

# **Hindsight and the delusion of control**

Conceptual paper/viewpoint

## **Purpose**

To draw attention to a philosophical vacuum underlying the current emphasis on risk assessment.

## **Design**

Definitions of chance, probability and risk are drawn from the literature and the development of risk assessment is surveyed historically. A critique of the philosophical basis of risk assessment is outlined.

## **Findings**

The paper argues that emphasis on numerical risk assessment disguises the underlying complexity and uncertainty of modern life and leads to a false sense of control. This has implications for the assignment of responsibility and accountability when unintended consequences arise.

## **Originality/value**

The paper raises questions concerning the meaning of 'risk' and 'uncertainty', and asks whether 'risks' can truly be assessed and managed in a meaningful way. It is intended to provoke thought and debate, and should be of interest to policy makers, academics, business professionals and a general readership.

## **Keywords**

Risk assessment; risk management; uncertainty

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