

# change

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# Setting the Stage

Increasingly, employee communications practitioners are being called upon to help organizations advance change. From transformation projects to reorganizations to new technology launches, change communications has become an essential imperative. After all, nothing changes without communicating.

As a communicator, some of the most meaningful and satisfying work you can do is as a change agent, helping an organization turn things around through large-scale transformation. Being a change maker allows you to bust out of the narrow confines that so many communicators experience and contribute at a higher, more strategic level to make a real difference. Change work unlocks new opportunities to create, to innovate and to explore uncharted territory. Because transformation is usually connected to leadership and executive decisions, it can also open up opportunities to contribute at the most senior strategic levels of an organization.

That's the good news.

It's also true that change can be very scary. Large scale transformation often triggers anxiety, disruption and destabilization. Leading change is the most difficult thing an organization can do, and the rates of success are sobering. According to McKinsey research, up to 70% of change initiatives fail to achieve the intended result.

This is the paradox of change – it's filled with possibility, but it's also fraught with pitfalls. In my consulting and training practice, as well as through my role as the Director of the Professional Development Institute's Strategic Communications & Change Program at the University of Ottawa, I regularly work with practitioners who are run ragged by the relentless pace of change. They are exhausted by the constant challenge of navigating around its surreptitious landmines. This Guide will help you navigate a path forward in this specialized field, helping you capitalize on its opportunities while protecting you from its inherent risks.

We'll explore some of the fundamentals of change, including the difference between change management and change communications, and the delineation of appropriate roles and responsibilities. I'll also introduce a playbook for change communications, covering key principles, guidance in the area of culture change and tips for working effectively with sponsors.

**As part of the design of the Results Map® Strategic Communications System, this Guide will help you work more effectively with leaders of change. The Results Map® Leader's Guide to Communications includes a companion section on change communications which can help level set key concepts and recommended approaches between the communications practitioner and the change leader.**

# What Makes Change Communications Different?

As change has become business as usual, there is a sharp rise in organizations' requirements for specialized support in change communications. This is emerging as an exciting and meaningful opportunity for communicators to add unique value, since communications is an essential enabler of any transformation or change initiative.

So what's the difference between communications during a period of stability and communications during change? I think it comes down to these essentials:

**Change communications emphasizes the emotional, rather than the intellectual connection to ideas.** One of the biggest mistakes that change leaders make is to try to implement change through information dissemination. This old-school "spray and pray" technique never works because of one basic fact: people experience change in their heart and gut, not in their head. The savvy change communicator helps connect the change to employees by reaching them on an emotive plane. This triggers a significant shift in the strategic and tactical approach to communication. Text heavy, one-way communication

channels such as emails are dialled down, while richer communication experiences delivered through tactics such as round table discussions, town halls and videos are dialled up.

**Success in change communications happens at the leadership level, not the functional level.** One of the aspects of change communications that practitioners find the most disorienting is that the work takes place at the leadership level of the organization, not within the parameters of the communications function. The change communicator becomes the trusted ally and partner of the change sponsor or leaders and as such the locus of contributions tends to happen outside the communications team. In many ways, it's an experience of straddling the world of the change sponsor with that of the communications function, rallying resources such as writing, design, event management and production in service to the change.

See page 22 for an explanation of the various roles in change communications, change management and change leadership and page 23 for definitions of change sponsors, change leaders and change agents.