Pharmony

FROM THE PM SOCIETY

Report, findings and insights from the PM Society Summit, June 2026

Shaping What Comes Next: Rethinking Value, Partnership and Human Connection in the future of Healthcare Communications

Pharmaceutical companies

Agencies

Procurement teams

Industry organisations

130+ delegates came together to challenge assumptions, share experiences and explore collaboration

On 9 June 2026, more than 130 delegates from pharmaceutical companies, agencies, procurement teams and industry organisations came together at the Royal Society of Medicine in London for the Pharmony Summit.

Hosted by the PM Society's Industry Agency Relations Interest Group, Pharmony was established to strengthen how pharmaceutical companies and agencies work together at a time when healthcare communications is changing rapidly. Commercial models are evolving, AI is reshaping how work is delivered, healthcare professionals (HCPs) are changing how they access information and organisations are under increasing pressure to demonstrate value.

Building on the conversations that began at the Summit in 2025, this year's event brought together a broad mix of perspectives through Oxford-style debates, panel discussions, live audience polling and interactive workshops. Procurement leaders, pharmaceutical marketers, agency leaders and industry experts came together to challenge assumptions, share experiences and explore what successful collaboration might look like in the years ahead.

The agenda covered four distinct themes:

- Rethinking value beyond time & materials
- Partnership evolution
- Healthcare professional engagement
- Artificial intelligence

At first glance, they appear to be very different conversations.

Yet as the day unfolded, it became increasingly clear that they were all asking variations of the same question.

How can healthcare communications create more value in a world that is becoming more complex, more connected and more technology-enabled?

The discussions did not always lead to agreement. In many cases they exposed differing perspectives, competing priorities and genuine tensions across the industry. But they also revealed something encouraging.

Whether delegates were discussing procurement, AI, briefing, measurement or HCP engagement, the conversation repeatedly returned to the importance of trust, collaboration and shared understanding.

Technology is changing how healthcare communications is delivered. These themes reflect wider changes across the life sciences industry. Deloitte's *Measuring the Return from Pharmaceutical Innovation 2026* highlights increasing pressure to deliver greater value from innovation[1], while Elsevier's *Clinician of the Future 2025* reports that clinicians are increasingly adopting AI and digital technologies as part of everyday practice.[2]

The challenge - and opportunity - is ensuring relationships evolve alongside it.

This report captures the key themes that emerged throughout the day, alongside reflections on what they might mean for the future of healthcare communications.

Prior to the Pharmony Summit, the PM Society conducted an industry-wide survey involving professionals from pharmaceutical companies and agencies to explore attitudes towards value, partnership and the future of healthcare communications.

The findings provide an independent snapshot of how the industry currently views many of the issues discussed throughout the Summit. Encouragingly, the survey closely reinforces the themes that emerged during the day, providing additional evidence that the opportunities and challenges highlighted in this report are shared across the wider healthcare communications community.

Trust is the foundation

59% of respondents said mutual trust between teams is the single biggest factor determining whether a pharma–agency partnership succeeds.

Collaboration is the destination

16% Only 16% say they currently work in a highly integrated partnership, yet 59% want shared accountability and joint problem-solving to become the norm.

Value lacks a common definition

82% More than 8 in 10 (82%) respondents agree that value is discussed but rarely defined consistently across pharmaceutical organisations.

Rethinking Value: Beyond Time & Materials

The Summit opened with an Oxford-style debate involving procurement leaders, pharmaceutical marketers and senior agency leaders, exploring one of the industry's most debated questions:

Is Time & Materials still fit for purpose in a technology-enabled world?

Rather than creating consensus, the discussion highlighted just how complex the issue has become.

The audience arrived divided. Before the debate, 58% of delegates believed Time & Materials was no longer fit for purpose.[3] By the end of the session, opinion had shifted to an almost even split.[4] Rather than creating consensus, the discussion highlighted just how complex the issue has become.

Few argued that Time & Materials is fundamentally broken. Equally, few were convinced that a ready-made alternative already exists.

There was broad recognition that Time & Materials continues to provide transparency, governance and budget control. However, many questioned whether hours worked remain an accurate reflection of how value is created, particularly as AI begins to change assumptions around effort, efficiency and delivery. The discussion reflected a wider shift taking place across healthcare and other industries, where organisations are increasingly questioning how work is done and where human expertise creates the greatest value in an AI-enabled environment. PwC have recently estimated that marketing teams spend approximately 70% of their time on execution and only around 30% on strategic activities.[5] Rather than measuring effort alone, there is growing emphasis on outcomes, impact and the quality of strategic thinking.

As the discussion developed, it became clear that the debate was no longer really about pricing models.

It was about value.

Several comments captured the mood in the room:

> "Time is a poor proxy for value."

> "The model still operates, but it no longer reflects how work happens in reality."

> "Time & Materials is dominant not because it works, but because it's habit."

Many organisations aspire to move towards more outcome-based approaches, yet delegates acknowledged that success is often defined differently across procurement, marketing and agency teams. Without a shared understanding of what good looks like, measuring value consistently remains difficult.

The discussion also highlighted the continuing tension within the procurement–pharma–agency triangle. While many organisations want more strategic partnerships, commercial structures can unintentionally reinforce more transactional ways of working.

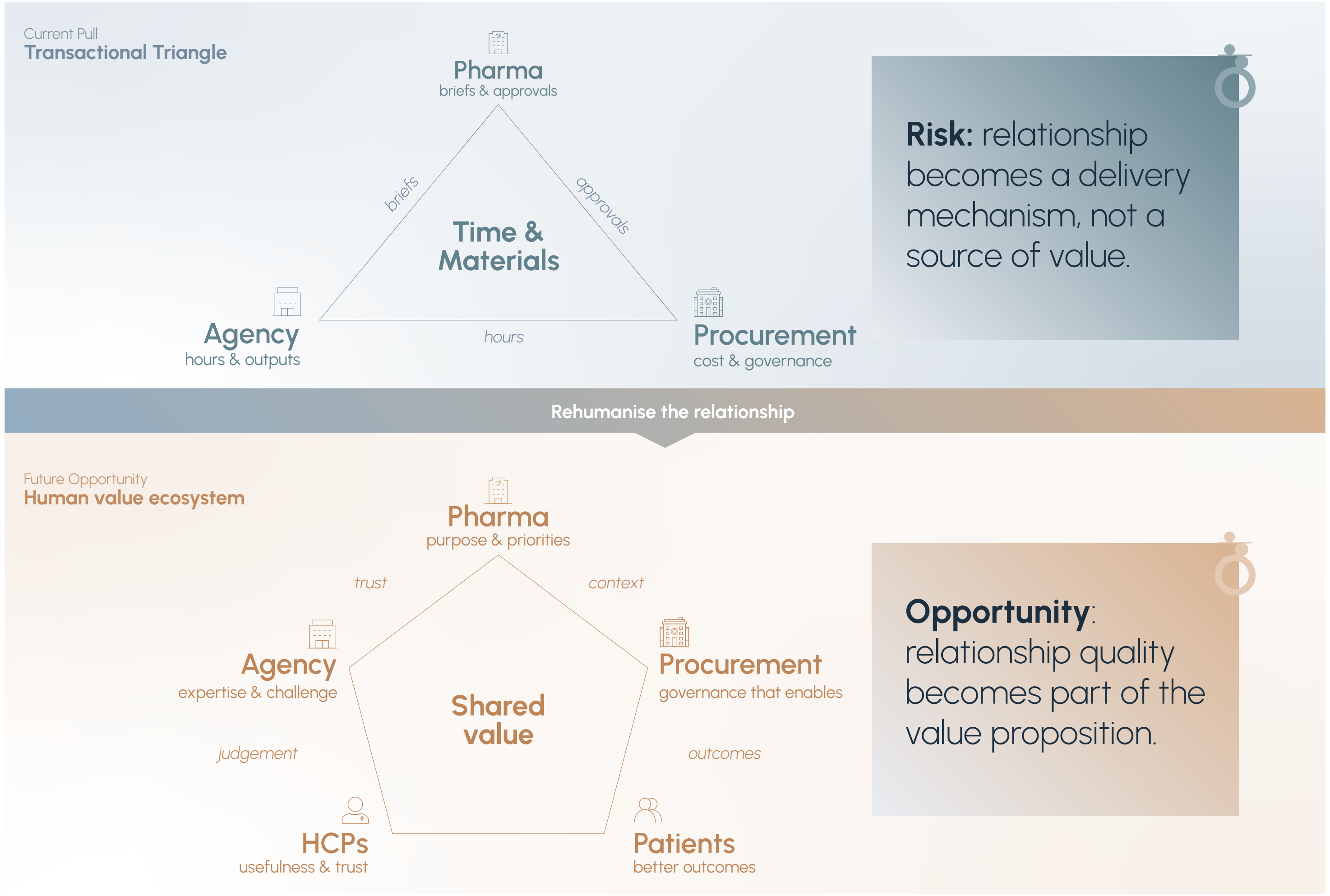
Rather than producing definitive answers, the debate reframed the conversation.

Perhaps the industry's biggest challenge is not replacing Time & Materials. Perhaps it is agreeing how value should be defined in the first place.

If time is no longer the best measure of value, what should replace it-and how can the industry measure it consistently?

From transactional triangle to human value ecosystem

The central shift: commercial structures should support shared value, not trap the relationship in effort-based delivery.



Relationships outperform transactions

67% say mutual trust is one of the three most important ingredients of a successful partnership—far ahead of governance, process or commercial controls.

Context matters

66% Almost 66% say the best partnerships are those where both sides share broader context, not simply better briefs.

Time & Materials survives because it's familiar

79% Nearly 79% believe Time & Materials remains dominant because it is easy to approve, audit and defend, while 69% say historical behaviour keeps it in place.

PM Society pre-Pharmony summit industry survey

Partnership Evolution: Moving Beyond the Transaction

The opening debate focused on commercial models, with the partnership session focusing on the relationships behind them.

The discussion recognised that while commercial models matter, they are only one part of the equation. **Even the most carefully designed contract cannot compensate for poor briefing, unclear expectations or a lack of trust.**

One of the session's most valuable outputs was the introduction of a practical framework to help organisations describe the different ways pharmaceutical companies and agencies work together. Rather than treating partnership as a single concept, the framework acknowledged that different situations require different types of relationships, each with a different purpose.

The five partnership models ranged from clearly defined delivery through to shared ownership of strategic outcomes:

Defined Delivery: Delivering agreed outputs against a defined brief, where success is measured by efficient execution

Improved Delivery: Building on delivery by bringing agency expertise and challenge to improve the quality of execution

Co-Designed Programme: Working together to shape programmes from the outset, with agencies contributing to strategy as well as delivery

Embedded Capability: Providing specialist expertise and continuity as an extension of the client team, becoming part of how the organisation operates

Strategic Co-Owner: Sharing accountability for long-term outcomes, where success is measured not simply by what is delivered, but by what is achieved together

Importantly, delegates challenged the idea that these models represent a ladder that every organisation should climb. They don't.

Different business challenges require different relationships. A straightforward tactical project may only require Defined Delivery, while a complex, long-term programme may benefit from a Strategic Co-Owner approach. The value of the framework lies not in suggesting one model is "better" than another, but in helping both sides have more honest conversations about expectations before work begins.

Supporting the framework were six behaviours that delegates agreed underpin successful partnerships, regardless of the model:

- Honesty about the model being used
- Transparency around constraints
- Keeping commitments
- Escalating issues early
- Investing in the relationship itself
- Regularly reviewing whether the relationship is still fit for purpose

The polling data revealed an interesting disconnect.[2] Only a small proportion of delegates described their current relationships as operating at Strategic Co-Owner level. Yet when asked where they would ideally like to be, significantly more selected either Strategic Co-Owner or Embedded Capability.

The aspiration is there. The challenge lies in creating the conditions that allow organisations to get there.

The five models of agency–client relationship

Not a ladder: the right relationship depends on the challenge, but every model needs honest human behaviours.

Choose the relationship the work needs

Avoid the "one-size-fits-all partnership" myth

Make expectations explicit before work begins

1 Defined Delivery

- Clear brief
- Agreed outputs
- Efficient execution

2 Improved Delivery

- Agency expertise
- Constructive challenge
- Better output quality

3 Co-designed Programme

- Joint shaping
- Strategy + delivery
- Shared programme logic

4 Embedded Capability

- Extension of team
- Specialist continuity
- Operational fluency

5 Strategic Co-owner

- Shared accountability
- Long-term outcomes
- Achieved together

Context decides which model is right — not status, seniority or habit

Foundation behaviours

Honest model | Transparent constraints | Keep commitments | Escalate early | Invest in relationship | Review fit

When delegates were asked what stands in the way, familiar barriers emerged: procurement processes, budget pressures, contracting structures, risk aversion and short-term thinking.These weren't presented as criticisms of individual functions, but as examples of the structural realities many organisations are navigating every day.

Interestingly, when the room was asked a much simpler question-

" When you hear the word partnership, what comes to mind?"

– the responses were remarkably consistent.

Trust. Transparency. Collaboration. Shared goals. Respect.

Those same themes surfaced throughout the afternoon discussion.

Perhaps the most thought-provoking finding came when delegates were asked which of the six behaviours is most often missing from client-agency relationships. The most common response was not communication, delivery or accountability. **It was investing in the relationship itself.**

Interestingly, this reflects findings beyond healthcare. Google's *Project Aristotle* identified psychological safety, trust and balanced participation as the strongest predictors of high-performing teams,[6] while research published in *Science* found that collective intelligence depends less on individual expertise than on how effectively people collaborate.[7]

One of the most popular words to emerge from the live polling exercise was simply: "coffee".

On the surface, it was a light-hearted response.
In reality, it captured something more meaningful.

Coffee represents the conversations that happen before the brief is written. It is where context is shared, difficult conversations become easier and trust begins to develop. It is often where the best ideas emerge-not because they were planned, but because people had the time and space to think together.

As technology continues to reshape healthcare communications, delegates suggested that these moments of human connection may become increasingly valuable rather than less.

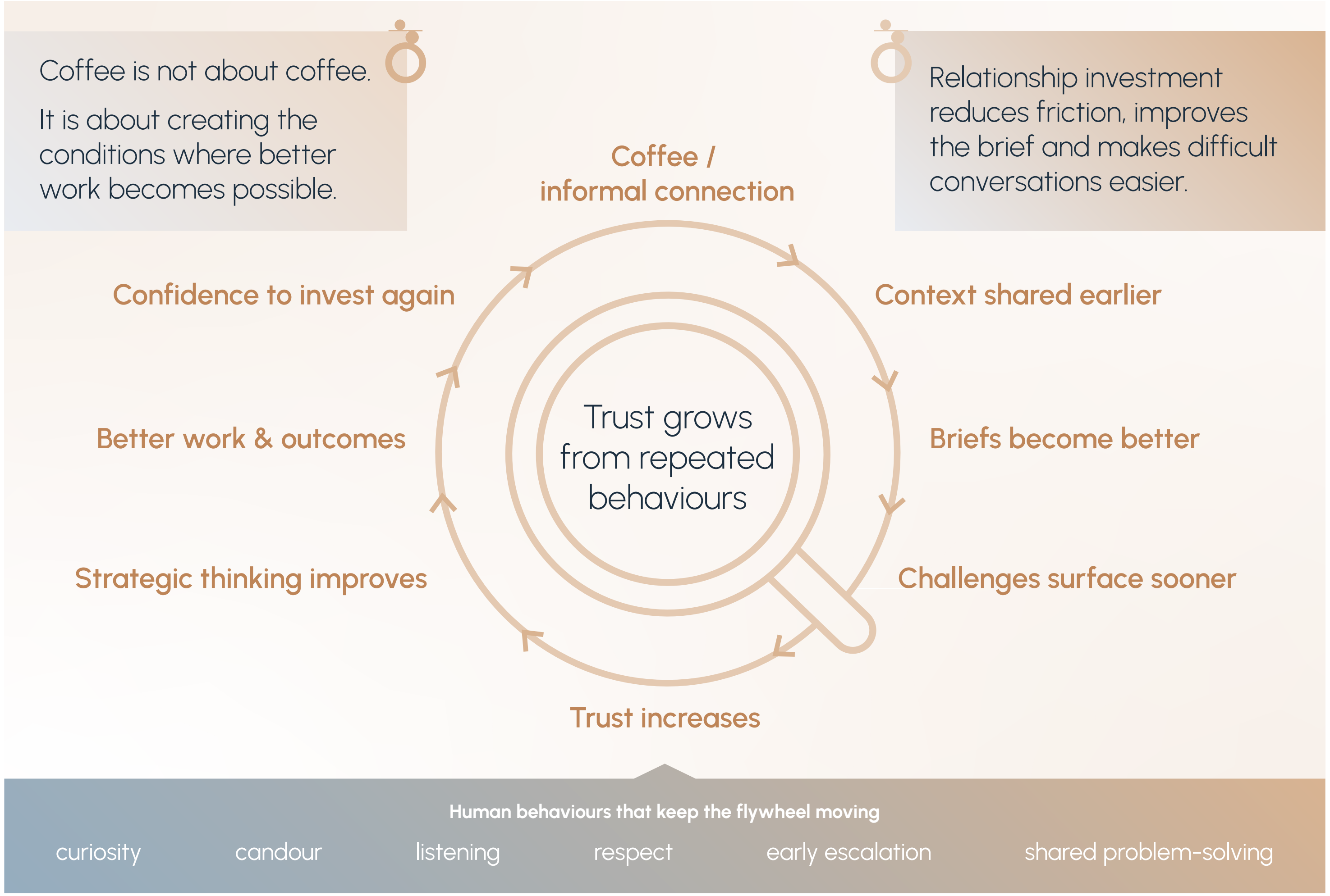
As one speaker observed:

"Trust is not a behaviour.
Trust results from behaviours."

Relationships shouldn't be viewed as something separate from delivery. Increasingly, they may be part of the value proposition itself.

The Coffee Flywheel

"Coffee" becomes the shorthand for informal human connection: where context, candour and trust start to compound.



Strategy remains undervalued

70% Almost 70% believe up-front strategic thinking is one of the most under-recognised sources of value in pharma–agency relationships.

Better beginnings create better outcomes

68% Nearly 68% say the single biggest improvement would be clearer alignment at the outset on roles, expectations and measures of success.

Process is getting in the way

47% The biggest barriers to effective partnerships are changing priorities (47%), unclear briefs (37%) and slow decision-making (37%)—not a lack of capability.

PM Society pre-Pharmony summit industry survey

Beyond the Triangle: Understanding HCP Reality

Following several sessions focused on industry relationships, the healthcare professional (HCP) engagement discussion offered an important shift in perspective.

The conversation moved away from agencies, pharmaceutical companies and procurement teams and back towards **one of the industry's most important audiences: healthcare professionals.**

It was a timely reminder that however commercial models evolve, partnerships strengthen or AI develops, healthcare communications will ultimately be judged by whether it helps healthcare professionals deliver better patient care.

A recurring theme throughout the session was information overload.

Healthcare professionals are navigating increasing volumes of information, growing channel complexity and rapidly evolving technologies, often while making decisions under significant time pressure.

Several speakers referenced the extraordinary pace at which medical knowledge is expanding. The challenge for healthcare professionals is no longer accessing information. It is identifying what is relevant, credible and useful.

This reflects wider pressures facing healthcare professionals. Elsevier's *Clinician of the Future 2025* found that 69% of clinicians are seeing more patients than before, while 28% do not believe they have enough time to provide a good standard of care. In this environment, usefulness becomes increasingly valuable.[1]

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80% of approved content is rarely or never used

Despite the volume of content produced across the industry, *Veeva Pulse 2025* reported that almost 80% of approved content is rarely or never used, reinforcing the importance of creating communication that is genuinely relevant rather than simply available.[8]

Against this backdrop, the discussion challenged some long-held assumptions about engagement.

Reach and frequency remain important, but delegates repeatedly returned to concepts such as relevance, usefulness and trust. One interactive exercise exploring email engagement generated lively discussion around expectations versus reality, reinforcing how easily performance metrics can be misinterpreted without understanding audience behaviour. The conversation encouraged attendees to look beyond activity metrics and think more carefully about what meaningful engagement actually looks like.

Behaviour change, understanding and action emerged as more meaningful indicators of success than activity alone.

The discussion also highlighted an audience that can sometimes be overlooked. Much of healthcare communications focuses on prescribing clinicians, yet allied healthcare professionals including nurses, specialist nurses, pharmacists and members of the wider multidisciplinary team play a critical role in patient care.

As healthcare delivery becomes increasingly collaborative, communicators may need to think more broadly about how they support the wider clinical ecosystem-not simply prescribers.

The session also touched on the growing role of AI in how healthcare professionals discover and consume information. As AI-powered tools become more commonplace, understanding how healthcare professionals evaluate and trust information may become one of the most important strategic questions facing healthcare communicators.

Interestingly, this echoed discussions from earlier in the day. Whether delegates were talking about partnerships, commercial models or HCP engagement, the conversation repeatedly returned to the same principle: creating communication that people genuinely value.

In a world where information is abundant and attention is scarce, usefulness may become the most valuable currency of all.

AI needs evidence, not excitement

74% Almost three-quarters (74%) believe AI is widely discussed, but its real impact on cost, quality and delivery remains unclear.

Transparency builds confidence in AI

52% More than half (52%) say agencies should clearly disclose when AI has been used, while 46% want measurable case studies proving its value.

Human connection still wins

73% Despite rapid advances in technology, 73% rank clarity of expectations and 67% rank trust built over time as the strongest foundations of successful pharma–agency relationships.

PM Society pre-Pharmony summit industry survey

AI, Implementation and What Happens Next

AI featured throughout every session, whether directly or indirectly. What stood out, however, was how much the conversation has matured.

The debate is no longer centred on whether AI matters. Most delegates appear to have accepted that it does. **The focus has shifted towards implementation and understanding where AI can create meaningful value.**

Several discussions suggested the industry may be moving beyond the initial excitement that characterised early conversations around AI. Viewed through the lens of the Gartner Hype Cycle, many organisations appear to be moving from the "Peak of Inflated Expectations" into the "Trough of Disillusionment" - the point where enthusiasm meets operational reality.

Far from being negative, many delegates viewed this as a sign of progress.

The questions being asked are becoming more practical:

- Where can AI genuinely add value?
- Which activities should remain human-led?
- How should outputs be governed and validated?
- What new skills will teams require?
- How can organisations adopt AI responsibly without compromising quality, compliance or trust?

One particularly thought-provoking discussion centred on strategic thinking time.

Research referenced during the event suggested that only around 20-30% of agency time is currently spent on strategic activities, with the majority consumed by administration, process management and delivery requirements. Rather than simply producing more content, AI has the potential to create more time for the activities delegates repeatedly identified as uniquely human: strategic thinking, collaboration, judgement and creativity. (PWC)

Against this backdrop, AI was viewed less as a replacement for expertise and more as an enabler of it.

Delegates discussed the opportunity for AI to reduce routine tasks and create more space for activities where human judgement remains essential: strategic thinking, creativity, relationship building and problem solving.

Interestingly, the AI conversation repeatedly returned to people rather than technology.

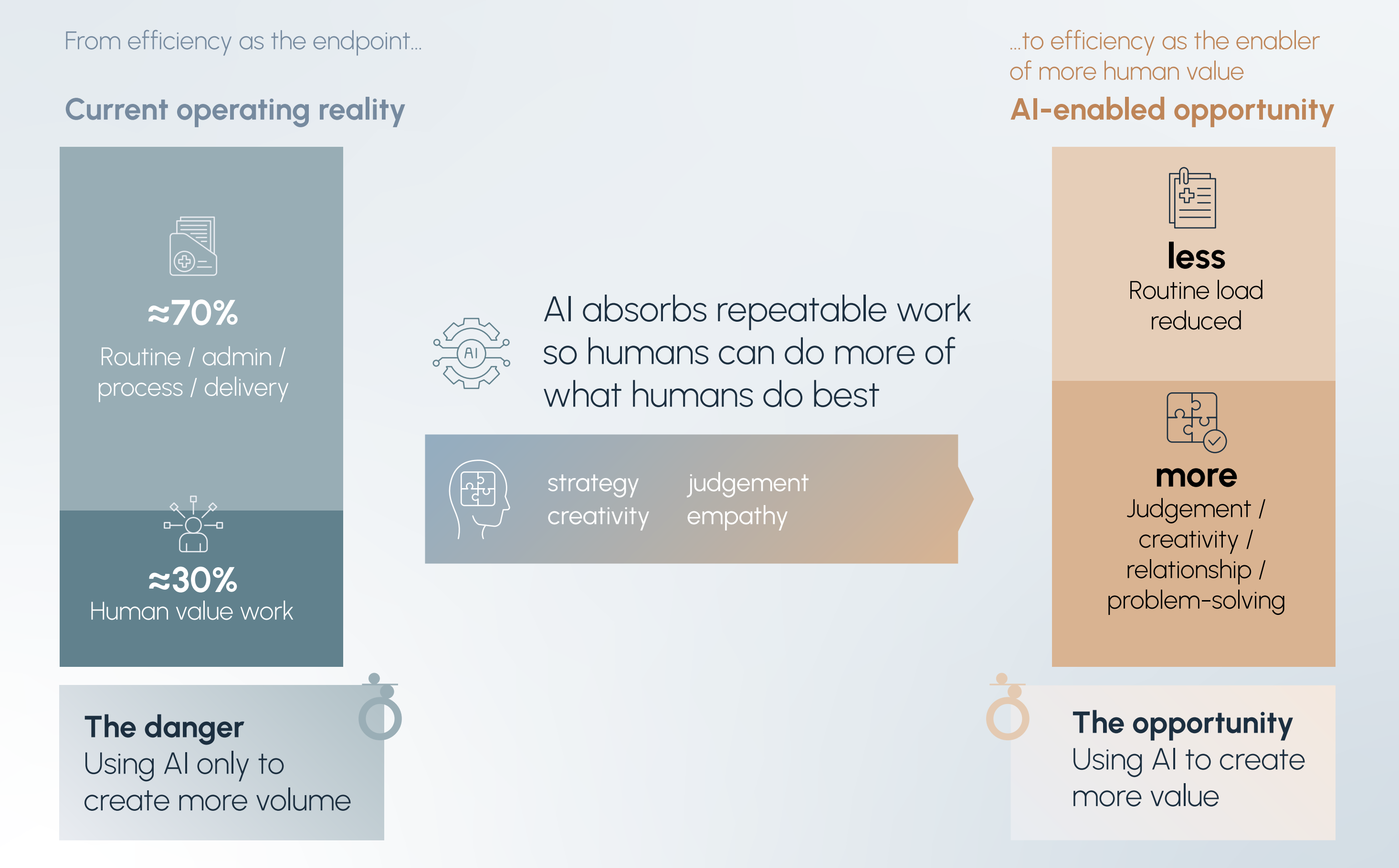
Judgement. Creativity. Empathy. Collaboration.

These themes surfaced far more often than discussions about tools or platforms.

Perhaps the greatest opportunity presented by AI is not greater automation but creating more time for the things humans do best.

AI should buy back human time

The opportunity is not simply faster production; it is more space for judgement, creativity, empathy and partnership.



Illustrative proportions based on the report discussion: most time is currently consumed by execution/process, leaving a smaller share for strategic activities.s

LOOKING AHEAD

If there was one message that resonated throughout the Pharmony Summit 2026, it was that healthcare communications is navigating multiple transformations at once.

Commercial models are being challenged, partnership expectations are evolving, healthcare professional behaviours are changing and AI is reshaping how work is delivered and where value is created.

That idea extends beyond healthcare communications. Research across multiple industries consistently shows that high-performing organisations invest not only in technology, but in the quality of collaboration that surrounds it.

Throughout the day, conversations returned to commercial models, procurement, AI, HCP engagement and measurement. On the surface, these appear to be different challenges. Yet taken together, they pointed towards a common conclusion.[6]

Healthcare communications is becoming more technological.

It also needs to become more human.

AI will undoubtedly reshape how work is delivered. But throughout the Summit, delegates repeatedly returned to the same qualities that AI can't replace: trust, collaboration, judgement and human connection. Perhaps that explains why one of the most memorable words from the day was simply: "coffee" - a reminder that progress still depends on people coming together, sharing perspectives and building relationships.

The partnership framework introduced during the Summit, built around five relationship models and six enabling behaviours, provides a useful foundation for future discussion and a common language for collaboration as the industry continues to evolve.

More importantly, it reflects a broader shift in thinking. Relationships are no longer simply a way of delivering work; they are increasingly becoming part of how value is created.

Perhaps that is the real relationship dividend.

Relationships that enable better thinking, stronger ideas, more effective collaboration and, ultimately, better outcomes for organisations, healthcare professionals and the patients they serve.

This is where the PM Society has an important role to play. As a trusted convenor and custodian of marketing excellence within life sciences, it is uniquely positioned to bring together pharmaceutical companies, agencies, procurement professionals and healthcare stakeholders to tackle shared challenges and shape future ways of working.

Pharmony has already established itself as more than an event. The opportunity now is to build on that momentum, continue these conversations and turn discussion into practical action. In doing so, it can help ensure healthcare communications continues to evolve in ways that create meaningful value for organisations, healthcare professionals and ultimately the patients.

This report is not the conclusion of a conversation – it is the beginning of a movement.

Pharmony was launched by the PM Society in 2026 to bring together everyone with a stake in the future of healthcare communications – pharmaceutical companies, agencies, procurement professionals, healthcare communicators, industry bodies, business leaders, shareholders and those building the next generation of our profession. As healthcare communications continues to evolve, so too must the relationships, commercial models and ways of collaborating that underpin it. Through research, surveys, events, working groups and practical blueprints, Pharmony will provide a trusted platform for bringing diverse perspectives together, testing new ideas and helping our industry adapt with confidence. If you share the belief that better relationships lead to better thinking, stronger businesses, more fulfilling careers and, ultimately, better outcomes for healthcare professionals and the patients they serve, we invite you to join us.

Contact the PM Society, become part of Pharmony and help shape what comes next.

Pharmony

Endnotes

1 Deloitte. (2026). *Measuring the return from pharmaceutical innovation 2026*. Deloitte.

2 Elsevier. (2025). *Clinician of the future 2025*. Elsevier.

3 PM Society,(May 2026) Pre-Pharmony Summit Member Survey

4 PM Society (June 2026) Pharmony Summit 2026, Slido Poll Results

5 PwC Strategy&. (2025). *Next in marketing*

6 Google re:Work – *Project Aristotle*

7 Woolley, A. W., Chabris, C. F., Pentland, A., Hashmi, N., & Malone, T. W.. (2010). Evidence for a collective intelligence factor in the performance of human groups. *Science*, 330(6004), 686–688

8 Veeva Systems. *Veeva Pulse report* 2025.

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