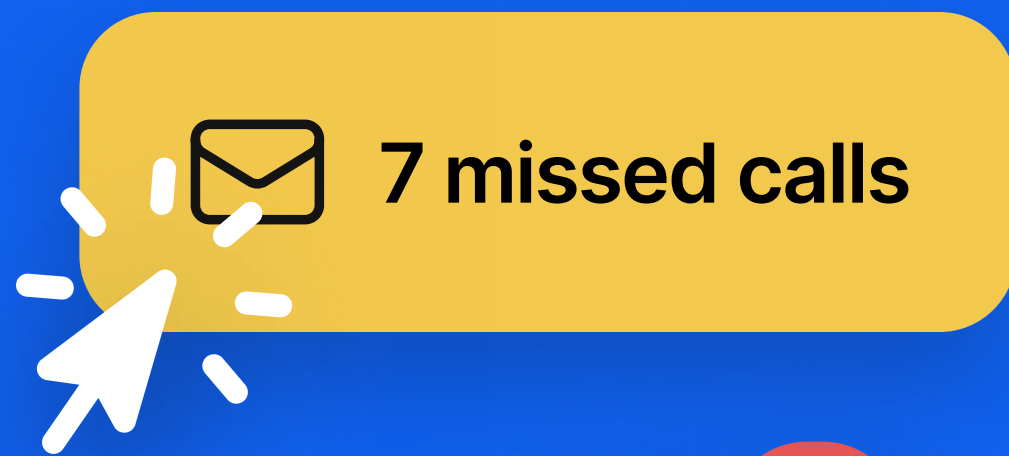


# The 2023 state of essential workplace communications

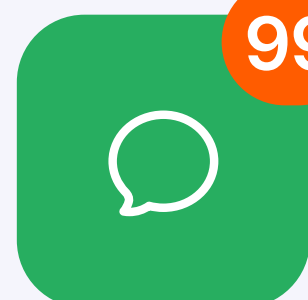




New Message

Please respond ASAP!!

There's a lot



99



127 New Emails



127 New Emails



going wrong



51



New Meeting Request

Time for a check-in...?

Feb

40

2



7 missed calls

in workplace



99 new messages



New Event

Meeting Request

communications



27 missed calls!



7 missed calls

right now



20



10 missed video calls

# ...And leaders need to fix it.

**We've talked to hundreds of executives** over the last year. Most agree on one thing: It has never been harder — or more important — to keep employees and stakeholders aligned.

- Inflation, economic uncertainty, and distributed teams add to the distraction, amplifying the urgent need for clearer workplace communication.
- “Quiet quitting” and the Great Resignation reinforce low morale and burnout among employees who need more effective communication to stay motivated.

**But when it comes to best practices**, leaders have more questions than answers. How do you identify and package vital updates to keep people aligned? How do you ensure a message lands when you're sharing plans, operational changes, or tough topics like layoffs?

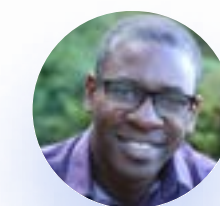
**Unfortunately, internal communications** is often under-invested in, and these are skills many leaders admit they were never taught.

- **So the crucial ability** to identify and elevate what matters — what we call Essential Communications Management — is, at best, underdeveloped, and at worst, totally missing in many organizations.

**The cost of getting it wrong is steep:** upwards of \$2 trillion per year.

- That's why Axios HQ is obsessed with finding ways to improve communication, drive alignment, and see results.
- This report highlights workplace trends we're tracking, points of misalignment between leaders and employees, and best practices to be an effective communicator.

Thank you for taking the time to check out our report. The next page has a few of my favorite findings before you go deeper.



Enjoy,  
Chike Farrell, VP Marketing at Axios HQ

# A few key findings before you go deeper...

Essential communications at  
my organization are...

...helpful and relevant

**77%**  
Leaders

**46%**  
Employees

...clear and engaging

**78%**  
Leaders

**51%**  
Employees

What are the most critical updates to create  
alignment among a team or department?

Leaders

Employees



How do leaders measure if the essential  
communications they send are effective?



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# The \$2 trillion question



Executive Summary

**Almost every leader at every organization** spends most of their time communicating — but no one teaches them to do it efficiently, effectively, and profitably.

- Many admit they're set up to lead in an era that no longer exists: the in-person workplace. And even two years of remote work hasn't been enough to help them reset.

**That poses a clear and present danger** to their culture, productivity, and future success — because poor communication leads to:

- **Misalignment**, as leaders and employees fall out of sync.
- **Disengagement**, as trust and transparency break down.
- **Massive waste**, in time, productivity, profit, and potential.

It also leaves employees, customers, and stakeholders underserved. Already overloaded with information — checking emails, IMs, and messages sometimes hundreds of times per day — they struggle to find the essential context they need to make consequential decisions.

The cost of ineffective communication adds up to...

- Over \$15,000 per employee every year.
- Or \$2 trillion annually across the U.S.

\*Based on IDC and OECD.org data and Axios HQ calculations.

**There is an urgent need for a new approach** that helps leaders punch through the noise, get their audiences aligned, and put an end to lost time and productivity.

- **The question:** What will it take for things to change?

**To find an answer**, we surveyed 540 leaders sending essential communications at organizations large and small and over 1,000 employees receiving similar updates. The study below digs into the disconnects between those groups — and how leaders everywhere can learn to be more effective communicators.

# Let this sink in

Nearly 50% of leaders say the top challenge they face in sharing essential communications — the updates that keep their organization aligned — is understanding what’s actually important to employees and stakeholders.

- **And 47% of leaders** say the toughest step in keeping the organization aligned is writing in a concise, engaging way people will actually read, rather than overlook in the daily flood of information they receive.

**That means the leaders** who sketch an organization’s blueprint are also struggling to decide whether teams will need a paint brush or a wrecking ball to bring that plan to life — so they drop both onto a pile of all their other tools and hope folks find what they need.

**Unsurprisingly, it isn’t working.** Our surveys unearthed four issues to help find what will:

1. Leaders are struggling to see what’s important to employees.
2. The context employees need to do their jobs is missing.
3. The data leaders need to improve communications is incomplete.
4. Insights meant to power smarter decisions aren’t easily accessible to staff.

**Left unaddressed,** employees will continue to be ill equipped — unsure where to put their focus, unclear if the decisions they make will equate to valuable work, and unable to use the resources their organization empowered them to own to their fullest extent.

## Essential communications at my organization are...

...helpful and relevant

...clear and engaging

**77%**  
Leaders

**78%**  
Leaders

**46%**  
Employees

**51%**  
Employees

# Imagine information nirvana

**Most leaders send essential communications** at least weekly, they say, to different areas of their organization and spend anywhere from three to 10+ hours preparing them.

- > 69% send a team or department update.
- > 52% send org-wide updates.
- > 56% send senior leader updates.

**Yes, but:** What if every one were 5%, 10%, even 50% more effective?

**To improve communication**, leaders have to prioritize it — put it at the [center of their business strategy](#), learn what readers need, invest in the tools to deliver it well, and build feedback loops so they can keep calibrating.

**It takes time to shift** from ineffective updates to essential, intentional communication, but the leaders who get it right say they see:

- Better employee engagement.
- Greater team alignment with leader vision.
- Stronger independent decision-making.
- Improved teamwork and collaboration.

**That means information flows** up, down, and around organizations more simply. Employees know where to find the details they want, with little distraction, and have access to the vital context they need to take informed action.





Leaders and  
employees aren't  
on the same page

New Message  
Please respond ASAP!!

127 New Emails

Trend

101

Meeting Request  
7am Team Standup



20

Meeting Request  
7am Team Standup

99

New Message  
Please res

pond ASAP!!



20



New Event  
Meeting Request

7 missed

127 New Emails

New Message  
Please respond ASAP!!

101

127 New Emails

Meeting Request  
7am Team Sta

# Leaders and employees aren't on the same page

1  
Trend

**If an organization is communicating** — internally or externally — using the same methods, cadence, and topics its leaders tapped before this work-from-anywhere era, they're doing it wrong. And it's showing.

- > 66% of leaders think they're aligned with employees.
- > 44% of employees agree.

In a world where staff and stakeholders may never return to an office, an organization's success — or even its survival — hinges on its ability to understand and end that gap.

**“Communication is at the core of keeping stakeholders aligned,”** says Cydney Roach, Edelman's Global Chair of Employee Experience, “as 74% of investors say your ability to attract and retain top talent and keep them engaged is more important than an ability to retain new customers.”

# The topics that matter most to employees



## Let's start with what we know:

Leaders are struggling to understand what is important to their employees. So, we asked them.

About 50% of employees agree the two topics that are most critical to helping them do their job well are:

- 1 Operational changes, like process and policy updates.
- 2 Organizational goals, plans, and new initiatives.

**That also exposed a few glaring issues.** Most notably, leaders ranked those same topics among the lowest they thought were essential for a team or department to stay aligned with its leadership.

- Only 16% of employees said the updates they get about operational changes and organizational goals are “very effective.”
- The two topics employees say are least critical to their jobs — business updates, and macro news — are the ones they hear about most often.

It's time for a reset. “When we think about communication, it's easy to get stuck in the trap that it's all about what I need you to do and want you to know — but that's only one part,” [says Patricia Kiernan Johnson, Curtis Institute of Music's VP of Communications](#). “It's crucial to listen to your audiences, really hear what they need, and to act on it.”



# The channels employees prefer



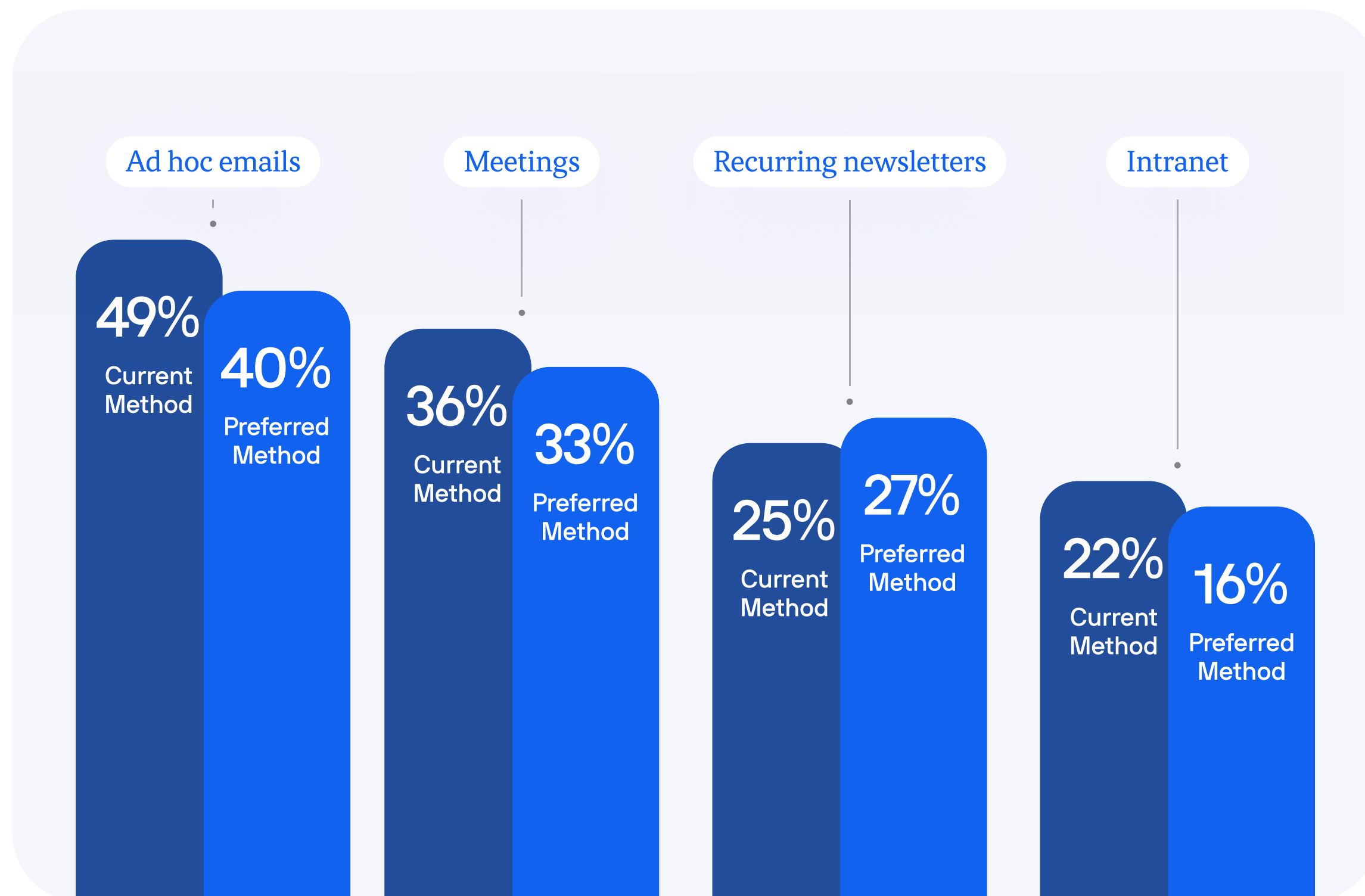
**On this note**, leaders and employees are more in sync. The top four ways employees say they get essential communications from their organization's leaders are mostly in line with what they'd prefer.

The other ways employees access essential communications — text, videos messages, chat tools, and podcasts — fall lower in current use and general preference.

## Newsletters are the only outlier.

- **Across organizations of all sizes**, they're the only method of communication employees said they'd like to see more of.
- **As teams grow**, it's also one of the top three ways leaders share essential updates with employees — after formal meetings and ad hoc emails — outpacing text messages, intranets, video messages, chat tools, and podcasts.

**The art is understanding** where your audience actually spends their time and expects to find the essential information. Ask them, accept it, and meet them where they are — rather than trying to change behavior and risking they never see it.



# A case study in *Smart planning*



**Go deeper**

How to create updates that unify a workforce

**We held SWOT analysis meetings** with our staff to find ways we can communicate with them better. What we heard: There were so many new employees. They didn't know each other. They didn't understand how the different departments worked together or the leadership vision. So we did two things.

1. **We started a weekly newsletter** for staff and faculty tailored to their needs. We're constantly fixing it and updating it, and it's getting really great feedback.
2. **We held a two-day staff retreat** to build those bonds and really learn from and listen to each other, instead of just talking at them.

It really builds trust when you have honest communication.

Patricia Kiernan Johnson

VP of Comms, Curtis Institute of Music

# How to breakthrough



**Knowing what your employees** and stakeholders need is hard. Leading a hybrid or remote workforce makes it harder.

- Technology was meant to ease the transition and keep folks informed, but as organizations added new platforms faster than they could define their purpose, communication got noisy.
- That means updates about a revised strategy and a remote happy hour would compete for attention in the same system.

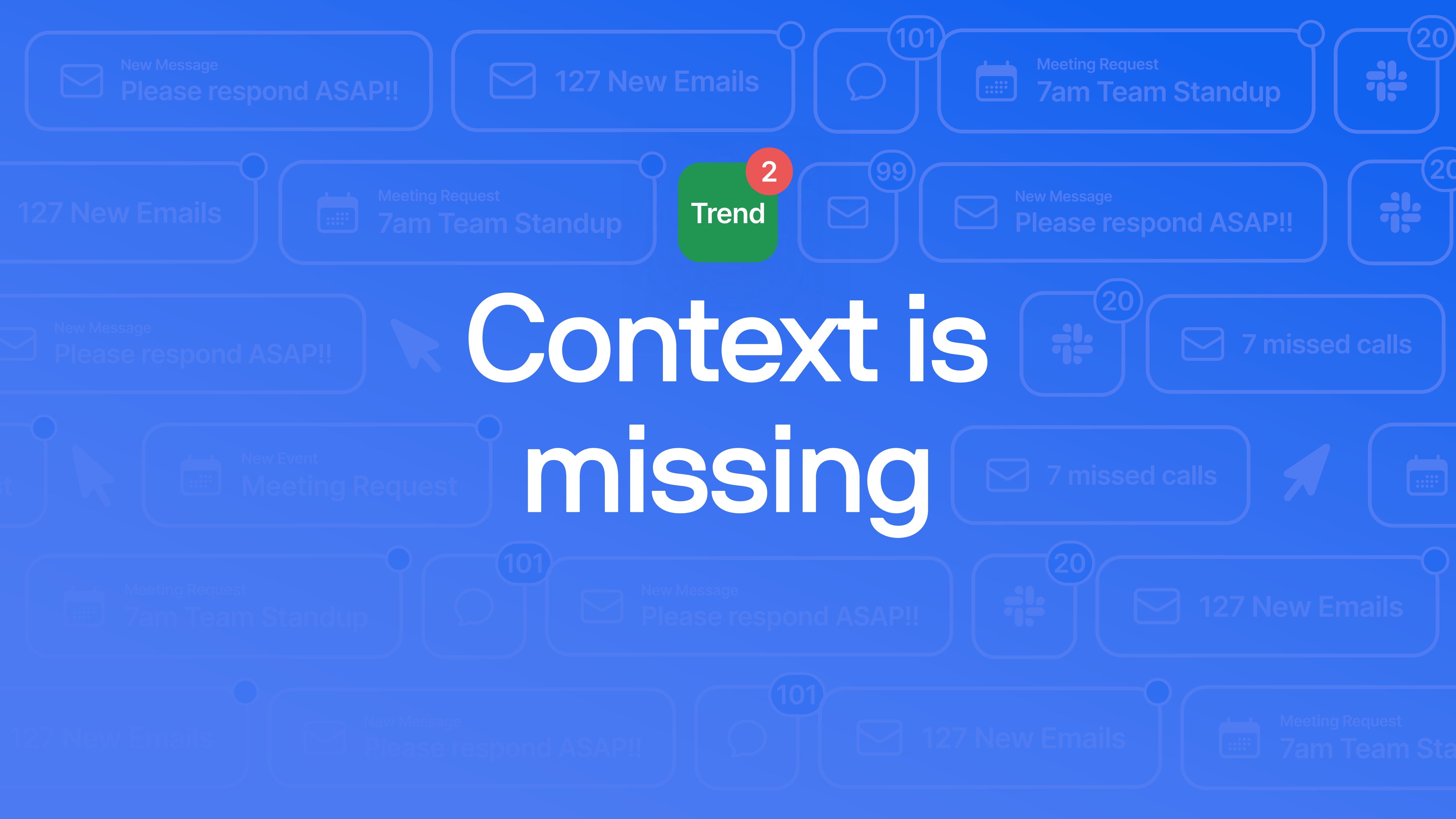
**Every leader can benefit** from pausing, listening to their audience, providing what they need, and making it easy for them to find it — free of distraction — in the channels that work for them.

In the words of a few employees who took our survey, the topics they want from their leaders are truly essential because...

“They ensure we are not wasting time figuring out the basics.”

It helps us all be on the same page, running more efficiently, and preventing errors.

The better information you have, the easier it is to do your job effectively.



**Trend** 2

# Context is missing

# Context is missing



**Many employees are begging for something simple** — yet something so many organizations still struggle to do: Tell me what's essential, and give me the context I need to understand why it matters.

- > 77% of leaders think the communications they share have the context employees need to do their jobs well.
- > 46% of employees agree.

**“One of the things we need to do is keep connecting people to the big picture and how they fit into it,”** says Jodi Kawada Page, Uber’s Chief of Staff to the CLO and a communications veteran. “It’s the impact their job has on a product or user. Help people connect the dots.”



# The improvements employees want

**Most executives have a strong vision** for where their organization is headed and clear goals that will get them there. But as teams scale, the depth of detail and nuanced insight each team needs gets more specialized.

**Three key improvements employees want** to see in the essential communications their leaders send:

- 1 40% want more thoughtful and insightful details.
- 2 36% say they want to hear from leaders more often.
- 3 34% want to receive updates on a more consistent cadence.

**The intrigue:** Most leaders think they are sharing insightful details relatively often — 69% say they send team or department updates at least weekly. So that made us wonder:

Is it the cadence, communication, or communicator?



# The leaders they need to hear from

We took a deeper look at who specifically was communicating across these organizations at a team and department level. In organizations of all sizes, we saw a similar story.

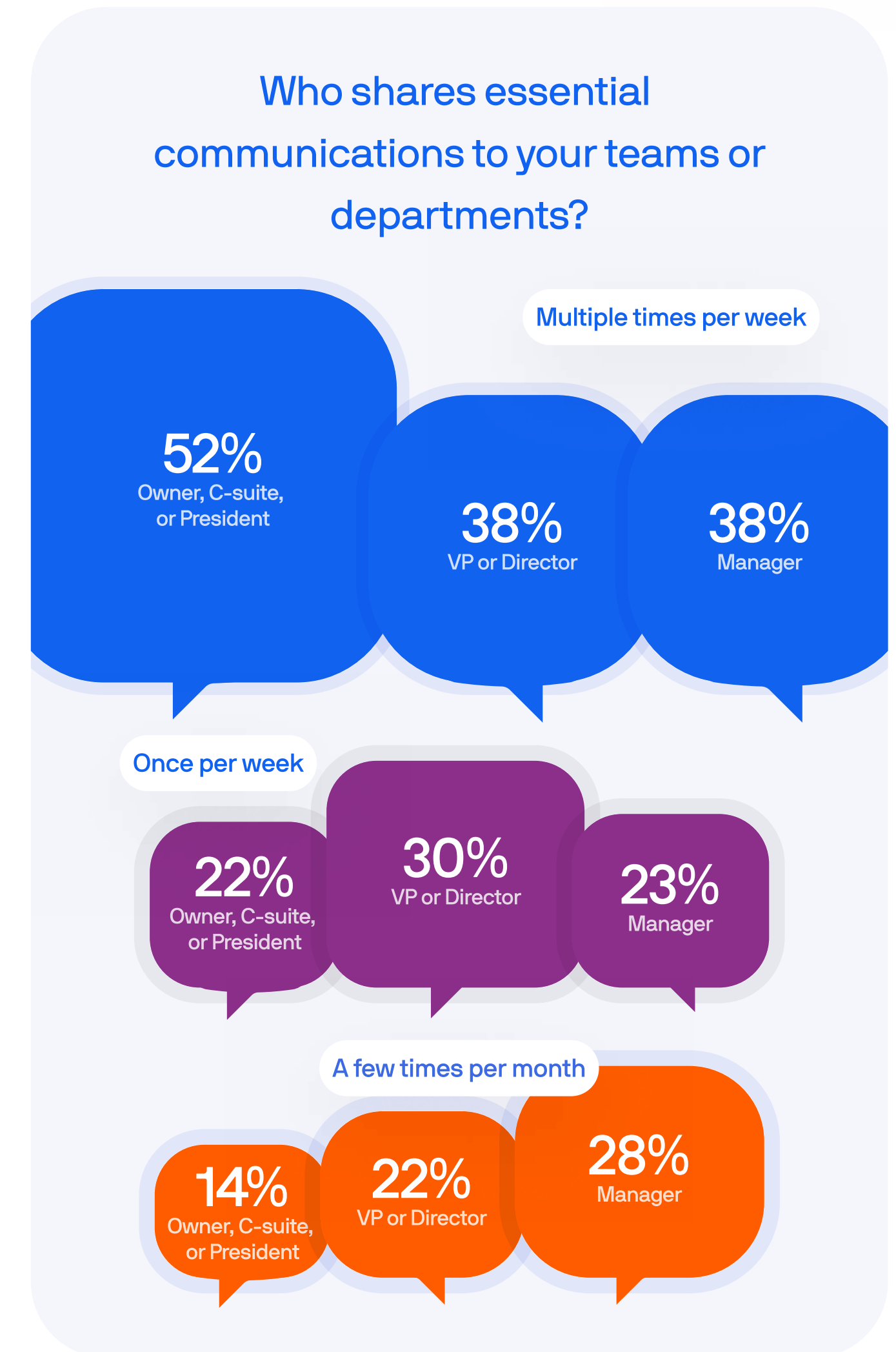
- Teams and departments hear essential updates from executives — C-suite, owners, and presidents — more often than from the VPs and managers who work more closely to them.

**On one hand, that's impressive.** Top leaders keeping a direct line of communication with individual contributors makes them feel more seen and respected — and engagement grows.

**On the other hand, it's incomplete.** Leaders and managers have unparalleled perspective: an ability to harness executive vision, translate top-down directives, and customize the context their teams need to turn big-picture strategy into day-to-day execution.

- And because VPs and managers play many roles — translation, communication, accountability — the cadence they use to communicate and details they offer when they do is often greater than what an executive can.

**More insightful details, delivered more often?** That's exactly what employees say leaders can do to improve their essential communications. [Managers play a powerful role in the modern workplace.](#)



# How to breakthrough

**More and more, people are feeling overwhelmed** by information, but starving for the context they need to understand it.

- Employees “are charging us with being more direct,” [says Deisha Barnett, UPS’ President, Corporate Communications and Content](#). “They want it to come from people they trust, so we’re leveraging managers more and more every single day.”

When you communicate the connective tissue and critical context employees need to stay informed and aligned, you keep them focused on doing work that’s valued by leaders and valuable to team success.

## Go deeper

A workbook on how to communicate more clearly



In the words of a few leaders who took our survey, the advice they would give other leaders trying to sharpen their employee outreach is...

“Start with WHY. Make time for it. Help each person see how their daily job contributes to the big picture vision.”

“Articulate the context. Keep it as simple as possible without losing any pertinent information in the process so that even people who may have problems with concepts can easily understand what you’re saying, feel respected, and be engaged enough to want to offer their own ideas, too.”

“Stay concise and to the point. No one wants to waste time reading long-winded communications.”

**Data**  
**is**  
**incomplete**



# Data is incomplete

3  
Trend

**Just like communication requires time** and intention to be effective, so does developing a dataset to understand how readers are or aren't engaging with it, what their attitudes are about it, and how it can improve.

- > **67% of leaders** say readers have an easy way to share feedback on essential communications they receive.
- > **43% of employees** agree.

**“Leaders need to be deliberate** about mechanisms for accountability,” says Blake Hall, ID.me’s CEO. “Have surveys collecting questions and concerns. Host Zoom meetings to answer them live — and record it for folks who can’t attend. You’ve got to create feedback loops and empower people to have a voice.”

# Smart data is a discipline

**Workers are demanding information** like never before. Customers and stakeholders expect organizations to speak out and take a stand on social issues. All three want evidence of an organization’s heart and humanity.

- **Yes, but:** Keeping stakeholders in sync through shifts in optics and expectations requires open lines of communication and structured systems to collect feedback.

**Many organizations aren’t set up** to do that. Forty percent say they don’t track — or are neutral about whether they do — how their audiences engage with essential updates. And 53% of those who do track success use casual, unsolicited feedback as a way to measure it.

**Worse, 36% of employees want to** share feedback with leaders about the essential communications they’re receiving, but they don’t feel like they have the opportunity.

- **And 27% of leaders say collecting** feedback is one of the biggest challenges they face when trying to make their essential communications successful.

**To get a full picture of what’s going on** — with employees and with an organization — it takes time, structure, and discipline to build the data story. But it’s worthy effort. Short of exerting it, leaders are choosing to stay in the dark and leave audiences underserved.

How do leaders measure if the essential communications they send are effective?



# How to breakthrough

**Building a discipline around data** doesn't have to be hard. Success starts with two qualities: structure and cadence.

- Start with a simple poll or survey, and put it on repeat — firing monthly, quarterly, or annually to your key audiences.
- As data rolls in, set aside time to explore it, learn from it, and make improvements based on it. Your communications — and your readers — will get smarter right along with you.

**Streamlined strategies, plus smart analytics,** can [help leaders start to track employee engagement](#), much in the same way they're used to tracking sales, marketing, and business performance.

In the words of a few leaders who took our survey, the advice they would give other leaders trying to sharpen their employee outreach...

“Send targeted communications — don't send everything to everybody unless it affects everybody. Then encourage employees to share questions and responses with the group.”

“Have advanced software and keep up with new technology. But don't lose track of the human side of things.”

# A case study in *Smart measurement*

**Go deeper**

How to be a heroic leader for your hybrid team



**Ultimately, your greatest investment** as an organization is your people.

So what are you doing to empower them, retain them, build their success? The headline response is ‘transparency,’ but the tactics are things like:

- Annual pulse surveys so you can re-evaluate.
- Monthly surveys within employee groups.
- Skip-level meetings to ensure employees feel heard.

**Actively listen to what employees say.** Press them when they make points... so you’re clear on what they’re saying, what their endpoint is, and what they want from it. Those human engagements are critical, and they’re the most valuable ways you can spend your time.

JP Fielder

Head of U.S. Communications, BP



127 New Emails

New Message  
Please respond ASAP!!

101

127 New Emails

Meeting Request  
7am Team Sta

New Message  
Please respond ASAP!!

127 New Emails



101

Meeting Request  
7am Team Standup

20

w Emails

Meeting Request  
7am Team Standup

# Insights

99

New Message  
Please respond ASA

AP!!

New Message  
Please respond ASAP!!



# aren't

20

7 missed calls

New Event  
Meeting Request

# accessible

7 missed calls

127 New Emails

New Message  
Please respond ASAP!!

101

127 New Emails

Meeting Request  
7am Team Sta

# Insights aren't accessible

4  
Trend

**When the pressure is on**, do employees and stakeholders know where strategies, details, and critical directives live?

Can they resurface them easily? When leaders need to add an update or new dimension to them, is that process simple and streamlined?

> **70% of leaders** think their staff and stakeholders can quickly find the organizational goals, strategies, or directives they need.

> **46% of employees** agree.

Now imagine when a leader needs those details to quickly compare quarterly or annual growth. Or when a team needs them to check in on progress to goals. Or a manager is trying to cascade an update to their team with new and useful context.

Success slows down.

# Store essential information in one place

4  
Trend

For years, studies from [McKinsey](#), from [IDC](#), and other organizations have captured the staggering amount of time employees spend searching for the information they need to do their jobs each week.

- **Estimates waffle by industry** — hovering around 20% for the average worker or 30-50% for those in technical roles.
- **But across the U.S.**, ineffective communication costs organizations \$2 trillion per year — or around \$15,000 per employee in lost productivity, according to IDC and [OECD](#).

**More recent deep-dives** have also shown the disruptive and counter-productive experience people everywhere are having due to distractions and interruptions in the workplace.

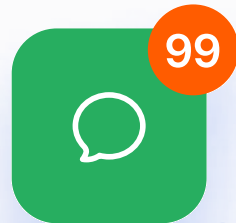
- Research shows it can take [more than 20 minutes](#) for people to refocus on a task after they've been distracted.

**So two keys stand out:** Beyond understanding an audience and communicating in a clear way, it's now increasingly critical for leaders to create a distraction-free and easy-to-access system of record where employees and stakeholders can revisit the essential insights they need — and act on them.

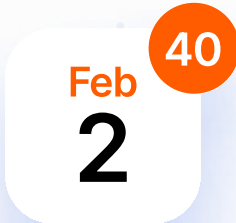
# Information is a spectrum

It's up to leaders to share what's essential and make it stand out.

Instant



- "Love the updates!"
- "Did you see that last email?"
- "Hey, where's that file?"
- "Are you joining the Zoom??"
- "Meeting is still on for this weekend?"
- "That presentation was amazing!"
- "Incredible work!"



- "Invitation: Another meeting invite"
- "Updates to our Terms and Conditions"
- "Updates to our Privacy Policy"
- "[App] Someone mentioned you"
- "Someone viewed your profile"
- "Submit your feedback today"
- "[App] New project assigned to you"



- "5 big things: Our acquisition"
- "All staff: Benefits enrollment"
- "Roadmap: Q4 OKRs"
- "Our DEI deep dive"

Essential

# How to break through

4  
Trend

**Overall, 55% of leaders say** their organization is doing an excellent or good job at using essential communications to keep employees on the same page.

- **Yes, but:** The work ahead is only going to get harder. And as the volume of information that's available to every one of us continues to expand, the organizations that survive will share one critical skill — creating clarity from chaos.

**It's like building a bionic brain** — finding a way to take advantage of all the information you have, synthesizing it in an accurate way, sharing it so folks have clear context, trusting them to act once informed, and empowering them to revisit if ever they need.

**The answer to all of this is in your inbox.** Think back to top three ways employees said they would prefer to receive essential communication:

- **40%** say emails.
- **33%** say formal meetings.
- **27%** say recurring newsletters.

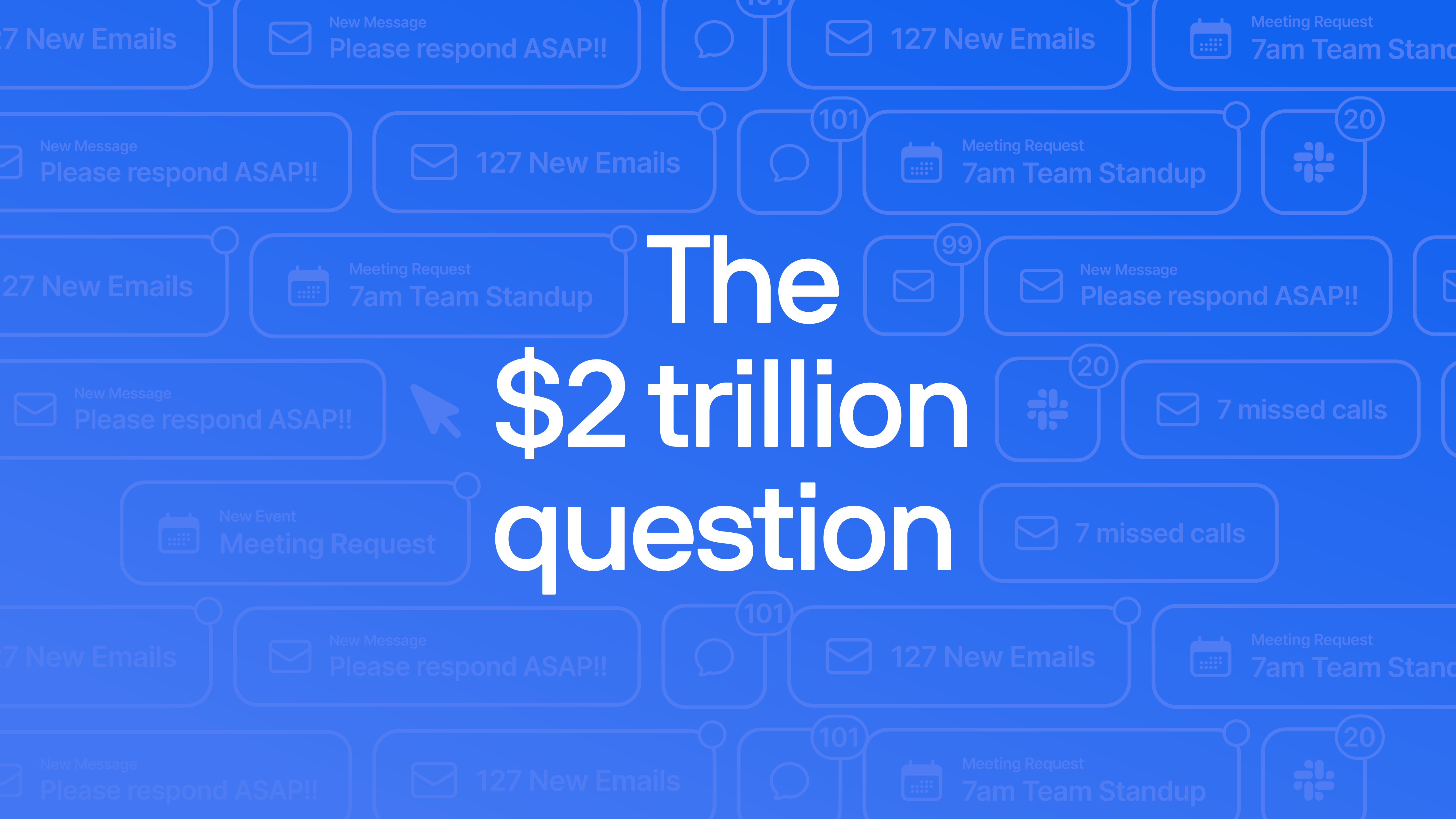
**Nearly 70% of what they want** lives in their inbox. It needs to be written in a clear and engaging way. It should include the relevant context they need to do their jobs. And because it's all right in one place, it would also be streamlined and centralized — simple for them to find.

[Go deeper](#)

A workbook on how to optimize an essential communication



# The \$2 trillion question



# The \$2 trillion question

**We're back to where we started,** trying to unpack the need for a new approach to essential communication management that helps leaders punch through the noise, get their audiences aligned, and put an end to lost time and productivity.

**Except now we know the answer** to our \$2 trillion question:

- What will it take for things to change?

1. **Prioritize planning** — so you can understand what your audience truly needs and values.
2. **Compose with context** — just enough to arm your audience to make smart decisions at work.
3. **Align for action** — so everyone has access to the information they need, in a clear and actionable way.
4. **Measure with structure** — so your data can tell a story and your audience can share actionable feedback.

**An organization's success,** profitability, employee happiness, and team retention all have a direct tie to how effective — or ineffective — its essential communications are. The leaders who acknowledge it and prioritize this will see an impactful difference: employees who are aligned and feel invested in their workplace.

# Your Essential Communications cheat sheet

The challenges — and opportunities — that lie ahead for any leader....

## Plan

### The challenge:

47% of leaders say it's planning — understanding what is most important to their audience.

### The opportunity:

Stronger engagement

### Your quick-start guide:

1. Reflect on the updates [you've been sharing to-date](#). Separate which are critical to success and which are contributing to clutter.
2. Survey your audiences to understand what they need to be productive, and [learn how they like to communicate](#).
3. Choose the channel that will [meet them where they](#) are so essential communications don't get lost or overlooked.

## Compose

### The challenge:

47% say it's writing in a concise, engaging way that people will actually want to read.

### The opportunity:

Better alignment

### Your quick-start guide:

1. Make your point quickly and clearly. [Share critical context](#), and then let your audience move on and use it.
2. Learn from other leaders near you. Communication is a critical skill — and also a team sport. [Solicit and share best practices](#).
3. Create a reliable cadence [that your audience can learn to trust](#). There's clarity that comes with consistency.

## Align

### The challenge:

32% of leaders say it's evolving their communication strategy as the organization scales.

### The opportunity:

Reliable growth

### Your quick-start guide:

1. Have a clear vision, articulate it well, and [empower your teams to figure out](#) how they're going to deliver on that vision.
2. Seek feedback often. [Catch issues and opportunities early](#) — and address them before they distract or disrupt your team.
3. Put comms at the heart of your leadership strategy. [Your team will fail](#) without clear, effective, accessible updates.

## Measure

### The challenge:

34% of leaders say it's knowing whether or not their communications were successful.

### The opportunity:

Rising productivity

### Your quick-start guide:

1. Lean on data. If you have it, use it. If you're lacking it, [use polls and surveys to collect it](#). And run them often.
2. Have more conversations [with more people at more levels](#). Listen to what they need — then act on it.
3. Test and learn. [Agility is key in business and communication](#). Use both data and conversations to constantly improve.

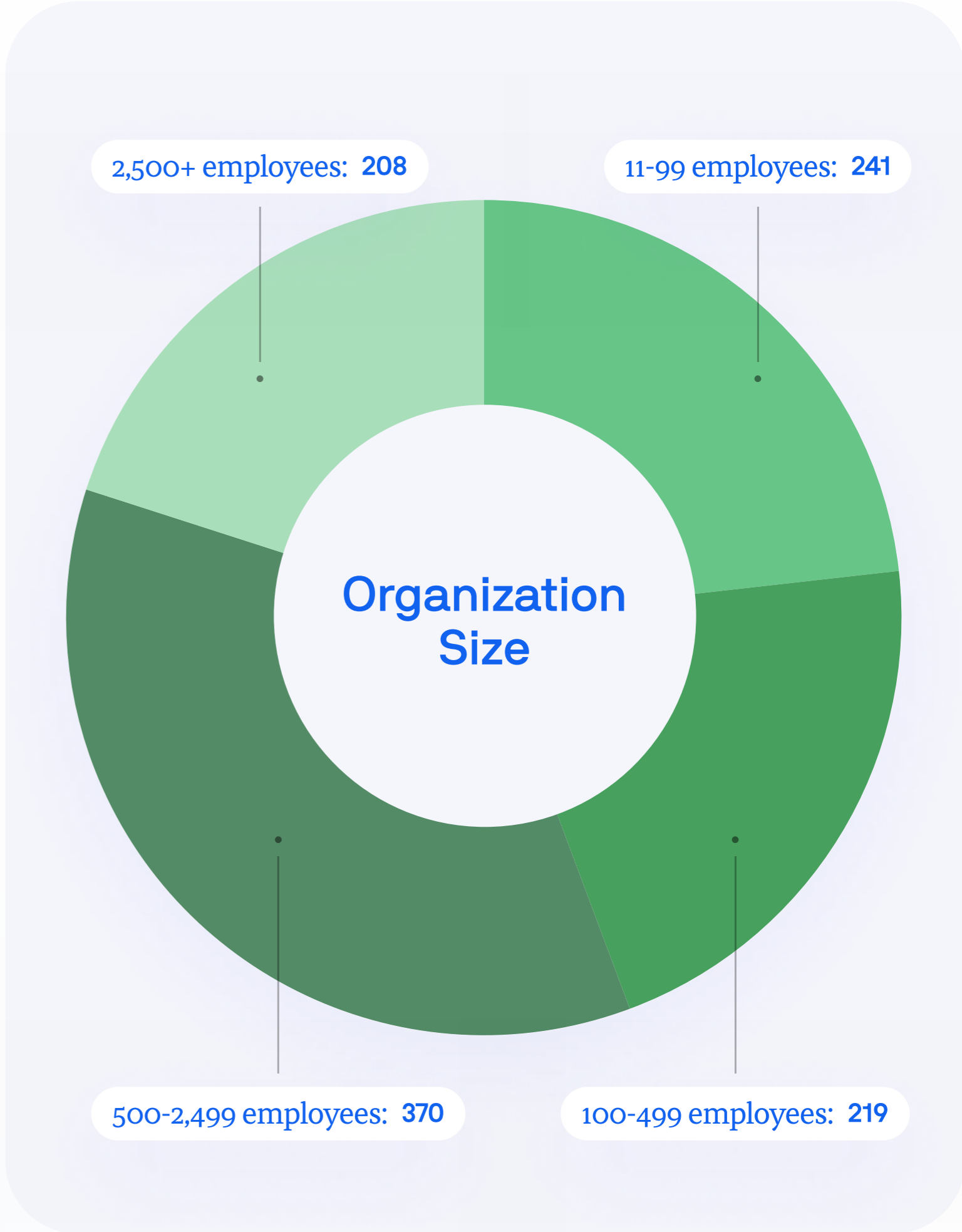
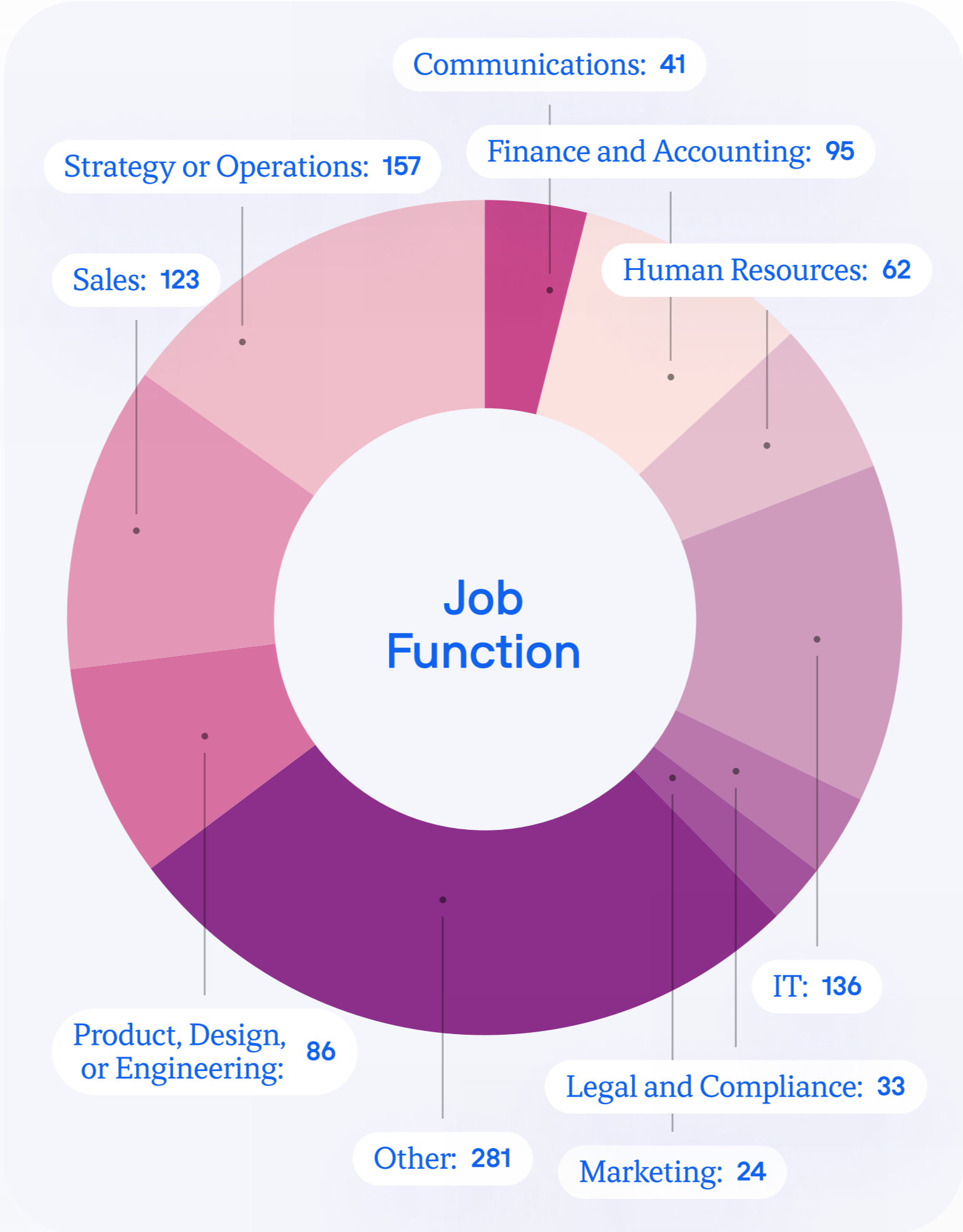
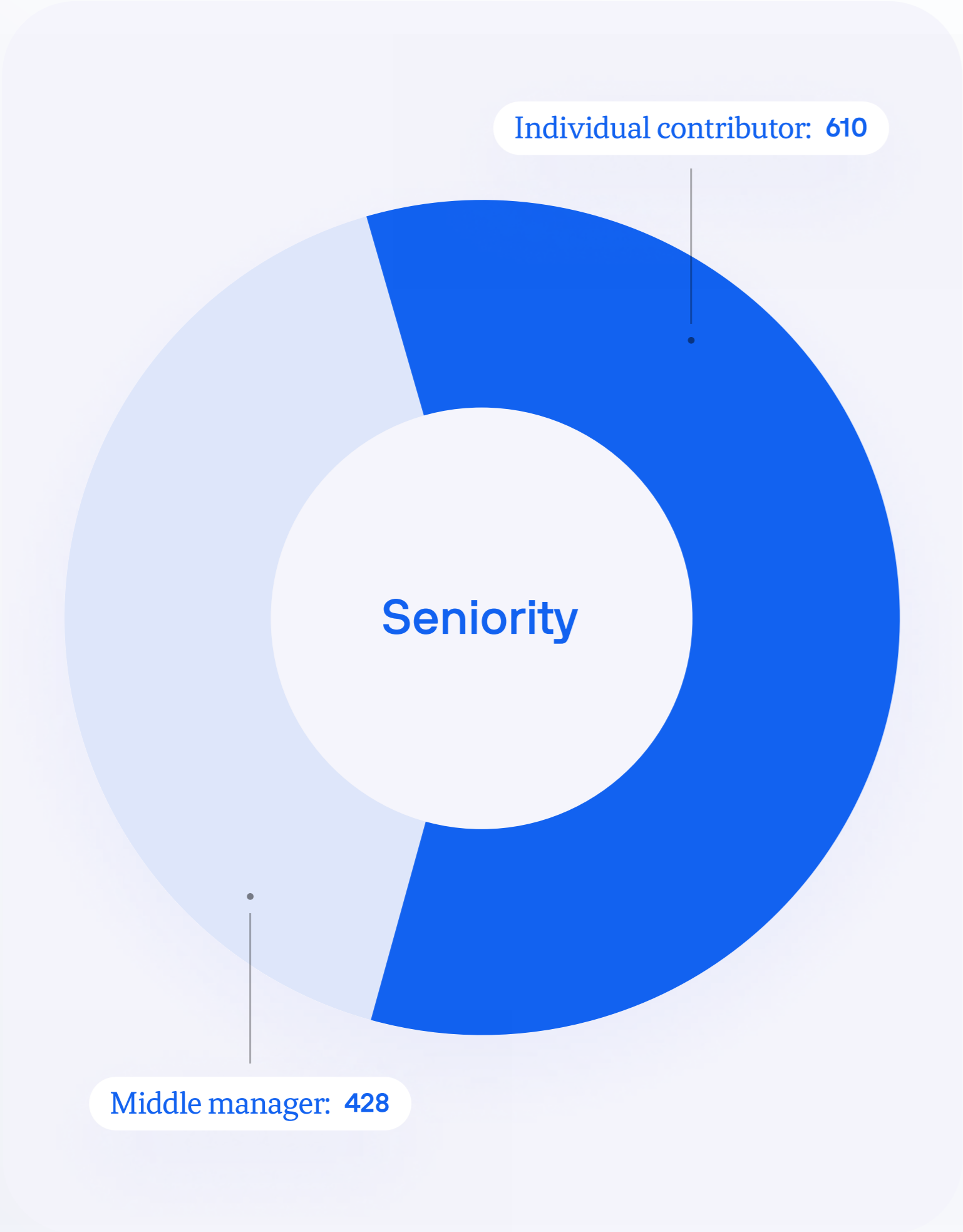


# Who we surveyed

We conducted two surveys in November 2022 — one reaching communicators and leaders across industries and organizations of all sizes, and one reaching employees inside similar organizations.

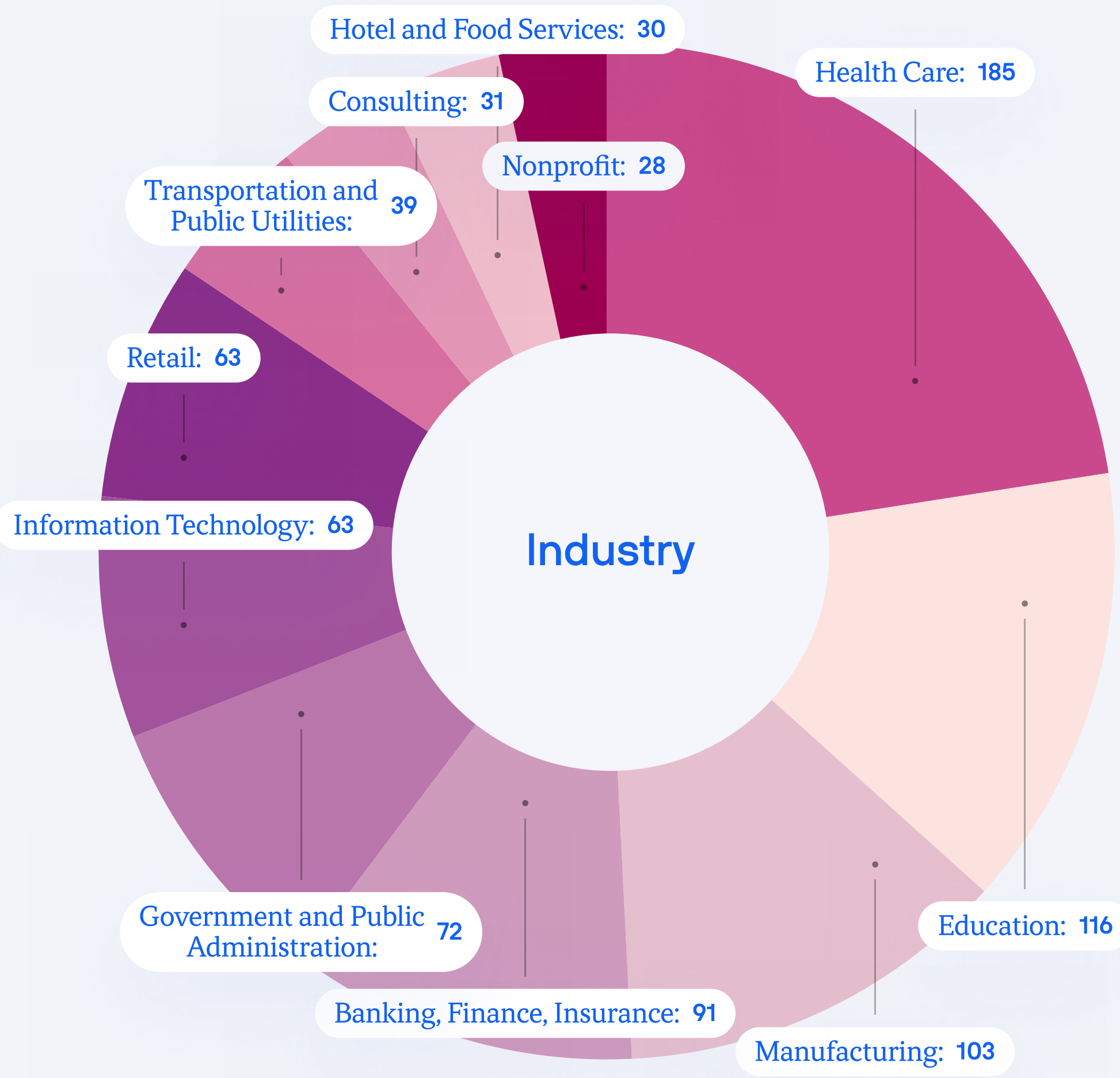
# Employees

1,038 employees in full-time entry-level, intermediate, or middle-manager roles at organizations with 11+ employees responded to this survey.



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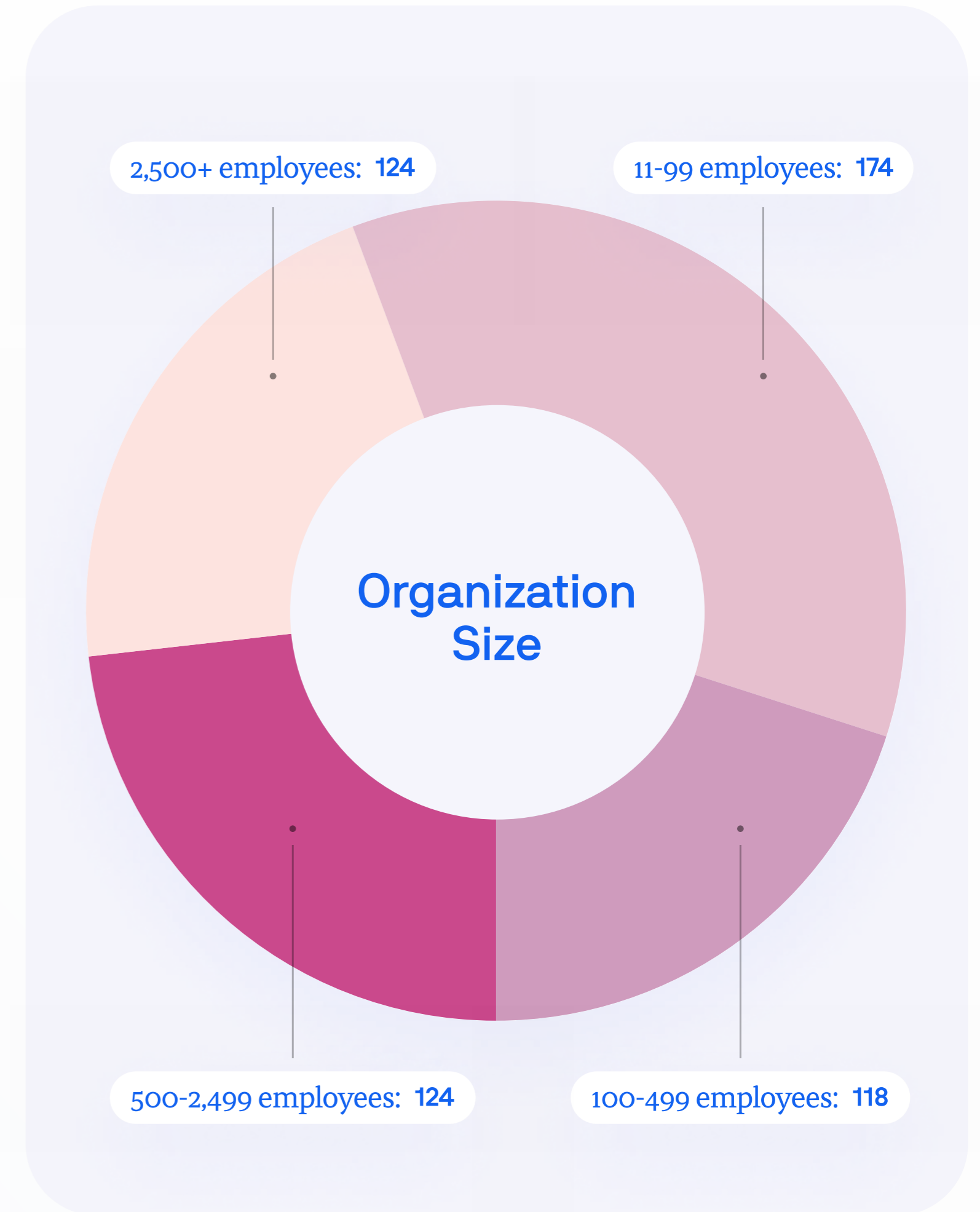
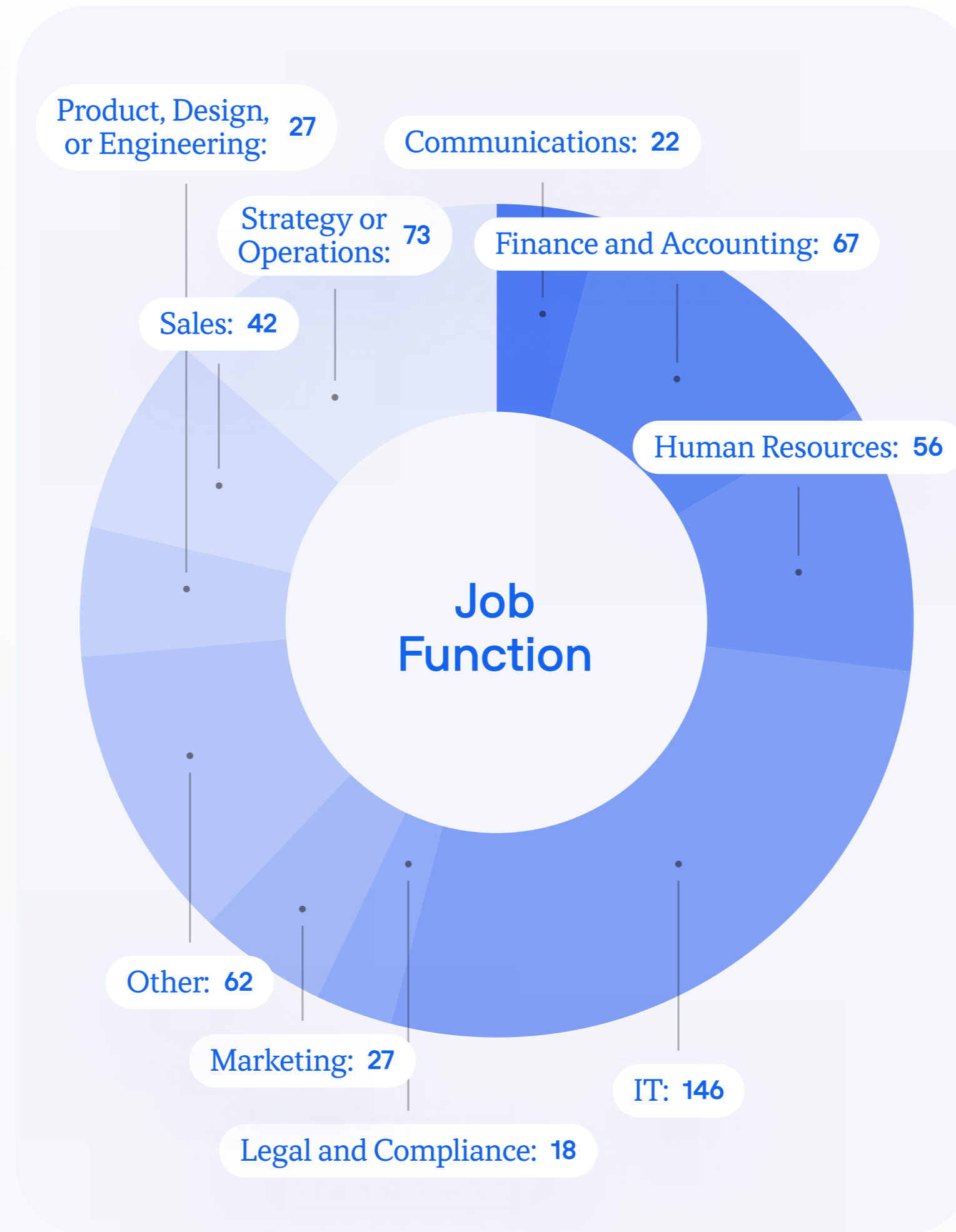
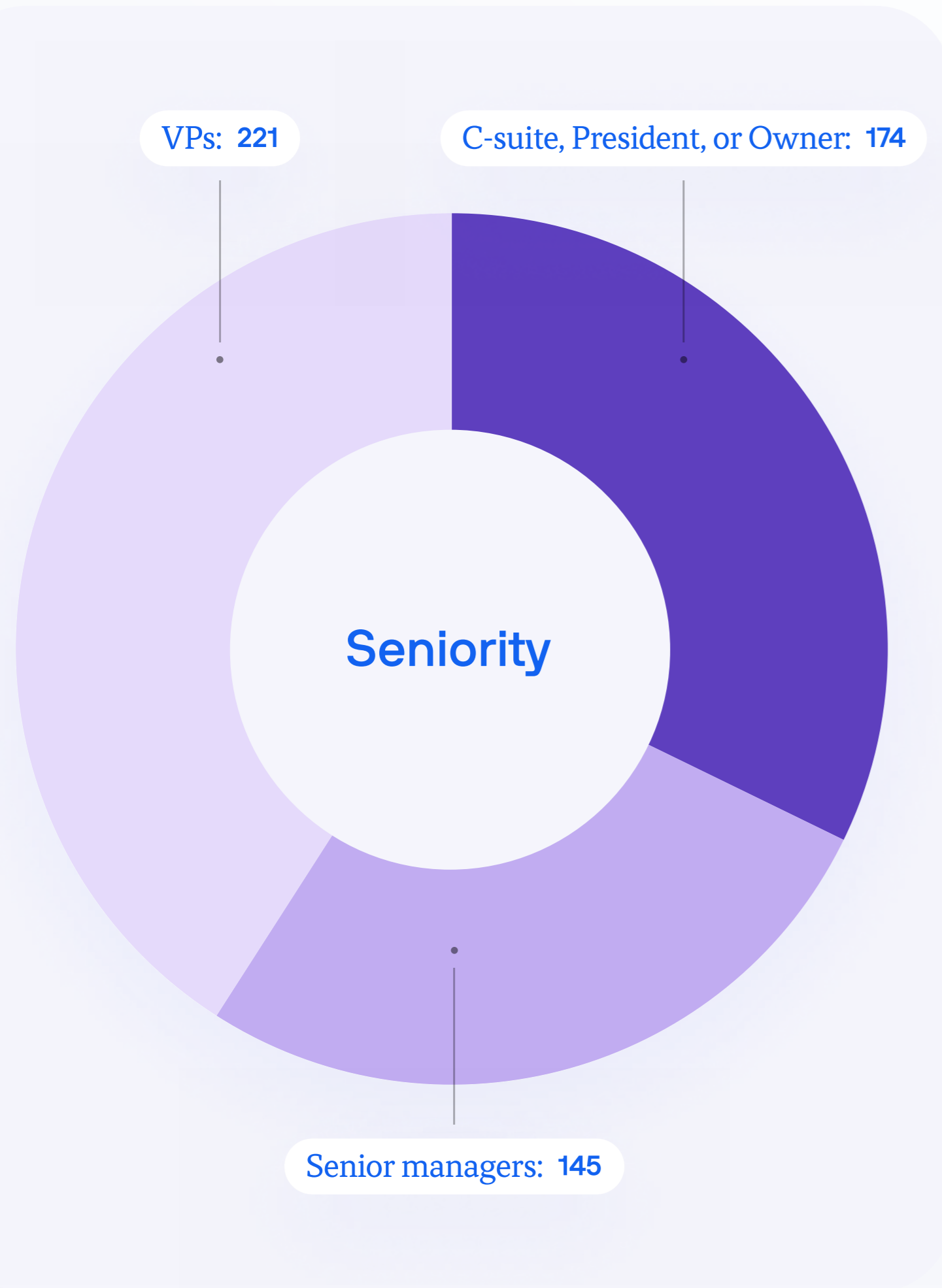


### Additional Categories

- 24 Academia
- 15 Arts and Entertainment
- 15 Telecommunications
- 13 Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing
- 13 Gaming
- 12 Real Estate
- 11 Professional Services
- 10 Legal Services
- 5 Media, Publishing, or Broadcasting
- 3 Government Lobbying
- 2 Military
- 2 Mining
- 2 Investing
- 1 Sports
- 89 Other

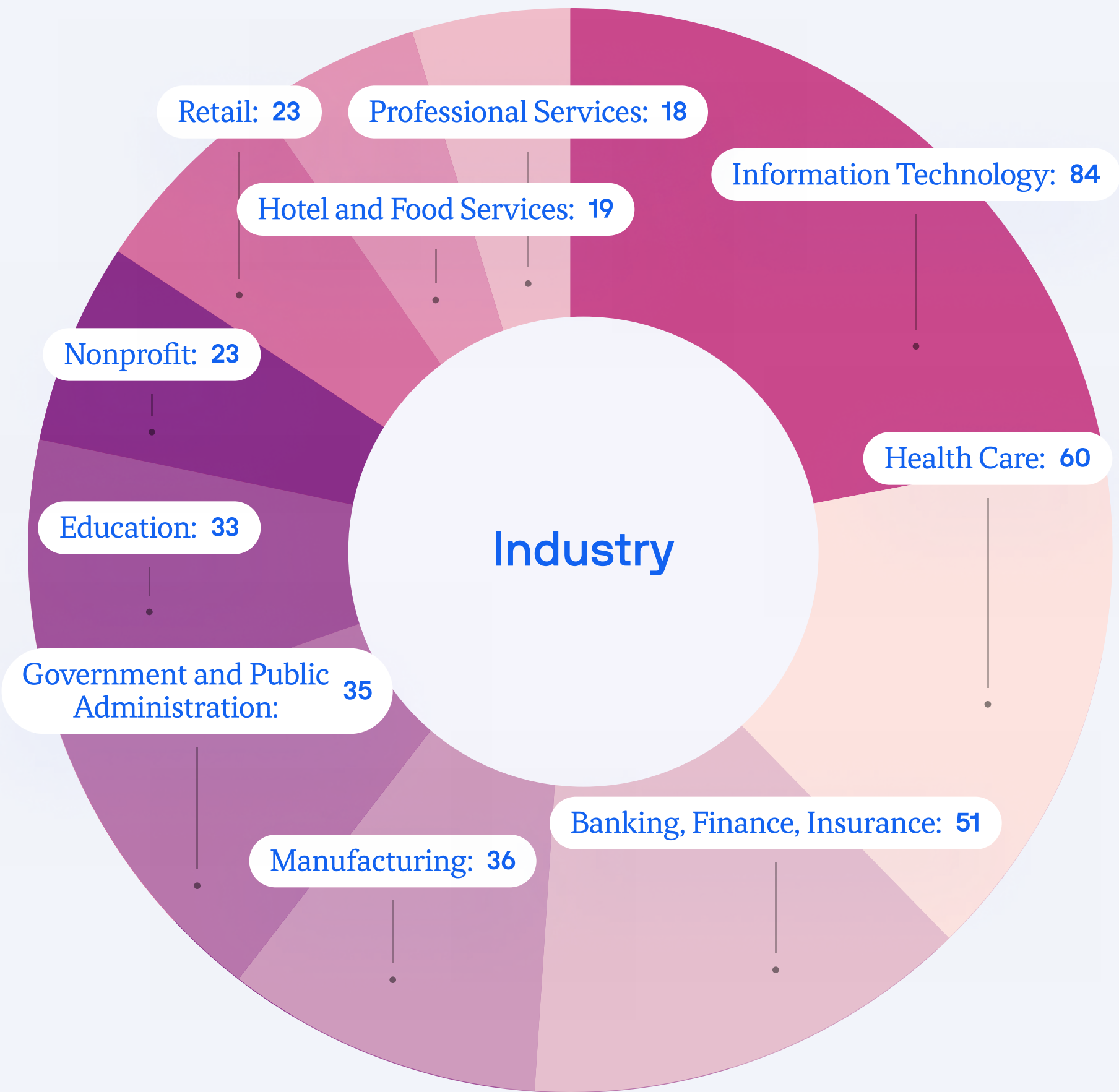
# Leaders

540 leaders employed full-time in a C-level, executive, or senior manager role at organizations with 11+ employees responded to this survey.



# Leaders

540 leaders employed full-time in a C-level, executive, or senior manager role at organizations with 11+ employees responded to this survey.



### Additional Categories

- 15 Consulting
- 11 Legal Services
- 11 Arts and Entertainment
- 11 Transportation and Public Utilities
- 10 Real Estate
- 8 Academia
- 8 Gaming
- 7 Telecommunications
- 6 Government Lobbying
- 6 Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing
- 4 Professional Associations
- 3 Investing
- 2 Media, Publishing, or Broadcasting
- 2 Mining
- 1 Sports
- 1 Military
- 52 Other

# About us

**Axios HQ is the only Essential Communications Management platform** helping organizations keep their teams aligned with what matters most.

- **Rooted in years of research** — and built with powerful AI — Axios HQ uses a science-backed methodology to make communications clearer and more engaging.
- **Your key audiences stay focused** and on the same page, and you earn their time and trust.

**Organizations large and small**, like Delta, Edelman, and Everfi, trust Axios HQ as their key to better organizational alignment and reader engagement.

See how Axios HQ has helped  
hundreds of organizations  
elevate what matters.

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# AXIOS HQ



Elevate what matters

