

THE 5 TENETS OF THE WORKFORCE CHAMPION

TENET 1: PROVE IMPACT

From opens to outcomes

Modern methods for measuring
communication impact



An open isn't an outcome. It's only the first signal.

For decades, internal communication has graded itself on a single number: the open rate. Did someone see the message? That is different from whether the message moved that person to act—or whether that action contributed to an outcome the business cares about.

HR and communication teams have spent years optimizing the answer to the wrong question. This ebook clarifies that distinction and gives practitioners a framework for answering the right one.

Retention. Safety and compliance. Productivity. These outcomes are built from thousands of employee actions: completing training, following a new procedure, finding the right information, or choosing to stay. Communication creates value when it helps employees take those actions and when the organization can connect them to measurable results.

The problem, in plain terms

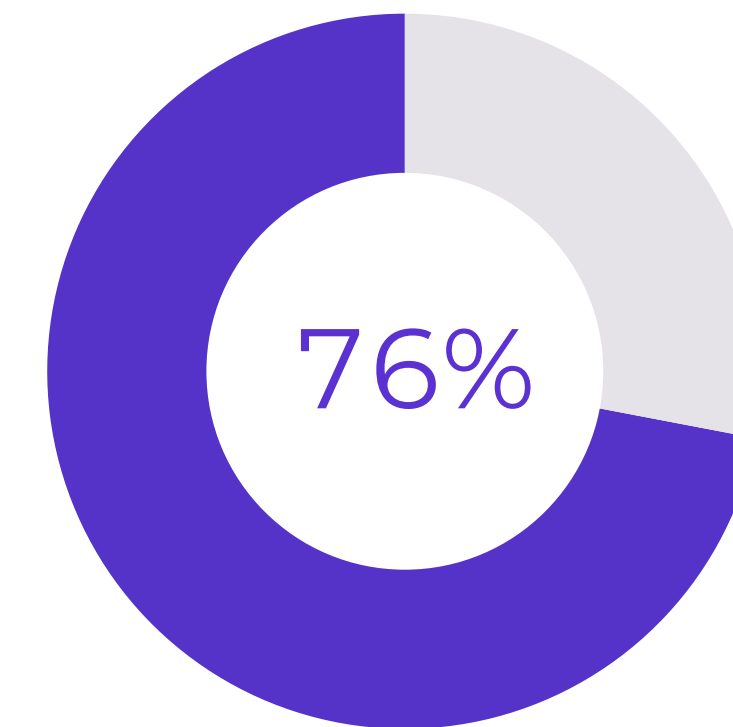
Critical information still fails to reach the people who need it. Up to [76% of employees](#) say they missed an important update from their employer, while 79%–90% of [factory](#) and [hospital](#) workers say they learned about safety rules only after the fact.

The stakes go beyond missed information. Between [9% and 12% of managers and hourly workers](#) connect a specific instance of miscommunication to a safety impact, and 23% cite communication breakdowns as a reason they are considering leaving.

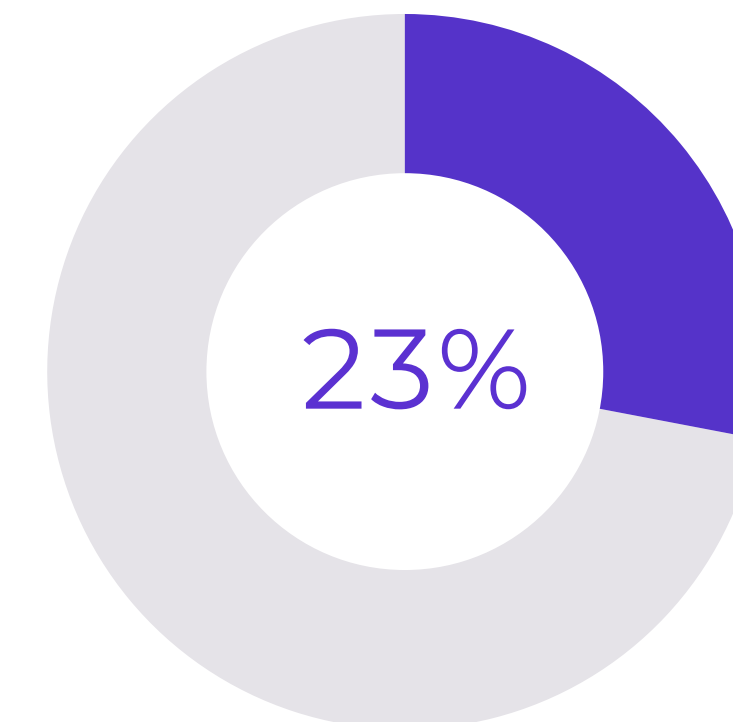
The answer is not simply to send more messages. Most employees already hear from their employer regularly, yet half say their employer lacks an effective way to reach them. Adding more messages and channels creates more activity—not necessarily more action.

BOTTOM LINE:

Too much of the industry still measures effort instead of results. That is the mistake this guide helps fix.



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The fix: Three levels of proof

Measure three things, in order: Activity → Action → Business Outcome.
Most organizations stop after the first.

- 1 Activity:** Did the message reach its intended audience? Delivery, reach, opens, and clicks show exposure. They are a starting point, not the goal.
- 2 Action:** Did employees do what the message asked—complete the training, acknowledge the policy, report the safety issue, or use the new process?
- 3 Business Outcome:** Did those actions contribute to a result that matters, such as better retention, fewer safety incidents, stronger compliance, or higher productivity?

An example: One message, measured three ways

A plant manager sends an update about a new safety policy

STEP 1

Activity

Was the update delivered to and opened by workers on the line?

STEP 2

Action

Did workers acknowledge the update and complete the refresher training?

STEP 3

Business Outcome

Did serious safety incidents decline after the new procedure was adopted?



That final result is the evidence a leader such as a CFO can use.

Why most teams stop at Activity

Most teams stop at Activity because it is the easiest layer to measure. Delivery, reach, opens, and clicks live inside the communication platform. Evidence of what employees did—and what changed for the business—is usually stored somewhere else, such as in a learning system, HRIS, survey, or incident log.

The [Kirkpatrick Model](#), a long-established framework for evaluating learning, reinforces this distinction. It separates reaction and learning from behavior and results. The same principle applies to communication: early indicators matter, but they do not prove that behavior changed or a business result followed. Because outcomes have many influences, the goal is to establish communication's contribution,

not to claim that one message caused the entire result.

IQVIA, a leading multinational health information technology and clinical research company, [demonstrates what strong Activity performance can achieve](#). After a major merger, 50,000 of its 58,000 employees became active users of their internal communications platform within nine months, accessing content across web, email, and app. That level of reach is a meaningful achievement, and it creates the foundation for connecting communication to the employee behaviors and business outcomes that follow.

What about trust and culture?

Trust and culture scores add important context, but they answer a different question. They show how employees feel about the organization. Activity, Action, and Business Outcome show who received the

communication, what employees did next, and which results those behaviors supported.

Common measures of employee sentiment include:

- Employee Net Promoter Score, which offers a consistent pulse on employee advocacy.
- [Great Place to Work's Trust Index](#), which examines credibility, respect, fairness, pride, and camaraderie.

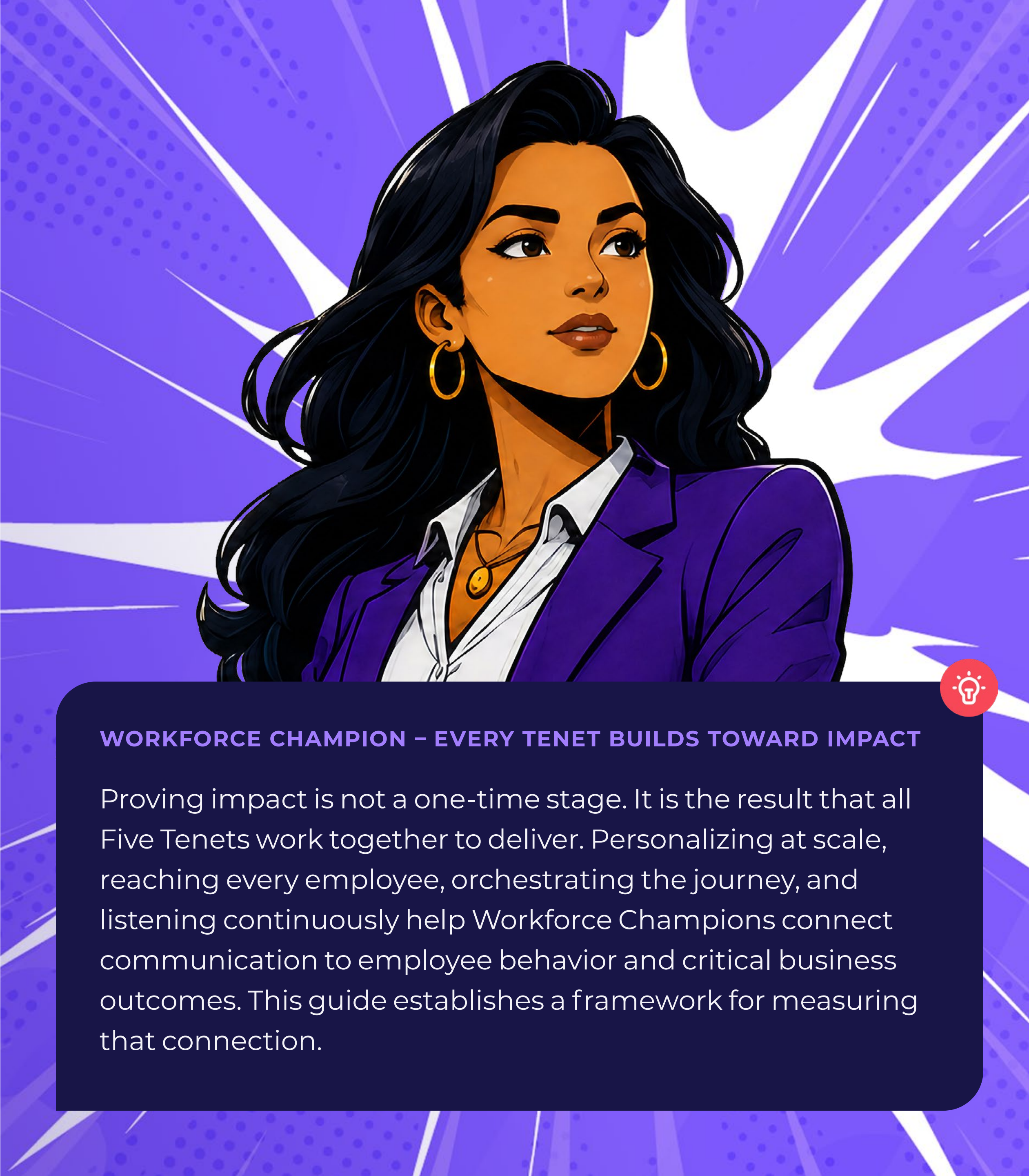
Whichever instrument you use, the score only means something if you bring it all together: [Gallup](#) found that only 23% of employees strongly agree their organization acts on what it hears in employee surveys.

Closing the loop is what turns measurement into improvement and shifts the focus from communication activity to business impact.

What changes when you measure the right way

THE OLD WAY	THE NEW WAY
Track opens and clicks	✔ Measure the intended employee action
Keep communication data isolated	✔ Connect communication, behavior, and business data
Optimize sends	✔ Learn which communication initiatives contribute to better outcomes

Source: Adapted from [Firstup Beyond the Portal: The Intranet Reckoning](#)



WORKFORCE CHAMPION – EVERY TENET BUILDS TOWARD IMPACT

Proving impact is not a one-time stage. It is the result that all Five Tenets work together to deliver. Personalizing at scale, reaching every employee, orchestrating the journey, and listening continuously help Workforce Champions connect communication to employee behavior and critical business outcomes. This guide establishes a framework for measuring that connection.

The proof: Measurable business impact

398% RETURN ON INVESTMENT | \$8.9M IN TOTAL
BENEFITS FOR A COMPOSITE 10,000-PERSON
ORGANIZATION | PAYBACK IN UNDER SIX MONTHS

[Forrester](#) developed these findings from interviews with eight decision-makers across the healthcare, manufacturing, distribution, and retail industries. It then modeled the results for a composite organization with 10,000 employees.

- **Frontline retention:** 52 skilled employees retained—\$4.7M
- **Workforce productivity:** 69,000 hours reclaimed—\$2.3M
- **Safety and risk reduction:** 30% fewer serious incidents by Year 3—\$1.1M
- **Communications team productivity:** 12,060 hours reclaimed—\$533K
- **Legacy tool consolidation:** \$336K

Over three years, the model estimates \$8.9M in benefits compared with \$1.8M in costs.

Evidence across three business outcomes

Retention: Nebraska Medicine

Personalized, milestone-based onboarding reached frontline healthcare workers without regular computer access. Voluntary turnover fell 16% year over year, while first-year turnover fell 15%.

“Had we not had Firstup, I do not believe those other retention initiatives would have been nearly as successful as they were.”

— VP, PEOPLE OPERATIONS, HEALTHCARE, FORRESTER TEI
INTERVIEW, 2026

Read more about it: [Nebraska Medicine customer story, Firstup](#)

Safety: Cooper University Health Care

Cooper used communication to make near-miss reporting a visible, celebrated behavior. Participation in its Good Catch program grew 30%, supporting the health system’s broader High Reliability Organization work and its Leapfrog “A” Hospital Safety Grade.

“The way we use Pulse Plus is to celebrate those Good Catches. It builds an understanding and culture around the importance of reporting.”

— DR. MICHAEL KIRCHHOFF, CHIEF INNOVATION OFFICER AND
PATIENT SAFETY OFFICER, COOPER UNIVERSITY HEALTH CARE

Read more about it: [Cooper University Health Care customer story, Firstup](#)

The Forrester study mentioned earlier found a similar pattern elsewhere. One healthcare leader attributed roughly 30% of harm-reduction events across major categories to Firstup-enabled reporting, while a manufacturing communications leader reported a 35% decline in serious injuries after increasing safety communication through the platform.

Productivity: Forrester composite organization

Employees at the composite 10,000-person organization reclaimed 69,000 hours that had previously been spent searching for basic information. [Forrester](#) valued that time at \$2.3M over three years—roughly six hours a year for each frontline employee and two hours a year for each desk employee.

A supporting measure: Communications team efficiency

Operational efficiency strengthens the business case, but it does not replace evidence of workforce action and business outcomes. At TE Connectivity, consolidating a manual, copy-and-paste workflow saved more than 2,700 hours a year. At Providence, the time required to produce a single employee newsletter fell from 10 hours to 45 minutes.

The [Forrester study](#) found the same pattern at scale: The communications team at the composite organization became up to 30% more productive and reclaimed more than 12,000 hours by Year 3.

Read the [TE Connectivity](#) and [Providence](#) customer stories.

This is why this guide is written for finance leaders too, not just communications teams. It answers the question financial leaders actually ask: What do we get for this investment?

WORKFORCE CHAMPION – COLLABORATION AND RESPECT

Proving impact is collaborative work. Communication, HR, operations, IT, and finance may each hold part of the evidence needed to connect a message to an employee action and a business outcome. Bringing those perspectives together also demonstrates respect. Every employee deserves information that reaches them where they work and helps them see how their role connects to the organization's mission.

Five steps to start now

Proving impact is not a research project. It is a discipline you can apply to your next communication.

1 Choose one business outcome.

Start with a strategic priority the organization is already committed to improving, such as retention, safety, compliance, or productivity. Then define a measurable result that communication can help influence.

For example, “improve retention” is a priority; “reduce first-year turnover among frontline nurses by 15%” is a measurable result. The more specific the result, the easier it will be to connect it to an employee action.

2 Define the employee action.

Identify the specific action employees need to take to influence that outcome. If the action is vague, the measurement will be too.

3 Establish the baseline and data source.

Before the communication launches, decide what you will compare, where the action and outcome data will come from, and who owns each data source.

4 Communicate, measure, and diagnose.

Track who received the message, who acted, and where participation broke down. Determine whether reach, timing, or channel contributed to the problems before sending a follow-up.

5 Report the complete chain.

Show Activity → Action → Business Outcome, then pair the evidence with one employee story. The numbers establish impact; the story makes it memorable.

WORKFORCE CHAMPION – ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability starts before the message goes out: Define the intended action, agree on how success will be measured, and own what the evidence shows. The goal is not a healthy-looking dashboard. It is a measurable result—and a clear plan to improve when the result falls short.

Where Firstup fits into the framework

To apply the framework, organizations need visibility into all three levels. Firstup connects who received a communication with what employees did next, and how those actions contributed to the results the business is tracking.

STEP 1

Activity—Reaching people

Firstup delivers communication across email, mobile, intranet, signage, and more, and shows whether a critical message reached every employee it was meant for, including frontline workers without a company email or regular desk access.

STEP 2

Action—Influencing behavior

Automated campaigns prompt employees to read, acknowledge, complete a task, or respond to a request. They can then retarget employees who have not acted. Teams can see who took the intended action and where participation broke down, so they can fix any problems with reach, timing, or channel before resending.

STEP 3

Business Outcome—Connecting communication to results

Firstup pairs campaign data with workforce data from HRIS, learning, and other systems. This helps teams show how communication contributed to results like first-year retention, safety reporting, or time spent finding information. That is the same connection Nebraska Medicine and Cooper University Health Care made in the examples above.

The takeaway

Communication is how strategy becomes execution. It turns business priorities into clear employee action, and that is what activates the workforce and drives the outcomes leaders care about. Measuring Activity, Action, and Business Outcome shows where that connection is working and where it is breaking down.

Measuring communication is not a reporting chore. It is a business strategy. If you cannot prove what worked, you cannot improve it, fund it, or defend it.

If you run communications: Choose one message this month and measure all three levels rather than stopping at the open rate. Bring the result to your next leadership review, even if it is small. One documented outcome is more persuasive than a quarter's worth of open-rate charts.

If you approve the budget: Ask to see all three levels. Who received the communication? What did employees do? What business result did that action contribute to? That is a stronger test than asking only how many people saw the message.

Either way, the starting point is the same. Stop asking only whether the message went out. Start asking what happened because it did.



WORKFORCE CHAMPION – PROVING SUCCESS ACROSS EVERY TENET

Proving impact creates the foundation for measuring every other tenet. It gives Workforce Champions a consistent way to show how each tenet contributes to employee behavior and critical business outcomes.

Coming Next:



TENET 2

Personalize at Scale

Deliver the right message to the right person at the right time, via the right channel, leading to fewer missed updates and a better employee experience.

ABOUT FIRSTUP

Firstup's mission is to improve the employee experience at every moment that matters. The Firstup intelligent communication platform empowers Comms, HR, and EX leaders to reach every employee and improve engagement with personalized omnichannel campaigns and real-time engagement data. The world's best companies communicate with Firstup.

Find out how to give your people an equitable digital experience with the Firstup platform. Learn more at www.firstup.io.

