



**2026 Report**

# Global State of Internal Communications



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# 1. Editor's Note

## The Culture Gap Is the New Engagement Problem

For years, employee engagement was the primary outcome internal communicators were asked to move - higher scores, stronger participation and better morale. In 2026, that lens no longer tells the full story.

This year's Global State of Internal Communications (GSIC) report reveals a widening culture gap: the disconnect between the structures organizations put in place and how employees actually experience work. Engagement may appear stable on the surface, but beneath it lies misalignment between leaders and employees, uneven trust in leadership messaging, inconsistent feedback follow-through, and growing communication fatigue.

Internal communicators are no longer just addressing disengagement, they are navigating culture under pressure.

Employees are absorbing constant change, adapting to hybrid and frontline-heavy work environments, and responding to emerging technologies like AI, often without greater clarity or confidence that their voices lead to action.

At the same time, expectations of internal communications have risen, even as many teams remain under-resourced, overly tactical, and limited in how they measure impact.

The data reveals a clear tension: most organizations have an internal communications strategy and leadership recognition in place, yet execution gaps persist. Behavior change is inconsistent, culture influence is uneven, and too much time is still spent producing content rather than driving outcomes.

GSIC 2026 examines what happens when internal communications doesn't evolve as fast as organizational complexity, and the cost of leaving culture, trust, and alignment under-supported.

We hope these findings help internal communicators (and the leaders they support) see internal communication not as a delivery function, but as a critical lever for culture, performance, and resilience in an era of ongoing change.

Happy reading,

**Cristina Huré.**

## 2. Executive Summary

GSIC 2026 shows that internal communications has become more complex, but not always more effective. While many organizations have formal strategies, established channels, and leadership recognition in place, execution gaps remain. Messages are still missed, behavior change is inconsistent, and measurement often falls short of proving impact. Engagement may appear steady, yet the underlying signals point to challenges with clarity, alignment, and follow-through.

At the same time, internal communications teams are navigating hybrid and frontline-heavy workforces, rising expectations for leadership visibility, and increasing pressure to demonstrate value - often with small teams and limited resources.

The GSIC 2026 data suggests that future progress will depend less on launching new initiatives and more on equipping teams with the infrastructure needed to prioritize effectively, measure meaningfully, and act on insight in order to transform internal communications from activity into impact.

## Report Highlights

### Organization & Respondent Profile

- The largest share of respondents work at organizations with **1,001–3,000 employees** (21%), followed by **companies with more than 10,000 employees** (18%).
- Mid-sized organizations (**201–1,000 employees**) account for roughly 26% of respondents.
- Internal communications teams are typically small: **49%** have 2–5 members, and **19%** have only 1 member.
- Respondents work mainly in **Internal Communications (39%)**, **Marketing/Corporate Communications (27%)**, and **HR/People & Culture (16%)**.
- Nearly **half of organizations (49%)** report an **established** internal communications function with consistent channels and some measurement, while **33%** remain at a **foundational**, primarily tactical stage focused on newsletters and basic updates.

## Industry Trends & Insights

- **Artificial intelligence in the workplace (57%) and employee experience (48%)** are the top focus areas for internal communicators in 2026, followed by **change management (43%)**.
- **69%** of organizations report being impacted by external market conditions, with political or government policy changes (**70%**) and inflation (**40%**) most cited.
- Email newsletters (**67%**), LinkedIn (**65%**), and industry events (**60%**) are the most valuable learning channels for communicators.
- Poor or unclear communication continues to create meaningful inefficiencies, with **50% of respondents estimating employees lose 1–3 hours per week due to poor communication** and an additional **29% reporting 4–6 hours of lost time**.
- Errors in internal email remain common, as **44% of teams had to resend or correct emails 1–2 times in the past year**, and **27% did so 3–5 times**, reinforcing the operational cost of manual processes.
- Despite relatively quick fixes (**48% of corrections take less than 15 minutes**) the cumulative time adds up, particularly as **73% of communicators spend 1–6 hours per week** designing, formatting, and sending internal emails.
- Communication overload and poor targeting also affects message reach, with **56% of respondents saying employees sometimes miss key updates** and **30% reporting this happens often or very often**.

## Culture & Engagement

- Most organizations have foundational engagement infrastructure in place, with **73% reporting a formal employee recognition system** and **95% collecting employee feedback**, signaling broad commitment to listening and recognition.
- Internal communications most often plays a **supporting role in DEI efforts (36%)**, partnering with HR or DEI teams, while only **11% say internal comms plays a central, leading role**, highlighting an opportunity for stronger strategic ownership.
- Employee feedback is gathered through a mix of channels, led by **comprehensive engagement surveys (76%)** and **short pulse surveys (53%)**, with **face-to-face feedback (46%)** and **anonymous comments (40%)** also playing a meaningful role.
- While feedback collection is widespread, follow-through is less consistent: **47% say actions are only sometimes communicated**, and **31% report inconsistent or delayed follow-up**, suggesting a gap in closing the feedback loop.

- Communication culture trends toward openness but lacks full participation, with **37% describing their culture as transparent and open**, while **30% characterize it as cautious and selective** and **21% say communication remains siloed**.
- Psychological safety is mixed, as **39% of employees are only somewhat comfortable sharing feedback upward**, and just **17% report being very or extremely comfortable**, pointing to barriers in upward communication.
- Cross-functional collaboration occurs regularly but not consistently, with **36% reporting frequent collaboration** and **41% saying it happens occasionally**, indicating coordination is common but not yet embedded.
- Leadership communication earns moderate confidence, with **65% rating leaders as very or somewhat transparent**, though **14% describe leadership communication as inconsistent or unclear**.
- Trust in leadership messaging is generally strong, as **58% mostly trust information from leadership**, yet fewer than **9% trust it completely**, leaving room to strengthen credibility and clarity.
- DEI communications show mixed impact on behavior, with **36% of respondents saying DEI messages sometimes lead to visible change**, while only **11% see consistent behavioral change** and **35% report rarely, never, or are unsure**, signaling a gap between intent and outcomes.
- Similarly, internal communication campaigns most often drive **inconsistent behavior change**, as **58% say they sometimes see changes after campaigns**, while just **25% report seeing change often or always**, reinforcing the challenge of translating awareness into sustained action.

## Goals & Priorities

- Employee engagement (**42%**) and leadership communication (**40%**) emerge as the top strategic goals for internal communications in 2026, followed closely by **change management (30%)** and **driving culture alignment (29%)**, signaling a strong focus on influence, alignment, and leadership visibility.
- Day-to-day priorities closely mirror these goals, with **41% prioritizing improvements in employee engagement** and **36% focused on strengthening leadership visibility and trust**. Reducing information overload (**27%**) and improving alignment between leaders and employees (**26%**) also rank high, reflecting persistent challenges around clarity and message effectiveness.

## Challenges

- Interdepartmental communication remains the most persistent challenge, cited by **53% of respondents**, followed closely by **low employee responsiveness (46%)**, highlighting ongoing issues with coordination and message cut-through. Strategy & leadership.
- Measurement continues to be a major pain point, with **40% struggling to track and measure communications**, and nearly **50% agreeing it is difficult to demonstrate the impact of internal communications**, reinforcing gaps in data, tools, and attribution.
- Feedback-related challenges persist, as **30% report limited or inconsistent employee feedback**, making it harder to assess effectiveness and close the loop on communications.
- Structural and organizational barriers also play a role, with **32% citing difficulty securing budget and leadership buy-in** and **29% struggling to engage remote or hybrid employees**, underscoring the operational complexity of modern internal communications.

## Leadership & Strategy

- Most organizations report having an internal communications strategy in place (**70%**), yet execution remains a challenge, as **54% say they lack sufficient resources** to fully deliver against that strategy—revealing a gap between intent and capability.
- When measuring success, communicators prioritize **employee feedback (77%)**, **open and click-through rates (65%)**, and **employee engagement scores (61%)**, indicating a blend of behavioral, sentiment, and channel-level metrics—though fewer rely on outcome-based measures tied directly to business impact.
- Success is most often defined through people-centered outcomes, including **improved employee engagement (64%)**, **greater alignment with company goals (49%)**, and **higher participation in company initiatives (51%)**, reinforcing the role of internal communications as a driver of connection and alignment rather than just information flow.
- Despite heavy emphasis on strategy, execution time skews tactical: **78% say creating content and templates takes up most of their time**, compared to **36% focused on developing strategy** and **41% on collecting and analyzing data**, underscoring persistent capacity constraints.
- Leadership support is generally strong in principle, with **82% agreeing that leadership recognizes the value of internal communications**, yet translating that recognition into sustained investment and influence remains uneven.
- When demonstrating value to leadership, the most compelling proof points are **improved company culture (58%)**, **higher employee engagement (57%)**, and **increased productivity (45%)**, suggesting leaders respond most to outcomes tied to culture and performance.

- Finally, internal communications teams report moderate influence across key organizational outcomes, with strongest impact on **driving company culture, reaching a dispersed workforce, and enabling people managers**, while influence over **reducing attrition** remains more limited—highlighting both the potential and boundaries of the function’s strategic reach.

## Work Structure

- Frontline and deskless employees represent a significant portion of the workforce, with **55% of organizations reporting 100 or more frontline employees**, reinforcing the scale and importance of reaching employees without fixed workspaces.
- Communication with frontline teams is frequent and operationally critical, as **51% of respondents need to communicate with deskless employees 1–2 times per week**, and an additional **16% do so daily or multiple times per day**, highlighting the demand for timely, accessible channels.
- Frontline engagement is widely recognized as a priority, with **72% of respondents rating it as important or very important**, signaling strong organizational intent, even as the size and communication frequency of these audiences increase complexity.
- Taken together, these findings emphasize that effective internal communications must be **frontline-ready by design**, capable of supporting large, dispersed audiences with frequent, high-impact messaging that drives engagement and alignment.

## The Cost of Inaction

Internal email remains the backbone of employee communication at scale, yet it often operates without the infrastructure needed to support it. As a result, internal communications teams spend much of their time on manual email creation, correction, and reporting, absorbing inefficiencies that grow as organizations scale.

Based on GSIC data, a single internal communicator spends an estimated **240 hours per year** creating and sending emails, **costing \$10,000+ annually in execution time alone**. Errors further add to this burden, with **over 90% of communicators** correcting at least one internal email in the past year, creating rework that delivers no new value.

For a typical 2–5 person IC team, this amounts to **\$20,000–\$50,000+ per year** in avoidable labor costs, quietly paid through manual workflows and lost strategic capacity. The data is clear: avoiding investment in internal email infrastructure locks inefficiency into the payroll.

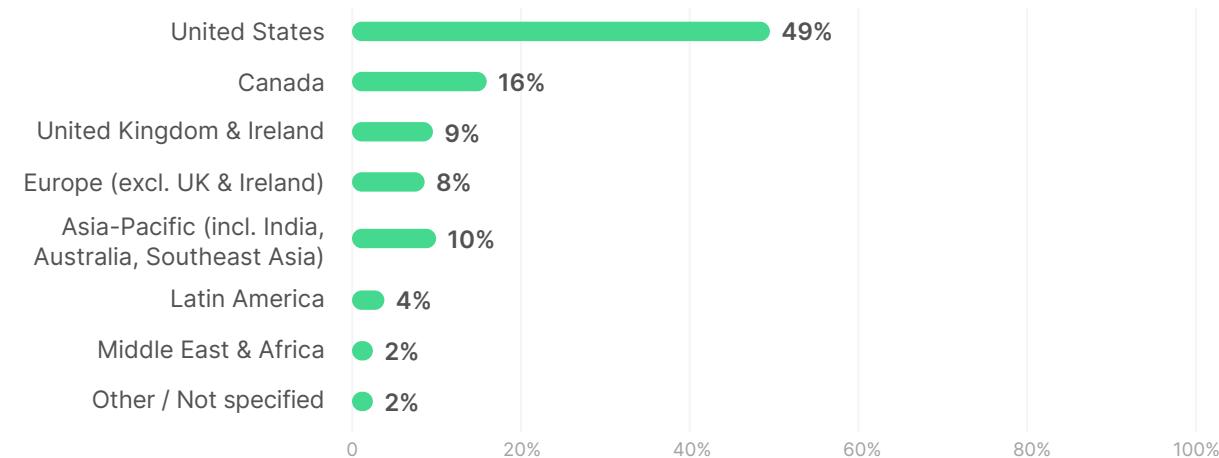
**The cost of inaction is cumulative, hidden, and already being paid.**

# 3. Survey Respondent Profile

The 2026 data provides a detailed view of respondents' organizational context, including company size, internal communications team structure, industries represented, and the roles internal communicators play within their organizations.

Together, these insights help ground the findings that follow and ensure the report reflects the realities internal communicators are navigating today.

## 3.1 Geography



The 2026 Global State of Internal Communications survey received responses from internal communicators across multiple regions worldwide, reinforcing the global relevance of internal communications as a discipline.

## Respondents represent organizations based in:

- North America
- Europe (including the UK and Ireland)
- Asia-Pacific
- Other global regions

## Several geographic patterns stand out this year:

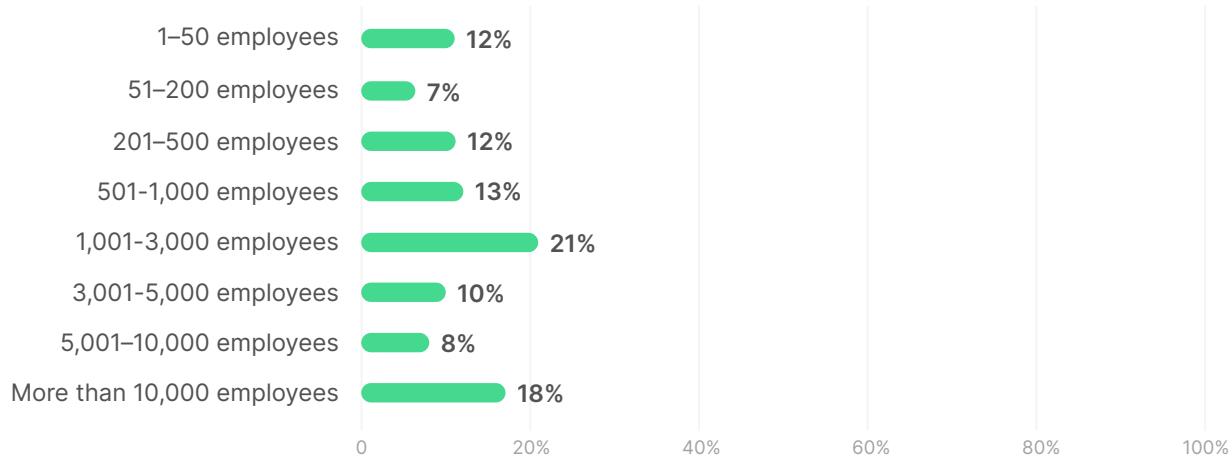
- **North America continues to dominate participation**, accounting for nearly two-thirds of all respondents, reinforcing the region's maturity and investment in internal communications functions.
- **International representation has increased**, particularly across **Europe and Asia-Pacific**, reflecting the growing global footprint of internal communications teams - especially in multinational and distributed organizations.
- Respondents from **Asia-Pacific and emerging markets** bring additional perspective on scale, change velocity, and frontline communication challenges, which strengthens the global relevance of GSIC 2026.

### Pro tip:

While many internal communication challenges are universal, geography influences workforce structure, regulatory environments, and communication expectations, making global representation critical to understanding the true state of the function.

## 3.2 Company Size

Organizations of all sizes participated in the 2026 survey, with responses spanning from small businesses to large enterprises.

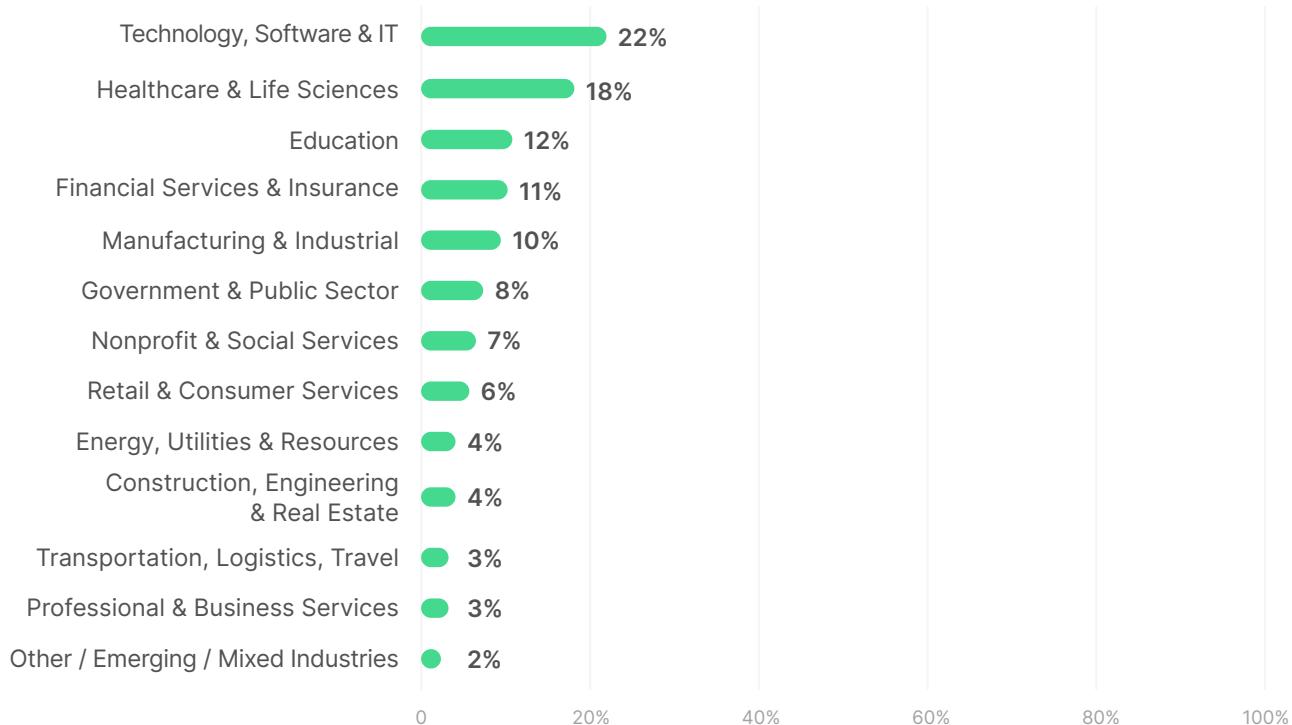


Based on the 2026 data:

- Respondents represent companies ranging from **1-50 employees to organizations with more than 10,000 employees**
- The strongest representation continues to come from **mid-sized and large understandings**, particularly organizations with **1,001+ employees**
- Smaller organizations (1-200 employees) remain well represented, offering insight into how lean teams approach internal communications with limited resources

### 3.3 Industry

Respondents in 2026 represent a **broad cross-section of industries**, reflecting the widespread need for effective internal communication across sectors.



#### Industries represented include:

- Technology, telecommunications, and internet-based organizations
- Healthcare and pharmaceuticals
- Education
- Manufacturing
- Finance and financial services
- Government and public sector
- Nonprofit organizations
- Retail, transportation, utilities, and energy

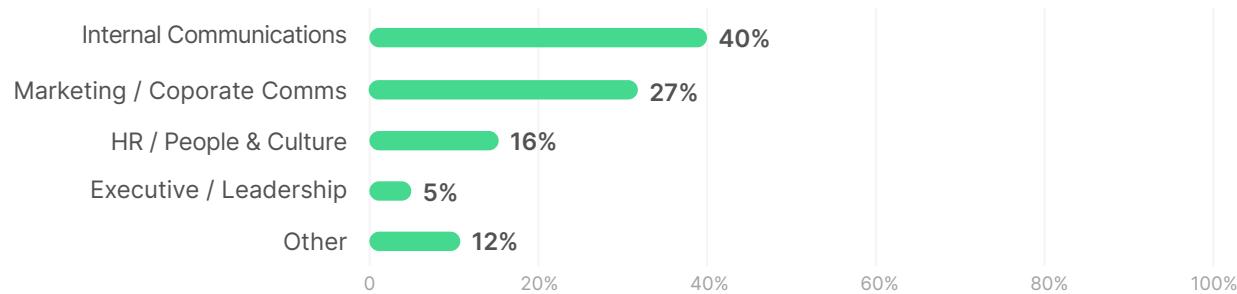
Notably, industries with **dispersed and frontline-heavy workforces**, such as healthcare, manufacturing, education, and government, continue to show strong representation. This aligns with the growing importance of internal communications in environments where employees may not be desk-based or consistently connected to traditional digital channels.

#### Pro tip:

These industries often face higher communication risk, making clarity, consistency, and reach critical to operational success.

## 3.4 Respondent Departments

Survey respondents in 2026 come from a wide range of departments, underscoring how internal communications responsibilities are distributed across organizations.



**The largest share of respondents work within:**

- Internal Communications
- HR / People & Culture
- Marketing or Corporate Communications

**A smaller but meaningful portion of respondents come from:**

- Executive or leadership teams
- Other hybrid or cross-functional roles

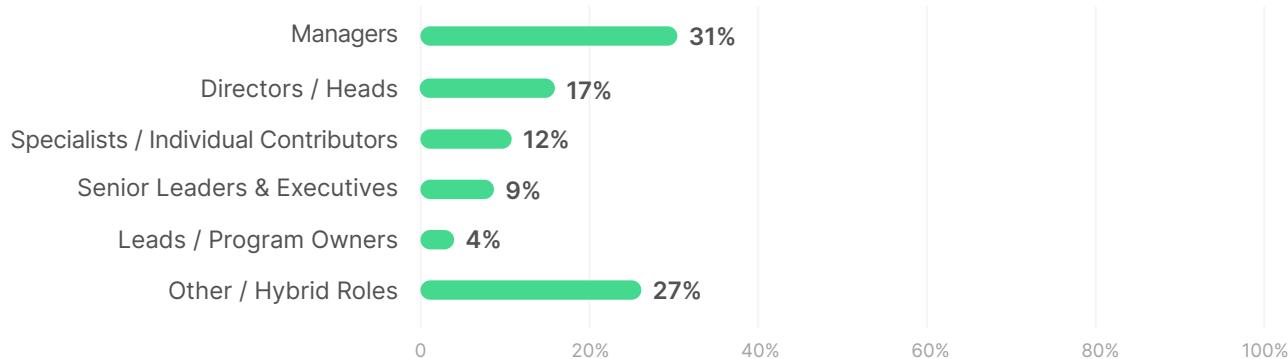
This distribution reflects a continued trend: **internal communications is rarely siloed**. Instead, it sits at the intersection of people, culture, leadership, and brand, often without a single clear owner.

### Key insights:

The shared ownership of internal communications increases its strategic importance—but can also complicate alignment, resourcing, and accountability.

## 3.5 Respondent Job Titles

Job titles among GSIC 2026 respondents reflect a wide range of seniority levels and responsibilities, underscoring how internal communications spans both leadership and execution roles.



The 2026 data highlights several important patterns:

- **Managers and directors make up nearly half of respondents**, indicating that GSIC insights are strongly informed by those responsible for both strategy and day-to-day
- A sizable **“Other / Hybrid” category** reflects the continued evolution of internal communications roles, particularly across employee experience, people operations, and change management.
- **Executive participation**, while smaller, ensures leadership perspectives are represented in how internal communications impact organizational outcomes.

### Key insights:

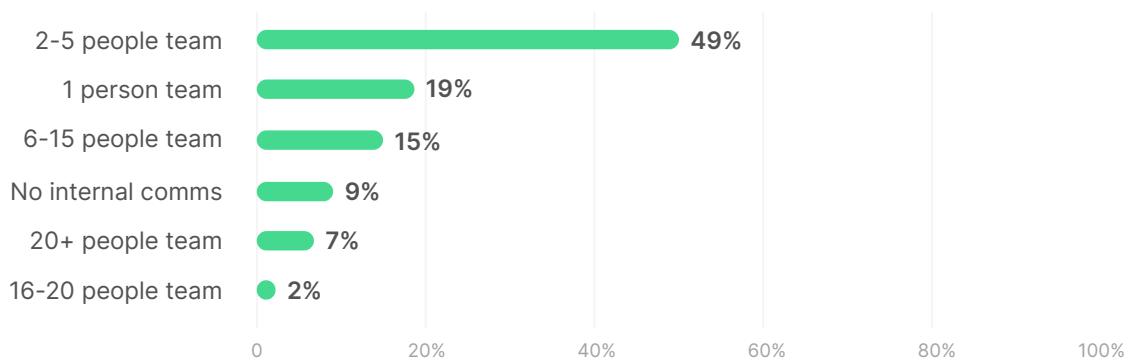
Internal communications is no longer confined to a single job path. The diversity of titles reflects how the function is embedded across leadership, people strategy, and organizational change.

## 3.6 Size of Internal Communications Team

Understanding the size of internal communications teams provides critical context for the challenges and expectations explored throughout this report. Team size directly impacts capacity, execution quality, and the ability to move from reactive communication to strategic impact.

Responses in GSIC 2026 show that **internal communications teams remain relatively small**, even as their responsibilities continue to expand across culture, engagement, leadership communications, and change management.

**Q: What is the size of your internal communications team ?**



Nearly **two-thirds of respondents (67%)** work in organizations with **five or fewer people** responsible for internal communications, and almost **one in five** operate as a **single-person function**. At the same time, nearly **10% of organizations report having no dedicated internal communications team at all**.

Even among larger organizations, relatively few respondents report teams of 16 or more people—highlighting a persistent gap between the **size and complexity of the workforce** and the **resources allocated to internal communications**.

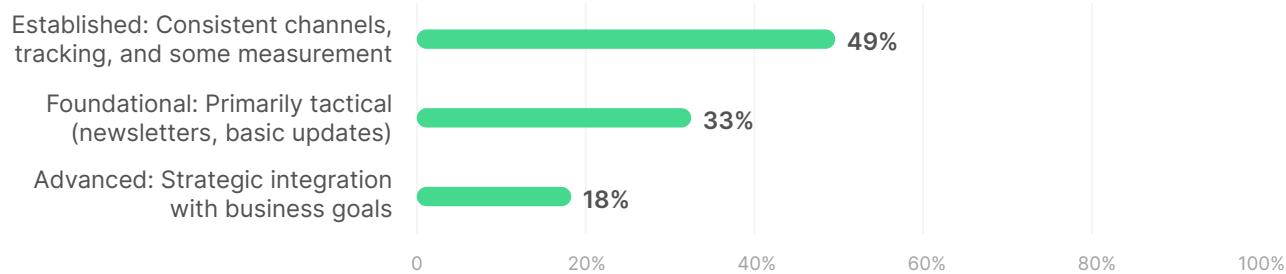
### Key insights:

As internal communications teams take on responsibility for employee experience, culture, leadership alignment, and change management, sustained under-resourcing increases the risk of burnout, inconsistent messaging, and reduced ability to measure and improve impact.

## 3.7 Internal Communications Maturity

To better understand the context in which internal communicators are operating, GSIC 2026 asked respondents to assess the overall maturity of internal communications within their organization.

**Q: How would you describe your organization's internal communication maturity?**



**In 2026:**

- 49% of respondents describe their organization's internal communications as **Established** (consistent channels, tracking, and some measurement in place)
- 33% report a **Foundational** level of maturity (primarily tactical communications such as newsletters and basic updates)
- 18% consider their internal communications function **Advanced** (strategically integrated with business goals)

Nearly half of organizations have reached an **Established** level of internal communications maturity, indicating that many teams have moved beyond ad hoc messaging toward more consistent, repeatable communication practices.

However, only **fewer than one in five organizations** report operating at an **Advanced** level—where internal communications is fully aligned with business strategy, leadership priorities, and organizational outcomes.

At the same time, one-third of respondents remain at a **Foundational** stage, focused largely on execution rather than strategic impact.

## Key changes to note (2025 → 2026)

Internal communications is operating at greater scale, but with largely unchanged team capacity.

GSIC 2026 shows broader global representation and continued dominance of mid-sized and large organizations, while internal communications teams remain small and under-resourced. Despite nearly half of organizations reaching an “Established” maturity level, only a minority operate at an advanced, strategy-integrated stage, highlighting a widening gap between organizational complexity and internal communications capacity.

# 4. Industry Trends & Insights

Each year, the Global State of Internal Communications survey highlights the evolving priorities shaping the work of internal communicators. In 2026, the data points to a function navigating **simultaneous expansion and constraint**, with growing expectations around strategy, technology, and culture, but uneven maturity and resourcing to support that shift.

The topics internal communicators are prioritizing reveal where organizations are investing attention, where pressure is mounting, and where gaps between ambition and execution are beginning to surface.

## 4.1 Topics of Interest

In 2026, internal communicators are most focused on areas that sit at the intersection of **technology, employee experience, and organizational change**.

## Q: Which topics are you paying the most attention to for 2026?



## AI Moves to the Center of the Agenda

**Artificial intelligence in the workplace** is the most frequently cited topic of interest, selected by **57% of respondents**. This reflects a growing recognition that AI will fundamentally reshape how internal communications teams create content, personalize messages, analyze engagement, and operate at scale, particularly as teams remain lean.

However, the prominence of AI also signals a shift in why communicators are paying attention. Interest is no longer driven by experimentation alone, but by a need to understand how AI can support clarity, trust, and effectiveness without compromising authenticity or employee confidence.

## Employee Experience and Change Take Priority

Nearly half of respondents (48%) cite **employee experience** as a top area of interest, reinforcing internal communications' expanding role in shaping how employees feel, connect, and engage at work.

At the same time, **change management** ranks third overall (43%), reflecting the sustained pace of organizational change, from restructuring and digital transformation to cultural and operational shifts. Together, these priorities signal that internal communicators are increasingly responsible not just for informing employees, but for helping them navigate disruption.

### Key signals:

Internal communications is being positioned as a stabilizing force during change, but many teams are still building the capability to deliver on that expectation.

## Measurement, Analytics, and the Push to Prove Value

More than 40% of respondents identify **internal communications measurement and analytics** as a key topic of interest, while **nearly one in four (24%)** explicitly cite **proving the ROI of internal communications**.

This dual focus highlights a growing pressure to move beyond activity-based reporting toward outcome-driven measurement. Communicators are increasingly expected to demonstrate how their work influences engagement, behavior, alignment, and business performance—often without the tools, data, or organizational buy-in required to do so consistently.

## Automation and Efficiency Reflect Capacity Constraints

**Automation in internal communications** ranks among the top topics of interest (31%), reinforcing a recurring theme throughout GSIC 2026: teams are looking for ways to do more with less.

Rather than signaling a desire to replace human communication, interest in automation reflects a need to:

- Reduce manual work
- Streamline workflows
- Free up time for strategy and analysis

This aligns closely with the maturity data, where only a minority of organizations report advanced, strategically integrated internal communications functions.

## Engagement, Feedback, and the Frontline Gap

Topics related to **employee recognition (29%)**, **collecting and acting on employee feedback (27%)**, and **engaging deskless or frontline employees (24%)** continue to rank highly, underscoring persistent challenges around inclusion, visibility, and voice.

Despite years of focus on engagement, these findings suggest many organizations are still struggling to translate intent into consistent, meaningful action, particularly for frontline and distributed workforces.

## Lower but Persistent Focus Areas

Several topics rank lower overall but remain notable:

- **Workplace technology adoption (17%)**
- **Employee mental health and wellness (16%)**
- **DEI (13%)**
- **Hybrid and remote work structures (≈11%)**

While these areas may no longer dominate headlines, their continued presence indicates they have become **baseline expectations** rather than emerging trends—shifting from “new initiatives” to ongoing operational realities.

## What This Tells Us About 2026

Taken together, these trends point to a profession at a crossroads:

- Internal communicators are expected to lead on **AI, culture, change, and experience**
- Measurement and ROI pressure is increasing, not decreasing
- Teams are seeking efficiency through automation amid limited resourcing
- Engagement challenges persist, particularly for frontline and distributed employees

This tension between **strategic ambition and operational reality** sets the stage for many of the findings that follow, particularly around culture gaps, trust, and the cost of inaction.

## Key changes to note (2025 → 2026)

Internal communications priorities are shifting from experience-led initiatives to capability and scale.

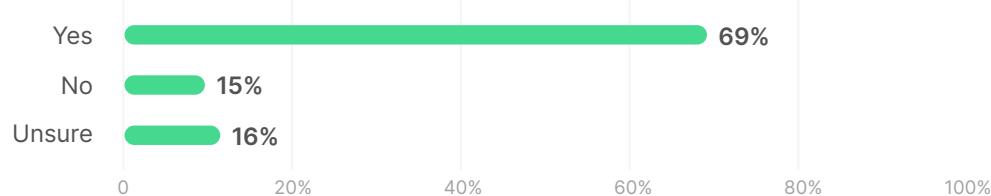
This marks the first time in seven years that employee experience has not been ranked as the #1 priority, signaling a shift toward efficiency, execution, and measurable impact as internal communications becomes more business-critical.

## 4.2 Market Factors Impacting Organizations

External market conditions continue to shape the environment in which internal communicators operate. In 2026, the data makes one thing clear: **economic and political uncertainty is no longer peripheral—it is a defining backdrop for internal communications strategy.**

**Q: Has your organization experienced the impact of external market conditions in the past 12 months?**

(E.g. inflation, possible recession, etc.)



### Market Impact Is Widespread

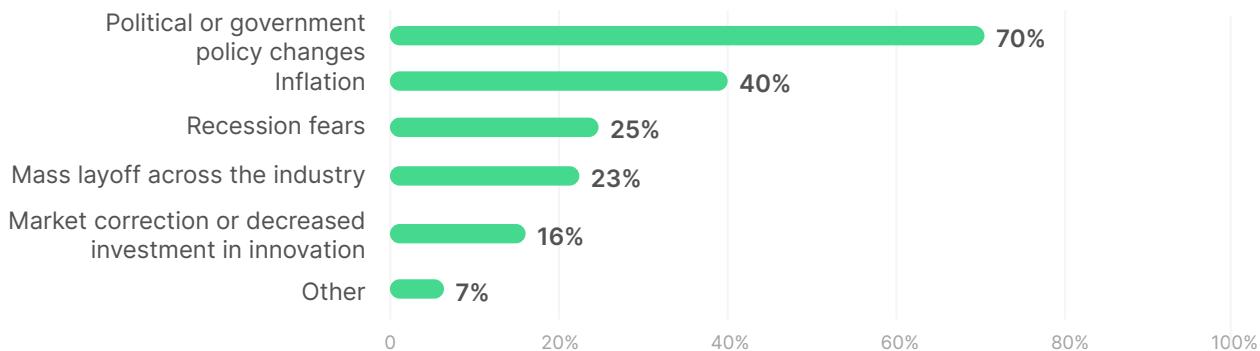
**When asked whether their organization has experienced the impact of external market conditions in the past 12 months:**

- 69% of respondents said yes
- 15% said no
- 16% said they were unsure

This means nearly **7/10 organizations** are actively navigating external pressure, while a notable portion of employees remain uncertain about how those conditions are affecting their organization, highlighting potential gaps in visibility, transparency, or communication.

## Political and Economic Forces Are Driving Uncertainty

Q: Which external market conditions are having the greatest impact on your organization?



Among respondents who reported being affected by external market conditions, several forces stand out as having the greatest impact:

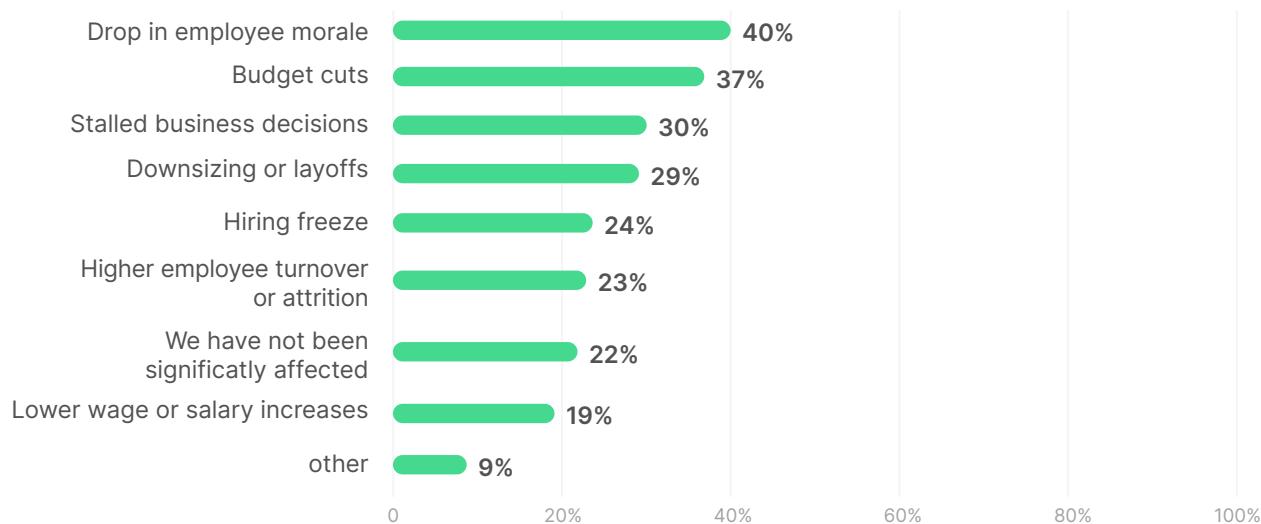
- Political or government policy changes – 70%
- Inflation – 40%
- Recession fears – 25%
- Mass layoffs across the industry – 23%
- Market correction or decreased investment in innovation – 16%

The prominence of **political and policy-related change** signals that many organizations are operating in environments where regulatory shifts, public-sector decisions, and geopolitical dynamics directly influence business strategy, workforce planning, and leadership messaging.

At the same time, continued concern around **inflation**, **recession**, and **layoffs** reinforces the persistence of economic pressure, shaping budgets, hiring decisions, and employee confidence.

# How Market Pressure Is Showing Up Inside Organizations

Q: How has your organization been affected by these market conditions?



External uncertainty is translating into very real internal consequences. When asked how their organization has been affected by these conditions, respondents most commonly cite:

- Drop in employee morale – 40%
- Budget cuts or reduced spending on technology purchases – 37%
- Stalled business decisions or unclear direction – 31%
- Downsizing or layoffs – 29%
- Hiring freezes – 23%
- Higher employee turnover or attrition – 23%
- Lower wage or salary increases – 19%

Only 22% report that their organization has not been significantly affected, reinforcing that disruption, rather than stability, is the prevailing experience for most organizations.

Notably, the most common impact is **not financial, it's cultural**. A decline in employee morale emerges as the top consequence, underscoring how prolonged uncertainty, cost control, and delayed decision-making are affecting how employees feel at work.

## Implications for Internal Communications

These market conditions place additional—and often conflicting—demands on internal communicators, who are increasingly expected to:

- Provide clarity amid uncertainty
- Maintain trust during periods of change
- Communicate decisions related to cost control, restructuring, or policy shifts
- Support leaders in navigating sensitive and high-stakes topics

At the same time, many teams are facing **reduced budgets, stalled investments, and limited tooling**, constraining their ability to meet rising expectations.

This creates a compounding risk: **organizations need clearer, more trusted communication precisely when internal communications teams have fewer resources to deliver it.**

**Why this matters:** In volatile market conditions, internal communications is not just a support function, it becomes a **stabilizing force** that shapes how employees interpret uncertainty, leadership decisions, and change. When communication is unclear, delayed, or inconsistent, the risk of disengagement, misinformation, resistance, and attrition increases sharply.

### Key changes to note (2025 → 2026)

**External uncertainty has shifted from primarily economic pressure to policy-driven disruption.**

While inflation and recession concerns remain influential in 2026, political and government policy changes now represent the most significant external factor affecting organizations—raising the stakes for timely, transparent, and trusted communication.

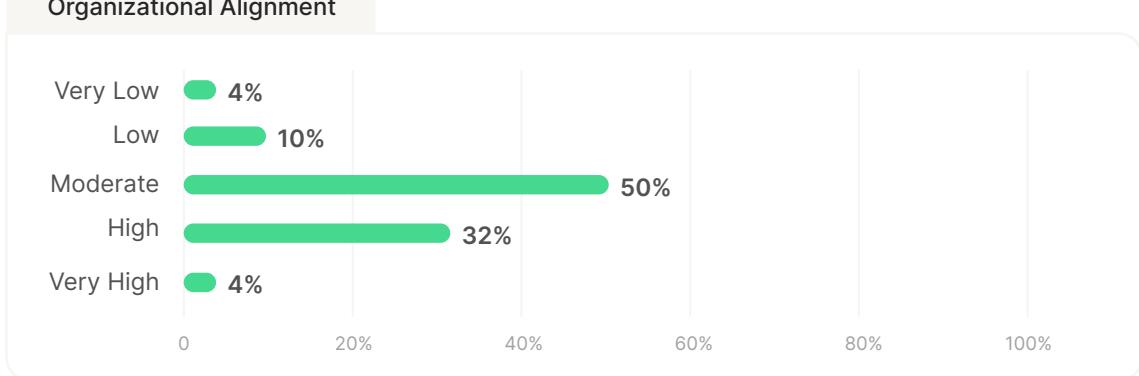
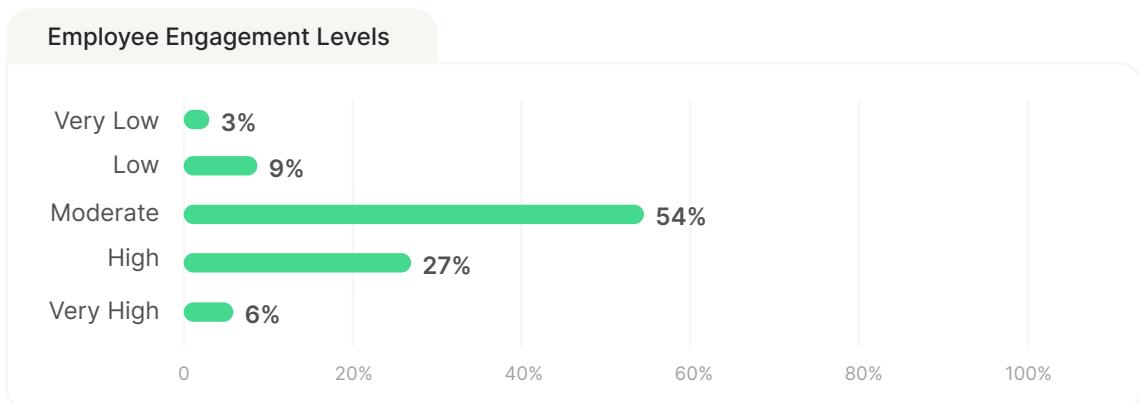
# 5. Workpalce Culture & Engagement

Workplace culture and employee engagement remain central to the role of internal communications, but the data shows growing strain. In 2026, many organizations are operating in environments where engagement is stable but fragile, alignment is uneven, and communication inefficiencies continue to quietly erode productivity, morale, and trust.

This section explores how employees are experiencing engagement and alignment today, how communication breakdowns are affecting day-to-day work, and what these patterns reveal about the evolving culture gap facing organizations.

## Engagement and Alignment Remain “Moderate,” Not Strong

**Q: How would you rate the following in your organization?**



When asked to rate engagement and alignment within their organizations:

- 54% of respondents rated employee engagement as *moderate*
- 27% rated engagement as *high*
- Only 6% rated engagement as very *high*

A similar pattern appears for organizational alignment:

- 50% rated alignment as *moderate*
- 32% rated alignment as *high*
- Fewer than 4% rated alignment as very *high*

While these scores suggest stability, they also reveal a ceiling. Most organizations are not experiencing disengagement crises, but neither are they achieving strong, consistent alignment between leadership intent and employee understanding.

**Why this matters:** Moderate engagement and alignment often mask underlying friction. Employees may be “coping” rather than fully connected—especially during periods of change, uncertainty, or operational strain.

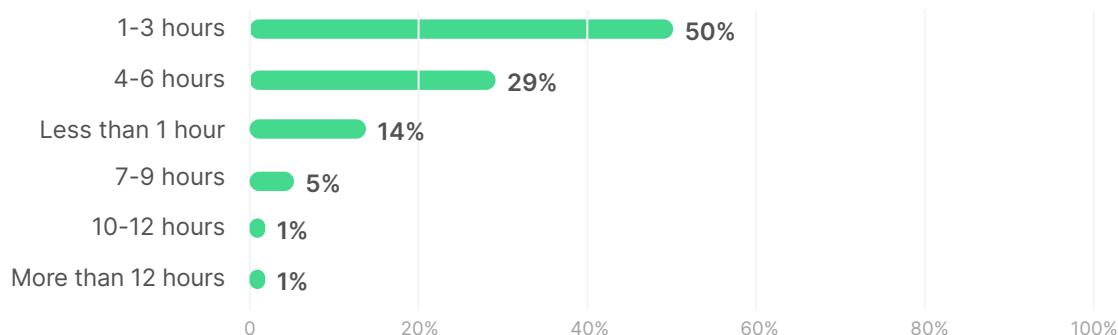
## Key changes to note (2025 → 2026)

### Engagement is steady, but stagnating.

Despite increased focus on employee experience, engagement and alignment scores remain clustered in the “moderate” range, suggesting that effort alone is no longer enough to move the needle without clearer strategy, better targeting, and stronger measurement.

## 5.1 The Hidden Cost of Poor Communication

Q: On average, how many hours per week do you believe employees at your organization lose due to poor or unclear communications?



Communication breakdowns continue to impose a measurable cost on organizations.

**When asked how much time employees lose each week due to poor or unclear communication:**

- 50% said 1–3 hours per week
- 29% said 4–6 hours per week
- Nearly 7% estimated 7+ hours per week

Even conservative estimates translate into significant productivity loss at scale, especially in large or distributed organizations.

**At the same time, errors remain common:**

- 44% of respondents reported needing to resend or correct an internal email 1–2 times in the past year
- 27% said 3–5 times
- Only 14% said they never had to correct an internal message

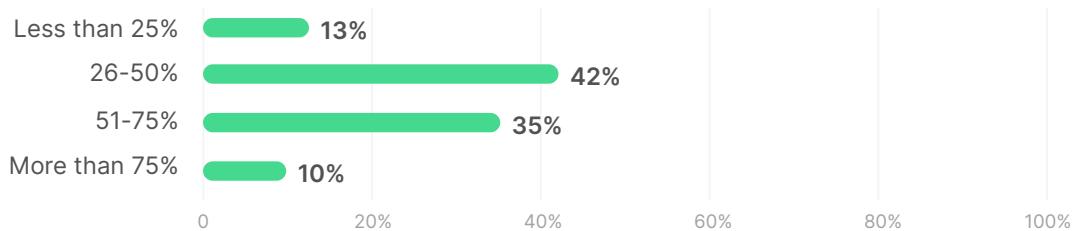
**Most corrections are resolved quickly, but not without disruption:**

- 48% said corrections take less than 15 minutes
- 28% said 15–30 minutes
- 24% said 30 minutes or more

**Why this matters:** Small, frequent communication errors compound over time, creating distraction, rework, and erosion of trust, especially when employees are already navigating change or uncertainty.

## 5.2 Engagement Does Not Equal Attention

**Q: What percentage of your employee do you believe consistently read or engage with internal emails?**



Even when messages are sent, they are not always received—or retained.

**When asked what percentage of employees consistently read or engage with internal emails:**

- 42% said 26–50%
- 35% said 51–75%
- Only 10% said more than 75%

**At the same time, message overload is widespread:**

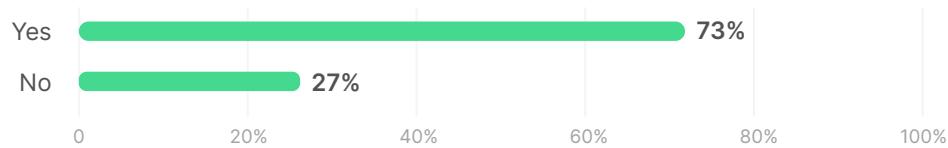
- 56% said employees *sometimes* miss key updates
- 24% said they *often* do
- 6% said *very often*

This suggests that engagement challenges are not just about motivation, they are also about **signal vs. noise**, targeting, and relevance.

**Why this matters:** When important updates are missed, organizations face increased risk: delayed action, misalignment, compliance gaps, and frustration among employees who feel overwhelmed rather than informed.

## 5.3 Recognition and Feedback: Strong Adoption, Uneven Impact

Q: Does your organization have a formal employee recognition system?



Recognition and feedback remain foundational to workplace culture—but execution varies.

- 73% of organizations report having a **formal employee recognition system**
- 95% actively collect **employee feedback**

Among organizations collecting feedback, structured methods dominate:

- Comprehensive engagement surveys
- Pulse surveys
- Ongoing listening mechanisms

However, high adoption does not always translate to high impact.

**Why this matters:** Collecting feedback is no longer the differentiator—acting on it is. Without visible follow-through, even well-designed surveys can contribute to skepticism and disengagement.

### Key changes to note (2025 → 2026)

**Listening is widespread, but expectations are higher.**

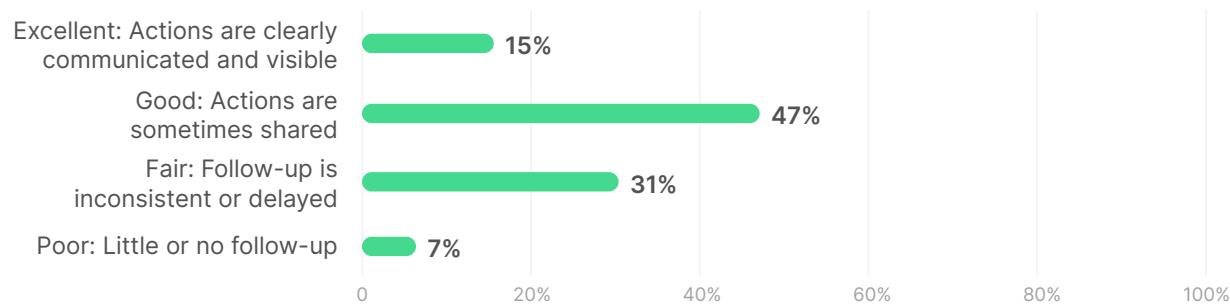
As feedback collection becomes the norm, employees increasingly expect transparency, responsiveness, and tangible action in return.

## 5.4 From Listening to Trust: Where Feedback Breaks Down

While feedback collection is now nearly universal, 2026 data shows that **the real challenge lies in what happens next**—how organizations respond, communicate, and embed feedback into everyday culture.

**Q: How well does your organization “close the loop” on employee feedback?**

(i.e, communicate actions taken)



### Closing the Loop Remains Inconsistent

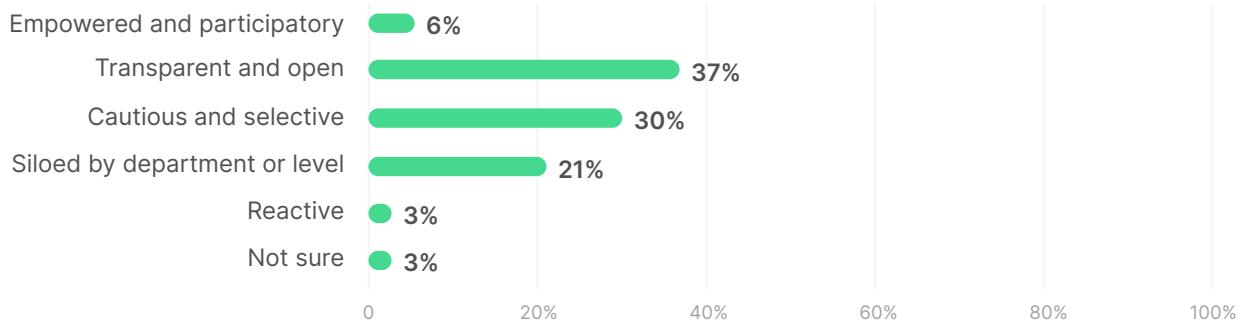
**When asked how well their organization “closes the loop” on employee feedback:**

- 15% say actions are clearly communicated and visible
- 47% say actions are sometimes shared
- 31% say follow-up is inconsistent or delayed
- 7% report little or no follow-up

This means **nearly 4/10 organizations struggle to consistently demonstrate that employee input leads to action**. In these environments, feedback risks becoming transactional rather than transformational.

## Communication Culture Is Open, But Not Yet Participatory

Q: How would you describe the communication culture in your organization?



Most organizations describe their communication culture as transparent, but far fewer describe it as empowering:

- 37% say communication is transparent and open
- 30% describe it as cautious and selective
- 21% experience communication as siloed by department or level
- Only 6% say communication is empowered and participatory

Transparency alone is no longer sufficient. Employees increasingly expect **two-way dialogue, shared ownership, and visible influence**, particularly during periods of change or uncertainty.

## Employees Will Speak, But Psychological Safety Is Fragile

Employees report moderate comfort sharing honest feedback upward:

- 39% feel comfortable
- 39% feel somewhat comfortable
- 17% feel uncomfortable to some degree

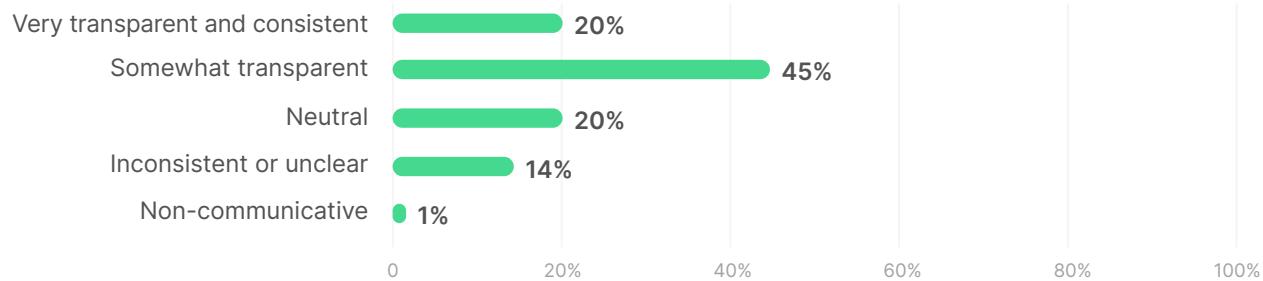
Similarly, when expressing differing opinions at work:

- 59% feel very or somewhat comfortable
- 29% feel neutral
- 13% feel uncomfortable

These results suggest a culture of **measured candor**—employees are willing to speak up, but many still pause to assess risk, relevance, and leadership receptiveness before doing so.

## Leadership Trust Exists, But Consistency Is the Test

Q: How would you rate leadership's communication style?



Leadership communication is viewed as credible, but not uniformly reliable:

- 65% rate leadership as very or somewhat transparent
- 15% say leadership communication is inconsistent or unclear

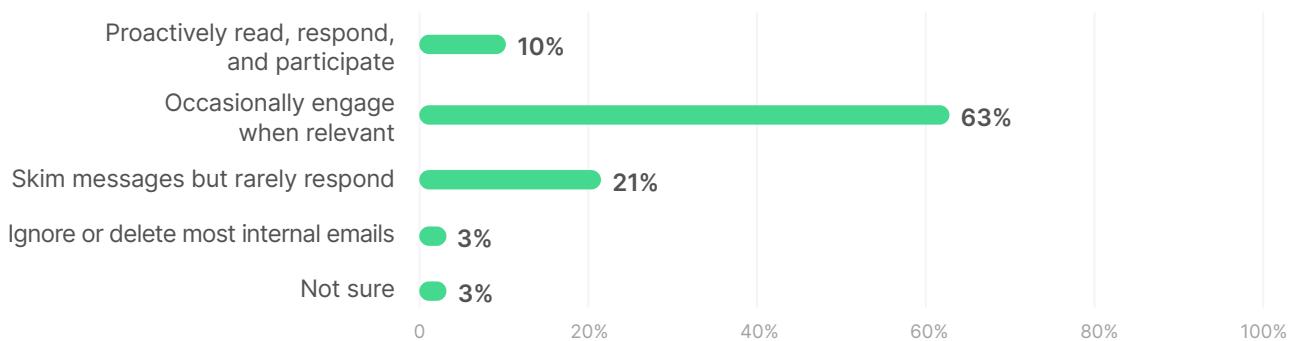
Trust in leadership information follows a similar pattern:

- 58% mostly trust leadership communications
- 9% trust them completely
- 33% trust them only somewhat, rarely, or not at all

This reinforces a recurring theme in the 2026 data: **trust is present, but conditional**, earned through clarity, repetition, and follow-through.

## Engagement Is Selective, Not Absent

Q: Which of the following best describes how employees engage with internal communications?



**Employee engagement with internal communications remains steady, but largely passive:**

- 63% engage occasionally when content feels relevant
- 21% skim messages but rarely respond
- Only 10% proactively read, respond, and participate

**Contribution levels mirror this pattern:**

- 59% contribute occasionally
- 20% contribute frequently
- 21% rarely or never contribute

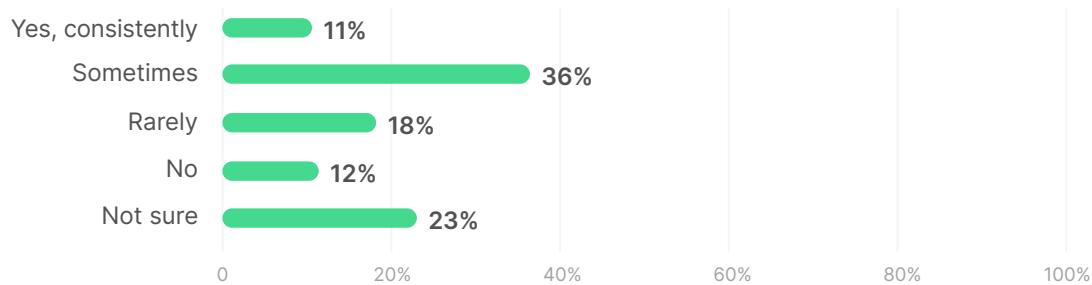
Employees are not disengaged, they are **discerning**. Relevance, timing, and trust determine participation.

## **5.5 From Listening to Behavior Change: Where Culture Efforts Stall**

Recognition, feedback, and DEI initiatives are now deeply embedded in many organizations—but translating intent into consistent behavior change remains a challenge.

**Q: In your experience, do DEI message or initiatives lead to visible behavioral change and among employees?**

(e.g., inclusion in meetings, equitable participation)



## DEI and Culture Messaging: Inconsistent Behavioral Impact

When asked whether DEI messages or initiatives lead to visible behavioral change among employees:

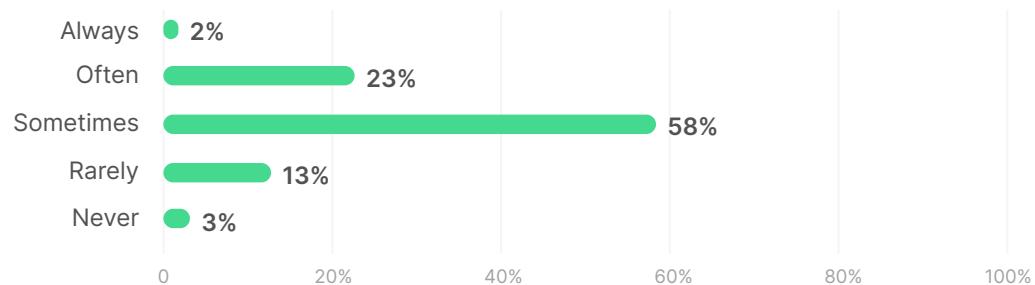
- 11% say yes, *consistently*
- 36% say *sometimes*
- 18% say *rarely*
- 12% say *no*
- 23% say they are *not sure*

While the majority see some movement, only a small fraction experience consistent, observable change. The large “sometimes” and “not sure” segments suggest that DEI and inclusion efforts often lack the reinforcement, measurement, or leadership modeling required to shift day-to-day behaviors at scale.

## Internal Campaigns Drive Awareness, Not Always Action

Q: After internal communication campaigns, how often do you see changes in employee behavior or action?

(e.g., town halls, strategy updates)



This pattern holds when looking at broader internal communication campaign:

- 2% say employee behavior *always* changes
- 23% say *often*
- 58% say *sometimes*
- 13% say *rarely*
- 3% say *never*

Most internal communications succeed in raising awareness, but struggle to reliably drive action. Behavior change appears episodic rather than sustained, reinforcing the idea that communication alone is insufficient without clear ownership, reinforcement, and follow-through.

## What Communicators Want to Change Most

Open-ended responses reveal strong alignment around the types of behaviors internal communicators are trying to influence. Across hundreds of responses, the most common themes include:

- **Greater engagement and participation** (reading, responding, contributing)
- **Stronger trust, transparency, and confidence in leadership**
- **Less siloed work and better cross-functional collaboration**
- **Clearer understanding of strategy, priorities, and “why”**
- **More proactive, two-way communication**
- **Reduced confusion, rework, and last-minute surprises**
- **Higher morale and stronger sense of belonging**

Notably, many respondents describe success not in terms of sentiment, but **observable actions**: fewer follow-up questions, increased participation, employees sharing stories unprompted, and teams aligning earlier instead of correcting later.

## The Pattern Is Clear

Organizations are:

- Listening more
- Communicating more
- Measuring more

But **behavior change remains fragile**, inconsistent, and heavily dependent on leadership reinforcement and operational clarity.

**Why this matters:** Culture does not change through messages alone. When employees repeatedly receive communications without seeing aligned decisions, visible leadership behavior, or tangible outcomes, credibility erodes, and engagement stalls.

# 6. Goals and Priorities: From Engagement to Execution

As internal communications teams look ahead to 2026, their goals reflect a clear shift from awareness-building toward impact, alignment, and behavior change. The data shows a profession under pressure to **drive engagement, support leaders, and navigate constant change, often simultaneously**.

## Strategic Goals for Internal Communications in 2026

Q: What are your top three focus areas for internal communications in 2025?



When asked to identify their **top three strategic goals**, internal communicators pointed to outcomes that sit squarely at the intersection of culture, leadership, and performance:

- **Employee engagement** leads the way (42%), reinforcing its role as the primary north star for IC teams.
- **Leadership communication** follows closely (40%), underscoring the growing expectation that leaders (not just comms teams) must be visible, credible communicators.
- **Change management** (30%) and **culture alignment** (29%) round out the top tier, reflecting ongoing organizational flux.
- Notably, **employee experience** (25%) remains important, but is no longer the dominant driver on its own.

Supporting goals such as **enabling manager communications** (22%), **productivity and performance** (20%), and **building organizational trust** (18%) suggest a broader evolution: internal communications is increasingly measured by its contribution to business resilience, not just message delivery.

## Operational IC Priorities for the Year Ahead

Looking at day-to-day priorities, the data reveals where teams plan to focus their limited time and resources:

- **Improving employee engagement** again ranks first (41%).
- **Strengthening leadership visibility and trust** (36%) reinforces the strategic findings.
- **Reducing information overload and communication fatigue** (28%) emerges as a critical operational concern, signaling that “more communication” is no longer the answer.
- **Improving alignment between leadership and employees** (26%) and **enhancing two-way communication** (25%) highlight a push toward dialogue, not broadcast.
- Tactical priorities such as **measuring ROI**, **modernizing platforms**, and **automation** appear lower, suggesting many teams still struggle to move beyond foundational execution.

## What This Tells Us

Taken together, goals and priorities paint a consistent picture:

- Internal communications is being asked to **do more strategically**, even as teams remain lean.
- The emphasis is shifting from **what is communicated** to **how leadership shows up, how employees experience change**, and **whether communication leads to action**.
- There is growing recognition that **clarity, trust, and relevance** matter more than volume.

**Why this matters:** When engagement, leadership credibility, and change management all rank as top priorities, internal communications becomes a critical lever for organizational stability.

### Key changes to note (2025 → 2026)

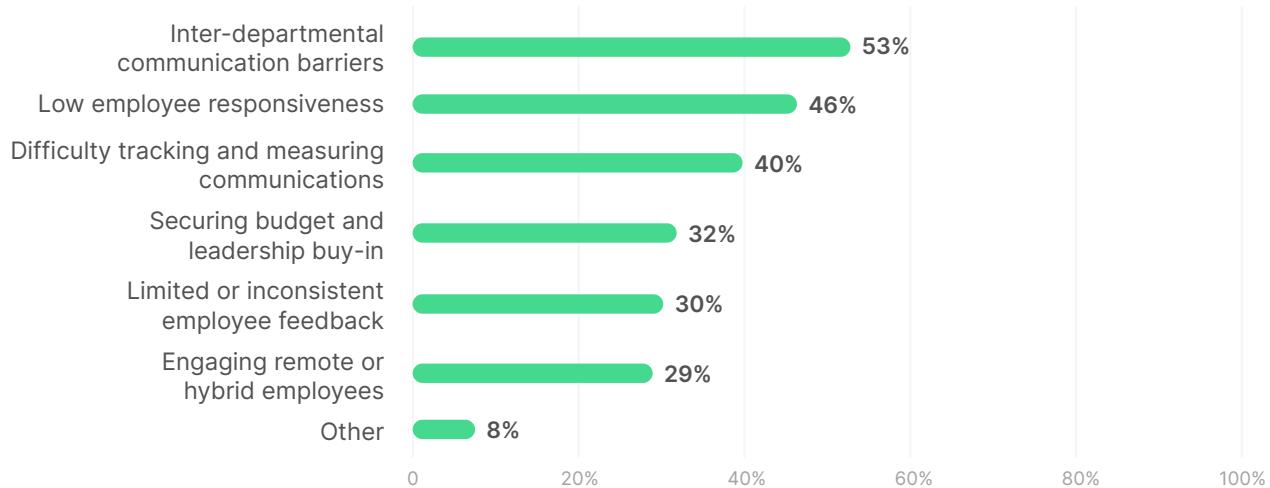
#### **Engagement remains the goal, but leadership is the lever.**

While employee engagement continues to top the list, 2026 marks a stronger emphasis on leadership communication, alignment, and trust. Internal communicators are increasingly positioned as enablers of leaders, responsible not just for crafting messages, but for shaping how leadership communicates in moments that matter most.

# 7. Internal Communications Challenges: Measurement, Alignment, and Engagement Gaps Persist

Despite growing strategic expectations, internal communications teams continue to face persistent structural and operational challenges in 2026. The data shows that while IC is increasingly seen as business priority, many teams are still constrained by fragmented systems, limited measurement capabilities, and inconsistent engagement

**Q: What internal communication challenges do you currently face?**



## The Most Common Challenges Facing IC Teams

When asked to identify their top internal communications challenges, respondents consistently pointed to breakdowns in coordination, engagement, and measurement:

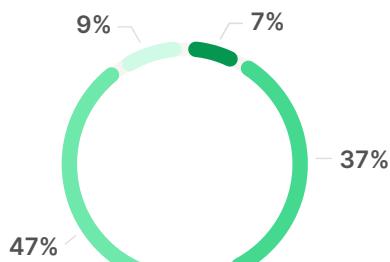
- Inter-departmental communication barriers – 53%
- Low employee responsiveness to communications – 46%
- Difficulty tracking and measuring communications impact – 40%
- Securing budget and leadership buy-in – 32%
- Limited or inconsistent employee feedback – 30%
- Engaging remote or hybrid employees – 29%

These results highlight a fundamental tension: internal communications is expected to drive alignment and clarity across the organization, yet teams are often operating without the visibility, authority, or tools needed to do so effectively.

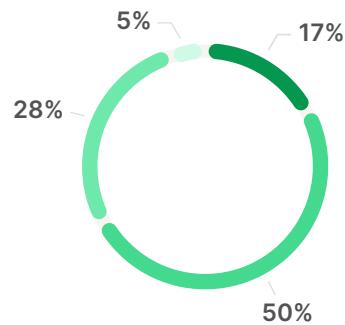
## Measurement Remains the Core Friction Point

Q: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Measuring internal communications is my biggest challenge right now.



It's difficult to demonstrate the impact of internal communications in my organization.



Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Challenges around measurement stand out not just in selection-based responses, but in how strongly respondents feel about them.

- **44% agree or strongly agree** that measuring internal communications is their biggest challenge right now
- **67% agree or strongly agree** that it is difficult to demonstrate the impact of internal communications in their organization

This signals a maturity gap. While IC leaders are increasingly asked to prove value, influence outcomes, and justify investment, many still lack the data infrastructure, benchmarks, or executive alignment required to do so confidently.

Without credible measurement, internal communications risks being perceived as tactical rather than strategic, regardless of the actual impact teams are delivering.

## **Engagement Is a Symptom of Structural Issues**

Low employee responsiveness and engagement challenges are not isolated problems—they are downstream effects of broader system gaps.

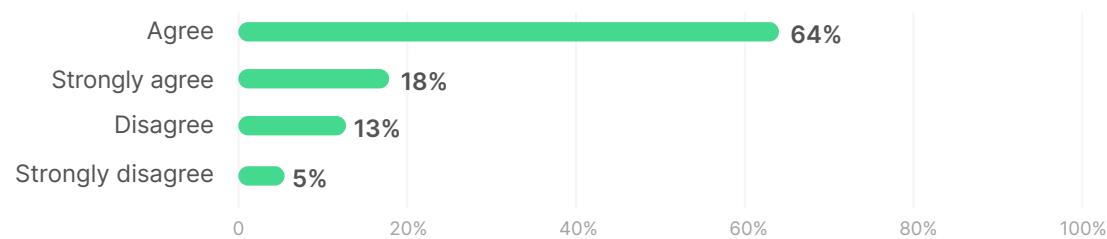
When messages compete across channels, lack personalization, or fail to connect clearly to leadership decisions and business priorities, employees disengage. In hybrid and distributed environments, this disengagement is amplified, making consistency and relevance even harder to achieve.

At the same time, limited feedback loops mean communicators often lack real-time insight into what is working, what is unclear, and where trust may be eroding.

## 8. Leadership & Strategy: Recognized, Valued, and Still Constrained

Internal communications has reached an important inflection point. In 2026, most IC teams are no longer fighting to justify their existence, but many are still working to secure the influence, authority, and resources needed to operate strategically.

**Q: To what extent do you agree with this statement: "Leadership recognizes the value of internal communications in my organization."**



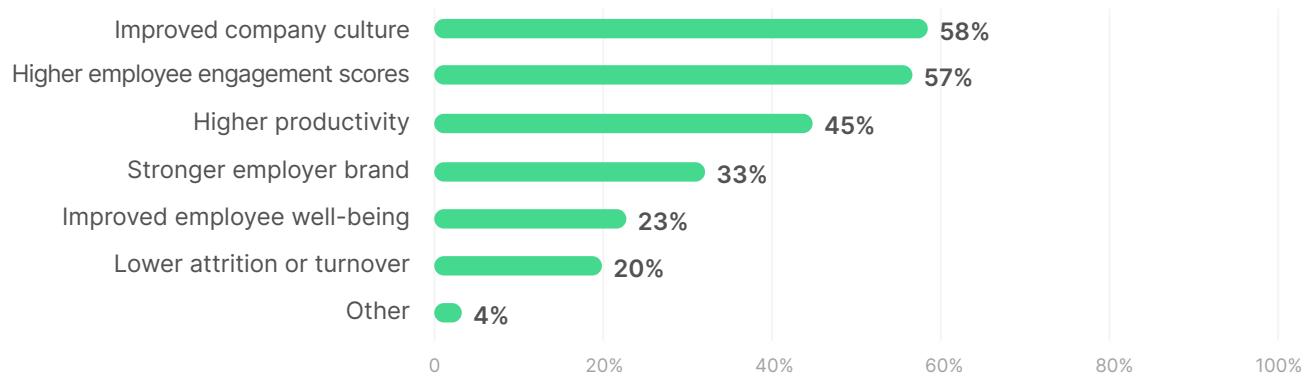
### Leadership Recognition Is Widespread

When asked whether leadership recognizes the value of internal communications, **more than eight in ten respondents (82%) agree or strongly agree**. This marks a meaningful shift from earlier years, signaling that internal communications is now broadly understood as a critical organizational function rather than a purely tactical support role.

However, recognition does not automatically translate into empowerment. While leaders may acknowledge the importance of internal communications, that acknowledgment does not always result in greater influence over decisions, clearer strategic mandates, or increased investment.

## What Leaders Respond to Most

Q: What resonates most with your leadership when demonstrating the value of internal communications?



When IC teams demonstrate their value to leadership, the strongest resonance comes from outcomes tied directly to culture, engagement, and performance:

- Improved company culture
- Higher employee engagement scores
- Increased productivity
- Stronger employer brand

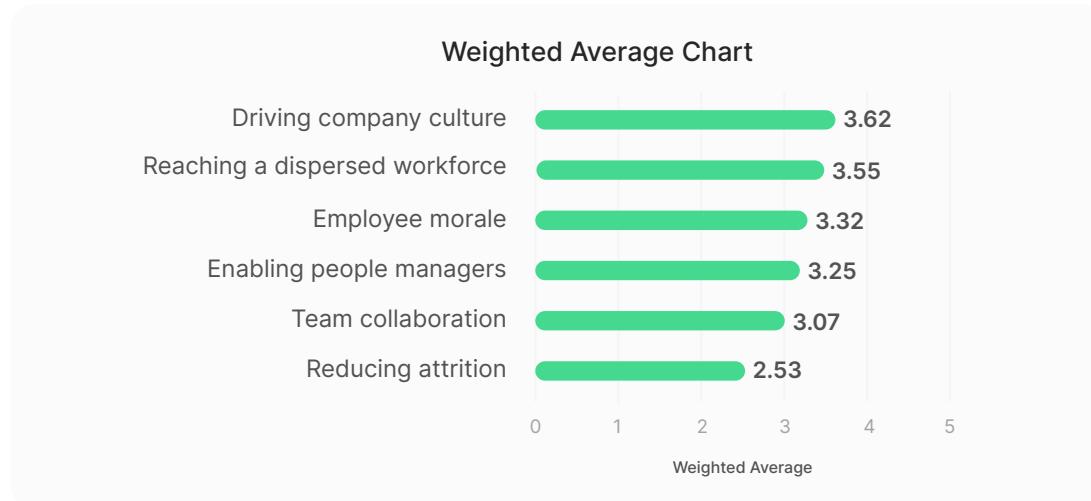
Notably, **attrition reduction** and **well-being rank lower**, suggesting that leaders increasingly see internal communications as a lever for shaping how work happens, not just for retaining employees or supporting morale initiatives in isolation.

This reflects a maturation in leadership expectations: internal communications is valued most when it helps align people, culture, and strategy at scale.

## Where IC Teams Have Real Influence

Q: How would you rate your team's current ability to influence the following?

(1 = No influence, 5 = Strong influence)



Internal communications teams report their strongest influence in areas closely tied to experience and connection:

- Driving company culture
- Reaching dispersed or distributed workforces
- Improving employee morale
- Enabling people managers

Influence is weakest when it comes to **reducing attrition**, reinforcing a persistent structural challenge. IC teams are often expected to support outcomes that depend on broader organizational factors (such as compensation, workload, leadership capability, and economic conditions) over which they have limited control.

## The Strategic Tension

Together, these findings reveal a defining tension for internal communications in 2026:

- Leadership **believes in the value** of internal communications
- Leaders **respond to culture and engagement outcomes**
- IC teams **influence how employees experience work**
- But **decision-making power and resourcing remain uneven**

Internal communications is increasingly treated as strategic in theory, but not always embedded strategically in practice.

### Key changes to note (2025 → 2026)

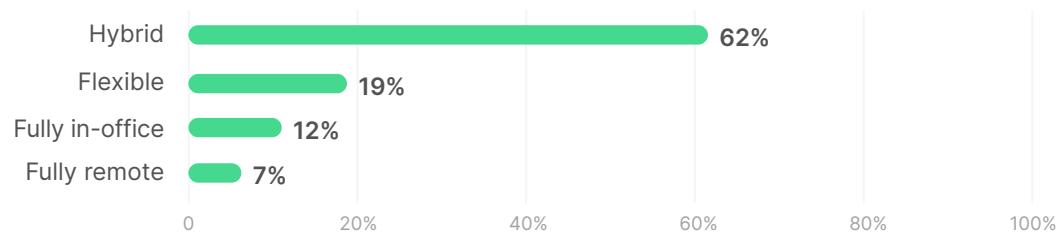
**The challenge has shifted from proving value to activating influence.**

In 2026, leadership belief is not the primary barrier for internal communications. Instead, the defining challenge is translating recognition into decision-level influence, manager enablement, and sustained investment—without which strategic expectations will continue to outpace execution capacity.

# 9. Work Structure: Hybrid Is the Norm, Frontline Complexity Is Rising

The way work gets done continues to evolve, and internal communicators are operating in increasingly complex environments shaped by hybrid models, dispersed teams, and large frontline populations. In 2026, work structure is no longer a transitional challenge; it is a permanent operating reality that directly influences communication strategy, channel choice, and message design.

**Q: What type of work environment best describes your organization?**



## Hybrid Dominates the Modern Workplace

A clear majority of organizations now operate in hybrid environments:

- 62% of respondents work in a **hybrid model with a predetermined split**
- 19% offer **flexible work arrangements**, allowing employees to choose between remote and in-office
- Just 12% are fully in-office
- Only 7% are fully remote

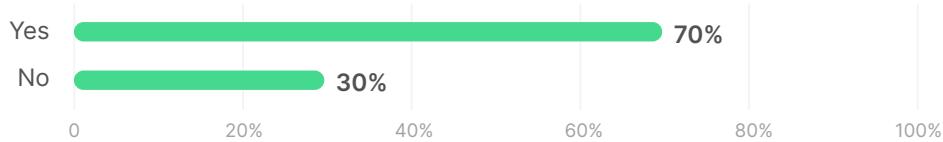
This confirms that most internal communications teams are designing for **multiple employee realities at once**, balancing in-office visibility, remote accessibility, and consistency across locations.

**Why this matters:** Hybrid work increases the risk of uneven information access, cultural fragmentation, and leadership visibility gaps. Internal communications must now be intentionally designed to reach employees regardless of where (or how) they work.

## Deskless and Frontline Employees Are Central, Not Peripheral

Q: Does your company have deskless or frontline employees?

(i.e., those without a fixed workspace)



Frontline and deskless workers are a core audience for most organizations:

- 70% of respondents report having **deskless or frontline employees**
- Among those organizations:
  - 55% support **100+ frontline employees**
  - Smaller frontline populations (1–100 employees) are far less common

Communication frequency with frontline employees:

- 51% communicate with frontline employees only **1–2 times per week**
- 16% communicate **daily or multiple times per day**
- 13% report **never** communicating directly with frontline teams

At the same time, frontline engagement is widely recognized as critical:

- 72% say frontline engagement is **important or very important**

## Implications for Internal Communications Teams

Today's work structures demand that internal communications teams:

- Design messages that work across **physical, digital, and mobile-first environments**
- Ensure frontline employees are not treated as an afterthought
- Balance cadence carefully to avoid overload while maintaining visibility
- Equip managers as communication conduits across hybrid and deskless teams

Without deliberate strategy, hybrid and frontline complexity can quickly turn into fragmentation.

### Key changes to note (2025 → 2026)

**Hybrid is no longer the exception, it's the default operating model.**

In 2026, hybrid work has solidified as the dominant structure, while frontline engagement has become both more critical and more challenging. Organizations are now navigating a widening gap between the importance of reaching deskless employees and the systems, cadence, and capacity required to do it effectively—raising the stakes for internal communications design, channel strategy, and leadership alignment.

# 10. Conclusion: The Culture Gap Is the New Engagement Problem

## Culture is the symptom. Systems are the cause.

Internal communications has never been more visible, more relied upon, or more strategically important, yet the systems required to support sustained impact have not kept pace. Across industries, regions, and organization sizes, the gap between expectations and execution is widening. While it often surfaces as a culture challenge, the data shows it is driven by structural, capability, and resourcing constraints.

Organizations are asking internal communicators to do more than ever before:

- Stabilize employees amid political, economic, and organizational uncertainty
- Drive culture, alignment, and trust through constant change
- Prove impact with data, often without the tools, time, or authority to do so
- Reach hybrid and frontline workforces with vastly different needs

At the same time, foundational constraints persist. Teams remain lean. Budgets are inconsistent or nonexistent. Measurement is expected but difficult. Strategy exists in many organizations, but execution and follow-through are uneven, and confidence erodes where systems fail to scale.

## What Changed in 2026

Several shifts sharpen this tension and explain why the culture gap has become more pronounced this year:

- **Employee experience fell from the top topic of focus for the first time in seven years**, AI has emerged as the dominant workplace focus, drawing widespread attention.
- **External forces now shape internal communications more than internal initiatives**, with political and policy uncertainty surpassing purely economic concerns.
- **Feedback collection is nearly universal, yet visible behavior change remains inconsistent**, reinforcing that listening alone is no longer enough.

- **Hybrid work is now the baseline**, while frontline engagement has become both more critical and more complex.

- **Leadership recognition of internal communications continues to grow**, but recognition does not consistently translate into sufficient resources, tools, or decision-making authority.

Together, these shifts point to a central contradiction: internal communications is widely acknowledged as essential, yet too often supported as a service function rather than built as foundational organizational infrastructure.

## Closing the Culture Gap

**Culture cannot be communicated into existence. It must be reinforced through:**

- Clear and consistent messaging
- Visible leadership alignment
- Measurable outcomes tied to action
- Credible follow-through

When the systems behind communication don't scale, even strong messages lose influence and begin to register as noise.

The opportunity for internal communications in 2026 is significant, but closing the culture gap will require more than intent or effort. It will require treating internal communications as a strategic discipline, aligning resources with responsibility, measuring what matters, and empowering communicators to influence outcomes.

The question facing organizations is no longer whether internal communications matters.

It's whether they are prepared to build the systems required for culture, trust, and alignment to scale.



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