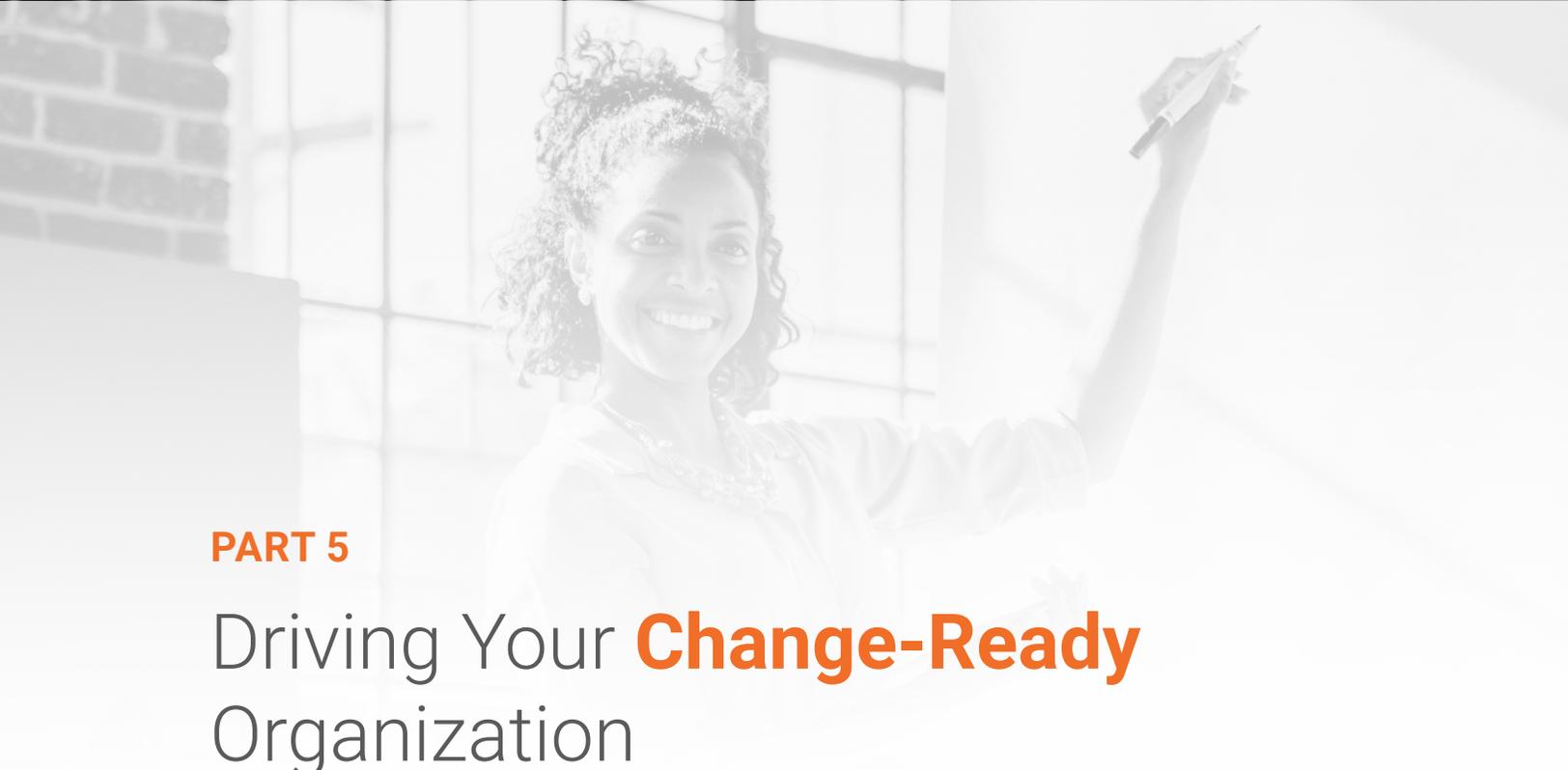


# Changing the Way We Work *For Good*

5-Part series that looks to the future of communications in our new work model

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## PART 5

# Driving Your **Change-Ready** Organization

As we wrap up our series on the future of communications in this *new normal*, we're left with an important decision to make. When the time comes, we can either try to return to the old way of leading our organizations the way we did before this global pandemic, or we can leverage the scrappiness, resilience, and adaptability that we've learned through this process. Business as we know it will only continue to evolve, and it's clear now more than ever that *communications*, in combination with a change-ready mindset, are a clear competitive advantage that will keep us moving forward.

I believe that our reaction to and handling of *change* will define this next generation of business – and empowering employees is the key to driving the “change DNA” we need in our workforce culture. And, by framing the change in terms of our larger strategic goals and desired outcomes, it will have an even more meaningful impact. Then, we'll be able to identify a successful change initiative by measuring the alignment, actions, and adoption that employees demonstrate.

However, no change can happen successfully in an organization that doesn't prioritize its communications. By reaching and engaging employees with strategic messaging, a change initiative can truly *break through the critical last mile* and drive program success. Strong communications have the power to gain the trust and buy-in from your workforce, carrying your change initiative over the finish line.



There are a few critical steps to take transformation from a theoretical objective to real, tangible results:

## Embrace the Change

If 2020 has taught us anything, it's that we should start getting comfortable with ambiguity and moving targets. Priorities and goals have shifted dramatically this year, and companies that are flexible and adaptable will not just survive, but *thrive*. To propel these skills forward, leaders should be authentic and transparent with their teams, using the information available – even when the answers are uncertain.

When leaders subscribe to the change-readiness efforts, it paves the way for their teams to understand and adopt the change in a significant way. But it doesn't stop there – all employees will need to acquire new skills to adapt to large-scale change. For some, this may mean creating new processes; for others, this may mean entirely new career paths. All of these moving pieces should boost employee engagement and retention while also alleviating their concerns around keeping with up with the new work environment.

## Personalize the Change

McKinsey & Company recently launched a podcast about the “personalization of change,” which is the idea of making change relevant by explaining what it means to employees on an individual role level. The concept goes deeper, by exploring employees’ obstacles in the face of change, whether employees feel they *aren’t allowed* to make a change, *can’t* make a change due to a lack of skill, or won’t make a change because they simply don’t believe in it.

**In talking with many executives in charge of enterprise-level change initiatives, one common theme I hear is that it’s important to answer the question, “what’s in it for me?”**

It’s something that employees often think but don’t always express. The McKinsey podcast also points to the *intersection of technology, data, and human insight*, which is “transforming the way we enact change,” and is key to effect mass transformation – starting at an individual level.



# Communicate the change

Finally, these change-readiness strategies rely on one critical step to move them forward – *how we use communications* to drive the change. Any strategies and plans around change and transformation will ultimately rise and fall – *succeed or fail* – based on how they're communicated.

We've highlighted many strategies to communicate effectively with your workforce throughout this series, but how do you then feel confident that your program has succeeded? To answer this, it's crucial to understand the strategic employee outcomes you're seeking across three pillars of communication success: **Alignment**, **Action**, and **Adoption**.



## Alignment

As the future of business becomes more and more uncertain, it's more crucial now than ever to be able to *bring your workforce with you* through unprecedented changes. When your employees buy into the steps you're taking to adapt to new challenges, they'll not only support those efforts, but *drive them toward success*.

Due to the ongoing pandemic, many organizations – especially those in the retail sector – are in a position of having a large number of employees on furloughed leave. With a strong communication experience, these businesses can retain the trust and connection with those furloughed employees, so that alignment is still in place as those employees return to work.

A merger or acquisition is another significant workplace change that will require a focused eye on alignment – after an M&A, it's critical that the entire workforce is aligned with the evolution of the business. Aligned performance goals can be one reflection of this, but frequent, ongoing communication – including opportunities for two-way feedback – is the strongest way to foster a true *cultural alignment*.



## Action

Tracking certain employee actions after the launch of a change initiative can sometimes be the clearest way to measure your program's success. With a clear understanding of the new employee behaviors your organization requires, a way to easily measure those steps will become an asset.

Consider the many organizations strongly prioritizing the health and safety of employees in recent months, with a particular focus on mental health initiatives due to the stressors this pandemic has caused. By successfully communicating the resources available to employees, an organization would see an increase in enrollment in mental health resources, which may ultimately result in a healthier, more productive workforce.



## Adoption

Successfully guiding your employees to adopt a new change has been a widespread priority since the onset of the shelter-in-place era. With such a large number of employees now working remotely, many have had to quickly *understand and adopt* new technology and digitalization efforts that allow them to work more efficiently in this environment.

And, with civil unrest and tensions around racial injustice and inequity making headlines in recent weeks, businesses have seen a need to communicate their priorities around diversity and inclusion – both to their employees and on an external level. Now, more than ever, employee adoption of these D&I initiatives has become an essential piece of gaining trust and buy-in from the workforce.

This pandemic has affected every organization differently – we’re all in new, uncharted territory where we have to juggle business priorities with a global health crisis, making difficult decisions every step of the way. But, it’s also true that organizations with a willingness to undergo dramatic change overnight, adapt to brand new business models, or completely revise their priorities in light of this new reality will be the ones to make it through this era in one piece.

I’ve talked at length in this series about the importance of strategic communications during times of change and uncertainty, especially in an increasingly noisy environment, but the COVID-19 pandemic has made it a make-or-break issue. With strong communications, you’ll have the foundation for a deep connection to your workforce – opening the door for buy-in and the strategic behaviors you need to keep your business moving forward, including alignment, actions taken, and adoption of your change initiative.

**Communications are the critical last mile that not only keep your employees informed, but enable them to engage with and become the driving force of your strategic priorities.**

