

COVID-19

13 August 2020

Small changes

Small changes and seemingly modest actions matter. In the same way that a butterfly flapping its wings in a Brazilian forest can create a raging storm in the North Atlantic, the actions we all take can make a difference. And huge change can happen rapidly.

In this, our last bulletin of this series, GGI would like to focus on the anarchist's creed of politics by deed. This is a time for action, and small actions are what will make the changes we need. The main crimes at such a moment in history are inactivity and indecision.

Dr. James Fox recently reminded us that the main meat of the Renaissance happened in 30 years and cost the same as a luxury yacht¹. As Lorenzo de Medici, the principal lubricator of this enormous change to European history, himself put it: "I do not regret this for though many would consider it better to have a part of that sum in their purse, I consider it to have been a great honour to our state, and I think the money was well-expended and I am well-pleased." We will pick up this reference to the Renaissance at the end of this bulletin.

Stepping up

One thing we have learnt from this first stage of the pandemic is what enormous changes can be made, and how important individuals are to the collective. Different parts of our national life have stepped up magnificently and imaginatively. Pubs and restaurants have become a key part of our public health system with track and trace; the costume department at a leading opera company have turned their skills to making scrubs for NHS staff; local shops have rationed essential supplies so there was something for everyone; and most importantly of all, almost without exception citizens quietly accepted the need to lock down in their own homes. We all acknowledge how difficult and testing this has been for families and individuals. But it was done.

GGI had no more insight than anyone else when the emergency phase of the pandemic struck. We just knew this was something big and that we had a clear duty to step up and support our main customer: our NHS. So we did three things: we started a weekly peer-to-peer webinar for NHS non-executives, we made our advisory service free to the NHS and third sectors and we started this bulletin series. With all due immodesty we now believe we hit three bullseyes in a row.

Today marks the end of GGI's bulletin series. We've issued one every working day since lockdown began in the UK on 23 March, which makes today's the 100th bulletin. We have published around 90,000 words of original content – about the same as Tolkein's Hobbit

1. 'A very British Renaissance' BBC TV 2014

The series reviewed

Looking back through the series, it's possible to read the prevailing mood at each stage of the pandemic. For the first six weeks or so it was all about reacting to the crisis. From the very [first bulletin](#), in which we offered guidance on how to run virtual meetings, to later examples that focused on how key [leadership relationships](#) would need to change, or examined some of the [barriers to digital adoption](#), a crisis management theme was clear.

Among these early bulletins was GGI partner Darren Grayson's [first-hand account](#) of his period on secondment back in the NHS, helping a local health care system to plan for the deployment of a Nightingale hospital in Sussex.

During the second phase, our focus shifted towards recovery. We addressed the importance of a robust [testing and tracing](#) regime, and of [including citizens](#) in the conversation about what recovery means for each NHS trust around the country. And we urged leaders to learn the lessons of COVID-19, including the [importance of kindness](#), as the longer term effects of lockdown started to make themselves felt.

Then the mood shifted again as we navigated through the continuing crisis, towards thinking again. We expressed our [solidarity with BAME people](#) in our communities as the disproportionate impact of the coronavirus on them – and the inadequate response to that impact – started to reveal themselves. We urged boards to understand how to [retain their best innovations](#) of the pandemic period. And we began our series of bulletins looking at how [sectors outside health and social care](#) were coping with the crisis.

Finally, we looked at ways to reboot the systems and structures we rely on across public life. We asked what employers must do to accommodate the increased [appetite for home-working](#). We offered advice to [charity trustees](#) as they face what in many cases is an existential challenge. And we asked what lessons NHS boards might learn from the [HIV/AIDS crisis](#) as they work through their approach to the months ahead.

Time to think again

We have had enormously positive feedback about this bulletin series. The reward for the many colleagues who have contributed to the series is to see the changes it has brought to local NHS leadership teams as they make sense of their contribution to national wellbeing at this time.

Going forwards for GGI, and looping back to the initial theme of The Renaissance, as this series of bulletins ends GGI's [2020 Festival of Governance](#) begins. Our theme, announced with unconscious prescience last November at the House of Lords, is 'Renaissance: It's time to think again'.

Inspired by the rediscovery and repurposing of former times, the Renaissance rewrote the future. Back in November we thought this rather neat as GGI would have been kicking our Festival off on 30 August at the ISQua conference in Florence, the home of the Renaissance, with a seminar on social prescribing and the arts. What surprises a year can bring, but 30 August it still is a time to think again, and Festival of Governance 2020 is an opportunity to welcome in a new cultural revolution, or Renaissance 2.0. The four key concepts we wish to explore with participants over the month of the festival and our four themed weeks running through to our annual lecture on 22 September are:

- Diversity
- Digital humanism
- Community interplay
- Modern governance

"This is a time for action, and small actions are what will make the changes we need"



If we can be allowed a final indulgence to end the series, all those who have found our bulletins helpful can thank the small step in starting the series off and the maintaining effort to see it through to the following: to Andrew Corbett-Nolan, who in a moment of *folie de grandeur* conceived the idea, to Jaco Marais, who set the ambition of 100 bulletins, made it all happen, edited and directed the series, to Emiliano Rattin, whose designs caught our imagination, and of course to Martin Thomas, our copywriter, who organised the words on the page.

Others at GGI have persisted with the timetabling and energy. For the series of accompanying videos we should thank Silvia Lozza for heroically editing these and Spike Smilgin-Humphreys for her distinctive voiceovers, recorded, we understand, under her duvet to keep the sound pure. For the individual bulletins we must thank the many authors from within GGI and our friends, colleagues, clients, contributors and collaborators.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of our bulletin series – or find out more about the 2020 Festival of Governance – please call us on 07732 681120 or email advice@good-governance.org.uk.