Ian Nelson: In the United Kingdom, there is a famous children's author called A. A. Milne, who wrote charming books for children, and in one of these books one of his main characters, Piglet, says to his friend, "If the tree falls on us what will happen?", and his friend is called Poo, and is a bear, ponders for a long time and then says, "But what if it doesn't fall?" And that, actually, is at the root of thinking about the paradox around unintended consequences; what if?

In one book on business model generation, which the reference you can find at the end of the chapter, the authors produced book, or one of these books, in collaboration with 475 academics and managers in 45 different countries, and they describe it as a handbook for visionaries, game changers, and challengers.

And the interesting thing about this book, or these models, in terms of business generation is that they are generic models, and they are both micro and macro models. So, therefore, they give guidance to how you can think about consequences on any problem or opportunity that you wish to think through.

Most business models, in fact, will talk about who you're in partnership with, what the key activities are, what resources you have, what cost structures you have, how you're going to make money, how you're going to collect money, what kind of relationships you're going to have with the people that you're serving, how you're going to, in fact, make sales, and, in fact, who you're going to give the sales [… or] going to be directed to. Now, it's a generic model because it's possible to adjust any of these nine areas so that it fits the issue which you wish to look at.

Once you have a model to work with you can begin to do some of the most interesting work which is visual thinking, and if you ever go to a visual thinking workshop you will find on the wall lots of diagrams, pictures, big arrows, people connecting one idea with another idea, an arrow which takes you from one picture and it says, what if, and directs you to another part of the wall where there's another picture. And so one of the key things to be able to do in terms of looking at unintended consequences is, in fact, to be able to think visually, and that means getting things on walls, getting diagrams on walls, getting pictures on walls.

The second thing I'd like to guide you towards is the more high end of thinking about consequences where companies, like Shell and other large multinationals, use computers and business modelling to try to think, make forecasts and build plausible futures based upon what if questions. And, again, at the end of the chapter you will find interesting references where you can learn more about people talking about these particular types of models, computer models and mathematical models.

And one final thing, for people who are interested, try reading any of the work by a man called John Chris Jones, who is one of the seminal people in the whole are of design methods, and you might find it interesting to talk about design methods when talking about consequences, that he was at the core of how you design things and think about the consequences of what it is that you're designing.