

BOOK REVIEW

Changeons de voie: Les leçons du coronavirus

Let's change lanes: The lessons of coronavirus

ABSTRACT

This review offers a positive and critically situated assessment of Edgar Morin's *Changeons de voie. Les leçons du coronavirus* (2020), written with the collaboration of Sabah Abouessalam. Taking the Covid-19 pandemic as a revealing event rather than an isolated health emergency, the book explores the interdependence of ecological, political, economic, social and existential vulnerabilities. Its central contribution lies in mobilizing complex thoughts to challenge fragmented explanations and to outline a reorientation of collective life. The review follows the book's progression from fifteen lessons of the pandemic to post-crisis challenges and, finally, to proposals for changing direction. Particular attention is paid to the value of the work for management studies, public governance and crisis decision-making, where uncertainty, institutional interdependence and the tension between efficiency and solidarity are especially salient. The book is commended for its intellectual coherence, accessible interdisciplinary argument and normative insistence on human dignity. Its broad program nonetheless raises legitimate questions concerning implementation, institutional trade-offs and empirical specification. These limitations do not undermine its achievement as an interpretive and programmatic essay. Rather, they clarify an agenda for research and public deliberation. The review concludes that Morin's text remains an important resource for examining the governance of interconnected crises and for reconsidering the purpose of organizational and societal transformation.

KEYWORDS Complexity · Covid-19 · Crisis governance · Public management · Solidarity · Societal transformation

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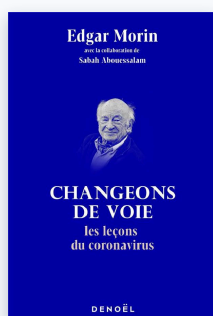
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LICENCE

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REVIEWED BOOK

TITLE	Changeons de voie: Les leçons du coronavirus <i>Let's change lanes: The lessons of coronavirus</i>
AUTHORS	Edgar Morin, with the collaboration of Sabah Abouessalam
PUBLISHER	Denoël (Paris)
PAGES	Paperback, 154 pages (catalogued physical edition)
YEAR	2020
ISBN	978-2-207-16186-9 (print edition)

1. Introduction

Published in the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic, *Changeons de voie. Les leçons du coronavirus* is best understood not as a retrospective account of an event whose consequences were already known, but as an intellectual intervention made amid radical uncertainty. Edgar Morin, working with Sabah Abouessalam, invites readers to treat the pandemic as a moment of revelation: a seemingly localized biological disturbance exposed the dense connections between healthcare, political decisions, global supply chains, social inequality, ecological conditions and everyday existence. The title itself proposes a dual undertaking. One must learn from the crisis and, on that basis, reconsider the direction of contemporary societies.

The essay is situated within Morin's longstanding work on complexity, uncertainty and the inseparability of parts and wholes. Rather than explaining the crisis through a single cause or sector, it foregrounds reciprocal dependencies and the unintended effects of action. This orientation gives the book particular significance for researchers in management and public administration. Decisions taken during an emergency do not simply execute pre-existing plans; they emerge under informational constraints, across organizational boundaries and amid conflicting public values. The present review examines the architecture of the argument, its principal intellectual merits, its limits as a policy-oriented essay and its place in the wider literature on complexity and crisis governance.

2. Summary of Contents

The book opens with a preamble that situates the pandemic against a longer historical experience of upheaval. This introductory movement prevents the Covid-19 emergency from appearing wholly unprecedented and prepares the reader for consideration of historical contingency and social change. The main argument then unfolds across three chapters, followed by a conclusion.

Chapter 1, "Les 15 leçons du coronavirus," brings together fifteen interrelated insights. These concern the human condition, the fragility and uncertainty of existence, the experience of mortality, the ambivalent character of modern civilization, the emergence of solidarity and the unequal conditions of confinement. Morin also reflects differences in national responses, the nature of crises, science and medicine, failures of intelligence and political action, economic dependencies, European fragility and planetary interdependence. The accumulation of lessons is not merely descriptive. Its overarching proposition is that a health crisis cannot be adequately interpreted outside the wider systems that shape vulnerability and collective response.

Chapter 2, "Les défis de l'après-corona," asks what challenges will persist beyond the immediate emergency. It considers existential and political transformations, globalization, democracy, digital technologies, ecological protection, economic disruption and the persistence of uncertainty. Importantly, the text rejects any automatic assumption that suffering necessarily yields progress. A crisis may generate solidarity and reflection, but it may equally accelerate regression, restrictions on freedom or the reproduction of inequalities. This recognition makes the book's prospective reasoning more nuanced than a simple optimistic narrative of renewal.

Chapter 3, "Changer de voie," develops the work's constructive dimension. Its proposals address the nation, civilization, humanity and the Earth, culminating in the call for renewed humanism. The author argues for reconciling terms too often are treated as mutually exclusive, including global integration and local autonomy, or economic activity and ecological restraint. Political regeneration, democratic participation, institutional reform and the humanization of social relations are presented as connected dimensions of change. The closing reflection thus transforms a diagnosis of interconnected crises into a normative project for collective responsibility.

3. Critical Evaluation

3.1. *Strengths*

The first major strength is the analytical fertility of complex thought. By resisting the isolation of health, economics, politics and ecology into separate explanatory compartments, the book provides a framework more appropriate to the cascading consequences of a pandemic. Its attention to feedback effects and uncertainties helps explain why apparently technical responses become ethical and political choices. For management scholarship, this is a valuable invitation to examine organizations as embedded in overlapping institutional and societal systems rather than as autonomous units.

A second strength is the articulation of uncertainty with responsibility. Morin does not portray the limits of prediction as a reason for inaction. Instead, uncertainty becomes a condition for deliberation, prudence, revision and learning. This perspective is relevant to public decision-making under crisis conditions, when evidence evolves and interventions generate unforeseen consequences. It also offers a corrective to managerial approaches that privilege measurable outputs without sufficient attention to context, social acceptance or human consequences.

Third, the essay takes inequalities and solidarities seriously. The pandemic affected populations unevenly, and the book connects differences in living conditions with the broader distribution of risks and protections. Its ethical emphasis on solidarity and humanization adds a necessary normative dimension to debates frequently dominated by organizational performance or economic recovery alone. Fourth, the work combines considerable conceptual ambition with clarity of presentation. Its thematic architecture allows scholars, students, public officials and non-specialist readers to enter a demanding philosophical argument without losing sight of its practical stakes.

Finally, the book's greatest achievement may be its refusal to separate critique from possibility. Its vision of institutional and civilizational change is not a claim that transformation will inevitably occur, but a reminder that the direction taken after a crisis is shaped by collective choices. That distinction sustains the book's constructive and enduring relevance.

3.2. *Weaknesses*

A favorable reading should nevertheless acknowledge the specific limits of the work's genre and moment of composition. Written during the initial phase of the pandemic, the essay could not incorporate the subsequent trajectory of vaccination, long-term health consequences, institutional adaptation or later comparative evaluations of national responses. These are temporal limits rather than substantive faults, and they reinforce the need to read the text as an early analytical intervention.

Some of the proposed changes are articulated primarily at the level of political and ethical principles. Readers seeking a detailed account of implementation may find that the book provides fewer operational criteria for prioritizing reforms, allocating scarce resources or adjudicating conflicts among legitimate objectives. For example, the desirable coexistence of autonomy and interdependence becomes more difficult when translated into concrete choices about procurement, public budgets or multilevel institutional authority.

A further limitation concerns empirical demonstration. The essay draws much of its force from synthetic interpretation and normative reasoning, not from an explicit comparative research design. This method is appropriate to its purpose, but it means that some claims should be treated as hypotheses for further

investigation rather than established causal findings. These qualifications strengthen rather than negate the review's positive evaluation: they define the boundary between a compelling framework for thought and the additional empirical work required to translate it into governance instruments.

4. Contextualization in the Literature

The work can be read as a concentrated application of Morin's wider intellectual project. In *Introduction à la pensée complexe* (1990), he challenges reductionist habits that isolate elements from the relationships through which they acquire significance. *Changeons de voie* extends this approach to an unfolding planetary crisis: health systems, economic structures, political legitimacy and ecological disruption are treated as mutually implicated. Similarly, *La Voie. Pour l'avenir de l'humanité* (2011) had already advanced a reformist perspective on the interconnected futures of humanity. The 2020 essay gives this longer-standing program an immediate historical setting and a renewed urgency.

For organizational research, the book also enters into a productive conversation with the literature on sensemaking in crises. Weick's analysis of the collapse of sensemaking in organizations (1993) illustrates how the breakdown of shared interpretations can undermine coordinated action. Morin moves at a broader societal level, but the comparison is instructive: crises test not only resources and formal procedures, but the cognitive categories through which actors interpret events. The emphasis on uncertainty further resonates with scholarship on managing the unexpected and organizational resilience (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007), while Morin's explicit normative commitments extend the discussion beyond the continuity of organizational operations.

The essay is particularly relevant to public management because pandemic governance involved simultaneous problems of coordination, legitimacy, knowledge production and social justice. Morin's perspective encourages the study of how public instruments, interorganizational cooperation and emergency decisions evolve through use, interpretation and local adjustment. Such connections should not be mistaken for empirical claims directly tested in the book. They are research implications that become visible when its philosophical argument is brought into dialogue with management and governance scholarship.

5. Conclusion

Changeons de voie. Les leçons du coronavirus is a persuasive, intellectually generous and timely contribution to the interpretation of contemporary crises. Its central insight is that the pandemic exposed not merely the vulnerability of healthcare provision, but the inseparability of social systems and the limits of narrowly sectoral responses. The sustained call for complexity, solidarity, democratic renewal and humanism makes this short essay unusually wide-ranging in its implications.

Its recommendations do not amount to an operational policy manual, and its early publication necessarily limits its empirical horizon. Yet this is not the standard against which its principal contribution should be judged. The book succeeds as a reflective framework that enlarges the questions asked of public authorities, organizations and citizens. For scholars of management, crisis governance, public policy and organizational transformation, it offers a valuable conceptual stimulus and a strong argument for connecting effectiveness with ethical and societal responsibility. The overall assessment is therefore distinctly positive: Morin and Abouessalam provide an invitation to rethink both how crises are understood and what forms of collective future are worth pursuing.