

Globalisation calls for respect

Cultural sensitivity. It's not something that's talked about much in business continuity. But such planning is not just an Anglo-Saxon or western European thing. And one firm, CS&A, has made a point of emphasising that getting the multi-cultural aspects of working in international organisations is all part of risk management. Mike Halls spoke to Caroline Sapriel, managing director of CS&A, International Risk, Crisis and Business Continuity Management



Caroline Sapriel

How did your company start?

We started 15 years ago in Hong Kong and as we've expanded, we've grown out of Asia and across the world. In terms of geography that's normally the opposite of how many businesses operate. From bases in Asia, Europe and North America we work in locations across the globe including Latin America and Africa.

So why is understanding cultural differences all part and parcel of risk planning and managing?

One can't apply an indiscriminate western European or US template to risk and crisis management planning internationally. In Asia alone there are profound

differences for what will be acceptable and effective for the same company in Brunei, Japan or Hong Kong.

Nor can one simply assume a western model in the way businesses run. We have seen European businesspeople absolutely flummoxed over basic business continuity exercises while others coming from apparently less sophisticated environments have grasped the point at once.

Whilst corporate values and principles must be followed and adhered to, local considerations must be taken into account to achieve a truly sustainable business contingency strategy.

So it's beyond the complex etiquette of shaking hands or bowing correctly?

Absolutely. Take an extreme – but not necessarily rare – case for a multinational: a set of fatalities in a foreign country. Part of any crisis management will have to include understanding how to talk to the families involved, what religious rites must be respected, how to get it right with the press to name a few.

Moreover, one characteristic of any major incident is the effect it has on what is termed the "stakeholders" of your company. The stakeholders are fre-

quently diverse — they could be various local government departments, shareholders, the local and international press to name a few. And frequently they have different and conflicting agendas. One thing we try to do with our clients is called "stakeholder mapping". This is where we work out who are the stakeholders, what influence we can bring to bear on them and what strategies to deploy.

How does this work in practice?

We don't see ourselves as being an external crutch to our clients, though we are on stand-by and ready to help if necessary. Rather we want to provide them with the tools to anticipate and be prepared to do it themselves. Given the nature of many of our clients, which are large corporations such as oil and gas companies, airlines, and so on, this fits in with the way that they work too.

One thing we always concentrate on is integrating the various risk management and business continuity parts of these large organisations so that they function together. I can't tell you the number of times where I've seen that crisis management plans have never been read by the business continuity professionals and vice versa.

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