

**NIK GOWING**

**Co-author, 'Thinking the Unthinkable' and Visiting Professor, Nanyang Technological University**



In 2016 Nik Gowing co-authored interim findings of the “Thinking the Unthinkable” study. It is based on sixty top level confidential interviews of corporate and public service leaders, plus hundreds more conversations including with the new generation of millennials. In partnership with CIMA it reveals candidly why so many leaders face new difficulties identifying what looms in the disruptions of the “new normal” that have emerged since 2014. The findings are scary.

Nik Gowing was a main news presenter for the BBC’s international 24-hour news channel BBC World News 1996-2014. He presented The Hub with Nik Gowing, BBC World Debates, Dateline London, plus location coverage of major global stories.

For 18 years he worked at ITN where he was bureau chief in Rome and Warsaw, and Diplomatic Editor for Channel Four News (1988-1996). He has been a member of the councils of Chatham House (1998–2004), the Royal United Services Institute (2005–present), and the Overseas Development Institute (2007-2014), the board of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy including vice chair (1996-2005), and the advisory council at Wilton Park (1998-2012). In 1994 he was a fellow at the Joan Shorenstein Barone Center in the J. F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. He is a board member for the Hay Literature Festival.

His peer-reviewed study at Oxford University “Skyful of Lies and Black Swans” predicted and identified the new vulnerability, fragility and brittleness of institutional power in the new all-pervasive public information space. The work builds on his work initiated at Harvard.

In 2014 Nik was appointed a Visiting Professor at Kings College, London in the School of Social Science and Public Policy. In 2016 he is a Visiting Professor at Nanyang University, Singapore. From 2014 he was a member of the World Economic Forum’s Global Agenda Council on Geo-Economics.

He was awarded Honorary Doctorates by Exeter University in 2012 and Bristol University in 2015. They recognise his ongoing cutting edge analyses and distinguished career in international journalism.

## **Brexit, President Trump, Russia, China.....The new uncertain normal for leadership in politics, public service and corporates. The imperative to Think the Unthinkable**

In 2016, the vulnerabilities at top levels of leadership are greater than at any time in recent history. The implications are deeply troubling. A proliferation of 'unthinkable' events since the Russian seizure of Crimea in early 2014 has revealed a new fragility at the highest levels of the corporate, public policy and investment worlds. The ability to spot, identify and handle unexpected, non-normative events at critical moments has proved not just to be wanting but perilously inadequate.

Examples of the 'new normal' keep stacking up. Most recently, they include; Brexit, Europe's migration crisis, the sudden 60% reduction in oil prices, and the new frailty of political stability. Traditional parties and structures are being challenged by the new, radical, disruptive scale of digital empowerment and public disillusionment. Who a few months ago seriously raised the prospect of US President Donald Trump? Even the sudden possibility in recent weeks confirmed two dark new realities: the destabilising impact of the 'new normal' of 'unthinkables', plus the narrowness and inadequacy of risk assessments.

These challenges raise major questions about the appropriateness and configuration of the human capacity of those at the highest levels to cope with and respond effectively to the fast growing proliferation of 'unthinkables'.

New research confirms how pressures resulting from an ever-more compressed time scale often overwhelm decision-makers' capacity to act effectively. New solutions and answers need to be found rapidly, especially in the areas of behaviour, culture, mindsets and systems. The ongoing research project 'Thinking the Unthinkable' led by Nik Gowing and Chris Langdon explores the inability to handle the 'new normal'. It is based on scores of confidential high level interviews and conversations. They are captured in 2,000 pages of transcripts. The interim findings are available at [www.thinkunthinkable.org](http://www.thinkunthinkable.org).