SEEING AROUND THE CORNER

THE COMMUNICATIONS READINESS GAP

Why business transformation is moving faster than communications capabilities

AN EXECUTIVE INTELLIGENCE BRIEFING

Research / Strategic implications / Practical decisions

FOR FOUNDERS, CEOs AND LEADERSHIP TEAMS

BEFORE THE BRIEF

NOVEMBER 2026

Executive summary

Business transformation rarely waits for an organization’s communication capabilities to catch up. Expansion, new technology, restructuring and rising stakeholder expectations can change the operating environment faster than leadership teams change how they listen, interpret risk, make decisions and communicate.

Gallagher’s 2026 Employee Communications Report offers a striking indicator of the challenge: 73% of surveyed organizations aspire to a strategic communications operating model, while only 18% believe that is their current reality. The survey covers more than 1,300 communications and HR professionals across 40 countries; it is not a census of all companies or a GCC-specific measure. [1][2]

For leaders, the more useful question is not simply whether the communications function is busy. It is whether the organization has the intelligence, governance and leadership alignment required to make consequential decisions with confidence.

Five potential readiness gaps to examine

- Decision timing — communications is involved after choices are made.
- Stakeholder intelligence — signals exist, but do not inform decisions.
- Leadership alignment — executives lack a shared narrative or decision logic.
- Change and reputation readiness — issues are handled reactively.
- Governance and measurement — activity is visible, but business impact is not.

These five gaps are an advisory framework proposed by Seeing Around the Corner, not five categories validated by the cited studies.

The central proposition

Communications readiness is the organizational capacity to detect relevant signals, interpret their implications, advise decision-makers early and act consistently. It is a leadership capability—not merely a publishing function.

01 / What the evidence tells us

Research signal	What it means—and does not mean
73% aspire to a strategic communications model; 18% say they have achieved it. [1][2]	A significant ambition–practice gap is reported among respondents. It does not establish the proportion of all companies with ineffective communications.
61% report no formal approach to change communication. [2]	A useful prompt to review change governance. A formal plan alone does not guarantee effective transformation.
75% describe AI maturity as ad hoc or discussion-only. [3]	An indicator of uneven AI maturity in the surveyed communications context; not a universal estimate of enterprise AI adoption.
Employer trust: UAE 88%; Saudi Arabia 82% among employees surveyed in 2026. [4]	A high level of reported employer trust is a valuable regional context—not proof that any individual organization is trusted.

A critical distinction

The research describes different populations, questions and contexts. We cannot combine these percentages into a single “readiness score,” infer causality, or claim they measure communications capability specifically within the UAE or Saudi Arabia. Instead, we use them to identify questions worth testing inside individual organizations.

Leadership questions

- What strategic decisions were materially improved by stakeholder insight during the past quarter?
- When did communications first join the discussion—before options were selected, or after?
- Can leadership explain how employee feedback and external signals affect priorities?

02 / Five readiness gaps

1. Decision timing

When communication is asked to announce a decision rather than inform it, leaders lose access to insight about stakeholder expectations, timing, credibility and likely consequences. Early counsel is not a veto; it is an input into sound decision-making.

2. Stakeholder intelligence

Organizations often have multiple listening channels but no consistent mechanism for translating what they hear into strategic choices. The problem may be less about collecting more data and more about deciding which signals matter.

3. Leadership alignment

Different executive explanations of the same decision create avoidable ambiguity. A shared narrative should connect business intent, evidence, trade-offs, what is known and what remains uncertain.

4. Change and reputation readiness

Change creates information gaps, and those gaps invite interpretation. Effective readiness includes scenario planning, issue ownership, escalation thresholds and the ability to adjust when stakeholders respond unexpectedly.

5. Governance and measurement

A calendar of activities can show output without demonstrating value. Leaders need a clear account of decisions influenced, risks anticipated, stakeholder understanding and observable outcomes—not just impressions or message volume.

These are diagnostic hypotheses to explore, not claims that a particular business has these shortcomings.

03 / A GCC leadership lens

Regional growth often involves more than translating a global narrative. Companies operating across the UAE and Saudi Arabia must consider different regulatory contexts, stakeholder ecosystems, workforce compositions, ownership structures and expectations of leadership communication.

The 2026 Edelman Trust Barometer reports that 88% of surveyed employees in the UAE and 82% in Saudi Arabia trust their employer to do what is right. [4] Those figures suggest the importance of employer relationships, but they cannot predict the experience of employees in any one business.

Separately, Edelman’s 2026 UAE findings report that 48% of respondents are unwilling or hesitant to trust people with differing values, facts, problem-solving approaches or cultural backgrounds. [5] This reinforces the need to test assumptions about audience understanding rather than treat “the market” as a single voice.

Questions for UAE and Saudi leadership teams

- Who has to understand, endorse or act on the decision in each market?
- What differences in language, institutional context or workforce experience could change interpretation?
- Where do regional teams need decision authority, and where is global consistency essential?
- What evidence will demonstrate that stakeholders understood the decision?

Seeing Around the Corner interpretation: regional readiness depends on consistent strategic intent combined with informed local judgment. This is a recommendation, not a measured finding from Edelman.

04 / Our framework: Listen → Interpret → Advise → Act

LISTEN

Capture meaningful signals from employees, customers, partners, regulators, media and leadership—not merely the loudest comments.

INTERPRET

Identify patterns, distinguish evidence from assumptions, test plausible explanations and clarify what is material to the business.

ADVISE

Bring options, trade-offs, timing and stakeholder implications into leadership discussions before the decision is finalized.

ACT

Align leaders, communicate with clarity, monitor outcomes and revise the approach as new evidence emerges.

A practical example

A company plans to announce an organizational change. Listening reveals uncertainty among managers; interpretation identifies conflicting expectations about timing; advice leads the leadership team to clarify manager responsibilities before announcing; action includes manager briefings, employee FAQs and feedback monitoring. The point is not to delay decisions indefinitely—it is to reduce avoidable uncertainty.

Framework status: original advisory model for use in strategic communications planning. It has not been independently validated as a diagnostic instrument.

05 / Communications Intelligence Readiness Assessment

Rate each statement from 1 (rarely true) to 5 (consistently true). This is a reflective leadership exercise, not a psychometric test or industry benchmark.

Strategic alignment

- ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 Communications counsel is involved before major decisions are finalized.
- ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 Business priorities and communication objectives are explicitly connected.
- ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 Leadership teams consider stakeholder implications when evaluating options.

Stakeholder intelligence

- ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 We monitor relevant stakeholder signals systematically.
- ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 We can distinguish anecdote from material evidence.
- ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 Stakeholder insight changes priorities or decisions when warranted.

Reputation and change

- ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 We have clear ownership and escalation criteria for emerging issues.
- ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 Major changes have a documented communication approach.
- ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 We test assumptions about how audiences may interpret decisions.

Leadership communication

- ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 Executives share a coherent explanation of major decisions.
- ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 Managers are equipped to answer questions and acknowledge uncertainty.
- ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 We check whether important audiences actually understand our messages.

Governance and measurement

- ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 AI-assisted communication has appropriate review and accountability.
- ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 We measure outcomes beyond publishing volume and reach.

- ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 We review lessons learned and adjust communication decisions.

Complete the interactive assessment online

Get instant overall and dimension scores, then print or save your results.
Report registration opens both the briefing and the assessment.

Open the report & interactive assessment >

06 / Interpreting your assessment

Add the 15 scores. Total possible: 15–75. For each of the five dimensions, the possible subtotal is 3–15.

Total score	Suggested reflection
15–34	Foundational: investigate priority gaps and identify immediate owners.
35–54	Developing: strengthen consistency and address lowest-scoring dimensions.
55–75	Established practices reported: stress-test against real decisions and stakeholder outcomes.

The ranges above are editorial guidance created for this self-assessment; they are not empirically calibrated thresholds. A high self-rating does not replace independent review or stakeholder evidence.

Three follow-up questions

- Which of the five dimensions has the lowest subtotal—and why?
- What recent leadership decision would have benefited from stronger communications intelligence?
- What one change could be implemented within 30 days?

Suggested next step

Use the assessment to begin an internal leadership conversation. Organizations seeking an external perspective can explore a structured strategic communications diagnostic with Seeing Around the Corner.

07 / A 90-day readiness action plan

Period	Leadership action	Evidence of progress
Days 1–30	Select two priority decisions; map stakeholders, decision owners and existing signals.	Decision map; baseline readiness self-assessment.
Days 31–60	Pilot Listen → Interpret → Advise → Act on one live decision or transformation.	Documented options, stakeholder insight and leadership response.
Days 61–90	Review outcomes; formalize escalation, executive alignment and learning routines.	Decision review; governance improvements; next-quarter priorities.

Five decisions to make now

- Which business decision most needs better stakeholder intelligence?
- What signal would make leadership reconsider its current assumptions?
- Who is accountable for translating insight into advice?
- What uncertainty must be acknowledged rather than concealed?
- How will we know the decision was better—not just better communicated?

A closing thought

The most valuable communication decision often happens before anyone writes a brief. It happens when someone at the leadership table asks what is missing, who has not been heard, and what could change the outcome.

Seeing Around the Corner — strategic communications counsel for founders, CEOs and leadership teams. The right communication decision happens before the brief.

Sources and methodology

[1] Gallagher, Employee Communications Report 2026 (State of the Sector), global report, based on over 1,300 communications and HR respondents in 40 countries. https://www.ajg.com/employeeexperience/-/media/files/gallagher comms/gcommssite/state-of-the-sector/gallagher-employee-communications-report-2026-global.pdf

[2] Gallagher Canada, “Closing the Readiness Gap with the 2026 Employee Communications Report.” https://www.ajg.com/ca/news-and-insights/2026-employee-communications-report/

[3] Gallagher, 2026 report findings on AI maturity, also summarized in its March 2026 release. https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/61-of-organizations-have-no-formal-change-communication-strategy-despite-ranking-it-as-their-most-pressing-need-302709190.html

[4] Edelman, 2026 Trust Barometer Global Report, “My Employer Trusted in 27 of 28 Countries Measured,” employee subsample. https://www.edelman.com/sites/g/files/aatuss191/files/2026-01/2026%20Edelman%20Trust%20Barometer%20Global%20Report_01.21.26_0.pdf

[5] Edelman, 2026 UAE Trust Barometer, Top Findings. https://www.edelman.com/sites/g/files/aatuss191/files/ae/2026-01/Trust2026UAE_Top%20Insights.pdf

Methodology and limitations

This publication is a secondary synthesis of publicly reported findings plus original advisory interpretation. No primary fieldwork was conducted by Seeing Around the Corner for this report. Statistics are not combined into a quantitative model. The assessment is a non-validated reflection tool; its scoring bands are illustrative.