

Leading at the **Intersections** 2024



The Moment We Face: Leadership Amid A Changing and Chaotic World.

The imperative to lead.

As we welcome 2024, we're all navigating seismic, ongoing disruptions.

War and violence.

Geopolitical fragmentation.

Climate change.

Humanitarian emergencies.

Economic uncertainty.

Political polarization. Misinformation. Disinformation.

Distrust and skepticism of institutions from across the political spectrum.

The rise of artificial intelligence and its implications for ethics and innovation.

The reinvention of how and where we work.

Plus, consequential national elections in the U.S., U.K., India and elsewhere.

The central question in 2024 – for individuals and organizations – is how to be a force for progress in the face of such vast and interconnected challenges.

How do you bring continued openness and curiosity to a rapidly changing world? How do you anticipate and mitigate risks – and identify and invest in emerging opportunities to create value? How do you build relationships with stakeholders in a fragmented, polarized context? How do you exemplify values in action – and bring moral leadership to complex challenges?

This third annual Leading at the Intersections report offers context and insights on the big questions of the day, designed to help Chief Executive Officers, Chief Corporate Affairs Officers, Chief Public Affairs Officers and other senior executives understand contemporary risks to their enterprises – and the expanding opportunities for innovation and leadership.

Our report's title felt apt when we first introduced it years ago; yet it has never felt more relevant to today's highly connected, changing world.

I hope you find this a worthwhile resource – one that illuminates timely topics, reveals possibilities in your work and sparks ideas for the year ahead.



Paul Massey

President, Powell Tate
Global Lead, Social Impact & Sustainability, Weber Shandwick



Leading in the Modern-day Public Square

Leading an organization today means engaging stakeholders in a time of unprecedented politicization and transparency. Everything is political. Everything is public. Leaders face an ongoing collision of business and public interests, often around policy or regulatory issues, but also on social issues, from the workplace to climate, data privacy, reproductive health, gender and sexual identity, democracy and racial justice. The risks will most certainly be heightened in this election year.

Today's public square is bigger and broader than ever before. It's everywhere where people weigh in on what they believe and how they act – not just as consumers, but at political rallies, town halls, sports events, in coffee shops, behind closed doors at the office and on the online platforms that welcome their comments and posts.

The public square is crowded, cluttered and frequently uncivil. It promotes the most extreme views of advocates on the left and right, who talk past each other or only with the inhabitants of their closed echo-chambers. The public square is also rife with misinformation and disinformation – driven by a small number of real influencers with political and personal agendas. Or by fictional characters made up to resemble real people by foreign or domestic actors. And with a rise in the use of artificial intelligence, it is increasingly difficult to discern fabrication from reality.

Against this backdrop, leaders are under greater pressure to speak out and take a stand, particularly when it comes to Gen Z employees and consumers. Whether your position is big or small, bold or modest, you are going to upset people. The key is to balance the competing demands of your stakeholders, assessing and understanding the risks and rewards that come with your communications. And making sure your action aligns with your expressed values.

Leading in the modern-day public square means communicating your views clearly and consistently. And preparing for the incoming arrows that are sure to come.



Pam Jenkins

Chair, Powell Tate
Chief Public Affairs Officer, Weber Shandwick



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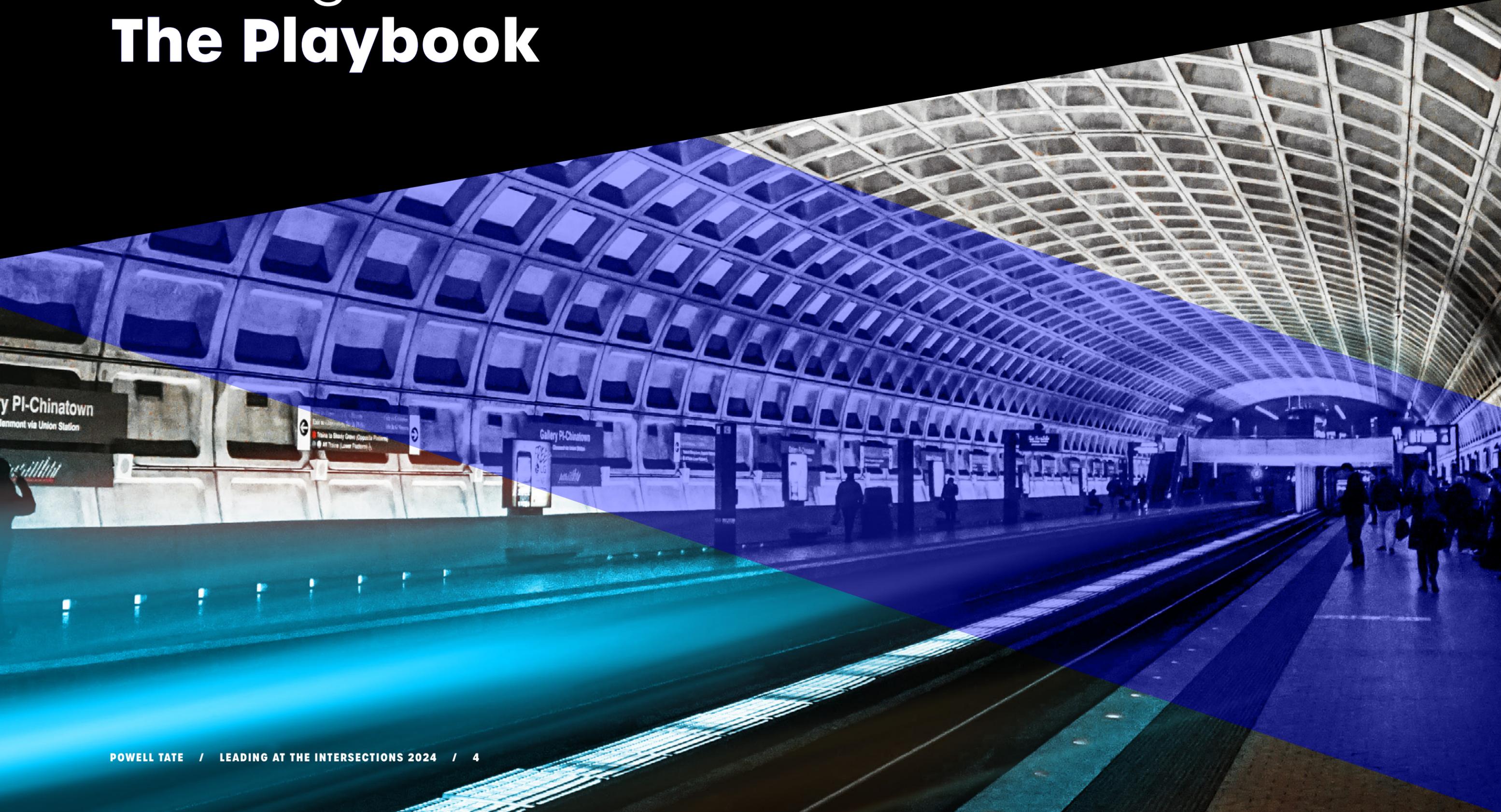
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Leading at the Intersections: **The Playbook**



From: Media Insecurity To: Narrative and AI Intelligence

Anti-ESG and DEI backlash. The rise of unions and worker empowerment. Geopolitical anxiety. Climate doomerism. Rise of the machines. Future shock. Economic fragility. Culturally, socially and politically, the media environment has rarely been as fractured and volatile as it was in 2023. With another contentious election season on the horizon, those conditions are set to increase in the year ahead. In this environment, corporations need to take a hard look in the mirror and ask if their narratives are credible, resonant and resilient. If not, an AI-enabled diagnostic could be the first step in meeting the needs of the moment and anticipating those to come in the ever-shifting times ahead.



Michael Connery
EVP, AI Strategy, Futures



Josh Wu
SVP, Analytics
and Intelligence



Three things to watch in 2024

AI-enabled diagnostics provide extraordinary understanding of the marketplace. Adopting these emerging technologies can help brands spot existing communications' vulnerabilities and create narratives that keep pace with or stay ahead of economic and cultural trends.

- 1 Narrative intelligence.** Use AI-enabled social listening tools to identify the predominant narratives that may amplify or counteract your own messaging and identify adversarial networks that may drive attacks on your brand.
- 2 Influencer intelligence.** Use AI-enabled trend monitoring to deep dive on what cultural influencers are doing and saying within your category, understand what topics are trending up vs. down and understand how that might drive audience behaviors and receptivity to your narrative.
- 3 AI intelligence.** Use ChatGPT-enabled personas to run simulations testing your narrative against a variety of audiences and situations to identify blind spots and sharpen your messaging before moving into traditional message testing.



In Focus: Climate and Energy

The 2023 UN Climate Conference – COP28 – marked the midpoint between the adoption of the Paris Agreement and the goal the global community established to effectively address the climate crisis by 2030. [A review](#) of the global media conversation surrounding COP28 reveals that many stakeholders are tired of rhetoric about commitments and long-term ambitions and are demanding action and impact now. That sentiment shaped the COP28 climate talks, which resulted in a ‘historic package’ of measures designed to transition the world away from fossil fuels. The outcome sends a strong signal that it is time to get real about the ‘how’ of the net-zero transition in ways that address the multiplicity of climate issues. Moving forward, leaders will need to become fluent in the intersectional climate challenges across energy, health, geopolitics, economics and social justice and advance holistic solutions that leverage the combined power of technology, nature and human ingenuity.



Kate Olsen
EVP, North America Lead,
Social Impact & Sustainability



Teresa Wykpisz-Lee
SVP, Public Affairs



From: Content Creation To: Influence

Can any brand thrive on social media today without collaborating with content creators? According to [Goldman Sachs analysts](#), approximately 50 million people worldwide are currently engaged in content creation and the global creator economy is now valued at more than \$250 billion. Whether or not your brand currently partners with creators for your social campaigns, they still hold significant relevance for you.

Social media users are increasingly turning to creators outside traditional media to help make sense of current events. This trend, according to the latest [Reuters Institute Digital News Report](#), is contributing to the decline in the audience of traditional media outlets. While some creators engage in original reporting, many simply repackage or build on the work of journalists in their quest to attract viewership through their own hot takes.

This shift has democratized influence allowing individuals and communities to wield significant power. Brands and organizations must adapt by engaging with a wide array of influencers, each with their own unique audience and perspective. The challenge lies in navigating this complex ecosystem, identifying authentic and authoritative voices and fostering genuine relationships to earn trust and credibility.



James Walker

EVP, Integrated
Media Strategy



Laura Wilson

SVP, Platform Strategy



Three things to watch in 2024

The media brands and channels that for decades conveyed authority to audiences are now sharing their imprimatur with influencers and creators who may not be as well-known on the main stage but carry enormous clout within their distinct communities.

1 Rise of the B2B influencer. Last year, LinkedIn reported that individuals were sharing their insights on the platform 41 percent more compared to 2021. Expect to see more brands partnering with thought leaders and key opinion shapers on LinkedIn this year.

2 More brands tapping employees and customers as influencers. It's time to think of "influence" on a larger scale, encompassing a wider range of creators – from your own employees to your loyal customers. Expect more companies to build formalized employee advocacy programs in 2024.

3 Data-driven influencer identification and measurement of campaigns. We will see more brands rely on advanced analytics and technology to measure the effectiveness of their influencer campaigns. The data-driven approach will include things like audience segmentation, predictive analysis, bot + fraud detection and more sophisticated attribution modeling.



In Focus: Healthcare

Healthcare issues typically rise to the top of candidates' policy platforms in presidential election years because few issues more directly and personally affect voters – or carry more weight with them – than matters like the cost of healthcare, access to it and abortion. In the election year ahead, it will be hard to overstate the importance these issues will have.

The influence of traditional media is waning. Voters are turning to personal networks and alternative news sources to shape their opinions. The shift in the media landscape affords the corporate community more opportunity to lean in on new channels that can have an extraordinary impact on the public dialogue, public perceptions and ultimately the election itself. Debates about rising healthcare costs, equitable distribution of medicine, and women's reproductive rights will influence not only the outcome of the election, but future thinking and initiatives in corporate America as well.



Nicole Arens
EVP, Healthcare



Tim Ryan
EVP, Integrated Media Strategy



Lauren DiPaola
EVP, Healthcare Communications Planning





From: Reputation Management To: **Authentic Advocacy**

In addition to strictly business matters, companies and brands today must navigate a convergence of highly polarizing issues including the economy, abortion, the Israel-Hamas war, immigration, racial inequities, LGBTQ+ rights and climate, alongside the impacts and consequences created by artificial intelligence, misinformation/disinformation and geopolitics.

A recent survey shows that the public – particularly young consumers and employees – want steadfast corporate leadership and advocacy, internally and externally, on social issues and public policy.

Workplace emotions may be heightened with high-stakes economic, social and foreign policy issues at the center of national debate, especially in an election year. So, being steadfast may be as easy as walking on a balance beam perched on a beach ball. Executives must set a tone of civility and respect in the workplace, remind employees to be tolerant of differing opinions and be a voice of reassurance. (Notably, many companies have urged their workers to vote and some provide paid time off on election days. Voter turnout in 2020 reached 66% of the voting-eligible population, the highest of any national election in the U.S. since 1900.)

Leaders should also foster cross-functional collaboration, partnering closely with human resources, government relations, legal teams and other colleagues to monitor and mitigate potential vulnerabilities. They should also engage stakeholders, thoughtfully and promptly responding to emerging issues as needed.

Moreover, narrative and stakeholder intelligence grounded in data enables organizations to see around corners to understand and anticipate business and social issues relevant to key stakeholders. This knowledge informs scenario planning in a world where almost everything is political and poses reputational risks.



John Files
EVP, North America
Co-lead, Public Affairs



Ashley Etienne
Senior Advisor



Three things to watch in 2024

The 2024 elections will create a highly charged, complex issue environment in which organizations must balance public discourse and internal engagement. Indeed, 2024 will be among the most consequential election years in American history.

1 This is the first AI election. Campaigns will use AI tools to target communications to specific segments of voting blocs and to reach them in real time. They will also be used to create and spread misinformation and disinformation, which diminishes trust in individuals and institutions.

2 Campaigns, partnerships and activations – big and small – can be politicized. They should be carefully vetted and evaluated relative to organizational values and based on potential for reputational impact. Consider the timing and potential responses, particularly during the months leading up to November 2024.

3 Political contributions can become a reputational challenge. Contributions to candidates, parties and political causes – either by executives or through corporate political action committees (PACs) – are being closely scrutinized by activist groups on both the left and the right.



In Focus: Social Issues

Many Americans – especially young people – have sharply increased civic engagement around social issues, raising their voices on climate change, racial justice, reproductive rights, gun violence, LGBTQ+ rights, even foreign policy. Rallies in the wake of the Supreme Court decision overturning Roe v. Wade and protests against human rights abuses, antisemitism and Islamophobia amid geopolitical conflict involve issues that will remain prominent in 2024. Corporate statements on social issues satisfy expectations and demands among many stakeholders. They have also drawn fire and material retaliation – like boycotts from groups that oppose the positions – while failing to meaningfully influence societal outcomes. The big question becomes: How can companies respond to hot-button issues in a way that averts backlash while also being authentic to their purpose and impactful to the cause?



John Files
EVP, North America
Co-lead, Public Affairs



Meghann Curtis
EVP, North America
Co-lead, Public Affairs



From: Rising Geopolitical Tensions To: Corporate Diplomacy

Leaders of global companies increasingly have to address the impact of geopolitical events on their business operations, workforces and supply chains. In the digital age, geopolitical power is infinitely distributed. It spans governments, multilateral organizations, business, media and increasingly empowered masses of digital citizens ready to praise or pillage.

For global brands to get and stay ahead, leaders must not only track governments, but also culture, social trends and rapid changes in public opinion. When geopolitical tensions spike, multinational corporations are expected to speak, act and even influence outcomes. We saw this in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, in the Israel-Hamas war and will likely experience it again if geopolitical tensions spike in other global hotspots like Taiwan or the South China Sea.

2024 will see a fracturing and uncertain global landscape, requiring leaders to closely monitor, assess and react to geopolitical tensions and engage in corporate diplomacy to manage risk and reputation.



James Meszaros

EVP, International
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Meghann Curtis

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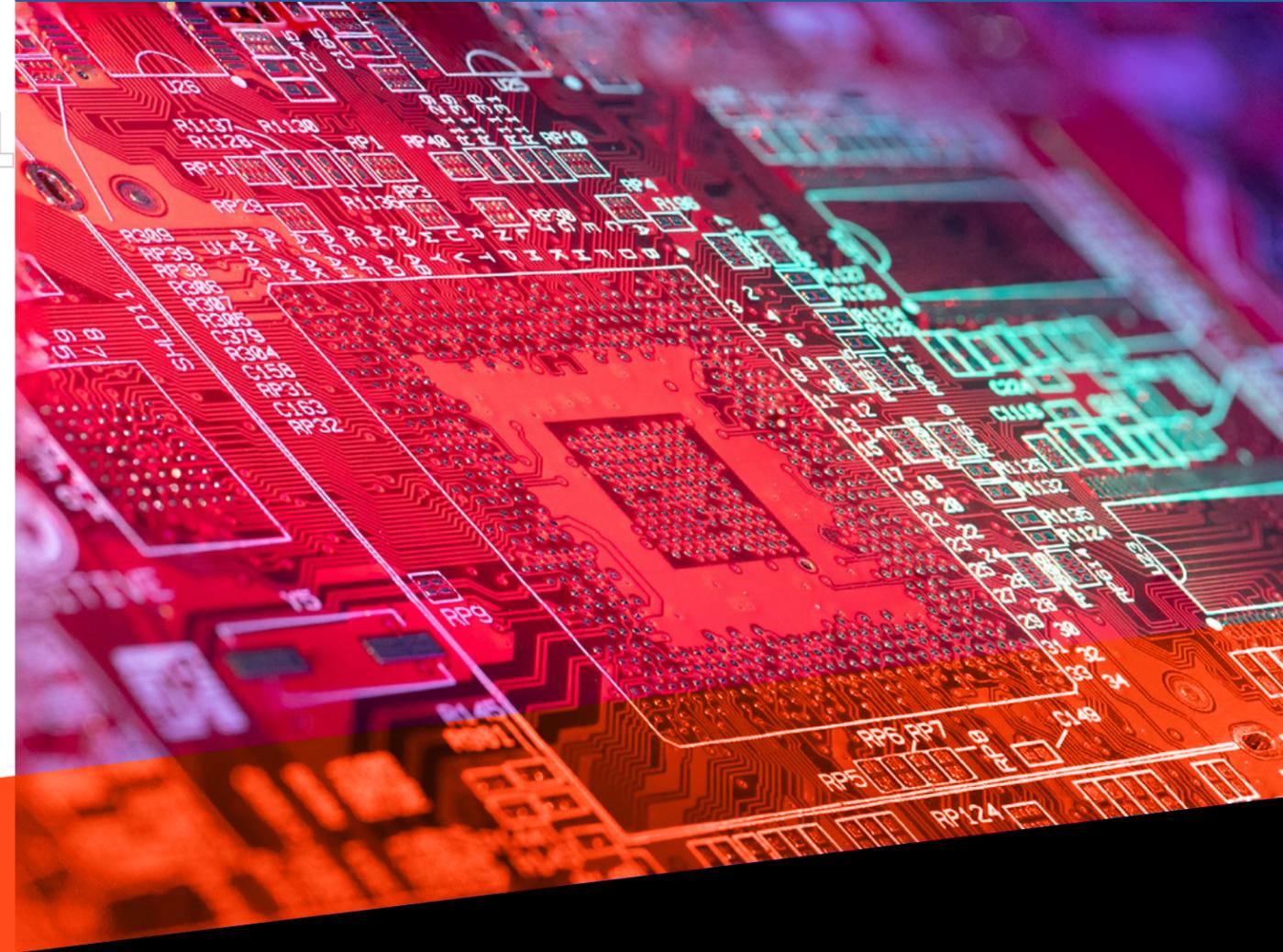
Three things to watch in 2024

In a little more than a generation, we've transitioned from "all politics is local" to "all politics is global" as geopolitical events around the world can immediately affect and transform businesses, governments and societies thousands of miles away.

1 More than half the world's population – 4.2 billion people – will vote in elections this year. Of the 70 elections set to take place in 2024, key elections in global power centers – in the U.K., the European Union parliament, Taiwan, India, Mexico, Indonesia, South Africa and the U.S. – will have significant impact on the geopolitical, economic and social landscape. This includes how national and supra-national governments will approach corporate actors on everything from climate and energy to AI and privacy regulation to supply chain management.

2 Talk of a new cold war with China isn't going away, even if the U.S. and China continue to hold bilateral meetings. Companies will continue to struggle to balance their political interests at home with their business interests in China. It turns out that diversifying manufacturing and supply chains away from China is easier said than done.

3 The Israel-Hamas war caught companies off guard and tested their in-house geopolitical capabilities. What had been contained to the realm of foreign policy in the past is now also a hotly contested domestic issue, engulfing employee groups, board rooms and investors. As the scope of the Middle East conflict threatens to grow – and set precedent for how corporate stakeholders engage on geopolitics – corporate leaders will have to think critically about what's needed to manage risk and reputation as the global order continues to shift.



In Focus: AI Regulation

While countries and multilateral institutions regularly seek cooperation in areas such as development, trade and climate policy, a new issue is fast emerging: AI regulation. Countries and tech leaders are exploring opportunities to align around a set of global rules and standards to ensure safety and competition in introducing AI platforms. The European Union is set to finalize a set of AI rules, while the U.S., China, the U.K. and other countries are also considering regulations. Many countries will face a delicate balance regulating an emerging industry without hindering innovation that can drive economic growth and human progress.



James Meszaros
EVP, International
Public Affairs



Katya Sotiris
North America Head
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From: Generative AI To: What's Next in Creativity

It's hard to believe that ChatGPT is just over a year old. In that short time, it has become the fastest growing app in history and part of our daily conversation. Where Generative AI – the broader tech category ChatGPT falls under – goes next is anybody's guess. Even ChatGPT doesn't know ChatGPT's full potential. But two things are certain: AI is moving quickly and it's being used to create new things daily. Beautiful things, like a "new" Beatles song first recorded in 1977 – a song none of us would have experienced without the power of AI; lifesaving things like improved diagnosis and treatment accuracy and personalized care plans; even playful things like the Pope dressed in a puffer jacket. And when new things are being created, creative people always want to be part of it. Of course, some (especially in the marketing communications industry) fear the worst – Amazon, Meta, Google and TikTok have all launched AI-powered advertising tools. But these won't replace strategic planning and creative roles. They will simply challenge us all to embrace technology to create something new, like the Beatles did. Because "Now and Then" isn't only a Beatles' song or an AI-generated one. It's a joint creation, as John Lennon himself would have understood: "now and then we must start again..."



Chris Ferguson
Chief Creative Officer



Kristine Fitton
EVP, Strategy
& Planning



Three things to watch in 2024

Every generation, it seems, worries about some new advancement that could transform society. AI is no different. And while there may be dangers ahead, the potential benefits for the world and the world of work are immense.

1 AI becomes fully integrated. In 2023, early adopters experimented with generative AI tools outside their traditional workflow. Expect companies to integrate AI into their suite of desktop tools so all writers and designers can more seamlessly “collaborate” with AI. Also look for next-generation AI tools to be multi-modal – integrating diverse kinds of data such as text, visuals and audio into a single AI product.

2 More human-centric design. It may seem counterintuitive, but AI will likely make creative content more personal. AI will allow for more efficient content customization. And AI tools will test more designs for readability for people with color blindness or dyslexia – and perhaps even begin to analyze content’s potential impact on the mental health of its audience.

3 A focus on ethical growth. For all its upside, concerns about AI abound and are broadly recognized. We expect thought leaders and regulators to find rare moments of consensus around tackling intellectual property challenges, bias and errors in AI-generated content, data privacy concerns and the evolving role of human writers and designers.



In Focus: Ethical AI

Generative AI can feel magical, but the results can be intensely practical. We believe that in the coming years Generative AI will completely rewire how communicators do their work. Realizing that vision requires both technical and cultural infrastructures that make safe and ethical use a reality. In 2023, our agency invested in the development of our GenAI Sandbox, a safe and secure space where our staff can experiment with using large language and image models in their work. Paired with a learning and development agenda that teaches staff the creative and ethical uses of generative AI, we’re laying the groundwork for redesigned communications and AI-driven processes that become core components of how we work.



Michael Connery
EVP, AI Strategy, Futures



Eben Gilfenbaum
EVP, Digital





From: Employee Engagement To: Empowerment

Organizations are attempting to address seismic shifts in the employer-employee dynamic in the face of unprecedented societal, generational and technological disruptions. Headlines shout about the competition for talent and the rise of employee power in the face of high-profile strikes and unionization efforts. Leaders worry about employee activism for climate and social justice issues on the one hand and the erosion of cohesive workplace culture – due to employee dissatisfaction and disengagement – on the other.

Managers bemoan younger employees who resist paying their dues to earn responsibility, demand more work/life balance and require a permanent commitment to hybrid work. At the same time, the emergence of AI technology is poised to fundamentally change the very nature of work, leaving workers at all stages of their career fearful of being replaced by machines. Finding and cultivating talent with the skills required to navigate the increasing complexity of modern work has never been more important.

Engaging employees is no longer enough. Leaders need to strategically invest in talent empowerment. That means going beyond efforts to close the skills gap and train the ‘workforce of the future’. The scale of disruption and speed of transformation means that technical knowledge is always changing and any training program or information cascade will always be at least a step behind. Talent empowerment requires cultivating the new workforce essentials of adaptability, agility and critical thinking that equip employees to drive sustainable performance in a time of ambiguity and constant change. Employees are more likely to invest in growing their careers when and where they feel empowered, rather than constantly searching for what’s next with a different organization.



Kate Olsen
EVP, North America Lead,
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Maureen Golga
EVP, Corporate
Reputation & Issues



Three things to watch in 2024

The generational transformation of the workforce and workplace will continue. Older workers will retire by the thousands every day (the youngest Baby Boomers reach 60 this year) and Gen Z, the largest generational cohort in the world, will increasingly take their place – with very different ideas about what they want from work.

1 Rise of Gen Z. Younger employees are entering the workforce at a time of great economic and social turmoil. Their young adulthood has been shaped by sociopolitical instability, war and conflict and the looming threat of the climate crisis. They are bringing a new set of expectations regarding inclusivity, responsibility and transparency to their employers and will have an indelible impact on the workplace of the future.

2 Stability of employee power. 2023 saw many examples of employees exerting their power through strikes, walkouts, protests and unionization efforts. But can those policies and practices be sustained if economic growth replaces the declining or stagnant economies of the COVID era?

3 Reskilling the workforce at scale. Central to the future of work is the need to reskill the global workforce across all industries to meet the realities of AI, climate disruption and other macro forces. The challenge is greater than any one organization and requires an enabling policy environment to put the right incentives and infrastructure in place. Time will tell if multilateral, national and local workforce development policies will be central to any agenda for change.



In Focus: Future of Work

Depending on who you ask, the return to office in 2023 was either a great success or a huge flop. The reality is somewhere in between – recognition and grudging accommodation to the benefits of office and home work – as the hybrid world becomes the new normal. Business success in the future will be based, more than ever, on balancing the expectations and needs of current employees while simultaneously transforming the systems and infrastructure that will empower future employees to become an enduring source of competitive advantage. The key signal for how well organizations navigate this shift will lie in their success in creating structured flexibility. It will look different for each organization, but it will include strategic clarity, intentional professional development, smart use of technology tools and clear support that considers employees as whole people with unique wellbeing and work/life balance needs.



Jennifer Hendrickson
SVP, Social Impact & Sustainability





We want to leave you with five things to know about us:

- 1 We understand how to power public affairs and advocacy outcomes.** We know how to identify and engage stakeholders across a broad range of issues, helping to advance business and policy results. We don't just create campaigns, we deliver truly integrated and holistic solutions at the international, regional and local levels that combine the expertise of our strategic, digital, creative and issues specialists – engaging the right audience at critical moments.
- 2 We know how to protect and elevate corporate brands.** We position C-Suite executives to bring corporate stories to life and operate as embedded guardians of reputations with our client partners, working in lockstep with corporate communications teams as well as creative and marketing teams to help clients maximize impact with minimized risk.
- 3 We know media.** Our earned media muscle delivers stories locally and nationally. Our network of dedicated media strategists and storytellers have deep, cross-vertical relationships with media across policy, business, energy, tech, trade and beyond. We understand the importance of creating a cohesive story and distributing it nimbly across channels, capturing the interests of media and your target audiences at the perfect time.
- 4 We help clients anticipate and navigate the critical issues shaping their industry.** By leveraging data, analytics and intelligence to understand the lay of the land and guide decision-making, we harness qualitative, quantitative and AI-assisted analysis to understand the scope and nature of news coverage and social media discourse.
- 5 We appreciate high-stakes engagements.** Whether we are launching a first of its kind coalition, navigating a crisis, anticipating the effects of proposed legislation, monitoring the changing landscape of geopolitical risks, engaging on critical social issues or preparing for a major milestone, our teams take the importance of the moment seriously and put our counsel and creativity to work for our clients.

Stay in Touch

Powell Tate, the public affairs unit of The Weber Shandwick Collective, is built to deliver the next generation solutions clients need to win in a complex, prove-it-works world. Our approach is informed by data and animated by a human element that creates compelling stories for our clients' audiences. As part of a broader network, we're led by world-class strategic and creative thinkers and activators who deploy leading and emerging technologies to inform strategy, develop critical insights, heighten impact and move the needle on reputation, public policy and social issues.

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Thank you for taking the time to read our 2024 edition of *Leading at the Intersections*. Please stay in touch – we'd love to hear from you.

