EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this monograph, the Arthur W. Page Society proposes a point of view on the future of enterprise communications. We offer it not as a finished construct, but a hypothesis—intended to spark further research, exploration and refinement.

Our thinking has been shaped by the Society's research over the past five years, beginning with its 2007 publication, *The Authentic Enterprise*. The long-term goal of this new model is to offer practical guidance to chief communication officers—as well as other leaders responsible for communications, including chief marketing officers and chief human resources officers—in helping their organizations succeed in a radically different 21st century environment.

The Model

Building Belief describes two important new dimensions of the CCO's role, each of which is grounded in the creation of shared belief:

1. **The definition and activation of corporate character.** Corporate character refers to the enterprise's unique identity, its differentiating purpose, mission and values. Management of corporate character involves *the integration of the organization's reputation and culture*. In an age of unprecedented transparency, "*how* we are is *who* we are," as one CCO interviewed for this study describes it.

   The CCO has two responsibilities in managing corporate character: definition and activation.

   Corporate character may be defined by history – imprinted by the founder of the enterprise, shaped and refined by decades of corporate life. It may also be recast by current management and employees in response to new realities, such as a long-term change in corporate strategy, a merger or spin-off or a significant crisis. In any case, the definition is foundational to the enterprise. It must include the enterprise's enduring purpose – what it exists uniquely to do in the world – as well as the values and principles that guide the daily decisions and behavior of everyone associated with it.

   Activation is the never-ending work of ensuring that the enterprise behaves in a manner consistent with its stated character. The New Model proposes a framework for determining whether the company *looks like, sounds like, thinks like and performs like* its stated character. This framework has implications for new ways in which the CCO should collaborate with his or her C-suite peers – since dimensions of this construct necessarily involve management responsibilities outside the domain of the CCO as it has traditionally been defined.

2. **The building of advocacy at scale.** Never have word-of-mouth and peer-to-peer influence been more ubiquitous or powerful. Billions of individuals now have the means to share their experiences, opinions and ideas – and to organize for action – at scale. They are revealing and generating unprecedented amounts of data about themselves. This has profound implications for CCOs and their functions. They must become adept at extracting actionable insights from what some are calling the "Big Data" era. But arguably the importance of this phenomenon has less to do with social networks and other technologies than with how and why individuals advocate. Simply put, they are motivated to do so when they have genuinely realized the value of their *decision* to buy from, work for, invest in or otherwise decide in favor of the enterprise. (The converse is also true.)

Therefore, this aspect of the New Model differs from prevailing communications models in at least two important respects. First, it is aimed at how an enterprise engages *individuals*, in addition to audiences, publics or segments of populations. Second, its goal is not merely to shape the opinion, sentiment and perception of those individuals, but to spur them to action, continuing behavior and *advocacy*.

Unlocking the power of advocacy at scale requires an understanding of how people make decisions. The New Model draws on insights from the fields of behavioral and cognitive science. They suggest a pattern for the creation of authentic advocacy.

This pattern begins with the building of **shared belief** with decision-makers – customers, investors, employees, citizens. This is different from raising awareness or delivering information.

That belief leads these constituents to **act** – to make a purchase, accept a job, invest their money, support a policy, etc.

Those actions, when successful, give people **confidence** in the decisions they have made, and turn actions into ongoing behaviors.

When those behaviors strengthen someone's feelings of agency and purpose, this can generate self-motivated **advocacy** – fueling a virtuous cycle, as these advocates build shared belief among new decision-makers.

Implications for the CCO

The work described in Building Belief expands the roles of organizational communications. The CCO must now be:

- **An integrator** – working across the C-suite to make the company "think like" and "perform like" its corporate character.

- **A systems designer** – not only systems of marketing and communications, but of how these relate to the company's operations and management systems.

- **A master of data analytics** – to understand customers, employees, investors, citizens and other stakeholders as individuals rather than publics, audiences and segments of populations.

- **A publisher and developer** – the same tools of information production that are in the hands of the masses are also available to the CCO, who can directly inform, empower and equip targeted individuals.

- **A student of behavioral science** – to inform the shaping of belief, action, behavior and advocacy.

- **A curator of corporate character** – to ensure that the company's communications and its people remain true to their core identity.

Getting Started

To provide leadership in defining and activating corporate character, the CCO should:

1. Initiate

Initiate a cross-C-suite effort to **define or reaffirm the enterprise's corporate character**—ensuring the corporate character includes the enterprise's unique, enduring and differentiating purpose, mission and values.

2. Apply

Apply the **"Looks Like" framework** to assess whether the organization consistently enacts and expresses its corporate character.

3. Partner

Partner with appropriate leaders in the enterprise to **systematically address gaps and deepen strengths.**

4. Examine

Examine measurement and listening instruments and revise or augment as needed to provide ongoing feedback and sensing.

To assert leadership in building advocacy at scale, the CCO should:

1. Assess

Assess communications strategy and programs against the authentic advocacy aspect of the model.

- Ensure that programs are aimed at individuals, as well as publics and segments of populations.
- Ensure the programs are aimed at spurring them to act and to advocate, in addition to shaping their perceptions and opinions.

2. Build

Build expertise and capabilities in data analytics into communications planning and programs.

- Work with the Chief Information Officer (CIO) to put into place the necessary tools and infrastructure to capture and accurately interpret enterprise and social data.
- Use data to detect trends and sentiment and to understand stakeholders as unique individuals.

3. Establish

Establish the capacity to create **"owned media"**—information, knowledge, apps, etc.—and to distribute this content directly to targeted individuals through modern channels, including social networks and smart devices.

- Leverage data to personalize and tailor communications and engagement to enhance relevance.

4. Engage

Engage the C-suite in establishing progressive **social business policies, programs and management systems.**

We believe that this new model represents a contemporizing of Arthur W. Page's foundational tenets on public relations. That should not be surprising. The Page Philosophy and Page Principles hold renewed relevance in a world of newly empowered customers, investors, employees and a general public that demands authenticity of businesses and institutions as a prerequisite for establishing and maintaining a relationship with them.