



We surveyed over 200 internal communicators with insight from industry experts.

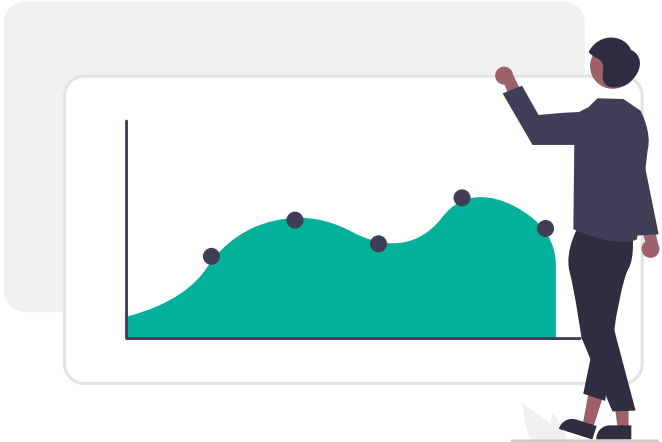
Oak Engage's State of IC 2023

A report which answers the key questions around internal communication objectives, trends, best practices and potential challenges with recommendations for the year ahead.



Contents

Welcome from our CEO	3
Key findings from the research	4
Priorities for internal communicators	6
Issues for internal communicators	8
Top blockers for internal communicators	10
The impact of poor internal communication	14
Internal communication best practices	18
Dealing with change	22
Our recommendations for 2023	26



Welcome from our CEO

Effective internal communication within an organisation is essential. It has been proven to enhance productivity, drive efficiency and provide a better place to work for employees.

With huge changes in how we work, businesses have had to adapt their practices to help better support their employees and how they communicate and engage with them.

However since the pandemic, the role of the internal communicator has become a lot more complicated. That's why we've created our State of IC 2023 report. We wanted to study the sector, combining a survey with insights from industry experts to understand the priorities and challenges that arise within the internal comms industry, along with recommendations to help you succeed in your role as strategic advisors.

We want to be an expert voice and guide you through 2023 to make sure your internal comms strategy is the best it can be. We also want to advise you on how the ways of working are still changing and how you can keep your employees motivated and engaged.

We hope you enjoy.



Will Murray CEO, Oak Engage

Key findings from the research

We conducted a survey of over 200 internal communication professionals. Here are some key statistics from the survey that will form the basis of this report.

Top priorities for communicators were all around effective messaging:

- 1 Getting the right message to the right people at the right time
- 2 Improving the actionability of messages
- 3 Making sure the message is impactful

Biggest challenges facing communicators:

- 1 People failing to act upon messages they receive
- 2 Employees are not contactable or reachable
- 3 Lack of an accurate and appropriately segmented audience list

Communicators believe that their biggest blockers are:

- 1** Lack of buy-in from C-level
- 2** Misaligned agendas across departments
- 3** Technology not fit for purpose

The top characteristics of poor internal communication are:

- 1** Low morale/high staff attrition
- 2** Declining productivity
- 3** Lack of motivation

46% of internal communicators believe that poor internal communication causes staff attrition. This shows just how vital a well thought out internal comms strategy is.

It also highlights that communicators are aware of the impact poor communication can have on business and correlates with the fact that their immediate priority is through messaging that engages and resonates with employees. This report will delve a little deeper and give practical tips and advice on how we can minimise these characteristics and improve internal communication within your business in 2023 and beyond.

Priorities for Internal Communicators

We asked internal communicators: **What are your internal communication goals and objectives?**

- 1 Getting the right message to the right people at the right time
- 2 Improving the actionability of messages
- 3 Making sure the message is impactful
- 4 Demonstrate the impact of communications to the wider business
- 5 Understanding the effectiveness of the communications we send
- 6 Getting people to actively engage with the content
- 7 Facilitating and enabling corporate change and transformation
- 8 Ensuring the message delivered is readable & uses the right tone

Our survey revealed that communicators top priority is getting the right message to the right people at the right time. The proliferation of communication methods means that employees are inundated with irrelevant and inconsistent messages. This results in noisy internal communications, causing confusion and frustration. This makes it a huge challenge for internal communicators to cut through and reduce the noise. New and better technologies need to be taken advantage of to combat this issue.

Improving the actionability of messages was second most important to communicators and third most important was making sure the message is impactful. Your role as a storyteller means you have the ability to take what's currently going on in the company and tell the story through the lens of what matters most, making that narrative more meaningful as a result. We've created a guide on [internal storytelling](#) so you can apply it within your organisation.



Issues for Internal Communicators

We asked internal communicators: **Indicate your three most immediate priorities from these common issues.**

- 1 Lack of an accurate and appropriately segmented audience list
- 2 People failing to act upon the messages they receive
- 3 Problems supporting different audience demographics
- 4 Employees are not contactable/reachable (disconnected)
- 5 Employees having access to multiple systems to get what is needed
- 6 Contradictory messages that confuse
- 7 Messages failing to arrive or be delivered
- 8 Message dilution or corruption as it trickles down or cascades
- 9 Difficulty demonstrating who knew what and when they knew



Our survey revealed that a lack of an accurate and appropriately segmented audience list was the biggest challenge communicators need to address (33%).

It is essential to understand who the intended audience is and who you're communicating with. It's necessary to also find out what your audience cares about so you can ensure the message resonates with each of them.

This correlates with the focus on engaging messaging. Internal communicators recognise that targeted messaging is key to engagement, but how can they achieve this?

Curated content systems reduce the noise and ensure your people receive the most relevant content on their favourite channels to maximise engagement and keep your whole business aligned.

People failing to act upon the messages they receive was identified as the second most immediate priority. Organisations need to be more strategic in their approach when they're communicating with their people. Just because the content has been sent on time to the right people, doesn't mean they will act in the way you want them to. In order to really change their perceptions or actions you need to understand where your people are mentally and plan a course of action from that in order to communicate with them effectively.

Top Blockers for Internal Communicators

We asked internal communicators: **Indicate which three are most significant to your experience from these commonly reported blockers.**

Lack of awareness about the value of IC at an executive level



Misaligned agendas across departments



Technology not fit for purpose



Poor people manager communication skills



Lack of resource and/or budget



No seat at the table



Gaining acceptance that an IC strategy is necessary



Lack of analytics

1.86

Trying to use comms as the answer to every problem

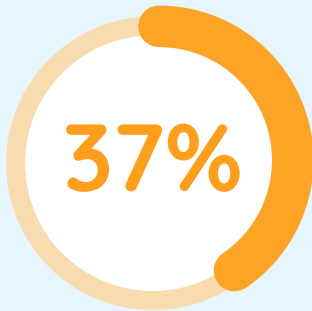
1.79

Lack of visibility into shadow/rogue comms channels

1.74

***A weighted average was calculated from the respondents' choices to determine a ranking order.**



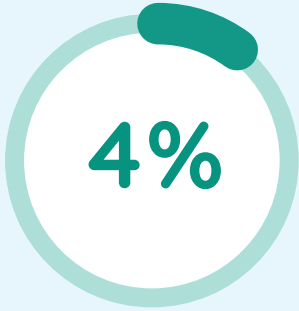


Our survey revealed that 37% of internal communicators believe their top blocker is lack of awareness about the value of internal comms at an executive level.

In order to get buy-in from senior stakeholders you need to have the confidence to influence others. You need to demonstrate your expertise and build trust as a strategic advisor. Advise your leaders and stakeholders when something hasn't worked. It's about being open and honest and giving them constructive feedback and the tools to be better communicators.

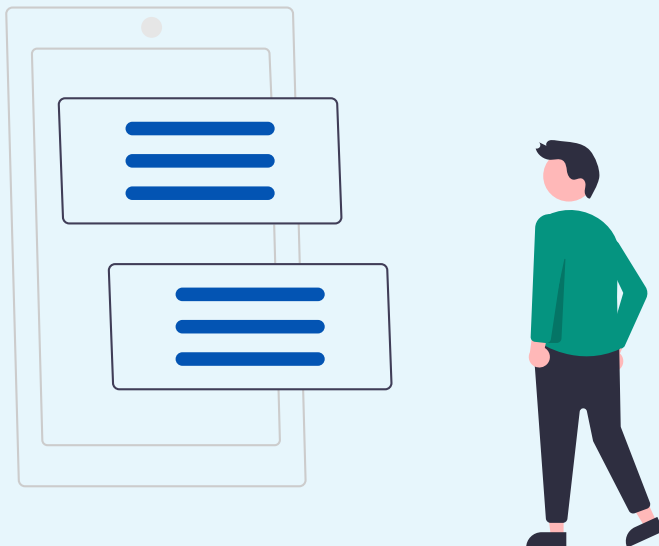
The second most significant blocker is misaligned agendas across departments. Managing and prioritising demanding stakeholders across different departments can be extremely difficult. Different departments want a slice of the action, (because let's face it), everyone thinks their content is the most urgent. Different departments and teams can sometimes take advantage of internal communicators, but in order to not overwhelm employees with irrelevant information, a more strategic approach needs to be adopted.

The third most significant blocker is that technology is not fit for purpose or that stakeholders think they already have the tools that they need. This is a worrying statistic and businesses need to start embracing new technologies in order to connect with their people, especially in the age of remote and hybrid working environments.



The survey also found that less than 4% of communicators are concerned about shadow comms and rogue channels.

Glassdoor has influence over 60 million users per month and 1 in 3 people have turned down a job offer because of a company's bad online reviews. Giving your people a forum to air concerns and frustrations makes it less likely that they'll air your dirty laundry in public. You can't control how your employees communicate with each other. It's much better to facilitate and support conversations that encourage participation, to avoid harm to your organisation's reputation and ensure your people feel heard and understood.



The Impact of Poor Internal Communication

We asked internal communicators: **Highlight your top three characteristics of poor internal comms from the following list of behaviours.**

Low morale/high staff attrition

2.49

Excessive rework

2.14

Declining Productivity

2.04

Requests for information that is readily available

1.98

High levels of employee scepticism

1.90

People not expressing pride in their role

1.89

High levels of corporate inertia

1.88

Failure to routinely position up-ell and cross-sell options to clients

1.86

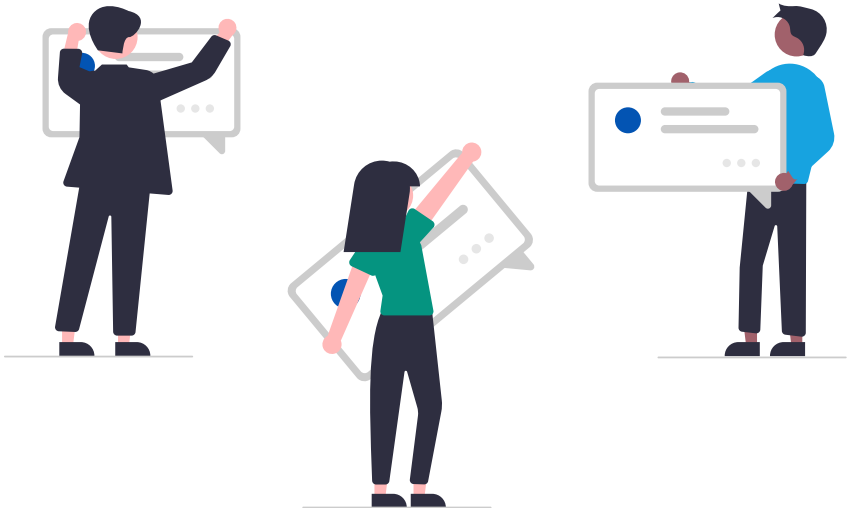
People disengaging or not participating in meetings, surveys or events

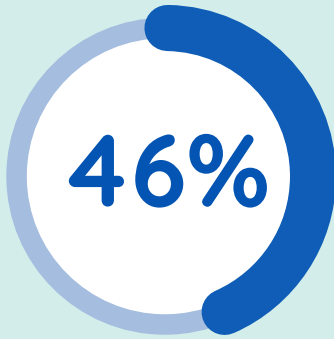
1.83

Lack of a sense of belonging within the business

1.71

***A weighted average was calculated from the respondents' choices to determine a ranking order.**





The survey revealed that **46% of communicators believe that poor internal communication relates to staff attrition.**

Replacing people is expensive. The typical cost for back-filling someone leaving the business can be up to 70% of their annual salary. Lowering staff turnover eliminates recruitment costs, avoids training and mitigates the impact of leaver-related disruption and knowledge loss.

Retaining staff has become a huge issue over recent years and with hiring and training costs surging and employees quitting jobs amongst the “Great Resignation”, employers need to be doing more to create a culture that fosters employee engagement and appreciation.

Over a third (36%) of communicators believe that poor internal communication contributes to excessive rework and wasted time due to miscommunication. If people don’t have access to the information they need to carry out their roles effectively this will lead to duplication and poor productivity.



Declining productivity and employee reluctance to “go above and beyond” was the third most likely to indicate an underlying comms problem (32%) according to internal communicators.

If you're not listening to employee feedback, showing them appreciation and involving them in the conversation, then they're going to disengage and be reluctant to “go above and beyond” for your organisation.

23% of communicators also agreed that people asking for information that is readily available was also a key issue. If this is happening within your organisation, you need to be asking why? Your employees need to have everything at their fingertips if they are to carry out their roles effectively.

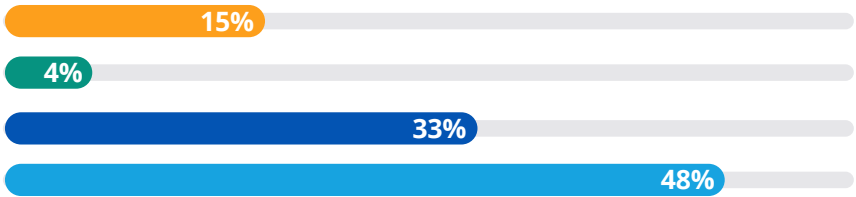
Our survey also revealed that 65% of informational requests could be addressed by employees accessing a self-service portal or knowledge repository. This will not only ensure that employees have access to everything they need to do their jobs, but save effort, time and money.

Internal Communication Best Practices

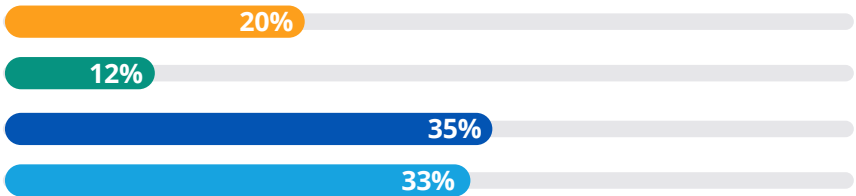
We asked internal communicators: **What best practices have you already implemented, plan to implement, anticipate implementing or have no plans to implement?**

- No Plans
- 12-24 Months
- 12 Months
- Already in Place

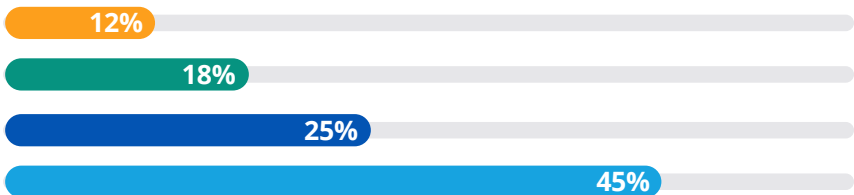
Use of operational hooks to make the portal a must visit destination



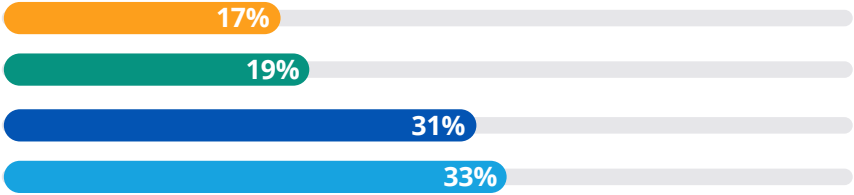
Creating “content sandwiches” to drive readership



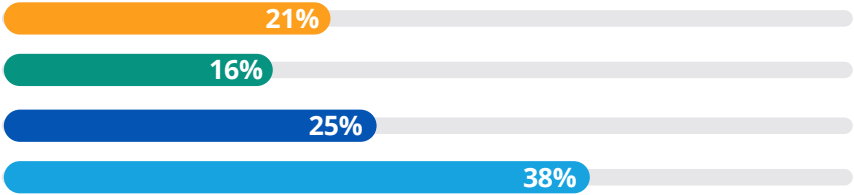
Soliciting employee created content



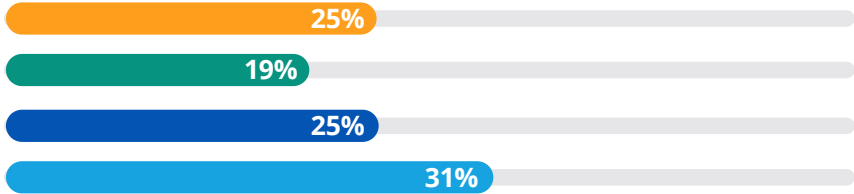
Syndication of externally created content to support core themes



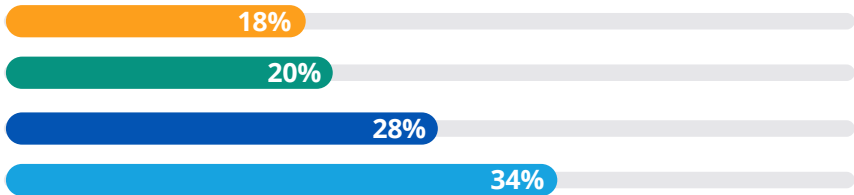
Use of professional copywriters and editors to refine content



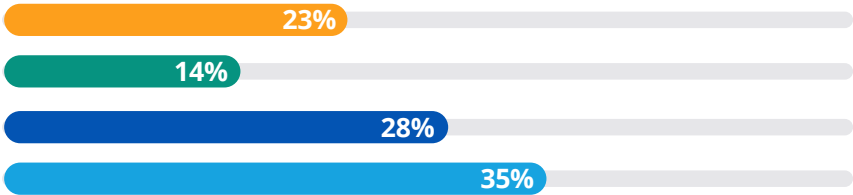
Leveraging workplace psychologists within the campaign design phase



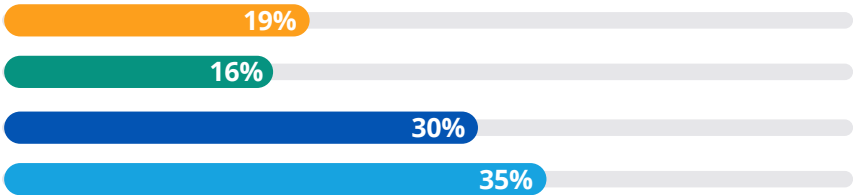
Deployment of gamification models to drive engagement and repeat visits



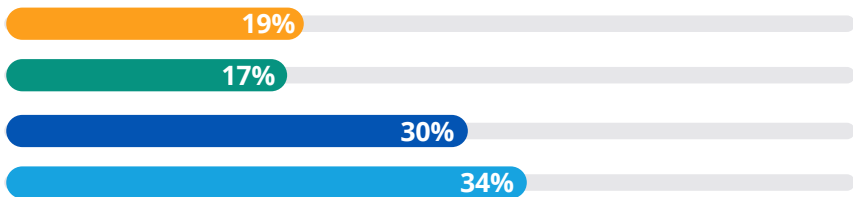
Implementing A/B testing within outreaches to help improve resonance and impact



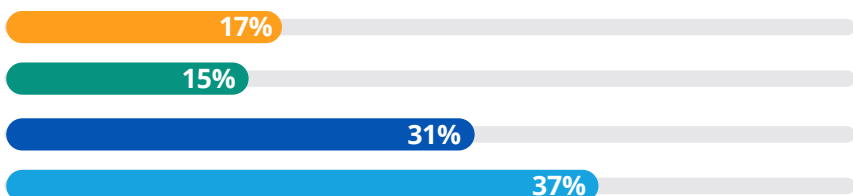
Use of focus groups to test how messages are likely to be received/interpreted



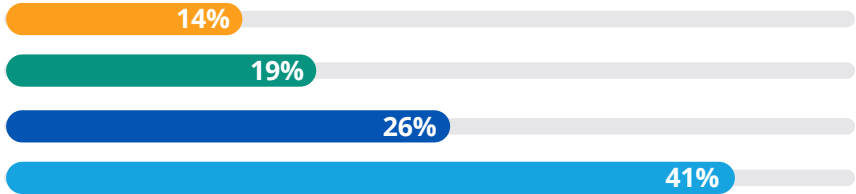
AI based analysis of messages to identify and prevent inherent bias, inappropriate phrasing, ambiguity etc.



A greater emphasis on employee recognition for deskless or deviceless employees



Implementation of an employee reward programme with associated campaigns



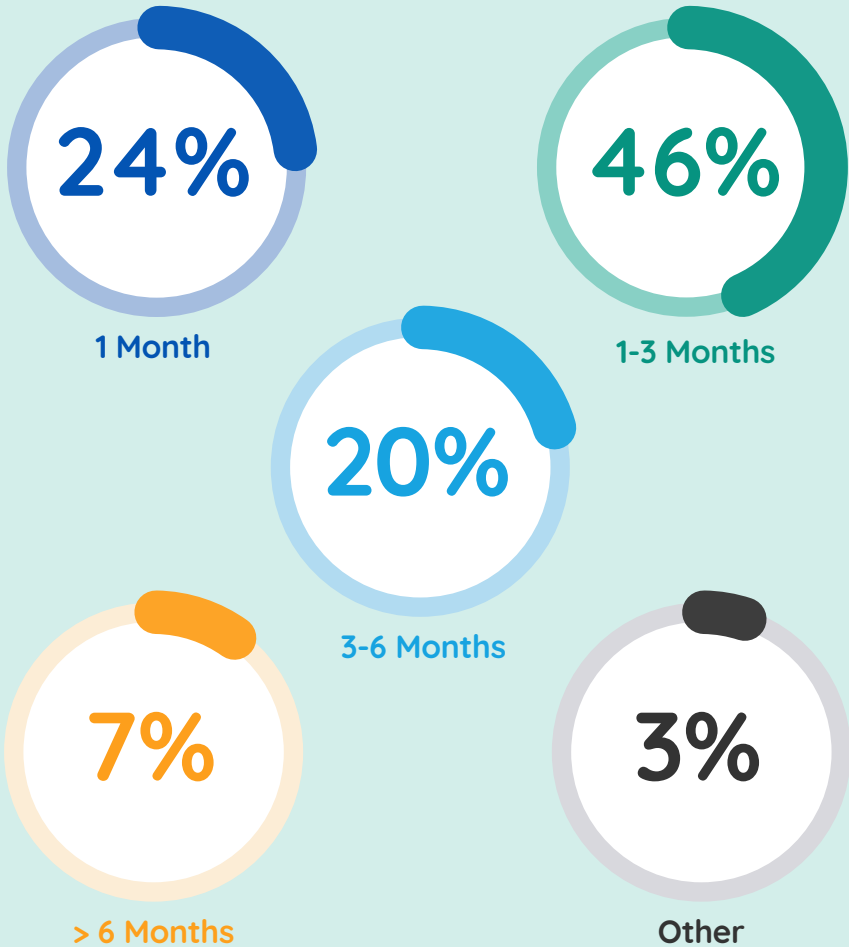
- No Plans
- 12-24 Months
- 12 Months
- Already in Place

Over the next 12 months the three main internal comms practices that communicators plan to implement are linked to content curation. In the next 12-24 months this transpires to AI analysis, demonstrating that many IC leaders see AI as the medium-term future of the profession.

However, with employees constantly being bombarded with irrelevant and inconsistent messaging, businesses need to look to new technologies now if they are going to make their messaging impactful and engaging. Oak Engage's omnichannel curated content system reduces noise by personalising and prioritising feeds for every employee across channels and audiences.

Dealing with change

We asked internal communicators: **How long before a change implementation would you start communicating with those affected?**



The majority of respondents (46%) would start communicating a change to those affected 1-3 months before the change implementation and only 20% would contact employees 3-6 months before.

When dealing with change, communicators need to be sensitive. People don't like change and employees can often feel a loss of control, feelings of uncertainty and doubt, and also a fear of failure. The pandemic has accelerated this and made the issue even more apparent.

The change curve is a model based on the work of psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and is relevant to communicators because it explains that people react to news of change in different ways at different times and their attitude will evolve over time. This will be useful to use as a timeline when going through change management communication. The first half of the curve should look to provide information and awareness to employees and the second half should be used to provide support, highlighting the need to communicate change much earlier in the process.

Whether it's remaining compliant with new regulations, communicating a merger of brands or introducing a new way of working, it's important to communicate change clearly and well in advance in order to maintain cohesion. Internal communication plays a critical role in organisational change and is integral to organisational resilience.

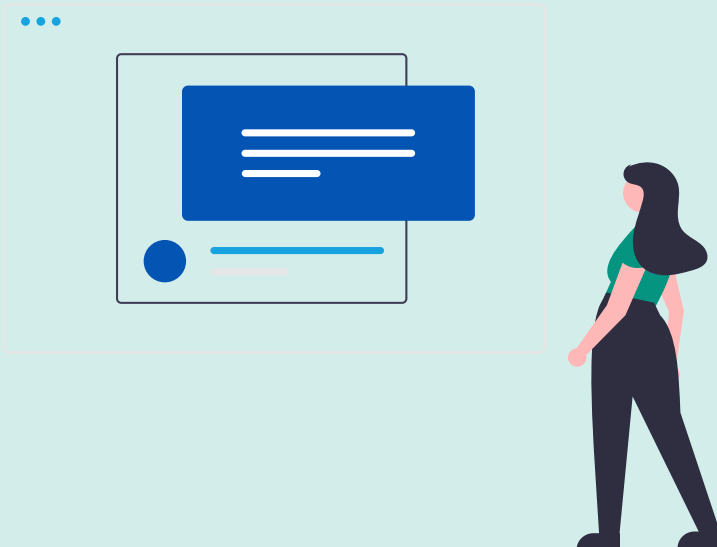
We also asked internal communicators: **For how long after a significant change do you continue to send messages to support and reinforce adoption and influence behavioural change?**



The survey revealed that nearly half (46%) will continue to send messages to support employees just 1-3 months after a significant change within the business.

However, you need to reinforce the message until it sticks. Employees should feel heard and understood. Try methods like face-to-face meetings and listening and Q&A sessions which will help in making your employees feel like they have been fully supported.

Oak gives you the tools to support you through the change, reinforce the message so it sticks and also help make it easier to create a culture of inclusivity, recognition and positivity. Making employees feel appreciated during a period of change will allow them to feel more positive. Values play an important role here, make sure to align the communication with your company values, which will help employees adapt to the change.



Our recommendations for 2023

Create a culture of openness and recognition

Our survey revealed that **46% of communicators believe that poor internal communication relates to staff attrition.**

This highlights the importance of internal communication and the consequences of getting it wrong. Fostering a culture of recognition will remind employees that you're part of one team and that you're encouraged to collaborate and support one another. This will also create a safe space for employees to come forward and communicate any issues they may have. If people feel safe they're more likely to bring their whole self to work. And if people bring their whole selves to work they will perform better, resulting in productivity.

"Most important for a successful communication system is for leadership to hear from and listen to employees about their concerns and needs relative to their work. Employee communication platforms are a helpful tool to foster these conversations."

Suzanne Benoit, Sociologist & HR Consultant



“Every single one of us has both mental as well as physical health needs. The only difference is that physical health needs are often more obvious so it’s important for employers to create a culture where employees feel able to seek support when they need to. Business leaders and people managers play a key role here in ensuring they create working environments where employees feel ‘safe’ to raise any issues. A healthy workplace culture of openness, transparency and good communication from the top down helps to create safe working environments.”

Lisa Seagroatt, Workplace Culture Expert, Lecturer & Author



“Recognition is a key motivator and provides people with a sense of accomplishment. Appreciation makes employees feel more confident and improves productivity, a simple thank you goes a long way. Initiatives such as days without meetings and mental health days also play a huge part in creating a positive working environment. We offer holidays whenever people need them and ‘Oak Bank Holidays’ to ensure employees are getting the rest they deserve.”

Will Murray, CEO at Oak Engage



Understand your audience

Our survey revealed that a lack of an accurate and appropriately segmented audience list was the biggest challenge communicators need to address. It is essential to understand who the intended audience is and who you're communicating with. It's necessary to also find out what your audience cares about so you can ensure the message resonates with each of them. Putting your audience first is key. We've created an [internal audience persona template](#) to get you started.

Pulse surveys and polls will enable you to better understand your audiences, giving them the ability to create messaging that will really resonate with people based on actual evidence. Different audiences will need different channels. Planning and creating a strategy will allow you to think about each audience and their needs. What do you want each audience to know, feel and do as a result of your internal communications?

If you have too many channels or channels that are unsuitable for your audiences, your people will feel overwhelmed and miss out on company news.

Influence your stakeholders

The top 3 blockers for internal communicators are linked to senior level buy-in, misaligned agendas and stakeholders thinking current technology is fit for purpose. Clearly the main obstacle for communicators are attitudes. Attitudes need to be changed at the top before you can effectively influence attitudes across the business.

As a communicator you need to be able to have influence over and prioritise your stakeholders. But what makes a good influencer?

Be prepared and plan

It's no good turning up to a meeting with senior stakeholders and being underprepared. Take time the day before to make a plan and write notes. Use a [stakeholder map](#) and a SWOT analysis to help you.

Know your audience and stay authentic

As mentioned previously, as a communications professional you should know all about your audience. Think about the outcome first and what you want them to know, feel and do. Then you can work out the appropriate messaging. Start a meeting five minutes early to build a rapport in order to get to know their personalities.

Don't be afraid to challenge

It might seem scary but be brave. You need to demonstrate your expertise and build trust as a strategic advisor. Advise your leaders and stakeholders when something hasn't worked. It's about being open and honest and giving them constructive feedback and the tools to be better communicators.

[Havebury Housing Partnership](#) uses Oak for their intranet, 'The Hive'. The Hive is the organisation's primary internal communications platform. It is used to share all news, conduct consultations and focus groups and encourage communication and engagement across all business areas.

Developing an intranet formed a key element of their communication strategy.

Communications Manager, Hayley Lambert explains that proactive communications are now firmly on everyone's radar, starting with their Leadership team:

"Communication is more streamlined and integrated. There is a comms place at the beginning of every project plan. The strategy is continuously evolving in collaboration with the leadership team."

"The message is that we all play a part in the wider organisation, and to let us know if you have news or information. I used to stumble across things but now we get so many people coming to us who didn't before, and all managers bring communication up in meetings - they know when to bring us into the plan. It makes our life - and their life - so much easier."

"We launched 'The Hive' in September last year, and it has been well received by the organisation. We look forward to testing the capabilities of Oak's product to improve our internal communications culture."

Hayley Lambert, Communications Manager, Havebury Housing



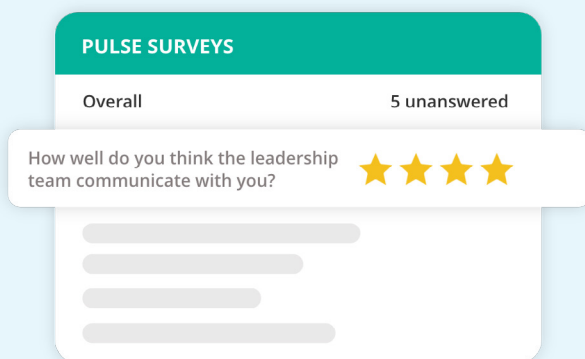
When it comes to getting buy-in from senior stakeholders, we have created an [intranet business case](#) and an [Employee Engagement Calculator](#) which gives you a clear action plan and the steps you indeed to take to demonstrate the value of investing in effective internal communication.

Measure your success

A huge challenge that the report highlights is the lack of awareness of the benefit and value of internal communication at C-level. Another focus of internal communications professionals is to demonstrate the impact and value of communications to the wider business. Measurement is a common problem throughout the internal comms industry. But what does success look like? This needs to link back to your objectives. It's so important to measure success and demonstrate the value back to the organisation.

Some examples can include:

- Adoption rates
- Employee satisfaction
- Staff retention
- Pulse surveys
- Sign ups



“Your company is measured on the basis of business performance, so look at how IC directly or measurably - even if indirectly - affects business performance. I recommend including these two questions in your survey: What are the top three priorities facing the organisation? What are the three things you’re working on? Think about what you want people to do - and find out how often that shows up in what people are saying.”

Mike Klein, Internal Communications Strategist



You can measure the success of campaigns with Oak’s in-depth analytics. Our analytics provide insights on how audiences are reached and will collectively measure the success and reach of campaigns so that a meaningful story can be crafted from the results and feedback. Want to measure internal comms success?

[Read our guide.](#)

Embrace technology

It’s clear from the report that communicators need to take more advantage of new technologies. 22% of communicators believe that either the technology they have is not fit for purpose or that their stakeholders think they already have the tools they need. This is worrying. Businesses need to start embracing technology in order to connect with their people, especially in the age of remote and hybrid working environments.

“Our report shows that 22% of internal communicators believe that the technology that they have at their fingertips is currently not fit for purpose. This is a worrying statistic and we believe that intranets should be working a whole lot harder for them.”

“Oak Engage can empower businesses to reach every employee, every time by using personalised curated content which will stop your employees being overloaded with irrelevant information and boost employee engagement. Today’s teams need a new way to communicate that reduces noise and this is what we’re focused on.”

Will Murray, CEO at Oak Engage



Our state-of-the-art technology is revolutionising workplaces and enables you to get the right message to the right people at the right time. Meaning you don’t have to worry about all of the channels on your channels matrix and you can focus your already limited resources on the things that truly matter. Making the message compelling, thinking about your audiences, how it will be relevant, and the priority. Oak takes care of the rest and delivers messaging across your channels. Think of it as a smarter way to deliver news. It will allow you to cut through the noise and deliver the right message to the right people when it’s most needed.



A better way to mobilise, motivate and engage your people.

An award-winning employee engagement and intranet solution.

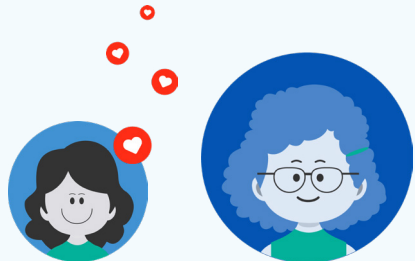
What we do

Oak Engage delivers next generation curated content across a modern intranet and employee engagement app. We empower internal comms teams to surface relevant content, to the right people, at the right time.

Our mission

We're here to make the experience of communicating with your people simpler, easier and more streamlined than anyone else.

We believe there is a better way to use technology to engage employees, cut through the noise, and inspire action that puts people at the heart of organisations.



Trusted by the world's biggest brands

Sevita

FIVE GUYS

NatWest Group

itv

NHS

boohoo

ALDI

INEP

Severfield



Get in touch today to see how we can transform your employee communication experience at www.oak.com

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engage

The logo graphic consists of three overlapping circles: a large dark blue circle, a smaller light blue circle, and a very small light grey circle, all positioned to the right of the word 'engage'.

oak.com