Risk is about what is uncertain. Humans don't know the future and so the challenge for humans is to discern risk with wisdom in order to live. Real Risk, Human Discerning and Risk is Dr Long's third book in the series on risk. This book is about the attribution of risk, the realities of risk, disconnectedness from risk and the wisdom of engagement with risk. Whilst there is much written about regulation and the assessment of risk, there is precious little discussion about discerning risk. Whilst so many advocate the aversion of risk as an intelligent course of action, the reverse side of this decision advocates non-learning and the 'dumbing down' of the risk intelligence of the population.

The idea that risk can be assessed objectively ignores human subjective participation in risk. Risk is a social activity and is not independent of human bias and social arrangements. It is because risk is social and subjective that embracing risk requires social discerning and wisdom, these come through viewing risk within a community context. The more we try to regulate risk without regard to community, ethics and learning, the more we get into hot water. Two stories illustrate the problem.

In 2012 the UK HSE launched an independent panel called 'the Myth Busters Challenge Panel' (Myth Squad). One month after the establishment of the Myth Squad the media and politicians were calling for the squad to be disbanded. The problem is simply this: tackling cultural problems with bureaucratic solutions perpetuates more complex problems. This kind of thinking sees every problem as a nail and, the only solution as a hammer. In one of the first cases referred to the Myth Squad was a request for a determination whether firemen should venture in to a pond to rescue a trapped seagull. The Myth Squad reply was that it would take 5 days to deliberate on the case and provide a ruling.

In November 2013 the ACT Government in Australia introduced the idea of regulating fundraising activities by requiring 'food safety supervisors' (http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/forking-out-cash-to-supervise-kids-bbqs-dont-be-a-silly-sausage-20131104-2ww10.html). Volunteers would be required to pay $150 to be trained as a food safety advisor. Fortunately, after much community outrage the idea was dropped. Unfortunately the regulators continue to entrench the idea that risk is to be feared and only trained experts can discern and manage risk.

The fundamental proposition of this book is that people are more disconnected from risk than ever before. The best way to become educated and discerning in risk is to embrace it. Risk aversion drives risk ignorance, risk engagement drives risk intelligence and, because of this continuing risk disconnectedness people have become less discerning about risk. The problem with this trend is that it is also matched by a decline in creativity, ingenuity, adventure, learning, imagination and innovation.
PostScript - Book 4

Tackling Risk, A Field Guide to Risk Engagement

There will be a fourth book to follow in this series on risk, entitled *Tackling Risk, A Field Guide to Risk Engagement*. The book will be a practical guide to the application of the many concepts put forward in the previous three books.

The Field Guide will provide training masters and a curriculum outline with directions on how to deliver effective training in the social psychology of risk.

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Risk Makes Sense

For the Love of Zero
Real Risk
Human Discerning and Risk

Dr Robert Long
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Foreword

Risk used to be more prevalent in our society - and I would argue, more viscerally joyful than actually risky in an objective sense; the open door in the old style moving trains or ‘riding the hook’ as the old builders used to do to guide a load up a building site. Nowadays risk is seen as bad and to be eliminated, no questions asked. But I wonder if in doing so we are causing unexpected problems, one being boredom. As Victor Frankl once wrote, ‘boredom is now causing, and certainly bringing to psychiatrists, more problems to solve than distress’.

I first met Rob Long when I was director of a building company and came across a rare approach to risk that looks through the purely-numerical-analysis method to the deeper relationship we have with risk. As Rob shows, a relationship with risk is essential for our own maturation and learning. Rob constantly draws out this need we have for growth, development, challenge, adventure, learning, imagination and ultimately, meaning and fulfillment. In encouraging us to embrace risk with wisdom, he keeps the proverbial baby whilst dealing with the bathwater. Boredom is kept at bay. This needs to be celebrated.

I love adventure. For me, risk is an integral part of that adventure. Whether it’s climbing a mountain, negotiating rapids or simply arriving in a non-English speaking city with no guidebook and no itinerary, there is something compelling about the unknown. Some strange relationship between the sick feeling of fear and the joy of pushing past it. In so doing you earn something valuable. Life feels richer and more, well, real.

My cousin died at 21 in an avalanche whilst skiing in Australia’s back country. A risky, adventurous activity ended in the worst possible way. At his funeral his brother and another of my cousins decided with me to organise an adventure in his honour. Rather than shy away from risk, the rule we established for ourselves was simple: at each decision point we would take the more difficult option. That is what saw us crossing Mongolia in the middle of winter using only horses and camels, and, when the wind was up, kite-skis. That we were out of our comfort zones goes without saying. We were managing risk the entire time. The adventure made us much closer to each other and gave us newfound confidence in dealing with the unknown. In addition it was incredibly rewarding.

There is something free and soulful about the exhilaration of jumping on the back of a truck in Patagonia or jumping into the sea in Antarctica. Not necessarily safe, they are definitely enriching experiences. This quest for meaning and enrichment is deep within us. It may come from a Paleolithic need to catch the wild animal or go hungry, where Charles Darwin helped reward (via natural selection) the ones who would take as much risk as possible for success without dying (or at least not until they had sired a few kids). Whatever its origin, the word most closely associated with risk is ‘reward’. You can’t have one without the other.

In the worlds of regulation, academia and boardrooms many obsess about the numerics of risk to the detriment of a real understanding of it. Some are good at counting risk but cannot discern its true value. How can anyone know about risk if they have spent their whole existence trying to avoid it? How can one understand risk if one doesn’t take risks? The truth is, risk makes sense. In the world of risk orthodoxy the opposite is the case; one would think risk is evil, to be feared and unnecessary.

This is Rob’s third book on the theme of risk and learning. This is a book about the realities of living in a world where things go bump in the night, wheels fall off and fallible people learn from mistakes. A world where millions of Australians don’t even think twice when walking one metre from a two tonne object driven at speed by a stranger yet in their workplaces work to a regime that demands a guardrail when working at a height of more than about one metre. This muddled state is highlighted...
by Rob in his books, where an individual’s acceptance - and even thirst for - risk in his private life contrasts with a complete abhorance of risk in his public life. No wonder people are so confused and unable to discern real risk from illusions of risk.

So what will the fear of risk give us? We may get to the stage where our children won’t know how to play without a device of some kind. They may not be able to undertake an activity without the safety advice of an expert. They may not be able to have fun or adventure with just themselves and whatever is available - sticks, stones and dirt. And so, when all risk is banned, all adventure is harnessed, all safety is deified and every sharp object is wrapped in protective foam, will we know how to be truly human? As we get closer to this risk-free reality, paradoxically we will see more societal pathology. We must bravely resist this tendency.

Warren Buffet might define financial risk in the perjorative as coming from ‘not knowing what you are doing’ but more broadly the Danish theologian Søren Kierkegaard said ‘during the first period of a man’s life the greatest danger is not to take the risk’. We’ve heard enough about the negatives of risk. Let’s learn more about the necessities of it.

James Kell
Adventurer, Photographer, Thought Leader and Businessman

Special Thanks

My deepest thanks to the amazing editorial and graphical support of Pip and Craig Ashhurst, also to Justin Huehn. Craig and Pip have been great friends and fellow travellers on the journey in learning for over 20 years. Justin has been amazing in turning my ideas into graphical realities, a language I wish I was more skilled in speaking.

This book would not be possible without them. I look forward to book four that will be co-authored with Craig and will rely a great deal on his PhD research into ‘wicked problems’. Craig’s work and research on wicked problems has also greatly influenced my comments on this subject in this book. Thanks Craig and Pip for your support over the years and in bringing this book to fruition.

Thanks to Gabrielle Carlton for her support and feedback regarding key concepts in the book.
With Thanks to Helen

A special thanks to my wife Helen who 40 years ago took a step in faith, as did I, into the mystery and uncertainty of marriage. At the time we thought as young twenty year olds that we knew what we were doing, that we knew the risks of the promises we made to each other. Now, with the benefit of hindsight, we realise we knew very little and in many ways took one of the greatest risks of our lives with very little knowledge and experience. But why not take that risk? How much have we learned from the journey? This journey has only been possible with the love and care of a number of supportive communities. Extended family, church and professional communities have all had a part in the getting of wisdom and the development of learning. Helen, thanks for walking that journey with me.

About the Book Logo

As with the previous book, three icons have been developed to assist with thinking. The three symbols on the cover and at the footer of each page serve to highlight the essentials in discerning real risk. The first symbol indicates ‘disconnectedness’. In many ways people are more than ever disconnected from risk. The quest for risk aversion in western society continues to attract executives and managers without any thought about by-products, the demise of learning and risk maturity.

The second symbol indicates the capability of discerning through contemplation and reflection. The idea that decisive decision making is better than no decision at all is valued by a society that prefers pragmatic activity and experience rather than critical ethical thinking. Observation of social media mindlessness demonstrates the attraction of simplistic, fundamentalist thinking in the face of complexity and a plethora of wicked problems. The ‘cult of the amateur’ fuels disconnectedness and a developing lack of discernment and wisdom in risk.

The third symbol represents community and it is only through the dynamic of community that people can truly engage and learn in risk. This symbol reminds us that all we do is in relation to others, what Martin Buber meant by the I-Thou that defines humanness. The challenge of risk is the challenge of social psychology; risk is a social activity. People will only become discerning and wise in risk if they embrace living and learning about risk through the dynamic of community. The management of risk, as if it is the problem of individuals, drives the attachment of blame through regulation-only approaches to understanding risk. This approach views people as objects within a system of work and living, and leads to exploitation and indoctrination. The combination of these three icons throughout the book serve to remind us that risk only makes sense when we learn how to embrace it.

A Special Note on Discerning

The choice of the word ‘discerning’ for this book is quite intentional. The idea of discerning complements the process of sensemaking (Weick) and emphasises the value attributed to sensemaking, particularly from an arational (non-rational) focus. Coupled with the idea of discerning is the activity of exercising wisdom. These days, neither wisdom nor discerning is spoken about very much in relation to education, learning and risk. Also, it is important to place the emphasis on the participle ‘discerning’, rather than the noun ‘discernment’. The emphasis is on the doing of discerning, this requires wisdom and strategic thinking. No good is served by ‘dumbing down’ engagement with risk. The key to discerning is the capacity to differentiate, to know how to tell the difference between a scam and a truth, the real and unreal, and things helpful and unhelpful. Whilst the concept of
sensemaking is good in explaining how we ‘make sense’ of things, it tends to have a very rational and cognitive focus. The idea of discerning extends the idea of sensemaking to show how we place value in our sensemaking, particularly at a subconscious and unconscious level. The term is used in this book to highlight activities in perception that go beyond the physical and material in sensemaking. This is where wisdom develops. Rather than talking about ‘common sense’, we should be speaking much more about the activation of wisdom and discerning of risk.

The word ‘discerning’ has its source in the Christian tradition and is originally associated with knowing ‘by faith’. Discerning carries a sense of knowing that extends beyond just cognitive sensemaking to a holistic form of knowledge that includes more subconscious ways of knowing, e.g. knowing in ‘the gut’. Discerning gives value to intuition, the unconscious and the arational in the engagement of risk. Discerning refers to how a person sifts and weighs up evidence arationally and make judgements by intuition and heuristics. Sometimes people are known to have premonitions, intuitions and ‘feelings’ about things (often based in experience), and don’t know where such judgements come from.

The connection between the discerning of risk, attribution of risk, attribution error and ‘feelings’ of risk are critical for the discussion of this book. Simplistic approaches to risk endorse ‘unreal’ risk, such as is evidenced in the love of zero. Similarly, it is quite easy for humans to confuse the ‘feeling’ of risk with the ‘reality’ of risk.

A Special Note on Wisdom

The choice of the word ‘wisdom’ is also quite intentional for the message of this book. The idea of the ‘learning person’ is strongly tied to the notion of wisdom. Wisdom is about human judgement and decision making with regard to relationships, people, events and culture. Knowledge tends to refer primarily to the attainment of information and data. Wisdom connotes a form of knowledge that has more to do with the management of emotions, social context and arational knowledge. In ancient times wisdom was associated with the control of passions and the exercise of mature differentiation. Wisdom requires not only the exercise of intelligence but also the generation of self-knowledge, self-regulation, community consciousness and intuition. Wisdom is the resource for discerning and insight. Wisdom enables people to say ‘no’ to immediate attractions because they know intuitively what damage (by-products and trajectories) such a decision will cause later. It’s the discerning of the ‘one minute of pleasure for a lifetime of pain’ choice that requires wisdom.

There is not enough conversation about wisdom in risk and far too much focus about knowledge of regulation of risk. Wisdom knows that risks have to be taken in living, even risks that are faith-like without any real knowledge of possible consequences. Wisdom knows that when risks are taken consequences must be owned. Wisdom prioritises the needs of the ‘learning person’ over risk aversion.
Glossary

**Arational**: not based or governed by reason. Neither rational nor irrational but non-rational.

**Cognitive Dissonance**: developed by Leon Festinger. Refers to the mental gymnastics required to maintain consistency in the light of contradicting evidence.

**Discourse**: developed by Michael Foucault. The transmission of power in systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak.

**Discernment**: used to explain arational sensemaking with a particular focus on attributed value given to an activity or choice in sensemaking. Used in this book to mean perception that goes beyond the physical and material in sensemaking.

**Heuristics**: refer to experience-based techniques for problem solving, learning, and discovery. Heuristics are like mental short cuts used to speed up the process of finding a satisfactory solution, where an exhaustive rational search is impractical. Heuristics tend to become internal micro-rules.

**Hubris**: indicates a loss of contact with reality which results in extreme overconfidence and complacency.

**Mentalities**: comes from the French Annales School of History and refers to the history of attitudes, mindsets and dispositions. It denotes the social-psychological and cultural nature of history.

**Mindfulness**: developed by Karl E. Weick and indicates the preoccupation with failure, reluctance to simplify interpretations, sensitivity to operations, commitment to resilience, and deference to expertise.

**Myth**: a fictional half-truth that forms part of an ideology that is embedded in culturally accepted practices.

**Priming**: is an implicit memory effect which influences response. Priming is received in the subconscious and transfers to enactment in the conscious.

**Sensemaking**: is about paying attention to ambiguity and uncertainty. Developed by Karl E. Weick to represent the seven ways we ‘make sense’ of uncertainty and contradiction.

**Unconscious**: processes of the mind which are not immediately known or made aware to the conscious mind. The term subconscious is also used interchangeably and denotes a state ‘below’ the conscious state. The subconscious is more associated with psychoanalytics.

**Wicked Problems**: A wicked problem is an intractable problem. Wicked problems are multi-layered, highly complex, multi-dimensional, unsolvable and require transdisciplinary collaboration just to ‘tackle’ the problem.
What This Book Is About

This book is the third in a series on risk. It is a complement to book one, Risk Makes Sense: Human Judgement and Risk, and book two, For the Love of Zero: Human Fallibility and Risk. Real Risk is a book about the attribution of risk, the realities of risk, disconnectedness from risk and the wisdom of engagement with risk. Whilst there is much talk about regulation and the assessment of risk, there is precious little discussion about the subjective discernment of risk. The idea that risk assessment can be undertaken objectively is a nonsense. No thinking about risk is independent of human bias or social context. So this book is about thinking and learning about risk in an imaginative and creative way. It seeks to step away from the mythologies of objectivity in scientific and engineering approaches to risk, and embrace the human dimensions of risk.

The first book commenced with a quote about risk aversion evidenced in the absurd bannings of sack races, dodgem cars and kite flying in the UK. Since then the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) of the UK have established a ‘flying squad’ to address this problem. In 2012 the HSE launched an independent panel called the ‘Myth Busters Challenge Panel’ (Myth Squad). The purpose of the panel was to scrutinise decisions associated with risk averse rulings (http://www.hse.gov.uk/contact/myth-busting.htm). As stated on the HSE site,

This Panel will look into complaints regarding the advice given by non-regulators such as insurance companies, health and safety consultants and employers and, quickly assess if a sensible and proportionate decision has been made. We want to make clear that ‘health and safety’ is about managing real risks properly, not being risk averse and stopping people getting on with their lives.

and

The HSE said that health and safety rules had been wrongly invoked to stop ‘pin the tail on the donkey’ games; to ban selling candy floss on a stick in case customers tripped and impaled themselves; and to replace park benches because they measured up three inches too low. However, the Minister for Employment Chris Grayling stated: ‘common sense is the key to successful health and safety’.

Unfortunately, invoking the non-sense of common sense doesn’t drive thinking and learning but rather maintains the mythology of an objective idea of risk assessment. With such illogical absurdity coming from the Minister, it is no wonder that nothing has improved and that absurd levels of risk aversion continue.

One month after the establishment of the Myth Squad the media and some politicians were calling for the squad to be disbanded. The problem is simply this: tackling cultural problems with bureaucratic solutions perpetuates more complex problems. This kind of thinking sees every problem as a nail, and the only solution a hammer. One of the first cases referred to the Myth Squad was a request for a determination whether firemen should venture into a pond to rescue a trapped seagull. The Myth Squad replied that it would take five days to deliberate on the case and provide a ruling. This case in April 2012 made the Myth Squad a laughing stock.

All risk is attributed, subjective, human, social and personal. There are dozens of factors that affect the way humans attribute risk. Humans overestimate or underestimate risk according to such things as recency, familiarity, sunk cost, representation, framing, availability and a host of cognitive biases in the human psyche. This is why the handbook Communicating and Consulting About Risk (HB 327:2010) to Risk management - Principles and Guidelines (AS/NZS ISO 31000:2009) for the first time, raised the issue of heuristics in the context of communication about risk. The assessment of risk
is a subjective exercise and the idea that a Myth Squad can arbitrate on the excesses of risk aversion simply perpetuates ongoing myths about risk assessment. The establishment of the Myth Squad more deeply endorses the idea that only experts can arbitrate about risk. Indeed, it is the professionalisation of the risk discourse that has generated the trend of risk aversion in society in the first place. This is why so many have called for the exercise of ‘common sense’ regarding this issue. The fact that ‘common sense’ can neither be defined nor demonstrated is brought to light by the fact that the UK is now caught in such a tenuous position.

I heard stated the other day in a tier one organisation that ‘the door of risk swings on the hinge of common sense’. Belief in the myth of ‘common sense’ is partially why people turn to a host of tools to regulate their own sensemaking. This zig zag push and pull by orthodoxy and government regulation about the everyday ability to manage risk, perpetuates the belief that risk doesn’t make sense. So now the call is for a return to ‘common sense’ by the government whose regulator sits in judgement on those who exercise their sensemaking to take risks. All of this is presided over by vested interests who are best served by ongoing confusion and fear. If there was ever a time for increased discernment about real risk, the time is now.

This brings us to the topic of this book: Real Risk: Human Discerning and Risk. The fundamental proposition of this book is that people are more disconnected from risk than ever before. Risk aversion drives risk ignorance, whereas risk engagement drives risk intelligence. And because of this continuing risk disconnectedness people have become less discerning about risk. People are more and more being ‘dumbed down’ by the simplistic thinking about risk, risk management and risk myths. The problem with this trend is that it is also matched by a decline in creativity, ingenuity, adventure, learning, imagination and innovation. Engaging with and learning from risk are vital if humans are to become risk intelligent. Risk aversion and learning aversion are on parallel tracks, running side by side. Risk aversion is anti-learning. There is plenty of talk about risk aversion these days but so little talk about imagination, the fundamental skill required to discern risk.

When Barack Obama became the 44th President of the United States of America he praised America’s risk-takers (http://www.entrepreneur.com/blog/218332). He stated:

‘It has been the risk-takers, the doers, the makers of things - some celebrated, but more often men and women obscure in their labor - who have carried us up the long, rugged path toward prosperity and freedom,’

Obama knows that countries decline and shrivel up without imagination, risk taking and learning.

What does the growing demand for risk aversion mean? It means that people without discernment in risk become blinded to the realities of risk and become more attracted to risk myths. This means that people fail to see things because they weren’t on the checklist, or fail to make a decision because the risk professional is not around. Such a disposition reduces the capacity of people to develop ownership for decisions in risk in deference to the fear and anxiety of insurers, legislators, regulators or professional risk merchants. This is how risk aversion has been accelerated. One of the greatest accelerants for the ‘dumb down’ inferno has of course been the discourse of zero harm. This was the topic of the second book in the series, For the Love of Zero: Human Fallibility and Risk. The pursuit of perfectionism and absolutes is an alienating quest, and one that disconnects humans from the wisdom of risk. The discourse of zero, and its priming of humans for failure, is the fuel for risk aversion. In that book the quest for absolutes was described as a fundamentalism, a black-and-white crusade that seeks to eliminate the need for wisdom or discernment in risk. The drive for risk aversion seeks to dehumanise the risk process.
What is disconnectedness in risk all about? Central to the idea of human disconnectedness is the idea of what it is to be a ‘learning person’. The learning person has a sense of meaning and purpose in living. This is what some might call an educational anthropology. Essentially this disconnectedness is an alienation from what it means to be truly human. When one is so choked by fear and anxiety about risk then one is alienated from what it means to be enlivened as a human. When one is swamped by the complexity of systems so that comprehension, action and living are squashed, then people are dehumanised. The machine-like approach of behaviourism (perpetuated by such movements as Behaviour Based Safety) offers no real humanisation for the ‘learning person’. It seems strange in a world that is busier than ever, full of intense social media exchanges and exploding knowledge, that western society is growing more risk averse, less adventurous, more lonely, more conservative and more mechanistic in dealing with risk than ever before.

It is in the risks of life that we live and learn and develop the wisdom to risk in learning. Fundamental to embracing risk with wisdom is the ability to live in community and relationship with others. One could be forgiven these days for thinking that risk management is all about the management of objects not subjects. Many people in professional positions as regulators and auditors are consumed by focusing on objects as if there are no subjects connected to those objects. Rather than studying social and psychological influences on human judgement and decision making, the assumption is that objects in themselves are dangerous.

When systems begin to serve themselves rather than the ‘learning person’ then disconnectedness occurs. When systems ‘flood’ humans so that they default to internalised non-relational decision making then we become disconnected from what it is to be human. The failure to think about risk is also a failure to think in ‘communities of practice’. The thinking of the individual now characterises what it means to think, and imaginative collaborative strategic thinking about risk is less common.

Whilst the first book was entitled ‘Risk Makes Sense: Human Judgement and Risk’, it could just as easily have been entitled ‘Learning Makes Sense: Human Judgement and Learning’. In many respects of meaning, the word ‘risk’ is interchangeable with the word ‘learning’.

So to become truly human one must connect with risk. To be able to embrace risk with wisdom one has to move away from the current trends in risk aversion. One of the best ways to connect with risk and learn from risk is within the support of a learning community. The idea of wisdom formed in community is foundational to this book, as it is foundational to the idea of discernment.

When I was a school teacher I used to take 15 and 16 year olds out to the bush for a three-day camping experience. I used to think that I needed a curriculum to justify its educational value but I soon learned that experiential learning on its own is a valid method in itself. We learned through relationship and community in a different context. I remember one such camp when some young ladies brought hair dryers to the bush. As a joke, someone told them that there were powerpoints at the base of large trees. So here they were looking for the powerpoints until one kind person told them it was a myth. Ah, the need for discernment.

The emphasis of this book extends our learning in the social psychology of risk. It seeks to broaden learning so that non-conscious characteristics of what it is to be human are emphasised and more considered in the discernment of risk.
Structure and Use of the Book

This book follows a similar structure to the previous books, in that it is intended to be a collection of short linked discussions. The first three chapters (Section One), deal with the need for discernment about risk. Chapters four to six (Section Two) deal with ways in which humans are disconnected from the realities of risk. Chapters seven and eight (Section Three) deal with ways to overcome ‘risk disconnectedness’ and the development of ‘risk wisdom’.

The book is not intended to flow in a cumulative argument like an academic piece but is rather intended for readers to surf like the Internet, jumping in and out of topics as required.

Some sources and books are referred to throughout the book. This is more as a pointer for further interest than for academic validation. A complete reading list is provided at the end of the book for those who wish to delve further into a particular topic.

The book can also be used as a workshop and training manual for programs in leadership and management in risk. Each chapter end has a section of suggested workshop questions which can be used by safety or security professionals or as a framework for a safety culture or security culture training programs with Dr Long and his team.

For those who wish to read the book from cover to cover, there are transitions at the conclusion of each chapter to help direct flow between chapters.
A Review of Ideas in Book One - Risk Makes Sense

Several prominent philosophies in the workplace now foster total risk aversion and therefore encourage a lack of discernment, wisdom and learning. Some of these life-learning destroying philosophies were discussed in the first book *Risk Makes Sense*. For the purpose of review these philosophies are:

1. **Engineer Out The Idiot**
   The philosophy of ‘Engineer Out The Idiot’ just creates more idiots. People without risk experience cannot make a decision because the experience and memory required to make sense of risk has been sheltered from them.

2. **Zero ideology**
   Zero ideology is another philosophy which accentuates micro-risk and risk elimination, and fosters an anti-human pro-robot goal. This goal and it’s discourse makes risk the evil enemy and distracts people from the need to intelligently embrace risk. The philosophy is encouraged by a simplistic binary logic about targets and goals that ignores all the espoused wisdom on goal setting and research in the psychology of setting goals.

3. **Professionalisation**
   The philosophy of professionalisation, of a risk management class, fosters the idea that ordinary people cannot make sound judgements about risk but rather must consult a professional. So whilst the building is burning down we must wait for the fire warden. The Engineer Out the Idiot philosophy assists in fostering the professionalisation of the safety and security industries.

4. **Rational-Only**
   The ‘rational-only’ philosophy which is fostered by a preoccupation with measurement in risk management fails to appreciate the important ‘arational’ nature of humans. Rational–only philosophy fails to understand the non-rational ways humans think and act. A failure to consider the unconscious and subconscious in human decision making misunderstands the foundation of human judgement. As a consequence the rational–only approach to managing risk can only see what can be measured and controlled through rational means. It is important that what is pursued in risk management is not cut off from the ‘naïve’ experience of humans. Unfortunately the abstraction of risk in encyclopaedias of paperwork and formalisation creates distance between the policy maker and user. This ‘gulf of irrelevance’ encourages cynicism and scepticism which in turn manufacture a lack of discernment. The wider the gulf between the policy-makers, the intelligence of research-based thinking and the user, the less discernment is enabled in the frontline worker.

5. **Behaviour-Only**
   A philosophy which de-emphasises learning and only promotes behaviour, e.g. behavioural based safety (BBS), encourages an action-only focus and diminishes the need for critical thinking (discernment) in the workplace. This is observed in many organisations’ mission and vision statements where the word ‘learning’ is neither identified or mentioned in self identity. Rather, the emphasis in often on compliance and policing, zero tolerance and control. These are tools for indoctrination and training rather than education. Education is about learning and ownership. Of what value is compliance if it is only obtained while the police are around?
6. The Intimidation of Orthodoxy

The ‘intimidation of orthodoxy’ is a philosophy that fails to encourage thinking ‘outside the box’. It is an outcome of the professionalisation of risk management. Yet critical thinking occurs best when people are exposed to a wide array of competing ideas and philosophies and are given space and thinking tools to discern human-enabling truth and ethics from dehumanising error and moral failure. Furthermore, the orthodoxy of compliance-seeking behaviour encouraged by regulators and legislators, fails to entertain thinking and ideas outside their sphere of interest. This is entrenched through the ‘sunk cost effect’ and paradigm constraint. Therefore, regulators tend to believe that ideas from psychology, social psychology and arational sources of knowledge have little relevance to risk management.

7. Risk Neurosis

The continual focus on litigation and compensation has driven a spiralling trend in safety, risk and security ‘neurosis’. Risk neurosis develops as an ideology in itself, fuelled by fear and anxiety. This was emphasised by the (now) British Prime Minister, David Cameron, when in 2009 he described the state of affairs as a ‘national neurosis with health and safety rules’. We are yet to learn this in Australia. Cameron argued that the UK had to reduce the blame and litigation culture which had developed to a choking level, and adopt ‘a more realistic approach to the management of risk’.

8. The Cult of the Amateur

The power of the philosophies of professionalisation and the intimidation of orthodoxy has given rise to a new yet ignorant wave of scepticism. The new populist scepticism is poorly informed yet more deeply entrenches orthodox views about risk. The Cult of the Amateur (Andrew Keen, 2008) evidenced in social media thinking, has given rise to the power of an army of ‘arm-chair experts’. The cult of the amateur, rather than bring an alternative perspective about risk, simply endorses orthodox views. This is because the cult of the amateur is about power-distance from experts rather than difference in perspective. The populist view about risk continues to endorse the philosophies of zero, rational-only and ‘engineer out the idiot’. The rise of blogs and social media such as Twitter and Facebook has allowed this new scepticism to have considerable power to an extent previously unseen. As Keen (p. xiv) states:

MySpace and Facebook are creating a culture of digital narcissism; open source knowledge-sharing sites like Wikipedia are undermining the authority of teachers in the classroom; the YouTube generation are more interested in self-expression than in learning about the outside world; the cacophony of anonymous blogs and user-generated content is deafening today’s youth to the voices of informed experts and professional journalists; kids are so busy self-broadcasting themselves on social networks that they no longer consume the creative work of professional musicians, novelists, or film makers.

Whilst some aspects of the social media are good, the devaluing of all knowledge as ‘opinion’ has now promoted a culture of the self as the final arbiter of truth and ethics. This has also been contributed to by tabloid journalism and ‘shock jock’ radio. The stratosphere is now full of a huge amount of ‘noise’ foisted on a society without the tools to discern its value. This is further exacerbated by the demise of school subjects such as History which were once understood as teaching tools for critical thinking rather than the memorisation of dates and parliamentary study of ‘civics education’.

These eight philosophies help fuel the current thinking that risk doesn’t make sense. People are now disconnected from the sense of risk more than ever. The realities of risk are denied to such an extent that the wisdom required to discern risk is now in short supply.
What can be done about risk disconnectedness? How can we help the next generation to embrace risk with freedom and wisdom rather than fear? Can the complexities of the risk industry and its professionalisation be countered?

9. Systems-Only

The systems-only philosophy misunderstands the complexities and inter-relationships of culture, indeed defining culture as systems. The systems-as-culture approach was discussed in the first book in relation to the way legislators and regulators seek to solve problems. This philosophy simply builds more systems on systems to solve systems problems. The trajectory of this approach leads to an outcome where humans are ‘flooded’ by systems and give up on them retreating to micro-rules, intuition and implicit knowledge.

10. Rationalist-Only

The final philosophy addressed in the first book was the view of the world which ignored the unconscious and subconscious in human judgement and decision making. The rationalist-only approach, which has close associations with the systems-only and behaviour-only approach, is another materialist ideology. The first book argued that without consideration of arational (unconscious and subconscious) dimensions of human decision making and judgement risk cannot make sense. Rationalist-only and materialist-only approaches fail to explain counter-intuitive decision making, cognitive dissonance, heuristics, cognitive biases and a host of arational modes of judgement.

A Review of Ideas in Book Two - For the Love of Zero

In the second book in this series, *For the Love of Zero: Human Fallibility and Risk*, a number of the ideas were presented in response to the populist notion of ‘zero harm’. The central ideas of the book were as follows:

1. Zero Harm Discourse is an Ideology

Humans have a tendency to take an idea or concept identified in a set of words, and develop it into an ideology. An ideology is to be understood as that synthesis of beliefs within a culture which defines answers to problems and tends to commit people to actions consistent with their belief system. When a concept takes on the characteristics of an ideology, the person’s ‘mentalitie’ (their social and mental equipment) causes the concept to become an all-encompassing determinant of culture. The word ‘zero’ of itself describes a concept beyond a number. Zero is both nothing and infinity; it is a conundrum of logic and mathematics.

When the zero harm discourse takes on the characteristics of an ideology, it becomes an all-encompassing identity that cannot be debated or challenged. Zero harm ideology is founded in a logic of binary opposition and all challenges to it as a system of thought are deemed oppositional. As a belief system, the idea of zero harm, drives proponents to a ‘calculative’ mindset. What often starts out as a simple quest to eliminate harm takes on, courtesy of its own dynamic of absolutes and perfectionism, an absolute trajectory that becomes increasingly difficult to maintain in the light of the reality of human fallibility.
2. The Ideology of Zero Harm is a Fundamentalism

The concept of zero is an idea of extremes. When one maintains a belief system that is founded in an extreme, a black-and-white concept, it becomes difficult to defend in a balanced way. Applying an absolute perfectionist idea to the everyday life of fallible humans is problematic, and leads to the maintenance of a belief system that cannot countenance non-absolutes in discourse and triggers absurd assertions such as ‘all accidents are preventable’. When the absolute is not achieved, when the target is not maintained, a whole new language is developed in cognitive dissonance to maintain the ideology. This trajectory emerges in the behaviour and discourse of zero harm proponents in the same fashion as in fundamentalism. This is evidenced in the selectivity of definitions of harm, hiding in reporting and shifting of meaning.

3. The Quest for Perfectionism and Absolutes is Alienating

The idea of an absolute and perfectionist goal as applied to fallible humans is alienating. The more one sets unattainable goals for fallible humans, the more is accentuated failure and confusion about the meaning of the goal. In the second book, evidence from the MiProfile survey was presented showing that more than 65% of all workers do not find the language of ‘zero harm’ motivational, meaningful or inspirational in the management of risk.

4. The Discourse and ‘Priming’ of Zero

The idea that the discourse of zero harm is a harmless set of words ignores all the evidence to the contrary that suggests that the human unconscious is easily ‘primed’ by words and influenced by discourse. Discourse is understood as the power embodied in the language associated with the words. So the use of the words ‘zero harm’ have their own dynamic and prime the receiver to a black and white mindset immersed in an absolute. The more one is ‘primed’ by the absolute discourse of zero, the more one has to juggle and use tortuous logic to manage the non-achievement of it. It was suggested in the book that the best way to manage zero harm was to be silent about it.

5. Strategies Without Zero

The second book concluded with a section on being ‘world class’ in the management of risk and safety without the use of the ideological discourse of zero. The risk and safety maturity matrix was introduced showing that excellence in engagement with risk can only be attained beyond the limits of the calculative mindset. In this sense those who wish to advance and mature to a generative approach to safety and engagement with risk need to give away the fundamentalist quest for zero harm, with its numerically-centred approach, and instead focus on a more human-centred approach.

6. The Humanising Organisation in Risk

Key to the alternative to ‘zero harm’ in engaging with risk is not just the rejection of the calculative zero, but movement forward and maturing of thinking in humanising the organisation. The learning organisation is one that humanises the focus on risk, moving away from counting to empathising. The humanising organisation knows that language and discourse shape behaviour. Language and goals that drive a calculative zero mindset, place people on a trajectory that meditates on binary thinking and club-centred belonging, and in the end this becomes anti-learning in focus. The humanising organisation has its mission focused on the social psychological and cultural determinants of behaviour. Leadership understands these factors and seeks to influence them through vision and the articulation of the humanising process.
7. The Maturation of Risk Management

The humanising organisation is a 'high reliability organisation' (HRO) as was first articulated by K. E. Weick. It is argued in book two that the humanising organisation is the goal of 'world class' organisation. The risk maturity matrix is used to diagrammatically explain the maturation process. More about the Risk Maturity Matrix is explained on the Human Dymensions website.

Figure 1. The Human Dymensions Risk Maturity Matrix®
SECTION ONE

The need for discerning in risk
CHAPTER 1
The Need for Discerning in Risk

Not by years but by disposition is wisdom acquired - Plautus

Do not judge and you will never be mistaken - Rouseau (Emile Bk 3)

Differentiating and Discernment

The ability to discern is the ability to tell the difference between what is real and unreal, what is harmful and harmless, what is true or untrue, what is genuine and what is fake, and what is of most or least value in competing goals. When it comes to assessing, understanding and managing risk, it is important to attribute risk realistically. All risk is costly, but absolute risk aversion is just as costly. A great deal of living and learning is sacrificed in the risk aversion crusade. The trouble is, the more society pursues risk aversion, the more people become disconnected from risk and lose the ability to rightly discern real risk from unreal risk.

The following news report makes sobering reading.

Vandals recently spray painted a doctor’s house with the term ‘paedo’.

A paediatrician at a South Wales hospital has been forced out of her home by vandals who thought her job title meant the same as ‘pedophile’.

South African born Yvette Cloete, a Pediatrician (Paediatrician in other English versions), is a specialist registrar for the Royal Gwent Hospital for almost two and half years. Some dummy confusing the term pedophile (paedophile) with pediatrics, thought she was pedophile, so they spray painted all over her home with the term ‘Paedo’. When she woke up she saw all the spray painting and got scared and is now in hiding at a friend’s house.

She has told the hospital and her friends, that she no longer will be staying at that area and feels it is less safe to live there.

Gwent Police are searching for the perpetrators and said it shows ‘extraordinary ignorance’ on their part.

The hospital spokesman told Ananova, a news site, that the doctor is very frustrated with the whole incident and would rather see it go away. He also requested if anyone knows about the vandals to contact them or the police.
Marie Thorn, a senior administrator at the Royal Gwent Hospital, said: ‘I spoke with Yvette after what happened to see how she is and she was dealing with it very well in the circumstances.

It seems Yvette was planning to move from the area for sometime, so this incident made her move quickly.

Marie said it is quite staggering people can make such a mistake, they must be incredibly ignorant. She also said Yvette has worked with her the last few years and she said Yvette is one of the nicest people one could ever meet.

Hope the doctor forgets this incident soon and gets on with her life. Lucky she was not hurt. She shouldn’t let this incident affect her life, she should keep doing her best, if at all they are the ones should worry, they will face far worse situations later in life.

Chris V. Thangham Digital Journal - Paediatrician Mistaken for Paedophile May 16, 2007

http://www.digitaljournal.com/article/182683

What a sad state of affairs when such ignorance is on display. The ability to make an ‘informed’ judgement is called ‘discernment’. A discerning person is generally thought to be able to act with wisdom, balance and perspective. The root of the word ‘discernment’ actually comes from the Bible and denotes the ability to make an informed differentiation between things. The opposite of discernment is observed in a lack of judgement and poor decision making. Poor discernment is often labelled in popular culture as ‘stupidity’. Discernment is about much more than intelligence, knowledge or skill acquisition. It is much more about wisdom, which has to do with perception, judgement, decision making, ‘mentality’ and maturity.

The ability to make wise choices is critical in the management of risk. If we are to embrace risk and learn from it, we must know how to make sense of it. Risk taking which makes sense enables learning and abundant living. Risk taking which does not make sense is that which is reckless and life-destroying.

A culture of discernment develops through the experiences and memories of those who have learned from risk. A culture of discernment cannot develop by constraining people from risk. The idea of wrapping people up in a legislative and regulation ‘bubble’ which devalues and constrains risk doesn’t make sense. Every time there is some failure in risk, it seems the only solution is the four B’s: barricades, banning, beltigns and bureaucracy. The solution to failure in risk is not eliminating risk, but embracing it with wisdom and discernment.
Visiting the Zarsaberries

Whilst the situation at the Royal Gwent Hospital is sad, it is relatively easy to make mistakes in meaning and language. Meaning and discernment depend upon knowledge, education, experience, learning capacity (an openness to learning) knowledge of limitations and how one’s knowledge and learning has been ‘scaffolded’.

In January 2011 my wife, my daughter and I caught the fast train from Helsinki to St Petersburg, the trip of a life time. St Petersburg is a most amazing city with a deep and rich history and culture. We were excited to be there despite it being a cold Russian winter, with all of the wonderful canals of the ‘Venice of the East’ frozen. With only a few days to spend I was keen to devote some time to wandering though The Hermitage, St Isaacs’ Cathedral, Kazansky Cathedral, The Winter Palace, Mariinsky Theatre and The Cathedral of Christ’s Resurrection. This last cathedral is known to St Petersburgers as the ‘Church of the Savior on Spilled Blood’, and is where all the Tsars are buried. This church has an amazing collection of mosaic icons, from floor to ceiling (103 metres). The Cathedral was commissioned by Tsar Alexander I on December 25, 1812, following the defeat and withdrawal of Napoleon’s troops from Russia. The Tsar proclaimed the cathedral a monument of gratitude for the intervention of ‘Divine Providence for saving Russia’ from doom, and as a memorial to the sacrifices of the Russian people.

Figure 2. Outside the Church where the Tsars are Buried
Architecturally, the Cathedral differs from St. Petersburg’s other structures. The city’s architecture is predominantly Baroque and Neoclassical, but the Savior on Blood harks back to medieval Russian architecture in the spirit of romantic nationalism. It intentionally resembles the 17th-century Yaroslavl churches and the celebrated St Basil’s Cathedral in Moscow. The church contains over 7,500 square metres of mosaics that depicted biblical scenes and figures with fine patterned borders setting off each picture.

Neither my daughter nor my wife are students of history and, with ears full of Finish and Russian, they heard my garbled request to ‘visit the church where the Tsars are buried’ as something akin to visiting a church selling ‘zarsaberries’. Jenni thought we were going to the church of the zarsaberries, maybe a special Russian blackberry?? Maybe this church had a market garden? It wasn’t until we arrived there, ‘ripped off’ by a mafia-looking taxi driver with no meter, that the misunderstanding was sorted out. After pulling my daughter out of the taxi (she wanted to debate the fare with the driver), I spent a few hours in this amazing place, the
church where the Tsars are buried. While my wife and daughter shopped at the markets across the road, I took my time head back in awe.

It is relatively easy to see how a lack of discernment occurs. We all come to information and communication from out of our own histories and biases. This is how we make sense of things. Sensemaking is characterised by seven factors, as introduced in *Risk Makes Sense* (adapted from K.E Weick in 2nd edition p. 101). These are:

1. **Self Esteem**: Your own confidence in yourself, personal identity and what you think of yourself in relation to others will affect the way you interpret information.

2. **History**: Your past story, from where you were born and lived to what got you to where you are. All things in your personal history have some influence over what you know and how you interpret the present. Interpretation is the foundation of differentiation.

3. **Social Context**: Where you are in relation to others, what is happening around you, the nature of those around you and the way they relate to the same information all influence the way you interpret information.

4. **Confirming Evidence**: We act something into belief, even creating a bias in our minds so that when something happens it confirms the belief. For example, if we rev up our own car in response to the hot car full of young men revving their engine beside us, we ‘enact’ a new scenario which may confirm or disconfirm what we already believe. We can hold our finger up in defiance to them or tactically ignore their behaviour, each act bringing into being a new act. Something new happens that makes sense of the past and affirms future predictions.

5. **Cues and Indicators**: What we see, hear and feel doesn’t necessarily carry information with it. We recognise indicators and cues which give us information similar to things we have experienced before. We recognise the importance of the revving motor and know it means power, provocation and aggression. All information is subjective and interpreted.

6. **Believability**: Isn’t it peculiar that when something unexpected happens we express surprise, amazement and disbelief? Our capacity to imagine is directly linked to not only what we believe but also to what we are willing to believe. Our ability to imagine extends or limits our ability to make sense of things. Believability is an important part of prediction, and combines with past experience and cues to help us imagine what is possible. If we don’t think something is possible, we don’t plan for it and certainly can’t imagine the risks associated with it. Believability affects the way we interpret new information.

7. **Flow**: The final tool we use to make sense of things is flow. The pace and speed of events affects the way we interpret them. Much of what we sense goes quickly to our subconscious and triggers a rapid intuitive response. Our intuition or gut feeling bypasses the need to process things step by step in a slow logical or rational pattern. For example, our intuition gives us the ‘flight or fight’ response we need in a crisis.

These are the tools we use to make sense of things, or ‘sensemake’. These seven factors can affect the way we hear words, understand concepts and respond to the unexpected or unknown. In the case of the Zarsaberries it was a simple lack of knowledge combined with the disorientation of a context of foreign languages that led to a misunderstanding. As in the case of the paediatrician mistaken for a paedophile, such confusion and lack of discernment can have disastrous consequences. Fortunately in this case, we all has a laugh outside of a most magnificent cathedral.
Chasing the Lolly Man

It’s difficult to separate risk from learning, learning from fun, and fun from risk. Whilst I understand the reasons playgrounds have become tributes to static plastic, I also see the by-product of risk aversion, in many more obese children playing on computers than running and playing outside. Risk aversion has a funny way of shifting risk rather than averting it. Is it worse to have a skinned knee from falling off a hurdy gurdy or the early onset of diabetes? This problem of shifting risk with children has been wonderfully articulated by Tim Gill in his book *No Fear: Growing up in a risk averse society*. For those interested, you can download a free copy of Tim’s book from [http://gulbenkian.org.uk/publications/publications/42-NO-FEAR.html](http://gulbenkian.org.uk/publications/publications/42-NO-FEAR.html). Tim is another who makes sense of risk with regard to learning, and his website is worth reading ([http://rethinkingchildhood.com/](http://rethinkingchildhood.com/)).

One of the essentials to discernment is experience: how can one develop experience in risk without taking risks? We do our children no learning service by wrapping them up in cotton wool and taking all moving parts out of playgrounds. We need to learn much more about the way risk trade-offs work and their by-products. One of the skills of discernment is knowing how risk trade-off creates new complexities that are not necessarily an improvement. Discernment knows about the dynamics of shifting risk, and includes insight into longitudinal perceptions about short term proposals. In some ways we have robbed our children’s generation of lots of fun, simple fun, that doesn’t require a hefty bank balance to satisfy. This kind of risk aversion also equates to knowledge and learning aversion. The following story illustrates this.

When I was young the majority of kids went to Sunday School. The idea of Sunday School grew out of efforts by the church in the mid 1700s in England to increase literacy in the Bible. Children who worked in factories were given opportunities by the church on their one day off in the week to improve Bible knowledge. In many ways the development of the Sunday School concept helped to improve literacy in general. Over the next century the role of Sunday Schools became a powerful movement in the church and society in moral indoctrination and identity. In the 1880s formal day schooling was developed by the creation of the Public Instruction Act.

In Australia in the 1950s Sunday Schools were popular, and even many parents who were neither Christians or supporters of the church sent their children to Sunday School for moral teaching. In hindsight, it was probably the best and cheapest child-minding service available for a quiet Sunday morning. All teachers in Sunday Schools were ‘lay’ people. Lay people are non-clergy enthusiasts who volunteer to teach what they know about Christianity to their class. Without much regulation or moderation of any kind (except for church membership and the eye of the clergy) this institution became a great melting pot for every shade of bizarre theology. It was also a magnet for all sorts of people with a ‘special interest’ in children.

My memories of Sunday School are very positive. I was lucky to have relationships with some great people who were ethical, animated, engaging and intelligent. Sunday Schools provided a session before or after church and in my experience were populated by hundreds of children - all my friends went to Sunday School. We used to have two big events each year: the Sunday School Anniversary (which included prizes and awards) and the Sunday School picnic. I loved both events but the Sunday School picnic was always exciting and fun.

Every Sunday School Picnic Day a bus or two would be hired and we would all travel to a local National Park or picnic spot and set up tables with food and treats, and community
events. There were athletics races and novelty events for everyone, but the best moment was the chasing of the lollyman.

At some time during the afternoon proceedings a man would appear (sometimes my Uncle Trevor) seemingly from nowhere with dozens of bags of lollies sewn onto an army great coat. The moment we caught sight of him the chase was on. The organisers of the picnic usually picked a strapping young 20 year old who was very fit and could outrun us for at least the first 30 minutes. There was so much excitement when the lollyman appeared, as free access to lollies was a rarity in those days. When I was a child the idea of austerity still lingered after World War II. My parents were products of the Great Depression and their conservatism with things such as lollies made the lollyman a great attraction. It was great fun chasing the lollyman; we were all overcome with feelings of frenzy, hysteria, abandon, excitement and recklessness.

I remember the excitement of seeing the lollyman for my first time and the reckless abandon that seized me in my quest to grab a bag of lollies. Here we were, over fifty kids scrambled in a race without thinking, crashing into each other, into trees, falling in ditches and getting plenty of knocks and bruises in our quest for a bag of ten lollies. The total value of the lolly bag was probably about 2 pence or 5 cents; such a lot of risk and adventure and so much fun at such little cost. We were so absorbed in this fun that we didn’t even talk about risks. As far as we were concerned there were no risks.

In 2012 ‘Chasing the Lollyman’ was an Indigenous drama production which toured Australia. The production involved a reliving of childhood stories and events of fun and laughter.

Figure 4. Chasing the Lollyman

The story of the lollyman illustrates how risk trade-offs work. Something of great attraction and fun is exchanged for risk. Sometimes these things that attract us have little tangible value. There are many activities in life where humans learn about losing control in pursuit of a goal, their value being in the fun and learning associated with the activity. And often such activities indirectly teach you how to make sense of risk.
More Bricks and Mortar for the Amphitheatre of Denial of Discernment

Sigmund Freud may have been wrong about a few things, but his discovery and naming of ‘defense mechanisms’ was ground breaking. However, we don’t need Freud to tell us that admitting being wrong is a profoundly difficult activity for most people. Children seem to learn how to deny wrongness automatically by the age of two.

Admitting wrongness is an extremely demanding emotional activity and humans have a range of strategies at their disposal to ensure that mistakes are explained away. Understanding ‘wrongology’ and the psychology of defence is the foundation of all under-reporting and creation of ‘spin’.

Some of the case studies in Risk Makes Sense concerned religious cults and addictions. We can learn much about risk from the way groups deny wrongness particularly in the face of uncertainty and addictions. We can learn even more by understanding how cognitive dissonance works in relation to risk and fear. One of the fundamental attributes of discernment is the capability of ‘sifting’ evidence and developing wisdom to tell fact from fiction. The story of the Star Amphitheatre in Balmoral Sydney in 1923–24 is a wonderful case study that illustrates this point. This was first brought to my attention in the 1960s, by my father who had seen the amphitheatre and knew of its story.

The Star Amphitheatre in Balmoral Sydney was built in 1923–24 for the express purpose of viewing the second coming of Christ who was going to walk on water through Sydney Heads. In 1923 a woman named Mary Eleanor Rocke began to buy land at the northern end of Edwards Bay in Balmoral, Sydney. She wanted to build an amphitheatre on behalf of an organisation called the Order of the Star of the East.

Figure 5. Laying the Foundation for the Star Amphitheatre

The amphitheatre was designed to face North Head and Middle Head, so it was ideally located to view the entrance to Sydney Harbour.
The Star Amphitheatre was finished in 1924, costing £20,000. It towered 20 metres above the beach, and could hold 3000 people. Unfortunately for this group, Christ failed to arrive on May 21 1924. However, this did not end the activities of the cult, but rather strengthened it. The group went on to develop a whole array of explanations as to why Christ did in fact return but they didn't see it. You can read about how cognitive dissonance, sunk cost effect and other denial mechanisms work in the first book *Risk Makes Sense*.

The Star Amphitheatre was demolished in the 1950’s and a block of flats built on the site.

**Figure 6. Construction of the Star Amphitheatre**

![Figure 6](image)

**Figure 7. Completed Star Amphitheatre**

![Figure 7](image)
What has all this got to do with the discernment of risk?

The foundation of the zero cult is the denial of humanness, and its logic is the idea that all accidents and incidents are preventable. This leads to people talking the impossible as possible and then justifying the impossible as a worthy aspiration. Zero harm is premised on a fundamentalist logic which projects attainable perfection onto human risk taking. The language of perfection, ‘primes’ humans for failure and denial. The language of ‘zero’ is a language that primes non-learning, and learning is the key to the development of discernment and wisdom. Rather than understanding that learning is essential to humanness and that risk is essential to learning, the zero harm cult indirectly proposes that risk is wrong and does not make sense.

Whilst ‘zero’ language may be attractive to CEOs it makes as much sense of risk as the Order of the Star of the East and the Star Amphitheatre does of religion. The logic and language of ‘zero’ is a language that is founded on proof of truth by opposites. In this binary way of thinking the language of ‘zero’ makes sense because a denial of zero somehow sets a goal of harm. Similar logic proposed that a rejection of the Afghanistan War was an expression of sympathy for terrorism.

The rejection of the language of ‘zero’ does not propose that injuries are acceptable. It is rather a rejection of language which primes humans in organisations for non-learning and non-discernment. Organisational culture characterised by non-learning and a lack of discernment is destructive to the understanding and management of risk. All goals have an embedded psychology which the cult of zero denies.

**Attribution and Fundamental Attribution Error**

Any assessment of risk is an emotional, arational and subjective exercise. Risks are not objective but are ‘attributed’. This is what Slovic talks about in his excellent book *The Feeling of Risk*. One person is anxious about an activity while the person beside them is not. Some people are confident with certain high level risks and others are much more cautious. Human biases aggravate or mitigate risk attribution (as discussed in books 1 and 2). The idea that humans assess risk objectively, or just calculate risk based on some common criteria in a risk matrix (exposure, frequency, probability and consequence), is not supported by the evidence. It is often after the event that we articulate
some rational explanation for our choice or risk ranking, but in reality that is not why we chose to undertake that task or take that risk in the first place.

**The South Korean Fan Death Mystery**

A good example of just how risk is aggravated, yet not connected to reality or scientific evidence, is illustrated in a study of the fear of fans in South Korea or what is known as ‘fan death’ myth. It is a widely held belief in South Korea that a fan left on overnight in a closed room can kill you. This is why all fans in South Korea must be fitted with a timer (see Figure 8).

**Figure 8. South Korean Fans with Timers**

Many scientific tests have proven that the risks associated with electric fans are not real but, due to cognitive dissonance, the evidence is not believed. To make matters worse, the South Korean Consumer Protection Board (KCPB) has issued the following warning:

*If bodies are exposed to electric fans or air conditioners for too long, it causes [the] bodies to lose water and [causes] hypothermia. If directly in contact with [air current from] a fan, this could lead to death from [an] increase of carbon dioxide saturation concentration [sic] and decrease of oxygen concentration. The risks are higher for the elderly and patients with respiratory problems. From 2003 to 2005, a total of 20 cases were reported through the CISS involving asphyxiations caused by leaving electric fans and air conditioners on while sleeping. To prevent asphyxiation, timers should be set, wind direction should be rotated and doors should be left open.*

**Figure 9 and 10. Warning on Packaging Selling Fans in South Korea**
Despite all the evidence from experts and research-based results proving the myth to be false the media continues to propagate the myth. What does such myth-making do?

Many people develop their decision-making based on fear and anxiety. Much of this fear and anxiety is generated by the language and images propagated by the media and professionals with vested interests in risk management expansion and regulation. For example, the more the discourse and language of ‘zero harm’ and ‘zero tolerance’ is used, the more organisations focus on and elevate the importance of low risks. The more zero language is used, the more it takes on a quasi-religious, even fundamentalist fervour, so that anyone who argues against it or proposes that such a belief is unhelpful is a ‘sinner’ in the religion of risk, safety or security. The propaganda of zero language and belief is no different than the fan death belief; the more it is peddled and propagated the more it is believed.

The way we attribute risk to activities is in part affected by many cognitive biases. The availability heuristic and probability neglect are two mechanisms that powerfully affect the way we attribute risk. Depending on what is ‘available’ to our memory or our senses, we magnify, distort or dismiss the value of certain risks. Humans are emotional creatures, and when fear and anxiety are intensified people focus on the adverse outcome more than the likelihood of that outcome occurring. This intensifying of emotions is where much human risk aversion originates. If you put this emotionally charged perception in crowds or through the media then mass hysteria and groupthink further distorts the real assessment of risk. The problem is that these factors make people fearful when they need not be, and fearless when perhaps more caution is required.

When humans mis-attribute risk this is known as ‘fundamental attribution error’ (FAE). One of the clearest examples of FAE is observed in the way people underestimate an addiction. It is not until the person admits the reality of an addiction that any beginning of change is possible.

**Dissonance at Jonestown**

If you want to learn something about discernment, a good place to start is to look at the dysfunctional activities of cults. The idea of ‘cognitive dissonance’ was first defined in relation to the study of cults. Many dismiss the activities of people in cults as the ‘looney fringe’ and so nothing is learned. However, the same dynamics operating in cults are evident each day in the workplace in the form of bullying, power-relationships, exploitation, blind allegiance, non-critical thinking, obedience/compliance regulation, attribution, reaction formation, groupthink and cognitive dissonance.

One of the most tragic events that illustrates the failure of discernment is the Jonestown mass suicide. The story of the People’s Temple and the rise of the Reverend Jim Jones, the migration to Northwest Guyana and the evolution of the Jonestown cult chronicle the typical development of cultic dependence and cognitive dissonance. On the fateful day of 18 November 1978, 918 people died, most by voluntary cyanide poisoning, in commitment to the cult of Jim Jones.

Jim Jones formed the People’s Temple, a fundamentalist group, in Indianapolis, Indiana, in the 1950s. The group received significant criticism and so moved to California in 1965. From there they subsequently moved to San Francisco in the mid 1970s.

The People’s Temple claimed to practise ‘apostolic socialism’. At the time the concept of forming communes was popular and Jones received endorsement from some politicians and prominent public figures. Jones’ preoccupation with the demonisation of government and his passion to establish a commune led him to move the People’s Temple to the jungle of French Guyana and set up Jonestown,
an ‘agricultural mission’, on 3,000 acres of land. The isolation and hardship associated with the chosen site helped build commitment to and ‘sunk cost’ in both the project and Jones himself.

Over time the community of Jonestown became increasingly fundamentalist and Jones more extremist and obsessed with conspiracy theories, positioning himself against supposed forces of darkness and evil. Indoctrination increased and questioning and debate were suppressed. Various forms of discipline, including confinement, were used for those who disputed with Jones. Children were surrendered to communal care and Jones insisted on being called ‘Father’ or ‘Dad’. He began to increase fatigue tactics and practised suicide commitment rituals called ‘white nights’.

Figure 11. The Cover of Newsweek December 4 1978

As the cult grew more extreme and some members escaped back to the USA, there was increasing scrutiny of Jonestown culminating in a visit by prominent congressman Leo Ryan on 14 November 1978. The visit precipitated a crisis for Jones, leading to some defections and a subsequent massacre of the Ryan delegation at the airstrip. Following this, Jones told the commune that the congressmen and party were dead and played a ‘death tape’ to the group. Members then vowed their loyalty to Jones and gave their support to the notion of revolutionary suicide. A vat of cyanide was mixed with ‘Coolade’ and administered first to children, then to adults, until all were dead. Jones himself died of a self-inflicted gunshot. A few survivors who hid in the bush lived to provide eyewitness accounts of the tragedy.

To dismiss this tragedy as the result of a bunch of ‘bone heads’ or the ‘lunatic fringe’ is simplistic and misunderstands what social psychology has taught us about the many dynamics at force to influence human decision-making. The power of the ‘sunk cost’ effect, conversion and cognitive dissonance are very powerful, and we fail to understand them at our own peril.
We may laugh at famous Hollywood people who fall victim to various cults, but are we so different? Are there various cult-like imperatives that influence the *cult*-ural imperatives in our workplace without our even realising it? For example:

1. What language and discourse is accepted in our workplace about the nature of risk, without question? Has the workplace adopted a ‘zero harm’ mantra without any evidence to support its claims?

2. Do the contradictions within risk management strategies at work get explained away?

3. Is blind ideological allegiance demanded and are people pressured into compliance?

4. Do people crusade over the will of others using the mandate of their risk profession to command rule?

5. Is debate and defection allowed? What concepts and ideologies are uncontestable?

6. Are learning, motivation, imagination and ownership key drivers of organisational strategy?

If one wants to develop a culture of ownership, learning and motivation (a learning organisation) one has to understand the drivers of cultural determination, diagnose them, and then develop strategies to implement them. Without such a culture an organisation will always have to ‘police’ for the behaviour it desires, and the culture will only exist as long as it is maintained ‘from above’. Punitive cultures are always expensive and rarely motivational.
Discerning *The Secret*

One of the most successful self-help books in history is *The Secret* (2006). Written by Rhonda Byrne, it has sold 21 million copies across 44 countries and the related DVD is one of the highest selling of all time. ‘The Secret’ promotes something called the ‘Law of Attraction’ in an objectified fashion as if it is a timeless principle which has previously been hidden from everyone.

The Law of Attraction principle posits that feelings and thoughts can attract events, feelings and experiences, from the workings of the cosmos to interactions among individuals in their physical, emotional, and professional affairs. The DVD includes interviews with individuals and self-described professionals and authors in the fields of quantum physics, psychology, metaphysics, coaching, theology, philosophy, finance, feng shui, medicine and personal development. All are referred to as ‘secret’ teachers. The DVD states that everything one wants or needs in life can be obtained by believing you will receive it, repeatedly thinking about it, and maintaining positive emotional states to ‘attract’ it.

The DVD was produced in Australia and promoted through talk and morning shows, backed by the marketing power of the Channel Nine Network. With endorsements by some of the big names in media such as Oprah Winfrey and Larry King, the book and DVD became an overnight success.

The success of ‘The Secret’ shows just how the general populace is lacking in discernment. Byrne’s inspiration came from the 1910 book *The Science of Getting Rich* by Wallace D. Wattles. Unfortunately humans are mesmerised by ‘get rich quick’ schemes through a range of heuristics and cognitive biases. Similar ‘quick fixes’ and snake oil schemes are also common in the security and safety industries. There is much money to be made by promising CEOs simplistic fixes and telling them what they want to hear.

One only has to observe the outcome of the production of The Secret and, what has happened to its creators, to understand how simplistic solutions are delusional and naive. The Secret DVD promotes happiness through obtaining what your heart desires, yet the legal wranglings which have ensued with the creators is far from happy. The bitterness of greed is apparent for all to see through the court system. It seems that Rhonda Byrne didn’t want to share the joys of hundreds of millions of dollars of success with the DVD director. At one stage it was selling at five copies per minute off the website and the book spent 66 weeks on The New York Times’s Advice best seller list. It should be no secret that, in contradiction to Gordon Gecko, ‘greed is not good’.

Dumb Ways to Die: A Strange Sense of Success

When it comes to misattribution in risk and safety there is no better example then the fanfare over the ‘Dumb Ways to Die’ advertising campaign and its claims to success.

B&T comment:

The ‘beautiful’ Dumb Ways to Die campaign is officially the most-successful ever campaign at Cannes bagging two more Grand Prix on its final day, and 28 Lions overall. (http://www.bandt.com.au/news/advertising/mccann-bags-record-haul-as-dumb-ways-becomes-best)

Rail Express claims:

Metro Trains Melbourne’s (MTM) Dumb Ways To Die rail safety campaign has officially become the most awarded ad in the history of the Cannes advertising festival with the campaign’s producer, Melbourne agency McCann, winning 32 Lions awards. (http://
Rail Express further claims:

So successful was the campaign that within three months, MTM reportedly saw a 21% reduction in railway accidents and deaths compared to a year ago, with one million people already signing pledges on MTM’s http://dumbwaystodie.com/ which reads: ‘I solemnly swear to not do dumb stuff around trains.’

Businessweek claims:

There are clear reasons why ‘Dumb Ways to Die’ has been a success. It’s catchy and the animation is hilarious. But it has another, less obvious, thing going for it: the power of positivity.

So what is the success of this campaign? A dip in statistics over a three-month period? An animation that goes viral on the Internet?

If you want to understand what is going on here there is much more to this story than a cute jingle, animation and millions of hits. The connections with suicide in this campaign are stark.

Safety Transport Victoria Quarterly incident statistics for HEAVY RAIL 2013 – 1st Quarter (http://www.transportsafety.vic.gov.au/rail-safety/newsroom/news/news-articles/latest-heavy-rail-incident-statistics) states that the average fatalities (excluding suicide) on Vic Rail is 2 per quarter. Serious injuries average 9 per quarter. Suicides average 32 per year or 8 per quarter (Rail-related suicides in Victoria, Analysis of databases and literature review http://www.monash.edu.au/miri/research/reports/muarc215.html). Therefore, non suicide related deaths on Vic Rail equate to only 20% of all rail fatalities. So it is clear that this campaign was designed to address the major cause of fatalities in Vic Rail, suicide. This is made clear in the documentary Hidden Tragedy of Rail Suicides (http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/hidden-tragedy-of-rail-suicides-20120603-1zq87.html). The Dumb Ways to Die video and campaign is designed to address the 80% of fatalities on Vic Rail, suicides. The fact that the campaign has a focus on choice of death and mode of death indicates that suicide is the target topic. This was recognised by a number of countries that banned the campaign, e.g. the Russian government banned the video in February 2013 stating:

The song’s lyrics contain a description of different ways of committing suicide, such as: using drugs beyond their expiration date, standing on an edge of a platform, running across the rails, eating superglue and other. The animated personages demonstrate dangerous ways of suicide in attractive for children and teenagers comic format. The lines such as ‘hide in a dryer’ and ‘what’s this red button do?’ contain an incitement to commit those acts. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dumb_Ways_to_Die).

Of course the parodies of the YouTube hit have now developed into the most absurd endorsements of suicide. The clip ‘Fun Ways to Die’ (with 1.7 million hits and counting) tells of many ways to commit suicide, including ‘telling your girlfriend her vajayjay smells like a skunk’ (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1B8kizCjQA). I am sure the loved ones of those who have committed suicide by train are devastated to be told that their loved one was ‘dumb’ for choosing to die by train.

For a better, more intelligent and realistic understanding of suicide perhaps more attention to research-based evidence would be helpful (http://suicidepreventionaust.org/).
Of course, everything about this campaign contradicts the basics of what we know about suicide (https://www.sane.org/stigmawatch/for-the-media/media-resources/1007-summary-of-mindframe-guidelines-for-media-reporting-of-suicide). The Salvation Army, who know a thing or two about suicide, have instead developed a Metro Transit Team to respond to the issue (http://www.salvationarmy.org.au/en/Find-Us/Victoria/Melbourne614/melbourne614-services/SalvosMetroTransitTeams/). Many experts in suicide prevention argue that strategies like the ‘Dumb Ways to Die’ campaign are naïve and dangerous (http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2220230/Schoolgirl-visited-suicide-sites-dead-train-tracks-Campaigners-ban-web-pages-glamorise-self-harm.html). The experts ‘called for websites to be forced to remove content that glamorises suicide and self harm to help prevent any more deaths like that of the private school pupil from Hampstead’.

So, what commenced as a naïve and supposedly ‘clever’ attempt to respond to the dilemma of suicides in Victoria Metro may actually stupendously backfire. The ‘Dumb Ways to Die’ campaign may indeed promote harm rather than prevent suicide. This is what social psychology calls ‘associative meaning’, creating an illusory correlation in meaning between two concepts and expectations. The new videos, animations and games that have resulted from the ‘Dumb Ways to Die’ campaign more strongly endorse and validate suicide.

As for claims of success, if Internet hits are the judge of success then one could claim that porn is successful, as if ethics has no connection to activity. Surely we should be much more discerning about what amounts to success in risk and safety. As for statistical claims based on a 3 month sample, this too breaks most accepted standards on statistical validation. So before people attribute claims of success perhaps they should look more closely at purpose and the hidden tragedy embedded in naïve and ill-informed strategies in risk and safety.

Discerning Real Risk - Ten Themes

The idea of discernment complements the process of sensemaking and emphasises the value attributed to sensemaking, particularly from an arational focus. Whilst the concept of ‘sensemaking’ is very helpful in explaining how we make sense of things, it tends to have a very rational and cognitive focus. Discernment, on the other hand, helps explain how we place value in our sensemaking, particularly at a subconscious and unconscious level.

For the purposes of this book there are a number of themes associated with discernment that are carried throughout the text:

1 - Start with Critical Thinking and Sensemaking

In the case of the first story in this section about the pediatrician and paedophile mix-up, the first characteristic of discernment is the capability for critical thinking. A great deal of confusion about risk exists because of the ‘cult of the amateur’ and the validation of populist ideas about risk. The purpose of this series of books is to contribute to a more intelligent view of risk and sensemaking. Simplistic ideas about ‘common sense’ and monological goals about ‘zero’ simply muddy the waters about how humans make judgements and decisions about risk.

2 - Understanding the Human Psyche

The story of the lollyman highlight the arational ways humans value risk. The story of the lollyman captures all those moments in life when caution is ‘thrown to the wind’ and we chase things with a passion. This is what makes life so exciting, this is how life can be invigorating, this is why risk is
essential to learning. There is no learning without risk. In the first book much was made about trends in western society towards risk aversion and fear of risk. The realities of risk are much more complex than this. Sometimes, throwing caution to the wind, stepping out in faith, wisdom and luck and taking a risk, have been the key to great human successes in business, sport, science and many other walks of life.

3 - Embracing ‘Wrongology’

The story of the Star Amphitheatre in Balmoral Sydney highlights the fact that sometimes humans get it wrong and then defend their wrongness in a state of cognitive dissonance. The idea of cognitive dissonance (as discussed in Risk Makes Sense) captures the idea that in the face of all the evidence to the contrary humans can deny, explain away, excuse, ‘spin’ and self-deceive about reality. ‘Wrongology’ is often the key to learning. Sometimes people need to unlearn many myths about risk before they can learn about real risk. The problem is the failure to understand why humans makes mistakes, rather than blaming people for making them. For more on this, I recommend Hallinan, J., Why We Make Mistakes (2009).

4 - Risk is Attributed. What is Real Risk?

The story of the South Korean belief in ‘fan death’ highlights the fact that whole populations can misattribute risk, based on myths and populist ideas. So much of the attribution of risk is arational and non-conscious. This is why leadership should be far more attentive to this layer of influence, and why knowledge of pitching, framing and priming discourse and language are so important in the development of culture.

5 - The Social Psychology of Risk Enhances Understanding about Human Judgement and Decision Making

The study of fundamental attribution error is one of the essentials in social psychology. Social psychology is interested in perception, cognition bias, social collective attitudes, collective mindfulness, attitudes of populations and organisations, persuasion, cognitive dissonance, interpersonal attraction and social influence. One of the best places to commence a study of social psychology is Abelson and Gregg’s Experiments with People: Revelations from Social Psychology. Such study should be foundational to any claim to leadership in helping organisations engaging risk.

6 - Averting Risk May Only be Shifting Risk

The study of risk aversion and the mollycoddling of children illustrates the fact that tackling risk is a complex problem and any simplistic idea suggested to address risk may only be shifting the risk elsewhere. In For the Love of Zero research on Fly-in-Fly-Out (FIFO) and Drive-in-Drive-Out (DIDO) was discussed in the context of claims made by many tier one companies that follow the ideology of zero harm. The research shows that many people and families are harmed by the practice of FIFO and DIDO but that this harm is hidden and ‘out of sight’. In an understanding of the dynamics of risk trade off, as discussed in the first book Risk Makes Sense, it should be understood that there for every action there is an equally opposite reaction. This is often the case with claims about zero harm e.g. the increase in suicide, self harm, psychological stressors, psychosocial harm and mental health is rarely counted by advocates of risk aversion.
Chapter 1: The Need for Discerning in Risk

7 - Understanding Risk as a Wicked Problem

Discussion of trends in OHS in the United Kingdom (UK) through the actions of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Mythbusting Panel Flying Squad and 'watchdog', highlight the reality that a preoccupation with health and safety in society in general has created a monster. This is more than just the shifting of risk, and illustrates the absurd lengths crusaders against risk take in the ideological quest for zero harm. Unless there is an understanding that risk is a 'wicked problem' it is not likely that leadership in risk will be humanised. Understanding and tackling wicked problems is key to understanding the nature of risk and uncertainty. Wicked problems are problems that are intractable, multi-layered, highly complex, 'messy' and unsolvable. We will look further at wicked problems in Chapter 5.

8 - Think Different and Different Thinking

The campaign for Macintosh computers for many years was 'Think Different'. The conundrum that marks the messy problem of the HSE in the UK demonstrates the need for new thinking in the engagement of risk. Perhaps what is required is not so much new thinking but the revitalising of some old thinking. The current problem in the UK is still a case of using old orthodox mentalities to try and solve a new wicked problem. The fundamentals of sensemaking and critical thinking are crucial. When a revolution occurs, generally it is because someone has dared to think differently about something. Where we find the will to step outside orthodoxy is where we find our creative artists, musicians and designers. The discerning of risk requires both wisdom and imagination.

9 - Learning Through Community

Individualism is the enemy of learning. Despite this, most of the 'noise' that floats across social media doesn't seem to qualify it as a learning community. Learning communities such as schools and universities create a climate for empathetic disagreement and respect for expertise. Social media tends to conform to the 'cult of the amateur' and the 'pooling of ignorance' paradigm rather than driving genuine learning. Most often the associations on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn are platforms for opinion but there seems little respect for researched expertise. Indeed, more and more the power of collective opinion seems to carry weight than the wisdom of a community of doctors and professors. This is not to say that academics are the only source of knowledge but in social media there is an increasing sense that everything is 'just opinion'.

10 - Imagination and Exploration in Risk are Essential to Learning

More than ever we need to understand the unconscious in the way we make sense of risk. In the workplace there needs to be far more emphasis on the importance of creativity and imagination in thought leadership and learning about risk. The over-emphasis on rational-only assessments and the misunderstanding of intuition and implicit knowledge do not auger well for sensemaking and management of risk.

Naive approaches to managing risk do more harm than good. This is because many have little sense of the 'trajectory' of their decision. They can see, as it were, a few metres in front of their face but they don't really know where things are going. This 'risk shortsightedness' is one of the problems with poor risk attribution and poor cultural analysis. The 'Dumb Ways to Die' campaign is a good illustration of a lack of imagination, not for what it achieved - an animation that went viral on the Internet - but about the by-products of such a campaign. Understanding the psychology of goals, wicked problems and the social psychology of risk is required if one wants to mature in understanding risk.
The notion of exploration does not sit well with a fundamentalist quest for certainty, and the control it requires to reach its goal of zero harm. Exploration is essential to the development of skills in creativity and innovation. Exploration requires the exercise of a faith-like knowledge and preparedness to wear the risk-cost trade-off. Faith-knowledge is not necessarily ‘blind knowledge’, but is associated with wisdom and maturity in critical thinking. ‘Checklist thinking’ is anathema to the creative and imaginative spirit.

**Workshop Questions**

1. What is your story of a common misunderstanding? Do you have your own zarsaberry moment?

2. Think of some areas of activity that have involved a need to differentiate between minor things that can make a major difference. It could be a simple word or the press of a button that is the difference between health and harm. List some examples.

3. List a few habits that require ‘no thinking’, that you have learned to do ‘on automatic’. If you were to break down one of those habits into its thinking parts, what would each stage of the process look like? Don’t choose something complex like driving a car but maybe brushing your teeth, for example:
   - Look at the tube of tooth paste
   - Locate it with your hand
   - Look at the toothbrush
   - Locate it with your hand
   - Grab the toothpaste, and squeeze to just the right applied pressure to extract just the right amount of toothpaste
   - Turn on the tap to just the right position and pressure and apply water
   - Look into the mirror, locate brush onto teeth, etc.

You will see what I mean. How did we learn to do so much without thinking?

4. Can you think of any ways that we rob children of valuable experiences by being overly risk averse with them?

5. Have you got your own story of poor discernment in risk? Share it with your workgroup.
Transition

A friend recently applied to do family home day care to earn some extra money. She loves little children and has the perfect yard for supervision and play. In–Home Care (IHC) is a flexible form of childcare designed to accommodate the needs of families unable to access the mainstream option. In our area the IHC is managed by a government funded community service. As part of the inspection process my friend was told she would have to remove the lavender flowers from her garden, as the risk of a bee sting was considered too high. Perhaps we should eliminate all flowers from all gardens and flowers from trees because of the risk of bee sting? So here is the logic: when a child goes to day care the threat of bee sting is a problem, yet when walking around the wonderful parks and gardens of our city, with all its flowers and trees, it is not a problem. How will you know if your child is allergic to a sting if he or she doesn't get stung? Fortunately, treatment for anaphylaxis is quick and easy: a shot of epinephrine (EpiPen) will relieve the symptoms almost as quickly as the bee sting brought them on.

Engaging with risk is the life of living. Risk is not the enemy and risk aversion is not the answer. Children simply require competent supervision more than a fear of flowers.

So what are the realities of risk? Can we teach others to ‘risk wisely’? Does the misattribution of risk create more problems than it solves? Can engagement with risk be taught and caught? What strategies are best when helping others engage with risk? Is there such a thing as leadership in risk? Where does risk aversion lead others? Can there be any ‘thought leadership’ in risk aversion and the ideology of zero? Can life be fun without risk? Can there be learning without risk? Can people mature through risk aversion?