How to Answer Questions About Change

If you're responsible for communicating a change program or new initiative, you'll likely face questions about it from your team. Some will be general questions about the nature of the change and its impact, and others will be more about resistance to the change itself. Giving employees the chance to ask these questions – and air their views – is a critical part of successful change.

People will be looking for information and reassurance. So, it's important you're well prepared and able to handle their questions confidently. This guide covers the top 10 most common questions people are likely to ask about change. And offers tips to help you put together responses in advance.

When to use this guide

- You can use this guide to communicate with your team about change in your organization, team or department. And as a reference tool to ensure you have considered each area as part of your presentation or briefing.

- It's best used at the outset of a change program or initiative, as part of your preparations to tell a group of people about change for the first time.

- You can also use it with team members who need one-on-one support.

Suggested questions

These are the most likely questions employees will ask when first hearing about a change initiative or planned program.

1.

Why is this change happening?

Ensure you can clearly explain the reasons for the change, and why it's happening now. For example, is the aim in your organization to increase output, save money, expand a product line or take advantage of changing market conditions or new opportunities? Help your team to understand the reasons for the change by explaining the logic behind it.

2.

What does the team, department or organization hope to achieve with this change?

It's important to summarize the intended benefits or end goal of the change program. People need to understand the overall vision they're working toward, why it's worth their effort, and why these changes will be better in the long run. Be positive and reassuring, and explain why the change is a good thing for your team, department or organization.

3.

What are the risks of not changing?

Spelling out the risks of inaction can help galvanize your team into positive action – and make change a reality. Although it's important to be honest with your employees about what could happen if the planned changes don't take place, don't get carried away painting a negative (or inaccurate) picture. Instead, put the change into context, and explain the practical impacts of not moving forward. For example, your organization may fall behind competitors with better products or a slicker customer experience.

4.

How will the change affect our team as a whole?

Your team will want to know specific details about how upcoming changes will affect them. Fear of the unknown can cause anxiety for some employees, particularly in a rapidly changing environment. Talking through the actual impact of the changes on their day-to-day work can help employees feel a greater sense of control.

With major changes, your team may need to adapt to new work, use new tools and technologies or even report to a new manager. With radical changes to a business, some employees may transfer to completely new roles in other departments or different locations. Think carefully about how you deliver news about particularly radical changes, and plan what you'll say in advance.

5.

Are there planned redundancies or major restructuring as a result of this change?

If your organization is planning to cut staff as part of the change process, it's important you communicate this information to those concerned at an early stage. Remember, the way you deliver this news has a significant impact on redundancy 'survivors'. That's the employees left behind in the workplace after the redundancies. It's essential you can explain which area(s) will be affected, and how your organization plans to support people throughout this process.

6.

Will my job or responsibilities change?

This is the number one question you're likely to face from your team members when organizational change is imminent. People will want to know how their duties and responsibilities are going to change. So, it's important you're honest in your responses to gain support and buy-in from employees.

As well as outlining how their responsibilities will change, explain why they're changing. That could be, for example, reducing reliance on manual procedures to focus efforts on more complex tasks. Or introducing new software to streamline processes to keep up with competitors.

7.

What support will be provided to help me cope with the change?

If you have already indicated that job roles are likely to change, then this question will naturally follow. When faced with the prospect of a major change to their job role, many people can feel anxious about how they'll manage.

You can help to counter these concerns by explaining how you'll support employees. For example, will there be additional training to help them get to grips with new systems and processes? Will your organization provide coaching and mentoring as part of the transition process? It's important that people don't feel like they'll be left to their own devices, so plan a suitable program of support to help your team get up to speed.

8.

How will the success of the change be measured?

As well as understanding how their role fits into the bigger picture of organizational change, it's important to outline how you'll measure the success (or otherwise) of the change initiative.

Key areas to think about include: what will 'success' look like in practical terms? What are the key milestones to reach on the journey towards the end goal of the change program? How will you measure progress toward these key points? What will happen if progress starts to slip or something goes wrong?

9.

Hasn't the organization tried this before and failed?

Some long-standing employees may have seen different change initiatives come and go. Because of that, they may experience change fatigue. With this question, it's important to acknowledge their views and opinions. But try not to become drawn into a debate about the merits of this change program over one in the past. Focus on the benefits this change will bring, and the part they have to play in making it a reality.

10.

What will happen next?

Your employees are likely to want to know when the planned changes will start, and what will happen around them. It can be helpful to share the planned change program and key milestones with them so they know roughly what to expect and when.

An important caveat

When talking to your employees about change, if you're asked a question that you don't know the answer to, it's OK to be honest. Say, 'I don't know' or 'I don't have that information right now, but I will get back to you' rather than evading the issue or saying something inaccurate.

What's more, try not to withhold information from your team, unless it's confidential. Even if you think it's better for your team not to know certain things, team trust can be damaged if they find out from other sources.