

A Quick Guide to Communicating Change

Is Your Organization Ready
for What's Next?

An unprecedented disruption

- The COVID-19 pandemic has brought upheaval and shifting norms to many aspects of our personal and professional lives. Some of the profound change organizations now face include:
 - **Dramatic and fluctuating impacts to operating environments**
 - **Major pivots in the what, why, where and how work gets done**
 - **New processes, policies, priorities and needs**
 - **New expectations of employees, stakeholders, clients and customers**
 - **Extreme budgetary and human resource pressures**
 - **Existing weaknesses, threats and trends compounded/accelerated**
 - **Realignment of mandates, plans and strategies**

Managing change and uncertainty

- The need for clarity, reassurance, and keeping everyone on the same page has never been greater.
- Change, both forced and voluntary, is now constant. Uncertainty has become the new normal.
- Internal resistance to this change is inevitable in most organizations and will have to be overcome.
- To manage this change and new ways of doing business, a renewed focus on developing change communication activities and materials has become imperative.

What is change communication?

- At its core, change communication deals with communication efforts designed and deployed to enable transformation related to an organization's policies, structures, mandates, mission, vision, as well as consequences from external events.
- Change communication goals can include:
 - **Providing the right information at the right time**
 - **Getting buy-in**
 - **Altering behaviour or motivating action**
 - **Influencing decisions**
 - **Maintaining cultural and financial stability**
 - **Maximizing positive impacts**
 - **Reducing negative impacts**
- In all cases, change communication is aimed at mitigating risk.

What makes change communication different?

- Change communication is not the same as other forms. Here are some of the most important elements for organizational leaders to consider:
 - **Real change succeeds when it is communicated and championed from the top and supported by allies, partners, and enablers from within.**
 - **Top executives and management leadership are expected to maintain near constant engagement with timely messages that convey accurate factual knowledge, confidence, and support.**
 - **Greater focus on conversational, two-way feedback is essential (especially in what are now often virtual-only interactions) in both collective and individual contexts.**
 - **Considerations surrounding emotional and psychological well-being of staff, as well as the impacts on moral and productivity, are a high priority.**
 - **Resistance to change must not only be expected but matched carefully and equally. Communication mechanisms should allow for revisions and flexibility in implementation based on reactions and performance measurements.**

So where do you begin?

As with other aspects of internal-facing communication, change communication requires the application of a distinct set of approaches and guiding principles to be effective and achieve the desired outcomes.

When thinking about developing winning strategies for change communication, your approach should be centred around NIVA's concept of **AGILITY**:

- **Adaptable**
- **Grounded**
- **Intelligent**
- **Leader-driven**
- **Integrated**
- **Trustworthy**
- **Yielding**

Let's explore these components a little further...

Adaptable...

...to respond to evolving operating conditions and future uncertainties. Change is rarely linear, with frequent stops, starts, and even U-turns.

Effective change communication will accelerate this process but expect the unexpected. The road less traveled is always bumpier but the desired destination makes the trip worthwhile. Having a clear map to help you navigate this journey will make all the difference.



Grounded...

...in your organization's vision, mission, and guiding principles.

Be authentic and personal. Align what you say with people's expectations. Be clear as to why this change is being pursued and what the ultimate goals and expected outcomes are.

Changing course is not easy, but much more likely to be accepted if those being impacted aren't left in the dark and agree on intentions behind related decision making.

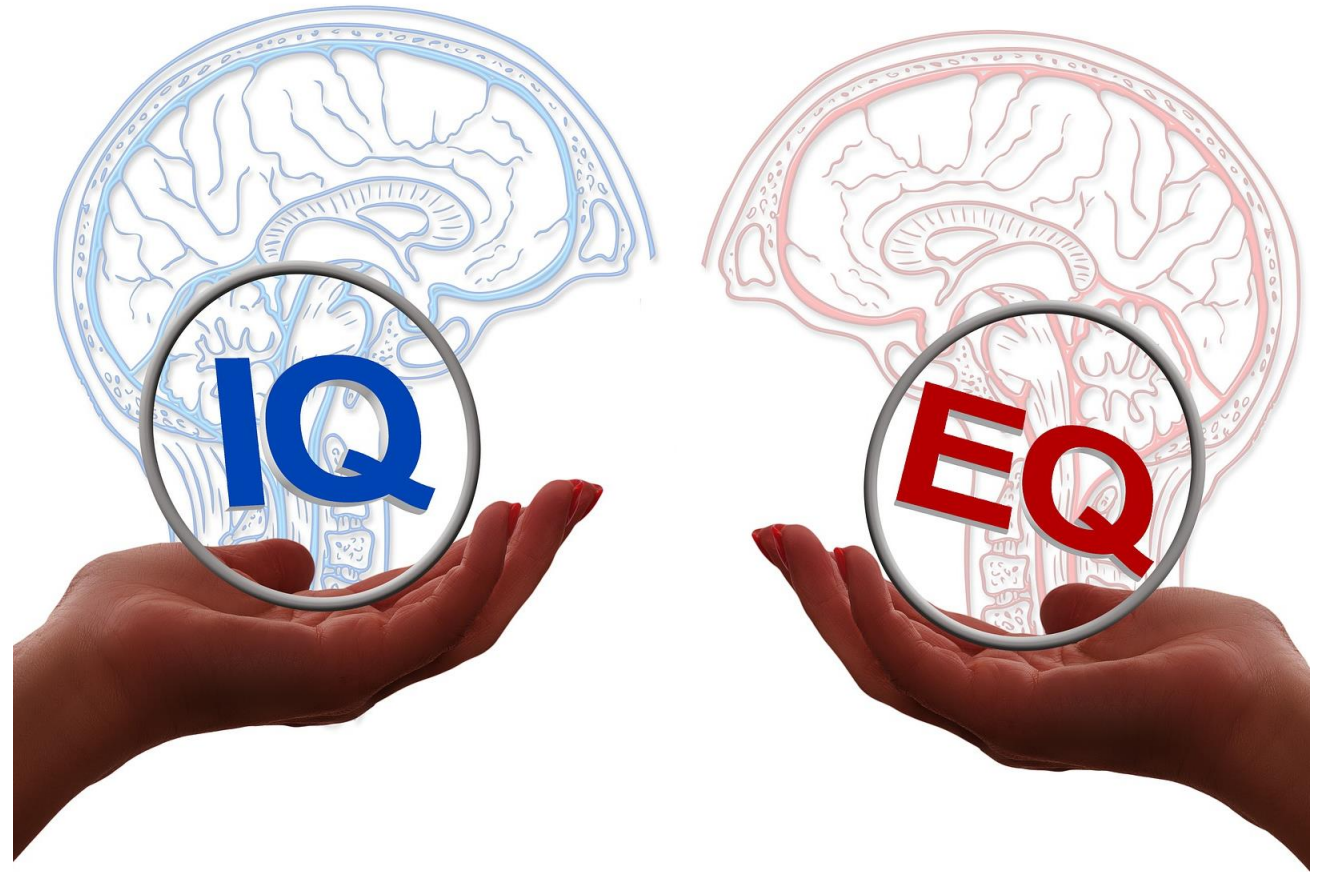


Intelligent...

...across both intellectual and emotional spectrums.

To help win both hearts and minds, sensitivity, empathy, and compassion must form the backbone of your approach in addition to logic, reason, and sound analysis.

This is a human exercise before anything else, so treat is as such.



Leader-driven...

...communication with reinforcement from management and echoed by working-level communicators.

Larger organizations especially face significant inertia to achieving major changes.

Overcoming barriers to these processes have the greatest chance of succeeding when those with the greatest authority act as champions who set the right tone and cut through the noise by rising above it.



Integrated...

...within all parts of the organization and applied through timely, consistent and well-coordinated messages by all those with responsibility for delivering them.

Nothing will derail change communication plans faster than information being shared that is inconsistent or contradictory. Rogue messengers need not apply. This must be a team effort with all participants reading from the same playbook.



Trustworthy...

...to build confidence in proposed changes and ease possible fears, anxiety, disruption, and destabilization.

Communication activities must maintain credibility and trust through transparency, ongoing dialogue, and mutual understanding.

People are much more willing to take a leap of faith when they feel safe, knowing that you have their backs no matter what might happen in stormy seas.



Yielding...

...to feedback and flexible to modification if something isn't working.

Ensure that you have the capacity to monitor and measure the performance of your communication efforts and respond quickly to any identified gaps or weaknesses.

Nothing is more dangerous than moving forward with change when you can't see the horizon in front of you, or not adjusting your speed when your organization isn't behind you, ready to take the wheel.



5 best practices for communicating change

1. Through learning, adapting, and remaining flexible, one of your primary change communication goals should be an organization that is significantly more resilient.
2. Invite and involve employees to be partners and advocates for the change you are seeking. Never give your employees any reason to think that their interests aren't first and foremost.
3. Demonstrate genuine interest in concerns raised by staff, management, and other stakeholders. Monitor feedback closely and adjust your approach accordingly.
4. Be prepared for human nature. Change communication is often about managing emotional and psychological reactions in times of uncertainty and high stress.
5. Be honest and open about what you know and what you don't know. Address any rumours, speculation, or misinformation immediately and assertively.

Ready to get started?

You don't need to do this alone.

- Now is the time to assess the status quo and analyze your communication-related decision making, processes, and content development. To examine what's worked well, what hasn't, and why. To assess your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. To consider what your goals and objectives are and what it will take to achieve them.
- In the face of managing important change and related challenges, this exercise will help you build a strong foundation for success and enable you to engage, inform, and motivate your organization through turbulent times. It will help you overcome the inevitable resistance, both internal and external, that can put your efforts at risk of failure.
- NIVA has over four decades of experience in helping guide organizations towards positive change through better communication. Our deep insight enables us to build thoughtful approaches that respond to the distinct needs of target audiences and get results.
- If you are ready to build an **AGILITY**-focused change communication strategy and related activities for your organization, contact us today: info@niva.com or visit: www.niva.com



Engage. Inform. Motivate.
Communicate better.

NIVA
NIVA Inc.
WWW.NIVA.COM