



## Miscellaneous Blogs

A selection of our 2021 blogs covering a variety of topics;

### Vaccine nationalism?

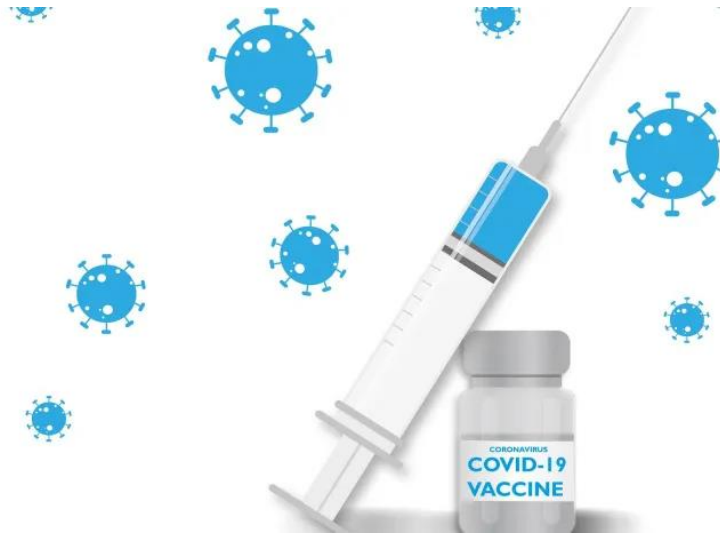
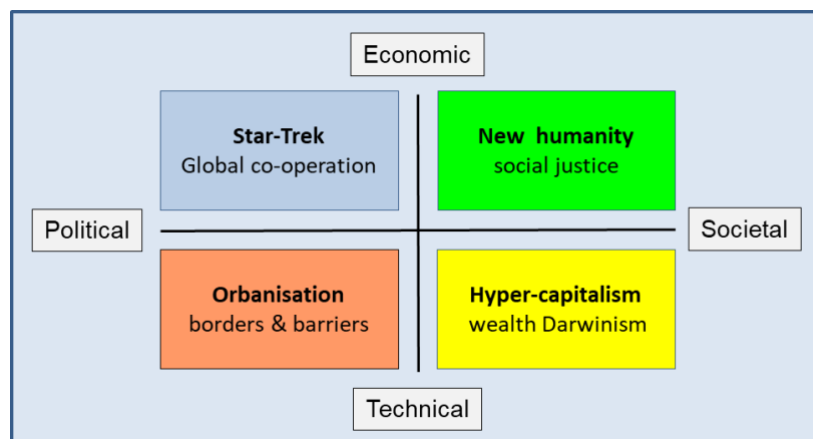


Image by Alexandra\_Koch from Pixabay

Nine months ago I wrote an article for the Journal of Future Studies looking at four alternative post pandemic scenarios. This was also later carried on the SAMI website. Although Brexit muddies the waters a little, it is now clear that at least one, if not two of the less attractive scenarios is/are playing out with a clamour for vaccines around the world.



**Orbanisation** was a future that saw more barriers being erected, national boundaries would be invoked to protect virus transmission irrespective of international agreements such as Schengen. This has transpired with each



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European government responding to protect its public health service. Even the UK has now closed its borders to international travel. Fear of foreign mutations of the virus sadly follows the same xenophobic trajectory as fear of foreign immigrant workers.

**Hyper-capitalism** was a future that saw the rich get richer while the poor got poorer, and sadly this appears also to be materialising due the nature of work. White collar jobs can mostly be done remotely, but blue-collar jobs require attendance at a place of work where social distancing is not always possible to a safe degree. We have also seen the western world grab the first batches of vaccine, or pay a premium as Israel has done, leaving the third world at the back of the queue.

Neither of the two more optimistic scenarios seems to be playing out and perhaps this should not be a surprise given the inequalities in wealth around the world. The **New Humanity** scenario would require health and care workers to be better remunerated to reflect their value to society, and this is not forthcoming despite the evident moral case. The **Star Trek** scenario would require global co-operation to tackle the pandemic, but we see only vaccine manufacturers competing for market share along with politicians trying to secure the best deal for their respective states.

Vaccine nationalism has led to political deal-making that does not encourage global co-operation. While manufacturers struggle to produce sufficient doses, politicians bid for supplies necessary to inoculate their respective populations on an ongoing basis. While in the West or First world Big Pharma controls vaccine manufacture, both Russia and China have developed vaccines also and could use them to exert influence in the third world. Vaccine diplomacy will become a weapon of soft power as a result of a fragmented and uncoordinated response by world leaders.

Israel's deal with Pfizer shows what it takes to secure supplies early, pay a premium for your population to act as an extended drug trial to help the manufacturer learn how to improve their vaccine to combat new mutations that will inevitably emerge. Early to test and then head of the queue for vaccine plus. The virus mutates to survive and the more resistance it encounters the faster it will mutate. This cat and mouse game gives every CFO in Big Pharma enormous optimism for future revenue, at least until faced with political pressures from taxation or nationalisation.

Vaccine manufacture is a business, it resides within states who can control distribution, look at how quickly the EU inspectors went into the Astra Zeneca plant in Belgium when they suspected that supplies promised to the EU were being re-allocated to the UK. Vaccine production for public health is a political football and while national boundaries remain it will remain in play, look at how quickly the solidarity of the EU collapsed once individual states made different rules on public



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health. Vaccine nationalism is an unpleasant reality and production is about profit. Astra Zeneca is so far the only manufacturer to price it in line with affordability, but this altruism is costing it dear with the EU.

Science fiction writers often postulate on how the planet would respond to an alien attack, how the human race would co-ordinate its defence. The coronavirus pandemic shows just how disjointed and piecemeal this would be. Fortunately the mortality rate of Covid 19 is nowhere near that of Ebola, but this is down to luck not prudence. While the utopian New Humanity scenario that relies on social justice is probably a bridge too far, the Star Trek scenario should be achievable but the World Health Organisation is a powerless beast and needs to be given teeth to fight future pathogens.

*Written by Garry Honey, SAMI Associate and founder of Chiron Risk . Published 4 February 2021.*



## The Role of Ethics in Strategy



*Image by ar130405 from Pixabay*

I have been invited to lead the Association of Strategic Planning's Virtual conference (ASP2-21) with a keynote address on the role of ethics in strategy. The keynote starts by asking why organisations need ethics – why is keeping to the law not enough? I use several examples of how the world is changing to illustrate that ethical behaviour in business reduces risk and contributes to performance – that ethics is absolutely a central part of strategy.

The keynote itself will be available only through the ASP web site until November 2021, so [this blog is based on a podcast for Strategic Motivator](#) arranged for the run up to the conference. In this blog and in the podcast, I expand on some of the ways in which the world is changing.

I focused on three: population, the economy, and the global balance of power.

To start – the global population- in many places like Latin America and East Asia, the numbers of people is shrinking, not growing and the global population looks to peak in 2040 at about 8.5 billion. This is because women are having smaller families. Think about what this means for individuals and the family – most people used to have siblings, cousins, parents and maybe one or two grandparents. Now, increasingly, globally, children grow up without siblings and cousins, with one or two parents or step- parents, and several grandparents, even great grandparents. Wow, this is different. The support and challenge that siblings can give each other is hard to find for only children.



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And the financial, emotional and care demands from older relatives is harder to meet if they are not shared with siblings. In the US, by 2030, for the first time ever there will be more older people than young.

This also has an effect in the business world too. Family firms are two-thirds of the global economy and are often a role model for ethical behaviour. As family sizes reduce, there is less likelihood of a child wanting to take the business on. The ability to plan for succession reduces, changing their focus – they may no longer be able to provide stability and act as role models, they may need to prepare for a sale.

Secondly, the economy. The use of automation and machinery has changed the nature and number of blue collar jobs, and this is fast happening to “middle class” or white collar jobs. The middle class is being hollowed out as knowledge is captured on platforms. Many white-collar jobs from medicine to law, accountancy and engineering, are changing to reflect the use of virtual working, big data and AI.

Inside firms, middle management has been drastically cut back as management reporting systems handle much of the data collection and analysis that middle management used to be responsible for. But middle management had two roles – one, those information flows and two, mentoring and management of people. This second responsibility, for people, is now often delivered through a range of special services, rather than by line managers. Now front line workers have little connection with management, and the idea of progression through the ranks is less attainable.

Another way in which the economy is changing is because of the ability of money to cross national boundaries. Governments are rooted in a specific geography. This makes it harder for governments to collect taxes, and to provide safety nets for citizens. Covid has of course stressed government spending further and is behind recent moves in some US states to permit – and tax – online gambling.

The third change, the global balance of power, will not be a surprise – but the extent of the impacts might be. The shift in economic power towards Asia from North America and Europe is going to have ongoing repercussions – from Chinese tour groups swamping scenic destinations and historic sites, to Europeans using online commerce platforms and cars designed mostly to meet Asian needs. And perhaps most profoundly, political power follows economic power.

So, just three ways in which the world is changing – from the individual and family, to the economy, to global political power. However, in case these all sound threatening and gloomy, I should say that I am an optimist and I believe that change creates opportunity – and that people are amazingly resilient!



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In particular, Gen Z and Millennials have grown up with high levels of education, and in the connected world of computers, phones and social media. They are able to connect globally to organise and tackle problems – think Operation Libero against the far right in Switzerland, Greta Thunberg and the climate change movement, Black Lives Matter protests with large white participation, the development of Covid 19 vaccines in 10 months rather than 10 years.

We live in interesting times!

*Written by Gill Ringland, SAMI Emeritus Fellow and former Director of Ethical Reading. Details of the new book “Green Shoots – from here to there” – can be found at [www.global-megatrends.com](http://www.global-megatrends.com). Published 9 May 2021.*



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## The Ministry of Mad er... Stuff.



Image by [Here and now](#), unfortunately, ends my journey on Pixabay from [Pixabay](#)

On May 26 this year, *The Times*' feature writer Janice Turner posted a rather thought provoking tweet.



Janice Turner ✓  
@VictoriaPeckham

My main takeaway from Cummings is there should be a Ministry of Mad Shit That Might Never Happen (But If It Does We're Screwed) whose brief includes solar flares, volcanoes erupting in Iceland, pandemics, asteroids, alien invasion & zombie apocalypse...

11:47 AM · May 26, 2021 · Twitter Web App

Since our last three blogs have been focussed on almost exactly this ([here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)), we've had a fair bit of time to think about Turner's idea.

What she is thinking about, as any reader of the late Iain M Banks' *Culture* novels will tell you, is an organisation called Special Circumstances. SC is a division of Contact, the only real organisation in Banks' techno-utopia called the Culture, Contact's "moral espionage weapon, the very cutting edge of the Culture's interfering diplomatic policy, the elite of the elite, in a society which abhorred elitism" (from *Consider Phlebas*). Its job is to solve problems, particularly those of the confusing or existential kind which Turner summarises. In a zombie apocalypse,

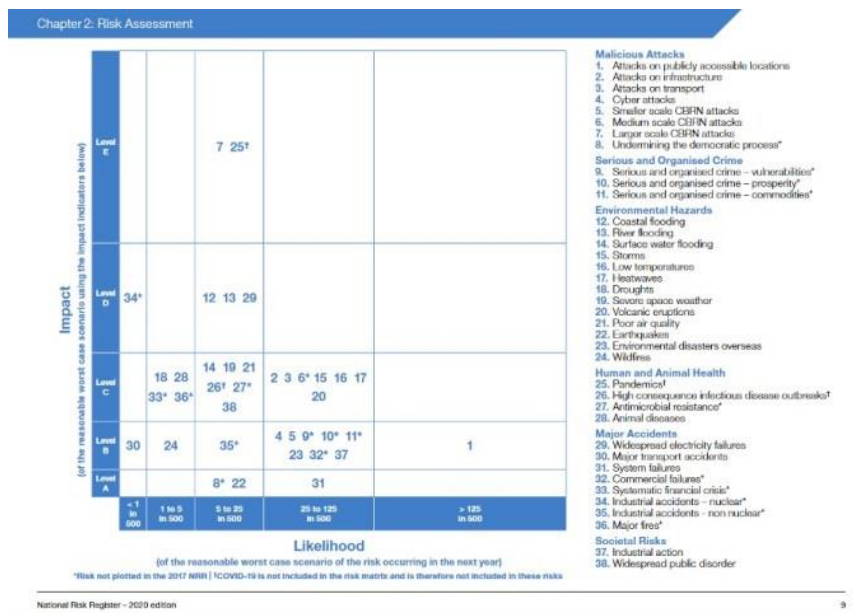


Special Circumstance, and the sentient spaceships called “Minds” would be at the front of humanity’s defence.

Most importantly, it would already have had a plan. This is what Turner’s Ministry needs to have – plans (and hopefully stockpiles) for the highly unlikely “but if it does we’re screwed”.

Such organisations already exist, of course. The UN has [UN Disaster Assistance and Coordination](#). The [Federal Emergency Management Agency](#) is in the US, [Министерство России по делам гражданской обороны, чрезвычайным ситуациям и ликвидации последствий стихийных бедствий](#) is in Russia (with the rather splendid name in English of “The Ministry of the Russian Federation for Civil Defence, Emergencies and Elimination of Consequences of Natural Disasters”), and the UK has its own [Civil Contingencies Secretariat](#) and its ministerial subcommittee, NSC (THRC) – the National Security Council Ministerial SubCommittee on Threats, Hazards, Resilience and Contingencies. It is a reasonable guess that armed forces, defence ministries, security services and other, even more covert government departments study risk on a day by day basis.

Indeed, page 9 of the UK government’s [National Risk Register](#) has a matrix of possible events, plotted in their likelihood against impact, which covers everything from malicious attacks to industrial action.



HM Government, National Risk Register, 2020 edition

As we have highlighted before, there are academic bodies looking at MSTMNH, such as the [Centre for the Study of Existential Risk](#) is dedicated “to the study and mitigation of risks that could lead to human extinction or civilisational collapse”. The [Bulletin of Atomic Scientists](#) “informs the public about threats to the survival and





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development of humanity from nuclear weapons, climate change”. At Oxford, the [Future of Humanity Institute](#) brings “the tools of mathematics, philosophy and social sciences to bear on big-picture questions about humanity and its prospects”. And among NGOs, the [Centre for Applied Eschatology](#), the [Centre for Long-Term Resilience](#) and many others, all concentrate on the sort of existential risk which Turner highlights.

The problem is that Turner’s brief is insufficiently well drawn. There should be such a Ministry – indeed, there sort of is. And whilst it may not explicitly cover zombie apocalypse, it certainly does cover pandemics, volcanoes, asteroids, and solar flares.

What it far more rarely covers is paying for it.

We have had recent experience in the UK of stockpiles – which gave us two key lessons. The first is that stockpiles need to be paid for, and maintained. The second is that stockpiles need to be of the right equipment. The UK’s pandemic flu stockpile was run down by 40% over 6 years; and spending on other stockpiled goods held for use in national emergencies has [fallen in value since 2013](#).

So when we needed it, we had 40% less than we needed – and for the wrong sort of disease. Both were predictable errors – Asia had had the experience of SARS and MERS, both CoV illnesses, as is coronavirus; and even a full stockpile is rarely enough to cope with a country-wide outbreak, so 60% of one certainly wouldn’t.

At SAMI, we spend our lives living in the future. We have experience thinking about what might happen, and how bad it might be. Some of us have direct experience in planning for the worst – from wars to disease. A vital part of contingency planning is not only knowing what might happen – but what you will do when it does. Who will you deploy? What equipment will they need? And where is it?

Turner has taken the wrong takeaway. We do have the Ministry she wants – in international bodies, national governments, academia and the private sector. What we do not have is enough preparedness – equipment, vaccines, swift-run vaccine roll-out programmes, in place contracts with factories to deliver kit, sufficient telescopes to give long-range warning of asteroids.

We know what might happen. We probably have plans in place, to one level of detail or another. But we are unprepared to spend public money year after year on things that may never come to pass. It is easy to understand why: in 2006, workers at the Brooklyn Bridge in New York [found a sealed room](#) with a stockpile of equipment and food to supply a nuclear war shelter. The equipment was date stamped 1962 – the date of the Cuban Missile Crisis. It had not been resupplied since. Someone had



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followed a well worked out plan, stockpiled equipment just in time, and when the crisis passed, it had never been restocked.

We must commit to resource not only our planning process, but also our preparedness. These stocks, as well as the plans, are our collective national insurance, and we should keep up the payments on the premiums. That way whatever happens, we shall be ready.

In a follow up tweet, Jess Philips MP pointed out that her "[husband has a well honed zombie apocalypse plan](#)". Which may come in useful, especially if he has up-to-date supplies.

*Written by Jonathan Blanchard Smith, SAMI Fellow and Director. Published 2 July 2021*



## Foresight training, action learning and more.....

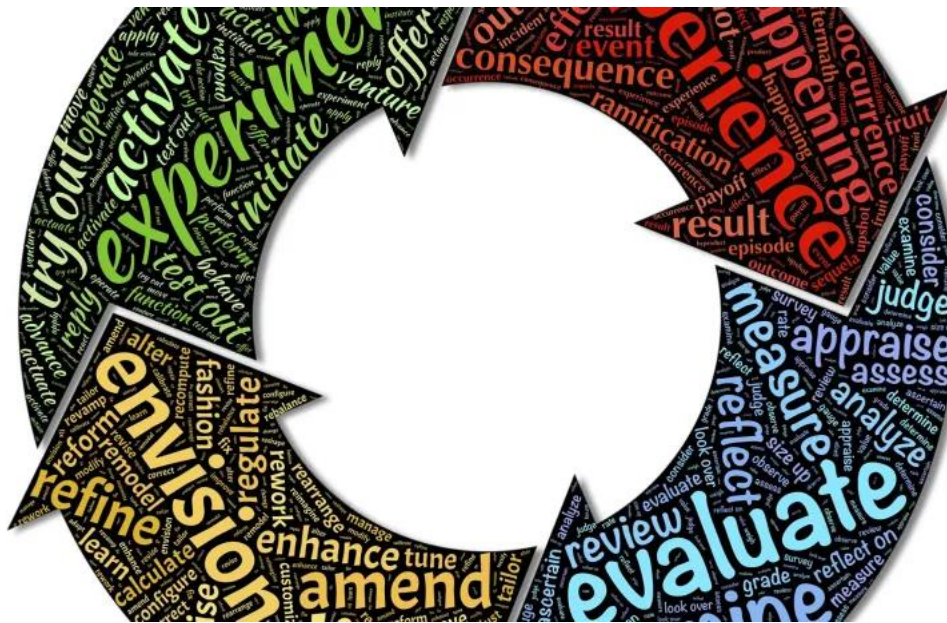


Image by [John Hain](#) from [Pixabay](#)

As the pandemic unfolded last year and the world of work shifted, we wanted to support our clients in new ways. This led us to explore a range of possibilities to help our clients in their foresight and futures work. From our conversations we developed the idea of the SAMI Futures Cohort and, encouraged by the success of a small pilot meeting, we signed up a small group of interested individuals.

Since last September, this small group of people from different organisations have met, via Zoom, for an hour and a half every two months. Based around futures-oriented techniques and themes identified by the group, such as horizon scanning, engagement of the organisation in foresight work and scenario planning, the sessions have included a mix of short presentations, plenary discussions on both the theme and more specific challenges posed by members of the group.

Feedback has been positive. Individuals have said that the presentations and discussions have given them new ideas and insights into some of the issues and challenges they are facing within their organisations when seeking to encourage and enhance futures thinking. Of particular interest has been the section of the Zoom call where the group shares and discusses some of the challenges they are facing.

These comments have encouraged us to think further about the options we can offer to help people build their futures community and support network.



As a result, we are looking how we can run these Futures Cohort sessions as Action Learning Sets. This process is something developed in the 1960s and 1970s by Reg Revans when he was Professor of Industrial Management at The University of Manchester. The sets are based on the simple principle that he held to be fundamental: *the key to better performance lay not with 'experts' but with practitioners themselves.*

This is derived from his thinking that people learn best when working together to help each other with problems, and then taking answers away and implementing them in the workplace. He recognised that we all have what he termed 'Programmed Knowledge (P)' – ie the things we've learnt about in order to do our job and then there are the 'Insightful Questions (Q)' which are those questions asked of experiences, which when asked at the right time, and considered with care, will yield new insights. Those of you who have worked with a coach or perhaps a boss experienced in coaching techniques will recognise that one or two timely reflective or searching questions can unlock even some of the most seemingly intractable issues.

The Action Learning process has been well documented over the years and has been used by many groups and organisations. It's based on small groups (5-8 members) working together to solve the real problems that each member of the Action Learning Set brings to the group by focussing on exploring answers to questions like:

- What do we really want to achieve?
- What is stopping us?
- What could we do about it?
- Who has knowledge (P) that we could use?
- Who has an interest in solving the problem?
- Who has the power to get something done?

Some of our initial Futures Cohort group will continue to meet using this process, supported by a facilitator. Nonetheless we believe that this will be helpful for other futures practitioners, so we are looking for other small groups of interested individuals who are willing to experience this process and, through doing so, help both themselves and others become better and more confident futures practitioners. If this is something of interest for you, please contact us at [info@samiconsulting.co.uk](mailto:info@samiconsulting.co.uk)

*Written by Cathy Dunn, SAMI Principal. Published 28 July 2021.*



## How scenario planning informs strategy



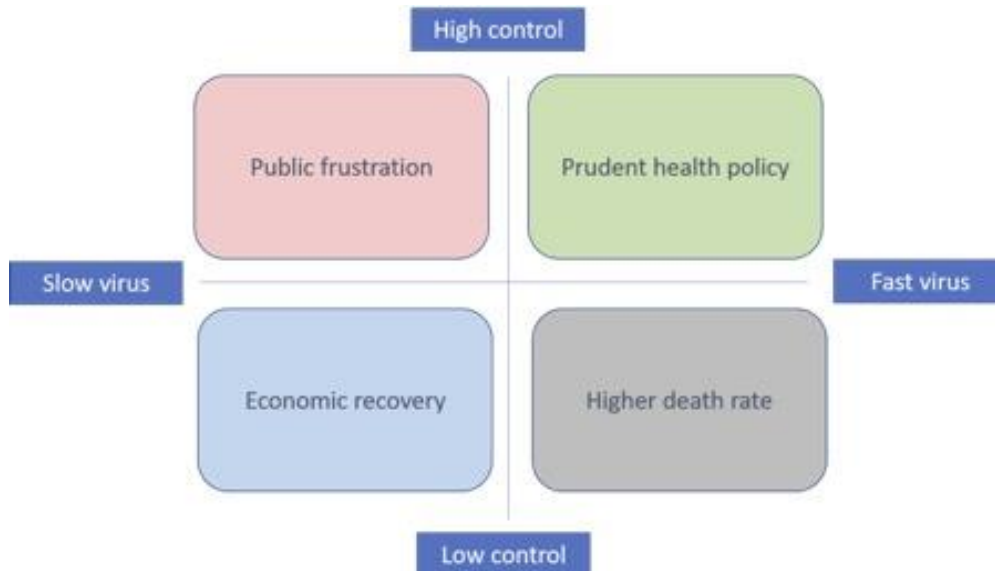
Image by [Bruno /Germany](#) from [Pixabay](#)

Many organisations still don't employ scenario planning to explore alternative futures, articulate risks and inform strategy. The following simple and topical example was recently created for a business school programme on risk management, but it has wider application and deserves to be shared with the SAMI community.

The policy challenge shared by many national governments concerns the binary choice between maintaining restrictions on individual freedom and re-energising a stalled economy. Too much public health focus and the economy suffers, but too much economic stimulus and public health is at risk. Getting the balance right in terms of degree and timing is a problem for politicians.

As with all scenario planning diagrams the trick is to identify and apply the most useful dimensions to plot as 'x' and 'y' axes for the matrix to have value. In this case we chose for the 'x' axis the speed with which the virus (irrespective of mutation or strain) will spread: simply a continuum from slow to fast. Conversely the 'y' axis uses the degree of public restriction set as law by the government from high to low. The lowest being complete relaxation of any controls on public life.

This produces a model as shown from which it is clear that the more desirable political outcomes are to be found in either top right or bottom left. Conversely the least desirable outcomes fall in the top left and bottom right.



The challenge for policy makers is to identify the levers to engineer a favourable outcome, but that requires a consensus view on whether the virus is spreading fast or not. In the UK some believe it is fast based on daily infections recorded, while others believe it is slow based on recorded deaths. Only time will tell which is the correct interpretation. Nevertheless, the model is a good start point and demonstrates how articulating four alternative futures can inform strategy.

The model demonstrates the need to keep the balance between the two dimensions, neither relaxing control too quickly, nor maintaining it too long. It emphasises the need for “data not dates” and the dangers of making commitments too early.

There may also be opportunities for mitigating the two unfavourable scenarios. Public frustration can be managed to a degree by clear communication, with an emphasis on “an abundance of caution”. In practice it seems that the public are, on average, more cautious than the Government and its back-benchers.

The risks of a higher death rate are reduced by the roll-out of the vaccine, so accelerating its deployment as fast as possible is clearly a sound strategy.

*Written by Garry Honey, SAMI Associate and founder of Chiron Risk . Published 4 Aug 2021.*