

Aiming for optimism

This week I have been speaking to a few members from the global business community to gauge their positioning in terms of our model of the four stages of emotional response: from uncertainty and frustration to acceptance and optimism. What has become apparent is the truly global nature of the pandemic challenge. China, previously in severe lockdown, has eased restrictions on its own citizens while firmly banning entry to outsiders. Sweden, bold in their response, has yet to enter a total lockdown and perhaps never will, while the USA grapples with different approaches in different states. All are now dependent in some way on how the other acts.

A volcanic eruption or monumental tsunami, or even a vile act of terror, all examples of episodic catastrophe, have somewhat predictable projections. The moment of terror is confined to a limited length of time with a long tail of grief and post-traumatic recovery. A global pandemic such as COVID-19 is a different beast altogether. It is so globally interdependent a situation that truly if a frog hops in China, the UK feels the lily pad shake.

Read also

Home, but not alone. Stay connected, informed and inspired

Looping between uncertainty and frustration

Some are caught churning in uncertainty and frustration; just as they feel the shift from fear to frustration along comes another challenge, and they are back in the area of uncertainty.

In countries that are ahead in the pandemic journey, certain people have seen the light at the end of the tunnel only to be yanked back to frustration as the global interdependency becomes apparent.

Four a day

Several people that I have spoken to describe going through all four stages almost daily.

Frustrated at the start of the day dealing with technology, and ever-growing to-do lists, or uncertainty about how their ideas will be received by colleagues and peers, there has also been space for a level of acceptance. In some cases, the very nature of working from home has allowed people to focus in on what they are good at and bring more of themselves to the conversation. On a personal level, this helps people appreciate more deeply what they have, although the stress of constant virtual communication, isolation, and uncertainty for the future hasn't gone away.

However, while working on future-focused solutions in their business, people are experiencing huge optimism and can see great opportunity and a better future for their business. The lockdown is forcing new approaches, and new ways of seeing, doing and being. Suddenly, small grievances become utterly irrelevant, old processes redundant, out-of-date methods exposed. And here, in the creative space, lies opportunities for innovation in methods, processes, production and management.

Informing our response

The four phases are not linear, their boundaries are blurred. But the model can help us to gauge where we stand at any given time and to reflect on those emotions so that we can respond to them in an appropriate and compassionate manner. It can also help us understand where other people stand at any given time and use this knowledge to either benefit from the feelings of acceptance and optimism of our colleagues, friends and loved ones at that moment, or offer the support needed.

Ultimately our aim should be to move toward an outer circle of optimism, where we find space and energy to develop new skills, live in the present, be plentiful in our outlook and hopeful in our journey.

Alexandra Pearson is an entrepreneur, facilitator and a trainer. She worked in China for 25 years where she established several successful organisations. She has trained and facilitated leaders, managers and employees in personal development, leadership and creative thinking skills, and has cycled from Beijing to Xanadu 25 times. Alex is now Co-director of [The Yurt Academy](#) and a Lecturer in Management at The Business School, University of Sussex.

Read also

[The virtuous spiral of mental resilience](#)

Article by ALEXANDRA PEARSON