# *Disruptive Technologies – Understand, Evaluate, Respond*
## *Review of Paul Armstrong's book*

## Paul Levy

**Book details**

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### How can organisations meet the challenge of technological disruption?

Disruptive Technologies offers a very practical approach to taking the next steps in an increasingly complex technological world. Its unit of analysis is the organisation - public or private - and it bases itself around a key model developed by the author over many years. We are essentially offered a blueprint for meeting the challenges of technological disruption.

Paul Armstrong
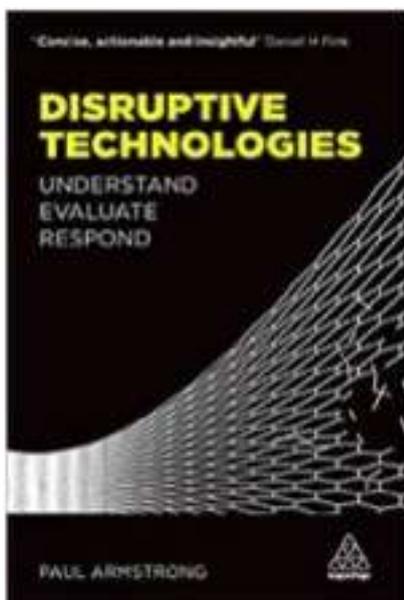
This book isn't a deep dive into any specific disruptive technology. Though we are offered snapshots of the headline disruptive technologies such as cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin, nanotechnology, 3D Printing, Artificial Intelligence, we are also offered the important insight of "collision".  These are not discrete technologies; they are in interaction, in change.  And that change is unpredictable. I do feel there is more scope here to dive deeper into that collision. You can find plenty written about each specific technology elsewhere, but it is this *collision* that will become more interesting and also more critical in terms of successful adaptation and exploitation of what is emerging in the tech space. Armstrong convincingly prepares us for this collision.

## The challenge of big data

The author points to the increasing complexity in our world. Big data alone will not necessarily bring benefits to public and private organisations. The real challenge is one of analysis, presentation and utilisation of that data in very practical ways.

The author is drawing on decades of practical experience, and therein lies the heart and also the virtue of the book. We are essentially offered a model, in both a simpler and a more elaborated form. The book's eleven chapters are full of insights and offer immediate advice and direction for leaders in the tech space. Commitment and sign-off is key, Armstrong notes.  We have to start taking the millennial generation seriously, and a culture of openness does not have to mean radical organisation redesign towards new models such as holocracy.  This is a pragmatic book that never becomes idealistic for its own sake. If you are looking for realisable next steps, you'll find them well articulated in this book.

## A TBD framework

Armstrong's TDB Framework (Technology, Behaviour, Data) is deceptively simple.  It is both a way of seeing technology and also a practical approach. At the heart of this is the need for ongoing flexibility and a culture of openness. We cannot wait to adapt - we need to foster flexibility now, if we are to be ready for the challenges and opportunities in the future. The book is written with a realism I found convincing and accessible. The model of 'complex TBD' is essentially a model of change, very people-focused, rooted in clear objectives, targeted, investment-focused and ultimately, strategic. It feels involvement-based, recognising that most organisations are still fairly hierarchical and top down. It won't sit as easily with those pursuing more horizontal forms of organisation.

I enjoyed this book and feel it has a valuable place in C-Suite Conversations as well as on the physical or virtual desk of those entrusted with meeting the challenge of technological disruption in the organisational setting - the leaders and catalysts of change.

The style of writing is accessible and feels like a conversation with a barefoot thinker and practitioner of change and business transformation. Tech can be bad for us, but it can also be loaded with possibility and potential.  Yet un-rooted in informed and wise decision-making, it can also be managed badly by the cultural norms of the business. People can mismanage its potential and its implementation. There are real examples throughout the book as well as a forthright style of advocacy of what felt to me like a very holistic approach to meeting the challenge of disruptive technology. A few more depth case examples would deepen and enrich the book. It isn't a long book; it has an economy of style that makes it ideal for taking on a business trip.

## Relevance to AMED 2020?

Why is this book relevant for AMED members? It offers a highly readable and applied overview of disruptive technology. It serves as both a primer and a guide for those involved in managing technological change. It is a prescriptive book, but the prescription is born of wide experience and ultimately takes a dual people and strategy centred approach. I could certainly see this book on the reading list of education and training programmes in the fields of business and technology management.

A book loaded with practical advice, this is such a rapidly changing field, so I'd also defend not including

more specific examples as a smart move. What we have here is a resilient approach to encountering disruptive technology presented in a holistic and effective way that will remain relevant in the challenging years ahead.

## About the reviewer

**Paul Levy** is a senior researcher at the University of Brighton in the field of Innovation Management, as well as an associate at Warwick Business School where he teaches Digital Innovation. He is the author of the books Digital Inferno and The Poetry of Change.  You can contact Paul by e-mail at paul@cats3000.net.