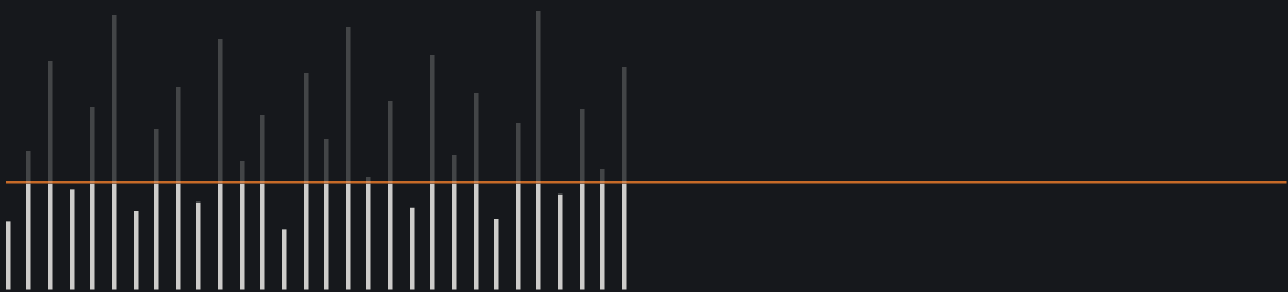
The State of Internal Communication 2026

A report on the distance between what internal communication measures and who it actually reaches.



66.2%

of internal emails are opened. Internal email works.

POLITEMAIL 2026
CHANNEL PERFORMANCE · MEASURED

45%

of employees without a desk are not informed about why their company changes what it changes.

STAFFBASE/YOUGOV 2025
EMPLOYEE-REPORTED OUTCOME · MEASURED

80%

of the global workforce is not desk-bound for most of its role. That changes what “reachable” means.

EMERGENCE CAPITAL
STRUCTURAL ESTIMATE · DATED

Sources: PoliteMail 2026, Staffbase/YouGov 2025, Emergence Capital. Full citations at the end.

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What is in this report

CHANNEL PERFORMANCE
Desk-based · measured evidence

WORKFORCE COVERAGE
Non-desk · measured evidence

CONCEPTUAL
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The measurement problem

CHAPTER OPENS

Internal communication has never been better measured than it is today. Platforms report open rates, attention time, click-throughs, reach. The numbers, on the whole, look good.

That is the problem.

We measure the channel that is easy to measure. Email leaves a trail: it can be opened, timed, counted. And when you count it, internal email turns out to work – the average internal email is opened by 66.2% of the people who receive it, and 83.7% of those who open it spend real time with it.

Meanwhile, 45% of employees without a desk say they are not really, or not at all, informed about the reasons behind the changes their company makes.

Both things are true at once. That is the finding this report is about – and it turns on a distinction internal communication rarely makes explicit.

Channel performance is not workforce coverage.

CHANNEL PERFORMANCE

A dashboard measures channel performance: what happened to a message among the people a particular channel actually reached.

WORKFORCE COVERAGE

It says nothing about workforce coverage – what share of the people an organisation needed to reach ever had a realistic opportunity to receive it, through that channel or any other.

READING NOTE

Throughout this report, blue marks channel performance and desk-based respondents; amber marks workforce coverage and non-desk respondents. A dashed rule marks a conceptual framework rather than measured data.

INTRODUCTION
CONTINUED

Non-desk employees report measurably worse communication outcomes than desk-based respondents within the same survey. And the working world is not mostly desk-based to begin with: roughly 80% of the global workforce is not desk-bound for most of its role. None of that proves internal communication has failed those employees — the evidence here does not establish that. It does establish this: many of the metrics organisations rely on are generated by digital traces — logins, opens, clicks — left behind by behaviours that are easiest to capture where work is already organised around a screen. The measurement risk is greatest where those digital traces are weakest.

Most of the world's workforce is reachable. Just not only through desk-based channels.

EVIDENCE BASE

This report brings together the primary research that maps that gap: Gallup's *State of the Global Workplace 2026*, the Staffbase/YouGov 2025 survey of 3,574 employees across six countries, PoliteMail's benchmark of more than two billion internal emails, Emergence Capital's count of the deskless workforce, and Edison Research's *Infinite Dial 2026* and *Share of Ear*.

We have added no data of our own. Where a widely repeated figure could not be traced to an original study, we left it out — including several that would have suited our argument.

01 The invisible 80%

THE SIZE OF THE GAP
TWO WORKFORCES, TWO EXPERIENCES
WHERE THEY ARE TOLD TO LOOK

EMERGENCE CAPITAL
STAFFBASE / YOUGOV 2025

CHAPTER 01 · I

The size of the gap

EMERGENCE CAPITAL
STRUCTURAL ESTIMATE

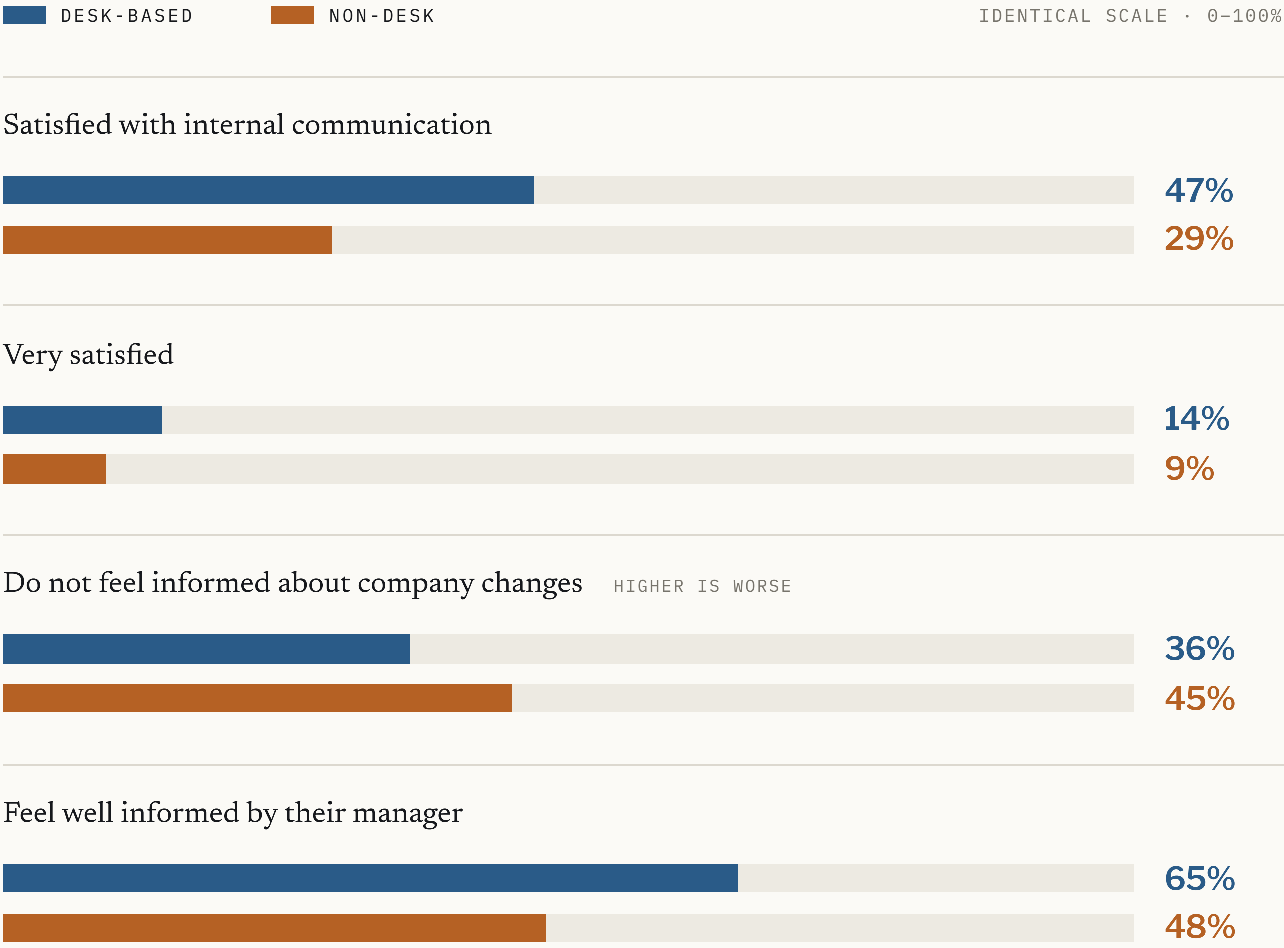
Around 2.7 billion people, roughly 80% of the global workforce, work without a desk. They are on production lines, in wards, in delivery vans, on shop floors, in kitchens, on construction sites, in warehouses, on the road between client visits and behind hotel and restaurant counters. The figure comes from Emergence Capital's *State of Technology for the Deskless Workforce*, published in 2018 and repeated in its 2020 edition. The figure is dated and should be read as a structural estimate rather than a current census — the shape of the world's labour force does not shift quickly, but the number itself is not fresh.

STAFFBASE / YOUGOV
FEBRUARY 2025
N = 3,574

What has been measured recently is what those people experience. In February 2025, Staffbase and YouGov surveyed 3,574 employees across Australia, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, the UK and the US. The survey sorted respondents by how much of their work happens at a computer: 51% work exclusively or mainly on one ("desk-based"), 26% mostly or entirely without one ("non-desk"), and 23% do both about equally.

That 26% sits well below the global 80% above, and it should. This is a six-country survey of advanced economies, where desk work is heavily over-represented compared with the world as a whole. It is not a census of the deskless workforce and is not offered as one. What it is is a within-study comparison between desk-based and non-desk respondents, surveyed using the same methodology — and the comparison is the finding.

Two workforces, two experiences



Source: Staffbase and YouGov, 2025 International Employee Communication Impact Study. n=3,574 across six countries. A within-study comparison, not a census of the deskless workforce.

READING THE COMPARISON

Read the second row again. Nine per cent of people without a desk are very satisfied with how their employer communicates with them. Not dissatisfied-but-coping. Nine per cent at the top of the scale – and 14% among the colleagues who sit at a screen all day, which is its own verdict on how well any of this is working.

The gap is not a rounding error at the margins of an otherwise healthy picture. On every measure above, the non-desk workforce sits behind – by five points at the top of the satisfaction scale, nine on feeling informed about change, seventeen on being well informed by a manager, eighteen on overall satisfaction. **The size varies; the direction never does.** Not one measure runs the other way.

And one figure in the survey is not a matter of degree at all.

12%

of non-desk employees say they never receive any communication from senior leadership. Not rarely, not too little, not badly timed. Never.

STAFFBASE/YOUGOV 2025 · NON-DESK RESPONDENTS

ONE IN EIGHT

Whatever the people running these organisations say about strategy, values or where the company is going, one in eight of the people without a desk has never once been on the receiving end of it.

Only 9% of employees without a desk are very satisfied with how their employer communicates with them.

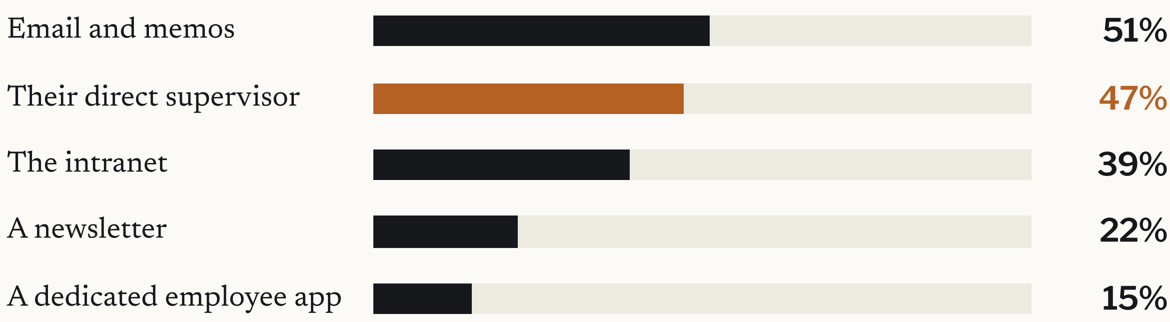
STAFFBASE/YOUGOV 2025

Where they are told to look

WHOLE SAMPLE
N = 3,574

Staffbase and YouGov also asked the whole sample – desk-based, non-desk and mixed employees together – one direct question: where do you actually get your news and information about your employer? In order, they named:

MAIN SOURCE OF COMPANY INFORMATION · WHOLE SAMPLE, NOT NON-DESK ONLY



Source: Staffbase/YouGov 2025, all respondents – desk-based, non-desk and mixed together.

THE CHANNEL THAT TRAVELS

Three of the top four are commonly visual formats that require a moment to read. The second – the supervisor – is the one channel that travels to where the work is, which is likely why it carries so much of the load. It is also the least controllable: it depends on whether a particular manager remembered, understood and had time. Only 48% of non-desk employees feel well informed by their manager, against 65% of desk workers.

EMPLOYEE APPS

Employees who use an employee app report notably stronger crisis-communication ratings: 68% rate their organisation's crisis communication as good or excellent, against 52% overall. Yet only 15% of respondents name an employee app as their main source of company information. Employee apps are often deployed precisely to improve access for frontline and non-desk employees – which makes the gap between those two figures worth noting, not explaining away.

CHAPTER 01 · IV

The point

None of this shows that the intranet, newsletters or email are inherently poor channels. Email, as chapter 2 shows, performs better than almost anyone assumes. Their usefulness depends, in part, on whether employees have a practical opportunity to consume them.

The gap cannot be explained by channel-performance metrics alone. Coverage is the part those metrics cannot answer.

CHAPTER 01
CLOSES

Nearly every channel a company owns is good at telling you how it performed among the people it reached. None of them, on its own, tells you who it never reached at all — and that distinction is where the rest of this report lives.

CHAPTER 02

02 Why the metrics say everything is fine

THE NUMBER NOBODY QUOTES
WHAT AN OPEN RATE IS NOT
THE ILLUSION, STATED PLAINLY

POLITEMAIL 2026
2BN+ INTERNAL EMAILS

The number nobody quotes

POLITEMAIL 2026 BENCHMARK

PoliteMail's 2026 benchmark covers more than two billion internal emails sent to nearly eleven million employees across ten S&P sectors. It is one of the few datasets of any size that measures what actually happens to corporate email after it is sent, rather than what the people sending it assume happens.

66.2%

unique open rate – the headline number. Two employees in three open the internal email their employer sends them.

POLITEMAIL 2026 · CHANNEL PERFORMANCE
MEASURED EVIDENCE

NOT MARKETING EMAIL

Internal email is not marketing email, and benchmarking the two as though they were the same behaviour is not especially useful – the two get compared anyway, and the comparison flatters nobody. The relationship, context and reason for receiving an internal email are fundamentally different from those of a marketing email.

The intuition that internal email is broadly ignored is not supported by the benchmark.

So if the channel works, why does the previous chapter look the way it does?

What an open rate is not

Three things, and PoliteMail names the first one itself.

First

First, the number is generous. The people who publish this benchmark are explicit that open rates flatter: automated security scans, outdated distribution lists and passive opens all register as opens without a human reading anything. Their words, not ours – "open rates can be misleading... giving a false sense of success". We are citing 66.2% as the best available measure of internal email performance, and the organisation that produced it is explicit that these effects can inflate it – the true human-open figure may be lower. Hold that thought; it makes the rest of this chapter worse, not better.

Second

Second, an open is not a read. PoliteMail also tracks attention: 83.7% of people who open an internal email spend more than three seconds with it and do not immediately delete it – the "attention rate". But 14% of openers skim, spending less than 30% of the message's predicted reading time with it. Roughly a third of all recipients never get past the subject line at all.

MEASURED READING TIME

The average corporate email contains about 500 words, which PoliteMail calculates as a two-minute read. Employees receive around 14 a month, and the time actually measured on them totals 33 minutes – slightly more than the reading time those messages were predicted to need.

33 min

A MONTH

the measured reading time on the corporate emails in PoliteMail's benchmark. Not a total for internal communication: PoliteMail measures email, not meetings, managers, apps, intranets, chat or anything else.

CAVEAT PoliteMail measures email, not all internal communication. This figure describes one channel and cannot be read as attention to internal communication as a whole.

HOW TO READ IT

That total is easy to overstate in a specific direction. It is not evidence that employees ignore internal email: the measured time is, in aggregate, roughly what the messages ask for. Nor is it evidence that everyone read carefully: an average sitting close to the predicted time is also consistent with wide variation underneath it – some people skimming, others opening nothing at all, others spending far longer. And it is not a measure of internal communication as a whole, however often it gets quoted as one – it is a measure of one channel, corporate email, produced by a benchmark built to measure exactly that channel and nothing else. What happens in meetings, with a manager, in an employee app, on an intranet or in a team chat is outside what these thirty-three minutes can tell us, in either direction.

For messages containing links, click rate is 7% of recipients and 10% of openers.

Third

Third – and this is the one that matters – an open rate is a channel-performance metric, not a workforce-coverage metric. It answers a narrow question with real precision: of the people this email was sent to, what happened? It cannot answer a different, prior question – what share of the people the organisation needed to reach were sent it, or could realistically have received it, at all. Many channel-performance dashboards, PoliteMail's included, begin measuring at or after "sent". Nothing in it can tell you who never reached that starting line.

A good open rate can tell you that email worked. It cannot tell you whether email was enough.

Where measurement begins

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK · BRANDSCAST · NOT MEASURED DATA

WORKFORCE COVERAGE

Intended workforce – everyone the message is meant for

↓

Reachable through this channel – has the login, the app, the inbox, the shift overlap

CHANNEL-PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT TYPICALLY BEGINS HERE

CHANNEL PERFORMANCE

Delivered

↓

Opened / played

↓

Attention

↓

Understood or acted on

CAPTION

A conceptual sequence, not a measured funnel – no percentages are attached to it. The coverage problem begins above the line.

The illusion, stated plainly

WHAT THE DASHBOARD SAYS

A communications team looks at a dashboard reporting 66% open, 84% attention and healthy clicks, and concludes that internal communication is working. The dashboard gives them good reason to believe the channel is working — among the population represented in it.

Whether the 45% of non-desk staff who say they are not informed about company changes sit inside or outside that population, the dashboard cannot say. That is not a gap in this particular benchmark; it is what a channel-performance metric is. It is built to describe, with real precision, what happens after a message enters the channel. It was never built to describe who never had the channel open to them in the first place, and nothing in it distinguishes those two situations.

TWO FACTS, NEITHER CANCELLING THE OTHER

The open rate is also inflated in a specific, documented direction — automated security scans, stale distribution lists and passive opens all count as opens without a human reading anything, by PoliteMail's own account. That may push the true reading number lower, not higher. It does not, on its own, tell us anything about coverage: a channel can be simultaneously over-counted among the people it reaches and silent about the people it does not. Neither fact cancels the other.

The risk comes when strong performance inside a measurable channel is interpreted as evidence that the intended workforce was fully covered.

This helps explain how a desk/non-desk communication gap can persist without ever showing up as a failure in the dashboards used to track it. It is not being ignored. It is not being seen.

CHAPTER 03

03 Why it matters

EMPLOYEE-REPORTED OUTCOMES FIRST
THEN MACRO ENGAGEMENT CONTEXT
THE REGIONAL PICTURE

STAFFBASE / YOUGOV 2025
GALLUP 2026

CHAPTER 03 · I

What poor communication is associated with

EMPLOYEE-REPORTED · ASSOCIATION ONLY

Engagement is not a communication metric, and it would be dishonest to present internal communication as the sole cause of anything as large as global disengagement. What the Staffbase/YouGov survey can show is narrower and still useful: it asked employees directly about their own employer's communication and their own intentions, and the association between the two is not subtle.

63%

of employees who are considering leaving their job name poor internal communication as a contributing factor.

STAFFBASE/YOUGOV 2025 · SELF-REPORTED

THE OTHER DIRECTION

And in the other direction: of employees who rate their organisation's communication as excellent, 76% say they are “very likely” to stay, against 20% of those who rate it as poor. These are employees' own reports of their own communication and their own intentions – an association, not an experiment. It cannot prove that improving communication would, on its own, change someone's mind about leaving. What it shows is that the two move together consistently, at scale, across a sample of more than three thousand employees.

IMPACT, ASKED DIRECTLY

The same survey also asked employees to rate communication's impact directly, rather than inferring it from intentions to leave. Majorities report that internal communication has some or a great impact on their productivity at work (63%), their motivation to do their best work (67%), and their understanding of the company's vision and mission (65%). These are still employees reporting on their own experience, not an independent measurement of productivity or motivation — but three separate questions converging on the same answer is a pattern worth taking seriously.

SOME OR A GREAT IMPACT, AS REPORTED BY EMPLOYEES · STAFFBASE/YOUGOV 2025

63%
their productivity at work

67%
their motivation to do their best work

65%
their understanding of the company's vision and mission

Employees reporting on their own experience — not an independent measurement of productivity or motivation.

The wider picture

GALLUP 2026
MACRO CONTEXT

Step back from individual perception to macro, independently tracked data, and a much larger problem comes into view – one internal communication is only a single input to, but sits inside all the same. Gallup's *State of the Global Workplace 2026*, reporting on 2025, puts global employee engagement at 20%. It was 23% in 2022.

20%

global employee engagement in 2025 – down from 23% in 2022.

TWO DETAILS

Two details make this edition different from previous ones. It is the first time engagement has fallen in two consecutive years, and no region increased. The decline is not simply one region dragging down the global average: Gallup reports that no region increased.

MANAGERS

Managers are where it is happening. Gallup is direct about this: lower engagement among managers "accounts for most of the recent downturn" in engagement overall. Manager engagement now stands at 22%, down nine points since 2022, and most of that fall arrived in a single year – from 27% to 22% between 2024 and 2025. Managers used to enjoy what Gallup calls an engagement premium. They are now roughly as disengaged as the people they lead.

ADJACENT FACTS
· NOT A CAUSAL CLAIM

That matters here for a specific reason. 47% of the whole sample named their direct supervisor as a main source of company information – second only to email. Non-desk employees are also less likely than desk-based employees to feel well informed by their manager: 48% against 65%. And manager engagement itself, as above, has just fallen sharply in a single year. None of this tells us that managers are the reason the non-desk gap exists, or that manager disengagement is causing it – the data does not establish that link. It does put two facts uncomfortably close together: managers are an important source of company information, and managers are the group whose own engagement has fallen fastest.

FACT ONE · STAFFBASE/YOUGOV 2025

47%

of the whole sample name their direct supervisor as a main source of company information.

FACT TWO · GALLUP 2026

22%

manager engagement in 2025, down nine points since 2022.

Two separate studies, placed side by side. The available evidence does not establish a causal link between them.

GALLUP 2026 · MACRO ESTIMATE

$10T

estimated annual cost of low engagement in lost productivity – about 9% of global GDP.

READ THIS WITH THE NUMBER, NOT AFTER IT

This is the cost of low engagement *broadly*, not a cost attributed to poor communication specifically – Gallup does not isolate communication as a cause anywhere in this figure.

IN THE REPORT'S OWN WORDS

Gallup puts the annual cost of low engagement at approximately $10 trillion in lost productivity, or 9% of global GDP. This is the cost of low *engagement* broadly, not a cost attributed to poor communication specifically – Gallup does not isolate communication as a cause anywhere in this figure.

The estimate is built by applying meta-analyses of the engagement–productivity link to GDP per worker and scaling globally. It should be read as an order of magnitude, not an invoice – and it measures the cost of low engagement across the whole economy, not a return on any single organisation's communication programme.

The regional picture

WORLD REGION	ENGAGED
United States and Canada	**31%**
Europe	**12%**

COUNTRY (EUROPE)	ENGAGED
Spain	**10%**
France	**8%**
Poland	**7%**
Croatia	**7%**

Source: Gallup, State of the Global Workplace 2026. Country figures are three-year rolling averages.

Regional engagement in 2025 ran from 31% in the United States and Canada down to 12% in Europe – and Europe has been the lowest region in the world for years running. Beneath that average, single-digit engagement is ordinary: France at 8%, Poland and Croatia at 7%. Spain sits at 10%, down from 18% in 2012.

Two honest qualifications. Gallup's country figures are three-year rolling averages rather than snapshots of a single year, so they move slowly by construction. And the European picture is not uniformly deteriorating: Spain fell as low as 6% in 2016 and 2017, recovered to 7% in 2018 and 2019, and has climbed roughly a point at a time since. What is stable is the distance: at regional level, Europe's 12% engagement rate is less than half the 31% recorded in the United States and Canada.

Gallup also shows how far this is from inevitable. In organisations it classes as best practice, 79% of managers are engaged – close to four times the global average of 22%. Those organisations are spread across every region and industry in the study, so this is not a story about one rich market or one forgiving sector. The comparison does not tell us which interventions caused the difference. It does show that low manager engagement is not inevitable.

Managers are a key source of company information for employees – and the group whose own engagement has fallen fastest.

CHAPTER 03 · IV

What chapter 4 has to answer

Non-desk employees report weaker communication outcomes than their desk-based colleagues, consistently, across every measure in chapter 1. At the same time, the metrics organisations commonly use describe what happens inside individual channels, not whether the intended workforce was ever fully covered by them. The evidence in this report does not tell us how much of that gap is caused by insufficient coverage. It tells us that the dashboards organisations already have cannot answer the question – and that not knowing is itself worth acting on, at a moment when engagement has fallen for two years running and the cost of disengagement is measured in trillions.

Which leaves a specific question, and it is not “which channel performs best”. Email should not be replaced; it works for the people it reaches. The question is about coverage, not performance, and it is narrower and harder:

What can carry a company's message to someone whose hands and eyes are already busy, without asking them to stop?

04

The channel that doesn't ask you to stop

BLOCKING AND NON-BLOCKING
AUDIO IS ALREADY A MASS HABIT
THE BENCHMARK THAT DOESN'T EXIST
ADDITION, NOT REPLACEMENT

EDISON RESEARCH 2026
SHARE OF EAR Q4 2025
ÁMBITOS 2026

CHAPTER 04 · I

Blocking and non-blocking

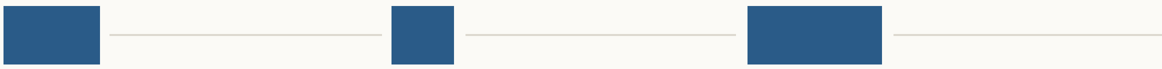
TERMS USED
IN THIS CHAPTER

Many of the dominant channels described in the first three chapters share one constraint. Email, intranets, newsletters and slide decks require a moment to read; all-hands meetings require synchronous attention. We use blocking here as shorthand for channels that require sustained visual or synchronous attention – not a claim that email is literally always blocking, or that every email demands the same focus. They are not worse for being blocking – a document you can re-read, search and forward is often exactly what a message needs. But blocking is a precondition, and for many non-desk roles that precondition is harder to meet during significant parts of the working day.

TWO ATTENTION MODES

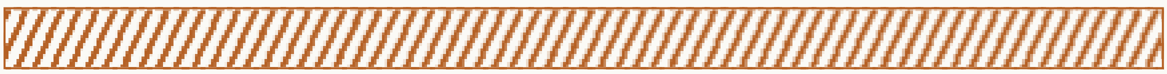
CONCEPTUAL · NOT MEASURED

BLOCKING – SUSTAINED VISUAL OR SYNCHRONOUS ATTENTION



Consumption happens in a dedicated moment: the message waits until work stops.

NON-BLOCKING – EYES-FREE, ASYNCHRONOUS WINDOW



Consumption can run alongside an activity rather than interrupting it.

NOTE They are not worse for being blocking – a document you can re-read, search and forward is often exactly what a message needs.

WHAT AUDIO CAN DO

Audio is one of the few asynchronous formats that does not require sustained visual attention. It can arrive alongside an activity rather than interrupting it, which is why it is one of the few channels a company owns that can open a consumption window for someone whose hands and eyes are already committed to something else.

WHAT IT DOES NOT CLAIM

That is not a claim about audio being more persuasive, more memorable or more modern, and it is not a claim that everyone can listen while they work – plenty of roles cannot, safely or otherwise. It is a narrower claim about *when* it can be consumed. Audio can create additional consumption windows. That addresses one constraint among several that screen-dependent channels cannot always solve.

CHAPTER 04 · II

Audio is already a mass habit

The objection to internal audio has always been that it asks employees to adopt something unfamiliar. That rests on two older assumptions: that digital audio itself is a niche behaviour, and that podcasting specifically is an unfamiliar format. Neither holds in 2026.

Edison Research's *Infinite Dial 2026* (n=2,050, fielded January 2026 on a probability-based SSRS panel) finds that among Americans aged 12 and over, 81% listened to online audio of any kind – streaming music and radio included, not only podcasts – in the past month. Digital audio is not a niche medium; it is closer to a default one.

EDISON RESEARCH
INFINITE DIAL 2026
N = 2,050 · US 12+

Podcasting specifically is also familiar, though it is worth being precise about what Edison is now measuring: its 2026 figures track people who have listened to *or watched* a podcast, since a growing share of podcast consumption happens on video platforms. Among Americans 12+:

80% have listened to or watched a podcast at some point — 230 million people

58% did so in the past month — 167 million

45% did so in the past week — 130 million

AGE CALLOUT **68%** monthly consumption among 35–54-year-olds, ten points above the all-ages average.

Edison Research, Infinite Dial 2026. These figures count listening *and watching* together; they are not a measure of podcast listening alone.

WHAT THE VIDEO QUESTION DOES AND DOES NOT SETTLE

The video question matters less for our purposes than it sounds. What it establishes is not that Americans specifically listen with their eyes closed — it is that podcasting is already a familiar format to a majority of Americans, with monthly consumption reaching 68% among 35–54-year-olds, ten points above the all-ages average. The middle of the working-age range is not a population that has to be taught what a podcast is.

Audio arrives alongside the work rather than interrupting it.

Where audio already lives

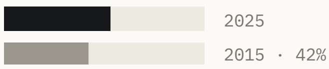
SHARE OF EAR
Q4 2025
VIA WESTWOOD ONE

If audio's advantage is that it travels into occupied time, it is worth asking where audio listening actually happens.

According to Edison's *Share of Ear* Q4 2025 (as reported by Westwood One), 53% of over-the-air AM/FM radio listening now takes place in the car, up from 42% in 2015. More than half of over-the-air AM/FM listening now takes place in the car.

53%

of over-the-air AM/FM radio listening now happens in the car – up from 42% in 2015.



ANALOGY Entertainment and news consumption, not internal communication. Presented as an analogy, not as proof.

We could not locate published cross-company data on whether a sales rep listens to a company update on the drive between accounts.

STATED PLAINLY RATHER THAN BURIED

We are presenting this as an analogy, not as proof, and the distinction should be stated plainly rather than buried: these figures describe entertainment and news consumption, not internal communication. They demonstrate that audio is already consumed, at scale, in a context – driving – where sustained visual attention to another medium is not available. They do not demonstrate that employees will listen to a company announcement in that same time.

WHERE AUDIO DOES NOT FIT

SAFETY AND ACCESSIBILITY

None of this holds everywhere, and it should not be read as though it does. Audio is not the right channel for every deskless job: a warehouse floor with reversing forklifts, an active construction site, a clinical procedure, a customer-facing conversation, or any moment where listening would compete with a safety-critical sound are not places to route a message through someone's ears. Audio alone is also not accessible to everyone, including some employees with hearing loss, so an equivalent written format or transcript remains necessary. Audio adds a consumption window; it does not remove the need for written and visual channels, and it should never be the only way a message reaches someone.

CHAPTER 04 · IV

The benchmark that doesn't exist

STATED NARROWLY

Which leads to the most striking gap we found while assembling this report — stated narrowly, because the broad version of this claim is not true.

Internal podcasts already exist, and they have received some academic attention. A 2026 study in *Ámbitos*, a Spanish communication-research journal, examined corporate podcasts run by Mapfre, Banco Santander and Coca-Cola as tools for internal communication and social engagement. What we searched for and could not find is a large-scale, cross-company benchmark for internal audio comparable to what PoliteMail publishes for internal email — reach, listening time, completion, and how those figures differ between desk-based and non-desk populations, measured across many organisations rather than described in a single case.

INTERNAL EMAIL · BENCHMARKED

PoliteMail 2026 · 2bn+ emails, ~11m employees

Unique open rate	**66.2%**
Attention rate	**83.7%**
Measured reading time	**33 min**
Click rate, recipients	**7%**

INTERNAL AUDIO · NOT YET BENCHMARKED

What we searched for and could not locate

Reach	NOT LOCATED
Listening time	NOT LOCATED
Completion	NOT LOCATED
Desk vs non-desk split	NOT LOCATED

Not a claim that no data about internal podcasts exists. Internal podcasts exist and have received academic attention, including case studies published in Ámbitos (2026). What is absent is a large-scale, cross-company benchmark comparable to PoliteMail's for email.

WHY IT IS ABSENT IS NOT ESTABLISHED

Why that benchmark is absent is not something the available research can establish. What we can say is narrower: we could not locate published cross-company data on whether a field engineer listens to a company update between calls, or a sales rep on the drive between accounts, or a nurse on a commute home. PoliteMail's benchmark reflects a mature, high-volume channel with years of measurement behind it. Internal audio does not yet have an equivalent published benchmark.

We would rather name that absence than paper over it with a borrowed statistic. Several of the figures circulating in this space – a podcast completion rate quoted as though it were an internal-communication benchmark, a claim that employees miss half of all internal communications – could not be traced to any original study, and they are not in this report.

A COMPARISON WORTH REFUSING

There is also a comparison worth refusing even when it is available. Podcast listeners choose what they listen to; employees generally do not self-select internal announcements the way consumers self-select podcasts. Consumer podcast completion rates are shaped by that self-selection and therefore cannot be transferred directly to internal communication. The honest version of the claim is narrower: when someone decides to listen, audio does not require continuous visual attention in order to finish.

Addition, not replacement

The conclusion of this report is not that companies should send fewer emails. Chapter 2 was unambiguous: internal email works, and works better than the organisations using it are usually told. Replacing a channel that two-thirds of its recipients actually open would be a strange way to respond to the evidence.

The finding is about coverage, so the response should be about coverage.

Email + audio

~~Email → audio~~

CONCEPTUAL · THE THESIS IS MULTICHANNEL COVERAGE

ONE MESSAGE,
MORE THAN
ONE CHANNEL

Send the same message through more than one channel and let people take it in the form that fits the shape of their day. The person at a desk reads it. The person driving between sites may hear it during an appropriate, legal journey. Neither is asked to change how they work, and nobody has to be at a screen at a particular moment to find out what their employer has decided.

That framing also resolves the tension that has made this problem so persistent. Internal communications teams are not going to abandon channels that measure well in favour of one that is unproven. They do not have to. Adding another format does not require sacrificing the reach of the channels already working.

The same message, taken in the form that fits the shape of the day.

Three conditions

For internal audio to function as a measurable coverage channel, it needs three things that consumer podcasting does not necessarily provide.

CONDITION 01

Supports segmentation

It has to support segmentation. Not every internal message needs to be segmented – genuine organisation-wide communication has its place. But a useful internal channel should allow communication to be targeted when only part of the workforce needs it: a production-floor update, field-team information, sales enablement. Without that, the channel risks adding noise and reducing relevance for the people receiving it. This is the one condition we argue rather than cite – none of the research in this report measures it. But it follows from chapter 1: a channel is only worth the time of the person receiving it if what arrives is relevant to them.

CONDITION 02

Private

It has to be private. Internal communication contains things that are not for public distribution. A channel that requires publishing to a public podcast directory is not a channel for internal communication, whatever else it is good for.

CONDITION 03

Measured

It has to be measured. This is really the answer to chapter 2. If audio is added as an unmeasured channel, it inherits the exact blind spot this report has spent three chapters describing. The value of Staffbase finding that 45% of non-desk respondents feel uninformed about company changes is that it makes the gap visible. At organisation level, the equivalent question has to be measured directly. If you cannot tell whether a new channel reached them, you cannot know whether it improved coverage.

Every channel in this report, audio included, can be asked the same two questions, and they are different questions. Did the channel perform well? And, separately: did the intended workforce have a realistic opportunity to receive the message? The first is what most dashboards already answer. The second is the one this report has been about.

QUESTION ONE · ANSWERED

Did the channel perform well?

What most dashboards already answer.

QUESTION TWO · USUALLY NOT

Did the intended workforce have a realistic opportunity to receive the message?

The one this report has been about.

PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK

A simple coverage audit

NOT A SCORING SYSTEM

The argument in this report converts into a short set of questions. They are not a scoring system and they are not research of their own – they are the practical version of the distinction chapter 2 makes: ask about coverage, not only about channel performance.

01	What share of the workforce is actually addressable through corporate email?
02	Who can realistically check the intranet during a working day?
03	Which employee groups rely mainly on a manager for company information?
04	Which groups have no convenient asynchronous channel at all?
05	Which channels require someone to stop and look at a screen?
06	Which parts of the workforce are absent from the dashboards in daily use?
07	Can reach and consumption be measured by workforce segment, not only by channel?

WHERE THE ANSWERS COME FROM

Some of these questions may be answerable from employee-directory, HRIS and channel data already on hand. Others require asking employees directly. The point is not that organisations already know the answers. It is that channel-performance dashboards, by themselves, do not provide them.

DISCLOSURE AND PROVENANCE

About this report

DECLARED INTEREST

The State of Internal Communication 2026 was compiled by Brandscast, which builds private audio channels for internal communication. That is a relevant interest and we would rather declare it than have it noticed.

NO DATA OF OUR OWN

The report contains no data of our own. Every figure is drawn from published third-party research, cited below. Where a widely repeated statistic could not be traced to an original study, it was excluded – including figures that would have supported our position.

CORRECTIONS

Questions, corrections and requests for the underlying source notes: hello@brandscast.com. If you find an error in here, tell us and we will fix it and say so.

CITING THIS REPORT

Brandscast, *The State of Internal Communication 2026*. https://brandscast.com/state-of-internal-communication-2026

Figures may be reproduced with attribution, including in commercial publications, without asking us first. A link to the report is the only thing we ask for.

SEVEN PUBLISHED STUDIES

Sources

GALLUP
GALLUP.COM

State of the Global Workplace 2026 (reporting on 2025).

Regional and country figures from the same edition's regional data pages; country-level numbers are three-year rolling averages.

STAFFBASE AND YOUGOV
STAFFBASE.COM

2025 International Employee Communication Impact Study.

n=3,574 (Australia 518, Austria 216, Germany 1,067, Switzerland 200, UK 529, US 1,044), YouGov panel, fielded 12–21 February 2025.

POLITEMAIL
POLITEMAIL.COM

Internal Email Communications Benchmarks 2026.

Over two billion internal emails sent to nearly eleven million employees across ten industry sectors.

EDISON RESEARCH
EDISONRESEARCH.COM

The Infinite Dial 2026.

n=2,050 Americans 12+, fielded January 2026, probability-based SSRS panel. Its 2026 podcast-consumption figures count listening and watching together, which this report states explicitly where those figures are used.

EDISON RESEARCH
WESTWOODONE.COM

Share of Ear Q4 2025, as reported by Westwood One.

Share of Ear is a subscription study; we have not read the underlying data and cite only the figures Westwood One published with attribution to Edison.

ÁMBITOS
REVISTASCIENTIFICAS.US.ES

Cartes-Barroso, M. & García-Estévez, N., *El pódcast corporativo como medio estratégico para la comunicación interna y el compromiso social. Estudio de casos españoles. Ámbitos. Revista Internacional de Comunicación*, issue 69 (April 2026).

Cited only to establish that internal corporate podcasting exists and has received academic study – not as a cross-company performance benchmark.

EMERGENCE CAPITAL
EMCAP.COM

The State of Technology for the Deskless Workforce 2020.

~1,500 deskless workers, 20 industries.