

LEADERSHIP DECISIONS IN UNCERTAINTY

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO ADAPTIVE
THINKING AND EFFECTIVE MVP STRATEGIES

J. D. COREN



BRIGHTPATHMAKERS
BOOKS

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About the Author

I've led global teams, managed large-scale technical programs, and faced more ambiguity than I ever anticipated. What you'll read in this book isn't theory, it's distilled experience. I wrote this for leaders who want to stay grounded, focused, and human, no matter how complex the landscape becomes.

If you'd like to share your feedback, ask questions, or simply connect, I'd be happy to hear from you.

You can reach me at: jdcoren@brightpathmakers.com

J. D. Coren

Why This Book Exists

There is a moment every experienced leader knows well: when you realize that having more data doesn't help, the roadmap is falling apart, and everyone is waiting for you to decide.

This book was born from those moments.

I've led projects where uncertainty wasn't just present, it was the environment. AI roadmaps with unpredictable feasibility. Strategic initiatives with vague expectations. Decisions where no answer felt safe. And still, we had to move forward.

What I found over the years is that decision-making under uncertainty is not just a skill, it's a mindset. And most importantly, it can be learned, tested, and refined.

This book is not about decision theory. It's not about planning the perfect strategy. It's about making better decisions when nothing feels certain, by thinking adaptively, acting iteratively, and building the habits of reflective leadership.

Whether you lead teams, products, or projects (or simply want to lead yourself better), this book offers ideas, tools, and real-world patterns to help you move forward, one decision at a time.

This book was born in an age of rapid technological transformation. Artificial Intelligence supported its creation by accelerating research, structuring references, and visualizing ideas. Yet, the book itself was not written by AI.

Leadership Decisions in Uncertainty

A Practical Guide to Adaptive Thinking and Effective MVP Strategies¹

Who this book is for

This is not a beginner's manual. It is written for experienced leaders, project managers, and product builders who have already *lived through* the tension of decision-making under uncertainty.

It assumes you've already learned how to run a team, lead a project, or build a roadmap, and now you're asking:

"How do I do this when everything keeps shifting?"

The pages ahead offer sharp, focused thinking tools, not detailed theories or one-size-fits-all templates.

If you've ever had to make a call with 60% of the data, this book is for you.

¹ The MVP – Minimum Viable Product – The Lean Startup Co.
<https://leanstartup.co/mvp/>

1. The New Reality of Decision-Making

In today's rapidly shifting and often chaotic business environment, the traditional comfort of detailed roadmaps, fixed milestones, and step-by-step execution plans has become a dangerous illusion. The era of predictable trajectories is over. We now operate in what is commonly described as a VUCA² world: one shaped by Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity. In such an environment, decision-making cannot rely on stable assumptions or linear logic.

Modern leaders are no longer called upon to choose among clear alternatives or respond to well-defined crises. Instead, they are expected to make progress when the end goal is unclear, the path is unstable, and the variables are constantly shifting. Leadership under uncertainty demands a new cognitive posture: one that embraces ambiguity, acts with incomplete information, and builds resilience rather than control.

Leaders are no longer asked to decide *what to do when things go wrong*. They are asked to move forward when it's unclear what "right" even looks like.

Why classic planning models fail in today's volatile world

Classical models of planning rest on the belief that with enough information, rigorous analysis, and sufficient lead time, we can minimize uncertainty to manageable levels of risk. However, this belief breaks down in reality. In today's volatile contexts, uncertainty does not diminish with time or data. Instead, it evolves, rendering even the most carefully constructed plans obsolete by the time they are implemented.

The reality is that we often spend valuable time perfecting strategies while the terrain underneath us shifts. We map the landscape only to discover that the map no longer matches the ground. By the time a plan is approved, new dynamics have already emerged. This mismatch creates friction, stalls momentum, and undermines confidence.

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/VUCA>

Understanding the difference between uncertainty and risk

Risk is quantifiable. It has variables we can identify, probabilities we can assign, and contingency strategies we can prepare. Risk management assumes that the parameters of the game are known and that with effort, we can influence the outcome.

Uncertainty, by contrast, deals with the unknown and often the unknowable. We may not yet understand what factors matter, which questions to ask, or what patterns are forming. In uncertainty, we lack a reliable frame of reference.

This distinction is not just academic. It is practical and urgent. Leaders who mistake uncertainty for risk may rely too heavily on rigid planning tools or outdated KPIs. Those who acknowledge true uncertainty must adapt continuously, update assumptions in real-time, and cultivate organizational sensing mechanisms that go beyond dashboards and reports.

Known unknowns vs. unknown unknowns

Effective leaders in uncertain environments understand the difference between the gaps they can see and the gaps that remain invisible.

- Known unknowns are gaps we can identify, monitor, and potentially close over time.
- Unknown unknowns are the blind spots – issues or variables that we are not yet aware even exist.

The most significant failures in leadership often stem not from miscalculations within our models but from an inability to question the model itself. Building in practices for reflection, feedback, and diverse input becomes essential. These mechanisms help surface hidden variables and challenge assumptions before they become liabilities.

The trap of overplanning and the illusion of control

A natural response to ambiguity is to overcompensate through excessive planning. Leaders often seek clarity by detailing every step, defining every milestone, and crafting overly rigid governance structures. But this instinct, while understandable, is counterproductive.

Overplanning can paralyze. It creates a false sense of certainty, consumes resources, and leaves little room for adaptation. In a dynamic context, clarity is not a prerequisite for action. Instead, action generates clarity.

Progress in uncertain conditions comes from short cycles of execution, reflection, and adjustment. The ability to pivot quickly is more valuable than the ability to forecast precisely. The most adaptive organizations treat plans as hypotheses, not guarantees.