

Elon Musk is wrong

Published: January 12, 2026, 10:05 pm

Elon Musk might think he's very smart, but his management style - which is controversial in the private sector - is totally alien to the state sector because it relies on the acceptability of failure and governments must never fail.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKxhWqVw5WU?si=75GhTUxjyByRrCaU>

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=p69gi-1808fc8-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

This is the transcript:

Elon Musk is wrong.

Now, that's not a very difficult statement to make because I think the vast majority of people in the world right now would agree with that, but I need to be more specific to justify the claim I've just made. Elon Musk is wrong because he doesn't understand government.

Let's be clear: whether Elon Musk is a good business manager or not is something that is open to question. His approach to managing Twitter, for example - which I still like to think of under that name - is questionable, to say the least. He walked in, he sacked 75

per cent of the staff, he saw what broke, and then he filled in a few of the remaining gaps, and this supposedly represented his management philosophy.

And so now, he's transporting that into the federal government in the USA.

He's walked in at the invitation of Donald Trump.

He's effectively taken over running the government.

He's sacking as many people as possible.

He's closing down every type of expenditure that he can.

And he's seeing what will break.

It's very clear that the model that he's using is identical to the one that he used at Twitter. But there are fundamental differences between running a company like Twitter and a state.

If Twitter failed, it would be annoying for those millions and even billions of people around the world who use it.

The political narrative that has been explored through it would, in my case, have been something I would have missed.

But in practice, I've already abandoned it now because I will not tolerate using something that Musk owns.

But, if it had failed, the world would not have come to an end. Remarkably few people would actually have really suffered because they would have moved to another social media platform remarkably quickly, as indeed, we all are, and that's the end of it. Private sector companies are replaceable at the end of the day. The few people who would lose their jobs - a few thousand - would have found jobs elsewhere because they're highly skilled individuals in most cases, and we'd all have moved on.

Government is nothing like that. It is so far removed from that, that it is quite ridiculous to pretend that a philosophy that can work in private sector enterprise can work in government.

Now, if you want to live in somewhere like South Sudan, I suggest you think again. Because failed states are truly terrible places. What goes on there is frankly unspeakable.

There is the rule of law via the club, the machete, the rifle, the submachine gun, whatever else it is that is used as a form of violence to ensure that the local warlord gets their way.

There is genuine hardship.

There is no protection for the vulnerable.

Those who disagree no longer disagree because they are no longer there to disagree with.

This is not the sort of society that I would suggest that anybody wants. And that is what happens when a state fails.

Musk is trying to fail the US state. He's trying to push it as far as possible to see how literally far he can go before he breaks it. And when he's broken it, he'll say "Oh, look, we need to put one or two things right, and then we'll have found the new equilibrium that we desire."

This is not an acceptable policy, and it's not acceptable for a number of reasons.

The first and most glaringly obvious is that people will be hurt as a consequence. Those people will not just be federal employees, although they are clearly hurting, but the people of the USA are going to hurt.

The people who will no longer have the social security check that they need.

The armed forces who will not get the support they require.

The veterans who will not get the services on which they depend, which are provided by the federal state.

The climate, which will not be supported.

The businesses that will fail because of what Musk and Trump are doing with regard to tariffs and so on.

Those people are really going to hurt.

And some people are going to hurt because, well - let's be clear about it - Musk is cutting the protection for some people as a consequence of the spending that he's got in line for removal, including in things like the FBI.

Now, I never thought I'd be standing up and defending the FBI, which is not a natural organisation of which I'm a fan. But we do need law enforcement agents. We do need to protect people, and we need to protect those who have served the state. And Musk is doing none of those things.

And all of this is frankly truly frightening. Because the consequence is that there isn't a state that we can rely on. And in a state that we can't rely on, we are all on our own.

Now, Musk does not understand what that means. Musk is the richest man in the world. He, as a sample of one in a population of 7 or 8 billion, can survive on his own. Or so he thinks. But the rest of us can't. The vast majority of us depend upon there being a functioning society in which there are things that we know will happen and on which we can rely just to give us an ordered life.

We haven't got the option of opting out.

We can't buy something else because it's not available to us, either financially or because it simply does not exist.

And we don't have the resources of the type that Musk has to command somebody to create them when we need them, even if he can.

So, his model, based around as I say, his own personal sample of one very rich individual, cannot be translated into the experience of the rest of the population.

Musk doesn't understand government because he doesn't understand why the rest of us need government.

He doesn't really understand how business works because his model of business management is truly dire and is, in most cases, likely to lead to such reputation loss that, in fact, the business will fail.

And let's be blunt about it: Twitter, or X as he would now rather have it, only succeeds because he is willing to provide it with financial support. It's a true basket case of a commercial entity now because he has destroyed so much value within it by his policy of trying to break things, but if he breaks the US government, things are much worse.

The people of the USA are left on their own, unprotected.

And so too, of course, are many of the rest of us because we've seen the threat that the US will withdraw from its support for stability around the world; stability that has not always been completely beneficial but on which we have relied, and from which, if we are to transition, well, we need time, and we're not being given it.

So Musk, and his philosophy of breaking things, is a very real threat. A danger. To you, to me, to everyone around the world. And in that sense, Musk really does not know what he's doing. He is wrong.