

We need a revolution

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We need a revolution because nothing seems to be working as it should.

People have lost confidence in the government, the NHS is under strain, utilities and many private companies deliver dire services, charities don't seem to be solving the problems they have been set up to address, and universities aren't meeting students' needs, and yet the organisations responsible continue to survive while those they should serve are deeply dissatisfied.

That is no accident. Too many institutions in the UK, whether in the public, private, voluntary or other sectors, have forgotten their purpose. They no longer face the people they were created to serve. Instead, they serve their funders, shareholders, managers, and internal processes. Balancing the books, protecting reputations and securing the next grant have replaced delivering for people, customers, students and those in need.

Institutional survival has become their apparent purpose, and failure has no consequence for those at the top.

The revolution we need then is not about barricades. It is about turning all these failing organisations around. They need to face the people they are meant to serve again. If meeting people's needs becomes the measure of success again, then spending, strategy and management action must follow that redefined purpose. People must, then, come before organisational preservation.

If we put people first, we can make institutions work again and rebuild an economy that actually serves the country it is supposed to support.

Is that too much of a revolution to hope for?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLP5qnqpSFs?si=ECr72wcGuUf2fp-d>

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=b9v47-1b57c6a-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=auto&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

This is the transcript:

I want to put an idea to you. We need a revolution in this country because nothing seems to be working as it should. The government is failing to deliver what people need. The NHS, education, social care, and childcare are all under immense strain. Privatised utilities provide another example of obvious institutional failure, and too many other organisations also seem very comfortable with failing to achieve their purpose.

As far as I can see, failure has become normal across much of our economy and our society. Elections happen, governments change, but remarkably little seems to improve. Organisations, from Thames Water onwards, continue even when they consistently fail to achieve their stated goals, and those running them still earn their salaries and maintain their lifestyles.

The disconnect between organisational survival and actual achievement is becoming increasingly obvious. And this failure is not confined to the state sector. I want to make that very clear. Privatised utilities, including the water companies, but by no means only them, provide other obvious examples. But many businesses also seem increasingly indifferent to the people they are supposed to serve.

How many times have you been made to hang on the telephone by a private company? It happens now as often as it ever did with the public services. Service businesses often seem more focused on their own processes than meeting customer needs, and the problem crosses the boundaries between the public sector, the private sector, and, and I stress this point, voluntary organisations and organisations like universities.

Charities have become disconnected from the problems they were created to solve. I've seen this happening in my career. Huge sums have been spent on causes that remain stubbornly unresolved, whether that be in health, whether that be in poverty or something else. Organisations tackling these issues still exist, and so do the problems.

It seems that progress is not being made, and it seems to me that many of these organisations have developed a powerful interest in their own continued existence.

Their directors and their senior managers don't seem to want to solve the problems they're meant to be addressing because, well, that would make their own lives uncomfortable, and I'm worried about that, and this is a problem that is widespread.

Now, economic theory tells us that competition should create efficiency and discipline, and that may sometimes work amongst small businesses competing at the margins of the market. But it clearly does not adequately explain what happens inside large established organisations. Organisational bloat, and maybe something worse, which is a lack of purpose beyond maintaining management, seems to me to exist across the private, public, and voluntary sectors.

Large organisations are becoming insulated from the consequences of their own failure. Everywhere, institutional survival is replacing organisational purpose, and people are suffering as a result, which is why these things matter to me.

So what do I mean by a revolution? Well, revolution does not have to mean manning the barricades, or violence, or insurgency. I have no interest in revolution in that sense. That is anathema to me. I'm a Quaker. We're peace-loving people. The revolution I'm talking about means 'to turn'. A complete revolution simply leaves you facing where you started. But the revolution I want would turn organisations in the opposite direction.

You would, as a result, be looking at my back. That's not a great way to make a video, so I'll come back and face you. But my point is, if we could get organisations to turn around, they would face the world in a different way.

And our large companies need to be turned around to face the people they should actually serve. Shareholders should not be the overriding focus of corporate activity. Customers should become central to the purpose of business. Employees, communities, and other stakeholders, as well as the planet, should matter as well.

Providing useful products and services whilst paying fairly, and working within planetary constraints, should again become the measure of success for our companies. That's the revolution I want, and it would be nothing short of that if it were to happen.

Charities also need to be turned around to face the people they exist to serve. Too many are dominated by the demands of funders, grant makers, and government agencies. I've seen that far too often. I've seen it in the development area, but I know it happens elsewhere.

And universities are the same. In those institutions which operate much like charities, students just don't matter anymore. The goals of balancing the books, keeping the management happy and keeping the funding going are the priority.

In fact, funding requirements can displace the original purpose of an organisation. And

institutional survival can become more important than delivering the services the organisation is meant to deliver. The needs of beneficiaries, students and others should begin again to determine what charities, educational establishments, and other organisations of similar sort should actually do.

And government, of course, does itself need to turn around. It needs to face the people it exists to serve. The media should not be determining what our government's priorities are. Donors, the City and businesses who are seeking favours should not determine them either. And governments should not exist simply to satisfy financial markets. Its attention should be directed towards us. That's me. That's you. The electorate. Meeting people's needs should be the purpose of democratic government. Government would look very different if that were to be the case. A lot of us would be a lot happier with it if that were to be true.

People should come first, is what I am saying. Every organisation should be able to explain clearly why it exists in terms of those it is actually serving and not just those it pays lip service to.

Businesses should exist to provide products and services that people need.

Government should exist to deliver the activities that society requires from it.

Charities should exist to help people and causes that might otherwise be neglected.

Organisational survival is not by itself a legitimate purpose. Neither is protecting the careers of comfortable managers. People matter first of all.

The revolution we need then is a revolution in organisational purpose. Too many institutions now face towards money, power, funders and their own survival. They need to turn around and face the people whose needs justify their existence. Success should be measured by whether those needs have actually been met or are addressed.

That revolution could give us the government, companies, charities, and other organisations that our society needs. That's what I call a revolution. Is it too much to hope for that revolution? Am I asking too much to believe we could get the world to move itself on its axis and face the other way and do just what is required to meet our needs?

That's what I think. What do you think? There's a poll down below. Let us have your opinions. Please do like and share this video. Please do subscribe to the channel. Hit the bell button, and we'll tell you when we make more videos. And if you'd like to buy us a coffee, that would be great. There's a link just down below.

Poll

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