

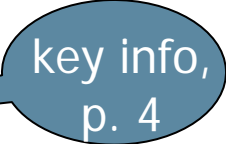


Results of the Survey on Leadership Communications:

How do you do leadership communications?

Liz Guthridge

November 2009

What we're covering

1. About the survey
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3. About the participants
4. About the findings
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 - What's working
 - How leaders are accountable
 - Your top barriers
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 - Demographics differences
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About the survey

- Online survey sponsored by two high-tech companies and Connect Consulting Group to assess what **leadership communications** actions are taking place at all levels **inside** organizations **with employees**
- Survey administered between Aug. 27 – Sept. 17
- 67 Internal Communications professionals answered all 23 questions, including 6 demographics, about:
 - What are you doing?
 - What's working?
 - What could be better?

About the survey

Definitions used:

- **Senior Leaders:** The individuals at the very top of your organization, such as your CEO, COO, CFO and CAO, etc, who are responsible for leading the business overall
- **Business unit/functional leaders:** Those who report directly to senior leaders and who are responsible for leading major segments, such as groups, divisions, and functions of your organization
- **People leaders:** Directors, managers, first-line supervisors, and team leads to whom individual contributors and other employees report

What's up?

1. Face-to-face remains the most powerful tool we have for leadership communications, especially for 2-way conversations.
2. We believe accountability for communication is important but more than a third aren't measuring it.
3. Information load is a significant barrier. *(In other words, it's critical that we make sure our communications is helping solve problems, not contributing to the clutter.)*
4. We need to leverage more to ensure leaders are all on the same page and using everyone's time and resources well. *(In other words, consider leaders to be a communication channel and amplify their words and actions. Also, coordinate their words and actions with other media.)*
5. Good things come to those communication professionals who take the initiative. *(In other words, don't wait to be asked. Step up, give advice and take actions.)*

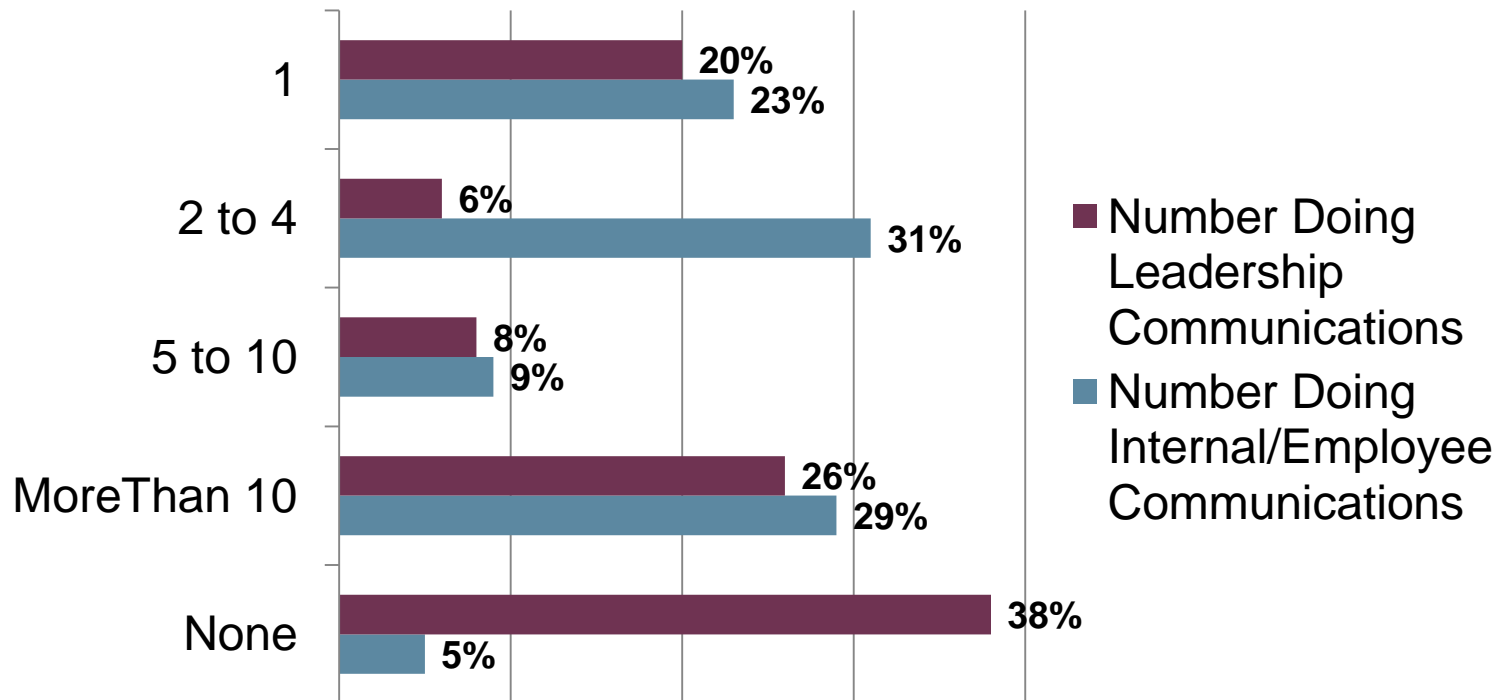


Small companies are measuring more than large.

About the participants

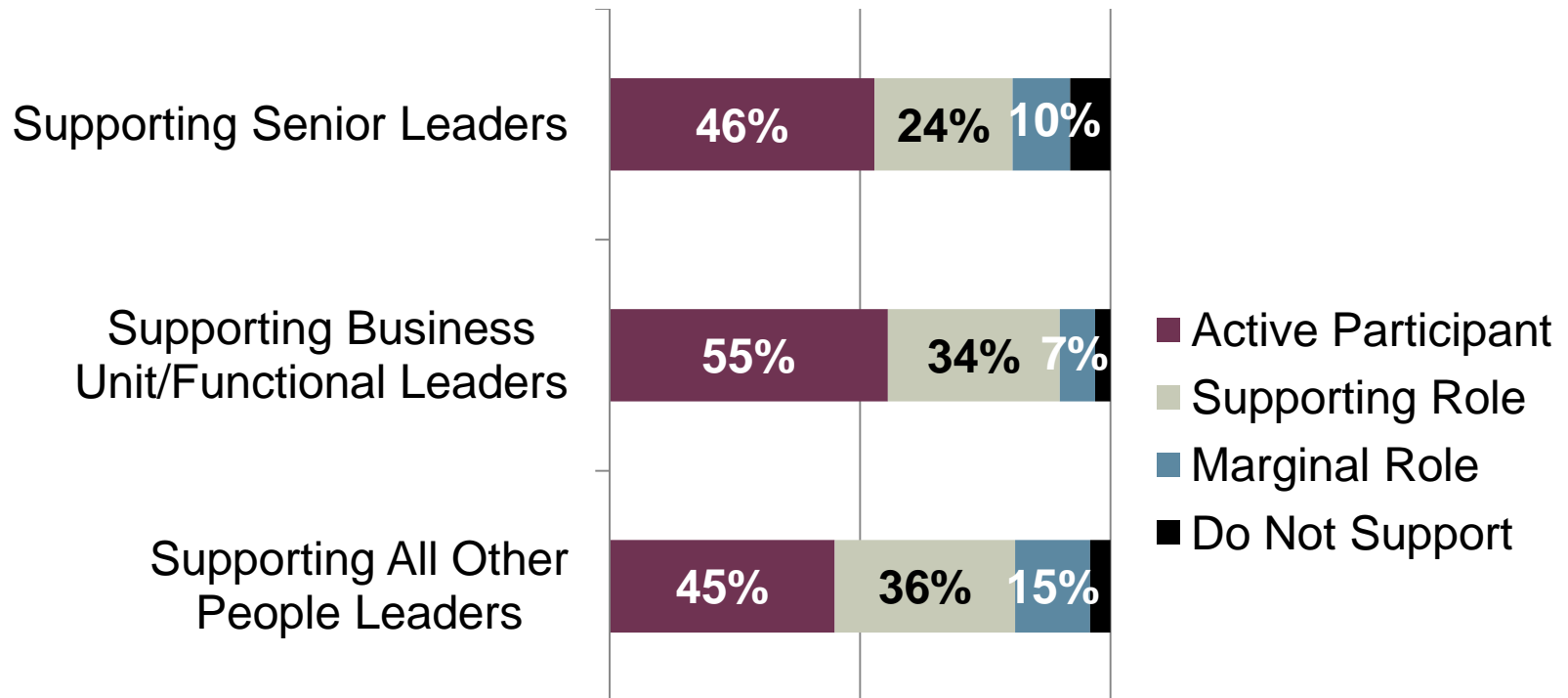
Participants were from a variety of industries and a range of company sizes, primarily serving North America. Here's how the size of staff ranks, comparing those who do just leadership communications to the entire Internal/Employee Communications staff.

Number of Full-time Staff Members



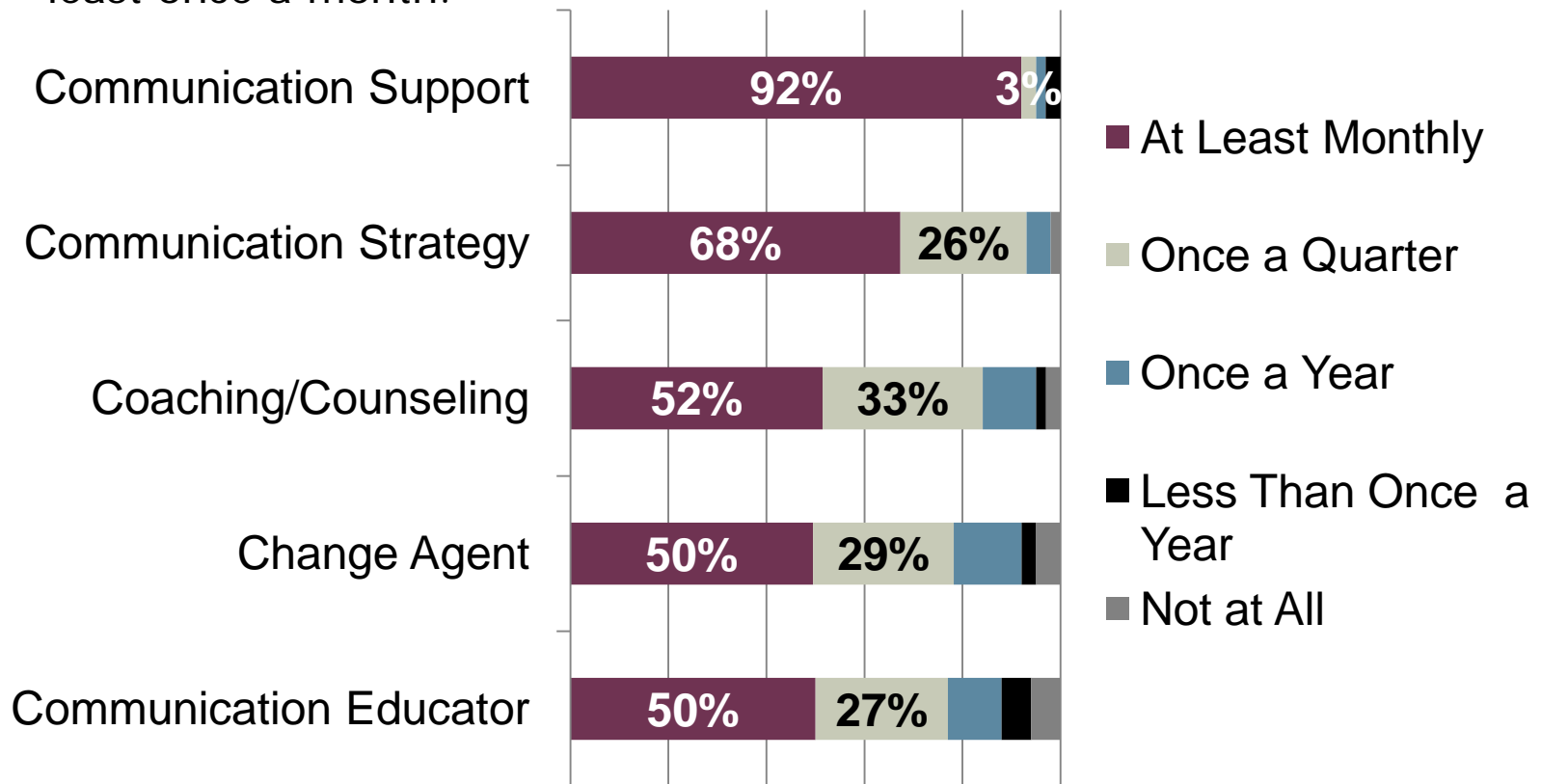
What you're doing

The vast majority of survey participants are playing either an active or supporting communication role with all three levels of leaders.



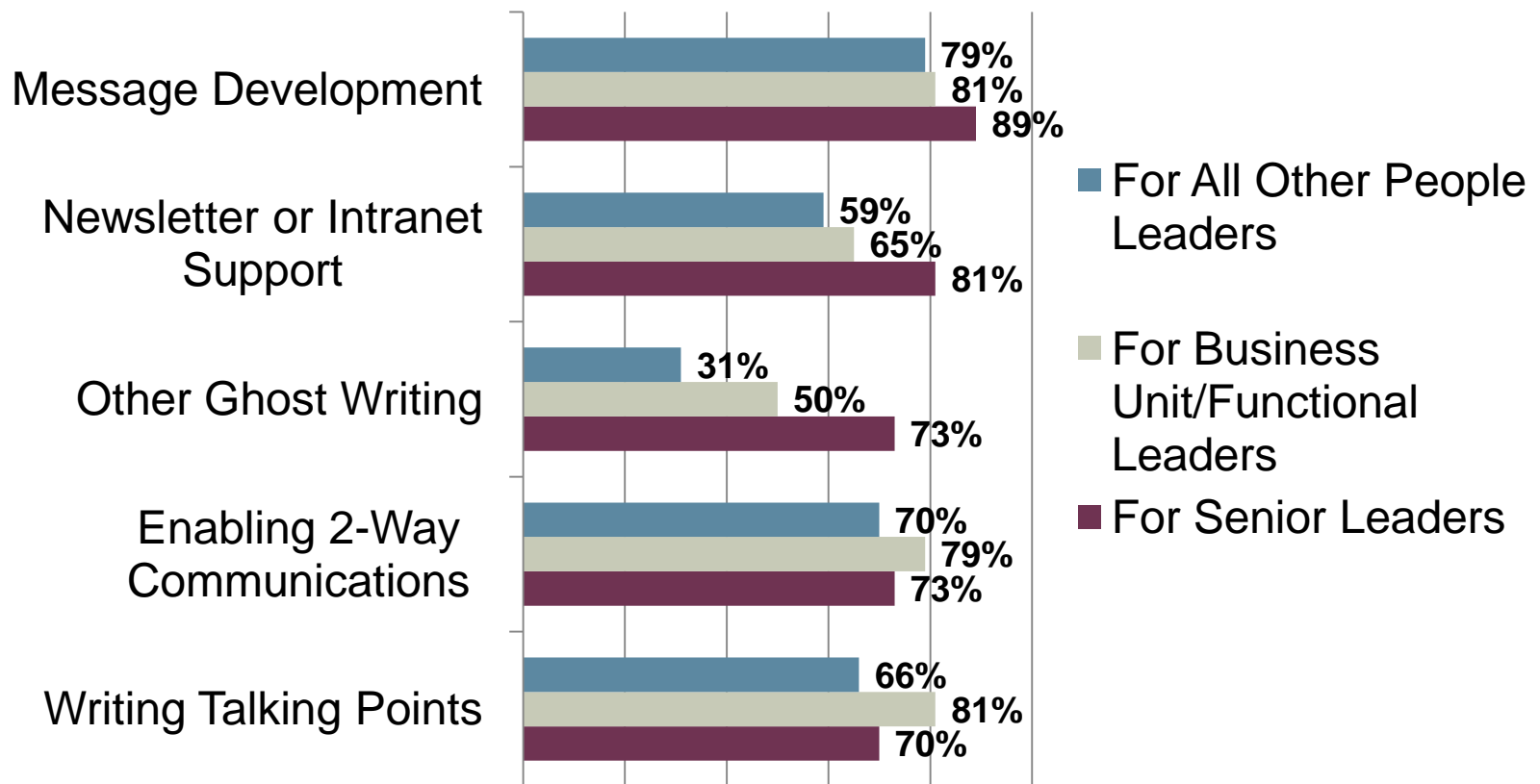
What you're doing

The most common type of communications support is technical help, such as writing, editing and producing. However, 50% or more of the participants are serving as strategic advisor, coaches and educators at least once a month.



What you're doing

The most common type and degree of technical communications support varies by the level of the leader, as shown here:



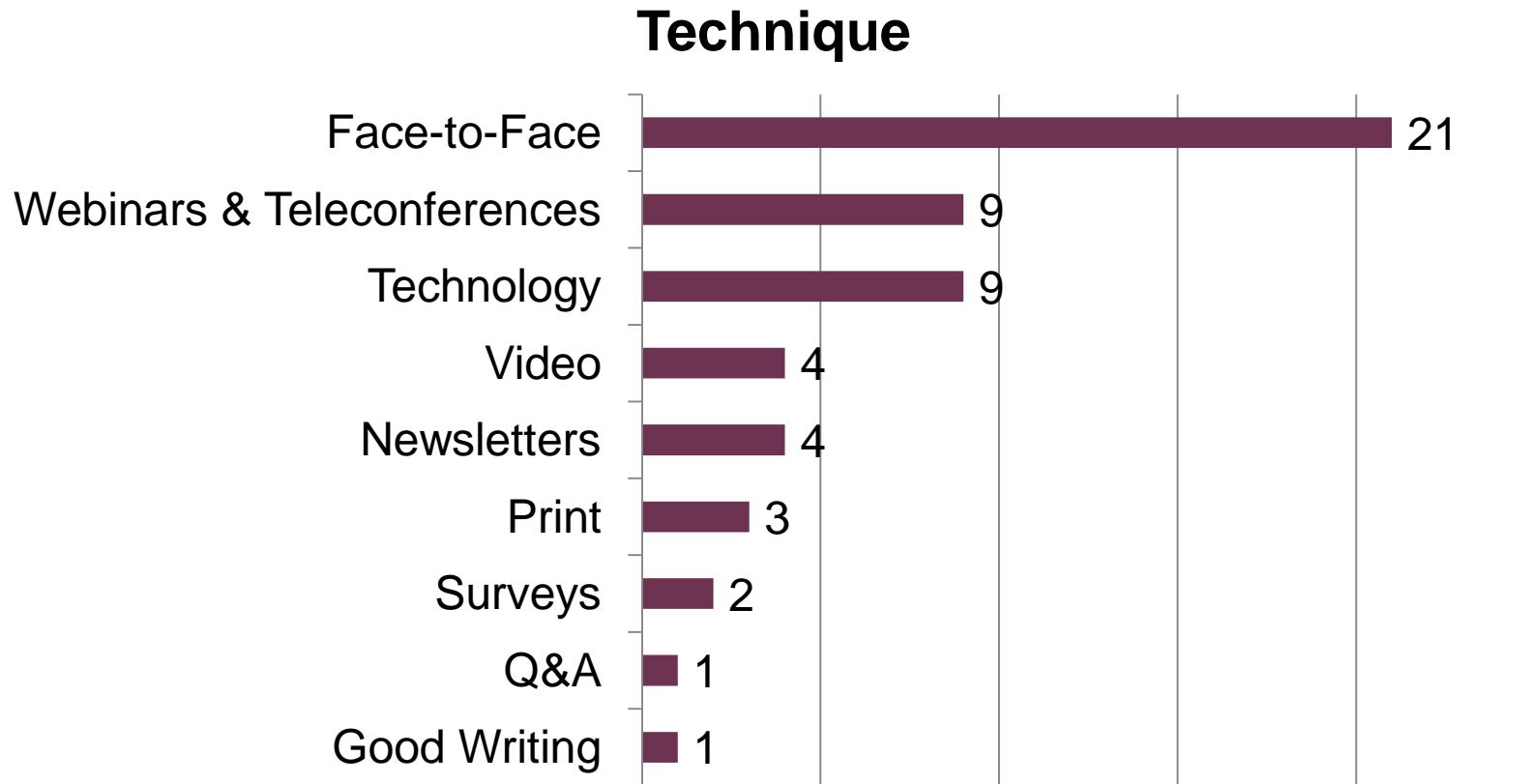
Top topics you're communicating

As for the content of the communication that participants help with, the top topics vary by frequency.

| At Least Monthly | At Least Once A Quarter | At Least Annually |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Products/services | 1. Recognition | 1. Ethics |
| 2. Customers | 2. Competitors | 2. Pay and benefits |
| 3. Strategic Direction | 3. Organizational Performance | 3. Community |

What's working

Participants shared the most effective/innovative technique they've used over the last 18 months. The techniques fall into these categories:



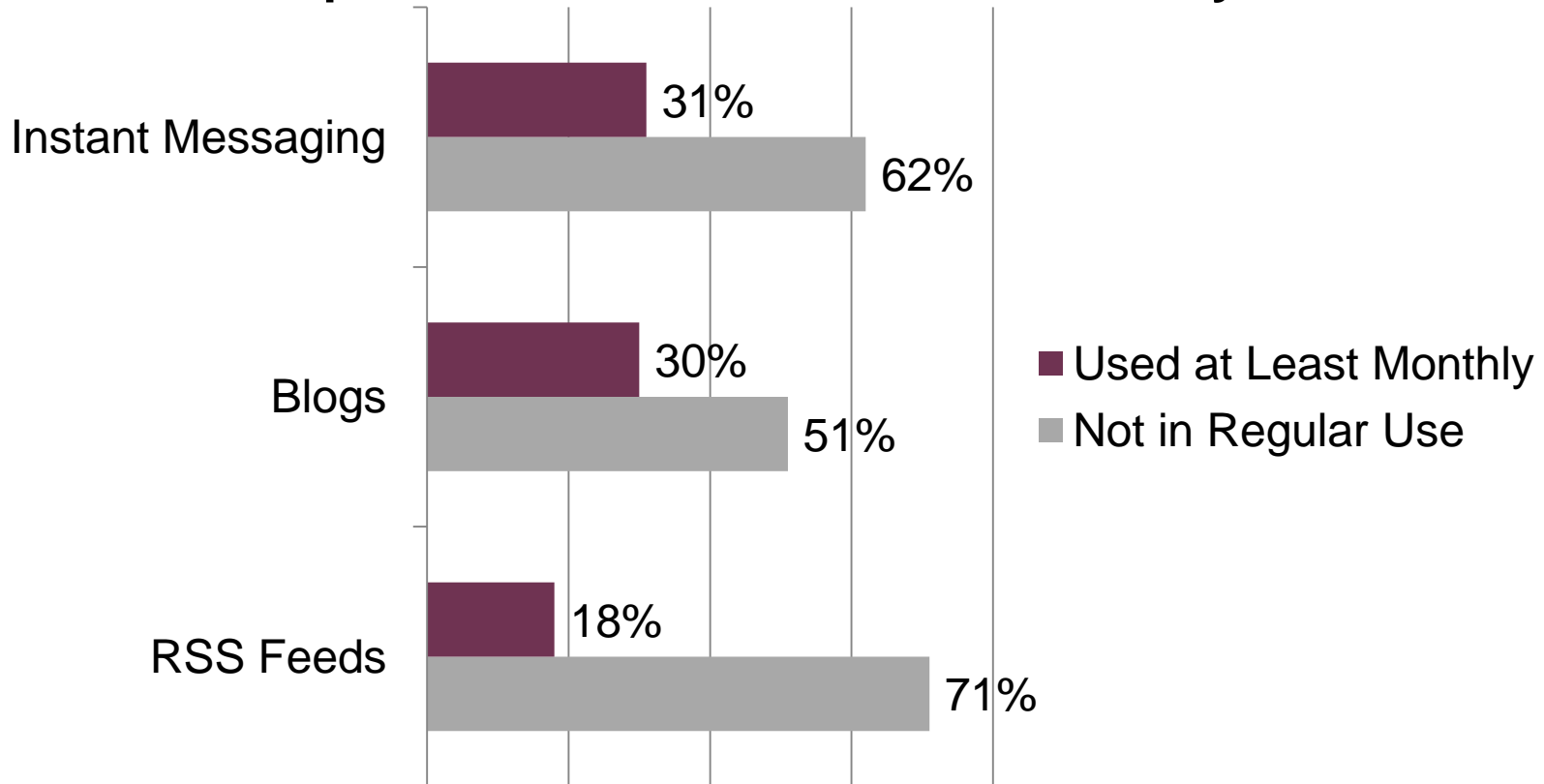
Some comments about face-to-face

- Tried and true: face-to-face.
- CEO breakfast meetings with select (random) employees.
- Leadership conference. 98% of participants said they understood the new business direction and their contribution to achieving it.
- Quarterly briefings by CEO to all staff; surveys confirm key messages received and understood.
- We used a “conversation-based” conference with the senior leadership population, which was unusual as they have been used to having information cascaded at them as we have been in crisis mode for the last two years. Having conversations with them and letting them air their thoughts has begun to really affect the way the senior leaders feel about their engagement in the organisation.

What you're doing—or not doing

Participants reported minimal regular use of new technology. These are their top three channels. The percentage who do not regularly use these channels is also shown.

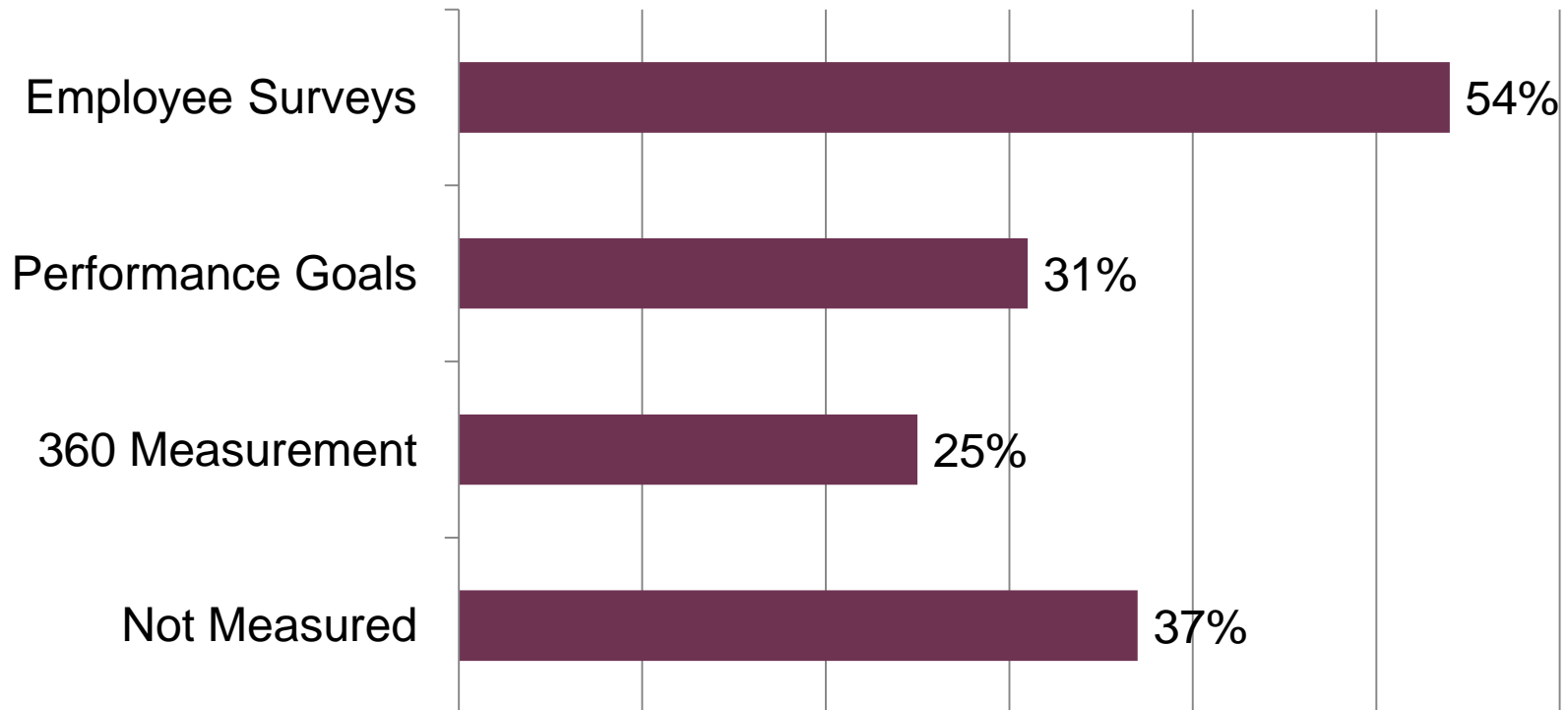
Top 3 New Media Used at Least Monthly



How leaders are accountable

Of the 63% who are holding their leaders accountable for communicating with employees, many are using multiple ways. These are the top three:

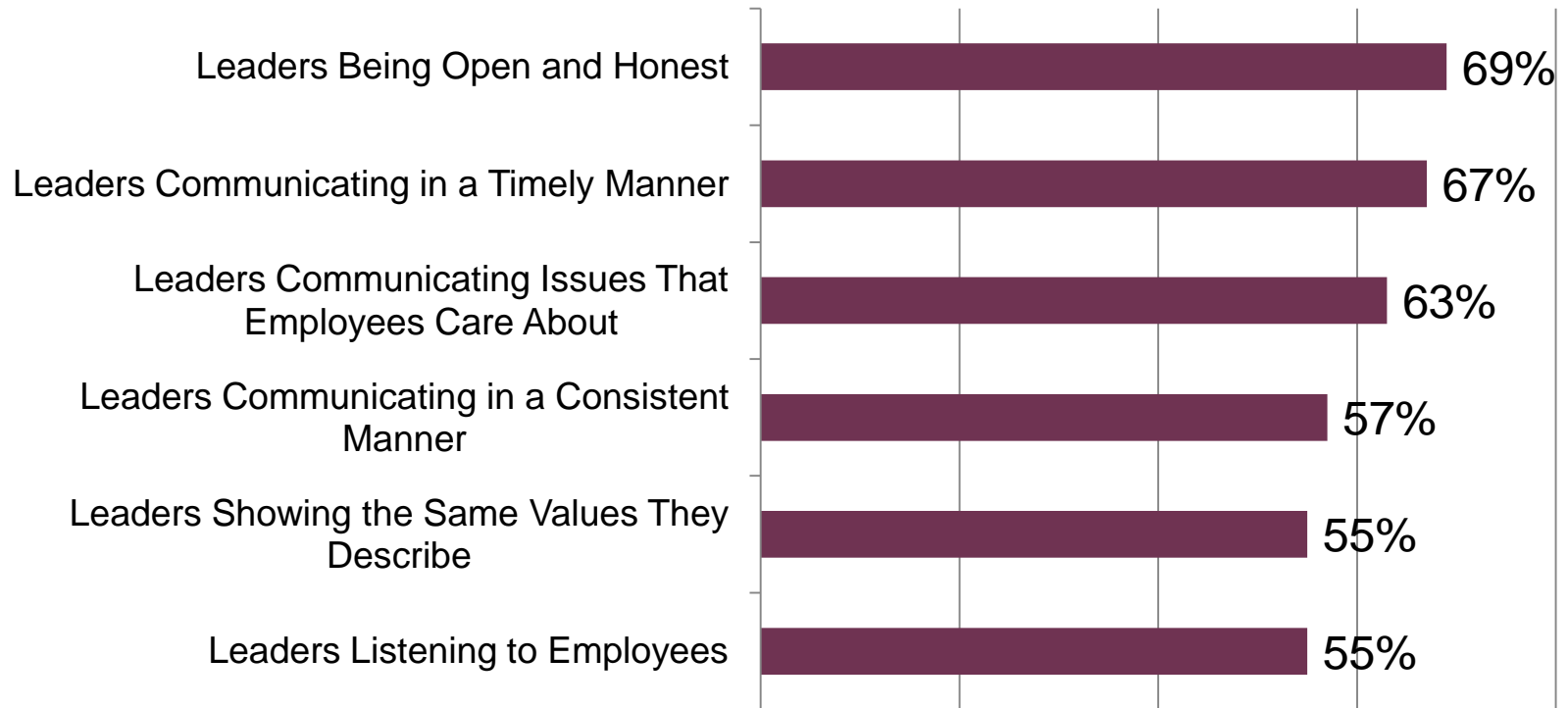
Types of Measurement



How leaders are accountable

The participants who do measure their leaders' accountability most frequently assess the following:

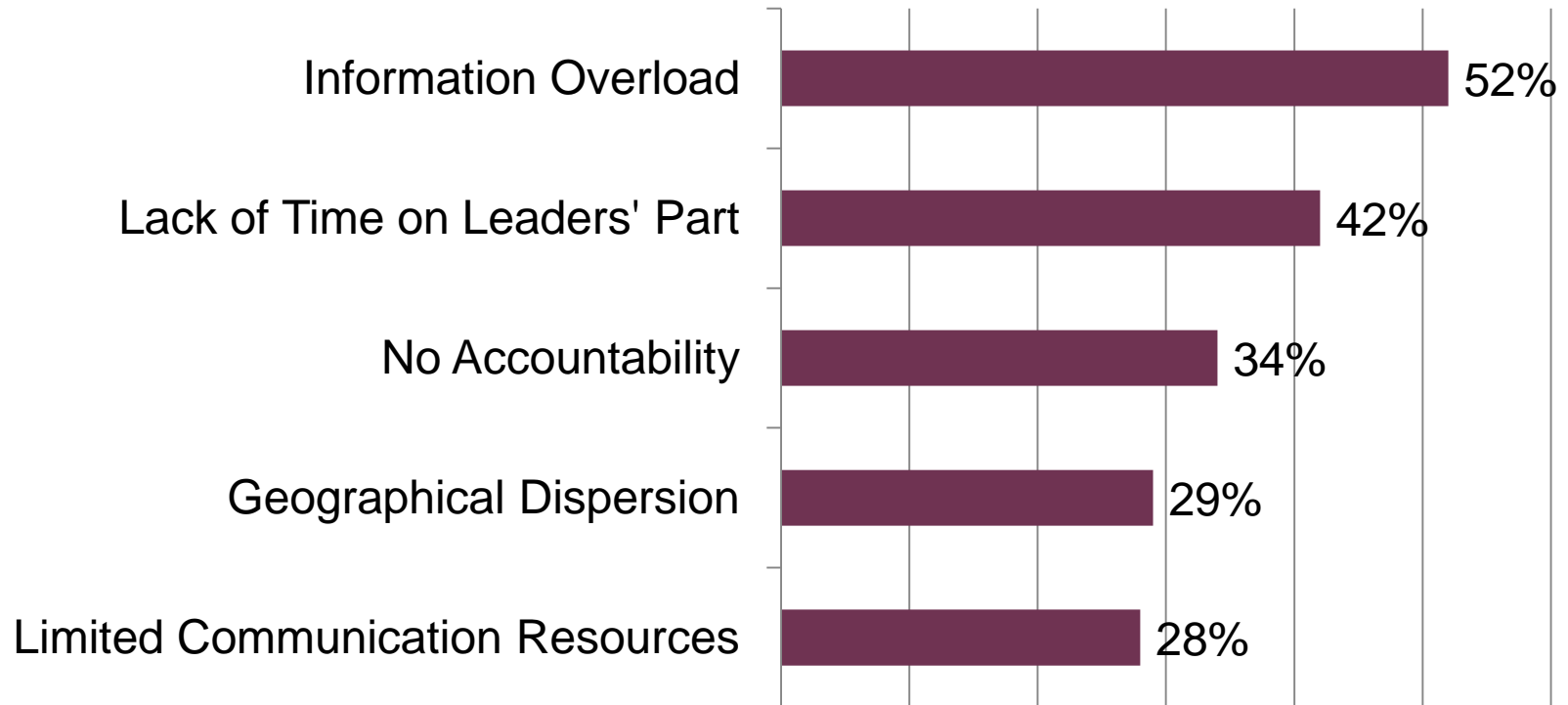
Top Aspects Measured



5 top barriers you face

Participants rated a number of potential barriers to effective leadership communications as “high,” “medium,” or “low.” These were the top 5 barriers.

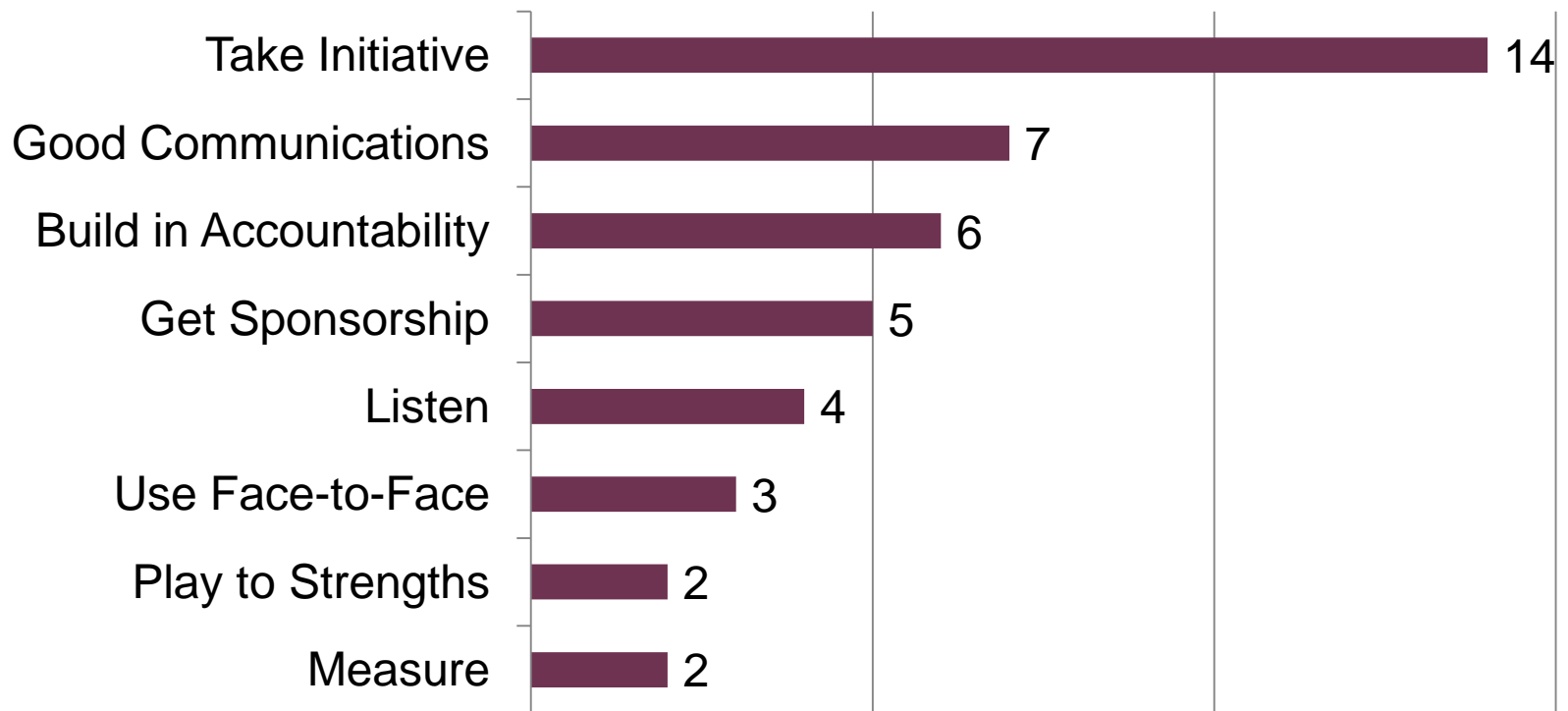
Top Barriers



Your advice

Participants gave advice to help other communication professionals be more successful with their leadership communications. The advice fell into these categories:

Your Advice



Some of your advice

- Don't give up...keep pushing and think like a business person, not just a communicator.
- Get to the front line more often.
- Learn to listen and take a course about leadership.
- Be a teacher and be patient; ground your recommendations in research; measure (even if they don't ask for it) and give feedback; push the envelope on new technology; show them how/tell stories.
- Tailor communications format to match leaders' strengths and skills as closely as possible. Identify and address existing shortfalls in skill or commitment, making it easier for leaders to communicate effectively and to get immediate feedback.

The help you need to be more successful

In another write-in question, participants shared what type of help they need to be more successful. The help falls into these categories:



Comments about the help you need

- Accessible metrics.
- Increased access to new thinking around communication measurement and ROI.
- More extensive integration of communications in leadership development.
- Consistent expectations across organization.
- Resources. I have one person and no budget in a 1.0 b company.
- Role of communicator understood better—being able to be part of the management team to find those issues to be communicated.
- A visible, weekly/monthly program to recognize people who “spoke the truth to power” or simply helped management do a better job.

Demographic differences

| Demographic Group | Difference Reported |
|--|---|
| Staff size: None or just one full-time staff member | More likely to measure the effectiveness of their leadership communications |
| Staff size: Fewer than five full-time staff members | Have an easier time getting the attention of their leaders; however, the leaders' lack of experience is more of a barrier |
| Staff size: 5 or more full-time staff members | More likely to have a regular channel for leadership communications, such as a newsletter |
| Organization size: Smallest organizations (less than 1,000 employees) | Are experimenting more with social media, using instant messaging, blogs, wikis and Twitter |
| Organization size: Largest organizations (25,000 or more employees) | Are coaching and counseling leaders quarterly rather than monthly |

So what?

So what to do with these survey results?

Nothing new, notable or navel-gazing here.

Instead, the results:

1. Validate that the *basics* work.
2. Show that being *LEAN* can work to your advantage.
3. Give you ideas for your professional *development*.

So what?

1. Commit to—don't just comply with—these *basics*:
 - Recognize that *information overload* is a real issue. Spare the air.
 - Be *accountable*, which involves measuring, adjusting and reassessing.
 - Use *face-to-face*, including webinars and teleconferences, which are the next best thing to being there.

So what?

2. Be proud to be *LEAN*:

- Keep *measuring*

It tells you what's working, helps you maximize your limited resources, and holds leaders accountable.

- Make sure you're *speaking truth to power*

By continuing to meet regularly with leaders and coach them, you can gain their trust, be more candid with them and they can become more effective communicators.

- Continue experimenting with *social media*

The tools have a business purpose. They can help people find others who are knowledgeable, trustworthy and willing to help them.

LEAN
COMMUNICATIONS™

Working smarter to add value, eliminate waste and make continuous improvements to get better results.

So what?

3. Take advantage of *professional development* opportunities that will help you with leadership communications:

- Measurement
- Business acumen
- Leadership
- Story telling
- Technology

Now what?

Actions to consider:

1. Regularly measure in your organization; do pulse checks around content, channels and frequency.
2. Partner with HR, especially OD and Leadership coaches, to support leaders on issues such as respect, recognition and soliciting feedback, which tend not to be measured in participants' communications surveys.
3. Focus on being a curator of conversations between leaders and employees rather than a master of messages.
4. At a minimum, experiment with social media tools because they can be cost effective and helpful for both communications and knowledge management.
5. Frequently monitor what you're doing, especially when new leaders join your organization; the landscape and expectations are constantly changing.

Reflections

The vast majority of individuals who took this survey asked not to be identified as participants. Even one of the companies that commissioned this study requested anonymity at its legal counsel's request.

While this behavior is understandable in this situation, if we want to build a culture of candor in our organizations, we can't hide. To serve as effective coaches, counselors and confidants, we need to be present, recognized, and courageous.

In particular, you need to:

1. Be confident in yourself and your capabilities, which will help you become a trusted advisor. *(If need be, get professional development help.)*
2. Speak with candor and conviction so you can raise difficult issues and push for improved performance.
3. Serve as a role model for living your organization's values, keeping your word, and showing character.

About Liz Guthridge



Liz Guthridge is a consultant, author and trainer specializing in strategic communications that incorporates LEAN practices and principles. She is the managing consultant of the boutique firm Connect Consulting Group.

Since 2006, Liz has been writing and editing, *The Lean Communicator™*, the popular monthly e-Newsletter on how to do more with less and get great results.



Visit: www.connectconsultinggroup.com & www.leancommunications.com

Email: liz.guthridge@connectconsultinggroup.com

Talk: 510-527-1213

Connect: www.linkedin.com/in/lizguthridge and the [LEAN Communications Network Group](#)

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