

BUSINESS EYE

'Interesting times'

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This week's insight into the 'interesting times' through which we are now living comes to you from a green and lush County Kerry in Ireland, where I'm doing some leadership and strategic thinking from somewhere that will definitely still be in the EU after October 31.

The Chinese greeting 'may you live in interesting times' is purportedly intended as a curse on the recipient.

While seemingly a blessing, the expression is normally used ironically, with the implication

that peace and tranquillity are more life-enhancing than interesting times, which usually include disorder and conflict.

'Disorder and conflict' seems to be an apt and accurate description of the Farage Chapter of the Trumpian dystopia into which our lives are being written.

The trouble with interesting times is that they inevitably mean less stability and more uncertainty.

This has a significant impact on business and consumer confidence.

If you have no idea if next month there will be an extra 20 per cent on imported goods, if you will keep your job, if interest rates will rocket, or if the ports will be blocked, it becomes harder to plan ahead, which raises the risk factors, which, in turn, lowers the confidence with which we look to the future.

That is, unless you are blinded by anger or madness and refuse to see the truth if it

is inconvenient, labelling it as 'fake news' so you can feel better about ignoring it.

In my own business, Brexit has caused the need to stock more parts, which has caused a shortage of cash liquidity in the business.

It has reduced our margins by 15 per cent and it has introduced the possibility of major supply-chain disruption.

It is, therefore, hard to remain both sane and confident about the future and has caused us to slash our business investment, financial targets and employee count.

We are not alone.

Business investment has fallen to the same levels we last saw in the financial crisis in 2008.

UK business leaders' confidence has suffered a further knock as a result of change at the top, according to a survey by the Institute of Directors (IoD).

The IoD's confidence tracker polled 900 directors and was conducted between May



22 and June 5. Theresa May announced her resignation on May 24.

Dealing with political uncertainty is part and parcel of leading a business, but this has been taken to extremes over recent times.

Policy instability, a lack of continuity and bi-polar swings in political uncertainty are seriously denting our long-term

competitiveness, which, in turn, is going to make us all poorer in future.

In many ways we are heaping more and more problems onto the shoulders of our kids and grandkids.

Not only are we living too long and causing them a massive health burden, not building enough houses for them to be able to afford to buy one, and

trashing the environment, but we are also divorcing the EU and taking them out of the only family they have ever known.

I have many business friends who say to me that we mustn't talk ourselves down and drive confidence even lower than it already is. We entrepreneurs are natural optimists.

The successful ones are, however, also realists.