineering, finance and public administration, since it deals with a fundamental part of human behaviour that has enormous financial and economic implications.