



SUPER CRUNCHERS **Why Thinking-by-Numbers is the New Way to be Smart**

By Ian Ayres
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This is not a how-to book. You will not find any formulas. You will not find suggestions about how to proceed with analytics, super or otherwise. What you will find is an extensive, thorough, and well-researched set of examples about how “super crunching” is impacting our lives. Some of Ayres’ examples will evoke no surprise at all from most readers, but some of them will be definite eye-openers.

What is super crunching? Ayres describes it this way:

“It is statistical analysis that impacts real-world decisions. Super Crunching predictions usually bring togeth-

er some combination of size, speed and scale. The sizes of the datasets are really big – both in the number of observations and in the number of variables. And when I say that Super Crunchers are using large datasets, I mean really large. Increasingly, business and government datasets are being measured not in mega- or gigabytes, but in tera- and even petabytes (1,000 terabytes). A terabyte is the equivalent of 1,000 gigabytes.”

By the time one reaches the end of this book, the extent to which all this statistical analysis is impacting our lives may be a bit overwhelming, even intimidating. At the very least, it is breathtaking. Businesses and governments are making decisions in every arena based on those massive datasets. Ayres makes no value judgment about whether or not those decisions are desirable, but simply puts them forth for our advisement. Consider two of the many examples in this book (in Ayres’ own words):

“Nowadays when a flight is canceled, airlines will skip over their frequent fliers and give the next open seat to the mine-identified customer whose continued business is most at risk. Instead of following a first-come, first-serve rule, companies will condition their behavior on literally dozens of consumer-specific factors.”

“The ‘No Child Left Behind’ Act, which requires schools to adopt teaching methods supported by rigorous data analysis, is causing teachers to spend up to 45 percent of class time training kids to pass standardized tests. Super Crunching is even shifting some teachers toward class lessons where every word is scripted and statistically vetted.”

Very few of the examples cited here are taken from the world of HR/HCM. Nonetheless, it may have value to IHRIM members and similar readers, in two ways.

First, the book unequivocally makes the case that statistical analysis – metrics and analytics – is no longer the wave of the future: statistical analysis is now. Senior management in too many organizations seem to think that this is something that other companies do; but if other companies are doing it and you’re not, well, you’re behind the times. For those of you who are attempting to convince your decision-makers to invest in the infrastructure necessary for serious analytics, this book will provide abundant ammunition for your argument.

Second, one or more of these many examples will surely be inspiration for measurements related to HR/HCM information. Read this with a little creativity and imagine what datasets you have available, or could develop (or buy?); imagine what aspects of employee behavior and attributes could be correlated with changes (positive or negative) in revenue or expenses or customer loyalty; imagine what super crunching could mean in your particular environment. It will depend entirely on your business or mission, your specific goals and strategies, but Ayres’ book is an excellent examination of possibilities.