Future of Reputation 2030

A global blueprint for leaders shaping reputation in the next five years

senate shj

About this report

In a world where trust is tested daily, this report provides the clarity and foresight that communication, corporate affairs, and reputation and risk leaders need to plan and stay ahead.

This report was prepared by SenateSHJ as part of our Future of Reputation 2030 initiative, it offers a practical roadmap for those responsible for building, protecting and restoring reputation in an era of volatility.

Drawing on 44 in-depth interviews with global experts in corporate reputation, communications, public affairs, and risk management, this report reveals how the foundations of reputation are shifting – what builds it, what breaks it and what will define credibility as we approach 2030. A full list of interviewees is available at the back of this report.

Leaders from across Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Europe, Asia, Africa, the United States and South America were generous in sharing lessons and observations from their personal experiences in managing trust through complex and uncertain times.

The report synthesises global expertise with actionable insights to help you navigate and lead through the next era of trust and reputation.

Executive Summary

Reputation is not solely about communication, nor is it the sole domain of communication leaders. Rather, it is built through accountability, behaviour, and system design.

A consistent message from the 44 global experts who were interviewed for this paper is that in a decade defined by transparency, activism and technological acceleration, the foundations for trust and reputation must be built through action – not assumed or declared.

Organisations that succeed by 2030 will embed integrity into how they operate. They will measure it, govern it and prove it consistently, especially when under pressure. Reputation is now a performance indicator of ethical strength and operational discipline around a business's strategy and its values or purpose.

Eight themes emerged from the interviews:

1. **Global reputation risk landscape: navigating an age of uncertainty** – Geopolitics, misinformation, polarisation, cyber exposure, climate change, wealth disparity and social activism are converging to redefine what legitimacy means for businesses.
2. **Trust and accountability: the currency of credible reputation** – Trust is earned through verifiable behaviour and evidence that inform an organisation's narrative.
3. **Leadership, culture and behaviour: the human architecture of trust** – Reputation begins inside the organisation; leadership conduct shapes external perception.
4. **Stakeholder complexity and polarisation: coherence as the new leadership currency** – Fractured publics demand coherence, empathy and the ability to manage contradictions without losing identity.
5. **Technology and AI: sentinel and saboteur** – AI enhances listening and foresight but introduces new ethical and reputational vulnerabilities.
6. **Measurement, data and governance: the metrics of modern reputation management** – Reputation must be quantified and governed like any other performance domain, with clear ownership at the board and executive levels.
7. **Crisis, recovery and humility: the hard road back** – Credibility and trust depend less on avoiding mistakes than on how transparently and humanely they are addressed in the moment.
8. **Purpose and values alignment: reputation's moral compass** – Purpose is credible only when it is consistently manifest in decisions, trade-offs and relationships.

Reputation resilience is now a strategic competency – the foundation of trust, a licence to operate and the creator of long-term value. As this shift accelerates, the corporate affairs function has taken on increased strategic importance as the arbiter of organisational behaviour and culture – reaching far beyond communication alone. As Helio Fred Garcia, Adjunct Professor of Industrial Engineering and Operations Research at Columbia Engineering, observed, *"Reputation isn't about being liked. It's about being believed – consistently, and for the right reasons."*

The head of corporate affairs will become the interpreter and guardian of trust within the organisation – ensuring alignment between what leaders promise and what the company delivers.

Turning insights into action

The eight themes in this report show what is reshaping reputation, but insight alone is not enough. For reputation and corporate affairs leaders, the question is how to respond and adapt.

To help organisations move from observation to implementation, SenateSHJ has applied its 5SL Framework – a practical architecture for embedding trust into organisational design, governance and behaviour – as the blueprint for building reputation resilience.

5SL discipline	What it enables
Shared principles	Clarify and codify the values that guide every decision.
Story	Align narrative with verified evidence of progress and behaviour.
Skills	Build multidisciplinary capability in data, ethics and empathy.
Support and structure	Embed reputation into governance and strategic decision making.
Systems	Create feedback loops that translate listening into visible action.
Leadership and rigour	Ensure leaders model credibility under pressure and reinforce integrity through example.

Together, these six disciplines form a system of trust – turning integrity from aspiration into capability. The 5SL Framework reappears later in this report as a detailed guide for boards, executives and corporate affairs leaders who are seeking to make reputation a managed performance discipline.

Theme 1 – The global reputation risk landscape: navigating an age of uncertainty

The next decade will redefine the boundaries of corporate legitimacy as geopolitics, technology, misinformation and societal distrust converge.

Risks to reputation are becoming increasingly complex. From geopolitical instability to polarised public sentiment and from AI disruption to ESG backlash – all of which can be fuelled by mis- and disinformation – leaders are navigating a *"multi-speed, multi-reality"* environment where what builds reputation in one region can damage it in another.

Climate volatility, data ethics and inequality are universal triggers of reputational tension. Each demands cross-functional coordination – communication alone cannot manage systemic exposure. In fact, if communication is tone-deaf, it can cannibalise reputation.

A borderless risk environment

Victoria Cross, Partner in Corporate Sustainability and Climate Change at ERM, captured this reality succinctly: *"The chaos of geopolitics now poses a massive reputational risk. What might be appropriate in North America just now is likely to be different to what's appropriate in, say, China. We're so interconnected that those ripple effects are felt instantly – you get it right in one jurisdiction, but it's wrong in another."*

Her point reflects the fundamental shift that reputation management is now global by default. Victoria warned that organisations face dual threats: the speed of information flow and the asymmetry of cultural norms.

"AI regulation isn't keeping up", she said. *"Companies need clear statements of intent – how they use machine learning and where they draw ethical lines."*

For global corporations, reputation risk no longer resides solely in headlines or share prices – it resides in how local audiences interpret global actions. Karine Lohitnavy, Master Connector and Founder of Midas-PR, added a deep cultural and technology overlay to this: *"Reputation risk today is largely digital. Technology amplifies impact and harm, so issues travel faster than organisations can control. In such an environment, purpose doesn't need to be loud to be powerful – especially in Asian markets, people remember humility, consistency and ethical leadership long after the campaign ends."*

Polarisation and the erosion of neutrality

Several experts noted that geopolitical tensions and the weaponisation of information are reshaping stakeholder expectations. Neutrality is no longer neutral; silence is often interpreted as complicity. Companies operating across markets must anticipate how local politics refract global brand values.

As Paola Vallejo, Founding Partner of Comunicandes, said, *"Something that earns praise in one country can cause outrage in another – you can't copy-paste reputation strategy."*

Emmanuel Goedseels, Partner at Whyte Corporate Affairs, observed that social media and political fragmentation have turned neutrality into a near-impossible stance: *"We live in a world that sees things in black and white. Being overly cautious is no longer an option for companies. There is no neutral ground anymore – you are required to take a stand, either in favour or against."*

Emmanuel described how stakeholder expectations now demand visible positions on social, political and moral issues. Yet those same declarations often divide rather than unite audiences: *"That's the danger for reputation; the world should be seen like a diamond, with many facets – but many insist on seeing only two."*

The implication is clear: leaders must learn to communicate across ideological lines without alienating one side or appearing insincere to the other.

Geopolitical and shareholder pressures

Dirk Aarts, CEO and Founding Partner at 24/7Communication, speaking from Poland, offered a visceral example of geopolitics reshaping corporate reputation. He explained that in politically charged environments, global companies face a no-win situation – every stance can alienate someone. He recounted how multinationals operating in Russia and Poland faced intense reputational backlash when their reactions to the Ukraine invasion were perceived as too slow. *"It's not the incident itself,"* he said, *"it's how the company reacts that causes the damage."*

Dirk also highlighted a new layer of risk: shareholder activism. *"The power is where the money is. Shareholders now have immense influence, and that power will increasingly define companies, employees and customers."* His point reflects a growing tension between investor expectations, moral leadership and operational pragmatism – a triangle that global reputation managers must constantly balance.

Technology, trust and the future of control

For Lori Turner, Chief Marketing Officer at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona, it's all about preparedness: *"The speed at which correct and incorrect information spreads is accelerating. Since there's no way to keep up, we'll have to inoculate ourselves ahead of time – have the answer before the scandal starts."*

Tony Langham, Co-founder and Executive Chair at Lansons, warned that the accelerating power of big tech poses a systemic threat to corporate independence and reputation: *"Almost all consumer business in the world now depends on the platforms – Amazon, Meta, Google. They know every customer and control every interaction. The real risk is that business becomes dependent on systems it can't control."*

Tony predicted that governments may eventually need to regulate or even dismantle dominant digital ecosystems to preserve competition and trust. Until then, reputation leaders must operate within what he called *"fields owned by others"*, where visibility and vulnerability are inseparable.

The misinformation tsunami

Across the interviews, misinformation emerged as one of the most urgent and destabilising forces shaping corporate reputation to 2030. Leaders consistently described it as *"a reputational accelerant"* – an issue that can distort truth faster than organisations can correct it. Several interviewees highlighted that the traditional communications playbook is no longer adequate when falsehoods can go viral in minutes and are amplified by algorithms designed for outrage, not accuracy.

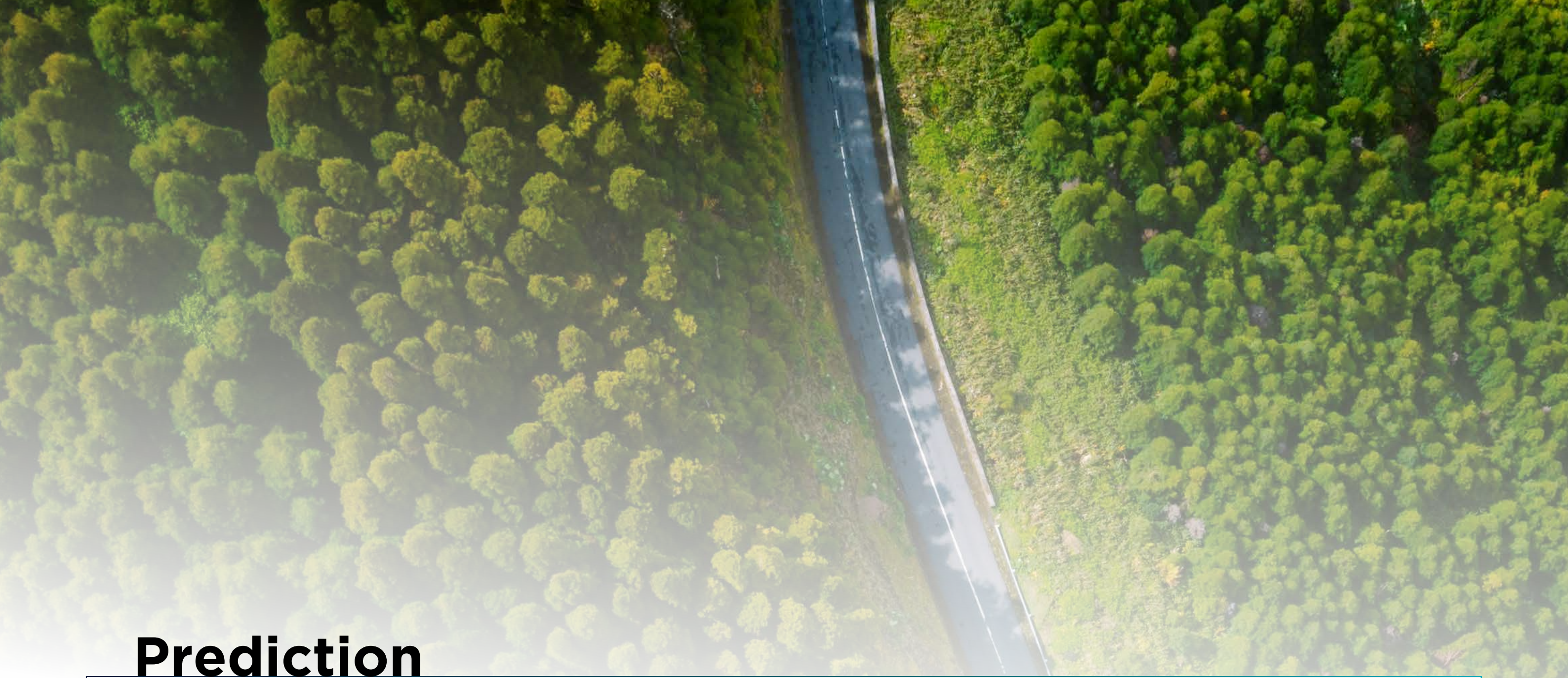
The consensus is that misinformation now represents a systemic risk, not merely a communications challenge. It erodes institutional trust, fuels polarisation and can move markets before facts have a chance to surface. As Sandra MacLeod, Group CEO at Echo Research, said, *"The contagion of misinformation travels faster than truth, and reputation damage happens long before correction. You need credibility embedded in every channel before you need to defend it."*

The sense of vulnerability is particularly acute given the rise of AI-generated content, deepfakes and synthetic media. Corporate affairs leaders argued that the line between reality and fabrication is blurring and that organisations must build technological capacity and cultural readiness to respond.

Several practitioners warned that fighting misinformation requires a shift from reactive crisis management to proactive signal intelligence – combining media monitoring, stakeholder listening and credible, transparent communication. A few also underscored that silence is no longer neutral; in a contested information environment, inaction can look like guilt. Several forward-looking interviewees framed the challenge as one of maintaining 'trust at speed': building the systems, credibility and leadership discipline to ensure truth can travel as fast as falsehood. Scott Sayres, Head of Reputation and Issues Management at Jackson Spalding, was particularly strong on this topic. For him, the only solution is what he calls *"fact fighting"*, and he was unequivocal in his response to this: *"It's never been easier to torpedo a company with half-truths and lies. Fact fighting needs to become the biggest part of corporate reputation management. Yet too many companies are reactive, assuming the truth will surface on its own."*

His view is that *"fact fighting"* must become the biggest part of reputation management. And he had a chilling warning: *"Deepfakes are next. Imagine a fabricated video tanking your share price overnight."*

For Richard Tsang, Chairman and Managing Director at Strategic Public Relations Group, misinformation isn't just a crisis; it's an ecosystem: *"If you're not part of shaping the narrative early, someone else will, and you'll spend years undoing a false version of yourself."*



Prediction

By 2030, reputation management will be global by design and guided by purpose.

In a world that is increasingly interconnected and instantaneous, purpose and values will serve as the stabilising compass for organisations that are navigating complexity. Every decision will be made on a global stage where cultural, political and technological forces collide – and where misalignment between words and action is amplified in real time.

Corporate affairs and risk leaders will act as navigators of complexity, integrating geopolitics, technology and stakeholder sentiment into a unified reputation system. Purpose and values will anchor this system – translating organisational intent into behaviour that is credible across borders, beliefs and algorithms.

The most resilient organisations will build borderless reputations that are consistent in principles, flexible and agile in execution and trusted because they lead with integrity.

Reputation resilience will depend on systems thinking: the ability to map interconnected risks, build trust across supply chains and stakeholder ecosystems, and communicate with credibility under pressure. The organisations that survive will be those that combine technical preparedness with ethical coherence.

By 2030, credibility will belong to those who use purpose as their navigational aid – not to control the world's noise, but to understand and act confidently within it.

For leaders to act

1. Integrate reputation intelligence systems that track geopolitical, cultural and digital risks across markets.
2. Build local coherence plans – apply global values consistently but with cultural nuance.
3. Include geopolitical scenario planning and 'misinformation war games' in annual risk reviews.
4. Define red lines for values that the organisation will not compromise on, regardless of region or pressure.

Theme 2 – Trust and accountability: the currency of credible reputation

Trust is no longer a promise; it is a performance continuously verified by stakeholders.

Trust and reputation – the inseparable equation

It's no surprise that there was a powerful consensus that trust and reputation are inseparable. Each shapes and sustains the other in a continuous loop of perception, experience and expectation. As Trevor Young, PR and content strategist and coach, put it *"You can't have a strong positive reputation without trust underpinning it."* Trust is not simply an ingredient of reputation – it is its foundation, its outcome and its test. Alan Chumley, Senior Vice President SignalAI believes that *"Trust drives reputation. It's the micro to reputation's macro."*

Trust as the foundation of reputation

Many participants described trust as the invisible architecture that supports reputation. Victoria Cross observed that *"Reputation is won or lost on trust."* Without trust, an organisation's claims of purpose, culture or leadership ring hollow. And without a living purpose, culture or values, trust is elusive. Reputation, the experts argued, is the external reflection of the internal trustworthiness of an organisation – how reliably it aligns its stated values with its actions and behaviour.

Several participants, including Lida Citroën, Reputation Management Expert at LIDA360, framed trust as an equation, *"trust equals values plus action."* In her words, trust begins with understanding what you stand for and then living those values visibly and consistently. Only then can credibility take root. For Lida and many others, reputation is the echo of trust – a collective judgement formed when values and behaviours are seen to be lived, not simply declared. Lida refers to this as *"principled consistency."*

As she puts it, *"Authenticity isn't saying whatever you think – it's saying what you believe and then standing by it when it's inconvenient."*

Reputation as the evidence of trust

While trust is built through behaviour, reputation represents the social evidence of that trust. It is what others believe, recall and repeat. Gary Davies, Professor of Strategy at Manchester Business School, neatly captured this interplay when he described trust as *"useful shorthand for reputation."* In other words, when people say they trust a brand, leader or institution, they are expressing confidence that has been earned over time through consistent, credible behaviour.

Oliver Freedman, EVP Enterprise Customer Accounts at The RepTrak Company (APAC/EMEA), who has been researching and analysing trust and reputation for decades, believes that *"Trust is a component of reputation."*

Several experts also noted the directional difference between the two: reputation often looks backward and is shaped by experience and memory, while trust looks forward and represents a willingness to believe that an organisation will continue to behave honourably. As Will Hetherton, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer at Future Fund, reflected, *"… reputation is based on experience and perception. Trust is almost forward-looking – it's what we believe that organisation will do in the future."*

Sandra MacLeod echoed similar sentiments: *"Trust is the end product of reputation – reputation is what you have proved yourself to be; trust is what we expect of you going forward."*

Elliot Schreiber, Consultant Board of Directors and Leaders and Author of The Yin and Yang of Reputation Management, defines the structural nature of reputation and how it bridges performance, perception and expectation: *"Reputation is the outcome of alignment between what you say, what you do and what stakeholders expect. The gap between those three is where trust is lost."*

The fragility of trust in a transparent world

In an era that's defined by scrutiny and hyper-connectivity, the experts agreed that trust has become more valuable and, at the same time, more vulnerable. Peter Heneghan, Founder of Albie.ai – a communications and AI advisory – described it as *"the superpower of our time – easily lost, rarely regained."* Social media, misinformation and politicised public debate have heightened stakeholder sensitivity and reduced tolerance for inconsistency. Audiences now demand that trust is demonstrated through action, not merely asserted in statements or campaigns.

Yet, trust's fragility also holds opportunity. Victoria Cross observed from her crisis management experience that *"trust, once undermined, can be rebuilt – even strengthened – if organisations show competence, control and accountability in their response."*

In other words, trust is not a quality we have no control over, and during a crisis, the way leaders handle adversity can influence trust more powerfully than the event itself.

Trust is leadership capital

Many interviewees positioned trust not as a communication issue but as a strategic leadership asset. It is earned through fairness, transparency and consistent decision making – not slogans. As Rod Cartwright, founder of Rod Cartwright Consulting, and others, noted, the real challenge lies in the difference between trust and trustworthiness. The latter depends on governance, ethics and behaviour – dimensions that cannot be manufactured or spun. The head of corporate affairs, therefore, becomes the interpreter and guardian of trust within the organisation – ensuring alignment between what leaders promise and what the company delivers.

Over the past couple of decades, trust has shifted from sentiment to system. The dynamic shift from organisations controlling their messages through the media to the dispersed nature of social media has meant that where reputation was once disproportionately managed through messaging, it is now earned through design; that is, the structures that make integrity observable. Interviewees described a decisive cultural turn: the public, regulators and investors no longer extend faith based on values statements but on evidence. *"People expect transparency as the default. If you're not showing them how decisions are made, they assume something's being hidden"*, said Paola Vallejo.

This expectation has forced boards to professionalise how they demonstrate integrity and credibility. Independent verification, transparent decision trails and public reporting are now the minimum standard of credibility and, increasingly, compliance.

Stephen Thomas, Partner at The Civic Partnership, believes it hinges on *"the company having clarity on what it wants to stand for … and an authentic and compelling narrative."*

Jason Laird, Executive Corporate Affairs at National Australia Bank, said that, *"Reputation is built in the decisions you make when it's inconvenient. Culture isn't what you say on stage; it's what people see in the hallway."*

There is a shift in how reputation is earned and judged because society no longer automatically trusts, respects or accepts authority. Stakeholders – from employees to investors – assume organisations will act in their own self-interest unless shown otherwise. Accountability has become the new language of trust. Companies that can 'show their workings' earn a reputation premium; those that don't, invite scepticism even when their intentions are good.

Action, perception and expectation

Ultimately, the relationship between trust and reputation is circular and self-reinforcing. Trust shapes perception; perception builds reputation; and reputation, in turn, influences future trust. But the loop only strengthens when leaders act with integrity and consistency across every stakeholder touchpoint. As Rod Cartwright put it: *"Trust is an end state achieved by being trustworthy. And the way that you are trustworthy is by focusing on your relationships – actively focusing on them – not just your reputation."*

Inconsistent behaviour – between words and deeds or between audiences – remains the greatest risk to both trust and reputation. Elliot Schreiber summed it up: *"Trust is not a value – it's a verdict. It's the judgement stakeholders make when they see consistency over time."*

In an age where scrutiny is constant and belief is optional, the experts agreed that trustworthy behaviours are the true currency of reputation. Helio Fred Garcia concluded that *"You can't buy reputation – you have to behave your way into it."*

And Richard Tsang went a step further: *"Transparency comes very top in the list … in the past you could say 'trust me'; now you must show it with facts."*

Reputation is multifaceted

For Rupert Hugh-Jones, Government and Corporate Affairs Specialist, there are two types of reputation at play: *"Functional reputation is what you earn through what you do; observational reputation is what the world sees. The danger comes when companies start managing the observation rather than the function."*

In Rupert's experience, too many companies obsess over observational reputation: *"They obsess over how they can curate perception rather than improving reality."* Instead, he believes that reputation should be built from functional truth; that is, operational integrity, consistency and competence that make perception self-evident rather than manufactured. For Rupert, the future of reputation management should focus on closing the gap between performance and perception because *"When that gap widens, credibility collapses. True resilience comes from embedding reputation into the way organisations function – not from how they narrate themselves."*

Peter M. Sandman, Risk Communication Speaker and Consultant, had an interesting take on good versus bad reputations. He says that they are *"… independent dimensions, not opposing sides of the same dimension. For many companies, much of the time, I think bad reputation should matter more than good reputation; reducing your critics' opposition is often more conducive to profitability than augmenting your supporters' enthusiasm."*

Prediction

By 2030, accountability for trust will be embedded not only in ESG and executive performance frameworks but also in culture, data and daily decision making. Across the expert interviews, there were differing interpretations of trust and reputation, yet all agreed that they are critical drivers of organisational success and that both ultimately depend on actions, not words, and the alignment of culture and behaviour with stated values. The organisations that treat reputation verification as continuous – measured through behaviour, transparency and stakeholder confidence – will set the benchmark for sustainable trust.

Boards that hardwire ethical leadership, AI transparency and stakeholder validation into governance will define the new gold standard for reputation integrity.

However, they should also heed Rupert Hugh Jones's point about reputation: *"It's a very emotional concept – we keep trying to give it scientific underpinnings, but it's closer to psychology than mathematics."*

For leaders to act

1. If you don't already have them, embed trust metrics into executive scorecards and performance reviews.
2. Conduct annual trust audits, assessing alignment between values, behaviour and stakeholder perceptions and expectations.
3. Introduce independent integrity verification through external reviews of governance, decision trails and transparency practices.
4. Require every major board decision to include an ethical impact statement that explains how the decision aligns with organisational values and principles.

Theme 3 – Leadership, culture and behaviour: the human architecture of trust

Reputation begins inside the organisation; leadership behaviour sets the tone for organisational culture and conduct.

If reputation is the external reflection of an organisation's trustworthiness, then leadership culture and behaviour are the internal mechanics that determine whether that reflection shines or shatters. Across the experts, one message was consistent: reputation begins within and is determined by how leaders think, decide and act. In Alan Chumley's experience, *"Reputation begins within – it starts with leadership and a culture where employees feel safe to speak up."* Alan is Senior Vice President at Signal AI.

Culture emerged as the single strongest internal determinant of reputation. The experts agreed that values and purpose statements mean little without visible reinforcement from leaders. Employees, they argued, are now seen as the expression of their organisation's integrity and trustworthiness. When they see hypocrisy, the external world hears it soon after. And purpose and values only matter when they show up in delivery – in the experience, reliability, quality and service a company provides every day. Stakeholders still judge reputation largely on whether an organisation consistently does what it says it will do. Jo Kinner, Founding Partner at Reputation Sherpa, made the point that *"Culture is foundational. You can't fake it externally if it's broken internally."*

Jason Laird views purpose as a behavioural constraint, a kind of moral threshold, not a branding device: *"Purpose is only powerful when it limits your choices. If it doesn't change how you act under pressure, it's just a slogan."*

For Anthony Larmon, Managing Director at Ruder Finn Era Southeast Asia, credibility is accumulated through small, consistent actions rather than broad declarations: *"Reputation starts with what leaders reward and what they tolerate. Culture isn't built in statements; it's built in moments of truth."* For Anthony, *"Behaviour is the most powerful form of communication."*

Gary Davies pointed out that leadership intent means little if daily culture undermines it: *"Culture is the invisible hand behind every reputation. You can't communicate your way out of a culture that contradicts your message."*

Corporate reputation risk frequently stems from internal structure, board leadership and culture. Reputation starts at the top with the board's agenda, its tone and its willingness to prioritise transparency and authenticity over cost and convenience. Many organisations pay lip service to culture, failing to embed values and behaviours consistently throughout the business. This results in a gap between what companies say and what they do – a recurring source of reputational damage. As Victoria Cross pointed out, *"Employees take their cues from leaders. If leaders cut corners, people assume that's acceptable."* Or as Paola Vallejo put it: *"Employees see everything first; they are the conscience of the brand."*

Culture as the mechanism of behaviour

Tony Jaques, Owner and Director at Issue Outcomes P/L, Consultant and Author of Crisis Counsel: Navigating Legal and Communication Conflict, expanded on this view, noting that culture functions as a risk control mechanism: *"Culture is the mechanism that minimises unthinking or unprepared behaviour."* He pointed to how reputations have been destroyed by the actions of those people who lacked guidance or ethical boundaries. Tony believes that leaders underestimate how everyday employee decisions – from a careless tweet to a customer interaction – can define the public's perception of the organisation. He stated that many leaders *"don't quite know what drives culture"* and that arrogance and ignorance at management levels perpetuate toxic behaviours. His insight was blunt: *"You cannot delegate culture – leadership must model it."*

Mike Abel, Executive Chairman and Founder of The Up&Up Group, suggested that culture is synonymous with brand reputation. He believes that internal behaviour shapes the external brand, connecting reputation directly to corporate character: *"Culture is the invisible campaign running inside every company. You can't brief your way to a good reputation; you must live one."*

The character of leadership

For Will Hetherton, leadership culture is inseparable from character: *"The culture of an organisation is shaped by its people and their behaviours, but it's owned by everyone"*, he said. He emphasised that culture fails when it becomes *"the CEO's culture and no one else's."* In his view, a strong reputation stems from clarity of purpose – knowing why the business exists and how it goes about its work. Misalignment between words and behaviour, he warned, leads to the "scrap heap" of crises we see across industries.

Emmanuel Goedseels echoed this, observing that *"Management holds reputation in its hands."* He argued that culture must be actively shaped by firm leadership, not left to drift. Companies falter, he said, when boards prioritise *"pure financial objectives"* – training leaders to chase quarterly results rather than sustainable behaviour. His view is that *"If the board gives financial KPIs alone, then you have asked your leadership team to behave that way while overlooking that reputation management can influence the P&L."*

Oliver Freedman from RepTrak believes that *"Leadership must straddle capability and character. You can't have a great reputation if leadership is failing on either. A leader cannot fail on either of those and still have a great reputation."*

Behaviour as strategy

Lida Citroën puts a human face to reputation. Her philosophy grounds corporate reputation in personal integrity. She argues that in the age of transparency, leaders themselves are brands of belief and that every action communicates intent. Her message to future leaders is that *"Reputation isn't built in a campaign; it's built in character."*

Basil Towers, Principal at Tie-Stone, reframed leadership behaviour as the essence of reputation strategy. He stated that *"Reputation is earned through decisions, actions and behaviour, not through communication."* He advised that businesses should spend *"80% of their reputation management effort on employees – how they act, how they behave and how they decide."* According to Towers, behaviour is not only a reputational risk factor but also the strongest form of reputation insurance.

Leadership as energy and meaning

Mignon van Halderen, Partner at the Reputatiegroep, approached leadership from a cultural-psychological angle. She described it as a process of shared meaning making. *"People need to feel they belong to a certain kind of story"*, she said. When leaders neglect this, organisations lose *"energy and alignment."* In her view, leadership culture isn't built on slogans or strategy decks, but through authentic human interaction and a shared sense of purpose. Without that, even strong reputations fragment.

Oliver Freedman summed it up this way: *"It's leadership conduct that determines perception – from the CEO to the front line."*

Behavioural risk and leadership exposure

Reputation resilience begins with leadership conduct, cultural alignment and accountability at the top. David McCarthy, Senior Counsellor and Strategic Advisor at Quinmacs Ltd (UK), directly addressed leadership behaviour, stakeholder expectations and the link between executive influence and reputation.

He explained that reputational risk often stems from how executive behaviour and decision-making shape organisational culture: *"As technology reliance increases, this stuff can sink companies completely. You've got to come back to basic principles: What drives your reputation? What do your stakeholders want to see? And how do you engage the rest of the organisation in that story?"*

He stressed that the executive committee's influence is pivotal, adding that reputation strength depends on whether leaders can connect strategy, behaviour and communication coherently across the organisation. *"Your influencing skills as a head of corporate affairs are vital because every touchpoint matters"*, he said.

For Rupert Hugh Jones, leadership behaviour is reputation risk in motion: *"Culture comes from the very top – culture drives behaviours. If it's the CEO's culture and no one else is bought into it, then you've got a problem. Behaviour at the top sets the tone for everything else."*

Human infrastructure and ethical compass

Rod Cartwright added a crisis perspective, arguing that most corporate crises stem not from external shocks but from internal *"behavioural and cultural failures."* He asserted that *"Softer cultural and behavioural factors sit at the top of the risk list, with leadership at the centre."* His warning was clear: companies overinvest in systems and underinvest in *"critical human infrastructure."* Reputations, he said, are safeguarded not by process but by people who are ethically and emotionally prepared to act under pressure. Ron Culp, Professional in Residence of the PR and Advertising Program (PRAD) at DePaul University and a doyen of reputation management, was quite singular in his assessment: *"Leadership must instil that you do nothing to risk the company's reputation."*

Gerry McCusker, Founder and Principal Adviser of The Drill Crisis Simulator, summarised what many others implied: *"Ethical behaviour, data awareness and crisis consequence management are the three pillars of future reputation management."* For him, leadership credibility will increasingly depend on the discipline to match ambition with accountability.

Sandra Macleod framed behaviour from a people risk perspective: *"Most crises are behavioural in nature. Our biggest above-ground risk is the people walking in and out of the company every day."*

Prediction

By 2030, reputation will be governed less by what leaders say and more by what their organisations repeatedly do. The future of corporate affairs will hinge on operational truth and a leadership team that treats communication as a mirror, not a megaphone.

To achieve this, reputation leadership will rest on behavioural governance through systems that embed ethics, empathy and accountability into every decision.

Leadership will no longer be judged by a crisis response or quarterly results but by the cultural footprint they leave behind. Reputation will be behaviour in motion – verified by conduct and care, and only then amplified through communication.

For leaders to act

1. Make leadership behaviour and culture alignment part of enterprise risk management and board oversight.
2. Establish a ‘Reputation Risk Radar’ dashboard combining employee sentiment, ethical reporting and behavioural risk indicators.
3. Define and train for moments of truth, focusing on how leaders act under pressure, not just what they say.
4. Incentivise integrity: link leadership bonuses to culture health and stakeholder trust indicators.

Theme 4 – Stakeholder complexity and polarisation: coherence as the new leadership currency

Reputation resilience depends on understanding a fractured, plural audience that no longer shares a common view of what drives trust.

Navigating the fractured landscape of reputation

The global experts who were interviewed for ‘The Future of Reputation 2030’ agree that the era of linear, one-message-fits-all communication is long over. In its place sits a fractured stakeholder environment that is defined by divergent expectations, ideological polarisation and competing truths.

As Richard Tsang said, *“Today you may be trusted by some stakeholders but opposed by others – the spectrum is wider than before.”*

Paul Stamsnijder, Founding Partner at Reputatiegroep, described the shift as a complete inversion of the traditional model: *“The orientation in building reputation has shifted from inside-out to outside-in. Where organisations once sought to control their message, they now must earn consent through dialogue.”* Paul called this the move from *“control to consent”*; that is, reputation no longer belongs solely to companies but to the networks of external stakeholders who can exert greater influence over a company’s reputation. He and others noted that this shift also requires organisations to move beyond listening and consultation and to work towards actively co-creating the future with their stakeholders far more than they have done previously.

As Peter Heneghan put it: *“We no longer communicate into audiences; we communicate into ecosystems. Every stakeholder is a broadcaster, and that changes the rules of trust.”* His central warning to leaders was this: *“You can’t out-spin an ecosystem; you can only out-behave it.”*

Kasper Ulf Nielsen, Co-Founder Reputation Institute/The RepTrak Company, argued that most companies still underestimate the importance and complexity of stakeholder engagement: *“They don’t look at reputation across stakeholder groups; they take a one-size-fits-all approach and blast out everything to everyone.”* He explained that the drivers of reputation differ sharply between audiences: *“Investors care about governance and performance; employees care about culture and fairness; consumers care about value and ethics. Organisations that fail to adapt to this complexity simply can’t handle the nuance,”* he warned.

Stephen Waddington, Director at Wadds Inc., added that *“We spend too much time listening and not enough time interpreting. The result is paralysis. You end up trying to please everyone and convincing no one.”*

Boards must help executives discern when to absorb pressure and when to assert principle. The new skill set is discerning signal from noise, as Sandra MacLeod put it: *“Listening – to communities, to employees, to critics – is a cultural competence many large organisations lose.”*

Context as a competitive advantage

Several experts stressed that in a world that is defined by polarisation and competing truths, context is no longer a background factor – it is the operating environment itself. Stakeholder expectations today are shaped by culture, identity, lived experience, social conditions, political climate and community sentiment. Organisations that misread this risk speaking into the void, fuelling backlash or unintentionally signalling indifference. Those that understand it are the ones that build trust quickly and credibly.

Understanding context means recognising that stakeholders don't interpret messages in isolation; they interpret them through the prism of their values, anxieties, histories and relationships. It requires more than scanning issues or tracking sentiment – it demands real situational and stakeholder awareness. As Alan Chumley put it: *"You have to map and close the linguistic gap between the language a corporation uses and the language its stakeholders use. Speak the language of the neighbourhood."* This includes knowing when to speak, when to act, when to stay silent and how different audiences will interpret each of those choices.

Organisations that map and understand this human terrain gain a decisive advantage. They can anticipate reactions, communicate with sensitivity, navigate contradictions and demonstrate empathy without compromising their values or identity. In an era when reading the room can be the difference between tactfully navigating an issue and provoking a hostile backlash against your brand, context becomes a strategic asset. Those who master it will win the reputation battle.

Polarisation and the politics of perception

The most urgent dimension of stakeholder complexity is ideological polarisation. Dirk Aarts captured this vividly: *"In every company now you have polarisation – people who are left wing, people who are right wing, people who are pro-LGBTQI+ or against. You must deal with that."*

Anthony Larmon reframes stakeholder engagement as an exercise in clarity and empathy rather than dominance: *"In a divided world, the role of communication isn't to win arguments; it's to build coherence. People may not agree with you, but they should always understand you."*

In an increasingly polarised environment, Karine Lohitnavy argues that coherence and empathy are no longer "soft" skills but core leadership capabilities. Drawing on her experience in Thailand, where reputation is legally protected and defamation carries civil and criminal consequences, she questions the idea that reputation is an asset a brand can own or fully control: *"Reputation doesn't sit on a balance sheet, it lives in people's minds. In a divided world, empathy and listening don't weaken your position – they strengthen your legitimacy by helping leaders stay coherent across very different stakeholder expectations."*

For Karine, reputation is shaped by behaviour over time rather than messaging alone: *"Reputation isn't owned by the brand, it's co-created by everyone who experiences it. Our role as communication professionals is to help organisations align words and actions consistently, so that trust can be built and sustained even in complex, polarised environments. Responsiveness, humility and empathy will be the true differentiators of trusted organisations in 2030."*

For Oliver Freedman, the risk lies in *"how the company handles opposing demands. When you over prioritise one group, you damage your reputation among the others."*

The view of Gary Davies is that coherence, not conformity, builds durable trust, which effectively moves the reputation challenge from one of agreement to one of clarity: *"You can't please everyone, but you can be understood by everyone."* For Gary, *"Coherence is the new consensus."* Basil Towers built on Gary's perspective: *"Reputation resilience is about coherence across difference. You don't need everyone to agree with you, but you do need them to believe you're consistent."*

Dustin Chick, Partner and Chief Executive at Razor Public Relations (The Up&Up Group), had a warning for those who choose what is seemingly the easy option – staying silent: *"Silence is interpreted in a very specific way now; saying nothing says a lot."* Mike Abel added his piece to this: *"In a polarised world, neutrality is the new provocation. If you stand for nothing, people will decide for you what you stand for."*

Information disorder and the erosion of trust

Misinformation and disinformation further complicate stakeholder management. Stephen Waddington noted that misinformation *"pollutes the dialogue between organisations and their publics."* He argued that fake narratives don't just distort facts: *"They corrode the very relationship infrastructure that reputation depends on. Geopolitics, disinformation and bad actors all challenge the equilibrium of relationships. They insert noise into what should be dialogue."*

Scott Sayres went a step further: *“It’s never been easier to torpedo a company with half-truths and lies.”* Scott is a strong advocate for combating this by what he calls *“fact fighting”*, something he believes companies do not take seriously enough.

We live in an environment where truth competes with emotion, and perception hardens faster than evidence. Mignon van Halderen underscored how this new complexity demands what she called a *“science of stakeholder management.*” She envisioned the use of technology and analytics to ensure leaders *“are right on top of every conceivable audience”*, warning that missing even one group can have serious consequences.

Geopolitical impact on reputation

Stephen Thomas pointed to how automation, layoffs and geopolitical tensions can quickly morph into moral and reputational crises if handled without sensitivity. *“Geopolitical happenings … have a big impact on reputation. They’re enormous”,* he said.

Prediction

The next decade will reward leaders who can navigate difference – not avoid it. By 2030, reputation management will rely on adaptive intelligence: systems that listen continuously, interpret sentiment dynamically and apply human interventions to turn tension into trust. The role of leadership will shift from controlling narratives to curating understanding across polarised audiences.

In a fragmented world, reputation will not be about silence or neutrality but about constructive engagement – knowing when to speak, when to listen, when to co-create and how to respond with empathy and evidence. The organisations that earn lasting credibility will be those that embrace stakeholder complexity as a reality and strategic opportunity, not a reputational threat.

Stakeholder complexity will demand interdisciplinary teams – blending behavioural science, policy, communication and data analytics – to anticipate how different publics will interpret decisions, behaviour, narratives and the actions of the business. In a fractured environment, the new currency of trust will be coherence – the ability to remain steady, humane and consistent with your values and purpose across conflicting expectations.

For leaders to act

1. Map stakeholder ecosystems – use AI to potentially do this in real time and identify polarised audiences, influencers and bridge builders. Don’t just map but analyse your network against your business strategy.

2. Train leaders in strategic empathy: listening that informs response, not reaction. This goes beyond emotional awareness – it’s about developing contextual intelligence, building bridges across divided groups, seeking dissenting perspectives and understanding the context. Strategic empathy gives leaders the judgement to pause, interpret and respond in ways that reinforce trust, coherence and credibility.

3. Replace one-way communication plans with coherent strategies that align with the business or strategic plans.

4. Simulate polarisation and misinformation scenarios quarterly to test readiness and message discipline.

Theme 5 – Technology and AI: sentinel and saboteur

AI is a guardian and amplifier of risk in reputation management.

Technology and AI are rewriting the rules of reputation management. Where reputation once relied on time, context and human interpretation, it now unfolds in real time – shaped by algorithms, automation and AI-driven amplification. The experts who were interviewed for 'The Future of Reputation 2030' believe that technology will be an accelerator and a stress test for corporate integrity. But this came with a warning from Oliver Freedman: *"AI could help analyse situations, but if it learns from biased inputs, it just becomes a mirror of a company's culture."*

The double-edged sword of technology

For Amy Binder, Founder and CEO at RF|Binder, technology has transformed the way organisations build and defend credibility, but not always for the better. She sees the digital environment as *"a world where misinformation spreads faster than truth."* In her view, reputations are now at the mercy of *"the wrong editorial impact"*, created by unfiltered social channels.

"Misinformation is a huge, huge issue", she warned. *"You listen to some of the media and think 'That's not the universe I'm living in'. Social media is an even bigger problem because rumours spread unchecked."*

Amy explained that the erosion of editorial oversight on digital platforms has created a trust vacuum: *"There's no curation, no accountability. Whatever anyone wants to say – true or false – it's out there."* She observed that major brands have already pulled back from certain platforms because *"you can end up with your ad next to something totally out of your value system."* Yet she also recognises the power of digital voice. Citing political movements and social causes, she said, *"You cannot win or influence public opinion anymore without social media. That's the danger and the opportunity."* Her message to communicators was clear: *"Master the medium, but don't lose your moral compass."*

Helio Fred Garcia offered a stark warning: *"AI can be a weapon that is used against a company in crisis"*. And for Sandra MacLeod, this means that corporate narrative accuracy is paramount: *"AI is changing how people form opinions – bypassing Google and reshaping information trust. Narrative accuracy will be critical."*

Automation meets accountability

Dirk Aarts framed AI as an inevitability – a tool that will shape every aspect of communication, decision making and perception. But he cautioned against ceding control: *"AI is unavoidable … but there must always be a human factor to judge what you're doing."*

He cited real-world failures – from algorithmic discrimination to automated financial risk systems – as evidence that reputational risk now lives inside technology itself. He warned that *"Automation without accountability is not efficiency; it's negligence."*

As organisations embrace AI, the role of corporate affairs will become even more important to ensure the right accountability and ethical systems are built in.

From data to decision

Chris Savage, Business Growth Specialist at The Savage Company, sees promise in what he calls *"data empathy."* As he put it, *"AI will have value in the measurement and understanding of data, but it must complement human capability, not replace it."* Future corporate affairs leaders, he believes, will need to pair machine-driven insights with instinct and context. AI can help organisations understand this in real time, but as Chris says, *"The intuitive, emotional side of communication can't be automated."*

Technology, ethics and authenticity

Mignon van Halderen took a more existential view, warning that AI risks dehumanising corporate character: *"If we talk about reputation as character, how do we make sure people still see real human beings behind the organisation?"* Mignon's call to leaders was to double down on visibility and empathy: *"Humanity has to be played up more and more because of AI."*

Stephen Waddington issued a stark warning: *"Our industry is either ignoring it or is incredibly optimistic about it and is overlooking the issues related to ethics and governance."*

Predicting perception

For Mark Hutcheon, Director at Deloitte UK, the integration of AI into reputation management is inevitable and potentially transformative: *"You could create an agent using generative AI that tracks public opinion in real time"*, he said, envisioning predictive tools that can *"read the room and make sense of chaos"*. But he underscored that judgement remains irreplaceable: *"AI might help you plan, but finding the position in the grey is still the human job."*

Trevor Young took it a step further: *"Everyone in a senior position is going to have an assistant – an AI agent – working on their behalf. Which means the importance of humanity, authenticity and openness will be even more important. We're never going to trust the machines as much as we trust people."*

Prediction:

By 2030, technology will have redefined reputation, but humans will decide its meaning. Reputation management will not be man or machine but man and machine: a partnership between artificial intelligence and human judgement.

AI will power predictive reputation systems – scanning risk, mapping sentiment and simulating stakeholder reactions in real time. Boards will expect integrated reputation analytics alongside financial dashboards. Data will sharpen foresight, but credibility will still depend on emotion, ethics and experience. The way AI is introduced and governed – and the degree to which organisations consider the human impacts of automation – will become a defining reputational test.

Companies that treat AI as purely operational will misread its societal consequences and undermine trust; those that deploy it with fairness, transparency and community awareness will strengthen their long-term social licence.

AI adoption will also force organisations to rewrite their 'corporate script'. Stakeholders will expect a narrative that goes beyond efficiency and productivity and reflects how AI supports inclusion, equity, accountability and community wellbeing. In this environment, early, genuine engagement with employees, unions, regulators and communities will become essential. Multinationals will need to align global principles with local expectations to avoid perceptions of inequity or indifference.

In a world where dialogue is digital and decisions are instant, the most trusted organisations will be those led by people who can interpret data with empathy and conscience and behave in line with an agreed and well-articulated set of values to which everyone subscribes and performs. Visible leadership, disciplined execution, and delivery against commitments will distinguish responsible innovators from those accused of opportunism – a lesson learned from previous industrial transitions in which communities were left behind.

Reputation leadership in 2030 will belong to those who know how to use the machine without becoming it.

For leaders to act

1. Create a cross-functional AI ethics and accountability council to oversee transparency, data bias and stakeholder communication.
2. Conduct tech/AI reputation risk reviews – assessing how automation aligns with your narrative and values, how it impacts risks and how it affects perceptions.
3. Require all AI deployment decisions to include a 'human-in-the-loop' accountability check.
4. Train communication and risk teams in 'data empathy' – interpreting machine insights through human context and ethics.

Theme 6 – Measurement, data and governance: the metrics of modern reputation management

Reputation can no longer rely on intuition; it must be quantified, governed and owned at the board and executive levels.

In an era that's defined by scrutiny and speed, the ability to measure reputation is rapidly moving from art to science. The experts interviewed for 'The Future of Reputation 2030' agree: numbers now matter as much as narrative. The challenge is not whether we can measure reputation – that is, the drivers, the outcomes as they relate to business strategy, the impacts of your actions on operational, strategic and corporate outcomes, etc. – but what we choose to measure and how that data shapes governance, trust and decision making. At the same time, Sandra MacLeod sounded a warning bell: *"Boards like numbers but very few genuinely manage reputation as an asset."*

Will Hetherton believes that the measurement of reputation is *"… about human experiences and perceptions across multiple stakeholders and it is dynamic. Focusing on a single number or metric doesn't make the best sense."* Will doesn't see the need to be overly scientific or exact: *"It's about being roughly right and using that to inform decision making rather than precisely wrong and missing the point. It's about how you draw together multiple contrasting insights and indicators and have the right process and mindset to interpret them usefully."*

Experts repeatedly emphasised that most organisations still manage reputation by instinct rather than by evidence. They warned that boards cannot distinguish between noise and genuine risk without meaningful metrics. Basil Towers framed reputation governance as a design challenge rather than a compliance function. For him, reputation governance is the architecture of modern trust: *"You can't govern reputation, but you can design for it. The frameworks you build, the voices you include and the behaviours you measure determine whether reputation emerges by default or by design."* This view was supported by David McCarthy: *"Reputation management without governance is theatre. The systems you build determine whether integrity is sustainable."*

Reputation is what people think, not what companies count

"You can measure reputation, but you have to start by agreeing on what it is", said Kasper Ulf Nielsen. For him, reputation exists *"inside the heads of people"*, not in media sentiment or social analytics. *"Too many companies think they're measuring reputation"*, he explained, *"but they're really measuring the indicators – the channels, the media coverage, the noise. Reputation is the perception people have of you, and you can only measure that by asking them."*

Lori Turner, Chief Marketing Officer at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona, backed this up: *"NPS bounces all over the place – satisfaction and verbatims tell you far more about brand strength."*

Kasper argues that true measurement is about understanding the drivers of those perceptions – from product quality to innovation, from leadership to ESG credibility: *"You don't own your reputation"*, he said, *"you own your brand. Your reputation belongs to the people who experience you."*

For Dustin Chick, *"Reputation managers will need absolute clarity on where they can add value and what matters most to their stakeholders."*

From outputs to outcomes

The distinction between outputs and outcomes was echoed by Mark Hutcheon, who believes that reputation measurement must evolve from *"... reporting activity to proving impact. You can't just tell the business that reputation matters",* he said. *"You have to show how it changes decisions, influences investment and drives performance."* Mark's 'ROSE Framework', which is used by corporate affairs leaders, links reputation metrics to operational value, stakeholder engagement and enterprise outcomes. *"It's not about assigning a billion-dollar number to reputation",* he said. *"It's about showing the difference your actions make."*

Patricia Santa Marina, Founder at MINERBA Corporate Communication, believes that reputation data should be used as a diagnostic tool for credibility, not a defence mechanism: *"Measurement should illuminate behaviour, not manipulate perception. The goal isn't to prove reputation; it's to understand it."* Corporate affairs leaders need to guard against focusing solely on a number – they should carefully interrogate the why behind the numbers to ensure they have the right impact on influencing their reputation.

Governance as a measurement discipline

Chris Savage reinforced the link between measurement and governance. He described governance as one of the *"pillars of reputation"*, alongside capability and character. *"An organisation that's committed to governance – that measures it, reports on it, and communicates it transparently – is an organisation that builds trust"*, he said.

Chris argued that measurement is not a marketing exercise but an ethical obligation: "Governance, reporting, disclosure – these are the checks and balances that protect not just shareholders but communities."

For Michael Felber, Partner at int/ext, governance isn't procedural; it's reputation architecture and a direct indicator of corporate character: *"Governance is no longer a box-ticking exercise; it's the architecture of trust. The way you make decisions – who's in the room, how transparent the process is – that's what tells stakeholders who you really are."*

Thomas Fife-Schaw, Managing Director of Ipsos Corporate Reputation UK, linked governance and authenticity to employer brand: *"You can't tell graduates you're ethical and inclusive if your governance structure doesn't show it"*, he said. He noted that *"Savvy companies understand that what shows up in Bloomberg or the Financial Times is their real employer brand."* For him, measurement is now reputational currency – the proof that corporate promises align with real behaviour.

From reporting to foresight

As governance expectations evolve, so too does the predictive power of data. The interviews revealed a growing focus on reputation intelligence systems – tools that integrate stakeholder sentiment, risk monitoring and crisis impact into decision frameworks. Several participants referenced SenateSHJ's own Crisis Index 300, a data model of listed companies across 27 stock exchanges that shows the impact of a crisis on share prices and earnings per share and how long they take to recover.

Ralph Jackson, Business Consultant at Ralph Jackson Consultancy and Author of *Crisis? What Crisis? How Businesses Can Prepare for and Manage Unexpected Events*, noted that analyses such as the Crisis Index 300 *"turn hindsight into foresight"*, enabling boards to predict recovery time and benchmark against best practice. *"Data is the new accountability"*, he said. *"It's how boards prove they're learning from the past."*

And for Oliver Freedman, *"Boards need people who understand reputation – people who've managed stakeholders, governments and communities. Having that expertise on boards will produce a better plan and a better response."*

From compliance to conscience

For Elliot Schreiber, data and governance must be grounded in principle, not performance. He warned that *"You don't build a reputation through marketing alone; you build it from the inside out."* Governance, in his view, is not a checklist but a demonstration of values in action: *"Executives think of reputation as image management",* he said, *"but it's really about behaviour management. You can't delegate your reputation; you must own it."*

His warning resonates across the research: the greatest reputational risks come not from measurement failure but from meaning failure or confirmation bias or when data tells a story that leadership refuses to hear. Measurement, these experts suggest, must move from compliance reporting to moral accountability – linking metrics to leadership culture and boardroom ethics.

Prediction:

By 2030, reputation will be governed in a way that is more akin to finance – audited, modelled and verified.

The new frontier of reputation management lies in governance intelligence – where measurement, ethics and decision making converge into one system of accountability.

Corporate affairs and reputation and risk leaders will oversee real-time reputation dashboards that are embedded in board reporting. Metrics will measure not just sentiment but sincerity – tracking alignment between purpose, behaviour and performance.

Organisations that master this will move beyond measuring reputation to understanding it: from counting impressions to shaping impact, from reactive metrics to predictive foresight. The future will not reward those who report reputation; it will reward those who can bring insight about it to the table.

For leaders to act

1. Develop a reputation performance dashboard that integrates trust, culture and stakeholder sentiment with financial data to build understanding.
2. Include reputation as a standing board agenda item every quarter.
3. Appoint a board-level reputation lead or subcommittee to ensure accountability and foresight, and bring a reputation lens to the audit, risk and compliance committee.
4. Shift measurement from compliance to consequence: track how decisions influence stakeholder confidence, not just outputs.

Theme 7 – Crisis, recovery and humility: the hard road back

Reputation resilience depends on whether organisations accept blame when they should, how quickly they act and how well and consistently they communicate with those impacted.

Crises test not only the strength of systems but also the integrity of leadership. Across the interviews, experts consistently agreed: it's not so much the crisis that destroys reputations – it's denial or obfuscation that does. The speed of information means missteps become visible almost instantly. What distinguishes survivors is not perfection but humility and disciplined transparency. Alan Chumley and Scott Sayres used almost the same words when talking about the actions to take in a crisis: *"Own it, respond quickly even if partially, acknowledge, fix it, show empathy and humility."*

Most described a crisis as a moment of truth during which the alignment of values, behaviour and communication is tested under pressure. Recovery, they agreed, is rarely about spin; it's about consequence, accountability and character. As Patricia Santa Marina put it, *"When crisis hits, people forgive mistakes, but they don't forgive manipulation. The fastest way to lose trust is to sound like you're managing optics instead of owning outcomes."*

Tony Langham, emphasised that recovery depends on sustained behavioural change. He noted that *"The best recovery plans look more like long-term cultural change programmes than PR strategies."* His perspective is that crisis recovery is built on action and the restoration of trust over time:

"Reputation recovery isn't about what you say after a crisis; it's about what you do next and how consistently you do it."

And Peter Sandman, best known for his work on outrage management, reframes crisis management as emotion management, which is the cornerstone of his theory. His experience is that truth alone doesn't rebuild trust; it needs empathy: *"The real crisis isn't what happened – it's how people feel about what happened. You manage the facts, but you must lead the feelings. That's outrage management. Outrage is the emotional amplifier of risk. If you ignore it, you lose control of the story. If you respect it, you can start to regain trust."*

"Outrage management begins with humility. People aren't angry because they misunderstand you; they're angry because they think you don't understand them."

Peter Heneghan, who worked in the digital team at 10 Downing Street for several years, brought a deep understanding of social media to crisis management. He underscored the reputational cost of hesitation and the premium on authentic agility: *"In a 24-hour news loop that's powered by social algorithms, delay looks like deceit. The currency of credibility is speed married with sincerity."*

Regret, responsibility and remedial action

Crisis recovery starts with owning the failure. And for Gerry McCusker, recovery rests on the classic three Rs: *"Regret, responsibility and remedial action."* He explained that the difference between reputational collapse and recovery often lies in a company's willingness to take consequences arising from the incident seriously: *"Repairing consequential fallout – that's the real work"*, he said. *"You can't talk your way out of what you behaved your way into."*

Gerry warns against treating a crisis as a communication problem rather than a test of morals. *"You can't fix it with a slick statement"*, he said. *"You fix it with right action – by understanding the pain caused and the ripple effects that follow."* His philosophy is that crises expose culture, revealing whether leaders are guided by empathy or ego.

The leadership imperative

Ralph Jackson views recovery as a leadership test above all else. *"If you were part of the problem, you can't talk your way out of it – you need to act your way out of it"*, he said. In his experience, recovery begins with ownership – leaders must accept responsibility before they can rebuild. He added that *"It's about your narrative, your language and the honesty that comes with those actions. We don't see enough of that in corporate life."*

Ralph noted that consumers are often more forgiving than companies assume: "*People move on quickly unless they've been personally harmed"*, he said. *"That's why organisations can rebuild, but only if they demonstrate genuine learning.*" His conclusion is disarmingly simple: *"Strip it bare. Go back to first principles: why you exist and what you stand for."*

"There's no getting around the fact that crisis ownership sits at the board level", says Tony Jaques. He argues that crisis recovery begins with governance accountability and warns that when boards overlook or tolerate misconduct, the resulting crises are inevitable and punishing.

Many experts agreed that the leaders who demonstrate empathy and moral courage in the early hours of a crisis often restore trust faster than those who default to legal or defensive messaging.

Micro-shifts and the long game

Jo Kinner offered a systemic view of crisis recovery as a continuum rather than a moment. *"A reputational event isn't automatically a crisis"*, she explained. *"It becomes one depending on how you respond and what preceded it."*

Kinner's concept of *"micro-shifts"* reframes reputation as a living system that is shaped by small, cumulative actions. *"Every decision, every message, creates micro-shifts in trust – upward or downward"*, she said. In her view, crisis management should be "*the culmination of proactive reputation work"*, not its replacement: *"If you've built credibility before a crisis, you start from a higher baseline of trust. If you haven't, every response looks like damage control."*

Credo and consequence

Few expressed the moral dimension of crisis more clearly than Helio Fred Garcia, who has spent decades advising global corporations and teaching ethics at Columbia University. He reflected on the Johnson & Johnson Tylenol crisis as the gold standard of reputational recovery. *"They pulled the product globally when they could have just pulled it locally"*, he said. *"They destroyed the entire supply and rebuilt packaging to make tampering impossible. That's why they were trusted for 30 years."*

For Fred, the lesson is timeless: *"Every time Johnson & Johnson has lost trust since then, it's because they failed to follow the credo."* His principle is uncompromising: *"You can't buy reputation; you have to behave your way into it."*

For Chris Savage, rebuilding reputation requires transparency and a structured recovery. He insists that credibility comes from reporting progress openly and allowing independent oversight to validate it: *"It needs to be accountable and transparent – a process governed by people who are not beholden to anyone in the organisation. You need a measured improvement plan that's publicly reported, governed independently, and led with conscience – not control."*

Preparedness as culture

Several experts, including Rod Cartwright, argued that resilience must be a cultural outcome, not a department. Organisations often treat risk and communications as separate disciplines, he said, which undermines readiness. The most resilient companies conduct cross-functional simulations – training leadership, communications and operations together.

"You don't build resilience in the crisis", he warned. *"You build it in the quiet moments before it happens."*

For Michael Felber, the degree of pre-existing trust equity will determine recovery speed and credibility post-crisis: *"In a crisis, truth only moves at the speed of trust. If you haven't built that trust beforehand, no amount of messaging can make your truth travel faster than your reputation."*

Prediction:

By 2030, crisis recovery will no longer be about image repair – it will be about institutional renewal.

The organisations that endure will be those that confront the truth quickly, act decisively and make their repair visible. Every apology will be backed by reforms, every promise by proof.

Crisis management will move from a reactive function to a continuous discipline with systems that detect reputational stress in real time, powered by behavioural data, predictive analytics and ethical governance.

The most trusted organisations will treat a crisis not as a catastrophe but as an opportunity to recalibrate; that is, a moment to demonstrate values under pressure and strengthen the cultural attributes that drive resilience.

By 2030, reputation strength will be defined not by whether companies avoid crises but by how they prepare and how quickly and effectively they learn from them.

For leaders to act

1. Build crisis rehearsal and reflection into quarterly leadership training – emphasise humility, empathy and transparency.
2. Create a trust recovery protocol: visible, measurable actions after every reputational event.
3. Conduct post-crisis learning audits – ensure reforms are documented, communicated and independently verified.
4. Ensure boards review crisis simulations that test response time, tone and stakeholder trust restoration.

Theme 8 – Purpose and values alilgnment: Reputation's moral compass

Purpose is credible only when it is consistently practised. Misalignment between values, decisions and the resultant actions is now the fastest path to reputational damage and loss of trust.

In a world rife with scepticism and where audiences see through the veneer of corporate purpose campaigns, the experts agree that values are now the ultimate differentiator of reputation. For Patricia Santa Marina, it is *"reputation over everything. Even if you temporarily lose money, reputation is more important."*

Purpose, once a slogan, has now become a test of truth – one that must be lived internally before it can be believed externally. Values alignment is no longer confined to CSR or sustainability – it spans pay equity, supplier standards, political donations, AI ethics and the like. Every policy, decision and action either reinforces or contradicts what the organisation claims to be.

For Mike Abel, *"Brands don't need to save the world; they need to behave as if they share it."*

From purpose as a slogan to purpose as a system

Victoria Cross linked purpose directly to credibility and trust. She argues that purpose becomes reputational capital only when it is clearly expressed and lived through culture and behaviour:

"Authenticity, as in, does it do what it says it's going to do, is probably the most fundamental factor. Having a clear set of values that are lived, that people experience when they interact with the organisation, is absolutely critical."

She went on to describe purpose as a *"bellwether"* for organisational health: *"It's often a very good sign of how well an organisation is run if it's got time to think about the full gamut of stakeholders, not just its investors."*

Predictability as the root of trust

Mike Abel described purpose and values as *"the DNA of trust."* He argued that predictability – showing up in the same way and for the same reasons over time – is what builds lasting reputations. *"All of the great leaders of the world are trusted because of a high level of predictability"*, he said. *"Predictability doesn't mean boring; it means I know who this person or organisation is and I can trust them."*

Mike believes that reputation collapses when *"purpose becomes performance art"* – when organisations change their stance to suit political or social winds. *"Values must be lived irrespective of the cost"*, he said. *"Otherwise, you're not building legacy; you're renting it."* He argues that reputation is the lived expression of values under pressure, not the narratives crafted around them.

Ron Culp equated reputation to *"... moral capital – you earn it through integrity, not image."*

For David McCarthy, it's all about accountability: *"Accountability used to mean who signed off. Now it means who stands up. The public expects visibility, not just responsibility."*

The cost of misalignment

Stephen Waddington linked purpose misalignment directly to crisis. *"A lot of reputational failures start with misalignment between behaviour, culture and stated values"*, he said. He cited the example of Boeing's 737 Max crisis: *"They said they were a safety-first organisation, but they overrode engineers' reports to meet shareholder expectations. That's culture driving a terrible outcome."* For Waddington, purpose acts as the internal circuit breaker that prevents ethical drift. *"The organisations that thrive"*, he said, *"are those whose purpose isn't reactive but rooted in long-term conviction."*

The false promise of performative purpose

Several interviewees warned of *"purpose fatigue"* and a growing public cynicism towards corporate virtue signalling. Furthermore, multiple interviewees argued that purpose, which was once a differentiator, has now become an overused and often unconvincing corporate trope.

Elliot Schreiber was among the most direct: *"We've seen the damage that has been done with virtue signalling. To be very frank, it was a lot of the responsibility of PR and HR that led companies to virtue signalling – 'Oh, we have to say we're this, we have to say we're that' – without really holding people's feet to the fire. And now they're running away from it, and it's done damage."* He concluded that *"Audiences have grown weary of companies preaching without proof."*

For Dustin Chick, it is a matter of *"... behaving yourself into the reputation you want; you don't communicate yourself there. Behaviour is our truth."*

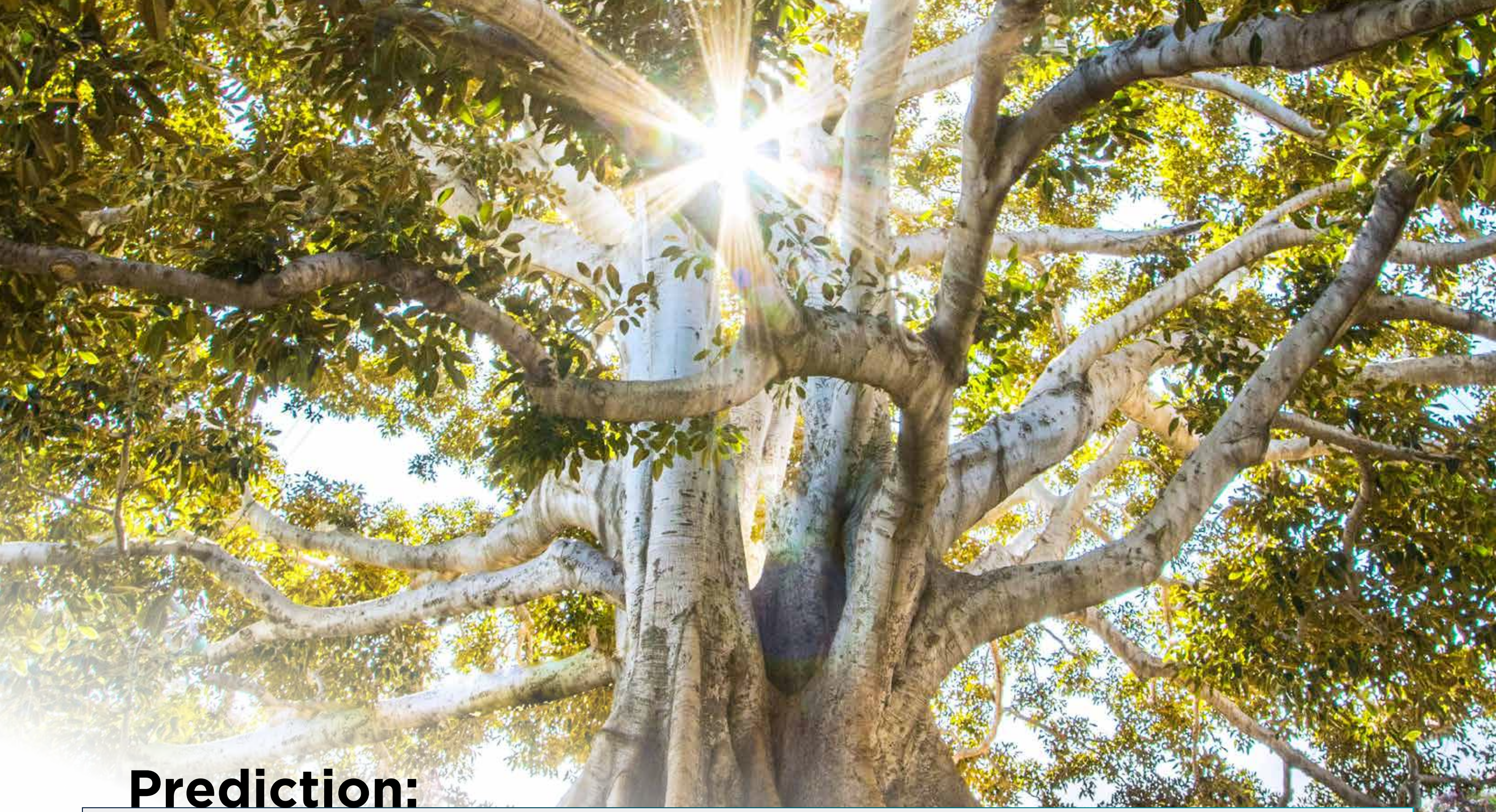
Purpose as governance

Stephen Thomas described purpose not as a communications device but as a strategic alignment mechanism: *"Reputation management must evolve to stay hyper-focused on aligning leadership and decision making with corporate values and purpose. It's about linking intent, behaviour and impact – and ensuring leadership decisions reflect that alignment."*

Stephen sees purpose providing a reference point for integrity: *"When leaders must make hard trade-offs, it clarifies what cannot be compromised."*

Several experts argued that alignment requires governance, not slogans. Boards must translate purpose into measurable behavioural standards, monitored with the same rigour as financial controls. This shift reframes purpose from inspiration to obligation.

For Oliver Freedman, *"Purpose is credible only when practised consistently – when behaviour matches stated values."*



Prediction:

By 2030, purpose will be woven into the fabric of the business plan – not as a statement of intent, but as the true north for strategy, performance and reputation.

Reputation will no longer rest on what organisations say they value but on how seamlessly those values guide commercial and cultural decisions that align with the business plan or strategy. The strongest organisations will treat purpose as the organising principle that connects profit with principle – aligning leadership, behaviour and operations to a single, credible narrative.

Boards will embed purpose and values into governance and business planning cycles, linking them to KPIs, investment priorities and performance reviews. Corporate affairs leaders will become guardians of alignment, ensuring that every aspect of the business plan – from growth targets to stakeholder engagement – reflects and reinforces organisational purpose and aligns with its values.

Organisations that sustain alignment between words, behaviour and outcomes will command trust even in polarised markets. Those that fracture under scrutiny will find that once-purposeful language becomes evidence against their hypocrisy.

For leaders to act

1. Conduct an annual purpose-to-performance report: does behaviour match stated values in decisions, pay, suppliers and culture?
2. Embed purpose integrity KPIs in strategy and leadership scorecards.
3. Test purpose resilience in scenario planning by examining how the organisation behaves when purpose costs money or convenience.
4. Link executive incentives to leading indicators of purpose – such as engagement, customer outcomes, employee and customer experience – not just profit outcomes.

Building Reputation Resilience: the SenateSHJ 5SL Framework

Reputation resilience will define corporate success over the next decade. It's not a campaign, a message or a crisis plan – it's the operational and strategic proof of who you are and how you work with your most important stakeholders, especially when things are at their most difficult. It requires a disciplined capacity to maintain trust under stress, respond to scrutiny and recover credibility quickly.

Across every interview, one principle was clear: reputation is now a performance system, not a perception exercise. It is built through the daily interaction of culture, governance and leadership and sustained when trust is embedded into how the organisation works, not just in how and what it communicates.

To make reputation measurable, repeatable and resilient, SenateSHJ's 5SL Framework offers a practical architecture for boards and executives. It defines six reinforcing disciplines – shared principles, story, skills, support and structure, systems and leadership and rigour – that together turn integrity into a managed, governable capability.

1. Shared principles – values as operating code

2. Story – align narrative with proof

3. Skills – building new reputation competence

4. Support and structure – embedding reputation into governance

5. Systems – listening, learning and acting

1. Shared principles – values as operating code

Resilience begins with clarity of principle. Trust breaks down when values are selectively applied or vaguely understood. By 2030, credibility will depend less on what companies declare and more on how visibly their principles govern behaviour.

Shared principles transform aspiration into accountability. They are the decision rules that guide leaders when trade-offs are hard, scrutiny is high and consequences are real.

As Peter Sandman said, *"People will forgive tough choices if they can see the integrity behind them."*

Boards can embed these principles through ethics reviews on major decisions and by linking values adherence to performance and reward. Leaders must be able to explain why every decision reflects the organisation's moral compass.

Applied across the report's eight themes, shared principles are the foundation of all credibility – from trust and accountability to purpose alignment and global coherence.

2. Story – align narrative with proof

A credible story connects past performance, present action and future intent. Stakeholders no longer seek aspiration; they seek evidence. And crucially, a reputation narrative is not the external brand narrative – it is the organisation's agreed understanding of what its reputation is, what drives it and how it will be built and managed. It provides the unifying logic that brings coherence across decisions, behaviour and stakeholder engagement. Once defined, it can be measured.

The modern reputation narrative must reconcile ambition with results, showing measurable progress against stated purpose and values. *"Storytelling"*, as Paul Stamsnijder noted, *"is only credible when it reconciles what happened with what's next."* A reputation narrative, therefore, sets the terms of that reconciliation: it is the shared story about who we are, how we show up and which evidence demonstrates our values are being lived.

For corporate affairs leaders, this means shifting from control to coherence – ensuring every communication aligns with data, results and lived behaviour. Narratives built on verification, not assertion, offer the credibility that underpins trust. A strong reputation narrative becomes the anchor, guiding how the organisation interprets itself and how it expects to be understood by its stakeholders.

Storytelling without proof risks cynicism at best and being 'cancelled' at worst. By 2030, the most respected organisations will treat their reputation story as an annual accountability report – a record of how promise became performance. A clear, evidence-based reputation narrative will be the through line that connects culture, action and stakeholder confidence.

3. Skills – building new reputation competence

Reputation is now a multidisciplinary craft that blends data literacy, ethics and empathy. Traditional communication skills remain essential, but they are no longer enough.

Reputation leaders in the next decade must read algorithms as well as audiences. They will interpret behavioural data, assess ethical risk and anticipate the social impact of technology and AI.

Jo Kinner explained that modern reputation management must focus on *"… understanding the signals and systems that drive stakeholder behaviour."* She called this shift *"moving from storytelling to sense making."* It demands professionals who can decode complexity and translate it into trust.

Boards and the executives should invest in cross-functional training that unites corporate affairs, risk, analytics and behavioural science. By 2030, reputation competence will be measured by how effectively organisations interpret complexity, identify meaningful signals – no matter how weak – and convert insight into effective action.

Some experts advocated creating a *"reputation intelligence"* unit – a small, interdisciplinary group that is responsible for mapping signals, advising on decision implications and designing preventative systems. Ralph Jackson called this *"the science of stakeholder management."* Mark Hutcheon described future reputation professionals as *"pattern recognisers and diplomats"*, who are adept at interpreting weak signals, anticipating risk and bridging gaps between business, society and technology.

4. Support and structure – embedding reputation into governance

Reputation resilience is designed, not declared. Structure signals seriousness; if accountability for reputation is unclear, it will fail at the first pressure test.

Jason Laird warned that unless someone explicitly owns reputation as a strategic function, it risks becoming an orphaned responsibility:

"If reputation doesn't have an owner, it doesn't have a defender. You need someone who sees the whole system – not just the comms or the crisis, but how behaviour, leadership and culture intersect with all your stakeholders."

Organisations that manage reputation well treat it as a standing board risk – monitored with the same rigour as finance, safety and cyber risks. They establish clear accountability from the boardroom to the front line and ensure that decisions with reputation impact are made at the point where trade-offs are decided upon, not after the fact.

Ralph Jackson summed it up: *"Governance signals intent. If it's on the board agenda, people act like it matters."* This view was echoed by many, and it's clear that what boards measure and discuss becomes what the organisation believes matters, making governance one of the most powerful levers for building and protecting trust.

By 2030, effective governance will mean clear ownership, transparent reporting and cross-functional alignment that makes integrity systemic rather than situational.

5. Systems – listening, learning and acting

Reputation resilience depends on feedback loops that turn listening into meaningful action. Technology has made data abundant; the challenge is to make sense of it.

"We drown in signals but starve for sense making", was a clarion call by Thomas Fife-Schaw. He was talking about how the explosion of data and monitoring tools has outpaced leaders' ability to interpret what it all means. Reputation management now depends less on collecting more information and more on making sense of it. As Thomas said, *"Sense giving, sense making and predicting – that's the real work of modern reputation management."*

The experts described this as the new firewall of reputation – closed-loop systems that combine digital vigilance with human judgement. They integrate stakeholder sentiment, media intelligence and AI-driven foresight to anticipate risk and opportunity.

Trusted organisations will not just monitor trust; they will demonstrate how feedback changes decisions. By 2030, the strongest companies will operate with real-time reputation dashboards that link stakeholder insight to business performance – translating observation into action before issues escalate.

6. Leadership and rigour – the moral centre of resilience

Every interview returned to this truth: leaders are the living expression of an organisation's integrity. Their tone, transparency and discipline set the cultural thermostat.

Leadership rigour is now a strategic asset. It means consistency under pressure, humility in crisis and accountability in decision making. As Tony Jaques put it, *"Leadership is reputation in motion."*

Boards should evaluate leaders not just on financial outcomes but on their contribution to trust: stakeholder confidence, culture health and governance integrity. By 2030, the most trusted leaders will be those who behave their way into credibility – demonstrating through their conduct what their organisations stand for. The most respected organisations will be led by executives who treat credibility as a collective asset, not a personal brand.

A blueprint for resilient reputation

When applied together, SenateSHJ's 5SL Framework turns reputation from perception into performance. It is the architecture of reputation resilience. It demands foresight, discipline and moral courage, but it offers a lasting dividend: credibility that endures scrutiny and strengthens through adversity.

For heads of corporate affairs, this is the new mandate – to make reputation a measurable system of integrity, not a manufactured image that has been glossed by communication. By 2030, reputation resilience will not depend on avoiding disruption but on managing through it with clarity, consistency and integrity when it comes. That is the blueprint for trust and the defining test of leadership in the next decade.

Reputation resilience will not emerge by chance; it will result from intention, investment and discipline. The organisations that thrive by 2030 will be those that see reputation not as an external reflection but as the operational and strategic proof of who they are, how well they behave in the eyes of their most important stakeholders, and the level of trust this imbues in the brand and its leaders.

As some of our experts, such as Rod Cartwright, concluded: *"Resilience shouldn't be a department, a job title or a business function – it should be a cultural outcome".* His prediction is that by 2030, companies that internalise resilience as behaviour – not bureaucracy – will recover faster and emerge stronger.

Thomas Fife-Schaw concluded that *"Reputation resilience will depend on how well companies build systems designed to protect trust – not just respond to its loss"*. For Thomas, the next frontier of resilience is structural and will require data-led systems that decode complexity, anticipate emerging risks and hardwire ethical responses into decision making.

Will Hetherton looked into his crystal ball and predicted that *"As the world gets more chaotic, reputation leadership must become more strategic, calmer and longer term. The crazier it gets, the steadier you must be"*. He foresees a shift from reactive crisis response to disciplined foresight and concluded that reputation resilience by 2030 will hinge on balance – the capacity to remain steady and values-led when volatility accelerates.

The work of leadership in the next decade is to make reputation measurable, repeatable and able to withstand the uncertainty of the times.

A huge thank you to the following Future of Reputation 2030 interviewees

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Dustin Chick – Partner and Chief Executive at Razor Public Relations (The Up&Up Group)

Alan Chumley – Senior Vice President at Signal AI

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Victoria Cross – Partner, Corporate Sustainability & Climate Change at ERM

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Gary Davies – Professor of Strategy at Manchester Business School

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Emmanuel Goedseels – Partner at Whyte Corporate Affairs

Peter Heneghan – Founder of Albie.ai

Will Hetherton – Chief Corporate Affairs Officer at Future Fund

Rupert Hugh Jones – Director of Corporate Advisory at Equitas Asset Management Pty Ltd

Mark Hutcheon – Director at Deloitte UK

Ralph Jackson – Business Consultant at Ralph Jackson Consultancy

Tony Jaques – Owner and Director of Issue Outcomes P/L. Consultant. Author of Crisis Counsel: Navigating Legal and Communication Conflict

Jo Kinner – Founding Partner of Reputation Sherpa

Jason Laird – Executive Corporate Affairs at National Australia Bank

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Stephen Thomas – Partner at The Civic Partnership

Richard Tsang – Chairman and Managing Director at Strategic Public Relations Group

Lori Turner – Chief Marketing Officer at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona

Paola Vallejo – Founding Partner of Comunicandes

Mignon van Halderen – Partner at Reputatiegroep

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Trevor Young – Content and Communications Advisor at The Influence and Impact Co.

Want to talk? We're here to help.

For more information or if you would like a presentation to your organisation on the report please contact:

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