Journal of Communication Management

The well-being-enhanced READINESS model: a human-centric extension for risk and crisis communication in generative AI contexts

Received 21 July 2025
Revised 17 January 2026
Accepted 3 March 2026

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Abstract

Purpose – This article proposes a conceptual extension of the READINESS model (Jin *et al.*, 2024, 2025) by introducing well-being as a foundational, transversal dimension that underpins READINESS as a mindset, multilevel efficacy and dynamic process.

Design/methodology/approach – Anchored in insights from genAI risk research and communication theory, the well-being-enhanced READINESS model reframes READINESS as a human-centred capacity driven by emotional sustainability, psychological safety and ethical reflexivity.

Findings – By integrating leadership communication, perceived organisational support and health-oriented infrastructures, the model offers a more inclusive and sustainable roadmap for genAI READINESS. It challenges both theory and practice to recognise well-being as a strategic imperative in the face of technological disruption.

Research limitations/implications – The article concludes by outlining implications for communication research, leadership development and genAI governance, advocating for systemic support that bridges operational efficacy with emotional and ethical sustainability.

Originality/value – While traditional crisis management models focus on preparedness and resilience, they often overlook the psychosocial tolls imposed on communication professionals navigating genAI-mediated environments, where emotional strain, ethical ambiguity and cognitive overload converge.

Keywords Well-being, READINESS, Well-being-enhanced READINESS model, Generative AI, AI risk management, Emotional sustainability, Psychological safety, Ethical reflexivity, Ethical resilience, Communication professionals

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

Recent advances in generative artificial intelligence (genAI) – particularly in generative and automated decision-making technologies – are transforming how organisations identify, manage and communicate risk. While genAI promises enhanced efficiency and predictive insight in risk management systems (McNulty *et al.*, 2024; Rahman and Ahmad, 2024),

Journal of Communication Management
Emerald Publishing Limited
e-ISSN: 1478-0852
p-ISSN: 1363-254X
DOI 10.1108/JCOM-07-2025-0172

its widespread integration introduces a spectrum of emergent risks that are technical, psychological and ethical in nature. These risks – ranging from data privacy violations and algorithmic bias to misinformation and deepfakes – do not always manifest as immediate crises but function as destabilising conditions that erode stakeholder trust, organisational cohesion and communicative legitimacy (Alzaabi and Shuhaiber, 2022; Hendrycks *et al*., 2023). Of particular concern is the growing reliance on genAI in high-stakes communicative functions such as public relations, crisis response and corporate messaging, where the automation of rhetorical tasks risks undercutting perceived authenticity and human relationality – what Piller (2024) terms "rhetorical humanity". Additionally, as organisations turn to genAI to augment or replace decision-making and monitoring, communication professionals experience new strains that directly affect their performance, engagement and ethical clarity. AI-driven environments often increase cognitive load and surveillance, challenge autonomy and blur accountability structures, leading to psychosocial risks including stress, disengagement and moral injury (Moore, 2019; Nazareno and Schiff, 2021; Stamate *et al*., 2021). Although some studies report that genAI-induced stress may correlate with increased engagement or happiness under certain motivational conditions (Loureiro *et al*., 2023), the broader pattern points to a fragile psychological ecosystem. Moreover, genAI's influence on task structure and work boundaries complicates role clarity, amplifies emotional labour and intensifies ethical dilemmas – especially in communication roles that depend on judgement, empathy and trust-building (Soulami *et al*., 2024; Verma *et al*., 2023). When organisational purpose and genAI strategy are misaligned, these stressors are exacerbated, heightening the risk of internal resistance or silent disengagement (De Cremer, 2024). This misalignment is particularly acute where AI systems alter task structures or decision autonomy without equipping professionals with the psychological resources needed to adapt. As Kim and Lee (2024) demonstrate, low self-efficacy in the face of AI-induced change significantly amplifies stress and emotional exhaustion, underscoring the importance of aligning technological implementation with human mental READINESS (Jin *et al*., 2024, 2025) and well-being.

In this study, we approach the adoption of genAI not only as a technical transformation but also as a communicative and psychological inflexion point for organisations and communication professionals. Organisational capacity to navigate genAI-induced disruption will depend not just on technological sophistication but on human-centred READINESS – defined here as the capacity to remain emotionally resilient, ethically grounded and communicatively agile amid evolving threats. Current risk and crisis management models, while increasingly dynamic, often underplay the role of well-being in sustaining such capacity. This article argues that as genAI reshapes our understanding of risk and crisis in technological transformations and professional evolutions, READINESS itself must be reconceptualised to integrate psychological well-being as a foundational dimension, encompassing *emotional sustainability*, *psychological safety* and *ethical reflexivity* – to support communication professionals and leadership systems in their ability to engage, adapt and ethically respond to emerging conditions of uncertainty.

The READINESS model, developed by Jin *et al*. (2024, 2025), offers a multidimensional framework for navigating complex and "sticky" crises. Built around three pillars – *mindset*, *multilevel efficacy* and *dynamic processes* – it emphasises a fluid, reflexive approach to crisis sensemaking and response. Unlike conventional resilience models, READINESS focuses on cognitive and emotional capacities across individual, team and organisational levels. It foregrounds self-efficacy, emotional intelligence and adaptive leadership as enablers of high-functioning crisis response. While this model has been applied in diverse contexts, including genAI-related communication risks (Wang *et al*., 2025), a critical component remains implicit rather than fully developed: the role of well-being as a condition of effective and responsible READINESS in general and genAI READINESS in particular.

This article proposes a conceptual extension of the READINESS model by integrating well-being as a core, cross-cutting dimension. Drawing on empirical insights from genAI risk

perception studies (Wang *et al*., 2025), as well as on perceived organisational support and well-being research (Anton, 2025), it outlines a revised framework that foregrounds well-being as essential for sustainable, human-centric risk and crisis capacity. The following sections present the theoretical foundations, introduce the extended model, apply it to genAI-related challenges, discuss implications for theory and practice, and set out a research agenda.

Theoretical foundations

The READINESS model revisited

Risk and crisis communication research has evolved substantially over the past decades, shifting from a primarily external focus on reputation management and stakeholder perception (Marsen, 2019; Schwarz, 2008) to a more holistic integration of internal organisational dynamics, such as employee relationships, leadership communication and knowledge flow (Frandsen and Johansen, 2011; Ravazzani, 2025). This evolution mirrors broader shifts in crisis theory, where frameworks such as uncertainty reduction theory (Grace and Tham, 2021), situational crisis communication theory (Coombs, 2007) and chaos theory (Seeger *et al*., 2003) underscore the importance of interpretive flexibility, message control and relational responsiveness in contexts of high uncertainty. Beyond immediate response, crises are increasingly viewed as catalysts for adaptive change (Seeger *et al*., 2003), requiring communicative strategies that are iterative, participatory and resilient. In this context, sticky crises, which are prolonged, ambiguous and resistant to clear resolution, highlight the need for expanded communicative foresight and agility. As Reber *et al*. (2021) observe, "sticky crises demand not only a near-instant response, but they may require crisis communicators to see possibilities, understand the potential breadth and scope of an emerging crisis, each of which can bring it additional complexities and communication demands" (p. 7).

The emergence of communication-based frameworks for organisational adaptability has further emphasised the integration of strategic communication with organisational learning, knowledge management and complexity theory (Rahman and Ahmad, 2024; Zhong and Low, 2009). These perspectives reframe organisations as adaptive systems, where crisis navigation depends not solely on structural preparedness but on the capacity to engage in real-time, multidirectional communication that supports both problem-solving and identity work (Bundy *et al*., 2017; Seeger *et al*., 1998). This relational lens aligns with the communication theory of resilience (CTR), which conceptualises resilience as a discursive and interactional process enacted through routines like affirming identity, maintaining communication networks and foregrounding productive action (Buzzanell, 2010). CTR and its extensions – such as anticipatory resilience through narrative construction (Betts *et al*., 2022) or scales measuring resilience processes (Wilson *et al*., 2021) – have expanded our understanding of how communication builds adaptive capacity before, during and after a crisis.

It is within this evolving theoretical terrain that the READINESS concept (Weiner, 2009; Weiner *et al*., 2008; Jin *et al*., 2024, 2025) finds its relevance and distinctiveness. Weiner (2009) and Weiner *et al*. (2008) argue that READINESS goes beyond organisational preparedness and vigilance, and represents the willingness and motivation to engage in preparation and the capacity or efficacy to execute. Later on, emerging from the Crisis Communication Think Tank [1]'s initiative to move beyond reactive and phase-bound notions of crisis response, the READINESS model redefines crisis management as an anticipatory and adaptive orientation that unfolds continuously across organisational systems. This conceptual framework is grounded in three interdependent dimensions. First, *mindset* refers to the cognitive and emotional adaptability required to perceive, frame and respond to evolving threats. It incorporates emotional intelligence, transformational leadership traits and a proactive, learning-driven approach to uncertainty (Jin, 2010; Wu *et al*., 2021). Second, *multilevel efficacy* encompasses self-efficacy, team efficacy and organisational efficacy – drawing from Bandura's (1997) conceptualisation of efficacy as both an individual and

collective belief in the ability to achieve crisis goals. This dimension underscores that effective crisis response is predicated on nested confidence across actors and units within the organisation. Third, *dynamic process* captures the ongoing nature of sensemaking, coordination and learning in contexts of high uncertainty, reflecting the model's systems-based orientation and responsiveness to real-time signals. Crucially, READINESS positions communication not as a post-hoc support function but as a constitutive process – central to interpreting risk, mobilising action and sustaining engagement across time. This makes the model particularly salient for "sticky crises" like those posed by genAI technologies, where ambiguity, ethical volatility and reputational stakes converge.

Yet despite its strengths, the model currently lacks a systematic focus on psychological well-being, an increasingly central concern as organisations face intensifying emotional and ethical complexity. Emerging research underscores that emotional labour, cognitive overload and decision fatigue are not incidental to crisis response – they are integral conditions that shape how *mindset*, *efficacy*, and *process* are enacted under pressure (Guberina and Wang, 2021; Sharma, 2024). High-EI (emotional intelligence) leadership, psychological flexibility and perceived organisational support are crucial mediators of both individual performance and collective adaptability (Chen and Bliese, 2002; Nielsen *et al*., 2008). However, traditional crisis models often overlook these variables, focusing instead on structural preparedness or tactical response (Smith, 1990; Šarotar-Žižek and Mulej, 2013). Models that do consider well-being, such as the Wellbeing Thermometer (Adamou *et al*., 2020) or ecosystem co-creation frameworks (Toufaily and Zalan, 2023), often lack direct integration with crisis communication theory. As genAI continues to reshape the cognitive and relational terrain of crisis work and introduces risks like deskilling, surveillance fatigue and identity dissonance, the absence of a dedicated well-being lens in the READINESS model becomes both a theoretical and practical limitation.

The following section addresses this critical gap by conceptualising well-being not as an outcome, but as a strategic, communicative input, central to the sustainability of genAI READINESS.

Well-being as a strategic communication construct

While traditionally situated within occupational health or HR frameworks, well-being in organisational settings is increasingly understood as a communicative construct, shaped by discourse, culture and leadership. Strategic communication research identifies internal communication as a core determinant of employee well-being, also highlighting mediating factors such as perceived organisational support (POS), trust, engagement and ethical climate (Anton, 2025; Meng and Berger, 2019; Verčič and Men, 2023). In high-pressure fields like public relations and communication management – routinely ranked among the most stressful professions (CareerCast, 2019; CIPR, 2019) – the relationship between communicative climate and psychological health is not peripheral, but foundational. Subjective well-being in these settings is shaped by both emotional responses and cognitive evaluations of work-life balance, role clarity and relational dynamics (Galinha and Pais-Ribeiro, 2011; Schimmack, 2008).

Recent scholarship offers more granular insights into how communication practices and POS jointly shape well-being outcomes. Internal communication satisfaction, for instance, fosters organisational identification through POS (Krywalski Santiago, 2020), while symmetrical communication styles enhance psychological well-being by promoting trust and reducing perceptions of dehumanisation (Caesens *et al*., 2017; Qin and Men, 2022). POS itself enhances employee affective commitment and reduces perceived lack of employment alternatives, both of which are strongly correlated with mental health indicators such as stress and burnout (Panaccio and Vandenberghe, 2009). Importantly, POS also mediates the relationship between communication and work-family dynamics, positively influencing facilitation and buffering conflict (Wattoo *et al*., 2018).

Building on this, Anton (2025) highlights the persistent gap between rhetorical and actionable support. While leaders often express concern or empathy, such expressions may lack accompanying structural interventions – such as mental health resources, flexible schedules or boundary-respecting workload practices. This incongruence weakens the intended impact of health-oriented leadership communication and underscores the symbolic and operational value of organisational consistency. POS, when truly enacted, not only improves job satisfaction and reduces burnout but also fosters inclusive climates in which employees can thrive across gender, age and career stages. Empirical evidence from global public relations research (Adi and Stoeckle, 2023) suggests that organisational support enhances well-being only when professionals can act in alignment with their professional judgement, as misalignment between managerial expectations and professional values produces sustained ethical strain (Garsten *et al*., 2025).

During times of organisational stress or transformation, such as those spurred by genAI, economic turbulence or public scrutiny, employee well-being becomes not merely a desirable condition but a strategic imperative. Emotional labour, identity ambiguity, after-hours connectivity, and the ethical weight of high-stakes messaging contribute to a communicative burden that, if unacknowledged, risks eroding trust and performance (Kim and Chon, 2022; Yeomans, 2019). Models of well-being now emphasise a constellation of antecedents, including internal communication, organisational resilience, high-performance work systems and employee participation in decision-making (Kang *et al*., 2022; Malinen *et al*., 2019; Walden, 2021). These mechanisms contribute to *psychological safety* (Kim *et al*., 2025), engagement, and even organisational citizenship behaviour – attributes critical to sustaining crisis agility and ethical conduct under pressure (Pipera and Fragouli, 2021).

Thus, reimagining well-being as a strategic communication capability – one shaped through internal practices, leadership discourse and perceived support – moves the field closer to a human-centred model of organisational READINESS. Rather than treating well-being as a post hoc concern managed outside communication frameworks, this view positions it as integral to resilience, legitimacy and sustainable performance in complex, high-stakes environments.

Generative AI risks, cognitive strain and ethical disruption

As artificial intelligence becomes deeply embedded in strategic communication workflows, professionals are increasingly tasked with navigating a matrix of risks that extend beyond technical issues to affect cognition, ethics and professional identity. Psychological demands – such as digital fatigue, ethical dissonance and role ambiguity – are not peripheral to communication work; they are becoming its defining conditions. Wang *et al*. (2025) underscore that professionals face a convergence of risks tied to content credibility, reputational integrity and human–machine substitution, with genAI tools often producing hallucinated content, amplifying misinformation and flattening organisational voice. These challenges are compounded by deskilling anxieties and diminished confidence in uniquely human capabilities, threatening both individual efficacy and professional legitimacy.

Participants in Wang *et al*.'s (2025) study articulated that individual READINESS must incorporate not only technical and analytical proficiency but also critical and ethical reflection – "a meta-skill of reading complexity and systemic analysis" – to maintain adaptive engagement amid rapidly evolving risks. Such cognitive and *ethical reflexivity* is essential in counteracting the attraction of automation and resisting blind genAI adoption (Swiatek *et al*., 2022; Yue *et al*., 2024). These capacities are closely linked with psychological resilience and emotional agility, which protect against the erosion of professional confidence and ethical judgement (Jin *et al*., 2024, 2025; Nindl *et al*., 2018). On the organisational side, the study highlights the criticality of structured support for genAI literacy, ethical governance and cultural adaptability. Respondents emphasised the need for clear, enforceable genAI policies, peer learning ecosystems and collaborative spaces that foster collective awareness and

mitigate overload. Yet, many organisations remain ill-equipped – lacking not only strategic foresight but also the infrastructural capacity to implement proactive risk management or cultivate ethical genAI cultures. The absence of such foundations undermines both individual and collective READINESS in the face of genAI risks.

Crucially, the study reaffirms that genAI-induced strain is not merely operational; it is existential. Communication professionals are now expected to act as both users and explainers of genAI, bearing the dual burden of functionality and accountability. This role intensification exacerbates emotional labour, with practitioners navigating the tensions between productivity pressures and ethical standards. The integration of well-being into strategic communication frameworks – through safe learning environments, health-oriented leadership and trust-based systems – is therefore not optional but foundational for *ethical resilience*.

Thus, conceptualising genAI risks through the lens of *emotional sustainability* and *psychological safety* allows organisations to shift from reactive posturing to systemic preparedness. By embedding well-being into READINESS, communicators are not only better equipped to handle complexity but also to uphold professional ethics and human-centred strategy in the face of technological acceleration.

Conceptual model: well-being as a core dimension of READINESS

Rationale for extending the READINESS model

While the READINESS model has advanced the field of crisis communication by shifting attention from linear preparedness and reactive recovery to dynamic, system-wide adaptability, its current formulation remains underdeveloped in one crucial area: psychological well-being. This gap is increasingly problematic as crisis contexts, particularly those shaped by genAI disruption, demand sustained cognitive and emotional agility from communication professionals. Psychological stressors – ranging from ethical dissonance and deskilling to digital fatigue – are no longer marginal; they directly influence how *mindset*, *efficacy* and *processes* function under strain. The absence of an explicit well-being dimension risks weakening the model's explanatory and practical power in such environments. Integrating well-being into the core architecture of the READINESS model reframes READINESS not just as a state of preparedness, but as an emergent, human-sustaining capacity. This extension is grounded in mounting evidence that *psychological safety*, emotional resilience and perceived organisational support are not mere background conditions but core enablers of adaptive leadership, ethical judgement and collaborative decision-making. Findings from genAI risk perception studies (Wang *et al*., 2025) reinforce this view, showing that professionals navigating genAI-induced complexity consistently call for "safe spaces," supportive infrastructures, and collective reflection mechanisms to maintain ethical clarity and communicative coherence.

This reconceptualisation aligns with and extends previous leadership and well-being research (e.g. Anton, 2025; Chen and Bliese, 2002; Nielsen *et al*., 2008), which demonstrate that emotionally intelligent, health-oriented leadership fosters environments in which individuals and teams can remain agile, ethical and engaged even amid volatile change. By treating well-being as an upstream condition for effective READINESS – rather than a downstream benefit of surviving a crisis – this article positions it as a transversal dimension that enables rather than follows strategic resilience. The next section introduces a revised conceptual framework that embeds well-being across the three pillars of the READINESS model: *mindset*, *efficacy* and *dynamic process*.

Model structure

The proposed extension of the READINESS model embeds well-being as a foundational, transversal dimension that undergirds and reinforces each of the original three pillars: *mindset*, *multilevel efficacy* and *dynamic process*. In this revised framework, well-being is not

conceptualised as an auxiliary outcome of successful crisis navigation, but as an essential input condition that enables professionals to sustain engagement, make ethical decisions and adapt communicatively in volatile environments. This reframing positions well-being as a structuring force that continuously interacts with, stabilises and energises the three dimensions of READINESS.

In the context of *mindset*, well-being manifests as *emotional sustainability*, focused on resilience and adaptability, both capacities that support professionals in reframing uncertainty, regulating stress and maintaining clarity under pressure. Emotional well-being enables cognitive flexibility, reduces burnout risk and enhances the capacity for reflective learning, all of which are critical for interpreting ambiguous signals and anticipating systemic risk. From an individual perspective, this pillar also addresses the internalisation of self-care practices, emotional boundary-setting and metacognitive awareness, which allow communicators to stay ethically grounded even when external structures are unstable.

Within *multilevel efficacy*, well-being supports both self-efficacy and collective efficacy through *psychological safety* manifested as trust, relational safety and perceived organisational support. Individuals who feel supported and valued are more likely to express concerns, contribute ideas and sustain effort during complex crises. This *psychological safety* fosters not only stronger individual engagement but also more cohesive and synchronised team dynamics, which are essential for shared situational awareness and coordinated response. At the individual level, this entails confidence in one's own capacity to act meaningfully, as well as a belief that others will respond constructively and supportively – a key buffer against isolation and ethical disengagement.

Regarding *dynamic process*, well-being is embedded in sustainable performance communicative cultures that promote *ethical reflexivity* as an ongoing process of moral sensemaking based on communicative coordination and reflective deliberation. High-functioning crisis response depends on the ability to coordinate in real time while preserving empathy, attentiveness and openness – traits that are depleted when well-being is compromised. By institutionalising well-being through norms and rituals, as well as through leadership communication, organisations create the communicative infrastructure necessary for agile, transparent and ethically grounded coordination. For individuals, this means having predictable, humane workflows and meaningful opportunities for dialogue and deliberation, which contribute to both cognitive clarity and moral stamina.

A critical outcome of this reconceptualisation is the cultivation of *ethical resilience* – the sustained capacity to engage with morally complex crises without disengaging, overcompensating or succumbing to ethical fatigue. *Ethical resilience* does not operate at the level of process; rather, it emerges cumulatively from repeated reflexive engagement supported by well-being across the READINESS pillars. Therefore, *ethical resilience* emerges when well-being is prioritised not only as a human right, but as a strategic resource that enables professionals to deliberate, resist simplification and align decisions with shared values, while also maintaining this alignment over time. In this way, the expanded model not only strengthens READINESS for technical and reputational threats but also for the moral and psychological tensions that increasingly define contemporary crises.

Figure 1 illustrates the integrated structure of the well-being-enhanced READINESS model, depicting well-being as a transversal layer that supports and interacts with each core dimension, culminating in the development of *ethical resilience*-mediated organisational and individual genAI READINESS. The figure highlights the three specific dimensions of well-being – *emotional sustainability*, *psychological safety* and *ethical reflexivity* – each mapped to a corresponding pillar of the model. These dimensions act as mediators in the pathway towards *ethical resilience*, which is itself positioned as a necessary precursor to achieving holistic, human-centred READINESS. *Emotional sustainability* emerges from adaptive mindsets capable of absorbing uncertainty without burnout; *psychological safety* underpins efficacy at individual and collective levels by fostering trust and confidence; and *ethical reflexivity* ensures that *dynamic process*es remain attuned to values, ambiguity and moral complexity.

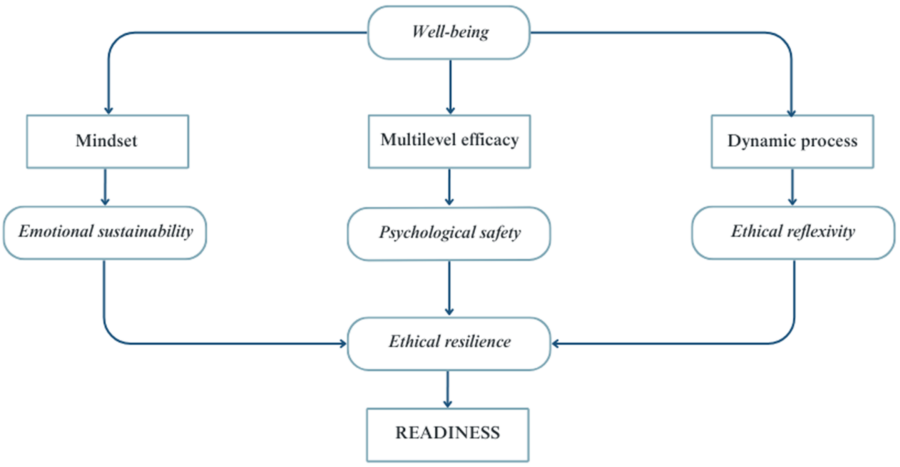

Figure 1. Well-being-enhanced READINESS model. Source: Authors' own work

Together, these mechanisms culminate in a form of READINESS that transcends operational competence, encompassing both organisational coherence and individual ethical grounding in contexts marked by accelerated risk, disruption and communicative strain.

Applying the well-being-enhanced READINESS model to genAI risk contexts

Conceptual insights from genAI risk communication suggest that emerging technologies do not simply intensify existing crisis pressures – they recalibrate the entire context in which communication professionals operate. AI systems challenge conventional decision-making processes, shift control dynamics and amplify ethical tensions, all while accelerating the tempo of organisational response. These conditions compound emotional, ethical, and cognitive demands, which cannot be adequately addressed through technical preparedness alone. Strategic communication, in this context, must evolve to manage not only information flow but the affective and normative challenges embedded in genAI disruption. The well-being-enhanced READINESS model responds to this need by proposing well-being as an organising principle that enables communicators to interpret complexity, act reflectively and uphold professional integrity. Moreover, the model highlights the need for differentiated support across professional identities and employment contexts. As noted in recent research, communication professionals do not experience genAI-induced risk uniformly. Factors such as autonomy, gender and career stage shape how support is perceived and enacted (Anton, 2025). Freelancers may benefit from flexible structures (Moise and Anton, 2022), while others face heightened strain due to organisational dependencies or role expectations. This underscores the imperative for communication teams to assess and personalise well-being strategies – not only to address moral and emotional strain but to ensure equitable READINESS across functions. In this framing, well-being becomes both a moral imperative and a strategic differentiator, anchoring crisis response in the lived realities of communicative labour and enhancing the profession's capacity to remain ethical, agile and legitimate in the face of technological transformation.

Individual READINESS: well-being as adaptive capacity

At the individual level, genAI-induced crises introduce distinctive stressors – ranging from deskilling and automation anxiety to ethical ambiguity and continuous digital connectivity.

Communication professionals, who operate at the intersection of technical innovation and public-facing responsibility, are particularly vulnerable to these pressures. Within the well-being-enhanced READINESS model, individual READINESS is reconceptualised not merely as cognitive adaptability, but as a composite of *emotional sustainability, psychological safety* and *ethical reflexivity.* These dimensions serve as critical enablers of ethical decision-making, stress regulation and sustained professional engagement. *Emotional sustainability* supports mindset flexibility under uncertainty; *psychological safety* empowers professionals to voice concerns, question genAI outputs and express vulnerability without fear of repercussion; and *ethical reflexivity* strengthens moral clarity in high-pressure situations. Conceptually, these dimensions align with the view that peer learning ecosystems, reflective spaces and practical support mechanisms function as buffers against cognitive overload and emotional fatigue (Moore, 2019; Wang *et al*., 2025). By embedding these well-being components into individual-level READINESS, organisations can reinforce not only performance and compliance, but the psychological integrity and ethical agency of communicators navigating genAI-driven transformation.

Organisational READINESS: embedding well-being in strategic culture

At the organisational level, READINESS for genAI-related disruption requires more than technical preparedness or formal governance. It demands the structural integration of well-being into the culture, communication systems and leadership ethos of the organisation. The well-being-enhanced READINESS model posits that *ethical resilience* and sustained responsiveness emerge from environments in which *emotional sustainability, psychological safety* and *ethical reflexivity* are actively cultivated, not merely signalled rhetorically. While some research suggests that managerial concern for employee well-being is often expressed, structural supports such as workload flexibility, access to mental health resources and ethical consultation mechanisms are inconsistently enacted (Anton, 2025). This conceptual dissonance invites rethinking trust-building practices and the psychological conditions necessary for adaptive performance. The model encourages organisations to integrate well-being into the communicative infrastructure: wellness-informed messaging, genAI literacy and ethics training, inclusive dialogue on technology use and policies supporting digital boundaries. Health-oriented leadership communication – emphasising empathy, inclusion and values alignment – helps establish climates of trust conducive to morale, collective efficacy and communicative agility. This aligns with research on symmetrical communication and peer-supported environments, which underscore the importance of trust and relational climate for organisational well-being (Qin and Men, 2022). In this framework, well-being becomes not merely an adjunct concern but a strategic and normative pillar of organisational legitimacy in a genAI-mediated communication landscape.

Implications and future research

On a conceptual/theoretical level, this article advances crisis and genAI risk communication theory by reframing organisational READINESS as an affective, ethical and relational construct. By embedding well-being within the foundational structure of the READINESS model, it challenges dominant paradigms that prioritise technical rationality and procedural resilience over human experience. A further conceptual implication concerns the distinction between ethical READINESS and ethical resilience. Consistent with the original READINESS framework, ethical READINESS is understood here as an anticipatory orientation and capacity to recognise and engage with ethical complexity due to genAI-linked uncertainty and pressure. Ethical resilience, by contrast, refers to the sustained ability to maintain ethical judgement and engagement over time as pressures persist. The well-being-enhanced READINESS model clarifies how ethical resilience does not replace READINESS, but emerges when ethical READINESS is supported by well-being as a foundational enabling

condition. Therefore, the proposed extension addresses a persistent gap in crisis and genAI risk communication scholarship by recognising psychological well-being, not as a secondary outcome, but as a constitutive antecedent of communicative efficacy. In doing so, it underscores the centrality of *emotional sustainability*, *psychological safety* and *ethical reflexivity* in sustaining crisis-related decision-making and adaptive performance. This reconceptualisation also refines our understanding of internal communication as a mechanism of cultural enactment and trust cultivation. Therefore, while the proposed extension of the READINESS model, which places the human element at the centre, is clearly relevant for risk and crisis communication as well as internal communication scholarship, the detailed implications and future directions outlined below can also help expand research on genAI in organisational contexts and well-being at work. Together, these contributions can enhance an interdisciplinary perspective on the phenomenon.

For communication leaders and practitioners, the well-being-enhanced READINESS model offers a strategic framework for integrating emotional and ethical insight into crisis preparation. This involves embedding well-being indicators – such as relational trust, perceived organisational support and reflective capacity – into risk audits, scenario planning and leadership communication protocols. Health-oriented internal messaging, digital detachment policies and safe spaces for ethical deliberation can be woven into everyday practice, ensuring that communicative performance is underpinned by resilience, inclusion and moral clarity. In sectors marked by high emotional labour and professional ambiguity, such as public relations, these interventions are not merely remedial – they constitute essential preconditions for ethical responsiveness and sustainable practice.

At the policy level, the model supports calls for integrative genAI governance that reflects the psychosocial realities of communicative work. Well-being metrics should be incorporated into ethical genAI frameworks, CSR reporting and professional standards. Regulatory bodies and associations in public relations, communication management and strategic communication – such as IPRA, ICCO, Global Alliance, CIPR, PRSA or EUPRERA – could lead by embedding psychological well-being into codes of conduct, accreditation schemes and risk oversight mechanisms. Moreover, senior leadership should be accountable not only for reputational risk but for the emotional and ethical strain borne by communicators operating in accelerated, genAI-mediated environments. Recognising this risk as strategic rather than peripheral reinforces the importance of institutionalising care, reflection and human-centred strategy within the architecture of organisational READINESS.

The critical synthesis of genAI risk and crisis communication literature highlights the need to foreground the psychosocial toll on communication professionals navigating genAI-related challenges. To address this pressing issue, the article emphasises the importance of introducing employee well-being as a foundational and transversal dimension of the READINESS model (Jin *et al*., 2024, 2025). The well-being-enhanced READINESS model offers opportunities for novel empirical research. For instance, researchers may explore in greater depth and from the perspective of employees' lived experiences the three specific dimensions of well-being: *emotional sustainability*, *psychological safety* and *ethical reflexivity*, which constitute the key pillars of the proposed model. It is important not only to clarify the organisational conditions (e.g. leadership style and change management practices) that support the development of each of these pillars, but also to investigate how these pillars may interact and are weighted differently in shaping *ethical resilience* and, ultimately, human-centred READINESS in the context of genAI. In addition, future research is encouraged to explore how these dimensions can emerge and evolve across diverse business contexts (e.g. different sectors) and communication roles (e.g. internal vs. external communication), particularly concerning burnout, perceived organisational support and professional identity under technologically mediated strain. To further extend these research streams, Table 1 presents additional research questions derived from the preceding discussion.

In addressing all these aspects open for further scrutiny, one should consider that the original READINESS model (Jin *et al*., 2024, 2025), as well as the proposed extension in this

Table 1. Further research agenda for genAI and communication research

Research questions
Impact of genAI on the psychological well-being of communication professionals
• How do communication professionals navigate the dual roles of being both users (functionality issue) and explainers (accountability issue) of genAI technologies?
• How do different communication roles (e.g. press officers, social media managers) experience moral and emotional strain in genAI-mediated environments?
• What are the long-term effects of genAI adoption on communication professionals' sense of identity, job satisfaction, and career retention?
Organisational enablers and governance of genAI READINESS
• In genAI-enabled communication workplaces, what specific factors contribute to negative conditions such as psychophysical stress (burnout, anxiety) and ethical distress among professionals?
• Which leadership styles most effectively support human-centred READINESS?
• How do corporate policy initiatives and training programs influence the integration of ethical resilience within and across organisational functions?
Operationalisation and measurement of the well-being-enhanced READINESS model
• How can reliable metrics be developed to assess the dimensions of emotional sustainability, psychological safety and ethical reflexivity in genAI-enabled communication workplaces?
• How do these dimensions interact with traditional constructs such as trust, organisational commitment and organisational cohesion?
• What context-specific adaptations of the model could be considered to advance its conceptual refinement and practical application across different industries, cultures or AI maturity levels at both individual and organisational levels?
Embedding the well-being-enhanced READINESS model in PR education
• How can communication and PR curricula integrate the dimensions of the well-being-enhanced READINESS model to prepare students for the emotional, ethical and strategic challenges of genAI?
• What pedagogical strategies (e.g. scenario-based learning, crisis simulations, reflective practice) are most effective for fostering ethical resilience in future communication professionals?

Source(s): Authors' own work

article, have at their core a multilevel dimension that is both horizontal (within a team and at the same management level) and vertical (across different levels of management). Therefore, it would be worthwhile to deepen the analysis of the different layers – individual, team and organisation – by comparing, for example, within-team dynamics or leadership versus operational levels.

Conclusions

In the context of genAI-induced technological shifts and emotional and ethical challenges, this article proposes a conceptual extension of Jin *et al.*'s READINESS model (2024, 2025), introducing well-being as a foundational, transversal dimension essential to navigating the complex demands of contemporary crisis environments. By foregrounding *emotional sustainability*, *psychological safety* and *ethical reflexivity*, the well-being-enhanced READINESS model reframes organisational READINESS as a human-centred, ethically resilient and communicatively agile capacity. It positions well-being not as an outcome, but as an operational enabler of each core pillar of READINESS – *mindset*, *multilevel efficacy* and *dynamic process* – and as a necessary pathway to *ethical resilience*. Informed by empirical insights from communication professionals navigating genAI-related risks, the well-being-enhanced READINESS model also offers a more sustainable and ethical roadmap for navigating "sticky crises". This model invites communication scholars to empirically test how well-being mediates message framing, decision-making and trust during genAI-related disruptions. It also challenges communication managers and policy makers to embed well-being into organisational practices through inclusive discourse, health-oriented infrastructures and ethical oversight of technological implementation.

Integrating well-being into READINESS invites a critical reframing: READINESS is not simply a matter of skill, structure or strategy, but of *sustainability*. The ability to interpret crises, act under pressure, and support ethical decision-making is contingent on communicators' *psychological safety*, emotional resilience and *ethical reflexivity*. As such, this article proposes extending the model with a fourth, transversal dimension: well-being, to more holistically capture what it takes for communication professionals – and the systems around them – to remain functionally and ethically ready.

Note

1. The Crisis Communication Think Tank (CCTT), founded in 2018, is the foundation of the University of Georgia's innovative crisis communication educational initiative – combining the evidence-based expertise of renowned academics from a wide range of disciplines with the experience-driven insights of communication executives with decades of practice. https://grady.uga.edu/crisis-communication-think-tank/

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