Protection    Prevention    Preparedness    Response    Resili...    Re...

70°

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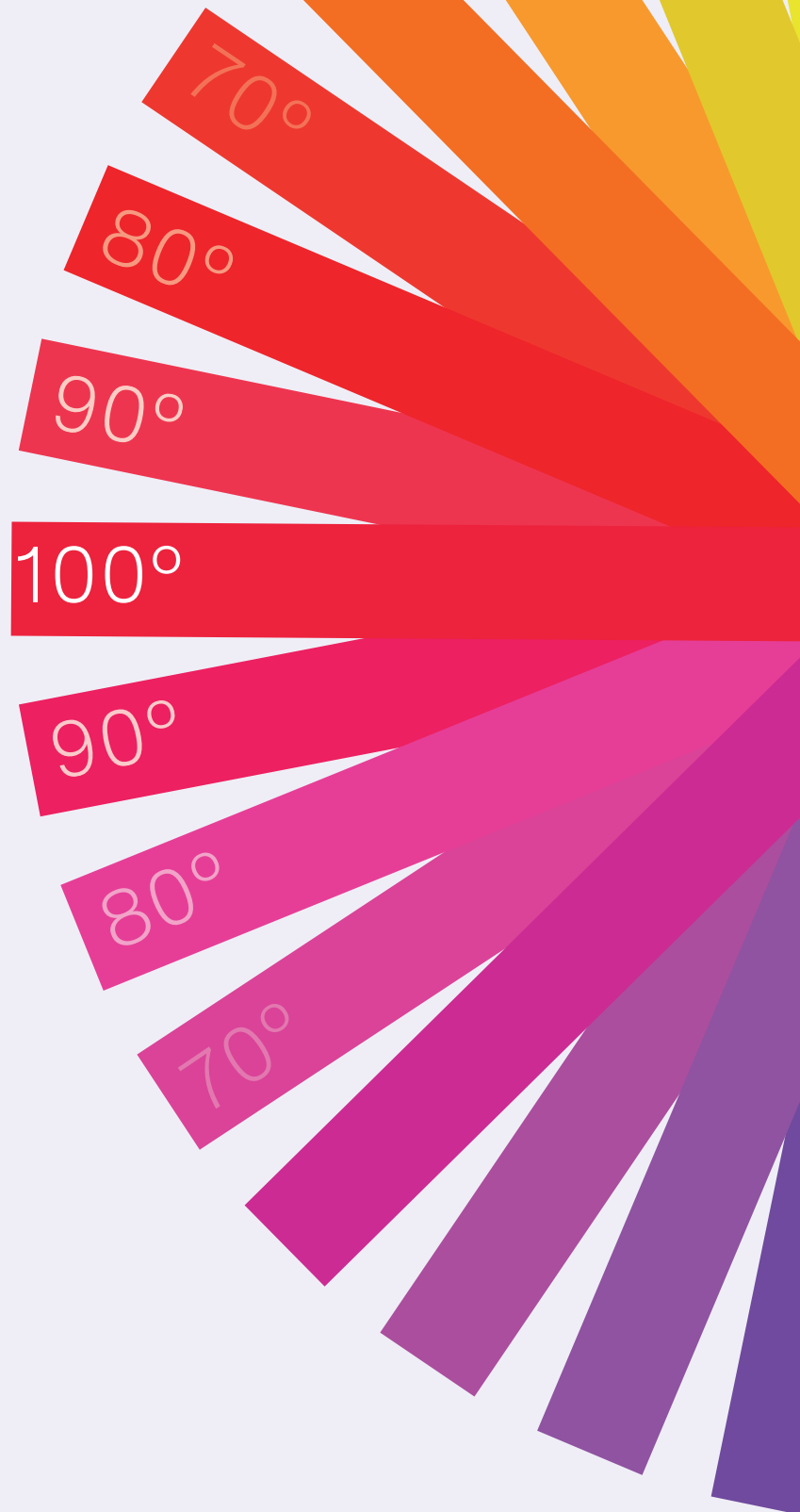
# FLASHPOINTS

Volatility in Trust, Climate, Society

# CRISIS›RESPONSE

# contents

Proactive leadership: p24



Otto Detmer | Ikon Images

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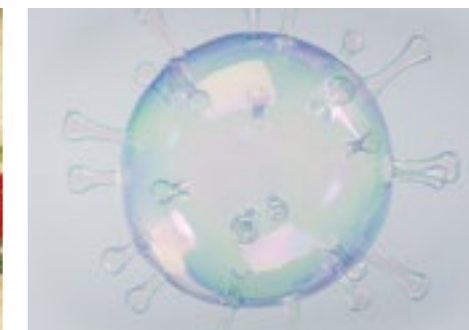


Armor Production | 123rf

*Cover story: Rising temperatures*
*Cover image: Gracie Broom*

# comment

**T**his edition's cover is a
representation of the
increasing volatility and
temperature of opinions,
discourse and beliefs.
An 'addiction to outrage'
is heating up (p76) and
red hot rhetoric is dwarfing calmer,
pragmatic and measured reasoning,
like a rampant infection burning
through communities and the world.

Our feature on society and polarisation
unpicks this phenomenon, because
to treat the symptoms, we must first
understand the causes, recognising how
a complex online ecosystem inflames
predispositions to the point where they
boil over into real world consequences.

But the cover is also a more literal
depiction of climbing temperatures and
a far less stable world environment.
*CRJ* has covered climate issues for
many years, homing in on how they
affect frontline responders, societies
and individuals. More than climate and
rising temperatures – the tipping points
to calamity are manifold and include
biodiversity and ecosystems. Humanity's
complex interaction with nature means
we treat the world's resources as if they
are an infinite commodity, squandering
and polluting without considering
the repercussions (p54 and p58).

The Covid-19 pandemic is far from
over, but the small glimmers of hope
have become more concrete. As Mami
Mizutori of the UNDRR says on p50, we
must seize the opportunity of crisis and:
"Use it to understand better what is going
on around us. We mustn't see a disaster
or crisis purely as a threat... If we prevent
better, the recovery process can be a
wonderful opportunity, or it can be a
catastrophe." Governments, the public,
private and third sectors can apply
valuable lessons and build back better.
Part of this lies in succession planning,
diversity, proactive leadership resilience
and continuous improvement, as covered
by our feature (from p14 onwards).

Because as we keep our feet
firmly planted in the present, while
remembering and drawing upon
what has been learnt from the past,
we have to keep both eyes firmly
fixed on the horizon to anticipate
the future, and make sure that in
solving current problems, we do
not unintentionally create new risks,
or exacerbate latent threats.

# Get it right the first time

**Andy Blackwell** explores the challenges organisations face as they recover from the effects of the global pandemic and questions why it often takes a crisis to strike before we start to look at better ways of doing things

T he term 'build back better', dismissed by some as a buzzword or political spin, is fast becoming a new mantra. But the slogan has a good pedigree and was first used to describe the official *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030*, adopted on March 18, 2015 at the UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, Japan.

The framework aims to: "Guide the multi-hazard management of disaster risk in development at all levels as well as across all sectors." The primary focus of the framework is on prevention and reduction of disaster risk, but it also covers planning for disaster response and recovery.

The UK Government adopted the slogan for its Build Back Better Council, which was established to ensure government and businesses continue to work closely together. The council aims to provide an important forum for frank feedback on the government's recovery plans to help ensure the steps being taken are the right ones.

The aviation sector has been one of the hardest hit by the pandemic and in December 2020, at a virtual open briefing of the UN Counter Terrorism Committee focusing on the terrorist threat to civil aviation (and the progress of *Special Resolutions 2309 and 2396*), the UK Department for Transport representative outlined the significant effects that Covid-19 has had on the sector. Global passenger flights were down 61 per cent compared to 2019 and aviation now faces huge resource challenges.

On a positive note, the representative said that there were opportunities to embed better security practices, an approach that aligns with the build back better theme.

The International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) has also designated 2021 as a year of security culture to raise security awareness in aviation. This is a timely move as there has been little change in the threat posed to civil aviation by malicious actors at a time when Covid-19 has created new vulnerabilities, including a displacement of focus from security to health protection. Refocusing on getting the security culture right will help to redress the balance.

The concept of building back better is a sound one, but why do some organisations wait for a crisis to strike before thinking about better ways of doing things? Missed warning signals; inadequate spending on security and resilience; failing to prepare for the perfectly probable; and not wanting to hear bad news are just some of the symptoms that can lead to 'organisational denial',

considered by many to be the biggest threat to crisis management. The 'it could never happen here' mindset prevails, and when the adverse event happens, the organisation is thrown into chaos, owing to inadequate emergency planning, the absence of appropriate systems and platforms and insufficient resources, particularly trained and 'battle-hardened' managers. This slide into denial can be stopped, but it requires affirmative action, which will become more and more radical the further entities move into the denial phase.

## Organisational denial

Rather than having to build back better, which is a reactive approach, embedding continuous improvement as a business-as-usual activity puts the organisation on the front foot, building things right first time round.

The term continuous improvement is often misunderstood; it is not about having to meet ever increasing targets, but more about how the organisation learns from its own mistakes and those of others, and constantly looks at ways to improve its performance and act on warning signals before they become crises.

To do this effectively, a clear understanding of what 'good' looks like is needed, together with the capability to measure performance robustly, and adapt security and resilience measures as necessary.

Building back better from a security and resilience perspective is not all about creating something new or reinventing the wheel, but building on existing good practices, such as the UK CAA's *CAP1223 Framework for an Aviation Security Management System (SeMS)*. This was developed for aviation, but its straightforward methodology is easily transferable to other sectors.

Likewise, the *Sendai Framework*, developed for DRR, has relevance in a much wider context, particularly in building organisational resilience.

Its four priority areas for action to prevent new and reduce existing disaster risks have been abbreviated here to demonstrate the point, and the words in brackets form part of the original text: Understanding (disaster) risk; strengthening (disaster) risk governance to manage (disaster) risk; investing in (disaster) risk reduction for resilience; and enhancing (disaster) preparedness for effective response and 'building back better' in recovery.

Remove the words in brackets and you have a skeleton for a high level action plan for other organisations seeking to look at ways of enhancing their business resilience.

Continuous improvement is about how the organisation learns from its mistakes and those of others, and constantly looks at ways to improve its performance and act on warning signals

Grundini | Ikon Images

practice. It is not just about their own lessons, but those identified as relevant by other organisations and sectors.

Continuous improvement is key to success, but difficult to achieve. There are two interconnected strands to continuous improvement: the organisation's processes, products and services, and the capabilities of its people.

Research reveals that although business leaders understand that continuous improvement is the key to success, it is difficult to achieve as the leadership teams are focused on success rather than failure. This non-exhaustive list shows just how challenging it can be to become a learning organisation:
● Poor culture, ie the existence of a blame culture, or a culture of concealment. The latter was said to have existed at Boeing and contributed to two deadly crashes involving the Boeing 737 MAX;
● Lack of employee engagement;
● Reward schemes that clash with required behaviours – aggressive production targets linked to financial reward may encourage staff to take shortcuts that could compromise safety;
● Stifling employees with the change repelling mindset: 'We've always done things this way';
● Employees not understanding how they contribute to the overall game plan owing to poor communication;
● Silo working mindset – creates difficulties fostering collaboration between multiple stakeholders, resulting in risks or opportunities being missed;
● Not knowing what 'good' performance looks like – not having the right performance measures in place, and not understanding how to select the most appropriate key performance indicators;
● Weak warning signal identification and/or failure to act on warning signals – the inability to pick up or act on signs that something is amiss. This can become a personal liability for board directors if they breach their fiduciary duties to shareholders. A shareholder lawsuit filed in November 2019 by the Kirby Family Partnership cited this allegation against Boeing Co's board directors following the two fatal 737 MAX crashes that killed 346 people; and
● Loss of corporate knowledge – vast numbers of staff have been made redundant owing to the pandemic, and this can lead to impaired corporate knowledge.

Last year, when examining how aviation businesses responded to the pandemic – particularly how quickly they recognised it as a risk and managed their response to it – three groupings emerged: victims, survivors and thrivers. The key group here is the thrivers, those highly resilient organisations that proactively identify things that could go wrong, such as the pandemic and other incidents with similar impact, plan for them and rapidly identify the warning signals.

The thrivers are swift and robust in managing the impacts to their businesses and understand how they need to adapt going forward. They do not wait for disaster to strike before acting and their culture is such that they are constantly looking at better ways of doing things.

The pandemic has reaped havoc, not only in terms of the tragic loss of life its left in its wake and which it continues to inflict, but also the

What some might disregard as old guidance material can still provide valuable insights. For example, *Managing Crises Before They Happen*, by Professor Ian Mitroff with Gus Anagnos (2001), focuses on the philosophy that crisis management begins with mechanisms long before crises occur, and that only continuous, proactive measures can prevent or limit their impact.

*Quality is Free* by Philip B Crosby (1980), informs organisations how to do things right in the first place to avoid having to pay to fix them or do them again. Another book, *Predictable Surprises*, written by Max Bazerman and Michael D Watkins (2004), explores the disasters you should have seen coming and how to prevent them. It provides insights on the failure of individuals and organisations to act on what they know.

Many of the modern management systems and methodologies are based on the sound principles in these publications. The guidance they contain has certainly stood the test of time.

Getting things right first time can be challenging for us humans, as most learning comes from making mistakes. To improve continuously, organisations must ensure that lessons identified become lessons implemented, and that these lessons convert into actual

> A blame culture is a serious impediment to becoming a learning organisation

unparalleled economic damage it has caused.

Unfortunately, the thrivers were in the minority. For many businesses, survival has been the key concern and thinking about moving to a position where they can thrive is simply a pipe dream. Sadly, numerous organisations have become victims and already gone out of business, with many others teetering on the edge.

There is much to learn from the thrivers, though; mirroring their *modus operandi* and organisational behaviour may help to bring back some organisations from the brink before it is too late.

Key features of thriving organisations not only include their continuous improvement culture, but their recognition of business resilience as a strategic capability. They have robust levels of crisis management, and while not immune from adverse events and crises, they are quick to learn from them. They manage risk sensibly while understanding that it can create danger as well as opportunity.

Most of all they are agile, pioneering and comfortable with taking brave decisions.

While the effects of the pandemic have forced many businesses to become more innovative just to survive, there are disrupters who are always striving to make their products and services better, and who don't wait for a crisis to strike before taking action.

## Agile behaviour
Anne Bowden's organisation, Starling Bank, is one such example of how an entrepreneur and her team disrupted the highly regulated banking sector by creating a digital bank that is shaking up the entire system for good. Starling Bank was built to withstand difficulties, and while it has indeed built back better, this was a deliberate and proactive move as a business start-up, rather than a reactive response to a crisis.

Starling built things right the first time round and its strength and resilience come from its ability to adapt and change for the better – continuous improvement.

One example of this agile behaviour is that customers can have a second card connected to their accounts via a dedicated section of Starling's app. The customer can hand over the card and a personal identification number to a trusted shopper who is authorised to spend the money that has been added there. This 'innovation' took just ten days to complete.

The mindset and behaviours of business disruptors can certainly provide us with much useful learning.

The following non-exhaustive measures are intended to help businesses understand how they can become a more resilient learning organisation that improves continuously:
● Promote a 'just' culture that encourages employee engagement, organisational learning and continuous improvement;
● Establish learning as a key driver of business strategies;
● Ensure the organisation's drive for efficiency and profit growth is appropriately balanced to avoid compromising business resilience;
● Anticipate problems before they occur and focus on what could happen in the future, without ignoring the enduring threats your organisation faces;
● Implement mechanisms to identify and respond quickly to warning signals and lessons identified to prevent or minimise the impacts of adverse events and crises;

● Explore tools to increase organisational efficiency, minimise the impact of adverse events and help protect your people, assets and reputation;
● Ensure performance monitoring and linked key performance indicators (KPIs) are fit for purpose;
● Ensure adequate resources are allocated to business resilience and 'protective' activities such as safety, security, risk management, medical services, and business continuity, and ensure that the skills and experience of the personnel taking up specialist roles within these business areas are sufficient;
● Consider merging the aforementioned 'protective' functions within the organisation to break silo working, create efficiencies and encourage collaboration and innovation; and
● Make use of existing best practice frameworks and publications.

The term build back better hints at missed opportunities to get things right first time. With the right mindset, people, frameworks and systems, we can prevent or minimise the impacts of many crises, and prepare better for those we have little control over, such as natural hazards or human-induced disasters. If we acknowledge that build back better is a reactive response, then our proactive slogan should be 'right first time' in the pursuit of continuous improvement.

Rather than closing the stable door after the horse has bolted, we will have secured the stables by design, to prevent the adverse event occurring in the first place. **CRJ**

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