

Change Management Communication: Laying the Groundwork for a Successful Communication Strategy



Over 60% of change initiatives fail, due in part to the absence of organizational acceptance. Communication is a critical factor in all change management activities.

A structure of regular and effective communications minimizes associates' levels of uncertainty and reduces the impact to the current business. Without organizational adoption, a new strategy or system will fail, regardless of how much money or planning is invested.

Communication is one of the toughest issues in an organization, so it is important to develop a carefully constructed communication strategy.

The purpose of this strategy is to define the overall approach that will be used in conducting the communication activities for the initiative. The communication strategy, prepared as the first step in the communication process, lays the groundwork for the Communication Program prior to the development of specific message content. An effective communication strategy should have five components:

- ① Communication Objectives
- ② Communication Principles
- ③ Audience Definition
- ④ Communication Roadmap
- ⑤ Communication Media Definition

1. Communication Objectives

Communication objectives are brief statements of what the communication strategy aims to achieve.

Examples of communication objectives include:

- To build awareness of the scope, benefits and impact of the project
- To deliver timely progress updates to project oversight and impacted associates through the program duration
- To ensure that consistent messages are delivered to stakeholders at all levels and that decisions, events and activities are communicated in a timely manner

2. Communication Principles

Communication principles are a series of guiding statements upon which the communication strategy is built. These statements are developed at the beginning of the communication strategy and are used as guidance for the development and delivery of the communication activities. The communication principles ensure that all formal communications from the project team are consistent in tone and message, timely and function well in the context of the organization's structure.

Examples of communication principles include:

- Utilize appropriate and effective communication vehicles for each unique audience group
- When the message is particularly important or complex, multiple communication methods may be used
- When possible, the project will leverage on-going scheduled meetings for incremental updates

3. Audience Definition

This defines the primary audience for the communications. The audience should be classified based upon project phase and the degree of impact to their organization, directly vs. indirectly impacted employees.

Directly impacted employees are defined as associates whose job tasks will change as a result of the initiative. Indirectly impacted employees will need to adjust to updated processes and understand the directly impacted roles. The indirectly impacted employees may supervise directly impacted employees or may simply collaborate with positions whose tools and tasks have changed. Groups that are highly impacted should be targeted for more frequent and varied communications.

Figure 1: Audience Impact by Phase (Illustrative)

Audience (Stakeholder Group)	Department	Impacted Phase	Level of Involvement
Item Control	Merchandising	1, 2	H
Sr. Buyer/Assoc Cat. Mgr/Analyst	Merchandising	1, 2, 4	H
Merch VPs	Merchandising	1, 2, 4	M
Customer Service	Field Ops	1, 2	L
Planning & Analysis	Finance	1, 2, 5	L
Sales & Cash	Finance	1, 2	H
Accts Payable	Finance	1, 3, 5	M L
Help Desk	Field Ops	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	M H
Ad Management	Merchandising	2	H
Pricing/FE	Merchandising	2	H
Space Planning	Merchandising	2	M
Pricing/Prod X	Prod X Ops	2	M
EDI Manager	Logistics	2	L

4. Communication Roadmap

The communication roadmap is comprised of messages about the initiative that should be conveyed according to four campaigns:

1. Awareness and Understanding Campaign
2. Understanding and Positive Perception Campaign
3. Training Delivery and Implementation Campaign
4. Follow-up Campaign

Messages in the four campaigns are linked to project milestones. Initially, the purpose of the message is to make impacted management and employees aware of the change and to understand why the change is necessary. Depending on the existing culture, the new initiative may represent an unwelcome change in familiar routines (e.g. "We've been doing things the same way for years, why do we have to switch now?"). These messages are critical because buy-in across all levels of the organization is necessary for a successful project. Later, as the project progresses, these messages serve to inform impacted management and employees about updates that pertain to their department and positions.

5. Communication Media Definition

The communication media definition identifies possible types of media that will aid the organization in delivering the messages in the communication program. It is best to use a combination of 'push' and 'pull' communication vehicles.

Examples include:

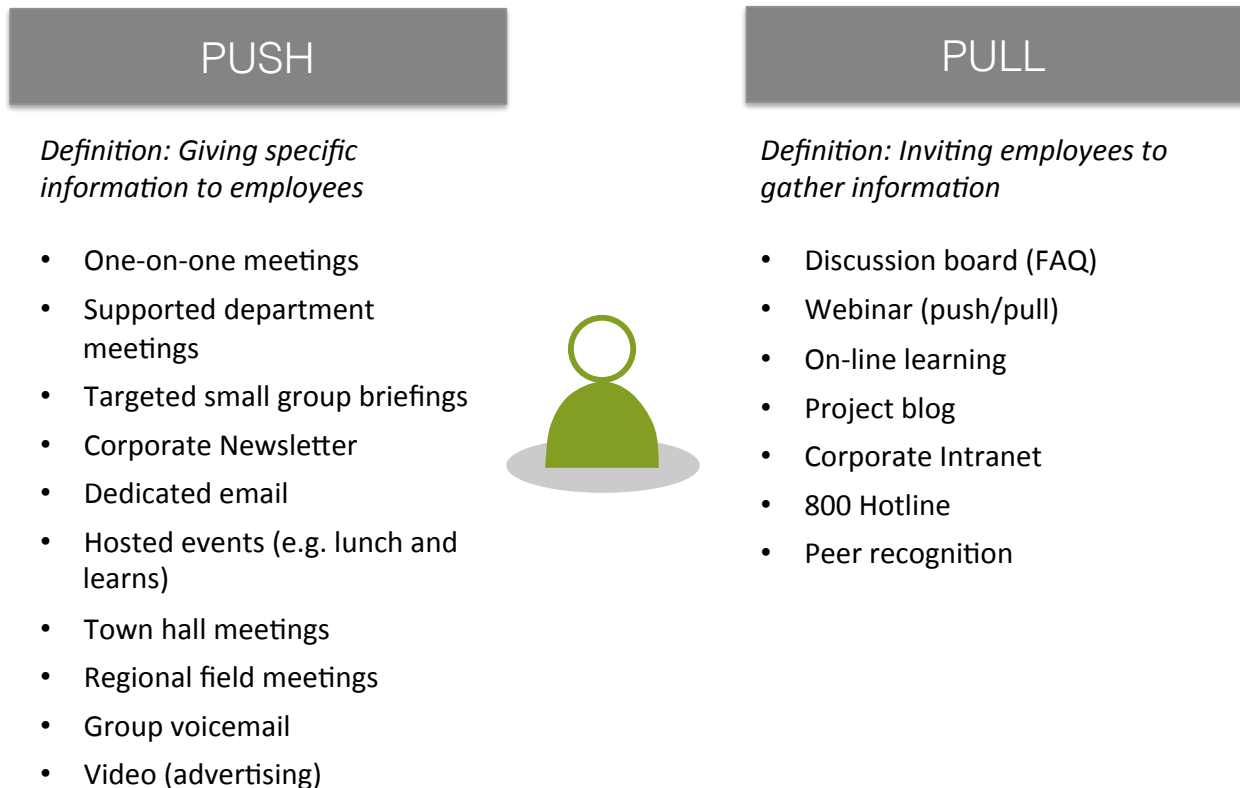


Figure 2: Communication Vehicles

Final Word

A good communication strategy should be at the heart of any successful change management process. It is important that an effective communication strategy is defined around the reasons, benefits, plans, and proposed effects of the change. This communication strategy should be updated as necessary and maintained throughout the duration of the change management program. Lastly, remember that it is almost impossible to over-communicate when leading change.

The Parker Avery Group

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