



Energy Game Changers: Communication about the energy transition

NAVIGATING TRUTHFULNESS

The global energy transition is not on the right path. At the current pace, we will overshoot climate targets, potentially facing 2.2°C warming by 2100 (source: DNV). The next decade is crucial for shifting humanity's trajectory. Research shows that 80% of the global population worries about climate change and wants to see action (source: Our World in Data). However, polarization, resistance, and reluctance to change are hindering progress.

Energy Game Changers

The Energy Game Changers network discusses how communications and brand professionals can help accelerate the energy transition. During the Charge Energy Branding Conference in Lisbon, a group of 13 communications professionals and other executives joined the debate to identify solutions and actions.

In this round of Energy Game Changers, we explored the critical role that communications, marketing, branding, journalism, and behavioural science professionals can play in the next phase of the transition. Participants discussed the pressing global macro challenges while diving deep into how the communications profession can address these issues and drive impactful change.

Top 5 macro challenges

- Poverty trumps energy poverty (reality check):** In analyzing the root causes of barriers to the energy transition, the focus quickly shifted away from Lisbon, where participants gathered, to the realities faced by people in developing countries. Although climate change is a real concern – especially as those in vulnerable regions experience its impact first – participants acknowledged that for many people, it is not their top priority. The immediate struggles of hunger, homelessness, and access to healthcare overshadow long-term climate considerations. While access to clean energy is desirable, the cost does not align with the daily realities in many poorer regions.

How our profession can contribute: While we cannot solve global poverty directly, we can humanize the energy transition, highlighting its tangible benefits: clean air, job creation, housing security, energy security, and recycling among others. By doing so, we not only ensure people see benefits (when economic situations allow) but also address “not in my backyard views” early on.
- Overconsumption:** While the industry proudly announces record installations of renewables, fossil fuels are still crucial in the energy mix. During discussions on how to address this, the group’s response was both simple and complex – as long as energy consumption remains at current levels, significant reductions in fossil fuel use will be out of reach.

How our profession can contribute: Support educational efforts across communities, governments, and other stakeholders. The power of education should not be underestimated. Education and communication are essential to understanding the dilemmas of reducing fossil fuel dependence.
- Fluctuating sense of urgency:** Recent crises, such as COVID-19 and the conflict in Ukraine, have shown that people in developed countries can change habits to more sustainable behaviours. However, this willingness often fades as soon as the perceived threat subsides, and other issues regain priority.

How our profession can contribute: Climate change is a crisis, but it is still rather abstract to many people. Helping people understand the immediate, concrete negative and positive consequences can heighten their sense of urgency while supporting communities, governments, and other stakeholders in recognizing the importance and benefits of the energy transition.

4. Technology reality check: Society is frequently presented with stories of technological breakthroughs, creating an expectation that these solutions are widely available and will quickly solve the challenges of decarbonization. However, this perception often clashes with reality. An example the participants mentioned is hydrogen. While hydrogen technology has seen promising advances, the readiness for scaled implementation is still far from being realized. Focusing communication exclusively on positive examples can foster unrealistic expectations and perceptions in society.

How our profession can contribute: Participants highlighted the importance of truthful and balanced communication – being open about failures, misconceptions, and challenges, not just successes. By presenting a realistic narrative, communications professionals can help society, media, and policymakers gain a more grounded understanding of the energy transition. Providing fact-based information enables the media to report accurately, fostering a well-informed public and balanced policy discussions.

5. Competing views within the energy sector: When comparing the visibility of renewables in the political – or more specifically lobbying – arena, there isn't a unified approach among energy companies. They often compete and do not work together. How can the various lobby initiatives align or collaborate more effectively for the greater good?

How our profession can contribute: Foster real collaboration and partnerships that both attract investors, but also voice the urgency of the energy transition to regulators, institutions, and governments.

Insider tip 1: Don't forget the priest!

When communicating or educating within communities, make sure you understand who the key influencers are. Who is the trusted voice? In a shared example, a local priest was the key in amplifying messages. In this case, securing the support of this person could be a game-changing step to making a difference in the community.

Insider tip 2: Know your friends, but know your opponents even better

While it may seem logical to closely align with political parties or instructions with strong green agendas, preaching to the converted often yields limited impact. Instead, dare to approach those on the opposite side. While you may not change their minds, you can provide them with factual information that enriches the discussion and promotes a more informed dialogue.

Insider tip 3: Don't judge, but collaborate

Recognize that we are all in this together. There is no good or bad in the energy transition. What matters is aligning on a shared vision, even if we might operate in different realities. Today, pure renewable energy companies cannot meet the energy demands on their own. Fossil fuel companies are still needed. The energy transition can only succeed if we acknowledge this mutual dependence and work together towards a common goal.



PARTICIPANTS OF THE MEETING ENERGY GAME CHANGERS, 14th October 2024

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