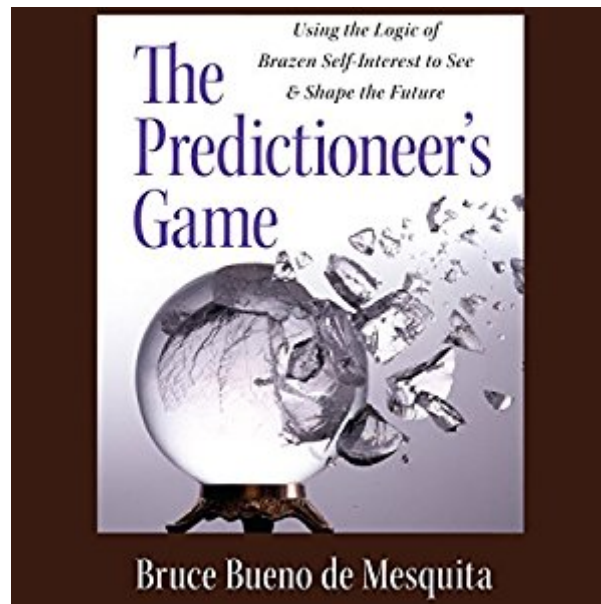# The Predictioneer's Game: Using The Logic Of Brazen Self-Interest To See And Shape The Future

Synopsis

Bruce Bueno de Mesquita is a master of game theory, which is a fancy label for a simple idea: People compete, and they always do what they think is in their own best interest. Bueno de Mesquita uses game theory and its insights into human behavior to predict and even engineer political, financial, and personal events. His forecasts, which have been employed by everyone from the CIA to major business firms, have an amazing 90-percent accuracy rate, and in this dazzling and revelatory book he shares his startling methods and lets you play along in a range of high-stakes negotiations and conflicts.Revealing the origins of game theory and the advances made by John Nash, the Nobel Prize-winning scientist perhaps best known from A Beautiful Mind, Bueno de Mesquita details the controversial and cold-eyed system of calculation that he has since created, one that allows individuals to think strategically about what their opponents want, how much they want it, and how they might react to every move.From there, Bueno de Mesquita games such events as the North Korean disarmament talks and the Middle East peace process and recalls, among other cases, how he correctly predicted which corporate clients of the Arthur Andersen accounting firm were most likely engaged in fraudulent activity (hint: one of them started with an E).Looking as ever to the future, Bueno de Mesquita also demonstrates how game theory can provide successful strategies to combat both global warming and terror.But as Bueno de Mesquita shows, game theory isn't just for saving the world. It can help you in your own life, whether you want to succeed in a lawsuit, elect the CEO of your company, or even buy a car.Savvy, provocative, and shockingly effective, The Predictioneer's Game will change how you understand the world and manage your future. Life's a game, and how you play is whether you win or lose.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This review has been edited to correct some misstatements pointed out by the author. I was working from a prepublication version that did not have all the end-notes, nor a reference to the website. Moreover, the author's comment to this review adds some useful material. On the basis of that, I would raise my rating from three stars to three and a half if that were allowed, but my basic opinion has not changed.This book is likely to teach you some fascinating and useful material, but I can't recommend it wholeheartedly because it may drive you crazy as well. The basic idea is simple. Experts know a lot, but are bad at making predictions about human affairs. Simple models based on quantitative game theory are more accurate, and even when they're incorrect they expand your thinking in useful ways. Moreover, these models allow you to simulate alternatives and generate outcomes as good or better than the best human strategists can achieve.To evaluate this book, it's useful to separate that claim into two parts. I'm a quant, and therefore I think it's pretty well established that you make better decisions by asking experts what they know and letting a computer trace the logical implications than by following the experts' recommendations. I also accept that simple quantitative models do remarkably good jobs, and are only rarely surpassed by complex qualitative analysis. Anyway, if you don't accept those positions, there's no point in even opening this book. So to me and probably to you if you're still reading, asking experts simple questions with answers on a scale from 0 to 100 and combining the results in a reasonable way, is an excellent approach to most decisions. Call this the basic quant position.

The Predictoneer's Game is a story about the author and the accuracy of his predictions than a discussion on the application of Game Theory to decision making. While the book contains descriptions of Game Theory, the majority of its pages are dedicated to the author explaining past predictions and how they were destined to be accurate. If you are looking for a book on how to understand and apply game theory for yourself, then you will need to look elsewhere in my opinion.In many ways, Bruce Bueno De Mesquita's book is similar to those written by Nicholas Taleb. Both authors explain their thoughts and tools in a self-referential style that you will notice throughout the book. In more than one place, this tone can be a bit overbearing. This is more of a book for those that admire game theory rather than people who want to learn how to apply game theory. This does not mean that the book is not enjoyable and worth the read - it is just not what I

expected.The Predictioneer's Game is organized around the authors experience applying game theory to a wide range of situations from peace in the Middle East, North Korea nuclear disarmament to how to purchase an automobile. Each of these case stories is interesting examination of the events and the motivations leading to the actor's decisions.The book does describe approaches for applying game theory. The appendix contains sample calculations all of which will get people started. These will help get people started in applying game theory to understand the behaviors and motivations of players in a decision, but according to the author there is more to the model than a table of influence, salience and position figures.

I bought this book because I had seen de Mesquita talk at TED[...]I found the TED talk intriguing but annoyingly devoid of the details that would help one understand how the model really works. This was part of a shrewd strategy employed by de Mesquita to make me buy his book. So, de Mesquita 1 - Stefano 0, I'll definitely give him that.The book is *worse* than the TED talk: nowhere in the book de Mesquita gives you an honest explanation of how the model works. To begin with, it is even unclear what the parameters of the model are. In some sections of the book (Chapter 4, an analysis of North Korea's nuclear strategy) it seems as if there are three parameters for each decision maker involved in a given issue: 1) what is their preferred outcome (expressed numerically on a sliding scale) 2) how influential they are; 3) how much they care about the issue. In other sections (Chapter 11, analysis of climate change international negotiations), it seems the parameters are four: the previous three plus 4) desire for agreement.de Mesquita's claims are that: i) a diligent subject matter expert can reliably identify the decision makers involved in an issue and assign to each of them a value for these three or four parameters; ii) the model takes this parameter assignment as input and charts the interactions among decision makers identifying *the* outcome with the most power behind it (the outcome preferred by the decision makers that collectively yield the majority of power); iii) the model is stable (i.e. small variance in the assignment of initial parameters does *not* result in drastically different outcomes).There is one big problem: the book does not contain a proof/explanation of claim ii).

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