

Human potential: shaping the best possible 'new normal' webinar
Question and Answers
Friday 29 May 2020

| Questions | Answers |
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| <p>Ruth says "What else might we be ignoring that might be brilliant or devastating for our objectives?" Ignoring implies knowledge. Very often it's a question of lack of awareness, Does Ruth have any suggestions on how to raise awareness of what we currently don't know? She says there was sufficient data in Feb 2020 to predict that a pandemic was at least possible - but how many people knew about it? How does the balance of ignoring vs ignorance relate to the image she showed on the early black&white slide by Dan??</p> | <p>There are two parts to my answer here and both are related to organisations not members of the public. At the point in the webinar that I asked 'what else might we be ignoring...', I was reflecting on the situations where information is freely available but where, through a mixture of conscious/subconscious/emotional influences on perception and decision-making that decision-makers have explicitly or implicitly chosen to ignore. The other part - and where I agree is that if it's not possible to know then technically you cannot ignore something. My challenge is that I believe that organisations need to be more curious, more focused on searching out information and being able to consider information, however weak the signal, that contradicts the dominant 'truths' for the leadership team. There will always be things that are a complete surprise, but with the data analytics and communication capabilities we now have, maybe these will become less of a defence for a lack of preparedness.</p> |
| <p>Brexit isn't an opportunity or a threat, it's a fact, an issue! To what extent does Ruth think we must take Brexit into account when planning for our post-pandemic world?</p> | <p>It's a fact that we've decided to leave the European Union. The impact of that is still very uncertain, with opportunities and threats. My personal view is that we would be misguided to ignore Brexit when planning for the future.</p> |
| <p>I really like the 4E's elements of potential to be unlocked. But they aren't independent. Economic unleashing may be inversely proportional to ecological. The link between e-working and emotional health is complex. Does Ruth think we can find an optimal balance between the 4Es, or will it be the lowest-feasible mix?</p> | <p>I agree - they aren't independent - I think that was covered in the webinar - maybe your question came before I said that? Economic unleashing could be inversely proportional to ecological - but not necessarily. The interactions I believe are specific to a particular organisational or sector context. As always - it depends. I do not propose any rational relationships or models and therefore 'optimal' in a scientific way is not appropriate. Instead I think it's a way of helping organisations to think through competing priorities, as an input into decisions about what they are prepared to trade, and therefore the best way forward for them at that time.</p> |

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| <p>Many of our big projects are about consuming more - infrastructure to get people from shop to shop (city to city) faster, new services and products. If public opinion changes, what does this mean for project professionals?</p> | <p>Is the question - what does that do for project jobs? Or how should project professionals respond? As I think I mentioned in the webinar, I believe that we will need to be more flexible in thinking through careers - 'I'm a PM who works on a particular type of project' may become less relevant with PM's to can manage any project-based change being more employable and useful? My hunch though is that we will continue to need infrastructure improvements to support movement of people and goods, and lots of them - but maybe smaller, more-modular schemes that can be expanded as required?</p> |
| <p>Some of the answers gave Ruth a surprise. Does Ruth think that these changes will stick?</p> | <p>I'm not sure at what point in the webinar this question was asked. If the question is, do I think that some responses are biased by the timing of when I asked them - yes probably. All we know is what people were thinking on the day. How much commitment to change exists - time will tell. We might go back to normal? I think we have the potential to back things better.</p> |
| <p>Is it possible that our approach to projects has created or encouraged fragility? How does our approach need to change to make projects (and their effects on orgs) less fragile, more antifragile?</p> | <p>That's an interesting question - I'd love to know what was in your mind when you asked it. Many strategic decisions and individual project decisions have made the world more fragile in my view. Our increasing skill in driving efficiency without a grown up conversation about how the degree to which we are ultra-lean is within or outside appetite for risk is a major factor. If we seek efficiency above all other objectives, that's perfectly fine - but we accept we've traded some other things for this - might be physical stocks, team capabilities, cash, other things. For me, this always come back to relative priorities of objectives - not a narrow TCQ view, but a wider set of decisions about all the things that are important and what we're prepared to trade for what. Similar answer to the one above in the end. Bit of a theme.</p> |

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| <p>In the light of the global pandemic, do you think 'virtual reality' will become the new normal and what do you think it's role (VR) will be in delivering complex projects going forward.</p> | <p>I'm sure VR will continue to play a role, but as a substitute for human interaction - hope not in my lifetime! Role of VR in delivering complex projects - I don't have a vision for that, but that might be my ignorance and fear driving that response. Would be interested to hear a positive spin.</p> |
| <p>Is the organisational enthusiasm for home working/work anywhere in danger of ignoring the human/social factors and home/work separation ?</p> | <p>Personal view - yes - massively. I hope we see this settling down into a more of a mix of home/anywhere when we are working alone, or short transactional meetings and together when that adds value.</p> |
| <p>COVID has exposed the technological divide ... those with and those without. Will this gap narrow or grow?</p> | <p>We have to make it narrow. I am hopeful that, if nothing else, we have become more aware of such issues AND that we have a willingness to resolve. It's not just money to buy tech kit, it's skills and confidence. I think we can tackle all that easily if we want to. I hope we do.</p> |
| <p>What do you think of the four day week?</p> | <p>I haven't really thought about it a lot, but I am a great believer in work being massively beneficial for everyone, so I would be a fan of more people having a four day/week job than fewer people working five days plus. Don't want to stray into the politics of all that - but there is enough evidence around that people need something useful to do to stay well.</p> |
| <p>Do you think that the big companies who are London centric will actually change things so that project professionals can work from their base wherever they are in the country once this pandemic is in the past?</p> | <p>I hope so for some of the time. As per my answer above - I don't believe office workers staying home permanently is good in the longer-term - but more flexibility is possible and I believe essential. I have experience of working in central London and having lots of flexibility to work from my home near Leeds and other place, and other experiences where this wasn't the case. I hope presenteeism in the office is a welcome 'thing of the past'.</p> |