

Comment Article

ITAnalysis - Thinking outside of the paddling pool

By Rob Bamforth, Principal Analyst, Quocirca Ltd

When faced with what appear to be insurmountable challenges, what are the options? Think about Keith Waterhouse's challenged hero Billy Liar, agonising about the future with his (favourite) girlfriend. He said he turned over a new leaf every day, but the blots still showed through. She said he was like a child on the edge of a paddling pool, wanting to step in but afraid to take the plunge. So he thought he should turn over a new paddling pool.

It's an odd image admittedly, but it sticks in my mind when I hear companies talking about 'difficult times' and 'making changes'. Too often they are paralysed into inactivity – as many are now – so just put everything on hold, not prepared to step in and take the radical decisions necessary. Otherwise they make changes that have little impact – cutting jobs and budgets just to appease accountants – without sufficient thought to the changes that are really necessary, and so have to go through the process again and again as the blots continue to show through. Why don't they turn over a new paddling pool and make a radical change?

Often, they don't know what that change should be, but there are often plenty of clues. Many need to find out what is most important to those that the organisation relies upon – its customers and those who influence them – the external stakeholders. First, however, they need to determine who the different groups of stakeholders are – a segmentation exercise – and then find out what representatives of each group really think. Only then can they understand what these people really need from the stakeholder relationship.

It's not always easy, especially to get candid opinions, which sometimes might have to be gathered anonymously, but it can be done. Those involved in technology-oriented organisations in particular find this a hard process as their twin points of emphasis are summed up in the expression "bang for the buck" – technical functionality and cost. Stakeholders, other than the external investors

and internal finance or IT management, might have further valid criteria and opinions, but it is necessary to identify who these groups are and then walk a mile or two in their shoes to see what really concerns them.

As well as direct customers in various different target segments there will be channel partners, primary suppliers and market influencers – competitors, the media and even analysts. Getting behind the public façade of these organisations will be even harder, but might be worthwhile and a good way to start is trying to find out what makes them tick.

I was really impressed when one organisation RIPE NCC, the highly technical Europe Regional Internet Registry (RIR), seemed to be doing just this. RIPE NCC's main role is to support the infrastructure of the Internet, through allocating resources, such as internet addresses and providing services for the benefit of the Internet community at large. It is an independent, not-for-profit organisation, yet it has identified over a dozen different groups of stakeholders or customer types, including the media and – yes – analysts.

Rather than asking the obvious direct question "what do you think of us", they asked the question "what matters to you". It may take more time to analyse the answers, but they will be more honest and open, and ultimately will be of more value. As in this case, they may also create a positive feeling that the organisation asking the questions is interested, and that might be the bold step that many organisations are missing.

A challenging economy often means organisations get introspective and look to make internal short term changes like axing departments and budget cutbacks, when they might be better off showing a real external interest in their stakeholders. Not a message that ineffectively intones "your call is important to us", but some action that demonstrates how. Time to turn over that paddling pool.

About Quocirca

Quocirca is a primary research and analysis company specialising in the business impact of information technology and communications (ITC). With world-wide, native language reach, Quocirca provides in-depth insights into the views of buyers and influencers in large, mid-sized and small organisations. Its analyst team is made up of real-world practitioners with first hand experience of ITC delivery who continuously research and track the industry and its real usage in the markets.

Through researching perceptions, Quocirca uncovers the real hurdles to technology adoption – the personal and political aspects of an organisation’s environment and the pressures of the need for demonstrable business value in any implementation. This capability to uncover and report back on the end-user perceptions in the market enables Quocirca to advise on the realities of technology adoption, not the promises.

Quocirca research is always pragmatic, business orientated and conducted in the context of the bigger picture. ITC has the ability to transform businesses and the processes that drive them, but often fails to do so. Quocirca’s mission is to help organisations improve their success rate in process enablement through better levels of understanding and the adoption of the correct technologies at the correct time.

Quocirca has a pro-active primary research programme, regularly surveying users, purchasers and resellers of ITC products and services on emerging, evolving and maturing technologies. Over time, Quocirca has built a picture of long term investment trends, providing invaluable information for the whole of the ITC community.

Quocirca works with global and local providers of ITC products and services to help them deliver on the promise that ITC holds for business. Quocirca’s clients include Oracle, Microsoft, IBM, O2, T-Mobile, HP, Xerox, EMC, Symantec and Cisco, along with other large and medium sized vendors, service providers and more specialist firms.

Details of Quocirca’s work and the services it offers can be found at
<http://www.quocirca.com>