AI is not Strategy

Regina Lewis Welcome to the inside. Straight and an inside straight is a hand with only four of the five cards needed to win. The missing card is what we're calling the gap. But we're not here to talk about poker. Instead, this site Inside Straight deals with all things branding and communications and the gaps that foil even the best laid plans. For example, a gap in brand alignment can cost ten percent of annual revenue. A core reputation sixty percent, a crisis triggered by a failed implementation, fifty percent of stock value over two years. Miscommunications leading to corporate inefficiencies up to eight figures. So who's minding the gap and who are we? We're a group of seasoned pros from various sectors who've banded together for this series of critical conversations on the hands that we've all been dealt. We're here to say the quiet parts out loud. In each game, we'll ask three critical questions to help close the gap. One. What's really going on here? Two. What assumptions were made? Three. What solutions would we recommend? I'm Regina, your host and moderator, and I will now hand over the cards to Carolyn to deal. She will introduce the suits and we'll ask the anchor question for this discussion.

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel Thanks, Regina. So as you guys know, there are four suits. So spades represents leadership, governance, accountability and decision making. There is hearts, which is a trust culture, psychology and human dynamics. For example, clubs, we have execution systems, implementation digital processes and finally diamonds which is budgets, Staffing, operational realities, resources and for days, today's discussion we're throwing in the Joker, which is everything. So that brings us to today's, uh, anchor question, which is, um, what happens when organizations automate communications before understanding themselves? Mmm. And that brings us into a lovely discussion around AI.

Russell Holley Our favourite.

Regina Lewis Yeah.

Russell Holley So we're obviously we're the primary suits for this are hearts, diamonds clubs. Yeah. And we're throwing in the.

Regina Lewis Joker just for fun.

Russell Holley So obviously diamonds. That's myself.

Regina Lewis Mhm.

Russell Holley Uh, that's and then hearts

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel is me, Carolyn.

Russell Holley Clubs.

Mark Evans That's me. Mark. That's execution.

Russell Holley And then the Joker. Right. Who's going to kick this one off?

Regina Lewis I'm spades. Regina. Spades. Right.

Russell Holley Yeah. Thanks, Regina.

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel So today we can think of the Joker is a free for all. Just throw it in.

Russell Holley Just throw it in.

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel Just go. Yeah, let's go for it.

Russell Holley All right.

Regina Lewis It's interesting in this this discussion it's going to be all of the cards except for, excuse me, all the suits except for spades. Okay. Sitting this one out. Mmm.

Russell Holley What's really going on? What is really going on with AI?

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel Well, I'll take a shot at it from a communication standpoint. Um. A lot of confusion because, uh, I said, and I'm being polite about it because, um, you're looking at organizations that are rushing to implement AI functions into the work and who's catching this? And I'll just be honest, who's catching as hell? Communications teams, communications teams are expected to actually implement, do the governance around AI actually use it for execution? And the crazy part about all of that, they already see what's wrong with it long before leadership does, and leadership in a lot of cases aren't listening to what they're telling them. And for me, the standpoint of what's wrong is around governance, not just in terms of how AI needs to work, but it's more around the governance and AI and relationship to how to protect that organization. You know what I mean? So it's privacy issues, it's protection issues. It's making sure you're not, um, sharing too much, uh, about your organization in the wrong ways, in the wrong hands. Um, it's also shortcutting to the point that you start to allow AI to take over your processes and it's not human led anymore. So garbage in, garbage out. So for me.

Russell Holley That's my favourite.

Regina Lewis one. Those are the, those are really the, the issues that I think that are there. And communications teams really see this. But the question is, is that when they're raising these alarms, is leadership actually listening to them?

Russell Holley Well, for me, with, you know, with the diamonds, it's it's about. AI does not replace investment in people or the training or sort of operational maturity. Um, and I gave the, when we were discussing earlier on, I sort of said, you know, when I was, it's not like, oh God, you know, here we go. You know, when I, when I was a lad, uh, it was, you know, when I first started learning about design, typography, what makes a good design from a visual perspective? It was a two piece of paper, you know, and my, my, my lecturers fill it in with typography. You learn the basics of what was good, um, and how to communicate. So you as an individual learned that. So there you are, you have an AI modeling, uh, let's not mention any actual platforms, but you can give it loads of references and it then churns out an advert for you. And the untrained individual will just post that out without any question, any clarification. And as you said, actually, uh, Carolyn, without sort of checking whether that's, uh, legally.

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel Legally.

Russell Holley Right, whatever that might be. Uh, and I, I see everybody turns around and says, oh, I, you can see that as they are generated, you know, the person's got five toes or six toes or seven, whatever it might be. Or actually you've got a, you can look a lot deeper and think, well, the messaging is there's too much going on.

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel It's syntax, all kinds of things.

Russell Holley So the narrative. So is it just because I at the moment isn't quite there yet? Well, that's one thing. But you can't take away the training of an individual that recognizes and they can validate something and say, let's change this. Let's change that as part of a process to deliver what the eye is going to be a great tool. Let's not, you know, but it, it has to have someone with expertise to be able to use it properly.

Mark Evans Yeah. I think this, this probably goes back to Regina's, uh, strong suit really in strategy. I think we got you got to start there. You got to look at alignment so I can chip in about, uh, obviously operation execution, but I want to sort of tail with that. But Regina, perhaps you've got a bit more of a perspective on, on, on that on your card.

Regina Lewis Yeah. You do. You do have to consider strategy. Where are you going? And, and what the objective with AI is and do a lot of the groundwork ahead of time, instead of just jumping in feet first to take a step back and ask the hard questions about how you want to use that from a communication standpoint. Um, also, I think you have to bring in ethics. Like where? Where is that line? One of the things that communicators have to be mindful of, somebody brought it up earlier, which is legal. You have to know where those boundaries are. You have to know who owns the IP. What's copyright infringement versus fair use. Where are all of these lines and where's where are the guardrails? And Carolyn brought up on governance and, and guardrails. And those things are critically important even before, you know, like you pour the proverbial cement because once it's set, it's set. You have to do all of that groundwork first. So it's the upfront, the diagnostic, the consideration. That's what I would look at before I engaged in AI. And then also make sure that

I had the capabilities, the talents and the know how in house. And if I didn't, I'd use that planning time to develop it, buy it, or, you know, um, bring it in somehow.

Russell Holley But do you think that organizations now are looking at it as the silver bullet, where they can see this technology coming down the road? And, um, obviously we're talking about communications. We're not talking about other industries. Um, and these organizations, obviously at the moment, budget is everything. There's a lack of money out there. So they're looking for sort of AI Wolf. If we just bring AI in, we, we can, you know, I'm talking about probably different levels throughout the communications, you know, uh, structure, I think in AI is going to be a godsend because it's going to replace, you know, copywriters, illustrators in, you know, every conceivable part of the creative process.

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel And that's where it goes wrong. I think it's not only that, but it's the pressure for speed. It's the pressure to scale. It's and it doesn't matter whether you are in a for profit environment or a non-profit environment. And in fact, I think nonprofit environments are probably the most endangered in moments like this, because while they may be looking for ways to cut costs and things like that, and maybe not necessarily replace people, but cut costs, and they inadvertently bring these things in and they're not actually set up correctly. And I think, um, there's another aspect about all of this and that is about, um, we talk a lot about what does good look like, you know what I mean? And that's literally where you have to start. And that is where that experience and judgment and ethics as, as um, Regina mentioned, all comes into play. You have to start from the place of where good looks like and build from there. Then you can actually, because I think really quickly, just to simply say, I think that AI can do a lot of good things, particularly around processes, particularly around planning, forecasting. Um, and yeah, research and I dare say, um, it can do some of the writing. It really can, but contextually speaking, it needs the right information in order to do that. And it needs a lot of information in order to do it well. But, but but it needs to human touch on the on the outside.

Russell Holley But I've heard this argument that if everybody starts using it, everything's going to be exactly the same.

Regina Lewis No, the only reason why that the prompts.

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel Yeah, exactly. And then I'm put in exactly. I'm going to I'm going to say something right there about prompts. I hate prompts and I'll tell you that right now, full on and and use it. I love using AI, but I don't use prompts. For me, it really does start to come down to how do you build a system that works for you that is contextual and conversational? Because when you're actually doing that, you're building with it and it's not building for you, you know what I mean? It keeps the human in at the lead. It keeps the human in the decision making role. Um, and you're able to actually bring in that judgment, bring in that experience and make sure those things actually stay aligned. If you start moving to prompts and simply only prompts, then this is how everything absolutely starts. Sounds the same every single time. And that's just my opinion.

Mark Evans Yeah. From a, from a production standpoint. And I sort of roll back on what you were saying about, you know, com some people in coms think it's a, you know, the goose that laid the golden egg or perhaps procurement or, you know, think, well, great, we're going to save money. We can get rid of staff. And there is that feeling, I think at the moment that speed and quantity overwrites quality, which is a real which is going to be the downfall of a lot of organizations. But I think that we've done a lot of research. We work with AI for, you know, half a year or so in, in the development team, we're using it to write code for us or, you know, and have been doing so for, you know, quite a while. And we use various tools and we've got a guy on, on the SEO team expert, and he used lots of different AI tools and platforms And we had a webinar the other day that we sat in, and we learned that how you write the questions, how you structure the questions, what types of brackets to use, what types of hyphens to put into your questions. So it's getting more and more technical as in, well, you need to know more. You need to know the questions to ask. You need how to ask the questions. You need to be technically very technically competent. That's right. You need to know what know what tool is best. ChatGPT is probably okay for one thing, or Claude might be better for others. We know it is, and it is also. On a lot of these three levels of of AI now the capability is becoming watered down. Yes. So you're having to you're being forced to, to pay for those models.

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel Absolutely.

Mark Evans And that's another issue. If I'm going to be paying which one do I choose. Which one do I choose? I can't just choose one. I've got to choose three or four or five.

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel Exactly. And where's my privacy? Where is my privacy best protected. And I'm going to say best protected. None of them are fully protected. Or where is it best protected or better protected. Right. So and that of course forces you to pay as well.

Russell Holley But what I'd like to try and maybe get cover in this is obviously because, you know, the diamonds is about investing in people training, uh, is how would we from our experiences, maybe, you know, you've got, you know, any type of communications, uh, person out there thinking, well, do I, do I just adopt it? So therefore, I'm, I'm important within my organization because I'm using AI. Well, what would we say to them? Because I always think to myself, you know, using the tool correctly as a support mechanism, but don't forget your core basics.

Mark Evans It just comes back to, you've got to look at it as a production and a research tool, which Carolyn said, and not forget that you've got to put good questions in. You've got to have a strategy. You've got to have an end goal. We're brand specialists and we're all we're all brand specialists. We all understand brand, we all love brand. And it's the one thing that's going to be subsumed by people just shooting from the hip with AI.

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel Mmm. Mmm. I agree with that one hundred percent. Oh. Are we okay?

Russell Holley Yeah, yeah.

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel Okay.

Russell Holley It's just an echo.

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel That's a bit of an echo.

Russell Holley Not to be cut out.

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel Okay. Um, I agree with what Mark is saying about that as well. And I think really what it starts to come down to is, like I said, I always ask questions like what's reality you're sitting in as a, as a person coming in and you're like, I need to adopt AI. And within my organization, what's the reality? You're sitting in reality for me is as a person, I need to deliver all of this work. I've got two people and there's an expectation I need to deliver all of this stuff by the end of the month. How am I going to do that? You know, there is a way in which AI can actually help me to structure that workflow and process. And I know what I got to get out. I know how it's got to go out. What's improvement you build in improvement, uh, on, um, um, you build in, um, how it needs to be approved internally, maybe externally you build in who has to sign off, you build in all of those things, you build the workflow, you know, so if you understand how to do those things, then you'll probably be okay. Identity. You know, who are you versus who you say you are? You know, that's a big part of where AI kind of comes in there. Can you actually take the work that you're working on and meld these things together so that you consistently communicate the way that you need to? We can come to you guys, for example, you help us build out a brand identity. You help us in terms of how do we communicate where things go awry inside of a lot of The organizations. Everybody is still communicating in their own way. They're no longer following style guides. They're no longer following anything. They're just turning on AI and just starting to do whatever. Yeah, part of my job is to make sure that everybody actually sings from the same hymn book, as you often say. Right. And AI can help you do that, you know.

Russell Holley Where do you think overreliance can creep in.

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel Over that kind of thing. You know, when you start using it to think for you, there lies a problem because it's easy.

Russell Holley But isn't it? You know, the essence of what people see AI is it's a tool. It's a tool to think for them, not to necessarily a lot of other computer, uh, applications are you? It's a tool for you to be creative through. Mhm. And I think that is a differentiation is that people aren't going to use AI to be creative through. They're going to use, they're going to use AI to create.

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel Yeah, for.

Mark Evans A really good point. Do you think that we need to reinterpret our understanding of AI and say, well, well, perhaps we should be looking at it as a creative tool?

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel Yeah.

Mark Evans How do we get it to be a creative tool? But you've still got to have that oversight. You've still got to have that experience. And as you say, that brand alignment, you know, what are we trying to achieve with this?

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel Mmm.

Russell Holley So it's going back to what I was saying is, is that are we going to be using or do people believe AI is a tool for a tool for them to be creative? Or is it going to be a tool that will create for them?

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel I think right now a lot of people are using it to create for them. That's why you see so much sameness, right? People think about it before people suddenly now write blog posts and never wrote blog posts before. People start putting out information and never put out before. And then it's like, hey, it could do it for me. You know, that's the problem with it. But if it works through you, that's something very different. That is like another, you know, tool or, or, or, or even, I dare say almost a person sitting in on your team as well, you know, that you are actually collaborating with along with the rest of your team, if you use it correctly.

Russell Holley But do you see this, this as the, the, the, the, the vision in a few years, not even a few years that you're, you're walk into a comms team and you'll go, this is, you know, John, Jake, Jennifer. Uh, and these are all our, our AI agent team.

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel Mmm.

Russell Holley Uh, and then you think, right. Okay. Um, and where are the, where are, where's the rest of where's.

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel Well, that brings me up to a really funny one that I read the other day where I forget what, what, what, what, uh, outlet posted this, but they talked about the possibility of having an AI generated spokesperson for a company. So there's an AI agent that is there that's going to give this press conference. And I said, so what are we going to do now? Have agents as reporters show up and then they go back and forth. What are we doing exactly here?

Regina Lewis Conference. If you have an AI, you can just send them distribute information. There's no point in having a press.

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel Exactly. So what kind of foolishness is this, you know, that we're talking about?

Regina Lewis Also before we move on, I do want to go back to Carolyn's earlier point about whether it would replace people and people using to do their work, their work. It does come down to the skill of the person pressing the proverbial buttons, because if that person person skill, they're going, they're going to AI as an AI, you know, to augment their work, help them think differently, expand their horizons. They're not going to get them to do the homework for them, so to speak. If the person does not have the skill level, level to the role and the demands of the role. Yeah, they might do that. Do that. But what you lose is the ability to judge the output. If you don't have the skills, knowledge and experience.

Russell Holley You bolted the other two things on you having. Yeah. Having the skills to use the tool. But for me, it's, it's, it's having the skills to use at all. But having the knowledge of evaluating what comes out as a, a viable product, you know, is this hitting the mark? If you, if you don't have that last bit, then the first bit is pointless. So for me, it's a sort of like, it's, it's symbiotic. You must make sure that the two are working in tandem.

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel And there's another part of that. There was a recent study that came out that says, does AI usage actually increase or decrease your work? and in fact, it increases your worth so tremendously. You know, primarily not because of the double checking. It has to do more with the fact that you feel that you could actually do more. If you're using it correctly, you will in fact, expand where you want to go and you keep going. You don't stop with the result that that you actually begin to work on. You actually

expand and go further. So you actually do way more work than you probably set out to do because you're like, okay, I found the answer to that. What about this?

Russell Holley Because the thing is, if you were listening to that point that you made there externally and think they're all against, I, I, well, I don't think any of us are at all. I actually see AI as an incredibly powerful, supportive tool to a communications company. I really do some of the things that we've been looking at over the last six to twelve months is just like, wow, okay. Just as I said before, just like Photoshop coming out or InDesign or, or, or a tool that accelerates and helps you. Yeah. Yeah. Well, not gonna say word words. That's. That's our Achilles heel. Horrible. Um, but.

Regina Lewis This is the point where we do need to make sure one that we've answered the questions set up in the beginning. Carolyn, would you mind repeating the question? And then we'll go around the room where each of the suits will identify their suit and give final remarks. And with those final remarks. Some recommendations for our listeners.

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel Sure. So the anchor question once again, is what happens when organizations automate communications before understanding themselves?

Russell Holley Well, I, I interpret that as when, when it comes to, you know, using AI, when they're automating things before understanding themselves. I'm looking at that is that they've, they're, they're using a tool when they don't understand what the tool is capable of or what the end product will be and don't. And make sure that doesn't replace the skill sets that can evaluate that. Um, have an expert in the field use it to enhance and improve and provide a different outcome, a different option that would be that a human being would generate and then evaluate them, uh, or integrate them. Um, so that's how I see it.

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel Uh, I'll just quickly jump in for hearts and just simply say that, uh, you risk misalignment, real misalignment. Because what you're doing is, is that you're introducing AI on top of something that's already messy. So it'll just accelerate that messiness, you know, as you go forward. So what you really need to do is to make sure that you keep, um, the AI work that you do, it works with you, not for you. Um, that human, uh, it's human led.

Russell Holley Human led foot mess in. You get mess out.

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel Yeah. It accelerates. Yeah. It not only does error because. Yeah, it gets messier.

Regina Lewis Compound effect.

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel Yeah.

Regina Lewis No kicks in and gets messy.

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel Yeah. It gets messier, messiest, you know, because it just accelerates the messy, messier faster, you know. So that's what you get messy cube. Yeah. So exactly. So, but I'm just going to say really quickly is about it is about being human led. It is about letting it work with you and not for you. And it is about judgment and, and using your emotional intelligence. I think emotional intelligence has is most important now than ever. And one last thing. I think we mostly as Gen X people, we sit as something that is really, really valuable because we have seen every major evolution of technology in the workplace. We've gone from analog to digital to platform to now this. We've worked in all of them. And that is a very small group of people. But sometimes it feels like we're getting pushed out the door a lot. But actually, looking back, they're going to realize they need us more now than ever because we actually connect what you were talking about, being able to do it because you learned the skill raw to where we want to go with training and building these systems.

Russell Holley And we found a fax machine in one of our cupboards for the day. And one of the staff turned around and went.

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel What is that? They still exist.

Regina Lewis They still exist. Yeah. Mark, let's hear from you. And then I'll close out with spades.

Mark Evans I always find it really interesting. You get forms from procurement, and they're still asking you for your fax number. What's the thing is hilarious. But anyway, so from clubs, from an operations execution and

build standpoint, I would say that it's a, it's a great as a research and a production tool. Um, but yeah, please don't forget that it's a skill that has to be learned. Like Photoshop, you can't just dive in. You need training. You need to understand it. You need to know its strengths and weaknesses. And it's probably going to be like, well, I remember when everything was computerized and you were using. So it was quark then. Now it's InDesign and Photoshop and Illustrator, and everybody's going, okay, we don't need a retoucher anymore. We don't need an illustrator anymore. The design is going to do everything the designer is going to do. DTP design is going to illustrate and design is going to photography. And then they did that for a while. But unfortunately or fortunately, people understood the capability, started to understand the capabilities of Photoshop, and then realized that actually to understand the full capabilities, Photoshop. And now also you've got other things like, you know, the animation programs that you can use in Adobe, you need to be a specialist. And that is, and we've got an SEO specialist in the team now, and we had one for three or four years now. And it is one of the best things we've ever done. And that's going to happen with AI. There's going to be people in your comms team that are going to need to be an eye specialist. Going to be a proper job. And I think that we're going on from what Carolyn has said, governance, governance, governance. Sooner people will understand that the better. But yeah, get up to speed. Train people. But it's a skill. It's a very it's going to get a whole lot messier, a lot more complicated. And you're going to need to employ people at the right level with the right skills. Come people coming out of college that have got AI degrees in a few years. You want them in your team.

Regina Lewis It's like a comms degree. Yeah, I agree with you, Mark. And that's a great, um, great summary of things that are needed. Um, and talking about older technologies, I don't think that AI is the problem per se. I think the biggest crime in technology was desktop publishing because it made they could design and write. I think that's a crime we've not overcome. But um. but in all seriousness, I would say this one is you can't overcome, um, bad with good AI for good, cannot overcome bad if there's a, you have to lay a proper foundation. That foundation is crack. Everything above it is rubbish to use your terminology. Um, you also have to have a strategy and long term thinking about how you're going to use this technology where within the organization, how those things sync up, what kind of knowledge and training which has already been mentioned is used where it's needed, who you're bringing into the organization, and you really need people that know how to think. Um, when I was in university and looking at a communications career, um, what the books back then were recommended were people with history or degrees like that, because they need people that know how to think and know how to research. I don't think that ever goes away. You need thinkers and you can't have doers without thinkers. And the last thing is you have to leave with legal and ethics and have those guardrails in place and then detailed down to the degree on how you're going to use this technology in whose hands it's going to be. And in some cases, who's the player, but who is the absolute authority on this? Because somebody has to say, no, somebody has to draw the line. And a lot of times those ugly, dirty jobs go to cons. If that's the case, then that's the case because coms is usually the last bastion before things go outside the organization. So That's my ten cents. Fifty cents. Any further closing thoughts? We have a couple of minutes here.

Carolyn Davenport-Moncel One really quick one. And that is that once again, just like as we've been into the digital age, there are jobs and there are positions that aren't even developed yet. Yeah. You know, and that is a place for a lot of people to fit. And that's why that experience and judgment is going to matter.

Regina Lewis Experience experience experience skills. Well thank you. This has been a rousing hand of poker. So thank you.

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