

AI IMPLEMENTATION IN CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

Widespread adoption amid strategic gaps

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The rapid adoption of AI in corporate communication departments contrasts sharply with the limited strategic integration found in many organizations. Drawing on a quantitative survey of 147 communication professionals from DAX, MDAX, and leading privately held German firms, this study examines the use, assessment, organizational embedding, and stress-related effects of AI. The findings point to a tension: while AI is associated with enthusiasm and efficiency gains, organizations still show structural blind spots in AI's strategic integration and evaluation of its effectiveness.



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RAPID INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF GEN AI

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has moved from early experimentation to everyday use in corporate communications within just a few years. Recent international evidence points to rapid adoption, particularly for content creation, research, and translation but also to persistent uncertainty about the quality of AI-generated content, as well as the governance and strategic value of AI adoption (e.g., Zerfass et al., 2024). Current research has focused mostly on the intention of and attitudes towards AI adoption (e.g., Kaclová, 2025; Kelm & Johann, 2024) rather than how communication professionals experience and evaluate the rapid implementation. At the same time, researchers have highlighted several areas that remain underexplored, including user typologies, systematic evaluation, and AI-induced stress (e.g., O'Neil et al., 2023; Sutherland, 2025).

Moreover, evidence from German-speaking communication departments, where regulatory expectations, organizational structures, and risk cultures differ from Anglo-American contexts, remains limited.

AI IMPLEMENTATION IN LARGE GERMAN COMPANIES

Our study offers an empirical account of how AI is currently being integrated into communication departments in Germany's largest companies. 147 communication professionals from DAX-listed companies (54%), MDAX-listed companies (25%) as well as leading privately held firms (21%) were surveyed between December 2025 and March 2026. The participants were predominantly senior professionals with up to ten years of professional experience. The study identifies six key findings that provide a differentiated picture of AI in corporate communications.

Six dimensions of AI implementation were examined: everyday use, user typologies, organizational integration and support measures, individual assessments and departmental evaluation practices, stress-related experiences, and concerns surrounding AI adoption.

1 AI is predominantly embedded in operational tasks

For most respondents, AI has become part of their professional routine: 87% use AI tools daily or several times per day, drawing on more than three different tools in parallel on average. Use is highly uneven across task types: AI dominates operational activities such as translation (92%), research and fact-checking (88%), and text creation (84%), but plays a much smaller role in strategic tasks like planning and strategy development (41%) and evaluative tasks like

sentiment analysis (33%) or reputation management (27%). The most widely used applications are Microsoft Copilot (82%), ChatGPT (74%), and DeepL (72%).

2 Communicators' AI use reflects distinct attitudes

Based on a cluster analysis, three distinct user types emerge: The so-called **"AI Pioneers"** (32%) use AI several times a day across operational and strategic tasks and hold the most positive attitudes toward AI. The name reflects their self-perception, as they consider themselves among the first to try out new technologies such as AI. **"Functional Users"** (60%), the largest group, use AI daily, primarily for operational support. The small group of **"Situational Users"** (8%) use AI only weekly and report neutral attitudes toward AI. The groups do not differ significantly in age, gender, position, or experience. What sets them apart is their attitude: Those who view AI positively use it more broadly and intensively.



AI Pioneers (32%)

AI use several times a day ($M = 6.0$)* and positive AI attitudes ($M = 4.7$)**



Functional Users (60%)

Daily AI use ($M = 5.4$)* and positive AI attitudes ($M = 4.6$)**



Situational Users (8%)

Weekly AI use ($M = 4.0$)* and neutral AI attitudes ($M = 3.1$)**

* Scale from 1–6 (1 = never, 6 = several times a day) ** Scale from 1–5 (1 = very negative, 5 = very positive)

The figure shows three distinct types of professional AI users that differ primarily in their attitudes toward AI and their intensity of use. Based on a survey of 147 communication professionals from DAX, MDAX, and leading privately held German firms.

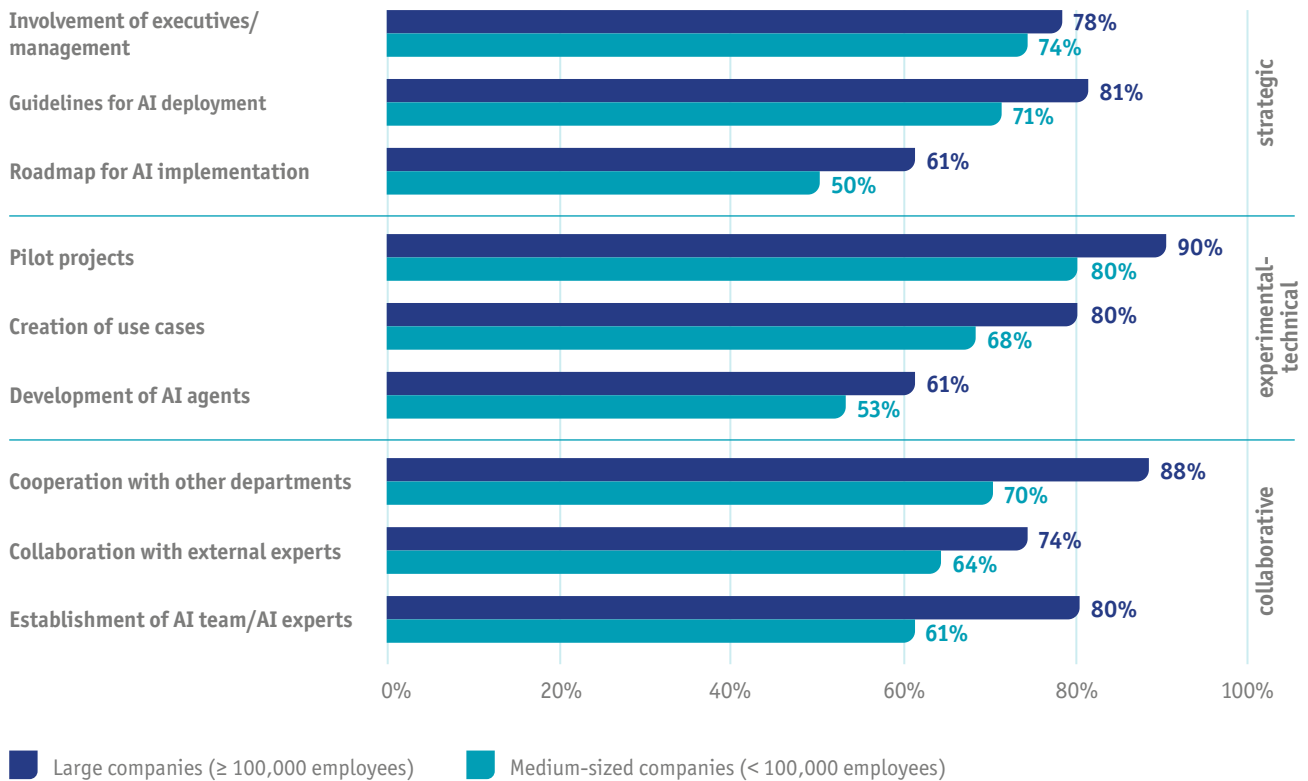
3 From first systematic application to broader organizational use

Communication departments are at different stages of AI maturity, ranging from early experimentation (15%) to a first systematic application (58%) to a broad organizational use of various AI applications (27%). However, AI is not new: Most communication

departments have been using it for two years or more (76%).

Measures for AI implementation can be categorized as strategic, experimental-technical, and collaborative. Larger companies tend to implement more measures in their communication departments than smaller ones – but across the board, the strategic

Departmental AI integration by company size



Based on a survey of 147 communication professionals from DAX, MDAX, and leading privately held German firms.

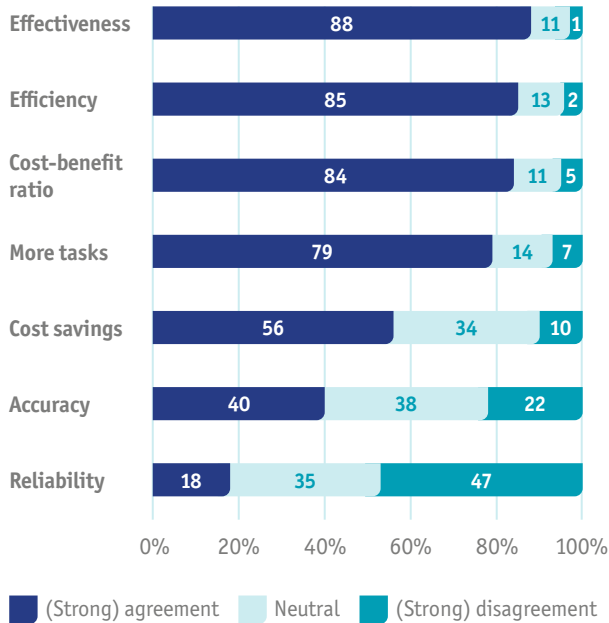
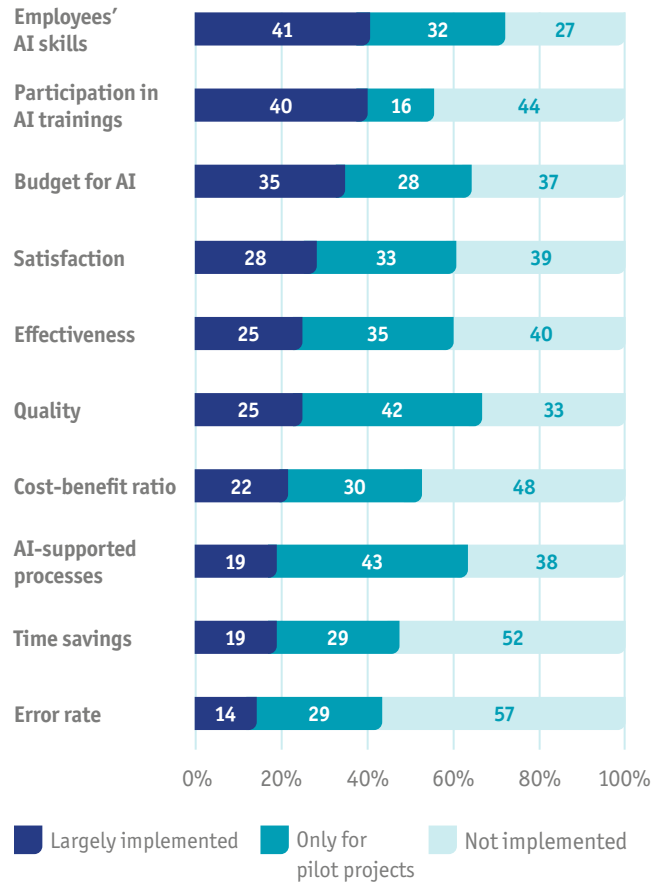
anchoring of AI lags behind its operational deployment. Overall, departments are currently focused on pilot projects (84%), leadership involvement (75%), and cross-departmental collaboration (75%). About half of the departments have developed an AI roadmap (53%) or AI agents (54%), but just 41% have already implemented AI competencies into performance objectives.

4 There is a high perception of productivity, but hardly any systematic evaluation

Most communication professionals report that AI helps them work more effectively (88%) as well as

faster and more efficiently (85%). At the same time, trust in AI-generated results is low: Only 18% consider AI output as reliable. The more frequently AI is used, the more positive the individual assessment of AI.

At the departmental level, the subjectively perceived value of AI is rarely matched by systematic evaluation: Only 25% communications departments comprehensively measure AI effectiveness, while 40% do not measure it at all. Similarly, only 25% of departments comprehensively measure the quality of AI-generated outputs, while 42% track this at least for pilot projects.

Individual assessment of AI use**Departments' evaluation of AI use**

Based on a survey of 147 communication professionals from DAX, MDAX, and leading privately held German firms.

5 AI is perceived as motivating rather than overwhelming

AI is predominantly experienced as energizing (also called “eustress”) rather than as overwhelming or burdening (also termed “distress”). However, one notable negative stressor reported by communication professionals is the perception that AI is constantly evolving in their company, making it difficult to stay up to date (67%). The strongest drivers of positive stress experiences are the sense of mastering work processes more effectively (82%), having more time for other tasks (67%), and leaving room to focus on strategic tasks (61%). Whether AI is experienced as motivating depends largely on organizational support structures such as AI-guidelines and transparent internal communication about AI implementation.

6 Concerns about AI are present, but they do not block use

Overall, reservations regarding AI exist, but they are moderate. Communication professionals are particularly concerned about the authenticity of AI-generated content (68%) and the risk of biases (55%). Concerns are less pronounced when it comes to AI decisions not being comprehensible or AI-supported decisions not being clearly communicated (35% each). Internal information about AI (e.g., timely and easy-to-understand information) is associated with fewer concerns and more positive attitudes toward AI.

SIX LEVERS FOR THE NEXT PHASE OF AI IMPLEMENTATION

The six findings of the study as well as recent literature point to six concrete implications for communication leaders.

- 1 **Broaden AI use beyond operational efficiency:** The current focus on operational tasks is strong but limited (e.g., Yue et al., 2024). Whether AI is deliberately underused for strategic tasks or whether untapped potential remains should be assessed on a company-by-company basis.
- 2 **Develop AI trainings for different user types:** Literacy and support measures should be decoupled from position or seniority and explicitly address hesitation or mixed attitudes toward AI, not only enthusiasm (e.g., Daly et al., 2025).
- 3 **Move from pilots to structured AI implementation:** Departments should assess their AI maturity and transition from isolated pilots to structured, department-wide implementation (e.g., Zeffass et al., 2020).
- 4 **Make AI value more tangible:** Departments need systematic evaluation practices to make the value of AI measurable (e.g., O'Neil et al., 2023). Given low trust in output reliability, quality checks and review processes are particularly important.
- 5 **Design structures that reduce AI-induced stress:** Organizational support structures shape whether AI is experienced as helpful or burdensome. Investment in AI skills, governance, and workflow design is crucial (e.g., Buhmann et al., 2026).
- 6 **Communicate clearly about AI:** Internal communication about AI including accessible information and feedback channels helps reduce concerns and reservations, fostering positive attitudes toward AI (e.g., Dong & Van den Berg, 2025).

CONCLUSION: FROM ADOPTION TO MATURITY

Nine out of ten communication professionals use AI daily, and most report meaningful productivity gains. Yet the picture is more nuanced than the dominant adoption narrative suggests. Usage appears to be concentrated on operational tasks, while strategic and evaluative applications seem largely underdeveloped. User types are differentiated by attitude rather than demographics.

Communication departments are organizationally engaged with AI, but systematic evaluation and quality assurance lag behind operational deployment. AI is experienced as both motivating and burdening, depending on the organizational context. And while concerns exist, they coexist with rather than block adoption.

The key shift is therefore not whether organizations use AI, but how they integrate it. The next phase of AI adoption will be defined by governance, evaluation practices, and organizational support structures that enable meaningful use beyond operational efficiency. Organizations now face the challenge of investing in the conditions that determine whether AI can deliver on its promise.

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READING RECOMMENDATION

Volk, S. C., & Buhmann, A. (forthcoming). Digital corporate communication and measurement and evaluation. In V. Luoma-aho & M. Badham (Eds.), *Handbook on digital corporate communication* (2nd ed.). Edward Elgar.

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RESEARCH PROJECT



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