Change Communication Deployment Strategies

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The Executive Council for Leading Change (ECLC) assembled a roundtable of seasoned executives to dig into the topic of Change Communication Deployment Strategies

Effective communication is pivotal in guiding organizations through various stages of change. The insights gathered from our recent roundtable with ECLC members spotlight the importance of a strategic communication deployment. By being intentional in how a message is conveyed and its content, change leaders can increase and secure buy-in across all levels of an organization.

Roundtable Participants

Led by **Brittany Gunter**
Chapter Lead of ECLC

CK Taneja
Senior Vice President
Enterprise Resiliency
Northern Trust Corporation

Iris McQuillan-Grace
Head of Employee Experience
OLIVER Agency

Vanessa Hammett
Change Communications Lead
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Annette Mychael
People, Process and Change Lead
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Ted Nevins
Senior Director,
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Benjy Grover
Chief Transformation Officer
**Lawrence Livermore
National Laboratory**

Kendall Knight
CIO
Loomis

Arkesh Mishra
Head of People
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Key Questions Answered

? How do you **communicate the purpose and goals of a change initiative** to your organization?

? What are the most significant **challenges you've faced in communicating change at different stages (initial announcement, planning, implementation, post-implementation),** and how did you strategically overcome them?

? How do you **sustain momentum and keep key stakeholders** engaged throughout the various stages of a change initiative?

? What **key metrics and feedback mechanisms have you found most effective** in evaluating and refining your change communication strategies across different stages?

3 Important Elements to Look for before Deploying Change Communications

Clearly Defined Goals

Without a clearly defined goal, it can not only be difficult to ascertain if a change initiative has been impactful on an organization but it can also be difficult to create key messaging around it. As in, it's difficult to explain the rationale behind a change to others if the rationale behind the change is itself unclear. Change leaders are well positioned to help senior executives **pinpoint the organizational issue they want to tackle** and what will truly push the needle forward.

Executive Sponsorship

Where possible, having a senior executive that actively backs a change initiative can really help with its overall adoption. **Senior executives make for excellent change champions,** as they often have the social capital and clout to make things happen. Bringing in senior executives early in the planning stages and asking for their input can increase the likelihood of executive sponsorship of various change initiatives.

Metrics

It's not only important to define metrics that will examine how the implementation is going but also metrics that measure how long-term adoption is going. **Having comparative data points** (before and after the change) also helps to point out how change initiatives (and the efforts of the transformation office) are positively impacting the organization.

5 Change Communication Deployment Strategies

Ongoing Feedback

As change initiatives are fleshed out and progressively launched, anonymous feedback from employees can be incredibly useful. **Adjusting initiatives based on this feedback** ensures that changes align with organizational needs and can also increase adoption rates. Early feedback not only shows progress on large-scale changes but also allows for timely adjustments, where and when needed.

Small Group Learning and Hackathons

Certain changes, like adopting new technologies, can be very daunting. By creating small, expert-led learning sessions, employees can try out new processes or tools in a supportive environment. Creating hackathons for different teams can also help foster collaboration, healthy competition, and, most of all, skill-building. **Hands-on learning in environments where it is safe to fail** can turn apprehension into enthusiasm.

Pre-Recorded Announcements

With global teams, synchronizing communication across a workforce is challenging. **Utilizing pre-recorded messages from senior leadership** helps to ensure consistency and prevent misinformation. Some platforms (like Tigerhall) can centralize and ease the transmission of these communications, becoming a central source of truth.

Strong Senior Executive Sponsorship

Where possible, securing the **active and visible support of a senior executive** can really help push an initiative forward. It's not just about passive approval from senior leadership but active, visible support. This distinction can be crucial for the successful, rapid adoption of a change initiative.

Explore Connections with Employee Programs

When there is a strong connection, create a link between change initiatives and existing Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) or high-potential programs. By doing so, change leaders can **leverage the commitment and engagement of employees** who are already deeply invested in these groups. These engaged employees can then become champions for the changes, advocating for them within the organization and helping to drive faster & broader acceptance.

6 Successful Approaches to Communicate Change

Habit Stacking

To ease the adoption of new changes, introduce them progressively and **link them to existing habits, procedures, or corporate processes.** This method minimizes disruption and resistance, making the new changes feel like a more natural, seamless integration to the status quo. By building upon routines that employees are already comfortable with, change leaders can more seamlessly introduce changes and new practices.

Bottom-Up over Top-Down

Instead of relying on a directive, top-down approach, focus on highlighting the benefits for employees. Shift the narrative to emphasize how the changes will positively impact their day-to-day work or better align with their values. This approach **fosters a sense of ownership and personal investment in the change,** making employees more likely to support and engage with new initiatives. Encouraging input and feedback from employees at all levels can also uncover potential issues early and provide ideas that might improve the change process.

Central Dashboards

Implement centralized dashboards to **track and communicate the progress of change initiatives across the organization.** These dashboards can serve as a critical tool for fostering engagement, transparency, and visibility beyond the transformation office to the entire organization. By providing real-time updates and accessible information, employees can stay informed about the progress and impact of change efforts. This transparency helps build trust and keeps everyone aligned towards common goals.

Multiple, Small Touch Points

Maintain regular communication about the highlights and status of change initiatives through various touch points led by different stakeholders. By consistently weaving change-related information into these diverse touch points, change leaders keep important changes at the forefront of employees' minds. Continuous communication helps reinforce the significance of the initiatives and better integrates them into the everyday work environment, improving the likelihood of successful adoption.

Highlighting Success Stories

Emphasize and showcase stories of employees who have successfully embraced the change and experienced positive impacts on their work. These narratives can serve as **powerful and relatable examples for other employees,** illustrating the benefits of the change and inspiring them to follow suit. Success stories not only validate the change initiatives but also help create a positive culture around change. Sharing these stories through various internal communication channels can amplify their reach and influence within the organization.

Message Segmentation

It's important to take enough time to properly segment audiences within an organization and create messaging that will appeal to them. One size does not fit all, especially when it comes to **fitting change initiatives within the different segments' values and priorities.** With proper message segmentation, more workers are onboard with important change initiatives which facilitates their broader adoption across the organization.

6 Common Challenges Faced

Can't Rip the Bandaid

Navigating large-scale changes can be challenging, as **employees seek clarity about their roles and future within their organization.** They want to know exactly how certain changes will impact them. However, the gradual and complex nature of implementing major changes means it's not always feasible for senior executives to provide immediate, comprehensive details and plans. This situation is also made more difficult by teams working in different time zones, where there is no good time to make an announcement to all those involved. Unfortunately, not being able to rip the bandaid often lowers workplace morale and increases turnover.

Resistance to Spearheading Change

Senior leaders are often reluctant to be the spokesperson of a change, especially if there's an organizational history of failed or divisive change initiatives. It's important to remind them that, by not controlling the narrative, the messaging of the change is no longer in their hands. Where there is a lack of information, rumors and uneasiness fill the void.

Leading Multiple Changes at Once

If employees could focus on one change initiative at a time, they would have an easier time truly adopting new processes. However, the reality is that several change initiatives might be needed at any given time, made necessary by the market or by the realities of the organization. **New changes thwart the implementation process of any ongoing initiative,** diverting focus and interfering with implementation timelines. It's important to continue the implementation with less impacted teams but to communicate how new change initiatives will slow down company-wide adoption of any ongoing, active initiatives.

Speed of Change vs. Technology

When the speed of technological advances surpasses the speed of implemented changes, it can feel like companies are always trying to play catchup. Remember to keep your workplace motivated by celebrating milestones, even in a **never-ending marathon of adopting cutting edge technology.**

Being Leery of Catch Phrases

"Efficiency" and "lean" are more and more being associated with organizational restructuring which, to the ear of an employee, sounds like "firing". **Overusing catch phrases** that don't go into the specifics of a change can cause a lot of anxiety amongst a workforce and should be replaced, where possible, with certainties and details on the plan ahead.

The Perfectionist Trap

Senior executives sometimes shy away from allowing a change to occur until all details are in order and just right. However, there is often **no perfect way to lead** any change initiative and the only way to improve change initiatives is to learn by experience over time. By helping executives let go of perfectionism, more important work can be done and more needed changes can be made, in a timely manner.

6 Notable Quotes from the Roundtable

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Leading change is more about evolution than about transformation. The speed at which technology is changing makes it critical for organizations to keep evolving and reinventing themselves.

Ted Nevins
Senior Director, Communications
Travelers

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Reinforce change through habit stacking: attaching change to existing processes. This reduces overwhelm for employees, embeds the change, and reinforces that the change is the next step in the evolving process

Iris McQuillan-Grace
Head of Employee Experience
OLIVER Agency

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It's important to involve frontline managers in change initiatives, to truly gauge how adoption is going and how it's evolving after the project is done.

Kendall Knight
CIO
Loomis

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Communicating important changes through gamification brings out an excitement for learning and a healthy competitiveness that makes the implementation of changes that much easier.

CK Taneja
Senior Vice President Enterprise Resiliency
Northern Trust Corporation

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After a change initiative is implemented, it's important to take the time and resources needed to truly embed the change.

Vanessa Hammett
Change Communications Lead
Mars

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Catch phrases communicated across an organization often don't work. The success of a change initiative often hinges on touching base with the right audience with the right message at the right time.

Annette Mychael
People, Process and Change lead
GroupM

Conclusion

Navigating the complexities of organizational change requires well-orchestrated communication strategies that are adapted to the type of change initiative that is being worked on. The approaches discussed in this brief underscore the significance of the gradual reinforcement of changes and the visibility that employees as well as senior leaders need to get invested in these transformations. By implementing these strategies, leaders can not only mitigate resistance but also cultivate a workforce that is resilient and adaptable to change.

The Executive Council for Leading Change

The Executive Council for Leading Change (ECLC) is a global organization that brings executives together to redefine the landscape of organizational change and transformation. Our council's aim is to advance strategic leadership expertise in the realm of corporate change by connecting visionary leaders. It's a place where leaders responsible for significant change initiatives can collaborate, plan, and create practical solutions for intricate challenges in leading large organizations through major shifts.

In a world where change is constant, we recognize its crucial role in driving business success.

ECLC's mission is to create a community where leaders can excel in guiding their organizations through these dynamic times.

Interested in joining ECLC?

Learn the membership criteria and sign-up here

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