

Communicating Major Organisational Change

Welcome back. I'm Kim Baillie she's Fulyana Orsborn, this is inside Exec. Today, we're going to talk about communication within organizations on major changes.

Now, we've talked about this on and off in many, many podcasts over the last 250 or so episodes, we want to talk today about timeliness and consistency in those communications and why it's more important than ever. And it's always been important. But now communication seems to be critically important in terms of organizations, in what we are continuing to see, are times of change.

You see, there's so much change as Kim just said has happened and it hasn't stopped and it's not going to stop. So it just goes through phases and so what's happening from around different organizations, regardless of the size, these changes that happen, working from home, working from the office, the pandemic post the pandemic, all of those things and people are expecting more changes within their organization.

Some of them are speculating about what might happen to do with the structure, with the organization, the location of the organization, having an office, having no office, having a smaller office, etcetera, how they're going to do things as the management structure changes. Has the purpose changed as an organization, are they going to buy arms of different organizations? There's a whole lot of that going on. And if there is any whiff of anything that might be changing, it's best to lead that properly, as we all know.

And just a reminder that it's important that we have this continuation or built of trust as a management team, you want to continue with that trust that if you're doing anything, you will communicate in a timely manner, you will communicate and you can't maybe have all the pieces together at the first communication.

Hopefully you have established that with your people, is that you have in the past told them what you can tell them when you can tell them and you tell them honestly clearly and consistently. There's a promise of the actual communication, but also that they are hearing the consistent message in different parts of your organization at the same time.

A lot of you will be familiar with the team briefing methodology - a leadership team will tell the next management level down and they will cascade it down through their teams and preferably roughly at the same time. But then you've got to make sure that your teams or the management of those teams are fully equipped with the information.

There's Q and A's that need thought beforehand that the language used is clear and straightforward and not try to use words that confuse but be very vivid and precise. But also to be honest and make sure that you say where we stand at the moment, tell them what they hear is only as employees and not for external use.

The other important thing is to say to them what has been changed and that right now we're saying this. But if we find that has to change or get fine tuned, we will come back and we will let you know.

More importantly, throughout the communication right from the very, very first step, it's two way, it's good to listen to their feedback, it's good to hear it. Sometimes, even if you can't take it on board, you want to hear it, so you can explain why you decided to go that way or that you at least consider what is being put to you.

The two way communication is so important because in some cases it might bring something to the table that you will take into account as an organization. In other cases it will help to clarify and it will help you get those people on board, they will become the ones that ask the questions or raised objections or arguments, whatever you want to call it, become the ones that will be selling the idea, not that you need selling it, but when they're communicating it, they will be communicating it in a way that it's meant to be communicated because now they've clarified their thoughts and their feedback and they'd be able to give it a clear message or the same clear message.

So it's going to be understandable. And what happens when you do things like that is you will end up respecting people, they see that you respect them and you can see that is within our values and behaviors as an organization. Yes and therefore people will say yes, they practice what they say.

My worries with the whole situation are about the communication style because if we just look at the past nearly two years of pandemic influenced communication with our teams and our work groups, if you look back to the way you communicate with your team when they were all in the building together, it will be very different, it will be very different in the

1st 12 months of pandemic influenced work and it will be different in the 2nd 12 months.

And I think from what I see that there has been a gradual relaxation as people got more and more used to working remotely and communicating through electronic media, whether it was zoom meetings or any other format of electronic or digital communication, that the communication style has become more relaxed.

So when you start up again with communication that is moving forward and trying to look at the changes that are happening to the organization, don't immediately jump back into the communication style that you had when everyone was in the building together because it's too much of a change and that's just yet another change that has happened.

So suddenly where we were relaxed and communicating well and almost having just a conversation about work, suddenly it's become more formal or more structured or whatever it is and that is a change that changes people on a personal interaction level and so they feel like they've been where they built up rapport and they built up trust and they built up empathy and all of those things and suddenly they've been pushed back to being just the team or just an employee or just something else. And that that closeness and that communication and that bond that they have felt has been built up in the two years of changed conditions has suddenly been severed or damaged in some way.

And so there's a little bit in every communication, there's a bit of resentment first about why can't we talk like we used to before they actually read the communications. So be very

wary of changing your communication style. If you've developed a conversational style over the last two years, then continue that. You can start to build it up into a bit more of a structure. They still have the communication but maybe break it down into paragraphs or points that if you're doing a written communication.

If it's better for you to do a video message to everyone, do that. The technology is here for you to use, people are used to looking at things that way. Now they might enjoy being able to see you again and here you talk and and in doing that style of communication, you will be far more who you are as a manager and a leader than if you're trying to write it down again or do it some other way. So watch the communication style and then the next thing is the communication regularity. So how often were you talking with your group in the past over the last two years?

Let's look at that particular area because that's the change that we've seen and we know from when we talked to Nancy Giordano, the change is not going to stop. We're going to always live with change and sometimes massive change in the foreseeable future.

So let's start thinking about timeliness of communication. How often pre pandemic did you communicate with your group? Did you have weekly meetings? And did that continue on without a break? Or was there a change in the time periods between when you had meetings? And did you have different levels of meetings? So did you have the one on one? Did you have small groups? Did you always have the big group when you had your meetings?

Don't change everything at once. Take simple little steps, but be mindful of the regularity, the content of the message, not too much. Just like an email, don't put too much in one message. The rule of thumb with an email is only one topic because people will only answer one thing in an email then everything else just gets ignored.

Then you have to ask it again, repetition, irritation, all those sorts of things. So be mindful of how often and perhaps coming into the next phase, it might be more communication than you had in the past because you know that once a week you've been sitting down to a zoom meeting. So if I think of something, well that can wait till we have the meeting because I can talk about it there now. Suddenly with that not happening as regularly as readily as it has in the past two years, do I need to keep notes? Do I need to send an email straightaway when I think of it because it might get lost and I don't know when the next meeting will be?

All of those things we really want to emphasise not just the communication but the communication style and the timing of it as it is reflected in what you've been doing up to this point. You can speak again now.

I think we've covered everything. I think that in my opinion, the bigger the changes, communicate more not less. And I totally agree with keeping it bite sizes rather than overwhelming where people can't take it all in so do it and do it as you said, the style is important and all of that. But I'd rather communicate more than less because it allows people the opportunity to ask questions, to bridge the gaps rather than make stuff up.

And also to tell people when you don't know the answer. You don't know what's happening. Information hasn't come to you yet. Think of ways that you can say that to reassure people that you understand that they're concerned about it, that you're on top of that situation. But you don't have the information, you can't get the information, it's not forthcoming, whatever it is. But be honest about it when do it. You can answer the question or not and that still forms part of the communication just because you're saying no, I don't know. It doesn't make it not communication. Yes.

There we go, communication. And in this we were talking about major organizational changes.

Look at how that will still reflect your general management of your teams, but think about the timeliness and the consistency because they are indeed more important than ever in communication.

For now, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn. This is inside Exec.