Time For Change: Managing A Successful Future Of Work

A NEW APPROACH FOR NEW WAYS OF WORK

Anticipating the Challenges of New Ways of Working

As the world begins turning a corner on the COVID-19 pandemic, employers are championing the "new normal" for workplaces. However, for employees it's likely that the "new normal" seems more new, and less normal, than many will be comfortable with.

The lingering effects of working in isolation, health anxieties and pandemic fatigue can easily follow employees back into the re-imagined workplace, impacting wellness and performance.

For employers, communicating and demonstrating a commitment to employee wellness will be critical. This can pay out in long term dividends in the recruitment and retention of quality employees, as well as the overall success of the business.

A successful return-to-work strategy involves: transparency, flexibility, responsiveness and support of employee wellness.

Transparency requires open and ongoing two-way communication. Leaders will likely be unable to make accurate assumptions about what employees are thinking and feeling based upon outward appearances. It will be important for them to have their fingers on the pulse of the workforce and check vital signs early and often, rather than waiting for problems to surface.

Leaders must also understand the negative correlation between employee stress level and their ability to meaningfully contribute. Mental noise theory suggests that when people are in a state of high concern, their ability to process information effectively and efficiently can be severely impacted.

Managing the health concerns associated with the new ways of working will also require sensitivity and attention to physical and mental health.

Striking the right balance of work-from-home, hybrid, and in-office work may remain a moving target for a while as the impact of vaccines gradually curtails the spread of COVID-19. Reopening the workplace will not be like flipping a switch.

Remaining open-minded and flexible will demonstrate that leaders are willing to work with employees and make the necessary adjustments to ensure individual and organizational success.

The post-pandemic workplace is uncharted territory. No leader can expect to be innately knowledgeable or skillful in meeting the challenges ahead. Training for managers who are close to the ground must focus on recognizing and responding to distressed employees, and how to respond to signs of trouble.

Leaders at every level of the organization must support these efforts in order to create an environment where employees are able to thrive. This not only fosters a positive workplace for the employee to return to, but has impacting effects on business itself. Higher retention rates and lower levels of stress often equate to highly productive business operations.

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The New Hybrid Workforce

Change is essential for business success. It provides the direction, drive, and clarity of purpose to avoid stagnation and achieve sustained growth.

But the process of change presents a challenge. Traditional business operations have been disrupted. Processes are now reengineered. Staff are the unwitting participants.

Organizations are facing levels of change matched only by 2020. Returning to the workplace is imminent – but in a different form. Right now,

organizations have the opportunity to front-foot the change and seize the initiative.

2020 was reactive. 2021 is the year to proactively shape the future of work with intention. Change communications are essential for enabling this.

2020 → **2021**
Survive   **Thrive**

Change and the Return to Work

The landscape of work is changing. For many organizations and their employees, this year will be different to anything they've experienced before. Staff will be returning to a working environment very different to the one they left behind – and very different to what they're accustomed to.

The new reality of work is likely to be a hybrid model, combining employees working fulltime in the office with others based part-time at home. Some departments may work centrally on certain days, other departments on different days. It promises to be a model that is difficult to administer and manage.

This new hybrid workplace is designed to keep employees connected to the wider business community while still enjoying some of the benefits of working remotely.

It's an approach exemplified by Spotify, the latest company to shift to a flexible "Work from Anywhere" model. By one estimate, managing a successful return to work transition is critical. That's why organizational design and change management is the second highest priority for HR Managers in 2021, according to a recent Gartner survey.[2]

But effective change is not achieved easily.

Traditional Model	Hybrid Model
Designated locations	Work from anywhere
Full-time in the office	Part-time or full-time in the office
Same every day	Different by day depending on team and business needs
Administratively simple	Administratively difficult
Staff easy to reach	Staff difficult to reach

25-30%

of the workforce will be working from home multiple days each week by the end of 2021.[1]

The Challenge of Workplace Change

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the pace of organizational change. Success or failure is determined as much by employees as employers.

Mergers and acquisitions, integrations, restructures, and digital transformations are shaping workplaces across the globe. Change is essential – and inevitable.

70%

**70% of change initiatives fail, and nearly 40% are due to employee resistance** [3]
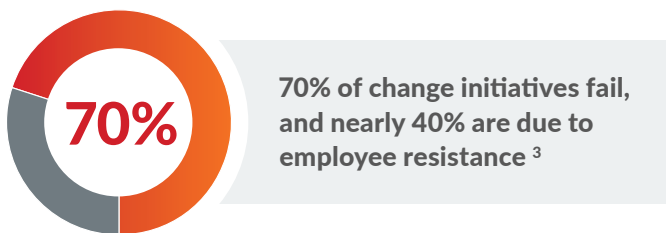
All too often the needs of the business are at odds with the desire of employees. Employers seek the improvements and growth that changes promise. Employees prefer the status quo; psychology shows that it's human nature to be afraid of the unknown, which is what change represents.

Returning to work is no different. Research reveals **83% of CEOs** want their employees to return to the office, but only 10% of employees want to return.[4]

The gulf between these numbers reveals a serious business risk. A failed return to work program will result in declining morale, rising turnover, and eroded productivity. Businesses that have suffered the impacts of COVID-19 last year simply cannot afford this in 2021.

But how can such opposing views be reconciled?
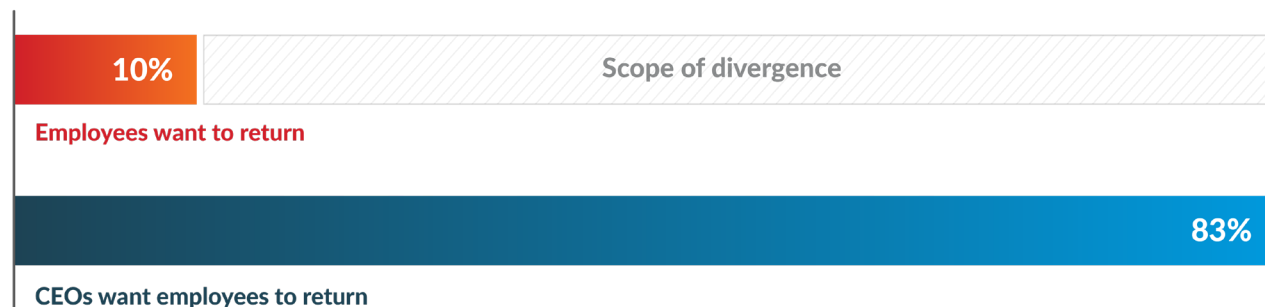
Communications and the Impact of Change

Change management is the process of defining the desired future state of an organization, and enacting the strategic and operational adjustments required.

To secure employee buy-in, employers must first understand how employees are affected. A change impact assessment should be conducted to identify how the proposed changes will impact on employees' professional and personal lives.

Transitioning to a new mode of work will affect working location, commuting, role responsibilities, work/life balance, family duties and more. Operating a hybrid workforce complicates this further. Inconsistencies in where and when employees are working centrally can undermine processes and disrupt collaboration.

Communication is the biggest influence on transformation success. At companies where management communicates openly about the transformation's progress, employees are 8 times more likely to report a successful outcome.

8x   **more success with open management communication** [5]

Employee communication and engagement enables a successful return to work by aligning business needs and employee needs. The next section presents a unique framework for achieving this, together with practical advice on implementing a return-to-work change program in your workplace.

10%	Scope of divergence

Employees want to return

	83%

CEOs want employees to return

Sources: 1 Global Workplace Analytics, **2** Gartner 2021 Top Priorities For HR Leaders, **3** Quantum Workplace, **4** Best Practice Institute, **5** McKinsey & Company

2 A Framework For Successful Change

The key to successful organizational change lies in sustaining momentum and reducing resistance. This involves two parallel tracks:

1. Enabling the business transition (through systems and processes)

2. Supporting the employee transition (through understanding and acceptance)

Both tracks take place concurrently, but their goals and methods may diverge. Businesses will require the removal of obstacles and expedition of improvements. Employees will require consultation on the change and nurturing to address what it means to them.

Business Needs Stages

Initiation	Enablement	Acceleration	Implementation	Sustainment

Employee Response Stages

Shock	Denial	Anger	Depression	Decision	Acceptance

The Employee Response to Change

During times of significant change, more than 80% of employees experience "cultural tensions."[6] They experience competing priorities that are difficult to manage, which can result in negative emotional responses.

This is even more pronounced when the proposed change is in opposition to the desires of many employees – as is the case for returning to work.

Left unaddressed, this emotional response results in dissatisfaction and disengagement. Staff who are unsettled or unhappy don't commit to the change, and perform their roles at reduced levels of effort. Online forums and chat channels become enablers for the spread of negative opinions.

Such a response can ultimately sabotage the entire change process. While employers are progressing achievement of the business track, the employee track is stalling – or falling. The failure of one track will doom both.

How can employers overcome this ingrained response? Timing and communication are critical.

Business Needs Stages

Initiation	Enablement	Acceleration	Implementation	Sustainment

Employee Response Stages

Shock	Denial	Anger	Depression	Decision	Acceptance

The Change Curve in the Workplace

The duration of the stages are unequal, and the actual time spent in each varies by individual and situation. But in all cases, a successful resolution is only achieved when an individual transitions through the whole process.
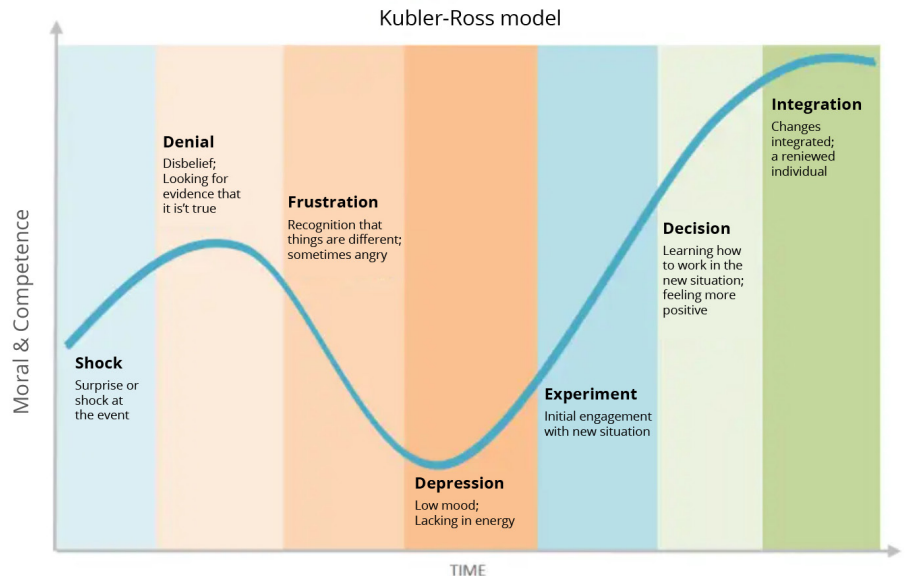
Employees experience the same journey when encountering workplace change. Their existing view of the organization or their role is challenged, which triggers the emotional responses that impact their capacity and willingness to perform.

A workplace application of the change curve is shown in the following table.

However, this only tells part of the story. While employees are experiencing their personal emotional journeys, employers are progressing their own business journey. These are the parallel tracks introduced above.

Kubler-Ross model

The traditional Kubler-Ross Change Curve provides a visual representation of the emotional journey people go on when experiencing grief or any type of major change. It demonstrates how people transition through several stages of response.

It's not enough for employers to focus on only the employee journey or the business one.

Supporting employees towards acceptance of change is pointless if the change itself is never realized. Similarly, advancing the business towards a successful change implementation is compromised if employees aren't committed to it.

Stage	Emotional Response	Role Impact
1. Shock	Disbelief the situation is happening	Reduced productivity
2. Denial	Fixation on the past state	Not adhering to agreed process
3. Anger	Frustration at the cause of the situation	Active disengagement from role
4. Depression	Resignation of the reality of the situation	Unmotivated to perform
5. Decision	Conclusion reached on the way forward	Reengagement with or resignation from company
6. Acceptance	Embracing (or at least tolerating) the new circumstances	Resumed engagement and productivity

Business Implementation Phases

The business implementation journey includes five phases:
Initiation – Enablement – Acceleration – Implementation – Sustainment.

During each of these phases the business will have distinct objectives related to their change initiative. Each objective must positively influence the business state and employee response for the overall change to be successful.

The objectives and influences for each phase of the business implementation are summarized in the following table.

Throughout these phases it's important for employers to demonstrate both management and leadership.

Management is the 'nuts + bolts' of establishing systems, processes and procedures; leadership is the grease which sets a common goal and inspires staff to buy into the vision.

Successful business implementation requires the systems and processes to optimize outcomes, plus the confidence and empathy to inspire others.

Tracking the progress of both the business state and employee impact ensures that changes are managed successfully and lead sensitively.

Phase	Change Objective	Business State	Employee Impact
1. Initiation	Establish foundation to position for optimal progress	Change initiative socialized; future state defined	High awareness, but low commitment needed
2. Enablement	Overcome obstacles to change success	Change progress embedded; organizational alignment on delivery	Deeper understanding of the change; waterfall down to role level
3. Acceleration	Accelerate progress towards completion	Change progress fully resourced; areas of resistance minimized	Acceptance of change reality; pivot towards commitment
4. Implementation	Finalize delivery and complete roll-out	Change nearing completion with high momentum; future state being realized	Greater investment in the change; genuine buy-in of the value
5. Sustainment	Embed new state in business operations	Post-change state now part of BAU	Total adoption of change as new normal

The Engage to Excel Change Framework

The SnapComms team, now a part of Everbridge, has developed a unique approach to align employee psychology with business strategy.

The Engage to Excel Change Framework provides a new perspective on aligning business and employee needs in times of change. It identifies points of high risk or potential employee-business disconnect, with tactical solutions to resolve these through communication.

The framework combines the traditional employee change curve model with the stages of business implementation. By overlaying both, business leaders can quickly and clearly assess where employees and the business are in their respective journeys, and introduce initiatives to address areas of misalignment or conflict.

Consider your return to work program. How advanced is your business? What stage are employees at?

If the business is well advanced along its journey (for example, beginning to deploy changes to the physical office environment), but employees are less advanced along theirs (such as, still experiencing denial that they will imminently be required to return to centralized work in some form), change communications must immediately pivot to address this conflict.

The value of this approach is that it drives achievement of overall goals, while enabling employers to take corrective action if change initiatives are not progressing as planned. If either employees or the business are responding poorly to the change program, employers have sufficient early warning to course-correct.

Without this approach, corrective actions are often left too late and are harder, or impossible, to enact. Therefore, the framework acts as a transformation dashboard to track momentum and assess progress over time, both for employees and the business.
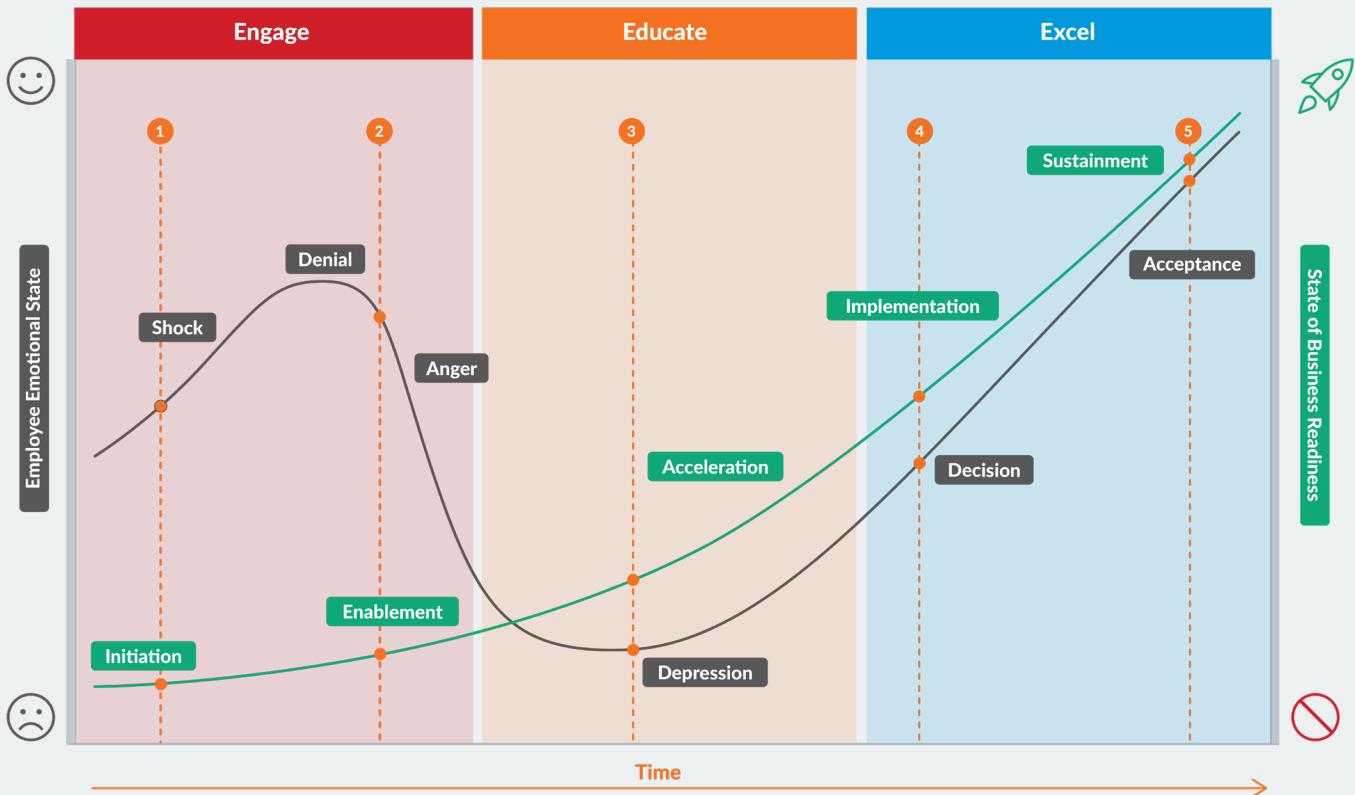
Tactics for Employee Communications can be Summarized for Each of the Business Phases.

Phase 1 – Initiation:

Focus on messaging that builds awareness while addressing employee wellbeing and morale.

Phase 2 – Enablement:

Focus on enablement messaging to build employee knowledge and drive commitment.

Phase 3 – Acceleration:

Focus on messaging that regulates emotions to maintain momentum while minimizing seeds of resistance.

Phase 4 – Implementation:

Focus on positive reinforcement and sharing of quick wins to build support and advocacy.

Phase 5 – Sustainment:

Focus on ensuring compliance with new processes and embedding the post-change state into regular business operations.

Communication Opportunities

The framework identifies several key areas of potential risk or opportunity between employees and the business.

1

When the change initiative is launched, and low employee awareness will cause shock

2

When staff awareness is higher, but objections are increasingly raised

3

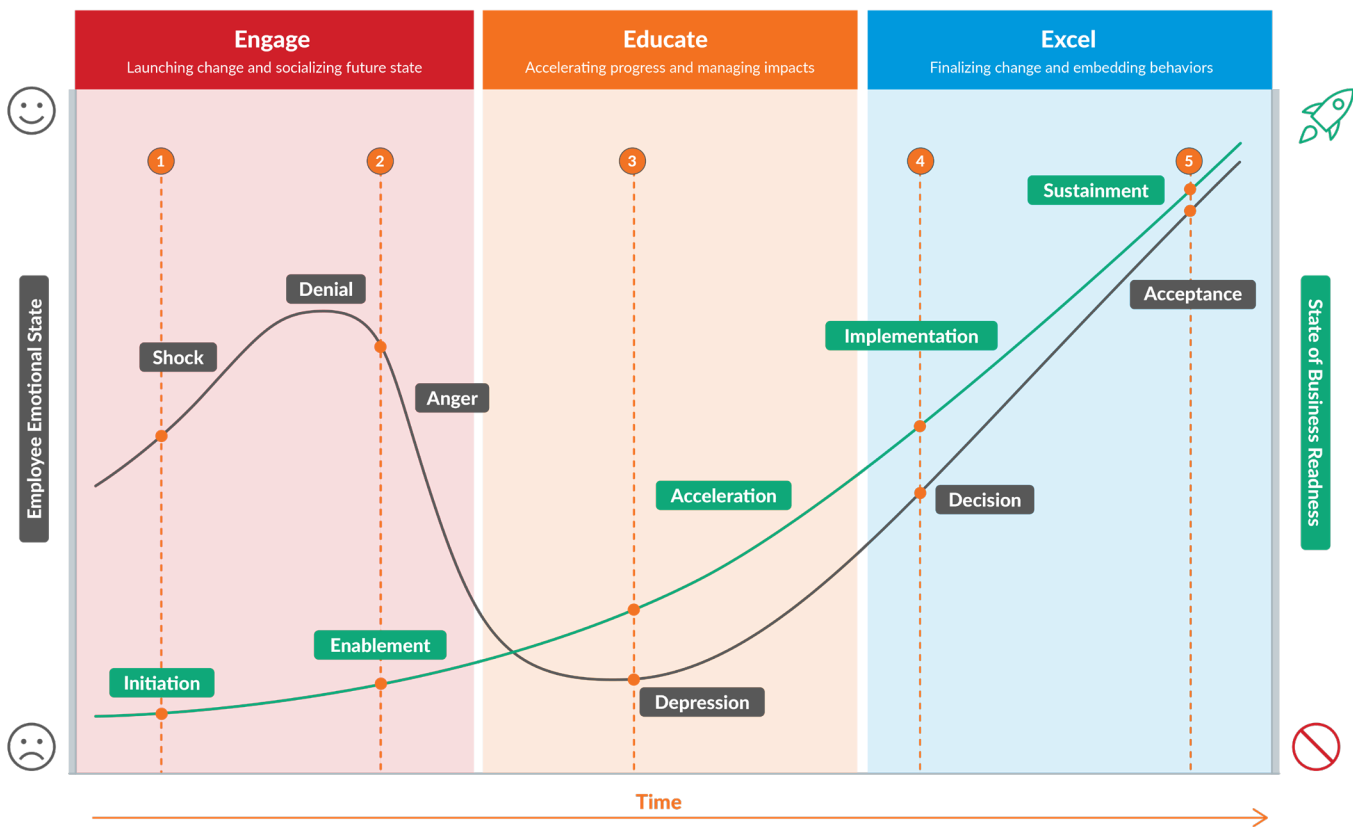When the business is accelerating progress, but employee resistance is rising

4

When the business needs to foster support to fully realize change objectives

5

When the post-change state needs to be embedded as the 'new normal'

These spotlights are an early-warning for Internal Communications and Human Resources Managers to put in place appropriate resources and prepare tailored communications in advance.
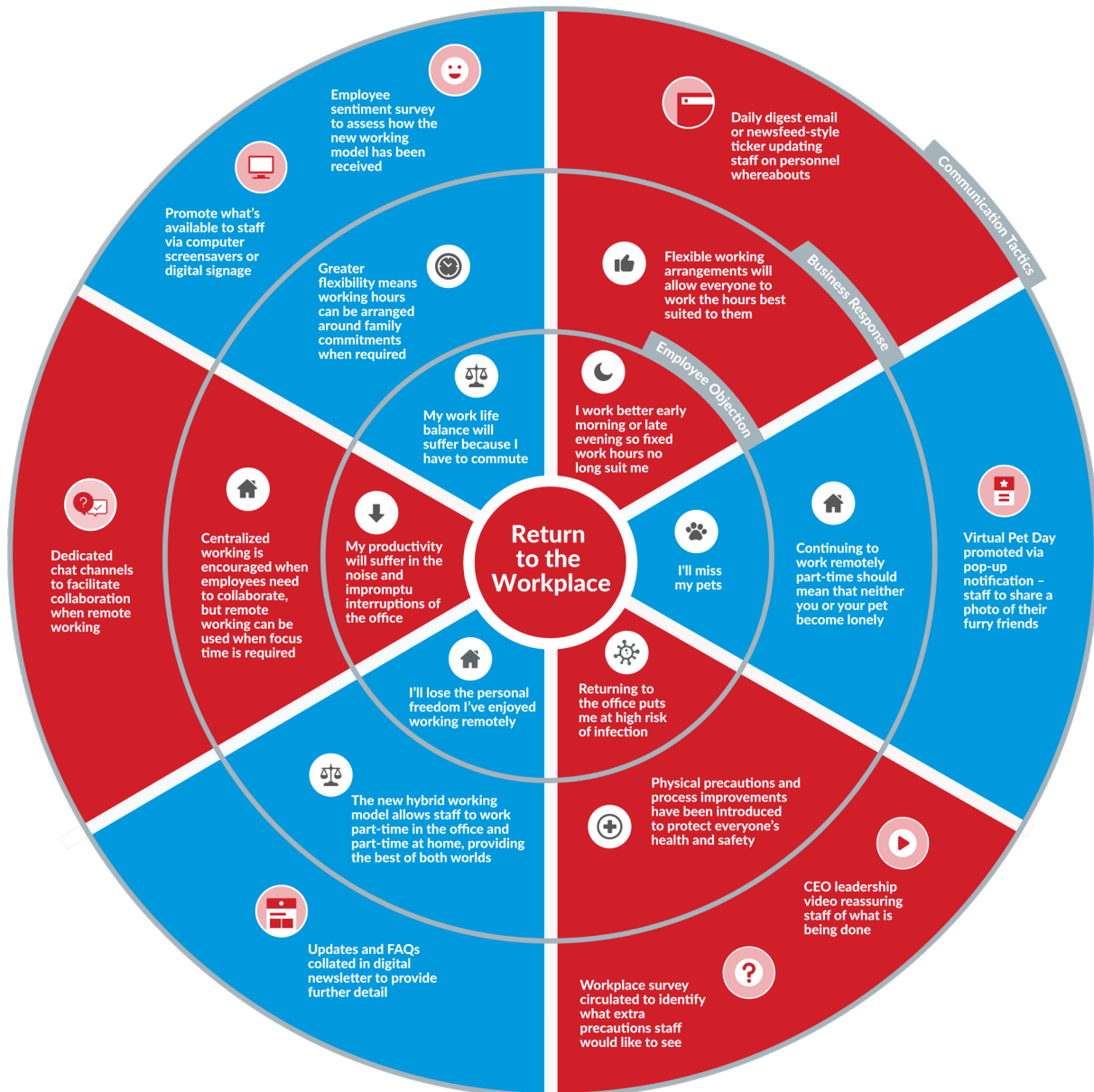
The Engage to Excel Change Framework

Engage		Educate		Excel
Launching change and socializing future state		Accelerating progress and managing impacts		Finalizing change and embedding behaviors

Employee Emotional State

State of Business Readiness

1 — Shock — Denial
2 — Anger — Enablement — Initiation
3 — Acceleration — Depression
4 — Implementation — Decision
5 — Sustainment — Acceptance

Time

1	2	3	4	5
Build Awareness	**Overcome Objections**	**Manage Resistance**	**Foster Support**	**Embed Change**

Communication Opportunities

Grow understanding, Emphasize benefits	Provide clarity, Increase engagement	Address causes, Minimize impact	Build commitment, Encourage participation	Celebrate success, Ingrain new state

Messaging Strategies

Bite-size, promotional-style comms (eg. pop-up notifications)	Longer, detailed comms answering FAQs (eg. corporate newsletters)	Reinforce benefits through high-impact visual messages (eg. computer wallpapers)	Change champions among staff identified through visibility on chat channels	Ensure compliance with new processes
Multi-channel, broad reach (eg. digital signage)	Executive sponsorship (eg. AMAs, CEO video message)	Address grievances (eg. in-person meetings)	Demonstrate benefit delivery to date	Assess change effectiveness through post-deployment staff quizzes
Education and training sessions	Empathy and support	Introduce fix or ringfence cause to limit influence	Recognize milestones (eg. newsfeed-style tickers, computer screensavers)	Promote success stories through all internal channels (eg. departmental emails, corporate newsletters)
Measure staff sentiment through surveys				

Addressing Employee Objections

We've already established that some level of employee resistance to change is inevitable. It's human nature to feel cautious around new things and to prefer the status quo. But it is possible – and desirable – to counter employee objections before they manifest as resistance that could derail your project.

The new flywheel chart shown here demonstrates how to address employee objections through communications.

It's focused on your change initiative at the center; outward from there, the surrounding ring summarizes common employee objections; the next ring details what the business response should be; the final ring recommends communications tactics to achieve the business response and resolve the objection.

Employee sentiment survey to assess how the new working model has been received

Promote what's available to staff via computer screensavers or digital signage

Greater flexibility means working hours can be arranged around family commitments when required

My work life balance will suffer because I have to commute

Daily digest email or newsfeed-style ticker updating staff on personnel whereabouts

Flexible working arrangements will allow everyone to work the hours best suited to them

Communication Tactics

Business Response

Employee Objection

I work better early morning or late evening so fixed work hours no long suit me

Dedicated chat channels to facilitate collaboration when remote working

Centralized working is encouraged when employees need to collaborate, but remote working can be used when focus time is required

My productivity will suffer in the noise and impromptu interruptions of the office

Return to the Workplace

I'll miss my pets

Continuing to work remotely part-time should mean that neither you or your pet become lonely

Virtual Pet Day promoted via pop-up notification – staff to share a photo of their furry friends

I'll lose the personal freedom I've enjoyed working remotely

Returning to the office puts me at high risk of infection

The new hybrid working model allows staff to work part-time in the office and part-time at home, providing the best of both worlds

Physical precautions and process improvements have been introduced to protect everyone's health and safety

CEO leadership video reassuring staff of what is being done

Updates and FAQs collated in digital newsletter to provide further detail

Workplace survey circulated to identify what extra precautions staff would like to see

Employee Objection

Returning to the office puts me at high risk of infection

⬇

Business Response

Physical precaution and process improvements have been introduced to protect everyone's health and safety

⬇

Communication Tactics

★

CEO leadership video reassuring staff of what is being done

★

Updates and FAQs collated in digital newsletter to provide further detail

★

Workplace survey circulated to identify what extra precautions staff would like to see

For example, one of the most common objections to returning to centralized work is the risk to personal health. Using the flywheel model, this objection can be addressed as follows.

While employees are working remotely, either fully or in part, they're not exposed to the brand signals traditionally seen in the office. Building trust or loyalty is more difficult.

Visual cues support employee cognition and quicken information processing. Use of visuals in brand communications improves learning by up to 400%.[7] Effectively incorporating this into your messaging can help foster the sense of belonging which builds loyalty.

Develop activities that increase employee awareness, interest and confidence in returning to work. Reinforce key messages to build commitment to and support of the new workplace model.

Encourage your leadership team to champion the return to work and act as role models through their behavior and messaging.

Identify the key influencers and thought leaders among your employees. Target messages specifically to them and involve them in your return to work program early, such that they can become valuable change agents who can help persuade others.

The next section brings everything together to construct highly-effective employee messaging to achieve your change communication goals
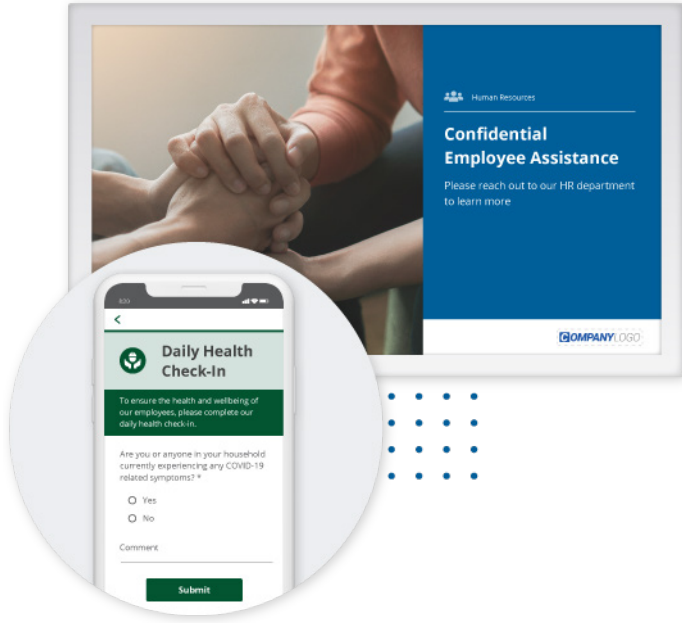
Sources: **6** Gartner, **7** Shift eLearning

1 WHITE PAPER

3 Building Perfect Messaging

With the frameworks in place, it's time to put them into practice. The Engage to Excel Change Framework has shown where your employees and the business are in their respective change journeys. Communication opportunities have been identified in high-priority places along the way.

Now these opportunities should be translated into compelling, effective messaging that informs, engages and motivates your employees.

The Communications Spectrum and best practice message templates provide helpful resources to transform your change program into a cause for celebration.

The Value of Multi-Channel Comms

Managing a successful return to work requires messaging that addresses a range of topics, themes and audiences. Certain messaging will convey factual information which employees need to understand. Others will require employees to perform specific actions. And some will provide supporting content to support wellbeing and morale. Examples could include:

Engage – What changes are being made to physical workspaces and when they are happening

Educate – How employees can provide feedback on what they want to see when returning to work

Excel – What support services are available to support a more efficient transition

Delivering employee messages which achieve all of these is impossible through a single channel. Every channel has its own strengths and weaknesses. Some are effective at fostering dialogue, but weaker at immediate notifications.

Others are useful for blanket coverage, but not for targeted messaging.

For example, in the early phases of workplace change, employees can't take in too much information at once – they need bite-sized messages if they are to understand and retain the information. Therefore, lengthy emails are unlikely to be effective. Desktop alerts which provide short, sharp and concise content are more likely to get read.

Multi-channel communications maximize the best attributes of every channel and reduce the risk in relying on any single channel. Each channel then becomes a component of your overall business comms stack, ready to be leveraged when planning your next communications campaign.

But how can the best channel for each communication need be found?
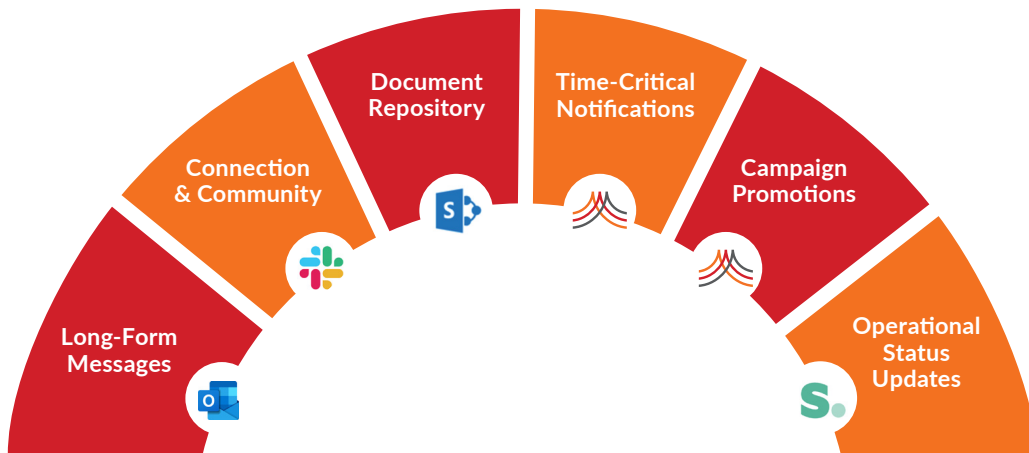
The Communications Spectrum

The **Communications Spectrum** is a framework that aligns business objectives with workplace outputs. It integrates fully into your wider communication plan, defining the critical pathways linking objectives, channels, execution and results.

The tiered format of the Communications Spectrum reflects the hierarchy of business decision-making and communication. Business requirements are defined (top layer), which are translated into communication needs (middle layer), before being communicated to staff (bottom layer), who then respond accordingly.

The top layer defines the range of business communication objectives, arrayed along a continuum based on criticality. These range from high criticality on the left to non-critical (or social) on the right.

The middle layer defines the essential linkage between communication objectives and channels. This linkage is demonstrated through use cases – specific communication needs common to different functional areas.

The bottom layer defines how various communication channels align to use cases.

These are arrayed along a continuum from high to low intrusion. More intrusive channels have high-impact formats that deliver immediate attention. Less intrusive channels use subtle formats to achieve sustained behavioral change.

By using this process when planning return to work messaging, managers can readily identify communication formats that suit their objectives, and dramatically improve the success of their activities.

CRITICAL	PRIORITY	IMPORTANT	RELEVANT	ENGAGING	SOCIAL
Emergency or urgent communication	Time-sensitive communications	Crucial for business operation	Valuable information for staff performance	Helpful content for all staff	Workplace culture and wellbeing content
I need to read this now to be safe.	I need to read this as soon as possible.	I should read this sometime today.	I should read this during the next 2-3 days.	I should try to read this sometime this week.	I'll read this if it interests me and I have time.

Mission Critical — **USE CASES** — **Good to Know**

Emergency Comms	**Health and Safety**	**Business Operations**	**Leadership Comms**	**People and Culture**	**Social News**
Active Shooter	Workplace Incident Advisory	Hybrid Working Changes	Return to Workplace Strategy	Welcome Back to the Office	Employee Awards and Recognitions
Fire in the Building	COVID-19 Case in Workplace	System and Process Update	CEO Office Update	Company Values Promotion	Celebrating Achievements and Holidays
Crisis Comms	**IT and Cybersecurity**	**Compliance**	**IT and Cybersecurity**	**Employee Engagement**	**Employee Wellbeing**
Extreme Weather Warning	Unplanned Outage	Read and Comply With New Policy	Planned System Maintenance	Sentiment Survey	Stay Hydrated Reminder
Critical Outage	Cyber-Attack Underway	Workplace Protocol Training	Workplace Cyber Security Awareness	Empathy Messaging	Mental Health Awareness

Business leaders cite culture as the number one barrier to transformations.[8]

Change Through Culture

Dynamic and visual communications are essential to building culture in a remote working or hybrid environment.

Culture is at the heart of how an organization does things and determines how it responds to change. The most effective change approach and strategies are developed to build buy-in, commitment and ownership of the changes and their adoption.

Introducing an ongoing internal communication and engagement program can help foster the strong company culture which supports successful change.

Employees have experienced a huge amount of change in the last year or more, and a return to centralized work in any form threatens to introduce even more. But while change is inevitable, change fatigue doesn't have to be.

Look for opportunities to get staff involved, celebrate team and individual achievements. Use social and engagement channels shown on the right of the Communications Spectrum, such as screensavers to promote cultural initiatives and surveys to encourage feedback.

Sources: 8 Gartner

ABOUT SNAPCOMMS,
AN EVERBRIDGE COMPANY

SnapComms provides solutions to solve internal communication challenges for organizations worldwide. Our employee communication platform provides a range of channels to get employee attention, including Alerts, Tickers, Wallpapers, Screensavers, Quizzes, Surveys and Newsletters. Prior to Everbridge, SnapComms was a self-funded, privately owned business that has grown from small beginnings. Determined to help more organizations improve employee communications, Sarah Perry and Chris Leonard launched SnapComms in 2007. Within three years, SnapComms grew without investors from zero to hero in the competitive sector of employee communication software, where it is now a global market leader.

ABOUT EVERBRIDGE

Everbridge, Inc. (NASDAQ: EVBG), a global software company and the leader in critical event management (CEM). Everbridge provides enterprise software applications that automate and accelerate an organization's operational response to critical events in order to keep people safe and businesses running faster. The company's platform sent over 3.5 billion messages in 2019 and offers the ability to reach over 550 million people in more than 200 countries and territories, Everbridge is based in Boston and Los Angeles with additional offices in Lansing, San Francisco, Abu Dhabi, Beijing, Bangalore, Kolkata, Paris, London, Munich, New York, Oslo, Singapore, Stockholm, Tilburg, and Auckland, New Zealand.

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