



Have we crossed the event horizon?

I saw a great presentation a few months ago from someone who had attended Davos, the annual invitation-only think tank in January hosted by the World Economic Forum. She said she witnessed a group of country heads and heads of large, global companies having a conversation about what changes are coming towards humanity in the years to come. She was somewhat taken aback that they didn't appear to be completely confident during this discussion. They weren't really sure what the future would hold.

The up-shot is, they were guessing and they knew it. They could see a whole bunch of technology shifting and could make some predictions based on some of that, but for the most part they didn't have a clue. They had even stopped trying to pretend they could know what the world would look like in three years - let alone thirty. Hearing about this made me wonder, if those guys don't know what's coming towards us, maybe no-one does. Maybe it's no longer possible to predict the future with anything approaching certainty. Maybe there are no longer invisible groups of men in dark suits who know what's going on and are somehow keeping us all safe (if that was ever a thing).

Maybe that's a horrifying thought, but maybe it's also a liberating one.

I have a friend who firmly believes that humanity is making greater progress now than ever before in many areas precisely because we have lost faith in our leaders. This is causing us to stop waiting for them to fix all our problems and spurring us to get up and fix them for ourselves.

Every time I see something on social media about people cleaning up ocean plastic or solving any of the countless other wicked problems we currently face, I reflect on the fact that we would once have expected our various governments to do that for us. We once would have been confident that the magical (probably mythical) 'they' are doing something about it. Now we know better. We know that politics is a power and numbers game that is played with a short-term focus and has almost always got more to do with getting elected than making lasting change.

I know there are many politicians who care deeply about the future and are trying their best to do the hard yards, but they're working inside a system that is not designed for the longer-term. I deeply admire their efforts, but I'm not holding my breath that they will fix everything and I'm by no means the only one who feels this way.

Many of us have stopped waiting for 'them' to fix everything for us. More and more frequently we just find a way to do it for ourselves. Sometimes despite our governments' best efforts to get in our collective way. How cool is that?

Are we, in fact, growing up?

If you're a leader in a large organisation, the equivalent of waiting for the government to fix everything is waiting for the most senior executives to tell you what to do - to have all the answers - to know what's coming and make all the important decisions. But the reality is things are now changing so quickly that they simply can't do that any more. It's not because they're stupid or lazy or somehow failing. It's because they're human beings and the rate of change has gotten so fast that it is literally impossible to stay on top of everything every minute.

And even if they're super humans who can somehow be on top of everything all the time (spoiler alert, they're not), unless they're very close to the action, they shouldn't be making all the decisions anyhow. They just don't know enough. They'll guess, they'll get it wrong and you'll end up picking up the pieces.

Overwhelm has become the new normal. And while it's true to say that things have never moved this fast, it's equally true to say that they will never be this slow again. The pace of change is not going to slow down. If the last few decades are any guide, it's just going to continue to speed up.

We can pat ourselves on the back and say 'whew' and feel good about how well we're 'surviving' under apparently impossible circumstances, or we can recognise that we can't keep going like this or one of two things is going to happen. We will break or our organisations will.

We can't stop the waves, so we have to learn to surf.



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