SETTING THE STAGE TO COMMUNICATE AND ENGAGE

A sequence of early communication and engagement activities



*About this guide*

**PURPOSE:** This guide will help users define and outline their first communication and engagement activities to their stakeholders.

**AUDIENCE:** The change manager or communications expert.

**INCLUDES:**

* Preliminary information on communication and engagement
* A proposed sequence list of activities and objectives
* Helpful tips
* Two examples of announcements (see Annex)

*\*The examples in the appendix section can be customized to suit your respective workplace modernization project.*

# **Preliminary information required to communicate and engage**

At the beginning of a project, it is important to focus on building the awareness and desire for the future way of work amongst employees. Within those first activities, you will need to explain the **WHY** of the project and **WHY** employees should participate. Prior to planning and implementing the first communication and engagement activities with employees on the upcoming workplace modernization project, the following should be defined. This will help to build the early communication and engagement documents/activities:

1. Ensure the organization has a clearly defined vision for its workplace transformation which is aligned with its mission, mandate and business objectives.
2. Ensure the project sponsor and champion are both identified, as they are the best people to communicate those first messages and lead engagement activities for the employees. As a best practice, first messages about the vision of the project should be communicated by the most senior leader in the organization who is involved in the project.
3. Make sure you have the answers to the following questions, as they will be the base of your message that will align with the organization’s vision for the workplace modernization project:
   1. What is changing or about to change?
   2. What are the objectives of the proposed change(s)?
   3. Is this change happening at a project or organization level?
   4. What will be the impact of the change on the organization and on employees?
   5. How will this benefit the organization and its employees?
   6. What is the desired workplace experience, and how does it support the organizational vision?



**Helpful tips**

* Change often drives a level of uncertainty among employees. Leaders can dispel rumors and alleviate anxiety by **communicating clear and consistent messages**.
* **Timing is key**, but it can often become a delicate balancing act. For instance, if you communicate change too early, you risk alienating employees when the change you announced has not come to fruition. If you announce change too late, and employees read or hear about it before hearing it from management, they will not trust that the organization is being transparent or acting in their best interest.
* **Employee engagement and internal communications should not be treated as one-offs to check the box**; they should be the basis of a cohesive change management strategy which often is not defined yet at this early stage of the project.
* **Always communicate desired behavior changes**: If the change that is occurring requires a change in employee behavior, internal communications should specify what these new expectations are, why it is important to the organization, and why it is important to the individual – what’s in it for me? (WIIFM).
* **Encourage real-time feedback**: This feedback can be gathered in a variety of ways, including through manager and employee one-on-one meetings, workshops, or web-based pulse feedback platforms like Slido, Mentimeter, etc. Engagement is at its best when employees feel like they are being heard and the organization is assuming accountability to this feedback. This engagement method also provides for real-time reaction to changes as they are occurring, so the organization can address specific pain points that arise.

***Note: all of the following activities should be communicated by the champion or project sponsor.***

| **Activity** | **Objective(s)** |
| --- | --- |
| Define the workplace vision and guiding principles | * To better align the project objectives and vision * To establish a shared path all can understand * To have something to work toward |
| Leadership team to embrace workplace vision | * Obtain leadership buy-in and explain what is expected of them * Provide key messages |
| Inform leadership team of the upcoming project announcement | * Prepare them for next steps, upcoming milestones, upcoming engagement activities and which role they will be expected to play |
| Inform middle managers of the upcoming project announcement | * Prepare them for next steps, upcoming milestones, upcoming engagement activities and explain what is expected of them * Provide key messages |
| Send the first communication to all employees | * Create awareness and build desire on the context, vision, objectives, etc., of the modernization project * Inform them on next steps, upcoming milestones, upcoming engagement activities and what is expected from them |
| Hold a townhall with all employees | * Create awareness and build desire on the context, vision, objectives, etc., of the modernization project * Inform them on next steps, upcoming milestones, upcoming engagement activities and what is expected from them Create awareness on GCworkplace * Prepare them for upcoming functional programming survey (if applicable) |
| Launch the GCworkplace functional programming survey and workshops with the entire population who will be affected by the workplace modernization | * Reiterate the workplace vision, what the organization is expecting from them (e.g. imagining themselves in the future) * Gather data regarding each group’s functional requirements, activities being performed, typical patterns of interaction and mobility, and general work styles and preferences of the surveyed population. |
| Communicate and explain the survey results | * Inform employees on how they will be engaged to participate in the upcoming months/years * Inform employees on how they are supported and empowered to rethink old ways of working based on where we are going |

**Annex A:** Examples of project kick-off/announcement to employees

One of the first communications should always include the following elements:

* The context of the change
* The change trigger: the what, the why, the who
* How the change will affect employees and the organization on a short and long term basis
* What’s in it for us/for me (benefits from the employees’ perspective)
* A clear workplace vision
* Defined objectives for the workplace modernization
* Clear expectations from the organization in terms of employee participation in the change; what it expects from them, How the organization and its senior leaders is showing support to the change (i.e. walk the talk, agreeing to the new way of work and forgoing large assigned offices, etc.)
* How the organization understands the range of emotions associated with the change; show empathy
* Next steps

**Example 1**

Hello,

It seems hard to believe that we are already into 2021 and it has now been over [*# months*] since our daily lives, and the way we work, have both profoundly changed. In the time it has taken to get to this milestone, we have demonstrated that most of our [*branch, division, sector*] can work efficiently and effectively from home, while still collaborating with stakeholders, advancing our agenda and implementing important initiatives for all our clients.

I continue to adapt, finding new ways to reach out and to collaborate, while leveraging technology more than ever. I know that I am not alone in this, as the dynamic of our workforce, as a whole, has changed at an accelerated pace and in ways I could not even have predicted a year ago. The resilience I see across [*branch name*] is very inspiring to me and I sincerely appreciate the compassion, the collaboration, and the ingenuity that I continue to witness from you every day despite so many months of living in uncertainty.

I have also come to realize that for me, and as I can imagine for many of you as well, this has been an unexpected journey of change. Whether wanted or not, this situation is actually providing us with unprecedented opportunities to positively adapt and to build a better workplace.

As mentioned during the [*meeting name*], the nature of how we do our work has evolved significantly, impacting how we will be using our workplaces. Since last March, we have also benefitted from the deployment of several new connectivity supports, and now even more collaboration tools are on the way.

As we shared during the [*Townhall/meeting name*], in this environment, [*Organization name*] is working towards a new vision of what our workplace could be. Our goal, which you heard first hand from our [*title of senior leader*], is to introduce [workplace vision (e.g. continually explore better ways to create an attractive work environment for the longer term and to advance our work culture to one that views “work from anywhere” as a viable option for a large portion of our operations.)]. I want to affirm that I am championing this shift for [*Organization name*], and your contribution in helping us lead by example can make a lasting impression on the [*Organization name*] and the way we work.

As a first step, [*Organization name*] has been working with [*Organization name*], as well as [*Organization name*], to begin planning for the modernization of [*building/space name*]. With this in mind, now is the time to have a conversation about [*insert what is expected (e.g. how we want to work in the future, how we envision using the workspace, how mobility will be integrated and supported)*].

[REMOVE THE FOLLOWING SECTION IF NOT APPLICABLE‒*If this communication is being used to send a functional program survey link:*]

**Refer to Annex B: Announcing a functional programming survey: Guidance provided by the Interior Design National Centre of Expertise**

*Insert link here and provide information on due date…*

[*Insert link here and provide information on due date*]

The feedback you share with us will help to inform the next steps in this workplace modernization project and to better define our future ways of working.

In that context, I encourage each of you to respond and to share your honest views. This is your turn, you’ve given so much to support our organization and our objectives, and now we truly want to hear what you have to say!

We are leading the way in the [*Organization name*] to find better ways of working and to create the very best work environment. You have already shown how well you are able to embrace change and new ways of doing things and I know that you will apply the same thoughtfulness to this initiative.

Thank you, and please do your best to stay safe.

**Example 2**

The way we work is changing! At [*Organization name*], we’re no strangers to change—in fact, it plays an integral role in the evolution and growth of our organization. Over the past few years, the [*Organization name*] has undergone an extensive transformation, from [*name initiative, if applicable*] to dealing with the pressures brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.

As you all know, COVID-19 has affected the way we work and interact with each other. In fact, work at [*Organization name*] will probably never go back to exactly as it was. The lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to shape the physical footprint of the accommodations over the long term and has led the department to re-think the workplace from the way we know it today. And this offers us the opportunity to re-imagine the workplace and how the work is done so that we can continue to ensure robust delivery of our programs and services to our clients.

Workplace modernization is a priority for [*Organization name*] and we are about to embark on a longer-term accommodation strategy, which will fundamentally transform the way we work. [*Organization name*]’s vision for workplace modernization begins with [*insert workplace vision (e.g. space that is designed and built around the concept of GCworkplace. It foresees an office environment that is healthy and safe, provides modern tools and technology, is flexible and green and that supports a workforce that is empowered and mobile*].

Solutions that will help us succeed in attaining this vision will include a change in culture to move to the “new normal”, provide modern tools such as [*insert tools*] and, most importantly, create important workplace modernization pilots starting with [*project name*].

[*Project name*] is at the heart of this transformation, the first of [*Organization name*] innovative workplace. So what is this brand new initiative called the [“*name of the project/initiative*”]? We will be offering [*Organization name*] employees a workspace that will provide flexibility and give our employees the freedom to choose where they want to work. [*Project name*] will showcase a consistent look and feel to the design and to the application of the GCworkplace concept by offering a variety of workpoints to support employees in the delivery of their work activities. We are hoping to have the [*project name*] fully operational by [*date*].

The initiative is led by the [*branch name*], in partnership with [*Shared Services Canada (if applicable), and the CIO Branch (if applicable)*]. At this early stage of the project, not all of the answers and options are clear and we expect that things will continue to evolve over the next months. Allow me to reassure you that you will receive frequent and relevant updates from the team throughout the project; we will reach out and engage as many of you as possible and seek ideas and feedback as the construction unfolds.

This is a big change that will mean a significant shift from the way many of us work day to day, but for the better. Achieving all of these goals is a lengthy and complex initiative; it will take a collective and consultative effort to ensure that our new work environment evolves into one that is modern, supportive, and flexible. It is also an opportunity for us collectively to build our workplace of the future. With that in mind, we want to assure you that you will be consulted throughout the process and that a change management team will engage with you to ensure that the transition to this new way of work is as smooth as possible.

I am very energized by the [*project name*] Workplace Modernization Project and the benefits it has to offer and I encourage you to participate, reach out, ask questions, and get involved. I look forward to working with you as we make the [*project name*] a reality for [*organization name*].

**Annex B:** **Announcing a functional programming survey: Guidance provided by the Interior Design National Centre of Expertise**

Here are some considerations to understand GCworkplace, and the new workplace needs assessment process:

With the introduction of GCworkplace, the way the Government of Canada designs workspaces has fundamentally changed, and the top-down information gathering model that has been used until now is no longer effective in gathering data about how an organization works. **GCworkplace takes a more user-centric approach to design, and this is why it is critical that this initial phase of information gathering be done at a whole-organization level in order to get the most reliable data.**

1. **Please inform employees of the importance of providing their feedback via this survey, and emphasize that this will be the only opportunity to provide direct input on their individual functional requirements** (some key functional representatives may also be asked to provide additional information pertaining to their workflows in subsequent engagements).
2. The client may choose how they wish to communicate the results back to employees—a summary report of the results will be provided to the project team, and the client may wish to highlight certain findings or give a broad overview. **It is recommended to let employees know how and when results will be communicated before they completed the surveys.**

Also, keep in mind is that this initial survey is not the only method used to assess an organization’s needs. In the subsequent phase the project team, in partnership with the client leadership, designated functional group representatives and internal stakeholders will be asked to review and validate the overall survey results and provide direction on more detailed program-specific requirements. For this reason, the survey aims to assess the broad and fundamental functional needs of employees, but does not go into a lot of detail with respect to specialized needs or space types. **We ask all employees to answer based on their personal experience, and to the best of their ability—there are no wrong answers.**

In summary, the email should include the following:

* Reminder of the GCworkplace concept (ideally related to the client's goals or vision)
* Survey background (to gather information on employees' functional needs)
  + This is the only time during the entire modernization process where all employees will be consulted. Their responses will have a real impact on the modernization project. This is the time to make your voice heard!
  + Expectations of employees regarding the survey (the minimum participation rate to be achieved)
* Information about the survey
  + Date the survey will be sent out
  + Length of data collection period
  + Approximate time to complete the survey (estimated at 10 minutes)
  + Link to the survey (if applicable)
* How the results will be used and shared

**Reference**

**GCworkplace communication toolkit**: ready-to-use communication tools, videos, key messages, photos, etc.

[GCworkplace communication toolkit GCpedia page](https://www.gcpedia.gc.ca/wiki/GCworkplace/Communications_Tool_kit)