



ECONOMIC
AND TECHNICAL
ENGINEERING

Scientific and practical journal "Economics and technical engineering"

Founders: State University of Economics and Technology

ISSN: 3041-1246

E-mail: ete@duet.edu.ua Journal homepage: <https://ete.org.ua>

JEL: M14, M31, D83

DOI: 10.62911/ete.2026.04.01.10

Adaptive Model of Corporate Communications in the Context of Global Challenges and Sustainable Development

Citation:

Slyusarenko, K. (2026). Adaptive Model of Corporate Communications in the Context of Global Challenges and Sustainable Development. Scientific and practical journal "Economics and technical engineering". Vol.4 No.1 (2026), 119–129. <https://doi.org/10.62911/ete.2026.04.01.10>

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Abstract: The article examines corporate communications as a systemic process transforming under the influence of global challenges, crisis conditions, and increasing requirements related to sustainable development, ESG principles, and corporate social responsibility. Particular attention is paid to the role of internal communications as a key mechanism for ensuring organizational stability, reducing uncertainty, and supporting the effective implementation of strategic objectives within corporations. The purpose of the study is to develop a theoretical adaptive model of corporate communications that integrates internal and external communication processes in the context of global challenges and sustainable development. The research employs systemic analysis, comparative analysis of international corporate practices, and a case study method, including the analysis of crisis communication practices of McDonald's in Ukraine, as well as communication models of corporations such as FlixBus, DHL, MHP, Tesla, and Nestlé. The results demonstrate that effective communication adaptation requires the integration of internal and external communication channels, the application of structured response mechanisms, continuous feedback processes, and alignment with ESG principles. It is established that internal communications play a decisive role in translating strategic sustainability goals into everyday organizational practices and employee behavior. The proposed adaptive model incorporates the classification of challenges, multi-level response strategies, channel integration, learning cycles, and innovative communication tools, ensuring flexibility and consistency in crisis situations. The scientific contribution of the study lies in the development of an integrated adaptive framework for corporate communications that ensures organizational resilience through the combination of strategic, operational, and communicative elements. The practical significance of the model is determined by its applicability in designing corporate communication strategies capable of responding effectively to uncertainty, crisis conditions, and the growing demands of sustainable development.

Received: 15/05/2026

Accepted: 19/05/2026



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Abstract: The article examines corporate communications as a systemic process transforming under the influence of global challenges, crisis conditions, and increasing requirements related to sustainable development, ESG principles, and corporate social responsibility. Particular attention is paid to the role of internal communications as a key mechanism for ensuring organizational stability, reducing uncertainty, and supporting the effective implementation of strategic objectives within corporations. The purpose of the study is to develop a theoretical adaptive model of corporate communications that integrates internal and external communication processes in the context of global challenges and sustainable development. The research employs systemic analysis, comparative analysis of international corporate practices, and a case study method, including the analysis of crisis communication practices of McDonald's in Ukraine, as well as communication models of corporations such as FlixBus, DHL, MHP, Tesla, and Nestlé. The results demonstrate that effective communication adaptation requires the integration of internal and external communication channels, the application of structured response mechanisms, continuous feedback processes, and alignment with ESG principles. It is established that internal communications play a decisive role in translating strategic sustainability goals into everyday organizational practices and employee behavior. The proposed adaptive model incorporates the classification of challenges, multi-level response strategies, channel integration, learning cycles, and innovative communication tools, ensuring flexibility and consistency in crisis situations. The scientific contribution of the study lies in the development of an integrated adaptive framework for corporate communications that ensures organizational resilience through the combination of strategic, operational, and communicative elements. The practical significance of the model is determined by its applicability in designing corporate communication strategies capable of responding effectively to uncertainty, crisis conditions, and the growing demands of sustainable development.

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Introduction

In the contemporary environment, the adaptation of corporate communications cannot occur without a shift in thinking regarding the role of sustainability, responsibility, and internal interaction within the company as a whole. Sustainability, once regarded as a separate domain-primarily external and associated with reputation - has become a criterion of business viability. At the same time, core business sectors continue to develop communications primarily oriented toward external audiences, including investors, government authorities, and society at large. Under these conditions, the active participation of business organizations in the international sustainability discourse stands in sharp contrast to the lack of internal transformations necessary to fulfill their commitments.

Empirical studies conducted by scholars reveal a gap between the external promotion of ESG communications and the level of internal awareness among employees within a given organization. For instance, Weder (2023), in a study assessing the effectiveness of ESG communication through a combination of internal surveys, external perception analysis, and secondary data, found that only 17% of employees were able to spontaneously recall ESG activities within their organization, despite the fact that these activities had been actively communicated externally. These findings indicate a

lack of internal resonance of ESG communications, as well as insufficient integration into everyday organizational practices (*Weder, 2023*).

From the perspective of sustainable development, ESG and CSR should not serve merely as reporting standards but must also be integrated into internal communication processes in order to influence desired employee behavior. The credibility and effectiveness of CSR and ESG communication have also been widely discussed in academic literature (*Lock & Seele, 2017*). Research on internal environmental communication has shown that a detailed explanation of sustainability goals, employees' roles, and expected behaviors can significantly enhance employee engagement and foster pro-environmental behavior within the company (*NV Business, 2024*).

Such perspectives position internal communications as a critical element in building trust, motivation, and effective management. Conversely, the absence of structured and clearly sequenced communication processes may lead to demotivation and confusion among staff (*Deloitte, 2021*).

Contemporary studies emphasize the strategic role of corporate communications in organizational management and stakeholder interaction (*Cornelissen, 2020; Macnamara, 2018*).

However, despite the growing body of research on ESG and corporate communications, the issue of integrating internal and external communication processes within a unified adaptive model capable of responding to global challenges and crisis conditions remains insufficiently explored.

The aim of this article is to develop a theoretical adaptive model of corporate communications that ensures the effective integration of internal and external communication processes in the context of global challenges and sustainable development.

Materials and Methods

This study conceptualizes corporate communications as a systemic process that transforms under the influence of global challenges, crisis conditions, and increasing expectations regarding corporate responsibility and sustainable development.

The methodological framework of the research is based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines elements of communication theory, corporate management, and sustainable development studies. The study employs several scientific methods to ensure the validity and comprehensiveness of the analysis.

First, a systemic analysis is applied to examine corporate communications as an integrated system of internal and external interactions, which enables the identification of key structural elements and their interconnections within organizations.

Second, a comparative analysis is used to assess the communication practices of international corporations (FlixBus, DHL, MHP, Tesla, and Nestlé), allowing for the identification of common patterns and differences in their approaches to communication adaptation. Cultural differences may also influence communication practices and stakeholder perception across international contexts (*Hofstede et al., 2010*).

Third, the case study method is employed to analyze crisis communication practices based on McDonald's operations in Ukraine (2007-2011). This approach enables the examination of real-life crisis situations and the identification of communication response mechanisms under conditions of uncertainty.

In addition, the study applies the method of analytical generalization to synthesize theoretical approaches (ESG, CSR, and SDGs) and practical communication models, which serves as the basis for the development of an adaptive model of corporate communications.

The development of the proposed model is based on the method of conceptual modeling, which allows for the integration of identified communication principles, crisis response mechanisms, and organizational learning processes into a unified adaptive framework.

This methodological approach makes it possible to interpret the adaptation of corporate communications not as a one-time response to external changes, but as a continuous process of internal transformation of communication systems.

Results

The analysis of contemporary approaches to corporate communication adaptation makes it possible to identify several principles that ensure the transfer of external ESG, CSR and sustainable development strategies into the internal environment of corporations, namely:

- the concept of internal priority, according to which internal communications are considered as a strategic resource in the formation of corporate culture, employee engagement, and trust;
- the principle of integration, which involves the alignment of external ESG communication with internal communication processes;
- the principle of dialogicity, which is oriented toward communication and seeks to address issues of two-way communication and meaning construction;
- the principle of ethical responsibility, whereby communication campaigns aim to enhance transparency, consistency, and value alignment;
- the principle of crisis flexibility, understood as the ability of internal communications to cope with uncertainty or crisis.

The achievement of ESG strategy implementation, in addition, includes public reporting and the operationalization of such reports through internal communications within the following:

- discussion of sustainable development goals with employees;
- implementation of ESG-oriented KPIs into internal evaluation processes;
- use of two-way communication channels;
- alignment of employee behavior models with corporate ones.

Based on the theoretical analysis and generalization of contemporary approaches to corporate communication adaptation, the key principles that determine corporate resilience under global challenges can be systematized. These principles connect sustainable development orientations (ESG, CSR, SDGs) with internal communication mechanisms and expected outcomes of organizational resilience (Table 1).

Table 1. Principles of Corporate Communication Adaptation in the Context of Sustainable Development

Principle of adaptation	Essence of the principle	Implementation mechanism	Relationship to ESG / CSR / SDGs	Strategic impact
Internal priority	Focus on internal communications as a driver of employee engagement and the internalization of sustainability principles	Structured internal communication initiatives and engagement programs	Integrating ESG goals into day-to-day operations	Strengthening organizational adaptability and employee engagement
Integration	Alignment of external ESG communication with internal communication processes to ensure consistency between declared strategies and actual practices	Consistent messaging, integrated strategies	Alignment of external reporting and internal practices	Reducing the gap between communicated strategies and actual organizational practices
Dialogicity	Establishment of two-way communication processes that enable feedback, meaning construction and employee involvement	Formalized feedback mechanisms and internal communication platforms	Building a shared understanding of ESG priorities	Building trust and embracing change

	in ESG-related transformations			
Ethical Responsibility	Ensuring transparency, value consistency and ethical alignment of communication practices across all organizational levels	Codes of conduct, internal standards	Support for the social and governance dimensions of ESG	Strengthening corporate reputation from within
Crisis preparedness and flexibility	Organizational readiness to respond to crisis situations through flexible communication strategies and adaptive internal coordination mechanisms	Contingency plans, scenarios, rapid communication channels	Ensuring resilience in the face of risks	Stabilization and organizational learning

Source: Compiled by the author

The systematization presented in Table 1 demonstrates that internal communications act as a mechanism for operationalizing ESG strategies by transforming abstract sustainable development goals into managerial decisions, employee behavior models and everyday organizational practices. Under crisis conditions, these principles become especially important because they stabilize the internal environment, reduce uncertainty and support organizational learning.

This logic becomes particularly relevant in the field of crisis corporate communications, where communication is aimed at managing stakeholder attitudes under conditions of reputational threats and information turbulence (*McKinsey & Company, 2022*).

The relevance of crisis communications in this sense is ensured by two important factors:

- first, the external environment has become increasingly less predictable: economic, social, political, and informational crises follow one another, reinforcing each other;
- second, businesses recognize that the algorithmization of responses – that is, the creation of structures, models, and matrices – must be urgent for rapid decision-making in accordance with the nature of the crisis, the scale of information dissemination, and the level of conflict.

An important contribution to the development of models for the adaptation of crisis corporate communications was made by studies of crisis situations of McDonald's in Ukraine in 2007-2011, within which a systematic analysis of several conflicts of different origins was conducted: from local operational incidents to large-scale informational and reputational crises (*McDonald's, 2011*). The methodological basis of these studies was the case study approach, which made it possible to trace the logic of managerial decisions in dynamics and to correlate types of crises with corresponding communication responses.

A distinctive feature of these studies is the attempt to create a universal model of crisis communication management that goes beyond the description of individual incidents and provides a structured decision-making algorithm. Within this model, three interrelated matrices were formed, reflecting the logic of the relationship between the characteristics of crisis situations and the organization's communication strategies (*McDonald's, 2011*).

Despite sectoral specificity, the cases of McDonald's in Ukraine can be considered relevant for the study of crisis corporate communication models, as they represent typical crises that may exist in different forms across various international corporations operating in different countries. Operational failures, social conflicts, value-based crises, and reputational crises are typical for international corporations regardless of their industry, which allows the proposed model to be considered not sector-specific but universal for different areas of business.

The first matrix shows how the origin of a crisis, its potential consequences for the enterprise, and the proposed form of response are interconnected – from compensatory communications to an observation approach. The second matrix illustrates how a universal set of managerial decisions can

be used by an organization as a basis for determining the most effective communication method depending on the resources available to the organization and its readiness for public responses. Accordingly, the third matrix suggests that responses should be differentiated in terms of the type of conflict that may contribute to the crisis (*McDonald's, 2011*).

The integration of such models into the overall concept of corporate communications transformation reinforces the main message of this section: modern communications go beyond ESG narratives and stakeholder communication, encompassing the company's ability to develop internal and external communication systems while maintaining their effectiveness under crisis pressure. Crisis decisions, in turn, acquire new functions – they act not only in response to a situation but also as a means of organizational development by enhancing internal coherence.

The integration of McDonald's crisis management models into the corporate context of business resilience provides confirmation of the following:

- the integration of crisis resolution algorithms and internal communication methodologies helps to prevent uncoordinated employee reactions;
- the presence of decision matrices makes it possible to ensure the predictability of organizational actions, thereby contributing to an increased level of trust among stakeholders;
- crisis scenarios, as such, arise as part of a broader approach to corporate responsibility and risk;
- internal communications serve as a carrier of information and a guarantee that the chosen strategy will be implemented at all levels.

Thus, the model based on the McDonald's study is naturally embedded in the conceptual framework of this subsection, since a corporation can ensure the resilience of its existence only if its communication system simultaneously possesses strategic orientation and algorithmization in case of crisis.

The analysis of McDonald's crisis situations in Ukraine (2007-2011) shows that crises of different origins and scales require differentiated communication responses. This differentiation can be formalized through three interrelated matrices: the first connects the origin of a crisis with its potential consequences; the second defines the sequence of managerial decisions in response to crisis signals; and the third specifies communication actions depending on the type of conflict and the level of media and public attention. This confirms that adaptive communication requires both structured decision-making and flexibility under unpredictable conditions (*McDonald's, 2011*).

The review of the matrices demonstrates that corporate communication adaptation includes not only external interaction with stakeholders but also internal communication mechanisms. Mini-matrices can support rapid decision-making at the local level, preserve strategic consistency and contribute to the formation of a transformation-oriented corporate culture (*McDonald's, 2011*). Moreover, the combination of algorithmization and flexibility of response strategies enables corporations to reduce reputational risk, respond to media waves, and ensure the transparency of corporate actions (*McDonald's, 2011*).

In view of the theoretical approaches and the models considered, several practical recommendations have been formulated regarding how corporate communication strategies can be adjusted in the face of crises and global challenges, including:

- it is advisable to combine internal and external communication processes, ensuring message consistency, preventing information gaps, and increasing the level of trust among all stakeholders;
- adaptive communication requires continuous measurement of the effectiveness of communication actions through the integration of analytical methods and the combination of quantitative indicators (reach, response speed, engagement metrics) and qualitative criteria (trust, message perception, internal climate);
- an important element of sustainable development is employee engagement in communication strategies, which contributes to the formation of a culture of responsibility, thereby facilitating transformational changes within the organization, as it has a stronger impact on employees than any other factor.

Accordingly, the principles of adaptability of corporate communications represent a combination of the algorithmization of actions, the structuring of decisions, and the flexibility of their application. These elements ensure both stability and responsiveness under conditions of uncertainty. Issues such as crises and environmental factors require systemic thinking; however, the actual transformative power of communications is realized through the direct involvement of internal personnel, the operational localization of decisions, and the transparency of decision-making procedures. Ensuring these principles enables companies not only to respond appropriately to any unforeseen situation, but also to create a foundation for long-term strategic transformations, a culture of corporate responsibility, and business resilience, particularly in the context of a globally dynamic and unpredictable business environment.

The application of formalized and metric-based models of crisis communication may entail a number of limitations that require critical evaluation. The applicability of such models largely depends on the context in which the organization operates, the degree of managerial centralization, the level of maturity of internal communication processes, as well as the specific features of the organization's corporate culture. Excessive formalization of models without consideration of internal processes and employee behavior patterns may negatively affect the flexibility of communication decisions and lead to their formal implementation rather than their substantive realization.

An adaptive model of corporate communications serves as a navigational framework within the environment which, in addition to formalizing the sequence of actions in a crisis situation, allows for the continuous adjustment of strategy to emerging conditions.

The transformation of corporate communications can be further illustrated through the analysis of communication practices of international corporations, which demonstrate different approaches to adaptation under conditions of uncertainty and global challenges.

The construction of such a model is based on a systematic study of communication models of international corporations and involves the integration of information flows, monitoring the effectiveness of responses to crisis signals, and forecasting potential crises. To ensure maximum effectiveness within such a model, the use of a matrix is essential, as it facilitates the comparative analysis of crisis types, their sources and expected effects, as well as the corresponding types of communication responses.

Based on the analysis of the practices of the five examined corporations, several adaptive communication patterns were identified:

- FlixBus demonstrates high mobility in digital communications and rapid response to changes in the local market environment, but its current operating model shows limited integration of internal communication (*FlixBus, 2025*);
- DHL applies a systemic approach in which ESG community development efforts are integrated with both internal and external communication. Matrices are used to forecast departmental responses and assess the impact of messages on stakeholders (*DHL, 2024*);
- MHP promotes transparency and consistency of messages during epizootic events, combining traditional and new media communication, but requires the involvement of internal communications for effective adaptation (*MHP, 2025*);
- Tesla emphasizes speed and external communication, which positively affects reputation, but may lead to discrepancies between internal and external knowledge when working with large groups of people (*Tesla, 2025*);
- Nestlé combines global ESG activities with local PR approaches, appropriately integrating both internal and external dimensions (*Nestlé, 2025*).

Although each corporation represents a successful example of effective practice in its field, they also share several core patterns of adaptive communication, such as: integration of internal and external information flows, application of matrices and structured methods for forecasting crisis situations, dynamic modification of messages in real time, and stakeholder engagement. The model approach is aimed at synthesizing effective elements from each of these companies: flexibility from FlixBus, a systemic approach from DHL, transparency from MHP, speed from Tesla, and balance from Nestlé. This synthesized approach enables a universal response to challenges in crisis situations.

The development of an adaptive model of corporate communications is based on a comprehensive strategy that includes the classification of threats, diversified response types, and the integration of internal and external communication channels. Thus, the adaptability of corporate communication strategy is one of the key factors that determine its effectiveness (Table 2).

Table 2. Components of the Adaptive Corporate Communication Model

Model component	Description	Examples of corporations	Strengths	Weaknesses
Classification of challenges	Systematic classification of crisis situations by origin, scale and potential impact on organizational processes	FlixBus, DHL	Signal ranking; avoiding a "one-size-fits-all" approach	May not fully account for specific organizational or cultural contexts
Rapid response	Timely communication response to crisis signals based on predefined scenarios and internal coordination mechanisms	Tesla, FlixBus	Ensures timely mitigation of crisis effects	A focus on external stakeholders may overlook internal processes
Strategic response	Development of long-term communication strategies aligned with ESG principles and organizational sustainability goals	Nestlé, DHL	Robust software, integration of business objectives	Requires significant resources and a mature culture
Transformational response	Internal transformation through communication-driven changes, including staff training, behavioral alignment and organizational learning	McDonald's Ukraine	Development of new standards and procedures	Dependence on staff engagement
Channel integration	Integration of internal and external communication channels to ensure consistency of messages and synchronization of communication processes	DHL, FlixBus	Consistent messaging, a cohesive brand image	It can be challenging in decentralized structures
Learning cycle	Continuous feedback collection and adjustment of communication strategies based on organizational experience	All companies	Enhancing adaptability and "collective experience"	Requires consistency and resources
Forecasting and Scenarios	Forecasting potential crisis scenarios and modeling communication responses based on risk analysis	Nestlé, FlixBus	Prompt action and preventing escalation	The need for continuous data updates
Innovation	Implementation of innovative communication tools and digital platforms to enhance adaptability and responsiveness	FlixBus, DHL	Supports flexible and adaptive communication solutions	May not be suitable for traditional structures

Source: Compiled by the author

The effectiveness of the model depends on the level of coherence of corporate culture, the provision of resources, and the degree of decentralization of management. The model should function as a single flexible tool, adapted to a specific organization and the type of crisis situation.

The proposed adaptive model of corporate communications is a comprehensive tool that combines crisis classification, multi-level response, integration of internal and external channels, continuous learning and stakeholder engagement. Its universality lies in the possibility of adapting these components to different organizational contexts while maintaining strategic coherence and crisis flexibility.

The implementation of an adaptive corporate communications model requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses an integrated communication channel for both internal and external communications, a multi-level response system, continuous employee training, and their involvement in communication transformation. Empirical data confirm that the successful adaptation of this process involves not only procedures but also a corporate culture oriented toward adaptability to change.

In addition, a key factor for successful transformation toward an adaptive approach is the combination of centralized control and autonomy; secondly, the integration of internal communications for information exchange and staff training; thirdly, reliance on external communications as a single point of view may, in some cases, lead to a loss of control and missed opportunities for rapid and effective response. The collection and analysis of feedback information, as well as the evaluation of the effectiveness of new communications, constitute one of the factors that facilitate adaptation and enhance organizational adaptability.

On the other hand, training, crisis simulation, and scenario-based exercises help employees respond quickly and effectively to unexpected challenges. This requires systematic feedback analysis, evaluation of communication practices, the creation of what is referred to as «collective experience», and the enhancement of transformation capabilities within the organization (Table 3).

Table 3. Components of Training and Performance Evaluation within the Adaptive Corporate Communication Model

Component	Goal	Implementation methods	Expected result
Training sessions and simulations	Enhancing staff preparedness for crisis communication and decision-making	Case studies, role-playing exercises, and digital communication simulations	Timely, coordinated and communication-consistent response to crisis situations
Collecting feedback	Evaluation of communication effectiveness and alignment with strategic objectives	Surveys, internal communication channel analytics, employee feedback systems	Identification of communication bottlenecks and improvement of decision-making accuracy
Continuous adaptation cycle	Ongoing improvement of communication processes and strategies	Regular communication audits, feedback analysis, and adjustment of communication practices	Increased organizational adaptability and resilience in dynamic environments
Consideration of internal factors	Ensuring employee engagement and emotional stability in communication processes	Employee satisfaction monitoring, internal discussion platforms, feedback sessions	Strengthening employee engagement, trust and accountability in organizational communication

Source: Compiled by the author

The components presented in Table 3 demonstrate that continuous training, feedback mechanisms and performance evaluation are essential elements of the adaptive corporate communication model, ensuring its sustainability and effectiveness.

These principles are also applicable to small and medium-sized enterprises, depending on their resource capacity, level of centralization, and maturity of communication systems.

From the above data, it can be noted that the principles of the adaptive model are not limited to large global companies; on the contrary, they can be appropriately applied to small and medium-sized enterprises, sectors, and markets. The implementation of such principles ensures increased flexibility, effective crisis resolution, and long-term resilience of business processes.

The analysis of FlixBus, DHL, MHP, Tesla, Nestlé and McDonald's demonstrates that organizational adaptability depends on the coherence of internal communication systems, the availability of structured response procedures, the balance between centralized control and local autonomy, and the ability to transform crisis experience into organizational learning. Therefore, the proposed adaptive model should be understood not only as a crisis response tool but also as a mechanism for strengthening corporate resilience and embedding sustainable development principles into everyday communication practices.

Conclusions

The study confirmed that corporate communications under conditions of global challenges function not only as a tool of external interaction, but as a systemic process that requires continuous adaptation under the influence of crisis situations, regulatory changes, and increasing sustainability-related requirements, including ESG and corporate social responsibility.

The theoretical analysis of contemporary practices of international corporations has demonstrated that effective adaptation of corporate communications involves the integration of external and internal channels, two-way interaction with personnel, transparency, ethical responsibility, and crisis flexibility. In particular, the identified gap between the external promotion of ESG initiatives and their internal implementation highlights the need to formalize internal communication mechanisms, enabling the translation of strategic sustainability orientations into everyday organizational practices, shaping employee behavior, and increasing staff engagement.

The empirical analysis based on the case studies of McDonald's in Ukraine (2007-2011) showed that crisis situations of different origins and scales require differentiated communication responses that can be formalized through decision-making matrices. These matrices establish the relationship between the origin of a crisis, its potential consequences, and the corresponding communication strategies, ensuring structured and predictable organizational actions while increasing stakeholder trust.

At the same time, the integration of crisis response algorithms with internal communication processes contributes to faster decision-making at the local level, stabilizes the internal environment, and supports the accumulation of organizational learning. The findings also indicate that such an approach is applicable not only to large international corporations but also to small and medium-sized enterprises, contributing to flexibility, effective crisis response, and organizational resilience.

The scientific contribution of this study lies in the development of an adaptive model of corporate communications that integrates internal and external communication processes, crisis response mechanisms, and sustainability principles into a unified framework for ensuring organizational resilience.

The practical significance of the proposed model is determined by its potential application in designing corporate communication strategies capable of responding to global challenges while supporting long-term sustainable development and internal organizational transformation.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

Funding

This study did not receive any external funding

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