

# Corporate Comms Is Playing Catch Up on AI. A Few Leaders Are Showing the Way.

By [Russell Dubner](#)

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A disconnect is emerging between CCOs and CEOs when it comes to AI. Many CEOs are doubling down on AI investments and assuming responsibility for AI transformation across their companies. BCG research found that more than 70% of CEOs now say they are the primary decision makers on AI, and half believe their job depends on getting AI right. But CCOs are struggling to keep pace, with a full 68% describing their function as an AI laggard, according to a BCG survey of more than 200 corporate affairs and communications leaders at large US- and UK-based companies.

These findings, however, do not reflect a lack of opportunity. In fact, few functions stand to gain more from AI—including GenAI and agentic AI—than corporate affairs and communications. According to BCG research, it ranks among the top two enterprise functions for GenAI transformation upside, with potential productivity gains of roughly one-third or more across critical tasks and processes.

Leading CCOs are making it happen, using AI to reinvent their operations: investing boldly, upskilling their teams, and reshaping how work gets done. Those who do not follow their lead, particularly CCOs running large functions, will miss opportunities to enhance the function's productivity, impact, and innovation. Over time, this may affect their credibility and influence within the organization.

## What CCOs Told Us About AI

In our survey, CCOs cited several barriers to capturing value from AI, most notably operating model challenges that make it difficult to design robust transformation road maps and drive deep, systematic integration of AI into workflows at scale. But they were also in broad agreement on AI’s potential.

**The AI Advantage.** Nearly three-quarters of communications leaders say they believe in AI’s potential and payoff—and with good reason. AI is a powerful tool for many of the areas central to the CCO mandate: real-time reputation monitoring, predictive risk modeling, leadership decision support, and coordinated stakeholder engagement.

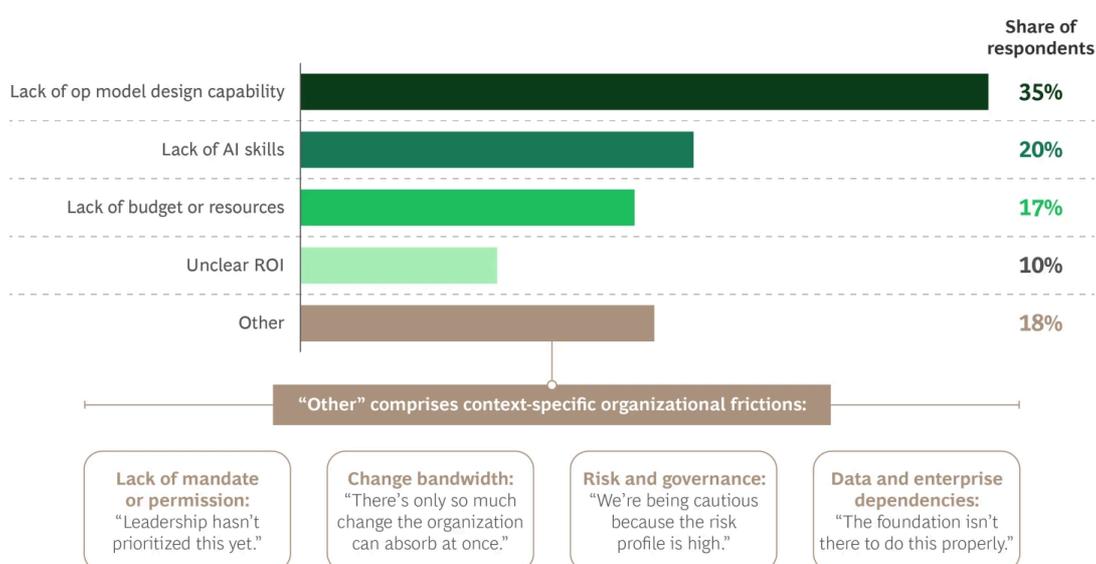
BCG research finds corporate affairs and communications can garner productivity gains of 26% to 36% at the task level (for example, drafting a post for social media) and 34% to 47% at the process level (for example, coordinating a social media campaign), once foundational capabilities are in place.

Yet most teams are failing to gain traction. More than 70% of respondents reported they are not capturing task-level productivity gains, a requirement before achieving the higher-level process improvements. Most are investing at subscale levels, with more than 60% planning to allocate less than 10% of their functional budget to AI—or nothing at all.

It’s not surprising, then, that 88% of CCOs report that they are not fully prepared to lead an AI transformation. In addition to operating model hurdles, CCOs in our survey note that weak AI skills within their teams as well as constrained budgets are blocking progress. (See Exhibit 1.)

**EXHIBIT 1**

**Corporate Affairs and Comms Leaders Cited Lack of Op Model Design Capability as the Top Barrier to Capturing AI Value**



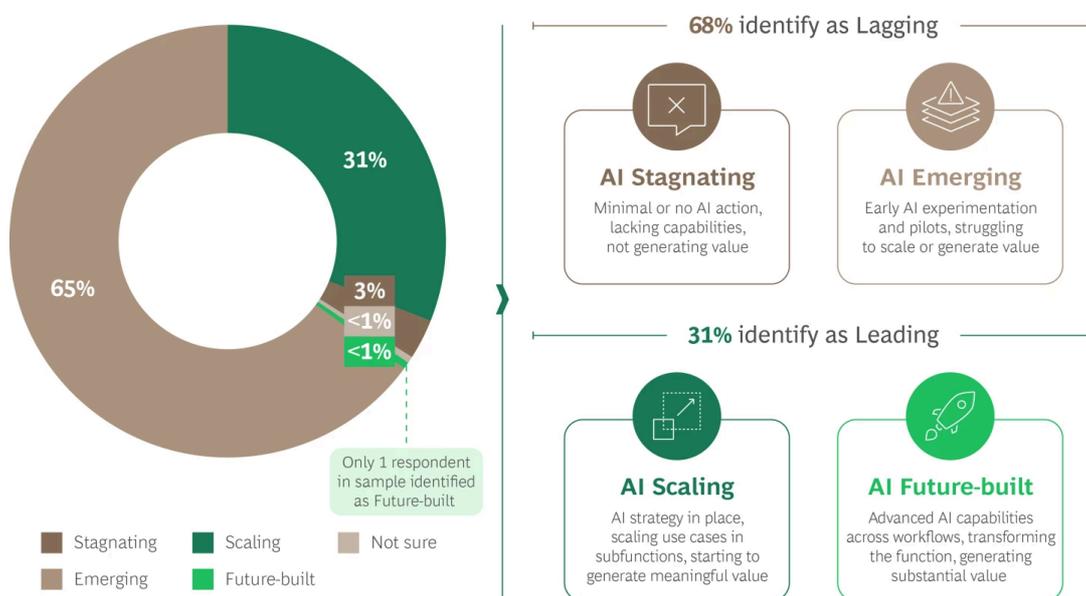
Sources: BCG GenAI Adoption in Corporate Affairs & Communications Survey; BCG analysis.

**The Widening Gap.** Despite the obstacles, pioneering CCOs are finding a way to create value, opening up a divide between the leaders and the laggards.

A hefty majority (68%) of CCOs surveyed report they have made little to no progress in adopting AI or are still in early pilots yielding little to no value. Just 31% of CCOs report that their teams are making meaningful progress scaling AI beyond pilots. (Within that group, only one respondent identified as having fully transformed the function.) (See Exhibit 2.)

**EXHIBIT 2**

**AI Adoption in Comms Functions Is Broad but Not Deep**



Sources: BCG GenAI Adoption in Corporate Affairs & Communications Survey; BCG analysis.  
 Note: AI maturity categories are derived from BCG Build for the Future 2025, *The Widening AI Value Gap*.

So, what are leading CCOs doing differently? The most forward-looking are redesigning how work gets done: one in ten corporate affairs and communications teams—entirely within the leading group—report deep or systematic AI integration into workflows. (Among lagging organizations, that figure is zero.) Overall, the leaders are 2.3 times more likely to commit at least 10% of their functional budget to AI than the laggards. They build confidence through experience: these teams are 1.7 times more likely to say they can demonstrate AI’s value to leadership. And they invest heavily in people, with 71% of leading teams having upskilled at least a quarter of their workforce, compared with just 22% among lagging teams. This talent investment is crucial, especially as half of surveyed CCOs plan to redeploy or reduce headcount within the next year owing to the impact of AI. Equipping employees with the right skills and capabilities will ensure they succeed in evolving roles.

Such moves have the potential to compound the advantages the leaders have today as AI tools advance. Consider agentic AI—systems capable of autonomous task execution and decision support. More than 70% of communications leaders believe it will have impact within the next 12 months, while about 20% believe it will fully transform work by 2028.

However, companies that have not put the right foundation in place to capture productivity gains at the task and process level will find it challenging to fully leverage agentic AI. The leaders in our survey are already investing in putting the necessary governance in place to deploy agentic AI. While governance alone doesn't determine maturity, teams expanding governance are 1.6 times more likely to feel prepared to lead AI transformation.

## Learning from the Leaders

To harness the full potential of AI, corporate communications leaders must follow the example set by pioneering peers. We have identified six steps CCOs and their teams can take to capture immediate value from AI and position themselves strategically for future innovation.

- 1. Map workflows to target inefficiencies.** Before adding new tools, the comms function can dissect how work actually gets done. Where are employees spending the most time? How many of their tasks are repetitive? Where could AI help eliminate those tasks? Documenting each task (such as briefing subject matter experts or publishing and reporting results) in a series of critical processes helps identify patterns such as wasted time and friction points. Based on that insight, the function can prioritize discrete AI use cases that will address the most problematic pain points. Early successes with those use cases builds credibility and momentum for the transformation.
- 2. Define the desired outcomes—and the value they will deliver.** The next level of transformation addresses the function's full processes, not just improving their efficiency but reimagining them. It starts with defining the outcomes the function wants to achieve—for example, an AI-assisted crisis communications capability or an enhanced content creation workflow for social media. For each outcome, the function identifies how its value will be tracked or measured; for example, faster response times after an incident or higher engagement rates from personalized multimedia content. The agentic architecture required to deliver the outcome can then be designed, along with the role that humans will play, including through reviewing the outputs, giving feedback, and providing approvals.
- 3. Remake the operating model.** With the right AI applications identified, the function can revamp the operating model to ensure that new tools can scale. This includes establishing clear decision rights, governance, and accountability. It also means ensuring alignment among people, processes, and incentives to drive broad adoption. And even if agentic AI is not part of

the initial rollout, CCOs can plan for it early on. Taking a thoughtful build or buy (and customize) approach to AI solutions, designing scalable data architectures, and putting the right guardrails in place with more advanced capabilities in mind will help ensure today's investments don't need to be reworked tomorrow.

4. **Redeploy capacity and fund the next wave.** AI-driven gains create strategic headroom, not just cost savings. CCOs plan early to redeploy freed capacity toward higher-value work and deeper stakeholder engagement. They can also identify and mobilize budget pools to finance sustained change, treating AI as a fundamental transformation rather than a one-time efficiency play.
  5. **Upskill talent and enhance capabilities.** Effective AI integration demands targeted upskilling. Leading organizations proactively train team members: 27% have upskilled more than 75% of their workforce. Investing in upskilling not only builds critical technical competencies but also prepares teams for the shifting roles and responsibilities AI introduces.
  6. **Embrace innovation.** Corporate comms teams have an opportunity to unlock the strategic potential of AI by actively exploring its frontier applications—not just incremental improvements. For example, leveraging predictive modeling and real-time risk analysis can enable proactive reputation management.
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For corporate communications chiefs, AI is no longer a side initiative. It is a leadership test—one that will shape not only how the function operates but how it is perceived in the C-suite.

For many organizations, it is also a shift that is unlikely to be solved in a single, sweeping move. In some cases, it makes sense to begin with specific subfunctions rather than trying to transform the entire function at once. Media relations, internal communications, or social and digital teams, for example, often have high-volume work where AI can show clear results quickly. Starting there allows CCOs to demonstrate value, learn what works, and build support before expanding across the broader function.

The data is unambiguous: a minority of AI leaders are already acting decisively, and they are pulling ahead. They are remaking how work is executed and how value is created. For those playing catchup, it is not too late. Closing the gap, however, will require deliberate investment and decisive changes to the operating model.

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