

How And Why The Lack Of Imagination Could Lead To Crisis Situations

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The imagination can be an important tool for preparing for a crisis—and the failure to imagine ... [+] GETTY

The imagination can be an important tool for preparing for a crisis—and the failure to imagine worst-case scenarios can impact responses when a crisis strikes.

A good example is the Covid-19 pandemic.

“Failures of imagination meant that relief packages such as disaster relief payments for those quarantined, as well as job seekers and employers, were all developed on the run,” [Lisa Sisson](#), author and founder of Australia-based risk consultancy Unearth, told *Corporate Risk and Insurance* in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021.

In addition to health issues, the consequences of the crisis “stretched across all aspects of society including employment, education, transport, supply chains, construction, health infrastructure, manufacturing, hospitality, tourism and energy sectors,” she noted.

“Future planning must go beyond the expected and the known and must focus on all the consequences, not just the immediately obvious impact,” Sisson advised.

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“A lack of imagination when preparing for a crisis can crater a company’s brand, create a media firestorm, expose the organization and its leaders to civil or criminal charges, and potentially lead to injuries or deaths,” [Rick Alcantara](#), founder and principal of Rick Alcantara Consulting, a public relations and marketing firm, noted via email.

Ignoring Crisis Triggers

After a [data breach](#),” a failure of imagination might influence business leaders to ignore the factors that caused the attack. It might also lead to a misperception about the chief information security officer (CISO)’s budget, level of visibility within the organization and ability to gain executive support to enact meaningful changes throughout the enterprise,” [Security Intelligence](#) reported.

Faulty Assumptions

“Finally, a failure of imagination could cause board directors to assume that management is on top of cyber risks when, in fact, top leadership has abdicated all responsibility for security,” it pointed out.

A Different Mindset

The same attributes that can help business leaders succeed might make it more challenging for them to prepare for a crisis.

"Successful CEOs and founders are almost always optimists, big thinkers who dream of what could be. They’ve defied the odds and beat their competition by focusing on opportunity over risk,” Dana Davis, a crisis communication expert and co-founder of [Steelwire](#), a strategic communications firm, pointed out via email.

“Yet good crisis readiness requires a different mindset—focus on risk, which is a pessimistic mentality that fundamentally conflicts with the optimism that fueled their success. The very best leaders are the ones who balance both, maintaining their vision while acknowledging risks that their business could face and planning for them. The best way to do this is to bring in experts who are trained to identify vulnerabilities and assess threats objectively, to make sure blind spots don’t go unnoticed,” Davis noted.

Unwarranted Assumptions

Unwarranted assumptions by corporate executives could also help lead to a crisis.

“Leaders could feel that their organization is too small to be affected by certain risks. They could place too much faith in their operational recovery plans while failing to consider the human impacts of a tragedy. They could turn a blind eye to potential risks, e.g., sexual harassment. They could craft crisis plans but fail to test them. They could also be oblivious to emerging issues, e.g., supply chain disruptions, pending legislation, and shareholder discontent,” Alcantara of Rick Alcantara Consulting, a noted.

Focusing On Past Threats

“There's a quote [that] ‘Generals always fight the last war.’ The same is true with executives. A lack of imagination keeps leaders focused on past threats and blinds them to future ones. It's a dangerous pattern that affects companies, regardless of size,” Zac Stucki, CEO of Ignition Point Strategies and a crisis management consultant, advised via email.

Proactive Steps

“Business leaders should take stock of the types of events/situations that might become a crisis of urgency for their unique sectors. This can be done by taking a historical look at past crises, conducting a scan of crises across their sector and other sectors, and to tap into the collective imagination to

consider the crises that may not have previously occurred,” Ralph Gigliotti, assistant vice president for organizational leadership at Rutgers University and author of *Post-Crisis Leadership: Resilience, Renewal, and Reinvention in the Aftermath of Crisis*, observed via email.

Whether caused by nature or people, a crisis that no one imagined and becomes a nightmare reality can have serious consequences for companies and organizations.

Creativity, objectivity, and considering different perspectives and points of view could help fuel the imagination—and guard against a crisis that no one ever considered.

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