



COLUMN

Change



'It is not the strongest of species that survives, nor the most intelligent. It is the one most adaptable to change.'

These were not exactly Darwin's words but rather an adaptation of one Leon Megginson, a professor of management

and marketing. Be that as it may, there is change in the world and it is both scary and exciting. Change means uncertainty and risk. Change can be slow and gradual – often associated with growth. And change can be sudden or abrupt – often associated with regression or decline.

Change per se is not the issue. We're facing multiple, complex and simultaneous change, culminating to risk. Risk which makes people generally just a little bit more anxious. Risk for which we have less recent historic data to rely on. The climate is changing as a consequence of this very ability of humans to adapt and survive. Not only adapt biologically, but also socially and technologically. And much of the social and political change we're currently witnessing and experiencing is a consequence of this collective survival.

Variations of Darwin's faux quote includes 'the ability to perceive change and adapt to it'. Which brings me to some of the traits we have as humans that aided survival. The desirable and also the less desirable.

Anxiety – one of the less attractive qualities in human beings, meticulously handed down in the DNA of our surviving ancestors. Not caution, I'm referring to raw

anxiety. That terrible feeling when things are off and you're not yet able to consciously discern what. When the sideways glance someone gives you does not match their words. When the constant low level buzz from a fridge in a hotel room keeps you from sleeping. Your ancestor who ran out of the cave ahead of an earthquake passed on the latter, while the one who navigated a savannah or a war zone the former. The innate ability to perceive risk. Other more popular qualities that aid survival includes fitness, specialisation, belonging to a group and self-control.

Artificial intelligence, the new pension law in the Netherlands and changing global climate risk patterns. It is a question of remaining relevant in this changing world. Balancing the most prominent changes we need to navigate as a profession and as individual actuaries against our toolkit it is tempting to provide an answer. And a hopeful positive one at that. Yes we belong to a group, we're specialised and most of us have high levels of self-control. Or better yet to present a negative as a positive – anxious nature as innate risk management.

The most advanced tool cannot replace the intuition of a seasoned actuary facing complex risk. A seasoned actuary without the most advanced tool will also struggle to remain competitive, I'm afraid.

By combining knowledge of the old with the new, backward and forward looking, data with 'gut' feels, the learnt with the intuitive, I believe we're not merely surviving professionally but adding value to this complex changing world.

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