

# Strategic Internal Communication: Overcoming Challenges and Demonstrating Value

In partnership with



# CSCE's Foreword

**In today's dynamic business environment, internal communication professionals play a pivotal role in driving organizational success. Our work involves strategically aligning communication efforts with business goals, fostering a culture of collaboration, and inspiring a shared vision among employees.**

Our collaboration with Hailo seeks to bring much-needed attention to the often overlooked, yet pivotal, role that internal communication professionals play in shaping and supporting organizational success. Through our comprehensive survey, we aimed to understand the obstacles preventing communication professionals from adopting a strategic approach and demonstrating their true value. The insights gathered from over 200 internal communication professionals worldwide paint a vivid picture of the current landscape and the challenges faced.

## Key findings from our research include:

- Over 70% of respondents feel confident in their ability to embrace a strategic approach to communication, despite a lack of understanding about what it means to be truly strategic.
- Two-thirds of respondents believe their strategic internal communication skills are either excellent or very good, yet there remains a disconnect in demonstrating these skills to senior leadership.
- Only a small percentage of respondents feel that their work in strategic internal communication is recognized and valued by top management.
- The main obstacles include a lack of recognition from leadership, insufficient time, and inadequate resources to focus on strategic initiatives.

The data reveals an urgent need for internal communication professionals to advocate for their role, effectively measure their impact, and communicate their value in terms that resonate with business leaders. This shift

in perception—from being seen as mere messengers to being recognized as strategic partners—can bring tangible benefits to the organization. When communication professionals are acknowledged for their strategic role, organizations are more likely to experience improved alignment and a stronger culture. This recognition leads to enhanced employee engagement, better decision-making, and ultimately contributes to the organization's overall success. By elevating their status, internal communication professionals can drive outcomes that directly support business objectives.

This report is not just a compilation of data; it is a call to action—a rallying cry for internal communication professionals to step up, embrace their strategic role, and champion the importance of their work within their organizations. By doing so, they can ensure that communication is not just an operational function but a strategic imperative that drives business success. It's time we demonstrate the undeniable value of strategic internal communication.



**Sia Papageorgiou FRSA, FCSCE, SCMP**  
 Managing Partner, Centre for Strategic Communication Excellence

# Haiilo's Foreword

I've seen firsthand, working with internal communication teams over the past 10 years, that their role is so much more than just communicating. They're at the heart of how a company operates—helping people make sense of change, keeping everyone aligned, and connecting teams to the bigger picture. But here's the challenge: despite their value, internal communication professionals often don't get the credit they deserve for their strategic efforts.

This report highlights what many of us already know: internal communication teams are confident in their ability to drive strategy, but they're often held back by a lack of resources, leadership buy-in, or time to focus on long-term goals. It's frustrating, but it can be fixed.

We've partnered with CSCE to shine a light on these issues and, more importantly, to show a way forward. The survey findings reflect my own observations from years of experience. There's a growing need for internal communicators to step into their strategic role, build stronger relationships with leadership, and prove the real business impact of their work. And yes, that means embracing metrics, but it also means telling a better story about the value communication brings to the table.

Start small. Measure content satisfaction or strategy comprehension through employee feedback and then tie those insights into more extensive initiatives, such as fostering a sense of belonging and improving employee retention.

This report emphasizes the need for prompt action: it's time for internal communication professionals to step up. Leaders don't care about clicks or open rates—they care about results that drive business outcomes. So, let's show them the ROI behind internal communication efforts.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin Hähnlein".

**Kevin Hähnlein**

Head of Growth, North America, Haiilo

# Introduction

## Are internal communication professionals equipped to be the strategic drivers their organizations desperately need?

Our research aimed to uncover the reality behind the titles and the true influence of internal communication professionals. While 'strategic' is a term widely used in the profession, there's often a gap between the ideal and the practice.

At the Centre for Strategic Communication Excellence (CSCE) and Hailo, we believe that strategic communication means being deeply integrated into the business, driving outcomes that align with organizational goals. However, our research suggests that many professionals struggle to embody this in their daily work. This report explores the differing perceptions of what it means to be 'strategic,' both from the perspective of the respondents and the broader profession. In the following pages, we examine these insights, analyzing the challenges and obstacles that professionals face in adopting a truly strategic mindset.

We gathered insights from over 200 internal communication professionals worldwide, the majority of whom identify as strategic advisors and business leaders within corporate communication departments. With more than two-thirds boasting over a decade of experience, the findings provide a seasoned and insightful perspective on the state of internal communication today.

### The objectives of our research were clear:

- 1 To unearth how internal communication professionals truly perceive their influence within their organizations.
- 2 To expose the barriers that prevent these professionals from adopting a strategic mindset and showcasing their value.
- 3 To identify the critical challenges internal communication professionals face in becoming genuine strategic partners.

What we discovered is both revealing and challenging. Internal communication professionals are confident in their skills but often lack the recognition and resources needed to make a strategic impact. There is a pressing need for these professionals to assert their value, innovate their approaches, and push for the resources necessary to fulfill their strategic potential. This report provides the necessary insights and actionable steps to transform internal communication from a support function to a central driver of organizational success.

**Note:** Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding or multiple responses allowed.

# Summary of findings



Strategic internal communication is the focused, measurable effort of informing, engaging, influencing, and inspiring internal audiences around the organization's strategic initiatives, KPIs, culture, and change management opportunities.

**Survey respondent**

## 1. Understanding strategic internal communication

The survey reveals varied definitions of strategic internal communication among professionals. Common themes include alignment with business goals, strategic planning, and employee engagement. However, many definitions reflect a narrow view, often focusing on operational rather than strategic elements. This indicates a need for broader education and a more comprehensive understanding of strategic internal communication. The responses show that while professionals recognize key components, there is still a significant gap in fully grasping the strategic potential of internal communication. By expanding their understanding and approach, internal communication professionals can better align their efforts with organizational goals, demonstrating their critical role in driving business success.

## 2. Confidence and skills in adopting a strategic approach

Our research highlights a high level of confidence among internal communication professionals regarding their strategic capabilities, particularly those in senior roles or with extensive experience. However, confidence does not always equate to competence. Systemic barriers, such as lack of leadership support and insufficient resources, often hinder the implementation of strategic initiatives. This disconnect suggests that while professionals are confident in their skills, they face significant challenges in translating this confidence into effective strategic action. Addressing these barriers is crucial for enabling internal communication professionals to realize their full strategic potential.

### 3. How internal communication professionals spend their time

The survey indicates that a substantial portion of internal communication professionals' time is dedicated to writing and developing content. While essential, this focus can overshadow more strategic activities. Developing communication plans and advising leaders are also significant tasks but occur less frequently. This imbalance highlights the need for professionals to better balance operational tasks with strategic initiatives. By reallocating time and resources towards strategic activities, internal communication professionals can enhance their impact on organizational goals and outcomes, ensuring that their efforts contribute more effectively to the overall business strategy.

### 4. Barriers and challenges

Internal communication professionals face several barriers that prevent them from adopting a strategic approach. Key challenges include a lack of recognition from leadership, insufficient resources, and time constraints. Despite being confident in their skills, many professionals struggle to demonstrate their value to senior management. This disconnect underscores the need for better advocacy and resource allocation. By addressing these barriers, organizations can enable internal communication professionals to focus more on strategic initiatives, thereby enhancing their overall effectiveness and demonstrating their critical role in achieving business objectives.

### 5. Tools and resources

Satisfaction with tools and resources varies significantly across different roles, career levels, and experience. Overall, less than half of respondents are satisfied with their current tools and resources, indicating a clear need for improvement. Foundation-level professionals and first-level managers report the highest levels of dissatisfaction, highlighting areas where targeted improvements could make a significant impact. Providing adequate tools and resources is essential for enabling internal communication professionals to perform their roles effectively. Addressing these gaps will not only improve satisfaction but also enhance the strategic impact of internal communication within organizations.

### 6. Looking ahead

Future investment priorities for internal communication professionals include learning and development, industry engagement, and measurement tools. These areas reflect a commitment to continuous growth and the need to demonstrate the impact of communication efforts. By prioritizing learning and development, professionals can enhance their skills and stay current with industry trends. Investing in measurement tools will enable them to effectively showcase their value and impact. By focusing on these priorities, internal communication professionals can strengthen their strategic role, driving better business outcomes and ensuring their contributions are recognized and valued within their organizations.

# Strategic Internal Communication in Numbers

72%

of internal communication professionals feel very or extremely confident in adopting a strategic approach to their work, despite a lack of understanding about what it means to be truly strategic.

34%

say their leaders don't value internal communication, hindering strategic efforts.



31%

report a lack of resources as a major barrier to taking a strategic approach to their work.

Internal communication professionals **collaborate most with HR** (42% always, 38% often), but to be truly strategic, they need to take a broader, whole-of-organization approach.

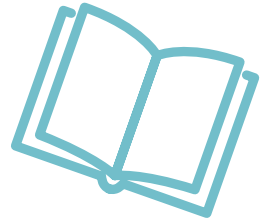


56%

spend most of their time on developing messages and executing tactics, limiting strategic activities.

23%

believe strategic internal communication contributes directly to positive employee experiences and key business outcomes.



22%

plan to invest in learning and development over the next 12 months.

44%

Only are satisfied or very satisfied with the tools and resources they have for strategic communication.

27%

struggle with calculating the ROI of internal communication efforts.

13%

plan to invest in measurement tools to demonstrate the impact of communication efforts.



9%

Only are involved in the decision-making process of organizational projects and campaigns, limiting their strategic input.

66%

are using AI tools, but primarily for content development and task automation rather than strategic planning.

21%

say building strong relationships with leadership is key to elevating their strategic role.

# 1. Understanding strategic internal communication

## Diverse perspectives and common themes

The survey reveals diverse definitions for strategic internal communication, reflecting both common themes and areas for growth in understanding. Respondents provided varied insights, each adding a layer to the complex picture of what strategic internal communication means.

A significant portion of respondents—29%—define strategic internal communication as aligning with business goals and strategy. This dominant view underscores the necessity for communication efforts to support the organization's mission, vision, and objectives. It highlights the importance of ensuring coherence and unity in organizational direction through well-aligned communication strategies.

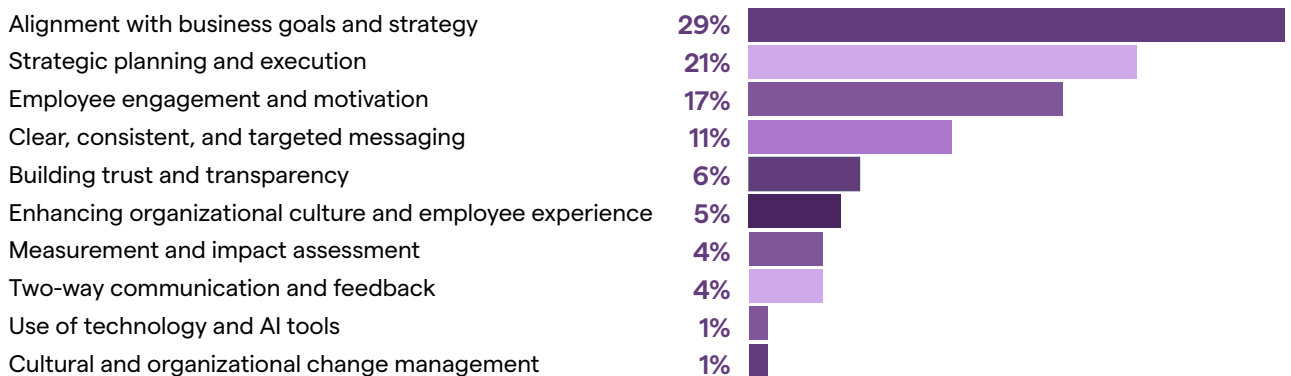
Another 21% of respondents emphasize the importance of strategic planning and execution. For these professionals, meticulous planning and effective execution of communication strategies are crucial for aligning with organizational priorities and enhancing

operational efficiency. This perspective points to the structured and deliberate nature of strategic communication.

Employee engagement and motivation also emerge as key themes, with 17% of respondents focusing on this aspect. These professionals view strategic communication as pivotal in boosting employee morale and fostering a sense of belonging. They believe communication can significantly enhance productivity by keeping employees motivated and well-informed.

The survey indicates that while key elements such as alignment with business goals, strategic planning, and employee engagement are commonly recognized, respondents' definitions of strategic internal communication often reflect a limited view of its full potential. This diversity in understanding underscores the need for broader education and a more comprehensive approach to defining and practicing strategic internal communication.

### In your own words, how would you define strategic internal communication?



(Open-ended n = 205 responses grouped into themes)



## Perceptions about the organizational impact of strategic internal communication

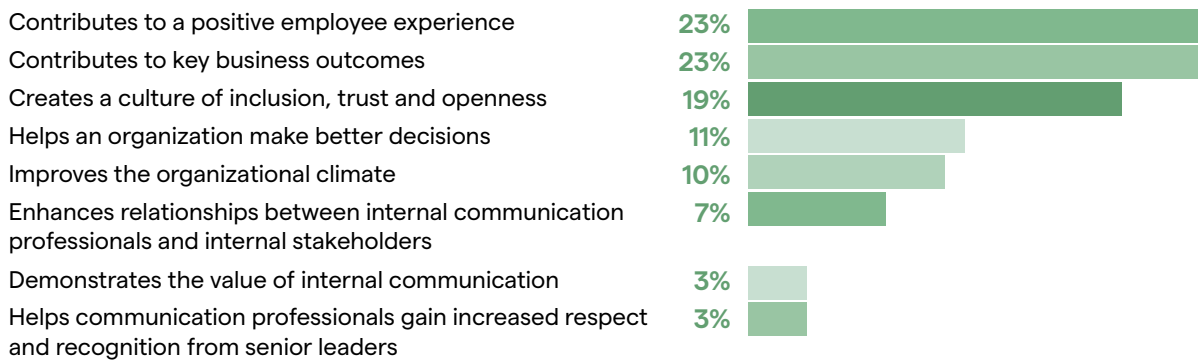
The survey data indicates that internal communication professionals clearly understand the organizational impact of strategic internal communication. However, the insights reveal a concerning disconnect between this understanding and senior leadership's recognition of their efforts.

The positive aspects of strategic internal communication are well acknowledged. A considerable 23% of respondents believe that it contributes to a positive employee experience, enhancing engagement and contentment within the workplace. Another 23% highlight its role in driving key business outcomes, underscoring its integral role in organizational success. Additionally, 19%

recognize its impact in cultivating a culture of inclusion, trust, and openness, which are foundational to a healthy organizational climate.

Despite these positive perceptions, only a small fraction of respondents believe that strategic internal communication effectively demonstrates the value of the communication function within the organization. Merely 3% of respondents feel that it showcases the intrinsic value of internal communication, and another 3% believe it helps communication professionals gain increased respect and recognition from senior leaders.

### In your opinion how does strategic internal communication impact an organization?



(Multi-select n = 205)

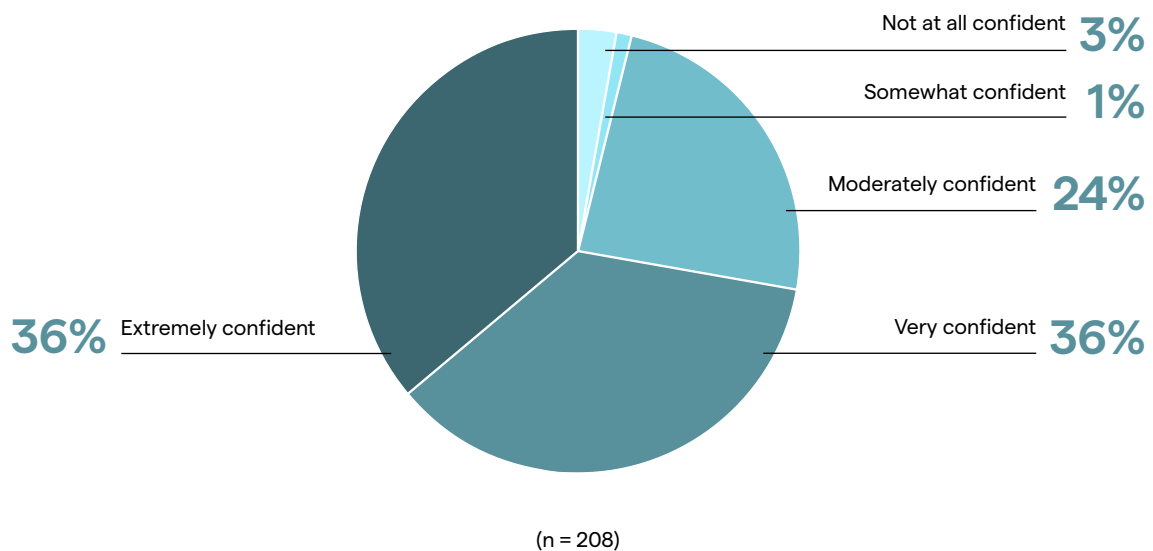
## 2. Confidence and skills in adopting a strategic approach

### Does confidence equate to competence?

The research revealed significant insights into the confidence levels of internal communication professionals in adopting a strategic approach to their work. Despite their numerous challenges, the results indicate a generally high level of confidence.

Over 70% of respondents reported feeling either very or extremely confident in their ability to adopt a strategic approach to internal communication. This high level of confidence is encouraging and suggests that many internal communication professionals believe in their capability to contribute strategically to their organizations.

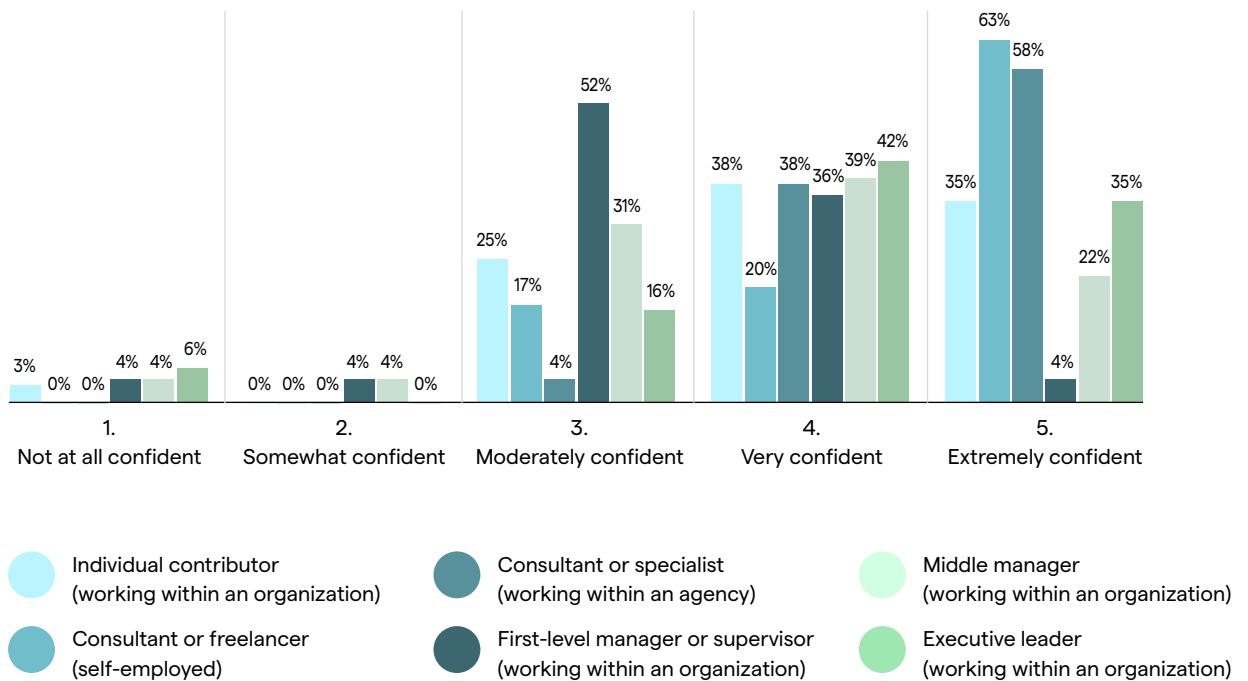
How confident do you feel about taking a strategic approach to your internal communication work right now?



## Confidence grows with experience and responsibility

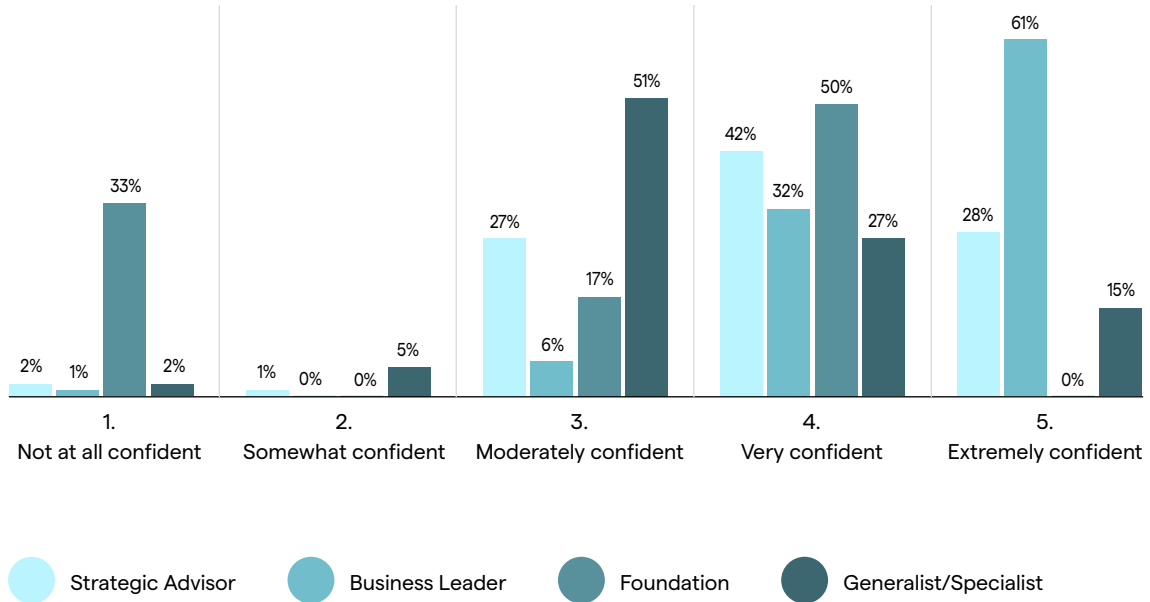
Consultants and specialists working within an agency reported the highest confidence levels (i.e., the sum of extremely confident and very confident), followed by self-employed consultants and freelancers. Their confidence likely stems from experience, role requirements, and the necessity to consistently demonstrate strategic value to clients or organizational leaders.

### Confidence in strategic approach to internal communication by role



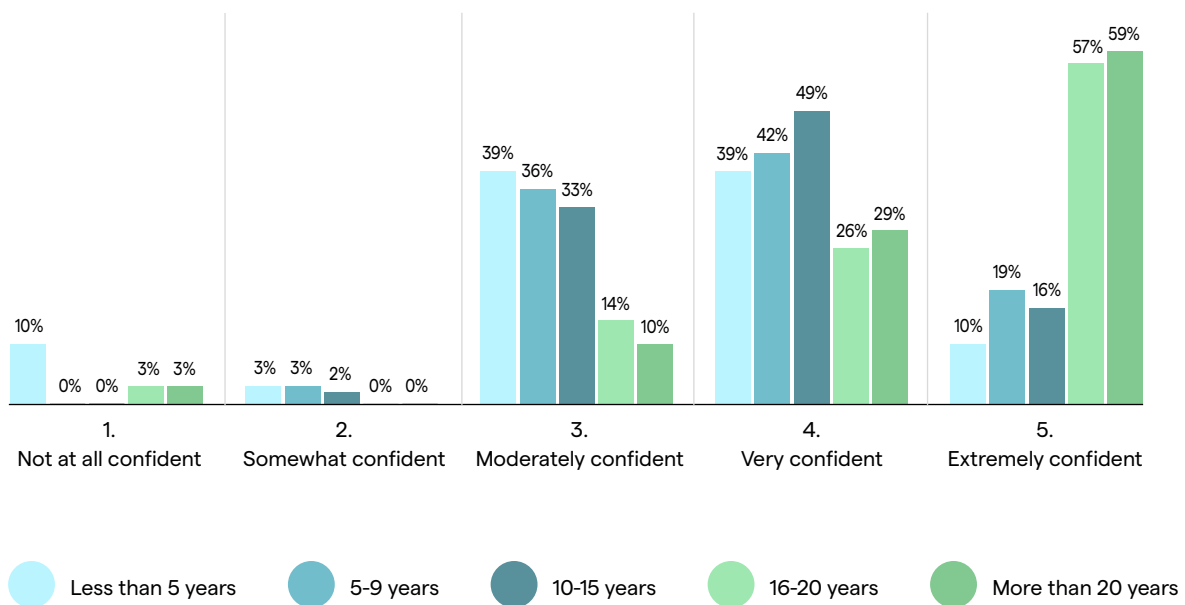
Strategic advisors and business leaders reported higher confidence levels compared to those in foundation-level roles. This indicates that career progression and role clarity significantly influence confidence in strategic capabilities. Those at higher career levels are likely more exposed to strategic decision-making, enhancing their confidence.

### Confidence in strategic approach to internal communication by career level



Professionals with extensive experience in internal communication are more likely to feel confident in their strategic abilities. This highlights the importance of continuous professional development and mentorship to build confidence among less experienced professionals.

### Confidence in strategic approach to internal communication by experience in internal communication (years)

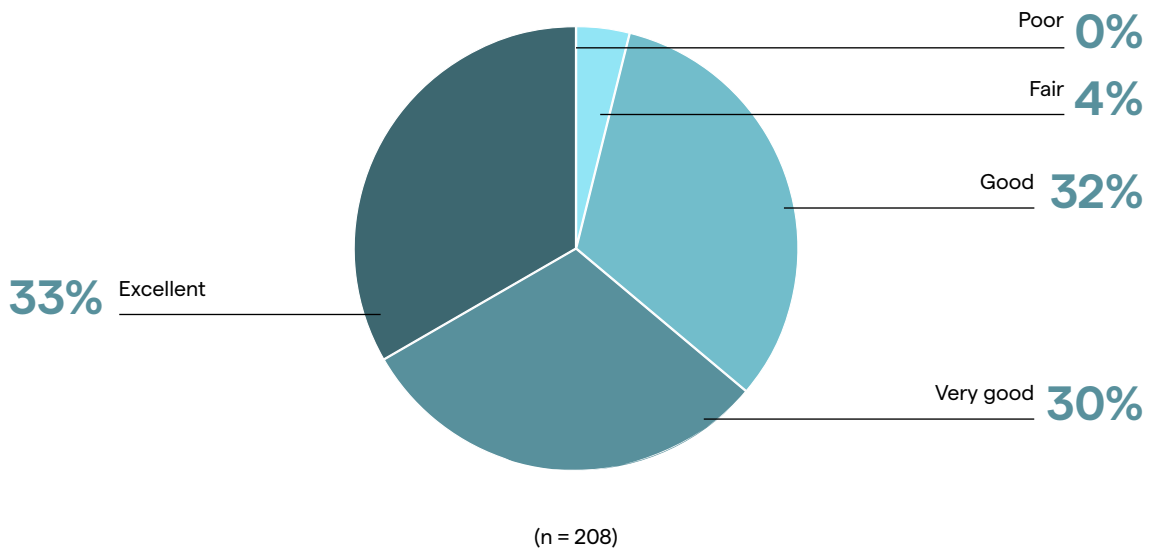


Confidence levels among internal communication professionals are a promising indicator of the potential for strategic growth within the field. However, realizing this potential requires addressing the systemic barriers preventing confident professionals from implementing their strategic visions and ensuring they effectively demonstrate their value.

## Perceived competence matches confidence

The self-assessment of strategic internal communication skills offers valuable insights into how professionals perceive their abilities. Like their confidence levels, internal communication professionals tend to rate their strategic internal communication skills highly, with almost two-thirds of respondents considering their abilities to be very good or excellent.

How would you rate your strategic internal communication skills right now?



## Experience matters

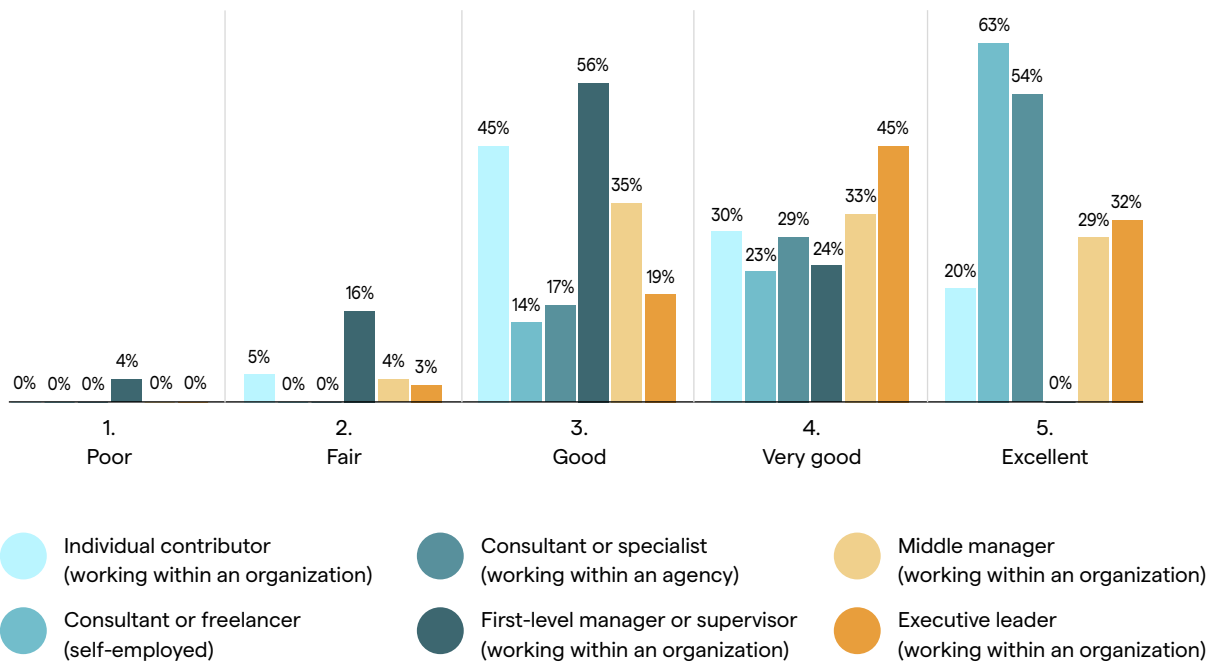
Confidence in strategic abilities correlates strongly with experience, seniority, and role independence (e.g., consultants and self-employed professionals). However, the data reveals important exceptions that offer a more nuanced understanding of these perceptions.

The most significant predictor of higher confidence in strategic skills is years of experience. Professionals with over 10 years of experience rated their abilities the highest, suggesting that extensive exposure to varied communication challenges enhances strategic thinking. Seniority and role independence also emerged as key differentiators. Senior-level professionals, consultants, and agency specialists consistently rated their skills as “very good” or “excellent.” These roles typically require professionals to be deeply involved in high-level decision-making and advising, which may explain their higher confidence levels.

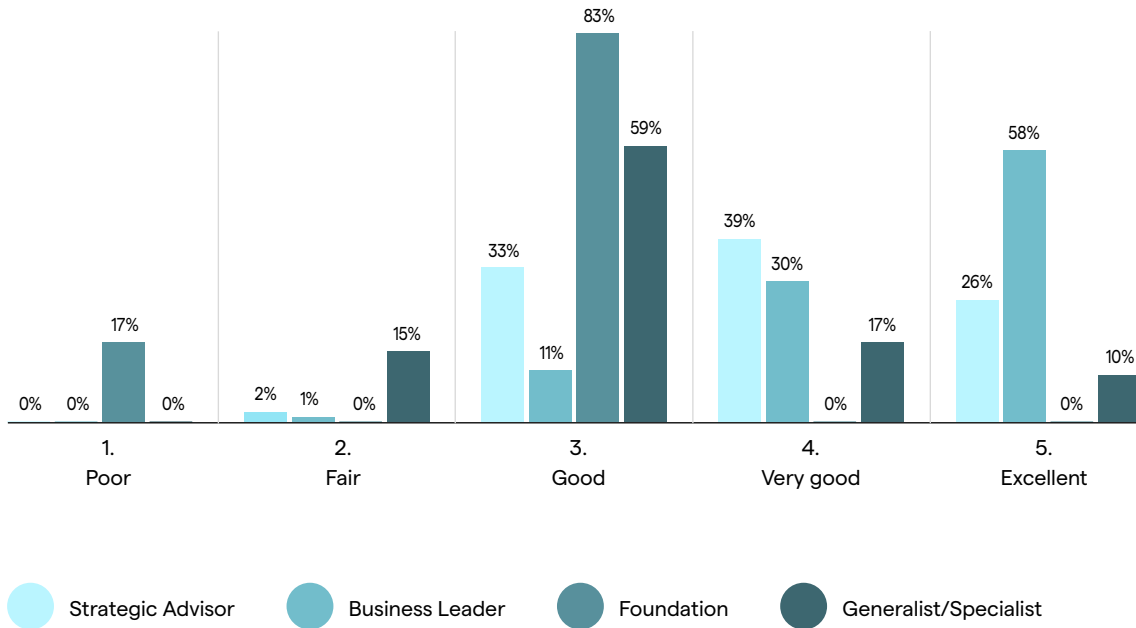
Cross-referencing role with years of experience suggests that many consultants and agency specialists may have built their confidence through previous in-house roles before transitioning to client-based environments. This trajectory could explain the elevated confidence of these professionals, as they draw upon both their in-house experience and the strategic agility required in consulting roles.

Interestingly, first-level managers reported lower confidence, with none rating their skills as “excellent.” Despite their leadership roles, this may reflect limited exposure to strategic initiatives compared to senior professionals. Similarly, individual contributors, who often focus more on tactical execution, rated their skills lower. This highlights a potential need for greater involvement in strategic tasks to bolster their confidence.

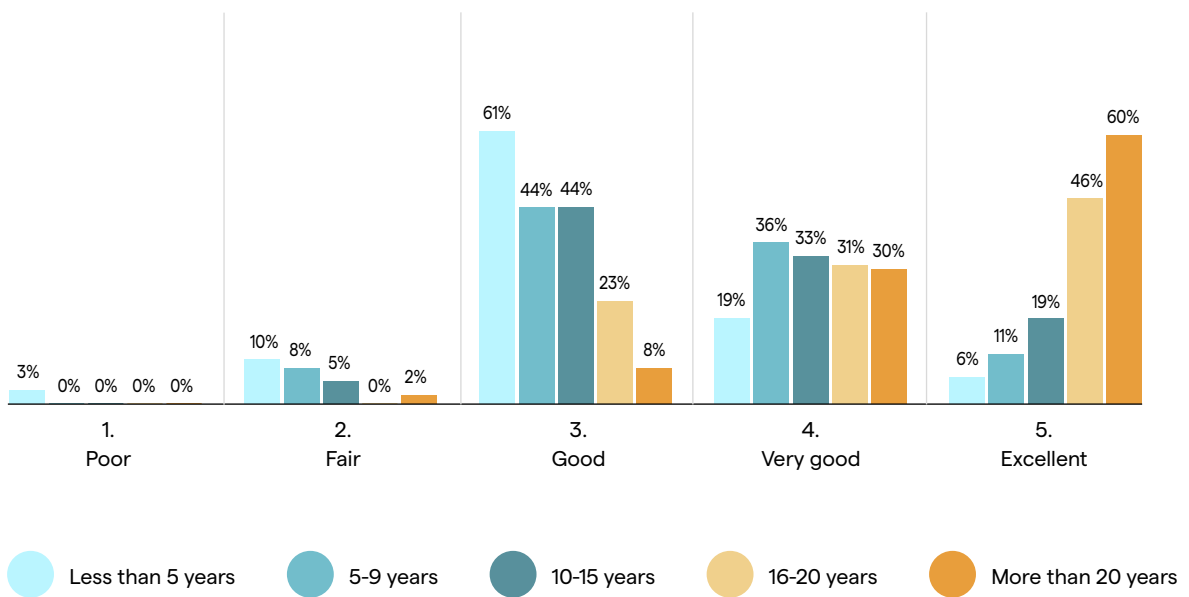
### Rating of strategic internal communication skills by role



### Rating of strategic internal communication skills by career level



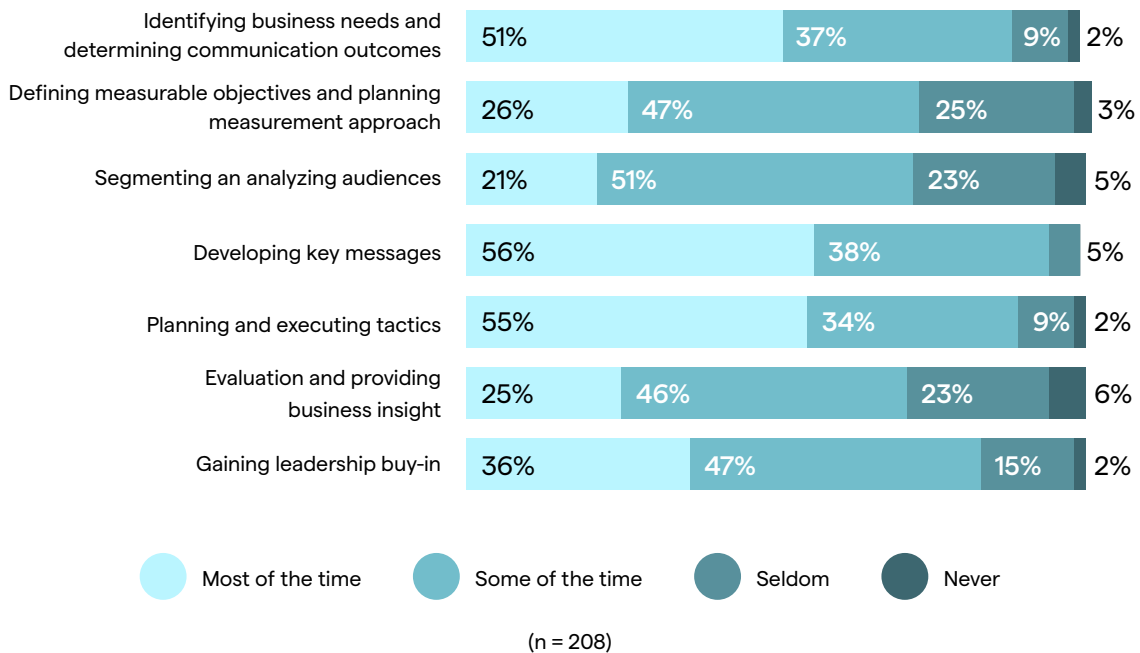
### Rating of strategic internal communication skills by experience in internal communication (years)



# 3. How internal communication professionals spend their time

## Time spent on elements of strategic internal communication

Please rate the following options in order of which element of strategic internal communication you spend the most time on to the element you spend the least time on.



The survey results indicate that internal communication professionals dedicate significant time to key tasks like developing messages (56%) and planning and executing tactics (55%), which are crucial to achieving organizational goals. Interestingly, while activities such as segmenting and analyzing audiences (21%) and defining measurable objectives (26%) are recognized as important, they receive comparatively less attention.

This raises an intriguing question: Are these priorities driven by the communication professionals themselves, based on their professional judgment, or are they shaped by the expectations and demands of the business? It's possible that internal communication professionals focus more on areas where they can have immediate impact, while other activities like evaluation and audience analysis may be under-prioritized due to time constraints or organizational pressure. This trade-off suggests a key consideration for the profession—balancing tactical execution with deeper strategic analysis to optimize communication outcomes.



## Strategic mindsets at every level

The analysis of time spent on strategic internal communication activities by role, career level, and years of experience reveals a notable trend. Professionals in more senior roles and with greater experience tend to engage more in strategic activities. However, this raises a critical question: why aren't all internal communication professionals, regardless of their career level, embracing a strategic approach from the outset?

The data suggests that as internal communication professionals advance in their careers, their focus shifts from operational to strategic activities. However, this should not imply that foundation-level professionals are incapable of strategic thinking. Cultivating a strategic mindset from the beginning of one's career ensures that all internal communication professionals, regardless of their role or experience, contribute strategically to their organizations.

This brings us to an important consideration: the role of senior professionals in nurturing the next generation of communication talent. It may not always be a matter of capability but rather the opportunities and expectations set for junior professionals. By providing mentorship and creating opportunities for these individuals to engage in strategic initiatives, senior professionals can help them develop and flex their strategic muscles early in their careers. This proactive approach can foster a universally strategic mindset, empowering the entire internal communication team to drive value and impact for their organizations.

## Primary internal communication requests

Writing and developing content emerges as the most time-consuming task, with 16% of respondents indicating that it takes up most of their time. This essential focus on content creation, while important, can sometimes overshadow more strategic initiatives.

Developing internal communication plans for organizational initiatives is the primary request for 12% of respondents. This task is crucial for aligning communication strategies with business goals, though it may still be driven by immediate demands rather than proactive planning.

One significant area highlighted is communicating organizational change initiatives, which accounts for 11% of respondents' primary internal communication requests. The focus on communicating organizational change initiatives underscores the critical role internal communication professionals play in guiding organizations through periods of transformation.

Coaching and advising leaders on communication strategies, along with collaborating with HR on employee engagement initiatives, each account for 9% of respondents' efforts. These strategic tasks emphasize the role of internal communication professionals in shaping leadership communication and enhancing employee engagement.

Supporting crisis communication efforts, though critical, is the primary focus for 4% of respondents. Despite its importance in maintaining organizational stability, it receives relatively less attention compared to other tasks. Similarly, providing training on effective communication practices is the main task for 3% of respondents, which is surprising given the need for ongoing training to enhance communication skills across the organization.

More concerning is the minimal time spent on facilitating employee feedback mechanisms (3%), conducting internal communication audits or assessments (3%), and supporting environmental, social, and governance (ESG) efforts (1%). These areas are vital for ensuring that internal communication strategies are effective, inclusive, and aligned with broader organizational priorities.

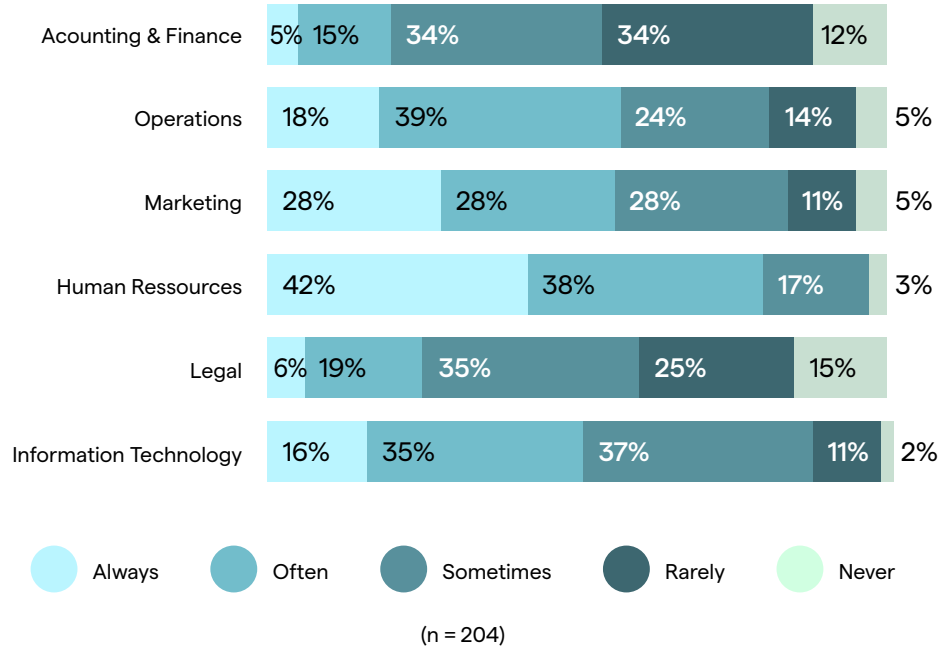
### Which types of internal communication requests take up most of your time?



(Multi-select n = 204)

## Frequency of cross-department collaboration

How often do you work with each of the following areas within your organization or your client's organization?



The highest levels of collaboration occur with Human Resources (HR), with 42% of respondents always and 38% often collaborating with HR. This strong partnership is expected, given the central role of HR in employee-related communication and engagement initiatives.

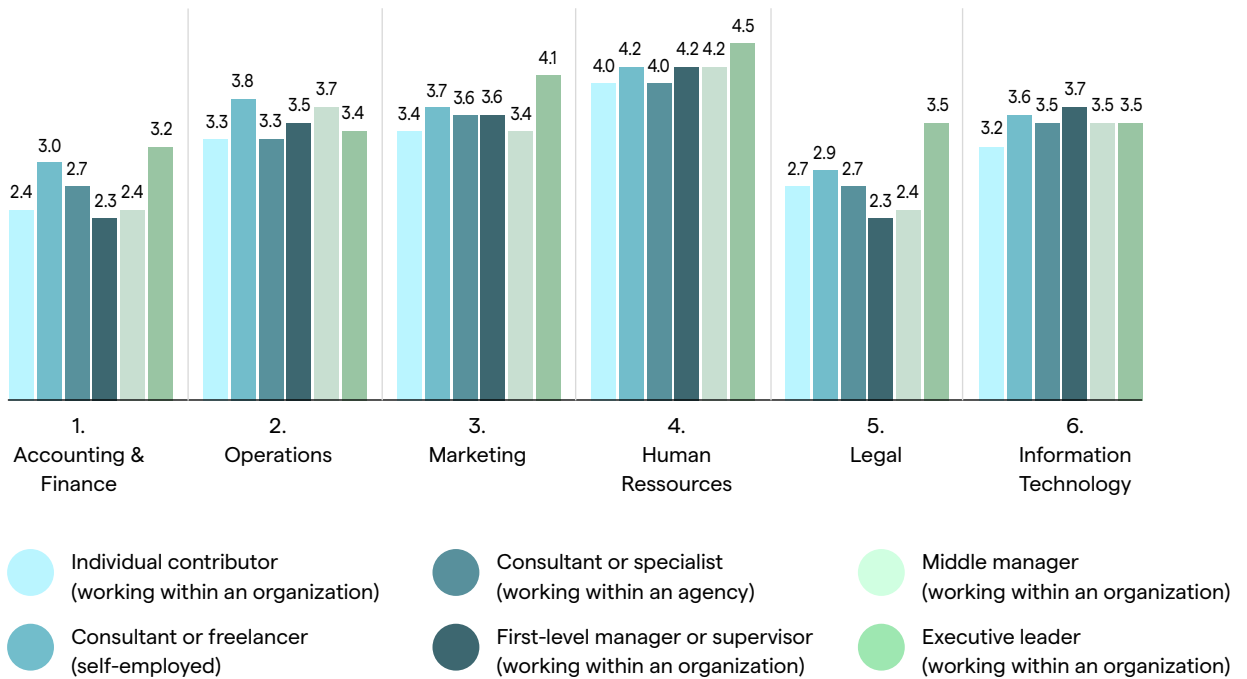
Collaboration with Marketing is notable, with 28% always and 28% often working together, aligning to ensure brand consistency and cohesive messaging across internal and external channels.

Collaboration with Operations and IT departments is also substantial, with 18% always and 39% often collaborating with Operations, and 16% always and 35% often collaborating with IT. These interactions are crucial for operational communication and the deployment of technology solutions that facilitate internal communication.

In contrast, collaboration with Legal and Finance departments is less frequent. Only 6% of respondents always and 19% often work with Legal. Similarly, just 5% always and 15% often collaborate with Accounting & Finance. This limited interaction may reflect a more specialized or compliance-driven need for communication with these departments.

# The collaboration divide across roles, career levels and years of experience

Frequency of collaboration with different organizational areas by role

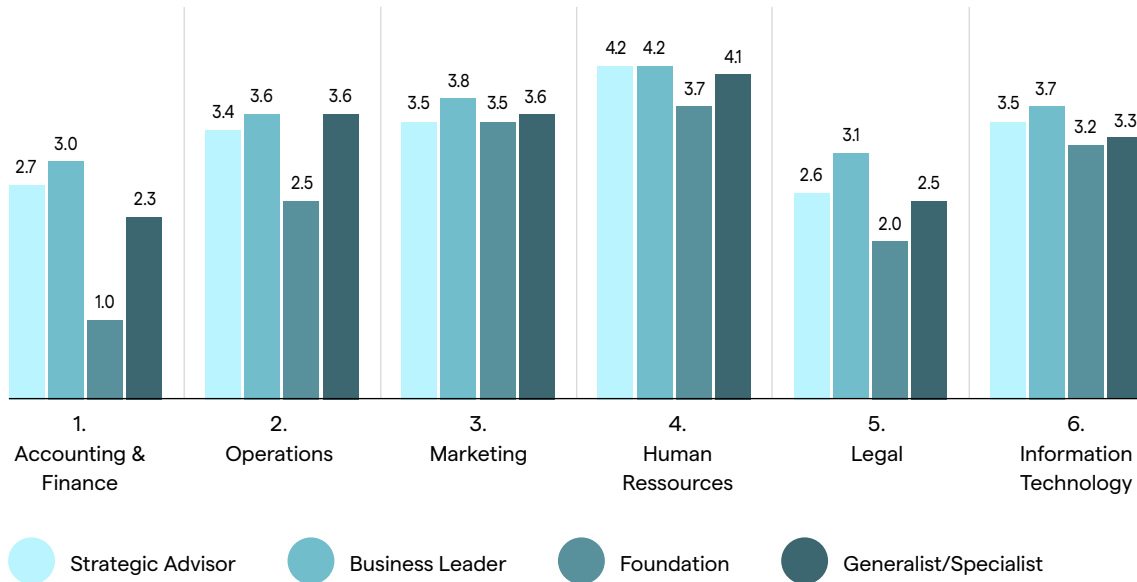


First-level managers find themselves in a crucial position, where managing team dynamics and employee relations necessitates moderate collaboration, particularly with HR. These managers, however, face challenges that limit their engagement with other departments, potentially affecting their ability to drive comprehensive communication strategies.

Similarly, middle managers experience a moderate level of collaboration, especially with HR. They navigate a complex landscape, balancing their operational responsibilities with the need for strategic engagement. Despite their moderate collaboration, they still encounter significant challenges in fostering deeper interdepartmental connections.

At the helm, executive leaders demonstrate the highest collaboration scores, particularly with HR and Marketing. Their strategic oversight roles naturally position them to engage broadly across the organization, ensuring alignment between communication initiatives and organizational goals. Their broad engagement reflects their ability to integrate communication strategies across various departments effectively.

### Frequency of collaboration with different organizational areas by career level



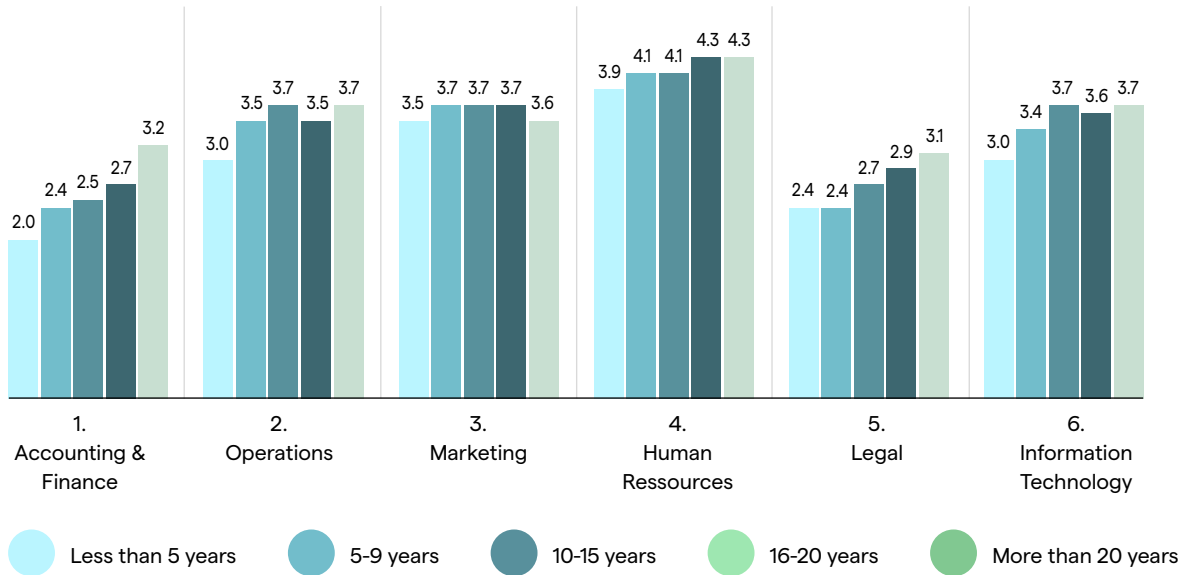
Examining collaboration by career level, foundation-level professionals stand out for their limited engagement across departments. Their lowest collaboration scores indicate a need for greater integration into broader organizational activities early in their careers. Ensuring they have opportunities to engage more widely could foster better understanding and strategic thinking from the outset.

In contrast, strategic advisors and business leaders exhibit strong collaboration, particularly with HR. Their roles demand alignment of communication with organizational goals, showcasing their pivotal position in driving strategic initiatives. Generalists and specialists also play a vital role, often intersecting with HR activities due to their specialized projects, bridging the gap between operational tasks and strategic objectives.

Years of experience further illuminate these trends. Less experienced professionals, those with less than five years in the field, show lower levels of collaboration. This suggests that early-career professionals need more opportunities to engage in cross-departmental activities to enhance their strategic impact. On the other hand, highly experienced professionals, with more than 20 years of experience, exhibit the highest levels of collaboration. Their extensive experience provides them with a deep understanding of organizational functions, facilitating broader engagement and strategic alignment.



### Frequency of collaboration with different organizational areas by experience in internal communication (years)



## When are internal communication professionals engaged?

The survey data sheds light on when internal communication professionals are typically engaged by their clients and business partners, revealing a significant opportunity for improvement in strategic involvement. Only 9% of respondents report being engaged during the decision-making process. This early stage is crucial for ensuring that communication strategies are aligned with business objectives from the outset, yet it remains largely untapped.

### At what stage of a project or campaign do your clients/stakeholders typically involve you?



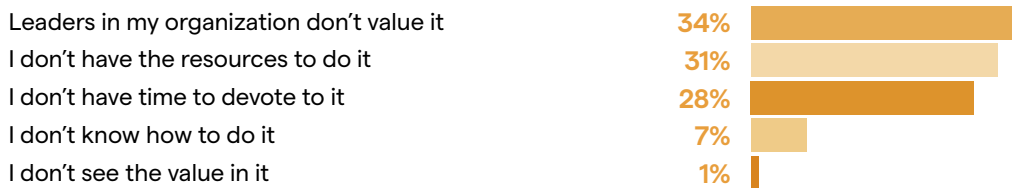
(n = 204)

Most respondents are engaged during the later stages of projects, with 42% involved during the initial planning stages, 24% during the development phase, and 22% prior to implementation. This indicates that internal communication professionals are often brought in when plans are already set, limiting their ability to influence strategic decisions and contribute to more comprehensive, integrated communication strategies.

## 4. Barriers and challenges

### Reasons for not taking a strategic approach to internal communication

If you don't employ all the elements of a strategic approach in your internal communication work, please indicate the \*main reason\* why.



(n = 167)

The survey results highlight several key barriers preventing internal communication professionals from adopting a strategic approach to their work. The most significant barrier, cited by 34% of respondents, is the perception that organizational leaders do not value strategic communication. This suggests a disconnect between communication professionals and senior management regarding the role and importance of strategic internal communication. It underscores the need for internal communication professionals to better demonstrate and articulate their value in terms that resonate with business leaders.

Resource constraints are another major impediment, with 31% of respondents indicating that they lack the necessary resources to implement a strategic approach. This highlights the critical need for better resource allocation or an increase in resources dedicated to internal communication. Without adequate resources, it is challenging for professionals to focus on long-term strategic initiatives.

Time limitations also pose a significant challenge, with 28% of respondents reporting that they do not have enough time to devote to strategic activities. This suggests potential issues with workload management and prioritization within departments. Internal communication professionals may be overwhelmed with immediate tasks, leaving little room for strategic planning and execution. However, this is precisely why these professionals need to adopt a more strategic approach—which is about setting clear priorities and having the courage to communicate in a straightforward way, saying ‘no’ to tasks that don’t align with key objectives. By doing so, communication professionals can ensure their efforts remain focused on what truly matters for organizational success.

Interestingly, only 7% of respondents admitted to not knowing how to take a strategic approach to their work. This suggests that the majority of communication professionals are aware of what needs to be done but face constraints that hinder their ability to prioritize strategic initiatives. This points to a broader issue within organizations where strategic internal communication is not given the importance it deserves, even within the field itself.

## What prevents internal communication professionals from achieving business outcomes

### What do you think is the \*biggest issue\* preventing internal communication professionals from achieving business outcomes?



(Open-ended n = 206 responses grouped into themes)

The most prominent challenge is the lack of leadership buy-in and understanding, cited by 25% of respondents. This lack of recognition from senior leaders affects the support and resources allocated to internal communication initiatives, underscoring the need for better advocacy and demonstration of the strategic value of internal communication.



Resource constraints are another major impediment, with 14% of respondents indicating that they lack the necessary resources and budget to implement comprehensive strategies effectively. Similarly, 14% report a misalignment with business strategy, indicating a need for better integration of internal communication within the broader business framework.

Perception and value of internal communication remain a critical issue, with 13% of respondents feeling that their work is undervalued, impacting its prioritization and the investment it receives. Operational challenges, including overwhelming workload and limited capacity, affect 7% of professionals, limiting their ability to focus on strategic tasks.

Skill gaps and the need for professional development are noted by 7% of respondents, emphasizing the importance of continuous learning and upskilling. Measuring impact and demonstrating ROI is also a challenge for 7% of professionals, complicating efforts to justify further investment in internal communication functions.

Other barriers include the lack of early involvement in planning (5%), tactical overload and a reactive approach (3%), and issues related to organizational culture and structure (2%).

These barriers collectively illustrate the complex landscape that internal communication professionals navigate. Addressing these challenges is essential for enabling them to achieve business outcomes and demonstrate their strategic value within organizations.

## What internal communication professionals struggle with the most

### Which elements of strategic internal communication do you struggle with the most?



(Multi-select n = 189)

Internal communication professionals face several significant challenges in their strategic efforts, with calculating ROI emerging as the most substantial struggle (27%). This is closely followed by defining measurable communication objectives (13%) and gaining leadership buy-in (13%). These difficulties highlight a critical area for development—effective measurement and demonstration of value.

The struggle with calculating ROI is not surprising. To elevate the value and visibility of internal communication, professionals must measure what matters. This means focusing on outcomes rather than outputs. Another key challenge is defining measurable communication objectives. This suggests that professionals need clearer frameworks for setting and evaluating communication goals and objectives. Without well-defined objectives, it becomes challenging to measure success and demonstrate the strategic value of internal communication.

Gaining leadership buy-in remains a significant hurdle for many communication professionals. This indicates a gap between communication efforts and senior management’s recognition of their value. Bridging this gap requires effective advocacy and demonstration of how strategic communication contributes to organizational success.

Planning a measurement approach is another area where professionals seek improvement (12%). This reflects the complexity of aligning communication strategies with business outcomes. Providing business insights to senior leaders and other stakeholders (11%) is also a challenge, underscoring the need for strategies that better articulate the business impact of internal communication.

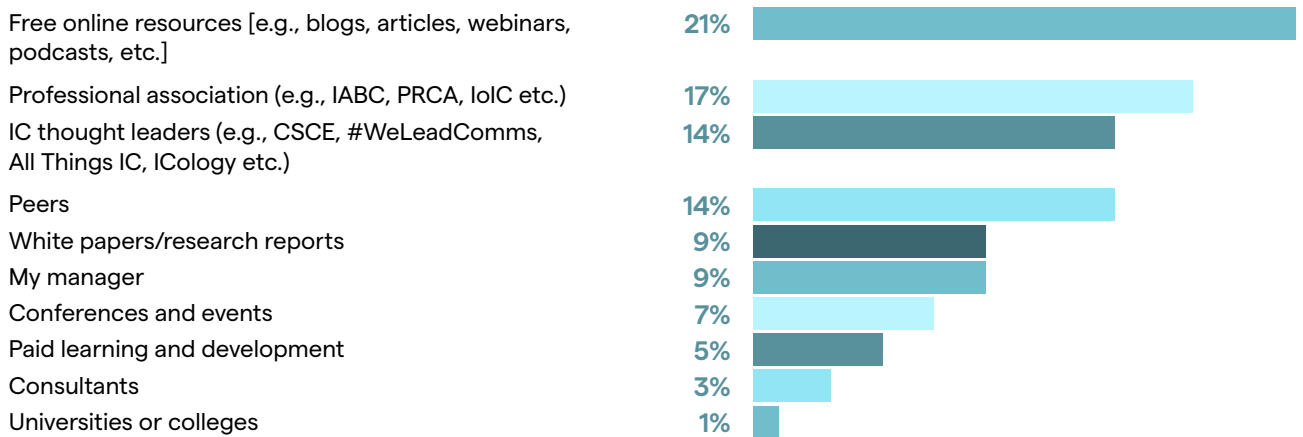
Segmenting and analyzing audiences (8%) poses difficulties for some professionals, pointing to potential enhancements in data collection and analysis techniques. A small proportion of professionals feel fully competent in all areas of strategic internal communication (4%), while others struggle with specific tactical elements like planning approaches and developing key messages.



# 5. Tools and resources

## Sources for strategic internal communication assistance

Which are your main sources for seeking assistance with strategic internal communication challenges?



(Multi-select n = 169)

Internal communication professionals rely on a variety of sources to seek assistance with strategic challenges, highlighting the diverse approach taken to gather information and insights. Free online resources, such as blogs, articles, webinars, and podcasts, are the most used sources, with 21% of respondents indicating their preference for these accessible and readily available options. This suggests that professionals value up-to-date, diverse content that can be accessed at their convenience.

Professional associations, such as the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), Public Relations and Communications Association (PRCA), and Institute of Internal Communication (IoIC), are also significant sources of information, used by 17% of respondents. These organizations provide structured guidance, industry insights, and networking opportunities, which are crucial for staying informed about best practices and emerging trends in the field. Similarly, internal communication thought leaders and peer interactions, each cited by 14% of respondents, play a pivotal role in offering innovative and practical solutions.

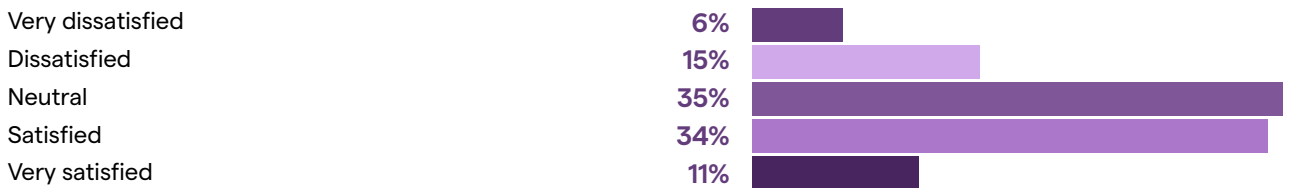
Managers are another key resource, cited by 9% of respondents, indicating the importance of leadership and mentorship within organizations. Managerial support provides tailored advice and strategic direction based on an understanding of the organizational context.

Conferences and events, paid learning and development opportunities, and consultants are used less frequently, with 7%, 5%, and 3% of respondents respectively. These sources, while less commonly used, provide valuable formal learning environments and specialized expertise, suggesting potential gaps in comprehensive, structured learning.

By leveraging a diverse range of information sources, internal communication professionals can enhance their strategic capabilities and effectively address the challenges they face in their roles. This balanced approach, incorporating both informal and formal learning opportunities, will ensure a well-rounded understanding of strategic internal communication and foster continuous professional growth.

## Satisfaction with **current tools and resources**

**How satisfied are you with the strategic internal communication tools and resources you currently have access to (e.g., training, templates, measurement tools, etc.)?**



(n = 208)

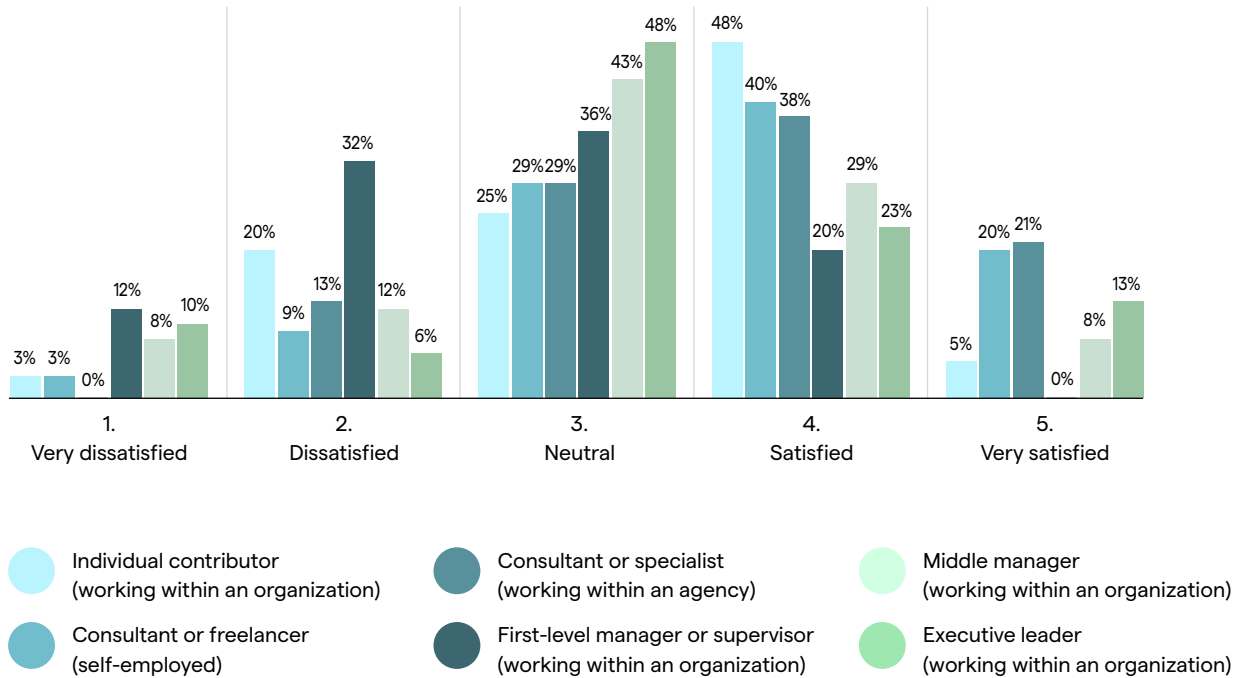
The data reveals that only 44% of respondents are satisfied or very satisfied with the tools and resources they have, indicating a clear need for better support and investment. A significant 35% remain neutral, suggesting mixed feelings, while 21% are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, further emphasizing the need for improvement.

## Satisfaction across **roles, career levels and years of experience**

Individual contributors—those on the front lines of communication efforts—display a mixed picture. Nearly half (48%) are satisfied, and a small fraction (5%) are very satisfied with their tools and resources. Yet, a notable portion remains neutral (25%), and there are significant pockets of dissatisfaction (20% dissatisfied and 3% very dissatisfied). This indicates that while many feel supported, there is still considerable room for improvement.

Consultants, freelancers, and specialists, particularly those who are self-employed, exhibit the highest overall satisfaction. This group clearly finds their resources adequate for their needs. Although some consultants face challenges they generally feel well-equipped.

### Satisfaction with strategic internal communication tools and resources by role

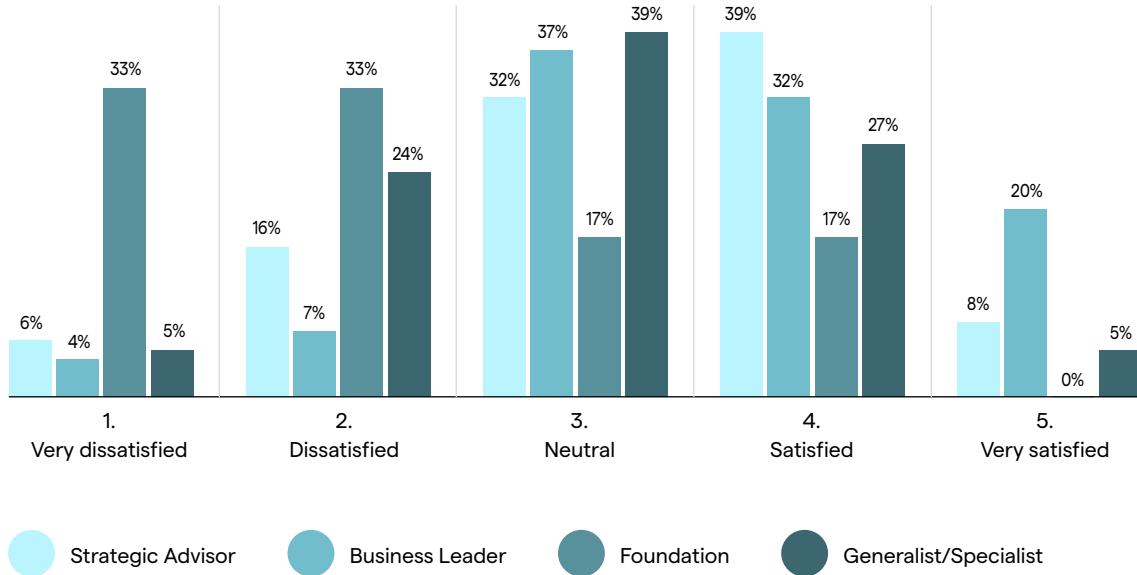


However, the story changes for first-level managers or supervisors. This group struggles the most, with only 20% expressing satisfaction and none feeling very satisfied. A significant 36% feel neutral about their resources, and dissatisfaction is pronounced (32% dissatisfied and 12% very dissatisfied). These figures highlight a critical gap in support for those in supervisory roles, which could impact their effectiveness and morale.

Middle managers also face challenges, though their satisfaction levels are slightly better. While 29% are satisfied and 8% very satisfied, 43% remain neutral, and dissatisfaction is still notable (12% dissatisfied and 8% very dissatisfied). This suggests that middle managers have mixed feelings about their resources, indicating areas that could benefit from enhancement.

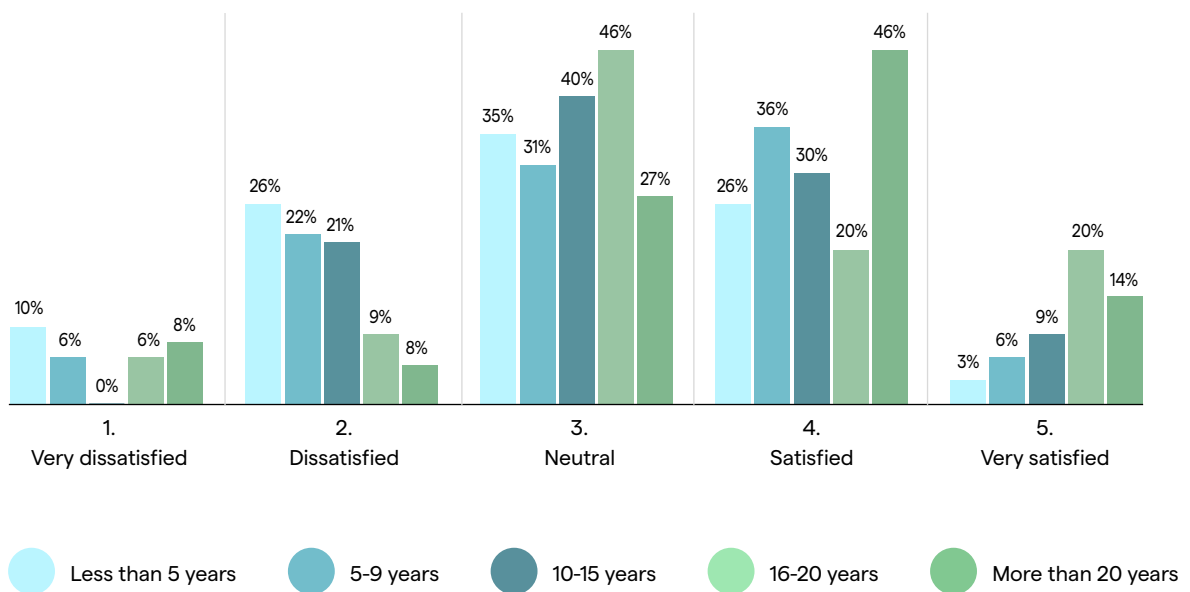
Executive leaders, responsible for high-level strategic decisions, show a more balanced view. There is a reasonable level of contentment with 23% satisfied and 13% very satisfied. However, a substantial 48% are neutral, and some dissatisfaction exists (6% dissatisfied and 10% very dissatisfied). This neutrality indicates that even at the highest levels, there is significant scope for improving the tools and resources to better support strategic decision-making.

### Satisfaction with strategic internal communication tools and resources by career level



When examining satisfaction by career level, foundation-level professionals emerge as significantly dissatisfied with their tools and resources. This is an important area of concern, as ensuring adequate support and resources at this level could foster better engagement and development from the outset of their careers.

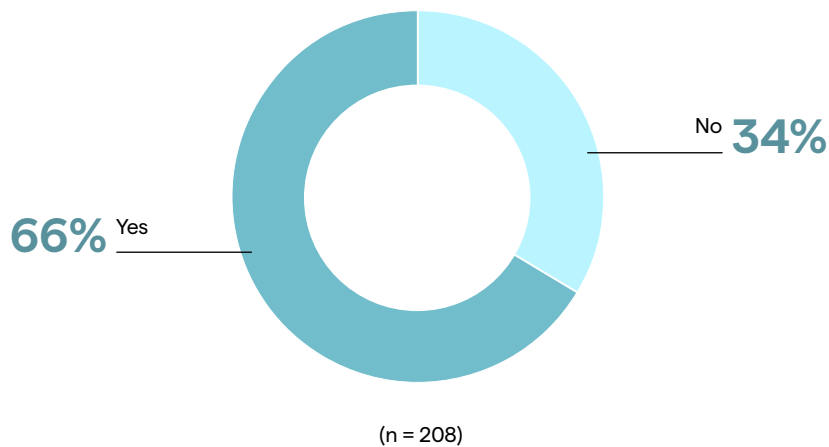
### Satisfaction with strategic internal communication tools and resources by experience in internal communication (years)



Satisfaction levels also vary significantly by years of experience. Less experienced professionals, those with less than five years in the field, show lower satisfaction levels. This group may require additional support and resources to enhance their effectiveness and satisfaction. Conversely, highly experienced professionals with more than 20 years of experience exhibit the highest levels of satisfaction. Their extensive experience likely provides them with better access to resources and tools, highlighting the importance of experience in resource satisfaction.

## The use of AI in strategic initiatives

Do you use AI tools to help you with your internal communication?  
 [e.g., copy generators, image generators, chatbots, news aggregators, transcription applications, etc.]



The survey data reveals a promising trend: a significant majority of internal communication professionals (66%) are integrating AI tools into their work. However, the extent of AI's potential in supporting strategic initiatives has not been fully realized. Most respondents reported using AI to develop content and automate routine tasks such as scheduling, sorting emails, and providing reminders. Additionally, AI is employed to speed up the content creation process and summarize information, showcasing its utility in enhancing day-to-day operations.

## How does AI help you with your internal communication?



(Open-ended n = 137 responses grouped into themes)

Interestingly, a smaller percentage of professionals use AI for more strategic functions, such as developing strategic frameworks, defining objectives, and creating detailed communication plans. This indicates a recognition of AI's potential to support strategic initiatives but also highlights that its full capabilities are not yet being fully leveraged in this context.

This trend suggests that while AI is primarily used to improve operational efficiency, there is an opportunity for internal communication professionals to explore and expand its use in more strategic areas. By doing so, they can potentially unlock new levels of efficiency and effectiveness in their strategic planning and execution processes.

As AI technology evolves, it will be interesting to monitor how its adoption and use in strategic internal communication develops over time. Embracing AI's full potential could significantly enhance the strategic impact of internal communication efforts, making it a valuable tool for the future.

## 6. Looking ahead

### Future investment priorities

The survey data highlights key investment areas for internal communication professionals over the next 12 months. Learning and development tops the list, with 22% of respondents aiming to enhance their skills and competencies, emphasizing the need for continuous professional growth in a rapidly evolving field.

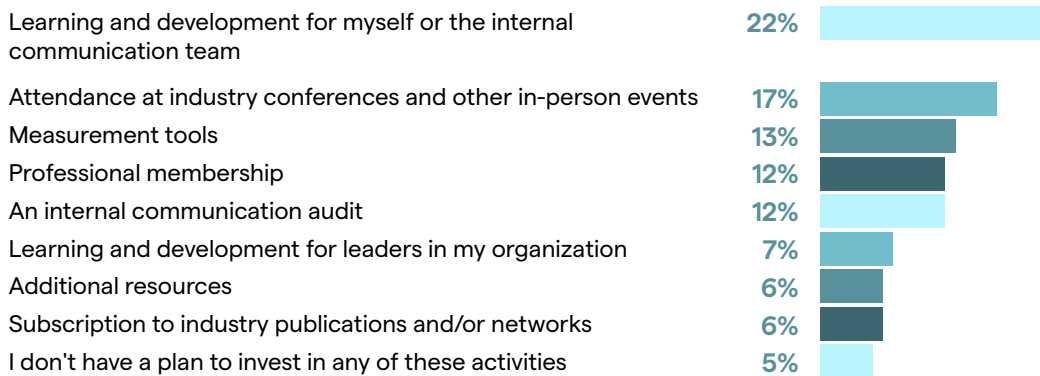
Industry engagement is also significant, with 17% planning to attend conferences and in-person events to stay current with trends and network with peers. Additionally, 13% plan to invest in measurement tools, underlining the importance of demonstrating the impact of communication efforts.



Professional memberships and internal communication audits each attract 12% of planned investments, reflecting a commitment to continuous improvement and industry standards. Investments in leader development account for 7%, indicating an opportunity to strengthen strategic communication from the top down.

Other investments include additional resources (6%) and subscriptions to industry publications and networks (6%), showing efforts to access extensive information and support. Notably, 5% of respondents do not plan any investments, which may indicate constraints or satisfaction with current resources.

### Which of the following activities are you planning to invest in within the next 12 months?



(Multi-select n = 207)

## Playing a more strategic role

When it comes to playing a more strategic role within their organizations, building stronger relationships with leadership emerges as the top priority, cited by 21% of respondents. This underscores the importance of securing leadership support and having a voice in strategic decision-making processes.

Demonstrating value through measurement is the second most cited action, with 19% of respondents highlighting the need to provide tangible evidence of the impact of internal communication efforts. Effective measurement not only justifies the role of internal communication but also helps gain senior leaders' respect and recognition.

A crucial factor, as recognized by 17% of respondents, is advocacy for the role of internal communication. This requires communication professionals to confidently and directly communicate their value proposition and challenge prevailing perceptions about effective communication practices across the organization. Advocacy is essential for raising awareness about the strategic importance of internal communication.

### What is the \*one thing\* internal communication professionals need to do to play a strategic role within their organizations or their clients' organizations?



(Open-ended n = 206 responses grouped into themes)

Understanding business goals and strategy is also critical, with 13% of respondents emphasizing the need to align communication efforts with organizational objectives. Building business acumen (9%), and proactive problem solving and strategic thinking (8%) are also seen as key actions that can enhance the strategic role of internal communication professionals.

Interestingly, only 5% of respondents believe that building a strategic internal communication plan is necessary. This is surprising, as a well-defined plan should be the foundation for all strategic activities, bringing together various elements to ensure coherence and alignment with business goals.

## Final thoughts and reflections from internal communication professionals



Strategic internal communication isn't just about communicating, it is an opportunity to engage and build culture, alignment, and productivity. It is more than a cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all approach. It needs to be inclusive and three-way (leaders to teams, teams to leaders, and employees to each other).

**Survey respondent**

These final thoughts from survey participants reflect a comprehensive understanding of the current landscape of internal communication. Based on 69 open-ended responses grouped into themes, they underscore the importance of strategic thinking, advocacy, and continuous improvement in the field. The insights emphasize the need for internal communication professionals to advocate for their role, demonstrate their value through measurable outcomes, and adapt to technological advancements to maintain relevance and effectiveness in supporting organizational success.

**Strategic importance**

**26%** of respondents emphasize the vital role of strategic internal communication in enhancing employee engagement and supporting organizational objectives.

**Advocacy and education**

**10%** call for increased efforts to elevate the understanding and value of internal communication within organizations, highlighting the need for ongoing advocacy and education.

**Measurement and demonstration of value**

**9%** stress the importance of clear metrics to demonstrate ROI and justify the strategic value of internal communication to senior leaders.

**Professional development and upskilling**

**7%** highlight the necessity of continuous learning in areas like data analytics and business strategy to align communication efforts with organizational goals.

### **Misunderstandings and underestimation**

**7%** note that internal communication is often perceived as a lower-priority function, impacting funding and strategic implementation.

### **Strategic planning and early involvement**

**6%** emphasize the need for early involvement in strategic planning to ensure alignment with business objectives.

### **Tactical focus vs. strategic role**

**4%** highlight the challenge of overcoming a tactical focus and the need to be recognized as strategic consultants rather than operational support.

### **Technology and AI**

**4%** acknowledge the role of technology and AI in enhancing strategy and execution in internal communication.

### **Additional themes**

Integration and influence across the organization, sharing best practices, and the influence of external consultants are other areas of interest.



## Strategic actions for advancing internal communication



Use more data to capture the relevance of what we do and connect them directly to business goals. Own the problems and be the solution providers rather than executors.

**Survey respondent**

The survey results suggest that many internal communication professionals struggle to fully embrace the strategic potential of their role. External pressures to deliver immediate results may contribute to this challenge, but it also presents an opportunity for internal communication professionals to refine their approach.

Many professionals lack the necessary training, skills, or development opportunities to adopt a strategic mindset. While organizational support plays a role, the onus is also on communication professionals to align their work with business objectives, build strong relationships, and measure what truly matters. By doing so, they can earn the respect and influence needed to drive meaningful change.

These findings reveal a significant challenge for the field. Despite the clear benefits of strategic internal communication, the struggle for recognition continues. To overcome this, internal communication professionals must better measure and articulate their value in terms that resonate with business leaders. This shift is critical for transforming their role from tactical executors to strategic partners essential to organizational success.

It's crucial that we focus on the communication function by driving strategic communication efforts, not just in the communication function by executing them. Strategic internal communication isn't just about getting the message across; it's about driving action that directly supports the organization's goals and objectives.



Strategic is in the mind of the beholder. It's key to understand what the business needs are and what other leaders (who you need to partner with) are focused on.

**Survey respondent**



Being strategic is a mindset. To demonstrate their value, internal communication professionals must think like businesspeople first and communication professionals second. By aligning their communication strategies with business needs and objectives, they not only enhance their effectiveness but also elevate their role as indispensable partners in their organizations.

Now is the time to embrace this mindset, continuously develop our skills, and lead the charge for meaningful change. Together, we can shape the future of our profession and contribute to the success of our organizations in ways we never thought possible.

**Sia Papageorgiou FRSA, FCSCE, SCMP**

Managing Partner, Centre for Strategic Communication Excellence

## Five actions to elevate your strategic influence

1

### Own your growth: Be relentless in self-development

Internal communication is evolving—so should you. Seize every opportunity to expand your knowledge and skills through certifications, courses, and industry events. Deepen your expertise in areas like data analytics, business acumen, and leadership. By staying at the forefront of trends, you position yourself as a strategic leader who drives internal communication excellence and organizational success.

2

### Plan smart, act strategic: Make time for strategic planning

Strategic thinking isn't optional; it's the key to saving time and maximizing impact. Dedicate time upfront to aligning internal communication objectives with broader business needs. Prioritize activities that deliver measurable results and assess long-term needs. This focused approach helps you avoid reactive, tactical work and ensures your efforts are purpose-driven and impactful.

3

### Prove your worth: Let data tell your story

Data is power. Consistently measure and evaluate your internal communication initiatives to demonstrate their impact. Use metrics that align with business outcomes—like employee engagement, productivity, or customer satisfaction. This data-driven approach elevates your role, enabling you to make a strategic case for internal communication's value in business terms that resonate with leadership.

## 4

### **Leverage the future: Use AI to amplify your impact**

AI is a game changer—use it to your advantage. Automate repetitive tasks, generate smarter content, and gain deeper audience insights. Beyond freeing up time, AI can enhance data analysis, audience segmentation, and optimize communication strategies. By focusing on areas where AI adds value, you'll drive more informed decision-making and increase the impact of your internal communication efforts.

## 5

### **Claim your seat: Advocate for strategic influence**

To secure a seat at the decision-making table, build strong relationships with decision-makers and demonstrate how your work directly supports their goals. Use measurable outcomes to communicate your value in business terms. Don't wait to be invited—seek opportunities to contribute to strategic discussions, assert your insights, and show how internal communication drives business success. By being proactive, you'll position yourself as a strategic partner who belongs at the table.





## About the Centre for Strategic Communication Excellence

The Centre for Strategic Communication Excellence (CSCE) is an award-winning global professional development and insights organization, trusted by top brands like Nokia, BHP, Veolia, and Unilever. We build strategic communication capabilities through customized training, empowering professionals and leaders to excel. Our memberships offer access to a global network of experts, enhancing professional reputation and credibility. Partnering with an extensive worldwide network, we provide exclusive resources and insights, keeping professionals at the forefront of industry innovations and emerging technologies. At CSCE, we equip people to learn, grow, and thrive in a rapidly changing world.

[thezsce.com](https://thezsce.com)

## About Hailo

Hailo is one of the world's leading providers of modern intranet, employee listening, and internal communications software with offices in Hamburg, London, Manchester, Helsinki, and Atlanta. Our employee experience platform is designed to help connect employees to the company's purpose and promote comprehensive communication in the workplace, regardless of location or workingstyle. Our solution can be seen as a social intranet — a platform to keep employees updated through all relevant channels, a digital home where employees can acquire and share knowledge, a platform that grows and evolves with you. More than 1000 global customers rely on Hailo, including Google, Ritter Sport, KPMG, Devoteam, and Deutsche Bahn.

[hailo.com](https://hailo.com)

## **Hailo**

800 Battery Ave SE  
Suite 100 Atlanta  
GA 30339  
mail@hailo.com  
www.hailo.com

## **Centre for Strategic Communication Excellence**

csce@thecsce.com  
<https://thecsce.com>

