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Chaos theory



Eversys' Kamal Bengougam and Anaëlle Parlier on how events are interconnected and how decisions can lead to unpredictability, disruption and perhaps, even chaos.

Some believe that if a colourful butterfly flicked its wings in the Amazon Forest, it could result in a powerful tornado ripping through the heart of Texas. This is called the Butterfly Effect.

Chaos could be defined as events that have become out of control, meaning that their end can no longer be predicted with any level of accuracy. And in that world, assumptions, fake news, or a loud, confident voice could even silence reason. In that realm, decisions are made, triggering a domino effect of negative waves that could impact our fragile destinies.

'YOU NEED CHAOS IN YOUR SOUL TO GIVE BIRTH TO A DANCING STAR.' - FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

Some assume that everything in this world is interconnected or is a coalescence of cause and effect stretching a silver chord from the beginning of time, the universe, Creation, through to infinity, whatever and wherever that might be.

Laplace, the famous French mathematician, was a proponent of this theory, and, on one occasion, he expressed it to no less than Napoleon Bonaparte after a famous victory.

Laplace said that if he had the details of all past events, he could predict all future events with absolute certainty. When Napoleon asked Laplace where God was in this theory, Laplace simply replied "je n'avais pas besoin de considerer cette hypothèse" or "I had no need to consider this information". He implied that there was no intelligence influencing or guiding our little planet as it soared and spun through time and space at incredible pace.

And now that we have this amazing new telescope in space, NASA's James Webb, capable of recording images, allegedly revealing a time close to the universe's birth. However, were we to look forward and try to peek into our future, even for the span of a mere second, we would merely be drawing a blank as humankind can unfortunately, in spite of its fascination with the future, only benefit from hindsight, not foresight.

In light of the above, we could ask ourselves what value the future might hold in our daily lives. Is it really that predictable, and could it therefore truly be governed by mere logic and/or scientific rules? Could the complexity of human nature and society be totally ignored, allowing algorithms to rule?



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And how important is it for us to know?

If we studied the history of the stock market performance since its inception in Amsterdam in 1611, we could conclude that actions do indeed have consequences – desirable or otherwise. This may however, only apply to simple equations based on already accepted norms, but as the level of complexity rises, so do inaccuracies.

Then, there is human-caused chaos, which science can neither forecast nor eliminate, as people have been upsetting the 'earthly' order since time began. The end of the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, inflation, global warming, and energy shortage forecasts have led us to this new reality, a time of transition where the paradigm shifts in unexpected ways.

Mankind, with its emotive framework, is far from being a simple linear formula, one that could be predicted or forecasted with any level of credibility. However, mankind also has this incredible capacity to adapt to new realities, transcend the unpredictability of the present, and transform it into a new paradigm, a new dawn, and hope.

In our global coffee world, how could the butterfly effect manifest itself? Could we foresee that if we introduced unsustainable practices such as deforestation, intensive farming, and genetic cropping to our current reality, in order to meet growing market demand, things might take a different turn? Quality might drop, which could prejudice the current appetite for more, putting into question the future sustainability of those decisions.

As prices increase and global warming intensifies, farmers will face increasing difficulties maintaining quality as well as productivity. Who can predict what their futureproofing may look like in five, 10, or 20 years? Will prices be renegotiated upwards so that they can reinstate old and trusted farming practices?

If that were the case, it would also impact coffee shops facing their own commercial challenges. Even though many remain open, some are closing due to rising business costs. After the pandemic, people tend to work more from home than before and don't travel to city centres as they used to. They have also developed the habit of consuming their morning coffee at home, buying higher quality equipment, and broadening their knowledge of coffee-making, thus shunning the places they used to frequent regularly.

On top of this, the hospitality industry is experiencing unprecedented staff shortages, making it challenging to run such a business.

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Moreover, it would be interesting to see how much more the final consumer would be ready to pay for an espresso. Is our morning cup of coffee becoming a luxury, a premium product, a nice to have as opposed to a necessity?

In view of this new-found reality, every single stakeholder needs to be heard. In our coffee world, we are truly all connected from the grower through to the consumer, a true community, and as our destinies entwine, so should all voices be heard, equally.

Unpredictability is an inevitable part of our daily lives, even though we know that we can forecast some events with a modicum of confidence, as logic can be applied to define outcomes. As such, we must embrace it, not fight it, and become like a tree that has learnt to cope with heavy storms.

However, making decisions without a clear framework of reference or values could lead to perdition, so why not wait for better facts to become apparent prior to allowing that famed butterfly to flick its wings and wreak havoc with our future? B

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