

Crisis management of the Brexit Article 50 negotiations

The European Union's Brexit negotiating screws are turning on a weakened Mrs May and Co. It is painful to behold the concessions given to them only to be followed by their extra demands, such as the rights of EU citizens in the UK after Brexit.

It must be tortuous being there in the room with Jean-Claude Juncker, Donald Tusk or Guy Verhofstadt (each an EU version of the Marquis de Sade) and Angela Merkel's (pig headed) attack dogs enjoying Schadenfreude. Did anyone think we could actually negotiate with them without being treated to an EU version of Count Dracula siphoning out as much of our life blood as possible? At what point do we recognise that these Article 50 negotiations are going to make us second class citizens in our own country and worse? Some serious crisis management is needed, preferably before being on the rack of this modern day Inquisition (or Imposition) gets unbearable.

The most basic rules of crisis management are:

- Don't get into a crisis in the first place;
- Once in a crisis, don't do anything to make it worse;
- Don't believe that the original timetable, objectives and budget can still be achieved;
- The earlier the remedial intervention, the greater the chances of recovery.

The basic problem – why things go wrong in the first place and don't get corrected in time – is that all decisions and resulting actions, whatever is happening, occur within an underlying paradigm or conceptual framework. This paradigm includes subject and other knowledge, assumptions, beliefs,

aspirations, language, philosophy etc. and operates to constrain intellectual activity. Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* explored the effect of paradigms on scientific progress. Kuhn noted that the luminaries of the science community tended limit their interest to exploring an existing 'conventional world view' of science, and ignoring contradictory evidence and theories. Progress tended to come from the 'outsiders' who established a new paradigm.

Individual paradigms can also turn into a group one or consensus that is fundamentally flawed; peer group pressure commonly stifles any dissenting views. Irving L. Janis in *Victims of Groupthink* explored how a group (in this case concerned with American foreign policy) could make potentially dangerous mistakes. He has suggested in *Crucial Decisions – Leadership in Policymaking and Crisis Management* how this can be avoided. The picture of imperatives towards bad policymaking is completed by process and bureaucratic controls, poor communications, custom and practice, heuristic shortcuts and management/political leadership ego (loss of face) which can all also help to prevent reality being accepted and acted upon expeditiously, when things are going wrong.

Regarding Brexit negotiations, once Mrs May made her Lancaster House speech in January this year the die was cast, come EU hell, high water, or General Election disaster. Yet there were – and still are – many issues where our Brexit negotiations looks like shambolic vague wishful thinking, based on incomplete and inaccurate information (see Brexit and some Alternative Facts), and questionable assumptions (for some significant assumptions see The Big EU-UK Question).

This makes us vulnerable and risks our being taken to the cleaners by the EU over, for example,: the number, order and imposed conditions of subjects 'negotiated' such as any ongoing contributions to the EU black hole (aka budget and liabilities), turning EU citizens remaining in this country

into a privileged caste, trade/bureaucratic regulation terms propelling our finest enterprises on a one way route to commercial oblivion and setting us up as a warning of what the vengeance of the EU élite means for any wayward populists in the remaining EU Member States. Less than two months ago, it was obvious the EU was behaving in an uncompromising way, showing bad faith in respect to Brexit negotiations (see Mayday, May! Brexit Mayday). Yet we are weaker now compared with then and need to come up with an alternative strategy (or strategies) that stands a better chance of getting us out of the claws of the EU political machinery and machinations – ensuring we achieve a real Brexit and not continuing EU members in reality, if not in name.

Recovery in a crisis needs a new paradigm to replace the existing failing one, and the resources to make it work. This suggests rapidly taking on board an effective Company Doctor or turnaround specialist (or team) for Brexit who thinks the unthinkable and stamps his or her authority and project management expertise quickly on the negotiations. Forget the idea of just getting more of the same people – usually this actually slows down progress. The new paradigm needs to be based on an understanding of the existing failing one and its obvious flaws, such as unrealistic assumptions about the EU' negotiating priorities, their desire to reach a deal, their honesty and integrity, their flexibility to achieve a deal, what is achievable within the timetable and the difference between a real comprehensive fully resourced plan and vacuous hyperbole. The new paradigm needs to be evidence- and analysis-driven, including risk assessments of probabilities of being realistic. Above all, it must not be based on wishful thinking or aspirations, or after drinks entertainment for the Westminster Bubble. And most importantly the existing team mustn't shoot the messenger because the message is unpalatable or demand a sycophantic re-write.

It would be nice to think that everything will be all right in

the end and we will leave the EU seamlessly in March 2019, despite the best (or worst) efforts of our negotiating team under the direction of Mrs May and Mr Davis (Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union). Unfortunately history is full of projects that failed to come in on time, budget and to specified requirements or objectives. In the absence of hard evidence to the contrary, Brexit negotiations appear to be heading the same way; or more metaphorically the Brexit orchestra is playing as the *Titanic* ship of state sails serenely on towards a sea full of EU negotiating icebergs.