

Data and Digital Transformation

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Digital transformation and change communication have **a powerful ally in data**

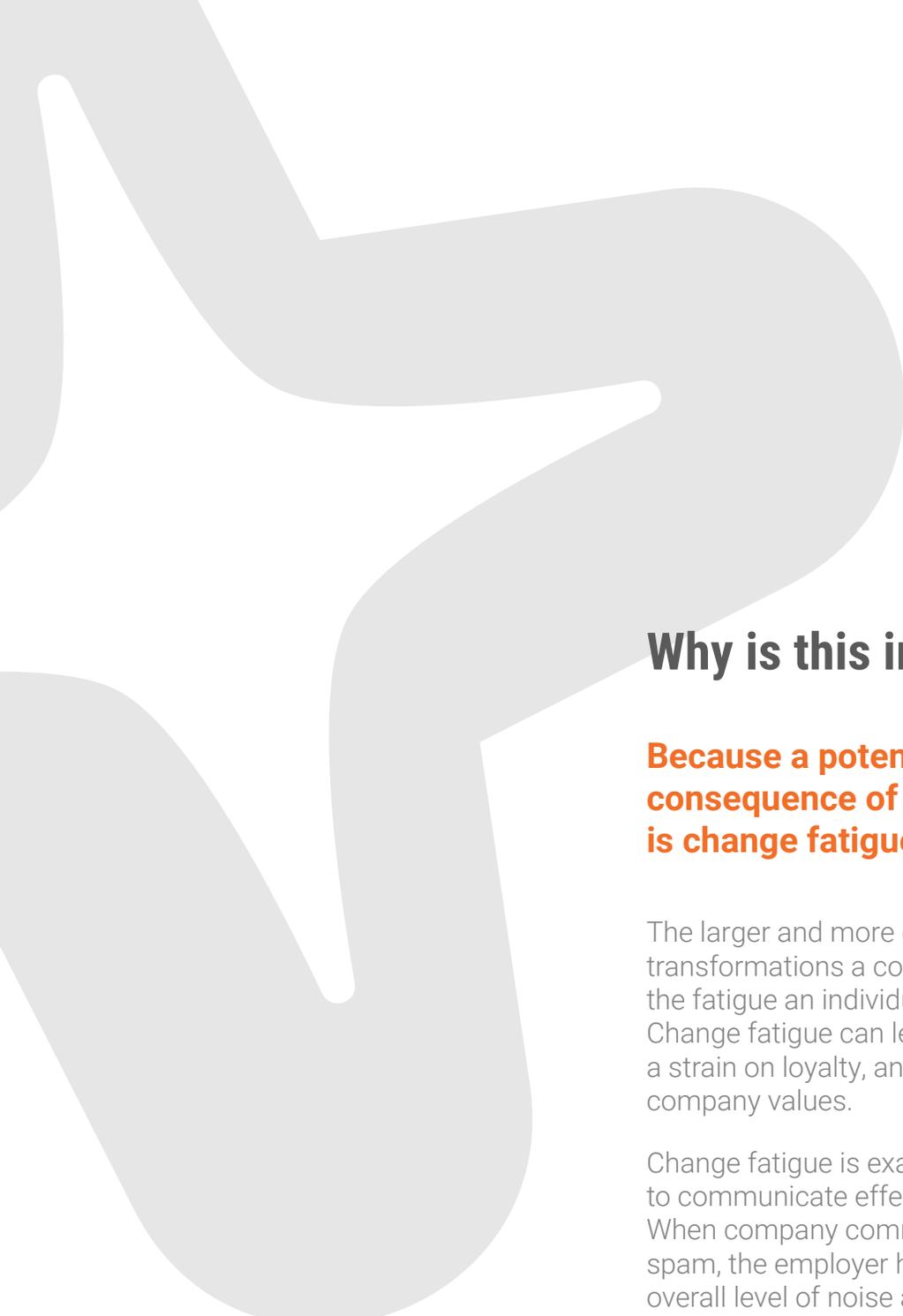
In the often confusing and chaotic times of Digital Transformation, successfully communicating through complex company changes is critical for employers. A well-known but often underutilized ally in successful communications is Data. Data is not just integral, but a requirement in order to effectively process and support company-wide change.

Digital Transformation is all around us.

From remotely collaborating with virtual employees to integrating with new HR systems to emerging productivity platforms, change in the workplace is everywhere. And with change comes the inevitability of unwelcome chaos.

As employers, managers, or leaders, the best we can (try to) do is make that chaos manageable for our employees. Company-to-employee communications is the stalwart frontline of chaos management. As workplace

digital transformations force change, the importance of effective communication is increased. And yet, many companies fail at distinguishing between the quality and quantity of communications. When communication is effective, the volume and frequency of communications your company needs to send on any given initiative or program is likely to be less each time, as quality will have superseded quantity.



Why is this important?

Because a potentially severe consequence of digital transformation is change fatigue.

The larger and more complex the number of transformations a company undertakes, the greater the fatigue an individual employee is asked to endure. Change fatigue can lead to declines in performance, a strain on loyalty, and general disenchantment with company values.

Change fatigue is exacerbated when companies fail to communicate effectively with their employees. When company communication becomes email spam, the employer has simply contributed to the overall level of noise and become another point of disruption for the employee. Thus, communications, if not properly personalized and targeted, will add to the overall fatigue instead of reducing it.



One of the most, if not *the most*, important ally in communication is Data.

Imagine an incredibly busy and complex intersection – the multiple and busy lanes of traffic converging at this intersection represent the digital transformation initiatives that your company is undergoing. The potential for accidents is high, stress levels are increasing daily, and it takes significant time and attention to keep this intersection from turning into unmitigated disaster.

At the center of this intersection is your change management team. This team has, at their disposal, the most powerful means to help navigate drivers through this dangerous intersection – communication. Communication is the leverage point to help guide employees through dangerous and fatiguing transformations. If used correctly, communication is really the only leverage point your team needs.

Note: The term “leverage point” is used in association with communication because based on the amount of change force, communication can cause from small to large changes in audience (employee) behavior. If you’re interested in learning more about leverage points in communication strategy, please keep an eye out for our upcoming whitepaper.

Communication can therefore be the effective means at navigating employees through change and transformation.

Communication directs the driver toward the desired lane – it helps to ensure information is provided in a timely and consumable way so that the driver can make the right choice or undertake a successful action.



But what happens when there are varying degrees of action?

What happens if the traffic intersection is the converging point for thousands, if not tens of thousands of drivers (employees) at the same time? Does your team have the means to quickly identify, segment, and properly direct all employees in your intended audience?

Expressed previously, as workplace digital transformations force change, the importance of effective communication is increased. As effective communication becomes more critical for companies to successfully implement, data becomes an increasingly key ally.



Data already allows you to know who your employees are – from their names to their job levels to their departments.

Every employee is unique, and data allows you to distinguish one record from tens of thousands of employee records.



Audience-based data is such an important factor in creating separation these days, that you hardly receive a marketing email now that isn't personalized.

And in fact, most marketing communications will not just include your name, but may also reference your job title, your boss's name, and the company you work for.

If using data for personalization and targeting is that important in marketing emails from people that you don't even know, then how much more important is it for company-to-employee communications when retention, action, alignment and behavior are all concretely affected by perceived familiarity, camaraderie, and company connection?

With tens of thousands of vehicles converging on the digital transformation intersection, your change team has the means to ensure every driver makes it through the intersection successfully – simply armed with communication. But without data to help inform them, the communication will be, at best, unqualified.



How often does an unqualified approach lead to an effective outcome?

Not nearly enough.



The **value propositions around data are rampant and can be overwhelming.**

It's understandable that the prospect of using data is overwhelming at the best of times.

There is the debate around good or clean data versus bad data. Data lakes versus data warehouses. GDPR versus CCPA. From Avro to ZooKeeper, big data is not only a buzzword but a broad generalization that implies much to learn.

But let's separate out this specific use-case for data. Data in communications is about leveraging what your company already has (audience data) and what your company can capture (results or engagement data). Audience-based data utilization doesn't require additional investments in cloud computing, or an advanced degree in data architecture and design. Chances are that your current HRIS system has exactly the information you already need to ensure more effective communications with your employees. In fact, you probably don't even need to rely on your IT Administrator to help you access this data.



Basic audience (or employee) data can help in a significant way to drive the overall effectiveness of your communications.

By using data, your communications have the ability to be segmented by employee audience groups/personas, or personalized to a very familiar level.

Engagement (or results-based) data, when used correctly, can help to optimize and improve your communications over time – thereby incrementally increasing its ongoing effectiveness.

Audience data can even be combined with engagement data to build a powerful foundation for productivity and automation in communication, as was in the case of an enterprise that set up a 30 day onboarding campaign for new employee cohorts using audience data, and then leveraged their engagement results to successfully augment 60 and 90 day onboarding journeys across every operating region – the end result being a comprehensive and wildly successful global onboarding program. Imagine the tremendous time savings and the productivity that increased due to leveraging existing and captured data!

On the flip side, ask yourself what the cost might be of not leveraging data?

Without data, there is limited ability to break through the clutter of workplace communications. Without data, there is almost a zero-chance at improving and optimizing based on quantitative measures.

The result? Masses of employee segments receive the same template, even though each group possesses levels of unique attributes. And individual employees quickly flash through another generic “to: employee” communicate that adds more to the ongoing fatigue that inherently accompanies large-scale transformations.

From governmental organizations that are spearheading dozens of concurrent transformation initiatives, to manufacturing companies that are taking careful, measured steps with just a few, even a single transformation initiative can have a wide array of layers across integration requirements, internal operations, business processes, and organizational structures. Data has the means of transforming even the most complex communication undertaking into a streamlined and manageable process.

Yes, the prospect of using and integrating data into communications can be frightening because it can seem complex.

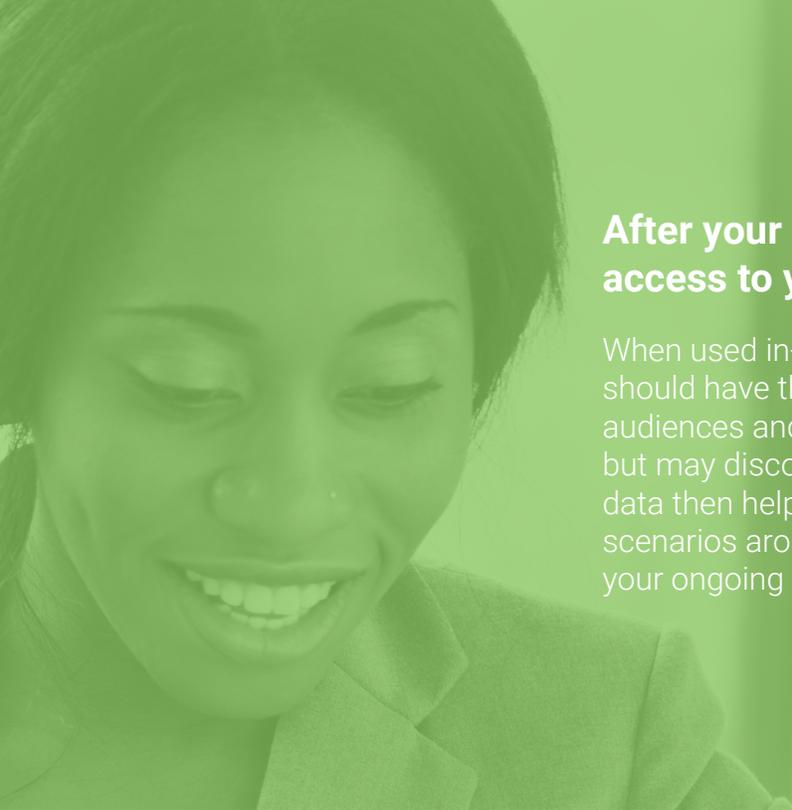
After all, data is a mere gateway from an overwhelming universe of quantitative analytics, artificial intelligence, and (perceived) costly business measures. But data in its current, simplest and unmanipulated format can likely be easily integrated into your communications protocol, and make a huge difference in your mission to manage the transformation chaos.



Don't forget, there are **two** different types of data to inform communications.

One set of data, when used properly in communications, can help to beget the other.

When starting communications for the first time, companies need to begin with their audience (employee-based) data. The purpose of audience data is to provide a strong foundation for segmentation and personalization – both of which should factor into the communication strategy. Audience data isn't only about being able to personalize aspects of your company's communication, but can also factor into type and timing of the communication. You may discover a segment of your employees are deskless, and require communication that is digestible in the form of an SMS rather than an email.



After your communication is delivered, you'll have access to your results, or engagement, data.

When used in-hand with a communications platform, you should have the ability to view the engagement data across your audiences and segments. You'll have hypothesized your results, but may discover variances in audience behavior. Engagement data then helps you to create new hypotheses, to test A/B scenarios around communications, and to optimize and improve your ongoing results.

Many companies make the mistake of believing their business strategy or program is faulty due to limited engagement or action.

Premature actions to fix and remediate on a strategic or program level can cost significant time and money.

The power of communications, when leveraging engagement data correctly, allows companies to access the lower-hanging fruit – perhaps a content tweak within the media, an adjustment to the campaign architecture, or even altered reach messaging to drive dramatic improvement in their results.

In the case of a company that was attempting to improve their employees' Open Enrollment participation, their audience and engagement

data showed extremely limited interest in certain younger employee demographics.

Instead of wasting valuable time in refactoring their benefits packages, they decided to try new reach messaging – subtly altering their Open Enrollment reach messaging from “Information about your Open Enrollment Benefits” to a simpler “Change Is Coming” which coincided beautifully with messaging from a popular HBO show. The new results were spectacular.

Altering the reach messaging allowed this company to achieve their program success, but it was the combination of symbiotic audience and engagement data that paved the way for that success.



It's **imperative** to use data effectively in communications.

By incorporating data in your company's communication strategy, it can play a vital part in properly shaping the planning and execution of your communication reach messaging, content, and journey architecture. Data helps to ensure proper measurement and iteration of content/information, which will help to optimize and improve results over time.

Whether the communication is complex (a journey or campaign) or simple (a messaging or announcement), segmenting and personalizing are still extremely beneficial to improve engagement.

When considering a cohesive measure & iterate strategy that combines content with data and builds upon a foundation of communication architecture, **consider a methodology.**

This can vary based on your company size, type of change initiative/program, or desired outcome, but a simple journey methodology that effectively utilizes data could look something like this:



Strategy

Positioning, goals, and associated metrics for achieving the transformation.



Development

Creation of content and media for campaigns and configuration of journey. Audience data can be used here for personalization.



Design

Journey architecture and accompanying communication strategy/plan. Audience data can be used here for segmentation.



Execution

Deployment of journey, along with strategy to measure/iterate. Engagement data can be used here to help optimize and improve ongoing success.

Data can help inform and shape every key point of the **journey methodology.**

With the execution and deployment of the journey, the journey itself begins to collect audience-segmented engagement data that can steer the iteration and optimization. This is a case where the use of data compounds its benefits to create an efficient and powerful highway toward improvement of overall results for the digital transformation.



Can you create successful communications **without** data?

Communication has evolved rapidly in a short amount of time, mostly due to the advancement of content and media as storytelling means. We've certainly (already) come a long way since the days of company-to-employee communication via PowerPoint presentations. In many modern workplaces, communication is consumed via digital storytelling – whether infographics, videos, or as part of prescriptively-scheduled campaigns.

But while communication in digital and multimedia forms may be an improvement over static and analog means, the practice of not leveraging data to inform the communication is the equivalent of aiming for an important business bullseye in the pitch dark. This may seem like an overstatement, though it's not about the absurdity of aiming at an important priority in the dark, but rather that the light switch is easily within reach.



Your current company HR system, without any adjustment or alteration, likely has all the audience data you need for communications.

And if your company has already transitioned to leveraging digitalization as a means for employee communication, then there's a high likelihood that your company is also utilizing a platform that is able to deliver the digitalized content, as well as measure and report on audience engagement.

Then the question to ask your external communications partner or internal communications team is "how can I use data to improve the overall effectiveness of my communications?" Chances are, they'll be thrilled you asked, and you'll be speeding down that integrated highway of improved communications effectiveness in no time.

But if you're not leveraging data for communications, then please weigh the risks of your qualitative approach.

It could be due to time or money. But the risk to truly consider is the cost of employees that are already fatigued by change – as these employees will grow more fatigued with ineffective communication, and if left unchecked, that additional baggage will make it difficult to win back those disconnected employees. Uninformed optimizations that don't utilize data are purely wild throws in the dark.

Don't think of data as the end-all, but rather part of the foundation for your company's communication journeys.

Data can provide the inexpensive means to create and iterate effective communications that are personalized, segmented, and optimized for success.

After all, if you have a hard time imagining how you might possibly direct converging traffic at an intersection for thousands of drivers while blindfolded – you don't need to blame a lack of imagination. Instead, just call upon your friendly ally – data – and empower your company to succeed through any digital transformation.



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