

TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

Teams That Communicate Through Uncertainty

Change has become constant in today's workplace. Economic uncertainty, geopolitical tensions, rapid advances in AI, and shifting business priorities are transforming not only **what we do**, but also **how we work**.

Employees are expected to learn new skills, adapt to changing KPIs, and deliver results in an environment that often feels uncertain. At the same time, they're also carrying burdens beyond the workplace.

Every day, we're surrounded by headlines about inflation, rising interest rates, geopolitical conflicts, economic instability, market shifts and evolving technology. We see many big organizations restructuring, well-known brands disappearing from the market, and businesses reinventing themselves just to survive. Employees naturally begin to wonder, *could this happen here? What does it mean for my role? Am I still secure?*

During periods of change silence often creates more anxiety than clarity. When people don't have information, they fill the gaps with assumptions, rumors, and worst-case scenarios.

As managers, we can't remove uncertainty, but we can reduce unnecessary uncertainty through clear and honest communication.

Research found that transparent communication builds trust, and trust makes employees more willing to embrace organizational change ^[1].



THE Communication Framework for Managers.



1 Transparent

People don't expect you to have all the answers, but they do expect openness about what's happening.

Explain why the change is necessary, the challenges the organization is facing, and the direction the business is heading. Share what you know and be equally honest about what is still evolving.

Transparency doesn't mean sharing everything. It means providing enough context, so employees don't have to fill in the blanks themselves.



Every communication should answer three simple questions:

- Why is this change happening?
- What does it mean for our team?
- What happens next?



2 Honest

When leaders try too hard to make difficult situations sound positive, employees notice. Overly optimistic messages can unintentionally damage credibility.

It's perfectly acceptable to say, "I don't have that answer yet." In fact, admitting uncertainty often builds more trust than pretending to have all the answers.

People don't expect perfection. They expect honesty which builds credibility, and credibility is the foundation of trust.



3 Empathy

Not everyone experiences change in the same way.

Some people are energized by new opportunities, while others may feel overwhelmed, anxious, or uncertain about their future.

Great managers don't rush to solve every concern. Instead, they create space for people to express how they're feeling by:

- Listening without interrupting.
- Acknowledging concerns instead of dismissing them.
- Encouraging questions, even difficult ones.
- Checking in with quieter team members who may be struggling silently.
- Recognizing that uncertainty affects wellbeing just as much as it affects performance.

Sometimes people don't need immediate solutions – they simply need to know they've been heard.



Tips for Communication During Change

When leading your team through change, remember to:

- Communicate early rather than waiting for the "perfect" message.
- Share facts instead of assumptions.
- Explain the why behind decisions, not just what.
- Repeat key messages consistently through different channels.
- Check in on how people are feeling, not just what they're delivering.
- Follow up after major announcements to answer new questions and address concerns.



The way we communicate during change shapes how our teams experience it. Clear communication builds trust. Trust creates psychological safety. And psychologically safe teams are far more resilient when facing uncertainty.

At the end of the day, great managers don't simply manage to change. **They help people move through it together.**

Resource:

I. Yue, C. A., Men, L. R., & Ferguson, M. A. (2019). Bridging transformational leadership, transparent communication, and employee openness to change: The mediating role of trust. **Public Relations Review**, 45(3), 101779.



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