

David McCarthy – Written Evidence (LBC0264)

Part 1 - Introduction

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the discussion about the new world order following the Coronavirus Pandemic and Covid-19. We have been considering the opportunities and threats since February – having a platform to expound and pass on our ideas is what we have been looking for.

Our background

My wife and I are recently retired after careers working with a wide range of organisations, both public and private. Our business, which have been recently wound up, included website design, copywriting and marketing (writing on- and off-line business content), and training English-speaking professionals around the world in the skills of copywriting (using a distance-learning system we developed).

Our professional life has included writing about Santa's Grotto, nuclear power stations, and everything in between. Our clients have been sole traders, and corporates (such as a Chinese petroleum company breaking into the Australian automotive market).

The Pandemic – what is different about this world crisis?

There have been serious world crises in the past, which have been brought forward as comparisons to this Pandemic – the so-called Spanish Flu, the World Wars etc.

However, the Coronavirus Pandemic is the only crisis our world has had to deal with which has affected every single nation on the planet. Not only that, but there is a general recognition that we are all in this together. Individual governments have their own ways of responding and attempting to protect their citizens. The spread of the virus and the rates of infection are modified by these actions, but until there is a viable vaccine, Covid-19 will remain the dominant healthcare problem facing the world.

When the first lock-downs were imposed and economic activity was affected, many business leaders talked about getting back to normal. The airline and tourist businesses were among the first to talk in this way.

What we saw at once was that the old "normal" could never return. The disruption to the world's business activities was so complete and fundamental that "normal" no longer has any meaning in this context.

The Pandemic – the opportunity

As the disruption is so complete across the whole world and in virtually every business and domestic situation, it is the first opportunity society has had to fundamentally re-think how everything is managed and organised.

Instead of trying to deal with individual problems which need to be fixed, governments and organisations have the freedom to re-invent society's structures, standards and protocols.

The Pandemic, equality and discrimination

Although the world strives towards equality for all, my legislating against inequality, the real problem is discrimination.

We believe it isn't possible to 'like' everyone (this is not 'like' in the Facebook sense). There will always be individuals with their thoughts and practices which we don't like.

The key to creating a fair and harmonious world is understanding what turns dislike into hatred and discrimination.

To fix this civilisation must learn what causes this change in people, and then to educate them so they are able to modify their behaviours.

This has become the other main topic of world news – with the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement. They are seeking to redress the balance so that people are valued whatever their skin colour.

As with every other area of society affected by the Pandemic, we have the opportunity to radically re-think how we deal with equality and discrimination to achieve fair and equitable outcomes for all people.

Part 2 – Radical re-thinking examined

Given the undoubted need to radically re-think every aspect of business and society, the following section looks briefly at some of the areas which can be changed and re-engineered over the next three to five years, as the effects of the Pandemic are incorporated into a new version of our civilisation.

All of these are possible and practical responses to the Pandemic. These are the things we would like to see tackled and changed over the next few years. By radically re-thinking and starting from fundamentals, everything is possible.

We owe it to future generations to get started on this as soon as possible.

Disrupted schooling and exams – learning loss

This has become the second most divisive topic in the UK over the summer of 2020. Exams were cancelled and, results became a political and statistical nightmare.

The most damaging part of the problem looking forwards, is the schooling time lost, and its effect on the children at school.

It is well documented that during long holidays, children are affected by “Learning Loss”. This has led to calls for shorter holidays, particularly over the summer. Research has also identified that children who are disadvantaged in some way, suffer a greater rate of learning loss.

This is something which can be fixed relatively easily ... with the will and cooperation of parents, teachers, unions and government.

As the effect of learning loss for disadvantaged children is greater, this change would bring greater benefits to them, and help to redress the balance.

Disrupted schooling and exams – playing catch-up

Even before the 2020 problem of catching up for lost learning time, a peculiar situation in the UK’s primary and secondary schooling has been causing problems for disadvantaged children.

This is the current system of ‘age cohorts’ passing through education.

Education should be primarily focused on the children. Unfortunately, the management of education itself has become the most important of the system.

By way of contrast, consider the process of learning to drive, or even higher education. There is no point in either of these where a student becomes too old to be in the education system.

With children at primary and secondary schools, they are generally required to stay within their year groups, when holding children back for a year or two would help at least some of the disadvantaged and less able to leave formal education with something achieved.

This would need a much larger shift in educational thinking, and make the administration of schooling more complex. But who is the schooling for?

Disrupting political norms

There two political norms which have no place in the 20th Century, and have largely been replaced by more measured responses in business.

Resignation or sacking

If the business world operated the 'resignation or sacking' policy seen so often in government, staff and managers would be constantly looking to minimise fallout from any decision they take. Making mistakes is part of learning. So long as mistakes are not repeated, sacking capable staff because they've made a mistake is not a productive response.

U-turns

U-turns are seen as a political weakness. U-turns are part of normal business practice when circumstances change, and this should be the case in politics too.

What is not acceptable is leaving the U-turn until the organisation has been damaged in some way.

Political parties and unions need to understand how positive a quick change of direction can lead to better outcomes. This is the whole essence of agile businesses.

Disrupting law and order

The need to change how order is maintained in a civil society has been brought into sharp focus following the unlawful killing of George Floyd. Although the discriminatory treatment of all races happens somewhere in the world, the USA has a particular problem with people of a black African origin.

De-funding Police Departments in a local response has started in some places, but the fundamental re-think required is to train the world's police officers as guardians instead of warriors. The warrior mentality is seemingly quite common in the USA.

Even here in the UK, the concept of 'guardian' could be developed to be the primary focus of our police and security personnel.

This change could have a major impact on the disadvantaged in our country, and radically reduce discrimination.

Disrupting globalisation and outsourcing

Both globalisation and outsourcing have been driven by political forces, and the desire to turn a quick (short-term) profit ... typically at the expense of future generations.

A consequence of these has been reported at numerous times since the Pandemic started, where manufacturing and supply has become concentrated and fine-tuned to provide the maximum profit, but at the expense of resilience. A case, reported on BBC Radio 4, was toilet rolls – it was impossible to make and ship more product because there was no flexibility in the whole supply chain.

The UK has lost many of its engineering skills as more and more manufacturing was outsourced overseas. Now China has all that expertise and the manufacturing capacity. As part of the UK response to the Pandemic, key parts of this need to be brought back to the UK.

This isn't a call to end globalisation, just a more measured approach which has some overarching plan to prevent future problems, and to make the UK a little more self-sufficient.

Disrupting travel

Significant changes are already taking place in travel, particularly global travel. In many cases, countries have shut their borders so it isn't possible to buy a plane ticket to anywhere in the world.

Business has had to adapt quickly, and now many meetings are virtual using applications such as Zoom. Businesses and employees are discovering the other benefits of virtual meetings ... huge cost savings and savings in travel time. This is probably the first example of a fundamental shift brought on directly by the Pandemic.

Travel for leisure has also been curtailed. The rapidly changing list of visited locations requiring a 14-day isolation has had a dramatic effect of holiday choices. This may settle down over time, but the UK's local tourism industry need to translate their overseas guests into people from the UK deciding to holiday at home. This doesn't seem to have started yet.

Disrupted healthcare

It's widely accepted that the UK's health care system is broken.

As it happens, I have recent and first-hand experience of the problems encountered when people are transitioned from a hospital ward to care at home. I had a couple of stays in hospital during February and March this year, and was fortunate to be discharged at the point where the UK's lock-down started. My Stage 4 cancer has left me paralysed from the diaphragm down, so I am totally dependent on my wife and the care teams who come in to look after me.

The initial issue is with funding. As soon as one leaves hospital and the hospital trust stops paying for care, patients are thrown on the tender mercies of the local authority. This is a different 'pot' of money, and delays in getting the hospital discharge are often to do with who picks up the tab going forwards.

Once funding has been sorted out (it was streamlined because of the Pandemic), every person being cared for is attended by various medical teams according to need ... District Nurses, Palliative Care, Occupational Therapy and so on.

Unfortunately, all these teams act independently, though they are all funded from the same source. There is little or no coordination between the teams, even very little continuity within any particular team – in five months we have seen over a dozen different District Nurses, many of whom do not know the relevant background information.

The Domiciliary Care teams are very limited in what they are able to do ... no changing of dressings, for example. The whole care process is hit and miss.

The Government is reviewing this whole area at present, but our concerns are they won't be radical enough. The really radical approach would be to bring all the funding into one budget, and to appoint every individual patient a lead Health Care Worker who will coordinate and arrange for whatever treatment is required.

It would be joined-up health care.

This is one of the key areas we expect the politicians to tackle. As always, disadvantaged people who do not have the experience or determination, will continue to suffer more without radical change.

A final thought

The most positive effect of the Pandemic is the 'whack on the side of the head' to re-think our society in a truly radical way.

We are most worried that politicians will be too timid.

We hope the UK puts on its thinking cap, and doesn't remove it again!

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