Future of IC Profession Survey

The rise of strategic internal comms — and the growing demand for skills and career clarity.

Institute *of* Internal Communication

Executive summary

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Chief executive, IoIC

Our latest research shows the future of the internal communication as bitter-sweet. Many internal communication professionals are being invited to work at a strategic level – something long sought after by the profession – yet when doing so, feel ill-equipped, under-resourced and under-appreciated.

Rapid technological progress, shifting attitudes to work and ongoing economic uncertainty continues to challenge most organisations. Internal communication is now expected to drive organisational transformation amid operating ambiguity.

Our analysis highlights a shift towards more complex responsibilities, with many IC professionals taking on roles

in change communication, digital transformation and coaching and advising leaders on the vital role of internal communication. This accentuates the growing importance of internal communication as a key driver of long-term success. It's an essential function to help organisations navigate their ongoing challenges.

But the data also shows that with increasing demand for internal communicators to contribute strategically, many feel stretched, stressed and overwhelmed. Simply put, as scope for the internal communication function expands, the support required to meet this increase in demand is not keeping pace. Many professionals feel undervalued and disconnected, struggling to balance the high expectations placed on them with insufficient resources available.

The research shows the future success of internal communication increasingly lies in human-centred communication. This means harnessing relationships, connection, community, engagement and trust for sustained organisational resilience.

"With the increasing demand for strategic contributions, many IC professionals feel stretched and overwhelmed. They feel undervalued and disconnected."

Executive summary

It also spotlights the need for advocacy. Internal communicators must promote their work and showcase the strategic value their contribution brings. Spotlighting the value of internal communication is particularly pressing at a time when shadow communication is on the rise. Just under two-thirds of respondents told us other departments are taking on their own communication tasks. While, of course, decentralised communication to some extent enhances agility, it also creates fragmented and inconsistent messaging, ultimately undermining the overall value of internal communication.

A further challenge highlighted in the survey analysis is a perceived lack of clear career progression pathways, which many feel impedes their growth.

In summary, the opportunity for internal communication professionals is substantial. Building human connection at work is paramount, as this underpins the essence of the future successful organisation. Developing the professional skills for the future of internal communication will ensure ongoing career success and help organisations navigate increasingly complex operating conditions.

"The research spotlights the need for advocacy. Internal communicators must promote their work and showcase the strategic value their contribution brings."

Introduction

In March 2025, the Institute of Internal Communication (IoIC) surveyed more than 300 internal communicators to learn how they felt about the current state and future direction of their profession. Respondents represented a range of management levels and years spent working in the profession.

They revealed key insights into the evolving challenges and opportunities facing internal communication. We discovered:

- **Internal communication is becoming more strategic:** 56% of respondents reported an increase in change communication duties, while 51% noted a rise in digital transformation responsibilities. Additionally, 34% were asked to advise senior leadership more frequently.

- **There is a widening skills gap:** Only 30% of IC professionals felt fully equipped with the necessary skills to meet the demands of their current roles. Areas identified for improvement included AI proficiency, digital literacy and data analysis.

- **Career progression is a concern:** 40% of professionals expressed uncertainty about their career trajectory, citing a lack of visible career advancement opportunities and structured development support. Around one in six (16%) cite their intention to transition out of IC.

- **Shadow communication is on the rise:** 63% of respondents observed an increase in communication responsibilities being taken on by departments outside of IC, particularly in HR and Operations.

These headlines show that internal communication is evolving, and that the profession is increasingly seen as a strategic enabler of organisational success. But it's also clear the profession faces challenges that need addressing to include career growth, skills development, and the rise of fragmented communication due to shadow roles.

These shifts are occurring against a global backdrop of rapid technological advancement, societal polarisation, and rising demand for more flexible and hybrid ways of working. As economic uncertainty, burgeoning colleague wellbeing issues and increased workplace activism continue to confound employers, the role of internal communication is more critical than ever.

It is an essential function that is integral to the successful fostering of colleague trust and alignment, which ultimately bolsters organisational resilience.
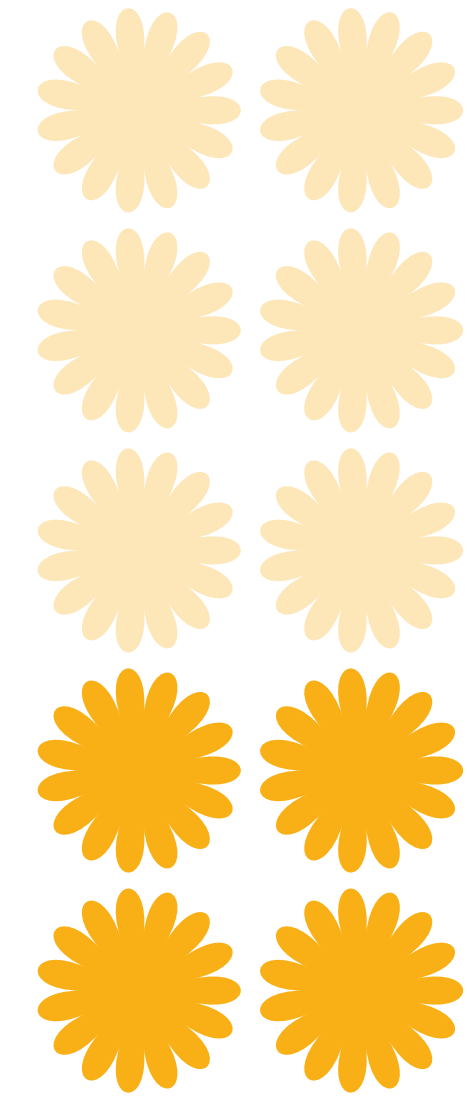
40%

Four out of ten respondents expressed uncertainly about their career trajectory and around one in six (16%) said they intend to transition out of internal comms.

Static roles and expanding responsibilities

Our analysis shows that the core responsibilities of internal communicators have remained largely unchanged over the past year.

Communication planning, editing/writing/storytelling, and communication strategy continue to dominate the work of internal communication, with global communication, storytelling and crisis communication identified as the most static areas of responsibility.

But alongside this, the remit of internal communication is broadening significantly. Respondents report managing, on average, 15 different aspects of internal communication. This widening portfolio highlights the ongoing challenge of balancing tactical delivery with creating the much-needed space to think strategically about how best to deliver optimal value within a rapidly shapeshifting operating context.

Unfortunately, the data suggests many are stretched too thinly as they juggle increasingly challenging workloads. This limits their ability to deliver greater value by focusing on the strategic objectives of their organisation.

Areas included in the current role and responsibilities

Area	%
Communication planning	89%
Editing, writing and storytelling	88%
Communication strategy	87%
Content creation	85%
Employee engagement	82%
Change communication	82%
Leadership communication	80%
Influencing and advising senior leaders	78%
Business partnering/stakeholder management	75%
Channel management	72%
Feedback and listening	67%
Culture	67%
Campaign management	66%
Event management	62%
Crisis communication	62%
Employee experience	52%
Data and analysis reporting	50%
Sustainability communication	35%
EDI	35%
Global communication	34%
Employer branding	33%
Community management	31%
Digital transformation	26%
Social media management	15%
Something else	2%

Q6 Which of the following areas are included in your current role and responsibilities? n=303

Static roles and expanding responsibilities

No change in roles/responsibilities in last year

Role	Percentage
Change communication	29%
Digital transformation	34%
Data and analysis reporting	35%
Sustainability communication	38%
Leadership communication	38%
Social media management	39%
EDI	42%
Culture	42%
Feedback and listening	42%
Influencing and advising senior leaders	42%
Communication strategy	44%
Business partnering / stakeholder management	46%
Community management	47%
Employee experience	47%
Event management	47%
Employer branding	49%
Employee engagement	50%
Channel management	53%
Communication planning	53%
Content creation	55%
Campaign management	58%
Crisis communication	64%
Editing, writing and storytelling	64%
Global communication	70%

Q7 How have these roles and responsibilities changed over the last year? n=various

Shifting priorities: what communicators are doing less

In contrast to the static nature of some tasks, some specific areas of responsibility are seeing a contraction. Our analysis highlights the top areas where internal communicators were asked to do less versus those they chose to do less.

Asked to do less	Choosing to do less
10% EDI communication	**13%** Event management
8% Sustainability communication	**10%** Content creation
7% Social media management	**9%** EDI work

One in ten respondents have been asked to reduce EDI communication, while 9% independently chose to scale back in this area.

In a similar vein, 8% have been asked to reduce their sustainability communication activities. It ranks 2nd on this list, but appears lower (=8th) on the "choosing to do less" list (5% of respondents), suggesting external operating pressures rather than internal strategy may be driving this shift.

The overall decline in both EDI and sustainability efforts likely reflects the current external landscape, where economic uncertainties and geopolitical tensions are prompting organisations to defer longer-term social and environmental commitments. There is a clear shift in focus towards more immediate business needs.
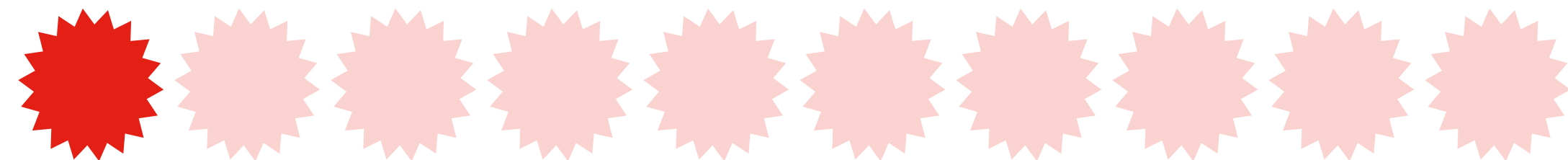
10% One out of ten respondents have been asked to cut back on communication relating to equity, diversity and inclusion; around the same amount of internal comms professionals (9%) have themselves chosen to cut back in this area.

Shifting priorities: what communicators are doing less

Changes in role/responsibilities in last year

Role/Responsibility	Asked to do less	Choosing to do less
EDI	10%	9%
Event management	5%	13%
Social media management	7%	7%
Sustainability communication	8%	5%
Content creation	1%	10%
Editing, writing and storytelling	2%	8%
Channel management	2%	6%
Community management	2%	6%
Campaign management	3%	5%
Employee engagement	5%	2%
Employee experience	5%	2%
Culture	3%	4%
Digital transformation	4%	3%
Employer branding	2%	5%
Business partnering/stakeholder management	4%	2%
Crisis communication	4%	2%
Data and analysis reporting	3%	3%
Global communication	3%	3%
Change communication	3%	2%
Influencing and advising senior leaders	3%	1%
Communication strategy	2%	2%
Leadership communication	2%	2%
Communication planning	1%	3%
Feedback and listening	2%	1%

Legend:
- 🟧 Asked to do less compared to last year
- 🟥 Choosing to do less compared to last year

Q7 How have these roles and responsibilities changed over the last year? n=various

Accelerating strategic responsibilities: what communicators are doing more

Our data analysis shows internal communicators are doing more relating to organisational change, leadership communication and insight-driven internal communication.

The top three areas where internal communicators were asked to do more versus those they chose to do more are as follows:

Asked to do more	Choosing to do more
37% Feedback and listening	**56%** Change communication
34% Influencing/advising senior leadership	**51%** Digital transformation
30% Data analysis & reporting	**38%** Sustainability communication

These scores show that leaders are increasingly seeing IC as a strategically important function. One-third of respondents have been asked to do more influencing and advising, with a similar number being asked to do more listening. There is a greater demand for IC professionals to be trusted advisers.

This indicates business leaders increasingly see internal communication as strategically important.
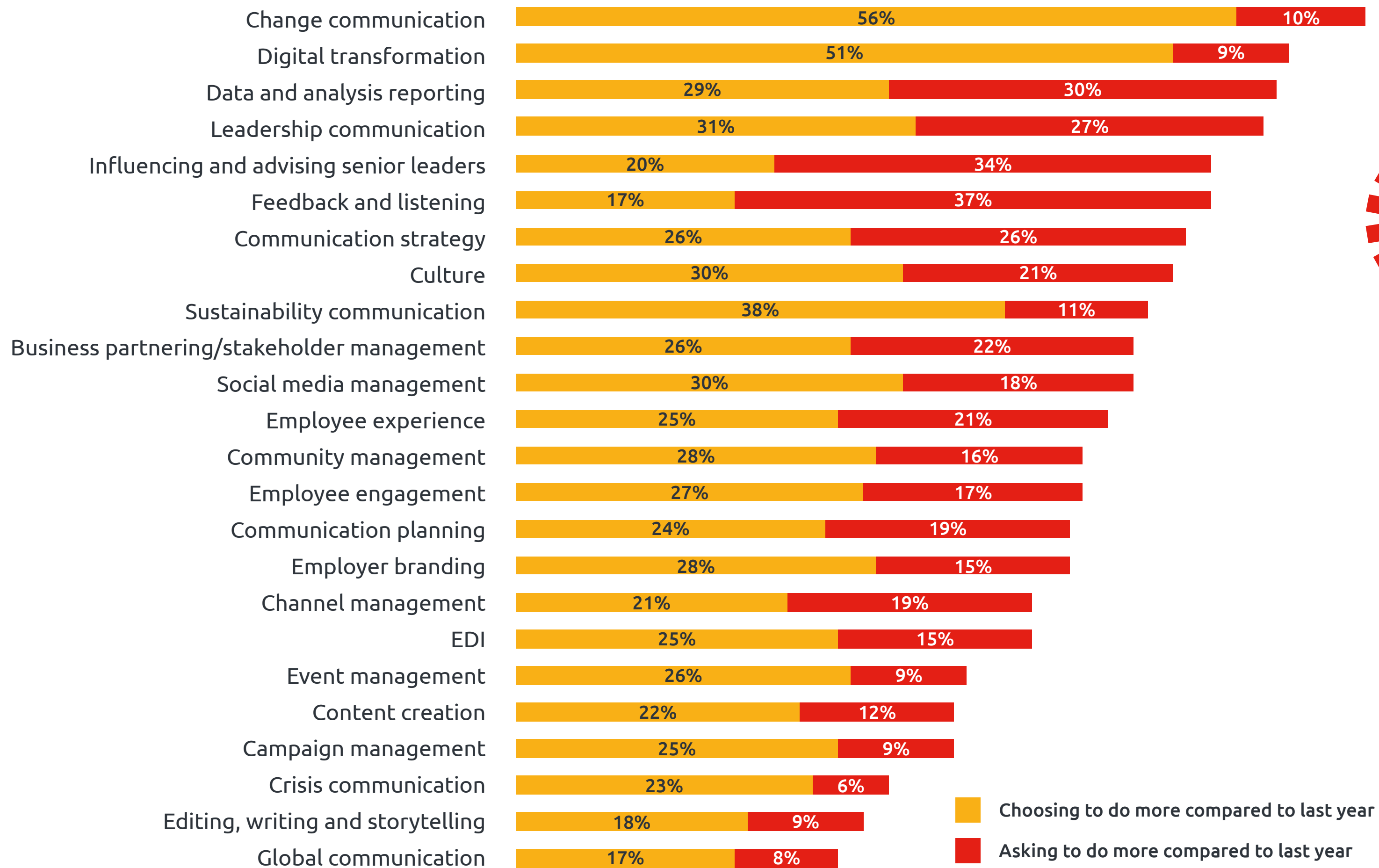
The uptick in strategic and insight-led work reflects the growing realisation that internal communication is an enabler of change, an accelerator of digital adoption and a trusted adviser to leadership. This marks an important milestone in the perceived value of internal communication.

34%
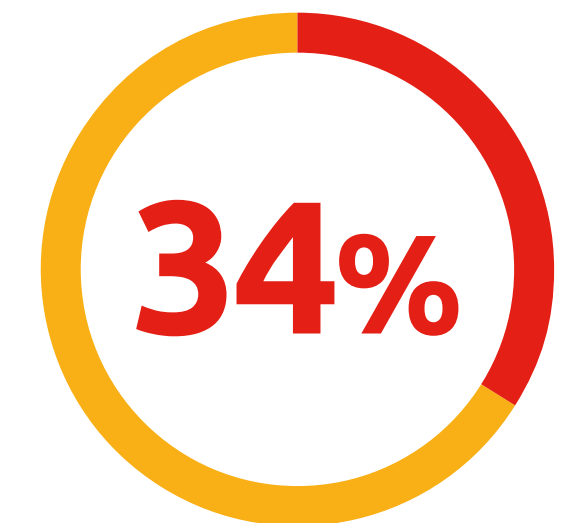
One-third of internal communication professionals are being asked to take on a greater advisory role to senior leaders, suggesting a growing recognition of IC's strategic value.

Accelerating strategic responsibilities: what communicators are doing more

Changes in roles/responsibilities in last year

Responsibility	Choosing to do more	Asking to do more
Change communication	56%	10%
Digital transformation	51%	9%
Data and analysis reporting	29%	30%
Leadership communication	31%	27%
Influencing and advising senior leaders	20%	34%
Feedback and listening	17%	37%
Communication strategy	26%	26%
Culture	30%	21%
Sustainability communication	38%	11%
Business partnering/stakeholder management	26%	22%
Social media management	30%	18%
Employee experience	25%	21%
Community management	28%	16%
Employee engagement	27%	17%
Communication planning	24%	19%
Employer branding	28%	15%
Channel management	21%	19%
EDI	25%	15%
Event management	26%	9%
Content creation	22%	12%
Campaign management	25%	9%
Crisis communication	23%	6%
Editing, writing and storytelling	18%	9%
Global communication	17%	8%

Legend:
- Choosing to do more compared to last year
- Asking to do more compared to last year

Q7 How have these roles and responsibilities changed over the last year? n=various

Low morale, high expectation

Our findings also reveal a concerning insight into the lived experience of internal communication professionals. Less than half report feeling "happy", "fulfilled" or "appreciated" in their current role. More strikingly, 80% express negative feelings about their work overall.

This signals more than just low job satisfaction – it highlights a potential motivation crisis within the profession itself. While internal communicators are tasked with shaping colleague experience, driving engagement and supporting leadership communication, many are doing so while feeling disconnected, undervalued or emotionally depleted.

Several factors contribute to this outlook:

- **High workload:** With an average of 15 areas of responsibility per role, IC professionals are expected to deliver across an increasingly wide spectrum – often without sufficient resourcing or recognition.

- **Limited career progression:** Many respondents cite unclear paths for advancement, role stagnation and a lack of opportunity to grow or specialise.

- **Strategic disconnection:** IC teams are increasingly expected to play a role in digital transformation, cultural change and leadership influence – yet often lack the formal authority, training or support to do so effectively.

- **Emotional labour:** Supporting others through change, crisis or uncertainty can take a significant toll on IC professionals, especially when their own needs for recognition, appreciation and development go unmet.

Left unaddressed, the disconnect between the rising strategic importance of internal communication and the psychological wellbeing of its practitioners imperils the very function integral to organisational engagement and resilience.

Feelings about current role

Feeling	Percentage
Happy	43%
Fulfilled	41%
Appreciated	31%
Stretched	51%
Frustrated	41%
Stressed	37%
Under-used	25%
Something else	8%
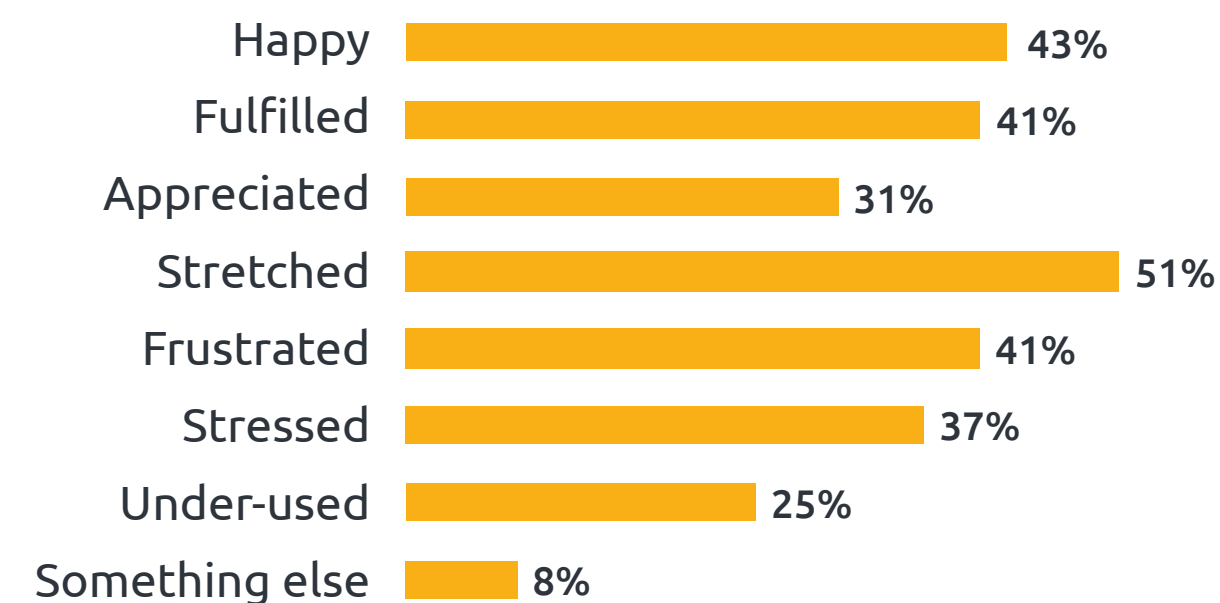
Q9 Which of the following best describes how you feel about your job most of the time? n=303

Trends influencing the internal communication profession

Our findings clearly demonstrate that internal communication professionals are highly attuned to the forces reshaping the future of work.
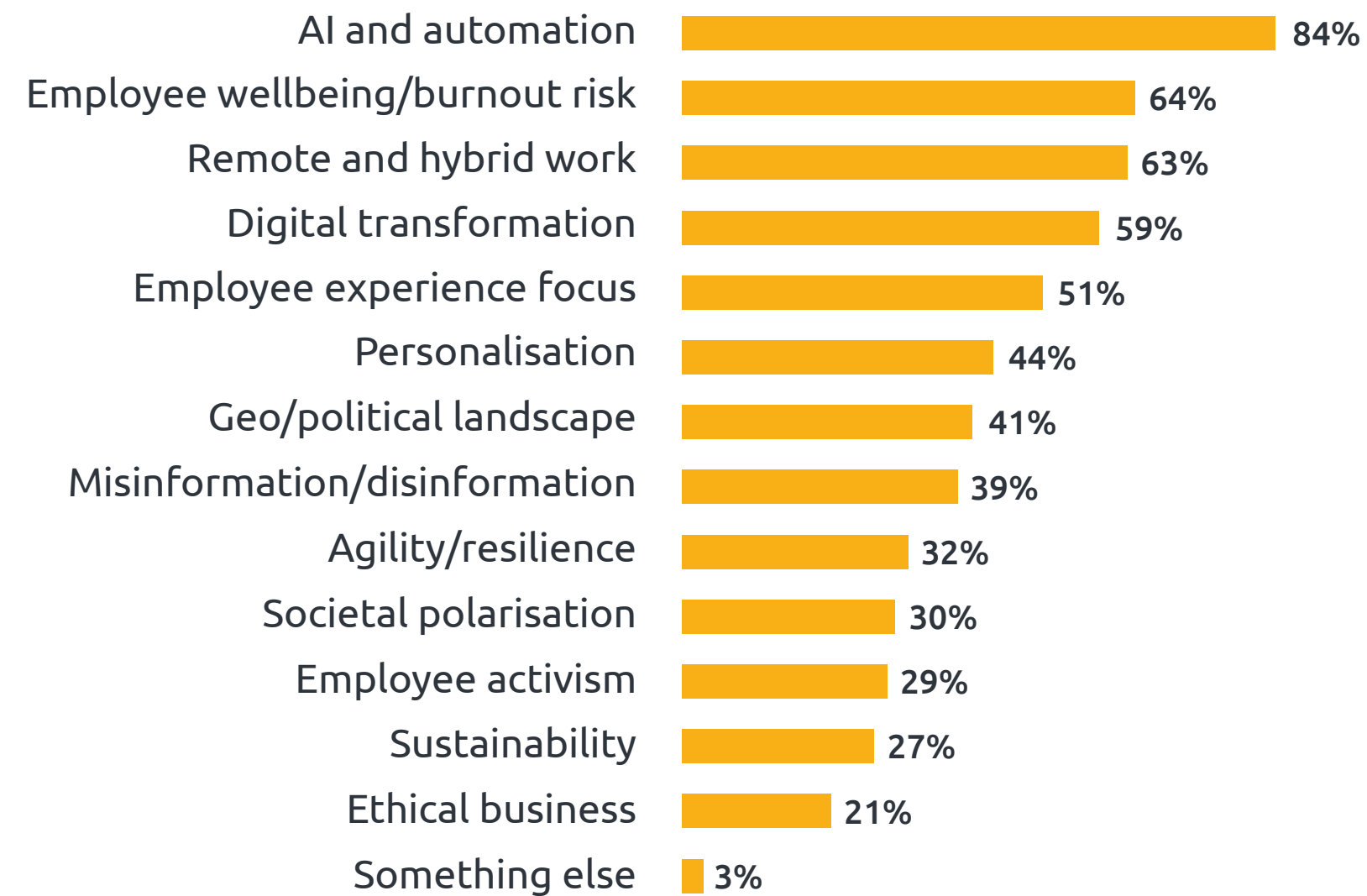
AI and automation are identified as the biggest factors reshaping internal communication today. Digital adoption drives the expectation of greater efficiency, more personalised communication and the use of AI tools to create content, segment audiences and analyse data.

Many professionals recognise AI presents both challenge and opportunity. While it has the potential to streamline processes and free up time for more strategic work, getting best value from it also requires rapid upskilling.

And of course, there is the ongoing question of AI's long-term impact on roles, responsibilities and employment itself. This is creating anxiety and tension in many workplaces, accelerating the need for inclusive, empathic internal communication.

Wellbeing surfaces as the second most important trend for internal communication. The long-tail impact of the pandemic and ongoing economic uncertainty has led many organisations to look to internal communication to boost colleague resilience, support wellbeing initiatives and sustain engagement in an increasingly turbulent world.

Emerging trends influencing the IC profession

Trend	Percentage
AI and automation	84%
Employee wellbeing/burnout risk	64%
Remote and hybrid work	63%
Digital transformation	59%
Employee experience focus	51%
Personalisation	44%
Geo/political landscape	41%
Misinformation/disinformation	39%
Agility/resilience	32%
Societal polarisation	30%
Employee activism	29%
Sustainability	27%
Ethical business	21%
Something else	3%

Q15 Which of the following emerging trends do you think are influencing the IC profession? n=303

Trends influencing the internal communication profession

Persistent demand for remote and hybrid working continues to shape the work of internal communication. Shifting away from traditional, office-centric operating norms demands new ways of sustaining human connection, upholding culture, enhancing leadership visibility and nurturing team cohesion. Internal communicators are expected to create consistent experiences for colleagues regardless of location or employment type, to ensure inclusion and equal access to information and opportunity.

Digital transformation rounds out the trends impacting the profession. This comprises not just the adoption of new platforms, tools and processes, but also new attitudes towards agility, transparency and innovation in communication. Internal communicators are increasingly expected to lead or support digital adoption journeys by embedding change narratives and maintaining colleague trust.

Interestingly, colleague activism, sustainability and ethical business – while still important – have been deprioritised for now. Our data indicates that they are currently secondary to the primary pressures of technology adoption, wellbeing and workforce agility.

84%

Survey respondents (84%) identified AI and automation as the biggest emerging trend influencing internal comms. Almost two-thirds named employee wellbeing/burnout risk (64%) and remote and hybrid work (63%) as the second and third biggest trend.

Responding with skills: overcoming the challenges ahead

In response to ongoing turbulence, our profession must proactively identify and prioritise the skills needed to remain effective and ready for the future. This isn't always easy when our data shows the internal communication remit is widening.
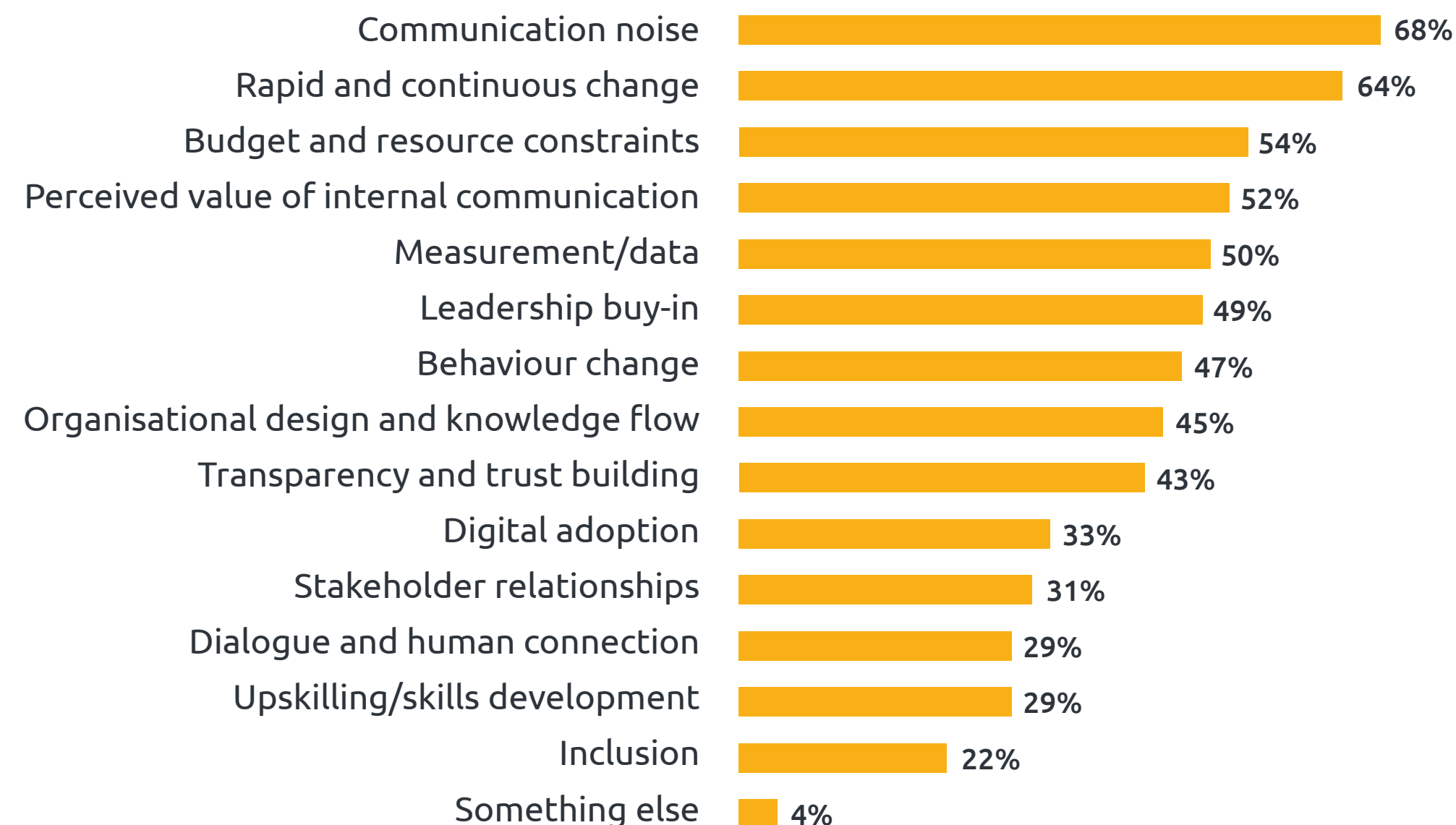
By way of upskilling, practitioners have told us they are prioritising development in areas such as strategic thinking, influencing, digital literacy, data analysis and change communication. This reflects a growing recognition of the need to operate at both strategic and tactical levels. The modern internal communication landscape faces various challenges, the primary two of which were reported by respondents as:

- **Communication noise** – a crowded communication environment where messages risk becoming lost, diluted or disconnected

- **Rapid and continuous change** – internal communicators must keep pace, often without additional resources or capacity.

Digital transformation is reshaping not only how communication is delivered, but also what is expected of internal communication itself. Respondents share concerns about staying ahead of technology trends and managing stakeholder expectations for faster delivery with fewer resources – and the inevitable impact of these concerns on team confidence and morale.

This underscores the need to invest in skill development. Organisations must provide structured learning opportunities to help internal communicators build resilience. Without this, the risk is that the profession will struggle to meet the demands of a workplace where continuous transformation has become the norm.

Challenges needing to address in the role

Challenge	%
Communication noise	68%
Rapid and continuous change	64%
Budget and resource constraints	54%
Perceived value of internal communication	52%
Measurement/data	50%
Leadership buy-in	49%
Behaviour change	47%
Organisational design and knowledge flow	45%
Transparency and trust building	43%
Digital adoption	33%
Stakeholder relationships	31%
Dialogue and human connection	29%
Upskilling/skills development	29%
Inclusion	22%
Something else	4%

Q16 Which of the following challenges are you needing to address in your role? n=303

Responding with skills: overcoming the challenges ahead

We asked: How is digital transformation shaping your role and upskilling requirements?

"We are testing use cases to make our work faster, so we can focus on the tasks that need our judgment and human connection. But it affects our team as they are unsettled by what it will mean in the future – so that affects my leadership."
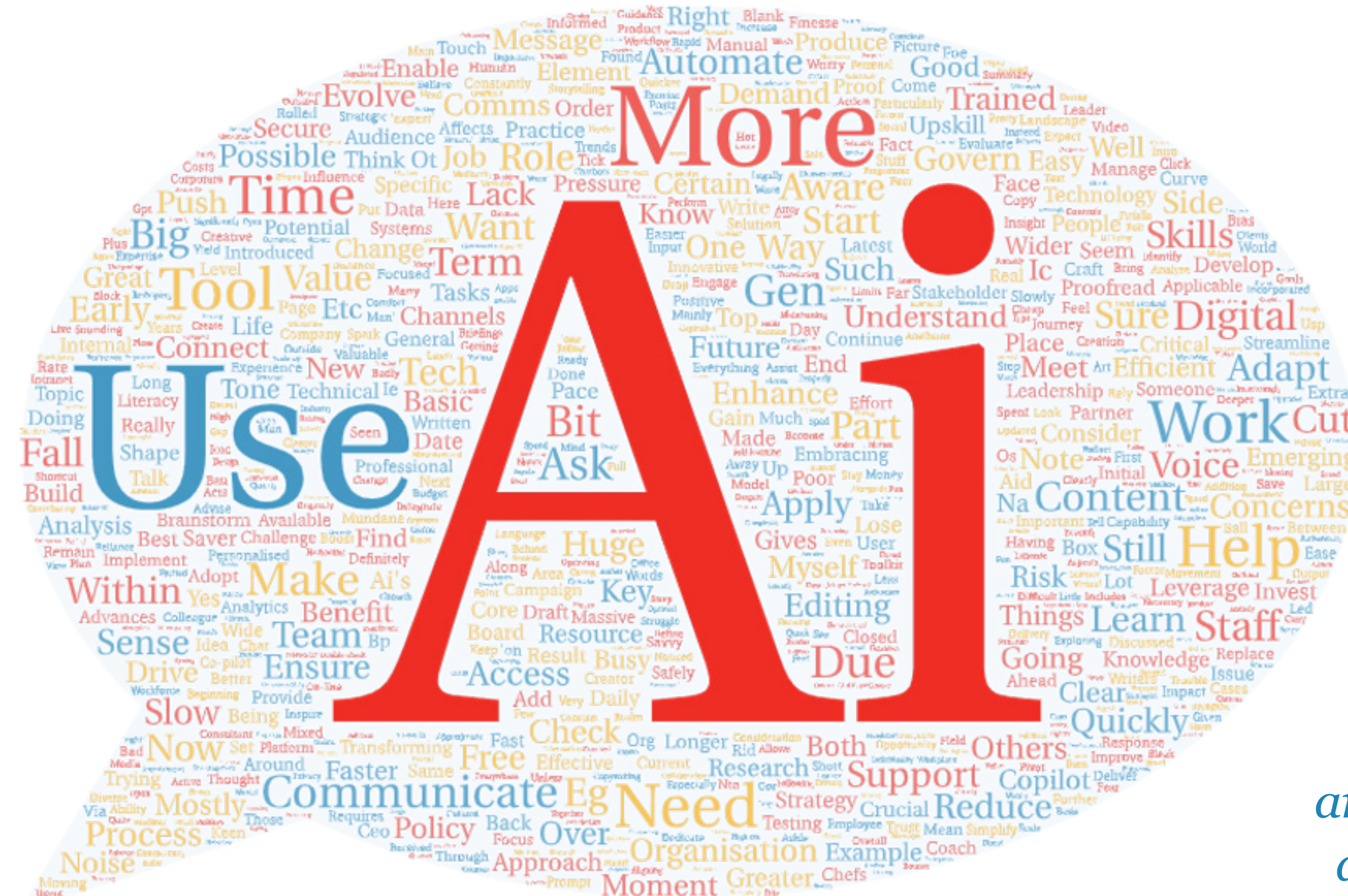
"Greater expectation that we will be able to do more, faster with less resources. Unless I understand the digital tools that will support me to do that, it's going to be harder to manage the expectations of my stakeholders."

"A positive change in reducing time on tasks from planning, analysis and writing, allowing for a focus on more strategic activity and supporting leadership."

Future-proofing the IC skillset

Our analysis highlights a clear and urgent focus on the skills required to future-proof internal communication professionals amid a rapidly changing workplace.

Only one in three believe they currently possess all the skills needed for their role. Just under two-thirds of respondents, however, recognise the need to upskill. This signals a significant gap between existing skill sets and the evolving demands of the profession.

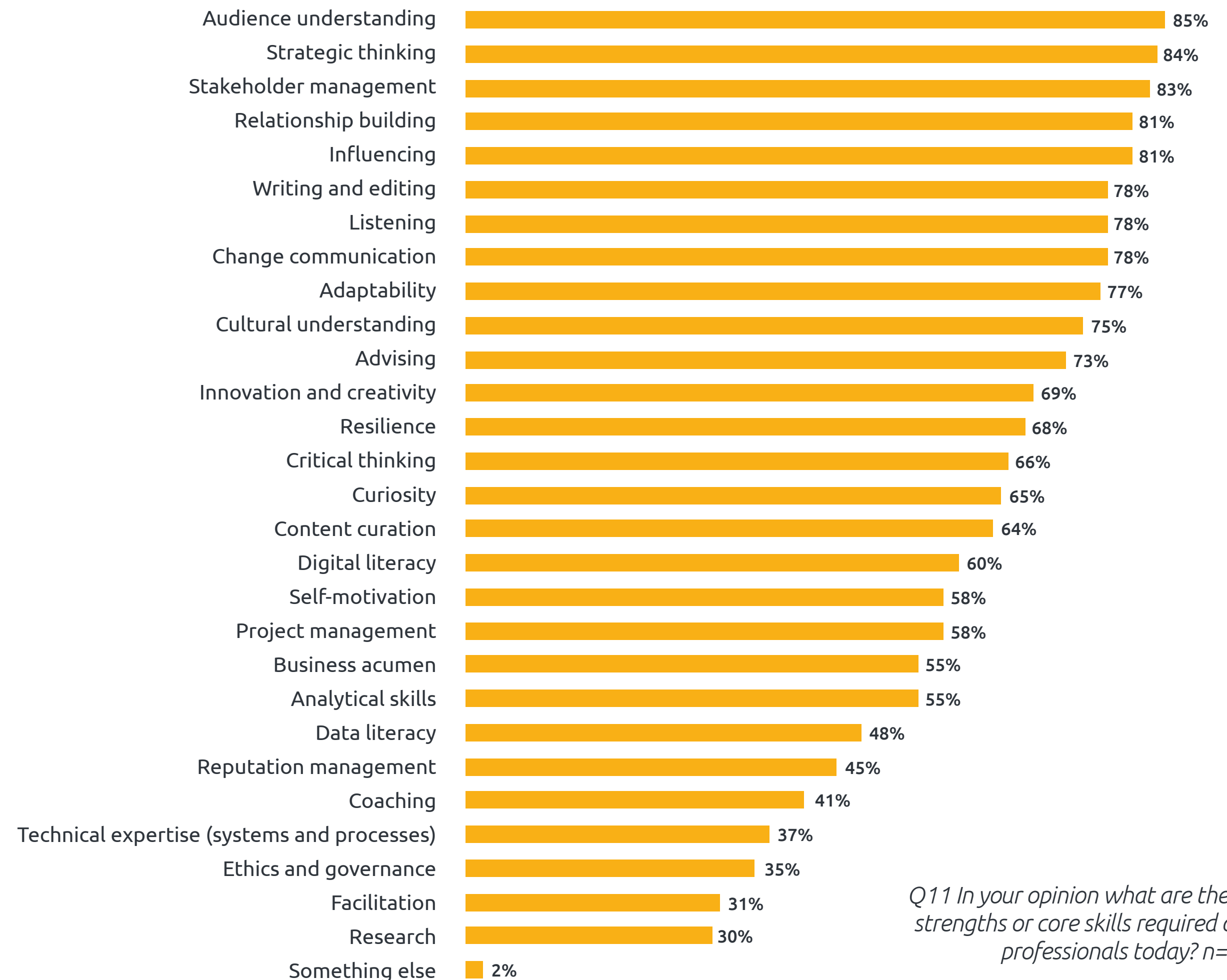## How IC professionals rate their skills for their current role

I have all the skills required	33%
I have most of the skills required	61%
I have some of the skills required	5%
I only have a few of the skills required	0%
I have very few of the skills required	0%
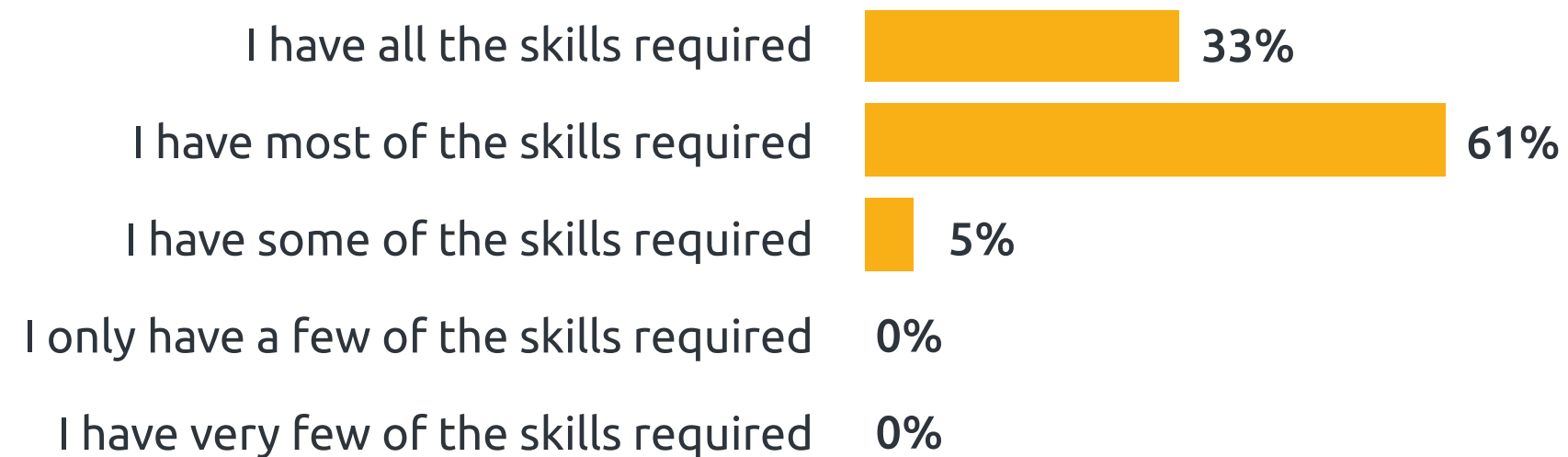
Q8 How would you rate your skills for your current role? n=303

Core skills for today

Respondents told us today's most critical capabilities include audience understanding, strategic thinking, stakeholder management, relationship building and influencing.

Key strengths or core skills required of IC professionals today

Audience understanding	85%
Strategic thinking	84%
Stakeholder management	83%
Relationship building	81%
Influencing	81%
Writing and editing	78%
Listening	78%
Change communication	78%
Adaptability	77%
Cultural understanding	75%
Advising	73%
Innovation and creativity	69%
Resilience	68%
Critical thinking	66%
Curiosity	65%
Content curation	64%
Digital literacy	60%
Self-motivation	58%
Project management	58%
Business acumen	55%
Analytical skills	55%
Data literacy	48%
Reputation management	45%
Coaching	41%
Technical expertise (systems and processes)	37%
Ethics and governance	35%
Facilitation	31%
Research	30%
Something else	2%

Q11 In your opinion what are the key strengths or core skills required of IC professionals today? n=303
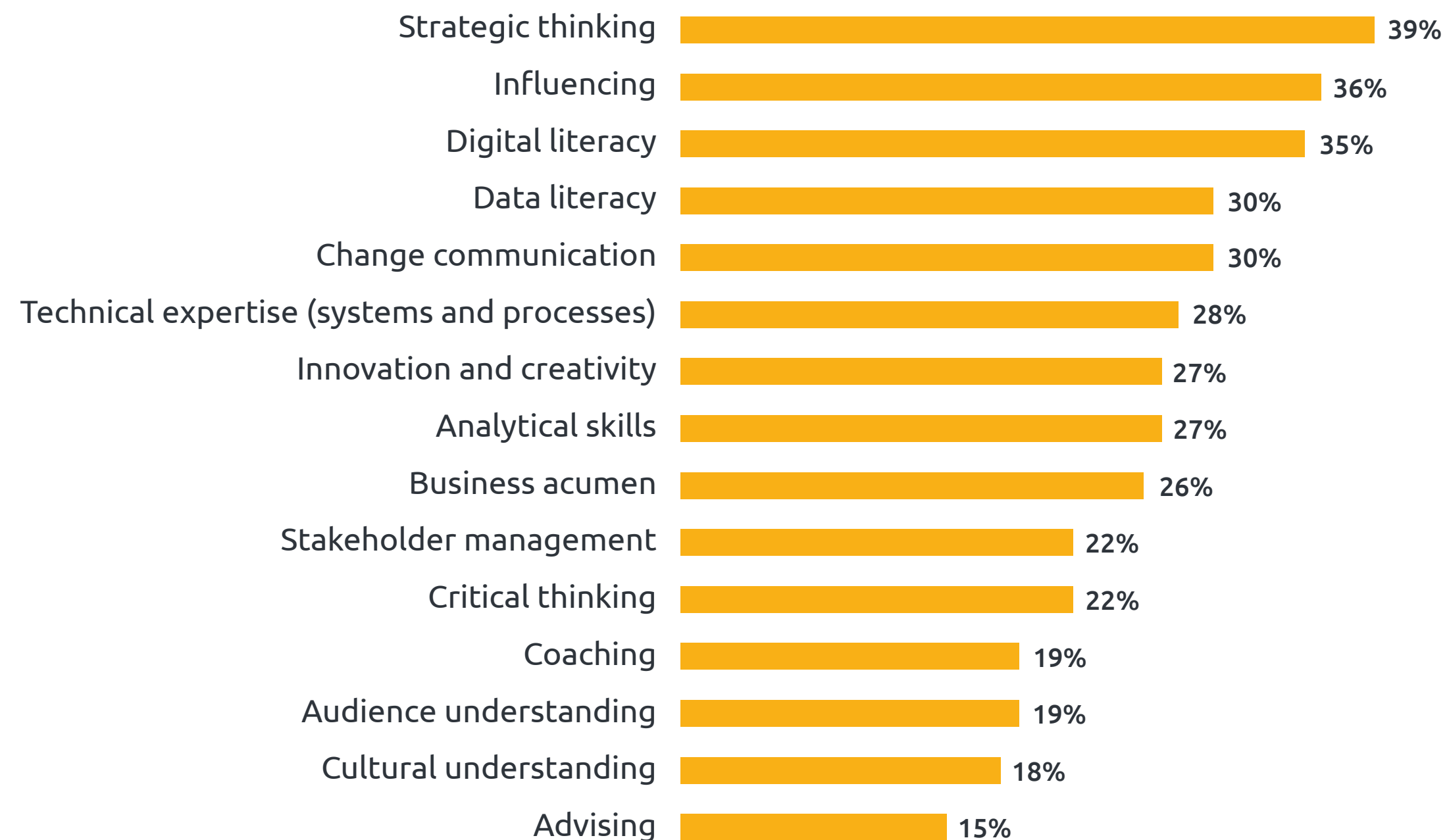
Future-proofing the IC skillset

Skills prioritised for the future

Looking ahead, IC professionals plan to develop key competencies, prioritising:

- **Strategic thinking**
- **Influencing**
- **Digital literacy**
- **Data literacy**
- **Change communication**

Respondents recognise the impact of AI on the profession and the urgent need to develop associated skills. They are shifting focus beyond tactical delivery towards more strategic, insight-driven and technology-enabled internal communication.

Skills most wanted to develop/update to keep pace with evolving IC role

Skill	%
Strategic thinking	39%
Influencing	36%
Digital literacy	35%
Data literacy	30%
Change communication	30%
Technical expertise (systems and processes)	28%
Innovation and creativity	27%
Analytical skills	27%
Business acumen	26%
Stakeholder management	22%
Critical thinking	22%
Coaching	19%
Audience understanding	19%
Cultural understanding	18%
Advising	15%

Skill	%
Relationship building	14%
Project management	14%
Ethics and governance	14%
Resilience	13%
Reputation management	13%
Facilitation	11%
Writing and editing	10%
Listening	9%
Content curation	9%
Adaptability	9%
Research	8%
Curiosity	5%
Self-motivation	4%
Something else	4%

Q14 And which of the following skills do you most want to develop to ensure you keep pace with the evolving IC role? n=303

Future-proofing the IC skillset

We asked: What skills do you most want to develop to ensure you keep pace with the evolving IC role?

"AI and the impact this will have, particularly with the pace at which it's developing."

"Change management (so we don't end up doing that on top of the day job!)."

"Data literacy and tools to support and digital skills, particularly around new tech that can support/ drive efficiencies."
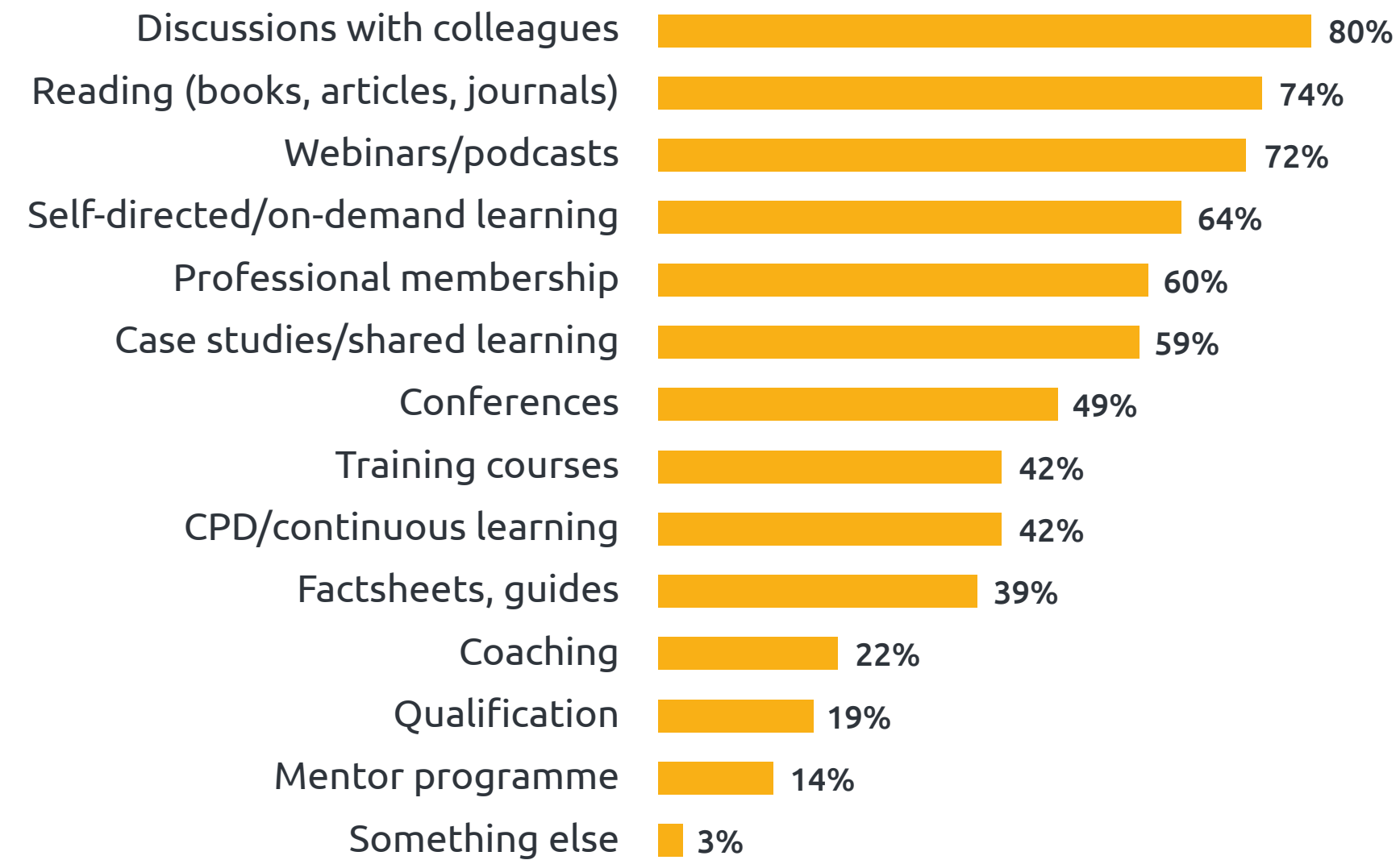
Future-proofing the IC skillset

How IC professionals are developing their skills

Respondents told us conversations with colleagues, reading industry material, attending webinars and listening to podcasts are the most popular ways they evolve their skills. Formal upskilling methods such as coaching, qualifications and mentorship programmes remain less widely adopted. From this insight, the IoIC recognises the opportunity to further professionalise and structure career development pathways.

Overall, the findings underscore the pressing need for internal communicators to continually adapt, upskill and proactively develop skills that align with the future demands of organisations and the workforces they serve.

Methods used for skill development

Method	%
Discussions with colleagues	80%
Reading (books, articles, journals)	74%
Webinars/podcasts	72%
Self-directed/on-demand learning	64%
Professional membership	60%
Case studies/shared learning	59%
Conferences	49%
Training courses	42%
CPD/continuous learning	42%
Factsheets, guides	39%
Coaching	22%
Qualification	19%
Mentor programme	14%
Something else	3%

Q13 Which of the following do you use to develop your skills? n=303

Career progression: barriers and enablers

Our research highlights a complex, sometimes challenging landscape for career progression within the profession.

The availability of suitable roles emerged as the biggest barrier to career advancement. Despite strong ambition, many feel constrained by a lack of visible pathways or senior opportunities within their organisations. Personal barriers also significantly inhibit career growth. Almost half of our respondents admitted they lack confidence and over one-third told us they struggle with work/life balance. Workplace culture also impacts career advancement.

Despite this, internal communicators are investing in themselves. They are prioritising:

- **Continuous learning** – with many embracing self-driven upskilling to adapt to evolving demands
- **Building a strong professional network** – recognising the power of connections, mentorship and peer learning
- **Career coaching** – seeking structured guidance to navigate progression pathways, boost confidence and plan for the future.

Barriers to career development

Availability of suitable roles	64%
Confidence/imposter syndrome	49%
Work/life balance	35%
Workplace culture	23%
Something else	13%
Discrimination/bias	13%
Unaware of where to find roles	12%
Lack of training and development	11%
Resistant to change	6%
Lack of specific skill	6%
Lack of experience	6%
None	5%
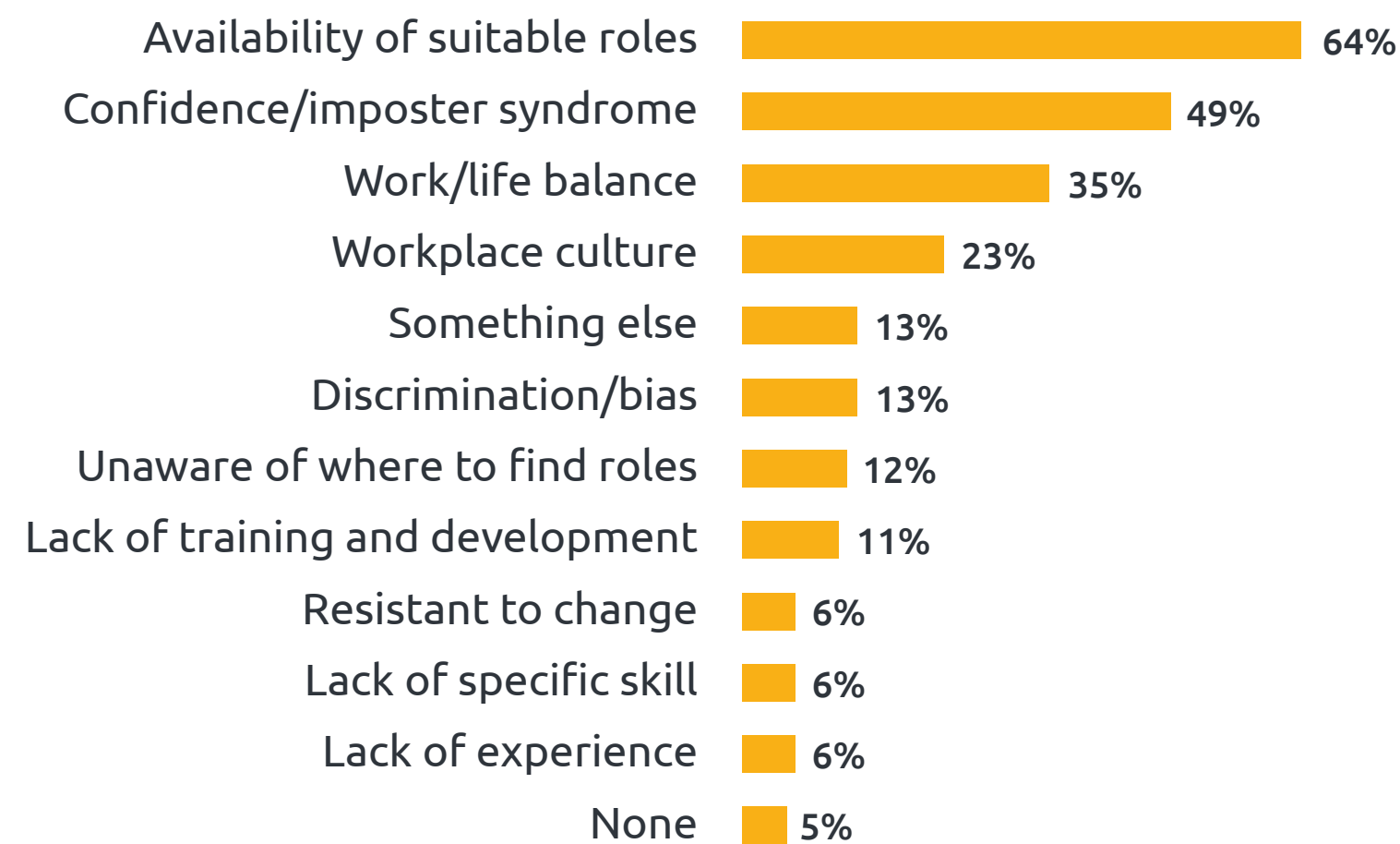
Q24 What barriers to progression exist for you, if any? n=303

Beneficial resources/support for career progression

Networking opportunities	52%
Career coaching	50%
Professional development courses	50%
Mentorship programmes	40%
Online learning	34%
Job shadowing/cross training	32%
Professional association	29%
Feedback and performance reviews	21%
Internal training programmes	20%
Employee resource groups	16%
Something else	4%
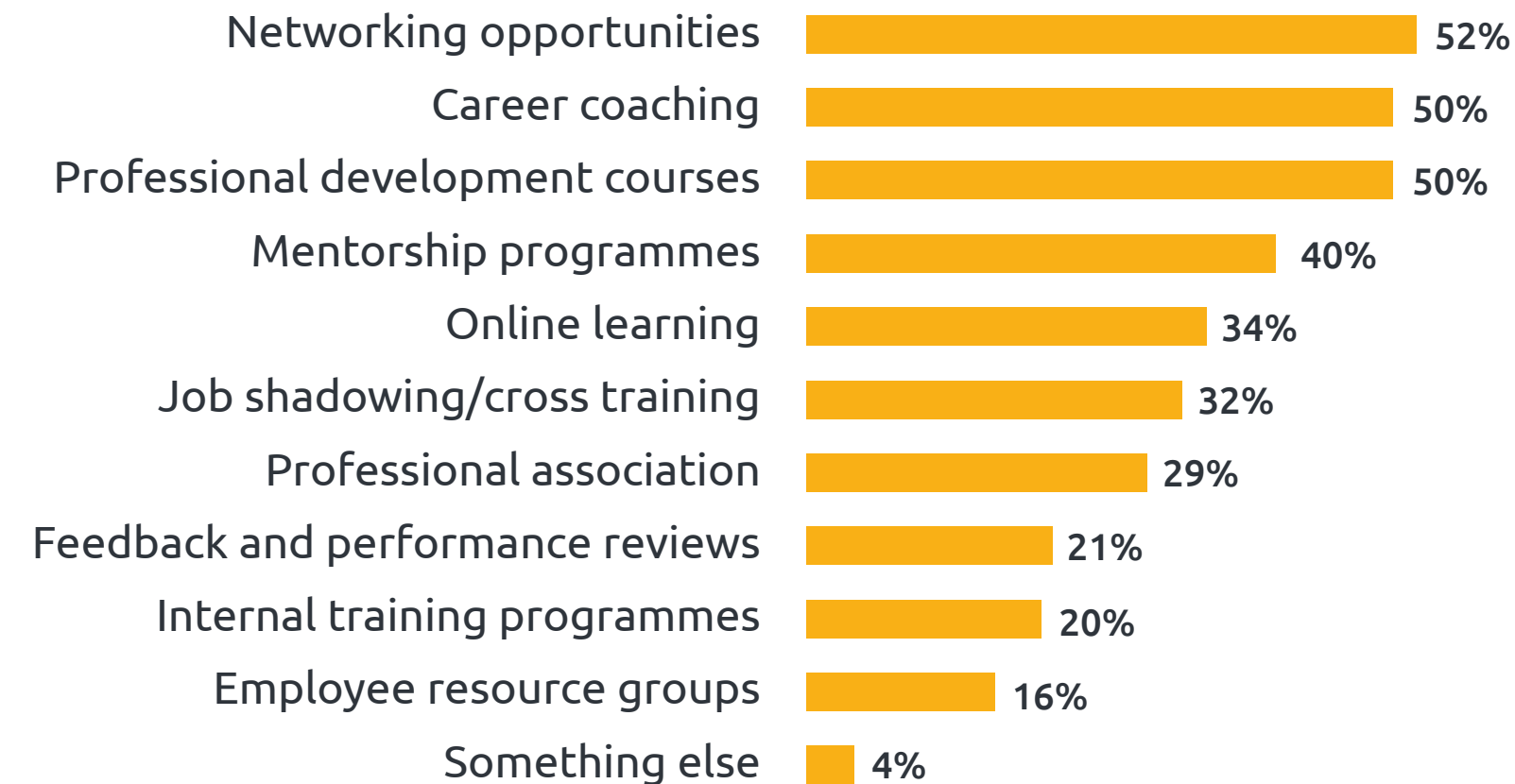
Q25 What resources or support would you find most beneficial to support you with your career progression? n=303

"The availability of suitable roles emerged as the biggest barrier to career advancement."

Career progression: barriers and enablers

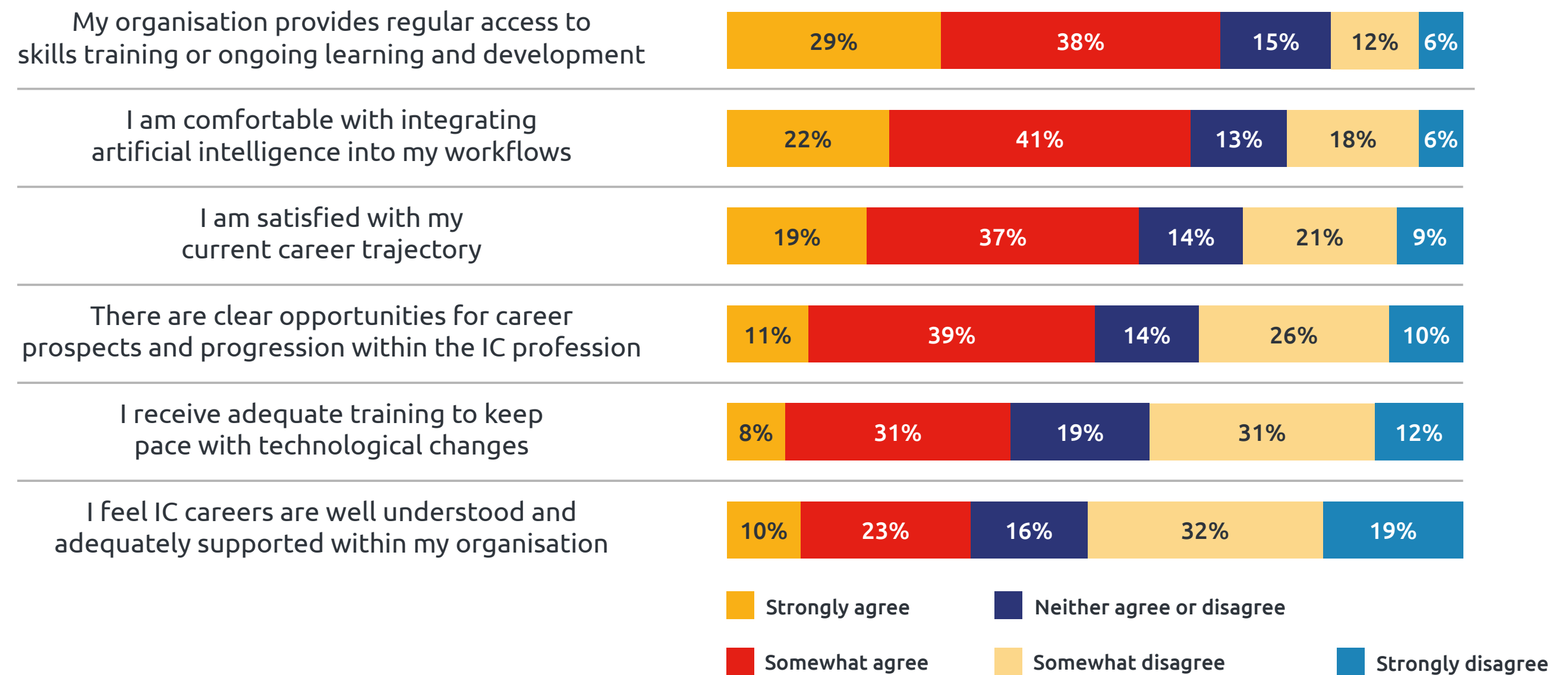The survey also highlighted key gaps in training and development:

2/3

Two in three respondents have regular access to skills training or ongoing learning.

39%

Only around four in ten IC professionals feel they receive adequate training to keep pace with rapid technological change.

It's clear workplace learning, development and training are not in step with the skills future-focused internal communicators recognise they need to do their best work.

Feelings about training access and career progression

Statement	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
My organisation provides regular access to skills training or ongoing learning and development	29%	38%	15%	12%	6%
I am comfortable with integrating artificial intelligence into my workflows	22%	41%	13%	18%	6%
I am satisfied with my current career trajectory	19%	37%	14%	21%	9%
There are clear opportunities for career prospects and progression within the IC profession	11%	39%	14%	26%	10%
I receive adequate training to keep pace with technological changes	8%	31%	19%	31%	12%
I feel IC careers are well understood and adequately supported within my organisation	10%	23%	16%	32%	19%

Legend:
- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q21 Agreement with statements n=303. (In order of % "agreement")

Career progression: barriers and enablers

Looking ahead, career aspirations within the profession vary:

- **Two in five** are seeking to **advance in their current internal communication role**, aiming to move upwards within the profession.

- **One in three** plan to **develop a deep specialism in an area of internal communication** – suggesting growing interest in niche expertise.

- A sizeable number are considering **exploring opportunities in different industries** or even **transitioning out of internal communication into other functions**.

- Notably, **one quarter are unsure** how their career will progress over the next five years, highlighting a degree of uncertainty and a need for greater career clarity within the profession.

Career progression in the next 5 years

Category	%
Advancing within my current IC role (e.g., seeking promotion)	41%
Developing a deep specialism in IC (e.g., change communication, employee experience, insights, business partnering)	36%
Exploring opportunities in a different industry	27%
Moving into a consulting or advisory position	25%
Uncertain at this time	24%
Becoming an independent contractor or freelancer	17%
Transitioning out of IC into another function (e.g., external comms, marketing, HR, operations)	16%
Something else	7%

Q22 Where do you see your IC career progressing in the next 5 years? n=303

The IoIC Profession Map

Designed to support structured career and skills development, the IoIC Profession Map is widely recognised. One in seven (71%) respondents told us they are aware of it. However, active usage is moderate: around one-third are currently using the Map, and approximately half intend to use it in the future. This shows there is more to do to embed structured development planning tools into everyday professional practice.

At a time when organisations urgently need skilled, strategic communicators to help navigate disruption, ensuring internal communicators have clear development pathways, targeted support and opportunity for advancement is crucial.

Usage of the IoIC Profession Map

13% Will not use

33% Already using

54% Plan to use
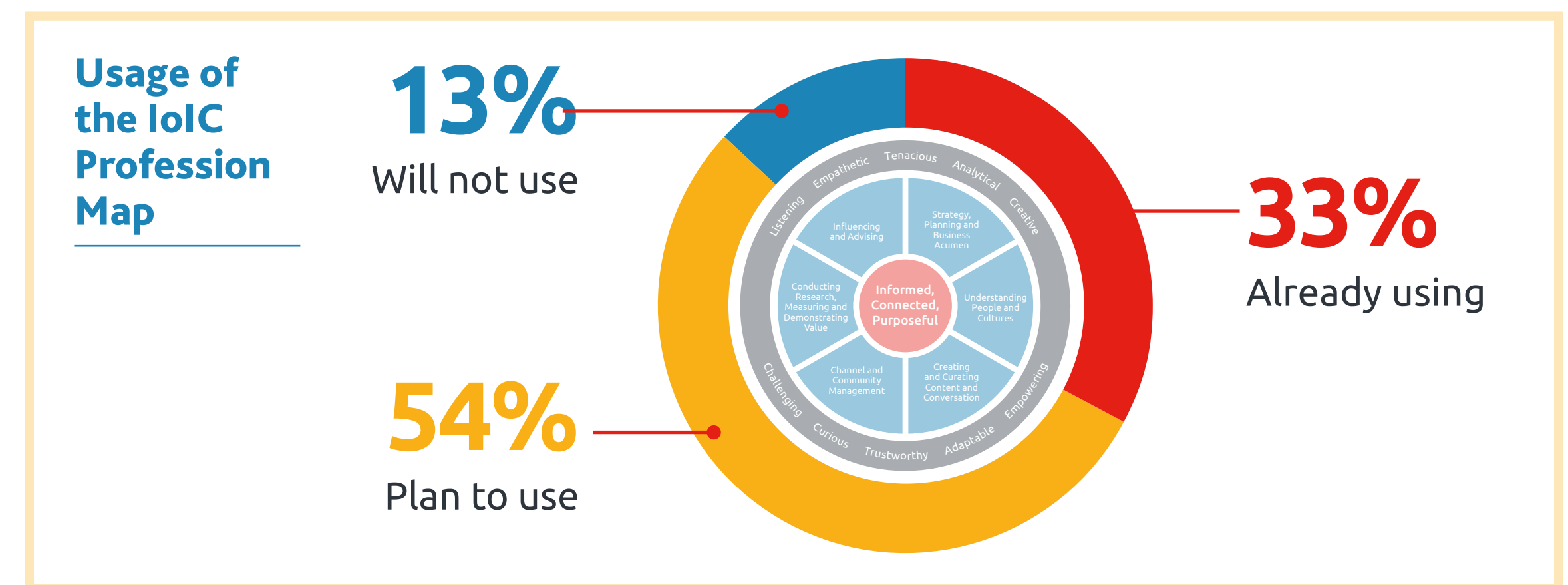
Q26 Before today were you aware of the IoIC Profession Map? n=303. Q27 Which of the following best applies to you in relation to the IoIC Profession Map? n=303
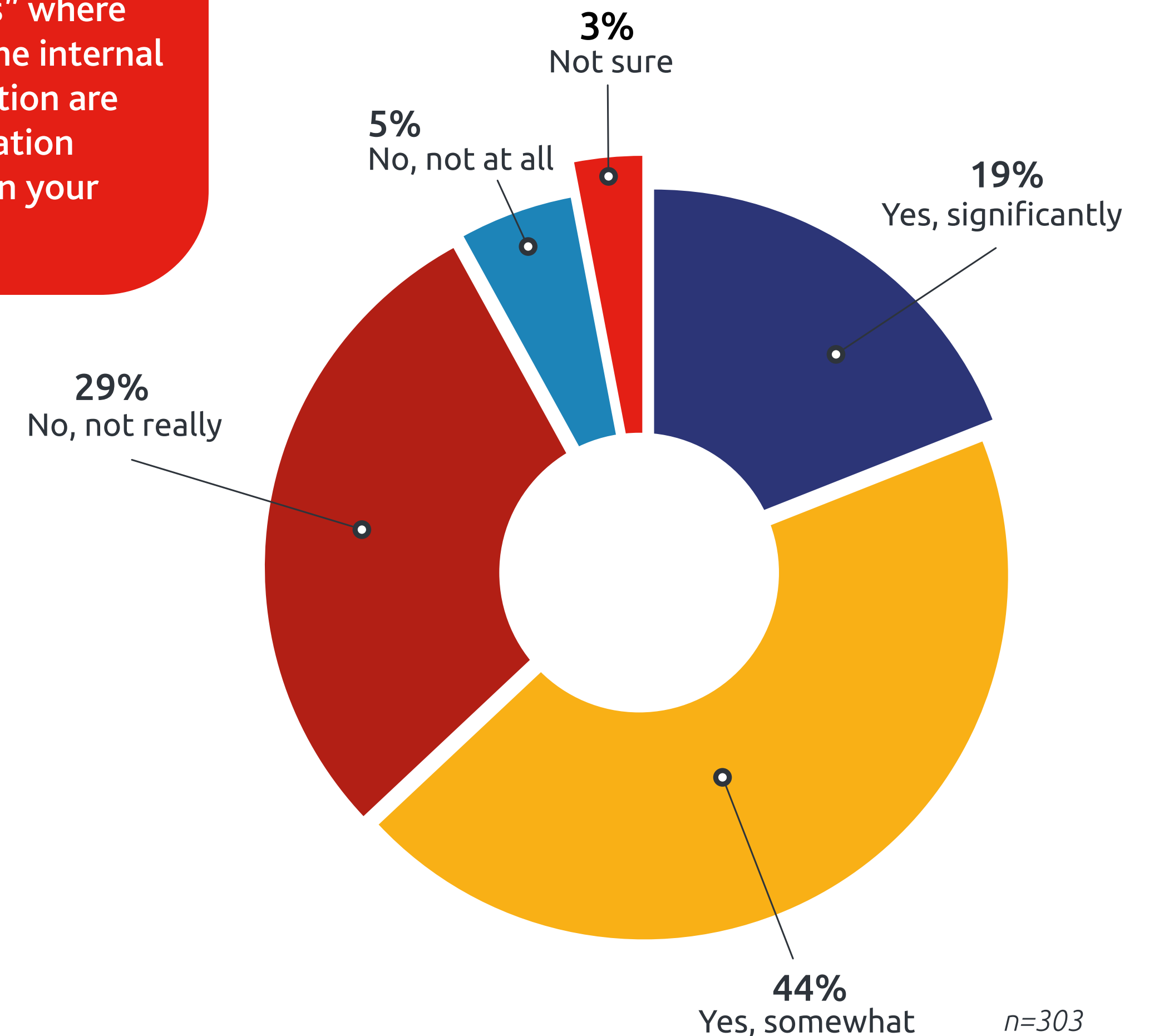
Rise of "shadow communication roles"

A key revelation of this research is that 'shadow communication roles' are on the rise across organisations. Almost two-thirds (63%) of respondents report an increase in communication activities being picked up outside of formal internal communication functions. HR and operations are particularly active in this area.

While this reflects positive intent – recognising communication as integral to colleague experience and direct engagement with audiences – it also poses a risk. Without coordination and oversight, shadow communication leads to message inconsistency, misuse of channels and an undermining of carefully developed communication strategies.

It can also contribute to a noisier communication environment, where colleagues become overwhelmed by fragmented messages that lack cohesion, strategic alignment or a clear organisational voice. It can duplicate effort and confuse colleagues about where to find credible information.

We asked: Are you noticing an increase in "shadow communication roles" where employees outside the internal communication function are taking on communication responsibilities within your organisation?

3%
Not sure

5%
No, not at all

19%
Yes, significantly

29%
No, not really

44%
Yes, somewhat

n=303

Rise of "shadow communication roles"

At best, joint ownership of communication across functions enhances relevance and responsiveness. But without a strong centralised communication framework, organisations risk eroding trust, blurring accountability and weakening the impact of their internal communication efforts.

This highlights the need for internal communicators to:

- Build stronger partnerships with other business functions.

- Develop training, support, and toolkits for colleagues operating outside internal communication.

- Reinforce governance models that maintain consistency, clarity and credibility in internal messaging.

In complex communication ecosystems, internal communication professionals are in a prime position to coach, strategically enable and conserve organisational voice and tone.

Departments/roles frequently taking on communication responsibilities

Department/role	Percentage
HR	53%
Operations	43%
IT	35%
Leadership	27%
Team managers	25%
Marketing	20%
Something else	19%
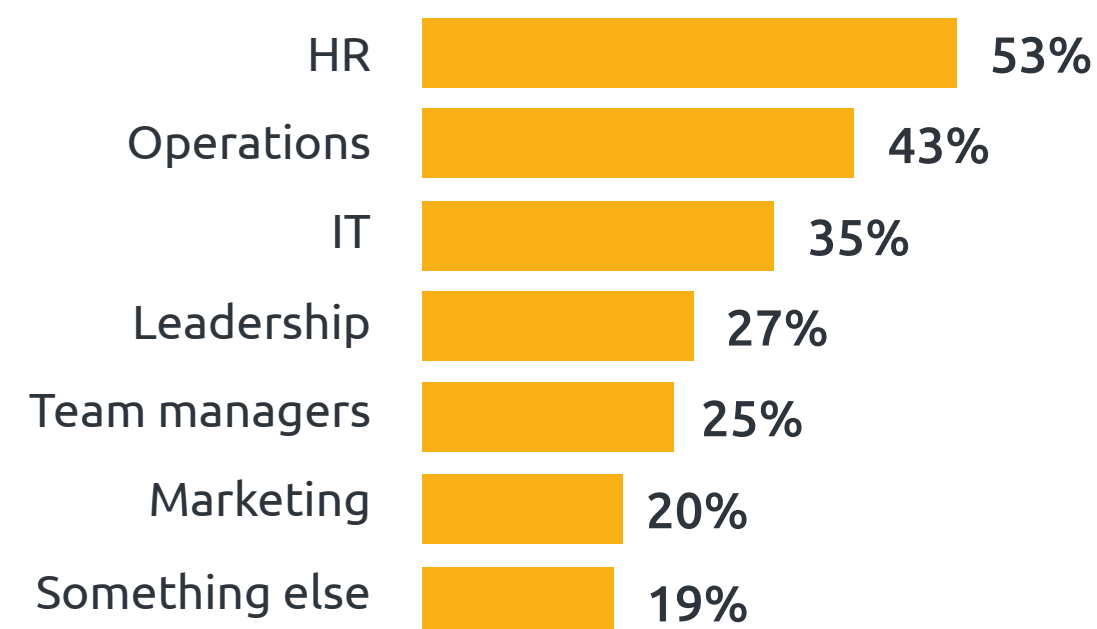
Q19 Which departments or roles are most frequently taking on communication responsibilities? n=189

We asked: How are shadow communication roles affecting internal communication in your organisation?

"Benefits are more people, who are closer to the target audience, are creating and supporting comms. The challenge is lack of skills, oversight and inconsistency."

"Adds to the noise, and bypassing me often impacts on my planner, causing delays to my comms schedule, as well as style/tone of voice sometimes being ignored. Also misuse of channels."

"We often proactively reach out where we see shadow activity taking place and are working to build better relationships, but this needs to work both ways and I think we also see this shine through in reluctance to communicate as leaders."
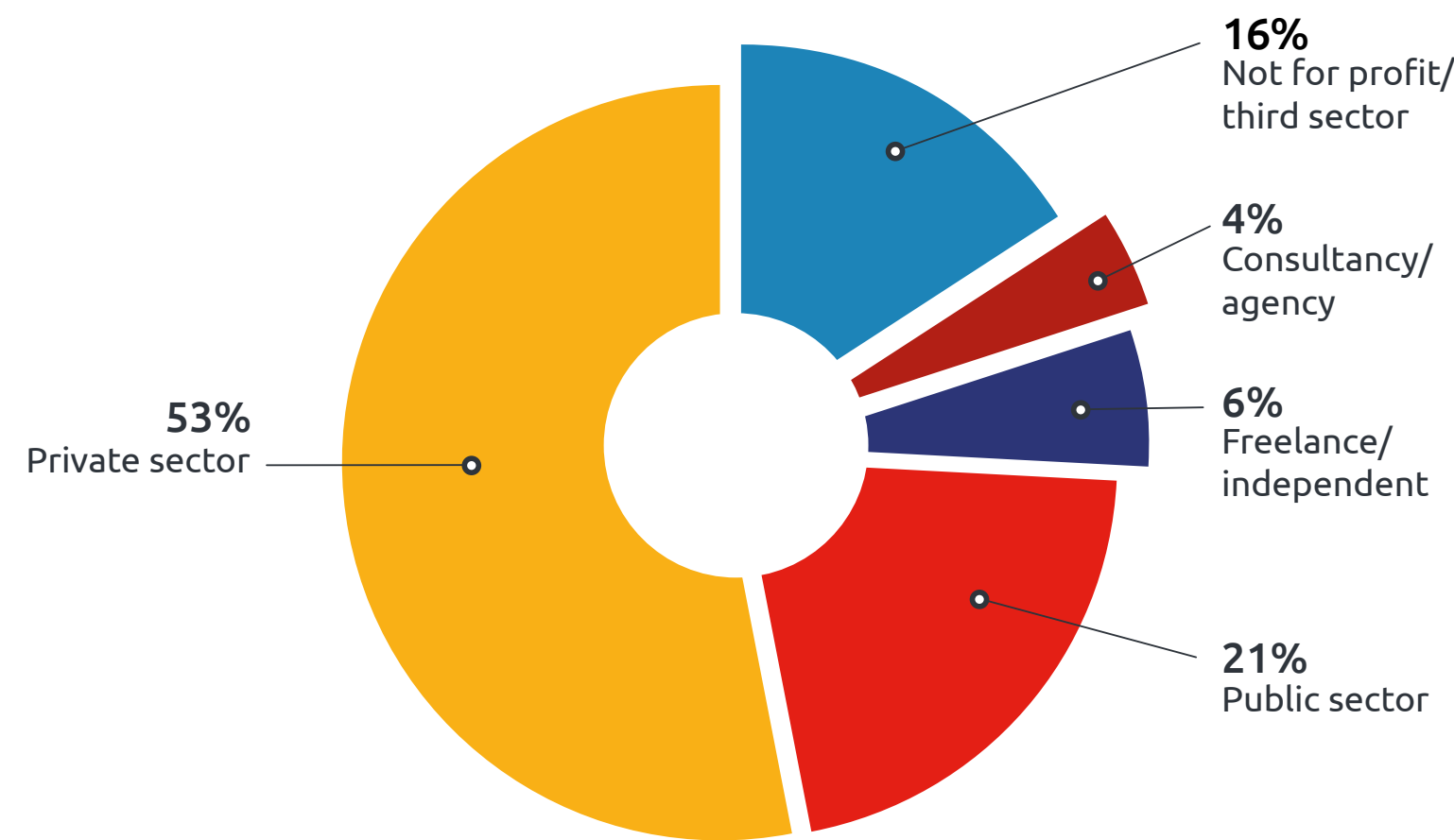
Methodology and respondents

An online questionnaire was distributed during March 2025 to gather data for this report. A total of 303 responses were received. The survey aimed to collect insights across a diverse range of participants, and respondent profiles which were as follows.
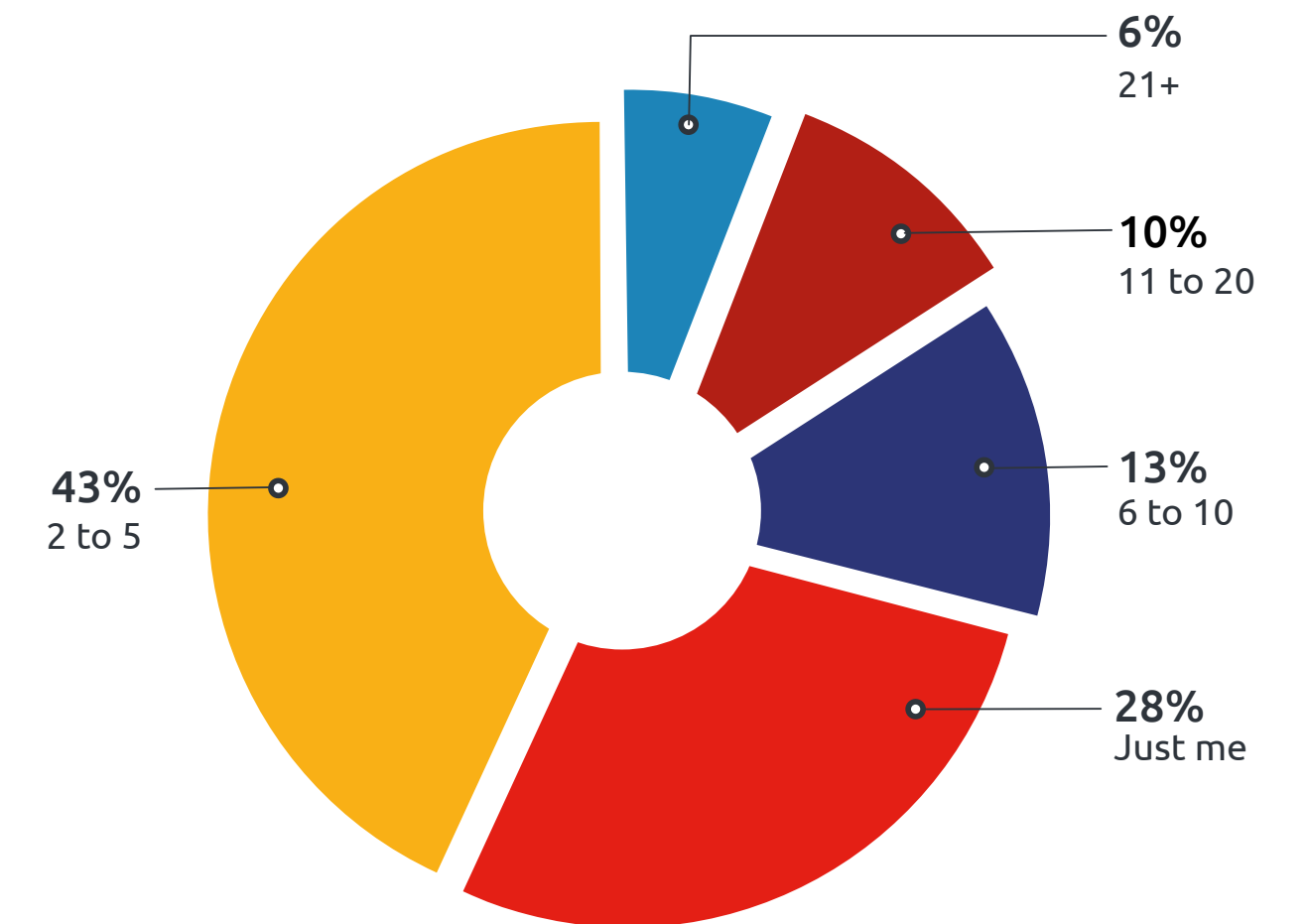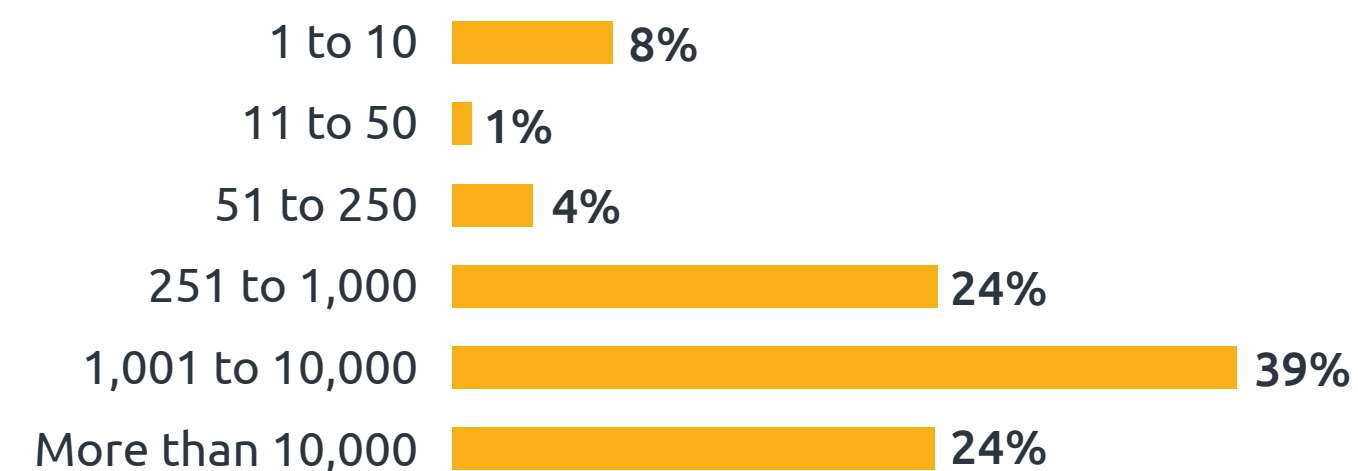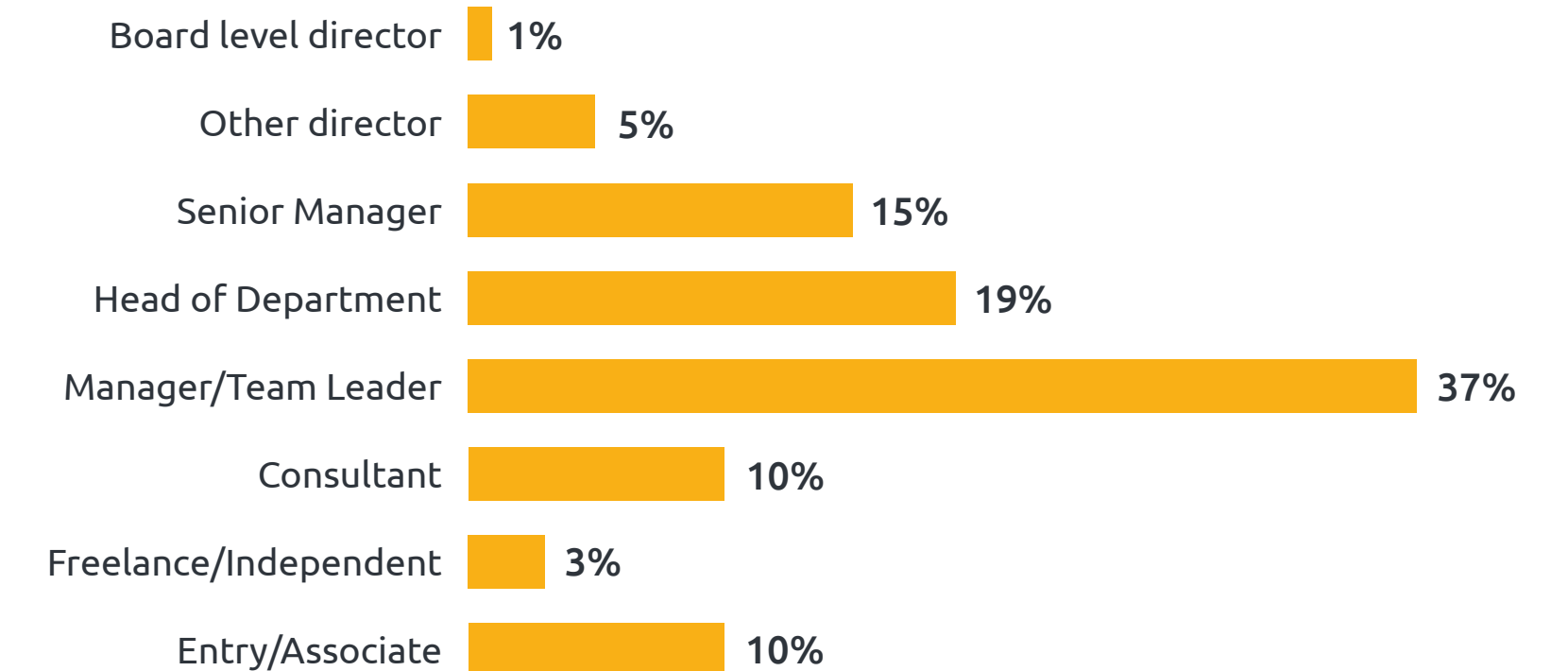
Sector

Sector	%
Banking/insurance/finance	19%
Government/public administration	11%
Technology/telecoms	9%
Other business services	9%
Energy/agriculture/mining	7%
Manufacturing	6%
Education	6%
Healthcare/medicine	5%
Transport/distribution	4%
Legal	4%
Wholesale/retail	3%
Travel/tourism	3%
Construction	3%
Media/entertainment	1%
Something else	11%

Type of organisation

- 16% Not for profit/third sector
- 4% Consultancy/agency
- 6% Freelance/independent
- 21% Public sector
- 53% Private sector

Company size

Company size	%
1 to 10	8%
11 to 50	1%
51 to 250	4%
251 to 1,000	24%
1,001 to 10,000	39%
More than 10,000	24%

IC team size

- 6% 21+
- 10% 11 to 20
- 13% 6 to 10
- 28% Just me
- 43% 2 to 5

Current role

Current role	%
Board level director	1%
Other director	5%
Senior Manager	15%
Head of Department	19%
Manager/Team Leader	37%
Consultant	10%
Freelance/Independent	3%
Entry/Associate	10%

Methodology and respondents

Region

UK	81%
Other Europe	9%
North America	4%
Australasia	2%
Asia Pacific	2%
Canada	1%
EMENA	1%
Latin America	0%

UK breakdown

- 9% Scotland
- 16% North
- 13% Midlands
- 7% East Anglia
- 27% London
- 15% South East
- 6% Wales
- 8% South West
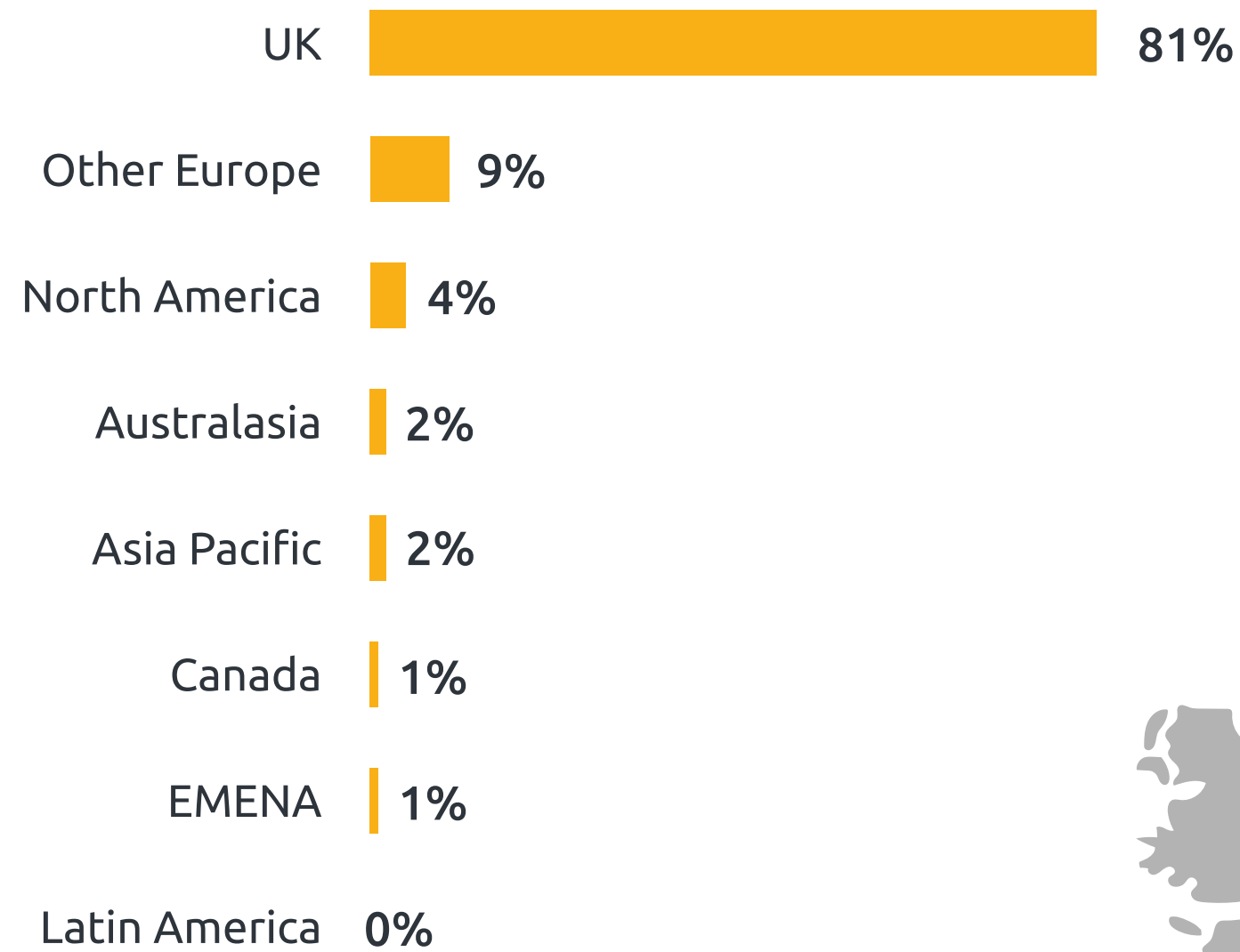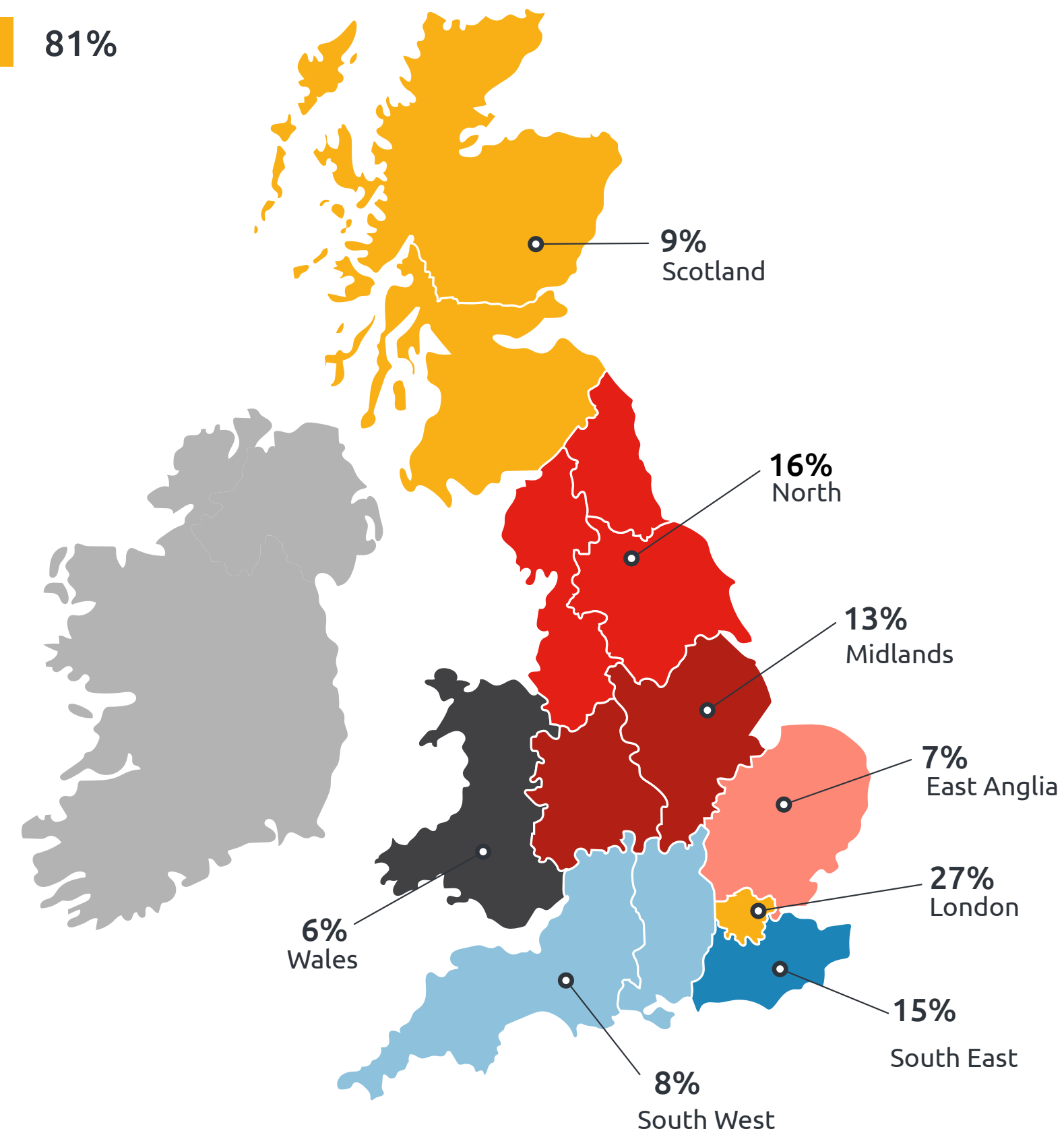
Physical or mental illnesses

No	71%
Yes, but no effect on day to day	11%
Yes, slightly reducing day to day activities	10%
Yes, heavily reducing day to day activities	0%
Prefer not to say	8%

Ethnic groups

- 84% White
- 3% Asian/Asian British
- 3% Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups
- 3% Other ethnic group
- 2% Black/African/Carribean/Black British
- 5% Prefer not to say
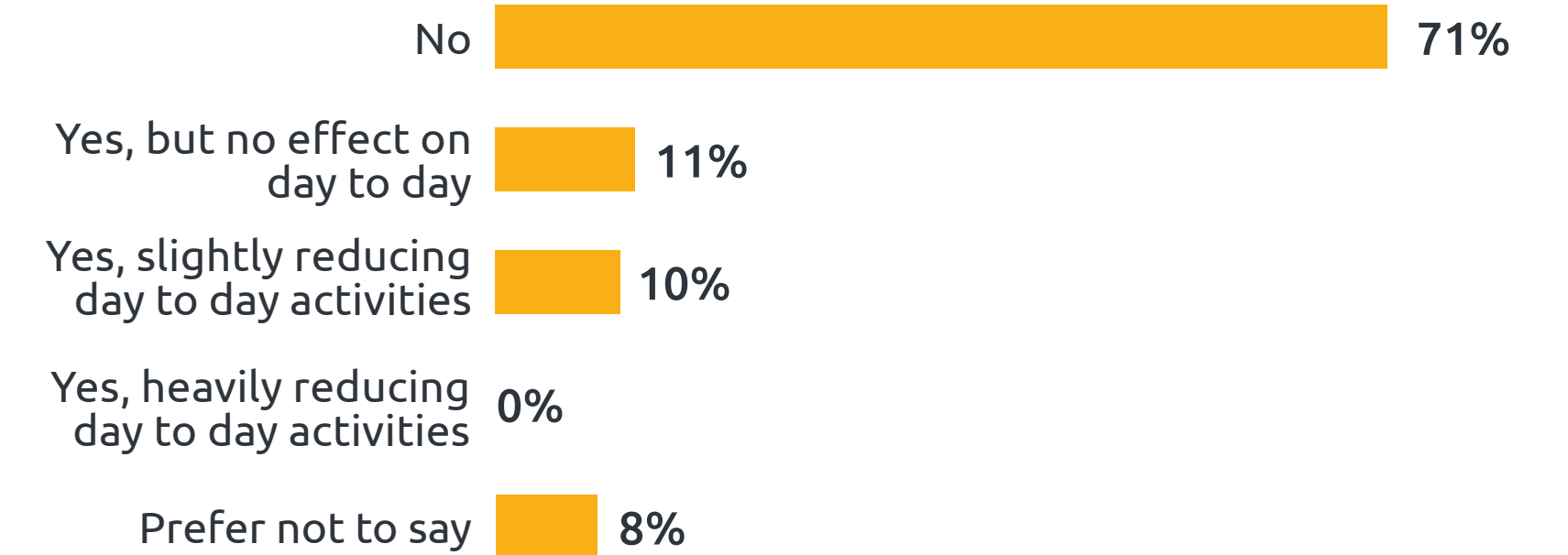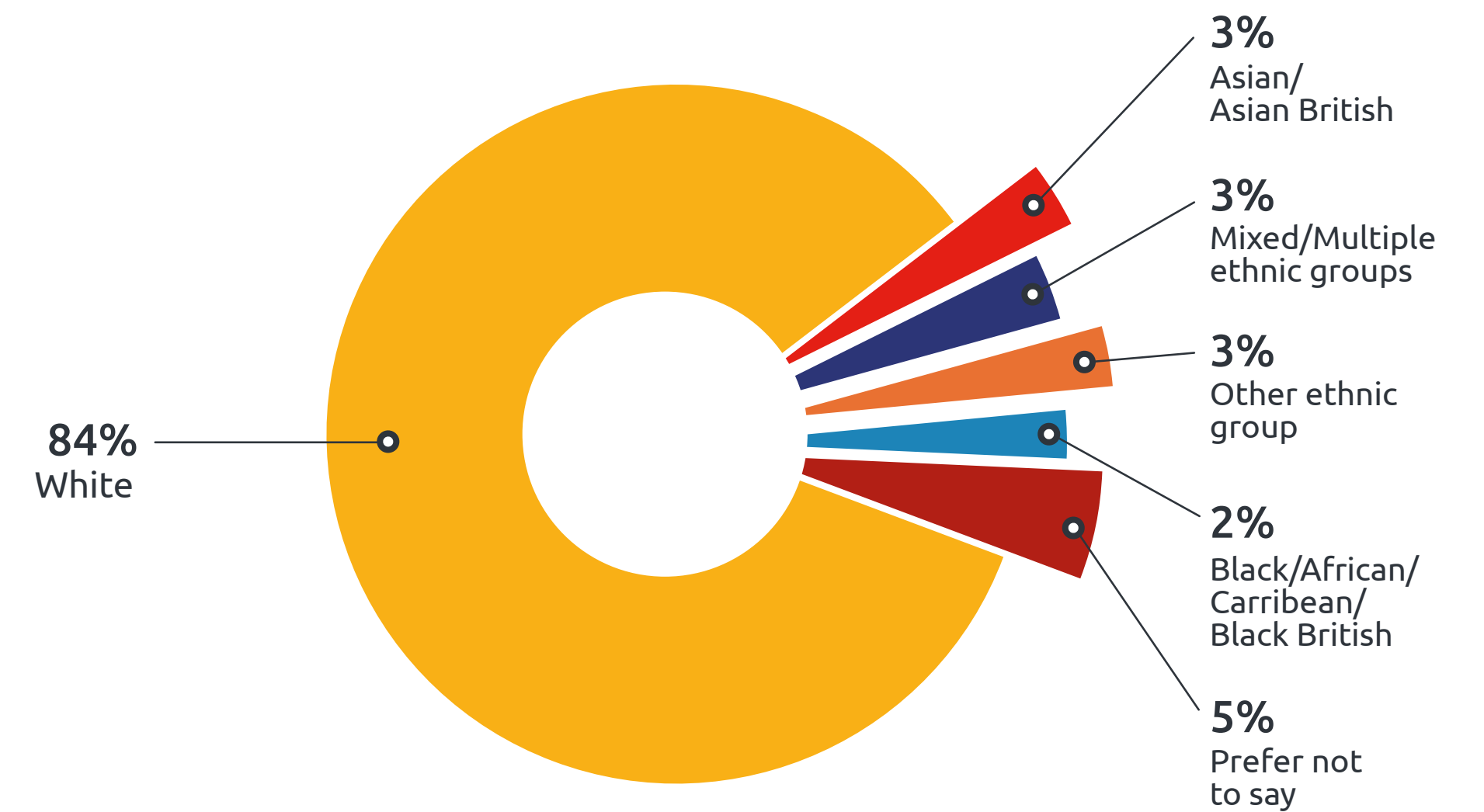
Conclusions

Our goal was to learn how internal communicators feel about the current state and future direction of their profession. Our analysis confirms the significant transformation currently taking place within the field of internal communication.

As organisations navigate extensive uncertainty, the scope of the profession is expanding beyond conventional activities. It's clear internal communication is fast becoming a critical driver of organisational performance.

However, this evolution is not without its challenges. Tactical demands must increasingly be balanced with strategic input.

In summary, we find:
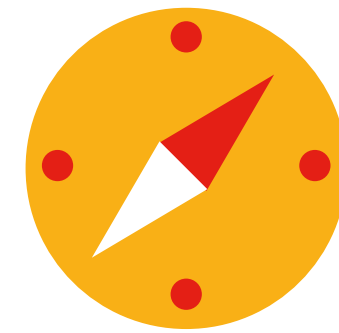
A strategic shift: Internal communicators are increasingly taking on more complex, strategic responsibilities, most notably in the areas of change communication, digital transformation and advising senior leaders. But the limited resource and support available to assist this shift leaves many feeling stretched and undervalued.

A skills gap: Despite demand for more strategic input, many professionals feel ill-equipped to meet the demands of their evolving roles. AI and digital proficiency and data literacy are identified as key areas for development.
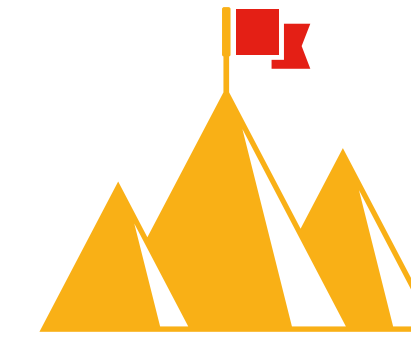
Limited career progression: A lack of clear career pathways and developmental opportunity concerns many, with almost 40% expressing uncertainty about their future growth trajectory.
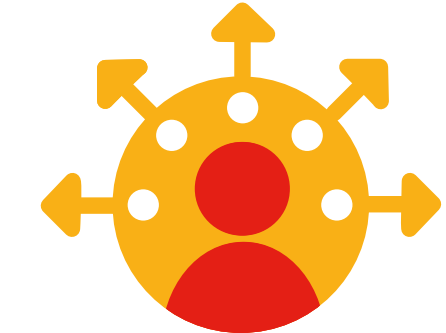
Rise of shadow communication: The increase in communication activity outside of internal communication is diluting the consistency and impact of IC's strategic voice. While to some extent, shadow communication accelerates agility, this fragmentation nonetheless needs to be addressed.

Recommendations

1

Invest in skills development:
Organisations should prioritise the development of internal communicators' skills in fields including AI, digital literacy and data analysis. Structured training and learning opportunities will ensure that internal communication is well-equipped to meet the growing demands of their roles. The IoIC will continue to invest in providing learning opportunities that meet these needs.

2

Clarify career progression:
Clearer career pathways and mentorship opportunities are essential to retain talent within the profession. These will help internal communicators better navigate their career development. The IoIC will invest in a review of its Profession Map.

3

Strengthen IC's strategic role:
Given the crucial role of internal communication in helping organisations achieve their strategic goals and deliver lasting change, investments must be made. Internal communicators must build advocacy for their craft, hone relationships with their most senior leaders and create strategic alignment throughout their organisations. The IoIC will continue to advocate for the strategic importance of internal communication.

4

Address the rise of shadow roles: While shadow comms holds some value, organisations must maintain consistency in messaging and communication strategies. This can be achieved through enhanced relationships between functions and the development of clear guidelines for communication across the organisation. The IoIC will share resources to assist in this area.

The role of internal communication is changing. We must embrace the upskilling opportunity and leverage our opportunity to deliver strategic value. Together, we will shape the future of the profession by driving transformation from within.

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