

Organizational Change Management: Building a Communications Plan CBT

Welcome

Welcome to the Organizational Change Management: Building a Communications Plan CBT provided by the Transportation Technology's Organizational Change Management Office.

Introduction

One of the Organizational Change Management Team's goals is to introduce or enhance more formal Organizational Change Management, or OCM, planning for Transportation Technology projects or initiatives within the Department. As part of this effort, we would like to continue to build awareness of OCM fundamentals.

The OCM Office has determined ten key OCM work products that should be considered for each Transportation Technology project or initiative. They are: Stakeholder Inventory & Analysis, Business Readiness Assessment, Leadership Alignment Strategy, Case for change, Job/Role Assessment, Communications Plan, Change Impact Assessment, Training Strategy and Plan, Change Champion Network, and Change Metric Scorecard.

Each OCM element feeds into other key elements to facilitate successful transformation throughout the change journey. This resource aims to provide greater insights and understanding around Building a Communications Plan, which is typically completed during the Design/Build Phase of a project.

What is a Communications Plan?

With any project or initiative, a communications plan is a critical component of any change to:

- Help provide support, ongoing awareness, and transparency of the journey to transition from the current state to the future state;
- Explain the benefits of why we are undertaking the project/initiative;
- Define communication needs for the span of people touched by the project/initiative; and
- Disseminate project information strategically and proactively to drive those involved toward understanding and accepting the change.

Communications Plan Overview

The communication plan, like a project management plan, is a living document that will be updated as the project progresses. The strategy helps to confirm the "why", or guiding vision, for all communications for the project. This is where you start to develop, deliver, and manage effective communications; including guiding principles, project key messages, governance processes, and

effective communication methods. It details how to tailor project messaging by phase and target audience.

The plan is the “how” the strategy connects to the details of communications plan inputs, by providing a comprehensive view of project communications across the project lifecycle. It details the communication objective, key messages, vehicles, creator, sender/presenter, and audience groups; and outlines forward-looking schedules of upcoming project communications.

The execution of the communication activities provides the “what matters” for stakeholders to build momentum, and the feedback loop encourages a two-way dialogue to confirm stakeholders’ understanding prior to project implementation and achievement.

Communications Plan Principles

Regardless of the approach or tactic, all communication plans should have guiding principles to keep communications targeted and relevant. Some examples of effective guiding principles include:

- Timely - Balanced with proper pacing to retain stakeholder interest.
- Open - “Tell it like it is” preferably face to face.
- Proactive - Communication must be planned, delivered quickly, then sustained.
- Layered - Tell them once, then tell them again via multiple channels.
- Consistent - Messages should be documented and transparent while being linked to strategic objectives.
- Responsive - Strong feedback mechanisms such as:
pulse checks, forums, and Q&As.

Effective communications are a priority for every leader.

Communications will differ as the project moves closer to completion, and thus the needs and project message focus will build in an iterative process over time. What’s important to remember during a project lifecycle is the emotional experience that employees will feel because of the change. A communication plan can help to emphasize moments that matter for stakeholders involved to manage the dynamic emotions they experience.

Developing a Clear Communications Plan

Let’s go into the 7 steps for developing a clear communications plan.

What steps go into building a communications plan? We have two inputs of the communications plan. The first four steps are the strategic input, and the last three steps show how we implement the plan.

In the strategic input, we figure out what needs to be communicated, who the target audience is, the best way to deliver it, and how it's going to be delivered. When we implement the communications plan, we deliver the message, make sure there is a support plan in place, and we monitor to make sure the message was understood.

What to Communicate

In the first step, we need to determine what type of information we are trying to communicate. Is it a process change, new policy, technology change? We have to think about why we are doing this change, what we are hoping to get out of it and how formal we want the communication to be.

FDOT Communications Examples

Here are a few examples of communications. Some are more formal, such as the Trans Tech Update, which communicates more detail; and some are more informal, such as emails, banners or posters.

Target Audience

The next step is identifying who is going to receive the message, and what their preferred communication style is going to be. This is an example of who the target audience is, and what impact they may have on this project over time, or what impact the project may have on them.

Target Audiences can be separated into two buckets. Individuals who need early buy in and support, such as Leadership, Project Leads, and Project Staff; and those who need eventual buy in and support, such as Directly and Indirectly Impacted Stakeholders.

As we think about who is going to receive the message, we want to think about what kind of supporting messages we might use to differentiate between those groups. For example, in the Information Security Management project, we see the Project Staff want to be more tactical, focusing on readiness and making sure communication is reaching them at specific intervals while making sure they are clear and they understand the value and the benefits. Whereas the Department are stakeholders of the change and the theme might shift to be focused on project operations, while maintaining transparency and openness on a regular cadence.

Deployment Strategy

In the third step, we figure out what is the best strategy to deliver the message to the appropriate audience. We will start to define different roles within the audience based on what we need from them and what is the purpose.

Take for instance the Leadership team. They're the ones leading the change. They need to be informed and updated from those working day to day on the project.

As you start to think about the end users, they're not as well informed as the Leadership Team in terms of running the project or stewarding the project, so they're going to need to know more about what's changing at a specific point in time.

What are the benefits of this change? The more downstream you get, be mindful of how you're communicating different things to the different audiences at different points in time.

This is an illustrative example of a project timeline that is starting in 2019 with a go-live target in 2020. Three stakeholder groups have been identified (Department-wide, Cost Center and Target) and the level of customization will vary based on the group and the various roles within each group.

The three phases that we will take people through to get them from point A to point B are:

1. Promote general awareness and continue leadership engagement;
2. Prepare Change Network across all entities for upcoming implementation; and
3. Facilitate full adoption and ownership of the projects by all stakeholders.

When developing the communication journey, there is a level of customization that will be applied to the different groups in your organization. The Department-wide group will require a high level of communication, including a Case for Change, Vision, Objectives and Scope. Moving towards the Go-Live date will require an adoption of the change including benefits and lessons.

In the Cost Center group, it will need to be determined what each stakeholder group needs to know that specifically impacts them leading up until go live. This would include project updates and benefits realization.

The Target group, also known as the end users, need their communication to be tactical and prescriptive with customized support based on the needs of different end user audiences.

Defining Customization

When you customize the support, you will need to consider the unique needs and concerns of the stakeholders to specify communication content and engage different audiences. We wouldn't want to just send one generic message to the entire stakeholder group; we want to produce customized communication based on the different groups.

Develop a Communications Plan

Now that we've built a customized communications plan for different audiences, we move on to step four to develop the communications plan and determine how the message is going to be delivered. Some channels that we can use are emails, posters, face-to-face meetings - whichever is best for your audience. Next, we will start to map those out and determine when they need to be informed throughout the duration of the project and what resources will be needed.

Building a Communications Plan

Returning to our OCM greatest hits, as we engage in project support, this helps to demonstrate how the various inputs work together to help craft the communications strategy and plan. Additionally, it helps to inform what outputs to expect as a result.

Sample Communications Plan

While previous samples have outlined how the audience will be considered throughout a project lifecycle, this is an illustrative communications plan that outlines how calls to action/behaviors, messages, and approaches should be considered over the project stages. As stakeholders continue to become increasingly informed, the direction of the communication plan should be updated accordingly to achieve the desired action from stakeholders for the specific stage. The content should be viewed as a practical way to continue preparing stakeholders for go-live.

Implement the Communications Plan

In step five, we shift from the strategic input to how we are going to implement the communications plan. So now we want to execute our planned activities to deliver our message. We want to make sure that every communication accurately informs people to help manage expectations and confirm benefits experienced by the audience.

Considering Different Methods

We are already putting a lot of this into practice with our communication tactics and efforts. We've utilized our SharePoint environment to keep project updates current and have developed Journey Maps to illustrate where a specific project is in its lifecycle.

Sample Communications Plan

When we put these pieces together to form one tactical plan, we start to map out what's being communicated to whom and when at a high-level overview. It's a good tool that helps to outline which stakeholders will be included in communications to help minimize fatigue.

Support Plan

As much as communications are delivered in a proactive manner, stakeholders will often react once they experience the change first hand. In step six of the implementation plan, we want to make sure there is a support plan in place to help manage the questions and issues that will come from Stakeholders after the delivery of the communication. An example of this could be a user guide or a Frequently Asked Questions document to help provide additional information to help navigate the change successfully.

Proactive Communications Tactics

It is helpful to plan for support, but considering how to proactively address stakeholder concerns is also a helpful tactic to address those feelings of angst and uncertainty as best as possible. We need to ensure communications are open, honest, and positive. Understanding the scope and milestones is also an important topic to communicate to stakeholders to keep the project status transparent. This includes not only proactive messages to communicate an on-time status, but can also be reactive to address setbacks and delays.

Monitoring Communications

The final step of developing a clear communication plan is where we monitor to make sure the message was understood. Monitoring communications is an important step to understand the outcome of the communications. While it's important to know what you'd like to measure as an output at the end of a communication delivery, it's equally important to plan upfront to ensure you receive the desired data. This data can then be leveraged as lessons learned to inform future communications and adjust the living document as necessary.

Communications Feedback

There are different options to consider when gathering feedback to ensure you've captured input from all impacted employees and stakeholders. When you've captured the feedback, it's important to make sure it gets back to the people who need to receive it.

Conclusion

In closing, communication plans are critical to a project's success. They provide consistent and timely information to all involved stakeholders while helping to prevent communication overload across all stakeholder levels. Without an adequate communications plan based on the project's needs, the inconsistent messaging can contribute to a lack of understanding and support for the change, which contributes to a gap in the behavior needed to implement the change successfully.

This concludes the Organizational Change Management: Building a Communications Plan CBT provided by the Transportation Technology's Organizational Change Management Office.

Thank you for your time and attention, and we look forward to working with you on your next project.