

REIMAGINING TOMORROW 2026

FROM ADOPTION TO ACCOUNTABILITY:
COMMUNICATION PROFESSIONALS STEP UP ON RESPONSIBLE AI

A report by the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management
Based on the Responsible AI in PR and Communication Management Survey 2026

CSCE Centre for
Strategic
Communication
Excellence



WE CONTINUE OUR JOURNEY — AND THE NEEDLE IS MOVING



Prof. Justin Green

President and CEO, Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management

Last year, this report captured a profession at an inflection point — one that had enthusiastically adopted AI tools but was grappling with a significant governance gap. A year on, the picture is more encouraging, though the work is far from done.

With more than 500 communication professionals responding from across the globe, the Responsible AI in PR and Communication Management Survey 2026 tells the story of a profession that is stepping forward — increasingly present in AI governance conversations, building confidence, and communicating more openly about responsible AI than at any point before. Governance frameworks are more prevalent. Stakeholder communication about AI has improved meaningfully. And for the first time, we are asking — and answering — harder questions about accountability, disclosure, reputation, and the arrival of agentic AI.

But stepping forward into the conversation is not the same as stepping up to lead it. The data shows involvement growing — and that is genuine, important progress. The harder, more urgent task is building the business acumen and institutional authority to drive the AI governance agenda, not merely respond to it. The profession is at the table more often. Whether it has a decisive voice at that table is the question this report challenges us all to answer.

This is the second edition of the Reimagining Tomorrow report series, and it gives us something no single-year survey can: the ability to track how the needle is shifting. The progress is real, even as the challenges remain substantial. Our profession still lacks a decisive claim to AI governance leadership. Too many organizations have no formal accountability structure for responsible AI. And the profession's own disclosure practices leave significant room for growth.

The findings continue to inform the Global Alliance's Responsible AI Principles and contribute to the Responsible Communication Movement — our commitment to ensuring communication professionals lead with purpose, integrity, and foresight in an AI-enabled world.

I commend every professional who participated. Your voices are shaping the future of this profession.

"The profession is stepping forward into the AI governance conversation. The next step — decisive, strategically credible leadership — is the horizon we must now reach for."

— Prof. Justin Green, President and CEO, Global Alliance



SCANNING THE HORIZON

This report — Reimagining Tomorrow 2026 — presents the findings from the Responsible AI in PR and Communication Management Survey 2026, conducted between 17 April and 17 May 2026. With 536 responses from communication professionals across six geographic regions, this is the second consecutive year of data collection — enabling, for the first time, meaningful year-on-year comparisons that reveal how the profession is evolving in its governance and leadership relationship with AI.

The survey expanded from 25 questions to 36, adding new sections on governance accountability, agentic AI, AI disclosure, and — for the first time — a dedicated section on the intersection of AI with organizational reputation. Demographic questions are presented for contextual reference; all thematic comparisons focus on the substantive questions that were consistent between survey years.

The headline finding: the profession is moving. Not swiftly, and not uniformly — but the needle is shifting on governance, confidence, and stakeholder communication. At the same time, new challenges are emerging. Agentic AI is arriving faster than governance can keep pace. Accountability for responsible AI remains diffuse. Disclosure is the profession's most immediate unmet obligation. And the reputational stakes of AI use — for organizations and for the profession itself — are now firmly, urgently front of mind.

2026 KEY FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

Key Metric	2026	2025
AI permitted in organization	95.9% ↑	91.0%
Have a responsible AI framework	47.0% ↑	39.4%
Very confident in evaluating ethical implications of AI	38.8% ↑	26.2%
Communicate responsible AI approach to stakeholders	64.5% ↑	49.8%
Communicate AI governance structure to stakeholders	51.1% ↑	35.6%
PR/Communication leading on AI governance	8.6% ↑	6.9%
PR/Communication involved in responsible AI guidelines	57.3% ↑	41.4%
AI seen as a significant reputational opportunity	60.3%	—
AI has increased organizational reputational risk exposure	56.1%	—

NINE FINDINGS SHAPING THE PROFESSION



95.9%

ADOPTION IS SETTLED

Nearly every professional can use AI. The question now is who governs it.



47%

GOVERNANCE GROWING – SLOWLY

Less than half have a responsible AI framework. More than half do not.



+12.6%

CONFIDENCE IS SURGING

Ethical confidence jumped 12.6% in one year – from 26.2% to 38.8% feeling very confident.



64.5%

COMMUNICATION IMPROVING

Around two-thirds now communicate about responsible AI. Governance transparency remains the gap.



57.3%

INVOLVED – BUT NOT LEADING

Involvement in responsible AI guidelines has risen sharply. Only 13.9% are leading.



1 in 3

AI AGENTS HAVE ARRIVED

One in three organizations is using or piloting AI agents. PR is barely in the room.



1 in 4

THE DISCLOSURE GAP

One in four organizations uses AI but discloses nothing about it to anyone.



60.3%

REPUTATION: OPPORTUNITY AND RISK

60.3% see AI as a reputational opportunity while 34.9 say it has raised reputational risk.



27.6%

THE UNDERUTILIZED MANDATE

Only 27.6% recognize that how they govern and communicate about AI is itself a reputational signal.



BLUEPRINT FOR TOMORROW

This section maps the terrain revealed by the 2026 survey in full detail. Where the same ground was covered in 2025, we mark the distance travelled. Where new territory has been opened — governance accountability, agentic AI, AI disclosure, and the reputation of AI adoption — we establish the baselines this research series will track in the years ahead.

Read this section as evidence for the executive summary that precedes it: the data that substantiates the nine findings, the numbers behind the narrative, the year-on-year signals that tell us whether the needle is truly moving — and where it still needs to shift.

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

2026 total responses: 536 (2025: 473 responses)

536 COMMUNICATION PROFESSIONALS | 6 REGIONS | 2026

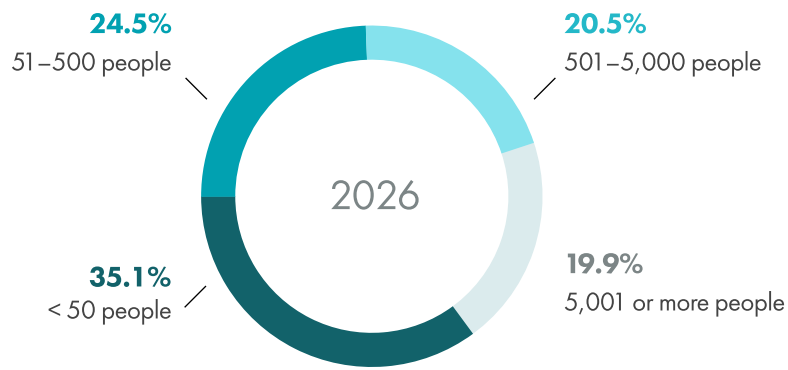
GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

2026

Africa	34.5%	
North America (USA / Canada / Mexico)	21.8%	
Asia - Pacific	14.4%	
Europe / Middle East / North Africa (EMENA)	14.2%	
Australia / New Zealand	9.1%	
South and Central America	3.8%	

Africa is the largest regional cohort at 34.5%, followed by North America (21.8%), Asia-Pacific (14.4%), and EMENA (14.2%). Australia/New Zealand and South and Central America contribute 9.1% and 3.8% respectively. Regional composition should be considered when interpreting findings, as it may influence aggregate results.

ORGANIZATION SIZE



Large organizations (5,001+ people) represent 19.9% of the 2026 respondent pool, the most balanced size distribution across the four categories in this survey to date.

JOB LEVEL

2026

Senior management	26.0%	<div style="width: 26.0%;"></div>
Middle management	24.1%	<div style="width: 24.1%;"></div>
Owner	18.8%	<div style="width: 18.8%;"></div>
Intermediate	13.9%	<div style="width: 13.9%;"></div>
Executive / C-level	11.8%	<div style="width: 11.8%;"></div>
Executive / C-level	2.8%	<div style="width: 2.8%;"></div>

YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

2026

Less than 1 year	5.1%	<div style="width: 5.1%;"></div>
1–5 years	10.4%	<div style="width: 10.4%;"></div>
6–10 years	14.8%	<div style="width: 14.8%;"></div>
11–15 years	13.9%	<div style="width: 13.9%;"></div>
16–20 years	14.8%	<div style="width: 14.8%;"></div>
21–30 years	23.3%	<div style="width: 23.3%;"></div>
30+ years	17.8%	<div style="width: 17.8%;"></div>

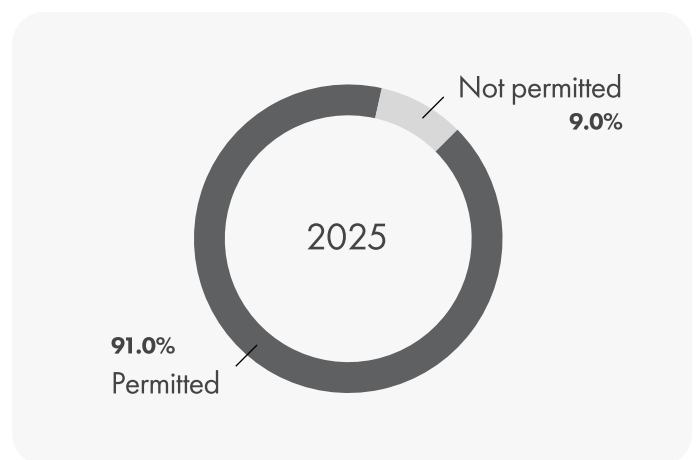
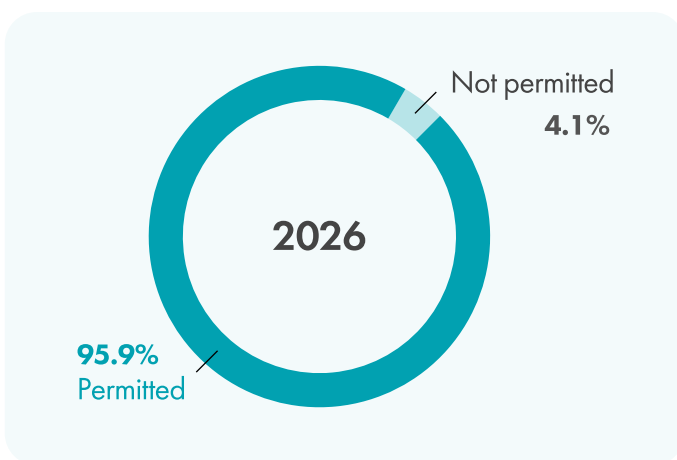
The sample skews toward more experienced practitioners, with 55.9% having more than 15 years of experience in the profession.

AI USAGE AND MANAGEMENT

Every journey has a starting point. For most organizations, the question of whether to permit AI has been answered. The more telling question in 2026 is what they do with that permission: whether they govern it, support it, and prepare their people to use it responsibly.

AI PERMISSION AND ORGANIZATIONAL STANCE

AI PERMISSION IN ORGANIZATIONS



Survey question Q9: Is your organization's use of AI formally permitted?

AI permission has reached near-universality — 95.9% of respondents work in organizations where AI use is allowed, up from 91% in 2025. The 'shadow AI' phenomenon, where professionals use AI despite organizational restrictions, appears to be declining as organizations increasingly formalize access. In 2025, 52.8% of those in organizations where AI was not permitted admitted using it anyway. The 2026 survey captured shadow AI differently — 2.9% of all respondents report using AI despite it being officially prohibited — reflecting a change in question structure that makes direct year-on-year comparison of shadow AI rates methodologically imperfect. This will be standardised for consistent tracking in future editions.

ORGANIZATIONAL STANCE ON AI

A new question in 2026 asked respondents to characterize their organization's overall stance on AI, providing more nuance than a simple yes/no:

Stance on AI	2026
AI is required in my organization	10.7%
AI is fully integrated into standard workflows	10.4%
AI permitted and actively encouraged, with some governance	40.7%
AI permitted but largely self-directed with minimal guidance	31.0%
Shadow AI — banned but I use it anyway	2.9%
AI is totally banned and not used	0.2%

Survey question Q11: How would you best describe your organization's current stance on AI?

The most significant finding is that 40.7% of respondents describe AI as permitted and actively encouraged with some governance in place — suggesting a meaningful portion of organizations are moving beyond pure permissiveness toward structured adoption. Yet 31.0% remain in a largely self-directed, minimally guided environment, indicating the governance journey is far from complete.

THE REGIONAL VIEW

Regional differences in how organizations approach AI are striking. ANZ leads globally on governance-backed adoption — 60.0% of ANZ respondents work in organizations where AI is actively encouraged with governance in place, nearly double the global figure of 40.7% and well ahead of Asia-Pacific (52.4%) and North America (47.2%). At the other end of the spectrum, Africa has the lowest governance-backed adoption at 24.8%, while simultaneously registering the only notable shadow AI rate in the survey — 9.0% of African respondents use AI despite it being officially prohibited. This paradox — high AI activity, low governance — is one of the defining regional themes of the 2026 survey.

Organizational Stance (Q11)	Africa	Asia - Pacific	ANZ	EMENA	N. America	S/C America
AI permitted + actively encouraged with governance	24.8% ▼	52.4%	60.0% ★	43.5%	47.2%	33.3%
AI permitted, self-directed, minimal guidance	35.3% ★	30.2%	20.0% ▼	30.6%	29.7%	33.3%
AI required in organization	14.3% ★	4.8% ▼	10.0%	9.7%	8.8%	13.3%
AI fully integrated into standard workflows	12.0%	9.5%	2.5% ▼	12.9%	9.9%	20.0% ★
Shadow AI (banned but using anyway)	9.0% ★	0.0% ▼	0.0% ▼	0.0% ▼	0.0% ▼	0.0% ▼

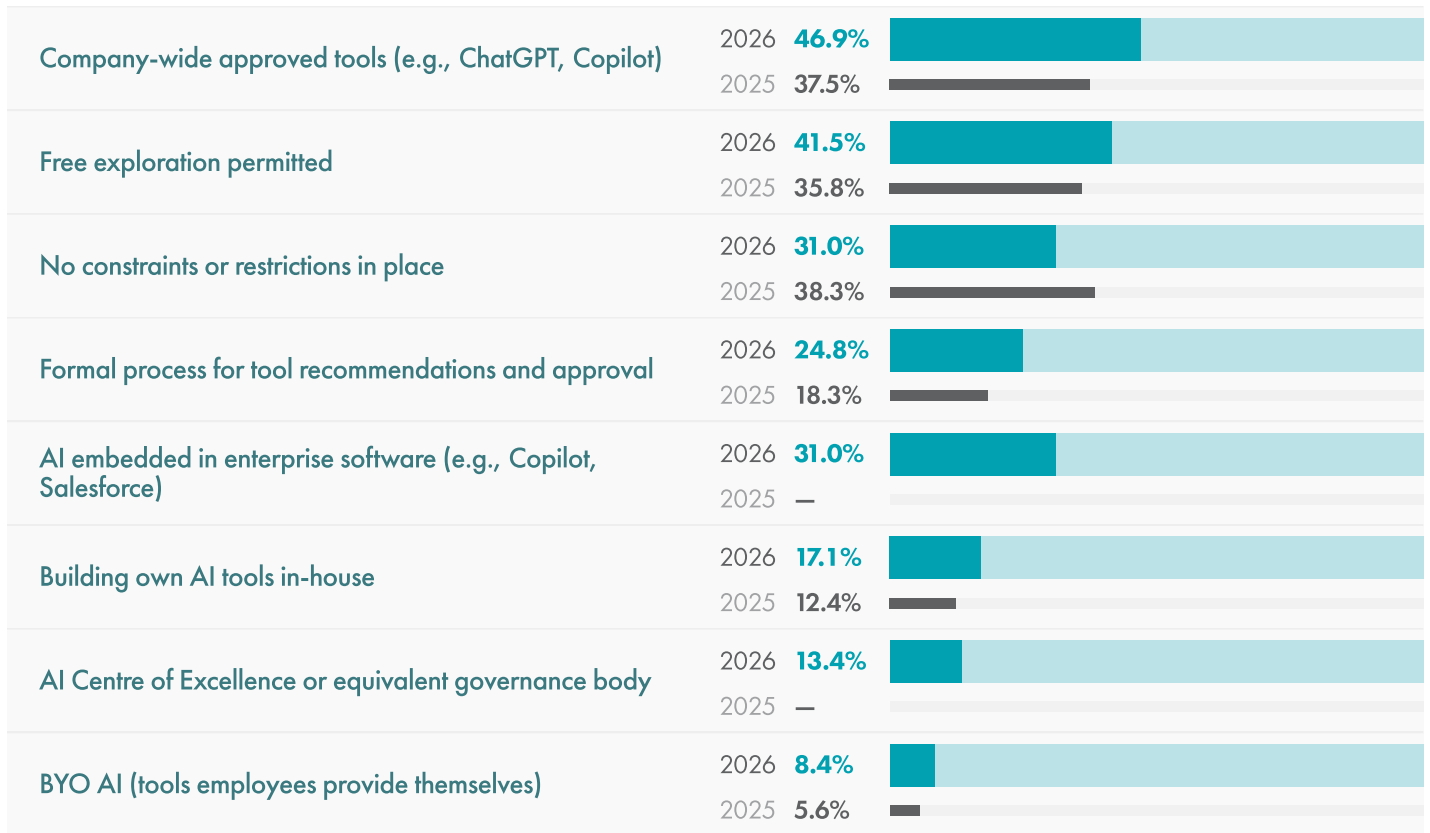
Note: n: Africa 133, Asia-Pacific 63, ANZ 40, EMENA 62, North America 91, South/Central America 15. Shadow AI of 0% in five regions reflects reporting; some use may remain undisclosed.

South and Central America show the highest rate of AI fully integrated into standard workflows (20.0%), suggesting rapid normalization of AI in that region even as governance structures lag. EMENA presents a notably polarized picture: the second-highest rate of AI fully integrated into standard workflows (12.9%) and the fourth-highest rate of AI required by organizations (9.7%) sit alongside a high level of self-directed, minimally guided adoption (30.6%), suggesting uneven AI maturity and governance across the region.

HOW AI USE IS MANAGED

The management approaches reported by organizations reflect a maturing — if still inconsistent — governance landscape:

AI MANAGEMENT APPROACH

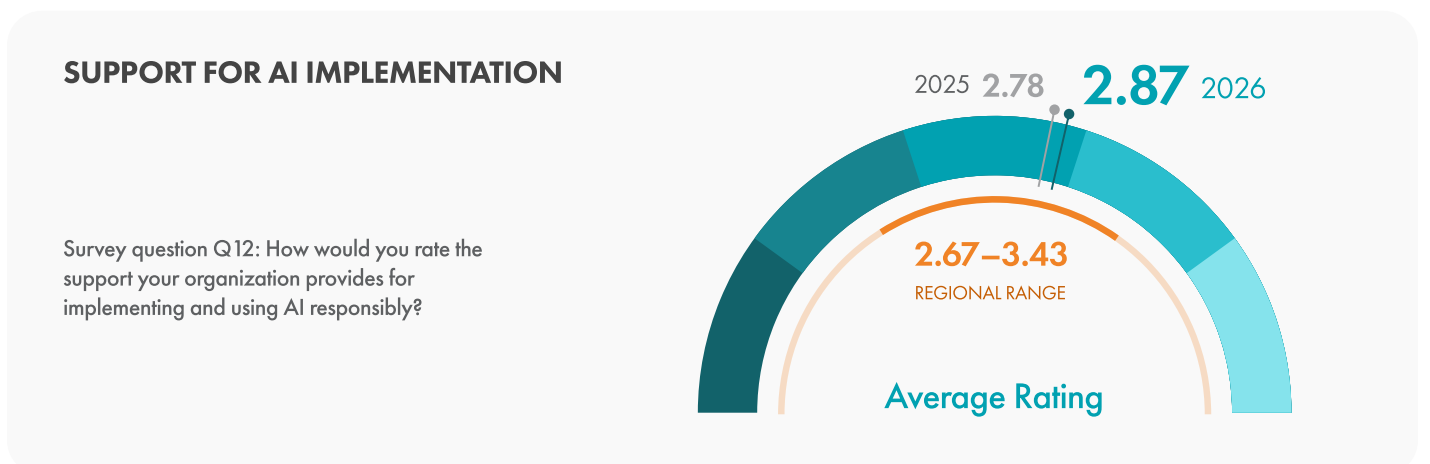


Survey question Q10: How does your organization currently manage the use of AI tools and technology?

The proportion of organizations with no constraints has dropped from 38.3% to 31.0% — a meaningful reduction. Approved tools are now more common (46.9% vs 37.5%), and formal processes for tool approval have grown (24.8% vs 18.3%). The emergence of AI Centres of Excellence (13.4%) and enterprise-embedded AI (31.0%) reflects the growing sophistication of AI infrastructure in organizations.

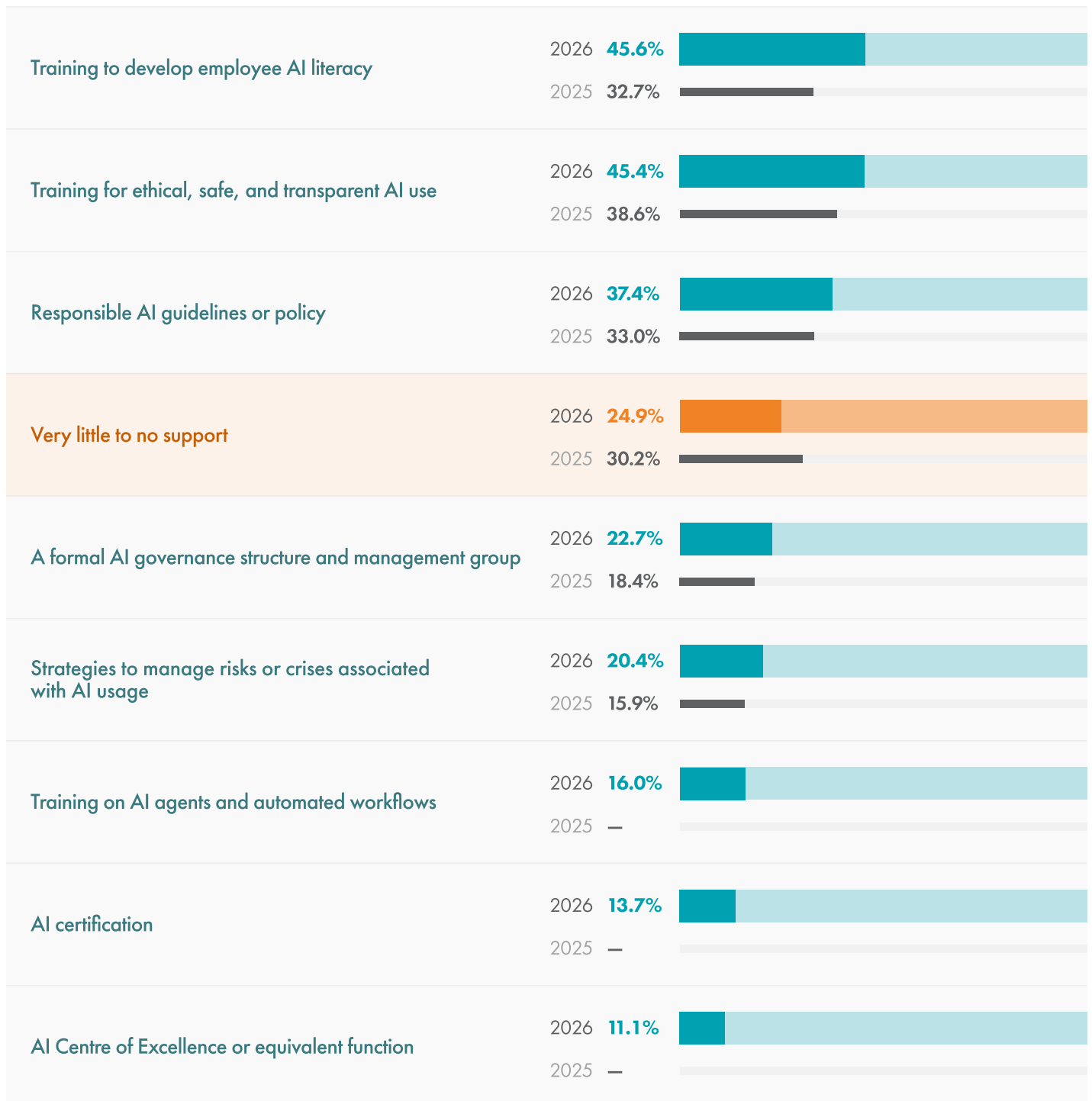
ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

SUPPORT RATING



Organizational support for AI implementation has improved slightly, from an average of 2.78 to 2.87 out of 5. While the improvement is modest, it is consistent with the broader trend of improvement observed across the survey: organizations are investing more in implementation support, even as this investment remains well below what most professionals require.

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS OFFER



Survey question Q13: Which of the following types of support does your organization currently offer related to AI?

Across all comparable categories, organizational support offerings have increased. Notably, 'very little to no support' has declined from 30.2% to 24.9%. AI literacy training has grown from 32.7% to 45.6% — the most significant single-category increase, reflecting the profession's prioritization of foundational competence.

THE REGIONAL VIEW

The gap between the best- and least-supported regions in the survey is significant. Asia-Pacific registers the highest average organizational support rating at 3.43 out of 5 — higher than the global average of 2.87 and substantially ahead of every other region. Africa (2.74), EMENA (2.69), and South and Central America (2.67) all fall below the global average, with South and Central America the lowest of all. The support quality story reinforces the broader pattern: where AI adoption is moving fastest, organizational investment in support infrastructure is not always keeping pace.

Average AI Support Rating (Q12, out of 5)	Africa	Asia - Pacific	ANZ	EMENA	N. America	S/C America
Average organizational support rating	2.74	3.43 ★	2.94	2.69	2.83	2.67 ▼

Note: Rating scale 0–5. n: Africa 128, Asia-Pacific 60, ANZ 32, EMENA 58, North America 84, South/Central America 15.

The divergence becomes sharper when examining what is actually being offered. Africa has by far the highest rate of organizations providing very little or no AI support (37.0%) — more than double the Asia-Pacific rate (14.8%) and well above the global figure (24.9%). The responsible AI guidelines gap is perhaps the most consequential: only 20.5% of African respondents report that their organization provides responsible AI guidelines or policy, compared with 59.4% in ANZ and 50.0% in North America. This means African communication professionals are using AI at relatively high rates, in organizations with little structural governance or policy support, and with the lowest rate of responsible AI guidelines of any region.

Selected AI Support Offerings by Region (Q13)	Africa	Asia - Pacific	ANZ	EMENA	N. America	S/C America
Responsible AI guidelines or policy	20.5% ▼	42.6%	59.4% ★	42.4%	50.0%	26.7%
Training to develop employee AI literacy	34.6% ▼	60.7% ★	53.1%	47.5%	48.8%	53.3%
Training for ethical, safe, transparent AI use	38.6% ▼	55.7%	46.9%	44.1%	45.4%	60.0% ★
Formal AI governance structure	13.4% ▼	22.9%	28.1%	27.1%	31.4%	33.3% ★
Very little to no support	37.0% ★	14.8% ▼	15.6%	18.6%	22.1%	20.0%

Note: n: Africa 127, Asia-Pacific 61, ANZ 32, EMENA 59, North America 86, South/Central America 15.

South and Central America presents an interesting contrast. While 20.0% of respondents in the region report receiving very little to no AI-related support, the region leads globally on ethics training (60.0%) and formal governance structures (33.3%). This suggests that organizations may be prioritizing governance and ethical oversight, even while broader workforce support and enablement are still developing.

RESPONSIBLE AI FRAMEWORKS

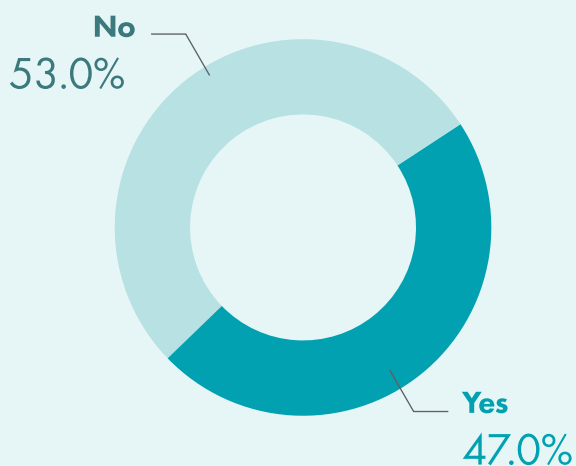
Permission is necessary. Frameworks are what give that permission its shape and integrity. This section examines the governance infrastructure being built — or not yet built — to ensure that AI adoption serves organizational values, not just organizational efficiency.

POLICY AND FRAMEWORK ADOPTION

RESPONSIBLE AI FRAMEWORK

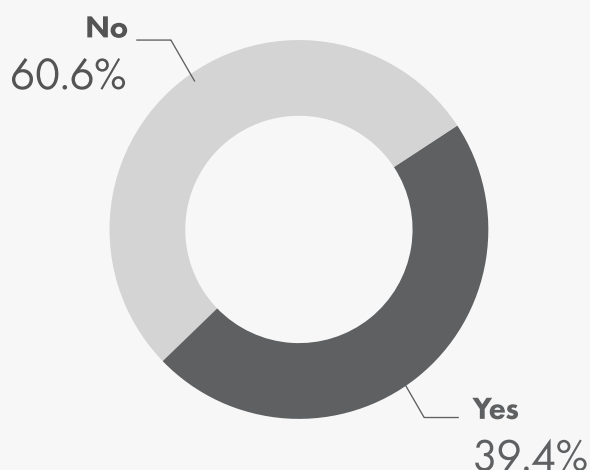
HAVE A RESPONSIBLE AI GUIDELINE
/ POLICY / FRAMEWORK

2026



HAVE A RESPONSIBLE AI GUIDELINE
/ POLICY / FRAMEWORK

2025



Survey question Q14: Does your organization have a responsible AI guideline, policy, or framework?

The proportion of organizations with a responsible AI framework has increased from 39.4% to 47.0% — a gain of 7.6 percentage points in one year. This is the most significant structural governance improvement in the 2026 data. Yet it also means that more than half of organizations — 53.0% — still operate without any formal responsible AI framework. The governance gap remains the profession's most pressing structural challenge.

THE REGIONAL VIEW

The regional divergence on framework adoption is the single most dramatic finding in the 2026 survey. Australia and New Zealand stands apart from every other region: 87.5% of ANZ respondents report that their organization has a responsible AI framework in place — more than three times the Africa rate and significantly ahead of all other regions. The 61.7 percentage point gap between ANZ (87.5%) and Africa (25.8%) is not merely a statistical difference; it represents a fundamental divergence in the institutional infrastructure for responsible AI practice across the global profession.

Responsible AI Framework Adoption (Q14)	Africa	Asia - Pacific	ANZ	EMENA	N. America	S/C America
Have a responsible AI framework	25.8% ▼	44.3%	87.5% ★	56.1%	60.5%	60.0%
Do not have a responsible AI framework	74.2% ★	55.7%	12.5% ▼	43.9%	39.5%	40.0%

Note: n: Africa 128, Asia-Pacific 61, ANZ 32, EMENA 57, North America 86, South/Central America 15.

North America (60.5%), South and Central America (60.0%), and EMENA (56.1%) cluster at moderate-to-strong framework adoption. Asia-Pacific (44.3%) sits below the global average of 47.0%, despite its strong support infrastructure — suggesting that high investment in training and tools does not automatically translate into formal governance frameworks. Africa’s 25.8% represents the most urgent governance gap: fewer than one in four African organizations has a responsible AI framework, at a time when AI adoption in the region is among the highest globally.

FRAMEWORK MATURITY

Among organizations that do have a responsible AI framework, 2026 introduces a question on maturity for the first time:

FRAMEWORK MATURITY JOURNEY



Survey question Q15: How mature is your organization’s responsible AI framework?]

The majority of organizations with frameworks (53.5%) are in the developing phase. Only 19.0% have frameworks that are genuinely embedded and actively maintained. This maturity data provides important context: many of the frameworks counted as 'in place' in 2025 and 2026 are relatively new and still being refined. Governance coverage is increasing, but governance depth is another question entirely.

THE REGIONAL VIEW

Among organizations that have frameworks, maturity levels reveal a counterintuitive finding: Africa, despite having the lowest framework adoption rate, has the highest proportion of embedded and actively reviewed frameworks among those that do have one. Around thirty-two percent of African respondents with frameworks report they have been in place for more than 18 months and are actively maintained — nearly double the global average of 19.0% and far ahead of ANZ (7.7%) and North America (11.8%). When African organizations invest in responsible AI frameworks, they appear to invest seriously.

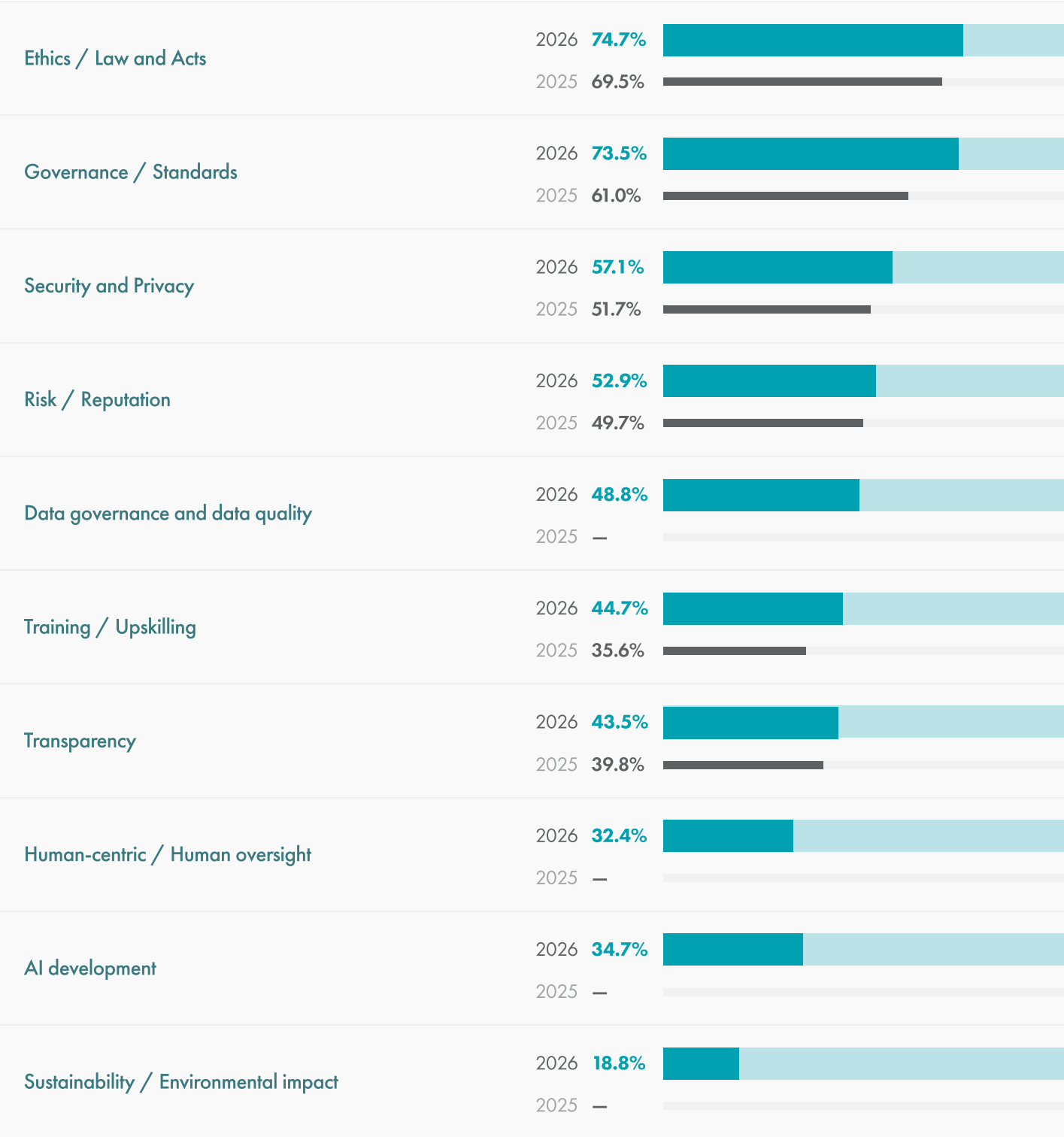
Framework Maturity — Among Organizations With a Framework (Q15)	Africa	Asia - Pacific	ANZ	EMENA	N. America	S/C America
Just established — in place ≤6 months	16.1% ▼	25.9%	26.9%	23.3%	25.5%	37.5% ★
Developing — 6–18 months, still being refined	48.4%	51.9%	65.4% ★	50.0%	58.8%	25.0% ▼
Embedded — 18+ months, actively reviewed	32.3% ★	22.2%	7.7% ▼	23.3%	11.8%	25.0%
Embedded — 18+ months, not actively reviewed	3.2%	0.0% ▼	0.0% ▼	3.3%	3.9%	12.5% ★

Note: Only respondents whose organizations have a framework answered Q15. n: Africa 31, Asia-Pacific 27, ANZ 26, EMENA 30, North America 51, South/Central America 8 (interpret with caution).

ANZ's dominance in framework adoption is tempered by its maturity profile: 65.4% of ANZ frameworks are in the developing phase, reflecting the high recent uptake — many of those 87.5% with frameworks are relatively new to them. North America has the most urgent maturity challenge: high adoption (60.5%) but only 11.8% embedded and active. South and Central America presents a governance risk: 12.5% of frameworks there are embedded but not actively reviewed — the highest of any region — suggesting frameworks that have been established but may no longer reflect current AI practice.

COVERAGE AREAS — CHANGES FROM 2025

FRAMEWORK COVERAGE AREAS



Survey question Q16: Which of the following areas does your responsible AI framework currently cover?

Governance/Standards coverage has increased significantly (61.0% to 73.5%), reflecting the profession’s deepening engagement with formal governance. New coverage areas in 2026 include data governance, human-centric oversight, and environmental impact — though the latter remains notably low at 18.8%, consistent with the broader finding that environmental implications of AI are not yet on most organizations’ radar.

THE REGIONAL VIEW

Regional differences in framework coverage priorities reveal distinct governance philosophies. Training and upskilling are the defining priorities of African frameworks at 74% — the highest of any region by a significant margin, and more than double the rates in North America and ANZ. This reflects both the acute support deficit in the region and a recognition that people development must precede process governance. Coverage of Ethics, Law and Acts is strongest in North America (81%), ANZ (80%), and EMENA (80%), while Africa (61%) and South and Central America (62%) report comparatively lower coverage in this area. Governance and Standards coverage is more consistent across regions, ranging from 61% in Africa to 77% in EMENA and North America.

Selected Framework Coverage Areas by Region (Q16)	Africa	Asia - Pacific	ANZ	EMENA	N. America	S/C America	Global
Ethics / Law and Acts	61% ▼	70%	80%	80%	81% ★	62%	75%
Governance / Standards	61% ▼	74%	76%	77% ★	77% ★	75%	73%
Risk / Reputation	58%	37%	72% ★	60%	50%	25% ▼	53%
Training / Upskilling	74% ★	41%	36%	33% ▼	35%	62%	44%
Security and Privacy	45%	37% ▼	64%	60%	71% ★	50%	57%
Sustainability / Environmental Impact	26% ★	7%	8%	10%	2% ▼	25%	19%
Data Governance and Data Quality	42%	56% ★	48%	50%	52%	38% ▼	49%
Agentic AI / Autonomous Systems	10%	19% ★	8% ▼	17%	17%	12%	14%

Note: Only respondents whose organizations have a framework answered Q16. n: Africa 31, Asia-Pacific 27, ANZ 25, EMENA 30, North America 48, South/Central America 8 (interpret with caution).

Security and privacy coverage shows a significant divide: North America (71%) and ANZ (64%) prioritize this most heavily, while Africa (45%) and Asia-Pacific (37%) have the largest gaps — a notable risk given AI adoption levels. Africa leads on sustainability and environmental impact coverage (26%), though all regions are low on this dimension. Agentic AI coverage in frameworks remains limited across all regions, with the highest rates in Asia-Pacific (19%) and in EMENA and North America (both 17%). Given that nearly one in three organizations globally is already using or piloting AI agents, the near-universal absence of agentic AI governance in formal frameworks is a risk that will require urgent attention in the year ahead.

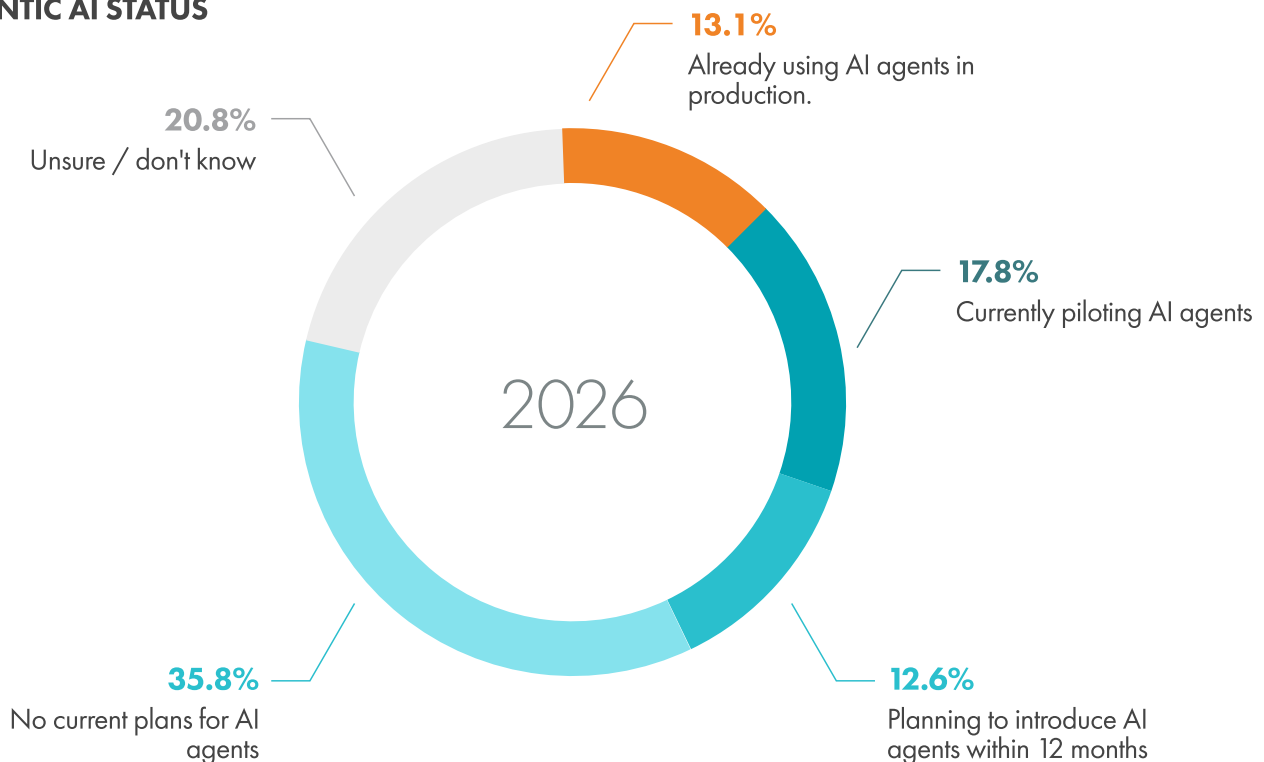


AGENTIC AI — THE NEXT FRONTIER

Just as the governance conversation is maturing around today's AI tools, a new wave is arriving. AI agents — systems that can act, respond, and engage autonomously on behalf of organizations — are already operating in nearly one in three organizations surveyed. This section introduces agentic AI data for the first time in this research series.

AGENTIC AI ADOPTION

AGENTIC AI STATUS



Survey question Q17: Is your organization currently using, piloting, or planning AI agents or agentic workflows?]

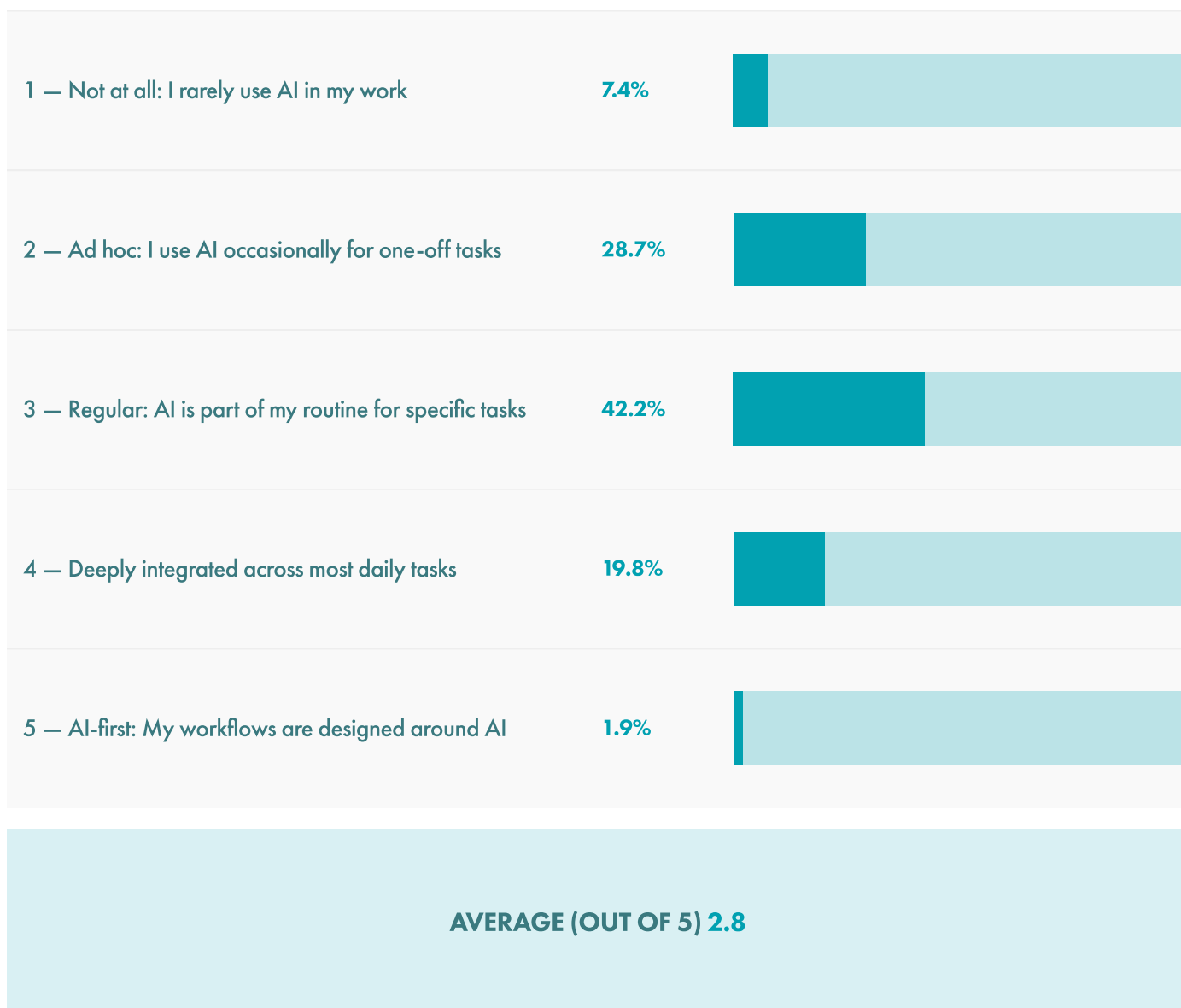
Nearly one in three organizations (30.9%) are already using or piloting AI agents. A further 12.6% plan to introduce them within 12 months. This means that by the time of the 2027 survey, agentic AI may be in active use in more than 40% of organizations represented in this research.

The implications for communication professionals are significant. AI agents can draft, publish, respond, and engage with stakeholders autonomously. Questions of human oversight, accountability, error correction, and ethical responsibility become more complex — and more urgent — when AI acts, not merely assists.

Yet PR and communication teams report very limited involvement in AI agent oversight (8.5% leading) and AI workflow governance (8.2% leading). This mismatch between the pace of agentic AI adoption and the profession's current governance footprint is among the most pressing risks identified in the 2026 survey.

AI INTEGRATION DEPTH IN DAY-TO-DAY WORKFLOWS

AI INTEGRATION LEVEL



Survey question Q18: How deeply is AI currently integrated into your day-to-day communication workflows?

Many communication professionals (42.2%) use AI regularly for specific tasks. Fewer than one in five have deeply integrated AI across their daily workflows, and only around 2% describe themselves as operating in an AI-first mode. This suggests that, while adoption is near-universal, deep integration is still the exception rather than the rule.



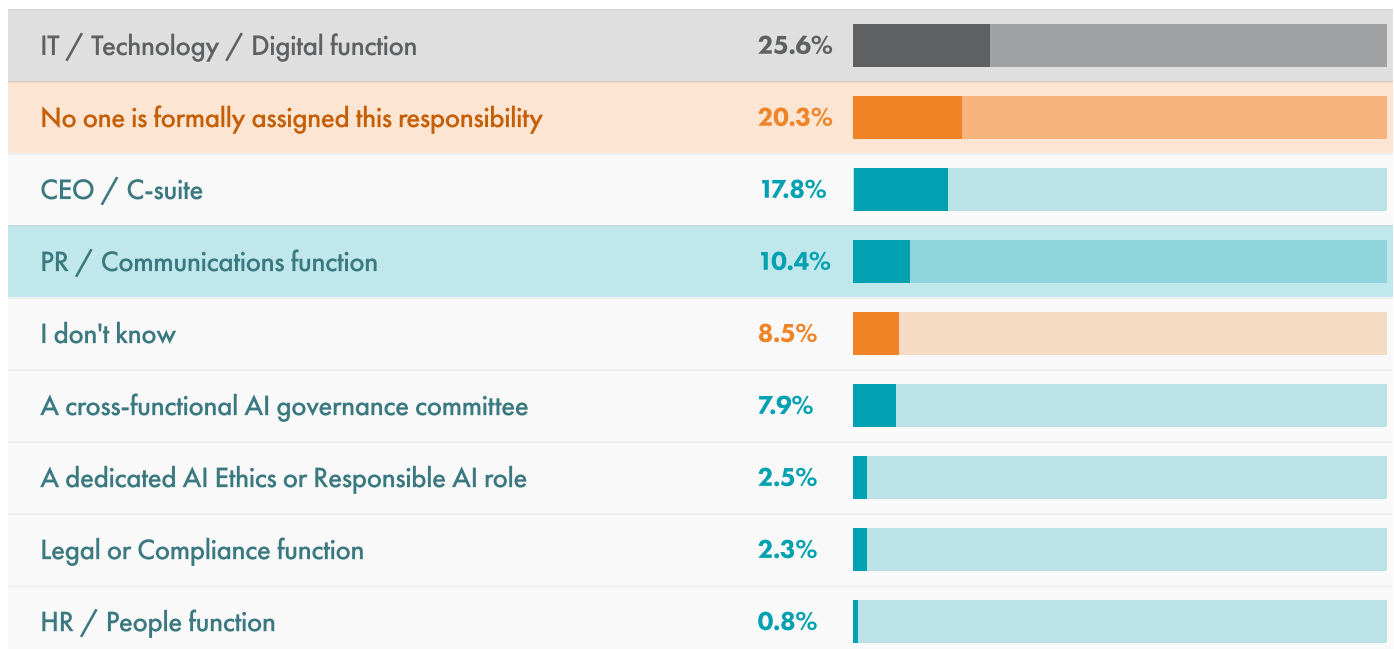
GOVERNANCE, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND DISCLOSURE

Having permission to use AI and having a framework for it are necessary conditions for responsible adoption. But they are not sufficient on their own. Someone must be accountable. Something must be disclosed. This section examines who owns responsible AI — and whether organizations are telling the truth about how they use it.

WHO OWNS RESPONSIBLE AI?

For the first time, the 2026 survey asks directly who in organizations holds primary responsibility for ethical and responsible AI. The findings reveal a significant accountability gap:

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR ETHICAL AI

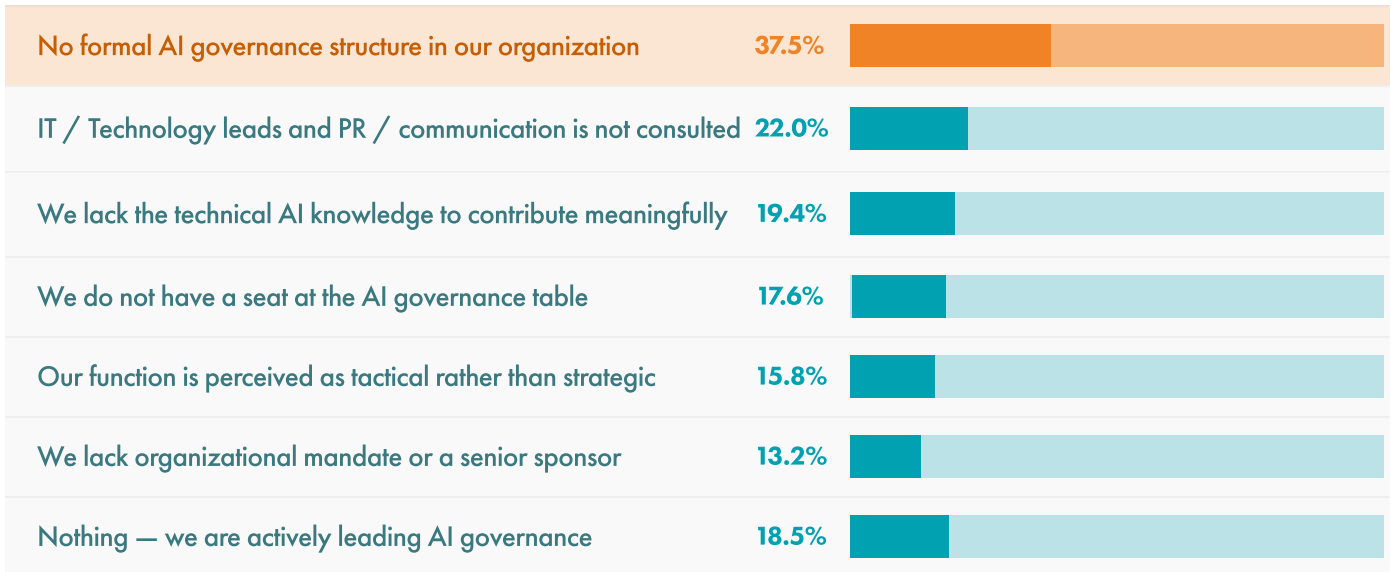


Survey question Q19: Who in your organization currently holds primary responsibility for ethical and responsible AI?

IT and Technology functions hold primary responsibility in 25.6% of organizations — more than any other function. One in five organizations (20.3%) have no formally assigned responsibility at all. Only 10.4% report that the PR and communication function holds primary responsibility. The case for communication professionals to stake a formal claim to this accountability has never been stronger — or more urgent.

WHAT IS PREVENTING PR & COMMUNICATION PROFESSIONALS FROM LEADING?

BARRIERS TO PR LEADERSHIP IN AI GOVERNANCE



Survey question Q20: What, if anything, is currently preventing your PR and communication function from having greater influence in AI governance?

The most common barrier is the absence of a formal AI governance structure — an issue that affects more than a third of respondents (37.5%). Where structures do exist, PR and communication is frequently not at the table, either because IT leads by default (22.0%) or because the function is still perceived as tactical rather than strategic (15.8%). More than 18% of respondents report that no barrier exists — they are actively leading. This figure, while modest, represents a cohort whose experiences and approaches may offer models for the wider profession.

THE REGIONAL VIEW

Barriers to PR Leadership in AI Governance — Regional View (Q20)	Africa	Asia - Pacific	ANZ	EMENA	N. America	S/C America
No formal AI governance structure	56.4% ★	47.5%	13.8% ▼	23.9%	19.7%	45.5%
IT leads on AI — PR not consulted	22.7%	21.3%	27.6% ★	17.4% ▼	21.1%	27.3%
Lack technical AI knowledge	26.4% ★	22.9%	13.8%	19.6%	11.8%	9.1% ▼
Perceived as tactical not strategic	16.4%	9.8% ▼	20.7%	10.9%	22.4% ★	18.2%
No seat at AI governance table	19.1%	13.1%	17.2%	15.2%	21.1% ★	9.1%
Nothing — actively leading	9.1% ▼	14.8%	31.0% ★	26.1%	25.0%	18.2%

Note: n: Africa ~110, Asia-Pacific ~61, ANZ ~29, EMENA ~46, North America ~76, South/Central America ~11 (interpret with caution).

AFRICA: THE STRUCTURAL BARRIER

In Africa, 56.4% of respondents cite the absence of a formal AI governance structure as the primary barrier — the highest of any region and well above the global figure of 37.5%. The implication is stark: in most African organizations, the conversation about who should lead AI governance has not yet happened, because no formal space for that conversation exists. Africa also reports the lowest rate of active leadership (9.1%) and the largest technical knowledge gap (26.4%). The challenge here is foundational — it is about building the structures before claiming the seats within them.

ANZ: THE INFLUENCE PARADOX

ANZ presents the most counterintuitive finding in the Q20 regional data. With by far the best governance infrastructure — 87.5% framework adoption, 31.0% actively leading — ANZ also has the highest IT-dominance barrier (27.6%) and the second-highest 'perceived as tactical' rate (20.7%). In short, governance structures exist in ANZ, but PR has not fully converted structural presence into decisive leadership. The profession in ANZ is in the room — but not yet consistently at the head of the table.

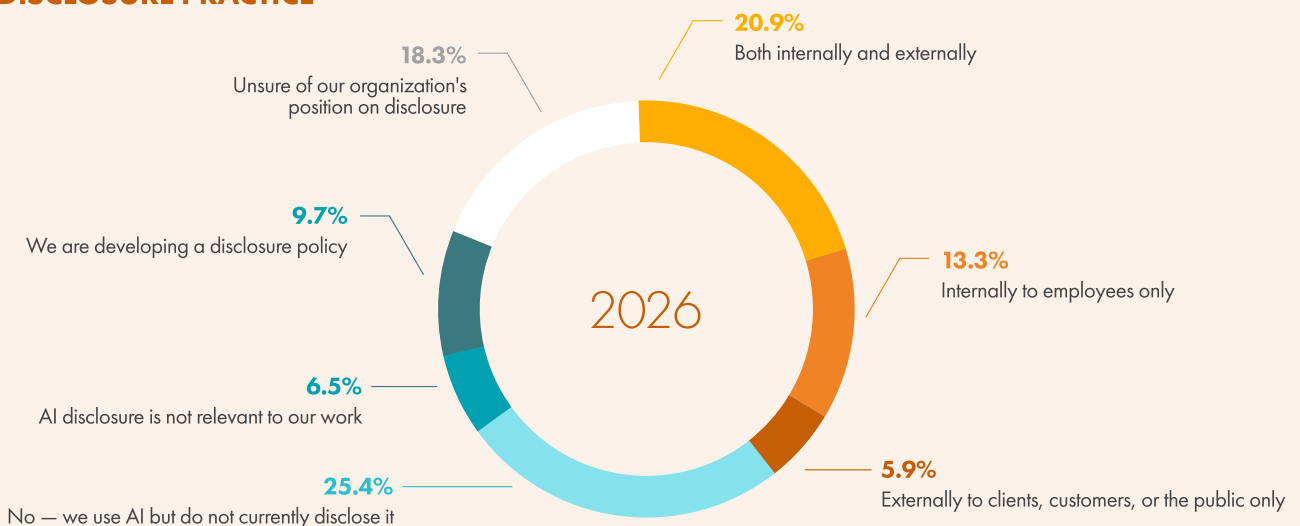
NORTH AMERICA: THE POSITIONING PROBLEM

North America's barrier profile points most strongly to a positioning and credibility challenge for the communication function. Structural barriers are comparatively low (19.7%), suggesting that governance frameworks are generally in place. However, the region records the highest levels globally for communication being 'perceived as tactical' (22.4%) and for having 'no seat at the governance table' (21.1%). Strengthening the strategic positioning of communication within governance and decision-making structures appears to be a critical regional priority.

EMENA: THE CONFIDENT MINORITY

EMENA reports the strongest actively-leading rate outside ANZ (26.1%) and the lowest IT-dominance barrier (17.4%) — suggesting a region where, in many organizations, PR has already secured meaningful influence in AI governance. Its strong agentic AI focus for the next two years (34.4%, as identified in Q29) reflects a region operating with confidence about its current governance position.

AI DISCLOSURE PRACTICE



Survey question Q21: Does your organization currently disclose its use of AI to employees, clients, or the public?

AI disclosure is one of the most striking gaps in the 2026 data. A quarter of organizations (25.4%) use AI but disclose this to no one — neither employees nor external stakeholders. Only 20.9% disclose both internally and externally. A further 18.3% are unsure of their own organization's disclosure position — a finding that underscores how early-stage disclosure thinking remains. For a profession built on the principles of transparency and trust, the disclosure deficit is one of the most important findings in this year's survey — and one with direct reputational implications.

PR AND COMMUNICATION TEAM INVOLVEMENT IN AI

The central question of this research series is not whether the profession is using AI, but whether it is shaping how AI is governed and practiced responsibly. This section provides the clearest year-on-year view of where communication professionals sit in the governance picture — and where they do not yet sit.

INVOLVEMENT IN KEY AI ACTIVITIES

The following table compares PR and communication team involvement across key AI activities in 2025 and 2026. Note that the 2026 survey includes additional activities not present in the 2025 survey.

Activity	2026 Not Involved	2026 Contributing	2026 Leading	2025 Not Involved	2025 Contributing	2025 Leading	Direction
AI governance structure	52.6%	38.7%	8.6%	57.5%	35.6%	6.9%	IMPROVING ↑
Ethical and transparent AI use	45.4%	43.1%	11.5%	46.8%	40.8%	12.4%	STABLE →
Employee AI literacy	44.2%	44.2%	13.6%	51.3%	37.0%	11.7%	IMPROVING ↑
AI risk and crisis management	45.1%	42.1%	12.7%	57.1%	29.1%	13.8%	IMPROVING ↑
Responsible AI guidelines	42.7%	43.4%	13.9%	58.6%	33.7%	7.7%	IMPROVING ↑
AI strategic alignment	49.7%	38.2%	12.2%	60.7%	—	—	IMPROVING ↑
AI agent oversight	65.0%	26.5%	8.5%	—	—	—	NEW 2026
AI workflow governance	61.6%	30.3%	8.2%	—	—	—	NEW 2026

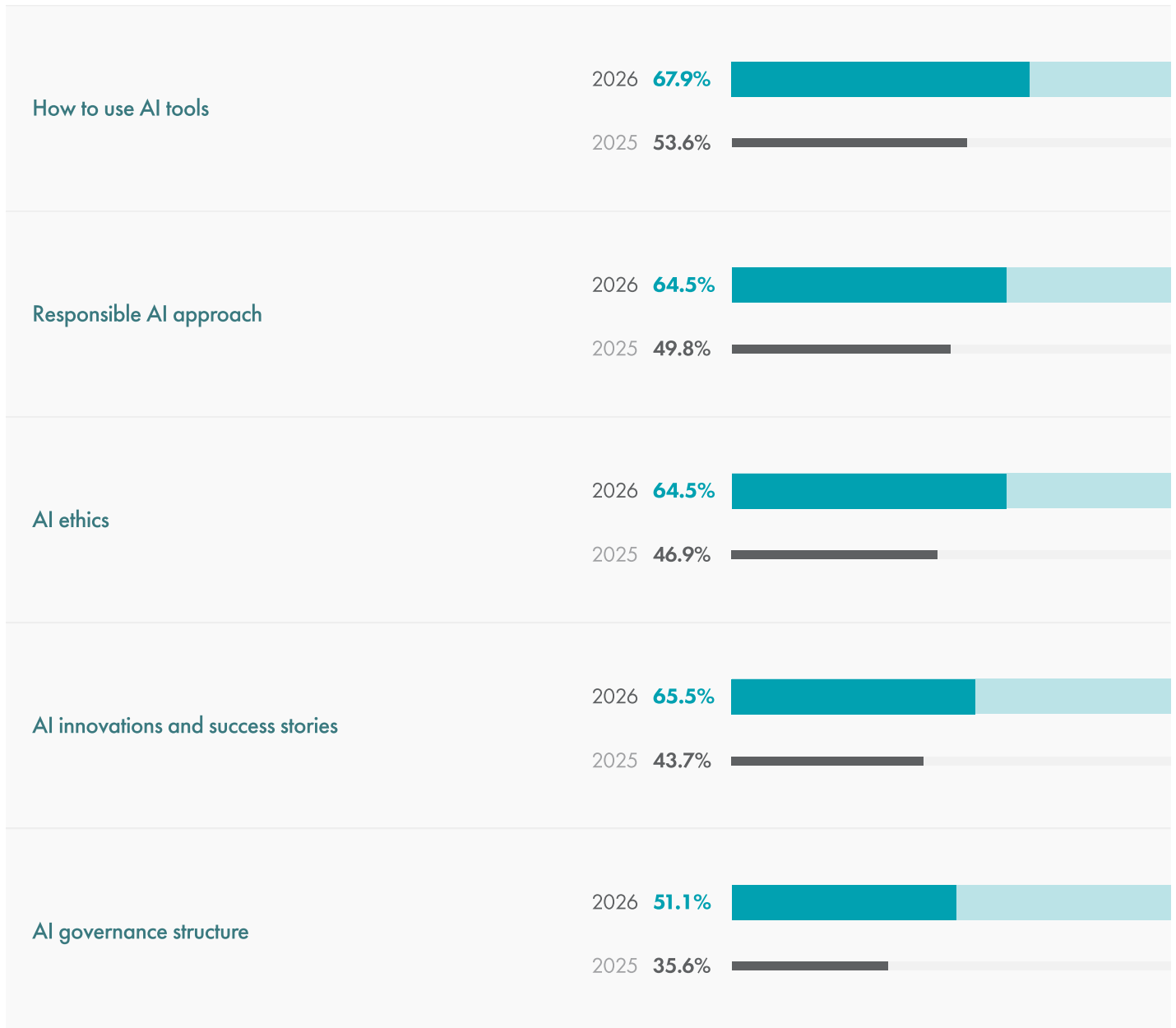
Survey question Q22: To what extent is your PR and communication team currently involved in the following AI-related activities within your organization? n=294–308. AI strategic alignment, AI agent oversight, and AI workflow governance were not included in the 2025 survey.

The consistent direction of travel across all comparable categories is encouraging: involvement is increasing and the 'not involved' proportions are declining. The most substantial improvement is in responsible AI guidelines, where non-involvement has dropped from 58.6% to 42.7% — a reduction of nearly 16 percentage points in a single year. This suggests that communication professionals are beginning to claim the advisory role in responsible AI policy that respondents consistently identify as one of their most important responsibilities.

STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATION

The 2026 survey revised the stakeholder communication question to distinguish between internal-only, external-only, both, and no communication — providing richer data on how and to whom organizations communicate about AI. Comparable 2025 figures represent the total proportion who communicated at all.

STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATION TOPIC

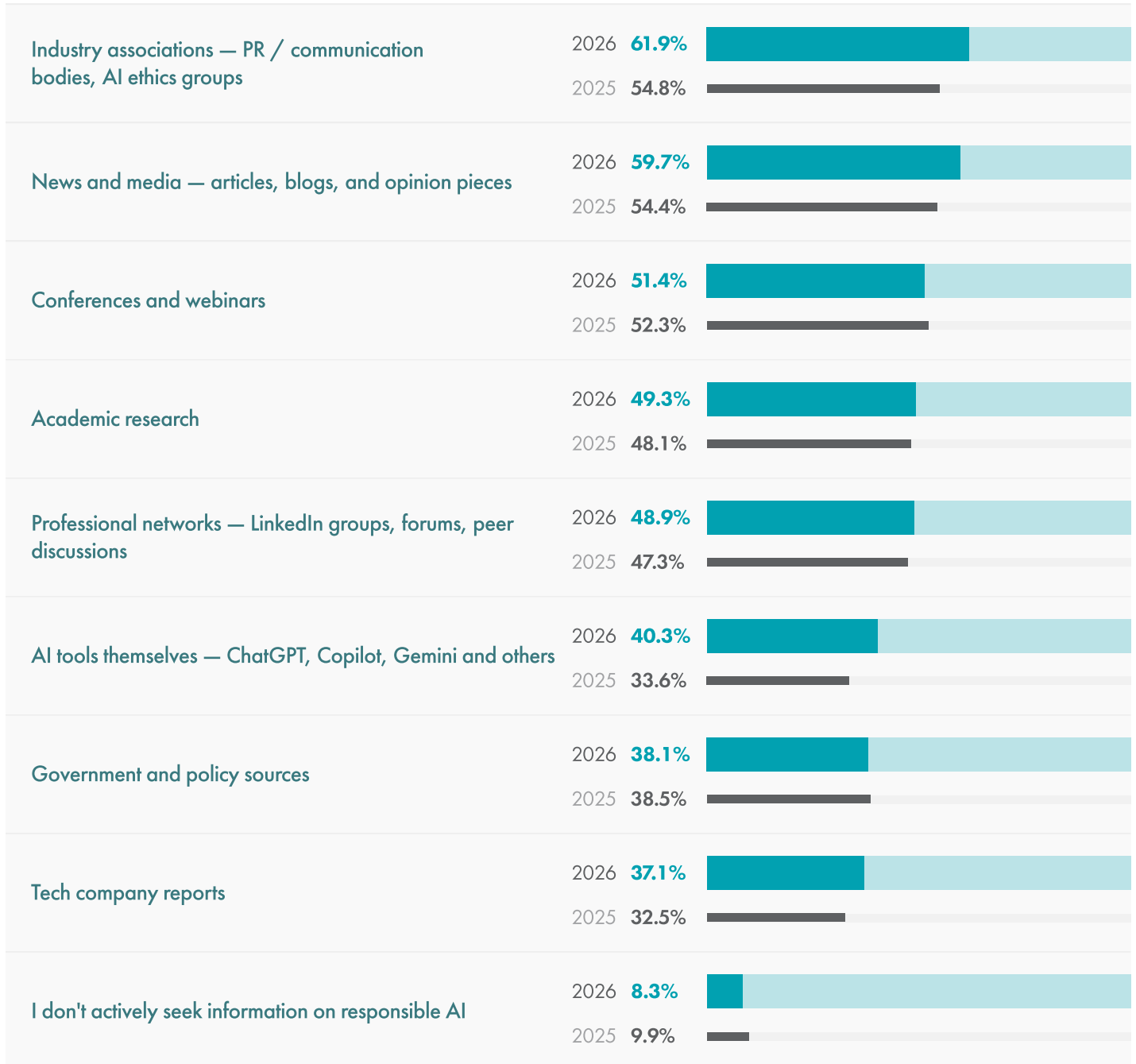


Survey question Q23: Does your organization proactively communicate with stakeholders about its approach to AI?

The improvements across all communication topics are substantial. Responsible AI approach communication has risen by nearly 15 percentage points; AI ethics communication has grown by almost 18 percentage points. AI governance structure communication, while significantly improved (from 35.6% to 51.1%), remains the governance communication gap—the area with the most room to grow. For a profession whose core competency is communication, closing this gap is both achievable and urgent.

SOURCES OF RESPONSIBLE AI INFORMATION

SOURCE OF RESPONSIBLE AI INFORMATION



Survey question Q24: Where do you primarily source information or guidance on responsible AI for your communication work?

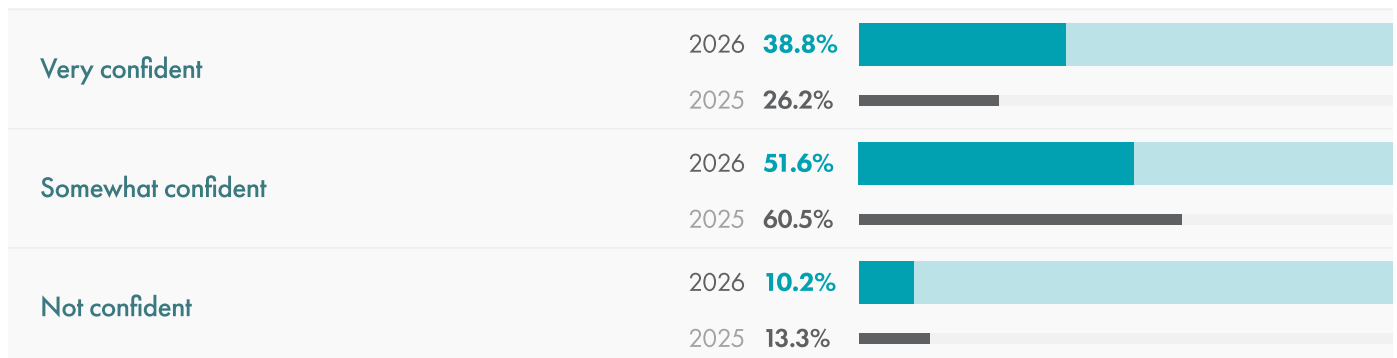
Industry associations have strengthened their position as the primary source of responsible AI guidance (61.9%, up from 54.8%). Notably, AI tools themselves have grown in importance as information sources (33.6% to 40.3%), reflecting the increasing role of generative AI in professional research. The proportion who do not actively seek responsible AI information has declined from 9.9% to 8.3% — modest, but directionally positive.

ETHICAL CONFIDENCE AND PROFESSIONAL READINESS

Governance structures and frameworks matter. So does the readiness of individual practitioners. This section measures the profession's own sense of its ethical preparedness — and finds the most substantial positive shift of any single measure in the 2026 data.

CONFIDENCE IN EVALUATING ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

ETHICAL CONFIDENCE LEVEL



Survey question Q26: How confident do you feel in your ability to evaluate the ethical implications of AI in your work?

One of the more notable shifts in the 2026 survey is the increase in ethical confidence. The proportion of communication professionals who feel very confident in their ability to evaluate the ethical implications of AI rose from 26.2% to 38.8% — an increase of 12.6 percentage points in one year

The proportion who don't feel confident has declined from 13.3% to 10.2%. While a substantial majority (51.6%) remain in the 'somewhat confident' category, the overall trajectory is strongly positive. The profession is building its ethical literacy at pace — a development that aligns with the growth in training offerings and AI literacy programs reported elsewhere in the survey.

“Ethical confidence in AI increased by 12.6 percentage points in one year — from 26.2% to 38.8% of communication professionals feeling very confident in evaluating AI’s ethical implications.”

— Reimagining Tomorrow 2026 — Responsible AI in PR and Communication Management Survey



OPPORTUNITIES, THREATS, AND FOCUS AHEAD

With the governance picture established, we turn to the horizon: what practitioners see as the AI opportunities and risks for the profession, and — for the first time in this research series — where they intend to direct their energy over the next two years.

GREATEST OPPORTUNITIES FROM AI

AI Opportunity	2026	2025
Enables faster content creation	68.4%	71.4%
Improves content quality	44.7%	39.9%
Automates tasks — monitoring, transcription, reporting	35.0%	35.9%
Enhances audience insights	25.9%	23.0%
Boosts creativity — brainstorming and storytelling	22.2%	27.4%
Supports data-driven decisions	22.2%	22.6%
Enables more inclusive communication	12.8%	16.9%
AI agents handling multi-step tasks autonomously	11.7%	—

Survey question Q27: What do you see as the greatest opportunities for AI in PR and communication management?

MOST SIGNIFICANT THREATS

AI Threats	2026	2025
Erosion of creativity and original thinking	47.0%	—
Misinformation and fake news	44.3%	—
Overdependence and declining critical thinking	38.6%	—
Job displacement and workforce reduction	36.3%	—
Authenticity loss	24.4%	—
Deepfakes and synthetic media	24.4%	—
Privacy and data security	16.4%	—
Devaluation of PR / communication	13.0%	—
Agentic AI risks — autonomous decisions without human oversight	6.5%	—

Survey question Q28: What do you see as the most significant threats or risks of AI for PR and communication management?

Faster content creation remains the dominant opportunity identified (68.4%), though it has declined slightly from 71.4% in 2025 — suggesting that other applications are beginning to compete for attention. Content quality improvement has risen (39.9% to 44.7%), and audience insights and data-driven decision-making are growing. The introduction of AI agents as a named opportunity (11.7%) reflects the growing awareness of agentic AI capabilities.

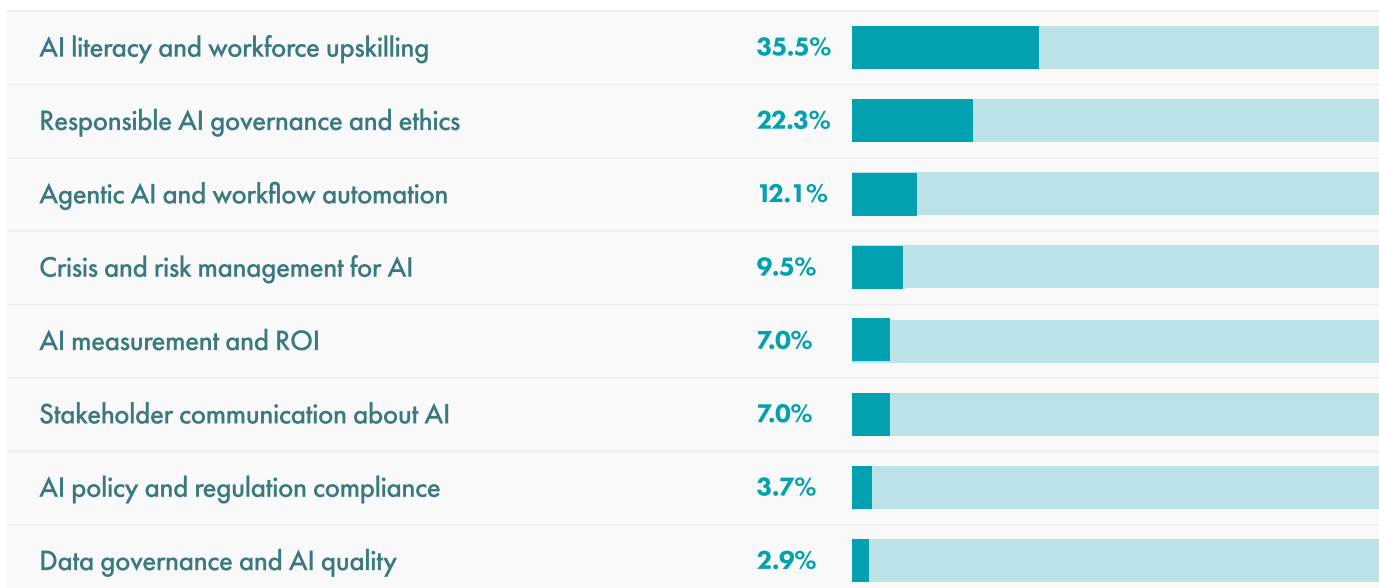
Note: The 2026 threats question was substantially revised to provide more specific, structured options compared to the 2025 open-text format. Direct numerical comparisons are not available, though the themes of job displacement, erosion of creativity, misinformation, and loss of authenticity remain consistent across years.

Creativity erosion (47.0%) and misinformation risks (44.3%) top the threat list. Overdependence and declining critical thinking — a concern expressed qualitatively in 2025 — has emerged as a formally identified threat at 38.6%. The devaluation of PR and communication (13.0%) is a new and notable finding: the profession is aware that AI could commoditize its outputs if the function does not establish and defend its strategic value.

FOCUS FOR THE NEXT TWO YEARS — NEW ANNUAL TRACKING QUESTION

A new question introduced in 2026 will be tracked annually: What will be your single biggest area of AI focus in the next two years?

NEXT TWO YEARS FOCUS



Survey question Q29: What will be your single biggest area of AI focus in the next two years?

AI literacy and workforce upskilling is the dominant stated priority (35.5%), reinforcing the profession's recognition that foundational competence — before governance and strategy — remains the most urgent need for most practitioners. Responsible AI governance and ethics come second at 22.3%, consistent with the profession's identified priority of formal governance structures. Agentic AI and workflow automation (12.1%) represents a notable forward-looking focus, suggesting that a significant cohort of professionals sees agentic AI as the defining operational challenge of the next two years.

REGIONAL VIEW: THE REGIONAL VIEW

Single Biggest AI Focus — Next Two Years (Q29)	Africa	Asia - Pacific	ANZ	EMENA	N. America	S/C America
AI literacy and workforce upskilling	42.0%	39.2%	52.0% ★	15.6%	32.8%	11.1% ▼
Responsible AI governance and ethics	19.8%	21.6%	16.0% ▼	31.2% ★	22.4%	22.2%
Agentic AI and workflow automation	2.5% ▼	7.8%	12.0%	34.4% ★	14.9%	22.2%
Crisis and risk management for AI	16.1%	11.8%	8.0%	0.0% ▼	4.5%	22.2% ★
AI measurement and ROI	3.7%	2.0%	12.0%	6.2%	14.9% ★	0.0% ▼

Note: n: Africa 81, Asia-Pacific 51, ANZ 25, EMENA 32, North America 67, South/Central America 9.

EMENA

EMENA is a global outlier: 34.4% identify agentic AI as their single biggest two-year focus — nearly three times the global average (12.1%), likely reflecting EU AI Act requirements and EMENA’s more mature governance environment.

AFRICA

Africa (42.0%) and ANZ (52.0%) converge strongly on AI literacy as top priority — well above the global average (35.5%) and directly reflecting the support deficits identified in Q12 and Q13.

NORTH AMERICA

North America is the only region with a material focus on AI measurement and ROI (14.9%), signalling a maturing conversation about demonstrating the business value of AI investment.

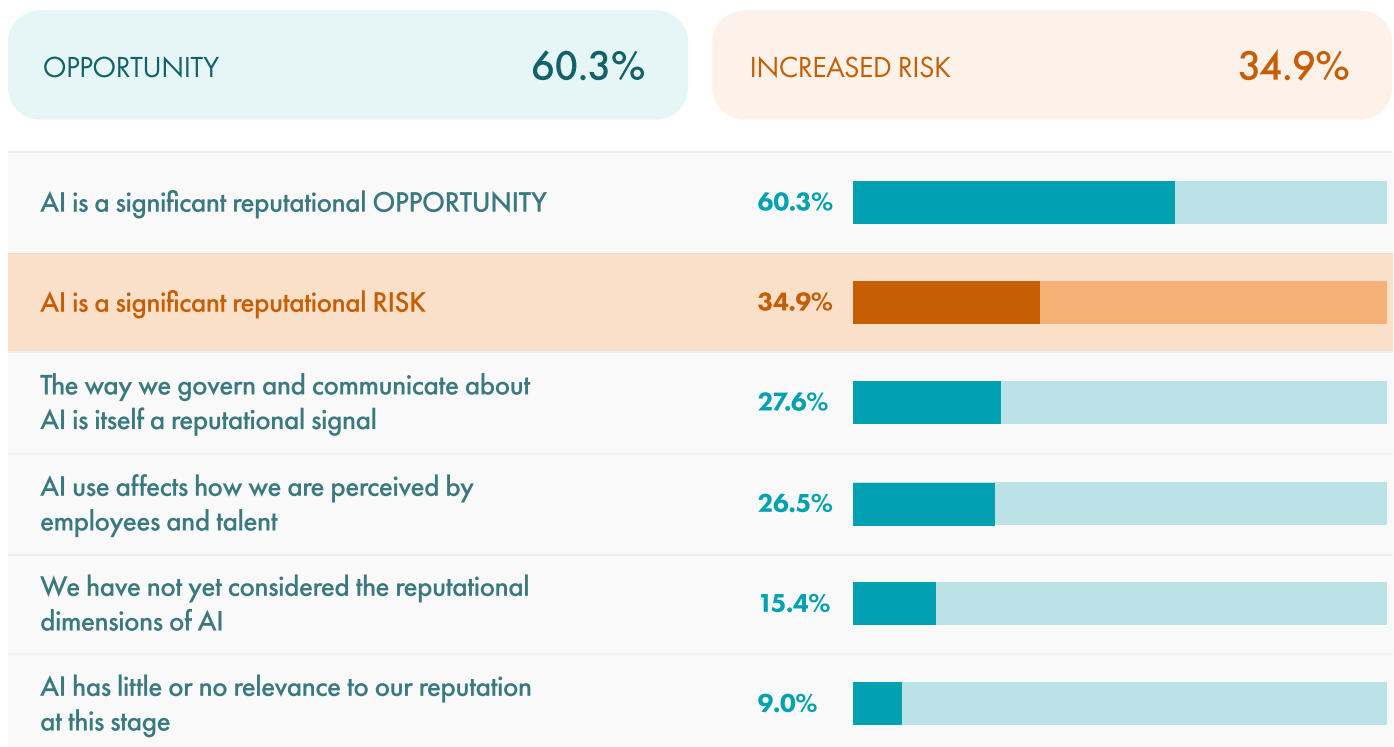


REPUTATION AND AI

This is where the journey becomes most personal for communication professionals. Reputation is the profession’s foundational currency — and AI is rapidly reshaping how it is built, protected, and measured. The 2026 survey introduces a dedicated Reputation and AI section that will anchor this research series for years ahead.

AI AS A REPUTATIONAL DIMENSION

The 2026 survey introduces a dedicated Reputation and AI section — recognizing that the way organizations adopt, govern, and communicate about AI is itself a reputational signal. This section will be tracked in future editions.



Survey question Q30: In which of the following ways is AI relevant to your organization’s reputation?

Most communication professionals (60.3%) see AI as a significant reputational opportunity. Importantly, 27.6% recognize that governance and communication about AI are themselves reputational signals — a sophisticated and consequential insight for a profession whose expertise lies precisely in this area. Yet 15.4% have not yet considered the reputational dimensions of AI at all, and 9.0% believe it has little relevance to their organization's reputation.

REPUTATIONAL RISK EXPOSURE

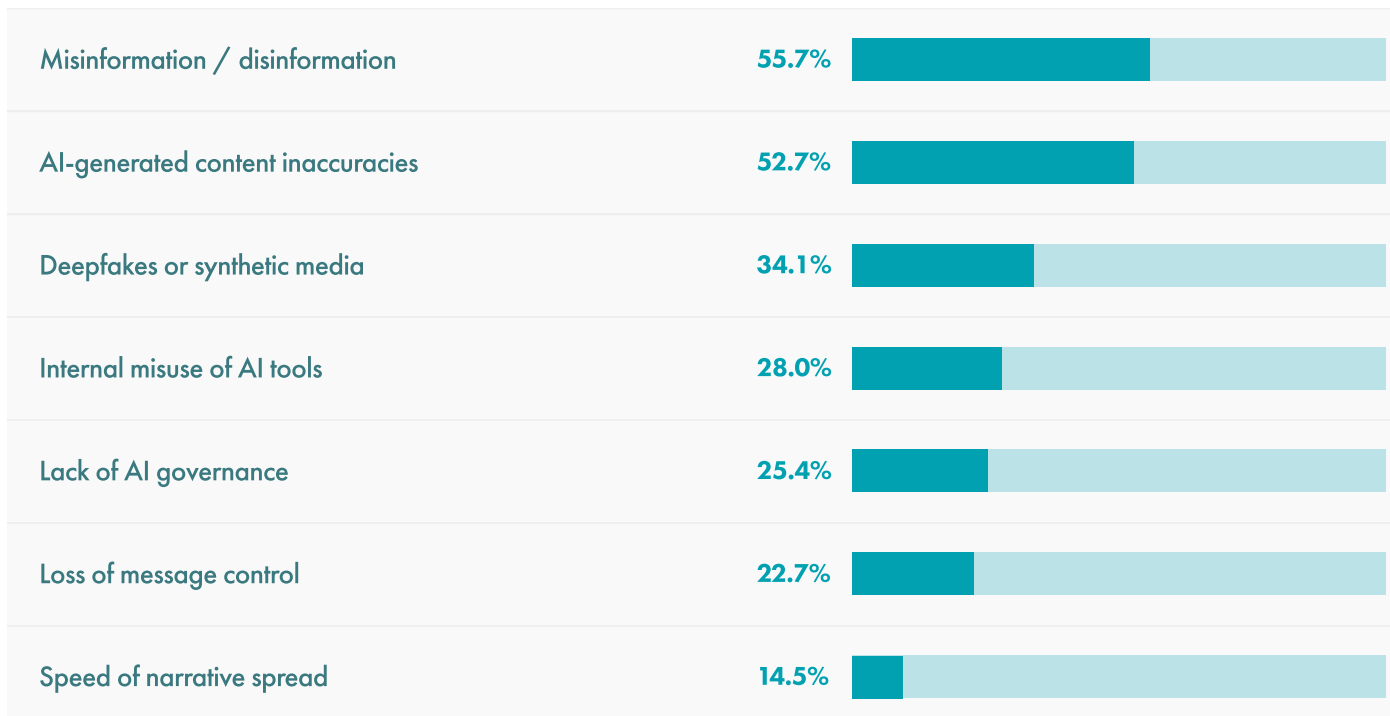
AI and Reputational Risk	2026
AI has significantly increased reputational risk exposure	14.5%
AI has moderately increased reputational risk exposure	41.6%
No change in reputational risk exposure	21.9%
AI has reduced risk	3.7%
Unsure	18.2%

Survey question Q31: How has your organization's use of AI affected its overall reputational risk exposure?

More than half of respondents (56.1%) say AI has increased their organization's reputational risk exposure — either moderately or significantly. This finding, combined with the 60.3% who see AI as a reputational opportunity, underscores the dual nature of AI's reputational impact: it is simultaneously an opportunity to signal innovation and leadership, and a risk that requires active management.

GREATEST REPUTATIONAL RISK FACTORS

REPUTATIONAL RISK FACTOR FROM AI



Survey question Q34: What do you see as the greatest reputational risks associated with AI adoption for your organization?

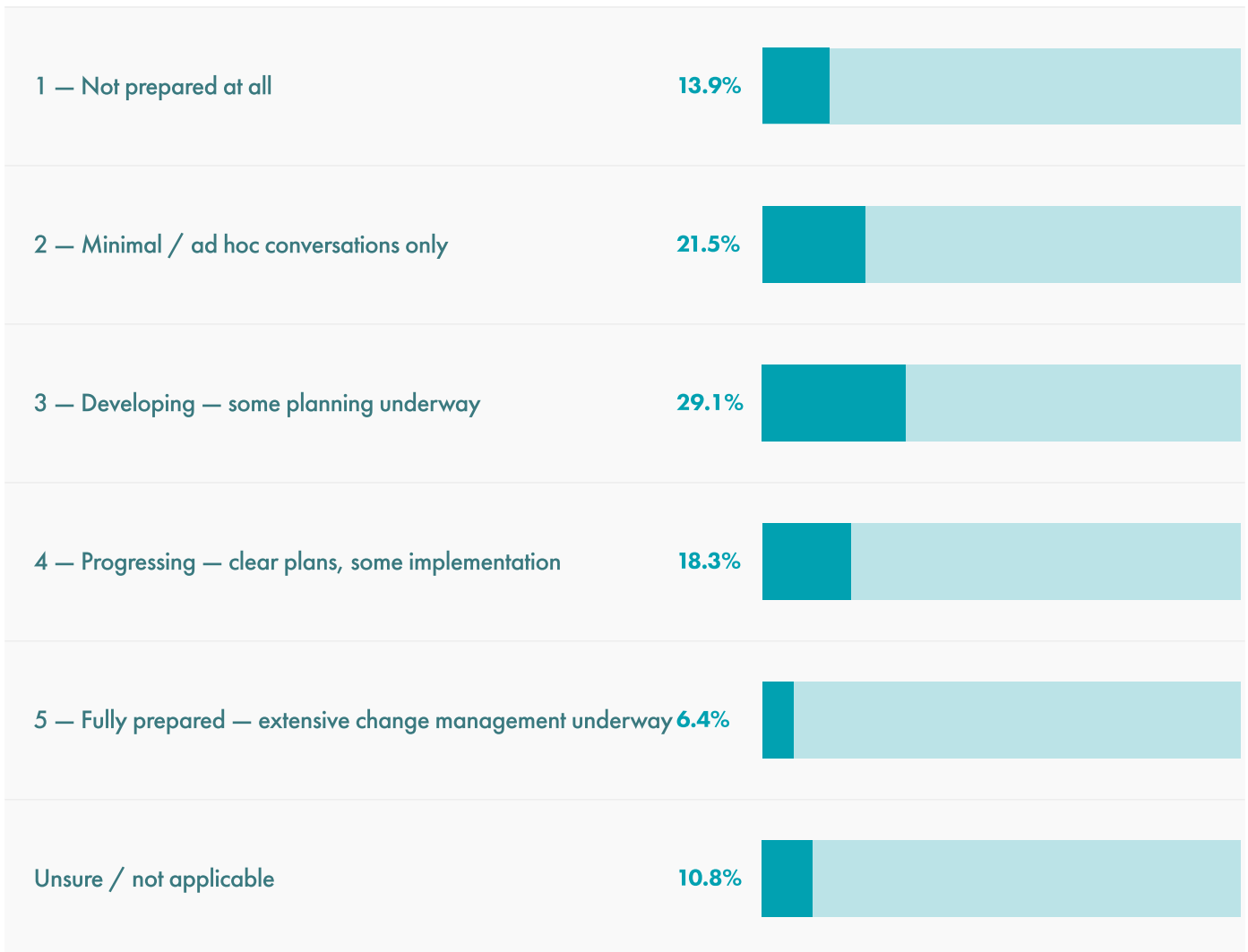
Misinformation and disinformation top the reputational risk list (55.7%), followed closely by inaccuracies in AI-generated content (52.7%). These findings are consistent with the broader threat perceptions identified earlier in the survey and point to a fundamental challenge: as AI makes content generation faster and easier, the risk of inaccurate, misleading, or deceptive content — and its reputational consequences — grows proportionally.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND WORKFORCE IMPACTS

EMPLOYEE WELFARE AND AI

Respondents were asked how well their organization is prepared to balance efficiency gains from AI with employee welfare and job security. The results reveal a significant welfare planning gap:

EMPLOYEE WELFARE PREPAREDNESS



AVERAGE (OUT OF 5) 2.81

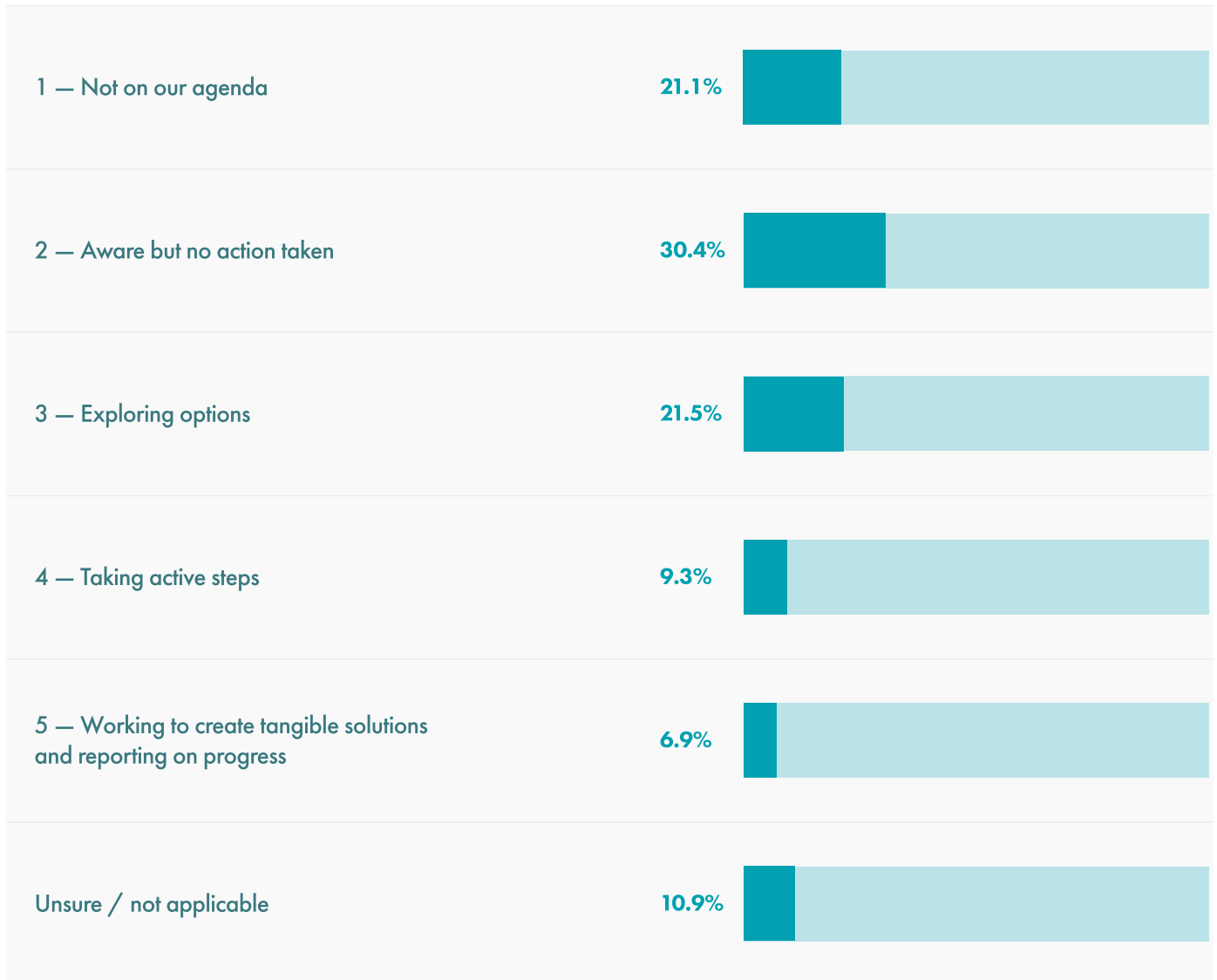
Survey question Q32: How prepared is your organization to balance the efficiency gains of AI with employee welfare and job security?

With an average rating of 2.81 out of 5 — and 35.4% of respondents reporting minimal or no preparation for the workforce impacts of AI — the profession's organizations are significantly behind where they need to be on employee welfare. This is not merely an HR concern: the way organizations manage AI-driven workforce change is a communication challenge, and increasingly a reputational one.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Organizations were asked the extent to which they are addressing the environmental impacts of AI's resource demands:

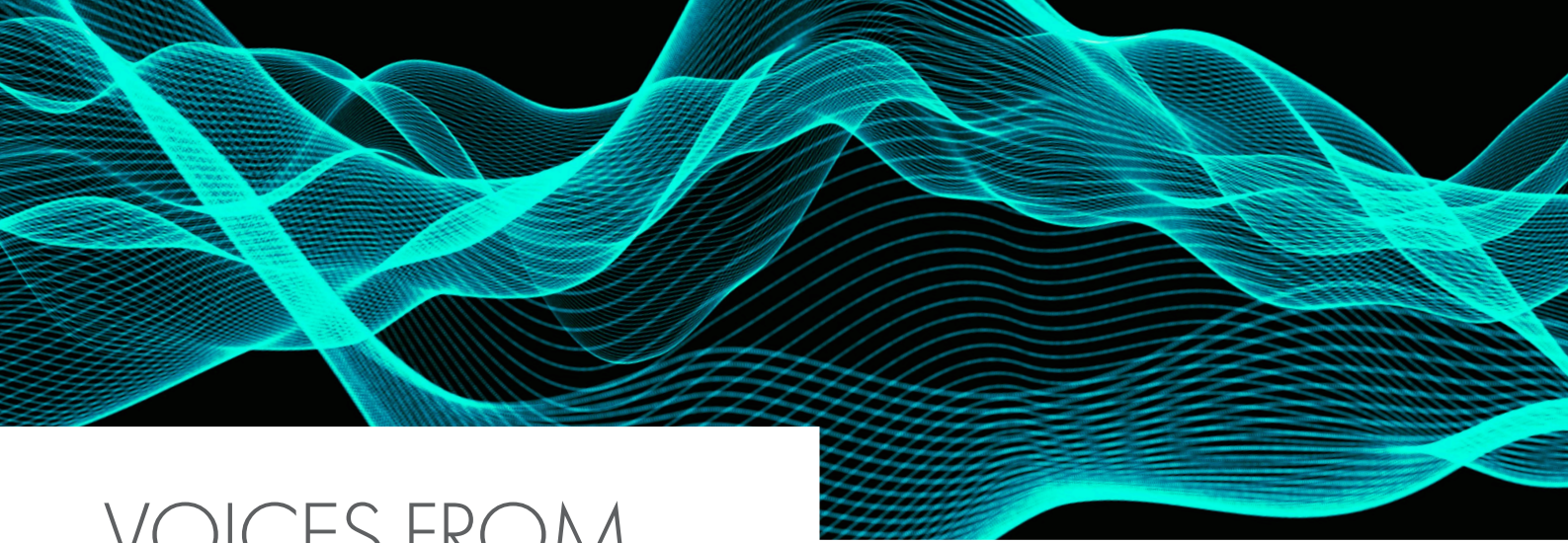
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF AI



AVERAGE (OUT OF 5) 2.44

Survey question Q33: To what extent is your organization currently addressing the environmental impact of AI's resource demands?

Environmental impacts of AI — including its significant energy and water demands — are the least addressed dimension in the 2026 survey. Around a third of respondents (30.4%) are aware but taking no action. Only 9.3% are taking active steps or working toward tangible solutions. As environmental, social, and governance (ESG) reporting requirements grow globally, and as AI's energy footprint becomes a more prominent public issue, this represents a significant governance and communication blind spot.



VOICES FROM THE FIELD

WHAT RESPONDENTS SAY: REPUTATION AND RESPONSIBLE AI

Survey question Q35: In your view, what is the most important thing an organization can do to protect and build its reputation in an AI-enabled environment?

The 2026 survey asked an open question: what is the most important thing an organization can do to protect and build its reputation in an AI-enabled environment? Two hundred and twenty-five respondents answered, generating a rich body of qualitative insight that both reinforces and extends the quantitative findings. Four themes emerged consistently.

1. GOVERNANCE AND CLEAR POLICY

The most common response — reflected in more than a third of substantive answers — called for clear, well-communicated governance frameworks and policies. Respondents called for governance to be led from the top, for transparency in how AI is used, and for review processes for AI-generated content. The convergence with the quantitative findings is striking: the same gap between adoption and governance that appears in the numbers also emerges in the qualitative responses, with practitioners clearly aware of the deficit.

"Governance is the foundation — lead it from the top and stay aware of new developments as they emerge."

— Survey respondent, 2026

"Have a clear policy that outlines use, clarifies when and how it is used, what data sets it is built off, and where the human is in the loop."

— Survey respondent, 2026

2. TRAINING AND AI LITERACY

Training and upskilling were the second most common themes, cited by around one in five respondents. The emphasis was less on technical training and more on helping all employees — not just communication teams — understand what AI can and cannot do, where it goes wrong, and how to use it responsibly. Several respondents noted that the danger comes not from AI itself but from uninformed use.

"Many of my colleagues are using AI tools but do not have a background understanding of the ways in which this technology can go wrong — this is an extremely dangerous position for adoption without appropriate guardrails."

— Survey respondent, 2026

"Build capacity in employees so they are able to understand what AI is about and to what extent it can be used. Capacity building is key."

— Survey respondent, 2026

3. TRANSPARENCY AND AUTHENTIC TRUST

A smaller but notable group of respondents focused on the concept of visible, verifiable trust — not trust as a communication strategy, but trust as an operational reality. These responses point to something Bonnie Caver's analysis captures precisely: that in the AI era, reputation will be built less through messaging and more through consistency that stakeholders can observe and verify.

"Make trust visible, verifiable and consistent. In an AI-enabled environment, reputation is shaped by both people and machines."

— Survey respondent, 2026

"In an AI-enabled world, reputation is built less by communication and more by consistency that machines and people can verify."

— Survey respondent, 2026

4. HUMAN OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

A consistent thread across responses was the importance of maintaining human judgment in AI-assisted decisions — particularly for high-stakes communication. Respondents were not anti-AI, most viewed AI as a valuable partner. But they were clear that the human must remain accountable for what is communicated and what is published in the organization's name.

"Use AI only as a tool to create better efficiency — critical and analytical thinking must still be left in the hands of people."

— Survey respondent, 2026

"While the machine can generate ideas, a human must make the decision on the final product."

— Survey respondent, 2026



THE ROAD AHEAD

The 2026 data does not just describe where the profession is. It points toward where it needs to go. The following recommendations are directed at three audiences: communication professionals themselves, the organizations they work within, and the Global Alliance and its member associations who set the conditions for professional practice globally. They are not a destination — they are the next stage of the journey.

FOR PR AND COMMUNICATION PROFESSIONALS

MOVE FROM INVOLVEMENT TO INFLUENCE ON RESPONSIBLE AI.

Growing involvement in AI governance activities is genuine progress — but involvement without a clear mandate is not leadership. Research consistently positions communication professionals as the natural owners of the responsible AI trust architecture: transparency, stakeholder communication, disclosure, and reputational accountability. Claim that mandate explicitly, ground it in business terms, and convert presence at the governance table into a decisive voice on the dimensions that matter most.

CLAIM RESPONSIBLE AI LEADERSHIP WITHIN GOVERNANCE.

Formal AI governance exists in a growing number of organizations, but PR and communication professionals are rarely leading within it. The profession's rightful claim is not governance broadly — that territory is already contested by IT, Legal, and Compliance. The stronger, more strategically sound claim is leadership on the responsible AI dimensions of governance: transparency, disclosure, stakeholder trust, ethical communication, and reputation. These are not peripheral contributions — they are the profession's irreplaceable expertise. Make that case with a clear business argument and make it at the governance table.

LEAD ON DISCLOSURE.

With 25.4% of organizations using AI without disclosing, it at all, communication professionals have an immediate and professionally non-negotiable opportunity: build and implement AI disclosure practices. This is foundational transparency — and it is currently being missed, which puts organizations at significant risk of trust erosion and reputational damage.

PRIORITIZE AGENTIC AI GOVERNANCE.

As AI agents begin to act on behalf of organizations, the communication profession must develop frameworks for oversight, accountability, and error response. The speed of adoption is outpacing governance in this area, and communication professionals have both the expertise and the responsibility to lead.

TRANSLATE ETHICAL CONFIDENCE INTO ETHICAL ACTION.

Confidence in evaluating the ethical implications of AI has grown substantially. The next step is to move from confidence to action — developing, advising on, and communicating about formal ethical frameworks, not just individual professional judgment.

COMMUNICATE AI'S ENVIRONMENTAL AND WORKFORCE IMPACTS.

The most underaddressed dimensions of responsible AI — employee welfare and environmental impact — are precisely the areas where communication expertise can make the biggest difference. These are not just HR or sustainability issues; they are stakeholder-trust issues that fall squarely within the communication function's remit.

BUILD AI LITERACY AS A STRATEGIC PRIORITY

AI literacy and workforce upskilling are the profession's stated top priorities for the next two years. This investment is sound. But AI literacy alone is not enough — it must be paired with governance literacy, ethical literacy, and the business acumen to use AI responsibly as a driver of organizational value.

FOR ORGANIZATIONS

ASSIGN CLEAR ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ETHICAL AND RESPONSIBLE AI.

With 20.3% of organizations having no formal accountability for AI ethics, and a further 8.5% of respondents unsure who holds it, the accountability gap is real and urgent. Clear, senior, and cross-functional accountability is the foundation for all other governance work.

FORMALIZE AI DISCLOSURE

Develop and implement AI disclosure policies that address both internal and external stakeholders. This is a governance baseline — and for communication-led organizations, a reputational imperative.

INCLUDE PR AND COMMUNICATION IN AI GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES.

The evidence consistently shows that PR and communication teams are underrepresented in formal AI governance. This is a structural deficit that organizations should address deliberately — not because it is politically convenient, but because governance without communication expertise is incomplete.

DEVELOP RESPONSIBLE AI FRAMEWORKS THAT ADDRESS THE FULL SCOPE OF IMPACT.

Current frameworks are strongest in ethics and governance but weaker in environmental impact, bias and diversity, and human-first design. Comprehensive responsible AI requires comprehensive frameworks.

INVEST IN EMPLOYEE WELFARE PLANNING FOR THE AI ERA.

An average preparedness rating of 2.81 out of 5 for balancing AI efficiency with employee welfare is insufficient. Organizations that fail to address the human dimensions of AI adoption face growing reputational and operational risk.

FOR GLOBAL ALLIANCE MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

CONTINUE DEVELOPING STANDARDS THAT REFLECT THE EVOLVING LANDSCAPE.

The addition of agentic AI, disclosure, accountability, and environmental dimensions to this year's survey reflects the rapidly expanding scope of responsible AI. Standards must keep pace.

SUPPORT THE PROFESSION IN BUILDING AGENTIC AI GOVERNANCE EXPERTISE.

Agentic AI is the most underserved governance domain in the 2026 data. Resources, frameworks, and training specific to agentic AI accountability should be a priority.

USE THE VENICE PLEDGE AND RESPONSIBLE AI PRINCIPLES AS LIVING FRAMEWORKS.

As the survey data demonstrates, the responsible AI landscape is changing year by year. Global Alliance principles should be reviewed and updated in line with emerging evidence — including these annual survey findings.

ADVOCATE FOR PR AND COMMUNICATION'S FORMAL ROLE AS RESPONSIBLE AI LEADERS WITHIN GOVERNANCE.

The case must be made — through published research, engagement with organizational leaders, and targeted advocacy — that AI governance is incomplete without communication's expertise in transparency, trust, and stakeholder accountability. The profession's claim is not to own governance; it is to own the responsible AI dimensions that give governance its human and reputational integrity.

BUILD DISCLOSURE AS A PROFESSIONAL NORM.

Through standards, education, and peer expectation, the Global Alliance community can help establish AI disclosure as a non-negotiable element of professional practice.

REPUTATION AND RESPONSIBLE AI: A PRACTICAL AGENDA

The 2026 survey's new Reputation and AI section reveals that AI has become a significant reputational variable — simultaneously an opportunity and a source of elevated risk. For the communication profession, which exists to protect and build organizational reputation, this creates both an imperative and an opportunity to lead. The following recommendations apply across all audiences — professionals, organizations, and Global Alliance members alike.

TREAT AI GOVERNANCE AS A REPUTATION MANAGEMENT DISCIPLINE.

More than a quarter of respondents (27.6%) recognize that the way an organization governs and communicates about AI is itself a reputational signal. Yet this insight is not yet reflected in practice — governance decisions are still predominantly made by IT and legal functions, with communication professionals absent from the room. Organizations should formally connect AI governance to their reputation management strategy, and communication professionals should be the ones making that case.

MAKE AI DISCLOSURE A TRUST-BUILDING ACT, NOT A COMPLIANCE EXERCISE.

Disclosure is the single most urgent reputation management action identified in the 2026 data. Around 25% of organizations disclose nothing about their AI use. For communication professionals, disclosure is not a legal checkbox — it is an opportunity to demonstrate accountability, build stakeholder trust, and differentiate the organization as a responsible AI adopter. Develop plain-language disclosure practices that explain what AI is used for, how it is governed, and where human oversight is maintained.

ADDRESS THE ACCURACY OF AI-GENERATED CONTENT AS A FIRST-ORDER REPUTATIONAL RISK.

Around fifty-three percent of respondents identify AI-generated content inaccuracies as a significant reputational risk factor — yet this risk is often treated as a technical quality control issue rather than a reputational one. Communication professionals must own the accuracy standards for AI-generated content, implement review processes, and maintain accountability for what is published or distributed in the organization's name.

POSITION THE COMMUNICATION FUNCTION AS THE GUARDIAN OF AI TRUST.

Reputation is ultimately about trust — and trust is the communication profession's foundational currency. As AI reshapes how organizations create content, engage stakeholders, and make decisions, the communication function is uniquely positioned to serve as the organizational conscience: monitoring reputational risk signals, advising on disclosure, managing crises arising from AI failures, and communicating the organization's responsible AI commitments with authenticity and consistency.

BUILD A PROACTIVE REPUTATION NARRATIVE AROUND RESPONSIBLE AI.

AI is currently seen more as a reputational opportunity (60.3%) than a risk (34.9%). Organizations that are genuinely investing in responsible AI governance, disclosure, and ethical practice have an authentic narrative to tell — and communication professionals should be building it proactively, before a crisis makes it reactive. The organizations that communicate responsibly about AI today will be the ones with the greatest reputational resilience when AI challenges inevitably arise.



FINAL THOUGHTS

The AI revolution in PR and communication is no longer emerging — it has arrived, and it is deepening. The question this report asks is not whether the profession is using AI, but whether it is leading on responsible AI. The 2026 data offer a nuanced, largely encouraging answer: the needle is moving.

Governance frameworks are more prevalent. Ethical confidence has grown substantially. Stakeholder communication about AI has improved meaningfully. The profession is more present in AI governance activities than it was a year ago. This is real, important progress — and it should be acknowledged as such.

But the data also offers a clear-eyed challenge. Involvement is not influence. Presence is not leadership. More than half of organizations still lack a responsible AI framework. One in five has no formal accountability for responsible AI. A quarter disclose nothing about their AI use. Agentic AI is arriving faster than governance can keep pace. And the environmental and workforce dimensions of AI remain largely unaddressed.

Then there is reputation — the dimension that, above all others, should anchor the communication profession's claim to leadership in AI governance. The profession's expertise in stakeholder trust, organizational credibility, and responsible communication is not a peripheral asset in the AI era. It is the foundational asset. The organizations that will navigate AI most successfully are those that govern it responsibly, communicate about it authentically, and build the trust that makes both possible. That is the profession's mandate. The 2026 data show a profession beginning to recognize it. The 2027 data will tell us whether it has risen to meet it.

"The profession is more present in AI governance than ever before. The next step — earning a decisive, trusted voice in how AI is governed, disclosed, and led — is the challenge the 2027 data will measure us against."

— Reimagining Tomorrow 2026 Report

THOUGHTS FROM OUR RESEARCHERS



ADRIAN CROPLEY
OAM, FRSA, FCSCE, IABC FELLOW, SCMP

**Co-founder, Centre for Strategic Communication
Excellence (CSCE)**

This year's findings represent a genuine turning point for the communication profession. For the first time, we can compare two consecutive years of global data and clearly see where meaningful progress is happening — and where it is not. The progress is significant. Involvement in responsible AI activities has increased, ethical confidence has strengthened, stakeholder communication about AI has improved across every measured area, and more organizations are putting formal responsible AI frameworks in place. That is real momentum in a relatively short period.

What stands out most to me, however, is the introduction of our annual tracker question designed to monitor how the profession's priorities evolve over time. Globally, AI literacy and workforce upskilling emerged as the leading priority at 35.5%, followed by responsible AI and ethics at 22.3%. That ordering reflects where the profession is today. We are still heavily focused on building foundational capability — learning the tools, strengthening ethical awareness, and developing the literacy required to operate responsibly in an AI-enabled environment. That work matters. But literacy alone does not create strategic influence.

The data tells us something important. While communication professionals are increasingly involved in responsible AI discussions, very few are leading them. Only 8.6% of respondents report leading formal responsible AI structures, and just 10.4% of organizations have assigned primary responsibility for responsible AI to the communication function. We are becoming more visible in the conversation, but visibility is not the same as influence. The challenge now is whether the profession can convert capability into leadership on responsible AI.

One of the strongest signals in this year's research comes from EMENA, where around 34% of respondents identified agentic AI and workflow automation as their biggest focus over the next two years — nearly three times the global average. That suggests a region already preparing for the next phase of AI adoption: autonomous systems capable of acting, responding, publishing, and engaging on behalf of organizations. As AI agents become more active in stakeholder communication, the reputational, ethical, and trust implications increase dramatically. Communication professionals have a critical opportunity here because we sit at the intersection of stakeholder trust, organizational reputation, transparency, and responsible AI adoption.

The next two years will be pivotal. The profession's long-term value will not be defined simply by how well we adopt AI tools, but by whether we step forward as trusted advisors on responsible AI, transparency, and organizational trust. If communication professionals can position themselves as architects of trust in an AI-enabled world, we will strengthen not only the profession's influence, but the organizations and communities we serve.

THOUGHTS FROM OUR RESEARCHERS



BONNIE CAVER
FCSCE, IABC FELLOW, SCMP

Founder and CEO, Reputation Lighthouse

The reputation and AI findings in this year's survey reinforce an emerging reality: AI implementation is no longer simply a technology conversation, it is rapidly becoming a reputation conversation. As organizations integrate AI into workflows, decision-making, customer engagement, and operational infrastructure, they are simultaneously shaping new forms of Reputation Currency™.

More than 60% of respondents now see AI as a reputational opportunity, while more than half report increased reputational risk exposure tied to AI adoption. Misinformation, synthetic content, disclosure gaps, data integrity concerns, and AI-generated inaccuracies are no longer isolated technical issues. They are trust issues with direct reputational consequences.

What organizations say about AI will matter. But increasingly, how they govern AI, disclose AI use, protect stakeholder trust, and respond to AI-related risk will become part of how reputation itself is measured. In the AI transformation era, reputation will not be built solely through messaging, it will be built through operational credibility, transparency, accountability, and demonstrated responsible behavior at scale.

This creates a defining opportunity for the communication profession. Communication leaders must evolve beyond merely adopting AI tools and become architects of organizational trust in an AI-enabled world. The organizations that treat responsible AI as a driver of long-term reputation equity, rather than simply a technology deployment exercise, will be the ones that build enduring stakeholder confidence in the years ahead.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Reimagining Tomorrow 2026 is based on the Responsible AI in PR and Communication Management Survey 2026, conducted between 17 April and 18 May 2026. It gathered responses from 536 communication professionals across diverse geographic regions, industries, organizational sizes, and career levels. The survey included both multiple-choice and open-ended questions covering AI adoption, governance, accountability, disclosure, reputation, and professional readiness. The 2026 survey expanded from 25 questions (2025) to 36 questions, with 13 new questions added to address emerging dimensions of AI adoption including agentic AI, framework maturity, governance accountability, and the Reputation and AI section.

Assistance in drafting and analysis was provided by Claude.ai under the supervision of the research team.

DATA LIMITATIONS

The following limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings:

- Regional composition shift: Africa, North America, and Asia-Pacific all increased their share of respondents in 2026, while EMENA declined substantially (from 27.4% to 14.2%). This compositional change may influence year-on-year comparisons independent of actual changes in practice.
- Experience profile shift: The 2026 sample includes more senior and experienced practitioners than 2025, which may contribute to the increase in ethical confidence and governance engagement observed.
- Skip logic: Certain questions were shown only to subsets of respondents (e.g., framework coverage questions only to those with a framework in place). Percentages for these questions reflect the relevant subset, not the full sample.
- Self-selection bias: Professionals who choose to participate in an AI-focused survey may already have a higher interest in or engagement with AI, potentially skewing results toward more active adoption and governance practices.
- New question context: The 13 new questions introduced in 2026 lack prior-year baselines. These findings will serve as the baseline for future annual comparisons.
- Response volume variation: The number of respondents varies by question due to skip logic and optional questions. Sample sizes are noted where relevant.

WITH THANKS

This landmark research was led by the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management in partnership with the Centre for Strategic Communication Excellence (CSCE) and Reputation Lighthouse. We extend our sincere gratitude to all survey participants from across the globe who contributed their valuable insights to this important study.



ABOUT THE GLOBAL ALLIANCE FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT

The Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management is the confederation of the world's major PR and communication professional associations and institutions. It represents more than 320,000 practitioners across 70 associations globally and provides leadership on professional standards, ethics, and the development of the communication profession worldwide. globalalliancepr.org



ABOUT THE CENTRE FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION EXCELLENCE (CSCE)

The Centre for Strategic Communication Excellence (CSCE) is a global professional learning organization dedicated to advancing the communication profession through world-class education, research, and community. Headquartered in Melbourne, Australia, CSCE partners with communication professionals and organizations worldwide to build strategic capability, ethical practice, and evidence-based excellence. With a commitment to equipping practitioners for the challenges of a rapidly evolving communication landscape, CSCE designs programs that bridge theory and practice at the highest professional level. thecsce.com



ABOUT REPUTATION LIGHTHOUSE

Reputation Lighthouse is a global reputation strategy and advisory consultancy dedicated to helping organizations build, protect, and recover organizational reputation. Founded by Bonnie Caver FCSCE, IABC Fellow, SCMP, Reputation Lighthouse brings deep expertise in the intersection of AI, trust, and organizational credibility — advising senior leaders on the reputational dimensions of AI adoption, responsible communication, and stakeholder engagement. replighthouse.com

SPECIAL THANKS TO

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— Co-Founder, Centre for Strategic Communication Excellence

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REIMAGINING TOMORROW 2026

FROM ADOPTION TO ACCOUNTABILITY:
COMMUNICATION PROFESSIONALS STEP UP ON RESPONSIBLE AI

A report by the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management
Based on the Responsible AI in PR and Communication Management Survey 2026