

When Labour is looking for an answer by next Friday it ...

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Pat McFadden, in his role as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and chief Starmer fixer, said on Radio 4 yesterday that he wanted the government to behave as if it is a start-up company. His explanation was that it should not be looking for solutions in the long term but for answers by next Friday.

To be precise, he said [in a speech delivered later in the morning](#):

In the digital age, you don't have to work out precisely what you need to build at the start, and then start building it.

You can start with something small and try it out. Test it on people. Fix the problems. Change the design. Test it again. Throw it away and start again cheaply, if it doesn't work. Tweak it again. And so on, and on, for as long as you provide the service.

Suddenly the most important question isn't 'How do we get this right the first time?' It's 'How do we make this better by next Friday?'

I have read the whole speech, and nothing takes away from the fact that this is was the message that he was seeking to deliver.

I have struggled to come to terms with his suggestion without having to come to the conclusion that he is either stupid or completely unaware of what start-up companies do, and I cannot help but suggest, having done so, that both my observations are true.

I have created and then managed more than my fair share of start-up companies. Not one of them sought solutions to any problem by the following Friday, although, on occasion, they might have been desperate for payment to them to have been made by that day. Instead, every single one of them had a long-term vision of what they were trying to achieve, and without exception a plan that showed how delivery would necessarily take place over time if goals were to be achieved.

It was, of course, always true that each of these start-up's plans required adaptation in the light of experience. Being nimble of foot, which most small companies are,

permitted that to happen. But this is not something that any of them sought to maintain. Startup companies, rather than one-person operations, always expect to grow to the point where consultations on the process of change, both internally and externally, are necessary, with the goal being to take staff, suppliers and customers with them on that journey. To pretend that imposition is something that can survive long into the life of such an entity is absurd, at least if you value your staff and their goodwill.

McFadden's comments were, therefore, utterly inappropriate, as was much of his speech yesterday morning. They show as much comprehension of the required actions from the government as Starmer did last week when throwing down a gauntlet to the civil service. But, most particularly, what they demonstrate is that McFadden thinks that government should be run on the basis of panic, reaction and U-turns rather than on the basis of developing a plan that people can understand and then work to achieve.

I have said, time and again that Labour lacks a narrative to explain why it is in government, and all McFadden succeeded in doing was to confirm that fact.

Worse, though, he tried to make a virtue out of his incompetence, and that is quite extraordinary because absolutely no one is going to be convinced that he, or Keir Starmer, or the government of which they are a part, knows what it is doing on the basis of what McFadden said.

Yet again, Labour has failed to reboot. How many times can they do that and survive with Starmer in charge?