



White Paper

Tips for Communicating with Teams During Times of Change

Communicating with your team in times of change can be challenging. While a full change management process is holistic and multi-faceted, here, we provide a few high level suggestions to get you started with the communication process.

Meet face-to-face. Employees prefer to hear about change face-to-face from their manager. Most people like to meet in small groups with their supervisor so they can ask questions and raise concerns early on. The opportunity to provide input increases employee acceptance.

Offer empathy and support. If the news is difficult to hear, your team may look to you for empathy and reassurance before they are ready to focus on the details.

Tell what you know as soon as you know it. If there's an information void, it will probably be filled with rumors. That's why it's a good idea to share information about major change as soon as possible. People need time to reflect on what's happening and what it means for them before the change takes place.

Acknowledge uncertainty. Communicate what you know as soon as possible, but be frank if some decisions have yet to be reached. Employees won't expect you to have all the answers, but they appreciate being kept in the loop nevertheless.

Describe the business case for change. People are more likely to accept change if they understand the business reasons driving the decision. If possible, express the case for change within the context of larger industry trends and the competitive landscape. Even an unpopular decision is more easily accepted when it makes good business sense.

Address "what's in it for me?" Will I have a job? How will the change affect my responsibilities? Who will I report to? Research suggests that up to 50 percent of lost productivity during times of major change is caused by employees looking for answers to questions like these. Addressing the "me" questions early on will help employees move past their uncertainty and focus on their work.

Listen. It's easy to place so much attention on delivering the message that you forget to

listen for feedback. Take your cue from your team; their questions and suggestions may lead to another conversation or viewpoint you hadn't previously considered.

Don't sugarcoat the bad. While you want employees to understand the benefits of change, you don't want to discount any potentially negative consequences. Significant change often comes at a price, and there's no point in glossing it over. Your team members want to know that you understand their concerns and the coming challenges.

Say it again – and again. You'll probably need to restate the case for change and its impact on your team several times. People can't absorb everything in one meeting, especially if emotions are running high. Reinforce important information through follow-up meetings, e-mail, and other forms of communication.

Give it time. After a change, there will always be a period of getting used to things. Let people know this so they have realistic expectations. Some companies find it helpful to protect a 90-day window in which complaints are discouraged.

Herman Miller's Change Management capabilities – part of the Performance Environments suite of services – help leaders communicate with their teams and navigate change successfully. Our proprietary methodology takes a holistic approach to managing the change from beginning to end with consideration for messages, stakeholders, and more. In addition, we identify obstacles to change and include a detailed communication plan that overcomes them by reiterating key messages at critical times. The result: Resistance gives way to enthusiastic acceptance. Workplace change often involves a significant investment in the physical space. Effective Change Management is like an insurance policy that helps you get the most from it. To determine whether the service is right for your organization, contact your Herman Miller salesperson or Herman Miller's Performance Environments group. www.hermanmiller.com/services