



Change Management



Don't Just Tell Employees Organizational Changes Are Coming — Explain Why

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Employees around the world are reporting that big organizational changes are affecting their jobs. From leadership transitions and restructurings, to mergers and acquisitions, to regulatory changes, there seems to be constant unrest in the workforce. But according to one survey of more than half a million U.S. employees, almost one-third don't understand why these changes are happening.

This can be detrimental for any company trying to implement change. When employees don't understand why changes are happening, it can be a barrier to driving ownership and commitment and can even result in resistance or push back. And employees' resistance to change is a leading factor for why so many change transformations fail.

Executives and those responsible for leading change cannot assume that employees understand the reasoning behind them. You must spend time explaining the changes and *why* they are important. Based on my experience supporting organizational change initiatives, there are four key aspects to helping employees understand change, to drive commitment, and to ultimately contribute to your success.

Inspire people by presenting a compelling vision for the future.

During times of uncertainty, people experiencing change want a clear view of the path ahead. It's important to share what you know – including what's changing, when, and how. But for most change initiatives, it is also helpful to start with a narrative or story that clearly articulates the “big picture” – *why* change is important and *how* it will positively affect the organization long-term. This should serve as the foundation for how you communicate about the change moving forward.

To be successful, your story needs to start with the company's core mission and then offer a compelling and inspiring future vision. You want to answer: How are the changes you make today helping you achieve your vision for tomorrow?

For example, in 2017 our client FMC Corporation was preparing to acquire a significant part of DuPont's Crop Protection business, which would transform FMC into the fifth-largest crop protection company in the world. As part of their change story, they developed a unifying

internal communications campaign called the “Nature of Next” that articulated the reasoning and vision for the acquisition.

The campaign explained how FMC would gain a broader product portfolio, an expanded global footprint, and full-discovery R&D capabilities – all of which helps them achieve their aspirations of helping customers feed a growing population in a sustainable way. While the integration is still underway, the campaign generated excitement for the acquisition among employees, and is still used today to communicate the promise of the new FMC.

Change events are often uncertain, unstable, stressful, and risky. But having a clear meaning or purpose behind the change will strengthen your case. If you can clearly articulate this case, employees will also build a better understanding of the business strategy.

Keep employees informed by providing regular communications.

Change communications is never a one-and-done event; keeping employees informed is something that you will have to do throughout every step of the change process. Studies have found that continual communication is a leading factor in a transformation’s success. When thinking about how to communicate, keep the following in mind:

Be clear and consistent: All of your communications should tie back to the narrative that you developed, reiterating the case for change and presenting a compelling future vision.

You will not have all the answers: Often times, you will not have all the answers employees are looking for, and that breeds anxiety and uncertainty. It’s important to focus on what you know, and be candid about what you don’t. If you do not have an answer, say so. When this occurs, it’s important to let employees know you are committed to

communicating openly and transparently, and will follow-up as soon as you know more.

Don't forget to articulate "What's in it for me?": One of the most important phrases you may come across in change communications is "what's in it for me?" If your employees understand what's in it for them personally, you're more likely to see individuals commit to and own the change. Failing to articulate "what's in it for me" will only hinder your efforts.

A few years ago, I supported change communications for the integration of two leading companies in animal health. A leader at one of the organizations was exceptionally good at communicating how individual employees would benefit from the merger. And it wasn't just about new job opportunities or increased market share. He reinforced how it would carry out their shared passion for keeping animals healthy, and how together, the two organizations would be able to offer new solutions, products, and technologies to customers that would not have been possible before.

Empower leaders and managers to lead through change. Major changes or transformations often require asking employees to adopt specific behaviors or skillsets in order to be successful. And when senior leaders model the behavior changes, transformations are five times more likely to be successful.

Leaders not only need to be equipped with information and resources, but they need to feel confident leading through change. This can be especially challenging, as leaders encounter more pressure to provide better answers and to support their teams. But how your leadership reacts to change will trickle down and impact your managers, who then impact your employees and their engagement.

To empower leaders and managers, executives and change leads should help them understand the fundamentals of change, including how to be an effective leader during times of change, how individuals react to and navigate change, and how to address roadblocks or areas of resistance.

Recently, I attended an offsite meeting for a client that was undergoing a major transformation of their shared services organization. While a vast majority of the offsite was focused on *why* the organization was changing and *what* would be happening, they carved out specific time to train and upskill leaders, the individuals who would ultimately be responsible for driving the change.

Leaders could select from trainings on a range of topics, including how automation and artificial intelligence are changing their business, how to apply Design Thinking to solve business problems, and fundamentals of change management. For example, during Design Thinking sessions, leaders were asked to problem solve and develop solutions around real-life challenges employees may face during the transformation. As a result, leaders walked away better equipped to support *how* they would drive the transformation forward.

Find creative ways to involve employees in the change. When planning for major change events, it is important to solicit feedback and engage people in the process. This helps build ownership in the change, and makes employees more likely to support the change and even champion it.

In preparation for FMC's crop protection transaction with DuPont, more than 150 FMC employees were nominated by leaders to be part of the Change Champion Network. The group was established to engage their peers, answer questions, and excite employees about the future of the

company. The group was an essential resource for fellow employees, and served as a channel for two-way feedback for leadership.

Another way to engage employees and drive commitment is to recognize those individuals who are embracing the change and demonstrating desired behaviors. For instance, a recent client wanted to drive a culture shift that was more open and transparent, and engage employees around recently launched corporate values. As part of the rollout, the company introduced a new award that recognized employees who were living their corporate values both inside and outside of work. Employees could nominate their peers, and winners were voted on by the entire organization and revealed at an all-employee town hall. Not only did this reward those who were role models for change, but it allowed the entire organization to become engaged in the process.

Being able to effectively lead change within your organization is crucial – and impacts more your culture and your bottom line. Companies who are highly effective at change management are three and a half times more likely to significantly outperform industry peers.

Assuming employees understand the changes your company is going through will jeopardize your change initiative. So the next time you're approaching a change project, be sure to think about how you can **inspire, inform, empower, and engage** your most powerful ambassadors – and successfully lead your company into the future.



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