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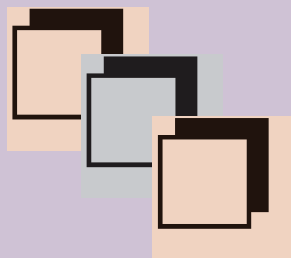
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# THE FABRICATOR

## Comment

As a bonus to Hallowe'en, and on the very day, Johnson announced a return to national lockdown for England. Among the exceptions to "stay at home and don't see anybody else" manufacturing and construction got a special mention so it will be interesting to see what our industry does this time.

Now, I am not a Corona-denier, it is there, it is nasty and you don't want to catch it. What does worry me though is the, mostly clueless, politicians' justification for shutting down our society. I saw a headline in one of the Sunday newspapers: "Boris couldn't ignore the facts," it said. One has to ask: "What facts?"

Well, as near as I can gather, the 'facts' are Prof Sage-Whitty's forecasts. Now having been in business for around 45 years I have probably written more forecasts than the good professor has had hot dinners. I produced many of them with my accountant to impress banks, I even did a few personal forecasts to impress mortgage providers and for general management satisfaction. I recall one occasion, when I was still working for someone else. The firm had just been taken over by a big publishing corporation and our MD, never having done such a thing before, had to produce a forecast for the new management. She came to my desk, worried: "I am supposed to show XX% profit," she said. "It's impossible." I took a look: "Well, what if you up that per-centage, increase the turnover and reduce the print bill?" I asked (or something like that). "But I would just be making that up," she said. "And what if it is it's wrong?" "Are they going to know?" I asked, "and anyway by the end of the year who's going to remember?"

Two days later she was back at my desk: "They loved it, thank you." I have no idea what happened beyond that but down the line everyone had justified their positions.

And, back to my previously mentioned forecasts, all presented to the consumer as facts, I don't think any of them were ever achieved. But they will have achieved their purpose; of gaining finance or satisfying management colleagues.

And then there are the treasury forecasts beloved of one former Chancellor of the Exchequer, (I can't remember which one but we were going through another financial crisis at the time). They showed that the economy wasn't as bad as everyone thought and always predicted strong growth. It quickly became apparent that these were always so wrong that business and even political writers applied a caveat every time one was produced.

So here we have Prof Whitty and his Sage colleague presenting as facts forecasts to support the decision to shut us down again.

Johnson may be right to do what he has done. In any case it keeps our minds off of the Brexit disaster that is about to hit. I would here just bring in Jonathan (Lord) Sumption the former supreme court judge. On Times radio he recently cautioned us to watch our democracy. His point was that governments, even liberal ones, use fear to keep the population obedient. I remember feeling something of a vacuum after the cold war ended (we won by the way) and before they invented the 'war on terror'. Now the enemy is Covid-19 and we don't hear too much about the terrorists.

On the notice board in my office there is a cartoon. The caption reads: 'We have charts and graphs to back us up, so f\*ck off!'

I hope you had a happy Hallowe'en.

*John Roper*

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