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Thoughts from Staff College.....the twelfth in our series of Faculty blogs

Climate Change

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Don't worry – this blog isn't about shaming you for running your central heating all day while working from home (although, as my dear old Ma would say: 'put a jumper on!')

Weather is the day by day changes in meteorological conditions we experience (or, in the hills of the Peak District where I live, the minute by minute changes!). Climate is the longer-term trends that occur (getting warmer, getting wetter etc).

One aspect of leadership is its ability to create the 'climate' in which teams and whole organisations operate. For 'climate' read culture. Those of you with longer memories may wish to reflect on the changes in office life from the 1970's to now – no, not just the smoking, tank-tops and droopy moustaches (mainly on the men) etc but also the broader changes in what is expected/ permitted/ rewarded and challenged in terms of behaviour. We have gradually changed the culture in many of our organisations – but there is plenty still to do and these changes sometimes seem to take an inordinate amount of time and effort.

Back to the weather though. Around 65 million years ago, there was an event of meteoric proportions that had an instant and sudden impact (boom boom!) on the Earth's climate – bad news for the dinosaurs, good news for small mammals.

Less than a year ago a small piece of DNA, which was usually only a nuisance to bats, escaped into the human population. The resulting pandemic led, almost overnight, to changes in the organisational culture of many parts of the NHS:

- There was clear and direct leadership accompanied by strong followership.
- Professional and departmental barriers were broken down.
- IT problems became IT solutions.
- You probably have your own list...

So, this event marked a dramatic change in the weather but what about the climate? Yes – there does seem to be some slippage back to 'the old normal', so although the weather is changeable at the moment ("It's looking brighter". "There's a hurricane coming!"), as a leader YOU have a CHOICE – carry on evolving the new climate created by Covid-19 or assume that a small break in the clouds means everything can carry on as before. As the dinosaurs found out, 65 million years ago, it can't.

Reference

- Autocracy and Democracy – An Experimental Inquiry
- Ralph K. White and Ronald Lippitt
- Harper & Brothers 1960

