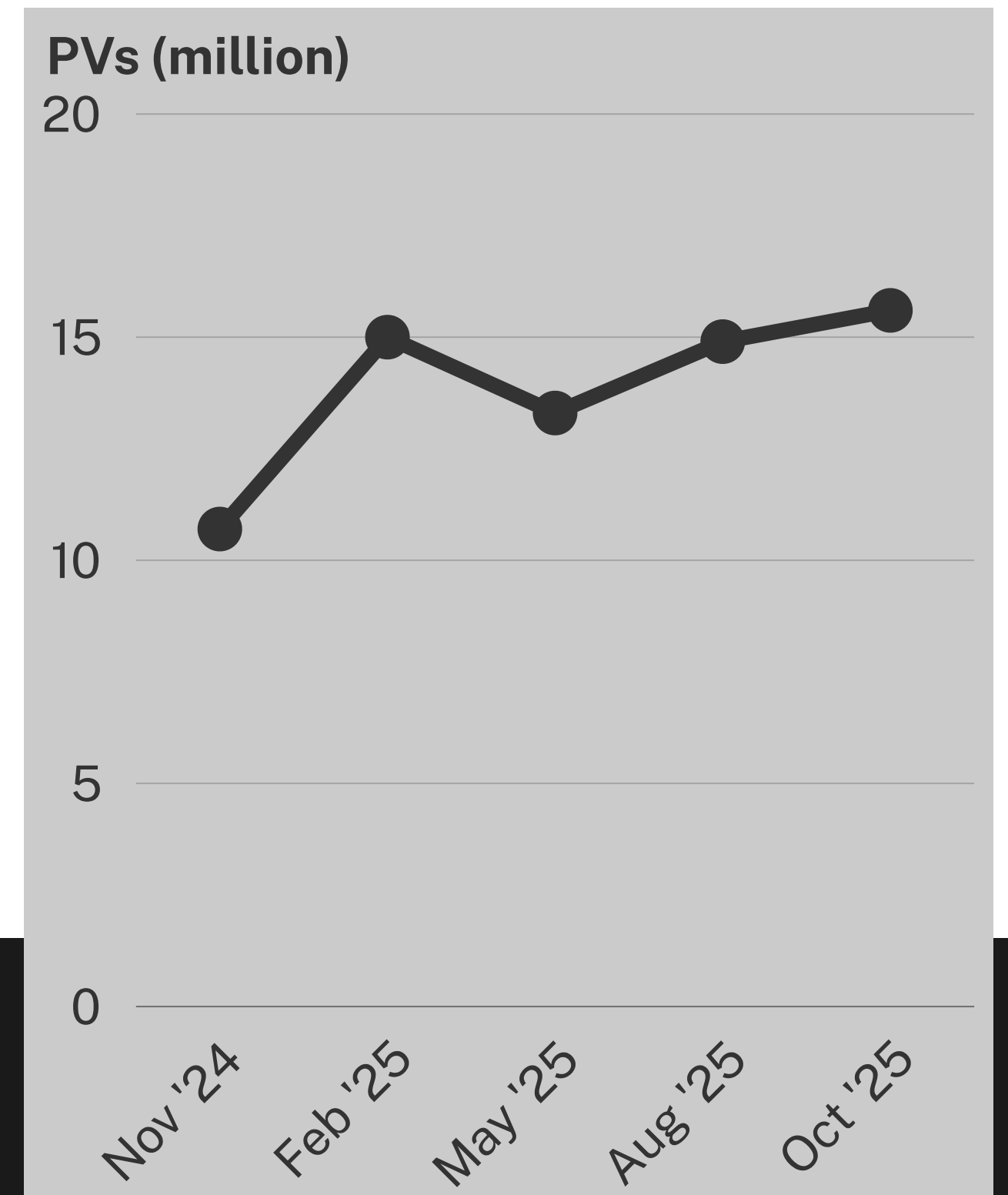


## LEVERAGING DATA TO DRIVE A 20% YOY INCREASE IN VIEWS

Organic subscriptions were also double that of our sister publications, leading BT to outperform in terms of both page views and paid subscribers.



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# Background

## A period of transition

In 2025, BT embarked on a major transformation process with an emphasis on data-informed decision-making. The traditional newsroom mindset of viewing change as once-and-done no longer worked. We had to inculcate a culture of continual change and transformation to ready the newsroom for bold strides into areas such as new regional markets and artificial intelligence.

## About The Business Times (BT)

Headquartered in Singapore, BT is the authoritative guide on local and regional business markets. BT covers corporate news as well as real estate, wealth, labour and tech. It also has an award-winning young audience initiative known as Thrive. BT is part of SPH Media.



# Goals

## Making data a habit

The goal was to make every journalist and editor in the newsroom comfortable with viewing data daily to help inform their decisions.

## Improving efficiency

As a small newsroom of around 100 employees, we had to ensure that each team worked as efficiently as possible - from wire selection, to publishing times, to story formats.

## Experimenting regularly

We wanted the newsroom to challenge assumptions on what worked and what did not by constantly conducting experiments and reviewing results.

# Summary

The transformation project aims to foster a data-informed newsroom culture by empowering staff to use analytics for daily editorial decisions, optimising content efficiency and reach, and continuously testing new hypotheses to improve audience engagement.

By leveraging cross-departmental collaboration and data-driven experiments in content formatting, timing, and SEO, BT achieved significant growth in page views, click-through rates, and organic subscriptions.

### Key Outcomes:

- Audience Growth: Total page views (PVs) rose 20.4% yoy
- Search & Engagement: Monthly SEO collaborations helped increase average page position by 47.5%, while daily headline testing boosted click-through rates by 45%.
- Subscription Impact: Despite not being a primary goal, the transformation led to a 4% growth in organic subscribers, with nearly 30% of sign-ups coming from paywalled articles.

# Process & Strategy

| Goal  | Objective  | Methods   |
|---|--|---|
| <p>To make journalists and editors comfortable with using data to inform their decisions.</p> | <p>For the newsroom to view data daily, weekly and monthly, and form editorial decisions with this data in mind.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Give all reporters access to live data via Chartbeat</li><li>• Lead daily meetings with data and analysis on articles published the previous day</li><li>• Introduce weekly and monthly data reporting with benchmarks</li><li>• Regular deep dives into sections, special event coverage and experiments</li></ul> |

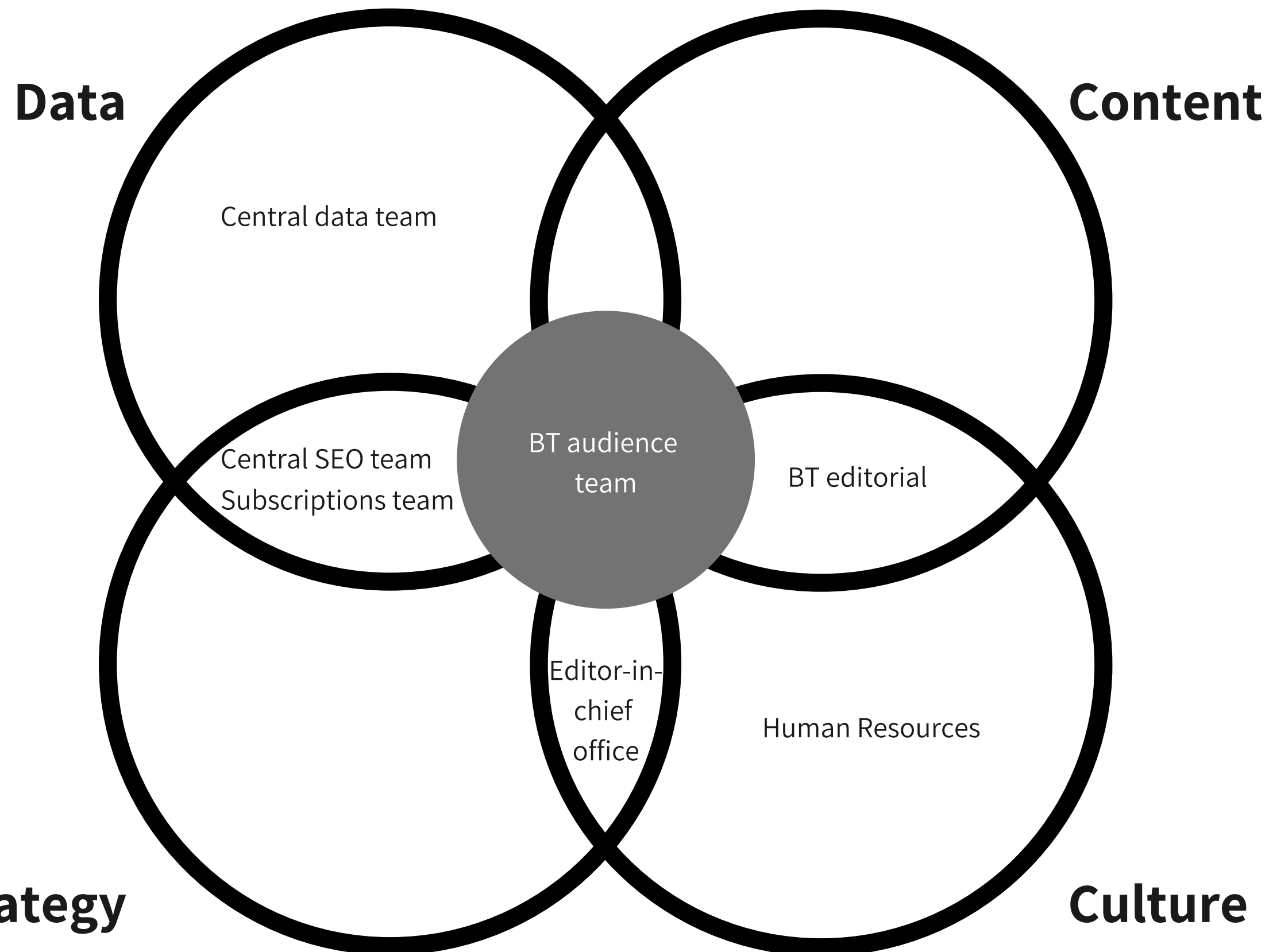
# Process & Strategy

| Goal  | Objectives  | Method   |
|---|---|--|
| <p>To ensure that teams worked as efficiently as possible and that published works were designed to maximise page views while remaining on-brand.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To reduce the proportion of wire stories published</li><li>• To reduce stories published during ultra-low-traffic timings</li><li>• To increase the number of “non-traditional” stories such as explainers, listicles, and multimedia works</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review the types of wire stories that performed well and poorly and develop guidelines</li><li>• Recommend best timings to publish stories and when to absolutely not</li><li>• Introduce new article formats and topics, review performance and produce a list of recommendations</li></ul> |

# Process & Strategy

| Goal   | Objectives  | Methods   |
|--|---|---|
| <p>To regularly challenge assumptions on what worked and what didn't</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To create one project per quarter that tests a new hypothesis that could guide editorial decisions</li><li>• To conduct daily A/B tests on headlines</li><li>• To review SEO practices monthly in order to keep up with Google algorithms</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Set up monthly meetings with different teams to brainstorm for ideas. We would then conduct experiments and review results to generate recommendations for the wider newsroom</li><li>• To assign headline testing to the audience team and build into KPIs</li><li>• To meet with central SEO team monthly to collaborate on algorithm updates</li></ul> |

# People & Collaboration



In order to carry out the newsroom transformation, we needed to tackle four main areas: data, content, culture and strategy. This involved several teams across departments in the larger SPH Media organisation.

## **Data**

We had access to a wide array of data. The challenge was bringing together the different pieces and creating a holistic strategy and processes.

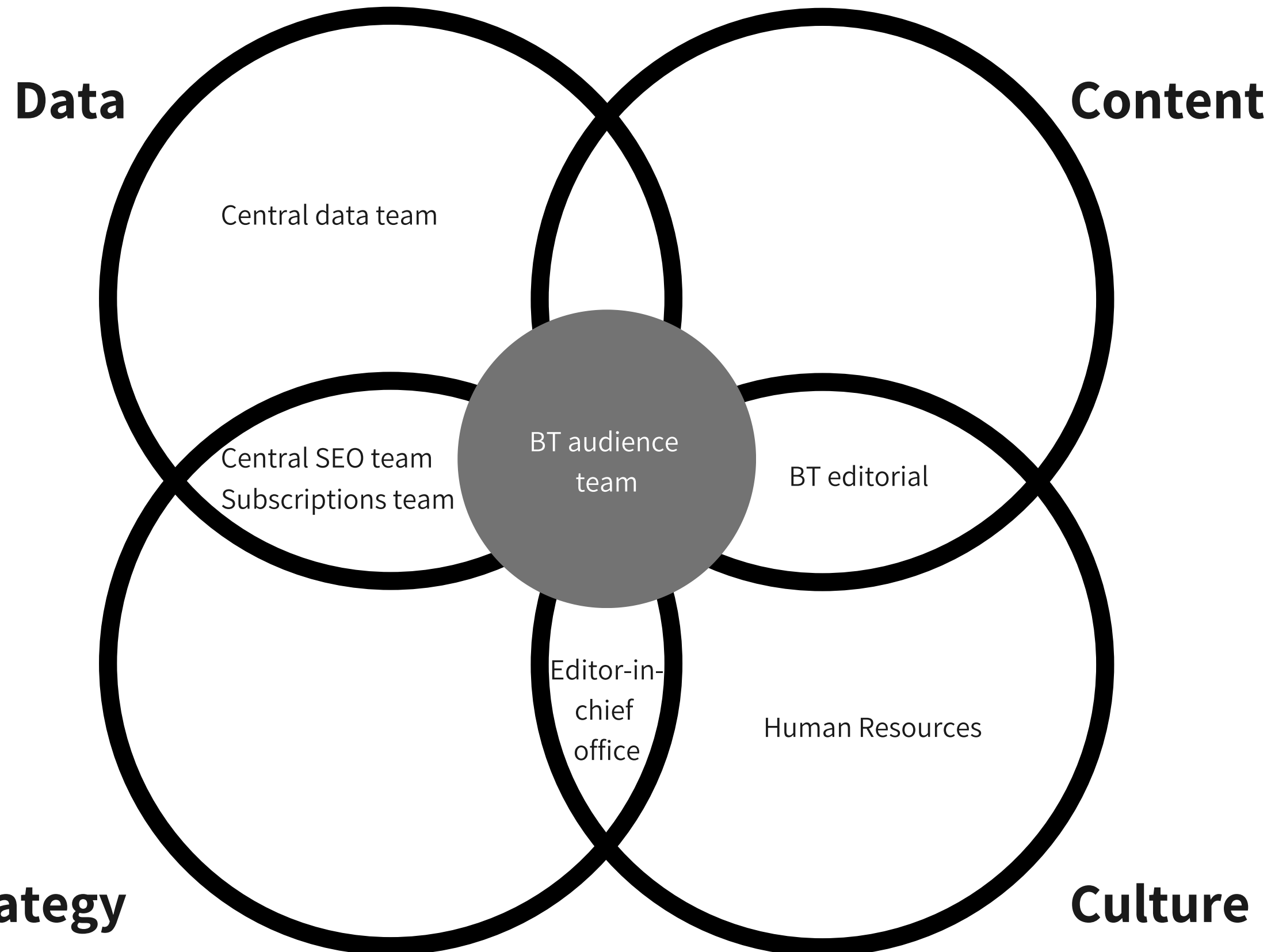
## **Content**

The editorial team was essential in creating content that drove the BT product.

## **Culture**

We needed support from senior management (editor-in-chief office) and human resources to help change the culture and appoint people to suitable roles to help with the transition.

# People & Collaboration



## Strategy

Several teams such as the central SEO, subscriptions and editor-in-chief office contributed to BT's strategy by providing their areas of expertise.

## Bridging role - audience team

The audience team played the essential bridging role of bringing everyone together, compiling data and executing the strategies to evoke meaningful change.

# Impact & Results

## PV growth

Keeping track of real-time, daily, weekly and monthly data allowed us to make decisions frequently whenever page views (PVs) dipped to produce more or better content to drive clicks.

By November, **total PVs were up 20.4% yoy** bringing us to a monthly average of 14.7 million, well above our 13.3 million target. This also made BT the top-performing publication in terms of growth among non-Chinese publications in parent company SPH Media.

## Special event deep dive

General election (GE) coverage brought in **2.2x more PVs** than the previous GE, thanks to our analysis of our GE coverage five years prior, that led us to make recommendations to assign more resources to live blogs, profiles, interactives, and explainers.

## Reduction in wire stories

Based off our recommendations, we **reduced wire articles by 31%** without compromising traffic as overall PVs continued to grow. Selection of wires was also better, as median PVs rose to 404 from 354, and the average rose 18% to 912 from 770.

## Publishing time

We reduced the proportion of articles published during the silent hours of 11pm-6am **to 6.23% from 13.13%** (we recommend 7am to 10pm, but give a bit of leeway for late stories or overnight breaking news)

# Impact & Results

## Headline testing outperforms

We assigned headline testing to two members of the audience team as part of their official job scope, resulting in daily headline tests. By November, we had boosted click-through-rates on the homepage by 45%, outperforming our sister publications.

- Chartbeat Headline Testing increased SPH's CTR average by 26%
  - Business Times saw 45% CTR increase through Headline Testing!

## SEO efforts pay off

In 2025, we began meeting with the central SEO team monthly to collaborate on algorithm updates and improve our SEO practices. In March, we released a Story Dressing Cheat Sheet to the newsroom that heavily features SEO best practices.

Our efforts paid off. Google Search impressions rose 8.4% and our **average page position increased 47.5%**. Google News impressions also **rose 35.7%**. We recently found out that close to 70% of our Google referrals came from Google Discover, which will be a focus in the next phase of our transformation.

# Impact & Results

## F1 Experiment

A story package on the Formula 1 night race emerged from our monthly brainstorming sessions that brought the graphics, video, breaking news and audience teams together. We produced six stories, two graphics and two videos as a result of a collaborative effort.

The result was **3x higher PVs than in 2024** and high engagement times, and over 20,000 video views. The F1 package experiment showed the newsroom that cross-team collaboration for multimedia formats and advance planning can yield very positive results.

## Lifestyle Experiment

The lifestyle experiment which included removing the paywall, listicles, better SEO, plus a greater emphasis on scoops and newsy stories over features led to a **69% uplift in PVs.**

# Surprise results

## Increased subscriptions

Despite not setting subscriptions as a goal for this transformation process, BT was the only SPH publication in SPH Media with **positive subscriber growth from Jan-Dec 2025 (+4%)**. Most of this growth is organic, i.e. not disproportionately driven by vouchers or discounts.

Almost **30% of all BT sign-ups** in 2025 came from paywalled articles, which is around double that of our sister publications. This meant that even as we experimented with different formats and introduced new ways of presenting the news, readers were still willing to pay to read our stories.

This suggests that **the new formats do not have an adverse effect on the quality of journalism** - a common concern among journalists and editors.

## Next steps

Building on these results, the team plans to work more closely with the subscriptions team to discover the content types that help to drive subscriptions. We will then develop a plan to generate and promote more of such content with specific calls-to-action.

# Looking forward

## Google Discover

As Google Discover now makes up around 70% of Google referrals, we plan to work with the central SEO and editorial teams to maximise Google Discover referrals, while looking for alternatives to soften reliance on it.

## Artificial Intelligence

AI presents opportunities and threats. Already, BT uses AI for summaries, research and graphics, and is exploring using AI to automate things like print layouts, print charts, certain articles etc. Instilling a change mindset in reporters and editors will ready the newsroom for future threats and opportunities.

## Unexpected turns

The speed of tech changes is accelerating. The newsroom's ability to adapt with minimal pain and complaints will be a true testament to the success of this transformation project.

