

THE
HUMPHREY//
GROUP

Leadership Communication Trends

Findings Report

April 2024

Top Leadership Communication
Trends and Leading Approaches
for Skill Development



Here are the key takeaways from this report:

Communication skills remain fundamental to effective leadership.

Today's challenges require leaders to use communication to navigate everyday complexities and make strategic decisions that guide organizations forward. They inspire trust and set clear direction amidst uncertainty, and they do all of this through inspiring communication.

The leadership communication skills required today are fundamentally different from those of years past.

Shifts in required communication skills are occurring due to the rapid pace of change, the rise of new technologies like AI, and the increase in remote and hybrid work models. Leadership communication skills must evolve with these shifts

The days of command-and-control communication skills are over.

Instead, some of the most critical communication skills for today's leader include transparency, building trust, and articulating a compelling vision. Today's leaders need to be open and trustworthy, and they need to respond to tough questions while incorporating empathy and building connection.

Leaders want to learn and build leadership communication skills in fundamentally different ways than in the past.

Learning methods are changing to adapt to shifts in learning preferences. Today's busy leaders also require different development methods to meet their needs. They don't always have time to dedicate to a day-long-plus training session. For that reason, we're seeing a shift in demand for learning towards a personalized, adaptive, and flexible approach to accommodate different learning preferences.

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About The Humphrey Group

For more than 35 years, The Humphrey Group has been dedicated to developing leaders who inspire through effective communication training. We believe that inspiring communication creates more human workplaces and a more human world. We conducted this research to better understand the evolving needs of the leaders whose skills we develop.

The Critical Role of Leadership Communication

Effective communication is a crucial skill for today's influential leader. The ability to inspire teams, foster open dialogue, and shape organizational culture are no longer mere "nice-to-haves"; they are now fundamental prerequisites for contemporary leaders.

In 2024, the pace of change, technological advancements, and global connectivity demand leaders who can articulate a compelling vision, build trust, and foster collaboration.

Masterful communication will be the catalyst that propels organizations forward. Leaders who excel in this art will not only inspire their teams but also shape the trajectory of their companies in this ever-evolving landscape.

Our 2024 Leadership Communication Trends Findings Report, informed by discussions with leaders across diverse sectors and a comprehensive industry survey, delves into the essential communication skills required for today's effective leadership.



Communication Challenges and Opportunities

Though respondents consistently articulated that effective communication has never been more important, the challenges at each level to foster that kind of effectiveness are pervasive. Here is what we heard about challenges by level:

C-suite:

C-suite leaders face two critical challenges – a perception of being “out of touch” with frontline realities, and overly high-level communication. This disconnect often appears as a lack of transparency and creates difficulties in effectively cascading information downwards.

Leaders/Emerging Leaders:

Leaders and emerging leaders tend to struggle with creating impactful presentations, exerting influence, effectively communicating strategies to their teams, and tailoring their messaging for conciseness. At times, the wordiness of their communications can obscure the intended message, leading to misunderstanding and disengagement.

Senior Executives:

Senior executives struggle with a lack of clarity in their messaging, a failure to connect with their audience, and challenges with receiving and acting on feedback. They also face difficulties in breaking down communication silos across lines of business, leading to disjointed and sometimes conflicting messages.

Individual Contributors:

Individual contributors often encounter challenges when it comes to engaging in difficult conversations, demonstrating courage, maintaining clarity, and effectively communicating upwards. These difficulties may arise from a lack of experience, confidence, or understanding of the broader organizational context.

Prevalent Challenges

Organizations face challenges stemming from a variety of factors:

1. Time constraints
2. Limited senior leadership exposure
3. Leadership and communication skills gap
4. Insufficient investment in targeted training
5. Rapid organizational changes
6. Change messaging struggles

The swift pace of change is a critical hurdle highlighted by many respondents. The absence of implementing specialized development programs compounds this issue, leaving leaders to rely on trial and error rather than structured learning.

Critical Skills for Masterful Communication

Mastering effective communication skills is crucial to helping leaders overcome today's challenges.

Navigating today's fast-paced world requires a variety of leadership communication skills. Respondents identified the top 10 skills that will help them move their organizations forward with clear, compelling visions and a confident grasp of today's evolving environment.





Clear, Purpose-Driven Communication

Leaders are increasingly expected to communicate with **clarity, purpose, and vision**, and go beyond the surface to explore the deeper “why” behind their message. Purpose-driven communication aligns team members with an organization's goals and offers both motivation and context for daily work and long-term strategies.

Clarity Matters: Effective communicators express their ideas with precision, leaving no room for ambiguity. Clarity ensures that the intended message is easily understood by all. It’s like a well-crafted arrow hitting its target directly.

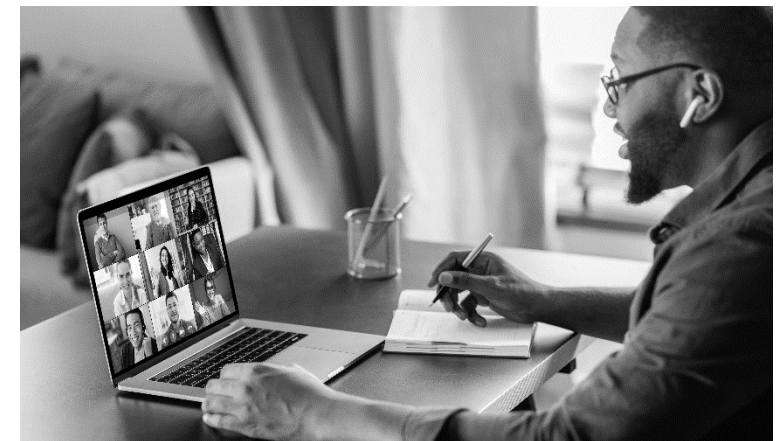
Brevity Is Key: Great communicators understand the power of brevity. They distill complex concepts into succinct statements that resonate. After all, impactful messages don’t need extra fluff—they stand tall on their own.

Memorable Messages: Think of memorable quotes or slogans—they stick with us because they’re clear, concise, and powerful. Leaders who create such messages leave a lasting impact on their teams.

Clear and purpose-driven communication is about delivering focused, concise messages that connect with everyone on the team — a skill essential for leaders aiming to motivate and guide their teams effectively in today's fast-paced business world.

Success Story*

New leader Jamal shared with us that despite his “burning desire to make an impact,” his words often stumbled, lacking clarity and conviction. Jamal embarked on a communication mastery journey. **He practiced concise messaging, honed his storytelling skills, and sought feedback.** Gradually, his influence grew and his team no longer dismissed him; they leaned in, inspired by his newfound clarity and authenticity.



*Names and identifying information have been changed for all success stories.

Persuasion & Influence

The ability to persuade and influence others, including team members and stakeholders, is a crucial leadership communication skill. Mastering persuasion and influence means not only adapting communication styles to diverse situations and audiences but also staying agile and responsive in the face of unexpected challenges.

Today, leaders must tailor their communication styles to diverse situations and audiences to achieve resonance and impact. Doing so requires the ability to pivot their message and remain agile when faced with unexpected challenges.



I rolled up my sleeves and showed my commitment... and shared stories of successful projects where collaboration led to breakthroughs.

Emotional Intelligence, Empathy & Trust

Emotional intelligence is now an essential expectation for leaders. They must be attuned to their own emotions as well as those of their teams. It has become a foundational aspect of effective leadership, emphasizing qualities such as empathy, trust-building, and adept management of emotional reactions.

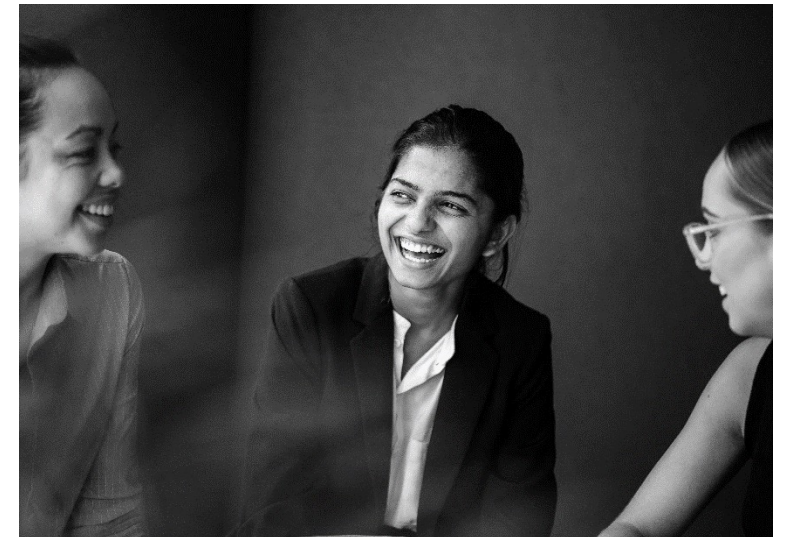
Leaders who demonstrate empathy and prioritize trust in their communications and interactions forge deeper connections with their team.



Leadership today is less about dictating and more about understanding and empathizing. My role is as much about being a good listener as it is a decision-maker.

Success Story

At a pivotal Town Hall, seasoned executive Alex told us that he faced a storm of critical feedback after unveiling a controversial policy. Instead of ignoring the rising concerns, he chose a different path forward. Alex acknowledged the dissent and invited open dialogue. **He addressed each objection with empathy, seeking to find common ground.** By doing so, he not only bridged the divide but also transformed tension into constructive energy. Employees felt heard, and Alex's leadership gained renewed respect.





Communicating through Change

Change communication is essential for effective leadership. The corporate landscape is continually transforming — technologies advance, markets shift, and organizational structures evolve. Amidst this flux, leaders serve as beacons during times of transition. Clarity in communication and transparency dispels the ambiguity that change brings with it.

Effective leaders reassure, acknowledge, and emphasize resilience to help refocus their teams by sharing the bigger picture and communicating a vision that connects individuals to organizational goals. Well-informed teams remain motivated and contribute to smoother transitions. Skillful change communication isn't a soft skill — it's a performance booster. When teams feel supported through effective change communication, they adapt faster, innovate better, and achieve more.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution skills are of the utmost importance in leadership communication. These skills help to foster positive working relationships and contribute to a harmonious work environment. Effective leaders recognize that addressing and resolving conflicts with diplomacy and respect is essential for maintaining open dialogue and inclusivity.

Leaders who excel in conflict resolution play a pivotal role in cultivating a workplace culture where communication is constructive, and disputes are resolved amicably. This ultimately contributes to a more productive and cohesive team.

Successful conflict resolution achieves several critical outcomes:

- 1. Preventing Escalation:** Addressing conflicts early prevents them from spiraling out of control.
- 2. Validation and Value:** All parties involved feel heard and valued, reinforcing trust.
- 3. Cultivating Workplace Culture:** Leaders who excel in conflict resolution create a workplace where communication is constructive.

“

Simplifying the message is something that we 100% struggle with at all levels in this organization. That ability to simplify and summarize is incredibly important, especially when communicating a difficult message.

Authentic & Transparent Communication

Leadership communication has shifted away from one-way communication, where leaders held the floor while employees listened passively, to a more dynamic exchange. In today's context, effective leaders embrace authenticity, transparency, and vulnerability.

This transformation is driven by a workforce that highly values forthrightness and openness. Employees seek a profound connection with their organization's vision and challenges.

Authentic leadership extends beyond self-expression; it involves candidly acknowledging challenges, and uncertainties.

This approach not only humanizes leaders but encourages open dialogue and strengthens team cohesion.



We're pushing towards a culture where we're open about our challenges, not just our victories. It's about being real with each other.

Research shows that authenticity in the workplace leads to several benefits:

Better Relationships: Authenticity cultivates stronger relationships with colleagues.

Higher Trust Levels: Employees trust leaders who are genuine and transparent.

Increased Productivity: An open environment encourages productivity.

Positive Work Environment: Authentic leaders contribute to a positive workplace culture.



Success Story

As the CEO of a thriving enterprise, **Maria prides herself on her strategic vision.** However, she noticed that her communication style was a barrier. Her messages - filled with abstract concepts and corporate jargon - left frontline staff feeling alienated. To bridge this gap, Maria acted on simplifying her language. She engaged in candid conversations with her team and focused on discussing their day-to-day realities. By actively listening and addressing their concerns, she shattered the perception of being out of touch. **Transparency became her ally,** and she cascaded information effectively, fostering a sense of connection and trust within her team.

Effective Storytelling

Organizations have increasingly acknowledged the critical importance of storytelling as a powerful communication tool. It is a strategic asset that empowers leaders to inspire, engage, and drive meaningful change within their organizations.

Storytelling matters because it taps into emotions, influences behavior, and creates lasting connections with audiences.



Authentic storytelling bridges the gap between companies and their audiences. It's not just about products or services; it's about the people behind them.

Key insights into authentic storytelling:

- 1. Inspiring Leadership** – Storytelling enables leaders to inspire their teams and stakeholders. By weaving narratives, leaders can evoke emotions, share values, and ignite passion, fostering a sense of purpose and commitment.
- 2. Engagement and Connection** – Leaders who master the art of storytelling captivate their audiences. Compelling stories create deeper connections, bridge gaps, enhance understanding, and promote collaboration.
- 3. Driving change** – Storytelling isn't just about anecdotes; it is a catalyst to drive meaningful change. Leaders can use stories to communicate visions, strategies, and transformational goals. When complex ideas are conveyed through well-crafted narratives, the impact is clear and memorable.

Leaders who harness this skill wield a potent tool to captivate and influence their audiences – one that can form deeper connections and convey complex ideas with clarity and impact.



Responding Effectively & Handling Tough Questions

Leaders who can adeptly address challenging inquiries demonstrate their commitment to open dialogue and collaboration. This trend mirrors the evolving expectations of employees and stakeholders who value leaders that not only convey messages clearly but also actively engage with their audience, even when confronted with difficult questions. In an era of transparency, accountability, and adaptability, the ability to handle challenging questions serves as a clear indicator of a leader's capacity to navigate challenges, build trust, and foster a culture of continuous improvement.

Digital Proficiency & Virtual Engagement

The seismic shift to remote work has redefined leadership engagement. Digital proficiency no longer means mastery of a tool, but instead encompasses the ability to convey authenticity, empathy, and clarity through digital channels. Understanding how to communicate effectively through digital mediums is non-negotiable, and leaders must now wield these digital communication skills to bridge the physical gap and foster meaningful connections.

“We've started integrating AI tools to help manage and analyze team communications. It's fascinating to see patterns and get predictive insights on team morale and

By leveraging AI, leaders foster understanding, build trust, and strengthen connections within their virtual workspaces. Effective communication through these digital mediums is no longer optional—it's essential for success in the new era of work.



Artificial Intelligence (AI) is no longer a mere efficiency tool; it has become a strategic partner. AI features:

- 1. Predictive Insights:** AI algorithms analyze data patterns, enabling leaders to anticipate challenges, trends, and opportunities. Armed with these insights, leaders can make informed decisions and steer their teams effectively.
- 2. Personalized Interactions:** AI tailors communication to individual team members. Whether it's personalized feedback, targeted coaching, or recognizing achievements, AI ensures that interactions resonate on a personal level.
- 3. Enhanced Team Dynamics:** Virtual teams can feel isolated, lacking the camaraderie of shared office spaces. AI bridges this gap by fostering connections. It suggests icebreakers, facilitates team-building activities, and encourages collaboration.

Integrating DEI¹ into all communication

Inclusive communication resonates with all members of diverse teams. This extends beyond mere rhetoric; leaders must actively **cultivate a culture where diverse perspectives and backgrounds are genuinely valued and integrated** into decision-making, innovation, and communication.



1. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion



Equity and inclusion are no longer confined to HR jargon; they serve as the foundational pillars of our organization.

It is no longer sufficient to offer standalone DEI courses; instead, **DEI is about seamlessly weaving these principles into everyday communication.** Leaders must be mindful of the impact of their words, and they should naturally incorporate a wide range of perspectives into their communication style. Failure to do so risks creating an impression of being out of touch and alienating employees.

Success Story

Sunita, striving to connect authentically with her diverse employee audience, realized that her uniform messages fell flat. She worked on personalizing her approach. Sunita shared relatable stories with the goal of touching both hearts and minds. **She celebrated individual contributions and acknowledged cultural nuances.** This shift created a genuine bond between her and colleagues, fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose.



The leadership communication skills identified here serve as more than a collection of data; they're an action guide. They invite leaders to reassess and refine their communication strategies, align with new trends, and master the skills crucial for leading effectively in today's dynamic, skill-focused business environment.

Leading Approaches for Skill Development

Now that we've identified the top communication skills needed for today's leaders, it's important to examine how leaders can build these skills as well. If learning opportunities don't align with leaders' preferred methods of learning, then the overworked, overwhelmed leader is less likely to engage in the learning.

We examined respondents' learning preferences by leader level to help identify the best methods for developing leaders at all levels of the organization.

Learning at Various levels

C-suite executives

Preference leans towards one-on-one coaching and high-touch small group training, indicating a desire for personalized, focused learning experiences that cater to the unique challenges at the top echelons of leadership. C-suite leaders show a nearly even split between in-person and virtual facilitated learning.

Senior management

Similarly, this group shows a tendency towards more intimate settings that allow for deeper engagement and practical learning. Senior executives and leaders/emerging leaders exhibit a significant inclination towards virtual settings, reflecting the broader organizational shift towards digital platforms.

Leaders and emerging leaders

This group displays a slightly different pattern, with a mix of preferences that include blended learning—self-study combined with facilitated sessions—emphasizing the value of flexibility and the ability to learn at one's own pace while still benefiting from expert guidance. This approach is particularly appreciated for its adaptability to various learning styles and schedules. Individual contributors are also expected to continue leveraging virtual learning, as seen by the unanimous preference across the responses.

Given today's evolving demands, there's a pressing need for targeted training programs that address all levels of leadership communication. Understanding these trends is key to creating targeted training programs that enable leaders to manage intricate communication challenges effectively. This insight is crucial for crafting training that meets the demands of contemporary leadership roles.

Key Insights into the Shift in Learning

Our findings reveal a definitive shift towards dynamic, flexible, and more personalized learning formats within organizations. Here's a consolidated summary of key insights and trends:

Preference for Bite-Sized Learning and Microlearning:

Microlearning has emerged as a powerful trend as bite-sized modules cater to mid-level leaders and employees who juggle multiple responsibilities and have limited time for traditional learning. The desire for brief 2-minute videos highlighted the need for quick insights without disruption to busy schedules¹ underscored the importance of retaining depth in a micro-learning experience.²

Shift Towards Learning in the Flow of Work: A significant trend that emerged in our findings is the desire for the integration of learning into the daily flow of work, or cognitive apprenticeship, where approximately 70% of learning occurs within the context of work. This approach allows for practical, on-the-job learning experiences that are immediately applicable and accessible within the workflow, making it an ideal learning method.

The Need for Streamlined Learning Approaches: The rigidity and time constraints of traditional, lengthy learning models are becoming less effective. For instance, employees often have to drop out of programs because of other prioritized tasks. The current demand is for flexible learning options that align with individual schedules and commitments.

Adapting to Modern Learning Consumption Habits:

Learners seek focused, actionable knowledge that leads to immediate success. The shift is palpable—from generic eLearning to tailored, real-world experiences. Organizations are seeking content that is deep, broad, and immediately applicable, moving away from one-size-fits-all eLearning solutions towards more personalized, immediate, and practical learning experiences.

Navigating the shift.

We're witnessing a demand for learning that is shifting towards a personalized, adaptive, and flexible approach. This approach includes the integration of eLearning, virtual learning, microlearning and learning in the flow of work, to accommodate various styles and schedules.

Organizations are responding to this demand by blending in-person and virtual learning, and using tools and technologies to support development right within the flow of work.

This evolution in professional development strategies prepares organizations to not only meet current demands but to also forge a future where varied learning modalities are seamlessly integrated, enhancing leadership skills at every organizational tier.



What about eLearning?

eLearning continues to be an important approach for skill development.

Learners want bite-sized, on-demand learning that goes beyond surface-level knowledge. This need is particularly pronounced for mid-level leaders.



We want bite-sized learning for our mid-level leaders; self-study accessed on demand.



AI is emerging as a crucial tool to build adaptive learning and provide performance support.

There's a desire for eLearning that's "in the moment" and "just in time", with AI solutions emerging as an important tool to achieve this.

Leadership Communication Trends

The insights garnered from this report underscore a new reality: mastery in leadership communication is no longer an optional skill but a critical component of effective leadership.

Organizations that strive to empower their leaders with advanced communication skills are investing in their future and positioning themselves to navigate complex situations, guide their teams through periods of change, and sustain a resilient workforce.



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Learn more about how The Humphrey Group can help your leaders develop the critical communication skills needed in today's dynamic work environment.

Visit [The Humphrey Group](#).