CASE STUDY | Creation

02

A brand-powering leadership study

A global research report based on a proprietary new model for wise decision-making positions a leadership services firm at the forefront of the field.



For the past decade, trust in leadership has been fragile. Yet leaders are struggling to meet multiple, often conflicting, demands.

A global leadership services firm saw a powerful case for a shift in the mindset of leaders and the way they approached real-world decisions

Task

It was time for a structured diagnosis of what was going wrong in the world of leadership.

The output must help leaders (and their organisations) identify avenues for improvement, whilst positioning the firm as a thought leader in the wise decision-making arena.

But the subject was fluffy and lacked a clean definition that would make sense to business leaders. Significant work lay ahead to clarify and crystallise wise decision-making in a way that was compelling and actionable.

A new definition and model were needed, backed by data from a global population of active business leaders. And so the research project was launched.



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Action

Terminology-setting

An internal project team was installed. It included two global board members, (from Europe and Asia) and a leadership assessment specialist with a Harvard doctorate in human development and psychology. A Professor of corporate governance and responsible leadership was welcomed to the team.

The team created a new working definition for wise leadership. This summarised the shift needed: from 'accomplished' (commercial) to 'smart', (reasonable) to 'wise' (responsible). This definition provided a robust framework to guide the whole project.

3 Building the business case

The team found clear evidence in existing research that indicators related to wise decision-making had a measurable impact on corporate performance.

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Understanding the terrain

A comprensive literature scan was now conducted: assembling and analysing current thinking in the domain (academic and business) and identifying the gaps that needed further exploration.

5 Building a guiding model

The team built a new model for wise decision-making. This covered factors within the leader's own scope of control. 9 categories expressed the attitudes and behaviors they should work on to 'step up' to sustainable business performance. These were organised into 3 pillars: 'self leadership', 'motivational drivers' and 'hygienes' (ways to keep one's decision-making engine healthy).

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From model to study

Following the model, a 109-item questionnaire was designed for rollout to a global sample of business leaders. Their answers would help the firm to build a 'leadership assessment' on the current state of decision-making.



7 Engaging internal stakeholders

An internal communications drive was conducted to mobilise the firm's Partners across the globe. They learnt about the new model, the moral and business case for wise decision-making, and how they could support the project. The invitation was enthusiastically received and the study was now ready for lift-off.

Ensuring relevance & reach

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After a pitch process an award-winning PR firm was engaged to garner press exposure to a business audience. The firm drew up a media plan and provided media training to spokespeople.

9 Collecting data

The questionnaire was engineered online by an ISO-certified research firm. A full toolkit was provided to support the firm's Partners in recruiting study participants from their senior network, and following up to those who responded.

O Analysing, insights and conclusions

363 senior executives from all world regions responded. Their answers revealed serious gaps between their desire to make wiser decisions, and their current ability. It also surfaced the blockages (personal and organisational) that stood in their way. It was clear that the work was resonating strongly in the market.

Report-writing & design

The report presented the model and the study findings. It shone a light on avenues for leaders to focus on, and contained a set of 'leading questions' for individual executives, organisational strategists, talent strategists and process designers.

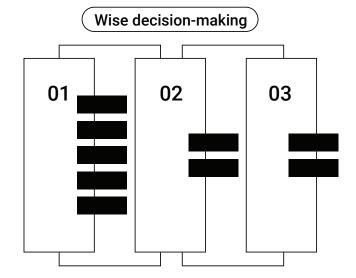
Creating output

The report was showcased in a range of formats: the classic executive summary and full report in pdf, a PowerPoint presentation, a press pack and a video. This featured the firm's CEO, the contributing professor and selected partners from across the world.

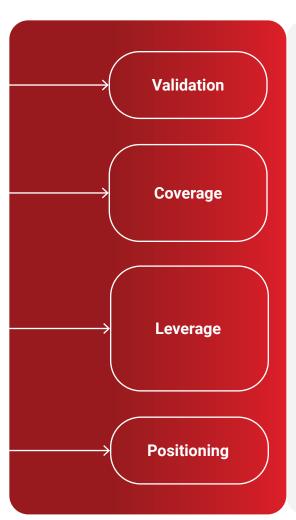
13 Distribution

The report was successfully rolled out at global and local levels in a multi-channel strategy*. This embraced digital platforms, press, print, one-on-one distribution and live client events (several involving external thought leaders).

*A full toolkit was provided for local firms.



Results



Survey participants said that completing the survey had raised their self-awareness and understanding of wise decision-making.

Extensive media coverage was achieved at global and local levels, surpassing targets.

There was a significant lift in web traffic and social media followership.

The philosophy, model and items were integrated into subsequent research projects for the firm, creating a 'golden thread' in thinking and messaging.

In addition, 15 spin-off articles were produced, with a major impact on social media followership and engagement.

The work positioned the global firm as a unique thought leader in a strategically-relevant domain, and contributed to the re-definition of its mission.