ROTHMAN & ROMAN

Communication Trend Report 2025

RESPONSIBILITY AND BELONGING IN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

Human Sustainability, Culture, and Communication in a Changing World

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*In loving memory of **Bhavani Krishnasamy (1963–2025)**, whose passion for purposeful communication and quiet strength touched many. Bhavani has inspired us through her integrity, generosity, and belief that words can create meaningful change. Her legacy continues to guide us.*

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Our heartfelt gratitude to our partners for their support rendered towards this publication.

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I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to the esteemed members of the Supervisory Board. Their insights, coupled with the experiences shared by our interviewees, offer a rich, inspiring tapestry that we hope will fuel further outstanding communications and expand the community of dedicated changemakers.

Thank you, Dr Sean Chaidaroon - Associate Professor, School of Culture and Communication, The University of Melbourne, Dr Felix Tan - Associate Lecturer at Nanyang Technological University, Ms Vanessa Wan - Vice President of the Institute of Public Relations of Singapore, Dr Chitra Rajaram - Director, Office of Corporate Communications Republic Polytechnic, Nisar Keshvani - Assistant Dean of Communications and Public Affairs, Northwestern University in Qatar, Ms Siew Ting Foo - Transformation Growth Leader, Board Member of The Marketing Society, and Ms Samantha Thian - Deputy Head of Operations, IPCC WGII Technical Support Unit, whose unwavering commitment to the development of the Singaporean communication industry and invaluable contributions have been instrumental in bringing this publication to life.

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Co-Founder & CSO, Rothman & Roman Group

ZSOFIA BALATONI
Co-Founder & CSO,
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"If business is the last institution people believe in, the cost of betraying that belief is existential."

Since the publication of our first report in 2024, the world has not become calmer. Wars continue, political polarisation has deepened, and artificial intelligence has introduced a new kind of uncertainty. Not about whether technology will change work, but about whether organisations are prepared to manage that change responsibly.

Trust in institutions continues to fracture. In many countries, employers are now the most trusted institutions. The gap between trust in employers and trust in government, media and NGOs is wider than ever. That is not a compliment to business. It is a burden. If business is the last institution people believe in, the cost of betraying that belief is existential.

Meanwhile, the toll of disconnection is becoming harder to ignore. Several studies have found a significant correlation between the rise of social media and the increase in loneliness across the United States. The implications go beyond individual wellbeing. We are now operating in a landscape where audiences are lonelier, more anxious, more sceptical and more alert to inauthenticity than at any point in modern communications history. This is the environment in which every message, campaign and strategy must now land.

Against this backdrop, the Communication Trend Report 2025 explores three interconnected challenges facing organisations today: The responsible adoption of artificial intelligence, the evolving conversation around diversity, equity and inclusion, and the growing demand for continuous learning and development as a condition of relevance. These are not separate agendas. They are expressions of a single question: Are organisations willing to invest in the people who make them work? How seriously do marketing and communication professionals take the societies they talk to?

Through research and in-depth interviews with communication, HR, and marketing leaders in Singapore, the report captures how organisations are responding to this moment. The picture that emerges is remarkably consistent. The companies and leaders navigating these challenges most effectively are those who treat communication as a cross-functional mandate, not a departmental function. They are the ones who understand that trust is built through behaviour, not messaging. And they are the ones who recognise that the tools matter far less than the integrity behind them.

Human sustainability is the thread that runs through every chapter of this report. Not as a buzzword, but as a measure: Are the people inside and around your organisation better off because of how you operate, communicate and lead?

The Communication Trend Report 2025 was shaped by the guidance and contributions of an exceptional advisory board, to whom we are deeply grateful: Professor Dr Sean Chaidaroon (University of Melbourne), Siew Ting Foo (The Marketing Society), Professor Nisar Keshvani (Northwestern University in Qatar), Dr Chitra Rajaram (Republic Polytechnic), Dr Felix Tan (NTU Singapore), Samantha Thian (IPCC WGII Technical Support Unit), and Vanessa Wan (Institute of Public Relations of Singapore).

We would also like to thank every interviewee who gave their time, insight and candour to this project, and the many supporters across the industry whose encouragement and belief in the value of this work carried it forward. Last but not least, our heartfelt thanks to the editors, designers, copywriters and the wider Rothman & Roman team whose work behind the scenes made this report possible.

This report is dedicated to Bhavani Krishnasamy, who believed in the power of purposeful communication and whose quiet strength continues to inspire the work we do.

Co-Founder & CSO, Rothman & Roman Group

Company Perspectives

IPRS| Bitdeer Group

ROSS GAN
President,
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President of the Institute of Public Relations of Singapore (IPRS) for the 2025-2027 term and Chief Communications Officer of Bitdeer Group.

A communications and public affairs veteran with over two decades of experience in fast-growing Asian multinationals, including senior leadership roles at Temasek, Huawei Technologies and Matrixport.

> **AI may accelerate execution, but human judgement determines impact.**

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The past few years have fundamentally reshaped how organisations communicate. AI has accelerated the speed at which information is produced and consumed. Geopolitical tensions have heightened scrutiny on corporate behaviour. Employees expect transparency and authenticity. Stakeholders question not just what organisations say, but whether their actions support their claims.

At Bitdeer Group, the response has not been to communicate more, but to communicate with greater intent.

On AI, the company's position is one of measured pragmatism. Speed without judgement creates noise, not value. Audiences are already overwhelmed, and indiscriminate automation risks diluting messages and eroding trust. The focus is therefore on using AI to augment human capability rather than replace it — freeing teams from repetitive processes so they can concentrate on strategy, context and relationships.

Effectiveness, in this model, is measured by relevance and clarity. AI may accelerate execution, but human judgement determines impact.

As expectations grow for businesses to comment on social and ethical issues, Bitdeer's approach is deliberate rather than reactive. The question the company asks before taking a public stance is not "***should we say something?"*** but ***"can we meaningfully contribute — through policy, action or resources?"*** If the answer is no, restraint is the more responsible choice.

Statements disconnected from a company's actual operations may generate short-term visibility, but employees and partners are quick to recognise when messaging is symbolic rather than substantive. The cost is trust.

The same logic applies to DEI. As the conversation has become more complex and, in some markets, more politicised, Bitdeer treats the shift as an opportunity for a more fundamental question: Was inclusion ever genuinely embedded in the organisation's values, or was it previously treated as a trend?

If DEI is linked to business outcomes — attracting diverse talent, fostering innovation, strengthening team resilience — then the commitment should hold regardless of external narratives. Inclusion becomes operational necessity rather than public positioning.

Communication, in this context, is not about crafting the right message. It is about accurately reflecting reality.

Policies, leadership behaviour and everyday practice carry more weight than campaigns or slogans. When employees experience fairness and psychological safety in their daily work, communication simply confirms what they already know to be true.

At Bitdeer, human sustainability is not a standalone agenda. For a technology-driven company whose performance depends on the expertise, engagement and adaptability of its workforce, it is a business dependency.

Attracting and retaining skilled talent requires more than competitive compensation. It requires an environment where people feel supported, respected and able to grow — which makes wellbeing, learning and belonging strategic priorities rather than discretionary benefits.

The communication principle follows naturally: messaging reflects the tangible steps taken to design better ways of working and support employee development. Bitdeer does not communicate about human sustainability because it is expected. It communicates because there is something concrete to say.

Booking.com

ADITI SINGH

HR Head (APAC),
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HR leader with experience spanning talent management, employee engagement and organisational development across the travel and e-commerce sectors in Asia-Pacific.

Previously held HR roles at ZALORA Group and Trident Group India.

Booking.com

> **Everyone means Everyone.**

Read more >

At Booking.com, the question has never been whether to adopt AI, but how to do it responsibly. After more than 25 years serving travellers and partners, the company places strong emphasis on data privacy, security and AI ethics — and as AI capabilities expand, governance and risk management evolve alongside them.

The focus is on enhancing operational efficiency so that teams spend less time on repetitive tasks and more time solving meaningful problems. Success is not measured by experimentation alone, but by adoption and tangible impact: how frequently AI tools are used in day-to-day workflows, and whether they lead to measurable improvements in productivity.

AI is already embedded across multiple workstreams. Glean, a generative AI knowledge management platform, surfaces internal information quickly.

Gemini supports productivity across everyday office tasks. Perhaps most notably, managers have access to an AI coach designed to guide them through complex conversations — including performance management and feedback discussions.

These applications reflect a consistent principle: technology should remove friction, not replace judgement.

Booking.com draws a clear boundary between HR as advocate and HR as steward. The role is not to take positions on every societal debate, but to focus on issues that directly affect employees' ability to work safely, equitably and confidently: inclusion, harassment prevention, mental health, psychological safety and workplace equity.

This boundary is not a retreat. It is a deliberate choice to maintain credibility through consistency and evidence rather than reaction. And it connects directly to Booking.com's core mission: enabling everyone to experience the world as themselves. As both an employer and a platform serving millions of travellers, inclusion is a business necessity. A workforce that reflects the diversity of its customers is better positioned to understand and serve their needs.

The practical expression of this commitment is the company's ERG network — more than 11,000 employees globally, organised into groups that raise awareness, provide community and inform the organisation about where policies or practices need to improve. In APAC alone, seven ERGs operate across the region, including B.Proud, which supports LGBTQ+ employees and allies.

Booking.com's framing of DEI is anchored around a single principle:

"Everyone means Everyone."

Rather than treating it as a standalone initiative, inclusion is integrated into how teams collaborate, and decisions are made. The emphasis is not only on representation, but on belonging, enabling people to contribute fully without having to leave parts of themselves behind.

Booking.com's view of culture is unambiguous: it is not built through grand gestures or occasional campaigns, but through thousands of everyday decisions made by leaders, managers and employees. Three core mindsets — Protagonist, Learner and One Team — act as practical anchors for how colleagues show up for one another, guiding behaviour from hiring through to offboarding.

Collective moments reinforce what daily practice builds. The recent APAC Reconnects gathering in Malaysia brought employees together to celebrate achievements, strengthen relationships and spotlight ERG work across the region — designed not just to recognise performance, but to foster shared identity across geographies.

Wellbeing follows the same logic of embedded support rather than isolated initiatives. The B.well programme addresses physical, mental and emotional health through a hybrid work model, ClassPass memberships, an Employee Assistance Programme, Headspace access and ERG-led wellbeing sessions. Benefits are also tailored for parents and caregivers — an acknowledgement that support needs differ across life stages.

The Booking.com Cares programme extends this outward, enabling employees to volunteer and donate to causes aligned with inclusion, wellbeing and sustainability. Human sustainability, in Booking.com's framing, does not stop at the individual — it extends to the communities the organisation operates in.

Singlife

DEBRA SOON

Group Head of Brand, Communications, Marketing and Experience, *Singlife*

Over 30 years of regional leadership experience across media, automotive, property and financial services.

Previously Managing Director of Channel NewsAsia, Chief Customer Officer and Chief Marketing Officer at Mediacorp, and Head of Group Corporate Management at Tan Chong International.

Singlife

"Consumers evaluate companies by how they treat employees, partners and society."

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From Dream Cube to Salesforce agent: AI with a specific purpose

Singlife's most striking AI application is not an internal productivity tool. It is customer-facing. The Dream Cube is a generative AI and web augmented reality experience that asks customers a few questions, then produces a personalised visual of their version of financial freedom. The goal is to make an abstract concept concrete — and to create a pathway from aspiration to action using the right plans, data and advice.

AI also informs how Singlife listens. By analysing enquiry patterns, sentiment and real-time needs, the company gains a clearer picture of what different customer groups actually care about — enabling more targeted messaging and more relevant content.

On the service side, Singlife recently became the first insurer in Singapore to implement a Salesforce AI agent supporting customer service teams. The tool gives employees fast access to accurate information without searching across multiple documents, enabling faster and more consistent responses — while freeing human teams to focus on the parts of customer interaction that technology cannot replicate.

Across these applications, the pattern is consistent: AI handles the retrieval, the personalisation, the pattern recognition. Judgement and empathy remain human.

Singapore's first dementia insurance plan — and the campaign that earned it a national conversation

Singlife's position on public stances is clear: speak when it genuinely aligns with your purpose, and back every statement with action. In insurance — a sector where products can feel technical and distant — this means making wellbeing, inclusion and fairness tangible rather than rhetorical. A disconnect between words and values is read quickly, particularly by consumers who expect organisations to reflect their own.

The most concrete expression of this philosophy is Reimagine Health, a campaign that went beyond marketing to reshape national thinking on long-term care, ageing and health. Anchored by a white paper drawing on research, insurance claims data and expert insights across healthcare and social sectors, the campaign brought together the Lien Foundation, Dementia Singapore, the Ministry of Health and the Monetary Authority of Singapore. The conversation it convened was substantive enough to warrant a dedicated panel on building a sustainable long-term care system.

The campaign also introduced Singlife Dementia Cover — the first dedicated dementia insurance plan in Singapore — and expanded the Singlife Care Collab ecosystem, developed in partnership with the Agency for Integrated Care and Homage to give customers and caregivers easier access to holistic support.

Reimagine Health was recognised as Outstanding Communications Campaign of the Year at the 2025 IPRS PRISM Awards. The recognition matters less than what it reflects: a campaign built on research, policy-level partnerships and a genuine product commitment is harder to dismiss than one built on messaging alone.

Wheelchair rugby, national shuttlers and netball — brand building through community, not campaigns

Singlife's SG60 and Beyond initiative reflects a deliberate choice about what brand building actually means. Rather than sponsoring high-visibility mainstream events, the company has directed support toward local sporting talent and underserved communities — including Netball Singapore, national shuttlers Terry Hee and Jessica Tan, and the Wheelchair Rugby Association Singapore.

Wheelchair rugby is the most telling choice. It brings visibility to a passionate but underrepresented community and broadens the narrative around sport, disability and inclusion in ways that a conventional sponsorship portfolio would not. The brand association is built through genuine community connection rather than borrowed audience.

For Singlife, this reflects a broader principle: consumers evaluate companies by how they treat employees, partners and society — not only by their products. Brand relevance, in this context, is earned through experiences and initiatives that improve lives rather than through communications that describe doing so.

SÁNDOR FASIMON

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A global energy executive with over 25 years of experience in upstream operations, trading and energy infrastructure across Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

Previously Executive Vice President and COO at MOL Hungary, Executive Board Member of MOL Group, and President of the Management Board of INA (Croatia).

Appointed to establish MET Group's Asia-Pacific presence in 2023.

MET Asia

"High performance and wellbeing are not competing priorities."

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MET Group's position on AI is deliberately sequenced. Digital transformation begins with people and governance, followed by clearly defined processes and reliable data. Technology comes last — not because it is unimportant, but because introducing it earlier amplifies existing problems rather than solving them.

The logic is straightforward: if definitions are inconsistent or processes are unclear, AI will produce confusion at scale. Poor data and misaligned workflows lead to mixed messages regardless of how sophisticated the tools are.

Used on a solid foundation, however, AI can meaningfully improve communication — streamlining access to information, reducing ambiguity and supporting faster decision-making across complex, fast-moving operations. For MET Group, that is precisely the role it is designed to play: enhancing communication that is already structured, not substituting for structure that does not yet exist.

Sixty nationalities, one team building event — inclusion as a daily reality

At MET Group, DEI is not a communications theme. With colleagues representing close to sixty nationalities and women visibly present across functions and leadership levels, diversity is simply a description of how the organisation operates.

This shapes what communication looks like in practice. Rather than broad messaging, inclusion is expressed through concrete experiences — most visibly through the annual Group Team Building event that brings together all employees from across geographies. For a workforce of nearly 1,400 people, gathering everyone in one place sends a stronger signal about belonging than any campaign would.

Structure reinforces culture. Clear values guide behaviour and leadership expectations across markets, while the Sales and Trading segment operates under a manifesto that emphasises meritocracy — ensuring that opportunities, development and performance are handled consistently and transparently.

The result is that DEI communication becomes more credible over time rather than more difficult. Repeated Top Employer recognition in Switzerland reflects a culture that does not need to be packaged — only accurately described.

MET Group's rejection of the performance-versus-well-being trade-off is not a philosophical position — it is an operational one. In high-pressure trading and

energy markets, unclear priorities and inconsistent messages create stress and disengagement directly. Communication that explains not just decisions but the reasoning behind them reduces uncertainty and helps employees understand how their work connects to broader goals.

Expectations are clear and accountability is valued — but leaders are deliberate about avoiding constant urgency or noise that erodes morale over time. Communication is also treated as a two-way responsibility: dialogue, feedback and peer exchange are actively encouraged through leadership forums, professional networks and everyday engagement. People who feel heard are better equipped to contribute sustainably than those who are merely informed.

Externally, MET Group connects its commitment to human potential through partnerships that reflect the same values. Support for the International Judo Federation and elite athletes, long-standing involvement with the Virtuosos classical music programme, and collaboration with universities reflect a belief that education and opportunity matter beyond the organisation's own walls. In Asia, employees contribute directly to mentoring networks and women's empowerment initiatives.

The through-line is consistent: human sustainability is not a separate workstream. It is a quality standard for how leadership communicates — and for MET Group, long-term performance depends on it.

AI Adoption: Thematic Overview

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Named six times by Campaign Asia as one of the Most Purposeful CMOs and recognised as a Global Top 3 Inclusive CMO by The CMO Club.

Board member of The Marketing Society.

Author of Building Brands with Soul (Amazon bestseller).

Currently provides advisory and consulting work on marketing transformation and leadership.

OPINION

AI and The Human Advantage

(not just ingenuity)

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"Your teams aren't afraid of AI, they're afraid of not knowing how they fit in."

In the last 2 years, since AI starts to shift from the next new thing to becoming prevalent in our everyday lives now, there are still so many conversations about despite the AI adoption and investment, many companies have yet to be able to scale it effectively across the enterprise.

According to Gartner, while **$1.5 trillion was invested in AI last year,** a McKinsey global survey of almost 2,000 companies found that nearly two-thirds have not yet scaled their AI projects across the enterprise. Corporations want to accelerate AI use to capture the full economic impact of this technology – *but how?*

Even as the technology matures and adoption becomes widespread, scaling AI still feels hard for many organisations. In fact, scaling AI, and overcoming the organisational challenges that come with it, surfaced across numerous high-profile CEO sessions at Davos 2026 conference.

So, what is the bottleneck and what do we need to do differently?

I have been observing, practising, reading and learning AI at different levels – whether it is at the board level, C-suite level or even within the marketing and communications functions. The impact of how AI is transforming work, our lives is here to stay.

However, much has been said about how to harness AI together with the human in the lead- to maximise its potential – both for the technology and for the human.

The unformulable truth is with AGENTIC AI coming on board, the workforce, workflows will be largely disrupted. It certainly paints a slightly different future of work – whereby there will be not only cross-inter-generational workforce – together with Agentic AI as one of the employees.

HOW TO START THINKING ABOUT AI ADOPTION

Perhaps the way to reframe this above problem statement is to look at it in the following way:

1. Starting with the human in the lead vs in the loop.

Most corporations start with what technology and data can do to processes. They tend to incorporate the human in the loop. Very few start with developing the workflow or work processes with humans leading the development of the workflows. I believe that the 'reframe' should be to start with having the leader redesign the workflow and then the organisation and resources required to fit the new workflow. Often it is the other way round, with humans in the loop vs the lead. Historically, career ladders assume that depth in a single task equals success. In the agentic AI era, the people who thrive are systems thinkers – those who can design, direct and improve agent-driven workflows. Anchor growth to expanding into new adjacencies, not mastering one domain. Sideways becomes the new upward. Create an environment where a social media manager learning prompt design becomes a content architect or a financial analyst understanding workflow logic pivots into revenue operations.

This is the new radically simple enterprise: more adaptive, more capable, more human in the work that matters most.

2. Trust is the goal post. The new foundation.

After you redesign the organisation, it is then all about building trust as the foundation.

In the last few decades, we have been operating in types of leadership environment whereby it is about top down- leadership driven by hierarchical structure and power being influenced by information and knowledge.

Enterprise governance systems were built for tools with predictable rules. Manual oversight might work for five agents, but it won't work for five hundred. Scaling requires a new blueprint.

Building trust from day one is the new foundation and needs to be intentional. This creates a new paradigm for supervision. It is not about leaders and manager auditing behaviours and audit trails. It is about transparency democratised by AI.

Your teams aren't afraid of AI, they're afraid of not knowing how they fit in. Don't turn away from discomfort, face it head-on: what work goes away, what becomes hybrid and what still depends on our uniquely human qualities, such as judgement, creativity and intuition. A five-slide deck won't cut it here. Formalise it. Create a new operating agreement with shared expectations, clear division of labour and a firm definition of what 'good' looks like.

When trust is built into your systems from day one, your enterprise moves with AI – not against it.

3. Knowing how to work with agentic AI to unleash the power of human potential. Simplify the enterprise.

The future of work is changing rapidly. We are entering a new era defined by a multigenerational workforce—comprising Gen Z entrants, millennials, and experienced senior professionals working fractionally—alongside AI agents.

Not only organisation systems, but processes also evolve, culture needs to evolve to unleash the power of human potential.

We need leaders who are not only system workers and architects of processes, but what is most important is leaders who deeply understand the human motivation, the psychology of great story tellers who can inspire the organisation to the north star, align everyone to a common goal and and know how to bring out the best potential of the workforce. This is a unique skill sets that needs to leaders who really starts with knowing themselves, we embrace curiosity, creativity and collaboration to power the full cognitive power of the workforce that they lead.

In my regular LinkedIn newsletter, "Leadership with Soul," I wrote about the 7Cs that I believe are critical modern leadership skills. They are, essentially, seven key skills that will be critical in the future. Three of these have to do with the individual (Cognition, Creativity, Curiosity) and three on how we connect with each other and the world outside our minds including working with Agentic employees and AI Tools (Collaborate, Communicate, Convince).

+ PLUS, ONE to do with personal purpose and belief – A dose of COURAGE!

In summary, perhaps starting with human in the loop to design AI workflows that help simplify the enterprise, building trust not as a byproduct but as the foundation and helping leaders of the future building modern skills (7Cs) will help unleash the human advantage.

This is by no means conclusive. However, what I know for sure is I am starting to expose my 13-year-old daughter differently to help her future proof her skill sets beyond what the education system provides. Perhaps advising her to study humanities on top of STEM subjects!

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: Thematic Overview

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Three decades of experience in communications, reputation management and corporate social responsibility across the government and private sectors, including senior roles at GE, Shell, and the Singapore Economic Development Board.

OPINION

From DEI to Human Sustainability Through Communication

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) as a Human Sustainability Strategy

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"The biggest threat to a brand isn't a bad news cycle; it's the say-do gap."

As I looked through the 2026 Edelman Global Trust Barometer report, I was dismayed to read that the world is retreating towards insularity. *"As economic anxiety, geopolitical tension, and technological disruption intensify, people are narrowing their world to smaller, familiar circles that reflect their views, and this hinders economic and societal progress."*

This eroding trust in institutions, widening inequities, and intensifying change have pushed Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) from just "good to have" right into the centre of business strategy. People are no longer just looking at a company's profits; they are watching its behaviour.

Amid all this, we've been hearing a lot about *"human sustainability"* lately. How organisations make life better for people – greater health, wellbeing, skills, opportunities for advancement, equity, and belonging and purpose.

So, DEI is no longer just about HR programmes or communications campaigns.

Communication is now a strategic enabler.
How do we design communication to increase fairness, transparency, and opportunity?

Communications leaders are uniquely placed to:

- → Make human sustainability visible and understandable through narrative and framing.
- → Build feedback loops.
- → Translate abstract commitments into concrete behaviours.

The data from the report shows that employees still trust their employers more than the media or government. That is a heavy responsibility. When we are silent or use corporate "bureaucratese" to mask inequity, we break that trust. But when we are transparent - even when the news is tough - we create psychological safety.

Communications and HR teams are therefore on the front line of trust.

We need to deliberately design inclusive, psychologically safe communication and systems that support human sustainability. The role of the Communicator is no longer about "getting the message out." It is about shaping cultures, guiding leaders through complex conversations, and navigating issues.

The biggest threat to a brand isn't a bad news cycle; it's the "say-do" gap. Employees see right through a polished DEI campaign if their daily reality includes pay gaps or exclusionary behaviour. When external marketing doesn't match internal experience, your employees will (rightfully) call it out on social media.

So responsible communication isn't about "protecting the brand" – it is about integrity. It's ensuring that what we say, what we do, and what we measure are all pointing in the same direction.

Communications teams have a distinctive role in driving this kind of responsibility by bringing the voice of stakeholders into business and strategy conversations, crafting messages that reflect both impact and intent, and ensuring that DEI efforts are seen, understood and valued by internal and external audiences.

This means communicators need to be in the room from the beginning, not called in at the end to "package" them. When communicators are involved early, they can help shape initiatives so that they respond to real stakeholder experiences and anticipate possible misinterpretations.

In addition, Communications teams can also help translate DEI principles into everyday practices that build belonging, such as:

- → **Inclusive meetings and messaging:** Rotating meeting times to respect global time zones; using shared documents so different communication styles are respected; ensuring that people who are neurodivergent or introverted can contribute.
- → **Accessible and multilingual communication:** Providing leadership messages in multiple languages where appropriate; designing content that is accessible for people with disabilities; considering literacy, cultural norms and technology access when choosing channels.
- → **Ongoing DEI communication, not just campaigns:** Integrating DEI themes into regular newsletters, town halls, social media and internal storytelling so that inclusion is seen as part of the organisation's identity.
- → **Employee networks:** Empowering employee resource groups to co-create content, advise on language, and share stories that reflect diverse experiences authentically.

Finally, we cannot talk about 2026 without talking about AI. While algorithms offer incredible scale, they also risk entrenching biases. If an AI decides which stories get amplified or which job ads get seen, we have to be the ethical gatekeepers.

Our new responsibilities therefore include:

- Studying datasets and prompts to ensure our AI inputs reflect diverse identities.
- Fact-checking AI content for potential microaggressions or non-inclusive language.
- Working with Legal, HR and Tech teams to build a framework for responsible AI use in employee and stakeholder communication.

At the same time, technology can be a powerful enabler of belonging when used thoughtfully. Digital pulse surveys can track inclusion sentiment; collaboration tools can give quieter and remote employees greater access; translation tools can expand access to leadership messages across languages.

We must therefore design our communication ecosystems, both human and digital, to make it easier for every employee to be heard, informed and respected.

At the centre of all this Human Sustainability. Is life better for people because your organisation exists? This means looking beyond the paycheck to health, wellbeing, skill-building, and a genuine sense of belonging.

In a volatile world, it is tempting to play it safe with generic, "beige" messaging. But the organisations that will win the next decade are those that treat communication as an important responsibility.

Communicators are uniquely positioned to make this happen by:

- → Helping organisations listen to all employees and stakeholders.
- → Designing communication ecosystems - human and digital - that give everyone fair access to information and recognition.
- → Holding up a mirror when language and reality diverge, and guide leaders toward greater alignment between word and action.

The next generation of our profession isn't only about managing reputations; it's about holding up a mirror to the organisation and asking,

"Do we walk the talk?"

If we do this right, we do not just protect a brand, we sustain the humans behind it.

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Over two decades of teaching and research experience across Thailand, the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom and Singapore, including positions at NUS, Nanyang Technological University and the University of Westminster.

Research focuses on corporate social responsibility, DEI in strategic communication, and digital media relations.

Fulbright scholar.

OPINION

Navigating the DEI Tightrope in Public Relations

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In January 2023, Singapore Airlines faced a difficult situation when Isabella Beale, an Australian student and congenital amputee, boarded an SQ flight to Europe. Having booked a seat in the emergency exit row, Beale found herself at the centre of a situation that highlights the difficult tension between individual inclusion and rigorous safety protocols. According to airline policy—which aligns with international aviation safety standards—passengers in these rows must be "fully able-bodied" and able to move quickly to operate exit doors in an emergency. This policy is designed to protect all passengers on board, as individuals in these seats with reduced mobility could endanger themselves or others during a crisis.

While Singapore Airlines maintained the legal and safety-mandated right to relocate Beale, the incident escalated into a public relations challenge due to the perceived manner of the enforcement. Beale reported feeling humiliated, claiming that staff used a frantic tone and gestured toward her missing limb when explaining why she had to move. The airline subsequently apologised for the "distress or embarrassment" caused by the request, while emphasising its zero-tolerance policy toward discrimination. **This case serves as a critical reminder for PR professionals.** While safety and international law are non-negotiable foundations, the way these policies are communicated to diverse stakeholders is what determines whether an organisation is seen as a protector of safety or a perpetrator of exclusion.

This article does not aim to criticise the organisational practice in managing the incident. Actually, this example really offers public relations (PR) professionals an interesting case of the complexities of managing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in an era where every interaction is a potential viral crisis.

The New Frontier: DEI as a Strategic PR Imperative

For decades, DEI was viewed primarily through the lenses of Human Resources and Management. It focused on internal hiring practices, organisational learning, and legal compliance. However, public relations practice and scholarship are now recognising a critical shift, as DEI has become a core component of both internal and external strategic communication.

As DEI-focused research in PR is still in its early stages, we are beginning to see three distinct **research trajectories** that professionals need to understand:

- → **Inclusive Research Practice:** Ensuring that PR research includes more diverse samples and "requisite variety" to represent various publics (Waymer et al., 2023).
- → **Critiquing Industry Communication:** Analysing how industries—from tech to travel—brand diversity and manage relationships with specific groups, such as neurodiverse or differently abled publics (Brenton et al., 2023).
- → **The Crisis Lens:** Learning from mismanagement, such as the backlash to Starbucks' #RaceTogether campaign, where DEI initiatives failed due to poor conceptualisation (Novak & Richmond, 2019; Peiritsch, 2019).

In the above case, we see these trajectories converge. When an organisation faces challenges in managing conflicting DEI expectations from its various external stakeholders, the resulting media narrative is rarely just about the policy itself; it is about negotiating tensions among safety, law, and human empathy.

The Complexity of the DEI Tightrope

Managing DEI in the public sphere is a complex, multifaceted issue that requires more than just a press release. PR professionals find themselves acting as mediators between competing stakeholder rights.

In the aviation industry, this tension is particularly acute. On the one hand, you have the airline's legal and safety imperatives. Other passengers have a right to travel safely, and in an emergency, those in the exit row must be physically capable of operating heavy doors. On the other hand, you have the individual's right to access public spaces without being vilified or humiliated for a disability.

Singapore Airlines faced intense pressure to balance these needs. While they had the legal right to move Beale, the public response seemed to focus on how that right was exercised. This is where public relations must step in to provide a holistic explanation of how these relationships fit together.

The digital landscape adds another layer of complexity: multivocality. In the wake of the incident, public opinion fractured. Some netizens supported the airline, citing safety as the ultimate priority. Others, however, accused Beale of being "entitled" or "playing the victim," while a third group expressed deep sympathy for her treatment. As a PR professional, you are no longer speaking to a monolithic "public"; you are navigating a minefield of conflicting netizens' perspectives.

ADVICE FOR THE MODERN PR PROFESSIONAL:

Three strategic lessons for PR practitioners seeking to move beyond reactive crisis management towards proactive DEI leadership can be drawn from this case.

1. Communication as a Negotiation, Not a Dictation

Every DEI incident is a negotiation. PR should not just be about defending a policy; it should also acknowledge the tension between that policy and the human experience. The fact that Singapore Airlines issued an apology for the "distress or embarrassment caused" demonstrated their intention to ease the tension between their legal rights and the passenger's emotional hurt.

Advice: When a conflict arises, start by acknowledging the stakeholder's feelings before citing policy. This negotiation approach builds bridges rather than walls.

2. Balance Rational and Emotional Appeals

To resolve a DEI crisis, you must speak to both the head and the heart. The rational message explains the why (e.g., FAA or airline safety regulations). The emotional message seeks identification with the affected party.

Advice: Your official statements should justify organisational decisions with facts while simultaneously seeking emotional common ground with the public.

3. Navigating the "Netizen" Echo Chamber

The above case showed that netizens often have mixed responses, with some even doubting the victim's account. This can be a trap for PR teams; appearing to side with sceptical netizens can alienate the broader public and damage the brand's DEI credentials.

Advice: Maintain trustworthiness and credibility by acknowledging the multivocality of the situation. Don't let loud, negative online voices dictate your brand's empathy levels.

> *"Every DEI incident is a negotiation. PR should not just be about defending a policy; it should also acknowledge the tension between that policy and the human experience."*

Towards a Holistic View of DEI

This case involving Singapore Airlines is a stark reminder that in the modern world, DEI is a complex phenomenon that requires holistic strategic communication management. It is not enough to have a policy on a website; that policy must be lived and breathed by every member of the organisation.

Public relations scholarship is demonstrating that our field has a unique and significant contribution to make to the DEI body of knowledge. While HR manages people and management handles the bottom line, public relations manage meaning. Communication practitioners must make sense of these complex human interactions and ensure that, even in the midst of a safety-critical operation, humanity is never sacrificed for the sake of the manual.

By adopting a strategy of tactful responses and negotiated communication, PR professionals can turn potential DEI disasters into opportunities for organisational growth and genuine stakeholder connection.

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Education and Development: Thematic Overview

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OPINION

Education & Development

Enabling Continuous Growth in a Fast-Changing World

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We are living through an era where the half-life of knowledge is shrinking. Skills that were relevant five years ago, are being reshaped by artificial intelligence, automation, shifting geopolitics, and evolving cultural expectations. In such an environment, education cannot be a one-time transaction. It must become a lifelong orientation.

For me, education has never been confined to the classroom. It is a mindset. A discipline. A quiet commitment to renewal.

In Arabic, the word tajdeed means renewal. That concept has stayed with me over the years. Continuous growth requires renewal — of skills, of perspective, of curiosity, and sometimes even of identity. The institutions that will thrive in the coming decades are not those that protect static knowledge, but those that cultivate adaptable learners.

Curiosity as Infrastructure

If I were to identify the foundation of development, it would not be technology. It would be curiosity. Curiosity is how we begin everything. It is the antidote to complacency. In fast-changing environments, curiosity keeps us relevant. It pushes us to ask better questions before jumping to answers. It allows us to examine blind spots — our own and those of our institutions.

When I work with students or teams, I **often observe that the most powerful growth happens not when someone acquires a new skill, but when they change the questions, they are asking.** Education, at its best, reshapes inquiry.

From Information to Discernment

We now have unprecedented access to information. Yet access does not automatically translate into wisdom.

Leadership and development increasingly depend on discernment — the ability to filter noise, evaluate credibility, and make decisions based on grounded realities. In my experience, the quality of our decisions is directly tied to the quality of the information we seek and the humility with which we receive it.

This is why continuous learning must include listening across hierarchies, disciplines, and generations.

The most effective leaders I have observed maintain a 360-degree information lens.

They do not rely solely on summaries or filtered reports. They engage directly with those closest to the work.

Education, then, is not only about acquiring new competencies. It is about cultivating intellectual humility and widening perspective.

Many people stop developing not because they lack opportunity, but because they fear appearing inexperienced.

Over time, I have come to see fear as one of the greatest barriers to growth. The fear of asking questions. The fear of admitting we do not know. The fear of failure.

In educational settings and workplaces alike, psychological safety becomes a prerequisite for development. When individuals feel safe to experiment, contribute, and occasionally fail, learning accelerates.

Growth requires an environment where feedback is given thoughtfully and received without defensiveness. Quiet feedback — delivered with respect — preserves dignity while encouraging improvement. It is a subtle but powerful leadership responsibility.

The Power of Relationships in Development

We often think of development in terms of formal training or certifications. Yet much of what shapes us comes through relationships.

Mentorship, collaboration, shared projects — these are the invisible classrooms of professional life.

Persuasion, collaboration, and leadership all hinge on trust. Titles may open doors, but relationships open minds. When trust exists, learning flows more naturally.

Ideas are tested without ego. Disagreements sharpen thinking rather than fracture teams.

In fast-changing environments, relational intelligence becomes as important as technical skill. People skills are not "soft." They are structural.

Institutions as Learning Ecosystems

For universities and organisations alike, the challenge is to design ecosystems that enable continuous development.

This includes embedding experiential learning, cross-disciplinary exposure, and real-world engagement into curricula. It means aligning academic inquiry with industry realities while preserving intellectual depth. It means preparing students not only for their first job, but for careers that may evolve multiple times.

We must also rethink how we recognise growth. Academic credit is important, but so is skills validation. Initiatives that allow students to apply storytelling to sustainability challenges, for example, bridge theory and practice. They cultivate communication skills, ethical awareness, and global citizenship in ways that traditional models sometimes miss.

Education must not only transfer knowledge. It must enable agency.

Modelling Growth from the Top

Continuous development cannot be delegated solely to HR departments or academic units. It must be modelled by leadership.

If leaders speak about innovation but resist learning themselves, the message is diluted. If they encourage well-being but do not respect boundaries, culture becomes performative.

Visible behaviour matters. Taking time to reflect, to learn, to recalibrate — these are not signs of weakness. They are signs of maturity.

In my own journey, some of the most meaningful development came not from formal programmes, but from pauses — moments of introspection, feedback, and recalibration. Renewal is not accidental; it requires intentionality.

Resilience Through Learning

The pace of change will not slow. Artificial intelligence will continue to reshape communication and work. Climate realities will require new forms of collaboration and responsibility. Global narratives will evolve.

Resilience, therefore, is inseparable from learning.

An institution that learns continuously adapts. A professional who learns continuously remains relevant. A student who learns how to learn carries an enduring advantage.

Education & Development, in this context, become less about credentials and more about capacity — the capacity to think critically, collaborate respectfully, adapt strategically, and lead ethically.

> *"In a world defined by acceleration, the greatest competitive advantage may not be speed, but the disciplined commitment to keep learning."*

A Culture of Continuous Growth

Enabling growth in a fast-changing world is not about chasing every trend. It is about building foundations: curiosity, discernment, trust, humility, and courage.

It is about creating cultures where questions are welcomed, feedback is thoughtful, and renewal is normalised.

Ultimately, education is not a stage of life. It is a lifelong posture.

In a world defined by acceleration, the greatest competitive advantage may not be speed — but the disciplined commitment to keep learning.

Case Studies

CASE STUDY

Singapore Airlines:
2,800 EMPLOYEES AT A LEARNING FESTIVAL — ABOUT AI

In 2024, Singapore Airlines brought together more than 2,800 employees globally for LIFE 2025 — a hybrid learning festival dedicated entirely to artificial intelligence and its implications for the future of work. For an airline whose core product is physical movement of people, organising a global staff event around AI literacy says something deliberate about where leadership thinks the organisation needs to go.

This sits alongside a broader learning infrastructure that is unusually dense for an airline. UPLIFT 2 embeds innovation and experimentation into everyday working culture. GenAI learning programmes and Sustainability 101 run in parallel, building digital fluency and climate literacy simultaneously. Cross-functional rotations, overseas assignments and sponsored higher education provide structural depth, while a year-long mentorship programme pairs newly promoted managers with senior leaders during what is typically the most disorienting career transition.

Leadership development extends to Scoot, where curated pathways equip leaders specifically for navigating organisational change. Executive education with global institutions reinforces this at the top of the house. Quarterly “Chill Out with Choon Phong” sessions — direct dialogue between staff and the CEO — are an unusual addition to the standard engagement toolkit, and the kind of detail that either works or feels performative depending on how genuinely they function.

The Singapore Airlines Foundation, established in 2024 with a S$30 million endowment, extends the development mandate beyond the workforce. Flagship programmes provide financial assistance, mentorship and industry exposure for students, with a specific focus on aviation pathways for youths who would not otherwise access them.

The Cabin Crew Flying Internship Programme with ITE Colleges, launched in 2025, follows the same logic: building the pipeline early, at the institutional level, rather than waiting for talent to arrive fully formed.

The cumulative picture is of an organisation that treats learning infrastructure as seriously as route infrastructure. The LIFE 2025 attendance figure is perhaps the clearest single indicator of how far that culture has actually taken hold.

TEMASEK HOLDINGS

CASE STUDY

Temasek Holdings:
WHEN TWO NEURODIVERSE HIRES CHANGE THE MEANING OF INCLUSION

Two hires in a procurement team might seem like a minor footnote in the story of a global investment firm. At Temasek Holdings, they represent something more deliberate: a commitment to inclusion that goes beyond gender ratios and nationality statistics into genuinely uncharted territory for most organisations.

With staff spanning 32 nationalities and a near-equal gender split of 53% male and 47% female, Temasek's workforce diversity is already notable. But it is the quieter details — the neurodiverse hires, the small-group mentorship sessions, the Temasek Women's Network — that reveal an organisation building inclusion into its operating model rather than its communications calendar.

Employee wellbeing follows the same logic. Flexible and hybrid work arrangements, generous parental leave, and the Temasek Heartbeat survey — which gives staff a continuous platform for feedback and policy co-creation — reflect a belief that sustainable performance depends on people who feel heard and supported. Programmes like Make-A-Difference (MAD) and Because You Matter extend this further, encouraging employees to take ownership not only of their own development, but of broader social and environmental initiatives.

That outward orientation is where Temasek's approach becomes distinctive at scale. The CEO Challenge tasks employees with developing practical sustainability solutions. The Breakthrough Energy Fellows programme connects staff with climate innovators working on green hydrogen and recycled battery materials. Flagship events like Ecosperity Week convene regional stakeholders around climate, ecosystems, and social inequality.

The result is a model where human sustainability and business resilience are treated as the same thing — and where the distance between a procurement hire and a regional climate strategy turns out to be shorter than it looks.

CASE STUDY

Grab:
5,000 AI APPLICATIONS BUILT BY EMPLOYEES IN TWO MONTHS

In 2024, Grab ran a Generative AI Sprint across all functions. Over two months, employees built nearly 5,000 AI applications — not as a hackathon showcase, but as a structured, company-wide effort to build genuine digital fluency. For a technology platform operating across Southeast Asia, the number is less surprising than the method: this was not an initiative for the engineering team. It was for everyone.

The governance side received equal attention. Before launching any AI-enabled feature, Grab runs structured risk assessments guided by explicit ethics principles centred on fairness, human-centricity, privacy and social benefit. In a regional market where AI regulation is still developing and public trust is fragile, building the accountability framework in parallel with the capability is a deliberate choice — and a relatively rare one.

The same logic of broad-based empowerment runs through the rest of the people strategy. Grab Grow, launched in 2024, creates an internal talent marketplace where employees can explore roles, mentorships and learning opportunities across the organisation, addressing the retention problem that most fast-growing tech companies eventually hit, where internal mobility loses out to external hiring.

The workforce numbers give context: over 11,000 full-time employees across 54 nationalities, 44 percent women, 37 percent of leadership roles held by women, and a 78 percent employee engagement score that outperforms industry benchmarks. Zero work-related fatalities in 2024.

The AI impact extends to partners. The AI Merchant Assistant helps food business owners like Yani Sardini — a Jakarta-based home cook — expand menus and improve packaging. It is a small story, but it grounds the platform's regional mission in something concrete and human.

5,000 applications in two months. The Sprint is the number that earns the rest of the story its credibility.

CASE STUDY

PSA:

WHEN 95 PERCENT OF 58,000 EMPLOYEES ACTUALLY FILL IN THE ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

Most employee engagement surveys struggle to break 60 percent participation. PSA's Global Employee Opinion Poll recorded 95 percent across a workforce of 58,000 people spanning 45 countries. That number is either a remarkable indicator of genuine organisational trust — or a question worth asking about how the survey is administered. Either way, it is the kind of data point that stops you mid-paragraph.

The learning numbers are similarly hard to dismiss. **In 2024, PSA employees averaged 34 training hours each — more than double the company's own target.** PSA University covers leadership, sustainability, data and technology, with AI learning programmes added in 2024 to build digital capability across the workforce. Global talent programmes — STRIDE, PHD and GMAP — provide international exposure and accelerated development for high-potential staff, while the Talent Tech 4.0 platform gives individuals access to personalised learning, mentorship and project opportunities aligned to their own career goals.

Underpinning all of this is the FISH philosophy — a workplace culture framework that encourages employees to choose a positive attitude, support colleagues and find purpose in their work. Across 183 locations and 73 terminals handling over 100 million TEUs annually, a shared cultural language is not a soft benefit. It is an operational necessity.

The safety record in 2024 included two contractor fatalities at overseas sites — disclosed directly, alongside the immediate response measures and the company's ongoing commitment to zero significant incidents. The transparency matters as much as the target.

Community investment included scholarships for students from lower-income families in Singapore, health programmes for seniors, and employee-led volunteering across healthcare, education and disaster relief initiatives in Asia, Europe and the Americas.

TIME named PSA one of the World's Best Companies in 2024. The 95 percent survey participation rate suggests the workforce may agree.

CASE STUDY

Wilmar:
WHERE A SUGAR DIPLOMA AND WOMEN'S WORKING GROUPS ARE PART OF THE SAME STRATEGY

At Wilmar International, a sugar technology diploma programme in Saudi Arabia and Women's Working Groups on Indonesian plantations might seem like unrelated initiatives. They are not. Both reflect the same underlying logic: that **in a company operating across 37 countries with over 100,000 employees, workforce development only works if it is built around the specific realities of each location.**

The Saudi Arabia programme — run through Durrah — gives employees hands-on technical qualifications in sugar technology. The Frontline Leadership Programme at Wilmar Sugar Australia does something similar at a different level of the organisation. Neither is a generic training module pushed down from headquarters.

The Women's Working Groups are equally specific. Operating across plantations in Indonesia, Malaysia, Ghana and Nigeria, they focus on reproductive health, education and gender-based violence prevention — topics that most corporate responsibility frameworks mention in passing, if at all. The fact that these groups exist at plantation level, where labour conditions are hardest to monitor and easiest to ignore, is the detail that matters.

The broader numbers give context. In Queensland alone, Wilmar converts over five million tonnes of sugarcane bagasse into renewable electricity annually — enough to power more than 52,000 households. Ethanol production through Shree Renuka Sugars and Wilmar Sugar Australia cuts CO_2 emissions by over 70 percent compared to fossil fuels. In 2024, community investment included building schools, crèches and infrastructure in remote rural areas, alongside smallholder programmes in Malaysia, Indonesia and Africa that provides farmers with training, resources and access to certification.

What holds these efforts together is not a sustainability framework or a set of KPIs. It is a recognition that a company embedded in agricultural supply chains across four continents has no credible separation between its business performance and the conditions of the communities it operates in.

comfortdelgro

CASE STUDY

ComfortDelGro:

THE ONLY SOUTHEAST ASIAN TRANSPORT COMPANY TIME THINKS IS TRULY SUSTAINABLE

In 2024, TIME magazine named ComfortDelGro the only Southeast Asian transport firm on its World's Most Sustainable Companies list. It is the kind of external validation that is difficult to engineer — and it raises an obvious question: what is actually different about how this company operates?

Part of the answer is in the safety data. **In 2024, ComfortDelGro reduced its Lost Time Injury Rate by 38 percent — a significant shift for a company operating 54,000 vehicles across 13 countries.** The improvement came through ISO-aligned standards, targeted workshops, safety committees and a systematic culture of incident-sharing across regions. For a transport operator, where physical risk is an everyday reality, this is not a peripheral metric.

The fleet transition tells a similar story of deliberate, measurable progress. By 2024, 60 percent of ComfortDelGro's owned vehicles ran on cleaner energy, backed by concrete capital commitments — including a S$100 million green loan with DBS to purchase 135 electric buses for UK operations. The target is a fully clean energy fleet by 2050.

Community investment in 2024 included S$1.1 million in cash donations, over S$100,000 in kind, and 20,000 volunteer hours — with notable attention to First Nations suppliers in Australia, where local procurement is increasingly a measure of genuine community commitment rather than compliance.

Employee development runs on a similar logic: professional growth, trade union collaboration and workplace safety treated as interdependent rather than separate agendas.

The TIME recognition, alongside appearances on the FT Asia-Pacific Climate Leaders list and the Dow Jones Best-in-Class Indices, suggests that this combination of operational discipline and community investment is being read — correctly — as substance rather than positioning.

CASE STUDY

Sembcorp:
WHEN A SOLAR SUBSIDIARY BECOMES A NATIONAL SKILLS HUB

In 2024, Sembcorp Solar Singapore became the first SkillsFuture Queen Bee for Singapore's Energy and Power sector — meaning the company is now formally responsible for driving solar expertise not just internally, but across an entire industry. It is an unusual role for a corporate subsidiary, and it says something about how seriously Sembcorp takes workforce development as a strategic function rather than an HR obligation.

The internal numbers support this. **In 2024, employees averaged 24 learning hours each — 60 percent of which focused specifically on sustainability skills.** Of 623 employees and partners who completed formal upgrade programmes, many did so through the Sembcorp Academy, a fully digital and blended learning platform offering everything from bite-sized modules to structured leadership development. The Group Leadership Programme, Upskill and Upgrade initiatives collectively address technical, leadership and sustainability competencies across the organisation.

This investment in people extends beyond the workforce. In 2024, Sembcorp contributed S$3.4 million to community initiatives globally, deploying 514 kilowatt-peak of renewable energy capacity across more than 70 facilities — including Assisi Hospice and Boys' Town in Singapore — generating 390,000 kilowatt-hours of clean energy and avoiding approximately 286,000 kilograms of CO_2 emissions.

The report also does not avoid difficult ground. Three contractor fatalities occurred at sites in India and Oman in 2024. Sembcorp responded with immediate stop-work orders, independent safety reviews, and a broader transformation programme. Lost time injury rates remained stable at 0.5 per million man-hours, but the inclusion of this data — rather than its omission — reflects a commitment to transparency that strengthens rather than undermines the company's credibility.

Taken together, Sembcorp's approach treats workforce capability, community access and operational safety as parts of the same system — one where the energy transition only works if the people driving it are equipped, supported and protected.

SHENGSIONG ... all for you!

CASE STUDY

Sheng Siong:
THE FOUNDERS WHO PERSONALLY FUND THEIR EMPLOYEES' CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

Since 2013, Sheng Siong's founders have been personally funding annual education grants for the children of lower-salaried employees. Not through a corporate foundation, not as a tax-efficient CSR programme — personally. In a retail sector not known for exceptional workforce investment, this detail sets the tone for everything else the company does.

The broader workforce numbers are equally striking. Today, 86.4 percent of Sheng Siong employees are covered by collective bargaining agreements — an unusually high figure for a retail operator. The company was also an early adopter of Singapore's Retail Progressive Wage Model, proactively raising base salaries and building structured career pathways for lower-wage workers before it became standard practice. The results: a Progressive Wage Mark, a Plaque of Commendation at the NTUC May Day Awards, and a SkillsFuture Employer Award Gold.

Training is structured but accessible. Through partnerships with the Singapore Institute of Retail Studies, NTUC LearningHub and the Institute of Technical Education, employees develop skills in food safety, cybersecurity, sustainability and leadership — accessible via the Staff Training Central mobile platform, which matters in a workforce spread across 27 outlets.

Wellbeing support is similarly practical. Daily nutritious meals, medical reimbursements, grocery vouchers during difficult periods, flexible work arrangements for parents, and weekly fitness sessions across outlets. In 2024, over 1,500 employees participated in health education sessions run in partnership with the Health Promotion Board.

On the operational side, AI-powered smart scales have improved pricing accuracy, and a demand forecasting system developed with AI Singapore is targeting inventory management and productivity — technology deployed in service of the workforce rather than as a replacement for it.

In 2024, The Straits Times named Sheng Siong one of Singapore's Best Employers. Given the founders' education grants, the collective bargaining coverage and the progressive wage commitment, it is a recognition that appears to have been earned from the ground up.

Enterprise Singapore

CASE STUDY

EnterpriseSG:
FIVE-YEAR CAREER PLANS, VERTICAL FARMING, AND ZERO INJURIES — BY DESIGN

EnterpriseSG asks its employees to map out five-year career plans. Not as a performance management exercise, but as part of a programme — Design-Your-Career — that gives staff genuine ownership over their development trajectory, including access to learning resources and cross-functional workshops. In a public agency context, this level of individual career architecture is unusual.

The 2024 Work@OC initiative took a different angle: Singapore-based employees were given the opportunity to gain overseas experience, building global perspective into roles that might otherwise remain entirely domestic. Meanwhile, over 500 colleagues completed a Fundamentals of Sustainability Programme — not as a compliance requirement, but as preparation for supporting enterprise transformation across the organisations EnterpriseSG serves.

Innovation is treated with similar intentionality. The annual Innofest event gives teams a platform to present operational improvements — ranging from a unified company engagement dashboard to cross-divisional process enhancements. The EnterpriseSG Appreciates Teams! Award recognises projects that demonstrate both impact and collaboration, making internal innovation visible rather than invisible.

Wellbeing programmes reflect the same specificity. Alongside standard health screenings and stress management sessions, employees have access to massages by visually impaired practitioners and interest groups spanning Traditional Chinese Medicine, coffee appreciation and vertical farming. These are not afterthoughts — they sit alongside Fitness First access and a structured wellness committee as part of a deliberate effort to make the workplace genuinely varied.

The safety record in 2024: zero high-consequence work-related injuries, zero complaints concerning breaches of customer privacy. In an organisation handling sensitive enterprise data and operating under public scrutiny, these are not minor footnotes.

sentosa™

CASE STUDY

Sentosa:
SINGAPORE'S FIRST ACCESSIBLE BEACH TRACK — BUILT ON 450 SQUARE METRES OF SAND

Development Corporation opened Singapore's first accessible beach track. Spanning over 450 square metres, the pathway allows wheelchair users and families with strollers to reach the shoreline — a space that had previously been physically inaccessible to them. Complimentary beach wheelchairs extend the experience further. For a leisure destination that markets itself as an island for everyone, this is the kind of infrastructure investment that either validates or exposes that claim.

The Beach Safety Ambassador programme, launched in the same period, operates on a similar principle: trained ambassadors work alongside professional lifeguards to engage visitors directly, identify risks early and prevent incidents before they escalate. In FY2024/2025, workplace injuries fell from 29 to 21 cases, and man-days lost dropped from 340 to 82 — a significant improvement for an organisation managing complex outdoor operations across beaches, nature trails and public facilities.

Guest safety follows the same logic of early intervention over reactive management. In FY2024/2025, 219 guest incidents were recorded, most minor or linked to pre-existing conditions. Heat management measures — water coolers, shaded areas along beaches — sit alongside clearly displayed safety guidelines across nature trails and digital platforms. Full regulatory compliance was maintained throughout the year.

Internally, psychological safety receives explicit attention. Employees have access to wellness resources, peer support and regular manager check-ins — creating, in SDC's framing, an environment where staff feel comfortable speaking up. Whether that culture exists in practice is harder to measure than the beach track, but the intent is at least operationally expressed.

Learning and development rounds out the picture: 29.5 average training hours per employee in areas including data analytics, AI, sustainability and guest experience. The CEO Sustainability Challenge and the 1 STEP initiative with NTUC LearningHub add structured pathways to the informal learning culture.

The accessible beach track is the detail that anchors everything else. Inclusion, at Sentosa, has a physical address.

Industry Commentaries

émer

CÉLINE VENTALON

Founder,
Émer

At Émer, human sustainability begins with a simple but often overlooked belief: People are not resources to be managed, but the reason organisations exist in the first place.

For the company's founder, Céline Ventalon, it is about having the courage to design systems that care for people over the long term, not just driving performance today, but protecting dignity, wellbeing and opportunity for the future.

Working in menstrual health has made this philosophy tangible. The category is still shaped by stigma and silence, rarely discussed openly in business settings. Yet it is precisely here, Emer believes, that human sustainability takes root. If girls cannot attend school comfortably, or women cannot work confidently during their periods, equity is compromised. And without equity, sustainability cannot truly exist.

This lens shapes how Émer approaches its work. Wellness is not treated as an add-on or employee benefit, but as a principle embedded into product design, operations and policy decisions. The goal is to create solutions that allow people to show up fully, not despite their biology or circumstances, but with them acknowledged and supported.

Balancing purpose with commercial realities remains one of the organisation's most consistent challenges. The tension is often framed as profit versus impact, but the founder views it differently. In her experience, it is less a lack of data and more a question of courage, the willingness to prioritise long-term relevance over short-term gains.

That mindset has required deliberate trade-offs: Pricing reusable products fairly in markets unfamiliar with paying for sustainability, investing in body-safe and environmentally responsible materials, and partnering with NGOs and community groups instead of scaling quickly at any cost. Growth may be slower, but it is grounded in integrity, something customers increasingly recognise and trust.

Communication and storytelling play a central role in this journey. Rather than using urgency or guilt, Émer focuses on invitation and openness, transforming conversations around menstruation from shame into confidence. Stories are designed to connect, helping stakeholders see themselves reflected in the brand's mission. Trust, Émer notes, is built not through perfection, but through presence, honesty and care.

One initiative that stands out is a series of menstrual health workshops launched in Vietnamese schools. What began as product demonstrations soon became safe spaces for dialogue, with girls asking questions they had never felt comfortable voicing, and parents engaging in conversations long considered taboo. For Émer, these quiet moments of understanding were a reminder that impact is not always loud or immediate; sometimes it is found in small shifts in confidence that ripple outward over time.

Looking ahead, Émer believes purpose-driven organisations will help define the next era of business. As expectations rise, especially among younger generations, customers are seeking more than products, they are looking for alignment, belonging and authenticity. Companies that embed purpose into everyday decisions, from hiring to supply chains, will be the ones that endure.

For Émer, the ambition goes beyond selling menstrual care. It is about reshaping how menstrual health is seen, spoken about and experienced, and demonstrating that sustainable businesses are ultimately those that make life better for the people they serve.

DR. CLĀRA LY-LE

Managing Director,
EloQ Communications

Artificial intelligence has made communication more efficient in concrete ways. Teams can analyse large volumes of online conversations in real time, detect sentiment shifts, and identify emerging risks before they escalate. Drafts, localised variations and testing that once required days can now be completed in minutes.

But acceleration cuts both ways. When organisations can publish faster, they can also make mistakes faster. A misjudgement in tone or an overlooked inaccuracy can escalate quickly. Audiences are also increasingly sensitive to messages that feel generic or over-polished — a signal of automation that weakens rather than builds trust.

EloQ's view is direct: AI is an amplifier. Organisations with strong strategy and clear values can use it to become more responsive and evidence based. Those without a solid foundation risk becoming more efficient at producing noise. The real advantage lies in knowing when to rely on technology and when to slow down.

EloQ's starting point on social and ethical issues is straightforward: organisations should speak when they can contribute constructively, not because the moment demands a response. A position only carries weight when it reflects genuine values and consistent behaviour. Without that alignment, public statements erode the credibility they are meant to build.

Internally, this means giving employees clear visibility into how principles guide everyday decisions — particularly on issues such as diversity, sustainability and responsible use of technology. In uncertain periods, that clarity strengthens cohesion more than any campaign would.

Externally, the calculus is more contextual. In markets such as Vietnam, younger employees and consumers are increasingly values-driven and read brand behaviour closely. The social environment is also sensitive and, at times, polarised. A carefully chosen stance can strengthen relationships; an impulsive one creates division that is difficult to undo.

On DEI specifically, EloQ's view is that the language itself has become a liability in some contexts — attracting scepticism rather than confidence. The credible alternative is not to communicate less, but to communicate only when there is substance to share. Honest reporting on both progress and gaps builds more trust than polished declarations. For organisations operating across multiple cultures, this also requires genuine local sensitivity: messages that resonate in one market can feel tone-deaf in another.

Inclusion, handled this way, becomes part of organisational integrity rather than a communications exercise.

For EloQ, the most telling indicator of commitment to human sustainability is not internal policy but client practice. The agency sets clear ethical standards with clients to avoid tactics that could mislead or harm communities. In an industry where the brief often determines the boundaries, that is a meaningful line to draw.

Internally, the same principle applies. Open conversations about workload and stress are encouraged — not as a wellness programme, but as a basic operating standard. Clear and empathetic communication reduces anxiety, sets realistic expectations and helps prevent burnout, with direct consequences for retention, morale and performance.

Externally, audiences increasingly judge organisations not by what they say about themselves but by whether their behaviour reflects genuine care for people and communities. The organisations that build durable trust are those where communication reflects reality rather than running ahead of it.

Credibility, in EloQ's view, is earned through consistency and care — not volume.

FARRELL TAN
Founding Partner,
Orchan Consulting Asia

When the message was technically correct, but the tone felt off

AI has improved speed and efficiency in measurable ways — sentiment tracking, real-time monitoring, faster drafting across multiple markets. For organisations operating regionally, it creates useful baseline consistency.

But Orchan's experience has also exposed the limits of automation directly. There have been cases where content appeared logical and well-structured but failed to resonate once released. The message was technically correct; the tone was wrong. Late-stage intervention was required to repair the gap. In markets such as Malaysia, that gap can be significant. Tone, context and relationships strongly influence how messages are interpreted — and these subtleties are difficult to code into an algorithm. A message that works in one environment can feel inappropriate or detached in another.

For Orchan, AI is a support tool, not a decision-maker. It scales operations and surfaces insights, but accountability remains human. The critical skill is knowing where automation should stop. Teams lose trust not because of what leadership says publicly, but because concerns go unaddressed internally

Orchan draws a sharp distinction between internal and external communication on social and ethical issues — and the starting point is internal.

Avoiding difficult conversations rarely preserves harmony. It produces uncertainty and disengagement. The firm's observation is direct: teams lose trust not because of what leadership says publicly, but because important concerns go unaddressed within the organisation. Clear internal positions on inclusion, fairness and workplace wellbeing create alignment and psychological safety. Employees need to understand what the organisation stands for before any external messaging carries weight.

Externally, the calculus is different. Silence is not always neutral — regulatory requirements, investor expectations and global reporting frameworks increasingly demand transparency. But speaking without operational backing undermines credibility faster than staying quiet. In many Asian markets, the gap between words and behaviour is noticed quickly.

Orchan's advice to clients is therefore sequential: before deciding whether to take a stand, evaluate whether your structures, policies and behaviours genuinely support that stance. When alignment exists, communication reinforces trust. When it does not, visibility magnifies the gap.

On DEI specifically, the regional dimension adds complexity. In Southeast Asia — and particularly Malaysia — diversity is not an abstract framework. It is a lived reality shaped by history, culture and community ties. Communication that ignores this context feels artificial. Global standards provide direction, but local grounding provides credibility. Measurable outcomes that employees and communities can recognise in their own experience are what distinguish genuine commitment from symbolic gesture.

Every brief starts with one question: Does this contribute positively to people in the long term?

Orchan's approach to human sustainability is framed in practical rather than idealistic terms — and it starts before any strategy is developed. Every brief begins with a single question: does this contribute positively to people in the long term? If the answer is no, the impact will be limited regardless of how polished the execution.

Experience has reinforced why this matters. Well-crafted campaigns can underperform when they ignore audience fatigue or anxiety. The problem is rarely the message itself — it is the mismatch between tone, timing and lived reality. In a region that has experienced overlapping economic and social pressures, audiences are acutely sensitive to communication that feels disconnected from their circumstances.

Internally, Orchan has focused on changes that directly affect daily working life: flexible arrangements that genuinely support families, mental health days that require no justification, and anonymous pulse checks that feed directly into policy adjustments. Not every measure worked perfectly at first — some required refinement after implementation. The organisation treats this as part of the process, prioritising listening and iteration over defending initial decisions.

Externally, Orchan has quietly supported non-profit and education organisations during periods of crisis — floods, community tension — often on a pro bono basis, focused on helping affected communities access reliable information. The firm deliberately avoids placing itself at the centre of these efforts. In these situations, trust is built through action rather than visibility.

CRAIG BADINGS

Partner,
SenateSHJ

According to SenateSHJ's Future of Reputation 2030 report, AI functions as both sentinel and saboteur in corporate communication — and often simultaneously.

On the sentinel side, AI improves the ability to scan environments, analyse stakeholder behaviour and detect emerging risks earlier. Predictive analytics and scenario planning free up specialist time for higher-value advisory work. In volatile markets and fast-moving news cycles, these capabilities are genuinely transformative.

On the saboteur side, the same tools that accelerate insight also amplify risk. Errors, hallucinations and insufficient oversight can damage credibility instantly. If human judgement is replaced by automated processes, communication risks appearing inauthentic or misaligned. Trust, in this environment, is not assumed — it must be demonstrated consistently through behaviour.

The implication is practical: organisations need to invest in culture, capability and governance alongside AI adoption. Ethical guardrails and oversight structures are not optional additions. They are what determine whether AI strengthens reputation or undermines it.

Silence on DEI is no longer neutral — but speaking without operational alignment creates its own risks. Public stances have become tests of governance, culture and transparency, and the bar for credibility has risen significantly. High-level declarations are no longer sufficient. Stakeholders expect measurable outcomes and clear evidence that policies and behaviours reflect stated values.

The challenge has intensified as DEI intersects with political polarisation and technological considerations such as algorithmic bias. This demands careful framing, deep listening and genuine alignment with organisational principles — not reactive messaging. Internal and external audiences expect coherence between what is said and what is practised, whether through equitable policies, transparent reporting or inclusive workplace culture.

The broader principle at SenateSHJ extends beyond DEI. Communication itself can advance or undermine wellbeing and inclusion. Internally, clarity and care influence engagement, performance and retention. Externally, the way an organisation communicates signals whether it sees employees and communities as human beings rather than resources.

In an environment complicated by misinformation, polarisation and AI, communication needs to function as a stabilising force. Principled positions, when genuinely aligned with behaviour and culture, build trust even when stakeholder perspectives differ. The measure of effective communication is not reach or volume — it is whether it creates conditions under which people can actually thrive.

Human sustainability has moved into governance and investor territory. Stakeholders increasingly evaluate culture, leadership and organisational behaviour alongside financial performance — which means communication that demonstrates genuine attention to wellbeing, inclusion and development is no longer a soft add-on. It signals whether leaders understand the deeper drivers of long-term value.

For SenateSHJ, this reframes what communication is for. It is not an output — a press release, a campaign, a set of talking points. It is a system that shapes organisational performance, embeds ethical conduct and strengthens learning and transparency. Credibility begins internally, with leadership behaviour and consistent alignment between values and practice. External communication reflects what already exists rather than constructing an image of it.

The implication is direct: communication that prioritises people and accountability build trust and reputation resilience. Communication that does not will be read — correctly — as performance.

KELVIN KOH

Managing Director,
Truescope

The shift Truescope has observed among its clients is not just about speed — it is about how AI has changed the nature of communication work itself. Teams that once relied on costly research projects or manual monitoring to understand public sentiment can now surface actionable insights within minutes.

The more significant change is behavioural. Clients have moved from using the platform reactively — checking coverage after the fact — to embedding it into daily workflows for strategy development, campaign planning, narrative stress testing and real-time messaging adjustments. Decisions are increasingly based on observed trends rather than assumptions. Budgets previously dedicated to research are being redirected to execution.

The platform has become, in Koh's framing, an integral day-to-day companion — used not just to check news in the morning but throughout the day to align teams and refine strategies.

AI has raised the standard of what communicators can achieve. The value, however, still depends on the judgement applied to what the data actually means.

Truescope's position on public stances starts with listening rather than speaking. Societal and ethical issues are complex and emotionally charged, and organisations consistently underestimate how their actions and messaging will be interpreted. Ongoing monitoring and analysis of public reactions is what Truescope calls developing a communication sixth sense — an awareness of what is acceptable and what could provoke a response that the organisation is not prepared to manage.

Where a stance is taken, it must be actionable and consistent with behaviour. In some cases, the sixth sense points toward silence as the wiser choice.

Internally, this same principle of transparency shapes how Truescope handles two specific pressure points. Operations teams frequently work long hours, particularly during crises and early morning delivery periods. Acknowledging this directly — and communicating the support structures in place, including automation to reduce routine workload — validates contribution and builds inclusion more effectively than formal programmes.

The second pressure point is AI. When automation was introduced into workflows, Truescope communicated clearly and early about what AI would and would not replace. That transparency reduced anxiety and created the conditions for employees and clients to experiment with new tools confidently. The message was straightforward: AI exists to elevate expertise, not replace it.

Transforming an operations department into an AI-first team — for the people, not the efficiency metrics. Truescope's most telling internal decision was not the AI tools it adopted, but why it transformed a traditional operations department into an AI-first team. The goal was not primarily efficiency. It was to develop skills, foster pride in mastering modern tools and prepare staff for evolving demands.

That distinction matters. Long-term wellbeing, growth and capability development are treated as equally important as operational performance — which means investment in training and leadership development is not a cost to be managed but a foundation to be built. When employees feel supported and equipped, communication quality improves and organisational resilience follows.

For Truescope, human sustainability is what allows both AI and human talent to perform at their best. The technology is only as effective as the people running it.

Genesis Partners
IT BEGINS WITH TALENT

CODY ROBERTS

Managing Partner & Founder,
Genesis Partners

At Genesis Partners, AI has found a role in organising data and streamlining administrative tasks, but recruitment processes and job offer remain people-led. Assessment, career conversations and hiring decisions are areas where the organisation believes human interaction is not optional.

The position is straightforward: technology should assist, not replace the judgement and engagement that candidates and employees expect in consequential moments.

Genesis Partners takes an explicit position on HR's role in social and ethical issues: provide frameworks and guidance, not formal stances. The belief is that organisations perform best when employees are trusted to navigate challenges and make informed choices — HR as enabler rather than arbiter.

On DEI, the approach follows the same logic. Genesis Partners is international with a mature, multicultural team, and formal DEI programmes have not been a priority — not because inclusion is unimportant, but because it is built into daily interactions and collaboration rather than managed as a separate initiative. In a team where diversity is simply the baseline, formalised programmes would add process without adding value.

Team building, offsite events, skills training — and the belief that simplicity works

Genesis Partners keeps its wellbeing and culture initiatives deliberately straightforward. Team building activities, offsite events and skills training have proven to be the most valued by employees — not because they are innovative, but because they work. They strengthen relationships, reinforce shared purpose and create space for continuous learning without requiring formal programme architecture.

The underlying HR philosophy is consistent: maximise performance by supporting sustainable career development rather than treating the two as separate agendas.

Encouraging habits that build learning, resilience and personal growth is, in Genesis Partners's experience, what drives loyalty and retention over time.

ROTHMAN & ROMAN

Thank you for reading our report!

We are eager to hear from you!
Please contact us to share partnership ideas, comments, questions or your greatest campaigns.

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