

## C-SUITE

By CLAIRE BROOKS



**BUSINESS EXECUTIVES** learn of marketing strategy formation in Business School. Fortune 500 corporations impose rigorous annual marketing strategy planning processes. Yet in a VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity) world, markets are now moving too fast for traditional models of strategy planning and market research. In a fast-paced environment, Fortune 500 global corporations increasingly use flexible, dynamic marketing strategy formation to cope with market disruption and the consumer's hunger for change and innovation.

My consultancy recently worked with a giant global technology company that had launched an innovative AI-driven consumer device, which had far exceeded their market expectations. Long before the start of the annual planning process, the marketing, product, insights and ad agency stakeholders needed to adapt marketing strategy fast, to leverage their success and defend their brand against upcoming competitive launches. The core strategy team made important refinements to marketing strategy in less than three weeks, using a three-step process called the Strategic Empathy® Process, to uncover deep insights about the brand's emotional connection with consumers and rapidly activate insights into positioning and communications strategy.

Henry Mintzberg of the McGill University faculty of management first demonstrated that the strategic planning processes of major corporations ignore that strategy formation is not a deliberate, planned approach, but is adaptive. In many successful Fortune 500 corporations, forward strategic planning has been replaced by strategic learning, which is an ongoing process of shifting strategy based on

organizational learning. Marketing strategy is now often adapted on-the-go through the actions of many different stakeholders (managers and employees in many business functions across the organization, for instance). In this new business environment, insights and strategy activities can no longer be owned by the C-Suite; every manager, perhaps even every employee, must become a strategist, and must develop strategic learning skills.

Corporations have more data than ever about their

consumers and customers, and advanced analytic platforms increasingly democratize data

analysis. However, while data confirms what is happening, it cannot nurture a rich, nuanced perspective on why consumers think, feel and behave as they do.

Deep consumer insight and intuitive understanding (empathy) is a pre-requisite of strategic learning. Empathy + Strategy Activation is what I call Strategic Empathy, which can be seen as a form of organizational "muscle memory", inspiring effective day-to-day marketing.

Strategic Empathy is not a fuzzy concept. Empathy without effective strategic action is not Strategic Empathy. The Strategic Empathy

process nurtures strategic learning through a rigorous process of stakeholder team-based deep insights development and rapid strategy activation. The third, crucial step in the process, requires socialization of strategic learning across the organization through strategic story-telling. In fact, entrepreneurs are Strategic Empathy naturals, having typically founded their businesses on deep insight and intuition for their customers. However, as their business grows, entrepreneurs must also invest in growing managers, perhaps even employees, into strategists who can develop and activate strategy adaptively, dynamically and effectively. ..marketing success. **BW**



Marketing strategy is now often adapted on the go

## Of Empathy and Strategy

*BW starts a column by global thought leaders on success in careers and at the workplace. Brooks is president of ModelPeople Inc., a global brand insights & strategy consultancy, and author of a new book, Marketing With Strategic Empathy: Inspiring Strategy With Deeper Consumer Insight*