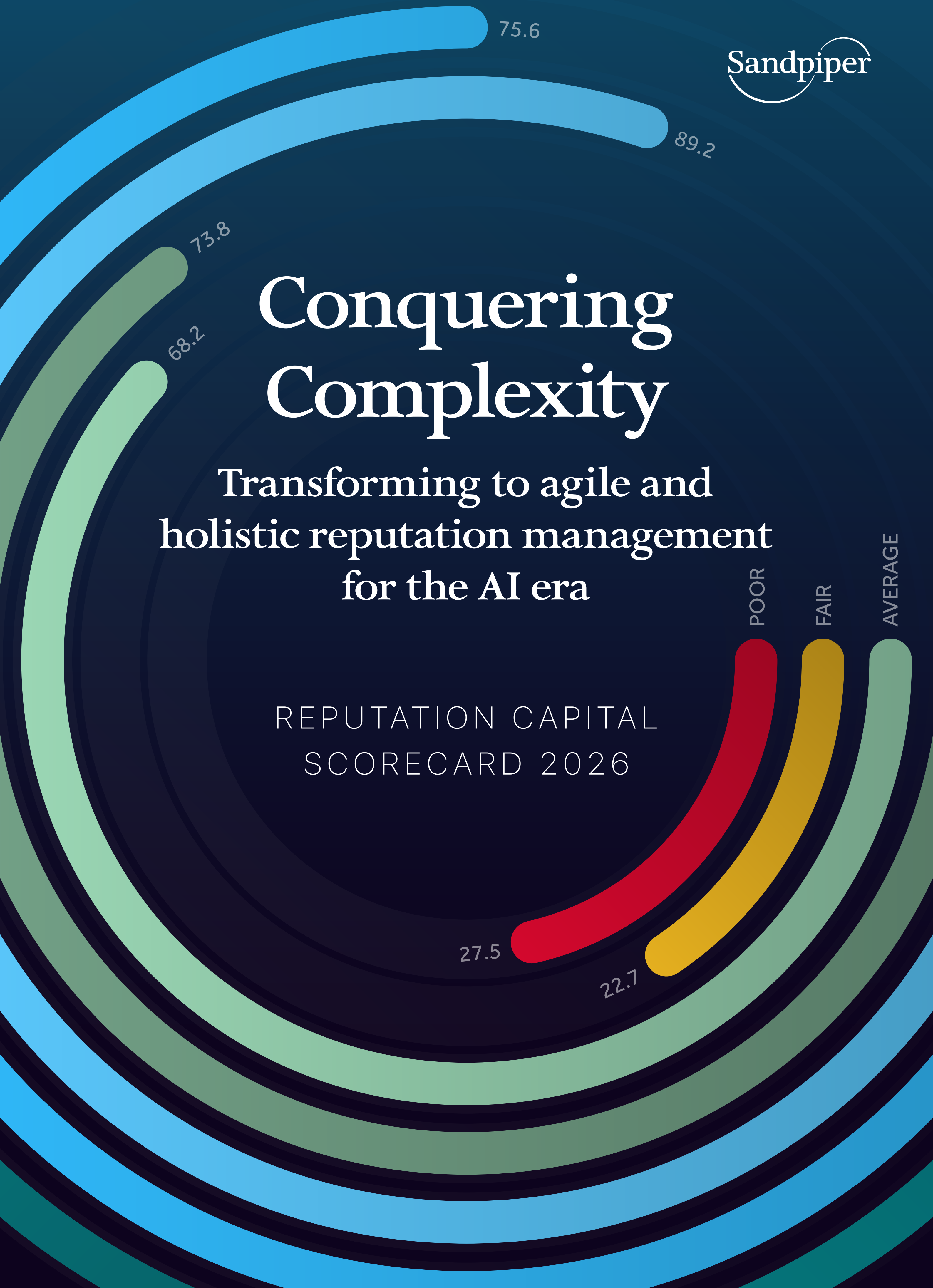
Sandpiper

Conquering Complexity

Transforming to agile and holistic reputation management for the AI era

REPUTATION CAPITAL SCORECARD 2026



Inform. Create. Shape.

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Executive summary

Reputation managers face a perfect storm. Technological advances continue to fuel the integration and consolidation of marketing and communications specialities; shifting risks, regulations, geopolitics, and societal expectations are rewriting the rules of stakeholder strategy; and AI has heralded an era where attention must be earned first rather than bought and speed matters as humans and machines work hand-in-hand.

This has thrust reputation management into the spotlight like never before and generated a level of complexity in Chief Communications Officer (CCO) roles that cannot be ignored. Numerous global management consultancies have pinpointed communications and marketing functions as ripe for Generative AI transformation, and our survey of C-Suite leaders as part of this study finds 72% of global CEOs now believe that their company's reputation is critical to its commercial success.

However, both opportunities and obstacles exist. While AI continues to be far and away the top reputation management concern since the 2022 launch of game changing chatbot, ChatGPT, most are not equipped to capitalize on the opportunities it presents – with less than half saying that their organization's approach is highly effective, agile or adaptable. Beyond AI, large preparedness gaps are also seen with other top reputational concerns ranging from ESG and sustainability scrutiny to employee activism.

Unsurprisingly given the state of preparedness and performance amid the changing landscape, this report finds that stakeholder relationships are under strain, with significant misalignments between corporate reputations and stakeholder expectations. Reputational weaknesses have also impacted company bottom lines more widely in the past year with 78% of CEOs seeing sales and trading activities reductions as a result, and 65% saying it has affected their organization's valuation.

Reputation Capital Scorecard – A holistic roadmap that shines a light on the multiplier effect of reputation investments in the AI era and the need to solve insights gaps

In this operating environment, where reputation is crafted and manipulated simultaneously by both people and machines, mis- and dis-information is rife, and seismic shifts in truth and trust can occur in seconds, a new model for reputation management is required.

Compared with one year ago almost all areas of reputation management have risen substantially in importance to the C-Suite – revealing leadership teams who increasingly see the value of holistic reputation management approaches, and are unlocking multiple and compounding benefits from it. They also indicate a plan to increase investments in it.

Accordingly, the **Reputation Capital Scorecard** outlined in this report offers a 360-degree health check of integrated reputation management performance across four indicator groups Insights, Strategy, Relationships & Connectivity, and Resources for eight pillars of reputation management.

The inaugural global scorecard reveals a significant gap in Insights, which scores the lowest of all four of the indicator areas assessed, despite being the most important differentiator for organizations having a reputation management approach that is effective. Those in the top quartile perform better by having access to high quality data and insights in real-time, the capability to extract meaningful insights, and they set clear and measurable KPIs.

In the other areas, the top performers are differentiated by having clear strategies that are aligned with commercial objectives, take a more comprehensive approach to stakeholder strategy, and are well-resourced with strong governance protocols.

Proving that more holistic and insights-led approaches are working, those in the top quartile of the scorecard rank stronger for performance in every area of reputation management and related outcomes.

Gap traps inside organizations distort reputation realities and stall progress

While the findings show strong support for reputation management investments, gaps in internal communications and information flows are highlighted as a key barrier and risk to improvement.

CEOs, CCOs, and other C-Suite members have significantly different views on almost every area of reputation management. While CEOs are twice as likely to feel a high personal responsibility for their organization's reputation, they are significantly more likely than corporate affairs leaders to believe their reputation is strong; to believe they have strong stakeholder alignment; and to believe their reputation management approach and function is performing well. This points to a significant disconnect between CEOs and the coalface of communications.

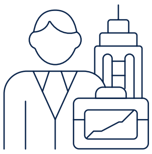
In what appears to be dual breakdown in information flows, CCOs are also significantly less aware of the bottom-line business impacts of reputational weaknesses than CEOs and other members of the C-Suite.

CCOs must gain or maintain a seat at the boardroom table

Highlighting the tenuous relationship that exists between the office of the CEO and the CCO, today less than four out of 10 companies have a CCO who reports directly to the CEO. A whopping 60% plan to change the reporting lines of their CCOs within the next 1-2 years, with increases to those reporting to CHROs and CMOs. However, this trend would appear to be unfavourable, since most corporate affairs leaders currently reporting to CHROs and CMOs plan to switch reporting lines in the coming 1-2 years. Also, leaders in the top quartile of the Reputation Capital Scorecard are 16 percentage points more likely to report directly to their company's CEO than average. This highlights the importance of CEOs and CCOs maintaining a close relationship, and ideally having CCOs directly represented on Executive Leadership Teams.

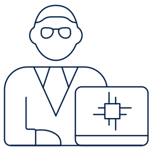
It is hoped that this report can offer useful insights to members of the C-Suite in every industry around the world as technological, societal, and economic transformations and trends re-writes the rules of reputation management and amplifies complexity.

About the research



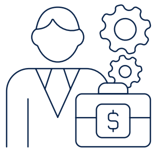
Chief Executive Officers (CEO)

33%



Chief Communications Officers (CCO)

30%



Other C-Suite Executives

37%

3,089 C-level respondents globally

70% in publicly listed companies

11 industries

Aviation & Hospitality, Business Services, Education, Energy, Financial Services, Food & Agriculture, Healthcare, IT & Telecom, Property & Construction, Public Sector, and Retail.

Different company sizes

Number of employees

100–249	21%
250–999	38%
1,000+	42%

Features longitudinal comparisons as follows global reputation capital study in 2024, with some questions repeated in 2025.

1.

Reputation management approaches must transform to be effective in an AI-powered world

In the AI era, the importance of reputation as a strategic asset is unquestionable. CEOs see the value of having a strong corporate reputation more than any other member of the C-Suite, with nearly three quarters considering it to be critical to the commercial success of the companies they lead.

With reputation in the spotlight as a strategic asset, one of the most prominent changes in the past 12 months has been greater recognition that all aspects and touchpoints of a company's reputation must be well managed to support its success. The CCOs we interviewed cited that with technological advances increasing the availability, speed, and connectivity of information, and the ability for crisis and issues to take off with 'machine speed', issues can affect a company's revenue, valuation or share price and come from anywhere at any moment.

This is reinforced by our quantitative survey findings, with a broad-based increase in the perceived importance of all aspects of reputation management. Compared with the 2024 survey results, almost every area except for Financial Communications and Media Relations rose in being seen as 'very important' by the C-Suite by between seven to 10 percentage points. As Financial Communications was previously the most likely to be ranked as 'very important' this has brought up all areas to be on par with it.

% who believe reputation is 'very important' to commercial success

Chief Executive Officers (CEO)	72%
Chief Communications Officers (CCO)	67%
Other C-Suite Executives	67%

This suggests recognition that managing the bottom line is now about more than just managing the bottom line, and strengthens the case for a 360-degree, integrated reputation approach that addresses every stakeholder touchpoint – from investors and regulators to employees, customers, and the wider public.

The stagnation of Media Relations, which is now least likely to rank as 'very important', is also a sign of the down weighting of importance of traditional media channels and stakeholders in the reputational mix. However, CCOs we spoke with also felt media was not declining in importance but rather that media ecosystems are being disrupted (e.g. through newsroom consolidation and new digital platforms) and that many organizations have not yet adjusted their media strategies to the new reality.

Five major reputation risks in view, with AI gaining the most attention

Navigating AI is the most significant reputational issue for organizations by a wide margin – with 68% of the C-Suite ranking it among their organization's top five reputational concerns. This reflects both the transformative potential being seen with AI and the risks associated with its rapid adoption, including ethical considerations, transparency, and trust. Concern around it has also increased since 2024, when 64% ranked it in their top five.

This underscores the urgency for companies that have not already done so to develop clear governance frameworks and communication strategies around AI deployment.

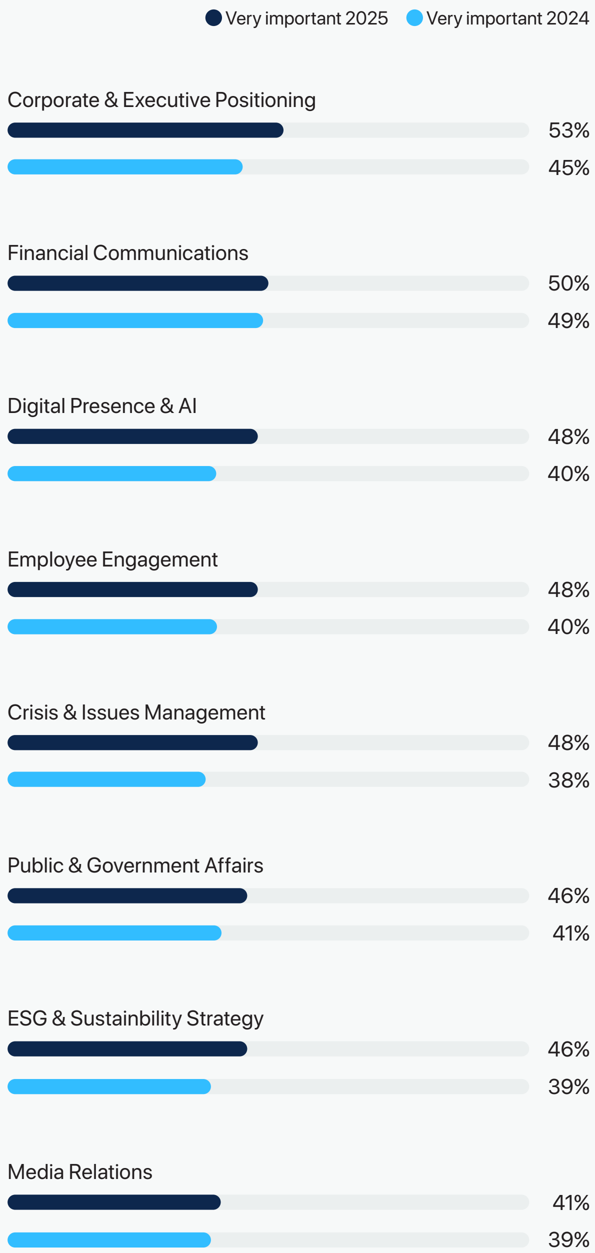
While scrutiny around ESG and sustainability has eased slightly – particularly in areas such as greenwashing and DE&I – the topic continues to maintain its position as the second-highest reputational concern. This suggests that while the intensity of public debate may have moderated, the C-Suite still need to take into account their stakeholders who still expect companies to demonstrate credible, measurable progress on environmental and social commitments.

Rounding out the top five reputational risks are: the rise of mis- and dis-information, which threatens trust and amplifies reputational vulnerabilities; cybersecurity and data privacy concerns, reflecting the growing frequency and impact of data breaches; and employee activism, signalling a shift in internal dynamics where workforce expectations increasingly influence external perceptions.

Together, these risks illustrate the interconnected nature of reputation management in an AI world, where technology, societal expectations, and organizational culture converge to shape corporate standing.

The lower rating of geopolitical issues among the top risks suggests C-Suite are also focusing more on issues they can control than those they cannot.

% of C-Suite rating area as 'very important' for successful reputation management



Attention failing to convert to action – preparedness gaps persist across the board with AI and other risks

Despite improvements in in the past year, organizations continue to report significant gaps in preparedness to tackle key concerns. Fewer than four in 10 leaders feel highly prepared for most issues, including only 40% feeling prepared for the impact of AI on communications.

The top five concerns for the next 12 months reveal striking gaps between perceived risk and preparedness – with gaps exceeding 20 percentage points between concern and preparedness for all except cybersecurity and data privacy.

Several CCOs we interviewed, indicated the lower gap with cybersecurity and data privacy is likely to be because this is a more mature issue that has been a significant focus of company resource investment in recent years.

These gaps highlight the need for proactive scenario planning and integrated risk management, especially as reputational threats become more complex and interconnected.

Proactive scenario planning and integrated risk management

Impact of AI

68% rank as a top concern; only 40% feel highly prepared (28pp gap).

ESG and sustainability scrutiny

61% rank as a top concern; only 34% feel highly prepared (27pp gap).

Misinformation and disinformation

58% rank as a top concern; only 33% feel highly prepared (25pp gap).

Cybersecurity and data privacy

53% rank as a top concern; only 38% feel highly prepared (15pp gap).

Employee activism

51% rank as a top concern; only 31% feel highly prepared (20pp gap).

% of C-Suite rating trend in top five concerns for the coming year

	2025	2024
Impact of AI	68%	64%
ESG & sustainability scrutiny	61%	59%
Rise of mis- and dis-information	58%	55%
Cyber and data security	53%	54%
Employee activism	51%	51%
Stakeholder and customer activism	48%	48%
Promotion of diversity, equality and inclusion (DE&I)	45%	48%
Consolidation of media	44%	45%
Greenwashing claims regulation	38%	42%
Rising geopolitical issues and tensions	35%	34%

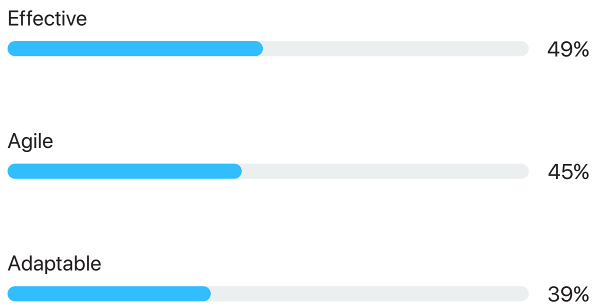
Transformation of reputation management approaches for the new AI-powered world fail to achieve lift-off

Alongside gaps in preparedness, and amplifying these, our findings point to a failure by C-Suites around the world to transform their organisations' approaches to reputation management for the AI era – despite being over three years into the generative-AI revolution.

In a fragmented, multi-channel, information- and content-laden landscape where the ability to convert insights to strategy at speed is critical, only 45% of the C-Suite believe their reputation management approaches are highly agile or highly adaptable at 39%. As a result, unsurprisingly, less than half of C-Suite believe their organization's current reputation management approach is effective.

This gap between urgency and capability underscores the need for a fundamental rethink of reputation strategies in the AI era.

% of C-Suite rating their organization's reputation management approach as 'high'



% of C-Suite who believe their organization is highly prepared to manage trend

	2025	2024
Impact of AI	40%	38%
Cyber and data security	38%	36%
Economic threats and pressures on budgets	36%	NA
ESG & sustainability scrutiny	34%	32%
Stakeholder and customer activism	34%	33%
Promotion of diversity, equality and inclusion (DE&I)	34%	33%
Rise of mis- and dis-information	33%	30%
Employee activism	31%	28%
Consolidation of media	30%	30%
Rising geopolitical issues and tensions	30%	29%
Greenwashing claims regulation	29%	28%

Breaking the bedrock: Relationships are suffering amid disruption

In the midst of these changing times, the bedrock of reputation management –strong stakeholder relationships – is also under strain. Fewer than half believe their organization's reputation is aligning strongly with the expectations of any audience group with customers being the most strongly aligned at (45%) and media ranking lowest at (32%).

While technological advancement can support this area with helping to provide data and insights to guide strategy and actions, relationship management will still remain a fundamentally human function. In an AI world where customers will have an increasing array of choices, pressure on margins will grow as efficiencies gain ground, and multi-stakeholder partnerships will be commonplace in increasingly complex business ecosystems, investing in building strong relationships offers a strategic differentiator.

Failure to invest will also limit opportunities and increase risk exposure. One CCO observed that the real reputational danger with AI isn't people being against it, but people not being on the same page. When companies don't align well with internal and external stakeholders, things tend to go badly. This is why managing what people expect is just as important as managing what you say.

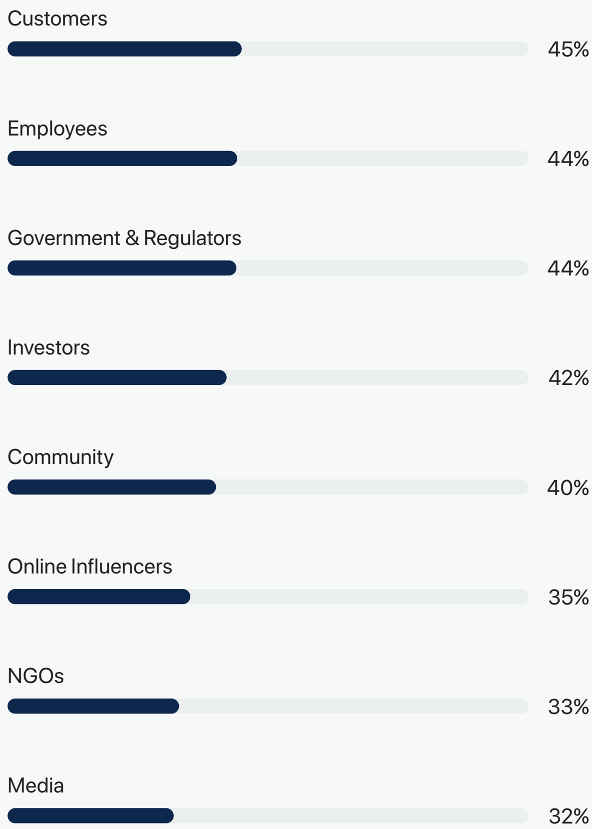
The costs of reputational weaknesses are hitting the bottom line

In addition to weakening relationships, the proportion of organizations reporting negative commercial impacts from reputational weaknesses in other areas has increased over the past year.

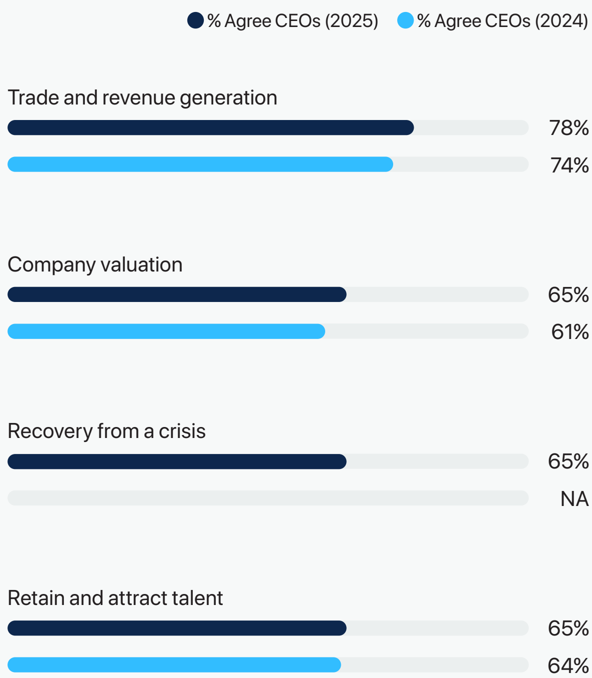
The majority of CEOs say in the past 12 months these have negatively impacted their ability to trade and sell (78%), to attract and retain employees (65%), and the company's valuation (65%). Compared with 2024, the impacts on the both the ability to trade and sell and attract and retain talent have risen four percentage points.

Only 61% of the global C-Suite also believe their organization's reputation is strong.

% of C-Suite indicating strong alignment of their organization's reputation with stakeholder expectations



% of CEOs indicating negative impacts in each area due to reputational weaknesses in the past 12 months



With challenges expected to rise, investment signals offer hope

Further fuelling the case for action, more than half of leaders believe reputation will become harder to manage, not easier, in the coming years. This concern is shared across the C-Suite.

The good news, however, is that leaders appear to be responding. Investments across all areas of reputation management are forecast to be higher in the coming year, suggesting that organizations recognize the urgency of strengthening capabilities in an AI-driven, risk-intensified environment.

% believe their reputation will become more difficult to manage

Overall	53%
Chief Executive Officers (CEO)	55%
Chief Communications Officers (CCO)	51%
Other C-Suite Executives	54%

% of C-Suite who say their organization intends to increase their investment of time and resources in the next 12 months

	% increase 2025	% increase 2024
Corporate & Executive Positioning	82%	75%
Crisis & Issues Management	82%	75%
Digital Presence & AI	81%	75%
ESG & Sustainability Strategy	80%	75%
Employee Engagement	80%	75%
Financial Communications	78%	76%
Public & Government Affairs	76%	74%
Media Relations	74%	76%

3.

Reputation Capital Scorecard – A 360-degree assessment of reputation management

With the importance of having a holistic reputation management strategy in the age of AI, the Reputation Capital Scorecard assessment shared here is designed to provide a 360-degree snapshot of the state reputation management performance.

Different to other industry methodologies that measure aspects of reputation such as leadership, products, workplace or citizenship, the scorecard measures reputation management actions – with the view (and evidence) that the right actions over time lead to the right results.

The Scorecard evaluates four key groups indicators – Insights, Strategy, Relationships & Connectivity, and Resources – across eight pillars of reputation management. Based on responses to questions in each indicator group for each reputation management pillar, survey respondents were assigned with a score out of 100.

Gaps in insights are dragging down performance in reputation management

Based on the Reputation Capital Scorecard methodology, on average, organizations achieve a global Reputation Capital score of 63 out of a possible 100.

Four indicator groups

INSIGHTS

20%	How you gather insights for strategic decision making
20%	Quality of current insights for strategic decision making
10%	Data literacy skills of corporate affairs team
10%	Research and measurement methods used
20%	Measurement approach
20%	Strength of performance in use of data, insights and measurement for different areas of reputation management

STRATEGY

25%	Approach to developing a strategy
25%	Strategic agility
20%	Degree of strategic alignment with other functions
30%	Strength of performance in strategy development and implementation

RELATIONSHIPS & CONNECTIVITY

30%	Approach to stakeholder mapping and management
50%	Strength of relationships with stakeholders
20%	Strength of performance in relationships and connectivity in different areas of reputation management

RESOURCES

30%	Approach to resourcing
20%	Agility and responsiveness of function
30%	Level of governance for safety and risk embedded in reputation management processes
20%	Strength of performance in people, tools & processes in different areas of reputation management

The strongest average global performance score achieved across the four indicator groups is 70 for Resources, which looks at the provision of people, tools, and processes. This is followed by Relationships & Connectivity at 65 and Strategy at 63. The lowest score by a significant eight percentage points, is Insights at 55 – highlighting significant performance gaps in this area in particular.

This insights gap is more than a performance issue – the CCOs we spoke with believe it reveals strategic vulnerabilities in an era where reputation can be reshaped in minutes by algorithm-driven narratives. It also highlights a systematic under-investment in data and data literacy, despite resources being channelled into reputation management. This gap is particularly concerning in an AI-driven environment where despite the explosion of available data, fewer than half of organizations have access to high-quality insights or real-time dashboards. The CCOs we spoke with also say this trend is undermining the credibility of corporate affairs functions, and negatively impacting decision-making.

Eight pillars of reputation management

- **Corporate & Executive Positioning**
- **Crisis & Issues Management**
- **ESG & Sustainability Strategy**
- **Media Relations**
- **Digital Presence & AI**
- **Employee Engagement**
- **Financial Communications**
- **Public & Government Affairs**

Reputation Capital Scorecard 2026

63
Global Average Reputation Capital Score

70
Strongest Indicator: **Resources**

55
Weakest Indicator: **Insights**

67
Strongest Reputation Management Pillar: **Corporate & Executive Positioning**

60
Weakest Reputation Management Pillar: **Media Engagement**

	Corporate & Executive Positioning	Crisis & Issues	ESG & Sustainability Strategy	Media Engagement	Digital & AI	Employee Engagement	Financial Comms	Public & Government Affairs	Score
Insights	58	57	54	53	56	55	56	55	55
Strategy	66	63	61	59	62	62	63	64	63
Relationships & Connectivity	69	66	63	61	64	65	65	65	65
Resources	73	70	67	67	69	69	70	71	70
Score	67	64	61	60	63	63	64	64	**63**

By far the greatest identified shortcoming in relation to how organizations use insights to support brand reputations is the appropriateness of the research and measurement methods used. This component of the Insights pillar scores an average performance score of only 27 out of a possible 100, compared with over 50 for each of the other insights components, highlighting a need for organizations to invest in more customised measurement approaches.

One CCO highlighted that lack of insights and related capabilities can lead to systemic risk. Organizations are spending on teams and tools, but measurement, analytics, and KPI design are lagging, generating reputation strategies that are more reactive rather than predictive.

What separates the best from the rest?

Looking at those in the top quartile, they achieve a better performance in the four key indicator areas by being significantly more likely than others to have achieved the following.

Insights: Have access to high-quality data and insights in real-time where necessary, they know how to interpret them, and have clear and measurable KPIs.

Strategy: They have a clear strategy that is well-aligned with commercial objectives and internal stakeholders, and which is set-up to be agile in a changeable operating environment.

Relationships & Connectivity: They have a comprehensive approach to stakeholder mapping, foster strong stakeholder relationships, and have appropriate channels in place for stakeholder and audience communications and dialogue.

Resources: They have well-resourced internal teams, sufficient access to tools and outside consultants, and maintain strong governance processes and protocols.

Reputation Capital Scorecard 2026 – Quartile scoring ranges and means

	Insights	Strategy	Relationships & Connectivity	Resources
Fourth Quartile (top)	71 to 100 (Mean: 76)	78 to 100 (Mean: 84)	82 to 100 (Mean: 86)	82 to 100 (Mean: 87)
Third Quartile	59 to 70 (Mean: 64)	57 to 77 (Mean: 72)	69 to 81 (Mean: 75)	72 to 81 (Mean: 77)
Second Quartile	43 to 58 (Mean: 51)	50 to 66 (Mean: 58)	52 to 68 (Mean: 60)	72 to 81 (Mean: 66)
First Quartile (bottom)	0 to 42 (Mean: 31)	0 to 49 (Mean: 37)	0 to 51 (Mean: 37)	0 to 59 (Mean: 48)

Differences by market, industry, and size

When looking at Reputation Capital Scores by market, industry, and company size some differences emerge which are notable for C-Suite executives globally. By market, a general trend is seen towards emerging markets performing typically better than mature markets. This is likely to be due to potentially higher levels of scrutiny and expectations in more mature markets for reputation management practices. Some markets also tend to self-score more favourably than others and the data in this study has not been adjusted to account for these nuances.

By industry, those in the IT, Telecommunications & Technology sector achieve the highest average Reputation Capital Score at 67. One CCO observed that this strong performance may be due to the naturally more advanced use of technology across the board in this sector, with companies generally younger and more technology-centric. It may also reflect the relative stability and fewer reputational crises faced by the industry during the study period. Organizations in the Public Sector & Government have the lowest average score at 58, which may be due to higher restrictions, regulation, and the scrutiny faced by public sector departments.

When it comes to organizational size, larger organizations with greater than 1,000 employees outperform smaller organizations in every area, but not by significant margins. The same trend is seen when assessing organizations by revenue size – with those with higher revenues outpacing others.

Reputation Capital Score by industry

	Mean	Quartile 4	Quartile 3	Quartile 2	Quartile 1
IT, Technology & Telecommunications	67	31%	30%	23%	16%
Financial Services	65	30%	23%	25%	22%
Property & Construction	64	27%	27%	23%	23%
Business & Professional Services	63	22%	30%	22%	26%
Energy, Mining & Natural Resources	63	25%	26%	24%	25%
Healthcare & Wellness	63	29%	19%	25%	27%
Retail, Apparel & Consumer Goods	63	25%	24%	26%	25%
Education	61	19%	26%	30%	25%
Aviation, Travel & Hospitality	60	18%	23%	29%	31%
Food & Agriculture	59	18%	20%	27%	35%
Public Sector	58	18%	20%	27%	25%

Reputation Capital Score by market

	Mean	Quartile 4	Quartile 3	Quartile 2	Quartile 1
Indonesia	78	55%	34%	8%	4%
Thailand	74	37%	47%	14%	2%
South Africa	73	47%	30%	15%	8%
Philippines	72	45%	25%	20%	10%
Saudi Arabia	70	40%	25%	23%	12%
Vietnam	69	25%	35%	29%	10%
Malaysia	68	30%	38%	12%	20%
UAE	68	38%	25%	23%	12%
India	67	32%	26%	27%	16%
USA	66	26%	30%	25%	19%
Australia	65	16%	38%	32%	14%
Brazil	65	29%	26%	23%	23%
Switzerland	64	24%	31%	25%	20%
Hong Kong	63	34%	16%	24%	26%
UK	63	22%	27%	24%	26%
China	62	32%	22%	17%	29%
Singapore	61	18%	27%	25%	30%
South Korea	61	25%	17%	26%	32%
Spain	61	13%	34%	26%	27%
Canada	60	21%	18%	32%	29%
New Zealand	60	22%	16%	34%	28%
Italy	59	14%	26%	34%	26%
Taiwan	59	18%	23%	23%	36%
Germany	58	15%	21%	28%	36%
France	55	13%	16%	29%	41%
Japan	54	11%	13%	33%	43%
Netherlands	53	10%	15%	26%	49%

Average Reputation Capital Score by company size

	100 to 249	250 to 999	1000+	Total
Insights	52	55	58	55
Strategy	59	62	65	63
Relationships & Connectivity	61	64	67	65
Resources	67	69	71	70
Total mean score	60	63	65	63

Reputation capital leaders deliver better business outcomes and unlock a multiplier effect

Translated into a real-word setting, our research highlights a direct and compelling correlation between organizations having stronger Reputation Capital Scores and improved performance.

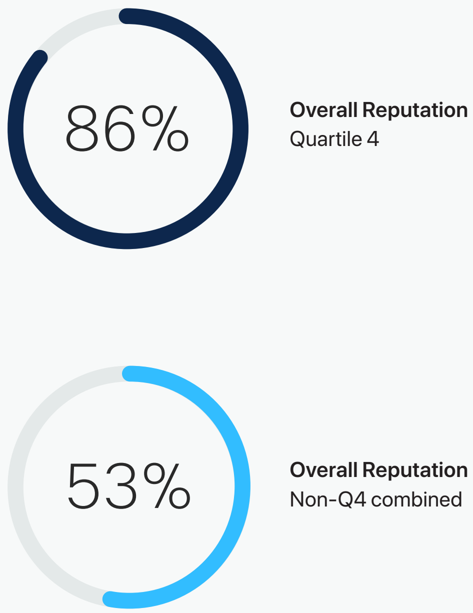
Those in the top quartile are 33 percentage points more likely than those in the other quartiles combined to have a strong reputation overall. When looking at different aspects of reputation they are significantly more likely by the same measure to be strong in leadership and governance (+33pp), cyber and data security (+29pp), products and services (+28pp), employee experience and citizenship (both +25pp), and corporate and financial performance (+24pp).

Looking at the breakdown by indicators, strength in Insights and Relationships & Connectivity are the top differentiators in overall reputation for the top quartile – with Insights strength the top differentiator also for every area except for Employee Experience, where Strategy rates higher.

Those in the top quartile are more likely to display the qualities that are necessary for their reputation management approaches to be successful in the AI era. They are 37 and 28 percentage points more likely than others to be high in Agility and Adaptability respectively; and, as a result, 38 percentage points higher than others in their approach being rated high for Effectiveness.

The research finds that holistic investments and reputation management, across the board, have compounding benefits on overall reputational strength, effectively having a multiplier effect.

% rating organization's reputation as strong by quartile



% rating organization as a high performer in critical qualities for reputation management approach by quartile

	Quartile 4 High	Quartile 3 High	Quartile 2 High	Quartile 1 High	Non-Q4 combined
Agile	73%	51%	34%	22%	36%
Adaptable	60%	45%	34%	16%	32%
Effective	76%	56%	43%	19%	39%

% rating organization as having strong alignment with stakeholder expectations by quartile

	Quartile 4	Quartile 3	Quartile 2	Quartile 1	Non-Q4 combined
Government & Regulators	69%	49%	33%	23%	35%
Media	51%	35%	27%	13%	25%
Community	68%	44%	30%	17%	30%
Customers	62%	51%	44%	22%	39%
Online Influencers	55%	39%	28%	17%	28%
NGOs	53%	37%	28%	15%	27%
Employees	69%	53%	36%	18%	36%
Investors	66%	51%	34%	17%	34%

When looking at how leadership in each quartile impacts performance in these qualities, the data shows that all indicators play a role in success – with strength in Insights having the strongest correlation with Effectiveness, with those in the top quartile 39 percentage points more likely to have highly effective reputation management approaches than others. The same size gap exists for strength in Relationships & Connectivity performance and Agility. Strength in Resources is the top differentiator for Adaptability – though as scores for Resources are overall higher across all organizations surveyed the gap is lower.

In terms of stakeholder relationships, leaders in the top quartile of scores are significantly more likely to have strong alignment with stakeholder expectations than others across every stakeholder group by at least 11 points, with the greatest leadership with Community stakeholders (38 points), Government (34 points), and Employees (33 points).

When looking at the performance of corporate affairs functions, those in the top quartile are significantly ahead here also, beating the non-top quartile by at least 25 percentage points. With the top quartile leading particularly with strategic qualities (+40 pp), followed by productivity (+35 pp), and respect (+35 pp).

% rating organization as having strong alignment with stakeholder expectations by quartile

	Quartile 4	Quartile 3	Quartile 2	Quartile 1	Non-Q4 combined
Strategic	82%	60%	42%	24%	42%
Efficient	67%	54%	38%	16%	36%
Industry Knowledge	68%	53%	40%	22%	38%
Well-resourced	60%	47%	40%	19%	35%
Productive	73%	54%	39%	21%	38%
Responsive	69%	53%	36%	20%	36%
Respected	71%	49%	41%	16%	36%
Internal Connections	56%	42%	33%	12%	29%

% rating organization as being well understood by internal stakeholders by quartile

	Quartile 4	Quartile 3	Quartile 2	Quartile 1	Non-Q4 combined	PP. Gap
Leadership	79%	60%	43%	26%	43%	36pp
Marketing	62%	49%	34%	16%	33%	29pp
General Employees	66%	47%	33%	18%	33%	33pp
Finance	66%	53%	46%	21%	40%	26pp
Legal	67%	48%	36%	19%	34%	33pp
Human Resources	69%	49%	37%	18%	35%	34pp
Procurement	59%	45%	28%	14%	29%	30pp

Further fuelling confidence in corporate affairs teams is the understanding of what this function does. Again, organizations in the top quartile are significantly more likely to be well understood by all functions as compared to others. The strongest differentiator is seen in understanding by the Leadership team, which is a 36 percentage point gap.

4.

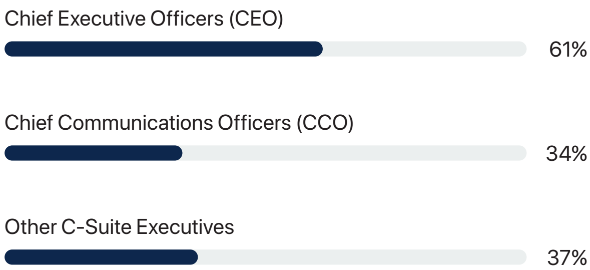
C-Suite gap traps stall internal alignment and strategy mobilization

With three profiles interviewed and surveyed as part of this study, CEOs, CCOs, and other C-Suite members, a particularly distinct gap emerges between the views and sentiments of CEOs and CCOs, which points to CEOs being disconnected from the coalface of reputation management. This is despite most CEOs we surveyed indicating that they feel a high level of personal responsibility for their organization's reputation – nearly twice as likely as CCOs and others in the C-Suite.

Disconnects with reputation performance and relationships

In a sign of potentially misplaced confidence, CEOs (66%) are significantly more likely than CCOs (59%) to believe that their reputation is strong. Also, that they have strong alignment with stakeholders – with the biggest gaps in between CEOs and CCOs existing in views on strong alignment with Online Influencers (11-point gap), Government and Regulators (13-point gap), Community, NGOs and Media (all 9-point gaps). This gap is significantly less for customers, employees, and investors – the groups which CEOs interact with the most.

% feeling a high personal responsibility for organization's reputation



% believing their organization's reputation is strong

Chief Executive Officers (CEO) 66%

Chief Communications Officers (CCO) 59%

Other C-Suite Executives 60%

Reputation management agility issues lack recognition at the top and impact performance

When looking at the qualities needed for a reputation management approach to succeed amid AI-driven change and with other macro trends and issues at play, CEOs continue to be significantly more confident than CCOs. Agility is where the greatest gap occurs, with CEOs 27 percentage points more likely than CCOs to think their reputation management approach is highly agile. Gaps also occur with Adaptability (5-points) and Effectiveness (3-points).

Alongside this, 60% of CEOs compared with just 48% of CCOs believe that their corporate affairs functions are operating in a highly strategic way, which points to a divergent views on the current and desired states of reputation management. A 9 percentage point gap also exists between CEOs and CCOs on corporate affairs having strong connections with other internal teams.

Dual track disconnects in information flows

While CEOs may lack granular insights on the efforts to build and protect reputations, corporate affairs leaders also appear significantly less aware of the bottom-line business impacts of reputational weaknesses compared to CEOs. This suggests fragmented communication channels and siloed information flows across leadership functions.

CEOs are almost twice as likely as CCOs to feel personally responsible for corporate reputation, yet compared with CCOs, CEOs are:

7 percentage points more likely to believe that their reputation is strong.

27 percentage points more likely to believe their reputation management approach is agile

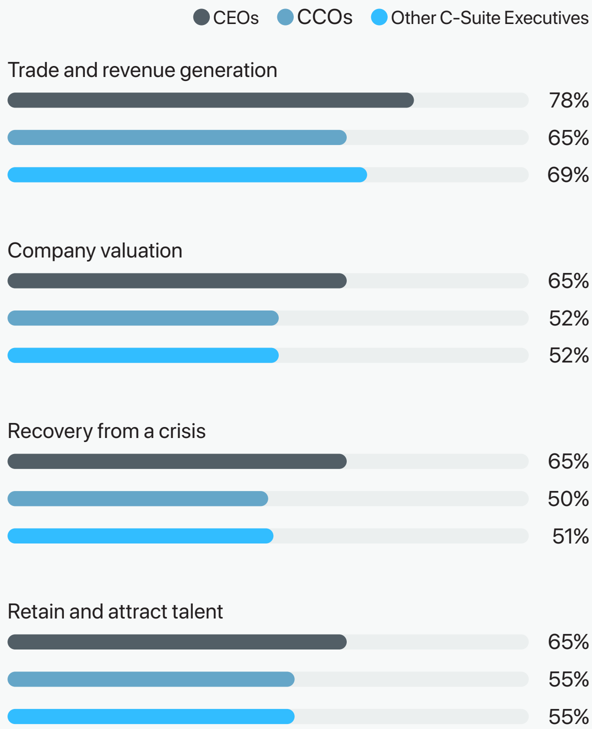
12 and 9 percentage points more likely to believe their corporate affairs functions are strategic and well-connected internally respectively

More likely to believe their organization's reputation strongly aligns with expectations for a number of key stakeholders:

Online Influencers ↑ **13 points**
Government and Regulators ↑ **11 points**
Community, NGOs, Media ↑ **9 points**

In a dual-track disconnect, **CCOs are also less likely to be aware of bottom-line business impacts driven by reputational weaknesses** when compared with CEOs.

% indicating negative impacts in each area due to reputational weaknesses in past 12 months



5.

The shape of reputation functions are shifting, but are the right changes in play?

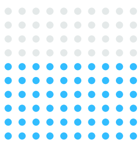
Internal issues with communications flows and information disconnects may be partly explained by visibility challenges. Today, fewer than 4 in 10 of respondents' organizations have their CCOs reporting directly to the CEO.

As organizations in every industry around the world work through the challenges and opportunities of AI transformations, all functions, including corporate affairs are facing change. Based on our survey, 60% or respondents' organizations plan to change the reporting lines of their corporate affairs functions in the next 1-2 years with declines in those reporting to CEOs and COOs and an increase in this function reporting to CHROs and CMOs.

This trend is likely to widen the gap between CEOs and CCOs. It also appears counterintuitive with (74%) and (66%) with corporate affairs leaders currently reporting to CHROs and CMOs planning to switch these reporting lines in the coming one to two years.

The most commonly cited reason for corporate affairs functional leaders to plan to shift reporting lines is in an attempt for the function to be more joined up with another or to reduce silos.

Those who have plans to change the reporting line for their corporate affairs team in the next 1-2 years



60%

% changing based on current reporting line:
CHRO (74%), CMO (66%), CEOs (58%), CFO (57%), COO (53%), Gen Couns. (51%)

Reporting lines of corporate affairs teams now and in the expected change in the future

	% Now	% Future	% Change
CEO/ Founder	39%	36%	-3pp
CHRO	18%	24%	+6pp
CMO	15%	18%	+3pp
COO	17%	13%	-4pp
Others	12%	10%	-2pp

Reasons why respondents are looking to change the reporting line of their corporate affairs functions

Our organization wants corporate affairs to be more joined-up with the functional leader and team it will report into in

70%

% changing for reason based on current reporting line: **COO (68%), CFO (64%), Gen Couns (60%), CHRO (54%), CMO (48%), CEOs (35%)**

The current reporting line encourages it to operate in a silo

46%

% changing for reason based on current reporting line: **CEOs (65%), CFO (62%), CHRO (39%), COO (32%), Gen Couns (28%), CMO (24%)**

Our company wants to reduce the number of seats at the boardroom table

39%

% changing for reason based on current reporting line: **CEOs (43%), Gen Couns (42%), CHRO (38%), COO (37%), CMO (34%), CFO (33%)**

The current leader that the corporate affairs function reports into doesn’t understand the function well enough

27%

% changing for reason based on current reporting line: **CEOs (31%), CFO (29%), Gen Couns (25%), COO (24%), CHRO (23%), CMO (22%)**

Our organization wants to cut costs and/or reduce headcount

7%

% changing for reason based on current reporting line: **CFO (10%), Gen Couns (10%), CEOs (9%), COO (6%), CHRO (5%), CMO (2%)**

Giving chief communicators a seat at the table makes commercial sense

Organizations that excel the most in reputation management understand the strategic importance of having corporate affairs represented at the highest level. Data from the Reputation Capital Scorecard reinforces this: leaders in the top quartile are 16 percentage points more likely to have their Chief Communications Officer (CCO) reporting directly to the CEO.

But maintaining influence isn't just about proximity to leadership – it's about proving value. CCOs must demonstrate their critical role in shaping and safeguarding reputation, positioning themselves as the bridge between the company and its stakeholders – including investors, regulators, employees, customers, and the broader public.

In the AI era, this mandate becomes even more urgent. Reputation risks can emerge and escalate in real time, requiring agile, data-driven insights. CCOs must embrace the AI toolkit to close insight gaps, anticipate emerging risks, and "see around corners."

By leveraging predictive analytics and integrated intelligence, they can ensure CEOs and the C-suite recognize reputation as intrinsic to commercial success, not a marketing function.

The lack of strong internal connections and exposure of CCOs and their teams internally is a likely cause of low understanding across organizations of the value of reputation management functions.

% reporting lines of corporate affairs teams based on quartile

	Quartile 4 Now	Quartile 4 Future	Quartile 3 Now	Quartile 3 Future	Quartile 2 Now	Quartile 2 Future	Quartile 1 Now	Quartile 1 Future
CEO	55%	51%	47%	45%	31%	34%	22%	23%
CHRO	18%	22%	19%	20%	19%	19%	15%	15%
COO	12%	10%	15%	14%	18%	16%	25%	23%
CMO	7%	9%	10%	11%	19%	19%	23%	24%
Others	8%	8%	9%	11%	13%	12%	14%	14%

6. Recommendations

1. **Embrace complexity to conquer it:** Seize this moment when reputation management is in the spotlight as an opportunity to drive and lead upgrades to the corporate affairs function and attract further investment in it.

2. **Invest in insights to enhance strategic output:** Every corporate affairs function should have in place a robust and well-considered data and insights strategy and roadmap for its function.The increased breadth and complexity of reputation management and its broadening stakeholder touchpoints is an opportunity to become a more strategic partner to the C-Suite but having access to meaningful insights to define strategic challenges and solutions, and demonstrate results, is critical to credibility and achieving stakeholder support as well as results.

3. **Breakdown data and information blockers and silos:** It is not just about having data and information, if data and information flows are fragmented or internally siloed or the right tools and capabilities are not in place to share and interact with it then the resulting insights will not be useful or actionable, and may in fact be disconnected with commercial realities. This includes breaking internal silos and establishing stronger communications and information flows between the communications teams, the CEO and other C-Suite members. It is important not to shield the CEOs from the inconvenient truths about reputation issues, on the flip side CCOs must also seek ways to build greater understanding of business challenges.

4. **Refine your operating model for real-time agility in the AI era:** AI is rewriting the rules, tools and channels of communications and how information is received and processed. It is also increasing the pace at which this happens to machine-level speed. It is important for CCOs to refine their organization's operating model for reputation management in this new era, which includes having the right people, processes and technologies to manage insights, strategy, relationships, and channels in real time. It is also important for CCOs to see AI for what it is and recognize it for what it can and can't do for the function. AI does not have the capacity to navigate the large volume of grey areas that exist in reputation management, not can it build or manage real relationships on an organization's behalf.

5. **Build the case for a holistic reputation management approach to unlock multiple benefits:** While some areas of reputation management have a higher profile than others, such as corporate and executive positioning and financial communications, this study highlights the compounding business benefits that gain from investing holistically across all reputation touchpoints.

7.

Meet the Reputation Capital Council of 2025 – 2026

Abhinav **Kumar**	Global CMO	TCS
Addy **Frederick**	Group Head of Corporate Affairs	Admiral Group
Alan **VanderMolen**	Senior Vice President and Deputy CCO	ADNOC Group
Alex **Aiken**	Communications Advisor, C4	UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Alex **Malouf**	Senior Director, Public Relations & Media	ROSHN
Andy **Pharoah**	VP Corporate Affairs & Sustainability	Mars
Angela **Balakrishnan**	Executive Director of Strategic Communications & Public Affairs	Information Commissioner's Office
Arnab Roy **Choudhury**	Communications Advisor	USSEC
Arpana Kumar **Ahuja**	EVP & Head, Corporate Brand & Communications	Jindal
Bella **Ling-Nair**	Senior Director, Communications & Patient Advocacy, JAPAC	Edwards Lifesiences
Caroline **York**	Marketing Director APAC	Serotonin
Charlotte **West**	Vice President, Global Corporate Communications	Lenovo
Damon **Jones**	Chief Communications Officer	P&G
Dan **Billings**	Asia Regional Head of Corporate Communications	Invesco
Dimple **Raisarana Kapur**	EVP & Head - Corporate Brand, Communications & Sustainability	Star Health and Allied Insurance
Hussein **Dajani**	Group Chief Marketing and Customer Centricity Officer	Petromin
Ilana **Ostrin**	Head of Global Communications	PPTA Global
Jai **Tolani**	Senior Director, Corporate Communications	DAMAC Properties
Jane **Lawrie**	Global head of Corporate Affairs	KPMG
Jasmine **Mobarek**	Head of Communications, International Markets	HP
Jay **Cooney**	Chief Communications & Marketing Officer	Enviri

Jeff **DeMarrais**	Senior Vice President, Global Marketing & Chief Communications Officer	Cognizant
Jon **Harris**	Executive Vice President, Chief Communications & Networking Officer	Cognara
Jonathan **Adashek**	SVP, Marketing and Communications	IBM
Jonathan **Hirasawa Ashton**	Head of Marketing and Communications - Middle East and Africa	KROHNE Group
Junaidah **Dahlan**	Senior Communications Leader	GE Healthcare
Karen **Wong Chayavirabood**	Regional Director Public Affairs, Asia Pacific	Abbott
Kate **Cronin**	Chief Marketing Officer, Medtronic Diabetes	Medtronic
Kelly **Johnston**	Global Chief Operating Officer	Sandpiper
Ken **Hong**	Head of Corporate Communications & PR, Americas Region	Hisense
Kym **White**	Chief Corporate Affairs Officer	Generate:Biomedicines
Lavanya **Mandal**	General Manager - Head of PR and Internal Communications	Aster DM Healthcare
Lavanya **Wadgaonkar**	Chief Communications Officer	Nissan
Lavinia **Rajaram**	Director, Global Brand Communications & Asia Head of Expedia Group Brands PR	Expedia Group
Lena **Goh**	Managing Director	Temasek
Leonard **Lin**	EMEA President and Global Head of Public Affairs	Shein
Lynne **Mulholland**	General Manager, Group Corporate Affairs	Hong Kong & Shanghai Hotels
Michael **Stewart**	Chief Corporate Affairs and Communications Officer	Unilever
Michael **Rinaman**	Global Practice Lead Managing Director, Strategy	Sandpiper
Michelle **Samuel**	Global Director - Communications	Mondelez
Mike **Fernandez**	SVP & Chief Communications Officer	Enbridge
Miki **Hirasawa-Ashton**	Senior Adviser	GlobeScan
Nadim **Hasbani**	Director - Head of Corporate Affairs Strategy META	Eli Lilly
Natalie **Faulkner**	Director of Communications	Property Finder
Neda **Shelton**	Group Head of Communications, Marketing & Corpo	Solutions Plus
Nicholas **Ionides**	Vice President, Communications & Corporate Affair	Marina Bay Sands
Nicola **Green**	Chief Communications & Corporate Affairs Director	Virgin Media-O2

Nikhil **Kharoo**	Director, Global Head of PR & Partnerships	Razer
Omar **Zaafrani**	Global head, Corporate Affairs & ESG	Puma Energy
Ophira **Bhatia**	Vice President	Mondelez
Paul **Marriott**	Global Head of People and Engagement	Macquarie Group
Peter **O'Sullivan**	Director, Group Communications	Woolworths Group
Priyanka **Tanwar**	Global head of Corporate Affairs	Hero MotorCorp
Puneet Pal **Singh**	Strategic Communications Leader	ByteDance
Ramya **Chandrasekaran**	Chief Communications Officer	QI Group
Rimmi **Harindran**	Senior Director, Corporate Affairs AMEA	Mars
Rishi **Basu**	Associate Vice President & Global Head – Corporate Communications & PR	Infosys
Ross **Rowbury**	Co-Head Group Corporate Communications	Nomura
Sameer **Bajaj**	SVP & Head of Corporate Communications and Corporate	MakeMyTrip
Sarah **James**	Head of Comms, Asia	Sun Life
Serene **Koh**	Director of Communications, South East Asia, Japan, Korea & Taiwan	Thales
Shalini **Gupta**	Head of Internal Communications, UKIMEA	Arup
Shorbani **Roy**	Regional Head of Communications, Asia & India	Lockheed Martin
Shweta **Shukla**	Head of Corporate Affairs – ASEAN & Taiwan, APAC	Haleon
Stephen **Forshaw**	Chief Representative, ANZ	Airbus
Su Min **Sng**	Head of Communications	Grab
Sujit **Patil**	CCO	Godrej Industries
Toby **Doman**	Head of External Communications	PPF Group
Tom **Blackwell**	CCO	Nebius
Torod **Neptune**	Assistant Professor Strategic Communications & Reputation Management	Univeristy of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Umesh **Nair**	Communications & CSR Director, East Asia & Singapore Malaysia	Alstom
Valerie **Tan**	Senior Vice President – Corporate communivations, CSR & Media Affairs	Emirates
Zoe **Hibbert**	Chief of Corporate Affairs	Prudential

About Sandpiper

Sandpiper is a pioneering reputation management consultancy headquartered in Asia and operating globally, proudly elevating the region on the world stage. Sandpiper offers government relations and public affairs services to business and political leaders across Asia-Pacific. As creators of business value, we are an independent, 100% employee-owned group comprising five specialist divisions: **Sandpiper Communications**, **Sandpiper Financial**, **Sandpiper Public Affairs**, **Sandpiper Health**, and **Sandpiper Research & Insights**.

Our core purpose is to help clients build, strengthen, and protect their reputations by directly contributing to their bottom-line business results.

Our technology-enabled services help clients future-proof their communications, leading industry transformation amid the rise of AI and emerging technologies.

Operating with a single global P&L, we are nimble, innovative, and uniquely positioned to harness new technologies.

We are trusted advisors to industry leaders and market disruptors, combining deep regional market understanding with global perspectives and cutting-edge technology.

Our expertise spans seven specialist sectors characterized by complexity: **Energy**, **Financial Services**, **Government**, **Health**, **Insurance**, **Professional Services**, and **Technology**. We provide comprehensive end-to-end reputation management services that begin by uncovering critical insights to support global reputation strategies. We then leverage our global network of senior industry specialists to create tailored approaches, and finally implement integrated communications with precise channel expertise.

Sandpiper has been recognised with multiple prestigious awards, including Global Corporate Agency of the Year from PRovoke, Asia Pacific Regional Network of the Year from Public Affairs Asia, Large Agency of the Year and ESG Specialist Agency from PRCA, and Asia Pacific Large Agency of the Year from PRWeek. We have also been ranked among the top 10 fastest-growing agencies in Asia Pacific, the top 15 fastest-growing globally, and one of the top five creative agencies in Asia Pacific.

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