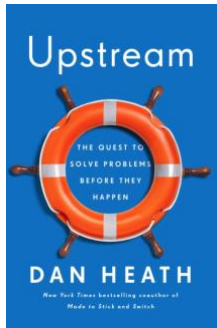


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February, 2021 *In The Know* Summary

Upstream: How to Solve Problems Before They Happen

By Dan Heath

Discussion Notes Prepared by Laurie Shellenberger

What is Upstream Thinking?

Reducing the probability that problems will happen, and for that reason, the work must culminate in systemic change. A structure or framework to address/consider whether there is a costly problem (e.g., Medicare spends a fortune on hospital visits that could be prevented).

Overview of the Book

- Not new information for we OD practitioners. A book about change, strategies to think big problems, take risks, think different (overlay different data), look at problems from all angles.
- Dan Heath is a very compelling storyteller, a story for every part of the book. Great to have in your toolkit – telling some of these stories that highlight the framework. Recommend a 15-minute TED Talk Daily podcast [How your brain responds to stories -- and why they're crucial for leaders | Karen Eber](#) **How the best leaders develop trust – by using data and telling stories.**
- Large systems change, individuals matter, and large systems cannot change until individuals look at data and issues differently.
- The book content is probably one third of the size. Many resources in the back, book recommendations, notes, questions for book clubs etc.
- Good book as a leadership book – getting people to consider bigger systemic change.
- Quick read for OD practitioners / Coaches can use this when working with C-suite leaders/ executive leaders to help them see the value and possibility of upstream thinking.
- Framework of 7 questions that a person or team or organization can work through when looking at root problems and upstream thinking.

Key Points by Section

Section 1

Barriers

1. Problem Blindness; When we don't see a problem, we can't solve it
2. Lack of Ownership; Walk in someone else's shoes
3. Tunneling; limited bandwidth to solve problems, little problems (crises) crowd out larger ones

Section 2

Questions for Upstream Thinkers

1. How will you unite the right people?
2. How will you change the system?
3. Where can you find a point of leverage?
4. How will you get early warning of the problem?
5. How will you know you're succeeding?
6. How will you avoid doing harm?
7. Who will pay for what does not happen?

Section 3

- Far upstream (distant and improbable threats)
 - Ideas that spark change
 - What if being prepared isn't good enough (Y2K example)
 - Conspiracy theories: current example where we might need to build a system to address it
- You, upstream (235) – a section that addresses how to choose what you focus on.
 - Be impatient for action but patient for outcomes
 - Macro starts with micro
 - Favor scoreboards over pills
- You as an individual can change an organization. Try and leave the world a little better.

Next Steps and Resources – Check out the [Website](#) with many resources including: 7 questions graph, book recommendations, questions for book club discussion. Notes section which provides all the books and websites and links to all the stories used throughout the book.

About the 'In the Know' Book Club In this monthly book club, a presenter shares highlights from a book related to leadership, business, neuroscience, or coaching. Membership is not required, and there's no obligation to pre-read the book. [Register here](#) for upcoming events. For the full set of discussion summaries, [click here](#).