

Roberto Paolo Nelli

# INTERNAL COMMUNICATION IN EUROPE

Key success factors and managerial approaches



VITA E PENSIERO



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# FOREWORD

Ascai is proud to highlight the results of an important international research work into internal communication, involving 448 companies that operate in ten European Union countries.

Ascai conceived this survey and offered it to Feiea, the European Association for Internal Communications.

With regards to such issue, a special thanksgiving goes to Massimo Greggia, member of Ascai Board and Ascai's representative within Feiea, for his fundamental role in making this project come to light and reaching a full success.

## A rather unique business setting

Three important factors played an undoubtful role in ensuring the quality of the findings.

The first one is the involvement of the internationally esteemed Università Cattolica as academic partner, with Prof. Roberto Nelli as the scientific director.

Secondly, the unique socio-economic context in which businesses were not only the target but also the protagonists of great organizational and managerial changes in the last three years. These changes were due to a host of concomitant causes, including aspects like company restructuring, changes in top management, introduction of new technologies, cost cutting, mergers and acquisitions, and repositioning or growth of businesses in communities.

Finally, the inclusion in the research of numerous companies with a dedicated internal communication department made the analysis even more focused and significant.

## Professionalism and satisfaction of an internal communication professional

The survey showed high levels of professionalism among respondents, with most of them holding the position of head of communication (corporate and/or internal). Their participation undoubtedly guaranteed reliable answers, which were provided through a questionnaire with 36 questions, centered on a complex series of variables that ranged from purely quantitative to others seeking opinions

on, for example, the effectiveness of internal communication and trends in this field.

Notably, when looking at the breakdown of professionals working in internal communication, the study found a clear prevalence of women in position of head of this department, close to 70%.

The high-levels of education were also significant, especially since all communication experts, regardless of their role, have a degree, a master's degree or a doctorate. In terms of age, 63% of the overall population is over 40 years old – a data explained both by the high-level of specialization required to access this profession and by the position of department heads held by a large amount of respondents.

Personal satisfaction is positive among internal communication professionals, although full recognition of their merit, appreciation from top management and positive feedback from other people in the company depend on the relevance of the role, which in turn provides different opportunities of career and achievement of a work-life balance.

### Importance of a dedicated department

The lack of previous internal communication research does not allow us to make many comparisons about how this aspect has developed. Nonetheless, some elements do indicate how relevant an area it is.

Forexample, the established presence of an internal communication department that is formally acknowledged in the organizational structure is an unequivocal signal of the importance of having ongoing, well-structured governance of internal relations – a task that is only rarely entrusted to HR (only 5.8% of cases), especially in multinationals and large companies.

However, this does not mean the IC department is completely independent from HR; on the contrary, the latter remains the department which IC is mostly engaged in cooperating with.

The importance of the role played by the IC department is evident when looking at the fact that, although it is generally poorly represented on Executive Boards (6.5%), it reports to this board and to the CEO on its given goals. This fact has certainly favored the growth, in 25.9% of case, or the consolidation (46%) of the budgets allocated to it. In addition, over the last three years, roughly 30% of companies have increased the number of staff or have stated they are planning to do so in the next three years. Nonetheless, many communication professionals generally feel (48.6%) investment in IC remains insufficient, especially in cases where the backing of the CEO is lacking.

## A largely strategic role

In terms of mission, it is useful to focus briefly on the fact that internal communication is expected mainly to promote and share the corporate culture and business strategies, with far less attention given to developing employee education and satisfaction, let alone improving their creativity or socialization. This trend, though less common in smaller companies that operate in just one country, seems to put in evidence that the consolidated theory that places people at the heart of each communication initiative in order to build-up a positive corporate climate, is mainly interpreted as providing people with a sound knowledge about the company, its strategies and goals.

As regards this corporate climate, it is interesting to note that a positive atmosphere among employees mainly exists in companies where the role of internal communication and its head are clear. This is because of both the significant contribution this department makes to strategic decisions and the support it provides other corporate departments by developing their communication skills and providing a genuine advisory service such departments can utilize in their own initiatives.

We are faced here, as we will see later, with what we can consider the *excellence* of internal communication. Based on our research, such excellence lies in it being a “Strategic facilitator”, which really is a decisive role in terms of having formal planning, particularly in companies with an IC department that has its own budget and a periodically drafted internal communication plan.

## Assessment seeking maturity

Every corporate communication system must also grapple with the need to measure its own effectiveness. One of the most interesting chapters of this research work covers precisely this aspect, highlighting notable shortcomings in the methodologies adopted and the choice of the elements to be assessed. On this front, more commitment was evident in multinationals and large companies based in Northern Europe.

Turning to the methodological approach, there remains a long way to go to achieve an adequate economic assessment of the cost/benefit ratio for internal communication activities and their impact on customer satisfaction, business results and increasing the company’s competitive advantage.

The same goes for the conduct being monitored or measured, where the focus tends to be on the frequency of use of media rather than their effectiveness or – better still – the overall quality of internal communication processes.

Such choices definitely place excessive importance on tools such as the corporate intranet, face-to-face events or digital media.

In addition, communication experts are faced with the taxing task of defining what needs to be measured and the metrics to be used. Such professionals also repeatedly indicate they have no time enough, tied to a sort of “inability” to undertake the concrete actions that would seem the logical improvements to make based on the measurement results.

### Towards excellence in internal communication

The considerations that I have briefly presented in this foreword find confirmation, I believe, in the real development expectations of internal communication expressed by the those who took part in our research.

There is general agreement among communication professionals that, in the future, the growth of their role will be tied to increasing their involvement in supporting top management in decision making. At the same time, they also believe it will be equally important to implement programs that inspire workers to create and share valuable corporate content, encouraging more active, decisive participation in managing the company.

In this sense, we can say the research achieved its target of identifying – in an international setting – the conduct and fundamental strategies that ensure the internal communication of a company meets standards of excellence. Without giving away too much of what will be presented in greater detail in the report, I think it is useful to highlight some features that emerged and that should inspire a good internal communication system:

- ▶ Experience and high levels of professionalism among the heads of such functions;
- ▶ Their involvement in strategic planning meetings with top management;
- ▶ Closer and more frequent contact with other corporate departments;
- ▶ More openness to exchange and dialogue between employees and with management;
- ▶ Constant pursuit of the best possible coherence between internal and external communication;
- ▶ Periodic monitoring of employee satisfaction/engagement;
- ▶ Support for organizational change, boosting employee commitment, motivation and satisfaction, especially stimulating and promoting innovation and creativity while encouraging networking;
- ▶ Adequate support to competitive advantage;
- ▶ Keeping up with the pace and volume of information to deal with ongoing digital and organizational development within the company.

In the light of these considerations, from an analysis of the practices adopted by the large European companies that took part in the research, it is plain for everyone to see that the target of excellence is all but easy and, above all, it is linked to the construction of a high level of commitment from executives and,

also, significant work by internal communication to engage people. This is not only to ensure credibility and visibility for the internal communication department, but also to nurture a fundamental relationship of trust between the company and those who work for it every day, ensuring its success.

Hence, the importance of the communication professional's role is evident. According to the views expressed by the European companies involved in the research, it will be necessary to be more sensitive to the ethical aspects of the profession, guaranteeing the internal communication department gets involved in defining guidelines for its own sustainability, as well as for the necessary bridging of generational and cultural gaps among company employees.

More than a simple expectation, this is a call to action to support that quantum leap which is expected of internal communication.

At the end of this foreword, on behalf of Ascai I would like to renew our gratitude to Director Giorgio Agagliati for his consultancy support on the research contents.

In addition, I would like to extend our gratitude to the following organisations members of FEIEA (European Association for Internal Communication) without which this research may simply not have taken place:

Austria - VIKOM - Verband für Integrierte Kommunikation;

Belgium - VONK - Netwerk voor intern communicatie;

Denmark - FIKOM - Foreningen for Intern Kommunikation;

France - AFCI - Association Française de Communications Interne (not a FEIEA member);

Portugal - APCE - Associação Portuguesa de Comunicação de Empresa;

Slovenia - SIK-PRSS - Slovensko društvo za odnose z javnostmi;

Spain - Dircom - Asociación de Directivos de Comunicación;

Switzerland - SVIK/ASCI - Schweizerischer Verband für Interne Kommunikation;

United Kingdom - IoIC - Institute of Internal Communication.

*Maurizio Incletolli*

President, Associazione per lo Sviluppo  
della Comunicazione Aziendale in Italia (ASCAI)

# INTRODUCTION

The role of Internal Communication, as a source of competitive advantage, is increasingly confirmed and highlighted by international research that examines the impact on companies of changeable economic and social conditions, constant technological innovation – offering new communication opportunities – and increasingly frequent organizational changes.

Thus, the key to competitive success of companies depends on top management's ability to promote the implementation of an effective Internal Communication system. This needs to be integrated into the operational processes of all corporate functions and must be able to create and maintain the conditions for the corporate culture to be deeply rooted in the company, and to guide the behavior of all employees such that it is aligned with the company's strategy.

Internationally, there is not much systematic scenario research focusing on Internal Communication. Some research looks at the global situation<sup>1</sup>, whereas others works focus on specific issues, such as the impact of technologies<sup>2</sup>, or on specific countries or geographic areas<sup>3</sup>. In Italy, the most recent research was promoted by Associazione per lo Sviluppo della Comunicazione Aziendale in Italia (ASCAI) and conducted by Università Cattolica<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, the Associazione Bancaria Italiana (ABI) with Università Cattolica conducted for over a decade constant research into Internal Communication in the Italian banking system<sup>5</sup>.

In 2017 ASCAI decided to promote a complex research project – entrusted to Università Cattolica – to investigate the status and trends in Internal Communication in Europe. It worked jointly with the European Association for Internal Communications, which was established in Copenhagen in 1955 as the Federation of European Industrial Editors Associations (FEIEA) and currently groups Internal Communication associations in ten European countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland and United Kingdom).

The key objective of this research project was to lay the foundations for acquiring in-depth knowledge of this sector, following and supplementing the multi-year data-gathering experience into corporate communication conducted by two European communication associations<sup>6</sup> – the European Association of Communication Directors (EACD) and the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA) – which have published an annual report since 2007 (“European Communication Monitor”).

This research was possible thanks to our partner ASCAI, which provided important resources needed for the study. Our gratitude goes especially to the

President of ASCAI, Maurizio Incletolli and to Massimo Greggia, who coordinated relations with the national associations to conduct research on behalf of ASCAI. The support of the Università Cattolica research team, Alessandra Carminati, Furio Reggente and Carla Vavassori, has been invaluable. Our gratitude goes to all of the Internal Communication professionals who spent some of their time participating in the survey.

*Roberto P. Nelli*

Scientific director of the research project,  
Università Cattolica

# 1. RESEARCH DESIGN AND PARTICIPANTS

The European Internal Communication Research explores current practices and future developments of Internal Communication in companies operating in nine FEIEA (European Association for Internal Communication) member countries plus France.

The online questionnaire used for the research consisted of 36 questions and was based on previous international researches and literature.

The questionnaire collected many variables: the positioning of the Internal Communication (IC) team/department; the methods of IC planning and controlling; the communication channels and tools used; the perception of the role of IC within companies; the organizational communication climate; the state of IC professionals; the future issues and challenges for IC; features of the organization (structure, industry, country); characteristics of communication professionals (demographics, experience, job status, job satisfaction). Furthermore, the study extends the debate about excellent communication departments (Tench et al., 2017; Verčič & Zerfass, 2016) by identifying characteristics of high effectiveness IC team/departments in the sample.

The questionnaire asked questions on dichotomous and nominal response scales and on five-point Likert-type scales.

The survey used the English language and the questionnaire was pre-tested with 12 communication professionals in eight European countries. Amendments were made where appropriate and the final questionnaire was activated online for three months (May-July 2017).

To ensure the consistency of survey measurements, a representative sample of large companies operating in ten European countries with at least 500 employees was generated. A stratified sampling technique was used by dividing the entire population of companies into five strata based on the number of employees so that each stratified group was represented in the sample as a proportion of its size in relation to the total number of companies at European level. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 5.25 percentage points at the 95% level of confidence.

More than 15,000 large companies throughout Europe with at least 500 employees listed in the Orbis database (provided by the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore of Milan) were identified and each national Association member of FEIEA was utilized in identifying key professional respondents, obtaining the list

of e-mail recipients, inviting target respondents with personal e-mails and ensuring the completion of the survey.

A total of 470 European companies completed the survey, however 22 of them were excluded because of partial or inaccurate data. The final sample consists of 448 large companies based in ten European countries and three geographic regions identified in the official country list by the European Union (Eastern Europe is not represented). Most respondents (55.4%) are based in Southern Europe (Italy, Spain, Portugal, Slovenia), followed by Western Europe (37.5%; Austria, Belgium, France, Switzerland) and Northern Europe (7.1%; Denmark, United Kingdom). Due to the relatively low number of United Kingdom respondents, the survey results cannot give insights about Northern Europe with the same reliability as the total sample size at the European level.

The sample includes services (74.2%; Banking, Insurance, Utilities, Healthcare, Retail, etc.) and industrial (25.8%; Manufacturing, Pharma, Technology, etc.) activities.

53% of respondents are multinational companies and the remaining 47% are from companies operating in one country only (28.3% with multiple sites and 18.7% with a single site).

Regarding multinational companies and national companies with multiple sites, the head office participated in the research in 73.7% of cases, while in the remaining 26.3% a subsidiary or local unit responded.

Most respondents (72.2%) employ up to 5,000 employees (35.6% between 1,000 and 5,000); 15.8% employ between 5,000 and 15,000 people and 12% over 15,000.

Respondent companies have faced several management and/or structural changes over the last three years that have affected their IC strategy: only 11.5% did not face any change, whereas 58.7% carried out organizational restructurings, 36.5% had changed the top management, 34.6% introduced new technologies, and 30.9% focused their attention on projects aimed at reducing costs; 27.9% faced mergers or acquisitions; 25.9% experienced geographical expansion or relocation and 13.6% downsizing.

The demographics reveal the high quality of the professional respondents: 67.6% hold a top hierarchical position as head of a department which includes Internal Communication, among others, or as head of Internal Communication department and 21.8% are unit leaders or in charge of some Internal Communication activities in an organization. 70.4% of the professionals interviewed have more than ten years of experience in Internal Communication management.

A large majority of respondents (63%) are over the age of 40; the single largest age grouping (41%) is of those aged between 41 and 50. In terms of the highest education level, 45.2% of respondents hold a bachelor's degree (19.4% in Communications), 54.8% hold a master's degree (27.6% in Communications) and 7% hold even a doctorate (3.5% in Communications). 69.4% of respondents are female.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences was used for data analysis. Factor analyses were carried out to identify some underlying dimensions of the Internal Communication system. Cluster analyses were used for classifying subjects. Results have been tested for statistical significance with, depending on

the variable, Chi<sup>2</sup>, Pearson correlation, one-way ANOVA and independent sample T; p-value less than 0.005 was considered statistically significant; in the text of the report significant p-values are mentioned in brackets. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to establish internal consistency of the multivariate scales and the reliability indexes showed that the recommended value of 0.700 was respected by all constructs (Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.852 to 0.915, except for the question on the barriers affecting the measurement of IC, where Cronbach's alpha was 0.730).

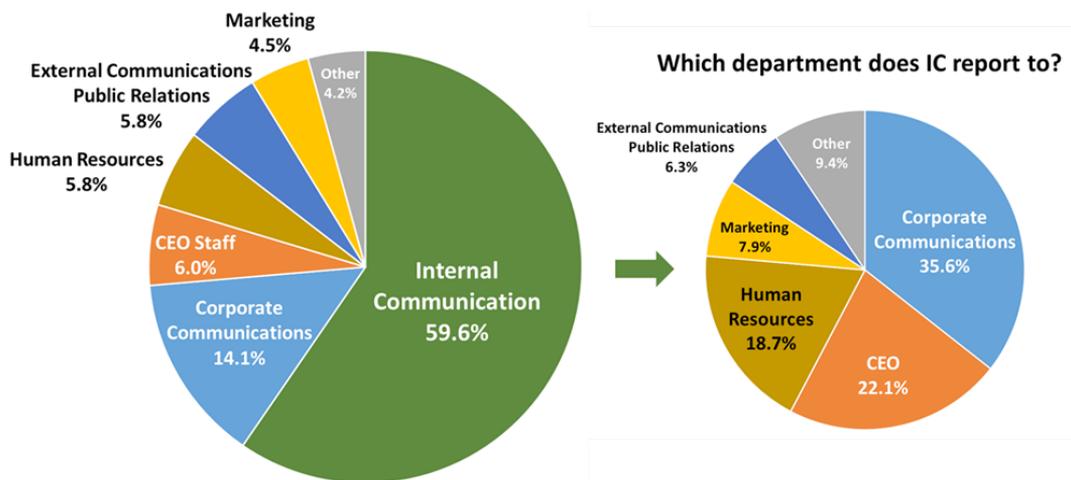
This study has some limitations. It is not representative for all companies across Europe, because it only examined large companies. Results are obtained through a survey, so self-reporting nature of results must be taken with caution. The study gives a cross-European indication and is not sensitive to national differences.

## 2. POSITIONING OF THE INTERNAL COMMUNICATION TEAM

Regarding where IC team sits inside organizations (Chart 1), in 59.6% of respondent companies the IC team sits in a dedicated Internal Communication department and in 40.4% it is part of another department: in 14.1% it is part of Corporate Communications department, in 6% of CEO staff, in 5.8% of Human Resource department and in 5.8% of External Communications/Public Relations department.

The **Internal Communication department** reports to Corporate Communications department in 35.6% of respondent companies, directly to CEO in 22.1% and to HR department in 18.7%.

**Chart 1 - Positioning of the Internal Communication team**



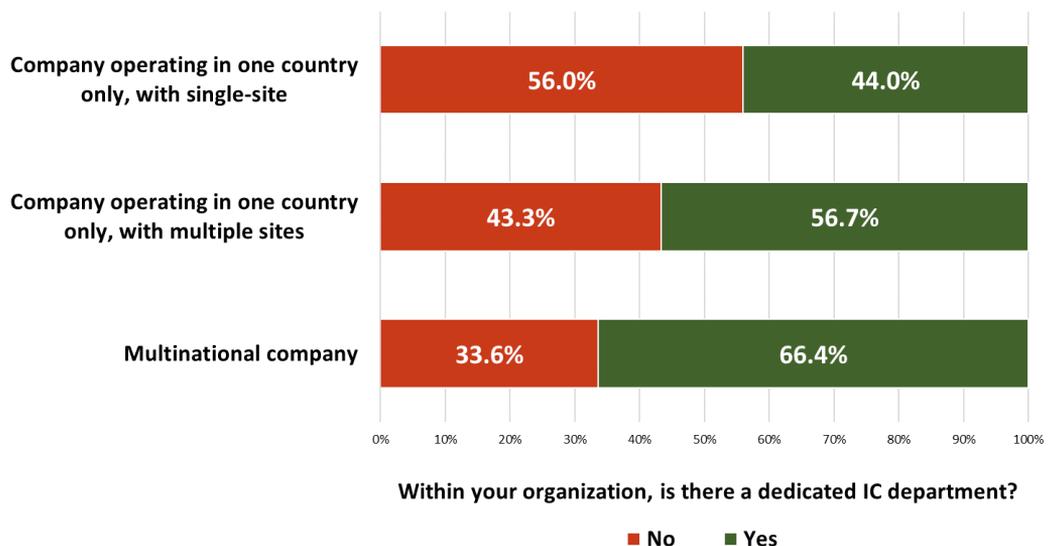
The existence of a dedicated IC department is significantly dependent on the size of the company ( $p \leq 0.000$ ): as the size-class measured in terms of number of employees increases, there is a greater percentage of companies in which there is a dedicated IC department: 39% in the size-class up to 1,000, 63.1% in the 1,001-5,000 size-class and 83.1% over 5,000 employees (Chart 2).

**Chart 2 - The existence of a dedicated IC department according to the number of employees**



Similarly, the existence of a dedicated IC department is significantly dependent on the type of company ( $p \leq 0.001$ ): 44% in companies operating in one country only with single site, 56.7% in companies operating in one country only with multiple sites and 66.4% in multinational companies (Chart 3).

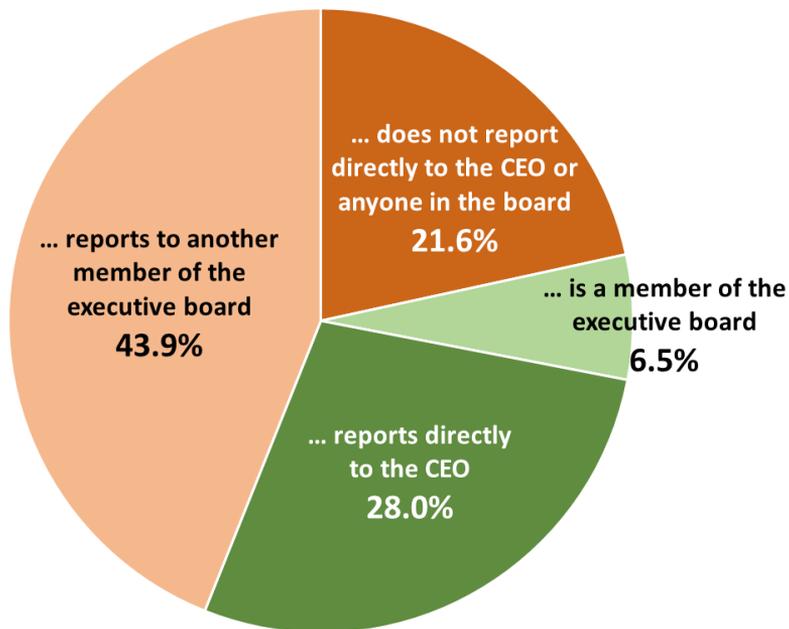
**Chart 3 - The existence of a dedicated IC department according to the type of company**



The research aimed to examine the alignment of the Internal Communication with both top management and the other organizational departments.

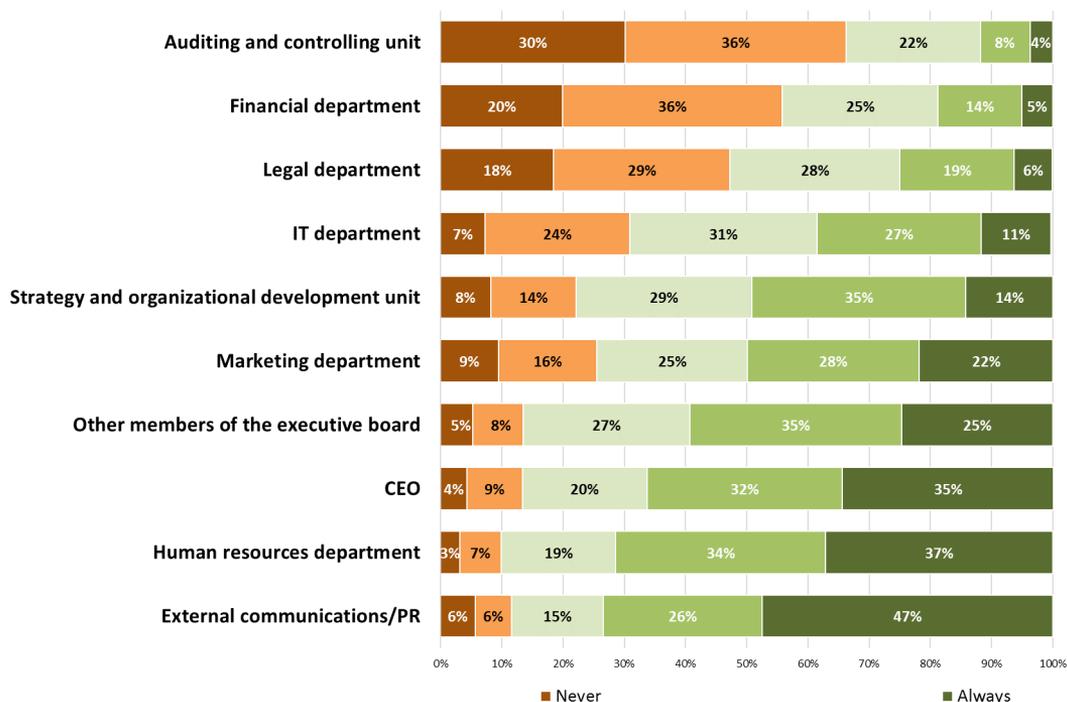
First of all, the research results revealed that within companies where a dedicated IC department exist (Chart 4), the head of IC department is a member of the executive board in only 6.5% of cases (**strongly aligned department**), reports directly to the CEO in 28% or to another member of the executive board in 43.9% (**aligned department**); in the remaining 21.6% of respondents the head of IC department does not report directly to the CEO or anyone in the executive board (**weakly aligned department**).

**Chart 4 - Within your organization, the head of IC department ...**



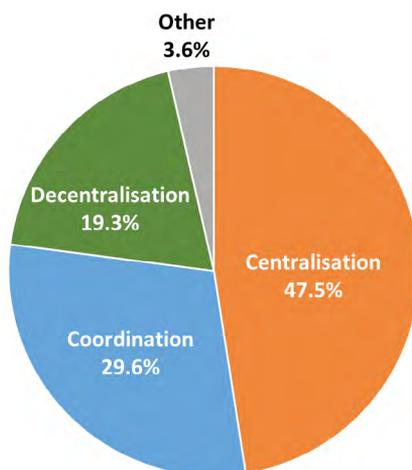
Secondly, the research explored how closely the IC team works with the other organizational departments (Chart 5) and the results showed that the two departments with whom the collaboration appears to be more frequent (always or very often) are the External Communications/Public Relations department (73%) and the Human Resource department (71%), followed by direct collaboration with the CEO (67%) or with other members of the executive board (60%). Less frequent (never or rarely) is the collaboration with the Auditing and controlling unit (66%), the financial department (56%) and the Legal department (47%).

Chart 5 - How closely does the IC team in your organization work with...



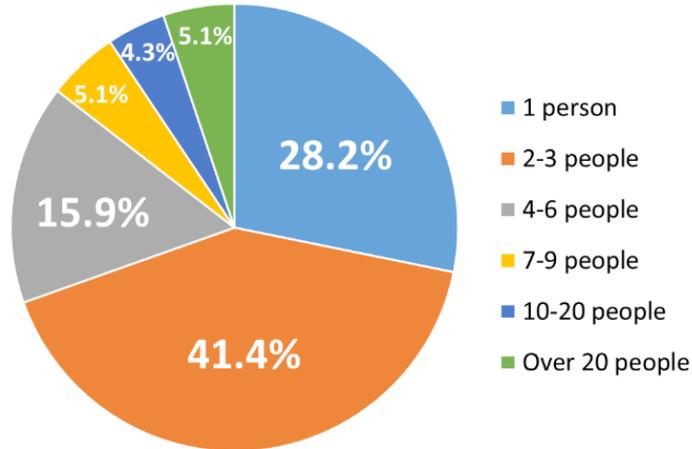
Regarding multinational companies and companies operating in one country with multiple sites (Chart 6), in 47.5% of respondent companies a dedicated central IC team defines both overall strategic guidelines and corporate contents, which local IC teams adapt (**centralization**); in 29.6% a dedicated central IC team acts as the reference point for IC local teams (**coordination**) and in 19.3% each local unit has its own IC team responsible for defining strategy and contents (**decentralization**).

Chart 6 - How is IC structured within your organization?



Overall just one person is dedicated to IC in 28.2% of cases, two or three people in 41.4% of cases, from four to six people in 15.9% of cases and at least seven in 14.4%. In 5.1% of cases there are over 20 people dedicated to IC (Chart 7).

**Chart 7 - Within your organization, how many people work in IC?**



Over the last three years, the number of communication workers remained unchanged in 56.2% of respondent companies, and it went up in 30%; 27.9% of companies planned to increase the number of people over the next three years.

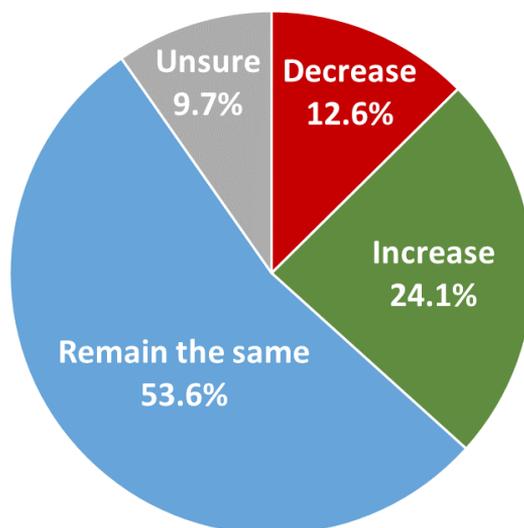
### 3. INTERNAL COMMUNICATION PLANNING AND CONTROLLING

#### 3.1. INTERNAL COMMUNICATION PLAN AND BUDGET

The research revealed the presence of a formal **Internal Communication plan** in 59.2% of respondent companies. The plan is reviewed with a pre-set frequency in 78.2% of cases (yearly in 43.2% of cases, every six months in 13.9% and every quarter in 21.1% of cases) and on an *ad-hoc* basis in 21.8% of companies.

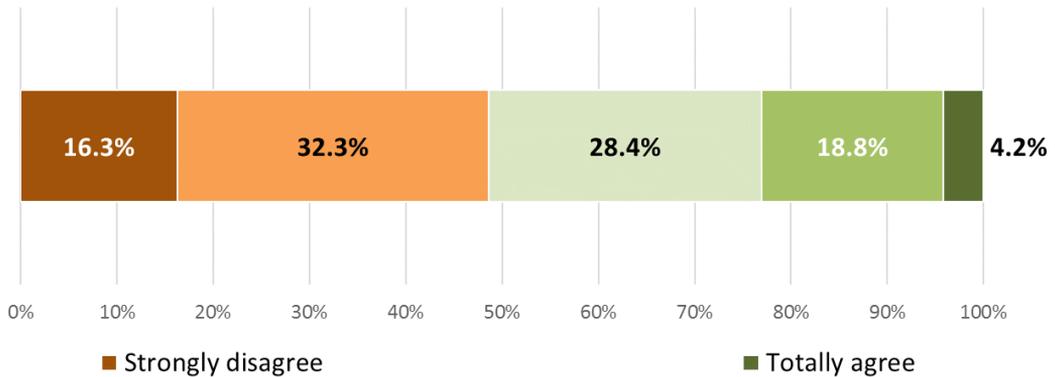
Internal Communication team/department has a specific **budget allocation** in 61.9% of respondent companies. The amount of this budget remained unchanged in 2017 compared to the previous year in 46% of cases, while it increased in 25.9% and decreased in 28.1% of companies; 24.1% of companies expect a budget increase for 2018, whereas 53.6% assume the situation will remain the same (Chart 8).

Chart 8 - How do you expect your organization's IC budget to change in the next 12 months?



With regard to the **level of investment in IC**, 23% of respondents expressed their satisfaction with the level of investment in IC, however 48.6% of respondents claimed that their organization invests not enough in IC (Chart 9).

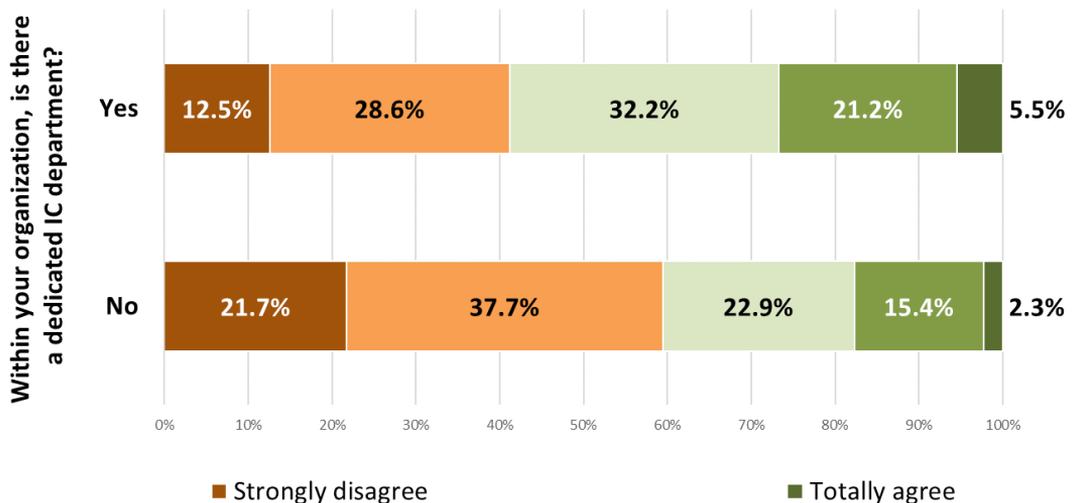
### Chart 9 - The organization invests enough in IC



Noteworthy is that the satisfaction with the level of investment in IC is positively and statistically correlated with the degree of the perceived importance that the CEO assigns to IC within the organization ( $p \leq 0.000$ ).

Finally, the analysis found significant differences ( $p \leq 0.004$ ) depending on the existence or not of a dedicated IC department (Chart 10): 26.7% of respondent companies with a dedicated IC department are satisfied (21.2%) or very satisfied (5.5%) with the level of investment in IC, while only 17.7% of companies without a dedicated IC department are satisfied (15.4%) or very satisfied (2.3%).

### Chart 10 - The organization invests enough in IC



### 3.2. INTERNAL COMMUNICATION PLANNING APPROACHES

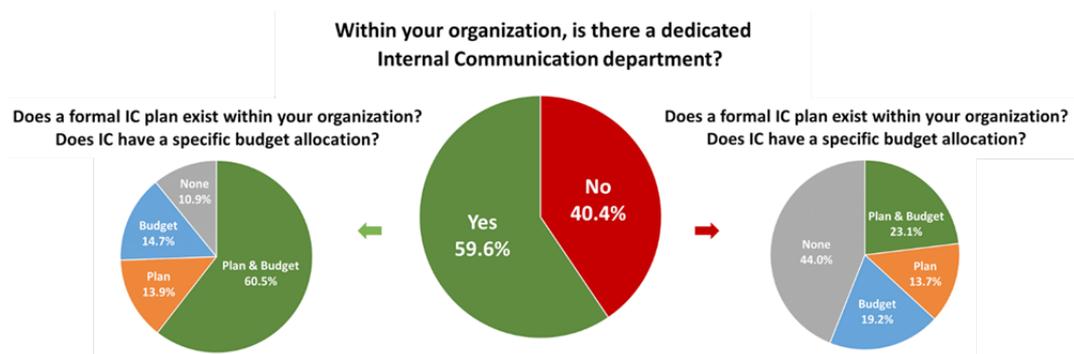
In terms of the approach to Internal Communication, the research project looked deeper into the analysis and considered jointly the following two variables that are significantly associated ( $p \leq 0.000$ ) and that helped identify four different approaches to Internal Communication planning (Chart 11):

- ▶ on the one side, the existence of a formal IC plan,
- ▶ on the other side, the fact the IC team/department has a specific budget allocation.

For companies where there is a dedicated IC department, the analysis showed 10.9% of respondents adopt “**informal planning**” since there is neither a formal IC plan nor a dedicated budget. In 13.9% of cases, planning can be defined as an “**emergent planning**” because, although there is a formal IC plan, the IC department does not have a dedicated budget. In 14.7% of cases, the planning can be considered “**tactical planning**” because, although a specific budget has been allocated, no formal IC plan has been drafted. Finally, 60.5% of respondents adopt “**strategic planning**” because the IC department has both its own budget and a formal IC plan.

For companies that do not have a dedicated IC department, the analysis showed 44% of respondents have “**informal planning**” since there is neither a formal IC plan nor a dedicated budget. In 13.7% of cases, the planning can be defined as “**emergent planning**”. In 19.2% of cases the planning can be considered “**tactical planning**” and only 23.1% of respondent companies seem to adopt “**strategic planning**”, having both a dedicated budget and a formal IC plan.

**Chart 11 - IC department, plan and budget**



### 3.3. INTERNAL COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT ROLES IN THE COMPANY PLANNING PROCESS

The role of the dedicated IC department in company planning – for the 59.6% of respondents where this function exists – was then analyzed, looking jointly at the following two aspects:

- ▶ whether the IC department will be responsible for Internal Communication objectives;
- ▶ whether the IC department has a dedicated budget.

The analysis of Table1 shows that, for 21.3% of respondents, the IC department plays a mere **executive role**, because it does not set the IC objectives and it does not have a dedicated budget. The opposite happens in 16.1% of cases where the IC department clearly takes on a **strategic role** having a formal IC plan in 90.7% of cases. In 3.4% of companies the IC department appears to play essentially an **operative role**, since, although they set the objectives, they do not have a dedicated budget (77.8% of these companies have a formal IC plan), whereas the most frequent situation, in 59.2% of cases, is when the IC department takes on a **supportive role**, since it has a specific budget for IC, but it is not responsible for the related objectives.

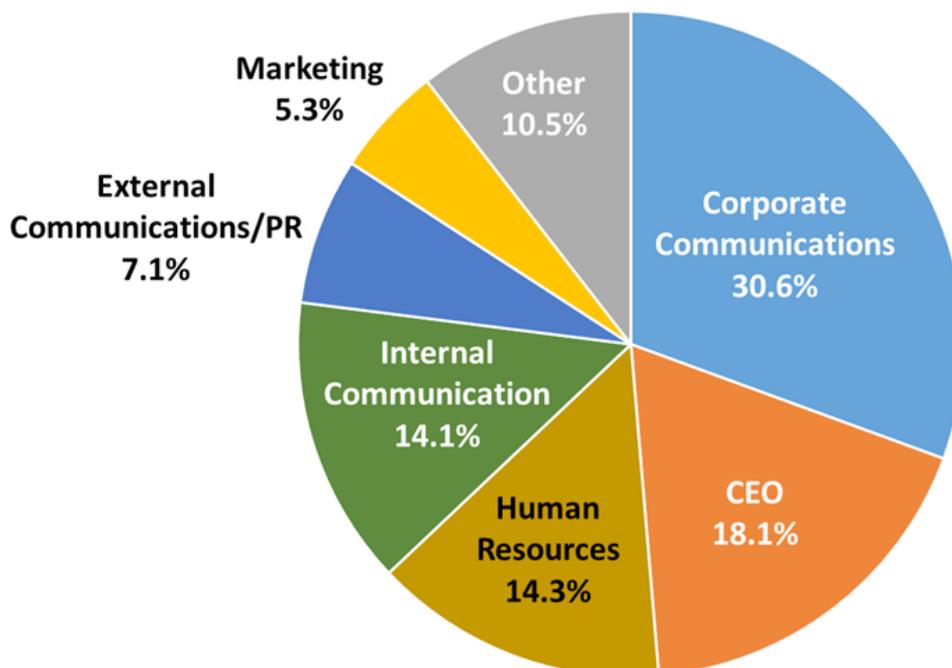
**Table 1- The roles of the IC department in the organizational planning process**

		Department responsible for defining IC goals and objectives	
		Internal Communication department	Another department
Budget allocation	No	Operative role: 3.4%	Executive role: 21.3%
	Yes	Strategic role: 16.1%	Supportive role: 59.2%

### 3.4. INTERNAL COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES

In 30.6% of the respondent companies, the department responsible for defining IC goals and objectives is Corporate Communications department (Chart 12), followed at a distance by the CEO (18.1%), by Human Resources department (14.3%) and by Internal Communication department (14.1%)

**Chart 12 - Within your organization, which department is responsible for defining IC goals and objectives?**



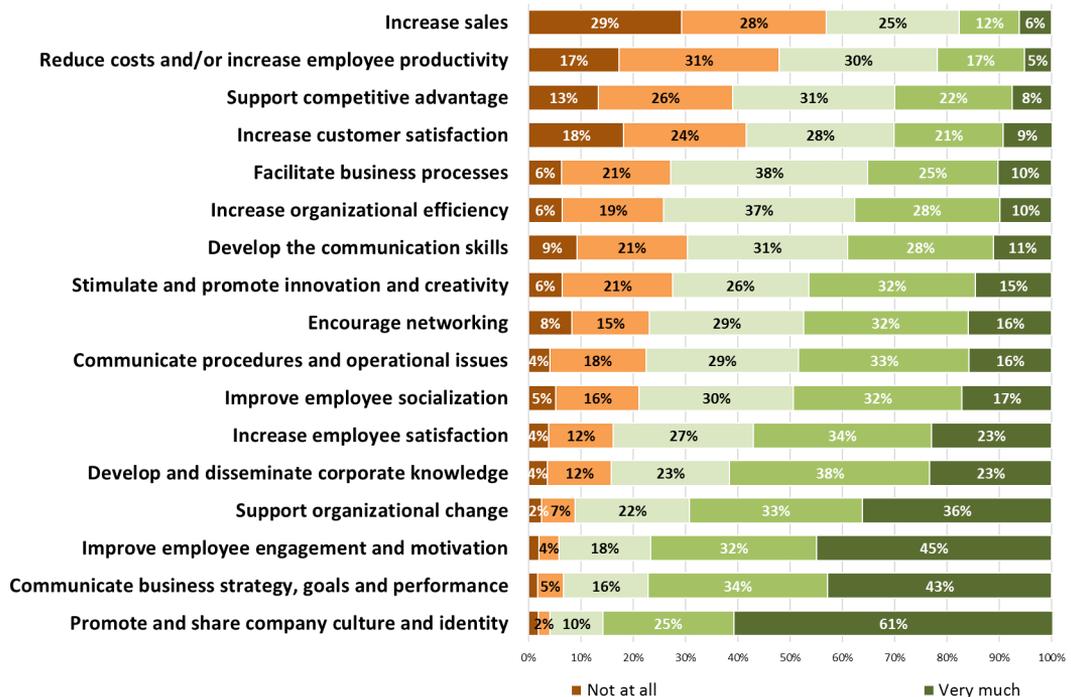
In order to investigate the type of objectives pursued by the Internal Communication system of the European companies being studied, a complete list of potentially achievable objectives was submitted to respondents, asking them to express to what extent the IC was concretely aimed at achieving each of them (Chart 13).

Respondent companies stated that Internal Communication is mainly aimed to promote and share company culture (much or very much for 86% of respondent companies), communicate business strategy, goals and performance (77%), improve employee engagement and motivation (77%), support organizational change (69%), develop and disseminate corporate knowledge (61%) and increase employee satisfaction (57%).

With lower intensity IC is aimed to improve employee socialization (49%), communicate procedures and operational issues (49%), encourage networking (48%) and stimulate and promote innovation and creativity (47%). The objectives

that IC seems to support to a lesser extent (not at all or very little) are related to the increase of sales (57%), the reduction of costs and/or the increase of employee productivity (48%), the increase of customer satisfaction (42%), the strengthen of competitive advantage (39%) and the development of the communication skills of the organization’s participants (30%).

**Chart 13 - In your organization, to what extent does IC support the following objectives?**



In particular, the research highlighted many significant differences in relation to the objectives pursued by IC, depending on whether there was a dedicated IC department. Indeed, in companies with a dedicated IC department all of the objectives taken into consideration were pursued to a significantly greater extent ( $p \leq 0.002$ ), except for those related to business processes, procedures, operational issues, employee productivity and customer satisfaction. Comparison of mean values identified highly significant differences for items “Encourage networking”, “Stimulate and promote innovation and creativity”, “Promote and share company culture and identity” and “Develop and disseminate corporate knowledge” (Chart 14).

Therefore, in companies with a dedicated IC department, the overall horizon for IC objectives seems broader and pursued using a more balanced approach.

**Chart 14 - In your organization, to what extent does IC support the following objectives? (average values)**



No significant differences in terms of defined objectives were found depending on company size, industry classification (industrial or service companies) or geographic area.

As regards the type of company, only two major differences were noted ( $p \leq 0.003$ ) in relation to the two key objectives of IC (“Promote and share company culture” and “Communicate business strategy, goals and performance”), more pursued by multinational companies than companies operating in one country with multiple sites and companies operating in one country with a single site.

A factor analysis was carried out in order to identify the underlying dimensions of IC objectives system. Factor analysis operates on the idea that measurable and observable variables can be reduced to fewer latent variables that share a common variance and are unobservable; these unobservable factors are not directly measured but are essentially hypothetical constructs that are used to represent variables. In other words, factor analysis is useful for placing observed variables into meaningful descriptive categories, that are believed to exert causal influence on the observed variables.

The factor analysis identified four factors: Competitiveness, Socialization & Networking, Corporate Identity and Operations & Processes (Table 2). 67.4% of the total variation is explained by these factors.

**Table 2 - Factors representing the underlying dimensions of IC objectives system**

<b>Factors and variables</b>
<b>Competitiveness</b>
Increase sales
Increase customer satisfaction
Reduce costs and/or increase employee productivity
Support competitive advantage
<b>Socialization &amp; Networking</b>
Increase employee socialization
Encourage networking
Develop the communication skills of the organization's participants
Stimulate and promote innovation and creativity
Increase employee satisfaction
Develop and disseminate corporate knowledge
<b>Corporate Identity</b>
Communicate business strategy, goals and performance
Promote and share company culture and identity
Improve employee engagement and motivation
Support organizational change
<b>Operations &amp; Processes</b>
Facilitate business processes
Communicate procedures and operational issues
Increase organizational efficiency

Extraction method: Principal component analysis

Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization

The factor represented by **Competitiveness** explains 19.5% of the variation. It pools together those objectives aimed at supporting the economic performance of a company derived from its actions in the market (increase of sales and increase of customer satisfaction), initiatives aimed to reduce costs and/or increase employee productivity and, more generally, all of those activities aimed at supporting competitive advantage.

The factor represented by **Socialization & Networking** explains 19% of the variation. It pools together those objectives aimed to develop and disseminate corporate knowledge and stimulate innovation and creativity through the growth of employee socialization and the strengthening of networking, also achievable through developing the communication skills of all the organization's participants, thus ultimately contributing to an increase of employee satisfaction.

The factor represented by **Corporate Identity** explains 17.1% of the variation. It pools together those objectives that are typical of IC, consisting in communicating business strategy, goals and performance and promoting and sharing company culture and identity, for the purpose of improving employee engagement and motivation and supporting organizational change.

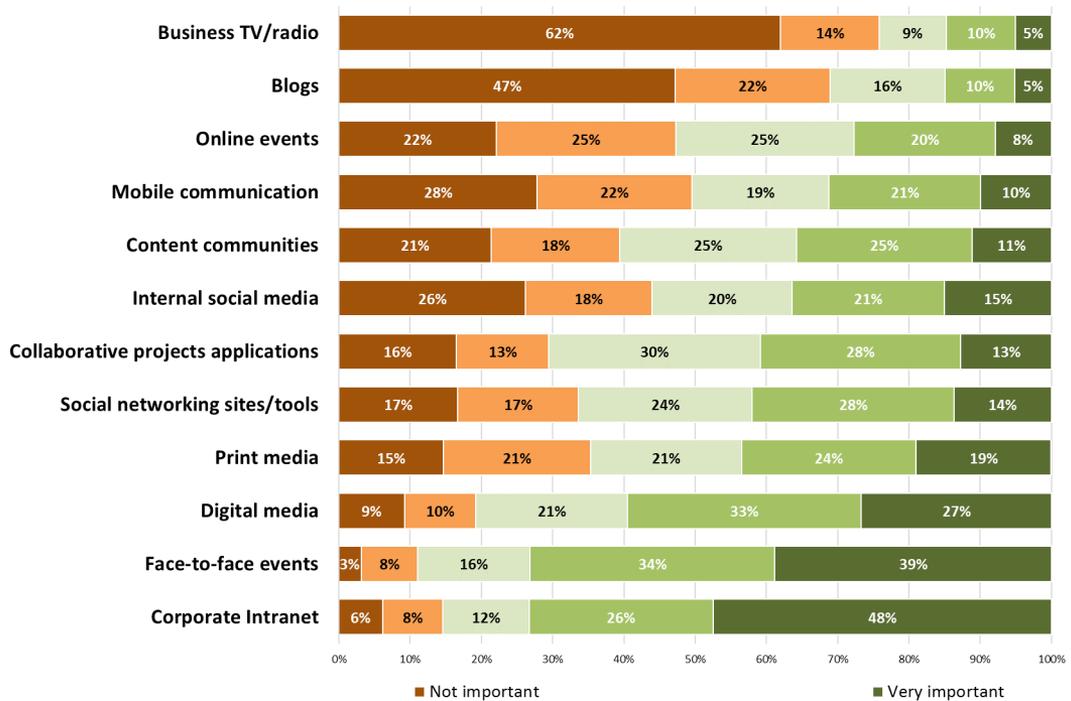
The factor represented by **Operations & Processes** explains 11.8% of the variation. It pools together those objectives concerning the simplification of business processes and the increase of organizational efficiency through communication of procedures and operational issues.

### 3.5. INTERNAL COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND TOOLS

In terms of the importance of IC channels and tools to achieve Internal Communication objectives (Chart 15), respondents confirmed the key role traditionally given to the corporate intranet and face-to-face events<sup>7</sup> (meetings, conventions, roadshows, conferences, seminars, etc.), followed by digital media (eMagazines, eNewsletters, etc.), traditional print media (magazines, newsletters, brochures, reports, posters, memos, etc.) and internal social media. Among internal social media<sup>8</sup>, collaborative projects applications and social networking sites/tools appear to be the most important to achieve IC goals, followed by content communities and blogs. Online events (online meetings, webinars, web conferencing, etc.), mobile communication (phone/tablet apps, mobile websites) and business TV/radio definitely seem far less important.

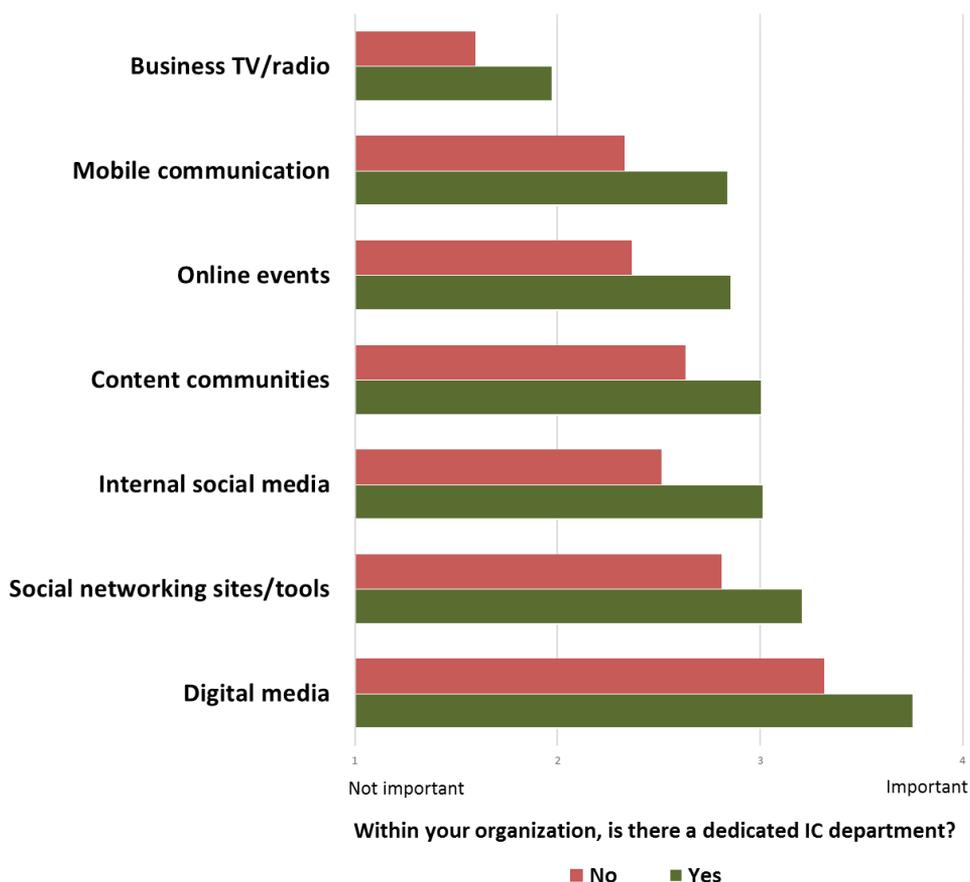
Specifically, with regard to the channels and tools believed to be important or most important in achieving IC objectives, respondents cited mainly the corporate intranet (74%), face-to-face events (73%) and digital media (60%), followed at a distance by traditional print media (43%). Slightly important or not important are considered the business TV/radio (76%) and blogs (69%), followed by mobile communication (50%), online events (47%) and internal social media (44%).

**Chart 15 - How important are the following channels and tools in achieving your IC objectives?**



No significant differences in terms of the level of importance of channels and tools were found depending on company size, whereas the analysis showed significant differences ( $p \leq 0.004$ ) in the average importance attached to seven channels and tools depending on whether there was a dedicated IC department. Indeed, digital media, the main internal social media (social networking sites/tools and content communities), online events and mobile communication are seen as more important in the companies where there is a dedicated IC department (Chart 16).

**Chart 16 - How important are the following channels and tools in achieving your IC objectives? (average values)**



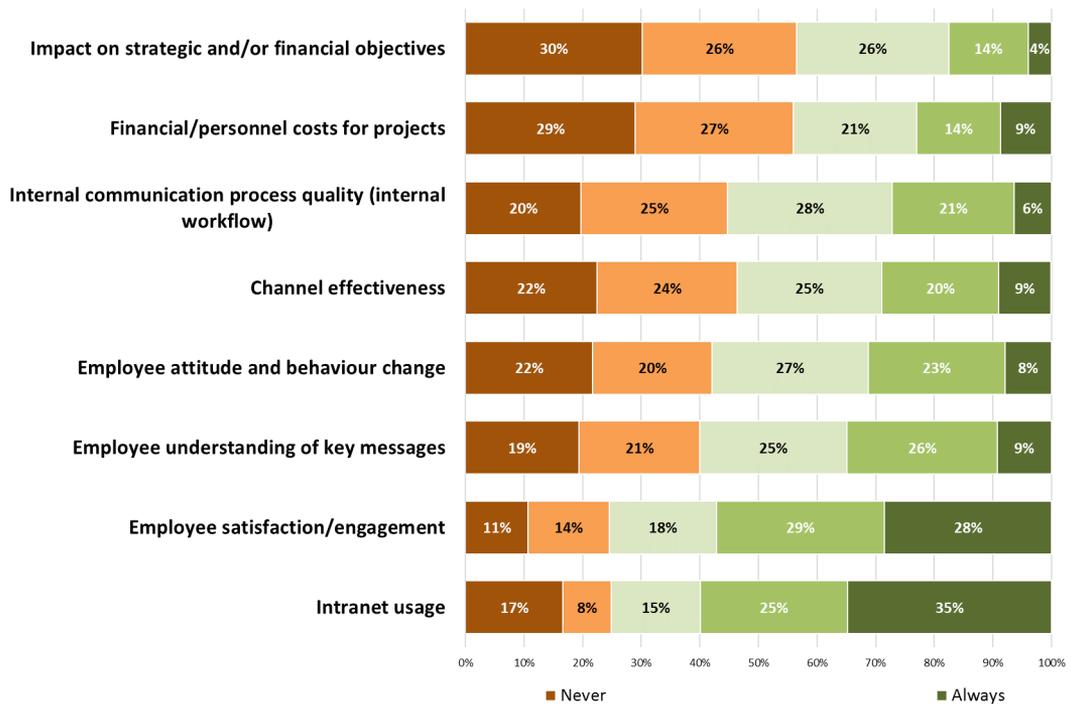
In addition, two major differences were noted ( $p \leq 0.001$ ) concerning the geographic area of respondent companies. Online events on average seem to be more important in Northern Europe, whereas mobile communication seems more important in Southern Europe closely followed by Northern Europe.

Finally, another two significant differences ( $p \leq 0.000$ ) were noted in relation to company type. Both face-to-face events and online events seem on average more important in multinational companies than in companies operating in one country with multiple sites and companies operating in one country with a single site.

### 3.6. INTERNAL COMMUNICATION ASSESSMENT

Regarding the items that are monitored or measured always or very often by organizations to assess IC effectiveness (Chart 17), respondents mentioned particularly intranet usage (60%) and employee satisfaction/engagement (57%), followed at a distance by employee understanding of key messages (35%) and employee attitude and behavior change (31%). Rarely or never are monitored or measured the impact on strategic and/or financial objectives (56%), the financial/personnel costs for projects (56%), the channels effectiveness (46%), the Internal Communication process quality (45%) and the Internal Communication process quality (45%).

**Chart 17 - Which items are monitored or measured to assess IC effectiveness?**



The items that are monitored or measured were analyzed in accordance with the theoretical framework developed by academics, management accountants, and communication associations in Germany (DPRG/ICV, 2011; Watson & Noble, 2014, pp. 170-181; Zerfass et al., 2017), also adopted by the «European Communication Monitor».

The DPRG/ICV framework conceptualizes evaluation and measurement activities in four groups:

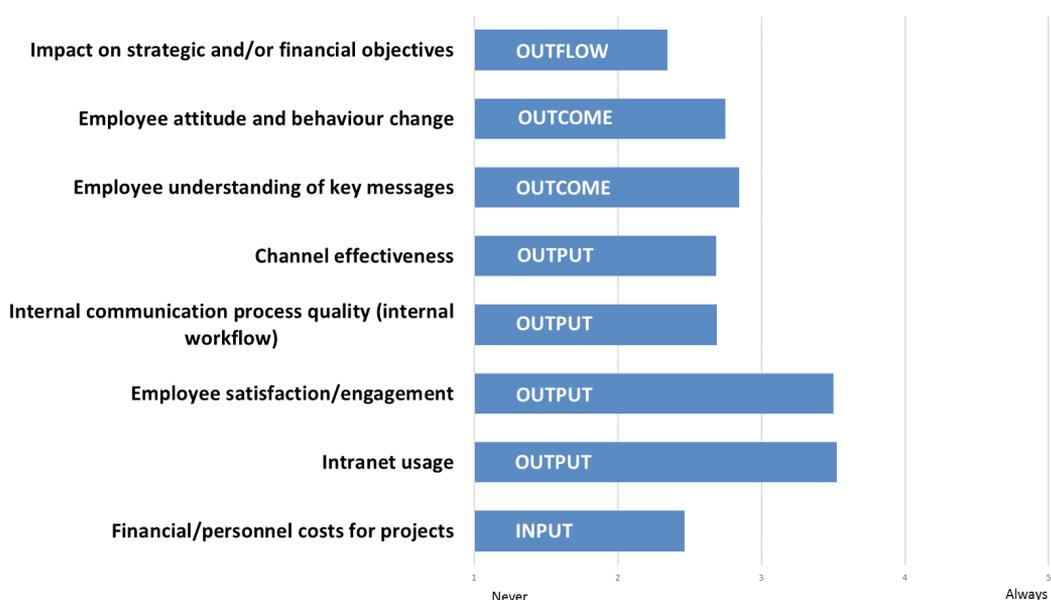
- ▶ **input:** this stage corresponds to the resources employed and includes staff employment and the financial costs of communication;
- ▶ **output:** this stage consists of both process efficiency, which can be recorded using the quality of internal workflows and activities provided by communication departments (comprised the level of employee satisfaction),

and range and contents of messages that are available to employees across numerous channels (included intranet and social media platforms);

- ▶ **outcome:** this stage relates to the changes affecting the employees, such as awareness, understanding of key messages, commitment, changes of attitudes, as well as behavioral dispositions or actions of employees;
- ▶ **outflow:** this stage refers to organizational goals achieved as a consequence of communication processes, i.e. strategic and/or financial objectives or corporate performance, such as turnover, project closings, cost reduction, or reputation and brand values.

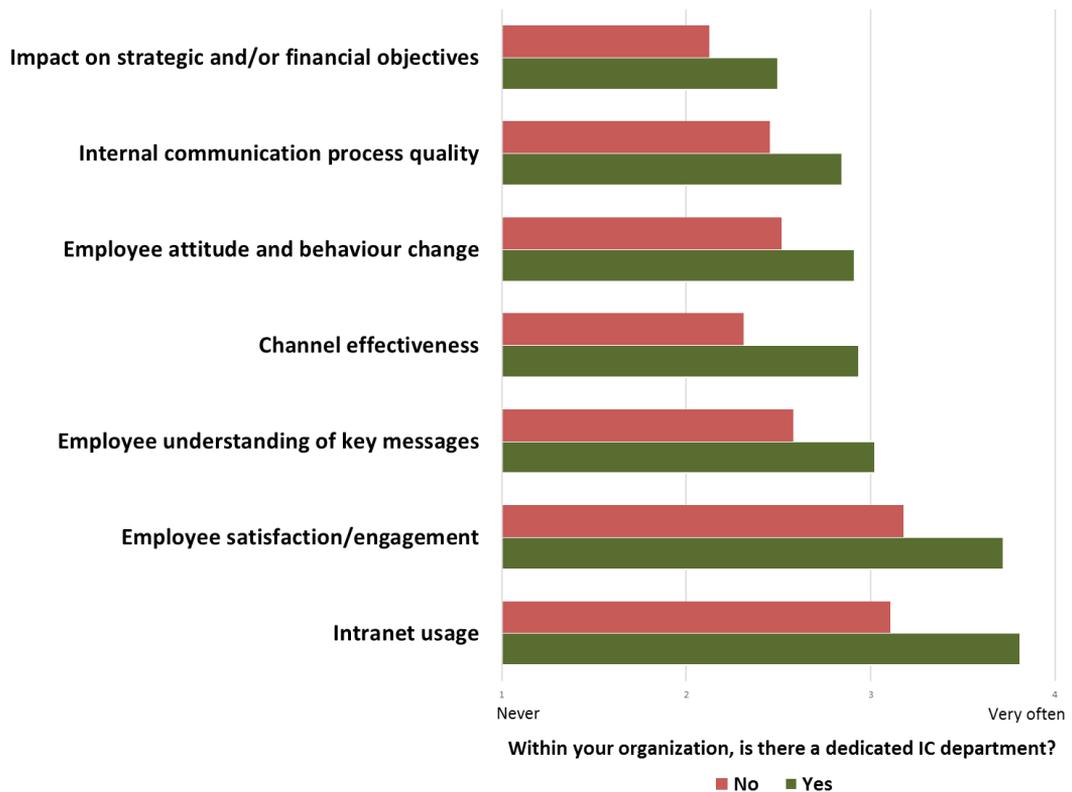
According to the DPRG/ICV framework, the research results showed that respondents generally pay little attention to the necessity of monitoring internal communication process from its initiation to its potential economic impact (Chart 18). At the initiation of communication process (input), companies rarely measure financial or personnel costs for projects (the average frequency is 2.46 based on a five-point scale); when evaluating communication process at the level of the availability of messages (output), attention is mainly focused on intranet usage and on satisfaction/engagement of employees followed by measures of the process quality of internal workflows and the channel effectiveness. For assessing communication outcome, the respondent companies focus their attention on the success of communication with employees through analyzing their understanding of key messages followed by indicators for evaluating the influence on employees attitudes and behavior change. Measures that reveal the impact of communication at the outflow level are scarcely utilized by respondents: in fact, methods to evaluate the impact of Internal Communication on strategic and/or financial objectives are ranked last.

**Chart 18 - Which items are monitored or measured to assess IC effectiveness? (average values)**



The analysis revealed that the items monitored or measured to assess IC effectiveness are significantly different ( $p \leq 0.001$ ) depending on whether a dedicated IC department exists or not: indeed, in companies with a dedicated IC department, all items (with the exclusion of the financial/personnel costs for projects) are measured on average more frequently (Chart 19).

**Chart 19 - Which items are monitored or measured to assess IC effectiveness? (average values)**



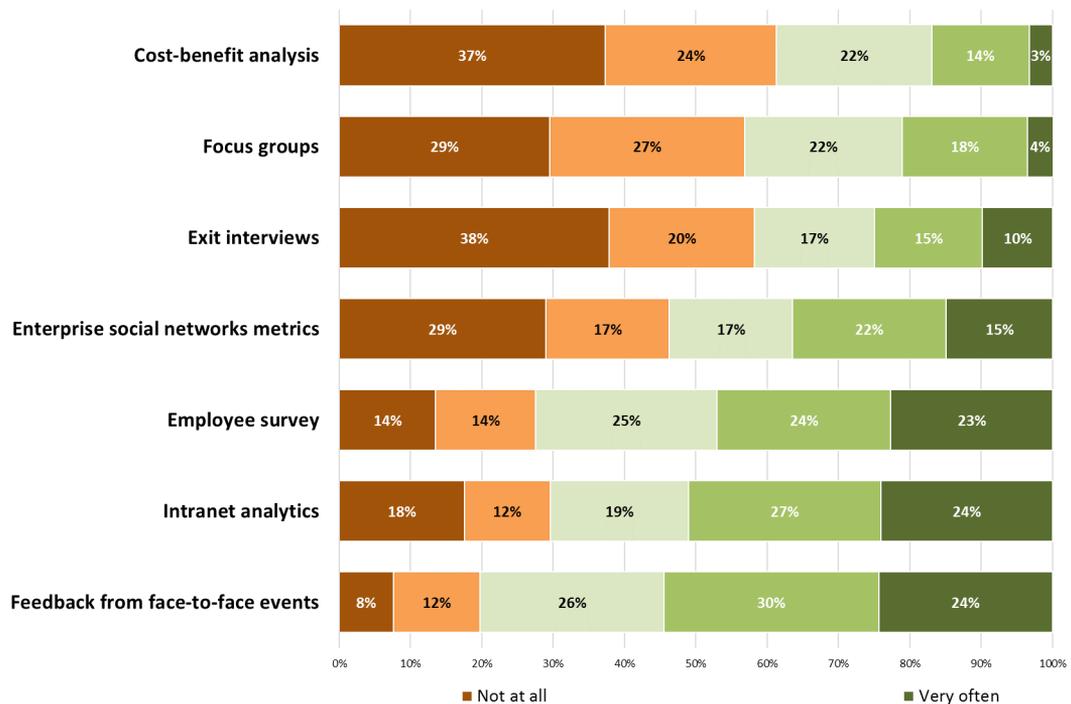
In addition, some significant differences were noted ( $p \leq 0.001$ ) with reference to

- ▶ **type of company**: employee satisfaction/engagement is monitored or measured more regularly on average in multinational companies than companies operating in one country with multiple sites and companies operating in one country with a single site;
- ▶ **company size**: the employee satisfaction/engagement and the intranet usage are monitored or measured on average more frequently in companies with over 5,000 employees;
- ▶ **geographic area** of respondent companies: the employee attitude and behavior change and the channel effectiveness are monitored or measured on average more frequently by companies in Northern Europe.

Regarding the methods used often or very often to assess IC effectiveness (Chart 20), respondents mentioned particularly feedback from face-to-face events (54%), intranet analytics (51%) and employee surveys (47%). Rarely or never are used methods as cost-benefit analysis (61%), exit interviews (58%), focus groups (56%) and enterprise social networks metrics (36%).

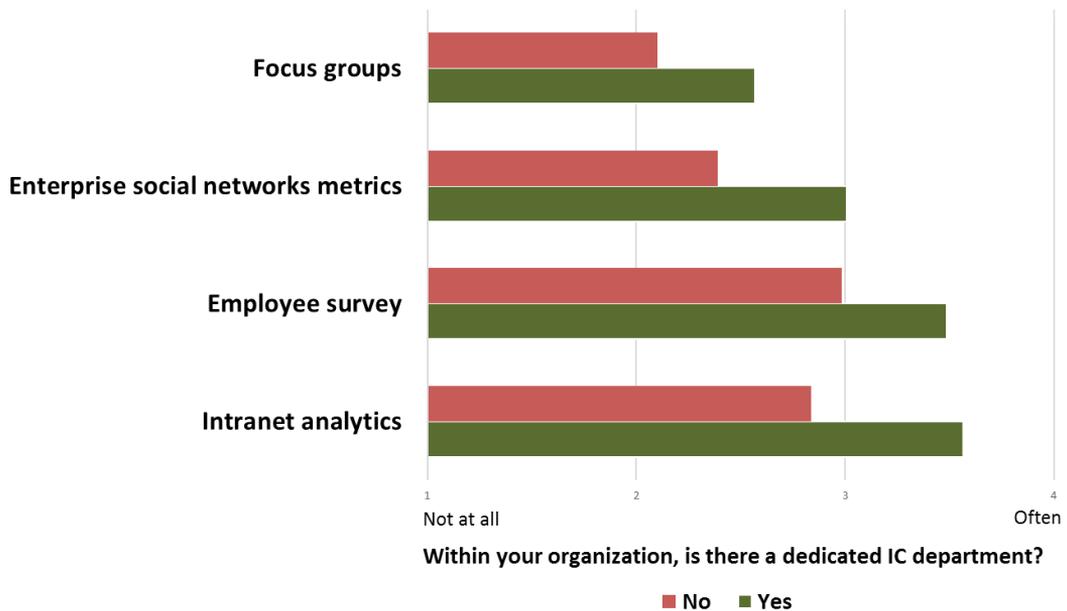
The special focus on measuring intranet usage and the use of feedback from face-to-face events and intranet analytics to assess IC effectiveness are in line with the increased importance attributed to corporate intranet and to face-to-face events in pursuing the IC objectives over other channels.

**Chart 20 - How often are the following methods currently used to assess IC effectiveness?**



The research revealed that the methods currently used to assess IC effectiveness differ significantly ( $p \leq 0.000$ ) depending on whether there is a dedicated IC department. Indeed, in companies with a dedicated IC department, four methods (intranet analytics, employee surveys, enterprise social networks metrics and focus groups) are used on average more frequently (Chart 21).

**Chart 21 - How often are the following methods currently used to assess IC effectiveness? (average values)**



In addition, some statistically significant differences were noted ( $p \leq 0.005$ ) with reference to

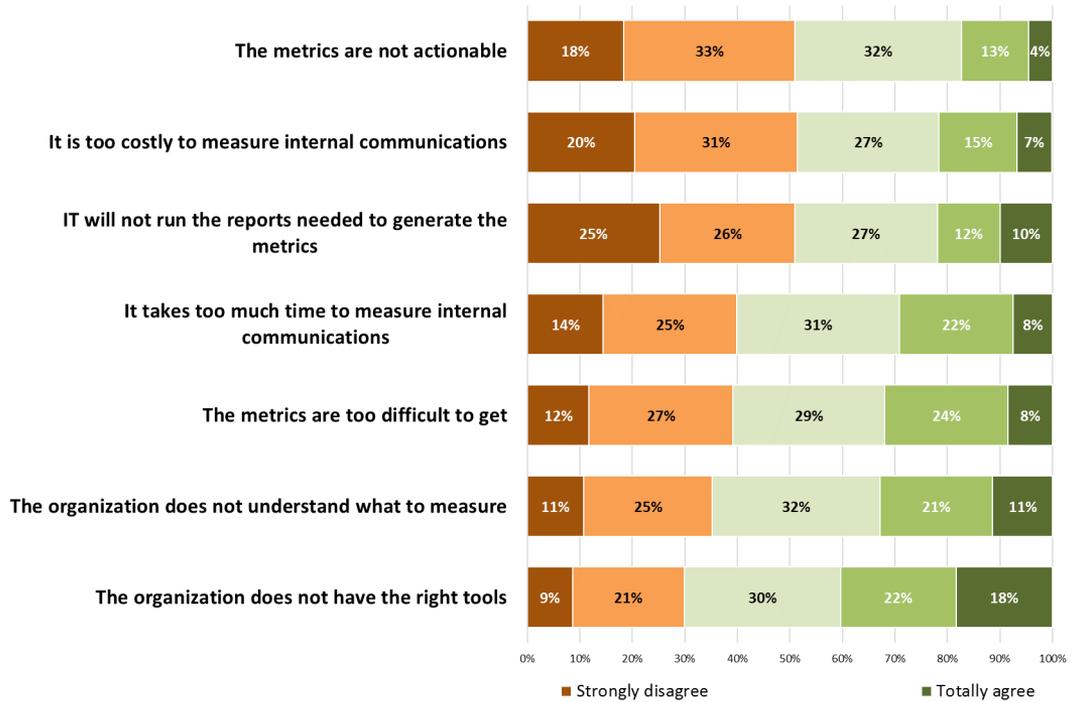
- ▶ **company type**: the employee surveys are used to assess IC effectiveness on average more frequently by multinational companies than by companies operating in one country with multiple sites and by companies operating in one country with a single site;
- ▶ **company size**: the intranet analytics and the enterprise social networks metrics are used on average more frequently by companies with over 5,000 employees;
- ▶ **geographic area** of respondent companies: focus groups are used on average more frequently in companies based in Northern Europe.

According to the respondent companies, the barriers affecting the effective measurement of IC are linked to the lack of the right tools, the difficulty in understanding what to measure (i.e. volume, reach, behavioral changes, etc.) and the fact the metrics are too difficult to get, in addition to the time needed to do the measurement (Chart 22). About 50% of respondents do not consider the following aspects a major barrier: collaboration with the IT department, the cost of measuring and taking concrete action in response to the results of the measuring.

Therefore, the analysis showed that, among the respondent companies, the critical issues in measuring the effectiveness of IC do not lie in the shortfall of adequate financial resources, but in the lack of adequate tools and in the difficulty of finding the right method to conduct measuring.

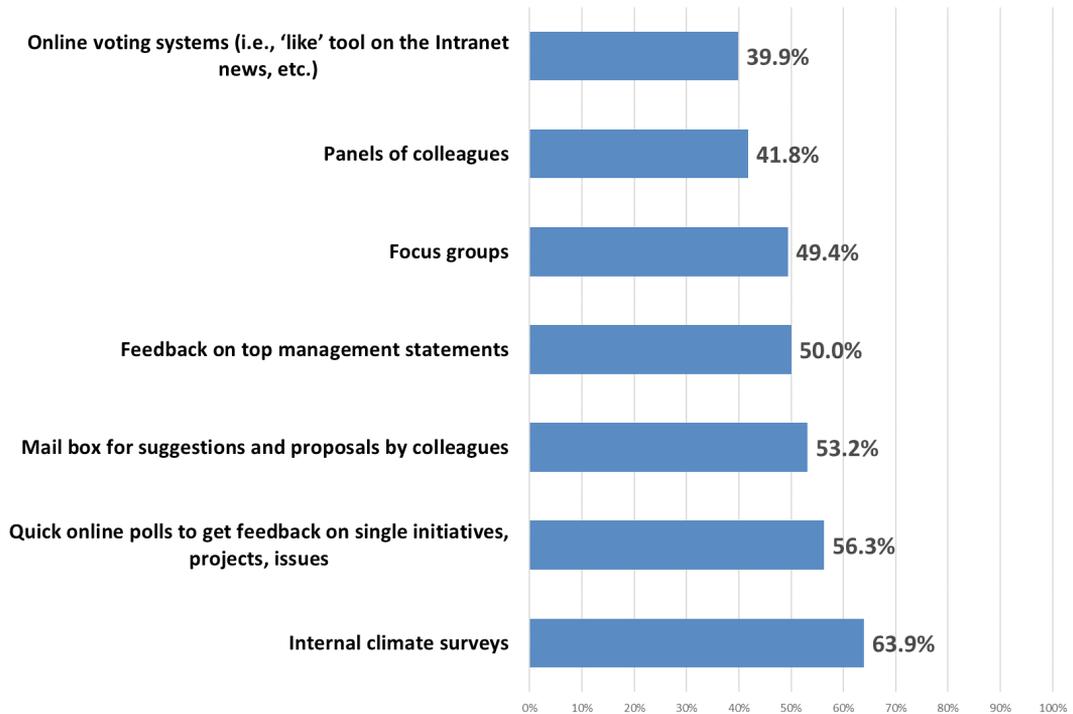
In terms of the barriers to measurement, no significant difference was noted in relation to company size, type (multinational or national) or the presence of a dedicated IC department.

**Chart 22 - To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements concerning the barriers affecting the effective measurement of IC?**



With regard to collaborators’ structured listening, such as ad-hoc surveys and regularly feedback collection, only 36.2% of respondent companies regularly hold listening activities. Of these, 63.9% regularly carry out internal climate surveys, 56.3% use quick online polls to get feedback on single initiatives, projects and issues and 53.2% use mailbox for suggestion and proposals by colleagues (Chart 23). Additionally, feedback on top management statements is used quite regularly, followed by tools such as focus groups, panels of colleagues and, finally, online voting systems (i.e., “like” tool on the intranet news, etc.).

### Chart 23 - What kind of listening initiatives do you regularly take?

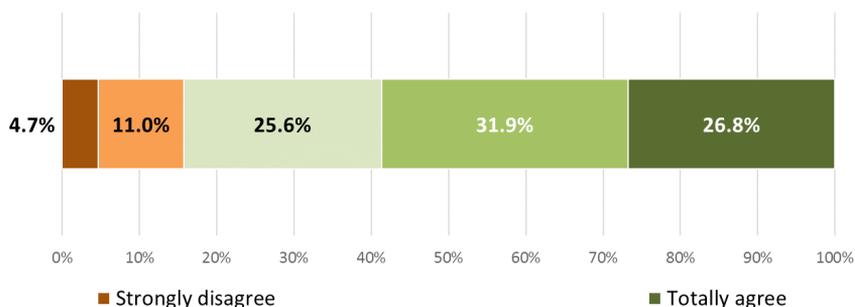


Finally, the analysis showed a significant difference ( $p \leq 0.000$ ) in relation to whether or not there is a dedicated IC department. Structured listening is performed regularly by 44.2% of companies where such a department exists, compared to 24.4% where there is no dedicated IC department.

### 3.7. INTERNAL COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVENESS

58.7% of respondents declared that generally IC supports the strategic goals of the organization and only 15.7% of them declared that IC does not sustain the strategic goals (Chart 24).

### Chart 24 - IC supports the strategic goals of the organization



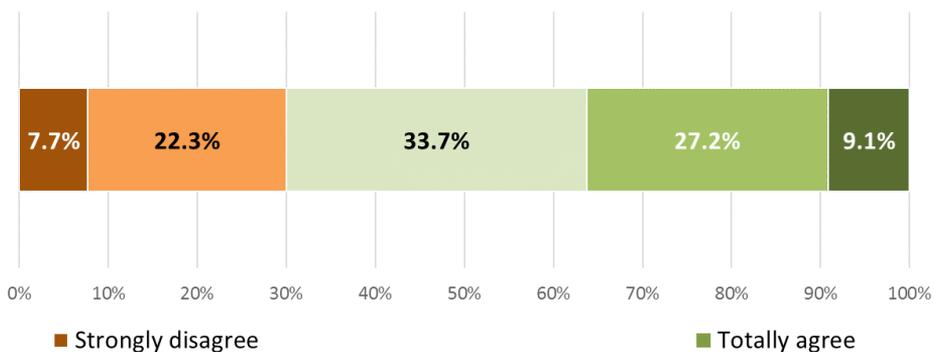
The analysis revealed that there were significant differences in terms of the level of agreement about this item between companies with or without a dedicated IC department ( $p \leq 0.002$ ). Indeed, in companies with a dedicated IC department 64.4% of respondents think IC supports a lot (33.6%) or very much (30.8%) the strategic goals of the organization, whereas in companies where there is no dedicated IC department, 50% of respondents think IC supports the strategic objectives a lot (29.4%) or very much (20.6%), yet 22.3% think it plays a marginal (13.5%) or even negligible role (8.8%) (Chart 25).

**Chart 25 - IC supports the strategic goals of the organization**



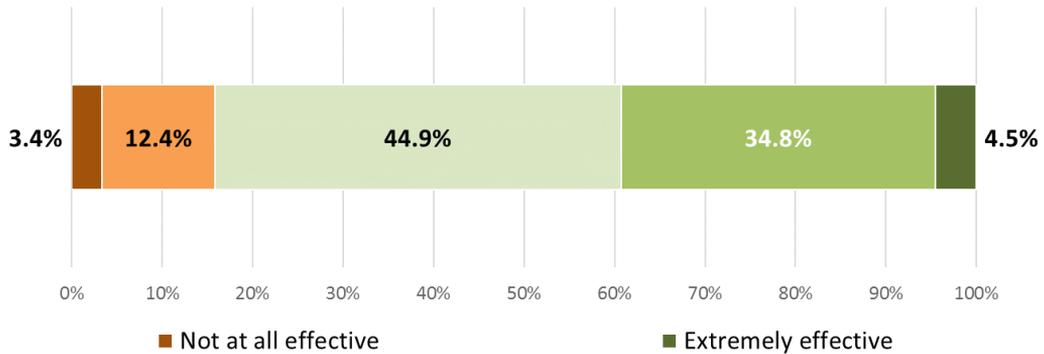
36.3% of respondents affirmed that IC plays an important role in the overall performance of the organization (Chart 26), but a surprising percentage of respondents (30%) declared that IC does not play a relevant role in their organization. No significant difference was found in terms of presence or not of a dedicated IC department.

**Chart 26 - IC plays an important role in the overall performance of the organization**



39.3% of respondent companies revealed their IC strategy is effective (34.8%) or extremely effective (4.5%) at helping achieve key business goals (Chart 27) and only 15% of respondents considered it low effective (12.4%) or totally ineffective (3.4%).

**Chart 27 - How effective is your IC strategy at helping your organization achieve its current business goals?**

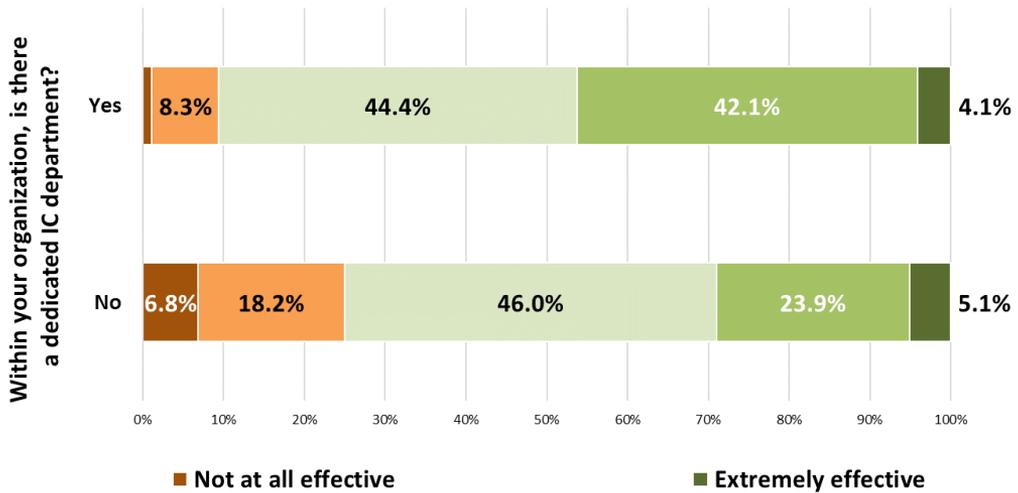


The analysis revealed positive and statistically significant correlations between the perceived effectiveness of the IC strategy and:

- ▶ the importance of the role of IC in the overall performance of the organization ( $p \leq 0,000$ );
- ▶ the belief that the organization invests enough in IC ( $p \leq 0,000$ ): respondents more satisfied with the level of investment believed at the same time that IC was more effective to help their organization achieve business goals.

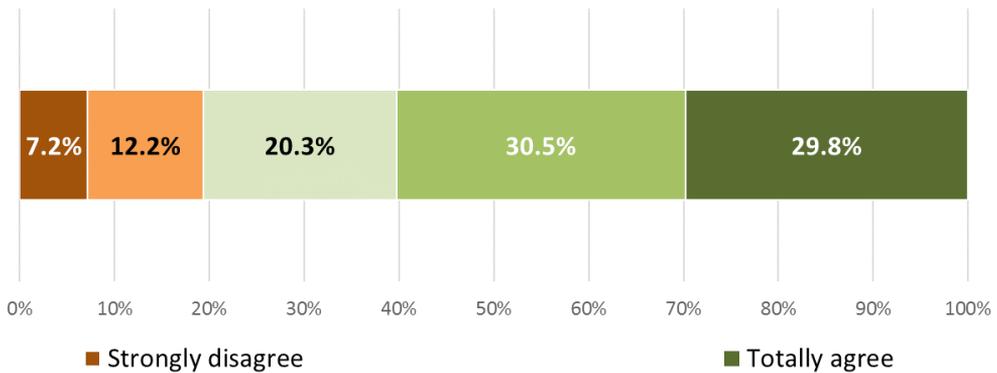
The perceived effectiveness of the IC strategy depends significantly on whether there is a dedicated IC department ( $p \leq 0,000$ ). Indeed, in companies with a dedicated IC department 44.2% of respondents deem IC effective (42.1%) or extremely effective (4.1%) at helping their organization achieve its current business goals, whereas in companies where there is no dedicated IC department, only 29% of respondents think IC is very (29.4%) or extremely (20.6%) effective and 25% think that it has a marginal role (18.2%) or that it is even not at all effective (6.8%) (Chart 28).

**Chart. 28 - How effective is your IC strategy at helping your organization achieve its current business goals?**

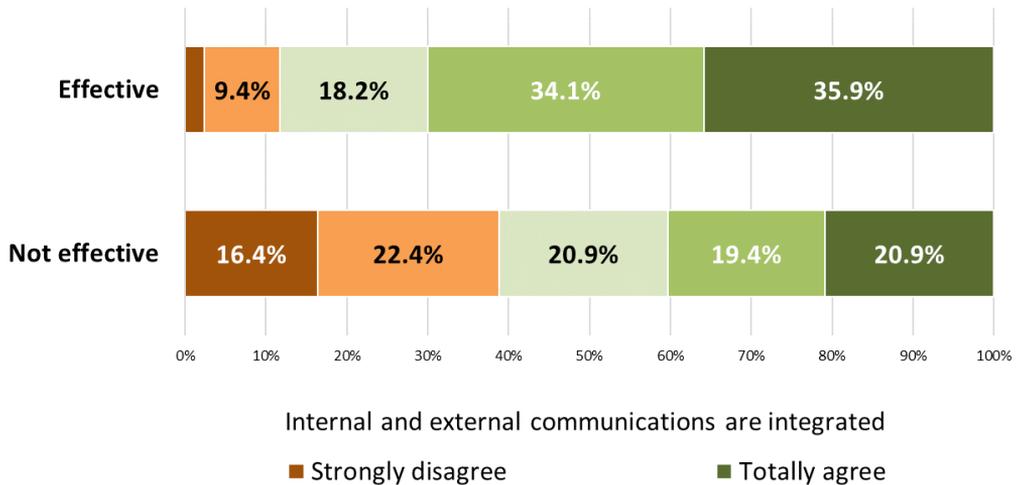


Noteworthy is that the perceived effectiveness of the IC strategy turned out to be dependent on the perception of the level of integration between internal and external communication ( $p \leq 0.000$ ). Indeed, if in general terms (Chart 29) – and regardless of the presence of a dedicated IC department – the level of integration is seen as high (30.5%) or very high (29.8%), 70% of respondent companies that perceived the IC strategy as effective at helping their business goals think that internal and external communications are integrated, whereas 38.8% of companies who are not convinced about the effectiveness of IC think that internal and external communications are not integrated (Chart 30).

**Chart 29 - Internal and external communications are integrated**



**Chart 30 - How effective is your IC strategy at helping your organization achieve its current business goals?**

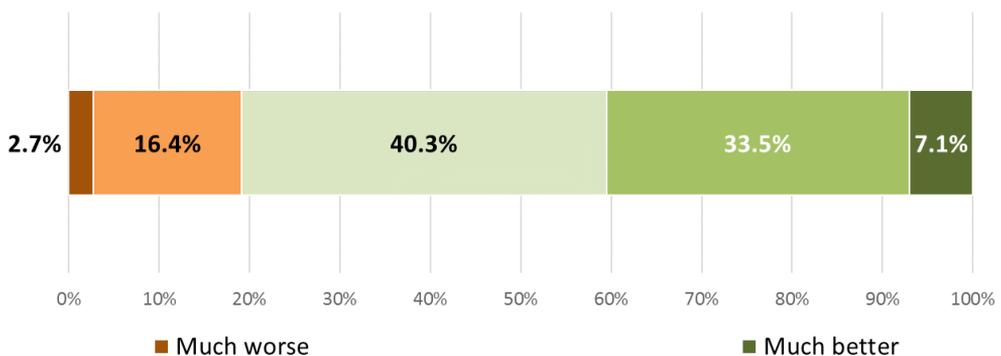


40.6% of respondent companies estimated the quality and ability of the IC team in their organization better (33.5%) or much better (7.1%) compared to those of companies considered as a benchmark; however, a valuable percentage of respondents (40.3%) have assessed that the quality and ability of their IC team are the same as those of other relevant companies (Chart 31).

The analysis revealed positive and statistically significant correlations between the supposed quality and ability of the IC team compared to those of companies considered as a benchmark and:

- ▶ the importance of IC role in the overall performance of the organization ( $p \leq 0.000$ );
- ▶ the perceived IC actual effectiveness in achieving business goals ( $p \leq 0.000$ ).

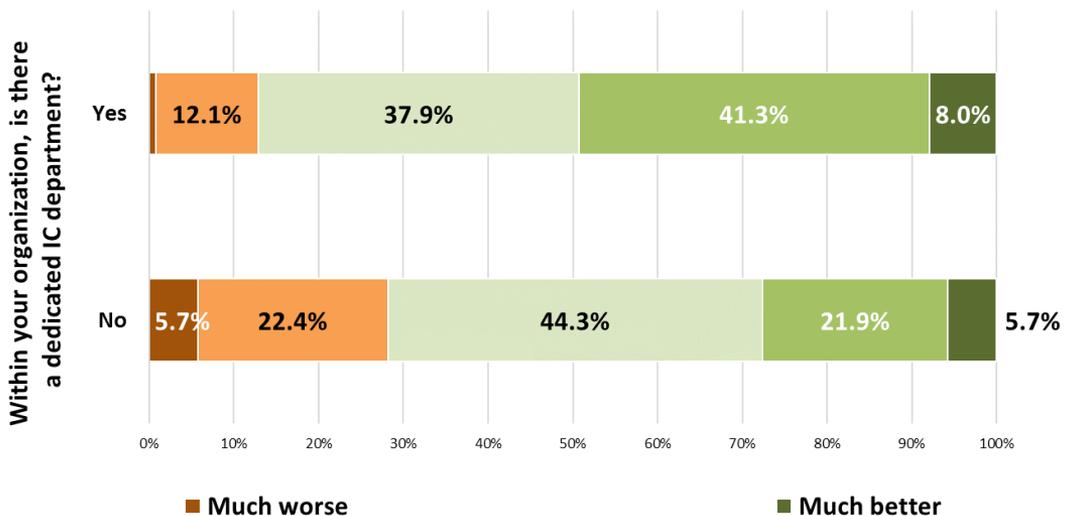
**Chart 31 - How would you estimate the quality and ability of the IC team in your organization compared to those of companies that you consider as a benchmark?**



The analysis showed that there were significant differences in terms of the perception of the quality and ability of the IC team depending on whether a dedicated IC department exists or not ( $p \leq 0.000$ ). Indeed, in companies with a dedicated IC department 49.3% of respondents think the quality and ability of the IC team in their organization are better (41.3%) or much better (8.0%) than those of companies considered as a benchmark, whereas in companies with no dedicated IC department only 27.6% of respondents think the quality and ability of the IC team are better (21.9%) or much better (5.7%) than other companies, but 28.1% think their situation is worse (22.4%) or far worse (5.7%) (Chart 32).

Therefore, the analysis confirmed that the existence or not of a dedicated IC department influences the average perception of respondents: in companies with a dedicated IC department the mean values of both the perceived IC actual effectiveness and the perceived comparative quality and ability of the IC team are significantly higher than the other companies ( $p \leq 0.000$ ).

**Chart 32 - How would you estimate the quality and ability of the IC team in your organization compared to those of companies that you consider as a benchmark?**



## 4. INTERNAL COMMUNICATION ROLES AND TASKS

### 4.1. THE CONTRIBUTION OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION TO ORGANIZATIONAL OBJECTIVES AND MANAGEMENT DECISIONS

The research aimed to analyze the roles enacted by Internal Communication team/department reflecting IC relationship with business strategies, according to the methodological approach adopted in 2014 by the European Communication Monitor (Zerfass et al., 2014), a joint study by academia and practice that has been conducted annually since 2007 by the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA) and the European Association of Communication Directors (EACD).

More precisely, several studies (i.e. Van Ruler & Verčič, 2002, 2005; Lurati & Eppler 2006; Zerfass 2008) have found that in general corporate communication can foster business goals basically in two distinct ways: (a) by solving problems deriving from business or functional strategies that can be solved by communication activities, and (b) by helping to define organizational objectives by adding the communicative dimension to strategy formulation.

Moreover, the research was carried out according to the framework that covers four elements of the Internal Communication consulting process: «a) recommending communication activities and techniques; b) providing and supporting communication competencies, structures, and processes; c) integrating communicative insights into task-related decision making; and, d) building and encouraging awareness of the communicative dimension of any management activities or task-related decisions» (Zerfass & Franke, 2013, p. 128).

Therefore, the research has deepened understanding of the role enacted by Internal Communication in respondent companies based on two key aspects that encompass five variables (Chart 33):

- ▶ the level of support given to senior management and other corporate departments both for the development of their communication skills, and in terms of communication consulting for performing their activities<sup>9</sup> (“**Supporting business goals by managing Internal Communication**”),
- ▶ the level of engagement of the head of Internal Communication in drafting strategic corporate decisions (“**Helping to define business strategy**”).

In relation to the first aspect, the research looked into the extent to which

the IC activities are focused on supporting business goals by managing Internal Communication and by facilitating organizational processes in the respondent companies. The results showed a fairly high level of support provided by the IC team/department. 57% of respondent companies reveal that IC advises executives/senior managers how to manage specific communication challenges, 49% indicate that IC supports executives/senior managers by providing information/insights for decisions and activities and 40% affirm that IC enables executives/senior managers to recognize the inherent communication aspect in any of their decisions and activities.

In relation to the second aspect, the research looked into the extent to which the IC head is responsible for helping to define business strategy by adding the communicative dimension to strategy formulation.

The findings generally revealed a low level of executive influence of the IC head: only 35% of companies say that the IC head is always invited to senior-level meetings dealing with organizational strategic planning and 32% indicate that the IC head is involved at the earliest stages of strategic planning. Furthermore, 19% of respondents reveal that the IC head is never invited to senior-level meetings and 17% claim that the IC manager is not involved at the earliest stages of strategic planning. Finally, 35% of respondents declare that the IC head is involved in decisions only when problems occur.

**Chart 33 - Thinking of IC within your organization, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?**



The analysis revealed that there were significant differences ( $p \leq 0.000$ ) between companies with a dedicated IC department, on the one hand, and companies without a dedicated IC department, on the other, with regard to the average perceptions of three matters concerning activities that are focused on supporting business goals by managing Internal Communication and by facilitating organizational processes (Chart 34): in companies with a dedicated IC department the IC activities are more dedicated on advising executives or senior managers how to manage specific communication challenges, on providing information/insights for decisions and activities, and on enabling managers to recognize the inherent communication aspect in any of their decisions and activities.

The research showed that, given IC's important advisory and support role for senior management and other corporate functions, which is more evident in companies with a dedicated IC department, the IC's level of engagement in strategic planning is not equally high, with no significant differences between companies with or without a dedicated IC department.

**Chart 34 - Thinking of IC within your organization, to what extent do you agree with the following statements? (average values)**

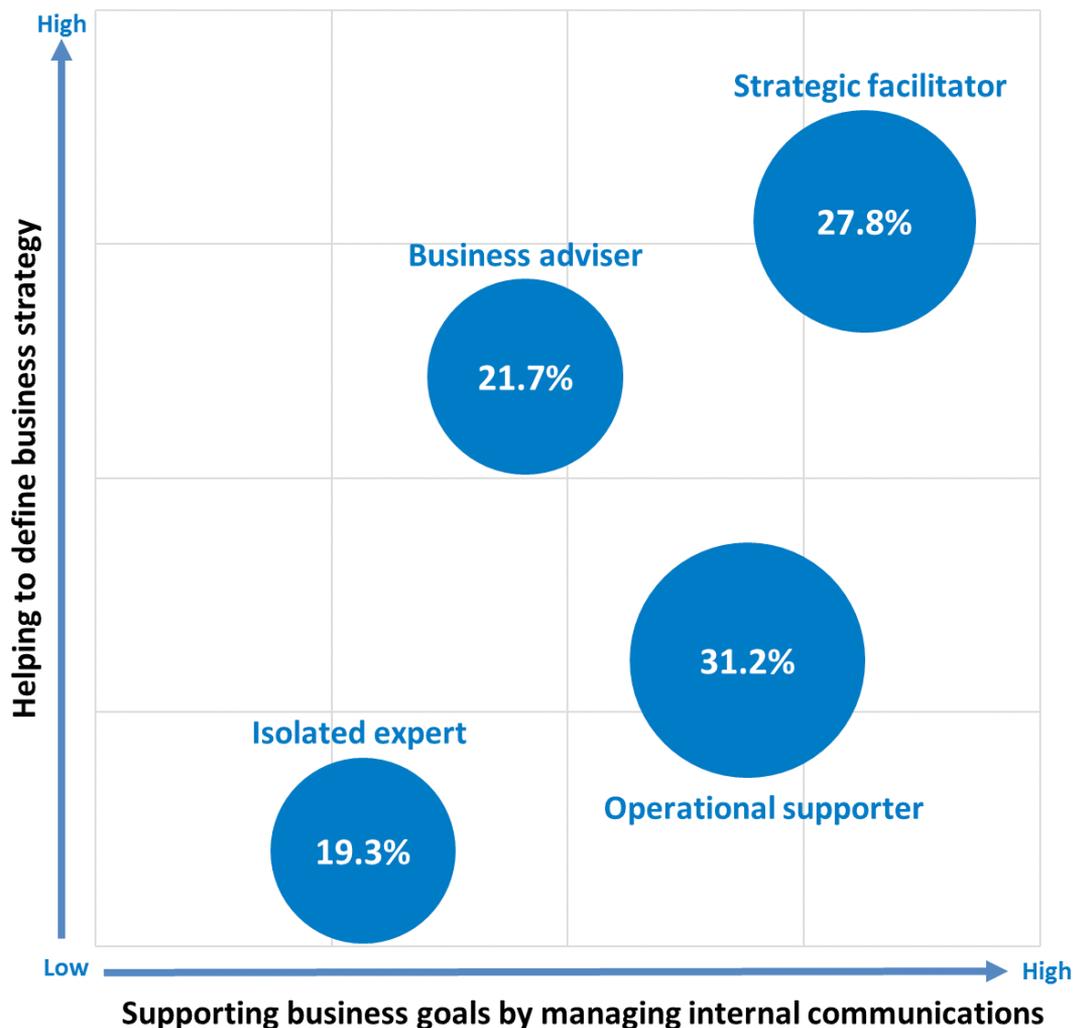


A cluster analysis was conducted in order to identify some groups of companies according to the values of the mentioned variables. Results showed that respondent companies can be clustered into four groups corresponding to four different roles enacted by Internal Communication team/department (Chart 35):

- ▶ **Cluster 1** resulted to be composed of 31.2% of respondent companies concentrating on addressing senior managers and executives in order to facilitate organizational processes by managing communication activities, without dealing with strategic planning; therefore, these respondents are acting as “Operational supporters”;

- ▶ **Cluster 2** resulted to be composed of 27.8% of respondents declaring that they use both ways to contribute to overall goals, thus enacting the “**Strategic facilitator**” role;
- ▶ **Cluster 3** resulted to be composed of 21.7% of respondents primarily perceiving themselves as “**Business advisers**” helping to adjust organizational strategies and supporting top management by adding the communicative dimension to strategy formulation;
- ▶ **Cluster 4** resulted to be composed of 19.3% of respondent companies declaring difficulties to see a clear link between what Internal Communication are doing and what the organization wants to achieve; therefore, in these companies IC act as “**Isolated experts**” and contribute to business management in a limited way.

Chart 35 - Roles enacted by IC that reflect the relationship with organizational processes and strategies

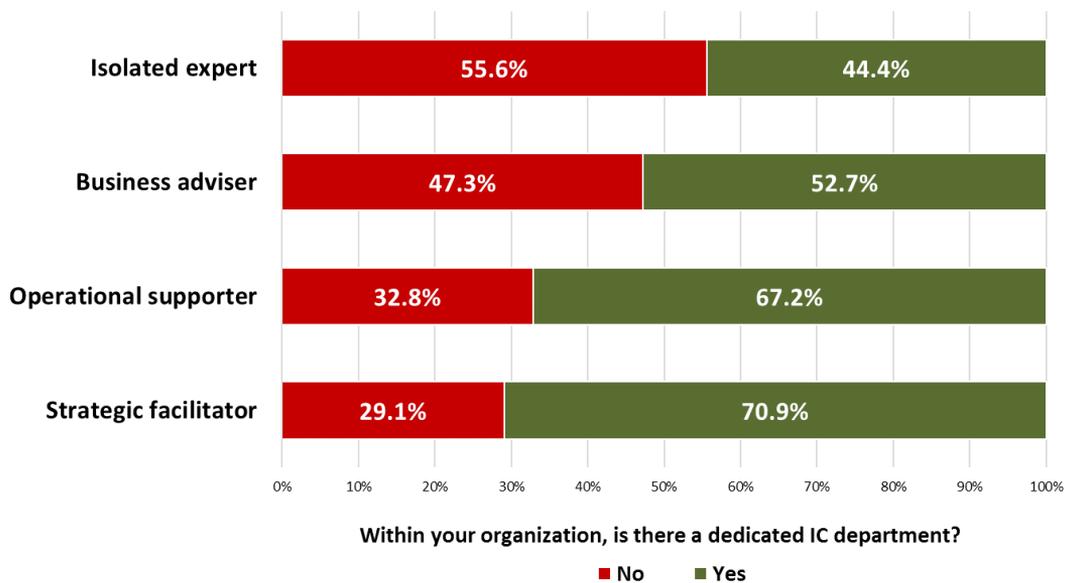


It must be noted that, in the four different roles taken on by IC, statistically significant differences were noted with reference to the presence or lack of a dedicated IC department ( $p \leq 0.000$ ) (Chart 36), and of a formal IC plan ( $p \leq 0.000$ ) (Chart 37), whereas no significant differences were observed regarding the allocation (if any) of a specific budget.

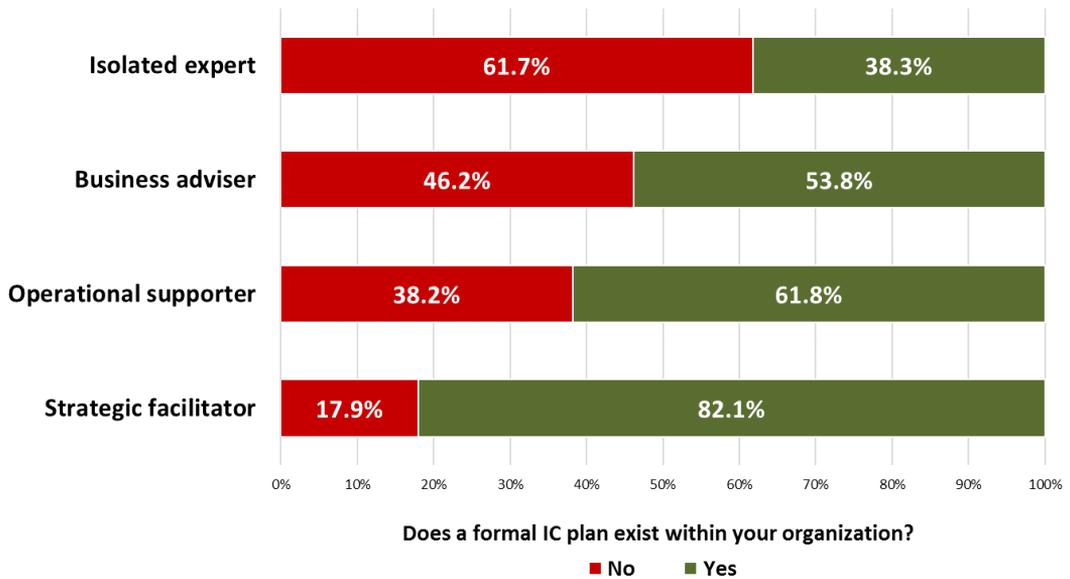
More specifically:

- ▶ in 70.9% of cases where Internal Communication takes on the role of “**Strategic facilitator**” there is a dedicated IC department and in 82.1% of companies there is a formal IC plan;
- ▶ in 67.2% of cases where Internal Communication plays the role of “**Operational supporter**” there is a dedicated IC department and in 61.8% of companies there is a formal IC plan;
- ▶ in 52.7% of cases where Internal Communication takes on the role of “**Business adviser**”, there is a dedicated IC department and in 53.8% of companies there is a formal IC plan;
- ▶ only in 44.4% of cases where Internal Communication takes on the role of “**Isolated expert**” is there a dedicated IC department and only 38.3% have a formal IC plan.

**Chart 36 - Roles enacted by IC and the presence of a dedicated IC department**



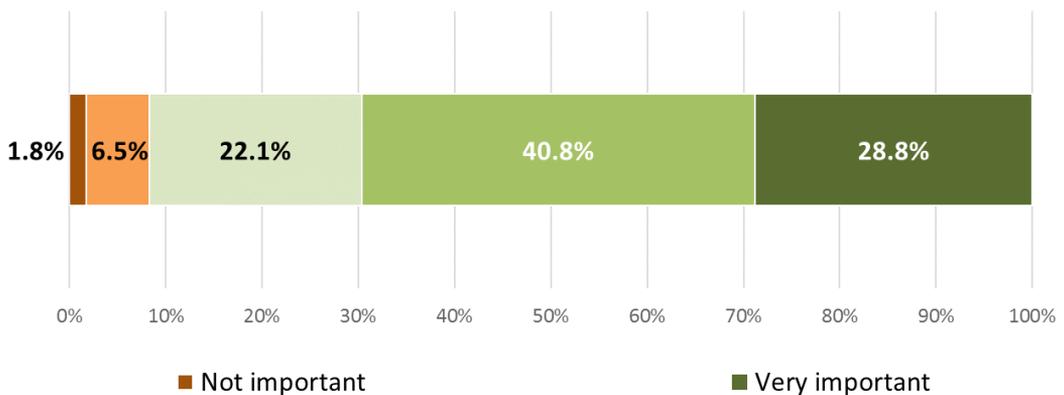
**Chart 37 - Roles enacted by IC and the presence of a formal IC plan**



**4.2. THE PERCEPTION OF THE ROLE OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION WITHIN COMPANIES**

Regardless the specific role enacted by Internal Communication, research results showed that the perception of the importance of IC within the organization expressed by CEO is very high (Chart 38): 69.6% of respondent companies affirmed that their CEO values IC important (40.8%) or very important (28.8%) within the organization. This perception was independent from the existence of a dedicated IC department.

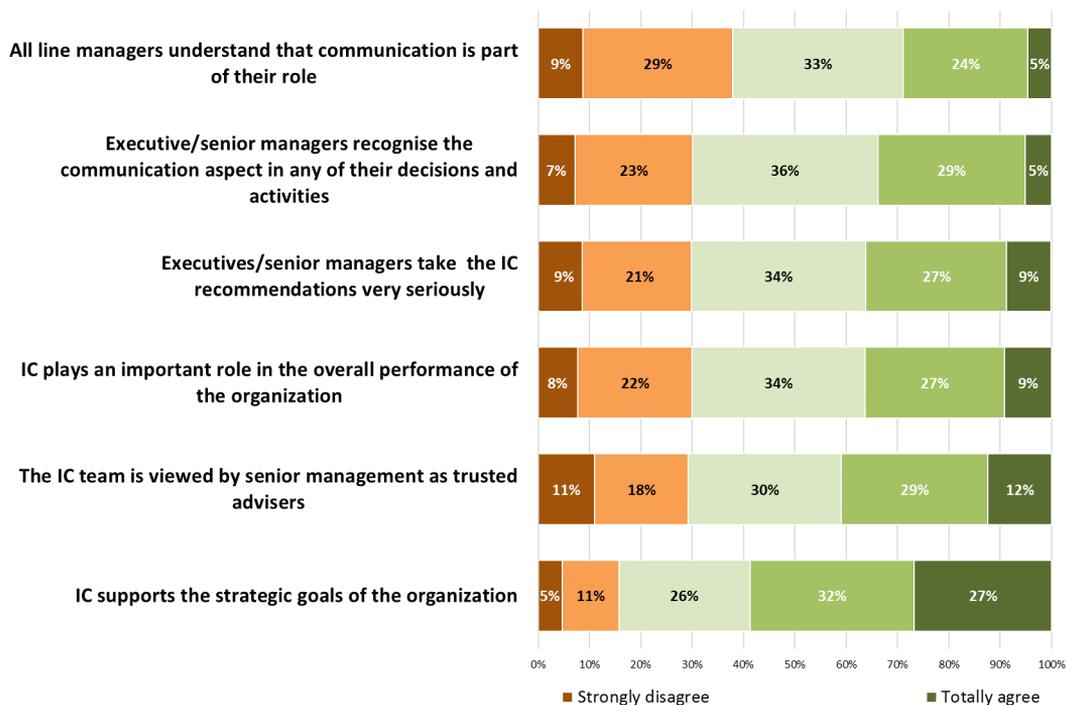
**Chart 38 - To what extent do you think your CEO value the importance of IC within your organization?**



More generally, examining the respondents' perception of the overall role in supporting the company's objectives and performance, and the acknowledgement of its role inside the company by managers and employees, the research showed three important topics (Chart 39):

- ▶ first, as noted previously, respondents state that IC supports the strategic goals of the organization and that IC plays an important role in the overall performance of the organization;
- ▶ secondly, IC seems to have only partially an advisory influence: only for 40% of respondents is the IC team viewed by senior management as very (29%) or extremely (12%) trusted advisers and for 37% of respondents IC team recommendations are taken seriously (28%) or very seriously (9%) by executives/senior managers. Conversely, for both items, 30% of respondents think there is limited or even non-existent capacity or opportunity to influence senior management with their recommendations;
- ▶ thirdly, to confirm the marginal impact of the awareness of the role of communication on company processes in general, respondents point out two aspects: only 34% of respondents think executive/senior managers recognize the communication aspect in any of their decisions and activities and 29% think all line managers understand that communication is part of their role. This against 30% and 38% who state that neither of these two circumstances applies to their company.

**Chart 39 - To what extent do you agree with the following statements?**



Therefore, the research showed that, although for the respondent companies IC aims to strongly support company objectives and performance, this role seems to be only partially recognized by executives/senior managers, who do not seem to fully value the consulting role of IC, nor are they fully aware of the impact of communications skills on their work.

A regression analysis was performed to examine the relationships between the perception of the **importance of the role played by IC in the overall performance of the organization** and seven explanatory variables considered in the analysis: two items related to the IC advisory influence (“IC team is viewed by senior management as trusted advisers” and “Executives/senior managers take the IC recommendations very seriously”) and five items related to the focus of IC activities on supporting business goals by managing Internal Communication and by facilitating organizational processes (“IC advises executives/senior managers how to manage specific communication challenges”, “IC supports executives/senior managers by providing information/insights for decisions and activities”, “IC enables executives/senior managers to recognize the inherent communication aspect in any of their decisions and activities”, “All line managers understand that communication is part of their role” and “Executive/senior managers recognize the communication aspect in any of their decisions and activities”).

Regression results (Table 3) indicated that there are strong relationships between the dependent variable and three independent variables ( $R^2=0.510$ ;  $F=141.10$ ;  $p\leq 0.000$ ). Regression model coefficients for all independent antecedent variables were significant at  $p\leq 0.000$ .

**Table 3 - The antecedent variables to the role played by IC in the overall performance of the organization**

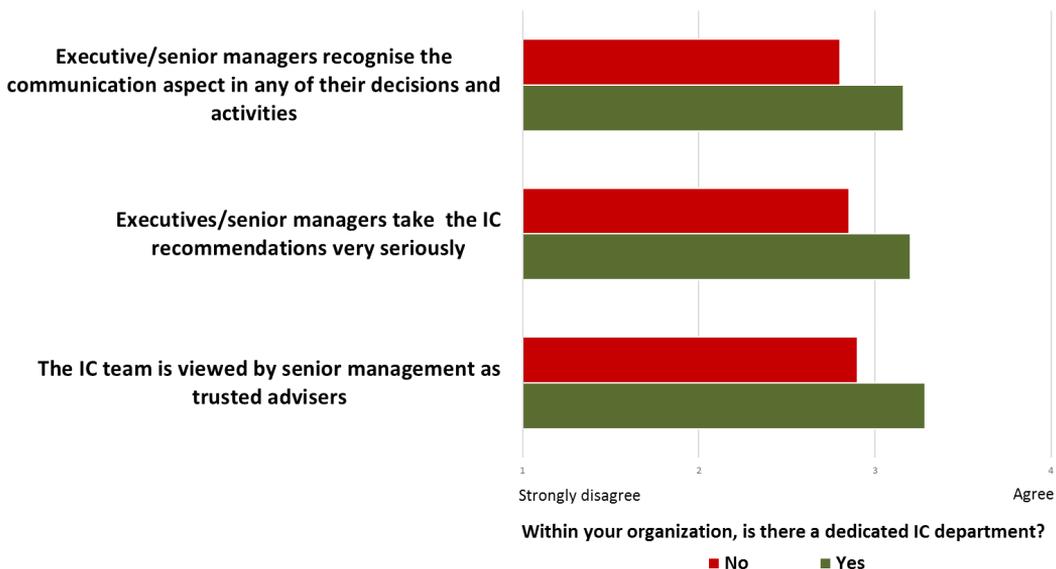
Explanatory variables	Standardized regression coefficients
The IC team is viewed by senior management as trusted advisers	0.356
IC enables executives/senior managers to recognize the inherent communication aspect in any of their decisions and activities	0.312
Executive/senior managers recognize the communication aspect in any of their decisions and activities	0.223

The opinion that the IC team is viewed by senior management as trusted advisers is a significant antecedent to the perception of the importance of the role played by IC, in addition to the perception of both the IC ability to make executives/senior managers understand the communication aspects in any of their decisions and activities and the actual aptitude of managers to understand the same aspects; together these three variables accounted for 51% of the variance in the perception of the importance of the IC and were all positive predictors.

Interpreting these results, the perception of the role played by IC has a linear connection to the perception of the reliability and credibility the IC team enjoys with senior management and the effectiveness with which IC feels it is able to make senior managers and executives understand the communication aspects in any of their decisions and activities.

Moreover, the analysis revealed that there were significant differences between the means of the perceptions of respondents depending on the presence of a dedicated IC department ( $p \leq 0.001$ ): in companies with a dedicated IC department, the perception of advisory influence is greater because the IC team is viewed by senior management as trusted advisers and senior managers take more seriously the recommendations of IC team. Moreover, the ability of executive/senior managers to recognize the communication aspect in any of their decisions and activities (Chart 40) is better in these companies.

**Chart 40 - To what extent do you agree with the following statements?**



In terms of the perception of the role of IC within companies, the analysis showed statistically significant differences ( $p \leq 0.000$ ) for the aspects that were considered (Chart 41):

- ▶ in cases where IC plays a role of “**Strategic facilitator**”, the communication team is considered by senior management as a reliable consultant. Indeed, the managers from the various corporate department take the recommendations from IC very seriously, being well aware that communication is an integral part of their role, and of their decisions and activities. In addition, IC plays an important role in the overall performance of the organization;
- ▶ in cases when IC plays the role of “**Operational supporter**”, the team is not perceived by senior management as a particularly reliable consultant; line

managers, despite taking the recommendations from IC quite seriously, do not seem to fully understand that communication is part of their role and they struggle to recognize the communication side of their activities;

- ▶ in cases where IC plays the role of “**Business adviser**”, respondents take part in the formulation of strategic decisions and enjoy the trust of senior management, supporting the strategic goals of the organization; the recommendations appear on average to be taken sufficiently into consideration by managers, who understand quite well that communication is part of their role and acknowledge the communication side to their decisions and activities;
- ▶ in cases where IC plays the role of “**Isolated expert**”, the IC team is not regarded by senior management as a reliable consultant and the recommendations they produce are not really taken into consideration by managers, who have a poor understanding that communication is part of their role and they do not seem to be aware of the communication side of their decisions and activities.

Chart 41 - To what extent do you agree with the following statements?



## 5. THE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION CLIMATE

Climate can be defined as the «relatively enduring quality of the internal environment of the organization that (a) is experienced by its members, (b) influences their behavior, and (c) can be described in term of values of a particular set of characteristics (or attributes) of the environment» (Taguiri, 1968, p. 27).

Organizational climate represents employees' perception of their work situation, including the characteristics of the organization they work for and the nature of their relationships with other people while doing their job in daily routines and behaviors. Organizational climate has been identified as a critical component of organizational effectiveness (Guzley, 1992).

Communication climate has been considered separately from the larger context of organizational climate in the literature and has increasingly become one of the most important factors in creating an effective organization (Nelli, 1994). Communication climate functions as a link between individual employees and the organization (Falcione, Sussman, Herden, 1987).

Pace (1983) suggested that communication climate is a subset of organizational climate by stating that the overall organizational climate consists of members' perceptions of dimensions of organizational life, including «information flow (i.e., perception of flow as adequate or inadequate) and some practices involving communication» (p. 126).

Dillard, Wigand and Boster (1986) asserted that communication climate «includes only communicative phenomena, e.g., judgments concerning such things as receptivity of management to employees or the accuracy of information being disseminated in the organization» (p. 87).

Welsch and La Van (1981) founded that five organizational climate variables (communication, decision making, leadership, motivation, and goal setting) were significantly and positively related to organizational commitment. The relationship between the communication variables (acceptance, accuracy, and all directional flow), however, was stronger than other climate variable, accounting for 38% of the variance in commitment.

Other studies confirmed that there was a positive relationship between the communication climate in the organization and the level of commitment of the employees to the organization (e.g. Trombetta, Rogers, 1988).

To summarize, five factors are responsible of communication climate: superior-subordinate communication, quality of information, superior openness, opportunities for upward communication, and reliability of information.

To build a supportive communication climate, which allows for a better exchange of information and a more positive work environment, companies need to send messages that acknowledge effort, creativity, and teamwork, engage people in the decision-making process, establish trust, which is maintained through consistency, congruity, reliability, and integrity.

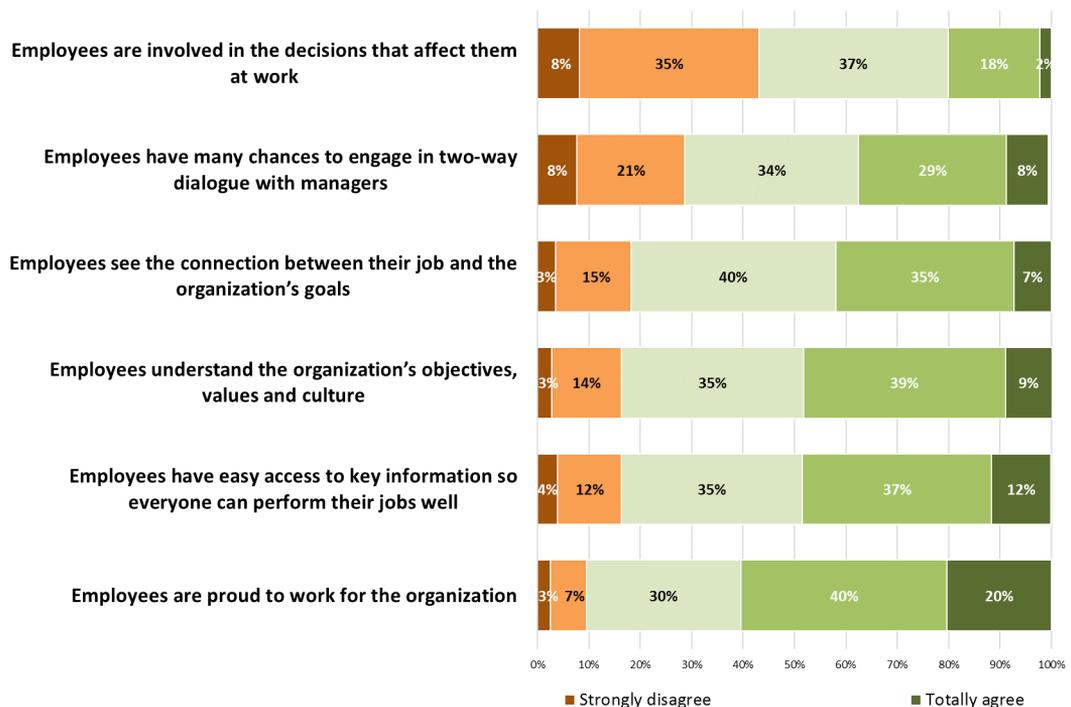
According to previous international researches and literature, respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed with questions regarding key communication climate issues inside their organizations.

Overall, the results of the research revealed the existence in responding companies of a supportive communication climate and the existence of a positive atmosphere that people feel within the organizations.

With regard to the attitude of employees towards the organization (Chart 42), 60% of respondents declare that employees are proud to work for the organization; 48% that employees understand the organization’s objectives, values and culture; 42% that employees see the connections between their job and the organization’s goals, but only 20% of respondents affirm that employees are involved in the decisions that affect them at work.

With regard to how the communication processes are performed, 49% of respondents reveal that employees have easy access to key information so everyone can perform their jobs well and 37% declare that employees have many chances to engage in two-way dialogue with managers.

**Chart 42 - To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements concerning your organization?**



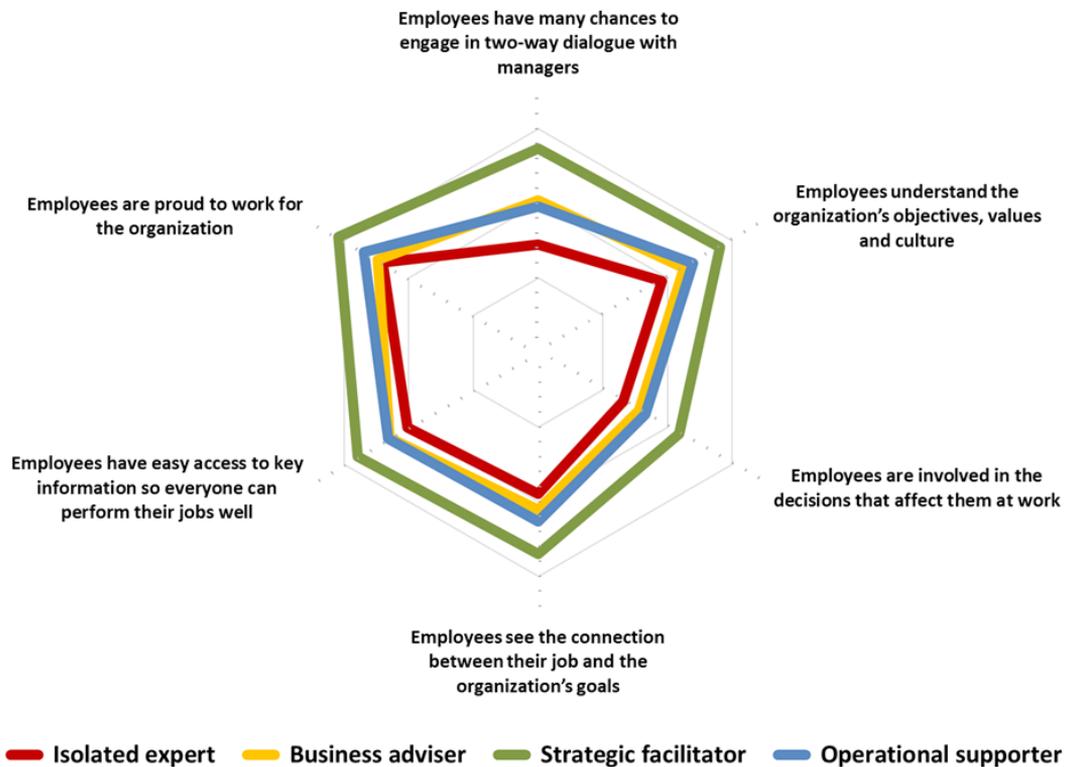
The two most critical aspects seem to be, on the one hand, the level of involvement of employees in the decisions that affect them at work, considered fairly low by 43% of respondent companies and, on the other, the opportunities that employees have to engage in two-way dialogue with their managers, considered limited by 29% of respondents.

It is worth noting that the perceptions related to the key communication climate issues that were examined do not differ with any of the structural and organizational variables of respondents (geographic area, number of workers, industry, type of company) or if there is a dedicated IC department.

Statistically significant differences ( $p \leq 0.000$ ) were noted for all aspects examined in relation to the four different roles played by IC (Chart 43):

- ▶ in cases where IC plays the role of “**Strategic facilitator**”, the communication climate is seen, overall, as open to dialogue and exchange between people, who seem to be very proud of belonging to the organization. They know the values and objectives well, and they clearly see how they are connected to their work. Employees are involved in the decisions about their work and they have the information needed to work better;
- ▶ in cases where IC plays the role of “**Operational supporter**”, overall the communication climate is seen as moderately open to dialogue and exchange between people, who appear sufficiently proud of belonging to the organization and have fairly good knowledge of the values and objectives;
- ▶ in cases where IC plays the role of “**Business adviser**”, overall the communication climate is seen as moderately open to dialogue and exchange between people. Employees know the values and company objectives fairly well and are proud of working for that organization. However, it appears there are not many opportunities for exchange with managers;
- ▶ in cases where IC plays the role of “**Isolated expert**”, overall the communication climate is deemed not very open to dialogue with managers and discussion between people. Although the employees appear to be relatively proud of working for the company, they do not know the values and objectives well and they do not see the connection of the latter to their work. They also appear poorly involved in decisions related to themselves.

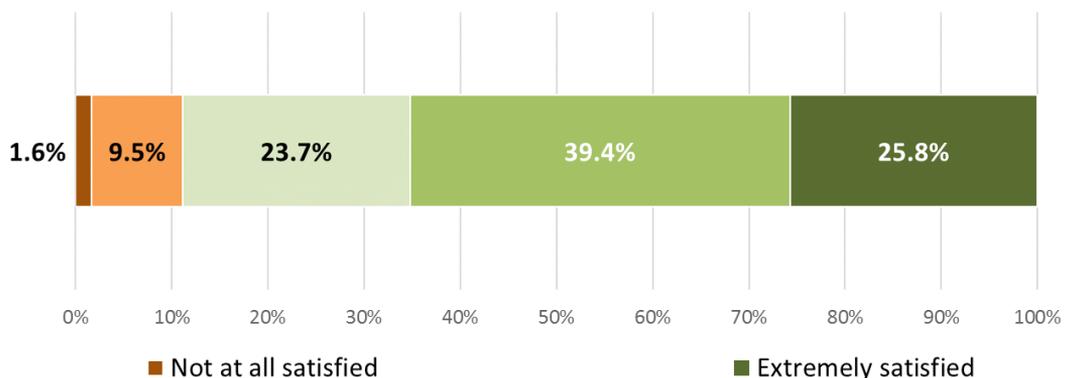
**Chart 43 - To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements concerning your organization?**



## 6. THE STATE OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION PROFESSIONALS

Professional respondents revealed a high level of satisfaction with their job (Chart 44): 65.2% of them declared to be satisfied (39.4%) or extremely satisfied (25.8%).

**Chart 44 - The level of satisfaction of professional respondents with their job**

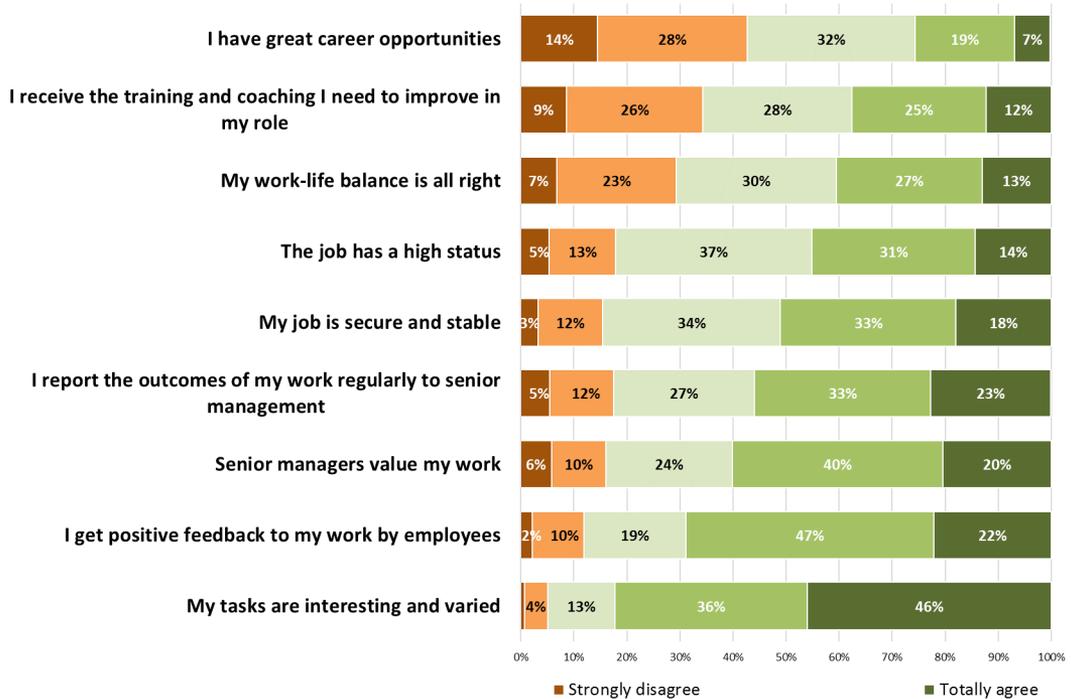


The respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed with questions regarding their professional role (Chart 45) and the results showed that – regardless the existence of a dedicated IC department – the highest level of agreement was expressed by respondents for statements about their tasks and the relationships with employees and senior management. 82% stated their tasks are interesting and varied, 69% that they get positive feedback to their work by employees; 60% stated that senior managers value their work and 56% that they report the outcomes of their work regularly to senior management.

With reference to questions regarding their actual job situation, 41% of respondents revealed that the job is secure and stable, and with high status for 45% of them.

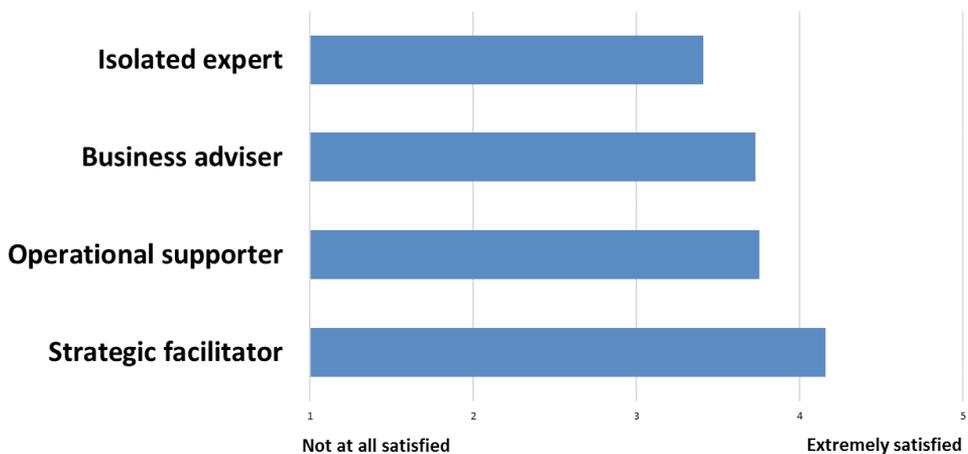
The most critical aspects were a general difficulty in achieving a work-life balance, reported by 30% of respondents, a lack of training and coaching to help them grow professionally, reported by 35% of respondents, and above all the lack of career opportunity, reported by 42% of respondents.

Chart 45 - How do you feel about your role?



A significant difference in job satisfaction level was found among respondents in terms of different roles enacted by Internal Communication team/department ( $p \leq 0.000$ ): when Internal Communication operates the role of “**Strategic facilitator**” the level of job satisfaction is higher, while when the role is that of “**Isolated expert**”, the satisfaction level is lower (Chart 46).

Chart 46 - The level of satisfaction of professional respondents with their job



For the seven variables considered, the analysis revealed significantly different perceptions depending on the roles played by IC ( $p \leq 0.000$ ). More specifically, the assessments by respondents in companies where IC plays the role of “Strategic facilitator” and “Isolated expert” were very different, whereas when IC plays the other two roles, respondents showed intermediate perceptions that are quite similar to each other (Chart 47):

- ▶ in cases where IC plays the role of “**Strategic facilitator**”, the IC managers or professionals express higher satisfaction about their work, receive more appreciation from top management, and get positive feedback from staff in relation to the initiatives undertaken;
- ▶ in cases where IC plays the role of “**Isolated expert**”, the IC managers or professionals express less satisfaction about the appreciation they receive from top management, the status of their job, the career opportunities, the training and coaching necessary to improve their role and the feedback by employees.

Chart 47 - How do you feel about your role?



A regression analysis was performed to examine the relationships between the **overall level of satisfaction of respondents** and the nine explanatory variables considered in the analysis.

Regression results (Table 4) indicated that there are strong relationships between the dependent variable and five independent variables ( $R^2=0.551$ ;

F=101.607;  $p \leq 0.000$ ). Regression model coefficients for all independent antecedent variables were significant at  $p \leq 0.000$ .

**Table 4 - The antecedent variables to overall job satisfaction**

Explanatory variables	Standardized regression coefficients
I have great career opportunities	0.316
My tasks are interesting and varied	0.262
My work-life balance is all right	0.173
Senior managers value my work	0.178
I receive the training and coaching I need to improve in my role	0.146

The variable “Career opportunities” is a significant antecedent to respondents satisfaction, in addition to “My tasks are interesting and varied”, “My work-life balance is all right”, “Senior managers value my work” and “I receive the training and coaching I need to improve in my role”; together these five variables accounted for 55.1% of the variance in the overall satisfaction and were all positive predictors.

Interpreting these results, to achieve a satisfied IC manager/professional, companies should first ensure career opportunities and then design the job in terms of interesting and varied tasks that allow a satisfactory work-life balance. Further means of satisfying IC manager/professional come from the appreciation by senior managers for the work accomplished and from the extent to which they receive the training and coaching necessary to improve their role.

With reference only to respondents with the position of head of Internal Communication or head of a department which includes IC, among others, the results of the regression analysis (Table 5) indicated that there are strong relationships between their overall level of satisfaction and four independent variables ( $R^2=0.513$ ;  $F=73.070$ ;  $p \leq 0.000$ ). Career opportunities always rank first, followed by appreciation from senior managers, the need for a work-life balance and interesting and varied tasks.

**Table 5 - The antecedent variables to overall job satisfaction of the head of IC department or the head of other departments**

Explanatory variables	Standardized regression coefficients
I have great career opportunities	0.358
Senior managers value my work	0.234
My work-life balance is all right	0.228
My tasks are interesting and varied	0.217

## 7. FUTURE ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FOR INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

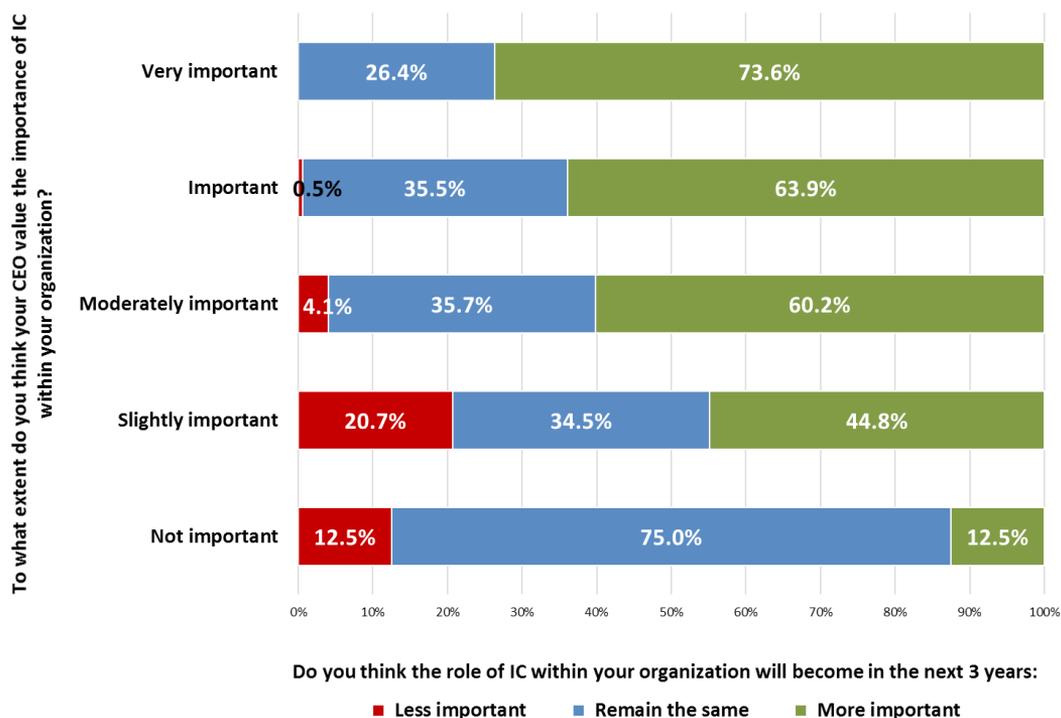
Thinking to the future of Internal Communication, 63.6% of professional respondents believed that the role of IC will become more important in the next 3 years, while 33.7% of respondents presumed that it will remain the same and only 2.7% assumed that it will be less important.

Noteworthy is that this assessment does not depend on whether there is a dedicated IC department.

The research showed a statistically significant correlation between the perception of the standing of IC in the next 3 years and

- ▶ the probability that the IC budget will increase in the next 12 months ( $p \leq 0.000$ ): 82.1% of respondents that think the budget will increase, think the role of IC will become more important;
- ▶ the aim to grow the IC team in the next 3 years ( $p \leq 0.000$ ): 80.6% of respondents that have planned to increase the IC team, think the role of IC will become more important;
- ▶ the perception of the importance given by the CEO to IC ( $p \leq 0.000$ ): 63.9% and 73.6% of respondents that had the impression the CEO deems CI important or very important, respectively, also feel the role of IC will increase in importance (Chart 48).

**Chart 48 - The perception of the future standing of Internal Communication**



An analysis was conducted to examine whether the perceived IC actual effectiveness and/or the perceived quality and ability of the IC team compared to companies considered as a benchmark were different for each group of respondents about the future standing of IC within their organizations. The results revealed that there were no statistically significant differences among the means of the three groups of respondents.

The analysis showed that there was no significant relationship between the perceived future standing of IC within the organization and:

- ▶ the actual effectiveness of IC strategy at helping the organization achieve its current business goals,
- ▶ the estimated quality and ability of the IC team compared to those of companies considered as a benchmark.

Furthermore, the analysis found no significant differences among the four different roles acted by IC within companies in terms of the future standing of IC within organization.

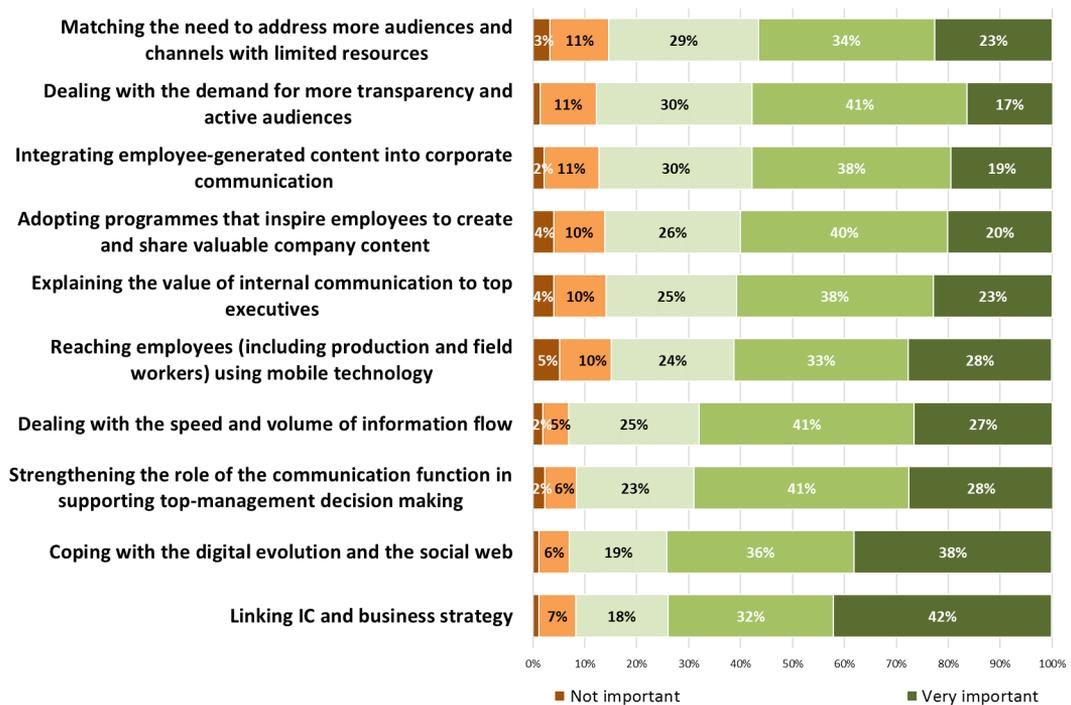
Finally, companies were asked to indicate the degree of importance of some issues and challenges that they will have to face managing Internal Communication in the next three years.

The following aspects were deemed important or very important for the future of the companies in the sample (Chart 49): linking IC and business strategy (74%),

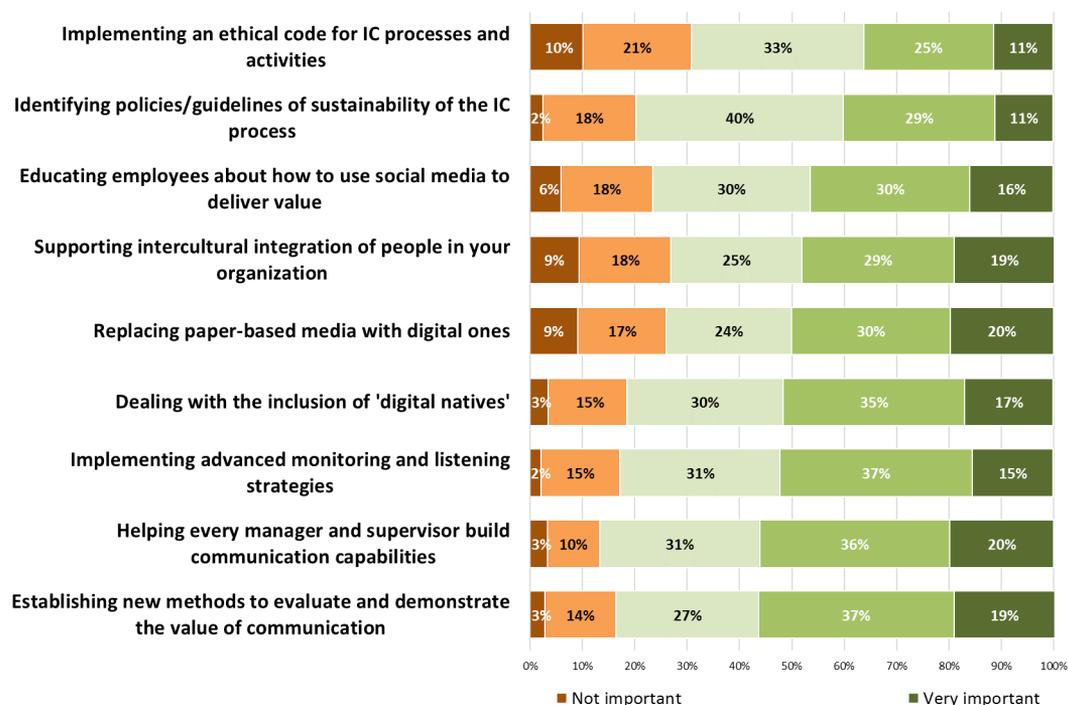
coping with the digital evolution and the social web (74%), strengthening the role of the communication function in supporting top-management decision making (69%) and dealing with the speed and volume of information flow (68%).

On the contrary, the aspects that respondents see as not important or slightly important are (Chart 50): implementing an ethical code for IC processes and activities (31%), supporting intercultural integration of people in your organization (27%), replacing paper-based media with digital ones (26%), educating employees about how to use social media to deliver value (24%) and identifying policies/guidelines of sustainability of the IC process (20%).

**Chart 49 - Within your organization, how important will each of the following issues be for IC in the next three years?**



**Chart 50 - Within your organization, how important will each of the following issues be for IC in the next three years?**



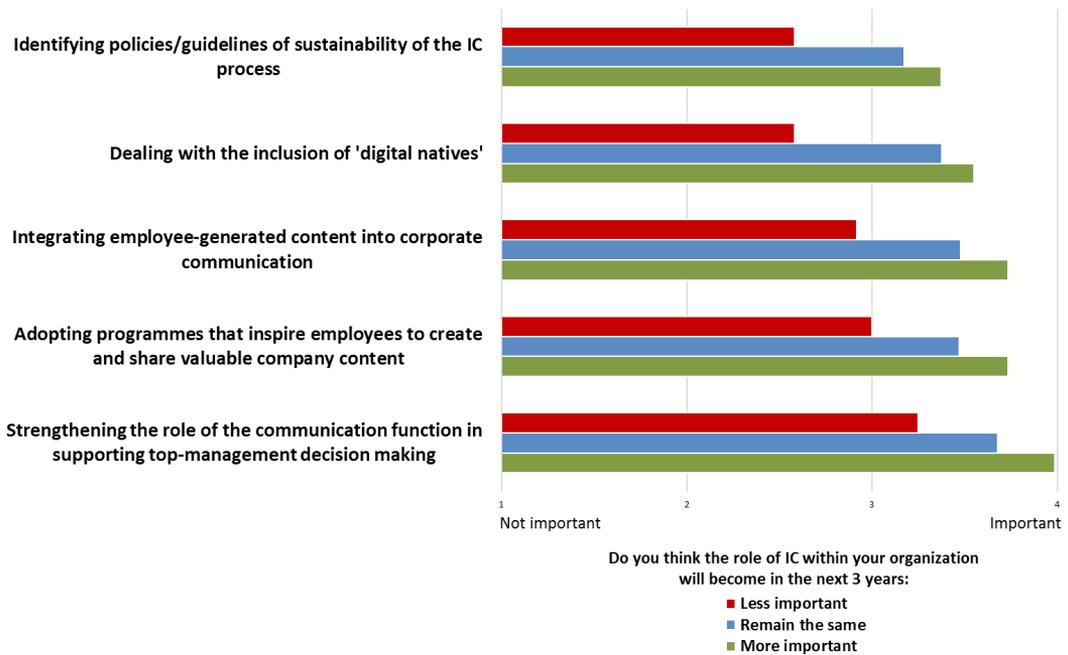
The perceived importance of a large number of issues does not depend on the existence or not of a dedicated IC department, with the exception of the following three aspects that result, on average, more significant ( $p \leq 0.001$ ) in cases when this department is present: reaching employees (including production and field workers) using mobile technology, dealing with the inclusion of “digital natives” and linking IC and business strategy.

Few significant differences ( $p \leq 0.005$ ) were found in terms of:

- ▶ **type of company:** the issue related to supporting intercultural integration of people is considered, on average, more important by multinational companies than companies operating in one country with multiple sites and companies operating in one country with a single site;
- ▶ **size of the company:** the issues related to coping with the digital evolution and the social web, reaching employees using mobile technology and dealing with the inclusion of “digital natives” are considered, on average, to more important by companies with over 5,000 employees;
- ▶ **geographic area** of the respondent companies: the issue related to implementing an ethical code for IC processes and activities is considered, on average, more important by companies in Southern Europe.

It is remarkable that some of the key issues appear to be more important for the future role of IC: as the perception of the importance of IC over the next three years grows, there is also significant growth ( $p \leq 0.005$ ) in the average assessment of the importance of strengthening the role of the communication function in supporting top-management decision making, adopting programs that inspire employees to create and share valuable company content, integrating employee-generated content into corporate communication, dealing with the inclusion of digital natives, and identifying policies/guidelines of sustainability of the IC process (Chart 51).

**Chart 51 - Within your organization, how important will each of the following issues be for IC in the next three years? (average values)**



## 8. CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGH EFFECTIVENESS INTERNAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

The goal of the analysis was to identify the elements that might define an overall effectiveness model for Internal Communication and the related organizational and managerial aspects. In this, IC was considered as an economic, technical and organizational process, that is, a productive combination (of human, economic and technological resources), which is a part of the broader socio-economic configuration that define a company.

The analysis was structured using the communication management excellence approach proposed by Verčič and Zerfass (2016) which underlines the dual responsibility of communication management to influence organizational decision-making process by helping to define business strategy and to support organizational strategies by building relationships and conveying messages to participants and influence their mindsets and behavior<sup>10</sup>.

The effectiveness of IC strategy relates to the extent in which the internal communication is seen as useful and contributing to business goals<sup>11</sup>.

By looking at the productive process implemented by IC in respondent companies – with or without a dedicated IC department – the research was able to identify a cluster of companies, about 40% of those participating in the research, that implements a high effectiveness strategy. They achieve excellence in trying to concretely help achieve the company's strategic objectives, putting in place effective strategies that enable IC to achieve recognition and support from top management – which in turn translates into the allocation of adequate financial resources.

The identification of characteristics of high effectiveness Internal Communication strategy was done with a cluster analysis that looked jointly at all the variables relating to (a) the role carried out by IC within respondent companies in the broader context of strategic and operational management, (b) the perception of this role by top management and (c) the communication climate in the companies.

More specifically, the research considered the following variables:

- ▶ the level of engagement of the head of IC in making strategic company decisions (“**Helping to define business strategy**”) and the subsequent executive influence;
- ▶ the level of support offered by the IC team/department to other company functions both in developing their communication skills and providing genuine

communication consultancy (“**Supporting business goals by managing Internal Communication**”), so as to help pursue company objectives (items related to the focus of IC activities on supporting business goals by managing IC and by facilitating organizational processes);

- ▶ the level of **IC advisory influence**, which includes top management recognizing the role played by IC in assessing suggestions provided to facilitate organizational processes and, more generally, the level of awareness of executive/senior managers about communication aspects in any of their decisions and activities;
- ▶ the perception of the **quality of the communication climate**, i.e. the existence of a supportive communication climate, which allows for a better exchange of information and a more positive and engaging work environment.

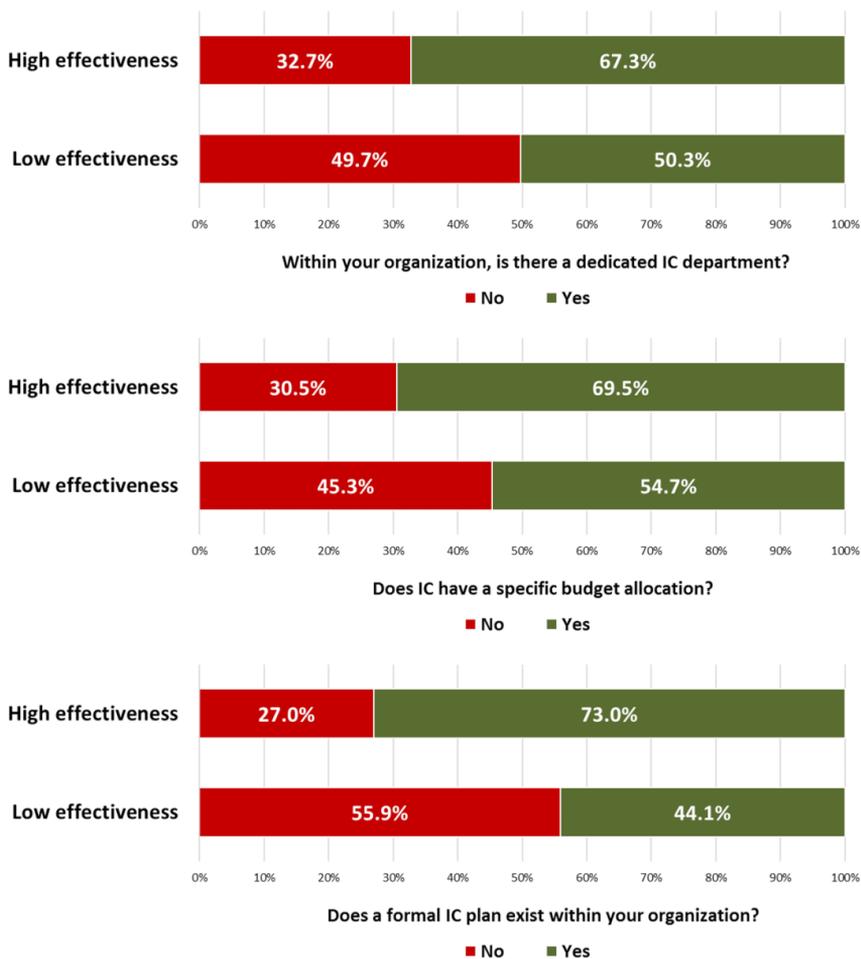
Results of the cluster analysis revealed that 86.4% of respondent companies can be clustered into two groups corresponding to different strategy performed by companies, with extremely different results in relation to the effectiveness achieved.

There are significant differences ( $p \leq 0.003$ ) between the companies in the two clusters in relation to the following IC organization and planning aspects: the presence of a dedicated function, a budget and a plan (Chart 52). No significant differences were noted in terms of company type (national or multinational companies), size (number of employees), business type classification (industrial or service companies), geographic location, or centralized versus decentralized approach to IC in the case of multinational companies or national companies with different sites across the country.

The first cluster (“**High effectiveness**”), where Internal Communication management achieves a high level of effectiveness, has 41.6% of the companies. 67.3% of these companies have a dedicated IC department, which reports to Corporate Communications department in 37.5% of cases, in 21.7% of cases directly to the CEO, in 16.5% to Human Resources department and in 7.9% to External Communication/PR department. The head of Internal Communication department is a member of the executive board in 7.3% of companies in this cluster (strongly aligned department), reports directly to the CEO in 26% or reports to another member of the executive board in 47.3% (aligned department). When there is no dedicated department (in the remaining 32.7% of cases), the IC team is either part of the Corporate Communications department (47.3%), External Communication/PR department (16.2%) or top management staff (12.2%). Only in 5.4% of cases is the IC team part of Human Resources department. In 69.5% of companies the IC has a specific budget allocation and in 73% exists a formal IC plan.

In the second cluster (“**Low effectiveness**”), which is not very effective at IC and accounts for 58.4% of companies, a dedicated IC department exists in 50.3% of cases and in 35.8% of these companies it reports to Corporate Communication department, in 19.8% of cases directly to the CEO and in 19.8% to the Human Resources department. It is useful to note that the head of Internal Communication department is a member of the executive board in 4.9% of the companies in this

Chart 52 - Significant differences between clusters

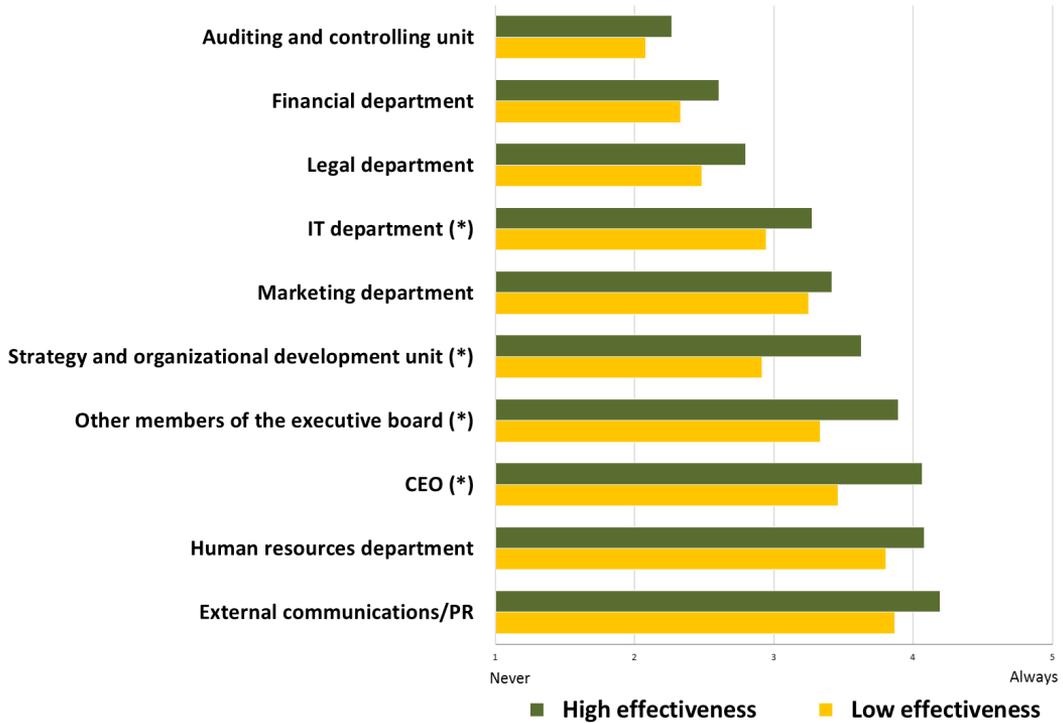


cluster, reports directly to the CEO in 25.9% or reports to another member of the executive board in 42%. However, in 27.2% of companies, the head of Internal Communication department does not report directly to the CEO or anyone in the board (weakly aligned department). When there is no dedicated department (in the remaining 49.7% of cases), the IC team is part of the Corporate Communication department (26.3%), the Human Resources department (22.5%), top management staff (16.3%) or Marketing department (15%). In 54.7% IC has a specific budget allocation and in 44.1% of companies exists a formal IC plan.

In terms of how closely the IC team works with the other organizational departments (Chart 53) the two clusters show significant differences ( $p \leq 0.000$ ) as regards cooperation with the CEO, other members of the executive board, the strategy and organizational development unit and the IT department. Such cooperation is much more common in the “**High effectiveness**” cluster than in the “**Low effectiveness**” cluster. In any case, the results of the analysis show

that in the first cluster all relations with the other departments are closer and more frequent.

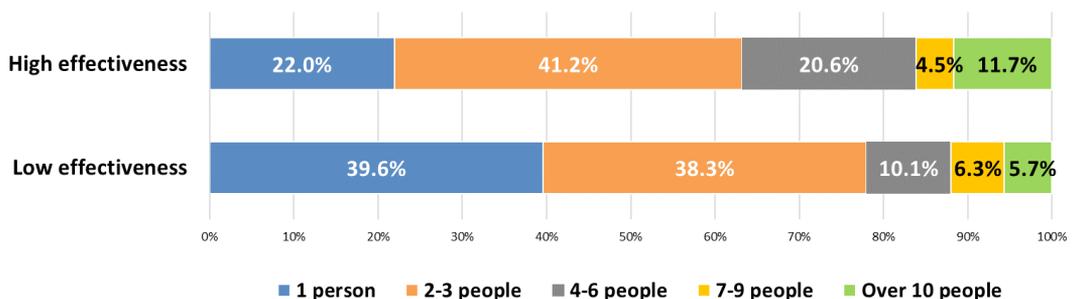
**Chart 53 - How closely does the IC team in your organization work with...**



(\*) = p<0.000

There is a further significant difference between the two clusters ( $p \leq 0.002$ ) in relation to how many people work in IC: in the “High effectiveness” cluster, at least four people work in IC in 36.8% of cases, with a notable 11.7% of companies with more than ten people working in IC. In the “Low effectiveness” cluster, conversely, in 39.6% of cases only one person works in IC (Chart 54).

**Chart 54 - Within your organization, how many people work in IC?**



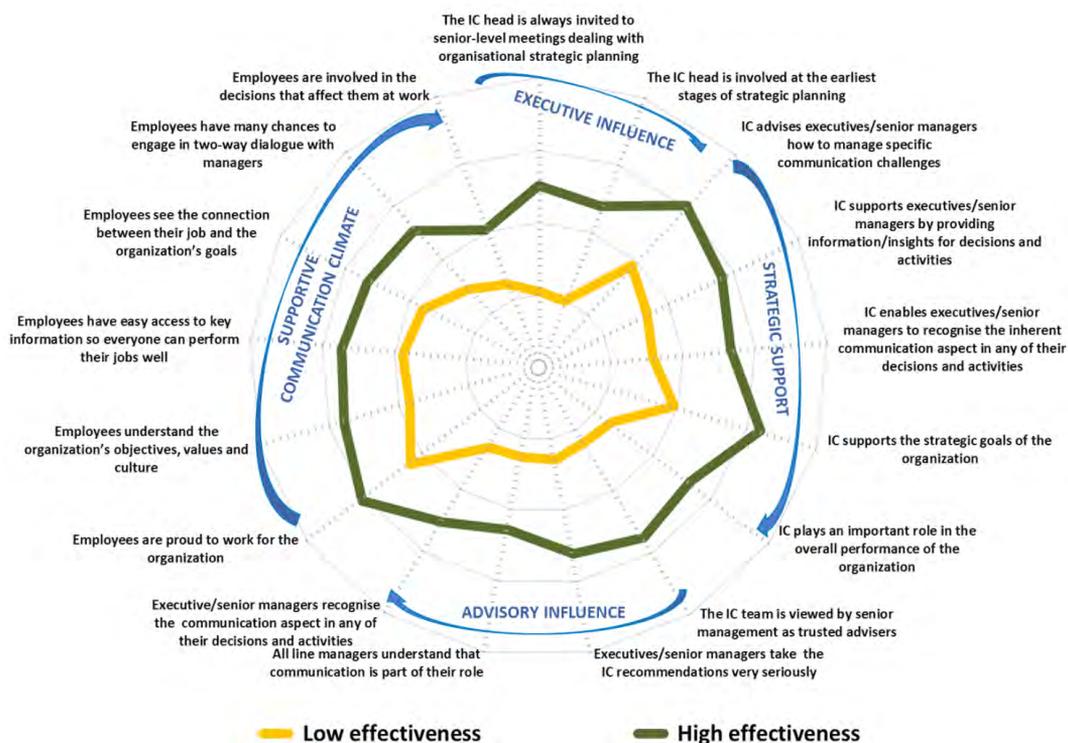
Finally, looking only at the respondents who are head of department (which includes IC, among others) or head of Internal Communication department (68.6% for the “**High effectiveness**” cluster and 63.1% for the “**Low effectiveness**” cluster), the analysis did not find any significant differences as regards:

- ▶ **gender:** females are more predominant in both clusters, with similar percentages (71.4% in the “High effectiveness” cluster and 66.2% in the “Low effectiveness” cluster);
- ▶ **age:** managers older than 40 are more common in both clusters (73.5% in the “High effectiveness” cluster and 66.3% in the “Low effectiveness” cluster);
- ▶ **job experience:** managers with more than 10 years predominate in both clusters (83.9% in the “High effectiveness” cluster and 75.2% in the “Low effectiveness” cluster).

The “**High effectiveness**” cluster has significantly different characteristics when compared to the other cluster in terms of all variables considered in the analysis (Chart 55):

- ▶ the head of Internal Communication is involved at the earliest stages of strategic planning and is invited more frequently to senior-level meetings dealing with organizational strategic planning;
- ▶ the IC team/department supports executives/senior managers by providing information/insights for decisions and activities, enables them to recognize the inherent communication aspect in any of their decisions and activities and advises them how to manage specific communication challenges;
- ▶ the IC team/department works closely with external communications/PR department, Human Resources department and CEO showing to have a high level of advisory influence: the IC team is viewed by senior management as trusted advisers and executives/senior managers take the IC recommendations very seriously; moreover, executive/senior managers recognize the communication aspect in any of their decisions and activities, and line managers understand that communication is part of their role;
- ▶ the communication climate is seen to be open to dialogue and exchange between people and employees have many chances to engage in two-way dialogue with managers; in these companies employees are proud to work for the organization, whose objectives, values and culture they understand; furthermore employees are involved in the decisions that affect them at work, see the connection between their job and the organization’s goals and have easy access to key information so everyone can perform their jobs well.

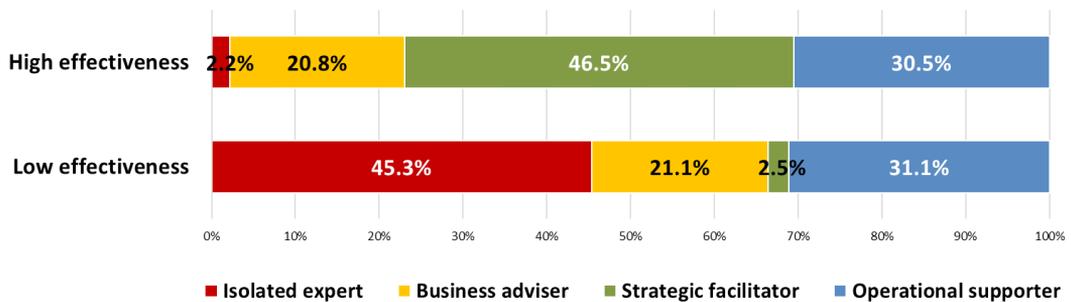
Chart 55 - The profiles of the two clusters of effectiveness



As regard to the four roles enacted by IC that reflect the relationship with organizational processes and strategies (Chart 56) were found significant differences ( $p \leq 0.000$ ) between the two clusters: the analysis showed that the “**High effectiveness**” cluster is made up in 46.5% of cases by an IC team/department that is acting as “**Strategic facilitator**”, while the “**Low effectiveness**” cluster is made up in 45.3% of cases by the IC team/department that is acting as “**Isolated expert**”. The roles of “Operational supporter” and “Business adviser” are always present in the two clusters in similar percentages.

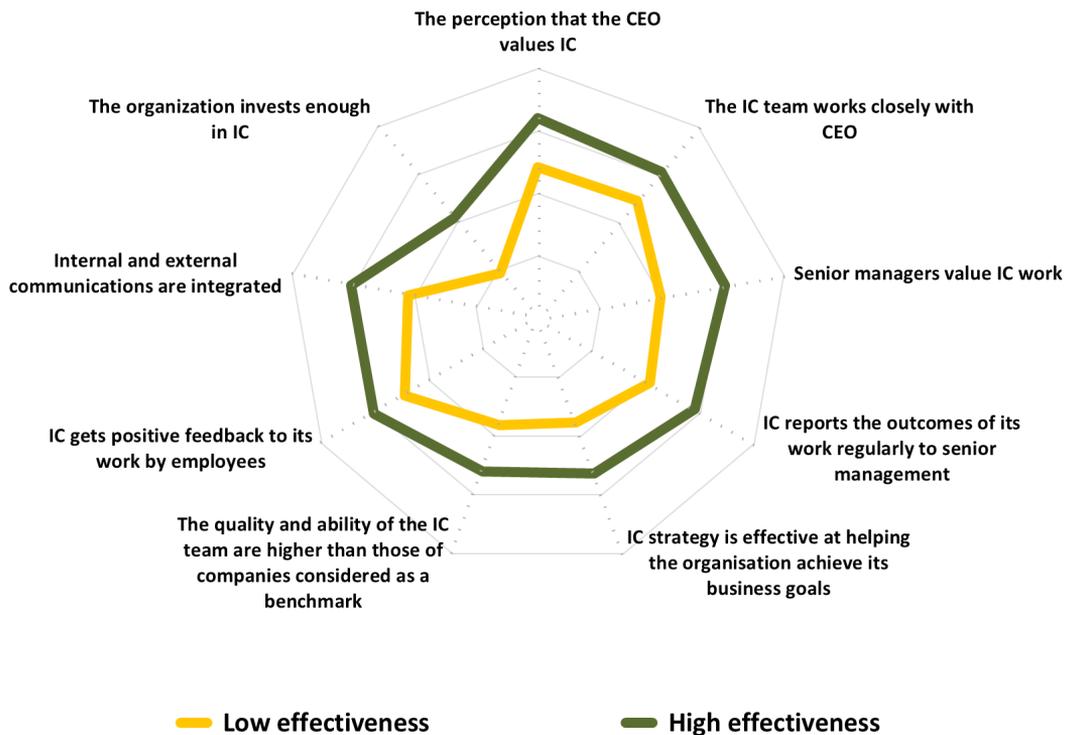
The high presence of IC team/departments acting as “**Strategic facilitator**” (46.5%) or as “**Operational supporter**” (30.5%) within the “**High effectiveness**” cluster confirms the trend that «to ensure the communicative competencies of an organization and its employees, communication experts need to widen their professional focus “from leading communication processes to developing the organization’s communication skills” (Hamrefors, 2009, p. 19) and thereby “building communicative capacity” (p. 10) within the whole organization. This, within a holistic perspective, requires a reconceptualization of the role set for communication managers within organizations by moving the focal point from communication execution to communication consulting» (Zerfass, Franke, 2013, p. 120).

**Chart 56 - Roles enacted by IC within the two cluster of effectiveness**



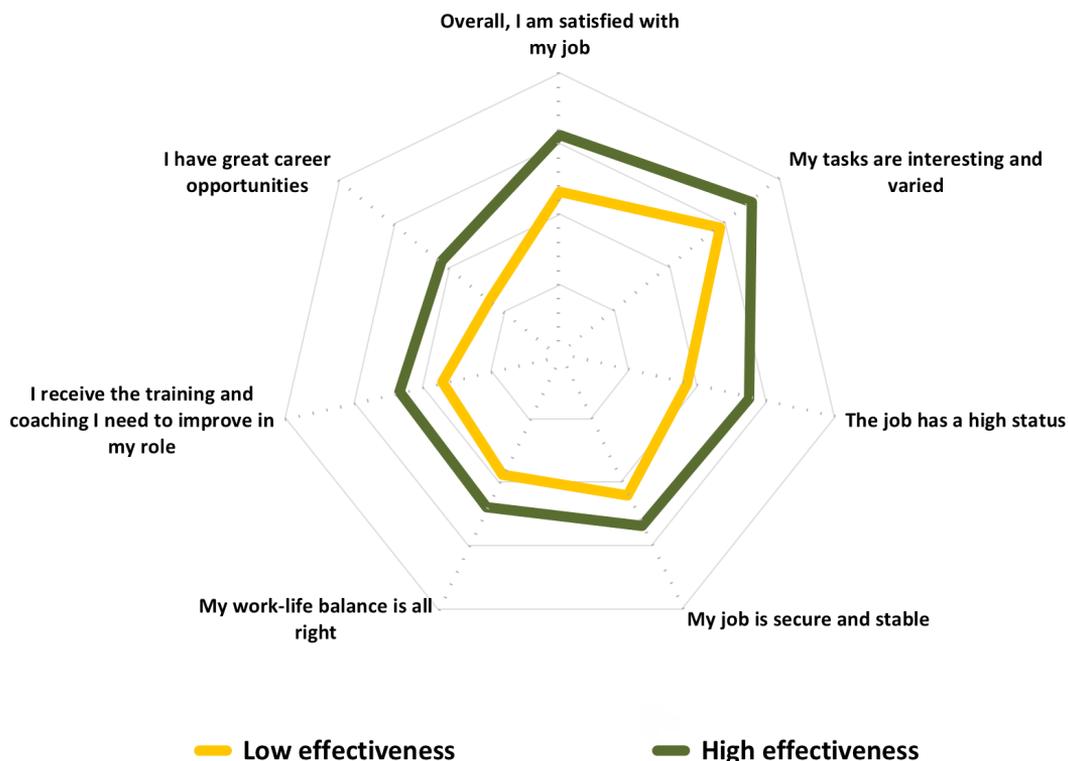
The “**High effectiveness**” cluster shows further significant differences when compared to the other cluster (Chart 57): respondents of “High effectiveness” companies believe that the CEO and senior managers value IC work and they also confirm that the IC team gets positive feedback to its work by employees; respondents recognize that the IC strategy is effective at helping their organization achieve its business goals and perceive the quality and ability of the IC team as being higher than those of companies considered as a benchmark. Furthermore, they are much more satisfied with the level of investment in Internal Communication than the other cluster and, finally, they consider that internal and external communications are integrated.

**Chart 57 - The profiles of the two clusters of effectiveness**



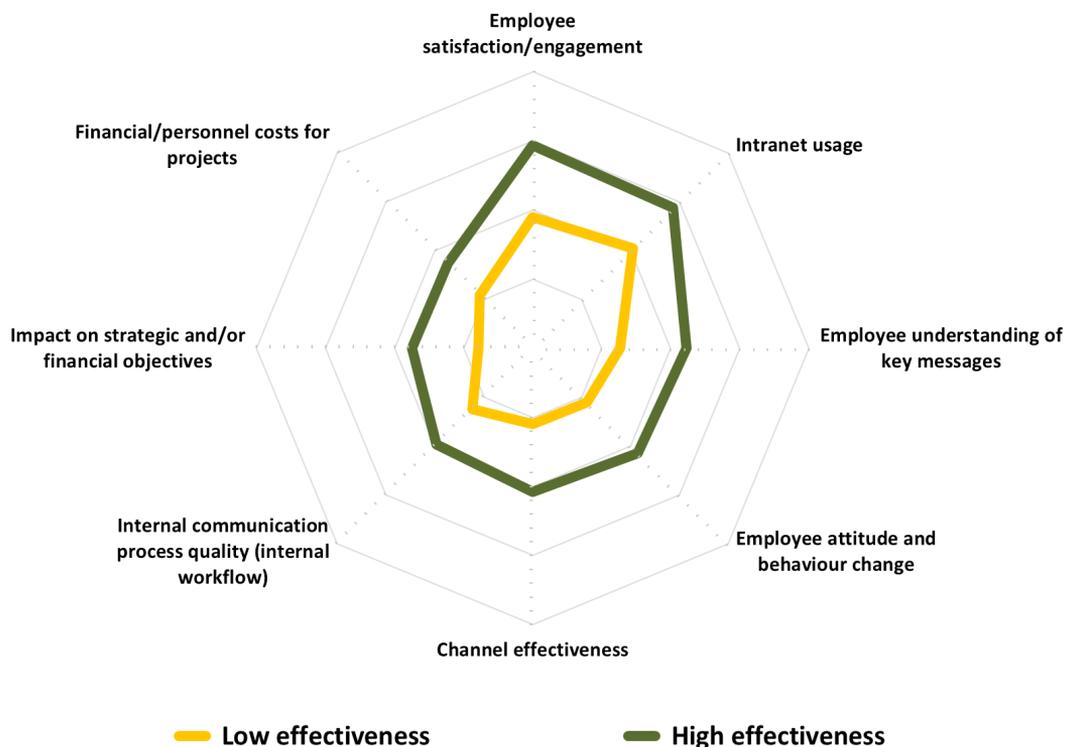
Consistent with the foregoing findings, professional respondents of companies included in the “**High effectiveness**” cluster reveal a higher level of satisfaction with their job (Chart 58) than the respondents included in the other cluster ( $p \leq 0.000$ ): in particular, respondents belonging to the “High effectiveness” cluster state, in a significantly higher proportion, that their job has a high status, that they have great career opportunities and that they receive the training and coaching needed to improve in their role.

**Chart 58 - How do you feel about your role?**



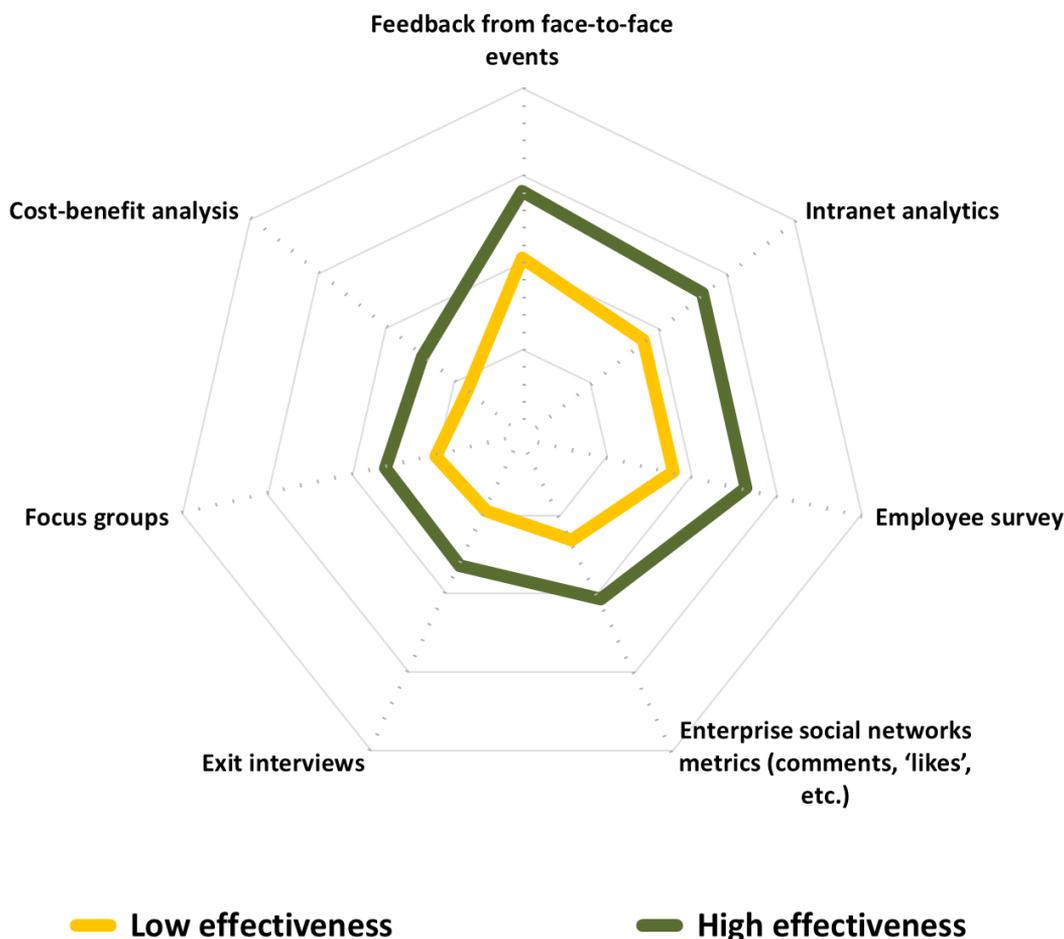
It should be noted that the perception of a more effective IC strategy by the companies belonging to the first cluster is related to more monitoring and measurement of activities undertaken. Indeed, the average frequency with which items are monitored or measured to assess IC effectiveness is significantly different ( $p \leq 0.000$ ) between the two clusters (Chart 59). More specifically, the “**High effectiveness**” cluster undertakes far more frequent measuring of the employee attitude and behavior change, the impact on strategic and/or financial objectives, the employee satisfaction/engagement, the employee understanding of key messages and the channel effectiveness.

**Chart 59 - Which items are monitored or measured by your organization to assess IC effectiveness?**



In terms of the methods frequently used to assess IC effectiveness the two clusters show significant differences ( $p \leq 0.000$ ). The companies that belong to the “**High effectiveness**” cluster are far more regular users of the employee survey, feedback from face-to-face events and intranet analytics (Chart 60), compared to the other cluster.

**Chart 60 - How often do you currently use the following methods to assess IC effectiveness?**



There are no significant differences between the two clusters in relation to the perception of the importance of barriers affecting the effective measurement of IC.

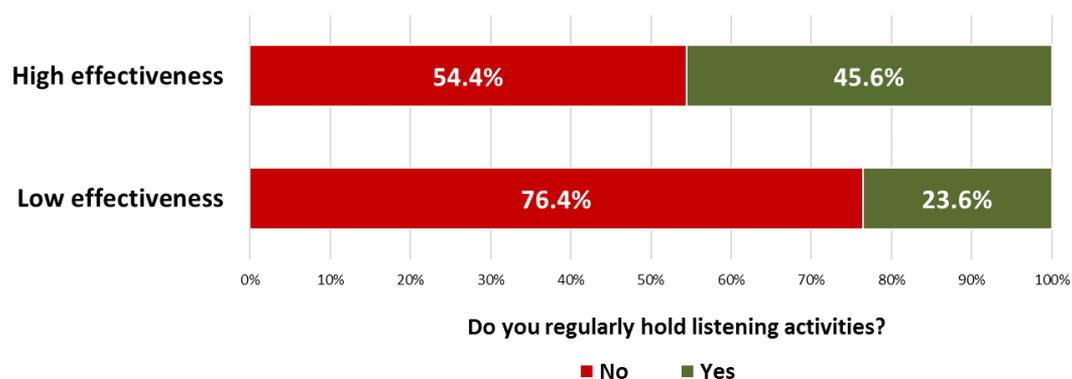
Finally, 45.6% of respondent companies included in the “**High effectiveness**” cluster regularly hold collaborators’ structured listening activities (Chart 61), compared to 23.6% of the “**Low effectiveness**” cluster ( $p \leq 0.000$ ), thus showing great sensitivity to the communication needs expressed in the company.

66.7% of companies in the “**High effectiveness**” cluster regularly execute internal climate surveys (compared to 52.6% in the other cluster), 63.7% use quick online polls to get feedback on single initiatives, projects and issues (compared to 42.1%), 55.9% use mailbox for suggestions and proposals by colleagues (44.7%), and 46.1% use online voting systems (23.7%).

Companies belonging to the “**Low effectiveness**” cluster that regularly hold listening activities use more panels of colleagues (57.9% compared to 35.3%),

feedback on top management statements (55.3% compared to 49%) and focus groups (52.6% compared to 47.1%) compared to the other cluster.

**Chart 61 - Do you regularly hold listening activities?**

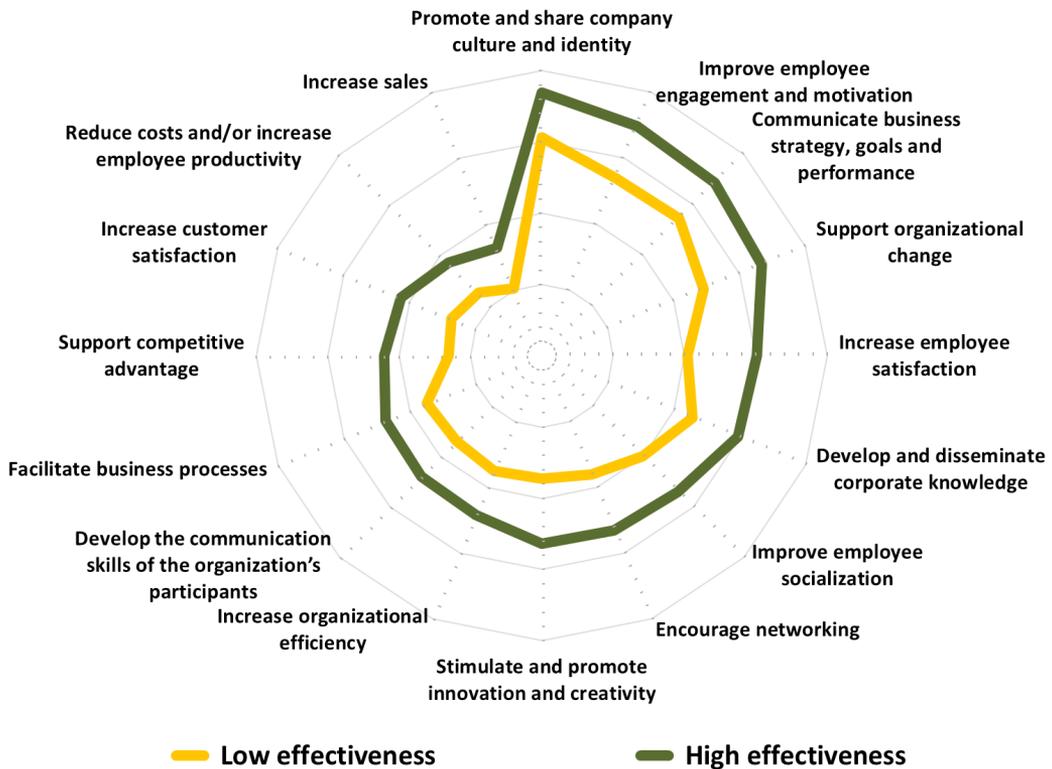


Looking at the concept of IC effectiveness, it is not possible not to look deeper into the objectives that IC intends to pursue inside the company.

This analysis clearly showed that companies in the “**High effectiveness**” cluster approach IC strategy with a significantly broader horizon ( $p \leq 0.000$ ) that goes well beyond promoting and sharing company culture and identity (an objective that ranks first) and increasing organizational efficiency and facilitating business processes: it includes supporting organizational change, improving employee engagement, motivation and satisfaction, with special emphasis on stimulating and promoting innovation and creativity and encouraging networking, without forgetting to support competitive advantage (Chart 62).

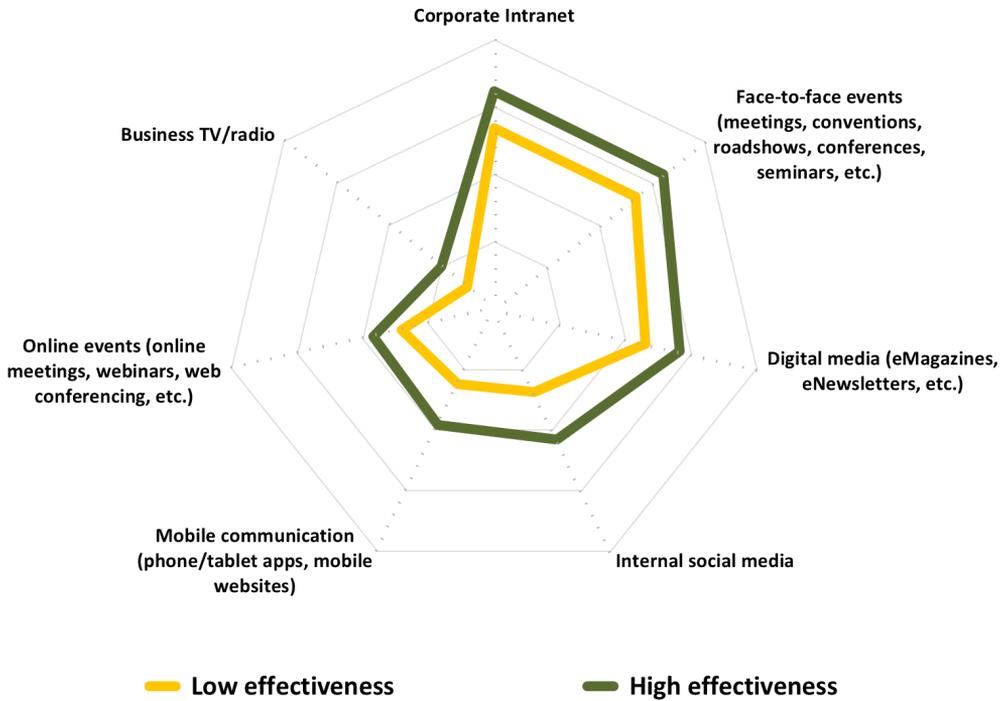
The first cluster focuses more on supporting organizational change. This is probably due to the fact the companies in the “**High effectiveness**” cluster had to deal with organizational restructuring in 66.8% of cases and, in 39.6% of cases, they introduced new technology versus, respectively, 56.0% and 28.9% in the other cluster, where companies in 14.5% of cases have not had any change in the last three years.

**Chart 62 - In your organization, to what extent does IC support the following objectives?**

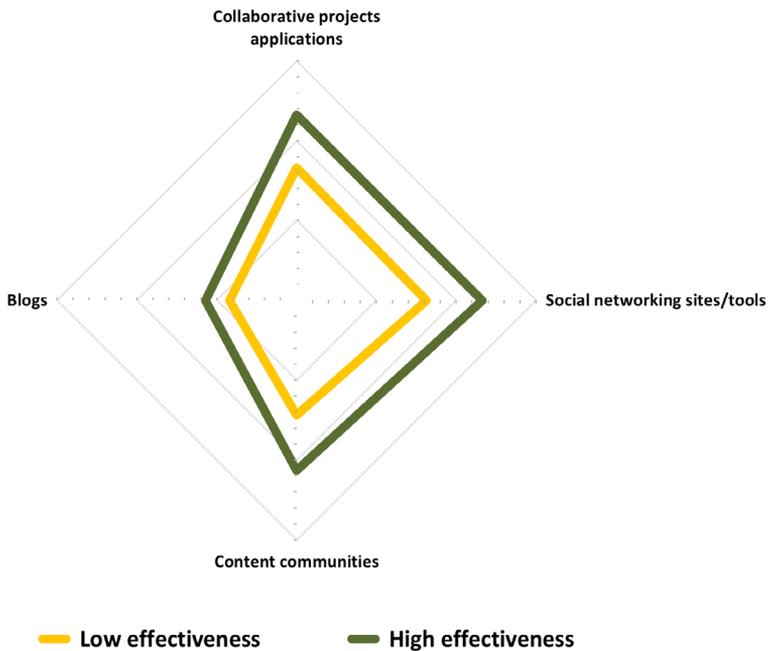


As regards the importance of channels and tools in achieving IC objectives, the most significant differences between the two clusters relate to mobile communication and, especially, the importance attached to internal social media (Chart 63). Indeed, companies in the “**High effectiveness**” cluster attach significantly greater importance ( $p \leq 0.000$ ) to all types of internal social media, such as social networking sites/tools, content communities or collaborative projects applications (Chart 64). This is perfectly consistent with the greater emphasis that companies in the “**High effectiveness**” cluster place on objectives related to stimulating and promoting innovation and creativity and encouraging networking.

**Chart 63 - How important are the following channels and tools in achieving your IC objectives?**

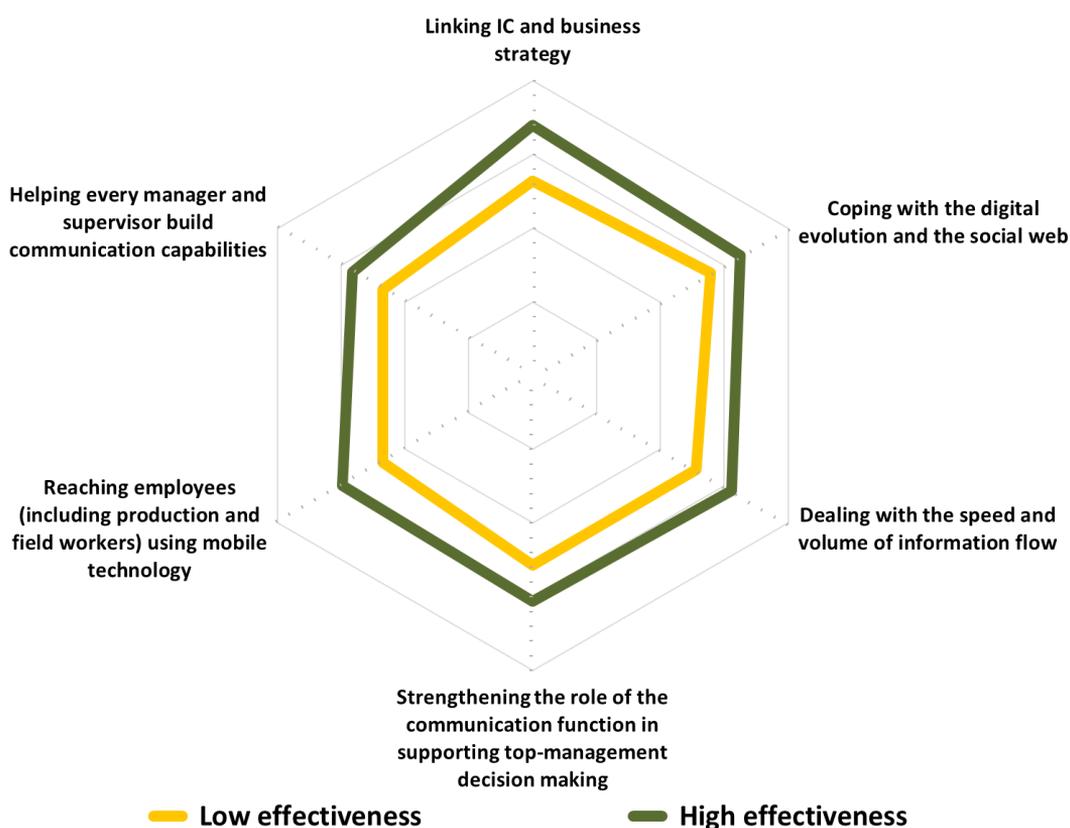


**Chart 64 - How important are the following internal social media in achieving your IC objectives?**



Finally, in terms of the degree of importance of some issues and challenges IC will face in the next three years, the two clusters show the greatest differences ( $p \leq 0.000$ ) with reference to the need of linking IC and business strategy by leveraging the following three items: strengthening the role of the communication function in supporting top-management decision making, helping every manager and supervisor build communication capabilities and reaching all employees using mobile technology. In addition, the companies in the “**High effectiveness**” cluster see the following two challenges as more important than the other cluster: dealing with the speed and volume of information flow and coping with the digital evolution and the social web (Chart 65).

**Chart 65 - Within your organization, how important will each of the following issues be for IC in the next three years?**



To conclude, the fundamental differences between companies in the two effectiveness clusters can be narrowed down to the following five elements:

1. **alignment of the IC department:** the proximity of the IC department to top management is higher within the “High effectiveness” cluster than the other cluster; indeed, the head of Internal Communication in companies belonging to the “High effectiveness” cluster is significantly more often a member of

- the executive board or reports directly to the CEO or the highest decision maker on the executive board, compared to the IC managers in the “Low effectiveness” cluster;
2. **collaboration of the IC team with other departments** within the organization: the IC team in companies belonging to the “High effectiveness” cluster is significantly more integrated in the organization and collaborates more intensively with the CEO, the executive board and the other departments;
  3. **measurement**: companies belonging to the “High effectiveness” cluster are better in using research to assess IC effectiveness on all levels, from input, through output and outcome, to outflow of Internal Communication; in this way, measurement allows communication professionals to conceptualize, evaluate, plan and demonstrate the value of their activities;
  4. **listening**: companies belonging to the “High effectiveness” cluster have significantly more developed methods of collaborators’ structured listening, such as ad-hoc surveys and regularly feedback collection than the other companies; this enables IC team to base its work on evidence and at the same time also be more responsive;
  5. **strategy formulation**: companies belonging to the “High effectiveness” cluster show a better ability to formulate, in a proper way, the IC strategy. This is because the IC team/department works more closely with top management and with the other departments, it has a specific budget allocation and a formal IC plan, and it consistently adopts listening strategies.

The results of the analysis showed that in the two different situations there is not really a better or worse operational approach to Internal Communication, but rather different overall strategic approach that is closely linked to the role attributed to IC by top management (level of engagement in strategic decisions, commitment of top executives and appreciation for the work done). It is also linked to the recognition of this role in companies (level of acceptance of the recommendations provided to other departments and level of involvement of staff in the initiatives undertaken) and to the ability of IC managers and, more generally, of the IC team to express their professionalism and manage as best as possible all communication processes, notwithstanding the limitations imposed by human, economic or technological resources available.

However, it should be noted that the commitment of top management, although fundamental, it is not sufficient by itself. To ensure the overall effectiveness of a well-developed and complex Internal Communication system, the contribution of the managers from each department is needed. Internal Communication is more effective in companies where a valuable system has been put in place to increase the awareness and competence in communication, in order to enable managers to analyze and assess the corporate culture, develop their own social skills, listen to their employees and share their feedback, having the ongoing support of those who are responsible for Internal Communication.

# CONCLUSION: THE ROLE OF A DEDICATED INTERNAL COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT

The findings of this research point out that the presence within companies of a dedicated Internal Communication department play a decisive role in contributing to the effectiveness of the overall IC strategy.

The existence of a dedicated IC department, in addition to depending on organizational strategic choices formulated by top management, is significantly linked to the size and type of the company. In respondent companies, the presence of a dedicated IC department actually increases as the size of the company grows, and it is greater in companies operating in only one country with multiple sites and, especially, in multinational companies rather than in companies operating in only one country with single site.

Companies with a dedicated IC department showed statistically significant differences compared to the other companies for all the other aspects examined:

- ▶ **IC objectives:** To a significantly higher degree, companies with a dedicated IC department pursue all of the objectives that were analyzed, except those that are related to business processes, procedures, operational issues, employee productivity and customer satisfaction. More specifically, the research identified the major differences with reference to the three objectives that fall under Socialization & Networking factor: “Encourage networking”, “Stimulate and promote innovation and creativity”, and “Develop and disseminate corporate knowledge”;
- ▶ **IC channels and tools:** Companies with a dedicated IC department place more importance on digital media, the main internal social media (social networking sites/tools and content communities), online events and mobile communication;
- ▶ **IC assessment:** In companies with a dedicated IC department all items monitored to assess IC effectiveness (with the exception of financial/ personnel costs for projects) are measured more frequently. Additionally, looking at all the methods currently used to assess IC effectiveness, these companies tend to choose intranet analytics, employee surveys, enterprise social networks metrics and focus groups more frequently. Noteworthy is that the collaborators’ structured listening (i.e., ad-hoc surveys and regularly feedback collection) is done regularly in 44.2% of companies where there is a dedicated IC department compared to 24.4% where there is no such dedicated department;
- ▶ **IC effectiveness:** In companies with a dedicated IC department, there is a

higher level of consensus on the role of IC in the pursuit of the strategic goals of the organization, and a higher level of perceived effectiveness at helping organization achieve its current business goals. More specifically, in companies with a dedicated IC department 64.4% of respondents feel IC supports, either well or very well, the strategic goals of the organization, compared to 50% of companies where there is no dedicated IC department, and 22.3% feel IC plays a marginal or even irrelevant role. In addition, in companies with a dedicated IC department, 44.2% of respondents consider IC effective or extremely effective at helping their organization achieve its current business goals, compared to 29% of companies where there is not a dedicated IC department, in which, moreover, 25% feel it plays a marginal role or is not at all effective;

- ▶ **IC team quality and ability:** Companies with a dedicated IC department have a more positive view of the quality and ability of their IC teams compared to those of companies considered as a benchmark. More specifically, in companies with a dedicated IC department, 49.3% of respondents consider that the quality and ability of the IC team in their organization to be better or much better than those of companies considered as a benchmark, compared to 27.6% of companies without a dedicated IC department, where 28.1% see their situation as worse or considerably worse;
- ▶ **IC investment:** Companies with a dedicated IC department are far more satisfied with their level of investment than companies without a dedicated IC department. More specifically, 26.7% of respondent companies with a dedicated IC department were satisfied (21.2%) or very satisfied (5.5%) with the level of investment in IC, while only 17.7% of companies without a dedicated IC department. In addition, respondents more satisfied with the level of investment believed at the same time that IC was more effective to help their organization achieve business goals;
- ▶ **IC roles and tasks:** Companies with a dedicated IC department feel more support is given to senior management and other company functions to develop their communication skills and in terms of providing genuine communication consultancy to help them perform their activities. More specifically, in companies with a dedicated IC department the IC activities are more dedicated on advising executives or senior managers how to manage specific communication challenges, on providing information/insights for decisions and activities, and on enabling managers to recognize the inherent communication aspect in any of their decisions and activities. In addition, in companies with a dedicated IC department, the perception of advisory influence is greater because the IC team is viewed by senior management as trusted advisers and senior managers take more seriously the recommendations of IC team. Finally, the greater ability of executive/senior managers to recognize the communication aspect in any of their decisions and activities was noted;
- ▶ **IC future issues:** In companies with a dedicated IC department, more importance was attached to reaching employees (including production and field workers) using mobile technology, dealing with the inclusion of digital natives and linking IC and business strategy.

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# NOTES

<sup>1</sup> NEWSWEAVER (2016), *Inside IC. Internal Communication Survey*.

<sup>2</sup> NEWSWEAVER-MELCRUM (2014), *Internal Communication and Technology Survey Report*.

<sup>3</sup> VMA GROUP (2016), *Inside Insight*; Gatehouse (2016), *State of the Sector: Internal Communication & Employee Engagement*.

<sup>4</sup> ASCAI (2010), *Dall'informazione alla relazione: la comunicazione interna delle aziende in Italia*.

<sup>5</sup> ABI (2003), *La comunicazione interna in banca*; ABI (2011), *La comunicazione interna delle banche italiane*; ABI (2016), *La comunicazione interna delle banche italiane*.

<sup>6</sup> ZERFASS, A., MORENO, A., TENCH, R., VERČIČ, D., VERHOEVEN, P. (2017). *European Communication Monitor 2017. How strategic communication deals with the challenges of visualisation, social bots and hypermodernity. Results of a survey in 50 Countries*. Brussels: EACD/ EUPRERA, QuadrigaMedia Berlin.

<sup>7</sup> Several studies (e.g. Stein, 2006; White et al., 2010) report that face-to-face communication is the preferred IC channel owing to its richness; face-to-face communication enables straight feedback and the transmission of information in a more personal manner than other communication tools. When people are in regular face-to-face contact, relationships start to evolve, and when people know each other, it is easier to communicate (Grunig et al., 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) categorize social media into six types: collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds and virtual social worlds. In terms of internal social media use, the most important element seems to be collaborative projects enabling simultaneous content creation by a number of employees. Collaborative projects include wikis and social bookmarking applications enabling group-based collation and rating of web links or media content (Kaplan, Haenlein, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> «The range of consulting provided by communication professionals may include the *advice* of fellow members of the organization on how to communicate appropriately (expert consulting) as well as the *enablement* of others to master communicative challenges by themselves (process consulting)» (Zerfass, Franke, 2013, p. 123). The last consulting form highlights that «supporting the communication of others does not necessarily mean that communication professionals need to be directly involved in all communication processes, but rather be a director who stages and provides preconditions for fruitful communication» (Heide, Simonsson, 2011, p. 214).

<sup>10</sup> «Influence can be observed in the form of advisory influence when communication managers are able to make recommendations to senior management or as executive influence, when they are invited to senior-level meetings dealing with strategic planning on the organizational level. In the latter case, communicators are not only internal consultants but part of the decision-making process» (Verčič, Zerfass, 2016, p. 276).

<sup>11</sup> «Prerequisite of performance is the quality and capability of IC team to do its job. This can be labeled as competence, which is a combination of knowledge (what practitioners are required to know to perform their job), skills (activities involving ideas, people or technical skills which practitioners perform with ease) and personal attributes (required character traits, personal attitudes and values) (Tench, Moreno, 2015, pp. 42-44). This can be assessed in relation to the competencies available in other organizations» (Verčič, Zerfass, 2016, p. 276). For further information, see Tench et al., 2017.