

4 qualities of a successful change communications strategy

Staff communications are at the heart of all change projects, yet many companies forget employees are the company. Here are our tips to help you create an effective communications strategy.

1. There is a shared purpose

Yes, it's change 101, however, many organisations continue to assume that staff are 'bought in', when in fact they simply don't share the vision. A recent survey conducted by [Harvard Business Review](#) found that the execution of strategy is not well understood by those who were not involved in building it, highlighting the requirement for a well structured communication plan for the change.

Therefore, any change communication strategy needs to start at the base question of why?

What your audience needs to know:

- What the goal is, why the goal exists and why it is needed or 'why we can't afford to go on like this'.
- How the change fits with the organisations values and objectives.
- There is absolute clarity over the personal implications of the change.

What you need to deliver:

- Clear, understandable and consistent messages that answer the questions above
- Ensure the HR department and the communications team (internal or marketing) are aligned and delivering consistent content
- A sufficient level of information, so that they understand the change, that is made available across all relevant channels

2. There is leadership

The leaders help reinforce and carry the shared purpose by living the vision for change.

How to select your leaders:

- Who has the most power and influence in your network map?
- They are natural communicators and understand the importance of communication.
- They have a history of being forthright and trustworthy.

What your leaders need to do:

- Provide transparency guidance and support
- Ensure staff are recognised and where required, rewarded. Remember, [money is not likely to be the motivation](#), so a reward programme needs to be carefully considered.

3. The audience has selected the communications plan

As I discussed in '[How well do you know your change communications audience](#)', it's a sin to deploy a machine gun approach to modern communications. For your communications to be successful you need to think like your audience.

Your change audience may well look the same as they did 5 years ago, or even 12 months ago, but the way they consume information will almost certainly have changed. Quite simply, they decide how they receive the information and as important, who they receive it from.

What you need to do:

- Listen. In the words of [Chris Brogan](#): "Grow bigger ears".
- If you don't know where to start, ask them. Communication is a personal thing, typically face to face is the preferred option, but for some an email or video will suffice.
- Be prepared to communicate beyond your traditional media such as newsletters and emails. A recent [Melcrum](#) report found that whilst the intranet was the most effective channel, video and webcasts were being seen as increasingly important.

What your audience will expect:

- All communication to be timely and consistent. The right message to the right people at the right time.
- All communication comes from the top. The line managers will play a key role here, and this is where face-to-face communication really comes in to its own.
- Communication is a two way process. Remember, the ratio of ears to mouth is 2:1. Use them in this order.

4. Staff feel engaged (and it is measurable)

According to research by the [CIPD](#), staff feel more engaged when:

- They have a voice, the opportunity to air concerns and issues.
- They feel well informed.
- They believe their line manager is committed.

Engagement can of course be measured. One way many companies do this is through an employee engagement survey to measure before and after, and to act as the benchmark for all future projects. As a change manager having access to this information could prove very valuable, and make future communication planning that much simpler.

This paper is one of a series on a number of change related topics all of which are available from the [Knowledge Centre](#) on the Changefirst [website](#).

