

# 30 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 tool on *William Bridges’ Transition Model* on page 28).

On the right side, we provide 8 principles to weave into your communications plan. On page 31, 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. First, describe the advantages of the status quo** and how it has helped you get you where you are today. Point out what is staying the same and what you have done well up to this point. Honour, never denigrate the past.
- 2. Second, list some of the challenges with any change** and reflect the concerns of your staff. Be honest about how tricky it can be to lead change.
- 3. Third, review some of the challenges** you're all experiencing with the status quo. Describe how sticking with the status quo can prevent you from being ready for the future.
- 4. Fourth, articulate your vision of the future** in as much detail as it takes to clarify the end point you are seeking after the changes are implemented. Described the advantages this will have for everyone, the supports that will be available, and list the key steps you will take from this point forward

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).

