



Leader Guide: Communicate a Reconfiguration

This guide is a starting point for leaders to use to create an effective communication plan that will support employees shifting from the “old” way of working to the “new” way of working. We recommend using this guide during the planning stage of your reconfiguration and re-visiting throughout implementation and sustaining stages.

Organizational change can be confusing and uncomfortable for employees. We recommend incorporating these communication best practices into your implementation plan as you support your employees through a reconfiguration.

A general plan we recommend is to notify:

- **Impacted Employees** – 1:1 meeting with leader and impacted employee to discuss changes. Depending on the type of impact a notification letter and/or updated job description may be provided to the employee. Additionally, depending on the change, it may be appropriate for your HR partner to join the meeting.
- **Teams and Departments** – An all-hands meeting to discuss the strategic vision and mission of the organization, announce the changes, and provide an opportunity for employees to ask questions. Follow up with an email summarizing the changes and clearly identify where the employees should go with questions or for more information.
- **Clients** – Notify external stakeholders of changes to contacts, services provided, etc. Clearly identify how the changes impact them and how they will benefit from the changes. This will ensure your “clients” are aware of the changes and do not, unintentionally, reinforce the “old” way of doing things.

Tips for communicating organizational change¹:

- ✓ **Repeat the message** (at least) six times using different types of communication (i.e., 1:1, townhall, email, team meeting, etc.)
- ✓ **Vary the medium** – after the first one-on-one conversation, try in-person meetings, phone calls, emails, etc. Consider your audience’s learning and communication styles and vary your medium and message appropriately.
- ✓ **Ensure two-way communication** – create feedback loops and allow time for questions and feedback. Remember to follow up on the feedback even if it is not being adopted. Research shows it is more important for a person to feel heard than it is that their suggestion/idea is followed.
- ✓ **Consider timing** – allow ample time for employees to process the information and ask questions.
- ✓ **Ensure consistency** – keep your message consistent. If multiple managers are responsible for notifying employees, create talking points so a consistent message is shared with employees.
- ✓ **Understanding is more important than agreement** – employees don’t have to agree with the changes, but it is critical that they understand what is and is not changing.

¹ * Source: Adapted from William Bridges and Linkage, 1998 & 2005



Leader Guide: Communicate a Reconfiguration

Build from Connection to Commitment

When preparing to communicate with employees, think of the “3 C’s” - make a **connection**, show **concern**, and most importantly, build **commitment** to the reconfiguration. For the reconfiguration effort to be successful it is key that employees “let go” of the old structure and “grab on” to the new structure as quickly as possible.

The 4-P framework² can be helpful to prepare your communication and craft messages that will **move your team from complying with the change to being committed to the change**.

The framework works with a variety of communication mediums including 1:1, emails, town halls, and more. While every question may not be applicable to your reconfiguration it can be useful to think through each “P” as you develop your communication plan.

4-P Framework Questions	Messages to Communicate
<p>Purpose</p> <p>Why are we doing this? What is the problem we are solving? What would happen if we didn't change? How will I/our team benefit from the new structure? How will our clients benefit from the new structure?</p>	
<p>Picture</p> <p>What will the other side of the change be like? How will the organization become more effective as a result of the change? What is changing and what is not?</p>	
<p>Plan</p> <p>What is the plan for getting where we need to go? What is going to happen over the next X months? What happens first, second and third?</p>	
<p>Part</p> <p>What is my role (in the change)? How will I be impacted (by the change)? What role can I play in making this successful? What kind of support and training will be offered?</p>	

Continue to revisit this framework throughout your implementation as stakeholders ask questions and your plan evolves. Try answering the questions in different ways and consider using different communication channels. Communicating a change is more than information sharing, it’s coaching people to transition to the “new normal” effectively.

² Source: Adapted from William Bridges and Linkage, 1998 & 2005



Leader Guide: Communicate a Reconfiguration

A reconfiguration may result in new reporting relationships and/or the formation of new teams and working relationships. Research shows clarity in role and goals, connection between team members, and mutually agreed upon ways of working (“norms”) are key to establishing a highly effective team. These tools can help you set your organization up for success after a reconfiguration.

Provide Role & Expectation Clarity

Role clarity is critical for any employee, especially when impacted by an organizational change. Undefined and unclear roles can lead to conflict, confusion, and may impact the success of the reconfiguration. Role and expectation confusion can contribute to mediocre performance, frustration, and eventually burnout. Creating role and expectation clarity and ensuring alignment between leaders and teammates sets up the whole team for success!

Put yourself in each team member’s “shoes” and ask yourself ...

- Q1 - What is my role on the team?
- Q2 - What is expected of me?
- Q3 - How do I contribute to the overall mission of the team/organization?
- Q4 - What does success look like in my role?
- Q5 - What is at stake if I fail in my role?

Incorporate your answers into your in-person meetings with impacted employees. This will allow you to understand their current perspective and level of understanding so you can create alignment together.

When to use:

When your reconfiguration includes changes in a position’s responsibilities or in reporting relationships. This can be useful with current employees as well.

Establish Team Norms

Establishing team norms can build team discipline and trust between team members. When managed well, norms help leaders develop the culture they want to create for the team.

Areas to consider when creating norms:

- **Communication** – Address individual behaviors like respect, when to email vs. call vs. meet in person, remote and virtual communication, etc.
- **Decision Making** – Address how decisions are made and how you know when a decision has been made.
- **Work Processes** – Address how work gets done and how to manage work when someone is out of the office.

When to use:

When your reconfiguration includes forming new teams or changes in reporting relationships. This exercise can also increase the effectiveness of existing teams.

Understand Workstyles

Understanding workstyles can help form meaningful and impactful work relationships. The following questions can be useful when forming team norms or in 1:1 discussion with new team members.



Leader Guide: Communicate a Reconfiguration

Start by answering these questions yourself and identifying what you want to communicate to your new direct reports to start building an effective working relationship. Then, incorporate these questions (as appropriate) into your 1:1 meetings with your new direct reports.

1. **What are some misperceptions people have had about you in the past?** Perhaps they haven't said it to you directly, but a friend or family member has jokingly commented about it.
2. **What do you care most about in terms of how work is done?** For instance, think about how you like materials to be prepared for a broad audience.
3. **What are some ways that you tend to communicate?** Some people tend to be direct, but others take a more indirect approach. Consider where you fall on the spectrum.
4. **What are your hot button issues?** Maybe you want to know ahead of time if someone is about to miss a deadline, or you don't like people interrupting you in a meeting.
5. **What are some quirks about you?** For example, one direct report has expressed that he isn't a morning person so asked people to defer critical meetings till after 10 am.

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“Organizations are communities of human beings, not collections of human resources.” – Henry Mintzberg

Use this guide as a starting point as you work with your HR partner to support your impacted employees. Each of us reacts and adapts to change differently. There is no one-size-fits-all approach. Encourage employees to voice their questions, concerns, and misunderstandings and provide opportunities for them to do so. Acknowledge their concerns and partner to move forward – together.

Additional Resources:

Watch	Read
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Elephant, The Rider, and the Path – A Tale of Behavior Change • Want Your Organization to Change? Put Feelings First • Why Change is Hard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Two Biggest Communication Blunders During a Reorg • The Hidden Risk of Unrealistic Expectations in the Workforce • 10 Steps for Establishing Team Norms

Sources: The Center for Creative Leadership; Gartner CEB; Harvard Business Review

Questions? As your strategic partner, unit/department HR partners are your primary contact for reconfigurations. For additional support, contact [Lindsey Micael Fenton](#), Organizational Design Consultant.