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I recently read on LinkedIn a practitioner's post about one man submitting a job application outlining 'googling' as one of his key skills. Not content search, content generation, big data or anything one would normally expect in a corporate language, but plain 'googling' explaining he knows how to use Google to find information quickly. As it turned out, a myriad of practitioners' comments ensued arguing that no matter how obvious this sounds, the skill is not something all people/employees have and in fact, it is a rare skill to be a very efficient person in using Google to find information. This presents one recent illustration of a semi-public debate about digital skills and their usefulness; however, the issue is much wider than that. Therefore, whilst this special issue, 'Digitalization of Corporate Communications: A Multi-Stakeholder Approach' guest-edited by Luis M. Romero-Rodríguez and Bárbara Castillo-Abdul from Rey Juan Carlos University, Madrid, Spain, was approved long before this LinkedIn debate, the fact it happened and that it instigated so much debate, and frustration among practitioners, shows the relevance of talking digital in corporate communications. And digital scholarship is on the rise too as Tatiana Hidalgo-Marí, Jesús Segarra-Saavedra and Javier Herrero-Gutiérrez show in their literature review of the corporate communications field, published in this special issue, arguing that corporate communications are usually understood within disciplines such as public relations, advertising or communications generally but with a heavy focus also on communications management and crisis management as well as a communications strategy. However, the works on digital communications, including the role of the Internet and social networks, particularly Facebook are growing particularly in the domain of case studies, thus authors arguing corporate communications migrating also to the area of digital communications, which means getting closer to publics and media consumed by them.

Digitalisation is not the same as digital transformation though. Whilst on one hand digital communications are overly present in our lives and we spend ever more time communicating digitally, this does not mean we have transformed our lives to digital entirely. In a survey of corporate directors and CEOs conducted in 2019, these executives expressed a view that digital transformation is their most relevant concern, however, data also showed that 70% of all digital transformation initiatives fail to reach their goal and thus approximately $900bn of investment goes to waste (Tabrizi et al, 2019). One of the main reasons for the failure of the digital

transformation is the lack of strategy as well as the human factor with the common advice for succeeding in the digital transformation being to design a business strategy taking into consideration digital transformation, taking consumer insight into consideration if the digital transformation is to improve consumer satisfaction and intimacy, and this can be done with extensive consumer research to understand their needs and priorities and thus also how to build relationships with them. What is more, employees can be an obstacle towards a digital transformation if they perceive it as something that could threaten their jobs, thus they can resist the change. However, if employees are included in the process and consulted on how they could adapt to new circumstances, then they might upskill and come on board, which can make the transition smoother. This requires talking to employees and conducting research on what matters to people (ibid), or as I have argued in my last editorial (Topić, 2023), we need to listen to one another and show understanding and most of all, remain human.

Digital technologies contribute towards the dehumanisation of the world due to their disruptive character, with most disruptive technologies being social, mobile, analytics, cloud and internet of things technologies (Sebastian et al, 2017, Vial, 2019, Kensbock and Stockmann, 2021). Technology transforms the way we "think, interact and progress" (Jagadesh Kumar, 2013, p. 3) and it enhanced our capabilities regarding what we can do now as opposed to a few decades ago. Whilst technology has progressed, many individuals and businesses are yet to adapt and some businesses get surpassed by innovative digital ventures (Verhoef et al, 2019), however, many studies continue to show the effect digital transformation has on employees. This is related to new job demands and work routines that employees are facing, thus employee willingness to adapt is seen as central to the success of the digital transformation (Oreg et al, 2011, Shoss, 2017, Van Knippenberg et al, 2015, Yoo et al, 2012). In a study by Kensbock and Stockmann (2021), the authors looked at innovation and digital transformation from an employee perspective examining employees' ability to learn new technologies and work routines as well as their willingness to raise concerns and offer ideas and suggestions. The findings showed that digitalisation forces employees to be innovative, which then must include employees feeling it is safe to propose new ideas, and suggestions and actively support innovation but the success of digital transformation depends on employees' willingness to learn and voice concerns and propose ideas. Authors argued that employees show intrinsic motivation to learn and develop new skills and competencies and this then increases the opportunity for them to show the so-called voice behaviour to improve things in their organisation. However, the study also showed that employees are only willing to do this when

they perceive low surveillance. If employees perceive high levels of surveillance, they are less likely to engage with an intrinsic learning orientation and engage in making suggestions that could support the organisation (ibid).

During the recent pandemic, there was indeed a move towards upskilling as we all found ourselves suddenly working from home (or in forced digitization as argued by guest editors in their guest editorial) and managing our workloads and relationships online whilst economies accelerated towards digital economies (Schwab and Zahidi, 2020). However, the human element remains visible in debates covered in this issue both in terms of organisational approaches as well as employee concerns and that it is possible to successfully change organisational business if employees feel included and supported. Therefore, in this issue, Paloma Díaz-Soloaga and Aurora Díaz-Soloaga explored telecommuting during COVID-19 lockdown by employees in Spain and Kazakhstan arguing that people need certainty and the best way to provide them with that is technical and emotional support, thus during a health crisis, employees expected their bosses to be assertive, driven, attentive and encouraging. Employees also reported devoting more hours to telecommuting at home and feeling that their jobs are invading their private lives, however, they were able to handle it due to procedures, rules and methods set in place by leaders to avoid uncertainty. Employees also praised the consistency of their leaders in providing certainty but also said they invented new practices to cope with the situation which also made them more positive about their work and less likely to complain, as well as trying harder in building relationships with their team members, which is arguably harder in a digital environment than in the traditional office culture linked to physical facilities such as offices, bureaus, departments, factories etc (Groves, 2010). In addition to this topic for this issue, Lucía Pérez-Pérez, Inmaculada Berlanga and Juan Salvador Victoria explain another model of working with people online and supporting them. The authors researched the internal communication of Spanish IKEA using a humanistic model. In that, authors argue that the recent pandemic has enhanced prosocial management and that IKEA's mission during the pandemic has been focused on confirming its vision and values, which has been the case before, but what the pandemic has added is the focus on older consumers as a risk group, being in the pandemic together and leading by example. But this was accompanied by being accessible as possible online which contributed towards building online communities by focusing on people and their needs in a time of crisis. What these two papers show is that organisations can only achieve good outcomes if they show care for people, be they employees or consumers because ultimately, society still consists of humans and thus, working with and

for humans, can increase motivation, and retention as well as build better relationships. In addition to that, for this issue, Rafael Ravina-Ripoll, Esthela Galvan-Vela, Deisy Milena Sorzano-Rodríguez and Missael Ruíz-Corrales also analysed how internal communication impacts happiness at work and intrapreneurship through the dimension of communication climate and communication in meetings and how the happiness-intrapreneurship constructs are related. The results suggest that the internal communication and intrapreneurship variables influence people's happiness during job performance, thus corporate governance models should include strategies for fostering a culture of happiness management. Authors argue that managers of companies in the post-COVID-19 era need to cultivate an organisational culture based on happiness management, which then includes strategic innovation and internal communications actions, which will furthermore allow for building loyalty among creative talent. This can be achieved by strategically encouraging interpersonal relationships, teamwork, collaboration and disruptive thinking. These practices, accompanied by ethical, assertive and empathetic leadership styles as well as implementing constructive, friendly and positive inter-organisational language can create a commitment, trust and passion for working for a certain organisation (Men & Yue, 2019, Jimenez-Marin et al, 2021). At the same time, and also in this issue, Gerrit Adrian Boehncke's paper argued that corporate social responsibility (CSR) has a high potential for recruiting talent including on social media and using digital channels. According to the current literature, companies only know about general CSR relevance for employees and applicants and thus, no attention-optimised CSR communication takes place whilst there is, concurrently, an ongoing battle for talent acquisition leading to undifferentiated communication formats such as social media ads, SEO strategies and head-hunter hiring. The author argues that "the less precisely the communicative needs of these digitally communicating high potentials are addressed, the higher the budgets needed to increase the reach of the measures. The result is ultimately increased media spending due to communication scatter losses". In a literature review, the author argues that talent acquisition linked to CSR is an unexplored issue particularly respective to recruiting future leaders. Therefore, as with a previous issue where some papers showed that companies that listen do better (Kim, 2023), equally, listening to consumers and what matters to them leads to better talent recruitment. However, Jana Brockhaus, Alexander Buhmann and Ansgar Zerfass studied the digitalization of corporate communications and the emergence of communication technology, CommTech and argued that despite the increase of digitalisation in corporate communications, not all communications departments and agencies are digitally mature, thus calling for a more strategic approach, thus paper in this issue going in line with other literature

showing that companies still did not adapt to digital transformation (Verhoef et al, 2019). Brockhaus and co-authors derived this view from a survey of practitioners who expressed dissatisfaction with the level of digital immaturity of communications departments and agencies with the necessity for digitalisation being understood but strategic approaches often missing. Thus, digital communications remain intuitively managed rather than strategically planned. Authors argue that strategies for technology, tasks, structure and people foster digital maturity and communications practitioners should start developing a holistic strategic approach when heading towards the digitalisation of communications to ensure digital transformation.

However, apart from the above-mentioned papers that outline digital processes and how digitalisation works or does not work, papers in this issue also show that digital communications are pervasive in corporate communications with an increased digital branding and advertising practice, as well as raising issues and concerns about privacy. In a paper on environmental digital communication on YouTube, Araceli Castelló-Martínez writes about the content posted by Spanish automotive sector brands on YouTube looking and branded content, insights and environmental commitment. In that, the author argues that the automotive industry focuses on communicating product features and advantages with environmental commitment is less common in the discourse and as a creative concept but serves as a supporting narrative linked to cars and their features. The environmental narrative is rarely used as a brand commitment in response to consumer concerns or the changes the sector is going through but it is linked to vehicle features and corporate values. However, when environmental messages are concerned, they are often linked to electric or hybrid vehicles rather than gasoline/diesel cars thus, companies communicate product features and advertise gasoline/diesel cars but without linking them with environmentalism, which would likely create a backlash, thus environmental discourse remaining with electric and hybrid cars.

Another important issue is trust particularly respective of the vast amount of data we leave online about ourselves, our habits and our behaviour, values, opinions, etc. We know from Snowden's leaks that there is a mountain of data being collected about any one of us and that, at any time, large digital companies who collect it can release it and most of us are not aware of it (Dencik and Cable, 2017). The issues with privacy respective to digital transformation are also covered in this issue where Estela Núnez-Barriopedro, Pedro Cuesta-Valiño and Sara Mansori-Amar examined the relationship between the usefulness and privacy of online ads to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of campaigns through the use of computation and big

data, in the context of programmatic advertising. As argued by authors, programmatic buying is a part of advertising that is gaining more and more followers and popularity among advertisers because these campaigns have the potential to better target audiences. However, the privacy of users remains a concern due to the use of cookies. The authors offer a model to analyse the relationship between users' perceptions of online ads and their concerns about privacy and the collection of their data through cookies and the level of usage. According to the authors, companies must prepare themselves to face the exponential growth of programmatic advertising and reduce the negative perception of users respective of personal data use by demonstrating "the positive aspects of Internet advertising (personalised ads, better offers based on user's interests, non-invasive nature of the same, transparency in relation to data processing and treatment, etc.). The concern with privacy is fundamentally a concern of the lack of trust and this is also visible in social relationships that are developing due to digitalisation. Therefore, Elena Borau-Boira, Ana Pérez-Escoda and Cristina Ruiz-Poveda Vera analyse the challenges of digital advertising looking particularly at the influencer phenomenon and parasocial relationships between influencers and their followers, including inter-generational (Generation Z and X) perceptions of influencers. Influencers are perceived as social agents and for Generation Z the strength of an influencer is linked to their communication skills, interaction with followers and enthusiasm with credibility and inspiration being also an important traits for the success of an influencer. However, followers from this generation are also aware of influencers having an agenda and potentially being opportunistic, deceitful, controversial and manipulative and that sometimes influencers contribute towards stereotypes. Generation X, on the other hand, also look at influencers' communication skills but care more about the dynamism of posts and influencers' leadership skills with credibility and charisma also featuring as relevant for a social role of an influencer. This generation also considers that some influencers are opportunistic, deceitful, controversial and manipulative but see professionalism as something that generates more engagement. Whilst this study used a small sample, results generated interesting categories for further research and open an interesting question, is trust different online than face-to-face? Is digital communication impeding our ability to estimate who is a trustworthy person?

Finally, and certainly not less important, Israel Doncel-Martín, Daniel Catalan-Matamoros and Carlos Elías warn us of the damage social media communication can cause by analysing the presence of hate speech in society, particularly looking at social media. The authors call for public-private collaboration to reduce social media hatred to build bridges between people, and

they emphasise the need for social media companies in inserting the reduction of social media hatred in their CSR policies.

As we can see from this special issue, digital transformation indeed must be looked at from a multi-stakeholder perspective. But what is central – and this is clear from all articles – is that digital transformation needs a human touch. On one side, digital transformation needs to work for humans, thus not being introduced in a way that replaces them and steals jobs away from them, which is indeed the main concern and has been for decades (Jagadesh Kumar, 2013) nor should it be used for the purpose of controlling or dominating, such as surveillance or environmental damage repairs instead of changing our behaviour (and abandoning the masculine domination of the planet via technology) (Cross, 2018, Topić, 2021). Digital transformation raises issues with privacy and surveillance; we already live in a Big Brother society, and it is legitimate to ask whether we need more surveillance and data sharing? There are some who are questioning democracy in so much power being handed over to digital communications and big tech companies arguing we are trading-off public safety for privacy and calling for a democratic debate about digitalisation and how digital transformation should work (Aschoff, 2020). Aschoff (2020) argued that when COVID-19 has driven us indoors, we all automatically reached out for our phones and downloaded millions of apps and we started to work and study digitally, thus showing how pervasive digital communication has become, re-opening the debate on surveillance globally started by Snowden leaks.

However, digital communications bring some opportunities as well. As argued by Bajer (2017), for too long humans have done jobs that they were not necessarily good at for the sake of keeping economies going, keeping everyone busy and raising productivity. This favoured "market dynamics over human unique abilities and preferences" (p. 91). Therefore, digital transformation could work for humans if they would meet their full potential and be able to do what they are good at, as well as choose how they work. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has revealed that a large part of the human population prefers to work from home and there is a rise of digital nomads who do work remotely (Ozimek, 2021). This contributes to the happiness and wellbeing of humans and if we are to remain a human society, the world of work needs to change. And so does corporate communications, where organisations need to design strategies for digital transformation taking into consideration concerns of their employees, job security and employee wellbeing and happiness, and then communicate these strategies in a way that reassures employees. Digital transformation is about people, not technology because people

have the ability to adapt, learn new skills and future-proof their own and others' potential (Frankiewicz and Chamorro-Premuzic, 2020) and if used unwisely, not only digital forces could harm humans but this would also harm organisations because transferring "employment relationships into an emotionless market transaction" (Westerman, 2016, p. 1) means people working on too many different gigs, precarious contracts, contributing negatively towards their quality of life and wellbeing, but this would eventually harm organisations as detached employees are not engaged employees nor they have any sense of loyalty to their organisations. Corporate Communications have a key role in managing digital transformation as well as fostering a sense of community and belonging and creating an environment where everyone matters and everyone's voice is heard. Some of the highest-performing companies also have issues with employee retention and many workers also work elsewhere and leave when a new opportunity comes (Westerman, 2016), therefore, organisations need to continue to support employees because "paying people only for time spent on task reduces opportunities to foster innovation and employee cohesiveness" (ibid, p. 1) and corporate communications need to find ways to build relationships and communicate that each organisation is more than just a transactional relationship. Or, a digital transformation needs humans, soft skills and it needs a heart.

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