

Principles for effective communication

Leaders and managers are the primary change communicators.

Employees typically prefer their direct line manager or senior leaders to tell them face-to-face about changes that will affect them. This reassures them that your organisation values them and cares about how they will be impacted. It is important that managers are well supported to deliver these messages clearly, consistently and at the right time.

For larger change programs, the communications team should provide leaders and managers with regular briefings and information packs so they can engage employees with confidence and respond to questions. You must, to the greatest extent possible, remove any barriers to communication between managers and employees at the beginning of the change journey.

Describe a range of benefits to motivate a diverse audience

Individuals across an organisation are motivated in different ways. What motivates an executive leader to change may not motivate employees. People are often motivated by a desire to:

- help the community
- support their colleagues
- see the organisation succeed
- understand benefits, such as recognition, professional development, career progression or better work-life balance.

Your communication should address benefits across these motivational drivers, so messages resonate with a larger proportion of the workforce.

Build cohesion

Employees need support to understand how different change initiatives fit together to deliver the overall vision. Ensure the vision is clear, expressed in simple terms and supported by practical examples of what will be different in the future. Use the vision consistently to anchor and frame communications about the change.

Keep it simple and memorable

Develop a graphical representation of the change project that people can easily understand and remember. This may include a flowchart or a visual depiction of the future state.

For larger programs, a shared brand or visual identity can help employees see how different activities connect. A well-designed name, logo or tagline can reinforce the purpose of the change and remind employees of what the change journey is really about. This helps maintain a sense of connection to the benefits the organisation is striving to achieve.

Be honest

Fear and uncertainty can stall progress during change. Address this by sharing facts, acknowledging challenges and helping people anticipate potential impacts. Be honest about difficulties and demonstrate confidence in the organisation's ability to work through them.

Listen

Make communication a two-way process. Spend as much time listening to what people are saying about the initiative as you do sharing information. Use feedback to adjust the approach and strengthen implementation.

Use evidence to explain the change and report on progress

Draw on evidence from the case for change to explain why the change is needed. Clearly define success and how progress will be measured. Evidence helps reinforce that change is purposeful and shows that concerns raised earlier are being addressed.

Use a range of communication channels

Use a mix of communication styles and channels appropriate for your audience. This increases the likelihood messages are received and understood. Common channels include newsletters, intranet content, emails, briefings, events, posters and roadshows.

Social media and other digital tools may be appropriate when:

- employees need timely access to information across locations
- people are encouraged to share views and contribute directly
- change is large-scale or spans multiple sites
- there is capacity to monitor and manage content
- leaders are willing to model use of the technology.

Think carefully before using social media and digital tools when:

- the change is highly contentious and likely to generate anger
- the workforce has limited access to or confidence with digital tools
- the change is small and communication can be managed effectively through direct, local channels.