



ABILITY

HOW TO FOSTER ABILITY TO IMPLEMENT A CHANGE

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AWARENESS

DESIRE

KNOWLEDGE

ABILITY

REINFORCEMENT®

In an individual's change process, results and outcomes first emerge at the ability stage. New behaviors are successfully achieved and the future state starts to take shape. With demonstrated ability, change is realized.

The five parts of the **Prosci® ADKAR® Model** show the milestones an individual must achieve for a change to be successful - *awareness, desire, knowledge, ability* and *reinforcement*. Ability is the fourth milestone.

Ability is turning knowledge into action. Ability means tangibly demonstrating the application of intellectual understanding in a real-world environment. Change leaders impact project success by intentionally providing time, resources and coaching to help impacted employees develop new skills and behaviors.

THE TRANSITION FROM KNOWLEDGE TO ABILITY

There is a discrete difference between knowing *how* to do something and being *able* to do it. In fact, the gap between knowledge and ability can often be quite large. Athletics provide one of the clearest examples of this gap. Understanding the strategy and mechanics for running one mile in under four minutes is attainable for most people. Only a very small percentage of the population will ever have the ability to successfully execute that feat. The presence of knowledge of how to change by itself is often insufficient to fully realize new behaviors proficiently.



Ensure that in addition to training that imparts knowledge, employees are also given sufficient time and tools for developing their own abilities. In order to successfully build new skills and behaviors, most employees do best in a supportive environment where they can practice and where it is safe to make mistakes.

Building ability is an individualized process.

The time and steps involved will vary from person to person. Some individuals will fall naturally into the new way of work, while others may not adjust with the same ease.

TACTICS FOR FOSTERING ABILITY

As a change leader, there are a variety of tactics you can employ to help individuals successfully develop the abilities they need to succeed and thrive in their changing

environment. Effective ability-building tactics from Prosci's benchmarking research include the following:

DAY-TO-DAY INVOLVEMENT OF MANAGERS

The direct managers and supervisors of employees impacted by change play an important role as coaches and advocates for change. Managers are often closest to the employees and therefore the best line of defense and support for their teams as a change nears implementation. They are problem solvers and supporters, teaching and mentoring on the job.



As it relates to ability, supervisors must be able to:

- **Provide one-on-one coaching of employees who are implementing new processes, tools and job roles**, effectively providing hands-on demonstrations and role-modeling the desired ability. Supervisors must be suitably trained and experienced in the change themselves and be on hand to answer any questions relating to the change as they arise.
- **Establish a safe, supportive environment** where employees can develop their new skills and practice new behaviors. Effective managers encourage and support employees while providing feedback and direction. Mistakes are a natural part of the learning process.
- **Create feedback channels** to identify gaps in processes or tools. Establishing a clear way for employees to provide feedback will ensure a supervisor can quickly learn of any problems related to the change and communicate them to the project and change management teams.

One-on-one coaching will help supervisors identify any gaps, whether they are related to the ability of the employee or to a process, tool or system. If a supervisor is not present during this crucial phase, an employee who experiences difficulty may be more likely to abandon the learning process, revert to old behaviors or create work-arounds for performing the task.

ACCESS TO SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS



Subject matter experts are also key resources in supporting and fostering ability. Experts or experienced employees can help by providing additional knowledge and by offering assistance if the question at hand is beyond the knowledge of the employee and their supervisor. Some companies will set up a help desk where employees can call with questions; other companies will provide the names and

contact information for mentors or subject matter experts. The key to making this work is letting employees know where they can go to get help.

HANDS-ON EXERCISES DURING TRAINING

Effectively designed training programs should include hands-on activities that allow employees to test their new-found knowledge in different work scenarios. Role-plays, simulations and actual hands-on work with new tools and processes can greatly accelerate the process of developing abilities.

Employees will feel more confident implementing a change if they have first been given the opportunity to practice what they have learned in a safe and controlled environment.

ADOPTION AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Employees need feedback on what they are doing well and what areas they need to improve. Equally, the organization needs to know if people are adopting the change as designed and if the implementation is going according to plan. While employees are in the process of developing ability, it is essential to measure and assess their adoption and proficiency.

Measuring adoption and performance provides critical information to the organization. Assessments provide information on where the change is succeeding so new behaviors can be recognized and reinforced. They also provide information about where the change is not succeeding so that corrective action and special tactics can be applied in those areas.



POTENTIAL RESISTING FORCES AND CHALLENGES

Resisting forces and challenges may arise during ability-building. Below are several common factors that can impact a person's ability to implement change:

PSYCHOLOGICAL BLOCKS

Each individual has their own set of different psychological barriers to overcome. Some employees may have a lot of self-doubt relating to a particular change because of their past



experiences or unique fears. They may be uncertain if they can really make a change happen or wonder if they will ever be able to develop the required abilities. Psychological barriers to change are complex and while their effect can be recognized, the solution for handling and overcoming them is often personal and not always straightforward.

Public speaking is a common example of how a psychological block can prevent individuals from demonstrating their full potential. For some people the fear of speaking in public can be paralyzing. Others will reflect back on their performance with frustration, aware that nerves prevented them from performing at their best. For a lucky few, there is no fear whatsoever.

THE FORCE OF HABIT

Humans are physiologically wired for habit. The development of new skills and the breaking of old habits requires the development of new neural pathways in the brain. The more that existing habits directly contradict new skills, the greater the barrier to developing ability.

Fighting these old habits can become very frustrating. It can even reduce previously felt awareness of the need for the change and desire to participate in the change. Understanding that people are wired to revert to old habits impacts how we approach fostering ability. Have patience, expect efficiency dips and allow time as people work to build new habits.



LIMITATIONS IN PHYSICAL OR INTELLECTUAL CAPABILITY

Sometimes physical or intellectual limitations will impact the speed or proficiency at which an individual can demonstrate a new skill. In the workplace, physical limitations may include strength, physical agility, manual dexterity, physical size and hand-eye coordination. For example, a tremendous amount of effort may be required for an individual with limited dexterity or arthritis to meet the performance level required by a new keyboard-based technology solution.

All individuals also possess unique skills that fall on spectrums of intellectual ability. While some individuals have a talent for finance and math, others may excel in innovation and creativity. Depending on the nature of the change, some individuals may have mental barriers to implementing the change. For example, a change that requires analytical skills may present an intellectual barrier to an individual who is unable to develop the required abilities around problem-solving and data analysis. Alternatively, a change that requires employees to utilize emotional or social intelligence may stretch analytical problem solvers beyond their natural capabilities.

TIME AND PRIORITIES



Time is a precious commodity in the demanding pace of businesses today. When competing priorities and essential business operations dominate an employee's work schedule, it can be a challenge to provide the time needed to build ability in a new skill. Often the time frame for implementing change is driven by external factors (outside of the control of managers and supervisors). If an

individual cannot develop the required abilities in the needed time frame, the change could fail, even if the individual has the potential to develop these abilities if given more time. Change leaders must leverage a coalition of sponsors across the organization to define the importance of the change and help remove barriers of time and priority.

THE AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES

Resources that support ability-building include financial support, personal coaching, and access to mentors and subject matter experts. Properly functioning tools, technology and materials are also essential to many change initiatives. When these resources are not available or not operating effectively, an individual's ability to perform can be compromised.

During this developmental period, the availability of the right resources greatly enhances the development of new skills and abilities. Providing structured support for an individual during this stage not only promotes the cultivation of new skills, it can also address knowledge gaps that reveal themselves once the change is underway.

FINAL THOUGHTS

We have explored the difference between knowledge and ability and looked at the most effective ways to support and assist employees as they are building ability. We have also explored potential factors that might prevent a person from developing ability.

Ability is not equivalent to knowledge. It is not the automatic result of training. After providing knowledge through well-designed training, change leaders must also ensure that employees are given sufficient tools for building their own ability and sufficient time to develop the new skills and behaviors required by the change.

Ultimately, ability is the demonstrated actions that allow true change to be realized at both the individual and the organizational level. Building ability requires hard work and practice from individuals who need to perform differently in a future state. Our role as change leaders is to enable this process by providing the support and resources required to make the change possible.

True and lasting change does not end with ability, however. Humans are hard-wired to revert back to our old way of doing things. The final eBook of the **ADKAR** series discusses the fifth and last milestone of the **Prosci ADKAR Model**: [Reinforcement: How to Sustain a Change](#).



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