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LEADERSHIP BRIEF

AI Essentials for Communicators in Healthcare and Life Sciences



AI is changing more than the tools employees use. It is beginning to change how work gets done, how decisions are made, what skills people need, and where the line sits between human expertise and technology.

For communication leaders in healthcare and life sciences, the implications are particularly significant. AI is entering organizations whose work can affect patient care, scientific progress, and health outcomes — and where trust, accuracy, privacy, quality, scientific integrity, and regulatory requirements matter enormously. The consequences of getting something wrong can extend well beyond the workplace.

At the same time, AI is changing the communication function itself: how content is created, how employee sentiment is understood, how communication can be personalized and delivered, and increasingly, how organizations and leaders may communicate through AI-enabled experiences.

That expands the mandate for communication leaders. Communicating *about* AI is only part of the job. The communication team also has an important role in turning uncertainty into clarity, trust, and action; supporting responsible adoption; navigating the human implications of AI-enabled work; and determining where human voice and judgment remain essential. Communication leaders also need to prepare *their own functions* for many of these same changes.

Here are seven priorities for communication leaders navigating AI now.

1

AI may be viewed as a technology initiative. Communications should be involved early.

The hardest parts of AI adoption often aren't technical.

Organizations are moving from experimentation toward repeatable workflows, agents, and systems. But operationalizing AI requires more than technology. It requires clear processes, good source data, governance, new capabilities, and significant upfront work. It also requires people to trust the technology, understand why and how to use it, and change established ways of working.

But by the time someone asks Communications to develop the rollout plan, many of the decisions that will shape employee understanding and adoption may have already been made.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Get upstream. Before deciding what needs to be communicated, ask what problem AI is solving, whose work will change, what people will need to do differently, what could get in the way, and how patients, providers, scientific work, or other critical outcomes could be affected.

2

When the answers keep changing, clarity becomes even more important.

Don't wait for certainty to create clarity.

AI capabilities are evolving quickly. So are organizational policies, governance, and expectations. New capabilities are raising questions that many organizations haven't answered before.

Employees don't need leaders to predict exactly where AI will take the organization. But they do need to understand what the organization is trying to accomplish, how AI is and isn't being used, what's expected of them, what guardrails apply, and where human accountability remains.

In healthcare and life sciences, questions about privacy, accuracy, appropriate use, and human oversight can carry particular weight because AI-enabled work may ultimately affect patients, providers, scientific work, or health outcomes.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Help leaders get comfortable saying what we know, what we don't know, what we're still learning, and how we're making decisions along the way. This is good counsel for almost any change, but it's especially important with AI, where uncertainty and evolution may be part of the organization's landscape for years.



3

Understanding the AI strategy doesn't guarantee adoption.

Awareness isn't adoption.



People don't become confident with AI because they've heard about its benefits or attended a training session. Confidence comes from experience: trying something relevant to their work, seeing what it does well, discovering where it falls short, and learning how to exercise their own judgment.

Small successful experiences can build competence. Competence can build confidence and trust. And that is much more likely to change behavior than another message telling employees to "embrace AI."

THE OPPORTUNITY

Think beyond the communication campaign. Partner with the teams responsible for adoption to create opportunities for employees across clinical, laboratory, manufacturing, field, and corporate roles to experience AI through relevant examples, safe experimentation, peer learning, and practical application. Listen continuously for concerns, barriers, and emerging opportunities.

4

As AI becomes more capable, human judgment becomes more valuable.

Knowing what AI can do isn't enough.

AI can produce work that looks polished and technically impressive while still missing context, nuance, or authenticity, or simply getting something wrong. As AI becomes more capable, the ability to recognize those shortcomings becomes increasingly important.

That makes judgment, curation, expertise, and accountability more valuable, not less.

The question isn't simply **"What can AI do?"** Organizations also need to ask:

What *should* AI do? Where do humans add distinctive value? And where must human judgment and accountability remain?

Those questions take on additional significance when the work can ultimately affect patients, providers, scientific work, or health outcomes.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Help shift the conversation from what AI can replace to how human and AI capabilities should work together — and where that combination can create better experiences and outcomes for employees and the people the organization serves.



5

AI can't become a shortcut around developing human capability.

People still need to learn how to do the harder work.



Much of the foundational work AI can now perform is also work through which people have traditionally learned their craft: drafting, researching, analyzing, synthesizing, and solving relatively straightforward problems before taking on more complex ones.

If AI increasingly does that work, organizations need to think intentionally about how early-career employees will develop the judgment, craft, and strategic thinking that will ultimately be expected of them.

As organizations define the respective roles of people and AI, the conversation needs a third question:

What should AI do?
What should humans do?
What must humans continue to learn how to do?

THE OPPORTUNITY

Bring capability development into the AI conversation. The communication team doesn't own the answer, but it can surface the question and partner with leaders, HR, and L&D to define what people across the future workforce need to know and be able to do.

6

Measure the value AI creates — not just the time it saves.

"Hours saved" is easy to measure. It isn't necessarily the value of AI.

If AI allows someone to complete a repetitive task in 20 minutes instead of two hours, the more interesting question is what happens to the other 100 minutes.

Does that person spend more time solving difficult problems? Listening to employees? Supporting patients or customers? Thinking strategically? Developing people? Advancing research? Improving quality?

Efficiency creates capacity. **What organizations do with that capacity determines its value.**

That distinction also matters to employees. A story about AI eliminating hours of work can sound very different from a story about AI creating more capacity for work people and organizations value.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Help redefine the AI success story from *technology used and time saved* to *better work and greater value created* — for employees, the organization, and the people it serves.



7

AI is changing Communications too.

Communication leaders need to prepare their own function for what AI changes.



Some questions are relatively immediate. Where can AI improve communication workflows? What should be automated? What still requires human judgment? What new skills do communicators need?

Others are only beginning to emerge.

What happens when an employee-facing AI agent speaks on behalf of the organization? Who determines how it sounds and behaves? How do you ensure it reflects organizational culture and values? When should employees know they're interacting with AI? How can they question or correct it? How do you protect a leader's authentic voice when AI can replicate it increasingly well?

These aren't simply technology or governance questions. **They're communication questions.**

THE OPPORTUNITY

Communication leaders can become stewards of human-AI communication, helping determine not only how the organization communicates *about* AI, but how AI communicates *for* the organization.

The role is getting bigger

None of this means communication leaders need to become technologists or AI experts.

But they do need to understand enough to ask better questions, recognize the human implications of technology decisions, and know when Communications needs a seat at the table.

That means moving upstream: shaping the narrative before there's something to announce; listening for concerns and opportunities; equipping leaders and managers; advocating for the human judgment and capabilities the organization will continue to need; and helping determine how AI itself should represent the organization.

For healthcare and life sciences communication leaders, there is an additional responsibility: helping organizations embrace the opportunities AI creates while maintaining trust and **protecting what cannot be compromised** — patient care, quality, scientific integrity, regulatory obligations, and the trust of the people they serve.

AI changes the work. Communication leaders can help make it work.

Put the thinking into practice

ROI helps healthcare and life sciences communication leaders turn complexity and change into clarity, trust, and action — so people can do their best work and stay connected to what matters most. Explore more perspectives and practical resources on our **healthcare and life sciences page**.

- **Assess your AI readiness.** Explore ROI's **AI readiness assessment** to identify strengths, gaps, and practical next steps.
- **Listen before you communicate.** Explore ROI's **employee listening resources** to uncover concerns, barriers, and opportunities early.



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