



# THE BUSINESS. Communicator

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WHAT'S WORKING IN CORPORATE COMMUNICATION

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## FROM THE EDITOR

It's impossible to avoid change, but we can learn how to manage it efficiently and effectively. This issue of TBC sets out to help you do just that. The problem of change fatigue among employees is the subject of debate in our lead article, with some useful pointers on how to avoid it. In one of our main features, you can find out how a company blog provided an unlikely resource for people stranded by Hurricane Katrina last fall, while two consultants from Hill & Knowlton change and internal communications practice share their top ten change issues in our second feature. The change curve, long familiar to practitioners as a change management tool, receives an up-dating at the hands of in this month's Flashpoint Guide. Finally, our opinion piece this month is from Tony Bradley, the new president of UK CIPR. And yes, he wants you to join up.

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## ▶ CHANGE COMMUNICATION

# How can change communication be credible and positive?

Change has been described as the devastating constant and, in recent years, organizations and employees have been forced to adapt to a climate of constant change. But when every other piece of corporate communication is a new initiative, how can communicators avoid change fatigue and keep messages both positive and credible?

**Tim Small**, director of group internal communications at **Compass Group**, believes that it's important that change communication sets out a clear timetable of expectation. One way to do this is by creating a sense of the change journey and its different stages: "Then you can keep coming back to it as the basis for decisions made or communicated." But ultimately what makes change programs credible is evidence of success. "It's important to remind people what stage the organization has reached on the change journey and to make the evidence of change and progress very demonstratable on a day-to-day basis," he says. He believes quick wins should be communicated and all messages kept simple, consistent and relevant to the audience. "For example, explaining to people their objective is to increase sales by £1 per customer helps them understand how their own contribution is part of a multi-million pound target."

**Helen Coley-Smith**, co-founder of **JMHCS Consulting**, agrees that setting a timetable to manage expectation is a good idea. When involved in change projects, she maps out communication programs,

and plans objectives and activities against the classic change curve. This allows the change team to anticipate when different audiences will be going through different stages of the change curve and to ensure that at each stage communication is meeting their needs (see Flashpoint Guide, back page). Increased client requests for measurement of change communication mean this is now an explicit part of the plan.

By showing what stage everyone in the organization has reached, measurement can help pinpoint where your communication priorities lie, according to Small. "Part of that comes from the employee survey — don't ask for feedback and then not act on it." Frequency of communication is another important expectation to set. "Sometimes good communication is telling people there's nothing to tell, otherwise the void is filled with uncertainty and speculation, both of which are hugely destructive," he says.

Coley-Smith believes leaders should also not forget past successes but acknowledge progress and achievement to date, as well as concentrating on the future, to keep ▶

## ► CHANGE COMMUNICATION (CONTINUED)

change fatigue at bay. "Quite often leaders will want to talk about the future when communicating about change, and it can leave people feeling dislocated and debilitated. To remain positive but realistic, we often ask leaders to shift their focus and acknowledge the past, previous achievements and progress, as well as concentrating on the future."

Small and Coley-Smith agree on the importance of audience segmentation in targeting communication. In the specific case of redundancy, you should remember the needs of those who are leaving immediately, those leaving at a future date and those staying on in the organization, says Coley-Smith. "It's easy to assume that people who are staying on in the company are going to be eternally grateful and therefore you don't need to communicate with them, but they may wish they'd taken redundancy too. Not many leaders realize that redundancy is no longer viewed as career suicide but more often as an opportunity," she adds.

It's also important to define the role of engagement in change communication. While Small shies away from over-use of the word engagement, he believes that

getting people involved is vital to making change happen. "The success with which our vision and values were rolled out three years ago was due to people being involved early on in their development." He also advocates allowing people to tell the change story in their own words. "Beyond the communication toolkit, you need to create opportunities to encourage feedback and allow people to express their own creativity. It helps people bring the change to life and build momentum. If it's a long-term journey, it's down to communication to maintain people's interest all the way."

Coley-Smith adds: "Engagement and involvement facilitate behavioral change, which is required to make most change programs a success. According to a recent CIPD study, 50 percent of reorganizations fail to achieve their intended improvements, and 60 percent aren't completed in time. Some of this is due to lacklustre communication and, as Tim says, involvement can help reduce the chances of disappointment or failure."

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## ► COMMUNICATORS' NETWORK

# Communicating via hidden channels

**Q:** What are key drivers to successful change management?

**A:** "Unfortunately, change management communication is rarely taken (or even thought about) beyond the PR-level by business managers," replied **Timm Suess**, head of strategic HR projects at **Novartis**. "The key is to convince support functions and message owners to use communication channels hidden within business, especially HR processes

(which will probably require explaining to them what a channel is).

Organizational charts, reporting lines, reward and recognition structures, salaries, bonuses, promotions, 'thank you' from managers, awards, general leadership behavior – all of these are hidden, but highly effective channels to communicate changes in behaviors. These channels aren't just change announcements (which get blocked out by human spam filtering anyway) – they are the change."

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