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Four Post-Covid Futures

And what this could mean for digital leadership

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March 2020 (please *note* this date!)
Credit: this is developed from some work I did for FutureGov

Purpose of this session

Have a conversation about the kinds of contexts in which we **may** be working a year from now - to help us prepare robustly

Understand some of the tectonic forces playing out to understand how we can influence them

Format of this session

I have some slides which I will talk though, pausing for input occasionally - we'll develop this together

There is a googledoc for live comments/discussion as we go here: https://bit.ly/lgc2020

What I'm bringing to this discussion...

Portfolio

Advisory

Council

Commercial

Uni

Non-Exec Director

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"Predictions are hard, especially about the future"

\- Niels Bohr

How do we begin to prepare?

Enormous change

Huge uncertainty…

… but important to prepare.

Well established tool: Scenario Planning

- NOT trying to forecast

Is about
- UNDERSTANDING the landscape of the possible futures by looking at extreme possibilities
- ACTING in ways that are resilient
- SHAPING the future as far as we are able

What's uncertain?

There are many things we don't know:
- How long this will last…
- How many will die…
- What state our economy will be in afterwards…

There are two uncertainties that seem particularly relevant to consider here

When this is over, **will we trust <u>the state</u> more, or less**…?

Will we trust <u>each other</u>, more or less…

Trust in the State - what factors will drive...

More

- Pride in the NHS
- Natural identification with the state in times of crisis
- We see strong, timely action
- We see the arms of the state work together, including central and local government
- We see open-ness with information and people taking responsibility and accountability
- As a nation we survive better than others
- More pressing/tangible local conversations, coordinated by local authorities
- Rewarding the NHS, Local Gov, and Care Sector (Staff) for the important role they have played

Less

- Lack of clarity about what announcements actually mean - confusion
- A sense that key decisions were too late
- Failure to equip the front line with the tools they need
- Excess deaths manifestly due to lack of resources or incompetence
- Confusion over expertise
- We see a blame game being played out, and people ducking responsibility
- Not organising the upsurge in volunteers effectively
- Linked to the blame game and the 'pride in the NHS', there will continue to be disproportionate impact on local services that don't have protected budgets. Support services/welfare that is underfunded and ineffective are likely to reduce trust
- Not supporting/protecting all people delivering services not just the NHS e.g. care , schools etc
- Not funding local gov given the loss of income and the massive change in demands and response required

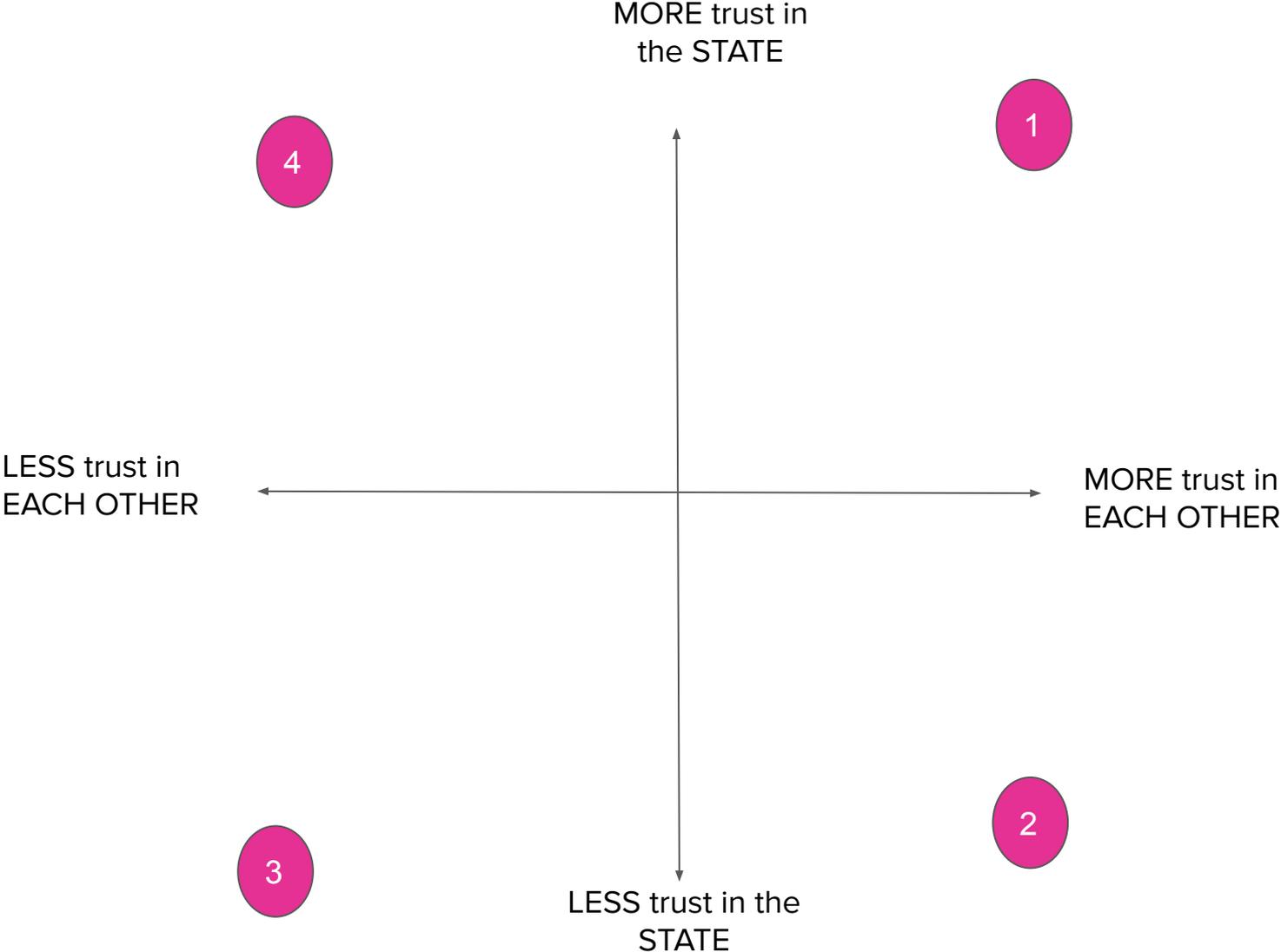# Trust in Each other - what factors will drive...

More

- Volunteering
- Mutual Aid
- A sense of community in adversity
- Feeling welcomed, supported and encouraged in volunteering
- Acts of selflessness
- Blitz Spirit - we survived a shared battle together
- Actively sharing and supporting ideas

Less

- Panic buying - "shelf stripping"
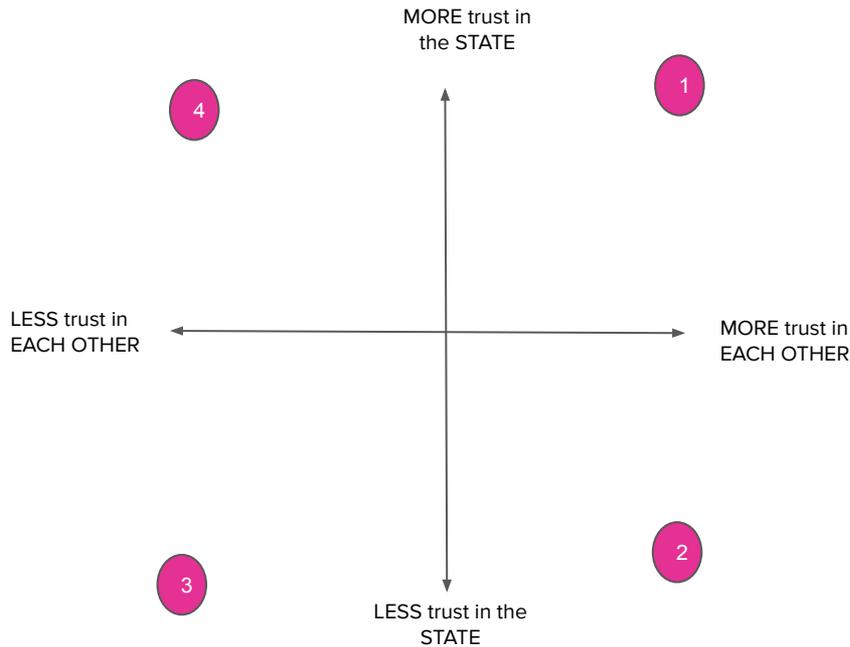- Breaking the new rules
- Disregard for the vulnerable
- Negative experience of volunteering, exclusion, cliques
- Fraud and exploitation
- Seeing others trusting the state/politicians when not deserved; political polarisation

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Imagine the four __extreme__ worlds

MORE trust in
the STATE

④

①

LESS trust in
EACH OTHER

MORE trust in
EACH OTHER

③

②

LESS trust in the
STATE

Imagine the four _extreme_ worlds

MORE trust in
the STATE

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MORE trust in
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③

②

LESS trust in the
STATE

For each of these **extreme** worlds in turn we will:

- Tell a fictional story of how they came to be, "looking back" from 2021
- Talk about the impact on the LG landscape and needs arising for digital transformation

World 1 - More Trust in the State and Each Other

How did this happen?

Looking back from the middle of 2021, we can see that the UK bore the brunt of COVID-19 better than other developed economies. The National Health Service came into its own and the injection of huge quantities of state resources in single minded pursuit of a national strategy seem clearly to have worked. Within one year the state became the larger part of the UK economy, swapping places with the private sector, and it worked. Temporarily nationalised rail services ran more smoothly without the complexity of franchise arrangements and KPIs, for example, and nobody wanted to go back.

The economic boost of putting more money into the pockets of some of the UK's poorest individuals without strenuous means tests and long delays reduced the burden on the state, all but eliminated rough sleeping, and kept many local high street economies going; the rebirth of the leisure industries with generous government support brought us out of our houses in a party mood and a desire to live life to the full.

And there were new people to party with! Communities had come together in support and many people got to know the names of their neighbours for the first time. Helpful people turned from mobile numbers in a whatsapp, to real people you could smile at and then to good friends you could embrace, bound together by the shared experience of successfully combating adversity.

People are more inclined to trust, to share, to be selfless than before the virus. Volunteerism is exploding in all walks of life.

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World 1 - What Happened Then?

Local Government's Agenda

- Facilitating community action rather than providing services
- Better resourced to rebuild the local state - and the local economy
- Using their local leadership role to promote the way systems operate to support the whole community- ie the interlinking role of health, care, housing etc.

The Digital Agenda

- Place as a platform - providing enabling digital infrastructure
- Health and care integration
- Opportunity - collectively to address legacy issues
- Recruitment opportunity - people seeking jobs with purpose
- Allowed to take more risk (as they have had to do in this emergency) and not be penalised for taking risk (but rewarded)
- More continuous and collaborative user research/co-design

Let's call this world the **Communitarian Utopia**

World 2 - Less Trust in the State but More in Each Other

How did this happen?

"We got through this, but no thanks to you" - this shout, aimed at the Prime Minister on what had been promised to be a safe photo opportunity, was the last straw. A visibly crestfallen prime minister's photograph was on the front page of every newspaper the next day, and everyone knew he was a marked man, his political career over. But it wasn't just the man at the top. The horrific scenes from care homes, the unnecessary deaths - everybody seemed to have a friend or relative who had died, or who was still traumatised with fear from their experience.

However, for each tale of failure of the state there were four or five wonderful examples of selfless volunteers who had stepped in to fill the breach. When the Army's attempt to feed 1.5m shielded people fell apart in chaos and recrimination, communities coordinating by mobile phones and internet tools rallied round to fill the gap. There are a large number of people alive today who owe that fact to their neighbours.

At one point or another just about everyone needed - and got - help. The voluntary sector is booming, and new levels of reciprocity are channelled into every sphere of community life, as people voted en masse to reduce the failing and irrelevant state to a husk of its former self.

World 2 - What Happened Then

Local Government's Agenda

- Facilitating community action rather than providing services
- Survival through rebuilding relevance
- Systemic change to commissioning services- better weighting towards local providers, more sophisticated and meaningful co-production
- Realising the opportunities of the 21st Century Public Servant skills, especially around storytelling, resource weaving, wayfinding
- Creating the environment for LOCAL- where the community can support the community
- Act through local organisations and partners on the ground

The Digital Agenda

- Place as a platform - providing enabling digital infrastructure
- Grassroots organisation and democracy
- Even more differentiated from place to place
- Help with capacity building in communities to be able to use agile/design approaches

Because of the fragmented nature of the resulting outcomes we call this scenario **Community Patchwork**.

World 3 - Less Trust in the State *and* Less in each Other

How did this happen?

Everybody dropped the ball. The state did way too little, way too late. The encouraging early signs of volunteering crumbled as people were driven back into their homes in increasingly stringent curfews and lockdowns, in an ever more desperate attempt to bring the virus under control. After 3 months of staring at the same four walls most people lost the will to help others. This was never better symbolised than when a lone vigilante, with significant mental health issues and desperately distraught at the avoidable death of his grandmother, patrolling the streets for people who were out during the late-summer emergency lockdown, stabbed to death the leading epidemiologist for his region, who was returning late after 36 hours of continuous work at the Hospital.

People remembered the panic buying, the stripping of shelves, the selfishness; only those who had stockpiled came through it well and they were shamed by the stories of privation and hardship of others. They were only too happy to distract attention from their own behaviour by joining the clamour for the dismantling of the ineffective state.

What did we learn? You have to look after yourself, because no other f**ker will. Populist parties, offering sound bite solutions and reduction of the state, are in the ascendant.

World 3 - What Happened Then

Local Government's Agenda

- Fighting for relevance
- Rationing of services/austerity

The Digital Agenda

- Huge focus on cost saving
- Increased focus on regulatory services
- Seeing a drop off in digital uptake for local gov services

We call this scenario **Anti-Social Self-Reliance**.

World 4 - More Trust in the State but Less in each Other

How did this happen?

We were glad to see the army on the streets of London during the third "darkest" lockdown crisis, and they did a magnificent job of apprehending, sometimes shooting, looters and the people burgling the homes of vulnerable older people who had given their safety away to what they thought was a WhatsApp group that would help them. The courts are now full of miscreants who pretended they would help people get food and defrauded them of their money and left them hungry - quickly apprehended by dedicated police units. Black market sales of food and basic essentials were rampant, though usually stamped out within days by active trading standards officers.

And yet through this all government was calm and confident. The NHS's "finest hour" came and went with thousands of people receiving superb care and returning home to find important food supplies coordinated for them by the local council.

Neighbours who turned their backs on each other avoid each others' gaze as they walk silently along the street. We learned that we couldn't be trusted, but that our government could. The State is strong, paternal, authoritarian and largely unchallenged.

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World 4 - What Happened Then

Local Government's Agenda

- Integration with the central state
- Provision of nationally standardised services
- Use its position to support programmes that bring together disparate groups (almost certainly through grantfunding to local VCSE)

The Digital Agenda

- Large scale national integration - local implementation of national programmes

We call this scenario **Benevolent Paternalism**.

That was intense - So What?

These scenarios were deliberately invented to be extreme cases - none will "come true".
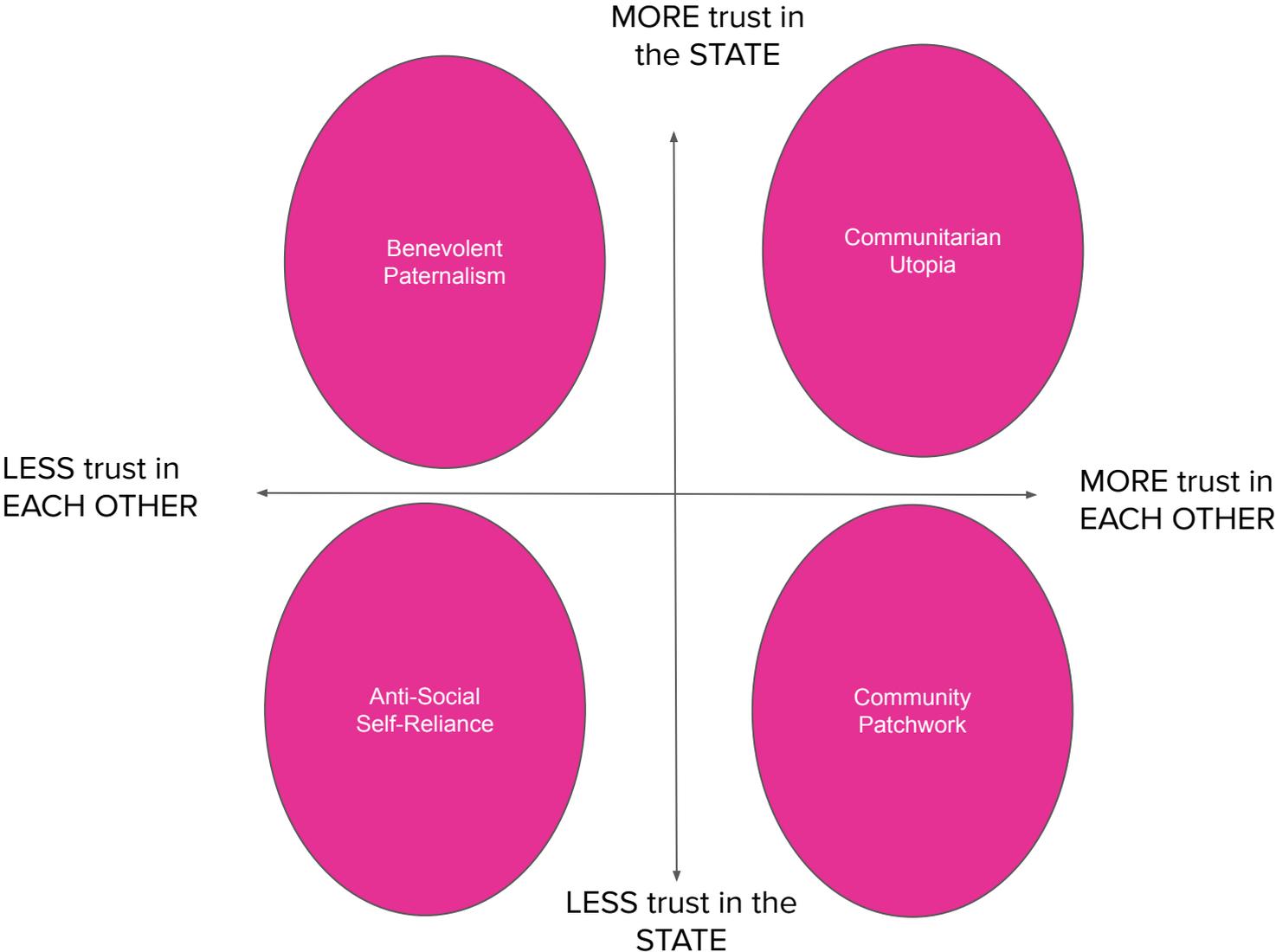
They may appear, in milder form, ***differently*** in different parts of the UK. If there are places where the local and central state differ significantly in the trustworthiness of their response that will leave a legacy.

The work that we are all now doing to strengthen both state and community responses to COVID-19 have a direct impact, to help us emerge into a better future. We are not powerless recipients of whatever fate dishes up for us.

Depending on the balance of how this plays out, Digital teams will be doing different sort of work.

By having an awareness of these futures we will spot the signs of help that is needed.

Four Post-Covid worlds

MORE trust in
the STATE

Benevolent
Paternalism

Communitarian
Utopia

LESS trust in
EACH OTHER

MORE trust in
EACH OTHER

Anti-Social
Self-Reliance

Community
Patchwork

LESS trust in the
STATE

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Where did workshop Participants think the UK will be?

	A lot less trust in each other	A bit less trust in each other	A bit more trust in each other	A lot more trust in each other
A lot more trust in the state				
A bit more trust in the state		X	X X X	
A bit less trust in the state			X X X X X X	
A lot less trust in the state				

Where did workshop Participants think <u>their place</u> will be?

	A lot less trust in each other	A bit less trust in each other	A bit more trust in each other	A lot more trust in each other
A lot more trust in the state				
A bit more trust in the .state			X	X
A bit less trust in the state		X X	X	X X X
A lot less trust in the state		X	X	