

Are We Really Learning Anything?

It is early July, and for the first time I can remember, it seems that everyone has the same basic view of a year so far. In previous years, there would be some mathematical breakdown about how many people think that the year to date has been better, or worse, or the same as usual, or perhaps, a bit different in some regards. But this year has certainly built a high level of alignment around one singular view; that this year is like no other that most of us have ever experienced.

There has been similar alignment from the business community, but for a different reason. Large, small, from any and all sectors, and from both the for-profit and the not-for-profit communities, the consensus has been that the impact of the virus was “unexpected” to say the least. The descriptors being used by CEO’s, investors, managers, and the business media, include; *“this was totally unforeseen,” “we were completely caught out,” “there is no way to prepare for something like this,” and, “why weren’t we warned about this?”*

A couple of months on since the arrival of the virus, and the almost total and complete collapse of many businesses, what we are hearing could be deemed “encouraging.” I use the word “encouraging” with my tongue firmly place in my cheek, as what we are hearing includes comments like; *“we are the right team to take us through this nightmare,” “we are in the process of adjusting our strategy based on what has happened,” and my favourite, “when this is over, we will be postured even better in the marketplace.”* Really? No, I mean **REALLY?**

Clearly, on the surface, the reason that companies and organisations have been devastated has been the arrival of Covid-19. This virus has changed our world dramatically; not only in terms of *what* we do, but also in terms of *how* we do what we do. The impact of Covid-19 is pretty clear, but equally as clear is that the underlying reason that the impact has been so great on the business community is that the key decision-makers in these organisations have not done what they are paid to do.

Making decisions in business – what we pay our senior decision-makers shedloads to do –

includes identifying what the future of the organisation should try to achieve, as well as developing a sound strategy on how they will achieve it. And whilst most organisations do have a strategy, the evidence now is clear, these strategies have not taken into consideration the answer to the question, *“what else could happen as we go along our strategic path?”* Answering the *“what else could happen...”* question is the key to ensuring that the organisation can have a chance of surviving virtually any scenario that arrives on the scene.

There will be quite a few decision-makers who will go directly into defensive mode with comments like, *“but who ever would have even considered that Covid-19 would come along?”* And to be fair, I don’t know of any scenario that actually identified Covid-19 as being a potential risk. But having said that, a strategy that does not identify that there is a risk that there could be a global-wide pandemic that comes along and ruins our day. This has happened previously, so it should not be something that is totally out of the realm of possibility.

Was the extent of the impact of Covid-19 on businesses a given? No, probably not, but it was a possibility that there could be something that would put virtually all businesses on hold, some of them permanently. For senior decision-makers in organisations to have developed strategies that have not explored the question, *“what else could happen...”* as part of identifying how they will help an organisation successfully move into the future means, in plain terms, that they have been derelict in doing what they have been paid to do.

As a shareholder, would you be happy with the performance of the senior decision-makers in an organisation you have invested in? Would you be happy to hear that these same decision-makers think that they are the best people lead the organisation out of this mess? Albert Einstein is quoted as saying, *“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.”* If the senior decision-makers in our organisations think that they are the best people to get us through all this, they had better change the way they do what they do, or perhaps shareholders should go find new and better decision-makers.