



INIZIO

Congress planning today:
pain points and opportunities.

Congress organizers reveal
what is and isn't working
to deliver a successful congress.

Foreword

Between December 2023 and February 2024, Inizio conducted a two-phase multi-methodology research study.

The study gathered feedback from global pharmaceutical company employees whose job roles include the planning and delivery of congress. Our primary objective for this research was to identify the challenges faced by congress planners working in pharma, understand specifically what is required to mitigate these challenges, and ultimately, improve the execution of future congress events.

Why we created this report

Through the two research phases, we heard key challenges raised, as well as successful examples—leading us to understand that many of the answers were in the room.

We believe in the value of these insights and findings, as they can raise clear priorities across the industry and help readers identify opportunities to create more success at future congresses.

What follows is a consolidated report of the two study phases with commentary from our Associate Insights Director, from Inizio Engage XD, Hannah McGill, and Senior Insights Manager, Annabel McLaren.

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Study design

We conducted the study in two phases, first lifting the lid on specific challenges and areas of improvement raised in a focus group, and then following up with a survey to quantify and prioritize the identified issues.

Phase 1

Explorative qualitative research

60-minute online focus group discussion with 16 congress organizers

Phase 2

Objective validators quantitative research

10-minute online surveys with 15 congress organizers

References: Inizio Congress 2023: Pain Points and Powerful Possibilities, Base n=16
Inizio Congress Value Proposition Survey 2024, Base n=15

Inizio Congress Report 2024

Sample

In both phases, we endeavored to hear from different perspectives with representation from a range of departments in pharma organizations, such as Medical, Marketing, and Congress.

Employees with the following job roles were asked to take part: Congress Leads, Commercial Operations Leads, Heads of Marketing, Scientific Directors, Strategy & Planning Leads, Scientific Communication Leads, and Medical Affairs Leads.



Chapter 1

Congress is still a high-value activity for pharma

We asked participants about the biggest opportunities presented by congress and **these two came out on top:**

81%

stated that congress is an opportunity for **connection and engagement.**

56%

highlighted the way congress enables pharma to **share new information** and data about products and innovations.

Congress provides an extremely valuable networking opportunity, both within and outside an organization. It brings together internal teams and external customers to discuss areas of mutual interest.

The value of congress reaches further than networking opportunities it provides an important space for knowledge exchange within the industry, and that sharing of information supports pharmaceutical teams to execute their brand strategy and showcase their company.

“Increasingly, it's an important internal event for teams who don't get together face to face that often.”

“Showcase our scientific advances, attain impactful insights, and establish meaningful connections.”

What participants said about the value of congress

“Education and growth within the industry, to bring back to stakeholders.”

“Exciting opportunity to engage with stakeholders.”

Chapter 2

Value is being lost in the complexities of delivery

Feedback revealed that on average, companies spend between **30%-40%** of their marketing budget on congresses:

What percentage of the marketing budget do you anticipate devoting to congress presence (including sponsorship) in 2024?

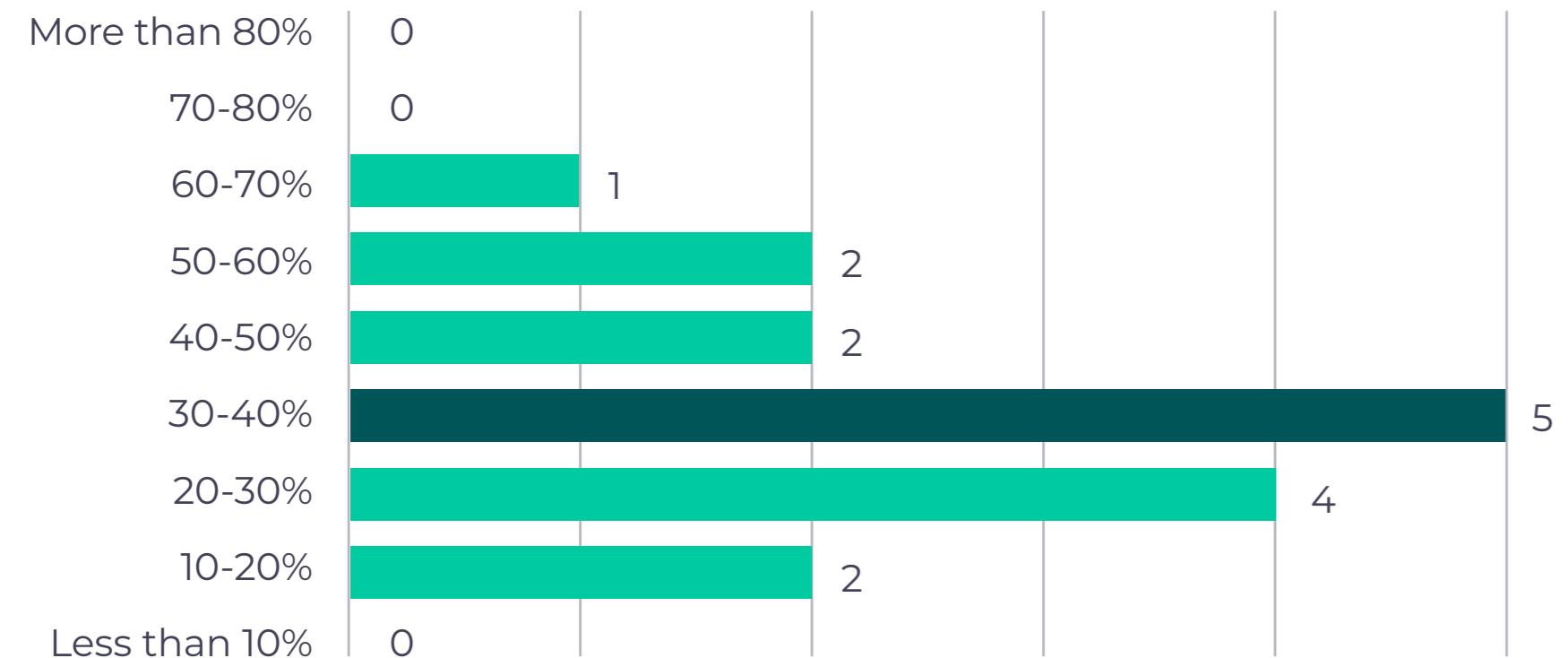


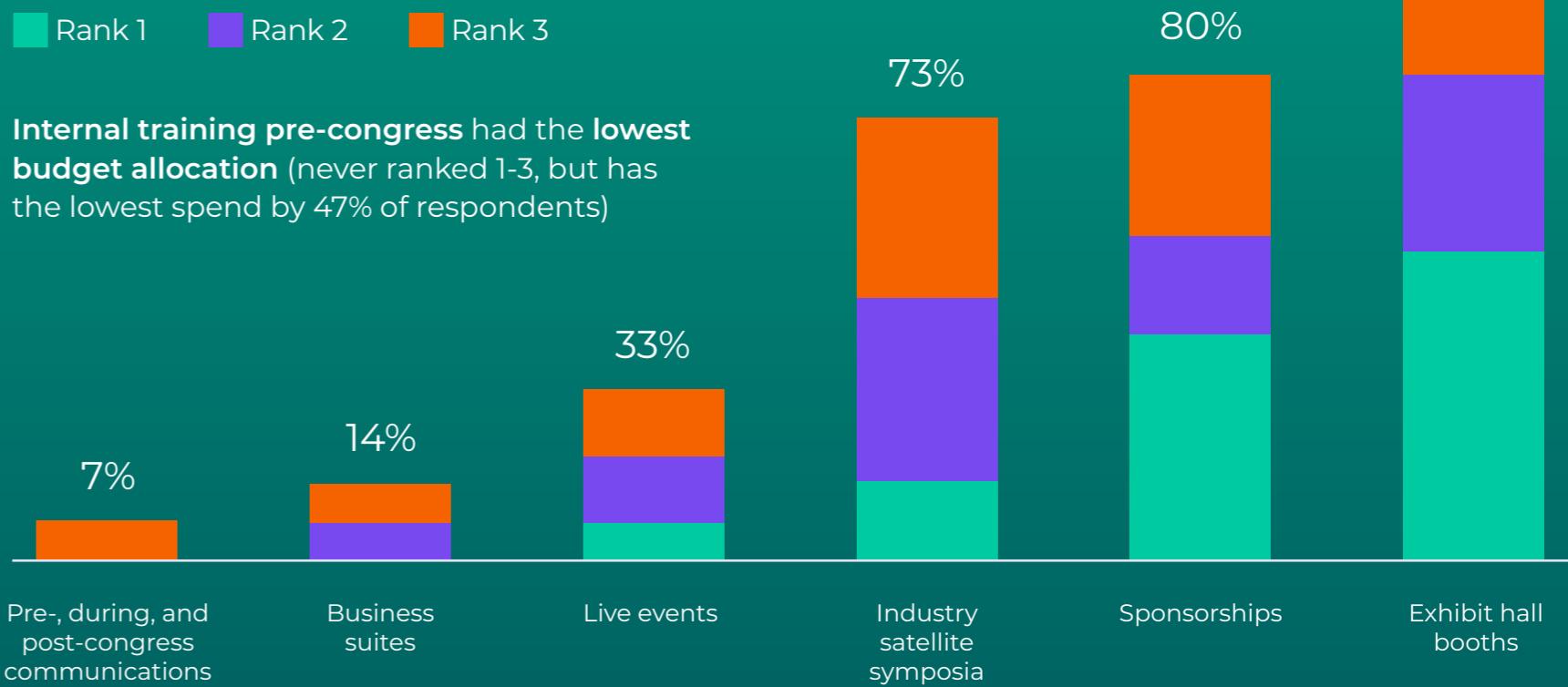
FIG.1

How are budgets typically split?

Of the budget that organizers anticipate spending on congresses in 2024, the majority is expected to be spent on activities such as exhibit hall booths and sponsorships. This ensures that companies are communicating their key messaging and content in the most prominent and engaging ways for their audiences.

However, participants allocated the smallest proportion of their budget to peri-congress communications. If the level of investment is our indicator, then it's possible that this aspect of congress marketing is being under-prioritized.

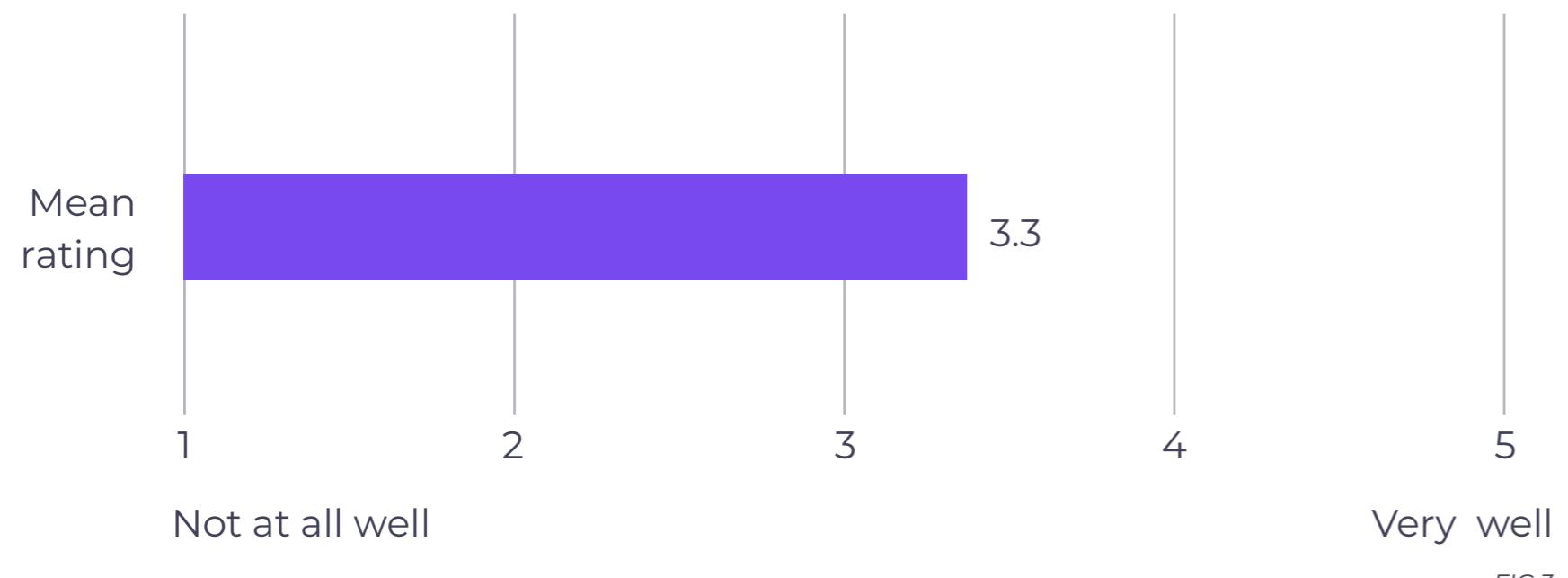
Congress activities that receive the highest spending budget



What is hindering the delivery of congress events?

Despite significant financial investment, most feel that there is room to improve the delivery of congress:

How well do you think your organization currently delivers congresses?



Internally, teams feel like they are “up against it” at congress, constantly fire-fighting issues.

88% attribute these issues to **lack of alignment within the organization**.

The majority of our participants said alignment is the problem, and we also found out where the issues they were talking about come from.

According to our sources, problems on the ground at congress are exacerbated by a flawed planning process that features:

A lack of forward-thinking, planning, and stakeholder buy-in

Limited alignment in objectives and unrealistic delivery expectations given the time and budget available

Too many stakeholders involved and no centralized decision-making

Lack of clarity on strategy, roles, and responsibilities

Lack of alignment frustrates processes and people

56%

described the planning process as “decentralized”, “complicated”, “chaotic”, and “disorganized”.

Unfortunately, this can lead to a stressful and inefficient working experience for the on-site team at congress events.

Turning to our quantitative research, team members highlighted two key areas that prove challenging when managing and delivering congress: **leveraging technology** and **communication channels**. These factors were rated as the two biggest challenges in executing congress plans.

Participants on challenges in congress delivery:

“There is a lack of continuity in terms of who has input and makes decisions about content for congresses internally.”

“[It’s challenging]... creating an innovative, meaningful exhibit that stays within budget and is well-attended.”

Participants on the value of congress:

60%

strongly felt that their team experiences **challenges when adopting new innovations and technologies**.

54%

strongly felt that their team experiences **challenges when utilizing communication channels** to engage with audiences pre-, during, and post-congress.

These two key challenges present **concrete opportunities to improve the congress experience**, increasing the value delivered by the planning process.

Chapter 3

Smarter ROI measurements reveal known unknowns

The challenges faced in executing plans are compounded by **difficulties measuring the Return on Investment (ROI)** and success of a congress event.



Our qualitative findings revealed that...

75%

cite the need to **collect and analyze congress metrics better** so they can effectively measure congress success by its ROI. **However...**

Only 7%

of pharmaceutical employees **feel equipped to measure** the ROI of their congress event.

This reveals the crux of the problem.

How can teams deliver congress experiences that inspire lasting change **if they don't understand their audience and measure their impact?**

Where to improve? ROI is the starting point.

Qualitative data shows that teams lack confidence about measuring objectives and ROI.

What participants said about measuring ROI:

“Metrics are collected but not analyzed correctly and/or there are no goals to compare against.”

“We need to use the data that comes out of the metrics and take action.”

“Focus on important measurements, not just vanity metrics.”

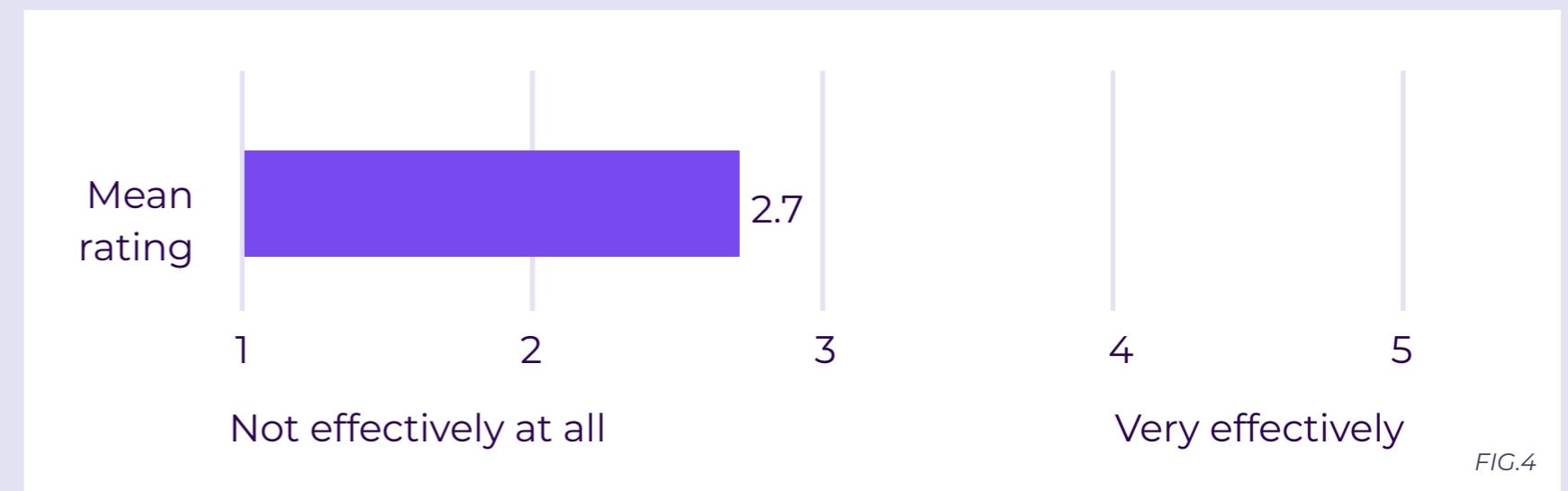
One respondent had several clear ideas about how they would make congress activities more effective:

“Maximizing face time with internal and external... stakeholders; aligning schedules; ...assessing ROI on overall congress presence, especially booths and exhibits (many existing metrics used to determine ROI seem fluffy/weak and are not compelling).”

The opinions we heard about ROI are bolstered by quantitative insight. Measuring sentiments confirmed that team members feel there is room to improve how congress success and value are measured.

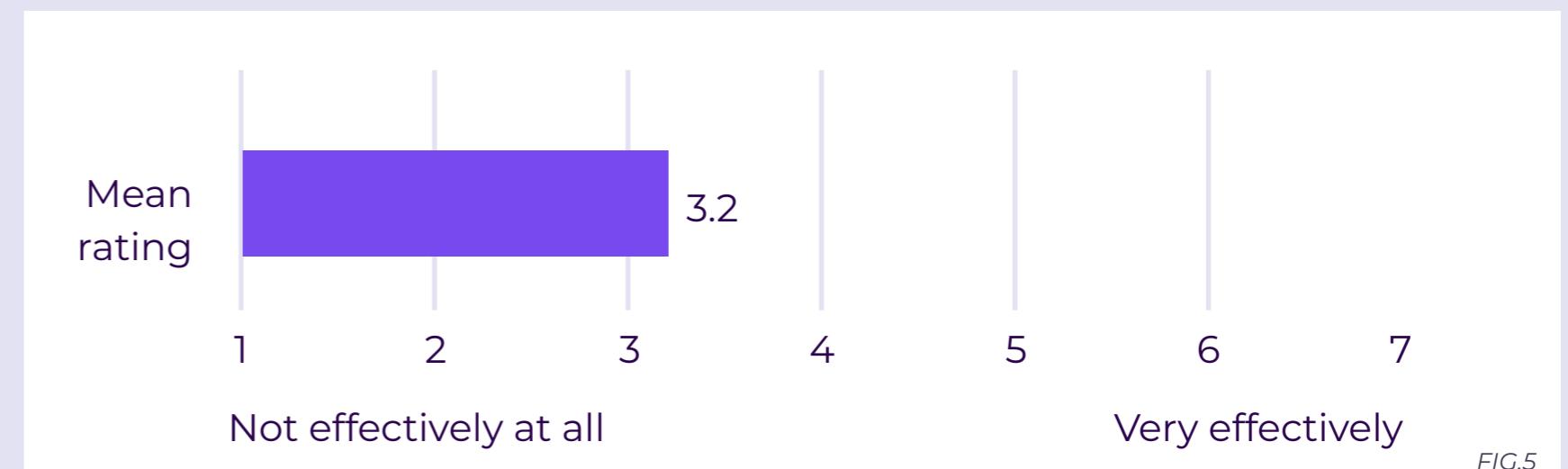
Focus group rating:

How effectively do you measure the success or value of your congress activities currently?



Survey rating:

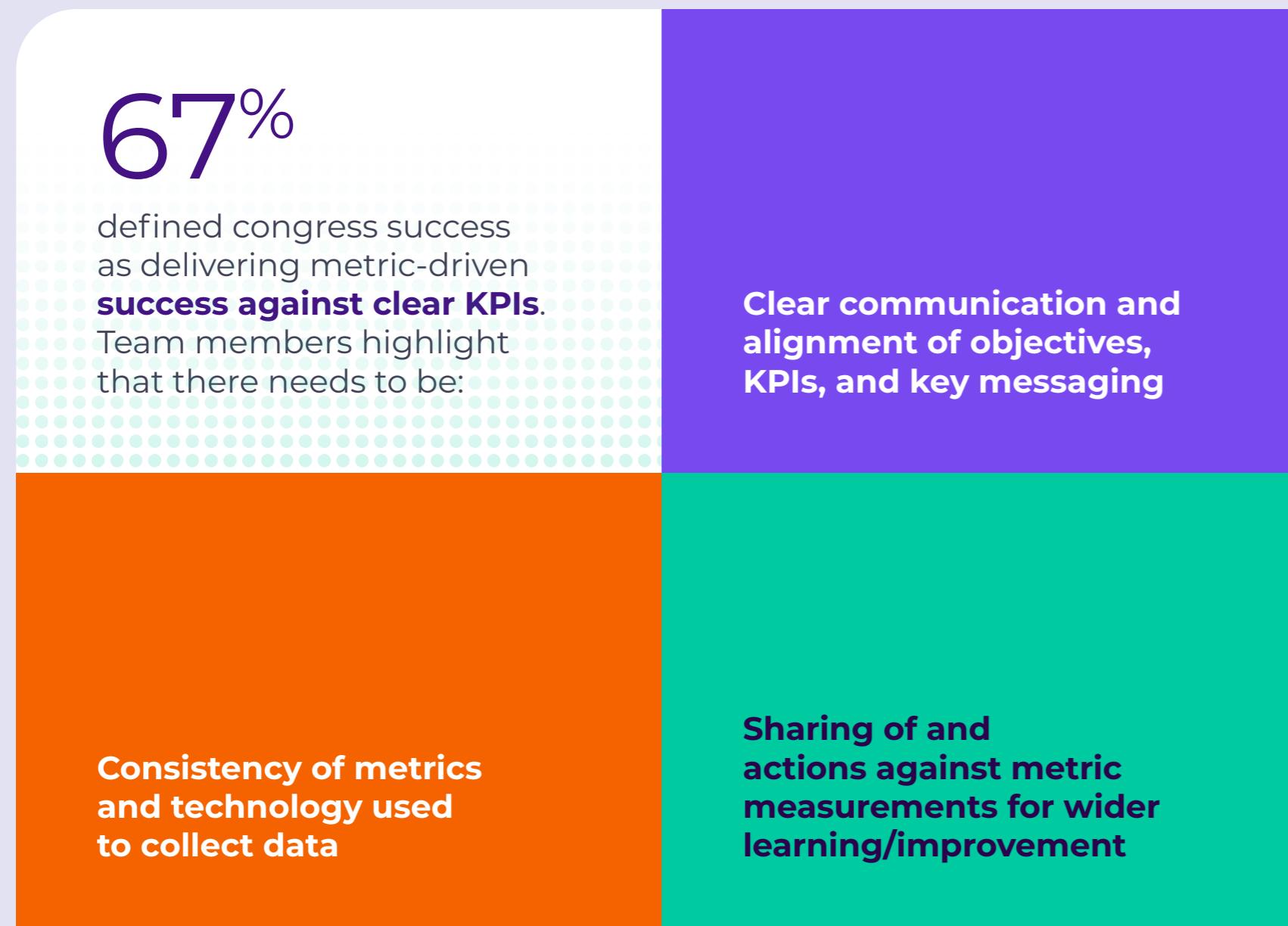
At congress, how equipped do you and your team feel to measure ROI/objectives?



Chapter 4

Overcoming complexities in congress execution

Unsurprisingly, pharmaceutical employees feel that if these challenges around internal alignment, adoption of technology, communication channels, and ROI measurement are addressed, then a congress is far more likely to be deemed successful.



How can agency partners support better audience engagement?

While pharmaceutical companies themselves undoubtedly have a role to play in better supporting congress organizers in the delivery of congress, external agencies could also offer invaluable support when it comes to congress planning and execution.

Pharmaceutical employees themselves highlight the role that external agencies can play in helping to overcome technological and communication challenges.



The type of agency help most congress stakeholders want:

67%

agree agency partners are valuable in **providing competitor intelligence and insight.**

60%

consider external agency support highly **valuable in utilizing communication channels** to engage audiences pre-, during, and post-congress.

60%

consider external agency support highly **valuable for adopting new innovations** and latest technology.

Where else do congress stakeholders want support?

Competitor intelligence, communication channels, and innovation are the three stand-out areas where agencies can help. Plus, there are other areas where participants called out for help in:

Business objectives and internal alignment

Some pharmaceutical employees (26% and 20% respectively) felt that agency partners could provide value by aligning with their own internal business objectives and key internal stakeholders. And as we know, 88% of participants attribute issues on-site at congress to lack of alignment within the organization.

Measuring ROI effectively

As we have seen, both study phases revealed how participants feel about not being able to measure the success or value of congress activities very effectively. Specialist agencies can support in selecting KPI metrics based on congress objectives, and ensure that these metrics are analyzed consistently and compared to targets. The results, clearly demonstrated ROI and insights enables organizations to get more impactful results in the future.

Our conclusion: **Overcome complexities to unlock value**

Overall, our research highlighted challenges and opportunities for improvement, yet it was extremely positive to hear that congress offers immense value to both pharmaceutical companies and their employees

Many of the answers to participants' problems were in the room, which was the inherent value of the session. After these indicative findings, our quantitative survey enabled us to analyze the raised topics and confirm patterns.

Going forward, it's worth noting that with a little extra support—from both pharmaceutical companies and external agencies—the individuals responsible for executing congress events could do so to an even higher standard.

Looking to the future of congress, participants agreed this is an ever-evolving space and they expect to

attend and exhibit fewer events throughout the congress year, resulting in more focused efforts to creating meaningful experiences

Furthermore, anticipated areas for external agency support include innovative technology to enhance delegate engagement, such as leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) to personalize interactions or measure engagement, as well as actions to reduce the environmental impact of attending congress.

Clear alignment on the delivery goals and objectives is crucial for congress success, which, along with improved relationship between pharmaceutical companies and agencies, results in a better, more meaningful congress presence.

About Inizio

As a market-leading commercialization platform for pharma and biopharma, our connected expertise brings unparalleled breadth and depth of expertise and capabilities to even your most complex projects.

Our integrated congress capabilities include:

- Engaging scientific content
- Eye-catching exhibitions
- Unforgettable delegate experiences
- Meticulous meeting and event production
- Holistic congress management
- Comprehensive research and reporting

Powering connection.
Simplifying complexity.

INIZIO
ENGAGE

INIZIO
MEDICAL

INIZIO
evoke

INIZIO
ADVISORY

Our full-service congress solution

Applying our end-to-end expertise, we create congress experiences that connect with your audiences, power your business, and transform patient lives.

Business objectives and internal alignment

Congresses are those pivotal moments when a pharma or biopharma company gets the rare opportunity to truly connect with healthcare audiences, human to human. It also facilitates the achievement of many objectives, ranging from presenting data, research, and evidence, to sharing emotive stories, capturing imaginations, and fostering actions that improve lives.

We provide everything you need for a successful congress, from initial strategy and research to creative execution, logistics, and post-event analytics. Let's talk.

Whatever your team's goals, whatever challenges you face, our experts are ready to help.

Email enquiries@inizio.com

to find out more about what we can do for you