

WHITE PAPER

A Guide to Effective Change Management

Decoding the know-how to ensure acceptance of organizational changes successfully with communication



“They always say time changes things, but you must change them yourself.”

Andy Warhol

We’re living in an agile-changing world. With technology and business practices evolving at breakneck speeds, ensuring employees skillfully adapt to the changing time is imperative to business success. However, countering employee readiness for change continues to be a challenge, even today.

Changes - whether big or small, such as getting used to mergers and acquisitions, using a new piece of technology, changing leadership positions, etc., often impact the talent pools’ morale and performance. Thus, introducing and implementing a change in an organization can be a challenging affair.

Statistically,



Only 34% of changes achieve the fruition of change initiatives without encountering significant difficulties.



Two-thirds of staff experience burnout when drastic changes are implemented, which often leads to organizational transformation failure.

Ignoring the personal impact that organizational changes can have on employees often results in resentment, resistance, and outcomes like rising attrition. Therefore, being sensitive and communicating the right message at the right time is critical to help different individuals to adapt to the changes with more perceived personal agency.

This whitepaper examines strategies to empower intern communicators and HR professionals to ace change management.



CHANGE MANAGEMENT AND ITS IMPORTANCE

Change management is a planned and systematic method of dealing with different transitions a company undergoes to achieve its goals and processes. These changes may include drastic organization-wide changes such as shifting to a new product line or accepting new management, adaptive changes like getting used to new technology tools, a team change, or an evolved modus operandi. Sometimes, it could also include dealing with a specific cluster of organizational individuals resisting change.

Effective change management focuses on enabling various stakeholders to adapt to changes in a humanely acceptable manner so that they are not rejected and accepted effectively. Though universally relevant, this knowledge is more critical in organizations where employees are used to a particular working method to want to transition toward a changing working environment.

In essence, change management helps to:

- Groom staff and decision-makers to adapt to all sorts of changes, adjust to new realities and learn evolving organizational processes and operations.
- Implement a process to plan and test the success of change implementation.



- Effectively communicate changes to employees without seeming abrupt or chaotic (even when the reality may be such).
- Document changes so that you can maintain an audit trail if you need to take a step back or if there are certain other exigencies.
Documentation is also necessary to comply with various regulatory requirements, both internal and external.

Read More: [Navigating Internal Communications Compliance in the Age of Employee Apps](#)

Successfully navigating the waters of change management starts with understanding the possible cause behind the resistance and its stages in the first place. The next step is using the right communication to address the concerns.



UNDERSTANDING WHY EMPLOYEES RESIST CHANGES AND ITS STAGES

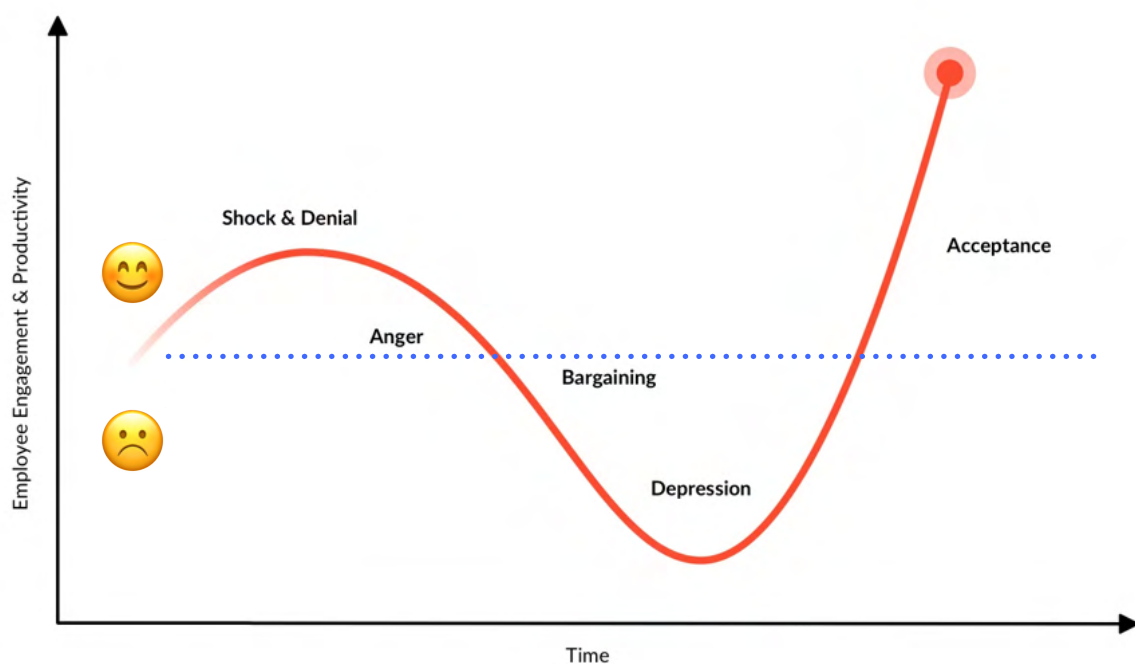
Whether junior or senior, employees universally have an innate tendency to work from their comfort zones. Commonly, they tend to resist change due to the following reasons:

- 1 Fear of the unknown and insecurities.
- 2 Refusal to learn something new.
- 3 Grief related to lost habits and practices.
- 4 Frustration while encountering something difficult.
- 5 Awareness of losing what was once familiar and dear.

Consequently, any change to established practices often ends up causing psychological discomfort, and this needs to be handled.



Sailing through the journey from psychological distress to acceptance of change is possible and is explained in a well-established psychological theory. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' famous book 'On Death and Dying' was the first to propose how people initially resist a terminal illness diagnosis or a loved one's death but eventually come to terms with it and accept their condition. Although implementing an organizational change at the workplace does not equate to a terminal illness or the grief one experiences during a loved one's death, it follows a similar trajectory of undesirable changes that result in complex emotions that mimic grief. Thus, the Kübler-Ross Change Curve described in the book is an excellent starting point to understand how people wade through initial shock and denial to accept with time.



Here is a detailed explanation of it based on the five stages of grief and how the complex emotions can play out in an organization implementing changes:

1 Shock and denial

When introducing a change in the company, such as using a new software application or a new manager, team members may react with shock and disappointment. After all, they are usually used to working a certain way and feel comfortable continuing with how things are. They may not want to admit that their cherished (but ineffective) practices are ending, and they will have to learn new ways of working. This can cause a denial of reality and a refusal to accept the changes.

To address this, as an internal communicator or HR manager, you must ensure employees are explained why these changes are put in place and how the previous practices did not help your organization. Focus on candid communication and two-way discussions. However, be prepared that employees may react to this information with disappointment, anxiety, and anger.

Read More: [Internal Comms Strategy 2/4: Two-Way Communication](#)

2 Anger

Once you communicate about change implementation, individuals may quietly resent this news as a reflex. They could experience anger, frustration, and a lack of motivation.

Proper communication is the key at this stage, as anger can quickly become self-sabotaging and lead to burnout, loss of productivity, and ultimately attrition.



For this, you must consider regular, one-to-one conversations with them and learn what bothers them the most about the change. This may not be possible in a large organization, but using easily accessible communication tools can help you ensure everyone feels heard.

3 Bargaining

When you persist so far, the next stage comes around where employees understand that older ways of working are no longer acceptable, and they have to get used to the new reality. At this stage, most employees make cognitive efforts (thoughts and beliefs) to make small steps toward accepting new working methods. However, they may still feel negative emotions and a feeling of helplessness. This may often result in frustration, disappointment, and an urge to request or bargain for possibilities of returning to older ways, as they're fragile at this stage.

When you sense your employees are bargaining internally, you must help them transition by implementing effective training programs. Your role as a communicator is to skillfully hand-lead them toward the desired change from here.

Learn More: [Internal Comms Strategy 3/4: Onboarding and Training](#)

4 Depression

Although the original model describes “depression” in the context of grief, in the organizational context, this may imply negative emotions, such as feeling burned out, irritated, or resentful toward the company. Tackling this is crucial as emotionally drained employees may look for a way out, usually by applying for another job.



To address, you must be sensitive and have a contingency plan to avert and ease the situation. Your intervention plan can be as simple as using an employee communication app to constantly disseminate information regarding the helpfulness of the changes, create events that boost morale, and engage your staff in active conversations. Whatever you choose to do, being proactive is super important.

5 Acceptance

Eventually, your employees will embrace changes with the time, effort, and encouragement. Time has shown that even the most resistant ones accept changes after training, engagement, and motivation.

It helps to get here quicker if you tailor your employee communication campaigns toward acceptance right from the onset. For that, you may create content that helps employees learn more about the changing business practices, conduct webinars and meetings to help them use newer tools more effectively, and regularly send newsletters with tips to adapt to novel strategies. Some employees may desire to use the older tool even at this stage, but in-house counseling and personalized employee communication can help you immensely.



BEST PRACTICES FOR SUCCESSFUL CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Managing change can feel intimidating even to the most seasoned HR professionals and internal communicators. The key to getting it right is understanding the human mind and creating conversations and communication collateral that help manage change effectively.

Here are five evidence-based best practices you can follow to manage change successfully in your organization:

1 Focus on ensuring a crystal-clear communication culture

According to a study by [Bagga, Gera, and Haque](#), leaders need to be proactive regarding change management. Their study shows how organizational culture mediates the relationship between change management and transformational leadership. In other words, following a solid corporate culture focused on clear communication helps implement change management more effectively. So, the authors propose that leaders must implement information and communication tools to facilitate a culture of multi-directional communication.

Suggested Read: [Crafting a Positive Company Culture: Tips for Supporting Workers](#)



2 Consider implementing robust Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies

Not all people have the same capabilities to accept changes. In that vein, according to Damon, Katrina, and Wade-Golden, diversity and inclusion efforts are critical to navigating change management successfully.

For example, suppose you deploy a new tech tool for internal communication and expect everyone to use it effortlessly; your deployment may fail. There may be an out-and-about front-line workforce who may find it challenging to use the tool, or you may have older employees who need to be more tech-savvy and therefore resist the change. Your chief diversity officer (or whoever handles the diversity and inclusion aspect of things) should be able to understand individual employees' unique needs and ensure that change management is a success.

Suggested Read: Is Technology an Obstacle for Your DEI Initiatives?

3 Don't make the mistake of neglecting employee resistance

Resistance has practical implications that may result in the failure of change management. Hence, some scholars believe addressing opposition through a micro-interpersonal lens is essential. Bianca Brandes and Yi-Ling Lai noted that to do so, the coaching process is an invaluable tool.



The authors suggest that individuals' emotional and cognitive should be addressed during change management as several micro-factors, such as personal experiences, previous knowledge, culture, etc, come into play. So you must ensure your change management involves an effective individual coaching plan considering the different micro factors.

4 Reinforce the idea that change is continuous

A study conducted on Chinese managers subjected to mergers and acquisitions showed that they tend to accept that "change is a way of life." In a scientific article that published the observations of this study, the authors noted that change is the only form of continuity and that staff needs to be trained to welcome new cultures, even when unpleasant. To help staff cope with continuous change, the authors propose building an "agile organizational identity"(AOI).

AOI helps staff always be ready to accept changes, whether in the form of technologies or leadership. Based on this study, you can create employee communication content highlighting the importance of being open to all kinds of changes at all times.

Read more about [AOI here](#).



5 Focus on self-care and human management

Michel Foucault was a French philosopher whose ideas on self-care, power dynamics, and human relationships changed perceptions and attitudes worldwide. In a recent article published in the *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, a group of authors influenced by Foucaultian theories recommended helping staff focus on self-care to accept organizational changes.

As an employee communication professional or an HR manager, you can train your employees to focus more on self-care, and create campaigns that encourage employees to take more time off when working overtime, etc. Less burned-out employees are more open to changes.

Check out this infographic: [How to Get Frontline Employees On Board With Change](#)



BOTTOM LINE: PROPER COMMUNICATION IS VITAL TO COUNTERING CHANGE RESISTANCE

Change management can get challenging even for the most seasoned employee communication or HR professionals. After all, it involves encountering resistance, complaints, and a general lack of motivation post-implementation.

The key to navigating through these complexities successfully lies in effectively communicating, liaising, and negotiating with all stakeholders. - both at the granular and macro levels.

Using an employee communication app such as [Speakap](#) is an efficient way to communicate internally across the organization and ensure everyone is on the same page. It is designed to mirror your organization's structure, making reaching different teams and monitoring progress easy - even as a solo communicator.

Read More: [4 Tips for Solo Internal Communicators to Supercharge Their Efficiency](#)



The application is tailor-made so that it is equally easy to use for the in-office staff and even the out-and-about frontline workforce.

As per average Speakap usage results, organizations have witnessed:



Contact us today to learn how you can use Speakap to communicate effectively with your employees and implement successful change management communication.



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