

North American Communication Monitor

2020-2021

**The impact of COVID-19 pandemic,
ethical challenges, gender issues,
cybersecurity, and competence
gaps in strategic communication**

**Results of a survey of 1,046
communication professionals
in the U.S. and Canada**



THE PLANK CENTER
FOR LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

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in the U.S. and Canada**

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A study organized and conducted by the Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations

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Foreword

At a recent international communications seminar, practitioners and academics the world over affirmed what so many of us observed and experienced this past year. Namely, that the pace of change, the significance of the challenges we face, and the import of our profession has never been greater. The year was described as “a marathon and then multiple marathons,” a “continuous crisis,” and “like standing in the center of a hurricane.” While we might all describe it a little differently, no doubt we would agree with the sentiment being expressed.

In these unprecedented times and amid a rapidly changing landscape, the global pandemic accelerated trends around ethics, cybersecurity, and gender and racial inequality. These are critical conversations, with communications at the center of the dialogue. And in the eye of the storm.

In this relevant and timely study, the North American Communications Monitor (NACM) 2020-2021 surveyed more than 1,000 practitioners from the United States and Canada on these key topics and more. Critical questions around disinformation and misinformation were probed, as

was the role of communications and the skill set required to advance authentic, transparent messaging as public discourse grows more divisive and fragmented.

Author/commentator Nancy Gibbs describes this environment as a “crisis of trust in an information battlescape” and advises us to “lean hard into truth, even when uncomfortable.” This speaks to the role of communications leadership, and our profession’s exponential opportunity to lead the way. This study helps identify where we are, so we are more prepared to do just that.

The Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations is proud to sponsor the NACM, and we applaud the efforts of these authors. They are uniquely positioned to conduct this seminal research and provide us with the insights to inspire and empower the leadership required in a post-pandemic world.



Bridget Coffing

Chair, Board of Advisors

**The Plank Center for Leadership
in Public Relations**

Introduction

The 2020-2021 North American Communication Monitor (NACM) is the second edition of a comprehensive survey focusing on strategic communication issues, practices, and roles in organizations in Canada and the United States. The NACM is part of the Global Communication Monitor series that includes similar surveys in Europe, Latin America, and Asia-Pacific—more than 80 countries in total. It is the largest global study of the profession based on sound empirical standards and diversity of researchers. The goal is to stimulate and promote the knowledge and practice of excellent communication in practice worldwide.

This NACM includes insights from 1,046 communication professionals in North America (268 in Canada and 778 in the U.S.). The questionnaire included 40 questions around eight topics, and here are just a few highlights from the rich findings. The study tracked current communication challenges like COVID-19 and cybersecurity in an age of disinformation. Most professionals (83.2%) said COVID-19 is a heavily discussed topic, and seven of 10 respondents felt their organizations did a satisfactory job managing this issue. On cybersecurity, more than half of respondents said their organization was a victim of cyber attack or data theft during the year.

Regarding communication ethics, respondents noted that ethical concerns regarding social media strategies were cited predominantly. In dealing with such challenges, most respondents said they rely on employer resources. However, codes of ethics of trade associations and personal values were close runners-up.

More than 80% of respondents have completed formal communications ethics training, and more than half (60%) within the past three years.

On the topic of gender equality in the profession, two thirds (65.6%) of respondents observed improvement in their country, though nearly half (49.5%) of surveyed women said they were personally affected by the glass ceiling barrier in leadership advancement. The three top strategic issues professionals named were building and maintaining trust, exploring new ways of creating and distributing content, and tackling DEI. On a positive note, the percentage of those communication departments deemed “excellent” by the Comparative Excellence Framework rose to 43.6% from 36.0% in the 2018-2019 NACM.

On behalf of the NACM research team, I thank the Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations at the University of Alabama for sponsoring and supporting this important study. I also want to recognize Plank Center Board advisors Dr. Bryan Reber and Dr. Juan Meng, University of Georgia, for their leadership of this project, and our European research colleagues for their invaluable guidance and advice. We are proud to be part of this global research project and its distinguished team of international scholars and professionals.



Bruce K. Berger, Ph.D.

Professor Emeritus, University of Alabama

**Board Member, The Plank Center for Leadership
in Public Relations**

Research Design

The North American Communication Monitor (NACM) 2020-2021 explores current practices and future developments of strategic communication in public companies, private companies, nonprofits, governmental organizations and other communication sectors in the United States and Canada. It is the second edition of a survey that focuses on the strategic communication practices in North America, sponsored and organized by The Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations at the University of Alabama.

The NACM is an academic study fulfilling high quality standards of social science research. The study is designed and executed by a team of renowned scholars and professors representing different institutions in the region. The NACM is part of the Global Communication Monitor series. It is complemented by other surveys covering five continents and more than 80 countries together. The involvement of a wider board of professors and international collaborators in the Global Communication Monitor series ensures the quality of the study and diversity of the contributions globally.

This edition of NACM is based on responses from 1,046 communication professionals from the U.S. and Canada. They answered a comprehensive online questionnaire that collects a variety of independent and dependent variables in a unique research framework (see page 10): personal characteristics of communication professionals; features of the organization; attributes of the excellence communication departments; the current situation regarding the communication professional and his/her organization; as well as perceptions of professional developments in the field.

The study explores several key constructs. First, the developments and dynamics in the field of public relations and strategic communication are identified by investigating strategic issues, communication channels and

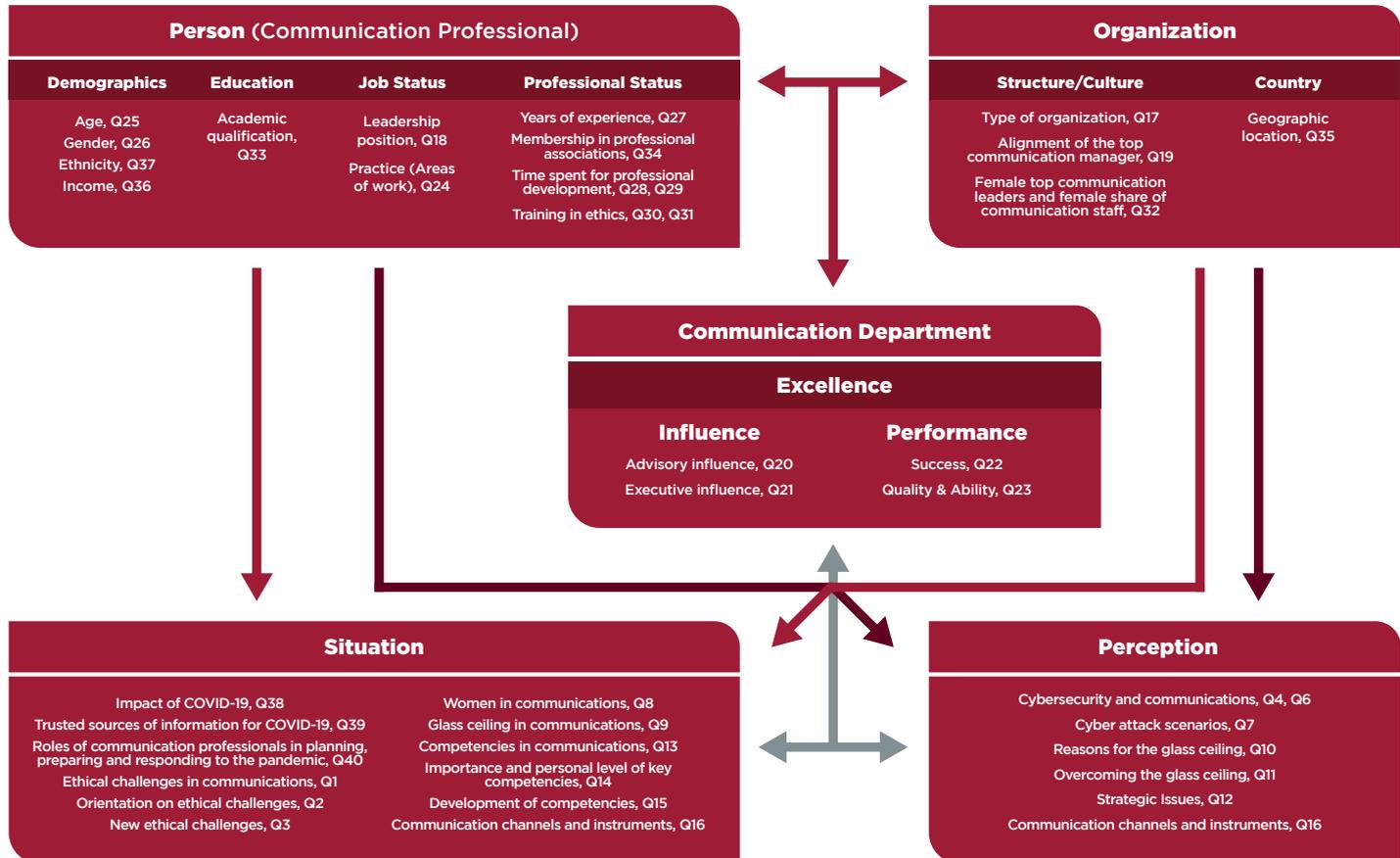
instruments, and excellent attributes. Questions on these topics from the previous NACM survey (see Meng et al., 2019) and the European Communication Monitor (ECM) surveys (Zerfass et al., 2020, 2019, & 2017) were repeated to build the possibility for longitudinal and global comparisons. Secondly, national differences are revealed by comparing the results between the U.S. and Canada.

Thirdly, a selection of current challenges in the field are empirically tested. The NACM 2020-2021 explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on communication practice (Mazzei, 2021) and how communication professionals adapt quickly to practice in new environments and continue to face numerous challenges (Agote et al., 2016). The topic of cybersecurity (Schatz et al., 2017) is also investigated due to the prevalence of disinformation related to the understanding, prevention, and safety guides associated with the COVID-19 pandemic (Nguyen & Catalan-Matamoros, 2020).

Another area of investigation is communication ethics. This NACM identifies the frequency of moral challenges and approaches to coping with them (Bivins, 2018), resources to use when encountering ethical challenges (Parsons, 2016), as well as ethical aspects of digital communication practices (Wiesenberg, Zerfass, & Moreno, 2017). Additional issues explored are gender equality in communications with a specific focus on reasons hindering women from reaching top positions in the communication profession (Meng & Neill, 2021) and competency development for communication professionals (Moreno et al., 2017). Lastly, excellent communication departments are identified in the sample (Tench et al., 2017) to indicate the differences excellence in communication can make. Overall, our research design investigates a broad range of trendy topics in today's communication practice and contributes to the body of knowledge of strategic communication.



Research framework and questions



Personal Background of Respondents

Job experience

More than 10 years	42.7%
6 to 10 years	32.5%
Up to 5 years	24.8%

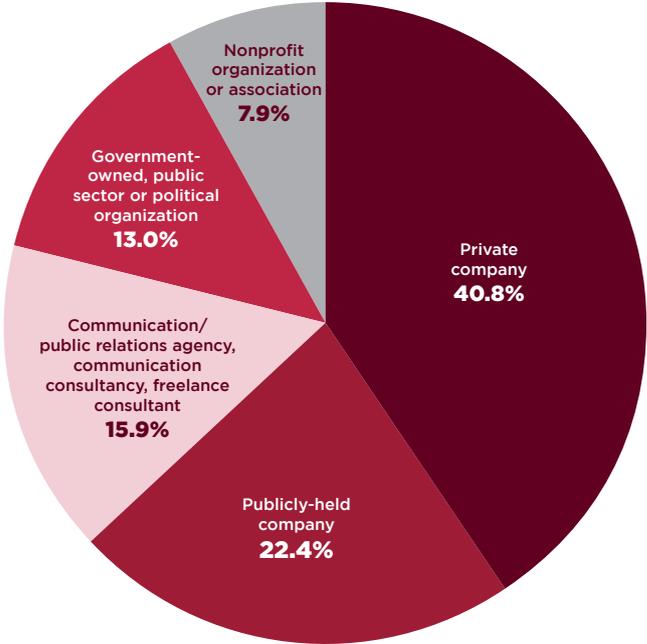
Position

Head of communication, Agency CEO	30.9%
Unit leader / Team leader	47.2%
Team member / Consultant / Other	21.9%

Ethnicity

White, Caucasian	72.0%
Black, African American, African descent	9.1%
Asian, Asian American	9.0%
Hispanic, Latino, Spanish descent	5.4%
Other minorities	4.5%

Organization



Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q17: Where do you work? Q18: What is your position? Q27: How many years of experience do you have in communication management/PR? Q37: Which of the following best describes your ethnicity?

Research framework and questions

Gender and country

Gender	United States of America (n=778)	Canada (n=268)
Women	55.9%	41.0%
Men	43.8%	59.0%

Gender and leadership position

	Overall (n = 1,046)	Head of comm, Agency CEO (n = 323)	Team leader / Unit leader (n = 494)	Team member / Consultant / Other (n = 229)
Women	52.1%	40.9%	51.6%	69.0%
Men	47.7%	59.1%	48.2%	30.6%
Age (Average)	41.2 years	42.0 years	40.4 years	41.6 years

Highest academic educational qualification

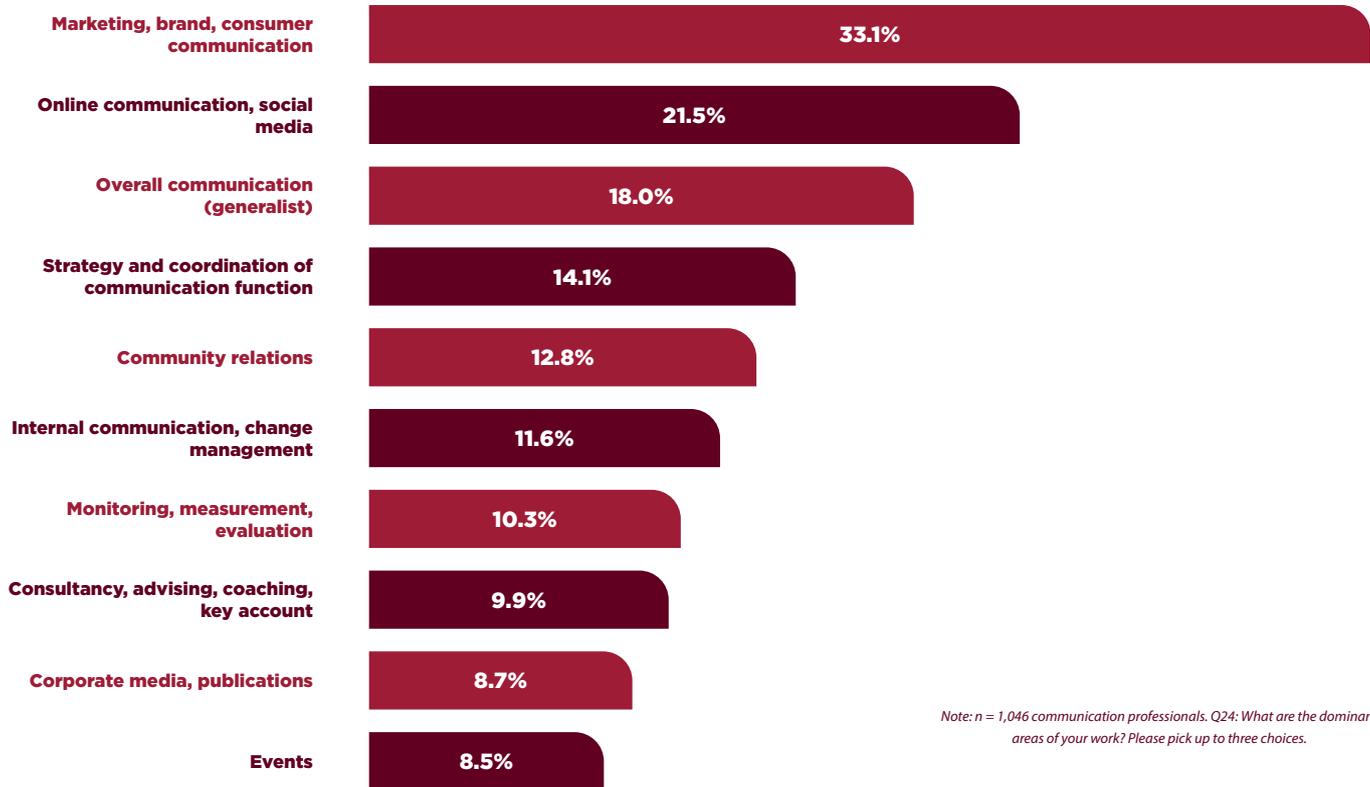
Doctoral degree (Ph.D., J.D., etc.)	8.5%
Master's degree (M.A., M.S., MBA, etc.)	28.1%
Bachelor's degree (B.A., B.S., etc.)	41.9%
Associate Bachelor's degree	10.2%
High school graduation or equivalent	11.2%

Membership in a professional association

Joined one professional association	47.3%
Joined more than one professional associations	17.9%
Don't have any membership with any professional association	34.8%

Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q25: How old are you? Q26: What is your gender? Q33: Please state the highest academic/educational qualification you hold.
Q34: Are you a member of a professional association? Q35: In which country are you currently based?

Top 10 areas of work in communication practice



Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q24: What are the dominant areas of your work? Please pick up to three choices.

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COVID-19 and
Communication
Professionals'
Responses

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 global pandemic has generated an ongoing and possibly long-lasting impact on many aspects of communication, working environment, and multiple sectors of the world. It is critical to explore how communication professionals adapted to COVID-19 impacts and led to successful communication and transitions during this challenging time. We designed a section focusing on the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact to gather information on several key issues related to communication professionals' responses and challenges in communication practices. These key issues include the perceived impact of the pandemic on communication professionals' daily work and working environment, trusted sources they used in keeping up with the pandemic, and COVID-related information used in planning, preparing and responding to the pandemic. Professionals' satisfaction with their organization's communication and management during the pandemic also was assessed.

Overall, clear evidence is found that the COVID-19 pandemic is a heavily discussed topic in their country (83.2%), and communication professionals in both countries have given attention to the news about the pandemic (75.0%). The comparison between professionals in the U.S. and Canada reveals attention is more prominent for professionals in Canada. Professionals also confirmed that the impact of the pandemic on their daily work is significant (65.8%) in general but much higher for professionals in Canada (70.9%).

Gender comparisons reveal that women perceive the pandemic as a heavily discussed topic, but men report a significantly higher level of perceived impact of the pandemic on the daily work of their communication department/agency (70.0% vs. 62.3% based on frequency analysis, chi-square test, $p < .01$). Professionals working in communication departments at public companies

report a significantly higher level of direct impact. Results also show a significant correlation between leadership and perceived direct impact. For example, those holding a top leadership position as head of communication, or as CEO of a communication agency, report the highest impact of the pandemic on the daily work of their communication department/agency.

Communication professionals also use diverse sources to gather COVID-19 information. The top five common sources for COVID-19 information include public health organizations and officials (72.0%), national news outlets (69.2%), local news outlets (61.9%), state and local elected officials (59.9%), and international news outlets (57.3%). Consistently, public health organizations and officials are the most trusted source for professionals to acquire information.

Communication professionals in both countries report similar patterns of communication strategies during the pandemic. The most common one is to use COVID-19 information to develop and implement formal safety guidelines, infrastructure, and routines for the organization or the client. The least used strategy is to propose a political stance for the leadership in the organization or the client. Communication professionals in public organizations are leading in adapting communication strategies during the pandemic for various purposes.

Overall, seven out of ten communication professionals are satisfied with their organization's communication and management during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the satisfaction level significantly decreases as the scope of the leadership responsibility decreases: four out of ten team members are neutral or unsatisfied. Professionals in governmental organizations report the lowest level of satisfaction.

Communication professionals give attention to COVID-19 news, but more so in Canada

- Communication professionals in both countries have given attention to the news about the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The COVID-19 pandemic is a heavily discussed topic in both countries.

	Overall	United States	Canada
I pay attention to the news about the COVID-19 pandemic.**	75.0%	73.2%	80.2%
The coronavirus outbreak is a heavily discussed topic in my country.	83.2%	82.8%	84.3%

Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q38: In today's COVID-19 reality, communicators now deal with accelerated needs to provide information to leaders, co-workers, and various groups of stakeholders. Please rate these statements based on your experience.

Scale 1 (Not at all) – 5 (To a great extent). Percentages: Frequency based on scale points 4–5. (Chi-square test, **p < .01)

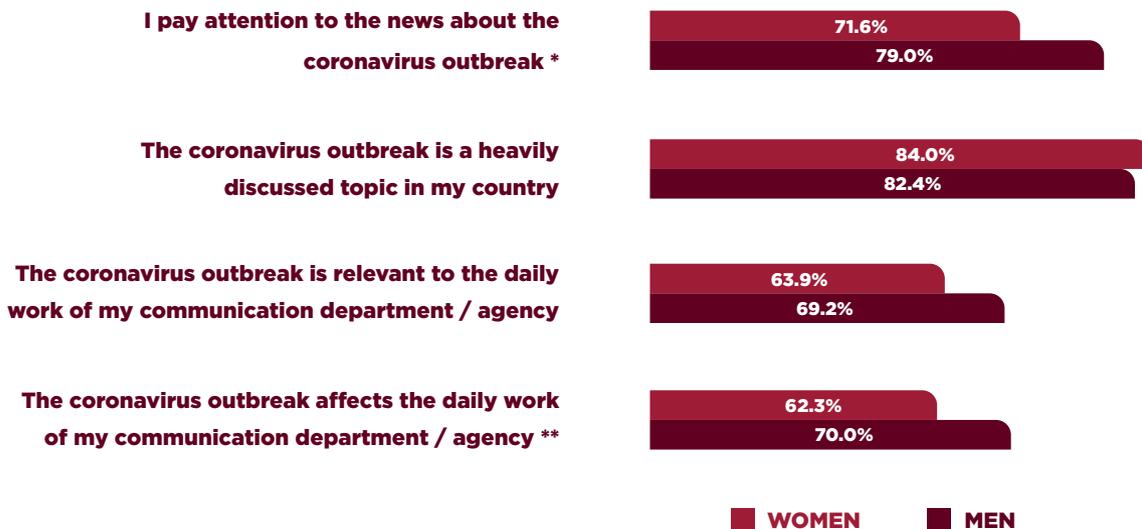
The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on communication professionals' daily work is significant: Seven out of ten professionals in Canada acknowledged the impact.

	Overall	United States	Canada
The coronavirus outbreak is relevant to the daily work of my communication department / agency	66.2%	64.5%	71.3%
The coronavirus outbreak affects the daily work of my communication department / agency*	65.8%	64.1%	70.9%

Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q38: In today's COVID-19 reality, communicators now deal with accelerated needs to provide information to leaders, co-workers and various groups of stakeholders. Please rate these statements based on your experience.

Scale 1 (Not at all) – 5 (To a great extent). Percentages: Frequency based on scale points 4-5. (**Chi-square test, $p < .01$)

Women perceive the pandemic as a heavily discussed topic, but men report a higher level of perceived impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on daily work



Note: n = 1,044 communication professionals. Q38: In today's COVID-19 reality, communicators now deal with accelerated needs to provide information to leaders, co-workers and various groups of stakeholders. Please rate these statements based on your experience. Scale 1 (Not at all) – 5 (To a great extent). Percentages: Frequency based on scale points 4–5. (Chi-square test, *p < .05, **p < .01)

The COVID-19 pandemic generates high impacts on communication professionals' daily work, especially for those working in publicly held companies and governmental organizations

The coronavirus outbreak is relevant to the daily work of my communication department / agency *



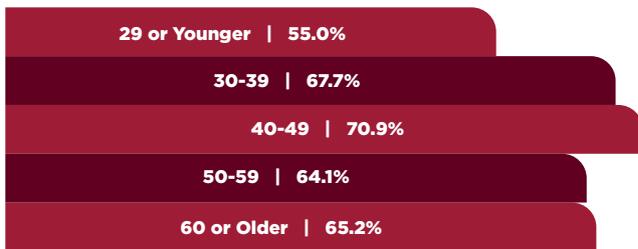
The coronavirus outbreak affects the daily work of my communication department / agency **



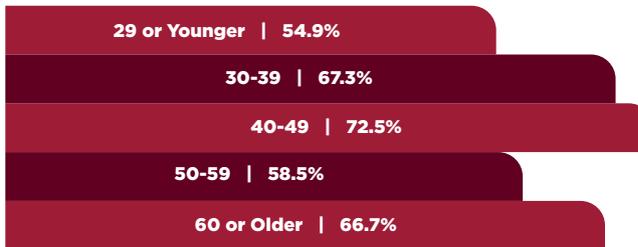
*Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q38: In today's COVID-19 reality, communicators now deal with accelerated needs to provide information to leaders, co-workers and various groups of stakeholders. Please rate these statements based on your experience. Scale 1 (Not at all) - 5 (To a great extent). Percentages: Frequency based on scale points 4-5. (Chi-square test, * p < .05, ** p < .01)*

Communication professionals in the age bracket 40 to 49 reported a significantly higher impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their daily work

The coronavirus outbreak is relevant to the daily work of my communication department / agency *



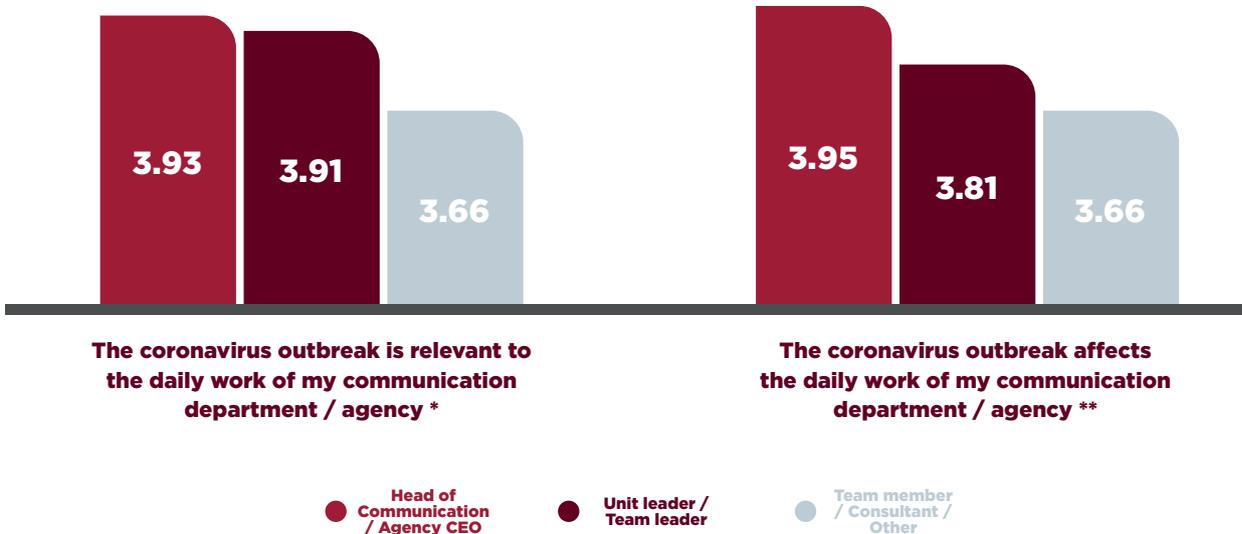
The coronavirus outbreak affects the daily work of my communication department / agency **



Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q38: In today's COVID-19 reality, communicators now deal with accelerated needs to provide information to leaders, co-workers and various groups of stakeholders. Please rate these statements based on your experience.

*Scale 1 (Not at all) – 5 (To a great extent). Percentages: Frequency based on scale points 4–5. (Chi-square test, * p < .05, ** p < .01)*

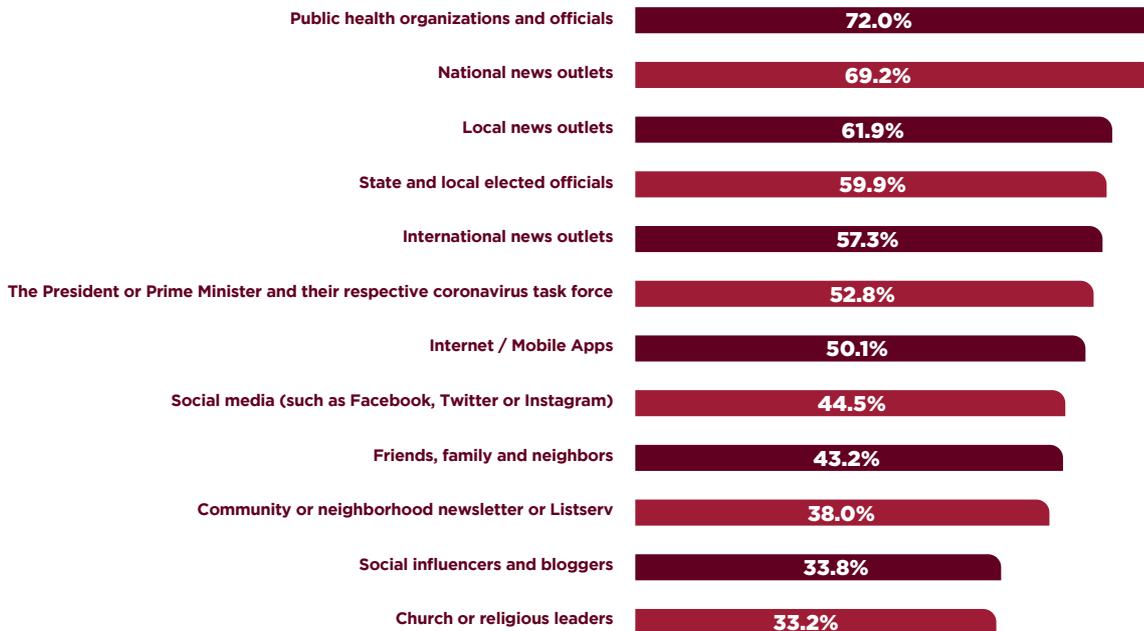
Communication leaders reported the highest impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the daily work of their communication department / agency



Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q38: In today's COVID-19 reality, communicators now deal with accelerated needs to provide information to leaders, co-workers, and various groups of stakeholders. Please rate these statements based on your experience.

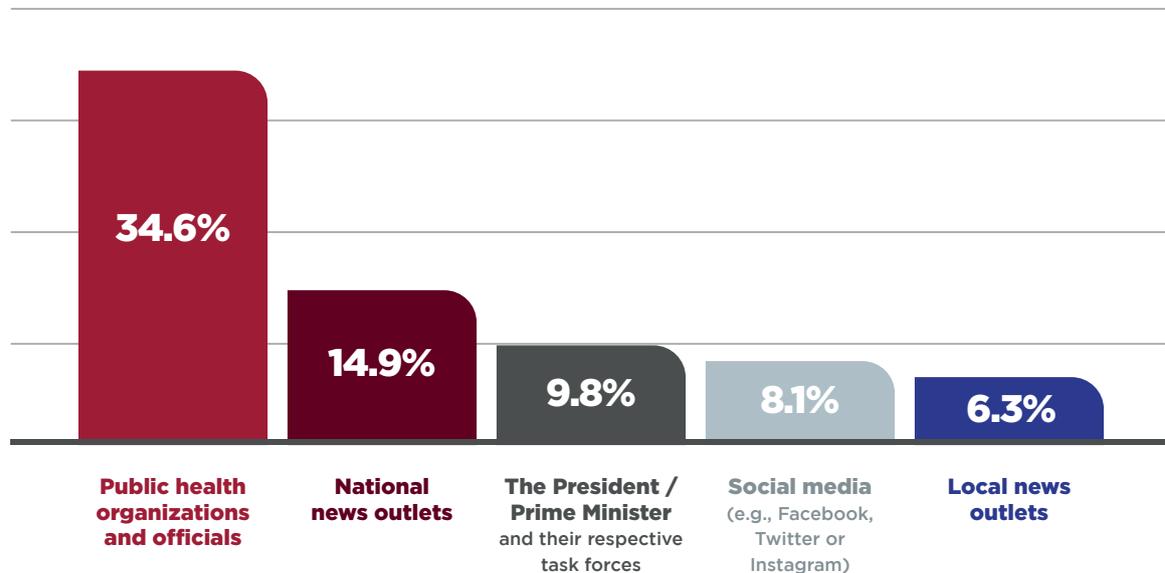
Scale 1 (Not at all) – 5 (To a great extent). Mean scores. (ANOVA test, ** p < .01).

Communication professionals use various sources for COVID-19 information



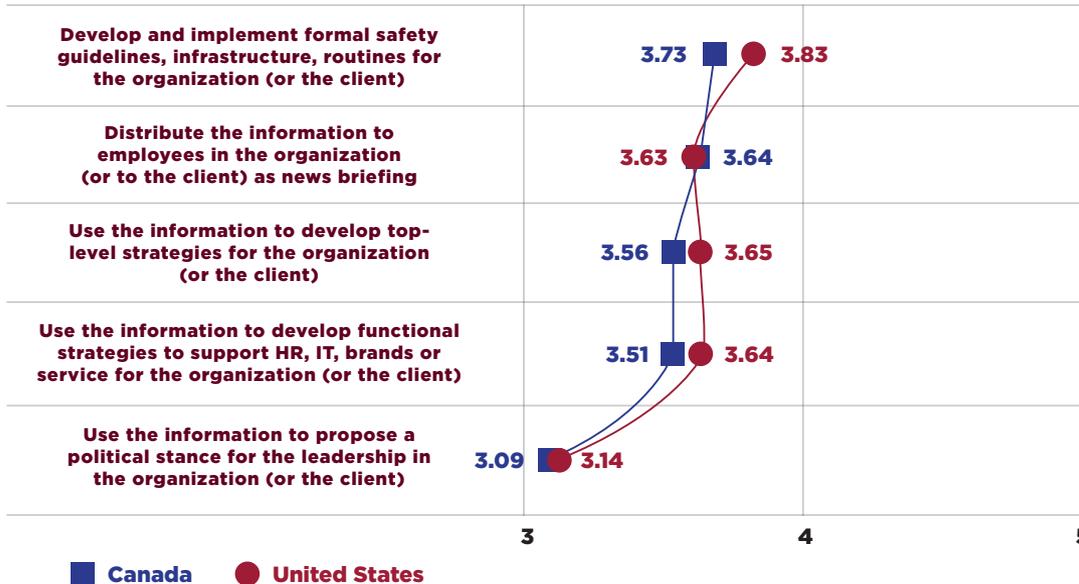
Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q39: As a communication professional, how much do you rely on the following sources in keeping up with the COVID-19 pandemic? Scale 1 (Not at all) – 5 (To a great extent). Percentages: Frequency based on scale points 4–5.

Public health organizations and officials are the most trusted source for communication professionals to acquire COVID-19 information



Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q39: As a communication professional, how much do you rely on the following sources in keeping up with the COVID-19 pandemic? Scale 1 (Not at all) – 5 (To a great extent). Percentages: Frequency based on scale points 4–5.

Communication professionals in both countries reported similar adapting patterns of communication strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic



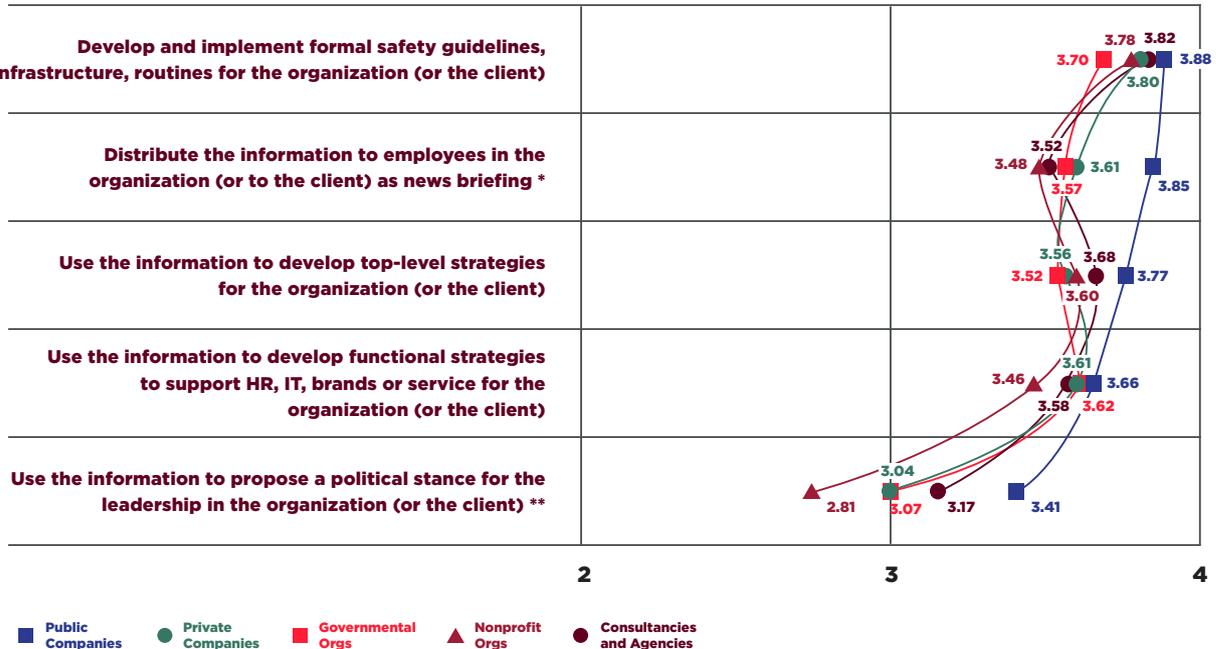
Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q40: How is your communication department / agency using COVID-19 information gathered to plan, prepare and respond to the pandemic? Scale 1 (Never) – 5 (Always). Mean scores. (Independent sample T-Test; no significant differences)

Men are more involved in adapting communication strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly on distributing information and proposing political stance for senior leadership



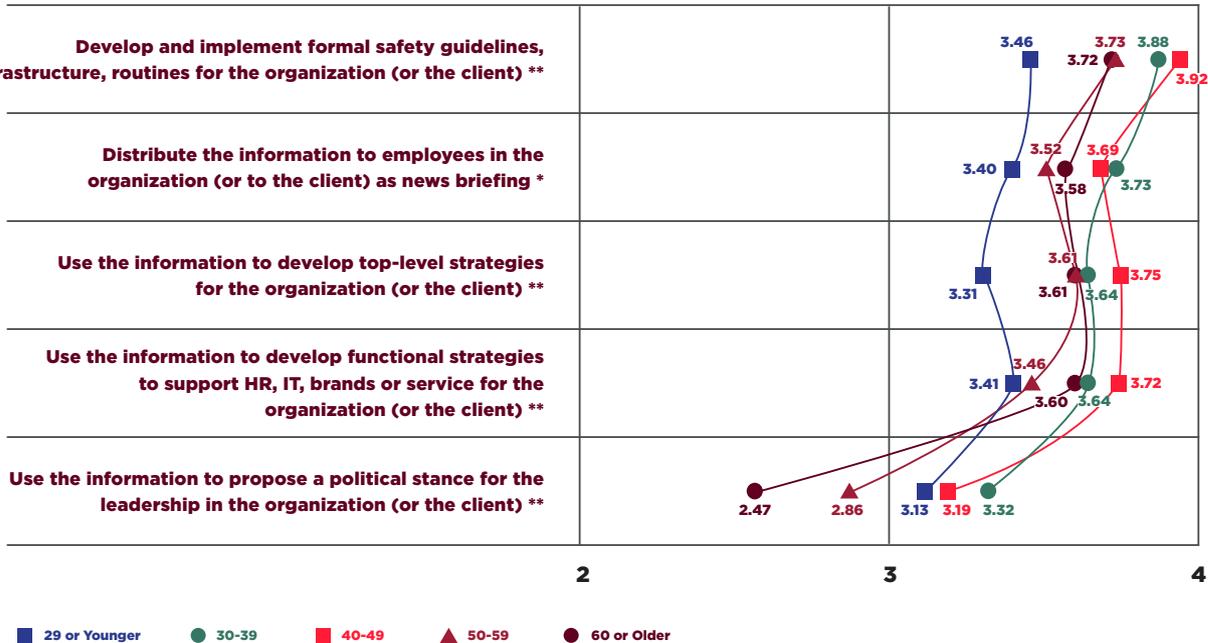
Note: n = 1,044 communication professionals. Q40: How is your communication department / agency using COVID-19 information gathered to plan, prepare and respond to the pandemic? Scale 1 (Never) – 5 (Always). Percentages: Frequency based on scale points 4–5. (Chi-square test, ** p < .01)

Communication professionals in publicly held companies are leading in adapting communication strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic for various purposes



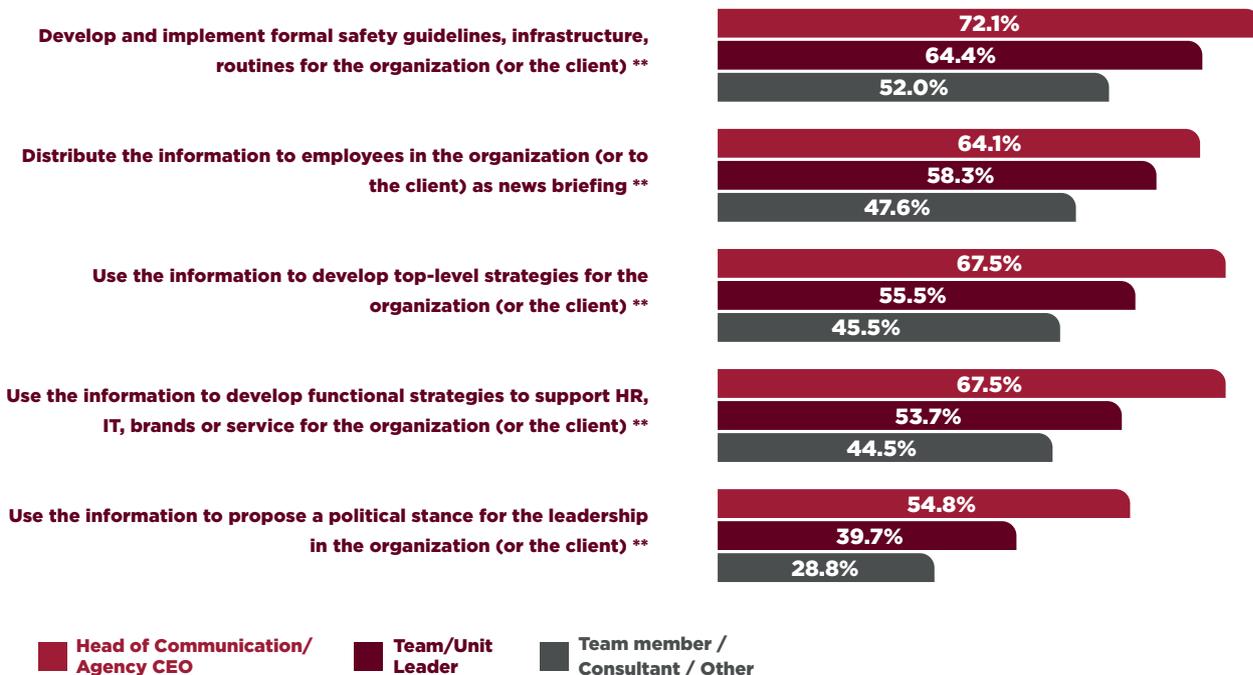
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Communication professionals in different age groups have different priorities in how to use COVID-19 information in strategic communication



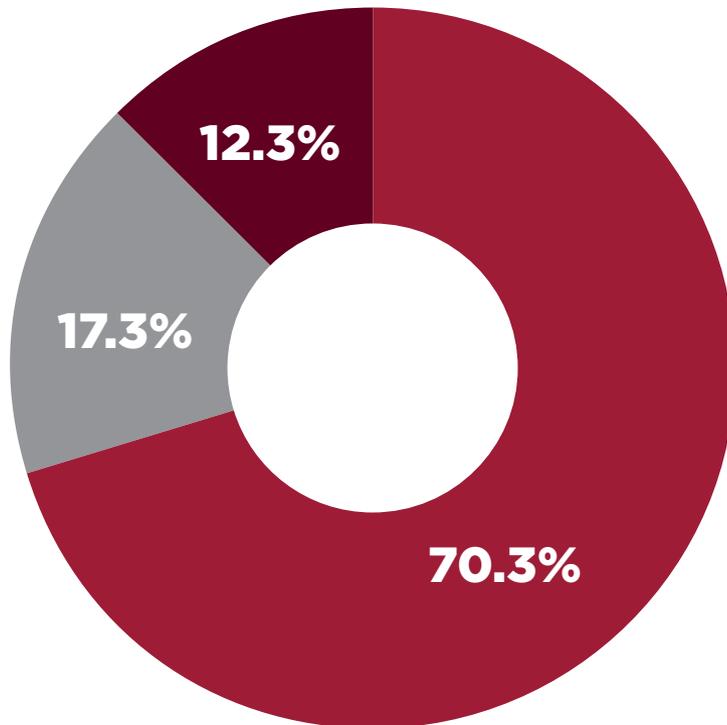
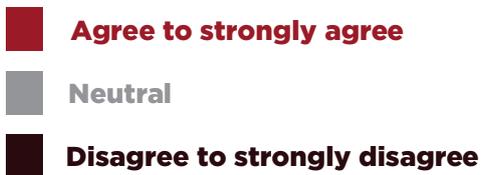
Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q40: How is your communication department / agency using COVID-19 information gathered to plan, prepare and respond to the pandemic? Scale 1 (Never) – 5 (Always). Mean scores. (ANOVA test, * p < .05, ** p < .01)

Communication leaders play a critical role in adapting COVID-19 related information to plan, prepare and respond to the pandemic for the organization / the client



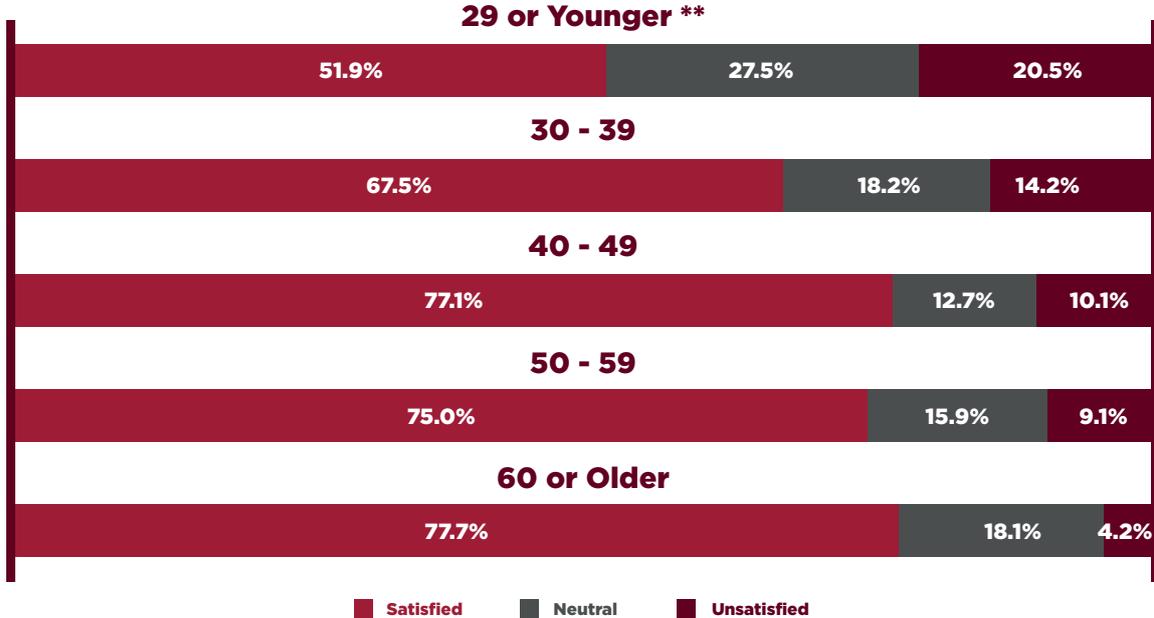
Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q40: How is your communication department / agency using COVID-19 information gathered to plan, prepare and respond to the pandemic? Scale 1 (Never) – 5 (Always). Percentages: Frequency based on scale points 4–5. (Chi-square test, ** p < .01)

Seven out of ten communication professionals are satisfied with their organization's communication and management during the COVID-19 pandemic



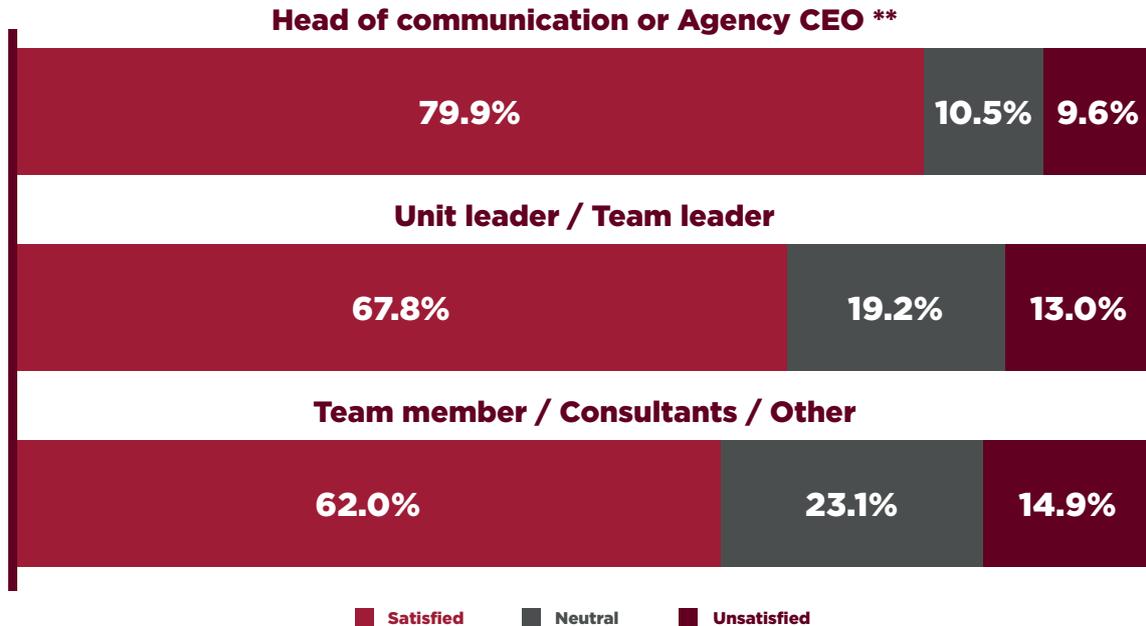
Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q41: From a communication perspective, I am satisfied with the way my organization communicates and manages the COVID-19 pandemic. Scale 1 (strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree). Percentages: Frequency based on scale points 1–5.

Almost half of young professionals (29 or younger) are unsatisfied or keep a neutral stand with the way their organization communicates and manages the COVID-19 pandemic; the satisfaction level increases significantly as the age grows older



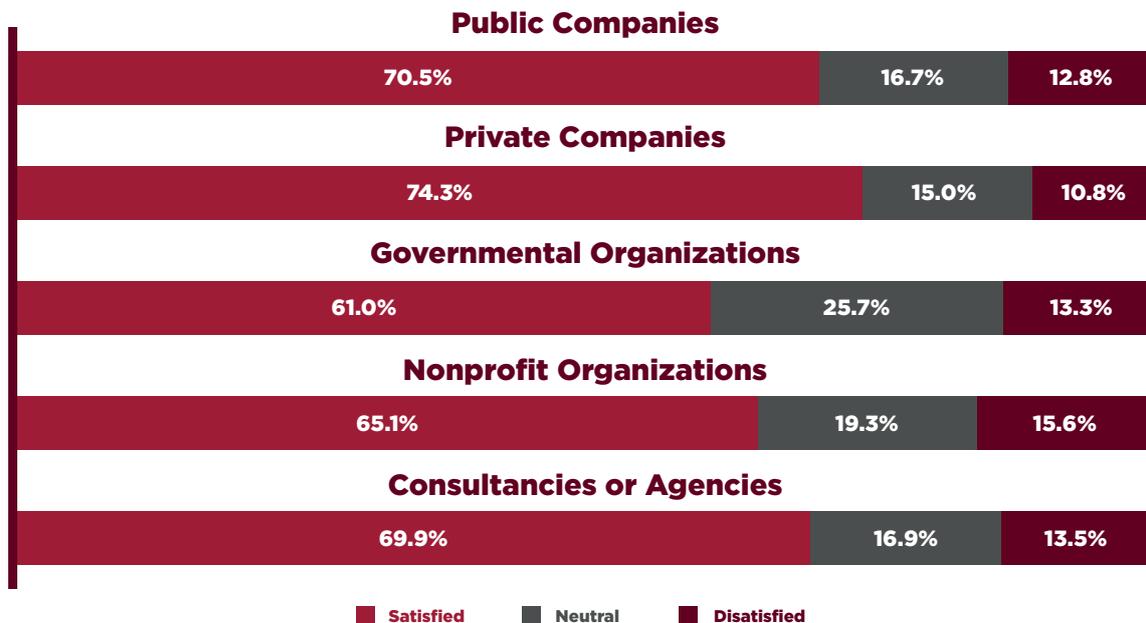
Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q41: From a communication perspective, I am satisfied with the way my organization communicates and manages the COVID-19 pandemic. Scale 1 (strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree). Percentages: Frequency of satisfaction is based on scale points 4–5. (Chi-square test, ** p < .01)

The satisfaction level significantly decreases along the leadership line when evaluating the organization's communication and management of the COVID-19 pandemic

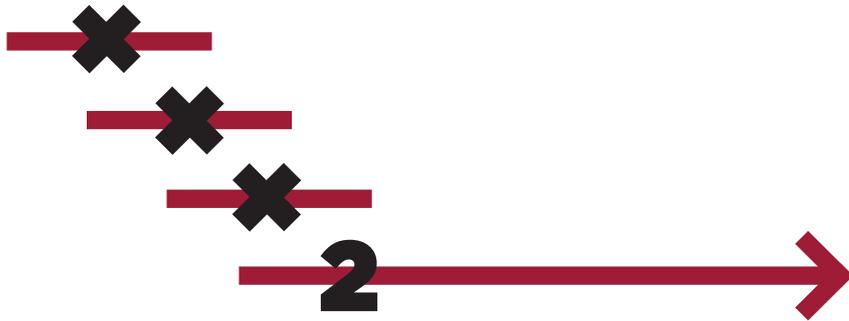


Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q41: From a communication perspective, I am satisfied with the way my organization communicates and manages the COVID-19 pandemic. Scale 1 (strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree). Percentages: Frequency of satisfaction is based on scale points 4–5. (Chi-square test, ** p < .01)

Communication professionals in governmental organizations report the lowest level of satisfaction while those in private companies are most satisfied with their organization's communication efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic



Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q41: From a communication perspective, I am satisfied with the way my organization communicates and manages the COVID-19 pandemic. Scale 1 (strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree). Percentages: Frequency of satisfaction is based on scale points 4–5. (Chi-square test, no significant difference was found.)



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Ethical
Challenges and
Resources for the
Communications
Profession

Ethical behavior in communication professions is an ever-present challenge (Bowen, 2008). Seminars and webinars on ethics are common offerings by professional organizations. Onboarding of employees emphasizes the place of ethics in the organization (Brown & Trevino, 2006; Brown, Trevino & Harrison, 2005). Whether we think about it or not, ethical considerations in business communication surround us like the air we breathe.

Our surveyed communication professionals found ethical challenges in their day-to-day work. Respondents in the U.S. were significantly more likely than their Canadian counterparts to report ethical challenges. U.S. practitioners were also significantly more likely than Canadians to cite their personal values and beliefs as a source of guidance in the face of such challenges. Male respondents to the NACM report significantly more ethical challenges compared to females.

Internal communicators report the highest percentage of multiple ethical challenges in a year, but when looking at one or more ethical challenges, those in community relations lead followed closely by strategy and coordination. Ethical challenges are most prevalent in consultancies, agencies, and government and least prevalent in nonprofit organizations. While consultancies and agencies report the highest percentage of multiple ethical challenges a year, government organizations report the most ethical challenges when looking at one or more such challenges. In fact, government holds a 10% lead over consultancies when considering one or more ethical challenges a year.

When faced with ethical challenges, most respondents rely on resources from their employer. However, codes of ethics of trade associations and personal values were close runners-up. There is a statistically significant difference between practitioners in the United States and Canada when asked about their

reliance on personal values to deal with ethical challenges. U.S. practitioners are statistically more reliant on personal values compared to Canadians.

Male practitioners say they use all three resources – trade associations' codes, organizational standards, and personal values – at a higher percentage than do females.

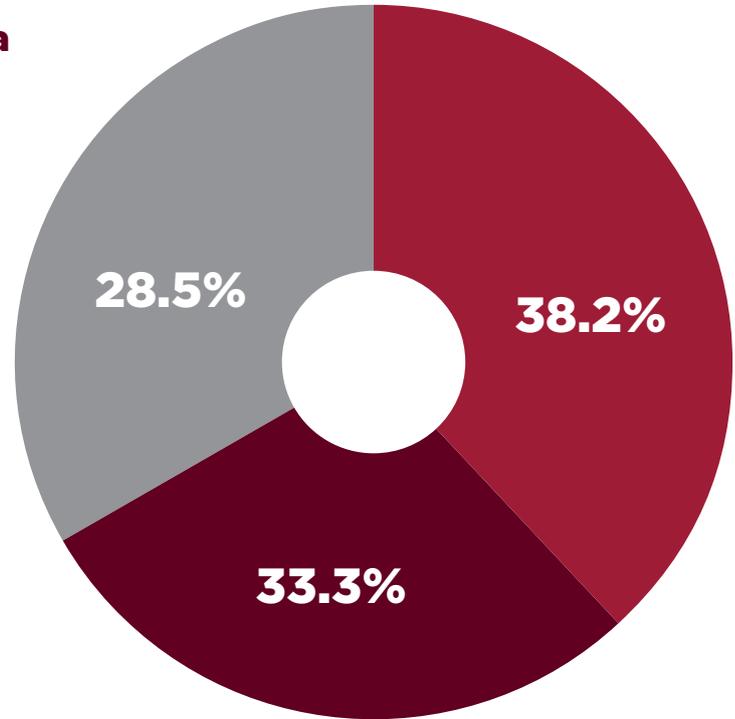
Ethical concerns related to social media strategies are particularly prevalent. Respondents say they are most concerned about the use of bots to generate feedback and followers on social media. Concerns about paying influencers for favorable mentions ran a close second. There is a significant difference among organization type in two categories measured in this study: public companies have the highest concern about profiling and targeting based on demographic characteristics including race, age, et cetera. Nonprofits have the least concern about profiling. Likewise, public companies report the highest concern about editing organization-related wiki entries with nonprofits reporting the lowest concern.

There are statistically significant differences between men and women in five areas related to social media. In each category, male practitioners are more ethically concerned than are female practitioners. The youngest respondents, those 29 and younger, were significantly more ethically concerned about asking employees to distribute organizational information through their private social media accounts compared to other age groups. Those respondents 40 to 49 years of age were significantly more ethically concerned about editing organizational entries in public wikis, compared to other age groups. Respondents who were age 60 and over were significantly more ethically concerned about using big data mining techniques to gather personal data about publics, compared to other age categories. Finally, more than 8 in 10 respondents have gone through communications ethics training. Among those, more than 60% have taken such training within the last three years.

Six out of ten communication professionals in North America encounter one or more ethical challenges in the past year

Number of ethical challenges encountered in day-to-day work in the past year

- **No ethical challenges**
- **One ethical challenge**
- **Several ethical challenges**



Note: n = 1,006 communication professionals. Q1: Like anyone else, communication professionals sometimes face situations where particular activities might be legally acceptable but challenging from a moral point of view. In your daily work during the past 12 months, have you experienced ethical challenges? No / Yes, once / Yes, several times / Don't know or don't remember.

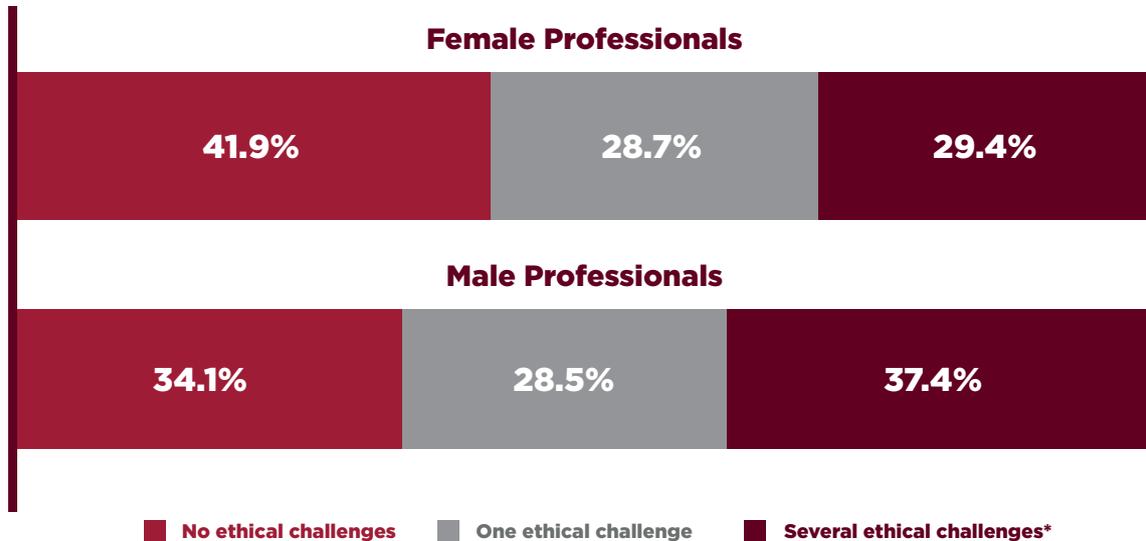
More communication professionals in the United States report significantly more ethical challenges in their work

	No Ethical Challenges	One Ethical Challenge	Several Ethical Challenges **
 UNITED STATES	35.1%	28.8%	36.1%
 CANADA	47.3%	27.7%	25.0%

Note: n = 1,006 communication professionals. Q1: Like anyone else, communication professionals sometimes face situations where particular activities might be legally acceptable but challenging from a moral point of view. In your daily work during the past 12 months, have you experienced ethical challenges? No / Yes, once / Yes, several times / Don't know or don't remember. (Chi-square test, **p < .01).

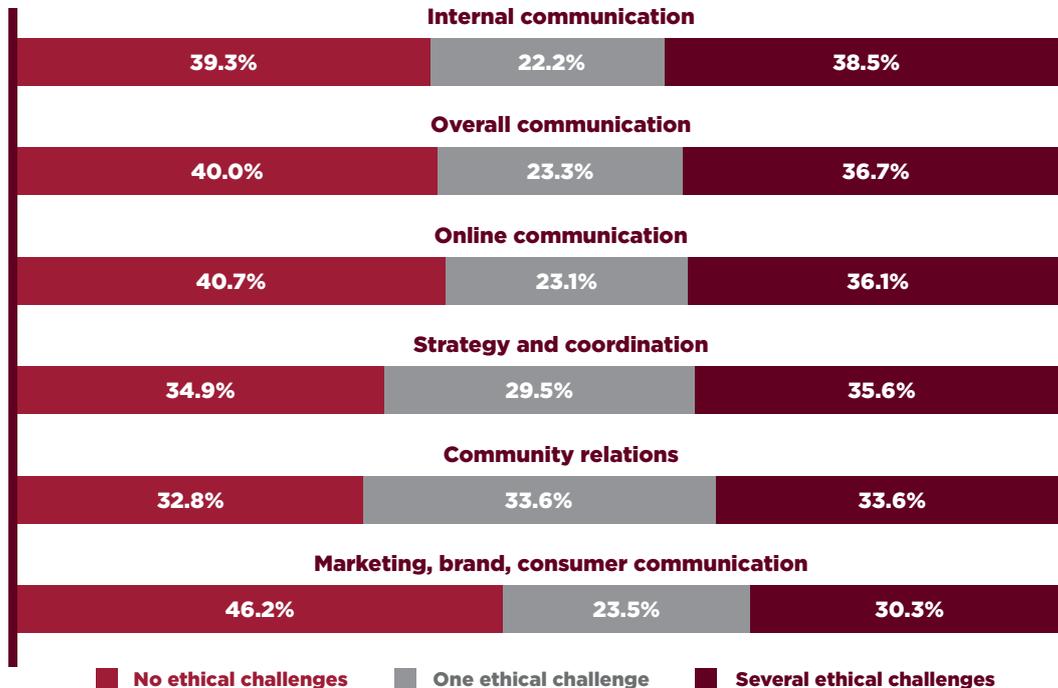
Male communication professionals report significantly more ethical challenges than female professionals do

Number of ethical challenges encountered in day-to-day work in the past year



Note: n = 1,006 communication professionals. Q1: Like anyone else, communication professionals sometimes face situations where particular activities might be legally acceptable but challenging from a moral point of view. In your day to work during the past 12 months, have you experienced ethical challenges? No / Yes, once / Yes, several times / Don't know or don't remember. (Chi-square test, *p < .05)

Different communication roles can be more or less demanding in moral terms, but professionals specialized in internal communication face the highest amount of ethical challenges



n = 1,006 communication professionals. Q1: Like anyone else, communication professionals sometimes face situations where particular activities might be legally acceptable, but challenging from a moral point of view. In your day-to-day work during the past 12 months, have you experienced ethical challenges? No / Yes, once / Yes, several times / Don't know or don't remember.

Ethical challenges are most common in consultancies and agencies when compared to other types of organizations

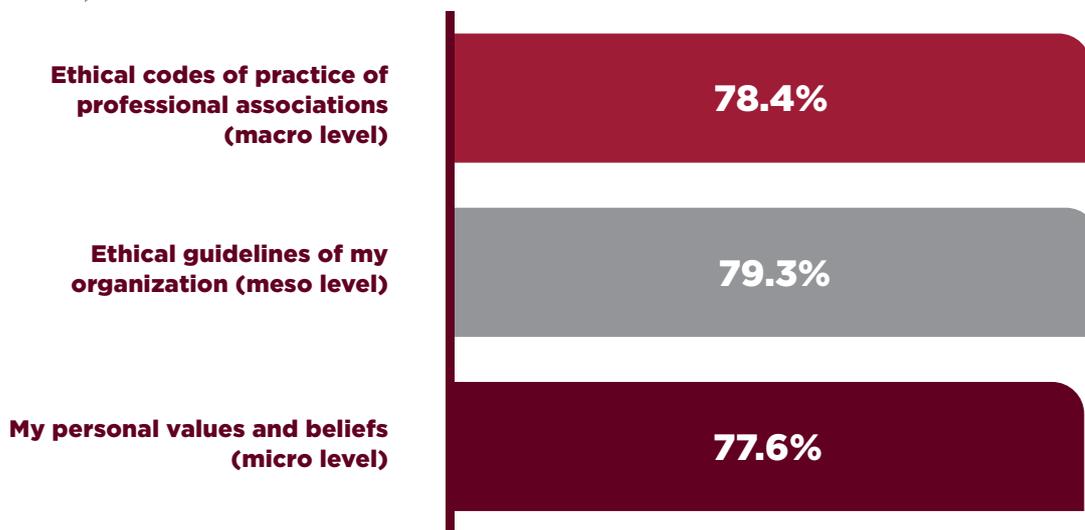
Number of ethical challenges encountered in day-to-day work in the past year



Note: n = 1,006 communication professionals. Q1: Like anyone else, communication professionals sometimes face situations where particular activities might be legally acceptable, but challenging from a moral point of view. In your day-to-day work during the past 12 months, have you experienced ethical challenges? No / Yes, once / Yes, several times / Don't know or don't remember.

Dealing with ethical challenges: Communication professionals use multiple resources; ethical guidelines at the organizational level are most important

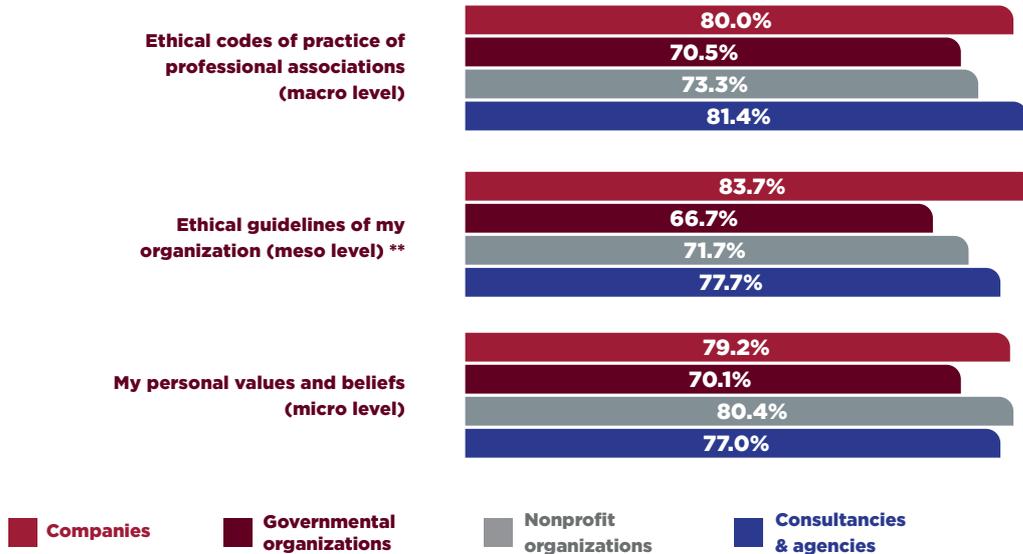
Resources used by communication practitioners when dealing with ethical challenges



Note: n=643 communication professionals. Q2: How important were the following resources to you when dealing with ethical challenges? Scale 1 (Not important) – 5 (Very important). Frequency based on scale points 4–5.

Professionals in consultancies and agencies use codes of ethics of professional associations more frequently, while organizational guidelines are more acknowledged in companies

Resources used by communication practitioners when dealing with ethical challenges



Note: n≥643 communication professionals. Q2: How important were the following resources to you when dealing with ethical challenges? Scale 1 (Not important) – 5 (Very important). Frequency based on scale points 4–5. (Chi-square test, **p < .01).

Resources used for dealing with ethical challenges across North America

	Ethical codes of practice of professional associations (macro level)	Ethical guidelines of my organization (meso level)	My personal values and beliefs (micro level)*
 UNITED STATES	77.5%	78.9%	77.8%
 CANADA	81.6%	80.7%	76.9%

n≥643 communication professionals. Q2: How important were the following resources to your when dealing with ethical challenges?

Scale 1 (Not important) – 5 (Very important). Frequency based on scale points 4–5. (Chi-square test, *p < .05).

Both male and female professionals use multiple resources for ethical guidelines, but men rely more on organizational guidelines and professional codes of ethics

Resources used for dealing with ethical challenges

Ethical codes of practice of professional associations (macro level)

74.9%

81.7%

Ethical guidelines of my organization (meso level)

76.4%

82.4%

My personal values and beliefs (micro level)

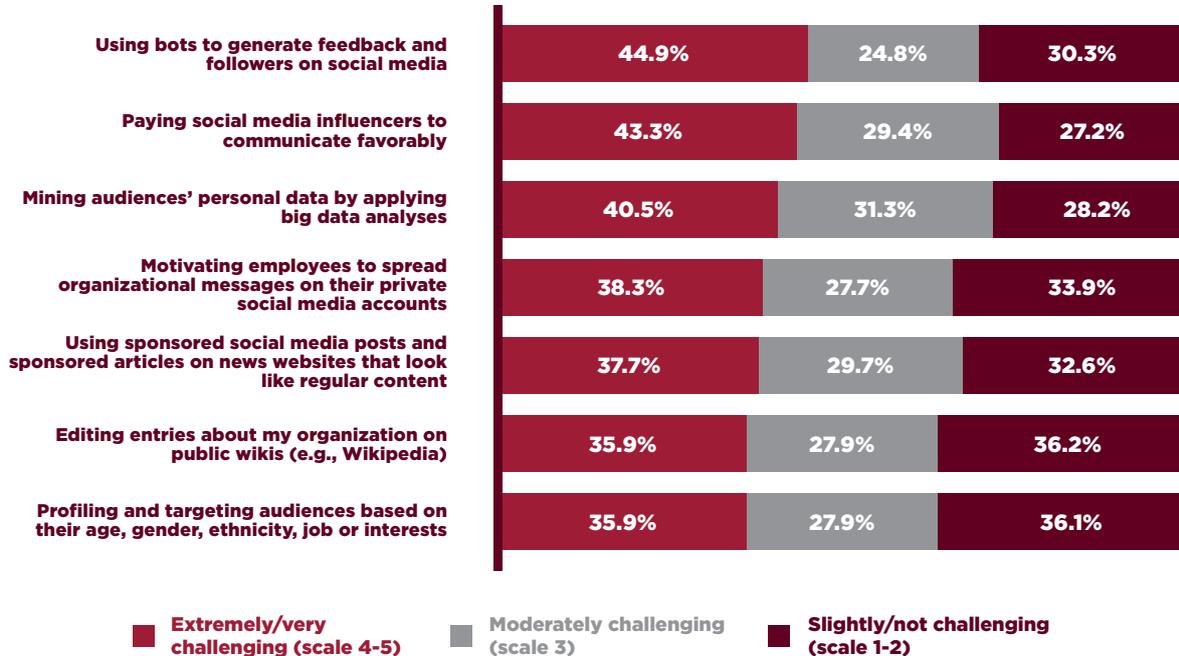
75.9%

79.1%

■ WOMEN ■ MEN

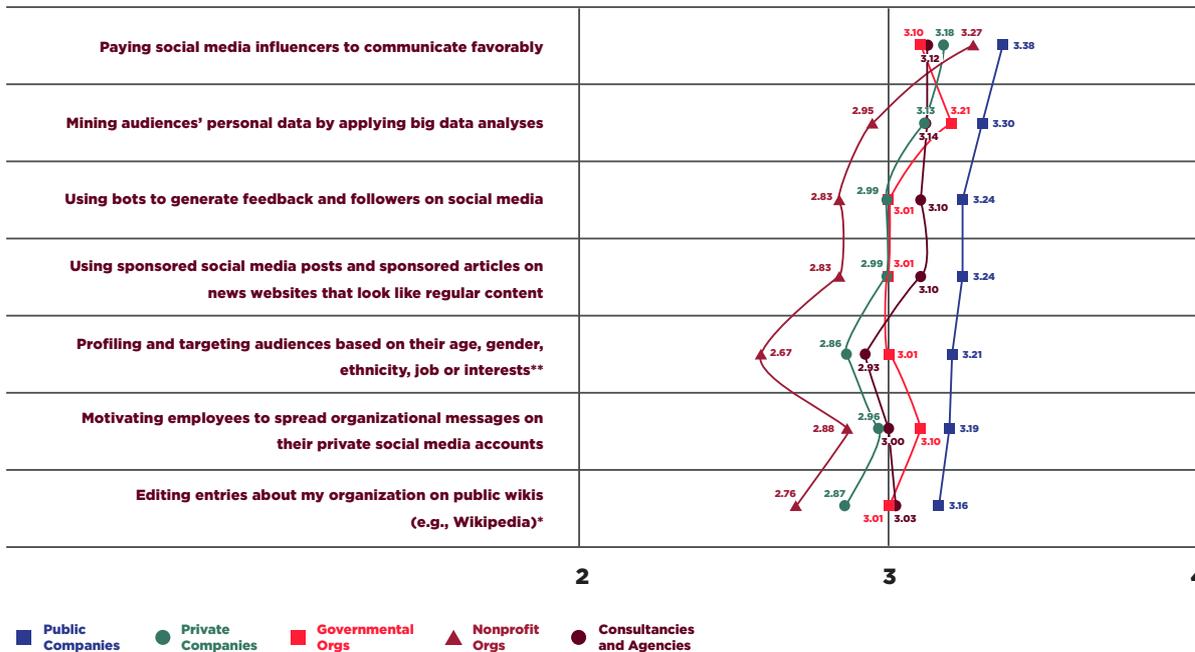
Note: n≥643 communication professionals. Q2: How important were the following resources to you when dealing with ethical challenges? Scale 1 (Not important) – 5 (Very important). Frequency based on scale points 4–5.

Ethical concerns over communication practices on social media: nearly seven out of ten professionals are worried about using bots, paying social media influencers and applying big data analyses



Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q3: Strategic communication and public relations are constantly evolving and introducing new ways of communicating with stakeholders. How challenging are the following practices in your opinion in terms of ethics? Scale 1 (Ethically not challenging at all) – 5 (Ethically extremely challenging).

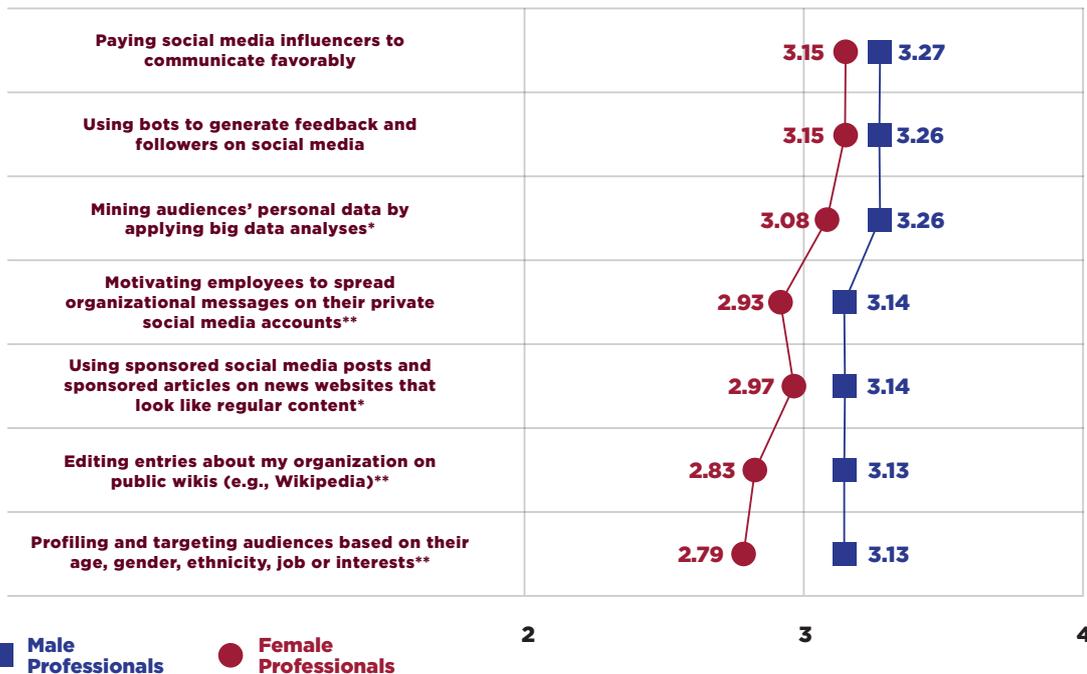
Professionals working in public companies are more concerned about profiling audiences and editing entries about their organization on public wikis



Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q3: Strategic communication and public relations are constantly evolving and introducing new ways of communicating with stakeholders (Ethically extremely challenging). Mean values. (ANOVA, **p < .01; *p < .05). How challenging are the following practices in your opinion in terms of ethics? Scale 1 (Ethically not challenging at all) – 5 (Ethically extremely challenging)

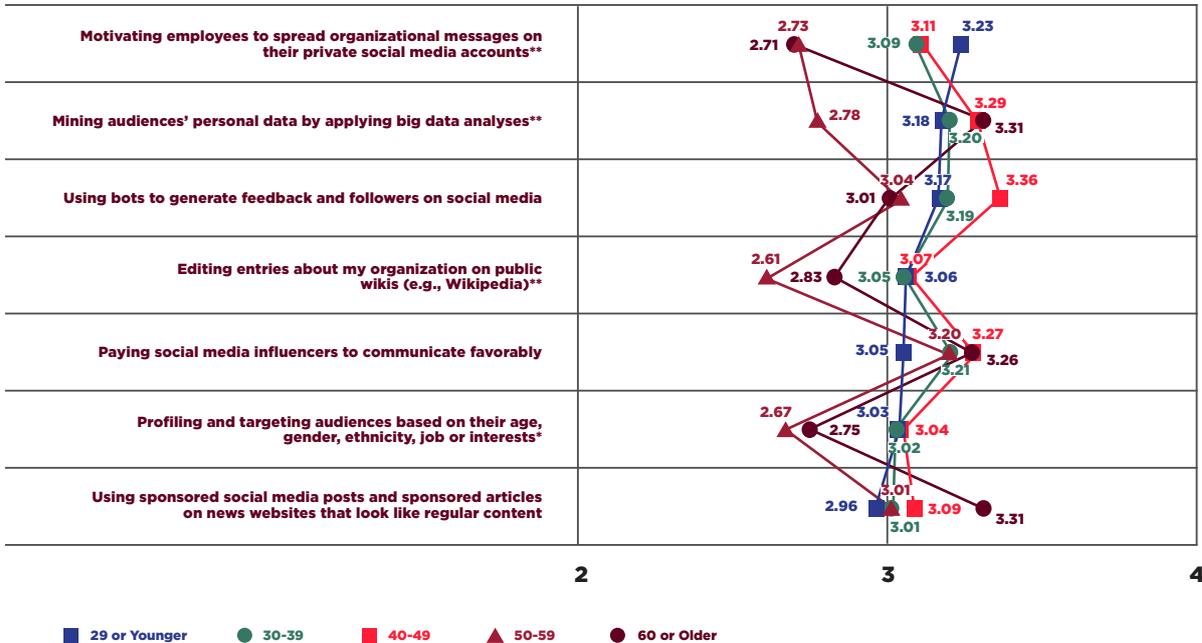
Male professionals have stronger ethical concerns on every addressed social media practice in professional communications

Ethical challenges of current communication practices



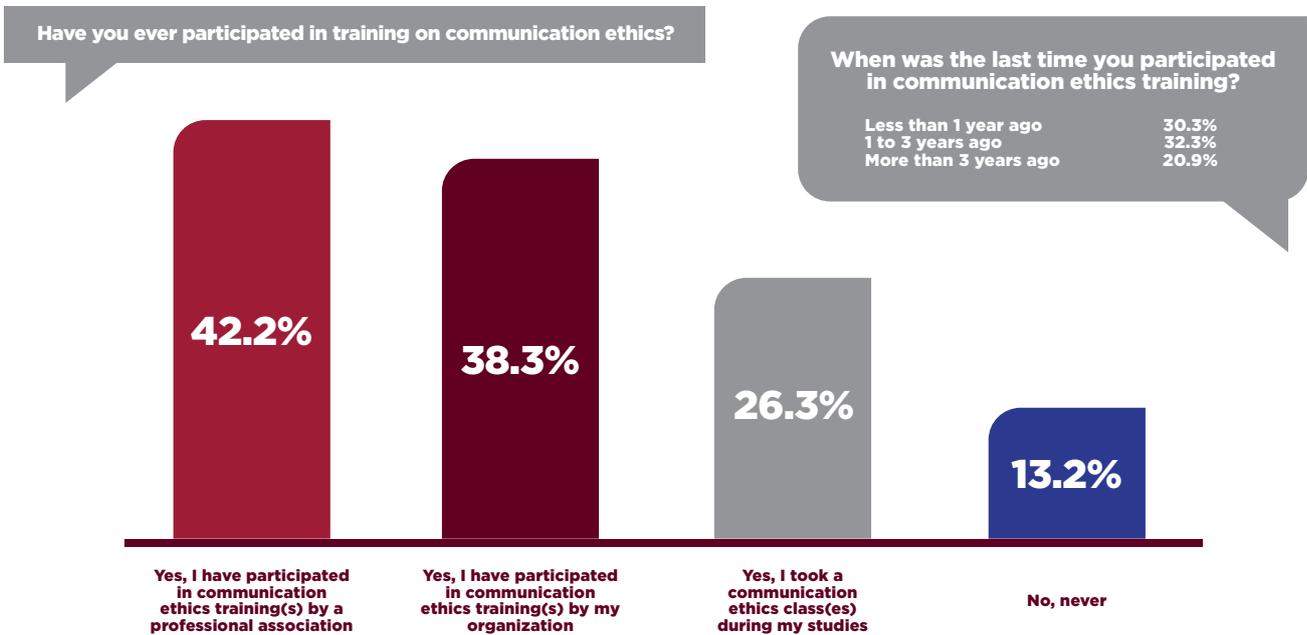
Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q3: Strategic communication and public relations are constantly evolving and introducing new ways of communicating with stakeholders. How challenging are the following practices in your opinion in terms of ethics? Scale 1 (Ethically not challenging at all) – 5 (Ethically extremely challenging). Mean values. (Independent sample T-test, **p < .01; *p < .05).

Younger communication professionals are more concerned about asking employees to spread organizational messages but less worried about paying social media influencers



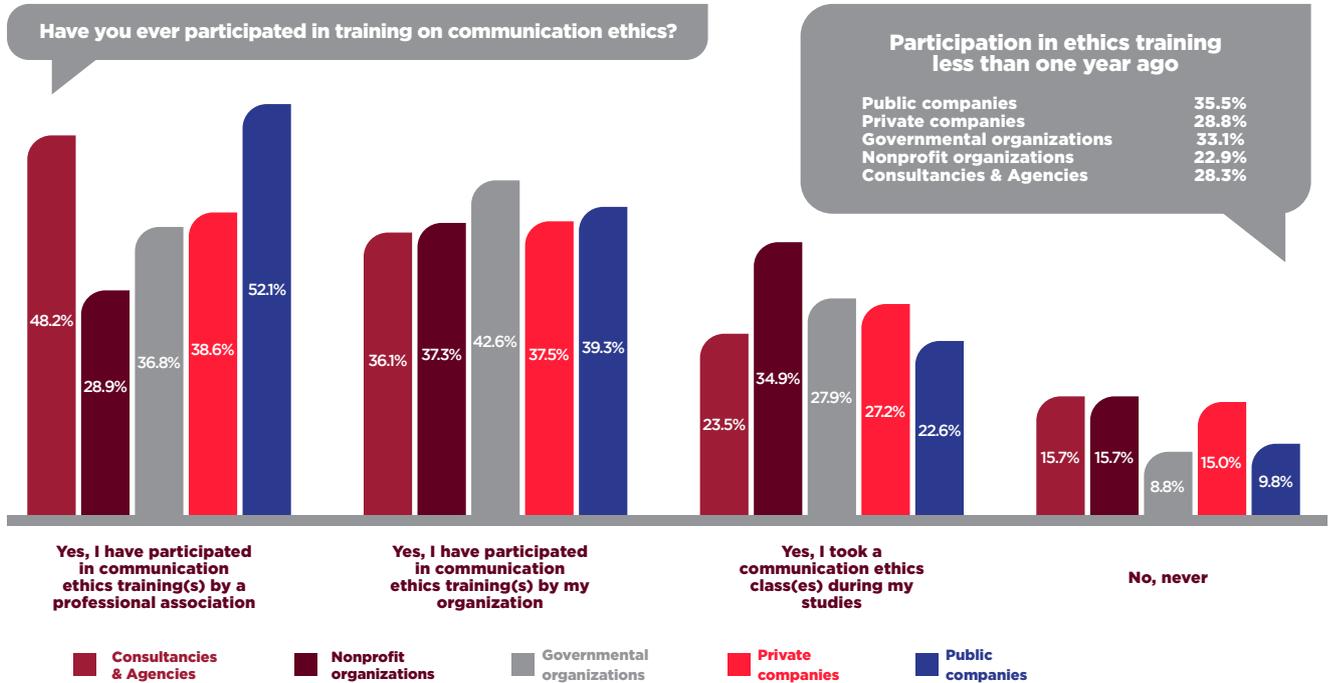
Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q3: Strategic communication and public relations are constantly evolving and introducing new ways of communicating with stakeholders. How challenging are the following practices in your opinion in terms of ethics? Scale 1 (Ethically not challenging at all) – 5 (Ethically extremely challenging). Mean values. (ANOVA, **p < .01; *p < .05).

The majority of communication professionals in North America have participated in different communication ethics training or classes



Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q30: Have you ever participated in trainings on communication ethics? Yes, I have participated in communication ethics training(s) by a professional association / Yes, I have participated in communication ethics training(s) by my organization / Yes, I took a communication ethics class(es) during my studies / No, never / Don't know or don't remember. Q31: When was the last time you participated in communication ethics training? Less than 1 year ago / 1 to 3 years ago / More than 3 years ago / I haven't participated in any communication ethics training so far / Don't know or don't remember.

Attending ethics trainings provided by professional associations is most common in public companies; professionals who work there also receive most up-to-date ethics training opportunities



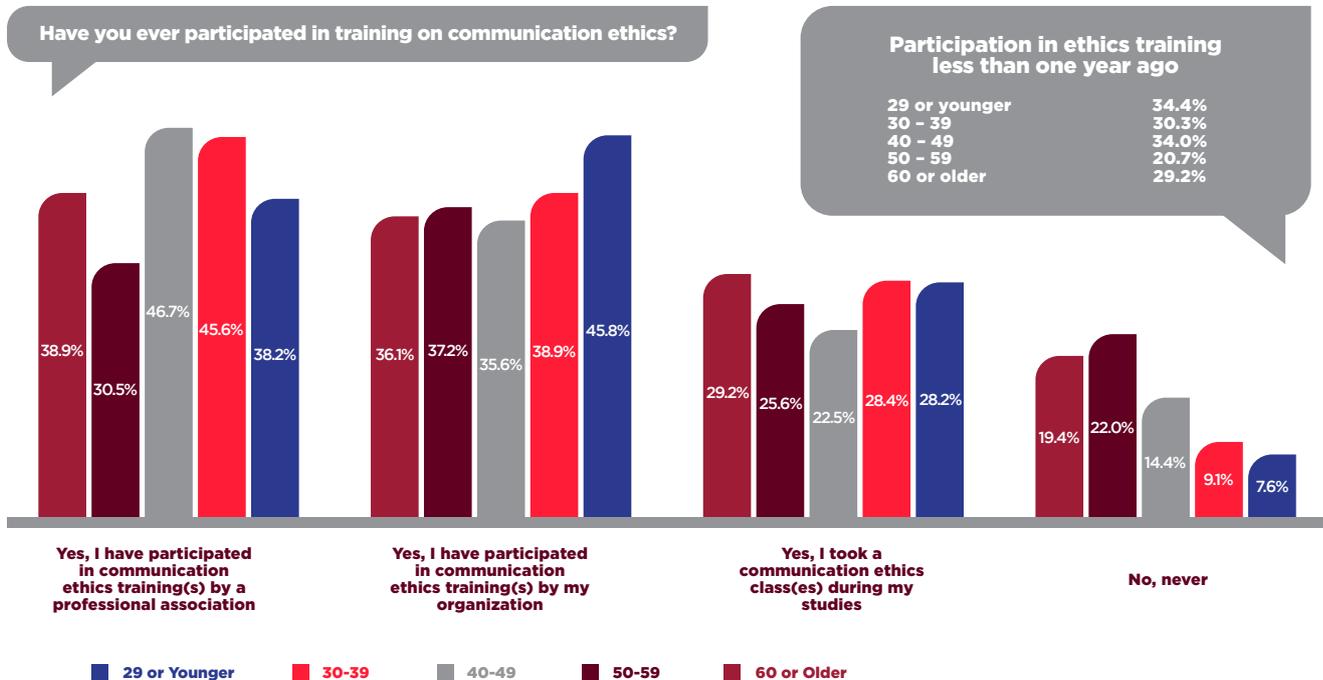
Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q30: Have you ever participated in trainings on communication ethics? Yes, I have participated in communication ethics training(s) by a professional association / Yes, I have participated in communication ethics training(s) by my organization / Yes, I took a communication ethics class(es) during my studies / No, never / Don't know or don't remember. Q31: When was the last time you participated in communication ethics training? Less than 1 year ago / 1 to 3 years ago / More than 3 years ago / I haven't participated in any communication ethics training so far / Don't know or don't remember.

Ethics training efforts shall be dedicated to employees at all levels: Many more communication leaders have participated in ethics training by professional associations than professionals at the team level

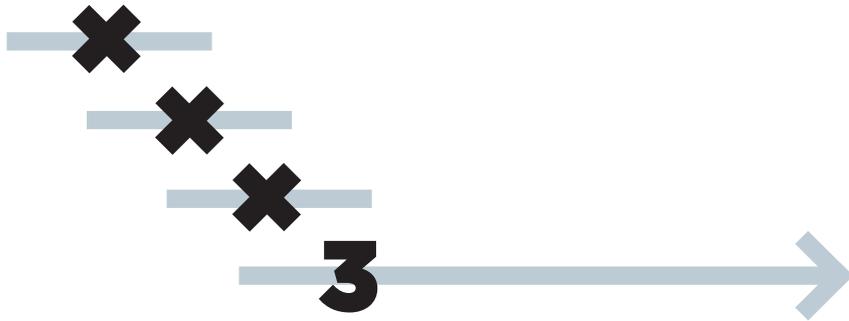


Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q30: Have you ever participated in trainings on communication ethics? Yes, I have participated in communication ethics training(s) by a professional association / Yes, I have participated in communication ethics training(s) by my organization / Yes, I took a communication ethics class(es) during my studies / No, never / Don't know or don't remember.

Communication professionals in their 30s and 40s are best educated in ethics; more younger professionals receive ethics training from their organization



Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q30: Have you ever participated in trainings on communication ethics? Yes, I have participated in communication ethics training(s) by a professional association / Yes, I have participated in communication ethics training(s) by my organization / Yes, I took a communication ethics class(es) during my studies / No, never / Don't know or don't remember.



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3

Cybersecurity and
Communications

Cybersecurity issues become communication issues. A cybersecurity issue can lead to a lack of trust and confidence among stakeholders (Pehar, 2020). In its 2021 Global Digital Trust Insights report, PwC noted that 55% of 3000+ businesses surveyed planned to increase their cybersecurity budgets (PwC, 2021). This NACM found that 6 in 10 respondents said cybersecurity is relevant to their daily work.

More than 6 in 10 respondents from public and private companies, government organizations, and consultancies/agencies report that cybersecurity is relevant to their communication work. There was a difference between practitioners in the U.S. and Canada regarding debate about cybersecurity. U.S. practitioners were significantly more likely than Canadians to report that cybersecurity is much debated in their country, and that the survey respondent personally had given attention to debate about cybersecurity. The difference between the countries is modest, but statistically significant.

More than half of NACM respondents said their organization had been a victim of cyberattacks or data theft. Nearly 1 in 5 said they had been victimized more than once. Public companies and government organizations were the most likely to have suffered one or more cyberattacks or data breaches with more than 60% reporting one or more attacks. Consultancies/agencies and private companies suffered the fewest attacks and breaches.

Nearly half (45.7%) of the communicators said they are charged with educating employees about cybersecurity for their organization or client. About as many (45.5%) said they are charged with managing crisis communication for their department or agency in the face of a cyberattacks. Educating employees

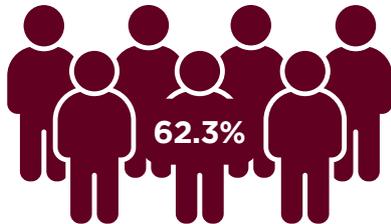
is also important for communicators in departments and agencies. The level of involvement in managing communication during cyberattacks differs significantly among types of organizations. Communicators at nonprofit organizations indicate the least engagement during these attacks. Private companies' communicators are generally the most engaged in managing crisis communication, addressing cybersecurity internally, and implementing cybersecurity technologies. There was no statistically significant difference among types of organizations when it comes to educating employees about cybersecurity. All five organization types indicated high involvement in that task.

The greatest concerns related to possible cyberattacks vary by organization type. Public companies are most concerned that cyber criminals will leak sensitive company information. Private companies, agencies, and nonprofits are most concerned that cyber criminals will hack their websites and social media accounts. Government organizations are most concerned that cyber criminals will steal stakeholder data. Concerns about potential attacks vary little between the United States and Canada. In both countries, the highest concern is related to possible hacking by cyber criminals into organizational websites or social media accounts.

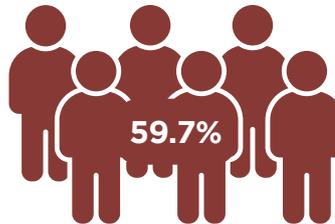
Cyberattacks on companies, nonprofits, and governmental agencies continue to climb. This has led to a high demand for communication professionals to become more expert in response to such attacks, according to NACM respondents. No sector is immune to these attacks, and they do not acknowledge national boundaries.

Cybersecurity--a trending topic among communication professionals in North America: Six out of ten professionals confirm cybersecurity is relevant for their daily work

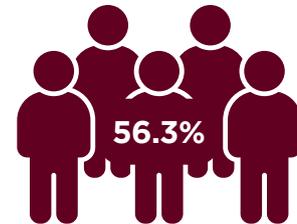
"Cybersecurity is relevant for the daily work of my communication department / agency."



"Cybersecurity is a much-debated topic in my country."



"I have given attention to the debate about cybersecurity."

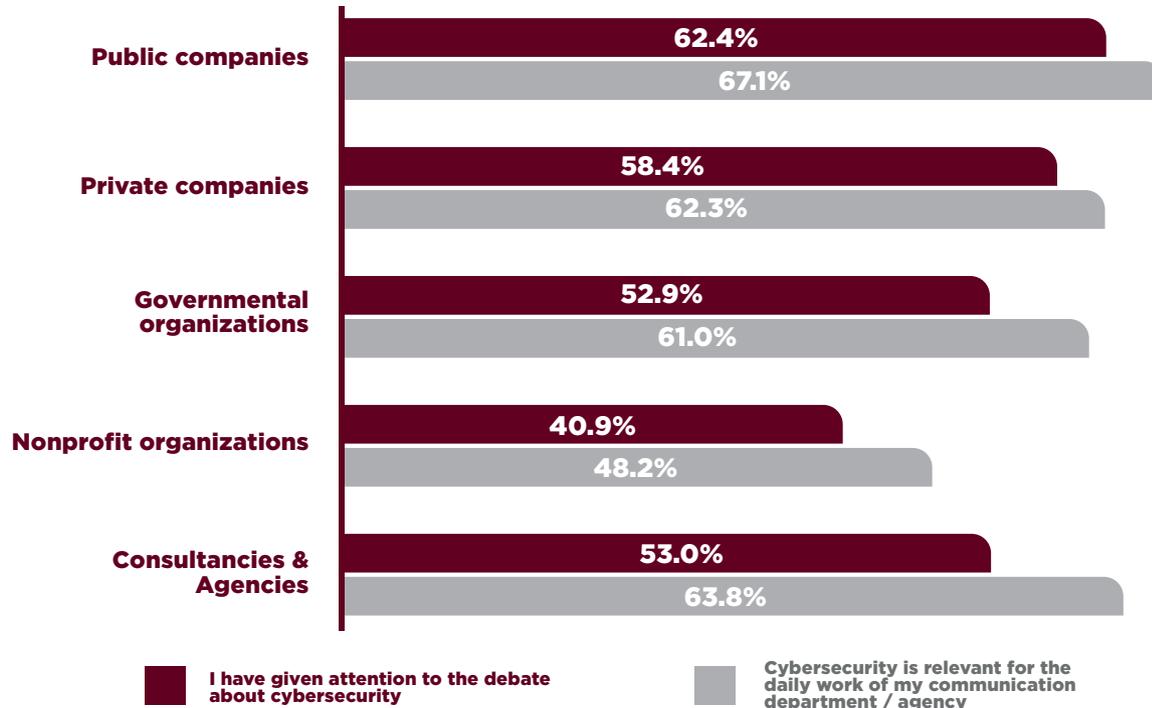


Cybersecurity

a set of guidelines, technologies and training that provide protection of an organization's data and of its computer and digital communication infrastructure.

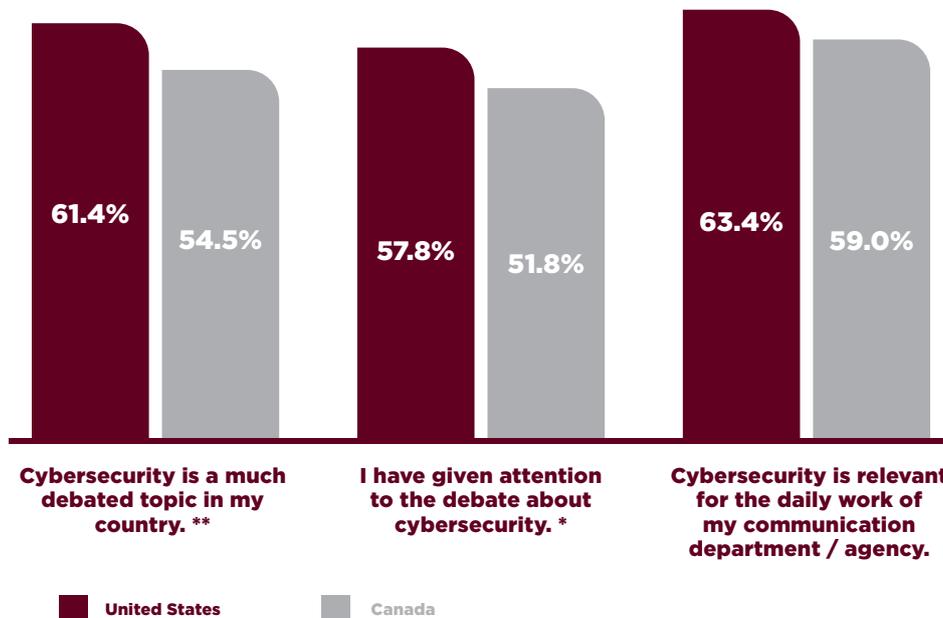
Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q4: Organizations are nowadays increasingly threatened by cyberattacks as well as data theft, manipulation, and fraud. Thus, cybersecurity becomes a highly relevant issue in all fields – including communications. We define cybersecurity as a set of guidelines, technologies and training that provide protection of an organization's data and of its computer and digital communication infrastructure. Please rate these statements based on your personal experience: Scale 1 (Not at all) – 5 (To a great extent). Frequency based on scale points 4-5.

Higher awareness of cybersecurity issues in communications in public companies and higher relevance for daily work in both public companies and agencies



Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q4: Organizations are nowadays increasingly threatened by cyberattacks as well as data theft, manipulation and fraud. Thus, cybersecurity becomes a highly relevant issue in all fields – including communications. We define cybersecurity as a set of guidelines, technologies and training that provide protection of an organization's data and of its computer and digital communication infrastructure. Please rate these statements based on your personal experience: Scale 1 (Not at all) – 5 (To a great extent). Frequency based on scale points 4-5. Significant differences between various types of organizations (chi-square test, $p < .05$).

Significant differences between two countries: Cybersecurity is more intensively discussed in the United States and its relevance for daily work is higher

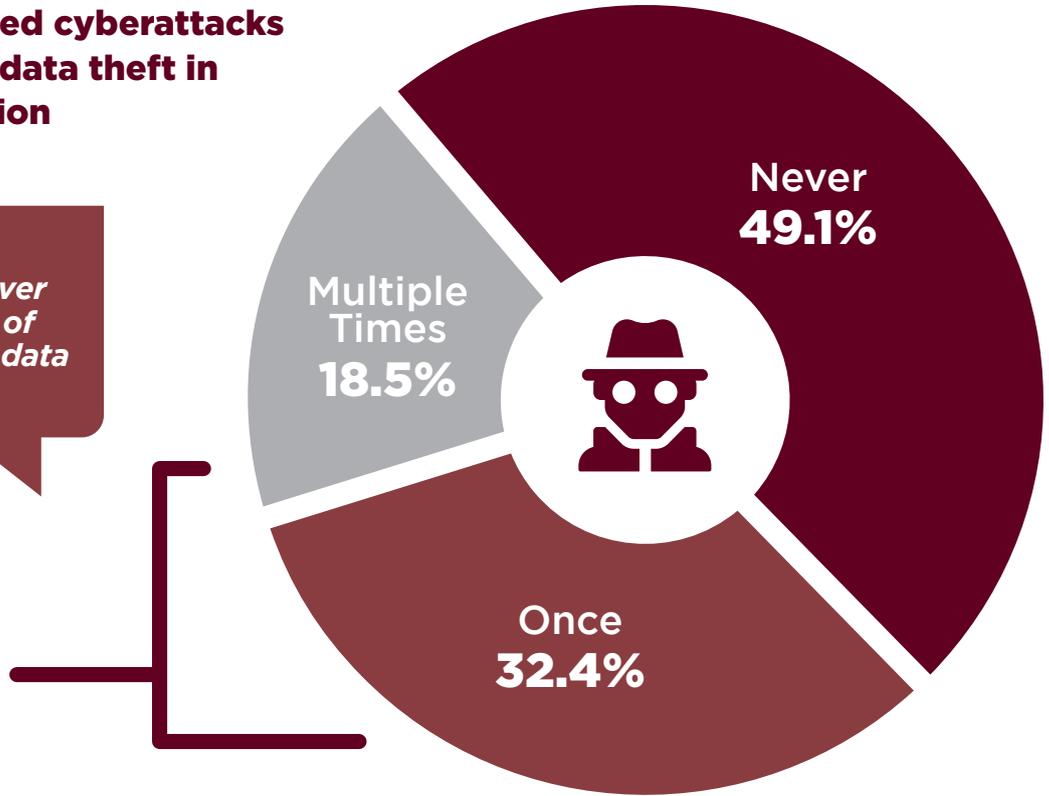


Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q4: Organizations are nowadays increasingly threatened by cyberattacks as well as data theft, manipulation, and fraud. Thus, cybersecurity becomes a highly relevant issue in all fields – including communications. We define cybersecurity as a set of guidelines, technologies and training that provide protection of an organization's data and of its computer and digital communication infrastructure. Please rate these statements based on your personal experience: Scale 1 (Not at all) – 5 (To a great extent). Frequency based on scale points 4–5. Significant differences between two countries (Chi-square test, ** p < .01. * p < .05).

More than half of the communication professionals in North America have experienced cyberattacks or incidents of data theft in their organization

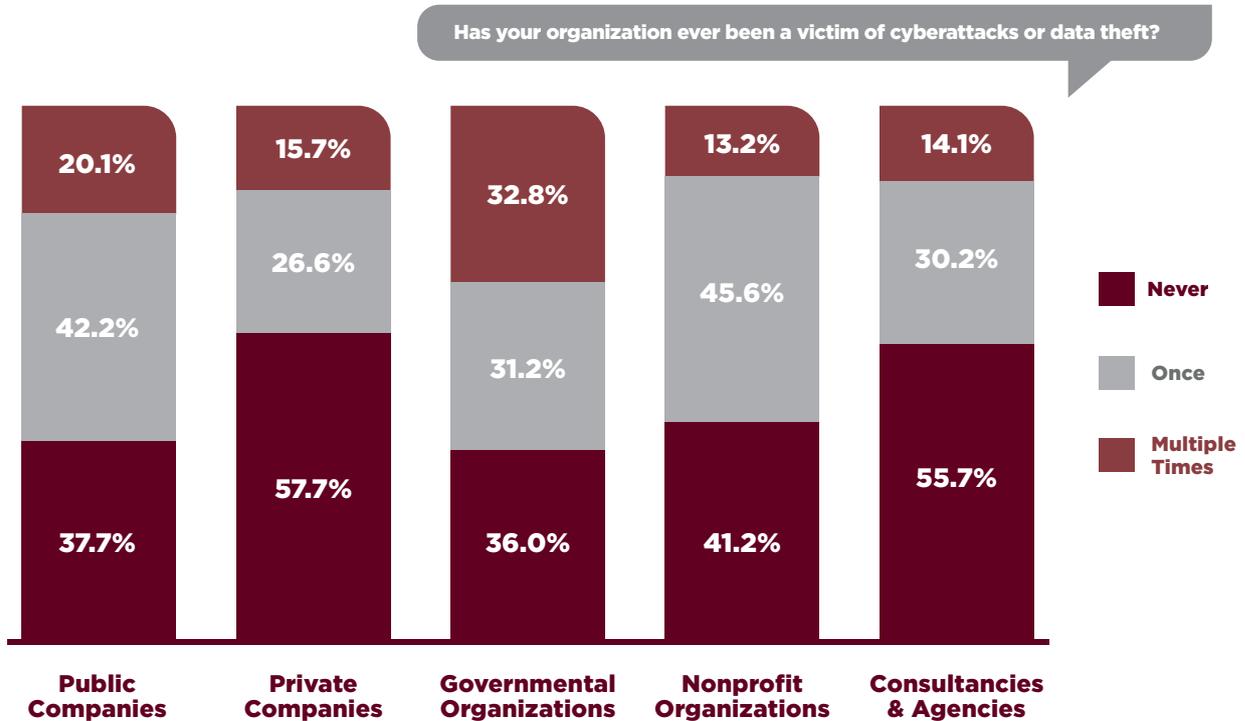
Has your organization ever been a victim of cyberattacks or data theft?

**Victims Overall
50.9%**



Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q5: Has your organization ever been a victim of cyberattacks or data theft? No, never/ Yes, multiple times / Don't know or don't remember.

Cyber criminals are attacking governmental organizations and public companies more frequently



Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q5: Has your organization ever been a victim of cyberattacks or data theft? No, never/ Yes, multiple times / Don't know or don't remember. Highly significant differences between various types of organizations (Chi-square test, $p < .01$).

Incidents of cyberattacks and data theft happen more frequently in organizations in the United States

Has your organization ever been a victim of cyber attacks or data theft?

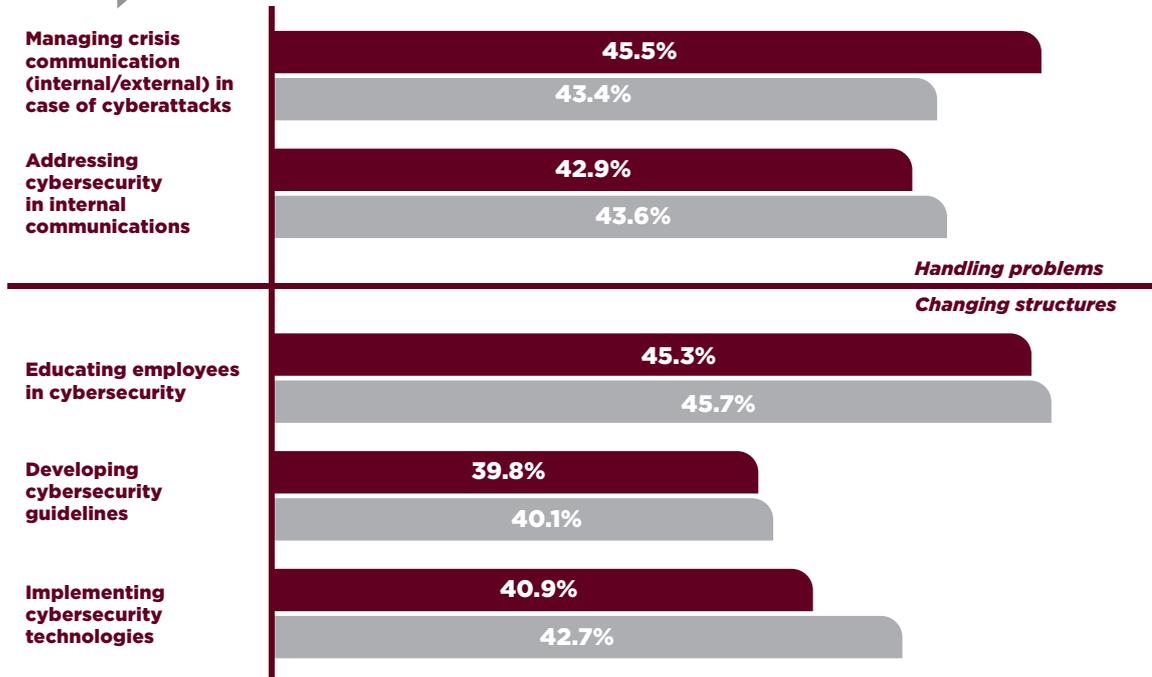
	Never	Once	Multiple Times**
 UNITED STATES	47.0%	32.2%	20.7%
 CANADA	55.2%	33.1%	11.7%

*Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q5: Has your organization ever been a victim of cyberattacks or data theft? No, never/Yes, multiple times / Don't know or don't remember. Highly significant differences between two countries (Chi-square test, **p < .01).*

Communication professionals are often involved in handling cybersecurity issues; they also take a critical role in helping to build resilience by changing structures

How communication professionals are engaged in fighting cyber criminality

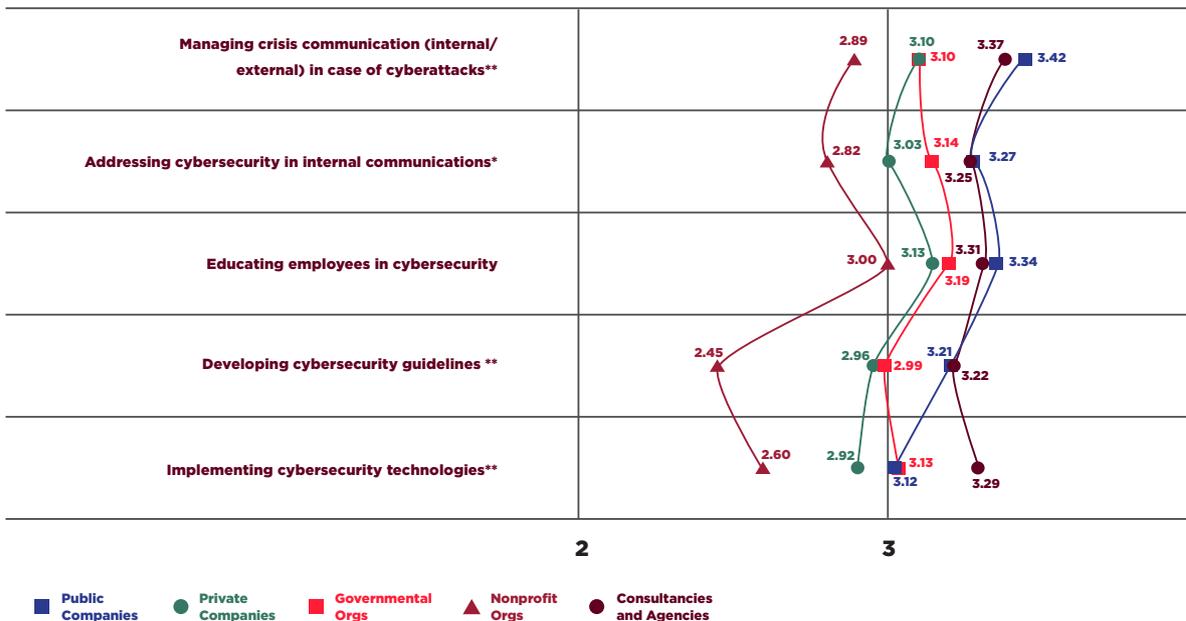
■ For my department/ agency ■ For my organization/ clients



Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q6: Are you as a communicator actively engaged with any of the following activities? Scale 1 (Not at all) – 5 (To a great extent). Frequency based on scale points 4–5.

Professionals working in public companies and agencies are more actively engaged in cybersecurity activities for their communication units

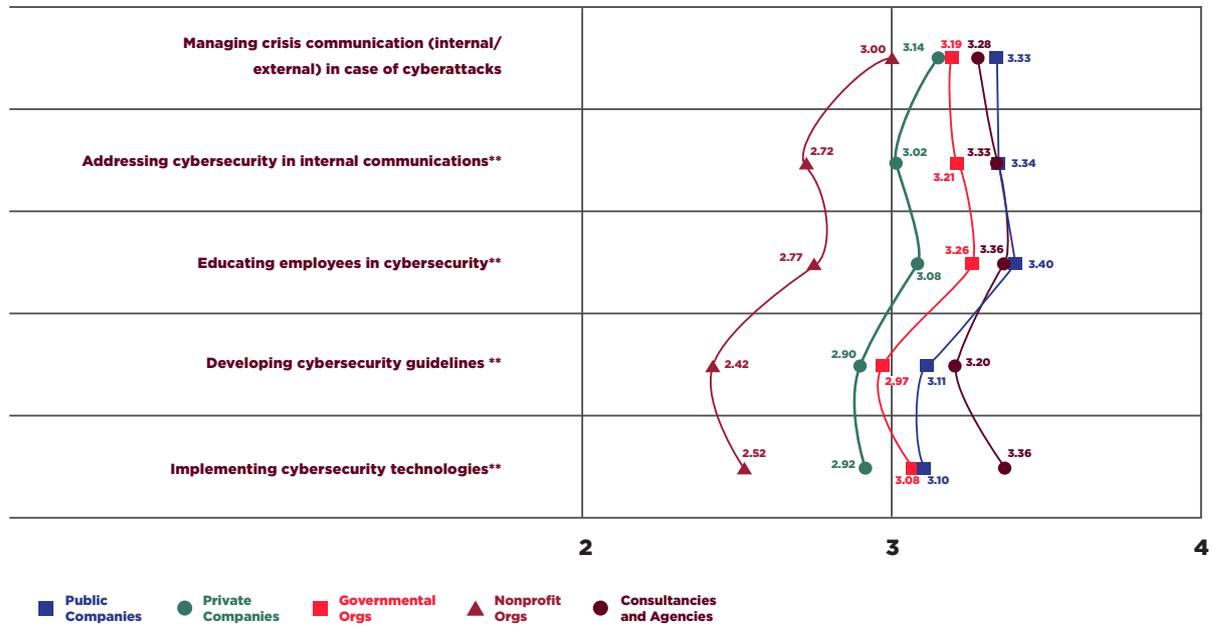
How communication professionals are engaged in fighting cyber criminality for their department/agency



Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q6: Are you as a communicator actively engaged with any of the following activities? Scale 1 (Not at all) – 5 (To a great extent). Mean values. (ANOVA, *p < .05, **p < .01).

Professionals in public companies and agencies are also more involved in fighting cyber criminality for their home organization or client

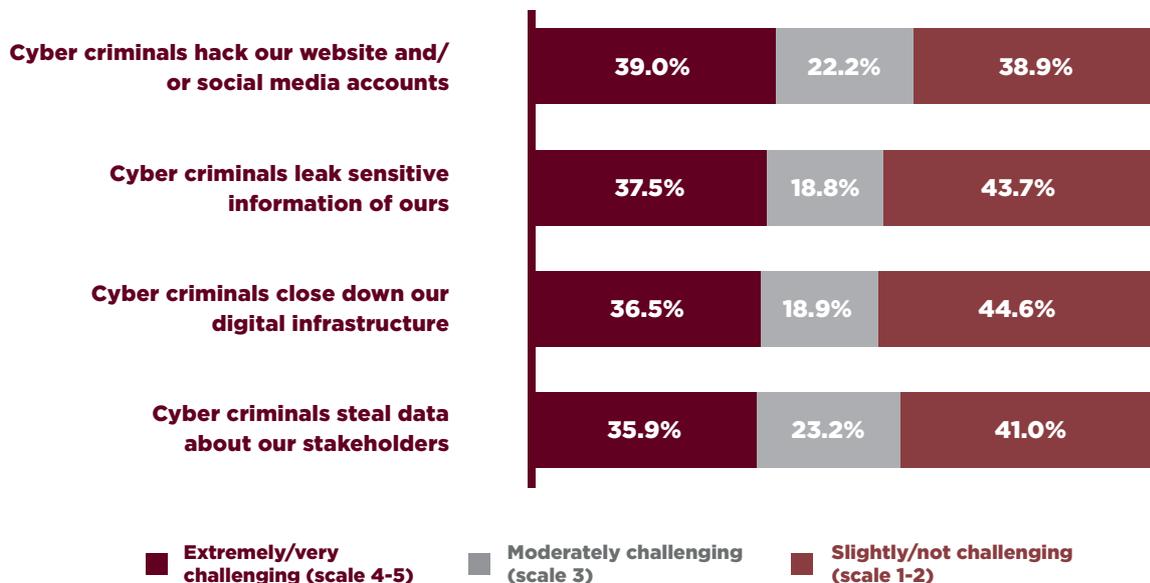
How communication professionals are engaged in fighting cyber criminality for their organization/client



Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q6: Are you as a communicator actively engaged with any of the following activities? Scale 1 (Not at all) – 5 (To a great extent). Mean values. (ANOVA, **p < .01).

Cyberattacks on communication departments and agencies can take different forms, but hacking websites and social media accounts and leaking sensitive information present the greatest threats

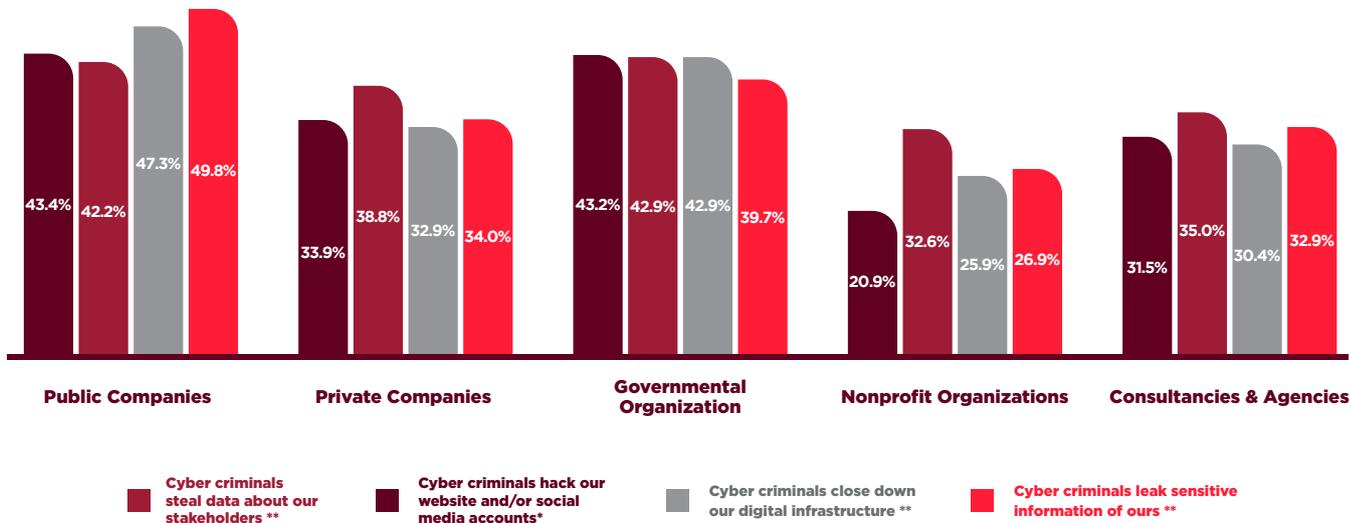
Estimated probability of different cyber attack incidents



Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q7: Each organization and each department might get attacked by cyber criminals – also communications, which relies on digital data and infrastructure in many ways. Thinking of your communication department or agency, how likely are the following incidents from your point of view? Scale 1 (Not likely at all) – 5 (Extremely likely).

Public companies and governmental organizations are especially concerned about criminal attacks on their sensitive information and digital infrastructure

Estimated probability of different cyber attack incidents



Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q7: Each organization and each department might get attacked by cyber criminals – also communications, which relies on digital data and infrastructure in many ways. Thinking of your communication department or agency, how likely are the following incidents from your point of view? Scale 1 (Not likely at all) – 5 (Extremely likely). Frequency based on scale points 4–5. (Chi-square test, *p < .05, **p < .01).

Communication professionals in both countries share similar anticipation of cyberattacks on communication units

	Cyber criminals hack our website and/or social media accounts	Cyber criminals leak sensitive information of ours	Cyber criminals steal data about our stakeholders	Cyber criminals close down our digital infrastructure
 UNITED STATES	39.6%	37.6%	37.2%	36.9%
 CANADA	37.0%	37.0%	31.9%	35.3%

Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q7: Each organization and each department might get attacked by cyber criminals – also communications, which relies on digital data and infrastructure in many ways. Thinking of your communication department or agency, how likely are the following incidents from your point of view?

Scale 1 (Not likely at all) – 5 (Extremely likely). Frequency based on scale points 4-5.

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Assessing and
Advancing
Gender
Equality

Over the years, women in public relations have been blocked from senior leadership positions by invisible artificial barriers (or the glass ceiling) (Aldoory & Toth, 2002; Toth & Cline, 1989, 1991; Wrigley, 2002). Although women make up 70% of the PR workforce in the U.S., they only hold about 30% of the top positions in the industry (Shah, 2015). The existence of these persistent barriers caused by attitudinal, structural, and societal prejudices deeply rooted in the unconscious gender bias have prevented women from being promoted and limited their advancement opportunities (Meng & Neill, 2021; Wright et al., 1991). Women still face the reality of underrepresentation in senior leadership positions across various types of organizations in the industry, and the gap widens for women of color (Meng & Neill, 2021; Topić et al., 2020). In this NACM, we evaluate how gender equality achievements are perceived by communication professionals. We also explore awareness of the glass ceiling and its causes, as well as the responsibilities to drive change at the individual, organizational and professional level.

Based on the study, gender issues remain a particular concern in North America where more women work in communication departments and agencies, but more men hold top leadership positions. Female communication professionals are the majority in almost all types of organizations, especially nonprofits and agencies. However, female leadership falls short in private companies.

Nearly seven out of ten professionals (65.5%) observe an improvement in gender equality in their country, but only half of them (45.6%) believe enough has been done. Specifically, disagreement arises when comparing perceptions by gender: 58.1% of men believe enough has been done, while only 34.3% of women agree. Consistently, communication professionals acknowledge the glass ceiling exists

in the profession in their country (59.0%) and within their own communication department or agency (46.0%). In addition, the glass ceiling problem is perceived as significantly worse in public companies (62.8%) and nonprofits (63.9%).

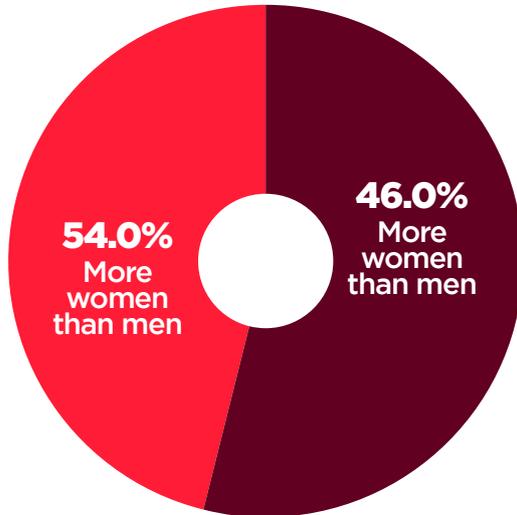
This NACM shows more women (60.2%) than men (57.7%) acknowledge the glass ceiling problem in the profession, while men are much more aware of the unacknowledged barriers faced by female professionals in their organization or department (49.5% vs. 42.5%, chi-square test, $p < .05$). Nearly half of surveyed women state they are personally affected by the glass ceiling in leadership advancement (49.5%).

When considering factors hindering women from reaching top positions in their organization, the results further validate those revealed in previous research (Meng & Neill, 2021; Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2018). The majority identify factors at the organizational level: lack of flexibility to take care of family obligations (66.2%) and nontransparent and informal promotion policies (65.2%). Barriers at the macro level are also persistent: lack of networks and development programs for women (63.2%) and too few inspiring female role models in top leadership (59.2%). Professionals in the U.S. address the influence of these factors significantly higher.

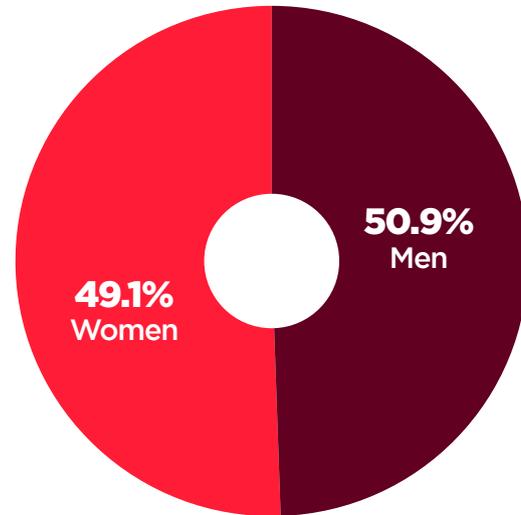
Gender comparisons reveal that both men and women feel strongly about the barriers at the levels of their organization and the profession. However, men tend to blame individual characteristics of women more—lacking specific competencies and motivation. Such results reinforce the existence of gender prejudices in the profession in North America. Lastly, professionals believe organizations have the greatest responsibilities for overcoming the glass ceiling and providing support to female professionals.

Gender issues at work: Overall, more women work in communication departments and agencies, but more men hold the top leadership position in communication

Practitioners working in communication departments and agencies

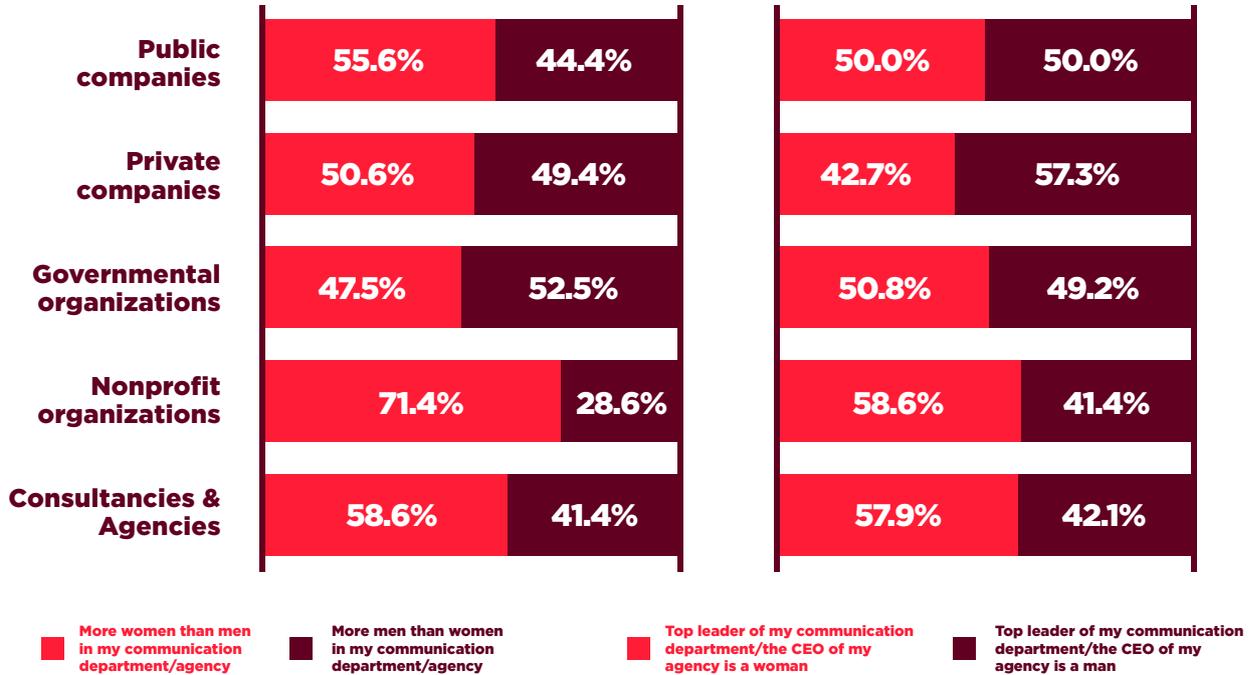


Top leaders of communication departments and agencies



Note: n ≥ 962 communication professionals. Q32: How is the situation regarding women in leading communication positions in your organization? The top leader of my communication department/the CEO of my agency is a women / Overall, there are more women than men in my communication department/agency. Scale: Yes / No / N/A.

Female communication professionals are predominant in almost all types of organizations, especially in nonprofits; female leadership is stronger in nonprofits, consultancies and agencies but falling short in private companies



Note: n = 935 communication professionals. Q32: How is the situation regarding women in leading communication positions in your organization? The top leader of my communication department/the CEO of my agency is a woman / Overall, there are more women than men in my communication department/agency. Scale: Yes / No / N/A. Highly significant differences between various types of organizations (chi-square test, p < .01).

Communication departments and agencies in Canada have even gender distribution

	More women than men	More men than women in my communication department/agency
 UNITED STATES	55.5%	44.5%
 CANADA	50.0%	50.0%

Note: n = 935 communication professionals. Q32: How is the situation regarding women in leading communication positions in your organization? The top leader of my communication department/the CEO of my agency is a woman / Overall, there are more women than men in my communication department/agency. Scale: Yes / No / N/A.

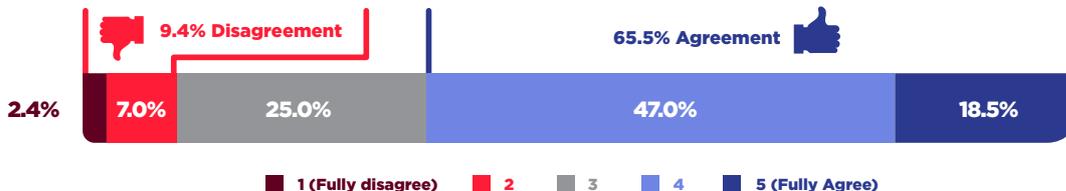
Female leadership in communication departments and agencies is stronger in the United States

	Top leader of my communication department/the CEO of my agency is a woman	Top leader of my communication department/the CEO of my agency is a man
 UNITED STATES	50.8%	49.2%
 CANADA	43.2%	56.8%

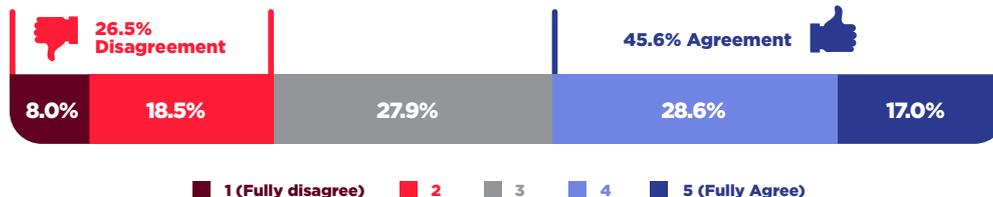
Note: n = 935 communication professionals. Q32: How is the situation regarding women in leading communication positions in your organization? The top leader of my communication department/the CEO of my agency is a woman / Overall, there are more women than men in my communication department/agency. Scale: Yes / No / N/A. Significant differences between countries (Chi-square test, $p < .05$).

Most communication professionals in North America agree that gender equality has improved recently but more disagree whether enough has been done to support women in communications

“Gender equality in communications has improved within the last five years in my country.”



“Enough is done to support women in communications in my country.”



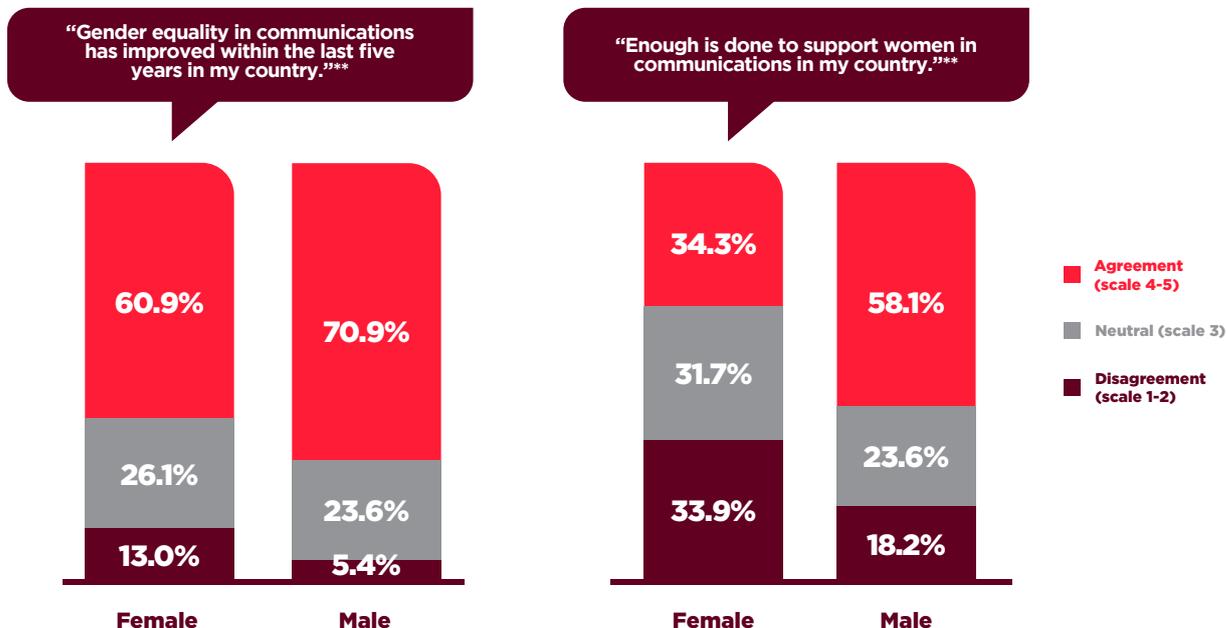
Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q8: Gender issues are heavily discussed at the moment across all professions – especially the equality of women and men. How would you assess the current situation of women in strategic communication and public relations? Scale 1 (Fully disagree) – 5 (Fully agree).

Communication professionals in both countries share similar perceptions on gender equality: Improvement is confirmed but more support is needed

	Gender equality in communications has improved within the last five years in my country	Enough is done to support women in communications in my country
 UNITED STATES	66.3%	45.9%
 CANADA	63.4%	44.8%

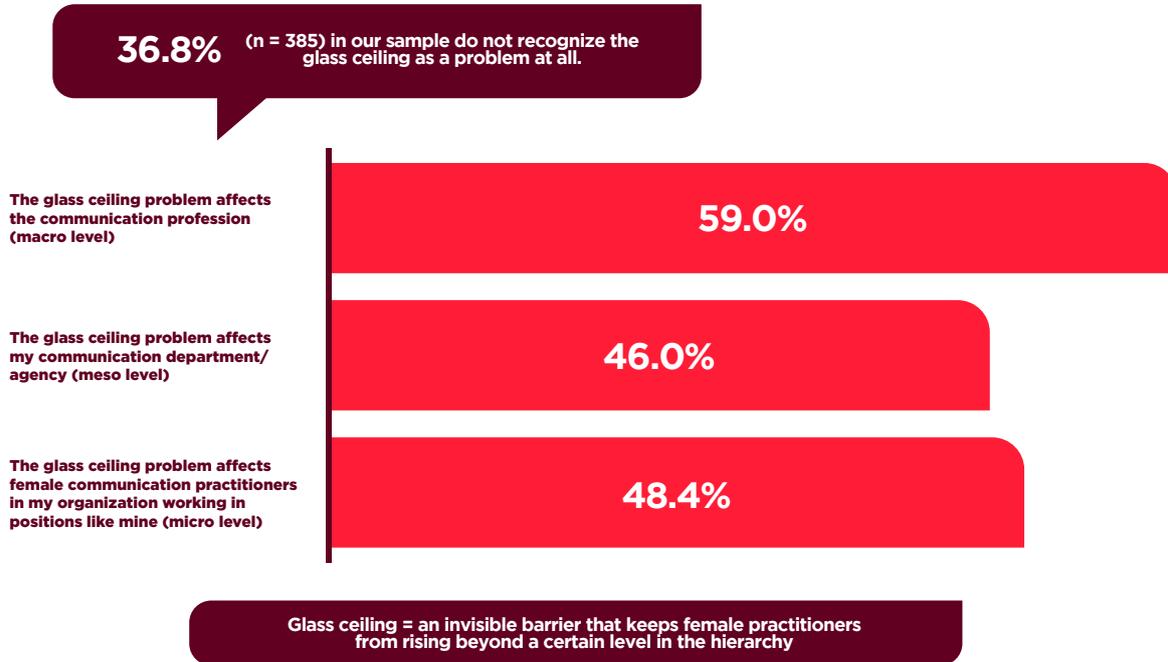
Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q8: Gender issues are heavily discussed at the moment across all professions – especially the equality of women and men. How would you assess the current situation of women in strategic communication and public relations? Scale 1 (Fully disagree) – 5 (Fully agree). Frequency based on scale points 4-5.

Different perceptions on gender equality were revealed: Male professionals are significantly more positive, and they hold a stronger belief that there is enough support



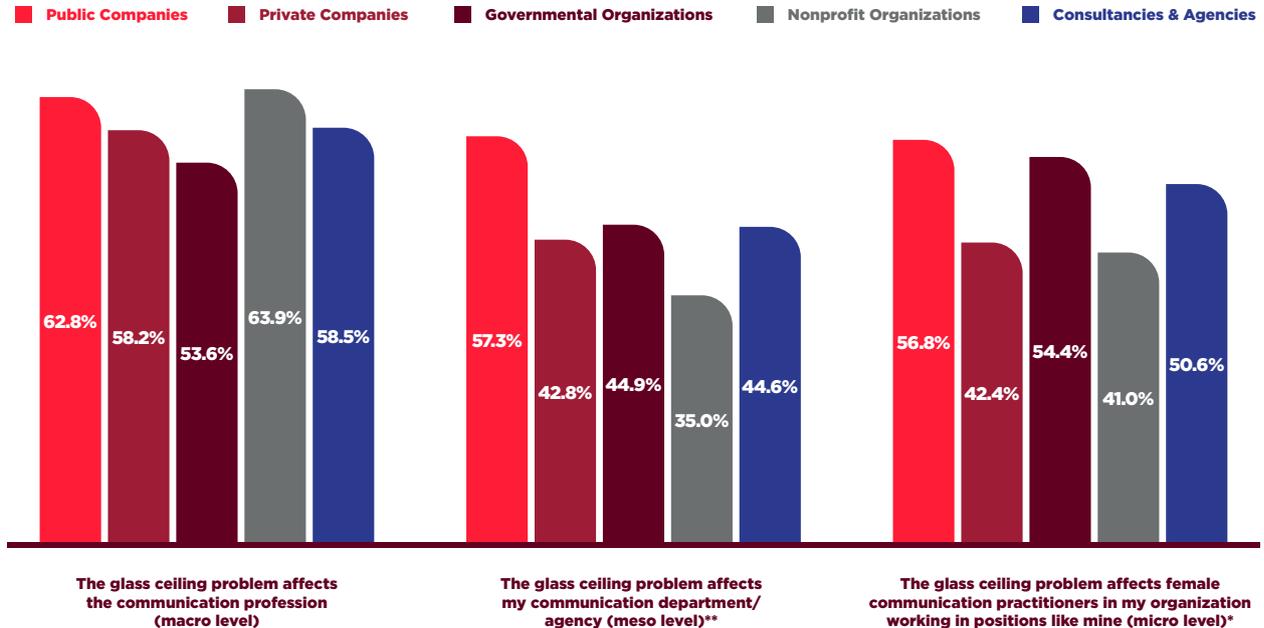
Note: n = 1,044 communication professionals. Q8: Gender issues are heavily discussed at the moment across all professions – especially the equality of women and men. How would you assess the current situation of women in strategic communication and public relations? Scale 1 (Fully disagree) – 5 (Fully agree). (Chi-square test, **p < .01).

Six out of ten communication professionals in North America believe the glass ceiling problem exists in the profession, and they also report about it in their own working environment



Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q9a: In many professions, women are less often found in leading positions. This phenomenon is referred to as the “glass ceiling” — an invisible barrier that keeps female practitioners from rising beyond a certain level in the hierarchy. How do you perceive the situation in the communication profession in your country and in your organization? Scale 1 (Strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree). Frequency based on scale points 4-5. Not recognizing the problem at all—respondents who disagreed with all three items (scale points 1-2).

Significant differences across various types of organizations: The glass ceiling problem is perceived as most relevant in public companies and nonprofit organizations



Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q9a: In many professions, women are less often found in leading positions. This phenomenon is referred to as the "glass ceiling" — an invisible barrier that keeps female practitioners from rising beyond a certain level in the hierarchy. How do you perceive the situation in the communication profession in your country and in your organization? Scale 1 (Strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree). Frequency based on scale points 4-5. (Chi-square test, *p < .05, **p < .01).

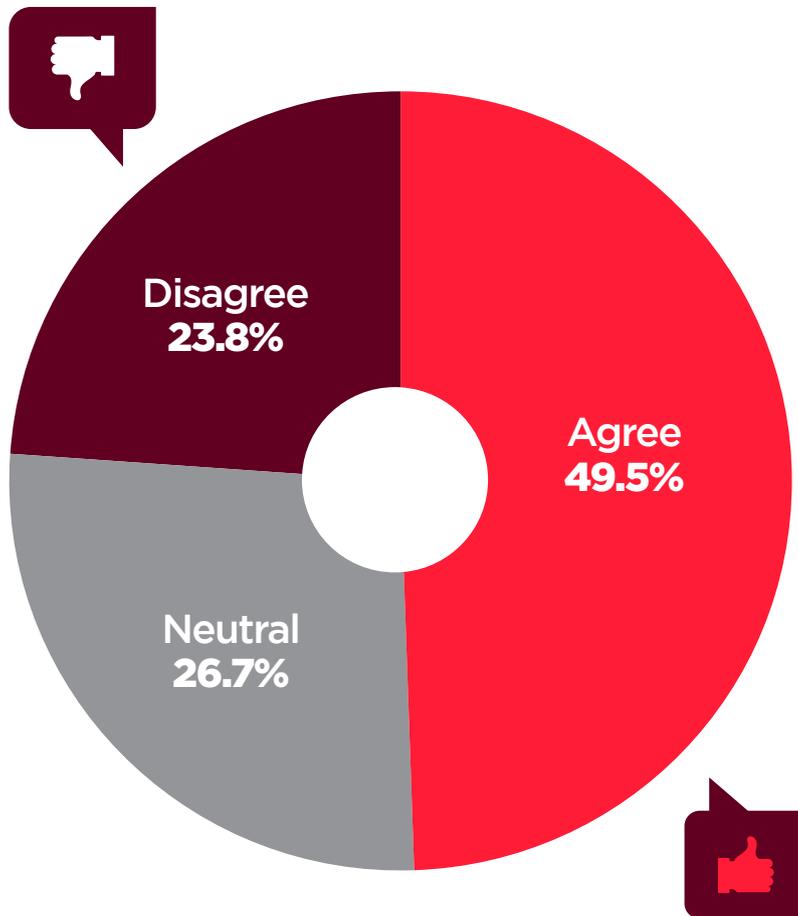
Female professionals are much more aware of unacknowledged barriers for promotion at the macro level, while men recognize the stronger barriers at the meso level



Note: n = 1,044 communication professionals. Q9a: In many professions, women are less often found in leading positions. This phenomenon is referred to as the "glass ceiling" — an invisible barrier that keeps female practitioners from rising beyond a certain level in the hierarchy. How do you perceive the situation in the communication profession in your country and in your organization? Scale 1 (Strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree). Frequency based on scale points 4-5. (Chi-square test, *p < .05).

Nearly half of surveyed female professionals in North America state that they are personally affected by an invisible barrier in leadership advancement

The glass ceiling problem affects a woman like me personally



Note: n = 558 communication professionals. Q9b: And what about you personally? Scale 1 (strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree). Frequency for agreement based on scale points 4-5. Frequency for disagreement based on scale points 1-2.

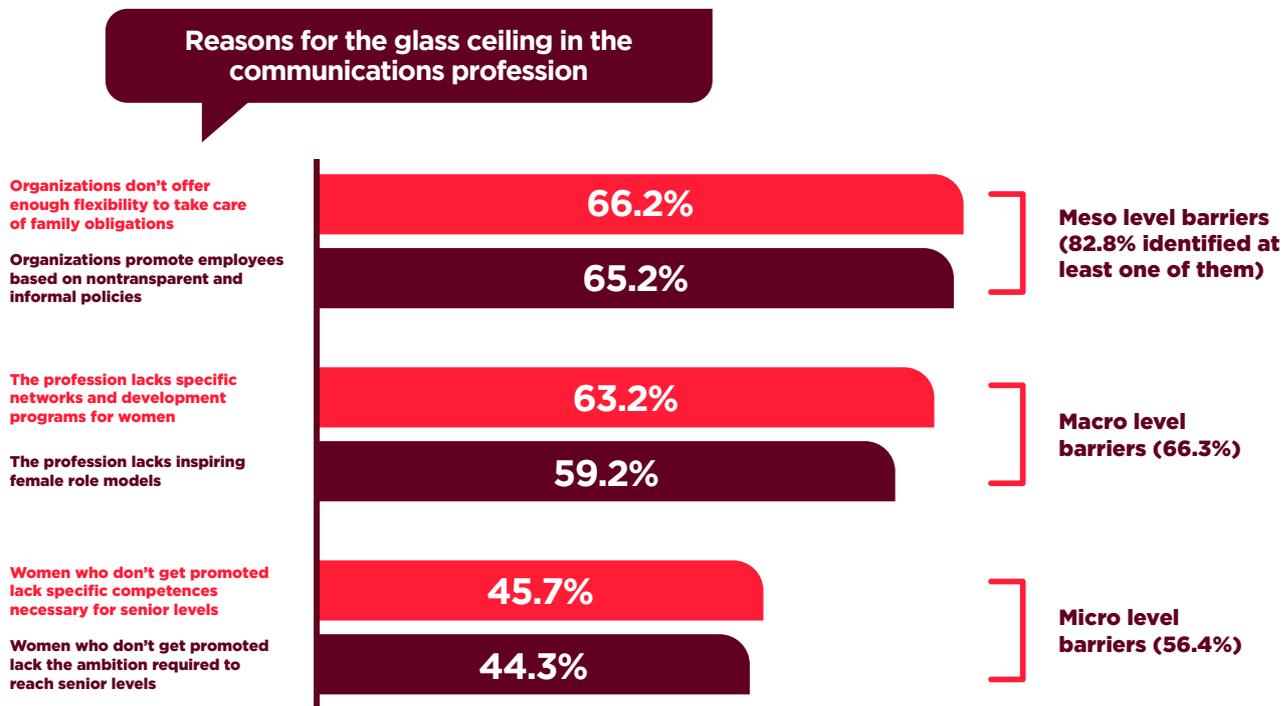
More female professionals in the United States report being affected by the glass ceiling problem in their career

The glass ceiling problem affects a woman like me personally

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
 UNITED STATES	51.5%	25.1%	23.4%
 CANADA	41.8%	33.0%	25.3%

Note: n = 558 female communication professionals. Q9b: And what about you personally?
 Scale 1 (strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree). Frequency for agreement based on scale points 4-5.

Factors hindering women from reaching top positions in communications: Organizational barriers are the most significant



Note: n = 750 communication professionals. Q10: What are the factors that hinder women from reaching top positions in strategic communication and public relations in your country? Scale 1 (Strongly disagree) – 5 (Strongly agree). Frequency based on scale points 4-5.

Professionals in the United States address several factors hindering women's leadership advancement: Lacking flexible support at the organizational level and lacking female role models in the profession

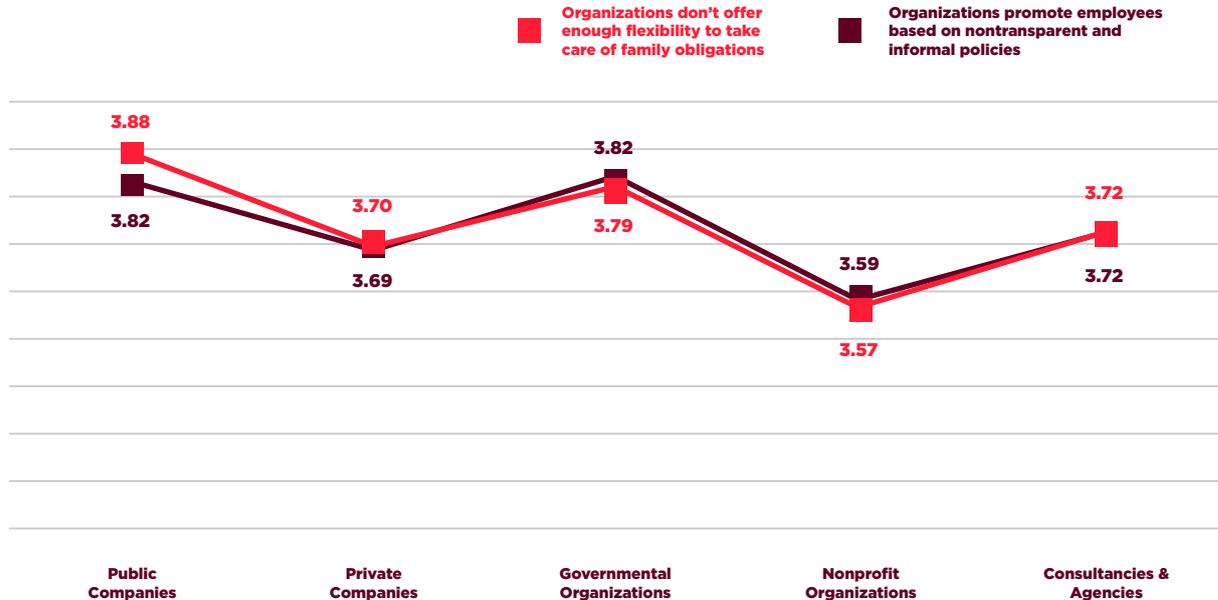
	United States	Canada
Women who don't get promoted lack specific competences necessary for senior levels	46.4%	43.7%
Women who don't get promoted lack the ambition required to reach senior levels	45.8%	38.9%
Organizations promote employees based on nontransparent and informal policies	66.2%	61.7%
Organizations don't offer enough flexibility to take care of family obligations **	67.1%	63.5%
The profession lacks specific networks and development programs for women **	62.6%	65.3%
The profession lacks inspiring female role models *	60.9%	53.3%

Note: n = 750 communication professionals. Q10: What are the factors that hinder women from reaching top positions in strategic communication and public relations in your country? Scale 1 (Strongly disagree) – 5 (Strongly agree). Frequency based on scale points 4-5.

** Highly significant differences (chi-square test, $p < .01$). * Significant difference (Chi-square test, $p < .05$).

Nonprofit organizations offer more flexibility to support family obligations, while public companies and governmental organizations are equally nontransparent and informal in their promotion policies

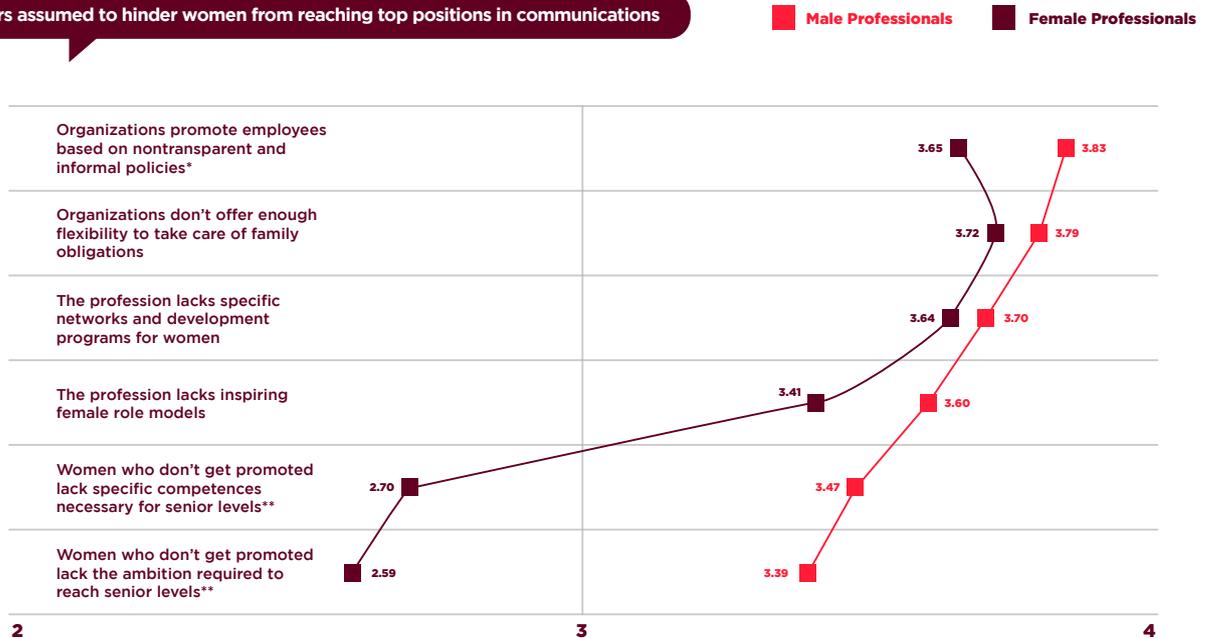
Organizational factors which hinder women from reaching top positions in communications



Note: n = 750 communication professionals. Q10: What are the factors that hinder women from reaching top positions in strategic communication and public relations in your country? Scale 1 (Strongly disagree) – 5 (Strongly agree). Mean values.

Both men and women feel strongly about barriers at the organizational and professional levels; however, men blame individual characteristics of women more often

Factors assumed to hinder women from reaching top positions in communications



Note: n = 750 communication professionals. Q10: What are the factors that hinder women from reaching top positions in strategic communication and public relations in your country? Scale 1 (Strongly disagree) – 5 (Strongly agree). Mean values. (ANOVA, *p < .05, **p < .01).

Overcoming the glass ceiling in communications: Four out of ten professionals in North America believe that organizations have the greatest influence on the issue

Agents assumed to be most capable of changing the current situation of women in communications

Professional communities (macro level)

20.9%

Organizations (meso level)

43.6%

Female practitioners themselves (micro level)

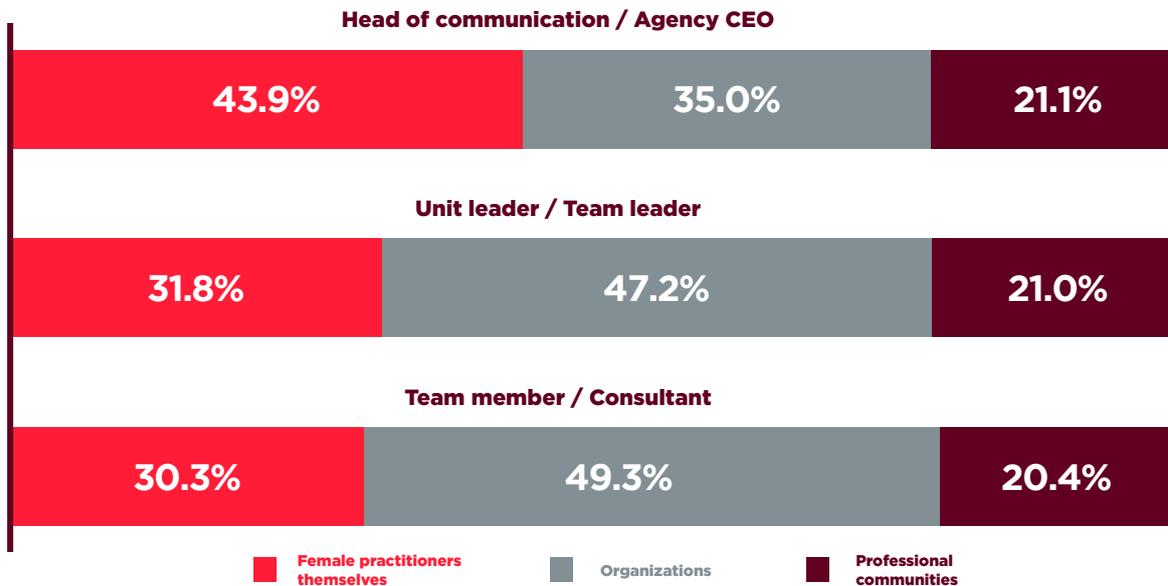
35.5%

The most significant barriers hindering women from reaching top positions were also identified at the organization level (see p. 82).

Note: n = 750 communication professionals. Q11: And who do you think is most capable of changing the current situation of women in communications? Female practitioners themselves (e.g. by enhancing their competencies and motivation) / Organizations (e.g. by changing structures and cultures) / Professional communities (e.g. by uniting and supporting female practitioners).

Top communication leaders stress the self-responsibility of female professionals, while leaders at the team level believe organizations should carry the major efforts in driving change

Agents assumed to be most capable of changing the current situation of women in communications



Note: n = 750 communication professionals. Q11: And who do you think is most capable of changing the current situation of women in communications?

Female practitioners themselves (e.g. by enhancing their competencies and motivation) / Organizations (e.g. by changing structures and cultures) / Professional communities (e.g. by uniting and supporting female practitioners). Highly significant differences between hierarchical levels (chi-square test, $p < .01$).

Professionals in both countries believe organizations carry the major responsibility in overcoming the glass ceiling problem in communications

Perceived capability of different agents to break the glass ceiling in North America

	Female practitioners themselves	Organizations	Professional communities
 UNITED STATES	37.7%	40.7%	21.6%
 CANADA	27.5%	53.9%	18.6%

Note: n = 750 communication professionals. Q11: And who do you think is most capable of changing the current situation of women in communications? Female practitioners themselves (e.g. by enhancing their competencies and motivation) / Organizations (e.g. by changing structures and cultures) / Professional communities (e.g. by uniting and supporting female practitioners). Highly significant differences between the United States and Canada (chi-square test, $p < .01$).

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5

Strategic Issues
and Communication
Channels

Awareness of the responsibility for organizations to actively address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) has increased over the past year. *PRNews* reported that 74% of respondents to a State of DEI in PR survey said they were optimistic about their organization's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The North American Communication Monitor explored issues related to DEI, both its perceived importance and where in organizational hierarchy responsibility lies to address these issues.

Communicators will also be faced with increasing integration of communication functions, programmatic tactics, increased data, and increased government regulation to protect online data between now and 2023, according to prognosticators. We asked respondents what they thought would be the top strategic issues between now and 2023 and how they thought media channels might change.

More than one-third of NACM respondents cited the importance of building and maintaining trust, exploring new means of content creation and distribution, and tackling issues related to DEI. Canadian respondents said building and maintaining trust would be most important; U.S. respondents cited new ways of creating and distributing content as the top issue. Practitioners in both countries agreed that tackling DEI was among the top three issues in second place. Men chose building and maintaining trust as the top issue. Women respondents chose issues related to DEI as topmost. Ten percentage points separate women (lower) and men (higher) on the importance of coping with the digital revolution and social media.

The choice of top issue varied by respondent's place in the organizational hierarchy. Those at the top (Head of communication or Agency CEO) and the bottom (Team member, Consultant, etc.) both chose exploring new ways to create and distribute content as the dominant issue.

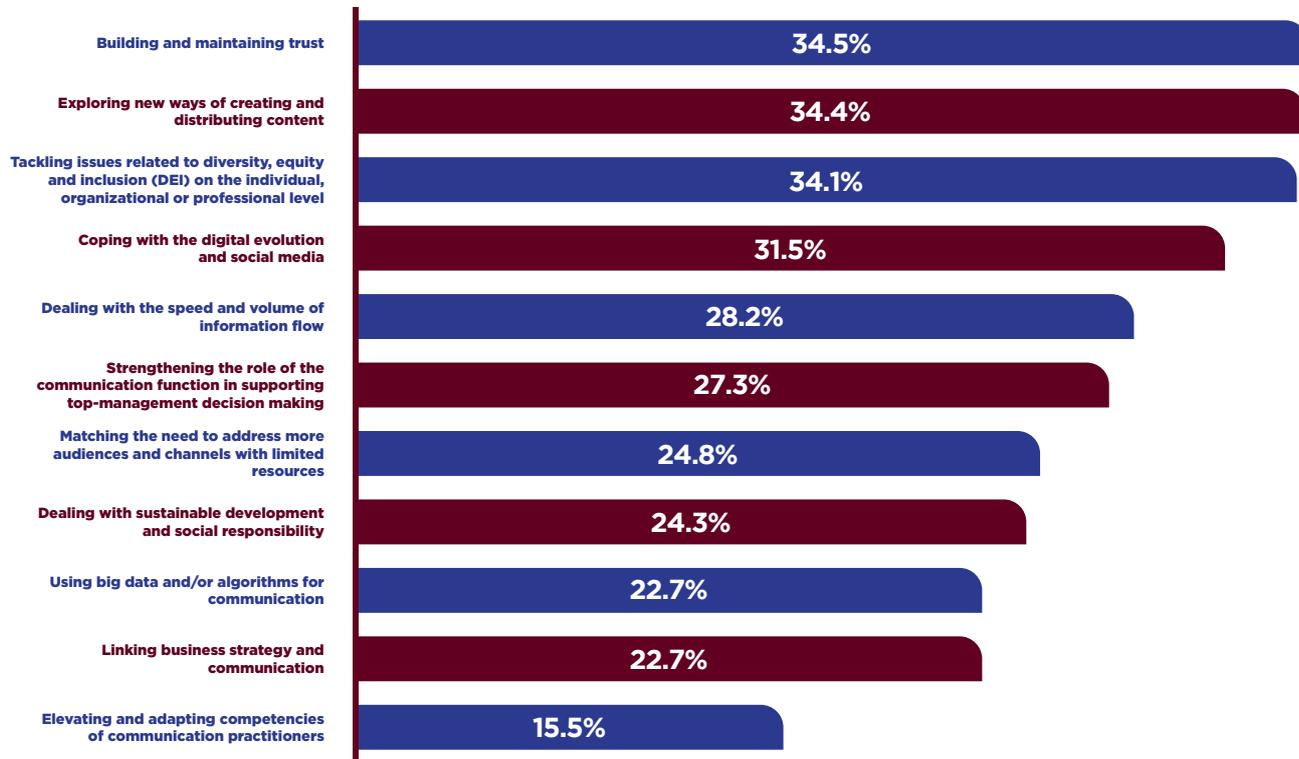
Middle management (Unit leader/Team leader) selected building and maintaining trust as the leading issue.

When asked who is most capable of solving DEI issues, just more than half of respondents identified organizational leaders. But only 39.9% of top communication leaders said "leaders in organizations" were most capable of solving DEI issues. Professional organizations were viewed as the least capable of solving these issues. A higher percentage of Canadians (57.5%) compared to U.S. practitioners (49.0%) said communication leaders are most suited to solve DEI issues.

About three-quarters of NACM respondents say online communication via websites, email, and intranet is important or very important today and will remain so through 2023. Practitioners predict the importance of press and media relations with television and radio stations will drop by more than 6%. They also predict strong drops in the importance of press and media relations with print and online publications, and nonverbal communication. A very modest increase in the importance of mobile communication is expected. The importance of face-to-face communication is expected to decrease by 4-5% by practitioners across North America. Canadian professionals expect almost a 6% increase in the importance of online communication; U.S. professionals expect a slight decrease of just over 1%.

The prediction of decline in importance among legacy media including television and print might have been expected since that trajectory is not new. However, before the pandemic with its massive decline in business travel and public events, a decline in the importance of face-to-face communication may not have been intuitive. But in 2020-21 NACM respondents find the drop in importance easy to imagine.

Most important strategic issues for communication management until 2023



Note: N=1046 communication professionals. Q12: Which issues will be most important for communication management/PR within the next three years from your point of view? Please pick exactly 3 items. Percentages: Frequency based on selection as Top-3 issue.

Professionals in the United States and Canada rank the top-3 issues differently

Top-3 issues in the United States

Exploring new ways of creating and distributing content

1

35.7%

Tackling issues related to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) on the individual, organizational or professional level

2

34.2%

Building and maintaining trust

3

32.3%

Top-3 issues in Canada

Building and maintaining trust

1

41.0%

Tackling issues related to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) on the individual, organizational or professional level

2

34.6%

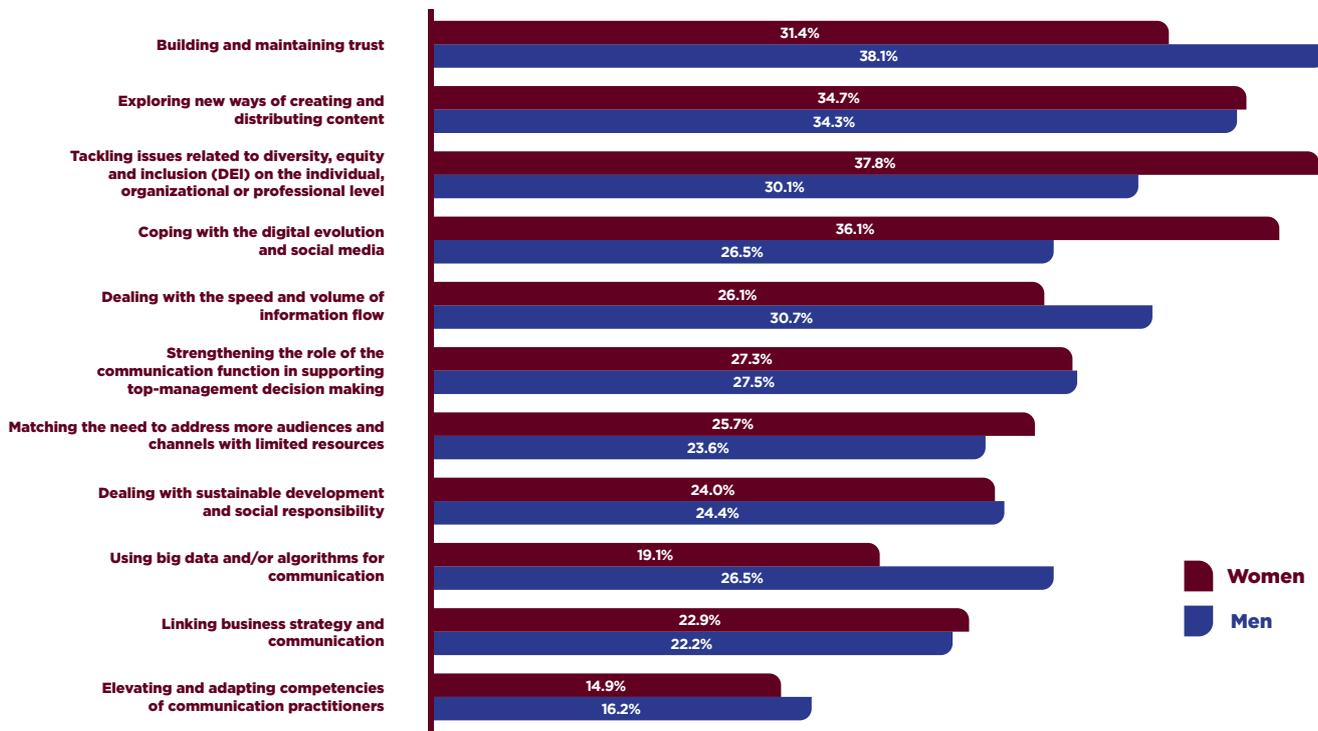
Coping with the digital evolution and social media

3

32.1%

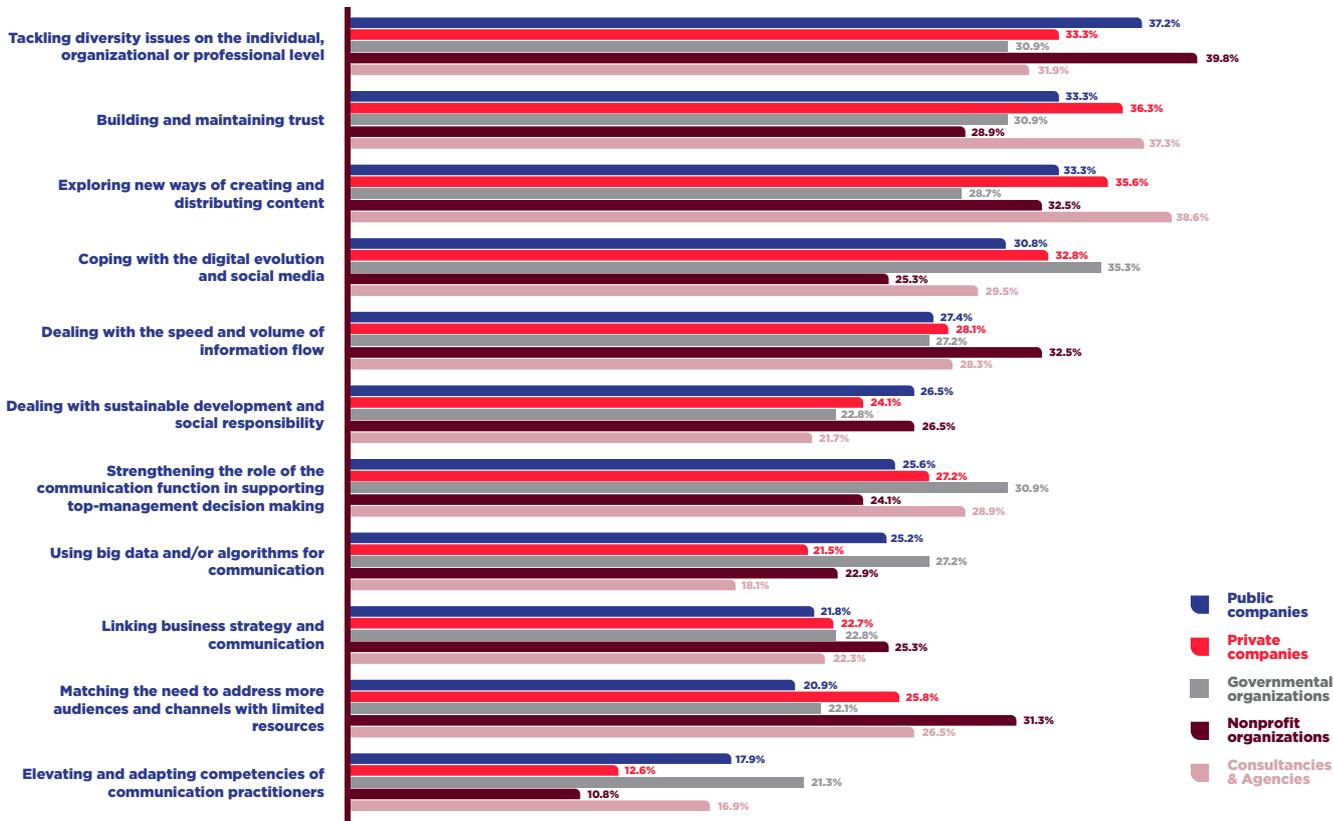
Note: N=1046 communication professionals. Q12: Which issues will be most important for communication management/PR within the next three years from your point of view? Please pick exactly 3 items. Percentages: Frequency based on selection as Top-3 issue.

Men and women address top strategic issues differently: Men rated building and maintaining trust the top issue while women emphasized the importance of improving DEI



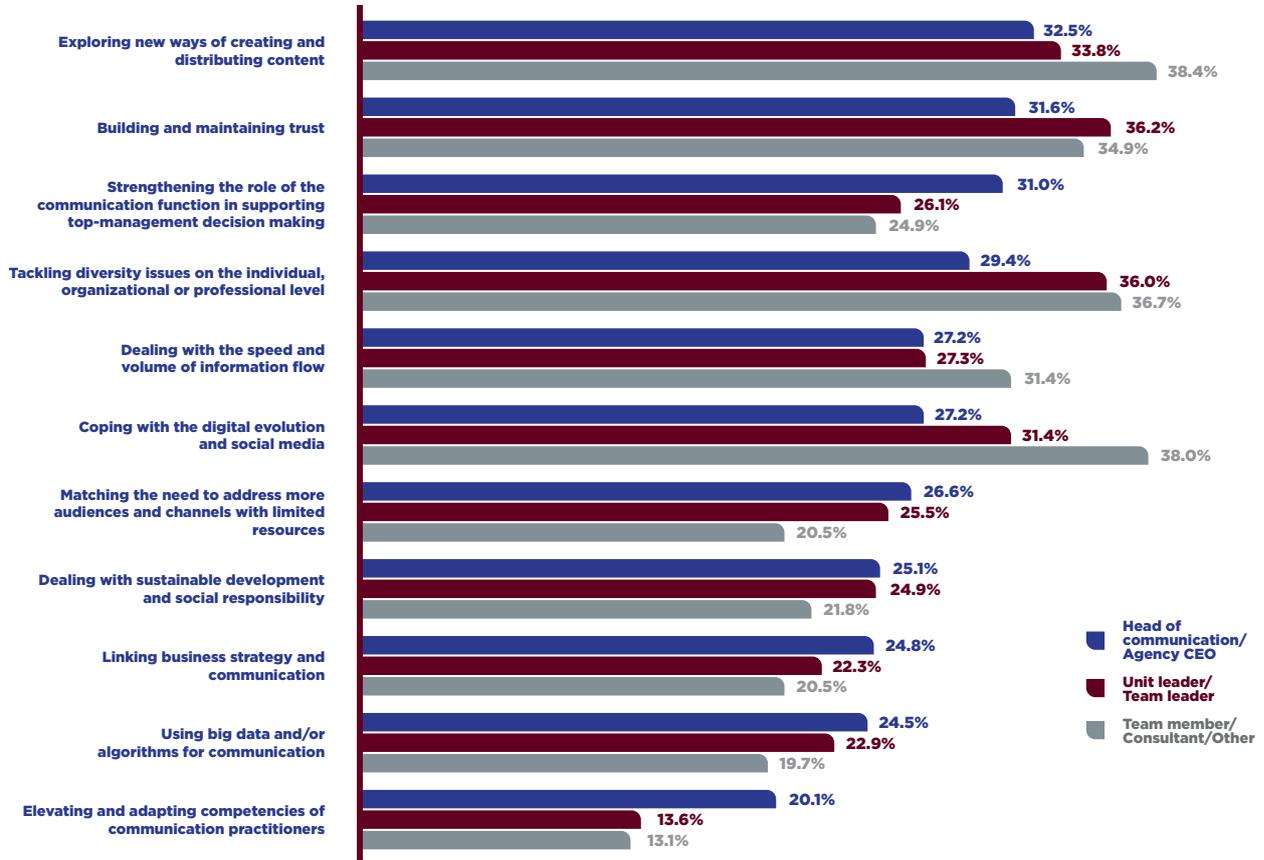
Note: n = 1046 communication professionals. Q12: Which issues will be most important for communication management/PR within the next three years from your point of view? Please pick exactly 3 items. Percentages: Frequency based on selection as Top-3 issue.

Relevance of strategic issues differs between types of organizations



Note: n = 1046 communication professionals. Q12: Which issues will be most important for communication management/PR within the next three years from your point of view? Please pick exactly 3 items. Percentages: Frequency based on selection as Top-3 issue.

Relevance of strategic issues differs along the leadership line



Note: n = 1046 communication professionals. Q12: Which issues will be most important for communication management/PR within the next three years from your point of view? Please pick exactly 3 items. Percentages: Frequency based on selection as Top-3 issue.

Overcoming the systemic issues in communications such as racial and gender bias to improve diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in the communication profession: More than half of professionals believe that leaders in organizations carry the biggest responsibility

Agents assumed to be most capable of changing the current systemic issues in communications

Professional communities/associations (macro level)

19.9%

Leaders in organizations (meso level)

51.1%

Communication professionals themselves (micro level)

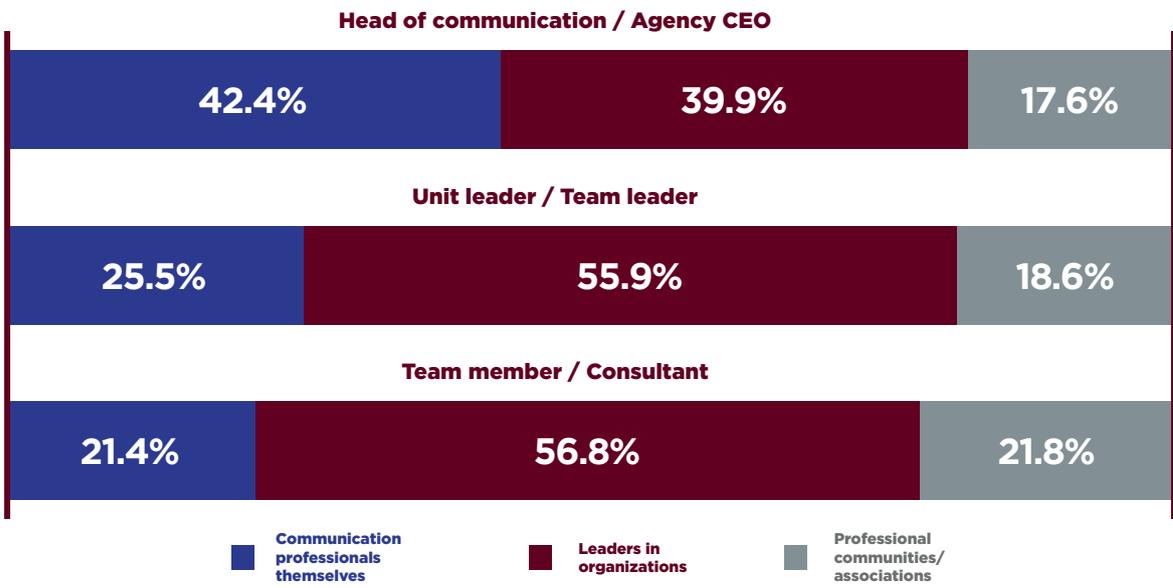
29.8%

Professionals also believe organizations have the greatest influence on the glass ceiling issue (see p. 86 in Chapter 4).

Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q44: Who do you think is most capable of solving the current systemic issues in communications such as racial and gender bias to improve diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in the communication profession? Communication professionals themselves / Leaders in organizations / Professional communities/associations.

Top communication leaders stress the self-responsibility of communication professionals, while professionals at lower levels believe leaders in organizations should carry the major efforts in driving change

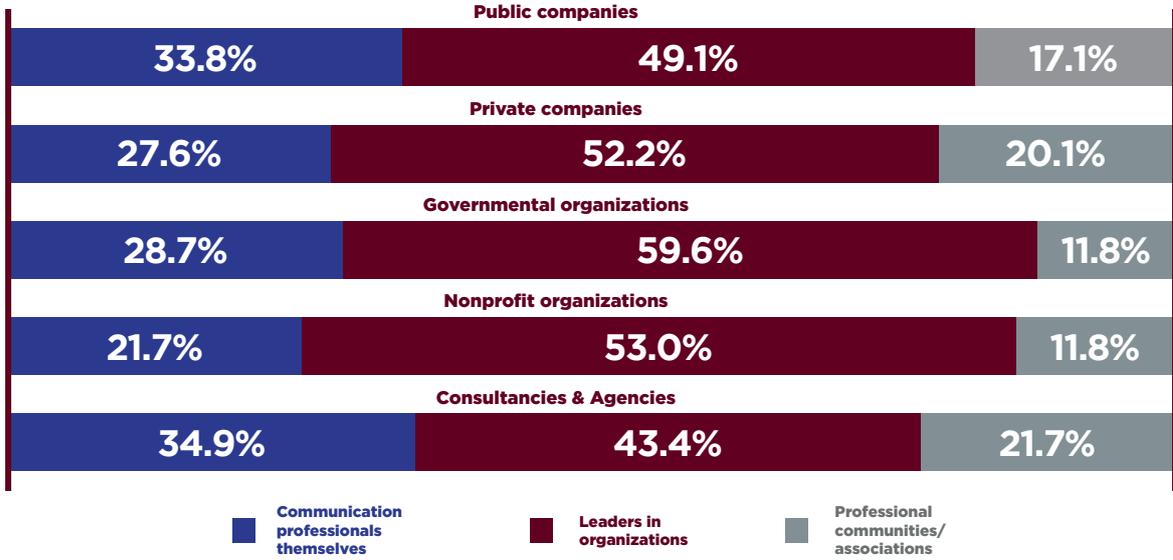
Agents assumed to be most capable of changing the current systemic issues in communications



Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q44: Who do you think is most capable of solving the current systemic issues in communications such as racial and gender bias to improve diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in the communication profession? Communication professionals themselves / Leaders in organizations / Professional communities/associations. Highly significant differences between hierarchical levels (chi-square test, p < .01).

Professionals in governmental organization particularly address the important role of organizational leaders in solving the current systemic issues in communication

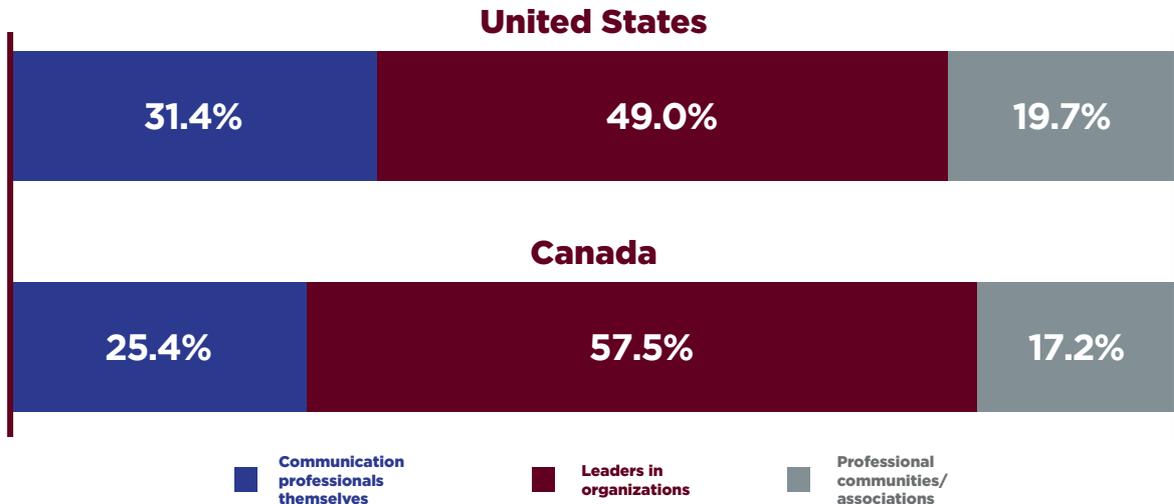
Agents assumed to be most capable of changing the current systemic issues in communications



Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q44: Who do you think is most capable of solving the current systemic issues in communications such as racial and gender bias to improve diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in the communication profession? Communication professionals themselves / Leaders in organizations / Professional communities/associations. (Chi-square test, p < .05).

Overcoming the current systemic issues in communications: A clear majority of Canadian professionals believe that leaders in organizations have the greatest influence

Agents assumed to be most capable of changing the current systemic issues in communications

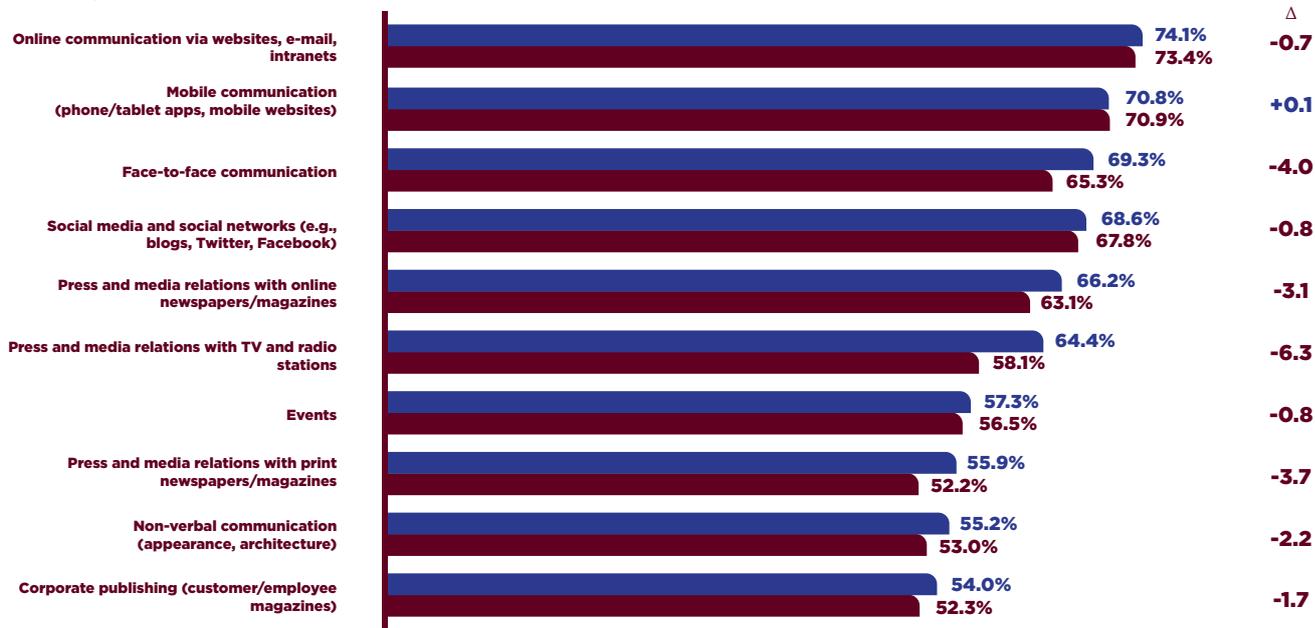


Note: n = 1,046 communication professionals. Q44: Who do you think is most capable of solving the current systemic issues in communications such as racial and gender bias to improve diversity equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the communication profession? Communication professionals themselves / Leaders in organizations / Professional communities/associations. Significant differences between two countries (Chi-square test, $p < .05$).

Importance of communication channels and instruments today and in 2023: Mobile communication is advancing steadily. Media relations with TV and radio stations is on the downturn, so is face-to-face communication

Perceived importance for addressing stakeholders, gatekeepers and audiences in 2020 and in 2023

Importance today (scale 4-5) Importance in 2023 (scale 4-5)



Note: n=1046 communication professionals. Q16: How important are the following methods in addressing stakeholders, gatekeepers and audiences today? In your opinion, how important will they be in three years? Scale 1 (Not important) – 5 (Very important). Frequency based on scale points 4–5.

Perceived importance of communication channels and instruments today and in the future in North America

	United States		Canada	
	Importance today (scale 4-5)		Importance in 2023 (scale 4-5)	
Online communication via websites, e-mail, intranets	75.7%*	68.4%	73.1%	74.3%**
Mobile communication (phone/tablet apps, mobile websites)	72.6%**	65.3%	72.2%**	67.2%
Social media and social networks (e.g., blogs, Twitter, Facebook)	70.2%*	63.4%	69.5%**	63.0%
Face-to-face communication	69.4%	69.1%	65.6%	64.6%
Press and media relations with online newspapers/magazines	68.4%**	60.1%	64.8%**	58.2%
Press and media relations with TV and radio stations	67.6%**	54.9%	62.5%**	51.1%
Events	59.8%**	50.0%	58.3%	51.2%
Press and media relations with print newspapers/magazines	58.0%*	49.6%	54.3%*	46.3%
Non-verbal communication (appearance, architecture)	58.3%**	45.9%	53.4%*	51.6%
Corporate publishing (customer/employee magazines)	57.3%**	44.4%	54.9%**	44.8%

Note: n=1046 communication professionals. Q16: How important are the following methods in addressing stakeholders, gatekeepers and audiences today? In your opinion, how important will they be in three years? Scale 1 (Not important) – 5 (Very important). Frequency based on scale points 4-5.

(Chi-square, *p < .05, **p < .01).

Canadian professionals predict a stronger shift towards online communication and mobile communication in the future

	United States	Canada		United States today	United States in 2023	Δ	Canada today	Canada in 2023	Δ
Online communication via websites, e-mail, intranets				75.7%	73.1%	-1.4%	68.4%	74.3%	+5.7%
Mobile communication (phone/tablet apps, mobile websites)				72.6%	72.2%	-0.4%	65.3%	67.2%	+1.9%
Social media and social networks (e.g., blogs, Twitter, Facebook)				70.2%	69.5%	-0.7%	63.4%	63.0%	-0.4%
Face-to-face communication				69.4%	65.6%	-3.8%	69.1%	64.6%	-4.5%
Press and media relations with online newspapers/magazines				68.4%	64.8%	-3.6%	60.1%	58.2%	-1.9%
Press and media relations with TV and radio stations				67.6%	62.5%	-5.1%	54.9%	51.1%	-3.8%
Events				59.8%	58.3%	-0.5%	50.0%	51.2%	+1.2%
Press and media relations with print newspapers/magazines				58.0%	54.3%	-3.7%	49.6%	46.3%	-3.3%
Non-verbal communication (appearance, architecture)				58.3%	53.4%	-4.7%	45.9%	51.6%	+5.7%
Corporate publishing (customer/employee magazines)				57.3%	54.9%	-2.4%	44.4%	44.8%	+0.4%

Note: n=1046 communication professionals. Q16: How important are the following methods in addressing stakeholders, gatekeepers and audiences today? In your opinion, how important will they be in three years? Scale 1 (Not important) – 5 (Very important). Frequency based on scale points 4–5.

6

Competency
Development:
Status quo
and Future
Needs

The year 2020 taught communicators a variety of lessons. Among those is the value of maintaining a flexible skillset. Business leaders in 2020 often talked about “pivoting” their businesses (Agrawal, 2020). But for organizations to change or adapt their business model, employees must maintain and build their core competencies. In April 2020, just after the pandemic lockdown began, PRWeek suggested that communication technology was essential and that such technology is critical to social listening, media monitoring, and internal communication among other standard communication functions (Bach, 2020). This NACM asked communicators about the importance of building competencies generally, and specifically the importance of competencies in data, technology, management, business, self-reflection, and communication.

Nearly two-thirds of NACM respondents agree there is a “great need” for communicators to develop their competencies. There was an 11 percentage-point gap between U.S. and Canadian practitioners on this need. More U.S. practitioners identified such a need. More than half of communicators of all ages noted a “much or great need” to develop competencies. However, more than 10% of the youngest respondents (i.e., 29 years and younger) said there is no need for such development. In what might be a complementary finding, only 54.1% of team members, the lowest communicators on organizational hierarchies, said that there is a “much or great need” while 74.9% of communication leaders cited such a need.

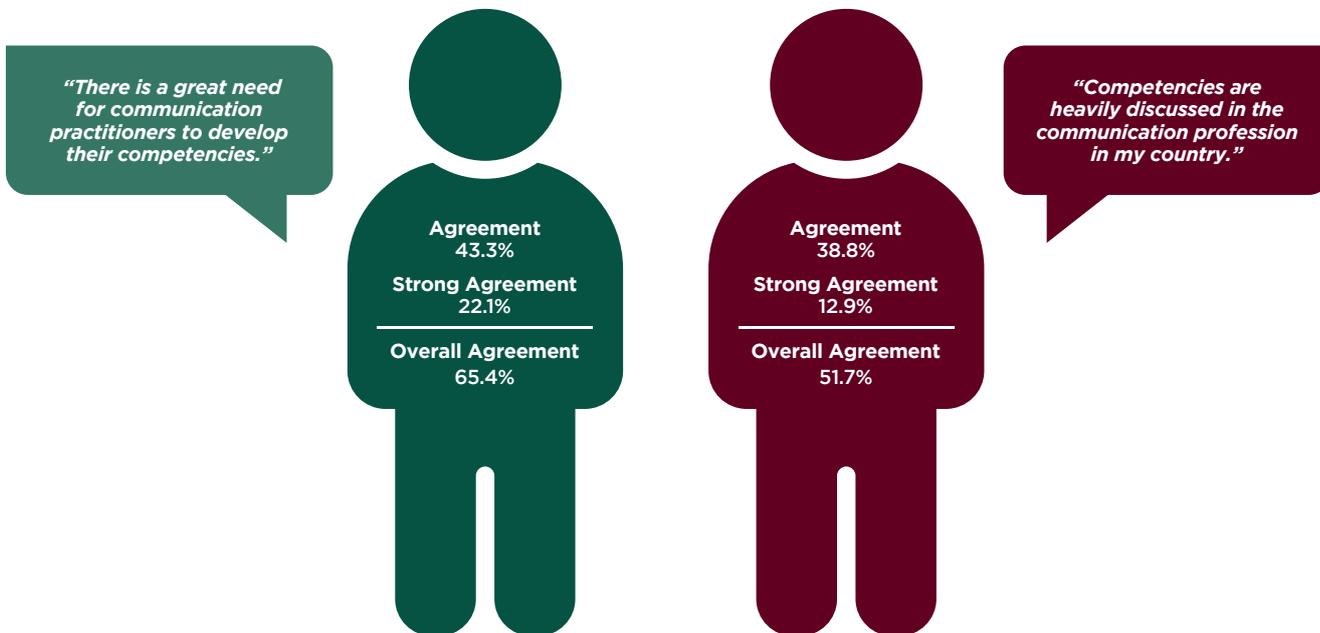
NACM respondents identified gaps between essential and highly developed competencies. In each of six competencies (data, technology, management, business, self-reflection, and communication) there was a negative value between the percentage of practitioners who believed the competency was key and those who thought it was highly developed. Competencies in data (-15.7%), technology (-12.4%), and management

(-10.4%) showed the biggest gaps between the importance of the competency and the level to which it is highly developed within the profession. In each of these three categories the gap was larger in Canada than in the U.S. Respondents from both countries identified management as the most in demand (“key”) competence. Likewise, professionals from both countries identified data as the least developed competence.

Based on self-assessment of skills, subsets of respondents were classified as under-skilled or critically under-skilled. Both groups identified data competence and technology competence as their weakest areas. Professionals at public companies identified as having the most data competence, nonprofits had the least. Public company practitioners also had the most technology competence, nonprofits the least. Respondents from agencies cited the most management competence, governmental organizations the least. Both women and men identified communication as their top competence. They showed statistically significant differences on business, data, and technological competencies. The youngest professionals (29 and under) exhibited the least competence in every category, save one. They showed dominance over professionals ages 50 and above in technology competence.

More than three-quarters said organizations should be responsible for providing training and development opportunities for their communication staffs. Between work hours and personal hours, NACM respondents said they averaged 29.3 hours of training and development each year. The highest level of training was reported among those who work in agencies (59.9 hours) and the lowest among those in government (21.9 hours). Mid-career professionals, ages 30 to 49, logged the most hours of annual training by age.

Competency development in the communication profession: Six out of ten professionals in North America believe in the need for constant improvement



Note: n = 1046 communication professionals. Q13: Practitioners working in strategic communication and public relations need a broad set of skills and knowledge to fulfill their tasks. How do you assess the current situation regarding competencies in communications? First scale 1 (Competencies are not at all discussed in the communication profession in my country) – 5 (Competencies are heavily discussed in the communication profession in my country); Second scale 1 (There is no need at all for communication practitioners to develop their competencies) – 5 (There is a great need for communication practitioners to develop their competencies). Frequency based on scale points 4-5.

“Competencies are heavily discussed in the communication profession in my country.”

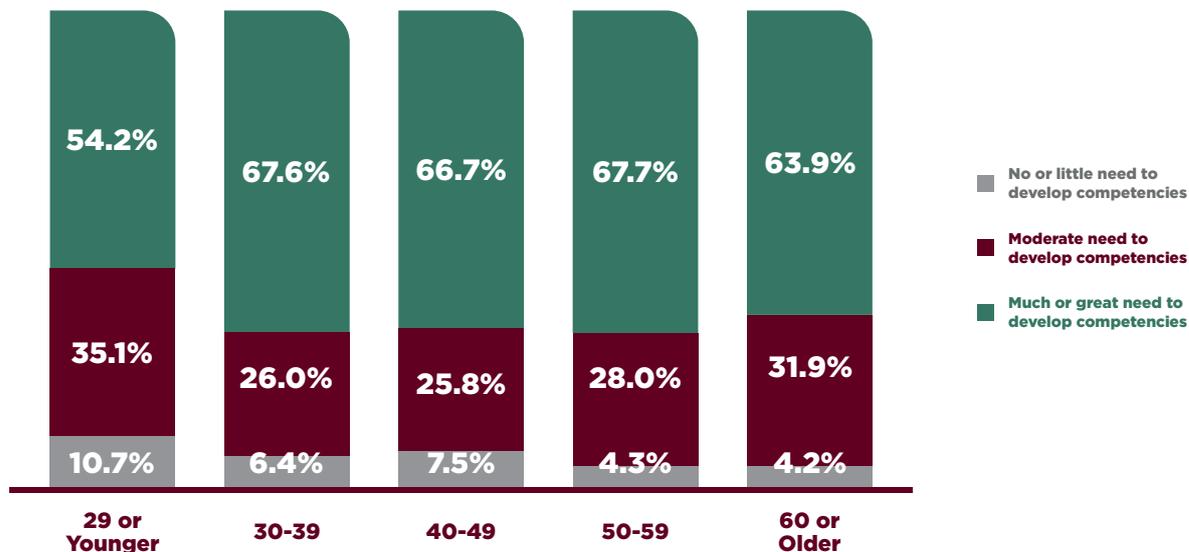
	Agreement	Strong Agreement	Overall Agreement
 United States	38.0%	14.4%	52.4%
 Canada	41.0%	8.6%	49.6%

“There is a great need for communication practitioners to develop their competencies.”

	Agreement	Strong Agreement	Overall Agreement
 United States	43.7%	24.6%	68.3%
 Canada	42.2%	14.9%	57.1%

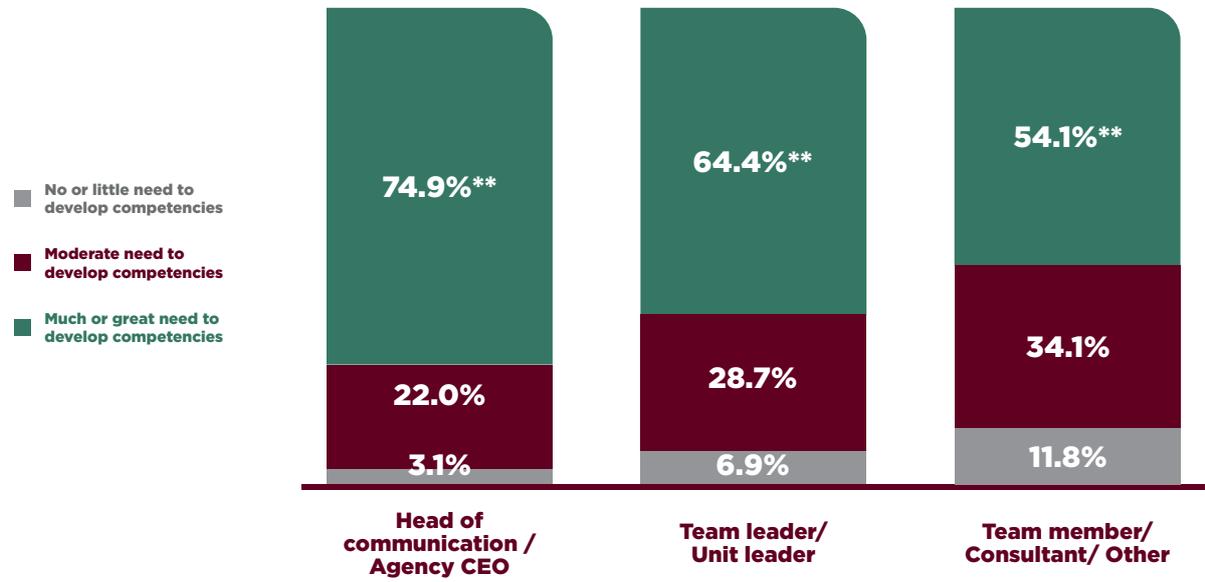
Note: n = 1046 communication professionals. Q13: Practitioners working in strategic communication and public relations need a broad set of skills and knowledge to fulfill their tasks. How do you assess the current situation regarding competencies in communications? First scale 1 (Competencies are not at all discussed in the communication profession in my country) – 5 (Competencies are heavily discussed in the communication profession in my country); Second scale 1 (There is no need at all for communication practitioners to develop their competencies) – 5 (There is a great need for communication practitioners to develop their competencies). Frequency based on scale points 4-5.

Seasoned communication professionals are more aware of the need to advance skills and knowledge—nearly half of professionals in their 20s see no strong need



Note: n=1046 communication professionals. Q13: Practitioners working in strategic communication and public relations need a broad set of skills and knowledge to fulfill their tasks. How do you assess the current situation regarding competencies in communications? First scale 1 (Competencies are not at all discussed in the communication profession in my country) – 5 (Competencies are heavily discussed in the communication profession in my country); Second scale 1 (There is no need at all for communication practitioners to develop their competencies) – 5 (There is a great need for communication practitioners to develop their competencies). There is no significant difference between age groups (chi-square test, $p = .136$).

Communication leaders address the strong needs to advance skills and knowledge

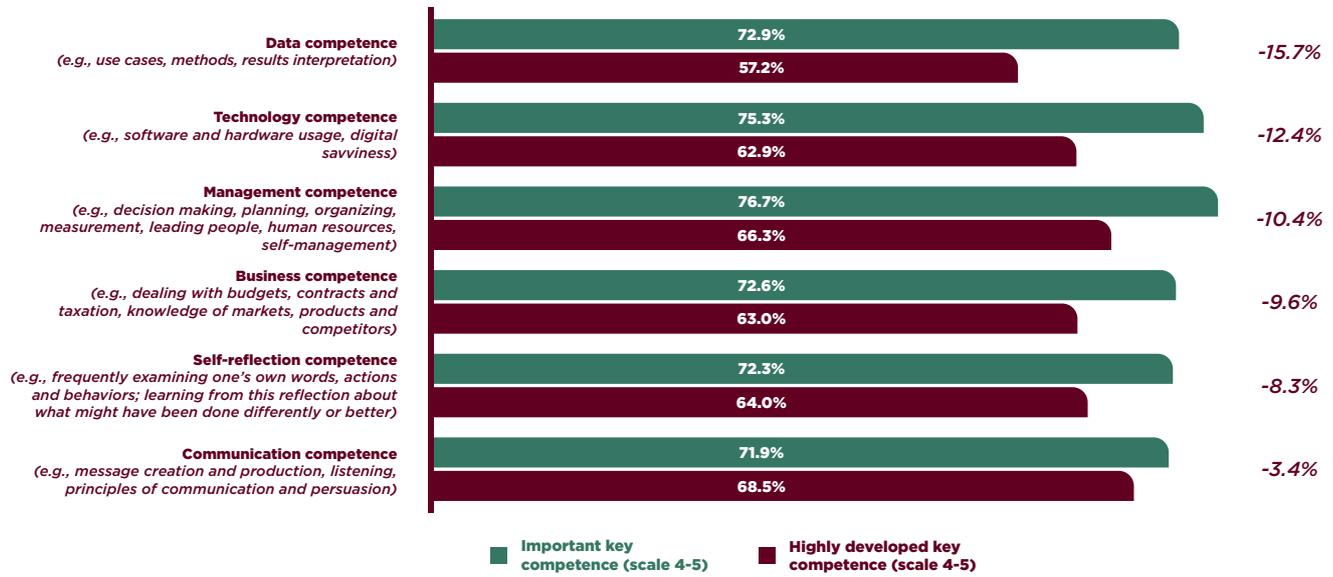


Note: n=1046 communication professionals. Q13: Practitioners working in strategic communication and public relations need a broad set of skills and knowledge to fulfill their tasks. How do you assess the current situation regarding competencies in communications? First scale 1 (Competencies are not at all discussed in the communication profession in my country) – 5 (Competencies are heavily discussed in the communication profession in my country); Second scale 1 (There is no need at all for communication practitioners to develop their competencies) – 5 (There is a great need for communication practitioners to develop their competencies). **Highly significant difference between job positions (chi-square test, p < .01).

Key competencies of communication professionals in North America: Large gaps between perceived importance and personal qualification level

Importance of competencies vs. personal assessment of competencies by practitioners.

Δ



Note: n=1046 communication professionals. Q14: Competencies are based upon knowledge, skills and personal attributes. Some of them might be more important than others. How important are the following competencies for communication practitioners in your opinion? And how do you rate your personal level in each case? Scale 1 (Very low) – 5 (Very high). Frequency based on scale point 4-5.

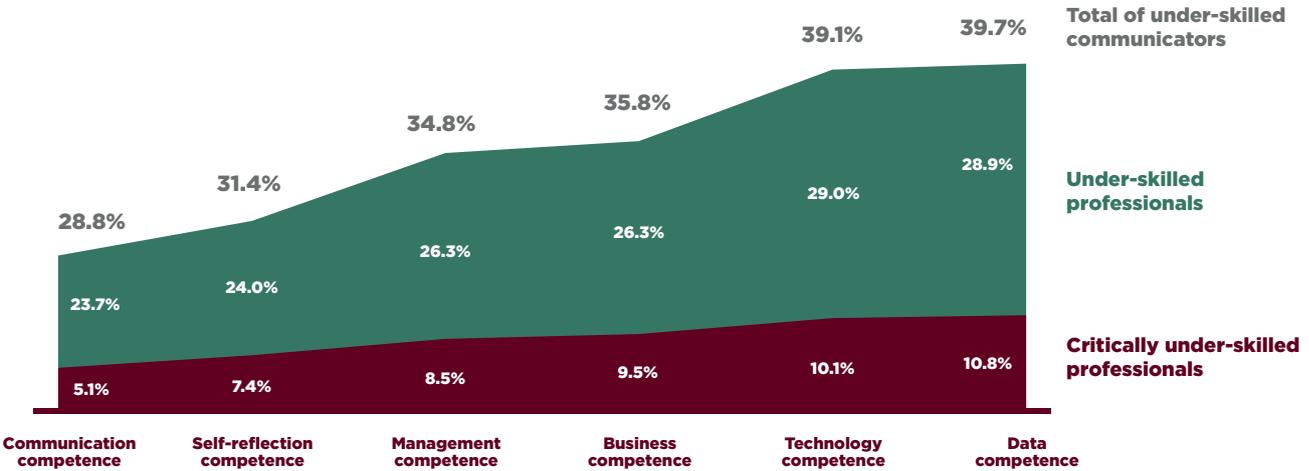
Key competencies of communication professionals: Similar gaps between perceived importance and personal qualification level

	Important key competence (scale 4-5)		Highly developed key competence (scale 4-5)	
Communication competence	72.6%	69.8%	70.3%*	63.4%*
Business competence	72.1%	73.9%	63.9%	60.4%
Management competence	76.5%	77.2%	67.2%	63.8%
Technology competence	75.2%	75.7%	64.3%	59.0%
Data competence	74.0%	69.8%	58.9%	52.2%
Self-reflection competence	73.1%	69.8%	64.7%	61.9%

United States
 Canada

Note: n=1046 communication professionals. Q14: Competencies are based upon knowledge, skills and personal attributes. Some of them might be more important than others. How important are the following competencies for communication practitioners in your opinion? And how do you rate your personal level in each case? Scale 1 (Very low) – 5 (Very high). Frequency based on scale point 4–5.

Lack of competencies among communication professionals in North America: The area of data competencies is the weakest



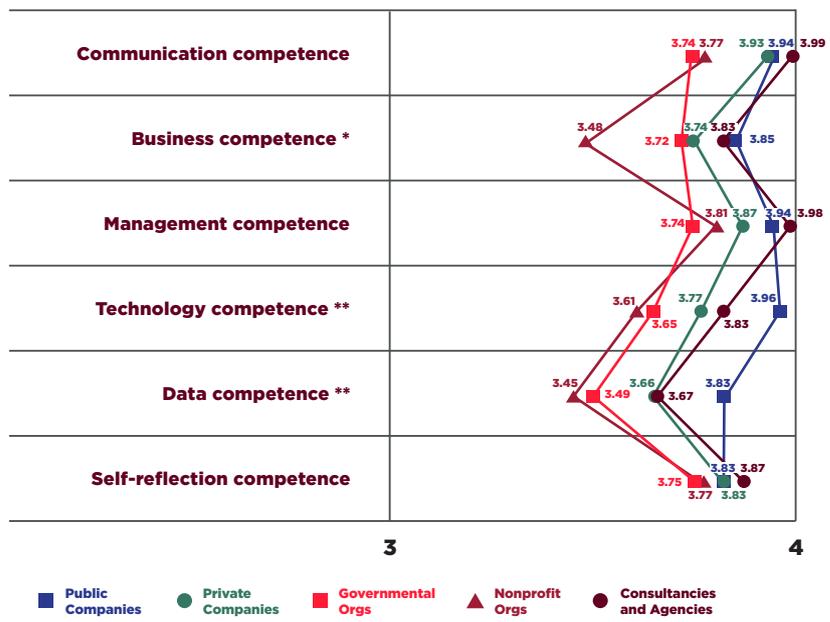
How the percentage of under-skilled professionals was calculated

Under-skilled professionals = those who perceive the importance of a competence 1 scale point higher than their personal level (e.g., importance = 5 “very high,” but personal level = 4 “above average”). Critically under-skilled professionals = those who perceive the importance of a competence 2 or more scale points higher than their personal level (e.g., importance = 4 “above average,” but personal level = 2 “below average”).

Note: n=1046 communication professionals. Q14: Competencies are based upon knowledge, skills and personal attributes. Some of them might be more important than others. How important are the following competencies for communication practitioners in your opinion? And how do you rate your personal level in each case? Scale 1 (Very low) – 5 (Very high). Frequency based on scale point 4-5.

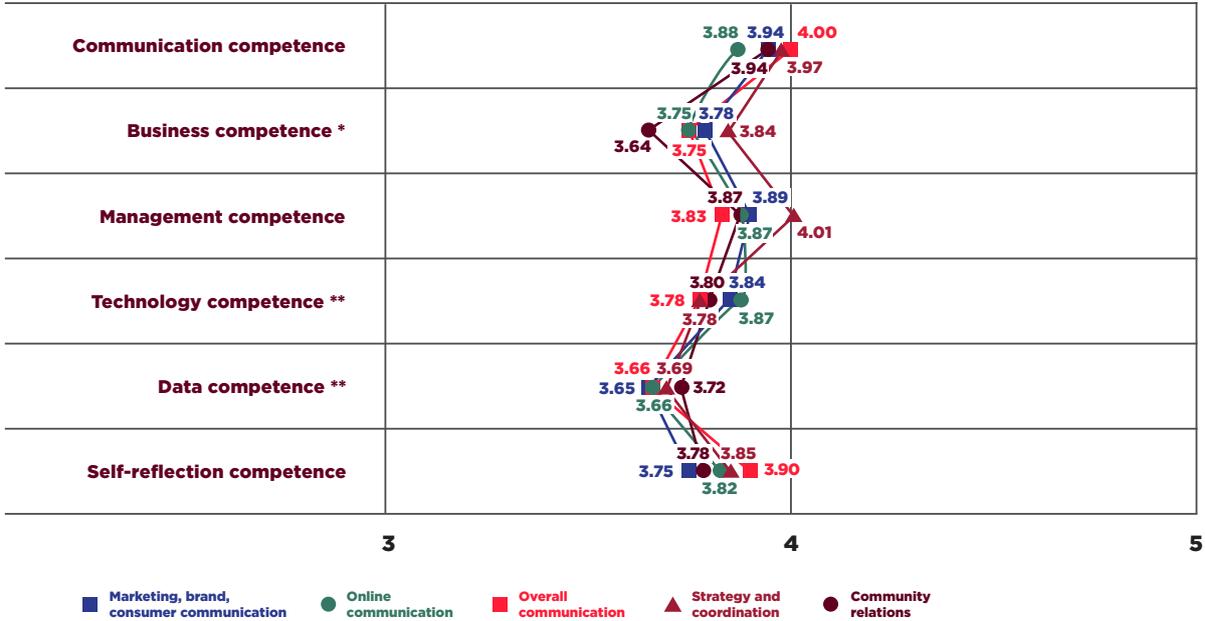
Professionals working in governmental organizations and nonprofit organizations rate their business, technology and data competencies significantly lower

Personal assessment of competency levels by communication professionals



Note: n=1046 communication professionals. Q14: Competencies are based upon knowledge, skills and personal attributes. Some of them might be more important than others. How important are the following competencies for communication practitioners in your opinion? And how do you rate your personal level in each case? Scale 1 (Very low) – 5 (Very high). Mean values. ANOVA, *p < .05, **p < .01).

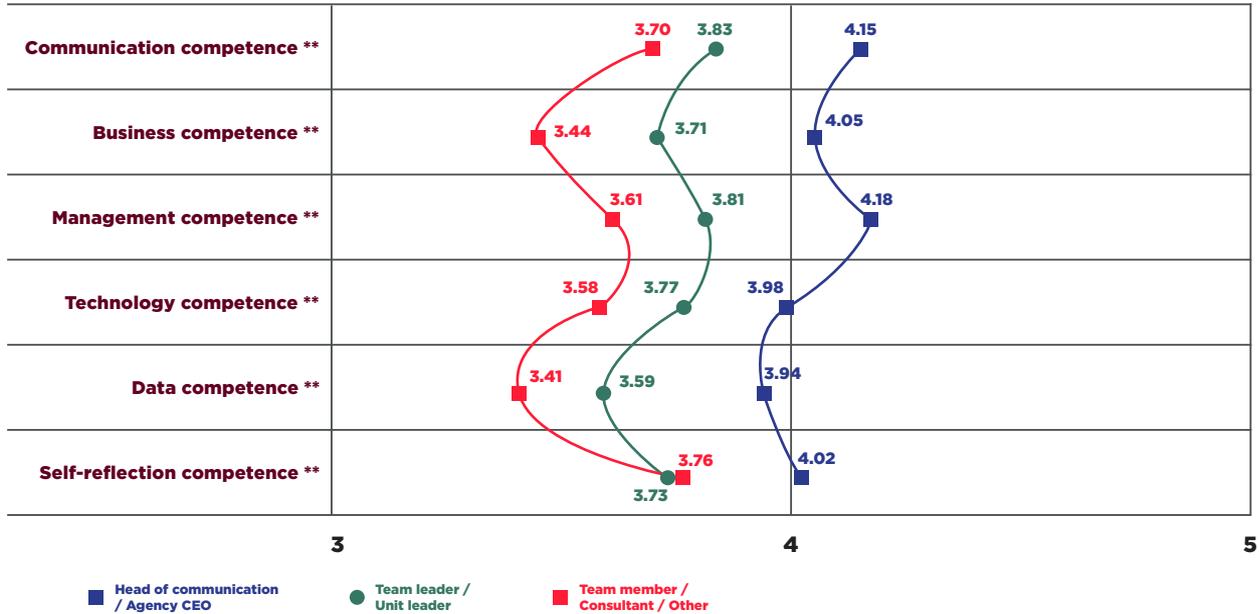
Personal assessment of competency levels varied as communication professionals shift their areas of job responsibilities



Note: n ≥ 814 communication professionals. Q14: Competencies are based upon knowledge, skills and personal attributes. Some of them might be more important than others. How important are the following competencies for communication practitioners in your opinion? And how do you rate your personal level in each case? Scale 1 (Very low) – 5 (Very high). Mean values. No significant differences.

Communication leaders are confident about their skills and knowledge in all investigated areas

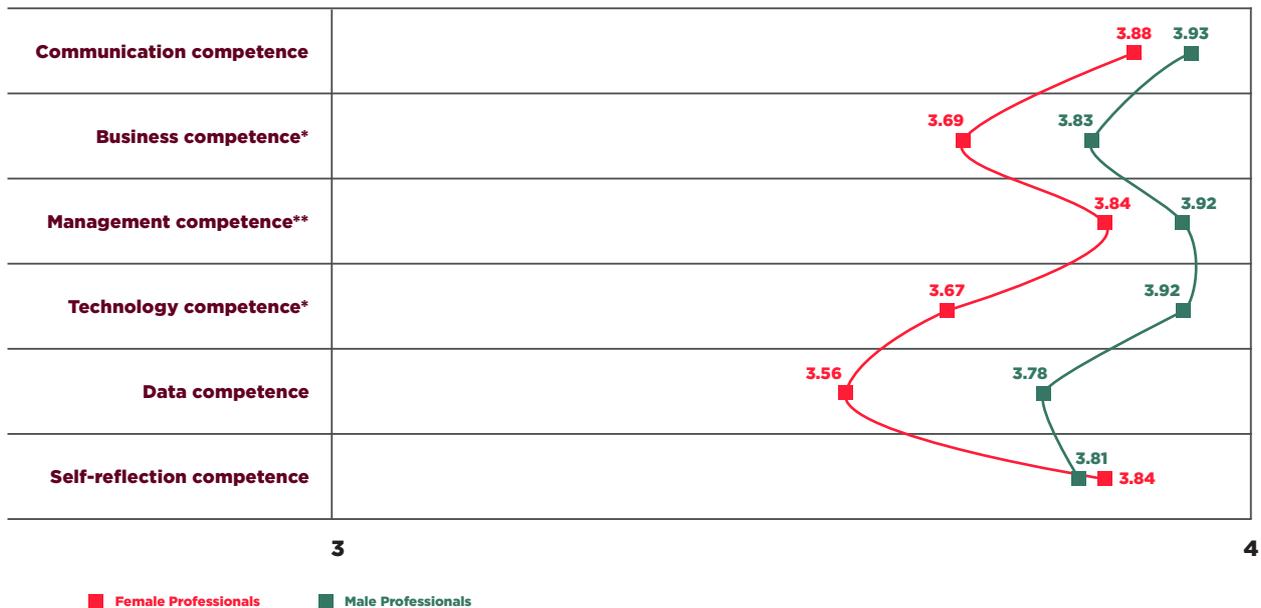
Personal assessment of competency levels by communication professionals



Note: n = 1046 communication professionals. Q14: Competencies are based upon knowledge, skills and personal attributes. Some of them might be more important than others. How important are the following competencies for communication practitioners in your opinion? And how do you rate your personal level in each case? Scale 1 (Very low) – 5 (Very high). Mean values. ** Highly significant differences (ANOVA, $p < .01$).

Men believe in their technology, business and data competencies, while women rate their self-reflection competencies slightly higher

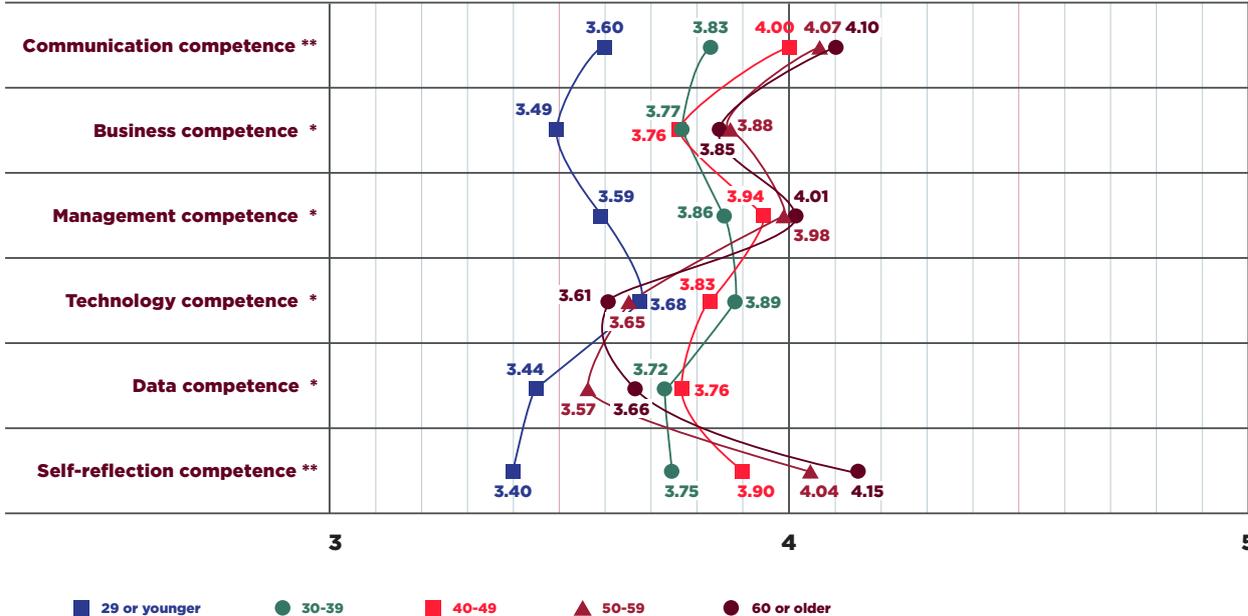
Personal assessment of competency levels by gender



n=1046 communication professionals. Q14: Competencies are based upon knowledge, skills and personal attributes. Some of them might be more important than others. How important are the following competencies for communication practitioners in your opinion? And how do you rate your personal level in each case? Scale 1 (Very low) – 5 (Very high). Mean values.(ANOVA, *p < .05, **p < .01).

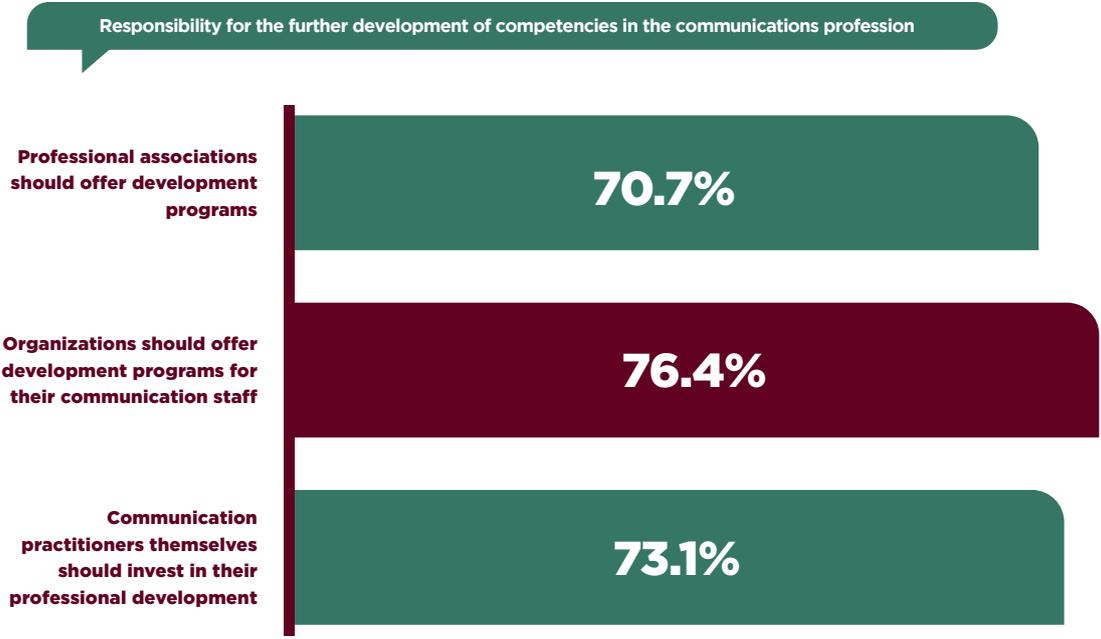
Younger professionals are clearly lagging behind in skills and knowledge in all investigated areas of competencies

Personal assessment of competency levels by age



Note: n=1046 communication professionals. Q14: Competencies are based upon knowledge, skills and personal attributes. Some of them might be more important than others. How important are the following competencies for communication practitioners in your opinion? And how do you rate your personal level in each case? Scale 1 (Very low) – 5 (Very high). Mean values. (ANOVA, *p < .05, **p < .01).

Competency development in communications: Most professionals believe it is their organizations' and their own responsibility



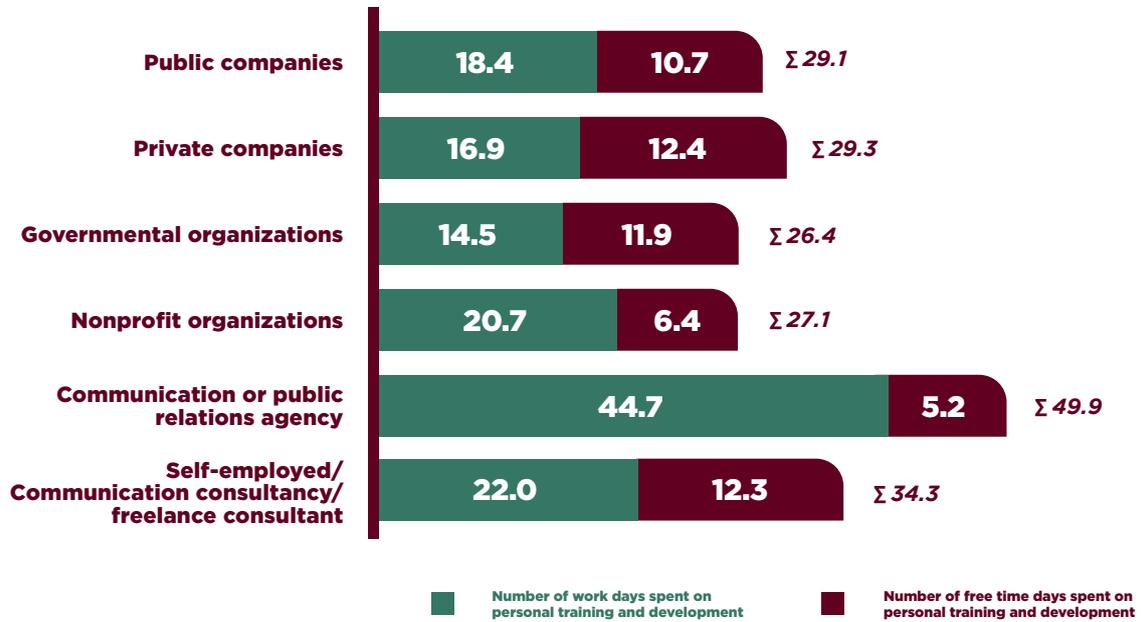
Note: n=1046 communication professionals. Q15: Who should take care of the further development of competencies in the communications profession from your point of view? Frequency based on scale point 4-5.

Practice of competency development in North America: Communication professionals have completed an average of 29 training days per year



Note: n = 1046 communication professionals. Q28: In 2019, how many days have you spent on personal training and development in any fields (including further education / studying while working; add part-time to full days)? Q29: And how many of these days were your free time that you have invested (weekends, holidays, evenings, etc.)?

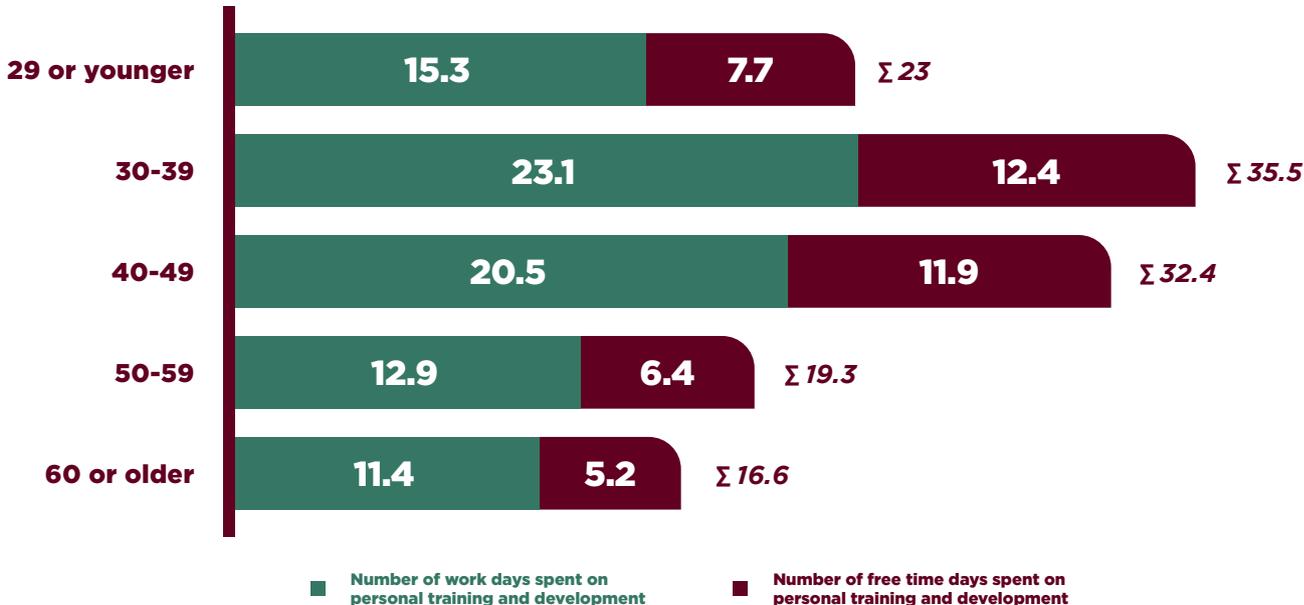
Communication professionals in consultancies and agencies spend more time on personal development than their colleagues in other types of organizations



Note: n = 1046 communication professionals. Q28: In 2019, how many days have you spent on personal training and development in any fields (including further education / studying while working; add part-time to full days)? Q29: And how many of these days were your free time that you have invested (weekends, holidays, evenings, etc.)?

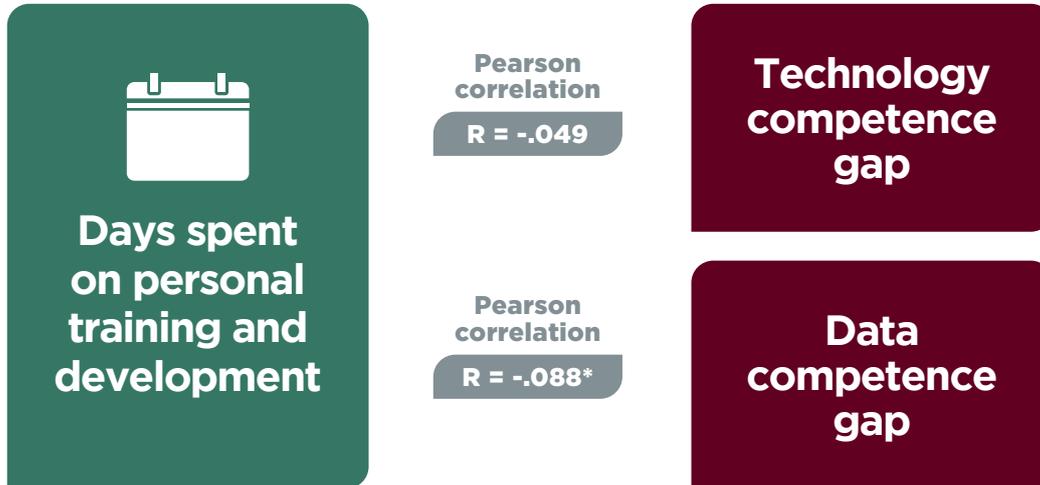
Professionals in their 30s and 40s invest more days in personal training and development per year

Average number of full days spent by communication practitioners for personal training and development



Note: n = 1046 communication professionals. Q28: In 2019, how many days have you spent on personal training and development in any fields (including further education / studying while working; add part-time to full days)? Q29: And how many of these days were your free time that you have invested (weekends, holidays, evenings, etc.)?

Educational efforts of communication professionals help close the competence gaps in handling data



*Note: n = 1046 communication professionals. Q14: Competencies are based upon knowledge, skills and personal attributes. Some of them might be more important than others. How important are the following competencies for communication practitioners in your opinion? And how do you rate your personal level in each case? Scale 1 (Very low) – 5 (Very high). Competence gap: Difference between perceived importance and personal assessment of technology / data competence, values ranging from -4 to +4. Q28 In 2019, how many days have you spent on personal training and development in any fields (including further education / studying while working; add part-time to full days)? (Pearson correlation, *p < .05).*

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Salaries

In its 2021 Salary Survey, *PRWeek* noted that median salaries in the public relations industry rose modestly in 2020. The median increase year-over-year was 1.5%, compared to 8.7% in 2019 and 6.7% in 2018 (Daniels, 2021). While the pandemic year was a business challenge for many, if not most, the NACM found that average reported salaries rose at the highest pay levels by as much as 5.3%.

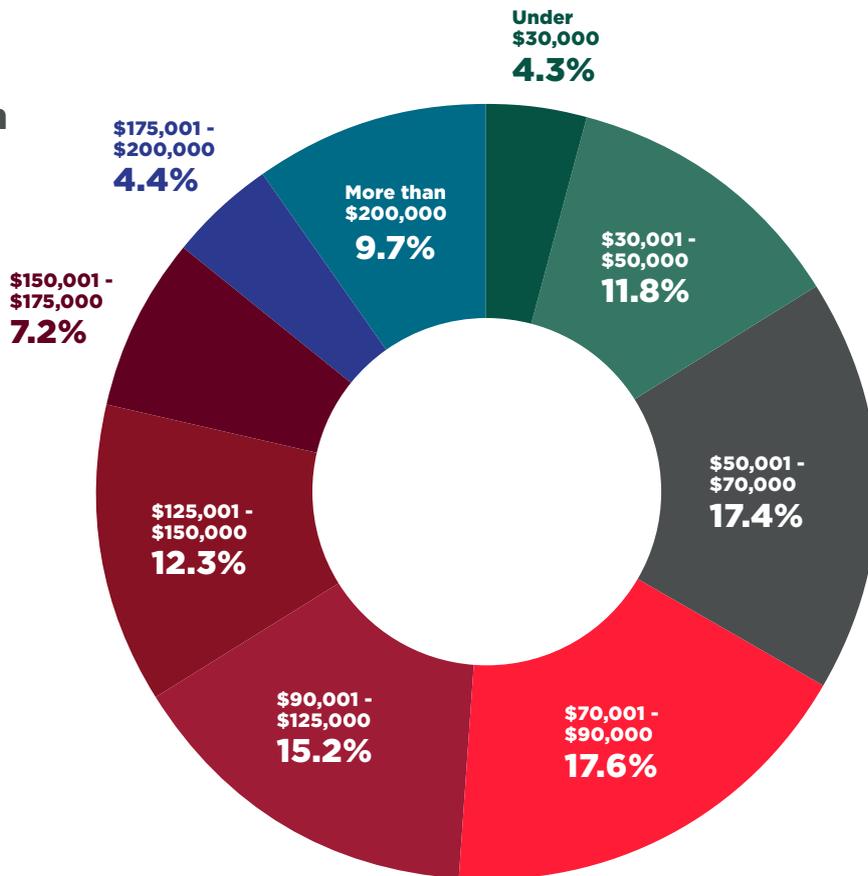
About half of NACM respondents earned between \$50,001 and \$125,000, whereas *PRWeek* reported a median salary for PR pros at the higher end of our findings at \$100,000 in 2020 (Daniels, 2021). A higher percentage of Canadians compared to U.S. practitioners fell into this salary mid-range, according to the NACM. More than 60% of Canadian professionals made between \$50,001 and \$125,000, compared to about 45% of U.S. professionals. The U.S. led Canada on the top and bottom of the salary spectrum. Just over 5% of U.S. practitioners said they made under \$30,000 compared to 1.9% of Canadians. More than 12% of U.S. respondents said they made more than \$200,000, compared to 2.3% of Canadians.

Gender pay inequity remains a problem. Women made more than men, sometimes statistically significantly more, at the lower end of the pay scale. But men made more than women, sometimes significantly more, at the top end of the pay scale. One in five women reported they made between \$50,001 and \$70,000 compared to 13.8% of men. Perhaps most importantly, more men than women fell into the pay ranges between \$90,001 and more than \$200,000; 11.8% of men earned more than \$200,000, only 7.7% of women did.

Pay disparity is identified not only between sexes, but also by the type of organization. Almost 30% of respondents working in consultancies or agencies made \$50,000 or less. Half of professionals working in nonprofits earned between \$50,001 and \$90,000. Most government workers earned \$50,001 to \$70,000 (19.8%) or between \$90,001 and \$125,000 (21.4%). About one in four communicators working in public companies earn between \$125,001 and \$175,000. About 10% of communicators in public companies, private companies, and consultancies/agencies earn more than \$200,000.

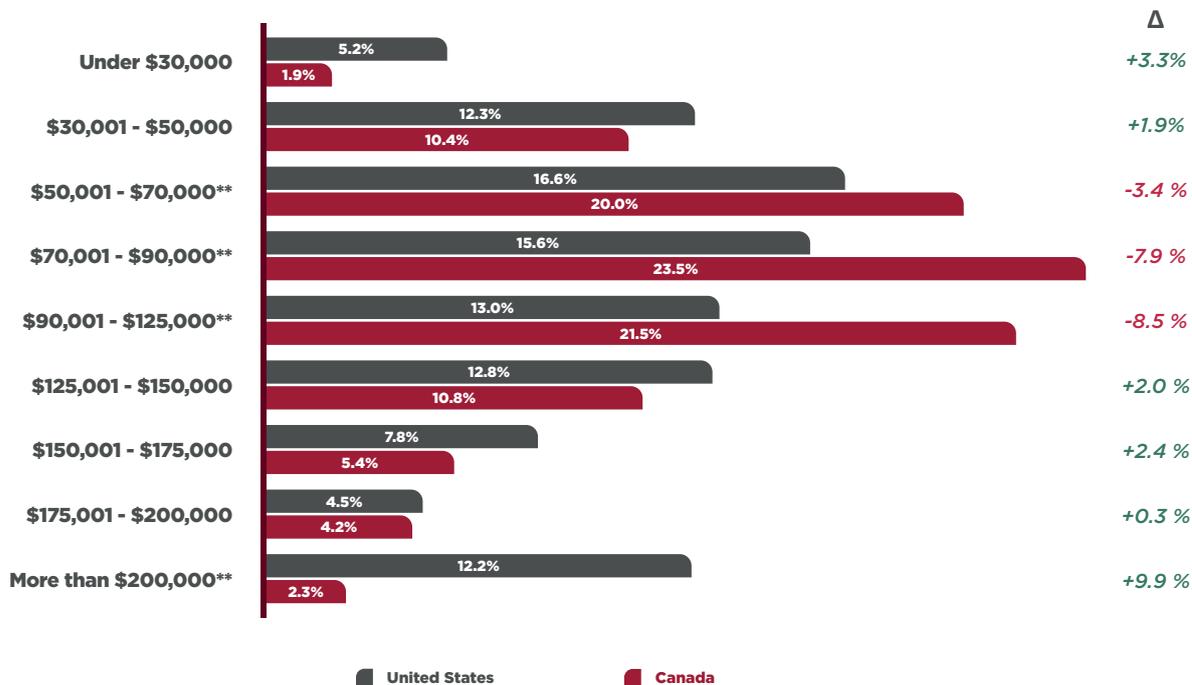
In some surprisingly good news, the percentage of professional communicators earning \$70,000 or less decreased between the 2018 NACM and the 2020 NACM by about 12%. Those earning \$125,001 or more increased by about 14% between 2018 and 2020. These trends were evident in both countries. There was a decrease of about 11% in the U.S. and 14% in Canada among those earning at the bottom end of the pay scale (i.e., \$70,000 and less). At the upper end of the pay scale, about 16% more U.S. practitioners earned \$125,001 or more compared to 2018; just over 10% more Canadian practitioners earned in that pay range when compared year-to-year. At the highest end of the pay scale, more than \$200,000, the number of U.S. practitioners grew year-to-year, while the number of Canadian professionals dropped very slightly. This pattern held when compared by sex. Both the number of both women and men declined at the lower end of the pay scale and both increased at the upper end.

Basic annual salary of communication professionals in North America in 2020



Note: n = 1,015 communication professionals. Q36: In which of the following ranges does your basic annual salary fall? Please state pre-tax income, adjusted to a full-time position.

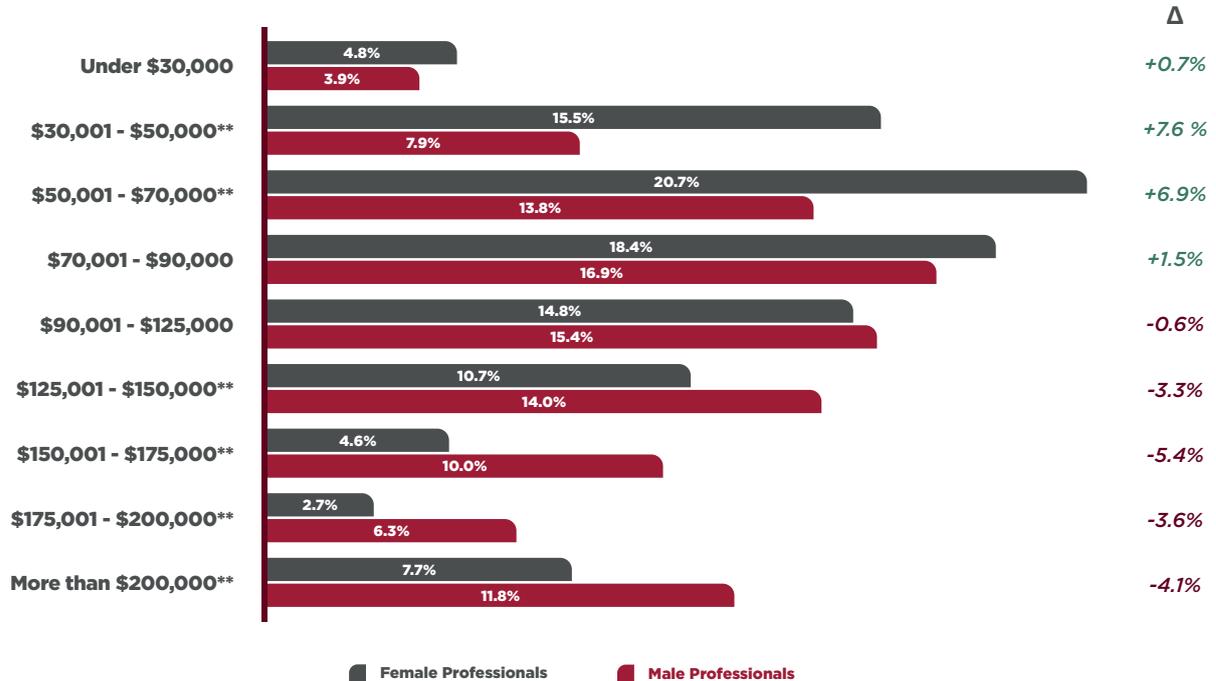
Basic annual salary of communication professionals in North America in 2020 (The United States is used as the base for comparisons between the two countries)



n = 1,015 communication professionals. Q36: In which of the following ranges does your basic annual salary fall?

Please state pre-tax income, adjusted to a full-time position. (Chi-square test, **p < .01).

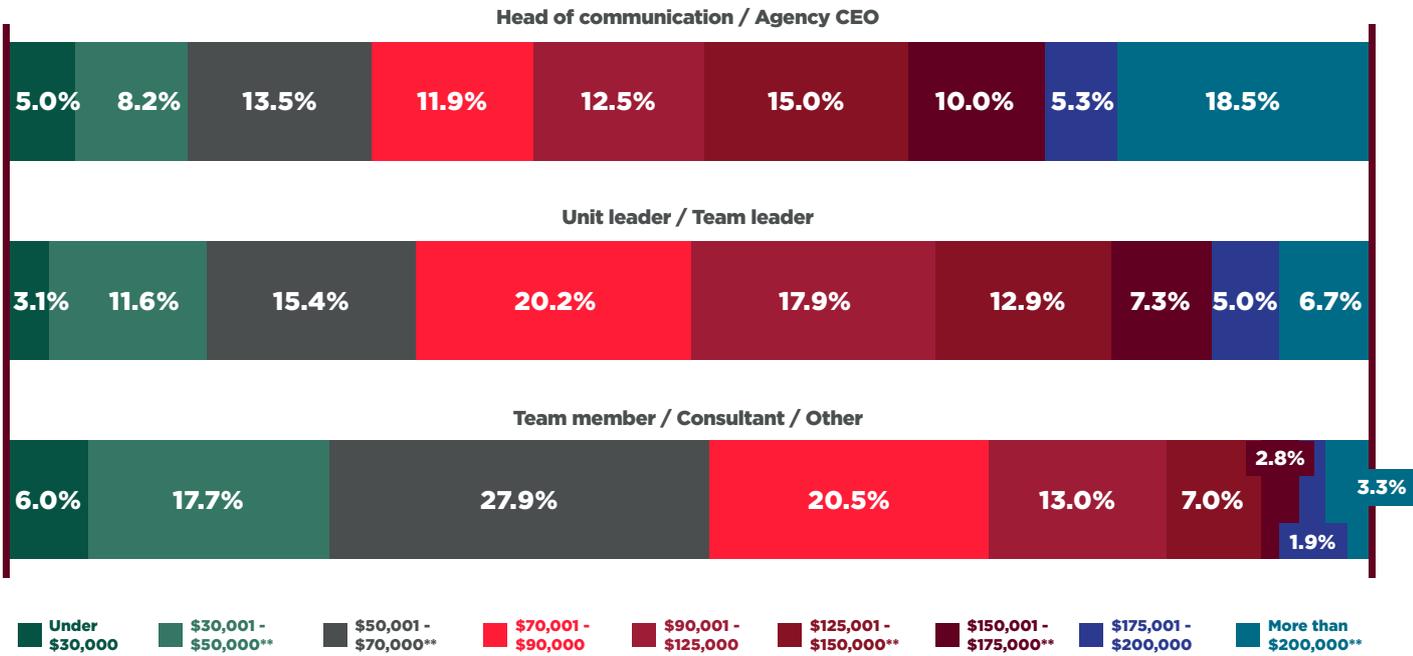
Significant pay gaps between women and men in North America in 2020



Note: n = 1,015 communication professionals. Q36: In which of the following ranges does your basic annual salary fall?
Please state pre-tax income, adjusted to a full-time position. (Chi-square test, **p < .01).

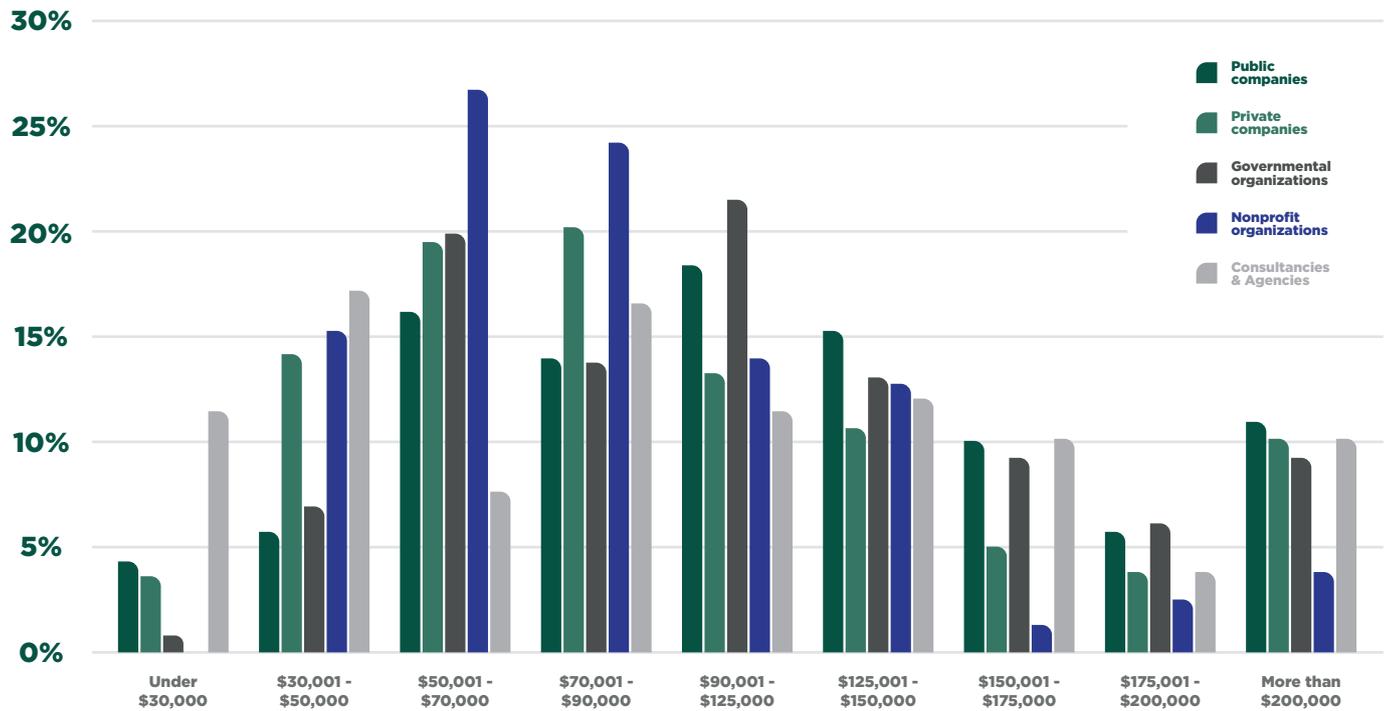
Salary development along the leadership hierarchical levels

Basic annual salary (top communication leaders, unit/team leaders, team members/consultants/other)



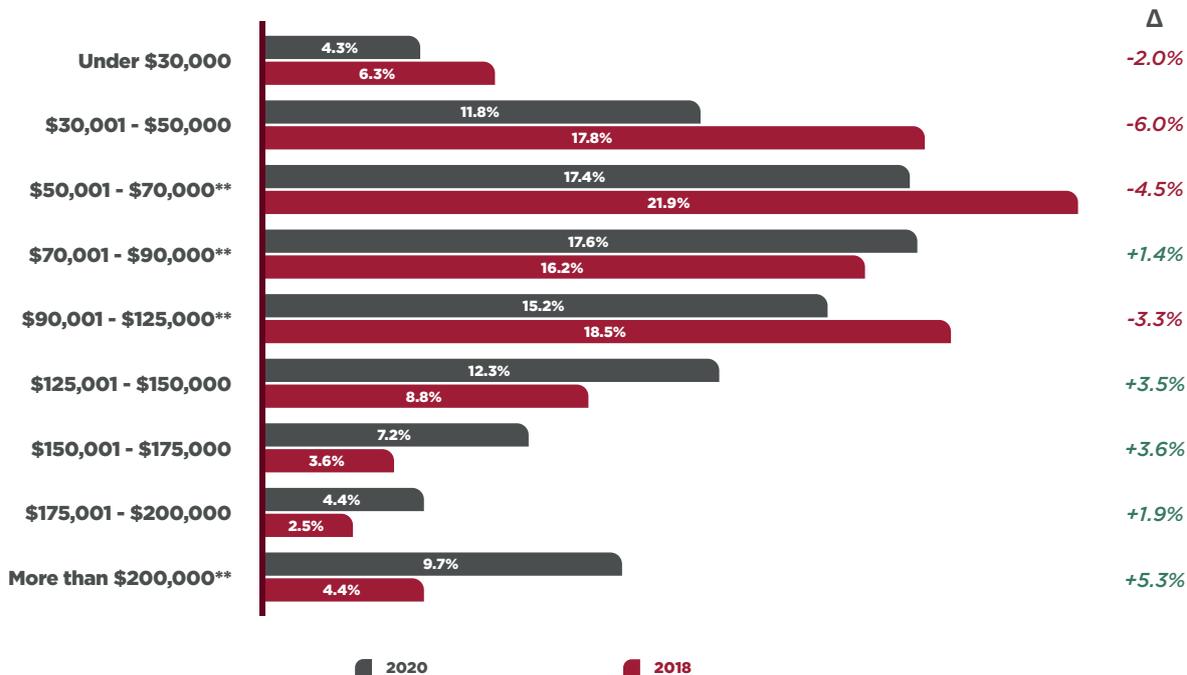
Note: n = 1,015 communication professionals. Q36: In which of the following ranges does your basic annual salary fall?
Please state pre-tax income, adjusted to a full-time position. (Chi-square test, **p < .01).

Annual salaries in different types of organizations



n = 1,015 communication professionals. Q36: In which of the following ranges does your basic annual salary fall? Please state pre-tax income, adjusted to a full-time position. Highly significant differences across types of organizations (chi-square test, $p < .01$).

Basic annual salary of communication professionals in North America: 2020 vs. 2018



Note: n = 1,015 communication professionals. Q36: In which of the following ranges does your basic annual salary fall? Please state pre-tax income, adjusted to a full-time position. 2018: n = 968 (Q38); Meng et al., 2019. Results might be influenced by varying numbers and regional/hierarchical background of respondents in our biennial surveys.

Basic annual salary of communication professionals in the United States and Canada: 2020 vs. 2018

	United States	Canada		United States in 2020	United States in 2018	Δ	Canada in 2020	Canada in 2018	Δ
Under \$30,000				5.2%	7.2%	-2.0%	1.9%	3.4%	-1.5%
\$30,001 - \$50,000				12.3%	16.9%	-4.6%	10.4%	20.5%	-10.1%
\$50,001 - \$70,000				16.6%	21.4%	-4.8%	20.0%	23.5%	-3.5%
\$70,001 - \$90,000				15.6%	15.7%	-0.1%	23.5%	17.9%	+5.6%
\$90,001 - \$125,000				13.0%	17.4%	-4.4%	21.5%	21.8%	-0.3%
\$125,001 - \$150,000				12.8%	9.5%	+3.3%	10.8%	6.4%	+4.4%
\$150,001 - \$175,000				7.8%	4.0%	+3.8%	5.4%	2.6%	+2.8%
\$175,001 - \$200,000				4.5%	3.0%	+1.5%	4.2%	0.9%	+3.3%
More than \$200,000				12.2%	4.9%	+7.3%	2.3%	3.0%	-0.7%

Note: n = 1,015 communication professionals. Q36: In which of the following ranges does your basic annual salary fall? Please state pre-tax income, adjusted to a full-time position. **Highly significant differences between two countries in 2020 data (chi-square test, p < .01). * Significant differences between the two countries in 2018 data (chi-square test, p < .05), 2018 Data: n = 968, Meng et al., 2019. Results might be influenced by varying numbers and regional/hierarchical background of respondents in our biennial surveys.

Differences in basic annual salary between women and men in North America: 2020 vs. 2018

	Female professionals	Male professionals		Female Professionals in 2020	Female Professionals in 2018	Δ	Male Professionals in 2020	Male Professionals in 2018	Δ
Under \$30,000	4.8%	7.8%	-3.0%	3.9%	4.9%	-1.0%			
\$30,001 - \$50,000	15.5%	22.6%	-7.1%	7.9%	13.0%	-5.1%			
\$50,001 - \$70,000	20.7%	25.6%	-4.9%	13.8%	18.3%	-4.5%			
\$70,001 - \$90,000	18.4%	14.9%	+3.5%	16.9%	17.5%	-0.6%			
\$90,001 - \$125,000	14.8%	17.2%	-2.5%	15.4%	19.8%	-4.4%			
\$125,001 - \$150,000	10.7%	5.7%	+5.0%	14.0%	11.8%	+2.2%			
\$150,001 - \$175,000	4.6%	2.7%	+1.9%	10.0%	4.5%	+5.5%			
\$175,001 - \$200,000	2.7%	1.0%	+1.7%	6.3%	3.9%	+2.4%			
More than \$200,000	7.7%	2.5%	+5.2%	11.8%	6.3%	+5.5%			

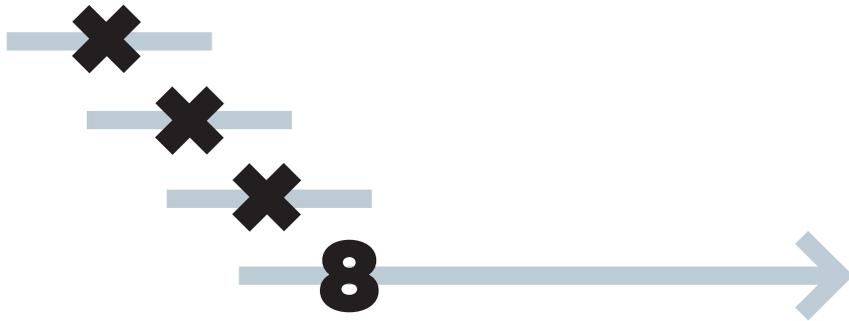
Note: n = 1,015 communication professionals. Q36: In which of the following ranges does your basic annual salary fall? Please state pre-tax income, adjusted to a full-time position. **Highly significant differences between women and men in both surveys (chi-square test, p < .01). 2018 Data: n = 968, Meng et al., 2019. Results might be influenced by varying numbers and regional/hierarchical background of respondents in our biennial surveys.

Tracking top level communicators' salaries in North America: 2020 vs. 2018

Basic annual salary (Head of communication departments and agency CEOs)

	2020	2018	Δ
Under \$30,000	5.0%	7.1%	-2.1%
\$30,001 - \$50,000	8.2%	11.5%	-3.3%
\$50,001 - \$70,000	13.5%	15.0%	-1.5%
\$70,001 - \$90,000	11.9%	9.7%	+2.2%
\$90,001 - \$125,000	12.5%	16.8%	-4.8%
\$125,001 - \$150,000	15.0%	15.0%	--
\$150,001 - \$175,000	10.0%	6.2%	+3.8%
\$175,001 - \$200,000	5.3%	2.7%	+2.6%
More than \$200,000	18.5%	15.9%	+2.6%

Note: n = 319 top communication leaders. Q36: In which of the following ranges does your basic annual salary fall? Please state pre-tax income, adjusted to a full-time position. 2018 Data: n = 113 (Q38) top communication leaders; Meng et al., 2019. Results might be influenced by varying numbers and regional/hierarchical background of respondents in our biennial surveys.



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Characteristics
of excellent
communication
departments

Since the first edition of the 2018-2019 NACM (Meng et al., 2019), we have adopted the Comparative Excellence Framework (CEF) developed by the researchers of the European Communication Monitor studies (Tench et al., 2017; Verčič & Zerfass, 2016) to identify excellent communication departments and explore the unique outstanding features associated with such departments. The CEF is based on four key attributes: advisory influence, executive influence, success, and competence. By using the framework, we use statistical approaches to calculate the scores and divide communication departments in our sample into two categories: excellent communication units and others to identify the differences between the two. Excellence is calculated as a common consequence of internal standing of the communication department within the organization (i.e., influence) and external outcomes of the communication department's activities and qualifications (i.e., performance).

Influence has two sub-dimensions. The first sub-dimension refers to advisory influence, which is conceptualized as senior managers taking recommendations of the communication function seriously and very seriously. The second sub-dimension refers to executive influence, which addresses the communication function being likely or very likely involved in senior-level meetings when dealing with organizational strategic planning. Similarly, performance includes two sub-dimensions. The sub-dimension of success refers to the communication of the organization being more or much more successful, if compared to those of other organizations. The second sub-dimension of competence is conceptualized as the quality and ability of the communication function being better or much better, if compared to those of competing organizations (Tench et al., 2017; Verčič & Zerfass, 2016).

In this NACM, 43.6% of communication departments outperformed on all four dimensions of the CEF. This number is slightly higher compared to

the proportion of excellent communication departments identified in the 2018-2019 NACM (36.0%). In addition, more excellent communication departments are identified in the U.S. than in Canada (47.3% vs. 34.2%, chi-square test, $p < .01$).

The factors that distinguish excellent communication departments from others are numerous. Communication professionals working in excellent communication departments take a significantly active role in adapting communication strategies to respond to the changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. They also use ethical guidelines developed by professional associations and their organization more often when dealing with moral dilemmas.

Excellent communication departments are more aware of cybersecurity. Professionals working in such departments contribute more efforts in managing cybersecurity, from managing crisis communication in cyberattacks to developing cybersecurity guidelines and educating employees. However, regardless of the excellence status of their department, one in two women states that she is personally affected by the glass ceiling problem in leadership advancement, which further confirms the urgent need and action to advance gender equality in the profession.

Not surprisingly, communication professionals working in excellent communication departments demonstrate a significantly higher level of competencies in all dimensions, particularly high in communication competence, management competence, and self-reflection competence. Finally, excellent communication departments emphasize the need to build and maintain trust, explore new ways to create and distribute content, and improve DEI on the individual, organizational, or professional level.

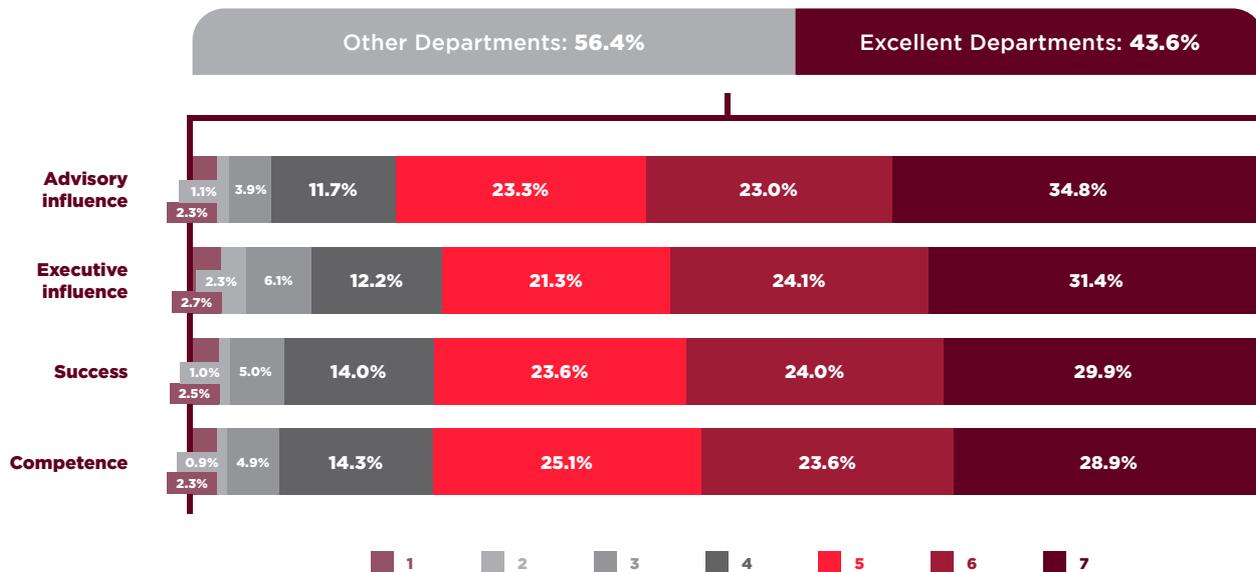
Identifying excellent communication departments

The Comparative Excellence Framework uses statistical analyses to identify outperforming organizations, based on benchmarking and self-assessments known from quality management



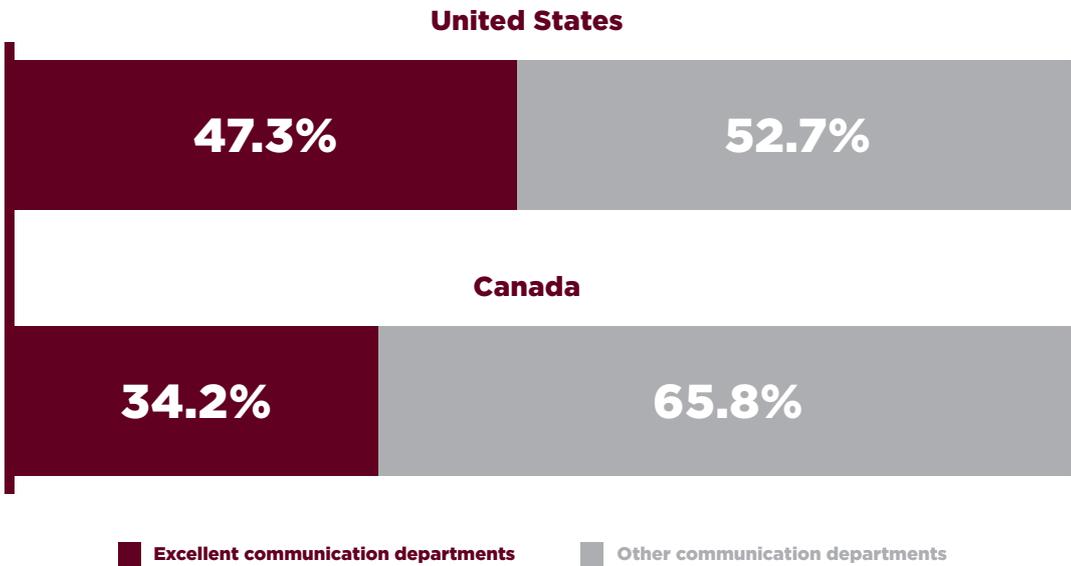
Note: Only organizations outperforming in all four dimensions (scale points 6-7 on a 7-point-scale) will be considered as "excellent" in the benchmark exercise comparing distribution and characteristics of organizations, departments and communication professionals. For a description of the framework and method see Tench et al. (2017).

Identifying excellent communication departments in the sample



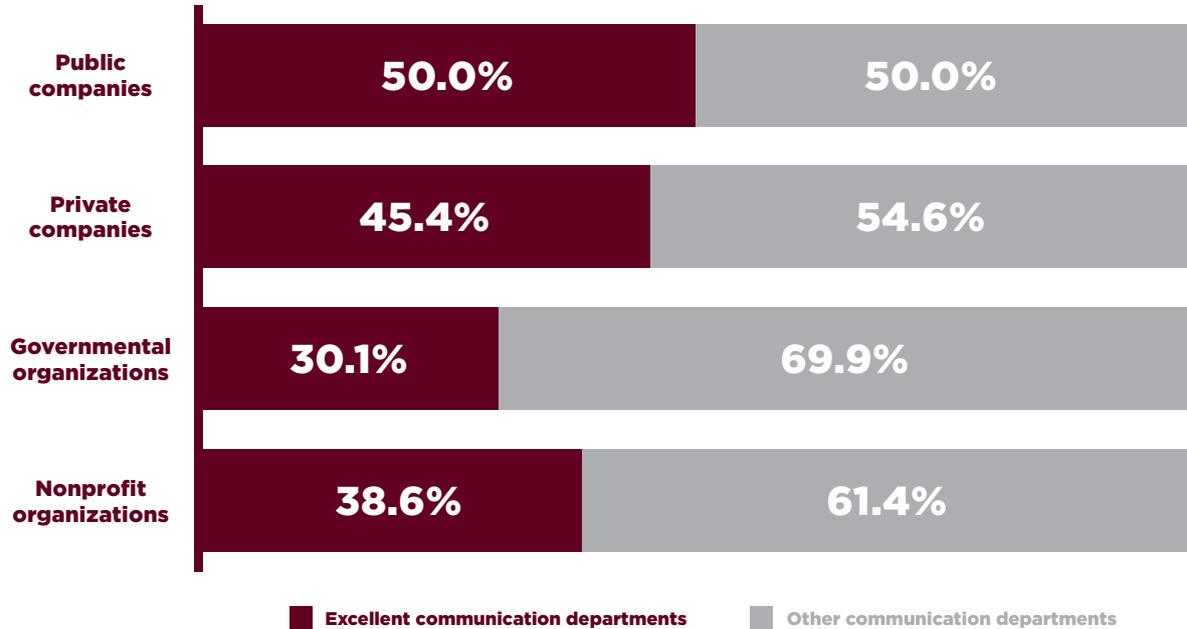
Note: n= 880 communication professionals in communication departments. Advisory influence, Q20: In your organization, how seriously do senior managers take the recommendations of the communication function? Scale 1 (Not seriously at all) – 7 (Very seriously). Executive influence, Q21: How likely is it, within your organization, that communication would be invited to senior-level meetings dealing with organizational strategic planning? Scale 1 (Never) – 7 (Always). Success, Q22: In your opinion, how successful is the communication of your organization compared to competitors? Scale 1 (Not successful at all) – 7 (Very successful). Competence, Q23: How would you estimate the quality and ability of the communication function in your organization compared to those of competitors? Scale 1 (Much worse) – 7 (Much better). Percentages: Excellent communication departments based on scale points 6-7 for each item.

Professionals in the United States identify more excellent communication departments



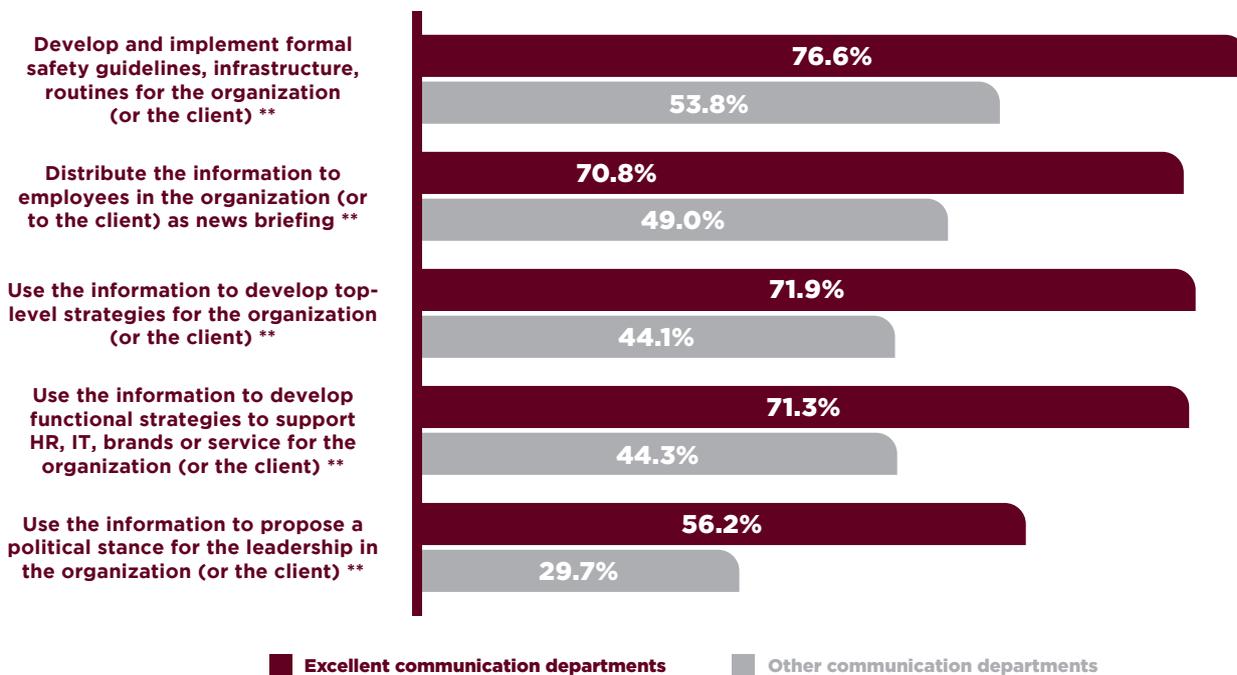
Note: n= 880 communication professionals in communication departments. Advisory influence, Q20: In your organization, how seriously do senior managers take the recommendations of the communication function? Scale 1 (Not seriously at all) – 7 (Very seriously). Executive influence, Q21: How likely is it, within your organization, that communication would be invited to senior-level meetings dealing with organizational strategic planning? Scale 1 (Never) – 7 (Always). Success, Q22: In your opinion, how successful is the communication of your organization compared to competitors? Scale 1 (Not successful at all) – 7 (Very successful). Competence, Q23: How would you estimate the quality and ability of the communication function in your organization compared to those of competitors? Scale 1 (Much worse) – 7 (Much better). Percentages: Excellent communication departments based on scale points 6-7 for each item. Highly significant differences between the two countries (chi-square test, $p < .01$).

Excellence in different types of organization



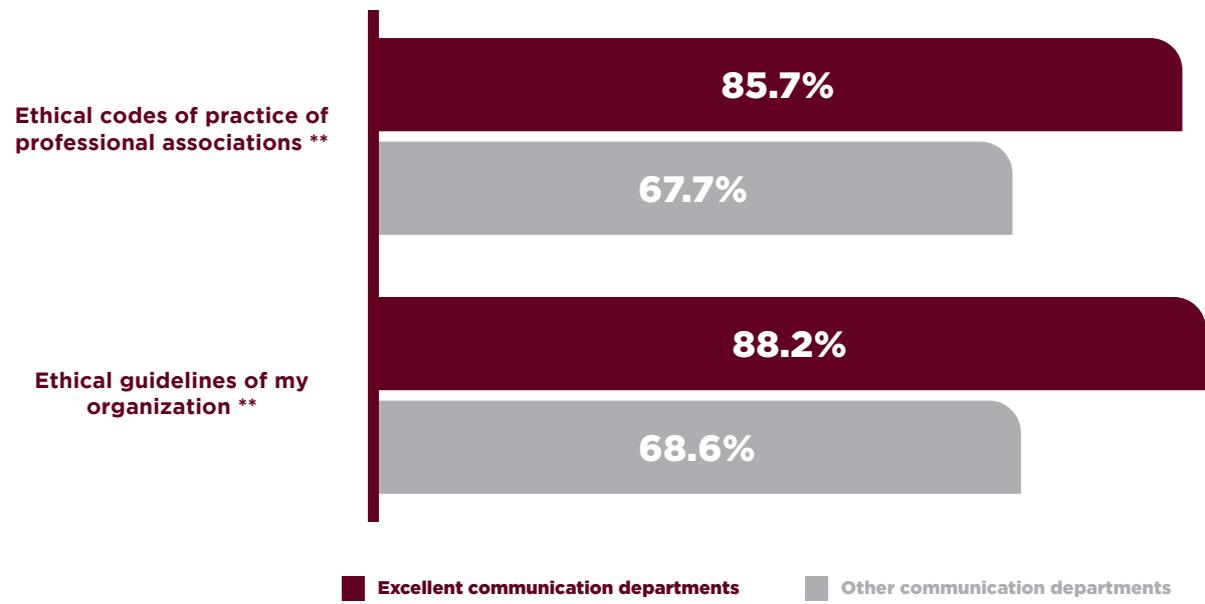
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Communication professionals working in excellent departments take a significantly active role in adapting communication strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic



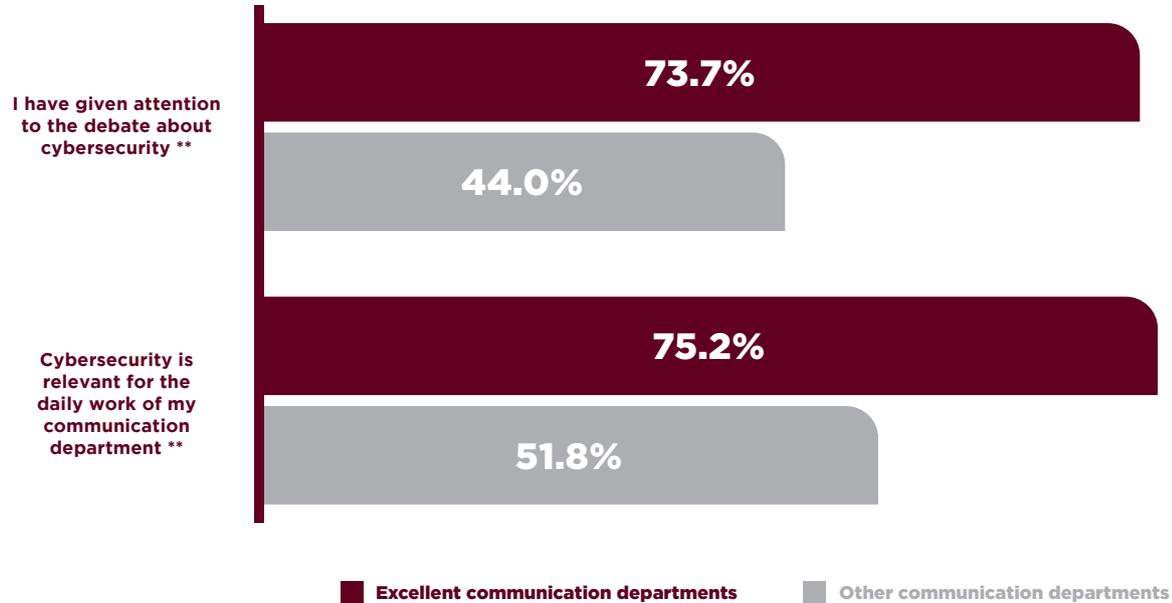
Note: n=880 communication professionals in communication departments. Q40: How is your communication department / agency using COVID-19 information gathered to plan, prepare and respond to the pandemic? Scale 1 (Never) – 5 (Always). Frequency based on scale points 4-5. (Chi-square test, **p < .01).

Communication professionals working in excellent departments use ethical guidelines by professional associations and their organization more often when dealing with moral dilemmas



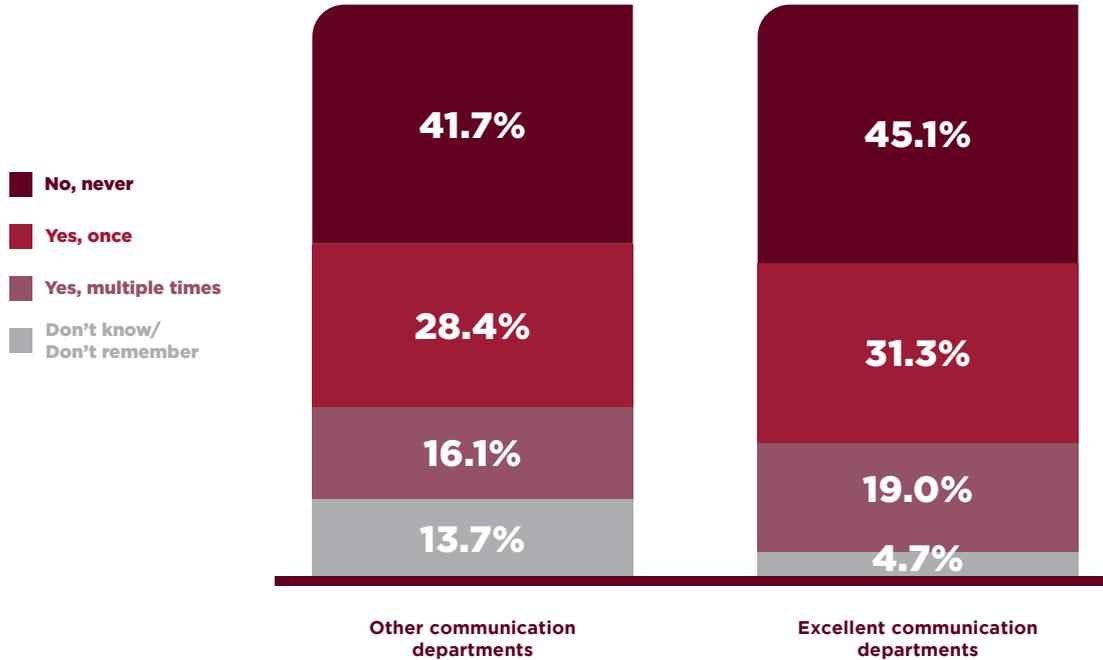
Note: n= 880 communication professionals in communication departments. Q2: How important were the following resources to you when dealing with ethical challenges? Scale 1 (Never) – 5 (Always). Frequency based on scale points 4-5. (chi-square test, **p < .01).

Communication professionals working in excellent departments are more aware of cybersecurity issues and take care of them in their daily work



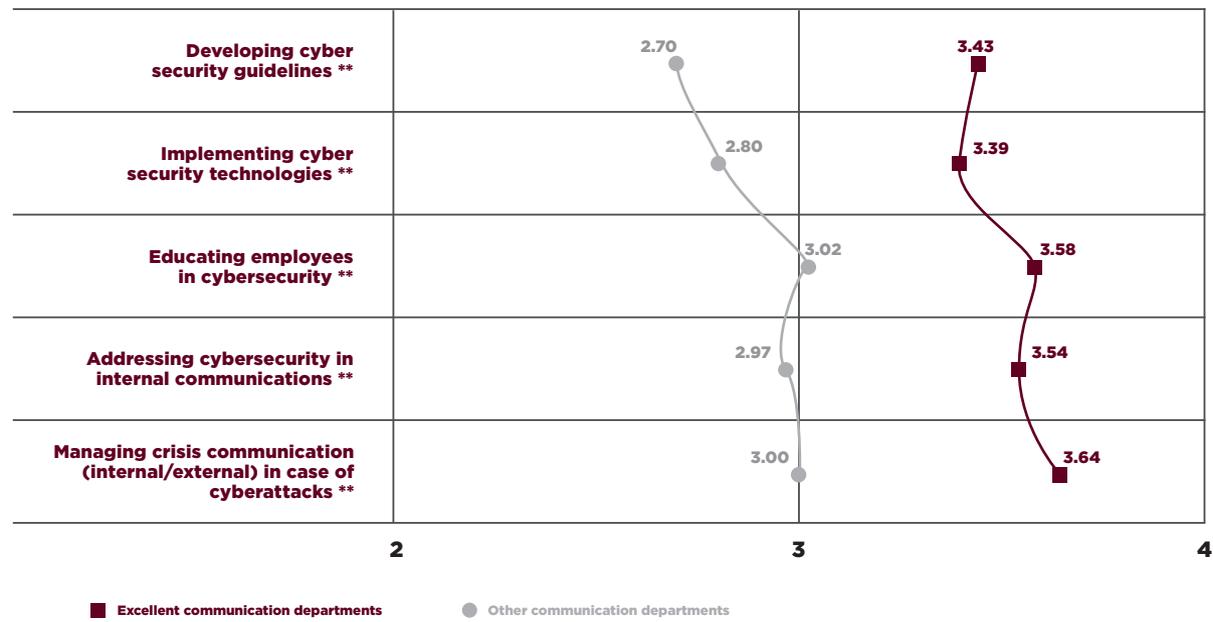
*Note: n=880 communication professionals in communication departments. Q4: Organizations are nowadays increasingly threatened by cyberattacks as well as data theft, manipulation, and fraud. Thus, cybersecurity becomes a highly relevant issue in all fields – including communications. We define cybersecurity as a set of guidelines, technologies and training that provide protection of an organization's data and of its computer and digital communication infrastructure. Please rate these statements based on your personal experience: Scale 1 (Not at all) – 5 (To a great extent). Frequency based on scale points 4–5. (Chi-square test, **p < .01).*

Excellent departments experience fewer attacks on their organizations by cyber criminals



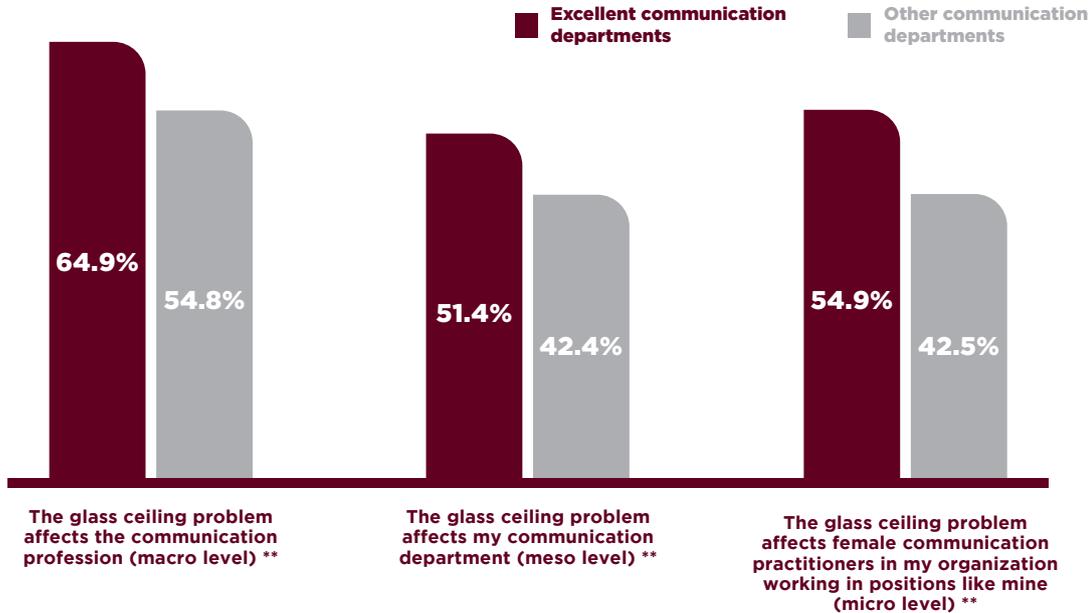
Note: n= 880 communication professionals in communication departments. Q5: Has your organization ever been a victim of cyberattacks or data theft? No, never/Yes, multiple times / Don't know or don't remember. (Chi-square test, p < .01).

Excellent communication departments are contributing more efforts in managing cybersecurity activities in their organizations



*Note: n= 794 communication professionals. Q6: Are you as a communicator actively engaged with any of the following activities? Scale 1 (Not at all) – 5 (To a great extent). Mean values. (ANOVA, **p < .01).*

The glass ceiling problem is prevalent: Professionals in excellent communication departments express much stronger concerns

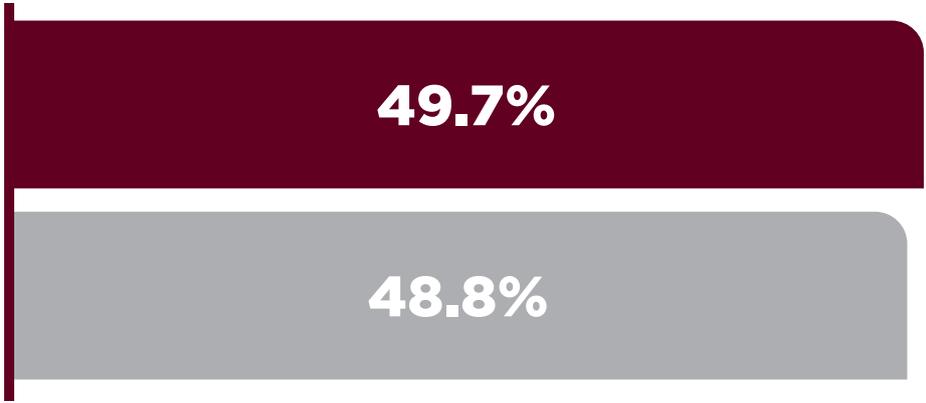


Note: n= 794 communication professionals. Q9a: In many professions, women are less often found in leading positions. This phenomenon is referred to as the "glass ceiling" — an invisible barrier that keeps female practitioners from rising beyond a certain level in the hierarchy. How do you perceive the situation in the communication profession in your country and in your organization? Scale 1 (Strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree). Frequency based on scale points 4–5. (Chi-square test, **p < .01).

Regardless of the excellence status of their department, one in two women states that she is personally affected by an invisible barrier in leadership advancement

The glass ceiling affects me personally

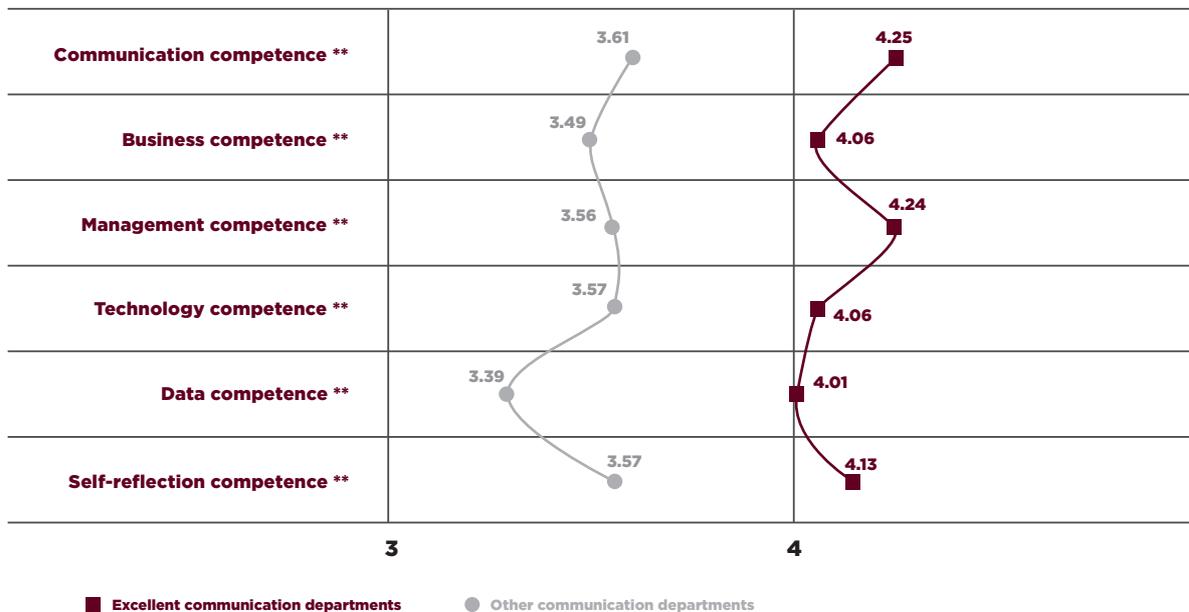
Agreement



- Excellent communication departments
- Other communication departments

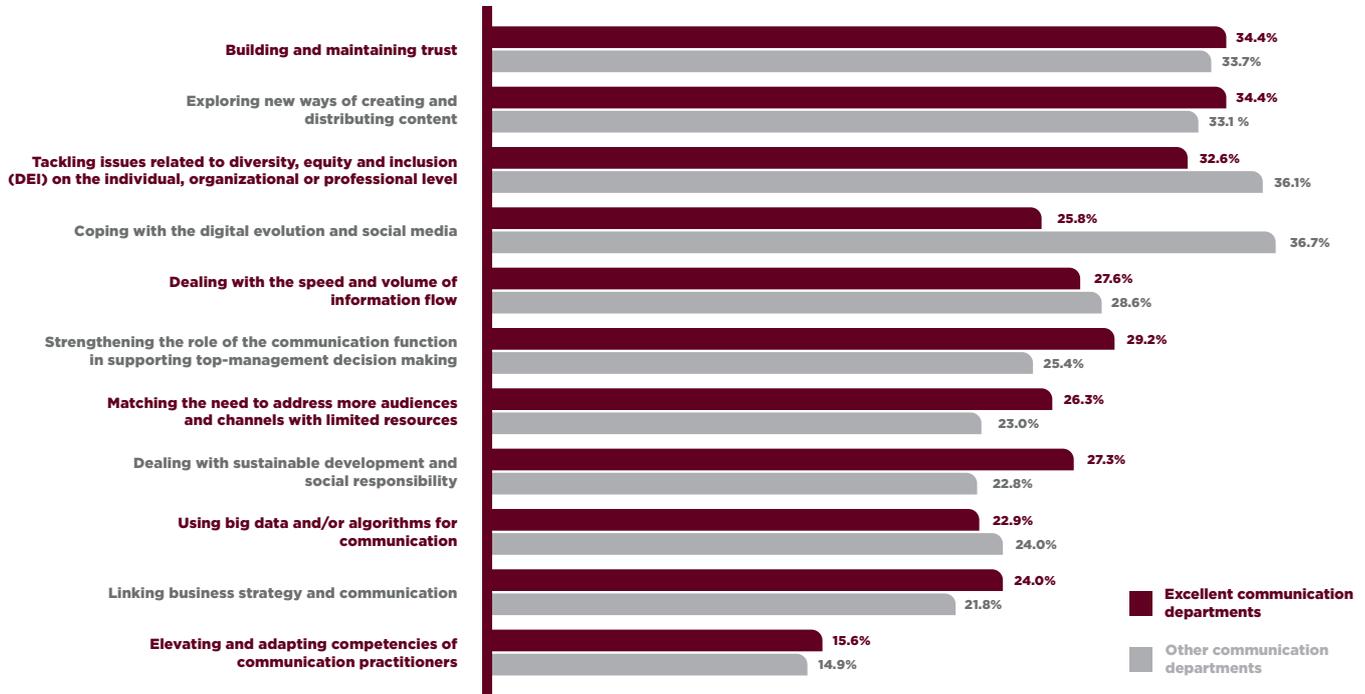
*Note: n= 794 communication professionals. Q6: Are you as a communicator actively engaged with any of the following activities?
Scale 1 (Not at all) – 5 (To a great extent). Mean values. ** Highly significant differences (ANOVA, p < .01).*

Professionals in excellent communication departments report significantly higher level of competencies in all dimensions



Note: n= 794 communication professionals. Q14: Competencies are based upon knowledge, skills and personal attributes. Some of them might be more important than others. How important are the following competencies for communication practitioners in your opinion? And how do you rate your personal level in each case? Scale 1 (Very low) – 5 (Very high). Mean values. (ANOVA, **p < .01).

Excellent communication departments emphasize the need to build trust, explore new ways of content creation and improve DEI as top three issues for the field in the near future



Note: n= 880 professionals in communication departments. Q12: Which issues will be most important for communication management/PR within the next three years from your point of view? Please pick exactly 3 items. Percentages: Frequency based on selection as Top-3 issue.



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