Hunting Black Swans

Dr Luke Kemp

Centre for the Study of Existential Risk
We suck at prediction.

We suck at thinking systemically.

We can suck less in the future.
Predicting Doomsday is Hard

1999: Heed my warning. The world will end in the year 2000
2011: Heed my warning. The world will end in the year 2012
2015: Heed my warning. The world will end in the year 2016
This time for real
Statistical Methods

Accuracy of three weather forecasting services

Source: "The Signal and the Noise" by Nate Silver | Author: Randy Olson (randalolson.com / @randal_olson)
“People who spend their time, and earn their living, studying a particular topic produce poorer predictions than dart-throwing monkeys who would have distributed their choices evenly over the options.”

- Daniel Kahneman
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Judgemental Methods</th>
<th>Delphi</th>
<th>Prediction Markers</th>
<th>Scenario Planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor reference class</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Partly.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate reference class</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Partly.</td>
<td>Anchoring could occur.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misplaced causality</td>
<td>Partly.</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame blindness</td>
<td>Partly.</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>No (needs devils advocates).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track record?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Good for binaries, useless for variables</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hunting Black Swans

- Use dialectic and devil’s advocacy.
- Combine methods.
- Note uncertainty.
- Build anti-fragile systems.
My hobby: extrapolating

As you can see, by late next month you’ll have over four dozen husbands. Better get a bulk rate on wedding cake.