

The Post-Pandemic Roaring 2020's - Are You Ready?

What can we learn about human creativity and business resilience from the roaring twenties? Are you ready for the post-pandemic roaring 2020's?

The year was 1920. The previous five years had seen the deaths of over 70 million people due to the First World War and the Spanish Flu pandemic. High unemployment rates and deflation was causing a depression as economies around the world readjusted themselves to the new reality. Thankfully 1921 witnessed the start of what we now know as the roaring 20's, a remarkable period which saw one of the greatest flourishings of music, art, literature, architecture, and enterprise. We entered a new economic and creative age.

As a keynote speaker on creativity, innovation and artificial intelligence a number of my clients are involved in vaccine development and distribution. In the coming months we should see a viable vaccine for COVID-19 as well as better treatments. While coronavirus will be with us for many years the discovery of a vaccine will at least mark the beginning of the end of the pandemic. Could this trigger the start of the roaring 2020's?

If previous pandemics are anything to go by then we should see an explosion in consumption as people exit lockdown and start socialising and travelling again. Part of this is because billions of people and millions of companies have delayed plans and spending until they are able to see light at the end of the tunnel. Another reason is simple human psychology. Many will take more of a 'carpe diem' attitude to life in the future. Why delay gratification when we don't know if another pandemic is around the corner?

What does this mean for human creativity and the world of business? Could the post-pandemic roaring 2020's be a more dynamic creative age?

The Woody Allen movie 'Midnight In Paris' sums up the feeling of artists, authors and inventors of the early 1920's. Writers like Ernest Hemingway and F Scott Fitzgerald and artists like Pablo Picasso, Man Ray and Salvador Dali had survived the First World War and the Spanish Flu and were all living in a post-pandemic Paris in 1921. Their close proximity meant their creativity and ideas were literally bumping into each other. After years of war and plague they were drawn to each other to create, collaborate and sometimes compete. Humans are social creatures. **Humans are creative creatures.**

In 2021 I believe we will see a resurgent demand from creative individuals to actually be in the same physical place as each other. This sounds counterintuitive because doesn't technology enable us to work on projects together across time and space without the need to meet in-person? Why get together in-person when we can exchange ideas virtually?

For all the amazing things technology allows us to do today, it still fails in effectively creating a virtual 'third place' for us to collaborate at a deeper level.

A third place is somewhere that isn't your home and isn't your workplace. In doing great creative work having a third place to debate, discuss and challenge each other's ideas is vital. In Ancient Greece it was the symposium, somewhere that philosophers, traders and poets would get together to talk through their ideas. In Edinburgh during the Enlightenment we had the private clubs where debates amongst scientists and merchants would happen. During the golden creative ages of 1900's Vienna, 1920's Paris or 2018 San Francisco it was the coffee shops, places like Cafe Central, La Rotonde or Sightglass Coffee respectively.

Creative collaboration requires a skillful blend of creating fast and creating slow.

The future of work will require quick virtual co-operation and quirkier in-person collaboration.

One danger we may see during a post-pandemic roaring 2020's is a K-shaped recovery. Those individuals, teams and companies who are able to augment human creativity with technologies like artificial intelligence and robotics can look forward to a time of growth, increased productivity and accelerated innovation. For them the 2020's will be roaring.

However those individuals and organisations who hope that life and business will return to some kind of pre-pandemic 'normal' will be in for a nasty surprise. Unless they are prepared to accept a period of unlearning and creative destruction it won't be possible for them to reinvent themselves.

In the 1920's the farming industry in America went through a dramatic slump because it was slow to reskill, reequip and reimagine. In the 2020's we are already seeing multiple industries, companies and countries failing to adapt to what a post-pandemic world might mean.

The roaring 2020's will see some do very well and others really struggle. So how can you ensure that you are ready for what could be a new golden creative age?

The first thing to think about is all those beliefs you may have had about your profession, job, business or industry previously that are no longer true. **It's a wasted year if we haven't jettisoned one idea or 'truth' that we previously held to be self evident.**

Next is to think about which technologies or new ways of working exist that can help you augment the talents you already have. How can you improve your own productivity and be able to do more with less.

Finally think about using the next six months to run a series of experiments where 50% will probably fail. What you are looking to discover is a new idea, business, product, service or creative project that you can demonstrate will work in a post-pandemic world. Something that is ideally resilient, sustainable and scalable. Then you know you can spend this new decade creating, developing and building something fit for the roaring 2020's.