

State of Internal Communications 2021

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INTRODUCTION

Every year, Simpplr Research conducts a study on the current state of internal communications. The **State of Internal Communications 2020** (pre-COVID-19) report is Simpplr Research's most downloaded report and provides useful benchmarking data for internal communications professionals. Insights from this report should still be relevant for most programs. In May 2020, we decided to conduct an intermediary study, the **State of Internal Communications During COVID-19**, given the abrupt transition from office work.

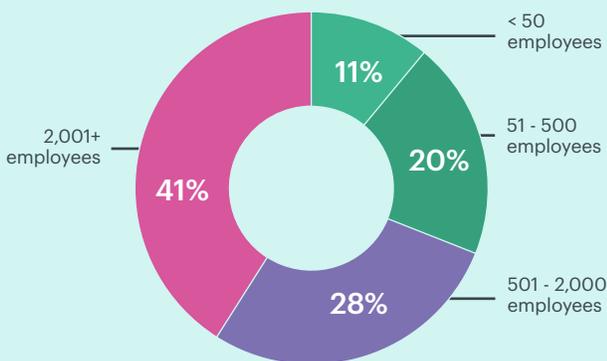
Given the current environment, our latest study, the State of Internal Communications 2021, is a follow-up to the May panel with survey questions focusing mainly on COVID-related workplace themes.

The State of Internal Communications 2021 summarizes:

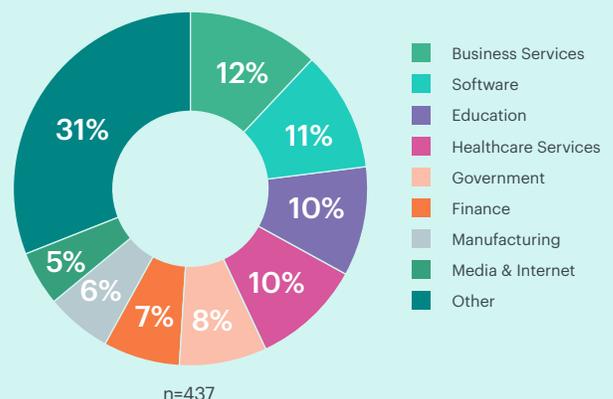
- How internal communications (IC) professionals have handled the recent changes (especially in transitioning toward work from home life)
- How organizations are responding to social justice and racial equality awareness (a theme that spiked during the summer of 2020)
- How IC professionals and programs fair relative to last year
- Whether leadership has risen to the occasion and how they're perceived
- How technology has held up and what changes are required

This year's survey was randomly distributed to over 400 IC practitioners, predominantly in the United States, across varying industries and company sizes.

What is the size of your organization?



Which best describes your industry?



Here are the primary takeaways from this survey:

- Some organizations have already shifted to a hybrid work from home model or attempted to return to normal; most employees with the ability to work from home are still doing so.
- COVID-19 has ironically helped the IC profession, with many respondents noting increased visibility and strategic relevance within their roles.
- The majority of respondents find the current state of their internal communications is better than it was this time last year.
- The communication frequency and employee engagement in communications are starting to decline relative to when the crisis first began. Both employee and communication fatigue has set in, and previously recurring struggles with readership and alignment are returning.
- Leadership engagement and employee perception of leaders are decreasing, while still better than a year ago.
- While most companies are doing more to communicate a point of view on racial injustice themes, demonstrable changes are lagging.
- Relative to IC professionals, general employee sentiment is worse. Employees stay well-connected with their immediate teams and stay informed but struggle to maintain connections across departmental lines.
- COVID-19 is driving more investment in internal communication technology, a vast improvement from a year ago. Improving intranet technology and internal communications apps are the top priorities for organizations moving forward.



Finally, the survey asked all internal communications respondents two optional, open-ended questions:

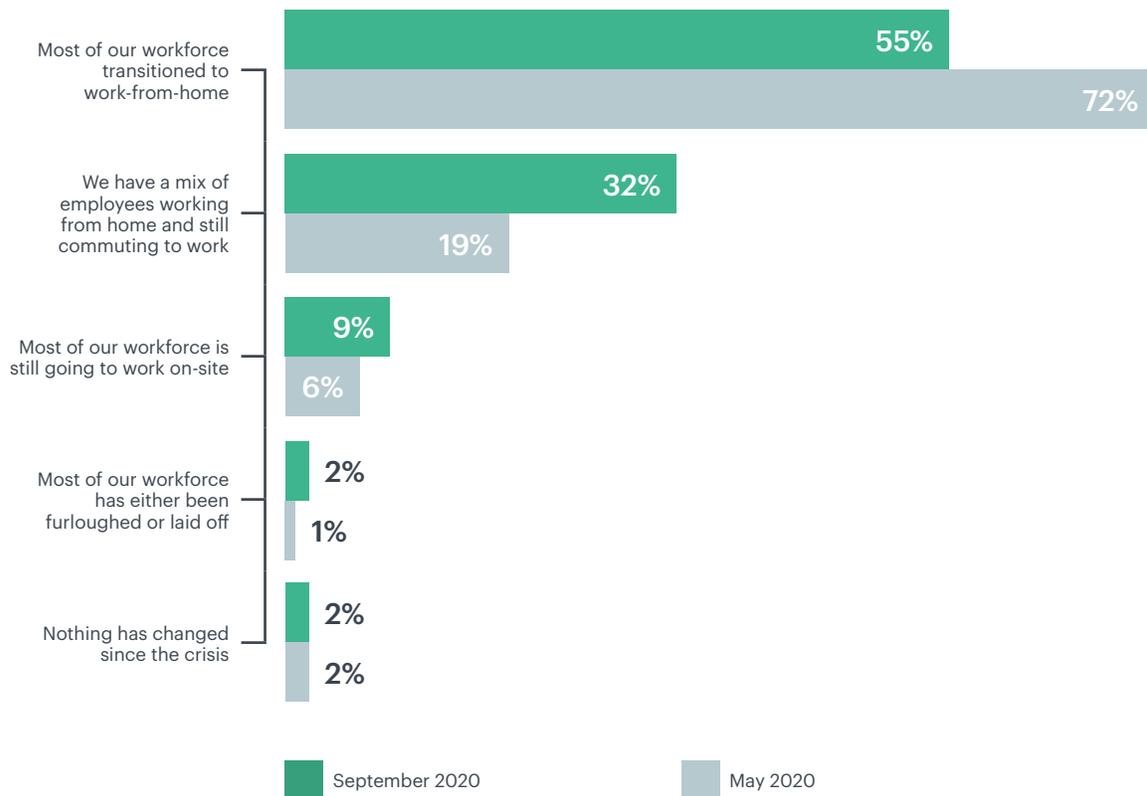
- What's your biggest takeaway or learning from your experiences during 2020 that you'd like to share with your peers?
- How do you think the role of IC will be permanently changed from the experiences of 2020?

Each question had over 200 responses. We are very grateful for the thoughtfulness and time that the respondents provided. We wanted to include the responses in their entirety in this report's appendices. It's nearly impossible to summarize or consolidate significant themes from these comments. They show the range of emotions and critical learnings that many of us have experienced over the past several months. These are arguably the most valuable aspects of this research and show how transformational COVID-19 has been for organizations. We highly recommend reading through this section!

CURRENT WORKING ENVIRONMENTS

In the May 2020 panel, we asked participants how to best describe their working situation. We asked the same question for this study.

Which of the following best describes your workplace since COVID-19 started?



Although our confidence levels are high with large sample sizes in both panels, it's essential to recognize these surveys came from different samples. Nonetheless, you can see a fraction of organizations has begun returning to work, mainly with a hybrid working model. The majority of deskbound workers continue to work from home.

GENERAL PROGRAM SENTIMENT AND COMMUNICATION FREQUENCY

We asked, “how would you rate the current state of your internal communications?” to get a sense of how practitioners feel about the overall state of their internal communications’ programs¹:

How would you rate the current state of your internal communications?

Overall state of my organization's internal communications	Poor	Below average	Average	Above average	Excellent	Sep 2020 Weighted average*	2019 Weighted average*	Factoring in COVID-19 and all of its complexities, how would you rate the following relative to this time last year?		
	3%	9%	32%	42%	14%	3.56	3.18	Worse	The same	Better
								9%	34%	57%

* On a scale of 1-5 (1 being poor and 5 being excellent)

A significant takeaway from the [May report](#) was: “COVID-19 has provided an ironic silver lining to many IC professionals. They’ve been taken to task, have been used more strategically, and have done a great job setting the tone with empathy and authenticity.”

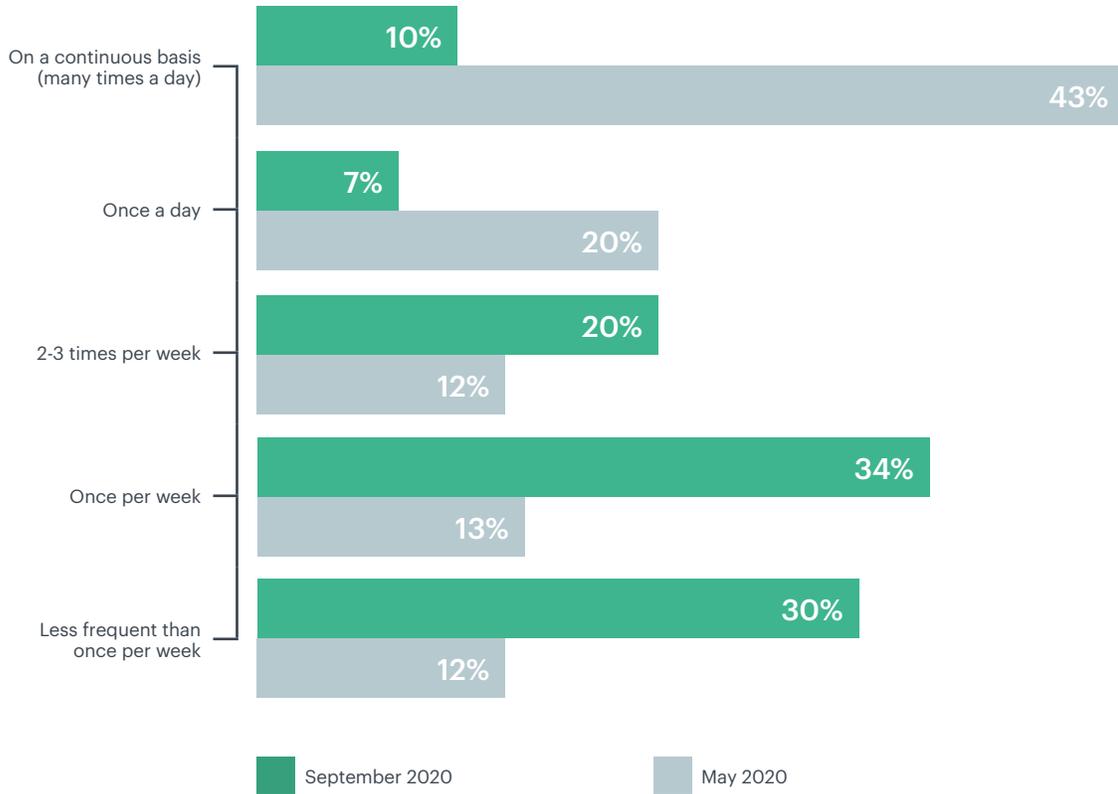
Compared to pre-COVID-19 data from last year’s study, IC program confidence is at an all-time high with an astounding 56% of respondents rating their program as “above average” or “excellent” compared to 37% last year.

Similarly, we asked people to rate the current state relative to last year, and 57% note they’re in a better position! This confidence is excellent news and a testament to how IC’s perception has benefited in 2020.

¹ Note, we typically ask this type of question to serve as a primary outcome variable which allows us to run cross-tabulations among leading and lagging companies. Given the time sensitivity of this report, we plan to run this analysis at a later date.

Immediately after March 2020, we saw that many IC professionals were overwhelmed. This sentiment was carried into our May survey, and we wanted to see if the dust has begun to settle — so we asked the same question again.

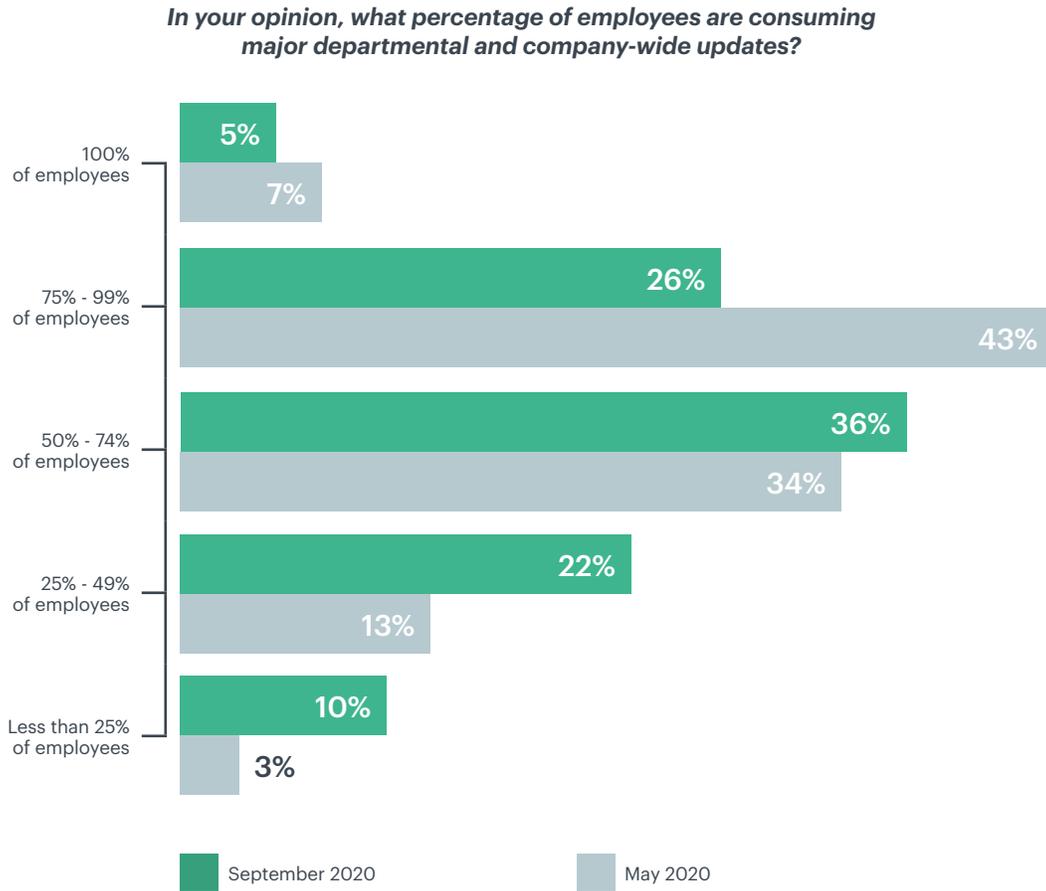
Since the advent of COVID-19, how frequently have you been getting company-wide updates to your employees?



The throughput has calmed down as organizations have found their new operating rhythms. As a result, this has likely made it easier for employees. This data suggests that communication fatigue may have set in, with 30% of respondents stating that they’re communicating less frequently than once a week. This low frequency poses concern considering how many employees are more isolated than they have ever been. The absence of information cannot help their sense of connectedness and overall engagement.

² For the questions: “Factoring in COVID-19 and all of its complexities, how would you rate the following relative to this time last year?”, respondents were asked on a 5-point scale (Far Worse, Moderately Worse, The Same, Moderately Better, Far Better). We’ve combined terms to simplify readability.

Similarly, we wanted to follow up with IC practitioners to gauge their sense of what percentage of communications are getting read.



This chart suggests that readership is regressing back to pre-COVID-19 levels. “Employees not being engaged or incentivized to participate in communications” has consistently been one of IC’s most significant challenges (as detailed in [Simplr Research’s State of Internal Communications 2020](#) report). From a statistical perspective, leading organizations that don’t have this challenge (with the same magnitude) accomplishes four things very well:

- Strong leadership engagement and consistent
- Well-facilitated town halls
- Frequent usage of videos to relay information
- Strong emphasis on employee communities within communications technologies

Interestingly, Simplr product data showed over a 20% increase in adoption rates across the board beginning in Mid-March. This increase has remained steady, so we’re surprised to see perceived consumption is decreasing.

EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATIONS EFFECTIVENESS

We asked various questions about how organizations have handled their responses to COVID-19. We wanted to understand (1) where things stand today and (2) whether the current state of IC is better or worse than it was a year ago (before COVID-19).

Describe your organization's internal communications:

Factoring in COVID-19 and all of its complexities, how would you rate the following relative to this time last year?

	Poor	Below average	Average	Above average	Excellent	Sep 2020 Weighted average*	May 2020 Weighted average*	Worse	The same	Better
Authenticity	1%	5%	27%	34%	33%	3.93	4.22	4%	46%	50%
Empathy	1%	6%	26%	39%	28%	3.87	4.18	4%	42%	54%
Timeliness of communication	1%	10%	34%	39%	17%	3.61	4.01	6%	38%	55%
Consistency of updates	2%	12%	31%	35%	20%	3.59	4.00	8%	34%	58%
Balance between over or under communicating	2%	13%	42%	37%	6%	3.33	3.76	10%	51%	39%
Getting employees to consume information	3%	12%	51%	29%	5%	3.20	3.63	10%	51%	39%

* On a scale of 1-5 (1 being poor and 5 being excellent)

Most survey respondents provided good grades for the various attributes, especially in timeliness, consistency, authenticity, and empathy. However, each criterion's weighted average was lower in the September sample (compared to May). This comparison suggests that some of the immediate post-COVID-19 momenta have waned. Nonetheless, relatively few practitioners feel they're in a worse position than they were a year ago. Given all of the changes, then and now, this should be widely appreciated as a success. The areas where people continue to be less confident are:

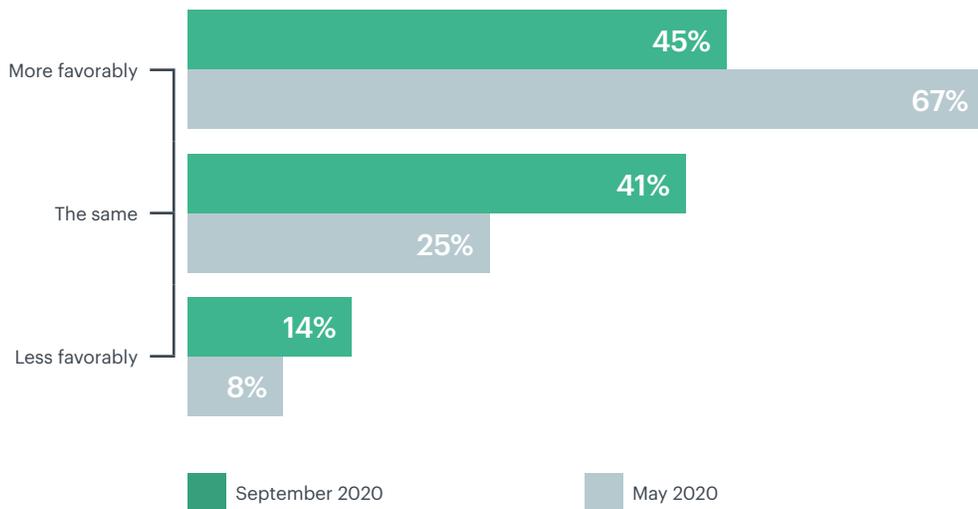
- Balancing communications
- Getting employees aligned with all of the information

The comments in the appendices strongly support these data.

LEADERSHIP ENGAGEMENT

A highlight of the May research was that leaders were having a moment — both in leaning in to improve their employee communication and how their employees saw them. We wanted to explore whether this is still the case.

Compared to a year prior, how are your leaders perceived during COVID-19?



Unfortunately, based on this data, the momentum appears to be slowing down. Most organizations feel they're in a better position than a year ago, but not with the same conviction. This may be an area to assess internally and explore with leadership.

Remember, leadership involvement is critical for IC success.

Organizations with leading IC programs are supported by leaders who constantly beat the drum and remind employees of priorities and goals. In contrast, organizations with lagging IC programs typically lack the executive involvement needed to unite employees across the board.



STATE OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS 2021

How would you rate the current state of the following:

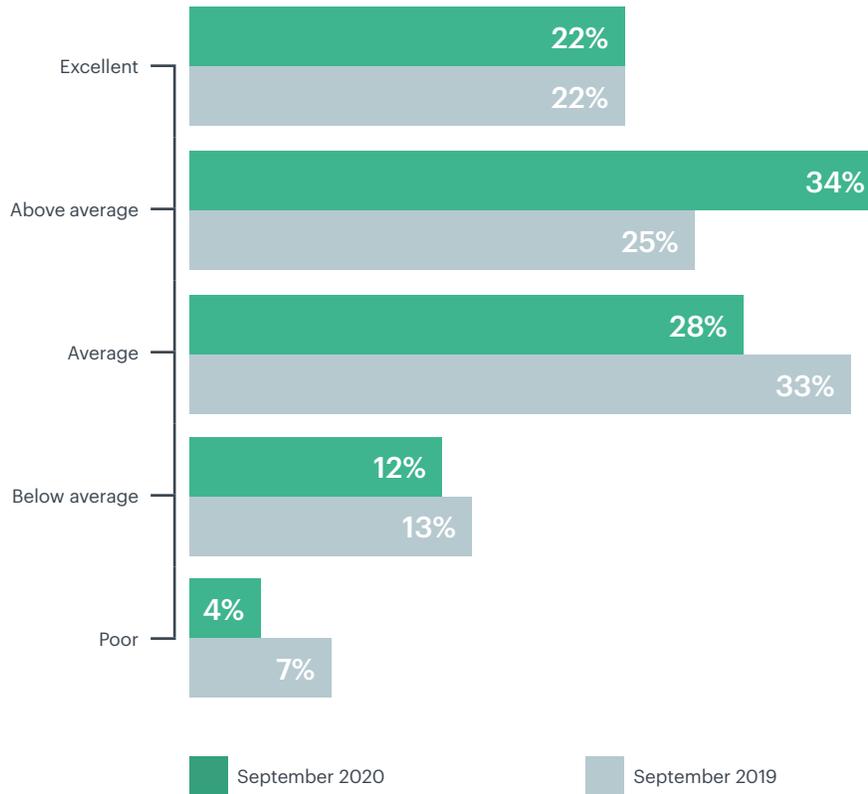
Factoring in COVID-19 and all of its complexities, how would you rate the following relative to this time last year?

	Poor	Below average	Average	Above average	Excellent	Sep 2020 Weighted average*	Worse	The same	Better
Internal communications' access to leadership	3%	11%	24%	36%	25%	3.69	10%	51%	39%
How leadership perceives internal communications' role	4%	12%	28%	34%	22%	3.60	5%	48%	47%
Frequency of leadership communication and accessibility	3%	13%	31%	38%	15%	3.51	8%	47%	45%
Employees' perception of their leaders	3%	9%	35%	43%	10%	3.48	14%	41%	45%

* On a scale of 1-5 (1 being poor and 5 being excellent)

Another theme from the May research highlights how many in IC felt COVID-19 has provided them a more strategic role and appreciation within their companies. We're seeing improved access to leadership, leadership communication frequency, and internal perception for IC professionals.

How leadership perceives internal communications' role:



Compared to responses in last year's [State of Internal Communications](#) report, leadership has understandably taken more interest in employee communications.

It's a positive sign that leaders are finally understanding internal communication's critical role, but it's key that IC be viewed as part of a company's management model. Like any other corporate function, IC should be given the proper resources, be strategically measured, and have leadership buy-in and engagement.

IC PROFESSIONALS' BALANCE AND OPTIMISM

Despite all of the advances, it's no secret that this has been a difficult time for employees, especially IC practitioners. So we wanted to benchmark how survey respondents were individually feeling. Unfortunately, these benchmarks weren't taken in the May panel when more people appeared to be more stressed and working longer hours. Despite that, it's probably safe to say that we didn't need a survey to tell us those things were accurate!

While most respondents are upbeat about their company, health, and balance in general, many are quick to admit that it's been a grueling year. It's encouraging to see all of this disruption hasn't negatively impacted people's outlook for their companies.

How would you rate the current state of the following:

Factoring in COVID-19 and all of its complexities, how would you rate the following relative to this time last year?

	Poor	Below average	Average	Above average	Excellent	Sep 2020 Weighted average*	Worse	The same	Better
My optimism about my company	2%	13%	26%	38%	21%	3.61	22%	45%	33%
My sanity	3%	13%	42%	27%	15%	3.40	38%	42%	20%
My work-life balance	8%	19%	36%	24%	14%	3.18	38%	30%	32%

* On a scale of 1-5 (1 being poor and 5 being excellent)

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Racial equity and social justice became elevated topics for many workplaces during the summer of 2020. While it may be a sensitive topic for some, Simpplr believes it is critical for organizations to address, listen, and improve.

My company's stated commitment to diversity and inclusion

	Poor	Below average	Average	Above average	Excellent	Sep 2020 Weighted average*	Factoring in COVID-19 and all of its complexities, how would you rate the following relative to this time last year?		
							Worse	The same	Better
My company's stated commitment to diversity and inclusion	4%	9%	31%	31%	25%	3.64	3%	50%	47%
My company's actual demonstrated commitment to diversity and inclusion	4%	17%	34%	30%	14%	3.32	6%	53%	42%

* On a scale of 1-5 (1 being poor and 5 being excellent)

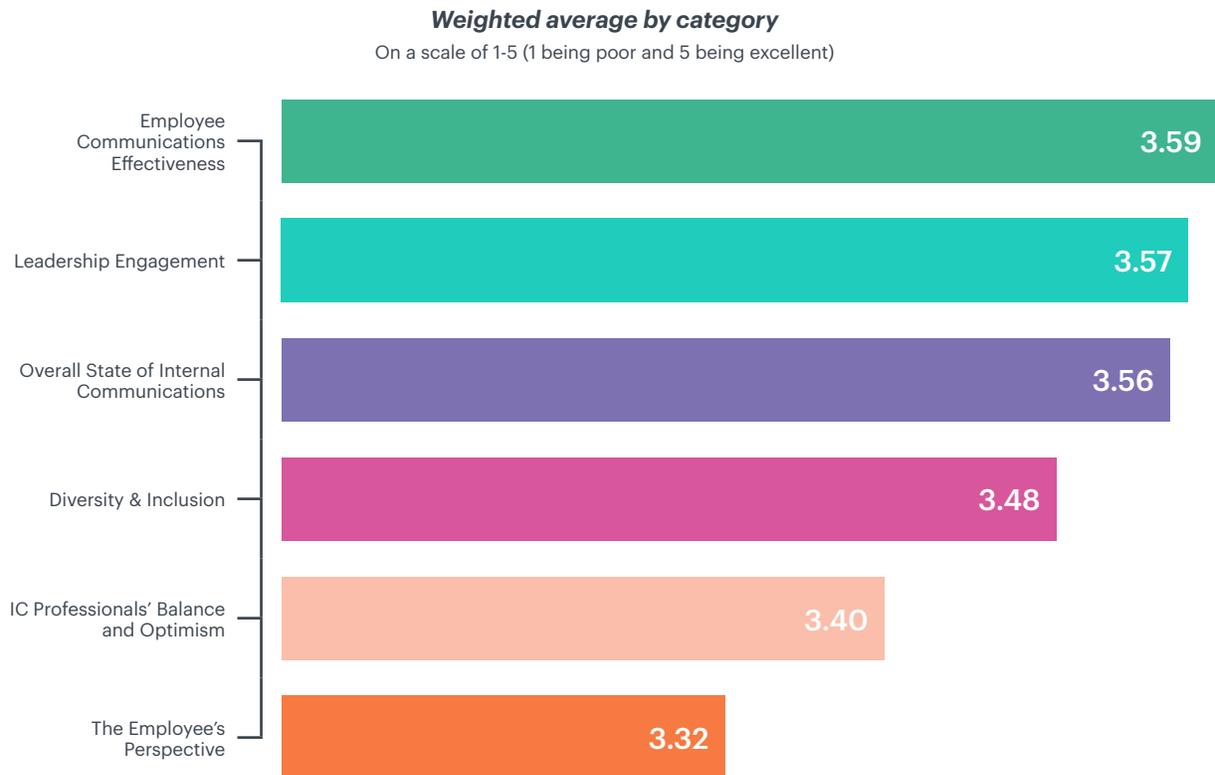
Recent events have shined a light on social issues, and organizations are almost uniformly addressing the topic more than they did a year ago. According to the data, there is a notable difference between many organizations' words and actions. Both HR and IC departments should pay attention to internal sentiment to ensure their employees see their diversity and inclusion initiatives as authentically as COVID-19 communications have been received.

According to Hired's 4th Annual 'Global Brand Health Report,' 64% of respondents agree that diversity and inclusion would significantly impact their decision on where to work.



THE EMPLOYEES' PERSPECTIVE

Relative to the other datasets, this section scored lowest. For example, the mean weighted average for each of the survey's sections, based on a 5-point scale, is:



A deviation of a few tenths of a point is significant. This difference is a telling reminder that while many aspects of employee communications are upbeat and improving, not all employee experience aspects are.

Describe the employee perspective and employee ability to:

Factoring in COVID-19 and all of its complexities, how would you rate the following relative to this time last year?

	Poor	Below average	Average	Above average	Excellent	Sep 2020 Weighted average*	Worse	The same	Better
Stay connected to employees within their direct teams	0%	4%	29%	43%	25%	3.90	22%	50%	29%
Find information to do their jobs	1%	8%	44%	38%	9%	3.45	14%	65%	22%
Stay informed with formal top-down company communication	3%	13%	33%	41%	11%	3.45	12%	51%	37%
Stay connected to employees in other departments	2%	17%	40%	33%	7%	3.26	33%	42%	25%
Stay connected to employees in other locations	4%	16%	42%	30%	8%	3.23	25%	46%	29%
Deeply collaborate with coworkers (i.e. brainstorm, ideation, strategy, etc.)	6%	20%	38%	28%	9%	3.14	39%	42%	19%
Onboard new employees	5%	19%	46%	20%	10%	3.12	33%	50%	17%
Stay informed of news in other departments	5%	22%	46%	23%	3%	2.97	27%	53%	20%

* On a scale of 1-5 (1 being poor and 5 being excellent)

Understandably, this was the one section in the study where much of the sentiment is worse instead of better. Generally, the disruptions (e.g., working from home en masse) haven't negatively impacted top-down communications, intra-team collaboration, and productivity. But most organizations are struggling to connect employees across departmental lines and establish deep collaboration.

Many of us who are newly working from home can relate to this. We've established a solid operating rhythm with our direct teams using technologies like Zoom and Microsoft Teams. But interactions with those outside our department are farther between and fewer.

On top of that, many employees find that their significant others, children, and others compete for their time throughout the day. This lack of time to “fully focus” on work in ways they used to is also likely a contributing factor to a decline in some numbers shown above. In many instances, it’s unlikely employees lack appreciation or interest in the value of communication and collaboration; they simply don’t have the time or the mental bandwidth to do so.

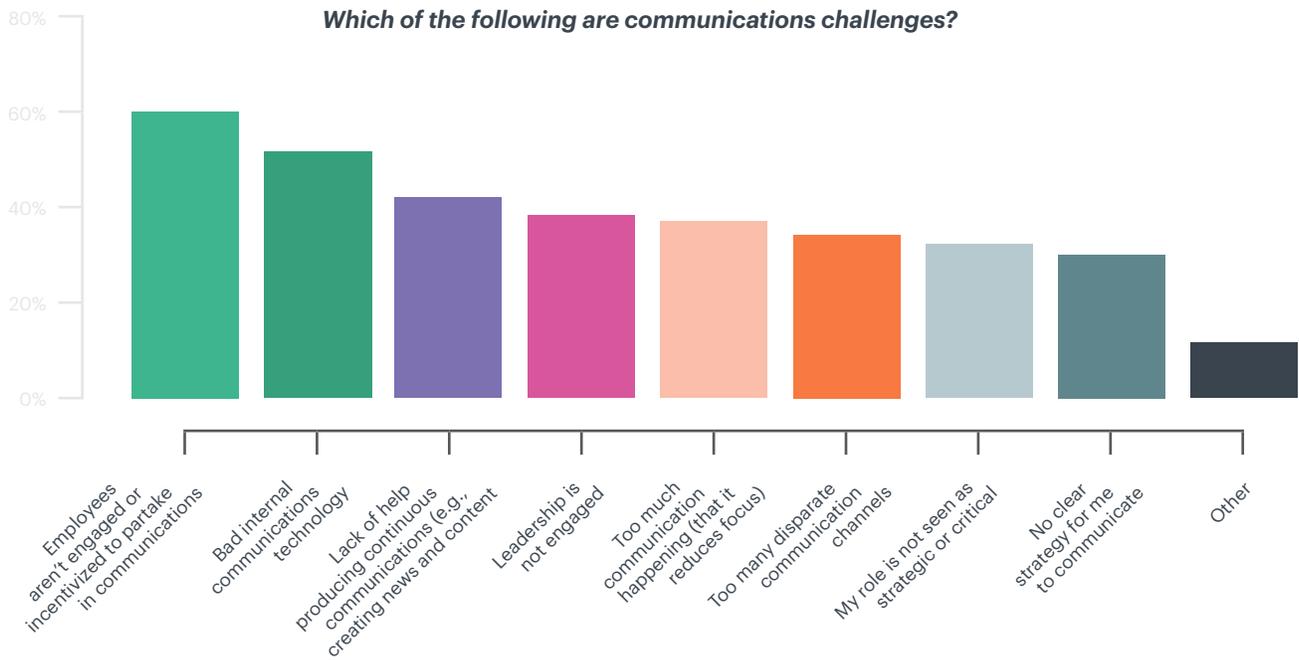
Virtual employee onboarding is also a significant new challenge in 2020, with many respondents citing it being worse than a year ago. In addition, 33 respondents noted, “Not Applicable” to “Onboard New Employees” (around 10% of the sample), which suggests many organizations are not hiring.

Even as internal comms has benefited from increased attention, it’s important to remember that many employees are still struggling, even if productivity remains the same. A recent survey by Mercer found that 94% of employers said that productivity was the same or higher than it was before the pandemic.



CURRENT STATE OF TECHNOLOGY

In last year's [State of Internal Communications](#) report, below were the biggest challenges for IC professionals:



Poor technology was listed as the second most common challenge. In addition to an increase in leadership engagement, 2020 also forced many organizations to invest in technology modernization.

Describe your company technology:

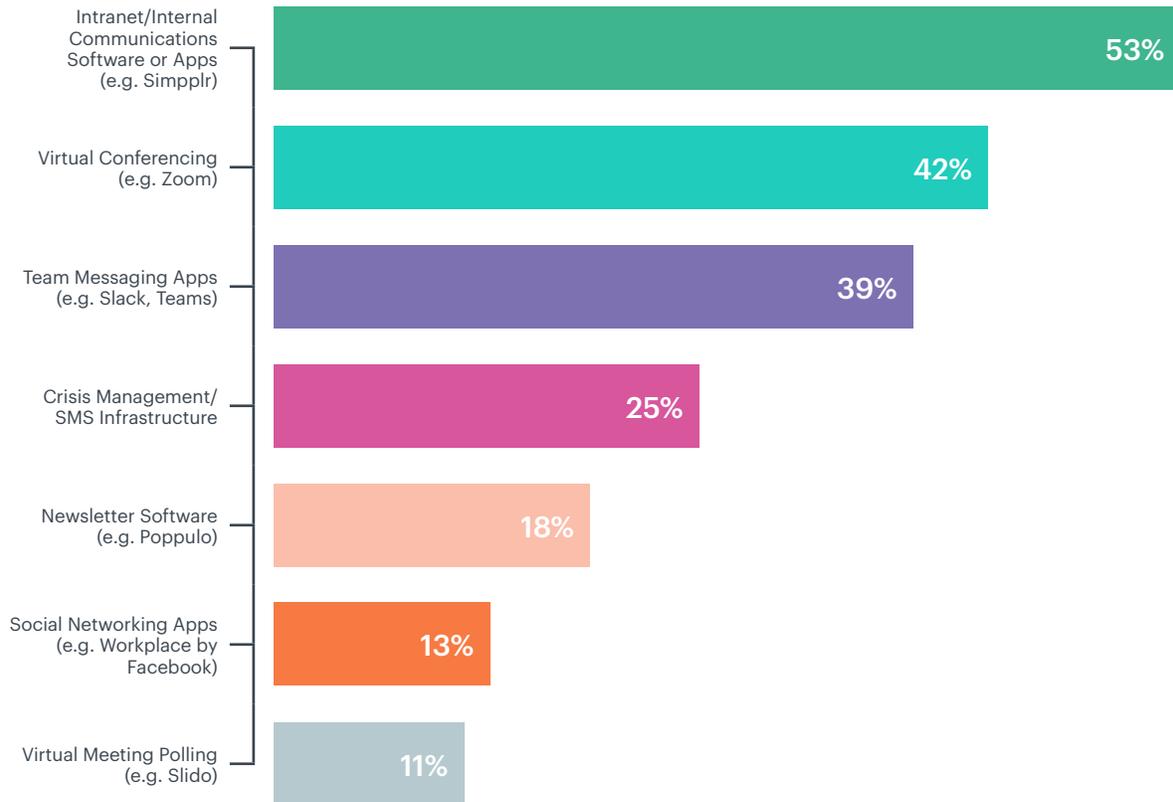
Factoring in COVID-19 and all of its complexities, how would you rate the following relative to this time last year?

	Poor	Below average	Average	Above average	Excellent	Sep 2020 Weighted average*	Worse	The same	Better
My current technology's (e.g. intranet, newsletters, etc.) ability to meet internal communications' needs	3%	13%	39%	30%	14%	3.41	9%	49%	43%

* On a scale of 1-5 (1 being poor and 5 being excellent)

An astounding 43% of people report having better technologies compared to a year ago. This data is consistent with other trends. 2020 has led to an increase in IT spending on technologies that assist with working from home.

**Based on your existing resources, what technologies would you prioritize over the next year?
Pick two.**



Finally, when we asked respondents to list their further investment priorities, they listed intranet and communications apps as the highest priority.

This data collected above suggests that intranets (or communications software) are just as critical as virtual conferencing and messaging apps that employees use day to day. The pandemic has forced leaders to recognize the value of both the internal communications function as well as internal communications tools. In today's environment, it's still essential to maintain a headquarters, even if it's a virtual one.

CONCLUSION

The effects of COVID-19 are still ongoing. Generally, IC professionals have risen to the challenge and shown they were well-prepared to manage the initial crisis in a very human manner.

While many employees are exhausted, we hope this experience brings a silver lining to 2020, especially to the IC function. IC has proven it deserves a seat at the table and that it's time to dedicate more resources to the function.

Nonetheless, there is still work to be done. Keeping employees connected and engaged has never been more challenging. Companies will need to improve their responses to complex social topics. And many of IC's old challenges with content readership and executive engagement appear to be trending backward.

Hopefully, this year provides the impetus to take IC more seriously and teaches us new ways to address long-standing challenges that help once we return to some semblance of normalcy. Until then, stay safe, and stay sane!

COVID-19 has forced CEOs to rethink the importance of IC. This new norm represents a frontier for the IC function to tackle unique challenges that will propel IC to becoming a critical organizational priority.



ABOUT THE APPENDICES

Simplr Research has always appreciated the irony of these benchmark reports. Our goal is to take an objective, quantitative approach with a qualitative audience of “storytellers.” Much like the May study, we found that the open-ended questions are arguably the most valuable. Because it’s challenging to summarize each individual’s perspective, we provided the full responses at the end of the report. Some of our respondents even left some entertaining easter eggs.

The survey asked everyone respondents two optional, open-ended questions:

- What’s your biggest takeaway or learnings from your experiences during 2020 that you’d like to share with your peers?
- How do you think the role of internal communications will be permanently changed from the experiences of 2020?

The responses are across the spectrum of emotions, including upbeat, skeptical, encouraging, practical, political, sarcastic, and more.

APPENDIX 1

Answers to “What’s your biggest takeaway or learnings from your experiences during 2020 that you’d like to share with your peers?”

- Organizational corporate communication must be ongoing and not sporadic. It leaves people guessing on what is going on and making up stories that are not factual.
- 1) We should be disciplined with our daily routine and have a good work life balance. 2) Need to have a work plan for job work so that we can keep ourselves busy. 3) Greater need to be in regular touch with all colleagues and family friends. 4) Motivation 5) Keeping good health and hygiene. 6) Important to learn or upgrade new skills.
- Bad communication is at the heart of the problem; good communication is at the heart of the solution. Sometimes it takes a crisis to clarify that.
- Meet employees where they are at and don’t assume how they are feeling. Employees want clarity, authenticity, and simplicity. Communicate more than you think you should. Don’t underestimate the importance of a risk and crisis communications strategy! If a crisis does hit, take a few hours to get organized and coordinated with anyone who would be communicating before reacting, it will save you time in the long run.
- Resist the urge to over-communicate. People are overloaded with information so make it quick and make it count.
- Internal Communications teams are vastly more successful if their senior leadership sees their value and supports their strategy
- Whether it was COVID or social justice, our response and communication felt late, even when we found we were ahead of many other companies. Note that for COVID, we had no business continuity impact, so this is all about ensuring our people are ok and feel supported. Improving response time to crises that impact our people that aren’t impacting business continuity is a priority.
- Email fatigue is always a challenge; definitely value in determining other ways to communicate key messages to employees.
- Be open and authentic as early as possible. Start communicating right away, even if you haven’t got it all “figured out” yet.
- The way to communicate with staff needs to be adapted with virtual connectivity. People lose focus much faster.
- With COVID-19 plans, transparency is key. The more open and honest leadership can be with work from home/ return to office plans, the better. Employees appreciate knowing and understanding the decisions being made in real time.
- Getting leadership to understand the importance of timely information is crucial. Plus the importance of sharing the ‘why’ behind some decisions helps employees understand decisions that may not sit well with them.
- Have a crisis management plan in place and agreed with leaders before a crisis hits, but be prepared to be VERY flexible and to amend the protocols as the situation develops. Engaging and educating leaders about the importance of timely, peace-time preparation is probably the hardest part.
- Internal communication is not a tool, but a fundamental strategy to maintain the corporate culture and the connection of people with each other and with the company.
- Being agile, relevant and resilient.
- Be willing to stretch beyond what you would normally do. Allow flexibility in your guidelines and templates.

- Focus on what you can control.
- Over-communicate in times of unknown. Let employees hear from their leaders. Be empathetic, -keep up the communication and reach out to the silent ones
- Self-motivation is supreme; be your brother's keeper.
- Constantly communicate. It takes more time but it's worth the effort.
- Leaders are just as tired as we all are, but they still need to rise up and embrace communication as a foundational element of their leadership presence.
- At a time of crisis or when we seem to be entering new territories every day, it's easy for the business to forget internal comms is not a resource to do everything and anything. The responsibility and remit and strength of internal comms must remain clear that we add value in communications best practice, editorial guidance and leadership comms requirement — and not wiping down all the desks in the office for example!
- People are much more forgiving when you don't have the answers, as long as you are communicating frequently and sharing information as it becomes available.
- The amount of grace given in a time of challenge has been incredible because of the resilient culture that was already in place.
- Communication is key to morale, retention and recruiting.
- Don't sweat the little stuff...it can always be worse!
- Organizational purpose and values have never been more important; pivot to technology use has actually increased ability to connect with colleagues globally.
- Leverage the technology that is available to you. Embrace e-communication methods and collaborative work environments. Create a structured database and define records management methods and policies.
- Major disruptors can force change and innovation.
- Work From Home is much more productive than companies have previously given credit. People can and do work remotely and are as productive or more so than when in the office. The takeaway is that business leadership is FINALLY seeing that.
- Things are constantly evolving so make sure you take time to look at new solutions.
- That effective communication is not the number of messages but the quality and usefulness of messages. In times of crisis every word counts and is scrutinized. Every employee is reading between the lines for authenticity and trend direction. Keep it tight, keep it real and keep it pertinent to get the best results.
- Pay attention to employee comms early and often. Define your audience and communicate well with each group. Especially in a large organization one size fits all messaging may not work.
- Having all employees working from home dramatically changes the dynamics of the workplace even though we had a high telework percentage before COVID. We have to intentionally make time for the casual, relationship-building conversations that grease the wheels of work — and we're becoming MUCH more transactional in our meetings.
- Even if it isn't perfectly aligned and crafted, employees value timely information that answers their immediate questions. It's my job to advocate for employee access to information about leadership decisions and direction. Pushing for more information to be shared (esp when leadership is not yet certain it should be shared) is critical to help the org build trust in leadership and their transparency.

- More internal communications are needed *much* earlier and processes put in place PRIOR to the crisis so that it is not such a big leap for employees (outside of Marcom) to accept/pay attention to them.
- More communication and collaboration when developing plans is essential.
- Authenticity matters — employees can see through corporate-speak, and when a leader communicates from the heart, employees know and pay attention.
- More open and honest communication from leadership builds better affinity to them by employees, builds trust, and adds to a stronger team / company attitude.
- Put as much of your content in the cloud as you safely can so that employees can access it from anywhere.
- We truly believe we are all in this together. We have a great culture here and the employees will go out of the way to help another employee. We are grateful to work for a compassionate and understanding employer.
- We are really doubling down on how we communicate with field employees. Routine matters (ie open enrollment) are a huge challenge with remote/ disruption.
- Communication is important. When a company becomes hyper-aroused due to events such as COVID-19 communications tend to decrease.
- Consistent communication and authentic communication go a long way.
- Listen more than you talk. And talk directly to the team members for feedback vs. than the leaders.
- People require a balance of two things: transparent, direct communication; and joyful, engaging connection with each other and with the company.
- When everyone is WFH there is more equality and understanding in communication and collaboration.
- The way things were done before isn't the way things are going to be done moving forward — and that's not a bad thing.
- I'm grateful companies are realizing working from home IS possible and efficient.
- Cross collaboration, the ease with accessibility, and the ability to gather frequent user feedback.
- Set reasonable expectations, show appreciation for your colleagues' work. Breathe.
- Keep Calm. Stay the course. Things will get better.
- Hearing from leadership is always critical, but in the crisis that is 2020 it has been paramount to increase the frequency, keep it real, stay on the pulse of employee sentiment, and keep the lines of communication open.
- Going 100% virtual has brought to light the importance of having an internal communication plan and having the tools to do this in an effective manner. In the absence of such a plan and the tools, it is very hard to align the objectives of a 100% virtual team.
- These circumstances are exposing the structural weaknesses of leadership and leadership's lack of understanding of the value of internal comms.
- Don't take anything for granted. We are really behind with technology - the technology exists and is readily available, but large organizations are restricted by compliance, legal and risk, so things move along really slowly and if they do move along, what is offered is not 100% of what is available.
- The decision to maintain a remote environment or return to the office should be led by a conversation across leadership and employees at every level. All points of view should be heard.

- My company far surpassed technology expectations. From day one, more than 90% of the workforce was able to connect to the office. Some trade work cannot be done “remotely” and those workers may have felt “helpless”. But it is what it is, many jobs are hands-on and physical.
- Just push out communications and resources. As many ways as you need to. Nothing needs to be perfect and can be polished as you go. Just respond and communicate timely. Iterate as needed.
- Engagement and content are key to raising connectivity.
- Taking the time to document processes and organize internal knowledge isn’t just a nice-to-have anymore. Access to crucial information is no longer a matter of tapping a colleague on the shoulder and asking: self-service needs to be as effective as possible.
- In a hybrid remote/in-person work environment, it is important that managers stay connected with each team member regularly, regardless of where they are working (remotely or in the office).
- Remote working works. We should definitely improve the remote tools related to working collaboratively.
- Work from Home programs do not decrease efficiency and generally work well when organized properly.
- That a large portion of our workers do not need to be physically present in the building to work effectively. Remote work has actually increased productivity in some cases.
- Digital burnout is very real, and when people make diversity/ staff support commitments, they need to regularly update with concrete actions being done
- Make sure that you are treating your fellow co-workers like people FIRST. We are currently undergoing a global crisis and some communities are hit much harder than others. We must keep this in mind when reaching out to one another.
- Internal Communication is the glue that holds culture, and therefore helps hold the company together. And that has been even more important during this year. Transparency and access to information is key for employees to stay engaged.
- Mobile-first communication creating a direct, immediate communication channel
- Internal communication flow charts are essential to have in place so that everyone understands the chain of command.
- Trust your instincts and do what you can to influence leaders to follow along with you. For example, prior to COVID, I suggested we make 2020 all about evangelizing MS Teams and I got significant push back from leaders. It wasn’t the right time, the right platform, etc. After COVID (May-ish) employees indicated on a survey they wanted more direction and access to Teams. Same push back. Now, 6 months later here we are rushing to launch teams, provide resources, change behavior, etc. The moral of the story is, if at first you don’t succeed, try again and again!
- Creating a forum for employees to ask questions is important. Communicating with employees on a consistent basis from leadership is necessary not only to inform but to offer a sense of steadiness for the organization.
- Over-communicate and then you will just barely be communicating with employees
- Internal Communications should be proactive, not reactive. I think there needs to be a strong pitch to upper management that there needs to be a seat at the table.
- Building robust communications tools takes time and budget, so invest as early as possible and don’t settle for the lowest cost option if it does not fit your needs, just because it fits your budget.

- Your biggest contribution during a pandemic is your knowledge of what your employees need in terms of communications. Getting management to listen to you will depend on how much groundwork you have laid already. I was able to contribute and make things better by being present and available to new task forces and other teams because they knew me and what I could bring to the table.
- Working from home is possible but it takes an investment not just in technology but also in tools, furniture, utilities and other things that make life easier during the workday.
- Prepare for the unthinkable!
- Open communication about priorities and balancing the workload is critical. As a one-person team it's important to be transparent when workload is overwhelming.
- Employees do want regular communications internally from leaders. It's easy to say your focus is on members/clients/customers but this year has demonstrated how important internal communication really is.
- Employees won't be honest with you about how they feel, but they're doing the worst they've done in a really long time.
- Always be mindful of people, everyone's emotions/feelings/mental state is being tested at this present moment, show empathy in difficult situations and work together to get through challenging periods.
- To keep people calm we need to provide stable internal communication tools (we did not have such enough so sometimes there was kind of mess).
- Healthcare is in a different position than most other industries. It is counterintuitive, but we have experienced significant layoffs.
- The future is all about virtual workplace, please be very receptive to the use of technology to make life easy.
- Informative and fun engagement activities and communicating differently to help employees feel connected to the business and leaders have been key to keeping up morale and motivation during these challenging times. We now need to harness that momentum by applying our future plans and new ways of working.
- While working remotely has its benefits people still want to connect and interact in person, (face to face).
- Cut people some slack during a pandemic. Work around their personal needs during this time. Be flexible.
- There was a lot of inefficient fuss before the pandemic but, turns out, some of that's needed to maintain sanity and build relationships.
- It really doesn't matter that much where you work. Where there's a will there's a way. If you were a superstar before COVID, you probably still are. If you were a slacker before COVID, you probably still are.
- Our leadership team has its differences. Some are very notable. However, in this time leadership has come together to implement big changes to the way we do business. It's been a surprising experience to see them set aside their differences and work together as more of a team.
- We need the right technology to telework and we excellent training across the board.
- I joined a new company in 2020. Remote onboarding focus is key to organizational success as it takes a concerted effort to integrate new people into company culture and norms.
- Remote work for all employees has leveled the playing field for our hospital workers, who often felt like outsiders.
- Give yourself grace during this time. Not every day is going to be your best but if you get up the next day and strive to do better, you're doing great.

- The need for clear, specific communication is more critical than ever. Lean into brevity, simplicity, and directness, while being mindful of tone. With regards to Zoom/online virtual meetings, consider raising one's hand to speak. Too much "talking over" each other happens, and important conversation is missed. Record every meeting for the sake of having notes/transcript for review later.
- I wish we'd had a better two-way communication tool that could be adopted for virtual employee engagement before COVID hit. We're still trying to get one developed/launched, and the year's almost over. I also think authenticity has never been more important. Everyone's feelings, fears, anger are all right on the cusp right now, and they need to KNOW that the agency's leadership is truly concerned about their health, welfare and safety more than the bottom line. I believe our (low tech) authentic, empathetic communication - and more importantly, our actions - have really increased the loyalty and engagement levels of our employees.
- A robust IC program paves the way for critical connection and communication during times of change/disruption for the company, and its internal and external customers.
- Many tasks can be done remotely!
- Empathy from leadership is critical — tone at the top, showing authentic interest in the well-being of employees.
- Be flexible, be real, listen to and advocate for employees, and don't expect perfection.
- Covid helped everyone to switch to remote working really fast, first it everyone was happy to work from home, later people welcomed the possibility to go to work and now we switch again to remote working. Overall this year was really hard for people in terms of changes and stress.
- Communicate what you know when you know it. I learned that it doesn't have to be perfect to be effective — it needs to be timely. Also, we were lucky to have put all the infrastructure components in place before we had a crisis -- that helped us as it's difficult to build and fly a plane at once!
- Just about everyone thought a very flexible work-from-home option would be all pluses and no negatives. But being forced to stay in work-from-home mode is really getting to me.
- Never underestimate the power of a transparent leadership
- Adaptability is key. Things are constantly changing so looking at alternatives and the big picture are important.
- Get comfortable with video technology — it's going to be around for a long time.
- The line between internal and external communication has been erased. Need to formulate communication knowing it will disseminate beyond the organization and to ensure that it contains talking points ready for wide consumption.
- Having the resources and personnel to produce compelling media content (audio, video, images, VR) is a must!
- Stay agile! Embrace instead of fighting change.
- We really need to take time out to reach out to employees and a frequent basis during crisis moments....let them know you are here, your firm is safe (hopefully)
- Tell employees you care. Over and over. It is never too much to say it again.
- Take it one day at a time.
- Sharing videos and written communications had a huge impact on employees. It looks like they felt they had increased levels of transparency because of it.
- The world is changing at a speed that never before, we must upgrade to accept new knowledge as fast as we can, as fast as we can. Timely and frequent communication is key!
- Meet people where they are. Don't expect one communication tool/channel to be able to reach everyone. Be okay with not being able to reach everyone.

- By removing face-to-face in-person communication and collaboration, I've seen my organization's weaknesses heightened while we work remotely, so we need to be more intentional in paying attention (not constantly multi-tasking on a second monitor) during Zoom and Teams meetings, so colleagues feel heard and respected. I've also seen gender inequality play out more than ever before and this cannot continue. Executive men with stay-at-home wives choose to work in the office because they can. They continue to go into the office despite public health constraints placed on the majority of the workforce. The opportunity gap is increasing while the majority of the workforce has a work-life routine like never before with children at home. Women are impacted more by this and I fear there may be long-term consequences that negatively impact women's career advancements.
- Communication is only as good as your employees. You can have great comms and timely/frequent messages, but if reading comms isn't already part of your company's "culture"/expectations, these won't help much.
- Figuring out how to support a remote workforce during this time will help us exponentially in allowing our employees better work/life balance even once we're back in the office.
- Less is more. We're all managing a new balance and the combination of work and life in a way we've never seen, and time is more precious than ever. We need to balance the need to over-communicate and over-share with the demands of the new day-to-day.
- I've noticed the weeks I have wrestled most with the message are the weeks we got the most encouraging feedback. Whether that is thoughtfully engaging with the Black Lives Matter movement or empathizing with working parents, employees are seemingly noticing when their leaders discuss tough things without pretending to have the answers. In leadership comms, it seems right now people want authenticity more than they want clear answers.
- Communicate clearly, authentically, and frequently (but don't over-communicate). It's a fine line.
- Be okay with good or great work, too much going on for perfection all the time.
- Work-life balance is really important. You have to make time for yourself and learn how to say no, and learn how to delegate tasks. My boss told me that just because you're not doing a task yourself, if you're delegating to someone else, you're still doing it. That's something that opened up my eyes a lot.
- When faced with a challenge, we are ready to respond and adapt quite nicely.
- Employees want to feel like their employer cares about them and their well being and this makes internal comms more important than ever.
- Invest in internal communications resources, processes, and technology before you need them. You don't want to be scrambling to implement these in the midst of a crisis situation.
- Human engagement outweighs digital dexterity.
- Remote work makes it much more difficult to maintain existing work relationships and to develop new work relationships due to decreased exposure and interaction with coworkers.
- We have been really focusing on empathy, diversity and inclusion.
- To remember that people have different work and personal life circumstances, and despite what is happening as a community and/or business, you will not be able to fully support everyone's situation, but you can try your best to create policies and resources that create positive avenues for change for all.

APPENDIX 2

Answers to: “How do you think the role of internal communications will be permanently changed from the experiences of 2020?”

- Internal communication is a very important aspect which gained more recognition during Covid. Especially during the present crisis, it helped in not only motivating the employees but also aligned them with common goals, best practices and was a vital communication medium.
- Internal communications can set the agenda for stakeholder engagement.
- We will play more of a role in crisis situations and hopefully we will be more respected at leadership tables because they see the value we bring in turbulent times.
- Leader perceptions of the value of internal communication have vastly improved and we must build on this momentum.
- A more important part of the overall success of the business and how we support our people.
- I did not have this problem, but I know a lot of my peers used to have to justify their existence in the past. I think 2020 shifted a lot of leaders to recognize that internal comms is a value creator, not a cost center.
- Leadership tying key messages into overall company wide objectives — relying on internal comms teams to do so.
- The frequency has gone up and there is much more openness, not just highlighting positive messages.
- I worry that my company saw it as just a moment in time and won't take much learning going forward. COVID did help the rollout of technology happen quicker with no adverse effects though, so i hope that is something remembered going forward. Sometimes a well-formed plan isn't required and if there is a need for the technology people will naturally gravitate towards it if it gives them what they want/need.
- We've raised the profile and understanding in the importance of IC, among leaders and employees. This has also increased demand from the business. We have a permanent seat at the table as trusted, equal business partners with leadership. We've seen a short-term increase in investment in communication technology, tools and resources. It remains to be seen if this will translate into a longer-term commitment.
- Internal communication should be more agile and will expand its role not only for company issues but for all issues requested by employees and their families. The company's internal communication has become a reliable source of information for employees for all matters.
- Communication continues to be pivotal.
- Brought to the table sooner.
- We demonstrated the value we can add when engaged strategically.
- We will have more consistent internal communications guidelines and broader acceptance of online tools for communications.
- We'll rely more heavily on internal communications than typical top-down verbal sharing of information. Tools like the intranet, Zoom, and Slack are more important than ever. Connecting remote users in a meaningful way is a higher priority and will continue to be.
- Leadership has now seen the importance of internal communications and how when done well (or poorly) it impacts employees. I would think leadership is more in tune with the importance of internal comm than prior.
- Internal communication will be more important for our employees; consistent clear and authentic news, articles, “lunch and learns”, town halls, and other opportunities for employees to interact.
- Even the smallest communication must be reviewed.

- Importance of Intranet; Keeping a remote workforce engaged.
- Remote work, in some form, is here to stay. We need to adapt to keeping everyone informed to do their jobs well wherever they work.
- WFH is going to expand year-over-year and into the future. Therefore, we need to figure out how to reach employees where they are physically, mentally, and when they are ready to hear from us.
- I hope it helps leaders understand the communications discipline better and be more open-minded to the knowledge and insight we can share as comms expert of what we do and what we can offer, and the limitless possibilities of creative ideas we have and can run with without going through layers and layers of approval!
- Using available technology is now a necessity to which I still feel many are resistant and “waiting for things to go back to normal” in lieu of adapting.
- I think the value of this role will begin to be acknowledged more broadly and utilized in a more effective manner.
- Value has increased in the eyes of leaders. Will have to find ways to keep employees connected over prolonged pandemic and working remotely and find ways to tap into the watercooler/grapevine talk.
- The frequency of regular updates will improve, as the responses were so positive.
- While our internal communications team was deeply respected for the work we did pre-COVID, the last few months have solidified the role of internal comms to an even greater extent.
- There will be — in many offices — no more ‘internal.’ Getting employees to use email, links, etc to access key and essential information will be key.
- Will have to continue to find and embrace new technologies, while increasing leader visibility and accountability.
- e-comm is the new norm. reinvest unused travel budgets into virtual conference and meeting hardware.
- I think the value is more pronounced now than ever before. Before it was a means to tell you about goings-on and promotions, but now critical and valuable business information is shared more frequently and more widely. Businesses are seeing the benefit/value of this now!
- The real, deep value of internal comms was proven for anyone who was paying attention.
- More focus will be given to creative ways of keeping the workforce engaged and informed.
- It will create an added expectation of accelerated two-way communication.
- Emergency/situational communications are much more important, and more highly valued by senior leadership.
- Central function for organizational information and cultural cohesion.
- When we talk about crisis comms in the strategic plan, they will pay attention. Investments tied to timeliness and remote connectivity of global employees are not a given, but they will be an easier sell. It has been proven to EVERYONE the importance of the ability to reliably reach and measure communications to all employees (no matter where they work) and the dependency on technology to do that.
- Hopefully, the perception of the importance of good internal comms will be cemented.
- There will most definitely be more team members working from home and many more online team meetings. We’ve learned that we don’t need to go into the office to get the job done.
- More focus on tools and techniques to support mass communications for the org. funding for remote infrastructure and WFH resources.
- All of our communications and workflows have permanently changed. In some ways that is going to be a net positive long-term (you know if this isn’t the End Times...).
- We know what mix of people we need to keep excelling on opportunities. We all realize there is a skill to this and all got some experience using it correctly during 2020.

- I think digital communication will become much more important; I also think that high-quality streaming and recording of events will become more of a requirement, even for companies without a large dispersed workforce.
- Definitely more transparent and more often with communication.
- Authenticity and transparency have always been important to internal communications, but now they are necessary.
- Much more expansion of the digital environment.
- This year demonstrates the tremendous need for quality and consistent communications.
- Simply that multiple forms of communication are necessary.
- It has come to the forefront and will remain a fixture while we try to get back to a “new normal”
- We’ll need to learn to communicate more even if we’re together more.
- Even when our office opens back up, we will still have remote team members. Hopefully, we have broken down the previous barrier where the remote staff was less included in conversations they should have been included in.
- The importance of internal comms increases in light of all that’s needed w/ regard to update employees about various actions and activities.
- Learning how to keep the engagement going in a virtual, remote world is evolving communication, as well as with the racial injustice efforts, communicators are being leaned on more than ever to be communicating D&I objectives and results, and engaging employees in that work.
- Internal communication will continue to be essential.
- Communication is key, keep the dialogue going.
- More communication is better.
- We will have way more virtual meetings. More emphasis on scanning documents and using cloud file sharing.
- I don’t think experiences from 2020 will have a permanent change in the role of internal communication. As things move back to normal in 2021, internal communication will still be trivialized, as lessons and experiences from 2020 start to fade from people’s memories.
- Internal communications will now wear even more hats. During COVID-19, I acted as crisis, external, leadership, internal, risk and much more!
- You need to be more nimble than ever. Be ready for anything and act quickly.
- Communication is always important, much higher and more needed in crisis time but still very important all the time.
- Internal communications have to be more effective in bridging the gap between organizational news/ updates and the change in culture and need to connect emotionally with its employees — in a way that the employees feel that the organization understands how this has changed the employees’ experience, as well as the organizations’ experience. This will be key to ongoing employee engagement and effectiveness.
- I’m not sure it has. I think companies that do it well continue to do it well. Companies that don’t do it well continue to say, “We should do better.”
- Our communications team as well as our Change Management team were communicating effectively and efficiently throughout this pandemic. They may have been a bit more stressed, but they handled it amazingly well.
- As important as before.
- Ways to engage with employees and reinforce morale will be permanently changed.
- The role of internal communications will be more visible and considered more valuable by leadership and employees overall.
- They will be much more frequent and electronic in nature, as opposed to in-person.
- More awareness of well-being and health; worker safety will be top of mind at all times.

- We will continue to use video conferencing and remote meetings much more than we used to do. Some workers may never be brought back into the building, but remain remote. As such it will be essential to focus on enhancing our internal communication structures to ensure effective messaging with remote employees.
- Hopefully folks will be more aware of its importance/the importance of caring for those employees
- I think we have become accustomed to using Zoom/ video chat at this point. I can't help but feel it is a little more fun communicating with everyone on the large group calls with the Brady Bunch Square set up.
- In many organizations, internal communications have shown how important it is for employee engagement. I am with the hope that the perceived value continues.
- It's a critically important function that remains under-resourced.
- I expect they'll play a more critical role in managing and ensuring message delivery across the organization.
- We've been available at all hours, for months, to the most senior members of the organization. They've listened to our expertise and taken their role in communicating with employees even more seriously.
- They will need to be accessible via multiple devices. They can be the stickiness that brings employees together especially considering many work forces will remain primarily remote.
- There is more of a focus on internal comms, but still a general lack of understanding of why it's important for the information to permeate the organization at all levels.
- I think internal communications will be looked upon more favorably to be the key conduit to ensure employees have updates and information from leadership, as well as have access to key tools and information that is necessary for them to complete their jobs.
- Internal Comms will be equivalent to the influence of C-Suite as are other functional roles such as HR, Operations and Finance.
- I think in our case it has elevated my role as an employee communicator. Leadership and our university communications team have a greater sense of the importance of this work.
- Leadership is finally seeing the value of internal comms much more during this pandemic.
- We've learned we can all work without being in the same room. There will be no going back from that.
- My hope is that companies will recognize it is more important than ever.
- More important, but competing for limited resources.
- Internal communications have been proven as a critical function. I'm using it as an opportunity for building the business case for additional budget and resources.
- Greater emphasis on virtual meetings and collaboration.
- It should hopefully be more valued and taken for what it's worth.
- Internal communications play a big role especially for the work-from-home arrangement
- More digital updates, no more town halls!
- Demand has increased and the overall awareness of the role has been made aware more than ever before. I think IC will be a firm mainstay in any organization moving forward as it has benefited so much throughout the pandemic."
- Internal communications will see more focus as all employees in near future will be working from home. These regular updates/ communications will bind and align them with the Company's vision and also an important tool for motivation and loyalty.
- There's been a need for better, more engaging and smarter communications during 2020 and we've been able to prove our value to the business.

- The role of simplifying messaging but having enough content to be meaningful
- I would like to think there is a greater appreciation for the role of internal communication practitioners.
- Internal communications will rely more on remote access than in the past.
- We can say it all we want but 2020 demonstrated a strong internal communications team is critical to success.
- I think we will continue to use virtual delivery for all-hands meetings because the attendance is better. We will probably use more videos going forward.
- We will need a way to measure how employees digest and understand internal communications and measure how many actually read/participate internal communications.
- Thinking about virtual communications has a much greater focus and impact.
- There is an understood importance of it, which means I have a lot more work now.
- The role of IC will be permanently changed in that it will have a vital seat at the table as a resource to the C-suite, as their importance to the company's success is recognized.
- It will become more strategic to retain and re-engage talent.
- I'm not sure there will be a tremendous change because people are fatigued by email, by virtual calls and meetings, and by inter/intranet hubs. It seems that even the most innovative and engaging tools will only speak to those who want to hear them. I do think that leadership will continue to want MORE internal communication because they will feel it's effective, but that's their delusion grounded in ego, thinking people really care about what they have to say.
- I anticipate a lag in internal comms due to burnout from the current cohort, but with an exciting rebirth when the next generation is ready to step in.
- Internal comms has to be more intentional than ever before.
- I believe that computer systems and programs will be more widely utilized for internal communications by companies that previously utilized a less digital approach or a more in-person approach.
- I think we will have to work much harder and use a lot more technology to keep our workforce informed as we will likely never return to a 100% in-house workforce.
- More employees will be permanently remote from now on, so it's more important that digital communications keep all employees up-to-date.
- Has to be on-demand and constantly evolving.
- I feel like 2020 has really shined a light on how important a good crisis communication plan and internal communications are. I hope that we will be better prepared for a crisis in the future and also our new leadership is committed to improving our internal communications and has stated it as a goal so I have hope we are at least moving in the right direction.
- Communication finally has a seat at the Leadership table. Work hard to be just as valuable when your company is NOT in emergency mode.
- Just increasing communication, finding new ways to stay connected.
- Continued focus on empathy and authentic communications. Not talking to, but with, employees. Showing that above all, the health, safety and well-being of employees come first.
- Internal communication will have to be faster, continuous and more authentic. It should give employees some stability that they lack at this time.
- I think people saw communication should be at the table. I'm fortunate that I've had a seat but, for other communicators, this was game-changing.
- Openness to more openness, authenticity and 'home-made' comms. 'We are all in the same boat' / 'We are in this together' feeling.

- No change. I always felt internal communications was important. I may not have attended all the meetings that I should have. But my feeling about the importance of those meetings has not changed.
- I'm hoping that the frequency stays up. Having more internal communications seems to have been helpful and keeps people feeling like they are in the loop, even if they aren't physically on campus.
- The expectations around internal communication will remain high as well as the demand for frequent communication with internal stakeholders.
- Be honest. Be timely. Get it out. Stop talking when there is nothing to say.
- Internal communications will see an increase in investment as we remain decentralized.
- Since we don't have the luxury of casual unintended meet-ups on campus, the ability to produce clear, concise and entertaining messaging is very important.
- See it consolidating under one "umbrella." It's currently fractured and communication is coming from multiple areas.
- Internal communications is most appreciated when the leadership sees its value, and COVID-19 has illustrated the value of what good internal communications should look like.
- There are more complex issues being communicated that we as communicators need to help others think through the execution.
- The pandemic makes remote work more important than at any time in history, even if someday pandemic over, this industry is already developed that no one can undo. Benefited from communication tools development, international communication will be digitalized faster than the normal historical process.
- Digital communications were important before COVID-19, however, now we must rely on them solely to build a sense of community when the in-person community is not allowable. This use will not be diminished when we return to normal, but it will be nice when digital communications can be complimented again with in-person communications.
- It will be much more focused on process and helping employees with coping mechanisms
- With many companies shifting to allow employees permanent WFH/remote working, internal comms will be much more important to keep everyone on the same page.
- Smart companies will invest more time and resources into internal comms and strive to increase employee engagement. Otherwise they will lose talent whenever the job market improves.
- It's less about push communications and more about creating the space and resources for employees to seek out as they need. Also, our reliance on digital tools is only going to continue to increase as we manage hybrid work environments — a mix of people in an office and working from home.
- I *hope* that leaders continue to see that proactive, consistent updates are the best way to keep employees engaged and aligned with strategy and goals.
- I think we will all be more forward-thinking. Looking at trends closer than usual and considering what can happen instead of what will likely happen.
- Everything is virtual and since we have found things still work well this way it will continue more.
- Intranets and other modern workplace technologies make up a new "facility" and should be prioritized and resourced on equal footing with physical office space. This was the case prior to the pandemic, but it has shone a spotlight on the importance of these resources.
- Expectations have been raised not just for internal communications output/outcome but also for the type of support and content we need from others in the organization.
- Trying to be more creative to reach our workforce and stay within our budget(s).

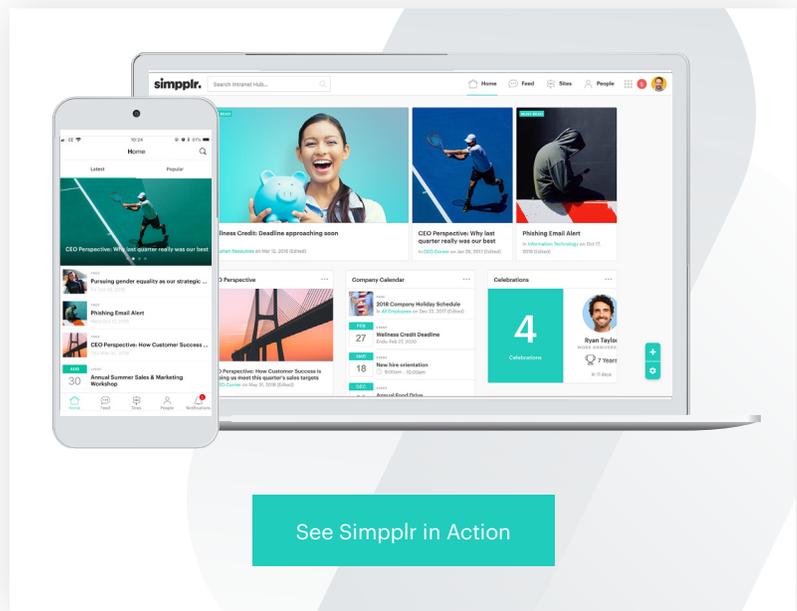
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