

## **ERP Implementation Communications Playbook**

### **Chapter 3: Translating Technical Complexity into Employee Understanding**

#### **What I Learned Managing ERP Communications for Two Global Organizations**

When I began working on ERP change communications at two very different organizations, healthcare manufacturing and publishing, each time, I inherited what most companies get: a technology team excited about system capabilities and a workforce dreading another "digital transformation." The gap between those two realities? That's where communications live or die.

Here's what actually works when you need to get thousands of people to embrace complex technical change.

#### **Start With What Employees Actually Care About**

Forget the feature lists. Employees don't care that your new ERP has "enhanced data integration capabilities." They care about whether they'll still be able to do their jobs effectively and whether this change will make their lives easier or harder.

At both QuidelOrtho and Wiley, instead of leading with technical specifications, we flipped the conversation:

**Instead of:** "The ERP implementation will modernize our enterprise architecture."

**We said:** "You know how you currently need three different logins to get your work done? Soon you'll need just one."

**Instead of:** "Advanced workflow automation will optimize operational efficiency"

**We said:** "Those manual reports you spend two hours building every week? The system will generate them automatically."

This isn't dumbing down—it's translating. Technical accuracy matters, but employee comprehension matters more.

#### **Address the Real Questions Before They're Asked**

Every ERP rollout generates the same employee concerns. I've seen it across healthcare, diagnostics, and publishing. Instead of waiting for resistance to build, address these head-on:

#### **"Will this make my job harder?"**

Show specific before-and-after workflows. We created simple diagrams showing current 8-step processes becoming 3-step processes. Visual proof works better than promises.

### **"Will I need to learn everything from scratch?"**

Break training into digestible pieces. "Twenty minutes a week for four weeks" sounds manageable. "Comprehensive system training" sounds overwhelming.

### **"What if I can't figure it out?"**

Be specific about support. "Nicole from IT will be available for questions every Tuesday and Thursday from 2-4 PM" beats "Help desk support will be available."

### **Make Technical Changes Feel Human**

The biggest mistake I see communications teams make is focusing on what the system does instead of what the person experiences.

When we communicated about data migration, we didn't talk about "seamless data transfer protocols." We said: "All your current project files and client information will be exactly where you expect them. They will just be easier to find."

When explaining system integration, we skipped "unified database architecture" and went with: "Instead of wondering if you have the latest version of marketing's price increase document, you'll all be working from the same real-time file."

### **Three Things That Actually Move the Needle**

After managing communications for multiple ERP implementations, here's what consistently works:

#### **1. Show, don't tell**

Set up demo stations where people can see the new system in action. We partnered with the tech team and external vendors to create realistic test scenarios and demonstrate new equipment. Seeing beats hearing every time.

#### **2. Use early adopters as translators**

Identify employees who pick up new technology quickly and ask them to share their experience with peers. "Joanne from accounting says the new expense reporting takes half the time" carries more weight than anything from IT or communications.

#### **3. Acknowledge the temporary difficulty**

Be honest about the learning curve. "The first two weeks will feel slower as you get used to the new system" builds credibility. Pretending change is seamless destroys trust.

## What Success Looks Like

Measuring ERP communications isn't about email open rates. Here's what I tracked:

- **Training session attendance:** If people aren't showing up voluntarily, your messaging isn't compelling
- **Question quality:** Basic "how do I log in" questions mean your communications failed. Strategic "can the system do X" questions mean people are engaging
- **Peer-to-peer conversations:** When employees start explaining features to each other, you've won

## The Bottom Line

Technical accuracy doesn't drive adoption—human connection does. Your job isn't to make employees love technology. It's to help them see how the technology serves their work and goals.

The difference between a successful ERP rollout and a costly failure often comes down to whether employees feel like change is being done to them or with them. That's determined in the first few communications they receive.