

Fundamentals of Organizational Communication

Prepared by

Dr. Walid El Leithy

Chapter 10



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Organizational Innovation, Change and Communication

In this chapter we talk about the realities of innovation and change and describe examples of productive change. We explore significant barriers to change and then examine planned innovation and change processes. Finally, we talk about communicating change. Throughout the chapter we define professional job opportunities associated with planned change. We also take the position that productive change is a broadly shared organizational responsibility.



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Organizational Innovation, Change and Communication

Innovation is a concept closely linked to creativity, invention, improvement, and communication. Innovation is the development of ideas, practices, products, and processes which meet needs in new ways.

Invention is the creation of new ideas, practices, products, and processes. Invention often is part of innovation, with innovation identified as more comprehensive because it takes invention into action.

Change is a somewhat ambiguous concept, often simply defined as an alteration from one state to another. Others define change as differences between two sets of conditions. When referring to organizational change, we frequently talk about changing circumstances that place individuals and organizations in constant states of flux. Organizational change is both planned and unplanned. In the next chapter we talk about changes brought about by crisis. In this chapter we focus on changes that are more deliberate and made with a desire to innovate or improve the organization and its overall functioning.

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Organizational Innovation, Change and Communication

- Many research-based reports also support the notion that change is all around us and what matters is not whether we encounter change, but how we respond. Think for a moment about your personal response to change. Is there a difference in your response when change is unexpected and when you plan for the change? What makes the difference?
- John Kotter (2012), a leading author writing about change processes, considers turbulence and disruption to be one of today's greatest challenges for leaders. Kotter contends, "We can't keep up with the pace of change, let alone get ahead of it."

Chapter
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- Clayton Christensen and Michael Overdorf (2000) identify three factors which affect whether organizations can innovate and change: resources, processes, and values. Resources are people, money, information, technologies, and a host of other factors. Processes are “ . . . the patterns of interaction, coordination, communication, and decision making employees use to transform resources into products and services of greater worth” (p. 2). Finally, values refer to culture and the principles which guide action.

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Sustaining innovation and disruptive innovation

- Sustaining innovations are evolutionary changes that make existing products or services which stakeholders already value perform more effectively. Disruptive innovations create new markets through the introduction of new products or services.

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Barriers to Innovation and Change

- **Complacency:** The attitude of individuals or groups who prefer the status quo based on their satisfaction with current circumstances or their lack of understanding of a need for change.

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Barriers to Innovation and Change

- **Organizational Silence:** One of the most important barriers to effective change is one we do not observe happening, unless we engage in the behavior personally. That barrier is organizational silence. When individuals or groups feel compelled to remain silent in the face of issues, problems, or concerns, the organization loses vital information necessary for making change.

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Barriers to Innovation and Change

- **Knowledge/information deficits** Barriers to productive change based on lack of knowledge and information from which to develop change strategy.

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Barriers to Innovation and Change

- **Risk perception** Beliefs about the potential impact of the change and its overall importance and desirability.
- when a top manager leaves and employees expect that a known individual who is highly trusted will be the replacement, a low risk perception is predictable. However, that same vacancy can create a much greater perception of risk if no one knows who the replacement will be and rumors begin that a change in approach to leadership is likely. Think about a time when you were worried about an upcoming change.

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Barriers to Innovation and Change

- **Uncertainty** The degree of ambiguity a change brings to both individuals and groups.
- Uncertainty, or the ambiguity a change brings, contributes to different types of responses for different people. Some will seek to reduce uncertainty by gathering more information about the change. Others will avoid information, either because they see little direct impact or because they are so fearful of change that dealing with “facts” is troublesome.

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Barriers to Innovation and Change

- **Contradictions and misalignments** Confusions which result when expectations about change developed through social interactions do not match direct experiences with the change.

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Barriers to Innovation and Change

- **Active and passive resistance** to change also can be a barrier to productivity. Active resistance includes a variety of efforts to stop a planned change. Open disagreement, mobilizing peers to dissent, dissenting up the chain of command, voting, attempts to get others to block the change, protests, slow response to requests, overt refusal to change, and sabotage are only some of the positive and negative ways people can engage in active resistance to change.
- Passive resistance includes visible but not active disagreement with change: ignoring change messages and strategies, ambivalence, appearing to agree while not actually making the desired change, and a variety of other less visible techniques. Resistance can be related to any of the above-described barriers as well as to others you can identify.

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Barriers to Innovation and Change

- **Leaders** who are not effective at change implementation become change barriers. Organizational leaders who force change, exhibit inconsistent behaviors, show marginal support for change, set unrealistic expectations, expect others to do the work, and fail to communicate effectively contribute to failed change efforts.

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Barriers to Innovation and Change

- **Organizational Trust:** Low organizational trust generates a powerful barrier to effective change. Organizations with low trust have difficulty getting customers, employees, stockholders, investors, or the general public to believe in the possibility of productive change.

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Barriers to Innovation and Change

- **Organizational decline** A time when an organization is in danger of losing its abilities to meet its goals and unable to mount productive change to increase effectiveness.
- Organizational decline can be understood as a time when an organization is in danger of losing its abilities to meet its goals and unable to mount productive change.

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Barriers to Innovation and Change

- **Organizational Crises** can be described as negative disruptions which are unexpected and are generated from either internal or external circumstances. Crises are barriers to productive change when leaders cannot respond in a proactive manner to the disruption. We have seen oil spills, corruption scandals, tragic employee deaths, ethical abuses, product failures, and a host of other examples deter organizations from productively changing to meet new circumstances.

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The Leadership of Innovation and Change

- Christensen and Overdorf (2000) describe the creation of three types of organizational spaces (structures) to meet the challenges of disruptive innovations. In all cases, Christensen and Overdorf contend the traditional hierarchy or bureaucracy was not designed to innovate and change rapidly enough for turbulence and disruption. **The first space was a new organization within an existing organization with focus specifically on new ideas, processes, products, or services.** The organization within an organization would draw people from throughout the broader organization with a clear emphasis on blurring functional lines and creating urgency for innovation development and implementation.

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The Leadership of Innovation and Change

- The second space, while similar to the first in many respects, was described as spinning a new venture off from the parent organization. The existing organization continues to run and the innovation spin off runs simultaneously and separately. The new venture would have a specific innovation project with leaders accountable for its success, including financial accountability.

Chapter
10**The Leadership of Innovation and Change**

- Finally, the third space is created by acquiring the capabilities of another organization already exhibiting needed innovation competencies. At times this acquisition is a formal merging of one organization into another. At other times, the acquiring organization makes a financial commitment to the “innovation” organization which links the two together in development of new ideas, products, processes, or services.

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The Leadership of Innovation and Change

- Michael Hackman and Craig Johnson (2013) describe the change-centered leader. These leaders encourage creativity, experimentation, risk-taking, and innovation.
- As Kotter (2012) suggests, change requires many change agents with attitudes of wanting to make a difference, set a vision, and take rapid action in support of that vision.
- Hackman and Johnson (2013) describe change leaders as engaging in monitoring the external environment, envisioning change, empowering innovative thinking, and often taking personal risks.

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Models and Processes for Innovation and Change

Organizational acceleration of innovation and change. The eight-step process includes creating a sense of urgency around a single big opportunity, building and maintaining a guiding coalition, formulating a strategic vision and initiatives to capitalize on the opportunity, communicating the vision and strategy to attract a “volunteer army,” removing barriers, celebrating short-term wins, never letting up and learning from experiences, and institutionalizing strategic changes in the culture.

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Diffusion of Innovation نشر الابتكار

- Organizational process which includes innovation, diffusion, adoption, and implementation and, in turn, is related to a variety of organizational outcomes, including routinization of the innovation, reinvention of the innovation or rejection, or discontinuance of the innovation.
- Laurie Lewis (2011) describes innovation as “a creative process of generating ideas for practice.

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Stakeholder Theory

- Employees, investors, customers, vendors, regulators, competitors, communities, and a host of other potential publics are stakeholders who have interactions with particular organizations. Lewis (2011) describes stakeholder theory as explaining “how organizations map the field of potential stakeholders and then decide strategic action in managing relationships with various groups of stakeholders”.
- Stakeholders can play significant roles in change. Lewis describes four specific roles: opinion leaders, connectors, counselors, and journalists.

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The Purchase Model

In the purchase model, the organization requests particular services from a communication specialist, whether an organizational employee or external consultant, to meet a need the specialist has not been involved with identifying. The communication professional may be requested to conduct a training class, write a news release, or design a publication announcing a new policy. The parties requesting the specialist's services assume they understand their own needs and have identified the specialist as capable of meeting those needs and bringing about productive change.

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The Doctor- Patient Model

- The doctor–patient model is based on assumptions very different from the purchase model. In the doctor–patient model, the communication professional acts in much the same manner as a medical doctor who examines patients, identifies their symptoms, and prescribes treatment.
- In the organizational setting, the doctor–patient model requires the communication specialist to examine symptoms of organizational problems and prescribe appropriate solutions to meet the identified problems.

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The Process Model

- The process model for innovation and change finds members of the organization working hand in hand with the communication professional to identify problems, propose solutions, implement action, and evaluate results. In the process model, the communication specialist is responsible for guiding organizational members through inquiry and problem solving. The basic assumptions underlying the model are that organizational members are more likely to be committed to solutions they have helped generate and that the talents of the specialist are best used when working directly with those affected by the problem.

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Appreciative Enquiry

- A growing trend in planning for change is the use of a process known as appreciative inquiry (AI). Change planning using appreciative inquiry begins with the best qualities of the organization or its employees.
- The process searches for strengths to move the organization forward as opposed to focusing on weaknesses or problems. The goal of AI is to create a positive, productive environment by expanding on proven successes rather than encouraging a negative culture of fixing problems.
- **Appreciative inquiry has four primary states: discovery, dream, design, and destiny.** Discovery is the process for identifying the best in the situation or person. In a sense, it is appreciating the qualities that are working successfully. Dream is envisioning the results of a positive future. Design is constructing the plan to support the dream, and destiny is putting the plan into action.

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المسائل الجوهرية Substantiative Issues

- The very reason for forming groups in organizations can contribute to group conflict. Organizations should use the energy of diverse individuals to establish effective ways of doing things or to challenge existing processes in favor of new and better efforts. In effect, organizations should encourage conflicts of ideas that contribute to excellence. Individuals normally and productively can differ about positions, interests, approaches, or problems. Groups can therefore be expected to have conflicts over issues, ideas, or tasks.



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Professional Responsibilities for Change

- Regardless of the model or models from which change implementers work, four professional activities occur in the process of innovation and planned change: data collection, data evaluation, planning and implementation of solutions, and evaluation of results. The effectiveness of each of these activities contributes to the overall effectiveness of change. Although the activities are closely related to one another, they each require unique skills for effective performance. These activities are common responsibilities for those with organizational communication competencies.

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Gathering Input and Data

- Data collection activities involve critical decisions about the input wanted from organizational stakeholders. As Lewis (2011) has described input from stakeholders can be direct, with individuals representing themselves, or more indirect, with a representative of an entire group providing input.
- Input can be voluntary or required as a part of work responsibilities. Laurie Lewis and Travis Russ (2011), in reporting how practitioners asked for and used input during organizational changes, report practitioners tended to favor a restricted and advisory approach to input solicitation and use.



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Gathering Input and Data

- There are diverse ways to gather input. Primary techniques include questionnaires, audits, interviews, performance data, cost analysis, and trained observation. Each technique can yield useful information, and often the techniques are combined to provide a more comprehensive understanding of potential problems and issues.
- Questionnaires and interviews are techniques that gather data the organization does not already have. Other data, called performance data, exist as a result of the daily operation of the organization. These performance data come from sales reports, turnover rates, employee absenteeism, quarterly profit statements, and a host of other routine organizational measures.

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Data Evaluation

- Once data are collected, evaluation and interpretation begin. In the case of questionnaires and audits, answers are tabulated and statistical analysis is used to develop a numerical description of the issues or problems under consideration. The use of appropriate statistical tests, an understanding of the limits of particular tests, and an ability to translate the numerical data into the essence of the problem are important in data evaluation.
- Once data have been analyzed, the communication professional is responsible for interpreting data for those involved in developing solutions and making decisions about change. Data interpretation must therefore fit the needs of the proposed audience while thoughtfully and honestly reflecting the findings. This feedback stage can be especially difficult if the specialist has data that may not meet with the approval of key decision makers.

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Planning and Implementing Solutions

- The planning and implementing of needed change come about in diverse ways. At times the communication professional is charged with the responsibility to develop and propose plans for change that are subject to management approval. At other times the specialist may be charged with developing and implementing plans as part of regular job responsibilities.
- Generally speaking, we can identify three basic approaches to organizational change: **structural, technological, and behavioral**. **Structural change** attempts to change an organization's basic design by altering chains of command, work functions, spans of control, and decision-making protocols. The team based organization is an excellent example of a structural and process change made by many organizations seeking competitive advantage.



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Planning and Implementing Solutions

- **Technological change** attempts to introduce change designed to improve the technologies and systems used by an organization. These types of changes focus on state-of-the-art machinery, automation, job design, and new products and services. Finally, **behavioral change** efforts focus on the use of organizational human resources. Experiences over the last many years suggest that structure, technology, and strategy changes are maximally effective only when employees and other stake holders are involved in innovation and change..

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Evaluating Results

- Changes in policies, processes, training and developmental activities, and advising and counseling are part of the ongoing process of organizational life. Almost everyone, however, recognizes that change for the sake of change may or may not be organizationally effective. Innovation and change processes also are evaluated for their results.
- Innovation and change can be evaluated in a number of ways and with a number of different criteria. **Organizations frequently use performance measures such as profit and loss, achievement of goals, donor loyalty and contributions, sales quotas, manufacturing output, quality defects, and employee turnover to measure the effectiveness of change.** When a sales and profit problem has been caused by new products introduced by competitors, the effectiveness of innovation and change efforts will be measured by how effectively an organization provides new products or services for new stakeholder needs or requirements.



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Communicating about Change

- The general plan for disseminating information and soliciting input during planned organizational change. Strategy is based on communication design.
- Communication design and strategy, simply put, is the general plan for disseminating information and soliciting input during planned organizational change.
- A communication strategy is the explanation for organizational change, the approach for gathering input about the change, the methods of evaluating the acceptance or rejection of the change, and the methods for disseminating change outcomes.
- Once the communication strategy has been selected, a communication plan deals with the implementation of strategy. The plan incorporates the goals of the strategy and crafts messages to solicit input (i.e., to actively listen) and to provide information. The plan includes an analysis of various audiences, selection of channels of communication, timing for message dissemination, timing for input and reaction to messages, and ongoing monitoring of acceptance and resistance to change.

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Key Trends Shaping Organizational Communication

Hybrid / distributed work models as baseline

- Hybrid work (some days remote, some in-office) is no longer a temporary fix but the “new normal.” Many organizations plan to keep hybrid or distributed setups permanently, which requires rethinking how communication works across locations.
- This shift implies that communication strategies must account for both in-office and remote staff — regular team check-ins, hybrid all-hands, and ensuring remote team members aren’t left out.

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Key Trends Shaping Organizational Communication

Asynchronous غير متزامن communication & flexibility

Asynchronous communication refers to interactions where participants do **not communicate at the same time**. Messages are sent, received, and responded to at different times, allowing individuals to work without requiring immediate interaction.

- Asynchronous (async) communication is rising in importance — recorded video updates, shared documents, chat threads, etc. This helps accommodate different time zones, flexible schedules, and avoids overload from too many live meetings.
- Async communication often leads to improved productivity and inclusion: fewer scheduling conflicts and better access for employees working outside “standard hours.”

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Key Trends Shaping Organizational Communication

AI, automation, and personalization

- Organizations are increasingly using AI-driven tools to manage internal communications — from chatbots handling FAQs to automating routine updates and delivering personalized content based on role, department, location, or even individual preferences.
- This helps reduce information overload, ensures relevant messaging, and frees up internal-comms teams to focus on strategic or creative tasks rather than repetitive work.

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Key Trends Shaping Organizational Communication

Channel optimization & unified collaboration platforms

- Rather than having many fragmented channels (email, chat, intranet, file-sharing, etc.), organizations are consolidating around unified collaboration platforms (e.g. chat + video + _docs in one place). This reduces “tool fatigue” and silos.
- Strategic channel optimization: rather than “use everything,” good internal-comms teams design purposeful flows — deciding which channel is for what, reducing redundancy and noise.

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Key Trends Shaping Organizational Communication

Multimedia, visual, and interactive content

- Communication is becoming more visual and interactive: video updates, infographics, interactive dashboards, short-form media instead of long text emails or memos. This is especially useful for distributed teams and helps engagement.
- For internal updates, training, onboarding, even casual “company culture” messages — video or visual formats are increasingly preferred.

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Key Trends Shaping Organizational Communication

Outcome-oriented communication: from “engagement” to “organizational velocity”

- There's a shift in how the effectiveness of internal communication is measured: instead of just “who saw the email”, organizations begin tracking how quickly teams act on messages, how aligned decisions become, and how fast projects move — sometimes called “organizational velocity.”
- This reflects a bigger trend: communication is not just “nice to have” but tied to real business performance and agility

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Key Trends Shaping Organizational Communication

Two-way communication and feedback culture

- Rather than one-way top-down messaging, companies are building communication flows that allow employees to respond, give feedback, or participate — in real time or asynchronously.
- This helps build transparency, inclusion, and a sense of belonging — especially important for hybrid or remote teams where informal “water-cooler” interaction is hard to replicate

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Challenges & What Organizations Must Watch Out For

- **Digital overload / noise:** With many channels and constant flow of messages, employees can suffer from notification fatigue, which reduces effectiveness. That's why channel optimization and purposeful flow design matter.
- **Maintaining human touch while using automation:** While AI and automation vastly improve scalability, there's a risk communications become impersonal or mechanical — companies must balance automation with genuine “human-centric” messaging.
- **Ensuring equal access across roles and locations:** For frontline, remote, or non-desk workers, traditional “email + intranet” may not suffice. Organizations need inclusive strategies that reach everyone.
- **Measuring impact, not just noise:** It's easy to push many messages — real challenge is ensuring those messages lead to action, alignment, and improved workflow (organizational velocity).

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Why It Matters — For Organizations & Employees

These trends reflect deeper shifts in how people work — more flexibility (hybrid/remote), use of technology, and demand for personalization and belonging.

When done right — unified platforms + async + AI + thoughtfully crafted content — communication becomes a key enabler for agility, employee engagement, productivity, and retention.

On the flip side: poor implementation can lead to overload, disconnect, feelings of isolation especially for remote or frontline workers, and waste of time — hence the need for strategy, not just tools.

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What This Means If You're Leading or Working in an Organization

Prioritize building a communication strategy (not just using lots of tools): define who needs what kind of information, when, via which channel.

Balance automation & personalization — use AI and automation to deliver efficiently, but keep a human touch.

Use asynchronous + multimedia communication to be inclusive and flexible.

Monitor outcomes: track how communication affects action, alignment, speed — not just “opens” or “reads.”

Encourage two-way feedback / dialogue so employees feel heard and included, especially in hybrid or remote setups.



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