

SIGNALS AND SHIFTS:

Insights from the 2025 CSCE
Professional Development Survey

A global snapshot of capability, confidence, and the critical tensions shaping the future of the communication profession.

Illuminating the path forward

This research began with a striking paradox: Professional development consistently ranks as a top priority for communication professionals in research and industry conversations – yet investment often fails to match this intent. While communication leaders regularly champion the importance of upskilling, many providers continue to report declining enrolments and limited organisational support.

Some attribute this gap to the rise of free or low-cost alternatives, or to professionals forging their own learning paths. But as this survey reveals, the reality is more complex. Amid unprecedented transformation – driven by AI integration, shifting workplace models, and growing strategic expectations – budgets for formal professional development remain constrained, often limiting access to the depth of learning now required.

Beyond resourcing, another challenge is emerging: a disconnect between confidence and capability. Many professionals believe they possess the skills they need, yet managers paint a different picture – suggesting the need for more reflective, feedback-informed approaches to growth.

To explore these tensions more deeply and understand how professional development can evolve to meet the changing needs of the profession, the Centre for Strategic Communication Excellence (CSCE) conducted this global survey in early 2025.

The state of communication excellence

This comprehensive analysis of the 2025 Centre for Strategic Communication Excellence (CSCE) Professional Development Survey reveals a profession at a critical juncture. Communication professionals are demonstrating remarkable resilience amid resource constraints and shifting expectations – with a strong endorsement of their career path (average recommendation score of 7.45/10) even as pressures continue to mount.

The data surfaces several key signals and shifts shaping the current landscape:

- **The hybrid revolution:** 80% of respondents work in hybrid or fully remote arrangements, fundamentally reshaping how professional development is accessed and delivered.
- **Strategic value recognition:** While two-thirds believe their organisation values the communication function, many still report challenges in achieving true strategic recognition.
- **The resource reality:** Nearly half of communication teams operate with fewer than five members, and 50% report professional development budgets of less than USD \$1,000 per person annually.
- **The skills perception gap:** A disconnect exists between how professionals assess their own capabilities (74–79% believe they fully possess key skills) and how managers assess their teams (only 25–37% see the same level of proficiency).
- **The technology imperative:** AI integration and technological adaptation top the list of desired professional development topics for 2025.
- **A global profession, common challenges:** With respondents spanning five continents and more than 15 countries, the data reveals shared development needs and organisational tensions – regardless of location.

Taken together, these insights paint a picture of a profession in transformation—eager to elevate its strategic influence, yet often constrained by time, resources, and recognition. The findings highlight critical opportunities for professional development providers to close capability gaps, embrace changing work models, and equip communication professionals for the complex roles ahead.

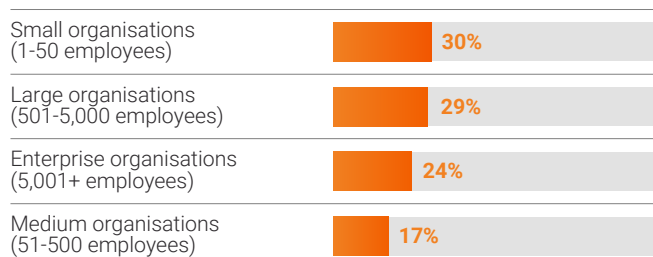
Survey methodology

Conducted between February and March 2025, the CSCE Professional Development Survey gathered insights from communication professionals across multiple regions, career stages, and industry sectors. The comprehensive survey explored a wide range of professional development themes, including current capabilities, organisational support, preferred learning approaches, and future skill needs. The respondent pool reflects a broad cross-section of the profession, offering a representative view of its current state and emerging priorities.

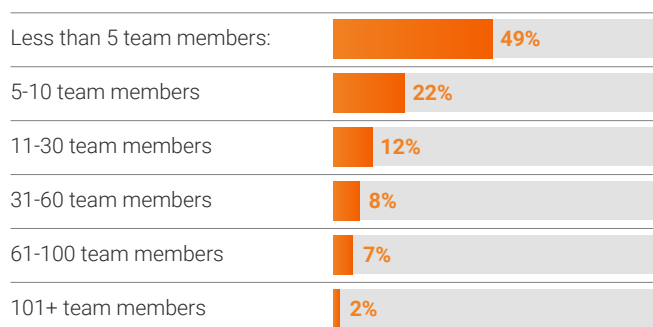
Please note: In some cases, percentages may not total 100% due to rounding or questions that allowed for multiple responses.

Communication professionals in context: who we are and how we work

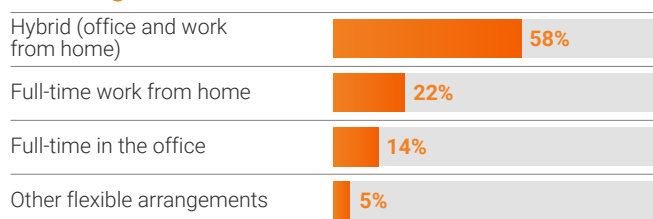
Organisation sizes



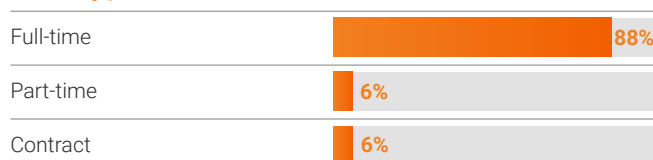
Communication team sizes



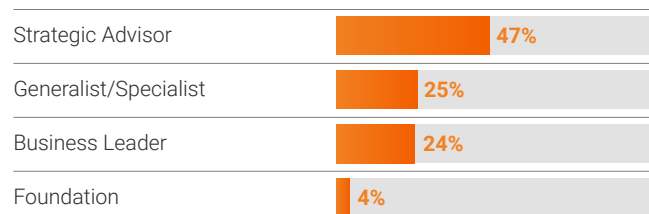
Working models



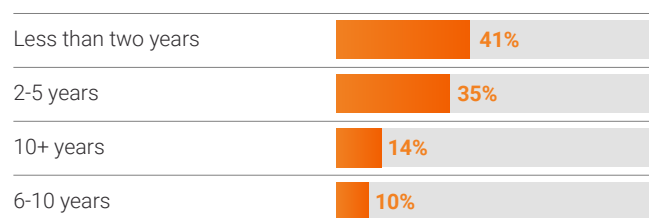
Role types



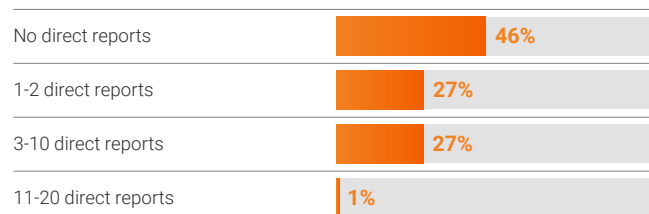
Career stage



Time in current role



Team leadership responsibilities



Global representation: Geographic distribution

The survey attracted responses from communication professionals across five continents, reflecting the global nature of the profession. This geographic diversity reinforces the universal relevance of strategic communication challenges and professional development needs, while also pointing to the presence of active regional networks and communities of practice.

Notable geographic clusters emerged in:

- **Australia/Oceania**, with strong representation from both metropolitan and regional areas
- **North America**, spanning a range of U.S. and Canadian cities
- **Europe**, including respondents from the UK, Poland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and Ireland
- **Africa**, with participation from professionals in South, East, and West Africa
- **Asia**, including representation from Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and India

Professional profile: Job titles and experience

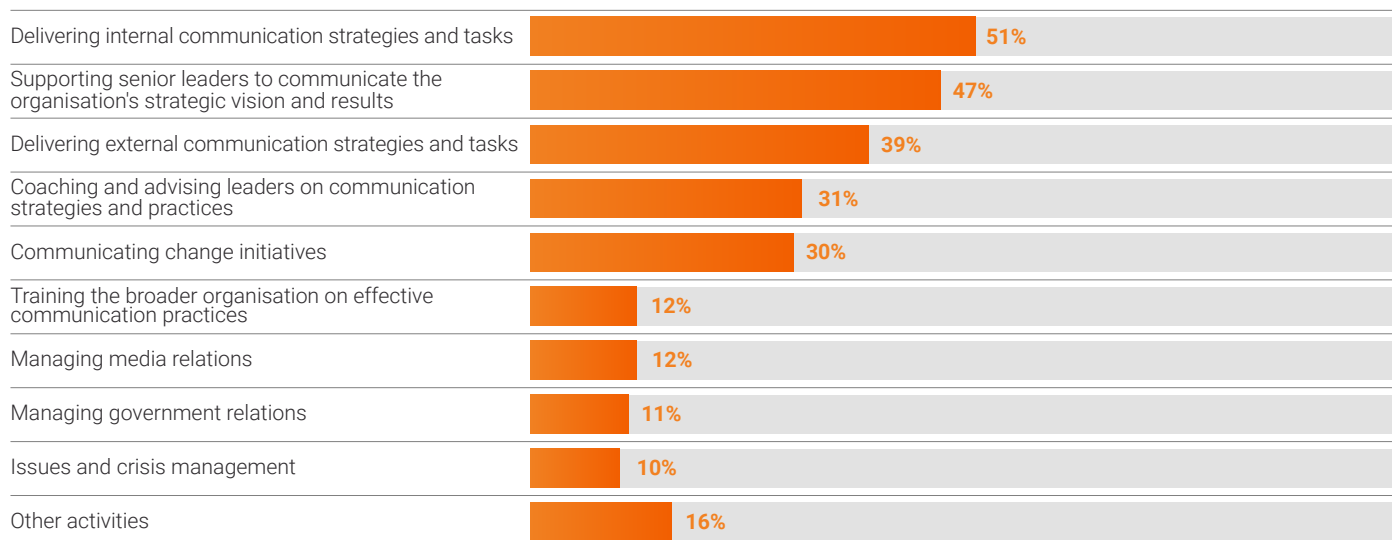
Free-text job title responses reveal the diversity of roles within the communication profession:

- **Senior leadership positions** (e.g., Director, Head of Corporate Affairs, Managing Director)
- **Specialised roles** (e.g., Senior Stakeholder and Communication Advisor, Content Writer and Editor)
- **General management positions** (e.g., Communication Manager, Global Communication Manager)
- **Emerging roles** (e.g., Marketing Coordinator, Head of CX)

This variety illustrates the evolving nature of communication roles and the broadening scope of the profession, with increasing integration between traditional communication and areas like customer experience, stakeholder management, and digital content.

Individual responsibilities

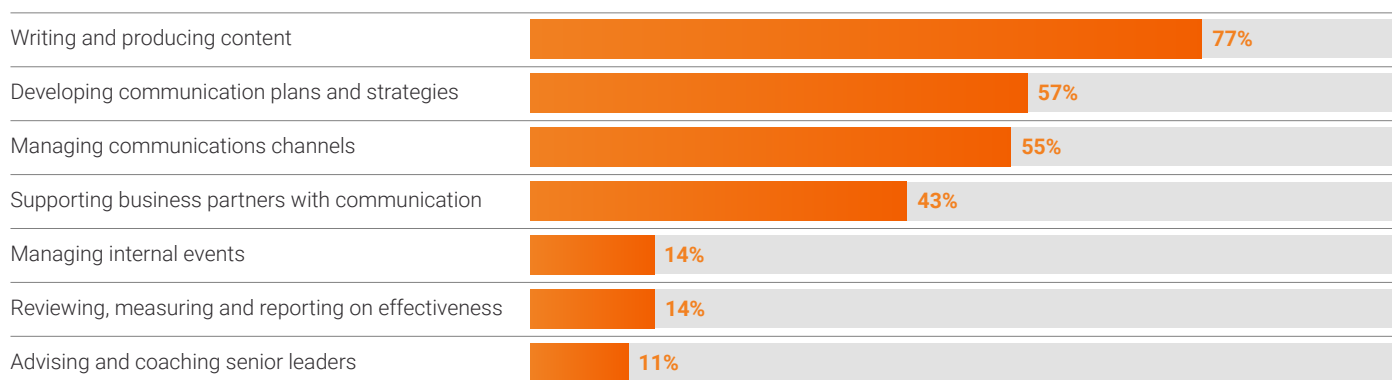
When asked to select the **top three responsibilities** they spend the most time on during an average week, communication professionals reported a mix of strategic and tactical activities:



“Other” responses included: stakeholder relationship management, board communication, team leadership, executive committee responsibilities, partnership building, and purpose coaching/mentoring.

Team activity focus

For respondents who manage teams, we asked them to select the **top three responsibilities** their staff members spend most of their time on:



This workload distribution reveals that team members spend the majority of their time on content creation and channel management, with considerably less time dedicated to measurement, analysis and strategic advising of leadership. This tactical-heavy focus may explain some of the challenges in demonstrating strategic value that were identified elsewhere in the survey.

Battling headwinds: challenges facing communication professionals

When asked to identify the **top three challenges** currently facing their teams, respondents revealed several recurring themes:

1. Resource constraints

- *"Lack of resources"*
- *"Budget"*
- *"Too much work for my team"*
- *"Overwhelming amount of information to select from and prioritise"*

2. Strategic recognition

- *"Constantly proving our value to our team"*
- *"Shifting understanding and acceptance of communication as strategic and upfront, more than tactical and reactive"*
- *"The attitude of senior leadership"*
- *"Volume of enterprise communications to align to"*

3. Workload and crisis management

- *"Urgent/crisis communication that disrupt our plans for the week"*
- *"Client ghosting"*
- *"Too much work for my team"*

Free-text responses show that communication professionals are particularly frustrated by the ongoing need to justify their strategic value while simultaneously handling growing workloads with limited resources. Many teams feel caught in a reactive cycle that prevents them from demonstrating their full strategic potential.

The capability imperative: essential skills and gaps

Critical skills for success

The survey asked both managers and individual contributors to identify the **top three essential skills** communication professionals need to perform their roles effectively. Analysis of these free-text responses reveals three dominant skill categories:

1. Strategic thinking

- *“Connecting the dots/strategic thinking”*
- *“Strategy/strategic planning”*
- *“Big picture thinking capability”*

2. Communication fundamentals

- *“Copywriting skills”*
- *“Master tactical or operational skills i.e., writing, planning and delivering products”*
- *“Creating content for different audiences”*

3. Relationship management

- *“Listening”*
- *“Empathy”*
- *“Stakeholder management”*

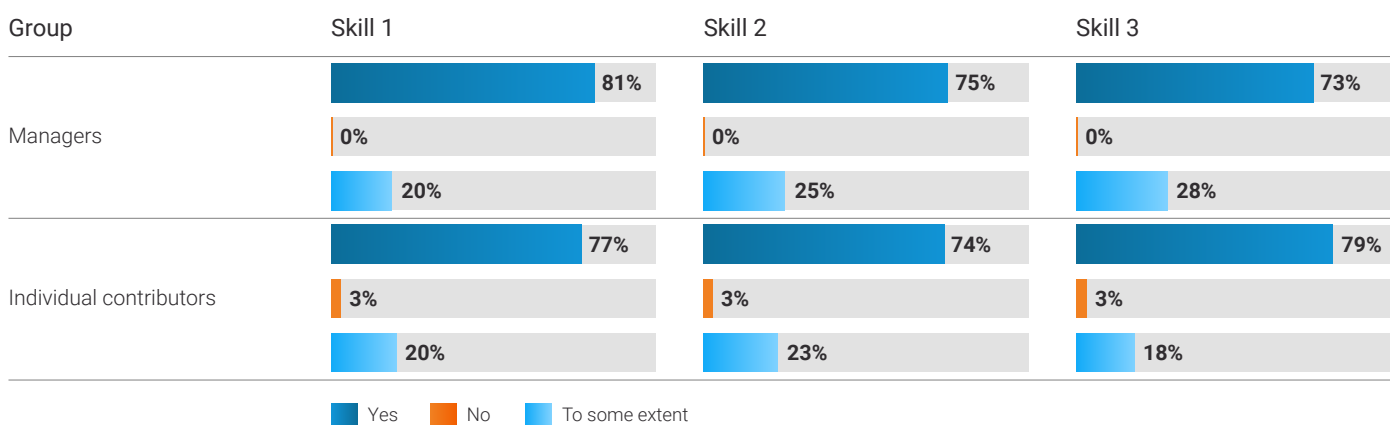
Other frequently mentioned skills included business acumen, leadership/influence, and project management capabilities – highlighting the multifaceted nature of modern communication roles that blend strategic, creative, and interpersonal competencies.

The perception gap: A multilayered challenge

After identifying their own top three essential skills, respondents then assessed their proficiency in those specific skills they had personally identified. This self-assessment process revealed fascinating perception patterns when comparing different groups:

Self-assessment comparison: Managers vs. individual contributors

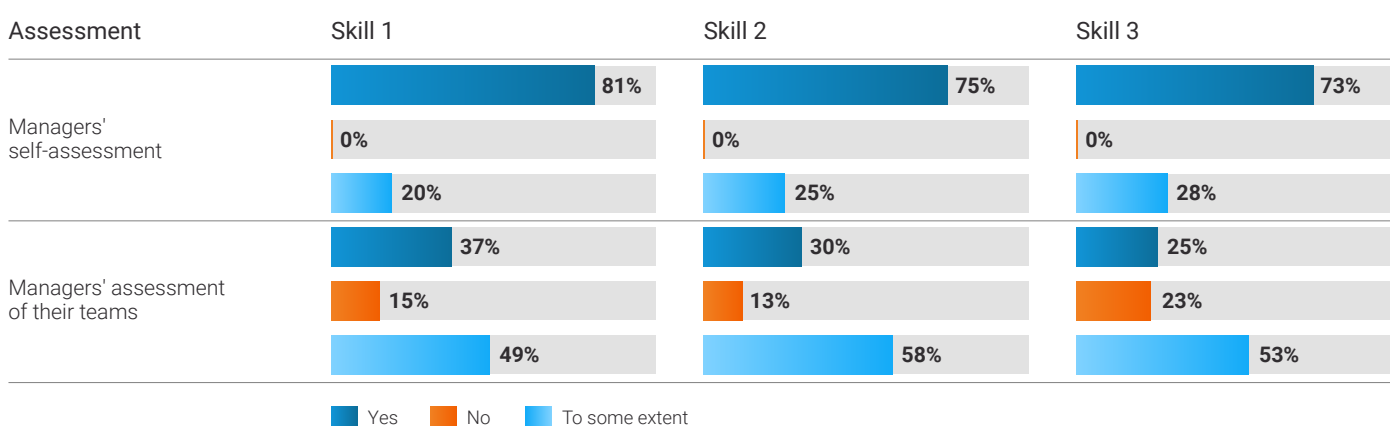
Both managers and individual contributors showed high confidence in their own abilities on their self-identified essential skills, with minimal difference between these groups:



This high self-assessment is consistent across both groups, showing that communication professionals generally feel confident in their own capabilities regardless of their position in the hierarchy.

The management perception gap: Self vs. team assessment

When comparing how managers assess their own skills versus how they assess their team members, a significant gap emerges:



This comparison reveals a dramatic difference between how managers view their own capabilities versus those of their team members. While 73-81% of managers believe they fully possess the essential skills, only 25-37% believe their direct reports have the same level of proficiency.

Implications for professional development

These perception gaps highlight several important considerations for professional development:

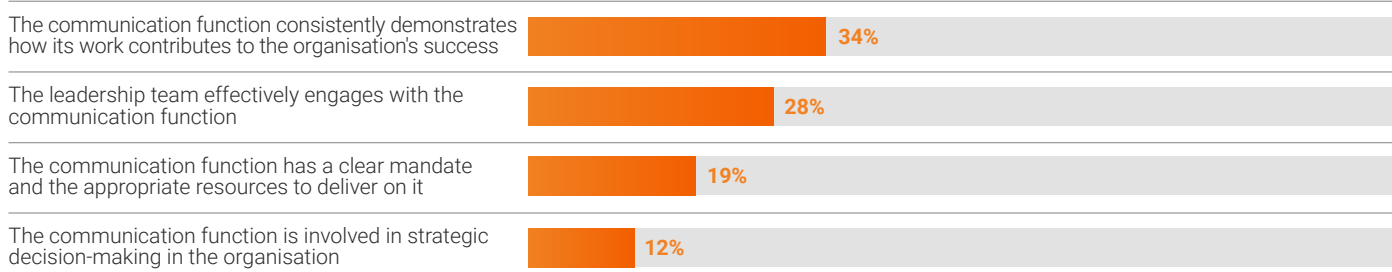
1. **The confidence-capability disconnect:** The high self-assessment scores across all respondents may indicate either genuinely high capability levels or potential overconfidence, which can sometimes impede professional growth.
2. **The development opportunity:** The substantial percentage of team members who managers believe possess skills “to some extent” (49-58%) represents a significant opportunity for targeted skill enhancement rather than fundamental skill building.
3. **The perception challenge:** Addressing the gap between how managers view themselves versus their teams may require not only skill development for team members but also improved assessment capabilities and recognition of team strengths by managers.

This multilayered perception pattern suggests professional development initiatives should focus not only on building specific capabilities but also on improving self-awareness, addressing potential blind spots, and enhancing managers’ ability to develop and recognise talent within their teams.

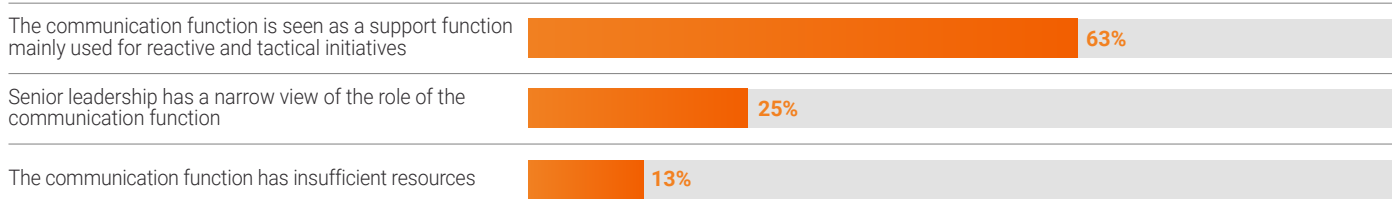
This misalignment in perceived capability suggests a deeper challenge: when confidence runs high, but competence isn’t validated, it becomes harder to design – and engage with – targeted development opportunities. As a profession, we must ensure that confidence is grounded in evidence, feedback, and measurable growth.

Organisational value of communication

Two thirds of respondents (66%) believe their organisation values its communication function, while 18% do not, and 16% are unsure. For those who feel valued, key contributing factors include:

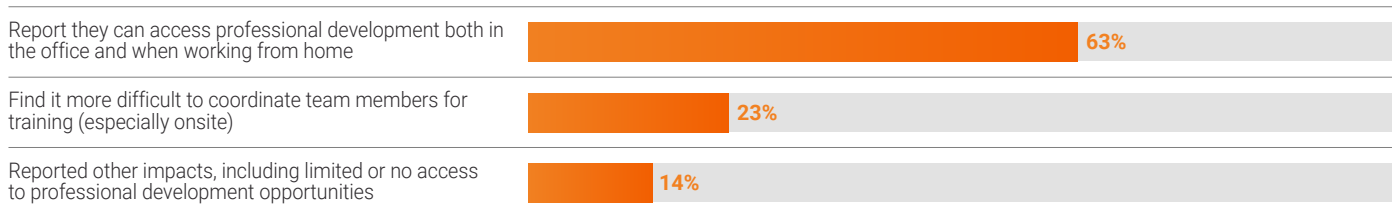


For organisations not valuing their communication function, primary reasons include:



Impact of changing work models on professional development

Since the pandemic, changes to working models have affected how teams access professional development:



Career outlook and recognition

Career recommendation

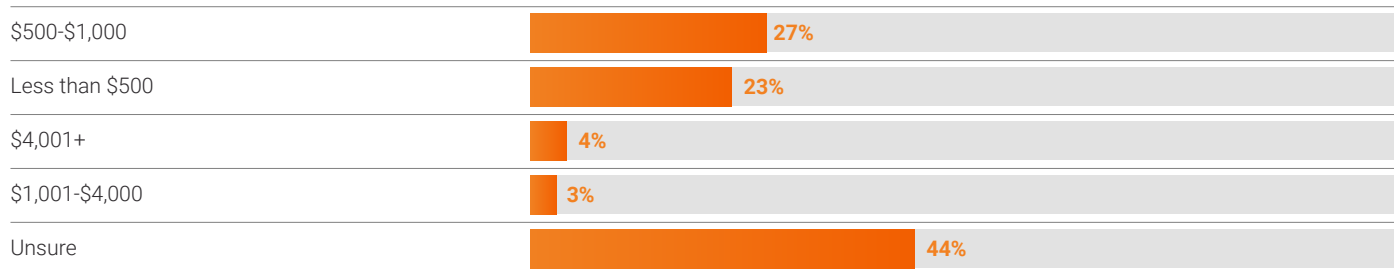
When asked how likely they would be to recommend a career in communication to a friend or colleague (on a scale of 1-10), respondents gave an average score of 7.45, indicating a generally positive view of the profession despite the challenges faced.

Professional development impact on hiring

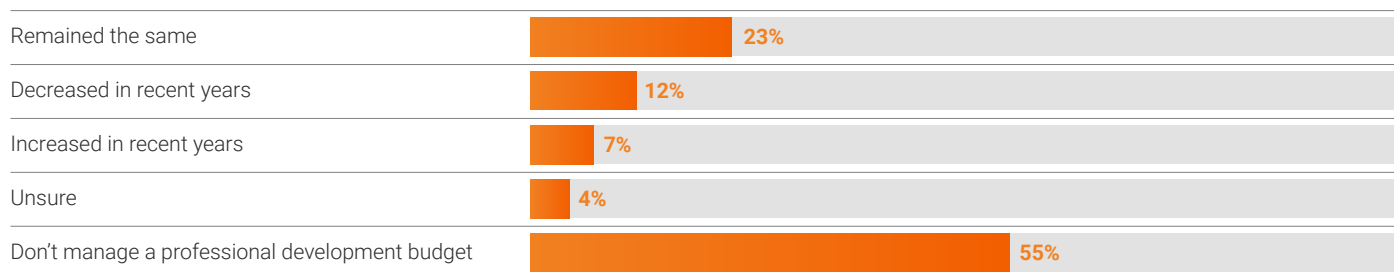
In response to the question, "When hiring, do you look more favourably on a candidate who has undertaken professional development?", the majority of managers (71%) said yes, while 11% said no and 18% were unsure. This underscores the high value placed on continuous learning when assessing potential hires in the profession.

The professional development landscape

Professional development per person budget allocation (USD)

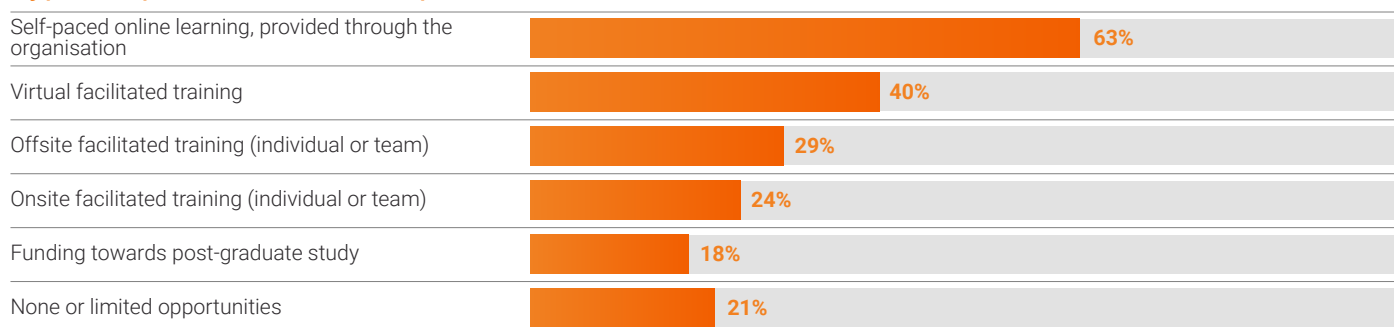


Professional development budget trends



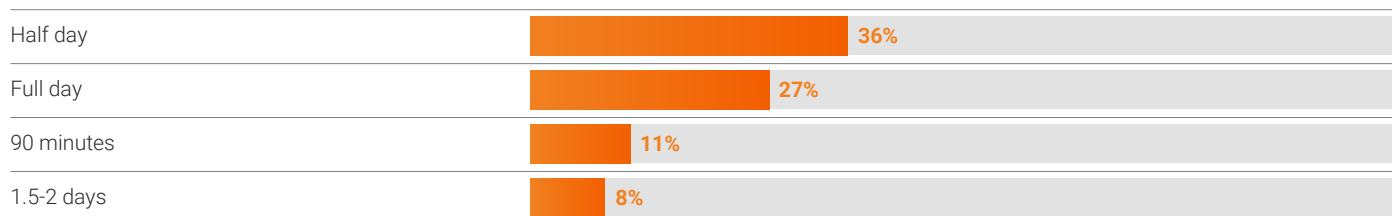
These figures indicate a concerning trend, with budget decreases (12%) outpacing increases (7%), potentially limiting professional development opportunities.

Types of professional development available



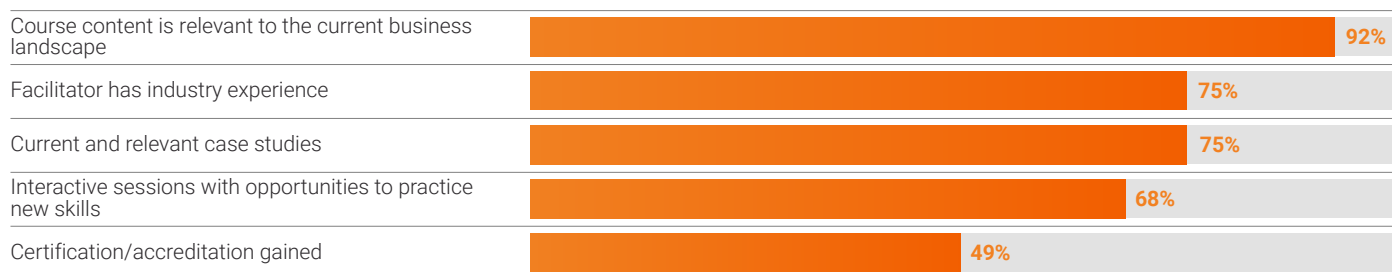
Professional development preferences and quality factors

Preferred session length

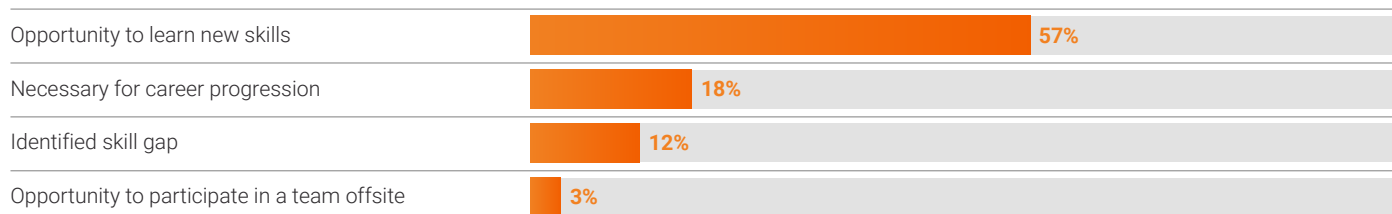


Almost a fifth of respondents noted that the optimal length depends on the topic and content.

What makes for high-quality professional development



What motivates professional development participation



Other motivations mentioned include:

- *“Necessary to achieve organisational goals”*
- *“Creates efficiencies in my work”*
- *“To remain relevant/ahead and because I love learning”*

Looking ahead: desired professional development for 2025

Respondents expressed interest in developing skills in these areas:

1. AI and technology

- *"AI integration"*
- *"Harness AI, new tech"*

2. Strategic communication

- *"Strategy building tools"*
- *"Strategic planning"*
- *"Measurement"*
- *"Communication auditing"*

3. Leadership and Influence

- *"Leadership – stepping into an influential role with the capacity to lead effective, value/s-driven communication"*
- *"Speaking influentially as a comms leader when in leadership and business situations"*

4. Specialised communication areas

- *"Employee engagement, remote work"*
- *"Change communication, crisis management"*
- *"Corporate Culture"*
- *"Reward and recognition"*

5. Data and measurement

- *"The changing landscape of value capture, analytics, and data"*
- *"Measurement"*
- *"Listening, research"*

Navigating the future: critical insights for communication excellence

The survey illuminates a profession at a pivotal crossroads. Communication professionals are increasingly recognised as essential to organisational success (with 66% feeling valued), yet they continue to battle resource constraints, limited professional development budgets, and the persistent challenge of demonstrating strategic value. At the same time, a confidence–competence disconnect is emerging – where self-perception of skill doesn't always align with external feedback – raising critical questions about how we measure, grow, and validate expertise in our field.

The findings reveal five critical tensions that will shape the future of the profession:

1. The expectation-resource gap

While expectations for communication functions continue to grow in complexity and strategic importance, resources remain constrained. Nearly half of communication teams operate with fewer than five members, and professional development budgets largely fall below \$1,000 USD per person annually. This gap represents both a challenge and an opportunity for innovation in how communication professionals develop their capabilities and deliver value.

2. The tactical-strategic divide

The survey exposes a persistent disconnect between how communication professionals view their role (strategic) and how organisations often use them (tactical). The most cited reason organisations fail to value communication is that “the function is seen as support for reactive and tactical initiatives” (63%). Bridging this divide will require both enhanced strategic capabilities among practitioners and better articulation of communication's strategic value to leadership.

3. The confidence–competence disconnect

The report reveals a clear mismatch between how professionals assess their own skills and how their managers view team capability. This confidence–competence gap presents a hidden risk: when individuals believe they've already “got it,” meaningful development can stall. Addressing this disconnect requires more than technical training – it calls for building reflective capacity, feedback loops, and a growth mindset across all career levels.

4. The technology-human balance

As AI and technology transformation dominate the list of desired professional development topics, a fundamental question emerges: How will communication professionals balance technological proficiency with the deeply human aspects of their work? The continued emphasis on relationship management, listening, and influence suggests that the future belongs to those who can harness technology while maintaining the human connection at the core of effective communication.

5. The global community of practice

The geographic diversity of respondents – spanning from Melbourne to Warsaw, Chicago to Nairobi – reveals a truly global profession with shared challenges and aspirations. This international community offers both the opportunity for cross-cultural learning and the challenge of developing professional development that respects regional communication contexts while addressing universal skill needs.

These tensions point to a profession navigating significant change while remaining committed to its fundamental purpose. The relatively high career recommendation score (7.45/10) indicates optimism despite the challenges, suggesting that communication professionals find meaning and value in their work even as they advocate for greater recognition and resources.

Where to from here?

For professional development providers like the CSCE, these findings present a clear mandate: to create learning experiences that address both immediate skill gaps and long-term strategic capabilities, that leverage technology while strengthening human connections, and that help practitioners demonstrate measurable value in an increasingly complex landscape.

The future of communication professional development will not be found in simply teaching new tools or tactics, but in equipping practitioners to navigate these fundamental tensions with confidence, creativity, and strategic insight. Crucially, we must also confront the confidence–competence disconnect – ensuring that learning journeys are grounded in real feedback, supported by manager development, and designed to challenge assumptions. The CSCE is committed to driving this evolution, helping communication professionals see clearly where they stand, and confidently grow from there.



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