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Light? Sorry, there's not a chink

Paul Winter

Like you, each day I scan the news for some confirmation of the much rumoured green shoots of recovery. And most days I am asked at business functions to predict the date when everything will be back to normal.

But I can't. The range and mix of challenges faced by all of us is so much more complex than we have encountered before. So how do we – business leaders and individuals – prepare, cope and thrive?

The challenge facing us strikes me as if I am standing on some metaphorical start line, between two Olympic sprinters.

My confidence is low and my expectations are lower. I catch the two muscular figures in the corner of my eye as my gaze is fixed down the track and I can sense their omnipotent presence. I keep very still, tense and rigid waiting for the off.

But in my heart I know I am already beaten and, with the odds stacked against me, don't even perform to my limited best as the sleek giants power ahead of me.



In life, I realise, there are metaphorical start lines like this everywhere, as far as my eyes can reach. Hundreds of races, over different distances and terrains, with millions of competitors, all of whom are different shapes and sizes.

So if you are in the wrong race for your talent, don't worry. So are many others. It's actually the main cause of business stress. It's also why organisational change is so difficult to cope with for many people.

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Just when you think you are doing well in one race someone stops it and starts a new one with new competitors. The secret is to try and get into the best race that most closely fits our personal talents, skills and training.

Our economy is full of different races each with its own rules and starting time.

So, in order to stay informed about what is around us - which races we should be really turning up for - we need a strong sensory system to keep us connected with what is happening.

When the start of the economic crisis appeared in the media, the smart people had already started to change or move. When the statistics finally confirmed just how bad the situation was, those without a strong sensory system and resilience to react to it, were and continue to be left behind.

We also need the personal skills to cope with change as it hits us. This means good networking to detect opportunities and threats in advance together with good personal and organisational resilience.

For me, resilience is about not taking things personally and bouncing back whenever I fall down.

A more professional definition is, of course, "the ability of a person or organisation to recover from a setback".

Resilience as a skill can be learnt - there are even faculty centres for resilience studies. But resilience needs to be a practical skill.

So the challenge is not just "Am I and my organisation strong enough?" You need to ask yourself "Am I connected enough and flexible enough to make sure we get into the right race for our combined talents?".

In short we need to get out there and engage with unwelcome situations even when it feels counter intuitive, so that we can participate better. Then we can create or take the opportunities when they begin to appear, pushing us well ahead of the pack.

I am keen to talk with you about the building blocks of this subject and share my knowledge and insights. Do keep an eye out for our seminar series that you can find on our website.

And contact me with any questions that you may have on improving resilience, connectivity in strategy, infrastructure and people.

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