

What do people say *about you?*



Managing your reputation

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Introduction - perceptions are realities

We may not like it but others will judge us, daily, not necessarily upon the quality of our work but upon minor details and passing remarks. These things shape perceptions. Often we ignore such perceptions. But if we are to maximise the impact we have on others, particularly when it comes to getting things done, then we should know how we are seen.

The reputation index model outlined in this booklet is based upon working with senior executives in the public sector and public organisations over the past decade. The model is not so much based upon detailed academic research as it is on a practical approach to understanding the way that people make judgements about others. It is designed to enable readers to understand the way in which others see them and to take account of it.

The reputation index hinges upon academic thinking and draws upon on the ideas of Erving Goffman in particular. But its true value is that it appears to work for people who have become concerned about the impact of the way that others see them on their ability to get things done. Its value is that it works. As one chief executive who read an early draft of this booklet put it, "This is something you can't afford not to do."

What you will find is that the model can be applied to your organisation and used as an exercise for your management team. But many people who have adopted the model keep it for personal use.

Reputation

1 Your reputation - what do people say about you?

For the purposes of this booklet reputation is taken to mean to things.

First, words, values, ideas and attributes that are associated with you. These things stand in as proxy for you. They represent what you mean to other people working around you.

Second, the value placed upon you by those whose confidence you need to enable you to do your work. This is referred to as your confidence circle. These are key people for you since without their support you might be perceived to have little or no value.

Reputation is concerned with perceptions

Reputations do not always have to be based upon reality. Perceptions stand in for reality and once associations are formed in people's minds it can be very difficult to change their perceptions.

Your reputation is the sum of those things that people consistently say about or associate with you. These

will take the form of comments made about you by people who may never have met you. These comments will appear in passing remarks about you. And they will be made by people about you without your knowledge or involvement. Broadly, they will be unsolicited. But these words and phrases will have an impact upon how you are perceived by people who have never met you at all.

Your reputation is proxy for your presence. And it will often appear before you do. If you have a strong reputation or a bad reputation, then it will not only affect how people see you - it will also have an impact on the way that people respond to you.

There are a number of reasons why you may have a particular reputation.

It could be because of:

- A single powerful defining act - something you have done or you have been involved in which sticks in the public imagination
- A particular way you have of behaving

- Particular things you do or have done
- A conspicuous way you have of dressing, acting, speaking
- Particular attributes you may have
- Accoutrements and other things that are associated with you
- Your presence and charisma

Of course, it may be that there is no association between yourself and anything in particular. Whilst people may know who you are, they may have no strong feelings about you either way.

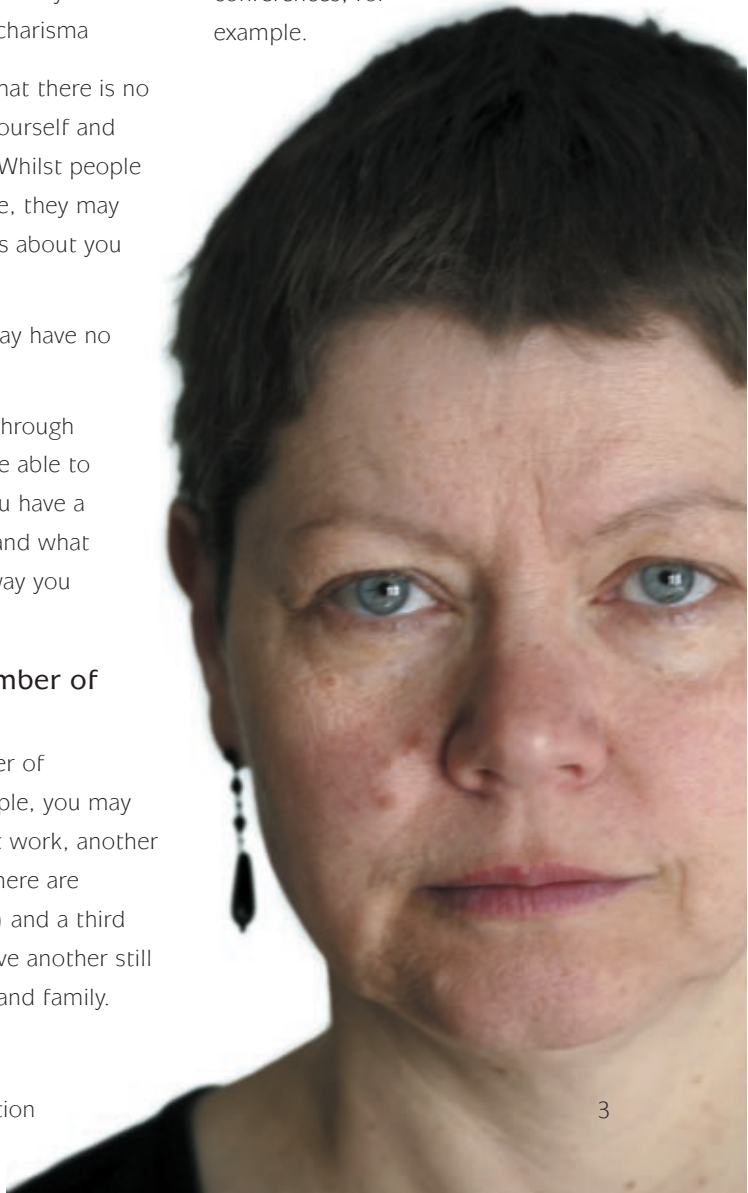
In other words, you may have no reputation at all.

By working your way through this booklet you will be able to determine whether you have a reputation, what it is and what impact it has on the way you work.

Not one but a number of reputations

You may have a number of reputations. For example, you may have one reputation at work, another in the region (where there are different stakeholders) and a third nationally. You may have another still amongst your friends and family.

Each will be a product of the way you are seen to behave and the things you do in each. Those people who encounter you at work may be totally different from those who see you at national events or conferences, for example.



And while those at work may judge you in terms of the way you behave in meetings (for example, always sticking to a clear agenda and running business efficiently), colleagues who make judgements about you at conferences may do so because you speak intelligently and appear thoughtful.

Building a reputation takes time. You need to decide whether you want to have a strong reputation at work, regionally, nationally or within a particular segment (in professional circles). You may decide you don't want a reputation at all.

Confidence, trust and belief - the crucial commodities

At the core a successful reputation will be trust, confidence and belief. We will trust someone to do something. We will have confidence in them. And we will believe in what they say and do. It's easy to see what happens when these qualities appear to evaporate. High Street brands and political careers alike have faltered or fallen when trust in them has been undermined.

When you consider the exercises in this booklet keep at the forefront of your mind the need to build trust, maintain confidence and cause others to believe in you. Each of these is hard to earn and may take years to do so. But daily life teaches us that each can disappear in a moment.

Trust and confidence can be undermined by:

- Inconsistency - saying one thing and doing another
- Incongruence - where we appear to be different things at the same time
- Incoherence - where we don't appear to make sense to others

2 Establishing what your reputation is - carrying out a reputation audit

A personal reputation audit is a way of finding out what people say about you. You will need to find someone whom you can trust to carry it out for you. It will mean finding the answers to the following questions.

- Do people know who you are?
- Do people know what you do?
- What do they associate with you?
- What words would they use to describe you?
- Why do they see you as they do?
- When they think of you or hear your name, what things/ideas/thoughts jump into their minds?

This is not just about establishing *what* people say about you it's also important to understand *why* people say what they do.

Once you know how you are seen by those with whom you work or associate, you will need to consider what this means to you. In short, does it make your life easier or less so?

For example, you may be seen to be a "hard task master who doesn't suffer fools". In the course of your work as a senior executive, this may make it easier for you to get things done.

However, you may also find that being described as "clinical", "cold" or "unemotional" may get in the way.

How to establish what your reputation is

- Identify someone whom you can trust
- Invite that person to ask around about you
- Ask that person to insert your name into conversation and note the response
- Ask that person to engage others around the key questions
- Ask for a full and frank report
- Think about what impact this has on the extent to which you are able to do your job

Points to consider

- You may or may not have a reputation
- If you do, you should know why you do and what it is
- You should be clear about whether your reputation makes doing your job easier or harder
- Overall, you should be clear about whether people generally have confidence and trust in you

3 Understanding your reputation

Once you establish that you have a reputation, it's vital that you know why. If you have an undeserved reputation - one that puts you in a bad light - then you may want to do something about it. That will mean causing people who see you one way to perceive you differently.

You need to be able to identify the basis upon which people make judgements about you. This is a challenging question since it is clear that we all make judgements on a daily basis *without knowing the full facts*. We often use *proxy indicators* which stand in for a full examination of all of the facts.

People will make judgements about you sometimes in spite of statistical evidence. Judgements are frequently made on the basis of *perceptions* rather than statistical evidence.

Crucially, however, we will act on the basis of our perceptions in spite of statistical evidence to the contrary.

For example, we may judge someone's competence by looking at whether the person is polite, turns up for meetings on time and know

our names when we speak to them. None of these factors, however, might tell us anything at all about whether or not they can do their job.

It's vital that you understand what counts as value where you are. You need to know the basis upon which people generally make positive judgements. For example, your organisation may put great store in accuracy and punctuality. Your reputation could be undermined if you displayed little aptitude for these qualities. Similarly, an organisation which put great weight upon spontaneity and creativity might value someone who had little of either very much. Bear in mind that such judgments might be made irrespective of the actual performance of that person.

Interviews for senior managers in the public sector will often use informal meetings with senior officers and councillors involving food - as a means of judging diplomacy, networking skills, listening skills and the ability to interact.

Passing remarks may condemn an

individual and may well be cited in evidence against them. We may do so without knowing why an individual may have uttered a certain remark.

There is a perversity in such perceptions. For example, following the Paddington rail disaster, fewer people travelled by train and took to the roads instead. This put more people at risk since it is more dangerous to travel by road than rail. In reality, such judgements were likely to have been based upon perceived levels of risk rather than statistical likelihood. Similarly, plane travel declines following air disasters.

It is likely that you will be judged in similar ways by those who assess your daily performance. Critically, you should know as much as you possibly can about the way that your key stakeholders make judgements. To read more about way we use such judgements see Paul Slovic's work in the Perception of Risk.

Key questions

- What do you know about the way in which people make judgements where you work?

- What counts as value in your organisation's culture?
- How many of your behaviours are perceived to be high value?
- Are there key places where people make up their minds about others?
- Are there key things that are expected of high credibility individuals?



4 Your confidence circle

Your *confidence circle* refers to the group of people whose confidence you must have in order that you can continue to do your job. These will be people with credibility in the environment in which you work. Where our colleagues have little or no confidence in us, it can be very difficult for us to continue.

For example, if you are a local authority chief executive this group might comprise everyone from the Leader of the Council through to your PA.

The acid test of the confidence circle is simple: if these people lost confidence in you it would be difficult if not impossible for you to continue to play the role you do or carry out your present job.

The **reputation model** is designed to help you to:

- Identify who is in your confidence circle
- Understand how they make judgements about you
- Reach a view about how much each matters

- Determine how much each member of your confidence circle values you
- Establish an overall weighted score for your reputation - your reputation index.

Calculating your reputation index

The key stages are:

- Identify all of the individuals in your confidence circle
- Understand the basis upon which each makes judgements about you
- Allocate a weighting to each individual
- Award a score from - 10 to + 10 for each individual on your current standing
- Multiply each audience score by the weighting to produce a weighted score
- Add the weighted scores together and divide by 100

The tables below show how this model would work in practice. The example chosen is a local authority chief executive. But it will work equally well for any individual.

Identify all of the individuals in your confidence circle

Begin by listing all of the individuals in your confidence circle. These are the people without whose support you could not do your job. You may have as many as you like but try to focus on those people whose support is essential to your ability to remain credible in your role. For example, if you are a local chief executive your stakeholders might look like the following.

Stakeholder

Leader of the council
 Deputy Leader of the council
 Chief whip
 Director of Finance
 Director of Children's Services
 Leader's PA
 Leader's policy assistant

Understand the basis upon which each makes judgements about you

Try to look at the world through the eyes of each individual and understand what matters to them, what they value and how they make judgements about success and failure.

The following table illustrates how to assemble a picture of others' judgements about you. This example might apply to a local authority chief executive.

Stakeholder	Basis for making judgements
Leader of the council	Scientist by background, expects things to be rationally thought through, likes specific language, wants delivery of key manifesto promise
Deputy Leader of the council	Rank and file trades unionist, emotionally driven, doesn't believe you can deliver, preferred the previous chief executive, believes your office to be very inefficient, expects you to fail
Chief whip	She is a former senior council officer and believes that all officers seek to keep councillors in the dark.

Director of Finance	Wants your support on a number of key strategic promises and will in return support you with the political leadership with whom he has good connections. He has been in council finance “man and boy” and is trusted by most politicians.
Director of Children’s Services	A new member of your management team and a key appointment. Believes that the council is badly run on the basis of her previous work in other authorities and in the health service. Wants significant change in the management team.
Leader’s PA	Fiercely loyal to the previous leader and the deputy leader. Suspicious of new projects and concerned that the Leader’s office may be reorganised. Has close access to key politicians and organises the Leader’s diary.
Leader’s policy assistant	Wants to be an MP and already has good relationships with national organisations. Wants the council to be seen as a flagship authority and is keen to use her relationship with you to advance profile raising opportunities.

Allocate a weighting to each individual

You now need to make a judgement about how much each individual from your confidence circle matters. Some people matter more than others. There will be some whose support to you will be crucial - if they withdrew it, you would find your position untenable. Others will be “nice to have” but not absolutely essential. Allocate points to each out of 100 to reflect their relative value. The total must add up to 100.

Stakeholder	Weighting
Leader of the council	30
Deputy Leader of the council ¹	5
Chief whip	10
Director of Finance	5
Director of Children's Services	10
Leader's PA	10
Leader's policy assistant	20
Total	100

Award a score from - 10 to + 10 for each individual on your current standing

Now you have to make a judgement about how well you think each member of your confidence circle judge your performance *at the moment*. Your score should reflect the extent to which you are delivering what each individual would expect from you. And these may change over time. The lowest score you can have for each stakeholder is -10 and the highest is +10. These are of course indicative scores based upon your evaluation of their perception. You could ask them directly however, this beg the question "why are you asking" and potentially undermine confidence.

However, even whilst these scores are subjective, they can give you an indication *over time* of key people's perceptions.

For example, as a chief executive you may have delivered a key project for the Leader of the Council and at this moment that results in you having a relatively high score, say 7. However, in doing so you may have neglected other stakeholders and the resulting score for the Deputy Leader of the Council might be -3. Then hard of the heels of your success the key project fails and this failure becomes closely associated with you, turning your 7 into a -5. It happens.

Stakeholder	Current score (-10 - +10)
Leader of the council	7
Deputy Leader of the council	-3
Chief whip	5
Director of Finance	3
Director of Children's Services	-3
Leader's PA	7
Leader's policy assistant	-2

Multiply each audience score by the weighting to produce a weighted score

Weighting scores allows you to take into account the impact of the importance of each individual in terms of your overall reputation score. Simply multiply the weighting by the score. This will give you a weighted score. For example, an audience with a weighting of 35 and a score of 3 would have a total of 105 points. Similarly, an audience with a weighting of 20 and a score of -5 would have a total of -100 points.

Stakeholder	Weighting	Score	Weighted Score
Leader of the council	30	7	210
Deputy Leader of the council	5	-3	-45
Chief whip	10	5	50
Director of Finance	5	3	15
Director of Children's Services	10	-3	-30
Leader's PA	10	7	70
Leader's policy assistant	20	-2	-20
Total	100		250

Add the weighted scores together and divide the total by 100

Total all of the weighted scores and divide this score by 100. This will give you a score which ranges from -10 to +10. Plus ten is a perfect score - anything less may give you scope for improvement and pointers. If your score is negative

this may be of concern. The general rule would be: your stakeholders will continue to invest their trust in a negative score provided they believe it will become positive at some point. If it is likely to become more negative, your analysis may give you pointers for action.

The resulting score is your **reputation index**.

On the basis of the above example, your score would be 250 divided by one hundred which equals **2.5**.

Here is how it is worked out

Stakeholder	Weighting	Score	Weighted Score	Total divided by 100	Index
Leader of the council	0	7	0		
Deputy Leader of the council	45	-3	-135		
Chief whip	10	5	50		
Director of Finance	5	3	15		
Director of Children's Services	10	-3	-30		
Leader's PA	10	7	70		
Leader's policy assistant	20	-2	-20		
Total	100		-50		



5 Who and what are you - you as a personal brand

What promise do you make when you put your name to something?

Positioning yourself means causing people to see *you* in a particular way. But what does the *you* mean? You will know from your audit how key people see you. You will be able to make a judgement about what whether that is helpful to you or problematic. You will also know something about what counts as value where you work. All of this research will tell you something about how people see you and things in this environment but it won't tell you what *you mean*.

Be clear about who and what you are

You need to be clear about who you are and what you do. Ideally, you should be yourself. It's hard to sustain a performance as anyone else. But you may have to suppress some elements of your personality if those are causing people to see you in ways you are not comfortable.

You should know what your values are, what things you believe are acceptable and what matters are definitely off limits. Our behaviour should be rooted in our values. You should be able to describe yourself in a single meaningful sentence. And you should know what behaviours would be associated with that.

Ideally, you should know what it means when *you say* you will do something or when you will be involved in something. It's the nature of the YOU that others will be concerned with. If you are an inconsistent figure that others are uncertain about, then that will become your reputation.

Crucially, when you put your name to something, others should be clear about what that means.

Be clear about what you do

If you were a product on a supermarket shelf, what would you do for the buyer? You should be clear about this. It may be simply that when someone asks you to deal

out a problem, *you sort it*. You may be the organisational *fixer*. You may be someone who *smoothes troubled waters*. Or someone who *always gets the job done*. You should be clear what the *promise* you make.

Understand what *this you* looks like in different ways

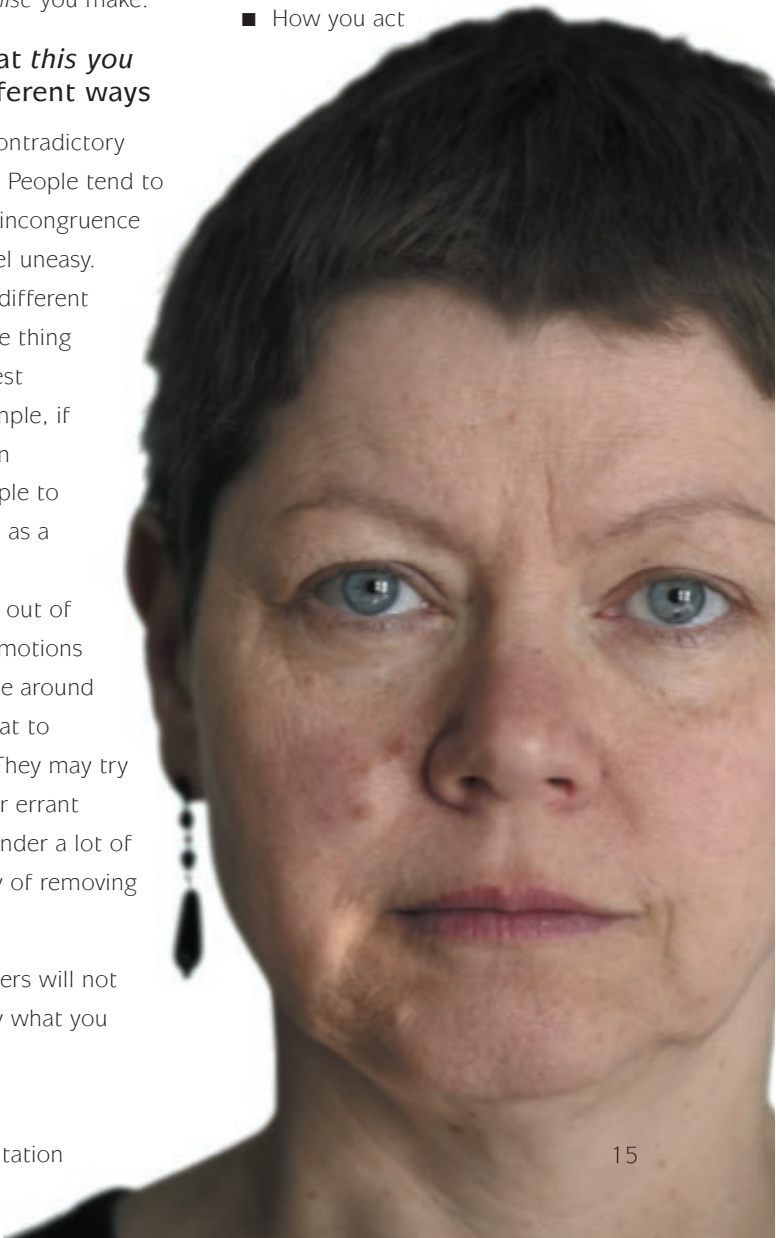
Often we present contradictory selves to the world. People tend to like consistency, so incongruence can make others feel uneasy. We are sensitive to different versions of the same thing since it might suggest deception. For example, if you were to position yourself (cause people to see you in one way) as a caring person but dismissed someone out of hand for showing emotions at work, then people around might not know what to believe about you. They may try to explain away your errant behaviour - “she’s under a lot of pressure” - as a way of removing this dissonance.

Remember that others will not judge you by just by what you

say - words are relatively easy - but by what you do. And they will look at all of the things about you to establish that what you say is true.

This will include:

- How you act



- How you dress
- The products and services you buy
- The way you speak
- The language you use
- The things you do

Ideally, you should be consistent in the way you represent yourself in any given environment.

Understand the general ways in which judgements are made where you work - and take account of them

Your reputation auditing research will tell you something about the way that people make judgements. It may be that in your organisation, people value punctuality and deference. And you may be the kind of person who likes to use first names terms with everyone and you don't mind being late. Until you are able to change the culture of the organisation, it's likely that you'll have to fit in with the way people think *now*. And that will mean changing *your* behaviour.

Look at the *defining moments* and manage them differently

Defining moments are key times when we make up our minds about

others. A job interview will be a defining moment as will a farewell speech for a member of your staff. Key points in others' lives may be defining moments - the birth of children, the death of relatives and so on. During these times, people may expect you to behave in particular ways. And if you don't, you may be seen negatively as a result.

Defining moments occur every day. They are those times when it is vitally important to do and say the right thing. Frequently, people will judge us by the way that we deal with difficult or challenging circumstances - when a colleague dies.

Look at your confidence circle and actively manage the way they see you

One group of people you can focus on is your confidence circle. If maintaining their confidence is critical to you, then understanding what they want and being in a position to deliver it will be vital. It may be that you are not clear about what each of them is looking for, in which case you should find out. Or it may be that they present contradictory challenges - some of

them wanting the opposite of others - in which case you will have to weigh up the relative impact of satisfying one set of needs over another.

Manage expectations

Once you understand the expectations others have of you, it will be important to manage those. They may, in the first instance, be unrealistic. As a general rule, it is better to under-promise and over-deliver. If you are going to successfully manage expectations around you, first take stock. What have you promised already and are you on target to deliver them? Next, look at what resources you have available to deliver future promises. Look at the sustainability of your promises. How many of them are dependent upon others? If your ability to deliver promises is entirely dependent upon other people and you are not confident that they will be able to

Keep a check on things

This is not about continuously auditing the way that others see you - that would become a defining act

in itself. Rather it means keeping an eye on key indicators that will tell you whether your reputation is strong or weak. Many people believe that these matters are irrelevant and that simply focusing on doing a good job will be the solution. Sadly, life is not that simple. People whose reputations have crashed will often talk about others not returning their phone calls or avoiding them at meetings. So develop a set of indicators that will tell you whether you are perceived as you would want to be perceived or otherwise. You can use the reputation model to look at risk around your reputation in the future. It can be deployed to forecast the potential impact of a variety of variables.

6 The value of your stock may go up or down - reputation variables

Here are some possible scenarios.

People may leave your confidence circle - people whose support you may depend upon could leave the organisation or end their association with you. This may leave you dependent to a greater extent on those who remain. You may want to think about who you could add to your confidence circle. There are certainly risks in having too few eggs in the one basket.

The value of people in your confidence circle may go up or down - just as you have a reputation, a value within your organisation, so do those in your confidence circle. This could work to your advantage as you may benefit by a remaining association with higher credibility people. Conversely, if people in your confidence circle significantly lose credibility, your close association may detract from your own reputation.

You may be able to bring high credibility people into your confidence circle - we can grow the

value of our reputation by establishing a productive relationship with those who have organisational credibility. In practical terms, this would mean finding out who those people are and establishing a working relationship with them - and then delivering the things that they want.

The judgements that others make may depend upon new variables - this is where new things count as value where you are. For example, whilst punctuality may count for a great deal today, in the future this may be less important.

Others may start to expect more of you - managing expectations will be one of the biggest challenges that you will face. It can be very easy to find yourself see

Your performance may slip - you may start to fail. When this happens others may be disappointed and may say so - both to you and to other key people in the organisation. Keep your performance under review. Look at the impact that changes in your

performance will have on perceptions and confidence. If it does start to ebb, talk to those in your confidence circle and try to redefine expectations. Our reputations have a value. If you

have a strong reputation in your organisation others may want to be associated with you. You may be asked regularly for references. Others may ask for your support on key projects.

7 Reputation is a commodity

Your reputation research will tell you something about what *you* mean to others. Often this will boil down to a very simple concept:

- Someone who is trustworthy
- A heavyweight
- An intellectual
- A thinker
- A do-er
- A fixer
- A troublemaker

This can become a commodity that others may want to make use of. If you are a “heavyweight” with “organisational clout” you may be called upon to *help make things happen, shift barriers* and so on.

When others ask for your support you also put your reputation at risk. For example, you may *underwrite* a colleague’s project by offering your

support. If this project fails, then this could reflect upon you. If your stock is strong (if your confidence circle supports you) then a one-off failure might not be a problem. But a sustained period of project failures might well undermine your reputation and where you might have been seen as a “heavyweight” now you could be seen as “risky” or “inconsistent”.

Some things to think about

- Be clear about the value of your reputation
- Keep a check on the promises you make
- Consider how others use your reputation
- Think about where your reputation might be vulnerable
- Consider where you might invest your reputation in others’ activities

About reputation

Reputation is a strategic communication consultancy offering a range of services to public sector organisations.

To find out more visit www.e-reputation.co.uk

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Printed by Martins the Printers

Designed by em communications ltd

Price: £10

ISBN number:

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