

# Credocast

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## Smooth Transitions

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## Change is Inevitable

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## Internal Communications Channels

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## Exploration Phase

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## About Credo Advisory

Credo Advisory is a strategic communications firm that specializes in designing and implementing strategic, operational and tactical communication initiatives. We provide a full suite of communications support to our clients, which include public communications and advocacy, government relations, community engagement, media relations, crisis communications, digital communications and capacity building.

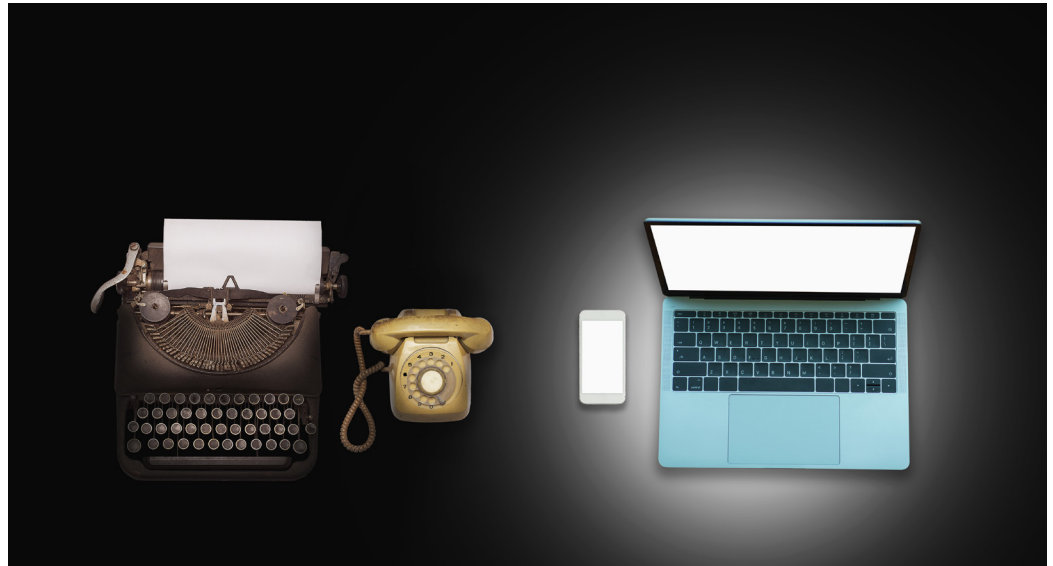
Our mission is to develop bespoke communications products, activities and campaigns based on knowledge, research and industry insights. With our ability to communicate effectively with diverse audiences and stakeholder groups, Credo's mission is to provide impactful strategic communications advisory from inception to implementation. At Credo, we are committed to improving the way societies communicate.

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*“Despite the excitement that rapid change brings, it could also present challenges for companies, especially the employees, who are usually the first stakeholders to be directly impacted by organizational change.”*

## Change is Inevitable



A popular quote by Heraclitus states that “change is the only constant in life.”<sup>1</sup> In our rapidly changing and fast-paced world, people, technologies, systems and beliefs evolve. The same goes for organizations – they change over time. The changes could be in the form of mergers and acquisitions, organizational restructuring, staff retrenchment, company closure, adoption of novel work technologies, etc. Studies have shown that there is a 60-70% failure rate for organizational change projects.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, companies who have a fair chance at succeeding in change management are those who recognize the importance of implementing effective communications to all stakeholders during the period of change.

This thought piece emphasises the role of internal communications during organizational change. It also examines the internal communications channels that are required for engaging employees throughout the change management process. It serves as a guide for top management of companies on engaging staff about imminent changes; in a manner that facilitates smooth transitions for all affected parties.

### Communicating Change – A Holistic Approach

Change management refers to the way an organization initiates, analyses and reacts to its change processes, with a goal to reduce disruption and improve the chances of success.<sup>3</sup> Disruption and resistance by employees are natural reactions towards change. Therefore, to successfully reduce these reactions, effective and consistent communication to staff is required. Organizations should refrain from leaving the job of managing change to only Human Resource professionals and top managers. An internal communications team is vital for successfully communicating the much-needed change that the organization intends to achieve.

<sup>1</sup> Ancient History Encyclopedia (2010) Heraclitus of Ephesus. Available at: [https://www.ancient.eu/Heraclitus\\_of\\_Ephesos/](https://www.ancient.eu/Heraclitus_of_Ephesos/)

<sup>2</sup> Harvard Business Review (2013) Change Management Needs to Change. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2013/04/change-management-needs-to-cha>

<sup>3</sup> Step Change (2018) Change Communications: A Leader’s Guide to An Effective Transformation. Available at: <https://blog.hellostepchange.com/blog/change-communications>



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# Internal Communications Channels

Internal communications involve keeping employees connected and updated on company initiatives, thereby creating a shared understanding of company goals, values and guidelines.<sup>4</sup> Nestlé, the world’s largest food and beverage company,<sup>5</sup> in its bid to sustain high-performance culture, adopted an internal communications medium for its employees – *Workplace by Facebook*.<sup>6</sup> Workplace supports communication and collaboration in organizations and is currently being used by over 30,000 companies worldwide.<sup>7</sup> There are numerous internal communications channels that companies can adopt, but the choice of channel(s) depends on certain variables, e.g. company type, diversity of workforce, message, etc.<sup>8</sup> The figure below illustrates some of the channels and their benefits:



Culled from <https://www.theukdomain.uk/five-top-internal-communication-channels/> and <https://blogin.co/blog/introducing-top-11-internal-communication-channels-for-todays-workplace-210/>

## The Change Curve Model

During change, the role of internal communicators is critical as employees go through different emotional phases that require effective communications. The Change Curve model, developed by psychiatrist Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, aids the understanding of personal transitions and organizational change.<sup>9</sup> The model, which stipulates the various phases that individuals go through during change, can be used to analyse employees’ psychological phases during organizational change:

**Denial Phase:** During this phase, employees may be in shock or in denial about the change that has been announced; they would require adequate time to adapt to the necessary change.<sup>10</sup> At this stage, internal communicators are responsible for developing communication messages that give the employees factual information about the current situation.

<sup>4</sup> Social Chorus (2019) What is Internal Communications in 2020? Available at: <https://www.socialchorus.com/blog/future-of-work/better-internal-communications-for-your-workforce-now-is-the-time/>

<sup>5</sup> Nestle. About Us. Available at: <https://www.nestle.com/aboutus>

<sup>6</sup> Nestle (2019) Nestle Launches Workplace by Facebook. Available at: <https://www.nestle.com/media/pressreleases/allpressreleases/nestle-launches-workplace-facebook>

<sup>7</sup> Forbes (2017) Facebook’s ‘Workplace’ Spreads To 30,000 Businesses, Nonprofits. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kathleenchaykowski/2017/10/26/facebook-workplace-spreads-to-30000-businesses-nonprofits/#531d40a31ec2>

<sup>8</sup> Blogin. Introducing Top 11 Internal Communication Channels For Today’s Workplace. Available at: <https://blogin.co/blog/introducing-top-11-internal-communication-channels-for-todays-workplace-210/>

<sup>9</sup> MindTools. The Change Curve: Accelerating Change, and Increasing Its Likelihood of Success. Available at: [https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newPPM\\_96.htm](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newPPM_96.htm)

<sup>10</sup> MindTools. The Change Curve: Accelerating Change, and Increasing Its Likelihood of Success. Available at: [https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newPPM\\_96.htm](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newPPM_96.htm)

“Communications professionals should ensure that employees questions are adequately answered and staff know where they can receive further information when needed.”

*Axero Solutions*, an intranet software company, provides some pointers on the kind of information that staff will require at this stage:<sup>11</sup>

- What the change entails
- What the goals of the change are
- If and how their roles and teams may be impacted
- What the timeframe is for the change
- Where to go to get help

During this phase, messaging should be consistent but not overwhelming, as staff will only be able to assimilate limited information at a time. *AccentCare*, a home healthcare service provider in Texas, had been involved in several acquisitions that led to a major increase in the number of employees. The company crafted snackable pieces of information to help the understanding of company culture and allay uncertainties felt by staff.<sup>12</sup>

Communications professionals should ensure that employees questions are adequately answered and staff know where they can receive further information when needed.<sup>13</sup> Some communication channels that can be used during the denial phase include: emails, face-to-face meetings, executive videos and company intranet. However, face-to-face communication is preferable in this phase and available research shows that employees desire this method of communication as opposed to electronically mediated communication, especially from their managers.<sup>14</sup>



<sup>11</sup> Axero. How to Communicate During Organizational Change. Available at: <https://axerosolutions.com/blogs/timeisenhauer/pulse/383/how-to-communicate-during-organizational-change>

<sup>12</sup> SocialChorus (2019) Ask A Communicator: When Your Workforce Doubles in Size—How to Take the Sting Out of Organizational Change. Available at: <https://www.socialchorus.com/blog/comms-heroes/when-your-workforce-doubles-in-size-how-to-take-the-sting-out-of-organizational-change/>

<sup>13</sup> MindTools. The Change Curve: Accelerating Change, and Increasing Its Likelihood of Success. Available at: [https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newPPM\\_96.htm](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newPPM_96.htm)

<sup>14</sup> Robson, P. and Tourish, D. (2005) Managing Internal Communication: an organizational case study. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*. 10(3), 213-222. Available at: <https://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/167447/Davidson,%20Alyssa%202013.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

<sup>15</sup> Axero. How to Communicate During Organizational Change. Available at: <https://axerosolutions.com/blogs/timeisenhauer/pulse/383/how-to-communicate-during-organizational-change>

<sup>16</sup> Alyssa, D. (2013). Communicate Your Change: a 4-Factor Model for Change Management Communication Pg 30. Available at: <https://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/167447/Davidson,%20Alyssa%202013.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

**Resistance Phase:** This is the phase where employees react to the change. Communicating to staff at this stage is key for the organization, as badly managed communications could lead to a crisis. The core need of staff in this phase is support.<sup>15</sup> The internal communications team should focus on understanding the source of resistance, which will guide them in drafting key messages (which will include responses) that will help to address possible oppositions from employees.<sup>16</sup> Communication channels that could be used during this phase include: company intranet, where staff can send instant messages and engage on group chats and face-to-face meetings, where staff are encouraged to express themselves and obtain concrete feedback from management.

*“The roles of the internal communications team are to encourage top management to communicate openly and sincerely with staff and develop or revise the messages when necessary.”*

An instance where internal communications channels were used during resistance is when staff of *Boeing*, the world’s largest aerospace company, used emails and instant messaging to express their dissatisfaction with the newly designed Boeing 737 Max.<sup>17</sup> One employee described the jet as "designed by clowns, who in turn are supervised by monkeys."<sup>18</sup>

**Exploration Phase:** During this phase, staff are beginning to accept the new change and desire direction. Management would need to develop training programs/tools for staff to begin the implementation of the requisite change. The internal communications team will have to communicate to the staff about the available training opportunities and ensure that staff have access to relevant documentation.<sup>19</sup> This is the point where there needs to be collaboration between the communications team and knowledge management team. The knowledge management team must ensure that the relevant documents are stored in a centralized location (e.g. company intranet or any other company database) and the internal communications team will ensure that the information is clear, concise and relevant for the staff. Possible communication channels during this phase include: company intranet and face-to-face meetings.



Image Source: <https://simply-communicate.com/nestle-connects-210000-employees-with-workplace-by-facebook/>

**Commitment Phase:** In this phase, the employees have accepted the change and need encouragement to continue with the new work methods.<sup>20</sup> The roles of the internal communications team are to encourage top management to communicate openly and sincerely with staff and develop or revise the messages when necessary.<sup>21</sup> Messaging themes should be positive, motivational and conversational.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> CNN (2020) New Boeing CEO says company must do much better. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/01/13/business/boeing-ceo-calhoun/index.html>

<sup>18</sup> CNN (2020) New Boeing CEO says company must do much better. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/01/13/business/boeing-ceo-calhoun/index.html>

<sup>19</sup> Axero. How to Communicate During Organizational Change. Available at: <https://axerosolutions.com/blogs/timeisenhauer/pulse/383/how-to-communicate-during-organizational-change>

<sup>20</sup> Axero. How to Communicate During Organizational Change. Available at: <https://axerosolutions.com/blogs/timeisenhauer/pulse/383/how-to-communicate-during-organizational-change>

<sup>21</sup> Axero. How to Communicate During Organizational Change. Available at: <https://axerosolutions.com/blogs/timeisenhauer/pulse/383/how-to-communicate-during-organizational-change>

<sup>22</sup> Axero. How to Communicate During Organizational Change. Available at: <https://axerosolutions.com/blogs/timeisenhauer/pulse/383/how-to-communicate-during-organizational-change>

*“ Available research shows that supervisors and managers are the preferred sources for communicating organizational change. ”*

Communication channels for this phase could include: emails, company intranet and team building events (where achievements can be celebrated). *Asendia*, a mail service provider operating in Europe, Asia and North America, developed a training and education program for its employees, which included a board game. This team building event, which was used to communicate the changes surrounding the company’s core products, enlightened staff and boosted engagement.<sup>23</sup>

#### Credo Experience

Credo Advisory migrated to a new office work tool - Microsoft Office 365 to enable its staff work more efficiently. Despite the fact that this tool aimed at ensuring smart and efficient work, Credo management recognised that staff required encouragement and proper training to transition from standard work tools. Various communication channels were utilized to encourage employee dialogue about the change, proffer training and respond to staff questions. The channels included team meetings, emails and team building events. Regular communications about effective adoption of the work tool has continued within the company and staff are gradually relinquishing their conventional work tools.

## Conclusion

Communication plays a key role in change management. The use of multiple communication channels, depending on the phase on the change curve, and the peculiarity of the workforce, is vital for managing the emotional state of employees. Available research shows that supervisors and managers are the preferred sources for communicating organizational change.<sup>24</sup> They can perform this communication function effectively through the guidance of an internal communications team and through the use of selected communication channels. Top management should recognise that during change, the employees should be engaged regularly; and this can only be done when there is effective internal communications.

<sup>23</sup> Ragan (2019) 14 compelling internal communication campaigns. Available at: <https://www.ragan.com/14-compelling-internal-communication-campaigns/>

<sup>24</sup> Alyssa, D. (2013). Communicate Your Change: a 4-Factor Model for Change Management Communication Pg 30. Available at: <https://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/167447/Davidson,%20Alyssa%202013.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>