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RSOG INSIGHT

MOVEMENT CONTROL ORDER EDITION

IN THIS ISSUE

With the COVID-19 impacting countries at various stages, everyone is trying to understand what is required to protect themselves and their communities.

We spoke to some of our friends around the world on how it has affected them and their views of the situation.

ABOUT OUR GUEST

Smita Elmore is a Director in Blue Harper – a consultancy for the Financial and Public Sectors. Helping people and organisations to be the best that they can be is her passion. Clients include leaders from the United Nations, FTSE 100, Local Government, and emerging leaders from London Business School. Her strengths include Executive Leadership coaching, team and organisational development with a focus on systemic culture change. With over 15 years consultancy and coaching experience, she also had a “first” career working in International Human Rights. She experienced first hand working with the extreme circumstances of conflict settings and developed partnerships with marginalised communities including survivors of violence and ex-fighters. Negotiating dynamic political environments and trying to influence wide groups of stakeholders who often held competing priorities was the norm. This experience shaped her approach that even in extreme situations people really are capable of challenging and supporting each other to deliver more than the sum of their parts.

VIEWS FROM UNITED KINGDOM

In this edition, we spoke to Smita Elmore of Blue Harper. She was instrumental in delivering the RSOG Senior Leadership Programme: Facilitative Leadership in 2018, in partnership with Questions of Difference.

RSOG: How has the pandemic affected your daily life?

Smita Elmore: The main effect for me is a reminder to be grateful. There are many others around the world who have seen their livelihoods rubbed out, and many who are suffering daily because of their circumstances or indeed the illness itself.

I am fortunate enough to work remotely (and virtually for the most part) so in many ways, home-based working is normal for me. However, the majority of the organisational development work I do for teams and leaders is primarily face-to-face, so trips across Europe, Asia and the Middle East were quickly postponed. I had to adapt and plan virtual sessions which have quickly become the norm and I imagine one that will remain in the future.

The changes to the work diary, whilst jarring at the moment, gave me a valuable window of opportunity to focus on priorities at home. I am reminded of how quickly habits can change. We, like so many young families, live a busy life full of school, work, extended family, and friends and at times we walk a logistical tightrope. We've had to adjust quickly to a different routine to help us and that's easier said than done when dealing with two children under the age of 6! We are trying to balance work alongside activities and time with the children. We are keeping it simple focusing on developing their own resilience at a time although it is at a time when our own is being sorely tested.

We are having to be more deliberate in planning our family time and work time and it's actually been a true upside helping us be present.

Disclaimer: Views expressed in the article are of their own and do not reflect the opinion of Razak School of Government.



That's not to say it is all plain sailing. It's a hectic at times as the lines between home and work is utterly blurred. It isn't unusual for my young daughters, or indeed my cat, to join me unexpectedly in meetings. Fortunately, the majority of people I speak to are in the same boat, and we are fast learning more about each other in ways we might never have before.

RSOG: Much of your work focuses on helping individuals and organisations achieve their ambitions and deliver results. In times of complexity and uncertainty, how can one move forward in such a challenging situation?

Smita Elmore: The week before lockdown I delivered an event at the London Business School for postgraduate students, and I remember looking around at the group, some wearing masks throughout the session, hand sanitiser out in front of them, all sat spaced apart and unsure whether attending was the "right" thing to do. At that moment it would have been easy not to continue, to be paralysed by the anxiety we were all experiencing. However, we chose to do something different and focussed on three things to help us.

Firstly, we recognised that this was not a "usual" time of change. We say quite simply to our children "you are living through a historical event". We are experiencing a degree of unprecedented change and, moreover, a period of collective trauma. Focusing on our physical and mental wellbeing and being kind to ourselves to sustain our own morale and those around us isn't just a nice thing to do - it's essential. This isn't easy especially for those who find themselves away from home and far from family.

Secondly, challenge your mindset and choose to reframe your thinking to look at the opportunity. Some colleagues across Asia told me of the benefits to them as they described quarantine as a "circuit breaker" rather than the language of a lockdown. This simple tweak in their approach helped them see they were resetting rather than restraining their communities and has helped some galvanise a community spirit. There is so much out of our control however, using our ability to consciously notice, interrupt and reframe our thinking will help us focus on what we can do.

Thirdly, actively reach out and connect to others' experience. We may need to socially distance, but this doesn't mean we need to be distant. And through connecting and sharing we help bring perspective, a sense of community and support - we all need this now more than ever. Whilst we are all experiencing something similar, it will impact us all differently. Resist the urge to hunker down as now is the time to get curious.

RSOG: In your opinion what would be the top three leadership lessons that we can learn from this global pandemic?

Smita Elmore: One sobering statistic before COVID-19 is that 75% of people don't "leave their jobs they leave their leaders." The current situation compels us to step into our leadership like never before. In my recent conversations, I have been asking leaders what were some of the things they were doing that was helping them at the moment. There was a key commonality: *a focus on trust*.

We know from research across industries, at the core what makes the biggest difference for leaders and teams that are high performing is that there are high levels of trust. I am sure we can all recall our own experiences that when there is high trust, we save time and resources, while when there is low trust it can cost us dearly



We often think of trust as something that either exists or does not. This mindset doesn't serve us well. It's important to remember that in every conversation and interaction we have an opportunity to develop trust. There are 3 key things we can do to help us and they are:

- Be credible and clear in your vision and priorities and communicate these early and often.
- Be reliable. Do what you say you will and what you expect others to do.
- Balance your focus on people vs. tasks- overestimate the need for compassion and actively reach out to others to help you test your thinking.

RSOG: Any messages you would like to share with our alumni and everyone involved whether directly and indirectly in curbing the COVID-19?

Smita Elmore: Some questions I would ask us all to consider during these weeks are:

“Imagine you are 6 months ahead of now, looking back:

- *What is it you would like to be saying about this time?*
- *How would you want people to be describing the way you coped, how you worked with others and what they noticed about you?*
- *Who is it that you can connect or reconnect with?*
- *What's the one thing you want to remind yourself to help you at the moment?”*

The mindset we use to approach these questions will determine a particular outcome and that is a choice in our control. Let's all use this choice wisely and thoughtfully.

More importantly, I want to wish everyone directly or indirectly involved in curbing COVID-19 safe and well now and in the months ahead.



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