



# COMMUNICATION THAT MATTERS REPORT

Building Brand Belonging

**Sefiani**  
Part of the Clarity Global Group



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# 01 INTRODUCTION

In a world plagued by crises and rapid change, businesses and their leaders face a new imperative: to truly understand and respond to the needs of the Australian community. As expectations soar, the demand for tangible impact across issues like climate change, social impact, diversity and inclusion, ethical supply chains, recognition of First Nations people and good corporate governance grows louder. Alongside this, the importance of upholding business integrity cannot be ignored.

Enter the realm of responsible businesses—the true change-makers. These visionary companies not only make measurable strides in addressing societal challenges but also foster a profound sense of belonging both within and beyond their organisations. They emerge as catalysts for social transformation, infusing their brand with purpose and earning the unwavering trust and loyalty of consumers, employees, shareholders, government entities, suppliers, and the community at large.

This is the magic of brand belonging—an undeniable connection that unites people with an organisation, its products, services, and its people, establishing an unbreakable bond.

## What is a responsible business?

According to the Organisation for Responsible Businesses;



**A responsible business operates efficiently and ethically, meets and exceeds legislation and always considers its impact on people (the workforce, the community and society at large) and the environment.**

Truly responsible businesses embed their social responsibility values into every aspect of operating their business. This means even seed-stage startups should be building these values into their upfront business plans.

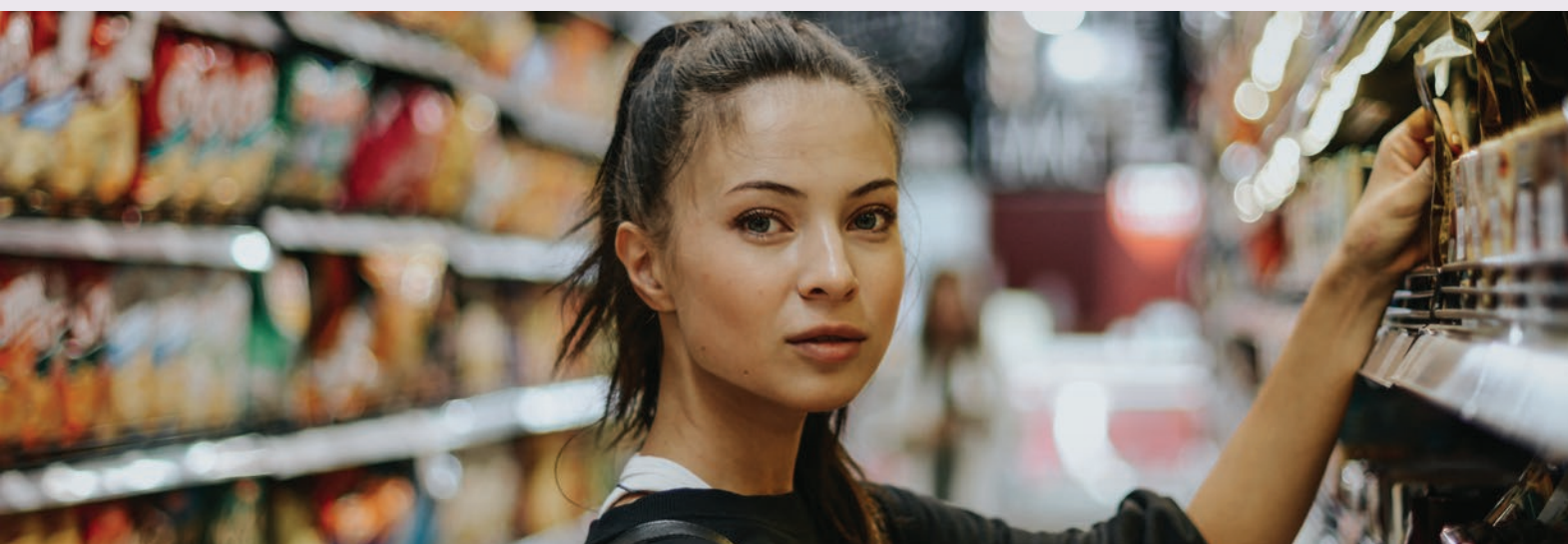
The elements touched by responsible business practices include: employees (ensuring staff are trained, engaged and motivated, and that diversity is welcomed and encouraged), the environment (the business is actively working to lower its carbon footprint), the community (understanding the needs of the local community and supporting it where possible, including sourcing products, services and talent locally), and the marketplace (ensuring the supply chain, suppliers, distributors, and customers are all managed and treated ethically).

## What happens when belonging isn't prioritised?

Organisations that are unable to respond to the issues that matter and thus, achieve brand belonging, will not have a viable future.

Take Norwegian Oil and Gas Company, Equinor. In 2022, the Norwegian oil company was planning a deepwater drill for oil in the Great Australian Bight Marine Park. It was granted environmental approval by the federal offshore petroleum regulator in December. However, neither the regulator nor Equinor had consulted opponents of the project, led by The Wilderness Society and including local councils and Indigenous elders in South Australia. This sparked legal action and protests attended by over 10,000 people.

By February 2020, Equinor had abandoned its plans, citing that the project was no longer “commercially competitive”. Equinor’s very public retreat followed BP and Chevron making similar movements into the area and then backing away due to stiff opposition. This demonstrates the ongoing fortitude of the local community’s commitment to protecting this ecologically sensitive area, meaning it’s untouchable even by some of the world’s most powerful brands



## Context: The socioeconomic factors impacting Australian businesses, communicators, and populations in 2023

The world in 2023 is extremely complex and interconnected—no organisation is unaffected by social, economic, and political factors.

Global economic turmoil is affecting brands. While the Australian economy remains strong, economists suggest we are now entering a more challenging period. Growth is expected to slow sharply to 0.7% in 2023 and 0.9% in 2024. In turn, this has seen a steep increase in business insolvencies as reported by ASIC.

Economic turbulence is having a direct and growing impact on everyday Aussies. Working Australians have experienced a record-high yearly jump in the cost of living, with Living Cost Indexes across the population increasing from between 7.1% to 9.6% in the March 2023 quarter. Add to this an employment landscape that has shifted from being in the employees’ favour amidst the Great Resignation (where staff took advantage of a lack of available talent to seek higher paying or otherwise better job opportunities) to one characterised by mass layoffs. The result is a society punctuated by worry for the present and future.

These repercussions are also flowing through marketing and communications teams, with a third of Australia’s biggest brands reporting they have cut their marketing spend. For marketers and communicators, this means increased pressure to do more with less, to navigate an increasingly complex business and consumer landscape while achieving the same or higher KPIs.

And, with even greater pressure to not just prioritise profit but also to create a positive impact in the world, the expectation is that brands take tangible steps to understand the issues that matter most to their employees and stakeholders—and that they take action to address them.





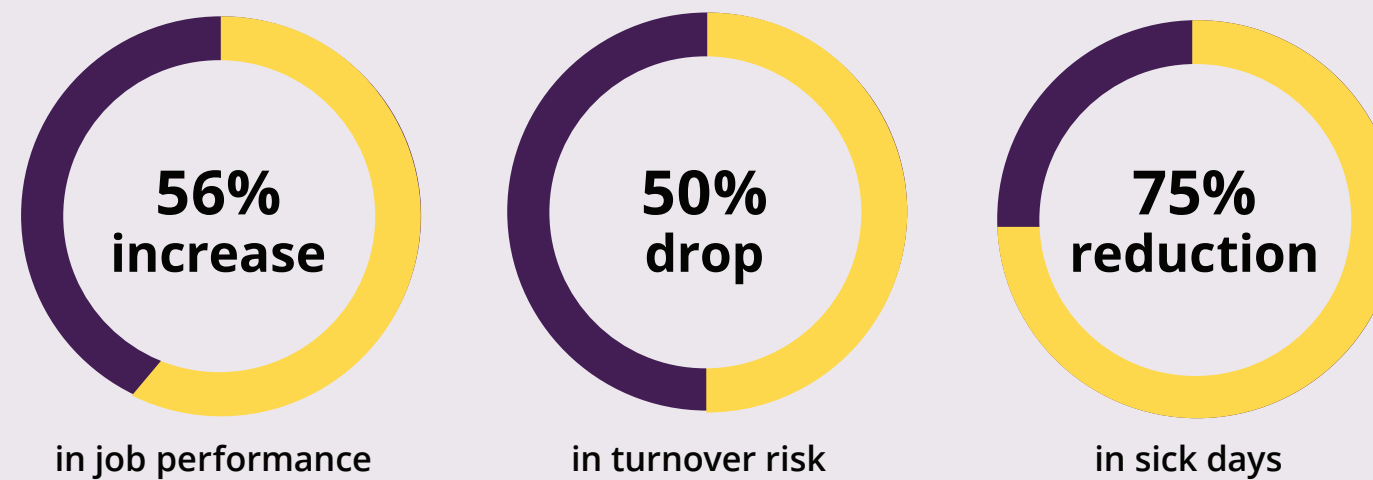
## How do we define belonging?

According to the organisation Great Place to Work, belonging occurs when people feel like they are being treated as an ‘insider’; when their unique needs are recognised and their values affirmed. Belonging is when there is alignment between the individual’s needs and values, and those of the organisation. The organisation then acts to not only recognise but respond to those needs and values, which also shift over time.

### Belonging is also good for business.

Research conducted by BetterUp, a human transformation company, found that if employees feel they belong, companies reap substantial bottom-line benefits.

#### High belonging was linked to a



For a 10,000-person company, this would result in annual savings of more than **\$USD52M (\$AUD78M)**

## Why belonging and a responsible business are interchangeable

Responsible businesses have a deep understanding of the communities they impact. Those communities range from internal stakeholders (employees, investors) to external stakeholders (customers, consumers and individuals in the locations featured across the supply chain).

Understanding the needs and values of these communities, and aligning a business accordingly, brings about belonging and supports responsible business growth. In short, prioritising belonging gives organisations a social license to operate.

An example of this comes from FMCG giant Unilever, which takes a community-driven approach to being a responsible business. The first line on its responsible business page sets the scene: “We know that our stakeholders care deeply about the same issues we care about.” Unilever goes into detail on each of these key issues, providing authentic and transparent insight backed up by tangible examples showing what they are doing to make a difference.

This commitment to responsibility then feeds down into Unilever’s individual brands, with each brand having specific purposes that ladder up to the company’s overall responsible business strategy and tailored to a specific community.

Unilever’s mayonnaise brand Hellman’s, for example, strives to tackle food waste in the home. Hellman’s set the foundations for doing this with a product truth that “mayonnaise can turn leftovers into new and tasty meals”. From there it focuses on ensuring there is minimal waste in its supply chain and factories, and that it is encouraging consumers to waste less food. Linked to its product truth, Hellman’s brand platform “Make Taste, Not Waste” has inspired over 200 million people to be more resourceful with their food and has helped the company to grow by 10% in 2020 and 11% in 2021.

## Understanding how to foster belonging

From Henkel to Ferrero, from CrowdStrike to the Australian War Widows New South Wales, at Sefiani, we work with local and global organisations navigating their way through change to create positive impact. Over the past twelve months, our clients have increasingly engaged us to help them create a deeper sense of connection, belonging, and loyalty between their organisation and its stakeholders.

Our team has been responsible for crafting Employee Value Propositions, supporting CEOs' internal communications during times of crisis, building external corporate reputations, and creating content for internal change management programs. The one challenge all our clients continue to grapple with however, is how to use their communications to drive meaningful impact and integrity, while fostering inclusion and belonging.

### This begs the questions:

- Do consumers and employees feel a sense of belonging to brands and organisations they work with?
- How do they define belonging?
- Should communications focus on internal concerns, or external, societal issues?
- Which stakeholders should you give preference to?
- How can brands open channels for people to communicate and openly share their views?

In 2023, Sefiani chose to focus its annual Communication that Matters report on the topic of belonging and respond to these questions with a practical and insights-driven framework for communicators.



**Belonging is one of the biggest buzzwords in business today. It's about time.**

Tony Bond, Chief Diversity & Innovation Officer,  
Great Places to Work



### **The Communication that Matters Report: Demographics and methodology**

In March 2023, Sefiani commissioned global research company Censuswide to conduct a study of 510 adult Australian consumers, 504 adult Australian employees, and 23 senior corporate communicators to gain both quantitative and qualitative insight into their understanding and experience of brand belonging





## A framework for belonging

We have reached a turning point in how brands are perceived by key stakeholders. Our research found that consumers are feeling more cynical about brands post COVID-19, and there is still work to be done to boost belonging amongst employees, especially as we navigate a period of job market instability.

The context behind this is that physiological and safety needs became paramount concerns during COVID. It's only now that consumers and employees are thinking once more about belonging, loyalty and a deeper connection to an organisation's values. Their immediate needs have only recently been met again (health, access to regular food versus food shortages, basic human connection). Consumers also very clearly remember what organisations did and didn't prioritise during the pandemic.

To empower brands to rebuild these connections, we have built an actionable, strategic framework that walks leaders and communicators through the building blocks of fostering belonging with stakeholders, and the eventual creation of a responsible business.

This framework has been inspired by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. We chose this format because, just as Maslow's Hierarchy moves individuals from having their basic needs met to achieving self-actualisation, we believe that creating a true sense of belonging is a process and takes place over time. In our framework, brands begin by creating fit-for-purpose, cost effective products and services for consumers, and workplaces begin by understanding the needs of their employees. They then move stakeholders up the hierarchy, building strong relationships and belonging with transparency, honest communications, personalisation and openness, and two-way conversations. When an organisation eventually reaches the top of our communications framework, it has created a responsible business that drives positive impact across its communities.

As brands meet stakeholders' needs and move them up through the belonging framework, they transform relationships from 'the purely transactional' to ones built on a foundation of long-term trust and loyalty. However, simply moving individuals from the bottom to the top isn't enough. The end goal is to retain and continuously grow your stakeholders' sense of belonging. As with Maslow's Hierarchy, all these needs must be continuously met, reviewed and flexed in response to individual requirements and changing socioeconomic factors.

## Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

American psychologist Abraham Maslow first proposed his Hierarchy of Needs in a 1943 paper "A Theory of Human Motivation". As the title of the paper suggests, Maslow's hierarchy was developed to better understand what motivates human beings. He landed on five categories of needs: physiological (basic) needs, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and finally self-actualisation. His theory is that humans move onto the next need in the hierarchy once the prior has been satisfied sufficiently.

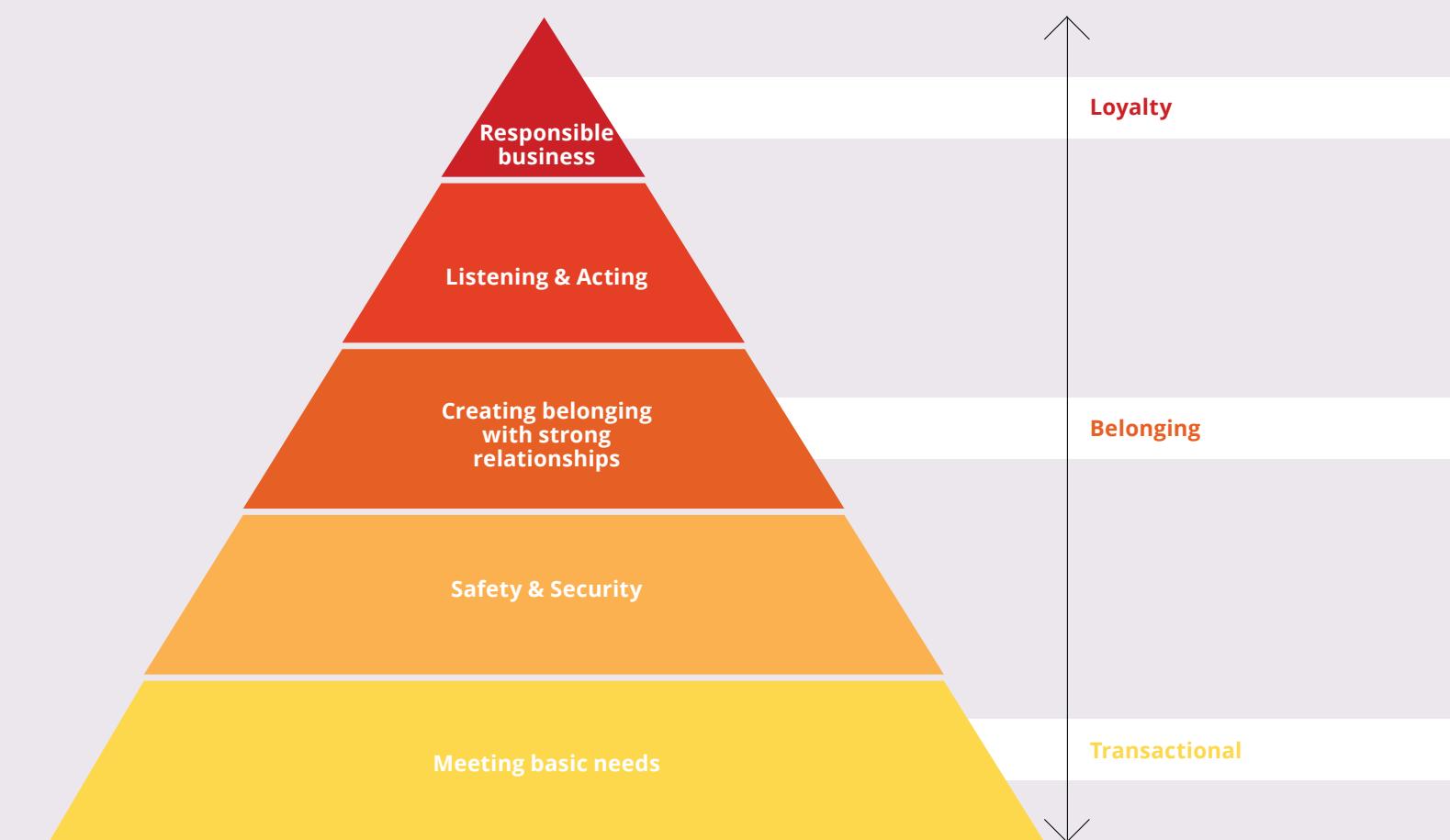


Image source: Shashwat Verma on LinkedIn Pulse

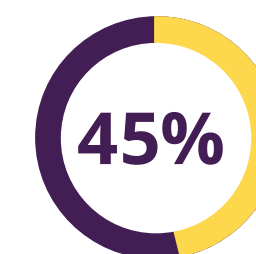
# 02 KEY FINDINGS

## BELONGING: THE STATE OF THE NATION

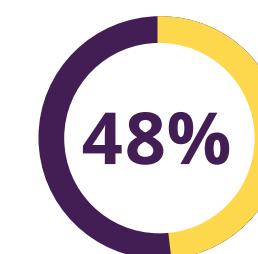
Consumers are feeling **more cynical** about brands post COVID, and there is still work to be done to boost belonging amongst employees, especially as we navigate a period of job market instability.

Most consumers and employees agree that **having a sense of belonging** with brands is important

## BARRIERS TO BELONGING



Almost (45%) of consumers said **brands take too long to respond to issues or trends**, with generic and blanket communications the biggest barriers to their belonging



Approximately half (48%) of employees are **not looking to move jobs** but would take a role elsewhere if the right opportunity presented itself

The biggest barrier to belonging for employees is traditional hierarchy and **'out of touch' thinking**

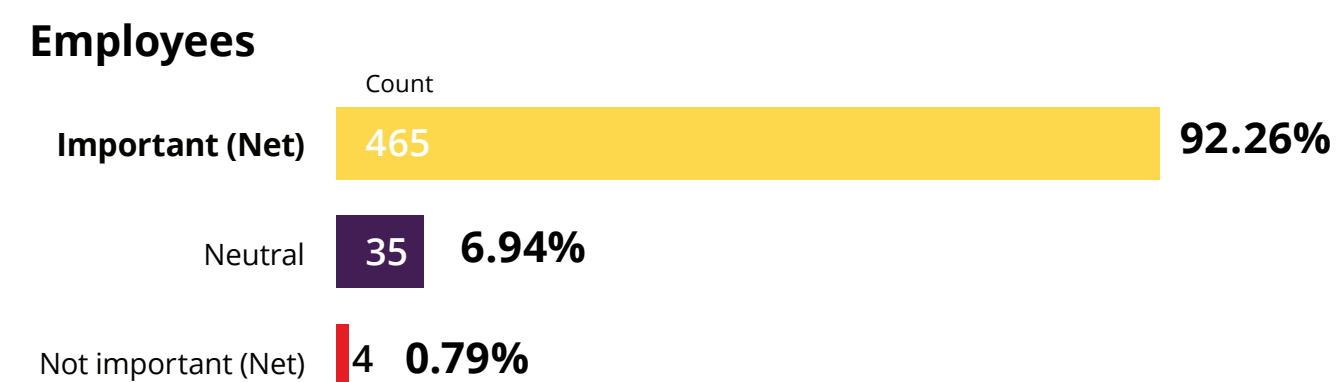
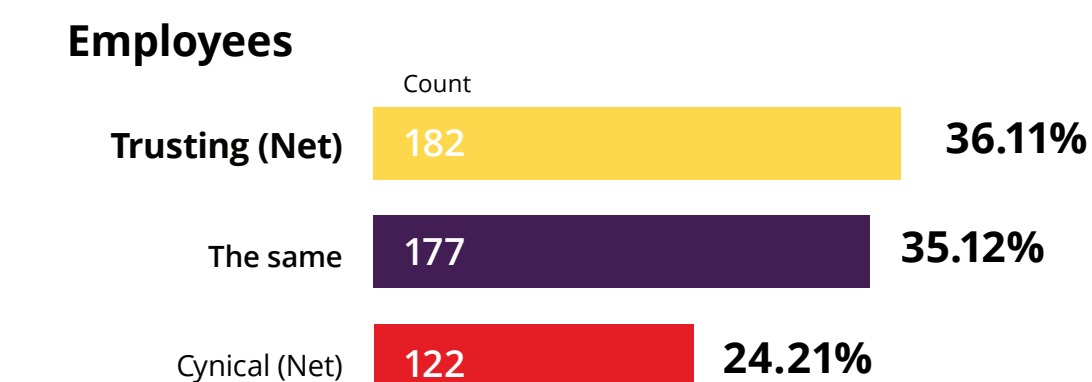
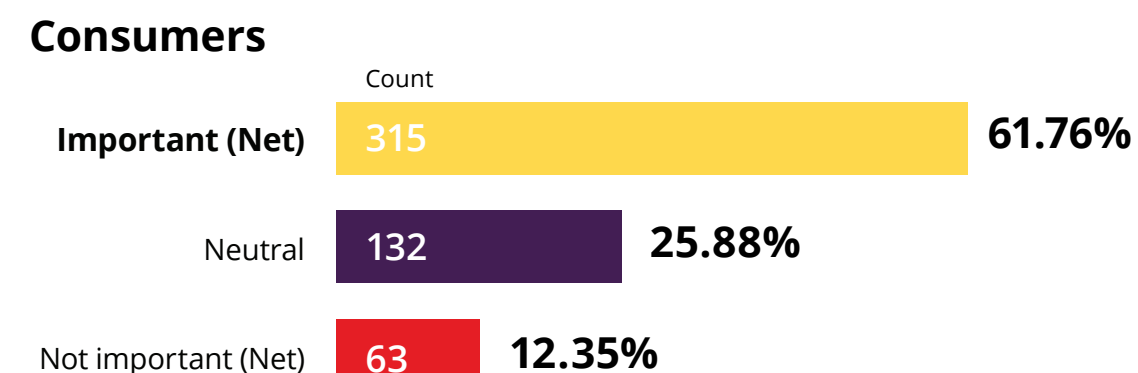
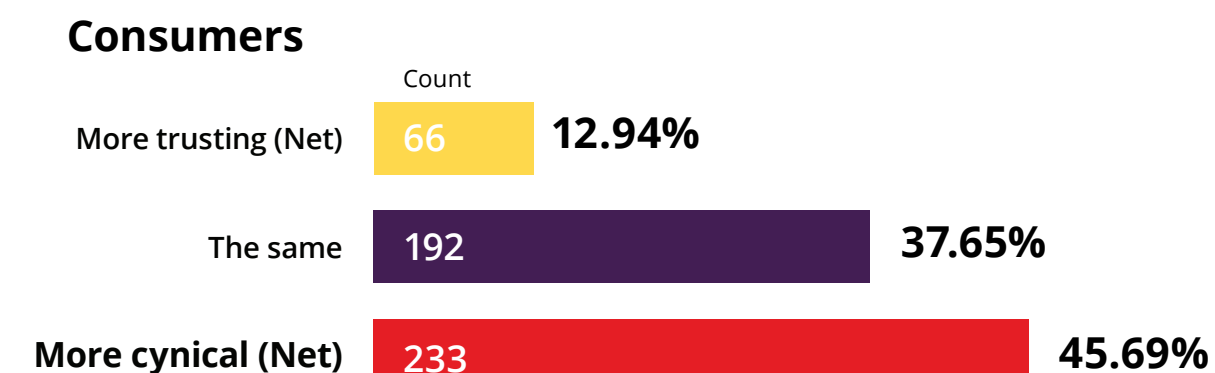
## THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATIONS IN BUILDING TRUST AND BELONGING

**70%** of corporate communicators believe their employees have a sense of belonging with the company despite around half being open to moving jobs, suggesting there's a false sense of security post Great Resignation

**Over a third** (39%) don't know if their customers have a sense of brand belonging with the company

**Half of communicators** have shifted their internal (50%) and external communications (45%) strategies to boost brand belonging post-pandemic

**Three-quarters** (73%) are confident that communications have the power to build belonging with employees and customers





03

# UNDERSTANDING & SATISFYING BASIC NEEDS IS ESSENTIAL



Maslow's definition

## basic needs

[base-ik\_nee-edes] term

Basic, or physiological, needs form the base of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. These are the most essential of our needs - having access to food, a living wage, and safe and reliable housing. If the basic needs are not met, the other needs can't be fulfilled, and belonging will be impossible





## Basic Needs: The challenge

The basic requirements stakeholders have of brands are different to, and less static than, Maslow's definition. Meeting these needs requires a deep understanding of audiences and how they're being affected by factors in the wider world, for example the cost-of-living crisis and job insecurity.

**“Building belonging can be a tricky thing during economic conditions that create an element of macro fears”**

Corporate Communications Leader, 2023 Communication that Matters Survey

Communicators' role is to have their finger on the pulse of these changing needs and play it back to the business, ensuring products and services, or working environments, are adapted accordingly, or that stakeholders are reassured that their needs are being met.

## Basic Needs: What we're seeing

For consumers and B2B customers, meeting basic needs can be as simple as providing a fit-for-purpose, affordable product or service for customers.

However, as Accenture recently reported, an environment of constant change is causing a lack of focused decision-making amongst consumers. For example, they may want to shop more sustainably and locally but increasing cost of living pressures favour more affordable, convenient options that allow their budgets to stretch further. As their needs and decision-making criteria change in response to what is happening worldwide, consumers expect brands to keep up, to market and flex their products or services accordingly. Otherwise, they'll simply shop elsewhere.

For staff, our research found that alongside job security, flexibility is considered the leading basic requirement of employers and a critical marker of trust. Flexibility as a concept differs by organisation and individual, but in practical terms the Australian Government's Fair Work Ombudsman defines it as ranging from having arranged around hours of work (changes to start and finish times), patterns of work (such as split shifts or job sharing), and locations of work (ranging from working from home to working from different locations through to Work from Anywhere policies.)

Hays Recruitment's recent research argues that alongside a financial salary, an “emotional salary” consisting of the right mix of benefits, work-life balance, upskilling, and personal fulfilment is essential to retention. Brands that reject flexibility will lose staff with around half (48%) of all employee respondents to our survey saying that while they may not be looking to move jobs right now, they would take a role elsewhere if the right opportunity presented itself. One employee respondent summarising this trend as:



**There was not much notice given to people working from home that they were expected back in the office full time... there is no flexibility now and people have moved on to other companies with flexibility and work life balance.**

Employee Respondent,  
2023 Communication that Matters Survey



## Basic needs: What this means for communicators

Building a fit-for-purpose product and applying flexible working practices may seem outside the scope of the communications team, however the role of effective communications is essential to achieving both.

## Products that align with needs

Half of the consumer respondents in our research stated that brand belonging requires companies to be responsive to and create products and services that align with their needs. Communicators aren't responsible for product design, but their role here is to understand the needs of consumers and customers and consistently feed this back to the business to influence necessary change.

There are numerous social listening tools that can be used, alongside regular customer surveys, to help communicators and brands keep abreast of customer needs. Keeping on top of the global news agenda, listening to stakeholder conversations, and having a voice or perspective on critical social issues have become increasingly important for organisations. Consumers and employees expect brands to respond in real-time, via social, earned, and owned media to the issues that affect them.

All these tactics help brands adapt their messaging and services to continue to support customers' basic needs as they change, while not losing sight of their primary vision and mission.



**We've actively invested in several programs and initiatives, and training, to improve our product, marketing, and teams to ensure customers feel a strong sense of belonging. We received a lot of feedback from a diversity of customers that indicates we are moving in the right direction.**

Corporate Communicator Respondent  
2023 Communication that Matters Survey



### CASE STUDY

## Modibodi: Continuous innovation in response to the communities' needs

Modibodi is an Australian brand that evolved in response to the basic needs of over half of our population. It was founded by Kristy Chong who, after having four kids, was training for a marathon and experienced mild incontinence. She discovered that leakproof underwear available at the time was ugly, uncomfortable, unreliable, and unsustainable.

Her solution was to build a product responding to all those factors. First developed for those with incontinence, feedback and demand from consumers meant the company quickly evolved to offer more products for different people. Today, Modibodi has offerings for all genders and all stages of life, and seeks to debunk myths around normal bodily functions, especially for those facing increased stigma, like transgender men.

This inclusivity and belonging with the brand's community starts with the products, but also shines through in all Modibodi messaging. Its taboo-busting campaign 'The New Way to Period' is a prime example of this, encouraging body positivity for all bodies and normalising periods by using red liquid instead of blue to show how the product works.

By listening to its community through different channels and evolving to continuously meet basic needs, Modibodi constantly finds new opportunities for product growth. This has paid off with a strong sense of belonging, and impressive financial results: Modibodi sold to Swedish company Titan in September 2022 for \$140 million and continues to experience an 18% annual growth rate.



## Flexible working with fixed messaging

When Commonwealth Bank announced a company policy requiring most staff back in the office 50% of the week from mid-May, employees responded with uproar and criticism around their employer's respect for mental wellbeing and cost of living concerns. From the perspective of employees, this is an example of so-called 'Productivity Paranoia', defined as leaders feeling they are less in control of the output and productivity of a workforce that isn't in the office. With flexibility considered a basic need by employees, this is not something they're willing to compromise on.

Communicators have a role to act as a mediator between leadership and employees, encouraging productive and strategic two-way dialogue between the two groups.

Leaders need to be kept up to date on the value of flexibility for staff, for example the Australian Government's Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) argues that flexible work has the potential to boost women's workforce participation and provides more equitable access to leadership and male-dominated industries. Flexible work also benefits the business's bottom line, with 85% of employees feeling more productive due to hybrid work. The importance of having the right technology to measure productivity, as well as an understanding of the messaging that resonates with leaders, is therefore critical.

On the other hand, employees need to recognise the importance of in-person collaboration, which should not be lost in favour of flexibility. Gallup argues that working from home all the time reduces connection to an organisation's culture, impairs collaboration and relationships, and disrupts work processes. These factors all then impact the ability to foster workplace belonging.

**We're a people-led business and we see the value of bringing our teams together in person... We would expect our support teams to get together in person more in 2023, but we need to be practical as it's not a one-size-fits-all. Leaders will need to balance the needs of the individual team member, the wider business, and the purpose of the group, of 'creating better experiences for customers and team.**

Brad Banducci, Woolworths

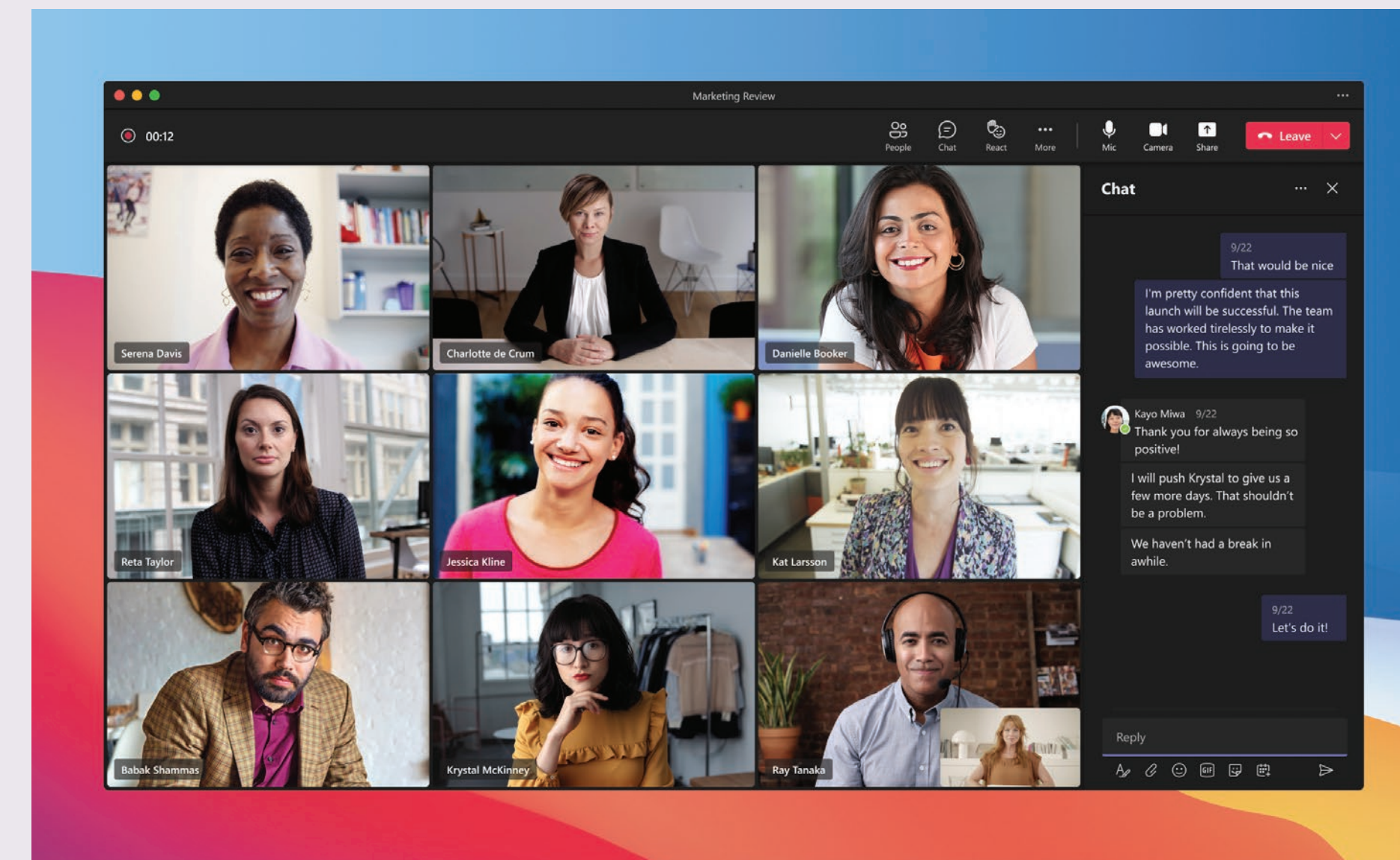
## CASE STUDY

### Microsoft: Leading from the top and countering productivity paranoia

Microsoft's innovation and products in the late 1980s and 1990s arguably shifted the PC into becoming a 'basic need' for much of the world's population. And while Microsoft began to fall out of favour in the 2010s, the hybrid and remote working revolution from 2020 brought it back to centre stage.

The shift to hybrid work wouldn't have been possible without Microsoft Teams (and its prime competitors Zoom and Google Hangouts). And to practice what it preaches with its technology, Microsoft's policies and messaging around flexibility and hybrid work are some of the strongest in the world. Microsoft has a long-term policy built into contracts for flexible working that is clearly defined in all job specs; jobs are marked either, 'up to 50% work from home', 'up to 100% work from home', or 'Microsoft on site only'.

Advocacy for flexibility comes from the top at Microsoft, with CEO Satya Nadella being outspoken about its benefits if managed properly. Backed up by regular data from the brand, he claims flexibility is essential to happy and productive employees, actively countering the 'Productivity Paranoia' narrative. Alongside being led from the top, a key element of Microsoft's hybrid work communications strategy is unified global messaging across internal and external content, from press releases and their yearly Work Trends Index, to its Flexible Work content hub.



Importantly, Microsoft also recognises local nuance, with communications benefiting from locally segmented data and commentary from spokespeople on the ground, like Jane Mackerell, Microsoft ANZ's Modern Work and Surface Business Group Director.

**The company's commitment to what is now considered a basic employee need means that despite a challenging start to the year, Microsoft still ranks at number 13 on Glassdoor's 100 Best Places to Work list for 2023, with a 4.5 Glassdoor rating.**

04

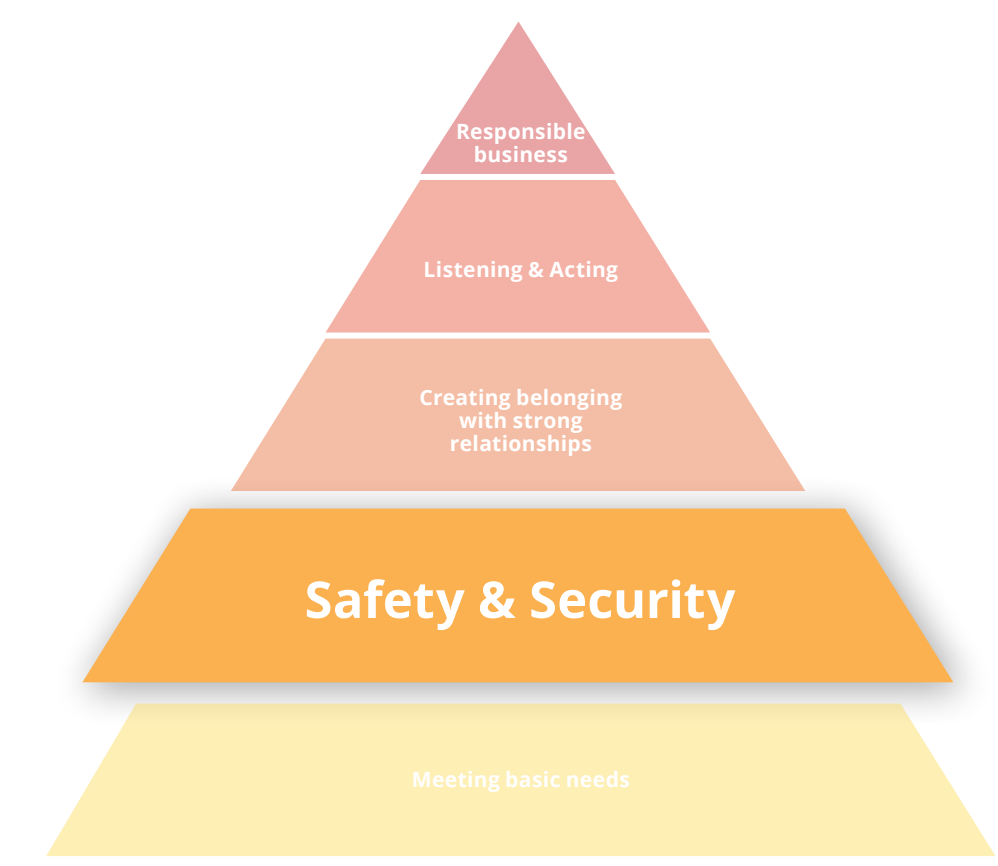
# DIFFICULT NEWS REQUIRES TRANSPARENCY AND HONESTY

Maslow's definition

## safety & security

[safe-tee\_and\_sek\_ur\_i\_tee] term

The second category of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is our requirement as humans to feel safe and secure. We yearn for predictability and routine, preferring the familiar over upheaval. During times of challenge or crisis, we look for any kind of stability to satisfy this need



## Safety & Security: The challenge

For nearly four years now, we've been living in times marked by crises, where our traditional concept of normality has been turned on its head. Safety, security, and stability – all essential elements of the second category of Maslow's Hierarchy – have been hard to come by. All of this has affected society's collective mental state, with the World Health Organisation (WHO) identifying that instances of anxiety and depression have increased by 25% worldwide due to the pandemic.

Governments and public sector institutions have been responsible for policy decisions aimed at protecting national health and economies, and they have equally been blamed for the hardships experienced by Australian citizens. As a result, Australians have turned elsewhere for stability and security, including to brands. As one of our corporate communicator respondents summarised when speaking about employee belonging:

**“..during the pandemic, employees were looking to organisations for leadership, often over the Government. ...Transparency in communications from leaders over this period has led to greater trust.”**

Corporate Communications Leader, 2023 Communication that Matters Survey

## Safety & Security: What we're seeing

Our research confirmed something most communicators already know. Difficult news affecting stakeholders—whether layoffs, budget cuts, or increased costs—needs to be communicated with transparency and honesty, and ideally must come from the top.

Corporate communicators flagged that leadership teams are at times standing in the way of transparent communications, with one respondent saying, “Senior management has a fairly conservative approach to communications – all news should be good news.” However, experience shows a lack of transparency and honesty can have a very damaging impact on an organisation and its reputation.

## BHP's response to underpaying workers

In early June, BHP reported to the ASX that an internal review unveiled rostered employees in Australia had their leave incorrectly deducted on public holidays since 2010. This means almost 30,000 workers have been underpaid, and the mining giant will need to pay over \$400 million to make amends. There's no doubt that this is a momentous scandal. However, BHP has prioritised transparency in its communications efforts, outlining figures and remediation timelines as well as providing authentic, honest communications to those affected via BHP's Australian president Geraldine Slatterly.

In a short and clear video, Slatterly says, “This should not be happening at all. And I'm deeply sorry that you're being impacted. I appreciate that issues with payroll will be important to every one of us as individuals. Please know, we're committed to understanding and correcting these issues quickly. And if you haven't received what you're entitled to, it will be corrected, and we will make it right.”

Globally, 71% of people expect brands to cultivate feelings of comfort and stability through openness. And for our consumer respondents, it seems this expectation isn't currently being met. Qualitative insight found that a lack of transparency from brands has decreased trust. Multiple consumer respondents proactively commented they believed organisations profited from the pandemic by letting staff go and benefiting from government

support, and that brands are now taking advantage of rising costs and “...thriving while families struggle”.

For employees, jobs are an extremely unstable issue. The Great Resignation of 2022, which favoured staff, has been sandwiched between two periods characterised by redundancies and layoffs. Tens of thousands of individuals have been laid off in 2023 so far, many from big tech organisations which historically offered lucrative and stable roles. In this environment, transparency is essential, with human transformation company BetterUp claiming that employees in a transparent workplace have a 12x higher job satisfaction rate.

Transparency is key to building belonging with prospective talent as well. Talent, especially Gen Z jobseekers, have much higher expectations of their employers about openness, transparency, salaries, employee benefits, and gender pay gaps, and are increasingly reluctant to meet with companies that fail to meet their standards.

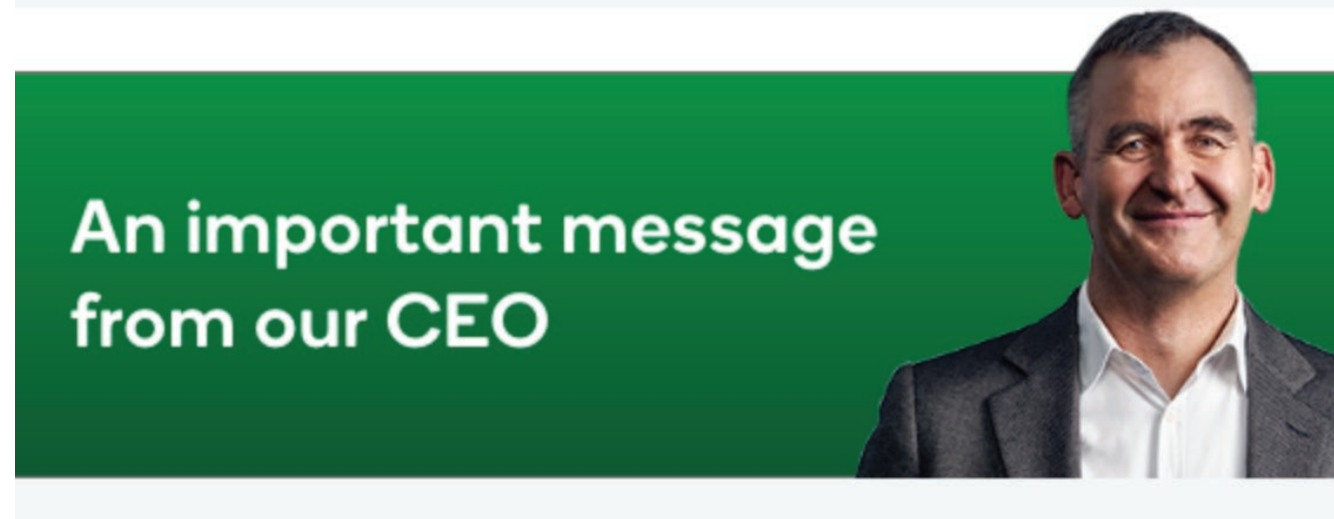
## Basic needs: What this means for communicators

Building a fit-for-purpose product and applying flexible working practices may seem outside the scope of the communications team, however the role of effective communications is essential to achieving both.

## Meaningful communications

According to Trustpilot's Brand Integrity Report, consumers want honesty from the companies they support, alongside a demonstration from brands that their actions match their words. Rhetoric must be honest, transparent and meaningful no matter the subject.

Communication for communication's sake can also be detrimental to brands. While Woolworths was commended for its early response to the first COVID-19 triggered lockdown, other brands who were seen to have 'jumped on the bandwagon' were met with criticism. Unlike Woolworths, which provided critical information at a time of need, other brands weren't seen to be offering consumers additional value and were slated for stoking fears. <https://mumbrella.com.au/brands-stop-with-the-well-meaning-covid-19-emails-622662>



## CASE STUDY

### Woolworths: strength through transparent communications

Woolworths has always been a strong brand trusted by the Australian public, but this was reinforced during the COVID-19 pandemic. When the nation's safety and security felt compromised in the early days of the pandemic, Woolworths stepped in to offer Australians some stability. Its multi-channel communications approach reflected that it understood this vital role that it played.

Woolworths was nearly always the first grocery provider to give answers in response to challenges like the supply of fundamental goods and services and health and safety. Messaging was empathetic, caring and detailed; the company was clearly speaking with customers to understand exactly what mattered to them. This customer-centric approach has been maintained by the brand today, as illustrated by its 2022 Price Freeze and 2023 Prices Dropped campaigns demonstrating its efforts to keep the cost of essentials as low as possible.

Woolworths is also known for investing in its stakeholders beyond consumers, with its employees, suppliers, and the wider community often benefiting from its charitable initiatives. A powerful example of this is when the company publicly hired Qantas workers who had been stood down when planes were grounded.

By consistently promoting safety and therefore belonging, Woolworths has built social capital over time and is now in a strong position when things do go wrong. When REDCycle (the company responsible for handling soft plastic recycling efforts for Coles and Woolworths until the end of 2022) collapsed, this was met with uproar from the Australian community. However, both supermarkets responded with transparency, and more importantly, solutions to the larger environmental concerns at play. This transparent, open approach to communications means as recently as February 2023, Roy Morgan still ranks Woolworths as the most trusted brand in Australia



## Transparency and strong leadership

For employees, regular communications about a business' performance and financial results are critical as livelihoods, basic needs, are at stake. As one employee respondent to our research stated: "More transparency minimises the anxiety and fear [at work] which eventually becomes gossip [and] negatively impacts the work environment. [A lack of transparency causes] distrust of management and creates a divide between colleagues."

A passionate leader with the ability to clearly and empathetically communicate with employees—to demonstrate that employee needs are being listened to and considered—is a priority for both internal and external communicators. As organisational communications and productivity expert Justin Hale puts has said,



**...successful leaders need to be able to both understand why people do what they do and use that knowledge to get people to change for good.**

Justin Hale, Principal Consultant  
Crucial Learning



## CASE STUDY

### Westpac: transparent policies, transparent communications

Effective transparent communications must be underpinned by transparent policy. There is a full-time gender pay gap of 26.9% in the Australian finance industry and, according to the Finance Sector Union, much of this is driven by a lack of pay transparency.

In March 2022, Westpac became the first bank to scrap the pay secrecy clauses that exist in employment contracts across the sector. This move means Westpac has gone from contractually preventing discussion around pay to actively encouraging open conversation on the topic.

Westpac has been working to support gender equality and women's workplace safety for some time, including with initiatives like a ten-point plan to address sexual harassment titled It Starts with Respect and generous parental leave entitlements. These simple steps have been welcomed by stakeholders as essential in challenging the gender pay gap at its core.

Building transparency into policies that respond to difficult topics can build belonging and foster security within key communities and affect larger social change. Westpac's move triggered Commonwealth Bank to also abandon its pay secrecy clauses. In December 2022, the Albanese government's 'Secure Jobs, Better Pay' Bill was passed to legally ban these types of clauses across Australia.





05

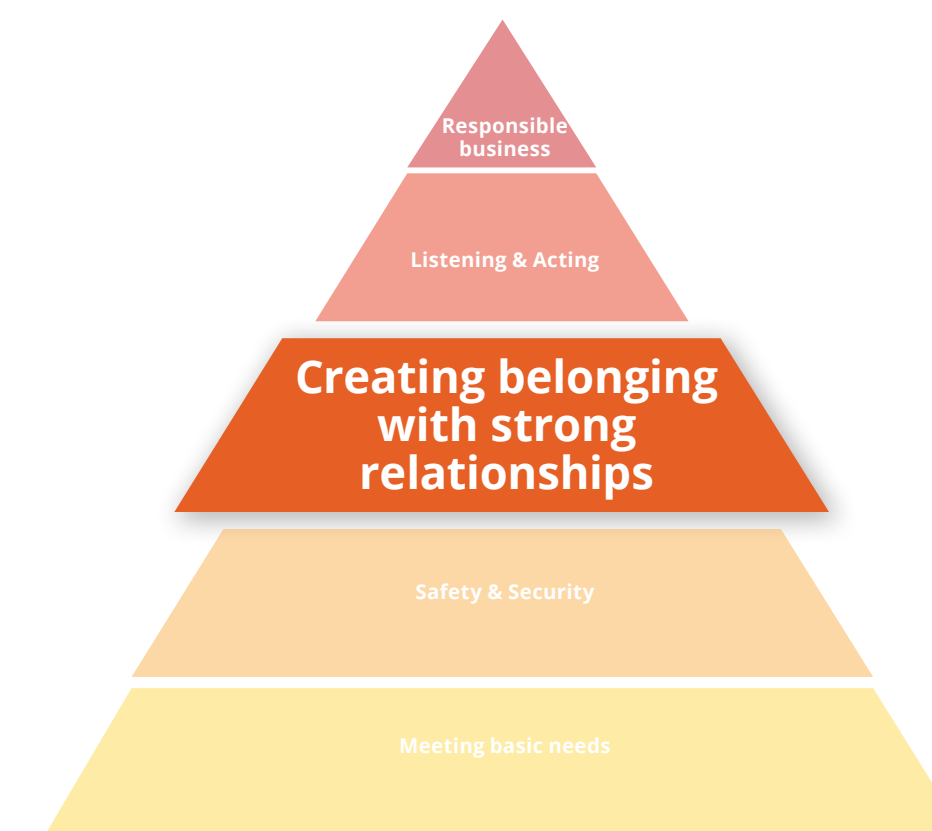
# BUILDING STRONG RELATIONSHIPS FOSTERS TRUE BELONGING

Maslow's definition

## belonging

[bee\_lonn\_g\_ing] term

Maslow defines the middle of his Hierarchy - belonging - as when humans feel loved and accepted. This relates to all important relationships in a person's life, whether romantic or with family, friends, peers, or within their community more broadly. Feeling belonging with different social groups is the key central element of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.





## Belonging: The challenge

The middle of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, and our framework, leads us directly to our focus area: belonging. Fostering belonging, according to Maslow, moves individuals from simply having their basic needs met to the more cerebral elements of the Hierarchy: esteem and self-actualisation. For communicators, this means moving internal and external stakeholders from having a transactional relationship with their brand, to a more emotional relationship that will lead to long-term loyalty.

To achieve this, brands must recognise that consumers and employees have undergone significant change, with everything from how we work, travel, eat, stay healthy, connect with others, and more, shifting from early 2020. Fostering a sense of belonging requires a change in mindset and strategy to acknowledge this shift. This is summarised in two quotes from an internal and external stakeholder respondent respectively within our research:

**“I like to feel connected to where I’m spending the limited amount of money that I have.”**

Consumer Respondent,  
2023 Communication that Matters Survey

**“I don’t just want to be a number - I want to feel valued.”**

Employee Respondent,  
2023 Communication that Matters Survey

## Industry trend: What does society want from brands?

Advertising company Wunderman Thompson’s ‘Age of Re-Enchantment’ Report identified that consumers are feeling a sense of absence that is hard to neatly define. This has been caused by the long-term effects of pandemic isolation mixed with the impact of grind culture ‘burn out’ and shock caused by political turmoil, war, and the climate crisis. The report states more than three-quarters of people “just want to feel something, to feel alive” and 74% say they feel like they are waiting for something good to happen.

Brands have a duty to “help people transcend tough times and jolt them from long-standing malaise by celebrating the thrilling, the uplifting, the awe-inspiring, and the magical.”

## Belonging: What we’re seeing

Consumer expectations of brands have skyrocketed. This makes sense considering that, for many, their primary daily contact during COVID lockdowns was with local businesses, like their grocery store or coffee shop. Close personal relationships with local SMEs became a basic need for many.

The repercussion of this in 2023 is that consumers expect to have the same level of relationship with all brands they engage with. KPMG states that personalised, meaningful, and relevant communications “are the new loyalty programs”. Recent data from Gartner supports this view, with Gartner identifying that personalisation boosts engagement and increases revenue up to 28 per cent, and sales conversion by up to 71%, when used at the

right touchpoints. This need for a personal experience is exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis, meaning consumers are pickier with the limited budget they have.

For employees, the concept of culture has also been flipped on its head with the shift to a hybrid workforce. The daily water cooler conversation has morphed into a Slack or Teams chat, or at least, is facilitated just once or twice a week when staff are in the office.

Fostering belonging and having a strong culture are usually one and the same thing. Our research identified that the majority (72%) of employees believe the most important factors driving a sense of belonging in the workforce are strong and happy relationships with their colleagues and peers, followed by great company culture and reasons to come together. The importance of getting this right impacts the bottom line, with global consulting firm EY estimating that when employees at APAC-based businesses feel a sense of belonging, costs across the region can reduce by USD\$100 billion. The same report identified that employees that feel they ‘belong’ are also three times more likely to stay with the organisation.

## Belonging: What this means for communicators

Our research identified that building strong relationships is the best way to foster belonging in and out of the organisation. Technology is increasingly being used to streamline relationship building en masse with stakeholder groups, but a deep understanding of audiences and a human touch must also be maintained.

## Personalised consumer communications

As with any relationship, building a strong relationship and brand loyalty with increasingly variable consumers requires organisations to actively listen and respond accordingly. Around half (45%) of the consumer respondents to our survey said that the biggest barriers to belonging were when brands take too long to respond, and generic, blanket communications.

Investing in a community management strategy and team that can respond to customers and prospects quickly is key. Hubspot claims building an active online community is important because it connects brands with their customers and brings them together by facilitating interesting conversations and forging deep connections, both of which foster brand loyalty.

Personalisation is also key to this and is becoming a consumer expectation, with Twilio recently uncovering that 79% of Australian consumers say a personalised experience increases their loyalty to brands. Achieving meaningful personalisation when brands are inundated with customer data requires a strategic use of technology, especially of AI solutions which can streamline communications with human guidance.

### Industry trend: The AI opportunity

With so much data available to support deep personalisation, there is also an opportunity to adopt AI (Artificial Intelligence) across the sales and marketing funnel to take activity to the next level. AI can build belonging and strong relationships between brand and consumer through predictive analytics (anticipating what a consumer will do next and serving messaging accordingly), real-time personalisation (the delivery of messages based on a consumer's behaviour and preferences), and hyper-local personalisation (the use of geolocation data to serve personalised messages and experiences tailored to the consumer's location).

It's important to note that AI adoption can't be rushed or siloed into one business department. Domino's' Linda Hassan recently reflected on how brands must understand that entire data architecture across a business must be set up to effectively facilitate AI. The outcome is powerful, but the set-up is a long-term project that requires investment in people, tools, technology, and an ethical framework around the responsible use of AI.

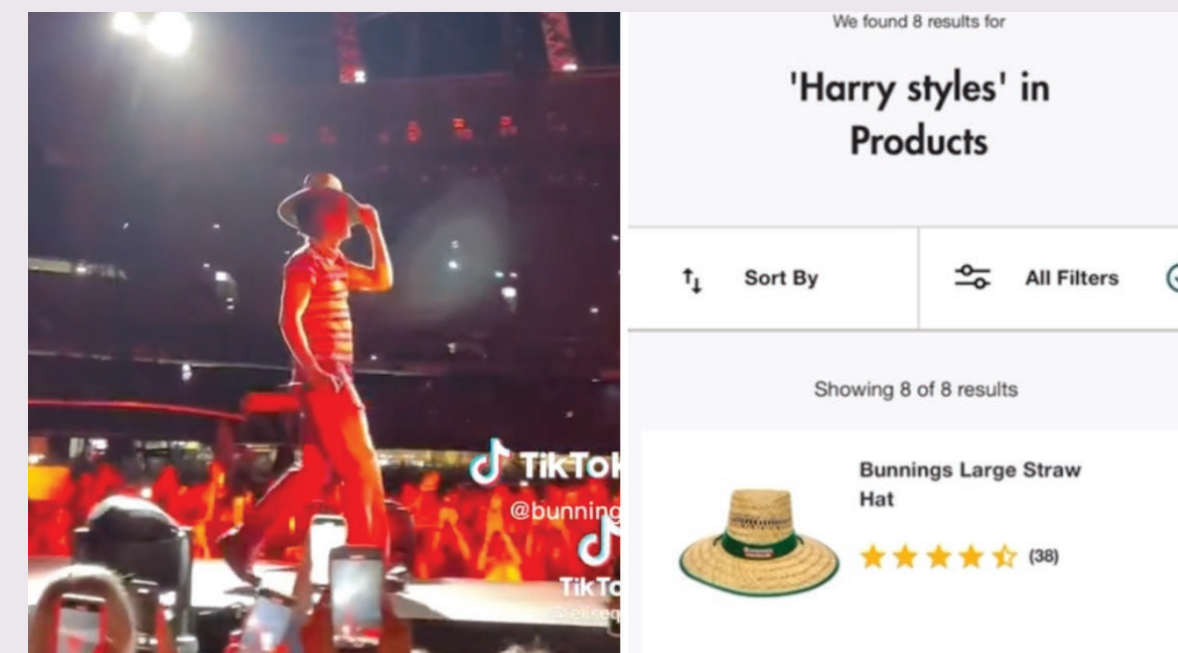
## CASE STUDY

### Bunnings: Building belonging with a new market segment

Bunnings identified that Gen Z-ers, while having increasing spending power, were less interested in DIY than other demographics because many still live at home. As a key future audience, Bunnings wanted to build relationships with Gen Z today to promote belonging and a long-term relationship as they grow older.

The brand identified that while Gen Z-ers may not own their own homes, many are creative, want to make their rental or family room personal to them, and love interior design. In response to this, Bunnings wanted to empower young adults to carry out their own kind of DIY. They worked with social media influencers and tapped into the success of their community-led Bunnings Workshop site, and The Block style content series Make It Yours, to excite this audience where they feel most at home—on TikTok.

Bunnings' TikTok feed has guides tailored to Gen Z customers on a range of topics, from making DIY gifts for friends to finding the perfect entryway jute rug. It also helps build a long-term fondness for the brand by highlighting things the nation loves about the store, like its sausage sizzle and Bunnings in-store radio, through TikTok trends like the 'John Cena Headphones' meme.



Bunnings' communications team also has its finger on the pulse of this audience so it can react accordingly. For instance, when Harry Styles wore a fan's Bunnings hat at a concert, the company quickly changed its site search capability so that when you searched Harry Styles, the hat would come up. This helped to extend the virality of the moment with the spotlight well and truly on Bunnings.

**An audience-focused content approach that grows with Gen Z and their unique needs and trends means Bunnings achieves significant engagement across its social media channels and is fostering true, long-term belonging between its brand and younger Aussies**

## Open cultures



**We define inclusion as the feeling of belonging in your organization and team, feeling treated with dignity as an individual, and feeling encouraged to fully participate and bring your uniqueness to work every day.**

'The Fabric of Belonging: How to Weave an Inclusive Culture', Bain & Company



For employees, rebuilding a culture of connection in the new hybrid workplace is essential to fostering belonging. We found that the amalgamation of the workplace with personal life due to more days working from home means employees are looking for a personal, trusted and honest relationship with their employer. In fact, the two phrases that came up most in our research when employees were asked about how they feel belonging in a workplace were 'family' ("Everyone gets along with each other like a family") and 'feeling loved' ("I feel cared for and loved by [my] colleagues and employer").

When asked about how they build a culture of belonging, corporate communications respondents flagged three main factors:

- 01. Shared values
- 02. Openness and transparency
- 03. Buy-in from executive leadership

These findings align with the most recent insight from Great Place to Work, which found that these factors generate improved organisational efficiency and productivity.

However simply having good company values and promoting a great employee culture is not enough. Organisations must clearly align their behaviour to their values and ensure that living these values is central to their culture. This can be realised through, for example, building internal taskforces aligned to values which drive internal and external impact.

Leaders must also be open to constructive two-way dialogue with their people. Open conversations where employees are encouraged to speak up, and where differences are celebrated, will help foster a sense of belonging no matter if an individual is working full-time in the office, hybrid, or is fully remote. As summarised by EY:

**"...welcoming differences improves the sense of belonging for employees. Celebrating and recognising uniqueness, creating an inclusive culture, and improving belonging has major bottom-line benefits."**

Holly McGhee, EY Asia Pacific DE&I Leader

## CASE STUDY

### Salesforce: Living your values through your Ohana culture



Salesforce's Ohana-focused culture was inspired by the Hawaiian concept of family, or Ohana, which includes blood relatives, adopted members, and intentionally chosen connections. It is well known and well liked because it transcends the business and has a clear focus. A large part of this is because it is value driven, focused on: trust, customer success, growth, innovation, giving back, equality for all, wellbeing, transparency, and fun.

Practical initiatives have been created against all nine values. For example, Equality for All launched Salesforce's Ohana Groups, which are resource groups for under-represented identities and their allies across the business that build internal community spirit and give back.

Key to the success of the Ohana culture is that it's driven from the top, with Benioff spending a quarter of his time empowering these Ohana Groups. Ohana shines through in everything Salesforce does—even its offices have a dedicated 'Ohana floor' that is used for open discussion and to host community events. Salesforce's new Sydney office, for example, has an Ohana floor which is used by community not-for-profits at no charge on weeknights and weekends.

Salesforce is consistently recognised for the power of its culture in driving belonging, including ranking as the second-best large workplace in Australia in 2022 by Great Place To Work. 95% of employees say that when they join the company they are made to feel welcome; 94% are proud to work at Salesforce; and 91% agree that it's a great place to work (versus the Australian average of only 56%).

06

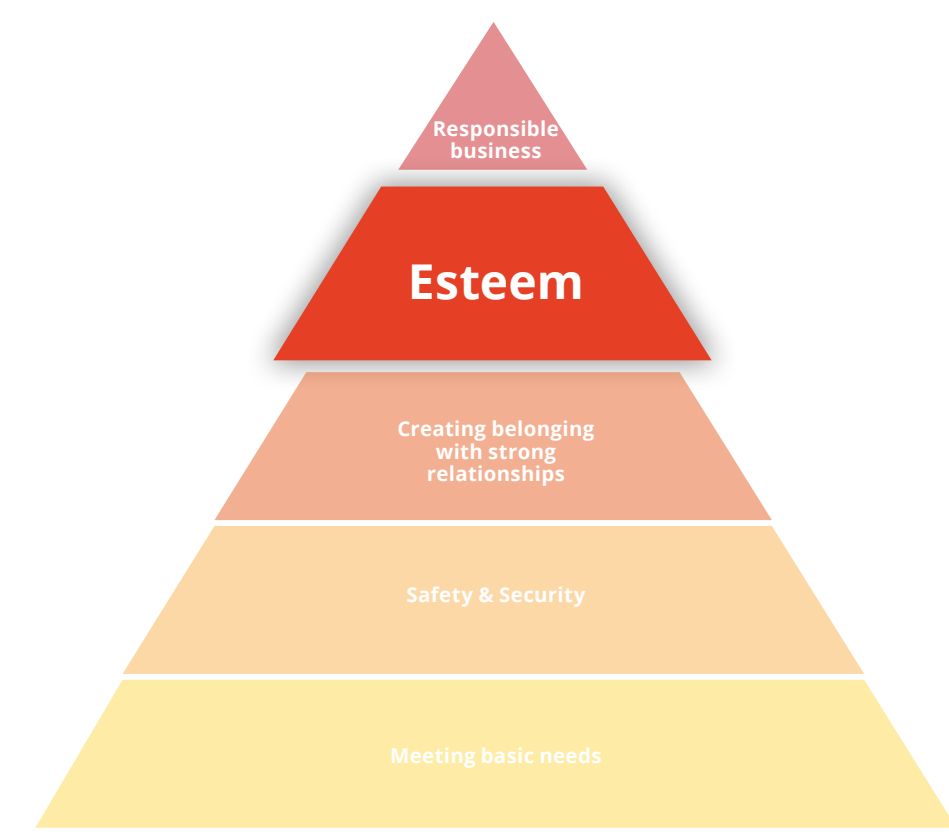
# ACTIVE, TWO-WAY COMMUNICATIONS NEED TO BE PRIORITISED

Maslow's definition

## esteem

[est\_eeem] term

Now firmly in the higher part of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the fourth and penultimate category is esteem, otherwise referenced as status, recognition, strength, and freedom. Maslow divides esteem into two components: feeling self-confident and feeling valued by others.



## Esteem: The challenge

For brands and communicators, building esteem, loyalty and belonging with audiences requires active, two-way communications which show to the stakeholder that the organisation sees them as an individual. This is especially important when individuals are going through a tough or uncertain period, as we are today as a society living through the cost-of-living crisis, job instability, and a continuously troubling news agenda.

## Esteem: What we're seeing

Consumer and employee respondents to our survey said they wanted brands to cultivate environments where they feel safe to express their view. They want to know that their opinion will be heard and responded to. One employee respondent said: "Communications and consultation are essential to improve relationships and make people feel a part of something". A consumer respondent reflected that when they're listened to: "It feels like the company cares about you as the buyer and makes changes and deals for you."



Consumers who feel listened to will feel valued and will therefore be more loyal to a brand and even spend more. Applied Marketing Science found that customers who simply receive responses to communications on social platforms like Twitter are willing to spend 3-20% more on average-priced items. Active listening is also essential to the success of key marketing tactics like Nudge Theory that seek to indirectly encourage and enable behaviour change. Nudge Theory works by designing 'choices' for audiences to affect some sort of change. But the choices only work if they're based on how people think and decide (instinctively and often irrationally), so they require communicators and marketers to have listened and applied feedback into their targeting strategy.

For employees, belonging and loyalty are boosted significantly when they feel they're listened to, and their feedback is acted on.

**Salesforce recently identified that when employees feel heard they're 4.6 times more likely to feel empowered to perform to the best of their ability.**

Taking this further, Gallagher's 2023 Workforce Trends Report also found that employees who are confident in their organisation's ability to take meaningful action show 1.8 times higher wellbeing and 1.7 times stronger intentions to stay with their employer.

## Esteem: What this means for communicators

Brands need to listen, respond to feedback, act, then report back on any progress being made. The benefits of fostering belonging and esteem across stakeholder groups by listening are significant, ranging from reduced churn and improved loyalty among customers, to better rapport between colleagues and a reduction in conflict and delays in the workplace.



## The power of social listening

Consumer respondents from our research nominated social media as the primary channel for sharing feedback and having meaningful conversations with brands. When a brand listens to and understands its communities' needs and acts to update its product or messaging in response, this can have a massive impact on the bottom line. Product changes and campaigns based on the insights gathered are likely to be more successful, with customer-ideated products reportedly performing 20% better than those that lack customer insight.

By combining social listening and community management, and seeking regular feedback through surveys, communicators and customer service teams can work together to listen to customers.

PayPal demonstrated the power of social listening for communications when it listened to consumers across social channels during the 2020 Christmas season to identify how people were changing their traditions in response to the pandemic. By building a Christmas campaign that recognised these changes, PayPal showed that it was listening to and understanding the needs of its customers, driving 10 million incremental transactions, £10.4 million (circa AUD\$20 million) in incremental transaction revenue, and £15.2 million (AUD\$29 million) in total incremental revenue.

## Industry trend: Social Video Listening

Social videos on platforms like YouTube, Instagram and TikTok, generate 1200% more shares than text and image content combined. With social video continuing to go from strength to strength, this should also be a medium that communicators use to listen to their consumers and to those who influence them.

Tools now exist that allow businesses to monitor brand mentions in video, as well as provide deeper analysis into the wider interests and demographics of those watching videos mentioning the brand or a key topic. Video is also a powerful way to communicate progress back to consumers, with viewers retaining 95% of a message when it is watched in a video compared to just 10% when read via text

## CASE STUDY

### Mastercard: Establishing true allyship by listening

For many people in the LGBTQIA+ community, their legal name (and therefore the name on their credit or debit card) doesn't reflect their identity. For transgender and gender nonconforming people, a new name can be something extremely life affirming: a fresh start that gives them a way to finally live their truth.

By speaking to groups representing its LGBTQIA+ customer base in Europe, Mastercard saw an opportunity to help support the community with True Name – a card feature that enables people to display their chosen name on their card. Mastercard launched True Name with an impactful, integrated communications campaign where listening was key to both planning and execution. It closely collaborated with LGBTQIA+ organisations and influencers to ensure all facts and insights used in the campaign were correct and exclusively cast transgender and non-binary individuals for campaign content.

The outcome was a pan-European marketing and communication campaign that launched with a brand video that gave local transgender and non-binary individuals a platform to share their stories and why being able to use their True Name matters. True Name was further amplified through an earned campaign, guided by an extensive Q&A to tackle misconceptions and possible hateful commentary. An influencer campaign centred around telling authentic stories,



campaign animations were designed by queer artists to educate the public about transgender and non-binary communities, and employee advocacy initiatives were also utilised.

The campaign was able to reach audiences in the millions, including through the most influential publications across Europe; Le Monde, Der Tagespiegel, Het Laatste Nieuws and ELLE among them. The success of the campaign earned it further support from the LGBTQIA+ community, including from the Transgender Network Nederland, Inter-LGBT and Stonewall UK, and Mastercard won the Outvertising Award for Brand of the Year.

## Continuous conversations with employees

A worrying statistic from our survey was that just a quarter of corporate communicators are currently investing in two-way communications with employees, despite the current unstable economic environment impacting job security. For those employees that are being listened to only half have the confidence that action will be taken based on their feedback.

Taking a step back from prioritising employee engagement based on an incorrect assumption that the Great Resignation is over and employees aren't going anywhere would be unwise. Australia continues to grapple with a skills shortage across sectors, including healthcare, retail and IT, and our data revealed that while half (48%) of employees aren't actively looking to move jobs, they would take a role elsewhere if the right opportunity presented itself (or they didn't feel valued in their current organisation).

Listening, responding, and acting is key; employers who act on employee feedback are regularly found to be 11 times more likely to have high employee retention.



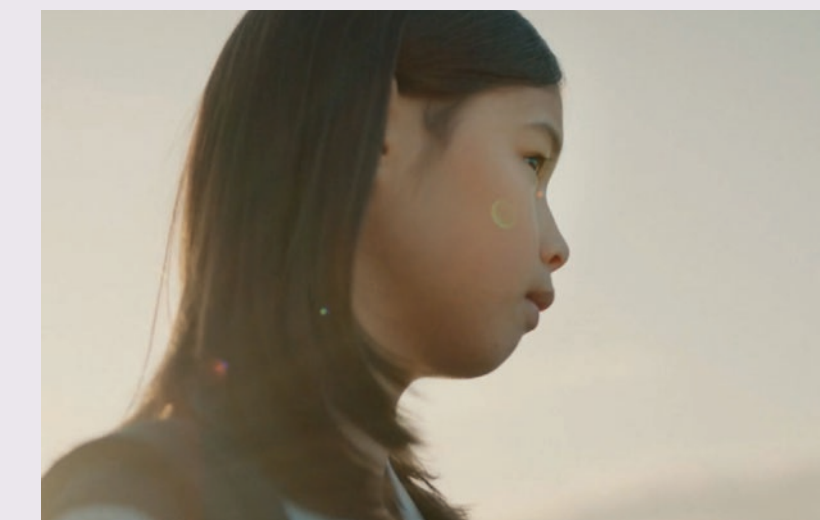
## Industry trend: The four types of organisational listeners

Industry research has identified four different types of organisational listeners based on how often brands seek feedback from employees, and how often they act on it:

- **Episodic listeners** drive the lowest level of business performance, conducting just one or two employee surveys each year and only sharing data gathered within the HR department; follow-up actions are top down.
- **Topical listeners** listen in-depth to staff, but only around specific topics or events like a pending IPO, or DEI. They encourage managers to act in response to staff feedback, but it is not mandatory.
- Organisations that gather feedback on an ongoing basis across the employee lifecycle have been termed **strategic listeners**. They are also likely to be using advanced analytics to see the relationships between employee data and other business data, like sales. Leaders seek employee feedback when making decisions.
- The most impactful brands are **continuous conversationalists** that use active and passive listening tools (surveys, email sentiment analysis, and internal crowdsourcing) at scale. Leadership responsible for acting on the feedback and reporting back to teams and individuals.

## CASE STUDY

### Aurecon: Listening and acting to create an impactful brand



Engineering firm Aurecon was well known in the engineering space, but not for what it wanted to be known for. The brand felt traditional but aimed to be unconventional, and Aurecon wanted to be seen as a key part of enabling the world's sustainable development with what it could offer. To communicate this, Aurecon's leadership turned to its people. By listening, it discovered a culture of people with almost childlike curiosity—a key strand in the DNA of any successful engineer. These were people who wanted to take things apart and rebuild them, ideally better than before, and with impact.

Aurecon brought this engineer 'wunderkind' to life through the eyes of a ten-year-old girl called Tilly who, through an open letter titled "Dear World", explained how Aurecon's approach would lead to a better outcome for business, people, and planet. Tilly's tone of voice, which reflected that of Aurecon's people, was then replicated across all internal and external content, as well as Aurecon's brand look and feel.

Employees now report feeling more inspired by their organisation, and that they are doing "more meaningful work". Engagement on social channels reaching external stakeholders is exceeding the industry benchmark five-fold. This campaign demonstrated how belonging can be cultivated across stakeholders, by listening to one group and acting to bring their voice to life. By using active listening techniques, Aurecon achieved its objective to be seen as more unconventional, with the Australian Financial Review recognising it as one of Australia's most innovative firms in 2022.



07

# RESPONSIBLE BUSINESSES CREATE LOYAL STAKEHOLDERS

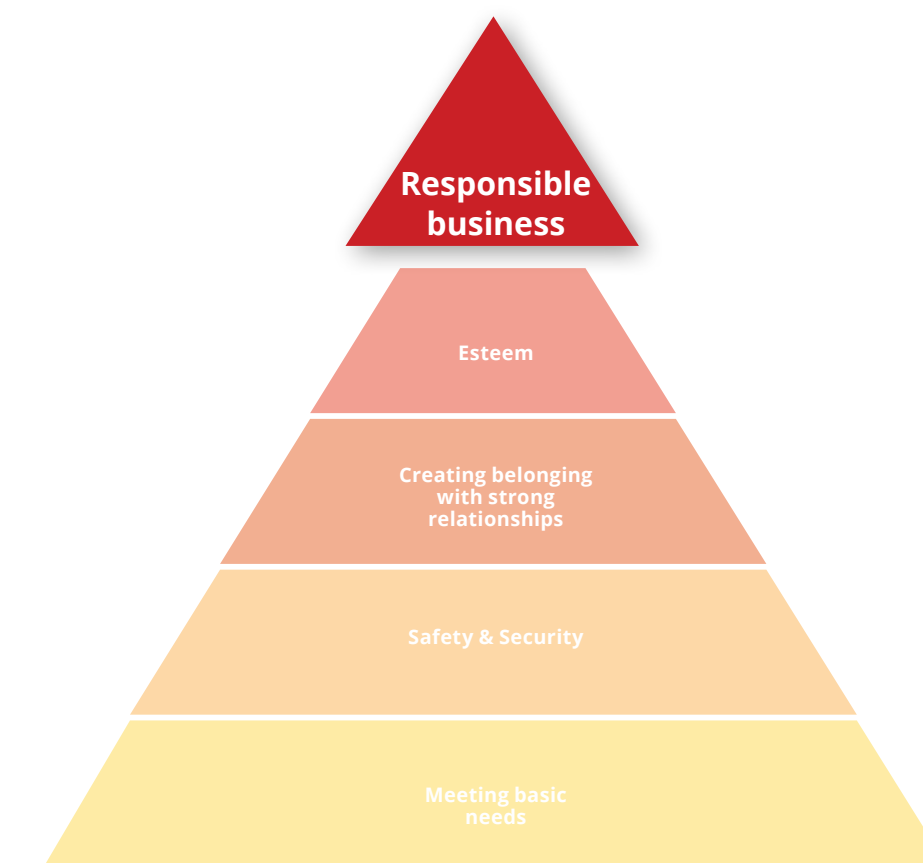


Maslow's definition

## self-actualisation

[est\_eeem] term

The top of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs refers to the achievement of self-actualisation: the desire to become the most that one can be. Individuals that reach this milestone feel fulfilled and that they've reached their full potential.



## Self-actualisation: The challenge

**For brands, self-actualisation may seem like a lofty goal. However, this stage ties back to building a responsible business alongside brand integrity and the achievement of long-term positive impact.**

Self-actualisation for businesses and their stakeholders requires a deep understanding of the community in which the organisation operates and an ability to be responsive to what that community cares about. The brand must then lead by example while mobilising stakeholders to make a tangible difference within that community.

## Industry trend: Defining business integrity

Part of being a responsible business requires having integrity, which the author of Return on Integrity John G. Blumberg defines as, "... an impactful set of core values... [that] are not just a guide; they should be the basis of every decision and action in the organisation."

The key traits of business integrity reflect the insights we have walked through in this report: trust (building and maintaining a foundation of trust with stakeholders), follow-through (the brand performs an action after saying it plans to do so), quality (delivering high-quality products and services), corporate citizenship (making a positive impact on the communities in which the brand operates), willingness to change, and respect (the brand shows internal and external stakeholders that it values and appreciates their contributions).

There are significant benefits associated with reaching the top of Maslow's hierarchy, achieving self-actualisation, and becoming a truly responsible business. These include:

- **A stronger, more competitive brand** – Customer purchase intention is more likely to be influenced by perception of the company (60%) than its products (40%). Within this, 42% of a company's image is driven by its corporate social responsibility initiatives.
- **The ability to attract and retain top talent** – A quarter of employees would take a pay cut to work for an environmentally-sustainable company, and 69% look at a company's environmental record before deciding whether to take a job.
- **Stronger relationships with customers** – Half of consumers globally would be more willing to pay more for goods and services from socially responsible companies.
- **Better employee engagement** – A strong sense of employee purpose increases employee engagement and results in a 17% increase in productivity, making businesses 21% more profitable.

## Self-actualisation: What we're seeing

According to the 2022 Global ESG Monitor report, in an assessment of the largest 197 companies on four major stock exchanges, Australian companies were found to lack transparency in their environmental, social and governance (ESG) reporting when compared with Asian and European organisations. Australian company reports needed to be clearer

about non-financial indicators for measuring progress, their use of and impact on nature, and their processes for managing critical sustainability concerns inside the company.

The most public iteration of this is lack of transparency is greenhushing - not communicating about sustainability actions, or even walking back on public commitments to public actions. This worrying trend comes in response to widespread criticism about greenwashing, where brands mislead about their sustainability practice, or highlight green practices for marketing or PR purposes only while obscuring ongoing unsustainable practices.

Unfortunately, these worrying behaviours aren't only occurring in the sustainability space. Another common example relates to unethical supply chain practices. H&M, for example, continuously states its commitment to both reducing its carbon emissions and promoting fair employment practices where garments are made. Yet these commitments are often undermined by the reality of the fast fashion industry. In 2016, H&M came under fire for working with clothing factories in Myanmar where children as young as 14 were creating garments for more than 12 hours a day. The company cracked down on the practice but in 2023, H&M has come under scrutiny again, this time for using clothing factories that exploit Bangladeshi workers.

The benefits of being a responsible business are significant. On the flip side, the ramifications of not being a responsible business can cost organisations everything.

**"Companies who are not up to speed on sustainability will be left behind. I like to compare it to the digital revolution, or Industry 4.0. Companies who aren't quick enough to adapt to the advancing digital revolution are falling rapidly behind. The same goes for sustainability. It's the fifth industrial revolution."**

Dr Annemarie Conrath-Hargreaves from the Department of Accounting, Monash Business School

**Brands need to elevate their purpose:** Building responsible business issues into the mission, vision and values in turn will mean brands have an authentic point of view on cultural issues and tension points. This creates a voice for the brand to intersect and connect with key cultural narratives.

**Brands need to drive authentic action:** Brand-led actions stemming from core beliefs should play an active societal role in resolving key issues. These actions can range from specific campaigns to initiatives, products, and statements.

**Brands can solidify their business responsibility through market moments:** The creation of a salient creative platform enables the point of view and actions of the brand to be delivered in high impact ways across paid, owned, and earned moments

**Responsible consumers want brand accountability**

Being a cultural leader has numerous benefits, including that it diversifies a brand’s relevance through cultural narratives and actions on topics that matter to most Australians, with a view to leading social and cultural change.

A key part of this lies again in understanding what the community cares about and driving positive change within these issues. This is especially important in the current economic climate, where around half of Australians (47%) are buying from cheaper brands, according to Monash University. At the same time, Australians continue to become more conscious shoppers. The same study identified that 35% of shoppers are increasingly looking for locally produced products and services, and 30% are shifting their shopping habits to be more environmentally friendly.

Our research supports this data; its showed consumer respondents are still expecting brands to be responsible and in turn empower them (as the consumer) to make more responsible decisions. Whether that’s through ensuring sustainable options are still affordable, or actively engaging consumers as advocates around a cause, this is something consumers feel strongly about:



**Companies shouldn’t use the environment as an excuse to increase prices. [Brands] should be sustainable every day and [this] doesn’t require a levy or penalty on your customers.**

Consumer Respondent, 2023 Communications that Matter Survey



**CASE STUDY**

**Henkel: Creating consumer advocates**



German-based FMCG brand Henkel (owner of Schwarzkopf amongst other hair, beauty and homecare brands) tasked Sefiani with creating meaningful sustainability messaging across its product portfolio. Sefiani then worked with Henkel to amplify this messaging to consumers, encouraging them to make tangible changes to their own behaviours to drive down carbon emissions and reduce environmental impact.

Henkel has been a sustainability leader for 30 years and knows this is something its global consumers care about. But customer data found that, while people want to be more sustainable, this doesn’t necessarily translate to their behaviours. And importantly, while Henkel has driven huge impact by lessening the carbon footprint of its products and supply chain, consumer behaviour once products are purchased still drives a significant volume of the brand’s carbon emissions.

Henkel understood that it had a responsibility as a brand to empower consumers to change their behaviours. Critical to this would be engendering a sense of belonging to bring consumers along this journey with them. The response is a multi-brand, multi-channel, and multi-country campaign, It Starts With Us. The campaign centres around building a sense of community, showing consumers that by working together they can achieve greater success for the benefit of the planet. The platform works to educate consumers on what Henkel is doing to promote sustainability, as well as the small changes they can make to lower their own carbon footprint.

## Making the most of employee advocates

LinkedIn's Workforce Confidence Index identified that 54% of individuals currently considering changing jobs are doing so because they want to work with an employer who aligns with their values.

Employees who clearly understand a brand's values and are actively encouraged to drive impact against those values, can reach true belonging and be transformed into advocates. Employee advocates perform better and help increase the brand's reach and support higher qualified lead generation, among other benefits.

To create true advocates, organisations must embed these values into the organisation's day-to-day operations so that advocacy becomes part of the job role. The Stanford Social Innovation Review recommends prioritising education (creating competence and knowledge in key value areas, for example, sustainability or the rights of First Nations peoples), cocreating value-based practices with employees (encouraging open discussions to identify the best path forward for change), and incentivising employees to become value champions (by joining broad incentives or joining issues-based groups).



## CASE STUDY

# DON'T BUY THIS JACKET



## Patagonia: A brand inseparable from its values

Patagonia was built by a nature lover for nature lovers – and everything it does works to retain and build relationships with this audience.

The Patagonia brand is inseparable from its environmental advocacy: the entire supply chain has been built to reduce environmental harm to the planet, and the company continues to invest in initiatives to make it better. Brave marketing campaigns like 'Don't Buy This Jacket' where Patagonia encouraged consumers to buy second hand rather than new mean it continuously reminds its audience of what it stands for.

Arguably, Patagonia can stay so true to its cause because of how strongly the brand's values resonate with its people. Employees are hired using a 'bottom up' CV reading approach where interests and volunteer work are prioritised over experience – they need to love nature and the planet to get hired. Once on board, the 'Let My People Go Surfing' employee handbook (and now, bestselling book) recognises that because Patagonia hires 'outdoorsy types', sometimes staff will want to prioritise catching a great wave over work, and they have the flexibility to do so.

**All in all, a commitment to its people, great products, and the planet has meant Patagonia is synonymous with belonging for nature lovers.**

08

# THE WAY FORWARD FOR COMMUNICATORS

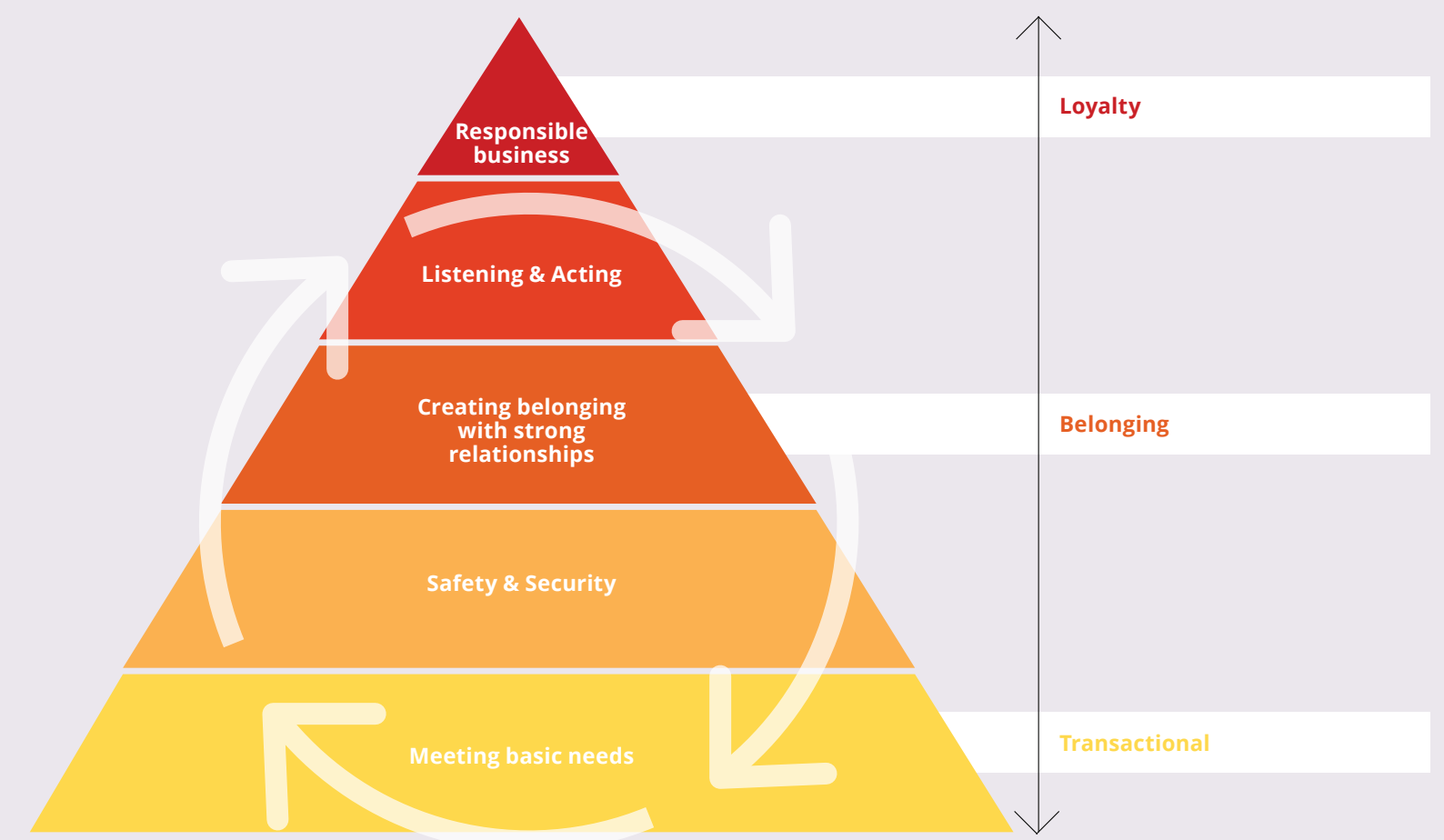


## Belonging has never been more critical.

Organisations need to be informed and prepared for every eventuality - and they must be prepared to have a perspective on what matters to their employees, customers, and all stakeholders that is communicated with transparency and authenticity. This is no longer just appreciated; it's expected.

By building belonging inside and outside their organisation, brands create long-term trust and loyalty with customers, employees, suppliers, and the entire community. However, building belonging can't be a set-and-forget exercise.

Just as the global landscape is complex and evolving, our communications approach to building belonging should be thought of as a continuum. This way of working prioritises a constant ebb and flow of contact with audiences but also promotes resourcefulness – re-using messaging and techniques that work well and adapting them for different topics or audiences. It involves circling back to the fundamentals and addressing the changing and evolving needs of your audiences.





As marketers and communicators, we play a key part in helping to establish, build, and grow a sense of belonging across our stakeholder groups. There are three simple ways that we can start to adapt our processes to put the insights from this report into practice quickly and simply:

**Listen:** Understand what systems are in place for gathering feedback from stakeholders about what matters to them. Adopt better processes to provide a more comprehensive view of this. Communicators' fingers must always be on the pulse to understand their audiences inside and out.

**Do:** Act on feedback. Stakeholder feedback should be used as the basis for all products, messaging, and campaign planning and strategies. Tangible, measurable changes should be made in a timely manner in response to this feedback and to create long-term relationships with stakeholders.

**Say:** Communicate the steps being taken openly, compassionately, transparently, and with integrity. It's important to take a top-down approach where leadership sets the communications standard, and that brand messaging is consistent across all channels.

Marketing and communications teams typically have direct contact with both internal and external audiences, and therefore play an important role in helping organisations to understand and respond to the key needs of their stakeholders. Whether that means understanding and responding to themes like climate change, diversity and inclusion, ethical supply chains, recognition of First Nations people, or showcasing business integrity, we can be true agents of change and help create positive impact for the long term.

## 01 LISTEN

Systems and processes to listen and learn

## 02 DO

Take action on key issues that matter

## 03 SAY

Communicate on progress and outcomes



**You**  
**belong.**

# Sefiani

Part of the Clarity Global Group

To learn more about how we can help you foster and build brand belonging with internal and external stakeholders, contact our team.

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