

## **NEGOTIATING IN A FISH BOWL**


**STEVE GATES, CEO & FOUNDER**

The key challenge for Brexit, it appears, is how will the UK trade freely with Europe, whilst putting controls on EU migration?

There are of course many other issues which Liam Fox and David Davis will need to address in what is widely regarded as the most complex political negotiation of all time. But this complexity is not because of the number of moving parts, sheer volume and diversity of stakeholders, disparate dependencies, and the dismantling of a marriage that has long served Europe and the rest of the world. It is also not because of the numerous short term pressures in play, both politically and economically. No – this is manageable, be it over a period of time.

What makes this the mother of all negotiations is that while Teresa May attempts to navigate options, manage information and prepare through her new departments to engage in dialogue, she has to do so in public whilst criticism rains from every political corner of the country, and industry leaders are quick to highlight any short term negative implication of one action or another.

The fact that this negotiation will play out on the world stage in public, like being in a 360 degree fish bowl, places May in a difficult negotiation position. Positioning, conditioning and anchoring will all be read into by the media, and critical headlines will offer an unwelcome distraction from the real work in play. In negotiation you have many levers available to you, many of which are not what they first seem...but try telling that to the media without giving your strategy away. Will it be hard? Will it be soft? Should you pacify the British public or the many EU leaders? Even Mark Carney's interpretations will influence the short term economic pressures that will bear down via the daily headlines.



May will by now have a strategy, but this in itself will not be enough. She will need experts, negotiators, a PR machine up to the job and a significant reserve of tenacity to see this through. But first there will be a high court judgement in December to establish if triggering article 50 should be voted on by members of parliament. Until we get over this hurdle most of the work in hand remains provisional. I suspect contingency work has already begun around the outcome of this decision and the direction we move in next.

I also suspect the ripple effect of this negotiation and the path we tread will be evident long after May has concluded her work as Prime Minister.

*Steve Gates is CEO and Founder of The Gap Partnership*