



# THE FUTURE OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

November 2016

Results of GFMP Management Consultants study

## Executive summary

Since 20 years we have been actively supporting the development of internal communication area at companies operating in Poland. We also regularly diagnose its state and reflect upon its future.

Everything seems to indicate that companies now are already in the middle of significant changes in their way of functioning. Digitalization processes require from companies a far-reaching transformation that will impact every single aspect of their existence: from applied solutions, through structures and processes, to practices of management, approach to employees and organizational culture. It is called a **digital transformation**.

It finally means a growing importance of internal communication that plays a key role in processes of change that are very significant for the company. But it also creates new challenges for this area that are related to changing attitudes of target groups and conditions, in which communication occurs.

This survey was conducted in August and September 2016 among professionals responsible for internal communication in companies operating in Poland. Presented results base on 92 on-line surveys.

### Key findings:

Communicators are cautiously optimistic and are convinced, that despite difficulties, communication works constantly better:

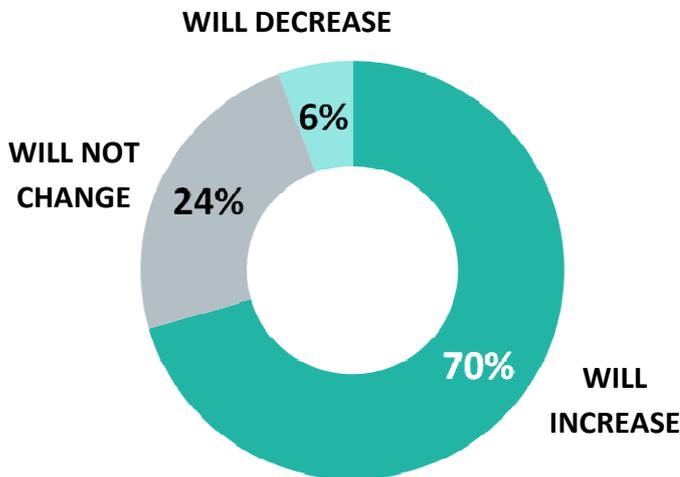
- According to 70% of respondents **the importance of internal communication will grow**, but only 45% of them believes that career in this field has good perspectives. The largest obstacle (according to 38% of respondents) is the lack of awareness of communication significance on senior management levels.
- **Functioning of communication in companies was evaluated positively**—according to 67% of respondents communication is more efficient than in the past, but only 16% of them believes that it is easier to build trust to communication
- 62% of respondents believe **that now it is much easier to reach employees with information than in the past** – problems with communication tools are rarely indicated as a difficulty, definitely more barriers are being perceived on the management side and in employees' attitudes
- 57% of respondents believe that **employees are not concerned with digitalization processes**

### PERSPECTIVES OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Communicators see the future of communication departments in their organizations in bright colors (70%). This optimism grows – in a similar survey conducted in 2013 62% of respondents believed that the significance of their departments will increase in the next few years. Such positive thinking about the future can be surprising, considering the fact that, according to respondents, currently the most frequently indicated problem is... the low level of awareness of communication importance among executives (see – next page). This raised the question, whether the expected growth of communication importance in the companies will happen on its own, or will it be facilitated by those interested in it? We can assume that respondents rely on themselves, as there are more doubts regarding the general field of communication (in other companies on the market) – perspectives of career in internal communication appear to be good only for less than half of respondents.

#### Optimism about the future of own communication department prevails...

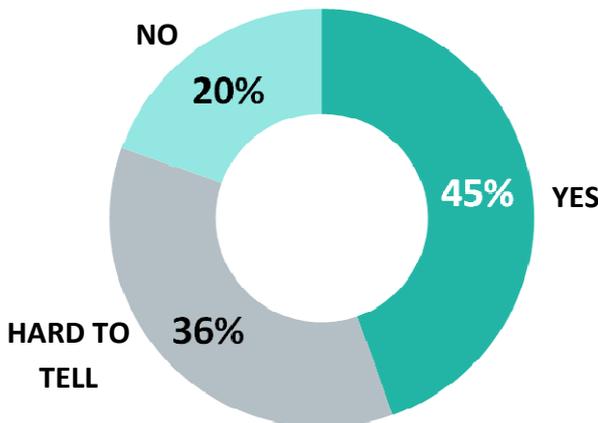
I am convinced that in the next few years the significance of communication department in my company:



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#### ...but the future of the field of communication raises significant doubts.

Is internal communication the field that provides good career perspectives on the Polish job market?



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#### Why does communication provide good career perspectives?

*Executives are increasingly more aware about the great significance of well-functioning internal communication for the goals of their organization.*

*Employers care increasingly more about their employees. They strive to deliver them reliable information about the company and to educate them – and this has direct impact on an atmosphere in the company. Benefits are very often not enough – atmosphere and dialogue in the organization influence employee identification with the company..*

*There will be constantly more companies that will have to shift quickly to new business models, what will meet resistance – meaning the demand for communication will increase.*

*In connection with new function in many companies – Digital Officer – and increase of competences in applying different innovative solutions, internal communication function will go beyond intranet and internal magazine, what will cause its dynamic development.*

#### Why communication does not provide good career perspectives?

*Large amounts of money are invested into external brand, but we neglect the best 'tool' that shapes our company's image – employees. I could compare it to a rotten egg – beautifully painted on the outside, but when you look inside, you simply can't stand the smell.*

*Immature market. Perceiving internal communication specialists only as content creators, whereas "communicator's" main role is supporting management in achieving business goals.*

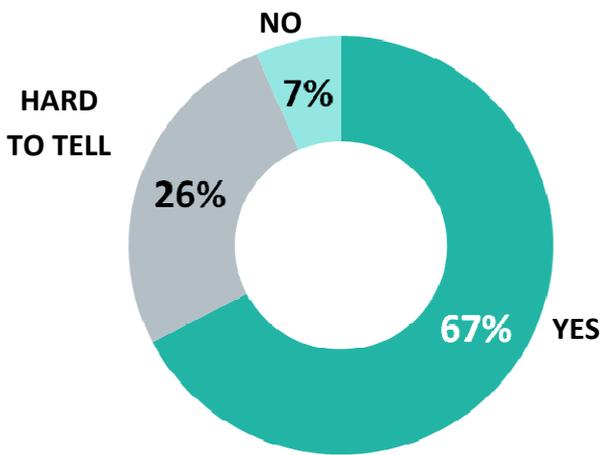
*Managers don't feel there is a need to invest into something that cannot be reported in revenue. Even more managers don't appreciate mega effectiveness of internal communication.*

## INTERNAL CHALLENGES AND DIFFICULTIES FOR COMMUNICATION

It's difficult to imagine efficient internal communication occurring with limited employee's trust, widespread fear and unfavorable organizational culture. These difficulties were indicated by respondents – but not as the most pressing ones. We could therefore assume that the world surrounding companies, full of threats for the majority of people, either has no impact at all on the idyll and carelessness inside the companies, or it is not noticed yet. Professionals managing communication perceive barriers mainly in insufficient communication awareness among managerial staff and, hence, limited resources, or in employees' attitudes, regarded as overly demanding. If we look at barriers for communication in more constructive way, following the structure 'reason-cause', it would turned out that merely organizing difficulties in a logical course, looking for solutions for core problems and presenting them to the management, by showing their business impact, would allow to shape this lacking awareness and therefore would solve the most pressing issue – lack of support. The least frequently indicated barriers were internal limitations, connected with the functioning of communication department. Is it easier to find the reason of own inefficiency in others?

### According to respondents internal communication is increasingly more efficient...

Do you think that internal communication is more efficient than it was a few years ago?



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What could be the reason for it?

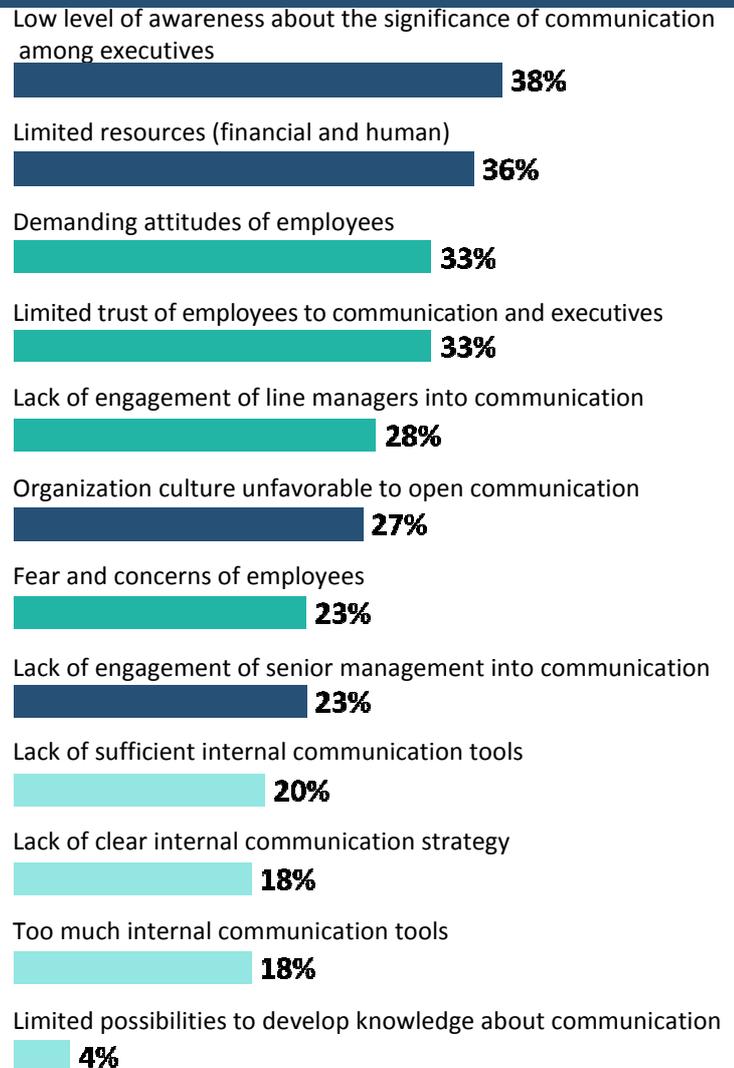
*On the one side, there are more tools and easier access to internet and intranet, but the information is less „valuable“, unique. Everybody is simply being bombarded with messages everywhere. Besides, there are more unofficial information about the company (gossip in social media spread faster), what increases chaos.*

*Greater efficiency results from greater awareness about communication significance, new tools and expectations of new generation of employees.*

*It is more difficult because of definitely excessive, complicated and incoherent, and even internally conflicted electronic communication that replaced all others interpersonal communication channels, functioning so far in synergy.*

### ...and would be even more efficient, if it wasn't for the attitudes of executives and employees

What is the greatest obstacle for providing a high quality communication in your company?



**Limitations from the top**  
(related with senior management)

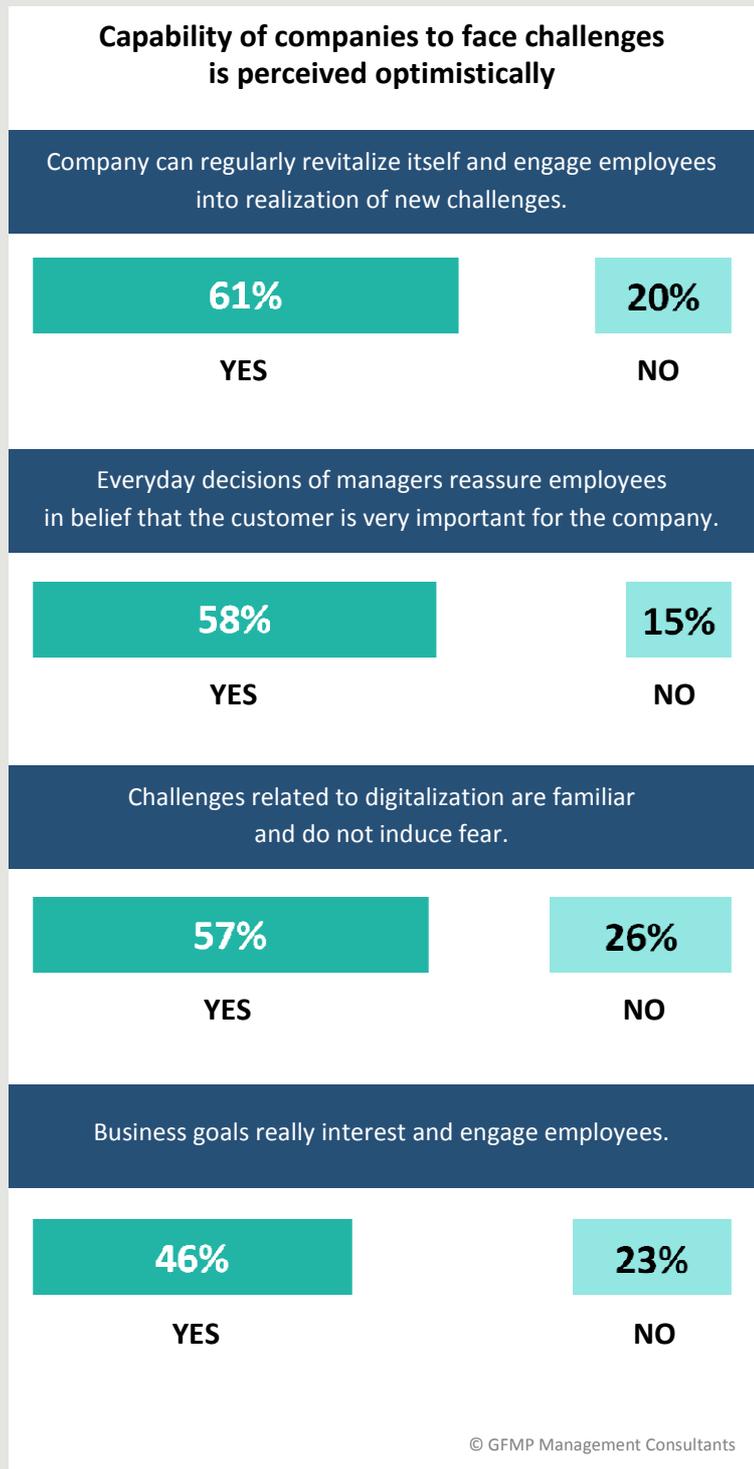
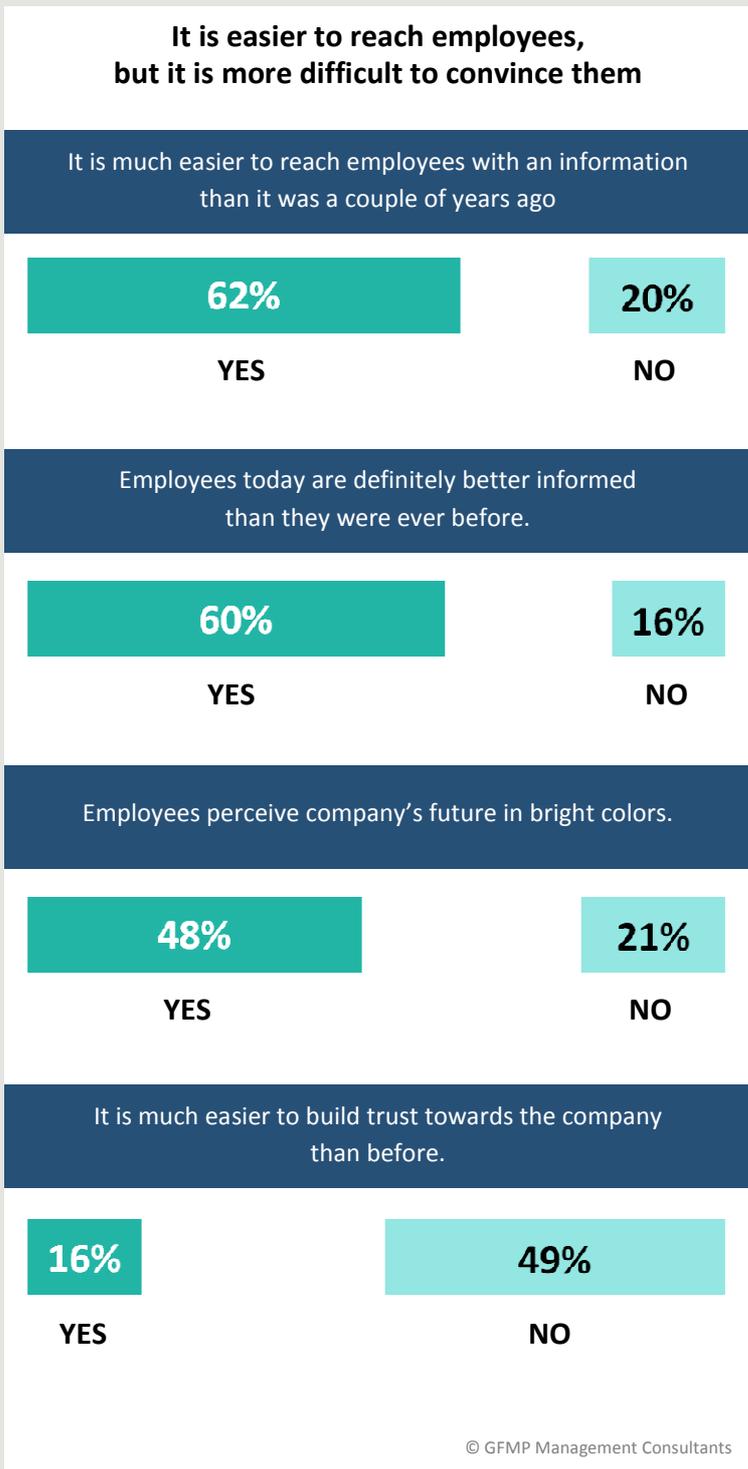
**Limitations from the bottom**  
(related with employees)

**Internal limitations**  
(related with communication department)

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### CHALLENGES RESULTING FROM SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGES

In contemporary economy, traditional companies are trapped between digitalization leaders – giants (Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Google, Microsoft) and extremely flexible start-ups. The strategy of both groups bases on disrupting foundations of operations of traditional companies. In this world, the fate of many organizations depends on their capability to revitalize, seek new value for the customer and engage employees into searching new ways and implementing correct strategy. More than half of respondents does not perceive any problems in capability of their company to deal with challenges of the future. Respondents even declare that employees have a high level of understanding of digitalization. The only dark cloud in this sunny landscape is the growing difficulty in building trust. It is a problem that has a broader social context. In company’s conditions it was caused by, among other, manipulative shortcuts in communication what resulted in the loss of credibility. Rebuilding it will surely require a tremendous work and fineness in communication strategy.

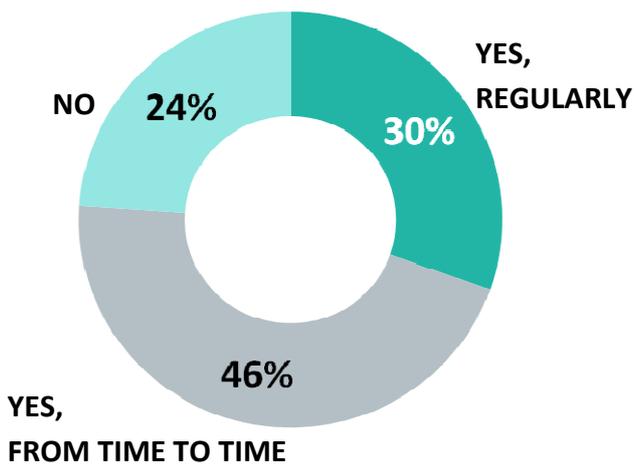


### STRATEGIC APPROACH TO COMMUNICATION

The majority of surveyed companies has communication strategy and more or less regularly diagnoses effectiveness of their action. In both cases there is a significant growth of positive responses in comparison to surveys conducted 6 years ago. But we should keep in mind that strategy not always equals strategy. It all depends upon its quality – it can be a half-page table or a detailed description of all elements in several dozens of perspectives. Considering effects of current actions – weak conviction of managers, problems with engaging managers into communication and limited trust of employees, we can assume that there are not enough high quality communication strategies.

#### Regular diagnosis of communication’s functioning is not a standard yet...

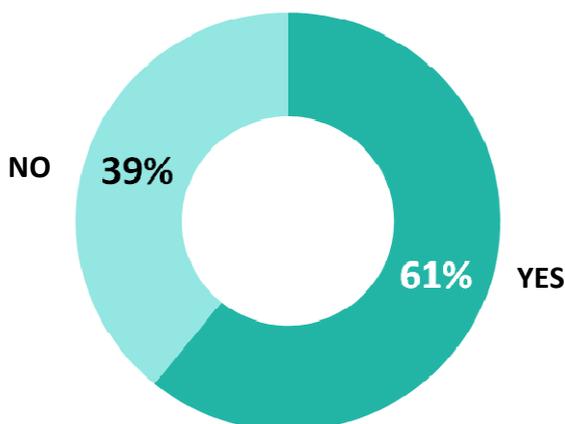
Do you diagnose effectiveness of internal communication?



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#### ...but the communication strategy is elaborated in the majority of companies

Does your company have formally elaborated internal communication strategy?



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### WHAT WILL BE IMPORTANT?

Results indicate a significant disruption in priorities of comms departments. Lack of employee’s trust is indicated as a problem (trust is a decisive condition for communication’s success), but it was mentioned only on 5<sup>th</sup> place. On the other hand (re-)building credibility, that is the very first condition of trust, is on the next to the last place! Definitely lower, than it would result from causal analysis, other important issues were mentioned: supporting digitalization and changes, engaging managers into communication. Instead of them, among the most important future issues, tools development and communicating with new generations were indicated. At this point, it is worth mentioning that needs’ basis of new generation is identical to the basis of older generations, and not, as it is falsely assumed, significantly different.

#### Communication with new generations, new technologies, dialogue and trust – on the agenda

What issues related to internal communication will gain importance in the next two years?



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## COMPANIES PARTICIPATING IN THE SURVEY

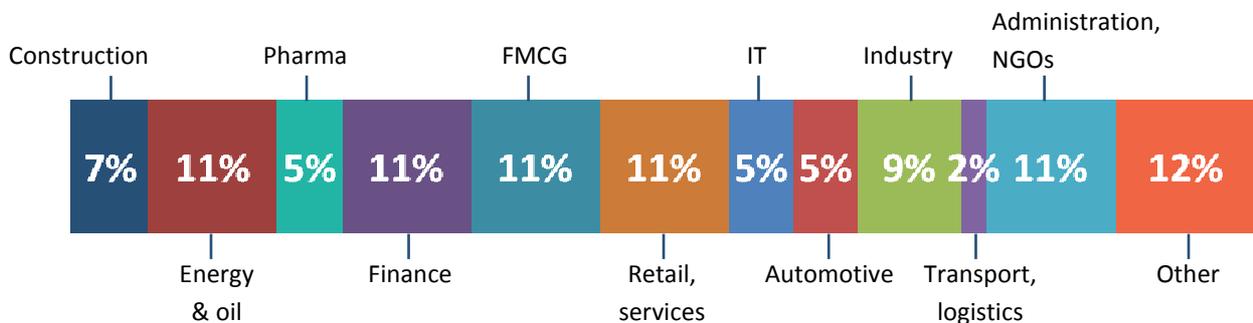
Survey was conducted mainly in large companies, with more than 100 employees, 60% of them were companies employing more than 1000 employees

Size of the company (number of employees)



Companies that participated in the survey represent the cross-section of industries

Industry



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Digitalization, that is unfortunately not yet perceived by many communication professionals as a significant topic, in reality is already becoming a **priority number 1 for companies** and only companies prepared in the area of communication will survive it.

Communication departments can look optimistically in the future, if they **adjust appropriately their internal communication strategies** – otherwise they will become another victim of digitalization. It means:

- Assuming **active, not reactive role** in digitalization processes happening in the company.
- Conquering the key problem for communication and executives – **limited trust** of employees, by sharp and consequent separation from old manipulative methods.
- Developing **high quality communication strategy**, that focuses on the company, managers and employees, not on communication tools.
- Precise, multidimensional and measurable **linking** of this communication strategy with the current company's strategy.
- Developing such internal communication system that is capable not only of delivering information to employees (postman function, or as it was earlier called – office-boy), but also **shaping efficiently adequate attitudes among employees**.

Report was prepared by GFMP Management Consultants, company that advises leading companies in the area of internal communication.

We conduct surveys in this area since 1998. The latest and archive reports can be found on our website: <http://gfmp.com.pl/en/#knowledge>

In case of any questions about the report, as well as internal communication area, feel free to contact me:



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