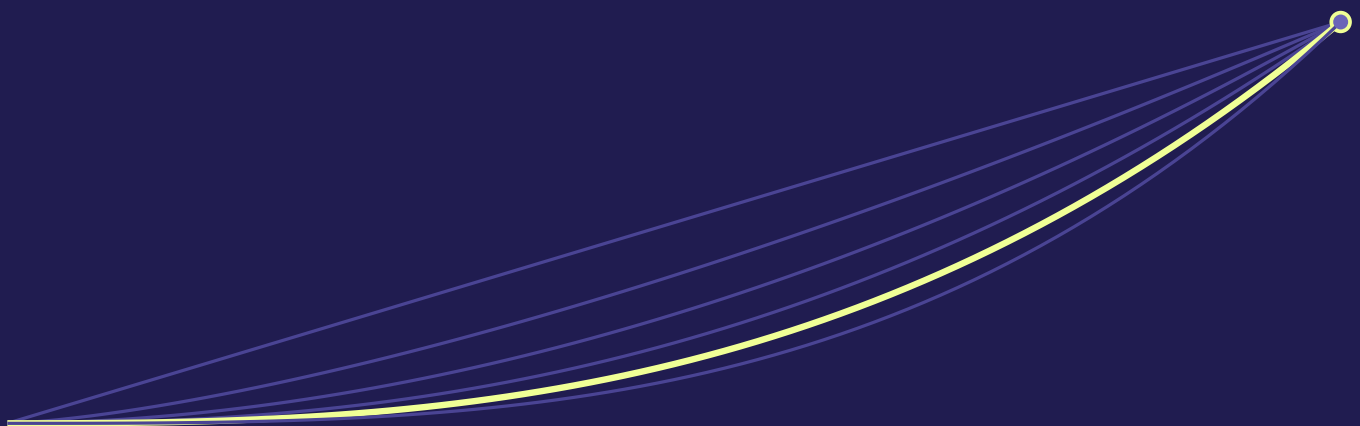


Institutional Communications Under Pressure

A field guide to decision intelligence, stakeholder complexity and communications in a fragmented information environment



ARTEFACT91

Campaign Intelligence + Strategic Communications

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ARTEFACT91 BRIEFING 05

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A field guide to decision intelligence, stakeholder complexity and communications in a fragmented information environment

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HOW TO READ IT

A briefing, not a report: the executive brief carries the argument, the numbered sections carry the evidence and the method, and every external figure is attributed to its source.

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Executive Brief

Institutional communications is being asked to do more in a harder environment. Leaders want communications teams to protect reputation, explain complex change, detect emerging risk, advise executives, support organizational strategy, respond to misinformation, understand stakeholders, use AI responsibly and prove impact.

At the same time, the information environment is fragmenting. Reuters Institute's 2026 Digital News Report finds that social media and video networks have, on average across surveyed markets, overtaken both television and owned news sites/apps as news sources. Trust in news has fallen to 37% globally in its survey, while concern about false or misleading information has risen. Edelman's 2026 research describes trust concentrating closer to home.

The old communications operating model—campaign calendar, media list, content pipeline, monthly report—is not sufficient for this environment. Institutions need communications systems capable of sensing change and informing decisions.

SECTION 01

From Communications Plan to Decision System

A conventional plan begins with objectives, audiences, messages, channels and tactics. Those remain useful, but they assume a relatively stable environment.

A decision system adds conditionality. If stakeholder resistance crosses a threshold, what changes? If a regulator enters the conversation, who is activated? If an executive statement is misinterpreted, what evidence determines whether to clarify or let the issue pass? If a campaign performs well on reach but poorly among a priority audience, do we optimize, pause or redesign?

Strategy becomes a set of choices linked to observable conditions—not simply a calendar of outputs.

SECTION 02

Stakeholders Are Networks, Not Lists

Institutions often create stakeholder maps containing government, media, employees, customers, partners, community and industry. The categories are too broad to guide action.

A useful map captures at least five dimensions: influence over the decision; exposure to the consequences; current posture; relationship strength; and capacity to mobilize others.

It should also capture relationships between stakeholders. A low-reach technical expert may matter because journalists rely on them. An employee group may matter because it can authenticate or contradict the institution's claims. A regulator may change the meaning of an issue simply by asking a question.

The unit of analysis is therefore not just the stakeholder. It is the network through which interpretation and action travel.

SECTION 03

Measurement Should Follow the Decision

Communications dashboards are frequently rich in outputs and poor in consequence: impressions, mentions, engagement, share of voice, clicks.

Those measures answer whether communication travelled. Leaders also need to know whether it changed anything relevant.

Artefact91 recommends a measurement chain:

OUTPUT — What did we produce?

REACH — Who encountered it?

RECEPTION — How was it understood?

RESPONSE — What did audiences do?

DECISION EFFECT — Did stakeholder behaviour alter the organization's choices, risk or strategic position?

ADAPTATION — What should change next?

Not every campaign can establish causality. The discipline is to make the limits explicit rather than converting correlation into proof.

SECTION 04

Build Scenarios into Campaign Design

Campaign plans often assume one future: launch, amplify, optimize, report. Scenario planning asks what else could plausibly happen.

For a consequential initiative, develop at least three conditions: expected trajectory, resistance trajectory and disruption trajectory. Define observable indicators for each. Pre-agree which tactics, messengers, resources and decisions change if those indicators appear.

This is especially valuable when the campaign intersects with regulation, labour, public controversy, institutional change or high-profile leadership.

The purpose is not to predict the future. It is to prevent surprise from becoming paralysis.

SECTION 05

The Communications Function as Intelligence

A mature communications team should return information to the institution, not merely distribute information from it.

That means synthesizing what stakeholders are asking, where narratives are shifting, which claims are gaining authority, what employees are hearing, what journalists are investigating, how AI systems are describing the organization and where public expectations conflict with operational reality.

This intelligence should enter leadership decisions in a concise form: signal, evidence, consequence, uncertainty, options and recommended next action.

Communications earns strategic influence when it improves the quality of decisions.

SECTION 06

A Practical Operating Rhythm

WEEKLY

review signals, emerging narratives, stakeholder movement and upcoming decision points.

MONTHLY

reassess issue priorities, audience assumptions and performance against behavioural or institutional outcomes.

QUARTERLY

run a scenario exercise, audit the answer environment, review executive exposure and test whether key public claims remain supported by evidence.

ANNUALLY

refresh the issue universe, crisis decision rights, stakeholder network, measurement framework and communications scenarios.

The operating rhythm should be lighter than the decisions it supports. Intelligence that arrives after the decision is reporting, not intelligence.

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Artefact91 Point of View

The next communications function is not a newsroom attached to an institution. It is a strategic sensing and decision capability with communications expertise at its core.

Artefact91's model—SIGNAL → INTERPRET → MODEL → DECIDE → ACT → MEASURE → ADAPT—treats communications as a continuous feedback system.

The practical question changes from “What should we publish?” to “What does the institution need to understand, decide and communicate now?”

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Sources & Research Base

[Reuters Institute — Digital News Report 2026](#)

[Edelman — 2026 Trust Barometer](#)

[World Economic Forum — Global Risks Report 2026](#)

RESEARCH NOTE

This briefing synthesizes current public research and Artefact91 analysis. External statistics are attributed to their source. Strategic frameworks and recommendations are Artefact91's analytical interpretation and should be adapted to the facts, jurisdiction and risk profile of each engagement.