

# PR2025

## **Trends, competences and solutions for the near future of PR/ Communications**

**Results of a Delphi method study**

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if you are interested in presentations, workshops, interviews, or further analyses of the insights enclosed in this report.

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# In a nutshell

# PR2025

## Trends, competences and solutions for the near future of PR/ Communications

### Total responses



### Respondents by company type



PR2025 (Adi, 2019). Comparison of qualitative and quantitative respondents demographics. Q17. Where do you work? and Q20. How would you describe yourself

### Respondents by gender

48.38% female



51.62% male

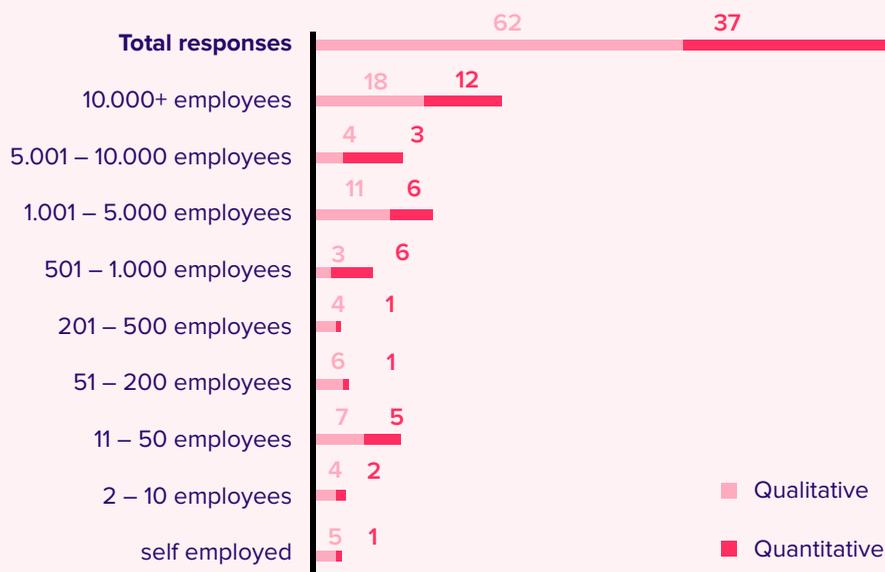
54.05% female



45.95% male

PR2025 (Adi, 2019). Comparison of qualitative and quantitative round respondents by gender. (Q20. How would you describe yourself?)

### From small to big: PR2025 respondents by company size



PR2025 participants by organization size (Adi, 2019). Q27: What describes best your organization's size?

# Top: Trends, competences and solutions

## Top Trends

Technology trends:

1. digitalization
2. artificial intelligence
3. social media

Business trends:

1. market fragmentation
2. sustainability
3. new patterns of consumption

Society:

1. decline in trust in traditional institutions
2. sustainability
3. demand for transparency

## Top Competences



Technology competence:  
**digital literacy**



Business/managerial competence:  
**strategy (development, implementation and evaluation)**



General competence:  
**understand business priorities**

## Desired Solutions



**More time and resources allocated by the organization**

# PR2025

## aspirational outlook in challenging context

The rapid change that the development of technologies is bringing about – from digitalization of processes to new business models and new ways of working – presents both an opportunity and a threat for communicators. With focus so strong into the far future or on creating standard frameworks to accommodate a still hierarchical development of the profession, communicators (whether practicing or teaching) are faced with a developmental gap when it comes to the near future exposing them to either repeat the same mistakes of the past or to go into the future unprepared. PR2025, a Delphi method study involving senior communicators, academics and experienced consultants, asked participants to consider the transition and mid-term period of PR/Comms and identify the competences needed to maintain confidence and relevance of the profession and its professionals.

PR/Comms will continue to build upon their hard-won battles continuing to move towards playing a central role to business and to become a trusted advisor. To get there, most PR2025 participants, believe PR/Comms should increasingly facilitate dialogue between organizations and their stakeholders.

Facilitating dialogue in a digital future of connected micro-publics that can be geographically disconnected and culturally and linguistically diverse is a big challenge. For starters, a greater emphasis on peer to peer communication and understanding of business and business models emerges. This makes trust an essential asset for communicators and transparency and relevant content as a way to achieve it. But this route hides several threats:

- mitigating opposing stakeholder demands and loyalties;
- balancing transparency and information access with information overload; and
- balancing business interests with societal impact.

For the way in which PR/Comms are carried out, the effects ushered in by technology, globalization (and through them fragmentation and segregation of communities, opinions, support) are equally telling and dramatic. In their relationship with the organizations supported, practitioners' understanding of how technology works will be important. However, it is the identification of the effects of technology on stakeholders and the organization that will be essential. In this sense, literacy and ethics (and digital ethics) are probably, more than anything, PR/Comms way into the role of trusted advisor, followed by an understanding of business. Considering that the role of facilitator is the one deemed desired for the profession

in the future, the ability of professionals to understand the ethical implications of the use and implementation of technology will come with the territory, no other current profession having currently the mandate to help understand and mitigate the multiplicity of stakeholder demands as PR/Comms do.

It is thus of no surprise that digital literacy (and ethics), and content production across a variety of platforms are at the top of the list of technical competences respondents suggest as essential in the mid-term. Mastering of strategy (from development to evaluation), on the other hand, leads the business/managerial competences list.

Indicating what the competences needed is one thing, but getting there looks like a long, winding road especially when considering the training currently offered. For instance, technology training has gained recognition to be necessary and thus respondents report that there are more development options within their organizations, with the preferred solutions involving a mixture of internal and external resources and solutions. This is however not the case for business/management training: on the contrary, practitioners are overwhelmingly left on their own both when it comes to identifying and pursuing training, organizations making available at best libraries of resources and materials. Looking to the future, three major solutions emerge: Looking to the future, three major solutions emerge:

- appropriate allocation of both time and money;
- collaboration (and support) of educational initiatives including research; and
- mix of internal and external training solutions driven by a collaborative assessment of personal and organizational development needs.

## The age of curiosity

**Speaking of their progression, the current hierarchical and incremental development frameworks will still apply but alternative routes will emerge, facilitated by the emergence of different business models and different ways of working (remote, agile). These include matrix-like development and progression routes, project related progressions and boundaries related progressions (changing offices/ countries within the same company, changing roles).**

It comes perhaps as no surprise, that when asked about the personal attributes practitioners should have to successfully navigate new contexts, that is it curiosity to experiment and learn, to test and try new things and understand different perspectives, that reigns supreme, followed flexibility and integrity.

# context



# Context

Public Relations/Communications is a practice constantly developing: whether incorporating lessons learned from the past, reflecting on its own practice, adapting to current demands, or pondering on its future. This is, at times, a self-absorbed exercise, concerned with increasing legitimacy and buy-in of the profession, while at other times is done in comparison with other connected fields (journalism, HR, politics, STEM).

Most recently, there are three major trends have been at the focus of most research and professional debates:

- operating in a VUCA world (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) on a background of increased public skepticism (this is linked also with two other mega-trends: globalization and individualization) (see IPSOS' what worries the world, the Edelman Trust Barometer, BRC's report on communicating in an age of uncertainty, The Global Communication Monitor series covering Europe, Asia-Pacific, Latin-America and North America)
- technological advances (from the now mainstream social media to big data, artificial intelligence and beyond on the one hand, and on other hand, to new ways working including remote and/or agile teams, new business models, and digitalization), (see [The Relevance Report](#) from USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations, the earlier 2013 ECOPSI study or Macnamara's 2018 article about competences and capabilities for public relations and series and more recently [Communicating AI: Building the Playbook 2019](#) released by the Center for Strategic Communication Excellence) and,
- the (continued) professionalization of PR more recently informed by the efforts and research of the Global Alliance and their proposed framework for PR capabilities (check out the [Global Body of Knowledge](#) from Global Alliance and the recently launched [Global Capability Framework for Public Relations and Communication Management](#) profession).

PR2025 complements and unifies these debates, identifying areas of immediate focus for communicators and a list of solutions with immediate implementation potential.

## Why PR2025 is timely: key pointers

- Discussions about the professionalization and excellence of public relations/communications have been vigorously renewed thanks to increase of skepticism and a general decreased in trust (see Edelman Trust Barometer, BledCom 2018);
- PR practitioners consistently report the need for more technical and managerial training, yet they continue to overwhelmingly be offered further communication training/development opportunities (Tench et al, 2013; Zerfass et al, 2018, Macnamara et al, 2017, 2016; Feldman, 2017; CSCE, 2019);
- Most of the current professional frameworks (see Global Alliance and UK Government Services) still consider career progression as incremental and hierarchical (this tends to work for medium to big organizations but not for consultancies and start-ups);
- Up to half of the jobs and occupations that exist today will not exist by 2025 (CBRE, 2015);
- But not PR/Comms (check out [Replaced by a Robot](#) and CIPR's [AI in PR: Humans still needed](#))
- Which is perhaps why most communicators are optimistic and perceive artificial intelligence and big data as opportunities to improve their work rather than threats.

# Research design



# Research design

In order to picture the future of public relations/communications, the competences required, and the solutions needed to accommodate them, PR2025 draws inspiration and addresses complementary questions currently addressed by existing research. In doing so, it focuses on four main thematic clusters: role of PR/Comms, trends, competences and solutions, each cluster having a series of questions (see research framework and questions).

The first two themes: roles and trends have benchmarking purposes as they help uncover and understand how practitioners perceive their role within their organizations and the future and what do they perceive to be the trends that will be most likely to influence the profession and its practice. This enables comparison with previous research both on role and perceptions of the profession (van Ruler, 2004; Adi, 2018; Adi and Stoeckle, 2018) as well as on trends (TrendOne, 2018; IPSOS, 2018).

The competences and solutions themes have predictive purposes and pragmatic applications. While current research focuses on harmonizing standards that would solidify the foundation of the profession and its progression (Global Alliance), this research invites participants to reflect on the professional development gaps within their own organizations, and readers of this report overall to consider the development and collaboration opportunities that would strengthen the profession.

<b>Roles of PR/Comms</b>	<b>Trends</b>	<b>Competences</b>	<b>Solutions</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Person</b>
Role of PR/comms in 2025 within own organization Q1	Main current trends Q5	General competences Q9, Q10, Q11	Current Q18, Q23	Type Q25	Gender Q28
Role of PR/comms in 2025 in society Q2	Main technology trends Q6	Personal qualities and attributes Q12, Q13	Recommended Q19, Q24	Industry sector Q26	Academic background Q29
Typology Van Ruler, 2004 – Q3	Main business trends Q7	Technical Q15, Q16, Q17	Owners Q11, Q17, Q22	Size Q27	
General perception Q4	Main social trends Q8	Business/Manageria Q20, Q21, Q22			
				Country Q30	
Career progression Q14				Region Q31	

## Methodology

As PR2025 sought answers and solutions to future problems, some probably inexistent, a Delphi study method identifying whether panels of experts can reach consensus over the matters discussed was most appropriate.

Described as a method that “provides an opportunity for experts (panelists) to communicate their opinions and knowledge anonymously about a complex problem, to see how their evaluation of the issue aligns with others, and to change their opinions, if desired, after reconsideration of the findings of the group’s work” (Kennedy cited in Wakefield & Watson, 2014) the Delphi study method enabled the exploration and identification of ideas that are not widely recognized.

PR2025 ran in two rounds: one qualitative, featuring open-ended questions and one quantitative, asking participants to rank and scale from a list of choices developed based on their answers in the first round (the research framework reflects the questions asked in the quantitative round). The Calibrium Delphi study platform ([www.calibrium.com](http://www.calibrium.com)) was used for the data collection and analysis.

The qualitative round was open from November 1, 2018 to December 17, 2018 and extended at the request of participants until January 7, 2019. The final number of completed responses is 62.

The quantitative round was open from February 1, 2019 to March 31, 2019. The final number of completed responses is 37.

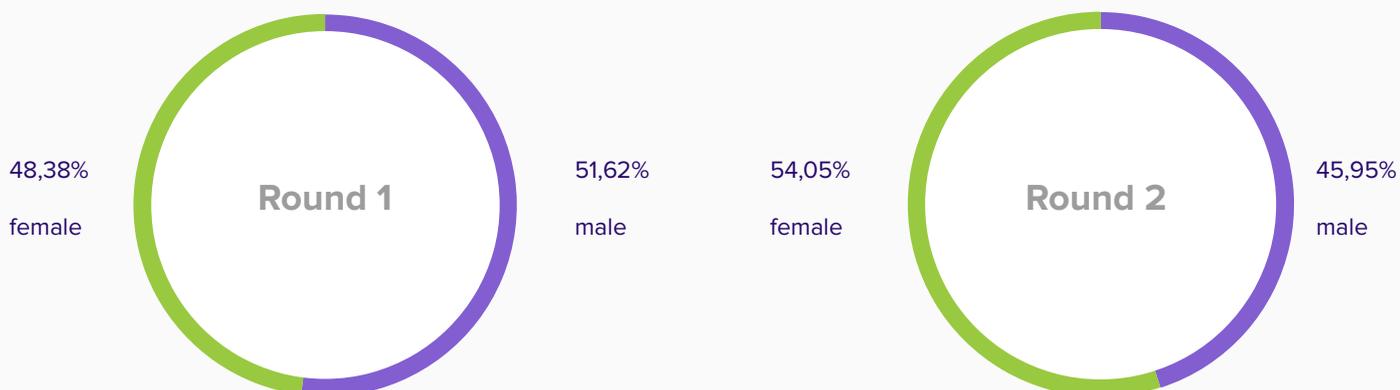
## Sample and sampling method

As the Delphi method requires the use of an elite, expert sample, purposive sampling (criterion sampling) has been used based on the following criteria:

- Practitioners (in various senior/executive communication roles including CCOs, VP of Corporate Communications, CMOs in organizations or agencies)
- PR/Communication associations representatives (activating worldwide and national associations, with a specific function focus or specific industry)
- PR/Communication consultants
- Senior academics either actively teaching and researching in the area of public relations/communications or running programs focusing on PR/Comms (both undergraduate and graduate)

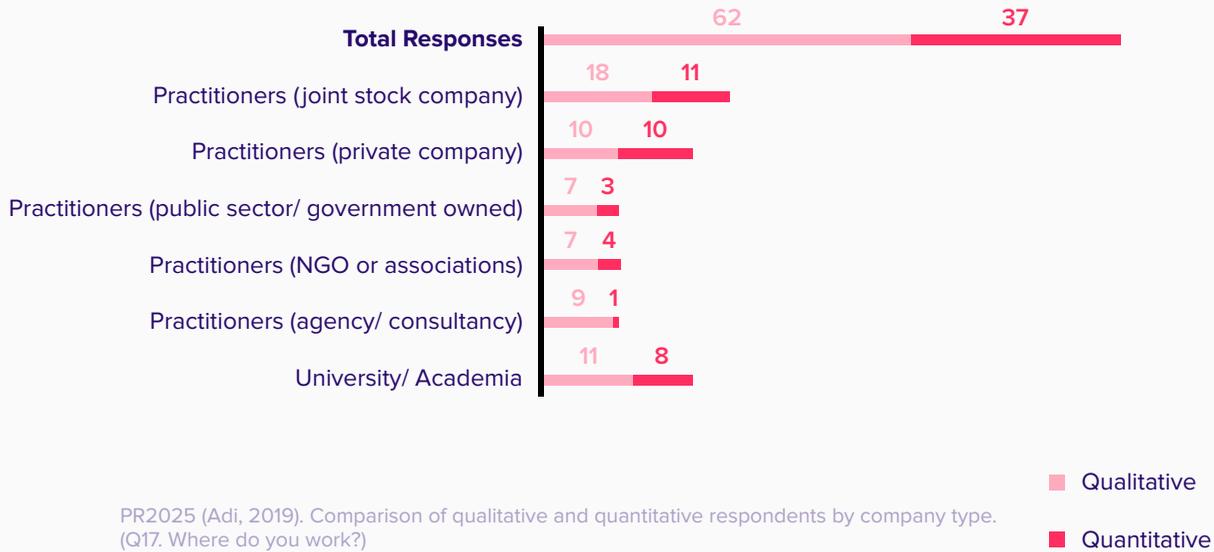
No questions about age, work experience or dominant areas of work have been asked, these characteristics being deemed irrelevant for the study.

### A balanced representation: PR2025 respondents by gender



PR2025 (Adi, 2019). Comparison of qualitative and quantitative round respondents by gender. (Q20. How would you describe yourself?)

## An even distribution: PR2025 respondents by company type



For both Delphi rounds the sample has been mainly European, with 57/62 in the first round and 31/37 in the second round. The industry sectors represented are also varied from chemical, finance and automotive to higher education, media and sport.

## From small to big: PR2025 respondents by company size



# Picturing PR

The background of the slide features several thick, diagonal, curved lines in dark blue, pink, and orange, set against a light cream background. There are also several thin, light-colored lines (white, grey, and purple) that follow the same diagonal path, creating a layered, dynamic effect.

# Picturing PR

Traditionally, PR roles have been described in technical/managerial dichotomies: a reflection perhaps of Grunig's work and models (the 4 models of PR – Grunig & Hunt, 1984 and the excellence theory in its many iterations) which since the early 1980s have been promoting and supporting the PR as management function. This separation between technical roles, usually associated with entry-level positions and thus basic competences, and managerial roles, usually associated with mid-career to executive roles and associated with more advanced competences including strategizing and insight, has been first noted by Dozier & Broom (1995) and later confirmed by Van Ruler (2004), Beurer-Zullig, Fieseler, & Meckel (2009) and Vieira & Grantham (2014) among others.

While Van Ruler's (2004)<sup>1</sup>, Beurer-Zullig, Fieseler, & Meckel's (2009)<sup>2</sup> and Vieira & Grantham's (2014)<sup>3</sup> studies focus on the then and now, the roles they identify and the dichotomies they confirm have benchmarking qualities. If PR practitioners and communicators are to embrace more the roles of consultants and trusted advisors, being at the confluence between organization and its stakeholders, and between organizational priorities and societal demands, one needs to also consider their background (both where they come from professionally – as a means of identifying both their professional strengths and opportunities for development – and where, as in what kind of organizations, they have been active the most). Moreover, consideration and discussion of what constitutes best practice (and equally worst practice) is also needed. All these bring into focus a variety of questions including

- how does education of PR/Comms practitioners look like?
- who should educate and PR/Comms practitioners at active in various industries/business areas as well as at various points in their careers?
- how can current institutions (universities, training bodies and more) contribute to and support this process?

PR2025 asked some of these questions. In doing so, it also asked respondents to reflect on their current role and position within their organization, on the role they envisaged for PR/Comms in the mid-term, their career paths projections as well as the typology/metaphor they feel PR/Comms will embody most frequently in the future.

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<sup>1</sup>Van Ruler's research identifies seven metaphors describing best the typologies of PR roles based on a review of Dutch practice and literature at the time. These include: **The town crier**: public relations as broadcasting their master's voice (prevalent in early professional literature on PR in the public sector and for-profit/enterprise contexts); **The steward**: public relations is pampering (prevalent in early professional literature on PR in the public sector and for-profit/enterprise contexts); **The traffic manager**: public relations is transfer of information (dominating the mid-1980s-mid-1990s literature for both public and private sector); **The conductor**: public relations is harmonic performance (dominating the mid-1980s-mid-1990s literature for both public and private sector); **The creator**: public relations is about creating a bond (generally associated with professional definitions of PR promoted by the Association of Communication, 1960s-1990s and thus very prevalent in undergraduate texts from the 1970s onwards); **The facilitator**: public relations is hosting the dialogue ("introduced only recently, first by the literature on public relations in the public sector and later by the business-oriented literature", p. 138); **The seat-of-the-pants**: public relations is an art, not a profession (found mostly in interviews, columns and biographies) (Van Ruler, 2004)

<sup>2</sup>Beurer-Zullig, Fieseler, & Meckel's (2009) typology includes negotiators, brand officers, policy advisors, internal communicators, and press agents. These were created based on cluster analysis of a sample of 1,410 communicators from 30 different European countries and represent groups distinctively different in terms of education, salary, and career, as well as job satisfaction.

<sup>3</sup>Vieira & Grantham's (2014) study shows similarities between the US and European sample, their descriptions however bringing some yet limited managerial duties to press agents, internal communicators and policy advisors. In the US sample, negotiators are usually portrayed as consultants, but they do share with policy advisors an orientation to evaluation and measurement of communication efforts as well as a reported comfort with such activities.

## Confident at home, reserved for the world

When asked about the role PR/Comms will play within their own organization, most participants were split between optimistic projections, and reserved, with hardly any negative remarks. However, while their projections remain positive for the future of the profession as well, current debates such as fake news, digitalization, globalization and their impact on the practice and its ethics emerge.

Within their own organizations, respondents often refer to an expected rise in status, influence and impact of PR/Comms within the organization and a shift from the technical/managerial dichotomy towards consultant/advisor characterizes the optimistic responses. Additionally, an emphasis on an integrative, collaborative and more egalitarian and transparent approach also emerges.

*PR/Communications will [be - sic] in a more prominent position when it comes to counseling, advising and „influencing“ the Board of Management. Strengthen the awareness, reputation and image of the company (F, appliance manufacturer)*

*A role as a general strategic adviser, advising on the appropriate interaction with all stakeholders of the organization (F, chemical industry)*

*Even more strategic, closely related to HR strategy and IT strategy, more advisory. Main responsibility includes to make sense of conflicting, confusing perception of reality („Story First“) to all relevant stakeholders of an organization. The role will be increasingly both: communicating the strategy (content orchestration) and helping define the strategy through communications (catalyst function). (M, automotive manufacturing)*

*Communications will play an integral part in the organisation as whole, working closely with other teams to bring together expert input, advocacy needs and clear communications to ensure an effect outcome (F, association).*

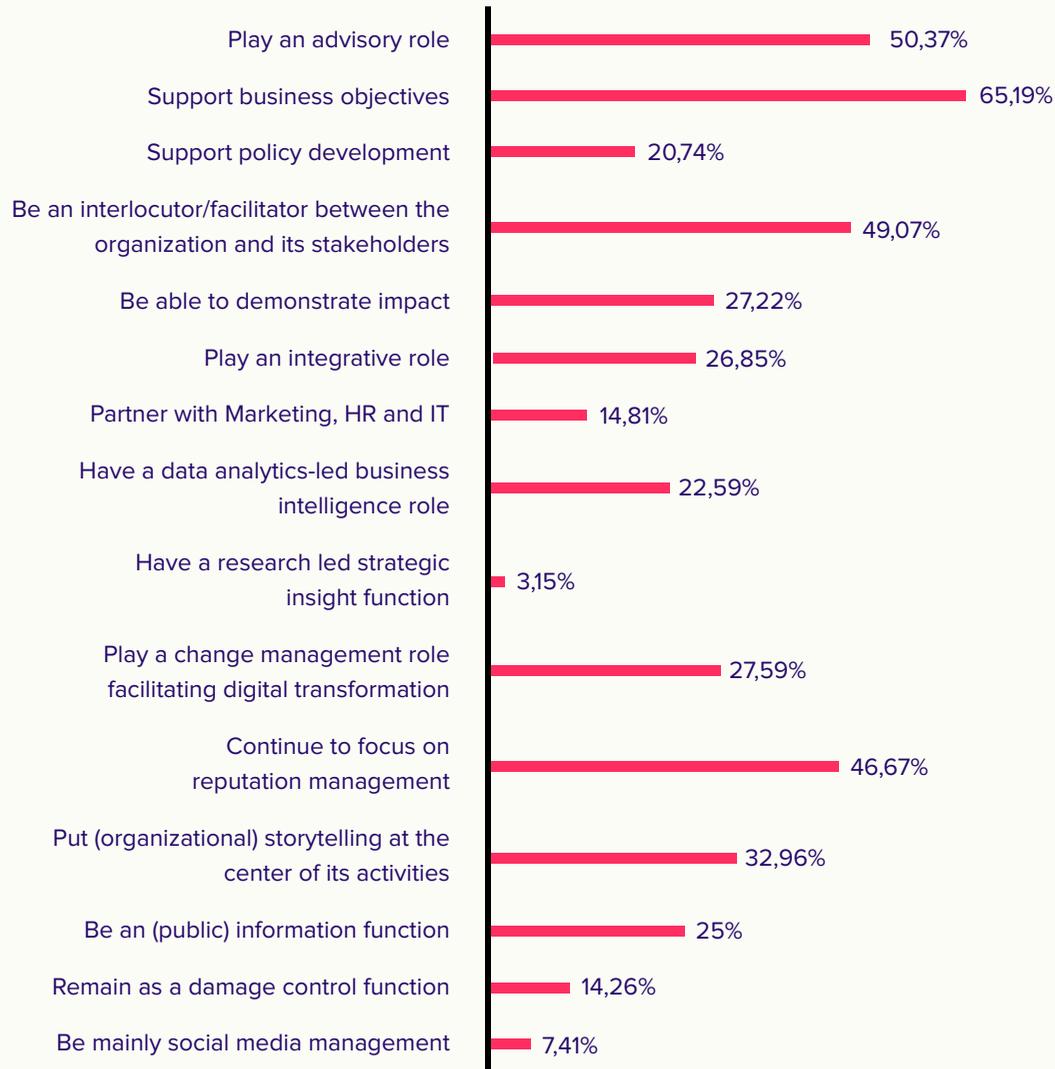
*I believe that Communication will continue to be shared with others within my company and that Communication will have to adapt and play a role of enabler and facilitator role. A key role of communication will be to help employee engagement in companies and the development of employee advocacy (M, banking).*

Interestingly, the consensus is that in the mid-term the PR practitioners' role within their own organizations will be to “support business objectives”, aligning thus the communication function to the wider business strategy and purpose (65.19%). Almost half of the respondents indicated that in the mid-term within their organizations, the focus will:

- Be to play an advisory role (50.37%)
- Be as interlocutor between the organization and its stakeholders (49.07%)
- Continue to focus on reputation management (46.67%)

With only 3.15% of the practitioners envisaging the role of PR in their organization to “have a research led strategic insight function”, it is fair to assume that discussions about giving a central role to research, measurement and evaluation will continue to remain pertinent in the years to come.

## PR2025 respondents see the role of PR/Comms as supporting business objectives in their own organization in the mid-term



PR2025 (Adi, 2019) The future role of PR/Comms within own organization.  
(n=36, Q1: What do you envisage the role of PR/Communications to be in 2025 within your organization?)

## Collaboration, transparency and stakeholder orientation but no consensus on what the future of PR in society is in the mid-term

Collaboration and transparency are common in the projections for the profession and they are seen as related to one another: collaboration between practitioners and their organizations will enable/enhance collaboration with stakeholders and thus help practitioners contribute personally and professionally to the societal good. These projections echo recent discussions about the role of PR/Comms and increasing preference for an advisory role.

*Comms will be much more the eyes and ears to the wider society. The missing link of the company to society. Comms has ideally a very broad knowledge background and less discipline specific focused. (M, food and beverage)*

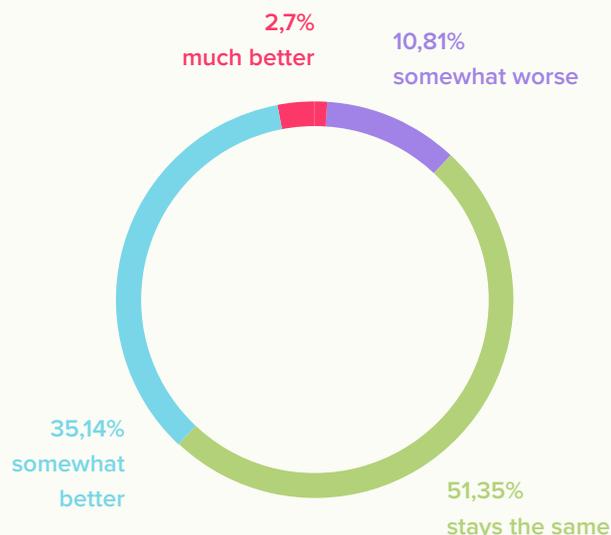
*Supporting public transformation in terms of successful adaptation to the disrupted digital environment, for example, anti-fake news training, building trust in fragmented ecosystem (F, academia)*

*In 2025 the role of PR/Comms in society will be: - Connecting organisations and society - meaning CITIZENS - by means of collaborating together (citizen science projects) - Creating opportunities for citizens to 'follow' projects real-time. In other words: greater transparency of the organisation in general and research projects specifically. (M, research).*

*The role of PR and communications in society...it would be to efficiently enable openness, transparency and sharing of information, rather than covering up or holding back information that may be of relevance to society (M, agency)*

Interestingly enough, there is no consensus around what role PR/Comms will be playing in 2025. Almost a quarter of the respondents believe PR will play “a central, strategic role to business” (24.32%). This is in line with respondents indicating that their role will be within their organization however the difference between their internal impact and external and societal impact is quite stark. Indirectly, respondents indicate to have reduced confidence in PR/Comms ability to go beyond immediate, business focused interests yet there is hope for the practice overall to improve.

### PR2025 respondents expect PR/Comms perceptions in society to stagnate or improve in the mid-term



PR2025 (Adi, 2019). Respondents expect PR/Comms perceptions in society to stagnate or improve in the mid-term. (n=37; Q4: How do you believe PR/Communication will be perceived in 2025 in society in general)

21.62% believe it will play a “collaborative, integrative” role and 13.51% believe in a shift in focus, with stakeholders taking center stage. The skeptical voices do remain, a little over than 13% maintaining that PR will play a “negative role (spin doctors and the like)” and another 10.81% asserting that PR will play a “strategic gatekeeper” role. Therefore, when asked about how PR will be perceived in society 2025, slightly more than a half of the respondents do not envisage any changes in perceptions (51.35%), however another almost 40% expect positive changes. This is also reflected when compared with van Ruler’s (2004) seven typologies and metaphors (the town crier, the steward, the traffic manager, the conductor, the creator, the facilitator and the seat-of-the-pants). Asked to reflect on the answers they provided, the majority of respondents (45.95%) contended that PR’s role in the future would be that of a “facilitator: hosting the dialogue”, two options – that of “steward: PR is pampering” and “the seat-of-the-pants: PR is an art not a profession” – being rejected by all participants.

# The trends



# The trends

Trusted content, explained as the verification of text, image, video and audio) was on [TrendOne](#)'s top 5 Mega trends list for 2018, together with CrisPR (genome editing), newtrition (new, nutritious sources of food), modular retail, millennial parents, circular economy and mystic movement. This comes on a background of a sustained decrease in trust since 2010 in authorities, media, business and NGOs (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2018). Attributed in part to the rise of social media and its democratizing of information, the report pointed out throughout the years how peers have been taking place as a primary source of information (and thus trust). More recently however, as various elections around the world have proven controversial, the increased uncertainty about what constitutes unbiased news and the lack of transparency into the algorithmic programming responsible for displaying information social media platforms, has put peers for the first time in 8 years into the position of the distrusted party.

The topic of the volatile environment and the concern with fake news and mistrust has also been reflected into the results of recent European Communication Monitor (Zerfass et al, 2018), and the BRC's research about "Communicating in an age of radical uncertainty"<sup>4</sup>. In both cases, members of the PR/Comms community name VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world) and fake news as a concern to their jobs, and feel unprepared to address them.

These topics have taken center stage in recent years, being featured in popular blogs, podcasts, conferences, research and publications. More recently [Van der Wal](#) (2016) focused on the impact of VUCA on public managers, indicating that this "operating environment will be to some extent 'unknown', not only in terms of projected outcomes, but also in terms of the required skills, strategies, and parameters" (p. 3).

PR2025 asked respondents to consider and reflect upon some of these unknowns by asking participants to name the trends they would consider influential in the mid-term. However, in order to ensure that they would not just simply confirm their exposure to recent debates, the study has proposed 4 questions covering thus main trends, technology trends, business trends and society trends.

For the qualitative round, participants were asked to list their top three trends they believed to be most influential on the practice of PR/Comms in 2025. These have been summarized and included as a list in the second round of the study, when participants were asked to choose the 5 most important from an extensive list.

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<sup>4</sup> Check out [John Kay](#)'s discussion about the origins of the "radical uncertainty" debate going back to Knight and Keynes and their belief that "Not only did we not know what was going to happen, we had a very limited ability to even describe the things that might happen".

## Technology trends: digitalization in focus; artificial intelligence follows closely

It is clear that participants have been following the recent debates and discussions about the evolution and impact of technology. While there are numerous references to digitalization, artificial intelligence, big data, these are clearly made in a context of reflection of what their meaning and impact on the profession and its practices are. This is perhaps why, beyond listing AI as a trend to watch, participants also point towards more specific implications of using technology including privacy, ethics and measurement and evaluation.

Considering that practitioners see their role improving and becoming more central to their organizations and society, a focus on matters of ethics and privacy, as well as on the impact of digitalization is a logical (and desirable) development.

*Big data analysis: Making sense of social media data via big data analysis will have a huge impact on communications. Artificial intelligence: that can help to automatize individualized content production and individualized content distribution. Social bots: as they become more sophisticated and are more and more difficult to detect, they will have the power to shape the public discourse and opinion of organizations and their products and services. Collaboration software: Technologies (tools and software) supporting agile working will help organization to succeed with agile working. (F, academia/research)*

*Thee increasing reliance on electronic channels makes it harder to rise above the „noise level“ and get noticed/get the information across. Seeing is believing and also increases the „human connection“ to communications so I think that very short videos/ podcasts and photographic journalism will continue to gain ground. Technology will continue to adapt to become more accessible to the large portions of the world's population that do not have access to the internet and electronic devices and media today. As new populations gain access to technology, communication professionals will need to develop content and information that is adapted to their needs and interests. Communication professionals will surely have to adapt to new social media channels (F, NGO)*

When asked to choose the technology trends that they believe will impact the PR/Comms practice the near future the most, respondents agree only two trends: digitalization (51.08%) and artificial intelligence (50.93%). Although both are interrelated, with digitalization referring to restructuring of social life around digital communication and media infrastructures and artificial intelligence referring to theory and development of computer systems able to perform tasks which required human intelligence in the past, the respondents' need to comment on the categories show their attempt to own and translate the impact of these trends on the practice:

*Keep in mind that not the data itself, but understanding them is a key driver of success. Understanding your data gives you the key to business success on social, digital and AI. (M, oil & gas)*

Four more categories, related to digitalization have also been listed among influential trends but they did not make the 50% cut-off needed to establish consensus: social media (48.61%), improved measurement/analytics tools for communicators including predictive analytics (44.44%), big data driven analysis (41.46%) and digital ethics (40.28%). Of these, two are again related – one referring to emergence/improvement of tools needed for analysis/measurement and the other to the actual analysis of available (and increasing amounts of) data. Moreover, although in the qualitative round big data was often mentioned, respondents in the second round opted for the more specific categories of big data analysis and measurement, reinforcing the rising concern with measurement and evaluation of communications.

Perhaps the most interesting in the list of technology trends is the concern with digital ethics:

*Already we are seeing our privacy being invaded, unethical handling of our personal information, and the real fear that everything we do online could be compromised.  
(M, academia)*

Although no solutions are offered here, the comments remind of the rising demands for the role of Chief Communication Officer to be renamed and refocused to Chief Conscience Officer (see [Corey duBrowa](#)'s for PRWeek and more generally [Shannon Bowen](#)'s work on PR ethics).

## Business trends: market audience fragmentation (a blessing and a curse)

The business trends focus on the environment, conditions and pre-requisites of business operations. In this sense, respondents focus is on the effects of the technological and social trends on business. A recurrent theme in this case is the change of patterns of consumption (and/or demand):

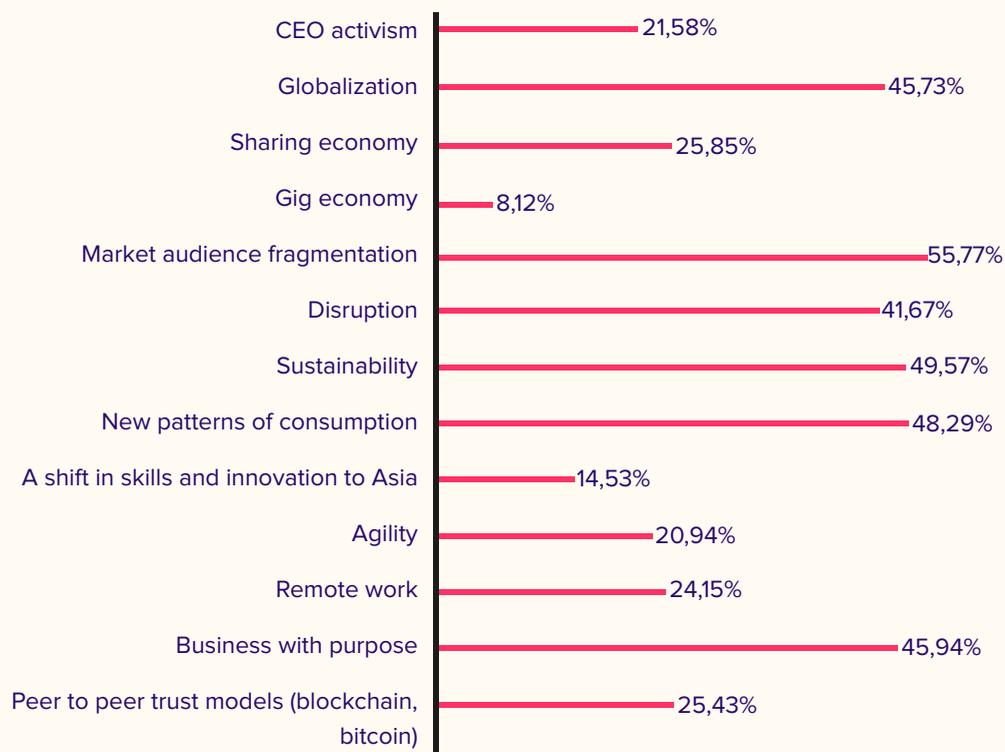
*Changing nature of consumers. New patterns of consumption such as personalized products/services, sharing economy, buying from local suppliers, etc. New investment models, such as activist investment. Changes in demographic patterns (ageing population, growth in urban populations, etc) (M, Academia)*

*Lack of growth due to lack of USPs in most categories. Power shift from brands to consumers also thx to social media. the importance to focus on brand reputation to influence positive consumer lead threads on brands (M)*

*Shifts in business models caused by social media on the one hand, and increasing tensions on cross-border trade on the other (M, association)*

Yet, for communicators, respondents agree that the market audience fragmentation (55.77%) will be the most important business trend practitioners and educators alike will be facing in the near-future. Sustainability (49.57%), new patterns of consumption (48.29%), business with purpose (45.94%) and globalization (45.73%) follow close by.

## The main key business trends or issues that will influence and shape the roles communication professionals will play in 2025



PR2025 (Adi, 2019) Key business trends affecting PR/Comms in 2025. (n=36, Q7: What are, in your opinion, the main key business trends or issues that will influence and shape the role of communication professionals will play in 2025?)

The resulting order of the trends listed, is also indicative of the effects of technology development covered earlier: the availability of information (and easiness to produce it, access it and share it) has to opposing results – information overload on the one hand and fragmentation on the other.

## Society trends: decline in trust

The theme of fragmentation recurs in the society trends (see IPSOS's 2017 [Global Trends: Fragmentation, Cohesion & Uncertainty](#) or Johnson, 2008 discussion about postmodernism and cultural fragmentation), respondents considering the shifts in society and the general public. In this sense, what would be seen as segmentation opportunities facilitated by technology and a demand for new business, more personalized models, is here discussed in terms of lack of unity and hence polarization and fragmentation of society. Considering the future, participants point out in this instance to the challenges communicators will face:

*Polarisation of the Society - we have to learn to deal with very different audiences (M, consultancy)*

*Sustainability matters will increase in importance, competition over skills and talents especially in the digital/ engineering field, productivity and cost efficiency (F, technology engineering)*

*Increasingly fragmented societies where social unrest will be the norm, lack of confidence in governments (F, academia)*

*Political extremism and the polarization of societies, politically, geographically and with respect to the competition of different political systems (M, consultancy)*

The decline in trust in traditional institutions (53.82%) is the key society trend that will considerably influence PR/Comms in the near future respondents indicate. This brings back VUCA and radical uncertainty in focus and with it the acknowledgement that the way in which communications used to be carried out might no longer work in a world of micro-publics and echo-chambers. This reinforces (if not reflects) the Edelman Trust Barometer's results according to which trust in traditional institutions is in decline with the traditional authority figures (the government, the media, NGOs and business) being replaced more and more by peer to peer influencers.

The decline in trust is also reflected in the following 5 trends listed (albeit they do not reach the 50% threshold for consensus): sustainability (47.4%) (here probably understood as increased public awareness and demand from society), demand for transparency (46.18%), polarization of society (46.18%), demand/concern for privacy (38.54%) and diversity (31.6%).

## The biggest worry: Loss of trust

The list of current trends mentioned in the qualitative round is extensive and diverse, including everything from automation, to fake news, and VUCA to globalization and multiculturalism. The trends identified in this case, overlap partially with the technological, business and social trends showing both the participants' awareness of the recent public debates, media discourses and professional conversations but also their reflection. Globalization and multiculturalism are also mentioned among the social trends to consider, while automation and digital ethics feature in the list of technology trends.

Similar with the technology, business and society trends, there is one overall trend that respondents agree to be influential in 2025: loss of trust in traditional institutions (51.25%), however unlike the other more specific trends, respondents' choices remain diverse.

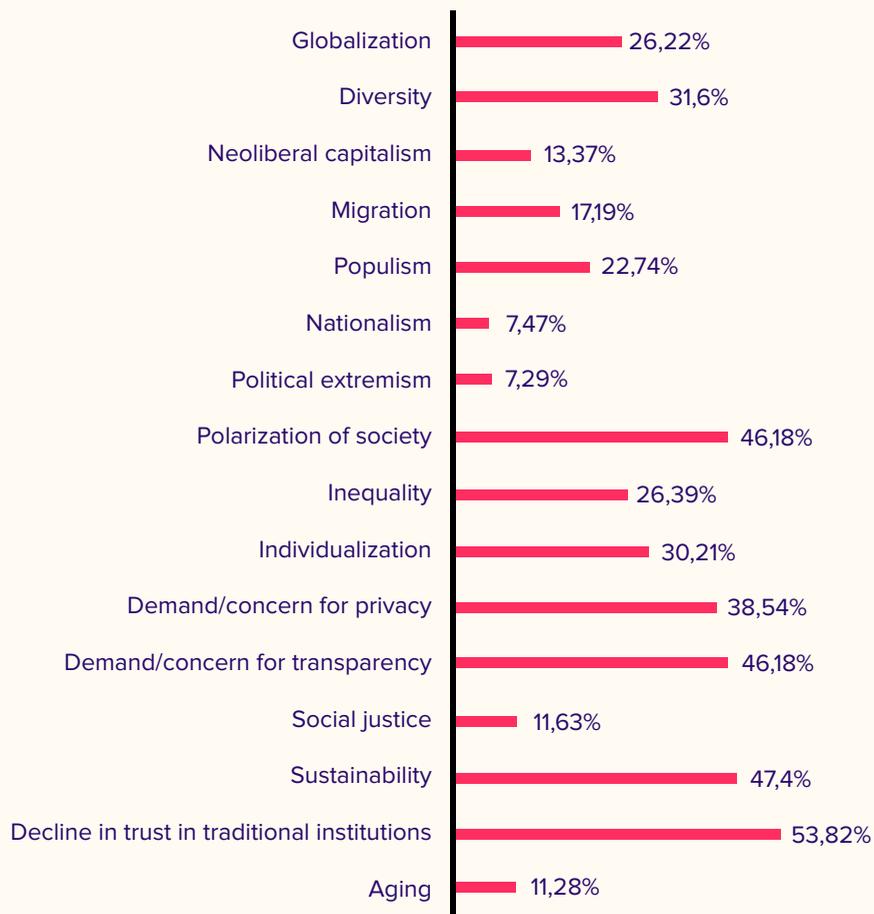
*Media are free. News are everywhere, and made by everyone. Information is everywhere. It is about who you trust and what you believe in. You follow people you like, people you trust, even if they don't tell the truth. (M, brewers)*

*Being transparent and ethical which is expected from organizations. – Winning the trust battle between organization and governments. – The power of stakeholders to lead the communication around the organization (social media, global connections, 24/7). – Data driven communication. (M, oil and gas)*

*VUCA - Complexity increases - while people expect simple easy to digest answers, therefore we need to navigate our stakeholders perception of our organization through the clutter (F, chemical industry)*

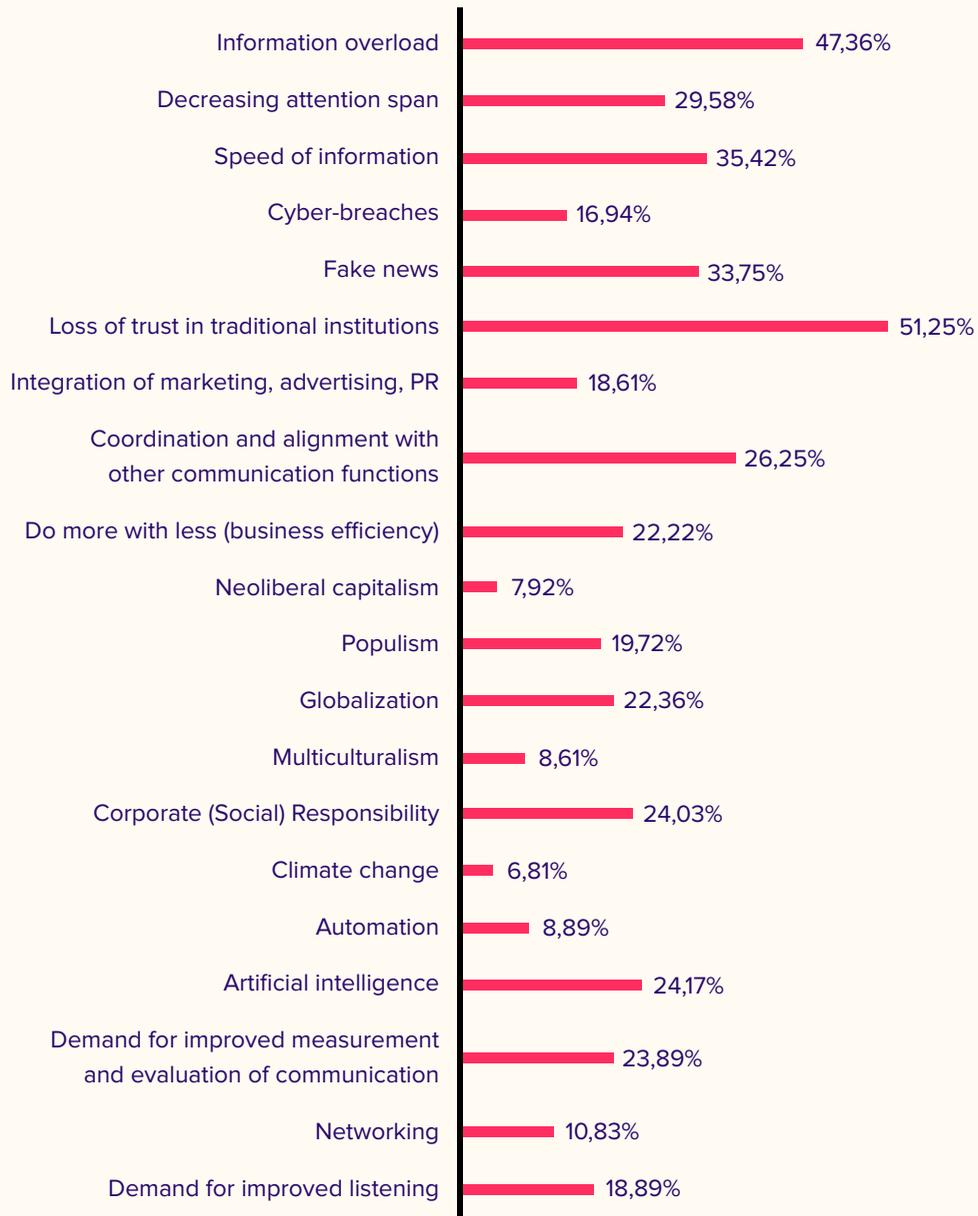
This regression to peer-to-peer trust and micro-units, is also a sign for challenges facing communicators: complexity and fragmentation.

## Social trends: decline in trust in traditional institutions is key



PR2025 (Adi, A) Decline in trust in traditional institutions is the key social trend affecting PR/Comms in 2025. (n = 36, Q8: What are, in your opinion, the key social trends or issues that will influence and shape the roles of communication professionals will play in 2025?)

## Overall trend to affect PR/Comms in the mid-term: loss of trust



PR2025 (Adi, 2019). Loss of trust in traditional institutions the main trend to influence the role of PR/Comms in 2025. (n=36; Q5: Wat are in your opinion the main (current) trends that will influence and shape these roles?)

## The trends paradox: transparency, information overload and fragmentation of audiences go hand in hand

- Automation (including chatbots)
- Artificial intelligence
- Digitalization
- Information overload
- Decreasing attention span
- Speed of transformation
- Cyber-breaches
- Fake news
- VUCA
- Loss of trust in traditional institutions
- Integration of marketing, advertising, PR
- Coordination and alignment with all communication functions
- Do more with less (business efficiency)
- Neoliberal capitalism
- Globalization
- Multiculturalism
- Populism
- (Corporate) Social Responsibility
- Climate change
- Employee advocacy
- Increased fragmentation of society (socially, politically, economically and culturally)
- Networking
- Demand for improved measurement and evaluation of communication
- Demand for improved listening

The trends identified are all related. Globalization, multiculturalism and networking tend to go hand in hand. So do climate change, CSR and employee advocacy. Speed of information can lead to information overload diminishing attention spans, propensity for fake news to propagate, concerns with VUCA and populism which for businesses mean most of time snail judgements in the court of public opinion (happening too often too fast for organizations with set processes to respond in a timely manner). Speed of information however and information overload increase demands for improved listening and improved measurement and evaluation of communication as well as the need for coordination and integration of communication functions. The resulting conflicting demands are apparent.

The resulting conflicting demands are apparent.

**By providing more information in order to respond to the increased transparency demands and facilitate trust, communicators are also contributing to information overload**

**and thus to their stakeholders potentially disengaging with them. Moreover, by attempting to become more relevant with their stakeholders, communicators risk contributing further to an already increasingly fragmented society by operating within echo-chambers.**

A wealth of questions thus emerge from here: if providing more information in the name of transparency is alienating stakeholders, then what is the solution to keeping them informed and engaged? And if communicators are to be facilitators and advisors with a commitment to the public good and an understanding of the various stakeholder demands an organization is facing, then how can they/should they engage with the disenfranchised, left-behind and ‘not listened to’ stakeholders? But more importantly, what competencies (skills, knowledge and abilities) and personal attributes do they need to have to navigate the world and the profession in 2025 and what competences, overall, should the field of and profession of PR/Comms focus in the near-term?

# Competences

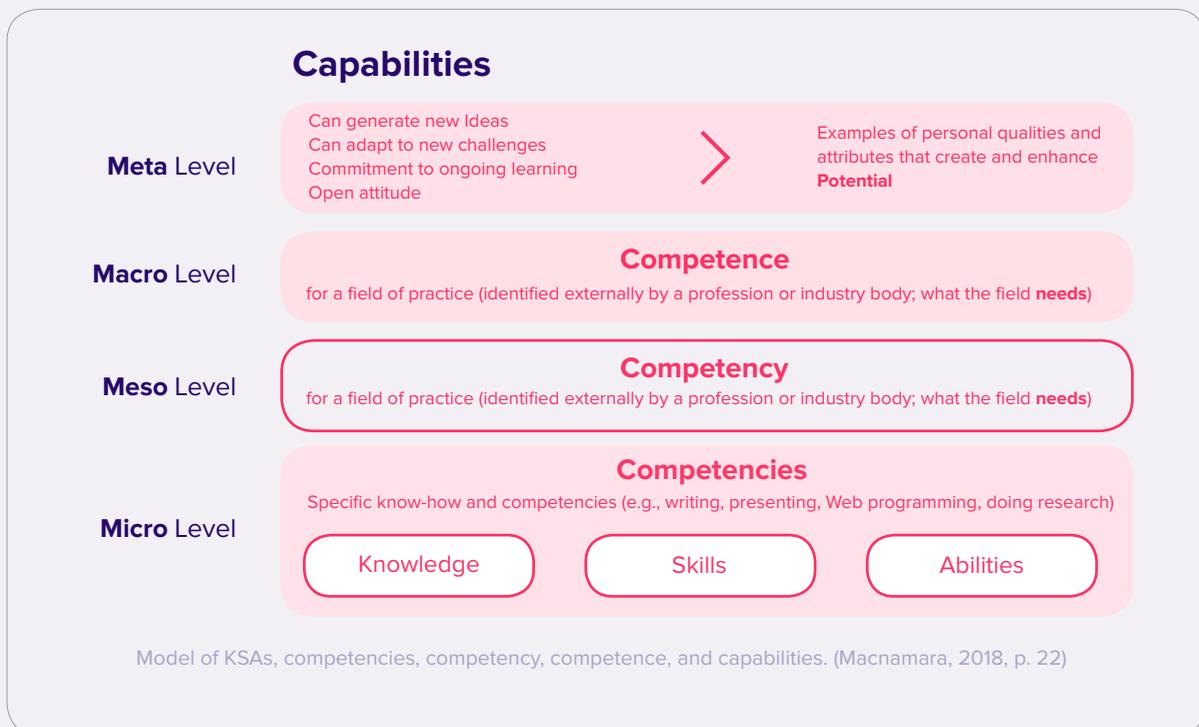


# Competences

## (what the PR profession needs to focus on)

A number of recent global and national studies aimed to identify specific know-how-knowledge (what practitioners can/should know), skills (what practitioners can/should do) and abilities (what they should know how to/could do) (KSAs) –, competencies (KSAs relevant to the role) and capabilities (needs in the field and developing potential) required to effectively undertake PR and communication management roles, both today and in the future (see Macnamara, 2018 and Macnamara et al, 2018 for further definitions and figure 1).

The Global Body of Knowledge (GBOK) undertaken by Global Alliance is especially focused on KSAs and competences, so the micro- and meso-level, with little predictive and future-proofing valences but tremendous benchmarking opportunities. It identifies roles specific for entry, mid- and senior- level jobs and proceeds by listing what knowledge, skills and abilities the PR professional should have.



The Global Capabilities Framework released by Global Alliance in 2016 was developed based on the insight gained from the GBOK and incorporates some of Lester's (2014) suggestions to specifically focus on core capabilities. These, Lester argues should be depicted in four main task-related stages (assess, decide, do, review) which should be further linked with

activities at each level which practitioners need to be able to undertake. The GCF therefore list 3 main capabilities for communicators: communication, organizational and professional with 11 sub-capabilities behavioral statements associated with each main capability including communicating effectively across a full range of platforms and technologies, conducting formative and evaluative research, building trust with internal and external stakeholders, building/enhancing organizational reputation, and offering organizational leadership. National frameworks have been developed as well, capturing thus the variety of approaches that the GBOK has reported (see for instance the [Australian example](#)).

PR2025 focused on competences, the needs that a profession overall has to address. It thus asked practitioners and academics to consider the macro-level of the profession, thus complementing the valuable contribution made by the Global Alliance project and its capability framework. In doing so, PR2025 moved away from current research and thinking focusing on hierarchical and incremental progressions, inviting respondents to consider career progressions, personal attributes and competences needed for a work environment that is moving fast and is not anymore bound to time and physical boundaries.

Additionally, PR2025 asked participants to identify specific technology and business/managerial competences addressing thus a gap in development identified as early 2012 when the ECOPSI study results showed that PR practitioners overwhelmingly receive training in communication related areas instead of management, business or technology which they indicate they need (Tench et al, 2013; see also Zerfass et al, 2018, Macnamara et al, 2017, 2016 and Feldman, 2017).

## Understanding business is the number one priority for PR/Comms

The number one priority for PR/Comms practitioners for the medium term is to better understand business priorities (62.32%). In this sense, the respondents of PR2025 are in line with two of Global Alliance's capabilities: "provide contextual intelligence" and "align communication strategies with organizational purpose and values" showing thus continuity into what is believed to be the direction of developing professionals and the profession.

*Competences: Good business understanding and economic/political/social analytics skills and ability to transfer these to take communicative actions. Human behavioral understanding. Result-oriented - ability to take actions that have positive business impact. Competencies: digital tools, user experience understanding, creative content production and storytelling, journalistic approach to things, i.e. research, selective angles, story-telling, brand platform understanding and skills, multi-functional understanding of business - natural sciences, human impact, economic/social/political Capabilities: story-telling/writing/producing relevant content for information sharing (video, imagery, writing), simplifying complex matters, multi-channel management, event/experience related content production (F, engineering)*

*Communication practitioners need to have a comprehensive understanding of regional and international cultures as well as political and economic challenges of societies that the organization may be doing business with or having as their key stakeholders. They are also expected to know the relevant policies, regulatory guidelines impacting on the organization and industry for successful and strategic engagement with stakeholders, and in their internal advisory roles. They will need to have strong communication and technical skills required for the communication on trending media platforms. (F, academia)*

What one should perhaps ask (and that is beyond the purpose of PR2025) is what exactly do respondents mean by “understanding business priorities” – is it maintaining the focus on the relationship business-profit-reputation or is it concentrating on the changing/evolving business priorities which include the emergence of new business models, the increased demand for responsibility, sustainability and sustainable development and the questioning of the neoliberal paradigm? In a sense, the responses to the trends and future of PR/Comms role indicate a reorientation towards the communication practitioner as driver of adaptation and change.

Beyond understanding business priority, there is little consensus into what competences are needed in the mid-term, respondents reverting to a combination of existing demands:

- Be able to operate across different communication disciplines (38.95%)
- Be able to create, acquire, aggregate and create content appropriate for various platforms (36.09%)
- Understand the media ecosystems that their audiences inhabit (35.61%)
- Inform management decisions based on knowledge of stakeholder expectations (30.52%).

## Technical competences – machine learning and coding – not important

Technology features only partially in the Global Alliance framework (“to communicate effectively across a full range of platforms and technologies”), which is why PR2025 participants were asked to identify the competences that should underpin this development. Digitalization, artificial intelligence and big data are among the technical trends mentioned most often with literacy, content production and moderation deemed more important than coding or even the ability to create data models for machine learning.

*wide range of digital content creation, performance, evaluation, measurement as well as correct data interpretation (F, finance)*

*need to be highly digital literate, need some level of business analysis skill or ability to read and translate data reports (F, academia)*

*Knowledge about latest technologies (e.g. bots, AI, algorithms, data mining), using of modern listening tools, CMS. (M, consultant)*

Almost 72% of the PR2025 respondents consider digital literacy as essential, followed by an understanding of content production (including video and advanced graphics, both online and offline) (67.03%), the ability to implement agile working methods (including remote working) (57.84%), and the ability to operate on a multitude of platforms (51.08%).

For the PR2025 respondents, the focus on literacy and thus of understanding the application and implications of technology (whether current or emergent) shows a concern beyond the optimizing processes and into understanding and enacting the practitioner’s social responsibility (hence, recurrent references privacy, transparency and ethics in the

qualitative comments). Moreover, considering the desire and projections for PR/Comms to act as facilitators in the near future, literacy is the gateway to understanding (and implementing) ethics. After all, a thorough understanding of how technology works can provide a pathway to uncovering stakeholder issues and thus invite examination of the purpose, application and implications of technology to various groups. This is very similar to what the Chief Conscience Officer is expected to do (see earlier sections in the report referring to technology trends).

Moreover, the listing of digital literacy as the top competence to be addressed also shows that there is still work to be done with current mastering current technologies, bringing thus in focus the pressure that speed of innovation might bring to practitioners: embracing new technologies (whether channels, platforms, tools) when the learning curve of the previous one is not yet complete.

## Business/managerial competences: strategy in and out

When asked to reflect and identify the main business/managerial competences (but not referring to managing communications) to maintain PR/Comms relevant, the respondents' agreed easily on the need to focus on and master strategy development, implementation and evaluation (74.94%). In some cases, this was expanded to cover remote working and empowering team (close and far; direct and company-wide – instead of regarding them and managing them as mere resources) (57.49%).

*The business/managerial competences a (senior level) practitioner should display are: - anticipatory strength: being able to ,read' developments and trends, and anticipate on it - being able to adapt to new policies, and strategies quickly (M, research institute)*

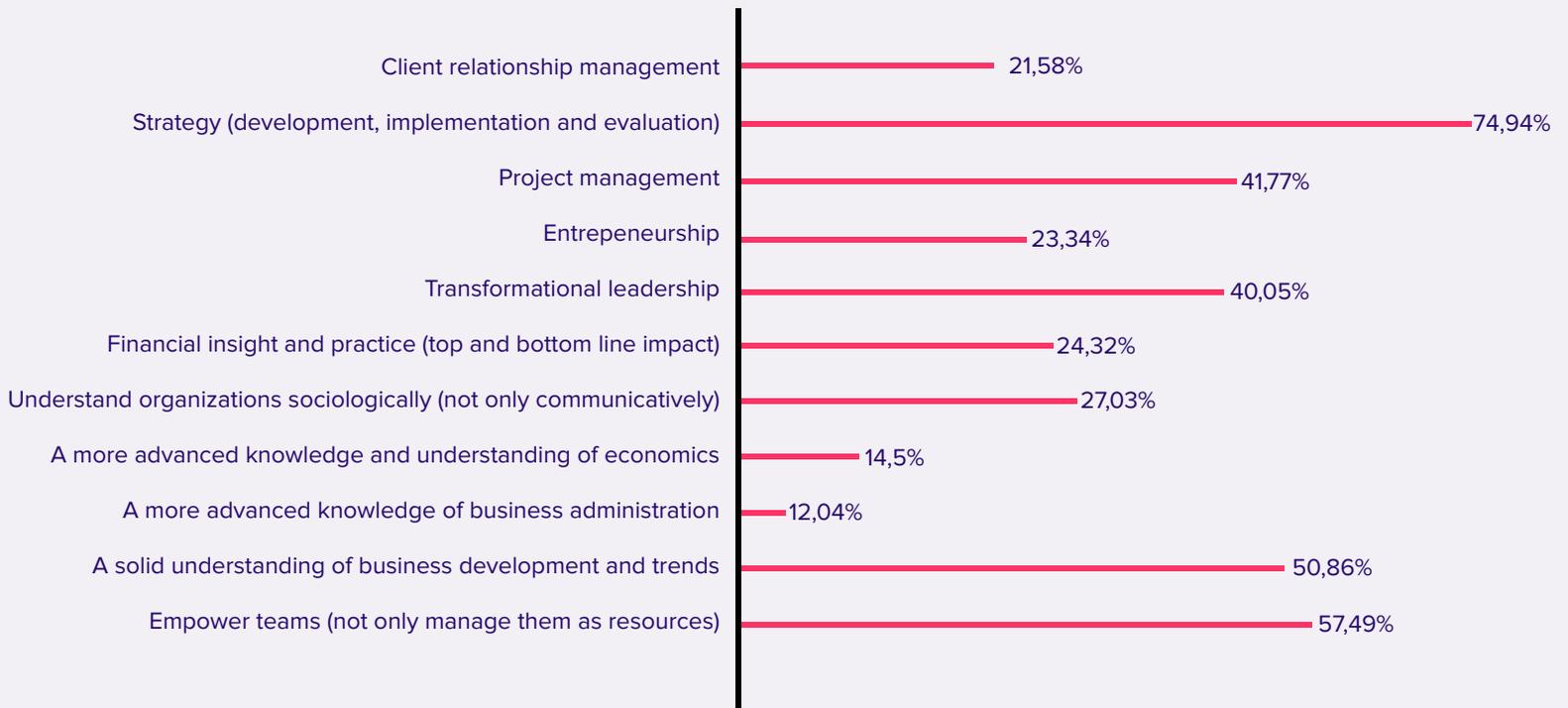
*Ability to take a „big picture“, which is focused to long-term business. (F, association)*

*Stakeholder relations management is crucial and in the evolving work landscape, inter-personal communications techniques need to be refined by practitioners as well as techniques of negotiation. Successful practitioners need to be helping their senior management teams to refine mid-long term strategy to be at the forefront of the business development rather than merely following it. (M, association)*

*The ability to keep on top of business goals whilst information on performance from teams and their content is recorded/assessed via a myriad of different methods. As more communications staff take lead responsibility for major external platforms, and do so whilst potentially working remotely, practitioners need to be competent at managing time and priorities when face to face conversations to aid clarification might not be possible (M, education)*

But understanding strategy, means understanding business developments and trends and this is the third most important competence (50.86%) respondents identify.

## Business/managerial key competence for the future: Strategy (from development, implementation to evaluation)



PR2025 (Adi, 2019). Strategy (development, implementation and evaluation) is the core competence for PR/Comms professionals (n=37, Q21: Considering how work is evolving (flatter hierarchies, remote working, agile methods) what business/managerial (but not understood as managing communication teams but rather as running a business) competences should practitioners display?)

The focus on strategy confirms that respondents internalize the calls for excellence in public relations/communications and support the views of PR/Comms as a leadership and management function (see Grunig's work, the Communication Monitor series, the IABC, Global Alliance, IPR and AMEC's work among many). The responses also mark a slight shift from external stakeholders to internal one with teams (and empowering them) taking center stage (client relationship management for instance is considered relevant only by 42.75% of the participants). In this sense, the presence of transformational leadership (40.05%) (where the leader works with teams to identify not only the needed change but build together a common vision and pursue it) is also telling, showing that respondents acknowledge (although not fully agree) that this is an essential competence for PR/Comms success in a work environment where current rules might not apply anymore.

What is clear, is that respondents of PR2025 do not consider necessary for PR/Comms professionals to possess a more advanced knowledge and understanding of economics (14.5%) and even less so, a more advanced knowledge and understanding of business administration (12.04%).



# Moving Forward

# Moving forward: career progression and personal qualities

As PR2025 invited participants to consider the future of the profession, questions on how they envisaged career progression to take place as well as about the personal qualities practitioners needed to succeed in their career and development were necessary.

While the question about career progression is a direct criticism to all the currently available frameworks for maintaining the gradual, hierarchical, linear progression at their core, the question about personal qualities and attributes incorporates Macnamara's (2018) work which links them with core capabilities and behaviors. These include "commitment to learning; positivity/enthusiasm; emotional intelligence; adaptability and openness". In doing so, the current research and report does not dismiss their value of previous models and frameworks and their contribution, the aim here was to invite participants to imagine alternative development pathways.

## Career progression: matrix, diverse, international

Globalization and multiculturalism are clearly influencing the participants' responses. Although they deem that the hierarchical progression might remain, it is the focus on tasks and their increasing complexity that participants deem as the likely happen in the future (62.15%). International progressions are deemed likely (40.54%) and very likely (31.43%) and so are grid-like (or matrix-like progressions featuring many side options) (37.84% likely, 16.22% very likely).

*Progression to – more complex ,projects' not per se related to one company/employer. – more integrated work environments (combination of business-comms-psychology-technology). – expert fields outside 'communications'; but with all the comms competences still needed. – new fields of expertise: community managers, mediators, facilitators, software developers (integrating comms knowledge into the heart of software programmes and tools (and not only UI and UX) (M, research institute)*

*communications teams and consultancies should become more matrix and teal; more focus on collaboration; specializations will develop on one hand, but more managerial and leadership knowledge will be demanded from those who have ambitions to lead teams and manage projects. Project and process management will be different. PR professionals will have to become „more rounded“ and interdisciplinary professionals in order to achieve successful careers in strategic fields. Specialists will be reduced to executive roles, not strategic. (F, agency)*

	Very unlikely	Unlikely	Possible	Likely	Very likely	Mean
Haphazard (as before; with people likely to „fall into“ the profession, take it as a lateral opportunity or by interest in something new)	16.22%	24/32%	29.73%	21.62%	8.11%	2.81%
Hierarchical (as before, from junior to senior positions)	5.41%	18.92%	<b>37.84%</b>	<b>35.14%</b>	2.7%	3.11%
Grid-like (or matrix-like - with many side options rather than hierarchical advancement)	2.7%	5.41%	37.84%	<b>37.84%</b>	16.22%	3.59%
Incremental (from simpler to more complex tasks)	0%	2.7%	16.22%	<b>62.16%</b>	18.92%	3.97%
Independent (from in-house departments to consultancy functions)	5.41%	10.81%	27.03%	37.84%	18.92%	3.54%
International (from one country/region to another)	0%	10.81%	16.22%	<b>40.54%</b>	<b>31.43%</b>	3.95%
Integrated (from one specialism to another)	0%	13.51%	32.43%	32.43%	21.62%	3.62%
Broad (no specialisms)	16.22%	24.32%	35.14%	18.92%	5.41%	2.73%
Niche (specialism and special skillset focused)	5.41%	8.11%	<b>45.95%</b>	32.43%	8.11%	3.3%

PR2025 (Adi, A, 2019) The future career paths for PR/Comms are difficult to imagine with preference for incremental, grid-like and international outlooks (n=36, Q14. Considering how work is evolving (flatter hierarchies, remote working, agile methods) and the possibility of excluding incremental, hierarchical career development, how would you envisage the career progression of a PR/communication professional?)

While this not perhaps the ideal response, as the question of progression and how this can be quantified and linked with knowledge, skills and abilities, and ultimately responsibilities and remuneration is not answered, the responses indicate that for the future participants expect more fluidity and diversity in the marketplace. This, however, validates the premise of this study and its focus on investigating and identifying competences for the profession, as they would be a providing a benchmark for what practitioners and academics deem relevant. What this also brings into focus, is the responsibility of development (see the following “Solutions” sections).

# Personal qualities – curiosity at the core of PR/ Comms success in 2025

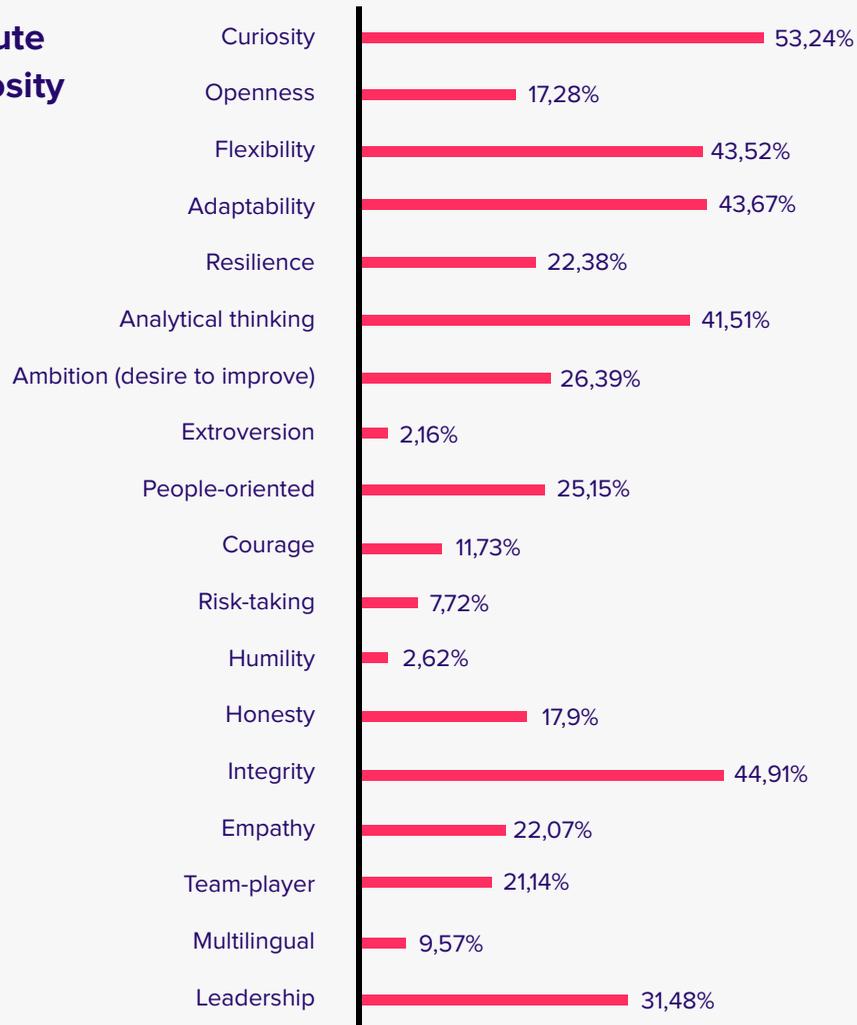
Personal qualities and attributes not only guide behavior (see Northouse, 2010) but are still included as a selection criterion in job descriptions. Macnamara (2018) includes “underpinning personal qualities” in his framework for government communication practitioners, linking them with core capabilities and behaviors. These include “commitment to learning; positivity/enthusiasm; emotional intelligence; adaptability and openness”.

*Ambition. Integrity. Curiosity. Openness. Flexibility. Involved leadership. ....and a slight touch of paranoia to motivate and address „outside treats“ (M, agency)*

*It is less important to have expertise in a given technical domain than the intellectual curiosity and adaptability to adopt new communication trends as they emerge. It is important to have a strong „people skills“ and capacity and affinity for teamwork. It is more of a challenge as teams are increasingly spread across geographies and remote working is common: it means that the personal connection and understanding needed for effective collaboration have to be maintained at a distance. Most of the other key personal qualities and attributes for communication practitioners are timeless and impervious to the changing technological landscape: integrity, rigor, discernment, diplomacy and discretion (M, NGO)*

Integrity (44.91%), adaptability (43.67%), flexibility (43.52%) and analytical thinking (41.51%) have been listed by PR2025 respondents among the personal attributes and qualities that practitioners should display, but it is curiosity (53.24%) that is considered and agreed upon to be the key needed to drive development.

## Key personal attribute for the future: Curiosity



PR2025 (Adi, 2019). Curiosity is the key quality communication practitioners need to be future-proof. (n=36, Q13: Considering the personal qualities and attributes identified earlier, please rank the top 5 that you believe are most important for communication practitioners to display).

# Solutions

# Solutions

**The future is decided today and that stands true for the development and progression of a profession. This is true for training institutions and universities, preparing the practitioners of tomorrow and helping upskill current practitioners. This also holds true for organizations and institutions who rely on the expertise and input of their professionals.**

However, there is little information about the type and amount of professional development offered to communication practitioners. In 2012, for instance, the ECOPSI study was signaling that PR practitioners overwhelmingly receive training in communication related areas instead of management, business or technology which they indicate they need (Tench et al, 2013). This has also been reflected into the earlier iterations of the European Communication Monitor and the Asia-Pacific Communication Monitor (Zerfass et al, 2016, Macnamara et al, 2017, 2016) where a big competencies gap has been reported: with practitioners demanding more technical and business skills and being offered in returned more communication and management training. In this sense, PR2025 asked participants to focus on the current and desired/future solutions recommended to address more specifically the technical and business/managerial competences identified.

## **Current solutions: from complacency to extensive, immersive, collaborative programs**

In the case of PR2025 respondents, the current solutions offered to address both technical and business/managerial competences cover a very large spectrum, from no solutions offered at all to comprehensive programs featuring in-house academies and external collaborations.

In the cases where no such solutions are offered or supported by the organization (about 10% of the cases for technology training and 6% for business training), it is the individual that is expected to identify, pursue and support their own development.

*To be honest, it doesn't do much at the moment. The responsibility falls on the individual (F, academia).*

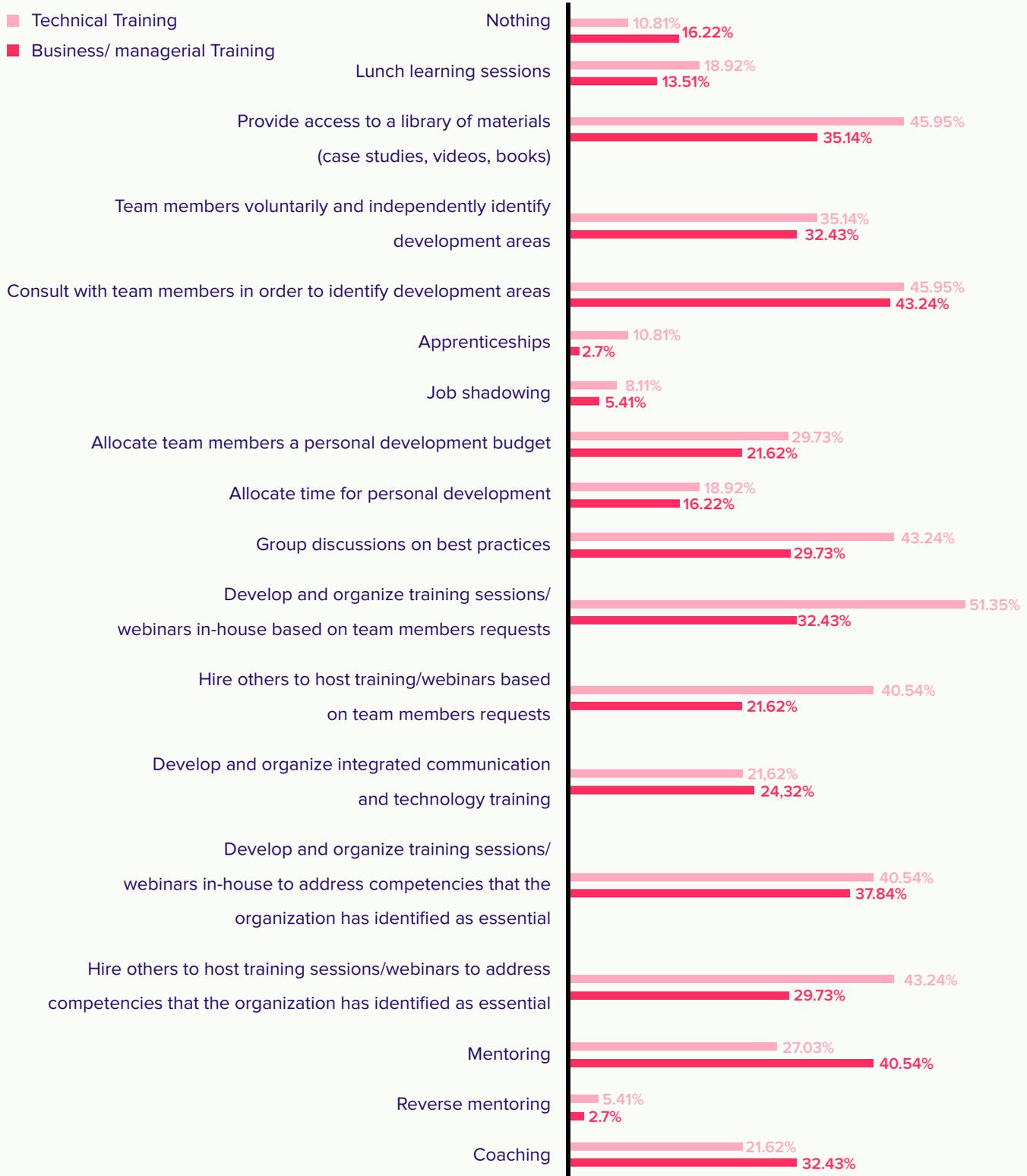
*Unfortunately: not much due to budget constraints and due to the fact, that communications is a niche discipline in the overall organization. Therefore, a lot depends on how much the individual PR practitioner/and his/her superior is pushing with this respect. (F, engineering/manufacturing)*

In the cases where training is supported, there is variety in how this is delivered: from internal workshops and consultations to hiring others and developing in-house academies to pursue and provide a mix of both. Especially when it comes to technology, it is the management mandate that seem to trigger the support and delivery of such programs.

*A very strong effort is put on digital transformation and pedagogy programs to support it by my company and its management. It goes up to the fact that our CEO started coding to understand how it works, and how new services / functionalities are developed. (M, banking)*

When it comes to technical training, the development and delivery of in-house training sessions/webinars based on team members requests is the most common solution (51.35%) followed by providing access to a library of materials for self-study (case studies, videos, books) (45.95%), consultation with team members to identify development areas (45.95%), and group discussions on best practices (43.24%). However, when it comes to business and managerial training, the variety of approaches is bigger, the most preferred option being the consultation with team members to identify development areas (43.24%).

## Personal development currently offered to PR2025 respondents



PR2025 (Adi, 2019) In house technical training and consultation with team members to identify business/management areas, are currently the most common offers (n=37, Q18 and Q23: What does your organization currently do to support practitioners acquire these competences?)

## Future solutions: development needs both time and budget

Considering future solutions, PR2025 respondents identify the need for a more structured approach to development, intensifying efforts where training takes place and enabling it where it doesn't happen. The key, they suggest, beyond tapping to the organization's strategic development needs and the individuals' motivation (and curiosity) is to allocate time and budgets for this to happen. Moreover, a mix is desirable, between internally and externally delivered programs, and between online resources and offline contacts (whether conferences, networking, mentoring, reverse mentoring).

*The networking between technologies and market requirements should be used more experimentally. More scope should be created for communication without neglecting the brand management and identity of the company (M, engineering)*

Additionally, creating a system through which learning acquired can be tested and implemented is essential some argue.

*We're not very good at following up with people after training or networking events to see how the new skills have been applied in practical situations. This also means it's difficult to get a handle on how well the overall competency health of the organisation is (how many communications professionals have we got that understand Twitter at an intermediate level for example). It would be good to track progress somehow and identify if there are any significant competency deficits around subjects which are an institutional priority (M, education)*

This, one participant suggests, could be addressed if training would be linked with performance, evaluation and career progression.

*Some training and some practices should be obligatory, specially concerning digital, collaborative and social medias. Their use by communication people should be one of the criteria in term of yearly evaluation. (LinkedIn profile, twitter account, etc). (M, banking)*

Compared to the training and development solutions offered, three new categories have been suggested: support research and degree education and thinking sessions.

*Look for mechanisms to connect practitioners with their counterparts in other countries. Enhance the knowledge base of practitioners through access to latest communication research. (F, academia)*

*To invest into education (F, financial industry)*

*The biggest challenge is always reserving more time for education. Today, the flexible organizations looking into the future have to assign a fair amount of time for educating their employees. (F, consultancy)*

The comparison of the currently offered solutions with the ones deemed desirable, shows dramatic changes. When it comes to technology training, respondents would prefer that more time (29.73%) and funding (21.62%) are allocated. Equally, participants suggest that training should respond more to business needs than team requests and be carried out by third parties rather than left in the duty of the teams or individual members. Speaking of business/managerial training and development, the trends are similar, but the differences are smaller. Here too, a better allocation of time (27.02%) and funding (16.22%) for personal development is desired with a preference for external training instead of in-house webinar and sessions being noticeable.

	Technical Training delivered	Technical Training delivered	Difference	Business/ managerial training delivered	Business/ managerial training future	Difference
Nothing	10.81%	8.11%	-2.70%	16.22%	8.11%	-8.11%
Lunch learning sessions	18.92%	8.11%	-10.81%	13.51%	8.11%	-5.40%
Thinking sessions		27.03%	27.03%		21.62%	21.62%
Provide access to a library of materials (case studies, videos, books)	45.95%	24.32%	-21.63%	35.14%	24.32%	-10.82%
Team members voluntarily and independently identify development areas	35.14%	21.62%	-13.52%	32.43%	24.32%	-8.11%
Consult with team members in order to identify development areas	45.95%	35.14%	-10.81%	43.24%	37.84%	-5.40%
Apprenticeships	10.81%	5.41%	-5.40%	2.70%	10.81%	8.11%
Job shadowing	8.11%	18.92%	10.81%	5.41%	18.92%	13.51%
Allocate team members a personal development budget	29.73%	51.35%	21.62%	21.62%	37.84%	16.22%
Allocate time for personal development	18.92%	48.65%	29.73%	16.22%	43.24%	27.02%
Group discussions on best practices	43.24%	27.03%	-16.21%	29.73%	40.54%	10.81%
Develop and organize training sessions/webinars in-house based on team members requests	51.35%	35.14%	-16.21%	32.43%	37.84%	5.41%
Hire others to host training/webinars based on team members requests	40.54%	35.14%	-5.40%	21.62%	40.54%	18.92%
Develop and organize integrated communication and technology/ business training	21.62%	35.14%	13.52%	24.32%	35.14%	10.82%
Develop and organize training sessions/webinars in-house to address competencies that the organization has identified as essential	40.54%	24.32%	-16.22%	37.84%	27.03%	-10.81%
Hire others to host training sessions/webinars to address competencies that the organization has identified as essential	43.24%	40.54%	-2.70%	29.73%	40.54%	10.81%
Mentoring	27.03%	29.73%	2.70%	40.54%	32.43%	-8.11%
Reverse mentoring	5.41%	10.81%	5.40%	2.70%	8.11%	5.41%
Coaching	21.62%	40.54%	18.92%	32.43%	37.84%	5.41%
Support degree education		37.84%	37.84%		35.15%	35.15%
Support research		40.54%	40.54%		32.43%	32.43%
All of the above	0%	8.11%	8.11%	0%	18.82%	18.82%

PR2025 (Adi, 2019) More time and resources for training, a preference for third party training and an increasing support for education and research guide the training recommendations for communicators in the future PR2025 (Adi, 2019) Future solutions for technical and business/managerial development should include a variety of formats but ensure that appropriate time and budget is allocated. (n=37; based on Q18 and Q23: What does your organization currently do to support practitioners acquire these competences? And Q19 and Q24: What should your organization do to better support practitioners acquire these competences?)

## Allocating responsibility: organizations to take care of business, universities of strategy, economics and big data and the individual of moral frameworks, platforms and devices

PR2025 has asked participants to identify the general, technical and business/managerial competences that would provide confidence and maintain relevance of the profession and its professionals in the mid-term. The previous sections of this report identified the top such competencies, with understanding business priorities being the general main competence, digital literacy as the main technical competence and strategy (development, implementation and evaluation) as the main business/managerial competence.

Since education and development is continuous, the questions of what organizations were doing and should be doing were insufficient, as they would have left respondents with the assumption that training and development is supposed to be business/organization led when in reality it is a continuous process involving a variety of actors. So, after having identified the competences for 2025, participants were asked once more to decide who should be main responsible party for the development and training of each competence identified.

The list is, at least in part surprising, as digital literacy is seen as a shared responsibility (between individuals, professional associations, training bodies, universities and organizations/employers), strategy is assigned to universities and the understanding of business priorities to business. While in part, this sustains the current model in which universities teach strategy in their various programs (from basic concepts to more complex ones depending on the program of study), assigning responsibility of explaining business priorities to organizations can be problematic. While it makes sense that a business would explain itself, its purpose, its mission and vision to its employees, including communication professionals (both internal or otherwise), this would also help perpetuate rather than reflect and question current business practices.

### Organization/Employer:

- Understand business priorities
- Use real-time data to plan and manage stakeholder interactions
- Involve employees and other functions on a network approach
- Act as facilitators of stakeholder ecosystems
- Inform management decisions based on knowledge of stakeholder expectations
- The ability to operate community software and tools
- The ability to implement agile working methods (including remote working)
- Client relationship management
- Transformational leadership
- Financial insight and practice (top and bottom line impact)
- A solid understanding of business developments and trends
- Empower teams (not only manage them as resources)

When it comes to business/managerial competences, the organization/employer is deemed responsible for the top 3 out of the 5 (including empowering teams and client relationship management), whereas when it comes to technical competences, it is the individuals that are deemed responsible for 3 of the top 5 (agile working methods, ability to operate across platforms).

#### **Individual:**

- Understand moral frameworks
- Be able to create, acquire, aggregate and create content appropriate for various platforms
- Be able to identify and respond to ethical challenges posed by new technologies
- Be able to work using agile methods
- Be able to operate across different communication disciplines
- Effectively communicate across a full range of platforms and technologies
- Moderation skills
- The ability to operate on a multitude of devices
- Entrepreneurship

Seeing the list, one can only assume that this group of respondents is highly demanding especially of individuals who they expect to navigate ethics on their own. The universities role is maintained as research, strategy, understanding of global trends, issues and threats, and of businesses beyond the bottom line remains within their remit however the demand to support and demystify coding and big data and help identify behavioral and social psychological insights and knowledge based on data brings pressure and renewed purpose. Professional associations/training bodies for these respondents are seen to fill niche areas: content management, project management, machine learning (all, arguably specialist fields).

#### **Universities:**

- Understand larger issues that are a threat to global society
- Be able to acquire, aggregate, and analyze data
- Be able to identify behavioral and social psychological insights and knowledge based on data
- Advanced data analysis knowledge (both qualitative and quantitative)
- An understanding of coding
- An understanding of big data
- Strategy (development, implementation and evaluation)
- Understand organizations sociologically (not only communicatively)
- Have a basic knowledge of economics
- A more advanced knowledge and understanding of economics
- A more advanced knowledge of business administration

**Professional training bodies/associations:**

- Understand the principles and mechanisms based on which technologies and platforms operate
- An understanding of content production (including video and advanced graphics, both online and offline)
- The ability to create data models for machine learning
- Project management

	Individual	Professional training bodies/ associations	Universities	Organization/ Employer
Have a basic knowledge of economics	31.58%	7.89%	42.11%	18.42%
Understand business priorities	13.16%	13.16%	2.63%	71.05%
Understand the media ecosystems that their audiences inhabit	26.32%	28.95%	26.32%	18.42%
Understand the principles and mechanisms based on which technologies and platforms operate	23.68%	34.21%	23.68%	18.42%
Understand larger issues that are a threat to global society	34.21%	18.42%	36.84%	10.53%
Understand moral frameworks	39.47%	13.16%	21.05%	26.32%
Be able to acquire, aggregate, and analyze data	18.42%	26.32%	31.58%	23.68%
Be able to create, acquire, aggregate and create content appropriate for various platforms	42.11%	28.95%	18.42%	10.53%
Be able to identify behavioral and social psychological insights and knowledge based on data	21.62%	29.73%	35.14%	13.51%
Be able to identify and respond to ethical challenges posed by new technologies	35.14%	29.73%	21.62%	13.51%
Be able to work using agile methods	43.24%	10.81%	10.81%	35.14%
Be able to operate across different communication disciplines	52.78%	13.89%	16.67%	16.67%
Use real-time data to plan and manage stakeholder interactions	27.03%	21.62%	8.11%	43.24%
Effectively communicate across a full range of platforms and technologies	43.24%	21.62%	13.51%	21.62%
Involve employees and other functions on a network approach	32.43%	2.70%	0%	64.86%
Act as facilitators of stakeholder ecosystems	37.84%	10.81%	8.11%	43.24%
Inform management decisions based on knowledge of stakeholder expectations	37.84%	5.41%	5.41%	51.35%

PR2025 (Adi, 2019) Organizations should focus on helping their employees understand business priorities, while universities should focus on economics and larger issues that are a threat to global society (n=36, Q11. Considering the competences identified earlier, please indicate whose main task/responsibility would be to ensure that they are acquired?)

### Organization/Employer:

- Understand business priorities
- Use real-time data to plan and manage stakeholder interactions
- Involve employees and other functions on a network approach
- Act as facilitators of stakeholder ecosystems
- Inform management decisions based on knowledge of stakeholder expectations
- The ability to operate community software and tools
- The ability to implement agile working methods (including remote working)
- Client relationship management
- Transformational leadership
- Financial insight and practice (top and bottom line impact)
- A solid understanding of business developments and trends
- Empower teams (not only manage them as resources)

### Individual:

- Understand moral frameworks
- Be able to create, acquire, aggregate and create content appropriate for various platforms
- Be able to identify and respond to ethical challenges posed by new technologies
- Be able to work using agile methods
- Be able to operate across different communication disciplines
- Effectively communicate across a full range of platforms and technologies
- Moderation skills
- The ability to operate on a multitude of devices
- Entrepreneurship

### Universities:

- Understand larger issues that are a threat to global society
- Be able to acquire, aggregate, and analyze data
- Be able to identify behavioral and social psychological insights and knowledge based on data
- Advanced data analysis knowledge (both qualitative and quantitative)
- An understanding of coding
- An understanding of big data
- Strategy (development, implementation and evaluation)
- Understand organizations sociologically (not only communicatively)
- Have a basic knowledge of economics
- A more advanced knowledge and understanding of economics
- A more advanced knowledge of business administration

### Professional training bodies/associations:

- Understand the principles and mechanisms based on which technologies and platforms operate
- An understanding of content production (including video and advanced graphics, both online and offline)
- The ability to create data models for machine learning
- Project management

	Individual	Professional training bodies/ associations	Universities	Organization / Employer
Advanced data analysis knowledge (both qualitative and quantitative)	2.78%	38.89%	<b>44.44%</b>	13.89%
Digital literacy	<b>33.33%</b>	<b>30.56%</b>	<b>30.56%</b>	5.56%
Moderation skills	<b>38.89%</b>	30.56%	11.11%	19.44%
An understanding of coding	5.56%	36.11%	<b>44.44%</b>	13.89%
An understanding of big data	8.33%	25%	<b>52.78%</b>	13.89%
An understanding of content production (including video and advanced graphics, both online and offline)	16.67%	<b>41.67%</b>	27.78%	13.89%
The ability to create data models for machine learning	8.33%	<b>41.67%</b>	27.78%	22.22%
The ability to operate on a multitude of devices	<b>63.89%</b>	13.89%	11.11%	11.11%
The ability to operate community software and tools	<b>33.33%</b>	25%	5.56%	<b>36.11%</b>
The ability to implement agile working methods (including remote working)	13.89%	5.56%	11.11%	<b>69.44%</b>

PR2025 (Adi, A., 2019) It is the individual's responsibility to learn how operate multiple devices and the organizations' to teach them agile working methods. (n=36, Q17: Considering the technical competences identified, please indicate who in your opinion should be the main actor responsible for helping practitioner acquire them?)

	Individual	Professional training bodies/ associations	Universities	Organization / Employer
Client relationship management	14.29%	14.29%	8.57%	<b>62.86%</b>
Strategy (development, implementation and evaluation)	8.57%	8.57%	<b>42.86%</b>	40%
Project management	17.14%	<b>34.29%</b>	28.57%	20%
Entrepreneurship	<b>34.29%</b>	20%	20%	25.71%
Transformational leadership	17.14%	28.57%	17.14%	<b>37.14%</b>
Financial insight and practice (top and bottom line impact)	8.57%	17.14%	31.43%	<b>42.86%</b>
Understand organizations sociologically (not only communicatively)	28.57%	14.29%	<b>51.43%</b>	5.71%
A more advanced knowledge and understanding of economics	17.14%	14.29%	<b>62.86%</b>	5.71%
A more advanced knowledge of business administration	8.57%	25.71%	<b>54.29%</b>	11.43%
A solid understanding of business developments and trends	22.86%	11.43%	25.71%	<b>40%</b>
Empower teams (not only manage them as resources)	17.14%	14.29%	11.43%	<b>57.14%</b>

PR2025 (Adi, A., 2019) Universities should teach basic economics and organizations should focus on client relationship management (n=36, Q22: Considering the business/managerial competences identified, please indicate who should be the main actor responsible for assisting practitioners to acquire them)

# Conclusions of an imagination exercise

# Conclusions of an imagination exercise: there's work to do but also some good news

PR2025 has aimed to complement current debates and research into the trends affecting PR/Comms and the skills, knowledge and abilities that would provide the profession the benchmarking criteria needed for consistent training and delivery worldwide. However, instead of focusing on the very long-term, PR2025 asked respondents to look the near future (so 2025) considering that current and up and coming practitioners will be addressing either effects of current trends or face challenges whose emergence can be already witnessed. In this sense, both current and future entrants into the profession would need guidance to navigate this “transitional” period.

As technology and business have been pointed out in previous studies as areas that PR/Comms practitioners wanted to improve. PR2025 asked respondents to consider competences in these specific areas. Moreover, as we are already witnessing the rise of alternative business models and philosophies (whether sharing economy, circular economy, public benefit corporations – see [Kickstarter's example](#)), PR2025 asked practitioners to consider competences and career progression in such work environments where flatter hierarchies, agility, mobility are in focus and not hierarchical or incremental progression.

For this reason, the sample had to be of practitioners and academics, as these two categories are involved in shaping and delivering what the profession is and thus are most likely to be confronted in reality with similar questions.

In a sense, PR2025 findings do not deviate from what previous studies have found either when it comes to trends (the focus on fragmentation, shifting values, digitalization), roles or competences but it makes apparent the paradoxes that come with the profession:

- PR/Comms aim to play a trusted advisor, facilitator role yet respondents consider that understanding business priorities should be a core competence. They assign the responsibility of ensuring this is understood to the organizations themselves (yet the challenge of navigating ethics or mastering various communication disciplines is left to the individual). If the business is telling practitioners what it means to do business, how is PR's contribution to the societal/common good and the stakeholder orientation going to be fulfilled?
- PR/Comms practitioners should adopt a stakeholder orientation (in line with the facilitator role). In doing so, they need to find a balance between calls for transparency (this also involves publishing, owning and managing a variety of channels) and information overload (and thus confusion and disengagement).
- PR/Comms practitioners declare loss of trust as the biggest and most worrisome trend. Gaining trust thus becomes central (trust in the profession, trust in professionals and the organizations/institutions groups they represent) and some of the mechanisms

to achieve that include establishing a closer relationship, communicate authentically and transparently. The side effects here are: segmentation and perpetuation of echo-chambers (so, contribution to a further deepening of differences and disconnect between various groups and in public debate) which in turn contribute to loss of trust.

- PR/Comms practitioners declare that they feel unprepared (see Global Communication Monitor, ECOPSI, CSRE studies) to tackle business and technology changes but when it comes to training they are overwhelmingly left to their own devices (with this being even more the case when it comes to business/management training).

Interestingly however, unlike recent studies focusing on AI (see CIPR, CSRE), it is digitalization as an overall phenomenon that respondents consider to be a more important trend to affect the profession in the near future. Considering that internet adoption and penetration as well as digital literacy, although growing, are very different from region to region (not only country to country), the focus on digitalization and digital literacy (digital ethics is also among the mix) as key competence is logical.

There is also good news ahead with strategy (development, implementation and measurement) being the core business/management competence. This reinforces the need and importance of research (prior, during and after) and confirms PR/Comms' positioning as a leading function within organizations and society. For educators and practitioners, this also means that the fundamental concepts and tools with which we've been working will remain relevant and in use in the mid-term: stakeholder analysis, cultural analysis, issues management and more.

Finally, there is work to be done. The gap between what organizations do to support their professionals develop and what respondents would deem desirable is at times big. A balance between time and budget allocated for development emerges as the winning combination however it is the variety of self, peer to peer and guided learning necessary (for those doing all that, is finding the right balance, for those doing less, it is certainly time to make an effort).

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# PR2025

**Trends, competences and solutions for the near  
future of PR/Communications**

Results of a Delphi method study

Prof. Dr. Ana Adi