

## **Decision Cascade Communication Framework**

The Decision Cascade Communication Framework equips mid-level leaders with the language and structure to effectively communicate decisions made at higher organizational levels. This tool helps you navigate the delicate balance of demonstrating loyalty to organizational leadership while maintaining trust and motivation within your team. By framing top-down decisions thoughtfully, you can foster understanding, minimize resistance, and maintain team cohesion even when delivering decisions your team may find challenging.

### **Goal**

To help leaders communicate decisions made above them in ways that maintain team trust, demonstrate organizational loyalty, provide necessary context, and support successful implementation—even when the leader may have mixed feelings about the decision.

### **Advice**

- Prepare thoroughly before communicating significant decisions to your team
- Be honest without undermining organizational leadership
- Focus on what you can control: the "how" of implementation, even if you couldn't influence the "what" of the decision
- Acknowledge legitimate concerns while redirecting energy toward constructive action
- Remember that your team will take cues from your attitude and energy about the decision
- Separate your personal reactions from your professional communication

## Decision Cascade Communication Framework

### STEP 1: Process Your Own Response (Before Team Communication)

#### Internal Reflection Questions:

- What are my personal reactions to this decision?
- What aspects of the decision make sense to me?
- What concerns do I have about implementation or impact?
- What information might I be missing about the decision context?
- How can I support this decision while staying authentic?

#### Consult Upward:

- **Seek clarity from your supervisor on:**
  - The rationale behind the decision
  - Non-confidential factors that influenced the choice
  - Expected outcomes and how success will be measured
  - Flexibility in implementation
  - What can and cannot be shared with your team

#### Prepare Your Mindset:

- Find the legitimate organizational perspective
- Identify opportunities within constraints
- Focus on how your team can succeed within the new parameters
- Separate personal reactions from professional responsibilities



## Decision Cascade Communication Framework

### STEP 2: Craft Your Communication

Use the following structure to plan your communication:

#### 1. Clear Statement of Decision

- State the decision directly and simply
- Avoid apologizing for the decision
- Use "we" language when referring to the organization

#### 2. Provide Context and Rationale

- Share the broader context that informed the decision
- Connect to organizational mission, values, or strategy
- Explain factors that may not be visible to your team
- Acknowledge constraints or trade-offs involved

#### 3. Acknowledge Impact

- Recognize how this affects your team's work
- Validate legitimate concerns or challenges
- Demonstrate empathy while maintaining positivity
- Focus on what's gained, not just what's lost



## Decision Cascade Communication Framework

### STEP 2: Craft Your Communication, cont'd

#### 4. Define Your Team's Role

- Clarify what aspects the team can influence or shape
- Identify where the team adds unique value to implementation
- Frame challenges as opportunities to demonstrate capability
- Connect implementation to team goals and growth

#### 5. Outline Next Steps

- Provide a clear path forward
- Set immediate actions and time frames
- Explain how you'll support the team through changes
- Establish how progress will be measured and shared



## Decision Cascade Communication Framework

### STEP 3: Deliver and Support (During Team Communication)

#### Communication Approaches:

- Choose the right format (in-person for significant changes, email for minor updates)
- Allow appropriate time for questions and discussion
- Maintain open, confident body language
- Use a tone that's both empathetic and assured

#### Supportive Language Templates:

Communication Needed	Helpful Language
When explaining organizational perspective	"Looking at the bigger picture, this decision allows our organization to..."
When acknowledging team impact	"I understand this creates new challenges for our team, particularly around..."
When refocusing on what can be controlled	"While we can't change the decision itself, we can shape how we implement it by..."
When addressing resistance	"I hear your concerns about X. The reality we're working with is Y. Given that, how might we best..."
When reinforcing team capability	"This is an opportunity for us to demonstrate our adaptability and creativity in how we..."
When acknowledging your own adjustment	"I'm also working through what this means for us, and I'm committed to making this work because..."

## Decision Cascade Communication Framework

### Response Techniques for Difficult Questions:

Question Type	Response Approach
"Why wasn't our team consulted?"	Acknowledge the feeling, explain decision parameters, refocus on current influence: "I understand that's frustrating. This decision required X factors to be considered at the organizational level. What we can influence now is..."
"Don't you disagree with this?"	Redirect to constructive focus: "What's most important is finding the best way forward for our team. I see several opportunities for us in this change, including..."
"This contradicts what we were told before."	Acknowledge the shift, provide context for change: "You're right that this represents a change in direction. The factors that led to this shift include..."
"This won't work because..."	Validate concern, invite problem-solving: "That's an important consideration. How might we address that challenge while working within these parameters?"

## Decision Cascade Communication Framework

### STEP 4: Follow Through (After Initial Communication)

#### Ongoing Support Strategies:

- Schedule check-ins about implementation progress
- Create safe spaces for continued questions and concerns
- Recognize and celebrate adaptive efforts and early wins
- Share feedback up the chain about implementation insights
- Provide additional resources or support as needed

#### Documentation Template for Upward Feedback

Implementation Aspect	Team Insights	Recommendations	Support needed

## Decision Cascade Communication Framework

### Example: Communicating a Program Restructuring Decision

**Decision Statement:** "The leadership team has decided to restructure our afterschool programming from daily general sessions to three specialized tracks meeting twice weekly, starting next semester."

**Context and Rationale:** "This decision reflects our strategic priority to deepen impact in specific skill areas and responds to feedback from our recent program evaluation. The current model has shown declining outcomes in skill mastery, while research in our field increasingly demonstrates that focused, progressive skill development leads to stronger youth outcomes. The new structure allows us to allocate our limited resources more strategically while potentially increasing our appeal to funders looking for specialized programming."

**Impact Acknowledgment:** "I recognize this creates significant shifts in how we design and deliver programming, and will require us to develop new curriculum components and adjust our staffing patterns. Some of you have specialized in areas that might not align perfectly with the new tracks, and I understand the uncertainty this may create."

**Team's Role:** "Where we have a tremendous opportunity is in designing these specialized tracks to reflect our team's strengths and the needs of our youth. While the structure has been decided, we get to shape the content of each track, determine how to maintain strong relationships with youth across a different schedule, and create the assessment tools that will help us demonstrate our impact in this new model."

**Next Steps:** "This week, I'd like us to begin by mapping our team's specialized skills and interests against potential track themes. Next week, we'll form three working groups to begin developing framework documents for each track. I've scheduled extra planning time for our team over the next month, and I've requested resources for any additional training we might need to implement this successfully."



## Decision Cascade Communication Framework

### Example: Communicating a Program Restructuring Decision, cont'd

#### Sample Responses to Difficult Questions

**Q: "Why wasn't our team consulted about this major change?"**

A: "I understand your frustration about not being part of this decision. The restructuring is part of a broader organizational strategy that considered feedback from multiple sources, including our program evaluation data. What I want to ensure is that our team's expertise and creativity shape how we implement these tracks, which will have a significant impact on their success."

**Q: "I don't think this will work with our population. Don't you agree?"**

A: "What's most important is figuring out how to make this work for the youth we serve. You raise a valid concern about our specific population. I see this as an opportunity to design specialized curriculum that's even more responsive to their unique needs and interests. What specific adaptations do you think would help make this successful for our youth?"