

Talk by Essity to the Technology For Everyone Group, Tuesday 6th October 2020.

This is a company name that does not ring a bell in conversation. Yet it is the largest paper company in the country with its business centred on health and hygiene, and it is based here in Manchester.

Our presenter was Sarah Wilson, Communications Director. She gave us a presentation back in October 2019, but today she presented on 'ZOOM'. This presentation was an update on products and procedures, with the added aspect of dealing with the effects of Coronavirus in a manufacturing and fast changing environment. Our U3A boffins organised the Zoom research including three dummy runs to smooth out any problems. They are BRILLIANT.

Most of us have been to presentations on many topics, but this was a presentation of a huge company, its aims, goals, ethics, philosophy and its future.

It was mind-blowing to have it explained (NOT by a politician) how the shortages of PPE were caused and how difficult it was to correct. The company's own very high-quality standards were being compromised by the huge influx of inferior, badly made, poorly designed products. It seemed that, outside of Essity, a new mantra was developing in the industry - 'GOOD ENOUGH IS THE NEW PERFECTION'

An interesting explanation of Panic Buying was given. Toilet rolls in particular. Before lockdown in March, the company was producing 45million per day. The production was raised to 90million per day, where it has remained ever since.

The cause of the panic-buying and hoarding? Journalists' imaginations! The Daily Mail in particular. There was no shortage, nor likely to be. Manufacturing capacity was more than adequate, as has been proven. Sarah was approached several times for an interview. Each time, she had to decline because they could/would not meet her condition. What was that condition? TO STICK TO THE TRUTH! Ultimately, they accepted; brought in their cameras, and were shown the well-stocked warehouses and busy production lines. In fairness to the Daily Mail, it should be said that they performed a total volte-face.

Early on in the pandemic apprentices were given freedom to come up with their own ideas and produced helpful devices, such as a "personal" hand-held gadget for opening doors without touching. These were produced by 3D printing.

WFH (working from home) became a necessity and video conferencing became the norm. They found advantages in this and it will become one of the standard ways of communicating in the future. They also experienced a "humanising" of executive meetings where it was not uncommon for a child to wander into the "conference room" to, for example, announce that the cat had been sick in the kitchen.

One of the stories Essity did not publicise was the making of facemasks from nappies – we can all imagine what fun the press would have with that!

Away from Coronavirus, they are still improving their products in other directions. To Essity, product improvement means more than increased profits. For example, sustainability is an important factor in their business plan; reducing plastic waste and increasing recycling are main objectives.

Reducing plastic waste is within their own control through material selection and product design, so they do a lot in that area. But recycling is another matter. Local authorities are not together in their recycling policies as they differ in the types of material to be recycled, therefore progress in one district is retrograde in another and Essity has no executive power in that world. Lobbying and influencing are the only tools available, and that makes it a slow process. Their objective is a common recycling policy so they can deal with a finite problem.

Towards the end of the meeting we were treated to an example of WFH reality. Sarah's little boy came home from school and hugged his mummy to say hello.

Derek Moffitt gave one of his special votes of thanks to Sarah, adding his own experiences of living with a pandemic.

Peter Hobson, aided by Roger Law