

Remotely interested?

**What remote workers
really want from internal
communication teams**



Remotely interested?

Research* tells us that remote workers/non-desk based workers are one of the biggest barriers to effective internal communication, yet the priorities on the list for internal communicators doesn't reflect this challenge.

*Gatehouse State of the Sector Report



Jenni Field



Benjamin Ellis

Jenni Field, Director of Redefining Communications and President-Elect for the Chartered Institute of Public Relations teamed up with Benjamin Ellis from SocialOptic to explore why this was continuing to be a challenge, and why it wasn't a priority.

“ We wanted to look at content, channels and engagement. We wanted to create a question set that would allow us to cross tabulate across the different questions so we could really delve into what channels were best, how important the line manager really was and whether there was any correlation between content and channel. To do this we broke down the content into three areas: Industry, Organisation and Department. ”

Jenni

60%

of their employees work
remote/frontline



SIEMENS



DEVON &
SOMERSET
FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE



West
Midlands
Railway

300+

remote/frontline workforce surveyed

In total, seven organisations took part and they ranged from public sector, to hospitality to engineering. On average each organisation had a remote/frontline workforce that made up over 60% of their business and we received information from over 300 of them.

They completed the survey online and each company that took part received their own report to support their internal communications plans for 2019.



This research was carried out by Redefining Communications and SocialOptic. Huge thanks to the organisations that took part and the internal communicators who helped us make it happen, giving us their time to explore what the results meant for them.

What does the data tell us?

While information overload is viewed as a big problem,

ONLY **3%**

say that they had too much information about their organisation, department or industry.

ONLY **36%**

of remote workers believe that their manager is an **accurate** source.

Other than email, most workers get information about their industry from their **colleagues**, rather than from any other channel.

ONLY **63%**

of remote workers believe that they have all of the information to do their job well.

Of non-face-to-face channels, **noticeboards** are still viewed as the second most useful channel.

27%

of remote workers had too little information about their organisation.



Of non-face-to-face channels, **print magazines** are still viewed as the most interesting channel.

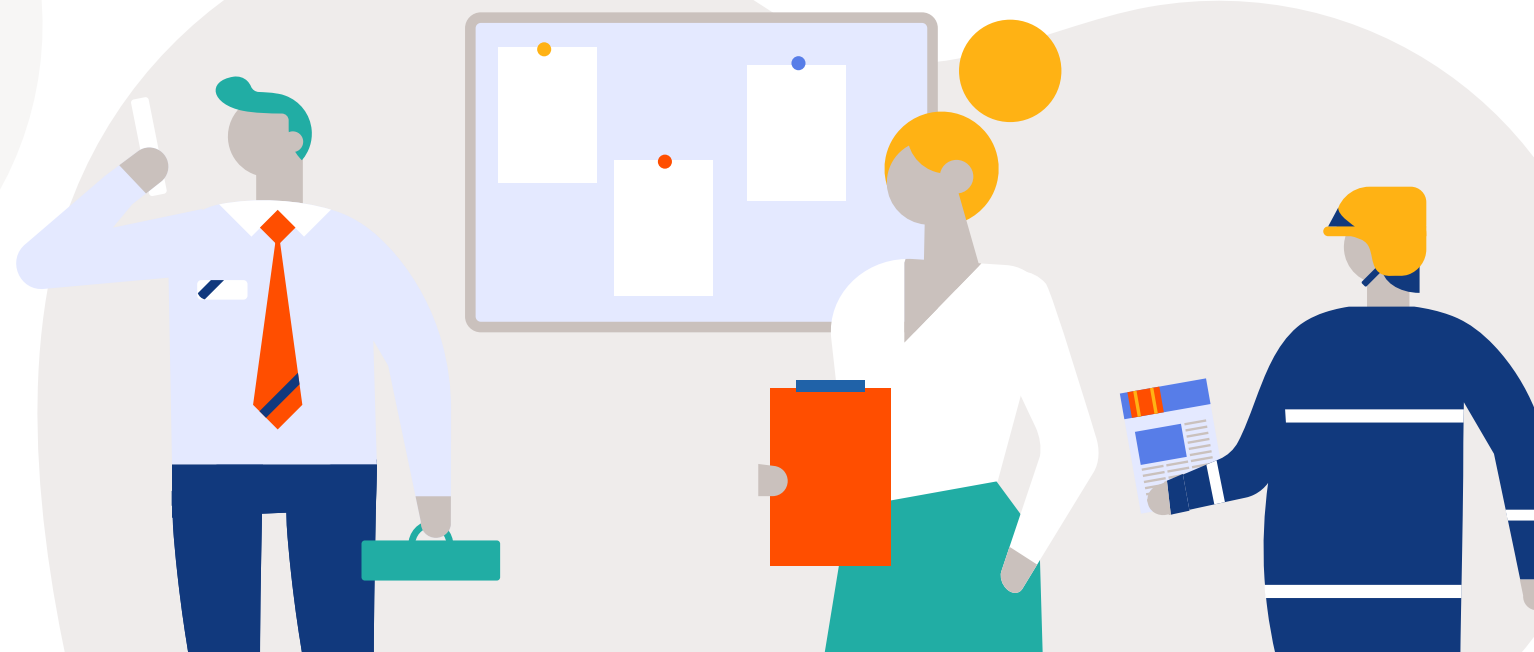
Remote workers view their manager as the most **informative** and the most accurate channel.

Even for remote workers, **the Intranet and company website** are the main channels for information about their organisation.

16%

of remote workers had too little information about their department.

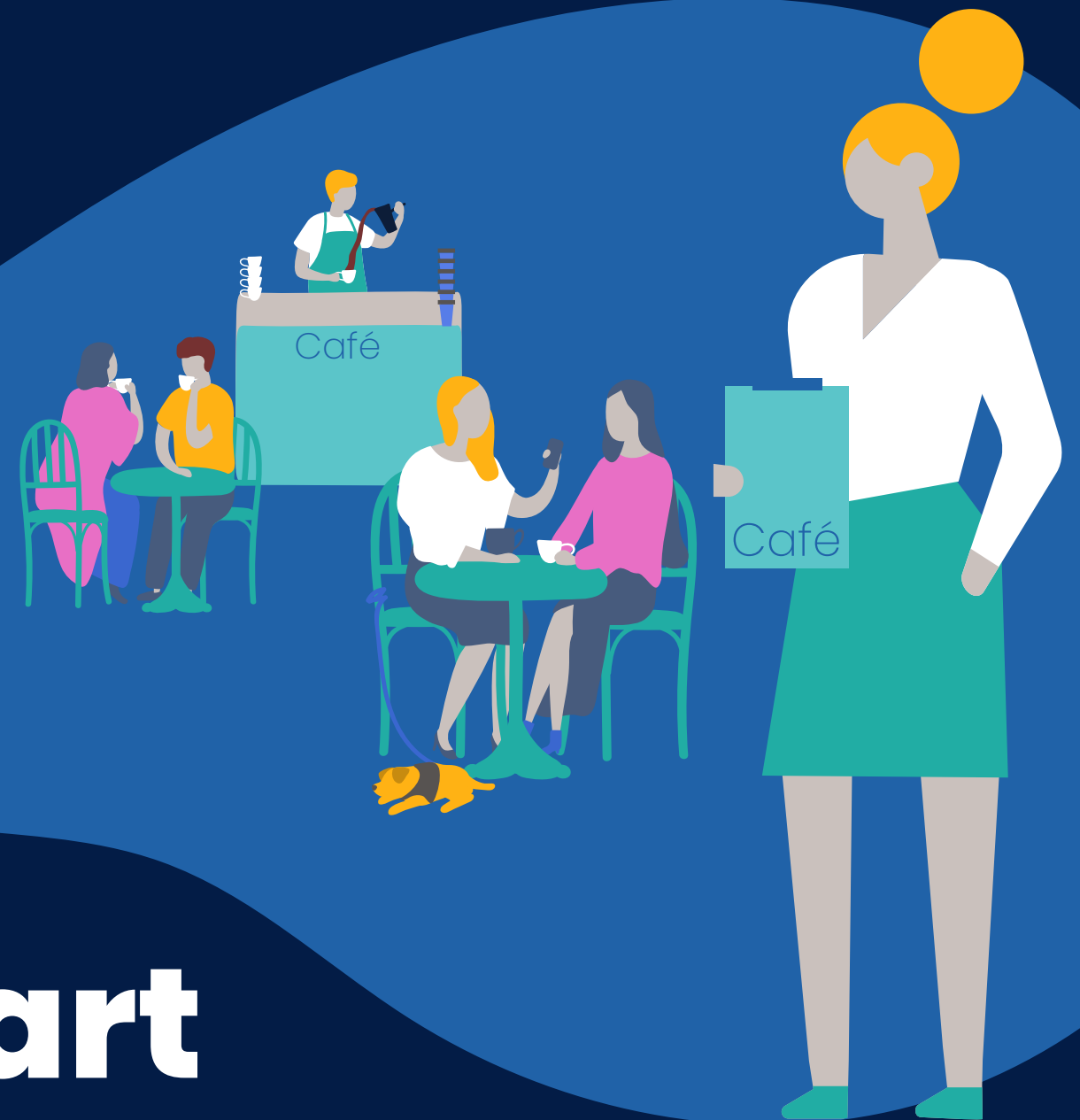
TV Screens and text messaging were rated as the least interesting channels.



Flying Solo

or

part of a team



Flying solo or part of a team

There is a difference between working individually and working as a team. If my work is solitary – a bus driver for example – then my interaction with my peers, my manager and the environment is different to someone who works in hospitality.

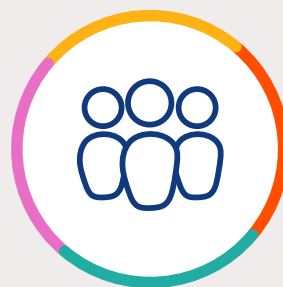
Solitary

These are workers who don't need anyone else to do their job. Their work is carried out on their own and they only see people they work with during breaks or at the start/end of their working day.



Team

Working in a team and being reliant on each other to complete a task is very different to other ways of working. A true team brings different skills together to complement each other and overcome a challenge



Mixed

Working in hospitality is often mixed. The individual might work in a team at times and on their own in others. It means that their interactions with others are a mix of work and social



Remote workers view their manager as the most informative and the most accurate channel.

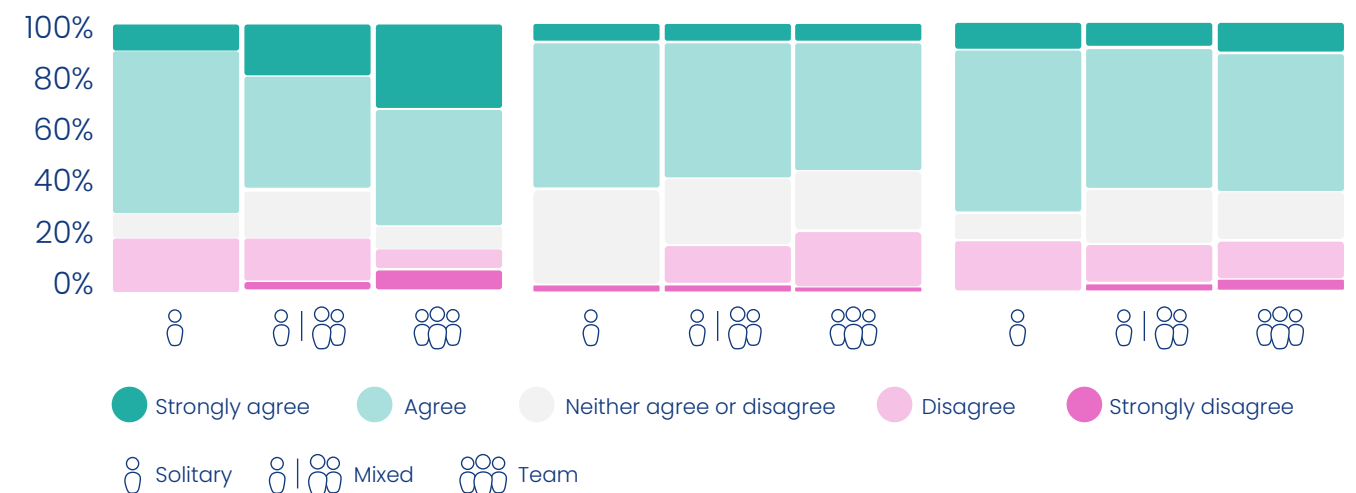


Overview

I have all the information I need to do my job well

The information I receive is relevant

My manager is a good communicator



The research suggests that working in hospitality, like a cafe for example, the individual employee is part of a team. The team start shifts together, rely on each other to serve customers etc. When the employee works in a solitary role like a bus driver or train driver this is not the case. They don't rely on others to complete the tasks of the job.

This has a fundamental impact on the content that needs to be shared with these groups of employees and it also links to their interactions with each other. The importance of social connections in the workplace can be more important with remote/frontline workers because their interactions are purely at times of break.

Needing some (third) space?



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Understanding the importance of third space is incredibly important once you understand the type of remote workers you have (solitary or team).

When it comes to remote workers, we often look at the spaces they use to convene and we use that as the place for screens or newsletters. Sociologist Ray Oldenburg coined the term Third Space or Third Place in the early 90s in his book *The Great Good Place*.

It's a space where people meet to unwind, discuss and talk about things that matter to them. Distinct both from the work environment where communication can be functional and distinct from the domestic space of home.

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Needing some (third) space?

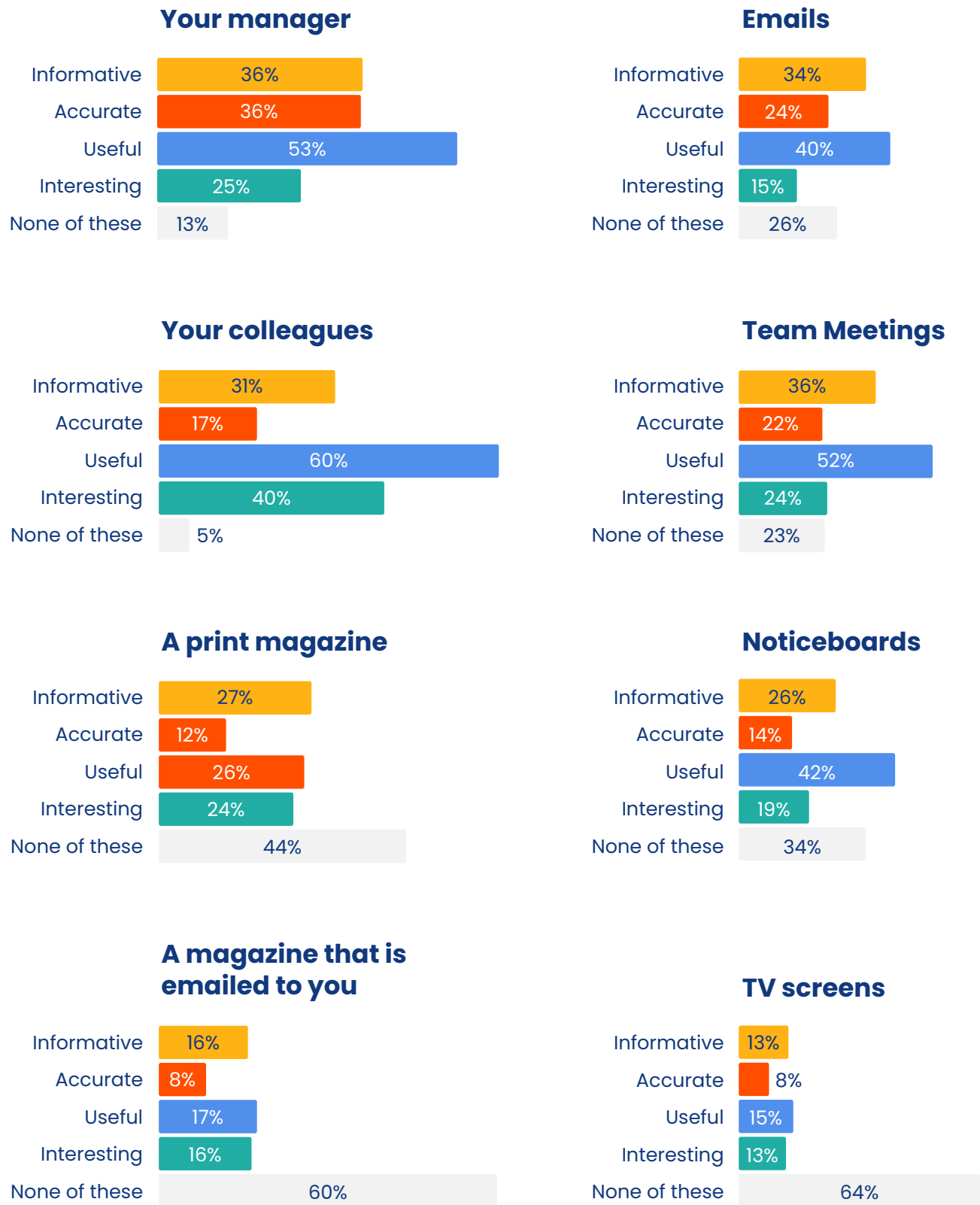
When it comes to third space, we found that the push or pull element of the channel is where the importance lies. Posting a magazine to a home address is not intrusive – The individual can choose to read it or throw it but the choice is theirs.

Putting a digital screen in the space where they eat lunch or meet with colleagues is intrusive. The choice is removed so they either switch it off or turn it to a different channel like the news.

Where you choose to communicate with people is important. You need to provide access and the ability to choose it, not force it. It's why we saw a surprising response to noticeboards as a channel and a lack of engagement in TV screens.



Quality of information



Where are they getting their information?



Where are they getting their information?

Email, email email.
Where it exists it is the most dominant channel.

External sources is one of the main places employees go for news about industry. If the internal communications function is not aligned or engaged with the external PR team then the potential for mixed messages or confusion for employees will be high. We are seeing a trend of internal communications teams moving from HR to Corporate Communications function and with the pace of news today, this can only be a good thing.



27%

of remote workers had too little information about their organisation



For organisational news the intranet, the company website and the manager are the core sources – a shift from technology to people starts to emerge. When we go one layer down into the department or area, the main sources are managers, colleagues and team meetings. A sign that for local, department news the face-to-face, conversation approach is better. Where channels like magazines are used, they are often under utilised suggesting that they could work harder for the communications team.

If you have a magazine, work with experts to make it the best magazine it can be – invest in the channel. It may seem obvious, but picking one channel over another doesn't inherently mean your communication will improve. It needs good content and an investment of time. While we often want to replace email with another digital solution, it would be better to spend time focussing on how to get the best from what we have.



**The importance
of relevance...**

The importance of relevance...

Over the years the importance of peer to peer communication has risen due to the increase of internal social networks, employees connected through public social networking sites and the trust in our peers rising. While all of this remains true, our research tells us that the relevance and trust of the information being shared is incredibly low. So, while we may want to create networks of champions across an organisation, the trust and belief in that information is lower than other channels like an intranet or a company magazine.

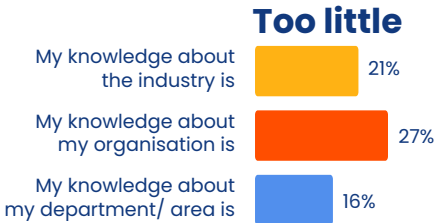
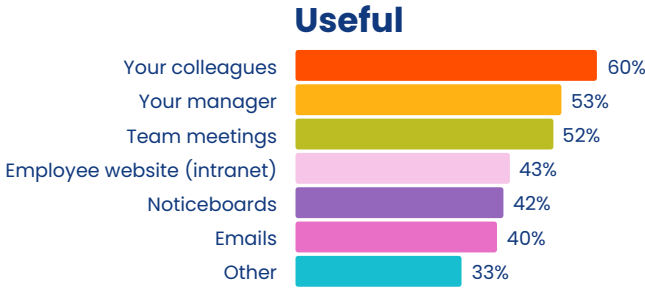


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of remote workers view their manager as the most informative and the most accurate channel

Relevance is the key to unlocking good communication inside your organisation. If the information is relevant, then they will have all they need to do their job well. Their line manager would be perceived as a good communicator because the information is useful , informative etc. Without relevance, we are just adding to the noise.

If we equip leaders or line managers with relevant and informative content, then the workforce will be better informed. We know that the manager is one of the core sources of content about the organisation and the department. Ensuring they have the right information for the team generally, will see an increase in employees having all the information they need to do their job well.



Line manager development



Line manager development

2019 research from Gatehouse suggests that this is a mountain we are unable to climb. But it's not something that we should give up on, it takes time and investment in people to do it. We have already said that we need to equip line managers with the right content, but if they have poor communication skills then even with the right information, it won't have been delivered effectively. The employee won't have what they need to get the job done.

It can take six months for a line manager engagement programme to have an impact and often leaders are asking for instant change. They want behaviours to suddenly switch into something different and this is unrealistic. We've made it so big now that it's become just too hard. If we took one part of the business, tested it, measured it and then took the next step it becomes manageable. We don't have to run up the mountain in one go – it can be one step at a time. When it comes to the remote or frontline workers, the internal communicators time and investment has to be in the line managers working with them everyday.

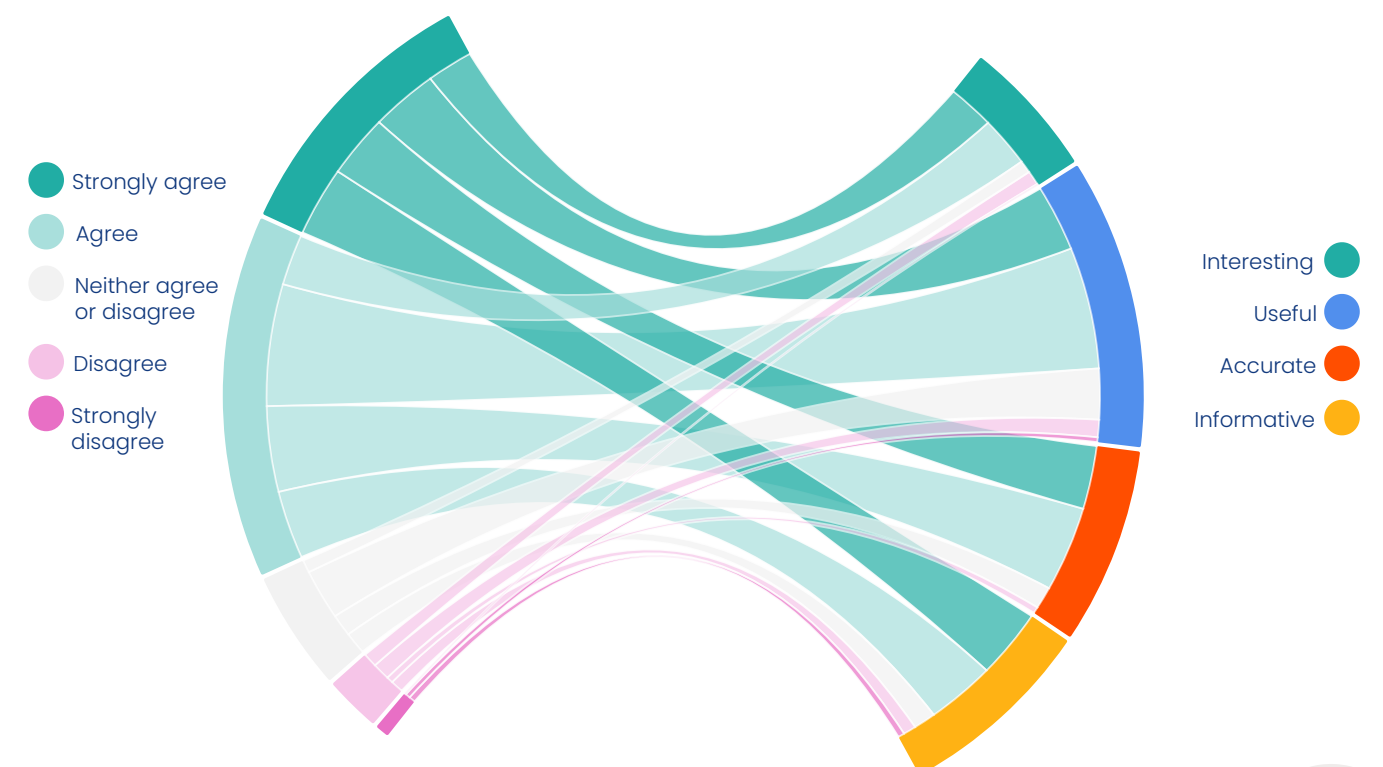
My manager is a good communicator

I have all the information I need to do my job well



My manager is a good communicator

Communication from my manager is



Conclusion

The reality for organisations with frontline workers



The reality for organisations with frontline workers

For some organisations there is too much noise but this is too broad as a statement for anyone to do anything with. Where is the noise coming from? Our research was able to pinpoint if it was departmental or organisational. This is important, especially if the business is going through periods of change. Take the time to explore what your employees mean by 'too much' or noise – the detail will determine your strategy.



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We often talk about internal communication and employee engagement interchangeably. As we look at the role of communication flow inside organisations, teams need to focus on the process and structure around that flow. As we explored the role of channels and content together it was easy to see how things could break down without a clear content strategy and a process to share news and information across the organisation.

With a better process and a better structure there will be opportunities to explore tailored and personalised content for the employee. This was not a big requirement for all but was certainly highlighted in the larger, more matrixed organisations.

The reality for organisations with frontline workers



The latest Edelman Trust Report tells us that our trust in different people or organisations is changing. **The insight for us was that employees might find information useful but not accurate when it comes from their peers.** This is particularly helpful to explore as you look into communication between colleagues. Compare this to what some claim to be propaganda in company magazines and we can see the challenge of trust play out inside the organisation

Don't underestimate the importance of external channels for employees.

Even for employees the website and social media were key information sources so ensuring alignment with external communications is vital. Exploring the timing of information shared internally and externally and the context should be part of any ongoing strategy.

If there is one thing we need to do differently as internal communicators, it's to focus on the people and the business rather than choosing the mix of channels.

We have spent a long time focussed on channels and the importance of an integrated mix – which is still important. Having lots of channels and investment in digital or printed media takes focus away from what is important. Business is about people and relationships.

Remote workers are one of the biggest barriers for internal communicators but this insight demonstrates that they don't need to be.

Tailoring the allocation of resource and focus based on a data-driven understanding of the working patterns and communication styles of your workforce will enable you to achieve significantly more impact with the same or fewer resources.



**Redefining
Communications**



Want to find out more?

Redefining Communications and SocialOptic often work together to gather insight about organisations and their people. Working together means we are able to combine the data and the communication solutions into a measurable strategy, so if you'd like to get in touch, just email info@redefiningcomms.com

#remotelyinterested

