

Corporate Reputation: The Definitional Landscape

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ABSTRACT

While interest in the concept of corporate reputation has gained momentum in the last few years, a precise and commonly agreed upon definition is still lacking. This paper reviews the many definitions of corporate reputation present in the recent literature and categorizes these definitions based on their similarities and differences. The purpose of the study is to review, analyze and evaluate prior definitional statements of corporate reputation. The analysis led us to conclude that the cluster of meaning that looks most promising for future definitional work uses the language of assessment and specific terms such as judgment, estimation, evaluation or gauge. Based on this review work and a lexicological analysis of the concept of reputation, we propose a new definitional statement that we think adds theoretical clarity to this area of study. The statement defines corporate reputation more explicitly and narrowly and distinguishes this concept from corporate identity, corporate image and corporate reputation capital. It is our hope that this study and the resulting definition will provoke further scholarship devoted to developing one voice when it comes to corporate reputation as a concept.

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INTRODUCTION

In the inaugural issue of *Corporate Reputation Review*, Fombrun and van Riel (1997: 5) lamented the dearth of studies on corporate reputation: ‘Although corporate reputations are ubiquitous, they remain relatively understudied. In part, it is surely because reputations are seldom noticed until they are threatened. In part, however, it is also a problem of definition’. Today, it is hard to argue that corporate reputations are understudied. Events of the last few years have certainly moved corporate reputations into the spotlight. As Figure 1 illustrates, the study of corporate reputation has intensified over the last few years. Figure 1 shows the number of articles devoted to corporate reputation for the period 1980–2003. To determine the trend, we searched for peer-reviewed, scholarly articles on corporate reputation that were published in academic journals indexed by ABI Inform (Pro Quest). Our search identified only those articles in which the phrase ‘corporate reputation’ appeared in the title or abstract of the piece, indicating that the authors were focused on this concept in their research. During the period

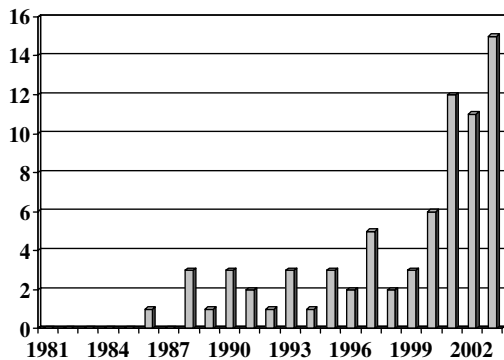


Figure 1: Indexed peer-review articles¹ containing 'corporate reputation' in title or abstract.

of 2001–2003, the average number of scholarly articles on corporate reputation more than doubled in frequency compared with the year 2000. And, the average number of scholarly articles on corporate reputation published during the period 2001–2003 is nearly five times as large as is the average for the period 1990–2000. In addition, a well-established scholarly journal, *Corporate Reputation Review*, devoted solely to the topic, now exists, and the associated annual conference on corporate reputation is now in its eighth year. The Reputation Institute and many other consulting firms are conducting brisk business advising corporations on how to manage their reputations. There are multitudes of scholarly and practitioner books available on the topic. In short, the importance of corporate reputation is evident.

Despite the fact that the concept of corporate reputation has driven considerable academic and practitioner work, several scholars have recently reissued Fombrun and van Riel's (1997) call for definitional and other theoretically oriented studies of the concept (Gotsi and Wilson, 2001; Caruana, 2001; Fombrun, 2001; Davies *et al.*, 2001; Wei, 2002; Lewellyn, 2002; Whetton and Mackey, 2002; Mahon, 2002; Wartick, 2002). For example, Gotsi and Wilson (2001: 24)

began their review with the reminder that 'over the years authors [in this area of study] have adopted different, sometimes even contradictory definitions for the term corporate reputation'. Lewellyn (2002: 454) stated that the purpose of her article was to 'focus the conceptual mess – the zeitgeist of the reputation literature...', but concedes that there is still much more work to be done. Mahon (2002: 415) contended that reputation as an idea is still 'not as clear as it might initially seem to a casual observer'. Wartick's (2002: 371) assessment of the state of the art when it comes to defining and theorizing reputation is perhaps the most comprehensive: '...definitions and data are found to be lacking, and ... many deficiencies in definition and data can be attributed to the fact that theory development related to corporate reputation has been insufficient'.

In light of current concerns raised by several scholars in this burgeoning field about the lack of a precise, common definition, in this article we revisit a fundamental question: What is corporate reputation? It seems clear that without a unified approach to the concept itself, we cannot effectively or efficiently advance research on corporate reputation. In our view, while many scholars have gathered under the same tent, in large part due to the impressive efforts of Fombrun, van Riel and their colleagues, it is important that we now devote some serious attention to forging a common vocabulary. With this goal in mind, below we list and review the many definitions of corporate reputation now present in the literature, and then categorize these definitions based on their similarities and differences. We know that researchers in this area of study are far from being in perfect agreement on one common definition, but wondered just how differently they are conceptualizing corporate reputation and what clusters of underlying meaning might emerge from careful study of previous definitions. Following our review and analysis of previous studies that have explicitly defined

reputation, we develop recommendations and advance a more precise definition that we think is useful for further research. The definition we advance adds theoretical clarity to this area of study in that we make distinctions among four key concepts in this literature: corporate identity, corporate image, corporate reputation and corporate reputation capital.

THE DEFINITIONAL LANDSCAPE: AN OVERVIEW OF THE RUGGED TERRAIN

Eight years ago, Fombrun and van Riel (1997) described the ‘reputational landscape’ as chaotic and barren. While it is easy to see the chaos in the literature of that time, it is not clear that the reputational landscape was barren. Indeed, Fombrun and van Riel (1997) identified several distinct views of reputation including economic, strategic, marketing, organizational, sociological and accounting, each with its own traditions of defining the concept and conducting research. As a multi-disciplinary field of study unto itself, the landscape of corporate reputation research was perhaps better described as replete with virtually self-contained islands than as barren. Of course, too much breadth in the perspectives taken can lead to a lack of productive study, which is surely what Fombrun and van Riel (1997: 6) had in mind when they stated: ‘The lack of systematic attention to corporate reputations can be traced to the diversity of relevant academic and practitioner literatures that explore different facets of the construct’. The key point is that researchers, each wearing their own disciplinary blinders, did not hold to an integrated definition and often were not aware of the diverse perspectives.

Accordingly, early efforts at advancing the field were rightfully placed on bringing discipline-based scholars into the fold of corporate reputation research. Several scholars attempted to build an integrative medium that would push the study of reputation for-

ward under ‘one vision, one voice’ (see Barnett *et al.*, 2000 for a summary of these efforts). Spurred on, in part, by Fombrun and van Riel’s (1997) call, researchers from across these disciplines have begun to join together. The corner has been turned in that some scholars now tend to recognize how disjointed this field of study is. There are many distinct visions and disparate voices echoing across the vast stretches of the reputational landscape and there is an urgent need to create a unifying framework.

Confusion Among Concepts of Corporate Identity, Image and Reputation

Perhaps the most fundamental barrier to the creation of ‘one vision, one voice’ relates to the confusion concerning the concepts of identity, image and reputation. Fombrun and van Riel (1997) sought to subsume image and identity within reputation. From their perspective, image and identity are the basic components of reputation. Their integrative perspective presents identity as the perception employees and managers – those inside the firm – hold of the nature of their firm. In contrast, image is the perception that external observers have of the firm. Reputation is the net result of the aggregation of these perceptions: ‘*A corporate reputation is a collective representation ... It gauges a firm’s relative standing both internally with employees and externally with its stakeholders ...*’ (Fombrun and van Riel, 1997: 10; italics in original). Even in its eighth year, however, the Reputation Institute’s annual conference individually lists reputation, image and identity in its title.

Fombrun and van Riel’s (1997) integrative perspective, though it is now more widely accepted, remains far from universal. Identity, image and reputation are still often used interchangeably (Wartick, 2002). For example, Markwick and Fill (1997) defined identity as ‘the organization’s presentation of itself to its various stakeholders and the means by which it distinguishes itself from all other organizations’. Bromley (2001)

defined a firm's image as 'the internal collective state of mind that underlies its corporate communications efforts (successful or not) to present itself to others'. Whetten and Mackey (2002: 401) defined image as 'what organizational agents want their external stakeholders to understand is most central, enduring and distinctive about their organization'. This internal focus is similar to Fombrun's (1996: 36) definition of corporate identity: 'the set of values and principles employees and managers associate with the company'.

When scholars do not use these terms interchangeably, they may instead argue for a particular hierarchy. For example, Wei (2002: 270) argued that reputation should not subsume image, but rather image should subsume reputation:

If 'reputation' stems (partly) from persuasion, as suggested by Fombrun, then it ought to be subsumed under 'image,' not the other way around. Of course, reputation also contributes to the making of a corporate image, but still it should be considered a variable within the parameters of 'image,' like other variables, such as marketing strategies, product qualities, and customer services, all of which can shape the outcome of image making.

Even when scholars use the same term – corporate reputation – they offer varying definitions, or avoid precise definitions altogether. We next detail our study of recent definitions of corporate reputation.

WHAT IS CORPORATE REPUTATION TODAY?

As mentioned above, we are not the first researchers to identify the disparity in terminology that lingers in the corporate reputation literature. Several calls for definitional clarification have preceded us. Most notably, Fombrun and van Riel (1997) called for work that bridges the many diverse perspectives on reputation, and built the Reputation

Institute and this journal with that aim in mind. A purpose of this paper is to assess how far we have come toward achieving that goal; to assess the level of unity within the field. Our assessment begins with an inventory of definitions of corporate reputation. We build on the work of Bennett and Kottasz (2000), who searched published and unpublished literature and found 16 definitions of corporate reputation. We use Bennett and Kottasz's (2000) definitions as a starting point, and extend the search for definitions by four additional years, to include the years 2000–2003. These additional years are particularly critical, given the time delays inherent in academic publishing. It would surely have taken several years for Fombrun and van Riel's (1997) call to pull together the various disciplinary perspectives on corporate reputation under a common tent to influence academic thinking and to be discernable in published academic work. Thus, our focus is on recent usage of corporate reputation in published academic studies.

Using the ABI Inform (Pro Quest) Database, we conducted a search for peer-reviewed, scholarly articles published on the topic of corporate reputation from 1 January, 2000 to 31 December, 2003. We also conducted an on-line search for recent books devoted to corporate reputation. We found that even though an article or book clearly fit within the domain of corporate reputation and made use of the terminology, its authors often did not offer a formal definition of the term. Thus, though our initial search turned up hundreds of potentially relevant articles and books, our reviews of these articles and books showed that only a fraction offered specific definitions. We also found that some articles referenced definitions of earlier articles or books, often works published outside of our search window. We traced such definitions to the original work, and where formal definitions could be confirmed, we added these to our database of definitions. As shown in Table 1, this

**Table 1: Inventory of Definitions of Corporate Reputation**

<i>Cluster</i>	<i>Citation</i>	<i>Terms</i>	
<i>Asset</i>	Goldberg <i>et al.</i> (2003)	An intangible resource	
	Mahon (2002)	(Strategy scholars) A resource for the firm (Social scholars) An asset	
		Financial soundness	
	Miles and Covin (2002)	A valuable but fragile intangible asset	
	Fombrun (2001)	Economic asset	
	Drobis (2000)	Intangible asset	
	Miles and Covin (2000)	Intangible asset	
	<i>Fortune</i> AMAC: Fombrun <i>et al.</i> (1999)	Wise use of corporate assets Quality of management Quality of products or services Innovativeness Long-term investment value Financial soundness Ability to attract, develop and keep talented people Responsibility to the community and the environment	
	Riahi-Belkaoui and Pavlik (1992)	Important asset	
	Spence (1974)	Outcome of a competitive process	
	<i>Assessment</i>	Larkin (2003)	A value judgment
		Lewellyn (2002)	Stakeholders' evaluation of their knowledge of a firm
		Mahon (2002)	An estimation of a person or thing
		Wartick (2002)	The aggregation of a single stakeholder's evaluations (1992 def.)
Bennett and Gabriel (2001)		Distribution of opinions	
Fombrun (2001)		Subjective, collective assessment Judgment of firms' effectiveness Aggregate judgments	
Fombrun and Rindova (2001)		Gauge of the firm's relative standing	
Gotsi and Wilson (2001)		Overall evaluation of a company over time	
Bennett and Kottasz (2000)		Opinions of an organization developed over time	
Cable and Graham (2000)		Affective evaluation	
Deephouse (2000)		Evaluation of a firm	
Dukerich and Carter (2000)		Assessments based on perceptions	
Fombrun and Rindova (2000)		General esteem Regard in which the firm is held	
Gioia <i>et al.</i> (2000)		Lasting, cumulative, global assessment	
Schweizer and Wijnberg (1999)	A shorthand evaluation about the stock of information about that firm		
Fombrun (1998)	Describes the firm's overall attractiveness		
Gray and Balmer (1998)	A value judgment about a company's attributes		

Table 1: Continued

<i>Cluster</i>	<i>Citation</i>	<i>Terms</i>
<i>Assessment</i>	Rindova and Fombrun (1998)	Aggregate assessment of constituents of an organization
	Fombrun and van Riel (1997)	Aggregate assessment of a firm's performance Subjective collective assessment
	Post and Griffin (1997)	Gauges a firm's relative standing Synthesis of the opinions, perceptions and attitudes
	Fombrun (1996)	Overall estimation of a firm Compared to some standard
	Herbig and Milewicz (1995)	An estimation of consistency
	Brown and Perry (1994)	The evaluation of a company
	Dowling (1994)	An evaluation (respect, esteem, estimation)
	Dutton <i>et al.</i> (1994)	Beliefs about what distinguishes a firm
	Fombrun and Shanley (1990)	Public's cumulative judgments
	Bernstein (1984)	The evaluation of what a company does
<i>Awareness</i>	Larkin (2003)	Reflection of a (firm's) name
	Pharoah (2003)	Exists in the eye of the beholder Exists in a million different minds
	Einwiller and Will (2002)	Net perception
	Mahon (2002)	Includes notions of corporate social responsibility
	Roberts and Dowling (2002)	A perceptual representation of a company's past actions and future prospects Global perception
	Balmer (2001)	Latent perception of the organization
	Fombrun (2001)	Collective representation of past actions and future prospects Individual perceptions and interpretations
	Fombrun and Rindova (2001)	A collective representation of a firm's past actions and results
	Hanson and Stuart (2001)	The corporate image over time
	Zyglidopoulos (2001)	Set of knowledge and emotions
	Bennett and Kottasz (2000)	Perceptions of an organization developed over time
	Ferguson <i>et al.</i> (2000)	What stakeholders think and feel about a firm
	Fombrun and Rindova (2000)	Aggregate perceptions
	Miles and Covin (2000)	Set of perceptions
	Mouritsen (2000)	An ambiguous assemblage of hunches
	Stuart (2000)	A set of attributes that observers perceive to characterize a firm
	Balmer (1998)	The perception of a firm
	Fombrun (1998)	Collective representation of past actions

**Table 1: Continued**

Cluster	Citation	Terms
Awareness	Fombrun and van Riel (1997)	A collective representation
	Post and Griffin (1997)	A collective representation of a firm's past actions and results
	Fombrun (1996)	A synthesis of opinions
		A snapshot reconciling multiple images
		A perceptual representation of a firm's past actions
		Net or aggregate perceptions
		'Net' affective or emotional reaction
	Yoon <i>et al.</i> (1993)	Reflects the history of past actions
	Andersen and Sorensen (1999, 1992)	A shared bundle of attributes
	Smythe <i>et al.</i> (1992)	A corporation's values
Weigelt and Camerer (1988)	A set of economic and non-economic attributes	
Levitt (1965)	A buyer's perception of how well known, good/bad, reliable, trustworthy, reputable and believable a firm is	

method produced a total of 49 unique sources (articles or books) with definitions of corporate reputation.

Clusters of Meaning

What we found through our search and subsequent analysis was surprising. Given recent calls to clarify the definition of reputation (eg, Mahon, 2002; Wartick, 2002), we knew that no single definition was commonly accepted and expected to find (a) numerous unique definitions and (b) broad differences in meaning between and among the definitions. Instead, we found that although terminology does differ across sources, there is more than a little underlying similarity. Overall, we identified three distinct clusters of meaning in the definitional statements: reputation as a state of *awareness*, reputation as an *assessment* and reputation as an *asset* (see Table 1).

Awareness

The first cluster, reputation as *awareness*, encompasses those definitions that referred to

a term or used language indicating that observers or stakeholders had a general awareness of a firm but did not make judgments about it. The single most commonly used term for defining corporate reputation in this cluster was perceptions. Within this cluster, corporate reputations were defined as an aggregation of perceptions, latent perceptions, net perceptions, global perceptions, perceptual representations and collective representations. Also included in this cluster are references to corporate reputation as representations of knowledge or emotions since these indicate an awareness of the firm.

Assessment

The second cluster, which is modal in this sample, is reputation as *assessment*. It includes those definitions that referred to a term or used language indicating that observers or stakeholders were involved in an assessment of the status of a firm. These include references to corporate reputation as a judgment, an estimate, an evaluation or a gauge. These four terms are synonymous in meaning. This

cluster also includes references to esteem, regard in which the firm is held, and how attractive the firm is. The terms ‘opinions’ and ‘beliefs’ also fit into this cluster because their definitions are judgmental in nature.

Asset

The third cluster, which we label *asset*, incorporates those definitions that referred to reputation as something of value and significance to the firm. This group includes references to the term as a resource or as an intangible, financial or economic asset. Definitions that frame reputation as awareness or as an assessment do not capture the idea that a firm’s reputation has real value. It might be questioned whether this way of referring to the term is more consistent with the idea of the consequences of reputation rather than with defining reputation itself.

These three clusters encapsulate the breadth of recent definitions of corporate reputation. While some overlap in the clusters may exist, they are relatively distinct. Awareness does not imply an assessment; assessment does not imply transformation into an asset.

WHAT SHOULD CORPORATE REPUTATION BE TOMORROW?

Informed by our review of recent literature and the 49 definitional statements, we offer the following framework to help further refine the concept of corporate reputation. We think it is particularly useful to outline its domain relative to the related concepts of identity, image and reputation capital.

In the process of analyzing the various definitions of corporate reputation and extracting the three clusters of meaning, we focused our attention only on sources that specifically defined corporate reputation. In the process, we differentiated corporate reputation from image, identity, reputation capital and other permutations of the pure term. Though we looked only at corporate reputation, we found many instances where

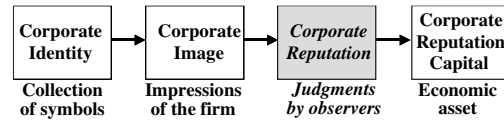


Figure 2: Disaggregating corporate reputation

the language bordered on or spilled over into what we consider aspects of image, identity and reputation capital, as we have presented them in Figure 2. Many definitions of corporate reputation literally encompassed aspects of these other constructs. For example, Fombrun’s (2001) comprehensive definition of corporate reputation includes reputation as an economic asset (reputation capital), a representation (image) and a judgment (reputation). Rather than blend these aspects into one broad definition of corporate reputation, we advocate distinct boundaries between and among these constructs and a more focused definition of corporate reputation.

Corporate Identity

We view identity not as the image of the firm held by an inside stakeholder (i.e., employees), but rather, as the underlying ‘core’ or basic character of the firm (cf. Melewar and Jenkins, 2002). That is, identity is akin to the concept of identity in mathematics – a representation of the firm that equates to its current state. It is not identifying *with* a firm, but rather, the identity *of* the firm – what the firm actually is. Groundwork for the corporate identity concept was laid by Albert and Whetton (1985) and has been developed most recently in the field of reputation studies by Fombrun and van Riel (2004: 165–166), who state that it consists of ‘(a) features that employees consider *central* to the company, (b) features that make the company *distinctive* from other companies (in the eyes of employees) and (c) features that are *enduring* or continuing, linking the present and the past to the future’. The idea of enduring, central features of organizations that makes them distinctive from other

organizations parallels and even duplicates frameworks in the field of organizational culture. In the culture literature, the organization is viewed as a collection of material and behavioral symbols and corresponding systems of beliefs and values and basic, underlying assumptions (cf. Frost *et al.*, 1991; Schein, 1992; Alvesson, 2002; Martin, 2002). Given the rich history of research on corporate culture and symbolism, we advocate conceptualizing corporate identity as a collection of symbols, as shown in Figure 2.

Corporate Image

We then treat image as observers' general impressions of a corporation's distinct collection of symbols, whether that observer is internal or external to the firm. Image is 'what comes to mind when one hears the name or sees the logo' (Gray and Balmer, 1998: 696) of a particular firm. The transition from identity to image is a function of public relations, marketing and other organizational processes that attempt to shape the impression people have of the firm. Image can be shaped but not controlled by an organization because factors such as media coverage, governmental regulations and surveillance, industry dynamics and other external forces also influence impressions of the firm.

Corporate Reputation and Corporate Reputation Capital

In our framework, we reserve the term corporate reputation for the judgments made by observers about a firm. Judgment may be rooted in perceptions of the firm's identity and impressions of its image but often occurs as a consequence of a triggering event. Triggering events may arise from a firm's more visible actions and mistakes (e.g., environmental damage or human rights violations) or various external events. It is important to recognize that the identity of a firm can remain static while its image and reputation

change as a result of external events (cf. Wei, 2002).

As judgments of the firm accumulate over time, reputation capital ebbs and flows. This is the economic and intangible asset quality that is often attributed to reputation.

Toward a Definition

The study of corporate reputation is maturing rapidly. Most scholars have either paid little attention to defining the concept or have relied on very broad terms in defining and otherwise trying to capture this important concept. We believe it is important to pause and try to isolate the exact nature of corporate reputation, distinguishing the construct from identity, image and capital, as well as providing a carefully crafted definition of the concept. Toward that end, we offer Figure 2, as well as the following definition:

Corporate Reputation: Observers' collective judgments of a corporation based on assessments of the financial, social, and environmental impacts attributed to the corporation over time.

There are two main justifications for this definition. First, looking carefully at the dictionary definition of reputation (the general estimation in which a person or a thing is held by the public, as defined in *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, William Morris, ed., New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1971), it is clear that the term reputation involves estimation, which implies judgment or assessment. While researchers can define terms using any combination of words, different definitional statements serve different purposes. In some cases, language that is at odds with everyday phrasing is desirable because it opens up new ways of thinking about a phenomenon and imaginative inquiry. Philosophers have sometimes argued that special language is necessary and must be created when everyday language dulls the imagination and inhibits new inquiry. They sometimes advocate the

creation of technical language that does not exist in dictionaries or popular modes of expression. The idea of a corporate reputation probably does exist in everyday language, but no doubt more closely resembles the idea of the reputation of an individual than is desirable for scientific study. It probably also has more in common with notions of corporate impressions or images than would be desirable. In our view, precise language that captures a phenomenon well and that fosters rigorous inquiry has advantages over both everyday language and highly technical language. Thus, for the task of defining corporate reputation, we favor taking the middle road between everyday language and highly technical language and find this in a careful, lexicological reading of a standard dictionary.

Second, while there is disagreement among even those scholars who assign themselves the task of precisely defining corporate reputation in their research, the frequency for unique definitional statements of assessment is greater than the frequencies for unique definitional statements for either awareness or assets. Of the 49 separate sources (articles and books) identified and analyzed, 17 defined reputation exclusively using the language of assessment, 15 defined reputation exclusively using the language of awareness, six defined reputation exclusively using the language of assets and 11 defined reputation using language that mixed two or more categories. Most of the mixed language definitional statements were authored by Fombrun and his colleagues, or were part of comprehensive review pieces (eg, Bennett and Kottasz, 2000; Mahon, 2002; Larkin, 2003).

It would be inaccurate to claim that there is something of an emerging consensus among researchers when it comes to defining corporate reputation because many do not appear to define the term or do not appear to be aware of how others are handling the concept. Among those who take the time to provide a formal definition of corporate

reputation, about as much attention is focused on the category of assessment as is focused on the categories of awareness and assets combined. Furthermore, among those researchers who define corporate reputation using only one of the categories we identified, the language of assessment is the most frequently used. From this, we believe it is accurate to state that during the period spanned by this study, more researchers distilled the reputation construct down to the idea of an assessment than any other approach.

CONCLUSION

It is doubtful that anyone today would argue that corporate reputation is unimportant. Without a clear and commonly agreed upon definition, however, it is difficult to move forward in this field of study. The purpose of this article is to propose a more precise definition of the concept of corporate reputation and clarify the distinctions between and among reputation, identity, image and reputation capital. While the definition proposed herein is not all-inclusive or integrative of the myriad of definitions that exist today, it does reflect the modal statement made by scholars who have explicitly paid attention to definitional issues. And, it also is consistent with the lexicology of the word reputation, which reflects a judgment or an assessment.

To achieve 'one vision, one voice' on corporate reputation, and to have a more thorough impact on practice, we believe it to be particularly important that future studies move away from the omnibus-type definitions – those encompassing statements that include content that configures reputation as awareness and assessment and even asset. Omnibus definitions have helped bring corporate reputation researchers together under one common tent in recent years, but in order to make our union academically and practically fruitful, we need to work from a common and more concise definition. Definitions that attempt to capture too much

conceptual space present problems for scholarly research but also have been shown to be of little value to practitioners. For example, Bennett and Kottasz (2000: 234) found that about three quarters of the practitioners they surveyed did not disagree with the statement that the 'academic' definition of corporate reputation is 'not sufficiently practical'. The academic definition of corporate reputation used by Bennett and Kottasz (2000) that so many practitioners found to be insufficiently practical was a 'compound statement' (p. 228) that contained aspects of both awareness ('images'; 'perceptions') and assessment ('expectations'; 'opinions').

In order to construct a more focused definitional statement of corporate reputation, we think it is the right time to move away from awareness-based definitions to one that emphasizes the language of assessment. Based on lexicological reasoning, the opinions of the majority of researchers, and pragmatic criteria, we think it is more promising for future research to define reputation in terms of estimation, judgment, evaluation and opinion.

NOTE

- 1 Corporate Reputation Review, oddly, was not indexed, so it does not account for the rise.

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