

Culture, Crisis and COVID-19

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The Great Reset

By

Fons Trompenaars
and Charles Hampden-Turner

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The Chinese Symbol for Crisis

危机

Danger

Opportunity

“A crisis is a terrible thing to waste,”
—Prof. Paul Romer, Stanford University

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INTRODUCTION

The Chinese word for “crisis” is “danger-opportunity”, two characters juxtaposed. Within any crisis there is both dire peril and the opportunity to learn something new, and to rebuild creatively, something more innovative, more inspiring, and more robust. So it is with the coronavirus pandemic, currently costing nearly 1.3 million lives and threatening economies worldwide. There is no doubt about the threat to lives; the death toll in the USA and Brazil will have topped 300,000 by the time you read this. 170 economies are forecast to shrink by the end of 2020. The Euro area is forecast to shrink by 8.7% by the year’s end, the UK by 9.5%, Spain by 12.6%, Italy by 10.8 %, and France by 10.4%. Despite all of this grief, there will be a recovery – such things pass. Yet the question remains: *what form will this recovery take?* Do we want an economy just like our old one?

The argument about government interference is over. Governments are interfering on a massive scale across the globe and will have to do much, much more to bring us out of the depression. The question therefore becomes *what kinds of business should governments encourage and what kinds should they allow to become relics?* Quite suddenly, we have a chance to choose what kinds of industry we want and do not want, and those governments that represent us are going to have to do the choosing, by providing stimuli to some but not others. They are going to have to borrow billions and our children are going to have to pay all this back over two decades or more. The debt is likely to exceed that generated by World War II and we will need something similar to the Marshall Plan, save that the USA may not be able to help on this occasion, given that COVID-19 is raging there with particular ferocity, although better leadership looks likely.

On June 3rd 2020 the World Economic Forum, in the person of Klaus Schwab, its founder, called for 'The Great Reset', which is the subtitle of this book. In this, he was backed by Kristalina Georgieva, head of the International Monetary Fund and by HRH Prince Charles and Sharan Burrow representing international labour (1). The chief executives of Microsoft, Mastercard and BP were among those at the launch ceremony, which has been backed by 1,000 businesses worldwide. We need nothing less than a new social contract to deliver a low-carbon economy and a job-rich recovery that respects our eco-system and fights climate change.

The word "culture" means "to work upon". Hence, "agriculture" is to work on land, "aquaculture" is to work on water, and "horticulture" is to work on gardens. Culture by itself, whether corporate, urban or national, works on whatever it may encounter. In this book, we will be describing the impact of the pandemic on different national cultures to explain why some appear to have escaped almost unscathed, while others have encountered near-disaster. What is it about cultures and the values these organise that allows Vietnam to have but 13 deaths as of November 11, 2020, despite its long border with China, while the USA, its old enemy, has passed 745(2)? The latter spends much more on its health system and is far, far wealthier. This book aims to explain such mysteries. We agree with the Stanford University economist Professor Paul Romer that "a crisis is a terrible thing to waste." We hope to show that market capitalism itself needs to be reconceived. This crisis is only the latest of many. Homo sapiens is a great killer. The planet is warming up. The ozone layer that protects us from deadly rays from the sun is now dangerously thin. Climate change could make parts of the world uninhabitable, with millions storming our shores in a movement provoking fascist reactions. Science needs to take charge of our destiny. We need to become consciously aware of what market forces can do very well *and cannot do*, like protecting us from pandemics. Our argument proceeds by the following steps.

Chapter 1: Private Enterprise Is in the Best Position to Manage This Pandemic argues that, once the pandemic takes hold of a nation and spreads, then its private enterprises are in a better position to contain it than are governments, nations, regions or cities. Companies have a younger age profile and are in a position to put those least susceptible to the virus at the forefront of their activities, while older top managers keep their distance and remain connected electronically, protected by their younger subordinates. The threat from the virus varies from company to company, from technology to technology, and from process to process, and generalizing to whole cities or regions makes no sense. The shifting balance between lives and livelihoods has to be spot on and varies between companies over time, so that lives saved now allow a greater subsequent emphasis on livelihoods. Now that vaccines are becoming available, it is companies you can rightly insist that their employees protect themselves, fellow workers and the company at large.

Chapter 2: How Do the Values of Nations Stand up to the Coronavirus? This chapter tells of a quick survey into the nations that have stood up to the coronavirus and those who have signally failed to do so. We see that their values differ markedly, as do the reactions of their values to the virus. We look at values that more resemble natural processes like the Yin and Yang of Taoism and values that resemble rocks of rectitude and have been inscribed on tablets of stone and in sacred texts. The latter are far less adaptable to such crises. Nations whose values resemble solid things and objects are at a serious disadvantage. What we in the West are up against is less communism, than East Asian civilization influenced over two centuries by China, which looks like returning to the dominant role it long held. China looks like emerging from this crisis in a much stronger position. The world will turn to nations that best manage this crisis and are prepared to help other nations.

Chapter 3: Why East Asia Copes with This Pandemic So Much Better asks why East Asia has ridden out this virus with less loss of life than Europe and the West. The differences are truly massive, with America's rate of deaths per million will pass 800 before Christmas 2020, while China's sticking at 3 for the eighth month in a row. We show that it is a matter of values and culture. A culture based on individuality and force of personality is helpless against an affliction grounded in the community, which needs to escape as best it can by mobilizing that community. This virus needs us to cooperate, not compete in taking advantage of each other. Letting prices go sky high and chasing profits slows our response. The pandemic spreads much faster than markets can react, doubling infections in just days.

The West's community spirit, insofar as it can summon this, resides in its corporations. A private enterprise is in a position to influence those it pays for their services and can require that they obey its rules. It is in a much stronger position to demand compliance than are federal or local governments in much of the West. Governments can be very effective in the early stages of locking down whole countries and regions of countries, but they are insufficiently selective and nuanced in the process of opening up the economy which needs to be done enterprise-by-enterprise and workplace-by-workplace.

It has become glaringly obvious that the virus has killed many more in the West than in East Asia, despite the fact that it originated in China and neighbouring countries had less time to react. While the West has a framework of laws, the East relies more on particular relationships. While the West stimulates consumerism and self-indulgence, the East emphasises productivity and self-control. While the West sees leadership as calculating and power-hungry, the East sees leadership as paternal and caring. The West sees contending values as rocks of righteousness. Taoism sees them as dynamic processes ever-shifting, more obedience now means more freedom in the future.

Come a pandemic like this one, the West hesitates to curb freedom and limit self-indulgence, while the virus doubles its infection rate every three days. The West tries to open up too soon in the name of freedom, even as the plague increases. It distrusts what governments implore it to do, believing its liberties are being eroded. Used to self-indulgence, it reacts resentfully to any controls. The consequences are very real. Most of East Asia has deaths per million in single digits, while much of Europe and the Americas has them in three digits or more. The differences are stark indeed. A selfish kind of Individualism may be the West's Achilles Heel.

Chapter 4: It's Teams That Change the World shows how teams can erect barriers to COVID-19 even while hatching ways to lift the siege. A team of say six to eight people meet as normal, face-to-face, but maintain social distance from others in the company, so long as the virus threatens. Should anyone in the team test positive, all are sent away to isolate, only to meet again fourteen days later and continue their work, which has, anyway, taken place remotely via Zoom while they were shut down. There is need to track and trace only private contacts, since team members were exposed to each other, but not the company at large. The outbreak, if any, *is confined to 6-8 people* who are promptly distanced from the rest. They may emerge from the situation immune as a group, which could help the company resist a spike in the virus and allow members to interact with all others in the company.

Spending longer with five to seven other people than with casual acquaintances *tightens group bonds and makes these more supportive*, as members learn more about each other and how to elicit talent from their group. Margaret Mead famously wrote, "Small groups of committed citizens have changed the world, indeed nothing else ever has." It is small groups that solve complex problems, that grow in effectiveness over time, that experiment and learn fast, that innovate and turn ideas into realities, that engage with each other and develop lasting bonds, and that propel the socially skilled into leadership positions. What we need in this crisis

are less answers than new questions. The face-to-face team is the origin of most entrepreneurialism and innovation.

Chapter 5: Public-Private Alliance: A Matter of Life and Death

reminds us that all values, everywhere and however different, depend on our staying alive to fulfil them. One potential “advantage” of this pandemic is that it asks whether what we do contributes to saving and enhancing lives, and to what degree. For example “caring” has a very low market value since so many people, especially women, do it for nothing, but has a very high value in a pandemic where we stand and clap those saving us. What a systematic attempt to open up with as few casualties as possible shows all employees is that everyone cares for their health and for their career prospects and that the company will stand by them, if they, in turn, support the company and help it survive. What employees do in this pandemic is very much more meaningful and responsible than anything they ever did before, as both lives and livelihoods depend on it, as is accurately reporting your condition day by day and not coming into work if symptoms arise. Each one of us is responsible for all others and the prospects of the company as a whole. In this crisis, companies can be extolled for saving lives along with the economy.

Quite suddenly, what companies do and how they do it are matters of life and death. You no longer just make widgets for the man who has everything, you give extra years of life to members of your working community. You do this by taking good care of their health and telling the world of your more successful and safer practices, so that others follow. Those who have given their blood plasma to the seriously ill keep a scoreboard of the lives they saved and those lives that the company as a whole community saved. We save lives in a way that assures our livelihoods by taking care of each other and publicising those vaccines and those precautions which have been found to work and those that have not. In the end, do we not all want to make a difference? Is there any difference greater than

between life and death? Could our work be much more meaningful than it was before?

Chapter 6: Overall Wellness and Health: Skill and Knowledge at Work asks whether companies might add immeasurably to public health by keeping employees well. McKinsey reckons that health adds as much as 30% to economic growth. For some years now, Johnson and Johnson, the US hospital supply corporation, has run a Wellness programme for volunteers among its employees. Nearly everyone volunteers and the extraordinary thing about the programme is that for every dollar spent on the programme the company *saves* an additional \$2.71 in the costs it had earlier incurred. Why should this be? *Because it is incredibly cheaper and smarter to keep your employees well than to wait for them to fall ill and then doctor them.* Just compare the cost of joining a company-based Weight Watchers group and being applauded by friends for every 6 ounce drop in your weight, with having surgery for the morbidly obese which carves three feet out of your intestines. Those that enjoy a healthy lifestyle and carefully monitor their condition often do not fall ill and need surgery in the first place.

Insurers charge higher premiums for those in poorer health, so companies could help their profitability *and* the health of their employees by getting as many as possible into the lower risk groups. It now seems that the number and strength of antibodies can be counted by recent tests, so we can discover who is most resistant to the virus. It could become company policy to increase this antibody count, to recognize who amongst their number can take otherwise risky jobs and to combat type II diabetes with liquid diets.

In **Chapter 7: Putting Females and Youth in the Vanguard**, we look at the inherent strength of young women vis-a-vis the coronavirus. If we look first at age, rather than gender, then those dying from the virus, between the ages of 18 and 44 are just 3.9% of the total. Women are less likely than men to die of the virus by a ratio of 1.4 to 2.4. This would indicate that the proportion of young women 44

years and under, dying is just over 1% of the total. Were we to eliminate young women with underlying conditions then the numbers get vanishingly small. Were we to allow for the fact that women do most of the nursing and caring, then the case for their near-immunity grows even stronger. If we knew a woman's antibody count to be high and that she has been vaccinated, the chances of death virtually disappear. Thus far, women are losing their jobs faster than are men, partly because many women are in jobs of personal service, but this could change.

What all this suggests is that *the empowerment of young women is a strategy for re-opening the economy fast*. Men are used to believing that they protect women. Here is a reverse situation with young women protecting mostly older men. They could do much of the face-to-face interaction which would be perilous were older men to do it. They could also do much of the travel. Giving them this added power would be experimental and discontinued were they to fall ill and it would require women to volunteer for such roles. In this chapter, we also examine the role of skill in maintaining mental and physical health and the much poorer mental health of those with low skills. We desperately need to train the trainable and rescue them from twilight existences. Everyone needs a skill with which to engage and to master their environments.

Chapter 8: Giving the Disadvantaged an Advantage looks at the shocking statistics on race and colour. In the USA, black Americans are 2 ½ times more likely to die – in Kansas seven times. The UK's National Bureau of Statistics has produced age-adjusted comparisons, which estimate the much higher toll among the elderly. Blacks are four times more likely to die. In the UK, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis are between 1.7 and 1.9 times more likely to catch the virus and their chances of survival are lower. There appear to be no genetic causes; rather, the evidence points to front-line roles in caring, to density of living conditions, to poverty in general and to more predisposing conditions like asthma, diabetes, hypertension and obesity, and to distrust of white-run

institutions. Most American insurers make the insured pay the first \$500, so many people cannot even afford to be diagnosed and pass on the infection.

Yet in these sad statistics, there is an opportunity to turn things around and turn disadvantage on its head. The number of COVID cases in the USA has passed ten million, but the number of those recovered stands at nearly seven million, rising to eight. Most of these ten million people will recover. Most of those testing positive will survive and the vast majority will be immune, assuming the virus is sufficiently similar to MERS, SARS and flu. In the latter case, it might mutate and the immunity may fade in time, but Dr Anthony Fauci is quoted as saying that this is improbable. At the moment, those who get re-infected make up less than 1.0% of the total, and doubts remain on the accuracy of their initial positive findings. The sheer number of recovered minorities grows by the day. Since they suffered disproportionately on the upside of the pandemic, it is entirely reasonable and prudent that they gain on the downside, being more employable and less likely to infect others. There is a strong case for positive discrimination, based not on race but on immunity.

Chapter 9: Business Belongs to Those with a Stake in Its Future asks whether this pandemic might not make at least one lasting change to the nature of capitalism. The epidemic reminds us that wealth is created by employees, suppliers and *those who hold a stake in the business* and without whom it could not exist. Shareholders are only one kind of stakeholder, those who have invested money, but others may have invested the best part of their lives. “Here is some money, give me your life as long as I want it,” is hardly a just relationship. The truth is that only the USA, the UK and the ex-dominions place shareholders above others and uphold their right to “own” the creativity and innovation of a whole community. This is widely rejected in East Asia. If companies are going to take responsibility for lives, as well as livelihoods, then their people matter above all. It is going to be employees who endorse, or refuse

to endorse, the efforts of a company to open up in a safe manner and deploy its workforce responsibly. Consumers are in a position to reward those companies that treat their people fairly, where information on this is supplied.

Moreover, there is growing evidence that stakeholder-oriented companies out-perform shareholder dominated companies. There is a burgeoning movement called “Conscious Capitalism”, a group of some thirty or so well-known US based companies, who have turned the good that companies do to their societies into a conscious, purposeful strategy of positive social impact. These have announced their intention to take the lead in rescuing their country from the COVID-19 virus. These include IKEA (US), Patagonia, Harley-Davidson, Honda (US), Trader Joe’s, Johnson and Johnson, Jet Blue, Southwest Airlines, John Lewis, Commerce Bank, COSCO, IDEO, Toyota (US), UPS, 3M, Jordan’s Furniture, REI, Caterpillar, Wegman’s, the Motley Fool and LL Bean, among others. They were selected for research because the public said they *loved them*, not a category used in most business research! Their profitability over recent years was multiples of Standard and Poor’s 500 averages (3).

Chapter 10: The Case for Servant Leadership: By what right does business lord it over us? What is the justification for earning so much? Why should we “give the time of day” to soap merchants like Unilever? Some say they are “winners”, but does that makes the rest of us “losers” in comparison? The real legitimacy of business is that it *serves us so well that we gladly confer the mantle of leadership upon it*. Business is a “Servant Leader” and its legitimacy derives from how well it serves us. This pandemic vastly increases this capacity for service. Business can literally save lives as these chapters will show. In fact, Unilever’s disinfectant soap and public hand-washing campaigns may have saved hundreds of thousands from typhoid and cholera. It has over a million young people enrolled in self-esteem classes and drills for the fresh water which its products need. It was sovereign wealth funds that recently saw off Kraft’s attempt to take Unilever over. Business has the health

and the future of stakeholders and much of the world in its grasp. We must demand more of it. We need statesmanship and imagination, and there is no time to lose.

Great leaders are humble before the movements and institutions they serve. Nelson Mandela was imprisoned but his wretched captivity only elevated him in the eyes of the world, a prisoner-cum-president who ruled over his jailors. Gandhi felt his life was of no consequence compared with Indian independence. However, his humble dedication to a cause meant that this cause raised him up. Servant leaders are focused on something bigger than themselves. We will show that several business leaders have behaved in a like manner. In the end, do not all of us want to make a difference? The difference between life and death is the greatest difference of all, and it is this which emerges from the way we combat this pandemic.

Chapter 11: Massive Fiscal Stimuli: But to What Purpose? argues that we only get out of this crisis with the help of governments and financiers making massive fiscal stimuli to get us back to work. Laissez-faire will only leave as we were, prone to global crises and unprepared to meet them, our industry without purpose or direction, dreaming of Internet bingo, popular war-games and similar addictions. The USA with a reserve currency is in a position to print money for the whole world, but what should it *do* with that money? The Book of Deuteronomy 30/19 puts it well: “I have set before you, life and death, blessing and cursing, therefore choose life.” Choosing life consists of asking ourselves what kind of industry we should resurrect from the rubble, what kinds we should speed on their way, and what kinds we should consign to history. We have been rudely reminded that life matters, now we must consider which kind of activities contribute to life and which do not.

What we need are challenging infrastructure projects that make our spirits soar, that engage our enthusiasm, which give our lives a meaning they never had before. It has taken the UK a decade to bicker about a fourth runway at Heathrow. In that time, China has

built fourteen entirely new airports. Such expenditures are not small change; the IMF has a trillion dollars, the Belt and Road initiative even more (3). The latter is twelve times the cost of the Marshall Plan which rescued Europe. We need public investments and incentives for private investments, to support climate resilience, to grow mangroves, reforest the land, insulate houses, replace fossil fuels, etc. As Nelson Mandela put it. “We must lay the scorch racism and divisiveness to rest. This requires strong democratic institutions and the will of everyone. None of this is possible without a strong economy and a culture of compassion in a cohesive society.” (4)

CHAPTER 1

PRIVATE ENTERPRISE IS IN THE BEST POSITION TO MANAGE THIS PANDEMIC

The theme of this chapter is that, while some government dictates have proved very effective in containing the pandemic in its initial stages, as with instant lockdowns, once we start to open up, this needs to be done in many different ways and there are no simple recipes for success. We must feel our way forwards in a thousand different contexts. Discovering how to create wealth while keeping those who do this safe, is *not* well-known and needs to be learned from scratch, if not invented by companies themselves. As such, it is better left to free-enterprise companies and those who run public institutions like schools. These should be judged on their *results*, by how productive and profitable they have become, while protecting the health of their people. Issuing general advice on how the populace should behave becomes less and less appropriate and at times laughable. Two families may meet indoors but “no hugging!” Seconds later, we are told to use common sense, and the “instinct” of a high official and father in breaking the rules for his child’s sake is praised (1). These kinds of muddle are farcical, like Trump wanting to cut back on testing because this raised infection rates and made him look bad.

The reasons for leaving the many ways of lowering the infection rate to companies are several:

- **It is wealth-creating companies that are the units of economic survival and recovery;**
- **Companies through their youthful profiles have the highest resistance to the virus;**

- Every company is different in its technology, its production process, its location and its people density;
 - Major spikes are occurring in key companies, and these must be extinguished;
 - Companies in the West command more allegiance, discipline and compliance than do governments;
 - Every company needs to ask different questions and find its own answers;
 - One answer may lie in team “bubbles” and cell-structures;
 - The optimal combination of caution with courage is different in every case;
 - Companies have opportunities to compete in activities that save lives and livelihoods;
 - It is high time companies took responsibility for all stakeholders.
-
- It is wealth-creating companies that are the units of economic survival and recovery.

To a very large extent, it is not the working-age population that this virus kills, but those who are older. Indeed, the age-group on which business relies risks dying from the virus in quite small numbers. It is comparable to flu in winter months. The virus mostly strikes at those in their retirement years and not those in occupations (2). Those actually *creating our wealth* are generally sickness-free and there are strong reasons for unleashing their energies, provided they are not infected and do not infect others, which is not difficult for companies to discover, where testing and vaccinating is the norm. How well our economies perform depends on those *least* susceptible to the virus and there is everything to be said for putting these at the forefront of the struggle to re-open. What would be chronically unsafe for retirees is a manageable risk for younger employees. They can shield older people from the danger by discovering which activities raise the infection rate and which do

not. Nearly all younger persons recover and their near-immunity could prove valuable.

It is business that is in the arena of risk-taking that has learned over the years to act quickly on the basis of imperfect information and to tolerate ambiguity. The truth is we do not *know* many things about this virus and it is going to cost us to find out. There are also large elements of good and bad fortune in this equation. This pandemic is arbitrary in whom it infects and it goes after a Prime Minister, Tom Hanks and the president of Harvard. Businesses are used to trying things out to see if they work and this is what we urgently need. Most of the nation's innovation, resources and knowledge are wrapped up in its businesses, and it is from them that new ways of containing the virus are likely to spring.

An example of what business can do is evidenced by the Munich-based Bauer Group; despite its automotive clients suffering, it switched its efforts to the healthcare sector, to helium recovery systems and the generating of biogas. It has created a new filter that traps viruses, bacteria and mould from the air, essential in all hospitals. It will meet all its 2020 targets for revenue. It is seeing its markets recovering (3). It is expected to recover faster than other industries. Germany's 5.9% forecast contraction is much smaller than the EU average and its deaths are 1/5th of those in the UK. Germany is expected to grow by around 5% in 2021. Spikes are occurring *within key businesses* like meat-packing, but these can be isolated and extinguished as they occur. South Korea traced a major spike to nightclubs and closed these down. There is much to be said for a business-by-business approach, with each unit held responsible for reducing infections.

That we put our faith in businesses does not mean ignoring what governments can do. The German government has launched a \$1.3 trillion "bazooka" of aid to companies, including its three million *Mittelstand*, or small and medium sized companies. Va-Q-Tec, a small flexible company, switched from insulating refrigerators to

insulated, refrigerated containers for shipping medicines and virus test-kits, a market that is soaring. Because of its relative success in containing the virus, most of Germany did not have to close down (4). Germany has China as a major trading partner and orders are now increasing from East Asia as China, South Korea and Japan recover. Germany's fiscal stimulus to companies as a percentage of GDP is over twice that of the UK and over four times that of the USA. It is also clear that the German government is not preparing to return to the status quo. There is a \$50 billion "future package" aimed at a hydrogen economy, electric vehicles, quantum technologies, the carbon-free economy, digitalization and artificial intelligence. Consumer confidence is rising, and purchasing managers have recovered most of the morale they lost in April-May, although a second wave has recently hit (5).

- **Companies by reason of their youthful profiles have the highest resistance to the virus**

It is plain common sense to confront this virus with our strongest, not our most vulnerable people. For every 100 people who die of the virus in the UK, 88 are over 65 years old. Only 2 in every 100 deaths are under 50 years old. 90.9% of those who die, have at least one pre-disposing condition, like asthma, diabetes, dementia, hyper-tension, pneumonia and influenza. If we look at age groups, then 12.5% of all deaths occur among those aged 15-44, 14.5% occur among those aged 45-64, while 73% of all deaths occur among those over 65. If we take young people with no predisposing conditions then these are *five time less likely to die* than those of retirement age (6). Over 1 in 100 persons who die are white, while 4 in 100 are black in the USA. In the UK, 7 in 100 deaths are Bangladeshi, Pakistani or Indian, only Chinese women die in fewer cases than whites. This means that if companies maintained those who worked for them in the same condition as white and Chinese employees, deaths would fall substantially. There is no indication that these differences are genetic. They are socio-economic and hint at the difference companies could make if they tried.

Suppose companies gave the jobs in which risks were inherent, to those best able to withstand this? There is no life without risk-taking. Thousands who drive professionally, heal, care, travel, glide, box, climb, head footballs and volunteer to trial vaccines take calculated risks as part of their active lives. There are issues important enough to risk oneself, and helping one's chosen company open up for business and staving off its collapse is one of these. The company is in a position to promote and reward those who came to its aid in a time of crisis. It is of course essential that young employees *volunteer* for the jobs that would be riskier if their seniors had to do them. They could be coached at a distance and engage more closely only when this was advantageous.

One advantage of such arrangements is that young people could assume responsibilities earlier than would otherwise be the case and would be enabled to prove their autonomy and loyalty to the company. Very few young people die, but there is no such barrier to them becoming infective and carrying the virus to their parents and grandparents. This is why it remains imperative to test, trace and isolate them almost immediately. A sudden spike in infections may justify closing down for a short period and then resuming. In the meantime, the testing of the young becomes the canary in the coalmine. You are warned before deaths occur by those who are least likely to die themselves.

- **Every company is different in its technology, its production process, its location and its people density**

Another reason for putting individual companies in the driver's seat is that it is virtually impossible for national, state, or local governments to specify what companies should or should not do about the virus in their unique situations. Companies have different technologies which may or may not require close proximities. They may have multiple people touching the same surfaces, crowded dormitories and/or canteens, unclean washrooms and noise so employees must shout at each other and scatter droplets. The only

conceivable way of judging companies is by their results. They either open up successfully and safely so that few if any test positive, or they do not. They either have their least vulnerable people in exposed roles or they do not. They either accept responsibility for the medical conditions of their workers or they do not.

Every company has a production process which exposes employees in different degrees to being infected. These processes can be varied, while hands and workspaces can be sprayed hourly, different spacings employed, the methods that infect people abandoned, and those methods reducing infections adopted. Much depends on geographical locations. There are regions of the USA which the virus has barely touched. To impose the same restrictions on the first as on the second is ludicrous. There are rural parts which the pandemic has passed by, thus far. Every region must be watchful, but act as suits its special circumstances. The virus is ubiquitous but also multi-local. There are different answers in different parts of the nation.

The virus is also on different time trajectories. It peaked first in China, then South Korea and Iran and parts of southern Europe, then in the UK and Ireland, then in the USA and currently in India and the Americas in general. It rises and then falls, but falls only if precautions are first taken. This is less a second wave than the lengthening of the first wave, where states in the USA have opened up too early. We have to set companies free to find their own paths, if only because the virus flows and ebbs at different times in different places. If shut-downs are not rigorous enough, then the rates of death and infection remain at a worryingly high level. The US has been trying to open up without following its own guidelines, afraid that other economies will steal a march on it. (7)

- **Major spikes are occurring in key companies and these must be extinguished**

A further reason for requiring companies to lead in quelling the pandemic is that several spikes in infections recently witnessed are

the result of particular industries. There was an outbreak in Singapore traced to the dormitory conditions in which immigrant workers lived. In South Korea a sudden spike was traced to nightclubs and to one infected person who had visited six of them. Meatpacking plants in Minnesota triggered 27,000 infections and were traced to poor living conditions and dense crowded working conditions imposed by the JBS factory. The Public Broadcast Service reported that the outbreak was blamed on the foreign immigrants themselves. They complained anonymously to PBS. Several packers were closed down by local governments, until President Trump ordered them re-opened. This occasioned more deaths but averted meat shortages. (8)

A similar sudden spike occurred in a large German abattoir at Rheda-Wiedensbruck, which slaughters 50,000 pigs a day. The armed services had to intervene to trace, track and quarantine 6,500 workers. The Tonnies company was heavily criticised for its poor working conditions and its use of agency workers from Eastern Germany. (9) There were similar, if smaller, outbreaks at two meat processing plants in Wrexham, Wales, where nearly half the 500 workforce became infected. A recent incident was a Norfolk poultry farm.

Much fuss is made over the “R number”, that is, the number of persons infected by a single infected person. If this goes above 1, the infection will spread. If it stays below 1, the infection will diminish. However, within companies doing particular jobs, the infection can quadruple in just two days because hundreds are confined in a limited space like a cruise ship, a floating petri dish where on several occasions the virus has run rampant and older people have suffered. We do *not* propose that companies should be allowed to endanger their people in search of profits, but that they be held wholly responsible for the health of employees and customers and be obliged to test them and compensate them where danger signals were present, yet ignored. In such places, infection rates can run away and action must be taken immediately.

As such, an additional reason for making companies responsible is that they constitute the greatest danger of a sudden resurgence. We must make such errors very expensive to the companies concerned.

- **Companies in the West command more allegiance, discipline and compliance than do governments**

One problem with our adversarial system of politics is that governments rarely command the allegiance of a majority of their citizens. Where we add those voting for the opposition to those not bothering to vote at all, most democratic governments attract around a third of their citizens, while often describing this as a “landslide”. Local government garners even less support. When ordered to do something unpleasant like staying in quarantine and avoiding beaches, the populace is loath to comply unless they believe the warnings to be true, and, even then, they do this only grudgingly. This is why we need companies to step up to plate and show us what they can do.

Any employer has much more leverage over what employees do and don't do than does a government, national or local. An employer hires, fires, pays, promotes, trains, supervises, assesses and evaluates employees. Their futures depend on pleasing the company and following its procedures. If told to protect the health of fellow workers, they must do so. If being tested regularly is company strategy, then this will happen. In Germany, Westfleisch, a meat packer, has publicly undertaken to test all its employees every day, immediately isolating those who test positive and so nip any epidemic in the bud. (10) Those who *do* test positive are relatively young with mild if any symptoms. These constitute a “reserve army”, and, once back at work, are mostly immune.

If opening up safely is the way the company relates to its market and to the public, then all employees can be assessed on how successful their efforts are in bringing this about. A company is a microcosm of the larger working environment and if companies

compete with each other, not just in creating wealth but in creating *health* among their people, then they will be doubly successful. What a company does for its customers and what it does for those employees encountering customers become the twin reasons for buying from it, and the employees must be allowed to testify as to the care and the consideration with which they are being treated.

- **Every company needs to ask different questions and find different answers**

Because this virus is so new, the emphasis must be on asking it questions, to reveal how it assails each particular company. These questions need to be about the particular challenges a business faces. How to protect a wine bar is very, very different from protecting an open-air garden centre, or a lab for micro-chips. If some employees need to be in close proximity to each other, let this be the youngest employees who have tested positive and are very likely to be immune. A company of organized people who have agreed to operate as a single unit is in much the strongest position to test a myriad of propositions crucial to its survival and future prosperity. There are dangers in being too cautious and in being too bold. If you are too cautious, everything will take longer and you will consume gallons of disinfectant and hours of nervous absenteeism. If you are too bold, then spikes will occur in different departments and all occupants therein must be separated from the rest.

As of now, we do not know how much difference the wearing of masks makes, but general answers are less important than specific answers, like “cashiers that wear masks are three times less likely to test positive in our company”, and, “One metre of distance is 90% as effective as are two, while doubling the number of people who can be served and raising revenues 50%.” We can disinfect one office every day and one every four days and see what difference, if any, this makes. Getting rid of needless precautions is vital, but this is done not because we are bored with the virus, wish to return to

normal and only care about our own incomes, but because our own company information shows that this is expedient.

What difference do hand-washing and hand sanitizers make? We may need volunteers to test the more optimistic propositions, but we believe these would be forthcoming. Some people will jump at the chance of opening up sooner rather than later and may be keen to help bring this about. Others will want to be more protective and will want to research areas of danger. Both can be given a chance to question the virus around the values they hold dearer. Some will want to protect their parents and grandparents. Some will want to see the back of needless regulations as soon as possible. The imperative is to test as many propositions as possible *and learn as fast we can* what serves a strategy of opening-up safely.

- **The answers may lie in team “bubbles” and cell structures**

Some of the ways of overcoming the virus could actually make a company more innovative and more able to solve day-to-day problems, whether connected to the virus or not. We do not have to *either* interact with each other normally *or* keep our distance; we can do both. We place people in 6-8 person “bubbles”, inside of which they may come as close to each other as they wish, but they must remain socially distant from everyone else in their company. This has the advantage of confining any spread of the virus to a particular bubble and we know in advance who has had contact with whom. If any member of a bubble tests positive, then all members are quarantined at once and the virus spreads no further. After say-twelve days, the healthy or immune members re-convene. Since these teams give members tasks, which are reported on when they meet periodically, work may be scarcely interrupted.

However, small teams have some very interesting properties and are importantly involved in both innovation and solving problems. In the final years of Jack Welch at GE, he created *hundreds of work-out groups*. These met outside the company’s premises so that routine tasks could not distract them and they could concentrate