

Creating sustainable futures for internal communicators

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EXECUTIVE FOREWORD

2024 marks the 75th anniversary of the Institute of Internal Communication. It's an opportunity to both celebrate the success of internal communication and explore the IoIC's history since it was established in 1949.

Our academic research partner, An Institutional History of Internal Communication in the UK, has uncovered rich detail about the role of internal communication in organisations as far back as the 19th century. Its findings underscore the value internal communicators deliver when people are recognised as the lifeblood of enterprise. Ours is a profession to be proud of.

But alongside retrospection, it's imperative we contemplate the future of our profession. Increasingly turbulent operating conditions demand it.

The future of work is moving at breakneck speed. Cumulative events since the 2020 pandemic outbreak have converged to create complexity at the heart of our workplaces.

While we can't possibly know the solutions to all the challenges that are now present in our workplaces, we can, of course, educate ourselves to identify where we, as a profession, can best add strategic value to our organisations and colleagues.

This report has been commissioned to showcase new opportunities for internal communicators to help their key stakeholders adapt to very different operating environments. We stand at the threshold of huge transformation. Without world-class communication within our organisations, internal stakeholders will struggle.

Strategic foresight and scenario planning – the practice of trend analysis and imagining plausible futures for enhanced decision-making – is a skillset perfectly within our gift. As expert storytellers, we can bring colleagues on journeys that helpfully pinpoint risks and opportunities in uncertain futures. It's a talent we must develop, hone and master.

As ever, this report is a starting point for debate and discussion. I look forward to many more interesting conversations with you all in the year ahead.



Jennifer Sproul
Chief executive, Institute of
Internal Communication

INTRODUCTION

Since 2019, the IoIC has explored the meta-trends underpinning the future of work. It's published a range of reports identifying key shifts and undercurrents shaping how we will work in the future. Moreover, it's invested in the identification of strategic opportunity in the future of internal communication. [These resources are available on our website.](#)

While we have tracked and analysed key work trends, the 2020 pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the escalating climate emergency have added layers of complexity and volatility to already uncertain and ambiguous operating conditions. The

pace of change will never again be as "slow" as it is today.

With so many external forces influencing and reshaping operating conditions, organisations across the board must adapt. They must reimagine and redesign the way they interact with internal stakeholders in a way that's more equitable and inclusive for all.

Against this backdrop, it's harder than ever to work out how best to add value to key stakeholders. What do we prioritise and where do we begin?

To narrow our focus and home in on key areas of opportunity for internal communicators in the next five years, we've identified four pillars of opportunity.



INTRODUCTION (CONTINUED)

In each area, our professional capacity to communicate thoughtfully, clearly and inclusively will strengthen organisational resilience. This will entail blending the best of what technology can offer us with the innately human art of communication. Using our human, or “vital” skills, is, of course, a form of professional futureproofing. For these are the skills no machine will replicate.

Of course, it’s unrealistic to think we can foretell with any degree of accuracy exactly how the future will pan out. But strategic foresight – the ability to explore future possible scenarios and better prepare for change – is a

powerful tool that relies on the craft of communication. And as storytellers, we’re perfectly positioned to assist in scenario ideation, and thus augment change effectiveness.

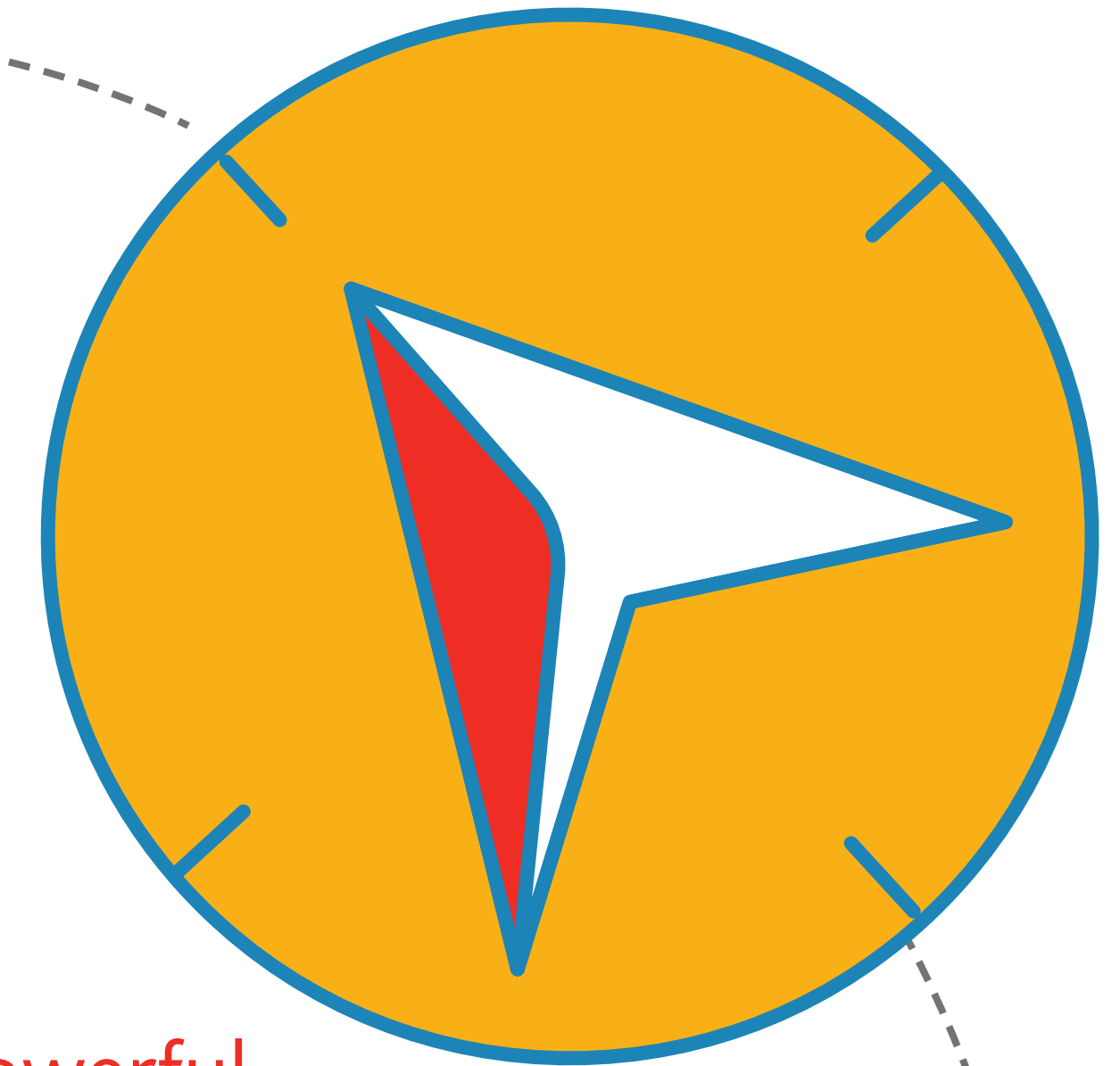
When we better understand the context of ongoing disruption at work, we are immediately better equipped to harness our unique skills and add strategic value to our executive teams and colleagues.

Let’s dive into these four pillars of organisational change, their implications for our workplaces and the opportunities they present in the future of internal communication.

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1. TECHNOLOGY

The pace and scale of global financial investment into technology is unprecedented. The AI market alone has been forecast to reach over US\$2.5 trillion in value by 2032, according to research. Technology is positioned as the panacea for our pressing societal and environmental challenges.

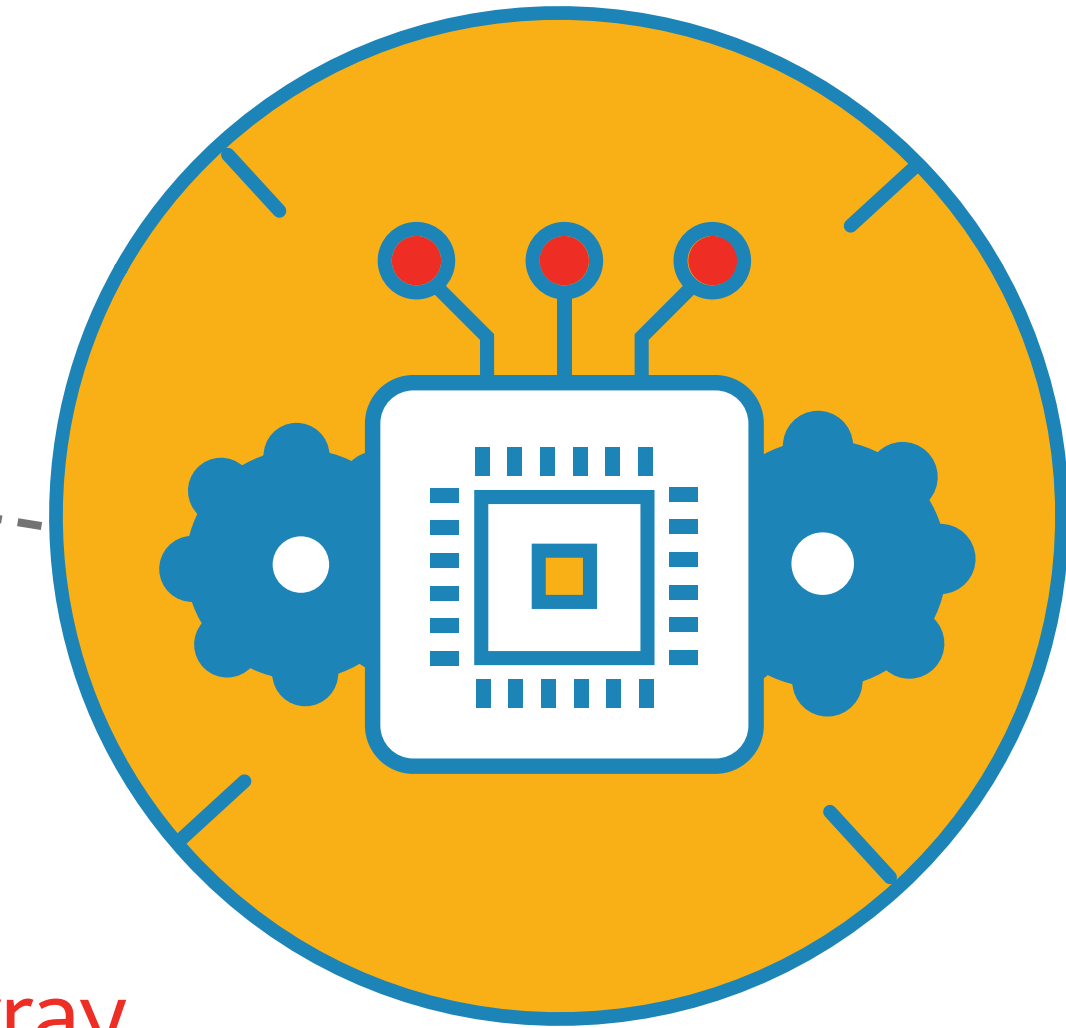
The World Economic Forum monitors global developments in AI, robotics, the Internet of Things (IoT), autonomous vehicles, 3D printing, nanotechnology, biotechnology, materials science, energy storage, quantum computing and more. It refers to these collectively as the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR).

An ever-expanding array of software, hardware, tools, platforms and devices is already reshaping how work tasks are fulfilled. Their impact can't be underestimated.

As consumers, we get to choose the extent to which we adopt new technologies. We have agency. In the workplace, however, it's a different affair. Since the pandemic outbreak in 2020, organisations across the board have acknowledged the criticality of digital transformation – business survival relied on it. Today, there's a race to introduce technologies that improve efficiency and automate routine and repetitive tasks.

This has a huge bearing on colleague experience.

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Increasingly, at work we're expected to integrate new tools, usually without sufficient training or knowledge transfer to use them optimally. It's become a commonplace expectation that we'll learn how to integrate these tools "on-the-job". The challenge is that the number of tools and platforms we're expected to cope with grows by the month, such that it becomes tricky to master any tool to any degree of success. In his book *The Inevitable*, *Wired* magazine co-founder Kevin Kelly anticipates the acceleration of digital technology adoption. He describes us all as "perpetual newbies" now¹.

¹Kelly, K. (2016). *The Inevitable: Understanding 12 Technological Forces That Will Shape Our Future*. New York: Penguin Random House

1. TECHNOLOGY [CONTINUED]

The psychological impact of having to work with sub-optimal tools and equipment is significant. [2023 research by MQ Mental Health Research](#) revealed the extent to which it fuels stress and anxiety at work. The pressure on organisations to rapidly integrate digital technology creates confusion and uncertainty when those expected to adopt it aren't provided with sufficient support.

The commercial launch of ChatGPT in late 2022 serves as an interesting example. Hype surrounding Generative AI (GenAI) has been hugely disruptive. Its potential to alter the way information and knowledge are created and shared remains to be seen, but nonetheless we've all witnessed the

“An ever-expanding array of software, hardware, tools, platforms and devices is already reshaping how work tasks are fulfilled. Their impact can't be underestimated.”

” extent to which businesses have scrambled to adapt. GenAI will inevitably reshape how standard tasks within the profession are undertaken and, indeed, the nature of internal communication itself.

Work life has become an endless carousel of change. And never-ending releases of new enterprise technologies pose both risk and opportunity.



1. TECHNOLOGY: RISKS

A primary threat posed specifically by the rapid uptake of GenAI technologies is that work colleagues slowly devalue the art and craft of communication; they misconstrue and deprioritise communication as something functional that can be rendered more efficient by algorithms.

This certainly seems to be the worldview of Silicon Valley, where computer science is prioritised over the more artistic, social and artisanal professions.

Anyone who works in internal communication will be aware, however, of the powerful link between thoughtfully chosen words and human emotion. Internal communicators appreciate the extent to which well-

crafted authentic communication can change attitudes, behaviour and culture.

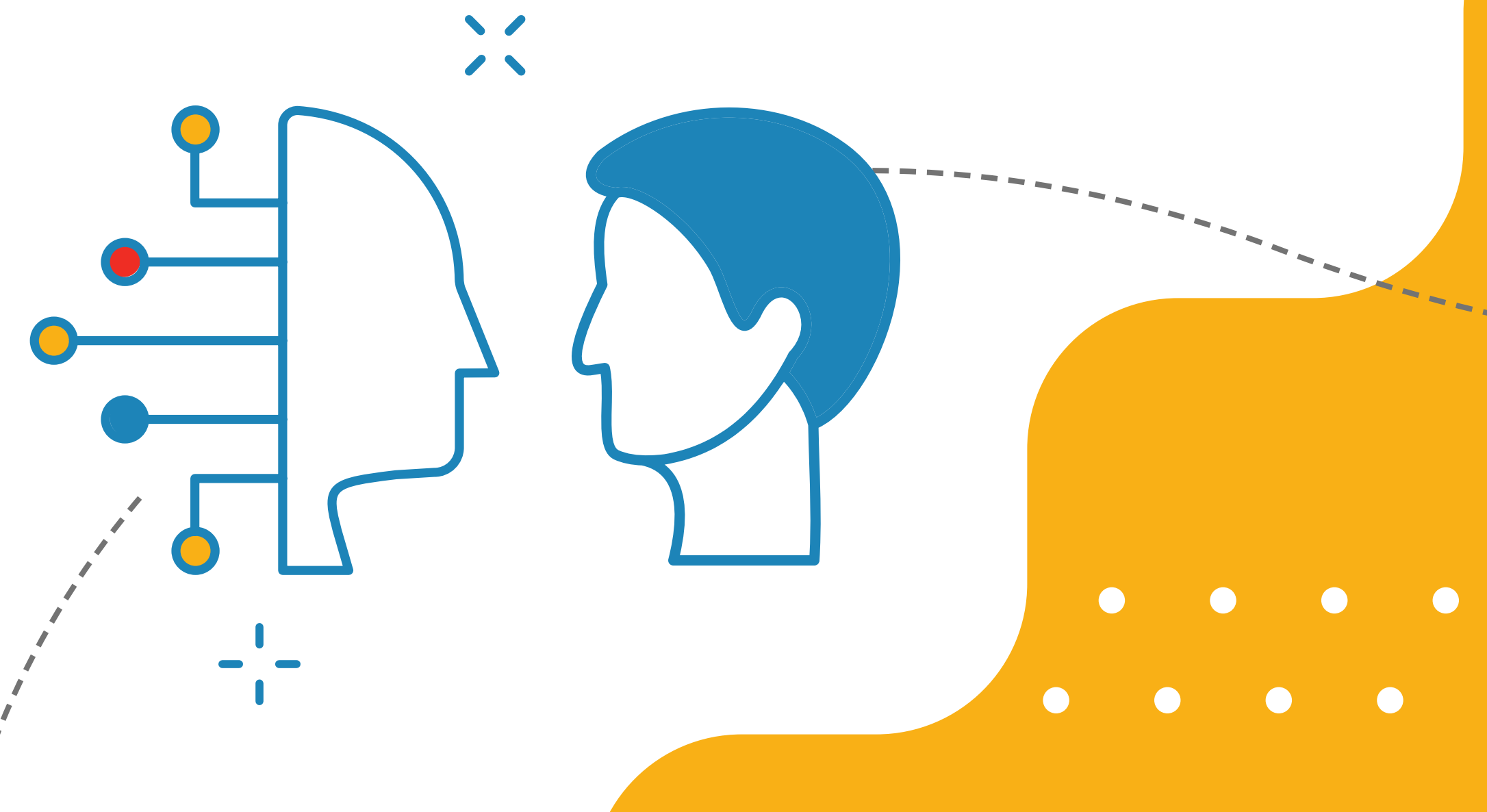
A secondary risk is that posed by the strain of colleagues left in a sub-optimal state of “perpetual newbie”. In complex markets, no organisation can afford a lag in productivity and performance. The psychological impact of continuous upskilling isn’t to be underestimated.

A final risk is that colleagues fail to consider the full suite of moral and ethical considerations before adopting these new technologies. It’s one thing to learn how to use a new tool, and something else entirely to consider confidentiality, privacy, security, bias, carbon impact and a raft of other issues that arise without applying due care and attention.

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1. TECHNOLOGY: OPPORTUNITIES

The opportunities from technology for internal communicators are manifold. Let's run through some initial ideas.

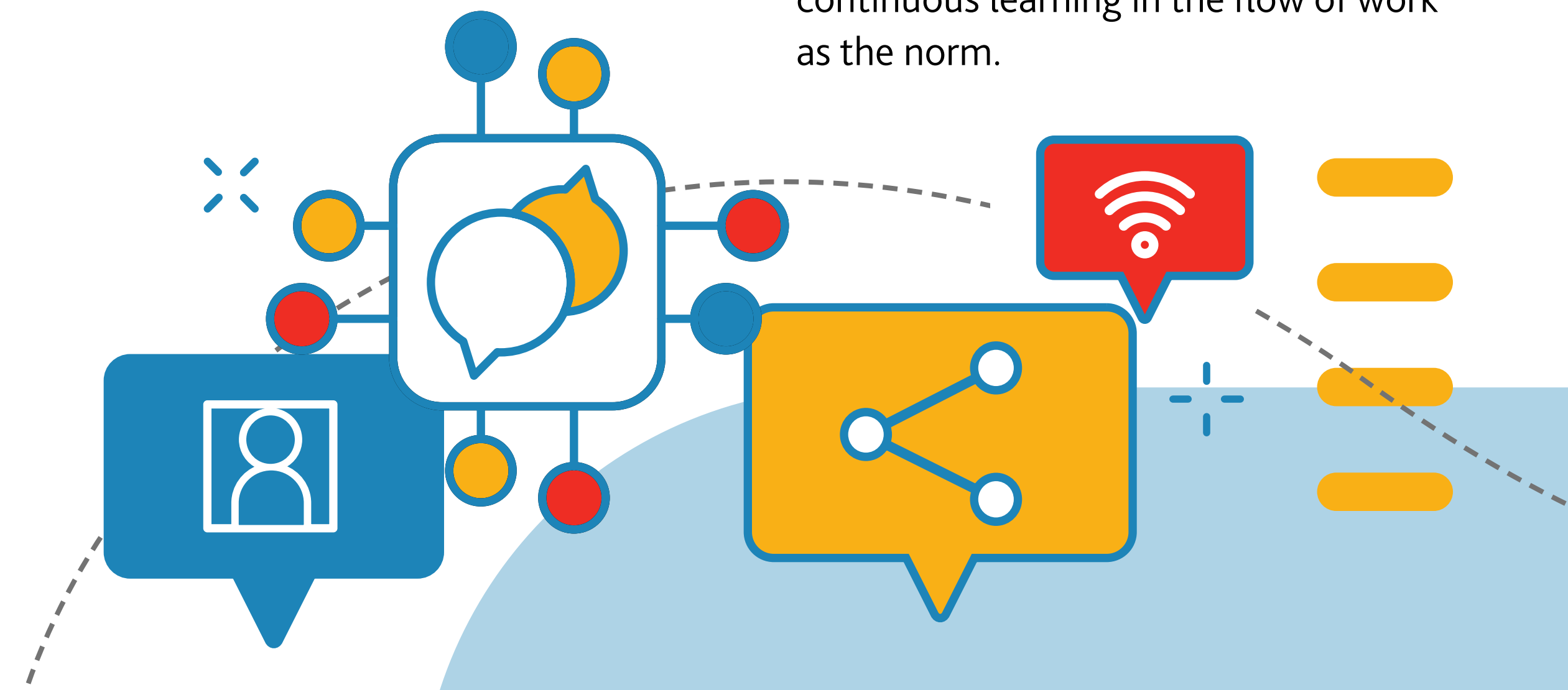
1 Respectful and inclusive communication at work has never been more important. In hybrid work environments where teams are increasingly distributed, quality communication builds social bridges that reinforces connection and community. Clear communication leads to shared understanding, which is key for all internal stakeholders to navigate complexity and maintain their focus on collective purpose, goals and outcomes.

2 It's vital business leaders understand that while it's increasingly easy to generate communication and content using digital technology, this form of communication rarely packs an emotional punch. As multiple sets of research in 2023 illustrated, colleagues want to know the work they do matters and to feel a sense of belonging. They want empathic, supportive relationships and communication with their superiors.

By drawing on the latest psychology research, internal communicators can demonstrate that communication is mission-critical in the future of work and add strategic value. It's crucial to advocate for and prioritise authentic interpersonal communication.

3 As technology adoption leads to ambiguity and uncertainty for those expected to embrace it, all organisations need a clear glossary of terms to clarify the meaning of new concepts. Shared understanding eliminates confusion. Who better than internal communicators to deliver this?

4 Informal conversations will reveal the extent to which colleagues feel confident and proficient as they adopt new technologies. Internal communication has a primary role here, creating environments where colleagues feel safe to voice concerns. Ongoing communication also helps seed continuous learning in the flow of work as the norm.



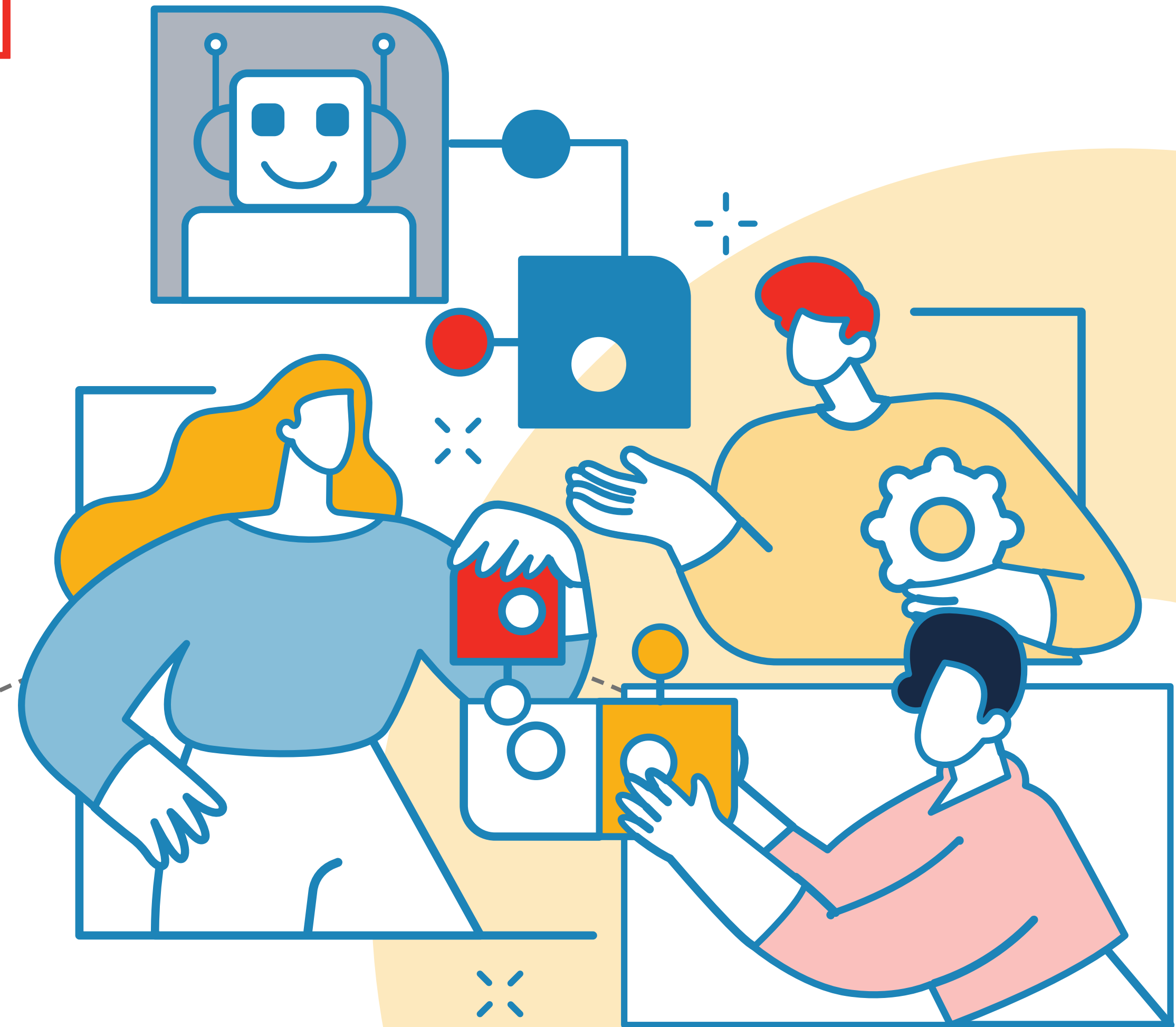
1. TECHNOLOGY: OPPORTUNITIES [CONTINUED]

5 Internal communicators are expertly positioned to explore the advantages and limitations of GenAI and role-model good practice. They should lead business-critical conversations about the moral and ethical considerations of AI adoption.

Entire industries will be transformed by the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The ongoing integration of technology into most human jobs will require upskilling on a massive scale. In some quarters, roles will be completely automated, requiring increased societal focus on reskilling, to maintain existing levels of employment.

How we communicate these seismic shifts at work will make or break culture. Inadequate communication will destroy colleague experience and ultimately place organisations at risk of ruin.

We predict a golden age of internal communication ahead. It's time to step up and leverage the emerging opportunities.



2. PEOPLE

As work becomes increasingly underpinned by digital tools, some media narratives describe a future world of mass unemployment. Technology will become so sophisticated, we're told, it will replace the human hand. While no detail on how we will otherwise spend our days is shared, this storyline nevertheless persists.

It's a viewpoint driven by the extreme opinions of a select few tech billionaires. It feeds on the slowing economic growth woes that many countries in the global north are experiencing since the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak. Technology is hailed as the panacea to these problems. Clickbait headlines successfully permeate because they

evoke societal instability, insecurity and fear.

We fundamentally disagree with this perspective. It's dystopian and unhelpful.

Throughout history, people have demonstrated industriousness and creativity. There's no reason to believe AI will steal all jobs anytime soon. More poignantly, there will always be a need for expert communicators – wordsmiths who use language to build connection and community.

Regardless of technology, it is, and will always be, people who sit at the heart of the potential, productivity, performance, purpose and, ultimately, success of organisations. People and their relationships with one another fuel

connection, goodwill, collaboration and the motivation to make things happen and achieve results. As [the groundbreaking research of Edward Deci and Richard Ryan](#) identified, several basic psychological needs underpin intrinsic motivation. Autonomy, competence and relatedness are key elements of high performing teams.



There's no reason to believe AI will steal all jobs anytime soon. It will always be people who sit at the heart of the potential, productivity, performance, purpose and, ultimately, success of organisations.



2. PEOPLE [CONTINUED]

When people feel connected to a community of others, free to act in an independent and self-governing way that allows them to master their skills, they become more motivated and aligned around shared goals. These dynamics sit at the heart of optimal colleague experience.

Staff recruitment and retention are primary challenges for employers since the pandemic. Creating and honing both a compelling employer brand and employee value proposition are key HR priorities.

In the most tumultuous labour markets for decades, the average length of tenure is reducing year on year.

People across the board are questioning their willingness to comply with work conditions that have become ever more transactional. They'll move if they don't like how work feels. Authentic and personalised colleague experiences invite and empower each individual to deliver their best.



POTENTIAL

when people work in environments that encourage and support them to fulfil their potential, the greater potential of the organisation is unleashed.

PRODUCTIVITY

productivity links closely to the level of engagement an individual feels for their employer and work. Engagement directly correlates with the quality of communication an individual has with their manager and the extent to which they feel their opinion matters.

PERFORMANCE

when team dynamics are honed, individuals collaborate to achieve far greater results.

PURPOSE

when organisations position the potential of their people at the heart of all business activity, purpose – the reason we're here, right now, collaborating – becomes baked into every decision and action taken.

2. PEOPLE: RISKS

Labour markets are increasingly complex. Organisations need to access the right people with the right skills at the right time, maintaining enough flexibility to quickly respond to changing market contexts. Organisational agility is no mean feat.

In parallel, the industrial west is grappling with an ageing population. As fewer people enter the job market than are leaving it, the Fourth Industrial Revolution has also fuelled a reskilling emergency. The World Economic Forum predicts that while 69 million new jobs will be created globally by 2027, [83 million jobs will be eliminated](#).

These volatilities mean employers must rethink how they build trust and retain both the talent and associated

cultural knowledge necessary to sustain business over the longer term.

Organisational longevity is threatened if approaches to employment aren't radically rebooted.

In the first instance, failure to update the human experience of work will leave organisations unable to access the skills and talent needed for business continuity and resilience. Modern jobseekers are discerning and will scrutinise employers before applying for jobs. Reputation is everything and any perceived "say/do" gaps can do untold damage to an employer's brand. Transparency, accessibility and authenticity are key for optimal employer brand success.

A second threat to organisations is the impact low engagement has over time.

83 million

Number of jobs predicted to be eliminated globally by 2027 – 14 million more than will be created. [Source: The World Economic Forum](#)

[Gallup's 2023 State of the Global Workplace report](#) estimates that low engagement costs the global economy some US\$8.8 trillion (ca. £6.9 trillion). While global engagement levels stand at 23% in 2023, in Europe they are at an abysmal low of 13%. The negative impact of that drag can't be understated. At worst, it signals the slow death of an organisation.

Third, when colleagues feel unable to voice their opinions, they're equally unlikely to share details of their learning and development needs. This places further stress on an organisation as an under-skilled workforce can't respond effectively to changing market contexts. As economic conditions deteriorate,

organisations need all contributors to perform optimally, for enhanced market responsiveness. Anything that inhibits an organisation's collective intelligence hurts progress and, ultimately, business sustainability.

Failure to accommodate the increasingly diversified needs of modern workers can easily be misconstrued as a failure to care. The age of one-size-fits-all approaches to employment is long gone. Workplace stress and anxiety levels are at record highs, with [2023 research showing 46% of surveyed workers to be experiencing mental health difficulties](#).

Employers cannot afford to drag their heels on prioritising an overhaul of how work is experienced.

2. PEOPLE: OPPORTUNITIES

Communication sits at the heart of optimal colleague experience. Let's explore some initial ways for internal communicators to add value.

1 A well-crafted and authentic employer brand will clearly articulate an organisation's purpose, values, vision and mission. All internal stakeholders want to know their contribution matters and how it feeds the wider vision of the organisation. The role of internal communication here can't be underestimated.

2 Organisations also benefit from an authentic strategic narrative that's visible throughout the colleague experience lifecycle. A decade back, UK

Government-commissioned research by David Macleod and Nita Clarke identified ["strategic narrative" as one of four enablers underpinning engagement at work](#). In complex markets, it's vital all internal stakeholders understand their organisation's strategy and their unique role in the fulfilment of that business plan.

As we'll discuss shortly, it's key that strategy is effectively communicated in a way that reaches all internal stakeholders at all times during their employment lifecycle. Recruiter colleagues will need help to make sure any hiring documentation aligns with wider colleague experience.

3 Another imperative is to create personalised information flows that meet the needs of each internal stakeholder using their medium of choice. [2023's IC Index highlighted the importance of communication channel preferences](#) in improving colleague experience.

4 Finally, hybrid and distributed working are here to stay. As colleagues meet less frequently than in pre-Covid 19 times, organising regular group gatherings that focus on trust and connection is essential for maintaining high-performing work environments. In the digital age, the art of relationship can't be underestimated.



3. SUSTAINABILITY



Evidence that the changing climate is directly attributable to human activity is irrefutable. 2023 has been the hottest year on record. The earth's atmosphere is at grave risk of exceeding the 1.5°C warming threshold scientists have agreed is a maximum safe limit. Beyond this, we will all be exposed to increasingly extreme weather events that threaten life and health.

The comforts and conveniences we take for granted in the Western world are causing colossal damage to our planet. All organisations must urgently reduce carbon emissions. This ultimately demands an entire rethink of the way products, services and solutions are delivered. We must redefine value beyond revenue generation and think about

markets and economics in a way that is less damaging for future generations.

Fortunately, data suggests most citizens are on board with climate action. [Edelman's latest Trust and Climate Special Report](#) reveals that a colossal 93% believe climate change poses a serious and imminent threat to the planet. For anyone tasked with sustainability responsibilities at work,

this is great news as it suggests the way is paved for bold action to reduce carbon emissions.

For organisations to become truly sustainable and transition to net zero, however, they must think far more broadly. While, of course, carbon footprint measurement is an essential first step, there's a far wider array of sustainability dynamics to consider.



It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land. Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere have occurred.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Sixth Assessment Report, August 2021



IoIC COMMITMENT

In spring 2023, the IoIC announced its commitment to reducing its own carbon emissions and to educate members of the essential role of internal communication in organisational sustainability.

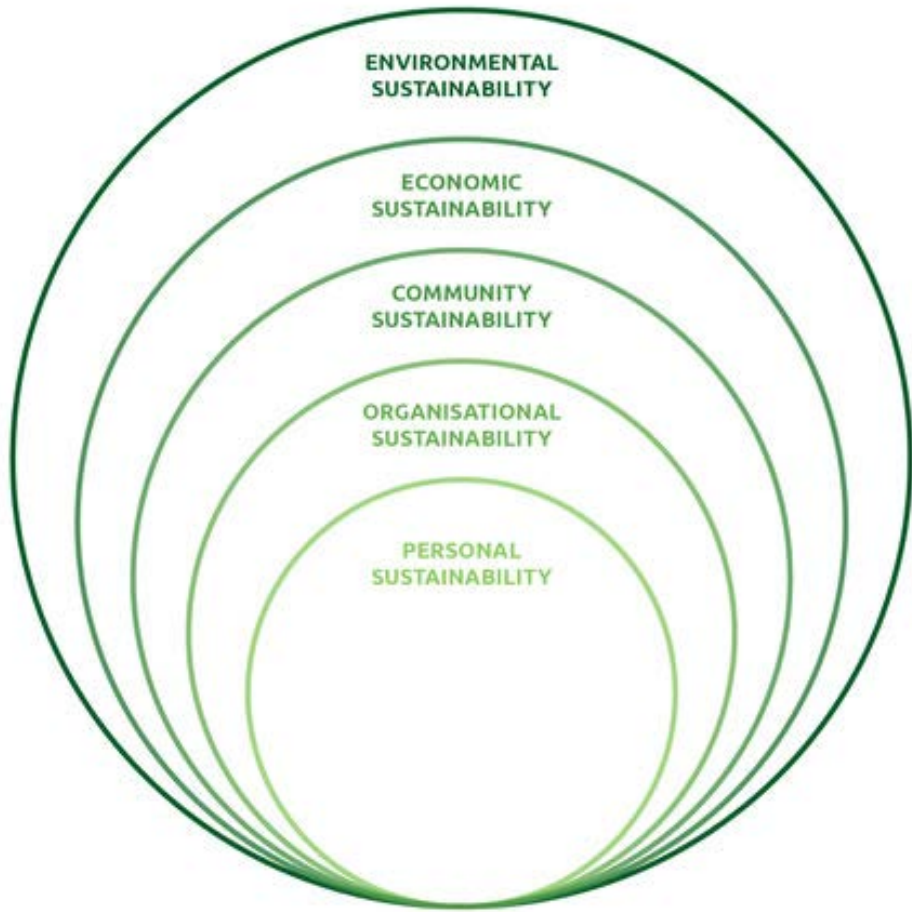
Approaching sustainability as a journey rather than a destination, IoIC wanted to take a holistic perspective. To get started, however, it was necessary to start with a commonly understood definition of sustainability. The Cambridge Dictionary contains two: *"The quality of being able to continue over a period of time."* and *"The quality of causing little or no damage to the environment and therefore able to continue for a long time."*

3.SUSTAINABILITY [CONTINUED]

Most organisations have started measuring and reporting on carbon emissions. But true sustainability encompasses far more than tracking a carbon footprint.

For any organisation to successfully navigate uncertainty and continuous change in the wider world, its fullest range of stakeholders must remain resilient. Stakeholders include employees and other staff (regardless of contract type), customers, shareholders, suppliers, communities and governing bodies.

While reduced environmental impact is essential, the fact is organisational sustainability comprises a more complex set of interconnected issues. And it demands a mindset shift.



FIVE TYPES OF SUSTAINABILITY

Environmental sustainability	How we recalibrate our human way of life to successfully live within the means available to us on planet earth.
Economic sustainability	How our organisations successfully adapt to regeneratively co-exist within hyper-connected, globalised marketplaces.
Personal sustainability	The routines, rituals and practices humans need to undertake at an individual level to ensure optimal health, vitality, energy, potential and performance.
Organisational sustainability	The rituals, practices and behaviours (the culture) required by individuals, teams, departments and business units within an organisation to achieve their best results. The collective commitment made to ensure organisations are energised, adaptive, regenerative, future-fit and healthful for all stakeholders.
Community sustainability	The holistic value organisations bring to their local communities and end-to-end stakeholders wherever they are located (including access to good work, charitable donations, sponsorships, work experience placements and more). The commitment made to ensure organisations are energised, adaptive, regenerative, future-fit and healthful for all stakeholders.

3. SUSTAINABILITY: RISKS

According to [the Science Based Target Initiative](#), organisations are responsible for 35% of all global carbon emissions under Scope 1 and 2 criteria. This increases to 85% once Scope 3 emissions are included.

Failure to successfully integrate sustainable business practices poses several risks.

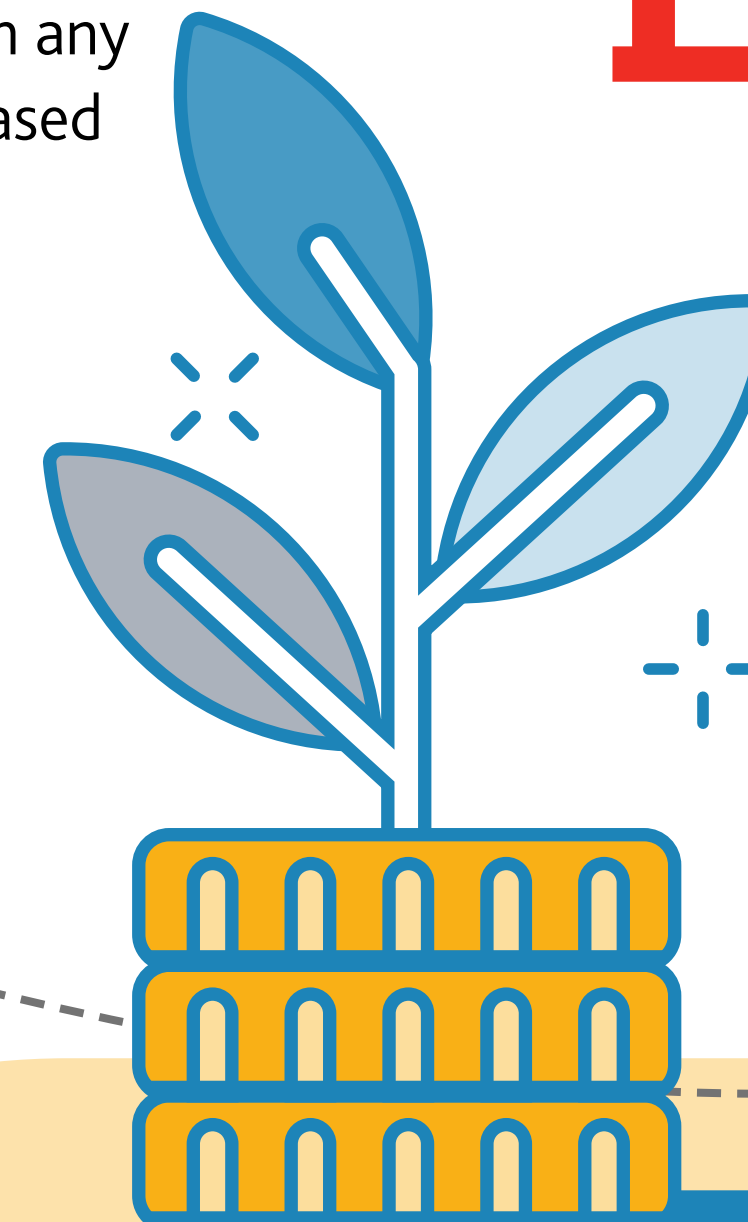
The first and most significant risk is that of compliance. In 2021, [the UK Government updated its procurement policy](#), with significant repercussions for the UK economy at large.

Any organisation now tendering for the supply of goods or services over a contract value of £5 million to any central government department, executive agency or non-department public body must provide evidence of its carbon reduction plan. This plan must set out the environmental management measures in place and a confirmed commitment to achieving net zero by 2050.

In parallel, its [Streamlined Energy and Carbon Reporting Scheme](#) requires all companies with more than 250 staff to report on Scope 3 emissions. Since Scope 3 emissions include emissions emanating from any goods and services purchased by an organisation, this means scant few organisations are exempt from carbon footprint measurement if they wish to continue trading.

£5 million

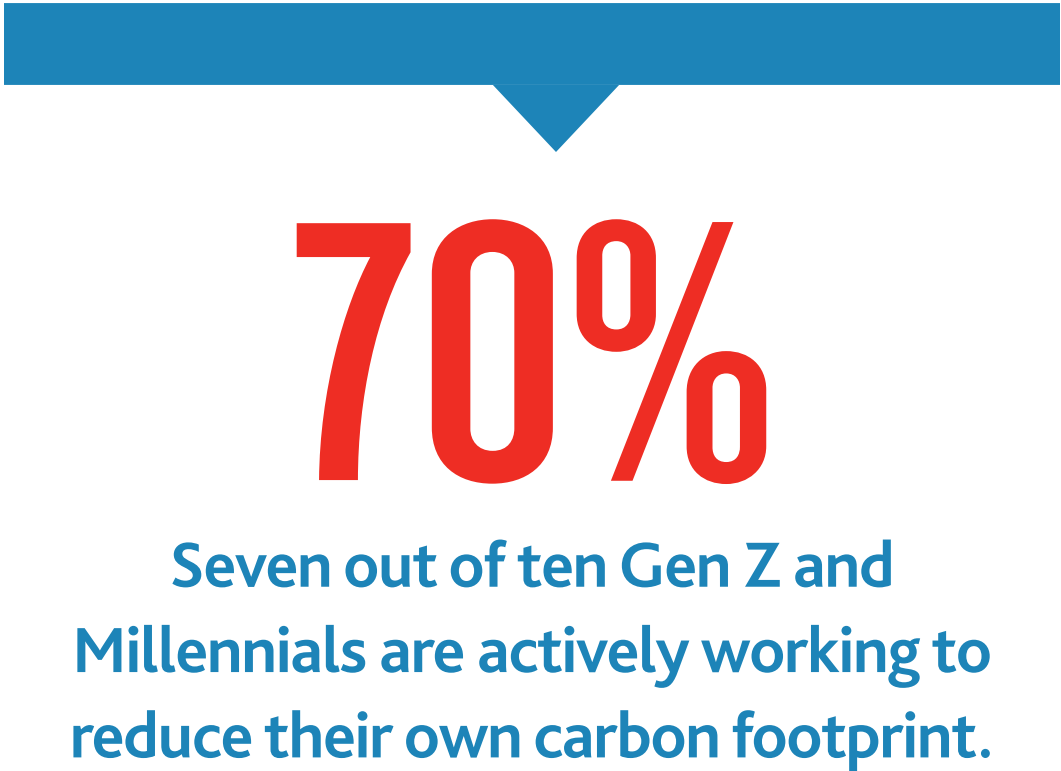
Any contract tenders for goods or services valued at over £5 million must include a carbon reduction plan.



3. SUSTAINABILITY: RISKS [CONTINUED]

A secondary risk to organisations is that of rising stakeholder activism. Research reveals that both as employees and consumers, people increasingly expect organisations to deliver products and services in a way that's more sustainable, equitable and inclusive. They will vote with their wallets and their feet.

[Deloitte's 2023 survey of Gen Z and Millennials](#) highlighted that seven in 10 respondents are now actively working to reduce their own carbon footprint. They're far more discerning of both the goods and services they purchase and the actions their employers are taking to reduce emissions. In more extreme cases, [we're seeing the rise of "climate quitters"](#) – activists who will walk away



from employers when they feel their environmental values don't align.

The days of ESG as a nice-to-have are over. Woe betide any organisation attempting to greenwash or greenhush. In the hyper-transparent social media age, activists are calling out companies' attempts to up-play carbon action or

indeed their refusal to communicate the environmental impact of their products and services.

Moving forward, employers will need to work much harder to authenticate their environmental credentials, both to maintain revenue and retain workers.

This will inevitably call for new ways of defining, creating and delivering value as organisations. Failure to adapt to modern market expectations poses an existential risk to business. At the same time, the future survival of the entire planet depends upon our doing the right thing.



3. SUSTAINABILITY: OPPORTUNITIES

There are multiple ways for internal communication to lead in the race towards sustainable business practices. Here are some ideas to get started.

1 All sustainability starts with personal sustainability – the ability to sustain one's efforts over time. In the years ahead, as we transition to different operating contexts, we will need to maintain energy and wellbeing like never before. Workplace wellbeing programmes are no longer tick-box employee benefits. Optimal colleague wellbeing is now a vital component of business resilience.

2 Let's acknowledge that in the growing list of stakeholders to whom organisations are accountable, internal stakeholders – any colleague involved in the delivery of goals and objectives regardless of their employment status – are the most important. Without their buy-in, progress towards sustainability goals will be slow.

3 The scale of sustainability transformation required demands all hands on deck. Every stakeholder has an active part to play. Rather than leave sustainability challenges to a select number of executives, let's harness the collective intelligence of the entire talent ecosystem. If 93% of the population are sufficiently concerned

about the climate crisis, it stands to reason there's a huge amount of untapped potential within any organisation. And a host of ideas for carbon action to be explored. Focus groups, deliberative dialogue sessions and other safe spaces where people can share their thoughts will help uncover easy-to-implement ideas for waste reduction and more sustainable ways of doing business.

4 As we learn to become carbon literate at work, each organisation needs its own context-relevant glossary of terms. We can't afford for engagement to lag because of confusion, or a lack of alignment and shared understanding.

5 Track, document and celebrate all progress. Getting to net zero and creating futureproof business models will be a complex and, no doubt, sometimes exhausting journey. We need to leverage the psychology of continuous change to access practices that keep us all invigorated and on track.

6 Finally, internal communicators must apply all they know about change management communication to this programme of work. Continuous change is the new normal and all colleagues will need help adapting.

4. EMPLOYMENT

Each economic downturn reshapes the labour market. The severity of the 2008 global financial crash was extreme. For many, it signalled the end of job security and the psychological contract between employer and employee that had previously underscored a more equitable approach to work.

Once the global economy began to recover, a raft of new employment types entered mainstream consciousness. Zero-hours, unpaid internships, gig-working, solopreneurs, online task marketplaces and more – today, self-employment is no longer unusual.

In parallel, organisations of all stripes increasingly rely on flexible employment contracts to both fulfil

work objectives and maintain operating agility. [Deloitte uses “the alternative workforce” to refer to the array of contractors, freelancers, outsourced teams, gig workers, and “the crowd”.](#)

Business intelligence platform Statista estimates [50.9% of the US workforce will operate as freelancers by 2027](#). This is significant as the UK tends to eventually replicate labour market trends.

50.9%

Estimated proportion of the US workforce that will operate as freelancers by 2027.

[Source: Statista](#)

While some contributors to the gig economy may work this way out of necessity, for others a freelance lifestyle offers flexibility, freedom, variety and choice. For younger cohorts, working as an independent can be perceived as entrepreneurial and aspirational.

As the population ages and the labour market slowly contracts, skills shortages will likely remain. External market and environmental pressures will continue



to throw up uncertainty, and organisational agility is increasingly essential to maintain market responsiveness and, ultimately, commercial viability.

This amplifies the need for “on-demand” and “just-in-time” ways of working. We can expect organisations to increase their dependency on the alternative workforce.

4. EMPLOYMENT: RISKS

Most organisations lack a strategy to meaningfully engage with non-permanent workers. This is evident in the way that we continue to talk about employee engagement and employee experience. As an imperative, organisations must look beyond the confines of their payroll and integrate a wider talent ecosystem for the completion of work objectives.

The greatest risk here is almost existential in nature. When organisations fail to engage with the full spectrum labour market, they restrict access to a rising percentage of talent. Employers who fail to build communication strategies that reach all potential contributors, regardless of

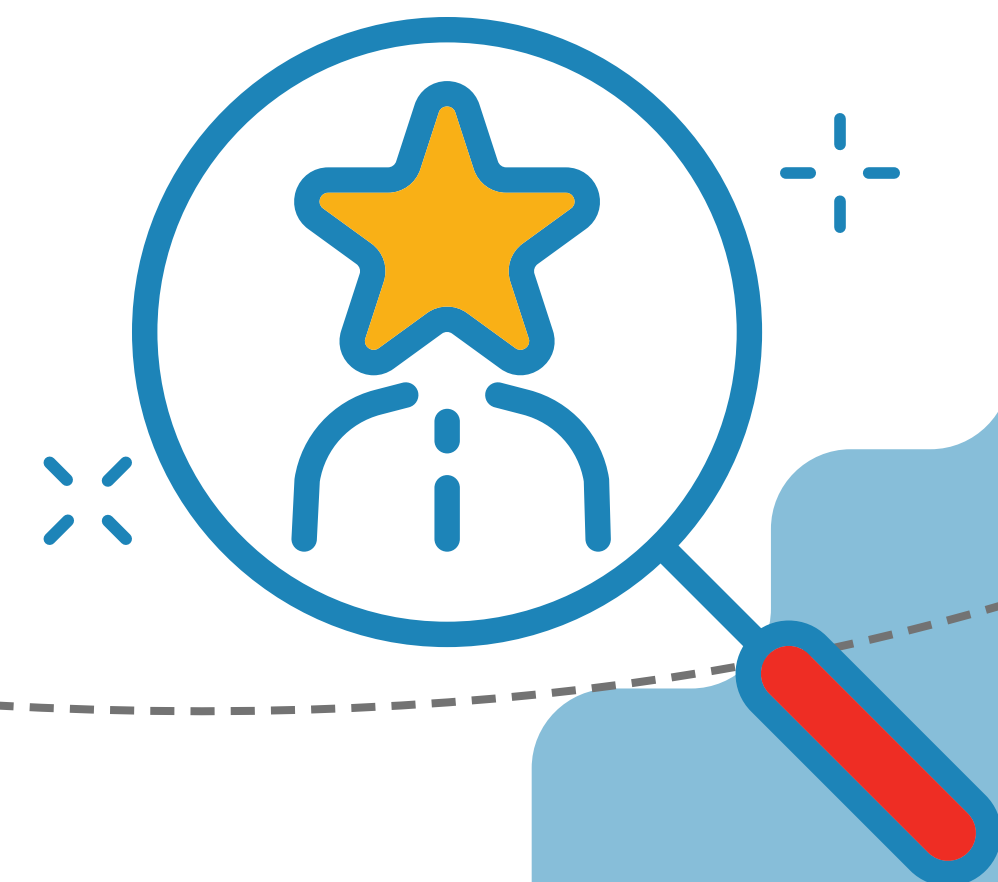
employment type, miss an opportunity to build brand reputation, loyalty, trust, goodwill and more. They miss out on a fluid talent pool where freelance contributors can roll on and off projects in a way that optimally works for all stakeholders.

The alternative to the creation of a robust talent ecosystem is that organisations ultimately risk running out of talent. In some sectors and localities, [staff churn rates are so high, this is already a looming reality](#). Treating contingent workers poorly not only damages brand reputation, but more poignantly threatens business continuity.

When employment is perceived as a transaction, it's hard to build goodwill. But every single contributor to an organisation amasses cultural knowledge over time. They learn about the way things are done, they find out who the linchpins and connectors are within an organisation, and they discover where to find information and knowledge that helps deliver results faster. This knowledge takes time to build up. It's this kind of knowledge that helps people hit the ground faster once they return to an organisation.

When employers lack a cohesive

strategy to maintain communication channels and relationships with contributors once they roll off a project, the loss of that cultural knowledge shouldn't be under-estimated. It causes a significant lag. Continuously rotating through brand-new hires results in prolonged ramp-up durations to reach full productivity. This inhibits organisational agility.



4. EMPLOYMENT: RISKS [CONTINUED]

Finally, it's a sad reality that most market-relevant upskilling occurs now when people change employer and environment. Rather than encouraging internal workforce mobility, most employers today have become accustomed to sourcing new skills from the open market. Given the accelerated pace at which their roles change and the increased number of projects they're exposed to, freelancers will inevitably accumulate market-relevant skills and experience much faster than permanent staff. They'll have experience of more contexts and scenarios than permanent employees with similar skillsets.

Volatile trading conditions require strategic foresight. Executives must imagine future plausible scenarios and

troubleshoot how they might play out, for risk mitigation. Contributors who have been exposed to a wider range of real-world experiences will add far greater value to this process. Failure to engage with the full spectrum of employment types restricts access to a rich seam of potential that would otherwise add huge value to commercial futureproofing activities.

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Rather than encouraging internal workforce mobility, most employers today have become accustomed to sourcing new skills from the open market. Freelancers will inevitably accumulate market-relevant skills and experience much faster than permanent staff.

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4. EMPLOYMENT: OPPORTUNITIES

The opportunity for internal communication here is vast. The delicate interplay between relationship-building and communication is intrinsic and offers an almost blank canvas to internal communicators to deliver strategic value to their organisations. Let's explore.

1 Most organisations have not yet fully appreciated the need to build talent ecosystems for success in the future of work. For these ecosystems to flourish, they will need dedicated community-builders who focus on strengthening interpersonal ties and bonds. As a core component of effective relationship-building, communication has a frontline role to play.

2 Internal communication has traditionally focused on engaging solely with payrolled employees. The new opportunity is to work with recruiter and HR colleagues to build communication strategies for future contributors and alumni groups. This will involve upgrading hiring documentation to include details about both the employee value proposition and the corresponding value proposition for impermanent internal stakeholders.

3 Effective collaboration is contingent on trust and the willingness of colleagues to support and help one another. Trust builds when people are allowed to develop relationships with one another. Regular gatherings – both online and in-person – are great ways to foster goodwill and strengthen trust bonds across a wider spectrum of internal stakeholders.

4 Futureproofed organisations will increasingly rely on the alternative workforce for agility and innovation. They must create ways to strengthen relationships that extend beyond the duration of employment. They will need help to design offboarding strategies that leverage loyalty and goodwill and encourage those with cultural knowledge and knowhow to return when needed in the future.

CONCLUSION

It's a sad reality that too many internal communication functions are under-valued and under-resourced. Yet internal communication is the foundational glue by which organisations will remain agile and resilient to future market forces.

Too many colleagues assume communication is easy because the capacity for speech is innate for most human beings. But misunderstanding, assumption and misalignment remain rife in many organisations. We could argue the lack of focus on internal communication is one reason for low productivity. While we have more communication channels available than

ever before, we must ask ourselves whether the quality of interpersonal communication is improving.

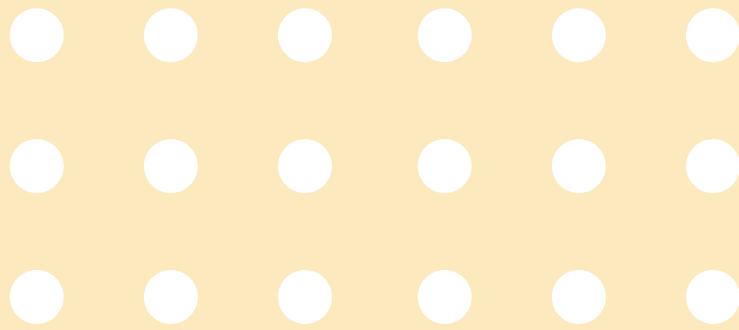
Those of us who work within the field of communication are blessed with a skillset that is an artform. We recognise the power of words to stir emotion, create feeling and build connection and community.

The complex world we now live in means the ways we organise ourselves at work are no longer optimal. In the coming years, we will need to find new organising and operating frameworks that work for the many, rather than the few. Throughout this transition, we will need to prioritise communication that builds relationships, trust, goodwill,

loyalty and commitment. We're entering a golden age for internal communication.

If the past five years have taught us anything, it's that global events unfold fast. Our operating environments can change overnight. As a membership body, the IoIC exists to promote internal communication of the highest standards. The four meta-trends highlighted in this report are fluid, shapeshifting and evolving in real time.

We will continue to track and analyse them, to provide you, as our members, with viable opportunities to deliver strategic value to your key stakeholders in the evolving future of work.



WHAT NEXT?

We're committed to creating sustainable futures for our members through the provision of educational resources.

Explore the [IoIC's Knowledge Hub](#) for articles and resources.

[Check out our training](#) with more courses added regularly.

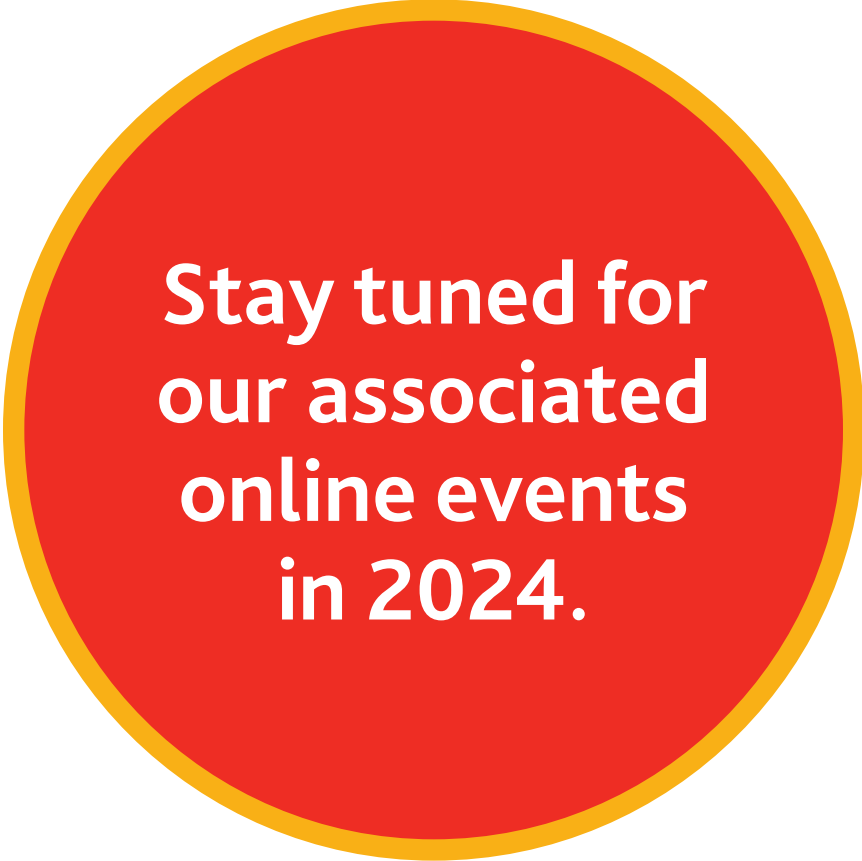
Bookmark and read our [future of internal communication research, analysis and reports](#).

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Stay tuned for
our associated
online events
in 2024.

The evolution of internal communication



Past

- One-way information distribution
- Mass broadcast
- Printed newsletters and magazines
- Briefing groups
- Team meetings
- Cascade leadership
- Town halls
- Digital communication and intranets
- Events management
- Welfare and benefits communication
- Senior leader-led communications

Present

- Content creation
- Channel management
- Change communication
- Two-way communication
- Intranets and newsletters
- EDI
- Inclusive and accessible communication
- Storytelling
- Effective leadership and management communication
- Engagement surveys
- Wellbeing initiatives
- Hybrid working environments
- Townhalls and events
- Distributed and personalised communication
- Prioritising people and culture
- Enabling good work
- Employee voice

Future

- Multi-directional communication
- Personalised internal stakeholder experiences
- AI enhanced communication
- Accessible, transparent and empathic leadership
- ESG communication
- Standards and ethics advocacy
- Alignment of people and purpose
- Complexity and continuous change
- Facilitation, enablement and strategic influence
- Data-driven decision-making
- Trust, truth and inclusion as first principles
- Communication across a full-spectrum talent ecosystem
- Communication for knowledge exchange and transfer
- Strengthened collaboration through cultures of belonging and connection
- Community building for stakeholder voice
- Information and knowledge integrity
- Active listening to optimise feedback loops
- The art of conversation
- #ReturnOnEmotion

Themes are listed under the era in which they emerged and/or were most prevalent, but we recognise that many 'Past' references are still prominent in the present, and many of the 'Present' themes will continue to be important in the future.



We Matter At Work