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**WHY ORGANISATIONS FAIL
DO WE KNOW THE SIGNS AND CAN WE READ THEM?**

ONLINE LIVE PANEL EVENT

 **WEDNESDAY 2 JUNE 10.00 – 15.00 BST** [**+ REGISTER HERE**](#)

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Why do companies fail? What lies behind corporate catastrophes such as Wirecard in Germany and Carillion in the UK? And why does a quarter century's corporate governance reform seem to have made little difference? While some businesses disappear as part of the natural process of renewal and innovation, others collapse at speed and for largely preventable reasons.

The Covid-19 pandemic has complicated the road to failure by creating the most difficult trading conditions many companies have ever experienced. Many of the economic pressures that were present before the pandemic are still with us and most forecasters believe it will take another four years to recover from the economic damage. At the same time, businesses are still grappling with the implications of changes in customer, employee and investor attitudes brought about by the pandemic. Consequently, more companies will come under pressure and more will be at risk of failure.

HOW DO WE AVOID FAILURE?

Policy responses are uninspiring. There is still too much focus on fixing the rules, without a corresponding focus on rebuilding cultural norms of common sense, integrity, and a willingness to ask difficult questions.

This is unhelpful because, while some of the factors implicated in failure are beyond a business's control, others – such as dishonesty, incompetence, managerial hubris, a lack of basic strategic and operational expertise or straightforward financial control – can be anticipated and managed.

Chaired by Margaret Heffernan, author of *Wilful Blindness*, PARC's Conference will provide some antidote to ensure failure does not happen to us by:

- Helping us recognise early warning signs and anticipate threats to the business before they become critical
- Providing an understanding of the legal framework in which businesses operate
- Highlighting how we can optimise our processes and project management skills
- Creating a learning opportunity to give us the benefit of profiting from the mistakes of others.


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AGENDA

10.00	Wilful Blindness – Ignoring the Obvious at Our Peril Margaret Heffernan Margaret will examine the intricate, pervasive cognitive and emotional mechanisms about which we choose to remain unseeing. Sometimes that choice is conscious, but mostly not – and in situations where we could and should know, but where we don't know because it makes us feel better not to know.
10.20	The Signs Were There – Clues That a Company is Heading for a Fall Tim Steer Tim's brilliant book lists appalling examples of the gloss and propaganda put out from some companies, large and small. Tim has a clear message for companies, managers and investors large and small.
11.10	Break
11.15	Project Management Successes and Failures Stephen Carver Organisations have to adapt and change, yet the vast majority of change initiatives fail. Even worse, many prove toxic or even fatal to their organisations – think Interserve or even Track and Trace. Stephen's session will look at how to avoid the traps of poorly managed change programmes and identify early warning signs of catastrophic failure.
12.05	Lunch
13.00	Decision-making Amid Deep Uncertainty Professor David Tuckett David's background in psychoanalysis and economics provides new ways of thinking about economics and finance. He introduces psychoanalytical understanding to behaviour in the financial markets and the economy more generally. His work towards understanding improved decision-making processes is internationally acclaimed.
13.50	Break
13.55	The Legal Pitfalls That Can Derail Us Diane Gilhooley Diane will pinpoint the legal pitfalls that can derail us should we not have a comprehensive, relevant, and precautionary legal framework for all employees. Getting it wrong opens the door to malpractice, litigation and potentially substantial material and reputational damage. This area for business leaders is not getting easier.
14.35	Summary Margaret Heffernan Margaret's task is to extract the key lessons from the day, and present us with her recommendations for healthy organisational survival. What should we do and not do in terms of practices, precautions and processes?
15.00	Close

CONFERENCE SPEAKERS →

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STEPHEN CARVER lectures in Project Management, Action, Execution and Implementation at Cranfield University. He previously worked in oil and for Virgin, with project and risk management experience in most sectors. He is a prolific writer, much sought-after speaker and highly regarded as a global expert in Risk, Influencing and Crisis.



DIANE GILHOOLEY is the Global Head of the Eversheds Sutherland HR and Pensions Practice. She is also a member of the Senior Management Team and International Steering Group. Diane is eminent in the field of employment law, handling high-profile cases and providing strategic employment advice at national and international levels.



MARGARET HEFFERNAN produced prize-winning radio and television programmes for the BBC and ran media and software companies in both the UK and US. She is the author of five books, including *Wilful Blindness* (a finalist for *The FT* Best Book award). Her TED talks have been seen by over eight million people. She mentors senior and chief executives, and writes for *The Financial Times*.



TIM STEER was an international rock band sound and lighting engineer before qualifying as a Chartered Accountant with EY. He then became an Investment Analyst with HSBC James Capel and Merrill Lynch. He was a founding partner of New Star and later joined Artemis. Tim is an observer and commentator, and author of *The Signs Were There*.



PROF. DAVID TUCKETT is a Fellow of the British Institute of Psychoanalysis, a Training Analyst, Professor and Director of the Centre for the Study of Decision-Making Uncertainty at UCL. He is also Senior Research Fellow at the Kiel Institute for the World Economy. He has held a number of other senior appointments and is a prolific author and contributor to a range of publications.