



# Leadership Communication Planning Worksheet

A structured, practical tool for mid-to-senior level professionals who want to communicate with clarity, intention, and impact. Whether you're preparing for a high-stakes presentation, a difficult conversation, or a team-wide announcement — this worksheet guides you through every step of the planning process so nothing is left to chance.



## SECTION 1

# How to Use This Worksheet

This worksheet is designed to be completed **before every significant communication moment** — not after. Think of it as your pre-flight checklist. It takes 15–30 minutes to complete and can save hours of misalignment, rework, and follow-up confusion. Use it for presentations, team briefings, stakeholder updates, difficult conversations, or written communications like emails and memos.



## When to Use This Worksheet

- Before a leadership or executive presentation
- When addressing organisational change or sensitive topics
- Before a performance or feedback conversation
- When launching a new initiative or project
- Before all-hands meetings or town halls
- For critical written communications to stakeholders

## What You Will Get

By the end of each planning session, you will have a clear, audience-specific message with a defined purpose, a structured content outline, a delivery plan with channel and timing, and a follow-up and measurement strategy. Each section builds on the one before, creating a complete communication blueprint you can revisit and refine.

 **Time Required:** 15–30 minutes per communication event

## SECTION 2

# Step 1 — Define Your Communication Goal

Every effective leadership communication starts with a single, clear purpose. Before writing a word, ask yourself: *Why am I communicating this, and what do I want to happen as a result?* Without a defined goal, even well-written messages can fall flat, confuse audiences, or fail to drive the action you need.

1

## Identify the Primary Objective

What is the single most important outcome you want from this communication? Choose one: **Inform, Persuade, Inspire, Align, or Request Action.**

2

## Write Your Core Message

Summarise your entire communication in **one sentence**. If you cannot do this, your message needs more clarity before you proceed.

3

## Define Success

What does a successful outcome look like? How will you know your message landed? Set a measurable or observable indicator.



## Worksheet Prompts — Complete These Before Moving On

| Prompt                                           | Your Response (Fill In)                                  |
|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| My primary communication objective is...         | [ Inform / Persuade / Inspire / Align / Request Action ] |
| My core one-sentence message is...               | _____                                                    |
| I will know this communication succeeded when... | _____                                                    |
| The urgency or timing of this message is...      | [ High / Medium / Low ] because _____                    |

SECTION 3

# Step 2 — Know Your Audience

The most common leadership communication failure is not a lack of content — it is a mismatch between the message and the audience. Senior leaders, frontline teams, cross-functional peers, and external stakeholders all have different priorities, concerns, and levels of context. What resonates with one group may alienate another. This step ensures your message is calibrated to the people receiving it.

### Who Is Your Audience?

List all key stakeholders who will receive or be impacted by this communication. Segment by role, seniority, department, or relationship to the topic.

### What Do They Already Know?

Assess their existing level of context. Do not over-explain what they know, and do not assume knowledge they lack. Calibrate accordingly.

### What Do They Care About?

Identify their top priorities, concerns, and motivations. Frame your message around what matters *to them*, not just what matters to you.

### What Might They Resist?

Anticipate objections, fears, or scepticism. Plan how you will address these proactively rather than reactively during or after delivery.

 Audience Analysis Grid — One Row Per Key Audience Segment

| Audience Segment       | Their Top Priority | Level of Context | Likely Concern      | How to Frame for Them |
|------------------------|--------------------|------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| e.g. Senior Leadership | ROI, strategic fit | Low detail       | Risk, cost          | Lead with outcomes    |
| e.g. Project Team      | Clarity on roles   | High detail      | Workload, deadlines | Lead with actions     |
| _____                  | _____              | _____            | _____               | _____                 |
| _____                  | _____              | _____            | _____               | _____                 |

## SECTION 4

# Step 3 — Structure Your Message

Great communication is not just about what you say — it is about **the order in which you say it**. A well-structured message reduces cognitive load, increases comprehension, and makes it easier for your audience to act. Choose a structure that matches your objective, and stick to it consistently throughout your communication.

## Choose Your Structure Framework

**BLUF (Bottom Line Up Front)** — Lead with the conclusion, then support it. Best for busy executives and written communications. **STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result)** — Tell a story with context and outcome. Best for performance conversations and case studies. **Problem-Solution-Benefit** — Frame the pain point, offer the solution, highlight the gain. Best for persuasive or change communications. **What / So What / Now What** — State the fact, explain why it matters, define the next step. Best for team briefings and updates.

## Message Architecture Template

Use this simple outline for any communication type:

1. **Opening Hook** — Grab attention with a relevant fact, question, or statement (1–2 sentences)
2. **Context Setting** — Why this, why now? Give just enough background (2–3 sentences)
3. **Core Message** — Your main point, clearly stated (1–2 sentences)
4. **Supporting Points** — 2–3 key arguments, data points, or examples
5. **Call to Action** — Exactly what you need your audience to do next
6. **Closing** — Reinforce the message and open for questions or dialogue



**Pro Tip:** Write your Call to Action before anything else. When you know exactly what you want your audience to do, structuring the rest of the message becomes significantly easier.

SECTION 5

# Step 4 — Choose Your Channel and Timing

Choosing the wrong channel — or the wrong timing — can undermine even the best-crafted message. A sensitive personnel update delivered by email, a complex strategy unveiled in a Slack message, or an urgent call to action buried in a long deck are all examples of channel-message mismatches. This step helps you make deliberate, strategic choices about how and when you communicate.

- Synchronous**  
Live meetings, video calls, town halls — best for sensitive, complex, or high-stakes messages requiring dialogue
- Asynchronous**  
Email, recorded video, memos — best for informational updates, formal records, and wide distribution
- Visual/Deck**  
Slide decks, reports, dashboards — best for data-driven, strategic, or structured presentations
- Informal**  
1:1 conversation, messaging apps — best for quick alignment, relationship-building, or real-time feedback

## Channel & Timing Decision Worksheet

| Decision Point                                                                          | Your Plan                           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Primary channel I will use                                                              | _____                               |
| Secondary channel (if any)                                                              | _____                               |
| Planned date and time of delivery                                                       | _____                               |
| Is this the right time for this audience? (Consider workload, news cycle, prior events) | [ Yes / No / Adjust because _____ ] |
| Who needs to be informed or aligned before the main communication?                      | _____                               |
| Do any stakeholders need advance notice or a pre-brief?                                 | [ Yes / No ] — Who: _____           |

SECTION 6

# Step 5 — Anticipate Questions and Objections

Exceptional leaders do not just prepare what they want to say — they prepare for what others might push back on. Anticipating questions and objections demonstrates strategic thinking, builds credibility, and ensures you are never caught flat-footed. This step transforms reactive communicators into proactive ones.

## Common Objection Categories in Leadership Communication

● "Why now?"

Timing and urgency challenges — be ready with a clear rationale

● "What about the cost?"

Resource and investment concerns — anchor to ROI or risk of inaction

● "Has this been tried before?"

Scepticism from past failures — acknowledge history, show what is different

● "What does this mean for me?"

Personal impact concerns — address WIIFM (What's In It For Me) directly

### Q&A Preparation Table

For each anticipated question or objection, complete one row. Aim for at least 3–5 entries per communication event.

| Anticipated Question / Objection | Your Planned Response | Supporting Data or Example |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| <div></div>                      | <div></div>           | <div></div>                |
| <div></div>                      | <div></div>           | <div></div>                |
| <div></div>                      | <div></div>           | <div></div>                |
| <div></div>                      | <div></div>           | <div></div>                |

 **Rule of Thumb:** If you cannot answer a question confidently, that is a signal your message needs more development — not that you should avoid the question.

SECTION 7

# Step 6 – Delivery Preparation

The way you deliver a message is as important as the message itself. Tone of voice, pacing, body language, word choice, and emotional intelligence all contribute to whether your audience trusts you, believes you, and acts on what you say. Use this section to prepare not just what you will say, but **how** you will say it.



## Tone & Register

What emotional tone does this message require? Consider: Calm and reassuring / Direct and assertive / Inspirational and motivating / Serious and formal / Collaborative and open



## Emotional Intelligence Check

What emotions might your audience be feeling? How might you acknowledge those emotions before delivering your message? Validate before you inform.



## Pacing & Length

How long should this communication be? Less is almost always more. Set a strict time limit or word count and cut everything that does not serve the goal.



## Language Check

Are you using plain language? Eliminate jargon, acronyms, and corporate-speak unless your specific audience expects them. Test: could a smart 16-year-old understand this?



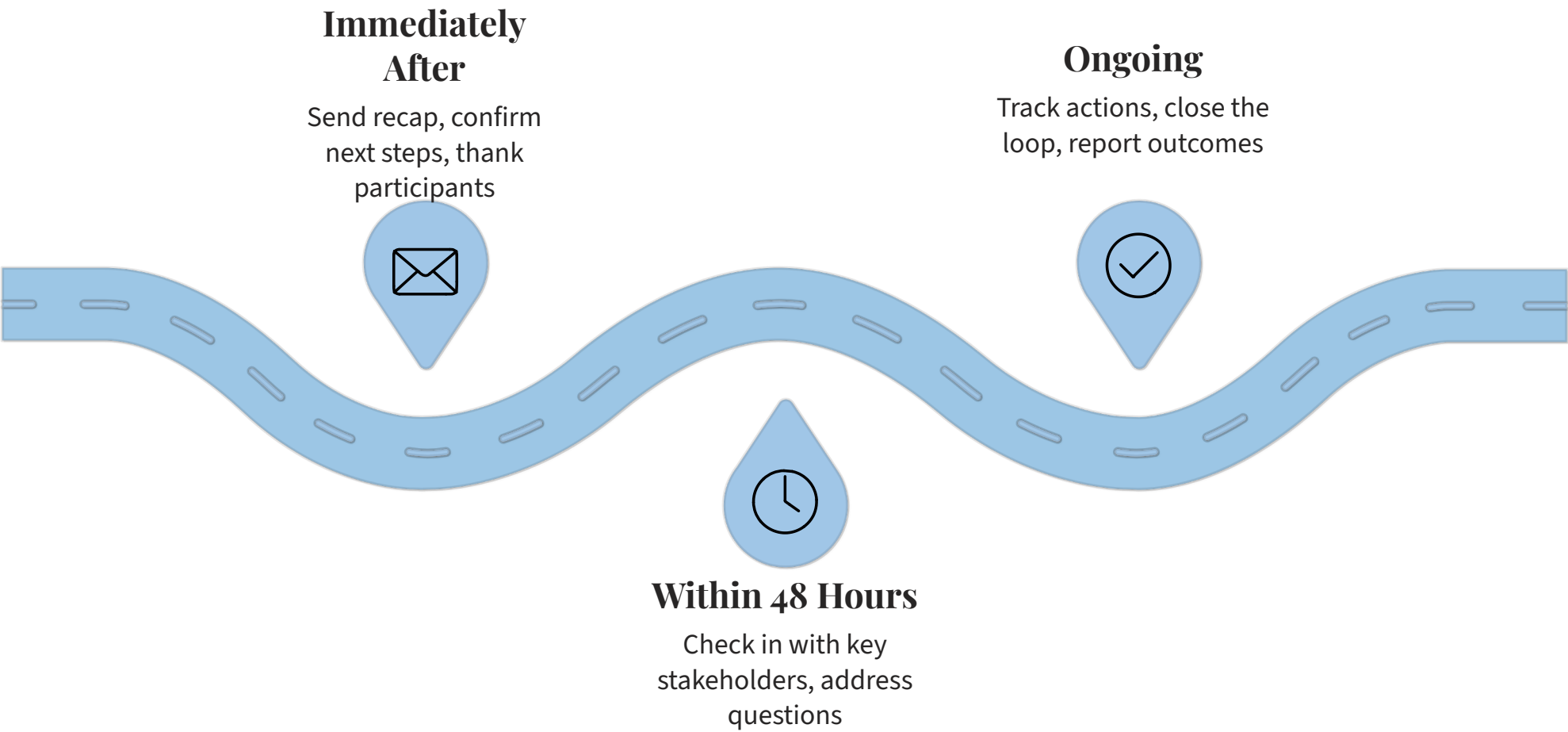
## Delivery Rehearsal Checklist

- ☐ I have practised this communication at least once out loud
- ☐ I have timed my delivery and it fits within the allotted time
- ☐ I have checked my tone — it matches the emotional needs of the situation
- ☐ I have removed or explained all jargon and acronyms
- ☐ I have confirmed the technology and logistics (room, slides, call link, etc.)
- ☐ I have briefed any co-presenters or supporting stakeholders
- ☐ I have a plan for what to do if I go off-track or face an unexpected question

SECTION 8

# Step 7 — Follow-Up and Feedback Plan

Communication does not end when you stop speaking. The follow-up phase is where alignment is confirmed, action is tracked, and trust is built over time. Leaders who consistently follow up are perceived as more reliable, more credible, and more effective than those who deliver great messages and then go silent. This step ensures your communication creates lasting impact.



The most powerful follow-up phrase a leader can use is: *"I said I would do X, and here is what happened."* Closing the loop on commitments — even small ones — builds extraordinary credibility over time.

## Follow-Up Planning Table

| Action Item / Commitment    | Owner | Due Date | Status / Outcome |
|-----------------------------|-------|----------|------------------|
| Send meeting summary        | _____ | _____    | [ ] Done         |
| Share supporting materials  | _____ | _____    | [ ] Done         |
| Schedule follow-up check-in | _____ | _____    | [ ] Done         |
| Report on decision outcome  | _____ | _____    | [ ] Done         |
| _____                       | _____ | _____    | [ ] Done         |
| _____                       | _____ | _____    | [ ] Done         |

 **Feedback Prompt:** After every major communication, ask one trusted colleague: *"What was the one thing I could have said more clearly?"* One question. Every time. Watch your communication improve rapidly.

## SECTION 9

# Real-World Scenarios: See the Worksheet in Action

The following scenarios illustrate how different types of leaders use this worksheet to plan communications that are clear, audience-appropriate, and effective. These are not hypothetical — they represent the most common leadership communication challenges you will encounter at the mid-to-senior level.

1

## Scenario A: Announcing a Restructure

**Situation:** A VP of Operations needs to inform her team of a department reorganisation that will affect reporting lines and some roles. **Goal:** Inform and reduce anxiety **Audience:** Concerned, uncertain team members **Structure:** Problem-Solution-Benefit **Channel:** Live all-hands, followed by 1:1 check-ins **Key Prep:** Anticipated "Will I lose my job?" and planned a calm, factual, empathetic response **Follow-Up:** Written FAQ document sent within 24 hours

2

## Scenario B: Executive Budget Proposal

**Situation:** A Senior Director needs board approval for a \$500K technology investment. **Goal:** Persuade and request decision **Audience:** Risk-averse CFO and Board **Structure:** BLUF — led with ROI figure, then supporting data **Channel:** Formal presentation with pre-read deck sent 48 hours in advance **Key Prep:** Prepared answers to "What if we delay?" and "What are the alternatives?" **Follow-Up:** Decision recap and next steps within 24 hours of meeting

3

## Scenario C: Difficult Feedback Conversation

**Situation:** A Manager needs to address consistent underperformance with a high-potential team member. **Goal:** Align and inspire change **Audience:** Defensive but capable individual contributor **Structure:** STAR — grounded the conversation in specific situations, not generalisations **Channel:** Private 1:1 video call, no observers **Key Prep:** Practised tone — direct but warm, not punitive **Follow-Up:** Written development plan co-created within one week

## SECTION 10

# Common Mistakes to Avoid

Even experienced leaders fall into predictable communication traps. The following mistakes are the most frequently observed at the mid-to-senior level — and all of them are entirely avoidable with structured preparation. Review this list before every major communication event.

## ✗ The 10 Most Common Leadership Communication Mistakes

1. **Leading with information instead of insight** — data without interpretation loses audiences fast
2. **No clear call to action** — audiences leave not knowing what to do next
3. **One message for all audiences** — ignoring audience segmentation is a costly shortcut
4. **Burying the lead** — putting the most important point at the end
5. **Overloading with content** — trying to say everything in one communication
6. **Avoiding difficult truths** — vague messaging erodes trust faster than hard news
7. **Skipping the follow-up** — great delivery without follow-through is incomplete communication
8. **Confusing channels** — using email for what needs a conversation, or vice versa
9. **Neglecting emotional tone** — speaking logically to an emotionally charged audience
10. **Never seeking feedback** — treating communication as one-directional

## ✓ The Fix for Each Mistake

### Lead with "So what?"

Always state the implication before the information. Start with what matters most.

### End with "Therefore..."

Every communication should close with a clear, specific next step or decision request.

### Segment ruthlessly

Write a different version for different audiences, even if the core facts are the same.

### Use the 48-hour rule

Follow up within 48 hours of every significant communication. No exceptions.

QUICK REFERENCE

# Quick Reference Cheat Sheet

Use this one-page reference as a rapid planning tool before any leadership communication. Scan it in under two minutes to ensure you have covered every critical dimension of your message before you deliver it.

|                                                                                     |                                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    | <b>Goal ✓</b><br>One clear objective. One core sentence. One measurable success indicator.                    |
|    | <b>Audience ✓</b><br>Who are they? What do they care about? What do they fear? How much context do they have? |
|  | <b>Structure ✓</b><br>BLUF / STAR / Problem-Solution-Benefit / What-So What-Now What. Chosen and applied.     |
|  | <b>Channel ✓</b><br>Right channel for this message type. Right time. Right stakeholders pre-briefed.          |
|  | <b>Objections ✓</b><br>Top 3–5 questions anticipated. Responses prepared. Data or examples ready.             |
|  | <b>Delivery ✓</b><br>Tone set. Language plain. Rehearsed once. Timed. Logistics confirmed.                    |
|  | <b>Follow-Up ✓</b><br>Action items captured. Owners assigned. Deadlines set. Feedback collected.              |

"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place." — George Bernard Shaw

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

# Summary & Key Takeaways

Leadership communication is a **learnable, improvable skill** — not a talent reserved for the naturally charismatic. Every high-impact leader has a system. This worksheet is yours. Use it consistently and you will notice a measurable improvement in how your messages land, how quickly your teams align, and how often your communications drive the outcomes you intend.

## 1 Clarity before content

Define your goal and core message before writing a single word. A clear purpose is the foundation of every effective communication.

## 2 Audience first, always

Frame every message through the lens of your audience's priorities, concerns, and context — not your own. The message is for them, not for you.

## 3 Structure earns attention

A well-structured message reduces cognitive effort for your audience. Less effort means more comprehension, and more comprehension means more action.

## 4 Channel and timing are strategic choices

The how and when of communication are as important as the what. Deliberate choices here prevent avoidable misalignments and missed moments.

## 5 Follow-up closes the loop

Communication is not complete until actions are tracked and the audience knows what happened. Consistent follow-through is what separates trusted leaders from forgettable ones.



**Start Now:** Identify your next significant communication event. Open this worksheet. Complete Step 1. The discipline of planning is where leadership communication excellence begins.