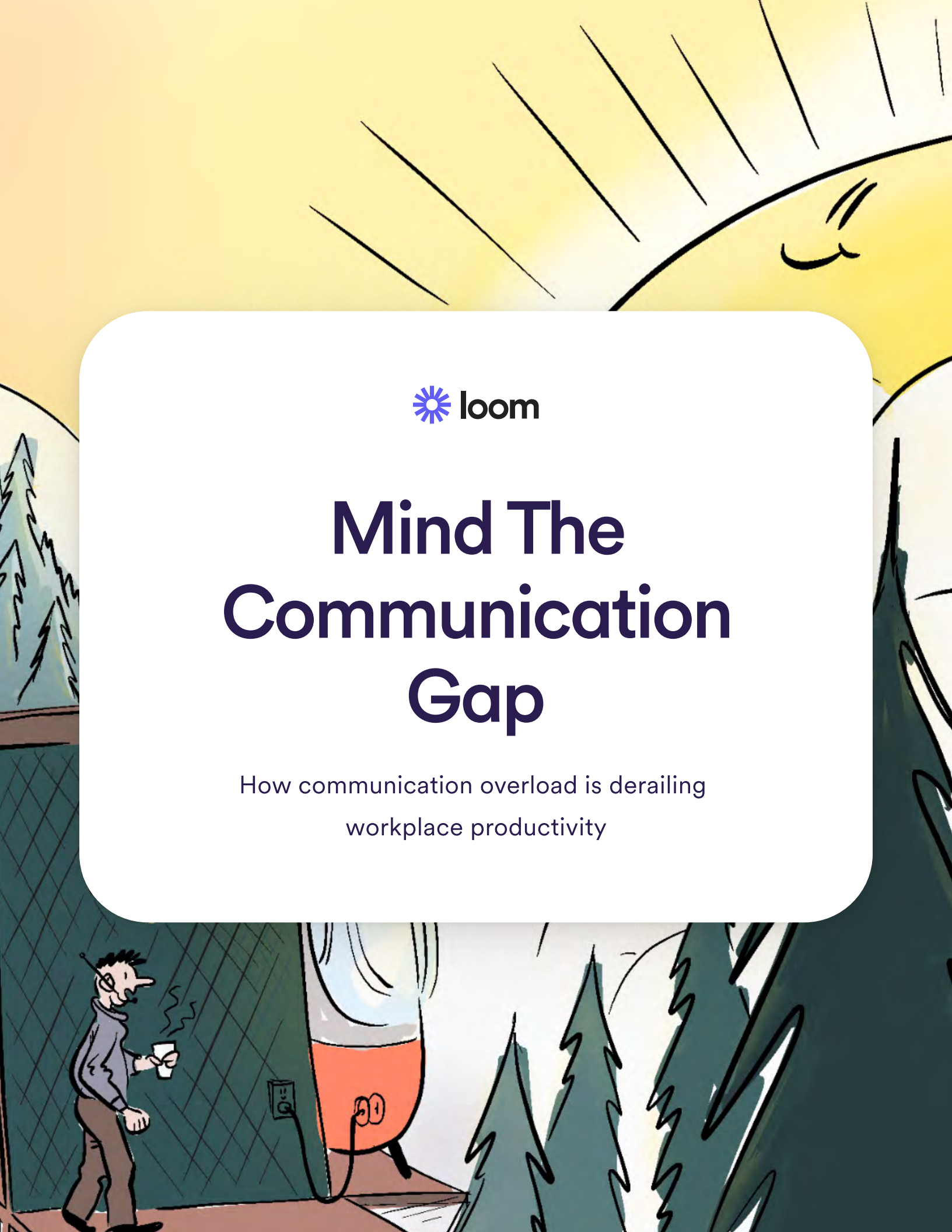# Mind The Communication Gap

How communication overload is derailing workplace productivity

Introduction

Odds are that you've seen the phrase "effective communicator" in a job posting. In many ways, strong communication skills have become a prerequisite for an effective workplace. But being a good communicator today looks different in practice than it did even 10 years ago.

A decade ago, the pace of comms was slower and the channels were fewer. Today, employees need to master a whole suite of tools just to talk to one another — not to mention the ability to think and move quickly, and the skill to convey nuanced ideas, often without the benefit of in-person nonverbal cues.

While technology has opened amazing new ways to collaborate with teams around the world, it's also created a Communication Gap — an overload of apps and messages that are causing communication pitfalls and wrecking productivity.

By clearing up miscommunication — or better yet, avoiding it in the first place — organizations can create and maintain trust, increase productivity and foster a positive and inclusive work environment. To help, we asked workers in the U.S. about their communication preferences and uncovered useful insights about what to say, and how to say it, at work.

Too Much Talk Time

Between emails, instant messages, video conferences and phone calls, workers in America report they're spending so much time communicating about work, they're struggling to actually get work done.

The average worker spends 3 hours and 43 minutes a day communicating — a whopping 252M combined hours every single day. That much talk time is costing businesses over $21B per week.* Communication is essential to productivity, but balancing it with focused execution time is key.

| 31% | of employees struggle to find time to work because of constant interruptions. |

With varying preferences and a dizzying number of tools, employees find themselves having to send the same information across multiple platforms every day.

| 85% | of employees are sending the same messages or information multiple times or in multiple places at least weekly — 69% do so every day. |

The reasons for redundancy vary: Some workers who double up on messages do so to create a trail of accountability (51%), some want to make sure their message is visible to more people (50%) and others say it's to make sure they accommodate the recipient's preference (38%).

Work Jargon, IRL

For 77% of workers, common workplace jargon has snuck into their personal vernacular:

- 48% of employees have used "following up" when communicating with friends or family.
- 43% have used "touch base."
- 29% have used "circle back."
- 21% have talked about their "bandwidth."
- 20% have "flagged" something.
- 20% have had a "one-off."

54% of employees think it's more important to use professional language at work than use a communication style that's true to their personality. 22% have been told by others at work to use more professional language and 17% have been told to stop using a specific word or phrase.

Speaking of Inclusivity

Inclusivity is easier said than done. Although an increasing number of organizations are trying to let employees communicate in the way that works best for them, the reality is that most people feel they're still bending over backward to work within their colleagues' preferences. This leads to more wasted hours and lost dollars across the board.

88% of employees have preferences about how they communicate at work.

Half (49%) of employees say using their preferred communication methods at work makes them feel more productive and 45% say it makes them feel more comfortable. Another 44% say using their preferred communication methods makes it possible to understand more of what people are trying to communicate.

74% of workers say companies need to recognize that everyone has a different personality and style of communicating and to make more efforts to be inclusive.

45% of employees say that companies should let their employees be themselves at work, rather than require them to adhere to certain standards of professionalism.

44% of workers say that allowing employees to communicate authentically helps create a more inclusive workplace.

"How people communicate can be a sensitive matter, especially in the workplace. People deeply value team connection—not only for improving productivity and collaboration, but also for increased job satisfaction, decreased stress, and the peace of mind that comes from expressing your true self at work. It would be a disservice as a leader not to consider the best communication practices for each individual."

— JOE THOMAS, CEO AND CO-FOUNDER

On top of the plethora of tools they have to navigate daily, employees also have to figure out how to balance their own communications preferences with those of their colleagues. What makes this more difficult is that some have never been asked what their preferences are.

83% of employees cater to others' communication preferences in the workplace.

42% say nobody has ever asked them what their communications preferences are.

On average, employees spend around 3 hours a week using communication methods they do not prefer. A quarter (25%) of introverts prefer written communication compared to only 11% of extroverts, and 22% of introverts say they exclusively cater to their coworkers' preferences, compared to 13% of extroverts.

Anxiously Awaiting

Common features of communications tools — like seeing an ellipsis [...] when someone is typing a message, or seeing a notification when someone has read a message — may hamper employee productivity, and actually cause more stress.

- 78% of employees say that when they notice a coworker typing a message, they become unproductive, either stopping all work and waiting or checking back every few minutes, unable to focus on a task.

- 21% say that when they notice a coworker typing a message, they get annoyed that someone is typing slowly.

- Including "read receipts," or notices that the recipient has seen your message, causes anxiety for employees (54%).

Under The Slack-Fluence

Duplicating messages for visibility or bending to others' communications preferences is causing many employees needless stress. Imagine if every time you left your home you had to not only say goodbye to your roommate, but you also had to send a text, call to leave a message, and leave a post-it note on the door. Now apply that to resolving a contract issue or finalizing a presentation at work. It sounds exhausting, but it's a reality for too many.

45% of employees say communicating is the most mentally taxing part of their job.

55% need a mental break in the workday because of communication stress.

Some employees are communicating for work all the time, and truly everywhere. Almost three quarters (72%) of workers admit to having sent work-related messages while spending time with friends or family.

31% of employees have used workplace messaging while driving.

31% have also used workplace messaging on the toilet and 14% have done so on a date.

Workers are turning to their employer for clarity — 66% say their employer should clarify communication policies so no one has to guess what's expected. Only 37% of employees have had managers look out for their work life balance by telling them to sign off early or reminding them to not work past business hours.

> "Empower your team to know when work should be synchronous and what's better handled asynchronously. One way to start is by building a framework based on your team's 'How We Work' values and your employer mission. For example, at Loom, we believe explanation and presentation is best suited for asynchronous channels. Whereas, group decision-making and active discussion about priorities are more suited for a synchronous conversation. If everyone on your team is making strategic choices about sync vs. async time, it can have a significant impact on productivity."
>
> — ANIQUE DRUMRIGHT, LOOM COO

AI Has Entered The Chat

AI-supported communication is closer to reality than ever before, and has already cropped up in many of today's leading work tools. But people are still split — some foresee benefits like clearer communication and improved productivity, while others express concern about less authenticity if AI is introduced.
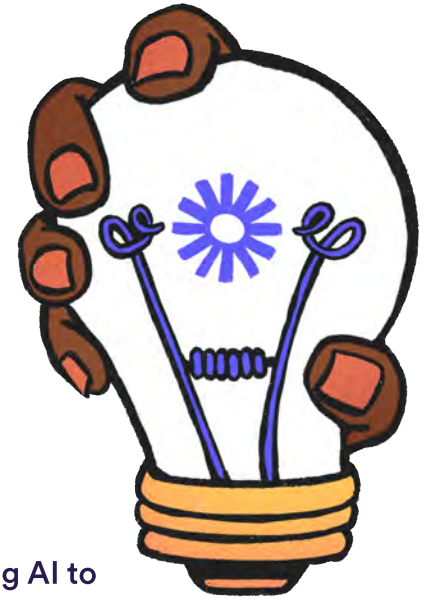
50% of American workers would feel comfortable using AI to improve or supplement their workplace communication.

How employees view AI supplementing their workplace communication:

32% say AI would help their coworkers' communicate more clearly.

31% say it would help everyone get more work done.

26% say it would help with managing client/customer relationships.

While there is some support for AI-supplemented conversation at work, over half (56%) of employees are leery of introducing AI into workplace communication.

38% would be worried about conversations being less authentic.

30% say it would make them worried they wouldn't actually be talking to their coworkers.

"AI-assisted communication (AI layered on top of human input) represents a massive opportunity to improve productivity and collaboration across teams. Let's say you have a manager with great ideas but a tendency to ramble for 30 minutes. An AI tool could distill that into 5 key takeaway points for team members almost instantaneously. This hits at the core tenets of modern communication: enable people to articulately share ideas in a way that uses company time and resources efficiently. This in turn creates more opportunities to focus on what matters most."

— JOE THOMAS, LOOM CEO & CO-FOUNDER

When Less is More

At the end of the day, mastering effective communication was, is, and will always be a fundamental element of work. This data underscores the need for thoughtful investment in the right processes and tools to keep communication running smoothly without becoming a drain on productivity.

The upside? Navigating the new world of work communication successfully represents a massive opportunity for unlocking productivity, increased morale, and resource efficiency.

Methodology

Loom conducted this research using an online survey prepared by Method Research and distributed by RepData among n=1,500 adults 18+ in the United States. All respondents work full-time in a desk job setting, with a subset of n=500 whose title is manager or above and works in the technology industry leading remote/hybrid teams at companies between 50-1000 employees. The sample was equally split between gender groups, including representative age groupings and a geographic spread of respondents. Data was collected from January 27 to February 7, 2023.

Ready to improve how your team communicates?

🗩 **Contact Sales**

* a) $684 minimum white collar wage salary weekly ($35,568 annually) / 40 hour work week = $17.1 per hour [U.S. Dept of Labor, accessed 2/22/23].
b) Workers spend $63.44 worth of time each day communicating, or $317.21 each week. Multiplying that by the white collar workers in the U.S. (68,099,000, Census BLS 2022), businesses are spending $21,601,343,295 each week while employees communicate.