

Chance favours the prepared mind

Sandra Macleod, Group CEO of global reputation analysis firm Echo Research, believes that research is the key to corporate survival and reputational integrity in times of economic turmoil.

In the first weeks and months of the global downturn, a kind of night blindness seized the business world. Now, the first shock past, we're starting to discern our surroundings again – we hope. Fresh imperatives are called for to operate more effectively with less, but protecting reputation is more important than ever before.

Necessity excites the inventive mind and with financial models unable to create a broad enough range of outcomes to capture current and future uncertainties, risk and issues management and scenario planning are stepping up to provide much-needed evidence to support improved decision-making.

These are growing in importance as companies adopt disciplines to collect signals of impending change and build scenarios to anticipate what may come.

'An organisation should be thought of as a complex adaptive system – a kind of neurosystem.'

Just as companies are investing in disciplines to return faster readings from their markets, so executives can pool knowledge and build projections more promptly than before.

Reputationally too, a rapid exchange of information and instructions is especially valuable if an organisation needs to

respond and adjust its trajectory in turbulent times.

An organisation should be thought of as a complex adaptive system – a kind of neurosystem – bombarded, challenged, and forced to adapt. This image captures the ebb and flow of reputation through the myriad channels of the internet and articulates the urgency of investigating these morphing environments. This provides the evidence for either consistency and focus on basics that are all too easy to lose sight of, or highlighting areas of change and action that may be necessary.

Tracking reputational risks and analysis of the points of light that make up perceptions around an organisation is the first step on the road. It yields contextual intelligence, without which complex adaptive systems seize up because they no longer know what to adapt to or how.

Testing times

When reaching out to customers, the demands to be future-proof and not waste expense require pre-testing to get right first time what an organisation takes to market – products and propositions alike. To be certain they are up to speed with customers' changing needs, habits, beliefs and intentions, research is a key aid.

At one extreme this becomes part of the trend of co-creation – involving buyers throughout the R&D process. At the other end, harnessing the power of word-of-mouth through greater web connectivity amplifies success or failure and requires its own due diligence.

Internally, do you know your teams' inclinations to be advocates and



'There are few today who would dare feel their way through the midst of reputational risk by guesswork alone.'

ambassadors, not jump ship to a more stable setup and go the extra mile, inspire, and stiffen the resolve of their colleagues to succeed? Research lays bare how teams feel and what is important to them, which is often not what senior managers focus upon.

There are few today who would dare feel their way through the midst of reputational risk and uncertainty by guesswork alone. Research remains a precious instrument in the toolbox. Supporting and influencing organisations through this challenging time requires all to raise – or change – their game. ■

Further information

Echo Research
Website: www.echoresearch.com