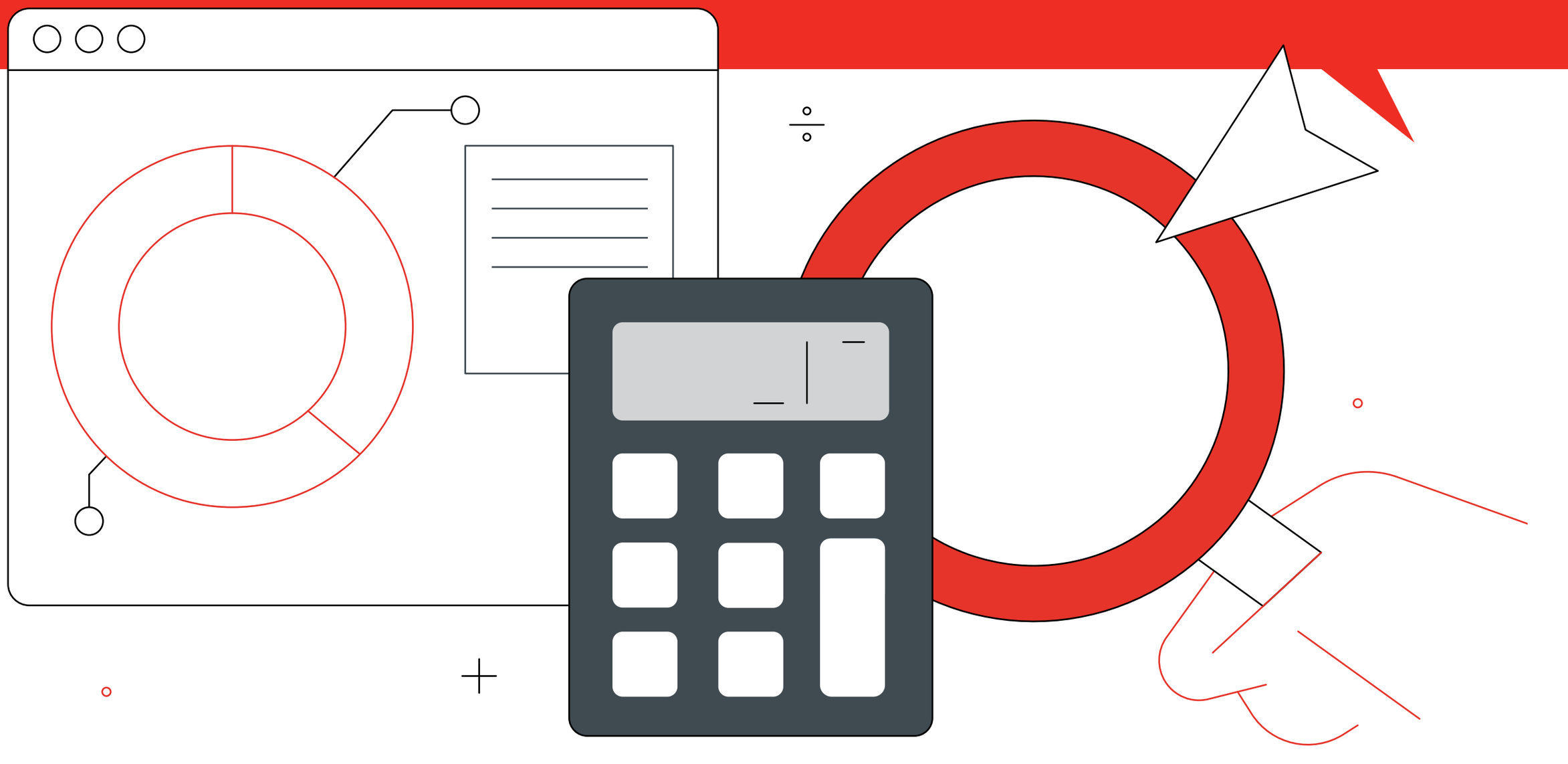
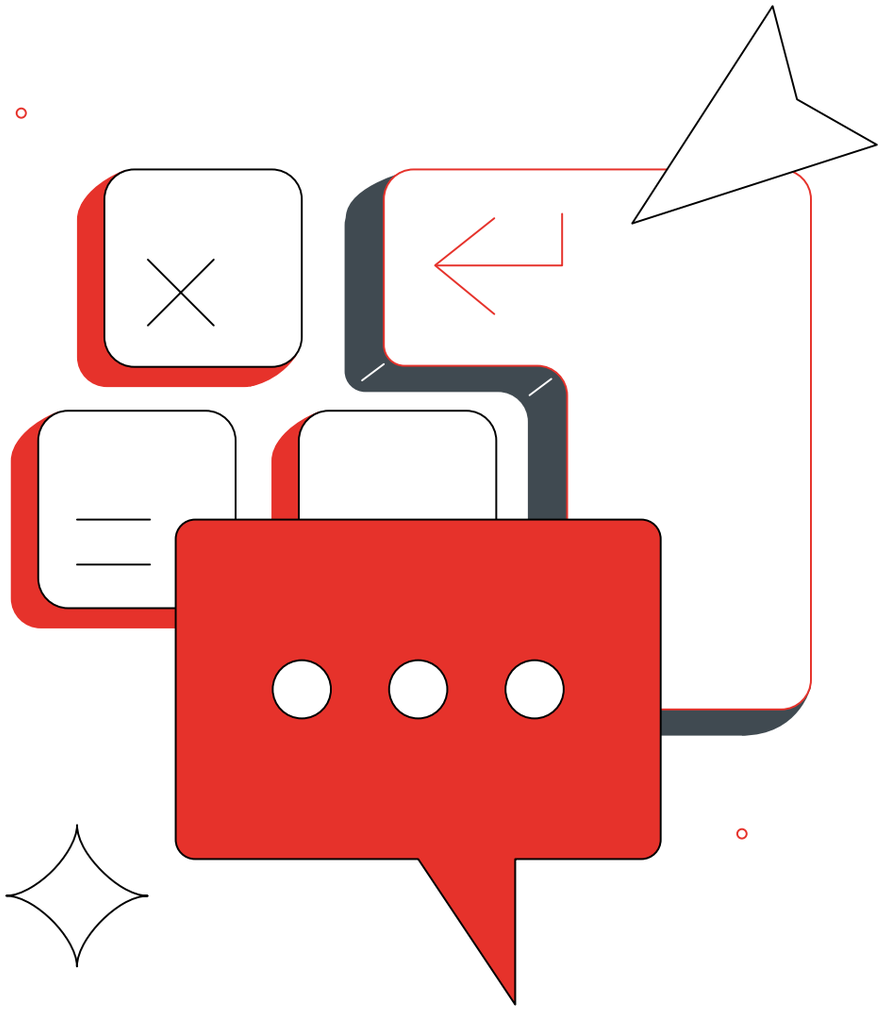
Institute *of* Internal Communication

DATA FOR INTERNAL COMMUNICATION PROFESSIONALS

2025



Data for internal communication professionals



Data is the lifeblood of the modern workplace, and working with data has become an essential skill for internal communication professionals.

We don’t need vast databases or sophisticated technology for data to be a useful part of our decision-making processes. The simplest way to think about data is that it is evidence that we can use to inform the choices we make, implement continuous improvement, and demonstrate the impact of communication on organisational objectives.

The increasing digitisation of the workplace has created more ways to capture data from software and devices, as well as new channels for gathering feedback from employees. For organisations in every sector this has become a vital resource that can be used to generate real value.

According to Gallagher’s Employee Communications Report 2025,

81%

of internal communication professionals are using data to demonstrate the impact of communications, inform decisions about future tactics and understand the effectiveness of communications.

What is useful business data?

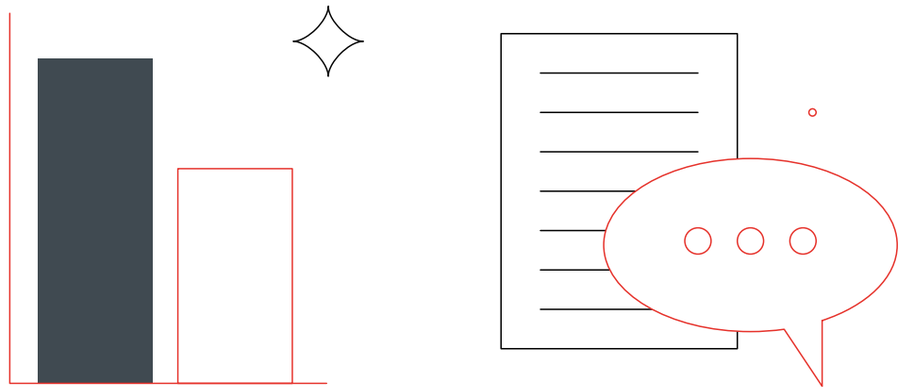
Before we carry out any kind of analysis we need to decide what we want to measure, and why. Although there may many things that we could track in our organisation, the most meaningful insights will come from metrics that are aligned with our objectives. This is often described as moving from measuring outputs to measuring outcomes.

For example, our objective may be to increase employee engagement. The open rate on an all-employee email is an output that we could easily measure, and it might give us some basic insight (e.g. if the open rate is extremely low). However, raising the open rate doesn't necessarily increase engagement. How do we know if people are actually reading it? Or that the content resonates with them and that they understand the key messages?

So instead we may want to focus on outcomes, such as survey feedback from employees on the email content, clicks on links to sign-up to events, or adoption of tools driven directly from the email.

Outcomes are focused much more on behaviour. What exactly are we trying to get people to think, do or feel? For example, an output might be to send 5 email newsletters. An outcome would be to increase employee understanding of strategic goals by 30%.

There are broadly two types of data collection:



Quantitative
This focuses on things that are measurable and quantifiable, so usually takes the form of numbers. This could be things like analytics to measure time spent engaging with content, adoption rates for new tools, or employee net promoter scores (eNPS) and other survey result metrics.

Qualitative
This focuses on non-numerical data which could be in the form of interviews or unstructured text. An example might be comments that have been left by employees on an intranet or social networks, transcripts from focus groups or meetings, and responses to open-ended survey.

Both of these types are important. Quantitative data often tells you 'what' has happened and is easier to present in charts and graphs. Qualitative data may tell you 'why' or 'how' things have happened and can give you a more nuanced picture.

Where do we get data from?

As more business processes have become digital, organisations are capturing data all the time. We can also decide to specifically measure a new initiative or process to see how it is working. And we can source data from outside of the organisation if we need external comparisons.

Here are a few common sources of data that can be useful for internal communication:

Analytics
Lots of different types of software enable user behaviour to be measured. For example you may be able to measure the open rates of internal newsletters, see which pages of the intranet are visited the most often, or track the adoption rate of new software.

Employee data
This could include retention and attraction rates, sickness levels, roles and levels of seniority, locations, demographics and average tenure. This data may exist across tools used by the communications, HR and finance teams.

Surveys
Most organisations will use these to get answers to specific questions from employees. You may have an annual survey but these could also be ad hoc pulse surveys, pop-up intranet surveys, or questions about a specific aspect of the organisation.

Benchmarking
With a bit of research you can find appropriate data points to use for comparison. These could be sustainability benchmarks, team sizes, or annual research reports that look at the state of internal communication, employee engagement, recent trends and challenges, or current employee perceptions and needs.

Demographics
Government websites or the Office for National Statistics can provide a breakdown of the wider population. For example, you can use this type of data to compare the make-up of your teams to the wider sector or the geographical area that you work in.

It is likely that the data that we need will be spread across multiple different tools and resources, and that we need to combine different sets of data to get to the outcome measurements that are most useful.

Common sources for data held by different business functions may include:

- Business intelligence software (eg. Power BI).
- Employee management applications (eg. Staffbase).
- Email providers (eg. MailChimp).
- Finance and payroll systems (eg. SAGE).
- HR platforms (eg. Deel).
- Assorted spreadsheets kept by different teams.

Data mapping is the process of identifying and bringing together the right data from these different sources before you carry out analysis. You may be pulling the data into a single dashboard built with business intelligence software or combining the data into one spreadsheet.

This requires working with stakeholders across the organisation to understand the data they hold and getting a clear idea of what each metric actually represents.

For example, what may appear to be a simple question relating to ‘headcount’ could produce a very different answer depending on whether you’re using a number from finance (counting full-time equivalents) or HR (counting actual people).

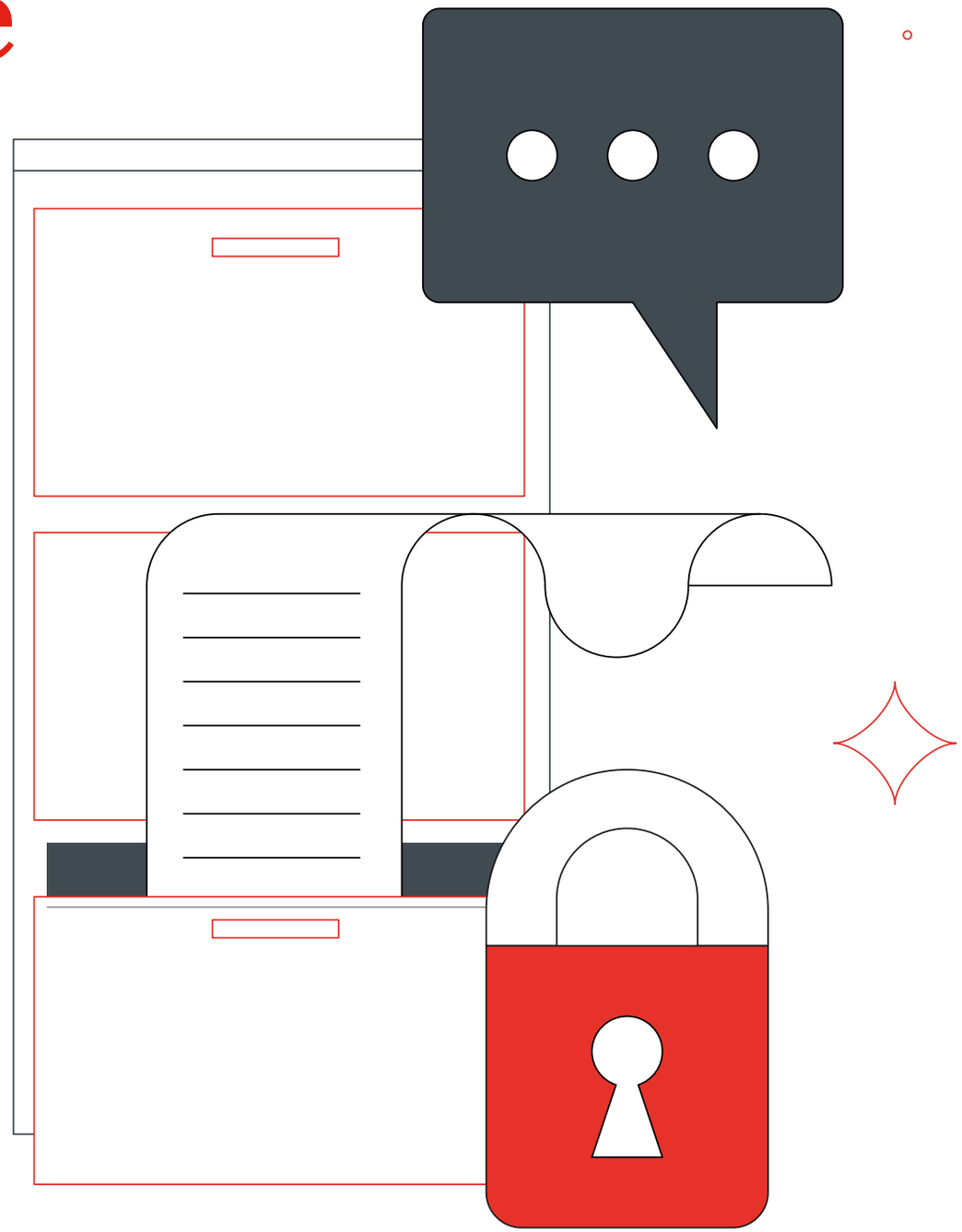
It can be useful to create a data dictionary specifically for your purposes. This is a simple reference list showing:

- Name of metric or data point.
- Definition of metric (i.e. exactly what it measures).
- Data source (i.e. which system or tool the data is stored in).

USEFUL RESOURCES

- The Office for National Statistics has open data sets covering demographics and industry sectors
- The IoIC’s IC Index: annual comprehensive study into employees’ perceptions of internal communication
- Gallagher’s State of the Sector: annual survey and report on employee experience and internal comms trends.

The importance of data governance



Every organisation has a responsibility to handle data ethically and responsibly – particularly where it relates to individuals. As a minimum we need to ensure that we are adhering to the law, but we should also be aiming to demonstrate a best practice approach.

Data governance is the set of policies, procedures and standards that your organisation sets for storing and using data. There should be people who are specifically responsible for maintaining this governance. You should be aware of both the specific policies of your organisation and the wider regulatory framework.

There are two key pieces of legislation that relate to how data is handled:

- The Data Protection Act
- The UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

While you don't need to become an expert on the legislation, there are some key principles contained in both laws that you should always bear in mind.

Fairness
Data should be used in a way that is reasonable and doesn't cause unjustified adverse effects on individuals.

Accuracy
Any data stored about individuals needs to be correct and up-to-date.

Purpose limitation
You should only use data for the purpose that was specified when you gathered it. If you want to use it for something else, you may need to go back and get further permission.

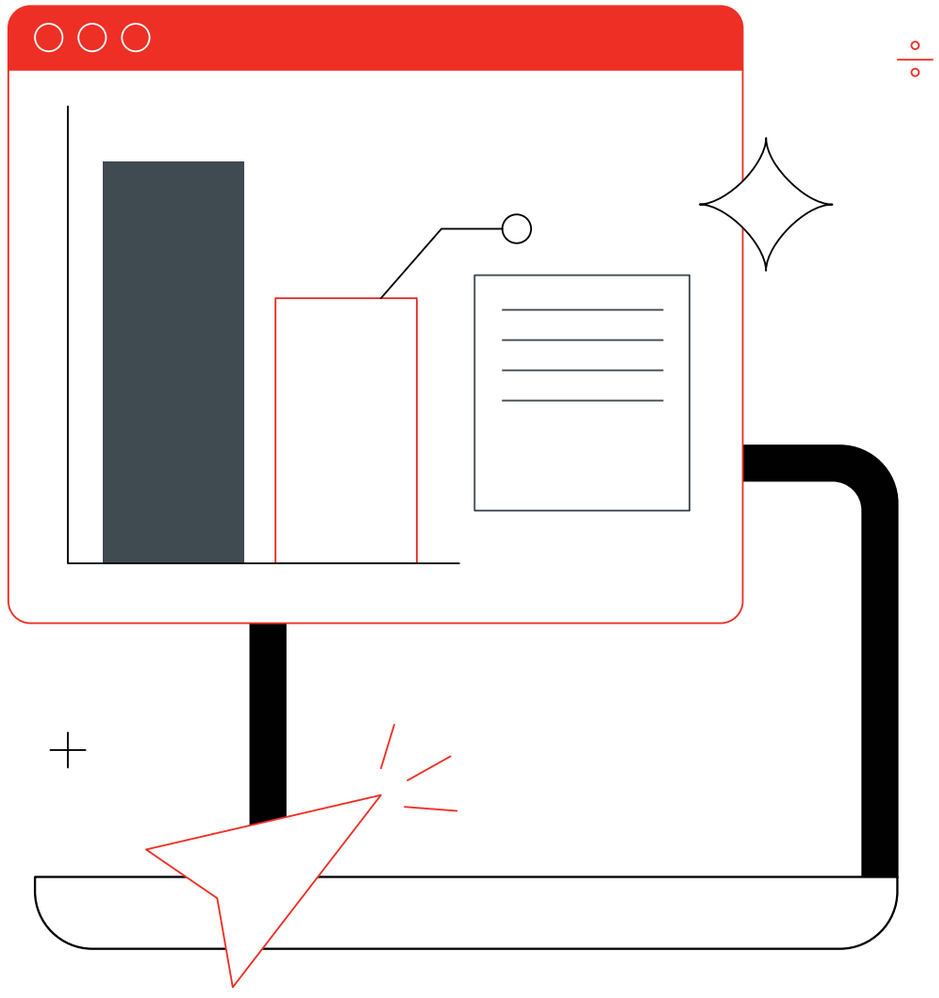
Data minimisation
You should only gather the data you need for the specified purpose, and you should only store it for the minimum amount of time necessary.

Integrity and confidentiality
Personal data should be stored and processed securely. This often means using password-protected software.

The legislation also gives individuals the right to know what data is stored about the and access the data if they want to. This could simply be by asking or it could be through more formal routes like Freedom of Information (FoI) requests or Subject Access Requests.

If you are working on a data project and you think there may be risks involved (possibly because it involves sensitive or personal data) you should carry out a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA).

A DPIA is a structured report that helps you to identify and mitigate risks ahead of time and going through this process also demonstrates that you are being responsible in your handling of the data. The Information Commissioner's Office provides a DPIA template that you can use, and if you have an information governance team you should work with them.



USEFUL RESOURCES

- An accessible breakdown of data legislation from the UK government
- The Information Commissioner's Office guide to DPIAs

Using data strategically

Gathering data isn't immediately going to give you useful insights. While data should inform our decision-making it does need to be combined with our professional expertise and experience.

At a high level we're generally looking for two things in the data:

Problems
These are things that we're currently doing that either aren't working or are underperforming. By targeting our energy at fixing these things we improve outcomes for the organisations.

Opportunities
These are things that we're not currently doing but it would benefit the organisation if we did do them. By launching new initiatives or deploying new solutions we can improve what the organisation is doing.

DEMONSTRATING IMPACT

We can use data to measure and demonstrate the impact of our work. There is normally a cost associated with any activity we carry out (even if it is only measured in person-hours). We often need to balance this with a measurable outcome.

These outcomes don't have to be financial. As internal communication professionals we may be more interested in raising employee engagement, understanding or satisfaction – but this is still a measurable outcome.

Employee engagement could be measured through participation rates in particular programmes or adoption rates for new communication channels. Employee satisfaction could be measured through surveys that quantify eNPS and feelings about support from leadership and opportunities for growth (we'll cover more on creating engagement metrics later on).

To demonstrate the direct impact of internal communications we need to tie metrics to both organisational objectives and our activities. For example, let's say we want to encourage greater participation in our peer recognition programme and we decide to run a specific internal email campaign. We can measure the resource we allocate to this (input), the number of emails sent with open and clickthrough rates (outputs), but most importantly track the engagement with the recognition programme before, during and after the activity (the outcome).

PLANNING RESOURCES AND ACTIVITY

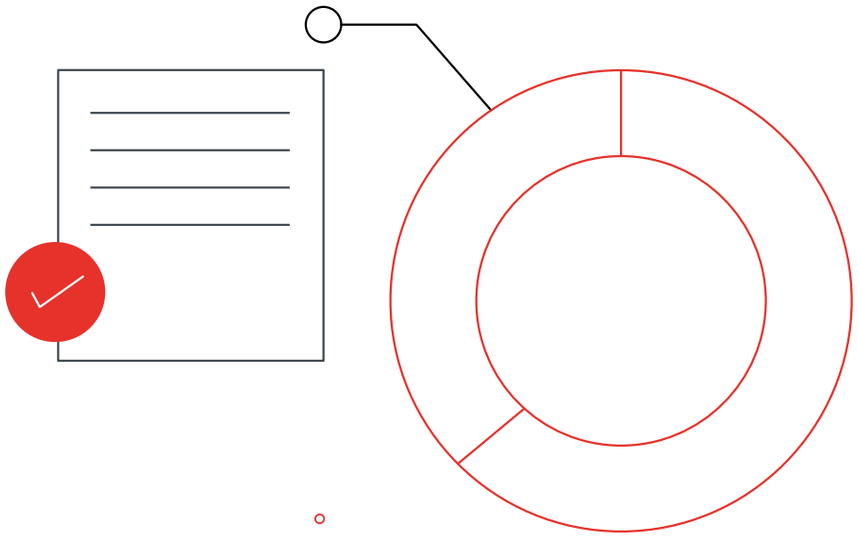
We should be able to use data to plan the allocation of time and resources. We will have limits on the amount of activity we can carry out, so we want to show that this is the best use of those resources. Or we may be trying to get additional resources (such as new software), in which case we need to estimate what the benefits of this would be.

In all of these cases we are trying to align our use of data with our communications objectives.

USEFUL RESOURCES

- A guide to the UK government's National Data Strategy
- A guide to the data strategy of the Office of National Statistics

Analysing data effectively



Data analysis can be done in simple spreadsheets, specialised software, sophisticated business intelligence tools, or programming code. There's no need to overcomplicate things if you're new to working with data – a spreadsheet will probably do everything that you need.

There are broadly four types of data analysis:

Descriptive

This summarises historical data and looks at 'what happened'. This relatively simple form of data analysis describes trends and patterns, but doesn't dig any deeper. For example, we might look at retention and turnover for employees in different departments, average employee engagement scores over time, or relative engagement rates for specific channels (we'll explain how to discern these metrics later on).

Diagnostic

This looks at explaining 'why' certain things have happened. For example if we notice that there has been a drop in the open rate for an email, or surveys show decreases in trust, we need to investigate so we can determine a solution. In this case we may look at things such as whether the drop is confined to a particular team or location or could be the impact of a recent internal change.

Predictive

This uses historical data to try and forecast what might happen in the future. If we can see that over the past two years progressively more employees are accessing resources from mobile devices then we might want to plot that rise into the next two years That may justify a greater focus on mobile content or employee apps. We could also use scenario planning around the organisation's strategy and look at how employees will be able to adapt or change based on current levels of understanding, behaviour and engagement.

Prescriptive

This takes insights from the other types of analysis and attempts to recommend the best course of action going forward. For example, we might use historic data to recommend internal communication strategies that to address current challenges, i.e. employee distrust of leadership and with that a communication plan based on employee data and preferences to increase visibility and ultimately drive trust.

Whichever type of analysis you're carrying out, it may help to segment the data. Segmentation is where we break the data into groups based on shared characteristics. It could be based on demographics, job role, geographical location, working patterns, time-period or user behaviour (e.g. daily users of the intranet).

This approach allows us to get specific insights about each segment and make comparisons between those groups. For example, we might want to compare employee satisfaction rates between different levels of seniority or different departments. Segmentation also allows us to tailor our communication to different groups. We can also see which channels resonate most and generate the highest engagement.

PRE AND POST ACTIVITY

Setting KPIs enables us to measure things before and after we've carried out IC activities. Let's say we want to increase attendance at voluntary training events, because that links into an overall objective to improve opportunities for employee development and growth. We decide to launch a series of short webinars to promote the training.

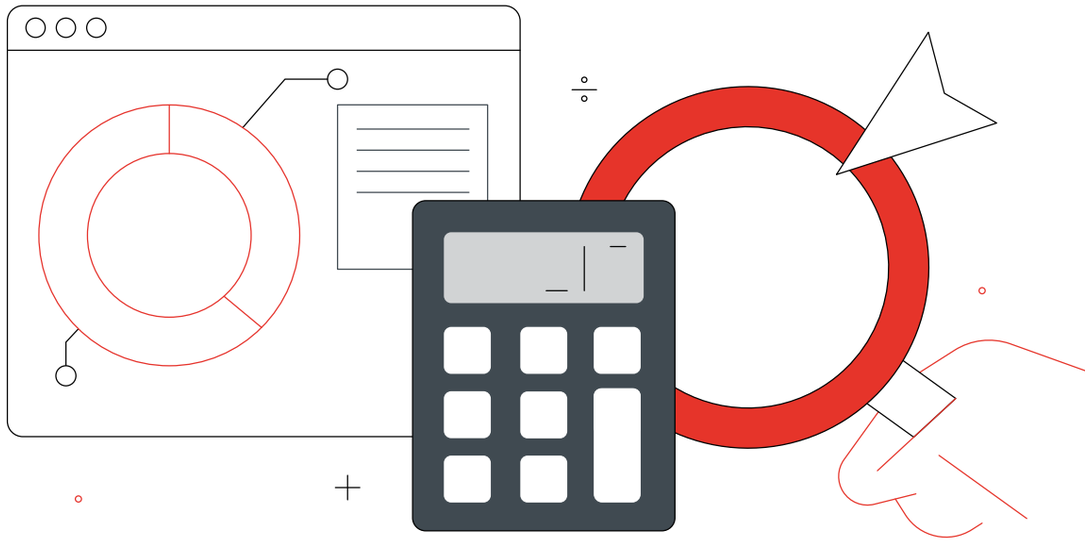
We can measure training attendance both before and after the webinars to see if there has been an increase. Through surveys we can also measure the perception of opportunities for growth specifically for the attendees, and see if this is higher than for the wider workforce. We might tailor future content based on these insights.

THE ROLE OF AI

AI tools have shown themselves to be particularly useful for analysing large amounts of unstructured, qualitative information. This is the type of useful data that can be sourced from open-ended survey questions, comments on an intranet, and transcripts of interviews or focus groups.

Tools such as ChatGPT or Microsoft Copilot can comb through this text and identify sentiment (e.g. positive, neutral, negative), emotional tone (e.g. trusting, frustrated, enthusiastic) and common themes or keywords.

It's important to only use AI tools if they are authorised by your organisation, the security of the data has been checked and you know how to use them safely. However it's highly likely that this technology will only become more important for internal communication professionals.



USEFUL RESOURCES

- A guide to the four types of analysis from Harvard Business School
- A Government Communications Service guide to segmentation for internal communications

Ongoing analysis and monitoring

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are measurements of the ongoing performance of a process, team, organisation or individual. They enable us to track how things are going on a daily, weekly or monthly basis and intervene where needed.

KPIs need to be created carefully. If a KPI can go up or down without it really affecting the organisation positively or negatively then it is probably a bad metric. KPIs also need to be reviewed regularly to check that they are still an effective way to measure performance or success. You can ensure that your KPIs are effective by using the SMART framework:

Specific

Be precise about what you want to measure. Rather than 'we want to raise employee engagement' you could say 'we want to increase the engagement with our new employee app by 10%'.

Measurable

KPIs need to be quantifiable. In the example above, we could measure how often people login to the app or how often they use a specific feature.

Achievable

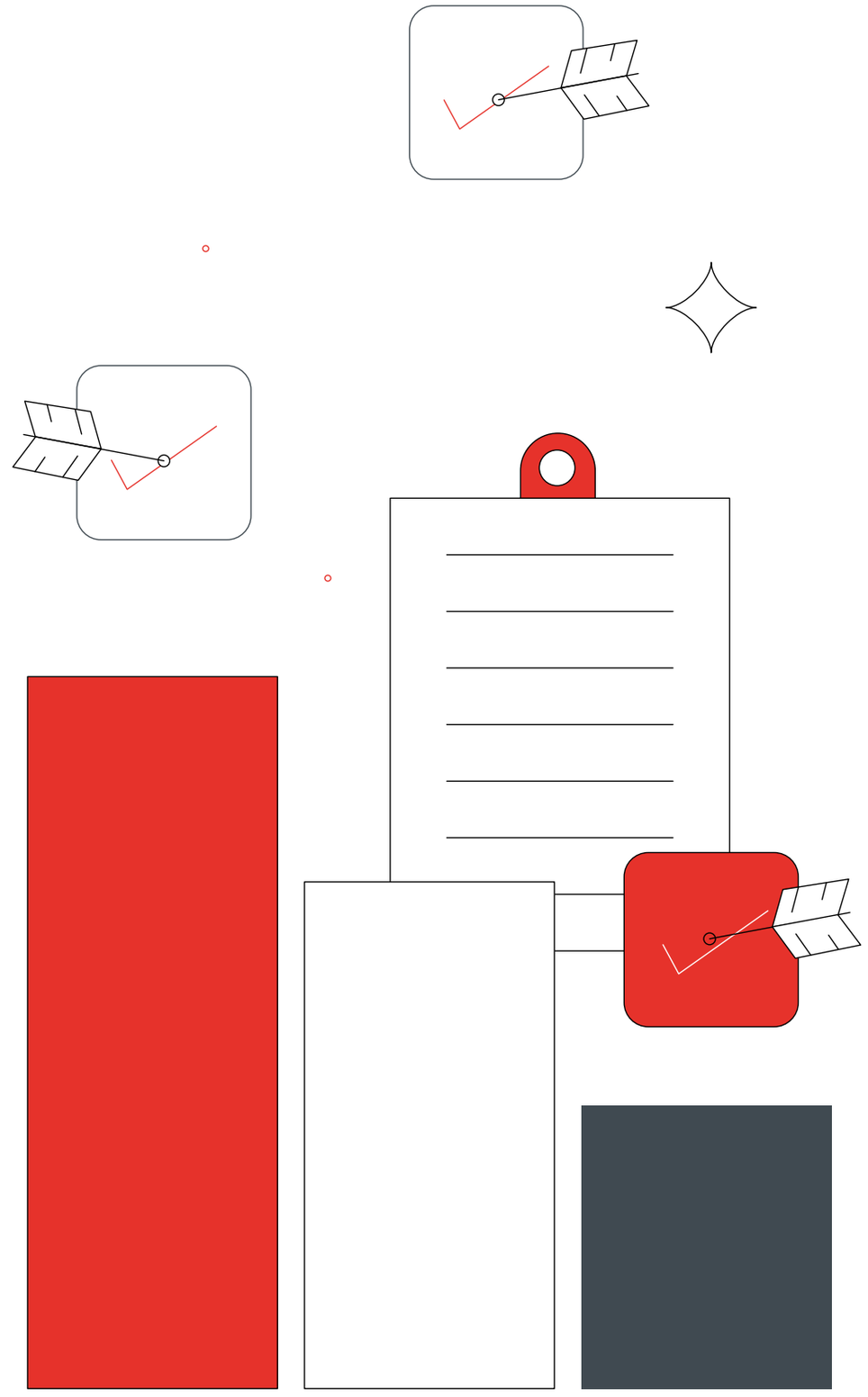
The targets need to be realistic. We may want our employees to give 100% satisfaction in a survey, but that's setting ourselves up to fail.

Relevant

Make sure KPIs are actually linked to some kind of objective for the organisation. You can measure the number of people who attend a colleague outing, but is it genuinely good or bad if that number is higher or lower?

Time-bound

There needs to be a time-period over which you're measuring success. This could be regular (e.g. weekly) or specific (e.g. over the next six months). The danger with open-ended KPIs is that you can just keep trying to reach them forever.



While KPIs should be tailored to the specific context, there are some common examples that are used in internal communication:

Open rates and page visits

These give a high-level picture of how many people are opening emails or going to particular resources. They don't give much depth of insight, but may tell you when a channel is particularly underperforming or underused.

Employee engagement

This is more valuable, but may be more complex to measure. One common way to generate an overall employee engagement score is to identify a few key metrics that align with organisational objectives (e.g. job satisfaction, eNPS, confidence in leadership, opportunities for growth) and measuring these through regular surveys. The average of these metrics then creates a score that can be tracked over time.

Adoption rates

If you're rolling out new technology or training initiatives, you can measure how many employees are engaging with them, and how quickly they're doing so.

Employee feedback

This will probably be a mix of quantitative and qualitative data, and can be gathered through surveys or open and ongoing channels for feedback. If you have access to AI tools you can carry out sentiment and theme analysis on qualitative feedback.

Employee retention and turnover

Higher turnover is often a sign of poor engagement, so this could be an organisation-level KPI that you want to track. Retention is calculated over a given time period (e.g. a year). You divide the number of employees at the end of the period by the number at the start, and express that as a percentage. This can be done for the whole organisation, or particular departments or teams.

Note that not all of these metrics will be entirely under the control of internal communication. The actions of other organisational functions (particularly leadership) will heavily influence them. However, tracking these metrics can identify areas where communication initiatives could help improve performance.

If you develop a set of useful KPIs, then these can be turned into a data dashboard. This is a simple, 'at a glance' view of what the latest data is indicating.

Normally these would display both the current numbers and the targets that have been identified.

There are digital tools (such as Power BI) that can create interactive dashboards that automatically pull in the latest data and can be accessed by different stakeholders. If you don't have access to this kind of software then dashboards can also be a simple one-page report that you pull together manually.

USEFUL RESOURCES

- A Tableau guide to developing SMART KPIs
- IoIC Factsheet: Measuring Internal Communication – The basics
- IoIC Factsheet: Creating a campaign measurement strategy
- An IoIC Knowledge Hub Article on measuring the impact of internal communications

Data storytelling

Outside of dashboards that report on KPIs you will find other insights in the data that need to be highlighted to different stakeholders: members of your team, senior leaders, colleagues from other departments, or the wider workforce.

While spreadsheets can be a good way to analyse data, they are usually a terrible way to communicate data insights. For most people, rows of numbers are hard to decipher quickly. This is where data visualisation can be incredibly valuable. We turn the data (quantitative or qualitative) into visuals that stakeholders can understand much more quickly. Visualisations can be used in slide decks, reports, web content, posters or social media posts.

When you're presenting data to other people, it can help to think through and define these three things:

Audience
Who are you presenting the data to? How data-literate are they? Do they have any preconceptions that you might need to tackle? Why is this data relevant to them?

Story
What is the key message you're trying to highlight? Can you sum it up in a single sentence? What data do you need to include to tell this story, and what can you leave out?

Action
What do you want this audience to do based on the insight? Give a green light to a new project? Sign-up for something? Change their behaviour in some way? This is a simple way to refine the story you're trying to present. It will also give you a simple brief to work to when it comes to creating a visual.

There are different categories of visuals you can use to present data:

Charts and graphs
These are designed to display quantitative data (numbers). Unless you're presenting to real data specialists, it's generally best to stick to the types of charts that most people are familiar with – there's little to be gained in being overly clever or complex from a communication point of view.

Qualitative information
Some of the data you need to present won't fit onto a chart, as it's not numerical. This is where it's useful to include things like quotes from employees, case studies, diagrams or timelines.

Infographics
This is a looser category of graphic design, and can include both charts and qualitative information. If you plan to use infographics regularly it's worth looking for templates to help start with your design.

USEFUL RESOURCES

- The Data Visualisation Catalogue is a guide to the best charts to use for different data stories
- IoIC Careers Hub: Comprehensive learning for MS Excel
- Stephanie Evergeen PhD has a guide to creating different charts in Excel