

## Returning to Business-as-Usual



I want to state from the outset that the title of this final report is a joke. I regard the possibility of us returning to business-as-usual as a rather scary outlier, for it would mean we are learning nothing of any value from this crisis.

### **Paying attention**

From a futurist's perspective there are always valuable lessons to be learned from how we deal with any situation involving large numbers of people - particularly those events that can cause harm to so many people or change the course of history. Diverse tactics for dealing with the SARS-CoV-2 outbreak, together with conflicting messages from governments - including the same government from one moment to the next - are quite literally littered with unforeseen consequences we would do well to analyse more deeply.

Most arise from delusions and misrepresentations that have evolved into sacred dogma over the years, and yet are now prisons of our own invention - such as the *natural order* comprising mostly *unnatural* or fabricated inventions we regard as essential to life - like competition, social division, economic growth and punitive-based rules regarding what individual can and cannot do.

If that were not so crazy it would be the darkest comedy ever imagined. But this is real. Not even the most talented comedy writer could make this stuff up.

### **The philosophy of separation**

It is ironic that the (almost universal) strategy we are presently adopting in order to contain the outbreak, that of self-imposed isolation, or what is euphemistically referred to as *social distancing*, is one of the root causes of the lunatic reality we ourselves have created. Separation, from each other and from nature, is endemic within our social structures - epitomised by the philosophy of individualism and patent law for example.

It is surely karma that we now need to reinforce personal separation to protect us from this disease when public policies emphasising closer community engagement and cooperation might have

allowed us to avoid the worst, which is undoubtedly still to come. Incidentally, the alternative mainstream strategy - that of *herd immunity* - being adopted in the UK, is even more farcical and downright negligent. The theory of *second wave immunity* is reliant on false assumptions, good luck, and a dearth of actual understanding posing as contrarian wisdom. More than that though it seems citizens over the age of 70 will be asked to self-isolate for up to four months, in order to protect them from the virus. As I entertained previously, you simply cannot make this stuff up.

The best comedy always has an element of tragedy embedded in it somewhere. True to form this came from Donald Trump last week. The President of the United States, a nation that views and promotes itself as the leader of the free world, offered to buy a vaccine from German scientists exclusively for use within the US. Such a brash, self-interested notion takes competitive behaviour and predatory capitalism to new heights, and the concept of national sovereignty into a mercenary and divisive era.

### **Commedia dell'arte**

It does not stop there however. We have the current corona virus outbreak to thank for revealing just how many of our power structures and compliance procedures are built on punitive threats and fear, as opposed to the public interest. Policy changes made in reaction to the coronavirus also reveal how absurd so many of our rules are to begin with.

Governments giveth and governments taketh away - seemingly at whim. But mostly they impose and intervene in ways that are, on any evidence-based arguments, utterly fallacious and illogical. Take yesterday's decision by The Transportation Security Administration in the US. Due to the coronavirus outbreak, they have agreed to waive the familiar 4-oz (100 gram) limit for liquids and gels on airplanes. But for hand sanitizer only!

This restriction, like the equally familiar removal of shoes and belts as we pass through security screens, or the banning of mobile phones on takeoff and landing, has been a core element of travel since 2006. So if we can now take 12 ounces of hand sanitizer liquid with us, will the airplane blow up? No actually. Flights will be no more dangerous today than they were yesterday because the ruling was incongruous in the first place.

Again in the US, the city of San Antonio has announced they will no longer incarcerate people for minor offenses in order to keep jails from being crowded with sick citizens. So why were they doing it in the first place? Removing homeless people off the streets? Not in the midst of a crisis. So why do it in the first place? Shutting off water or electricity as a punishment for hardship? Cities have suddenly found new ways to keep services on. Sick casual employees forced to take unpaid leave if they want their jobs back? The list of pointless rules and regulations goes on and on and on.

### **Rituals of government theatre**

Scour the entire range of public policies and I promise you will find countless rules and regulations that are not based in fact and serve no useful purpose, other than to keep people employed. After all, if a regulation can be so easily waived, why was it imposed in the first place?

Naturally there are explanations for these things. In spite of protests from officials, they are usually designed to make our lives just a little more difficult, to discipline specific groups of people, and to ensure that money keeps flowing into the coffers of the wealthy.

Until now many people believed what they were told - that such policies were too expensive to change or would upset the way things are meant to be done. But surely not now? The rule-makers have revealed themselves for what they are - mostly middle-aged white men operating machinery they barely understand and speaking into microphones supplied, in many cases, by the Wizard of Oz himself - otherwise known as Rupert Murdoch. We are witnessing the revealing of truth.

### **Ignoring the data**

If we really do nothing different after this crisis, except try to return to the situation that existed prior to November 2019:

- We would have to ignore the fact that although a vaccine is possibly 12-18 months away (because of patent laws and mandated government testing slowing things down) treatments using a cocktail of broad spectrum antiviral drugs like Remdesivir, anti-malaria drugs like chloroquine, and anti-HIV drugs such as Kaletra, seem to be working.
- We would deliberately fail to notice that scientists working cooperatively and openly sharing their information, would undoubtedly find a vaccine faster than is possible under the rules of commercial rivalry.
- We would overlook the fact that certain countries, including China, Singapore, Thailand, and South Korea, that suffered the brunt of the SARS outbreak in 2003 and learnt from that, quickly controlled the spread of the virus (through rapid testing and quarantine measures) without the draconian disruptions to daily life being imposed elsewhere.
- We would arrogantly downplay the warnings of expert virologist Shi Zhengli who believes there are many more variants of the coronavirus that have not made the leap to humans. Yet!
- We would also need to assume, that when the current crisis passes, we will choose not to change our behaviour in any way, shape or form - even though some temporary lifestyle adjustments made during the crisis - including working from home, using online meetings, and cutting back on airplane travel, might be preferable in terms of quality of life.

### **The gift**

But the real challenge is whether we can tolerate governments and large corporations attempting to return to business-as-usual.

The key in this regard will be data. Outside of the few Asian countries mentioned above, we are still failing to test a population in a manner capable of precisely calculating infection, morbidity, and mortality rates. Meanwhile reckless politicians, hell-bent on mimicking each other by orchestrating police-state interventions, allow markets to collapse, enterprises to close, educational programs to be interrupted, routine activities to be cancelled, and travellers to be forced into a self-imposed quarantine, without a shred of evidence that we actually know what we are doing.

Once doubts creep into the communal mind regarding the efficacy and relevance of public policy and the motives of decision makers, it is much harder to turn back the compliance clock and to convince concerned citizens they should meekly submit to policies that are deceptive nonsense.

Perhaps the gift of this crisis will be a world in which we begin to question the relevance, viability, and resilience of strategies without the benefit of data-driven evidence that the path we are on is heading in the right direction and will get us to the destination we desire.

Meet you on the other side.

Richard David Hames

A Strategic Intelligence Briefing from The Centre for the Future