



# RATIONALE **BUILDING UNIVERSITIES' REPUTATION INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**

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Reputation is now a key intangible for all kinds of organizations. In recent times, its strategic value has prompted lively debate in both business and academic circles. The university, as a social institution, is also implicated in such discussions.

Moreover, in the past few years, countries, cities, governments and businesses have begun to devote more time and resources to improving their reputation management, especially since the field of activity in which they operate is a globalized one.

The increasing significance attributed to reputation is largely due to the commitment of communication professionals to understanding the role played by organizational identity and corporate brand in a globalized world. Through academic research, scholars have also contributed to a greater awareness of how intangible assets of this kind may be modeled and measured. A change in social outlook has also played an important role in this regard: intangibles are now ranked higher than tangibles as value drivers.

Managing reputation is not an easy task because it involves both understanding the meaning of such management and implementing the procedures that enable it to be measured and assessed; it requires in-depth knowledge of an organization, its stakeholders, organizational identity and social context. The overall goal is to codify such knowledge as a set of dimensions and attributes, benchmarked in relation to specific metrics. Communication departments play a crucial role because they shape information flow and brand design, as well as listen to and interpret stakeholder perceptions. In other words, they are responsible for the management of intangible assets.

The university is not immune to these issues and concerns. Indeed, mobility for study, research and/or teaching purposes is a common phenomenon nowadays. University activity is bound by neither physical nor intellectual borders. Such features of globalization as mobility and immediate communication enable more

objective and comparative reputational judgments. Given this situation, university stakeholders, including professors and students, frame their standards of excellence in terms of language preferences, research specializations and other such criteria.

University rankings have begun to play an increasingly important role in this regard. Given the wide range of academic opportunities on offer and a general lack of direct knowledge of educational institutions, rankings act as screening tools that guide the search for a quality university among the almost twenty thousand universities in the world. Hence the vital significance of the variables assessed in rankings, and the need for debate regarding the way they are measured and compared.

Universities are facing new international and competitive challenges in a globalized world marked by more limited funding, fewer resources and – in some countries – serious questioning of what the university system should be. University presidents and other leaders are subject to extraordinary pressures that compromise the everyday management of their educational mission.

In this context, the University of Navarra, in conjunction with ten other institutions from a number of different countries, has organized an international conference that aims to explore these challenges from an international, interdisciplinary and interactive perspective. Since the conference agenda is wide-ranging and complex, a further goal is to ensure this inquiry and debate continues into the future, as well as to design research projects that may shed enabling light on all these matters.

The main speakers and other participants will reflect together on current issues in relation to reputation, which may be framed as questions and categorized as follows:

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## **I. UNIVERSITY REPUTATION**

1. What does university reputation mean and what are its key features?
2. What are the effects of a good reputation, particularly in terms of attracting talent and resources?
3. How is university reputation forged?
4. What is the relative significance of each of the university's established roles (teaching, research, knowledge transfer) in building reputation?
5. To what extent may structural dimensions such as country, location and history affect university reputation?
6. What is the significance of factors such as management, marketing and communication in shaping reputation?
7. In endeavoring to establish an international reputation, how can a balance be struck between standardization and differentiation?
8. Do governmental agencies help improve university quality assessment and accreditation?
9. Are there any examples of public support for universities in their processes of internationalization?

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## **III. DEFINITION OF REPUTATION**

1. What does reputation mean, and what are its key features?
2. How are reputation and social responsibility related?
3. How can an organization build a positive, stable and well-grounded institutional image?
4. What expertise have businesses and other organizations built up in managing reputation?
5. What objectives, processes, metrics and measurement parameters enable improved reputation?
6. Can tangible and intangible assets be integrated within organizational strategic management?
7. Are reputation and intangibles taken into account in audit reports?
8. In what ways do such reports influence the governance of organizations?
9. What can be done when vital institutional values are not measured in standardized metrics?

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## **II. UNIVERSITY RANKINGS**

1. What influence do rankings have on student, professor and researcher choices in relation to particular universities?
2. Do university rankings have a positive effect on educational policies?
3. Might rankings be perpetuating the reputations of some elite universities?
4. How do different rankings systems address internal methodological biases, including the privileging of the English language, the underestimation of the humanities and social sciences, etc.?
5. How could rankings better measure all the dimensions involved in university quality – in particular, intangible assets such as social responsibility and sustainability?
6. Beyond their specific validity, should rankings be a factor in the everyday running of the university?
7. How can rankings help improve the management and, as a result, the quality of universities?

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## **IV. COMMUNICATION AND REPUTATION MANAGEMENT**

1. Who are the main stakeholders in a university, and how are specific relationships formed and managed?
2. How can intangibles be managed in university context, and what bearing may they have on reputation?
3. In what way may a strategic communication approach contribute to improving reputation?
4. How should communication departments be organized and managed to prioritize the management of intangible assets?
5. What areas of communication – internal, media, digital, brands, etc. – are essential in the reputation management process?
6. How do social networks affect the reputation of a university?
7. How important are networking and sharing best practices in improving university reputation?
8. Might greater cooperation among universities strengthen the reputation of the university sector as a whole?