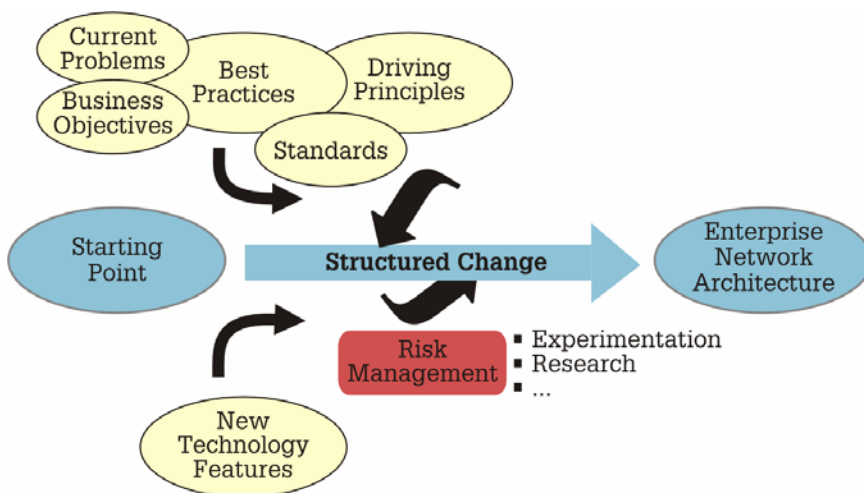


Communications and Change Management

Migration projects — projects whose focus is to migrate from one technological platform to another — are often projects that introduce massive change. As such, these projects disrupt daily operations and affect all users. Even though users welcome the changes introduced by these projects, they will still undergo the emotional cycle of change. It is important to communicate with affected personnel beforehand to limit the impact of the change on business operations. Most projects will include a communications program whose purpose is to limit the impact of the change and to inform affected users about project status and objectives. But this is often not enough.

In many cases, the people who are in charge of communications within the project are also users who will be affected by the change. They are responsible for this critical change management tool at the same time as they are affected by it. It's a vicious circle. Because they are also affected by the change, they tend to focus only on the project status. But it is also essential for people to understand the *reason* behind the change. When you communicate the impact of a change, it is essential to include the objectives of the change. This part of the communications strategy must focus on the reasons behind the change — the reasoning used to justify every critical selection made during the elaboration of the solution. It must include at every level, the information required for people affected by the change to fully understand the proposed changes. Comprehension ensures participation.



The communicator must create an environment supporting the desire to change. This is the point where communications becomes a marketing tool supporting the acceptance of the change. The success of a proposed change relies heavily on the quality of the communications during the transition period between the initial introduction of the change and the full integration of the change within organizational processes. The negative impacts of a change are always reduced by a strong and

effective communications program. This program must identify both favorable and unfavorable impacts of the change and design communications that put both in their best light. Proper communications will make the difference between the way people perceive the change, as welcome or unwelcome. If you implement an inappropriate communications program, your project will suffer the consequences.

A well-structured communications program includes information for each of the audiences affected by the change and identifies for them processes and methods they can use to reduce the impact of the change in their own situation. It's simple: the greater the change you intend to introduce, the more comprehensive your communications program must be. The message needs to be simple and clear. It must be easy for people to understand; it must be at their level of comprehension. If it is intended for users, it shouldn't be too technical. If it is intended for managers, it needs to be in terms that they will understand and that interest them. If the message is appropriate, it will invariably result in greater participation and easier acceptance of the change. Everything depends on content and method.

It is important to know at which stage of a change process communications should be introduced. During the change management implementation, communications provide ongoing risk management. In society, as in organizations, communications are essential. Every human interaction begins with communication. One piece of advice communicators should heed is to *listen* before you *speak*.