PURPOSE AND PREMISE OF THE BOOK
Of all the books I have commented upon, ‘Redressing the Balance’ presented the most difficulties since it requires the International risk and safety management community to question certain views on causation. Amongst others, it requires a questioning of the widely held belief that management or organisational failures are the root causes of most, if not all, accidents. In relation to the UK for instance, Difford cites one source of that particular belief as being the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) in conjunction with elements of certain publications. In addition, he says that the causal philosophy promoted by the HSE is aligned to models and theories of writers such as Petersen (1971), Bird (1974) and Reason (2004). However, he argues that the causal philosophy of the HSE is contrary to its own and others data and that the theories upon which it relies are ill-founded. Consequently, he offers the following towards the end of the book;

Unpredictable and uncontrollable consequences of natural phenomena aside, human behaviour, suitably defined, will be the underlying cause of any accident and the behaviour of a man who has been found to be the underlying cause of an accident is attributable only to him as far as the central causal enquiry is concerned.

If we genuinely get up each day to reduce organisational risk and improve the health, safety and well-being of our workforces, the book should be an automatic read without going further here. Difford’s premise, clearly, cannot co-exist with the above philosophies.

The book is about causation and does not seek change in the way we manage risk and safety per se. Difford, a dedicated, respected and highly qualified safety professional, makes it clear that his purpose is to encourage us to pause for a moment and consider the basis of our views on the causes of accidents. If we are certain of our views then pausing to consider, question or validate them will not be a problem and the invitation should therefore be embraced in the interests of prevention alone.

ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS
In view of the status of the authors, organisations and causal philosophy being challenged, the book’s task should have been impossible. Initially, some might feel that the arguments are rather one-sided until they recall Trevor Williams warning (Williams produced the Foreword) that the book contains the argument that has not been aired before. That reveals itself to be an understatement.

In many respects, Difford is but the messenger since some of the critically contrary evidence he presents has clearly existed for centuries. However, he is obviously not a casual observer and any perceived difficulty in his task quickly erodes. His familiarity with the relevant subjects is undeniable as are the sources he turns to for support.

According to Difford, Reasons’ (2004) ‘latent condition’ is an “academic construct” that results in an empirically contrary, logically invalid and exceptionless causal statement. To support the view that empirical data alone is contrary to Reason’s belief that Organisations cause all accidents, a range of HSE and International data are utilised. That data does not support Reason or the HSE’s slightly tempered belief and the point is driven further home via startling contradictions from both. The ease with which Difford is able to highlight damaging contradictions is alarming.

Whilst generally supportive of Heinrich (1941), Difford presents the case to revise Heinrich’s finding that 88% of accidents result from unsafe acts and proceeds to logically adjust that figure to 98%. Later, we also see Difford challenge the ‘so-called’ Domino Theory itself and he sets the scene for a convincing disproval.
By way of everyday language and examples, the book de-cloaks some potentially difficult concepts and if the flaw in Domino Theory alone is correct then the validity of Bird (1974) and Reason (2004) become instantly questionable in the reader’s mind.

Difford’s choice of the words “academic construct” seems inventive until one realises that a systematic deconstruction of the relevant theories is taking place. Having laid the initial ground (by highlighting major contradictions within the work being challenged), Difford then draws from formidable lineages of support from giants in the respective fields. The responses from certain academics, writers and International organisations will be interesting, especially in view of him finding such things as the “common cause hypothesis” to be irrefutable modern day realities.

According to Difford, flaws in ‘Domino Theory’ were incorporated into the theories that followed. He argues that Petersen’s (1971) multiple causation theory appeared unaware of obstacles such as post hoc fallacy and that Reason’s (2004) Swiss cheese model attempted to by-pass them. Either way, they erroneously presented the view that everything is transitive causative of everything else. Difford again presents contrary evidence from the authors themselves before identifying why authorities in the relevant fields would describe such theories as ‘ridiculous’ and ‘absurd’. Aided by simple diagrams, “Redressing the Balance” defines an accident sequence according to science and logic and highlights the distinction between factors that are truly causative of an accident and those that are merely associated with it. From there, it is difficult to support Petersen or Reason’s belief that causal links to management always exist. For some, such theories are unsupportable by philosophy, legal minds, science or logic. For others, they violate commonsense.

**SHOULD WE BUY IT?**
Difford tells it like it is. Early on he uses words like absurd and ridiculous but, they are the words of the giants upon whom he relies. In places, he seems to hammer some points repeatedly but his style is to hammer them comprehensively until home. He attacks certain theories but makes it clear, a little late perhaps, that he has absolute respect for their authors...read with an open mind. To absorb the numerous messages and points fully requires a read from cover to cover, certainly first time around. That will not agree with some but the points continually build so be warned.

The range and depth of information is impressive and we have not heard these arguments before. Whether there will be any challenge to the critical point or not is immaterial, the book is a must have and a must read for too many reasons beside. For those who might challenge, the task confronting them is clear and some may see it as impossible. Given the current demand for a return to commonsense in safety, the book’s relevance and timing is superb and it is a singularly unique contribution to the fields of risk and safety management.