

Communication Strategies for Managing Change

Overview

Managing change isn't about change. It's about emotion.

Communication about change has to address people's emotion-based concerns before they can learn new skills or take in and analyze potential solutions. "SCARF: a brain-based model for collaborating with and influencing others" (Rock, David. http://www.your-brain-at-work.com/files/NLJ_SCARFUS.pdf), says that people's negative emotional reactions are often triggered by trying to reduce threat in one or more of five different domains: status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness and fairness.

Good change management models take emotion into account.

Bridges, William. *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*. (DaCapo, 2009; 978-0738213804)

Kotter, John P. *Leading Change*. (Harvard Business Review, 2012; 978-1422186435)

What happens when you can't make use of the models?

Being thrown into a change with expectations for fast turnaround, or coming into the middle of a change means you can't start from the beginning. What do you do instead?

Change Communication Strategies

1. Who's concerned about what?
Use the SCARF model to anticipate the concerns people are likely to have so that you can respond to them empathetically.
2. Plan what to communicate when
There's no such thing as too much communication. Communication should come at regular intervals, ramping up as you get closer to key dates or events.
3. How many modes of communication can you use?
There's no such thing as too much communication. Make time to talk to people and listen to concerns in person. Assume people will gloss over communication modes that aren't meaningful to them.
4. Create tiered levels of detail
There's no such thing as too much communication. Provide detail and explanations, but give it in chunks. Assume people will gloss over details that aren't of interest to them.
5. Communicate directly – don't rely on trickle-down
Let individuals (i.e. not you, not their supervisors) decide for themselves whether or not your communication applies to them.
6. Ask for feedback and acknowledge it
Make a point to address feedback and concerns in subsequent communications with everyone involved.

What do you say when you're uncertain yourself?

Say, "I don't know."