



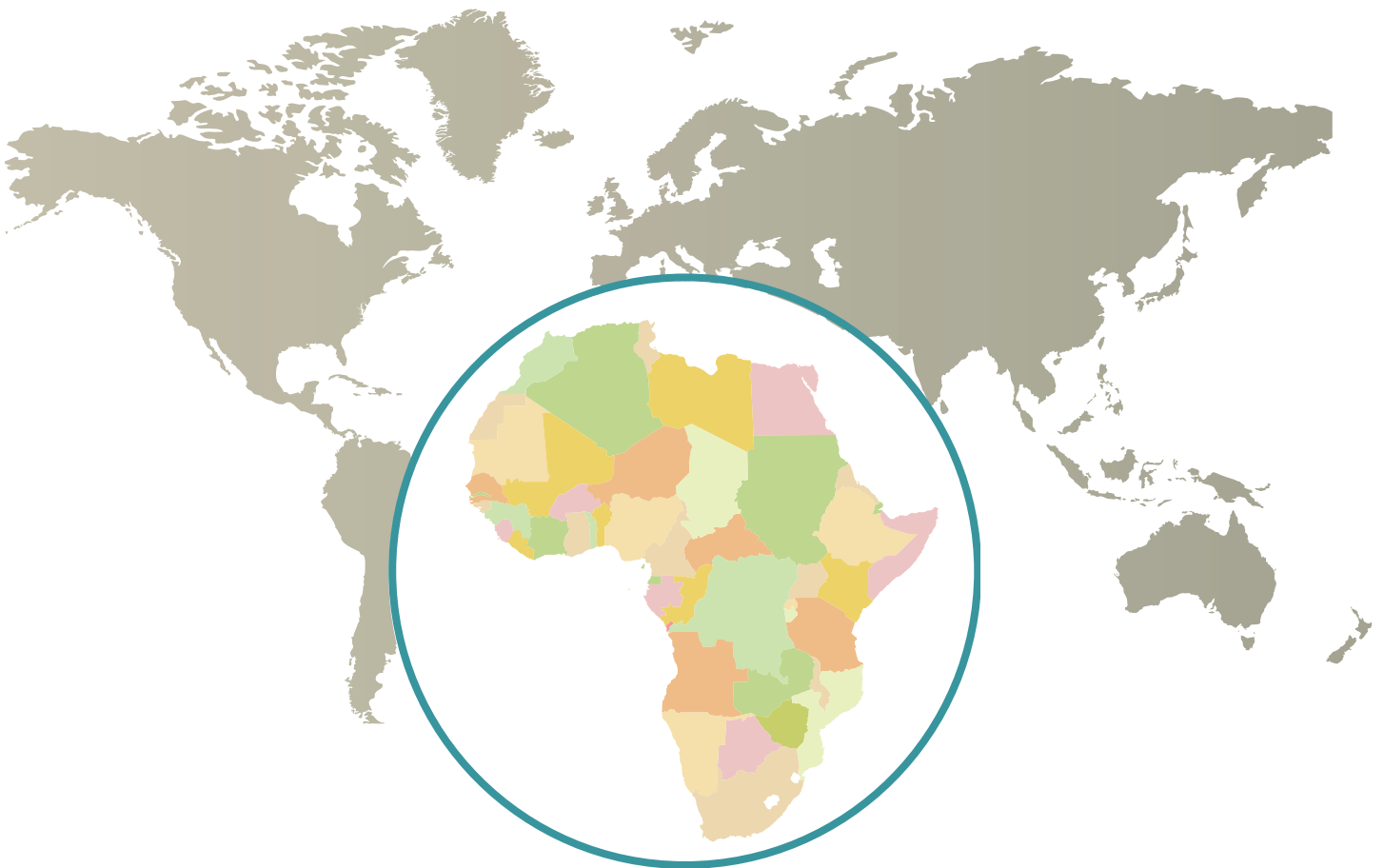
**VMA**  
GROUP

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# Africa Communications Survey **2016**

*Key trends shaping business communications  
in South Africa*

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# VMA Group - Key Information

*Global recruitment and training specialist for corporate and marketing communications*

Since launching in 1978, VMA Group has built its business around phenomenal people.

We have grown to be the leading global resourcing, professional development and career partner for corporate and marketing communications, PR and investor relations.

Employing industry sector specialists alongside communications professionals, we maintain long-term, commercially successful relationships with our global network of clients – from innovative, independent start-ups to large, complex corporates. Working on their behalf, we resource the brightest and best in communications talent.

## Practices:

- External Communications
- Internal Communications
- Marketing Communications
- Digital Communications & Social Media
- Financial Services Communications
- Investor Relations
- Public Affairs & Stakeholder Relations
- Healthcare Communications
- Agency & Consultancy Communications

## Why work with VMA Group?

### Heritage and reputation

We have been building highly effective corporate communications and marketing teams for over 35 years.

### Size and specialism

We are the world's largest, specialist corporate communications search and selection, professional training and development consultancy.

### Global reach

We are a dedicated team of over 60 professionals with key offices across the UK, Europe, Asia-Pacific and Africa, and an affiliate partner in North America.

### Unrivalled network

We have immediate access to over 50,000 leading communications professionals, from entry-level, rising stars to senior business leaders.

### Community building

We source the best talent through the hosting

and sponsoring of leading industry events, and have a vibrant online community, with a strong social media following.

### Consultative approach

We offer all candidates a free, hour long, face-to-face career consultation session. We foster long-term relationships and see ourselves as career-long partners.

### Insight and advice

We have active partnerships, through our Advisory Boards, with over 100 leading Communications Directors, and produce market leading industry research.

### Flexibility with commitment

We offer bespoke services to suit your needs and budgets, and commit to pre-agreed timelines for our recruitment services.

### Success story

Over 35 successful years of attracting and securing talent in corporate communications and marketing, internationally. With 100 per cent success rate on retained assignments.

## Offices:

- London
- Amsterdam
- Brussels
- Frankfurt
- Paris
- Hong Kong
- Singapore
- Johannesburg
- Cape Town

### *"The advantages of working with a specialist communications agency are obvious"*

Head of Communications, Coventry Building Society

### *"VMA offers an incredible service and I highly recommend them"*

Head of Internal Communications, Vaultex

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## About Us

Global recruitment and training specialist for corporate and marketing communications.

We place high-calibre professionals in permanent and interim positions at junior-to-senior management level. The Group specialises in:

- External Communications
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- Financial Services Communications
- Investor Relations
- Healthcare Communications
- Government & Stakeholder Relations
- PR Agency
- Digital & Social Media
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# Introduction

Since 1978 VMA Group has sourced corporate/marketing communications talent, and nurturing this talent via our training division, VMA Enhance. We believe our finger is on the pulse of trends and developments across the communications disciplines, but we like to have the data to back up our views, and we know our clients are keen on these insights to help them make more informed recruitment decisions too.

VMA Group Africa undertakes an annual industry-wide survey among communicators, to better understand the challenges the industry faces. This year's research was proudly undertaken in partnership with the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA), and the Africa region of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC). By doing so, we ensure it is representative of the industry and becomes a benchmark in terms of what strategic business interventions need to be adopted to mitigate future risk around reputation and employee engagement, not to mention social media, crisis communications and of course employment trends and resource management. Combined, this becomes a sound platform that supports business leaders in determining corrective action to support business communication as a strategic imperative.

The 2016 research results within the communications profession very much reflect the broader macroeconomic context that South Africa continues to face. In many instances, the decline in certain indicators within this report happened at an almost unprecedented rate, very much in line with market conditions. For a number of questions, we have drawn year on year comparisons to isolate key factors that are keeping communicators up at night.

Nearly 400 communications professionals completed the VMA survey, which makes it one of the most representative surveys of its kind in terms of depth of assessment and reach within the industry in South Africa. Approximately 10% of total responses came from other African countries. The survey covers a number of categories, each contributing to the future of the communications profession. These include, among others, geographic expansion, resource management, skills development, remuneration trends, recruitment trends, social media, and crisis communications.

Overall, there has been a drastic decline in optimism across the industry.

However, there is a major shift year on year to improve skills development among communicators, especially on strategic thinking and business acumen. This is likely the result of mounting pressure on communications professionals by senior leadership demanding better measurement and sound returns on reputation management activities.

There is also stability among communicators' views of how senior management see the profession. While also declining year on year, the trend remains positive with a majority believing executive leadership consider the function of communications to be an important business driver.

All the findings in this report must be interpreted within a broader macroeconomic context that is increasing pressure at a fiscal level. Invariably, those challenges filter down to big business, small business, and of course into the communications industry.

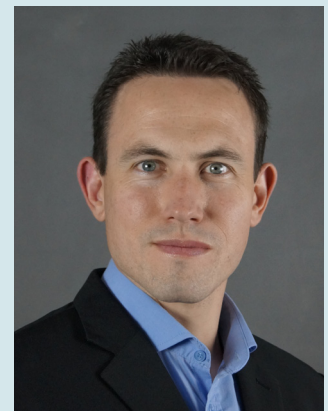
When analysing budgetary constraints, as well as skills shortage and a reversal of expansion opportunities, one should note that the South African economy expanded an annualised 0.7% in the three months to September of 2015, recovering from a 1.3% contraction in the previous period.

Despite the optimism, figures came below market expectations of a 1.1% growth and lower than a 2.1% expansion seen a year earlier. On 2 February, the day after this survey was launched to the communications industry, the Business Day reported that the World Bank followed the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in slashing its economic growth forecasts for SA. It projected growth of 0.8% for 2016, in line with the IMF's forecast of 0.7%. But 2017 growth is estimated at 1.1%, also substantially lower than the IMF's expectation of 1.8%. The World Bank also noted that the South African economy was "flirting with stagnation if not recession".

It is not possible to exclude these business metrics when considering the findings of this report. For example, in April 2015, 61% of communicators were upbeat that there would be local expansions and growth in their departments in the coming year. By February 2016 only 13% expected there to be growth in the next two years – effectively, a 470% decrease in sentiment.

However, perhaps the downward trend has had an unexpected positive turn. A record number of in-house communications practitioners are now reporting into executive and managing director level functions within their organisations. This indicates the growing recognition of the strategic role communications can play in reputation management and internal operational efficiencies through an engaged workforce.

We hope that you find our latest VMA research an insightful reflection of the latest trends and developments in corporate communications across the continent right now. As always, we welcome comments and feedback and the opportunity to have a deeper conversation about what the data means for you, your team and the recruitment and professional development decisions you will be making over the coming year.



**Daniel Munslow**  
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# Executive Summary

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**Here are some of the key outtakes from the 2016 survey, which the report will provide further insight:**

- Representation for the 2016 research report expanded to include feedback from communicators in East and West Africa
  - In line with cost cutting, there is a trend to centralise the communications function across federated businesses
  - 30% of communicators say their salaries were cut or remained the same year on year
  - Career development is the number one reason people leave their jobs. Remuneration is rated the third reason only
  - Nearly 9% of respondents have started their own consultancies on the back of retrenchments (5% of those surveyed have been retrenched since March 2015). They also noted they are seeking a better work/life balance, which they feel is lacking in many organisations. This is a key insight for corporate HR as they attempt to improve various components of their employee value propositions to retain staff
  - There has been an increase in the use of personal contacts for career development, with recruitment firms still holding a strong lead position as a way of sourcing top talent
  - There has been a drastic downward trend in communicators looking to expand into Africa, with 66% saying they have no plans to expand. South Africa expansion plans are down from 61% in 2015 to 13.6% in 2016
  - 29% of respondents confirmed their teams had shrunk in the last year
  - 35% of comms budgets have increased, and the exact same amount have decreased their budgets
  - 51% of respondents say business acumen is a critical skills for communicators, up from 5% in 2015
  - While training remains a critical skills development tool, the absence of training is the number one reason for loss of talent, 52% of companies have cut their training budget in the last year
  - 39% say they have a full-time, in-house resource to manage their social media
  - Almost half of all surveyed companies are not using any form of internal enterprise social media
  - In 2015, 58% of respondents said they believed the influence communications would command in business would increase in the next two years. In 2016, this number dropped to 40%
  - Encouragingly, 53% of respondents say communications is included in business work streams from the outset of projects. Fewer than 7% of agencies are brought in timeously to help their clients manage reputations from the beginning
  - Downward pressure on budgets has overtaken skills shortages as the number one concern for communicators. In 2015, 22% said budget was a key challenge for business over the next 12 months, this number has increased to 58%
  - 29% of all respondents indicated there is a shortage of good skills and talent in the marketplace in 2016, up from 25% in 2015
  - 33% of communicators say their leadership's ability to communicate with their stakeholders is a major business concern. This did not feature in the top five pressures in 2015
-

# Foreword

## **PRISA's collaboration with VMA Group Africa.**

I would like to thank our partners for conducting this sound and valuable research. Working with VMA group Africa and the African region of the IABC has indeed been a seamless undertaking.

Hearing the insightful 2015 VMA research findings presented at the IPRA Conference held in Johannesburg last year, PRISA felt compelled to get involved this year, as we believe the results offer great insights and impactful action points for our members and the industry as a whole.

The partnership with VMA and IABC gives us a good understanding of what our

industry is currently facing, and the year on year comparison clearly shows the impact of our macro environment and socio-political landscape on our industry.

We would like to thank Daniel Munslow, Principal Consultant VMA Group, South Africa, for the opportunity to partner with you. PRISA stands firm in the belief that collaboration is the cornerstone of our future and as we move to new frontiers with the rich legacy behind our name, we will continue to look for more interaction with our industry during 2016 and beyond.

**Adele Paulson, Executive Director,  
Public Relations Institute of Southern  
Africa (PRISA)**



VMA Africa also partnered with the International Associations of Business Communicators for the 2016 communication survey.



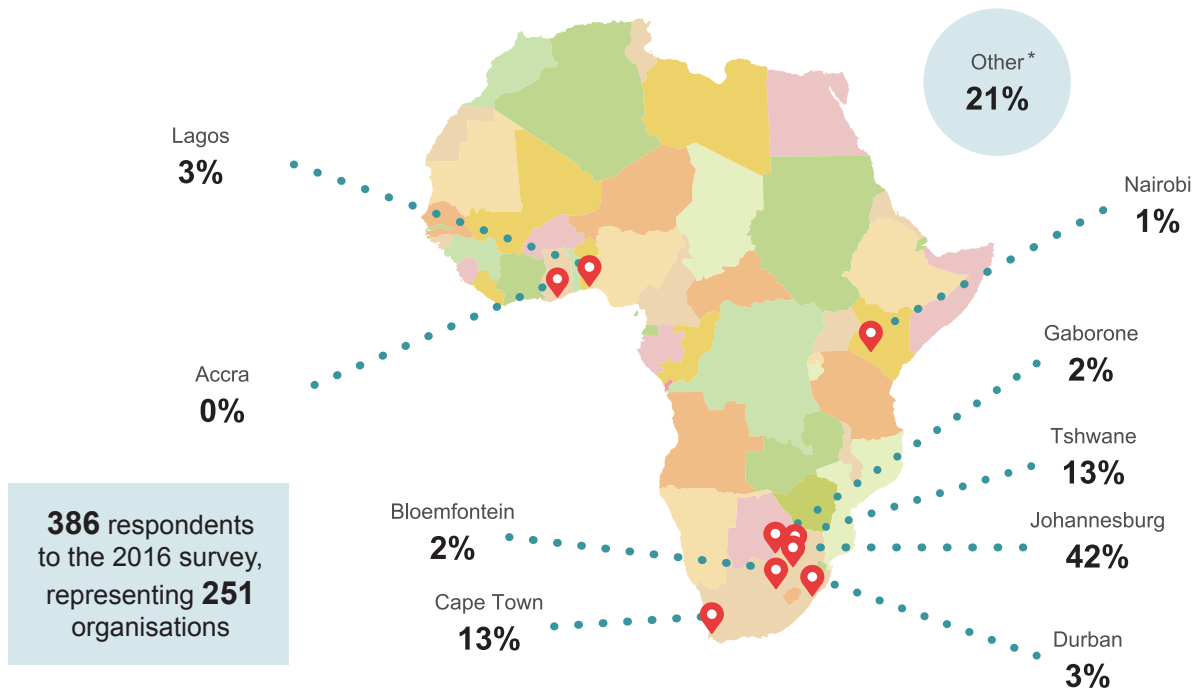
**P R I S A**  
**PUBLIC RELATIONS &  
COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT**



**International Association  
of Business Communicators  
Africa Region**

# Demographics

## Our survey respondents



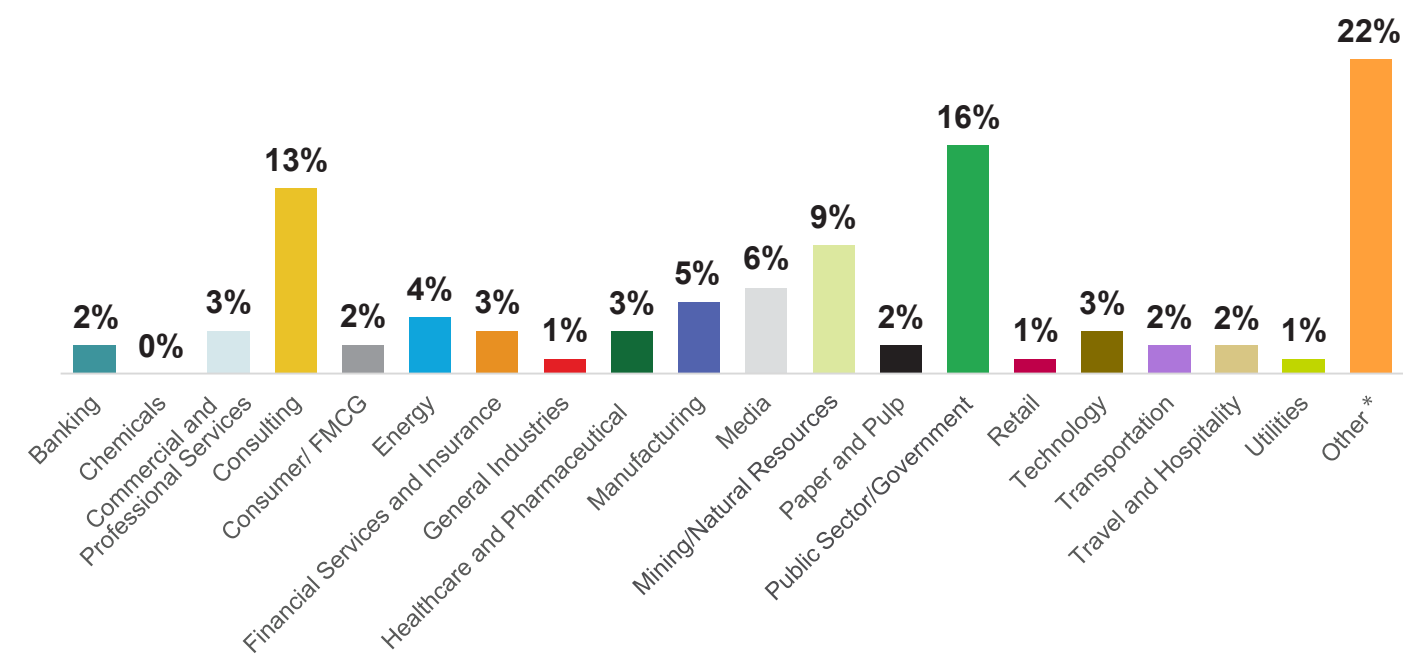
\*Other respondents were from smaller cities in South Africa, including Port Elizabeth, East London, Bloemfontein, Kimberley; as well as Windhoek in Namibia.

## Do you work in an agency or in-house?



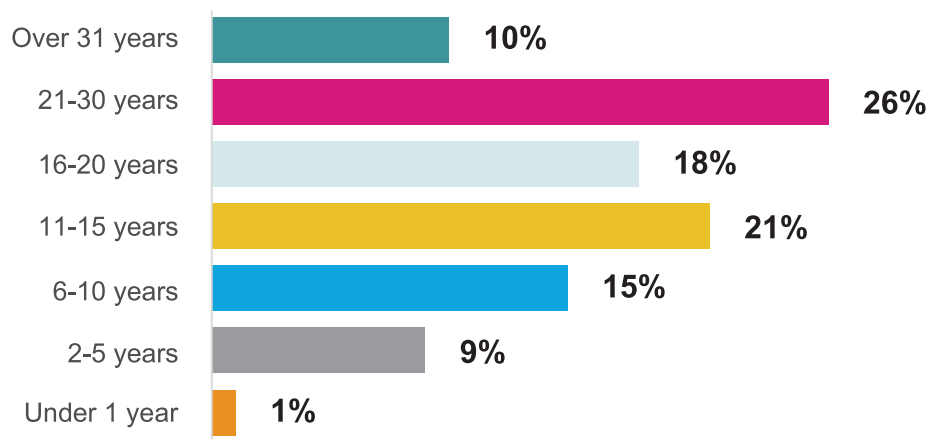


Which industry do you work in?

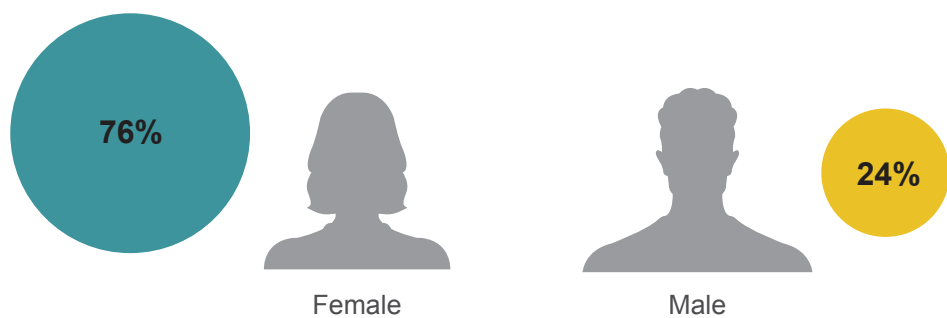


\*Other includes motoring, NGOs and NPOs, as well as respondents from academia.

How many years' experience do you have?

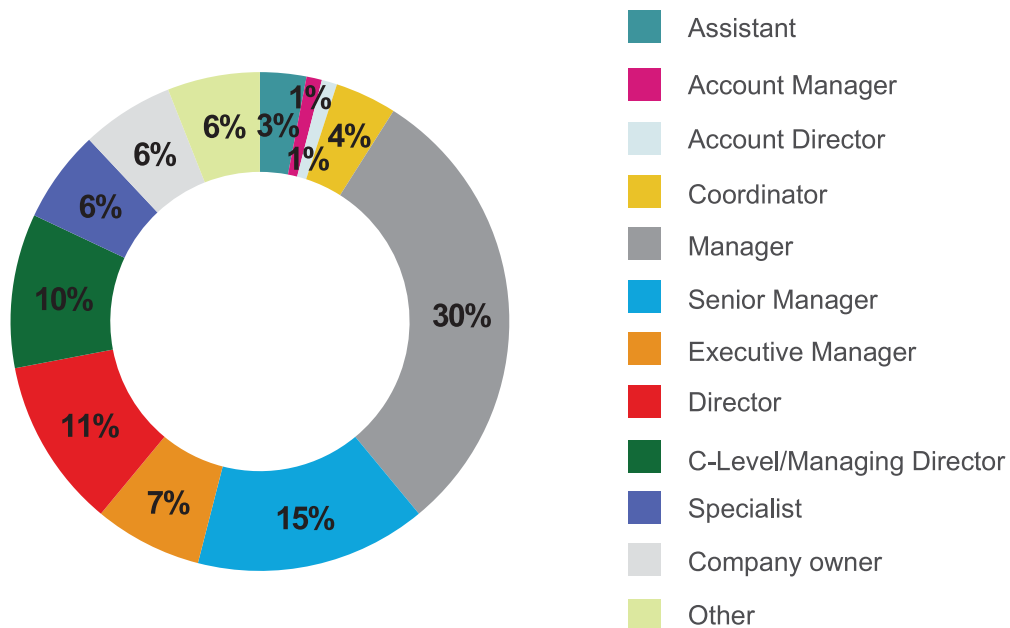


What is your gender?



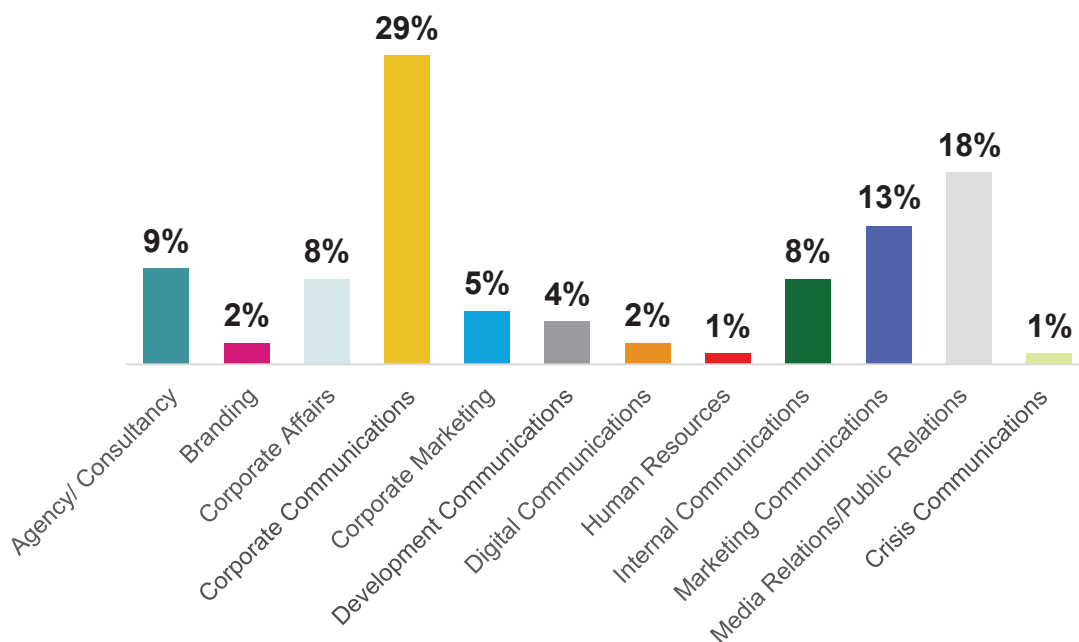


## What is your current job title?



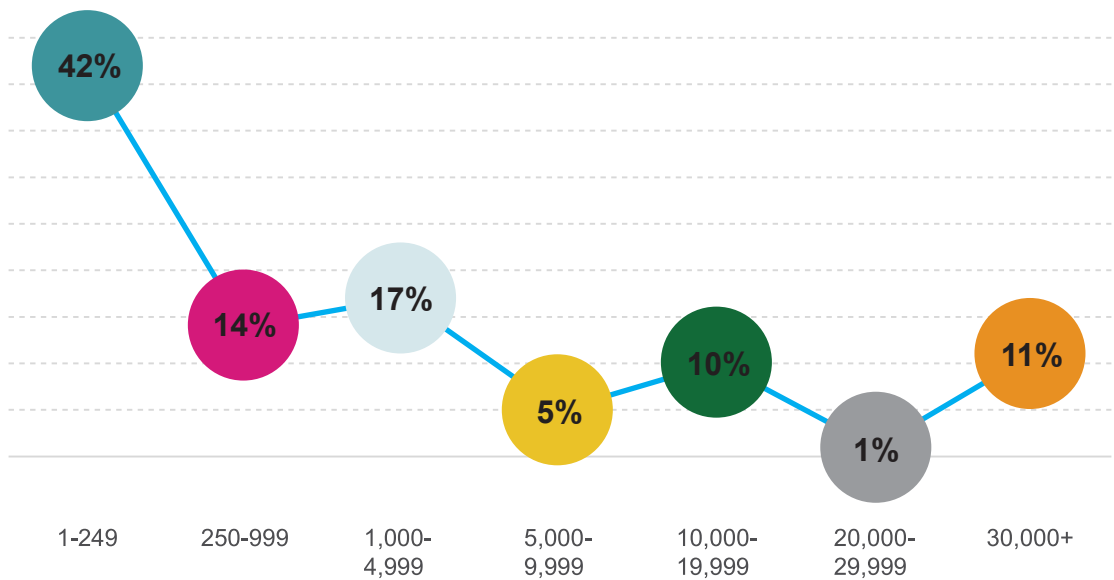
\*Other includes, marketing, divisional head, senior communication officers, and HR practitioners.

## What is your role primarily focused on?



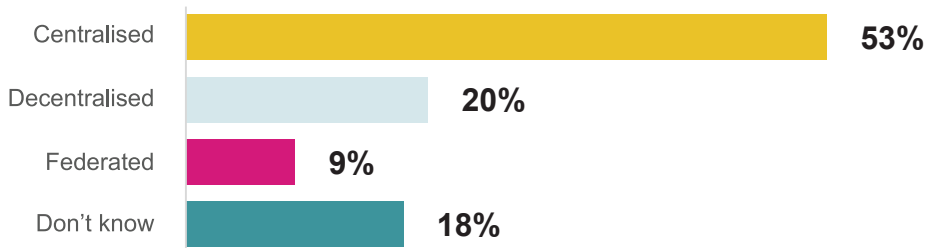
# Company Profiles

How many employees work in your organisation?



Respondents to the VMA Group survey represent organisations of all sizes across Africa, ranging from small to medium size businesses to large multinational conglomerates.

What structure best describes your company?



The larger the organisation, the likelihood is that the communications department is centralised. Overall, just over 53% of all communications departments are centralised.

However, when analysing the data further, and reviewing responses only from companies with a staff compliment of 10,000+, the number increases significantly to 62.5%. Centralising functions and operating on a strategic centre of excellence business model is starting to emerge as a preferred format for communications departments who, as will be analysed under the budget segment of the survey, are under increasing pressure to cut costs and streamline their execution.

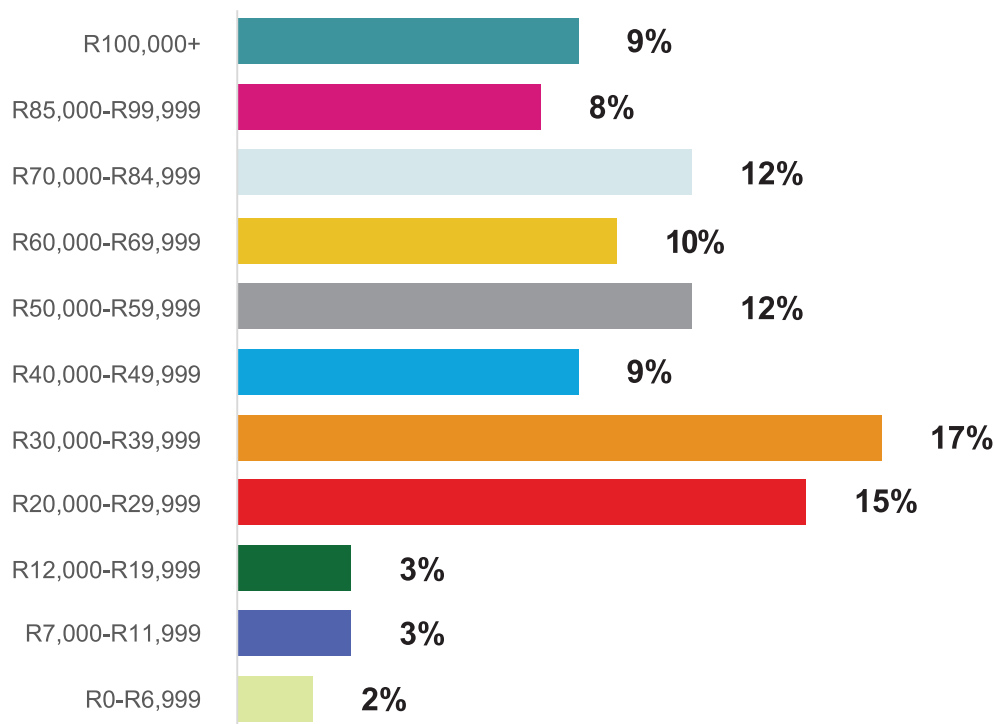
A centre of excellence not only provides cost optimisation, but also allows a central repository of knowledge to reside within a central location that can be leveraged across all business areas. A centre of excellence becomes an organisation's shared facility that provides leadership, best practices, research, support, and training for a particular focus area.

18% of respondents were not sure whether their departments were centralised or federated.

# Employment Trends

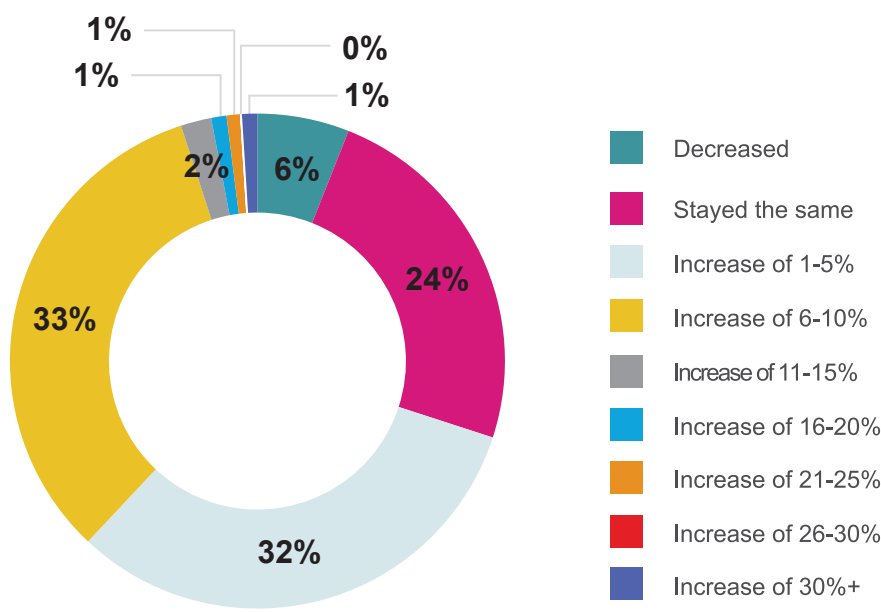
In this section, the survey sought to identify current recruitment trends, salary brackets and other factors affected employment in the marketplace.

## What is your current gross monthly salary (before tax)?



A significant majority of respondents indicated they were fortunate enough to have received an increase on their base salary in the past 12 months. However, one in four respondents said their salary remained the same, and a further 6% took a reduction in salary as organisations restructured and redeployed in desperate attempts to avoid retrenchment. This is highly comparable year on year, showing little movement or uplift in the marketplace.

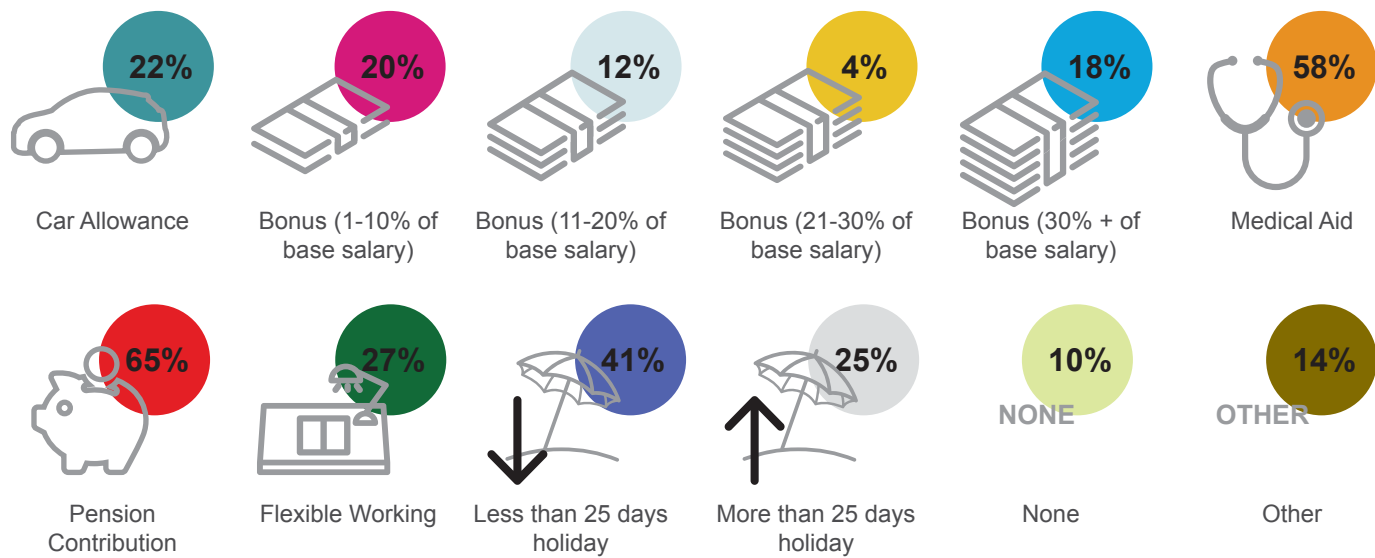
How does this compare to your salary one year ago?



Which benefits do you receive as part of your package?

The results of the question interrogating the benefits companies provide their employees is a telling story of the future trends we can expect to see in the workplace.

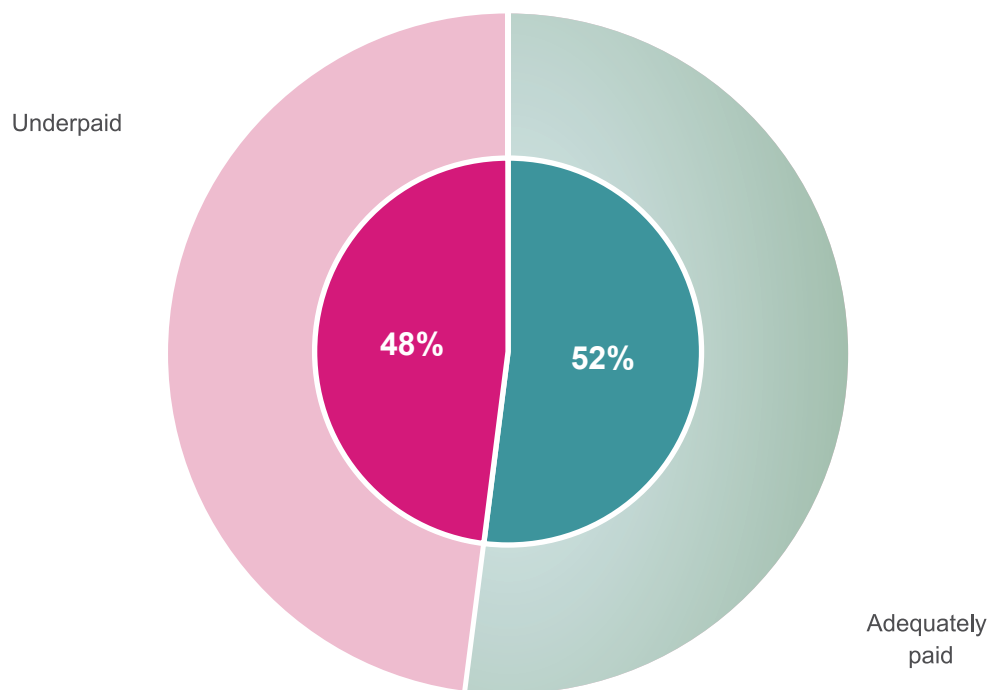
Despite popular opinion that the majority of organisations, large and small, offer pension and medical aid benefits, results show that approximately 60% of companies offer these as an average. Large corporates, of 10,000+ employees are the ones most likely to offer these benefits, with 70% offering medical aid (against the 60% average) and 91% offering pension funds.



The highlights of this question were that nearly 27% of employers allow for flexible working arrangements, including the ability to work from home for a number of days a week. This figure was less than 12% in 2015, showing the dramatic shift in employment trends and the desire to have a better work/life balance.

For hiring managers keen to understand the most effective retention strategies likely to keep talented PR Agency practitioners onboard and in-house practitioners engaged, the latest research tells us that the incentives that appeal the most are better working hours, promotion and training. While we know that salary is always going to be a strong incentive, it's interesting to note how working hours clearly play a role here too and, in fact, this group had the highest number listing this as an incentive.

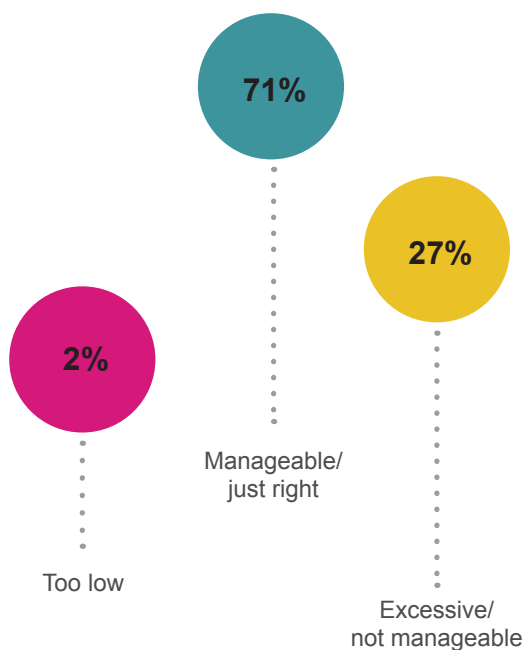
### In terms of remuneration do you believe you are:



South Africans are generally satisfied with their pay, across all pay grades and company sizes. However, when analysing data by company size, 75% of employees in organisations of 10,000+ employees say they are satisfied with their pay; while 59% of employees in organisations under 5,000 and 67% of employees in organisations under 1,000 feel they are underpaid.

In organisations under 1000 employees, medical aid benefits drop to 45% and pension contributions to 43%.

### In terms of hours worked a week, do you feel your hours are:



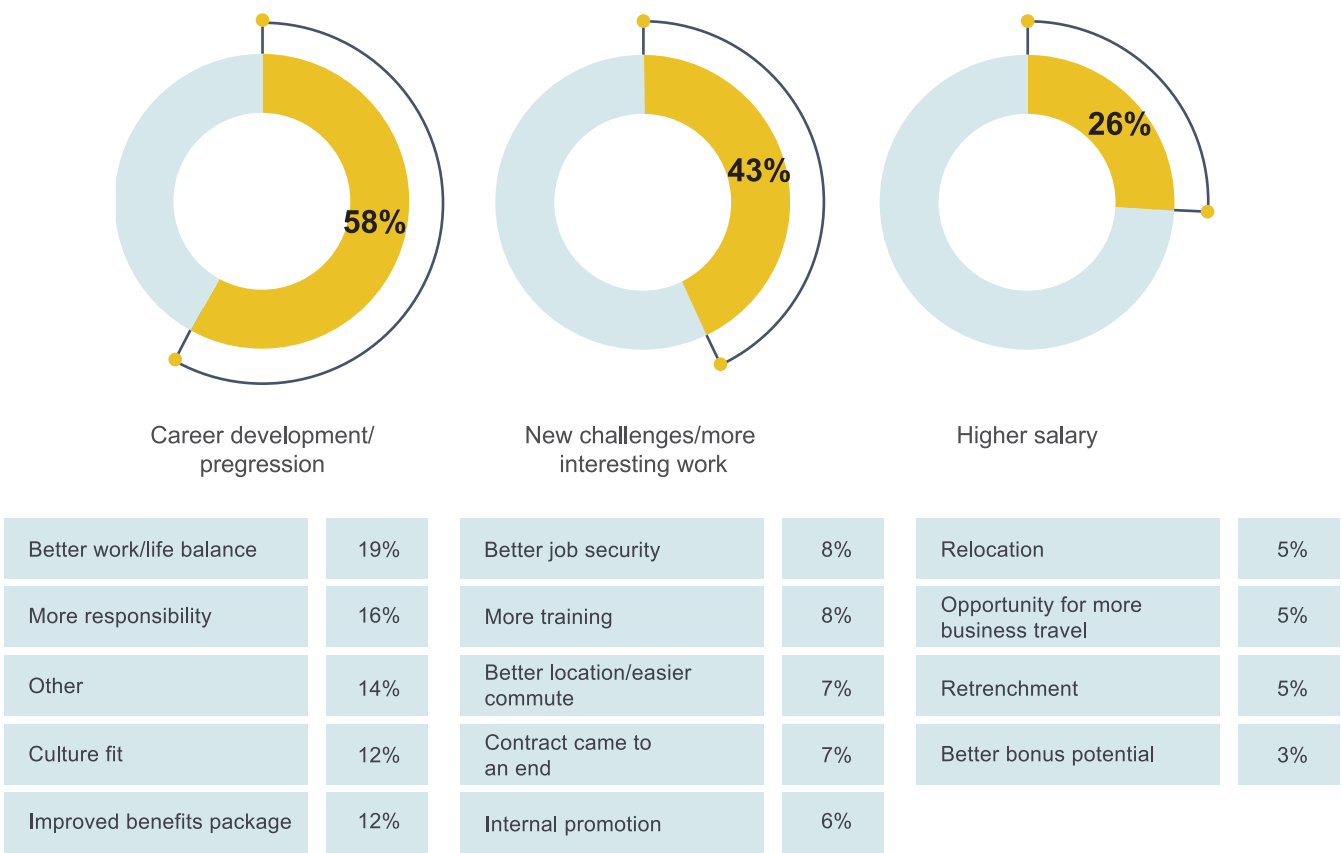
For many, work-life balance can seem like an impossible goal, especially in an era where technology makes workers accessible 24/7. Fears of job loss incentivise longer hours in many instances, and more so the case in the local market at present. A Harvard Business School survey shows that an unbelievable 94% of working professionals reported working more than 50 hours per week and nearly half said they worked more than 65 hours per week.

***7 out of 10  
employees across  
the board feel  
their workload is  
manageable***

# Recruitment

We asked our respondents to rank the top three reasons why they actually leave. Surprisingly, the results were not that different between agency and in-house, or against current remuneration levels (i.e. people earning in the higher bracket had the same reasons for leaving).

## What are the top three reasons for leaving your last role?



Human resources departments should recognise that the number one reason for employees leaving is career development. What is intriguing, is that later on in this survey we asked if training budgets had increased or decreased, 51% have had their training budgets cut, despite this being the number one factor that could influence employee retention.

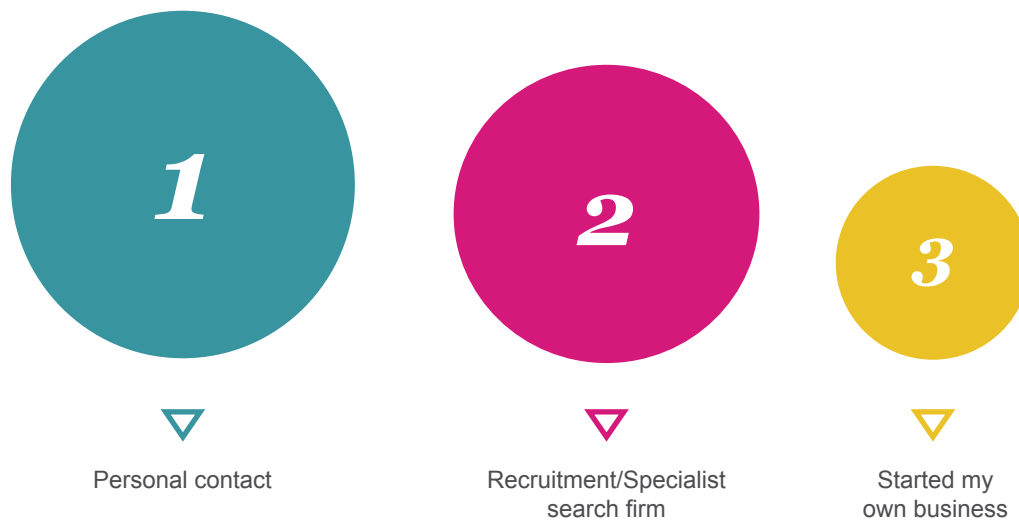
43% move for more interesting work, while only 26% leave for more money, as a sole motivator. A growing trend of seeking a better work-life balance is also emerging, with 18% saying that was a primary consideration. Based on trended data, this figure is likely to rise to between 23%-27% next year, making it the third most significant reason for moving jobs.

Organisations who fail to take these factors into account, will likely see continuing, and evening increasing, staff turnover.

As noted, the variances between large and small organisations are not a factor here. The above diagram depicts total responses. In organisations under 1,000 employees, the top three reasons are; career development (56%), new challenges (37%), and better work-life balance (27%). In organisations over 1000 employees, the top three reasons are; career development (68%), new challenges (50%), and higher salary (36%).

In fact, work-life balance appears to be a greater challenge in smaller organisations than larger ones - a good reason to review current practices within organisations to understand future talent pipeline management.

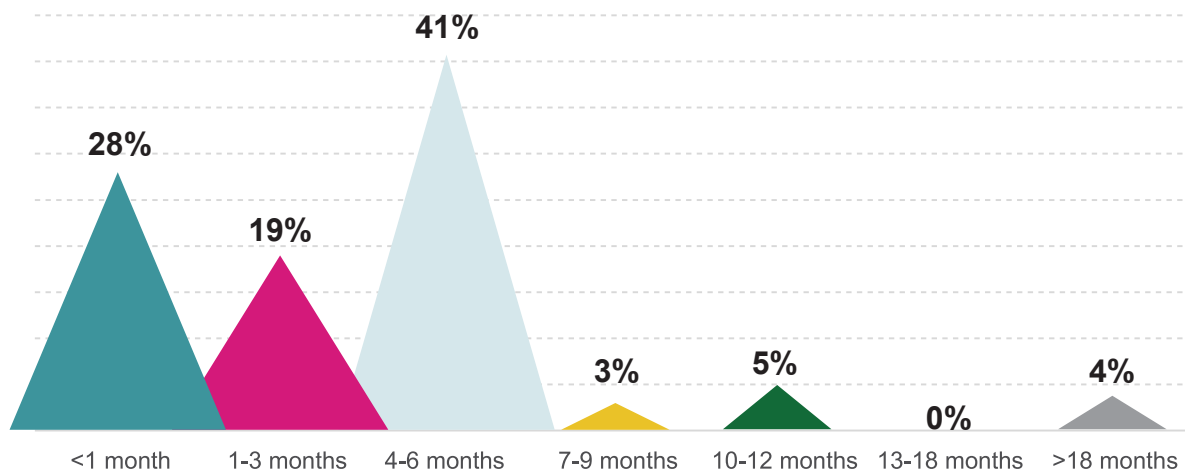
## Top three methods of gaining employment:



There has been little change year on year in the top methods communications practitioners are using to find employment, those being personal contacts and the use of specialist search firms. The third reason, and a completely new entry into our top three, is people setting up their own businesses due to redundancies in the corporate and agency environment. This is highly indicative of the current macroeconomic climate in South Africa, where no fewer than 7% of respondents to this survey indicated that they had been retrenched in the last year.

Organisations continue to seek an overall achievement of cost efficiencies when it comes to recruitment, resulting in the preference to reduce search time by using specialist firms who are able to provide the right candidates within a reasonable timeframe. This turnaround time is quantifiable in monetary terms.

## How long did the search and recruitment process take?



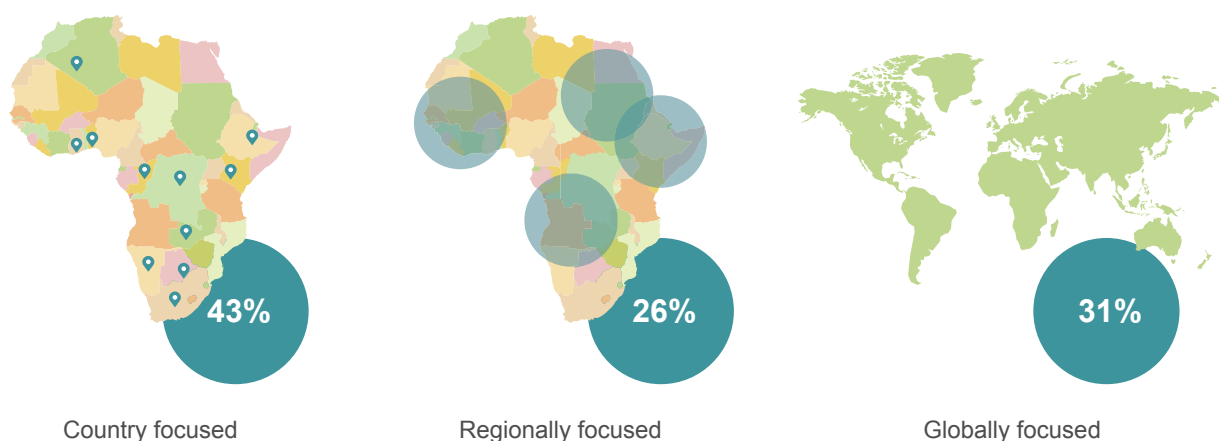
It would appear that those who look for work are taking more than double the time they took in 2015. This is aligned to the challenging economic climate the country is grappling with.



# Geographic Reach

There has been a drastic shift in the geographic focus areas for communicators year on year, most likely as companies consolidate their foothold in their key market rather than exploring non-core business opportunities.

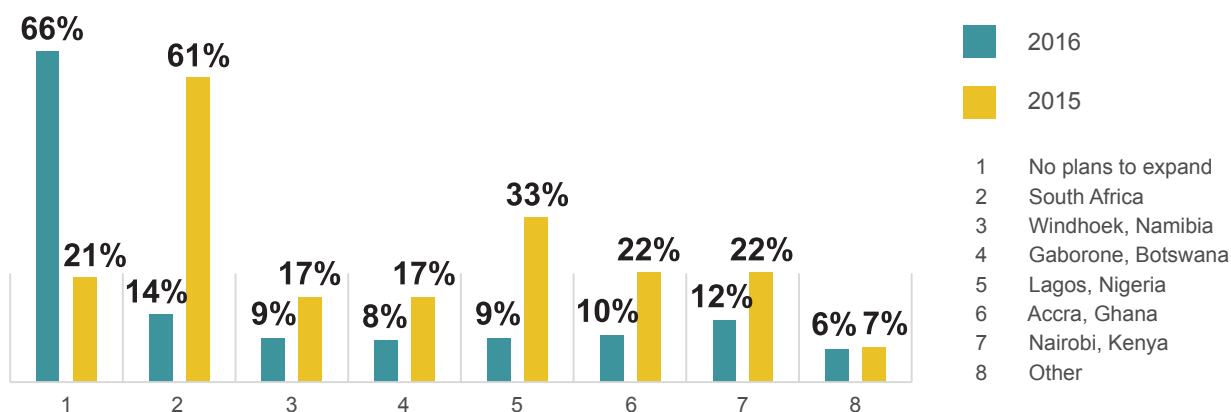
## Is your role:



In 2015, 27% said their role was country focused, while 32% was regionally focused. The 2016 survey results show a massive 16% uplift in a more country based approach and reduction in regional and global focus. Many multinationals noted in the survey that global restructurings meant Africa HQs were relocated to the Middle East or West Africa, leaving less regional and global focus needs for practitioners out of South Africa.

*\*Respondents could choose more than one location*

## Is your business looking to expand their communications team in Africa within the next two years? If so, in which locations?



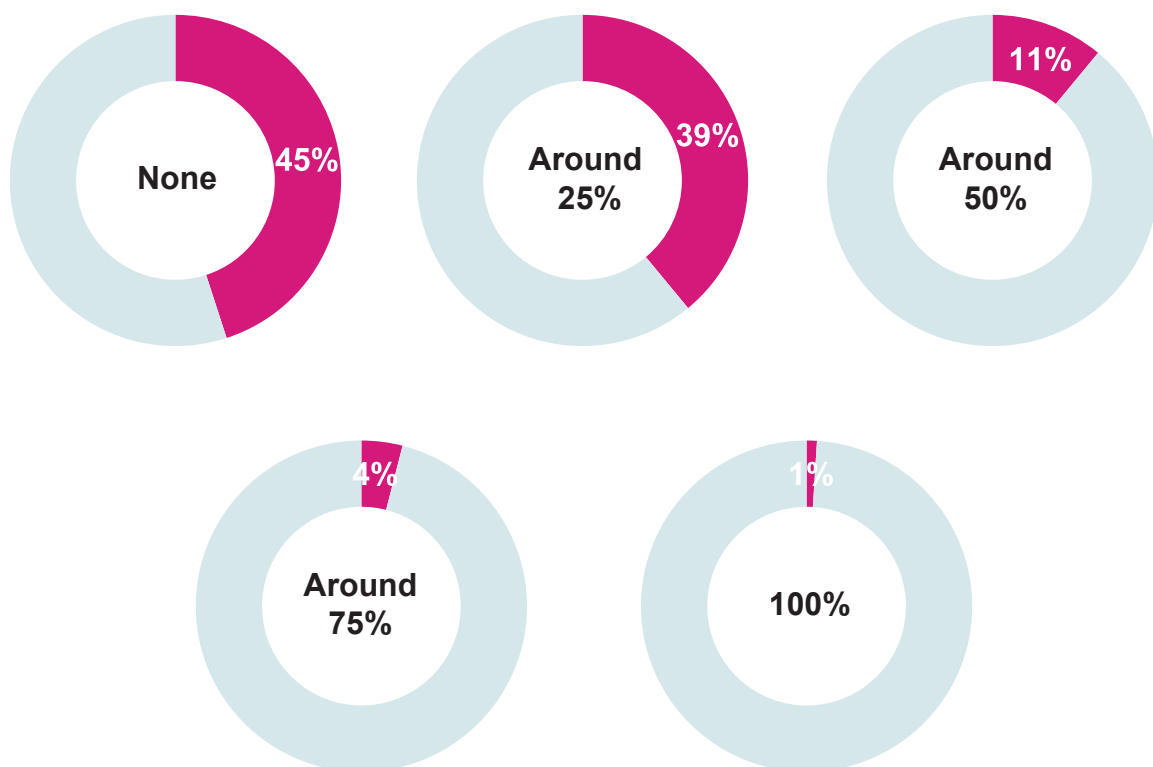
One of the most dramatic shifts that has been observed in the last year, reflective of the current broader economic and socio-political challenges South Africa is facing, is the almost overnight reversal of focusing on expansion and rather consolidating local efforts.

In 2015, communicators were upbeat that there would be local expansions and growth in their departments. At the time, and important to note the survey was done in April 2015 before the major economic slump in July 2015, 61% of communicators felt there would be an opportunity to grow the communications function. The survey of February 2016 shows that only 14% now feel there is growth potential in the next two years – effectively, a 47% decrease in sentiment.

Opportunities to expand the communications functions into other African markets has equally declined, with the biggest drop reflecting the opportunities to expand into Nigeria.

# Outsourcing

How much of the communications function is outsourced to an agency?



With the downward pressure on budgets reaching record highs, coupled with the trend to centralise functions across federated businesses into centres of excellence models, it was not surprising to see that amongst the in-house respondents, 81% say they outsource under 25% of their communication capabilities to agencies. Only 13% outsource 50% of the function and under 5% outsource 75% of the function.

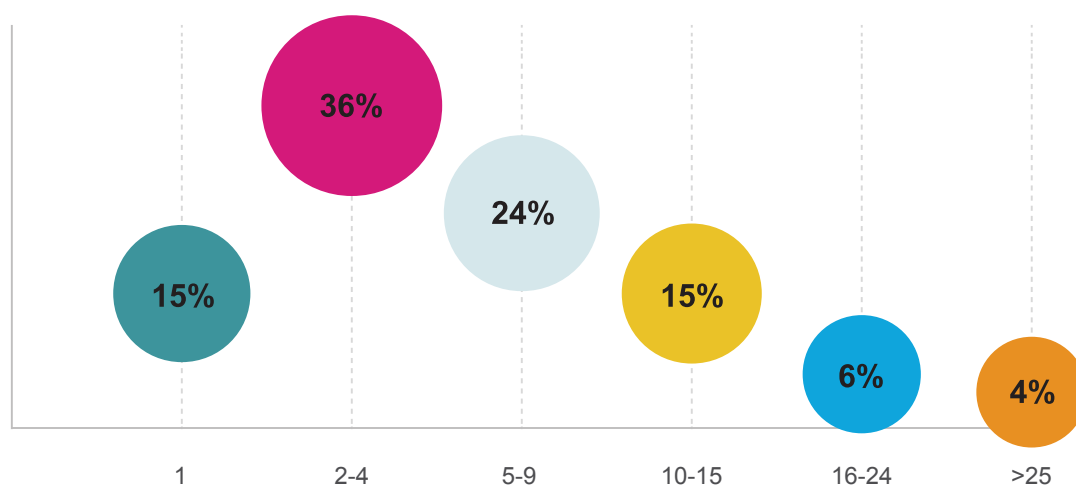
The good news for agencies is that 65% of companies say they will continue to outsource the same amount they are currently doing for the foreseeable future. However, there is a ratio of 2:1 in terms of the number of companies planning to cut back on the amount of work outsourced.

Outsourcing is becoming an increasingly popular option, whereby certain job functions are performed outside a company, instead of having an in-house department or employees manage the workload. Outsourcing is therefore to either another company or an individual.

From an HR perspective, outsourcing has become a major trend in human resources over the past decade. Certain job functions are being sent outside a company instead of being handled by in-house practitioners. Very often, recruitment is one such function that is outsourced. Small and large companies are turning to outsourcing as a way to grow their own business while keeping payroll and overhead costs in check and achieving further cost optimisations by leveraging the economies of scale of specialist firms.

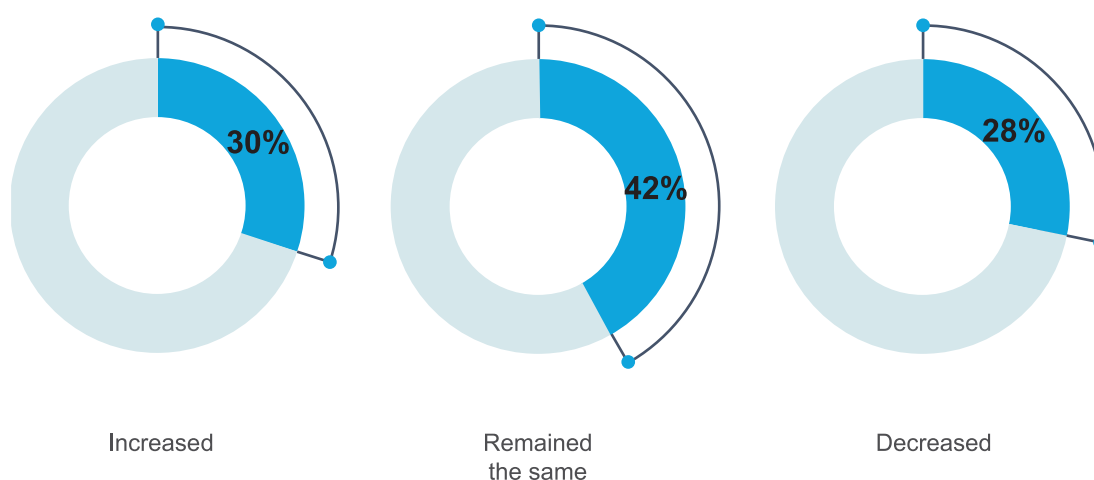
# Teams

## What is the current size of your team?



The average number of team members that are employed within a corporate communications function is three to seven people, with no correlation to size of organisation. Some in-house practitioners who said they work for an organisation of 20,000+ employees had a team of between two and four; while others who work in organisations of under 5,000 employees have teams of five to nine. The data indicates that in South Africa there is no norm in terms of the number of communicators relative to an organisation's size.

## How does your current team size compare to two years ago?

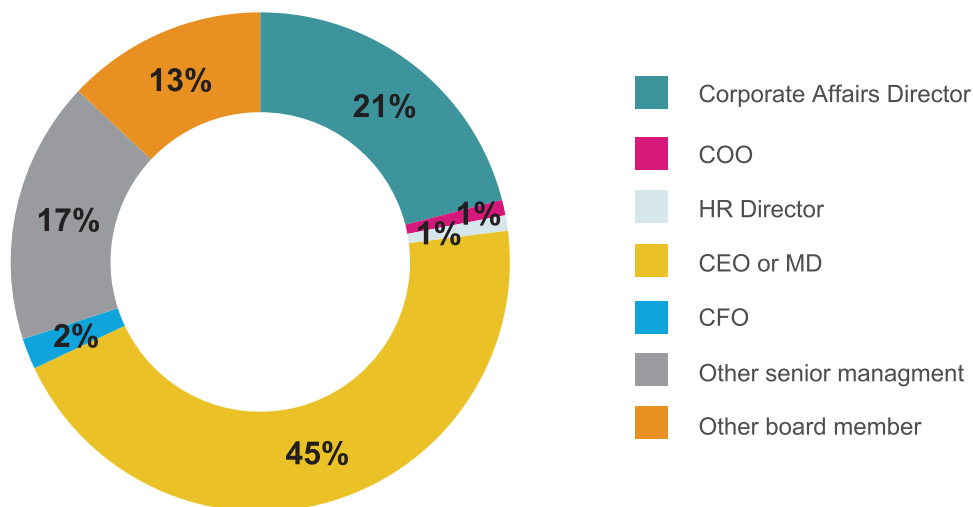


In line with other findings of this research, there is a mixed reaction in terms of resourcing plans for the future on the back of an uncertain economic climate.

Historically, however, nearly 28% of respondents have indicated that the size of their teams have decreased over the past two years, with 30% claiming their teams had increased over the same period.

# Reporting Lines

To whom does the most senior communications professional report?



The majority of communications practitioners surveyed said they report into a managing director level function, with a consistent decline in communicators who report into HR and other support functions.

Further to this, 77% of communicators are measured by defined KPIs on an annual basis. The remainder have indicated that they are informally evaluated, especially for in-house practitioners.

Do you have clearly defined KPIs/financial targets to measure your own performance?

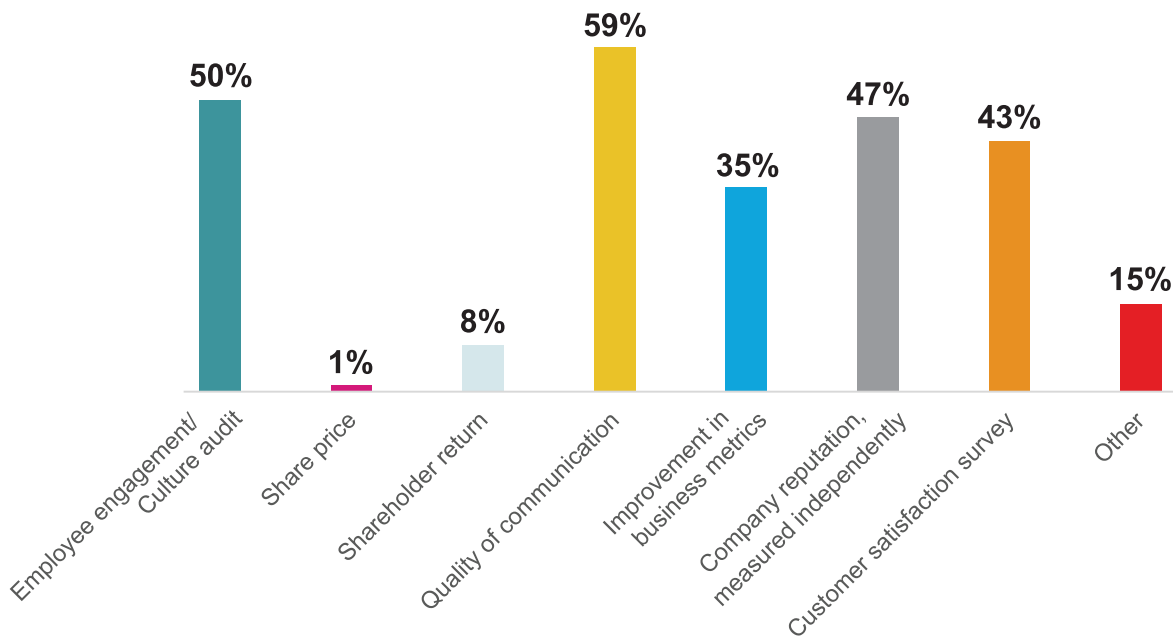


With nearly 3 out of 4 in-house practitioners controlling their own budgets, our attention is turned to the financial challenges of balancing budgets with deliverables. There is an almost equal split among respondents in terms of those who have had their budgets cut over the past two years, and those who have been fortunate enough to have experienced an increase.

The biggest single shift, however, is 17% of respondents whose budgets were cut by more than 20% over a 12 month period.

In terms of measurement, as an assessment of return on effort on financial investment, communicators have indicated that there are a myriad of methods used to assess how the communications function is performing.

What criteria are these targets based on?



43% of in-house practitioners have indicated that they do not conduct an internal communications assessment annually to determine how effective their employee communications.

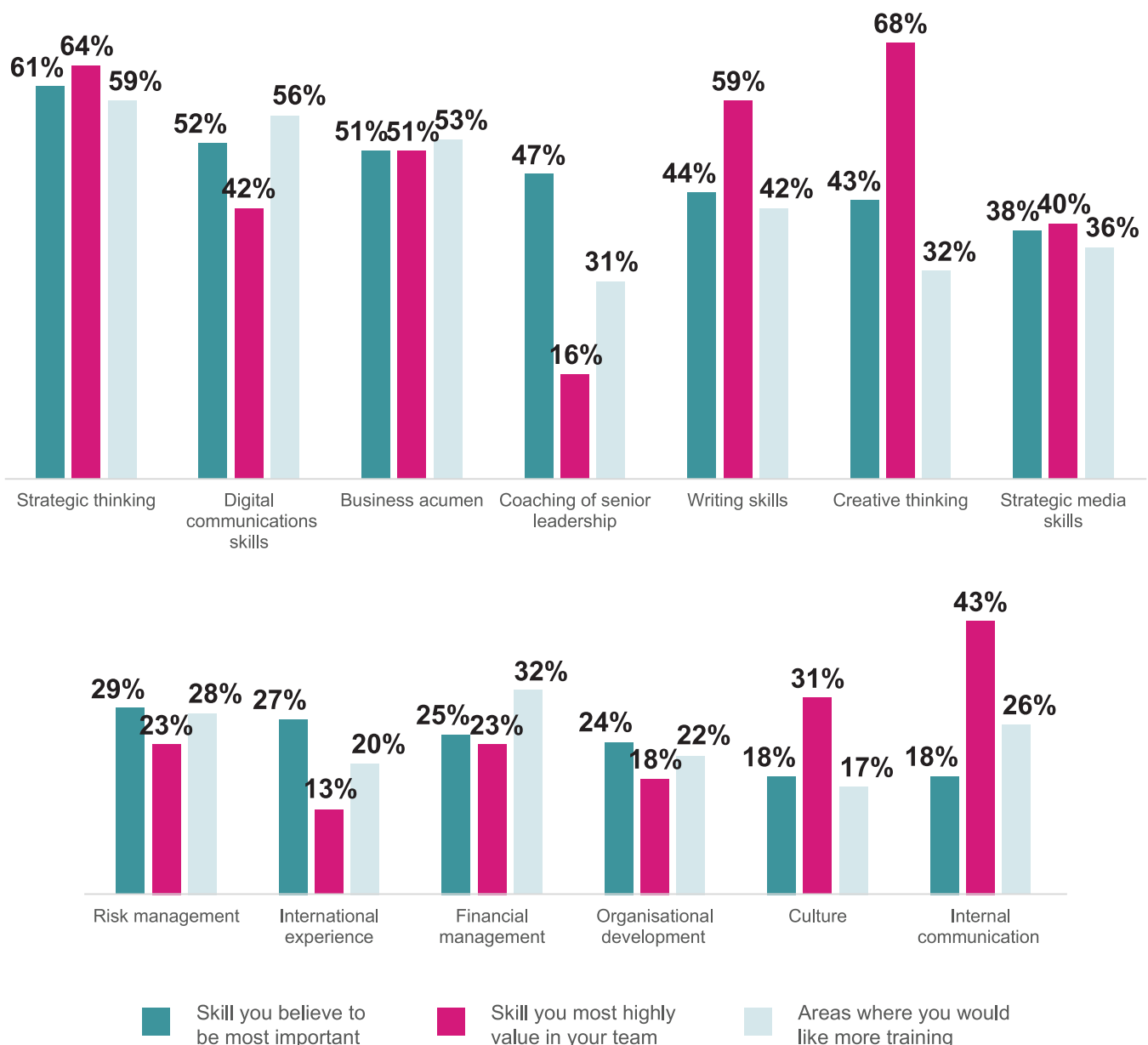
43% *don't measure internal communication*



# Skills Development & Training

The main factor for employees looking for alternative employment opportunities is the lack of skill development within the marketing and communications space. At the same time, one out of two organisations have cut their training budget, which conflicts with the main purpose of ensuring skilled people remain in the organisation.

To better understand skills development requirements, we asked three related questions to assess which competencies are most valued.



In 2015, only 5% of respondents said that business acumen was an important skill for communications practitioners. Encouragingly, this is now regarded as important by 51% of practitioners, and 53% want more skills development opportunities.

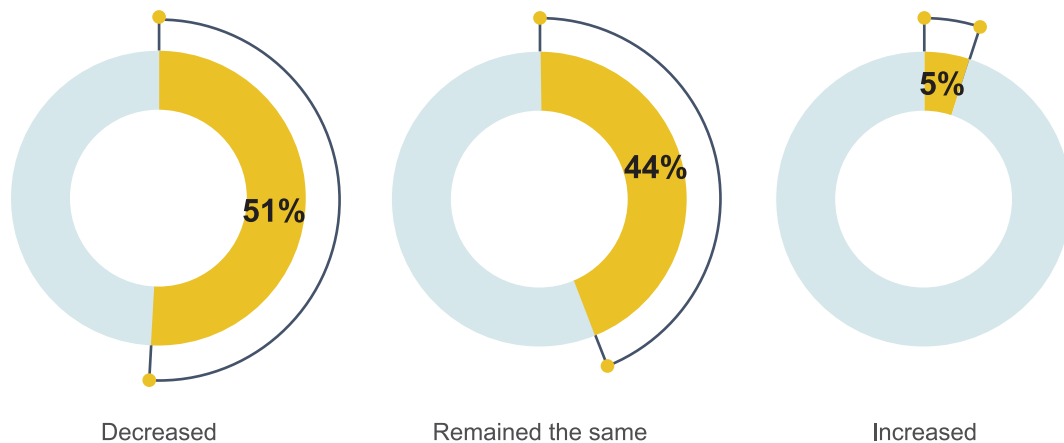
As the business landscape becomes increasingly complex and challenging, and leaders become a vital communications tool, we see that 47% of communicators believe coaching leaders is an important skill and 31% want more training on it. In 2015, only 5% regarded it as important and 30% wanted to be trained on how to support their leadership teams.

An increase in the importance of leadership communication, organisational development, and culture is key in today's rapidly evolving corporate landscape. Knowing what culture is, and how to shape it, is knowing the difference between communicating and engaging. Knowing how to influence your management team and engage your whole organisation in embedding a more empathic culture. The role of the corporate communications professional is increasingly complex yet potentially more influential and is there anyone better placed to have an unhindered view of this state of affairs? But where do you start to tackle the issues, and where can you go to for help?

These are the questions practitioners should be asking themselves with a few to further their depth of influence within their organisations.

Despite all indicators pointing the critical need for skills development due to skills shortages and retention factors, over 50% of companies have seen fit to cut their training budgets in the past year; with 60% saying it will be cut further in this financial year.

### How have your training budgets been affected by the current economic climate?



Business acumen and influencing skills saw the biggest jump in terms of the top skills which communication practitioners use on a daily basis. When asked where further training was required, respondents indicated that coaching senior leaders was still high on the list, as it was last year. Strategy development and creative thinking increased slightly when compared to the previous year's figures, possibly suggesting growing competence in this area.



# Key Business Challenges

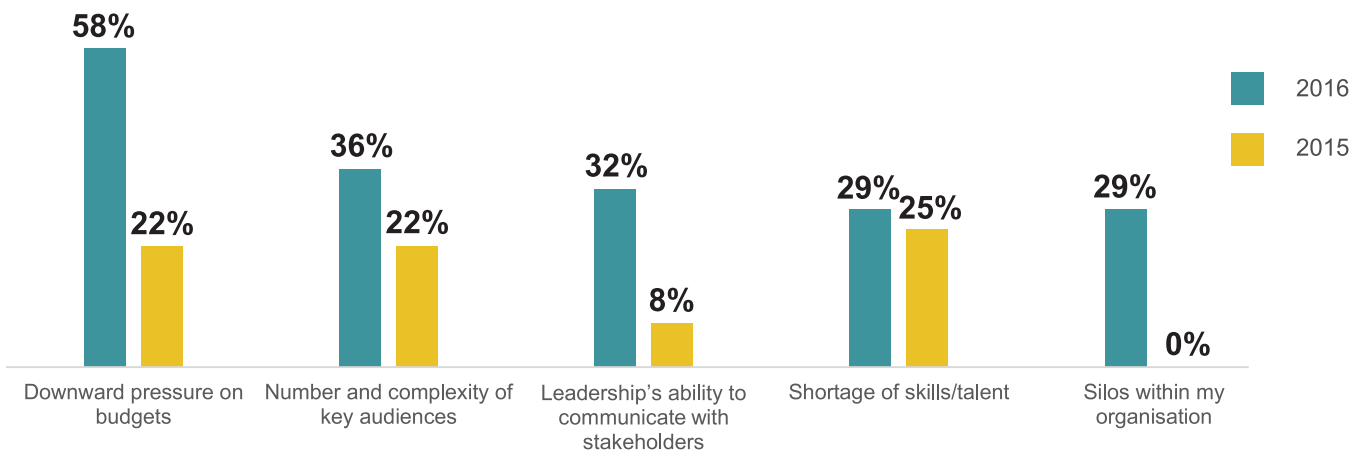
The communications challenges faced by organisations became a key talking point of the 2015 communication survey, and this year has shed additional light on the issues that keep communicators up at night.

Number and complexity of key audiences	36%	Enhancing the priority given to external communications	17%	Online reputation management	24%
Decline of trust in big business	17%	Enhancing the priority given to internal communications	21%	Silos within my organisation	29%
Downward pressure on budgets	58%	Shortage of skills/talent	29%	Social and digital communication	28%
The impact of media reporting on managing reputation	20%	Leadership's ability to communicate with stakeholders	32%	Other	4%

Top five challenges:



If we now compare the top five challenges in 2016 to the key challenges of 2015, the differences becomes apparent in how quickly communicators have had to react to the economic climate in South Africa.



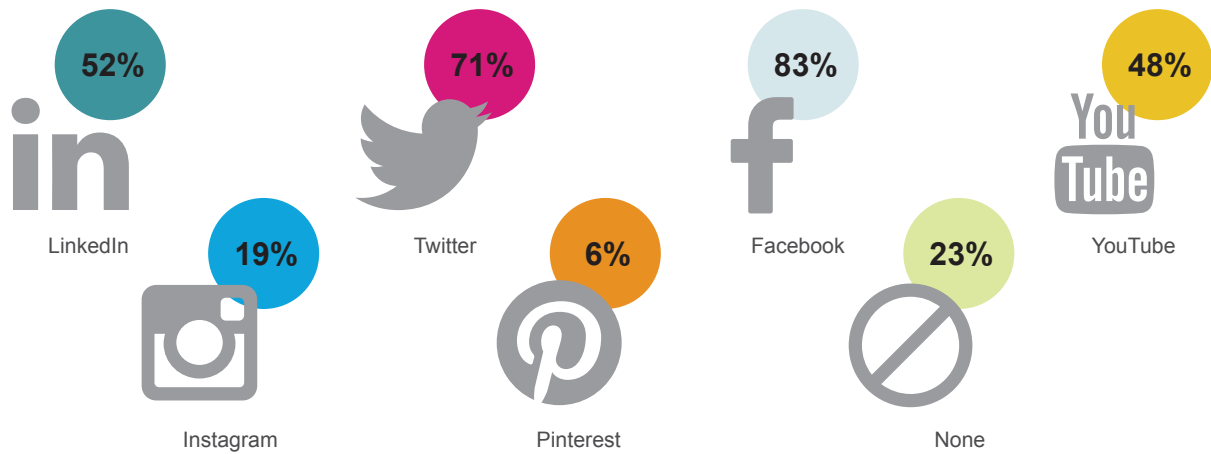
The most statistically significant variances are those around the downward pressure on budgets and the urgent need for leaders to enhance their change communications as businesses continue to perform under pressure. Budgetary pressures have doubled in less than 12 months; there has been a four-fold increase in the need for leadership communication to assist employees and other stakeholders during these challenging times.

# Digital Media

Social media has certainly gained substantial traction over the past few years, with a majority of respondents indicating they use external social media tools. This year’s survey singled out these professionals for the first time with a view to staying abreast of how this important function is evolving.

In the latest research there was a rise in the number of respondents describing themselves as “digital communicators” which in itself reflects growth and development in this specialism.

## Which platforms your company uses to engage stakeholders?



40% of all social media is run by a full-time in-house resource and a further 17% is outsourced – where an agency runs the social media programmes.

Internal use of social media falls somewhat further behind the curve, with 48% of in-house respondents saying they do not use any enterprise social media. Of those who do, SharePoint is by far the most utilised tool. Of those who indicated they had used Yammer, approximately 10% said they stopped due to low adoption and lack of buy-in.

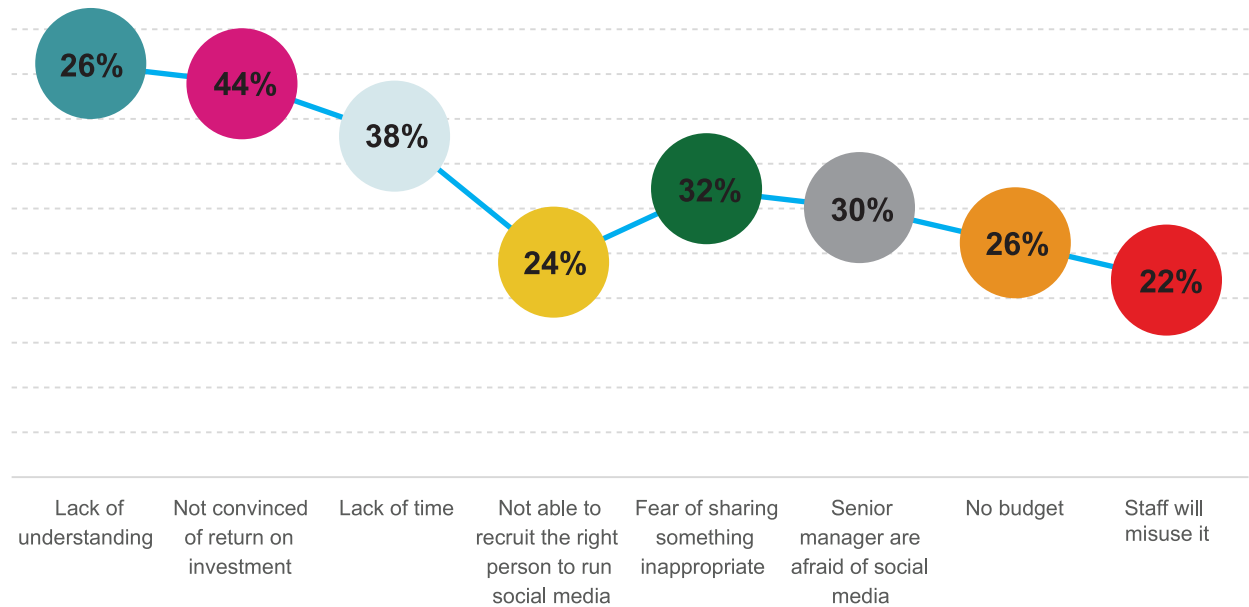
One can appreciate, however, that the growth of internal social media platforms is a cultural and organisational phenomenon globally, and one that is experiencing especially explosive growth in the European, American and Asia markets. The large, young populations of the world are optimising for a mobile-first, cloud-first world and demanding from their employers the same access, speed and collaborative capabilities to problem-solving, that they experience outside of the corporate firewall.

## What enterprise social network do you use to engage with stakeholders and employees within your business?

SharePoint	38%	Jive	3%	Huddle	1%
SnapComms	4%	SalesForce Chatter	1%	IBM Connections	1%
Yammer	9%	My business does not make use of enterprise social networking	48%	Other	9%

Three key challenges emerged as to why organisation do not make use of social media, lack of understanding; no proven return on investment; and no time to implement. These key points go a long way in appreciating why so many organisations find the use of social media challenging.

### What are your company's three biggest challenges in developing its external or internal social media offering?



One out of three communicators acknowledged that their managers are afraid of social media. Correlating to the lack of understanding and measurability, this fear of the unknown is understandable and is a valuable insight for communicators to embark on internal social media education programmes.

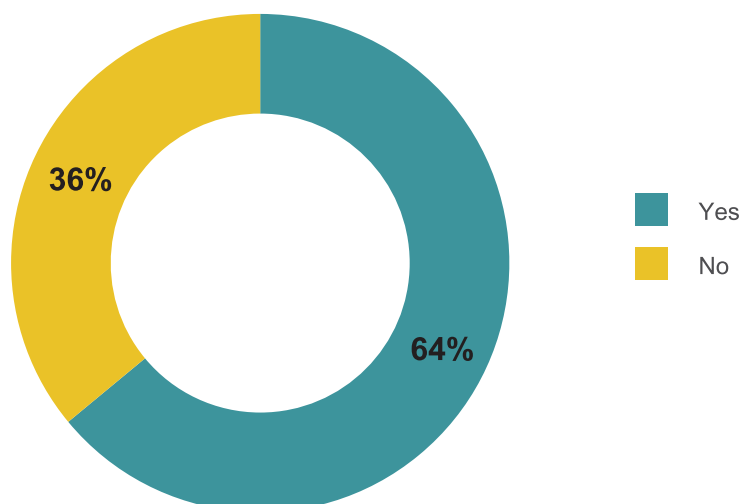
# Future Proofing

**I expect the influence exerted by the communications function to increase in the next two years:**



Encouragingly, despite an extremely difficult economic environment to operate in, 40% of respondents strongly agree that the influence of the communications functions will increase over the next two years. This is still down from 58% in 2015. The variance is likely attributed to organisations cutting training budgets and struggling to retain staff due to the lack of skills development, not to mention other cut backs in the number of staff that increase pressure on the teams that remain in place.

**When my organisation undertakes new projects, the communications team is involved in the process from the beginning:**



In this consolidated view, one can be encouraged to see that 64% of in-house practitioners are involved in projects from the get-go. 47% of agencies are brought in to support their clients from the outset of a project.

Communication perform optimally when the function is included from the outset of a project. All too often, the communications team are brought in to address critical reputation management matters both internally and externally.

# Conclusion

This year's Africa Communications Survey throws certain key challenges into stark relief, at times uncomfortably so. The economic climate is already claiming casualties in the form of retrenchments, budgetary constraints and recruitment freezes. This year's survey highlighted a number of key areas that should provoke much debate within the communications community.

## Plans on hold

In marked contrast to the findings of last year's survey, South African in-house communications teams will not be expanding any time soon, either in terms of local headcount or geographical reach. This highlights the importance of retaining and developing in-house talent and ensuring that communications teams are equipped to manage the increasing demands on their resources as well as being mandated to deal effectively with local issues without necessarily having to 'kow-tow' to a global HQ.

## Skills & training

Two of the biggest challenges facing senior communicators and their teams in the current economic climate are declining budgets and an acute skills shortage. The pressure on the communications function to prove itself at C-suite level demands a different kind of communicator, adept at managing an ever-increasing number of external and internal stakeholders as well as having a deep understanding of key business drivers. The ability of senior communicators to input into a range of business issues and to develop and implement a communications strategy that is completely aligned to business objectives is a trend the VMA Group has noted over the past few years globally.

## Investment in human capital

Topping the list of reasons people leave their jobs is a lack of career development. All the restructuring and re-strategising in the world won't make an ounce of difference if employees aren't engaged, valued and listened to. Replacing lead communicators invariably carries significant time and financial implications and unless a succession plan is in place, may have a severe impact on team performance and output. What the report also highlights is the importance of specialist search firms such as VMA Group to identify talent and to whom professionals turn for help in securing their next role.

## The public sector

For communicators from the public and government sectors, strategic and business skills are no less important. The need for the leaders of these departments and organisations to lead by example when it comes to driving a communications agenda is commercially aligned engaging all stakeholders at every level. This is where digital, social media and stakeholder engagement skills are paramount and it is not surprising that these are skills moving firmly out of the 'nice to have' camp to the 'must have'.

## Leadership communications

Representation of lead communicators on boards or management committees is increasing steadily in the UK and Europe as VMA Group's annual surveys show. In this study, whilst it is encouraging to note that more communicators are reporting at a more senior level, concern over their leadership's ability to communicate with their stakeholders has risen up the list of major business concerns. A belief and commitment to communications must be driven from the top – perhaps this is an opportune time for leadership teams and communicators to proactively look for ways to work more closely together.

## Centres of excellence

In this study, the centre of excellence (CoE) model appears to be becoming popular, often as a cost-saving measure as companies move toward centralising their functions. The model can have far-reaching, long-term benefits. CoEs are a valuable way of collating talent and experience and, where a company is undergoing significant change, often help to ensure that messages are communicated effectively and consistently throughout the organisation.

In keeping with our partnership with PRISA and the IABC for this year's report, we will continue to engage in alliances and partnerships with organisations and industry bodies across Africa to help address the key challenges for communicators across the African regions. We will continue to provide training and skills development through VMA Enhance and to build strong communities of corporate communications and marketing professionals. Never more so have communications teams and practitioners had to demonstrate their value, through strong, strategic narrative which underpins the business strategy, through insightful and practical measurement that clearly demonstrates how continuous and consistent engagement with an organisation's stakeholders impacts the bottom line.



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# About us

Since its inception in 1978, VMA Group has grown to be the leading global resourcing and career partner for corporate and marketing communications, PR and investor relations.

## Specialist Practices:

- Corporate Communications
- Internal Communications
- Financial Services Communications
- Investor Relations
- Healthcare Communications
- Government & Stakeholder Relations
- PR Agency
- Digital Communications & Social Media
- Marketing Communications

## What sets us apart?

### Reputation:

Established over 37 years ago, and a leader in communications recruitment

### Network:

Immediate access to over 40,000 communications professionals

### Global:

VMA Group operates in Europe, Asia-Pacific, Africa and North America

### Advertising:

We have an extensive advertising network at our clients' disposal

### 100% Success:

VMA Group's success rate on retained assignments

### Flexibility:

We offer bespoke services to suit your needs and budgets

### Timeline:

We commit to pre-agreed timelines for recruitment assignments

### Experience:

Almost all consultants are senior excommunications professionals

## Key Services:

- Permanent recruitment
- Interim management
- Retained assignments
- Professional development/training

If you would like to talk to discuss the findings from the survey, your recruitment needs or your next career challenge, please contact a member of VMA Group on +27 (0) 83 338 7794 or +27 (0) 72 634 6550 or email [africa@vmagroup.com](mailto:africa@vmagroup.com)

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*VMA Enhance is the training arm of VMA Group and delivers professional development courses for communications teams across the globe.*

**VMA Enhance, part of VMA Group, delivers professional development courses for communications teams and more general communication and leadership development to managers across organisations.**

Our courses are based on thorough cross-industry skills research and competency frameworks. We provide professional development that is timely and relevant to the needs of corporate communicators in business today. All of our courses are led by a team of highly regarded industry-leading associates. This hand-picked team all have recent in-house experience at a senior level, allowing them to call upon real-life examples and understand the challenges and issues facing communications professionals today.

We offer both face-to-face (1 day) and virtual training programmes (3x90 mins) to suit regional and local teams. Recent programmes delivered for comms teams in Financial Services, FMCG, Healthcare, Insurance, Property & Construction and many more include;

- Strategic Communications Planning
- Trusted Advisor
- Communication Measurement
- Advanced Internal Communications
- Social Media for PR/IC
- Bullet-Proof your Media Message

"The biggest challenge of learning functions in global companies such as Unilever is balancing the fine line between learning and development with managing cost. Although the best method of delivering learning is through instructor-led training, the associated cost can be astronomical when each penny saved matters. However, this does not mean that learning and development should be put in the backburner.

This was precisely the challenge I faced as I developed the professional skills-development programmes for the global Communications team in Unilever. However, by working with VMA, we have achieved transforming a Strategic Communications workshop from a face-to-face to a virtual workshop. In fact, we managed to save as much as 60% of the budget, and increase the number of participants at the same time – a definite win-win situation."

**Shanahan Chua**  
**Manager, Global Communications Capability Building, Communications Academy**  
**Unilever**



**Europe | Asia-Pacific | Africa | North America**

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# Notes





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