Developing a communications plan

Frequent, timely and accurate communication is critical for successful change. To maintain a sense of trust, employees need to know where the organisation is heading, what the changes will look like, how it will affect them and how they can contribute. Without good communication they will become anxious and generate rumours which can create change resistance. Make sure you give employees a voice in the change process, and remember that communication is a two-way process.

Templates to help with developing a communications plan
Communications plan

How to do it

There are four major communication activities:

### 1. Identify audiences and set objectives

Start by identifying key groups and audiences. This should complement the stakeholder analysis and mapping exercises. Use the figure below as a guide to identify your stakeholders, basing audience segmentation on major differences such as:

- The scale and scope of the group's capacity to impact, or be impacted by, the change.
- The importance of the group to the success of the change and how this might evolve over time.

Instructions for stakeholder analysis
Prioritising your stakeholders
Mapping your stakeholder network
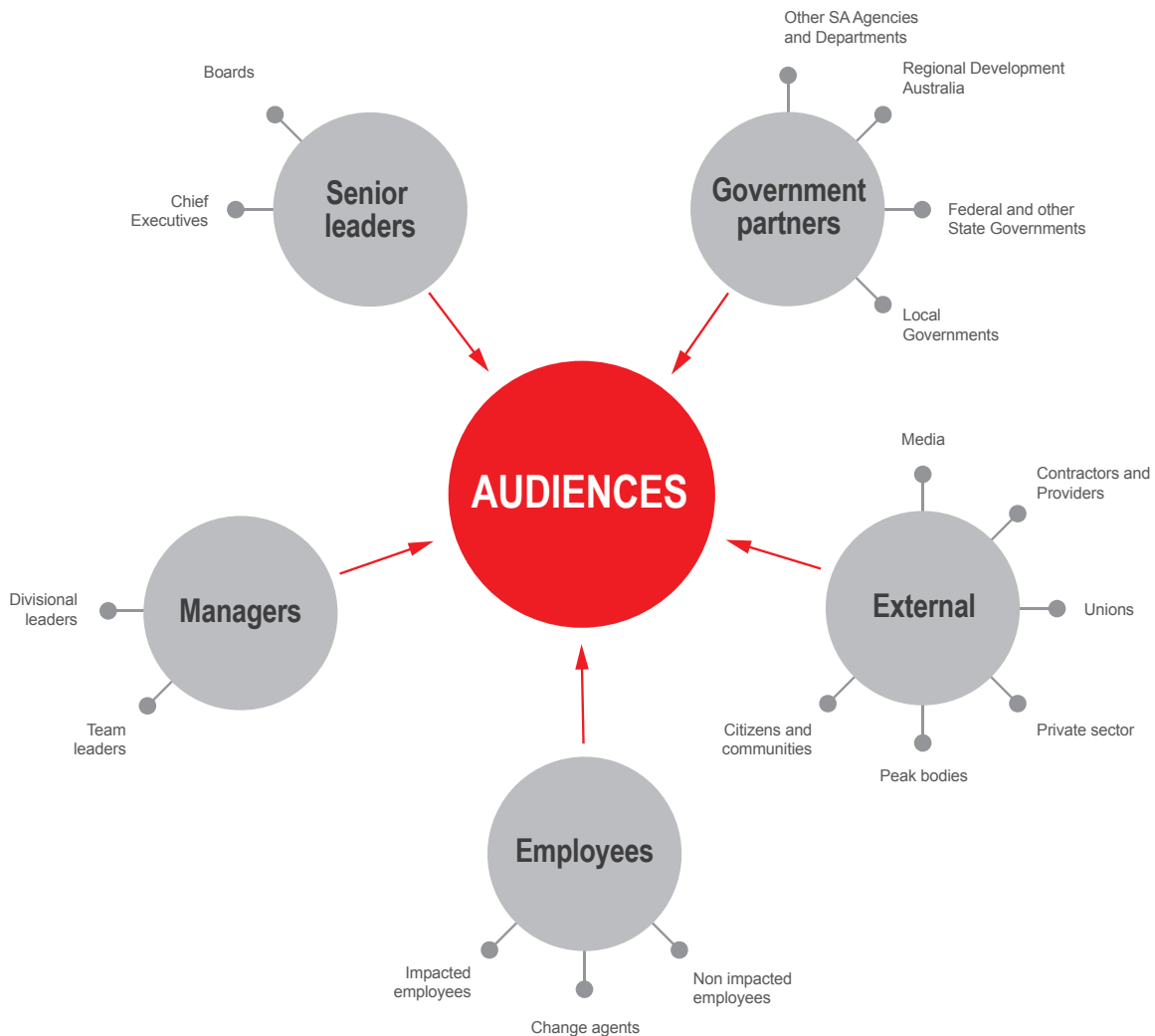
With the audiences identified, communication objectives should be based on the following:

- what specifically is needed from that stakeholder group to make the change successful? What do they need to understand, support and do differently?
- the current and required level of engagement of each group
- potential risks and issues
- their unique communication requirements.

Use the outcomes to set communication objectives for the whole program and, where required, for each audience.

2. Develop key messages

Develop key messages which are consistent, credible, compelling and clear.

Include details of where affected employees should get more information. For projects of high impact, employees may need additional help during the transition (e.g. from HR representatives).

Templates to help with developing key messages
Communicating a compelling vision of the future

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3. Create a communications plan

Your communications plan should cover:

- the audience receiving or providing the communication
- the objective of the communication activity
- the communication channels
- timing of the communication
- people responsible for different activities
- key stakeholders who need to be involved.

4. Implement the communications plan

How this is done depends on the size of the change. Larger transformation efforts require a dedicated change communication team while communication for smaller change initiatives can be undertaken by the project director or manager.

You should continually assess and refine your communication plan as reactions to the change become known. Also keep a log of all consultations and feedback – this is not only good practice, but shows that you have complied with any consultation requirements in your Enterprise Agreement.

Templates to help with implementing the communication plan
Logging feedback from consultation

Adjust for scale

Small: Improving and refining methods, policies and procedures; the future state is not very different to the current ways of working	Simple communications involving impacted audiences. This can be done using existing channels (i.e. company memos, intranet sites etc.).
Medium: Distinct modifications to strategies, structures and management processes	- Development of dedicated channels such as an intranet site is likely to be required. Request advice from your communications team. - Consider all four key communication activities for changes of this size and larger. Each step should be reasonably fast to work through for incremental adjustments.
Large: Substantial realignment, restructuring and transformation of all or part of the organisation	- May require a dedicated communications team who understand media relations, internal employee communications and the challenges of change communications. - The communications plan needs to be supported by a higher-level strategy outlining the preferred communications techniques to guide the work of the combined team.

Success measures

Success measures should be tailored to suit specific objectives of the plan and include a survey to determine whether employees:

- have heard about the change effort
- are interpreting messages as intended
- are supportive of the change
- have started to do things differently as a result of the change effort
- are recognising the positive effect the changes are having on themselves, customers and the organisation at large
- advocate for the change efforts, promoting them to others.