The Expectation-Performance Gap

A new approach to diagnosing, tracking and reporting reputation

The need

Traditional reputational tracking gives you a generic benchmark of your reputation against competitors. But what Corporate Affairs Directors need is:



Bespoke insight, rooted in your business and strategy



Data that can help test and influence business action



A way to prioritise what's important, above what's merely noisy

Importance of expectations

Reputations are relative. Stakeholders judge a business relative to how they expect that business to behave. The bar is different for each company and measuring performance alone misses that important context.

For example – our data (see overleaf) shows that Primark scores ahead of Next and Shein on value, yet falls further short of its own consumers' expectations. Its reputation on value exposes it to risk, despite apparently strong performance.

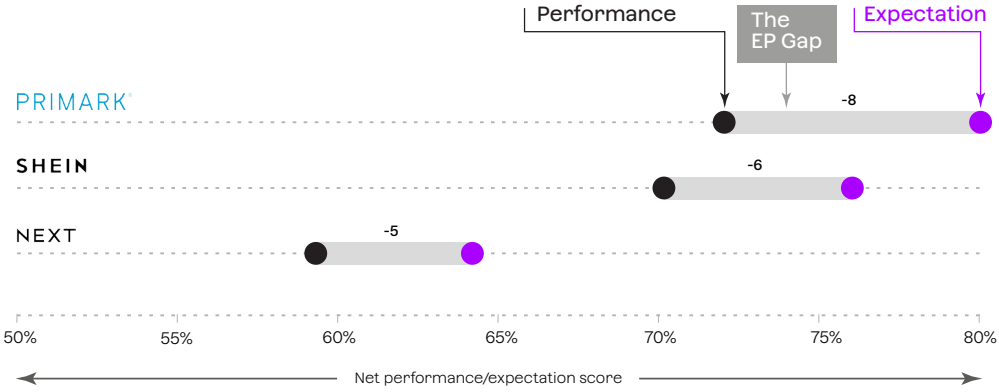
Expectation-Performance Gap

Our new approach focuses on the gap between what stakeholders expect and how that business actually delivers.

A big gap can signal risk. A small or non-existent gap provides a potential strength or campaigning opportunity.

Expectation-Performance Gap in action

What consumers expect and how they see fashion retailers performing on value



UK nationally representative polling, 30 September – 2 October 2026. **Sample:** likely to consider each company (n=845–1,276).
Net percentage score is the percentage of respondents giving a positive score (7–10) minus the percentage giving a negative score (0–3), on each question.

"Corporate Affairs sits between what society expects of a business and what that business actually delivers. Our job is to understand and shape those expectations, but also to bring them back inside the organisation and influence what happens next."

FTSE100 Corporate Affairs Director

Get in touch

For a discussion on how to improve reputation intelligence at your organisation, please get in touch with the Headland Strategy & Insights team.



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