



Masters of Uncertainty: Weather Forecasters and the Quest for Ground Truth

Phaedra Daipha

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Though we commonly make them the butt of our jokes, weather forecasters are in fact exceptionally good at managing uncertainty. They consistently do a better job calibrating their performance than stockbrokers, physicians, or other decision-making experts precisely because they receive feedback on their decisions in near real time. Following forecasters in their quest for truth and accuracy, therefore, holds the key to the analytically elusive process of decision making as it actually happens.

In *Masters of Uncertainty*, Phaedra Daipha develops a new conceptual framework for the process of decision making, after spending years immersed in the life of a northeastern office of the National Weather Service. Arguing that predicting the weather will always be more craft than science, Daipha shows how forecasters have made a virtue of the unpredictability of the weather. Impressive data infrastructures and powerful computer models are still only a substitute for the real thing outside, and so forecasters also enlist improvisational collage techniques and an omnivorous appetite for information to create a locally meaningful forecast on their computer screens. Intent on capturing decision making in action, Daipha takes the reader through engrossing firsthand accounts of several forecasting episodes (hits and misses) and offers a rare fly-on-the-wall insight into the process and challenges of producing meteorological predictions come rain or come shine. Combining rich detail with lucid argument, *Masters of Uncertainty* advances a theory of decision making that foregrounds the pragmatic and situated nature of expert cognition and casts into new light how we make decisions in the digital age.

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