

Internal communication beyond big corporates

Practical guidance for organisations with fewer than 500 employees

In this guide

This Skills Guide is for in-house internal communication professionals working in organisations with fewer than 500 employees, or leaders of these organisations who are considering investing in internal communication.

The context of these organisations is often very different from their larger, corporate counterparts. With thousands of employees across multiple sites, big corporations can dedicate entire teams to internal communication. Smaller organisations cannot. Yet communication is no less important.

Key context for these organisations:

- resourcing is thin, often fractional, and usually at the Manager level,
- email, intranet, and town halls form the backbone of channel frameworks,
- connection with leadership is vital, but often difficult to secure,
- strategy, governance, and measurement represent the biggest opportunities,



- triggers for investment include growth in headcount, complexity, and moments of change,
- organisations are experimenting with AI, and governance is emerging.

This Skills Guide draws on the research findings from *The Inside Story: Investigating Internal Communication in organisations with fewer than 500 employees*. For full details, see the main report.

Laying the foundation

This stage is about recognising when your organisation has reached the tipping point and the way things have always been done no longer works. Typically, when organisations grow to between 100-200 employees, complexity arises and clear, focused communication becomes more critical. The guidance here focuses on making the most of existing tools, setting up the right channels, and ensuring no part of your workforce is left behind. This is the groundwork that creates a solid foundation for internal communication as you scale.

// RECOGNISE YOUR CRITICAL MOMENT

Organisations with fewer than 500 employees typically reach a critical point between 100–200 staff where informal communication networks begin to fragment. This aligns with Dunbar's number, where once group size exceeds 150 individuals, members struggle to keep track of each other's roles, intentions, and actions. At this point, organisational complexity increases, requiring formal hierarchy, written procedures, and focused communication. Organisations that are growing and scaling and hit this point need to consider focusing on internal communication to ensure cohesion and consistency of understanding throughout the organisation.

// BUDGET FOR MORE THAN SALARY

If hiring an internal communication professional, allocate budget beyond salary. Funding is needed for tools, platforms, and external support. Financial ability to invest budget for internal communication may be a challenge, but it is essential. If you can't afford both a budget for tools and platforms, consider a fractional or part-time internal communication resource instead. Without the means to deliver the communications, even experienced practitioners will struggle to deliver strategic value.



// START WITH WHAT YOU HAVE

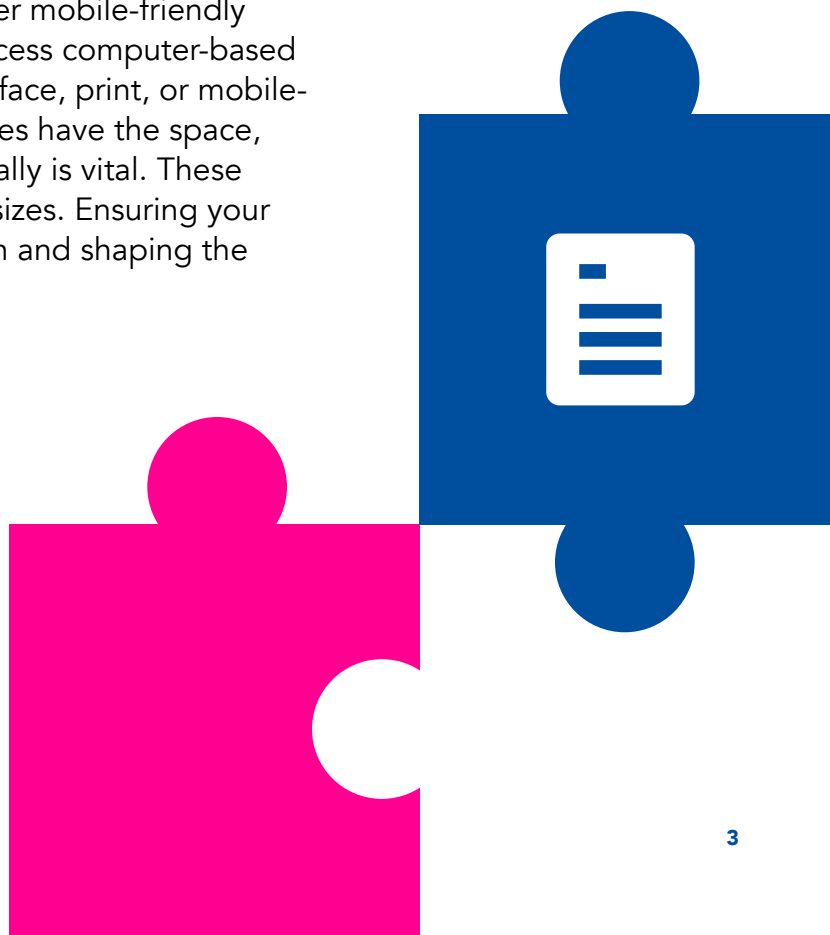
Most organisations of this scale operate on Microsoft technology because they already hold enterprise licences. Rather than seeking expensive new platforms, maximise what you already have: use Teams for key channels like your town halls and SharePoint for your intranet. While not perfect, these tools are accessible, familiar to users, and cost-effective. This theme is so common that there are businesses that produce software as service platforms that can act as bolt-ons to these core platforms, enhancing their performance and metrics, so that when investment is available, you aren't spending as much as you would be to implement an entirely new platform.

// BE RUTHLESSLY SELECTIVE WITH CHANNELS

When resources are limited, resist the temptation to expand channels unnecessarily. Create a simple, manageable framework that can be consistently maintained within your capacity. A smaller, well-defined channel framework is far more effective than numerous underutilised platforms. Having the channels that align with your audiences and an understanding of the cadence they require helps you to begin mapping out your capacity. Don't forget, each of these channels will require content; make sure you have the time to create or curate it.

// ENSURE COMMUNICATION IS FOR ALL COLLEAGUES

If your organisation has deskless or frontline workers, make sure your channel framework reaches them. Consider mobile-friendly solutions and avoid assuming everyone can access computer-based communications. Whether you choose face-to-face, print, or mobile-friendly channels, ensuring that these employees have the space, time, and ability to access communication equally is vital. These types of roles are found in organisations of all sizes. Ensuring your communication reaches them is about inclusion and shaping the culture you want to foster.



Leading strategically

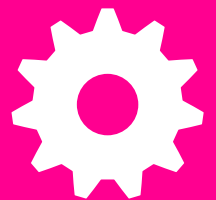
In organisations with fewer than 500 employees, internal communicators often have to manage both tactical delivery and strategic planning without the support of large teams. Striking the right balance is essential because capacity is limited. The guidance here shows how to shift perceptions and position internal communication as a strategic enabler of culture, change, and performance. The focus is on securing leadership support, building alliances, and maintaining visibility during moments of uncertainty.

// POSITION YOURSELF STRATEGICALLY, NOT ADMINISTRATIVELY

This is sometimes easier said than done. However, when looking at organisations of this scale, many internal communication functions (and internal communicators) end up doing a lot of administrative work instead of focusing on things that have a strategic impact. Where possible, push back against being seen as a “post box” for management messages. Use your limited time to focus on outcomes rather than outputs. You don’t have time to do everything, so having a solid internal communication strategy will give you the framework you need to reposition requests that you receive yet aren’t the best use of limited time.

// GET LEADERSHIP BUY-IN FROM THE TOP

The recognition of internal communication’s value by Senior Leadership is crucial. When leaders see the function as strategic, resources and support follow. Ideally, this will be the CEO; however, if you can’t get buy-in from the CEO, ensure that whoever represents internal communication at the Senior Leadership level both understands its importance and is able to explain how it supports the organisation in achieving its goals. Without this, internal communication struggles to get prioritised, and funding will be harder to secure. While nothing is guaranteed, it certainly helps to be in alignment with Senior Leadership.



// BUILD TRUST DURING CRISIS

Crisis moments frequently trigger investment in internal communication. In difficult periods, keep communication regular even when there is nothing new to say. This allows for a level of transparency that reassures employees and builds lasting trust in leadership. Internal communication often becomes incredibly important during times of crisis. Being able to advise leadership and have plans in place to address the crisis is key. Making sure you handle the situation appropriately when communicating with colleagues is important.

// FIND YOUR ALLIES STRATEGICALLY

Cultivate relationships with colleagues who can amplify and enable your work. For example, some key relationships in an organisation may be: IT for technical support, HR for people-focused initiatives, and Marketing for design resources and platform sharing. These allies are vital when budgets are tight and external suppliers are out of reach. You may be able to use their systems, platforms, and data to help achieve your goals. Find ways that you can offer them something in return, so that the relationship isn't one-sided.

// MANAGE EXPECTATIONS PROACTIVELY

Be clear about what you can and cannot deliver with available resources. Set boundaries with colleagues. This is where your channel framework and internal communication strategy come into their own. What are the communication channels that internal communication owns? Those are the ones that you need to focus on. Are there channels or initiatives, and events that are important but that you don't own? If so, help and offer strategic advice if they are important enough, but let your colleagues know that you aren't taking ownership of it. Finally, anything that falls outside of these can be done without internal communication support. This way, you can maintain focus on strategic priorities. Educate stakeholders about the value of focused communication and set expectations accordingly.



Delivering impact

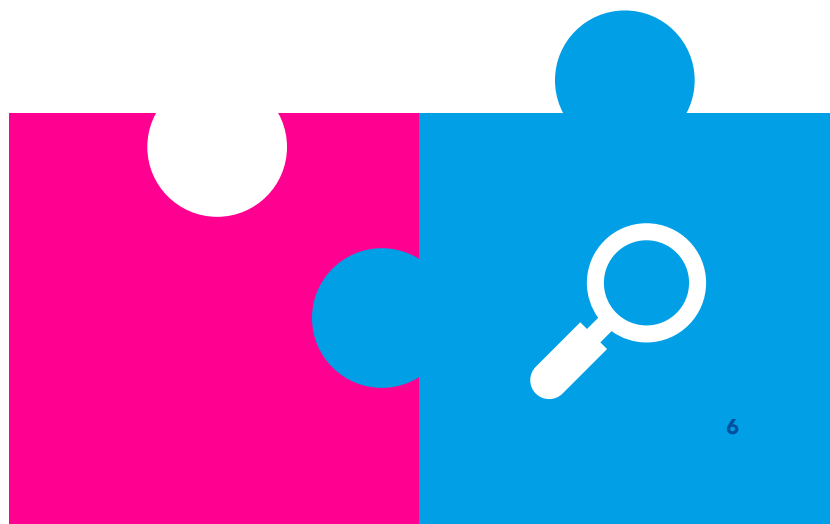
Effectiveness in internal communication comes from consistent, measurable practice that helps the organisation achieve its goals. With limited resources, the goal is not to do everything, but to do the right things well. These tips demonstrate how to maximise the impact of tactical delivery: making the most of available channels, reinforcing what matters, using technology wisely, and evidencing value through data.

// MAKE THE MOST OF TOWN HALLS

As mentioned earlier in the Skills Guide, many organisations use the Microsoft technology platforms. As a result, Teams is their primary virtual meeting platform, and many organisations use it for their town halls. Whether they are called town halls or all-hands, these meetings present the opportunity to get everyone in the organisation together. Make these sessions count by ensuring all voices can contribute meaningfully and by creating opportunities for two-way engagement. The great thing about Teams is that everyone can see and hear each other. Give colleagues a voice and a chance to participate. Structure meetings with clear agendas, maintain a regular cadence, and follow up with actions to maximise their impact.

// LEVERAGE FACE-TO-FACE OPPORTUNITIES

With the advent of hybrid and remote working, face-to-face time with colleagues matters even more than ever before. Where possible, bring the whole organisation together regularly at a cadence that works for your context and budget. Whether it's annually, quarterly, or monthly. These gatherings strengthen collaboration and relationships in ways virtual meetings cannot replicate. For distributed teams, these events are even more valuable in reinforcing culture and connection. Think about the role



those face-to-face meetups have in your organisation.

// USE AI CAUTIOUSLY BUT PRACTICALLY

Many organisations of this scale are experimenting with AI through Microsoft Co-Pilot, often due to security concerns with external platforms. Again, Co-Pilot benefits from being part of the Microsoft technology stack, so while it may or may not be your preferred AI, it integrates easily with the enterprise architecture of the systems you are already likely using. AI is not going to steal your job. But it can make you more effective and efficient, particularly addressing areas where you have limited capacity. Use AI for brainstorming and to overcome blank page syndrome, but never for final communications. Always verify and adapt outputs to maintain trust and authenticity.

// PROVE VALUE TO SECURE INVESTMENT

Focus on meaningful metrics that demonstrate business impact rather than vanity measures like clicks and open rates. Track town hall attendance, engagement with key messages, and employee feedback on critical communications as well as the impact or outcomes. Did your organisation achieve its goal? Did the communication influence behaviour? Did colleagues sign up for the new initiative? Build simple dashboards, collect feedback, and link communication activity to business outcomes wherever possible. Track your measurements over the year to evidence trends and impact. Use this data to secure investment.

