

## **Can you plan for such uncertainty?**

***Jean Pousson offers some thoughts to company directors and executives.***

Uncertainty is a property of nature and has always been a property of organisational life. The very word planning in the context of strategic planning implies a certain level of order and precision. After all planning disciplines were adopted with equal vigour by large multinational corporations and by the mandarins of the now defunct Soviet empire! But the environment in which we currently find ourselves is anything but certain. One of the most accurate economic forecasts for the calendar year 2008 after all came from Lehman Brothers!

Investment legend Warren Buffett recently described investors and executives as bloodied and confused as if they were small birds that had strayed into a badminton game. This is certainly what I am finding out as I chat to Boards and Directors of organisations of all sizes.

Not knowing what the future holds should not be the trigger for abdication or corporate mid life crisis. Bear in mind that your competitors also do not know what lies ahead.

A couple of ideas for you to think about:

Keep playing to your strengths and capabilities. There are a number of organisations out there who keep it simple and execute flawlessly. South West Airlines, the pioneer low cost airline, and the UK insurance company Admiral Insurance are both organisations that fit that profile, and which are so far 'beating' the recession with some good set of financial results.

Manage definitely. Your people are stressed too. More than ever they need direction and assurance as to where the company is going. Communicate far more than ever and be truthful at all times.

Your values must not be compromised for the sake of short term commercial expediency no matter how seductive. If, for example, quality is an integral part of your customer offering, that must not be diluted, under any circumstances.

Be prepared to unlearn. Many business concepts, ideas, (prejudices?), views, may no longer hold. How are you keeping in touch? What about considering a reverse mentor? A mentor is always thought as someone older, wiser, the sage, the oracle. How about someone much younger than yourself? They have a contribution to make too, you know. Think of your kids. You learn from them too, don't you?

Be also prepared to continually learn from your people. No leader, no matter how smart or hardworking, has all the answers. Many great ideas and innovations have come from personnel making a suggestion that to them made sense. Organisations are reservoirs of talent. It would be a great shame if that wealth of knowledge was not fully utilised.

Good luck!