

Guiding Climate Communication for Hong Kong Businesses



Abstract

Strong climate communication requires addressing the knowledge gap and uncertainties at the science-policy interface. With the Business Environment Council, this project aimed to improve communication regarding climate change to promote better action for Hong Kong businesses. Information from literature review of climate communication materials and interviews with a wide range of employees identified barriers within climate communication. Recommendations to address these barriers focused on improving communication structure, creating a climate glossary, streamlining disclosure guidelines, and improving visibility of information. A list of recommendations and a glossary were produced as materials for employees. A climate communication playbook was identified as an area for further research.

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Implications of Climate Change & Climate Communication

According to the Carbon Majors report by the environmental non-profit CDP (formerly known as Carbon Disclosure Project), global business emissions have been contributing significantly to climate change¹. The United Nations asserts

that both knowledge and action is needed to combat climate change and its effects². However, not every person or group understands climate change on the same level. Those with limited knowledge may not internalise core climate concerns for their organisation and inhibit positive climate action. The solution to this knowledge gap is effective climate communication. By improving the language around climate change to establish base level un-

derstanding, individuals and organisations can make better progress on climate initiatives.

Climate change is an especially pressing issue to Hong Kong. As a major harbour region, rising sea levels will disrupt shipping and land use. An increase in the intensity and regularity of extreme weather threatens city buildings and in-

frastructure³. Additionally, climate change increases the severity of the already prevalent housing crisis. Rising sea levels have the potential to displace 45 million residents from Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Tianjin^{4,5}. Since Hong Kong hosts innumerable businesses as a global economic hub, any significant action from businesses will improve Hong Kong's climate situation.

Going under

Impact on Shanghai and Hong Kong under 2-degree and 4-degree scenarios

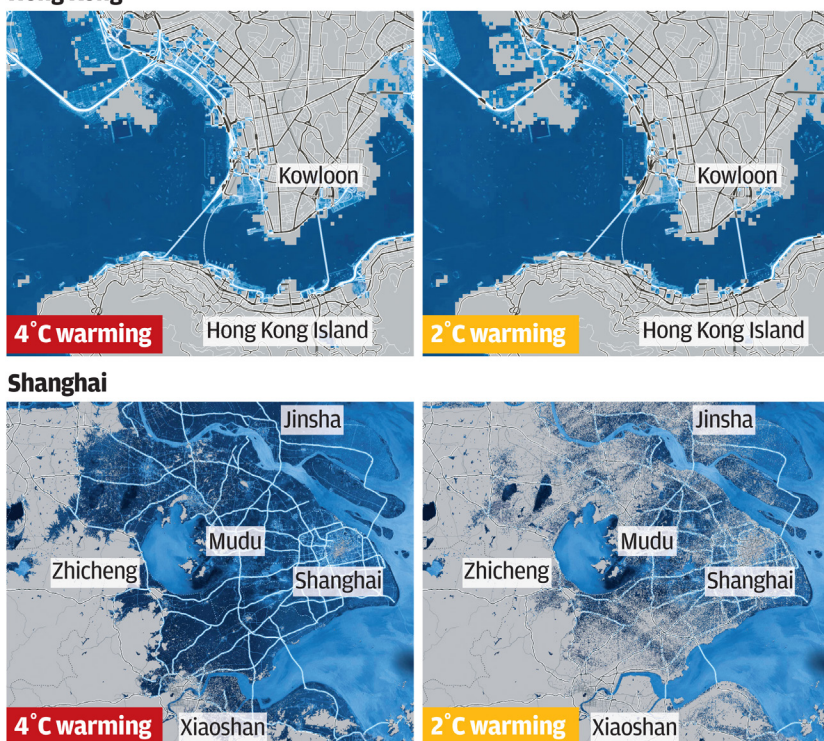


Figure 1. Impact of rising sea levels due to climate change⁴

Climate Communication: A Field Needing Further Research

A report by the Business Environment Council (BEC) indicates that Hong Kong businesses need to build capacity on climate resilience to minimise climate change risks⁶. To help build this capacity, BEC suggests more research on climate communication for Hong Kong businesses to improve the rhetoric surrounding climate change. The report recognizes there is a knowledge gap at the science-policy interface and a need to understand community expectations on climate change.



Figure 2. Internal communication structure in businesses

Further research on climate communication practices can address how to overcome these challenges.

Ineffective internal and external climate communication may obscure the exchange of ideas around climate-related issues⁶. Internal climate communication refers to horizontal or vertical communication among organisation employees and departments. External communication refers to how organisations communicate with the public, consumers, and stakeholders. Without effective internal communication, employees may have inconsistent knowledge and expertise on climate-related issues and climate initiatives. Without effective external climate communication, the organisation may have trouble ethically promoting their climate goals and initiatives to meet consumer expectations⁶.

Our Project: Guiding Climate Communication

Our project aimed to recommend practices that improve the rhetoric surrounding climate change to promote better climate action for Hong Kong businesses. We developed

three objectives to meet our goal:

- 1. Analyse how employees perceive common climate-related disclosure guidelines.**
- 2. Analyse how employees perceive current climate communication practices by Hong Kong businesses.**
- 3. Identify the barriers to understanding within climate communication.**

Working with the BEC, we collected information from literature reviews of climate communication materials and guidelines and interviews with a wide range of employees in different business sectors. From our analysis of these data, we identified three main barriers within climate communication. Our recommendations to address these barriers focused on improving communication structure, clarifying unclear and inconsistent rhetoric, and improving the accessibility and visibility of information. We've extracted these recommendations to a streamlined list. In addition, we produced a sample

glossary of climate-related terms for employees and identified a climate communication playbook as an area for future research.

Negative Impacts of Misleading External Climate Communication

A poor practice known as “greenwashing” is a core concern in climate communication for businesses. Greenwashing is when a business presents themselves as being more environmentally friendly than they actually may be². It may take the form of vague, empty, or even false claims that call to question the validity of a business’s environmental practices⁷. Usually, vague claims are overly broad or poorly defined, creating a limited and even incorrect impression of the business’s sustainability values. With greenwashing, businesses have the opportunity to cover up lacklustre sustainability performance. In doing so, the business hopes that greenwashing will create positive attitudes toward the

brand. Businesses want to seem as “green” as possible to appeal to a consumer base that has become increasingly aware of sustainability concerns⁸. According to an article by journalist Bruce Watson, polls showed that a business’s environmental reputation influenced the majority of consumer purchase decisions⁹. Additionally, a Nielsen poll asserted that 66% of global consumers are willing to pay more for products advertised as being environmentally sustainable¹⁰. Alternatively, some businesses may fall to greenwashing to overcome issues of transparency on sustainability practices. They recognize they must market their sustainable practices to green consumers, but rely on ambiguous statements to avoid being transparent on how eco-friendly their initiatives actually are. A case study critiquing H&M’s annual *Conscious*

collection claims that H&M provides insufficient information on the collection’s level of sustainability¹¹. For example, it points to H&M’s use of buzzwords to describe their products, such as “sustainable,” without explaining what that actually entails for the production and distribution of the *Conscious* collection.

One way to deter greenwashing is to address its reputational incentive. Because consumers have become

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Written by Chris Remington

H&M called out on “illegal” sustainability marketing Premium



H&M launched its Conscious collection in April

Figure 3. Critique of H&M’s marketing for the *Conscious* collection^A

increasingly attuned to sustainability concerns they have become increasingly scrutinous of how businesses present their sustainability statements and initiatives^{9,12}. The H&M case study claims that consumers have consistently critiqued the marketing of the company's *Conscious* collection since the first edition in 2010¹¹. A study by business school scholars Farhat, Aslam, and de Luna found that consumers are increasingly sceptical of business advertising on social media because consumers are aware of possible greenwashing behaviors¹³. The same study suggests that this increased scepticism will quickly affect brand image. These sceptical consumers hold unfavourable judgments related to the brand and are more likely to express these negative feelings on social media and to friends and peers¹⁴. The study by Farhat et al. further suggests that this brand scepticism negatively affects purchase intention¹³. The opinions about a particular brand drive consumers to lean into or avoid purchasing prod-

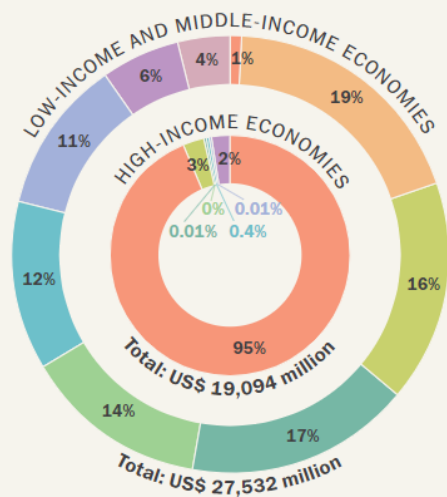
ucts from that brand.

Importance of Strong Internal Communication

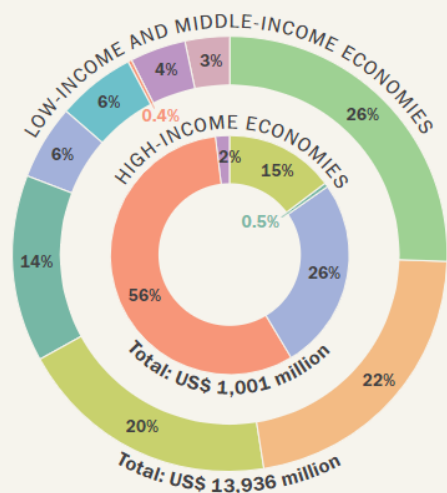
Internal communication can be defined as "communication transactions between individuals and/or groups at various levels and in different areas of specialisation that are intended to design and redesign organisations"¹⁵. There is no one standard definition of climate communication or a standard for how businesses communicate about climate change. Because of this lack of standardisation, businesses and employees may hold differing interpretations of what climate communication looks like. This can lead to inconsistencies in communication, which can be observed in how information flows through corporate structure.

In corporate structure, board members are at a high position which creates a top-down flow for communication. Generally, decisions on

environmental action at the board level have to be communicated to management and then to operational teams who are responsible for implementing these decisions⁶. However, the lack of awareness on climate-related issues at the board level can hinder the flow of communication, resulting in ineffective implementation of climate action⁶. The lack of strong climate communication impacts a business's financial decisions on climate action. Businesses globally waste billions of dollars on climate mitigation over real adaptation because of the lack of awareness of how their climate action plans affect the environment. A 2019 joint report on multilateral development banks found that \$46 billion, or 76% of the total commitments, were spent for climate change mitigation efforts, while commitments for adaptation efforts were only \$14 billion, or 24% of total commitments used¹⁶. The costs of mitigating climate catastrophes are only going to increase in the coming years, and do not include the



MITIGATION FINANCE BY REGION
US\$ 46,625 million



ADAPTATION FINANCE BY REGION
US\$ 14,937 million

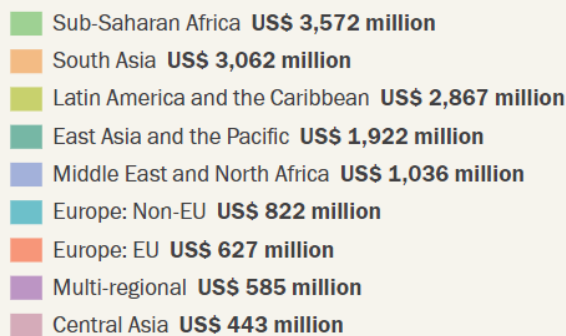


Figure 4. Cost breakdown of adaptation vs. mitigation efforts by region¹⁹

increasing costs of damages³. Yet, many climate mitigation efforts have been reported to only remove one percent of global emissions¹⁷. The insufficient understanding of the effects of adaptation versus mitiga-

tion efforts stems from little communication to board members on the topic. A report from the Business Environment Council stated “Two-third of [board directors] regard climate change as a very material

topic or key sustainability issue, in which around one-third specifically pointed out climate change adaptation or resilience to be material,” indicating a lack of awareness at the board level on climate adaptation⁶. As a result, many businesses overlook chronic physical and transition risks, as well as negative impacts to the supply chain.

Impact of a Business Values on Communication

Business values, the principles and beliefs that guide a company’s actions and decisions, are important to how a business communicates about climate action¹⁸. Many businesses value leading responsible business practices that balance environmental, social, and economic interests. These businesses are likely to communicate openly and honestly about their climate action¹⁹. This may include sharing information about the company’s steps to reduce its environmental impact and any challenges it faces in the pro-

cess. By being transparent and up-front about its climate-related activities, a business can demonstrate its commitment to sustainability and build trust with consumers and stakeholders.

We see an example of how values impact external communication in IBM's recent integration of sustainability into its brand. IBM's recent advertising has focused on outcomes and social benefits rather than products and services¹⁹. The integration of sustainability values helped IBM become more transparent on their sustainability initiatives by integrating sustainability messages into advertising for their product performance. Advertisements included producers using IBM technology to improve the freshness of their food to educators using IBM technology to teach underprivileged children.

Corporate Social Responsibility of Businesses

Businesses follow Corporate Social

Responsibility (CSR) policy to address and communicate about climate change. CSR is defined in basic terms as the social responsibility of a business that "encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary (philanthropic) expectations that society has of organisations at a given point in time"²⁰. In the context of climate action, a business that fulfils its CSR meets societal expectations on combating climate change. An article from the *International Journal of Corporate Social Responsibility* describes the role CSR plays in climate communication: "Communication is more than a tool to craft a positive corporate image so as to gain or protect legitimacy. It is the means through which CSR sustainability-related initiatives are created and disseminated within organisations and among their key stakeholders"²¹. A study conducted by management firm Walker Information indicated that public perception of good corporate citizenship relies upon transparency, continual growth, and sustainable

practices— all relevant themes in effective climate communication²². When businesses commit to ethical communication about their sustainability efforts, they meet the climate-related expectations of society and thus fulfil their CSR. In turn, this encourages other businesses to take up their own climate action. Businesses who demonstrate successful climate communication and climate action practices create new benchmarks for societal expectations for other businesses to meet.

Implementation of Effective Climate Action Depends on Effective Climate Communication

At a basic level, climate communication is the field of communication that focuses on the causes and effects of climate change. At a deeper level, climate communication studies the practices of the communicator as well, researching the ways they educate audiences about climate issues and mobilise

them to take up climate action^{2, 23}. How people communicate about climate change is shaped by their experiences, cultural contexts, and internal values and worldviews. Climate communication practices can be specific to one group or individual based on these contexts²⁴.

The first principle of climate communication is to inform people about climate change issues. Individuals or groups cannot mobilise climate action without the necessary knowledge and expertise about climate change²¹. Part of climate communication is to frame climate change concepts in a way that is accessible and easy to understand²⁵. Effective climate communication guides individuals or groups to understand the relationship between their current actions and the impacts of climate change.

The second principle of climate communication is to mobilise audiences to promote climate action. Climate communication must prop-

erly engage audiences. At its core, climate communication is a means of engagement that “aims – preferably in a two-way manner – at better access to, greater interest in, and improved exchange of information, knowledge, opinions and experiences” of climate change and the environment²⁶. It is not only informative but is done with intention to receive a response. Compared to a “one-way approach [which] limits corporation’s ability to share their sustainability agendas,” a two-way manner of climate communication will increase involvement with climate action¹². Communication is only one means of engagement, which is broadly described as “those purposeful deliberation processes of involving the public in matters of public concern and decision-making, in this case climate change, sometimes over an extended period of time”²⁴. Adaptation actions can only advance if individuals become invested in climate concerns through proper engagement.

Ineffectiveness of Climate Communication Guides

Existing guides and reports on climate communication practices are problematic due to their academic and abstract nature. A majority of climate communication articles and journals lack examples of actual application. One example is the climate handbook from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Despite the organisation’s experience in climate action, the handbook is devoid of concrete action examples and mostly focuses on high-level language²⁷. The lack of evidence can leave beginner climate communicators adrift from specific talking points. More importantly, it is difficult to gauge if these strategies are effective in climate communication practice. Without enough hands-on application, strategies could become ineffective or even detrimental to the goal. Additionally, this lack of evidence can lead to mistrust in the reports and studies. If the average reader, including businesses, believe the

climate communicators are out of touch with their struggles, they may ignore the message entirely and ignore opportunities for improvement in climate communication and climate action.

This hands off-approach has permeated academic work surrounding climate communication, according to research published by *Environmental Communication*²⁸. For instance, scholar J. Besley asserted that “scholars had not done enough to make environmental communication scholarship relevant outside the academy”²⁹. Besley’s research found that over half of the selected studies focused on analysing mainstream journalism and media articles. Additionally, “more than half of the studies us[ed] a rhetorical analysis or content analysis method”²⁹. This points to a broad bias among climate communication researchers to focus on publicly available and easily critiqued information. It is relatively easier to sift through news articles and find problematic word-

ing or framing. It is much harder to conduct studies on NGOs that address climate change, or conduct surveys on the state of climate communication at specific workplaces. Nevertheless, working along these lines is important to create actual progress for improving climate communication practices.

Project Approach

Our project goal was to recommend practices that improve the rhetoric surrounding climate change to promote better climate action for Hong Kong businesses. We developed three objectives to meet our goal, shown in Figure 5 with their respective methods.

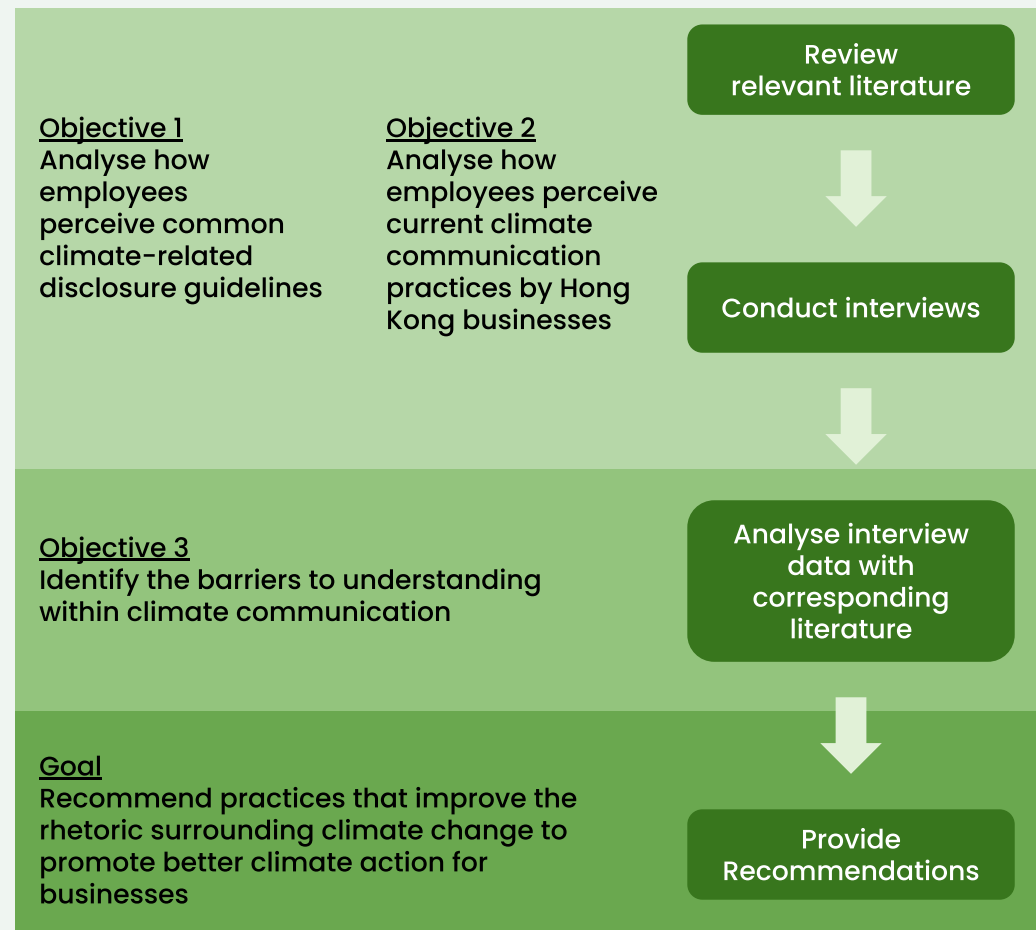


Figure 5. Project methods to complete objectives

Analyse how Employees Perceive Common Climate-related Disclosure Guidelines

We aimed to understand how Hong Kong businesses utilise existing climate communication guidelines and learn about the frameworks and policies they uphold when producing climate-related disclosures. For employees who work with climate communication guidelines, we should understand how user-friendly and practical these guidelines are to the business's climate communication. We conducted a literature review of common climate-related disclosure guidelines and interviewed employees that work with climate-related disclosures to gain insight on how employees perceive and handle climate-related disclosure guidelines as a whole.

Literature Review

To learn about the frameworks that Hong Kong businesses follow for climate-related disclosures, we reviewed commonly utilised guide-

lines such as the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures recommendations and the Global Reporting Initiative Standards. We investigated common climate-related disclosure practices, common climate terms and concepts, and core sustainability-related business topics such as ESG to establish a base understanding of how businesses may approach climate communication and to identify potential climate communication pitfalls.

Interviews

To understand how employees work with climate-related disclosure guidelines, we interviewed a wide range of employees in different business sectors who work with climate-related disclosures. We asked how these employees perceive and utilise the collection of guidelines in their work to gain insight on any difficulties working with the current climate communication standards as a whole for Hong Kong businesses. This insight helped to identify potential climate communication pitfalls.

By interviewing different business types and sizes, we could identify pitfalls that are consistent across many Hong Kong businesses.

Analyse How Employees Perceive Climate Communication Practices by Hong Kong Businesses

We aimed to determine if Hong Kong businesses are communicating the correct messages about sustainability to promote climate action, and if these businesses are communicating their intended messages accurately and clearly. For internal communication, we aimed to learn about the corporate communication structure and understand how the sustainability department interacts with the rest of the business. For external communication, we aimed to learn about the process of producing and publishing the business's sustainability-related information to the public. We interviewed employees that work with climate communication and conducted a literature

review of Hong Kong businesses' publicly available sustainability information to identify their core messages and gain insight on their climate communication process.

Literature Review

To learn about Hong Kong businesses' messages on core sustainability values, targets, and action, we reviewed their sustainability-related webpages and their periodic reports and disclosures on sustainability, sustainable development, and/or ESG. We not only investigated the actual messages communicated, but also how these messages were presented to gain insight on how readers may engage with and interpret the business's sustainability information.

Interviews

To understand how Hong Kong businesses communicate about climate change and their climate initiatives, we interviewed employees from different organisations that work with climate communication.

To gain both internal and external perspectives, we interviewed employees who work for a business that have their own climate initiatives as well as employees who work for organisations that evaluate climate communication practices, such as a university or a council. By understanding both internal and external perspectives, we gained wider insight on different approaches to creating and presenting climate communication.

Identify Barriers to Understanding Within Climate Communication

We aimed to understand where the knowledge and communication gap lies within corporate communication in order to identify the pitfalls and shortcomings of the current climate communication frameworks, structures, and practices by Hong Kong businesses. In order to improve the climate communication practices of Hong Kong businesses, we should understand the common challenges

that businesses and their employees face that hinder effective climate communication.

Data Analysis

To identify potential areas for barriers and pitfalls within climate communication, we reviewed common climate-related disclosure guidelines to observe similar characteristics across all or most guidelines. We compared and contrasted our observation notes to identify patterns that could be potential barriers to understanding. During interviews, we posed questions about our observed patterns to evaluate the relevance of them. If multiple interviewees confirmed our observations to be relevant and valuable considerations, we identified the pattern as a barrier to understanding. We also identified themes that emerged from our interviews that highlighted additional barriers. If these themes were repeated across multiple interviews or observed in our literature review, we confirmed them to be relevant to our research as a barrier to understanding.

Employee Perceptions of Climate-related Guidelines

We found that employees were unsure of which reporting guidelines were most relevant. Interviewees expressed their concern over the growing number of guidelines and frameworks that needed to be followed. According to one interviewee, the problem did not lie with insufficient help from the guidelines, but rather too many reporting guidelines. The existence of multiple guidelines makes it difficult for organisations to understand which guidelines are best suited for them. For example, an interviewee stressed how the ambiguity of reporting measures makes it hard to compare ESG performances in terms with other companies. The TCFD report also recognized the presence of too many reporting guidelines, stating that “some organisations expressed concern that multiple disclosure frameworks and mandatory reporting requirements increase the administrative burden of disclosure

effort”³⁰. By analysing multiple individual perceptions of climate-related guidelines, we observed that there was a lack of clarity when it comes to following guidelines. We also found that employees have trouble understanding rhetoric surrounding guidelines and standards. Six out of nine interviews remarked on the challenge with certain phrasings of terminologies and understanding of them. An interviewee mentioned that despite how comprehensible climate guides are, the main problem is when multiple organisations have different definitions of one term. Having these different definitions can be confusing to companies especially when looking at multiple reports. Another interviewee remarked that confusing terminology leads to a confusion of concepts, e.g., when sustainability and ESG are used interchangeably.

Employee Perceptions of Climate Communication Practices

We found that some businesses follow a corporate structure that constrains conversations involving climate action and communication. An example of this structure from our literature review is research conducted on Finland-based elevator company KONE, which, despite being a foreign company, has key similarities with Hong Kong businesses. The interviewees employed in office jobs at KONE described a lack of discussion surrounding climate action initiatives in the offices, with only the official documentation and outreach as instructions for climate action³¹. In the interviews we conducted with Hong Kong companies, the sustainability department employees had a comparable experience with their communication practices. They pointed out that the sustainability department has been designated to produce materials contributing to some form of weekly or monthly

newsletter, and occasionally hold some training sessions. The department's main focus seemed to be to fill out forms, such as sustainability and ESG reports. One of the interviewees mentioned that filling out these reports is a tedious government-mandated task that requires extensive data collection from every department. Two interviewees within a sustainability department expressed that some organisations do not have a streamlined flow of information; to get the relevant data, they require the sustainability department to independently ask each department. One interviewee outside of a sustainability team described a sustainability department that was mostly in an advisory role and separate from most decisions of the company. The sustainability team was only consulted when there was a specific sustainability concern. We also found that employees who work in climate communication are aware of the potential risk of greenwashing accusations in the way that some businesses publicise their

sustainability initiatives. According to all interviews, Hong Kong businesses primarily publicise their sustainability initiatives on their website and social media platform(s). Seven interviewees noted that greenwashing should be a core concern for businesses communicating externally on these platforms because of the reputational risk. Three interviewees claimed that the general public have become more scrutinous with how businesses communicate their sustainability values on these platforms. They stated that consumers, stakeholders, and NGOs are now quicker to point out when businesses make vague or ambitious sustainability target statements without grounding them in evidence of current climate action that works toward those targets. Consumers and stakeholders now expect to see a one-to-one relationship between a business's sustainability targets and sustainability initiatives to prove that the targets are realistic and feasible. These interviews support existing literature that similarly claim consum-

ers now think more critically on how corporate sustainability is presented in external communications^{32,33,34}.

Barriers to Understanding Within Climate Communication

Limited Approach to Sustainability

One readily apparent barrier for improving climate communication is a limited approach to sustainability by Hong Kong businesses. While all of the companies that we interviewed have a sustainability team, some are not as closely integrated with the company structure. This creates the problem of overwork for the sustainability team as they have to work to obtain the statistics necessary to complete their tasks, something that we saw in our interviews. This takes away from their effectiveness as a whole as they cannot spend as much time promoting climate initiatives. Additionally this decision to leave sustainability issues to the sustainability department means

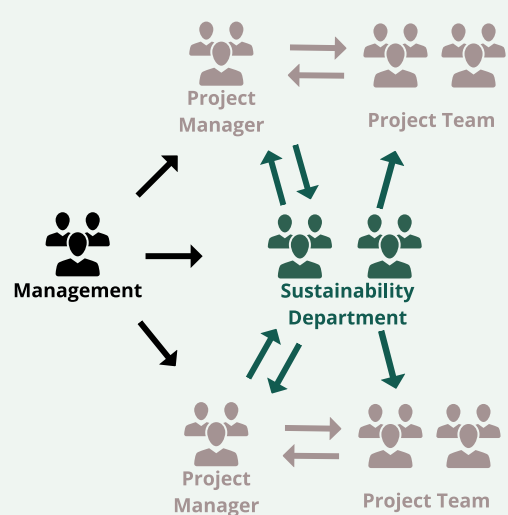


Figure 6. Generic engagement of sustainability department in corporate structure

that average employees have less knowledge about sustainability concerns, and what specifically they can do to improve the company's climate initiatives. The implications of a limited approach to sustainability prevents it from becoming a core value of the company.

Lack of Clarity & Consistency in Climate Guidelines

Another barrier we identified is the unclear and inconsistent wording in climate communications. Many of the frameworks such as the TCFD Guidance on Climate Disclosures

and SASB Annual Report have different standards to report business emissions and sustainability practices. Each framework approaches reporting differently, and organisations select which framework to follow based on factors such as their organisation type, disclosure type, and government requirements. However, the multitude of reporting guidelines become confusing to businesses, due to the differing information each one requires and how the guidelines define climate-related terminology^{30,35,36}. The inconsistency of definitions in climate-related reporting



leaves readers to define terms on their own, which may cause confusion when trying to understand climate-related reports. With differing definitions of the same terms and concepts, it becomes more difficult for businesses to set a standard for what effective sustainability will look like. It also increases the likelihood that conflicting definitions arise for the same terms and concepts, muddying the discourse with conflicting directions of action. Communicating between different departments is already a challenging task for employees because of the varying perspectives and ideas conveyed. Adding a barrier of terminology differences within communication only increases this difficulty and there-

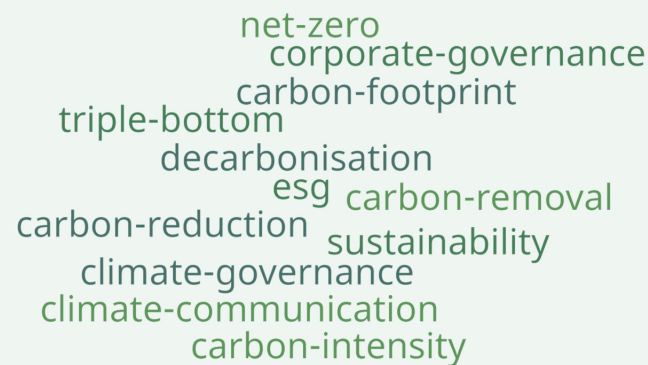


Figure 7. Word cloud of confusing terms mentioned in interviews

fore the efficiency at which different departments are able to understand information.

Inconsistent Accessibility & Visibility of Climate Action Information

In the thirty websites we reviewed, we found that Hong Kong business websites, regardless of sector, generally have inconsistent levels of accessible and visible information on their climate action and sustainability initiatives. However, our interviews and previous research indicated that consumers and stakeholders expect such information to be easy to find, access, and read to present a one-to-one relationship between sustainability targets and sustainability initiatives^{32,33,34}.

Many of the websites have a dedicated webpage for sustainability-related information, but the visibility of this webpage varies across different websites. For example, some websites emphasise their sustainability webpage by displaying a

clearly-labelled link at the header of the homepage. This approach is highly visible, easily leading the viewer to information on the business's sustainability goals and initiatives. Other websites do not have a labelled header, but a link to their sustainability webpage at the footer of the homepage. While less visible, the viewer is still only one click away from the homepage to business's sustainability-related information. An approach that needs improvement, when it comes to visibility, is to only link the sustainability webpage under a different page than the homepage. For viewers, it is unclear from the homepage that the website has a sustainability section at all since there is no visible link to that section.

The accessibility and visibility of the sustainability webpage's information also varies. Some websites overview their sustainability goals and initiatives together in layman's terms so the information is easy to understand and the relationship

between the goals and initiatives is easy to recognise. Other websites present their sustainability goals on one page, but present their sustainability initiatives on a different page. This disconnect makes it harder for viewers to recognise the relationship between the sustainability goals and initiatives. An approach we have seen that has room for improvement is highlighted in Figure 8. All information on the business's sustainability targets and initiatives are held in their annual sustainability report. Sustainability reports are technical business documents with pages of technical data and information. An average viewer may have difficulty navigating and digesting these

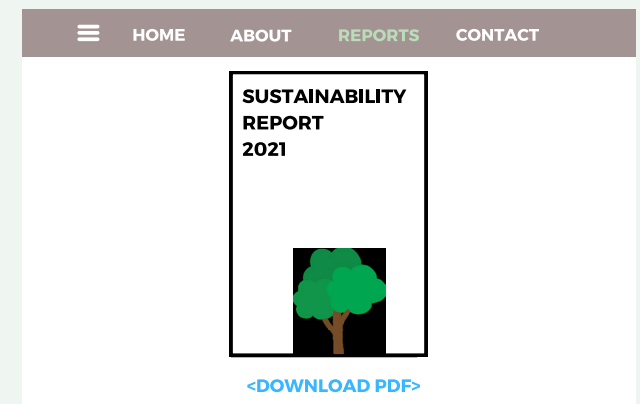


Figure 8. Mock-up page with low visibility of information

reports. As such, viewers may not see the relationship between the information in these reports and the business’s sustainability goals and strategy. Additionally, sustainability reports may be difficult to find on the business’s website.

Our Recommendations

We present the following recommendations to Hong Kong businesses for BEC’s consideration. If satisfactory, the BEC should communicate these recommendations to their members and other Hong Kong businesses:

Introduce Flexible Methods to Integrate Sustainability

Inflexible organisation structures hinder sustainability from becoming a core focus of an organisation as a whole. This structure fails to support a holistic integration of sustainability into the organisation. These are our recommendations to improve the integration of communication about sustainability into organisations:

Establish Sustainability

Representative in Each Department

To improve internal climate communication, organisations could assign a sustainability representative in each department. A sustainability representative refers to someone who will work in their assigned department and reports to the sustainability department. A sustainability representative would be hired by the sustainability department. The representatives should not be a volunteer or part-time employee; they should be trained in sustainability practices either by previous experience or by the companies’ sustain-

ability team. Their responsibilities would include educating employees within their assigned department on sustainability concepts, collecting data for reporting, and promoting climate action with small behaviour changes around the office. The goal of this position is to show the non-sustainability department employees how their work relates to sustainability. Creating a connection between an employee’s job and how their day-to-day tasks can impact their climate action will allow for employees to take more ownership over their actions and act with more purpose. A sustainability represen-

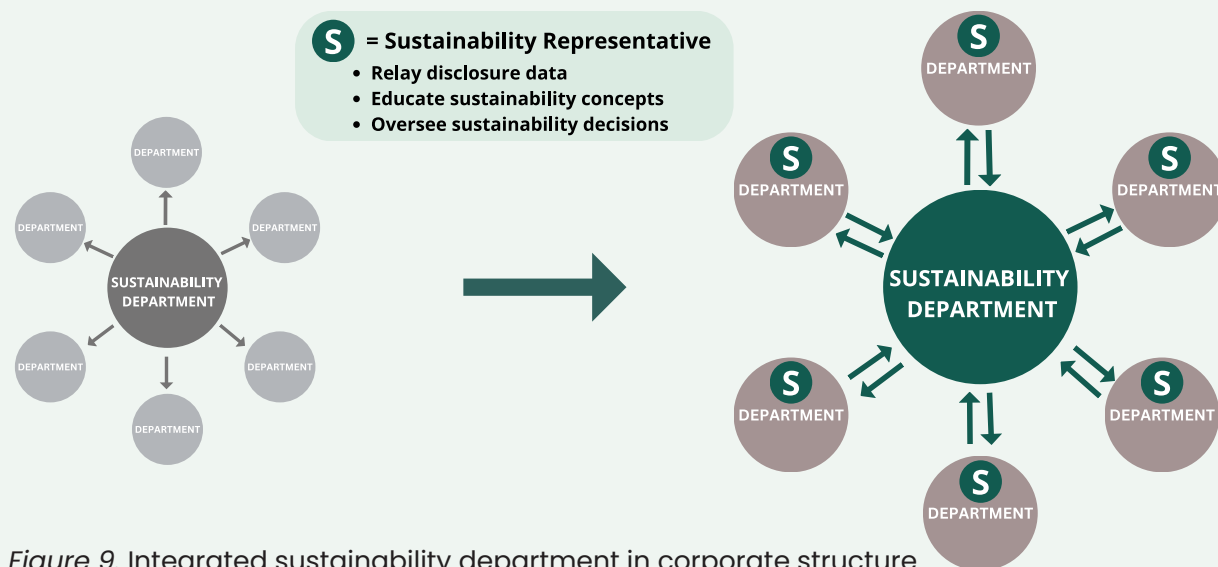


Figure 9. Integrated sustainability department in corporate structure

tative will allow better connection between the sustainability department and the department they are assigned to. Having better communication between the two departments will be beneficial when collecting department-specific data for climate-related reporting. Having a sustainability representative creates a structure to support climate communication which travels two-ways, allowing for more engagement and furthermore fosters climate action. We learned that organisation structures that support the integration of sustainability allow for more conversations about climate change, and turn sustainability into a core value of a company, furthermore improving the climate action initiative that an organisation has.

Clarify Unclear & Inconsistent Rhetoric

The inconsistency and variety in existing guidelines with the lack of standardisation can make it harder for an organisation to sustain effec-

tive external climate communication in disclosures. The unclear and vague nature of existing guidelines lead to confusion, and we recommend the following to help address the difficulties organisations may face:

Streamline Reporting Guidelines

We recommend the BEC assist in streamlining reporting guidelines to facilitate a better understanding of existing guidelines and policies for Hong Kong businesses. This can be achieved by creating a centralised platform, such as a website or report, that provides clear and concise guidelines and templates for reporting. Access to this platform should be provided to all BEC members to ensure consistency and accuracy in reporting. To support this effort, we recommend BEC look into existing attempts at streamlining reporting guidelines. The World Business Council on Sustainable Development in collaboration with ESG Book created a library that connects companies to multiple reporting re-

quirements for specific sectors and countries. This library allows companies to understand what, where, and how to report sustainability information³⁷. By studying and adopting these existing efforts, the BEC can ensure a similar platform is effective and meets the needs of its members.

Standardise Climate-related Terms

We recommend that the BEC expand our current climate glossary and encourage Hong Kong businesses to utilise such a glossary. A climate glossary with easily understandable definitions can help standardise these terms in climate communication. Standardising climate-related terms clarifies the meaning behind common buzzwords or phrases in climate rhetoric. This will prevent reports and guides from using conflicting definitions of the same term. Each entry to the glossary will include a definition and relevance section. The definitions should provide a clear explanation of the term's meaning and concept, cited from a

Term	Definition	Relevance
Sustainability	_____	_____
ESG	_____	_____
Climate change	_____	_____
Carbon footprint	_____	_____
Carbon offset	_____	_____

Figure 10. Climate glossary template

trustworthy source. It should not be ambiguous. The relevance section provides details about the term’s relationship with other terms, further information on the meaning or concept, and common misinterpretations of the term. It should provide more clarification for the definition. Our literature review and interviews provided information for this section.

Improve Accessibility & Visibility of Sustainability-related Information

Our research indicated that greenwashing concerns for Hong Kong businesses are mainly centred around the visibility of sustainability-related information. Organisations are expected to be more

transparent with how their actions support their sustainability claims. The key to avoid accusations of greenwashing through vague claims is to support those claims with accessible and visible information of sustainability initiatives. To meet this goal, we recommend the following:

Present Claims & Evidence Together on Front-facing Platforms

From our observations of Hong Kong business websites, we identified a simple but highly visible approach to communicate the business’s sustainability targets together with the initiatives that work toward those targets on a dedicated sustainability webpage. For all Hong Kong business websites we reviewed, this information is available in sustainability reports at the very least, so our recommendation focuses on presenting this information on a much more front-fac-

ing platform. Figure 11 illustrates our recommended approach.

The dedicated sustainability webpage is clearly labelled, and the link to this page is easily visible on the website. In this case, the link is displayed at the header of the website. The sustainability webpage then overviews the business’s sustainability goals, followed by supporting evidence of initiatives to meet those goals. These overviews should be easy to understand so an average viewer can recognize the relationship between the goals and actions. Presenting the evidence for their

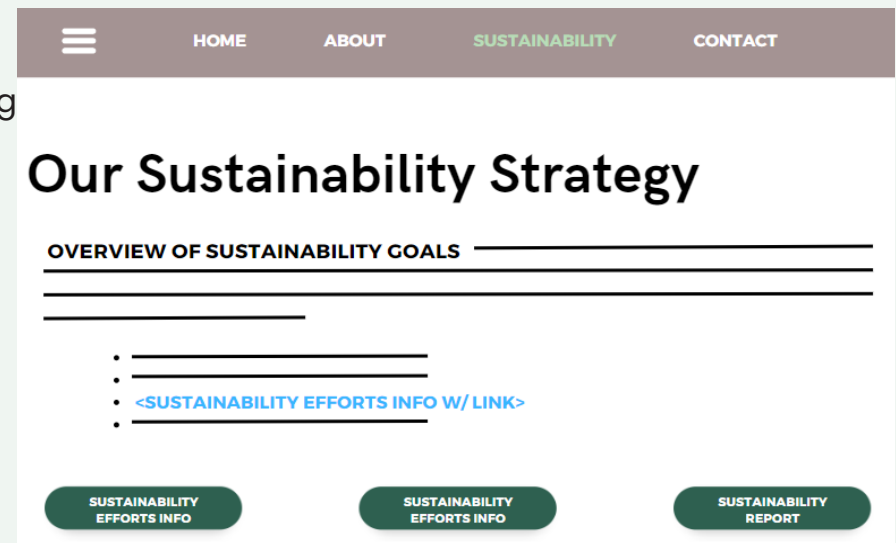


Figure 11. Mock-up page with highly visible information

sustainability claims together maximises the visibility of relevant information for the viewer. If the viewer wants more information or technical details, links or buttons to that information should be clearly labelled and accessible on the same page. This recommendation could build better consistency in available climate-related information and address the knowledge gap between consumers and businesses on their roles in sustainability.

Conclusion

Gradual improvements in the way that businesses communicate about climate change can facilitate a larger impact on climate action. Climate communication is essential for raising the business's understanding of climate change concepts at the science-policy interface. Effective climate communication can inform and inspire wider action, both individually and collectively, to build capacity for mitigating the effects of climate change.

Businesses may not have the manpower and capacity to make sweeping changes to how they engage with climate communication and climate change, but these small steps of improvement can be taken to ensure a more sustainable future. Starting internally with employees and their communication practices can help companies promote better culture of communicating and also have sustainability built into their values. Once one business adopts a set of changes, they set a precedent for other businesses to follow them, helping older businesses which may be more conservative be more willing to adopt improvements to their current sustainability structure and practices.

Deliverables & Further Action

In addition to this booklet, we created three deliverables for BEC. The first deliverable is the list of recommendations. This is a condensed version of our recommendations laid out above, which address the current problems we have identified

in climate communication in Hong Kong. It is categorised into sections of three of the largest problems found through our research. We gave the list of recommendations to the BEC with the hope that they will consider them when drafting future papers, discussing sustainability with companies, or conducting further research.

The second deliverable to the BEC is a sample glossary of climate-related terms which presents terms and definitions of climate-related concepts surrounding climate communication. While not fully comprehensive of all climate terminology related to business, the glossary may help define core terminologies and buzzwords used throughout different business sectors and departments. The intent of the glossary is to help standardise the terms that are used through many different guides and reports so that it can be easy to understand to an employee which would then translate to more clear communication between different

departments.

The third deliverable includes details of a proposed structure of a possible climate communication playbook. In a playbook, climate communication strategies to improve corporate sustainability are broken down into easy to understand imagery and diagrams, and distributed to companies' sustainability departments. We have created a set of design guidelines and recommendations that could guide further research into this. The idea of the playbook is meant to address the issue of employees being unsure of how their roles relate to sustainability and climate action. The playbook enables employees to recognize and take ownership of actions related to sustainability in their daily work setting.

For further research, we recommend BEC investigate use of a playbook for business employees to be used across all departments. We believe that a playbook could effectively communicate the ideas behind our

research and create the connection between employee work and sustainability, and illustrate realistic ways employees can take sustainable actions. The use of a climate glossary and playbook for engagement with external stakeholders should be considered in the future as well.

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**List of Recommendations to BEC:
Guiding Climate Communication for Hong Kong Businesses**

We hope for BEC to recommend the following to the Hong Kong business sector to implement.

Structure: Creating a More Integrated Sustainability Department	
#1.	We recommend that companies work to incorporate sustainability as a core value of their business, such that major decisions they make are considered in the context of sustainability.
#2.	We recommend having representatives of the sustainability department across different departments in a company, with the purpose of coordinating on climate disclosure and action plans, as well as educating and informing other employees.
#3.	We recommend that regular employees be trained in the basics of sustainability to ensure that they can assist with sustainable practices, and that they are knowledgeable about the topics and techniques they use.

Climate Rhetoric: Increasing the Clarity of Terms and Creating Standardisations	
#1.	We recommend that reporting guides have a standard definition of terms used. The language within each of these definitions should not change and be reworded.
#2.	We recommend that reporting guides have clear definitions of terms so that they can be differentiable from other commonly related terms.
#3.	We recommend that organisations streamline reporting guidelines so it will be less overwhelming for companies on which guide to use and also to reduce the confusion on the formats of different reporting styles.

Visibility of Information on Sustainability Initiatives	
#1.	We recommend all company websites to increase the accessibility and visibility of information on sustainability targets and initiatives to meet consumer expectations of easily visible information on sustainability initiatives.
#2.	We recommend that information on sustainability targets and initiatives be presented on webpages in an easy-to-understand form for an average viewer. This may include an overview in layman's terms of the company's sustainability targets, then an overview in layman's terms of the initiatives to meet those targets. Links or buttons to more information should be clearly labelled and easy to find.
#3.	We recommend companies to include evidence of sustainability initiatives on social media posts that promote their sustainability values to meet consumer expectations of providing evidence to support claims on sustainability.

Climate Glossary: Guiding Climate Communication for Hong Kong Businesses

This glossary is a sample on what would be in a full standardised glossary of climate-related terms. This climate glossary will have easily understandable definitions that can help standardise terms commonly used in climate communication. Standardising climate-related terms clarifies the meaning behind common buzzwords or phrases in climate rhetoric. We recommend that the BEC expand our current climate glossary and encourage Hong Kong businesses to utilise such a glossary.

There are eight terms outlined with definitions, relevance, and the sources of the information.

- The definitions should provide a clear explanation of the term’s meaning and concept. They should not be ambiguous.
- The relevance section provides details about the term’s relationship with other terms, further information on the term, and or common misinterpretations. It should provide more clarification for the definition. Our literature review, and interviews provided information for this section.
- The references below indicate where these definitions originated or are derived from.

Climate Glossary

	Term	Definition	Relevance
1	Carbon neutrality	Carbon neutrality is a state of net-zero carbon dioxide emissions, achieved by either complete net-zero or by carbon offsetting. In other words carbon neutrality means the CO ₂ released into the atmosphere from a company's activities is balanced by an equivalent amount being removed. ¹	This term should not be confused with <i>Net-zero emissions</i> . <i>Net-zero emissions</i> goes further than carbon neutrality as it aims to eliminate emissions from all greenhouse gases, not just carbon emissions ¹ .
2	Carbon offset	Carbon offset broadly refers to a reduction in GHG emissions that is used to compensate for emissions that occur elsewhere. This involves compensating for carbon emissions that have already been generated by investing in projects or activities that reduce greenhouse gas emissions elsewhere. Carbon offsets are used to balance out emissions that cannot be avoided through carbon reduction measures ^{2,3} .	This term should not be confused with <i>Carbon reduction</i> . <i>Carbon reduction</i> aims to decrease the existing amount of carbon emission while <i>Carbon offset</i> aims to compensate for carbon emissions that have already been generated ^{2,3,4} . It is important to note that the sources cited for <i>Carbon offset</i> used <i>Carbon offset</i> interchangeably with greenhouse gas emissions.

	Term	Definition	Relevance
3	Carbon reduction	Carbon reduction is the process where an organisation directly reduces greenhouse gas emissions through efficiencies. This involves implementing measures to reduce the amount of carbon emitted into the atmosphere. This can include actions such as reducing energy consumption, using renewable energy sources, and improving the efficiency of industrial processes. The goal of carbon reduction is to decrease the amount of carbon emissions that are generated in the first place ⁵ .	Carbon reduction is commonly confused with <i>Carbon offset</i> . Refer to <i>Carbon offset</i> for the distinction between these terms. The sources and definitions cited for <i>Carbon reduction</i> , referred to <i>Carbon reduction</i> more generally. In other words they did not specifically talk about the type of carbon emissions.
4	Carbon removal	Carbon removal is the process of removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and locking it away for decades, centuries, or millennia ^{5,6} .	Carbon removal is often confused with carbon capture, as they both involve removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. However, there are important differences between the two concepts. Carbon capture is mainly focused on preventing carbon dioxide emissions from entering the atmosphere, while carbon removal is focused on removing carbon dioxide emissions that have already been released into the atmosphere ^{5,6} . It should be noted that <i>Carbon removal</i> was specifically defined as the removal of carbon dioxide rather than the removal of carbon in general.
5	Climate communication	Climate communication is the field of communication that focuses on the causes and effects of climate change. At a deeper level, climate communication studies the practices of those who communicate about climate change, researching the ways in which they educate about climate change problems and mobilising audiences to take up climate action solutions ⁷ .	Climate communication can take many forms, including media coverage, social media engagement, and community outreach. It can help to build public support for climate action, increase understanding about the causes and impacts of climate change, and promote the development and implementation of policies and practices that support a sustainable future ⁷ .

	Term	Definition	Relevance
6	ESG (Environment and Social Governance)	ESG is a broad set of environmental, social and corporate governance considerations that may impact a company's ability to execute its business strategy and create value over the long term. ESG is a framework used by investors and companies to evaluate the environmental, social, and governance performance of businesses. ESG factors are used to assess a company's risk and potential for long-term financial performance. Environmental factors include issues such as climate change and resource usage. Social factors include employee relations, diversity and inclusion, and community engagement. Governance factors include issues such as executive compensation, board diversity, and shareholder rights ^{8,9} .	<p>ESG is commonly confused or used interchangeably with sustainability.</p> <p>ESG is related to <i>Sustainability</i>, but encompasses a smaller scope of concepts that focuses more on evaluating the environmental, social, and governance performance of businesses^{8,9,12}.</p> <p><i>Sustainability</i> is a broader concept that covers social, environmental, and economic issues.</p>
7	Net-zero emissions	Net-zero emissions refers to achieving balance between greenhouse gas emissions produced and greenhouse gas emissions taken out of the atmosphere. The goal of achieving net zero emissions is to limit the increase in global temperatures caused by human activities. By achieving net zero emissions, the amount of greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere will be balanced by the amount removed, resulting in no additional warming of the planet ^{10,11} .	Refer to <i>Carbon neutrality</i> for the distinction between these terms.
8	Sustainability	Sustainability is defined as the quality of causing little or no damage to the environment and to prevent the depletion of natural or physical resources, so that they will remain available for the long term. The term has been coined at the United Nations Brundtland Commission in 1987 in which sustainability has been defined as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" ¹² .	Refer to <i>ESG</i> for distinction between Sustainability and <i>ESG</i> .

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Climate Communication Playbook Details: Guiding Climate Communication for Hong Kong Businesses

We recommend future research into producing a climate communication playbook that can be used by employees within the Hong Kong business sector. A playbook consists of strategies and methods for communication regarding the business's climate initiatives, sustainability strategy, and ESG strategy. The playbook will be presented as action options that employees can engage with and take ownership of. It will be a document that allows employees to learn and explore how they can contribute to the discourse surrounding climate change and sustainability issues as part of their daily work life and the business operation.

Target Audience

- Individual employees in any and all departments of a business

Purpose

- Educate employees on climate concepts in an easy to understand way
- Engage employees by creating and maintaining a connection between employees and their role in contributing to climate action
- Provide climate communication information that employees can reference

Features

- Easy to understand information to educate employees on climate-related concepts
 - Emphasis on use of data visualisation to convey technical information
 - Examples: infographics, flowcharts, etc.
- Engaging & interactive activities
 - Small tips & tricks that help with climate action
 - Focus on concrete actions that can be taken:
 - Individual goal tracking of simple daily tasks in office:
 - Turn off lights during lunch, bring lunch from home, bring reusable water bottle, etc.
 - Individual goal tracking of simply daily tasks in personal life
 - Turn off lights at home when not in use, recycling food containers, etc.
 - Group goal tracking within office communities (within departments, floors, etc.)
 - Leaderboard of goal tracking (incentive to participate)
 - Create sense of community with competition and engagement

Structure & Format

- Clickable PDF (if applicable)
 - Clear headers that can be clicked to jump to different sections
 - Can include links to provide additional information
- Concise and clear information:
 - Will avoid wordiness and too much technical information
- Accessible and visible information:
 - Information divided into individual subsections so that most relevant parts could be displayed separately

Implementation

- Playbook would be given to a company's sustainability department to distribute
- Sustainability department would determine which sections are most relevant to their employees
- Distribute in method that would be most effective for the company
 - Through email/intranet, message board, paper handout, workshop, social media, etc.

Why a playbook?

- Visual aspect would help with communication and means less of a language barrier
- Good tool to communicate concepts in simple terms. Climate change at its heart can be uncomplicated, so we want to avoid creating another complex research document
- Employees are less likely to read paper-based research, making a visual based approach such as a playbook important

The BEC WPI Project Team would like to acknowledge Vivian Yeung, Head of ESG Strategy at the BEC, who suggested the concept of a playbook. She also provided crucial insight about how sustainability departments in Hong Kong function, which is the inspiration behind most of our points.