



## An unfiltered look at what's percolating now

Below are key themes that dominated corporate communications news in April 2025.

### LEADERSHIP IS BEING REDEFINED — BUT ITS MORAL FOUNDATION REMAINS THE SAME.

A plethora of coverage reflected a recalibration of what effective leadership looks like in today's hyper-politicized, AI-disrupted world. According to [Harvard Business Review](#), executive teams are losing stakeholders' confidence, prompting urgent calls for more transparency and cohesion. Meanwhile, [Chief Executive](#) warned that silence in the face of political pressure can erode trust — and urged leaders to anticipate and prepare for intensifying headwinds. In this landscape, empathy is not a soft skill but a strategic one. A separate [HBR](#) piece called it a non-negotiable trait, while [MIT Sloan Management Review](#) argued that courage — especially the willingness to speak up — is critical to building moral capital. Others are expanding the leadership toolbox: [Fast Company](#) introduced curation as a new leadership superpower, and [Forbes](#) championed bravery as “the new currency of change.”

As HAVAS Red's EVP Lesley Sillaman puts it, “We're seeing a shift from hierarchical influence to earned trust. Leaders can tap into this with authenticity, transparency and humanity, and wield them more intentionally, in new ways and at greater speed.”

Managing Partner of HAVAS Red Australia Myrna Van Pelt adds, “Leadership in a complex world isn't about having the loudest voice — it's about having the most grounded one. In a time defined by chaos and rapid-fire change, the most effective leaders anchor their decisions to core values and a clear sense of purpose. They also widen the aperture — embracing emotional intelligence and having the courage to lead with it.”

**Bottom line:** Now is the time to help executives expand their emotional range. Communicators need to equip them to respond with empathy, act with courage and show moral clarity — not just message discipline. In a climate where every word is scrutinized, silence may speak louder and human connection is more valuable than ever.

### HUMAN SKILLS ARE GETTING SIDELINED, PUTTING CULTURE AT RISK.

As businesses race to scale AI, many are neglecting the soft skills that sustain creativity, collaboration and connection. [Fortune](#) called out a growing imperative for leaders to champion uniquely human traits — such as critical thinking and compassion — to future-proof their teams. [Forbes](#) echoed this, urging leaders to choose humanity over convenience in the AI era. But it's not just a leadership challenge. [Inc.](#) warned of a workplace-wide “soft skills crisis,” noting that **(Cont.)**

**(Cont.)** these traits are becoming harder to find just as they're becoming more essential. That's especially true as more teams return to in-person work — and tensions rise in a polarized world. An additional [Fortune](#) article explored the rise of workplace incivility and [another](#) offered strategies for leaders to reset social norms and invest in healthier working relationships.

**Bottom line:** The success of AI — and hybrid work — depends both on on upskilling in tech and on reinforcing the human side of the equation. Communicators and business leaders need to focus on helping their teams re-center empathy, patience and purpose. Without them, innovation will stall, connection will fray and culture will suffer.

## DESPITE MORE TOOLS AND CHANNELS, EMPLOYEES ARE NOT HEARING WHAT THEY NEED.

Despite the explosion of platforms designed to educate, engage and align the workforce, a consistent gap persists between what leaders think they are communicating and what employees actually receive. [Axios HQ's 2025 State of Internal Communications Report](#) found that 69% of communicators believe their updates are effective, while only 44% of employees agree. The Global State of Internal Communication Report by [ContactMonkey](#) showed similar disconnects, especially around message clarity and channel fatigue. The impact is measurable: According to [Forbes](#), poor workforce engagement cost the global economy \$438 billion in 2024. [HR Dive](#) reported that inconsistent messaging across departments is a major driver of disengagement — especially in hybrid settings. To close the gap, another [Forbes](#) article urged C-suite leaders to build better feedback loops, empower middle managers and prioritize comms as a business-critical function.

**Bottom line:** Channel sprawl won't fix culture gaps. Communicators and leaders should focus instead on clarity, consistency, and credibility — especially through people managers, who remain the most trusted internal messengers. Better communication doesn't just inform. It drives performance.

## SEARCH IS BEING REWRITTEN BY AI — AND MARKETERS NEED TO CATCH UP.

The rollout of Google's AI Overviews and AI Mode is accelerating a shift from traditional search to AI-powered "answer engines" and it's already impacting how people find (and trust) brand content. [Search Engine Journal](#) explained how large language models are now interpreting content structure to generate direct responses, bypassing links altogether. [Financial Times](#) reported that publishers are alarmed by plummeting clickthrough rates and the opaque nature of AI-generated answers. Meanwhile, [NBC](#) highlighted how Perplexity AI's new smartphone integration is bringing "answer engines" directly into consumers' hands. [PRWeek](#) also explored how this shift could upend not only search and content, but advertising, as brands compete for visibility in AI-synthesized environments.

**Bottom line:** As AI reshapes how people search, brands must shift from traditional SEO to answer-first strategies. That means structuring content to be clear, credible, and easily surfaced by AI. Tracking AI visibility and adapting accordingly will be key to staying discoverable — and trusted — in a rapidly changing digital landscape.

## SIGNALS OF CHANGE IN DEI AND SUSTAINABILITY ARE RESHAPING HOW COMPANIES COMMUNICATE VALUES.

Last month brought a mix of reaffirmation and recalibration across DEI and sustainability. On the DEI front, [HR Grapevine](#) and [WWD](#) reported shareholders at Levi Strauss and Goldman Sachs voted down anti-DEI proposals, signaling continued support for inclusion despite ongoing scrutiny. [HR Dive](#) explored how uncertainty around DEI is now fueling concerns about pay equity and talent retention, while [Fortune](#) highlighted the early onset of the gender pay gap for Gen Z graduates entering the workforce. At the same time, [Fox News](#) and [ESG Dive](#) focused on how public backlash continues to influence headlines — from boycotts to lawsuits — raising the stakes for how companies articulate and act on their inclusion commitments.

In sustainability, [Harvard Business Review](#) argued that corporate sustainability is in crisis — not due to lack of commitment, but confusion over priorities and language. A shift from siloed ESG tactics to integrated business strategies is underway, as reported by [edie](#), which emphasized embedding sustainability at the core of business strategy. [Fast Company](#) highlighted that companies are continuing to tackle climate change despite shifting government policies. Meanwhile, [Ragan](#) explored how ESG storytelling — grounded in transparency and outcomes rather than labels — is emerging as the most powerful lever for rebuilding trust.

**Bottom line:** Whether navigating DEI debates or reframing sustainability, clarity and conviction matter. Words must reflect action — and resonate across stakeholder groups. Now is the time for communicators and business leaders to reinforce core values through consistent, credible messaging that transcends headlines and builds long-term trust.