

# What's next?

## AI needs a human partner

*As AI transforms the workplace, organisations must ensure technology strengthens rather than replaces human relationships. Andy Lopata, an expert on professional relationships, explores why trust, connection and empathy will become even more valuable in the years ahead.*

For a while, the conversation around AI centred on the technology itself. Internal communicators wanted to understand the tools, while many worried about what AI might mean for their jobs.

That conversation is already changing, because we have realised that AI is here to stay. The real question is no longer whether organisations should embrace it, but how they do so without sacrificing the very thing that makes organisations successful – human relationships.

As we look towards 2030, the organisations that thrive won't be those with the most advanced AI. They'll be the ones that understand where technology adds value, and where only people can.

I trust AI every day. Like many people, I've found tools such as ChatGPT and Claude consistently produce useful outputs, and that reliability earns a degree of trust. But that's very different from the trust I place in another human being.

Trust between people is built through competence, yes, but also empathy, vulnerability and genuine care. AI doesn't know when someone is anxious about a merger, worried about job security or quietly struggling with change. It can't read body language, sense emotion or recognise what's left unsaid. Those are uniquely human capabilities, and they'll become more valuable, not less. Internal communicators have an important role to play in helping leaders recognise that distinction.

AI should absolutely remove administrative burden. Use it to draft communications, challenge assumptions, stress-test how messages might land with different audiences and speed up routine work.

Julie Holmes, an AI expert, recommends



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starting with the 20-60-20 ‘You-Do-You’ approach:

- The first 20 per cent is **you** setting strategy, providing context, picking the tool, crafting the prompt.
- Let AI **do** the 60 per cent drafting, analysis and heavy lifting.
- Then **you** spend the final 20 per cent reviewing, vetting and validating.

The danger comes if we use those efficiency gains simply to complete more tasks. Instead, we should reinvest that time in human interaction: have the conversation with the employee who's anxious about change; spend longer coaching a new manager; create more opportunities for mentoring and knowledge-sharing between colleagues. These are the moments where

trust is built, expertise is transferred and culture is strengthened.

This will become increasingly important as experienced employees retire. AI can capture processes, documents and information, but it cannot fully capture judgement, lived experience or the subtle insights people gain from years of solving problems together.

Organisations must continue creating spaces where expertise is shared through conversation, observation and mentoring – not simply uploaded into a knowledge base.

There's another risk we should be watching. As AI becomes increasingly capable of writing our emails, messages and even mentoring us, we risk outsourcing the small interactions that relationships are built upon.

AI is also remarkably agreeable. It rarely challenges us in the way trusted colleagues do. Yet the strongest workplace relationships aren't built on constant praise: they're built on honesty and respect.

That's why I believe the future isn't about AI or HI (human interaction). It's about AI supporting HI.

Used well, AI can even help us build stronger relationships. It can identify gaps in our professional networks, help us prepare for difficult conversations or suggest who we should involve in a project. But the conversation itself, the empathy, the trust and the connection still belong to us.

For internal communication leaders, the challenge over the next five years is simple. Whenever AI saves you time, ask one question: how will I reinvest that time in people?

Because in a world increasingly shaped by intelligent technology, our competitive advantage won't be artificial intelligence. It will be human intelligence, human relationships and, perhaps most importantly, our very human imperfections. **O**



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