

Communicating During Times of Change

When an organization is undergoing change, a corresponding communications plan is essential. A communications plan starts with clear objectives and key messages, and then defines the communication vehicles, activities and timing that will help people understand the rationale for change and ideally, answer questions before they are asked. When it comes to change, most people want to know the answer to: “What does it mean for me?”.

For communications to be effective, we recommend leaders build the case for change, set the conditions required to make the transformation successful, and develop a communications plan that recognizes each person’s perception of what the change means to them. Some will be very happy with the status quo, and others will be excited by the possibilities in the future. A well-developed communications plan can help everyone through the change curve (see our post on [William Bridges’ Transition Model](#)).

On the right side, we provide 8 principles to weave into your communications plan. On slide 2, we present a model that will help you construct messaging that address all audiences’ perceptions of the change that is happening.

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Communicate Clearly. It is important to communicate with clarity and with as little ambiguity as possible. If you don’t know something, just say you don’t know.



Communicate Consistently. Communication should be coordinated, consistent, and connected.



Communicate Early and Frequently. Communication timeliness and leader credibility go hand in hand. Communicate early and often.



Communicate Frequently Enough So as Not to Create A Vacuum. Communication vacuums tend to be filled with speculation – much of which isn’t productive. If you don’t have new information, tell people when you will.



Communicate the case for change, change strategy, and future vision. Start by building the case for change, followed by subsequent communication and actions that create support and buy-in for the future vision.



Use multiple modes of communication tailored to your situation.



Pay attention to your different audiences when constructing messages.



Err on the side of over-communicating versus under communicating.



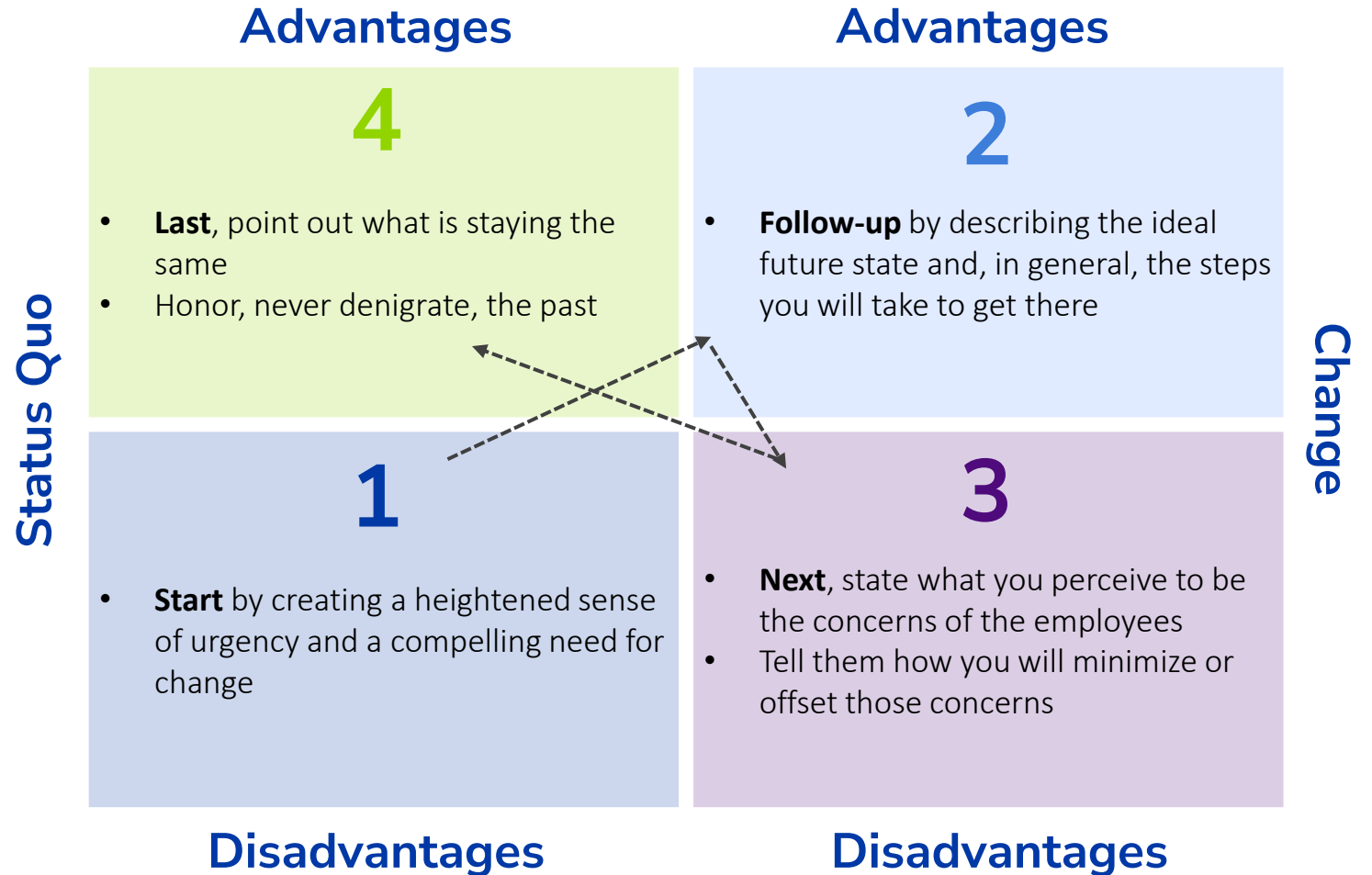
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The Change Communication Matrix: How to construct change messages and address different audiences based on their perception of the change.

How to use this tool:

The Change Communication Matrix is a powerful tool to communicate your case for change, change strategy, and future vision. Here's how to use it:

1. Start by creating a heightened sense of urgency and the rationale for change. This will help those who see the disadvantages with the status quo.
2. Next, describe the ideal future state, change strategy, and next steps. This will help the audience who is excited by the possibilities the future holds and create buy-in for the future.
3. Then, acknowledge people's perceived concerns about the change and explain to them, in specific terms, how you plan to minimize those concerns. This will help the audience who sees disadvantages with the change.
4. Last, point out what will stay the same and will not be impacted by the change. Most importantly, honor, never denigrate, the past. This will help the audience who sees advantages with the status quo.



Sources: The Change Leader's Roadmap, Ackerman Anderson, Linda and Anderson, Dean, Published by Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, 2001; [Communicating During an Organizational Change](#), Dr. Carol A. Beatty, Queen's University IRC (2015).