

The Nobel Prize vs. Bob Dylan:
Bob Dylan's controversial behaviour and its potential
impact on the Nobel Prize reputation

TEACHING NOTES

The authors prepared this case solely as a basis for class discussion and not as an endorsement, a source of primary data, or an illustration of effective or ineffective management. Although based on real events and despite occasional references to actual companies, this case is fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons or entities is coincidental.

Case Synopsis

On October 13, 2016, The Nobel Foundation awarded Bob Dylan with Nobel Prize in Literature “for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition”. The choosing of the artist divided the opinion of the general public and stakeholders by encouraging a debate about what literature means and what can be understood as poetry. As if the controversial choice was not enough, the singer-songwriter decided not to attend the official awards ceremony. Instead, he sent his friend and also singer Patti Smith (a symbol of the punk movement) as his representative to perform one of his songs during the event.

In order to fulfill Bob Dylan's wishes, after months of wondering if he would indeed accept the prize in person, the Swedish Academy committee, which is responsible for the administration of the literature prize, announced that a private event was arranged as a request by the singer. Bob Dylan accepted the prize in person on April 1st, 2017 in a ceremony attended only by twelve members of the Swedish Academy and one personal guest. Such privilege of having his own private ceremony as wished has been criticized by other laureates and stakeholders since the action is not a common practice. In this scenario, would question arises: Did Bob Dylan's controversial behaviour regarding his literature award affect the reputation of the Nobel Prize?

Learning Objectives

The presentation of the Nobel Prize vs Bob Dylan case should promote different key learnings which will be mainly driven by:

1. the questions asked during the presentation of the case and the analysis conducted during the presentation in collaboration of fellow students;
2. the analysis conducted by the group while writing the case; and
3. the association with relevant literature studied during the course.

Corporate Reputation

Reputation can be described as the combination of impressions and views that stakeholders perceive of a certain company ¹. As claimed by Frooman ², a company's reputation functions as a benchmark for quality, affecting stakeholders' decision-making process and representing the firm's past actions and its ability to live up to the stakeholders' expectations in the future ³. Indeed, a corporate with a strong reputation is able to increase trust and reduce customers' uncertainty during their purchasing process, since there is the assumption that a firm with a good reputation delivers higher quality products ⁴. The Nobel Prize is perceived as being a prestigious award, with a strong heritage based on Alfred's Nobel Will, that chose their laureates according to rigorous process based on integrity and respect ⁵. It is "the last word in recognition" ⁶.

A good reputation entails four key principles - credibility, trustworthiness, reliability and responsibility- and it is not per se a dimension, but the result of a series of corporate aspects that work on different levels but in the same direction, including the Corporate Identity and Image.

Corporate Identity

Considering that the identity of a firm helps it to differentiate itself from competitors, it appears as an important aspect of corporate reputation. While reputation is based on how stakeholders see an organisation, the corporate identity is about internal perceptions ⁷. As observed by Bernstein ⁸, every firm has an identity. It represents the essence of a corporation ⁹ and it reflects how a corporation wants to be perceived internally and externally ¹⁰. In the case of the Nobel Prize, the strong heritage aspect of Alfred’s Nobel Will -‘for the benefit of mankind’- is seen as a foundation and enrichment of its identity, which helps it to stand out from the competition ¹¹.

When it comes to the management, the reputation and identity of an organisation two questions arise: “What to manage?”, and “How to manage it?” ¹². In the case of the Nobel Prize, what needs to be managed is a complex and highly visible networked brand which includes multiple stakeholders: general public, scientific communities, media, sponsors, and laureates ¹³.

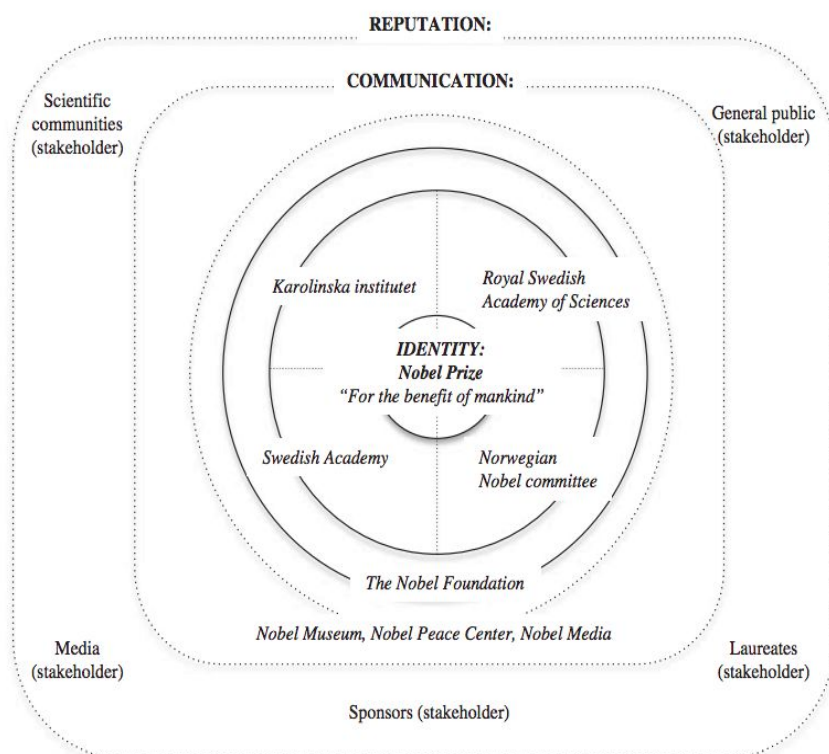


Figure 1: The Nobel Prize: A networked brand and its stakeholders (Urde and Greyser, 2014).

Figure 1: A network brand and its stakeholders. Source:Urde and Greyser, 2014.

The figure above shows how the 'hub' of the Nobel is guided by its Identity - meaning, the Nobel Prize and its heritage enrooted in the Nobel's Will. As observed, the outer circle constitutes the reputation and is formed by stakeholders, including the laureates ¹⁴. Following the idea of brand co-creation ¹⁵, the laureates, in conjunction with the Nobel Foundation, contribute for the construction of the Nobel brand identity and its meaning, communicating directly or indirectly the Nobel Prize ¹⁶.

Corporate image and Image transfer

Several definitions of image have been provided by authors over time. Hatch and Schultz ¹⁷, describe image as the outside world's overall impression of a company and its stakeholder. Zimmer and Golden ¹⁸ define it as the general judgment or view of the enterprise in the eye of the customer. A similar clue is given by Roper & Fill ¹⁹, who point out that corporate image is the audience's perception of an organisation and can be transferred from stakeholder to stakeholder.

The Nobel Prize is perceived by public and stakeholders as an elite prize that is awarded to intellectual above the average laureates who have made exceptional contributions to society, helping it to evolve in a better way. As a result of its strict selection process and procedures, the prize carries a more distinct image and perception when setting side by side to other awards. Moreover, reflecting the interests of Alfred Nobel, it deals with intellectual and scientific concepts such as chemistry, physics, economics, and literature, thus popular culture expressions such as music, television, and cinema are not considered and awarded. Furthermore, the Nobel Prize award is associated with "integrity", temperance and with behavior that strictly follows the established rules.

Corporate Communication

Corporate communication enables the easy understanding of corporate identity by connecting and linking the building blocks of a corporate reputation. In case of a crisis, the communication can function as an important tool to inform the public and the stakeholders about "unexpected event occurs that could have a negative impact on the company's reputation" ²⁰. When managing a crisis, the communication dimensions described by Roper and Fill ²¹- such as style, timing and the tone of communication - play an important part in the effectiveness of the message being transferred. The style of communication is addressing the truthfulness of it. The timing is crucial as a support of the style because inaccurate information can easily and quickly be delivered by informal communication channels of the media. The tone of the message deals with the level of formality. The careful choice of the corporate communication dimensions is in favour of avoiding misunderstanding and confusion ²².

As discussed in class, Nobel Prize communication procedures can be seen as an attention point: due to the structure of its network, there are too many official "speakers" and there is not a single-centralized source of information. This characteristic can reduce the effectiveness of the statements issued in case of a

problem considering that when having different speakers it is difficult to adopt a coherent and effective style, timing and tone of communication.

Going from theory to practice

As described in the Nobel Prize network (Figure 1), Bob Dylan functions as a stakeholder which operates as an important actor of the structure and whose attitudes and identity affect the overall reputation of the Nobel Prize organization. However, by reflecting on the attributes of the Nobel Prize and its image, it becomes clear that Dylan's image is not aligned with the one cultivated by the prize. Furthermore, the analysis clearly highlights an image mismatch between them or even a contrasting one. Therefore, we believe that the singer's image affects the Nobel Prize' perception.

Furthermore, although previous laureates were unable to attend the ceremony, by being a pop icon, Dylan's decision to abstain himself from the event split the public, causing great media coverage and public commotion. Other stakeholders questioned the relevance of his works in relation to the standardized idea of what literature means, encouraging a discussion on how fair the foundation's choice was. The artist's personality as a disruptive and "rebel" persona, which often goes against the norms of society, was perceived by his fans and audience as a sort of political and social statement. Because of the Nobel Prize respectable and prestigious reputation, the general public and stakeholders would not expect the committee to make a choice perceived as in total incongruence with the usual and ordinary decisions. Thus, from the analysis of the incongruity in the image of Bob Dylan and the Nobel Prize, we wondered about the possible reflections that the artist's attitudes may have caused in the reputation of the prize. Was the reputation of the award affected by Dylan's absence?

By considering "The Corporate Brand Identity and Reputation Matrix" of the Nobel Prize conducted by Urde and Greyser ²³, we identified that some key dimensions of the reputation sphere were indeed affected by Bob Dylan's absence from the ceremony (Figure 2).

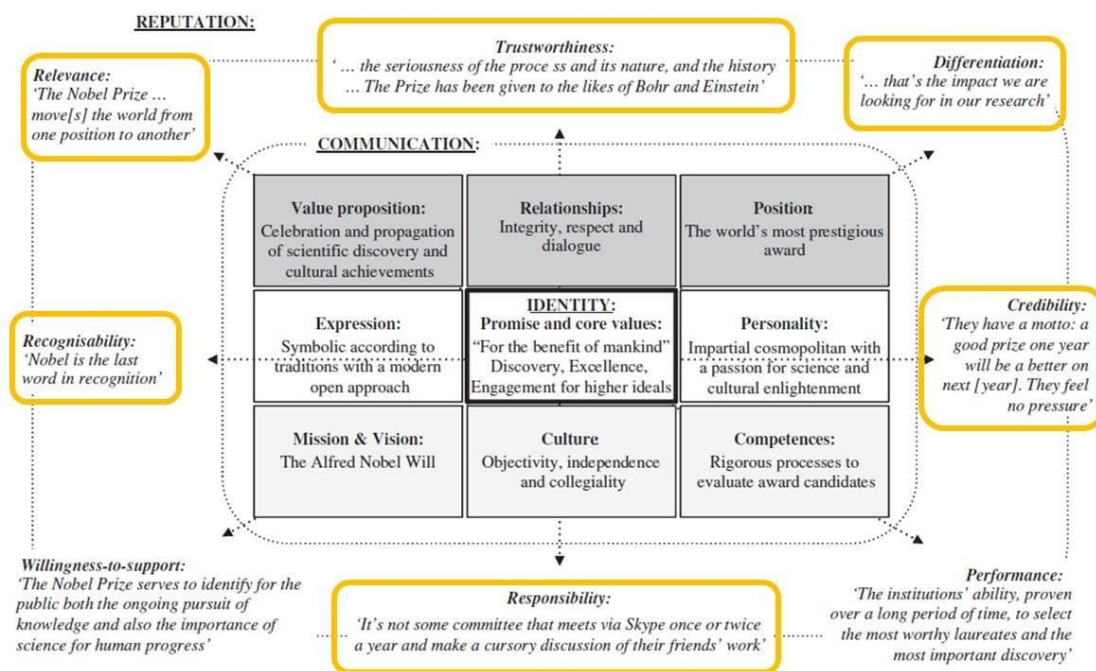


Figure 2: “The Corporate Brand Identity and Reputation Matrix”: the Nobel Prize vs. Bob Dylan case

Because there was never an official explanation for the occurring, it can be argued that the *credibility* of the Prize suffered since stakeholders may have perceived the artist's act as a way of stating that he sees the prize as unimportant. This fact influences also its the *responsibility* and *differentiation* of the prize. It is known that the Nobel Foundation shows commitment to its stakeholders by taking responsibility through engaging in a series of strict rules and procedures - devoted to its heritage and Alfred's Will - when selecting the winners. Its heritage is an important aspect of the differentiation of the Nobel Prize in relation to the competition. Because the general public and stakeholders could have the impression that the committee awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature to a laureate who does not care about it, the Nobel Prize's *differentiation* and positioning as a responsible and distinctive award can be disturbed, hitting also its *relevance* and quality. Additionally, the way in which Sara Danius, general secretary of the Swedish Academy, handled the communication about the issue can have implications on the *recognisability* and *trustworthiness* of the Nobel Prize. In the case of Bob Dylan vs. the Nobel Prize, the Swedish Academy communication activities regarding the singer's behaviour can be characterised as quick, brief and straightforward, expressing the true and honest opinion of their standpoint, without issuing any kind of official statement. Not much was said and done despite the decision to wait for the singer to pronounce himself: “Right now, we are doing nothing” (Sara Danius). In terms of form and style, the communication practices, in this case, did not fit the standards expected from a prize that has awarded names like Bohr and Einstein, interfering therefore in the *trustworthiness*.

Furthermore, in order to deal with the situation, the Swedish Academy made the decision to arrange a special and private ceremony as required by the singer. Such action can be perceived in two different ways: first, one can argue that by doing so the Swedish Academy helped to preserve the rules and guidelines traditionally

established and followed by the committee, therefore, protecting the credibility of its internal procedures for the selection of the laureates; secondly, one could say that the choice to host a private event for only thirteen people - twelve committee members and one artist team member - may have conveyed the idea that the committee cared too much about pleasing Dylan by meeting all his demands. Some people may argue that if he was not a pop icon, a celebrity with a big attention and media coverage, the academy would probably have acted in a different same way. Moreover, the intense media coverage of the happening may have influenced the reputation of the prize especially considering the decisions mentioned above. However, we believe that, due the strong Nobel Prize heritage and prestigious reputation, this impact only occurred in a short-term, falling into oblivion as soon as the media stopped publishing news about it.

Nevertheless, the effect of his absence and, as a result, the organization of a private event, was not only negative, as it helped to amplified the media coverage about the Nobel Prize and stimulated the word of mouth increasing, as a result, the awareness of the prize.

Teaching Plan

The aim of the case based teaching and learning is to connect the theoretical background about corporate brand management and reputation with a business case borrowed from real life into the classroom. Therefore, the specific Corporate Brand Identity and Reputation Matrix work as a remarkable theoretical and managerial tool for the purpose of this analysis.

Both the instructors and the audience play an important role during the teaching and learning process in the interactive environment. It is important to ensure that the atmosphere is relaxed facilitating the learning process through the stimulation of positive thoughts and creativity. The responsibility of the instructors lies in providing a clear and concise presentation of the case itself. On completion of this part, the instructors are expected to state the preliminarily formulated management question to the audience in order to generate discussion about the topic in the classroom: "Did Bob Dylan's controversial behaviour regarding his literature award affect the reputation of the Nobel Prize?"

Next, by having a rather neutral and impartial role and following a time frame structured in 3 phases, the instructors should lead the discussion, mediate and moderate it (according to the Board Plan) during the argumentation of the class in order to keep track of the previously specified case learning objectives, yet being flexible to let the audience share ideas and opinions. To stimulate the discussion assisting questions will be asked:

1. Would it affect only the Nobel Prize in Literature or could potentially hurt the other ones?
2. In what ways did it affect the reputation and prestige of the Nobel Prize? Does it have a short-term or long-term effect?
3. Can something actually be done in such situation? How would have you faced the situation in the role of the Nobel Committee?

The available technological equipment in the classroom allows the instructors to use a presentation software program, such as MS PowerPoint or a similar one, alongside with the usage of the whiteboard in the room. These tools serve as visual representation of the presented case. Firstly, the PowerPoint presentation is used to introduce the audience to the background and history of the Nobel Prize, the selection procedure of the laureates and the specific criteria of the Nobel Prize in Literature. It is also including a short summary of the happenings as well as a brief description of Bob Dylan and his work. Since the singer-songwriter Bob Dylan was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his song lyrics, it is suggested to extend the media usage by incorporating lyrics and songs to keep the audience's interest and attentive. In this specific case, for instance, playing one of his famous songs or sharing a piece of one of his lyrics can help the audience to grasp the atmosphere, understand his style and work, and to engage in the media controversy mood ("Can song lyrics ever be poetry?").

Additionally, the whiteboard is used as a support and interaction tool during the case discussion with the audience. Implementing the Corporate Brand Identity and Reputation Matrix ²⁴, by sketching its reputational elements on the whiteboard, is seeing as a useful and convenient way to highlight the necessary key learnings and insights shared by the audience. Specifications of the exact whiteboard discussion are further detailed in the Board Plan section of this Teaching Suggestion description.

When the analysis of the reputation dimensions is finished, the instructors should place the question regarding the management decision, which reads as follows: "What can the Nobel Prize (Nobel Committee) do to overcome the situation and how should it react?" The audience is expected to raise a few ideas regarding it and then the instructors continue to explain what happened in reality. Lastly, to close the case-based teaching in the classroom, the instructors ask for feedback and any additional comments from the audience as a final brief evaluation of the case.

1. What do you think about the way they handled the communication in such situation?
2. Do you think that organizing a private event especially for Bob Dylan was a good solution?

The benefit of this case-based learning and teaching approach is to improve the understanding of a real-life management situation, stimulate critical thinking and advance problem-solving skills with reasoning techniques during tough situations of the business life in general. It is also a good opportunity to apply the analysis of the Corporate Brand Identity and Reputation Matrix as proposed by Urde and Greyser to evaluate how different dimensions regarding the reputation of an organisation can be hit in a case where the behavior of one of its stakeholders gain big repercussion due to its celebrity status.

Discussion Questions

Main Question:

1. Did Bob Dylan's controversial behaviour regarding his literature award affect the reputation of the Nobel Prize?

Assisting Questions:

2. Would it affect only the Nobel Prize in Literature or could potentially hurt the other ones?
3. In what ways did it affect the reputation and prestige of the Nobel Prize? Does it have a short-term or long-term effect?
4. Can something actually be done in such situation? How would have you faced the situation in the role of the Nobel Committee?

(After presenting what the committee did)

5. What do you think about the way they handled the communication in such situation?
6. Do you think that organizing a private event especially for Bob Dylan was a good solution?

Overview of Key Learnings

Table A

Applying	The Corporate Brand Identity and Reputation Matrix	Here: we identified the dimensions of the Nobel Prize reputation which can be affected by Bob Dylan's behaviour
Evaluation	Brand reputation in an issue situation	Here: analysis of the case through the use of the CBIRM
Providing	How a prestigious prize can strive to save its reputation in a stakeholder mismatch situation	Here: organising a private event

Table A: Overview of key learnings. Source: own source.

Time Plan

In addition to the teaching suggestions, a time plan is provided. The aim of the time plan is to help the instructors to optimize the time provided in order to produce a more in-depth and interesting analysis of the covered concepts. In a teaching process, it is important not only to inform the audience but also stimulate the interaction and critical thinking through the process of collaboration and co-creation of the content and analysis. Thus, Figure 3 was created to support the understanding of the flow of the presentation. The entire instructional process will be held in the time frame provided: 25 minutes plus five minutes of ‘after discussion’. The lesson plan was organized into three phases. Phase one will be a 7 minutes presentation (representing 28% of the total presentation time) which will encompass the introduction of the Written Case. In phase two, the discussion, guided by the main and assisting questions, will take place. At this stage, the whiteboard will be used to assist the analysis of the possible impact of the occurring on the Nobel Prize reputation based on the dimensions of the Corporate Brand Identity and Reputation Matrix. Due to the importance of the interaction with the students in the construction of knowledge, this phase will comprise 15 minutes, representing 60 % of the total lesson time. Phase three is the end phase, where the final discussion happens. After the presentation of the management decision and new insights provided by the students during the analyses in phase 2, the instructors will finalize the discussing by asking what are the impressions about the solution adopted by the Nobel Prize committee. Phase three will take 3 minutes, thus 12 %.

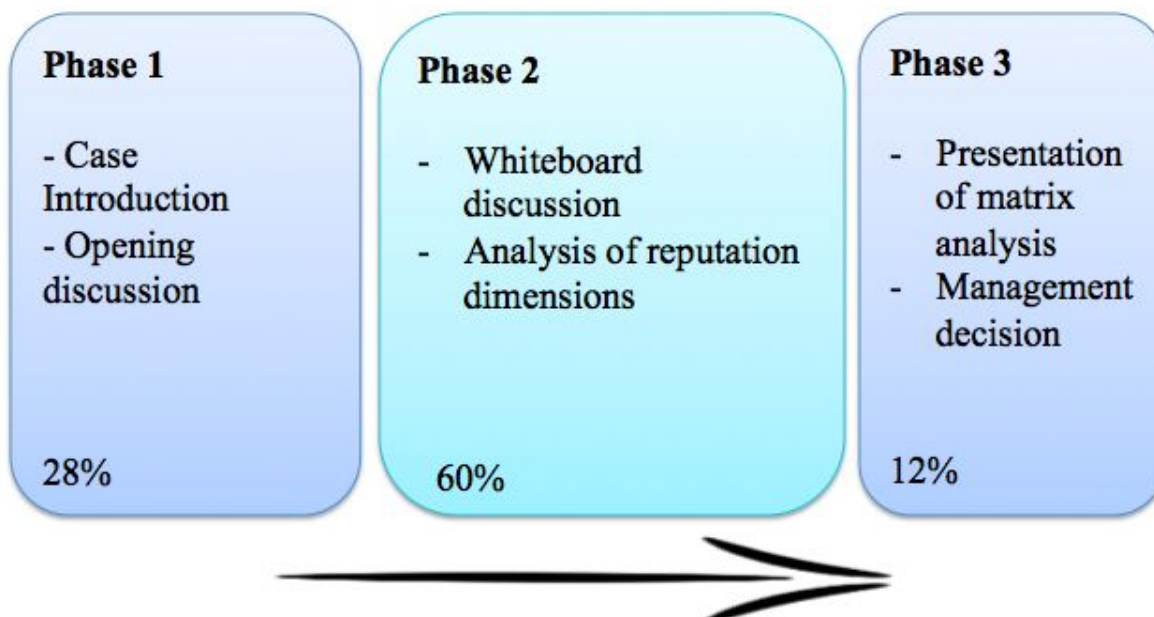


Figure 3: The different phases of the presentation divided into tasks and percentages. Source: own source.

Board plan

The use of the white board helps the instructors to organize and lead the discussion with the audience. We recommend structuring the whiteboard in 4 columns, as shown in Figure 4. First of all, the instructors will write on the board all the dimensions related to the corporate reputation which are included in the Corporate Brand Identity and Reputation Matrix. In the second column, students are asked to express which of the dimensions can be affected by Dylan’s decision of not attending the Nobel Prize ceremony. The “Yes” answers will be written in green, while the “No” answers will be in red. The next column “Short/Long-term” aims to identify how each reputation dimension can be affected over time, while the final section is reserved to extra comments and insights related to the occurring and the theoretical applications. In fact, when students reply to the “Yes/No” and “Short/Long-term” questions, they have to support their choice with an argument that will be regarded as an extra comment and considered for the final analysis.

In such structured way, we believe the instructors will be able to keep track of students responses and comments in a more efficient way. Furthermore, the whiteboard notes are helpful to confront students’ responses to our analysis of the CBIRM.

Reputation dimensions	YES/NO	SHORT/LONG-TERM	COMMENTS
1. RELEVANCE	Y	LT	image transfer
2. RELIABILITY	Y	ST	heritage
3. WILLINGNESS-TO-SUPPORT	N	/	competitors
4. RESPONSIBILITY	Y	ST	importance of the prize
5. PERFORMANCE	N	/	Celebrity
6. CREDIBILITY	Y	ST	audience's perception
7. DIFFERENTIATION	Y	LT	rebel persona
8. TRUSTWORTHINESS	Y	ST	

Figure 4: How to use the whiteboard. Source: own source.

Epilogue

The Nobel Prize operates in a similar way to any corporate brand that holds other brands under its umbrella and is represented by a network where stakeholders are active actors involved in the construction and maintenance of its reputation. Among stakeholders, one group stands out: its laureates are perceived as guardians of prize's identity serving as custodians of its reputation and heritage²⁵. Bob Dylan's controversial decision not to attend the award ceremony sparked a media commotion, and in addition to the already on going debate as to whether the artist's choice as a winner was appropriate or not, generated negative comments from the general public and stakeholders - including fellow laureates - about the reliability of the its selection process. Therefore, understanding and evaluating how a stakeholder's attitude - especially one that is considered an icon of pop culture and a celebrity per se - can influence the reputation of a prestigious and distinct award/brand is the major learning outcome from this case. Likewise, by observing the way the Swedish Academy communicated its struggles to contact the artist and manage his demands, it is possible to recognize the importance of managing the communication dimensions in a proper way. The right style, timing and the tone of communication could have helped decrease the buzz generated by the media. This conclusion reinforces the importance of corporate communication as a management tool when facing issues. Furthermore, the decision to fulfill Bob Dylan's wish by organizing a private ceremony indicates the flexibility of the Swedish Academy in such a severe situation. It created an opportunity to prove their ability to mitigate the tension derived from Bob Dylan's controversial behaviour. Realising the impact of a potential even more serious reputation damage, especially because of the pressure of different channels in media, the decision of organising a private event by fulfilling Bob Dylan's wish is regarded as a rather attentive and considerate action to overcome the challenge of crisis management.

Reflections

As an end assignment of the master *BUSN35 Corporate Brand Management and Reputation* at the Lund School of Economics and Management, a real case is studied, explained and reviewed on an academic level.

In agreement with and inspired by professor Mats Urde, the decision was made to choose the case of the Nobel Prize vs Bob Dylan which revolves around the singer's decision of not attending the official award ceremony after winning the Nobel Prize in Literature. Although existing literature already described and analysed the Nobel Prize network and its reputation, no information was found about the implications of Bob Dylan's decision - as a laureate and therefore, stakeholder - on the reputation of the Nobel Prize. This gap in the literature appeared as a great opportunity for the group members to explore their analytical side and apply the theories and concepts acquired during the *BUSN35 Corporate Brand Management and Reputation* course. Additionally, having the opportunity to work in a

culture diverse group in Sweden on a case portraying a typical Swedish organisation made it even a more unique and inspiring opportunity.

With this background information, the given cases and the articles about the Nobel Prize included in our course literature, our team started to prepare organizing several meetings, discussions, questions and conducting a lot of research until a final question was defined: **The Nobel Prize vs. Bob Dylan:** *Did Bob Dylan's controversial behaviour regarding his literature award affect the reputation of the Nobel Prize?* With this question in mind, the group decided to conduct a full reputation analysis of the Nobel Prize focusing on the impact of his absence from the award ceremony in the different reputation dimensions.

In doing so, the group could engage in a management role, gaining a deeper understanding and insights on the use of the CBIRM Matrix and how a stakeholder's controversial attitude can generate so much media buzz hitting, as a result, an organisation's reputation, even if only for a short period of time. With the focus on the reputational perspective, we refined the case several times to understand what should be the main important outcomes and key learnings.

Several test runs were conducted to prepare for an interesting presentation. Different factors were taken into consideration, as for example; *interaction with the audience, the key leanings, use of the whiteboard, use of the CBIRM matrix and interesting bullet points on the powerpoint.* All these factors helped us to feel confident about the case and to create an informative and interesting presentation.

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