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“Values on air”: using narratives to “follow” top management values entering ethical organisational reputation

Introduction: Corporate reputation is an increasingly valuable intangible organisational asset. Reputation is perceptual, multidimensional, specific and varies from stakeholder to stakeholder. However, there is still a lack of research on the ethical reputation formation process. Despite the recognised importance of espoused values—those adopted by top management—research examining their impact on internal and external stakeholders' perceptions is limited. This study aims to bridge that gap by employing a combination of qualitative methods, namely semi-structured interviews and archival data on cases and events, to build narratives that assess the interplay between organisational values and stakeholder perceptions, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the ethical reputation formation process. Goals and Methods: This study aims to understand how the values embraced by top management play a role in forming an ethical corporate reputation. Using a qualitative processual approach and a narrative construction strategy, 62 in-depth interviews were conducted with members of a national radio group's management and various other internal and external stakeholders. In addition, archival data on cases and events identified in the interviews, in 28 cases, support the narrative-building process. The methodology employed in this study allows for advancing qualitative research innovation, particularly in understanding the ethical corporate reputation formation process as a valuable intangible asset. Results: Five narratives emerge from the analysis and support identifying a process for mapping the integration of top-management values in an organisation's ethical reputation. This process maps the values' “circulation” within the organisation and their diffusion to internal and external stakeholders within relationships, organisational communications, and events. Conclusions: Narrative building strengthens the mapping of a process by resorting to semi-structured interview thematic analysis and archival case identification and analysis. It sheds light on how top management's espoused values affect an organisation's ethical reputation construction.