



Media Release

Institute for Enterprise AI names the Communications Advisor as the 'Most Important Person in Enterprise AI' for Q3 2026

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As organisations move deeper into AI transformation, the Institute argues that the ability of enterprise leaders to read the room on AI sentiment, build trust and communicate with authenticity is more important to the AI transformation journey than the technology itself.

The Institute for Enterprise AI has named the Communications Advisor as its 'Most Important Person in Enterprise AI' for Q3 2026, reflecting the growing importance of trust and organisational sentiment towards AI as enterprises seek to transform with AI strategically, sustainably and humanely.

The designation reflects the critical role communications advisors can play in helping enterprise leaders 'read the room' on AI sentiment and build the clarity, calm, confidence and trust within the enterprise needed to progress effective AI transformation.

The Institute is not suggesting that communications can or should 'spin' AI. Rather, it argues that the ability of leaders to communicate authentically, acknowledge apprehensive, concerned or negative sentiment towards AI, and create the conditions for trust and confidence in the enterprise's approach to AI transformation is, at this point in time, critical to successful enterprise AI transformation.

Methodology

The Institute's designation draws on the methodology developed across John Harding's Hearts, Minds & Hands trilogy of enterprise AI transformation, which approaches AI transformation across three interconnected dimensions: the individual, the relationship between the individual and the enterprise, and the way AI transformation is actually deployed.

The methodology across the trilogy argues that strategic, sustainable and humane enterprise AI transformation requires strength and humanity, with clarity providing direction, calm helping organisations work through uncertainty, courage allowing leaders to confront what the transformation reveals, care recognising the human experience of change, and conviction sustaining the effort beyond implementation.

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The Communications Advisor vs the CEO and Executive Suite

Why is a communications advisor more important than a CEO CFO, CHRO, CIO, CTO or any member of the enterprise's executive suite?

The designation is deliberately provocative — and, the Institute argues, entirely defensible.

The CEO, CIO, Head of AI, Transformation Leader or Change Manager may appear to be more obvious choices. But right now, against a backdrop of significant public concern and negative sentiment towards AI, it is what the enterprise says to its employees — not only about what AI means for them, but about where the enterprise's values on AI sit — that can have an immediate and significant impact on AI transformation.

It is not an argument that the Communications Advisor carries greater authority or accountability for AI transformation than the CEO or other executives. Rather, it recognises that almost every major AI decision being considered around the executive table ultimately encounters the same critical variable: trust in AI and trust in how the enterprise will deploy and transform with AI.

The CEO may be balancing competitive urgency and enterprise risk; the CFO examining productivity, investment and return; the CIO and CTO assessing capability, infrastructure and technological opportunity; and the CHRO considering workforce capability and impact. The Communications Advisor sits across all of these perspectives, helping leadership understand how the collective decisions of the executive team will be heard and experienced by employees and other stakeholders.

Reading the room on AI Sentiment

The role of the Communications Advisor becomes particularly important because enterprise AI transformation is taking place within a wider environment of uncertainty, scepticism and legitimate concern about AI. The Communications Advisor cannot manufacture trust, nor should they attempt to 'sell' AI to employees.

Their value lies in helping leaders read the room before they try to change it: bringing employee and public sentiment into executive deliberation, identifying where words and actions may diverge, communicating honestly about what is known and unknown, and helping establish the values, authenticity and credibility against which future AI decisions will be judged.

In that sense, the Communications Advisor is not more important because they own the transformation; they are more important at this moment because they can help connect every part of it.

The growing importance of the Communications Advisor in enterprise AI should not be mistaken for an argument that organisations need better spin. In fact, it is the opposite. Senior leaders need to establish the values, authenticity and credibility of their AI transformation journey now, because there is little reason to assume that increasing AI capability, adoption or even demonstrable social benefit will automatically translate into increasing trust.

AI presents an unusual leadership challenge because progress itself does not necessarily resolve the concerns surrounding it. The more capable AI becomes, and the more deeply it enters our workplaces, institutions and private lives, the greater its potential benefits may become. Yet that same progression can intensify legitimate contemporary concerns about employment, identity, privacy, fakery, creative ownership, energy and resource consumption, inequality, control and human agency.

This is where the Communications Advisor becomes consequential. Their role is not to persuade employees that AI is good, suppress legitimate concern or manufacture enthusiasm for a predetermined transformation. It is to help leadership read the room accurately, understand what people are concerned about, communicate what is known and unknown with credibility, and ensure that organisational actions remain consistent with organisational words.

Ultimately, authenticity cannot be created by communications. It has to be created by leadership decisions and made visible through communication.

The Communications Advisor can help an enterprise tell a credible AI story, but leadership has to give them a credible story to tell.

The objective should be to create sufficient clarity, capability, agency and trust that employees can participate constructively in the organisation's AI transformation while retaining the right to hold legitimate concerns about AI.

Where Communications Fit's Into AI Transformation

Traditionally, communications has often been positioned downstream of strategy: leaders decide what is happening, and communications helps explain it.

The Institute argues that enterprise AI requires something different.

The role is considerably more sophisticated than telling people ‘what’s happening’, attempting to sell a predetermined position, or treating communication as a mechanism for ‘overcoming resistance’. This is what makes the Communications Advisor designation considerably more substantive.

The Communications Advisor should increasingly operate upstream, helping leaders understand the social and human context in which AI decisions will land before those decisions are made or communicated.

“The Communications Advisor should not be brought into the room to work out how to sell AI to the workforce. Rather, they should be in the room helping leaders understand how the decision will be experienced before it is made,” says John Harding.

This means helping leaders to:

- read the room on AI before assuming people are ready for change
- distinguish AI anxiety, uncertainty and concerns about relevance from simplistic notions of ‘resistance’
- understand where trust is strong, weak or being eroded
- communicate what is known without pretending to have certainty about what is not yet known
- connect AI transformation to the changing experience of work and human contribution
- ensure that leadership messages are supported by corresponding actions
- create the calm and confidence required for people to participate constructively in transformation.

“The role of the Communications Advisor in enterprise AI transformation is far more consequential than it has been in any other transformation to date,” says Harding.

“They need to help leaders understand the story that is already being told by their people, their customers and their communities.”

The Institute’s assessment comes at a time when enterprises are increasingly moving beyond isolated AI experiments and beginning to confront the broader implications of AI for jobs, capability, productivity, organisational structures and the employment relationship.

The Institute argues that this transition creates a communications challenge that cannot be solved through polished announcements, internal campaigns or AI-generated content alone.

A strategic, sustainable and humane approach to AI transformation requires enterprises to align their strategy, employee engagement, capability development and implementation, while allowing confidence and capability to develop rather than pursuing speed at the expense of stability.

For the Institute, this is ultimately why the Communications Advisor has been selected as its Q3 2026 Most Important Person in Enterprise AI.

“I want to be clear: it’s not about spin. Senior leaders need to plant the values that will underpin their enterprise’s approach to AI transformation and demonstrate those values with authenticity,” says Harding.

The Institute believes this is where the Communications Advisor’s role is changing.

The increasing importance of communications in enterprise AI transformation repositions the Communications Advisor from a role traditionally downstream in change and transformation to one that operates much closer to first principles — helping leadership shape the environment for transformation, rather than simply communicating it after the fact.

Whether an enterprise is already deep into AI transformation, just putting a toe in the water, has yet to move beyond AI embedded in applications such as Microsoft Copilot, or has yet to begin transforming with AI, the values and expectations it establishes now can shape the trust available to it later.

About the Institute for Enterprise AI

The Institute for Enterprise AI is an independent research platform examining the leadership, people and trust shaping enterprise AI transformation.

Its work explores the human and organisational dimensions of AI, including leadership, workforce relevance, trust, communication, capability and the conditions required for sustainable transformation.

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