

# Strategic Shifts: Communication for Meaningful Organizational Change

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Transformation isn't about perfection and technicalities; it's about engaged people. The authors focus on ways organizations can effectively implement change management to activate employees and enable sustainable growth.

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education | research | information

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**T**he only constant is change. While this may sound cliché, it's never been timelier. Organizations everywhere, of all sizes, are managing some type of transition on a day-to-day basis.

Whether it's shifting company policies, introducing new technology or planning another type of impactful transition, organizations are consistently navigating the ebbs and flows of change while striving to maintain employee engagement, productivity and growth.

The employee benefits space is a perfect example of an area where change management can make or break outcomes. Health and financial benefits are personal and often complex topics, making it essential to communicate updates with clarity to build employee understanding, minimize resistance and drive action.

By adopting a strategic and employee-centric approach to communicating change, organizations can not only manage transitions effectively but also reinforce their commitment to their most valuable asset—their people.

## Breaking Through the Noise

From a distance, communicating organizational change seems straightforward—let employees know what's happening and tell them what actions (if any) they need to take. The truth is that getting from point A to point B smoothly and successfully requires a much more strategic, thoughtful approach.

Communicating change isn't just about delivering information; it's about building trust, fostering understanding and empowering employees to thrive in an environment filled with competing demands. Organizations that prioritize the well-being and needs of their people have the best chance of creating lasting change.

Let's face it—Change is difficult, even at the best of times. Routines and habits are hard to break, uncertainty can be stressful, and the benefits of a new process often take time to see and feel. Without a well-planned, people-centred approach (that balances how much you're asking of your employees), you risk team members feeling overwhelmed, confused and ultimately disengaged.

Implementing a strategic change communication plan is also vital to preventing change fatigue—a real risk for many organizations that can affect employee well-being and job satisfaction. Ensuring the right messages are delivered to the right people at the right time empowers employees to remain engaged, motivated and focused on priority outcomes.

## Building a Better Experience

If change is so critical, why does it so often fail? Too often, we forget that organizations are made up of people, and it's people who drive change. An organization doesn't innovate, sell to customers, make decisions or transform itself. People do.

Prioritizing *people over process* is perhaps the most important way to drive successful change. One of the first questions to ask is: Who is impacted? Then, explore how you can best support them before, during and after a change. What do they need to know, and when do they need to know it?

Prioritizing transparent communication that uses plain, direct language (explaining the who, what, when, where and why of the stages ahead) is mission critical. Provide clear timelines, deliver consistent messaging, and don't be afraid to address concerns and unknowns openly and collaboratively.

If you've got an organizational change on the horizon, keep these building blocks in mind when it comes to your communication plan:

### 1. Know Your Why: Engagement and Action Through Purpose

To fully participate in a change, people need to understand why it's happening and how it ties back to the organization's larger strategy (and their role within it). Capturing the “what's in it for me” for audiences drives action through an understanding of impact.

### Takeaways

- Effective change communication builds trust, reduces resistance and empowers employees. To help achieve this, a strategic, people-centred approach prevents confusion and change fatigue.
- Successful change starts by identifying who is impacted and supporting them before, during and after. People need to understand why change is happening and how it ties back to the organization's larger strategy and their role within it.
- Overlapping changes can be overwhelming. Encourage two-way communication through surveys, Q&A sessions and feedback channels.
- Change is always ongoing, and technology can play a key role in building effective communication. Organizations can use benefits administration platforms to provide personalized information, send automated reminders and track employee engagement.

Prioritize clarifying the reasons behind the change and connecting them to the organization's goals. Is it to improve day-to-day efficiencies, increase online security, align with new policies or legislation, or improve customer service or another key element to your organization's success and longevity?

## **2. Have the Right Partners at the Table**

In addition to technical and leadership teams, ensure a solid governance structure for decision making, request prioritization and more. And, equally as essential, ensure your communications partners are involved from day one.

This includes your internal communications team, who understand the intricacies, structure and culture of your organization. And, if the expertise does not already exist in-house, there is tremendous value in bringing in a change communications specialist who will collaborate with your internal teams to bring a fresh perspective, added industry knowledge and a project-specific focus.

## **3. Build a Detailed and Flexible Roadmap**

A well-built project plan is the roadmap to your goals. Start with a comprehensive process to truly understand what is happening and why, who will be impacted, the time available or needed to implement the change, and any potential obstacles that may arise. Clearly define the scope of the proposed change and evaluate the organization's readiness to undertake the transition.

After completing a thorough analysis of the current and desired future states, you'll be ready to build and deliver on a well-informed, strategic change communication plan—one that is tailored to the specific needs of your organization's employees and structure, including considerations such as resourcing, communication channels, approval processes, training and development options, and governance frameworks.

Once the plan is in motion, stay engaged to ensure the change is rolling out as intended, that messages are breaking through and people are adapting well. Keeping an eye on progress allows you to celebrate wins and quickly course-correct if needed.

## **4. Understand the Role of Uncertainty**

With the ever-changing world, particularly in technology, and no shortage of new things to learn, it's easy to see how uncertainty can contribute to employee overwhelm and confusion.

Providing easy access to information hubs where employees can find the latest updates, tailored learning materials and more can empower employees and provide a sense of control, thereby reducing the anxieties and stress that often come with the uncertainty of change.

## **5. Choose the Right Messengers**

Senior leadership, project sponsors, direct managers, individual team members—everyone has a part to play in demonstrating support for a change. In general, senior leadership and sponsors play an overarching support role by sharing project updates and celebrating successes.

When it comes to day-to-day changes to processes and job-related impacts, employees tend to prefer to receive that information from a direct manager—someone with whom they have regular contact and have built a sense of trust.

Managers and leaders are often the first point of contact for employees seeking information or clarification. Equip them with the knowledge and resources they need to communicate effectively and address their employees' concerns.

## **6. Empower Your Teams**

Provide clear calls to action, develop self-serve tools and engage team members to champion the change to their colleagues. Build pathways for people to be on the inside of the change, helping drive enthusiasm and a greater understanding of the why and how.

## **7. Be Authentic and Empathic**

Messaging should be authentic and appropriate to each sender. Underscoring communication with key messages that are consistent but crafted to be empathetic to the time and relevance of the reader is a surefire way to gain awareness and support. Don't be afraid to say if you don't know something, or if certain decisions are still in progress. Transparency builds trust.

## **8. Know Your Audience and Meet Them Where They Are**

The multidisciplinary nature of organizations today—including wide-ranging roles, hybrid environments, and varying schedules and departmental structures—means a tailored communications approach is almost always the way to get your most important messages across: *What's changing? Why, when and what does it mean for me? What happens if I don't make the change?*

Fragmentation of organizations and physical workspaces means mass communication is no longer the main route for change messaging. Town halls, intranet posts and company-wide emails might be useful for raising general awareness, but they can't provide the detail and ease of access needed to cut through the flurry of messages and the general noise employees encounter day-to-day.

Make sure the information you're sharing is timely, is efficient, is relevant to your audience and includes clear calls to action. Take care to match the right message with the right channel. Know where to find your audience and meet them where they are so that they don't have to seek out information (e.g., shift workers may require an asynchronous approach with several touchpoints such as posters, FAQs, videos and messages for managers to share during team meetings).

Integrating employee-centred change management principles with existing internal communications planning also helps to ensure people have the runway and bandwidth to adopt a change while minimizing impacts on their day-to-day priorities.

### 9. *Avoid the Silo Effect*

Without thorough oversight and a big-picture view, changes of all sizes can be in motion from different departments at the same time. Because they are managed separately, it can be easy to miss that multiple requests are impacting the same individuals simultaneously, leading to confusion over how to prioritize as well as difficulties absorbing new requirements.

It's beneficial to consider all ongoing changes at once to see where requests overlap, where they can be combined or where reprioritization is needed to benefit all involved.

### 10. *Build Opportunities for Feedback*

Change communication should be a two-way conversation. Create spaces and opportunities for employees to ask questions, share concerns and provide feedback. This can take many forms, such as regular surveys, focus groups, Q&A sessions, or dedicated mailboxes or phone numbers. This not only helps to ensure employees' concerns are addressed but also lets them know their feedback and involvement are important to the organization.

### 11. *Leverage Technology*

Technology can play a key role in building effective change communication. For example, organizations can use benefits

## BIOS

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administration platforms to provide personalized information, send automated reminders and track employee engagement. Virtual tools such as webinars and video tutorials can also help explain complex benefit changes in an engaging and accessible way.

### 12. *Monitor and Adjust*

Change communication is not a one-time event; think of it as an ongoing process. Continue to monitor the effectiveness of your communication efforts so you can celebrate

wins and adjust as required. Make sure to track metrics such as employee engagement, feedback and participation rates. Use follow-up surveys to assess employee awareness, understanding and sentiment.

### How Do You Know If Your Strategy Is Working?

Several qualitative and quantitative indicators can tell you if you're managing change well or if fatigue is starting to set in. Exit interviews, turnover rates, performance report trends and employee engagement survey responses can be early indicators of a problem or signals of success, depending on their trends.

From the perspective of a leader, what is the general sentiment from the team? Are they optimistic about the future? Are they excited for growth opportunities?

Or perhaps a more concerning red flag to watch for is no response at all. This could mean that change fatigue and disengagement are already setting in and that a proactive approach is needed to boost morale.

And finally, keep an eye on what's being said outside of your organization on employer review sites, social media and more.

### Setting Up for Success

Change doesn't happen with the flip of a switch. It starts well before activation day and requires buy-in from all levels. The success of your transition depends on each affected employee understanding the what, when, how and why. That's how you build engagement, generate momentum and—most importantly—create lasting change that helps you reach your goals. 🌟

