



COVID-19: Fear to Respect, Crisis to Renewal

2020 has seen dramatic impacts on the world's economic, social and health systems. Initiated by an unknown virus, the world took steps to slow or stop illness and death through economic and social restrictions and relief programming coupled with medical system interventions from hospital repurposing to fast tracked pharmaceutical and vaccination remedies.

To date, the world has not succeeded in moving beyond fear and crisis. **Fear** – of illness and death, of economic catastrophe, of the unknown future. **Crisis** – the breadth of impacts across countries and economies, disproportionate impact on socio-economic groups - compounded by the realization of world-wide systemic racism and concern for police, political and extremist group behaviour.

As the world emerged from a first wave of virus, restarting led to a second wave of infection, the fear that the virus will be with us for a very long time, and the continuance of a crisis in economic, political and social systems. Now – what do we do? Must we stay locked in crisis and fear?

Fear: Move to Respect

The CBC broadcast network featured the Pasqua First Nation (Saskatchewan) and their approach to restarting school. Two things were particularly noteworthy:

- First, they had taken immediate steps to create a safe environment through preventive techniques including distancing, mask policy, and physical barriers all of which they addressed methodically, in line with health guidelines, and through their own manufacturing and installation services – they thought, investigated, and learned about the virus, then chose a path and implemented it in a manner that is respectful of the virus; and,
- Second, they discussed how to move people from **fear** of the virus to **respect** for the virus, learning from indigenous knowledge on how and why to address fear. It is this **fear to respect** concept that holds the key for the world successfully living with the virus. It is the basis for the implementation steps that the Pasqua First Nation are taking as they open schools. It is not exhorting people to go back to work when it is not safe to do so. It is not giving up on social distancing because it is awkward. It is about having people learn about the virus, what it does and how it lives so that they in turn learn what they must do to live with the virus – not to fear it, but to respect it and act accordingly. The school system is implementing actions on this basis, and individuals and groups need to also take this approach to complement their actions.

Indigenous people around the globe have developed knowledge on turning fear into respect, a key to survival and certainly applicable to interacting with the COVID-19 virus.

If one lives in fear of a circumstance (e.g. an animal, a change in ecology) and as a result stops acting as needed to conduct their life - or acts recklessly by failing to recognize the potency of the circumstance - the consequence will be severe. Survival will be questionable.

By respecting that which is otherwise feared, responsive and anticipatory actions can be created and learned so that one's life may continue, not being curtailed by the fear of the circumstance, and not acting in a manner that would give the circumstance a distinct advantage and hence put you at risk.

Today the circumstance is COVID-19, *the virus*. If we respect the virus – learning how it acts, what can result – we can design actions that allow us to achieve our needs, to do our work, all while the virus exists amongst us.

A simple example: we know that the virus transmits in water droplets expelled by others within six feet, and hence constraint on the water droplets coupled with exclusion zones of six feet respects the virus and allows us to live without fear. *But if one ignores this knowledge* - perhaps because you don't believe it or don't think it will happen to you – then you are not respecting the virus, leading to an increased probability of an unwelcome outcome.

Each of us and each of our organizations can move from fear to respect by acting to:

- Learn all we can about how the virus acts, what are its strengths and weaknesses
- Design actions for our particular circumstances that will respect the virus
- Act and monitor results and adjusting as needed to live with the virus
- Act individually and collectively – respect of the virus must be a societal norm

Crisis: Move to Renewal

The world is in crisis. Chaos (or at least confusion) exists in economic, political and social systems and is revealed as disagreements, inequities, and injustices. This crisis presents a unique opportunity to create, to renew.

To date government and corporate responses have been directed at retaining the status quo through monetary manipulations – employment, types of industry, social structures (although this is now challenged through Black Lives Matter and other social initiatives, and increased visibility of economic and social inequities). Despite massive debt financing there is no consensus on recovery – and most notably, no articulation of a vision for a future that incorporates the discontinuity that the COVID-19 virus has introduced to all our “systems”.

A structured approach to renewal is needed – the crisis should serve as the opportunity to create new systems that are not merely adjustments but visionary, addressing the realities that the crisis is revealing.

A framework for renewal from crisis is presented by David Hurst, *Crisis and Renewal – Meeting the Challenge of Organizational Change*, 2002. Based on a thorough understanding of the ecocycles for earth's natural systems (e.g. the life of a forest), an Organizational Ecocycle is presented, adding rational actions to the standard natural ecocycle model to recognize that humans take conscious actions that have immediate impacts. For our purposes attention is drawn to one portion of the ecocycle – namely, when crisis arises, confusion (chaos) results and the successful emergence from this confusion is led by a charismatic leader with a vision that in time will become the new (renewed) system.

Crisis induced confusion, chaos provides the opportunity to create and successfully implement a new vision and concept for the economy, for society, for politics. What is required is the articulation of the characteristics and principles of these systems, expressed and then implemented by charismatic leaders that inspire the support of the populace.

It should be noted that introducing systems change is aided when there is instability in the current system – instability allows shifts to be made more quickly as the status quo does not offer confidence. The instability needs to be managed – if left on its own, chaos will continue and the system can destruct. Managing the instability can lead to tremendous accomplishments – a somewhat off topic example of this success is found in the British Harrier jet that was designed to function in a state of dynamic instability, allowing it to be the most maneuverable and responsive aircraft. But, if the instability wasn't managed, the aircraft would have crashed.

Current and immediate future responses by government – as demanded by the public – appear to be directed to sustaining the status quo. Help to keep food on the table through cash flow. Create a sense of safety through the provision of personal protective equipment. Support social movements such as Black Lives Matter or #MeToo or indigenous rights. None of these are wrong, but they are incremental in nature. They do not reflect a new vision or concept. They work from the stance of where we are today and will incrementally try to change to a better place. Surely the world will be a better place as a result of these changes, but will it be renewed with a new vigor and purpose, or simply a better version of what has existed, leaving in place residual difficulties?

The confusion and chaos of today creates an instability that by its very nature provides a platform for dramatic renewal to a new vision of what the world systems can and should be. It is a time where fundamental principles can be articulated and implemented. These are waiting to be articulated by the charismatic persons that will lead the renewal. A failure to take this opportunity will probably still see improved systems but the time is now if there is to be benefit from the wide chaos that crisis has created.

- Will charismatic leaders emerge?
- Will leaders articulate a new vision for our political, social and economic systems?

What does this mean for individuals and organizations?

A. Move from Fear to Respect

First, learn about the virus – how it acts, what it is looking for to survive, how you can defeat it.

Second, create the action plan for conducting work, life that respects the virus

Third, educate everyone on the virus and respectful actions.

Fourth, enforce the actions – ensure a consequence that serves to support the broader implementation.

B. Renewal from Crisis

On a broader scale, define the new political, social and economic principles and systems and implement broadly, not on an incremental level.