

GLOBAL CONFERENCE 2026

FROM CHAOS TO COMMAND:
RISK LEADERSHIP IN INDUSTRY 6.0

**THE TRUST RECESSION:
PROTECTING CORPORATE
LEGITIMACY IN A SCEPTICAL WORLD**

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GET TO KNOW THE SPEAKER

- Deputy Chairman of Public Relations PRactitioners Society of Malaysia
- General Manager, Strategic Communications & Stakeholder Engagement, West Coast Expressway Sdn Bhd
- A seasoned communications and reputation leader with over 35 years of experience across journalism, corporate communications, public affairs, stakeholder engagement and strategic advisory.
- As Deputy Chairman of the Public Relations PRactitioners Society of Malaysia, he contributes to advancing professional standards, ethical practice and practitioner development within Malaysia's public relations and communications community.
- At WCE, he leads strategic communications, media relations, government affairs, ESG communications and stakeholder engagement for one of Malaysia's key highway infrastructure organisations.
- His experience spans senior roles in PLUS Malaysia, PIDM, Standard Chartered and communications consultancy, bringing deep insight into reputation management, public trust, crisis communication and leadership decision-making.



The relationship between organisations and their stakeholders has fundamentally shifted. Confidence is no longer assumed – it must be continuously demonstrated.

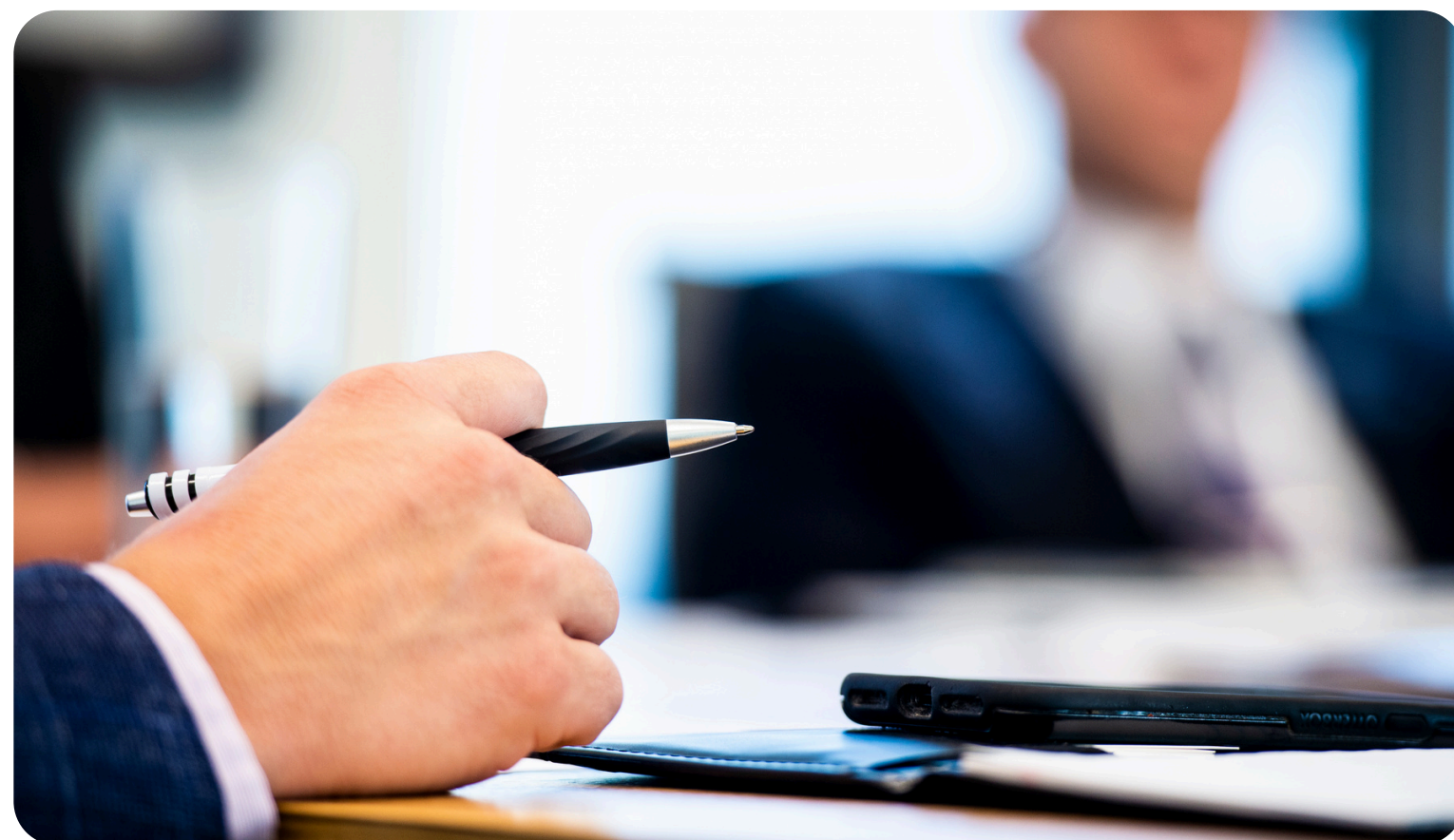


Why Trust Is Even Harder to Earn Today

- ✓ **Public confidence is more fragile than ever before**
- ✓ **Stakeholders question corporate decisions faster**
- ✓ **Every organisation operates under constant public scrutiny**

In today's environment, trust deficits accumulate quickly. Organisations that fail to communicate with clarity and accountability risk losing legitimacy before they realise the gap has opened.

Trust is not disappearing, but it has become significantly harder to sustain. Understanding what the trust recession means is the first step toward addressing it.



What We Mean by The Trust Recession

- ✓ **Trust is not disappearing, but harder to sustain**
- ✓ **Scepticism of institutions, corporations and leadership narratives is rising**
- ✓ **Legitimacy must be continuously earned**

The trust recession describes a structural shift in how publics relate to organisations. It is not a crisis of facts, it is a crisis of confidence, and it demands a strategic response.

Understanding the distinction between reputation and legitimacy is critical for organisations operating in the public eye, especially in infrastructure.



Corporate Legitimacy

Is Not Just Reputation

- ✓ **Reputation is what people think of you**
- ✓ **Legitimacy is whether people believe you deserve your role, authority and social licence**
- ✓ **For infrastructure companies, legitimacy affects public confidence, regulatory relationships and stakeholder support**

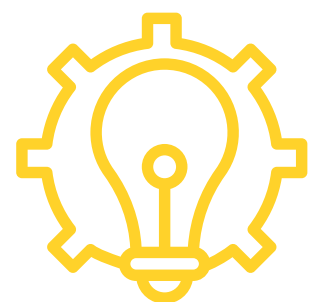
Legitimacy must be continuously earned. It is shaped by how decisions are made, explained and aligned with the expectations of those you serve.



Who Is Watching and Why It Matters

Highway users, communities, regulators, media, employees and digital audiences now form opinions quickly.

Expectations are shaped by lived experience, social media and prevailing public sentiment.



Stakeholders no longer wait for official statements. Every action or absence of action is observed, interpreted and shared in real time.

The New Sceptical Stakeholder



Opinions Form Fast Across All Stakeholder Groups



Silence or Slow Response Creates Dangerous Perception Gaps

Trust Is Now Shaped in Real Time

News, complaints and speculation travel instantly. Organisations must be ready to respond with clarity, speed and credibility before narratives form without them.



News cycles, complaints and public speculation now move faster than any organisation's internal review process.



AI and social platforms can rapidly amplify misinformation, making early, accurate communication a strategic imperative.



Speed & Clarity

Silence creates a vacuum. Organisations must respond quickly with clear, factual and consistent messaging.



Respond with Credibility

Credibility is built through consistent action and honest communication, not reactive damage control.

A Missing Bolt, A Missing Confidence

What happened:

In January 2024, an Alaska Airlines Boeing 737 MAX 9 experienced an in-flight mid-exit door plug separation. The NTSB later said the probable cause was Boeing's failure to provide adequate training, guidance and oversight to factory workers, with FAA oversight also criticised.

Trust issue:

The crisis moved beyond a technical aircraft issue. It raised questions about safety culture, quality control, leadership accountability and whether the company could be trusted to protect passengers.

Leadership lesson:

When safety is involved, trust is not rebuilt by technical explanation alone. Leaders must show visible accountability, explain corrective action and demonstrate that the system has changed.



Alaska Airlines 737-9 MAX exit door plug separates in flight

An Alaska Airlines 737-9 MAX exit door assembly separated from the aircraft after the aircraft departed Portland for Ontario, California.

Flightradar24 Blog / Jun 27, 2025

Infrastructure In the Public Eye

Highways affect mobility, safety, communities, economic activity and the daily routines of millions. How we operate and how we explain our decisions both shape public trust.



Beyond Operations

Trust is built through decisions explained, not just services delivered



Public Visibility Is Constant

Communities, regulators and users observe every outcome and response

WCE Perspective: Connecting Delivery to Understanding

Strategic communications & stakeholder engagements bridges technical delivery with public understanding, ensuring decisions are not only correct but credible and clearly explained.



When Truth Is Not Enough

Technical correctness alone does not close the legitimacy gap. Organisations may act within policy, meet standards and deliver results yet still lose public confidence when stakeholders feel unheard or excluded from the narrative.



Leaders must consider not only what is decided, but how it is communicated – with fairness, empathy and an awareness of timing and context.

The Legitimacy Gap



Intent vs Perception: What you mean is not always what stakeholders believe



Beyond Correctness: Fairness, empathy, timing and context shape trust

The System Was Wrong, But People Paid the Price

What happened:

The UK Post Office Horizon scandal involved faulty accounting software that created false shortfalls. Sub-postmasters were made to repay those shortfalls, and many were wrongfully convicted of theft, fraud or false accounting.

Trust issue:

The organisation trusted the system more than the people affected. The crisis became deeply damaging because affected stakeholders were not properly heard, and accountability came far too late.

Leadership lesson:

Data and systems must never replace judgement, listening and fairness. When people repeatedly raise concerns, leaders must treat those signals as risk intelligence, not noise.



Seema Misra says Post Office scandal 'taken 21 years of my life'

Seema Misra calls for accountability as a report by MPs raises concerns about ongoing delays.

... [bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com/news/health-57111111) / Mar 13

Strategic Communications as a Leadership Function

Communications should not sit at the end of decision-making.
It is a leadership tool that shapes how decisions land internally and publicly.

Helps leaders anticipate stakeholder reaction and identify reputational risk before decisions are made public.

Translates complex organisational decisions into credible, clear and meaningful public narratives.



Anticipate & Advise

Embed communications early to foresee stakeholder concerns and guide leadership decisions.



Reputational Risk

Turn technical and operational decisions into credible public meaning that builds confidence.



Communication Beyond Statements

Communication is not only about producing statements or press releases. It is about creating genuine understanding, building public confidence and achieving alignment between what an organisation does and what it says.



When words and actions are misaligned, stakeholders notice. Meaning is built through consistency, credibility and follow-through, but not through volume of messaging.

From Messaging to Meaning



**Creating Understanding,
Confidence and Alignment**



**Messages Must Be
Consistent With Action**

Sustaining legitimacy in a sceptical world requires consistent action across three critical dimensions that stakeholders observe and measure.



Three Trust Pressure Points

- ✓ **Transparency: What We Explain**
- ✓ **Accountability: What We Own**
- ✓ **Consistency: What We Repeat Through Words and Action**

These three pressure points define how organisations are judged. Leaders who address all three build durable trust that withstands scrutiny and crisis.

When Facts Alone Are Not Enough

Facts answer questions, but trust answers doubt.
Stakeholders need more than data. They need to believe your organisation is listening, acting and being fair.



Stakeholders want to know whether an organisation is genuinely listening, taking meaningful action and treating people with fairness, not just presenting correct figures.



Communication must combine evidence with human judgement. Context, empathy and timing matter as much as the accuracy of the information shared.



Facts Answer Questions

Data and evidence inform, but they do not resolve doubt or rebuild eroded confidence on their own.



Trust Answers Doubt

Trust is earned through demonstrated accountability, consistent action and credible, empathetic communication.

Proactive engagement is not a reactive measure, it is a strategic investment. Building trust before pressure moments ensures credibility when it matters most.



Stakeholder Engagement

Before Issues Escalate

- ✓ **Build relationships before pressure moments arise**
- ✓ **Listen early, map concerns and clarify expectations**
- ✓ **Engagement reduces surprise and strengthens credibility**

Organisations that engage stakeholders early are better positioned to manage issues, maintain legitimacy and sustain public confidence through periods of scrutiny and change.

A Practical Framework

Listen, Align, Act, Communicate

A four-part trust framework for leaders navigating stakeholder complexity and reputational risk in a sceptical world.



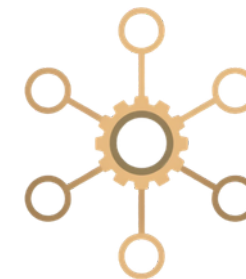
Listen

Understand stakeholders, sentiment and emerging concerns early



Act

Act with accountability and follow through on commitments



Align

Align leadership, operations and communications into one voice



Communicate

Communicate with clarity, consistency and credibility

What Leaders Should Ask Before Trust Is Tested

Four critical questions every leader must answer before a trust moment arrives – not after.



Will People Understand This?

Is this decision explained with clarity and context stakeholders can follow?



Have We Shown Accountability?

Have we owned outcomes, not just communicated intentions?



Will They Believe Our Intent?

Do stakeholders see genuine purpose behind the organisation's decisions?



Are Actions & Messages Aligned?

Do our public statements reflect what we are actually doing on the ground?

Trust is not only protected during a crisis, it is built long before one arrives. How an organisation communicates defines whether its legitimacy endures.



Protecting Legitimacy in a Sceptical World

- ✓ **Trust is built before crisis and tested during crisis**
- ✓ **Strategic communications protects more than reputation**
- ✓ **It protects confidence, legitimacy and the social licence**

Organisations that invest in strategic communications before pressure moments are better positioned to maintain public trust, regulatory confidence and stakeholder support when it matters most.

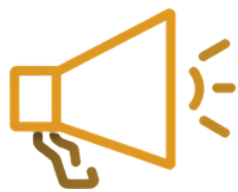
Key Takeaways for Risk Leaders

Four principles to protect corporate legitimacy and build lasting trust in a sceptical world.



Treat Trust as a Strategic Risk

Embed trust considerations into risk registers, leadership decisions and governance frameworks.



Build Stakeholder Confidence Before Pressure

Engage stakeholders proactively – relationships built early reduce reputational exposure.



Bring Communications Into Decisions Early

Strategic communications must inform decisions, not merely announce them after the fact.



Communicate with Transparency & Consistency

Align words with actions. Accountability and clarity reinforce legitimacy over time.

Questions & Discussion

Let's Connect

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THANK YOU



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