



AWARENESS

HOW TO EFFECTIVELY BUILD AWARENESS FOR CHANGE

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AWARENESS

DESIRE

KNOWLEDGE

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Any successful change begins by answering one of the most basic questions about change: Why? It is human nature to want to understand the reasoning behind an action or a required change.

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. Awareness is the first goal.

Awareness represents a person's understanding of the nature of the change, why the change is being made and the risk of not changing. Awareness includes information about the internal and external drivers that created the need for change, as well as "what's in it for me?" This first goal is defined as "awareness of the need for change," not simply "awareness that a change is happening." This subtle nuance is an important distinction.

WHY BUILD AWARENESS?

Lack of awareness of the reason for change was cited as the primary source of employee resistance in the *Best Practices in Change Management - 2016 Edition*. This lack is caused by failure to communicate details of a change to employees. Ultimately, if an employee is unable to answer “what’s in it for me?” resistance is likely to occur, and when awareness is overlooked or ignored, projects face increased resistance, slow progress and reduced return on investment. As one research participant said:

“Often employees are not opposed to a solution or a new way of doing work, but rather they resisted change because no one made a clear and compelling case as to why the change was needed.”

The elements of the Prosci ADKAR Model fall into a natural order of how one person experiences change. It is tempting to skip awareness and jump straight ahead to desire and knowledge. Building awareness establishes the groundwork upon which individuals can make personal choices about change. Desire or knowledge cannot come before awareness, because it is the awareness of the need for change that stimulates our desire or triggers our resistance to change.

When it is readily visible to employees that an organization is in trouble, building awareness will be relatively easy. In contrast, it is often more difficult to build awareness when an organization is already succeeding. Change leaders will need to create a very compelling case and make the reasons for change blatantly evident. If they are responding to an opportunity, they will need to be clear in communicating this and sharing the reasons for change.

BUILDING AWARENESS

Building awareness as defined within **ADKAR** means sharing both the nature of the change and communicating why this change is necessary. It means clearly explaining the business drivers or opportunities that have resulted in the need for change. It also means addressing why a change is needed now and explaining the risk of not changing.

Meeting the human need to know “why” is a critical factor in managing and enabling change. People begin to seek this information at the first signs of change. In an organizational setting, employees and managers alike will be eager to know the business or organizational reasons for the change, so they can better understand the change and align themselves with the organization’s direction.

Many will assume that the act of sharing information is enough to produce awareness. This is not the case. The effectiveness of your communication depends on how the messages are received and internalized. When an employee says, “I understand the nature of the change and why this change is needed,” you have succeeded at building awareness. The only way you can measure awareness is through interactions and feedback.

Below are several tactics for effectively building awareness:

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

Awareness-building will be most effective when the message is set in the proper context for each audience and designed with them in mind. This begins with identifying and segmenting audience groups, determining the appropriate messages and the preferred senders for each, then developing the most effective packaging, timing and channels for these communications.

In any awareness-building plan, allow ample opportunity for two-way communications. Check for understanding and buy-in. Provide opportunity for impacted groups to raise concerns and engage them in the broader change initiative.

Depending upon the audience and position in the change process, channels of communication may include:

- Face-to-face meetings
- Group meetings
- One-on-one communications
- Email
- Newsletters
- Intranet
- Executive presentations
- Training and workshops
- Project team presentations
- Update bulletins
- Video conferencing
- Demonstrations



EFFECTIVE SPONSORSHIP

For employees, the executive sponsor of change is the best spokesperson for communicating why a change is needed and the risk of not changing. To be effective the executive sponsor must be active and visible throughout the entire change process, engaging with the project team and collecting feedback from employees. This direct communication with employees will increase adoption of the change. The executive sponsor must also build a coalition that reinforces the awareness messages at all levels - enabling peers, managers and direct reports to communicate the reasons for change through multiple communication channels and throughout the organization. A dedicated and supportive sponsor is critical to a successful change initiative.

In the Best Practices in Change Management - 2016 Edition, as in previous research reports, participants identified “active and visible sponsorship” as the most important contributor to change management success - more than three times as often as other contributors.

COACHING BY MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS

Part of awareness-building for employees is learning what the change will mean for them personally. When a change is proposed, a supervisor or manager is in the best position to help employees understand the reasons for change in meaningful terms and to evaluate how the change will impact them at the individual level. To be effective in this role, managers and supervisors must have the opportunity to build awareness of the need for change themselves - and must therefore have accurate and complete messages relating to the change and basic skills and knowledge in leading change with their own employees.

It is also important to remember that managers are employees first and managers second. If they don't understand the need for the change themselves or don't have the support to participate in the change, they will experience resistance themselves. It is critical to plan activities to build awareness of the need for change with managers before expecting them to effectively build awareness with their employees.

Managers and supervisors have the greatest challenge as they are in charge of translating the change message from the top to their employees. Once a manager is onboard and has received the appropriate training and coaching, they will be able to conduct effective sessions with their employees. Face-to-face communications with employees about the change has been cited in all of our longitudinal benchmarking studies as the most effective form of communication. Honest, straightforward and confidential discussions also help to correct any misunderstandings and provide an opportunity to collect feedback from employees, which will help leadership better understand the background conversation. While group meetings are more convenient and useful for initiating communications, one-on-one conversations that offer details of the change on a personal level are best at answering "what's in it for me?"

READY ACCESS TO BUSINESS INFORMATION

Many companies underestimate the power of readily accessible information about company performance, market conditions, environmental factors, competitive threats and changing business priorities. Transparency builds awareness on an ongoing basis and supports not only the current change but also future changes. Increasing visibility and creating a culture that values open sharing of information about the company, market and business direction translates directly to increased awareness of the need for change among employees.

OBSTACLES TO BUILDING AWARENESS

There are many factors that influence how readily people recognize the need for change. As a leader of change, you will need to understand not only the activities that drive awareness, but also the resisting factors or restraining forces that may prevent the awareness message from taking hold with your audiences. In some cases the resisting factors are so strong that even the best communications plan will not be sufficient. Effective change management plans are designed to surface and deal with these resisting factors.

Below we list potential resisting factors and suggestions for overcoming these barriers:

A PERSON'S VIEW OF THE CURRENT STATE

Individuals who are comfortable with or strongly invested in the current state may discredit or deny the reasons for change in favor of maintaining the status quo. Take the time to listen to and understand their point of view. One-on-one conversations will be most effective for this.

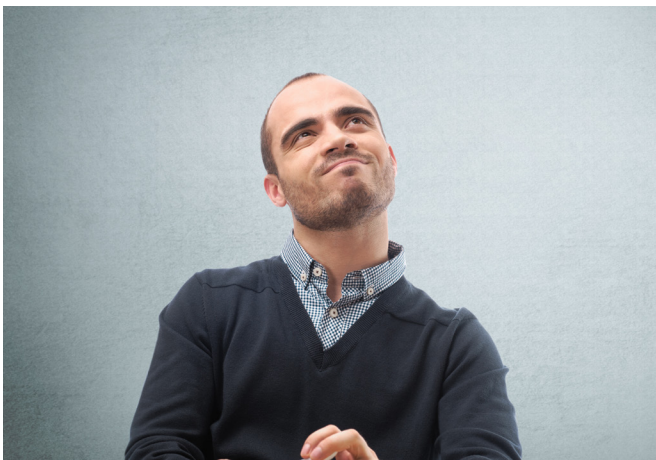


HOW A PERSON PERCEIVES PROBLEMS

People have different cognitive styles and this will impact how an individual approaches a problem, internalizes an awareness message and perceives the need for change. While some individuals will already see the need for change, others may be completely caught off-guard. For this reason, broad and general communications to create awareness of the need for change may not be effective. Individualized messages and one-on-one communications will once again be more effective, along with providing the time and opportunity for people to process new information and ask questions.

THE CREDIBILITY OF THE SENDER

Recipients of the awareness message will view the sender either as a credible source or someone not to be believed, depending on their level of trust and respect for the sender. The sender will directly impact how the message is internalized.



Senders from different levels of the organization are more credible than others, depending on the message. Messages around why the change is being made and how it aligns with the business strategy are expected from the person near or at the top of the organization. Messages about how the change will impact employees personally are expected from their immediate supervisors.

Employees will also weigh the message against the backdrop of the organization's track record

with change. If there is a history of false alarms or failed changes, individuals will tend to disregard the new information. Credible awareness messages must be designed specifically for each group, informed by their unique context, the access they have to information on a regular basis, and their specific pain points regarding the proposed change. Key messages must be tailored for each group and delivered by their preferred senders.

CIRCULATION OF MISINFORMATION OR RUMORS

If business managers have withheld information from employees about the change, rumors may have spread and clouded the facts - and employees may prefer to listen to the rumors. To overcome the barrier of distorted or incorrect background information, leaders and supervisors will now need to spend extra time correcting misinformation, and employees will have to decipher the real information from the fabricated.

Since circulation of misinformation stalls efforts to create awareness, it is better to communicate the right information from the start. Even if all information is not yet solidified, it is better to start clearly communicating what is known and what is not yet known rather than letting people start to fill in the gaps for themselves.

CONTESTABILITY OF THE REASONS FOR CHANGE

If the reasons for change are unclear, subjective or open to debate, extra time will be needed to build awareness. While some changes have external and observable reasons that are difficult to dispute (like new industry regulations that require compliance) other changes have reasons that are internally oriented and not immediately obvious to employees. When employees question the credibility of the reasons for change, they are more likely to resist.

NEXT STEPS

Once the first objective of the ADKAR Model has been achieved, we can shift our focus to the next milestone. In **Desire: How to Positively Influence a Person's Desire to Embrace Change**, we explore the importance of creating desire, typical challenges and many tactics that can be used to influence and create the desire to support and participate in a change.



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+1 970 203 9332

solutions@prosci.com

www.prosci.com

