How to follow true north in your crisis response

Mercer's Future of Work Thinkers Board crisis response decision-making tool

The Future of Work Thinkers Board is a global, diverse and non-governing assembly of business leaders, academics and innovative thinkers. Dedicated to inspiring the future of work, the board aims to reimagine the workplace, promote access to good work and foster economic growth, paving the way for a brighter future for a wider audience.

Crisis response decision-making tool

The following tool outlines several key actions and focus areas from our collective wisdom. The goal is to support your crisis response efforts through more effective and nuanced planning, communications and actions.

Types of issues in scope

Note that these examples are necessarily broad to cover the full range of potential issues. For example, human rights violations might include discrimination, assault and human trafficking.

Dis/misinformation
Deepfakes
Libel
Slander

Environmental
Climate change
Extreme weather
Infrastructure

Financial
Economics
Performance
Poverty

Geopolitical
International terrorism
Sanctions and tariffs
War

Ideological
Religion
Values
Worldviews

Operational
Business interruption
Labor unions
Supply chain issues

Political
Elections
Legislation
Public policy

Reputational
Bad press
Scandal
Social media

Societal
Civil unrest
Domestic terrorism
Human rights violations

Well-being
Illness
Injury
Work-related incidents

Continuous listening feeds

When collecting and analyzing data from a range of different channels, prioritize the most important insights for a given situation — and accelerate plans to use AI in your always-on listening channels. At a minimum, determine the top three feeds to monitor (which will vary from issue to issue), and ensure that all voices (whether bold or soft-spoken) are heard. Options include:

- BRGs/ERGs

- Capital market movements

- Customer sentiment analyses

- Response to internal communications/surveys

- News and social media coverage

- Public policy

- Supplier networks

- Trade press coverage

- Word of mouth

- AI-driven personas
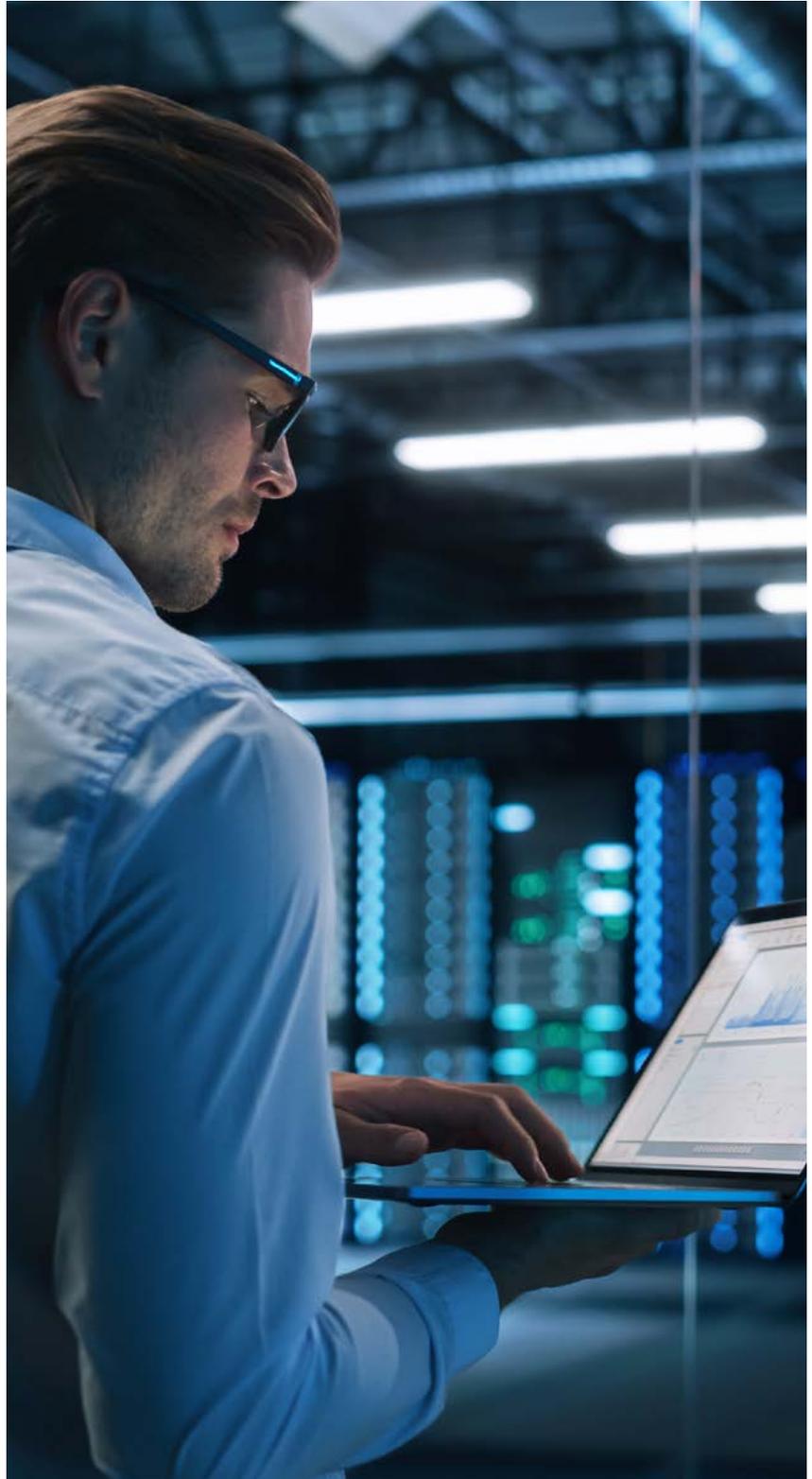
Decision-making assessment

As issues arise, it's important to make early decisions on whether and how to respond. This includes testing responses for potential reactions from various groups. The following considerations can help inform these decisions.

| | **Contacts**
Who can share related insights from each group? | **Rate the impact: (0) None/no extent, (1)Little extent, (2) Moderate extent, (3) High extent** | | | |
		Perceived relevance To what extent does each group care about this issue or event?	**Negative impact** To what extent might this issue or event harm each group?	**Potential backlash** To what extent might our response conflict with each group's interests	**Group total** 0–3 = low 4–6 = moderate 7–9 = high
The organization *(brand, culture, objectives, performance and values)*					
Investors					
Shareholders					
Executives					
Managers					
Direct employees					
Customers					
Contractors					
Partners					
Suppliers					
Public officials					
Local communities					
General public					

Action

Below are some suggestions on how to operationalize the decisions you make, with additional considerations for how to align behaviors with stated intent.

	Act now	Act soon	Refrain	Monitor
Criteria	Crises with high business and stakeholder impact potential, where doing nothing is riskier than taking action — and/or when the nature of the issue demands an urgent response	Issues with moderate-to-high impact and relevance that merit a timely and measured response once the team and key stakeholders are fully prepared to do so	Issues with limited business and stakeholder impact, regardless of public attention — or issues for which the risk of amplification could outweigh the risk of not responding	Issues with little-to-moderate business and stakeholder impact that could spill into other areas with higher impact and/or increase in severity over time
Example	**Example:** The Russian military's invasion of Ukraine and the impact on employees and citizens	**Example:** Public health mandates amid the COVID-19 outbreak	**Example:** Reproductive rights for certain religious institutions	**Example:** A regional issue or event (such as George Floyd's murder in the US) that could potentially trigger a broader response
Consideration	• What is the likelihood of fatalities, serious injuries, or urgent physical threats to employees or customers? • Which groups will not agree with acting on this issue, and how might we respond to their position? • What are the logistical, financial and process-related issues that could impact response efficiency, and how can we mitigate them?	• What needs to be in play before issuing a public response to ensure that agreed-upon actions happen in a timely manner? • How well positioned are we to execute on the follow-up plan: dismissals, removal of business entities, extraction plans, etc. • Who needs to be informed and engaged prior to issuing any response? Who will be accountable for taking the response action? • What can be gleaned from monitoring competitors' and industry leaders' responses? Is there an opportunity for collaboration and an consortium response?	• How are our primary competitors and other industry bodies responding to this situation? • Which groups might need to be informed of this decision? With whom should we not engage? • How should we respond if there is an unsanctioned response?	• What are the various lenses, contexts and nuances that should be considered? • Who will monitor the agreed-upon triggers, and to whom will any new developments be communicated? • How might various stakeholder groups react, and how can we be prepared with a response? • What scenarios would require reevaluation?
Next steps	C-suite, legal and PR develop an empathetic initial response, with more info to follow. Set up a rapid response team, a tight communication cascade, and daily meetings to execute plans and monitor impact. Consider partnering with other organizations facing similar issues.	Executives and PR craft a strategic response informed by social/employee listening and BRG input. Legal/logistics/compliance/HR and other partners are poised to take action.	Not applicable	Monitor the situation, and define what conditions should trigger an action or reassessment.
Timing	Within 8 hours	2–10 business days	Not applicable	Ongoing
Dealbreaker tip	Ensure daily communications between monitoring, deployment and response teams	Ensure there is a clear, defensible reason for a delayed response and that this is effectively communicated to all stakeholders	Ensure there is a clear rationale as to why the company won't be engaging with or responding to a certain issue.	Ensure that all executives and board members are aware of the decision and its rationale.