

Creating a Communications Center of Excellence for the *Modern Enterprise*

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PART 1

THE CURRENT COMMUNICATIONS GAP

More Technology, More Noise

The current work landscape has been transformed by the impact that COVID-19 has made on our personal and professional lives; the way we're living and working now is completely different than it was before 2020 – and our collective priorities, habits, and skillsets have all shifted too. The world of work was certainly well on its way to becoming more digital and remote-friendly, but the pandemic accelerated the digital transformation timelines of many organizations, shrinking a potentially years-long plan into an overnight change. And even as we start to see the light at the end of the tunnel of this pandemic, it's exceedingly clear that many companies won't be going back to "normal" – instead, [we'll see a new normal take shape](#) that still echoes the changes we've seen in the last year.

We've been using the communication resources that are available to make the best of these circumstances; digital meeting rooms, online messaging platforms, emails, phone

calls, the list goes on. While we have a seemingly endless suite of tools we can use in this environment, we're also part of a workforce that's more digital, diverse, and distributed than it's ever been. The use of digital communications was already increasing drastically in recent years, and have now essentially become *the only available medium to reach most employees*. Even pre-pandemic, employees were receiving a seemingly insurmountable [576 billion work-related emails per day](#), and we can only assume that number has increased under the current circumstances. On top of this, employees' typical day-to-day schedules are now full of virtual communications – platforms like Zoom are fantastic as an alternative to formerly in-person meetings and sessions, but this rise in virtual connection has also resulted in a [new phenomenon of "Zoom fatigue,"](#) and a general sense of communication overload.

It's now more difficult than ever before for organizations to cut through the noise to reach and engage their employees, but it's also more important than ever that they do just that.

We've been through massive change in the last year, and the digital work environment for our employees is not going away – and the potential distractions and new communications will only increase over time. Effective communications are critical to driving the success of any program or initiative, making the strategy of your company's communications the most crucial piece of the puzzle when it comes to achieving business success.



Communication is **Not “Send”**

I am continuously amazed at the human spirit when we are faced with a calamity or immense change. 50 years ago, a ruptured oxygen tank on NASA's Apollo 13 mission triggered a series of lifesaving adaptations and innovations on the part of both the astronauts and the teams on the ground. Some of these moves were performed in minutes, hours, and days.

This pandemic may have knocked us down, but we will get back on our collective feet and be better for it. If this new work model becomes the norm, many companies will have to make significant transformations and innovate quickly in order to survive. Communication will be critical to keeping employees aligned and productive through these changes, and will help make these unprecedented changes *achievable*.

Engage Employees **Like a Marketer**

Great marketing revolves around consumers – targeting them with relevant messages and ultimately driving more engagement. Targeting and engaging employees through communications should be no different; you need to understand your employees, and center them as a priority in your communication process. When messaging is built on that employee-centric foundation, reaching and engaging employees is more much effective.

Another lesson from the marketing handbook is about orchestrating the *overall consumer experience* to drive engagement. But for many companies, departments communicate independently of each other, creating an overwhelming and disjointed communication experience for employees – significantly reducing engagement. Each program or initiative is communicated separately, rather than as part of an orchestrated communication experience designed to reach and engage employees.

Current employee communications also tend to use “one-size-fits-all” messaging without considering the individual employee’s perspective. Your employees are all unique, and sending the same single message to the entire organization can cause many to quickly register it as irrelevant. Using an employee-centric, marketing-based approach is the best way to capture the attention of your workforce in this noisy environment.

To build a communications experience that’s centered around your employees, there are several important variables to consider – think about how you might start building a framework that orchestrates communication across key factors like **audiences** (based on the demographic makeup of your organization), **channels** (the delivery methods you’re using), different **topic areas** according to your key programs and initiatives, **employee journeys** or individual campaigns, and timing (whether it’s time of the year for the campaign, day of the week for a specific message, or automatic event-based triggers).

The Power of a **Communications Framework**

Communications are the connective tissue between you and your employees; they're key in building and supporting the employer-employee relationship, empowering a purpose-driven workforce, avoiding costly turnover, driving program success, and cultivating connection, especially during times of change. It's not enough to just communicate programs and initiatives to employees – there's a growing need to think about employee communications from a holistic perspective to make a lasting impact. You can create an organizational communications framework that will help coordinate the overall employee communications experience, enabling you to cut through the noise to drive engagement and critical outcomes. Think like a marketer to craft communications and content from your employees' perspective, and better align your workforce with the internal programs you most need to promote.

Use communications to raise awareness, educate and inform your audience, catalyze behavior change, inspire action, and even enhance workplace culture – all of which are critical to the success of your key initiatives. Use this model effectively to increase transparency and education around your most important programs, like performance management, compensation, or benefits, and use the data you measure along the way to continuously iterate. Over time, effective communications allow for the creation of an agile organization, which is critical in today's business environment of constant change and uncertainty.

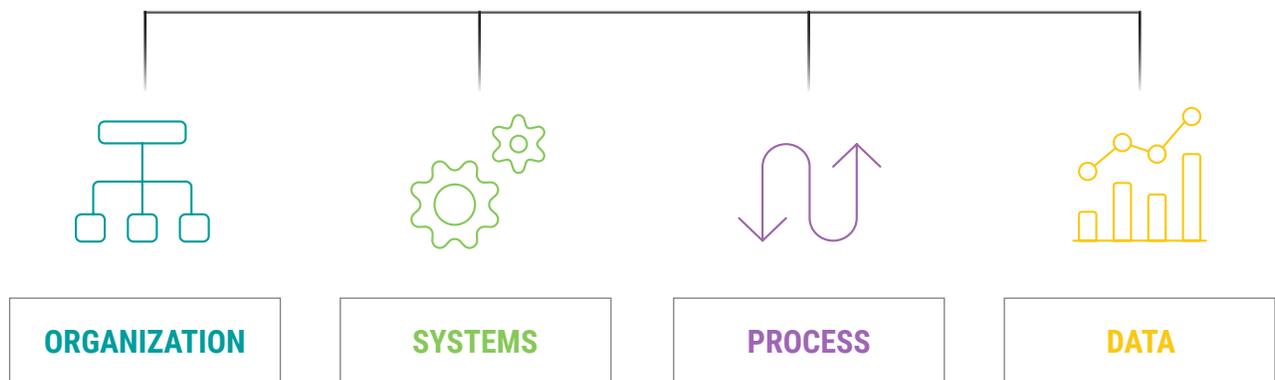


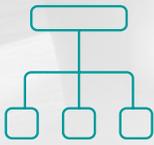
PART 2

CREATING A COMMUNICATIONS CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

In this modern world of work, communications will truly become the backbone of any organization that wishes to be more agile, change-ready, and successful in this rapidly-changing world. Leveraging a consistent communications framework will be a critical competitive advantage in our increasingly digital, diverse, and distributed enterprises. Think of employee communications as the way you go about *getting the right information to the right people at the right time*, all to drive specific business outcomes, such as behavior change, action, employee alignment, or program adoption. An operating framework, built around **organization, systems, process, and data**, can be the foundation for a communication center of excellence that will carry your company toward those goals.

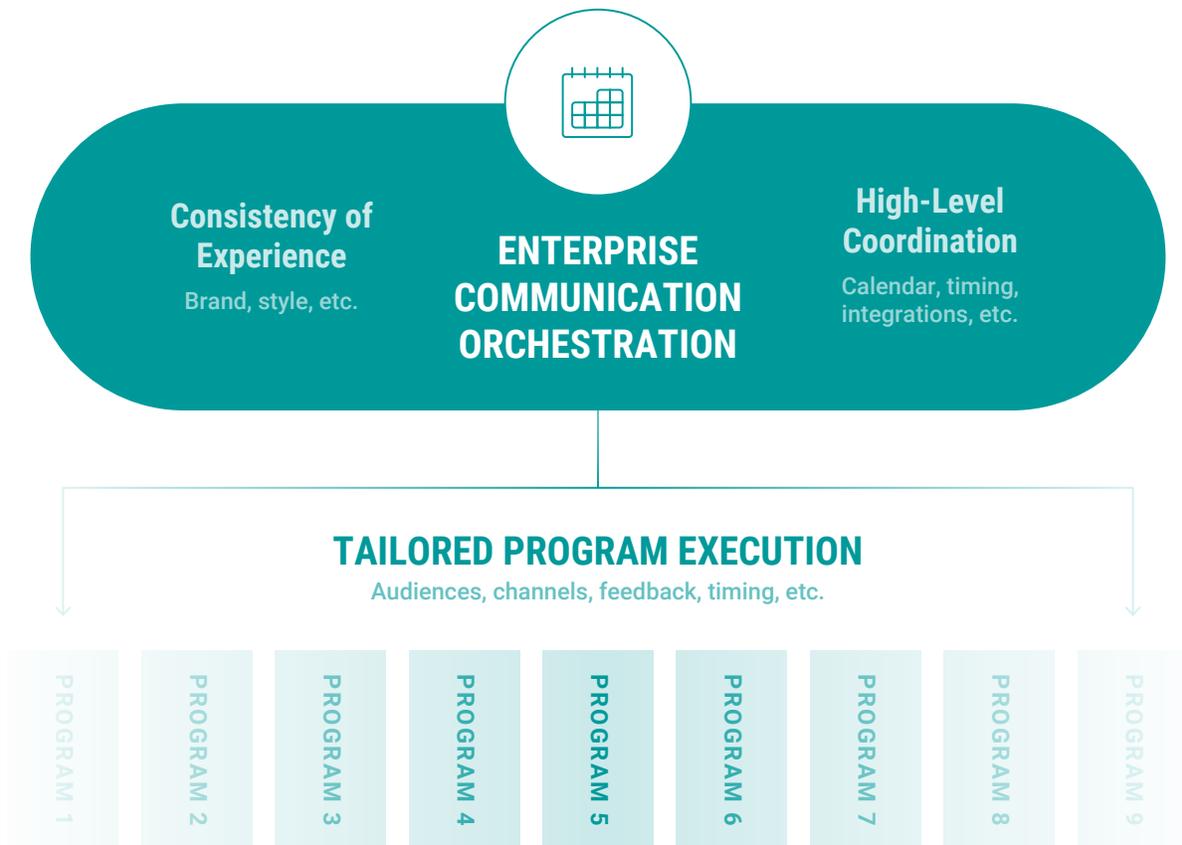
Communications Center of Excellence





ORGANIZATION

In this fast-paced world, it's impossible to manage all communications centrally, so aim for a structure that provides both high-level **coordination** – with consistent standards and enterprise communication orchestration – and custom, program-level **execution** – allowing program owners the freedom to optimize communications to drive the important outcomes of their specific initiative.



Having a holistic view of the communication experience for employees requires a certain amount of consistency and coordination. Think about building a framework of complete, employee-centric communications experiences, rather than focusing on one program rollout at a time. Consider the **standards** you may want to develop early in the process; this might include the brand voice or look and feel of your communications, the roles and responsibilities of different individuals, or the timing and cadence of your communication schedule.

Then, find ways to build out your approach to **cross-communication consistency**, which can include the management of audience groups, which group receives which message at which time, and how you might launch multiple programs during the same timeframe.

Once coordination is established, the **program-level execution** of your communications serves to drive the success of each specific initiative. For successful program execution, this must be customized to the specific program. For example, communicating company strategy is very different than communicating the latest wellness program – so it's important each program can customize their approach while aligning with the high-level strategy.

Specific things to consider include:

Audiences

Your employee data, organized by audiences and personas

Channels

The delivery methods that carry your communications, like email, text messages, collaboration tools, or other mobile apps

Topic

The subject matter of your program

Sender

Who your messaging will be sent from, whether it's an alias or an individual

Feedback and Dialog

The ways you collect data from your audience to make sure your experience is as effective as possible

Campaigns and Content Experiences

The combination of engaging communication with eye-catching content that carries your program details

Timing

Time of the year, day of the week, or event-based triggers

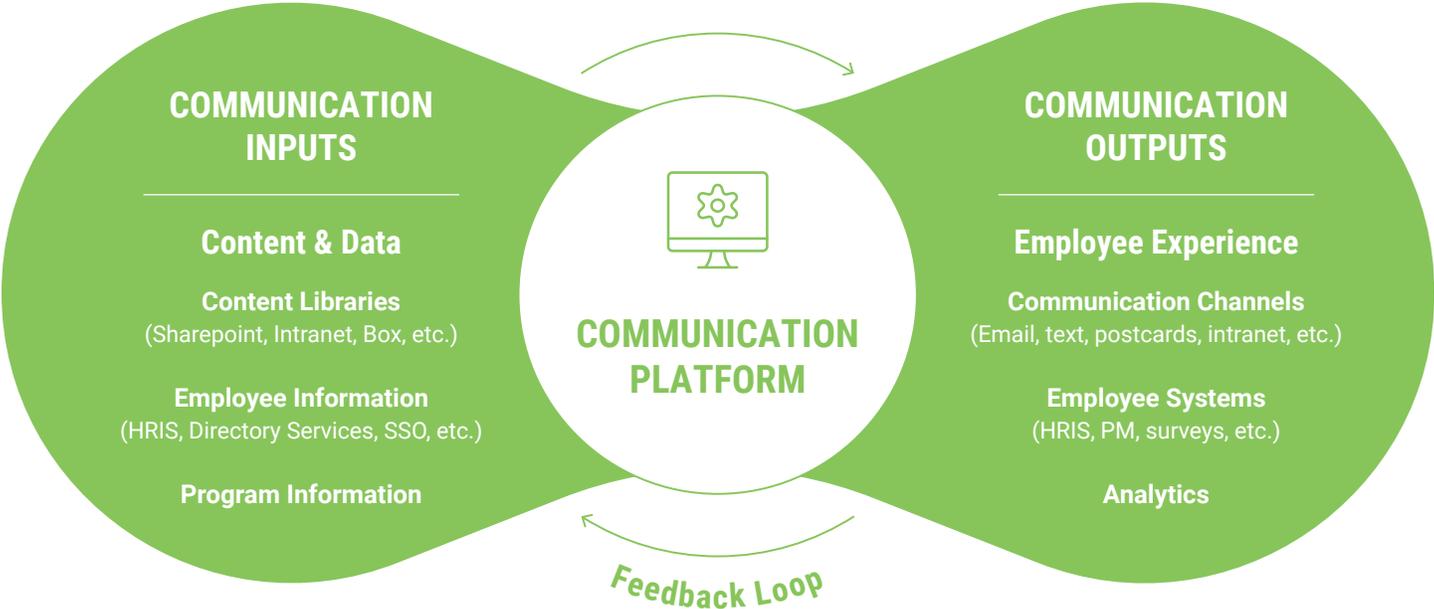
Integration

How your communications interact and connect with other programs and platforms



SYSTEMS

For communications to become a critical part of the operational ecosystem, you'll need to integrate them into your current enterprise systems on multiple levels to drive the results you're looking for.



Inputs – Leverage content and data from various systems to drive optimal communications.

Your **content** promotes and delivers crucial information to captivate your audience, and you can structure it according to a formula that serves to inspire, inform, and reinforce key points that relate to your topic. Leverage your content from across the enterprise.

Then, utilize your **employee profile data** including key demographic information (from your HCM and other platforms) to help tailor content, messaging, or both to better engage the employee audience you're talking to.



Outputs – Communication can be delivered throughout your employee experience, leveraging the channels and systems your employees use most, all while collecting data along the way.

Your communication experience will reach employees through the **delivery channels** you determine to be the most effective – for example, email and messaging applications are likely some of the most-used forms of communication for remote employees, but a different approach might be necessary for front-line workers.

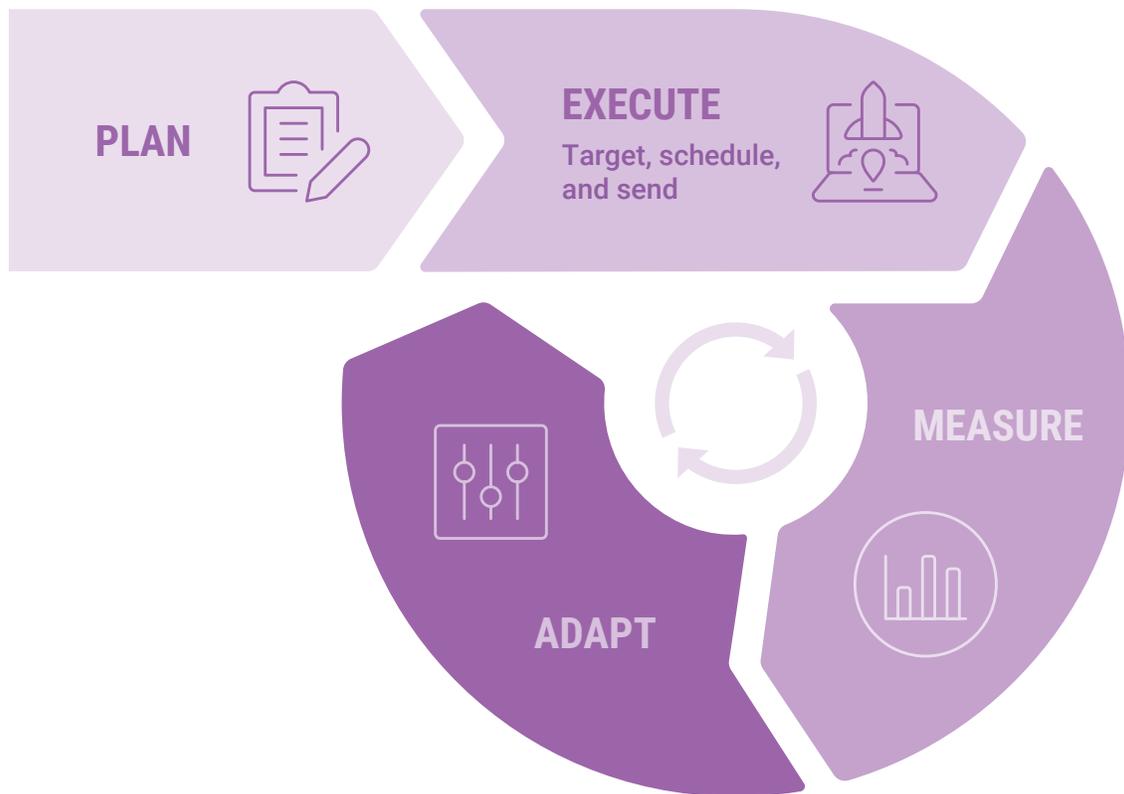
As you launch various campaigns and communications, you should collect the **communication analytics** behind the scenes, including engagement data such as views and email opens, to ensure you are achieving your communication and program goals.

You can also integrate communications to drive activity through **external action channels** associated with the specific initiative. For example, your communication experience can drive employees to complete key tasks or take action on other systems, such as entering goals in a performance management platform, or enrolling in benefits.



PROCESS

COMMUNICATION WORKFLOW



Just as communication does not equal a single “send,” an effective communications framework is not a “set-it-and-forget-it” activity. Attracting more engagement and interaction with your communications – not to mention higher levels of program success and employee adoption – requires an ongoing process of analyzing and improving.

Think about these key factors as you iterate:



TARGETING

Segmentation and personalization are key to getting across the *right message to the right people at the right time*, increasing interest and engagement in your communications. Rather than expecting users to seek out your content, you'll need to reach out and engage your audiences with relevant communications. Craft messaging that motivates your audience segments using key phrases, the recipient's name, or messaging that applies to their unique situation. Targeting can also apply to trigger-based functionality, which enables you to tailor the schedule, cadence, and automation of your communications around the moments that matter most to employees (think: new hire onboarding, manager promotions, or major life events that impact benefits).



MEASUREMENT

As campaigns begin to launch, pay close attention to the data around engaged views, email opens, and other key engagement data. If one message or piece of content performs significantly better than another, analyze what might be the cause. Or, if an entire program seems to be resonating more strongly than another, measure the data to get a sense of what boosts or hinders engagement at your organization.



ITERATION

Utilize engagement data, user and audience metrics, and other analytics to drive *forward* improvement on the individual program communications level. If one message in your campaign didn't perform as well as the others, analyze the details and differences around why that might be the case, and gradually build this knowledge base to holistically optimize communications across the enterprise.



ADAPTABILITY

A communication framework should be easily *flexible* for the context and environment your employees are in. Rather than holding tight to one communications approach that may have worked in its own specific context, be ready to change course quickly with an agile, flexible mindset. Your companies and employees are constantly changing and evolving – your communications should as well.



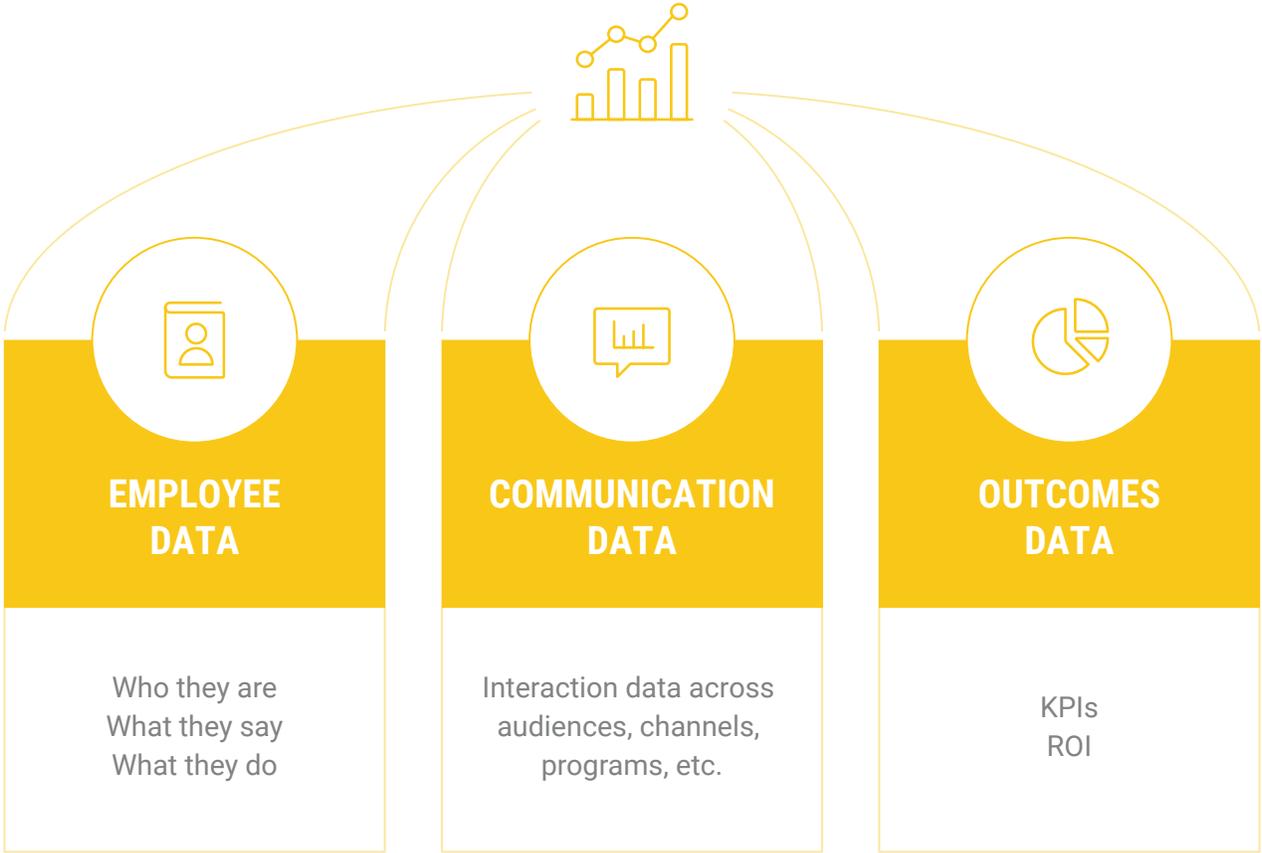
TIME AND SCHEDULING

A centralized communication calendar can help your entire organization create consistent, engaging employee experiences that aren't overwhelming employees. Planning with a bird's-eye view will ease communication overload on a given day or in a given week, allowing each message the space to connect with audiences and optimize engagement.



DATA

Data is an invaluable tool to ensure you’re reaching the right audience for your communications –in the right place, at the right time–and that employees are not only reading your message, but understanding and interacting with your subject matter, then taking action. You can leverage several different types of data and analytics:





Employee profile data

This includes the demographic data, or employee profile data, housed by your HCM software or other systems, including location, department, age, union status, salary tier, and more. Employee data can also include the communication profile data associated with each individual, including employee engagement analytics (click and open rates on emails, or engaged views on content) and any user configuration conveying the audience's desired communication settings or preferences.



Communication analytics

This data set provides the overall results, such as the engagement and action-based feedback from a specific program, which will demonstrate how well the campaign has resonated with your audience; this can include the number of email opens, message clicks, engaged views, or actions taken based on each individual message. Communication analytics are critical for companies to understand the complete picture of employee-centric communications, and they can be analyzed and leveraged over time to both *customize* an organization's communication experiences, drive higher engagement results over time, as well as *measure the effectiveness* of specific communications.



Program success

Finally, it's crucial to also track the data and analytics related to the *specific program* you are communicating. For example, if you've launched a communications campaign to onboard new employees, are you seeing data that indicates those new employees have completed their milestones successfully? Are you receiving feedback that they feel prepared and ready to begin their new role? Or, if your communication experience was launched with the goal of increasing HSA enrollment, are you seeing tangible evidence that it's been effective and more employees have enrolled? This data will vary dramatically in size and scope according to the initiative, but the indicators that you're reaching KPIs and broader goals are the true intended outcome of a communications framework.



PART 3

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 Communications are critical for today's enterprise.

Right now, for many businesses, employee communications can be a daunting challenge to organize and orchestrate successfully. There's often an inconsistent mix of newsletters, notifications from intranets or employee portals, and one-off messages from varying teams within the company. This causes frustration from a lack of cohesion, low employee engagement due to "one-size-fits-all" messaging in a time of extreme communication fatigue, and a disconnect when it comes to action items and major business goals. Without a communication strategy and framework, companies run the risk of letting their most critical messages slip through the cracks, leaving employees unaligned, disengaged, and unproductive – and in this digital environment, the likelihood that this will only get worse is staggering.

2 Rethink your digital transformation.

Many companies have made a number of moves to a digital environment and experience – but from what I've seen, many of those efforts have been a simple digitization of existing programs. What I believe is the more effective approach is a complete reimagining of what a digital approach could look like for your company – it's more than creating online or cloud-friendly iterations of traditional processes, it's about using the tools and automation features available to orchestrate a streamlined, connected, and optimized experience. This mindset, when applied to employee communications, can help broaden the scope of what's possible and drive toward communication success.

3 Build out an agile communications Center of Excellence.

Communications will be the backbone of any agile organization in our constantly-changing world – make sure your organization is prepared by making communications a key organizational skill and competitive advantage. A communications framework needs to be able to scale with the ever-increasing amount of employer communications in this digital environment. Your communications center of excellence needs to not only work for your organization right now, but also be able to grow and scale with organizational needs into the future. If the pandemic has taught us anything, it's that change is inevitable and constant... but also that businesses are much more capable of change than we may have once assumed. This flexible, agile skillset we've built should translate into communications as well.

4 Leverage automation features to communicate like a marketer.

New communication platforms and tools are providing internal communicators the same power as your marketing colleagues, and will be critical to improving and automating your communications. Automatic sends, event-based triggers, and calendar planning features can serve to make it simpler than ever to create cohesive, effective communications. And, when the heavy lifting is off the shoulders of each program owner, they can focus on what's truly important: the needs of the employees they're trying to reach. With data as a foundation, the process of visualizing a big-picture framework across systems becomes feasible and attainable for any organization.

5 Start small, grow incrementally.

A new communications framework won't be built overnight –a key part of the process is learning as you go and working with new data as it comes in. But more importantly, this iterative process will be more functional, impactful, and effective when business leaders take the time to learn what their own organization needs most and improve their communication model over the course of many experiences. Always thinking about what could be improved on or changed for the better is a key mindset to continuously foster connection with employees over time –and the most important step you take is your first attempt at a communications framework, no matter how minor the first stages may seem.



About Keith Kitani



Keith Kitani is CEO and co-founder of GuideSpark, a SaaS company helping enterprises transform workplace communications to drive the success of HR programs, such as total rewards, performance management, culture and onboarding. Keith has spent over 20 years building communication solutions that connect people and information for both startups and technology leaders like Macromedia and Adobe.

About GuideSpark

GuideSpark is the leader in change communications. Our proven solution enables you to orchestrate data-driven communication experiences that cut through the noise, reach and engage employees, and ultimately drive program success. With hundreds of customers and 12 years of experience, we make it simpler than ever before to manage, measure, and scale your communications to build a change-ready organization.

Learn more about GuideSpark

Interested in learning more about how to leverage your communications to achieve business outcomes?

Request a demo today: www.guidespark.com/schedule-a-demo

