

Stockdale Paradox: Ten Lessons to deal with COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has unleashed global havoc and has already resulted in millions of deaths. To deal with difficult scenario created by the pandemic, in this paper, inspiration is taken from “Stockdale Paradox” to derive ten lessons. These lessons are precious in the current scenario and discuss in detail the various issues and challenges with solutions. The lessons are useful for anyone in successfully dealing with brutal facts of pandemic and overcome the odds.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has been highly unpredictable. The unexpected second wave coming in middle of April 2021 has resulted in death count reaching more than 3 million worldwide as per WHO[12]. The highly infectious disease has been spreading rapidly in spite of many harsh lockdowns and countermeasures. Some may survive and some may not in the pandemic. Also, the pandemic seems to be endless with many mutant viruses spreading rapidly out of control. The way to deal with harsh reality of COVID-19 pandemic finds parallels with Stockdale Paradox.

The Stockdale Paradox is named after Admiral Stockdale who was imprisoned during Vietnam War[3]. The Stockdale paradox has been made popular by Jim Collins book on Good to Great[1]. The Stockdale paradox states that “*you must maintain unwavering faith that you can and will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties, and at the same time, have the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be*”.

The paper explores how Stockdale Paradox can find application in dealing with COVID-19 Pandemic. One can observe the current reality with rapidly spreading disease with thousands dying everyday. Also, there is no endpoint is visible with second wave of COVID-19 pandemic coming in. The COVID-19 pandemic is also posing difficulties in finding right medicines and vaccinations. The situation is unparalleled as the virus, the disease causes, symptoms and treatments that are all completely new.

The first statement of the Stockdale paradox i.e., “You must maintain unwavering faith that you can and will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties” can be applied as follows. There are many infections and there are possibilities that one may also get infected any point in future. However, one should have unwavering faith that we will survive no matter whatever difficulties may arise. There may be lockdowns restricting movements and difficulty finding right medicine, healthcare facilities etc. While one needs to be prepared to deal with the brutal facts of current reality, as per the second part of the paradox, one needs to maintain discipline. The discipline may involve strict adherence to COVID-19 protocols such as wearing masks, maintaining social distancing, washing hands, vaccination etc. There may be situations of quarantines where one is faced with isolation and hardship. This also requires

psychological preparation to deal with hardships. Mental toughness and unwavering faith to prevail at the end are tools for survival. One may even get infected and end up in ICU, but never give up hopes. The best way to deal with current scenario of COVID-19 Pandemic is to apply the Stockdale Paradox and survive the pandemic. There is also growing literature in finding application of Stockdale Paradox for COVID pandemic and lockdown[4-5].

Ten Lessons:

The following lessons derived from “Stockdale Paradox” can be life savers for many.

Lesson 1: There are many predictions regarding when the COVID-19 pandemic will end[7-8]. There are mathematical models, computer simulations and AI based predictions[11]. However the second wave with mutant variants of COVID-19 virus have taken everyone by surprise. This surprising twist in the COVID-19 pandemic can be handled without heartbreaks if one were to fully understand the concept of Stockdale Paradox.

Lesson 2: Medicines and Vaccinations have been developed for COVID-19. However, there is no silver bullet till now to solve the COVID-19 conundrum. Further, the virus is mutating day by day and new variants may or may not be controlled with the medicines or vaccines developed for original virus strains. Researchers and scientists are on their toes to come up with better medicines and vaccines.

Lesson 3: Misinformation and conspiracy theories are flooding the internet. These are misguiding the people about the pandemic. The current situation requires that we get news and updated information from trusted sources. As the number of infections are exponentially increasing, there are many messages and information flooding the social media such as Facebook, twitter, Whatsup etc.

Lesson 4: ICU bed, Oxygen and Ventilator shortages. The exponential growth of the infections during pandemic has resulted in big rush of patients in the hospitals. There is a sudden shortage of medicines, ICU beds, Oxygen concentrators, Ventilators, Doctors and nurses. This can be an anxious moment for many added is the isolation due to lockdown and curfews. The need of the hour is to plan well in advance for many possible outcomes and be prepared to face the situation as it arises. In planning, one needs to take the Murphy’s law into account: “*Anything that can go wrong will go wrong*”[13].

Lesson 5: Emergence of alternative medicines and immunity booster medications. There are many alternatives as the vaccinations are slowly becoming available. Homeopathic, Ayurvedic and other alternative medicines and immunity boosters are becoming available. There are also many mobile apps which facilitate one to stay safe during the pandemic[10].

Lesson 6: Emergence of new normal of lockdowns, wearing masks, Social distancing etc. The pandemic has unleashed certain brutal facts and needs to be quickly adjusting to new normal. One needs to be updated about the various measures and protocols and dos and don’ts and strictly follow them. Social Vaccine plays an important role in the control of spreading of COVID[9].

Lesson 7: Psychological effects and mental toughness. Stockdale while being captured by his enemies was constantly tortured. For enduring such scenerios, one needs to be tough. The current pandemic can trigger psychological problems due to isolation and sad situation. One needs to face the brutal facts with awareness about how to deal with them through

counselling and relationships. The social networks, video conferencing etc can connect people and they can seek help through these mediums. One should visualize the most happiest moments one will have once the Pandemic has ended and keep the hopes alive all the time. Also, the psychological technique “things getting better each day” will have healing effect and enhance ones confidence in coming out of the pandemic safely.

Lesson 8: Discipline is the central point in the concept of Stockdale Paradox. The current scenario requires one to follow strict protocols of wearing masks, maintaining social distance, washing hands etc. One needs to be disciplined and adhere to the protocols of COVID pandemic.

Lesson 9: While the gyms, sports facilities and swimming pools remain closed, one can easily follow the fitness routines such as walking, jogging, running, yoga, exercising etc to keep oneself fit. The fitness and health consciousness can contribute to overall wellbeing and may also aid in beating the infection.

Lesson 10: Faith and the pandemic should not be mixed up. While one prays for the safety and wellbeing, one needs to maintain unflinching faith in passing through the pandemic. From Stockdale’s experience, one sees that many of the optimists suffered heart breaks when they were not freed as per their expectations [14]. There is a similarity in the current pandemic where one can see new wave of infection while there was a short period of relief. The Pandemic has had first wave and second wave. While it may end anytime, one needs to be prepared to deal with if it does continue for more time.

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