
THE FUTURE OF CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

From a lingering pandemic to growing geopolitical tensions, never-ending technological disruption and an accelerating climate crisis--**at no time in history have business leaders been forced to confront such complexity**. Today's executives must navigate these challenges while creating resilient companies that can thrive in any economic, social, political, or technological environment.

Accordingly, **there is no established playbook** for the myriad of issues that corporate communications teams are now grappling with as they seek to navigate changing stakeholder expectations while advancing the business interests of their companies.

To address this void, we set out to understand from senior communicators themselves what they are experiencing on the front lines. Our research reveals that the role of the corporate communicator has forever changed, with new expectations and rules of engagement. The message from nearly 250 of the world's most senior communicators is clear: to meet the challenge of this moment, **the corporate communication function must advance** from operating as a transactional cost center delivering on a communications agenda to being an indispensable partner generating measurable business value.

Some notable insights:

1. The role of communications has become more materially important to CEOs, Boards, and the C-Suite.
2. The modern corporate communications function is agile, multidisciplinary, and insights-driven.
3. CommsTech is already ushering in a new era and communicators can use it to deliver quantifiable value to the business.
4. An increased focus on the workplace, workforce, and well-being of employees isn't a pandemic fad.
5. Expectations around social issues have shifted the agenda — and there is no turning back.
6. A modern organizational structure only gets you so far.
7. Communicators are increasingly acting as change agents, enabling ongoing transformation.
8. The lines between communications and marketing continue to blur, creating new challenges and opportunities.
9. In an increasingly complex and activist multi-stakeholder world, the corporate brand matters now more than ever.
10. While the importance of the communications function is increasing, resources to deliver are lagging.

These insights form the basis of our *Future of Corporate Communications* study. Through direct conversations with senior communications leaders, along with a quantitative survey, we examined how the corporate communications function is evolving its role, strategies, structures, capabilities, and operations. Our study's core objectives were to:

- *Understand the trends driving the evolution of the modern communications function.*
- *Understand the current and future priorities of today's senior communications leaders.*
- *Benchmark baseline corporate communications function design and organization.*

We are deeply appreciative of all the CCOs and communications leaders who took the time to speak with us and respond to our survey. This report reflects the changing nature of your work, your priorities, and the critical role many of you play within your companies.

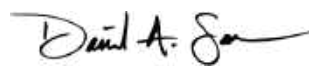
There has never been a more inspiring time to be a part of our profession. We are excited to share this glimpse into the future with you.

With gratitude,



Jim O'Leary

U.S. Chief Operating Officer &
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A person is shown in profile, looking at a smartphone. The image is overlaid with a blue tint and several circular icons representing different communication and technology concepts: a shopping cart, a share icon, an envelope, a smartphone, a document, a mobile phone, and a gear. The background is a blurred office setting.

THE FUTURE OF CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

TOP INSIGHTS:

A summary of key findings from our research



01

The role of communications has become more materially important to CEOs, boards, and the C-suite.

CCOs report having increased strategic importance to the business. More are reporting to and actively partnering with CEOs than in previous years.

34%

of CCOs reported to the CEO in 2014, whereas ...

46%

report to the CEO today.

77%

say perceptions of the role of communications as a strategic business driver changed within their organization during 2020.

However, **significant variability** exists in the perception of communications as a business driver depending on industry and organizational maturity. A **continuing uphill battle** exists for many CCOs.

THE PLAYBOOK

- **Recognize that you're operating in an era of increased accountability for corporations, creating more demands but also the opportunity for communications to play a material role.** Similar to the HR function a decade ago, the communications function has the opportunity to shift to a true business partner. Those that succeed will seize this opportunity.
- **Ground your goals in a singular objective: driving a shift from cost center to value creator.** The ball has rolled in your direction thanks to changing factors in the external environment, navigating COVID-19, social justice, geopolitical challenges, and stakeholder activism, among others. To solidify your role as value creator, you'll need tangible proof of your business impact. Design your team, investments, and communications strategy accordingly.
- **No communications leader can succeed solely by their own doing.** Create a business-facing organizational design that delivers the greatest collective contribution by building a bench of multi-talented, multidisciplinary team members whose skills go beyond the traditional to meet the new demands of communications.



"My communications team used to be my PR team. Now my communications team is in the room when we are debating what to do on social issues, human capital challenges, risk prevention, and how we position the company in an increasingly complicated stakeholder ecosystem."



02

The modern Corporate Communications function is agile, multidisciplinary, and insights-driven.

CCOs are seeing their organizations shift from singularly focused expertise to a multidisciplinary function of complementary capabilities. Leading teams are now balancing traditional skills like writing, storytelling, and media engagement with expertise in new areas like social purpose, risk management, creative, and content marketing underpinned by a CommsTech stack providing data science, actionable insights and measurable outcomes.

89%

of CCOs said “functional organization” is a top-five area of internal investment for the coming year.

CREATIVE & DIGITAL

were noted repeatedly as having increased importance as core communications function responsibilities.

Communicators also frequently spoke about the hurdles posed by creating, leading, and managing

MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAMS.

THE PLAYBOOK

- **Hire for expertise, but also for business acumen.** Today’s communications function demands “T-shaped” people — professionals with deep expertise in a particular domain but enough breadth of skill to think strategically and plug seamlessly into a variety of contexts while moving at the speed of today’s news cycle.
- **Manage your team as an integrated unit.** Ensure that all team members have a shared commitment to and understanding of common goals and the technology enabling the outcomes. Build processes that enable different functional specialists to work together effectively.
- **Cultivate a culture of collaboration.** Create opportunities for team members to build strong relationships and develop an appreciation for the diversity of their colleagues’ skill sets.
- **Invest in professional development.** As the demands and technology tools of the profession change, your talent mix will need to evolve. Offer and reward continuous learning and development that keep your team at the forefront of industry evolution.



“A senior communicator used to be the best writer or had the best media contacts. But now the role of the top communicator is to pull together the right skill sets to drive a strategy aligned with the business and know how to maximize the value of the specialist on his or her team.”



03

CommsTech is already ushering in a new era, and communicators can use it to deliver quantifiable value to the business.

Technology changed the game for the marketing world. Now communications leaders are leveraging its value in better understanding and predicting stakeholder behaviors. But the road to a sophisticated CommsTech-enabled function is fraught with uncertainty about how to proceed.

70%

of CCOs report CommsTech as a top area of investment for the coming year.

56%

report increased use of communications technology.

But adoption is scattershot, for example,

44%

report baseline measurement of media impressions, but only 30% are mapping revenue growth back to their core activities.

58%

report it's hard for them to justify large technology investments, and 39% say this is not a strategic priority for their CEO or C-suite.

THE PLAYBOOK

- **Recognize and embrace the role of CommsTech in driving and proving your ROI.** Digital tools, data, analytic capabilities, and technology can not only help you sharpen your message and better reach your audience, but can help you prove the value and impact of communications with stakeholders. Invest with a clear eye toward tying activity back to business strategy and results.
- **Start small and learn, then expand.** Pick one or two low-risk areas where more effective use of data, analytics, and technology could measurably improve your impact. Use these as opportunities to develop confidence. Let them serve as a beachhead from which to expand and develop a more robust CommsTech-enabled function.
- **Build the right processes to ensure results from technology adoption.** CommsTech adoption doesn't — and shouldn't — stop at the purchase of a new tool or platform. Ensure you've designed the right processes, structures, and governance around the technology to manage and derive compelling insights and outcomes.
- **Evolve your leadership style to manage a multidisciplinary team.** Leading a modern Corporate Communications function built on data and insights requires new leadership skills. Embracing technology also means engaging new types of talent, collaboration, information-sharing, and strategic outcomes.

“We just have to continue to challenge ourselves. How do we get in front of our target audience in new and different ways? [In terms of] proving business value, how can you make that simpler and make better connections to the business results?”



04

An increased focus on the workplace, workforce, and well-being of employees isn't a pandemic fad.

As employee engagement and the war for talent continue to be recognized as imperative to business performance, CCOs report an increased investment in employee communications and engagement systems and programming, specialty areas of expertise in need of ongoing development and attention.

62%

of CCOs report an increased focus on employee communications.

54%

rank employee communications in their top five areas of talent investment for the coming year.

38%

report talent considerations have shifted their communications agenda.

THE PLAYBOOK

- **Put effective employee communications at the center of business strategy.** License to operate and sustained competitive advantage are increasingly driven by a more purpose-driven, engaged workforce. Evangelize the role of effective communications in driving high performance.
- **Build permanence into the employee communications function.** Encourage stakeholders to recognize that employee communications is not simply “a pandemic issue” but a tipping point in a long and ongoing increase in strategic importance.
- **Recognize employee communications as a distinct and specific skill set.** Hire functional experts with the experience, tools, and resources to create a robust employee engagement competency that demonstrates measurable business impact.
- **Borrow from consumer marketing tactics.** Great employee communications include experiences, as well as paid, earned, and owned media. Develop the ability to segment and target the right message to the right employee at the right time through the right medium.
- **Create a powerful employee engagement-specific tech stack.** Build the digital and human platforms to engage, inform, and track employee sentiment and engagement. Embed two-way communications and leader visibility into your employee communications tool kit so you — and they — know what's driving or hindering performance, trust, and engagement.



"I always say that I love crisis because it's the opportunity to demonstrate the real value of communications. Last year was an exceptional opportunity to show the value of employee communications and our team; they really relied on us regarding internal communications. We had a big challenge too, to create internal campaigns, to keep our employees safe."



05

Expectations around social issues have shifted the agenda — and there is no turning back.

A pandemic, public reckonings on racial injustice, hyper-partisanship, climate change, and the 24/7 news cycle have put businesses in the hot seat. Belief-driven employees, customers, and shareholders are demanding action, and increasingly, communicators find themselves navigating uncharted waters, often in direct partnership with the CEO, that are unlikely to recede.

73%

of CCOs report that social issues have shifted their communications agenda.

51%

report an elevated or altered importance of communications in today's environment.

THE PLAYBOOK

- **Ensure that all stakeholders are aligned on your organization's social purpose.** Explicitly defining your enterprise purpose and ESG road map is now table stakes and an opportunity for the communications function to exert leadership.
- **Develop a consistent framework for engaging and responding to social issues.** Establish a process that determines when you will and won't speak out. Gain stakeholder buy-in and conduct regular table-top exercises to ensure that your process results in outcomes consistent with your values and business goals.
- **Understand where the risk is for your organization.** Identify and align on top internal and external risks for your organization related to social issues and environmental issues and develop an early warning system. Create and implement an action plan for proactively mitigating risks.

“

"There is a shifting recognition that we [Corporate Communications] have to be involved in many of the strategic decisions that are made. I've seen our function grow in size, but also expand in influence and recognition that we are critical voices when it comes to protecting, shaping, and advancing reputation."



06

A modern organizational structure only gets you so far.

Corporate Communications structures continuously transform, often more as a product of incremental change than intentional design — each evolving to fulfill the unique strategies, needs, and operating environment of the business it supports. Structures typically start with one of three basic frameworks: centralized, decentralized, and matrixed, none of which is objectively preferable to the others, and all of which should support business strategy.

43%

of communicators report operating in a centralized structure that provides them greater awareness and access to business strategy and increased relevance across channels.

26%

of communicators leading matrixed functions and 31% leading decentralized functions report closer relationships with business leaders and more evidence of their work producing results.

THE PLAYBOOK

- **Organization design is almost always a pendulum shift.** The current trend is toward centralization, but communications functions are constantly being arranged and re-arranged. Rather than putting your focus on “is my organization correctly designed?”, realize there are legitimate pros and cons for different models.
- **Start with a clear vision and direction.** When evaluating your function’s structure and operating model, start by aligning on the business strategies you’ll drive, the vision and guiding principles around how you operate, and the outcomes you’re responsible for.
- **In any model, focus on governance, process, and accountability.** The biggest steps you can take to improve functional effectiveness often have limited connection to the model or organizational chart you’re operating in, but in overlooked or underdeveloped areas like governance, process, and accountability — which have been long shortcomings for most communications function.

“In a centralized team, you have a better chance of having a great understanding of the business climate, and they know what events and programs are happening.”

“Alignment to [specific business units] means the communications team has a deep understanding of who our partner is within the company. We understand our client’s audience and can have thoughtful discussions about the objectives of the messages and channels to use.”



07

Communicators are increasingly acting as change agents, enabling ongoing transformation.

Nine out of ten organizations are in some form of transformation, but more than three quarters fail. Corporate communications functions are increasingly called upon to play a leading role in organizational transformation. This role is no longer limited to employee communications and reputation management, but now includes strategy on how to engage and drive a shift in mindset and behavior across internal and external stakeholder groups — from workplace to marketplace — to achieve transformation objectives.*

77%

of CCOs report that business transformation has impacted their communications agenda.

51%

report an increased focus on business transformation efforts.

THE PLAYBOOK

- **Recognize change as an opportunity for value creation.** Establishing a capability within the Corporate Communications function to support transformation is a great way to demonstrate the impact your team can have on business outcomes.
- **Build greater business acumen and an understanding of business strategy across your communications team.** It's increasingly important that communicators have an understanding of competitive dynamics, business models, and strategic priorities in general, but especially as critical underpinnings to a transformation agenda.
- **Train communicators in the fundamentals of change management.** A good transformation communications strategy starts with a basic understanding of the principles of organizational transformation and change. Invest in change certification courses for your team and develop internal mentor programs to grow their skills.
- **Address organization transformation needs through the right processes and structures.** For businesses experiencing significant or ongoing transformation, a matrixed communications structure can help communications teams ensure both business access and sufficient central resources to drive an effective communications strategy. Relationships across the organization will make your change agents more effective.



“Change communications has become so much of an integral part of our function across the entire company. And so we’ve gotten very good at change management communications because we’ve had to.”



08

The lines between communications and marketing continue to blur, creating new challenges and opportunities.

Rapid proliferation of available channels and the ongoing blurring of the lines between paid, earned, owned, and social media have driven communications to play a bigger role in upper-funnel and lower-funnel marketing, often driving more marketing responsibilities into the office of the CCO.

65%

of CCOs rank marketing communications in their top five areas of increased agency partner investment for the coming year.

45%

are engaging in advertising of some sort.

12%

of budget, on average, is going to digital capabilities such as SEO, advertising, and paid amplification, resulting in continued ownership tensions between marketing and communications.

42%

report challenges in collaborating with marketing and sales functions when asked about challenges to technology adoption.

THE PLAYBOOK

- **Demonstrate ROI.** Many communicators express frustration at not having the budget of their counterparts in marketing. To grow your budget, focus less on competing with marketing and more on helping your team to recognize and embrace the new permission being granted to the communications function. Use that permission to execute CommsTech-enabled programs demonstrate business impact and ROI.
- **Partner with marketing.** Teams that have successfully bridged the communications-marketing divide report collaborative, integrated planning that acknowledges the fluidity of both disciplines. By embracing CommsTech, CCOs can co-create systems and processes that clarify roles and drive collaboration. Use budgets to build distinctive capabilities in each function, but that are shared across both functions where appropriate.



“The worlds [of marketing and communications] are blended, and it’s a fight for relevance. It’s a fight for talent. It’s often a fight for ownership of the audience groups that we want to own and the CEO we are both trying to demonstrate value for.”



09

In an increasingly complex and activist multistakeholder universe, the corporate brand matters now more than ever.

As the dividing lines between product brands and corporations blur in the eyes of stakeholders, corporate leaders find themselves under pressure to take a stand on various social issues on behalf of the broader enterprise. Defining a platform that not only articulates what you stand for but, more importantly, drives engagement across a multistakeholder world is paramount.

63%

of CCOs say “brand and corporate identity” is something their team is responsible for today.

51%

rank “corporate positioning” in their top five areas of most strategic importance.

44%

rank “corporate positioning” in their top five areas of anticipated agency support — second only to marketing communications.

THE PLAYBOOK

- Trust should sit at the center of your corporate brand. Trust is the currency that creates lasting stakeholder relationships, gives organizations permission to innovate, and ultimately drives growth for the organization.
- Define a clear and compelling corporate brand platform and narrative grounded in trust insights that enable your team to deliver an understanding of your brand responsibility as a leader in business and in broader society.
- The corporate brand must be brought to life through consistent storytelling activation and creative newsroom that help your stakeholders see human faces, voices, and the impact you deliver as an enterprise.
- Communications leaders should own their corporate brand experience across stakeholders. The Corporate Communications lens is crucial in understanding and interpreting risk and delivering an integrated corporate brand experience that maximizes trust and delivers engagement returns.

“

“I think that thread [corporate-level narrative] is needed now more than ever given the complexity of organizations, the pace of change, the complexity of the external environments. Everything requires a communications lens and a consciousness around that narrative ...”



10

While the importance of the communications function is increasing, resources to deliver are lagging.

Despite a broader scope of responsibility and higher expectations, less than one in ten CCOs anticipate a budget increase of more than 15% this year. In fact, nearly half of CCOs expect their budgets to remain the same or decline in the coming year. The evolved CCO remits, and the expanded set of capabilities to deliver measurable value against them, are often underfunded.

30%

more functional responsibility has been given to CCOs who are seen as strategic business partners. Yet only...

6%

of CCOs anticipate a budget increase of 15% or more, and...

45%

anticipate a budget decrease or no change.

THE PLAYBOOK

- **Create opportunities to demonstrate measurable impact.** Focus communication efforts where return on investment can be measured and used as evidence to support increased funding asks.
- **Link budget requests to strategic goals/priorities.** Define budget categories in terms of business priorities and illustrate how investment will enable progress against stated goals.
- **Partner with business leaders.** Understand influential leaders' priorities and KPIs and design initiatives that will benefit them and can be funded from sources outside of the annual communications budget.
- **Do more with less.** Make the budget you have go further by investing in people with agile, flexible skill sets and new technology that drives efficiency and enables the measurement of quantifiable results.

“

I agree wholeheartedly that corporate communicators need to be seen as strategic business partners and not just a cost center or an afterthought. The more we can share the importance and value of Corporate Communications with business leadership, the better for everybody.





PART 1:

The Evolution of Corporate Communications



**Advancing up
the strategic
continuum.**

Among corporate leaders, there's a slow but growing recognition of the value of Corporate Communications with COVID-19 accelerating the role the corporate communications function plays in ensuring a business's license to operate.

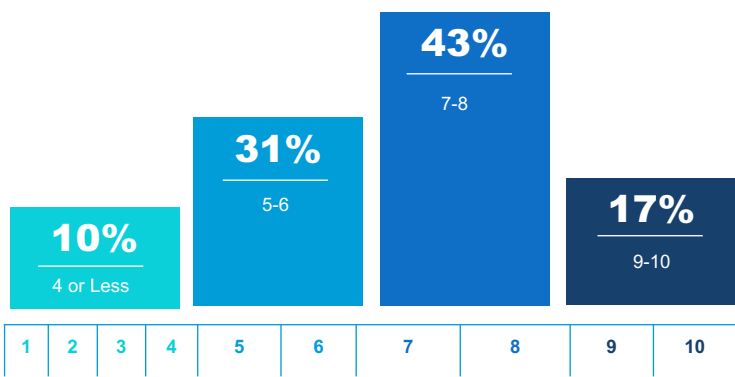
This section looks at the impact of the past several years on communications functions strategic positioning, looking beyond the pandemic to the headwinds and opportunities shaping Corporate Communications' ability to advance up the strategic continuum to the heart of business strategy.

Impact & Opportunity of COVID-19

The pandemic has accelerated the strategic positioning of communications functions. It has rapidly dialed up the importance of communications and forced teams to reassess and reimagine their ability to reach, engage, and impact stakeholders — beginning with employees — across a fundamentally changed and volatile landscape.

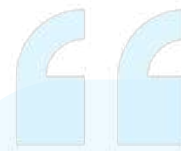
In interviews and survey responses, a majority of Corporate Communications leaders say steering their organizations through the changes and challenges wrought by COVID-19 has altered the communications agenda. It has caused significant shifts in their function’s focus and ways of operating as the relevance and demand for communications internally and externally has escalated.

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being no disruption and 10 being significant disruption, how have your communications objectives and agenda been impacted by COVID-19 and the events of 2020?



NO DISRUPTION

SIGNIFICANT DISRUPTION



“Because of COVID-19, I am now assigned to high-level committees. My name is always out there and if there’s a special project, I get that special project most of the time.”



“The role communications played [during the pandemic] was key for our success, internally and externally. It has opened up new collaborations with different global teams and has given communications a lot of visibility.”



“The silver lining of COVID-19 [for us] was that Corporate Communications jumped high in the eyes of leadership because we both performed, but we also had the opportunity to work more closely with leaders and show them our value.”

The Rise of Employee Communications

External communications has been on an accelerated journey to strategic partner. Employee communications, however, has been on a much slower trajectory. Interviewees report that in the past, their organizations have not viewed a robust employee communications program and capability as a priority. There was, and continues to be, a pervasive perception that anyone can pitch in and create employee communications.

COVID-19 has shown this is not the case. It provided an accelerant to the advancement of employee communications through the pressure to demonstrate and deliver clear strategic leadership and business continuity in the face of a volatile and disruptive period to organizational operations. It forced leaders to stay ahead of a rapidly changing corporate culture and to be constantly communicating, demonstrating a new level of public care and attention for their workforces.

COVID-19 continues to force critical changes to employee communications in three ways:

1. The need to form a critical safety net that ensures employees are safe, connected, supported, and heard in an uncertain and virtual environment.
2. The ability to help leaders align and communicate consistent policy and points of view as a matter of strategic imperative and to be responsive to employee needs, concerns, and demands.
3. The necessity to reduce the “noise in the system” by streamlining and focusing content and messaging on what is valuable and relevant.

More than half of communicators (53%) report shifts in communications focus and demand from COVID-19 — with employee communications impacted most significantly.



How has COVID-19 impacted your communications function and agenda? (Shown among: n=200)

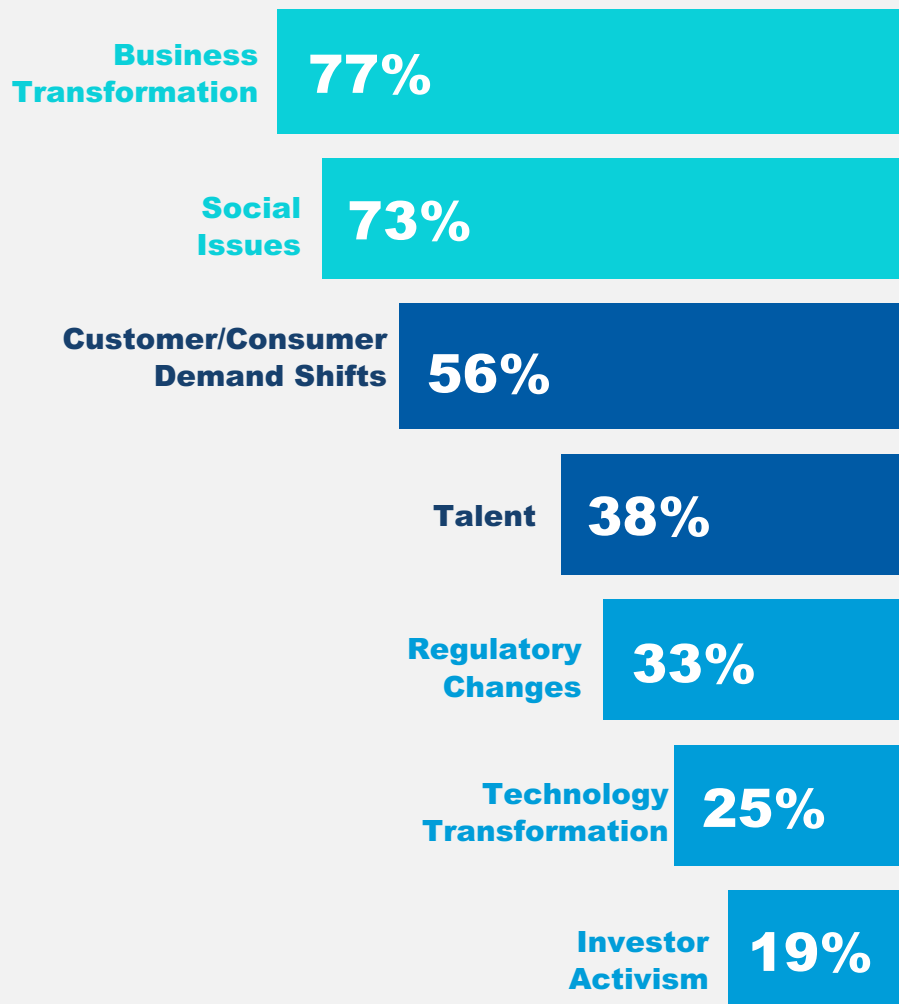
Key Finding:

The Corporate Communications Agenda Is Changing

COVID-19 is not the only change driver in Corporate Communications functions.

Communications leaders identified additional forces impacting changes to their function and agenda, with business transformation at the top of the list.

Shifting expectations of corporations and their leaders to take positions on social issues, particularly in the United States, also emerged as a central driver of the Corporate Communications agenda in the past 18 months.



What forces beyond COVID-19 are most impacting your communication function and agenda? (Shown among: n=200)

A New Role in Business Transformation

Today’s communicators find themselves playing new roles in leading the transformation agenda.

As companies reorganize and reorient to meet shifting strategic priorities, Corporate Communications functions are increasingly called upon to lead and drive organizational transformation. Because of this, communications leaders are seeing an increased need for their teams to have greater business acumen, as well as knowledge of the basic principles of change management, and to be able to apply both to communications strategy and execution. Many teams report this need as particularly urgent as they see their organizations underinvest in change management functions, support, and expertise and rely instead on communications strategy to drive transformation through the organization.

More and more teams report establishing change communications centers of excellence, hiring entire new sub-teams with crossover experience in change and communications, and investing in change management training and certification courses for communications practitioners. Just as many Corporate Communications leaders are also taking a more scrappy and practical approach to skill-building, they are developing their own methodologies and approaches to change communications and mentoring team members through projects that allow them to build expertise through empirical experience.

77%

of communications leaders report that business transformation has impacted their communications agenda.

51%

report an increased focus on business transformation efforts.

“

“Change is a place we’re going to continue to invest in because we’re going to go through a ton of change in the next two years.”

“Change communications has become so much of an integral part of our function across the entire company. And so we’ve gotten very good at change management communications, because we’ve had to.”

”

Social Issues Shift the Communicator's Agenda

Changing expectations of the role of corporations in influencing social as well as economic direction in modern society is another key factor moving communications forward on a strategic continuum. It represents perhaps the most significant factor, outside of COVID-19, shifting viewpoints on the role of communications and elevating its influence in the organization and C-suite.

Communicators reported “the times in which we're living” — meaning the public dialogue around political and social issues, and the increased expectation that brands and corporations take a position — as having thrust their companies and leaders into the public spotlight in ways that demand more of them. Being proactive with a story and point of view is felt to be increasingly demanded by employees and consumers alike.

And yet, for many organizations, engaging in a public dialogue about the organization's vision and strategy, much less broader social issues, represents a huge mindset and cultural shift, and one not without risks. Communicators, especially in more conservative industries and organizations, talk about ongoing efforts to evolve Corporate Communications' culture and approach from within while overcoming leadership resistance to public engagement. For others, their role as leaders and change-makers on emerging issues impacting reputation, brand, and employee sentiment is giving them greater opportunity, visibility, and responsibility. And they are taking advantage — working to demonstrate engagement through communication as central to the organization's ability to build and maintain trust and remain competitive in consumer and talent markets.



“The more we continue to play in these spaces, more opportunities come to us — demand has grown.”

73%

of communications leaders report that social issues have shifted their communications agenda.

51%

report an elevated or altered importance of communications in this new world.

19%

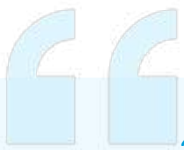
report that investor activism has shifted their communications agenda.

An Ever-Changing Information Ecosystem

Finally, the modern media and information ecosystem of the past decade fundamentally changed the ways in which businesses communicate and engage. The ecosystem that emerged continues to expand in breadth and complexity and remains a critical driver of the advancement of Corporate Communications as a strategic imperative to effective business strategy.

Communications leaders say the way social media cycles now drive news, product marketing, and sales cycles (not to mention employee communications rhythms) has permanently altered their function's approach to stakeholder engagement and information dissemination. Web and social, at first critical to reputation promotion and issue response, have become fundamental tools for consumer, media, and brand engagement and storytelling. Over time, consistent shifts from a focus on owned websites to the prioritization of social platforms have elevated the importance of Corporate Communications and brand PR and the role they play in driving the business forward.

These shifts have changed how Corporate Communications functions are structured, ushering in a new set of digital and creative multimedia capabilities still being integrated into the Corporate Communications operating model.



“We had a couple of situations, years ago, that resulted in negative news coverage that raised awareness of how important social is and that led to the organization dedicating more resources to addressing inbound messages. Then the next question is, ‘What positive stories do we have to tell and how do we tell them?’ And that's led to an increase in resource allocation around the storytelling piece.”

“My next challenge is getting the organization to move into that phase of [short-form video] storytelling because we're still primarily text-driven in terms of how we're telling our story.”

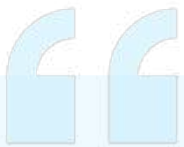


Barriers Remaining to Advancement

An obstacle to Corporate Communications' strategic positioning is the maturity of the organization in terms of its receptivity to communications as a strategic driver and how it thinks about and uses communications in service of business strategy.

For some, industry and geographic location, especially, anecdotally, in South America (e.g., Brazil, Mexico) and Asia (e.g., Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong) affect how far Corporate Communications can permeate and positively influence the business. More than a few communications leaders say regional culture and operating norms dictate their approach to communications and hold them back. In Japan for example, some communications leaders see social culture as having an outsized and heavy hand in dictating everything from information sharing and transparency to employee and media engagement practices, leaving communicators feeling behind their North American and European counterparts in sophistication and approach.

Lack of maturity in the application of communications to business strategy becomes a critical barrier to the function's strategic advancement and poses particular strategic and logistical challenges to globally integrated teams and organizations. Organizational and leadership maturity has significant influence on Corporate Communications' ability to secure the budget needed to advance and modernize the function and often impedes investment in advanced capabilities like data and analytics and employee communications. These deficits are shown to have a cumulative detrimental impact on everything from labor relations, to customer retention, to overall brand and business performance.



"It's not because the organization doesn't want to change, but the entire culture and context around the organization and in specific geographic locations doesn't support it. For us, the mindset change in the organization is still too slow."

"If you're in the service sector or a technology sector, [communications] is more important right now and they are valuing communication more and more. Traditional manufacturing and industrial sectors still do not recognize the strategic payoff unless there is a crisis."

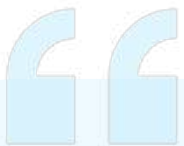


The Ongoing Competition with Marketing

Another barrier to the advancement of Corporate Communications is a persistent comparison to and competition with marketing. For many of the mid- to large-sized Corporate Communications teams we spoke with, collaboration with marketing is an increasingly routine occurrence, and yet in the Future of Communications survey 42% of respondents report challenges collaborating with marketing and sales colleagues.

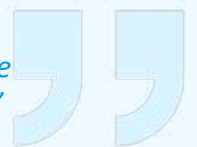
Who takes the lead was and is often situationally determined — marketing traditionally leads when the need is specific to demand generation; communications leads when the objective is broader brand promotion. But, as integrated campaigns become increasingly common, roles, accountabilities, and leadership are less clear. As digital and social ecosystems grow and take a dominant position next to media and advertising, the dividing lines between communications and marketing change and converge, creating new tensions.

Sometimes the tension can be a positive — communicators report competition with marketing as compelling both functions to up their creative game and set new standards for multimedia, multichannel strategy, and content. In a fight for leadership over the strategic approach, communicators also report working to get their teams to new levels of business acumen and ability to demonstrate audience insight and a point of view of how and where the organization needs to drive to produce business results.



“We’re spending too much time competing with marketing for budget, rather than proving a case for the value of communications and earned media [in its own right]. Everything that we do should be seen as either an independent value driver or as complementary to marketing. Instead, we look at it as a zero-sum game.”

“I see the lines [between marketing and communications] not so much blurring as converging. The tension comes from determining where conversion is healthy for a business, but the battle over turf is silly. No one ‘owns’ brand, for example. We all have a role to play based on our ability to generate content that resonates with audiences.”



The Ongoing Competition with Marketing (cont.)

The tension between communications and marketing can be good for both disciplines. It can also be an unproductive distraction.

Some communicators see the competition between communications and marketing — for position, budget, executive attention — as shifting critical energy and focus from the real value Corporate Communications should be bringing to the organization. A fruitless focus on one-upmanship, born from battles for talent, resources, audience ownership, and ultimately relevance within the organization, were consistently reported to lead nowhere.

Communicators blamed themselves, and the failure to correct corporate leaders' misperception that communications and brand PR should be able to demonstrate impact and results — on stakeholder engagement, sentiment, and action — as clearly and easily as their marketing counterparts.

Communications leaders see their profession's preoccupation with holding themselves against a marketing performance benchmark (and trying to match or beat marketing teams) as counter-productive and needing to be corrected through education and the identification and defining of their own value proposition for the discipline, the function, and the organization.

The case for a communications-led approach

“Marketing is responsible for the buyer. Communications is responsible for the stakeholders, which includes the buyer, but is not only the buyer. And to me, that’s a communications-led approach. It makes an argument that in this battle of who leads, the CCO or the CMO, I feel like the CCO is truly an all-encompassing role that looks at strategy holistically inclusive of the buyer, but not exclusive of that. The label is important because it signals approach and it signals a philosophy around the role that both marketing and communications play. That’s the case that we’ve been arguing as communicators forever — that communications is a thread that must run through everything. We should have that seat at the table because at the end of the day, it doesn’t matter if you’ve got this great human capital idea, a great commercial product, if it’s communicated poorly across the organization or externally, or it’s not bundled or thought of properly, or put in perspective of priority, it’s going to fail, internally or externally, or both. I think that thread is needed now more than ever given the complexity of organizations, the pace of change, the complexity of the external environments. Everything requires a communications lens and a consciousness around that narrative through line now more than ever.”

Proving the ROI of Communications

Proving Corporate Communications' relevance and strategic importance to the business hinges on demonstrating value through measurement — explicitly showing impact and outcome.

To this end, measurement and analytics continue to make slow progress. Qualitatively, communicators see how good content affects consumer behavior and business performance and compels stakeholders to action. But the quantification and correlation of impacts remains elusive and time consuming. Because of this, communications are often not included as part of business KPIs — like marketing or human resources — for most organizations.

Today, many Corporate Communications leaders report being on a mission to demonstrate the clearer results and return on investment that the business requires. While the mission is clear, they say the path to proving outcomes in a consistent and scalable manner is hard, requiring a new, more rigorous measurement discipline and significant investment in time, technology, talent, and capabilities.



“We don't have a business case [for Corporate Communications]. We think we have a business case, but at the end of the day we are looking for tangibles that are only intangibles.”

“The challenge for a lot of us in our function is how close can we get to actually measuring business impact? It's hard to say this article led to a client in engagement.”

“Our KPIs are not overly impressive, which is why I really want something that can say we are influencing [upper funnel] customer leads too. We track marketing influence on leads and opportunities. Well, what about PR-influenced opportunities? How do we get those on the chart?”

“We can see how many people went to the media page, but how do we know where they went next? And then how do I get them to go somewhere else? What is it about this press release that got attention versus that one? I want to go deeper. I need to go deeper.”

The Playbook:

What communications teams can do to advance Corporate Communications:

- **Be strategic:** Demonstrate an understanding of business priorities, profit drivers, and strategic choices; explicitly connect communications decisions, campaigns, and aspired outcomes to business priorities and impact.
- **Be diverse:** Take a multimedia, multidimensional approach to communications; bring different perspectives, approaches, and ideas to the table that may not be there today.
- **Prove your business acumen:** Understand and have a perspective on the business, its performance, and its vision and direction beyond communications.
- **Network:** Focus on developing relationships with the business through the quality of counsel you give, the performance of the function, and the quality of content and programming.
- **Lead with insights:** Create the data that ties communications activities and investments to business outcomes; feed the data back to the business leaders speaking their language.
- **Invest in specialists:** The general practitioner can't do it all. Invest in insourcing and/or outsourcing the skills and capabilities that bring the function to the next level.
- **Stay connected:** Emerge from your corporate silo (regularly and often) to proactively drive collaboration and ensure a general view of the field and markets outside of your own.
- **Know how to prioritize:** Base communications strategy on the needs of the business and keep pace, constantly course correcting.
- **Execute flawlessly:** You don't move up the continuum if you have the smartest ideas but you're not executing well and consistently; you're not going to even be invited to the table.

PART 2:

Becoming a Strategic Partner Starts Inside The Function

**Drive your
own evolution.**

The rise of the new social enterprise, significant transformation, and a global pandemic may finally cement Corporate Communications' strategic positioning, placing it at the center of organizational strategy.

This section looks at moves communications leaders are making to advance their functions up the strategic continuum, and in turn the role and responsibility their corporate leaders and organizations have to help them get there.

Communicators Are Driving Their Own Evolution

Moving up the strategic continuum from cost center to value creator.

Since the first Edelman benchmarking study in 2014, communications leaders have built new functions and capabilities that successfully navigated dramatic changes in how we consume information, market and promote products and services, and build corporate brand and reputations.

Now, there is a new set of expectations being set upon Corporate Communications teams. They're helping organizations navigate the choppy waters of trust, grappling with the rise of the new social enterprise, experiencing significant sector and industry transformation, and facing an ongoing global pandemic. These factors may finally cement Corporate Communications' strategic positioning, placing it at the center of organizational strategy.

What our study shows us is that, despite the barriers and roadblocks, Corporate Communications functions are making progress, and a lot of that evolution — strategically, structurally, capability-wise — is driven from within, by charismatic communications leaders and their teams.

Becoming a Strategic Partner Starts From the Inside

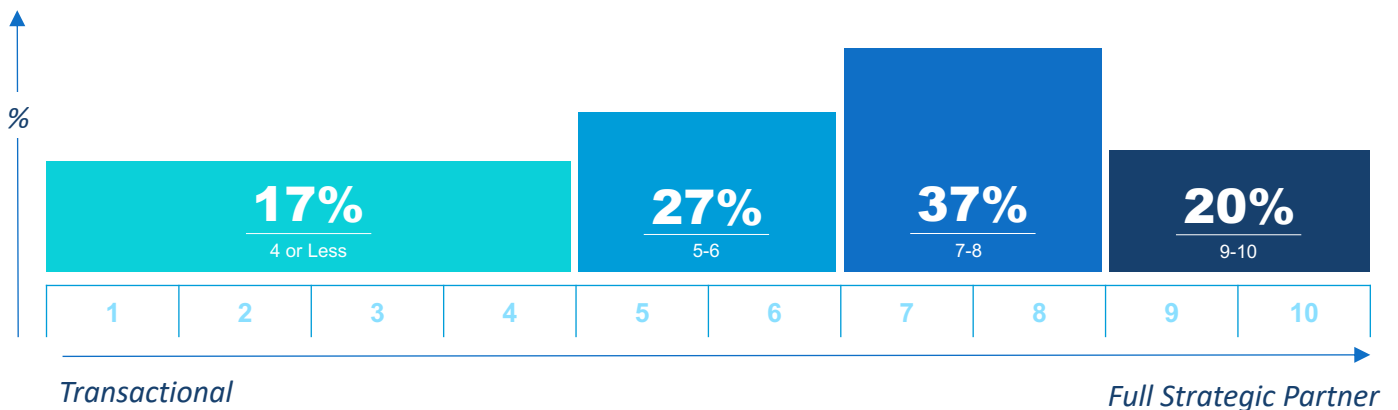
In speaking with communications leaders, one of the key drivers in the evolution of Corporate Communications is how teams see themselves and think about their work. As leaders set goals to take their functions from cost centers to value generators, they’re starting with a holistic change in their vision of the role of Corporate Communications and perpetuating a mindset shift in how their teams approach and build communications strategy.

These leaders push their teams from a reactive, check-the-box focus on storytelling and information dissemination, to operating within a strategically defined framework that considers the impact and outcomes of content and programming on business priorities. They use pressure-testing strategies to ensure they tie back to objectives and think creatively about using data and insights to tell a better story and drive specific action and sentiment in their audiences.

In survey and interview responses, a majority of Corporate Communicators leaders see themselves advancing on the strategic partner continuum. Few, however, see themselves as fully actualized strategic partners, with more work to be done.

Strategic Partner Continuum

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being transactional and 10 being full strategic partner, how is your communications function currently regarded by business leaders in your organization?
(Shown among n=200)



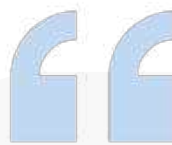
Relationship Building and Education

Communications leaders we spoke to spend significant time and effort educating their leaders and organizations on the value of communications.

They understand that leveraging communications as a strategic business driver requires access and acumen — understanding of the strategic vision and voice of the CEO and the priorities of the business moving forward. Communicators challenged to advance Corporate Communications' strategic position lament the lack of direct access to the CEO and C-suite leaders. A lack of exposure to business strategy and decision-making hinders Corporate Communications' impact and ability.

Teams that view themselves at the far value-driven end of the strategic continuum have gotten there by securing — by invitation or sheer force of will — regular, direct engagement with CEOs and participation in business strategy. From there they leverage solid impact data and analytics to show the ways communications is driving stakeholder sentiment, behavior, and action.

These communicators are in the room representing all factors of trust, public relations, and the reputational and workforce risks of business decisions.



“If you don’t let people know the contributions you’re making and you don’t have other people validating it, you’re not going to get very far, especially if the leadership team doesn’t fully appreciate or value what you’re doing or understand the power of what you’re doing. If you don’t find a way to have other people influence and help expose him to that, then you’re dead in the water.”

“It was really the mindset of our CEO and the senior leadership team at the time that our communications function be run very much with a news desk mentality. We waited for things to come to us, and then we reacted. Our leaders didn’t see a lot of value in communications because we weren’t necessarily a partner saying, ‘Hey, you know, we can help you with this.’”

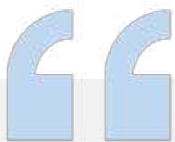
“Before I got in here, the senior communications director, he did his work, he kept his head down and he didn’t really influence as much as he could. I’m trying to raise the profile of what we’re doing and be that squeaky wheel.”



The Responsibility of Corporate Leaders

While much of the evolution in communications is being driven from within, there's a role for C-suite leaders to create the access and opportunities that pull the function forward and advance communications within their organizations. How leaders view the role of communications and engage their teams is significant to the positioning of the function.

There is a need for C-suite leaders to mature their own thinking and educate themselves to understand how corporate and brand reputation, employee engagement, and the articulation of business strategy impact the business's ability to execute. It is also imperative that corporate leaders be held accountable. While in the minority, a few organizations have started to elevate reputation to a shared business goal, and ultimately a goal for the board of directors. They are compensating leaders based on reputation and trust metrics as they relate to different constituents from customers, to employees, to shareholders.



"It's really top buy-in to the Corporate Communications function. Having a champion in our corner [is what has] allowed us to grow and do new things."

Things a CEO can do to advance Corporate Communications:

- Lead by example, partnering with communications as a strategic advisor on the execution of business strategy and priorities.
- Direct business unit leaders to engage communications and ensure that a thought-through communications strategy runs through the business.
- Bring communications into decisions earlier — as they are being made, not after the fact.
- Ensure there's always a communications representative evaluating strategic moves from a risk, reputation, and positioning perspective.
- Ensure that limits to budget, staffing, and resourcing are not holding the function back from being a true partner.
- Ensure that Corporate Communications has enough of the right talent in the right places to serve the business.

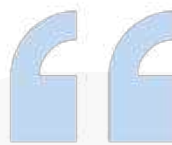


The Responsibility of Corporate Leaders (cont.)

Many executives are on their own evolving communications spectrum. Those who have arrived understand that the successful execution of business strategy requires frequent communications and stakeholder engagement, the strategic use of media, messaging, and storytelling, and ensuring that business innovation and advancement is shared as loudly and effectively as the competition.

That is not to say leaders aren't still attracted to the shiny objects. Communications leaders report that external validation through the media, such as a flattering profile executives can share with their boards or a Fortune's Best List placement, can still have a bigger impact on C-suite validation of communications than strong data and analytics.

In light of this tendency, communicators report working to help executives think more consciously and conscientiously about how trust and reputation impact business goals and then engage Corporate Communications as a strategic business partner.



"If I had a more direct line with the CEO and we spoke more and interacted together more, and we supported him more on the business side, we could be a better partner to the business."

"Not being part of the C-suite is a major impact to our positioning. When we reported in to the CEO, we were much closer to the business and understanding in real time what was happening directly from the business leaders ... We were able to be more responsive to business and leader needs. Not being part of those critical conversations, and being able to understand and respond either reactively or proactively, really sets us back."

"We wanted that connection with the leader, but we wanted to ensure it was a consultative connection, a strategic connection — a 'business partner first' connection versus a 'we've made all the decisions and now we need you to go execute.'"

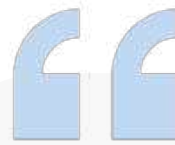
Establishing the Building Blocks

Mindset, education, and relationship building are only three pieces in the value continuum puzzle. In addition, communications leaders identified the following structures and management imperatives for a well positioned strategic function.

Integrated Strategic Planning: Leaders report needing strong integrated strategic planning processes at the functional and campaign levels. These processes involve business and functional partners and align communications objectives directly to business priorities and goals. Discipline within functions drives purpose, intent, and business outcomes in every communication strategy and every campaign.

Building a Consultative Team: Stand-out leaders are shifting talent within their teams. They are looking for more than a good storyteller and are developing communications practitioners with the consultative skills to advise the business on reputation and engagement impacts and opportunities. More than a few leaders talk about actively working to empower a consultative mindset and culture, moving staff beyond service providers to strategic advisors.

Holding Your Own Budget: Communications leaders universally recognize the importance of holding their own budgets and not being beholden to another function to determine where to make investments. Leaders talk about leading with strategy and watching budget increases follow.



“We have a really good planning system in which we seek out what the business objectives are for our business partners. Then we have a really good campaign development template and process to then come back to them with a strategy to [achieve the business goal].”

“I sit on our operating committee and it helps me create strategic plans. The benefit is I know all of the macro and micro projects that the business is focusing on. If it’s important enough to come before the operating committee then I know that’s a priority.”

“One of the strengths is that we’re not a charge-back department, we’re a stand-alone function that can initiate projects on our own. And we have budget responsibilities for programs, so we manage the budget for the programs for the company.”

Taking Advantage of This Moment in Time

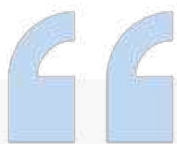
At times, a barrier to Corporate Communications advancement is communicators themselves. Interviewees point out that in some corners of the profession there is still an attitude or approach of “covering” the business and its communications needs in a reactive, transactional manner, as opposed to moving it forward strategically.

Communications leaders view counterparts who keep their heads down, delivering only the rote communications demanded by the business, as not only holding back their functions from playing a strategic role, but the greater discipline also. They view these teams as passive, with no strong strategic planning processes or point of view on the role of communications in place. But this may be changing.

Capitalizing on the opportunity COVID-19 has wrought

More than a few communications leaders, especially those overseeing smaller, centralized teams, say they have new access to the C-suite and a new voice in high-level meetings as strategy and policy are being determined.

The shrewdest communicators are taking full advantage of these opportunities — actively participating and extending feedback and a point of view on reputation and engagement considerations, and developing stronger, lasting relationships with leadership. They are cementing their position by making sure their teams are delivering quality content, engagement, and results. Together, these shifts are forcing a rethinking on the part of management teams in how they leverage communications in ways that sustain post-COVID-19.



“I agree wholeheartedly that corporate communicators need to be seen as strategic business partners and not just a cost center or an afterthought. The more we can share the importance and value of Corporate Communications with business leadership, the better for everybody.”

Key Finding:

Driving a communications evolution starts with showing your team, and your organization, the difference between being a cost center and becoming a value generator:

FROM COST CENTER

TO VALUE GENERATOR

Business leaders are leery of leveraging communications as a tool to drive strategy

As a result of education, execution, and proven results, communications is embraced in everything the organization does

Corporate Communications is brought late to business strategy, projects, and initiatives

Corporate Communications is fully integrated into business strategy and consulted on all major decisions

Corporate Communications is treated as merely a cost center and service support provider

Corporate Communications shows up as much more than an execution function, providing strategic counsel and partnership

Corporate Communications operates in siloed isolation and is reactive to needs and requests

Communications leaders and teams have earned a seat at the table by marrying their expertise together with a holistic view of the business

Corporate Communications produces programming and content based on precedent and instinct

Communications programming is insight-driven, directed by data and analytics, and measured for impact and outcome

Corporate Communications function rests on traditional notions of storytelling, media, and stakeholder engagement

Corporate Communications embraces a diversity of cutting-edge multimedia, multistakeholder, and omnichannel strategies to drive engagement

PART 3:

Investing in the Future of Corporate Communications

CommsTech as a principle investment for 2022.

Investment strategies are as individual as companies and communications leaders. But CommsTech — the tools, technology, and data that allow communicators to precisely target, measure, and shape perceptions — is emerging as a top investment priority for 2022 and beyond.

This section looks at investments, both traditional and novel, that communications leaders are looking to make in the coming year. It also includes advice on building the business case to make them.

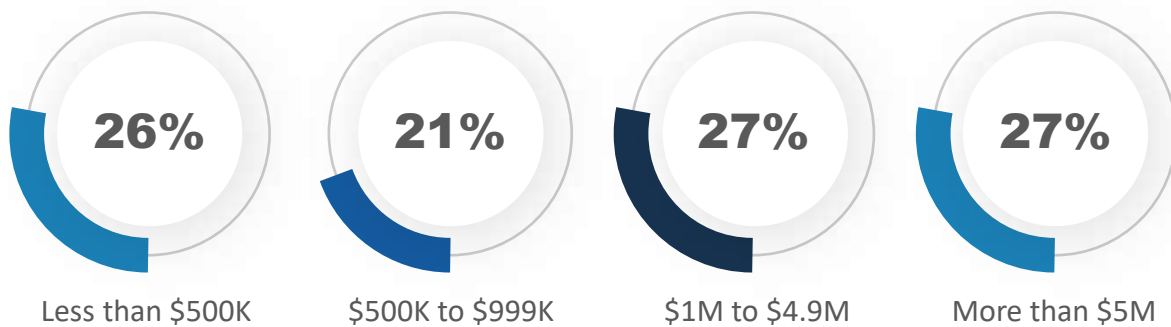
Budget Benchmarks

The Organization of Corporate Communications: How to Think About Functional Structure

In the 2014 Edelman communications benchmarking study, as today, Corporate Communications budgets spanned a significant range. Influences include everything from the size and type of business, to the position of the function and its maturity.

In the 2021 survey, annual budgets range from less than \$500,000 to over \$5 million. The good news: As organizations advance into a post-COVID period, 54% anticipate some level of budget increase in 2022.. The bad news: Despite new expectations for measurable impact and a broader mandate, 46% are expecting budgets to remain the same or decrease.

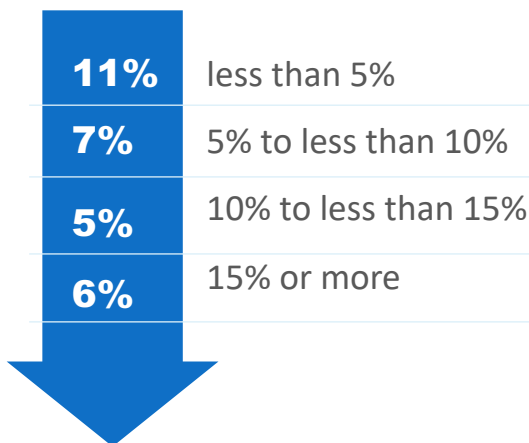
2021 Budget Snapshot



Anticipated Budget Changes – 2022-23

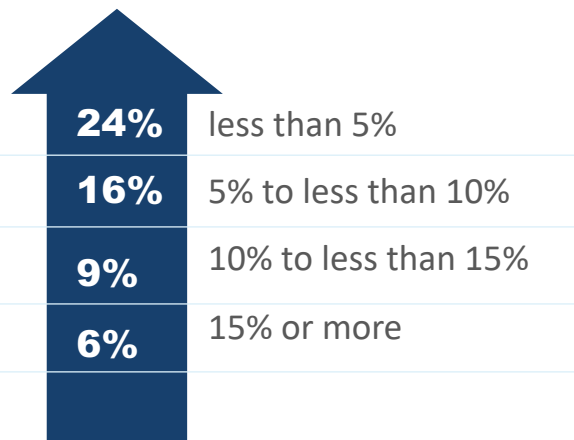
29%

Budget Decrease



55%

Budget Increase



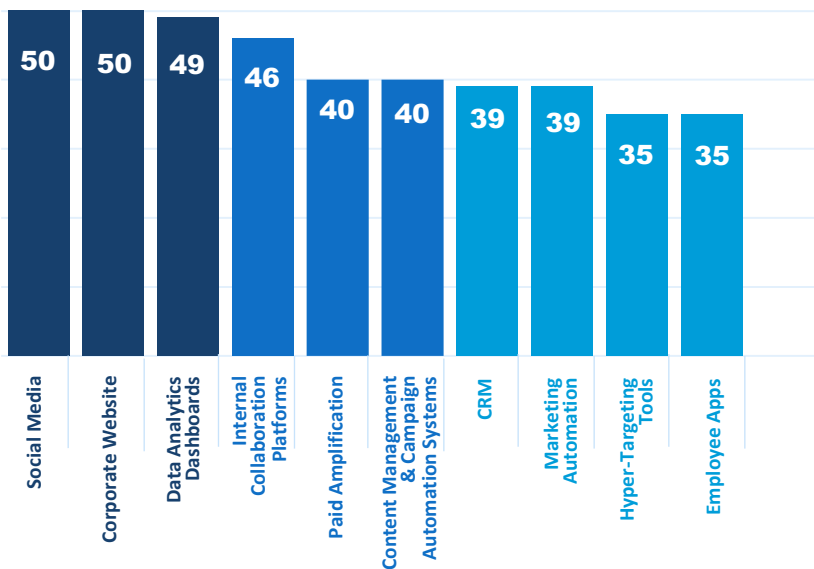
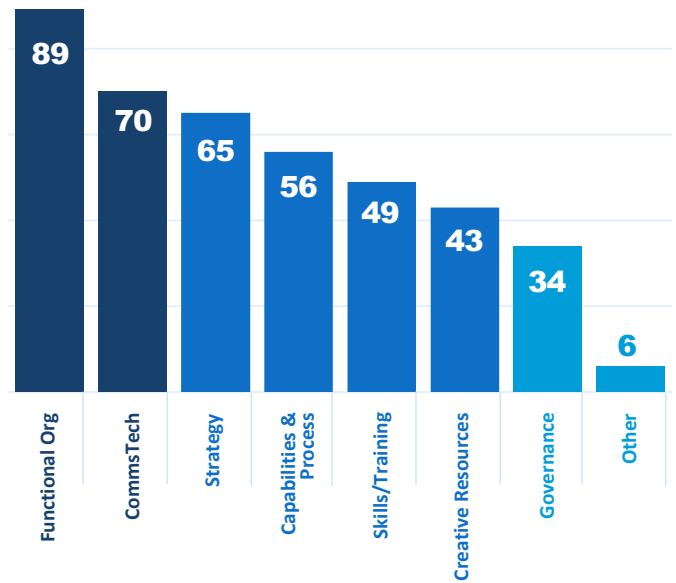
Investment in Next 12 to 18 Months

Most communicators are understandably conservative in their 2021-22 budget forecasts.

Most are also optimistic about 2022 being a year that marks a return to growth. Everyone has a wish list of where they would like to make investments. From these sentiments, a rough set of investment themes emerged.

Top five areas of anticipated investment over the next 12 to 18 months.

Please rank the top five areas of anticipated investment for your function over the next 12-18 months. (Shown among: n=200)



Top five areas of anticipated investment in CommsTech, data, and analytics over the next 12 to 18 months.

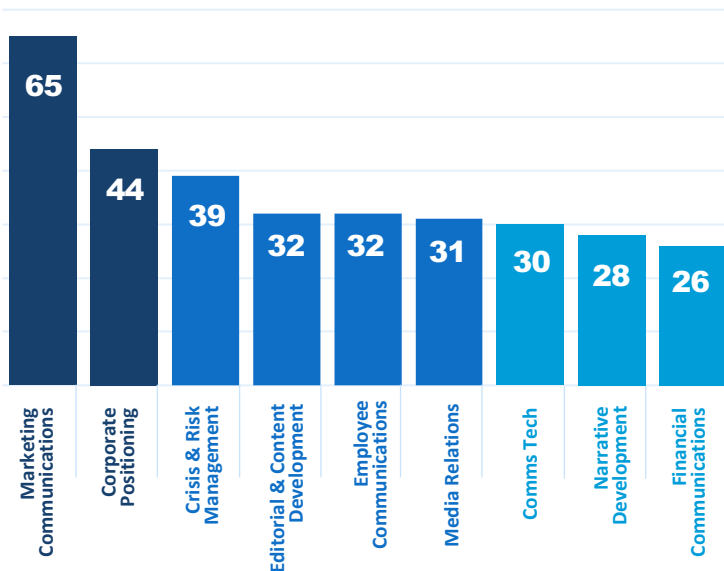
Please rank the top five areas of anticipated investment in digital and analytic capabilities for your function over the next 12-18 months. (Shown among: n=200)

Talent Investment and Agency Support

Communicators place head count at the top of their investment wish list, noting that while additional staff is often what is most needed, it is also the most difficult to secure.

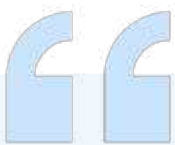
Interviewees say budget dollars aren't always the deciding factor in winning new headcount. Communications leaders cite pace of work and growth of the functions — in workload and capability demand — as central to the business case for new talent and increased agency support.

While many communications leaders are committed to expanding permanent head count, a few are moving in the opposite direction, reducing team size and outsourcing specialty skills and capabilities to agencies and contractors. They view this strategy as more efficient and effective in advancing their functions in areas as diverse as creative brand promotion, change communications, and predictive analytics, shortening learning curves and allowing them to experiment with new capabilities.



Top five anticipated areas of partner support over the next 12 to 18 months.

Please rank the top five areas of partner support you anticipate needing over the next 12-18 months. (Shown among: n=200)



“The pace of work is so much quicker than it was before. And so helping the team really manage through that through new team members and great external partnerships as an extension of our team — we need to tap into that.”

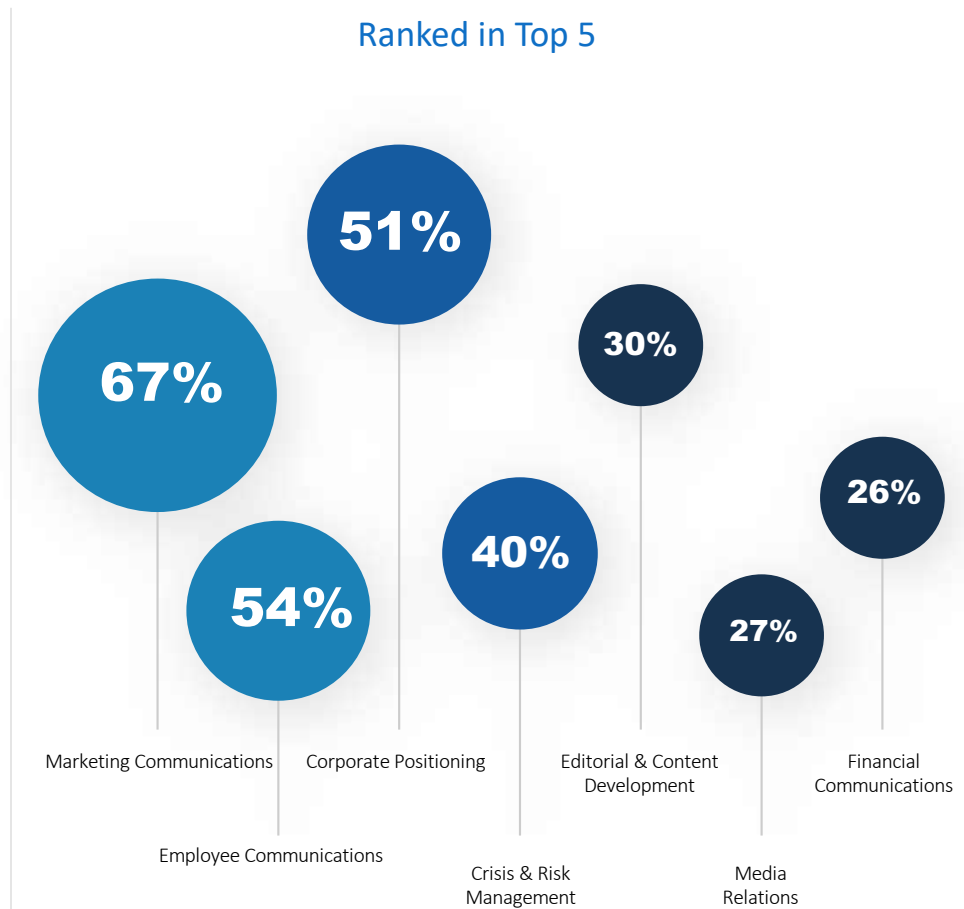
Skill and Capability Investment

Notably, investment in core skills and capabilities is second only to head count in communications leaders' budget priorities. This includes investing in talent, training, and/or wholesale specialty areas like data and analytics.

Leaders continue to focus on the basics, however — media relations, multimedia content and creative, and employee communications. These investment areas correlate to functional responsibilities that leaders identified as critical to delivering on communications strategies and objectives in the next 12 to 18 months.

Responsibilities Critical to Delivering Strategy

An overwhelming majority (67%) put marketing communications at the top of the list, followed by employee communications.

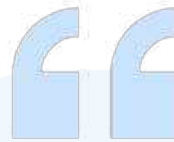


Please rank the top five capabilities you consider paramount to delivering your communications strategy and objectives in the next 12-18 months. (Shown among: n=200) Marketing Communications is net for respondents who selected corporate branding, marketing communications, or corporate advertising. Corporate Positioning is net for respondents who selected enterprise positioning or mission/visions/values work.

Skill and Capability Investment (cont.)

Beyond traditional capability development, three new areas of expertise are singled out in interviews with communications leaders and are quickly becoming the new hallmarks of Corporate Communications.

1. **Change Communications:** As many organizations navigate some form of transformation, change management and change communications capability is fast becoming a leading investment for many Corporate Communications leaders.
2. **Data and Analytics:** Communicators recognize that the use of advanced data and analytics requires new skill sets, and at times a whole new specialty group (in-house or from agency) embedded in the function. These specialists are immersed in data, can analyze for insights, and work with strategists and planners to frame insights into something actionable to take back to the business.
3. **Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG):** ESG skills and experience is another capability investment on the list of more than a few teams. The ability to support communications and engagement around social issues and environmental, social, and corporate governance is increasingly core to Corporate Communications' role, particularly in the United States.



“For us, ESG is a big area of continued growth and investment. Bringing in agencies that specialize in that to help us navigate that will be important to our business.”

“I recognize that the communications strategist can know how to use an analyst, but the communicator may not be able to also be an analyst.”

“Supporting social issues is an area of growing need to support both internally and externally. Our employees are demanding it and our customers are demanding it as well.”

The Playbook:

What communications leaders can do to build high-performing teams:

- Invest in professional development for your communicators — building a baseline of strong communications and business skills, supplemented by cutting-edge approaches and specialties.
- Focus on your people as business leaders with a specialty in corporate affairs, as opposed to the other way around.
- Focus on building good critical thinking and decision-making discipline that can move with the speed of the business (and the modern media cycle).
- Talk to your teams, keeping a pulse on how they're feeling and what they need to perform and grow.
- Embed and empower your teams in the business; as a leader, give up control and trust the team.
- Have people who are smart, have frameworks, and have principles — the guts to go out there and tell the story.

Program and Channel Investment

Many communicators see a continued need for investment in external communications — corporate brand promotion, paid media connected to the purchase funnel, and deeper multistakeholder insights.

These investment insights correspond to the responsibilities defining the Corporate Communications function today and represent a stable majority of activity and investment for Corporate Communications teams.

Communicators note that media investment remains a priority for many teams, but as functional responsibilities shift and capabilities like brand and corporate identity, digital, and analytics take an increasingly prominent position in functional activity, communications leaders are doubling down on investments in owned digital channels covering a range from influencer programming, to website refreshes, to corporate video and multimedia.

Channel investment on the employee communications side of the house will also continue. After the rush of setting up virtual work environments at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, communications teams are extending the investment period to stabilize and introduce more sophisticated digital tools, starting with mobile apps as a replacement for the traditional intranet and collaboration sites, and more sophisticated collaboration platforms.

CommsTech and Advanced Analytics Investment

The ability to build insight into communications strategy is another element identified by a significant number of communicators as continuing to change and advance the shape, positioning, and capability of Corporate Communications functions in the years to come.

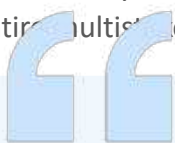
CommsTech represents the largest share of budget allocation at 35%, as reported in the 2021 Future of Corporate Communications survey.

For 2022, most communications teams report focusing on “just trying to get back to normal.” But looking past pandemic-driven technology investments, many leaders anticipate increased spending in advanced communications technology and analytics. This holds particularly true for larger, global Corporate Communications teams.

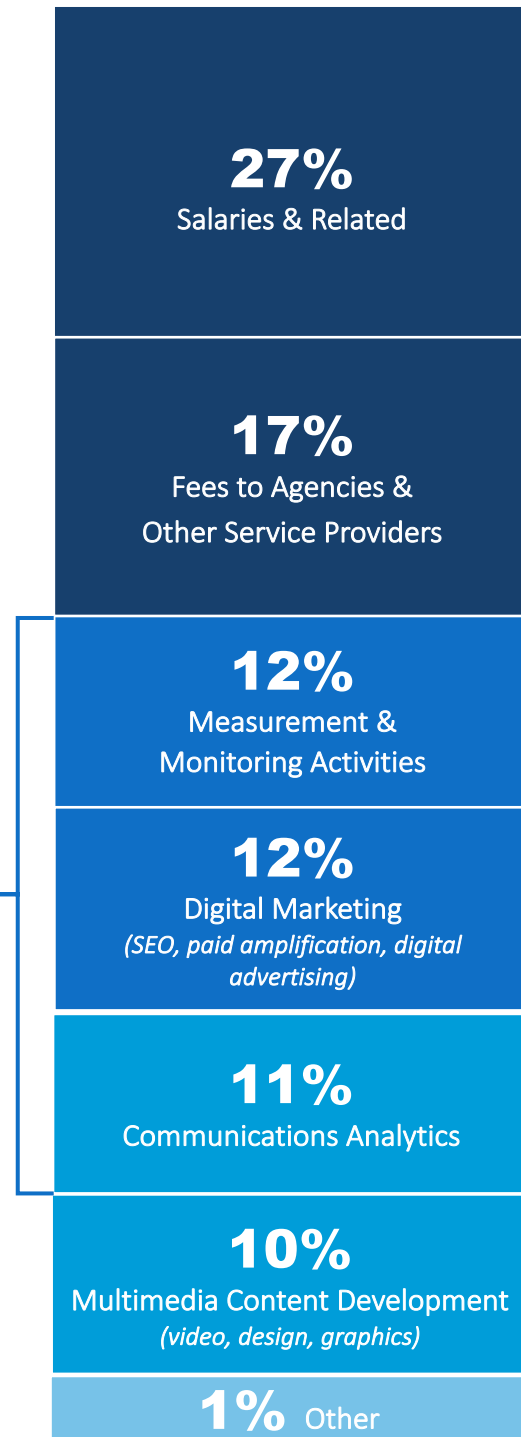
To justify CommsTech investment, communicators are building cases around the need to build tools and platforms capable of aggregating data and creating insights that drive more targeted content and messaging across audiences. Communicators are focused on data that helps them dial up or dial back programming to drive a particular sentiment, action, or outcome. This holds true for brand marketing, corporate and brand reputation, and employee communications.

To this end, Corporate Communications teams also report seeking new partnerships with marketing counterparts to present joint investment cases for shared analytics to drive integrated insights across an entire multi-stakeholder engagement spectrum.

CommsTech is the tools, technology, and data that allow communicators to precisely target, measure, and shape perceptions and behavior at the individual level.



Equally and across the board, we are using technology and data on the internal, external, and marketing sides, embedding CommsTech and MarTech into everything we do.”



Please provide an estimated average operating budget allocation by major operational type/category. (Shown among: n=200)

Key Finding:

As CommsTech grows in strategic importance, communications leaders say they are struggling to develop their strategies and investment cases. They point to challenges in three areas: At a foundational level, many are still navigating self-education around what CommsTech is. Next are decisions around technology and platform investments and complex aggregation efforts requiring considerable time and expertise. Finally, there is the challenge of application — getting teams to successfully understand and apply insights to communications strategy.

Top five most significant barriers when it comes to increasing the use of technology, data, and analytics in corporate communications.

1. Investment justification
2. Challenges educating and engaging corporate IT functions
3. Internal team adoption challenges
4. IT and/or marketing function conflicts
5. Collaboration barriers

Please rank the top five most significant barriers for your organization when it comes to increasing the use of technology, data, and analytics in communications. (Shown among: n=200)

58% It's difficult to justify large tech investments	47% My team struggles to adopt and leverage digital tools and analytics	42% Challenges in collaborating with marketing and sales operation
49% IT operations understanding of communications needs	46% IT and/or marketing has responsibility for this in my organization	39% This is not a strategic priority for my CEO/C-suite
36% I don't have the budget	34% My CEO/business leaders don't see or understand the value in these tools and capabilities	23% I don't fully understand the benefits and value proposition of these tools
34% Budget is decreasing	34% I don't know what's out there and what I should be leveraging	6% Other

Barriers to CommsTech Digital and Analytics Adoption

In more detail, three main challenges to the adoption of CommsTech were highlighted in communications leader interviews.

1. **Finding and building the right technology solutions:** The need for better analytics powered by automation and AI was mentioned in interviews and survey responses as central to Corporate Communications' ability to guide external consumer, stakeholder, and media engagement. As brand PR teams become an increasingly core component of B2C and B2B marketing and sales, a new arena of measurement and analytics systems is needed to track consumer sentiment and engagement. Communicators' challenges have been in automating the process of collecting, aggregating, and analyzing data from multiple sources and in creating tools and platforms that enable diverse systems and data sets to converge.
2. **Gaining and leveraging metrics at scale:** In large, geographically dispersed teams, the systems and capabilities required to collect and leverage insights at a global scale require time, investment, and, again, automation. Metrics often exist in functional pockets or with regional teams. Rolling them up to be able to look holistically at activity and impacts at the enterprise, country, or market level is a logistical undertaking that teams are just beginning to wrap their arms around. For smaller teams, data at scale is a challenge in a different sense, with difficulties in maintaining a robust impact measurement strategy due to a lack of data volume and team capacity and capability.
3. **Harnessing insights to influence strategy:** Finally, there is the slow process of building the strategic discipline to harness data into meaningful, actionable insights, and from there facilitating strategy and programming pivots when data is saying the opposite of the direction that's been set. Most corporate communications leaders talk about building stronger data fluency in their teams. They are looking for new and novel ways to incorporate and integrate insights into current processes and getting their teams to a comfort level where this becomes a natural, ingrained part of how the function operates.



"The website people, digital people, they're all data. They have analytics coming out of their ears. There's so much data, but what we don't have is the deeper dive to understand what the data is actually telling us about channel and content performance and how it is driving sentiment, behavior, and action."

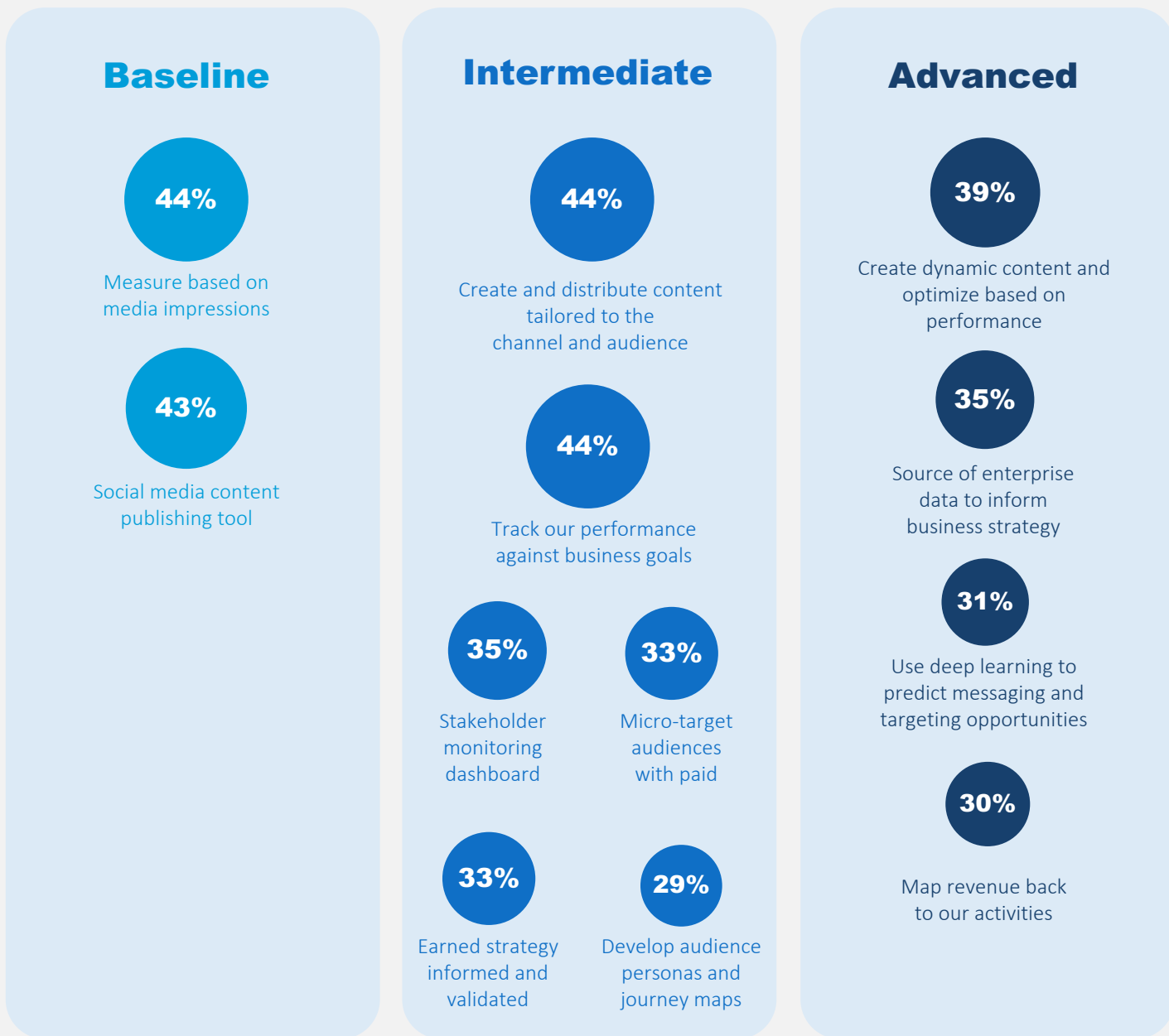
"The Holy Grail is something where you could connect all your channels ... [into one integrated] dashboard that ties everything together. How do you tie together share of voice, FCM results, digital engagement results, social media engagement, advocacy metrics? How do you tie that all together in one snapshot that says this week, this happened?"



Key Finding:

CCOs who see themselves as full strategic partners to the business are more likely to track communications performance against business goals, are investing in content publishing tools, and are producing tailored content.

CCO Adoption of CommsTech by Level



Which of these best characterize your team’s adoption of communications technology (CommsTech)? (Shown among: n=200)

The Playbook:

How to make the case for investment in Corporate Communications:

Most communicators agree the key to unlocking new budget rests in part on speaking the language of the business. Communicators focus on educating and influencing leaders on the value and necessity of communications in the context of corporate goals and the impact of reputation on revenue and profit drivers. When asked how they develop business cases to justify budget increases or investments, communicators outlined three components.



ROI: Most communicators are building budget cases based on a return-on-investment (ROI) calculation that includes both need and impact justifications, focusing on the business return of a particular tool, staff addition, or agency support over time.



Metrics: Closely aligned, and often a part of an ROI argument, metrics tracking the impact of communications and its correlation to business results such as conversion rates, share of voice, or talent retention are core components of the justification for budget and investment. Beyond those standards, communicators are developing more sophisticated measurement and analytic arguments that show upper- and lower-funnel consumer behavior correlations mapped to communications programming and product and brand performance. All admit that demonstrating behavior and sentiment to performance correlations is challenging and is one reason many communicators keep their KPIs to more basic, provable metrics.



Strategy: Finally, as communicators build closer working relationships with the C-suite, a clearly articulated strategy for the function is increasingly used as baseline justification for investment. Communications leaders are making their business cases based on a clear vision and set of objectives for the function and how those objectives help advance it, the business, and ultimately the bottom line.

A person in a suit is holding a tablet. Overlaid on the image is a network diagram with nodes and lines, and icons for a smartphone, a laptop, and server racks. The background is a solid teal color.

PART 4:

The Organization of Corporate Communications

**Corporate
Communications
structures are
constantly
evolving.**

In multiple studies over the years, a wide range of team sizes, reporting lines, and functional breakdowns is found. What this Future of Corporate Communications study confirms is that there is no set standard for how Corporate Communications functions are organized and structured. There is, however, a set of principles and best practices that govern good functional design.

This section offers perspective on how to think about the nuts and bolts of Corporate Communications function design, from vision and purpose, to budgets and reporting lines, enabling the function to perform to new expectations and propelling it toward strategic partner.

Key Finding:

Corporate Communications Functional Responsibilities Benchmarks

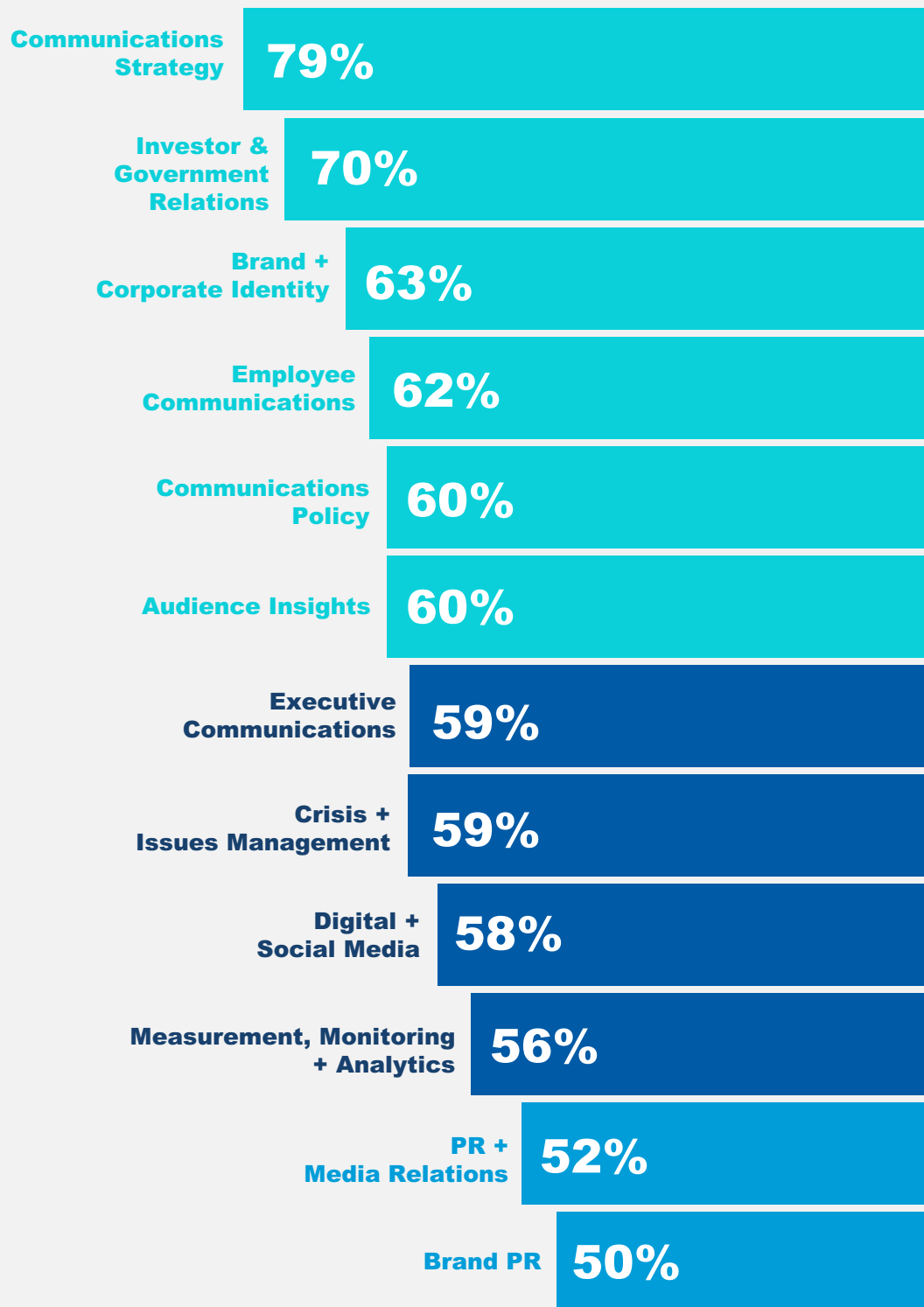
Traditional Corporate Communications functions — from employee communications to crisis and media relations — still represent a stable majority of activity for teams and have not shifted significantly over the years.

What has shifted is the increased focus on newer capabilities like brand and corporate identity, advanced analytics, and digital, all of which have taken an increasingly prominent position as core responsibilities for the Corporate Communications function.

In defining the areas of work and responsibility, please check all that apply for your organization’s Corporate Communications function. (Shown among n=200)

Investor & Government relations is combined into those respondents who selected investor relations/financial comms, stakeholder relations, or government relations/public affairs.

Audience Insights is combined into those respondents who selected audience insights, audience targeting/micro-targeting, demand generation or revenue attribution.



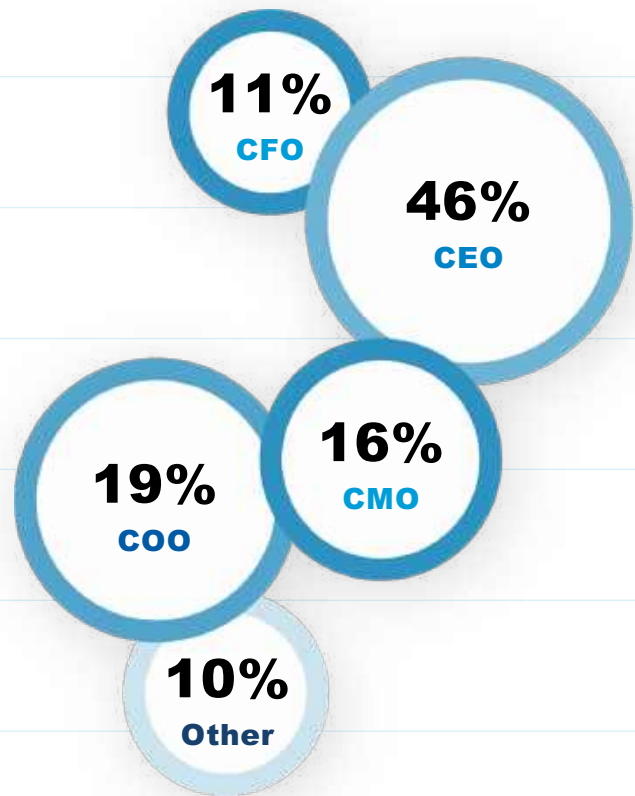
Functional Reporting Lines

In 2014, there was a significant variance in Corporate Communications’ functional reporting lines up through the organization; CEO, CMO, HR, legal, and corporate strategy functions were all listed as mostly equal owners of Corporate Communications.

While these ownership dynamics still exist, in 2021 there is significant consolidation with 46% of Corporate Communications functions now reporting directly to the CEO.

Interviews with communications leaders corroborate this finding and associate it with the elevation of Corporate Communications’ strategic role and positioning in the organization. Respondents in 2014 and today agree that reporting directly to the CEO is the most effective way to move Corporate Communications up the strategic continuum and closer to the heart of business strategy.

A vast majority of Corporate Communications functions currently report directly to the C-suite.

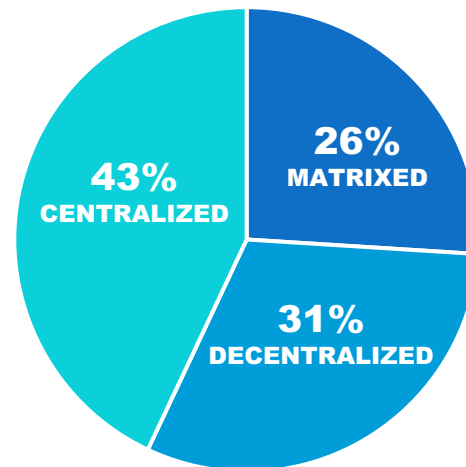


Who does your most senior communicator report in to? (Shown among n=200)

Functional Structure

Corporate Communications structures, organizational charts, and operating models are constantly evolving and are often more a result of incremental change than a deliberate design strategy. Many, if not most, interviewees describe a natural cadence of assessing and adjusting their functions to keep pace with the changing communications environment. For these leaders, finding the right operating model and structure starts with thinking through communications' role and defining its purpose and value proposition. From there, they were able to more easily determine the right structure required to execute on the vision.

There are multiple structures communicators can build from. The three most common are represented in the graph.



How is your communications function currently structured (i.e., configuration and reporting lines of teams and individuals)? (Shown among n=200)

Corporate Communications structures swing from centralized to decentralized depending on the year and the trend. More than a few leaders talk about moving back toward centrally managed Corporate Communications functions, or matrixed functions with a center enterprise governing team in 2022. They attribute the moves in part to the following:

- A direct response to a business shift or realignment at the enterprise level; as businesses centralize and consolidate their operating models, so goes corporate communications.
- The need to reduce complexity and streamline decision-making within the function based on a centralized approach and point of view.
- The desire to operate with greater coordination and agility by pulling all communicators into a centrally managed model with a shared vision, objectives, and strategies.
- Correcting a lack of line of sight across communications programming, content, and messaging that can undermine corporate positioning and stakeholder engagement.
- The ability to deploy resources more easily, matching resources and expertise to business need quickly, efficiently, and in real time.
- The need to more effectively leverage economies of scale, from content and message development, to media pitching, to capability development.

Breaking Down Structures

Centralized Model

Centralized structures are most often led from the center enterprise level and organized around communications disciplines — most often Corporate Communications, brand, employee communications, and digital/social.

Core pillars may be accompanied by capability experts such as newsrooms, channel teams, and increasingly, measurement and analytics.

Our survey showed corporate communications functions with operating budgets of less than \$1 million annually were more likely to exist in a centralized model.



Advantages

Team operates under centrally managed, aligned vision and strategy.

Easier to manage consistent enterprise narrative and brand and reputation agendas.

Easier to drive transparency and collaboration within and across function.

More consistent and efficient processes and approaches.

Increases agility and economies of scale around resources, content, technology, analytics, etc.

Disadvantages

Greater enterprise focus can be at expense of market, geography, or business function/unit considerations.

Content can be overly directed by a dominant geography and fail to land in local market context.

Teams find themselves removed from direct business relationships, diminishing business acumen and strategic reach.

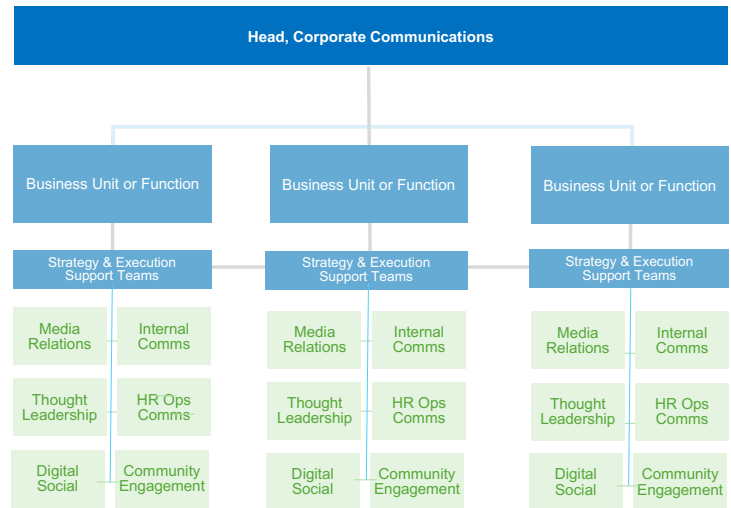
Requires teams to work well within a matrix and operate in alignment to the same communications philosophy and approach.

Fights for resources and investments within and across the function, as needs in different areas of the business can differ.

Breaking Down Structures (cont.)

Decentralized Business Partner Model

Business partner models provide direct support and engagement with business units, geographies, or functions through self-contained communications teams that mirror the operating structure of the business. This model is nearly as common as the centralized model. It helps teams achieve a high level of “local” relevance and deliver communications and programming that are especially well designed for stakeholder and market needs. Business partner models can also be matrixed with discipline or center-of-excellence teams that provide strategy and execution support across business units.



Advantages

Proximity to leadership with opportunity to cultivate deep strategic counsel relationships.

Deep business acumen and intimate knowledge of business/product strategy.

Dedicated teams focused on developing localized, targeted strategy and programming.

Strategic themes emanate from the center as well as from local market teams.

Directed allocation of budget and resources aligned to specific business unit needs.

Communications roles and resources closely aligned to specific business unit needs.

Disadvantages

Absence or challenges in maintaining enterprise corporate/brand identity strategy and positioning.

Difficulty maintaining enterprise vision, narrative, and consistency of communications and messaging.

Uneven communications strategy and delivery due to lack of centralized strategy and approach.

Collaboration is challenged as teams revert into business-driven silos.

Redundancy in resource and process and challenges in creating economies of scale.

Communicators in compromised positions when business unit leaders act counter to enterprise strategy.

Breaking Down Structures (cont.)

Matrixed Model

A hybrid or matrixed structure is the most common. It often combines dominant and secondary teams that emphasize core communications disciplines managed from the center and are supplemented by geographically aligned teams. The strategy may also be the reverse, giving geography-based teams greater autonomy supported by discipline centers of excellence. Process and governance are very important in matrixed models where strategy encompasses multiple areas of the business and execution is happening at the enterprise and local levels.

The survey showed Corporate Communications functions with budgets over \$1 million annually are more often matrixed models.

Advantages +

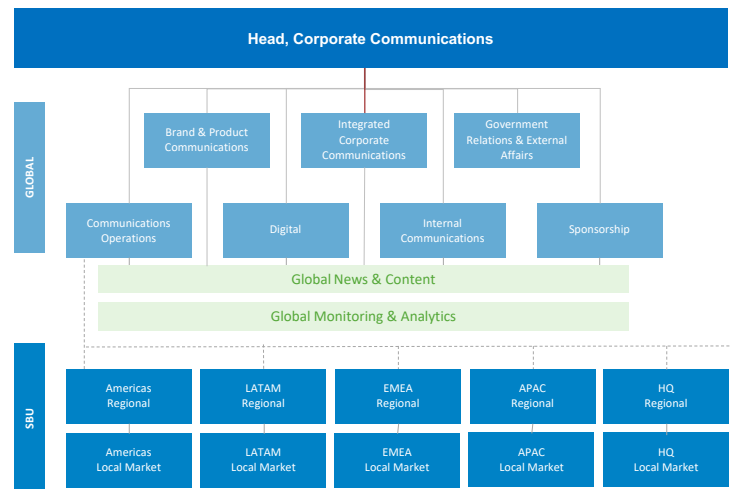
Teams guided by a centralized, enterprise strategy and approach.

Better balanced enterprise and local market communications and brand objectives.

Ability to more easily anticipate potential conflicts of interest across markets/business units.

More balanced focus between corporate reputation initiatives and individual business unit/business activities.

Better collaboration and ability to bring teams together around strategy and approach and individual issues or initiatives.



Disadvantages -

Content and message overlaps and redundancies, as well as floods of uncoordinated messaging from enterprise and regional teams.

Challenges in determining decision rights and accountabilities for strategy and content development and execution.

Management of function demands more coordination and collaboration, even when org. chart provides for direct and dotted reporting lines.

Strategy misalignments and conflicts due to dual ownership at the enterprise and business unit levels.

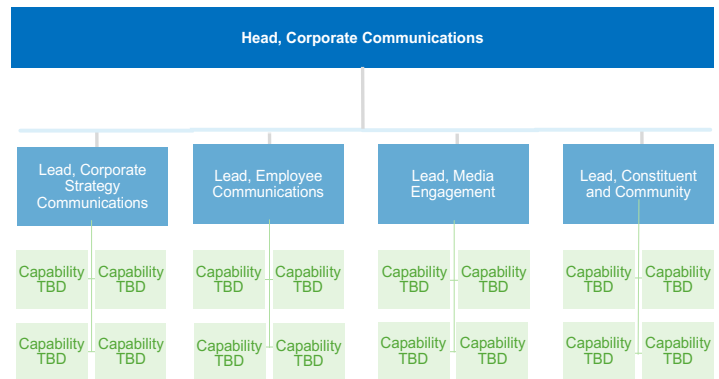
Lack of clarity or confusion around roles, responsibility, and decision-making authorities.

Breaking Down Structures (cont.)

Decentralized Stakeholder Model

Decentralized stakeholder models are organized around audiences. This is a less common model and most often used by smaller communications teams (i.e., fewer than 25 people), as well as in some pharma/biotech settings where the needs of unique scientific and patient constituencies dominate the communications agenda.

Like business unit-aligned functions, designing a function around stakeholders while providing deep audience insight and experience can challenge strategy, approach, and message consistency. Without careful planning, management, and collaboration, the model is less efficient at leveraging talent and resources.



Advantages

Increased audience insights-driven strategy and content; clarity on the what and why of messaging against audience insights.

Easier story sourcing within and across business.

Clear roles and accountabilities for communications team segmented by audience or stakeholder group.

Opportunity to build deep, tailored capability and resources aligned to specific stakeholder strategies.

Opportunities for scalability of team and team capabilities.

Disadvantages

Lack of business alignment (outward vs. inward focus), which undermines strategic positioning of function.

More work and effort to find and pull through red thread of central narrative and themes.

More complex for business to navigate multiple communications POCs and points of engagement.

Resource and talent redundancies and lack of ability to leverage economies of scale through matrixed teams.

Career growth and succession potentially more challenging.

Key Finding:

The Elusive Integration of Marketing and Communications

From a structural perspective, the successful blending of marketing and communications functions continues to elude many organizations and create confusion around leadership, roles, and accountabilities. While there was an initial trend several years ago to try to merge marketing and communications functions, because of significant operating and cultural divides difficult to overcome, a majority remain separate, and teams are still working through integration growing pains.

Teams that successfully bridge the divide start by creating joint planning that exists within a flexible framework that accounts for everything from individual product lines to local markets. These are dynamic, as opposed to rigid planning and collaboration systems. This process allows teams to confront cultural differences through strategic approach and understanding — how teams view and perceive each other’s role and value proposition, but also how they think about programming, particularly when it comes to brand and product marketing that dictates communications and marketing work closely together. From there, teams jointly work through the process of co-creating the right systems and processes to drive collaboration.



“The swim lanes used to be very clear between marketing and communications and it has become less clear. We’re both sort of encroaching on each other’s territory. And now that’s where the tension is.”

“[Team members] want to know ‘what box do I play in? What am I accountable for and what am I not? And when do I pass the baton?’”



Good Governance

At the most basic level, governance is how decisions are made and how information moves, both within the function and between the function and other parts of the business. Taken further, governance is a critical framework defining how strategic and operational decisions are made and executed. It is fundamental to how the function is managed and more important to efficient and effective operations than structure.

For Corporate Communications, the essential aspects of governance fall in three categories:



Many communications teams struggle to build the right forums and processes to ensure good governance both within their functions and as the critical connective tissue with other functional partners and the business.

Left undefined, a lack of defined governance becomes the primary barrier to productivity and execution in Corporate Communications functions today.

More than a few communications leaders believe they had structural or reporting issues that required an overhaul of their teams and organizational charts, when in fact they were experiencing a lack of governance and clear accountabilities, which are much more easily solved.

Effective communications governance models include the following elements:

- Clear roles and responsibilities
- Defined decision rights
- Formal and informal communication mechanisms
- Consistent leadership
- Aligned incentive structures
- Metrics or KPIs

Good Process + Workflow

Communications leaders say establishing strong processes around core work has had the greatest return on time and investment and is one of the most critical aspects of their functional design to get right.

Defining processes is critical to establishing how the function's work gets done in the context of specific activities. While some processes evolve naturally, there are others for which it is important to develop clear policies and procedures that are consistent and institutionalized. Interviewees singled out three processes they see as both essential to a well-functioning Corporate Communications function and benefiting from having defined approaches and workflows.

1

Strategic Planning

Communications leaders who have instituted regular, integrated strategic planning find it to be a starting point for better collaboration and a way to ensure that teams and functional partners are informed and aware of each other's strategies, goals, and program planning.

2

Content Development + Newsrooms

Another core process that teams spend significant time establishing is around the administration of content creation and dissemination — whether through a traditional storytelling engine or an internal newsroom. Corporate communications leaders see value in developing an engine that defines its audiences, identifies priority topic areas, and categorizes the optimal channels for distribution, ensuring a well-managed, fully integrated content development process.

3

Issues and Crisis Response

A central process and plan built with the appropriate resources to proactively monitor the organization's issue risk portfolio should include crisis team roles and responsibilities, response protocols, and playbooks that reinforce a process-driven communications approach and serve as the central resource for issue response.

Team Size and Head Count

There does not appear to be any standard benchmark for the appropriate size of the Corporate Communications function — teams run in size from two to 200.

Factors influencing size have as much to do with the value the business places on communications and reputation management as with the function’s organic growth and strategic positioning. Size correlates somewhat to the role and complexity of Corporate Communications, but not necessarily to the size or revenue of the business.

Function Head Count	Total	Org size		Org revenue		Corp Communications Budget			
		Under 5k	5k+	<\$2B	\$2B+	Under \$500k	\$500k-\$999k	\$1M to \$4.9M	\$5M+
Sample size	N = 192	N = 102	N = 90	N = 94	N = 98	N = 48	N = 40	N = 51	N = 53
1 to 4	15%	16%	14%	18%	12%	46%	5%	6%	4%
5 to 9	54%	69%	37%	64%	44%	44%	78%	61%	38%
10 to 24	19%	11%	29%	11%	28%	6%	10%	24%	34%
25 to 99	6%	4%	8%	5%	6%	0%	8%	8%	8%
100+	6%	1%	12%	2%	10%	4%	0%	2%	17%
Median	8	7	9	7	9	5	7	8	11
Mean	51.01	12.94	94.14	17.52	83.12	21.94	9.45	20.86	137.70

*Median refers to the middle response provided of all responses, while mean refers to the average of all responses.



“I don’t know how much of our staffing numbers were data-driven or just some random business number — you can have 120 people in the department.”

“Shadow communicators contribute to our challenge [of growing the size of the team]. We might have had 10 people in communications that we know about, and 20 more behind the scenes that we don’t.”



Key Finding:

Building and Leading a Multidisciplinary Team

Corporate Communications is shifting from singularly focused communications expertise — creating and disseminating content — to a multidisciplinary function of complementary capabilities. To lead an effective corporate communications function in today’s environment, teams we spoke to are beginning to shift their talent and capability sets to a more diverse balance of traditional skills (e.g., writing, earned media, employee communications) and new skills in strategy, data and analytics, brand and marketing PR, and multimedia.

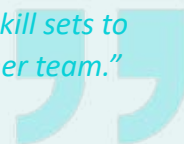
The dilemma of how to create new multidisciplinary teams and strategic disciplines within Corporate Communications, starting with embedding data and analytics, was called out as one of the biggest hurdles facing many communicators in advanced and global functions.

For some, the first step to building a multidisciplinary team is thinking of the team as an integrated unit as opposed to a collection of individual specialists or silos on an organizational chart. Doing this requires adjusting leadership style, building culture, and rethinking the underlying architecture of the function with a special focus on collaboration. A few other critical components highlighted by communicators include:

- Shared understanding and alignment around a common set of goals and objectives that the entire team, regardless of discipline, is working toward.
- A baseline, generalist understanding of the core disciplines of communications regardless of specialty.
- Processes that guide integrated planning at the macro and micro levels.
- Collaborative processes that make it easy to come together and produce work as integrated teams.



“The ability to lead and manage multidisciplinary teams — that in and of itself is a very different skill set for communications leaders than maybe 10 years ago when you were managing a more homogenized team with similar skill sets. It changes the role of a communicator. A senior communicator used to be the best writer or had the best media contacts. But now the role of the top communicator is to pull together the right skill sets to drive a strategy and know how to maximize the value of the specialist on his or her team.”



People, Teams + Collaboration

Roles and Responsibilities

One of the biggest challenges for Corporate Communications teams, regardless of structure, is keeping roles and responsibilities clear within the function, and between the function and other departments such as marketing and HR.

Some teams report using RACI-style exercises to clarify roles and responsibilities, ensuring that individual communicators and teams understand their swim lanes. Others looked to create broader service-level agreements that approach roles and responsibilities from the perspective of the work being done.

In each exercise, communications leaders took pains to think not only about tasks and skills, but about ownership around channels and strategic platforms and types of communication — earned media, paid media, websites, social handles, etc.

Integration and Collaboration

An additional challenge is fostering engagement and building the appropriate networks that compel and enable teams to effectively emerge from discipline or business unit silos and work cross-functionally. Building necessary collaboration and knowledge-sharing networks and behaviors is never a simple task; undermining these efforts are everything from strategic and physical silos, to time and resources, to the competitive tendencies of corporate culture.

Teams reported that good collaboration for them started with setting routines where teams gather and work together on a regular basis. Remote work over the past 18 months has helped. It has accelerated and facilitated development and investment in improved technology and collaboration platforms, and a focus on more formal processes and governance, starting with a proliferation of alignment meetings used to speed collaboration and decision-making.



“[COVID-19] showed what collaboration and working across the organization really meant, not just in my silo to deliver the work product. And that really helped us.”

“One thing that I would like to see stay [as a result of COVID-19], and everybody's seen the value of, are regular alignment and integration meetings between teams and functions.”



People, Teams + Collaboration (cont.)

While the COVID-19 pandemic has forced greater collaboration, some communications leaders expressed concern over long-standing, ingrained challenges they face. These challenges manifest frequently in two places: global teams facing tensions between center and regional communications authorities and engagement, and between Corporate Communications and marketing.

Solutions that have made a difference and were referenced by communications leaders are:



Institutionalizing Collaboration Processes: Cross-collaboration is achieved through formal and informal relationships. Some teams have taken steps to institutionalize routines to ensure that collaboration is a deeply ingrained accountability in the performance of the function.



Investment in Collaboration Platforms and Tools: Teams continue to make significant investment in collaboration platforms and tools — from digital work environments to content databases — to drive more virtual collaboration and information-sharing.



Meeting Cadence: Teams are trying to make COVID-19-driven work groups and alignment meetings permanent. Regular meeting cadences supplemented by informal check-ins, strong editorial and issues management processes, and more formal annual summits and strategic planning processes are just a few things teams are focused on.



Collaboration Is Cultural: There's a recognition that collaboration must be ingrained in the culture and operating environment. This manifests through leader and manager approach, norms and behaviors that define performance, and a discipline of transparency and information-sharing across teams.

“We've absolutely broken the barrier on communications as a strategic driver and we've expanded the team dramatically. Since COVID, we've been way more valued. I get pushback way less.”

“There are still region-centric fiefdoms. There's still the ‘you guys in [the corporate center] don't really understand us’ and us saying ‘we don't know why you can't execute that in your region.’”

The Playbook:

Guiding principles for designing your communications function.

Communications leaders are trying to build operating models that move them closer to the business without losing a consistent, managed approach to enterprise communications strategy. Some leaders are also confronting the need for a (sometimes vastly) different talent mix and wrestling with developing new capabilities and a new functional architecture to support them.

While there are no hard and fast rules to functional design, communications leaders, backed by Edelman's own experience, offered a set of guiding principles influencing functional structure and design today.



Have a clear vision. Perceptions of the role of communication hinder or advance the function and impact structure, budget, and strategic positioning. Create and leverage a clear communications vision and value proposition to signal the function's strategic value to the business.



Enable business strategy. Closely align Corporate Communications structures and operating models to the broader organization mission and business strategies and objectives.



Combine planning and insight. Leverage data and advanced analytics to drive strategy; ensure that the necessary tools and disciplines exist to integrate insight, outcome, and planning.



Optimize how work gets done. Establish good processes and institutionalize the critical ones to enable the team to perform the activities consistently and efficiently across the function.



Allow governance to trump structure. Establish rules for how the team and individual contributors share information and make decisions within and across the function and the broader business.



Have a strong people strategy. Define and continuously re-evaluate the skills and capabilities necessary not only for today, but to bring the function into the future.

The Future of Corporate Communications

APPENDIX

About the Authors

Lead Authors



Geren Raywood
Executive Vice President, Business Transformation

Geren Raywood is an Executive Vice President and leader in Edelman Business Transformation practice. Geren brings more than 20 years of experience in strategic communications, organizational strategy and change, and employee engagement. Geren partners with clients at the executive and functional levels to develop large-scale workforce and change communications programs designed to deepen stakeholder engagement and drive business performance. With a background in management consulting, Geren has worked extensively in the commercial, government, higher education, and nonprofit sectors.

At Edelman, Geren also leads an Organizational Design practice focused on assessment initiatives analyzing strategic, operational, and cultural issues in the context of large-scale functional redesigns and communications effectiveness audits. Her recent work includes new marketing and Corporate Communications functions for a global commodities company and two major universities, a global approach to manufacturing communications for a major automaker, and internal communications and labor relations strategies and counsel for two global companies managing through major crises.

Before joining Edelman, Geren was at Booz Allen Hamilton, where she developed leadership, human capital, and workforce planning strategies for the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Homeland Security, Justice, and the President's Management Council. Geren graduated from Boston University and has her master's from Columbia University. She holds post-graduate certificates in Global Affairs and Change Management from New York University and Georgetown University, respectively. She has worked throughout the U.S., Asia, Europe, and the Middle East.



Kari Butcher
Managing Director, Edelman Data x Intelligence, U.S.

Kari is a research and communications specialist with more than 25 years of experience in corporate reputation, public affairs, and issue campaigns where she has deep expertise in turning data into actionable insights to drive client engagements. As a former political pollster, Kari brings a unique combination of issue management, reputation, and advocacy campaign expertise to the team. She has led the research for national issue advocacy campaigns and global reputation benchmark and tracking studies, and worked with multinational companies on managing risk and crisis recovery.

Kari works with some of the leading global government affairs and law firms and trade organizations on crafting issue narratives, testing messages, and measuring impact to guide communications for local, national, and global issues. She has expertise working in highly regulated industries and navigating sensitive issues dealing with policy, legislation, energy, transportation, environmental, and community issues.

About the Authors

Research & Editing Team



Lindsay Hanson
SVP, Global Corporate Practice Strategy

Lindsay leads strategy for Edelman’s Corporate Affairs and Advisory Services practice. Over her career, she has worked in advisory capacities to help organizations define and understand their stakeholders, establish strategic priorities, and achieve target outcomes.

As strategy lead, Lindsay collaborates with a global network of practice leaders to drive business growth, capability innovation, and efficiency.

Lindsay holds an MBA from the University of Chicago’s Booth School of Business and a bachelor’s degree in political science and economics from the University of Richmond. As an undergraduate writing fellow, she was trained in the art of developing young writers, a practice she continues to enjoy today.



Alayna Van Hall
SVP, Corporate Growth and Innovation, CommsTech

Alayna leads innovation at Edelman’s Corporate Affairs & Advisory Services practice. With more than 10 years of experience working with marketing, advertising, AdTech, and innovation firms, Alayna works with Edelman’s leadership and clients to uncover the most pressing needs of the communications industry and leverages design thinking to bring each solution to life.

With a focus on CommsTech, Alayna has helped to infuse digital, data, and analytics into the Corporate Practice — helping communications do what they do, but better.



Stephanie Lesser
Consultant, Edelman Data x Intelligence

Stephanie is an experienced market research professional and 7-year veteran of Edelman's data and intelligence arm. While at Edelman, she has developed and led bespoke audience insights research for a variety of leading companies, government entities, and not-for-profit organizations. In recent years, Stephanie has helped design and execute both qualitative and quantitative research for several of Edelman's organizational design projects.

Stephanie holds a Master's in international economics and international relations from Johns Hopkins University and a Bachelor's in linguistics from the University of Florida.

Our research focused on two tracks:

1. A quantitative survey fielded to 200 participants in December 2020 and January 2021.
2. In-depth interviews with 35+ senior communications leaders from participating U.S.-based organizations.

Our survey was a combination of trend identification and baseline functional benchmarking (e.g., head count, scope of responsibilities, operational models, budgets, and investments).

Interviews focused on the operations and strategic positioning of the Corporate Communications function and forward-looking insights around future growth and investment.

The survey was conducted by Edelman Data & Intelligence, an independent research firm and part of the DJE family of companies.

Data analysis was performed by an integrated team of Edelman organizational design subject matter experts and Edelman leaders and subject matter experts.

For more information, contact FOCC@Edelman.com.

The Future of Corporate Communications Study in Numbers



3 months of research



200+
Survey participants



35+
Interviews and conversations

Representative Geographies

North America (85%)
EMEA (7%)
APAC (4%)
Latin America (4%)



Representative Sectors

Public: 49%
Private: 49%
Nonprofit: 2%



Global Reach

Multinational: 61%
National (U.S.): 39%

Participants



Senior Corporate Communications leaders, Minimum 10-24 years professional experience

Survey Demographics

Survey Participant Profile

Over eight weeks in December 2020 and February 2021, Edelman conducted a survey and interviews with a diversity of leaders in Corporate Communications.

The objective was to understand how communications leaders are thinking about the strategic positioning and structure of their functions today and in the future.

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Private

2%

Nonprofit

61%

Multinational

39%

National (U.S.)

Role:

Corporate
Communications

Level:

Senior Leader

**Professional
Experience:**

10-24 years

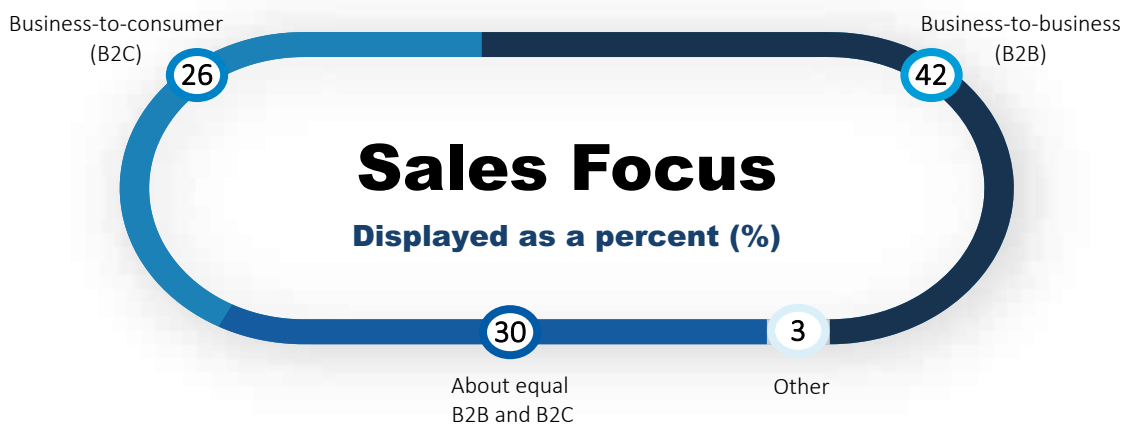
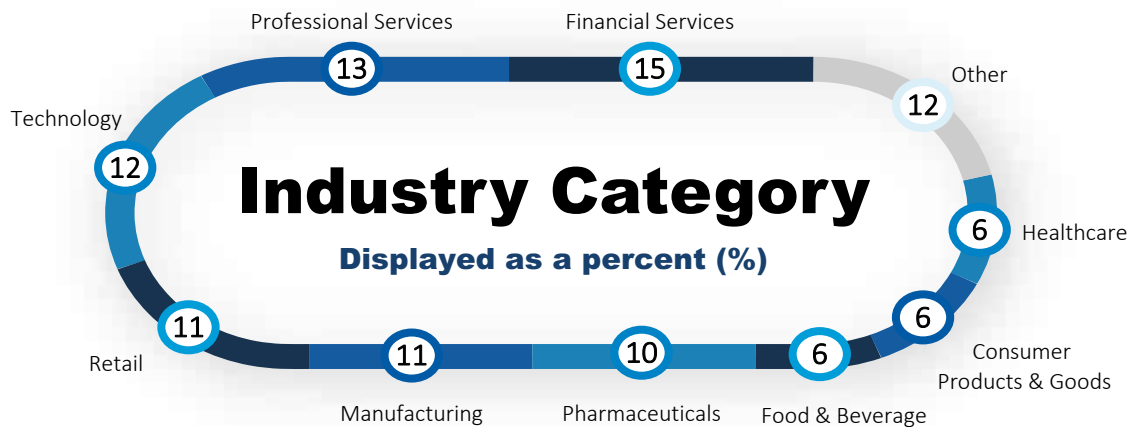
Survey Demographics

Industry + Focus

Survey respondents represent a range of industry categories.

The top five industries representing between 10-15% of total respondents include:

1. Financial Services
2. Professional Services
3. Technology
4. Retail
5. Manufacturing



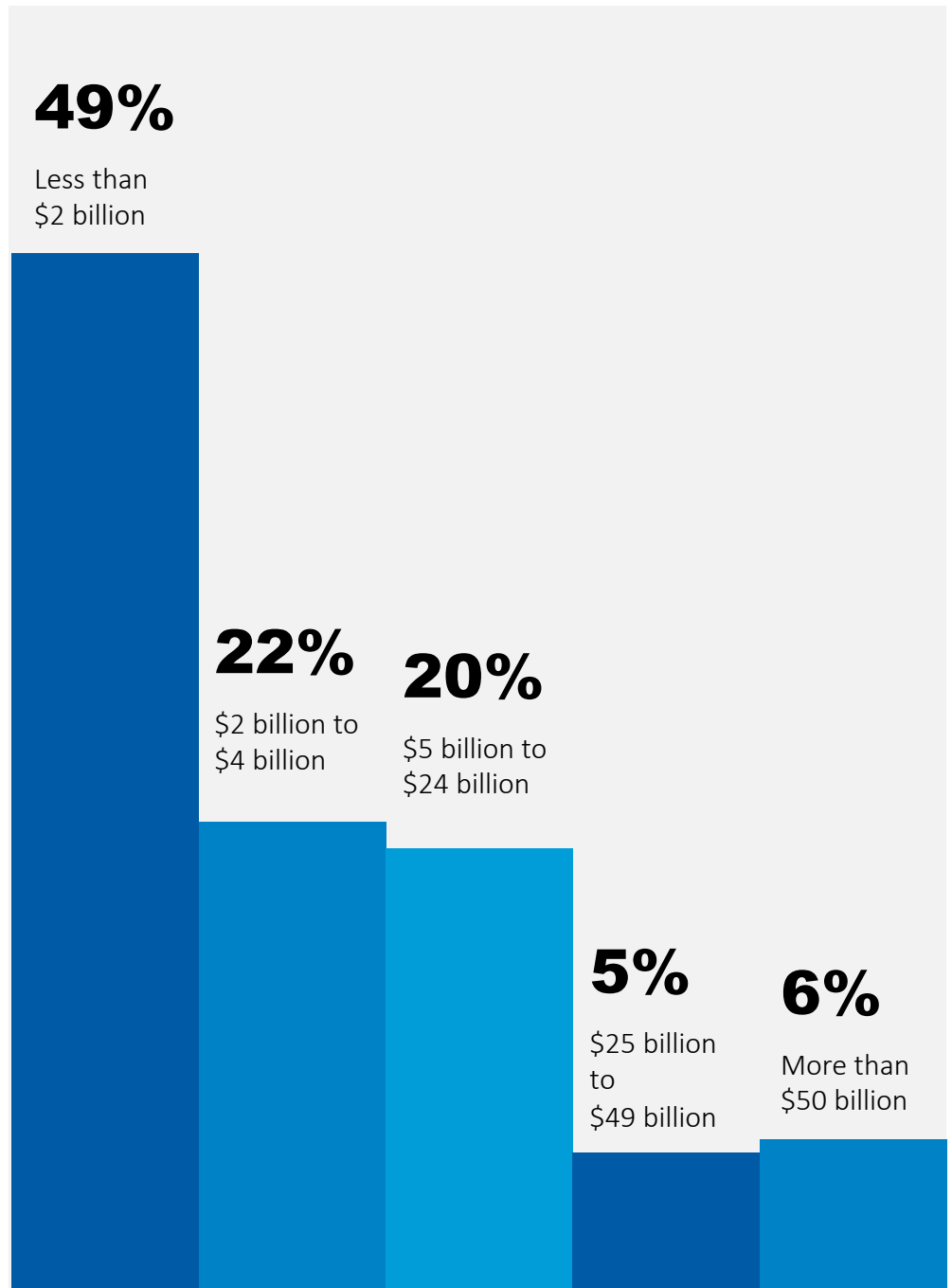
Which of the following best describes your industry? (Shown among: n=200)

How would you describe your sales focus? (Shown among: n=200)

Survey Demographics

Company Annual Revenue

About half of survey respondents manage communications for companies with less than \$2 billion in annual revenue.



Approximately how much is the annual revenue of the organization you work for?
(Shown among: n=200)

Survey Demographics

Survey Participant Profile

The average workforce size for the majority of survey respondents is less than 5,000. An additional 44% of respondents represent between 5,000 and 100,000 employees.

